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FUGUE



FEATURING:

CHARLES BAXTER and BRIAN CHARLES CLARK

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FUGUE

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FUGUE

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Managing Editor

Scott McEachern

Prose Editor

Matthew Vadnais

Poetry Editor

Mary Ann Hudson

Staff

Paul Cockeram

Jennifer Hirt

Taya Noland

Jessamyn Birrer

Melissa Montgomery

Molly Drumps

Darlene Jones

Aaron Stanton

Layout

Sarah Wichlacz

Cover Design

Sarah Wichlacz

Faculty Advisor

Ron McFarland

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Letter from the Editor

The first idea I had about the letter from the editor was a long laundry list of thank-you's that segued into an extensive poem-by-poem, story-by-story compendium of how fabulous Issue twenty-two is. Thankfully, I won't do that. Yet as I sat down to write, as I always do when I write stories — with a cup of coffee and the germ of an idea — I began to rethink my position as editor, and what kinds of duties I need to fulfill in the editor's letter. I wondered if I could shape the letter to give you an idea of the struggle, the passion, and the ultimate success we experienced in putting the issue together.

During the production of Issue number twenty-two, we continued an internal change that began about a year ago. The editorial staff—consisting of myself, Matthew Vadnais and Mary Ann Hudson — is attempting to revamp not only the image and content of the magazine, but also the internal structure of manuscript consideration. I believe we have succeeded in bringing to *Fugue* a smooth, efficient mechanism of decision making that ultimately will allow the journal to thrive not only regionally, but also with older, more established national journals. I'd like to thank Ron McFarland, the faculty advisor, for trusting us with the responsibility of aiming the journal in this direction.

Yet I'm letting my enthusiasm get ahead of the letter. At the beginning of the semester, way back in August, the future of the magazine seemed to be jeopardy, due to circumstances beyond the control of the *Fugue* staff. In response, a sense of purpose filled our offices and as we sifted through the stacks of manuscripts arriving every day, we sharpened our critical acumen to find poems and stories that would show our readership that *Fugue* is a quality journal, ready to be recognized on the national stage.

In fact, more than just our expectations changed as we tackled the rigors of not only *Fugue* work but also our graduate studies. Our internal structure has undergone a radical reorganization at the editorial level. Matthew, in fiction, and Mary Ann, in poetry, work with a group of undergraduates and graduate students, on jury boards, who pore over manuscripts, whittling and shaping the granite-like stacks of submissions to reveal the best work underneath. I'd like to pause to extend a hearty thank-you to those on both jury boards — your work is invaluable and I am excited to work with all of you again — and I feel Jessamyn, Taya, Jennifer, Paul, Aaron, Melissa, Darlene and Molly

have all injected a deep sense of individuality into the issue.

Again I'd like to pause for a moment to consider our editors. Mary Ann Hudson, our poetry editor, brings a new and rigorous appreciation to the poems in this issue. We have included a series of very exciting "wordships" that are scribed by an innovative artist from New York City. Matthew Vadnais, our fiction editor, brings to bear a deep appreciation of story that is simultaneously intense and inspiring to those around him. The work in this issue reveals his commitment to new, exciting ideas in fiction. Both of them helped me immensely throughout the semester, and I trust both of them implicitly.

And truthfully, as we sat in our office struggling to give the issue an order, a shape — a face — we discovered a strain running through many of the stories. Spectral, is one word, or perhaps ephemeral is another. I'll leave it for you to decide as you read through the issue. Yet, as I said above, we didn't start out with a particular theme in mind — the content of our final decisions arranged our discovery — and the final product, from the cover to the content, reflects the beauty inherent in a serendipitous realization.

As I work toward a conclusion, I'd like to say a few words about production and then end with a bit about the future. From the cover photograph to the logo, I wanted the visual look to reflect the content of the issue, an effort that succeeded in every way, with the invaluable help of our graphic designer Sarah Wichlacz. She designed the cover, as well as the new font of the journal. She also took the disturbing and amazing front cover photograph that carries with it ghastly implications far beyond the image itself. Many thanks go to her.

With a consideration of the front cover it's appropriate to transition into what we all might expect for the Spring issue-number twenty-three. First off, *Fugue* is running a contest in both fiction and poetry. It is our first contest, yet we expect great work to arise. Secondly, I realized that even with the success of Issue number twenty-two, only one essay is present. Thus, in the interest of reflecting all genres equally, I am advertising in other journals for non-fiction submissions to fill the gap. And finally, in the future I'd like to include more graphic design artwork — painting and photographs, woodcuts and watercolors. With all gears interacting smoothly, the future looks bright for *Fugue*.

Scott McEachern
Managing Editor, *Fugue*

I'm Saying This Now So I Won't Be Tempted

to blurt it out when the time comes. This is really really true and if anyone has any *positive* ideas or suggestions I would appreciate it. Somehow it's "blame the victim." I did break down once and confide to a friend who stared me up and down then whispered, "That's disgusting." Only adding to my already overwhelming sense of guilt and shame. **HERE GOES:**

Dear Prospective Buyer,

The co-op apartment you are considering has a ghost. I'm not the only person to notice her, also my husband and cat (more later). She has the tact not to appear in the night when I am alone. However, she can be unsettling and yes I do feel a sense of violation: the sound of her breathing in the closet. The other thing she does is rock the back of the reclining chair.

Her name was (is?) Mrs. Allen. She was an elderly woman who died in the early 1980's in what is now my bedroom before she could move to Florida. The since-retired doorman (Bruno) whose nephew took over told us her story. Given the layout of the room, the only place she could have expired is where my bed is now. She left the room painted a ghastly, worn-out pink. We found her hair pins in the bathroom. Another creepy thing is she had an "attendant" who cut a hole high in my bedroom door so he could "observe" her. He must have been very tall; you can see where the hole was covered over with thin wood. (I'm afraid while I'm writing this she's going to appear.)

You don't have to believe this either, but my cat is psychic. He seems to know when someone is en route to the apartment. (In response to the inevitable question, you can tell because he runs meowing to the door and paces up and down.) *Max sees the ghost:* in

the reclining chair he will suddenly sit upright in my lap to watch her come out of the closet. He follows her with his eyes when I am in the living room and she drifts down the hall (I have tried to see her reflection in his pupils). I know she is a benign spirit because Max is not afraid of her.

I hope she is not unhappy. I ask her telepathically to leave us in peace. I have not resorted to a formal exorcism or any other rite.

Enjoy the apartment!

Mary

Landrover

The night before my brother Teaboy and I left home, Mom celebrated the moonwalk by turning the coffee table into a buffet of sandwiches, celery sticks, popcorn, Cokes, and beer for her and Dad. We ate supper in front of the television and took turns fidgeting with the aluminum foil flags on the antenna. At the first grainy footage of the astronauts, Dad shook his head and Mom covered her mouth with her hand. When Armstrong delivered his message from space, I signed it for Teaboy. His head oscillated between my hands and the screen. I marked every detail that night as if I'd intuited the last time we'd be whole — the katydid on the gold drapes, the way Mom fussed with the doilies on the sofa arm, Dad's wince when Teaboy used his legs as a back rest. In two years Dad would be dead and Teaboy would drop Mom and me postcards from places with strange names like Marfa, Texas and Truth or Consequence, New Mexico.

After the broadcast, Teaboy left to meet his buddies and I went to my bedroom to study for summer class. The textbook pages dissolved behind the hot dream of hitching south. A few older guys Teaboy knew, ones who'd enlisted and had a month or two before boot camp, had set out on Trailway Five-Star buses destined for California. I knew nothing of disappointment as I paced the room, punched the air, and started packing.

The next day when I got home from school, Mom went to run errands and Teaboy and I walked out of the house and away. Leaving in the middle of the afternoon sucked the drama from our escape, but we made up for it by living like skilled survivalists. Teaboy field-stripped cigarette butts and I buried our trash and swept our tracks with pine boughs. Every night for a week we slept in a different place — under the park band shell, in the bathhouse

by the river, between headstones in the college professors' plot — until a cold snap and a string of showers forced us to find better shelter.

In the abandoned engine assembly building, we laid out our gear, set up a canteen, and designated as bathroom the back corner where we'd placed a ten-gallon plastic bucket Teaboy stole from a construction site. By our fourth day in the echoey brick hide-out, we'd grown comfortable and out of habit I fell into the routines of home.

Teaboy snored on his side of the steel tracks while I prepared breakfast and listened to birds fussing in a nest in the girders. Overhead, a row of milky windows glowed orange and through a space between the corrugated doors, at the foot of the tracks, a red sun mushroomed behind the gas station across the street. On a mess-kit plate I arranged eight Saltines smeared with the last of the marmalade. I licked the threading, and then ran my finger around the inside to collect a few rind slivers the knife missed. The label pictured an orange grove. A man in coveralls tossed fruit from a ladder to a boy beneath the tree, work Teaboy and I could do during winter to get us to Arizona or New Mexico.

I kneeled down beside my brother and blew on his face, a trick I learned when he was expelled from the deaf school in Buffalo and moved into my bedroom permanently. Teaboy spooked easily, and if poked or jostled while sleeping, he'd fly out of bed and howl like a sea lion. I tried again. Aiming at his chin, I whistled the tune from *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly*. He raised himself on his elbow, then sat up and rubbed his tattoo sleeves. "Breakfast's ready," I said, and made two quick motions with my fist towards my mouth.

Teaboy took his place at the milk crate. He moaned when I put down the plate. "We have to get more supplies," I said and pointed to the empty food safe I'd built with bricks from the demolished boiler-works annex. I ate my crackers one at a time. Teaboy made two sandwiches out of his and crammed them in his mouth, whole. He inhaled deeply and widened his eyes at the warm smell from

the bread ovens up the street. "It's your turn to get supper," I said, wiping the plate with my tee-shirt.

Technically, it should have been my turn, again, since I'd failed to secure a meal the previous day. But I was in charge of this operation, and, besides, my brother was a skilled shoplifter. He'd returned from the farmer's market with peaches, tomatoes, and a head of cabbage. He knew how to get free soda from a vending machine, and after our first night, when we'd camped in the stand of firs between Central Park and my junior high school, he'd filched a package of tube socks and a couple of army blankets. While he occasionally made some poor choices, like the cabbage which had to be eaten raw, we wouldn't starve before finding jobs down south.

I filled the two mess-kit plates with water from my scout canteen, washed, then filled them fresh for Teaboy. He shooed me away when I told him to bathe. His chin had two days worth of stubble, and his pits stank to high heaven. "You make my eyes water," I said and pinched my nose. On a tie between the tracks, he laid out playing cards for a hand of solitaire. He refused to look at me, so I kicked his leg.

The flashlight missed my head.

By the time I'd ducked, it had bounced off a nail cask. The batteries went sailing in opposite directions. Teaboy could have clocked me if he'd wanted. Instead, he'd given me a warning, let me know I'd stepped out of bounds and had gone back to flipping cards.

In those days, my brother had a short fuse. I don't know how, but Dad discovered that Teaboy had been sleeping with a married woman and decided to put an end to the affair before the husband found out. I think he was more afraid for the man's safety than Teaboy's. Dad tried to reason with him, explain the immoral nature of the relationship, and make clear that he would not step to Teaboy's defense if the husband came looking for him. Teaboy refused to listen, and instead, aping a kickboxer, demonstrated on a kitchen chair the short work he'd make of the husband. As he geared up for a roundhouse, Dad slapped the back of his head

with an open palm. Teaboy left the house and returned swinging a length of garden hose. A week later, Mom took me to a cafeteria for lunch where she explained that she and Dad had begun the paperwork necessary to have Teaboy committed to the state hospital in Rome. That's when I made the decision to split.

I didn't have time to supervise — summer school class started at eight-thirty and it was an hour walk to Washington Irving. Still I appealed one last time to Teaboy to cleanup his act. I was not a personal hygiene zealot, though I preferred to smell nice, but figured that two neatly dressed, groomed teens were less likely to arouse suspicion. Packing for our trip, I'd considered this and brought a comb, soap, a razor and shaving cream, and talcum powder to keep our hair from looking greasy between washings. There were also long-sleeve shirts for Teaboy, to cover his tattoos. He was miserable over the shirts. I promised to get him some cooler ones after I finished school and we left the city.

I crawled between the doors, under the chain and padlock, then dusted my knees. Ten years later I would be hired to build an eight-bay coin-operated car wash less than a hundred yards from where I scoped the lot for cops or contractors from the hotel construction site up the block. I followed the train tracks out onto Jay where they sank below the newly paved street. Had I been a spend-thrift, I could have caught a bus and been dropped a few blocks from school. But wasting thirty-five cents on a ride seemed extravagant unless it was raining.

For eleven days Teaboy and I lived without breaking a single bill from my small savings. Our nest egg amounted to the forty bucks I'd earned mowing lawns all summer. Teaboy often made that much money in an evening with two or three tattoo jobs, and he blew it just as quickly. I knew when he'd had a good night because he'd stroll home around five in the morning and treat me to breakfast. He was generous and bought me official Boy Scout camping gear, even though I'd never joined Scouts, so I didn't begrudge financing our get-away. Besides, once we settled down, we planned to open a tattoo parlor, and he would support us while I finished

school.

Downtown the morning crush of cars bottlenecked at the gate of General Electric. I squeezed between bumpers to cross the boulevard and then took side streets to avoid running into my father or any one of our half dozen aunts, uncles, or cousins who worked at the plant. While I prided myself for finding obscure hideouts and taking precautions Teaboy found overbearing, I still considered it odd that no one had spotted us traipsing around the city. It was certain that our parents, not wanting to involve the police, didn't report us, believing that in time we'd wander home, having run out of money or places to sleep.

The sun crested over the asphalt roofs of businesses that striped the hill. Lack of a substantial meal in days had left me sluggish and put me behind schedule. Although I'd be in plain view, I gave in to the temptation to shave fifteen minutes from my walk by taking the mile-high ramp that connected the summit and valley. It looked like a giant tiered birthday cake with silver piping, topped with street lights. My father, against my mother's better judgement, used to tie a rope around my waist and follow as I roller-skated the spiral. He trusted that I'd never sneak off to skate alone, but he wasn't so sure about Teaboy. When my brother moved home from Buffalo, we stopped going, and he told me to keep talk of our excursions between us.

My parents learned quickly that freewheeling down the Klondike ramp was the least of their worries. The school put Teaboy on probation for acting as ringleader in hazing new students and cheating on exams. His final stunt, peeing in the footlockers of his enemies, earned my undying esteem and resulted in expulsion. Still, away from the tightly structured routine and formal discipline of school, he really cut loose. Barring physical force, it was impossible to keep him in the house, and once he was out the door, our parents could only speculate where he hung out and with whom and hope he possessed a healthy fear of the law.

The first few months Teaboy ran around with a clique of phony toughs, who wore leather, drove new cars, and received allowances.

He gave each of them a crude tattoo, with india ink and a sewing needle, of a panther that looked more like a house cat. They'd dare him to shoplift cigarettes and beer; then they'd moved to big-ticket items like record albums and a turntable, and finally a brand new '68 Pontiac. Luckily, the owner of the car was a middle-aged social worker, and when she found the car in perfect condition and learned Teaboy was deaf, she declined to press charges. The kid who finked got his nose broke. My brother has never had reservations about beating the shit out of someone when wronged. It's been ten years since Teaboy's been in a fight, but some nights I still dream that I'm leaving the house in the morning and he's lying dead on my lawn. Awake, I know my real fear is the opposite, that he's capable of killing another man.

Being deaf turned out to have its advantages. Teaboy easily passed for eighteen, but if he got carded in a bar cracking down on underage drinkers, he'd pretend he didn't read lips. He'd act out the story over breakfast, first by playing the frustrated barkeeper insisting on ID, looking to the other drinkers for help. Then he'd show how he made a huge scene of not understanding, shaking his head furiously, jabbing his finger at the taps behind the bar. With exaggerated effort he'd croak out the word "beer." A few got wind of his scam, but most didn't care enough to push the issue. Teaboy spent a few months closing bars until he got in tight with some guys from the tattoo studio. Mom's concern about their ages — Teaboy described them as being in their late thirties and early forties — was unnecessary. They watched out for Teaboy, and for the first time since he'd been home, he had a steady job and we knew where to find him.

He still stayed out till dawn, but they wouldn't let him drink in bars, they wouldn't let him drink, period, and every morning at two they made him call home. At first the calls disturbed my mother. She'd stand in the kitchen holding the phone from her face, not wanting to hang up on him, but obviously unable to talk, until my father would take it from her and gently place the receiver in the cradle. Eventually the job of answering my brother's calls fell to

me. I only had to hear him screech once, and it was back to bed. Teaboy told me that after the studio closed, someone would make a beer and soda run, the soda being for my brother and a couple of teetotalers, and they'd spend the night adding to the jungle on some guy's back or the sorcerer and serpent on another's neck. Teaboy practiced on roaster chickens until one guy was brave enough to give him a shot at a tarantula on his shoulder.

It was a straight shot from the ramp to Washington Irving, and I arrived with time to spare. Not trusting myself to stay awake at the back of the classroom, I took a desk in the front row. While Mrs. Capiello called roll, she passed a wooden bowl of hard honey candies crusted with sesame seeds. I wanted to fill my pockets, but grabbed two and handed it to the kid behind. The class was MACOS, Man As a Course of Study, an enrichment course for students in the accelerated learning program. If I passed with a B, I could skip ninth grade and graduate in three years. That had been the plan. Things would change, though, now that Teaboy and I would be traveling. I hoped to return to school within a year.

Mrs. Capiello announced there were two sessions left until the final exam, so we spent the first half of morning in study groups reviewing our notes and asking questions. She passed the bowl around again, and when it came to me, she said I could take as much as I wanted. She was watching her figure and didn't want to bring them home. Then we watched a film about Eskimos. I dozed briefly during the salmon mating season, and when I woke, a family dressed in parkas were roasting the fish on sticks over an open flame. The inside of the igloo was bright and homey, with plenty of room to sleep and cook and restring snowshoes. I missed our home. I missed my mother and father.

When class let out, I headed for our neighborhood. Two blocks from our house, I weighed the risk, and decided it wasn't worth it. My father would be at work, but my mother would be home, and I didn't think I could resist assuring her we were safe. Of course she knew; I found out later that Mrs. Capiello phoned every day and let her know I'd made it to school. I ran down State Street, and

anxious to keep moving and not wanting to think too long on it. I took a detour around the doughnut shop and slowed at the cosmetology school. Across the street sat the tattoo studio and, next door, the art theater that showed nudie flicks and sold illegal fireworks.

I'd never met Teaboy's buddies, so there was no harm in looking at the drawings taped to the window. Full-color samples of roses, skulls, mountain cats, birds of prey, and military insignia framed the two men inside. A man with Prince Valiant hair swept the floor, while the other, a younger man wearing army fatigues and a safari hat, reclined in a barber's chair and puffed on a cigar. Neither wore beards or leather chaps as I'd pictured. Somehow I'd come to believe the guys at the studio were the seven dwarfs in biker gear. The man with the broom paused and narrowed his unfriendly eyes at me. Except for the barber chair and an aluminum cart, the studio was empty. There wasn't even a cash register. I'd always imagined receiving a warm reception when I met my brother's buddies. There would be hearty back-slapping, offers of soda, and stories about late night capers Teaboy had never told me. I doubted that now, suspecting instead that I'd probably, in their minds, been lumped into the same category as my parents. A strange sadness passed over me.

I marched up Robinson Hill, caught my breath when I reached the park, then headed downtown toward ALCO. The temperature dropped and I felt refreshed, but my legs still felt like gum. The wind gusted east and exposed the silver bellies of leaves. Off to the west, a bank of dark clouds washed over the sun. Fat raindrops started to splash the sidewalk, so I ducked into a laundromat to wait for the shower to end. The laundromat was warm and steamy and smelled of clothes baking in dryers. Leaning against the detergent dispenser, I sucked on one of the honey candies from class and watched a woman fold fitted sheets into perfect squares. She worked with a sense of purpose and level of intensity I admired. When Teaboy focused, the world around him disappeared. For hours he'd sketch detailed drawings at my desk from pure memory, and I'd lean on my elbows and watch, making suggestions, trying to

be a part of what he created. It may have been my idea to give a tiger dagger-like fangs, or add lightning-bolt stripes to a hot rod, but when he was through, after he'd fixed the drawing with hairspray, it was all his.

The rain ended as quickly as it began. Outside the air smelled like green corn. Sheets of water arced from the wheel wells of passing cars. I skirted the edged lawns of colonial homes. Tonight, after supper, I'd study for the final and maybe I'd spring for a movie. The last few nights Teaboy had been antsy. He'd thrown a fit when, for security reasons, I'd confiscated his flashlight. He begged for five more minutes to finish a chapter in the spy novel I'd borrowed from the library, but I was firm and stuck to my rule of no lights after sundown.

Under the trestle I froze. Parked out front of the engine assembly building was a Dodge Dart I didn't recognize. Immediately I thought of the man with the safari hat. He knew me from a photo or something and called my parents. It had been arrogant of me to believe we could hide for two weeks, flit around the city, attend class, steal from local merchants and not get caught. That first night we should have gone straight to the bus station and gone as far as possible on my savings. Through the doors I heard a woman's voice. I crawled under the chain, and when I stood, my brother and a trim woman in a lime pantsuit waved.

"What are you doing?" I signed Teaboy.

"Hi, I'm Carol," the woman said and held out her hand. "You must be William." Teaboy put his arm around her. Carol fanned her face with her hand and told Teaboy he was ripe.

"I like your digs," she said and looked around the empty building. "You wouldn't expect two boys to be so tidy."

Boys, I thought, considering it strange that Teaboy's girlfriend would refer to him that way.

"Your brother and I went grocery shopping," she said and pointed to two paper bags on top of the food safe.

Everything looked wrong with her here. I was trying to save my brother and here was this woman, Carol, admiring this place like it

was a clubhouse.

I checked the paper bags. There were steaks, potatoes and carrots, a pound of coffee, and a pink bakery box in one. The other held toilet paper, paper plates and napkins, plastic utensils, and hand soap.

"What do you expect us to do with this?" I threw the package of steaks at Teaboy and dumped the potatoes on the ground. "We're starving," I shouted at Carol, "and you buy food that has to be cooked. Do you see anything around here to cook on?"

"Your brother picked it out," she said softly, not at all angry. "I didn't know where you were staying. I was just trying to help."

"If you want to help, give us money so we can get out of here." That was a cheap shot, and I knew it. We could leave now. I was the one keeping us here. I ripped open the bakery box. It was angel food cake. I tore a huge chunk from the cake and stuffed it in my mouth. Teaboy banged into my shoulder, then stooped to pick up the potatoes.

Carol opened her pocketbook and pulled out a thin layer of bills.

"We don't need your money," I said feeling ashamed of the forty dollars I'd been hoarding.

"No, please take it," she said. "Your brother told me what your father did to him with that garden hose. It made me sick. I want to help."

When she'd finished speaking, Teaboy turned to me. He wanted me to confirm his story.

"Yeah, it was terrible," I said to Carol. "We should have called the cops on him, but my mother pleaded with us, said they'd make him spend the night in jail."

"I just want you to know," she said, "I think you're a good person, sticking by your brother like this." She kissed him on the mouth. She was like him, I think. She didn't care much whether she was found out or not; she just did what she did to be doing it. And I think what irked me was that she thought we were funny and that in her own way she wanted to take care of my brother too.

I stared Teaboy in the eyes and signed “dope” over and over. He moved closer and I could smell that he hadn’t washed. His face was blank and uncomprehending, the same look he probably fronted at bars when asked for ID. The same look he’d give me years later when I told him it was a federal offense to graft the corners from tens onto dollar bills. The way he was able to tune everything out frightened me. I asked Carol to please leave before I returned, slung the canteen over my shoulder, hefted the stack of library books due tomorrow and left before Teaboy beat the tar out me.

The afternoon I had lunch with my mother, I told her I thought what she and Dad were doing was lousy. Carol made me see these past weeks had been a sham. At the library I broke a five-dollar bill, called my mother and told her where to pick us up. Teaboy would never know. I’d blame it on Carol.

When I returned, the Dodge was gone, the groceries had been put away, and the milk crate was set with paper plates and plastic forks. Teaboy’s back was toward the door. Bent over a paper bag, he worked on a drawing of an eagle. I recognized it as the one in the tattoo studio window. I wondered how many of the samples he’d drawn. I blew on the back of his head and he turned, smiled. He pointed to the drawing and shrugged, mouthed *what else*. I told him it needed something in its talons, spears or a rabbit. He nodded and drummed his temple with his finger — *good thinking*. Then I confessed calling our mother. He asked me to help him pack his duffle bag and thanked me for my short-sleeve shirts, the savings, and the maps I’d razored from the library Atlas. I wouldn’t see Teaboy again until I’d graduated from high school and had been married a year. Out of the blue, he appeared at our door, riding a bicycle, wanting me to cash his social security check because he didn’t have a bank account or a driver’s license.

In the car, my mother tried to console me. There would be plenty of opportunities for me to see the country and she was positive my brother would be home within a month. Then our talk turned to the astronauts. They’d made it home safely. Mom took a detour and stopped for a fish fry at a stand by the river. Waiting at

a picnic table for our order, she discussed the possibility of missions to other planets, but I couldn't think that far ahead.



Jeffery Bahr

Raku

Wheeled and bisque-fired, lifted
from the kiln anonymous,
each mark an accident
of pine boughs. Sold, empty,
holding roses, empty again

my gloved hands elsewhere —
poised with the ring, holding
the newborn's dusty head, palming
a lemon, the surprise
of possession. Here

is a boy, trailing
his fingers on the pot's rough husk,
my boy but equally
unmarked. A fly lands, lost
on the image of needles. Now,

up these stairs: salt thrown
against the heat of coupling,
the bartering of faces, your sweat's
signature. Look up. One turn

of the world and still
you can't parse your desire, even
the spider must eat. You can't keep
it all. You can't keep any of it.

White
for Sheila

If she writes a poem
about her son's death
it won't be by assignment
it won't take the snow
and turn it into fate
it won't make him a sparrow
it won't lift him quickly
up the mountain and follow
him skis parallel straight down
the fall line. It won't
condemn trees or rock
or excuse a weak sun.

If she writes about her son's death
the page will be black with type
knots and wedges of deranged
ink. Or it will be white
no shape or trope possible
white with the true poem
waiting under the page as the blank
countenance of the mountain
waits to assign the rock beneath
its white to this boy.

Beer Stories

Father always wanted to be a writer. That's what he often said, sitting at the kitchen table, the cracked, brown Silvertone radio by his left hand tuned to a New York classical station, the signal strengthening and weakening at whim, arbitrarily selecting what of Tchaikovsky or Brahms he would hear and, in the process, increasing and decreasing his frustration.

A quart of Hull's Export beer in a squat, high-shouldered brown bottle was his companion. That, and a glass, a nickle beer glass, cousin to a juice glass. A schooner would have been profligate, a pilsner glass effete. No, the squat glass suited, for it allowed him to measure out his pleasure while listening to the waffling radio, eyes half closed as the music soared, perhaps remembering carriages and wagons and a world that two wars had put paid to, the first fought when he was a child, the second capturing him, though he was exempt by age.

By day he worked for the railroad, coupling and uncoupling cars in a yard that clanged and hissed and rumbled with the power of engines that would soon disappear. In the evenings, when my mother would sit before our Philco television watching Jack Benny, or *The Big Story*, or *The Ed Sullivan Show*, my father would sit in the kitchen, his second quart of Hull's uncapped, memory loosened, and write in his notebooks, thick, perfect bound school tablets with an Indian's profile on their covers. He would write until the second quart was gone, then gather his notebooks and pencils, walk to their bedroom and retire for the evening, the notebooks hidden beneath socks in his top dresser drawer.

Perhaps I have it wrong. Was it the second drawer? Were the notebooks hidden beneath his boxer shorts? Does it matter?

Perhaps it does, perhaps not. I'm trying to remember.

It seems to me, if memory serves, that it was the port of Algiers that the Germans bombed, concussions from an exploding ammunition ship knocking him from the top bunk to the gritty concrete floor, forever ruining his back. Yes, I believe it was. The Germans were after the transports and supply ships. My father's back was a bonus.

Was his name Whitey? I feel it was, though the moment after I'd read that name a door opened somewhere, there were footfalls, and the notebook was hastily shoved back beneath the shorts or socks. What fear doesn't erase it twists. Let's call him Whitey.

I seem to recall my father on guard duty. Whitey stumbling back after curfew, drunk, defiant, cursing my father who had the weight of a forty-five on his hip and the smooth persuasion of a billy club in his hands, an MP brassard tied to his left shoulder the justification for carrying both. And Whitey screams and Whitey taunts and my father unbuckles his web belt and lets the forty-five fall to the pier's damp stones, then tosses away his billy club and beckons with empty hands, urging Whitey forward. Yes, yes, that's how it was.

There were searchlights, or work lights. This in a port under strict blackout conditions, but no matter. There had to have been light, for the scene is stark, primordial, with the pulse and feel of *On the Waterfront*, which was yet to be written, yet to be filmed, yet to be seen by my father. Perhaps there was fog, just wisps and tendrils, for effect, snaking and eddying in and out of the light that threw the boxes and crates and sharp-edged machines of war into stark relief as my father confronted a cursing Whitey, who looked like Richard Widmark, or perhaps George Raft, or maybe Jack Palance.

And Whitey jumps from a crate and attacks, or Whitey swings from a rope and drops, or Whitey leaps from netting draped against a rust-stained ship. Whitey picks up a boat hook, or a belaying pin, a cutlass, a lance, a club. And still my father unbuck-

les his web gear, tosses aside his billy club and faces Whitey with naked, clenched fists as German bombers grumble in the sky, bombs tumble, and the world takes little notice of the microcosmic Manichaean battle occurring on the pier as it tears itself apart.

Viewing the world with a writer's desire, my father had seen a picture of Hemingway sitting at some cafe, head bent, attention riveted, hand etching prose into a notebook. Summer, sitting on the porch, jalousie windows tilted to allow the breeze entrance, my father affected a similar pose, though I don't believe Hemingway drank Hull's Export, though would have, I'm sure, if it had been offered.

On a country road near Norwich, Connecticut, on a summer's day that has since been folded and creased so often it hangs together by the sheerest of threads, my father and a future United States senator stole a wagon filled with apples. They were summer apples, grown in orchards long since paved, so I cannot tell you where you might find them today, but I do know they were ripe and sweet and as large as memory requires.

Or was it a dray they stole, filled with summer squash? Or perhaps it was a sleigh, a summer sleigh drawn by a troika, with sacks of rubies nested in the back and runners that glided magically over sun-warmed grass. Perhaps it's not important.

Brown-skinned lads of eight and ten, fresh from a kitchen where a harried grandmother had spread lard on fresh bread then shooed them out the door, sending them off in search of a Rockwell moment. The wagon and team were in front of the barn, the dray was beside a shed, and the sleigh was resting on the front lawn, or maybe beneath a tree.

It was all my father's idea, his lips lard greasy. If it wasn't, then it was the senator's idea, but if he's alive he'd deny it. In any event, my father climbed up in front and grabbed the reins while the senator scrambled into the back of the wagon or dray or sleigh. With a snap they were off, trailing apples or squash or rubies,

their laughter delighting the robins and wrens that darted above their heads.

They careened down a rutted lane beneath trees whose branches formed ceremonial arches, then rattled over a bridge, sending dust and startled bats high into the air. They came to where Potter's Farm Road crossed before them, turned left and headed for Osterman's pond, or turned right and trotted down towards town, or went straight for a visit to Napawa Falls.

If it was left, then my father hauled back on the left rein, the horses hawed, and the wagon bounced off the road into a meadow where pheasants were nesting, sending them high into the air.

If it was right, my father hauled back on the right rein, the horses geed, and the dray first trundled down Fairweather Street, then bumped across Main's cobblestones, its iron-rimmed wheels shooting sparks high into the air.

If it was straight, then my father snapped both reins, three white stallions came to life, and the sleigh sailed down the road behind manes flowing free and fair. The sleigh soon came to Beaver Dam Creek, its runners biting into the water, startling napping trout and sending them leaping high into the air.

Left, right or straight, it was now in the back that the senator stood and urged their steeds forward by throwing apples, squash or rubies at their switching tails. To the left, the horses neighed and panicked. The wagon's left wheel hit a rock half submerged in the field, tossing both boys high into the air as the wagon rushed forward into Osterman's pond. My father broke his arm, the senator his leg, apples bobbed in Osterman's pond, and it took two days to calm the horses.

To the right, the horses nickered and panicked. The dray's right wheel jumped up onto the curb, tossing both boys high into the air while the dray's back end smashed into the window of Henderson's Dry Goods store. My father broke his leg, the senator his arm, the cobblestones were slick with summer squash, and it took four days to calm the horses.

Straight ahead, the horses whinnied and panicked. The sleigh's

runners bumped over roots and sliced against bark as the white stallions flashed past stands of maple and oak. Reins snapped, traces ripped, the horses broke free and veered as the sleigh rushed forward unchecked. The runners hit a berm and bounced off the bank of the Napawa River, tossing both boys high into the air to land with explosive splashes in the rushing river which gathered them up and propelled them over the edge of Napawa Falls. Tumbling and spinning in the froth-white cascade, boys and sleigh plunged one hundred feet into Napawa Lake. My father broke his arm and leg, the senator broke his leg and arm, to this day rubies can be found in the mud and weeds at the bottom of Napawa Lake, and it took six days to calm the horses.

In my father's mind, being a writer demanded a modicum of suffering. That's what he thought. In the winter he would work at a desk in our unheated attic, though he preferred to call it a garret, wearing knitted gloves with the fingers cut off, a black shawl draped about his shoulders, his quart of Hull's on the dormer's windowsill, his glass positioned hard by inkstand and pen rest. As I remember, we would often hear him stamping his feet on the rough finished floor in attempts to urge blood back into his toes. Yes, that's how it was, and if we stood at the bottom of the narrow, unlit stairs I'm sure we heard him cough.

It was in the first winter after the Great War that my grandfather succumbed to the flu. Adding to the tragedy was the fact that he had just returned to the family after being separated from his wife, Elizabeth, and their son, for five years, or maybe it was seven. He had been a civil engineer, but apparently not civil enough for Elizabeth.

While he had been gone, living in San Francisco as a driver of a horse-drawn trolley and sending no money home, or perhaps working as a collier on a coal barge that plied the Great Lakes and sending no money home, or quite possibly working as an extra in such films as Chaplin's *Kid Auto*, Griffith's *The Birth of a Na-*

tion, and alongside Douglas Fairbanks in *The Lamb*, and sending no money home, his estranged wife, my grandmother, had made ends meet and kept appearances up by playing piano in posh hotel dining rooms throughout New England. At each hotel, mother and son were provided free room and board and a small weekly salary was paid. Upon my grandfather's death she returned to the hotels and pianos.

It was at the Stanhope in Hartford in 1919 that my father distinguished himself both in his mother's eyes and those of the entire waitstaff in the hotel's main dining room. By the age of eleven, he was a veteran of dining at tables-for-one in the finest hotel restaurants, listening attentively while my grandmother sat in a high collared, white muslin dress and played Beethoven, Bach and Chopin. He would speak softly yet authoritatively to the waiters, order with aplomb, and often send compliments back to the chef when a dish especially pleased him. Thought a spoiled brat by some, snobbish by others, and certainly precocious by all, he maintained a quiet dignity that drew comments from women peering through lorgnettes and from men in silk vests smoking thick black cigars.

It was on a Thursday evening, just a little past eight, and my father had just been served an exquisite *boeuf bourguignon*, when a lady of mature years and massive bosom sitting two tables away was ignited by flames from the flambe pan her waiter was using to prepare her *cerises flambees a la bourguignonne*. The woman's husband was aghast, the waiter appalled; the woman jumped to her feet and in panic ran for the door. As she passed by my father's table he nonchalantly lifted his crystal goblet, filled to the brim with water, and with a flick of his wrist doused the fire. Immediately there was applause. Lifting a knife, then positioning a fork, my father returned to his meal.

My grandmother died long before I was born, so there's no source for corroboration or confirmation. Thus, there is the possibility that the conflagration might have occurred on a Tuesday. That evening, the restaurant was featuring *anguille a la proveniale*,

the very aroma of which turned my father's stomach. Thus, on Tuesday he dined alone in his room, reading Thackeray's *Pendennis*, and was not bothered at all by the screams.

However, it is most likely that the accident occurred on Wednesday, and my father was definitely there. The chef that evening had prepared *cotelettes d'agneau du Barry*, one of my father's favorites, especially if the cauliflower was both small and fresh. Fortunately for the lady sitting two tables away, that evening she did not order *cerises flambees a la bourguignonne*. Unfortunately, she did order *bananes flambees*, which she preferred prepared with Armagnac (my father preferred it with rum).

Again the flaming, dripping sauce, husband appalled, waiter aghast, and the woman, trailing flames, on her dash for the dining room door. Unfortunately for the lady, my father had just drawn the last drop from his crystal goblet. Fortunately for the lady, an elegant gentleman at the next table had serendipitously ordered Dom Perignon and bottle in hand was pouring some into a flute for his dinner companion, a woman most female patrons thought was entirely too young and pretty to be his wife. As the lady, afire, rushed to the door, my father regretfully set down his fork, an especially small floret impaled on its tines, and in one fluid movement arose, lifted the ice bucket from its stand and successfully doused the dowager. Bucket replaced, a soft "*Pardon*" offered to the elegant gentleman and his guest, my father regained his seat to the sound of applause and delicately lifted his fork.

Under Construction

My grandmother's pearls
were buried in the folds of her neck.
She glistened, a Madonna in sunlight,
rouge blazing withered cheeks
filled with creases that fell in cascades.
I could have tugged out two of her,
used birch saplings for bones in the second one,
wrapped her liquid folds around the whittled wood,
tucked her tight to its form. Imagine
a child arranging birch limbs on the leafy ground
to puzzle out skeletal shapes.
Construct another grandmother!
Who ever heard of such a thing?
I reasoned that to build a spare grandmother
was in prudent keeping of my Yankee tradition:
spare nothing, toss nothing out.
What were those long hanging sheaves of skin but something to be saved,
turned into the useful.
If one grandmother were to keel over, there would always be
another one of her hidden in my bedroom closet.
Tough as hardwood, she slept in her going-away-boat,
the wind through the creaky boards
of a decrepit New England funeral parlor
immense, unyielding as I gripped
the branch of her goodbye hand.

Blowhole

Flukes considered, it's strange how Mike walks around with a blowhole in his head. Though he normally breathes through his nose and his mouth, at times he must use his blowhole. This fact makes life difficult every six hours or so, when air bursts out and blossoms like an exploding eggplant. He must sit for a few moments in order to recover his sense of balance. Mean people call him "Spoutie," though they are rare and do not inhabit his spaces of work.

Sometimes, when his sleep pattern has been interrupted, the blowhole goes off more often, much like an allergic reaction. Usually, though, it follows the six-hour cycle. This allows Mike time to ready himself, to find a bathroom stall or an idle corner. He has shown his alternate form of breathing to his friends at times, but it gets old, exhibiting oneself for a beer or two. It turns most women off, he's discovered sadly.

Mike has never felt free and constantly yearns for the sea, which is strange for a native Nebraskan. Just the other day, he questioned the rationale of his existence which is something typical isn't it, even when considering suicide or immersion in a thick and potent pile of hay.

Mike has earned, over the years but mostly in his youth, a heady sum from various scientific research organizations. This money was safely tucked away in different savings accounts and investments. Yesterday, he decided to dip into it. Work was stressful, and the approaching holidays only accentuated his loneliness. He decided to go camping for a whole year.

The trail bounces under his feet and the blowhole goes off more times than usual. He's a long way from the sea; it appears he is afraid to arrive there. He pitches his tent among the cacti, eats his

Kathleen McGooley

Glamorous Joan

Privately, my five friends worry over glamorous Joan, unmarried and, *unhappy*, they murmur, *living alone*. But Chicago is different from Spokane. The parrots, really sparrows or more likely pigeons, wouldn't dare obscure Joan's sky. Her eyeshadow is the color of a doe in spring mixed with shiny beetles' shells. Okay: say the Chicago skyline is lonely, its huge glitzy sprawl wishes for color instead of its absence: Lake Michigan is lonely, the lovely sand off Lakeshore would moan if it wasn't covered in footprints. Being alone is not so bad. It's pleasant enough seeing my five college friends, but I do not tell them enough: a thin clear sheet descends and I can see them but cannot connect. So I am alone: what do they say about me? Joan, putting her lovely manicured nails through her hair, refused to rate her happiness. Scant evidence. I rated mine near the top but as always, it varies according to the day. I didn't say that. I didn't say I was wearing my only good sweater. Perfume lingered on her cuffs when she tried on my engagement ring in the train station. I was sure it would get stuck or lost, but I pretended to be calm, I annoyed only myself, checking and rechecking for the ticket I'd just put away.

Seven Poems for Holly

i. The Game

*But one wanted to get up again with chin uplifted,
only to roll into a deeper ditch.*

Kafka

Woman alone in the garden,
man in the garden alone,
monkeys baring upside-down
their teeth, their young, each other —
assign ourselves to truth
as inconvenience, or
to cut flowers, the nature of criticism:
cut off, cut-rate, cut time.

Words lie where they won't sleep — this grass
growing little blades.
Whose mother said a cut flower
can't reseed itself?
Whose baby cried all night long?
Who blames the dark?
A mole sabotages long caverns, rooting out....

ii. In A Chamber of the Innermost Palace

Distinct as if I had run my hands over him,
the priest walks into his own shadow
and there removes his hat, his white collar,

places them on the mahogany table
with a jar of dead grasshoppers
and a tray of bird feathers

“all from different countries,” he says.

He holds a black feather up to the candle
which he had lit when he first entered the hall

and which I forgot to mention.
“Did you know the smallest birds
sing some of the longest songs?” he asks.

Frayed edges of the feather
catch fire and then
the hallway down which I follow him

catches too.
The grasshoppers did not.
They were in the jar.

iii. Eye

When you touch the glass, cold
runs the length of you,
finger to temple.
Your print has an eye,
the eye a hole.
Through the hole, the moon
carves one side of itself away.
The cut curves around you,
the dream has you
running from one end of the cage
to the other.

iv. Sabotage

The pulse will not let you
sleep, or if you do, it must be
with a faster heartbeat — the heartbeat of

a child skipping rope
or out of sight —
you are trying to skip that part.

In the valley of stone
the train will stop, the windows collect
eyes and mouths, geometric art.

The conductor slides his shadow between cars,
and uncouples the shadow.
But you promised

not to reveal the missing — neither the passengers,
nor the buttons on his uniform,
nor his missing hand.

v. Salamander

Draw ahead without a body, tie it.
Place a petal on each eye, and an eye in the forehead.
Put Kafka in the picture wandering among children
who think the dead are angels, and an angel

takes your hand,
walks you down the street where the organ grinder
feeds his little monkey grapes
and sweet spun licorice on a stick.

If you pay him, he will play
and the bird perched on his shoulder
flap its underwings.
The fire has a nostalgic blaze....

Should you try to put it out?
The children do not mind the heat,
just notice how their bones light up:
the bird burns blue.

vi. Gift

The howl not big enough
to stick one's hands in,
if a howl were all you needed,
would be simple —
to disappear from a mirror
or the mouth of the moon, or from under the house.

In the bare-bulb light of the basement stairs,
you followed your terrier down
to the room with the dirt floor, where he dug up
his bone, and another, and another, until
the floor was strewn with bones.
His tongue hung, a dull ornament.
He wanted you to pet him.
He wanted to lick your hand.

Old uncles, pot roast, grace, rats in the pantry,
a broken jar of marmalade.
Needles stick in the carpet under the Christmas tree.
Carry a corpse into the house
and it fills the house,
but a live body the house fills.

The gift wrapped in tissue and red ribbon
which had a tag but no name,
and which a voice told you to open,
opened itself.

vii. Comedy

Today, it was the man whose eye socket
bled where stitched.

"I dropped a boy," he told me.

"How badly does it hurt?"

"There are many others," he said,
"who may or may not be the window's eye."

"And what is your final trick?" I asked.

"There will be a streetcar passing soon."

The passengers beckoned for us to board,
extending limp hands at the ends
of arms not limp exactly, but more like stuffed fur.

"My final trick," he said, "is comedy."

He had, of course, been running,

but I, trying to catch up,
kept stumbling over my shoelace.
We laughed until our sides ached,
laughed ourselves on and off.

The streetcar disappeared; they
had taken him on board,
and I, who could not hold on,
absorbed myself with that part of town
where streets, deserted, run both ways.

The Searchers

Mornings, Henry could almost believe that Miriam was all right. He could almost believe that the Miriam of all the nights before, the silent Miriam who lay huddled on the living room couch in front of the same reflected blue light from the same movie, did not exist. Instead, there was only day Miriam who woke up chatting every morning at seven o'clock, just as Henry did. She dressed herself neatly in trousers, a sweater, thick socks and sneakers. Henry liked to watch as she washed her face and brushed her teeth. Miriam used a very white cream on her face. She would place two great smears of the stuff on either cheek and then scrub hard with a rough brown washcloth before she rinsed with the icy water that she sometimes splashed at Henry.

After they were both dressed for the day, Henry and Miriam walked down the dark, cramped back staircase into the kitchen. They drank coffee and ate muffins, and sometimes Henry made oatmeal. They talked of the weather, of the garden, of their daughter Sara who taught high school biology three states away.

As Miriam talked and drank her coffee, lots of milk and no sugar, Henry would lean his left cheek against the back of his left hand and wish that they could just sit at the shiny wooden table forever and talk over coffee. But all too soon, Miriam was leaping up and rinsing the dishes and Henry felt the day ripping in half, falling into shreds, disintegrating.

This morning, for instance, Henry saw a small square of autumn sunlight resting on his shirt, just above the elbow, and suddenly he dipped his head and licked the bright patch. If I get out of this seat, he thought, day will pass and when I come home tonight she will not speak to me. Even as Miriam bustled happily around the kitchen, finding her garden shears and yanking her brown garden boots up

over her calves, Henry thought, I will come home tonight and she will not speak. Henry pictured Miriam's small lips, open in a wide circle that got smaller and smaller with every swipe the hand made around the clock.

Henry shuffled to his feet and said he'd better be getting down to the school. Henry was a guidance counselor at the local high school. Miriam nodded and craned her neck to see the thermometer through the window above the sink. "It's warm for November," she said, "why don't you walk?"

"Why not?" said Henry. He stepped into the little washroom under the back stairs, shut the door, and scrubbed his hands. She just waits for me to leave, he thought suddenly. She just waits for me to leave so that she can start and end her day. The quick thought hurt, as if he had slipped and landed on his tailbone.

In the kitchen, Miriam kissed Henry on the cheek and ran out the back door. Henry watched her small body drop down among the dying mums and disappear. He turned away and walked slowly through the series of small rooms and crooked doorways that made up the downstairs and opened the creaking French doors to the living room. The VCR light was still on. Henry could not remember it ever being dark.

He touched the eject button on the tape machine and felt the videotape push into his hand. It was warm. Henry flipped it over and rubbed the top with his thumb as he looked at the worn title sticker: *The Searchers*. Should I take it? he wondered. Should I just drop the tape into my coat pocket and walk out of the house with it? He didn't want to think about what might happen if he did: Miriam, white-faced and taut, ripping apart the dining room, the little den, the living room, searching, searching for her movie as the rooms grew darker and darker, finally fading to black. After a minute, Henry tossed the tape onto the TV and left it there, out of place, for Miriam to find.

Henry usually enjoyed his walk, but today he felt as if his gait were awkward, as if the people in passing cars were looking curiously at him. He cleared his throat many times. He could not catch

his breath. I'm old, he thought, aching. She's made us old.

Henry remembered the first time he had watched *The Searchers* with Miriam. They had just gotten married and were honeymooning in Melbourne, Florida. Every day, they walked to the beach loaded with fruit, sandwiches and a giant thermos of gin and tonics. They lay on the beach, browned and slightly boozy, watching fishermen cast lines into the waves. At four o'clock, they swayed back to the hotel under the orange Florida sun and made love in the cool air-conditioned room. The sheets were very fine and smooth, and Henry watched as they slid across Miriam's small dark body in soft waves.

At night, they walked over the cooling sidewalks that lined the small town. They held hands and ate giant ice cream cones. Miriam pulled Henry into little shops and bought silly presents for all her friends: T-shirts embroidered with parrots, tiny buckets and miniature shovels, a bracelet made of dried sea horses. Henry carried all of Miriam's packages.

On their last night, Henry and Miriam just walked and walked. They made up memory games to ensure that neither of them forgot any details of their honeymoon.

"Name of that waiter from Conchy Joe's?" quizzed Miriam.

"Sean," said Henry.

"What did I have for breakfast on the second morning?" Miriam narrowed her eyes.

"Strawberries and cornflakes," said Henry. He had been just about to give Miriam a little kiss on the brown tender spot just inside her elbow when she stopped dead in her tracks.

"Look!" she shouted. Henry looked. Across the narrow street was a movie theater, the kind that showed only one film at a time. The marquee lights had suddenly clicked on and they glowed dimly in the Florida dusk.

"Oh, *The Searchers!*" Miriam cried. Henry looked blankly at her. "You know," Miriam said impatiently. "Uncle Ethan and poor Lucy and little lost Debbie who was stolen by the Indians. Didn't

you ever see it?" She grabbed Henry's arm and dragged him across the street. "The Indians kill Joe and his wife — I can't remember her name — and his son, but they steal the two girls and Ethan spends five years searching the West for them." Miriam bought two tickets at the window and turned back to Henry. "But when he finally finds Debbie, Lucy died years before, when he finally finds Debbie he wants to shoot her because she's all grown up and an Indian's wife." Miriam had a huge smile on her face.

"Well," Henry said nervously, "sounds great, just great."

"It's *John Wayne*," Miriam said, as if that explained it. She practically raced Henry into the theater's balcony and scurried about buying popcorn and sodas. "Sit down, sit down," she said excitedly, even though it was Henry who had already found his seat. Miriam was the one still standing. "You're going to love this movie!" Henry hoped he would love the movie, if only for Miriam's sake.

It turned out that Henry liked the movie a good deal. He liked the way John Ford used all those different kinds of doors in the film. Civilization was always on one side of a swinging door, the side that John Wayne was never allowed to see. The last scene of the movie was what Henry liked the best: the Swedish couple had rushed Debbie, saved from the Indians by her Uncle Ethan who had decided *not* to shoot her after all, into the house. They passed out of the bright Western light, through the open door and seemed to walk straight into the camera and disappear. John Wayne took a few hesitant steps toward the door, stopped, slapped the dust off his hat and turned away. His back filled the doorway, a solid back, a lonely back, and then the door swung shut.

Miriam was wiping her eyes with a napkin. She had begun to cry at the climatic scene as Uncle Ethan chased Debbie, a very young Natalie Wood, down a long rocky path, grim intent on his face. He rode high in the saddle, practically hanging over his horse's head as he tried to run Debbie, fleeing desperately in her thin moccasins, into the mountain dirt. Ethan vaulted off his horse and stood over the frightened girl. Only her wide dark eyes and that sturdy dust-covered back could be seen, and then Uncle Ethan swung the girl

up in his arms in one swift saving motion and said, "Let's go home, Debbie." Miriam leaned toward the screen as John Wayne lifted Natalie Wood high into the air before he tucked her into his chest.

Miriam snuffled all the way back to the hotel.

The next morning, however, Miriam was fine. She lolled on the bed and moaned, "I don't want to go back to New York," but she was giggling the whole time. Henry smiled and rushed about with suitcases and timetables and tickets. He couldn't wait to get home and see his dark Miriam yawning at their breakfast table, wearing her light pink robe and tiny white slippers. He couldn't wait for her to start decorating his small bachelor house: their bedroom, the bathroom, maybe she'd even want to redo the kitchen! He couldn't wait for Miriam to kiss him goodbye in the morning and greet him again when he returned in the late afternoon. Henry couldn't wait for their life, his and Miriam's, to start.

The first part of marriage is adjustment, Henry thought to himself two months later. "Marriage is like monkey bars," he said aloud. Who had told him that? His long dead mother? An aunt? He couldn't remember. What was the rest of the saying? "Marriage is like the monkey bars," he whispered, "it's a struggle from one side to the other, and it's hard to keep the same pace." Henry was sitting at the kitchen table in his pajamas and robe, waiting for Miriam to return from her morning jog, feeling distinctly out paced. Henry had discovered that Miriam did not sit around yawning in the morning, in fact, she never sat around at all. He hadn't seen the pink bathrobe or white slippers since they had come back from Florida. "Why don't you wear your pink robe anymore?" he'd asked last month.

Miriam had looked puzzled. "What pink robe?" she'd puffed. She was doing sit-ups on the living room floor in a raggy pair of running shorts and one of Henry's old T-shirts.

"You know," said Henry, "the one you wore in Florida all the time. You wore it with those little white slippers." He put his hand on her stomach and felt Miriam's muscles tighten as she pulled her

upper body into a sitting position.

"Oh," Miriam panted, "that was just for the honeymoon. I don't even know where I put it."

"Well," said Henry, smiling heartily, "I really love that pink robe of yours." He took his hand off Miriam's hard stomach and put it in his pants pocket.

"Do you?" Miriam said. "That's funny. I mean, it's not something I'd normally wear."

Henry felt crushingly let down, and it must have showed in his eyes because Miriam dug the robe out of her closet and wore it for a few minutes in the mornings before she changed into her jogging clothes. Then she must have forgotten all about the pink robe, because the only time Henry ever saw it was when he opened the spare room closet door. A small pink sleeve showed between some dark tweedy things, and sometimes Henry would feel the light material with his fingers and think of the orange Florida sun.

There were other things, too. Miriam showed no sign of wanting to redecorate anything and refused to discuss even wallpaper or paint. "My parents never stopped redecorating our house when I was growing up," she had said seriously. "If I ever smell wallpaper paste again, I'll be sick to my stomach!" Henry's heart had dropped; he had pictured Miriam dressed in one of his old button-down shirts, her dark hair tied back in a bandana, a splotch of creamy yellow paint on her cheek as she smoothed color onto the inner walls of their house. He had pictured lifting her down from a ladder and kissing the line between her eyes as he admired her handiwork.

But Miriam was rarely ever *in* the house. She left for work — how had he forgotten that she had a job? — even earlier than Henry did and when she was home she spent most of her time working in the yard. Henry hadn't mowed the lawn once since they'd been married. The garden, all reds and blues and greens, was beautiful; strangers always slowed their cars to admire it, but Henry felt disturbed, anxious. Little things gnawed at him.

Just last night for instance, when Henry couldn't find his razor.

He had poked around in the bathroom for a minute and then went to the top of the stairs. "Miriam," he had called down, "where's my razor?"

"Your razor?" she called back. Henry waited a few minutes, thinking that she would come upstairs and pull the razor out of whatever drawer in which she had tucked it away. She would smile at him, shaking her head, pleased that he needed her to do these little things for him. He waited and waited. Finally, he went downstairs.

"Miriam," he said impatiently, "I need my razor." Miriam stopped snipping leaves off the potted ivy she was trimming and looked at him.

"My razor," Henry said again.

"Did you lose it?" asked Miriam. She looked confused, and Henry grew angry when he realized she didn't understand what he wanted.

"Why didn't you come upstairs and show me where my razor is?" Henry said, a little loudly.

"How in the world would I know where your razor is?" Miriam asked, surprised. "I never touched it. I don't think I'd even know what it looked like." She was staring at Henry as if he were a stranger who had stopped her on the street and asked for directions to Thailand.

Henry struggled with himself. He was embarrassed for growing angry over such a little thing, but what did she mean that she didn't know what his razor looked like? How could she not know? Why didn't she know where his razor was, or whether his white shirt needed ironing, or whether there was any cereal left in the pantry, or where his brown shoes were? Wasn't she *supposed* to know these things?

"Do you know where *my* razor is?" asked Miriam. She was twirling the scissors in her left hand and looking at him curiously. "Do you know what it looks like?"

"No," said Henry, suddenly deflated. "No, I don't." He turned away slowly and made his way back to the second floor. He could hear Miriam talking to her plant.

“That’s better, isn’t it?” Miriam was saying as she snipped. “Yes, that’s much better.”

All in all, though, Henry decided he was very happy. He had his Miriam, and even if marriage wasn’t exactly the way he imagined, it was still wonderful. He even grew to like those little boy togs she wore everywhere except to work. Gradually he understood that all those clothes he’d seen while they were dating, the red dress, that blue skirt with the striped blouse, those shiny maroon leather shoes with the brass buckles, the delicate white sweater, weren’t hers. Miriam had borrowed them from her girlfriends on the nights she and Henry went to a concert, or ate dinner out. “Actually,” Miriam remembered, “I never even *asked* my friends if I could borrow their clothes. On Friday or Saturday nights, Karen or Sally or Samantha would just show up with an armload and dress me before you came to pick me up.” Henry had felt a tinge at this: didn’t that smack just a little of conspiracy? But as he gazed at Miriam’s thick dark hair and as he felt her warm fingers rubbing the inside of his wrist, the twinge disappeared. Miriam’s lips were a brownish-pink and they were as warm as her finger.

As he sat in his guidance office, Henry tried to figure out the exact point in time when Miriam had stepped out of their marriage and into John Wayne’s sturdy arms. It hadn’t been too long ago, Henry thought. She had always loved the movie, but she hadn’t been so — Henry shied away from the word obsessed — *taken* with it until oh, five or six months ago? A little less? He leaned back in his chair and reeled time through his head, trying to remember every time he and Miriam had watched *The Searchers*, looking for some clue, some explanation. There were gaps, of course, years and years in which Miriam and Henry had been married and Miriam *hadn’t* seen the movie. Between the Melbourne showing and the time they saw the film with Sara at Proctor’s in Schenectady, nine or ten years had gone by. Had she thought of John Wayne all those years?

Maybe all that energy, the running, the gardening, had merely

been an outlet, a way for Miriam to keep her mind off the Duke. Henry pictured Miriam as a dark jerky marionette, wrenching her tiny limbs this way and that in frantic exercise while a movie burned in her brain.

If this was true, thought Henry sadly, it was really he who had put all of his energy into loving Miriam and their marriage, while she had put all her energy into not loving John Wayne. Henry realized that Miriam had not stepped out of their marriage, she had dropped out. She had dropped down far below to the ground and just lay watching as he struggled, struggled to hang onto the metal rods, always moving ahead as she lay motionless, a viewer.

Someone knocked on Henry's office door, but he ignored it. He had taken to keeping the door shut lately, even though he had left it open every day for years. Students had always been free to wander in and out with sodas and jokes and complaints, but Henry couldn't seem to gather enough strength to pull the door open, or call "Come in." He wondered what Miriam was doing, wondered whether or not she had finished her gardening, wondered if she'd had her lunch. He imagined her sitting at the kitchen table with a cheese and mustard sandwich and a cup of Lipton tea, chewing and sipping, maybe leafing through a seed catalog or a magazine. Maybe she was writing to Sara with her little pearl-handled pen and that thick cream-colored paper that she liked to use for letters. Henry loved watching her write letters; he loved the way she pushed up her sleeves; he loved the way she crinkled her forehead; he loved the sound of her pen scratching across the paper.

He should have stayed home today, he thought. But he knew it was useless. On weekends, she would just slip away from him when the shadows started to lengthen. She would just fall silent and slip away, no matter what he said. The house made it easy for her to disappear, thought Henry. Every room had at least two doors that led into other rooms. They had a funny kind of a house with no real hallways, just lots of rooms spilling into each other, and the foundation leaned on an odd angle so that all the doors swung shut unless something propped them open. It made Henry feel strange

and breathless to search through room after room for Miriam, opening door after door only to hear them click or slam shut behind him. He stared at his feet as he moved from room to room, crossing over thresholds and carpets, scuffing against hardwood and linoleum. He felt as if he were leaving a trail, a trail of noisy doors that Miriam could hear and mark. So he would just sit and wait and when it was midnight Miriam would reappear in the living room only to push in her videotape and curl up on the couch.

Henry was happy when Miriam agreed to name the baby Sara, after his mother. In the hospital, looking through the nursery glass at the small baby wrapped in pink, Henry felt the name form in his mouth. He pictured her walking beside him, taking careful steps in white shoes, holding onto his hand trustingly. He saw her pursing up her lips for a kiss, fresh and clean from the bath. Henry leaned his forehead against the cool glass and smiled.

At home, though, looking at Sara, Henry felt as though he had suddenly shrunk. The baby seemed to have swelled during her week in the hospital. Her head was a ponderous balloon, puffy and lopsided, and she gripped Miriam's breast with huge squishy hands.

Miriam put the baby in Henry's lap but he was afraid to touch her. Henry suddenly remembered sleeping in a friend's tent when he was a young boy. It had rained and Henry had touched the roof of the tent with his finger and watched as a stream of rainwater gushed through the print his finger had made. If he touched the baby, touched her tight rubbery skin, she would leak all over the floor.

Henry never understood the baby clutter, the clothes, the toys, the fold-up crib and playpen that Miriam said were so necessary, never understood the parade of pink ducks that marched around the walls of the tiny nursery. As Sara grew, it seemed as if the clutter grew with her. Henry would lean awkwardly in the child's bedroom doorway, his shoulders filling the frame, and watch her play among her scattered toys. Some of these toys disturbed Henry. For instance, why did Sara own all of these naked dolls? "This is Barbie,"

Sara would say in that froggy little voice she had, holding up a plastic figure with chipped toes and enormous breasts. The pale protruding cones had no nipples.

"Doesn't she have any clothes?" Henry asked once.

"Sure, but they're for good," Sara said reassuringly.

"Oh," said Henry. Maybe I should buy her a chemistry set, he thought. Weren't little girls today supposed to be thinking about careers in law and medicine and science? He eyed the empty cleft between Barbie's legs and cleared his throat.

Henry walked down the back stairs to the kitchen where Miriam was planting seedlings in paper cups. "Why is it that none of Sara's dolls are wearing clothes?" he asked.

"She loves to dress and undress them!" Miriam said. "She's got a wonderful imagination."

"She never dresses them," said Henry. He didn't like the dolls, but he didn't want to say so. Instead he said, "Why don't we buy her a chemistry set?"

"Oh, Henry," said Miriam, laughing, "they're just toys." She packed dirt into the paper cups with her thumb and picked delicately at the seeds. Henry touched her knuckles with his finger and decided to laugh. Miriam's fingernails were a clean, faint pink against her brown fingers, the faint pink of a sun-bleached seashell lying on warm beach sand.

It was during the naked doll phase that Henry saw *The Searchers* for the second time. He had come home from school to find Miriam washing Sara's long curly hair in the tub and setting out smooth clothes — Miriam rarely ironed — for all of them. "*The Searchers* is playing at Proctor's!" Miriam was shouting. She pushed Henry into their bedroom and told him to change while she dried Sara's hair and dressed herself. It was only after they were in the car, Sara's hair still damp, that Henry realized he'd had nothing to eat. "I'll get you some Junior Mints," Miriam promised. By the time they reached Schenectady, Henry's stomach was growling and Miriam had added popcorn to Henry's dinner menu.

Miriam hustled them into the theater and found them seats in

the balcony just as the movie started. The screen was huge, much bigger than the one in Melbourne, and John Wayne loomed large in the darkness of the theater as he slowly rode onto his brother Joe's dusty Western farm with a leather pouch full of Mexican gold. He kissed his pretty nieces and shook Joe's hand, and then he turned to Joe's wife who looked as if her big blue eyes were full of tears, and he kissed her too, a gentle kiss. And she whispered, "Welcome home, Ethan," and Henry knew that Ethan and Joe's wife loved each other, knew by the way she hurried into the house without looking at her husband, by the way she held Ethan's coat to her breast as the camera framed her in the doorway. Why, I never even noticed that, thought Henry.

Miriam seemed impatient though, restless. Only during that almost fatal scene, where Natalie Wood dashes for her life, her long dark braid streaming out behind her, did Miriam settle back and relax. Then came the pounding hooves of Ethan's horse, and then the big red-shirted man himself was holding grown-up little Debbie in his arms and Miriam was crying and reaching out for Ethan to come and cradle her against his chest, too.

Henry picked at his nails and shuffled student files. Should he call a doctor for Miriam? Should he write to Sara and ask her to come home? He had waited too long, Henry thought in despair. If only he had acted that first week when she had silently watched the movie for seven straight nights, replaying over and over again those broad shoulders as they lifted Natalie Wood toward the sky.

Henry himself had brought Miriam the videotape a few years ago when it seemed every movie ever made was available in the stores for nineteen-ninety-five. Henry gave Miriam her own tape for the movie so she wouldn't have to keep renting it because once VCRs had been developed, Miriam had rented the tape every few months and bundled herself up on the couch to watch. On those nights, Henry would come home from work and find Sara, a plumpish high-schooler by then, waiting for him. "There's no dinner," she would announce matter-of-factly. "Mom's just sitting there

watching that movie and she won't get up." Henry would sigh and nod and together they would make waffles with lots of syrup and eat too much ice cream.

But now, thought Henry, Sara is gone and I have to go home and watch the movie with her, or sit alone in the kitchen again. Henry slowly pushed a stack of SAT forms over the edge of his desk and watched as they fanned out against the floor. He thought of Florida: of the orange Florida sun, of Miriam's pink bathrobe, of that thermos they had used to carry the gin and tonics.

Henry, forty-four and feeling eighty, laid his head on his desk and cried.

After awhile, he got up, left the school, and went shopping.

Henry let himself into the house at midnight. He had deliberately stayed away until he was pretty sure Miriam had turned off the television and made her way upstairs. Now, he tiptoed into the dark living room; it was empty and motionless except for the blinking green light on the VCR. Bags crinkling under his arms, Henry crossed the floor and turned off the VCR before he headed upstairs.

Miriam lay silently with her back to the bedroom door. Henry rustled by her and crept into the bathroom. Once he had the door shut, Henry stripped down to his white briefs and then started opening his bags. He pulled out a pair of chaps and slipped them on over his underpants. Then he added boots, complete with jangling spurs, and to top it off, a black cowboy hat. Henry stared into the mirror, looked critically at his stomach. I will do anything, he thought. Then he jangled into the bedroom and walked, boots thumping, around to Miriam's side of the bed. Henry opened his mouth— oh, how he had rehearsed this! — and said, "Let's go home, Debbie."

And Miriam, she rolled over in bed, looked at him and said, "I don't want you. I want Ethan." Then she folded herself into a soggy crying lump and Henry jangled back into the bathroom and shut the door. He quickly took off the boots, the chaps, the spurs. His

face was red and hot and he kept moving by jerking his legs back into pants, his arms back into a shirt. He swung the bathroom door wide open and rushed through the bedroom, not looking at Miriam — goddamn her! — and back down into the living room.

Henry clicked the VCR back on, saw the green beacon shine out from the machine, and slammed the videotape back into the slot. On the screen, John Wayne was shooting wildly at buffalo, killing them recklessly so that the Indians would have no food and starve. His face was twisted and ugly and he fought his dark young nephew off and as he pumped round and round into the great woolly beasts. Henry sat and watched as the massive buffalo roared and crashed to the snowy ground, and he watched as the blue and gold cavalry came and still the buffalo died.

Charles Baxter

“You’re Really Something”
Inflection and the Breath of Life

Give me the daggers....
Lady Macbeth

He’d kill us if he had the chance.
Francis Ford Coppola, *The Conversation*

Before Spielberg, and before *Jurassic Park*, and before *The Lost World* was found and filmed and sold to millions, and before there was tie-in merchandising of *Jurassic Park* lunch boxes and T-shirts and video games, before special effects and multimillion dollar box-office receipts, before all this, there was, and still is, along Highway 12 in southern Michigan close to the Ohio border, a humble tourist trap, Dinosaur World. Dinosaur World is a little roadside attraction in Michigan’s so-called Irish Hills. It shares the neighborhood with a Mystery Spot, where the laws of gravity are violated and where, the billboards claim, scientists are baffled; a fireworks outlet called The Boom Box; the Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential railroad car set up next to a chocolate fudge stand; Chilly Willy’s putt-putt golf course; and other odds and ends of local tourist interest, including a water slide and a go-cart track. Most of the businesses could use a few coats of paint. The place has seen better times. Like Norman Bates’s motel, the area has suffered neglect ever since, to use the local phrase, “they moved the highway,” meaning the freeway, which is now fifteen miles north.

When our son was seven years old, my wife and I decided to make a day of it and take him to Dinosaur World. We figured he was ready for the terrors of prehistoric killer raptors and reptiles.

He thought so, too.

Outside Dinosaur World a fountain of sorts spouts water tinted dark blue, thanks to heavy doses of blue dye. You pay the entry fee and are loaded onto a train of what seem to be about eight rusting golf carts, Cushman Cars, linked together. There are no rails. These carts are on kid-sized rubber wheels. While you wait for the guide, you watch the Triceratops, the one dinosaur available for free viewing. He is constructed out of chicken wire and some sort of painted plaster. His mouth opens and shuts every five seconds, like an elf in a department store Christmas window display, and the sound of reptilian indigestion emerges from a hidden loudspeaker in the bushes.

At last our guide arrived. He was a high school kid. This was his summer job. It was August, and you could tell from the expression on his face that he had just about had it with Dinosaur World. He was exasperated and bored but was playing it cool. He looked at us, his customers and fellow adventurers, with ferociously undisguised teenaged indifference. "Welcome to Dinosaur World," he said in a flat monotone. "We are about to go into a land that existed before time began." He had said the line so often that it had turned, almost Germanically, into one word. "Wearcabouttogoointoalandthatexistedbeforetimebegan." He plunked himself down into the driver's seat of the head golf cart and began speaking into a microphone. "Fasten your seat belts," he said, unnecessarily. His voice came out in that distinctly distorted tin foil PA system bus tour manner. "Lemmeknowifthereareanyquestions."

The hapless train, moving backward in time in several respects, followed the asphalt road around the displays of chicken wire and painted plaster. The multinational technology of Disney World was far, far, *far* away. Every once or so often the guide would stop to explain a prehistoric wonder that was before our eyes, reciting his memorized script with incremental boredom. At the climax of the tour he said, mumbling into a microphone close by an eight-foot-high killer dinosaur, "This is the fearsome

Tyrannosaurus Rex." He yawned, and the three of us, my wife and son and I, burst out laughing. The guide looked slightly taken aback. "What's a matter?" he asked. "You're not scared?"

I can't remember what my wife and son did, but I shrugged. I had loved his use of the word *fearsome*, however, and I resolved to remember it and use it someday in a story.

Feeling slightly defeated, however, we rode back to the gift shop, where Dinosaur World salt-and-pepper shakers and post-cards were for sale. There we bailed out. I could imagine how the tour guide would sound when he was behind closed doors, talking to a fellow guide. "So they're, like, *sitting* there, and I'm like, doing the tour? and man, these *assholes*, begin to, y'know, *laugh*? and, jeez, it just totally fucking freaks me *out*. I tell you, man, Dinosaur World is *the* job from hell. You know what I'm sayin'? This place is the fucking armpit of the universe. Man, I cannot *wait* until football practice starts." All the inflection missing from his tour would have found its way into his inventory of complaints.

Coleridge's "willing suspension of disbelief" is a curious category. What makes it curious is not the "suspension" but the "willing." None of us at Dinosaur World expected to believe what we were seeing. We expected to be invited to a little party where the host acted as if *he* believed, or at least was interested in what he was seeing, and was inviting us into that *as if*. The tour guide had an actor's job, and he had to perform a role and play a part. His job was to encourage us, to invite us, to will our suspension of disbelief. That was his task, his summer vocation. His role was to pretend, within limits, that he was inside a moment of time and that we could join him there. He was supposed to hypnotize us a little. This is the technical problem of narratives concerning fantasy materials. He was supposed to pretend to be interested, and he had to be the first person to believe. He had to perform his belief. All his information about dinosaurs was secondary. He didn't perform magic, and we didn't really expect him to. There was no true magic to be had, and we knew that.

No: *He was supposed to act as if there was magic.* As Orson Welles once said, there are no magicians; there are only actors who are playing magicians. A great magician is a great actor. And great actors perform hypnosis on a small scale. They make us fall asleep into another world.

You get involved in a story when, among other reasons, you get attached to a set of narrated events, or when the tone of the narrative has so many signs of emphasis that it rouses itself to life and disbelief is suspended. The story starts to believe in itself, and it often does so through inflection. You also acquire the sensation that somebody has believed this story. That's called conviction, and it may be pleasant or unpleasant. "Once a bitch always a bitch, what I say. I says you're lucky if her playing out of school is all that worries you" (Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*).

Inflection, the tone in which something is said, particularly when applied to extreme events or circumstances, can be relentlessly important to writers of fiction. It signals belief. It is not emotion recollected in tranquility; it is emotion reenacted before your eyes. The story is singing or groaning itself awake. And belief creates a feeling of being inside a moment and re-creating it. Inflection is the sign of spoken intensity; it is the sign that somebody cares about what's being said.

Writers of fiction not only stage events but often must suggest how those events and statements are to be inflected, that is, how they are to be acted, how they should be pitched, how they should be voiced. As fiction writers, we are both the creators and the directors. My dictionary defines *inflection* as an alteration in tone or pitch of the voice. This might seem to be a small matter, but an alteration in tone or pitch can be the difference between being inside a moment and literally being out of it, or between fighting words and a statement of love, using the identical phrase, such as "You're really something." Say it one way, it's a caress. Say it another, and it's a slap. Say it flatly, and you're thrown out of the story.

Inflection, then, is two things: an indication of life-in-the-moment and an indication of how a phrase is to be understood. How a phrase is to be understood, or is understood, is often more important than what is literally said. It is the life of the story and its subtext. It is the difference between a tone of uninvolvedness with one's own story and a sense that the story is alive, that it is going on *right now*, in front of us. A shift in tone constitutes a shift in meaning, from sincerity to irony or exasperation to incredulity, and it is a shift that has the strange capacity to bring a scene to life, to suspend disbelief.

But here, as writers, we have a large-scale problem. The trouble is that every page is silent. Every writer sooner or later runs up against the silence of the page, where tone and pitch are only implied. Sooner or later, the reader's imagination must take over. Indications of inflection encourage the reader to become active.

In real life you start to inflect statements when you don't quite believe that the words alone will carry the emotional meanings of what you need to convey. "So, they're *sitting* there, and I'm, like, doing *the tour*?" It's like saying: I can't believe what I'm telling you. Inflection is often a substitute for eloquence for the inarticulate — it can convey feeling despite a screen of poor or approximate word choices, because the words that it *does* employ are being subjected to so many tonal shadings. Multiple inflection typically gives the sense of the speaker's great involvement in what he or she is saying. It puts stress on the words, it weights them, it *enthusiastifies* them. And it is particularly necessary to those who don't have access to official language and official eloquence — to teenagers, and the dispossessed, to minority groups, and those who are baffled and broken, the hopeless and downcast, the obsessed and the fantasists, outsiders of every kind and stripe, and those who are feeling two contradictory emotions at the same time. Inflection is the home of fugitive feelings and of layered or compounded emotion. It is the eloquent music of colloquial language. It is the homing device of effective liars, magicians, outcasts, and hypnotists.

Is it possible that some fiction may be underacted? This is not a criticism we usually hear. After all, stories can be told without being brought entirely to life, and one of the signs of this semi-lifelessness, this zombie condition, this Dinosaur World narration, is that the whole story seems uninflected, as if the writer had not quite believed his own story, or was an agnostic about it, or didn't want to get involved in it, or was bored, or wanted to keep a safe distance from it or from the audience. Sometimes writers want to tell a story without being committed to it. How odd that is! It's as if the cooking temperature of the story has been set too low.

I am on an Amtrak train in Oregon. Right behind me there is a little girl commenting on the trip, town by town, mile by mile. When we cross a river, and the bridge under the tracks is not visible underneath us, the girl says to her mother, "I'm frightened! We'll all fall into the river. We will be *destiny*." I immediately write down the sentence and am simultaneously plunged into despair about how to convey on a page the way the girl sang out the word *destiny*.

Inflection in fiction writing can probably be understood to include the writer's use of indicators about how a line of dialogue was spoken or emphasized or repeated or how it might be heard or misheard or misunderstood. Inflection can be built into the dialogue itself. After you've written the line, you sometimes have to decide how you want it to sound or to be acted. This is the art of acting as applied to the art of writing. Inflection provides a context for a line, so that we know how the words, "You're really something," are to be understood. When a statement is operatively vague, like "You're really something," inflection or its context fill in what the vagueness leaves out. Sometimes we know how to hear it by noticing how other characters react to it. And good acting often gives us an unexpected inflection, a reversal of

what's expected, that makes a scene with dialogue come to life.

Often beginning writers are warned against telling the reader by means of adverbs how a person said something. When I was a kid, these writerly dialogue adverb tags were called Tom Swifties, in honor of those Tom Swift young-adult books for boys. A Tom Swifty is an adverb tag that stupidly points up what is obviously there already. "I won't do it!" said Tom, stubbornly."

But most of the time we are saying what we are saying in a manner that isn't obvious. And we are accompanying these statements with a large inventory of pauses, facial gestures, body movements that can intensify or contradict the apparent meaning of what we're saying. You can say, "I love you," while at the same time your body's actions can disprove it. A conversation can go on entirely by means of body language, with no words at all. In dialogue we emphasize some words over others, thereby giving a special meaning to the sentence. In act 2, scene 2, of *Macbeth*, for example, the woman who plays Lady Macbeth has to decide how to deliver the simple line: "Give me the daggers" (she means the bloody knives that Macbeth has used to murder Duncan). If she says, "*Give* me the daggers," she's exasperated; if she says, "Give *me* the daggers," she's mocking Macbeth's weakness and emphasizing her own strength and ability to get the job done; if she says, "Give me the *daggers*," then she's triumphant and blood-thirsty.

The plot of Francis Ford Coppola's remarkable movie *The Conversation* hinges entirely on how a single line of dialogue spoken by two young people is inflected and how the movie's protagonist, Harry Caul, hears it or mishears it. The line is "He'd *kill* us if he had the chance." If the inflection, the emphasis, is on *kill*, then the two people who are overheard in the conversation are frightened for their own safety ("He'd *kill* us if he had the chance"). If the emphasis is on *us*, then they are plotting a murder themselves ("He'd kill *us*, if he had the chance"). In the second reading, by the way, it helps to have a pause, a comma, after *us*. What happens, in that reading of the line, is that inflection

flips the statement's apparent meaning.

Notice this flip in tone. Actors sometimes describe a "flip" as an unexpected reading of a line that wakes you up. The actor switches or flips the emotion so that the tone you had expected isn't there. Instead, the line is delivered, altered, with a tonal shading you hadn't expected but which was buried in the line nevertheless and makes the line more immediate. Christopher Walken has described seeing Laurence Olivier playing Dr. Astrov in Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* and flipping the tone in Astrov's first long speech. In this speech, near the beginning of act I, Dr. Astrov comes on the stage and describes losing a patient, a railroad worker, who has died on the operating table under chloroform. Most actors, playing this role, deliver this speech using a commonsensical tone of slightly depressive anxiety and unhappiness, reflecting Dr. Astrov's despair over his inability to do much good for anyone.

But that was *not* the inflection that Olivier used, according to Walken. What Olivier did was to laugh during this speech, but not a laugh of relaxed good humor. Far from it. Olivier's laughter was exhausted and giddy, arising from the sort of spiritual fatigue that is so intense that it has gone a little crazy, laughter that's soul-sick. Walken says that watching Olivier laugh like that on stage was mesmerizing. It was, he said, hypnotic.

One of the filmed versions of *Vanya*, *Vanya On 42nd Street*, is full of moments like this, and I would recommend it to any fiction writer as an example of what can be done with unexpected tone shifts. In the middle of act 2, for example, where Sonya, among other things, asks her stepmother, Yelena, if she's happy, and Yelena simply says, "No," both Julianne Moore and Brooke Smith flip the tone. They play the scene with barely suppressed expectancy and giggles, as if they had finally been able to get to the big questions they had always wanted to ask each other. They are *not* solemn about these solemn questions. The effort to get to that place has apparently made them feel like adolescent girls, trading secrets back and forth while the men are out of the room,

and they can't quite shed the feeling of girlish co-conspirators. In this way, avoiding male self-importance and solemnity, they are able to admit the most devastating emotional truths — in a way that provides distance and comfort to each other in a manner that binds them together. By upsetting the seriousness of the moment, they relieve the pressure on each other by, almost literally, being flip.

Similarly, Wally Shawn, playing Vanya, never lets you forget that Vanya feels despair about his own life but that, in addition, *he finds his own despair comic*. Vanya is a master of combining emotions, layering them. He is a desperate comedian, handling his despair through clowning. Wally Shawn delivers the comedy lines with a woebegone mournfulness and the lines of resignation with a strange, heady exhilaration, as if he were a brave heroic explorer, a sort of Scott-of-the-Antarctic, in the poorly mapped continent of patient despair.

Sometimes a slight shift in tone or pitch can be marked simply by a pause. Think for a moment of the last scene of Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night*. The aging Mary Tyrone comes on stage, completely stoned on morphine, and in her last speech, in front of her husband and two grown sons, drifting in a free-floating reverie, she remembers how, years ago, she met her husband. This last statement consists of four sentences.

That was the winter of senior year. Then in the spring something happened to me. Yes, I remember. I fell in love with James Tyrone and was so happy for a time.

Now, on almost every occasion when I have seen this play, the actor playing Mary Tyrone is careful to insert a little pause between *happy* and *for*. That little pause is an expressive air pocket of dead silence, during which reality, for that one microsecond, floods back into the mind of a woman lost in a fog of drugs and nostalgia.

Yes, I remember. I fell in love with James Tyrone and was so happy (split-second pause) for a time.

She doesn't say that she was so happy, period. She turns it around at the last split-second. She was so happy *for a time*. Those three words signal difference between the working methods of kitsch and a masterpiece.

Now let's look at the way that inflection can be signaled in a work of literary fiction. In Katherine Anne Porter's story "The Leaning Tower," set in Berlin in 1931, Charles, an American, has been staying at a hotel and then finds an apartment house where he would rather reside. His ability to speak German isn't as good as he would like it to be, so, like most foreigners, he has to study facial expressions and body language to be sure that he has understood what he thinks he has heard.

In signing a lease for the apartment, Charles accidentally knocks over a little plaster Leaning Tower of Pisa in the landlady's parlor. The landlady tells him, "It cannot be replaced," and then the author adds that the line has been said with "severe, stricken dignity." Note the compounded emotion here. This is a sign that Charles is paying attention to her intonation, but it is also a small indication of how she is reinforcing her distress, dramatizing it, theatricalizing it, with visual cues. We can see her physically stiffening. A few moments later the landlady adds, "It is not your fault, but mine. I should not have left it here for — " She doesn't finish the sentence. The text tells us, "She stopped short, and walked away carrying the paper in her two cupped hands. For barbarians, for outlandish crude persons who have no respect for precious things, her face and voice said all too clearly."

What Katherine Anne Porter signals here is that conversations are *not* over when people stop speaking. Conversations continue for several moments in the silence that follows, often by means of facial expressions and body language. The largest, most emphatic points in the sentence may arrive not with the last word but with a refusal to say a word, allowing the silence to be suspended in

the air. After all, which is worse or more effective in a quarrel? To say, "You're such a creep and a liar," or "You're such a—"? You can argue with option A, but you can't argue with option B.

Anyway, in the following scene Charles goes back to his Berlin hotel to move his belongings and to check out. Here he must deal with the "sallow wornout looking hotel proprietress" and her "middle-aged, podgy partner." Charles had previously agreed to stay in the hotel for a month, but now, after eight days, he is leaving. What follows is a masterful scene of telegraphed malevolence and dramatized malice, indicated by both words and physical indicators.

"Our charges here are most reasonable," the proprietress says, "her dry mouth working over her long teeth." Why does Katherine Anne Porter insert this detail of the mouth and the teeth? Partly, perhaps, to slow down the scene. To convey the woman's anxiety and suppressed rage. But also to put those "long teeth" into our mind's eye, so that we don't take her as a purely comic figure.

"You will find you cannot change your mind for nothing," she continues, in what we are told is a "severe, lecturing tone." We would probably figure out this tone for ourselves, but the statement of it intensifies the feeling and adds a slight aura of danger, a sense of the woman's horror of flexibility and her pedantic vehemence. This sense is increased when the narrator illustrates the woman's facial change. "She glanced up and over his shoulder, and Charles saw her face change again to a hard boldness, she raised her voice sharply and said with insolence, 'You will pay your bill as I present it or I shall call the police.'"

Enter the proprietress's podgy partner, who, hands in pockets, smiles "with a peculiarly malignant smile on his wide lipless mouth." The author here is not only writing the words of the scene, she is directing them for us, showing us how they are to be played. Charles pays the proprietress all the money she has demanded, to the last pfennig, and then, the podgy man, whose "pale little eyes behind their puffy lids were piggy with malice," asks to see Charles's identification papers. I should stop here

again and point out that now, in the late twentieth century, many writers are reluctant to characterize a character so judgmentally and so maliciously as Katherine Anne Porter does the podgy partner. Contemporary writers don't like to use phrases like "piggy with malice," maybe because we've grown sentimental about pigs and because judging characters that quickly is regarded as bad taste and mean-spirited. But it's an extreme situation, and it's important to note that the author's details are not purely malicious but are instead both malicious and carefully observed. This makes them a considerable pleasure to read.

Insisting on seeing the papers, the podgy man is then observed with a series of what we might now call close-up details. "He seemed struggling with some hidden excitement. His neck swelled and flushed, he closed his mouth until it was a mere slit across his face, and rocked slightly on his toes." After Charles has shown him the papers, the man says, "You may go now," with the insulting condescension of a petty official dismissing a subordinate." In the next sentence we learn that "they continued to look at him in a hateful silence, with their faces almost comically distorted in an effort to convey the full depths of their malice." Notice how, again, a silence is being drawn out and how this silence is not peaceful but hateful. It is a hateful silence. Notate your silences if you can. Fully expressive silences are by no means easy to create in fictional narrative. Finally, after Charles has left the hotel under their "fixed stare," he hears, "as the door closed behind him," the two of them laughing "together like a pair of hyenas, with deliberate loudness, to make certain he should hear them."

The cruelty here, and the malice, is very great indeed, and it's marked by all its small details of gesture, speech, and gratuitous meanness. But cruelty, as Henry James and Katherine Anne Porter knew, is increased and intensified by shades of detail. Cruelty often lives off small signs and hints, closed rather than open doors. Cruelty is not increased by brutality but is *diminished* by it. Cruelty and brutality are two different things. One is gestural, and the other one isn't. Brutality makes everything easy — easy to respond

to, easy to judge. Subtle cruelty, by contrast, as we all know, is a web meant to catch you in a couple of different directions and to keep you hanging as you are punished by small but incremental wounds. Brutality is rather common, and true cruelty is rather uncommon. You might say that Katherine Anne Porter's scene demonstrates the effective malice of indirection, of cruelty slowly turning *into* brutality. She shows you, as clearly as she can, exactly how these people are signaling what they feel. The scene is intensely alive on all counts. Despite its great literary qualities, it feels immediate. No Dinosaur World zombie effect here.

Another means of combating the zombie effect appears in Eudora Welty's "A Visit of Charity." The ground situation in this story is quite straightforward: Marian, a junior high Campfire Girl, has been assigned to take a flower to a retirement home for old ladies and to sit there and chat for a while. This visit of charity is part of the procedure for Marian's earning of a merit badge. Simple enough.

I think I should stop here and say that this ground situation is not particularly promising, and in our own time old ladies and old men have become objects of commonplace writerly pathos. There is no place like a retirement home or a hospital to turn up the needle on the pathos meter. Running into a scene in an old-folks home is like meeting a bully at the end of an alley. It preprograms your responses. And I should know; I've used such places myself for those purposes. But it's hard to get *real* feelings, as opposed to preprogrammed ones, out of those settings now, in a work of fiction. If you locate a scene in a retirement home or a hospital without flipping it or defamiliarizing it in some way, every reader knows that his or her assignment is to feel sad and to weep dutifully. But when you know your assignment, you tend to resist it.

But what Eudora Welty does in this story is to upset the expected tone of the story so that pathos is a minor element. Instead, there is a kind of dry wit at work, not pitiless but in the service of genuine but very dark compassion and understanding,

and this dry comedy moves the proceedings in the direction of what I will call, for the sake of brevity, the abyss. Suddenly, the mystery of existence opens up in front of Marian and the reader. Eudora Welty does all this by carefully inflecting every moment of the scene. After a few pages Marian's old ladies stop being pitiful creatures, old Southern ladies down on their luck, and seem more like Samuel Beckett's tramps, Vladimir and Estragon, in *Waiting for Godot*, struggling with time itself.

The reader is given, moment by moment, very careful and close direction and detailing of the scene. Notice that this *is* a scene and is *not* summarized. Marian has walked into the room with her gift of the potted plant. There are two old ladies in the room, one lying down and one standing up. The one who is standing up has a "terrible square smile stamped on her bony face." Think of that: a *terrible* square smile. We're not told what makes it terrible. Nor are we told exactly how to visualize it. It seems contradictory. Her hand, "quick as a bird claw," grabs at Marian's cap. The room is dark and dank, and Marian starts to think of the old ladies as robbers and the room as the robbers' cave: "Did you come to be our little girl for a while?" the first robber asked." The plant is snatched out of Marian's hand.

"Flowers!" screamed the old woman. She stood holding the pot in an undecided way. "Pretty flowers," she added.

Then the old woman in bed cleared her throat and spoke. "They are not pretty," she said, still without looking around, but very distinctly.

After the first old woman repeats that the flowers are pretty, the old woman who is lying down says in return, batting the ball back, that the flowers are "stinkweed." So much for nice old ladies. Somewhat disarmingly, the old woman in bed is described as having a bunchy white forehead and red eyes like a sheep. When she asks Marian, "Who are you?" the line is interrupted by dashes to indicate slowness of speech, and the author tells us that the words rise like fog in her throat and that the words are

“bleated.” In the direction of a line of dialogue, you can’t get more specific than this.

We learn that the woman in bed is named “Addie.” Addie and her unnamed old companion then commence to have an argument about a previous visitor and whether they had enjoyed that visit. Triangulated by the two ladies, Marian, the Campfire Girl, begins, very mildly, to hallucinate, to go off into the hallucinations of ordinary life created by the scene before her. At this point Addie and the other old lady have a surrealistic discussion about who is sick and who is not and who did what as a child. The standing woman speaks in an “intimate, menacing” voice, another unusual combination. This is interrupted by Addie’s first long speech. It is directed, interestingly, toward both her roommate and, I think, obliquely to Marian. Notice how the author gets out of the way here and lets the speech speak for itself.

“Hush!” said the sick woman. “You never went to shool. You never came and never went. You never were anything — only here. You were never born! You don’t know anything. Your head is empty, your heart and hands and your old black purse are all empty, even that little old box that you brought with you you brought empty — you showed it to me. And yet you talk, talk, talk, talk, talk, all the time until I think I’m losing my mind! Who are you? You’re a stranger — a perfect stranger! Don’t you know that you’re a stranger? Is it possible that they have actually done a thing like this to anyone sent them a stranger to talk, and rock, and tell away her whole long rigmarole?”

Do they seriously suppose that I’ll be able to keep it up, day out, night in, night out, living in the same room with a terrible old woman — forever?”

At the end of this speech the author notes that Addie turns her eyes toward Marian, eyes that have gone bright. “This old woman,” the author notes, “was looking at her with despair and calculation in her face.” We then get an image of her false teeth and tan gums, “Come here, I want to tell you something,” she whispered. “Come here.” Marian is frightened, we’re told, and her heart

nearly stops beating for a moment. Then Addie's companion says, "Now, now, Addie. That's not polite."

This scene, I would argue, is packed, completely layered, with seemingly contradictory emotions: Marian's fascination and terror, Addie's despair and calculation, her companion's fake sentimentality and cynicism — the scene is a mixture of despairing comedy, pathos, terror, and metaphysical giddiness. These elements are built into Addie's speech through the use of repetition of words like *empty*, *talk* and *stranger* and the use of carefully deployed dashes and pauses. And they are then cemented by the brilliant inflection tag following the speech, noting that Addie is now turning toward Marian with despair *and* calculation on her face. Please note this. Addie is not feeling one thing. She is feeling several emotions at once. One of them makes her pitiable, the other makes her dangerous. We then learn that today happens to be Addie's birthday.

As if this weren't enough, when Marian leaves, the nameless woman (the other half of this terrible octogenarian vaudeville team) who has been playing the straight woman to Addie's riffs of calculation and despair, this nameless woman then goes into a tiff of her own. "In an affected, high-pitched whine she cried, 'Oh, little girl, have you a penny to spare for a poor old woman that's not got anything of her own? We don't have a thing in the world — not a penny for candy — not a thing! Little girl, just a nickel — a penny —.'"

The "affected, high-pitched whine" notation tells us that this woman may have fallen into a moment of senile dementia. Or, more likely, she may be playing a role for her own amusement to scare and disconcert Marian, maybe even to get some money out of her. You simply can't tell. And that's the way the author seems to want it — your uncertainty parallels the uncertainty that Marian must feel. You can see clearly and distinctly what you see, but *you simply can't be sure of what you're looking at.*

This transcendently wonderful scene worries me. It worries me because I think it's true, moving, beautiful, and funny. And

yet it worries me because I think that if it were brought into a writing workshop, someone or other might accuse it of being “unfair” to old women or “mean-spirited” or, even worse, “age-ist.” Why? Because it doesn’t reinforce an orthodoxy: it doesn’t reinforce what we are *supposed* to feel about the old, namely, that we are expected to pity them and to love or admire them more than we usually do. Nor does Eudora Welty’s scene mock them, which would also be easy and shallow. In some sense the scene has no *social* purpose at all. It has another purpose altogether in mind. It presents these women, as Samuel Beckett presents his tramps, with all the complexity of art, of realism flying off into the metaphysical and then flying back, flipping and inflecting the scene until it’s so layered that you cannot describe the scene’s feeling tone in one word. You can’t do that. It’s impossible. What’s going on with the two old ladies, triangulated by Marian, is too complicated for that.

There is much to be said for the uses to which the opposite — an uninflected voice — may be put. There may well be certain justifications for what might be called zombie voicings in literature, a deliberate tonal blank-out. Certainly it’s notable in Kathryn Harrison’s recent memoir, *The Kiss*, and in virtually all the work of the novelists Craig Nova and Rudy Wurlitzer. And this tone of blank uninflected death-in-life is put to interesting use in Tim O’Brien’s recent novel *In the Lake of the Woods*, though just in the main body of that text, not in the footnotes. There is a certain Dinosaur World narration effect all the way through O’Brien’s novel, and I think, oddly enough, that it often works, given the subject of that book, which happens to be posttraumatic stress disorder. There is something about uninflectedness that suits trauma very well.

What can be bothersome about uninflectedness from the last two decades generally, however, is that it can seem like a decadent form of hipsterism, a retro form of cool, of being removed, which can harden into a posture. Against middle-class fake sincer-

ity, fake patriotism, and fake fervor of every sort, uninflectedness and ironic withdrawal, at least since World War II, have been deployed massively and effectively in every form of postmodern art. It is, however, now completely mainstream. The trouble with uninflectedness is that, because it is an attitude, it has a tendency to be inflexible. And this, it strikes me, is what has happened to some otherwise interesting contemporary writers who shall go nameless here, whose work sometimes seems to be trapped in the effort to turn attitude into subject matter (a fault, I might add, of a certain percentage of Ernest Hemingway's work).

The guide at Dinosaur World was at pains to demonstrate that he was above what he was saying, detached from it, *better* than it. And so he was. But as triumphs go, this is a very minor one and, in its way, is as much a miscalculation as overacting would be.

In his recent memoir, *Crabcakes*, James Alan McPherson describes a moment during which he listens to two African Americans flirting with each other. Then he remarks:

The kindly flirtation between the two of them reminds me of something familiar that I have almost forgotten. It seems to be something shadowy, about language being secondary to the way it is used. The forgotten thing is about the nuances of sounds that only employ words as ballast for the flight of pitch and intonation. It is the pitch, and the intonation, that carries *meaning*. I had forgotten this.

Nabokov once said that the price of being a writer was sleepless nights. But, Nabokov added slyly, if the writer doesn't have sleepless nights, how can he hope to cause sleepless nights in anyone else? If the writer doesn't indicate interest in the story through inflection, how can she expect the reader to be interested and willingly suspend disbelief? To close the book or finish the poem and to say, "You're really *something*"?

Fiction Eyes: Baxter's Burning Down the House

Novelist, short-story writer, self-described former poet, and creative writing teacher Charles Baxter has a keen eye and a strong heart for detail. In *Burning Down the House* he wrestles with "the imagination's grip on daily life and how one lives in the pressure of that grip." Because they grip us, because we wrestle with them, the images and voices of the imagination require the attention of a muscular criticism: the keen eye of the narrator, plus compassion — a willingness to accept the "other" without capitulating the ideals, the *imagination*, of one's own community. Baxter reads the tropes of America the way a masseuse approaches muscle, feeling for knots and eddies in the landscape of textured skin and sinew. Baxter has detected a knot among contemporary American narratives: a *strain*, in the senses of both *speciēs* and *stress*.

Baxter names this strain in the title of the leadoff essay, "Dysfunctional Narratives: or: 'Mistakes Were Made.'" "We often pretend," Baxter writes in his preface, "that public lying by politicians has no effect on the stories we tell each other, but it does; or that our obsession with data processing has no relevance to violence in movies, but it might." The assassination of JFK, Nixon's Watergate, and the obsessive attention given to grainy film and gaps in audiotape are archetypal instances of the kinds of stories straining the imagination of contemporary culture. Baxter takes a critical path that echoes the Frankfurt School, as well as Christopher Caudwell, who wrote in the early 1930s: "This is the first unwritten law of alienation, and we need to be conscious of it: The something we say NO to is never the real enemy, but only the shadow it casts over and within us." All of this, of course, is a textbook description of the "postmodern condition." But instead of a criticism of relentlessly reductive materialism (that, in Baxterian terms, might

well be seen as dysfunctional, a kind of depressive downward spiral), Baxter's is more generous.

Baxter is not afraid of the conspiracies of abuse and narratives of confession, but he is concerned with our expressions of "sorrow mixed with depression or rage, the condition of the abject..., the psychic landscape of trauma and paralysis" Baxter does not dwell in these conditions; he guides us through them, firing off tips for re-imagining the same old story all the way. For example, if we have learned to be suspicious of feeling "bad," and find ourselves in the psychic ghetto as victims of "disorders," what we may truly suffer from is an addiction to narrative epiphany. Just as a religious experience is an epiphany, a life-directing experience, for a believer, so we've come to believe the cure for depression is an interior act of insight on the part of the depressive. In "Against Epiphanies," Baxter argues that "This country has always... been fascinated by a certain variety of the isolated thinker — sometimes a genius, sometimes a crackpot, and sometimes a weird mixture of the two." Baxter samples Thoreau and Henry James, Sr., but his point is about the kind of paranoia that, on the one hand, produces the *Unabomber Manifesto* of hermit Theodore Kaczynski, and, on the other, the underground hermeticism of UFOs and vanishing hitchhikers that surface in, for one, *The X Files*. That "Insights, in art and outside of it, depend on an assumption that the surface is false" and that everybody else is missing the real story is a narratively productive "pathos..., especially among Americans and adolescents." We're on a slippery slope, as Baxter observes: "the fascination with false surfaces leads, fairly quickly, to a fascination with conspiracies. It is one thing to say that the surface is illusory. It's another to say that the illusion has been designed that way by fools or malefactors."

Baxter's case against epiphanies in fiction has echoes in the anti-psychoanalysis movement, especially in the writings of the post-Jungian James Hillman. Like Hillman, Baxter is a fierce defender of the prerogatives of the imagination. In *Healing Fiction* Hillman writes that an "act of turning to imagination is not an act of introspection: it is a negative capability, a willful suspension of disbelief in them

(the muses and abusers of our interior lives) and of belief in oneself as their author." If this Keatsian negative capability is at first an epiphany, we shouldn't linger, for our way leads us to the vale of soul-making, where the real work of a narrative relationship begins. Thus Baxter writes: "To line up with the anti-epiphanic is to withdraw from officialdom. Officials, and official culture, are full of epiphanies and insights and dogmas. One is free to be sick of that mode of discourse." The confessional soup boiling in talk-show TV-land (Jerry Springer, Ricki Lake), and MFA programs everywhere, is *strained* in the stock image of "people acting meaningfully or stewing in their own juices." We *want* that epiphany, but the "epiphany was never meant to be used for merchandising and therapy. It is not easily adapted to a mass market. But practical measures have been applied. The job has been done." To refuse the epiphany is thus to read and write one's way out of the box of sorrow and depression. This is a narrative voice that is "quarrelsome, hilarious, and mulish." This voice in our stories is needed, it is necessary: "It has to be. It's a correction." Anti-depressant and resistance movement? Same thing — at least in fiction. In "Talking Forks: Fictions and the Inner Life of Objects," Baxter explores the idea "that contemporary fiction has gradually been developing a fascinated relationship with objects that parallels in some respects the concerns of various ecological movements." Perhaps the idea of "objects and humans" as a "collaborative" is risky in that Baxter veers perilously close to "crackpot New Age dogma," but that which "may be good for fiction is not necessarily good in the realm of ideas." Perhaps the apologia is required — an academic product disclaimer? — but Baxter's attempt to recover for fiction a, so to speak, secret life of objects is most welcome. This recovery is needed because, as Baxter points out, there occurred a split around the time of the Romantics in which "Poetry was supposed to get the spirit, and fiction got the material world." Baxter locates a knot in the Nineteenth-century essayist John Ruskin's notion of the "pathetic fallacy." Ruskin thought the "literary response to nature" of his time was "unhinged." I think Baxter takes this personally, and

I'm glad he does because he manages to say this:

Poetry gets the spirit and hears it speak but is called mad.
Prose fiction is given a landscape of dead objects and is rewarded for writing about these things with a popular acclaim, a mass audience. This is a particularly solipsistic and Puritan solution to the problem of inner and outer worlds.

"Talking Fork" winds its way through a garden of fictions: Baxter has a nose for examples, and ranges from Rilke to Cervantes to the Russians, taking us on the scenic route through a history of the mind-body split. Fiction writers *need* poetry because the world is not a dead object. The material of writers, Baxter writes, "Materialism without ideals, mad or not, weeps. Deprived of a quest, it is consigned to centuries of weeping."

Burning Down the House is an important book for readers, writers, and especially teachers, of literature — not only fiction. If there are two kinds of thinkers in the world — "splitters," who tweeze apart the world seeking difference, and "lumpers," who seek to reduce the number of categories by seeking connection — then Baxter is a lumper *par excellence*. Baxter tries, and in my view succeeds, to give back to American fiction the things that have been suppressed in more than a century of ruthless realism and abject materialism. His essays abound with close readings of Nineteenth and Twentieth century writers, making this collection not only a scholarly all-terrain vehicle, but a practical road map for crafters of fiction as well. In a contemporary fiction-writing scene that is traumatized by an ahistorical rootlessness and a scienceless suspicion of memory and its resulting narratives, Baxter sweeps away the cognitive cobwebs and the anxious dust of 'postmodern' angst and shows us what remains. Here is 'stillness,' the quiet attending to the world that, despite materialistic attempts to make consciousness an existential fluke, continues to impose itself on writers who do what writers are taught to do: attend to detail. Here is "rhyming action," the massively parallel connections that, de-

spite our best attempts to rationally disavow any such knowledge, we continue to find at play in our dialogues of imagination and acts of being. Here is a new kind of resistance to “the official Happiness Project,” to the octopii of TV-land and New York publishing. Here's to a “fiction [that] thrives, not on statements and claims, but on questions....”



Bradford Gottschalk

Eating the Egg¹
by W.C. Schwartzkopf
with Annotations by Todd Sweeney

1 In the animistic religion of the Durdah who lived in the lower valley of the Swy River, the egg was the symbol of the cosmos; the cosmos existed in an egg in the mouth of Kar, their supreme deity. Thus, by eating the egg, one becomes a god. It should be noted that the title refers to *the* egg, not *an* egg. In the tradition of the Fuko, who lived in the highlands on the banks of the upper Swy, the egg is the symbol of life; the people have banned the eating of eggs as the Jews and Muslims have the eating of pork, and the Fukoan death-deity, Teeveess, is often shown devouring eggs by the handful. This equation of the divine with death is a recurring theme in the story.

On a Saturday morning², gloomy with fog³, Seth⁴ Frell⁵ climbed out of bed and having nothing better to do decided he would eat an egg for breakfast. His small house, cold and damp though it was, still gave him a sense of comfort. This was due primarily to

2 In the calendars of both the Durdah and the Fuko, Saturday is the last day of the week, and is known simply as "Ob Efer" or "The Day". It was common for people in both groups to spend the entire day engaged in meditation.

3 A reference to Werner Von Krell's Romantic epic, "Return of the Dragon":
The fog comes, breath of history
And clothes the known in mystery,
Confounding time, and lies abed
where we whisper with the dead.

4 The god of evil in Egyptian mythology. Seth was jealous of fertility god Osiris's supremacy, so he killed Osiris and scattered the pieces of his body throughout Egypt. This heralded a time of great famine in Egypt which was ended only when Isis reassembled Osiris's body, resurrected him, and became pregnant with the sun god, Horus.

5 Frell, in contrast with the above, was the Ulmorian god of fertility. Another reference to the theme of death and religion. It is interesting to note that the character is referred to by both his first and last names throughout the story.

the interior walls which were painted pumpkin orange⁶, and this gave the illusion of warmth even when there was none⁷. The result of this security was that Seth Frell almost always awoke feeling hungry. During the week, he was usually too busy to make his own breakfast and had to content himself with an orange and a cup of yogurt⁸ purchased at his office's cafeteria. Indeed, he often considered painting over the walls with a lighter, neutral non-color, but when he thought of facing the damp and cold unmasked, without even the illusory armor the orange walls provided, he always changed his mind and resolved to put up with the inconvenience of weekday morning hunger.

The sand of sleep wiped carefully from his eyes, Seth Frell

6 Reference to the well-known pop song, "Pumpkin Eater", by Jimmy Olson and the Supermen:

I knew a girl named Mona tried to eat her treat her well
And I wound up just like Peter livin' in her pumpkin shell
in which the pumpkin is a euphemism for female genitalia.

7 See above note. In Schwartzkopf's story, the comfort of sensuality/fertility is an illusion.

8 In the Insultakian folk tale "Emar Becomes a Giant", after being magically transformed into a giant, Emar becomes very hungry. A witch tricks him into eating an enchanted orange and a cup of yogurt that shrink him down even further than his normal size.

climbed from his bed and donned his thick black robe⁹, a necessary bulwark against the cold, for the kitchen walls were painted white. That morning, a grey and watery light¹⁰ filled the kitchen, that, together with its white walls, made it seem much colder than the bedroom and hallway. Seth Frell measured out coffee ground into a fine Turkish powder¹¹, and started the pot brewing before removing a slice of bread and an egg from the refrigerator. He spread a thin layer of butter on the bottom of a frying pan and, with great care, cracked the egg and poured its viscous contents onto the pebbled teflon surface. Then he poured a cup of coffee from the still bubbling pot and stood at the counter watching the toast turn slowly brown and the egg turn from clear to opaque

9 The Huron Native Americans of Canada called the Jesuit priests "Black Robe". Death is also often portrayed wearing a black robe.

10 In Eighth-century Byzantium, a monk named Efficius wrote an essay in which he claimed that fog was proof of God's existence, for it mixed light with water, and only by God's intervention could two such disparate elements be combined. Efficius's intricate theory of natural elements was determined by the patriarch to be rooted in the Monophysite heresy, and he was executed shortly after his treatise was published.

11 Reference to a popular English music hall song, "Can't Stand the Moguls":

They drink no wine in Turkish towns
But dine on moistened coffee grounds.

white¹². Both toast and egg were finished at the same time. He removed the frying pan from the hot burner, took the toast out of the toaster-oven, spread butter on it, then carefully peeled the egg from the pan and laid it upon the center of the twice-cooked bread. He topped off his coffee and sat down to eat. The clock read eight forty-seven.

It was another eight forty-seven¹³, another Saturday morning blanketed in fog, in which the first decision was made that led to the end of his engagement to Sara¹⁴. This one was in October, a day begun unseasonably warm and laden, too, with sensual mist¹⁵.

12 Reference to the little known existentialist poet Basil Borikoff:

God made the world
Then sat on the throne to contemplate his achievement
As he stared, recognition was lost
The world turned into a mystery like clear water turned to ice.

13 Jon Bliny of Yorkshire wrote, in 1847, "... all past is eternity. There is no real sequence, no true chronology, that is an illusion. What occurred yesterday is as irrevocably lost to us as that which occurred on the banks of the Nile four thousand years ago. Memory has no more standing than imagination." Thus, this short flashback is set in eternity, or a time out of time.

14 In the Durdah religion, Sara is the goddess of new life, but also the goddess of physical pain.

15 See note 10. The divine and the sensual are here equated.

Seth Frell and Sara left the house to have breakfast outside, a breakfast of melon¹⁶ and croissants, food which he had subsequently been unable to eat at all. They spread a blanket on the ground and placed a plate of croissants and a bowl of melons, cantaloupe and honeydew, and themselves upon it. An overwhelming enthusiasm for his bride-to-be suddenly overtook him – he fed her melons with his fingers and from his lips, then he untied her shoes, pulled them off and kissed her feet¹⁷, drawing each individual toe into his mouth and massaging it with his tongue. At first Sara giggled like a young girl, as if he were tickling her, but then more womanly feelings flooded her and she fell back on the blanket sighing. Seth Frell's lips began to travel up her legs, his head burrowed under her skirt, his hands reaching for her underpants. Her hips were rising with enthusiasm of her own when Seth Frell felt something brush against his leg. He turned, looked up and saw a large crow,¹⁸ wings outspread in a foolishly threatening pose, picking melons from the bowl which lay a short

16 In the Shurha culture, the melon is a complicated symbol representing, in different stories or rituals, one or more of the following: female genitalia, the womb, the ocean, childbirth, the moon, and, strangely enough, cannibalism.

17 A Durdah saying goes, "He who kisses Sara's feet shall be blessed with a fruitful household."

18 The crow, of course, represents death. This is true in many parts of the world, but here the imagery is a reference to a Fukoan legend in which a mortal man, Ke, battles Teeveess to save the fertility goddess, Lok. The legend echoes both the Orpheus and the Proserpine myths. In Schwartzkopf's story, the battle with death is fruitless, for though death is defeated, the goddess still vanishes, thus continuing the theme of death and divinity inexorably linked.

distance from Sara's recently ablated foot. Seized by a sudden mixture of rage and fear Seth Frell picked up his fiance's left shoe¹⁹, swung around, and dealt the crow a fatal blow upon its bowed and open-beaked head²⁰.

"Don't!" yelled Sara²¹.

He admonished her from worrying and showed her he had dealt with the intruder. But it wasn't the crow's attendance at

19 See above note. This is almost a retelling of the Fukoan story. The left shoe represents Lok's favor.

20 The crow's pose as described by Schwartzkopf is often pictured in Fukoan art. It is a direct imitation of the pose most often seen in Fukoan portrayals of the owl, which, like in Europe and America, represent for the Fukoans wisdom and patience. In other words, death mocks wisdom.

21 The only spoken word quoted in the story. This is obviously an inversion of the famous Nietzschean dragon, "Thou Shalt."

their breakfast that had shocked her, it was Seth Frell's violent act. A week later she broke off the engagement.

He'd have given up eating meat for her²². But it was pointless to dwell on the incident. He glanced at the clock – eight forty-eight²³ – no memory attached to that set of numbers.

His fork separated a piece of toast and egg from the main mass and carried it to his mouth. There was nothing quite like the flavor of an egg. He ate slowly. Before he finished, the morning sun began to burn away the fog, and as it vanished Seth Frell began to feel better. He looked down at his plate. Surrounded by damp crumbs sat a bulbous still unbroken yolk²⁴ atop

22 Reference to pop musician and animal-rights activist Poi Zubees's anthemic song, "Meat Grinder":

If you want to eat meat, then you won't be eating me.

23 Reference to the comic book, *Limbo 2050*, which was published from 1976-1979. The main story follows a man with no memory who escapes from a mental institution and wanders over a desolate, futuristic world. He is known only as 848, which was his patient number at the asylum.

24 Reference to a little-known children's story by Marcel Foulieu, who lived in France in the first half of the nineteenth century. In the story, a young boy named Jean receives a magical egg yolk which, if not broken, will stop him from growing. He has a lot of adventures, but eventually grows tired of life as a child. He breaks the yolk himself and begins to mature. The yolk, of course, in addition to other things, represents potential, which must be sacrificed in order to achieve anything meaningful.

a small round piece of bread. He slid his fork under them, took a slurp of coffee, lifted toast and yolk to his mouth, and swallowed them whole²⁵.

²⁵ See above note. Seth Frell swallows his potential whole, thus destroying it without fully realizing it. This image closes the story on a note of barrenness and crushing despair.

Rob Cook

The Buried Zirpoli

I never knew my Aunt Mary,
But when her aorta burned down to the bone
She was buried with her gray
Oldsmobile in Red Bank, New Jersey.

Her husband, a Sears organ player,
Counted her eyelashes by the bedside.
Paint-by-the-number cassanovas
Fixed themselves in the deep ranges

Of her throat where the moans escaped
Under the emergency room lights
And the lover Doctor Surgeon
Yelled at me *Get out*; my aunt's

Soul had to break from her pelvis
Or how else would she make heaven
By daybreak? A Marilyn half-ringer,
No blonde, a woman who traveled sweat

And breathy turnpikes of bearded pectorals
But Uncle Jim Zirpoli loved her.
She's in the rose pockets now, snowing
Under Jerusalem where it stays six o'clock

And the birds click gently inside
The carburetors. I don't mind
When the warm things die. The dirt
Needs them more than we do.

In my aunt's parlor of dry fog the Olympian men
Grow wings from their tuxedos and caress her
Electrodes for one lick, one quarter-inch
Of skin before the kisses quit.

Let Some Time Go By

The basic problem with my cousin Leon is the same as with lots of men. Back when he was growing up, he had to face the fact that up wasn't exactly the way he was growing. By the time Leon was in high school, any fool could tell he wasn't ever going to get tall or come anywhere near it. Didn't get much in the way of looks either, which might have helped. Anyway, Leon ended up turning into one of the worst types there is, what I call the Loud Introvert.

I'm on the tall side myself, for a woman, and even if I was a guy, which I'm glad I'm not, nobody would call me short. When I was a girl, my dad used to call me a long drink of water. I played basketball back then with some of the boys in our neighborhood, and most of the time I just hung around the basket, waiting for somebody to pass so I could chuck it on in.

I don't deny being tall has given me a problem or two, especially when it comes to men. When I hear people carrying on about whether or not a man can look up to a woman, I have to laugh. But I don't think the distance from the top of my head to the bottom of my feet has affected the kind of person I turned out to be, the way it has with Leon.

Leon's single, same as me, so whenever our family has a big get-together, with everybody in sight married and more kids running around than you can shake a stick at or even stand, the two of us pretty much stick out. Mutt and Jeff, you know. The old maid and the little loudmouth. And, of course, if we're running true to form, we always manage to stick out even more by getting into a fight with each other.

At our family picnic this year, we got into it over *The Sound of Music*. I couldn't help it. Leon was going on and on about what a wonderful movie it is and how he'd jump at the chance to see it again any time. And I have to tell you, the first time I saw *The*

Sound of Music was one time too many. I don't have any patience with Julie Andrews trying to be a nun, traipsing around in all this pretty scenery like an ad for menthol cigarettes.

I wasn't just picking on *The Sound of Music*, either. The whole point I was trying to get across to Leon is how movies *always* come off phony when they're about real people. If you ask me to watch somebody like, say, Mia Farrow in a movie they made up from scratch, I can do it. Something about that one bothers me, but I can put up with her. If she's going to try to do Joan of Arc, though, count me out. They can burn her without me.

I don't care *who* it is they're trying to do, Napoleon or Eleanor Roosevelt, it always puts me in mind of a bunch of little kids dressed up for Halloween. They even had one on TV where this guy who's the spitting image of the butcher over at Avenue Foods talked exactly like John Kennedy.

You don't want to get me going on movies about Jesus. *Anything* is easier for me to take than that, even if it's Ruth Ford playing an old potty mouth.

Anyway, I'm explaining all this to Leon, just like I'm explaining it to you, and I seem to be making some headway, when all of a sudden Claire — that's his sister — puts in her two cents and starts taking Leon's side.

I'll give you an idea what *that* one is like. One time Claire said to me — *her* words — “in our day and age, masculinity has been redefined.”

My definition of masculinity is still the same as it always was, thank you, and if you want my opinion, I think Claire married herself a fruit.

Anyway, there I am talking to Leon and Claire butts in to tell me I have peculiar taste anyway, and then Leon chimes in to say I *always* had peculiar taste, even when I was a kid.

You don't talk to me that way.

I said, “To the likes of you two, anything that isn't flat-assed dumb is peculiar, just like it was with Aunt Paula.” That's their mother and I don't care whether she rests in peace or not. One

good thing about family get-togethers since Aunt Paula passed away is we don't have to deal with her break-your-teeth baked macaroni anymore.

I ask you — how ignorant do you have to be to spend hours on end pedaling away at a tinny old player piano, which was Aunt Paula's biggest claim to fame?

Anyway, when I said that about her mother is when Claire had the nerve to say to me, "Mary Ann, that's enough."

You don't talk to me that way, either. I said, "Claire, will you kindly tell me just who the hell you think you are, telling me what is or isn't enough?"

And all she says to that is, "This is a free country. You may not like Julie Andrews, but we can like her if we want to."

See what people do with what you say? I told her I did *not* say I didn't like Julie Andrews, just that having her try to pass herself off as a nun makes me laugh.

Claire and Leon shot each other these looks, but we let that particular discussion drop.

Things went all right for a while after that until my cousin Ann's oldest girl, Bernice, climbed on one of the picnic tables to say the blessing. I thought getting up on the table was a bit much for somebody the size of Bernice, but her blessing started out just fine, and the way she remembered all the family we've lost through the years was downright sweet. Then she had to go and spoil it all with this patriotic stuff that comes up in our family all the time. One minute she's asking God to look after Grandma, and the next thing you know she's talking about how lucky we all are to live in America, where you can go to a picnic without asking the government for permission.

I could not believe my ears.

I managed to control myself while she laid the rest of her blessing on us, but the minute she was through, I said to Leon, "Excuse me — but don't you think most people in the world today can go to an innocent little picnic if they want to?"

Leon didn't even know what I was talking about, of course. Most

of the time, people don't half listen.

So I repeated for Leon's benefit what I had just heard come from Bernice's mouth there on the picnic table. And he tells me, as if I didn't know, that what she said was for the folks who came to the picnic from Texas or North Carolina. That's where some of our family lives now.

"Bernice said that to make them feel good," he tells me, and he asks me what's wrong with that.

I said, "Leon, you can make people feel good without asking the Lord to listen to crap. Most folks, all over the world, come and go pretty much the way they want to. Folks from the North of France go to picnics in the South of France, and folks from London go to picnics in the South of France, too. It happens all the time. There is nothing special about being able to take your butt to a park."

That's all it took for Leon to come completely unglued. When we were having our controversy over *The Sound of Music*, the mouse in Leon was pretty much in charge, and he let Claire deal with me. But now the bantam rooster in Leon got going, and when that happens, there's no stopping him.

And, of course, what do people always do when they don't have anything sensible to come back at you with? They try to drag everybody else they can into the argument on their side. The next thing you know, Leon's going from one table to another, hollering for the whole family to hear. "Whoa," he says, "did anybody else here have a problem with the way Bernice prayed for us? Cousin Mary Ann seems to have been offended."

I hate it when something that's going on between me and another human being gets broadcast like that. To me, that's ten times worse than gossip, because you have to be there while it's happening.

Anyway, it was all downhill from there. Leon told everybody what I'd said, and they behaved exactly the way you'd expect our family to behave. Even Cousin Ted's father-in-law, who never has much to say besides hi and bye, asked me if I'd ever heard of Russia. I didn't give him the dignity of an answer.

Oh, I thought about going over to Bernice to explain that I wasn't criticizing her blessing, but she gave me the cold shoulder the rest of the time I was there. And besides, what did I have to apologize for? If Bernice's feelings were hurt, it was Leon's fault, not mine.

I finally got tired of it all and went home. I learned a long time ago – when something like that happens, the best thing to do is to put some space between you and the family and let some time go by before you mix it up with them again.

You're not going to believe what I'm going to tell you next. Back when Leon and I were growing up, whenever there was a prom at school or anything like that, we used to be each other's dates. I was at Beasley High here in town and Leon was twenty miles away at Tri-City High, so this was easier for us to get away with than if both of us had gone to the same school.

I guess the plain truth is, we had trouble getting dates – me because I was so tall, and Leon because he was Leon. And going places with each other was better than staying home and feeling completely out of it. You could go to a movie by yourself or with friends, or maybe go to after-the-game dances and stuff like that, but for something like a prom, you need a date.

At least you did then. Everything is so different now. I've read about places where guys go to the prom with each other, and even dance together, and it wouldn't surprise me to find out there are girls who go right ahead and do the same thing.

I can tell what you're thinking. We must have looked funny together. And I suppose we did. But *lots* of couples look funny together. Just look around. I remember the shortest girl in my class at Beasley was Janie Padgett, and of all the guys to go with, Janie picked the captain of the basketball team. A regular beanpole. When they danced close together, her head was practically in his crotch.

The funniest thing about Leon and me on a dance floor wasn't the Mutt and Jeff thing. It was that Leon was a good dancer and I

was stiff as a board. Still am. The way people dance nowadays, that wouldn't make any difference. I don't know how you're supposed to tell whether what you're looking at on a dance floor today is a couple dancing together or two people dancing by themselves. But it made a difference back then.

I don't remember which one of us first asked the other out, but once we'd done it, the arrangement just kept going. Even after Leon went away to college, sometimes I drove over on weekends to be his date for one thing or another, and when he was home for Christmas, we went together to the party at the electric company where I had my first job.

The whole time I was in high school, the one time I was with any boy besides Leon was at graduation. It sticks in my memory like only the best things and worst things in your life, and I can tell you it isn't because it was one of the best. My ears burn just thinking about it.

Everybody had to march down the aisle two at a time to get their diplomas. That's just the way it was done, a boy and a girl marching together. And for most of the kids, that was no problem, because almost everybody had somebody they were going with.

Not me.

They had us all go down to the gymnasium to practice, and everybody started pairing up to march down the aisle. The music they were playing was "Pomp and Circumstance," which I guess is one thing that still hasn't changed. I kept watching what was happening and seeing the number of us left in the hall outside the gymnasium get smaller and smaller, and I started feeling sick to my stomach. I don't remember exactly, but there were finally no more than six or eight of us left, and it was nothing but people nobody ever talked to.

I've toughened up over the years, but back then I was just this gangly girl on the other side of my 18th birthday. I cannot tell you how I felt inside, listening to that grand music and seeing the sad bunch I was stuck there with.

The boy who finally stepped over and asked me if I would walk

with him ended up dying by his own hand three years later. If it wasn't for that, which they put in the newspaper, nobody but me would probably remember his name. Freddy Martin. He was thin as a rail and had bad teeth, and I believe he drew pictures.

I walked down the aisle with Freddy Martin at practice, and I did it again the night we graduated. The moment that's so painful to remember came when we were practicing. All the couples who'd already marched in were standing around at the front of the gymnasium, and when they saw Freddy Martin and me coming down the aisle together, they started to applaud. Some of the guys even whistled. I've wondered all my life if they really meant to be that mean.

But I was talking about Leon.

For all the fighting we've done, and I know we'll fight plenty more before we go to our graves, I have to say we stand by each other. We don't fit in with the rest of the family, and neither one of us has made a family of our own, so when the going gets rough, we are each other's family.

Leon scared the hell out of everybody about ten years ago.

He left his office at lunch time one day and ended up over at Mercy Hospital. The way I heard it, he just came barging into the emergency room waving his arms and making funny noises. Couldn't communicate with anybody, and he was having trouble getting his breath.

The name on the identification card in Leon's billfold was mine, same way his name is on mine, so I was the one the hospital called. By the time I got there, they had him in a room, and he was beginning to come around and talk a little bit. But he wasn't making much sense, even for Leon, and he was real nervous.

To tell you the truth, I never did find out what the problem with Leon was. I recall hearing the term "aphasia" thrown around, but I looked that up in the dictionary and it has to do with brain damage, which Leon didn't have, at least not any more than plenty of folks in our family.

They kept him under observation almost a week, and that was back before they spruced Mercy up, so his room was pretty depressing. It seemed to me he had just about every kind of doctor there is, including a psychiatrist, which is one breed I don't take much stock in. Don't get me going on that subject.

In the end, after they gave him a bunch of medication and put him through all these expensive tests, they just sent him home. Maybe there was something Leon didn't tell me, but I don't think so. Seems to me lots of folks spend time and money on doctors and end up with whatever has happened to them, whether it's physical or mental, still pretty much a mystery.

I went to see Leon twice every day he was there, in the afternoon and in the evening, and I drove over to take him home the morning they released him. So far he hasn't had to, but I believe he would do the same for me.

The minute I laid eyes on Leon that first day in the hospital, I could tell he was worried. That, and embarrassed, too. Leon is a school counselor, and in my experience, people who earn a living doing things like that tend to be extra sensitive about what they do and what happens to them.

I still remember how frightened he looked. It isn't like me to be touchy-feely, but I took Leon's hand and it was like ice. And what I remember clearer than anything else is the way he looked at me when I did that, like there was something I was supposed to be able to do now that I was there.

So what if Leon drives me nuts half the time, and some days I'd just as soon not be around him? We stick by each other. I held Leon's hand like a wife with her husband or any mother with her son, and I told him, "Leon, everything is going to be all right."

I'm not half as bad as I sound sometimes.

Robert Wrigley

The Local Myth of a Kiss

That neighbor boy who tried to kiss the frost
from Alice Murtaugh's tombstone married
his lips to the legend of this place. Did he
notice the dates of her life at all, I wonder.
Or how despite the cold the flowers on her grave
were hardly spoilt at all: three red roses,
their petal edges kissed half as hard as he was.

There is someone, it is said, who remembers
just what it was Alice Murtaugh whispered
in the shotgun's mouth, who had tried
the tongues of love and found them wanton.
Remembers, and dies
a little every day, it is said, though no one
knows the source of the weekly flowers.

It's like the weather or the wind,
the way the fog crawls up the canyon walls
and freezes, until the cemetery's ornate gates
loom ghostly, and the stones recede in clouds
that cling. Had he not panicked
and snapped his head back hard,
the boy might have been all right.

Now, however, an odd blossom etched
in the polished stone, a faint gray rose
over the weekly, inclement others
no one ever sees arrayed.
How is it forgotten,
such desperate parting, the kiss
that won't let go?

Cuna Sundays

My adopted father owned the first Mercedes dealership in Panama until the Noriega Regime took it from him. When it was safe to, he started a "chain" of grocery stores in Panama City. His brother was a lawyer with the "good" government of Panama. My uncle and his wife had adopted five children when he found me. My adopted mother would say to me over and over, "Your father said to your uncle, 'You have five already. Give this one to us. And he will be called Eduardo after you.'" And my uncle did. My adopted mother was Swiss. I think all of these were wonderful people. I think the world needs wonderful people like these persons who became my adopted parents and my adopted uncle and aunt.

My uncle saw me when he accompanied the delegation that went to persuade my people, the Cunas, to stop demonstrating against the hand-over of the Great Canal to Panama. My people have a secret name among themselves. Outsiders call us "Cuna People," but Cuna is only what we call our language.

My people flew the American flag. They were jealous when the Chocós were chosen to train the astronauts in survival, but our Chief said that the Chocós had the Darien Jungle for the training, and we of the San Blas did not. Our Chief said that we must remember the Cunas had 365 islands, one for each day of the year. This was not a small thing, our Chief said. Still, my people asked for a separate treaty with the United States of America. My people never helped with the Great Panama Canal (and only 357 Panamanians). Another delegation had come to them to ask for permission to take our sand. The ancestor of the Chief that was Chief when I was a child would not permit our sand to be removed. He said, "The Great Father gave into the protection of the Cunas the

sand and all natural things in our islands. If we do not protect them, the Great Father will be angry with us. The sun will go away." This would not be a bad thing for me but for my tribe. The Chief said, "Then hurricanes will come. Then floods will come. What water we have will dry away." The Cunas have almost no fresh water on their islands. They were made for beauty only and are a string of pearls in the great, great sea.

Now that I have lived in two worlds, I have no reason for why my adopted uncle selected me. He was not a man who made a circus sideshow, no more than my adopted father. When I went with my uncle to my new family, I remembered how to look behind the eyes in the Cuna way. I could read their character looking behind their eyes. But why did my uncle pick me? I was smaller even than other Cunas. Except for the Pygmies of Africa, we are the smallest people in the world. My uncle was not a man of science to want to study me. Most of the Non-Cunas wish to study us, for we have more of what I am among us than any other people in the world. I am an albino, one of the White Indians of the San Blas.

I want to know, still, if my uncle knew of what sex I was when he picked me to be adopted. I never wished to ask him or my adopted parents. It was not a thing to talk about. It was enough that they called me Eduardo.

The Chief had adopted me, too. At that time, I was the only albino in the tribe. Albinos are special. The Chief's sons hated me because I was special and their father adopted me.

I do not remember my real mother as a person of her own. I have confused the tales they tell of her with what I know of her. When I think very hard inside myself, when I am alone, I can get her smell, I think. She comes to me as dark, strong colors. Tall, which she could not have been as a Cuna. This must be the perspective of the child I was. When I try to paint her face, it is luminous. And her face is almost over-closed with black, black hair parted in the middle. Yet the hair is captured in braids that are long and end in great upward-swimming fishes. These fishes want to eat my mother alive. My mother's red pulsating mouth moves

out from the black hair and luminescence to laugh at them. When I first saw the Bird-Woman of Chagal, I knew that he knew my mother, even though his woman is different.

My real mother was a beauty. That is not good among the Cunas. They want Cunas to think of the tribe and not to stand out as persons. All of the Cunas, except my mother, worked for the community. My mother was too beautiful and self-willed for that. She must always have a flower or something different. She painted designs on both sides of her nose as well as the black line down its middle. She did not want to cut her hair and keep it short. The tribe would have to cut it for her. Her ankles were the most beautiful among all the Cuna women. So slim. She would not wear the women's leg bracelets up her legs because she wanted her slim ankles to be seen. I tried and tried to make my own ankles slim but could not do so. In my paintings, even the men have nice slim ankles. The critics do not notice.

I thought my mother must have been pleased to have a different child. Meaning me, an albino. But the Chief said my mother thought I was a white grub. She was beautiful, as I have said, and believed in the power of beautiful things. The Chief did not mean to be unkind to me in telling this. The Chief says that the only way to live in the world is to live in as much truth as it will let in. So I must know what truth I can about the way I came. That is one reason why I consented to work with Doctor Abilio. I also wanted to please my adopted father, who was dying.

My mother was the Chief's only niece, so he knew more about her even than about many of the members of the tribe. It is the Chief's business to know the least small thing about all of the people.

The Chief said there was no tall and handsome man in the whole tribe, not handsome by my mother's thinking. The Chief is the tallest among the tribe, and he could not be chosen by his niece. To marry outside the tribe cannot be done. Even today. Some members dare, but they cannot bring the Non-Cuna with them. And when they return alone, they must be punished. I do not know how this is done, for the punishment is very secret. It must

be greatly terrible, for only one of the few who went away with a Non-Cuna ever returned.

My mother finally chose a man, and her parents arranged the marriage. Her father and his friends kidnapped the man and brought him to my mother's hammock in the hammock lodge. Even though my mother was very beautiful — perhaps because she was so very beautiful, the Chief told me — this man who became my father did not want to be her husband. He was supposed to talk with her in the hammock the whole night through and not sleep once. The Chief says this man, my father, wanted to sleep to cast bad omens on the marriage and be put out of it, but he could not. He was too afraid of what my mother would do to him to fall asleep. We Cunas know that sleep comes only when the soul is at its peace. This man my father, could never be at peace around my mother. When she went into the jungle to make rain, he ran away. The Chief did not know what my father said to make my mother think he would not run. Still, I know from this that my father was a clever man.

They brought him back. This time he and my mother left her hammock and went for privacy upon the beach. This time this man became my father. This time, he ran away again when my mother, I think, fell asleep. My mother was shamed. If he ran away a third time, he did not have to be married with her.

My mother ran away instead. She took a dugout and meant to go to another island far away. Her cayuca was found washed up on the far end of our island. A hole was punched in it. Some said the gods made the hole because she was a proud woman. Some said my father had made the hole to let her soul run out so he'd be free. My mother's body was never found. She was known to have traded many coconuts with the Colombians who came regularly to our islands. Her wealth disappeared with her. It is whispered of a special place in the Darien Jungle where a tribe of mixed Cunas and Chocós live. It is whispered that my mother took a Chocó man who did not fit his tribe like her, and they made this mixed-up race. I do not know. I have thought upon looking for them but never have.

Questions were whispered about my strange mother. If my father had stayed the third time, he would be married with her. She had only to place his things outside the communal hut to be put apart, "divorced," from him. Then my father could not remarry unless she gave her permission or chose another Cuna man. Why did my mother run away? This I do not know.

The Chief, in the absence of my mother, allowed my father to re-marry. For a time, he was very happy with the girl who had taunted my mother about her ways. After seven changes of the moon from the time my father became her new husband, my father sickened. The medicine man can give medicine to make a woman create more daughters. The medicine man can give medicine to make a woman create more wonderful molas. The medicine man could do nothing to help my father. They put him aside in a special hammock under a palm-leaf-covered roof. His new wife and her mother and aunt stayed all night tending him, never letting the fire die down, for he must be kept hot to drive away the fever beings that possessed him. But my father could not fight them off, for they had been sent, the medicine man said, by my mother. And women are always more powerful in their secret ways than men. His new wife said in a loud and angry voice, throughout the tribe, that his old wife, my mother, had returned in the night to poison him with a dart from a Chocó blowgun. But everyone knew that my father was not well of soul. He had never wanted my mother, a thing which went against his self. We Cunas know that what we are outside has to do more with the soul than the body. When the soul is sad or sick or torn and old, the body must be also.

So, my father died. His new wife and her mother and aunt sewed him into his hammock to be taken to the Secret Burial Place. I was his son, though little more than a baby, and was allowed to go with them. The Wife of the Chief held me in her arms. I think I remember being held in her arms. I cannot tell whether I remember the rest or was allowed to know it from the Chief because my father had died.

The Secret Burial Place was on a special island where no one

lived. My father's new wife and her mother and aunt brought the bundle that was my father in a special cayuca. They hung it between two forked sticks and dug out a cave to shelter him. They covered it over with rocks and the fronds of palms and other living things. And then they set a chair beside the cave. My father's soul would roam and roam the world all day trying to be at peace with itself. When my father's soul returned to the cave at night, it would be tired, very tired. It would sit in the chair at night to rest. When I remembered my father in the Secret Burial Place years later, I wondered at this. The death rites of the Cunas are sacred. The Cunas have no chairs except for the dead souls to sit on. The dead souls that are weary from going about and about to find peace with themselves. I have painted chairs in my paintings, but the critics do not notice or ask what they mean. For chairs are not foreign to them as to the daily life of Cunas. Even unto this day.

I remembered my father in the Secret Burial Place many years later when Doctor Abilio began to work with me to open my memories again.

But the greatest Secret Place was deep inside me and required a long time with Doctor Abilio to open so that I could remember.

I have said that the albino is special among the Cuna people. They are always male when they appear, though I do not know how that can be. The Cunas are, in today's language, "matrilinal." Being an albino is the only way, aside from being descended from a special line of Chiefs, for a male to have power. Unlike most of the peoples of the South American countries, Panama included, the Cunas do not have "macho" males. As an albino, I was a true mola male, but all non-albino males are teased among us as "mola males," for the women are dominant in our society.

The life of the albino may not suit all born to it. Unable to bear the rays of the Great Sun, he is trained in woman's ways. He sits inside among the women and sews the molas. This is where, I think, I became an artist, for no two molas must ever be alike. Not even on the same blouse can the front and the back be alike. The sewers of molas must create, create, create. Else they are ashamed.

We are proud of our handiwork and wear the blouses ourselves, at least the five-swatched ones, until we tire of them. Then and only then are they sold to the tourists. That is not cheating, for only the greatest of the molas are worn by ourselves. To have one of the blouses we have discarded is no small thing and is much sought by the collectors. If I have had success as an artist, it is because of what I remembered from making the molas. No critic seems to guess that "the Eduardo technique" is only an adaptation of the appliqué and cut work of molas. I use the strong colors of the mola. I sew with paint where I first sewed with thread.

My adopted father was more bothered than my adopted uncle by my woman ways. I liked the bright colors. I liked the women's clothes. I liked the black paint down my nose and the big rings in it. I cried when they were taken away. My soul became sick.

But the soul of my adopted father was more sick than mine when it looked upon me through his eyes. It was not so much the women's ways that bothered him. It was what had happened to me among the women.

My uncle had had his private doctor examine me before I was adopted by his brother. I do not know what he told my adopted father, but I believe now that he did not tell him all. I was tended by the old nursemaid, Tialima. She was like the Cuna Chief's wife who cooked in the cooking tent of the women. Tialima made clucking noises in her throat when she first saw how I was. I think she told my adopted mother. I think now that my adopted parents viewed me as I slept. My adopted father's soul sickened. My adopted father would not stop until something could be done.

We went to doctors of all kinds. They all cautioned that I could not be changed until I understood. That is why I was sent to work with Doctor Abilio.

Before the doctors, I was almost happy. My adopted parents and Tialima were very good to me and loved me. I liked the schooling. I liked everything but having to pretend that I did not want to dress in the woman fashion and sew molas all day out of the sun. Sometimes my uncle would take me among the Cunas, which made me

very, very happy.

But Doctor Abilio spoke of my responsibilities to my adopted father. I knew that I must try to make my adopted father happy to repay him for his great kindness to me. Doctor Abilio said that living the way I had lived was right among the Cunas but not right in the great male "macho" society of Panama. I must try to adapt myself to the Panama way, which was not wrong for me because I was a boy. On the other hand, because of the very fact that I was a boy, what had happened to me among the Cunas was "unnatural." To be unnatural was bad for both Cunas and Panamanians. I must try to find my natural self again. My *boy* or *male* self.

Doctor Abilio worked and worked with me. Every day but Sunday we worked together to make me natural. I thought inside myself that I would become natural faster if he worked with me on Sunday. On Sundays, after mass, I was free to do as I pleased. I could think then of my Cuna ways and could sometimes find a secret place to reenact them. It seemed to me that my Cuna Sundays made up for my Panamanian weekdays. "The Painter Eduardo" came to paint only on Cuna Sundays.

Then my adopted father caught the "testicular" cancer, and we traveled to the United States of America for months at the time so he could be treated. But he could not be cured, for he would not permit the damaged parts to be cut off. I thought to myself that my "condition" prevented his curing. I tried harder and harder to find my natural self. The one great wish of my adopted father was to see me "well" before he died.

Doctor Abilio had tried the hypnotizing in little bits before. Under the hypnotizing, I remembered the chair that was put out for my dead father in the Secret Burial Place. Another time, I remembered a mola dress my mother had sewn. It was all-over the octopus, which was a terrible creature of evil to the Cunas. They had run from her in that dress, and she had laughed and laughed at them. She had become angry when I was afraid of the octopus dress, too, but I remembered in the hypnotism that she taught me to love the creature. I did not mean to deceive Doctor Abilio then

or later. But it came to me that my mother was not with me long enough for the octopus occasion to occur. I knew then that I could not trust the hypnotism, for I must have been told of the octopus story as I was told of almost all that I know of my mother. Else, I was in the dream state of the Cunas. When I was out from under the hypnotism, I did not share these thoughts with Doctor Abilio.

My adopted parents let me keep two small octopuses in a large tank. That is where the octopus comes from in my paintings. The octopus became a kind of "signature of the artist," but the critics do not seem to notice.

I and Doctor Abilio built up to the Great Hypnotism which was to make me want to be my natural self and be "reconstructed." I did not discuss with him what would happen after the reconstruction. Among the Cunas, I could not intermarry. What would I do after the reconstruction when I was a natural Panamanian?

The Great Hypnotism was like sleepwalking.

I remembered that I had helped the women make the chichah. The only time we Cunas take strong drink is for the sacred ceremonies. Only the women make it. Only the women drink it. Except for the albino. Which I was.

There were two of us for this ceremony. It was what the sociologists call now the "Puberty Rite." It would last for three days and three nights. All the while, we would drink the sacred chichah.

We were escorted to the Secret Place of the Women on another island. We wore the special molas we had made for this special occasion. My fellow honoree would pass hers to her first daughter. I would keep mine hidden and pass it to a future albino. I do not know what happened to mine. I try and try to paint it, but I cannot capture it. When I recall it to paint its patterns on my canvas, it will become "Eduardo's masterpiece." All of the critics will say this.

The women painted the black stripe down our noses. I remembered that the finger of The Wife of the Chief tickled as she painted, and I giggled. There was much laughter and giggling. They put in the nose rings, and the tool for the holes used by The Wife of the

Chief hurt, but not very much because the other women poured chichah on the wound and gave me more chichah to drink. The hair of my fellow honoree was chopped off, and she watched and waited while The Wife of the Chief cut off mine. It had been let grow until The Great Ceremony.

The women spoke things to each of us. I had not heard these things whispered before, and I wondered. Usually, the whisperings come about all that has happened with us Cunas, all that will happen. But I had not heard these things before. I wondered if I was told all the things my fellow honoree was told. I was different from her and did not think so because, even as an albino, there were things that only the women would know. I could never be a woman except outwardly. I tried to study upon this, but they gave me more chichah, and I could not think. I could only laugh and watch the women do their sacred dances. Dances I had never seen before. I felt that I was very privileged.

And then they took away my companion. The Wife of the Chief stayed behind with me, and we sat upon a palm mat on the ground and drank more chichah. She whispered kind things to me, and I was very, very happy. I thought I heard my fellow honoree call out, but The Wife of the Chief shushed me and gave me more chichah. At last my fellow honoree stood before me in her red and gold scarf, and she was a girl no more but a woman. I wished so much for my own red and gold scarf.

Then The Wife of the Chief led me off to the sacred place where girls became women. I was so happy. But then someone started screaming. I could not stand the screams. I hid my face in the arms of The Wife of the Chief. Then the screaming stopped at last, and the other women gave me my red and gold scarf. I was a woman, too, like my fellow honoree. And when Doctor Abilio made the hypnotism of me, I remembered who it was that was screaming.

Sally Pfoutz

Barren Shed

My mother sits by the bridge
waiting for nightfall.
Gentle manatees nuzzle
her feet, boat bellies,
newborn kittens.

Don't give them your sandwich,
I tell her, they're vegetarians.
My words jar the silence and rattle
the loose evening air
like a bullfrog's deep banjo twang.

She drops little corners of salami.
They get snapped up by scavengers,
homeless turtles, walleyed sharks,
my reflection in the black water.

Seabirds dip down for her bread.
She kisses their sharp lips.
Her limbs drop away
and reattach to starfish.

Water flurries churn
stirred up clouds in the wake.
Ashes glint like diamonds in the sand.
Sun warmed wood seeps into me.

Old river smells quell my hunger.
The sun sits on my back holding me down.
My splayed arms become landing pads
for dragonflies. Tall oats brush the salt air.

My mother, a purple martin,
flies away from the deserted house
trailing cobwebs. Beetles and termites
descend on the rotted wood, my hands.

Wordship
Richard Kostelanetz



WISDOM
WISDOM
WISDOM

TESTIMONY
TESTIMONY
TESTIMONY

COURAGE
COURAGE
COURAGE

PEOPLE
PEOPLE
PEOPLE

Contributors' Notes

Jeffery Bahr

Jeffery Bahr lives in Colorado and is on the editorial staff of *The Alsop Review*. His work has appeared in various publications including *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Barrow Street*, *Borderlands*, *Indiana Review*, *Many Mountains Moving*, and *Rattle*.

Charles Baxter

A longtime professor of English at the University of Michigan, Charles Baxter is among the nation's most widely admired writers and fiction teachers. Known as the "writer's writer," his most recent novel, *The Feast of Love* was a finalist for the 2000 National Book Award, a New York Times Notable Book and Boston Globe and independent bookstore bestseller. The book is a lushly re-imagined *A Midsummer's Night's Dream*, featuring a cast of characters reeling from the joys and anguish of love and its many manifestations. He is also the author of *Burning Down the House*, a collection of essays about fiction and writing, and a book of poems entitled *Imaginary Paintings*.

Brian Charles Clark

Brian Charles Clark has been a contributor to the independent publishing scene since 1975. He has contributed poems, stories, and essays to publications as diverse as *Rolling Stone* and *Driver's Side Airbag*. His first novel, *Splitting*, was published in 1999 by Wordcraft of Oregon. His essay on essay writing is forthcoming in *River Teeth*.

Rob Cook

Rob Cook lives in rural New Jersey where he works in the mental health field and co-edits *Skidrow Penthouse* with Stephanie Dickinson. His work has been published/accepted by: *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *South Carolina Review*, *The Laurel Review*, *Runes*, *Sundog*, and *Mudfish*.

Geary Danihy

A University of Idaho graduate (MA, English). During the day, he has worked in the wines & spirits industry and managed his own advertising/marketing communications agency. By night, he writes short stories and poems. His stories have appeared in *Houghton Mifflin's 2000 Best American Mystery Stories* anthology, *Indigenous Fiction*, *Blue Murder* and *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*.

Christiane Farnan

Christiane Farnan is Assistant Professor of American Literature at Siena College (Loudonville, New York) and is co-advisor to the student literary journal, *Pendragon*. She lives in Ballston Spa, New York with her husband Angelo and her son James.

Meg Files

Meg Files' books include a novel, *Meridian 144*, a collection of stories *Home is the Hunter*, and *Life Moments into Stories*, a forthcoming nonfiction work about writing. Her stories, poems, and articles have appeared in scores of publications including *Fiction*, *The Tampa Review*, and *Crazyhorse*. She was recently the James Thurber Writer-in-Residence at Ohio State University and has been selected as the Jack Kerouac Writer-in-Residence in Orlando.

Brad Gottschalk

Brad Gottschalk began his literary career as a playwright in Madison, WI, where a couple of his plays were produced by First Banana productions. He is currently working on a novel and as a father and house husband.

James Grinwis

James Grinwis now works as a writer for an educational research company. He has published poetry in numerous magazines

such as *American Poetry Review*, *Indiana Review*, *Cream City Review*, and *Gulf Coast. Blowhole* is the second short-short he has published.

Dianna Henning

Dianna Henning was awarded a California Arts Council Residency for their Artists-in-Residence Program 2000-2001. She is an Artist-in-Residence at Diamond View Middle School this fall, her second year as a CAC poetry instructor. Henning has taught creative writing in several prisons: Folsom; the Stockton Youth Authority; California State Prison, Sacramento. She has also taught for California Poets in the Schools for a number of years, and was the area coordinator. Henning was recently awarded third place in the CA State Library's Focus on Writers Contest for her story *The Lake the Animals Drink From*. She has recently published in *Fugue*, *Asheville Poetry Review*, *The Spoon River Poetry Review*, *The Red Rock Review*, and *Crazyhorse*.

Kathleen McGookey

Kathleen McGookey's work has appeared in journals including *Boston Review*, *Cimarron Review*, *Epoch*, *Field*, *The Journal*, *The Missouri Review*, *Quarterly West*, and *Seneca Review*. Poems are forthcoming in *Luna*, *The Texas Observer*, and *Verse*. White Pine Press will publish her first book of poems, *Whatever Shines*, this fall.

Sally Pfoutz

Sally Pfoutz is the author of *Missing Person*, a novel. Her poetry has appeared in *Phoebe*. She won first place in the 2001 American Mothers Literature competition for her short story "If You Were a Tiger". She is the mother of two grown daughters. She lives on a farm in Virginia with her husband

Mark, where she writes in the morning and teaches preschool in the afternoon. The rest of her time is taken up caring for her horses, dog and cats and admiring the country sky.

Lynn Veach Sadler

Former college president Dr. Lynn Veach Sadler has won an Extraordinary Undergraduate Teaching Award, pioneered in Computer-Assisted Composition, published widely in academics, and traveled around the world five times. Now a creative writer, she has many publications/awards in fiction, drama, poetry, and creative non-fiction.

Barbara Stewart

Barbara Stewart grew up in Schenectady, NY and received an MFA from Wichita State University. She lives with her husband, David Kopecek, in Kansas, where she is completing a novel, *Walking After Midnight*. Recent stories have appeared in *Yemassee* and *The North American Review*.

Georgia Tiffany

Georgia Tiffany's poems have appeared in such publications as *Iris*, *South Dakota Review*, *The Malahat Review*, *Willow Springs*, *Poetry Ireland*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Hampden-Sydney Poetry Review*, *Orbis*, *Birmingham Poetry Review*, *Grasslands Review*, *Snowy Egret*, *Spectrum*, *American Forests*, *Poetry Nottingham International*, *Cedar Rock*, *The Runner*, *Plainswoman*, *Bloodroot*, *Goblets*, *Blue Unicorn*, *Poet*, *The Voice*, *Wire Harp*, *Jeopardy*, and *Inland Journal*. She is included in the Washington University Press anthology of Northwest Poets, *Deep Down Things*, and received a Pushcart nomination in 2000. She lives and teaches in Moscow, Idaho and is a teacher-consultant with the Northwest Inland Writing Project at the University of Idaho.

Mary Winters

Mary Winter's poetry has appeared in this review as well as *Anthology of Magazine Verse* and *Yearbook of American Poetry*; *Cimarron Review*; *Commonweal*; *Gulf Coast*; *Quarterly West*; *Seneca Review* (whose editor nominated her poem for a Pushcart Prize); and *Washington Square*. She was a featured poet in the Palanquin Press pamphlet series; two of her chapbooks were contest winners. Her book *A Pocket History of the World* was published by Nightshade Press. After working as a lawyer, she is currently studying at Columbia University to become a reading specialist.

Robert Wrigley

Robert Wrigley is director of the creative writing program at University of Idaho. His most recent book is *Reign of Snakes*.



FUGUE

JEFFERY BAHR
CHARLES BAXTER
BRIAN CHARLES CLARK
ROB COOK
DAVID CURRY
CHRISTINE FARNAN
MEG FILES
BRAD GOTTSCHALK
JAMES GRINWIS
GEARY DANIHY
DIANNA HENNING
KATHLEEN McGOOKEY
SALLY PFOUTZ
LYNN SADLER
BARBARA STEWART
GEORGIA TIFFANY
MARY WINTERS
ROBERT WRIGLEY