WEBER THE CONTEMPORARY WEST
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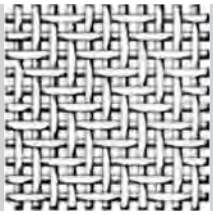
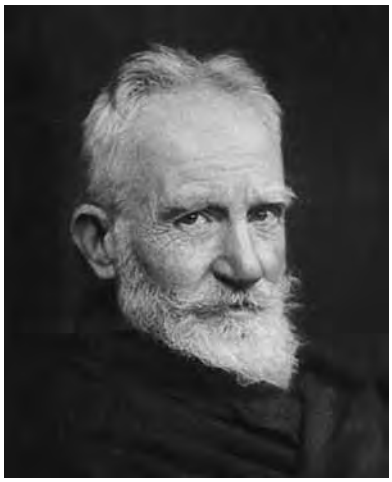
Spring Film Focus



Deriving from the German *weben*—to weave—*weber* translates into the literal and figurative "weaver" of textiles and texts. *Weber* (the word is the same in singular and plural) are the artisans of textures and discourse, the artists of the beautiful fabricating the warp and weft of language into ever-changing pattterns. *Weber*, the journal, understands itself as a tapestry of verbal and visual texts, a weave made from the threads of words and images.



George Bernard Shaw

Shaw on the Screen

Few members of the turn-of-the-century literary intelligentsia were more interested in film than George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950). As a playwright making a living with spoken words, and as a writer as voluble as the characters in his plays, it came naturally to him to have opinions about a new medium that would soon emancipate itself into a new art form, even as it took its first artistic prompts from the stage. Shaw was an original subscriber to the Film Society of 1925, a coterie of British and often left-leaning intellectuals that included Julian Huxley, John Maynard Keynes, and Roger Fry, among others. The group set itself the task of screening artistic films—frequently from the Soviet Union—which were not widely available in central Europe, with a view toward generating artistic and political discussion.

In 1928, one year before he would make his own first appearance in a sound film, after already having appeared in several silent short features, Shaw became outspoken on the subject of not-only-cinematic censorship. Against claims that films could undermine public morale or independent political thinking, he defended screenings of Sergei Eisenstein's now-classic Battleship Potemkim (1925), about the 1905 mutiny of the crew of the battleship against their officers of the Czarist regime, and the British film Dawn (1928) by Herbert Wilcox, about the execution of nurse Edith Cavell, made martyr by German military authorities during World War I:

> All the censorships, including film censorships, are merely pretexts for retaining a legal or quasi-legal power to suppress works which the authorities dislike. No film or play is ever interfered with merely because it is vicious. Dozens of films which carry the art of stimulating crude passion of every kind to the utmost possible point—aphrodisiac films, films of hatred, violence, murder, and jingoism—appear every season and pass unchallenged under the censor's certificates. Then suddenly a film is suppressed, and a fuss got up about its morals, or its effect on our foreign relations … One of the best films ever produced as a work of pictorial art has for its subject a naval mutiny in the Russian Fleet in 1904 … The War Office and the Admiralty immediately object to it because it does not represent the quarterdeck and G.H.Q. as peopled exclusively by popular and gallant angels in uniform. It is suppressed. Then comes the Edith Cavell film. It is an extraordinarily impressive demonstration of the peculiar horror of war as placing the rules of fighting above the doctrine of Christ, and geographical patriotism about humanity. No matter: the film is at once suppressed on the ridiculous pretext that it might offend Germany … The screen may wallow in ever extremity of vulgarity and villainy provided it whitewashes authority. But let it shew a single fleck on the whitewash, and no excellence, moral, pictorial, or histrionic, can save it from prompt suppression and defamation. That is what censorship means.

Then, as now, it seems, art and politics sometimes make for uneasy bedfellows.

Front Cover: Monte Dolack, Detail from *Moonlight Rainbows*, 2001, acrylic on panel, 36" x 40"

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ANNOUNCING
the 2010
Dr. Sherwin W. Howard Poetry Award

to

Doug Ramspeck
for
"Ghost Child" and "After the Storm"

in the 2009 Fall issue

The Dr. Sherwin W. Howard Award of $500 is presented annually to the author of the "best" poetry published in *Weber* during the previous year.

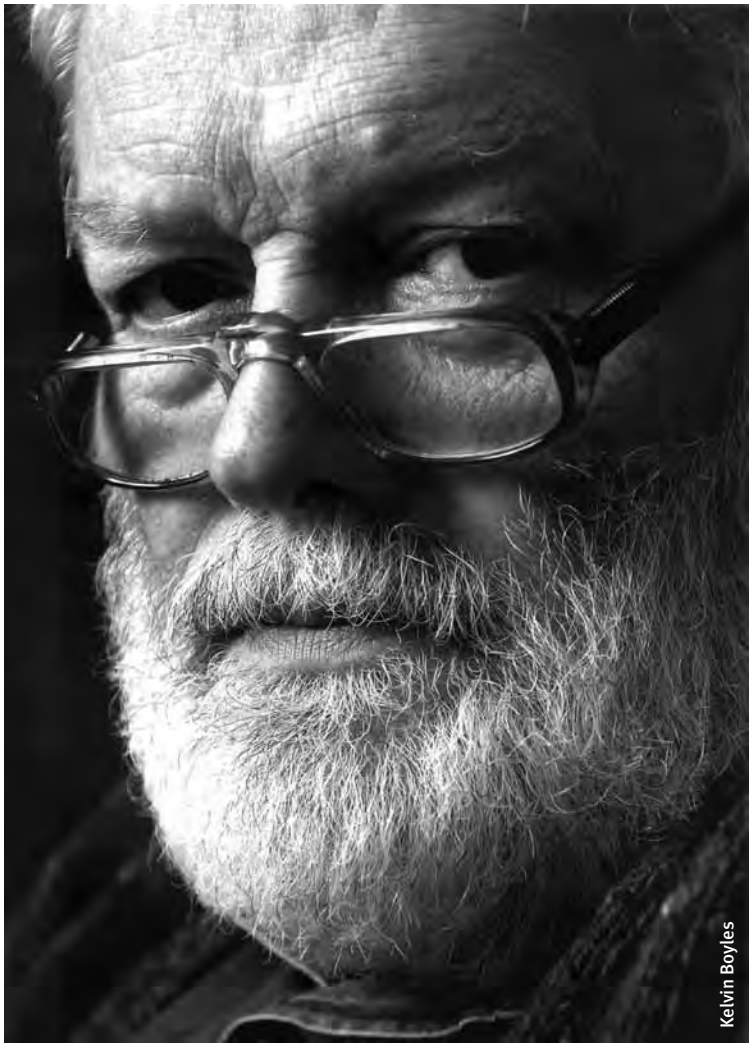
Funding for this award is generously provided by the Howard family.

Dr. Howard (1936-2001) was former president of Deep Springs College, dean of the College of Arts & Humanities at Weber State University, editor of *Weber Studies*, and an accomplished playwright and poet.

Karen Marguerite Moloney

Above the Battlefield

A Conversation with Michael Longley



Kelvin Boyles

PRELUDE

On the sunny afternoon of August 1, 2008, Michael Longley and I met in the library of the Faculty of Letters at the Universidade do Porto in northern Portugal. We were in Porto to attend the annual conference of the International Association for the Study of Irish Literatures (IASIL), where Longley and his wife, critic Edna Longley, were featured speakers. This was our final day of meetings. Longley had been interviewed during the morning plenary session, but he had graciously agreed to be interviewed again. We arranged our chairs by an open window. Nearby, the river Douro emptied into the Atlantic, and seabirds soared above the estuary and adjoining city. Our conversation would be punctuated with cries, caws, and squawks – perhaps the birds' tribute, even if awkward, to a poet who memorializes their avian kin and other fellow creatures with such a sympathetic eye.

I'd admired Longley's poetry since I first heard him read at the 1995 ACIS conference in Belfast. I purchased The Ghost Orchid, *Longley signed it, and I quickly added the love poem "The Scissors Ceremony" to my syllabi. More recently I'd taught Longley's poetry in a graduate seminar on war literature; my students responded to his nuanced subtlety as enthusiastically as I. Today I had some questions for this poet whose verse defies easy classification. Neither nature, love, nor war poet, he is instead all three – and more.*

Born to English parents in Belfast in 1939, Longley read Classics at Trinity College Dublin and later taught secondary school in Belfast, Dublin, and London. From 1970 until early retirement in 1991, he worked as Combined Arts Director for the Arts Council of Northern Ireland. He published No Continuing City *in 1969; in 1985 he published* Poems 1963-1983, *which gathered his first four collections. A twelve-year dry spell followed before publication of* The Echo Gate *(1979),* Gorse Fires *(1991),* The Ghost Orchid *(1995),* The Weather in Japan *(2000),* Snow Water *(2004), and* Collected Poems *(2006). His edited volumes include* Poems: W.R. Rodgers *(1993) and* Selected Poems: Louis MacNeice *(2007). Appointed Professor of Poetry for Ireland in 2007, Longley has won the Whitbread Poetry Prize, the T.S. Eliot Prize, the Hawthornden Prize, the Belfast Arts Award for Literature, and the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry. He and Edna have three children. When not in Belfast, the Longleys have access to a cottage in Carrigskeewaun on the coast of County Mayo, where seabirds also call.*

> *I'd taught Longley's poetry in a graduate seminar on war literature; my students responded to his nuanced subtlety as enthusiastically as I. Today I had some questions for this poet whose verse defies easy classification. Neither nature, love, nor war poet, he is instead all three – and more.*

A great deal has been written about the Belfast Group, the writers' group hosted by Philip Hobsbaum from 1963–1966, yet you told us today at our plenary session that "it's all wrong." What could you say now to provide a more accurate view of those early days in Belfast?

The early days began before Belfast. They began at Trinity College Dublin, where Derek Mahon and I served our poetic apprenticeships, vying with each other and exploring English literature together. As well as Derek and myself, there were Brendan Kennelly and, later on, Eavan Boland. So I think of my apprenticeship, as it were, beginning in Dublin. There was a wonderful man there, an exceptional advocate for poetry, named Alec Reid. He was very fat, albino, eccentric, and he took an interest in the young poets. For Derek and me, he's a far more important figure than Philip Hobsbaum. Alec is never mentioned, so that annoys me.


Patricia Lynch

Yes, you've spoken of him to Jody Allen Randolph (see Longley 295-296). He seems to have been a passionate man, a vital source of encouragement.

And he was a very good judge of poetry. It was Alec Reid who got both Edna and me interested in Edward Thomas and Louis MacNeice. I've just come from a session here on Louis MacNeice, and among the books those young people were reading was my selection of Louis MacNeice. Edna made a study of Louis MacNeice, and her most recent book is an annotated edition of Edward Thomas's ***Collected Poems***, and none of that Alec-Reid-inspired stuff is ever mentioned. Then Edna got a job at Queens, in Belfast, and I followed her, as I was in pursuit.

In pursuit. (Laughter)

And we settled down in Belfast. One day Edna said, "Philip Hobsbaum wants you to join the Group," or "wants us to join the Group." And I said, "I don't want to join the Group. That's not my scene, really." I didn't want to join. But she said, "Well, he's a colleague." So I went along, and I am very glad I did because it was through them that I met Seamus Heaney. That was the second really big poetic friendship. But I'd have met him anyway. I enjoyed in a way the excitement of the sessions—practical criticism, poets reading new work. Before that I had been studying Latin and Greek very much according to the Victorian tenets of scholarship—such things as variant readings. I had never actually read a poem for pleasure. When my own poems were discussed, I didn't change a semicolon in response to what Hobsbaum said.

(Laughter) *Not a semicolon.*

No, no.

Not even a comma?

(***Laughter***) I might have. The exciting thing about my apprenticeship was sharing poems with Derek and Heaney, but with Edna most of

all. She was the critic I valued most. Does that more or less answer your question?

You do suggest an alternate view to conventional notions about the Group.

Also, Derek Mahon went there only once. That was all, once. It's a convenient mythology to have the notion of Hobsbaum as this Socratic figure. Another thing, his own poetry was crap. I knew as soon as I read it that his poetry was no good. But there he was telling us what to do.


Patricia Lynch

You've spoken before of such influences on your life and work as music, painting, Classical literature. But I'm wondering what inspiration the Irish literary tradition might have provided for you. Why do you think you were drawn to the work of Yeats, for example, so early in your life?

Irish culture did not play a big role in my life at that time. My mother and father came from Clapham, in London, London SW 11, in 1927. I was born in Belfast in 1939. I was aware of a rather schizoid existence from a very early age because my parents both had rather nice English accents, and then as soon as I went off to primary school, I came back with this very broad Belfast accent. In the playground you have to sound the same as everybody else. This rather shocked them! So I learned at a very early age how to remake myself, twice a day. My parents, both very intelligent, were uneducated. There were very few books in the house. I wasn't, say, like Ciaran Carson, brought up in a house where they spoke Irish, where people sang songs and told stories. That was not my background. It was only very gradually at school, where a brilliant English teacher introduced us boys to W. R. Rodgers, Louis MacNeice, Patrick Kavanagh, and W. B. Yeats. At that time, under the Unionist hegemony, Irish literature was not on the menu. I discovered Yeats by accident, really. I liked some of his poems, and so for my third or fourth year, when I was about fourteen or fifteen, I chose his *Collected Poems* as a prize. But I wasn't really able to read Yeats until I was well into my twenties. I knew nothing about Irish myth, nothing about Irish music. I acquired that gradually by chance.

You did acquire it though?

But not in a way that would necessarily make me feel more Irish. Sometimes I don't feel Irish inasmuch as I don't spontaneously burst into song. I know one of the most musical men in the world, James Galway the flute player, comes from Protestant East Belfast. And I heard him in an interview say much the same thing: he doesn't really feel all that Irish, he couldn't play without music. He couldn't improvise, either musically or verbally. If you're Northern Irish, by and large, Northern Irish from the Protestant side, you tend to be quieter and more reticent.

Do you identify with the British tradition more?

No, not now. But I did then. I identify now with both. In my boyhood, there were the BBC and awful newspapers. Awful right-wing, middle-class English newspapers like the *Sunday Express* came into the house. And the *Daily Mail*. When I was about seventeen or eighteen, I discovered *The Sunday Times*, *The Guardian*, *New Statesman* (my parents were slightly alarmed, I think), and then *The Irish Times*. To this day when I'm somewhere like Portugal, I miss two things deeply: daily doses of *The Irish Times* and *The Guardian*, and BBC Review 3, beautiful music all the day long.

You'll be going back soon enough.
(Laughter)

When the Good Friday Agreement was signed in '98, I wrote a letter to *The Irish Times* welcoming it. And I said that I was born in Belfast, educated in Dublin, and therefore I'm Irish. And I said my father served in two world wars, was decorated in the first, came from England as did my mother, and they were both Londoners. Therefore, I'm British as well. And I said some of the time I feel Irish, some of the time I feel British. Most of the time I feel neither.

(Laughter)

And I welcomed the agreement because it allowed one to have more than one cultural allegiance, and why should anyone be confined to just the one? So I'm Irish, but I have to be true to the Britannic side. I'm deeply Anglophile, as indeed many Irish people are, though they won't admit it—even those that can sound quite bigoted about Britain. I mean, they follow British football teams, they listen to British radio, watch British television. As I see it, the destinies of the two islands are inextricably bound up, and it's very foolish to try and extricate one from the other. Mind you, when there is an England-Ireland match, rugby or football, I unreservedly support Ireland.

I was born in Belfast, educated in Dublin, and therefore I'm Irish. My father served in two world wars, was decorated in the first, came from England as did my mother, and they were both Londoners. Therefore, I'm British as well.

(Laughter) *Well, would you say that the Gaelic tradition has had no effect, or has it had a recent effect, on your work?*

What do you mean by the Gaelic tradition?

The native Irish tradition, the literary tradition in the Irish language.

No, I don't know enough. I have translated a poem ["Aubade"] by Nuala [Ní Dhomhnaill]. I do think that the present collaboration between English-language and Irish-language poets, as instanced by Nuala and Paul Muldoon, or Nuala and Michael Hartnett, has produced epoch-making books, and it's an epoch-making moment in our culture. The Irish language has been a political football in the past. Now, the existence of several writers of genius in the language has made it a cultural resource rather than a political football. I regret very much that I don't have Irish and I don't speak Irish. Do you?

No, I don't. I struggle to pronounce the words.

(Laughter) Well, so do I. But I am aware that at a certain subcutaneous level, if you like, it has got under my skin.

But you've never, for example, knowingly written an aisling*? What about a poem like "Peace"?*

No, I'm inclined to go along with Kingsley Amis and Philip Larkin when they say we don't want any more poems from the myth kitty. [Kingsley Amis asserted in 1955 that "nobody wants any more poems about philosophers or paintings or novelists or art galleries or mythology or foreign cities or other poems." Philip Larkin in turn discredited the widely held view of literature as a "myth kitty" for safeguarding allusions, legends, and traditions.] That's not the way I write poems. Despite what I've just said, I hope my poems read as though they could not have been written by anyone other than an Irish poet. If I'm not an Irish poet, I'm nothing.

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But with British parents.

I would hope that I extend the notion of what an Irish poet might be.

Yes, exactly. Well, as long as we're speaking of influences, could you also comment on the connection, the lifeline you feel to Edward Thomas?

Yes, that's partly as a result of my wife. It's very much a love affair as far as I'm concerned, and I think he's a profound and original poet who still hasn't had his due. I was drawn to that period by the First World War, by my father's involvement, by my discovery at school of poets like Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, Isaac Rosenberg. And then Edward Thomas, who sometimes doesn't get into the war anthologies but nevertheless is a war poet. I think if you take a poem like "Tall Nettles," a poem about the rain washing the dust off tall nettles in the back end of a farm yard, it's somehow about everything. And he said this extraordinary thing, that anything, however small, can make a poem: nothing, however great, is certain to. So, you think of all those awful poems about the Vietnam War, about big subjects—they just fall flat on their arses. And then there's a poem like "Tall Nettles" by Edward Thomas or "To a Daisy" by Robert Burns. And, you know, Thomas is quite right. So it's the sotto voce, oblique, subtle approach of Edward Thomas that I like. And it's ridiculous to confine him as a nature poet. You can say everything you have to say in a poem about a daisy or tall nettles.

What about your "kindred spirit," Robert Graves (Mahon 55)?

Well, he's a kindred spirit, which goes back to my Trinity days. "She tells her love while half asleep, / In the dark hours." You know that poem, "She Tells Her Love While Half Asleep"? Or "There is one story and one story only / That will prove worth your telling" from "To Juan at the Winter Solstice." It was the perfection of his small lyrics that drew me.

They're what attracted you?

Yes, especially those. But also I loved ***Goodbye to All That***, and some of the historical novels, rather than ***The White Goddess***. Again, it was the lyric perfection. He doesn't quite manage what Wilfred Owen or Yeats do, which is to show that the lyric utterance, the lyric poem is sturdy enough to deal with extreme subject matter—like the hell of the trenches in Owens' case, or in Yeats' case, the nightmare

of Civil War. I lost interest, to be quite honest, with Graves' later poems where he got more and more refined and more and more obsessed by the White Goddess (who was really a sequence of young women that he wanted to have an excuse to flirt with).

Some critics see you as responding to Graves's thesis in The White Goddess *that we've upset the natural balance – that with the trenches, with the mushroom cloud, we've brought disaster to the natural world. I've read critics who say that you're responding to that idea.*

I don't know if I'm responding to that. I agree with it. I agree with Mao Tse-Tung when he said, "Women own half the sky." And I don't think the race will survive unless men listen to women. Inasmuch as Graves says all that, that's fine. I do believe in the Muse. And the Muse for me would be every woman, every female who has mattered to me, be it a wife, a lover, a mother, or sister. And I have two daughters. And then there's the female in me, my two nipples. So one of my mottoes to men would be, "Be true to your nipples." I think the world will be lost if the men don't look to the woman in themselves as well as listen to women. I have learned most of what I know from listening to intelligent women. That's the Muse. The Muse for me is all of that, plus the woman in me. But she almost has immanence, you know. So I like all that nonsense in Graves. But I find him tiresome when he is monothematic. And also I find him tiresome in his dismissal of everybody. He could find nothing good to say about Dylan Thomas or W. H. Auden or Eliot or Pound or Yeats, and I think that was unhealthy. And he withdrew to Majorca and surrounded himself with flatterers. That's very unhealthy for a poet.

I think the world is lost if the men don't look to the woman in themselves as well as listen to women.

I would agree. Getting back to Graves' thesis in The White Goddess*, I could ask you, why is our relationship to the natural world so important at* this *time?*

The coal miners used to take a canary down into the mine, and then, when it passed out, they knew they had to get out themselves. The whole world is beginning to behave like a canary at the moment, isn't it? So I think it's the number one issue–how we look after the other creatures, as well as ourselves. Make room for them. If we can't make room for the polar bears, there's going to be no room for us.

The feminist literary criticism published in Ireland during the late 1980s and early 1990s had a powerful effect on a generation of scholars. From your perspective, did it also have an impact on Irish poets?

It had on some of us, especially the girls (as I'm not allowed to call them) with Eavan [Boland] very much in the vanguard, vociferous and challenging. Younger poets such as Paula Meehan would see Eavan very much as a mother figure. I pride myself on being a feminist, though I keep lapsing!

Did the literary criticism published then have an impact on you?

I don't read much literary criticism. And I don't think of the female poets as women poets. I think of them as poets. I don't think of Medbh [McGuckian] as a poetess. I think of her as a challenging poet. Yes, I'm not really moved by the gender-binary thing. I think Eavan makes too much of it, but it's a theme, a theme for her to explore. And Adrienne Rich—I think she has just become boring, I'm afraid. Once people start to take themselves too seriously...

…there's a danger.

I think you take the poetry seriously, but you don't take yourself seriously. One of my favorite sayings is that "self-importance inscribes its own gravestone."

That's definitely worth contemplating. Paul Durcan once noted that the Great War provides the "primal landscape" in your poetry (6), and I can't disagree. Could you perhaps explain the ways in which the Battle of the Somme continues to color our life today – and why it does so?

To begin with, the Ulster division came from where I come from, and on July 1, 1916, at the beginning of the Battle of the Somme, it was more or less wiped out. Every little village and town in Northern Ireland has its war memorial. So it's still a huge wound in the Northern Irish psyche. In addition, my father fought in the First World War. He joined up as a sixteen- or seventeen-year-old in 1914. Somehow or other, he survived through to 1919. He was decorated for gallantry, and he became a captain. And he haunts me, and I often wonder did he share a cigarette with Wilfred Owen or Edmund Blunden or Siegfried Sassoon. I feel that today every mess in the world can be traced back to the Great War.

Could you explain why?

Well, after the Treaty of Versailles, which was ridiculously punitive to the Germans, there was only a breathing space and then we hit Hitler and the Second World War, and in between, of course, the Spanish Civil War, and then there was a breather and we hit Korea. Then only a brief stop for breath, and we had Vietnam. It's just been continuous war as a result of 1914. Not to mention Ireland.

These later wars, then, were consequences of the Great War?

Yes, I think so. And they resulted, too, from things that weren't resolved. The Irish problem in a way had its roots in 1916. Iraq is the result of British manipulation in the 20's. The Balkans is another example. All of that…

…can be traced back.

Yes. The war was a huge disaster. I wonder why they started it. And then when they saw how awful it was, I wonder why didn't they stop it. Difficult to stop wars, easy enough to start them. I'm haunted by it; I can't get around it.

Have you always felt that way?

Yes, ever since I knew anything about it.

As a child?

Not quite as a child, but I've always been enthralled and fascinated and appalled.

Some of your most anthologized poems are those in which you describe the personal impact of war on your father's life, and you've written as well of its consequences in the lives of your mother,

Patricia Lynch

grandmother, and uncle. You tell us that your uncle's death in No Man's Land "haunted [your] childhood." Do you feel that elegizing these family figures has helped you exorcize whatever demons they may have passed on to you?

Yes, definitely. Definitely. Getting it down on paper in a strange kind of way helps. Lionel had flitted in and out of one or two stories from my mother. And one or two stories from my grandfather. But everyone seemed to want to forget him, including his sister and his father. So that 's why I wrote the poem, just to make sure that he wasn't forgotten.

Do you think they were just trying to deal with their grief? Or did they honestly feel they had some reason not to be proud of him? Why do you think they wanted to try to forget him?

They were embarrassed by him, because he was not all there, as we say. I think he molested my mother, as far as I can remember.

So they had their reasons.

Yes. My mother had a very bad limp. She had a congenital hip malformation and limped very badly. My grandfather could never admit that. He had to say a nurse dropped her. He couldn't admit that he had fathered an imperfect girl. So the fact that there was a boy who was not all there—he couldn't admit to that either. This was a few generations ago. This was the way we dealt with problem children. We sent them to homes, forgot about them.

You write in the elegy "In Memoriam" that your father's "old [war] wounds woke / As cancer" during your twentieth year, and this strikes me as a very holistic way of looking at illness. Could you tell us how you came to have this view?

There is a certain amount of poetic license there. He was shot, and he was penetrated by shrapnel, as he said, "running from enemy fire." It went right the way through his buttock, it didn't shatter his hip, but it went right through, and it sliced his genitals. And when he got cancer, it was down there. So the poem was a way of explaining something; it wasn't exactly documentary. It might well have been documentary, but I can't prove it. It was a way of talking about the lingering malignity of war damage.

I did suspect there was a metaphor at work there – that you were making a point about the longlasting, deadly effects of war and violence on our psyches, and how those effects play out years later in someone's life.

Yes. That's going to be the case back home. It's going to take us a couple of generations to get over what has happened in Ireland. In America they're still not over the Civil War, especially when you go to the South. They use phrases like "antebellum," "before the war," and "before Atlanta was burned."

Among your more recent poetry I find "Pipistrelle," your poem about "The soldier who had lost his skin" and his befriending of a small wounded bat, to be especially poignant. I love it. I really do. Could you comment on the poem's genesis? I assume you based it on a real incident?

No. I based it on a picture in an exhibition which I visited in the Imperial War Museum. It had this terrible section of pictures of soldiers whose faces had been blown off. And there was also a photograph of this soldier in a bath. He had lost most of his skin, but he was kept alive by loving nurses, in a solution of warm, salty water. Extraordinary devotion. And he remained cheerful, I gather. And I wanted him to have a pet. That's my own invention. I wanted him to...

…have a moment of respite.

Yes, every night the little bat would come. You've seen them scooping up a sip of water?

"Tipple" was the word you used, I think.

"Tipple." What a lovely word. And that was an experiment, but it has taken off on its own, hasn't it, that little poem?

It has. For me, it also called to mind images of Michael Ondaatje's burn victim in The English Patient *in a wonderful coupling of fiction and what I assumed was fact. Did Ondaatje's novel have any influence upon you at all as you wrote the poem?*

I don't know where poems come from, and I don't know where they go when they disappear. I don't quite understand it.

No, I hadn't even read it. I saw the movie.

You must read the book now. And think about your patient in the bath.

Yes, I shall do so. I've met Ondaatje. I got ***The Irish Times*** award for poetry, and he got ***The Irish Times*** award for the novel. Yes, I liked him.

Looking back at the period of your own creative dry spell in the 1980s, can you pinpoint any reasons why the Muse might have left you for a time – or are we simply, inexplicably, at inspiration's mercy?

I think it was probably a combination of things. It had something to do with a midlife crisis which hit me rather powerfully, and I was drinking far too much. And I hated my job. I had produced a premature ***Poems: 1963-1983***, which was my first four books gathered together, and that was probably a bad idea. It made me too aware of myself. And then there's just the mystery of it all. I mean to be quite honest. I'm not being flirtatious when I say that. I don't know where poems come from, and I don't know where they go when they disappear. I don't quite understand it. But certainly when I got out of the Arts Council in 1991 at the age of fifty-one, I had a whole new lease on life, and I produced another four books.

*So, in retrospect, if there's anything you might have done differently to entice inspiration to come back sooner, you might have left your job sooner? (*Laughs*)*

Exactly! Ha, ha, ha.

I know you've referred before to the betrayals you experienced in public life and with your job. You made me curious. Can you comment on that? It's a strong word, "betrayal."

Well, it's true. When I was getting out of the Arts Council, they wanted to get rid of me because I was awkward. They appointed a new director, and they appointed the wrong man, and I knew that they had. But because he was black, I was accused by people who knew me very well of being racist. And all of those people shuffled over to his side, without any embarrassment, without a second thought. And I had met him, and I knew that he was a fraud. But I had to go into hospital for what might have been a cancer operation on my jaw. And it wasn't cancer, and I came out of the hospital elated.

Like Patrick Kavanagh. A rebirth.

Exactly. I came out like Patrick Kavanagh, elated, and I knew with extraordinary clarity that the new director wasn't who he said he was. And I did some very brief research, and I was right. He couldn't take up the post. He had to leave. And all those people, really, in my mind were treacherous. They were just

going where the power was. They weren't questioning anything. Then one or two people with whom I'd worked over many years called me evil. That's what I meant.

You told Margaret Mills Harper that a culture should be judged by how it treats its most vulnerable members, those "less fortunate than we are, children and animals" (Longley 62). How did you come to this conclusion, and how do you feel it plays out in your verse?

I think a poet's mind should be like Noah's ark and make room for the animals. The two charities which I support out of my own pocket are the NSPCC (National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children) and the RSPCA (Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals). What strikes me about both children and animals is that they're at our mercy.

And, finally, since we continue to live in a world that I see as in need of redemption, could you explain for us any of the ways in which you believe poetry can help us to redeem ourselves?

I think it can encourage us to be attentive and reverent, and to slow down, and to look around. A friend of mine who's a naturalist said to me about poetry that it gives things a second chance. I think that's right. Poetry gives things a second chance. But it's getting too late for that now. We're on the brink of ruin.

Can you hold out any hope for us?

I don't know. I was thinking of the carbon footprint (that awful phrase; I hate it) of this one hotel room and how awful it is. Then I was thinking of how irritated I would be if there weren't hot water and air conditioning. (Laughter)

And clean towels.

Oh, yes, I love all that. So we're going to have to make do with less. I think that's it.

So, in telling us this, are you acting as a priest of the Muses?

Yes, I like that. Priest of the Muses. Yes, I hope that's what I am—*musarum sacerdos*. I would never claim to be that. I think there are two phrases that best reflect what *poet* means. The first is the old Scottish word *makar*. The poet has something in common with the craftsman, the carpenter, the blacksmith. But then there's that other expression—*musarum sacerdos*, priest of the muses. It's the more religious, mysterious, mystical, transcendental side of things. I think if a poet goes too much in either direction, he or she loses out. Art is in good health when the pendulum is oscillating—it's from the oscillations between craft and vision that poetry happens.

A friend of mine who's a naturalist said to me about poetry that it gives things a second chance. I think that's right. Poetry gives things a second chance. But it's getting too late for that now. We're on the brink of ruin.

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Rick Creese

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Michael Longley

Cygnus

Cygnus infuriates Achilles who just cannot kill him—
Spears bouncing off each shoulder as off a stone wall
Or cliff face, that cumbersome body blunting his sword. So,
He pummels chin and temples—knock-out punches—and
Trips him up and kneels on ribcage and adam's apple
And thrapples Cygnus's windpipe with his helmet-thongs.

But this is no triumph for Achilles: he has strangled
Neptune's son who grows webs at once between his fingers
While his hair turns snowy and feathery and his neck
Lengthens and curves out from a downy chest and his lips
Protrude as a knobbly beak through which he wheezes
And he is transformed into a—yes (hence the name)—

A white swan that flies above the bloody battlefield.

Jeff Fischer

The Holly Bush

in memory of Dorothy Molloy

Frosty Carrigskeewaun. I am breaking ice
Along the salt marsh's soggy margins
And scaring fieldfares out of the holly bush
And redwings, their consorts, chestnut-brown
Flashing one way, chestnut-red another,
Fragments of the January dawn-light
That Killary focuses on the islands
Before it clears the shoulder of Mweelrea.
Caher Island and Inishturk are frosty too.
In the short-lived spotlight they look like cut-
Outs and radiate apricot from within.
I learn of your death in this weather and
Of your book arriving the day after,
Your first and last slim volume. Dorothy,
You read your poems just once and I was there.
The poets you loved are your consorts now.
Golden plovers—a hundred or more—turn
And give back dawn-light from their undersides.
The edge of the dunes wears a fiery fringe.

Mark Osteen

In the Echo Chamber

All photos courtesy of the author

You speak at last

With a remote mime

Of something beyond patience,

…wordless proof

Of lunar distances

Travelled beyond love.

– Seamus Heaney,
"Bye-Child"

Bayto! Bayto! My eleven-year-old son Cameron is shouting. I pay attention: he is autistic and seldom says anything intelligible. But what is he saying? "Bathtub?"

"You already had a bath, bud. It's time for bed."

That isn't it. He repeats "Bayto, bayto," for several minutes, each repetition more emphatic than the last. Finally he declares, "That hurt!" That's a rote phrase left over from one of our attempts to teach him not to hit people, and usually crops up completely out of context. This time he is trying to convey something specific, yet I can't for the life of me determine what it is. My wife Leslie is usually better at deciphering his language, so I call her into Cam's bedroom.

"What was that all about?" I ask her afterward.

"Something hurt, I think," she answers, shaking her head.

"You think he really meant 'that hurt?'"

"Yeah. But I'm not positive."

After Cam finally falls sleep, we sit side by side on the sofa, recalling our long struggle to help him talk. We feel frozen in time, beset by scenes and sounds reverberating from years past.

Gloss

At ten months, Cam said "Hi," then added "raisin," "kitty cat," "dog," "cup" and a few other words. By age three he'd lost most of these, and seemed utterly fogged in, confined to a looking-glass land where everyone spoke jabberwocky.

Gradually, he began to understand a few simple, familiar words and phrases. But saying things was much tougher. Sometimes the more we tried, the worse things got. When he was about six, for example, we tried to teach him to frame requests with "I want": "I want to go outside," instead of just "outside." The goal was to build on single words until he could say full grammatical sentences. But "I want" flummoxed him, and after a few weeks of this training he developed a stammer. It was excruciating to watch his brown eyes blink and his lips tremble as he stuttered out "Wah, wah, wah, wah." He'd stop, slap his chest and try again, only to be confounded by the same syllables. We'd give him as much time as he needed, but often he'd get so frustrated he'd just give up and howl or pinch his interlocutor.

Then one of our behavioral therapists began placing her finger on Cam's chin to prevent ticcing; her tactic helped

After Cam finally falls sleep, we sit side by side on the sofa, recalling our long struggle to help him talk. We feel frozen in time, beset by scenes and sounds reverberating from years past.

to defeat his stutter. For the entire summer of '96, when he turned seven, Cam "wanted" everything in sight—food, the swing, rides, you name it. His confidence bloomed; his demeanor calmed.

When Diane, our therapeutic supervisor, heard that Cam was suddenly speaking in short, clear sentences, she was convinced we'd witnessed a miracle. "This is very unusual. Kids who are essentially nonverbal at five, like Cam was, almost never learn to talk." Our elation knew no bounds: our son had finally broken through into language!

It's easy to imagine that a deep silence hangs over people with autism, but nothing could be further from the truth, at least in our case.

But before long he began prefacing every request with "want to go," as in "Want to go cheese, yes." Both Diane and Cam's school speech pathologist assured us that "want to go" was a "verbal stim" (i.e., a non-productive utterance) and urged us to get rid of it. We tried: "Not 'want to go.' Say 'I want cheese.'" Cam's response: "Want to go I want cheese." The stutter returned; soon "want to go" went, and nearly everything else went with it. Our efforts to improve his speech had only hampered it. We rued our misguided efforts: hope's budding made its wilting all the more devastating.

It's easy to imagine that a deep silence hangs over people with autism, but nothing could be further from the truth, at least in our case. Cam has always been a noisy, histrionic child. He speaks most volubly with his body, and over the years we've learned to interpret this language: those gleeful scissors-kicking jumps; that contented or angry rocking; the myriad variations on his wordless shouts; the fine gradations in a face that to the uninitiated seems blank; an entire lexicon of claps.

Cam's claps are his personal Morse code. Thus, a single clap after he has sung a line or done something he finds remarkable serves as an exclamation point: "How about that?!" A series of claps in front of his open mouth creates a booming effect that means "I'm getting mad," or "I wish I could tell you what I mean." Several loud claps and a grimace means "I'm anxious," or "I don't like what you told me" (e.g., "stop splashing water outside of the tub"). And let's not forget those declarative rhythmic claps he favors in public places: "Cam is here!"

He also uses a few all-purpose words, such as "Coke" (which sometimes means "I want a Coke," but sometimes means "I want . . . something") or "car" ("I don't know where I want to go, but I want to get out of here"). And he never says plain old "no," but always "No, okay." Leslie and I inadvertently gave birth to this locution through conversations like this:

"Cam, do you want to go outside?"

"No."

"Okay."

The two words became a single thought. Those who don't know him are confused by the phrase: does he mean no or yes? To us it seems to encapsulate Cam's struggle with language: one word cancels the other.

Sometimes he gives forth a long stream of syllables that sound like gibberish but really aren't. Over the years we've learned to decrypt this jargon.

CAM'S GLOSSARY

1. "Loo, loo, loo," or "lu-ee, lu-ee, ah lu-ee" (uttered in a low, even tone) = "I'm really contented," or "I think you're cool," or "I'm pleased with myself." After a gymnastics lesson in 2000, Cam's coach told me that he seemed to like Louie, another boy in the group. "He kept saying, 'Louie, Louie, Louie.'" I didn't have the heart to tell her that he was just naming his own satisfaction.

2. "Hooka, tooka, tooka" = "This is really fun."

3. "Hey, hooh, huuh" = "I'm deep in thought."

4. "Eeeh, geeta gee!" = depending upon tone, anything from strong displeasure to panic.

5. "Huh huh huh" (a fake laugh, followed by rocking) = "Let's laugh together!"

6. "Hmmmm?" = "Are you noticing me?" (The proper response is "Hmmmm?" followed by a conspiratorial laugh.)

7. "Cut-tik, cut-tik, cut-tik" (whispered) = "I'm concentrating deeply."

I've often speculated that Cam's expressions are his version of Leslie's quirky wordplay. This is a woman who can't leave words alone. Thus "Watson" (her pet name for me) metamorphosed into "Wallace," then "Walmart" and "walnut," among others. Similarly, "to pee" evolved into "Peabo Bryson," and then into "bryson." A stupid person is not merely dim but "dimsky Korsakov," or a "nylonhead." A cold day isn't "chilly"; it's "chili-dog," or "Chilliwack" (fans of '70s rock will recognize the allusion). How, we wonder, could two such confirmed wordlovers manage to produce a nearly wordless child?

Though Cam's sounds and multipurpose words do have meanings, they are blunt instruments—poor tools for expressing anything complex or precise. Hence, we've had to become detectives or telepaths, deducing our son's emotions, desires, and thoughts from his facial expressions, gestures, cryptic syllables. Yet we've often failed at the guessing game, partly because his language is so rudimentary, partly because his thinking is so different from ours. At times we've felt like poor, beleaguered Alice, protesting to pugnacious Humpty Dumpty that "glory" doesn't mean, as he claims, "a nice knock-down argument."

"'When I use a word,' Humpty Dumpty said, in a rather scornful tone, 'it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less'" (Carroll 269).

Unlike Humpty, Cam can't enforce his definitions. Instead his language embodies the eggman's other major trait—fragility. Once Cam's language shattered, all of the teachers and all of the speech therapists couldn't put it together again.

Cam enjoying the swing

Reverb

Starting when Cam was four, Les and I met yearly with our son's team of educators and therapists. Each year we stressed the same points; we could have recorded the conversation when he was four and played it back when he was eleven: "We think the main focus should be on communication. If he can express his wishes, he won't have to resort to slapping, pinching and biting." Every year the team members nodded sagely and outlined a plan. And the next year Cam had made little or no progress. We seemed to live in a gigantic echo chamber where our words bounced back at us year after year.

Young Cam with *Max's Christmas*

Mark Osteen

And so did Cam: for years his spoken language consisted mostly of echolalia. The phenomenon is named for Echo, a nymph in Greek mythology charged with entertaining Queen Hera with lively talk. One day, when Hera was attempting to catch her husband, Zeus, frolicking with other nymphs, Echo's chattering distracted the queen from the task. She punished Echo by proclaiming that henceforth her speech would be limited to repeating someone else's last utterance. When Echo fell in love with the beautiful youth Narcissus, her echoing scared him off. Despondent, she retreated to mountain caves, and eventually faded away until nothing was left but her voice. For years Cam seemed to share her fate.

Many experts hold that echolalia isn't true language, that although typical children pass through an echolalic stage that functions as a bridge to true symbolic language, echoing lacks the originality, spontaneity and give-and-take of real conversation. Special educator Adriana Schuler and speech pathologist Barry M. Prizant argue that when an autistic person quotes a TV commercial—as many love to do—he or she is using only lower brain structures; no real language is being spoken. Famed neurologist Oliver Sacks even claims that autistic echolalia is "purely automatic" and "carries no emotion, no intentionality"(233-4).

Cam's echolalia did often sound like mechanical parroting. If, for example, we asked him, "Do you want a banana or an orange?," he would probably say "orange"; but if we reversed the order, he'd say "banana." He couldn't seem to remember that we'd offered two choices. Even when we coached him, his "improved" responses were often just redoubled echoes: "Do you want bread?" "Bread." "Don't repeat; say 'yes.'" "Yes." "Do you want bread?" "Bread, yes."

But other clinicians have shown that echolalia serves a variety of linguistic functions, and autistic authors such as Jasmine O'Neill and Donna Williams write that their childhood echolalia was useful, giving them time to process others' words and a way to join conversations. In any case, our own experiences have proven Sacks wrong. For example, in the bread exchange, Cam isn't just echoing—he's also assenting. Schuler and Prizant cite cases of "situation-association," in which people use echolalia to comment on their surroundings by associating current activities with previous events or occasions. Sometimes the scripts have a metonymic relationship with the circumstances. Thus when Cam, at four, wanted to end a speech therapy session, he used a memorized script, "Take your shoes off," by which he meant "Put your shoes on"—i.e., "let's get ready to go home."

For years Cam has used phrases he learned from toddler books or kids' songs to express himself. Hence, when he looks at Les or me and says, "Guess what, Max?," we are to respond with "What?"—the next sentence in the book *Max's Christmas*, which he memorized at age two—and then we must recite the entire book. These questions and answers may not be "true" conversation, but they involve give and take, shared attention and associations. They are Cam's way of asking for help or intimacy. (Others can misinterpret these phrases. Once his teacher called home, extremely excited that he'd said, "What happened? Be calm," and "Who are you talking to?" She had no idea that these were phrases quoted from *Max's Christmas*.)

Sometimes an echo's meaning is quite clear. One morning, for example, he bounded into our room, crawled into our bed, and led us through Barney's theme song: "I love you, you love me/ We're a happy family. . . ." He knew exactly what he meant and so did we. I've always hated that song, but when our nearly non-verbal son sang it, the saccharine sentiment carried a redeeming poignancy.

Sometimes an echo's meaning is quite clear. One morning, for example, he bounded into our room, crawled into our bed, and led us through Barney's theme song: "I love you, you love me/We're a happy family. . . ." He knew exactly what he meant and so did we.

Such incidents inspire wonder at Cam's capacity to comment on his world, to compensate for his disability by selecting the right script. And once in awhile, his ritualized monologues become less cryptic, as he composes an idiosyncratic "mash-up," that mixes snatches of songs, words and near-words in a strange and beautiful poetry: "Heeka-deeka duh, ah loo, ah loo, ah yuh you, hoppeen on one foot, huh-huh." It's as though he's traveled to some distant place and reporting what he's seen there. Who could doubt that these strategies, which Paul Collins likens to a magpie building its nest from stray flotsam (81), display creativity and intelligence?

Yet our son's inability to generate novel phrases remains deeply debilitating. Sometimes, for instance, the rote

scripts interfere with his meaning. Let's say he wants to go for a ride, and we ask him to use proper words.

"Cam, what do you want?"

"Car."

"Can you say 'I want to go in the car?'"

"Car, yes."

"I want."

"Want."

"To go."

"Go."

"In the . . ."

"Bed."

Why does he say "bed" when he means car? Because "in the" precedes "bed" in the memorized phrase "sleep in the bed." He seems to forget the original request once the sentence is broken into parts, and instead of recalling that in this context the phrase ends with "car," the script "in the bed" usurps it. Yet he knows full well that "bed" is the wrong answer. So after saying "bed," he'll growl or clap angrily, as if to say, "Damn it, I don't know why I said that, because it isn't what I meant."

Sentences are thin-shelled eggs; once broken, they can't be reassembled.

We "neurotypical" people flip through our mental rolodex until we find *le mot juste*—the appropriate word with the right nuances. Usually we retrieve at least an approximation. But even when Cam has used a given word many times, he still must hunt laboriously for it like someone looking for pictures in a dark, crowded attic. He'll stare into your eyes and scan your face intently. You gaze back at him, trying to will the words into his mind. He grabs the closest approximation—a garbled word, a metonym—but there may be no picture for what he wants to say. How, for example, does his concrete mind convey something like: "I'm anxious about entering this noisy, unfamiliar building"? Shouting "Coke!" won't really do the job.

He'll stare into your eyes and scan your face intently. You gaze back at him, trying to will the words into his mind.

When Cam was about nine, we started using assistive technology devices: first an Easy Talk machine (a console of large buttons with pictures pasted on them; you push the button and it says a recorded phrase). We replaced that with a Language Master (which reads recorded strips on cards). It was eerie to hear my own voice trying to make routine outings—"go to Burger King"—sound like glorious escapades. Eerier yet was the feeling that the machine had snatched Cam's lost words from the ether to give them fleeting expression.

The machine said what he couldn't, and said it clearly every time. But we could never create enough cards for all the possible situations in his life: the machine could not say, "I feel sick," or "I'm afraid," or "That sound hurts my ears."

Noted autistic author Temple Grandin writes that she thinks not in words but in pictures (19). Does Cam? Is his head filled with a slideshow of captionless illustrations? If so, does he maintain that voice in his head that comments on his activities, makes long- and short-term plans, tells him what to do next? Sacks theorizes that many autists can't connect individual experiences into a

continuous narrative, and thus exist in a pure present of "vivid, isolated moments, unconnected with each other or with [themselves]" (201). Anyone living in such a "pure present" might lack the self-awareness we identify with true human consciousness.

Our son has sometimes behaved as if he lived in a pure present, failing to remember an activity from one day to the next, or not recognizing people he's known for years. But sometimes he says something so appropriate you know he must tell his own story.

For instance, when he was about five we drove from Baltimore to Atlantic City so I could take the test to become a *Jeopardy!* contestant. The long day tapped out Cam's shallow reserves of patience. As we wearily rode the elevator back to the parking lot, two grizzled gents, reeking of smoke and stale liquor, boarded the car with us. This was the final indignity: as soon as the door thumped shut Cam started shrieking. Then, suddenly, he stopped and shouted, with perfect clarity, "I need to go crazy!"

One of the casino habitues nodded sagely and said, "We feel the same way, kid."

Cam had made perfect sense: this elevator is too small, I don't know these people, and I want to scream! Such moments prove that my son does narrate his life, and even has some understanding of his condition. They also remind us again how often he reaches for words but comes up empty. They make me wonder: does he think fluently in words but stumble only when trying to say them?

Other linguistic eccentricities invite further speculation. For example, Cam often uses "I" for "you" and "he" for "I." Since nobody has ever called him "I," he figures—with sound autistic logic—that he is "he." But he's not sure. So he takes a middle ground, employing a pronoun that combines "he" and "I": "Ee take a baff."

If a person has trouble using "I," you have to wonder if he thinks of himself as an "I." Does Cam live at a distance from himself, responding to his own acts with bewilderment, as if they've issued from some other "he"? In fact he seems to enact this relationship daily, when he stops whatever he's doing to watch his fingers create shadows; he seems both to know and not to know that the movements come from him. On the other hand, perhaps the problem is that he can't imagine himself as another person might see him. This, the well-known "theory of mind" dysfunction (the idea that autistic people don't understand others' thoughts) would suggest that Cam's problem is not that he's too distant from himself, but that he can't distance himself from his own thoughts and actions, can never see outside his own obsessions, never breach the walls of his echo chamber.

Cam's problem is not that he's too distant from himself, but that he can't distance himself from his own thoughts and actions, can never see outside his own obsessions, never breach the walls of his echo chamber.

Because our son was so aloof and so seldom talked, we fell into the habit of treating him as if he couldn't hear. When we was very young and nothing seemed to penetrate his cocoon, he might as well have been deaf. In later years, however, he occasionally showed us quite plainly that he understood our words. One day I was talking with our head therapist about how hard it was for Cam to think of the right words, and started recounting the history of his language problems. After a couple of minutes he put his head on her shoulder, then approached me, growling and gnawing fiercely on his rubber chew toy.

Cam, 2009

The truth dawned on me: "I think he wants us to stop talking about him," I said. "I think it bothers him." She nodded: first he seemed to want sympathy, then had acted embarrassed, and finally irritated. I realized with chagrin that we'd been treating him like an infant or pet. Our life might have been easier if he were: at least then we could reliably estimate his cognitive abilities.

One morning, after Les told Cam—then aged eleven—he couldn't go outside until after breakfast, he launched into one of his wordless monologues, concluding with a phrase that sounded like, "That's annoying."

"Did you hear that?" Leslie said to me.

"I did. Is that even possible?"

We shook our heads, wondering all over again if normal language lay somewhere in his brain, misfiled and unavailable. When those spotlights of comprehension shine through the fog of the disorder, you no longer trust your judgment. The worst of such moments—such as the time when, during a screaming fit one fateful evening in 1996, Cameron shouted "trapped!"—only make his condition more agonizing for all of us. In the wake of such utterances, our hard-won accommodation to reality is, like Humpty's shell, shattered all over again.

On the evening Cam shouts "Bayto!," I have a dream I've had before. I am falsely accused of some vague crime. Though innocent, when I try to defend myself in court, I am tongue-tied: I literally cannot open my mouth. I wake in a cold sweat and stumble into the bathroom to wipe my face. I think about how, in barbaric societies, traitors and informers get their tongues cut out. As I look in the mirror, it strikes me that my nightmare is my son's waking life. Cam has never done anything wrong, yet he has spent his life, in effect, tongue-

less. A wave of nausea courses through me. I gag. Eventually I push down the sickness, but there is no more sleep that night.

The next morning Les calls me into Cam's room. "Bunny, look at this." She points to Cam's big toe: it is bruised and blue, the cuticle crusted with dried blood.

"Oh my God," I say. "Big toe! That's what he was trying to tell us last night! How stupid am I? I thought he was saying 'bathtub.'"

I had dismissed his words as echolalia. His meaning now seems obvious: his toe was throbbing, but he couldn't make his dense parents understand.

That hurt.

Thinking again of the hardships my son faces every day, I am briefly overcome by sadness. But then I realize that, in trying to communicate in spite of his disability, in seeking to escape from his echo chamber, Cam displays "something beyond patience": something like heroism. He has never given up trying to talk. How, then, can we ever stop listening?

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Toni Thomas

Who Says the Shattered House Can't Live Here Anymore?

You can live forever
with a sunken wing.
Sylvia's brother did that.
Took the leftovers of his life
and made a nest here.
Maybe not satin coated
but then how much better
worsted wool suffices in a snowstorm
and come winter we get plenty of them.
Thirty five years old and he still
hobbles out for walks in the snow.

In August the wasps in our yard
get voracious with their swollen tongues
will dine on anything—pink salmon
Kool-Aid, the fluoride toothpaste
my brother uses to dab on the balsa wood
of his rudderless plane.
My mother spreads baby oil
all over her body
manages to keep the wasps
but not the sun
away from her.

I don't tell my mother the garden
is shrinking
clutches lost petals
parched geraniums.
Like my body that will whittle itself
into twigs so hard my father's might
can't snap them with his unimmaculate hands.

"Elizabeth" by Toni Thomas

"Maddy's Choice" by Toni Thomas

White cake batter invades the oven.
We send cupcakes three doors down
to Sylvia and her brother.
They are angel food
with colored sprinkles on them
deny the inclemency
of the rain.

I paint my hands white.
Am too young to know yet
that I won't be able to save
my mother.
That no man wants a girl
with crimped wings.

I still believe God is a field
of parched lemons
slice their bodies in half
at the kitchen table.
Squeeze every ounce of juice
out of them.
"Bitter as ravens" my brother tells me
after one sip.
But what does he know.
His tongue is sugar coated on cup cakes
prickly church sermons
that ransom sin
make it pay here.

When you slice through
the night
do you enter the day
or only the screech of crows calling?
I hold a telescope up to the moon.
As if lust can speak
to me.
My lucky coin a recipe
against disaster
unprotected days.

At 8pm I will meet my lover

He stockpiles compost for our yard.
Meet him in front of the French café between Belmont and Stark.
He will anguish over the world's breaking
obsess about the day's indictments
the bombings in London, Egypt,
the Oregon budget that won't pass.
I will ply baked brie
into his mouth's damp wing.
The waiter will be lean as a runner
cute with his nipped pants
watery blue eyes.
I will want to offer a prism
for what's been lost here.
My dress will stick to my thighs
because it's 90 degrees and
the restaurant has no air conditioning
just two mahogany ceiling fans blowing.

I will imagine wandering along the Champs-Élysées
a choir of birds in my hands
my love not sanguine but crusty
as a loaf of good bread
soft and dense
when you dig your teeth into it.

It will be approaching midnight
the city lights spread across
an unhinged sky.
We won't be weary
won't need to drive anywhere
will know only the steady bird peck of kisses
the wafer of happiness
love has called back into our arms.


"Ieashia" by Toni Thomas

Back in Yevsky you came to me

clear light on a purgatoried day
the lavender cloth of it
pot of black tea
words that scatter their thimbles
grow warm as watermelon seeds
then walk away.

I confess to you that
I have left my mother with no shoes.
She is old and I worry about her
in her scant blue coat
the sermon of crows calling.
Delinquent child lost amid
the market stalls and fish grinding
machinery.

How many bodies have frozen to death
in a house with thin walls?

Some people believe that death
is an overgrown garden
and what we don't tend
dries up in infirmed hands
that there is derision in the doilies,
the walnut sideboard coated in dust so thick
my mother wrote her name in it.

"The tableau of want,"
my Aunt Gelbhur says,
"has invaded our beds."
She swears by her crystal rosary
hulks her flour sack of repentance into the street
looks for miracles,
shakes her head over
the men who have spent the weight
of their bodies over the delicacy
of my mother's bed.

"Frankie Goes to College" by Toni Thomas

I am back at the table with you
mourning America, the headlines
my misshapen hands.
You pour more tea.
Offer up saffron buns from a scallop edged
dessert plate.
The sermon of praise that belies
what we spend.

I dream of spoons, no heart failure
my thrifty father
lighting the oil lamp
my mother guardian of fishes
the discourse of your hands
balm of the eucalyptus tree
the tamer of serpents
how they rise and descend on me
carry my clearest envelopes
my body's softest effigies
my mother's quivering voice
here and abroad
back home again.

Toni Thomas (MA, MFA) has worked boxing greeting cards, making paper-mâché dinosaurs in the parks, counseling families and children, sculpting clay torsos, teaching adjunct at university, and studying the quiet disposition of the moon from her chair. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Prairie Schooner, Notre Dame Review*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *The Minnesota Review*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Poetry East*, *Eclipse*, *Blue Collar Review*, *Paterson Literary Review* as part of an honorable mention, and in *Southern California Poetry Anthology* as part of a 2005 Ann Stanford Poetry Award. She has received an International Merit Award from *Atlanta Review*, among others, and currently lives in Oregon with her husband and two children.

Pat Lynch

Hand-Me-Downs


Kaneez Hassan

Who would stalk Dustin? I know you're not supposed to think like that—you're not supposed to assess the victim's desirability—it's as bad as blaming him. But Dustin? Good God.

He was the sorriest looking kid in the class, possibly the whole school. Gangly, tall, he wore thin, dirty tee shirts, and seemed oblivious to the extremely pertinent truth that he emitted an odor. It was a tad gamy and sometimes, on fierce days, it clung to the air around him. The usual hormone riot had given him that violent teenage skin, which wasn't so bad, but he picked at it with dirty fingernails, and that was bad. And his breath was bad, and that was worse. Expectedly, the other kids regarded him with a vague contempt, those who noticed him, that is.

We're a bottom-level high school in a Sacramento ghetto; our population: the children of America's vast, integrated underclass. Dustin belonged to our third largest group—poor whites. I say this because here kids mention ethnicity first, always, when talking about people. Abraham Lincoln was that white dude from back in the day, Martin Luther King the black dude who gave a speech.

Teachers do something similar (though more tentatively and with the appropriate euphemisms) but even we called Dustin Blake that weird white kid who wanders. And he was a wanderer all right; the security monitors nailed him daily for roaming the campus without a pass, and after a while they stopped bringing him to detention and brought him directly to us. We're the Compromised Learners Assistance with Studies Program (CLASP) and Dustin was signed up with us for English and Math.

Last January, when it was so cold I brought in a space heater for my classroom, the polite East Indian security guy pushed open our door and stood aside to let Dustin through. "I find him out there in the field again, Mrs.," the guard said while Dustin shuffled to his seat. The guard shook his head, his dark, sweet eyes following Dustin. "Big boys like this," the guard said. "Nobody's chasing him."

I made Dustin stay after class so I could chew him out, yet again. I began with my Sigh of Under-appreciated Patience (SOUP). "You're still at it. I thought we had a deal."

"We do." He stretched his long legs out and tilted the empty desk in front of him. The cuffs of his jeans were wet. "But I thought I seen someone. I got someone following me."

"That's so scrawny it's not even a lie. It's lower than a lie." SOUP bubbled again while I put before him a puffy bundle of down jacket loosely tied by string. He got up, broke the string and stared while the jacket tumbled loose, then gathered it, slowly unzipped it, unzipped every smaller pocket, snapped and unsnapped every snap. "It's from the Lost and Found in a school in Colorado," I said. "It's practically brand new. You've scored, my friend."

Dustin put the jacket on and zipped it up. "It fits perfect," he said. "See? And it's so hella cold out there." He peered up at my extraordinarily up-to-date evolution time-line encircling the room, the time-line nobody ever looked at, his eyes fixing in turn on each stapled picture. "It fits hella good," he said. His gaze went back to discretely naked Australopithecus, crouched by a stream, gathering rocks into his hairy arms. "That dude wouldn't believe there could be something like this." He kept his eyes on the picture. "Thanks, Ms. Boyd. It fits hella good."

"It ought to do the job. Now go to Math."

"Okay." He went to the door. "But I got someone after me. It's real."

He was absent the next two days. This was unusual because despite his aversion to class, he seemed to gravitate to the school itself. He had lived for the first semester with his mother, speed-addicted father and younger sister in a single room in a dive motel near the freeway. Over the holidays his father repaired a truck with a camper attachment and now they lived in it, on a campsite down by the American River. He'd told me that he slept in a raised "thing like a shelf " above his parents' double sleeping bag, and his sister, the shortest, slept in the front seat. So school had to be a refuge. His previous jacket, which I'd procured from a supply of used clothes collected by the volleyball coach, had been stolen during his move. I bought the present one because I owed Dustin. He was useless, he wouldn't concentrate and he smelled bad, but he had forgiven me back in September when I had wrongly and publicly accused him of downloading porn on our class

computer. When the real culprit confessed a day later I announced, at the beginning of class: "I need to say something here. Yesterday you heard me accuse Dustin of downloading that material. And when he said he didn't do it I didn't believe him. I was wrong. I'm very, very sorry." Then I turned to Dustin and said, "Dustin, I hope you'll accept my apology." And he, his pocked face reddening, drawled, "It's okay. I woulda thought I done it too." Even as he spoke Belinda, a pudgy Senior whose glistening pink lips were outlined in ferocious blue, said, "Ms. Boyd, you don't gotta apologize to him," and the sneer in her voice triggered a nasty laugh from a couple of the others. So my honorable gesture went belly-up, but Dustin lingered after the bell rang and showed me the area on his arm he intended to one day adorn with a snake tattoo. He made no mention of what had happened. But after that he started hanging around, before class and after, and that's how I came to know the particulars about his home life, and came to wonder now at his absence.

He came back the third day, the new jacket hanging loose.

"Were you sick?" I said. "You're never sick."

"I got hurt. Burnt. See?" He lifted his tee shirt to his neck. A blister covered almost his whole stomach and part of his rib cage. The thing was massive.

"My God." I'd never seen anything like it. The watery sprawl went up from his navel and spread outward, contained by a thin, yellowing coat of skin.

"You can poke it," he said. "It don't bust."

I suppose that I should have shown more physical reserve, but the blister was too fascinating, and ghastly. My finger made a dent. "How on earth?" I said. I touched another spot, farther up.

"They was cooking, and it was a pot of water, and it got knocked on me but nobody seen it happen. It was dark." He lowered his shirt, the same rank thing he'd worn three days ago.

"You mean somebody did this to you?"

"I guess," he said. "Could I git on the computer?"

"After you talk. Talk." We were playing our game now, where he assumed a certain reportorial nonchalance and I pressed sternly for details.

"So, um, we was cooking, and when it happened it hurt like you wouldn't believe it, and I was yelling, I was screaming."

"Who was cooking? Were you outside?"

He nodded. "Down at the river. It was just the people what live there."

"So you were standing around in the dark, outside, and then a pot of boiling water fell on you?"

"Or got throwed," he said. "And then everyone come around, all like, hollering, and after that my Mom, she wanted to put vitamin E on it, but she couldn't bite the vitamins open cause she hasn't got her new teeth yet. So she took me over to the Emergency."

I went to my desk and sat down. Things pretty well added up: I knew from his file that his mother was forty-two, too young to be toothless unless the teeth had been unnaturally removed, perhaps by the same methamphetamine junkie who knocked the boiling water on Dustin. "Where was your father in all this?" I said.

"It ain't him." Dustin kept his jacket on while he hunched over the computer. "He wasn't home. I got a stalker."

"Come on." The sister, maybe, sleeping in the front seat of the truck—she might be stalkable, but Dustin? "Who'd be after a big kid like you? Why?"

"Somebody is," he said. "I feel them eyes on me."

"Cheap thrill," I said. Just the kind of thing they love around here, kids and adults alike.

The next morning when Dustin got off the school bus a dark car from across the street pulled out and headed toward him, horn blaring. Belinda told me all about it. "That white boy, he run back up on the bus, Ms. Boyd. "He run so heckka fast. You should of seen."

I went to the administration office to check. It was true. A dark car, driver unseen, had indeed charged at Dustin who, the last to straggle off the bus, left a gap between himself and the other kids. The car was a battered maroon Pontiac and it went at him so fast it skidded, and when Dustin jumped back on the bus the car backed up and roared down a side street. Vice Principal Monteith, a sturdy, freckled man who perpetually but almost undiscernibly chewed gum from way back in his mouth so that it barely qualified as chewing but nevertheless threw you off, said that he thought Dustin had set the thing up himself, to get attention. About five of us lingered near his open office door. "Someone needs to talk to him," Monteith added, looking at Coach Warren. "Any maybe mention the old hygiene." One of those knowing, insider laughs came up and the coach shrugged and said, "I'd hose him down myself but he never comes to class." Another laugh. "I don't think Dustin did this," I said finally. "He's not… crafty." But somebody behind me said, "Don't underestimate these kids," and that launched an eruption of anecdotal lamentation that might still be going on as far as I know.

I found Dustin in the stucco courtyard by the cafeteria showing his blister to three tall basketball stars who wore forbidden red headbands—gang colors. "They axed if they could see it," he said to me when I came up. The other boys didn't move or look up when I approached because, when they're outside of class and when they're together, gang kids make a point of looking sullen and not acknowledging adults.

"What happened this morning?" I said to Dustin. "I heard."

"Someone tried to run me down." He zipped up his jacket, slowly. "I dunno who."

"Somma them Aayrab faggots wanna git you, maybe," one of the headband boys said to Dustin. "A terrorist."

I sent the kid a menacing grimace, which he, of course, ignored. I'm going to have to come up with a new look for some of the crap I'm starting to hear.

Dustin walked back to the room with me. "Them black dudes never talked nice to me before," he said with a small smile. "Mostly black people don't like me."

"Oh, come on." But I didn't want to trot out my harmony bromides. "Tell me what's going on."

"I dunno. I don't sleep so good."

"Who's mad at you, to do this?"

"I dunno. Nobody. It's weird."

For the next week he seemed to ride a crest, not of popularity, but of abated scorn. The Crest of Abated Scorn. It was as close to a shining time as he was going to get. Even Belinda said "Whazzup?" when he drifted into class, and another kid, Jose Pizarro (last year's prom king), asked Dustin if his new jacket was reversible. It was, and Dustin took it off and turned it inside out and Jose Pizarro watched with absorption. "It's from Colorado," Dustin said. "It hella snows there."

I worked the phones during my prep time, trying to contact his previous teachers, a counselor, any authority listed anywhere on his paperwork—I wanted to know what to do. But nobody thought he was in any particular jeopardy. The Vice Principal's supposition that Dustin authored events himself had spread comfortably through the faculty; people felt pretty much relieved of the burden to act. "All right, what if he did set it up?" I said when I called Monteith. "Shouldn't we get him a shrink or something?"

"Get him a bath," Monteith said, laughing. And then naturally he went on to say if we got help for all the crazy kids who needed it there'd be a line from here to Maine and if I really wanted to see a nut case I ought to have a look at Nate Jefferson who he had to suspend last week and we just simply don't have the time or the resources or the personnel and blah blah bladda yackety blah. So I called my buddy, Cheryl, a social worker in the Kids at Risk Enrollment (KARE), and she said they'd look into it but it would take a while because there were no phones down there in the river camps.

The next day I saw Dustin in the cafeteria, actually eating pizza at a table with other kids. This was unusual because he usually roamed solo during lunch, even though he qualified for the Community Nutrition Plan (free lunch for the low income). I saw him again, coming out of the boys' bathroom just before fifth period. "Hey, I saw you in the cafeteria," I said. "Chomping on pizza."

"It was good," he said. "I've ate a lotta pepperoni in my day, but that was way good." He made a move as if to rub his stomach, then stopped and sent me an arch, recollecting grin.

"Right. Be careful. How're you doing, anyway?"

"There was some noises night before last, and I seen these car lights up at the levee, but then nothing happened." He spoke as if

remembering from a distance in time; he had that curious, vaguely entranced tone people get when they're prowling through memory, squinting after details.

"Is your father still using?"

"It ain't him doing this," he said. "You think it's him, but it ain't."

"He still does drugs, right?"

"He's gonna quit," Dustin said, looking away. "He's trying. He'll make it."

They talk like that, kids in the booze and drug world, the users and the satellites alike. They adopt that trite, forgiving recovery lingo. But I waved him off. I didn't want my crankiness to complicate things for him, or dilute the pleasure he took in his new acceptance.

The next morning he was absent again, and it caused a ripple. "Dustin ain't here," Belinda said. "Maybe he got kilt or something."

And when he came back the day after he wore his jacket loose over his shoulders, his left arm in a sling. He said someone, again at night, threw bricks at him while he urinated in a gully not far from the camper. Whole bricks. One of them connected and put a tear in his jacket and a sprain in his shoulder. "It almost like, knocked me over," he told me. "If I hadn't of wore the jacket it would of broke my arm, I know it."

It was raining heavily and there was another morning assembly mix-up so by nine a.m. the whole school had to meet in the gym. We stood around while the custodial guy with the orange vest noisily wheeled in sets of folding chairs. Dustin occupied the center of a group now, showing the rip in his jacket. "Alls I was doing was pissing," he said slowly and with uncharacteristic loudness, and in a nearby group handsome Jose Pizarro put up his hand to silence the others so he could listen.

Vice Principal Monteith came, smiling, to my side. "This is his moment, isn't it," he said, inclining his head to Dustin. "He's working it."

"He's working it. But I don't think he's doing this to himself," I said.

"Honey, I've got a bridge I want you to take a look at."

I've never been able to like this guy, with his shrugs and chuckles and tiny chews of gum.

AT FOUR THAT AFTERNOON I WENT HOME BY THE LEVEE ROAD, which looked down on one of the river encampments. We have homeless shelters in Sacramento, and they're filled to capacity in the winter, but even then people live among the trees on the riverbank, in trailers and lean-tos. I've seen the smoke from their illegal campfires. But today everything was glutted and all you could see was a slick stretch of green under the pounding rain. Dustin was probably not down there now because the drenching forced everything inside and the interior of a camper shell had to be too nastily cramped for him with his long legs and wandering attention. He was probably idling in one of the

malls, waiting till it closed. I drove on through the rain. I didn't see any dark Pontiacs.

A woman sat alone in my classroom when I went in the next morning. I knew as soon as she looked up. It wasn't just her teeth, though some of the significant uppers were missing. It was the gauntness, the lemony tinge to the skin; she was bundled up in a man's overcoat but you knew there were tattoos under there somewhere. She had kind, small gray eyes.

"Mrs. Blake?" I put out my hand. "Is Dustin okay?"

"I'm glad to meet you." She shook my hand. Her gloves didn't match. "He's okay, yeah, but I'm taking him outta school."

"Can you tell me what's going on? Somebody's…harassing him?"

"He knows who it is too." She started to stand. "That's the part he don't tell you."

I gestured for her to stay seated and plugged in the floor heater, aiming it at her feet.

"He gone and got this girl pregnant," she said. "Crazy girl, from the motel."

I believe that it is my capacity to still feel surprise that keeps me vital as a teacher and a person. "A girl's doing this to him?" I said. "A pregnant girl?"

"Crazy girl." Dustin's mother shook her head slowly. "Felicia. Her daddy's locked up. He done murder. She's wild."

These things remain hard to imagine. It's hard to have to imagine Dustin and some girl, well, getting it on. And then getting pregnant. Then staying pregnant. Then the stalking. Feral Felicia from the sleazy motel. "She tried to run him down?" I said. "And threw that brick into his back?"

"She done way more. But we got things settled now."

The settlement was this. They were going to Prescott, Arizona, to live with her brother in a duplex while Dustin's father looked for work and a better drug rehabilitation program. "We need to git outta there, where we are now," she said. "It's too cold. It's wet. And Dusty's gonna git a part-time job and send money back for the kid."

I've heard this before, of course. About the jobs these sixteen-year-old boys are going to get to support their children. Boys who can't use self control, or birth control, or do their homework, or dress for gym, or stay sober, or pay attention, or pass the simplest quiz—all heading off for these famous jobs. So no surprises here. But the rest of it, and the particulars—ah. "And she scalded him with the boiling water?"

"She says she dint do that one, but she lies." She crossed her feet in front of the heater, smiled the disconcerting smile of those with few and disastrously palced teeth. "I've got to get me one of these. Boy." Then she looked up at the evolution time-line, "He told me about these pictures. It's inner-est-ing. People started out so rough and over the years we've turnt human."

"Mrs. Blake, I hope you'll take this heater." The first bell rang and the door opened and my single "A" student, Jeff Wong, always irritatingly punctual, came in with his solar system poster. I gave Jeff a bright, false smile, turned off the heater and unplugged it, put it on a desk near Dustin's mother's cloth purse. "And I hope Dustin will come to see me before you leave for Arizona."

"I'll tell him," she said. Her eyes fell softly on the heater. "Thank you a lot. This'll git used, I can tell you that." She got up slowly. "He wanted me to see you today, when I come to sign him out. You're someone who's gave him respect."

But Dustin didn't come back to school to say good-bye, and after a couple of days the speculations about his fate ceased. When Belinda asked about him I said I didn't know anything and pretty soon she and the others stopped asking.

In June I went to graduation with my friend Cheryl, the social worker. She pointed to a group of girls sitting in the first three rows in the Civic Center Auditorium, the official mothers-to-be section. "That kid of yours who flew the coop? His girlfriend's third from the left in front."

Felicia. The stalker. She was a hefty girl to begin with, now easily eight months pregnant. She sat scowling at the stage, her big arms folded. "She's black," I said stupidly.

"Half," said Cheryl. "Her mother. The father's white. He's in prison." After a pause, she said, "It's a boy."

I squinted at Felicia, at her smoldering eyes and hard round belly. Dustin's son. I was going to ask Cheryl, rhetorically, of course—what chance this kid had, with his kid father abandoning him, his kid mother crazy, one grandfather doing a lifetime for murder, his other grandparents sure to be blitzed and jobless into their sixties—but I knew she'd say: us. We're it. And she'd be largely right. Us. With our stupid anagrams and our political correctness and the pompous mediocrity of our idiot vice principals—we're the chance. If I stay in this business, in fifteen years I'm going to look up on the first day of class and Dustin's son is going to be looking back at me. If that doesn't make you pay attention I don't know what will.

Ellen Cochrane

Pat Lynch's work has appeared or will appear in *The New Press*, *Mainstreet Rag*, *Alimentum*, *The Sierra Parent*, and *The Sacramento News and Review*. She lives in Sacramento.

Susan Aronstein and Robert Torry

Magic Happens

Re-Enchanting *Disney Adults*

Giselle dreams of her true love. Still from Disney's *Enchanted* (2007), ©The Walt Disney Company.

In 2007, Disney Studios launched the holiday movies season with *Enchanted*. Its trailer explicitly placed the film in the context of the Disney canon, promising that "of all the classic Disney stories, of all the miraculous adventures, of all the magical tales, there has never been anything like *Enchanted*, because no other story has ever taken you to a land as strange and terrifying as ours." As the trailer sought to lure in viewers outside of the studio's usual target audience of children and their parents, it situated *Enchanted* as a comedy—a good natured joke aimed at the princess tale that provides much of the Disney Corporation's revenue. The trailer features those scenes in the film that show a clueless princess and her equally inept prince trying desperately to negotiate the real world, suggesting that "their world" and "our world" have nothing in common; its final clip showcases Prince Charming launching into song in Central Park, "I've been dreaming…," only to be run over, mid-note, by a group of bicyclers.

That the *Enchanted* trailer could rely on its audience's recognition of the standard Disney "Princess" narrative speaks to that narrative's integral, if contested, place in American (and, indeed, global) culture. Disney's not-necessarily-benign influence on children has been recognized by cultural critics since as early as Richard Schickel's pioneering 1968 study, *The Disney Version*. Writing in 1985, Mike Wallace complained that the Disney Corporation had succeeded in "putting a pair of Mickey Mouse ears on every developing personality in America" (33).[1] By 2007, however, Mickey Mouse ears were far less prevalent than princess-tiaras. Re-releases of the classic Disney Princess canon, stretching from 1937's *Snow White* to 1991's *Beauty and the Beast*, straight-to-video offerings (*Cinderella: A Stitch in Time*; *Disney Princess: A Christmas of Enchantment*), and various *Disney on Ice* productions renewed the narrative for each generation of small girls. The Disney Princess brand flourished, selling everything from diapers and play-sets to backpacks and ball gowns along with its "happily-ever-after." Princess-revenue streamed into the Disney coffers, as girls primped and dreamed of their own Prince Charming.

This princess industry and its potential dangers, however, did not escape the notice of feminist and cultural critics, many of whom had themselves grown up with Disney.[2] These critics, following in the footsteps of Schickel and Wallace, questioned what these narratives were teaching our daughters about body image, gender roles, and class, pointing out that Disney's princesses enshrined outdated models of femininity and domesticity, encouraging young girls to focus on beauty as their only asset and marriage as their only dream. In addition, a larger cultural cynicism—adults, who had grown

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beyond Disney optimism with its valorization of "magic" and its doctrine that "dreams really do come true"—discounted the Disney myth.

Thus, Disney found itself opposed on two fronts as it retailed its Princess line. In reaction, in 2001, the corporation launched its "Magic Happens" campaign, aimed at adults who—living in the grown-up, real world of "bills and work"—have forgotten the Disney "truth." From the middle-aged woman lying in bed, worried she and her husband are "drifting," to the working mother insistent on bedtime, to the fraught dinner date of a couple in their twenties, these commercials showcase an emotionally barren reality waiting to be redeemed by the Disney touch—Donald Duck's distinctive chatter, a family performance of the "Circle of Life," a glass slipper. At the moment of this redemption, the scene fades to black, and the words "magic happens" appear, giving way to the iconic Disney signature.

This campaign sought to remind a fallen-away adult audience that Disney provides magic and endows their everyday world with meaning. *Enchanted*, in spite of the fact that its trailer explicitly appealed to this audience's cynicism about the Disney narrative's viability in the "real world," provides a feature-length version of the campaign's message while explicitly responding to feminist critiques of the Princess story, arguing that its absence leads to sadness and sterility. Without Disney, our world is indeed—as the film's villain observes—a world in which "there are no happy endings."

Without Disney, our world is indeed—as the film's villain observes—a world in which "there are no happy endings."

Enchanted's initial segment, an animated sequence taking place in the fairy-tale world of Andalasia, appears invested in the gentle mockery of the characters and narrative/thematic conventions of the previous Disney films that the theatrical trailer promises. This sequence abundantly references those films. It begins as the camera zooms into Sleeping Beauty's/Cinderella's Castle—the icon that "brands" the film as a Disney product, referencing the corporation's fairy tale canon, the Sunday night weekly series so many of us grew up with, and the company's multiple theme parks. As it passes through the leaded-glass window, the medium changes from Pixar-style CG to traditional hand-drawn animation, focusing on a pedestal holding a bound volume, which, in turn, contains the story the audience is about to enjoy. Even in these first few seconds, *Enchanted* invokes the Disney Princess narrative: *Snow White*, *Sleeping Beauty* and *Cinderella* all open with the device of the book, whose written words quickly dissolve into the animated film, a framing trick that displaces previous literary manifestations of the tale with the Disney version. Furthermore, the book's resting place on a pedestal, alone in the top room of a castle, echoes the opening frames of *Beauty and the Beast*, which replace the "book" with a story told in stained glass windows, focusing on a single rose, on a table, in an empty room, high in the enchanted castle.

In *Enchanted*, this opening shot promises a new addition to the company's popular princess tradition. The

book opens, and the tale begins: "Once upon a time, in a magical kingdom known as Andalasia, there lived an evil queen. Selfish and cruel, she lived in fear that one day her stepson would marry and she would lose her throne forever. And so she did all in her power to keep the prince from ever meeting the one special maiden with whom he would share true love's kiss." As the narrator sets the scene, the books' illustrations reference previous Disney films. It depicts the "evil queen" parting the drapes of the castle window, surveying her realm, a direct visual reference to Snow White's stepmother peering down at the little princess, including the colors of the drapes and the queen's robes. The prince on his white horse, an overweight servant holding his reins, comes directly from *Cinderella*.

Still from ***Snow White*** **(1937), ©The Walt Disney Company.**

As the film segues from static book art to animation, not only does it employ the multi-plane camera originally developed by Walt Disney studios to achieve verisimilitude and depth of field but it also identifies the "special maiden" with a whole host of Disney princesses to be found in a cottage in the woods (Snow White, Aurora/Sleeping Beauty, Belle). Surrounded by woodland creatures, with a rose-colored gown (referencing Aurora's birthday dress) and flowing reddish hair (Ariel and Belle), Giselle and her furry and winged friends are working on a creation draped over a dressmaker's dummy (the construction of the original ball gown in *Cinderella*); when they finish, and Giselle turns the creation to present her "prince," the make-shift statue invokes Ariel's prized possession—the statue of Prince Eric.

This sequence ends as Giselle promotes for her companions and the audience the virtues of dreams and "true love"—a motif that also appears at the beginning of *Snow White* and *Cinderella*. She launches into the first of the films' formulaic "princess" songs, the opening song that identifies the princess's desires and dreams. "I've been dreaming of a true love's kiss," Giselle sings, brushing her hair in the mirror (another reference to *The Little Mermaid*) "and a prince I'm hoping comes with this." As she sings, the animals form a tower to present her with a rose (as the dwarfs do to construct a tall-enough dancing partner for Snow White). Recognizing that she "needs more help," Giselle goes to the cottage's window and trills, calling in extra animal troops (again, *Snow White*); they scamper in happily, an unfortunate frog falls into a tub of suds, and emerges with a bubble crown on his head (from *Snow White* and *The Princess and the Frog*, which was in production as *Enchanted* was being filmed).

From this point, the story moves rapidly from lack and desire to fulfill-

ment: Giselle, a good Disney princess, longs for the prince who will deliver her "true love's kiss," a sign of desire utterly annihilated in the perfected stasis of life lived thenceforth "happily ever after." Her song reaches the hearing of Prince Edward, who falls immediately in love with her "sweet voice" (*Snow White* and *The Little Mermaid*) and rushes in Giselle's direction. There follows the briefly articulated obstacle of the troll (himself drawn directly from various Disney giant tales, such as *Jack and the Beanstalk* and *The Brave Little Tailor*), then Giselle falls literally into Edward's lap, where the two finish "love's duet" (*Snow White*, *Cinderella*, *Sleeping Beauty*), followed by Edward's declaration of love and promise that the two will be married in the morning. As the two ride together on Edward's horse into a glowing, romantic sunset (a direct visual echo of the end of *Snow White*), the film's soundtrack swells to the rising strain of music suggestive, especially in concert with this visual imagery, of achieved narrative conclusion: tale over, happily-ever-after to follow.

This condensed narrative affords the audience the pleasures of both recognition and the knowing wink—participation in what the opening sequence suggests are the parodic interests of the film. As we have seen, it repeatedly references the Disney Princess canon, invoking the viewers' fond memories of their Disney past. At the same time, however, that very abundance—the fact that Giselle is an overdetermined Princess—invites them to comically distance themselves from those narratives. In addition, that the tale should thus begin and end within minutes of the opening of the film, should trace the passage from desire to true love achieved in such a condensed and unproblematic fashion, seems to comment on the unrealistic simplicity of such a view of the world, suggesting that fairy tales themselves are ludicrous fantasies at best and dangerous delusions at worst. As we watch this head-long version of the formulaic Disney Princess tale, we are invited to snicker knowingly—adults with an adult perspective on a child's tale.

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Yet even as the film encourages its viewers to dismiss Giselle's love story as hopelessly naïve, the implications of her fall from Andalasia and into New York, as engineered by Narissa, work subtly to contest what may initially appear to be the proper reading of the film. When Queen Narissa (reincarnating the "old hag" manifestation of *Snow White's* evil queen) pushes Giselle into the wishing well's (also from *Snow White*) plunging cataract, the film, lightly if insistently, introduces the archetype of the fall. Narissa's action hurls Giselle from the wholly imaginative (if not in the terms of the film imaginary) animated world of Andalasia into the dense materiality of a filmed New York and a physical rather than animated body. That Giselle's descent concludes in the sewers beneath Times Square suggests a sense of entrapment within a degraded world, a place, as Narissa explains, "without any happy endings." This

evocation of the fall subtly interferes with the film's parodic implications, implying that however naïve Giselle's faith in "true love's kiss" may appear, the alternative entails a reduction of possibility genuinely to be lamented.

In this context it is worth considering the role of Narissa as Giselle's nemesis. We are initially inclined to see Narissa as little more than a necessary fairy tale actant: the villain/obstacle in the familiar form of the evil stepmother. The specifics of Narissa's character, motivation and the plot she devises, though, invite a more detailed consideration. Realizing that should Edward marry, she would be displaced from her position of power, Narissa attempts to prevent Prince Edward's falling in love. She wants, that is, to prevent his engagement in the quest for true love's kiss. When we consider that Narissa is a powerful, single woman, jealous of her position and antagonistic toward romance, we begin to understand her significance in the context of the film's dedication to the revitalization of the fairy tale narrative of true love ordained for each "princess" with faith in its validity. As a representation of woman's fate deprived of true love—a woman who knows of and delivers Giselle into a realm she asserts to be without happy endings—Narissa embodies the alternative to belief in and successful realization of the romance narrative. To put it bluntly, Narissa functions as a demonized representation of modern enlightened women unenchanted by the conservative, "traditional" gender roles and values, especially that of marriage as a means of self-perfection, promoted through the icon of the Disney princess—the very women who pen cultural critiques of the Princess narrative.

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Narissa, desiring at any cost to preserve her solitary power which will, she asserts, be undone by the success of fairy tale romance, is uninterested in love except as a means of manipulating Nathaniel into doing her will. (Note that even Nathaniel, the henchman, dreams of true love, however mistaken he is in his choice of object.) Thus the power-loving, isolated and unloving Narissa, in propelling Giselle into a disenchanted reality, hopes to deliver her rival into the condition she, Narissa, perversely inhabits and prefers.

Thus, Giselle's precipitation into the "real world" of New York which seems, initially, a continuation of *Enchanted*'s parody of the princess narrative, sets the stage for a conversion narrative in which the film's adult viewers must learn to remember the Disney truths that they have forgotten, a re-membering that will allow them correctly to perceive the subtle magic in the apparently degraded "real world" around them. Giselle repeatedly "falls" in the film—from her tree house into Edward's arms, from Andalasia into

Still from *Snow White* (1937), ©The Walt Disney Company.

New York, from a castle billboard into Robert's arms, and—almost—from the top of the Woolworth Building. These falls, in conjunction with *Enchanted's* repetition of the image of "apples" in Narissa's poisoned apple plot (as does the evil stepmother in *Snow White*) to eliminate her rival—the apples floating in hot water in a restaurant, offered as candy apples in Central Park and as an appletini in the Italian restaurant—suggests what we will come to understand as the film's true thematic interest: the reversal of our expectations of parody in accordance with the "adult" sensibilities of children grown old. Giselle's fall, and that of adults once enthusiastic believers in Disney magic and romance, is, the film implies, a *felix culpa*. To have fallen into the wasteland is to be afforded an opportunity to discern the absence of a fatal division only seemingly occasioned by disenchanted adulthood. To bite the apple and, again, to fall—here into a deep and troubled sleep—is to achieve the necessary pre-condition of awakening through the agency of true love's kiss; we have been disenchanted only so that we can reawake to a recollected Disney magic.

The character of Robert shows us the way. Narissa's counterpoint in the world of New York, Robert takes up the position of Disney's critics with his disbelief in Disney optimism and his feminist critique of an ideology that encourages women to find a prince to fulfill their desire for "true love's kiss," a kiss that will transform them from girls to princesses. We first meet Robert, a lawyer, sitting through the Banks' particularly acrimonious divorce negotiation. When he emerges, his secretary asks him if, after hearing the couple rage over Hank Aaron's Rookie card, "he still wants to get engaged." Robert quickly distinguishes his views of love from the Disney myth: "Those people got married on a crazy romantic whim. It's not like that with Nancy and I…. We're rational. We've taken the time to understand each other's strengths and weaknesses."

Robert's dismissal of "romantic whims" is a dismissal of the essential premise of the Princess narrative. The fact that he and his daughter, Morgan, have been abandoned by his unnamed, now divorced wife, is doubtless conducive to this dismissal in both his personal life and his professional one. Robert, as a lawyer and as a suitor, devotes himself to the application of reason and restraint to ameliorate or avoid the damages inherent in the pursuit of true love and its inevitable catastrophes. He wishes to achieve an equitable,

reasonable divorce for Banks, and he hopes to avoid making any precipitate, overly romantic errors in his courtship of Nancy. After five years he has convinced himself that he and Nancy, having discovered compatibility and mutual interests and not having been swept away by romantic passion, can make a reasonable and rational wedded partnership.

Father to a daughter, Morgan, who herself dreams of princesses and romance, Robert is determined to "save" her from the dangers of this Disney narrative. He gives her a book on accomplished women—Rosa Parks, Madame Curie—rather than the book of fairy tales she wants. On presenting Morgan with this unwelcome tome, Robert tells his daughter that Nancy, whom he intends to marry, is "a lot like the women in that book." Robert's ambition for his daughter, if successful, and his intention to enter into a less than whole-hearted marriage with Nancy, will achieve for each the very displacement of romantic possibility manifest in Narissa's purging Andalasia of Giselle and all she represents.

However, Giselle's fall into New York City renews that possibility for Robert, Nancy and Morgan. Initially, this fall seems to continue the parody introduced in the opening animated sequence. Comically dressed in her (Ariel's) princess wedding dress, Giselle—insisting that the world works as Disney promised—is utterly unable to negotiate the less than ideal conditions of the city. She fails to realize that the commuters rushing past her have no interest in her desire to find the castle and wed her true love, hopes to spend the night in a hollow tree, a peaceful meadow or with hospitable dwarves, and drastically misjudges the homeless man who runs off with her tiara. As even Giselle's determined optimism starts to wane, the film cuts to Robert informing Morgan of his decision to marry Nancy as they ride in a taxi through the rainy, dark, and grimy streets to which Giselle has been abandoned. It is during this ride that he presents his daughter with the book on accomplished women rather than the book of fairy tales she hopes for. Doing so, Robert declares his allegiance to "the real world," the character of which is represented by the cold and gloomy scene outside the taxi. This is the world for which Robert intends to prepare Morgan who will, as her father reminds her, "not always" be a little girl. The only bright spot in this desert of the real is a floodlit billboard featuring a pink and blue, cartoon-like castle, sparkling with pixie dust, advertising—in pseudo-gothic fairy-tale lettering—"The Palace Casino, Where Dreams Come True." Piled up next to the castle, in primary colors, are three sacks, each emblazoned with a dollar sign.

Moments earlier, Giselle, wandering dejectedly through the night, stumbled upon this same billboard. *Enchanted* presents this scene as a beatific vision, with swelling music and Giselle basking in the illumination the sign provides before cutting to the billboard itself. As it does so, the film immediately—seemingly—undermines the referent. What Giselle encounters is not a "real" castle, but a representation of a castle employed, as the bags to the side explicitly state, to generate profit. The nod to and swipe at Las Vegas ' Excalibur Casino aside, which borrowed Disney's iconic architecture to do just that, here *Enchanted* again seems to be critiquing its own parent-company's implication in gaining revenue from

both the castle brand and its promise to provide both narrative (film) and literal (theme park) spaces "where dreams come true."

Giselle's absurd attempt to gain entrance to this billboard castle thus seems at first a continuation of what the audience is invited to understand as a mockery of fairytale conventions and the monetary use to which they are put—precisely the optimistic, magic laden stuff of Disney fantasy utterly at variance with the gritty, rain soaked wasteland that is New York. The sight of Giselle on the door of the castle billboard interrupts the taxi ride and provokes Morgan with an image precisely of the sort Robert denied her when he failed to give her the book she hoped for—"there's a princess on the billboard." Her father, however, assures her that what she sees is merely a mannequin, a fake reality like the dream-induced image of true love's object Giselle constructs in her tree house in Andalasia. And, even when Giselle proves to be real, the audience is invited to sympathize with Robert's assessment of her as "a seriously confused woman who has fallen into our laps."

The true fairy tale happens here, in a real world where dreams—with their happily-ever-afters—do indeed come true.

Giselle's fall into their laps—as she fell into the arms of Prince Edward—however, ends not in disaster but rather the confirmation of true love's expectations. When Narissa tells Giselle that she will find her "heart's desire" at the bottom of the well, she thinks she is subverting the fairy tale narrative, but the wishing well outwits her; Robert, will indeed be Giselle's prince and the object of all her wishes and desires. As *Enchanted's* narrative continues, it displaces its original sequence—and our cynical response to it—as a false start. The true fairy tale happens here, in a real world where dreams—with their happily-ever-afters—do indeed come true.

From the moment she falls into his arms, Giselle's view of the world threatens Robert's carefully-constructed rational universe. To Morgan, she offers both the possibility that she "might be a real princess" and the fairy tales her father has denied her. As she trails up to their apartment in her ridiculous dress, she tells a rapt Morgan and exasperated Robert the story of her meeting with her true love, her fall down the well, and her expectation that Edward will appear to carry her back to live with him in bliss. In the Italian restaurant sequence, Robert tells Giselle his own fractured fairy tale, which ended when Morgan's mother left and he "woke up," insisting that the "lovey-dovey version" of love that Giselle believes in is "fantasy." He explains his hopes for his daughter, that she be instructed in the realities of the world and be "able to face the world as it is." "That's why," he tells Giselle, "I don't encourage the fairy tales," which he feels will "set her up to believe the dreams come true nonsense." Earnestly Giselle protests, "But dreams do come true and maybe something wonderful will happen." Laughing ruefully, Robert admits, "I forgot who I was talking to." "Well, Giselle responds, "I hope you don't forget."

Giselle's hope that Robert will not forget but will rather remember her joyful optimism—"dreams do come

true"—embodies a capacity for anamnuesis fully endorsed and enacted by the film itself. The film works immediately and continually to deny the putative opposition between Andalasia and New York, fantasy and reality, by representing New York as replete with indices of the marvelous, hints of an available, if at times unnoticed, realm of imaginative potency. These indices are embedded in the very buildings and streets of the city, which feature the neo-gothic architectural motifs evocative of fairy-tale illustrations and films. Even the manhole cover over the sewer from which first Giselle and later Edward, Nathaniel, and Narissa will emerge, is, as a close-up shot reveals, quite beautifully decorated with a wreath of flowers in bas-relief.[3]

This instance of the wonderful resident within even (or especially) the most lowly and commonplace of objects and contexts is the first of a number of images enacting a similar function. Most especially, *Enchanted* insists, castles abound in New York City. Indeed, if Robert is finally to be understood as the prince whom Giselle has seen in her dream, we are to understand that he lives in a castle (in fact The Paterno at 440 Riverside Drive apartments are currently available from around $800,000 and up). As Robert and Morgan guide Giselle to his apartment, the camera notes the stained glass windows in the hallway, just as it notes the floral decoration in relief on the apartment's balcony and the highly ornamented beauty of the Paterno's famous curved *porte corchere*. Robert does not live in the only castle in the city. As he and Giselle walk through Central Park, the camera rises and rests a moment, intent upon the castle-like double towers of the San Remo apartment building rising above the trees in the distance. Here, in the heart of New York City's most famous public space, we also see Robert and Giselle among the children and adults gathered around Belvedere Castle, as well as Giselle singing from the castle balcony of a fairytale stage set in the Naumberg Bandshell.

This triple evocation of the castle as synecdoche of fairy tale romance invites our re-evaluation of the first item in the series: the billboard castle. This catalogue suggests that the billboard castle's crass commercialism is an anomaly at variance with the other castles that illustrate a discernable persistence of faith in the accessibility of the marvelous, even amidst the apparent wasteland of a knowing and cynical modernity; these castles subvert the initially implied opposition between Andalasia and New York, between the magical/imaginative and the "real."

Giselle's entrance into New York provides the mechanism through which the apprehension of the magical in the real becomes possible. It is she who sees the commonplace as enchanted; she makes fairytale dresses from Robert's curtains and flowered sheets and, on her first morning in the apartment, enlists the aid of the local wildlife—flies, pigeons, rats and cockroaches—to clean the place up as she sings the "Happy Working Song" (referencing both the film's initial sequence in Andalasia and *Snow White's* "Whistle While You Work" sequence, in which admittedly more colorful and hygienic animals come to the aid of our princesses). This is the first time that Giselle's fairy-tale sensibilities are portrayed as operable in the "real world. The animals, as lowly as they are, *do* aid Giselle and, by the end of the sequence and in spite of Robert's horrified response, the messy apartment does sparkle.

Giselle's next song—"How Does She Know You Love Her?"—sung in Central Park, amidst the castles, brings Robert, random park inhabitants, and the audience into her spell. While both of her earlier songs, "Love's Duet" and "Happy Working Song," functioned as parodies distancing the audience from their sentiments, "How Does She Know" (the formulaic "tell her" song, such as "Kiss the Girl" in *The Little Mermaid*) functions to draw the audiences in as it mediates between Giselle and Edward's initial precipitous courtship and Robert and Nancy's five-year odyssey. The sequence opens with the arm and antenna of a performer clad in a red-crab costume intruding on the frame—referencing Sebastian in *The Little Mermaid* and explicitly placing the sequence that follows within the Disney canon. Robert and Giselle move into the frame with Robert trying to explain dating, Nancy, and his proposed engagement. As he ends with marriage, Giselle reminds him, "You forgot about happily ever after." "Forget about happily ever after," Robert replies, echoing Narissa, " It doesn't exist." Giselle insists that it does and breaks into song—much to Robert's dismay: "People are looking; don't sing."

Robert perceives Giselle's singing, like her romantic optimism, as out of place in the real world. However, this sequence insists that both are very much in place. A Jamaican singer, accompanied by the zydeco rhythms for "Kiss the Girl," picks up Giselle's song. "You know this song too?" Robert asks,

Giselle sings and dances her way through Central Park. Still from *Enchanted* (2007), ©The Walt Disney Company.

befuddled. It seems as though everyone in Central Park does indeed know this song; Giselles dancing her way across the landscape calls it forth. This scene, like the opening scene is Andalasia, is littered with Disney references: the covered bridge, whose Bavarian folk designs evoke the antechambers of Fantasyland's fairy tale rides; Giselle echoing Belle as she swirls and sings on a grass-covered hill (a scene itself taken from *The Sound of Music*); the boat-ride from *Little Mermaid*; Lumiere (whose very name gestures toward the Lumière brothers as the co-inventors of the cinematic magic) from *Beauty and the Beast*; the fountain from *Cinderella*. However, in this scene these references function to collapse the distance between Disney fairy tale and our own world, and at the end, we—like the passersby who become performers—are meant to sing along, rather than snigger at Giselle's celebration of romantic certainty and happy endings.

By the end of this show-stopping performance number, *Enchanted's* parody is over and its fairy tale begins in earnest. In the midst of her song, Giselle has called in her friendly doves to deliver to Nancy a floral invitation, ostensibly from Robert, to attend the King and Queen's ball—a fairy tale event if there ever was one. And—despite her ostensible approval of Robert's careful, restrained five-year courtship, her willingness to play the role of independent professional woman and thus act as the type of role model for Morgan Robert hopes her to be ("Ready to kick it, girlfriend?")—Nancy's reaction makes it clear that she longs for exactly the sort of fairy tale that Robert insists she, a modern woman like the ones in Morgan's book, should reject.

The dove's flower delivery, the second example of overt magic undertaken in NewYork, further elides the distinction between Andalasia and New York—the doves do indeed know Nancy's address and can efficiently deliver the bouquet with its invitation. Furthermore, not only can Giselle perform magic in New York, but New York itself is magical. It is certainly marvelous that Robert enters the apartment's bathroom to see Giselle's towel held for her by singing birds, but Giselle's exclamation, "This is a magic room!," implies an equal footing: magic for magic, dissolving any significant distance between the worlds of the marvelous and the mundane. In addition, if Giselle and Edward comically misinterpret the signs of the "real" world—the old man as a kind hermit, the bus as a dragon—they are also amazingly familiar with that world. Giselle knows how to operate the bathroom; Edward seemingly has no trouble renting a hotel room or navigating the streets to find Robert's apartment. When Edward identifies the television as the magic mirror that can give him the information he desires, he is both deluded and right.

The film's initial perceived difference between the two realms—the fairy tale world of Andalasia, with its happy endings, and the real world of New York defined by its lack of such endings— is completely dissolved in *Enchanted's* final sequences, beginning with the King and Queen's ball at which the Disney brand of fairy tale romance achieves its culminating triumph (and for which Giselle prepares under the auspices of Morgan, her New York fairy godmother). As Narissa, preparing for the final confrontation between romantic desire and its negation, bursts into Time Square, she also explodes the barrier between the two realms, propelling the manhole cover into the sky, where it hurls into and shatters Time

Still from *Enchanted* (2007), ©The Walt Disney Company.

Square's iconic Coca-Cola sign, sign of a mercantile world based on exchange and profit rather than fantasy and desire. By the time the scene switches to the ball itself, which takes place at the film's final castle, the famously neo-gothic Woolworth Building, the two worlds have merged; the characters in the ball room, dressed in fantasy, fairy tale costumes, re-enact the Disney princess canon at the same time that they "straighten out" the parody of *Enchanted's* opening animated sequence.

Giselle, like Cinderella, appears at the top of the stairway; Robert, like Prince Charming (and garbed as Giselle's rendering of her dream prince in Andalasia) stops, transfixed, moves across the room and asks her to dance. What follows is essentially a repetition of the film's initial sequence. That is to say, it involves the recognition of love: between Robert Giselle of course, but also between Nancy and Edward; the appearance and elimination of a threat, and the promise of a "happy ever after" for the two couples.

As Robert and Giselle dance to the strains of a love song that announces we are "so close to reaching that famous happy end," the film again evokes the Disney Princess canon. This dance scene is culled from the "Tale as Old as Time" dance in *Beauty and the Beast*, visually reenacting this scene in both its focus on the chandelier and the repeated use of the circle shot. Here, however, we are not meant to "wink" but to enter into the fairy tale as does Robert, when he, not Giselle, begins singing "love's duet." Although this duet is momentarily interrupted as Nancy cuts in, the ball sequence will indeed end with all of the fairy-tale actants fulfilling their roles.

Narissa seeks to rewrite the archetypal ending. As this tale's villain she attempts to reaffirm the distinction between the two worlds, urging Giselle to forget this "terrible place" and embrace an alleged return to prior happiness that would in fact take the form of forgetfulness and death. As Giselle bites the apple, the film segues into both *Snow White* and *Sleeping Beauty*, and it is only Robert's memory of these tales that saves her. Nancy tries the real-world solution, calling 911; Robert, now fully inscribed within the fairy-tale narrative, realizes what is needed: "true love's kiss." Robert's role in the narrative, however, becomes clear only when Edward's kiss fails and he realizes that all of his own myths about love are false. Reliant still upon his rational and cautious definition of love's progress, Robert protests, "It can't be me; I've only known her for a few days." Thus, when Robert awakens Giselle with true love's kiss, he enacts a truth he has tried to deny: that he has, since his initial encounter with her, been inexorably a participant in a benign narrative pattern far more powerful than his cynicism, reason and doubt.

Robert may be converted, but Narissa is not. She derides "all this nauseating talk of true love's kiss; it really does bring out the worst in me." By trying to rewrite the conclusion so that the dragon wins and lovers die, she attempts to deny the inevitability of happy endings. *Enchanted*, however, denies Narissa narrative authority as it reenacts the film's initial sequence. Here, Narissa substitutes for the original troll; the spire from which Robert hangs takes the place of the branch from which Giselle hung, and just as Giselle is briefly saved from falling by Edward's sword thrown to pin her sleeve to the branch, Giselle throws Edward's sword to pin Robert to the spire. Finally, while the troll at the beginning of the film is catapulted into the distance, Narissa falls to the pavement below, setting the stage for the film's now double happy ending.

In ending as it began, the film confirms, in contrast to its apparent initial invitation to adult cynicism, the constant availability of the Disney narrative, the very reiteration of which testifies to its continued informing validity unchallenged by apparent change, by modernity and adult submission to the disenchantment of the world. Time and difference are eclipsed in this repetition of archetypal narrative as the time of childhood belief coincides with the time of an adulthood redeemed by the magic of romance. Appropriately enough, the point is underscored through a further emphasis on redemptive repetition in the immediacy of Nancy's recognition of Edward as her prince, as he slips Giselle's slipper onto her foot. Nancy's immediate agreement to marry Edward in Andalasia, like Robert's acceptance of his hitherto unacknowledged love for Giselle, restages affirmatively the initial narrative that had seemed unquestionably to invite "adult" mockery.

In case the audience has failed to appreciate both *Enchanted's* revalorization of the Disney narrative and its assertion that the Disney world and the real world are not distinct, the imagery of its final montage serve as an emphatic summation of the film's themes. As the camera pans from Giselle and Robert on the roof, it frames the shot to illuminate the visual equivalence between the Woolworth building and the iconic castle (Disney's corporate logo). In the succeeding shot, the Disney book, Andalasia, and the real world are made coincident through the device of the book with which the film began. The turning pages alternate between depictions of Andalasia and New York. By combining these within the covers of the fairy tale book, *Enchanted* insists that the real world can be made magical if only we believe, a sentiment unambiguously stated in the accompanying Carrie Underwood song: "Story book endings, fairy tales coming true./ Deep down inside we wanna believe they still do/…Sometime you reach what's realest by making believe…. /Let yourself be enchanted you might just break through."

By implying that our own happy endings depend upon our ability to be enchanted, to believe that Disney magic happens, the film revokes its own initial invitation to adult cynicism and disbelief, silencing its critics (and encouraging them, as Nathaniel's book title suggests, to *Vanquish… the Evil Queen Within*.) *Enchanted* brings the original Disney audience home and urges them to go out and buy fairy tale books and dresses—Andalasia/Disney Fashions—to enchant the next generation of Disney princesses.

Endnotes

[1] Richard Schickel, *The Disney Version: The Life, Art, and Commerce of Walt Disney*, 3rd Edn. (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1997, 1985, 1968). Mike Wallace, "Mickey Mouse History: Portraying the Past at Disney World," *Radical History Review* 32 (1985): 33-57.

[2] For samples of this critique, see the essays in *From Mouse to Mermaid: The Politics of Film, Gender and Culture*, eds. Elizabeth Bell, Lynda Haas, and Laura Sells (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); A. M. Davis, *Good Girls and Wicked Witches: Women in Disney's Feature Animation*. (Eastleigh U.K.: John Libby Publishing, 2006); Wohlwend, K.E., "Damsels in Discourse: Girls Consuming and Producing Identity Texts through Disney Princess Play, *Reading Research Quarterly* 44 (2009): 57-83. This topic has also been widely discussed in the popular press.

[3] It is interesting to note that the manhole cover in Times Square has recently been replaced with an official *Enchanted* manhole cover. (One wonders how quickly this will be stolen.)

Photos courtesy of University of Wyoming, www.uwyo.edu

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Luis Guadaño

When Thesis Films Don't Work—

Representational Strategies and Immigrants in Contemporary Spanish Film

Courtesy Estudios Picasso

If we take a look at Spanish films for the period 1975-2007, about seventy-four deal with immigration in Spain. This is a large number, though it includes documentaries, shorts and feature films. Thirty-eight of these films, which I will call "films about immigration," have followed three approaches: films that show immigration from the immigrant perspective; films that illustrate Spaniards' reaction toward immigration; and films that deal with problems faced by Spaniards and immigrants alike. Those approaches can be exemplified by three movies: *Las cartas de Alou* (*Letters From Alou*, Montxo Armendáriz, 1990) describes the life and problems faced by an illegal immigrant, from his own perspective, while he is trying to establish and make a living in Spain; *Bwana* (Imanol Uribe, 1996) presents the Spaniards' reaction during their first contact with a newly-arrived illegal immigrant; and *Flores de otro mundo* (*Flowers from another World*, Icíar Bollaín, 1999) deals with the problems faced by both Spaniards and immigrants while trying to establish a lifelong relationship through marriage.

Since the turn of the century, other films like *Poniente* (*Sundown/West*, Chus Gutiérrez, 2002), *Ilegal* (*Illegal*, Ignacio Vilar, 2002) or more recently *14 Kilómetros* (*14 Kilometers*, Gerardo Olivares, 2007), the short feature *Usar y tirar* (*Use and Dispose*, Daniel García Pablos, 2003), and the documentaries by José Luis Tirado *Paralelo 36* (*Parallel 36*, 2004) and *La liga de los olvidados* (*The Forgotten's Soccer League*, 2007) have explored similar issues on immigration. Although differing in their approach and narrative style they all share, as Inmaculada Gordillo notes, a very negative representation of intercultural relations between Spaniards and immigrants, leading her to conclude that solidarity and equal relations as shown in Spanish films appear to be isolated cases (14).

I disagree with Gordillo in terms of how she characterizes Spanish film and its portrayal of immigration because her analysis does not take into consideration another cluster of films that deals with the same topic. One possible explanation for this exclusion might lie in the fact that, since these films are not directly dealing with immigration issues, the presence of foreign characters in them can be understood as purely ancillary and thus not elaborating on or advancing the debate.[1] A more likely cause for such an omission derives from the critical tendency of favoring a highbrow, educational, propagandistic, and aesthetic/artistic conceptualization of cinema. As the director of *Paralelo 36*, José Luis Tirado has noted the purpose of films depicting the existence of racial, ethnic, and cultural tensions and confrontations is to "question reality and the dominant ideology through the media, based on the poetry the media expresses."[2]

I partially agree with Tirado's idea since cinema has proven, in some cases, to be a good propaganda tool to promote (for good or bad) social change. However, in order for a film to be successful in its questioning of both reality and the dominant ideology, it requires an audience that is willing to watch it. If we check the domestic box office figures, the combined audience for those thirty-eight films reached roughly 1.7 million moviegoers. If this number is low in terms of viewers attending Spanish films over a one-year period—the annual average for the period 1998-2008 is around 20 million—what happens if we stretch those numbers over a thirty-year period? We end up having roughly 56,000 viewers per year or around 75,000 per film which, in neither case,

is a solid box office success. A film with no audience is like the proverbial tree falling in the middle of the woods. Do these films make any "noise?"

The answer is yes. Many films about immigration have found a receptive audience within intellectual and academic circles because they are "good educational examples" that illustrate how a film, or a specific auteur, questions and criticizes politically incorrect reactions and feelings towards immigrants. In the process such films establish a connection with the Spanish social context and thus validate themselves, as Gordillo explains, by promoting the views expressed in them as "a reflection of the extra-cinematographic reality taking place in some Spanish cities… [or]… a representational model which might influence the audience individually and socially"(2). The problem with this position is that it isn't the true audience, but select intellectuals, scholars, or government officials who validate a film. And why are these groups taken into consideration, instead of everyday moviegoers? Well, we can say that, when an idea or a film is trying to be validated as a sound representation of a real situation, securing the support of the experts is best. What happens, however, when expert opinions are not shared by the public? Can we still maintain that those movies have an influence on individuals and society? Or should we just claim, if anything at all, that they only validate the "extra-cinematographic reality" for/of a specific social group?

What happens, however, when expert opinions are not shared by the public? Can we still maintain that those movies have an influence on individuals and society?

It seems that "films about immigration" receive attention and institutional support due to political correctness and hegemonic ideological reasons related to issues of discrimination and racism within the Spanish democracy. They reflect the "official view" as well as part of the filmic canon because of that support, hiding the failure of their representational strategies to convey the intended politically correct "message" to the audience. The latter, which should be enough to question the representational validity of "films about immigration"—as well as their link to an extra-cinematographic reality, and the relevance of their message—brings forward the question: do Spaniards really care about immigration?

Rethinking the Context: Looking in a Different Direction

Moving away from this conceptualization of cinema as an educational, propagandistic, and aesthetic/artistic vehicle, one can identify another group of about thirty-seven films that, instead of strictly focusing on the problems posed by immigration, include immigrant characters that share with their Spanish counterparts a common goal, situation, or problem. If we compare the films produced under this category—which I call "films with immigrants"—with the previous one, "films about immigration," there is not a great disparity in the number of films in the thirty-year period we are examining here. The box office figures,

however, tell a different story: "films about immigration" reached a total of 1.7 million viewers, while the audience for "films with immigrants" climbed to 25.5 million. That situation is not new in Spanish Cinema.

As Nuria Triana Toribio and Isabel Santaolalla have noted, this disparity in public attendance can be compared to what happened in the 1960s and early 1970s between the NCE (New Spanish Cinema) and the so-called *Tercera vía* (Third Way) films. NCE, following an auteur approach, received international attention at the time because of its opposition to the Franco regime, while in Spain those films did not have much public success. On the other hand, the *Tercera vía* movies also touched on sensitive social and political topics, but from a commercial and popular point of view. Nonetheless, *Tercera vía* films were largely ignored inside and outside of Spain by intellectuals and left-wing critics alike, yet became the blockbusters of their time because the audience perceived them as being culturally more relevant than NCE films.[3]

"Films about immigration" share with NCE films their asynchronicity in relation to the topics and narratives they present. While NCE still criticized the Franco regime, the Third Way was already aware of the factuality of those changes and was cashing in on them. In a similar manner, the 1990 release of *Las cartas de Alou*—considered the first Spanish film about immigration—seems to suggest that there was either no immigration flow to Spain until then, or that nobody had paid any attention to it. This is, of course, far from the truth. The immigration phenomenon in Spain was already well underway in the 1970s, as *El Puente* (*The Long Weekend*, Juan Antonio Bardem, 1977) attests in relation to Northern Africa immigration, and as was acknowledged socially in the 1980s when a Morrocan and a Philipino character were included in *Moros y cristianos* (*Moors and Christians*, Luis G. Berlanga, 1987), and when *El vuelo de la paloma* (*The Flight of the Dove*, José Luis García Sánchez, 1989) featured Sub-Saharan characters.

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In addition, it can be argued that, since the 1990s, the strategies of representation used by "films about immigration" have had no impact on the audience. It seems that stressing skin color, origin, cultural differences, lack of language skills and education has not eased the process of assimilation of these "new Spaniards." On the contrary, they have instead strengthened the differences between both groups, which could help explain why Gordillo concluded that Spanish cinema shows deficient intercultural relations and why "the search for differences [between immigrants and Spaniards] might not be the right path to follow" (14).

The "Other" is not so "Other"

Not searching for differences has been the path followed by "films with

immigrants" from *El Puente* (1977) to *Los managers* (2006). If we take a quick look at this cluster of films, they seem to share strategies of representation that have been present in popular Spanish film since the 1930s: a mix of genres; recognizable or popular characters, spaces and locations; the use of street language; and, more importantly, the interlacing of daily life topics following a narrative structure in which the central character or main plot are hard to determine. On the one hand, the combination of all these factors in "films with immigrants" might explain why they have not been given critical attention. They do not seem to display the clear-cut dualistic approach characteristic of "films about immigration." On the other hand, it is precisely the combination of these representational strategies that facilitates the incorporation of "sensitive topics" in a way that is not overly evident, mainly by integrating immigration matters or immigrant characters in a non-threatening way because they are at the same level as any other topic or character in the film.

It is precisely the combination of these representational strategies that facilitates the incorporation of "sensitive topics" in a way that is not overly evident, mainly by integrating immigration matters or immigrant characters in a seemingly non-threatening way because they are at the same level as any other topic or character in the film.

In some cases, immigrant characters and immigration appear to be mere footnotes or digressions that do not relate to what we perceive as the main narrative in the film. A barroom scene in *El Puente* features a bartender verbally attacking an Algerian immigrant, who tells Juan, the main character, that "Moors are like Gypsies" because the Algerian has no money and asks only to have three empty bottles filled with tap water. The scene does not stick out because it appears as just any other of the 21 tableaux that compose the film commenting on the general situation in Spain. Its inclusion is not ancillary, however. On the contrary, its juxtaposition with the next tableau—in which Juan runs into a friend who emigrated to Germany—compares the two immigrants and suggests that, in 1977, an Algerian in Spain could be seen as one of the one million Spaniards that left between 1959 and 1973 to work in other parts of Europe. As if to confirm this mass migration of North Africans to Spain, in 1978, a year after the movie's release, a Royal Decree was passed to regulate working permits for guest workers in Spain.

Another law to regulate immigration, the *Ley de Extranjería* (Foreigners Law), passed in 1985 under the first Socialist government, might have been the cause for the inclusion of immigrant characters in *Moros y cristianos*. In the film, Cuqui, an important candidate running in the Madrid local elections for a conservative party, has decided to hire a Philipino cook, Manulín, and a Morrocan maid, Jofaifa, as a way of increasing her electoral chances by showing her support for legal immigrants. The relation she has with them is relaxed. She treats them decently and

takes care of them. But although she herself keeps the stipulated relation between master and servant, the rest of her relatives do not care much about etiquette and relate to the cook and maid on equal terms.

In terms of labor and social rights, *El vuelo de la Paloma* moves a step forward in the homogenization of immigrant and Spanish characters. It does so by giving a voice to a group of Sub-Saharans working as film extras in a TVE (Spanish public television) production about the Spanish Civil War, allowing them to act as the rest of their fellow Spanish co-workers. Their story appears mixed in with that of a love pentagon between Paloma; her husband Pepe; Juancho, the neighborhood fishmonger; Toñito, a right wing extremist; and Luis Doncel, the star of the production. Both story lines are further complicated by the relationship between Paloma's father, who lived during the Civil War, and the historical consultant of the movie, who does not care that the extras representing Moorish troops are Sub-Saharans instead of Moroccans. In the film, the filming is taking place in a downtown square in Madrid on the same day that the 1988 general strike is scheduled by the Union. The extras, while remaining on the set as do many other employees, demand food and water until a decision about cancelling the production and joining the general strike is reached. At first, the show's executive producer reacts by asking police to keep the Africans "under control," but after inconclusive negotiations, the Sub-Saharans, like the rest of the workers, decide to join the strike and leave the production. They do so with the permission of the executive producer, who ends up identifying himself as a member of the union.

Still from *El Vuelo de la Paloma* (1989), © Ames Films and Lola Films.

From Stressing Differences to Underlining Similarities

The release of *Torrente, el brazo tonto de la ley* (*Torrente, the Dumb Arm of the Law*, Santiago Segura, 1998) marks a breakthrough in the portrayal of immigrants in Spanish film. This is the first time, and I believe the only time, a film is populated almost exclusively by immigrant characters, in one way or another, even though the movie is not about immigration itself. *Torrente* is the story of a cop who, kicked out of the force, decides to become something of a vigilante in his own Madrid neighborhood. During one of his night patrols, he discovers that an international gang, managed by an Argentinian, Mr. Mendoza, and aided by a man nicknamed

Still from *Torrente, el brazo tonto de la ley* (1997), ©Andrés Vicente Gómez.

"The Frenchman," is using a Chinese restaurant as a cover-up for their drug trafficking operations. In order to end their racket, Torrente forms his own anti-vice squad, recruiting one of his neighbors, Rafi, whose family just settled in the neighborhood, and three of his best friends: "El Malaguita" (The Malaguenian), Toneti, and "El Bombilla" (The Lightbulb or Smart One). Although the movie is about good guys and bad guys, the division between the two cannot be established based on race, color or origin. What we have are good and bad immigrants, and good and bad Spaniards. To prove the point that motives of good and bad are not based on ethnicity, the film also includes a love story between Rafi and Lio-Chi, who works as a waitress in the Chinese Restaurant where the drugs are being produced.

Torrente presents a view of the relations between immigrants and Spaniards that is well-balanced. It is true that the film sports some instances when Torrente himself could be seen as being anti-immigrant, such as when he breaks the pinkie finger of Moreno (Santiago Barullo, one of the first black actors in Spanish TV), or when he mocks Lio-Chi about using chopsticks instead of a fork, telling her that bamboo shoots are for panda bears, not people. However, I think that all these actions cannot be understood as properly anti-immigrant because Torrente behaves the same towards relatives and friends. He lives off his father's disability pension and uses Amparito, Rafi's cousin, as his sex toy and personal maid. Torrente mistreats everyone equally.

Still from *Torrente, el brazo tonto de la ley* (1997), ©Andrés Vicente Gómez.

The inclusion of Rosa Zidhan, an actress from Spain but of Chinese origin, in *Torrente*, illustrates extra-cinematographically what *Se buscan fulmontis* (*Full Montys Wanted*, Alex Calvo Sotelo, 1999) incorporates as part of its narrative: the life of first generation immigrants born in Spain.[4] *Se buscan fulmontis* deals with the problem of unemployment and personal relations, although in this case the film centers on young adults. A group of friends is so

desperate to find jobs that they decide to start their own strip-sex business as a last resort. The interest of this movie lies in the fact that one of the friends, Felipe, is the multicultural offspring of a Spanish woman and an African-American soldier who was stationed at a U.S. Army base near Madrid before dying in Vietnam. Even under such circumstances, Felipe's mother takes care of him until he earns a Ph.D. in Spanish Philology. After three years without a job, Felipe becomes an example of the situation lived by many other young Spaniards: a college degree does not guarantee employment. What is important is that Felipe does not lack a job because of his color, which causes him problems every other day with the cops and with a neo-Nazi group that ends up burning down his home. Even when he seeks work in construction and the foreman tells him that there is nothing for him, it is clear that the response is not due to his skin color. Half of the workers at the site are Moroccan immigrants, after all. Furthermore, Felipe is a Spaniard in "every aspect" except his skin. He speaks with no accent, dresses normally, has a college degree, and a white girlfriend. In fact, Felipe acts as the leader of the group of friends—the one who seriously challenges and exposes the stupid questions they are asked every time they go to the employment office.

THE FIRST SEVEN YEARS of the 21st century have produced seventeen major immigrant films, which have largely followed the representational strategies of the films from the previous decade, except that they show more depth in their portrayal of some of the topics and characters. *Los lunes al sol* (*Mondays in the Sun*, Fernando Leon de Araona, 2002) explores the problems faced by a group of middle-aged Spaniards and their families when there are no jobs available, a situation that also affects the immigrant population in the area. In this case, we have Sergei, a Russian astronautics engineer who left his country after the dissolution of the Soviet Union because his space program was cancelled. Although we do not know much about Sergei's private life, we can assume that he faces the same dilemmas as the rest of his buddies in the shipyard where he works.

More interesting are *Tapas* and *El penalti más largo del mundo* in that they develop and reframe two topics that have appeared in previous movies: abusive relations and the multicultural family. Set in Barcelona, *Tapas* (*Snack Bar*, Juan Cruz and José Corbacho, 2005) combines the stories of different people whose commonality is their relation with a tapas bar. One of the plots explores the relation between the owner of the bar, Lolo, his wife Rosalía, and an Asian immigrant, Mao, and illustrates how immigrant and Spanish characters suffer the same type of problems and situations, making them in effect interchangeable. When Lolo becomes abusive, Rosalía decides to leave him. To cover up Rosalía's disappearance, Lolo hires Mao, a recently-arrived Asian immigrant, as a cook, but Lolo seems more concerned about hiding Rosalía's absence than the reasons for her departure. As a result, Lolo reproduces the abusive relationship he had with his wife, but now uses Mao as his target. Later, after Mao resolves a series of problems in the bar kitchen, Lolo stops being abusive and starts seeing him as a human being instead of a stereotypical "Chinese." Lolo then realizes that the reason Rosalía left was because he only viewed her as wife and employee, not as a person and partner.

El penalty mas largo del mundo (*The Longest Penalty Shot in the World*, Roberto García Santiago, 2005) uses amateur soccer as a platform to explore the life of three characters: Fernando, the second goalie for Estrella Polar, interested in the coach's daughter; Bilbao, a married man who has lost his job but has not told his wife; and Kahled, a Morrocan immigrant who is going out with Fernando's sister Ana. What is striking about Khaled is that he seems to be completely integrated in the grocery store where the majority of the soccer team works: he is a single parent and, though Muslim, works in the meat section dealing with pork every day. He also plays on the team and has had a long-term relationship with Ana, although no real commitment has come out of it. Kahled never comes across as a foreigner trying to marry as a way to legalize his situation. What his relation with Ana exemplifies is how a lack of commitment to planning a future together can seriously threaten a relationship. Kahled represents a man who needs a push in order to commit. Indeed, once Ana urges him on, he starts saving money to buy a house where they can live together.

Los managers: from Spain as Point of Arrival to Spain as Point of Departure

Some of the movies I have been discussing, such as the all-immigrant cast of *Torrente*, have implicitly questioned Spain's economic standing or wealth through the personal situation of some of its characters. Others, like *Los lunes al sol*, have suggested the possibility of migrating to other countries, such as Australia, where life appears to be easier and better. *Los managers* is the first Spanish movie to put both of these ideas together: it is the first to suggest emigration from Spain and to question the idea of Spain as a land of opportunity.[5] In itself, the film is not criticizing immigration or the presence of immigrants in Spain. In fact, the film is not even concerned about discrimination or intercultural relations and solidarity in the way films about immigration usually are. What *Los manangers* seems to be questioning are the representational strategies used in many Spanish films that stress the differences between Spaniards and immigrants, and the very idea of Spain as a suitable place for living for immigrants and Spaniards alike.

Los managers tells the story of two jobless middle-aged men, Maca (short for Macario) and Rena (Renato), who devise a plan that will make them rich: work as managers for David and Pipo, two young brothers with good voices who are working in their family junkyard. To prepare them for their performance on the Spanish version of *American Idol*, Maca and Rena take them on tour around the most isolated and remote areas of Southern Spain. Maca secretly uses the tour as a cover-up to distribute the drug that a certain La Rota—a retired singer controlling much of the distribution in Southern Spain—has given him. During their tour they share the stage with Josete and his partner Irina, an Eastern European girl who falls in love with David. In the midst of all this, a Moroccan-looking guy named Alfonso tries to befriend David and Pipo. After the cops accidentally discover that Maca is trafficking in drugs, Maca, Rena, Pipo, and David escape from the Spanish police, only to be arrested by the U.S.M.P. for trespassing onto a U.S. naval base in Southern Spain. Eventually they flee the naval base and decide to go to Africa. Mean-

while, Rena is abducted in a flying saucer commanded by Alfonso, who, it turns out, is not Moroccan but an extraterrestrial. Alfonso tells him to have faith and wait for a sign. After Rena returns to earth and tells the group about his close encounter, they receive a phone call inviting Pipo and David as contestants on *Spanish Idol*. They win the contest and, together with Irina, move to Miami to start their singing career, while Maca and Rena remain behind in Spain as they were at the beginning: broke and thinking about either moving to Miami or Africa.

In order to eliminate any interpretation that could lead to a grouping of characters based on origin, which would make the movie resemble the structure of a "film about immigration," *Los managers* establishes a common link between all the characters from the beginning, creating a context that fits them all. The movie opens with Alfonso's voice-over telling an old story about a little boy named Mustapha. "He reached his arm out so far he touched a star with his hand. Poor boy! Little Mustapha didn't know stars are always shooting, like dreams." This introduction gives the audience a general idea of what they are going to watch before it happens. Alfonso's accent and the name in the story suggest that the voice-over is spoken by a native Moroccan who wants to realize his dream of moving to Spain. But such an assumption is misleading. If the first part of the little story might seem to present Spain as a desirable destination for a Moroccan immigrant—touching the star, after all, might signify crossing the Strait of Gibraltar and reaching Spain—the second half warns that the star might not be what Mustapha thinks it is, but rather something as short-lived as a shooting star.

During this voice-over, what we see on screen is not a decent Morrocan kid, but two nasty-looking Spaniards, Maca and Rena, sharing a bunk bed. While this juxtaposition of voice and image directly debunks the notion of Spain as a suitable place of immigration, it does not erase the fantasy of what Spain has become for many people living in Africa, Eastern Europe, Latin America or Asia: a place where the grass is going to be greener than in their own countries.

Nevertheless, and reinforcing the first scenes in the film, the Spain appearing in *Los managers* is not the one viewers have become accustomed to. It is true that on several occasions we see a map of Andalucía showing the

David and Pipo in still from *Los managers* (2005), © Altube & Cuervo and Estudios Picasso.

Rena and Maca in still from *Los managers* (2005), © Altube & Cuervo and Estudios Picasso.

route followed by Pipo and David, "Los Reyes del King" (the kings of King), pinpointing with well-known symbols the location of important towns and cities, like a bottle in Jerez or a bull in Seville. But it is also true that they never get close enough to any of them. The towns and locations where the action takes place have nothing to do with the marvelous vistas appearing in tourist brochures and posters. What we see is precisely the opposite: a countryside completely depopulated, arid, and full of wind turbines producing electricity; small towns with few people in them, and very simple arrangements for celebrations that have nothing to do with, say, the splendor and color of the April Fair or the Holy Week in Seville; and, finally, beaches without restaurants or any other type of services, so isolated and deserted that they have become ideal landing places for boats arriving from Morocco full of illegal immigrants.

This feeling extends also to the housing we see pictured on the screen, like Maca's home or the road hotel where they stay. In fact, the film features only three brief instances of the official Spain. One is when Rena looks through a telescope, from the roof of Maca's house, to spy on his wife and new husband. The second is at the wedding where Maca and Rena meet Josete for the first time. The third is on the TV show where David and Pipo sing at the end of the movie.

This critique of Spain's popular tourism image does not stop there. Other groups of foreigners in the film also lack a realistic idea of what Spain is. The first group, from Morocco, reinforces Alfonso's opening story by depicting their arrival on the coast by boat. They rush across the beach to avoid being caught by the border police, only to step on Maca, Rena, Pipo, and David, who sleep "outdoors" to save money. The other group is formed by Colonel Frankenheimer, the commanding officer of the U.S. naval base in the area, and Sargent Mortimer, who is in charge of security. While Frankenheimer represents the stereotypical view of Spain as the country of the flamenco and the bullfight, Sargent Mortimer behaves as if he were in an uncivilized non-western country. After arresting the friends for trespassing onto the base, he treats them as if they were Guantanamo detainees, holding them incommunicado, dressing them with orange jumpsuits and covering their heads with bags, certain that Spain supports the Taliban and oblivious to the fact that they carry Spanish IDs and do not speak Arabic.

If these scenes debunk the traditional and clichéd representation of Spain, the idea of Spain as a better place to live quickly vanishes due to the negative economic situation presented in the film: Maca is jobless and lives off of his mother's retirement pension; his friend Rena, in addition to being jobless like Maca, is living with him after the divorce from his wife; and David and Pipo work in the modest family junkyard, making only enough to have some fun every once in a while. In addition, working relations between employers and employees also show signs of discontent. Maca treats David and Pipo, at least until they encounter the police, the same way Josete treats Irina: exploiting and abusing them as much as he can, on the assumption that even such treatment affords them a better life than the one they had before.

Conclusion: Strategies are the Message

Los managers ranked seventh in 2006 box office earnings for Spanish films, reaching an estimated total of 400,000 viewers. The movie's success can, at least partially, be explained on the grounds of its interesting combination of representational strategies, which characterize much of Spanish popular film and "films with immigrants:" a mix of comedy and drama; characters that are easily recognizable as either lower or lower middle-class, or as belonging to other specific groups, such as immigrants; TV personalities, or even drug dealers, with distinctive accents that define their ethnicity; plots with characters from various countries of origin whose lives are interlaced; action placed in unknown but identifiable locales; and finally, situations facing the characters that are related to contemporary issues, ranging from economic hardship to immigration and career aspiration. Additionally, *Los Managers* incorporates two extra elements that have proved successful in Spanish film in recent years: music from a popular band, in this case Patanegra, and a road movie configuration.

What these representational strategies underscore is that "films with immigrants" present a completely different perspective about immigration in Spain, one that cannot be understood if we only take into consideration "films about immigration." The relevance of "films with immigrants" is, of course, not limited to the incorporation of immigrants or to giving immigrants the same status as Spanish characters. As *Los managers* shows, a number of films included in this group question reality and the dominant ideology, which is what Jose Luis Tirado suggests "films about immigration" should do. Following Isabel Santaolalla, such films are also connected to an important extra-cinematographic reality. Although these similarities might seem to suggest that "films with immigrants" follow the same pattern as "films about immigration," the target of their critique is not confined to political incorrectness or anecdotal racial conflicts that might happen in some Spanish cities, as Santaolalla pointed out. What they do show is that, to convey such a message, a thesis film might overshoot the mark and further alienate its intended audience. It is easier to stick to those representational strategies that the audience knows and understands well. Indeed, films based on popular strategies of representation can have the same, if not more, social leverage than auteurist films grounded in intellectual critique.

Endnotes

[1] An exception is Isabel Santaolalla's book *Los Otros, etnicidad y raza en el cine espanol contemporaneo* (2005), which takes into consideration films not directly related to immigration.

[2] In Rubén Díaz´s interview with José Luis Tirado,"Paralelo 36 - Documento y ficción en la frontera sur de Europa."

[3] See, for example, Ramón Buckley´s *La doble transicion* and *The Return of the Civil Society* by Víctor Pérez Díaz.

[4] This first generation of "new Spaniards" was not showcased in depth in Spanish newspapers and magazines until 2003 by *El país semanal* in "Españoles de toda la vida."

[5]To be precise, *Suspiros de España (y Portugal)* (José Luis García Sánchez, 1995) ends with two of the characters leaving Spain for a better life in Portugal.

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Greg Lewis

Promethean Cinema in Mao's China:

Sun Daolin and Xie Jin in Shanghai, 1948-1987

毛泽东时代的伟大电影创作者：孙道临与谢晋在上海

This essay is conceived as a segment in the as-yet unwritten history of Chinese film making and a descriptive homage to two contributors to PRC (People's Republic of China) cinema. Although almost no English-language historiography for the actor Sun Daolin or the director Xie Jin exists, their body of work deserves recognition in any globalized post-1945 history of transcontinental cinema.

Sun Daolin and Xie Jin. They were the preeminent filmmakers of Shanghai cinema for four decades. One was rough-hewn, outgoing, intuitive, provocative, informally educated; the other, patrician, well-schooled, handsome, philosophical, deliberate, subtle. Their passing in consecutive winters (2007 and 2008) marked the definitive end of an era whose significance remains hotly debated in and outside of China.

Two very different men, but with one shared destiny. In fact, to appreciate their accomplishments is to appreciate the times they lived in. The nascent national cinema they helped to create no doubt far outweighed the political shadows cast by Mao Zedong's sturm und drang. However, maintaining one's status as a film artist in the so-called New China was a high-wire act performed without a net, and the more prominent the film artist, the higher the wire. Over time both men learned a great deal about how to keep their balance, and yet the politics and personal tragedy of each man is what makes their story compelling.

Xie Jin
China's Versatile Master Filmmaker

"Take a seat there."

Xie Jin motioned me to a stuffed leather sofa in his office. I looked around at the no-frills functionality of Xie's working space, a contrast to the gleaming foyer announcing "Xie Jin—Heng Tong Film and Television Company" in foot-high gold letters and displaying a dozen oversized film posters celebrating the director's fifty years in cinema. The office reflected the historically dichotomous worlds Xie Jin had inhabited. Outside, the visual images— vivid, contemporary, unbounded—practically screamed, "This is an important artist!" As I walked down the hall I wondered if Xie was simply softening up his visitors. Should I be impressed? Intimidated? Disbelieving at the half-dozen bona fide classical films Xie made between 1957 and 1987? Inside, however, I relaxed as Xie Jin, solicitous and attentive, eased into a chair across from me. His office was large, but also staid, comfortable, and grandfatherly. A wall of barrister bookcases included some of his awards, yet Xie obviously was also a reader of books, especially history and literature.

Xie Jin looked and acted nothing like a man almost 80 years old. An abundant head of black hair and large glasses set off his ruddy complexion, and a vigorous handshake put me further at ease. He took my card. "Liu Yisi boshi (Dr. Lewis)," he said, smiling faintly, and then laughed.

"A doctor (coming to see me?)," he repeated. I smiled, too, surprised at his curiosity. "What questions do you have?"

It is June 13, 2009, eight years to the day since I first sat in Xie Jin's office. The venue is Shanghai again, this time for an academic conference to commemorate Xie's life and career. More than sixty film scholars gather at Shanghai University for this meditative exercise, which has special import because of Xie's unexpected passing the previous October. Many of these are Chinese cinéastes who have devoted long years of research on Xie Jin, and as such, their last opportunity to reflect on the man and his achievements turns into something more than academic wordplay.

The majority began by affirming Xie's status as the most prolific and versatile auteur (*geren feng'ge*) of PRC

Political bombshell [*Legend of Tianyun Mountain*] (1980)

A pensive Xie Jin; he made 14 films after the Cultural Revolution

(People's Republic of China) cinema, one who broke significant ground in nearly all of the dozen films he made between 1957 and 1987. His internationally-recognized [*Woman Basketball Player #5/Nu lan wu hao*] (1957), was the first to utilize a sports theme to explore individual characterizations of love, betrayal, competition, and national pride. Though he entrusted the two leading roles to experienced Shanghai actors, in this film and many others Xie used fresh-faced beginners or amateurs, especially attractive females.

One of these, playing a servant-turned-revolutionary in the 1960 revolutionary war film [*Red Detachment of Women/Hongse niangzijun*], made such an indelible impression that she was often called "Qionghua" (her film character's name) by filmgoers even decades later. Xie Jin also waded into controversial subjects when few others dared to do so, as in the 1963 satire [*Big Li, Little Li, and Old Li/Da li xiao li he lao li*], or especially, with the melodramatic soap opera of theatre life, [*Two Stage Sisters/Wutai jiemei*] (1964).[1]

After a full day of hearing scholarly platitudes which were then augmented by the reminiscences of several former Xie Jin colleagues, I suspected that this exercise was the academic equivalent of a show trial.

None of the presenters crossed any boundaries, although in most cases academic rigor, insights, or standards of research did not seem to noticeably suffer. However, establishing a critical distance between participants and observers proved challenging, as I realized when it came my turn to speak.

I had prepared remarks on Xie Jin's career before the Cultural Revolution started in 1966[2], focusing on questions about his auteur status and the dilemma of making films during the successive political high tides of the Anti-Rightist campaign (1957), when many intellectuals became political prisoners, and the Great Leap Forward (1958-1960), a slapdash attempt to rapidly industrialize that finally served only to demoralize the entire populace. To me, Chinese scholars conclusively demonstrated that Xie rated as the single undisputed auteur of Maoist-era cinema (1949-1976).

Further, once recognized, Xie ascended to the level of a "great master"

(*dashi*) or "artistic authority" (*yishu quanweizhe*) who shaped mainstream social concepts, rather than being merely judged solely on the basis of his art (as in the West).[3] I had once asked Xie Jin about how the didactic priorities of Maoist cinema interacted with the singular vision that had made him successful. Xie replied by noting that his successful films paralleled the strength of audience reactions; the stronger and more positive the reaction, the more successful the film. He clearly wanted audiences to identify with his film characters (he wrote or co-wrote most of his screenplays) and to be moved (*gandongle*) by them. The didactic message, whether praising patriotism or heroism or self-sacrifice, then became merely the vehicle which carried his protagonists' development through the narrative process.

In fact, one of the criticisms of Xie Jin, as it materialized on the conference's second day, was that he had been too formulaic. Critics, especially younger "Fifth generation" filmmakers[4] who began their careers after the Cultural Revolution ended in 1976, declared that Xie's were nothing more than "Hollywood-style melodramas" covered with the Confucian veneer of nationalism, patriotism, or collectivism.[5] This was true even for his great post-Cultural Revolution breakthrough films, [*The Legend of Tianyun Mountain/Tianyunshan chuanqi*] (1979) and [*Hibiscus Town/Furongzhen*] (1986). Both films set daring precedents with full frontal assaults upon the political failures of the Anti-Rightist campaign and the Great Leap Forward, respectively. However, heavy sentimentality and melodrama, including familiar themes of unrequited love, betrayal, and self-sacrifice, remained central to both narratives. Once again, Xie's audience empathized with his characters, but for the first time, they also experienced a full-blown political catharsis as they witnessed their own history writ large on the screen.

An assistant director emphasized Xie's anything but formulaic life experiences. She related the grisly story of how Xie Jin recovered the bodies of each of his parents during the Cultural Revolution. Both had committed suicide.

Historical orthodoxy and the respect accorded Xie at this gathering was such that criticisms, including those from a 1986 article on the so-called "Xie Jin Model," came under heavy fire. Here, too, colleague-participants trumped their academic counterparts with stories more compelling than any academic treatise. For example, an assistant director emphasized Xie's anything but formulaic life experiences. She related the grisly story of how Xie Jin recovered the bodies of each of his parents during the Cultural Revolution. Both had committed suicide. His father had taken an overdose of sleeping pills, a quiet and comparatively peaceful demise during the chaotic "active phase" of the Cultural Revolution between 1966 and 1969. His mother's death was more horrific. Xie discovered her crumpled body under a sheet next to her apartment building after she had jumped out of an upstairs window.

Real life historical narratives thus made their way into the conference proceedings, and not inconsequentially. As the room grew quieter with these reminiscences, it occurred to me that any critical assessment would need to take on the entire Maoist era and not just the film industry, individual films, or even prominent individual filmmakers like Xie Jin. However, it seemed that systemic failures too must relate back to the film industry and difference makers like Xie Jin.

One keynote speaker did just that, but looked at the last half of Xie's career (post-1982) rather than the Maoist era. In the 1980s, the Chinese party-state repudiated the "years of turmoil" associated with the Cultural Revolution, but did not recognize the mistakes of the Anti-Rightist campaign (as did Xie Jin in *Legend of Tianyun Mountain*) in any way, shape, or form (nor have they as of this writing).[6] Xie Jin thus put his government in something of a quandary. Many of his films had supported the communist revolution and government, yet his iconic status came from films he made after the Cultural Revolution critical of the political status quo. While Xie felt pressure to duplicate his critical successes, he also knew the government gave him wider latitude than any other filmmaker due to his past overall contributions.

Personal reminiscences also opened the possibility of revising the orthodox historical record. For me, this meant examining Xie Jin and the dilemma of politics between 1957 and 1965. He had not flinched eight years earlier when I asked him about the Anti-Rightist campaign, when 400,000 intellectuals and many filmmakers were exiled for speaking out against government and party shortcomings. Xie himself avoided official sanction; he was in Moscow to collect an award for *Woman Basketball Player #5*. In fact, his success led to membership in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), one of several such film industry recruits made during the Great Leap Forward. However, one can wonder why those so privileged did not raise hue and cry when the failures of the Leap, including millions of deaths from starvation, became apparent. To me, Xie Jin characterized the film crew gathered on Hainan island from late 1959 to shoot *Red Detachment of Women* as "uneasy . . . we knew something was amiss," but pled ignorance as to the details. As it turned out, no scholar broached discussion of Xie's life outside film or his political dilemma, and neither did I. The dilemma of Xie Jin as an artistic authority operating in the overheated political atmosphere of the Great Leap Forward would have to await further scrutiny.[7]

Sun Daolin
Patrician Maoist Matinee Idol

"There are some who . . . would say that we failed." As he pondered the relative merits of his long film career, Sun Daolin gazed at the Wasatch front while standing on an empty Weber State University campus walkway in October 2003. His words caught me by surprise. Sun had readily agreed to be interviewed on his last morning in Ogden at the end of a whirlwind two-week trip, but also neatly avoided any provocative on-camera statements. On this, his first invite to a U.S. campus, Sun introduced several of his important films, contrasting an often-violent pre-1949 Beijing with the intense but secure post-revolution Shanghai. The exchanges seemed to invigorate him, as did an

Classic PRC cinema: Sun Daolin as the empathetic school teacher Xiao Jianqiu in [*Early Spring in February*] (1963)

academic roundtable discussion among faculty and students on PRC cinema.[8] However, only later would I realize the importance of this dialogue for Sun, and it gave me additional insight into his thinking about the Maoist period of Chinese filmmaking.

For many, Sun Daolin represented the iconic face of Maoist Chinese cinema: handsome, articulate, and credible. As an actor, he may have been less recognized as an auteur than Xie Jin. However, Sun began his film career much earlier than Xie (in 1947), and his popularity in the formative years of PRC cinema (1949-1955) was second to none. Only Sun rated leading roles in more than a dozen films before the Cultural Revolution, including five seminal portrayals in consecutive films he made between 1954 and 1958. As guerrilla commander Li in [*Reconnaissance Across the Yangzi/Dujiang zhenchaji*] (1954), Sun adroitly led the scout team that enabled the Chinese communists to avoid heavy casualties in their decisive civil war battle with the Nationalists in Shanghai. As an action thriller and love story, *Reconnaissance* became the most successful PRC film to date, and made a bona fide star of Sun. He followed this up with roles as political instructor Han Chengguang, martyred in the Sino-Japanese War [*Storm on South Island/Nandao fengyun*] (1955); as the vacillating eldest son Gao Yuexin in novelist Ba Jin's melodramatic study of genteel feudalism in 1920 Beijing [*Family/Jia*] (1956); as returned student and would-be industrialist Zhang Bohan in postwar Shanghai [*The City That Never Sleeps/Bu ye cheng*] (1957); and finally, as

《永不消失的電波》劇照

First-rate Maoist political thriller: Sun Daolin as undercover operative Li Xia in [*The Unfailing Radio Wave*] (1958). Film posters were routinely dominated by Sun's familiar countenance.

the versatile underground radio operator Li Xia in wartime Shanghai [*The Unfailing Radio Wave/Yongbu shaoshide dianbo*](1958).[9]

Any of these now-classic films would have assured Sun of preeminent status in China's nascent national cinema. Collectively, they brought him not only immense fame but also recognition as the most sophisticated artist-practitioner of Maoist-style heroism, nationalism, and collectivism. This career trajectory differed slightly from the artistic authority attributed to Xie Jin, but by being more accessible and visible to the general public, Sun also exercised considerable influence beyond the silver screen. And deservedly so. Through publications like *Popular Cinema/Dazhong dianying*, details of Sun's patrician upbringing became common knowledge to filmgoers. The son of a foreign-educated engineer-turned-industrialist, Sun graduated from prestigious Yanjing University with a philosophy degree. His broad interests and letter-perfect English earned him the nickname "China's Jimmy Stewart" in Western circles. He further augmented his thinking, caring screen persona with roles as university student martyr Jiang Meiqing in [*A Revolutionary Family/Geming jiating*] (1960), and especially, as teacher Xiao Jianqiu in [*Early Spring in February/Zaochun eryue*] (1963).

Like Xie Jin, Sun Daolin joined the CCP in his thirties, a tangible measure of success for each man. Unfortunately, both men had films withdrawn from circulation and criticized on the eve of the Cultural Revolution. Thereafter their paths diverged. Xie Jin overcame the controversy surrounding his film [*Two Stage Sisters/Wutai jiemei*] (1964) to direct an episodic feature about a barefoot doctor, *Chun Miao* (1975), arguably the best film of the entire Cultural Revolution. However, his revived political standing could not prevent the tragic deaths of his parents, and those undoubtedly led him to make the savagely critical films mentioned above. Meanwhile, like most other Shanghai film artists, Sun Daolin spent a portion of the Cultural Revolution in a "cow's pen" (*niupeng*).[10] He partially resur-

rected his career after 1976 with several less-than-compelling films. Roles as the Chinese geologist Li Siguang [*Li Siguang*] (1979) and Republican founding father Sun Yatsen [*Feichang da zongtong*] (1986) reacquainted Sun with filmgoers, but unlike Xie Jin, his earlier films remained his most popular. Sun also turned to directing in an effort to approach his fading career. However, his rendering of Mao Dun's classic tale of 1930s Republican-era paternalistic family hijinks, [*Thunderstorm/Leiyu*] (1983), appeared anachronistic to younger film audiences who would soon embrace the iconoclastic and often bleak films of China's Fifth generation filmmakers.[11]

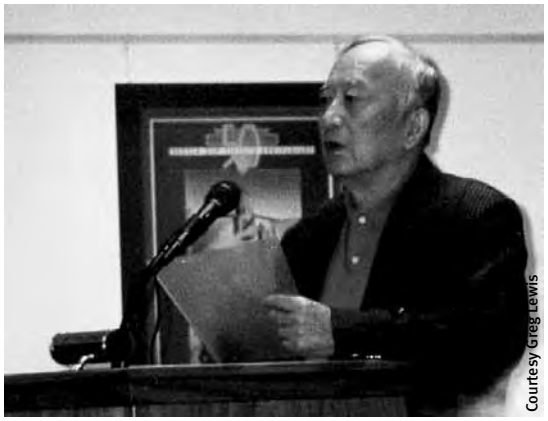
Sun answered almost matter-of-factly: "I never stopped believing in Communism, and I am a Communist."

Once retired, Sun Daolin's storied career failed to attract scholarly attention like Xie Jin's. Many associated him with an aesthetically static, heavy handed, and artificial Maoist cinema. Sun reinforced this perception by being singularly unapologetic about the era or the films he made. He had lost his mother to illness during the Cultural Revolution, and as a newlywed with a young child, he saw his family rent asunder. However, he bore these injustices without fanfare and remained steadfast in his commitment to the Chinese communist party-state. This conviction came out unexpectedly during Sun's lecture at Weber State University. Following his remarks about the tumult in China prior to the Communist takeover and what had caused him to embrace the revolution, one listener asked him directly, "when did you stop believing in Communism?" As the question seemed confrontational, some audience members shifted uneasily in their seats. However, Sun belied no emotion or resentment. He answered almost matter-of-factly: "I never stopped believing in Communism, and I am a Communist."

Sun Daolin's no-holds-barred question-and-answer session at Weber State was preceded by a lecture that he had fretted over for months. When I had first met Sun in 2002, he had told a story about one spring on the Korean War front with a group of film artists. This venture, designed to raise the nationalist political consciousness of young Shanghai filmmakers who for the most part came from the bourgeoisie, ended tragically when an American B-52 bomb exploded nearby, killing the group leader and several others.[12] After he agreed to visit, he questioned whether the story was appropriate for U.S. students, given that the U.S. and China were enemies at the time and that this cultural exchange should be about bridge-building. He relaxed only when he delivered the talk and students realized, as I told him they would, that in his didactic message, the tragedy and horror of war trumped any political ideologies.

What I learned from two weeks with Sun Daolin in Utah about Maoist cinema's contribution to rebuilding a war-torn country whetted my appetite for a deeper and broader exploration on the subject. Little did I then realize that Sun would act as the midwife for many of my future activities. Months later in Shanghai, he facilitated access to three

dozen filmmakers, scholars, and executives, all with a view towards making Cold War-era Chinese cinema more accessible and understandable to the West. Best of all, he made himself available to me, and over the course of three summers I learned a great deal indeed about the Maoist era and its cinema. Even as I was thankful for these opportunities, I sometimes wondered if Sun was simply trying to engineer a favorable legacy for himself.



Sun Daolin speaking at Weber State University in 2003

Two occasions, however, disproved my suspicions. The first came when Sun and I dined one evening at the posh Shanghai Cinema City restaurant developed by Wu Yigong, chairman of the China Film Artist's Association and an award-winning Fourth generation director in his own right. Fourth generation filmmakers in China were the most difficult for scholars to classify. Like Wu Yigong, they were born during the years of the Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945) and became the first formally educated directors at the Beijing Film Academy before the Cultural Revolution. Unfortunately, a forced hiatus greeted these newly-minted filmmakers when China ceased to make any feature films between 1966 and 1973. Thereafter, however, the Fourth generation found a secure niche in PRC cinema annals with a series of extraordinarily frank commentaries on Chinese society that differed markedly from the so-called socialist realism (*xianshi zhuyi*) of Sun Daolin's generation. Wu Yigong was among the most prominent of these with two Chinese "Oscars," for the searing Anti-Rightist-era drama [*Evening Rain/Bashan yeyu*] (1981) and the affecting homage to 1920s Beijing courtyard life, [*Memories of Old Beijing/ Chengnan jiushi*] (1983).

With his credentials and a sixteen-year age difference, I guessed that Wu Yigong was no shill for Sun Daolin. He readily deferred to Sun because of Sun's senior status, but Wu's habit of endlessly swirling a cigarette around a small circular ashtray while Sun talked of halcyon days subtly expressed, to me at least, the differing visions of the two men. Whereas I had usually met Sun Daolin in his simply furnished apartment, the elegant dining room we now shared felt like Wu Yigong's home turf, a place of corporate business, modern times, and conspicuous wealth.[13] Maoist-era cinema seemed far removed from Wu's thoughts as he listened. But not completely. Wu Yigong affirmed Sun's call that night for further Sino-American cultural exchanges and assembled a number of sophisticated filmmakers and scholars from three generations who made their way to Weber State over the next three years. These men and women assessed aspects of China's decades-long film development with surprising candor,

fostering a dialogue that gave me hope regarding the exposition of a too-long dormant history.

The second occasion followed from this promising beginning. In June 2004, Sun Daolin, Wu Yigong and I gathered with six prominent Chinese film scholars on the lush grounds of the Shanghai Federation of Art and Literary Circles for a "retrospective" symposium on Chinese cinema. I knew most of the scholars from their outstanding published works but wondered especially how the dialogue with Sun Daolin would unfold. Few had written about Sun, and as an accomplished "old revolutionary" (*lao geming*) a critical appraisal of his career or era in this setting looked to be impossible. Under these circumstances, I figured Sun's charisma and superior storytelling qualities would easily carry the day, and they did. The scholars found themselves reacting to Sun's experiential history by scrambling for theoretical frameworks that might explain the entire Maoist era. The symposium ended with just that as a stated goal, and plans by the participants to form a bilateral research organization as the means toward understanding art, cinema, and politics in China.

Whither Maoist China and Its Cinematic Legacy?

Only with the publication of an authorized biography on the first anniversary of his death did I learn how completely and assiduously the scholarly community had ignored Sun Daolin.[14] Certainly, no academic gathering like Xie Jin's followed Sun's passing in 2007, though he seemed to be worthy of such reflection. Sun cast a large shadow both professionally and personally, even if his later incarnations never obscured the basic persona he had put forth on screen way back in 1954. In fact, if any film artist could be said to represent the entire trajectory of Mao's China (1949-1976), it was Sun Daolin. As a largely unrepentant *lao geming*, perhaps it was inevitable that he would be closely identified with that era despite his long career. And yet, only Sun Daolin among all our Utah visitors seemed to transcend mere discussion of films or politics.

Visited by extraordinary personal tragedy, Xie Jin reluctantly moved on from representing the unattainable utopian ideals of Maoist politics and cinema to taking a harshly critical view.

Visited by extraordinary personal tragedy, Xie Jin reluctantly moved on from representing the unattainable utopian ideals of Maoist politics and cinema to taking a harshly critical view. He rationalized his success by noting the cathartic effect of his post-Cultural Revolution films for Chinese film audiences. Or did he really move on? Xie knew well that the failed political and artistic milieu he condemned after 1979 was the same one that produced him. Many of his contemporary Third generation colleagues, including Sun Daolin, admired him, but few followed his example. Distanced professionally from his own generation, Xie was further buffeted by the ascension of Fifth generation directors and criticism they

and others embodied in the "Xie Jin Model." The Xie Jin Model essentially argued that the director never changed his stripes, but rather continued to manipulate his audience's emotions as melodramatically as he had in "Hollywood-style" films made before the Cultural Revolution.

Did advocacy of the Xie Jin Model finally diminish its subject by identifying him with the academically discredited Maoist era? At Xie's commemorative conference, the Xie Jin Model stimulated the most contentious and frank discussions. Whenever scholars verged on endorsing it, others shouted them down, fearful lest it appear to be the dominant component of his historical legacy. In the end, an uneasy truce prevailed, with "advocates" saying little more than that it should remain part of the accepted historiography. At conference's end, it seemed that Xie Jin could thus not be separated from his Maoist past. However, rather than addressing the entire era's failings, scholars simply ignored the political milieu altogether or acted as apologists for several lesser films Xie made during political high tides by speculating he had not wanted to make them.

Finally, the legacies of Xie Jin and Sun Daolin can be sourced to a single wellspring even if the men trod two different paths. Xie Jin never publicly commented on the "model" that, in effect, politicized him. This is not to say that he was insensitive to negative judgments about his Maoist past. However, being more widely traveled, surprisingly, than Sun Daolin, he took pains to enumerate the many artistic influences on his career, including Chinese theater and film training, Italian Neo-Realism, Soviet socialist realism, and, yes, Hollywood. Meanwhile, Sun Daolin spoke openly about both art and politics in his life. While Xie Jin punctuated discussions with references to Rosselini, de Sica, or even Cecil B. DeMille (!), Sun Daolin described his personal rectification (*zhengfeng*), of what it meant to be an artist in Mao's China and how it came to be for him personally. Perhaps, secure in his enormous popular fame and a beloved screen persona that transcended time, he was less fearful of being judged about his part in the political calamities of the late Mao period.

It remains for the academic community in and outside China to devote greater attention to this era's film and politics, and the prognosis is distinctly favorable. The sizable turnout for Xie Jin's conference demonstrates continuing interest in Maoist cinema, even among younger scholars who offered perspectives both novel and frank. Ample institutional support also appears to be forthcoming. Although the Chinese party-state is understandably reluctant to revisit the self-defeating mistakes of the Anti-Rightist campaign and the Great Leap Forward, studies of PRC film must at least acknowledge—and should assess—the political environment as well. To date, organizations like the China Film Archive and the Shanghai Federation of Art and Literary Circles have recorded dozens of memoir accounts, many of which do indicate the extraordinary conditions film artists labored under during the Cold War. Regardless of the outcome these efforts generate, the complete stories of both Xie Jin and Sun Daolin have yet to be written.

Bibliography

To date, no full-length biographies of either Xie Jin or Sun Daolin exist in English. Standard Chinese-language works include, Xie Jin, *Zuji: Xie Jin wushi nian dianying yishu shenghuo huimou/Footprints: Looking Back at Xie Jin's Fifty Year Career as a Film Artist* (Shanghai 1999); Dai Xiu and Zhuang Xin, *Xie Jin zhuan/A Biography of Xie Jin* (Shanghai 1997); Zhongguo dianying jiaxiehui [China Film Artist's Association], *Lun Xie Jin dianying/An Assessment of Xie Jin's Films* (Beijing 1998); Sun Daolin, *Zoujin yangguang/Walking into the Sun* (Shanghai 1997), and Yu Li and Qing Na, *Sun Daolin zhuan/A Biography of Sun Daolin* (Shanghai 2008).

Endnotes

[1] Some of the best recent scholarship dealing with this era of Xie's career can be found in a commemorative section of *Dangdai dianying/Contemporary Cinema* 118 (January 2004), pp. 4-38.

[2] A ten-year nationwide unraveling of existing social mores, the Cultural Revolution had purported to create a new culture (including "revolutionary romanticism" in film and art). Because of political chaos and violence, China closed its primary and secondary schools and its film industry for seven years (1966-1973). Although eight lavishly filmed versions of the so-called "Model Operas" were produced over this time, not a single feature film was made. Instead, Chinese filmgoers watched a handful of approved films produced between 1949 and 1963.

[3] See Hu Ke, "Xie Jin dianying yu zhongguo dianying lilun fazhan/Xie Jin's Movies and the Development of Chinese Film Theory," *Dangdai dianying/Contemporary Cinema* 118 (January 2004), 31-34.

[4] Because of dramatic generational shifts in Chinese politics, filmmakers are often classified according to their age or generation. Fifth generation filmmakers were fortunate to make their iconoclastic features in the new era [xin shiqi] after 1978, when Chinese films could be exported to the West.

[5] For an early English language treatment of the different perspectives held by Xie Jin vs. the Fifth generation filmmakers, see interview transcripts in George Semsel, *Chinese Film: The State of the Art in the People's Republic* (Praeger 1987), 104-141.

[6] Chris Berry (keynote speaker), "Xie Jin as Auteur," *Tongsu xiandaixing, guozu shenfen rentong yu qingjiejude wenhua zhengzhi: Xie Jin dianying guoji suishu yanjiuhui/Vernacular Modernity, National Identity, and Cultural Politics of Melodrama: A Tribute Conference to Xie Jin*, Shanghai University, June 13-14, 2009.

[7] Transcripts from the author's interviews with Xie Jin: June 13, 2001 (Shanghai), June 6, 2002 (Shanghai), and June 6, 2005 (Beijing).

[8] For all of his travels—and because of his fame and the duration of his career, he had visited the U.S., Europe, Japan, and the former Soviet bloc—Sun never hinted that he had visited a U.S. university. The last time he had touched U.S. soil, in San Francisco nearly twenty years before, it was for a theater play.

[9] Several of Sun's and Xie Jin's signature films are available on DVD at Weber State University's Stewart Library as part of the project *Translating New China's Cinema for English-Speaking Audiences*.

[10] Mao Zedong's wife Jiang Qing was a film actress in the 1930s and blamed the Shanghai film community for her failures. As the leader of the so-called Gang of Four, she exacted her revenge on many prominent film artists during the Cultural Revolution.

[11] Zhang Yimou, Chen Kaige, and Tian Zhuangzhuang are the best-known of these Fifth generation directors.

[12] See Greg Lewis, "China's 'Jimmy Stewart': An Encounter with Leading 1950s Actor Sun Daolin," *Rough Draft* 24:1 (Winter 2003), 7-9.

[13] I want to add the caveat that traversing the football field-length distance between the street and restaurant reminded me of the durability of long-ago fame. Once the considerable crowd lined up outside an adjacent theater realized that Sun Daolin was in their midst, they parted as if it were Moses passing through the Red Sea.

[14] Yu Li and Qing Na, *Sun Daolin zhuan/A Biography of Sun Daolin* (Shanghai 2008).

Lewis with Sun Daolin, from the author's collection

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Isabel Asensio-Sierra

Faith, Doubt, and Religious Ideology in Contemporary Spanish Cinema

Gloria showing her daughter, Camino, a poster with the caption "Jesus loves you." Still from *Camino* (2008), © Altafilms.

Contemporary Spanish cinema underwent a process of re-organization during the last two decades of the 20th century.[1] Pilar Miró, general director of cinematography from 1982 to 1985 initiated these structural changes with the intention of increasing quality in film making. As a result, the average number of films produced yearly decreased as better quality movies were made. Due to the changes introduced by Miró, Spanish cinema began to receive more international attention, which is evidenced by the prizes various productions received in the 80s, culminating in 1983 when José Luis Garci received the Oscar for best foreign movie with *Volver a empezar* (*Begin Again*, 1982). One of the most important of Miró's achievements as general director was the recovery of category A for the San Sebastián International Film Festival in 1985.[2]

During the three years of Miró's leadership, films produced regionally emerged as a strong force. For instance, Basque cinema produced box-office hits such as *La muerte de Mikel* (*Mikel's Death*, 1983) by Imanol Uribe. Other autonomies also developed and produced films in an attempt to form a regional identity. In short, Miró played an essential role when it came to transforming Spanish cinema into a solid organization. All directors succeeding Miró—Fernando Méndez-Leite, Miguel Marías, Enrique Balmaseda, Juan Miguel Lamet, and others—worked to defeat the crisis in the domestic film industry and to overcome the powerful presence of Hollywood in Spanish theaters.

Spanish history, with its civil war and dictatorship afterwards, provided enough material to feed a substantial part of Spanish cinema during the last years of the 80s and the beginning of the 90s. With the passing of time, the fears caused by the Franco regime began to disappear and, as Jean-Claude Seguin affirms, although there remains an insistence on "a past that obsesses the Spaniards, the truth is that history becomes just a backdrop" (81). Two examples of this pseudo-historical cinema are *La guerra de los locos* (*The War of Fools*, 1986) by Manuel Matji and *Mambrú se fue a la guerra* (*Mambrú Went to War*, 1986) by Fernando Fernán Gómez. Paralleling this type of film, almost as a counterpoint to the more serious cinematic treatment of Spain's dictatorial past, Spanish cinema produced comedy, a genre that has traditionally been well received by Spaniards.

Two Basque film directors that have significantly contributed to the comedy genre, and to innovation generally, are Enrique Urbizu and Julio Medem, as well as Pedro Almodóvar. Although much of the Spanish public has, to this day, not taken to his films, Almodóvar is, without doubt, one of the most well-known and internationally recognized Spanish film directors. Almodóvar is particularly notable for the use of the Hispanic dimension of the art of bullfighting, Catholicism, and death (Seguin 82). In many of his movies, the city of Madrid functions as the setting where the characters interact and analyze their inner beings. Examples of such urban introspection are Almodóvar's first films, such as *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios* (*Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*, 1988), ¡*Átame*! (*Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!*, 1989), and *Tacones Lejanos* (*High Heels*, 1991).

Pilar Miró, general director of cinematography in Spain, 1982-85

Other Spanish film directors have also continued to make artistically sound films. A common trend was literary adaptations of novels that had already become classics in Spanish literature. The important aspect, though, is that Spanish directors started dealing with broader themes, while analyzing a changing society. Seguin emphasizes that "film makers now focus their works on international issues that may get the interest of a non-Hispanic audience" (88). Such a reorientation, Seguin explains, is due to Spanish filmmakers' desire to establish an international audience for their work.

The Impact of Religion in Contemporary Spanish Cinema

While the Spanish cinema of genres began to disappear during Miró's leadership (Gubern 421), two genres that continued to be made were literary adaptations and religious movies.[3] Literary adaptation, history, and religion often merged in films such as *La monja alférez* (*The Nun Alférez*,1986) by Javier Aguirre, about the life of Catalina de Erauso, a nun who became a soldier in the Americas, and *La noche oscura* (*The Dark Night*, 1988) by Carlos Saura, about mystic poet and priest San Juan de la Cruz. In the 1950s and 60s, long before Miró's restructuring, religious films were one of the favorite genres of Spanish audiences. During the Franco regime, the links that had previously been established between the Government and the Catholic Church became stronger, a fact that was inevitably reflected in the Spanish movie industry. The Church played a significant role by screening films for their moral and thematic aspects and by censoring or suppressing any movie that was deemed immoral or out of bounds of perceived social norms. By contrast, the Church willingly supported movies that narrated the life of saints and that reflected overall Catholic virtues. One such religious film that had a dramatic success both within and outside of Spain was Ladislao Vajda's *Marcelino, pan y vino* (*The Miracle of Marcelin*o, 1955), based on a narrative by José María Sánchez Silva about a young boy who is raised by monks.[4]

Even today, religious genre films continue to be an important part of the Spanish film industry, although they are mainly produced by Christian groups and religious associations.[5] Documentary films are also an important part of this genre, as are movies with spiritual themes—those about life, family, Christian values, and traditions. Film distributor Karmafilms, for example, created www.cinereligioso.es as a portal for religious films in Spain. This essay does not intend to engage religious genre films per se, but rather the portrayal of Catholicism in contemporary Spanish cinema.

The Blind Sunflowers and *Camino*

Since the end of censorship after the death of Francisco Franco, filmmakers have approached Catholicism with a critical eye and the intent of analyzing, sometimes in a highly ideological way, the relationship between human beings and religion in general, and between Spaniards and Catholicism in particular. Movies such as *Los girasoles ciegos* (*The Blind Sunflowers*) by José Luis Cuerda, and *Camino* by Javier Fesser, both released in 2008, have caused controversy because of their religious content, and the Spanish audience's reaction is generally either one of acceptance or rejection. *The Blind Sunflowers* is a literary adaptation, by Cuerda himself, of a novel with the same title written by the late Rafael Azcona. *Camino* is based on Fesser's original script. *The Blind Sunflowers* was selected by the Spanish Film Academy to represent Spain in the 2009 Academy Awards in the Foreign-Language Film category. *Camino* won the Goya Award for best film in 2009. Both are dramatic genre films and their main characters' lives are affected by Catholicism in one way or another.

The story of *The Blind Sunflowers* takes place in the northwestern region of Galicia, an autonomous community that has been historically conservative

and right-wing during Franco's regime. Ricardo, one of the main characters, leads a life of seclusion, hiding in a small room which he can only enter through the wardrobe in the master bedroom of the family apartment. He is being persecuted for his political ideology and for being a socially committed poet. He lives tormented by the idea of being discovered, arrested, and killed. Elena, his wife, is also part of Ricardo's secrecy and lives like a widow mourning her husband's fake death. Salvador, the other major player in the film, is a young seminarist who—having recently returned from war—arrives at the grade school of Ricardo and Elena's son, Lorenzo. Even though he has yet to complete his ecclesiastical training, he is arrogant and totally believes in the superior social status that the hassock confers upon him. From the very first day in the school, Salvador feels attracted to the young and beautiful Elena, who he naturally believes is a widow. Lorenzo, in the meantime, is a kid forced to live like an adult, lying to survive because of his father's circumstance.

Ricardo and Salvador incarnate two sides of the same coin: the defeated and the victor. Both men feel confused and desire to be free, but only one of them is able to come out of their spiritual and emotional prison at the other's cost. At the end of the movie, Salvador is the winner, but he will continue to live with uncertainty. Elena's life has also little happiness. She knows the hidden truth and feels tied to it. Despite her circumstances, she has a strong character and strives to have a normal life by taking care of her house and son, while secretly trying to revive her marriage.

Doubt is a constant in *The Blind Sunflowers*. Ricardo doubts that some-

Elena walking her son Lorenzo to school. Still from ***The Blind Sunflowers*** (2008), © Altafilms.

day he will be free again, able to live a life of happiness without fear, and with the power to write poetry free from censorship. Elena doubts her marriage. She still loves Ricardo intensely, but his passive attitude and lack of interest in their life frustrates her, and she often feels desperate. Salvador, meanwhile, has doubts about his faith. He feels uncertain about his role at the seminary due to several reasons. First, he regrets having killed in the war and wonders how he could lead a life of priesthood after having committed one of the capital sins. Second, after meeting Elena, Salvador's sexual instincts emerge, as he feels a strong attraction toward her and even more insecurity about his life in the seminary. He basically starts stalking Elena; he lies to the other priests in order to go out and pretend to run into her, and he asks Elena to meet with him using Lorenzo's class performance as an excuse. Being the presumptuous man that he is, Salvador does not want to realize that Elena has been trying to avoid him.

Doubt ruins Ricardo and Salvador's lives as well. Toward the end of the movie, Salvador shows up at Elena's apartment, dressed in his soldier's uniform, determined to seduce her. She rejects him, but he forces himself upon her. When Ricardo hears them struggling, he comes out of his hideout to confront the seminarist. Surprised and feeling fooled and betrayed, Salvador's immediate reaction is to call the police. He puts an end to Ricardo's years of silence and confinement by shouting his whereabouts out of the apartment window. Once the truth is revealed, Ricardo is hopeless and stripped of the idea of ever enjoying a free life. Without apparent consideration for his wife

Salvador's attraction to Elena remains unreciprocated. Still from *The Blind Sunflowers* (2008), © Altafilms.

and son, he commits suicide by jumping out of the window. Ricardo breaks his silence not with words but with action, and literally throws his years of inhibition and self-captivity out the window—the same window that had kept him isolated from the rest of the world.

As for Salvador, he is frightened by the truth and, after destroying Ricardo and Elena's lives, makes the easiest and most cowardly decision: he blames Elena for everything and retreats back into the protective shell of the seminary. This ending may be frustrating to the audience. Not only has Salvador broken this family into pieces instead of saving it, as his name implies, but he comes off well and remains unpunished thanks to his religious position in society. In one of the last scenes of the movie, Salvador, during a confession to the Rector, denies responsibility for the family's breakup and blames Ricardo for being a fugitive communist. He also blames Elena and her seductive wiles as a sinful woman.

The polemical plot of *Camino* has caused much discussion among audiences since its release in 2008. This film, which was inspired by real-life events, deals with the dying days of Camino, the eleven-year-old daughter of an Opus Dei family who happens to simultaneously experience two events totally new to her: falling in love and dying.[6] Despite her pain and suffering, Camino, in the course of the narrative, chooses unconditional love over self-absorption and narcissim. Watching this film can be hard on the audience. The director, Javier Fesser, has no reservations in showing the various surgeries and the deterioration of the protagonist's body, nor does he hold back on candid criticism of religious ideology. In fact, he makes the audience wonder: how can one accept disgrace as a sign of God's love? How can one be happy for the pain and ordeal of a fatal disease?

From the beginning of the movie, viewers are exposed to the strong influence of the Opus Dei institution on the protagonist and her family. Camino, her older sister Nuria, and her parents completely depend on this religious environment within which they have grown up and been educated as a family. Nuria lives in one of the Opus Dei centers with other women and men, and it is through her eyes that the film begins its critique of religion. Opus Dei has been widely criticized and accused of proselytism, sectarianism, and the dissemination of ultraconservative ideas. The film also takes issue with Opus Dei's accumulation of enormous power and capital through the donations and tithes that it implicitly demands from its members. These common criticisms are shown through Nuria, who lives cloistered away as if residing in an orthodox order. She is obliged to stop any kind of contact with her immediate family. The only relative she is allowed to visit is an aunt. However, these visits only occur on the days that her aunt must make her tithe, and Nuria is always under surveillance, as it were. Camino wonders why her only sister is not visiting her more often during her illness. For the audience, Camino's naiveté concerning Nuria's situation is heartbreaking. In the movie, Nuria gets permission to visit Camino just twice. During her second visit, Nuria arrives at the hospital room just in time to see Camino take her last breath.

Similarly, Nuria cannot write nor receive letters unless they have first been

approved by Opus Dei censors, another aspect that has been harshly criticized in the past. It is dramatically ironic that, unlike Nuria herself, the audience knows that none of her boyfriend's letters to her actually reach her because of this type of censorship. In addition, Nuria is not allowed to engage in the type of activities that she used to do for leisure, such as playing the guitar and reading non-religious books. At one point, Nuria's father takes her guitar to the center, but the authorities do not let him give it to her. Nuria is overly controlled at all times, even when she walks in the streets. In one scene, she is called to her director's office because she was caught looking at shop windows.

How can one accept disgrace as a sign of God's love? How can one be happy for the pain and ordeal of a fatal disease?

Another criticism of Opus Dei that the movie clearly articulates is the institution's chauvinistic treatment of women, especially when it comes to numerary assistants, which Nuria happens to be. Numerary assistants are celibate female members of Opus Dei, whose occupation is to oversee the domestic tasks of the center and who are typically not allowed to participate in university-level studies. The film's criticism is based on the harsher norms applied to female numeraries as opposed to male numeraries. It is also based on the peculiar conduct of male numeraries toward female numeraries. The latter, for example, are not allowed to make eye contact with the former, nor to talk to them. Several scenes depict this restrictive behavior.

As in *The Blind Sunflowers*, uncertainty is part of the main characters' existence. Nuria seems to doubt her regimented existence for a few brief moments. The audience hopes that she will acknowledge her doubt and free herself from the restrictive religious order. However, the oppressive environment of the center has placed a psychological burden on her, and her personality may be too weak for any substantial resistance; she is unable to face her own desires and fears.

Nuria, however, is not the only character who hesitates. Camino and her parents, Gloria and José, also experience moments of doubt in their faith and religious ideology. Nevertheless, for them as well the influence of the religious community they belong to is too powerful to allow for any resistance or resolve. This situation creates tremendous frustration for the viewer and the movie becomes increasingly distressing and difficult to watch.

José, in particular, is a truly pitiable character. The audience immediately sympathizes with him. He is a good-natured man, devastated by his young daughter's fatal illness. Unlike his wife Gloria, José is conscious of his daughters' wishes to behave like people their age: dating a boyfriend and playing the guitar, in Nuria's case; being part of a drama group, instead of a cooking group, and reading storybooks, instead of books about the life of saints, in Camino's case. Finally, he is the only person to realize that Camino is in love with Jesús, one of the kids in the drama group she wants to join. José faces up to Camino's illness with confusion. When he sees her in pain, he seems to lack any genuine conviction and, in silence, his

Family members and Opus Dei priests surround Camino at her death. Still from *Camino* (2008), © Altafilms.

eyes show that he questions the God in whom he thinks he believes. In the moments that are most difficult to watch, José feels profound unease about the religion that Gloria so fervently practices, and he calls into question what Gloria is totally convinced of: namely, that Camino is suffering to testify to God's immense love. José asks himself the same questions as the audience: how can so much suffering be a reflection of God's love? How can one understand and cope with such paradox when your daughter is dying?

By contrast, the audience is anything but sympathetic to Gloria and possibly compares her to the evil stepmother or witch in fairy tales. Gloria incarnates one more critique of Opus Dei: she is a religious fanatic and manipulative woman. Gloria attends study groups that instill fanaticism into her and the other mothers and make her obsessed with the idea of sanctity and body suffering. She even makes a plan for Camino to be sanctified by Opus Dei after her death. Gloria repeatedly reminds Camino that she needs to be happy because God has sent her illness and suffering as an example of his love. Toward the end of the movie, when she realizes Camino's inevitable death, Gloria finally shows her most human side and breaks into tears while hugging José in the hospital chapel. This moment, together with the moment she learns that José has died in a car crash on his way to the hospital, are the only instances in the movie when the audience may forgive Gloria and feel sorry for her. Depressed by her husband's death and her dying daughter, Gloria may call into question the whole ideological system within which she has been educated as a Catholic. Such doubts make her feel guilt—guilt that is a constant burden and makes her a slave to faith.

Both José and Gloria's fidelity to Opus Dei is reflected in the name of the eponymous heroine; *Camino* is also the title of a book written by Opus Dei founder Josemaría Escrivá in 1934. Like any other girl at her age, Camino

Still from *Camino* (2008), © Altafilms.

wishes to experience new things. At the beginning of the movie, she discovers love for the first time by falling for Jesús. Although Gloria does not allow her to participate in the drama group, Camino finds ways to see Jesús, such as when she shops at the bakery that Jesús' mom owns because he works there. Gloria's omnipresence in Camino's life compares to that of the Opus Dei in their family. Similar to the way the Opus Dei center controls Nuria, Gloria manipulates Camino in her daily proceedings. Camino might have ended up in an Opus Dei center just like Nuria, but this plan is interrupted by her fatal illness. Director Fesser portrays Camino's life like an invented fairy tale of sorts, but one full of cruelty and pain. Her illness is cruel, and so are the smiles of the priests that surround the hospital bed, as they already contemplate the secret posthumous destiny they have planned for the patient.

Camino is full of double meanings, beginning with the names of two of the characters: Camino and Jesús. Lying on her hospital bed, between dreams and nightmares, Camino calls for Jesús, longing for a first kiss that she will never have. Those witnessing Camino's dying hours, adults such as Gloria and the priests, wrongly believe that the girl is having a mystical encounter with the biblical Jesus. Fesser employs this misunderstanding to mock blind religious faith and fanatic devotion common to some conservative religious institutions. Camino's last word, Jesus, is about both sacred love and profane love, and how a person can simultaneously feel both. During the movie, the audience is invited repeatedly to wonder about the wickedness of the major players, including Gloria and the group of priests, and to dismiss them with a mocking smile. In the end, viewers themselves are not sure for whom to feel pity, Camino or Gloria.

Conclusion

Both *The Blind Sunflowers* and *Camino* are brilliant narratives that question excessive religious devotion for contemporary Spanish audiences. Both directors play with the metaphor of blindness as an obstacle to the characters' fulfillment as human beings. *Camino* is a criticism of any type of fundamentalist behavior that becomes capable of destroying human reasoning and shows how faith can combine love and death. *The Blind Sunflowers* also comments on the politics of suppression, and in both, religious and existential doubt become an omnipresent motif. Unfortunately, most of the characters do not have the strength to face up to their doubts and, in the end, succumb to the pressures of religious conformity. While neither of these two films falls under the category of religious cinema or genre in the traditional sense of the word, both are nevertheless excellent examples of the constant presence of religion in contemporary Spanish cinema. In addition, both films also powerfully engage the more universal theme of religious fanaticism, which has decidedly contemporary overtones that extend well beyond a European context.

Endnotes

[1] Román Gubern et. al. explain that this reform is a response to the political desire to modernize the obsolete Spanish film industry, at the same time that the audiovisual field was internationally redesigned and Spain was about to become a member of the European Union (400, my translation).

[2] These are categories assigned by the FIAPF, the International Federation of Film Producers Associations.

[3] The production of erotic films, also known as domestic comedies, as well as the so-called "destape comedies," made by director Mariano Ozores, decreased significantly.

[4] Ladislao Vajda was a Hungarian filmmaker who worked in various countries including Spain, Portugal, the United Kingdom, Italy, and Germany. Vajda was one of the most important film makers in the Spanish cinema of the 40s and 50s. He was once nominated for the Golden Bear at the Berlin Film Festival, and several times for the Golden Palm at Cannes. He died in Barcelona in 1965 while filming *La dama de Beiru* (*Woman from Beirut*). He is considered to be among the most important European filmmakers. José María Sánchez-Silva (1911-2002) was a Spanish writer of children's literature, who won the Hans Christian Andersen children's literature prize in 1968. He is the only Spanish writer to have been acknowledged with this prize.

[5] Other movies that stand out in the religious genre are *La mies es mucha* (*Harvest is Plentiful*, 1949) by José Luis Sáenz de Heredia, about the life of a Spanish missionary in India; *La guerra de Dios* (*God's War*, 1953) by Rafael Gil, in which a priest must survive in a mean and impious society; *El beso de Judas* (*Judas' Kiss*, 1953) by Rafael Gil, which deals with the biblical character of Judas; *Balarrasa* (*Scapegrace*, 1955) by José Antonio Nieves Conde, about a repentant man who becomes a priest; *El canto del gallo* (*The Song of the Rooster*, 1955) also by Rafael Gil, that deals with the adventures of two Catholic priests who are persecuted in a communist country; and *Johnny Ratón* (*Johnny Mouse*, 1969) by Javier Escrivá, about an atheist who becomes a priest. There are also various movies that narrate the life of saints, such as *La Señora de Fátima* (*The Lady of Fatima*, 1951) by Rafael Gil; *Teresa de Jesús* (*St. Teresa of Jesus*, 1962) by Juan de Orduña; and *Isidro, el labrador* (*Isidore the Laborer*, 1963) by Rafael J. Salvia. Recently Ray Loriga released a polemic version of the life of Santa Teresa entitled *Teresa, el cuerpo de Cristo* (*Teresa, the Body of Christ*), starring Paz Vega (2007).

[6] Opus Dei, the Latin term for "the Work of God"and formally known as The Prelature of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei, is an organization of the Roman Catholic Church teaching that everyone is called to holiness and that ordinary life is a path to sanctity. Opus Dei believes in helping people find Christ in one's work, family life, and other daily activities. The organization was founded by priest Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer on October 2, 1928.

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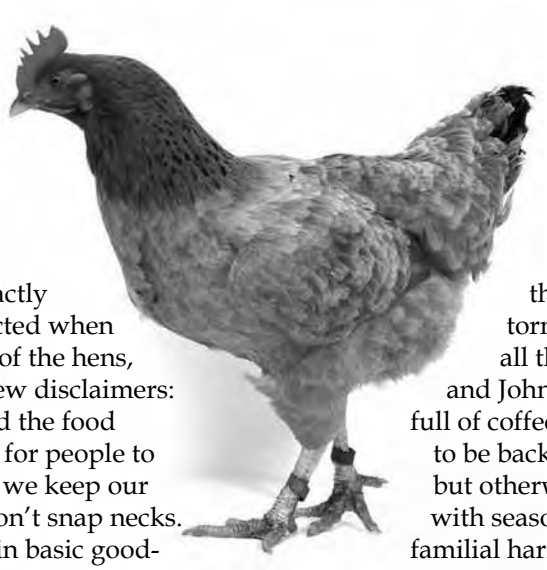
Kate Krautkramer

Chicken



Before I admit exactly how badly I reacted when our dog ate one of the hens, I'd like to throw out a few disclaimers: First, while I understand the food chain and think it's fine for people to raise chickens for meat, we keep our hens only for eggs—I don't snap necks. Second, I try to believe in basic goodness. I'm not naïve to human-caused atrocities and struggle, but I am hopeful that evolution is pushing us slowly toward a position of benevolence and compassion to match our upright stature. I'd like to be part of that push. Third, I am not a person prone to sudden fits of anger. And last, I think people should be kind to animals; I'd never hit my dog before.

But there the chicken was, a creature entrusted to my care, headless and eviscerated, lying in her own feathers and firework splashes of blood on snow. Her compatriots, with no help from their pea-sized brains, seemed not to notice and went about scratching and pecking in the chicken yard she had, earlier that Christmas morning, somehow escaped. I approached slowly, my dog unsuspecting and aloof, brushing against my leg.

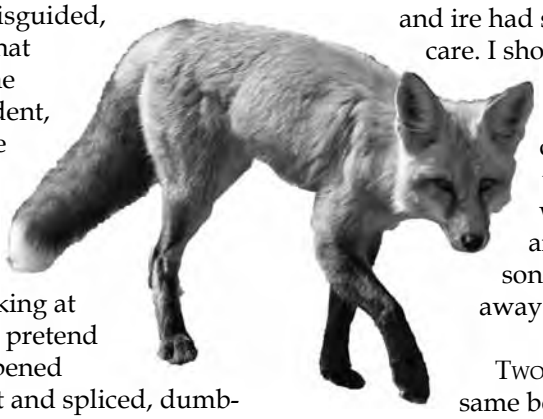
My brain bluffed for time to process the imagery. It was the quiet time after the boys had torn through all their gifts, and John and I were full of coffee, wishing to be back asleep but otherwise content with seasonal cheer and familial harmony. I wasn't prepared to handle death, even a hen's. The clear Colorado morning helped keep reality, for a moment, at a distance. Our yard sat silent, covered in white, mountains in the background bearing up mightily under the weight of December. A resolute snowman, stiff-armed, stood watch from atop a plow bank.

But a few steps closer to the henhouse, and I could no longer avoid understanding. The chicken made a grisly snapshot. Her pathetic, terrifying legs poked out stiff and straight, the claws curled as if reaching for a last chance at the perch.

Even while I threw my dog to the ground, made a fist, and began to beat her and shout obscenities, my mind moved to a bird's eye, slow-motion view.

This drawing back from the scene is automatic. The reaction functions as part of the mass cultural anesthetic

against feeling anything toward the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. I've grown increasingly committed to my numbness, especially in the context of raising children. I don't want to associate myself or my kids or my thinking with conflict, battle, violence, anything coarse, especially as it has played out as unnecessary, misguided, and with a focus that seems to shift at the whim of the President, no matter what the cost in lives.



As I watched the film unfold frame by frame, I was already working at editing. So, I don't pretend to relay what happened accurately; I've cut and spliced, dumbed content down, and used a fuzzy lens for my own sake.

Even while I carried out the actions, I knew at the fringes of thought that I was not behaving honorably. Fury consumed me, and even in reconstructed episodes, I see myself delivering several body blows to the dog, followed by a pin to the ground and full-volume yelling. I wasn't aware that my son, Sarvis, was standing by the barn watching.

The reasons it does not make sense to beat up a dog for acting on instinct never entered my mind. The respective nature of dogs, who were predators before humans started feeding them, and chickens, who strut around begging to be caught and eaten, eluded me completely. The thought of the hen—so quickly turned to a carcass, her flesh hanging in ragged, red flanges—enraged me. A living thing I was supposed to protect had been brutally murdered, and I reacted swiftly and without thought to punish the perpetrator, pounding on a gentle dog I've loved for 10 years. Never mind the implications of a woman beating the hell out of her dog on Christmas. Never mind that I was using my body as a weapon. Reason and analytic faculties ran off toward the hills to watch and chime back in later, when the surge of heart rate and ire had subsided. I didn't care. I shoved the dog away from me. I shoveled the dead chicken into the garbage. Then, when I turned around, I saw my son, Sarvis, running away toward the house.

TWO YEARS LATER the same boy came running from the house with a predator impulse and curiosity all his own, eager to witness exactly what punishment I might deliver to a fox caught in the henhouse. The boy was gangly, long-haired, and shirtless. This time he'd grown up to nine years old and was actively making deposits into his schemas for violence, predation, country living, and dead stuff. He ran out into the yard, which was practically gagging on snow, monstrous feet of it still standing well into April. The banks, grown to fence height with a late storm, enabled the fox to jump in the chicken yard, with full confidence it would also be able to jump back out.

Full of lamentations, talking to myself about the crocuses and daffodils that should have been up with at least green leaves showing but were still buried, I came out of the house to feed the chickens in the evening. The sun had at last shown up, and I may have thought the chickens were so glad they were

moved to uncharacteristic squawking, giving up their loud, awkward praise to the sky.

But they were strident, and from one hundred feet away, I looked up to see the telltale tail, bushy and silver-red, disappear into the chicken house through the little door the hens use to pass from coop to yard. My husband happened to be standing in the bathroom with the window opened, so I yelled to him, then ran full bore toward the henhouse, screaming as loud as I could.

This time, with the previous experience acid-etched on my brain, I had the consciousness to notice what I was doing as it was happening. And, because the animal was not a family pet, I think I can tell something pretty close to the truth.

As I ran, my eyes fell on a big, green, plastic snow shovel, but I discounted this artillery as too light. Instead, I took two extra seconds to grab the heavy, metal garden spade I would need to bash the impudent fox's head in.

An assortment of hand tools leaned on the side of the henhouse. These were scrapers and shovels we had used through the winter to liberate the coop from the regular dumps of snow and the buildup of ice and shit. As I ran, my eyes fell on a big, green, plastic snow shovel, but I discounted this artillery as too light. Instead, I took two extra seconds to grab the heavy, metal garden spade I would need to bash the impudent fox's head in.

Again I want to mention that I consider myself a gentle person. As evidence, I admit the following: I read with my children, cuddle them, spy on them when they play and sing, drink in their voices like healing elixir. We talk almost daily about what constitutes and does not constitute nice behavior. Together, we all feel sad if I inadvertently run over one of the millions of kamikaze ground squirrels that play chase across our roads. When I push away the realities of war and starvation, famine and tragedy, it is because I can't function and raise joyful children with my mind constantly in turmoil, struggling to sort out the meanings of inequity, strife, and the deaths of innocent people. Let me hold the babies, let me sing with the grannies, let me fret when bluebirds fly down the chimney and bash themselves into the windows, trying to escape the confines of a house. Let me swoon for pure love at the shape of a child's hand. I'm tender.

But, to further complicate the chicken scenarios that stand as evidence against me as a peaceful soul, I admit also that I don't really love chickens. When we moved to the country, my sister, who is a veterinarian, encouraged me to get them. "They're great," she explained, "because the kids can learn about life and death, but they aren't like dogs or horses or people. I mean, if one dies, you know, it's just a chicken."

Chickens are endearing for their giving qualities. Feed them every kind of food garbage—the crusts from the kids' grilled cheeses, the three bites of sad spaghetti that sat in a bowl on the counter all night, a glop of slightly moldy sour cream left in the fridge a month too long—and they thrive. Chickens accept all, and, like true angels, recycle the detritus of our culinary shortcom-

ings into incredibly delicious, brown on the outside, golden on the inside, wholesome eggs. For this I give them thanks.

Still, when I go to feed them, it isn't unusual for one or more to fly straight at my face as if they want to poke my eyes out. They aren't pets with love in their hearts, and, once grown, they rarely make themselves available for any sort of anthropomorphizing. They are generally unappealing once they molt, their ugly, rosy, pimpled skin glowing like shame. In those many, many moments when I am not defending them with complete and directed fury, I consider chickens interchangeable, dispensable, and stupid. Really.

But here's the thing. Two years after I beat up my dog—still feeling terrible and confused about that, about violence in general, about the war specifically, and especially about whatever effect the scene had had on my son—I ran at that fox with the intent to kill. Kill bad. Kill dead. Dead forever. By my hand. No problem.

Fortunately, the fox ran. He came back out of the coop, looking not particularly scared. Waiting until the last possible safe moment, he watched me, calculating. He was unmoved by my yelling, nonplussed by my hysterical arm flaps and the threat of the shovel. More than anything he appeared tremendously reluctant to give up his meal, a necessity if he was going to make the jump and escape over the fence. Eventually, he leapt and left one big, buff-colored hen for dead.

Again there was blood, startling and stark, like a living thing itself arriving in spurts out onto the snow. The hen twitched radically. "It was already dead," my husband said. "Those were just twitches." As comfort, he offered this, because I had to turn my head and couldn't watch her die. Our family, gathered for the excitement, all nodded, and looked for the fox. Carmen, our two-year-old daughter, was fascinated and confident in her identification of the offender who had loped away about 15 feet and sat casually back on his haunches.

He didn't move from his seat; he sat there panting and looking at us, from face to face. I felt like a character in a nursery rhyme or the folk song that has lately been a staple on the kids' channel of our satellite radio. "The fox went out on a chilly night, he prayed for the moon to give him light, he'd many a mile to go that night before he reached the town-o." The song is all about the fox's perspective. The kids sing along in affected bluegrassy twang. In the last verse the fox and his foxy wife have a fine supper, and "the little ones chewed on the bones-o."

I wished that I were wearing one of those puffed-up, cotton caps old women in fairy tales wear. My heart was running full clip. I was still dangerous, brandishing my chosen instrument of death. Again I was astonished at the propensity of body and mind to work together to achieve reactions they otherwise abhor and work to suppress—instantaneously. I started to feel a little floaty. A little sexy. A little giddy, as I always do when I feel that I have had an instinct.

The next day, driving to town while I was listening again to satellite radio, the program broke, and the serene voice of Oprah filled the car. She didn't introduce herself, it was just Oprah talking, like God talking, immediately recognizable, her tones plucking along the strings of familiarity to propose, I think, that I take up meditation or perhaps just take up listening to her radio show about meditation. The blurb was

long and began something like, "Have you ever had a moment of perfect being? The moment of serenity, where things cease to exist in time, where is-ness is perfect…." Her question went on and on, and I drew in, knowing in my deepest, purest self that I had already realized the momentary nirvanas of which she spoke. Doctrine flowed like the breath of a love from my bad car speakers. I was the target audience, and she hit my bull's-eye when she went on to say, "That moment when time drops away, and you just…are." Even though my little girl was in the car, I nodded fervently and said, "Yes!"

Oh yes, Oprah, I know. I know that sacred, rare, pure moment of which you speak. And for me that moment of true knowledge is the time of absolute certainty, when I am perfectly unaware of discursive thought or any thought, because simply being has taken over, and I know with diamond clarity that I can and will—and want—to kill whatever harms the stupid chickens. Om and Amen.

I meditated awhile on the result of cherry picking at bits of American culture, then trying to assemble the fruits into a digestible pie. I considered the consequences of innate and irrational need to protect and the ultimate lack of restraint when threat raises a hand toward a living thing I've nurtured. Chickens? My children? What about the dog?

Most alarming is the implication of my blissed-out, murderous moment for the children, who, the day before, gathered to see me wield the shovel. No one on the set was averse to violence as entertainment. We had all been, in fact, gung ho to view the episode. And I had directed, produced, and starred as the mother of all contradiction. While we stood there in the snow, the is-ness Oprah was to speak of drooped with the sun, and the fox regarded us coolly.

In spite of the long winter, his coat was glossy red, his eyes playful, his ears at perky attention. He sat like a cairn, something recognizable to guide by on the wide, white field. He judged me. Stupid human female. Held captive by emotion. So silly and rash. He was like and not at all like my dog—sweet face, furry, cognizant. I thought about tossing him the chicken then, because it seemed a shame to waste her. I forgot that I hated him for killing my charge. I forgot how to play out my role of aggressive protector. I forgot that the chicken had been living just a few moments before. Then I remembered everything I was supposed to have learned when I had beat up the dog and Sarvis was seven and had seen me and run away into the house.

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Inside, that Christmas morning, he had cried in his room.

He'd burrowed himself all the way under the quilts, fully clothed in the middle of the day and would not be consoled. He shrank away from me when I made the climb to the top bunk and tried to make sense of the world for him and for myself.

While I am fairly certain that, at that moment, my son wasn't concerned

with the broad ramifications of war and human violence, he was, for sure, no longer focused on his new juggling set and the joy of giving. My thoughts, however, shot toward Iraq faster than, well, faster than a bullet. At the time, the war and occupation had already been going on half of Sarvis' life. Even here in our bucolic, rural landscape, the turmoil is real to him. I can't guess how his mind assimilates audio-visual imagery supplied by his culture (and his mother). He's asked me about missiles and body counts and the definition of casualty.

I've learned I can't measure or control how much his thoughts and consciousness become entrenched in the vocabulary of combat. Still, as his mom, I accept the mission—search and destroy—violence, grief, savagery, any ungentle vessel come to harbor in my son's fresh, little heart.

Unless, of course, I am busy demonstrating the barbaric tendencies of my species, because I became out-of-control infuriated when my dog killed a dumb hen.

When I reached toward Sarvis on his bed, my son wanted nothing to do with me. The knowledge that I'm capable of hurting our dog undid him. All the careful conversations we've had about using words instead of hitting, all the times I've danced round his questions about the war and dying, all the times I've turned off the radio because I was afraid he would have to learn something about violence—evaporated in that one terrible moment. I climbed down and stood like a stone at the end of his bed, worrying that he is so tender, horrified that I'd forced images of brutality into his thinking forever.

There was nothing I could say to improve my lot. Sarvis lay wrecked and limp in the bed. I ached to hold him, to be in his grace, to have him kiss me. His narrow back heaved, and he struggled to control his sobbing.

My son had seen me act out in rage, and now he was scared of me. I kept reassuring myself that I would never let anyone hurt this child. I wanted to explain that he didn't need to be afraid, that he was safe here at home with me.

But my credibility was as far gone as the chicken I'd shoveled into the garbage. I didn't say anything. Sarvis wouldn't look at me. And I had to leave the room, staring in wonder at my own hands.

Kate Krautkramer's work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The North American Review*, *Fiction*, *Creative Nonfiction*, and *So to Speak*. She has written for *National Geographic*, NPR's *Day to Day* and *Morning Edition*, and more recently for the *New York Times*. Her essays have been anthologized in *The Best American* and *The Beacon Best*.

Chicken Image Courtesy Houses for Hens, UK

Fox Image Courtesy Alan and Elaine Wilson at http://www.naturespicsonline.com/

Nancy L. Graham

Along for the Ride


Carl King

Stevie's weekend visits with her dad Bill are often interrupted by someone's car repair emergency. Typically, a guy wearing a worried expression under a baseball cap comes up the front walk clutching a greasy engine part. The parts with dangling wires remind Stevie of the chicken innards Grandma tosses into the bushes when she cleans out a hen.

Bill may be careless with Stevie's lunch money and field trip permission slips, but he keeps every bit of car gut that crosses his path. However, this time even the doublewide, root cellar, garage, and shed didn't hold whatever metal gizzard was needed for the latest repair. So Stevie and Bill were laying a plume of dust down an unfamiliar road on a hot July morning. The windows were down because the air conditioning in Bill's pickup didn't work. Stevie stuck her head out the window and closed her eyes, imagining the scenery as it flashed by: the earthworm stink of water caught in ditches, the chill cast on her cheek by overhead branches, the snicker of irrigation rigs.

Stevie pulled her head inside the truck. "Why we going all this way? How come we don't just go over to old Luther's junkyard?"

Bill punched in the lighter and reached into his shirt pocket for a cigarette. "Me and Luther had words, Stevie. Can't go there for awhile."

"You had words? You mean you talked to each other?"

Her father chuckled, but it wasn't a nice sound. "You could say that."

The lighter popped out.

THE DAY BEFORE, STEVIE'S BIG SISTER AMY HAD BEEN IN TEARS. Amy was trying to frost a cake to take to Grandma, but it was so hot in the kitchen that the icing kept sliding down the sides. Stevie sat at the table waiting for Bill. While anxious for Bill to arrive, Stevie hoped it wouldn't be before the frosting bowl came available.

Donna, Stevie's mom, was leaning on the counter watching Amy. The click of Donna's bubble-gum pink nails on the Formica might have been making Amy cry. It was sure starting to bug Stevie.

Donna sighed and stubbed out her cigarette. "Stick that knife and bowl in the icebox. Blow your nose and fetch your stuff. We'll try again."

Their house, a square little thing with yellow aluminum siding and green shutters, sat one street back from the main road and was shaded by cottonwoods that Grandma said were in need of a trim. Bill had moved out, so Donna got her cousin to mow the lawn and a neighbor jump-started the Ford in the winter. Stevie's grandfather came once a month to tighten and patch and hammer.

Amy returned to the kitchen with a grocery bag of clothes, retrieved the bowl from the refrigerator, and made a couple of half-hearted swipes at the icing. Donna grabbed Amy's hand and moved it like the seeker on a Ouiji board. Stevie caught Donna's scent—cigarettes, hairspray, and Lily of the Valley cologne—over the enticing perfume of the icing. Donna made one last swoop and tossed the knife into the bowl. "There, that's good enough for Grandma. Just tell her you did it and she'll be impressed."

Amy refused to go to her father's place over weekends. Amy told Donna that it was because of the fleas in the couch and the lack of a television, but Amy told Stevie that she wanted to keep an eye on their mother. This weekend no one would be keeping an eye on Donna, because Amy was off to the farm with a badly iced cake.

Grandpa's old truck arrived first. Grandpa might give Stevie a quarter for no reason at all if she went outside, but there was icing in the bowl. The screen door slammed as Amy left.

"Well, that's one down, right?" Donna lit a new cigarette.

Stevie didn't know what she was supposed to say. Grown-ups were always asking questions that had obvious answers. Either that, or they asked questions that didn't seem to have any answers, like: "What was that son of a bitch thinking when he turned left from that lane?" Stevie was a little kid; how was she supposed to know the answer if they didn't?

Lost in the icing, Stevie didn't hear Bill's truck pull up in the driveway. Donna pulled Stevie away from the bowl and pushed her out the screen door. Stevie bolted down the steps toward Bill. Donna shouted in their general direction, "The rent check's late, asshole."

THE TRIP TO THE FAR-AWAY JUNKYARD HAD BEEN A SUCCESS. Now Bill and Stevie were sitting at an A&W drive-in, watching the waitress back out of the door with a tray. The part Bill had needed was in a grimy cardboard box at Stevie's feet, along with something mysterious wrapped in an oil-soaked t-shirt. Stevie squirmed with impatience as the waitress hooked the tray over the window, then accepted a mug from her father and drank. The sweet chill of the root beer slid down the back of her throat, erasing the memory of all that dust.

Bill drained his mug, and then lit another cigarette. He pushed a lung's worth of smoke back out with something like a sigh. "How would you like to do a big favor for me?"

Stevie nodded. She would do anything for her father; Bill ought to know that.

"Well, you know that big dog over to Luther's? He's fond of you, isn't he?"

"Killer? Yeah, me and Killer are good friends."

Bill nodded. "That's right. So you wouldn't mind playing with him some night this week, right?"

Stevie frowned. "Are we going there for supper? I thought you and Luther was mad at each other."

Bill shifted on his seat so he could look right at Stevie. "See that's the thing. I've got to put something back at Luther's and I need you to keep Killer busy."

Stevie was silent for a moment. "Is it something you took, Dad?"

Bill laughed. "No, of course not, Stevie. What do you think I am, some kinda thief? No, it's just that someone took it and Luther thinks it was me. So I'm gonna put it back so he can stop worrying about it." Bill took another puff and tossed his butt out onto the oil-spotted concrete. "Kind of like a joke, see?"

Stevie didn't want Bill to think she was stupid, so she laughed.

On the way home, Bill seemed more content. He even hummed a bit while he drove. Stevie was starting to feel thirsty again when Bill turned the truck off the main road onto another dirt track. "Where we going, Daddy?"

"Fella at the junkyard made me a good deal on a new pistol. So I figured it was time I showed you how to handle a gun." Bill patted Stevie on the head. "Seeing as how you're going to assist me in some important work."

Stevie hoped that the work wouldn't involve shooting, because guns made her ears hurt. The only time Bill had taken Stevie hunting had ended badly because Stevie refused to look at the rabbits Bill shot. Stevie felt ashamed that she had let Bill down; maybe she could do better this time.

Back in the deep woods, Bill set a couple of old tin cans up on a sawhorse in front of a hill. Stevie could see that they weren't the first people to shoot guns here. The hill and the sawhorse were pocked with holes.

Bill stood behind her and put his hands over Stevie's. "Here, let me show you. Close one eye to aim and squeeze, don't pull, the trigger." Bill's smell – motor oil, sweat, and cigarettes – distracted Stevie. But the first shot sent a tin can flying into the air.

"See, we're a pretty good team, ain't we, Stevie?"

On Sunday night, Bill dropped Stevie off and sped away before she reached the porch where Donna was sitting in the swing, smoking. Donna gave Bill the finger as he drove away and then patted the seat next to her. "Don't ever let me catch you doing that, you hear?" Stevie nodded and climbed up into the swing. Donna pushed off with one bare foot and they swung in silence for a few moments.

It was just coming into full dusk and the crickets were warming up. The hum from the streetlight was getting louder, and the click and hiss

of Donna's inhaling and exhaling seem to occur in rhythm with the slip and catch of the porch swing chain. Stevie wondered whether darkness made sounds louder or just invited her to listen harder.

Grandpa's pickup truck pulled up and Amy hopped out. Stevie was glad to see her, but sorry to see her too. Stevie had been enjoying swinging back and forth with Donna, even though they weren't saying anything. As Amy waved goodbye to Grandpa, Stevie saw that her long hair was neatly braided. Grandma must have done that.

Amy tossed down her paper bag of clothes and climbed into the swing on the other side of Donna. Donna pushed off again and the swing resumed its smooth path. Amy was old enough to pump along with Donna. Together they could make the swing go higher. Stevie didn't bother to pump. Her legs were so short that it didn't make much difference.

Amy smoothed out her skirt. "We got ice cream. I had butter pecan."

"Well, Dad and me stopped for root beer."

Donna had her arms stretched across the back of the swing behind Stevie and Amy. To take a puff of her cigarette, Donna had to lift the arm behind Stevie and maneuver the cigarette to her mouth. Then she put it back into place, passing it over Stevie's head like a blessing. Donna exhaled a cloud of smoke, and said, "Jerry and I went to the drive-in."

"What did you see?" Amy was very interested in movies and spent several hours a week at the library reading magazines about movie stars who wore long flowing gowns and lived in mansions.

Donna chuckled, a deep chesty sound that turned into a cough. "Not much, honey, not much." Stevie wasn't sure what this meant. Did they get there late? Was the windshield dirty?

A car came around the corner, raking them with its headlights. It pulled to the curb and Stevie saw that it was Jerry's Crown Victoria. Jerry was a lawman. Just the other day, Donna said on the phone to Grandma, "I should have married Jerry in the first place." Jerry was okay; sometimes he let Stevie turn on the flashing red and blue lights in the cruiser. But when Jerry arrived, Donna didn't have time for anyone else.

Sure enough, as Jerry came up the front walk, Donna put out a foot and brought the swing to a stop. "You two get to bed."

The next day Stevie woke to the sound of rain on the tin roof over her room. The rain was a friendly sound because it meant that there would be no swimming lessons. Stevie snuggled deep into her covers and listened for the sound of Donna's car leaving. Donna was a cashier at the hardware store part time until something better came along. She didn't work all day every day, but even when she didn't work, Stevie and Amy were expected to keep themselves busy. That was their job, Donna said.

When Donna's car finally cranked over, Stevie padded to the kitchen. She had just set the cereal and milk on the table when Amy came

into the room, rubbing her eyes. Her braids had come partly unraveled during the night, and the lengths of hair were festooned with tiny red curls.

Amy stared out at the rain while she ate. "Yesterday Grandma said to Grandpa, 'Jerry isn't going to buy the cow if the milk is free.' What would Jerry do with a cow? He lives in that apartment over the drug store."

Stevie shrugged. This was just another of those questions she couldn't answer. She dumped her bowl and spoon in the sink and skipped off down the hall, careening back and forth and slapping the walls with her hands. She would have time to hide Amy's stuffed bunny before Amy got done with the breakfast dishes.

Later that afternoon, Donna took Stevie to the grocery store. Amy was off at a friend's house. Stevie was too big to sit in the cart, so she trailed along in Donna's wake. Donna consulted a list and added up numbers under her breath.

They had just turned into Aisle 4 when Stevie heard a familiar voice. "Donna, haven't seen you for a month of Sundays." It was Christine, Luther's wife and one of Stevie's favorite people. Unlike Grandma, Christine never thought of chores to do and kept a bag of candy in the cupboard over the refrigerator, where Luther wasn't supposed to see it. Luther had the sugar problem.

"Hey, Christine." Donna stopped the cart and leaned her elbows on the silver crossbar of the cart.

Stevie darted out from behind Donna. Christine made a big surprised face. "Come here, honey. Give me a hug." Hugging Christine was like hugging several pillows at once.

Then there was a strange silent period when the two women just stared at each other, like dogs meeting up for the first time. Finally Christine shrugged. "I don't see why some crazy thing between our husbands should keep us from being friends, Donna."

Donna grinned. "Hell, no. Those two. Anyway, Bill might not be my problem much longer." What did this mean? When he moved out, Bill had said that it was just for a little while; that he and Donna needed to have a vacation from each other. What was Donna planning to do to Bill? Stevie reached out and poked a row of ketchup bottles. One of them teetered off the shelf and hit the floor, where it shattered, spreading red sauce and glass on the waxed linoleum.

Donna swung around. "Stevie, goddamn it all to hell."

Christine laid a hand on Donna's arm. "Why don't you let her come home with me? She can help me bake this afternoon and then stay to supper."

"Oh, Christine, would you? I've got a million things to do and they'll take twice as long if I have to drag her along."

It wasn't until Christine and Stevie bounced up the gravel driveway to her house and heard Killer barking that Stevie remembered that she and Bill were going to put something back in Luther's junkyard. Stevie was supposed to leave some clothes and shoes under her window so

she could slip out fast when Bill tapped on her window. But Bill hadn't been sure which night it would be, so Stevie hadn't been sleeping very well.

As they passed into the kitchen, Christine called out, "Luther, why is the door locked in the middle of the day?"

Luther shouted from his office. "Because they's thieves about."

"Oh, for pity's sake." She raised her voice again. "I brought Stevie home with me. She's going to help me bake."

There was no reply from the office.

Christine set down the grocery bags and pulled Stevie toward the open door of the office. "Luther, I said that Stevie is here."

Luther was seated in his rolling chair facing the picture window that overlooked the junkyard. Luther was so big that parts of him stuck out on either side of the back of the chair.

"Luther." Christine's tone had a note of warning.

Finally Luther put his hands on the front edge of the desk and pushed himself away. He swiveled around to face them and threw his arms open. Stevie hesitated for a moment before running into them.

Later, while Christine was fixing dinner, Luther and Stevie went out into the junkyard. Luther's knees didn't work much anymore, so he kept a golf cart close to the back door and had hired a contractor to lay gravel along the main thoroughfares that wound through the rusting autos and trucks. Stevie squeezed into the golf cart beside Luther and they took off. Killer trotted alongside, ears set on alert.

Stevie had never been to a museum, but Amy's class had taken a field trip to the city last year and she had described the bare, wired-together dinosaur bones that had towered over them. Stevie imagined that it might be a little like the junkyard. Car carcasses were piled in untidy rows. Stevie could see the setting sun through busted-out windows. It made the rust glow even redder, and struck sparks off door handles and hubcaps.

"Every one of these cars tells a story, Stevie. Every single one." Luther pointed at a Volkswagen van painted with flowers. "See that? Went to California and back before the engine seized. And that convertible?" Luther pointed. "Two people died in it. See how the top is sheared off? Slid right under a semi. You can still see the blood stains."

Stevie shivered at the thought of such a terrible accident, but felt safe wedged in next to Luther. These were just stories about people that were dead, or had moved away, or were driving newer and nicer cars.

After dinner, Luther and Christine sat on the front porch watching Stevie throw a stick for Killer while they waited for Donna to arrive. Stevie caught part of the conversation. Luther always talked kind of loud; Christine said he was getting hard of hearing.

"She deserves better parents, Christine. But, goddamn it, business is business. I can't let that light-handed son-of-a-bitch take advantage of me."

Christine said something that Stevie couldn't hear.

Luther answered back, sounding angry. "Save your breath, woman."

Late that night, Stevie woke and had to go to the bathroom. She waited for a long time, willing the feeling away, afraid that Bill would come to the window while she was peeing. But eventually she couldn't wait any longer. She was on her way back to her room when she heard Jerry's voice at the front door. Stevie paused in the hallway, listening. She walked her fingers up the doorframe, pausing at each penciled line indicating how tall Stevie or Amy had been on a given date. The marks had stopped about the time Bill moved out.

Stevie heard kissing sounds and someone dragged out a kitchen chair. Jerry sighed. "I got to go out to Bill's place later this week and find some part Luther claims is missing. Hell, I don't even know what it looks like."

Donna laughed. "That's ok, honey, you make enough money to not know what's under your hood. It's only the low-lifes like Bill that have to keep patching up whatever piece of shit they're driving at the moment."

More kissing sounds. Stevie went back to bed and arranged her head on the pillow so one ear could be listening for Bill.

The next night, Donna got wrapped up in a television show, so it was later than usual when she sent them off to take baths. Stevie got to the bathroom first, slammed the door in Amy's face, and lay in the tub until the water went cold. Back in her room, Stevie dropped the wet towel on the bed and dragged cotton pajamas on over her damp body. Then she skidded back down the hall and rounded the corner to find Donna seated at the kitchen table, leafing through a magazine. The phone was on the wall by the back door; Stevie gave it a nervous glance.

Donna stared. "Where you going in such a hurry?"

Stevie hopped in place, poised to run to the phone. "I need to call Daddy." While bathing, she had remembered that she needed to warn Bill about Jerry's visit.

"Oh you do, do you? And what exactly do you need to tell him so urgently?"

Stevie shrugged. "I just need to."

"Well, that's too bad, because he isn't home. I tried him while you were lounging around in the bathtub, driving your sister crazy. Now, get off to bed."

Once again, Stevie tried hard to stay awake so she wouldn't miss Bill. But she was dreaming about the swimming pool when she was startled awake by a rapping noise.

"Stevie, wake up." Bill's whisper sounded irritated.

Bill had already taken the screen out, so Stevie snatched up her pile of clothes and shoes and climbed over the windowsill. After she

dropped from the window, Stevie barely had time to stuff her feet into her Keds before Bill dragged her toward the alley.

Stevie pulled her clothes on over her pajamas while Bill drove out into the country. They bumped down the dirt road that ran behind Luther's junkyard, lights off. Luckily it was a bright moon night and Bill seemed to be able to avoid the most serious ruts.

Bill switched off the engine and they coasted to a stop. Stevie peered through the windshield at the glow of the yard lights over the hill. With the truck silenced, Stevie could hear crickets and the occasional whine of a mosquito. She was glad of the dark hooded sweatshirt that Bill gave her to wear; it would keep the bites to a minimum.

"Now, don't slam the door when you get out, okay?"

Stevie opened the door cautiously and stepped down right into a puddle deep enough to soak her sneaker. But she remembered to close the door gently, and went around the truck to meet Bill, who was stuffing the part into a bag. Bill gave Stevie such a wicked grin that Stevie felt a little rush of warmth on her face. She was helping Bill make something right.

They crept through the woods, hand in hand. Stevie slipped once or twice, but Bill held her up. The fence was not much of a problem because it was not much of a fence. On the way over, Bill had told her that Luther used to patrol his perimeter with zeal, often taking Bill along for company. Bill said he had started hanging around the junkyard when he wasn't much older than Stevie; maybe eight or nine. When they had finished their fence check, Luther's wife always had a slice of pie or some watermelon waiting for Bill—or a cup of hot chocolate if it was chilly out. Bill's voice sounded sad when he told Stevie about this.

These days, Bill said, Luther was too lazy and too large to move out of reach of his telephone and recliner more than once or twice a day. As a result, the fence sagged sufficiently in several places to permit a skinny man and a small girl to climb over with ease. The minute they hit the dirt on the inside, they heard Killer's warning bark. Bill leaned close to Stevie and handed her a warm, squishy packet. "Just give him this and sit with him until I come back." Bill darted off toward the north end of the junkyard, running hunched over.

Killer quit barking as soon as he smelled Stevie and the hamburger. He stuck his snout in Stevie's crotch in friendly greeting, and then nuzzled the packet gently. Stevie unwrapped the bribe and set it on a hubcap so it wouldn't get mixed in with the dirt. She hunkered down and watched as the Doberman ate. An owl hooted behind them, causing Stevie to whirl around, her heart pounding. She told herself that it was just an old bird, and besides, Killer was right there.

Killer was finishing up his snack when Bill came huffing back. Stevie gave Killer a good-bye pat before they slipped back over the fence. The truck was tilted slightly toward the passenger side. Stevie climbed up onto the seat and tried to pull the door shut, but it was extra heavy.

She finally yanked it as hard as she could and it slammed shut, sounding like a rifle shot in the quiet night. Killer started barking again.

Bill turned the key and hissed at Stevie, "Goddamn it, didn't I tell you?"

Stevie pulled away from Bill and the door handle poked into her ribs. "I forgot."

Bill flung an arm across the back of the seat, making Stevie flinch, and glared out the back window. "Should of turned this truck around when we got here. Now I've got to back out. Shit." He gunned the motor and popped the clutch, throwing clods of mud out in front of the truck as they backed away.

The truck came flying out of the lane like a cork popping out of a bottle, and Stevie just had time to turn her head and see Luther's Caddy coming around the curve before it hit them. After a massive clash of metal and glass on metal and glass, Bill's truck and Luther's car sat sighing together. Steam hissed, engines ticked, and fluids dripped. Dazed, Stevie yanked back on the door handle and rolled out onto the blacktop.

Some time went missing in Stevie's head. She remembered opening her eyes to see the front door of a house across the road flung open by a woman in a nightgown. The gown billowed behind the woman as she ran and was lit from within by the light streaming out of the door. The woman had stopped short of the front gate and turned to run back toward the house. Then Stevie had closed her eyes.

Angry voices woke her. First it was Luther. "I never said it would be yours. You ain't no kin of mine. And you can't just help yourself to whatever . . ."

Then it was Bill. "Goddamn you, Luther, why are you going so hard on me? I said I'd pay you when I got paid for the job. Isn't my word worth anything after all these years?"

"No, it for sure ain't. I'd about decided to let you have it when you waltzed in and just took it."

"So I made a mistake! Damn it, you've got so much here, and I just needed . . ."

"My three hundred dollar part. Bill, you owe me at least a thousand dollars for parts in the last year. It has to stop somewheres."

Stevie heard a car pull up fast and the sound of running feet. A cloud of Lily of the Valley perfume reached Stevie just before she was yanked roughly to Donna's chest. Donna shouted at Bill. "You irresponsible, no-good, son-of-a-bitch!" She set the girl on the ground and started feeling her arms and legs.

When Donna reached her head, Stevie said, "Ow, stop it."

Donna gripped Stevie by the upper arm and turned to continue hollering. She and Luther were shouting at Bill; Bill was shouting at Luther and Donna. Stevie saw that they were being painted red and blue by the flashing lights on top of Jerry's cruiser. Jerry was making calming gestures with his hands, but then he was struck in the face

when Bill threw up his hands in disgust. So Jerry started yelling at Bill too.

Stevie wrenched free of Donna and wormed into the center of the group by getting on her hands and knees and scooting between Luther's tree trunk legs. Stevie stood and jumped up and down. "Stop it. Everybody stop yelling!" No one listened.

Stevie remembered the gun. She knew that it would make a noise too big to be ignored. So Stevie squirmed out of the circle and went around to the driver's side of Bill's truck. She stuck her hands under the seat and dragged the gun out.

Bill had shown Stevie how to turn the gun on when they shot the tin cans. Holding it in front of her with both hands, she walked back around the truck, knees trembling.

Luther had his big belly pressed right up against Bill and was glaring down at him while he shouted. Donna was hitting Bill on the shoulder. Jerry was hovering behind them. No one noticed Stevie or the gun. She tried to raise it up, but it was too heavy.

Stevie backed away from the group into the deep shadows cast by Bill's truck. She was crying and couldn't wipe her face with the gun in her hands. Bill had never showed Stevie how to turn the gun off, so Stevie pointed it down into the ditch by the side of the road, closed her eyes, and squeezed the trigger. She dropped the gun and plopped down on the blacktop that still held a faint memory of the heat of the day. Stevie lifted the front of the dark sweatshirt and wiped her face.

There was so much ringing in her ears that she barely heard Donna say "Stevie?" in a scared shout. She saw the four of them—Luther, Bill, Jerry, and Donna—looking around frantically. Stevie realized that she was sitting in such a dark place that she was invisible.

Jerry put a finger to his lips and made a pushing down motion with his hand. The grown-ups all stood listening with their heads cocked. Under the ringing in her ears, Stevie heard quiet. No one was shouting. No one was even talking. As if waiting for their cue, crickets started chirping. They were joined by the high thin wail of an ambulance growing closer.

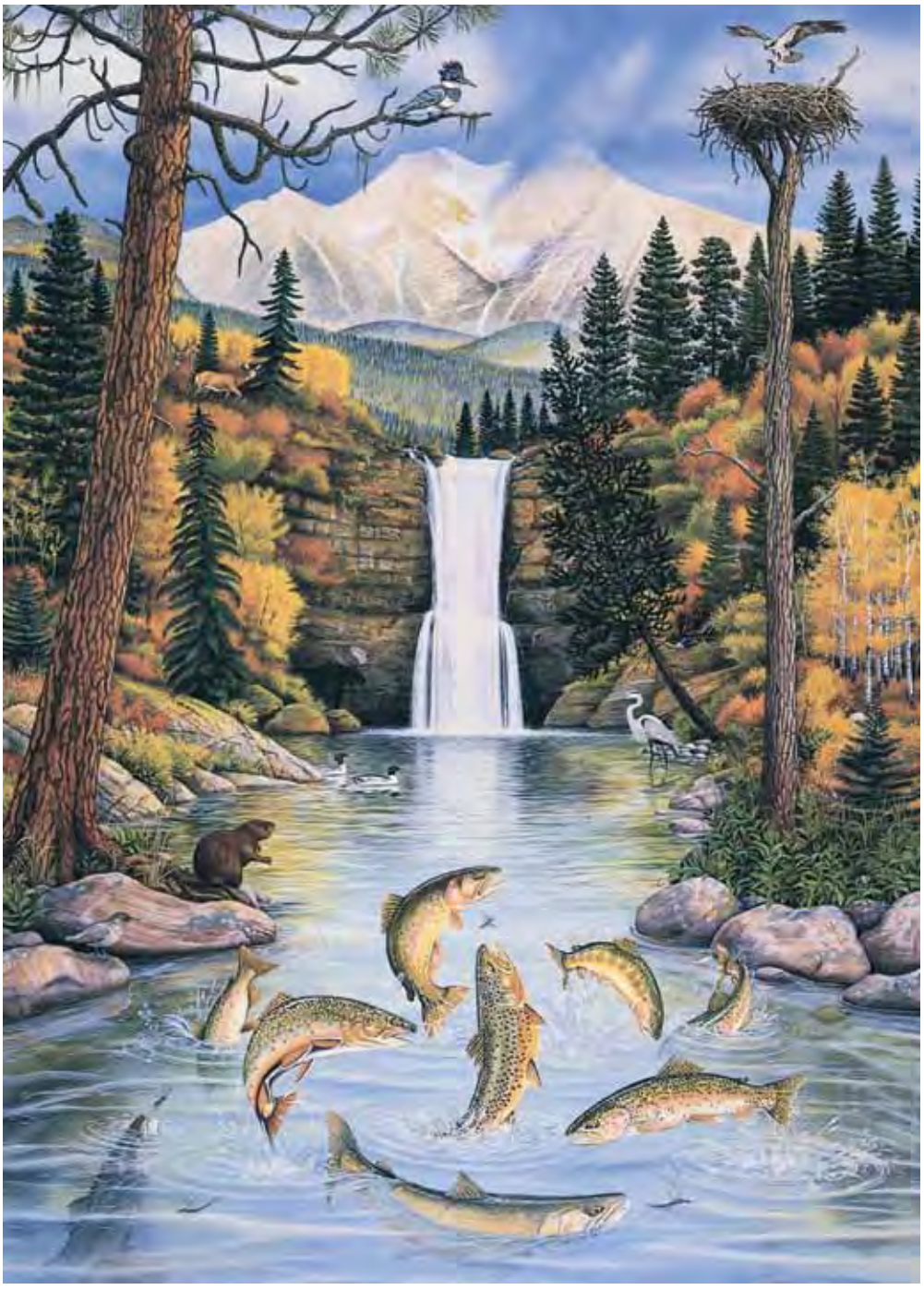
Stevie thought, I should call out to them. But instead, she rested her head on her knees, closed her eyes, and waited to be found.


Julia Behr

Nancy Graham has lived in Colorado for more than thirty years. She is a member of the Lighthouse Writers Workshop in Denver and holds an M.A. in Political Science. She has worked as a corporate executive, web content developer, and consultant to human service agencies.

Monte Dolack

Encounters



***Watershed Preservation*, 1992, acyrlic, 24" x 36"**

***Long eared owl*, 1995, acrylic, 16" x 20"**

Making pictures in the Northern Rockies for the past 30 plus years, I sometimes euphemistically refer to our Missoula-based studio and gallery in Montana as located in the remote western outback. As a friend once remarked, "It may be the sticks, but it's the workable sticks." Now with UPS and FedEx and the Internet, the communication revolution has made the challenge of being an artist living away from the major cities a much more physically possible task than it was a few years ago. Our once-little mountain town of Missoula has grown and evolved into a culturally active community with a vibrant downtown including cafes and galleries, The University of Montana, two major medical facilities, and the Missoula Art Museum.

For many years I did commissioned work that consisted mainly of posters for a variety of clients in the film and music world, as well as regional businesses and non-profit organizations working on conservation, environmental and cultural projects. Many of these clients were scattered around the country. In between commissions, I worked on my own paintings, which were shown in various regional northwest galleries. The commissioned posters would feed energy and ideas into my personal works and vice versa. Paintings like *The Great Bear*, for example, helped free me to work in a more mythic space, which transfused commissioned works such as *Bear Trust International*, *Watershed Preservation* and *Witness to Change*. *Restoring the Wolf to Yellowstone*, a poster for Defenders of Wildlife's wolf reintroduction project, brought me closer to important environmental issues and led to paintings such as *Stealing Fire* and *Ascension*.

In 1985 *Suburban Refuge*, a painting of mine, was distributed nationally and internationally as a fine art poster. Reproduced from a painting using humor rather than sarcasm to address the issue of conflict and tension between nature and civilization, the poster became financially successful enough for me to spend more time painting and pursuing my interest in world travel. A series of paintings, posters (the Invaders series) and lithographs followed. I also continued to accept commissions that focused on my interest in the natural world and organizations dedicated to its preservation, such as Trout Unlimited, The Nature Conservancy, Clark Fork Coalition, Idaho Rivers United and many more.

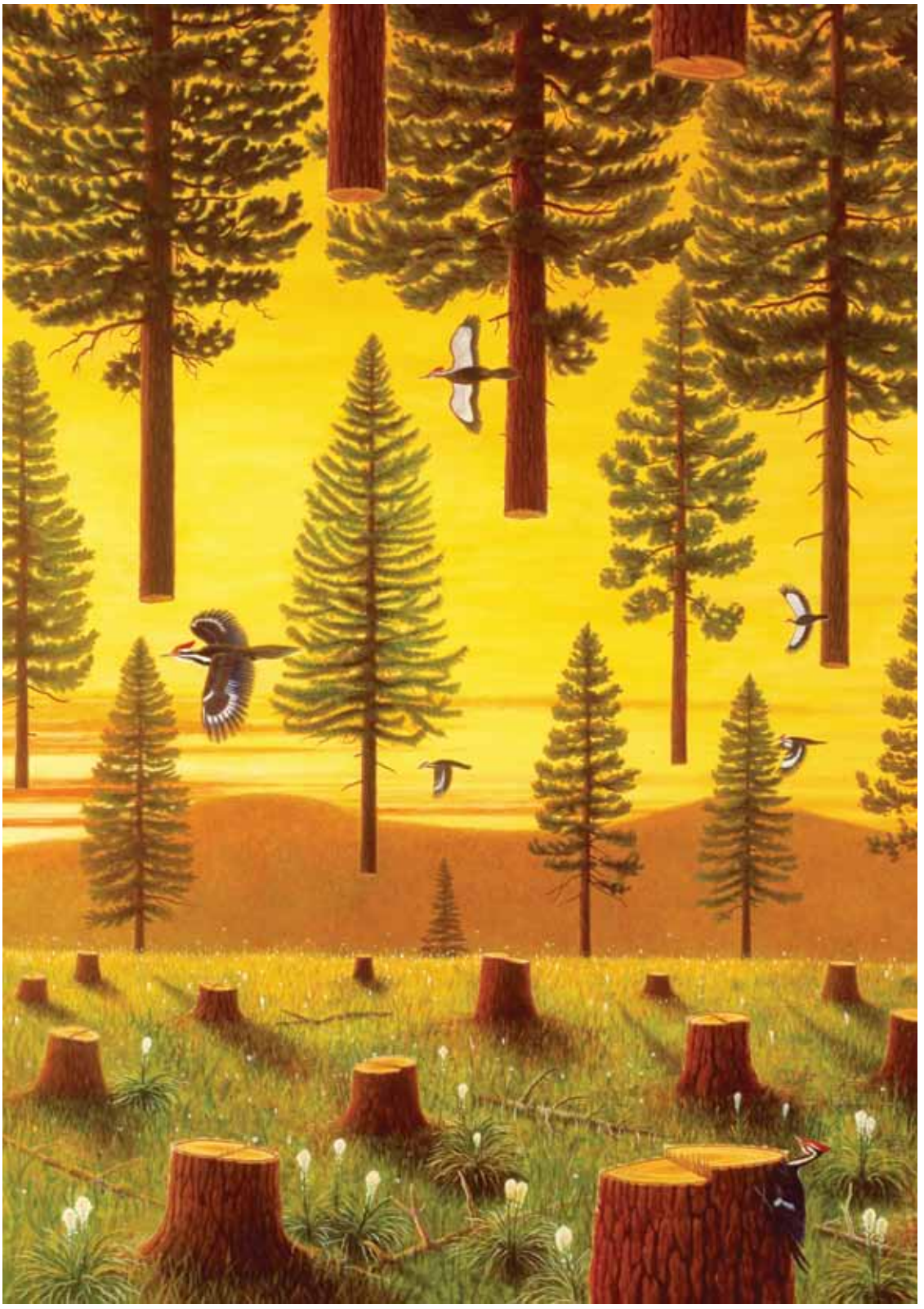
My wife, business partner and fellow artist Mary Beth Percival and I share a keen interest in journal keeping and making *plein air* paintings and drawings on location. The Montana landscape remains one of our most significant places of inspiration. At the same time, our travels have taken us to many places beyond Montana, including France, Ireland, Scotland, Italy, Japan and Mexico, where we started making paintings on and after those travels as well. It helps me process the travel experience by making a series of paintings in the security and comfort of my studio upon our return. I base these paintings on observation, journal notes, sketches and photographs that I make while traveling. (As I write this artist statement, we are packing our gear for travels in Egypt.) The sum total of all of these experiences have also led to an ongoing series of paintings that fuse landscape, history, mythology and nature.

I love creating narrative situations that explore encounters between nature and our human world, and personalizing the images by inventing my own

***Suburban Refuge*, 1985, acrylic, 24" x 24"**

***Leave It Beavers*, 1992, acrylic, 34" x 36"**

***Witness to Change*, 2006, acrylic, 17" x 20"**



Detail of *Ascension*, 2002, acrylic on panel, 40" x 36"

scenarios and symbols to represent cultural and social influences. Color, composition and drama are also an important consideration in my paintings. These paintings are created using layer upon layer of thin acrylic paint glazes, although in some of the newer paintings I have introduced an under-painting with heavy texture using acrylic mediums and collage. A visit to the 18,000-year-old painted caves of Lascaux in France several years ago helped inspire some of this work.

***Taurus*, 2006, acrylic on linen, 36" x 48"**

Societies throughout the world tell stories in which animals are metaphors for knowledge, power and creation. I find the interaction between humans, animals, nature, and civilization a visually and intellectually rich subject for picture making. *Taurus*, for example, explores the connection and content of the Bull in cultural mythology, history and modern life, as well as being a powerful armature to hang paint on.

***Equis*, 2006, acrylic on panel, 36" x 48"**

My lithographs are done in small editions with a similar building up of layers of ink through the printing process. The picture-making process for this particular method is achieved by printing layer upon layer of delicate transparent colors as in *Moonlight Rainbows*. The artist does not always know how many layers of color it will take to achieve the richness and balance of color that is desired. It is a process of exploration and discovery that makes this an artistically exciting and challenging experience.

***Montana History Lesson*, 1999, acrylic on panel, 36" x 42"**

***Great Bear*, 1991, acrylic, 30" x 40"**

***Northern Lights*, 2002, acrylic on panel, 36" x 40"**

***Mountains to Prairie*, 2007, acrylic on panel, 20" x 40"**

I find the work of René Magritte and Man Ray and the surrealists' school especially stimulating, as well as the work of more contemporary narrative surrealists such as Mark Tansey. I am inspired by the Finish artist Akseli Gallen-Kallela and the naturalist school of painters, as well as Caspar David Fried-

rich and the German Romantics. The energy and metaphysical aspect of Marc Chagall and the colors and painting techniques of J.M.W. Turner and Claude Monet are also an influence, and of course the unknown artists who filled the cave of Lascaux with energy, color and magic.

Detail of *Lion of Venice*, 2008, acrylic on panel, 9" x 10"

Detail of *The Dingle Guardian*, 2005, acrylic, 9" x 10"

***Bearing Witness*, 2006, acrylic on panel, 30" x 40"**

Stealing Fire, 2002, acrylic on panel, 36" x 40"

***Midnight All A Glimmer*, 2004, acrylic on panel, 16" x 20"**

Mark Bryant

As a native of Great Falls, Monte Dolack studied art at Montana State University and The University of Montana and opened his first studio in 1974. His work is part of the collections of the Library of Congress, the American Association of Museums, the National Wildfire Foundation and numerous other museums and corporations. His latest exhibitions include *The Montana Exhibition* at the Manawatu Art Museum in New Zealand; *Artists of the American West* at the Bank of Ireland Arts Centre in Dublin, Ireland; The Kumamoto Prefectural Art Museum in Kumamoto, Japan; and *The New West* at the National Art Museum of Beijing, China. Monte's work was also included in *The North American Print Biennial* and *New American Paintings*. The *Missoulian* selected him as one of the 100 Most Influential Montanans of the 20th century, and he recently received the Distinguished Fine Arts Alumni award from the University of Montana. More of his work can be seen at www.dolack.com.

Mary Beth Percival

Finding Beauty

Glacier Aspens, 1995, watercolor, 32" x 23"

***Western Winds*, 1999, watercolor, 30" x 36"**

Left: *Sagebrush Country*, 1995, watercolor, 22" x 30"

Mary Beth works mainly in watercolor and is most passionate about the Montana landscape and its dramatic big sky. She finds beauty in the wild places of nature, but also in the commonplace views of her own backyard. As with Monte, working on commissioned illustrations and paintings has helped infuse her fine art paintings with an increased sense of competence and design. She retired from commissioned work several years ago and continues in the pursuit of her own artistic vision. In addition to painting and sketching, she devotes time to her interests in cooking, bird watching and walking her dogs in the wild areas near her home on the outskirts of Missoula. Mary Beth and Monte's travels in and beyond the Northern Rockies provide inspiration and adventure, as do viewing art in the world's great museums and discovering new landscapes.

Starflowers and Larkspur, 1991, watercolor, 16" x 20"

***Silver Sage*, 1993, watercolor, 22" x 30"**

Mark Bryant

Mary Beth Percival is a native of Montana and grew up in the Big Hole and Boulder valleys, where her father was a ranger for the U.S. Forest Service. She attended the University of Montana and San Francisco State College and graduated from the University of Montana with a B.A. in Fine Art. For fourteen years Mary Beth supported herself as a graphic designer and illustrator in a diverse community of timber workers, environmentalists, writers and artists. She is best known for her watercolor paintings, many of which show a strong bond to the surrounding area. Mary Beth now divides her time between her artwork and co-managing an art publishing company with her artist-husband Monte Dolack. Her images are available as posters, prints and note cards published by Monte Dolack Graphics.

Diana Corbin

Sucker Punch


Kaneez Hassan

At a wedding, a stranger asks the carpenter's wife to dance and all John, the carpenter, does is rub his palm over his thin hair. He wonders whether husbands in San Francisco let their wives dance with other men or whether he should cock his head, hold his vision steady and say: "I'd rather you find your own goddamn wife." But, he lets her go.

Priscilla does not look back at John as she falls in line with the stranger. She goes away like she's heading for an amusement park ride. The man limps. How can he dance teetering off-balance like that? John doesn't like the look of him: boney, shorter than John, but stick upright like a game-show host. The man grins with his thick white teeth like he's in a toothpaste commercial, leading Priscilla to the dance floor, his hand holding her elbow, his head bent into hers.

The bottom of Priscilla's new dress flaps against the backs of her knees as she circles her hips with the music on the edge of the dance floor. The dress has orange flowers on a white cotton background and yellow dime-sized buttons up the back like the bumps between the lanes of the highway John and Pricilla drove from their home in Atwater to the wedding. The drive took them over two hours. Priscilla passed the time by reminding John of their first trip to San Francisco. That other trip was their first date.

"Remember? You looked good," Priscilla said. "Your jeans were ironed and you smelled of linseed or gasoline, or both." She always remembers the details, while John just holds onto a cloudy memory, like he's not sure if he actually lived it at all.

"Sure I do. We went to the stadium with all those cars."

John did recall he was eager to take Priscilla out. He turned free tickets to a San Francisco auto show into a date with Priscilla—a girl he went home with once when they happened to be at The Rusty Nail at last call. Relationships like that usually don't turn into anything steady,

but John had a thought that it could be more. He couldn't exactly say why, but around her he struggled for more air, like when he held his face under the showerhead too long in the morning. The feeling left him a little jittery but he still liked it, as if whether or not he could breathe again was out of his control. John came for Priscilla that day in his father's red pick-up, which was polished to a shine between the dents and rust. John was polished too.

"I knew you were it when you took my hand in front of that green van turning round and round on the platform and proclaimed that one day we'd buy a car together. But, you said I'd better want a truck over a van. Your set look made me believe every word. I can't picture if you were smiling or not."

"I likely had a silly grin. You were quite a girl, with those crab-grass bangs of yours sticking straight up front. Why'd you used to do that to your hair?"

"It was a style. You wouldn't know."

"I was sweet on you."

Tonight they are in San Francisco for John's cousin's second trip to the altar. John said they should show up for the wedding, to set an example, even though John has only set eyes on Randy twice since high school: fifteen years ago at their grandma's funeral, and at a family picnic right before Randy and his first wife tricked their grandpa into leaving his split-level to Randy. Randy and his wife never even set foot in that house. The old man probably figured that if he passed it to Randy, he'd settle down and find his roots. Randy's other grandma had taken Randy away after Randy's father died of lung cancer and his mother succumbed to drink and, to look at her, Big Macs. Randy had their grandpa's house up for sale before the funeral, not even bothering to sell the furniture and tools separate.

I could crush a man like that, John thinks, watching the stranger dance with one skinny hand on his wife's waist. I could drop him to the ground with one jab, but a wedding isn't the place. Besides, John is not a fighting man. His wife tried to get him to fight his grandpa's will, but John said he didn't want to set off a family feud. Priscilla said the property was rightfully John's since for years John had spent Saturday afternoons with the old man, sipping warm beer, listening to him talk about his goddamn ferrets and the same stories that didn't matter anymore because most of the people were dead anyway. John didn't want to stir up anything that would cause him more concern than it was worth.

John does not wait alone at the table for his wife to finish dancing. Their table, where they ate wild salmon and wasabi mashed-potatoes with the other non-city relatives, is empty. By now, everyone is dancing or at the bar. John finds an empty bar stool and orders a scotch on the rocks—a drink for someone not fooling around. His cheeks pucker around his mustache, which curls over and hides his upper lip, as he swallows the first gulp. He's accustomed to the smooth stroke of beer.

Scotch burns going down and is hard on your nostrils like when you get a whiff of gasoline at the station. He does like how it immediately expands the space in his chest and relieves the pressure in his head. He orders another.

He glances back at his wife and the stranger. They are slowly gyrating toward the center of the crowd. They don't look like they'll take a breather anytime soon. Crystal chandeliers glow above them like clusters of dying flashlights. Priscilla's hips have widened over the years, even though she never suffered through pregnancy and childbirth. Her calves have lost the taper toward her ankles, but John doesn't mind much. His body has settled into softness from his chin to below his belly-button. His forehead is more washer board than his stomach. He's almost fifty-two and Priscilla is not much younger. John has begun to think about being put out to pasture, as his father used to call retirement. Then he and Priscilla will spend their days together, not just the tired hours between dinner and bed. They might not sink comfortably into spending so much time together, but John could always convert the carport into a workshop, throw himself into projects, fix things. Priscilla's jabbering, which John relies on to cool his ears down after the scream of saws and banging of hammers at work, might turn into grit in his ears if he hears too much of it. He used to tell her what happened at work. Like he would have told her how Taylor, the youngest Sunshine boy, shows up liquored, if he shows up at all. These days, it seems like more work to tell her these things.

The music jangles the ballroom windows in their panes the way the windows of John's Chevy rattle when they're not rolled up all the way. The DJ is playing Top 40, Justin Timberlake and Maroon 5, not John's taste. He prefers country, but his wife sings some of these songs in her Ford Taurus as if she's getting paid to do it. She pounds or pets the steering wheel depending on the speed of the beat. Beads of spittle collect at the corners of her mouth as she becomes parched in the dry heat of the valley. John tells her, laughing, that she acts possessed when she gets like that. She says he's got it all wrong, that songs get her feeling like she knows what redemption is. This is one of the reasons he let her dance tonight. He wishes contentment came that easy for him.

John takes another two drinks outside to the stone patio. Each scotch glides more easily past the back of his tongue than the last. His whole body is giving into it. The night's chill finds the rifts and thin patches in his jacket. The sports coat is a hand-me-down from his older brother, Phil, who died in a car crash three years ago. John wears Phil's clothes and sometimes plays dad to Phil's two boys, since Priscilla and he don't have any kids of their own. He is careful to keep his hands off Stacey, his brother's pretty widow, but sometimes Priscilla gives him looks when he returns home from Phil's house anyway.

The air is full of moisture, but rain won't come. This is San Francisco fog. John pulls Phil's coat together at the collar. His blood is used to being where there are no hills for the sun to dip behind and no cool sea

water to drop the temperature. He's not accustomed to the strange bite of a cold summer night. At least here there are no mosquitoes like there are at home. They don't bite John too much, though. His blood isn't tasty, his wife always tells him smugly as she scratches the red bumps on her arms. Tonight Priscilla has a scab not from a bite, but from a gash an old, rarely-used, razor made against the paper-thin skin of her ankle bone. She tried to cover it up with makeup, but John told her that the foundation just sat on top like puss. As she stepped into white pumps, she said that having puss on her leg was better than having it in your head. He knew she meant it to be funny.

Movement catches the corner of John's eye as a gray cat creeps from behind a row of hedges. The bumping music doesn't bother the cat. Its eyes are locked on something. He watches the animal dive into the bushes, then unbuttons his coat and steps back into the hotel's ballroom. He does not see his wife in the dark room. The light is even lower than it was and his night vision isn't what it used to be.

His cousin steps next to him. "You should be dancing, buddy," Randy says, slapping him on the back. Randy is the kind of guy who would call you buddy even if he just shot your dog.

"No, no, the knee is busted," John says, lifting his thigh and letting his lower leg dangle. John sees his wife in a corner with the stranger. They are talking, leaning against the wall. Priscilla used to finger her hair when talking to John, like she does now. John feels sore just below his left collarbone, pushes it with his knuckle. John pats Randy between the shoulder blades and says "way to go" before pushing his way through the dancers. He bounces off moving bodies like he's on a bumper car ride. The stranger's head tilts closer to Priscilla's.

"Having a good night?" John asks as he treads up to his wife, hoping his face is straight. The pressure in his temple tells him that he is coming up to his limit.

"I'm rusty," his wife says. John hears criticism. Years ago, Priscilla used to try to get John to take her dancing on Saturday nights. Now they usually spend weekend nights watching two-star movies on basic cable, one of them on the sofa and one on a reclining chair. Priscilla has taken up knitting and bourbon. The stranger blurts out that she has good moves. This makes John's ears tingle—the man took the bait she was fishing with. At the same time he notices red splotches on Priscilla's cheeks, even in the bad light.

"Thanks for taking care of my Priscilla. I have a bum knee, or I'd..." he pauses, remembers the stranger's limp. "Well, heck, the knee's not that bad right now, 'specially with the booze. Want to?" John asks. John looks at the man instead of Priscilla, even though the question is for his wife to answer.

Priscilla gives John a flat look. The stranger raises his eyebrows and nods his head. John grabs his wife's hand and pulls her to the dance floor.


Steen Talmark

John starts to move, copying his wife and nodding his head with the beat. She glances at him, smiles with her lips together, then looks away. When he reaches for her hand so they can dance closer, she says that it's not that kind of song.

"What did you mean about your knee?" Priscilla asks. "It hasn't bothered you for years."

"Must be the cold," he shouts above the music.

When the song ends, John leans to her ear. "Let's take off." He wishes they were already home, wishes they hadn't come to the wedding in the first place.

"There's still cake." Her hands are fists next to her thighs.

"We have a long drive."

"You're just fuming 'cuz I danced," Priscilla says under her breath.

John's hand flies up and grabs Priscilla's arm with a force that surprises him. "We are dancing," John says.

John sees the man, who has been close to them all along, stride up out of the dark, holding himself as tall as he can. "Everything alright?" the stranger asks.

"Fine," John says.

"It looks like your wife wants her arm back," the stranger says, pointing at John's fingers around Priscilla's soft flesh.

"I think you should mind your own business," John says, redirecting Priscilla away from the man with a twist. "Jerk." He should let go, but can't. He's never laid a hand on a woman.

Priscilla lets out a soft "ouch."

In a flash, the stranger steps forward and clocks John in the face. The pain takes a second to show up. John feels it on the bridge of his nose, spreading out to his cheek bone. At the same time, his mind starts moving faster than his body, like when he has too much strong coffee. With one foot in front of the other and one hand still holding onto Priscilla, John raises his free arm, clenches his fist until he can feel his nails digging into his palm. The thought of hitting this man has buzzed in his head like a fly all evening. He lets his fist go without thinking, without setting up. The snap of his reaction, the fact that he isn't square on his feet and the murkiness of his mind make him lose his balance. His punch barely meets the side of the man's face before John falls to the tripod of his knees and his punching hand.

The music keeps on. After a beat or two, wedding guests rush in, mainly to get a better view. These people would make their own assumptions. They know John isn't from around here. John realizes that he still has a firm hold of his wife's arm, and she's leaning over him.

"Nice evening," John says, to no one in particular, as he pulls himself up and leads Priscilla to the door.

THEY LIFT THEMSELVES INTO JOHN'S TRUCK IN SILENCE. Priscilla has the sense not to ask John if he's alright. A drop of blood is caught in his mustache. In the dark, it looks like a black spot against the brown and silver hairs. The moon drips light on the street. Windshield wipers flop back and forth on low to erase the thick moisture; the thumping is the only sound inside the car as they pull out of the parking lot. Then, Priscilla flips on the radio. She switches channels until she finds one she likes. "Red, red wiiiiiine," she starts to sing.

"Cut it out," John says.

His wife jabs at the radio, turns up the music and sings louder. She rolls down the window and leans her head out the side so her bangs fly straight back from her forehead. The truck is bouncing toward the freeway entrance. She's like a dog, hanging her head out of the car like that. It is now the same temperature inside the truck as outside. The night air doesn't seem to bother Priscilla. Her sweater sits crumpled like a paper bag on her lap.

"What are you doing?" John asks, his eyes still on the road, his hands gripping the steering wheel like reins.

"Tasting," she says, in between lyrics. She sticks her arms, fingers extended outside the car, lets her mouth fall open, her tongue catching the fog.

John yanks the car to the side of the road and says, "I can't drive with that racket."

"You're just sore," Priscilla says.

"I got sucker-punched."

"You wanted to hurt that man long before he got you."

"Were you pulling strings? Did you want me or him to get hit?"

"You don't know anything. Don't know what you do with Stacey, but I just danced."

"Get out," John says, with a rumble in his voice. "Get the hell out!" He pushes her thigh toward the door.

"I can't stay here." Priscilla wraps her fingers around the door handle, her look is unsteady. The dark outside has lost its blue.

Fury rams into John like being hit hard in football. John reaches up and slaps her in the face. Priscilla's hand shakes as she puts it in front of her mouth. Then quiet catches in John's throat like a bone as he stares ahead into the dark.

Finally, he says: "Shit. Just don't talk to me."

He rolls his window down, reaches his hand out and uses the old

work shirt he keeps under the front seat to wipe the side mirror clean of dust they brought from the valley and droplets of fog. He cranks the window back up, using his entire left side. Priscilla is quiet during the ride home.

The next morning, the bitter smell of freshly brewed coffee finds its way into John's head and interrupts a dream. Priscilla got up earlier because she took the couch. John had said that he was sorry he raised a hand to her when they got home, but he was still wound up. He only gets that worked up when he returns home from Stacey's house without having had a bad thought, and Priscilla bangs plates, doors and chairs around all evening and doesn't look him in the eye anyway. He never acknowledges it, but he knows Priscilla thinks he's up to something. He is careful to avoid any appearance of impropriety. His brother was his best friend and their town is small.

Under the worn thin sheets John considers how it went that far the night before. Sometimes a person needs to blow off steam. Early in their relationship, Priscilla let him talk her into which watch to buy, let him decide whether they would go to church on a particular Sunday, let him pick the living room paint color: Mountain Orange. He made the decisions and she went along. Some time later, Priscilla called their living room dingy. She started wrangling to have her position followed more, to take vacations to places that he never heard of.

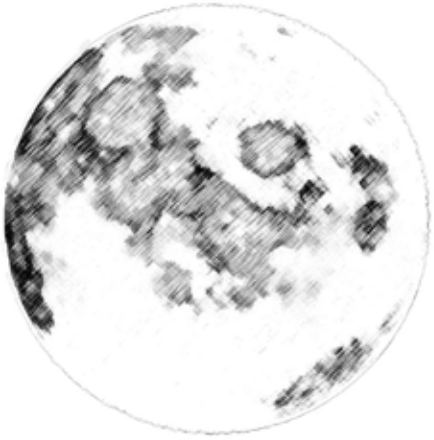
John wiggles his toes under the covers. The flesh under his toe nails is numb from knocking up against the tips of his dress shoes the night before. He thinks he hears humming. John rises from bed, pulls on pajama bottoms, walks to the kitchen and spots Priscilla, her hair a messy reminder of how it was sprayed in place the night before. The sun bursts through the sheer yellow curtains behind her, lighting her up.

"You look like an angel," he whispers. He knows his nose has swollen up to twice the size it was the day before, and it wasn't small to begin with.

The channel 5 news blares from the small television on the counter. Priscilla looks at John straight.

"I know, sugar" she says, fingering her hair.

Diana Corbin earned a law degree at Cornell Law School and currently resides in Orinda, California. Her fiction has appeared in *Two Hawks Quarterly*.



Doug Ramspeck

Vespers

Dusk light is clinging to the river.
We do not think of this as blood.
The wild buckwheats have opened
their yellow flowers to the heat.
And although the night is gathering—
not as a premonition, not as finality—
the sagebrush will glow incorporeal
beneath the bleached moon.

For there is comfort in remembering,
as though the vesper sparrow—laying
its eggs in the small depression in the ground,
singing its melancholy song at twilight—
will fly against the red sky as an occultation.
This is not the blood light congealing
into clouds. Not the river current moving
slowly as a dream.

We have come here this evening to stand
amid the sagebrush: perhaps a coyote will carry
past us in its jaws a twitching kangaroo rat.
Perhaps a night snake will leave its skin
as a reliquary across the exposed rock.
We want the flatness of the days to speak
to us amid the locoweeds. For the moon
to lift itself above the river like powdered bone.

Old Country

The old men are talking about a mule deer.
They believe it is a ghost deer. They believe
that the half-moon prints gouging the earth
near the drying stream were made long before
the ground hardened into stone, before the rains
stopped and the sky turned white and dry as salt.
There are days when the sun reminds them
of a tongue listing mute and swollen in a mouth,
when they stand on their back porches or walk
amid the rabbitbrush and imagine the landscape
around them as a desiccated tooth, as a severed
limb, as a forgotten country of cracked earth
and dead skies. A common story in these parts
is of the deer that was shot in its neck
and so transformed itself into a prickly pear.
Other mule deer arrived to feed on the body,
to drink the blood. And in the moonlight
the new ghost deer would then wander out into
the sagebrush. No human eye could any longer
see them. Still they left their hoof prints in the earth.
And each time an old man knelt to touch the grooves,
the land around him would harden into stone.

Doug Ramspeck's book, *Black Tupelo Country*, received the 2007 John Ciardi Prize for Poetry and is published by BkMk Press (University of Missouri-Kansas City). Numerous poems have been accepted for publication by journals that include *Prairie Schooner*, *Third Coast*, and *Northwest Review*. In 2009, he received an Individual Excellence Award from the Ohio Arts Council. He directs the Writing Center and teaches creative writing at The Ohio State University at Lima. He lives in Lima with his wife, Beth, and their daughter, Lee.

Joyce Yarrow

Desert Quest

Leon's curly black hair bounced off his shoulders as he strode through the Chicago station, where they changed trains for the southern route. She had first seen him while passing between cars on the way to the snack bar. He was leaning against the sliding door on the other side of the coupling, and he looked down at her—he must have been at least six-foot-three—with a sheepish grin at having been caught smoking. A ray of light penetrated the grime on the windows and glanced off his shoulder for a brief moment, until the speeding train lost its alignment with the sun.

Later that day he nodded to her without stopping as he walked by her seat and she noticed how his thick lips accentuated the thinness of his face. When she thought about it later she realized it was no accident that he waited until the night prior to their arrival in El Paso before inviting her to join him in the dining car. There's no danger of entanglement when your departure time is already scheduled and printed for all to see.

She felt an instant rapport with Leon and loved to hear his thick Boston accent stretching vowels to the breaking point. He told her he played the flute and was in a jazz orchestra, but young as she was she knew how easy it was to lie to strangers. She did it herself. When he ordered a burger, she chose the risotto, claiming to be a vegetarian. To her disappointment, this failed to make him squirm. Instead, when the food arrived he took a juicy bite, grinning as he chewed, and said, "It's enough that I'm eating a vegetarian. I don't need to be one myself."


Shantelle Schweikart

As they ate, Sandie watched the sunset floating by like a giant napkin streaked with shades of mustard and ketchup. "It must be hard for you. How are you holding up?," he asked over coffee and rum cake that tasted like the real thing. *What could he mean?*

How could he know the purpose of her trip? "I never ride coach for long distances," he added. "It throws my back out."

Relieved that her new companion could not read minds, Sandie dug into the creamy rice laced with saffron and mushrooms. It reminded her of the last meal she'd eaten at Stella's, hyper-conscious of her packed suitcase hidden under the bed in her room just a few feet away. Two weeks earlier, rifling her aunt's purse for some loose change for the bus, she had found a letter from her father. *I'm not fit for fatherhood, never was. Cash the check and let her buy something nice. Then break the bad news.* She had copied the return address in Tucson and then replaced the letter. After a week went by and Stella failed to follow her brother's instructions, Sandie realized her aunt meant to keep the money. The thick roll of bills—a combination of her wages and money she'd pilfered while working at the bridal boutique and used to buy her ticket—was now as thin as the crepes they served for breakfast on the Texas Eagle.

"Wither bound?" asked Leon. The archaic phrase was an obvious attempt to make himself appear worldly but she found it charming.

"Tucson. I'm spending the summer with my dad." She wanted the falsehood to be true and who knows—if she stuck to it maybe it would be.

She couldn't remember ever feeling so comfortable with anyone. It was like diving into a pool where the water perfectly matches your body temperature. Although he was almost ten years older than her, Leon's way of looking at commonplace things, as if seeing them for the first time, made him seem closer to her age. "See the way that woman grips her spoon? It's like there's an ogre in her soup who's gonna steal it." Later, as they passed neatly kept farms and fields outlined by stone walls, he asked her, "Why rectangles? If acres were measured in circles, civilization might have turned out different." The crazy thing was that she knew exactly what he meant.

She told him that she was eighteen, knowing he'd challenge this, making it easy for him to believe her when she confessed to being one year older than her real age of fifteen.

After dinner he took her to the observation car and they made out under the star-filled glass roof. He wasn't clumsy and rough like the boys at school but he wasn't overly smooth either. There were hesitations, looks that asked permission, and she was sure that if she had turned down his offer to share his sleeping compartment he would not have insisted. Which, of course, is why she accepted and how, in retrospect, she knew he had planned it all along.

She was careful not to let on that it was her first time. *It's like putting a tampon in, only bigger*, her one friend at the high school in Queens had told her. As he moved inside her she felt her heart speed up, sending pulsations through her body in rhythm with the rumbling train. She let these new sensations carry her away, felt the tension growing, not knowing where it would lead or how it would be

released, and then she felt Leon shudder and then withdraw, rolling off and then pulling her back so that her head lay against his shoulder as he stroked her hair. She stayed awake for a full hour after he fell asleep, her smile a strange mixture of rapture and disappointment.

The next morning, in El Paso, she walked parallel to Leon as he strode down the platform towards the exit. She found her seat in Car G, empty and waiting. It was hard to believe they would never meet again—they got along so well—but when he'd asked for her phone number she made one up, guessing that 408 was the right area code for Arizona.

EIGHT HOURS LATER, DETRAINING IN TUCSON, the blast of hot air suffocated her anxieties more than any pill or shot of whiskey could have. By the time she reached the street, the thin sleeves of her cotton pullover were saturated with sweat and pinned to her underarms like wet butterfly wings.

In a park near the station old men occupied the shaded benches, their angular profiles sending a shiver of pre-history up her spine. Unsure that the few Cuban phrases she had picked up in New York would suffice, she walked a few blocks before stopping a blond teenager in a tilted beret and shortened black pants, his calves bulging with snake tattoos, his eyes darting behind her as if there were someone standing there. "Tanque Verde Road is on the other side of town. You gotta take the bus on Speedway," he said. "It's about a mile, straight up 4th Avenue." She hadn't given much thought to what Tucson would be like and as she walked through the heat-soaked neighborhood was surprised to see ramshackle bungalows that looked like they'd been built in colonial times.

The AC on the bus re-awakened the doubts she had pushed back like a horde of panhandlers demanding their due. Did Frank still live at the address in her pocket? Would he be glad to see her in spite of what he'd said in the letter to his sister? If he asked her what she wanted—why she'd come to Tucson—how could she translate the combination of hope and dread she was feeling into words he would understand? *You won't have to take care of me—I won't be a burden. Yes, I've got to finish high school but I can work on the weekends and I don't eat much. I've grown up—more than you know—and I'm not the kid I was when you left. I'm good company.* She imagined his eyes, rocks of green-gold agate that could seem impenetrable, warming up as he listened and finally filling with tears when she got through with him. "You're my daughter," he'd say, "I thought I was doing what was best for you but now I see we're meant to be together."

The bus was crowded with college students—some talkative, some tuned into their iPods—most of them getting off before she reached her stop on the east side of town. Walking up Tanque Verde Boulevard in the blazing sun, she paused to pull a headscarf out of her suitcase and admire the graceful outline of the foothills to the north.

A pair of giant cacti stood guard at the entrance to the Mediterranean Village, their stiff arms pointing skyward, spines at the ready. Brown stucco, three-story buildings with red tile roofs sprawled over acres of parking lots connected by patches of strange plants with puffy leaves that she assumed were native. If all the apartments here were piled on top of each other, she thought, they would form one giant high-rise. At least then they'd have a view of the mountains instead of soggy swimwear and towels flung over balcony railings.

The front door of the building, covered with cracked inlays of now faded desert flowers, was unlocked, no sign of an intercom or other security device. In the lobby, she was greeted by a cheap reproduction of a rodeo scene: a cowboy in midair, jettisoned from a bucking bronco, doomed to remain in limbo forever, never making contact with the ground. Under the mailbox for 2D, Sandie read the white letters punched into a black plastic strip—*F. Mitchell*. She walked up the stairs, striving to empty her mind of expectations.

The Frank who opened the door to 2D was a browner and leaner version of her father, but the sideways hug he gave her, after what seemed like an interminable moment of hesitation, was familiar—an avoidance of body contact he'd begun to practice shortly after her mother died.

"Come on in. Let's find a place for you to sit."

Cardboard boxes occupied every available space in the living room, which was furnished with a sad yellow couch, a TV on a metal stand and a few plastic patio chairs. "It's amazing what you can accumulate in a year's time," he said, with no trace of irony, as he cleared a pile of clothes off the couch to make room for her.

"I thought you were staying at Devan's ranch." Frankie and Devan had met in the children's ward of a Catholic hospital, where they shared the dubious honor of being counted among the last American children to contract polio before the vaccine was in widespread use. The boys had been inseparable as teenagers and Sandie had listened to many stories of their adventures, which ended when Devan was sent to "Juvie" for torching the '67 Chevy owned by his rival for Annie Slowalski's affections. After his rehabilitation, Devan and his parents moved to Arizona, and when Devan's parents died, he inherited the ranch. Frank had read his friend's letters out loud to his little daughter, promising to take her with him if the day ever came when he could accept Devan's invitation to visit.

"What he didn't tell me," Frank now said, "was that he and his wife have turned the place into a resort for spoiled rich kids. I stuck it out for a few weeks but after taking those brats on forced marches and teaching them the finer points of shoveling shit and combing the nags they have stabled out there, I quit and found a job that didn't involve unblocking toilets."

Sandie looked around at the cardboard boxes. "Have you just arrived or are you moving somewhere?"

"One more day and you'd never have found me." He said this with a touch of wistfulness that made her wonder if he was glad that she had. He caught her look and added, "Of course I would have left you a note. Stella called a few days ago. You're not her favorite person these days. I thought I taught you better than to steal from the hand that feeds you."

She ignored the bait. "Where are you moving to?"

"It's complicated. Are you hungry?"

Over tuna fish sandwiches, hers washed down with milk and his with Tuborg, they warily exchanged information, like spies forced to work together but not longer owing allegiance to the same country.

"If you'd phoned ahead I could have picked you up at the airport."

"I took the train – and your number wasn't listed. Stella chose to keep your whereabouts a secret."

"She has her ways," he said with a grimace, implying that his disappearance from Sandie's life was all a misunderstanding perpetrated by his temperamental sister. "Why did you run away?"

"It's complicated."

"Okay, okay. I'm sorry. I ran out on you, but I thought Stella would be a better caretaker."

"She's not and I don't need one. Why can't I live with you?"

"Believe me, I'd like nothing better." He cleared the table and had his back to her when he said, "Trouble is, there's room for just one more where I'm going."

"And that would be?"

She waited while he forced himself to look at her. "I met someone. She's got a small house in the Chirachuas. When I lost my job she suggested I move in, just until I get back on my feet. I suppose, now that you're here, I could try…" He looked around helplessly and she wondered what this woman could possibly find so attractive. *He needs a mother more than I do.*

Suddenly she was very tired. "Do you mind if I lie down for a bit. Then I'll see if I can find a cheap hotel."

"There's no need for that—the hotel I mean. At least not yet. The rent is paid up until next week." He pushed aside some boxes, clearing the way to the bedroom. "Here's a clean towel. You can take a shower when you wake up."

Lying on his bed, which smelled faintly of nicotine and something else she didn't want to think about, Sandie told herself she couldn't blame him, not really. He barely had his own head above water. Any extra weight was sure to pull him under.

She woke an hour later with a splitting headache and a bad case of fish breath. Frank's voice was a low murmur in the other room. She cracked the door so she could hear him on the phone.

"I called the Runaway Hotline. They have a Home Free program—they'll put her on a Greyhound Bus at their expense and send her back. Please Stella—you're my only hope."

Sandie tried to read Stella's answer in his face, but it remained impassive. "Okay, okay—I get it."

Sandie retreated to the shower stall in the bathroom, standing under the slow lukewarm dribble as she considered what to do next. She'd be damned if she was going to crawl back to New York and beg Stella for forgiveness, even if it were offered, which sounded unlikely. Should she call Leon? One night spent with a stranger on a train wasn't exactly a relationship.

"Feel up for a drive?" Frank asked when she emerged, wearing clean jeans and drying her hair with a towel so thin she was afraid it would disintegrate if she rubbed her head too hard. "I'd like you to see Devan's place."

"You still on speaking terms after you quit?"

"Of course. Our friendship bounced back quicker than a cowboy sobers up when he's tied to a bronco." The fact that he was still driving a pickup truck with Recovery Ranch stenciled on its side seemed to support that statement. They listened to a plaintive singer on the Spanish radio station, which oddly enough made her homesick for New York, as Frank drove west and then into the foothills, past quarter-acre subdivisions packed with particle board colonial style houses.

When the bumpy pavement turned to dirt she got her first glimpse of the desert *au natural* against the backdrop of the Santa Catalina Mountains. The giant saguaro cacti she had seen at Mediterranean Village were reproduced here a thousandfold, some of them blooming with deep red flowers that Frank explained were distilled into a ceremonial wine by the Indians. "Never tried it myself," he said, "but I hear it packs quite a wallop." She had been surprised to hear the western twang in her father's voice but only now did she realize how thoroughly he had blended into his new environment.

They drove by a rectangular adobe structure minus its roof, walls covered with scaffolding. "A hundred years ago this was a station on the pony express route, a piece of living history. In a few weeks all that's left of it will be a plaque in the ground next to some lawyer's air-conditioned condo."

The ruts in the dusty road slowed the truck to what seemed like an endless bouncy crawl, and just as Sandie was about to protest that if her lower back endured one more bump she was going to be crippled for life, they rolled onto a smooth macadam surface and Frank got out to open a bright red metal gate. Her eyes following the narrow black road, which cut through the desert with knife-like precision, Sandie strained for a glimpse of the ranch house. It didn't appear for another ten minutes, and then only as a black spec in the distance. Frank turned off the AC and rolled down the windows. "Take a deep breath," he said. The smells coming in from all sides were new to her and not unpleasant, chicory and something like licorice—anise, Frank explained—but the aromatherapy fell short of quelling her unease.


Montri Wongworawat

The first thing she noticed about Recovery Ranch was the electric fence around the perimeter. "Used to be a horse ranch. Keeps the coyotes and rattlers out," Frank explained. The massive hacienda was covered with rocks embedded in its thick clay walls and seemed to tower over the small bunkhouses surrounding it. A group of teens were unloading bales of hay from a truck and carrying them into the barn. "Why don't you go have a look at the horses," Frank said. "I need to talk some business with Devan."

She heard the snort before her eyes adjusted to the dim light in the barn and she could see them—one ebony black with a white blaze under his forelock, the other a speckled bay mare. She stroked the black's nose, soft as the foreskin she'd been shocked to feel on Leon's penis. The unexpected comparison made her giggle. "Prince doesn't like to be laughed at." Over her shoulder she saw the owner of the voice, a skinny girl in an army fatigue shirt that was either the real thing or a great imitation.

"Hi. I'm Tiffany. Where's your stuff?"

Sandie stood there looking at her, so Tiffany explained, "I'm in charge of new arrivals, getting you set up in your bunkhouse, orientation, that kinda' stuff."

"Not necessary. I'm just visiting with my dad." It felt strange saying those words—*my dad*. She wasn't sure she believed them herself.

Tiffany looked at the house through the open barn door and then back at Sandie. "He says he was gonna' talk some business with Devan?"

"They're old friends."

"Sure. Old as the money that's changin' hands."

It took five seconds for Sandie to get the gist of Tiffany's words and then she was off and running. She was halfway up the porch steps when she heard the sound of an engine turning over. Frank would have beat her out of the driveway, but a group of kids chose that moment to drag some piles of firewood across the path of the truck.

She tugged at the handle on the passenger door but by then he'd locked it from the inside. She jumped up on the floorboard of the truck and leveraged herself onto the front fender and then the hood. A group of residents gathered to watch the fun.

Frank got out of the truck and dragged her off the hood, hustling her over to a grove of scrub oaks where he could deal with her in private. His voice was a low hiss she'd never heard him use before.

"You're going to stay here and from what Devan's told me you'll start to like it. The kids here learn real life skills and he's been generous enough to offer you a job that will cover the cost of your room and board."

"Like the one shoveling shit that you thought you were too good for?"

"I knew there'd be no talking to ya."

"So you've decided to run off—it's what you do best."

"You stole from your own flesh and blood and gave my sister no respect. It's better you learn now that there are consequences. This place is a lot better than a foster home and if you obey the rules, you'll come out with some appreciation of what freedom means—you have to earn it. If you behave yourself, maybe in a few months, when I get on my feet—"

"No. You'll never stand up like a normal person. Not you. You're gonna creep around on all fours for life, like a whipped dog slinking from alley to alley. And one day you're gonna wake up in a flop house in some sorry city, wondering if anyone even knows you're alive. And you'll try to find me so you'll have somebody to hold your stinkin' hand when you die but it won't do you no good because by then I'll have forgotten your name and when this stranger calls I'll hang up the phone and that'll be your last memory of me—a big, fat, *click*."

She didn't choose these words, they chose her, as if a ventriloquist had replaced her voice with a stranger's, filled with hatred and a vocabulary to go with it. Frank's back was straight as he walked away. She'd given him the out he needed and he was finally off the hook.

She lay on the ground, banging her hands against the sharp pebbles in the dirt until her palms bled. After that she pictured herself wandering out into the desert, losing her way, drying up into a stack of bleached bones, and the thought brought with it a strange comfort. If things got too bad, she knew what she would do.

Joyce Yarrow's short stories have appeared in *Descant*, *Inkwell Journal*, *Whistling Shade*, and *Arabesques*. She is the author of the novels, *Ask the Dead* (Martin Brown, 2005) and *The Last Matryoshka* (Five Star/Cengage 2010). "Desert Quest" is excerpted from her new work, "The Ring of Truth."

Richard Robbins

Kitchen

How is it, cutting
pink grapefruit, the bloody halves
rock a moment on

the board, shining up all
the way to the table, all

the little rooms scooped
out, moving your direction
on the spoon, and you

hardly notice what's going
inside, those hundreds of tears,

hundreds of dams near
breaking, newspaper glaring
back in its dumb way,

your mouth open, the city
moving the dead river west.

Peter Horowitz

Where They Met Him at the Los Angeles Airport

Mainly in the tunnel between terminal
and gate, a tiled tube of light sunk under
this taxiway or the next. First the children
running through strangers to bury their heads
in his greatcoat, their grandmother finally
catching up, the two of them kissing.

Maybe they'd all take the back way home
through Inglewood and Westchester, past homes
the two owned once, the dramas all past climax,
unraveled even in memory. More than once
the carload took the long way back, through Hollywood
to the turnaround point at C.C. Brown's,

all the hot fudge anyone wanted. Any
of those nights coming down out of the sky,
beyond his Teamster bosses in DC,
beyond the striking drivers in Albuquerque,
did the old man ever wonder what it meant
to fall back into all those arms of love

in that bright space under the ground? Or did he
just fall into them, a failure half the time
on the surface? Without knowing why, they knew
a touch could heal, whatever ached them
died for a while in the hugs, the kisses,
in climbing the stairs to ground level, where

the night, rich and lethal, would have to wait.

Trace

– in memory of John Cuchessi

A last wave of him slicing
away from the pier. A last
ride of him pedaling south
along the tracks.

The match of rise and fall, one
beat to the next. What makes a
good man good. The ocean and
the barren hills

survive him. What leaves no trace,
what quiet invisible flower
stitches sea and land to its
own insistence.

Montri Wongworawat

The Bernard de Voto Memorial Cedar Grove

—Lochsa River Gorge, Idaho

Hardly any place darker at noon
than in the ancient grove where de Voto,
leaning against deadfall, waits for Lewis
to come down the Indian trail
from Montana. He's lived in the canvas tent
all month. He's pinned a map to bark, made tea
from rosehips and roots. Waiting for Clark,
he draws papers from his pack more plentiful
than the trees, and lays them on the ground.
Nothing, he knows, could simulate the want
he reads about in the journals: snow night
after night, the men all sick, horses
shot and eaten. It's summer now, pleasant
and cool under fanning branches.
A nutcracker hops and grinds a few yards away.
In a while he'll walk the short path and step
into painful bright day over the river.
The billion stones will be talking back
to water louder than traffic or doubt.
He is hearing the river they would never
know, deep in their first frozen crossing.
This is more the water Nez Perce saw
returning from the eastern plains, their ponies
weighed down with hides and jerky, those
riders singing and yelling down the trail. Back
in deep shade, de Voto waits for two men
knowing the expedition still lost
in the Bitterroots, finding and losing
its way along anonymous summits,
the journal pages circling him
like private snow. No way to tell their story.

Stafford's Cave

They gave it your name
the day the one narrow path
through Doug fir and fern

turned so quiet they could hear you
breathing the fifteenth, sixteenth

lines of a sonnet—
the last joke you played on us
crossing your big dark

rhyming every English word
with every other, sort of.

Richard Robbins grew up in Southern California and Montana. He studied with Richard Hugo and Madeline DeFrees at the University of Montana, where he earned his MFA. He has published three books of poems, most recently *Famous Persons We Have Known* and *The Untested Hand*. Two new books, *Other Americas* and *Radioactive City*, are due out in 2009 from Blueroad Press and Bellday Books, respectively. He has received awards from The Loft, the Minnesota State Arts Board, the NEA, and the Poetry Society of America. He directs the creative writing program and Good Thunder Reading Series at Minnesota State University, Mankato.

READING THE WEST

read-ing [from ME reden, to explain, hence to read] – vt. 1 to get the meaning of; 2 to understand the nature, significance, or thinking of; 3 to interpret or understand; 4 to apply oneself to; study.

HARD TIMES FOR STATE PARKS

Concerns for the state of state parks in the current economy are being expressed throughout the West. There are over 6,600 state park sites in the U.S. covering 14 million acres of land. State parks serve 2½ times as many visitors as the National Park System with only 16% of the acreage.

...[S]tate parks all over the West... have quickly become standing metaphors for the tattered U.S. economy. Arizona closed two historic parks in its 30-park system due to an $8 million loss in state funding and a $200 million maintenance backlog. Idaho reduced hours at its state parks after losing $9 million in state funds; Colorado raised camping fees to pay state park bills. Just about the only state park system in the West not suffering is in Oregon, which funds parks with lottery revenue.

The state park decline is most dramatic in California. California State Parks lost 10 percent of the $143 million it gets from the state's general fund, as both the Legislature and Gov. Schwarzenegger scrambled to resolve the state's $24 billion deficit. And because that lost revenue "snowballs to other cuts," says parks spokesperson Roy Stearns, "our total loss for the year is $38.6 million."

Stearns predicts that as many as 100 of the state's 278 parks may close, many of them historic sites, such as Monterey State Historic Park with its 19th century adobes, and the fabled Bodie ghost town. "Historic sites have the lowest visitation," Stearns says. They can't compete with Southern California's state beaches, which bring in two to three million visitors a year. "But they represent the legacy of who we are as a people. We shouldn't just abandon them."

State	# of Parks	Annual Visitors	Annual Budget	Trend	Fallout
Arizona	27	2.3 million	$19 million	-30%	2 parks closed, 12 threatened
California	278	72.2 million	$233 million	-21%	100 parks threatened
Colorado	42	11 million	$40.8 million	-5%	reduced workforce
Idaho	30	3 million	$38 million	-11%	reduced maintenance
Montana	53	1.79 million	$9.8 million	-16%	none reported
Nevada	23	not reported	not reported	not reported	not reported
New Mexico	36	4 million	$32.7 million	-5%	none reported
Oregon	200	40.3 million	$81.9 million	0%	fewer new parks
Utah	43	4.5 million	$31.2 million	-9%	staff cuts
Washington	120	41 million	$76 million	-49%	40 parks may close
Wyoming	36	2.6 million	$26 million	-10%	seasonal staff reduction

Source: Lewis, Ruth, "Lawless Future, Hard Times Extra Hard for State Parks," *High Country News*, vol. 41, 31 August 2009; http://www.hcn.org/issues/41.15/lawless-future. See also: Walls, Margaret, "Parks and Recreation in the United States, State Park System," *RFF Backgrounder*, January 2009; http://www.rff.org/RFF/Documents/RFF-BCK-ORRG_State%20Parks.pdf.

CALIFORNIA PARK LEGISLATION

There is currently an effort to propose a ballot measure for the November 2010 election: the "California State Parks and Wildlife Conservation Trust Fund Act of 2010." This act would establish the State Parks and Wildlife Conservation Trust Fund in the state treasury where, by law, it could only be spent on state parks, urban river parkways, wildlife, natural lands and ocean conservation programs. Funding for the Trust Fund would come from an $18 annual State Park Access Pass surcharge on all California vehicles, including motorcycles and recreational vehicles. Larger commercial vehicles, mobile homes and permanent trailers would be exempt.

Early supporters of the proposed ballot measure include California State Parks Foundation, The Nature Conservancy and Save the Redwoods League....

[B]udget cuts have starved state parks, causing them to accumulate a backlog of more than $1 billion in needed maintenance and repairs.

Roofs and sewage systems leak, restrooms are not cleaned regularly, bridges have collapsed, trails are washed out, campgrounds and visitor centers are shuttered and buildings and structures throughout the system are badly deteriorated.

Thousands of scenic acres are closed to the public because of reductions in park rangers, and crime has more than doubled. Destruction and vandalism of the parks themselves has grown fourfold, and beachgoers are often unprotected because of decreases in lifeguards.

Twice in the past two years, state parks were on the brink of being shut down. Only last-minute budget reprieves kept them open. But nearly 60 state parks will be shut down part-time or their hours of operation reduced because of this year's budget cuts, and more park closure proposals and budget cuts are expected next year.

"California state parks are in peril because of chronic underfunding," said Elizabeth Goldstein, President of the California State Parks Foundation. "Our state parks were once considered the best in the nation, and now they're falling apart and threatened with closure because they have no reliable source of funding."

Source: *Lake Country News Reports*, 8 November 2009; http://lakeconews.com/content/view/11171/919/

THE NATIONAL TRUST WEIGHS IN

In 2008 the National Trust for Historic Preservation listed the California State Parks system as one of 11 most endangered places in America. California's state park system is the largest state park system in the U.S., encompassing an array of historic and cultural resources. The system encompasses 278 parks, including 51 designated State Historic Parks, covers 1.5 million acres and protects 295 miles of ocean front. In a recent issue of its publication, Main Street News*, the Trust made another argument for protecting the parks.*

For Main Street districts in close proximity to the parks threatened with closure, this...could have dire consequences. Take Grass Valley, for example. A community of 15,000, Grass Valley is a quintessential historic gold rush town, born out of gold mining in the hard quartz rock of the Sierra Foothills region. Although other areas market themselves as "Gold Country," more gold came out of the Empire Mine than any other mine in California; and Nevada County is blessed with three state parks—all threatened—that celebrate its gold mining heritage....

Ukiah, a city of 15,000 in Mendocino County, is another community vulnerable to a loss in parks-related tourism. Ukiah has only one state park directly adjacent to it, but many tourists visit the area en route to several nearby parks, all of which are on the closure list except for one. The popularity of these parks is rising, as more Californians choose the "stay-cation" option over more costly out-of-state trips. This has a direct positive impact on spending in nearby Main Street districts. As Joy Beeler, executive director of Ukiah Main Street puts it, "We may not travel to Hawaii and go shopping in downtown Lahaina, but we can drive an hour to our own Mendocino Headlands and shop in downtown Fort Bragg for fun." Their proximity to the parks has allowed Main Street districts to survive in an economy characterized by belt-tightening.

Source: Stewart, Erica, "California Main Streets Threatened by Park Closings," *Main Street News*, 17 July 2009; http://www.preservationnation.org/main-street/main-street-news/ .

UTAH PARKS CLOSED

State Park officials in Utah have been struggling to maintain facilities with fewer resources. They recently announced that Red Fleet State Park near Vernal has been closed for the winter due to budget cutbacks.

The gates at the park were closed Nov. 1 and will remain closed until March 31, 2010. All facilities at the park have been shut down and there are no services and no staff, including emergency help.

While the state agency can't physically keep visitors out, Utah State Park officials are asking people to refrain from visiting Red Fleet until it reopens.

"We had to do something to meet our [budget] needs," said Jim Harland, Northeast Region manager of Utah State Parks. "Short of having to close the park permanently, this is the best we could do."

The closure affects anglers who ice fish at Red Fleet Reservoir more than any other group. Closing Red Fleet will save money on seasonal employee salaries, maintenance costs and snow removal. Officials encourage those who had plans to visit Red Fleet this winter to consider going to nearby Steinaker Reservoir.

Source: Prettyman, Brett, "Red Fleet State Park closed for the winter," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 6 November 2009; http://www.sltrib.com

THE OLDEST UTAH STATE PARK

Utah government officials considered a state park system first in 1925, when all 48 states were formulating park development plans following the 1921 National Conference of State Parks. However, it was not until 1957, with vigorous campaigning by the Sons of the Utah Pioneers, that the state created a commission and opened the Territorial Statehouse in Fillmore, This is the Place Monument in Salt Lake City, and Camp Floyd/Stagecoach Inn in Fairfield. However, as Jenny Brundin recently reported on the local affiliate of National Public Radio's Morning Edition*, budget states are having an effect on the state parks.*

Jenny Brundin: The fall leaves disappear in the path of a power mower at Territorial Statehouse State Park. It breaks the usual quiet of the historic grounds in the center of the tiny town of Fillmore, Utah.

The man on the mower takes a break to introduce himself.

Carl Camp (Curator, Territorial Statehouse State Park): I'm the curator.

Ms. Brundin: You're the curator, and you're mowing the lawn!...

Mr. Camp: Our staff has been reduced so I'm kind of the curator slash whatever else needs to be done.

Ms. Brundin: Mirroring a nationwide trend, Utah's state parks took a deep cut earlier this year. Another double-digit cut is likely next year, so one of Utah's oldest and most important parks is down to one employee, Carl Camp. The 13-year park veteran has explored many of Utah's open spaces, and for him parks restore, inspire, and teach.

Mr. Camp: Those connections to what we really are are found in the parks.

Brundin: He's had to cut outreach programs to schools and accept the help of volunteers.... The recession has dealt a devastating blow to parks and recreation budgets across the country. Pennsylvania and California's budgets were cut about 20 percent, Georgia's 40 percent. Visitors may find closed camp grounds, overgrown trails, or dirty bathrooms.

As lawmakers cut, however, the number of visitors to state parks is surging. Utah Parks director Mary Tullius says the economy forced people to stay closer to home.

Ms. Mary Tullius (Utah Division of Parks & Recreation): We had one of the busiest summers we've ever had, so we had more people in the parks, but we had fewer staff to help them to keep the rest rooms clean, to collect the fees and to take care of those customers.

Ms. Brundin: A new report by the think tank Resources for the Future shows that Parks and Recreation does suffer a disproportionate share of the budget cuts. During the last recession, local spending declined up to 2 percent. But cuts to Parks and Rec were deeper— up to 13 percent.

This year, from Atlanta to Phoenix, entire sports divisions and after-school programs are being eliminated as budgets are slashed by a third or more. Retired D.C. Parks and Rec manager Sharron Wilson says the cuts most affect the least, the lost, and the left out.

Ms. Sharron Wilson (Retired Parks and Rec Manager): Recreation is the be-all and end-all when it comes to the children leaving school in the afternoon, and having a safe place to go to and having mentorships on weekends, because a lot of kids are deprived, and so those are the ones that we really know have been hit the hardest....

Ms. Brundin: A national campaign launches next year to prove with research and data that Parks and Recreation can be the solution to many societal problems, from juvenile crime and obesity to air pollution and depressed urban economies.

Source: Brundin, Jenny, "NPR Reports on State Parks and Budget Cuts," *Morning Edition*, October 30, 2009; Children & Nature Network; http://www.childrenandnature.org

UTAH STATE PARK MUSEUMS

In July 2009, because of budget cuts during the last legislative session, Utah State Park museums reduced hours of operation, many electing to close on Sundays. They include:

- Anasazi State Park Museum, Boulder
- Camp Floyd/Stagecoach Inn State Park and Museum, Fairfield
- Edge of the Cedars State Park Museum, Blanding
- Fremont Indian State Park and Museum, Sevier
- Iron Mission State Park Museum, Cedar City
- Territorial Statehouse State Park Museum, Fillmore

EDITORIAL MATTER CONTINUED

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