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Linda Hogan

ONE CREATION

I am a warrior
wanting this world to survive
never forgotten, this earth
which gave birth to the bison, the scissortail
the vultures of Tibet consuming the finally released
mystics, the old ones
who taught we are always a breath
away from bullets.

I am from a line of songs,
a particle of history told by the wrong people,
a country before lines of division.
In every gulley lies the power of a forest waiting.
It heard the stories elders told when they crossed
this canyon where I live. I dreamed they passed down
to the creek-bed, each human creation still present,
loving the stones I love, the mosses between them,
the remembered creek that runs all year.

It is hard for some to know
the world is a living being.
Some live with forgotten truth.
Others replaced truth with belief.
That's why the books of the Maya were burned
like the ones of Australia and the close North.

We can weep over such things
as lost love, as the passage away of others,
but also remember those birds, the bison,
the grief they have felt, and how the land hurts
in more chambers than one small heart
could ever hold.

Linda Hogan

WHITE DEER, YOUR DIRECTION I FOLLOW

from the pasture this morning,
out by the old tools,
from the white under-leaves of poplar shade,
I follow the deer
to the trail beyond men with rifles or bows.

The place we journey is far
but no pain creeps into my body.
This deer is the map
I have waited for.
She is something come to our place
like the white dog my people followed
to and across
the roaring river,
into the world after first creation.

The white deer leaps the dirty river.
I follow in the wake of it,
the deer so like a cloud
I know she is more than a guide,
so perhaps she is partly
the way of sky milk, such sweetness,
the mothering constellations,
the great spiral countenance, (of animals)
from our earth, the milk of forever
an infant will seek.

If she is merely a small deer
curled inside herself,
a spiral of innards, always content
for the suckling,
such a creation is so miraculous
I almost forget the path,
to follow.

In these words I am almost lost,
so simply any track or trail could disappear,
so could anyone from a journey

of so much wonder,
when the deer becomes smoke,
merely an animal of light
passing into the wilderness
or rising with the prayer.

You have to ask,
how often do you see it,
how often does it come to you,
how often, really,
do you follow?

Linda Hogan

IF HOME IS THE BODY

If, as they say, your home resembles your body,
 please pardon my rumpled clothing,
this untidy appearance. But in this home
are pockets of memory,
stones I carried from places of holiness,
even disordered papers, plentiful, close to finished.

The windows need no curtains,
only light peers in from the black
vessel of night gone over the red mountain.
But the nautilus still rises,
shining on the surface of every night.

The house is old with dusty corners
where memories have settled
along with gifts from deep oceans

Inside, also, a picture; two women
ride through a red valley on horses,
a Woodland family smiles, especially
the child standing proud beside his father,
the kindness, the love of the mother.

In one corner hangs a strand of blue beads from Turkey
to protect us, as do lucky coins
and tree frogs that sing before a rain,
the sounds of crickets and smell of human nights,

and forgive the dog her wet paws.
She loves each morning, going out,
only returning to announce,
I am here.

Elise Paschen

WHALE SONG

Pilot whales have a close-knit social structure that can cause them to follow sick or lost members of their pod and then resist leaving those animals.
Los Angeles Times

At counters in grocery stores
friends purchase turkeys large enough
to feed twelve siblings, thirty cousins,

while our family table grows
smaller. Across the continent
the pilot whales click, call and keen

as one, then another, dry-docks.
Hovering nearby in shallow waters,
the pod can't be lured to the deep.

On linens we station pale candles,
marshal chrysanthemums in vases,
balance wedding glasses for five,

while in the graveyards the headstones
wait to be carved. Around the table:
ghost of song, empty chairs.

Jen Karetnick

SHOOTING THE ALPHA FEMALE

She is the one with gravitational pull
so that apples fall to the ground

if she thinks the words sweet
or hunger. But she never goes hungry.

Beta females lay their food at her feet,
arrow their toes in her direction, provide

the conversation when she has nothing
more to say, tailor their moods

to hers like fitted blazers. She is not
the selective mute who seams her lips

all day, only to rip away that prim collar
with a howl in response to Plath,

caught in the snare of such moonlight.
She is not the practical joker

who sews her own jester's cap,
then hangs herself with its tassels.

She is the bitch of good genes and jawline
with generations behind her and ahead,

the rare white wolf of Yellowstone,
posing on the ridge while her mate

tends the litter. This is what makes her
an easy mark. We have believed too long

she is as invincible as oxygen; her refuge
could never be revoked. He is sure

to stay downwind, doesn't leave behind
his weapons: a gun, the usual cruel words,

a whistle as shrill as her voice. They will offer a reward. But his job here is done.

One blast. The rest come tumbling after. How well he's been taught to take out the leader.



Autumn Leaves, print on paper

Ron Fundingsland

Sybil Baker
PEOPLE I KNOW

I.

Shahab from Tehran, a graduate student in linguistics I met in Cyprus, invited me to join his friends to celebrate Nowruz, the Persian New Year, by jumping over a fire and eating lentil soup. When I was back in Chattanooga, he Skyped with my freshman students to answer their questions about Iran.

Salim, an Iraqi Kurd who was a translator for American soldiers. His family was threatened by Al Qaeda, and he and his family are now political refugees in Chattanooga.

Nahid left Iran long before the Iranian Revolution to study in the States. She became a US citizen, and is now a well-known writer and teacher.

My English literature students in North Cyprus, men and women with abundant hair, living in jeans and faux hiking boots, smoking fearlessly before class. After hearing about another mass shooting in the US, they asked me: Is American as dangerous as it seems?

No, I said. It's more.

Masoud from Abu Dhabi, now a Norwegian, with a doctorate in petroleum engineering. He wants nothing more than to see the Egyptian pyramids.

Fidan, whose name means "small tree," a counseling professor from Ankara who knits and paints. In Cyprus we went to aerobics class twice a week, and on other days we'd take long walks in the olive groves near campus.

Ali, the vice rector at the university in Cyprus, loved Bloomington, Indiana, even more than New York (he lived in both cities). He would play cards with us most weekends.

Çem, the mathematician who'd studied at Oxford, loved to recite poetry in Turkish, Arabic, English, and German. He told me he'd never been to the States but imagined it to be just like The Simpsons TV show.

The boys from Indonesia who made a raft out of tires and rope and took us down a river in Sumatra, cooked our food while they squatted in their sarongs in the jungle rain, who asked me if I knew Madonna.

Adnan, a Bosnian refugee, who now is an English professor, writer, and editor in Sweden. We taught together in Hong Kong, and once were on a short story panel at a conference in Little Rock, Arkansas. I remember meeting him on a bridge in Little Rock, the only people outside in the hundred degree heat. I never heard him complain about anything.

My sister-in-law's brother, who let us stay with him during the summer she and my brother married. He still remembers me flossing my teeth on the stair steps to his Ankara apartment. My sister-in-law's other brother's wife, who, although eight months pregnant at my brother's wedding, performed the traditional Turkish dance with mesmerizing grace.

Her son Mehmet, now a handsome eighteen, about to begin a degree in engineering. His family hopes the world will have calmed down in a few years when he has to do his military service.

My sister-in-law Professor Dr. Ozgur Erdur Baker who at the very moment I write this is in Southeastern Turkey working with UNICEF to develop programs for children of Syrian refugees.

My nephew, Deniz, an unexpected and beloved addition to the family. I held him in my arms when he was a few weeks old. The next time I see him, he'll be walking. I wonder what language he'll be speaking? I wonder how he'll greet me, with arms open or with his head turned away.

II.

He wasn't my first boyfriend (that distinction went to Warren McDonald just a few months later in kindergarten), but Willie Johnson was the first boy who had a crush on me. This was probably during the waning months of the sixties, only nine years after the Fairfax County school system began to desegregate. Willie was one of

two Black kids in our class. We were supposed to be learning to tie shoes, but I'd learned that when I was three, so when Willie offered to tie my shoes for me I let him. Our teacher caught him bowed down, a suppliant tying my shoe. She yelled at us, and threatened to spank me if I let Willie tie my shoes again. I still don't know what it was that upset her: a Black boy stooped over and subservient to the blond white girl or a white girl and Black boy play-acting an interracial romance. Was she trying to protect him or me?

Later in Korea, after my divorce, I ended up becoming involved to varying degrees with three Black men. Whenever I was out with them, the Koreans gave us little attention. I assumed they'd much prefer a Black man be with me, a blond foreigner, than with a Korean woman.

At least two of those American men are still in Asia with no desire to return to the US. Better to be an outsider and a foreigner than to be a Black man in America. The third man was an American who'd emigrated from Trinidad. Once I met him and suggested we take a walk along the wooded paths behind the campus where I worked. He looked at me strangely and followed. In my country, he said, a woman would never invite a man to go into the woods with her.

What I had imagined as safe and neutral—a walk in the woods—he saw as an invitation weighted with danger.

III

My father was the middle of five children who grew up on a small farm in Possum Valley, Arkansas. Nicknamed Cotton-top for his white blond hair, my father didn't see his first flush toilet until he was twelve. As a boy he'd search the sky for planes, and when one passed him, he'd shield his eyes and follow it, wondering where it would go.

I suppose I got my wanderlust from him. He loved traveling. Every summer we'd hitch our pop-up camper and hit the road for two weeks, burning through my dad's vacation time. My dad saw all fifty state capitol buildings. After they retired,

my parents traveled to Korea, China, Turkey, Egypt, Israel, Norway, and dozens of other countries. Even when he was a few months from dying, my dad, chemo-free, was itching to get on the road again. He never made it to the next place on his bucket list: Costa Rica.

Even so, I'm sure my dad would have agreed with me: life takes us places we never dream of going.

But before all that traveling and wide-openness was the antebellum family plantation in Georgia, rumored to have been used in filming *Gone with the Wind*, lost after the Civil War. Once or twice I remember my father reminiscing, saying, if only we still had that family plantation, we'd be living the life of Riley.

I said nothing.

I'm haunted not so much by my cowardice but that I don't remember feeling horrified and outraged by what he said.

I owe so much to so many. I try to commit to embracing and forgiving this world.

But until I begin reparations, I will not be able to forgive myself.

Edward Earl S. Braggs

WHY WHAT NOW (ONE LONG QUESTION MARK)

Let me ask you this, America: How can Barack Obama, arguably, one of the most knowledgeable, insightful, graceful, thoughtful,

the coolest president in the history of US presidents be the most hated president in the history of the US Presidency and why-what

why does America's ugly love apartheid hide so easily out in plain view and where, really, is Niggerhead Road, North Carolina and

what, why do horse blinders disallow, disavow the nautical nature of a straight line, fishing line between a 2017 family luxury yacht

full of vacation white, white people pulling out of Charleston Harbor at the exact same time a 1717 sailboat slave ship full of double digit

money niggers is pulling in under a Charleston Harbor moon, and why is it that America will never allow the news reporter to report

that 200 years of slavery hand-made America the richest nation in the world and why and what did John Lennon really mean when

he said "Woman is the nigger of the world" and is that why Hillary Rodham Clinton was designed not to win in 2016 way back in 1776?

Melissa Downes
OF ALL WE SURVEY

The following survey divides fog
from sand, the caress of morning
from the slap of the alarm. The following
survey will announce that all the universities
have closed their doors. Men—whose fat
bodies in thin suits polish leather chairs,
heavy as judgment—promise you business
degrees if all you do is kneel.

This survey is bilingual. This survey shouts
grita; shouts fuego and fogo; shouts mariposa
and borboleta. This survey has witnessed fire
on butterfly wings and cannot stop dreaming.

This survey will serve notice; this survey
will serve as injunction, injection,
indiscretion. I'm tired of politicians—
whether at tea or on leftist vacations—
who benefit from liberal arts educations
and then berate those who teach, those
who learn. Politicians and parents insist
on the importance of making children
a proper workforce: do not play with
one's food, one's words, one's mind.
A widget is a terrible thing to waste
an education on. Do not breathe wheat,
sun, and thought; do not challenge
someone else's gods or one's own; never
vote anything but what one's father's
father's father did. Meanwhile, rich men,
wrinkled as old dollars, pay off lobbyists
with casino chips and lotto tickets and scroll
Cayman bank accounts—a little drool
at the creased mouth as the zeros line up
behind them, as they know that they can
always get more if they close another college,
starve another town, tell another grand story
of America and all our fine, thin, smoky dreams.

This survey will determine why tomorrow
and what tomorrow looks like and where
you might be when it happens. Please close
your eyes and press yes. This survey will rock
your children to sleep once you die a hero
in the war we are expecting next Tuesday,
though full statistics have not yet been
determined: we need to find a new
word for lie, for patriot, for weapons
of mass distraction.

Survey says that dawn is the best time
to swallow morning and that swallows
drink morning at an alcoholic's rate,
tippling at first and then throwing them
all back down their pink little throats.
This survey wishes it were a swallow,
a robin, a cardinal, a borboleta's fiery wings.

Melissa Downes

HEARTS OF DARKNESS: TEACHING WORLD LITERATURE

I get it, turning a someone into a nothing,
turning a thing into a totem or taboo; I get
investing all your desire and fear in all
the wrong places. I get we have these
lovely brains, prettily twisted and pinkly
coiled that can make sunsets and chords
of tangerine and blood oranges, words
of vermillion, and physics shaded vermouth,
bitters, and grenadine, and yet we lie,
we obfuscate, we deny, we disembowel

as if denial is the righteous red hand of us,
but I still don't get this: I teach it, I study
it, and I still don't get it, though my best
friend laughs at me, that naiveté at the heart
of me that just doesn't get how to look
at an ebony-carved country, shaped
like a heart, and scramble for it, willing
to kill aunts and uncles, daughters, sons,
whole clans and continents across to claim
it, flag it, feel coin in pink palms.

They map it at some conference in 1884
as if everyone owns god-given scalpels
to carve the flesh of a continent into puzzle
pieces, easily pink and blue, lavender and gold,
and I don't get it, the hubris, the more than
casual arrogance of saying everything is black
and white, and everything black is invisible,
and I can walk 1000 miles and call it mine
and many millions dead is nothing— miasma,
mirage, malarial febrile hallucination,

and I wonder—if 150 years ago
righteous men and women could
knit and sip and scalpel and burn
villages and feel the righteous red
hand as it rocked empty cradles rightly,

then what are we blinking at? How many
thousand miles of dead do we divide
into pieces to be claimed, traded, and sold
while we measure the days with calipers
and knit black wool in quiet rooms?

EDITOR'S CHOICE

Steve Ramirez

EL MAQHREB AL AQSA

It was only a few days ago that I first came to Morocco. Tangier seemed stark and white yet wonderful as it appeared all at once along the hills that plunged into the Strait of Gibraltar. Looking back from where I had come, I could see the mountains of Andalusia in the distance. I checked my watch as I walked up the hill and away from the harbor. It was half past twelve in the afternoon Moroccan' time; I had just arrived and I was already late. We were to meet at the Zoco Chico at twelve and although I had received good directions from her letter, I was not at all sure how long it would take to get there.

The crowds of people who choked the streets of Tangier were oppressive in the midday heat, and I was left with the loneliness that I always felt when surrounded by a humanity who cares little for my existence, and for whom I care even less. I have always known that someday I would die alone. My arrival in Morocco did nothing to change that knowledge.

I can see her clearly now, looking back through my mind's eye, just as she was then. I had ridden the Metro each day since my arrival in Rome. I was used to the cave-like feeling as I descended the steps, underground, under the throb of the Eternal City, under history. Waiting for the next train, standing in line at the station, side by side with the workers and the pickpocket gypsies and the transvestites and somebody's mother visiting from the country; it was always the same people with different faces.

I will never forget that morning, the morning I first saw her. I was hanging on to the strap at the front of my train car and through the glass I saw her hanging on to the strap in the back of the car ahead of me. When I first looked up she was looking at me through the glass. She smiled at me as if she had known me forever, as if she

could see through me, as if she had been searching for me and had somehow stepped on the wrong car.

Rome was full of beautiful women, but for me, she was different, and although I didn't know why, I knew it was true all the same. Her black hair tumbled down along her neck and across her shoulders. Her dark eyes held me in that moment, and as if it were our own true history I could see her in my arms, and feel her breathing in the night, and watch her wake in the early morning half-light, and the train stopped, and the door opened, and she was gone. I had to find her.

I don't know how it is that I began on this foolish journey, this obsession. Throughout my life, almost every person I have ever loved has been a woman. Every one ended the same way-with me cut and bleeding, my spirits spilling among the stones. Each one gave me hope of some simple kindness, some compassion, some form or fashion of love, some taste of passion, but it was always a lie. Still, I starved for her touch, reaching for her in the darkness, waiting to hear her breathing next to me in the night. I knew if she were with me that my own darkness would leave me, and I wanted it to leave me and leave me always. And, then there I was, sitting alone in an empty café trying to find something to believe in, something to hold on to, a reason to keep breathing.

In time, I pulled it together, just enough to keep stepping forward. It seems as if all my life I have been in pain. In time, my pain became anger and then it became a wall, protecting me, stone-like, surrounding what was left, inside. My anger became ability, and training, and direction. My anger became a deep port to which I set sail and that is when I began to make my living killing other people. How ironic that they were all men, like me.

In my first war I killed them from far away. I saw their muzzle flashes in the dark and returned more than they gave. And then we made the rush across the desert and into the trenches and I saw their dead faces and twisted elbows and jutting arms in the black, wet, sand. And, I could smell them dead deep inside my nostrils. So many times that smell would return to me, the smell of dead burning flesh and bile, and the smell of what I had done. That night, that first time, I stood

there with the corpses of young men who looked like me. I stood there secretly hoping that none of my bullets found their mark. I knew then that the dead faces would come back to me-that they would follow me. In the night, they would visit me, and I would wake up screaming and gasping for air with hot tears rolling down my screaming cheeks, and then I would lie there alone in the dark. I wasn't angry anymore; I was afraid.

In those first days after my first war I was afraid to go to sleep. I would stay up reading or drinking alone in the darkness hoping that the sun would rise and they would not find me. But they always found me because I could not stay awake and I could not run fast enough in my dreams to get away from myself. So, I went to the doctor and she sent me to another doctor and he made me relive the bent elbows and half-closed eyes and the dark sand and after a while they did not visit me as often.

From my anger, I had learned a trade. I used it to go after them-not the young men in the trench who like me were there because someone told them it was their duty. They, like me, never wanted this life-of-death. They, like me, only wanted to hear the birds sing in the early morning half-light and see the sun setting over their homeland. War is a deep and meaningless maze that once in, you never escape...even in your dreams.

Still, the life I'd come to know taught me that some monsters are real. And so, I went after those who killed more of their own tribe than mine, not because I found any value in the killing, but rather, I found purpose in the saving. And every time I pulled the trigger and felt the recoil in my shoulder and inhaled the sweet smell of burning powder, I could feel the bullet pass through me.

The first time I saw into those dark eyes it was a young Jihadi killer. He was hunting me, so I hunted him. That's how you save yourself, and all the others. We were about the same age, him and me, but unlike the dead faces of my first war, his eyes were already dead so when he hit the ground, I felt nothing. We could have been friends if not for the hate. I did not hate him, but I knew him, and so I shot him. I

heard his last breath again and again in my dreams. My life was not my own anymore-perhaps it never was.

I was always the man who held the door open, who said please and thank you and smiled as people passed me by, but they were different. They were the ones who killed the innocent and blamed it on God. For me, they became cruel insects to be stepped on and step on them I did. I killed them in back alleys and along ancient roads lined with date palms. And they visited me again when I slept but I didn't care as much as before because now I would keep killing them when they came. I killed them and killed them until they stayed dead in my dreams.

At first, I couldn't find her, and she haunted my thoughts and weakened my resolve. I would find myself walking the streets of Rome searching the crowds for her face. Once I thought I saw her along the Veneto and again in Villa Borghese, but it was only a woman with long black hair. Still I found myself ridiculous in my obsession, always watching, waiting, and hoping it was her. And then I saw her. She was looking straight through me as though she were waiting for me at the last of the Spanish steps. We smiled, and I kept walking down past the Italians playing guitar and the vendors of gelato, and without knowing how it happened we were standing together, smiling at each other, and I said in English, "it's you!" She touched me gently and said, "Salaam."

When we made love, it was natural, primal, driving, it was timeless. And I could feel her breathing and hear her heart beating through her body and into mine until it wasn't there anymore because there wasn't any me or any her, there was only us. And I would look down at us, together, through her inverted valley toward the raindrops upon her breasts, and when I tasted her she tasted like the sea. And I'd feel us moving as one, trebling and grasping, holding the moment, desperate that it never leave. And then we'd lay together, our bodies wrapped in twisted linen, staring at the ceiling, trying to breathe and laughing out loud because life was so good. This was the beginning of the end of my pain and my anger, of my trade and of my

aloneness. It left me when she found me and for now, I was happy. I was the little boy that I had never been.

We walked together in the evening through Villa Borghese. We sat in the park and I held her hands. They were lovely and perfect, and they fit inside mine. I couldn't stop smiling across the table, over the wine, into her dark passionate eyes. And she would smile at me as if she were hungry, and touch my hand gently, running her fingers along my thumb, my arm, and inside of me. We made love from a distance and sometimes I would feel sorry for everyone else. That was then before she went away and took with her my spirit, my hope, my joy. The little boy hid in the closet, in the darkness, inside himself, alone, again.

It was raining the night that she left me. I remember taking the taxi along the cobble stone roads and thinking to myself that I hated every stone, every rain drop, everyone. That was the night that I remembered to hate God. That was the first night that the faces came back with their twisted dead elbows and their stinking black sand, and I found myself gasping for air, with hot tears rolling down my screaming cheeks.

When she left me, she did it first with her eyes. I saw in them something different, something left unsaid. At first, I pretended I did not know. I saw myself disappearing from her life: a photo missing from the wall, a letter in the waste basket, a touch unreturned. When we made love, she came back to me. As we laid together looking at the ceiling and breathing heavy and relaxed in each other's arms, I told myself that everything was fine and that my life would be as happy as it has ever been, but I knew I was lying.

The letter that told me she was gone was missing the tenderness I had come to know in her writing. It lacked the stamped wax seal she once put upon each envelope and the drawings she used to place between the lines. It was clean and straight and empty. It only said that she had to go, it never told why, and I hated every word, and every blot of ink, and I hated myself. I sat there on the edge of the empty bed with tears running down my broken cheeks. I sat there alone in the dark

with no where to go, not knowing what to do next, with nothing but that empty, hollow aloneness that kills a man from within.

When the telephone rang, and I heard his voice I knew then that it was time for me to pull myself together. I met him at the café across from the embassy. He ordered a cappuccino. I had a double espresso. I noticed his gentle white fingers and his nervous tick and in short order I decided that he was a gutless pussy and an errand boy. He handed me the documents and the photos, and I read them silently. When he could stand the silence no longer he asked me if I had any questions. I told him not any that he could answer. I got up and walked out.

It was a long flight to Kano and we flew low over the Sahara so that I could see every dune, each drifting toward some imaginary seashore. On occasion, I would see a road always leading to some date palms surrounding encampments where they either trained killers or watered camels depending on the owners of the tents. As we drew closer to Nigeria the desert became more broken and soon I could see a few trees scattered among the rocks. The plane floated lower toward the airport and below I could see corrugated tin roofs and crumbling mud walls. Here I was once again walking across a tarmac in the scorching desert heat into one of the many shitholes where this world stores its biggest turds.

I picked him out right away. He had that look of someone who was glad you made it but unhappy to see you. I knew why the fear was in his face. He was worried that if he helped me that he might go to hell too. He wanted to get rid of me as soon as possible before he could become one of the damned, guilt by proxy.

I found myself watching as a large black vulture as it circled in the warm air high overhead. I began to consider how much its life was quite like my own, always alone, looking at but never truly a part of the goings on, sometimes soaring yet without anyone to share it with, only to come together with others of my kind when struggling for the few scraps which life may offer from time to time.

And there I was lying flat upon the rooftop in the baking sun with my rifle, waiting for the bastards to come. The rifle was not special. It was an M-4 lower with a modified upper in 7.62. It had a fluted, brushed stainless match-grade barrel and a good scope and a better trigger. The whole kit broke down and fit nicely into my backpack and if I rubbed dirt in my hair and picked my nose as I walked the dusty backstreets I looked more Peace Corps than Marine Corps. Everything is always working out, I told myself.

I'm not a patient man. I've always hated the waiting. I try to keep my mind busy so I won't think too much about how I got here, or where I've been, or where all this is going. Sometimes I let my mind wander back to hunting with my grandfather in the Texas Hill Country. I remember the first time I shot a dove and how he slapped me on the back and smiled as we ran up to it under the mesquite tree. I remember how when we got there I saw that it was still alive and how all happiness left me; I owned it now, the death I caused. In time, I learned that it was all a part of it, life and death, and I marveled at how the men laughed around the fire-pit, and how the stars came out, and how life went on, and how I wasn't sad anymore as we ate the doves wrapped in bacon with jalapeno peppers inside.

As I was lying on the roof I took out the book that the old man gave me in the first war. I met him while on patrol in the village. Sometimes we would hand out candy to the kids and they would follow us and laugh. Sometimes the kids would warn the insurgents that we were coming and then all I could see was that dove looking at me.

When I met the old man, it was different. He was a bookseller and a teacher, and he had the same kind, smiling eyes as my grandfather. I never doubted him. I loved him. There was no difference between us. His hands and my hands clasped naturally as we greeted each other, saying said, "Salaam," as we touched our hearts. We had the same heart. His Arabic and my English heard the same sadness and joy. We both dreamed of love and woke to war. We both wished for poetry and found pain. Perhaps Allah and Jesus loved us both, or at least perhaps the universe loved him, and forgave me. I don't know.

He wore a rough textured gray robe with a knitted cap on his head, and each day I would check on him to make sure he was safe. I feared for him because he loved me. Our interpreter would help us speak with each other, but we really didn't need words-just like my grandfather and me. I wished we could go dove hunting together, the old man and me. It was a foolish dream...I knew he would never kill something as lovely as a dove.

One day he smiled when I came by to check on him and he pressed a small colorful book into my hand. I looked at the book and I looked at his hands, they were both like soft leather. He said it was called, "The Gift." It was all in Arabic, so I couldn't read it, but when I found her and she found me she translated some of the poems for me and wrote them in English beside the Arabic and she didn't laugh at me when sometimes I would think of the old man and cry. They killed him. That's what they do. They kill everything that is kind. And now, I kill them back. Still, nothing seems to kill the deep, hollow, empty inside me. Nothing except the smile of an old man, and some words upon a page.

I carried the Gift with me always. On the roof of the building I rested in the shadows of the ornate wall surrounding the flat hot surface. I took the book out of my pack and touched it feeling its soft leather cover, its fragile yellowed pages. Whenever I did I thought of the kind old man. And, when I saw her writing inside it I thought of her, and it hurt. Nothing hurts as deep as empty. And then I would read, "Stay close to any sounds that make you glad you are alive." I could hear the birds singing. I saw white clouds drifting over me shaped like horses with their necks outstretched and their tails flowing behind them. I wanted to ride away on their backs. I felt wetness in the corner of my eyes. I wished I was home again, fishing in the Texas hills. I wished I could undo the world.

It was just coming on dusk when I first saw the bastards walking out of a tea house on the edge of town. It was too easy. Shooting him wasn't the tough part, getting out of there was. Still, I had always managed in the past. I let them enjoy each others company a while as they walked along the ally and then when they walked into the zone I applied pressure to the trigger. My hands were always steady

in these moments and the bullet ripped through the base of his skull and entered the shoulder of the bastard he was embracing. It was done, and it was time to go. That's what you get when you're a bastard who kills a 72-year-old doctor who only came to help.

The boys did a good job getting me into an old Toyota and down the dirt roads into the desert and on to the airstrip. When the plane lifted off I could see the mango trees looking dark green against the red African dirt. The tin roofs looked silver and red because they were dirty too. I was covered in it too: red dusty African dirt.

When finally, I made it back to Rome I took a taxi back to my flat. It was raining again, and I started hating the cobble stones and the rain drops and even God. And then as if nothing had happened I was sitting alone eating some pizza rustica I had bought from a street vendor and drinking Frascati. That's when I saw her letter in the stack of mail that was waiting for me when I returned. I recognized the red wax seal on the envelope and her lovely writing. I remembered her small drawings along the margins and the soft, perfect way she formed her letters. I cried that big sobbing kind of cry that men have when they feel that it's over and they just pretended to be alive because they do not know what else to do... except keep breathing.

She asked me to come to Morocco and I did. That is what had become of me, the mighty warrior. I had lived so many dangerous days and nights. So many times, I should have died and so many times I didn't care, but this was different. Now my heart pounded through my chest and I could barely breathe.

Once, for a moment in time I had been truly happy, truly whole. Now as I rounded the corner to the Zoco Chico I wondered, could it all be over...the dead faced dreams and sleepless nights; the heartbreakingly lonely days wandering the streets with no where to go, no place to call home? The many times I have been so sick of the pain and the dead faces and what I had become that I sat there on the edge of the bed with my pistol in my hand, wondering.

When I first looked across the road toward the café she was looking at me through the red dust. She smiled at me as if she had known me forever, as if she could see through me, as if she had been searching for me and I had somehow stepped into the wrong life. I kept walking down passed the Moroccan's begging for alms and passed the water vendors, and without knowing how it happened we were standing together, smiling at each other, and I said in English, "it's you!"

She took my hand and for the first time in a long time I was breathing again. I felt her perfect hand in mine and it fit just as it always had, as if it was created for mine. We walked briskly down a narrow ally under the drying cloth and past the baskets filled with spices. I couldn't stop smiling and I told her that I loved her, and she smiled at me but didn't reply.

We came to a red door on a white wall and she opened it. There was no one else in the ally. We walked together, her walking in front, up the dark narrow stairwell. I could not hold her hand anymore on account of the dark narrow stairs and the fact that she was no longer looking at me. I was thinking of how desperately I wanted to make love to her, to feel our bodies together as before, to feel alive and whole again. I felt the little boy inside me... hopeful. And that is when she opened the next door and they seized me by the arms and throat.

They wore black cloth across their faces and I knew them all too well from my dead faced dreams. They strapped me into a chair and I saw her leaving the room and heard her footsteps descending the narrow stairs toward the street and the sunlight. They beat me for a while with their fists and choked me with a raw hide strap, but it did not hurt me because I was already dead inside. She had killed me when she turned and walked away. I saw one of them pull a knife from his belt and I knew what was coming next, but it didn't matter because I wasn't breathing anymore, not really. As he started to cut my throat I wondered how she could love me with all her heart and all her soul and all her warm and wanting body... and not be here for my last gasps of air.

And then, I saw her in the market buying pomegranates. And then I felt a hand press against mine, it felt like soft leather. The old man smiled, and I smiled

back and we embraced and warm tears of joy rolled down our cheeks. And then he touched me gently and said, "Salaam." I smiled and gazed into his young-old eyes and said, "Salaam." "Peace." It was then that I realized that loving kindness never dies, alone.

Rachel Heimowitz

THE DESERT OF RED

Like a sunrise strengthened
from a morning, gray and strange,

in air after sand, after rain. Red
hills as unknowable

as a risen sun captured
in a kiln, in the ceramic pot

of some Canaanite believer,
kidney beans boiled and sold, a birth-

right to the highest bidder. That
same sun, baked and beaten,

thousands of pounds of camel
feet, soft as chalk, blood

oranges purled in milk.
A broken promise

like an umbilical cord,
pumped, cut and dying.

Not the red of wine
or love, but the failure

of true pink, the pigment
of breath, my breath, red,

the red of a face full
of passion, the color punched

in before the bruise rises. This
stone kneaded to fineness

with a rusted hammer and a chisel
of silver, veins

turned inside out,
the platelets caught inside

my eye, that globe
where tears are born.

Rachel Heimowitz

EVENING WALK NEAR JERICO

A shofar-shaped moon and stars that sparkle
like teeth, slit-exposed from deep
between your darkneses. Seven bats
can dance, can swirl seven circles around security
lights, can fly seven times towards blindness,
the forward explorer, the rearward failure and peace,
a silent light between raised wings that transforms
black bodies into phosphorescent butterflies.

Why not? In this oasis anything is possible.

Seven bats might cry, locked in moonlight; my voice
in the night with no echo; a sickle moon
that can't sever the dark space between our nations,
and no sound yet loud enough
to force these ancient walls to dust.

CUTTHROAT DISCOVERY POET



Erin Coughlin Hollowell

lives at the end of the road in Alaska. In 2013, Boreal Books published her first collection *Pause, Traveler*. Her second collection *Every Atom* is forthcoming in April 2018 from Boreal. She's been awarded two Rasmuson Foundation Fellowships, a Connie Boochever Award, and an Alaska Literary Award. Her work has been most recently published in *Prairie Schooner*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Sugar House Review*, and was a finalist for the 49th Parallel Contest for the *Bellingham Review*.

Erin Coughlin Hollowell
JANUARY

Rain thunders on the metal roof all day, while I consider your words.
Orion, a January night's companion for a brilliant waltz.
On a box of Christmas ornaments, my father's handwriting fading.
Winter rain comes knocking on the door of my face, bringing such wild news.
The sky is aswim with ink, branch-sliced and breathing, full of glass and rain.
In the distance, a dog is barking, saying here I am here I am.
Inside the kernel of the seed there is darkness; that's where green begins.
We don't own anything in this world, just our borrowed, banged-up story.
Winter night's scent of wood-smoke and moonlight; ermine prints in the creek bed.
The mountains look so different now that you aren't watching them with me.
All of those lost voices in the silence right before you drift to sleep.
In the sky's dark cupboard, a pale smudge of moon like a leftover bone.
If you live in wingbeats, the path from dawn-gleam to nightfall is always.
To make fire, find air, find fuel, find spark, and learn the story of ashes.
At what point does breath become thought become word become wind become still?
Coyotes sing over the far hill; one voice shivering, then many.
Love is the ocean and the boat, whale-song, muskeg, brilliant stars, and you.
Spun-glass span of ice above the once-puddles glints in the morning sun.

Erin Coughlin Hollowell
FEBRUARY

We told stories because that was all we knew; we fashioned our own myths.
Landscape recalibrating ice to thaw and back again, gray sky day.
Sometimes a heart breaks in so many pieces, we all must help hold it.
We are connected in a thousand ways, roots touch beneath the surface.
The sun glares hard on the carved mountaintops, snow sliced deep by blue shadow.
I am listening to what winter rain has to say about dreaming.
Road ahead under a sliver of moon, frost rattle and thrum of tires.
I've learned water's secret: the dance is in disobeying gravity.
Exhalation of earth, this tumble towards daylight, this birch-scented wind.
These are strange houses our hearts choose to live in, fragile and luminous.
When the dangerously leaning tree comes down, lots more sky and firewood.
Two young moose crossing the dark road will cause a winter night traffic jam.
A storm sweeps in and the mountains disappear, but they still stand solid.
A world of whirl and shush, snow kissing branches, kissing its own white cheek.
We forget to open the box; then we forget that there is no box.
One green strawberry leaf surfaces through melting snow, summertime's ghost.
Magpies gather in the bare alders, a black and white conversation.
All this time traveling, road beneath my feet even when I stand still.

Erin Coughlin Hollowell

MARCH

We must believe there are stars overhead even if we can't see them.
Sunlight so keen it slices cold air and shatters the trees into birds.
Blue sky vaulting over the mountains, rearing like a horse newly loosed.
Branches like narrow train station benches, the drunken snow tumbles off.
Owls duet in the gathering dark and the flicker of sudden moths.
Rhubarb knuckles out of sun-warmed soil, pretending winter is over.
Wearing a dark overcoat fashioned of rain clouds and mountain shadows.
I had lost the words, and turned out every pocket looking for them.
Every emptiness a new opening, a doorway to someplace else.
Moon startle and the mineral scent of melt-water's answering shine.
Long ago a lonely person put words to page, and now you breathe them.
When you're home, you don't need to ask the land for its story; you know it.
Snow swept in with her cold white hands and shushed us to silence and sleeping.
A burst of snowflakes swirled through the air, revelers late to the party.
Night tastes of moon-wind, moth-wing, and the mournful call of a great horned owl.
Along the road, one story that could have been and the story that is.
Porch-light gathers moths, like a dance of soft stars in the mud-scented night.
Finding words scattered, she opened her mouth and invited in some birds.

T. Givón

TALE OF TWO CULTURES

The sad saga of the rise and hoped-for quick demise of our current Whatever-in-Chief brought into sharp relief an older story, one that had been flying just under the national radar for years. It is the story of two cultures that have ceased to communicate, and have over the years grown to viscerally detest each other. The story goes back some distance, more recently to Charles Murray's "Coming apart", Joseph Stiglitz's "The Great Divide", or J.D. Vance's "Hillbilly Elegy". Tho one may go back a bit further.

In the early 1980's, my friend Ed Sadalla, a social psychologist at ASU, conducted a simple-minded study. He recruited a socially diverse group of subjects and asked them the following question: Given the two diets below, which one do you prefer: (1) a health-food diet (lots of fruits and vegetables, grilled or stir-fried fish or chicken, fruit juices of skim milk, whole-wheat bread or brown rice). Or (2) an all-American diet (deep-fried or mashed potatoes, steak, sweet sodas, white bread, fatty milk products).

Dividing the original group into two sub-groups according to their food-preference, my friend then proceeded to ask them for their: (a) preferred alcoholic-beverage (wine vs. beer); (b) preferred music (jazz or classical vs. country or pop); (c) education level (highschool diploma or less vs. one or more college degrees); (d) employment (blue-collar vs. white-collar or beyond); (e) politics (liberal vs. conservative). When the responses were analyzed, the results were rather striking: Preference for the all-American diet correlated almost perfectly with less education, blue-color employment, and preference for beer, country music and conservative politics. And the converse with the health-food diet. What my friend had demonstrated was the clustering of major features that, to this day, define the two main American sub-cultures. For his pains he also received the Golden Fleece

award from then-senator William Proxmire (D-Wisc.), bestowed upon the most useless government-funded study of the year.

More than a decade earlier, in 1967, Lila and Henry Gleitman, two psychologists at Penn, conducted a study on the major dialect boundary in American English (measured by several grammatical features), as correlated to level of education. Their subjects were divided into four groups: (a) secretaries; (b) lower-division undergraduates; (c) upper division undergraduates; and (d) graduate students. The major dividing line, it turned out, grouped the secretaries and lower-division undergraduates on one side, and the upper-division undergraduates and graduate students on the other. Your education level, it seemed, correlated with the American dialect you spoke. It took at least two years of college to cross the divide. Among Democrats, locally and nationally, it has become a favorite pass-time to pick the reason for the disastrous results of the last national elections, with much finger-pointing and gnashing of teeth. The various beefs that right-thinking Democrats have with Trump's core constituency (Hillary's 'deplorables', a.k.a. Rednecks) are, alas, only too familiar.

Having lived among the Rednecks on and off for 45 years now, I happen--unlike most of my over-educated friends and fellow travelers--to share some of their background: back-breaking childhood labor on the farm, high-school dropout, 3 years of military service, love of Bob Wills' fiddle, fatal infatuation with firearms, a passion for horses and Stetson hats.

The fact that I spent much of my working life in and out of universities obviously makes a difference. But unlike most over-educated Rednecks (as my wife is fond of calling me), I have remained bi-cultural and bilingual, and have retained my sympathy for this depressed minority who work with their hands, live on the land and drive on the gravel, and who have largely been left behind by our complex, fast-moving, urban culture and economy. I may not always share their politics, but I still feel their pain.

What is more, I suspect that one of the most decisive reasons why a toxic sociopath now occupies the White House is the fatal inability of educated liberal

America to understand where our Redneck come from, what ails them, why they voted the way they did, and why it is so easy for the rich and powerful, those who own our politicians and rule our lives, to re-direct the anger and frustration of working-class America toward us rather than against them.

I am also old enough to remember the tale of Weimar Republic of 1918 -1933, where much of the blame for Hitler's phenomenal rise can be laid at the feet of the German Socialists and Communists, their incessant sectarian bickering, their nit-picking Marxist dogmas, and their inability--just like ours--to communicate with their Rednecks. The German left didn't get their Rednecks' number, but Hitler did. He spoke their language, felt their pain.

What we have here, just like what they had in Weimar Germany, is an acute failure of cross-cultural communication. They don't understand--and feel put down by--our language and cultural choices. We don't understand--and often deride and condescend to--theirs.

You may not recall the old cartoon-strip Pogo, but I will always cherish one installment from way-way back. Its logo was: "We have met the enemy, and he's us". The same idea can be found, in a more gentle form, in both the Hebrew Bible and the Gospels: "Remove the beam from between your eyes before you propose to remove a speck from your friend's eye".



Fighting For Space, mixed media

Ann Phong

Patricia Jabbeh Wesley
HOLD ON

Hold on to your heads, the wind is blowing.
Hold on to the hats on your heads,
the wind is blowing.
Hold on to your heads over your shoulders,
the wind is blowing.
Hold on to your shoulders under your heads
holding on to you.
Hold on, the brain is fragile in the wind
of lies, the shock of lost morals,
and suddenly, our brains are flying
away from us. Hold on, hold on, the escalator
is coming to an end.
Hold on, the sail is blowing in the wind.
Waves, rolling against other waves?
Hold on, hold on to your heads,
we have become like captives at sea.
We have been ambushed like war-weary
refugees, our rags, dashed on muddy roadsides.
Hold on to yourself, something
has broken loose. The unbuckling
of steel against steal, hold on to your
heads, this is a country of captives.
This is a country of captives.

Naomi Shihab Nye
Travel Ban

If only Iraq

and Afghanistan

had said

no Americans.

Anita Endrezze

THE MOLOTOV COCKTAIL OF LOVE AND FEAR

Politician Ted Cruz said he wanted to bomb them until the sand
glowed. The president wants to bomb the shit out of people.

Look, the stars are boxed up.
Even snow is in a glass globe.
You don't know the world.

Here, the seacalm is an iris blue field.
On the other side there was napalm
but I wasn't invited
to that party when everyone marched
over the water with their salt boots.

When I was young
I had a lover afraid of horses
and doors, so I made my moony body into a key
and lather-rode into his nightmares,
hoping he'd wake up love-brave.
But he left, fear spurring him.

If you open the box
and stars swarm out like bullets
I'll drink all your darkness deep.
I'll drink to forget how we lost the light.
I'll swallow ecstasy
until the world is turned twirly updown
and outside in.
How else to make sense
of this life when babies
are boiled by gas.

We hand wring our fingerbones,
worrying about dictators with ego bombs.
The party is over. Or it's just begun.
The generals put on their party clothes.
Ships are asea,
with penile missiles and stars that will explode
inside skin boxes
with foreign names.

Dictators are afraid of projectile dysfunction
and small small hands.
They know the world is up for grabs
yet fear fear they can't hold on.
They chew beautiful slices
of death.

The innocents scream prayers
but generals put the godspirit
in grenades. We're all in a dark place.
Boxes or coffins. See the ashes
swirling in this globe. Sand glowing
in the dark. Shit falling from the sky.

Everything has eyes. The heavens
with the stars of the dead,
the trees in roseate bomb light,
the grasses that grow from lost bones.
We thought love was stronger.
We see that life is a dirty bomb.

Damn the blind gods.

Anita Endrezze

PRESIDENTIAL INTERVIEW: THE DONALD OF ALL BOMBS

1

The world is a beautiful chocolate cake.
Brilliant missiles light up the cake.

59 missiles. Make a wish and blow
it all up. Grin and eat cake.

We need more bombs!
My factory makes em! Smash the cake!

Big bombs. Beautiful death. Hugely sums
of profit, icing on the my cake.

NATO is not obsolete. China doesn't manipulate
currency but they make terrible terrible! rice cake.

Cut the arts! Cut the food programs!
It's not good for children and old people to eat cake.

2

After a weekend of golf and small balls,
let's send a 21,000 lb non-nuclear bomb to cake

the whole area in blasted dust. My ratings
will go up bigly. I'll take ALL of the cake.

I don't have small hands. My bombs are huge.
Syria or Iraq or Afghanistan. Those people don't eat cake.

I won the election. The media is a stink bomb.
Obama hid "wiretaps" in my chocolate cake.

I'm President.
You're not. Don't eat my cake.

Anita Endrezze
ENIGMAS

There are contradictions
in sunlight, the way it touches
a gassed child
as well as a yellow rose.

Everything is a riddle,
like turning your favorite shirt
inside out and finding
dark feathers.

This is my heart, a secret moon.
Distant blue mountains
float above the Salish Sea.
My shadow is growing old.

There is a paradox
in the water washing
the dead child
for the afterlife.

We are on our knees.
A puzzle with no solution.
We raise guns and aim.
We lift palms and pray.

A weary poem made of flesh
and bone.
Look into my eyes, beloved.
When does it end?

Victoria Hodge Lightman
IF THE SHOE FITS

She was proud of her new Fendi booties. Half sock, half high-heeled shoe. She struggled only slightly pulling them on, no zippers, no laces, no Velcro, just the sock to keep them in place. One of the decorative elements, a fake shoe lace up the front, gave the impression of high-topped sneakers. Dove gray, cabled knit, with horizontal stripes around the top, several inches above her ankles, kind of like fisherman's sweater meets 1970's basketball socks. The shoe bed felt sturdy enough; instep support would be important as she climbed the steps; there were always steps.

The boot part of the shoe was decorated with faux needlepoint flowers, so feminine. Nice chunky heels, only three-and-a-half inches high, had red and white vertical stripes. She had to avoid spiky heels these days as a strategy for climbing metal-grated steps, all cameras pointed at her, waiting for her to trip climbing aboard Air Force One, like in a runway model mishap. It would be all over the media in a split second, looping over and over. No, it would not be her. She would not be the clown in this scenario.

The other fun fact about these booties—they satisfied her passive aggressive tendencies. She knew her husband would find them distasteful; but as always, he walked two paces ahead, never lending an arm in case she should teeter on the fuck-me pumps he preferred women to wear. He wouldn't notice these until too late. Maybe not until he saw the recap on Fox News. And by that time, she would be safe on her own floor in the NYC Trump Tower. By that time, she'd be in her sweatpants and Ugg slippers, halfway through a bottle of Pinot Noir, her phone set to vibrate, the door to her private elevator locked.

Only four more years, her new mantra. She squinted down at her feet, pleased that these Fendi's obeyed the letter of the law, if not the intent, that didn't violate the prenuptial agreement. Soon, so soon, she'd be free to fade away like the other ex-wives—even though she'd have to leave the child behind with the father

who, like Rumpelstiltskin, would exact his loathsome payment in return for her precious freedom.

America should be so lucky.

Willie James King
I WENT HOME

I spent time
in Selma today.
I returned home,
remembering,
and I am still
remembering

the lumber company
where father worked
as a de barker

for over 30-years
without ever missing
a day. It took that long,
such persistence; then

the nursing home
where mother cared
for so many wasting away,
no different.

I drove back across
that infamous bridge
where gravity's
turgid undertow
brought tears,

the silent kind
no amount of sun
can cure, no
clearing
in sight.

I spent time
in Selma, Lord,
I went home.

Willie James King
ON EDGE

It stuns me when folk think
America is in a terrible condition
worse than ever before. Imagine,
four hundred years of slavery, and
it exists now, if you are attentive,
you can see. Imagine having
to be separated from your family,
as family meant nothing then
when there was a Trump behind
every hedge, tree, ready to lop
off the limb of an attempted escapee
those singing praise songs of hope
to no avail but a noose, shot gun blast,
dogs and horses trained on them
none like what occurred in Selma,
wearing the same old cotton-
smelly clothes, day-in, day-out. You
think these are scary times now. When
all that matters to you, concerns you,
when one's life does not depend
on the end-of-the world. It depends
on now! Folk grow numb daily
dealing with bullshit, bigotry, who'd
rather give up all before bending
to kiss one's ass like politicians, per se.
I am not bothered in the least bit by none
of this absurdity. How long can one exist
in a state of being alarmed? Remember
those horrible accounts of our Civil War?
Remember the Indians, their travails?
Things fester, come to a head. Trump
and Ben Carson both are as American-made
as can be. Sometimes, I the equate the tales
of slaves to what cops are doing now.
Are there different manifestations
of terrorism? If so, please,
would someone name them? This
is merely seeking what I would
like to know, now that it seems
that everyone's life is on edge.

Willie James King
I WILL NOT FORGET

When my older siblings
walked out of school
to join the ranks of every other
youngster marching for freedom,
mere children witnessing
what no children should have
to witness, endure, like cattle prods,
teargas, sheriffs who had no care
for their well being, I knew then,
as each day, my mom and dad
gathered us for prayer, to pray for them,
in case they never made it back
to us again. I remember.

It was like a world divided then,
I saw white folk, and like them,
we all pretended not to see each other.
Thanks to my hardworking parents,
I didn't have to deal with them until
long after I had graduated from high
school, gone out into the world.
It was then that I witnessed racism.
But, by then, I had the heart of
an African King who had grown up
on another continent. My siblings
were awesome! I had that air
of arrogance, good, or bad, that
wouldn't allow me to be wounded
by them then, not even now.

Michael Wasson

NOTES FROM ONE[INDIGENOUS] BOY TO AMERICA

1. Forgive me for I have something to say
2. Everything is in the language we use. – Layli Long Soldier [This means the world to me]
3. 13:34, it's raining again
4. First of all, I'm quite shy [so I'll try my best]
5. I mark the white page & erase what dark I've made
6. Let me begin again
7. I watch my people arrested at night
8. What I saw: their wrists gleaming with moonlight
9. 'anoqónma, my uncle says / meaning, indigenous
10. Question: are there enough metaphors to sink the world? Or to keep it moving?
11. Sometimes, standing in the rain makes me feel more alive—why is that?
12. My cousin has two long braids that reach down his body—& for that, I'm so happy
13. See your mouth—our lips want nothing but to be this red
14. The whole world was water once / don't you remember?
15. 21:07, I want my mother / to know I love her
16. Bones speak / bones, speak
17. Stop & listen to the silence between us
18. What might that mean?
19. Some of us are more afraid than others
20. Note to self: every word I've ever spoken was & is laced with water, a burning water
21. Question: have you stared at your fingerprints in the window?
22. Immediate thought: the only proof of your humanity / sometimes / that you were here
23. How might we prove we're really alive? / Too deep? Too soon? Maybe.
24. Let them say: the dead coded you like this: hidden in your fingertips
25. Touch me / I promise I'm only a body with a heart beating
26. With enough loss / of light / you see yourself / in the glass
27. Note to self: every ghost in your bones moves you
28. That's life / sometimes
29. My student / who wrote notes in Sharpie to himself on his arms / died of thirst in a field
30. Internet comment duly noted: we won the war so shut the hell up
31. You were made flesh from so many
32. (-continued-) rifle blows

33. Another internet comment: let the dogs eat them DAMN DOG EATERS
34. Have you looked in the mirror & said: you are a graveyard
35. I have
36. I warp the mirror only by standing there / only by thinking of you, America
37. Touch yourself in the dark (any way necessary) because you are
38. (-continued-) a pleasure to be alive
39. Question: have you heard voices when looking at a puddle of rain?
40. It rained yesterday too
41. Imagine: the rain leaping up from the field / like locusts
42. I made my yáaca' cry from an ocean away / from laughing
43. Because memories of joy between us keep our blood in motion
44. I wanted to know the body / was all we had
45. Trying to remember how my skin felt after someone said: fucking Indians
46. By the way: here you are / my god / Gentle Reader / because I'm praying & you're listening
47. Thank you / qe'ciyév'yew'
48. The loneliest word is the one you have inside you but haven't spoken yet
49. To learn to make love in another language / I cried that night
50. All that was left—bodies remembering—breath, now gone, still wetting the mouth
51. No, the body is built to bear the dead
52. My grandfather's tap water is the best in the world / I swear
53. It's good for your blood, says my uncle [who sees better in his one eye than I can with both]
54. I was made because it was dark—& somebody was missing
55. Undress & stare at yourself / smile / that is you
56. Put your hand to your chest & say something like: a house with everyone inside
57. I'm part monster, part animal, part water, part story, part song, part trickster, always blood
meeting water & sprinkled on the earth
58. You breathe / my heart can't help / but react
59. ... gather the senses, but I say gather your hands, dearly beloved
60. In my mother's tiny red Honda hatchback, the radio plays: dearly beloved, we are gathered here today
61. (-continued-) to get through this thing called life. & I've loved Prince ever since.
62. You are passing through your life, like [a. a season, b. a child playing in limbo, c. a clock,
d. all of the above]
63. In the field, at the massacre site, I wept & wept while my classmates watched
64. Question: do you dream of me?
65. After the rain finishes, I will ask: will you remember me this way?
66. First frost of the year means: yes, even breath touches earth & stays
67. Question: how to clear the air if the air is all your loss?
68. I gave you America what it wanted but I kept something
69. On my mother's Facebook post, I write: to be in this skin is a resistance

70. On my friend's Facebook post, I write: indigenous existence = oxymoron
71. One headphone shorts &—suddenly—the same song is something I've never heard before
72. The sparrows broke across the rice field / leaving behind a naked tree
73. I love you all / I swear
74. Or in other words: 'óykaloo, 'eetx heetiwiise
75. Please: look in my eyes—that's all I ask

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Mary Salisbury

REMEMBERING CARLOS

The white blinds were drawn up and the October sun poured into the room, flickering off the walls and across Carlos on the hospital bed. His arms lay at his sides like branches. Just an hour earlier he had been high up on a ladder, picking Jonathan apples and placing them in a basket.

It was simple for me to picture him at his job, given that I always drove past the orchards on my way to work. Men gathered early, before seven each morning, first light coming up. They would park their cars and pickups in the rows between the trees.

Carlos was still wearing his brown flannel checked shirt, sleeves rolled up, though it was ripped open across his chest. His blue jeans were cuffed around his black work boots. I had just begun my morning shift. A buzz had come from the ER that a young man, a probable quadriplegic, would be coming to us in ICU, and that he would be my patient. Previous patients assigned to me included only heart attacks and strokes.

They wheeled Carlos in on a stretcher, and he had a brace-like halo around his head, holding it just so. A lab-technician said, "A C3 fracture. No movement in any of the four extremities."

Behind the stretcher was a woman. She was heavily pregnant, near the end of her confinement. She appeared scared and lost. She was slight, with brown hair and eyes and skin, and she looked like an immigrant from another time and place. Carlos scanned my eyes, no doubt looking for the answer to what had happened to him. In an attempt to shield him from finding the truth from me, I turned away and asked his wife, "What's your name?"

She spoke in Spanish, a soft unhurried voice, but I spoke only English. "No habla Espanol, I'm sorry," I said, and looked at Carlos, his thick black hair and round face against the white hospital pillow. He had closed his eyes. Between the nurse's aide and two lab-techs, using the small sheet placed under him in the ER, we slid

Carlos from the stretcher to the hospital bed, me protecting his head brace. Next I busied myself adjusting his IV tubing and glanced at the catheter already collecting his urine. I checked the tape holding his tracheotomy tube and set the alarm to high on his ventilator. We log rolled him side to side, as we cut and then removed his clothes, exchanging them for the blue and white hospital gown.

The only thing Carlos could do without assistance was think, or imagine, or, I thought, dream. He could no longer even breathe, but his heart continued to pump like the machine that it was. I wanted to run my finger across his smooth nut-brown cheek, to touch his lips, as if to urge him to speak, to say the one last thing he'd never get to say, but I didn't. I wanted to weep, to cry out, to scream, but instead I pulled open his ER chart.

He was 28 years old, married, his wife's name, Lucia, and she was eight months pregnant. They had a four year-old son, Manuel. Time of injury: 7:58 a.m., on the 21st of October, 1978. A farm-worker, up from California. A legal citizen, employed by Highcrest Orchards, who provided fruit for a mail-order outfit that shipped world-wide, usually at Christmas time. A statement from a co-worker read: "Carlos, he was on the row next to me. Both up on our ladders. The bushel, it was on a little shelf. No talking, just picking. Out the corner of my eye something, it moves, and Carlos, he's falling to the ground. One minute up like me, and next he fell off. He's there in the grass not moving or saying nothing."

One minute and your life can change forever. No. One second, not one minute.

I closed the chart and set it on the bedside table, and asked my head nurse if anyone spoke Spanish.

"Dr. Campanili does," she said.

Dr. Campanili, a quiet dignified man who kept to himself and did his rounds, never engaging in the banter between some of the doctors and other nurses. Respectful but distant was how I saw him. The legend was that when John F. Kennedy was shot a call had come for Dr. Campanili to fly to Dallas, and he had, a brilliant neurosurgeon.

He entered the room now, a man in his early 60's. Slight, olive-skinned and, as always, well dressed in a formal style: pleated pants, sport coat, and a tie. His black shoes held a high shine, and I never once saw his socks.

He picked up the chart and read. I knew to stand ready and not to speak until spoken to. He didn't inspire fear so much as respect. He never raised his voice in anger.

Ignoring me, he began to address Lucia. I couldn't understand what passed between them, but she wept at the end, and I handed her some tissues. Carlos had opened his eyes during this exchange, but shut them again at the sound of her sobbing. I touched his forearm and held my fingers there until Dr. Campanili said, "Nurse, please follow me." I did, and we stood to the side of the long desk of the nurse's station, where rows of monitors blinked green lines on a black screen.

"I want Carlos to be comfortable," he said. "He knows—his wife knows—what the diagnosis is. There will be no change."

I nodded.

"I will call in Father O'Reilly. Carlos is a Catholic and wants a priest."

"Would you like me to call him?"

"No. I need to speak to him myself."

I waited while he wrote his orders on the chart: IV drip—morphine as needed.

Position of comfort.

I returned to the room and found Lucia asleep on the chair by the window. A golden light bathed her face, and her skin glowed like a lantern. I saw her life force and her fecundity, not only in the fullness of her belly, but on her moist open lips. Carlos, by contrast, looked like a man caught in a trap, chained to his equipment like an animal. His terror was palpable and painful to confront. I could see the man he must have been hours before, but I could also see the man he would become. I felt his gaze on me again, and when I turned toward him I began to say things, anything to obliterate the image of his future.

"Carlos, I'm going to be adjusting your IV."

He gave me a long fixed stare.

"I'd like to come back and give you a sponge bath." The dirt and bloodstains from the accident still showed on his arms and hands. I would bathe him while Lucia slept. If she woke she could help me. His eyes followed me and, meeting them, I tried to smile, but it wouldn't come. It felt false. We both just looked into each other's eyes with grim awareness.

I gathered my supplies: a plastic tub filled with warm soapy water, washcloths and towels. I began to gently rub his arms with the warm cloth. His muscles were the muscles of a working man: capable, powerful, firm. I wondered how long before the inevitable flaccidity of paralysis set in. I washed his shoulders and neck, stroking him, willing the warmth of the water to somehow make him better, but there was nothing I could do to make Carlos better.

I moved down to his chest and stomach, moved the blanket off one leg at a time, protecting his privacy, his legs stocky and compact, the color of mahogany. His feet were small, perhaps a size 8. I drained the tub and filled it with fresh water for his face. Sticking my index finger inside the cloth, I massaged around his eyes. I cleaned inside his ears and behind them like a mother would a child.

I was the same age as Carlos, wasn't married, and hadn't thought much about having children yet. I believed I had all the time in the world for that.

The tracheotomy tube hung from the left side of his mouth, and I cleaned around it. I cleaned around his full lips and applied chap stick to them, lips that could still send signals up to the brain if kissed. But his brain was powerless to make his arms move to wrap around the woman he loved, to make his hips move to connect to her hips, to allow his legs to press up against the woman and hold her.

Lucia stirred. I drained the tub and placed the soiled washcloths inside it. Her eyes opened, and for a moment she seemed to be trying to remember where she was. I saw her, so young and alive, her pregnant belly stretching at her shirt as she seemed to remember. She gave Carlos a stricken look.

"I gave him a bath," I said, and she nodded. Then she stood and went to the bed and picked up her husband's hand and stroked it and kissed it and put it to her mouth. I felt as if I were intruding on an act of the greatest intimacy. I left the room.

I felt useless, and it was a new and bitter feeling. My other patients had needs I could meet. Most recovered and moved out to the ward, hearts repaired, injuries from accidents mended.

I took my break in the room reserved for naps or reading. I couldn't face the staff room with my feelings. I sat beside the window that looked out on the parking lot. The view extended across a four-lane divided highway to a tall, straight, two-story house that faced the hospital. It was a white house with two white columns holding up the front porch. A lone Japanese maple, maroon-leafed and magnificent, stood in front; the autumn colors at peak, reds and yellows not yet beginning the shift to decay. The beauty of the scene plunged into me like a sword. The crying felt as natural as the autumn day. I had believed that life stretched endlessly ahead. Now, with a bruised sorrow, I saw life with an unrecognizable clarity: There was fate, there was disaster, and there was uncertainty everywhere.

Cars streamed by, their occupants worried, I imagined, by their own thoughts, some perhaps as simple as what to make for dinner, or if they'd paid their phone bill.

I left the quiet of the reading room and re-entered the ICU. How I hated the hospital in that moment, the billows of the ventilators moving up and down, the drip-drip-drip of the IV chamber. The flash of green light for every heartbeat, the smell of antiseptic fluids. Body fluids and cleaning fluids, the dripping, the humming, the beeping. Where was God in all of this? Where was the Catholic God of Carlos? Where was my God, the one who'd led me here to this work?

I busied myself at the desk, attending to charts and orders and the dull comfort of paperwork. Lucia appeared before me, her face blotchy. She gestured for me to follow her, and I did, back to where Carlos lay. I couldn't meet his eyes. If I did I would become a conduit of his pain. I'm ashamed to say I didn't have the strength for it.

What did they expect from me? Lucia pointed to his tubing, and Spanish words poured out of her. She finished speaking and put her cheek against Carlos, then kissed him fully on the mouth. When she moaned his eye lashes fluttered.

Dr. Campanili walked in and I fled from the room. But soon I was summoned back.

"Lucia wants to end all life support," Dr. Campanili said. "She is certain Carlos does too. I have called in Father O'Reilly."

I said nothing. What was there for me to say? I was just a nurse.

"Yes, doctor." I went to my station to read through the charts of other patients. Their orders were simple, and I could fulfill them. What was I to do about Carlos? Was I going to be a party to this?

Father O'Reilly arrived. He gave Carlos his Last Rites, and then he spoke with Lucia alone for quite a while. When the priest left, Dr. Campanili called me into the room.

"Please close the door," he said. I did as I was told and waited. Lucia held Carlos's hand, stroked his wide shoulders. She rubbed his chest and stomach, the hairs on his chest a deep, rich black. I wanted to cry out, but I held my composure. Dr. Campanili didn't interfere or insert himself by word or deed. It was only when Lucia straightened up that the doctor moved forward. I had made no decision regarding right or wrong, but by my presence, I chose.

"Hello, Carlos," the doctor said. "I am here to do as you asked. May God be with you." He slid the ventilator tube from Carlos' mouth, and turned the breathing machine off. Silence filled the cell-like room. Then Dr. Campanili did something unexpected. He knelt down and began to pray. He said the Lord's Prayer. I began to weep. I knelt down in a corner by the closed door.

Lucia held a red votive candle in the palm of her hand, and turned off the overhead fluorescent light. I wondered where the candle came from. The priest? The room absorbed the muffled sounds that floated in, and became an isolated space cut off from the everydayness of the ICU. Minutes passed. My eyes had adjusted to the darkness—all the blinds closed—and I could make out the rhythmical, but slowing, up and down motion of the gown Carlos wore, his heart monitor still in place, but all alarms turned off. The iridescent green blip came and went and eventually slowed.

Lucia began to sing in Spanish, her voice soft and sweet, as beautiful as a child's. I felt something I had never felt in any church. Death swept into the room like a winter wind. Its ghostly power pulsed through me and settled upon what I believed to be the soul of Carlos.

Silence reigned as the gown moved less and less. Minutes passed. Then the gown stopped moving. Lucia rose and made the sign of the cross over her husband's body. Dr. Campanili stood and placed his stethoscope on Carlos' heart and listened. There was nothing more to hear.

"God bless you, Carlos. God bless you, Lucia," he said. Then he left the room.

Lucia made low keening sounds as she and I removed the patches that were part of the heart monitor. We gently slid the tape away from his mouth where the breathing tube had been. I warmed a washcloth and cleaned his lips, and Lucia kissed Carlos one last time, her belly up against his chest.

After they took Carlos away, I cleaned out the room. I removed the sheets from his bed and the scent of the man rose up, musty and full of the outdoors.



Wheels, print on paper

Ron Fundingsland

Maj Ragain

A SMALL WINTER MEDITATION FOR THE HUMPED

The last night of January,
I am counting out the final minutes
at Ciccone's bar, Kent, Ohio.
Bob, the owner, tells me Thistledown,
the thoroughbred track, opens
in only forty three days.
We are both counting.

A few of the jockeys have fled
south to Tampa Downs
to ride in the sunshine,
Michael Rowland, Omar Londono,
good brave little men
afraid of the cold.

I have stayed home in the freeze
to wait it out, though
snow makes me stupid,
beer makes me stupid,
and horses make me stupid.

Out in the parking lot,
the earth is tilted.
I can hardly walk on it.
The darkness is deep enough to wear.

Suddenly, I remember thirty-five years ago,
a winter I spent in Saint John's
Children's Hospital, Springfield, Illinois.
A palsied, gnarled boy would stumble
Laughing from room to room every morning,
pulling window blind rings down
with his teeth, making them rattle to the top,
while an old German nun chased him,
smiling and shaking her finger,

Stop that, stop that, she scolded.
It was the only work he could do.
He ever missed a room,
window after window,
stunning the bedridden with light.

first appeared in Burley One Dark Sucker Fired, Bottom Dog Press

Emari DiGiorgio
FROM INSIDE

If she can start
by wiggling her toes.

If she can kneel, then stand steady,
without assistance, without reeling
in the afternoon glare.

The blood and pus bind her thighs.

If she can take one step. If she can
find her way out of the open desert.
If she repeats a short hymn or psalm.

If she finds her village has been burned,
her father splayed twenty yards
from the remains of their home:
a cast iron pot, a ladle, spilled millet, the scent
of rubber and flesh and gasoline burning.

If she finds her mother, brothers, and sisters
missing. If she sifts through the village.

If she finds a neighbor crushed beneath a roof
but breathing, uttering prayers, her name.
If she promises to help him. If she looks
for water. If she leaves him. If she has nowhere
else to go. If she returns to the clinic,
its mopped floors, its clean linen.

If she can bandage her own wounds (the ones
that are easy to wash and rinse, to apply a compress,
some gauze). If she returns to work.

If she keeps reporting the numbers, not the names,
herself a number too. If she remembers six men
calling each other by name, calling her
many names, never her given name. If she remembers
how their horses were audible in the clinic's ER,
how they said Now you can talk about rape.

If she remembers reentering her body—
having hidden behind a rock or in some cloud—
the smell, like an old wound.

If she can talk about rape now. If she can
avoid being stoned. If she keeps counting
the men will come for her again.

They will burn the clinic this time:
its tiled floors, straw mats, vials of blood,
cotton swabs. The records. They'll kill
anyone they catch. They'll hold her down.
They'll mount her without seeing her.
Her body will buckle.

She'll slip through fingernails gripping
the earth or her lidded eyes. If she's lucky
she'll live. If she's lucky she'll die.

If she's lucky she'll reenter her body again,
flex the muscles of her legs and walk.
She will sharpen her claws. She will hunt.

Emari DiGiorgio

THE JINXED BULLET CATCH

after Dorothy Dietrich

The air's a sheet cake.

She's as ready as she's ever been, this lady waiting, a woman
in white fringe, angel face, a witch's uneven hem.

The marksman takes aim,
double-paned glass—crowd gasp—
the small black crevasse.

What stops her knees from buckling?:

5 4 3 2 1 and the gun.

The crack, slap, and shattered glass, her own foot kicking out
the window of her bedroom the last time her father
brought the belt.

How many threats has she already swallowed?
This woman without a ballistics expert,
her homemade mouthpiece to catch the bullet—

.22 caliber jewel of naught little death scarab unswallowed pill—

sparing uvula's guillotine. The trick: to soften
the throat, the way you might take a ball into a mitt.

I'm sixteen on the third base line
when coach calls my name, drives a line drive
to the bridge of my nose. Cartilage inverts,

sinus bones split, a wash of blood
rushes from the two pig holes above my lips,
staining shirt, glove, gravel at my feet.

What to do but try to hold yourself upright.

A girl's used to holding her face like this.

Daniel Ross Goodman

THE MONSTER AND THE NOVELISTS: WRITERS REACT TO THE ELECTION OF DONALD J. TRUMP

It is no great secret that Donald J. Trump has dominated the media for some time now, and no thoughtful reader (a category that, unfortunately, does not appear to include our president) should be surprised that the towering mass of his cantaloupe-colored shadow covers even The New York Times Book Review. What may be more surprising, though, is that many of the most barbed and brilliant verbal barrages that writers have unloaded upon President Trump have been composed not by policy analysts or political science professors but by prose fiction writers. And what is even more striking is that they have delivered their literary laments in writings that ostensibly have nothing to do with twenty-first century United States presidential politics.

In a kind of literary analogue to the return of the repressed, the election of Mr. Trump has so suffused the consciousness of fiction writers that this stark new reality cannot but seep into their post-presidential election prose. In her review of Magda Szabo's novel *Iza's Ballad*, which appeared in the November 13 issue of The New York Times Book Review (every review and quotation cited in this essay appeared in The New York Times Book Review unless specified otherwise), Lauren Groff spoke of "apocalyptic nightmares sparked by yam-colored men." In her December 4 review of Therese Oneill's *Unmentionable: The Victorian Lady's Guide to Sex, Marriage, and Manners*, Leah Price dolefully asserted that the 2016 election cycle "seemed to hinge on how often a candidate compared beauty queens to barnyard animals." And in the same issue, in her review of Sarah Gristwood's *Game of Queens: The Women Who Made Sixteenth-Century Europe*, Sarah Dunant somberly meditated upon how "[f]or a moment it seemed that a powerful American grandmother would join [current European female leaders] on the world stage. How quickly a few yesterdays harden into history."

All of this foreshadowed the December 25 issue's manic flurry of literary firecrackers set off by fiction writers, each raising their pens in protest of the president-elect. Zoë Heller, discussing Emma Cline's *The Girls*, noted how Cline's novel "about the charismatic power of an evil cult leader turned out to be a not altogether inappropriate fable for 2016." In the same issue, Ann Patchett appeared to be alluding to the 2016 election season when she quipped that "[i]f ever there was a year to turn off the television, throw the phone out the window and pick up a book, this was it", and Junot Díaz gloomily referred to "the darkness of these last months." The verbal torrent shows no signs of abating; in the Jan. 8 issue, Parkaj Mishra—responding to the question of whether it's possible for a writer to be objective—lamented how a "Twitter troll" is now "the most powerful man on earth."

It is difficult to draw any conclusion other than that the election of 2016 has already affected fiction writers to a far greater extent than has the immediate aftermath of any presidential election in modern United States history. Something unprecedentedly awful has happened in presidential politics, many writers are saying, and the appalling electoral scenario that so many were dreading cannot but come through in their writing, even when the books they're reviewing and the topics they're discussing have nothing more to do with twenty-first century politics than an infantryman's helmet has to do with applied astrophysics. It is the dawning of the age of Dada (and the Donald), and anything goes in this surreal era, even apparently absurdist associations like Victorian sexuality and the forty-fifth president of the United States.

But what exactly accounts for the torrential downpour of tear-tinged words written by fiction writers about Mr. Trump? The kind of rueful, indignant rhetoric writers are resorting to manifests something much more serious than a mere liberal bias; writers were not nearly this disconsolate after the election of George W. Bush. The collective corpus of bitterness and hopelessness currently emanating from the literary world—the feeling that something so momentously grave has occurred in the real world that even those who make their living in the fictional world are not immune

to its consequences—makes the writer in Philip Roth’s *Exit Ghost* who expresses her anger over the results of the 2004 election seem petty. (Roth, it merits mentioning, registered his dismal reaction in a Jan. 23 email to *The New Yorker*, limning our 45th president as a “humanly impoverished” man who is “ignorant of government, of history, of science, of philosophy, of art, incapable of expressing or recognizing subtlety or nuance, destitute of all decency, and wielding a vocabulary of seventy-seven words that is better called Jerkish than English.”) It seems to be that writers feel that for the first time in their lifetimes what they most value—a public sphere where the differences amongst us (and the diversity of perspectives that make for compelling characters and enriching fiction) are embraced, rather than denounced—is, or will come, under serious threat. Others, mistrustful of a president who has openly attacked what may currently be America’s most beloved work of literature-based art—the Broadway musical “*Hamilton*”—may be wary of potential cuts in federal and state arts and humanities endowments which significantly assist many fledgling writers in their attempts to learn how to make their prose soar; without such grants, some of the nation’s next great novels may never even get off the ground.

The Romanian novelist Claudiu Florian, according to Tim Parks’ report from a London bookshop event in the Dec. 18 issue, speculated that Brexit could very well have a positive effect on literature—after all, so many great works of literature, from *The Iliad* to *The Trial* to countless others in between, were either inspired by, or produced under, terrible turmoil. The inescapable question, then, that we are now inevitably led to ask is: “How will literature be affected by the election of Donald J. Trump?” If the aforementioned responses of prose fiction writers who have already addressed this question without even having been prompted to do so are any indication, regardless of whatever else happens in the world, we can only hope that the abyssal darkness so many writers fear to be overtaking the country will inspire a literature of light that outshines even the gaudiest of the gold-gilded Trump residences with its scintillating artistry and its inextinguishable humanity.



Yellow Banana Kong, ceramic sculpture Toshima Hirotsune

TR Hummer

MARKET

In the parking lot of a strip mall, I saw the body politic
shambling behind a grocery cart--or was it
Walking a big borzoi? There was something vague
about it, almost undefinable, though I knew exactly
Who it was--like a politician or a movie star
wearing sunglasses: you know the face but not
The name. In this case it was the opposite: the face
was out of focus, but it was the body politic all right.
It was humming a diminished chord, it was singing
something I could barely hear--I hurt, I hurt
I hurt, fix it!--the same thing it was saying when Oedipus
met it in the marketplace. He was on his way
To his desk at the palace. He had just bought a sticky
baklava, and had a briefcase full of scrolls that needed
Signing, but he paused beside a hoplite while the body
politic passed. He listened to its mumble for a moment; then,
Turning toward the soldier's gleaming shield to check his own
reflection, ran his honeyed hand through his royal hair.

TR Hummer
TURMERIC

I was trumping up a curry—an ugly American
riff on an ancient Afghan recipe—
And in my hunger I fumbled a bottle
off the spice rack. The powder billowed
And settled on my damp forearms and hands,
an indelible agent orange. Thus I was anointed,
I was covered in bitterness and sealed
blind in amber, I took my seat
Among the potentates and pontiffs, present
in power, presidential--sad!--ready to devour
The infant and the infidel, my aura
almost golden, rhyming nothing with nothing.

Stevie Roman

RANT 8: THE WORST PERSON IN THE WORLD

2016 was officially the first year the AGE OF IGNORANCE. The presidential campaigns were an assault on the truth. Although we've apparently become used to the lies of politicians, the 2016 campaign was unprecedented not only for its extreme dishonesty but also for its grotesque mudslinging. Hillary Clinton ran a shaky campaign but the view of her so-called crimes was exacerbated by the Republicans and misogynists like Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity and Bill O'Reilly. They vilified her over a long period of time, about e-mails, about Benghazi, about the Clinton Foundation. Her opponent boasted of grabbing pussies, incited violence at his rallies, claimed that he was the only person who could fix America and exposed himself and his supporters as racists and xenophobes. She lost because these bastards soiled the reputation of a devoted public servant who, granted, made a few mistakes over her long career, but more so because she is a woman—and because of the undemocratic and unfair Electoral System of not counting the popular majority and because the Russkies finagled the election. It is widely accepted that the press held Hillary to much higher standards than Donald John Trump and gave him far more air time, and this fact increased his ratings. When I think of the cheating, the lies and the finagling, I weep for our democracy.

Regardless of whose fault it was, we're stuck, for God knows how long, with an inarticulate, illiterate buffoon of the lowest moral character and inferior intellect—disorganized, incompetent, petulant, mentally unstable and unfit in every way to lead the country. It's impossible to deny because he has proven it again and again by his stupid tweets, his snotty, arrogant posturing, his ignorant, uninformed executive orders, and his dipped-in-shit attitude. At least now the press calls him what he is, a BIG FAT LIAR! It took a while, and it's unprecedented but most people (except for the true adherents to the Book of Ignorance) understand that Mr. Trump is a

disaster— incompetent, ignorant, completely dishonest, arrogant, tyrannical, corrupt and dangerous.

Trump has infected the government with an infestation of racists, white supremacists, religious fanatics and self-serving bottom feeders. Incompetence and nepotism are rampant and several appointees to his key appointees appear to be in bed with Putin or the Russian mafia or BIG money; they have shady backgrounds, have previously attacked the very agencies that they are supposed to lead, and are clueless about how to govern. What Trump once called a swamp is now a cesspool. It looks like the court of the Romanov's. Steve Bannon who, though no longer in the circle, is still a big influence and is a Rasputin in a den of vipers in a feeding frenzy, enriching themselves with legislation that further fattens their billions. They serve themselves the BIG slice of the pie, and care not a lick for the people they are supposed to represent. We are witnessing corruption on an unprecedented scale in these United States. And like the Czars, he appoints generals! Generals galore!

America is becoming a dystopian kleptocracy. Kiss democracy and the first amendment good-by, folks. Trump and the Republicans are attacking the press and our right to free speech. Their worldview is that God blesses the strong and rich, while the weak, vulnerable and poor are cursed by God and should be punished. This is, in fact, the result of the Calvinist/Puritan tradition that was the foundation of Colonial America in the seventeenth century and adhered itself to our culture throughout the industrial revolution and into the twentieth century. But today's iteration has been enhanced by ideas straight out of "The Fountainhead" by Objectivist Ayn Rand, known for her philosophy centered on the idea that selfishness is "virtue," or more directly by "Mein Kampf" by you know who.

Historically there have been moments of enlightened government: the framers of the constitution, for example, who I most gratefully acknowledge for letting me publish this rant without fear of imprisonment or worse and who insisted upon the separation of church and state. As for Thomas Jefferson, Abe Lincoln, FDR, JFK, LBJ, Jimmy

Carter, Barrack Obama, this is not to say that every one of these guys didn't cook up some pretty nasty policies or don't have blood on their hands. But by their demeanor, style and policies they all at least attempted to give a nod to the little guy. Trump's ungoverned arrogance is out in the open for all to see as he raises his middle finger to the middle class, whips the boy scouts into a *Hitlerjugend*-like frenzy, incites violence in his rallies, lies about crowd sizes, and regularly appoints to his key posts those who have become billionaires arguably either by inheritance or theft. Donald John Trump gets my Gold Medal for being the Biggest Liar and the World's Worst Person.

Are you shocked? I'm not. As brother Malcolm put it "The chickens have come home to roost." Familiarity with the facts of basic American history reveals that since our beginning the United States of America—like many other power-hungry imperialist countries around the world—has expanded its borders by war and violence as well as by purchase, has wrecked foreign democracies and pillaged the resources of other countries by using gunboat diplomacy, has assassinated legally elected leaders, has enslaved and persecuted minorities and people of color, has killed millions and raped the environment all in the name of motherhood and apple pie while playing "America the Beautiful" on the banjo.

So Is it any surprise that many Americans would vote for a creep like Donald Trump? As Americans we are entitled to endow our leaders with the biggest slice of the pie. Aren't we? We'll make America Great Again by expanding our borders, wrecking democracies, pillaging resources, assassinating legally elected leaders, enslaving and persecuting minorities and people of color, raping the environment and killing millions more. After all, God and Jesus are on the side of the whitest and wealthiest of MEN. So let's raise our Glocks and fire a few rounds into the sky in tribute to the criminals, liars, tyrants and sociopaths that are leading us into the abyss.

from Stevie Roman Rants, online blog

Lindsey Royce

PLAY ME A REVOLUTION

(after listening to Gerry Mulligan)

Play that funky sax,
Jeru—
 whip up a mean feed
for hungry ears,
 come
connect
 with my
 dark mood.

Imploding like our Towers,
 democracy morphs
into a Clown-in-Chief's shrieks
normalized
 by a fun-house mirror.

Our nation splits like
 your reed,
squeaks
 broken splinters of song,

a subtext from old resistance poems
that look
 and sound
 like love,

except to those who
 cipher
 their metaphor.

Some say poets will stand against powers,
 prophets
 bearing
 steadfast witness.

Strung together, like a child's paper garland of O's,

protestors could throw open

 windows to dark rooms,
shake the walls of the tenement.

Jeru, there is no funeral march

 solemn enough to feed the poor,
clothe the naked, shelter the outraged
 who lay soft bodies on battlefields

for ideals politicians never
dream.

Artist, speak
 to me as I am.

Tongue the dark notes in my heart.

Groove
 the sound of dread and horror,

the scent of its burning, vehement.

Ellie Francis Douglass
NO, SHE DIDN'T

No, Persephone didn't grow to love him
didn't consider his past

like bees orbiting a spill
(swat and they sting).

When she arrived, she was a feather
aquiver—soft, pliable, blown about.

Now, she's a sharp point suspended
before his eyes.

He beckons from the sofa, Come
watch a movie with me. As if

kidnap and rape were just
a bad start. Fuck that.

Hedy Habra

Or Could I Finally Be Allowed to Leave My Analyst?

After Remedios Varo's "Woman Leaving the Psychoanalyst"

I am leaving his office with my hair standing on end. No iphone at hand, or else that would have made a great selfie. I walk out with a steady stride, tired of these useless sessions. After all, am I not reconciled with my dark side? No more makeup to hide the once widening circles around my eyes: I'll let the gray show on my temples, allow my electric hair to rise and curl at will, catching sunlight and moonbeams in its spires. I don't need him anymore but he doesn't seem to know it. There's still work to be done, he says, wants me back over and over again. I have no more stories to tell, no more foggy areas to recover, forge and weld. Has he become addicted to my voice, or does he see his own shadow reflected in my dreams? See, this is the story of my life: analyzing instead of being analyzed, entertaining instead of being entertained.

Marilyn Nelson

THE HOUSE FORTY-FIVE BUILT

This is the house Forty-Five built.
These are the lies
That were hatched in the house Forty-Five built.
These are the orders
That were based on the lies
That were hatched in the house Forty-Five built.
These are the courts
That stopped the orders
That were based on the lies
That were hatched in the house Forty-Five built.
This is the press
That explained the courts
That stopped the orders
That were based on the lies
That were hatched in the house Forty-Five built.
This is the man with the fake golden mane
That condemned the press
That explained the courts
That stopped the orders
That were based on the lies
That were hatched in the house
Forty-Five built.
This is the bigly emolument gain
That was made by the man with the fake golden mane
That condemned the press
That explained the courts
That stopped the orders
That were based on the lies
That were hatched in the house Forty-Five built.
This is the nation in shock, awe and pain
That was caused by the bigly emolument gain
That was made by the man with the fake golden mane
That condemned the press
That explained the courts
That stopped the orders
That were based on the lies
That were hatched in the house Forty-Five built.
This is the question: Is he insane?
That was asked by the nation in shock, awe and pain
That was caused by the bigly emolument gain

That was made by the man with the fake golden mane
That condemned the press
That explained the courts
That stopped the orders
That were based on the lies
That were hatched in the house Forty-Five built.
This is a president dreaming a reign
That would silence the question: Is he insane?
That was asked by the nation in shock, awe and pain
That was caused by the bigly emolument gain
That was made by the man with the fake golden mane
That condemned the press
That explained the courts
That stopped the orders
That were based on the lies
That were hatched in the house Forty-Five built.
This is the megalomaniacal brain
That twerks in a president dreaming a reign
That would silence the question: Is he insane?
That was asked by the nation in shock, awe and pain
That was caused by the bigly emolument gain
That was made by the man with the fake golden mane
That condemned the press
That explained the courts
That stopped the orders
That were based on the lies
That were hatched in the house Forty-Five built.
This is the...

Thomas Kearnes
A MATTER FOR MISS WINFREY

November 5, 2004

Oprah,

If the women at the church knew I was writing you, I'm not sure I could ever go back. I've seen what they do. You walk in wearing the new dress you drove all the way to Dallas to buy, your husband behind you. The kids are away, but the women know why, so it's okay. You and your husband sit down, your eyes never leaving the pulpit. That's what my friend Mari Lynn did last year. She sat where she always did, in the second pew. Daniel was there, too, but it was Mari Lynn they were staring at.

I knew why. Sometimes I understand why you chose to live in sin with Steadman even though marriage is God's plan for us all. Divorce is so ugly, a wound you share with another person, a wound you pluck so the other person can feel the pain over and over, even if it means you will, too.

What Mari Lynn's mother-in-law did, though, was cruel. Now everyone knew about Mari Lynn. Everyone knew Daniel only sat beside her so he could witness the congregation turn on her, cast out the whore. I wanted to go up to Mari Lynn, counsel her and promise her the Lord's eternal love, but I never saw her again, after she stood up quietly, smoothed her dress and walked out. When she stopped at the door and looked behind, I'm not sure if it was at me, but I remember she looked relieved.

Mari Lynn drove a very expensive Lexus since Daniel was a doctor, and everyone knew what it looked like. Everyone would see it parked in front of my house. I'm sorry, Edna, she told me on the phone the last time we spoke. I never thought I'd give it all up for a man, she said, especially after I'd already done it for Daniel. While she talked, I kept tabs on Royall watching Fox News in the living room, hoping he wouldn't notice I was gone. But this is different, she said. I love him. I love you. It surprised me to hear this. She sounded so clear and focused, it felt like a language I'd forgotten.

She said goodbye. I watched Royall nod along with Bill O'Reilly. Mari Lynn couldn't call me. It was summer and my son, Toby, was home from school during the day. Of course, Royall was home at night. I couldn't call her, either. Royall handles the bills, and he always rants and raves about whatever numbers he doesn't recognize.

So, I know what will happen if you read this letter on the air. I know what will happen if you bring me on your show and I tell all the women in your audience what I'm about to tell you. But Oprah, I am not happy. I go to church every Sunday with Royall and we sit in our usual pew, sing from the hymnbook, listen to the pastor, pray for all those who have not found their way into the loving embrace of the Lord. It is part of our church's mission to minister to those who have not found their way to His Heavenly Light. To show them a life free of perversion, selfishness, and greed. But sometimes, Oprah, I can feel the stares of the women in the congregation. Not the kind Mari Lynn received; these are more than accusations. There's pity. There's disgust. And with each passing year, there's more.

I know what those women are thinking.

They're thinking of my son, Toby, and how my husband and I failed him.

I recall hovering outside Toby's room one night. I stood and listened, like a mother in one of those awful movies with my schoolmarm glasses and my hair in a bun. I was the old fool, and I was not happy. But my beautiful boy was happy, experiencing a joy as distant to me as birth, as distant as...well, Chicago.

I've watched your show for so long. You were once the same size as me. Watching you haul out that wagon full of meat (I think it was meat, wrapped in butcher paper) that represented all the pounds you lost, I cried. Toby and Tamera, my daughter, I could hear them coming down the hall. Even back then, they knew that sound, my crying. They knew it even without the screaming and the shouts before. I turned on the vacuum and watched the audience cheer as you leapt around the stage in your jeans and tight black pullover. The roar of the vacuum and the applause, I was inspired. Of course, if you could see me, you'd know it didn't last. It never does. No one looks at me in the grocery store, and no one looks at me behind

my desk four days a week, answering every phone call the same way. After I turned off the vacuum and blotted my eyes, he appeared behind me and my heart tore like an angel's wing.

My baby boy asked what was wrong. Mama, are you crying?

I turned around and smiled like my mother had smiled, like my mother had seen her mother smile. Must be the pollen, I said. Mama's right as rain.

These days, whenever I catch him in a lie, Toby's eyes well up and he says he was trying not to hurt me. He was at his dorm all weekend, not off heaven knows where in Dallas. He's never met that boy my neighbor's daughter saw kissing his cheek. And in front of that place in Longview they should have closed down long ago! Each time, though, I try to believe him. I don't want to hurt his feelings. One terrible thing about being a mother, Oprah, one thing you should feel blessed you'll never know, is hearing your child repeat every lie you ever told your mother.

Tobias James was born in 1984, just a week after Reagan took office. Royall thought that was a good sign. Toby was a happy boy. He loved to stomp into the kitchen, banging that toy guitar with the bright plastic strings. Tamera used to sing with him, but she gave up when Toby was still small. She went back and played with her makeup and listened to the same album over and over until Royall finally hid it in the utility room.

I can't even remember what his songs were about. They were so simple and silly.

And the way he smiled when I clapped... As long as I remember that smile, so sweet and comforting, like the sunrise after staring all night with dead eyes through the curtains, as long as I remember that smile, it won't hurt so deep when Toby can't share our family's great reward.

I don't need to list the signs, Oprah. You don't have to be a mother to know, but it helps if you want to forget. Those kinds of boys have appeared on your show many times. Too many, if you ask me. You've always showed them compassion, and as a Christian, I must admire that. We have a great deal to learn from your charity to those who are lost, Miss Winfrey.

Long ago, Mari Lynn and I watched Toby sing. He was too young for school. He finished and threw his arms wide like he wanted to hug the world.

That's so good, she said, lips resting on the rim of her coffee cup. Her voice carried a tone—actually speaking to me, not him. Mari Lynn never had much use for kids.

After I hugged Toby, kissed him, and sent him to his room, Mari Lynn set down her cup. She held me in her gaze like only a rich woman can. Like a woman who knew the world far better than I dared imagine. Sometimes I think that's the true value of money: not the nice things it buys you, the vacations somewhere besides your mother-in-law's. It buys you time, time to learn the things your neighbors felt were safe to skip.

Edna, she said, you have to know.

If it had been anyone else, Oprah, I would've denied it. I would've said this was a house of God, and my husband would not tolerate such things, even from our own, especially from our own. It was NOT our only son's destiny to endure a desire I have trouble even writing down. I don't pretend to understand the ways of God, but I simply cannot comprehend what Royall and I could have done to witness such damnation.

But this was Mari Lynn, my best friend. Even though I didn't know it at the time, she knew not just how to walk with sin but offer it her hand.

I smiled. I opened my eyes a little wider so I wouldn't squeeze out a tear. I smiled because I had a guest and the house was clean and my son loved me with a purity that now someone else knew wasn't true, wasn't forever. Soon, others would know. I smiled because Mari Lynn would understand that smile was all I could do. She promised that it was okay, and I knew it was...for her. You'll love him, she said. And one day when he brings a boy home, you'll sit at this table. She kept her eyes focused on me. What was she looking for? Royall will shake his hand, she said. She sipped her coffee. You'll ask what he does, where he's from. And Toby will tell you his name. He might even tell you two that he likes this boy, she added. She lay her hand over mine. She assured me that I wouldn't need that clarification.

Mari Lynn took a breath, like she knew I'd lost mine. I made this high, sudden sound, and without warning my kitchen seemed a tomb—a locked, dusty room filled with events, my entire life boxed and stacked. I shook my head and reached for a chair. If the world spun fast enough, maybe I would fall, maybe there would be mercy.

Mari Lynn did not move.

Toby is your son, she said, like a doctor with bad news, and what else can you do?

At the time, I didn't know. When Toby and his best friend in high school, Ian, spent their weekends in his room, nonsense music blaring from behind his locked door, I didn't know. When Toby told me and Royall he wanted to major in theater, that he wanted to sing on stage, I didn't know. And last year, when my beautiful boy told me what I'd always known, I didn't know what to do. I didn't know what to do. My beautiful boy, enraptured to the Devil, and I didn't know what to do. Not at all, Oprah, I didn't know. Did I miss that show?

The doctor called it a mild stroke. I didn't know I was old enough to almost die.

When I woke up in the hospital, after they found my son hiding out at his professor's house, crying and scared, I still didn't know. When they were small, I'd find him and Tamera wrapped in my mother's quilt in my daughter's bedroom, Tamera holding him in her arms. Both crying, both crying so hard you couldn't hear the words anymore, just the sounds, like a beaten dog. One time I just stood there as she rocked him, his face framed in her arms, his cheeks full with baby fat. It was my job, though, to hold him, because I always worried one day he would call out Tamera's name and not mine. This only happened when Royall lost his temper. Not all the time, I swear.

I heard my name from beside my bed as I woke. Toby stood there, his hand gripping and releasing the bedrail.

He said he was sorry. It was then I saw Royall's hand clamped on our son's shoulder, ready to steer him right back into the hall. He was holding him in place until I opened my eyes.

I'm really sorry, he said again. He opened his mouth, and I first noticed that I couldn't move, and couldn't speak. Royall gripped Toby's shoulder hard, but our son said no more. I tried to speak. It was for the best that I couldn't manage, I had no idea what I should say. I closed my eyes because the only other option was to do nothing.

Later, I woke up. I saw you smiling and jumping on the TV, and I was alone. I guess this is the point on your show when one of the ladies stands up and says she went through a similar thing, but everyone talked and there was an understanding, and all the other ladies clap. Then you say that's all it takes. Everyone simply tells each other what they want and then gives it to each other, because that's what a family does. Well, I guess the families on your show, at least.

Royall and the kids put me in the living room and never said much unless asking what I wanted. Royall even let me decide what to watch. I didn't know what else was on, so we watched Fox News at night. I watched you during the day, of course. Toby was with me. Tamera came by whenever she wasn't with her fiancé, Clyde. Or she'd bring Clyde, and he'd go talk with Royall about Bush and the war, while Tamera and I watched people we barely recognized talk about a world we often feared.

Over the last year, I've gotten better. I watch your show, these families who say things to each other I'd never say to even Mari Lynn. Back when I knew where she lived. I suppose I'm jealous. When Toby's home for the weekend and he rushes outside to answer his cell phone, sometimes I sneak out the side entrance, follow the clouds of cigarette smoke floating up ahead. I don't hear his actual words, but I can hear his voice, that light rumble of affection, followed by quick laughter. Coming closer would be wrong, so I stay out of sight, feet damp and chilly in my house slippers. If I heard his actual words, Oprah, I might not be able to forget.

I've never slept at night. Not all the way through. When my son stays the weekend, when I can't convince him to stay with me, he comes in late. That place in Longview, the one I mentioned earlier, with its pink siding and unpaved parking, closes late. It's in a wet county. Once Toby came in the house and I was awake. I crawled out of the bed and went to the den's doorway.

My son sat on the couch with another boy. He looked a little older. Dark hair, thinner than Toby. Maybe too thin, like those boys on your show who used to sell themselves for drugs. He was handsome, but in a different way than my son, who's fleshy and fair-skinned, like Royall. This boy's face had angles; when he turned to kiss my son on the neck, I caught two near-black circles reveal themselves on his face. They were his actual eyes, dark and alluring like the Devil's must be.

I remembered what Mari Lynn used to say back when we were young. Edna, she'd say, that boy's got some miles on his tires. Then she'd laugh like he belonged to her.

Toby and this boy kissed, his arm reaching around the boy's waist, Toby's hand stroking his hair. I couldn't breathe. The TV facing them was up a little too loud for that time of night. Royall might hear, and my first instinct was to tell Toby to turn it down. But I couldn't do that. I stood there, just out of their sight, waiting for the brief silences between their sighs and kisses and the noise on the TV. In those silences, I listened for his father's footsteps. The boy swung his leg over my son's lap and straddled him. Their kissing became more...more.... I had to turn away.

My son whispered, My mom might come in.

I couldn't hear the boy's reply, just his voice, low and merry. My beautiful boy's laughter, loud and sharp like a goat's bleat, echoed through the house. I froze. I waited.

Someone turned off the TV. I heard the rustle of clothes against cushions, footsteps. They stumbled, knocking into each other, followed by more kisses. I backed deeper into the darkness until shadows swallowed my face, watching them stroll down the hall. The moonlight from the hall's rear window cast silhouettes heading toward my son's room. My son and the boy he was taking to bed leaned

their heads together. The boy kissed Toby's cheek. My son pulled the boy closer and reached for the door.

I should've gone back to bed, Oprah. I'd stare through the curtains until dawn and wait for Toby to come in with this boy like he had with the others before him. Listen to him tell us that this was a friend, maybe someone from school, and he'd needed to stay the night. The boys never speak, just eyeball Toby while he lies and lies. My husband and I nod, and I wonder if my son suspects that my silence is also a lie.

That night, I don't know how long I stood outside the door. I heard their voices, Toby shushing the boy. I heard the clothes hitting the floor. The creak of the bed. I listened, Oprah, I listened to my son fall into temptation, his cries held back. He swore, took the Lord's name in vain. My cheeks were hot and the tears slipped down my face. The wall supported my body like a crutch. This strange boy with the sharp jaw and piercing eyes gave my son a joy I couldn't remember. A joy I once thought could be no one's if not from my husband, the man who loves me, gave me his vows. Tobias James and this boy seized pleasure beneath the moonlit night, forbidden beneath the sunshine.

Oprah, I heard my son yelp in a pleasure so foreign and complete, I felt lost in my own home. Whose room was this, who were these boys behind this door? Finally there came silence, save for my breath. I was so thankful to hear it.

I went into Toby's room the next morning, silently opening the door. I told myself it was to protect my son, hide all proof of their sin from my husband. Toby slept alone in his bed, the sheets pulled up to his chest. He was wearing a T-shirt. He looked at peace. I wanted to brush his cheek, but I stopped myself.

On the floor, with only a blanket and one of Toby's pillows, slept the boy. He was dressed head to toe, like my son had never seen his body, held it trembling next to his. I didn't like how determined he looked even while he slept.

At the kitchen table, Royall and I ate breakfast. I waited. Toby came in with the boy.

Good morning, he said, and the boy stood beside him. He didn't stare blankly at Toby like the others. He put out his hand to Royall.

He said his name was Russell Byers. Our son had given him a place to stay after he lost his ride back to Mount Pleasant. He said we had a beautiful home.

Royall looked at the boy like he'd offered him a stranger's mail. Terror leapt into my son's eyes as neither his father nor the boy moved a muscle.

Royall, I said. There was far more I could say right then, but Royall didn't need to hear it.

He shook the boy's hand.

Toby had to take the boy back home, about an hour away. It was Sunday. I still had to dress and think of what to tell the women when they asked about my beautiful boy.

Leaving the kitchen, Russell's hand fluttered up my son's back. Before my son noticed, made a gesture that seemed somewhere between a shrug and a slap, Russell's hand fell to his side.

Royall's calling from the living room. It's time for church.

Oprah, I need your help. I want all four of us to come on your show, even Tamera. I want the other women to hear me when I tell my son I must let him go. I couldn't bear to hear him lost in happiness so all-consuming I know he will never forsake it, a happiness I never experienced myself. I'm so lonely, Oprah, and I need someone beside me who will remain when the Lord opens his gates and I can finally rest. I know the Lord will take him away from me when I need him most. The Lord promised these things. The Lord will never leave me.

I know you will understand. I know the women will understand. I know everyone who watches you, trusts you, will know I had no choice. I had to let my son go or I could not continue with God. And when you take Toby's hand to lead him away, I hope he will smile and look back. I envision him looking at me, and you're looking at me, too. Every woman in your audience wonders what I did to deserve such selfless love. They're waiting to see what I do.

I hope my son will say, I understand, Mama. I love you.

Thank you, Oprah. I think of you as my sister in Christ.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Edna Martell

Texarkana, TX

Abigail Carl-Klassen

AIN'T COUNTRY LIKE YOU: THOUGHTS ON THE "VICTORIES" OF THE BUNDY BROTHERS AND DONALD TRUMP

You act like there's only one way
to be country. That country only means
white as though the boondocks did not
become white by design. Like redlining
and the Homestead Act never happened.
Like Oregon wasn't founded as a white Utopia.
Like freedmen actually got their forty acres
and a mule and then just left for no reason.
You benefit from the architecture of exile
and genocide and then ask, "What?
Who, me? It's not my fault they don't
like living in the country." You act like
you invented country music. As though
the southern in "Southern Gospel" doesn't

just mean segregation. Like you own the folk
tradition. Like you're the only ones
who drive trucks and dig in the dirt.
Like you're the only ones who have
ever hunted and fished and drank beer
or sang sad songs about getting your
woman back or getting revenge on
your cheating man. Like you're the only
ones who've ever lived in a trailer.
Acting like black and brown people
don't still live in "real America"
even after being systematically targeted
and terrorized for centuries. Acting
like there's no people of color in

Appalachia or the Mississippi Delta.
Acting like Eatonville is on Mars
and not in Florida. Like migrant workers
weren't black before you could get them
cheaper. Like Central Americans aren't
pulling night shifts at dairies in Wisconsin

and Indiana. Like Somali refugees aren't
splitting open pigs in the panhandle
of Oklahoma. Like all the vaqueros in Texas
and New Mexico aren't wearing cowboy hats
and shit kickers just like you. Acting like
they didn't dress like that before you. Like when
you say the Rez is in the middle of nowhere,
but sure as hell ain't country like you.

Abigail Carl-Klassen

TO ALL THE APOSTATES IN TRUMP COUNTRY: INAUGURATION DAY, 2017

They say, "That ain't the way
you were raised," as though
I forgot somehow. As though
my identity should be static.
As though my politics and life
decisions were seamless—part
of a process that never happened
because now they say I was
always, "that way." As though
they could never be "that way."
As though I didn't hear the students
gasp, "you went to school here?"
when I came back to teach
for a season where I grew up.

As though I never read the Bible
or wanted to be a missionary.
As though I never owned anything
monogrammed or rhinestoned.
As though I don't flatten my accent
or remind myself that the department
potluck doesn't need potato chips.
As though every time I try
to dress up, I don't look like
I'm going to a Baptist wedding.
As though I didn't spend
undergrad mispronouncing
Descartes, Dada and Socrates.

As though I didn't learn
a whole new language so I could
understand my psychosocial
identity negotiation.
As though I could actually
use that language where I'm
from. As though I don't wonder
what words we would choose
to describe our own experiences.

Or if such words exist. As though
I didn't have to explain
my use of the word butt-hurt
to my colleagues. As though
I didn't consciously keep
y'all as a socio-linguistic marker.

As though I don't already
think that what I do isn't real
work. As though I don't feel like
I have put up with classism
in order to hang out with
people who share my other
ideals. As though I don't feel like
screaming at "upper-middle class"
hipsters, "Take off those trucker
caps you fakers!" but don't because
I feel like I fit in pretty good—
minus the way I was raised.
But I see you, ex-fundamentalists,
not raised with social justice Jesus.

I see you, small-town drag queen, not
raised to slay in heels. I see you
flower child crystal healing
toking farmer, not raised to be
an artist. I see you, chemists,
microbiologists and science
educators, not raised to believe
in evolution or climate change.
I see you single-mother, not
raised to be the breadwinner.
I see you Dreamer, not raised
to admit you were undocumented.
We, raised up in the same dust.
I see you. I see you. I see you.

Ellen LaFleche
LAST

I

There will be a last couple making love.

Some autumn night when the moon in its white kabuki mask
emerges from its curtain of fog.

The room is scented with vanilla candles,
with warm sighs tinged with garlic and wine.

A canister of nerve gas begins to hiss in the street. A hissing
too soft to hear. When the vapors seep through the windowsill
the twined lovers will continue to kiss, they will kiss until
they drool poison froth into each other's mouth.

II

There will be a last tulip.

Some languid dawn when pink and orange clouds
melt into the horizon like layers of molton sand.

A blast of atomic wind turns the tulip inside out.

Windows burst from their sills and glass arrows
pierce trees and children, brick chimneys,
horses in their stalls. The flash lingers.

Humans with their scorched eyeballs will not see it,
but the last tulip will glow neon white and die.

III

There will be a last iceberg.

Some June morning when a rose bud opens to reveal
its fragrant pink nub. A fracking drill cracks open a rock
and the ground rumbles. The ocean stands up,
rears back like a fanged animal.

Seafoam crackles like radio static.

Claws are torn from lobsters.

An octopus flies through the air,
its suction cups grasping at sky.

The last iceberg will crack open like a geode
and explode into luminous blue sapphires.

IV

There will be a last ballgame.

Some warm twilight in Boston when the thud of oars on the river
echoes the thud of the right fielder punching his glove.
The catcher opens his mitt and squats under the moon
like a woman giving birth. The pitcher raises his leg
just as a passenger jet spirals out of the sky.
When the plane slams into the light tower
there is a dazzle of sparks,
an electric rainbow arcing through the crowd.
Blue smoke will curl from the umpire's mask
and the baseball will be a globe of fire in the pitcher's hand.

V

There will be a last snowy owl,
a last snowy egret.
A last wedding ring sliding down the drain in a nest of hair.
A last barrel filling with rain water.
There will be a last embryo dozing in its plush red waiting room.
A last blue popsicle on a dying man's tongue.
A last lung expanding with the scent of roses.
A last lobster blistered in a pot.
There will be a last horse dipping its head into a little girl's hand.
A last teapot lifted out of the potter's kiln.
A last couple lolling in a hammock.
A last lightning bolt drilling into ocean.
There will be a last shopping bag filled with tomatoes and basil.
A last blue goblet blown from the glassmaker's mouth.
A last white buffalo.
A last catcher's mitt opening to the pitcher like a heart in love.
There will be a last undertaker cranking a casket into earth.

VI

Who will bury the last undertaker?

Richard Jackson

IT IS IF YOU SAY IT IS

I had almost forgotten my life as a constellation until the ray from the lighthouse, wobbling like the beam from those colliding stars burning out eons ago, and leaving a black hole, brought it all back.. Originally, I compared that black hole to an abandoned campfire but Pam and Bill thought that was too much of a stretch. But then what should I do with the image of the hiker who passes by and remembers his own burnt down house? Nothing I guess. Let's move on. You can't just carbon date a memory like that. It's like a mysterious note tucked in an old Bible some relative left for who knows whom. This explains why the air today is so metaphysical. Dawn steps down. Night raises its head. This is Time's ruthless floor plan.. We are all punching-in for the last shift Phil mused, and not a moment too soon.. For years Tomaz refused to open his Chinese fortune cookie hoping to hold off the future he couldn't hold off.. Nowadays they are mostly stuffed with silly slogans. We must love one another and die wrote Auden, revising the choice he gave us in his first version. Derrida says we wrote before we spoke. See, I told you today is metaphysical. Charlemagne is responsible for the script we use that separates words. But we still hardly understand each other. Words mean anything you want them to mean, no more, no less, said Alice's White Rabbit. In Cherokee, the first woman's name is also the name for corn. Pharmacy comes from the Greek, meaning both poison and cure. The quick brown fox jumps over a lazy dog is a Panagram meaning it uses all the letters of the alphabet, which is not to say it is not true. You can stone some peaches, but you shouldn't stone your neighbor (even if he says he likes to get stoned). Why is it that all elegies are love poems, and all love poems elegies? In the end, we are just looking for a human feeling. Sometimes it is impossible to decipher the tone of an e-mail. No one has yet deciphered the strange prehistoric Rongorongo script of Easter Island. Its heaven-looking

statues aren't saying a thing. Neither are the stone saints wandering around Italy with their lifelines to another world. I haven't talked to my angel in days. Nightingale, when will your song fly beyond the world we know? You need words for that kind of love, but there aren't any. They dissolve like the stardust that falls around us each day. There are things we never forget and things we must never know, will never know. Even the most trivial things are metaphysical. Take for example my dog, Wilbur. It's important for her world that she knows where to pee. And why does the campfire smoke always blow towards me? We are floating on the sea surface of space with no light to guide us. These late eclipses of the sun and moon, lamented Gloucester. And what should we make of the hundreds of ancient stone gates discovered in the Saudi desert and leading to nothing at all? The whole planet is riding like driftwood towards the shores of another galaxy. Is that why the moon stalking us? If light really does bend will it circle back to its beginnings? Why does the trail of string always end before the end? How do those deep sea creatures produce their own light? Like them, we live in one of those snow globes. I still can't figure out if that is a metaphor or a reality. My students say Mother is a film whose metaphor describes Eden. Someone else says it's Satan's version of events. The heart of one character is torn open to mean God's beginning. I'm opting out that meaning. You can put anything next to anything and someone will tell you what it means. The world is a place where truths dream we know about them. The heron floating over the river like a divining rod. Not to mention, the owl smacking into the sky, an optical illusion maybe. The wooden warbler on my desk wants to flap away the pesky gnats that have suddenly flown in through the open window. And how about Jim writing about the trout that bit him while washing the dishes? What are the chances? I miss Jim, too. There's no way to avoid the past tense. Our dreams traipse about the streets on scraps of paper. There are just too many hurts I want to bubble wrap with these clouds of forgetfulness. I called Gerry just to see if he was alive after the news of Phil. The heart's dam bursts at these farewells. Dean's heart is not his heart. What are those chances? He thinks we are all just celestial debris. Maybe we should be listening

to the static that comes from, well, --remember those dead stars at the beginning? Too often our lives are like those old silent movies. Everyone busy looking at their phones. It won't be long before we turn into electronic signals like the woman in Lucy who turned herself into electrons. She's there every time we turn on the light. Is there any way to ever tell the whole story? All that was left of the bicyclist yesterday was a chalk outline on the road. Time's a custodian who never sweeps away everything he sees. We get worried the constellations will keep drifting apart and become new gods. That's why we keep lighting the church candles that burn down. Now the clock is searching for an extra number. This is the only prayer I could muster before it turned elegy. Who's left? The stars don't care for our geometry. I wish I had enough time to mention everyone I loved. Beyond that lighthouse, by mid-air, the dolphin has seen enough.

BOOK REVIEWS

Warrior Writers: A Collection of Writing & Artwork by Veterans,
edited by Lovella Calica & Kevin Basl
L. Brown and Sons Printing, Inc.
Paperback, 303 pages \$20.00
Second Edition, August 2016.
Reviewed by Susan Foster

I opened the pages of this book and found perhaps the most honest, starkly intimate, and refreshingly unpretentious poetry and works of art I have seen in a long time. Coming from the experience of those who have been so newly affected by the disturbing ambiguities of war, each poem and piece of artwork is an unforgettable personal signature of heart and soul.

The book was produced by Warrior Writers, a nonprofit organization that was created to “support and inspire veterans through creativity, encouraging an open dialogue between veterans and the greater civilian community, in order to promote connection and understanding.” The organization sponsors a variety of workshops, exhibitions, trainings, performances, and other events in the effort to provide a safe creative space for all veterans and to involve the wider community of our country in gaining a greater understanding of all of the many nuances of the military experience. It also offers retreats, consultations, and conferences. More detail is given on the organization’s excellent website: www.warriorwriters.org. This book is the fourth anthology of veterans’ work published by the organization; this and all previous books may be ordered on their website.

Each page of this book is fragile and compelling: there are stories of death and torture, PTSD, violence, leaving family and home, guilt, shame, pride, hopelessness, hope, suicide, love, longing, anger, devastating and enduring loss, and so much more. All of the deepest questions engendered by war are brought out into the open, not because they are asked directly, but because they are so poignantly implied by every line of poetry, every photo, and every artistic work in the book.

Turning to any page in this book is at the same time both heart-wrenching and artistically rewarding. For example, the photo exhibits “We’re Ready Uncle Sam I, II, and III,” “Contemplation,” and “The Grenade Series” by Guiseppe Pellicano are uncannily haunting, depicting a little boy who holds and contemplates a grenade, plays with army figures, and then actually becomes a soldier. He looks out at us from the page with a detached and unemotional expression. Pellicano explains: “[these series] represent the effects of violence that are portrayed and emboldened by our media, video games, and toys. In addition to numerous others, these outlets promote calloused views in our children...” “The Grenade Series” shows children engaging in ordinary childhood/family activities such as tea parties and eating family dinner and yet the ominous, ever-present grenade is looming like “the elephant in the room” all around them- an evocative reminder that the premonition of war lingers all about us.

Chilling us further is the beauty and horror in the book’s poetry: for example, in “Nike Boy,” by Krista Shultz, we are heartbreakingly reminded that the “enemy” is often just a child: “You touched my heart as we talked/Not as interrogator to prisoner/But as two teenagers curious about each other.” The captured prisoner of war just wanted to know “About America, about music, about shoes/You, my enemy, were just a boy of 17/Just a boy.”

“And in Patrick,” written by W.D. Ehrhart, the poet expresses the nightmare of battle as being akin to the inner turmoil of Lady Macbeth’s: “He can’t get out of his head the horrors he’s seen/picking the pieces up and stuffing them back/Like Lady Macbeth, his hands will never be clean.” And finally, one of the book’s major themes is expressed by poet Jason Gunn when he laments “When I say I am a soldier/I am not a bringer of peace/But a destroyer of families and nations” in his poem “When I Say I Am A Soldier.”

Ironically, in this world, so torn with war, and so distraught with the nightmares of violence, hate, and torture, there is somehow a gentle sense of reprieve in reading this book. Although the subject matter is horrifying, experiencing it through the lens of warriors so fresh from battle becomes in a surprising way both

edifying and cathartic. The horror is not lessened, but instead is brought so sharply into focus that it becomes easier to look at piece by piece. At the same time that we are bombarded with the enduring social and personal questions around the justification for war, we are also offered the gift of healing from deep inside the human spirit: the artists and writers of this book bring us this gift- with an honest, pleading voice- as only true artists and writers can. I look forward to reading the other books in this series, and feel truly honored to do so.

This Shaky Earth

Linda Parsons Marion

Texas Review Press, Huntsville, TX, 2016

ISBN-13: 978-1-68003-085-3

73 pages

Reviewed by Thomas Alan Holmes

The title poem of Linda Parsons Marion's latest collection, *This Shaky Earth*, conflates notions of vulnerability; standing roadside on a busy interstate, a flat tire on her ironically branded Outback, the speaker contrasts her immediate discomfort and inconvenience with the long-term endurance of her widowed aunt who after years of tending to an ailing husband now suffers her own debilitating illness. The speaker considers how a semi driver's briefest distraction would lead not only to her losing knowledge of a comforting world but also of the world's losing recognition of her, "the earth / barely shaken" (17-18). Coming to terms with one's place in the world provides this volume's overarching theme and makes its transitional joy sweeter.

And this volume contains a great deal of joy, although its nature changes as the aggregate narrative voice weighs a lifetime of experience. The opening poems celebrate abundance, sometimes in nostalgic images of comfort but just as often in the expected renewal of spring planting and protracted harvests of summer and fall. The volume's opening sections often rely on the images of cultivating, tending, harvesting, and cooking as symbols of emotional attachment, cherished skills learned and taught in turn. In "An Embarrassment of Chard," profligate nature far exceeds the persona's needs. "I can't keep up," she complains, "can't make enough soup, / an embarrassment of chard brushed / by the bare legs of girls, profuse as clover" (27-29). Resigning herself to the idea that her garden offers so much that she might as well invite granddaughters to "tear squash buds for tea, clink / birchbark cups, sip ahhhh. Your ground / sprawls nigh and yonder" (34-36), the persona associates the earth's boundless capacity for renewal with the girls' immediate and personal potential.

Nostalgia acknowledges loss, however; in “Sated,” an elderly woman “puzzles / why she’s still above the contrary ground she hoed / tugged, swept clean” (12-14), and in “The Great Lie,” the speaker cannot brake the course of disturbing associations, “my father footloose at sorority parties, / my mother’s miscarriage between husbands” (17-18). As a result, the speaker turns instead to what values she hopes to preserve, celebrating the creativity nurtured in her family (“let fingers wing apple to cocoon, / x-ray to zebra” [“Signature” 21-22]) and her own resolve to continue to create (“I let it flow—tiny refusals” [“Blood Soup” 7]). And, while poems such as “Old” and “Knitbone” overtly focus on healing from physical injury, the poems invite our understanding subtle allusions to emotional healing as well; the “bruises, once sore and glaring, seep into forgetfulness” (“Late Ripening”10).

In *This Shaky Earth*, Linda Parsons Marion insists that finding delight and helping others discover it provide much needed resilience to sustain us in our changing world.

Before the Drought,
poems by Margo Berdeshevsky
99 pp. (pb), ISBN: 978-1-941783-39-9
Glass Lyre Press (GlassLyrePress.com)
Glenview IL \$17 Published: Fall 2017
Reviewed by John Domini

How can work so haunted by destruction — a nightmare looming in its very title — yet so lushly alive in its metaphors? Images like “The boots of war are sweating,” [42] and “A chapel stained incarnadine, open, under / iodine sheets,” [73] lend a vivifying, even redemptive beauty to Margo Berdeshevsky’s third poetry collection (along with an award-winning cross-genre text). *Before the Drought* never shies from horrors, though these include more familiar depredations like growing old; the author is a late bloomer, confounded by “Body my deceiver / Body my taunt.” [11] Also, in elegies that recall W.S. Merwin, she mourns the damaged environment: “the long-clouds that know the herds of lost.” [71] Overall *Drought* proves substantive, with more than 40 poems, most running a full page, and the title piece considerably longer. Rhymes play occasional peek-a-boo, like “incarnadine” and “iodine,” and so does rhythm; the poet’s most common form, reliant on long lines in pairs, feels neither flat nor sing-song. Still, amid such finely tooled variety, always ripe with the sensory, what lingers most are those pieces that grapple with the ubiquitous barbarity of our global moment. The recent massacres in Paris, the author’s current home, haunt these pages, wailing over “gunned children’s empty now/ open armed embrace,” [62] and suffering, throughout, “under the same wide sky/ that lists to blood-fall of a beheaded son.” [41] Amid such violence, the artist brings together her cry for humanity with a dream of sanctuary: “Cave that has no bullet holes/ but song — Call me in — .” [40] The upshot is that the best poems, like “Half Moon Holy,” feel like lasting testimony to contemporary terrors, and any sensitive reader will find it hard not to concur with Carolyn Forché, in her ringing endorsement: “Before the Drought is... a book to read at the precipice on which we stand.”

CONTRIBUTOR NOTES

Among Sybil Baker's three fiction books are *Into This World* (INDIE Book of the Year Finalist, Eric Hofer Honorable Mention) and *The Life Plan*. Her book of nonfiction is *Immigration Essays*. Baker received a 2017 Tennessee Arts Commission Individual Artist's Fellowship. Her short stories, novels, and essays focus on borders, expatriates, refugees, and immigrants. She was 2015 Visiting Professor at Middle Eastern Technical University in North Cyprus. A UC Foundation Associate Professor of English at University of Tennessee, Chattanooga, she is also on faculty at the Yale Writers' Conference. Her novel *While You Were Gone* will be published in early 2018.

Edward Earl S. Braggs is a UC Foundation and Battle Professor of English at University of TN at Chattanooga. Braggs is the author of eleven collections of poetry. *Negro side of the Moon* is his latest. Among his many awards are Anhinga Poetry Prize, Jack Kerouac International Literary Prize, and Gloucester County Poetry Prize. Braggs' novel *Looking for Jack Kerouac* was a finalist for the James Jones First Novel Contest.

Abigail Carl-Klassen was raised in a small town in the Texas panhandle and radicalized on the U.S.-Mexico border. She has done docupoetic work with migrant workers, Old Colony Mennonite communities in Mexico and Texas, social workers, homeless communities, immigrant communities along the U.S.-Mexico border and most recently, with Central American migrants and asylum seekers in Mexico. Her work has appeared in *ZYZZYVA*, *Catapult*, *Cimarron Review*, *Willow Springs*, *Guernica*, *Aster(ix)* and *Kweli*, among others. She earned an MFA from the University of Texas El Paso's Bilingual Creative Writing Program and taught at El Paso Community College and the University of Texas El Paso. She is a staff writer at *Poets Reading the News* and her chapbook *Shelter Management* is available from dancing girl press.

Ellie Francis Douglass holds an MFA from Oregon State University and is the Poetry Editor of *Carve Magazine*. Her poems have appeared in *Washington Square Review*, *The Missouri Review Online*, *Dash Literary Journal*, *Borderlands: Texas Poetry Review*, and others. She lives in San Antonio, Texas, and teaches at Northwest Vista College. You can learn more about her at EllieFrancisDouglass.com or follow her on twitter @elliefdouglass.

Emari DiGiorgio is the author of *Girl Torpedo* (Agape, 2018), the winner of the 2017 Luminous Orison, Luminous Origin Literary Award, and *The Things a Body Might Become* (Five Oaks Press, 2017). She's the recipient of the Auburn Witness Poetry Prize, the Ellen La Forge Memorial Poetry Prize, the Elinor Benedict Poetry Prize, RHINO's Founder's Prize, the Woodrow Hall Top Shelf Award, and a poetry

fellowship from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts. She's received residencies from the Vermont Studio Center, Sundress Academy of the Arts, and Rivendell Writers' Colony. She teaches at Stockton University, is a Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation Poet, and hosts World Above, a monthly reading series in Atlantic City, NJ.

John Domini's latest book is MOVIEOLA!, linked stories, on Dzanc. In early 2019, he'll publish his fourth novel, The Color Inside a Melon.

Melissa K. Downes teaches English at Clarion University of Pennsylvania. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in Poet Lore, Vine Leaves Literary Journal, and the Women's Review of Books. She was a finalist for Hunger Mountain's Ruth Stone Poetry Prize.

Anita Endrezze's books include at the helm of twilight (Broken Moon Press, 1993): a book of poems which won the Weyerhaeuser-Bumbershoot Award and the Washington State Author's Award, Throwing fire at the Sun, Water at the Moon (U of Az Press, 2000): a book about her Yaqui family history, Butterfly Moon (U of Az Press, Fall 2012): short stories, and A Thousand Branches (Red Bird Press), poems and art in postcard size format with 4 detachable post- cards. Anita has MS and is housebound but remains creative and connected with her artist women friends. They've collaborated on several altered book projects and paintings. They often donate their work for good causes.

Ron Fundingsland received his B. F. A. from the University of Colorado. For the past 30 years, Ron has worked out of his print studio in Bayfield, Colorado. He has exhibited in many national exhibitions and is the recipient of numerous awards including the Ture Bengtz Memorial Purchase Prize, awarded by juror, Jim Dine, at the Boston Printmakers 2011 North American Print Biennial. Two of his prints were included in the 2012 Krakow International Print Triennial. His work has also been exhibited in Korea, Taiwan, Egypt, Norway, Poland, Germany, Brazil and Czech Republic. His prints are included in the permanent collections of the Denver Art Museum, Seattle Art Museum, Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Arts - Palace of the Legion of Honor Museum/San Francisco, the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, the Art Complex Museum and others.

Tom Givón ranches near Ignacio, Colorado; he is Professor Emeritus of Linguistics and Cognitive Science at the University of Oregon <tgivon@uoregon.edu>

Daniel Ross Goodman is a writer, rabbi, and Ph.D. candidate at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America and is studying English & Comparative Literature at Columbia University. A contributor to the Books & Arts section of The Weekly Standard, he has published in numerous academic and popular journals, magazines, and newspapers, including The Wall Street Journal, Tablet, and Harvard Divinity

School Bulletin. His short stories have appeared in *The Cortland Review*, *aaduna*, *Bewildering Stories*, *Calliope* (forthcoming, Fall 2017), *Aurora Wolf*, *cc&d magazine*, *Short-Story.me*, and *The Acentos Review*.

Hedy Habra has authored two poetry collections, *Under Brushstrokes*, finalist for the Best Book Award and the International Poetry Book Award, and *Tea in Heliopolis*, winner of the Best Book Award and finalist for the International Poetry Book Award. Her story collection, *Flying Carpets*, won the Arab American National Book Award's Honorable Mention and was finalist for the Eric Hoffer Award. Her work appears in *Cimarron Review*, *The Bitter Oleander*, *Drunken Boat*, *Gargoyle*, *Nimrod*, *Poet Lore*, *World Literature Today* and *Verse Daily*. Her website is hedyhabra.com

Rachel Heimowitz is the author of the chapbook, *What the Light Reveals* (Tebot Bach Press, 2014.) Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Crab Orchard Review*, *Spillway*, *Prairie Schooner* and *Georgia Review*. She was recently a finalist for the COR Richard Peterson Prize, winner of the Passenger Prize and she has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. Rachel received her MFA from Pacific University in Spring 2015. www.rachelheimowitz.com.

Erin Coughlin Hollowell is a poet and writer who lives at the end of the road in Alaska. In 2013, Boreal Books published her first collection *Pause, Traveler*. Her second collection *Every Atom* is forthcoming in April 2018 from the same publisher. She has been awarded two Rasmuson Foundation Fellowships, a Connie Boochever Award, and an Alaska Literary Award. Her work has been most recently published in *Prairie Schooner*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Sugar House Review*, and was a finalist for the 49th Parallel Contest for the *Bellingham Review*. She is *Cutthroat's* 2017 Discovery Poet.

Thomas Alan Holmes joined the East Tennessee State University English faculty in 1996. He earned his PhD from the University of Alabama, where he served as the fiction editor of *The Black Warrior Review*. His scholarly and creative work has appeared in such journals as *The North American Review*, *The Valparaiso Review*, and *The Connecticut Review*, as well as in many Appalachia-based journals. In 2018, his essay about the influence of Gerard Manley Hopkins on contemporary Appalachian poets will be part of *The Fire That Breaks: Gerard Manley Hopkins's Poetic Legacies*, which he is editing with Daniel Westover and William Wright for Clemson University Press.

Linda Hogan's (Chickasaw Nation) latest collection is *Dark. Sweet. New and Selected Poems*. Her novel *Mean Spirit* was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize. Other novels include *Power*, *Solar Storms*, and *People of the Whale*. Her poetry includes *The Book of Medicines*, finalist for the Book Critics Award, and *Rounding the Human Corners*. Her nonfiction includes *Dwellings: A Spiritual History of the Natural World* and *Woman Who Watches Over the World*. Hogan has received a Guggenheim

Fellowship, an NEA Award, a Lannan Fellowship, and the prestigious PEN Thoreau Prize for 2016.

TR Hummer's twelfth book of poems, *Eon*—which completes a three-book project ten years in the making—will appear from LSU Press in 2018. His poems appear most recently in *The New Yorker* and elsewhere. He lives in upstate New York with his cats, a beagle and his wife, the writer Elizabeth Cody.

Richard Jackson is the author of nearly 25 books, 13 of poetry, and winner of Fulbright, Guggenheim, Nea, NEH, Witter-Bynner and 5 Pushcarts. He was awarded the Slovene Order of Freedom for his humanitarian and literary work in the Balkans, and most recently the Dane Zajc Residency in Ljubljana.

Jen Karetznick's seven poetry collections include *The Treasures That Prevail* (Whitepoint Press, September 2016), finalist for the 2017 Poetry Society of Virginia Book Prize. Winner of the 2017 Hart Crane Memorial Poetry Contest, the 2016 Romeo Lemay Poetry Prize and the 2015 Anna Davidson Rosenberg Prize, her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *TheAtlantic.com*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Guernica*, *The Missouri Review*, *Negative Capability*, *One*, *Painted Bride Quarterly*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Verse Daily* and *Waxwing*. She is co-founder/co-curator of the not-for-profit organization, SWWIM (Supporting Women Writers in Miami), and co-editor of *SWWIM Every Day*.

Thomas Kearnes graduated from the University of Texas at Austin with an MA in film writing. His fiction has appeared in *Hobart*, *Gertrude*, *Berkeley Fiction Review*, *PANK*, *BULL: Men's Fiction*, *Split Lip Magazine*, *Night Train*, *Word Riot*, *Storyglossia*, *Driftwood Press*, *Adroit Journal*, *Eclectica*, *wigleaf*, *SmokeLong Quarterly*, *Sundog Lit*, *The Citron Review*, *The James Franco Review* and elsewhere. He is a three-time Pushcart Prize nominee. Originally from East Texas, he now lives near Houston and works as a cashier.

Willie James King, a native of Orrville, AL, writes and dwells in Montgomery, AL. His poems appear widely across the globe. His latest book of poems is *Autumn's Only Blood*. His work has been nominated for several Pushcarts.

Ellen LaFleche's chapbooks include *Worker's Rights*, *Providence Aetheneum*, and *Beatrice*, *Tiger's Eye Press*. Her awards include the Jeffers Tor House Poetry Prize, The Ruth Stone Poetry Prize and New Millennium Poetry Prize. She is Assistant Judge at North Street Book Prize from www.winningwriters.com

Victoria Hodge Lightman has published personal essays and articles about the visual arts, including a cover story for *Sculpture Magazine*. Originally from the Bronx, she has lived and worked in Houston for the last 30 years. Victoria has published fiction in *Found Polaroids Project*, and *Glass Mountain*.

Marilyn Nelson is the author or translator of twenty-four poetry books, among them the recently published *How I Discovered Poetry* and *My Seneca Village*. Nelson's honors include two NEA creative writing fellowships, the 1990 Connecticut Arts Award, a Fulbright Teaching Fellowship, a fellowship from the J.S. Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, the Frost Medal, the NSK Neustadt Award, and the NCTE Award for Excellence in Poetry for Children. She was the Poet Laureate of the State of Connecticut from 2001-2006.

Naomi Shihab Nye's most recent books are *Famous* (Wings Press) and *The Turtle of Oman* (Greenwillow). She has been a Lannan Foundation, a Guggenheim and Library of Congress Witter Bynner Fellow as well as the Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets. Her *Voices In The Air—Poems For Listeners* is forthcoming from Greenwillow Press.

Elise Paschen's new work recently has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Poetry* and *The Virginia Quarterly Review*. Her most recent book, *The Nightlife*, which contains "Whale Song," appeared in May 2017.

Ann Phong is a Vietnamese/American multi-media artist and painter who teaches at Cal State University Pomona. She is Board President of the Vietnamese Art and Letter Association. Ann has had major exhibitions in Houston, Albuquerque, Los Angeles and other American cities as well as globally in such places as Paris, Chengdu, China, Krabi, Thailand, Bangkok, and Vancouver, Canada. She wrote, "In the 21st Century, material goods are deemed vital in providing comfortable lives. It seems the more civilized we are as humans, the more trash we create. When environmental issues affect me, I transfer those feelings to my art."

Maj Ragain's most recent collection *CLOUDS PILE UP IN THE NORTH: NEW & SELECTED POEMS* is fresh off the press from Press 53. "A Small Meditation For The Humped" demonstrates Maj's mantra that "Poetry continues to build and walk that bridge between solitude and community." Of his five previous books and seven chapbooks it's been said he "sports the Tenderest Knockout Punch in the World as he shuttles back and forth between gravitas and what Raymond Carver in his last days called gravy." In addition to his work teaching off and on since 1969 at Kent State University, Maj has for 30 years served as host to open readings monthly in Kent, currently at Last Exit Books. He leads a vital writer's circle for Vets as well.

Steve Ramirez lives and writes in the Texas Hill Country. His work has been seen in various journals including, *Cutthroat: A Journal Of The Arts*, *The Houston Literary Review*, *Pecan Grove Review*, and *Under Wild Skies*. His short-fiction, poetry, and creative non-fiction focuses on the tragedy of war, the power of love, and the value of respecting and protecting the earth. Steve is a Lecturer at Texas A & M University in San Antonio.

Stephen Romaniello aka Stevie Roman is an artist, writer and educator. He lives in a house on Hampton Street in Tucson Arizona where he spends most of his time painting portraits of his friends. He has written nine books, all pertaining to the field of digital art and also has a monthly column, The Digital Eye, in Sign & Digital Graphics magazine published by National Business Media. His blog, Stevie Roman Rants (stevieromanrants.blogspot.com), which he publishes whenever he feels the urge, is his personal opinion of the current political climate in America.

Lindsey Royce received her Ph.D. in Creative Writing and Literature from the University of Houston. She also holds an M.A. from New York University and an M.F.A. from Brooklyn College. Her poems have appeared in numerous journals, including Cutthroat: A Journal for the Arts; New York Quarterly; Poet Lore; and Washington Square Review. Her first poetry collection, Bare Hands, came out in September of 2016. Royce is currently Professor of English at Colorado Mountain College in Steamboat Springs, Colorado.

Mary Salisbury, an Oregon Literary Arts Fellowship recipient and finalist for the Orlando Poetry Prize, graduated with an MFA in writing from Pacific University. Finishing Line Press published Salisbury's chapbook, Come What May, in 2014. Salisbury's short fiction received Honorable Mention from Glimmer Train Press. She lives in Portland, Oregon.

Hirotsune Tashima is a Japanese/American sculptor who lives in Tucson, Arizona and teaches ceramics at Pima College. His work, which often makes a political statement, is exhibited widely around the world. "Yellow Banana Kong" is a satirical look at the World War II American atomic bombing of Nagasaki.

Michael Wasson is the author of This American Ghost (YesYes Books, 2017), winner of the Vinyl 45 Chapbook Prize. The recipient of the 2017 Adrienne Rich Award, his poems appear in American Poets, Beloit Poetry Journal, Gulf Coast, Kenyon Review, Narrative, Poetry Northwest, and Best New Poets. He is nimiipuu from the Nez Perce Reservation in Idaho.

Patricia Jabbeh Wesley, a Liberian civil war survivor, immigrated to the U. S. with her family during the Liberian civil war. She is the author of five books of poetry, including The River is Rising, and Before the Palm Could Bloom: Poems of Africa. She is author of a children's book, In Monrovia, the River Visits the Sea. Her poem, "One Day: Love Song for Divorced Women" was selected by US Poet Laureate, Ted Kooser, as an American Life in Poetry June 13, 2011 featured poem. Among her prizes are a 2011 President Obama Award from the Blair County NAACP, the 2010 Liberian Award for her poetry and her mentorship of young Liberians in the Diaspora, a 2002 Crab Orchard Award for Becoming Ebony. Her poems and memoir articles appear in literary magazines and anthologies worldwide, including Prairie Schooner,

the New Orleans Review, and Crab Orchard Review. She is Associate Professor of English and Creative Writing at Penn State University's Altoona campus.



TRUTH TO POWER: WRITERS RESPOND TO THE RHETORIC OF HATE AND FEAR, 357 pgs., 2017 confronts racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, human rights abuses and assaults on the environment. Contributors include Wendell Berry, Rick Bass, Martin Espada, Natalie Diaz, Linda Hogan, Joy Harjo, Keith Flynn, Dan Vera, Carolyn Forché, LeAnne Howe, Marilyn Kallet, Metta Sama, Doug Anderson, Sherwin Bitsui, Rosemary Catacalos, Elmaz Albinader, Melissa Tuckey, Sarah Browning, Pam Houston, Carmen Tafolla, Howie Faerstein, Greg Glazner, Melissa Studdard, Darlin Neal, Elise Paschen, Connie Post, Cynthia Hogue, Leslie McGrath, Yahia Labididi, Bryce Milligan, Carmen Calatayud, Chard di Niord, Willie James King, Ann Fisher-Wirth, CM Fuhrman, Melissa Pritchard, Kim Shuck, Susan K. Shied, Teri Hairston, Margaret Randall, Mona Susan Power, Alicia Ostriker, William Pitt Root, Eleanor Wilner, Luis Alberto Urrea, Pamela Uschuk, William S. Yellowrobe, Christopher Buckley, Marvin Bell, Richard Jackson, William Luvaas & Dean Rader.

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