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The Watermark: A Journal of the Arts - Vol. 15 - 2006

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The Watermark is a journal of arts and literature published bi-annually by the University of Massachusetts, Boston. The journal is entirely operated by a staff of students. We are dedicated to publishing the highest quality poetry, fiction, non-fiction, and visual art by the University's undergraduate and graduate student bodies.

The Watermark accepts submissions for its Fall issue from September 1 through mid-October and for its Spring issue from December 1 through mid-February.

Selections for publication have been reviewed anonymously by a democratic jury process. Information about submitting or getting involved can be found on our Web-site (URL below) or in person at our office on the 2nd Floor of the UMB Campus Center. The journal holds first-time North American serial rights to published pieces only; copyrights remain with the authors/artists.

The Watermark is supported by a yearly grant from the UMB Undergraduate Student Senate as well as a generous contribution from UMB's Graduate Student Assembly. Copies of the journal are free to students, staff, and faculty of the University and are available throughout the campus.

The off-campus price of single issues is $10.95; subscriptions are available for $20 per year. All proceeds from sales and subscriptions of the journal are used to fund our prizes and scholarships (further information in the back of the issue.)

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Poetry

Art

Fiction

Non-Fiction

Interview

There's More...

Editors' Note

"Silence is more fluent," writes Abdurrahman Wahab in his poem, *A Phone Call to Kurdistan*, and perhaps he is right. As writers, we struggle to capture universal passions in new words and to make the specific relevant to all. The act of writing is always an act of translation and, unlike in speech, there's no one there to hear us shout, "You know what I mean!"

As editors, we demand that writers "show" rather than "tell." When we read great writing, we cease to acknowledge each individual word and become a part of the narrative. A sentence or phrase that tells us what we already know, explains what we have intuited, can break this spell—what is not said is just as important as what is. Considering this inherent clumsiness of language, each successful "translation" may be seen as a small miracle in itself.

We're therefore extremely proud to write this preface to some of the most fluent work we've seen in a long time. From the literal translations of Neruda's *XI* and Farhad Shakely's *Supplication*, to the quirky, disturbing realism of Jen Beagin's *Pretend I'm Dead*, each piece in this issue of the Watermark takes us to new settings and holds us there until the very last lines. UMass Boston is the most diverse public university in New England, so it's no surprise that in this one issue we travel to Bakersfield, California, Chile, a New England beach, Kurdistan, and Cuba, to name a few places.

In our first semester as co-editors, we've been grateful for the high standards left by Amber Johns and Erica Mena, whom we would like to thank for their wise advice and soothing reassurance. It would not have been possible for us to formulate our own vision for the Watermark without this strong foundation. On that note, we're thrilled to announce two major changes!

First, beginning with the release of this issue, the Watermark will now be available for sale off-campus, at a number of local bookstores, and over the Internet. It's an honor to offer the excellent work coming out of this campus to the wider literary community, and to provide this opportunity for our writers and artists.

Second, it's an incredible pleasure to disclose news we've been sitting on all semester. After much work from many corners of UMB, the first annual Watermark Scholarships will be awarded in our Spring issue.

Working with the terrific folks from UMB's Institutional Advancement, the Watermark will now be sponsoring two high-school contests, one for writing and one for visual art. In each Spring issue, we'll publish one piece from each category and award two scholarships of $500 for tuition or other college-related costs to the winning students. Eligibility is limited to college-bound juniors and seniors attending Massachusetts public schools. More information about the scholarships is available at the back of the journal.

We're editors-in-chief, but we've also been tagged with the slightly ambiguous and embarrassing title of "Student Leaders." As such, we view it as our responsibility to support UMass Boston in its "urban mission"- making an excellent public education available to anyone and everyone with the talent, intelligence, and desire to attend university. The current crisis in urban public schools means that most available funds are concentrated towards raising test scores, and rightly so. But we wanted a chance to reward students' often-overlooked creative talents. Our scholarship is a small step, but an important one that we hope will continue to grow over the years.

Sadly, we can't list every person who helps make the Watermark what it is, but certain names cannot be ignored. We extend hearty thanks to the Creative Writing department for their support and funding of the Fiction and Poetry awards, and to our invaluable faculty, especially Joyce Pesseroff, Askold Melnyczuk, and Lloyd Schwartz; and to every professor who promoted the journal and allowed us to visit their classes.

We thank Thomas Sayers Ellis for judging the Martha Collins Poetry Award, and for consenting to the interview found on page 101; Jessica Treadway for judging the Chet Frederick Fiction Award: Donald Cookson for judging the Donald Cookson Non-Fiction Award; and Hope Klebenov for judging the art.

The Graduate Student Assembly, Mike Metzger and the Undergraduate Student Senate continue to ensure our financial existence; Michael Sullivan, of the Joiner Center, provided venting sessions at no cost and helped re-define "sardonic." We thank Donna Neal, Kelly Meehan, and everyone at Student Life for de-mystifying fine print; Alphan Gunaydin, for our beautiful new Web-site and continuing tech support; Morgan Coe, Rosie's partner, for his never-ending patience and encouragement on the home front, and Shea's parents for their endless support and encouragement to live the life of which one dreams.

Last and most important, we thank our talented and tireless staff. Each of you has helped to make the journal a truly collaborative process as you contributed your ideas at every turn, pored over each submission with scrutiny, worked directly with authors on final revisions, and contributed to the grunt work of promotion and advertising. We could not ask for a better team or a better community.

Rosie Healy & Shea Donovan Mullaney
December 2006

Farhad Shakely

Supplication

Translated from the Kurdish by Abdurrahman Wahab

Come.
Only you understand the tongue of this city—
Come.
Only you are the expert
you know the paths in dark and daylight
Why don't you come?
You are the wise and the guide
Come, even for once
show me a way,
read me a letter from my remote love—
Come.
Explain the lessons of agony and waiting
teach me the alphabet of these people.

Jorge Albarez

my life in tongues and seaweed twisters

Martha Collins Poetry Award Winner

i. christmas 1963

sucking craggy rocks pebble smooth
my mother walked into the wall of a *botanica*
bloodied her nose broke water
and expelled me in the alley

little havana saints
ate black beans and rice in the blue
redeeming light of jesus

i mooned and glowed
in the sardine afterbirth
to the on-off on-off on-off
of the stroboscopic santa claus

ii. christmas 1968

caterwauls and cold gusts filled the room
the cloudless sky died in the open window

the organ grinder in my head pumped
a counterpoint to wails and dark tongues

i seeped out through the crack in my head
and landed next to the flayed pig

my syphilitic father impotent

mother's dark visions *devils minions*
blah blah blah *disemboweling me*
blah blah *crawling in*
blah *severe*

they failed to notice their airborne son

iii. christmas 1973

my father killed god
after my goldfish died

he hovered upside down into the room
through the fishbowl
his lost ghost talk

the sun is going to explode in 10 million years
white dwarf fiery giant swallow you whole

i said
but god won't let—

he's dead he said *like the upside down fish*

iv. august 9, 1974

helicopter nixon waved
two peace signs on tv

my father's wreckage
beneath the sheets
this spot he told me
i tried to shoot myself

helicopter nixon waved
two fingers
one last time

v. christmas 1977

the air was fried cod
in the overstuffed kitchen

fish heads stared at hissing green plantains
dropped unceremoniously to their *autos da fe*
mother blazed as grand inquisitor

mother fish eyed grew gills

we swam green streaks to cuba
i was lost in seaweed twisters

vi. november 4, 1980

first time i did drugs with my father

cbgb's roaches scurried
to the damned the fall

i ate his yellow blot of paper
became an expanding red balloon

my face disintegrated cell by cell
a bloody pool of primordial matter

vii. 1981 - 1986

i kept my father's head
in the refrigerator's freezer

next to the snapper
these years were a blur to me

viii. christmas 1986

cuzco cathedral
an impaled guinea pig
as last supper painted on the wall

chewing acrid coca leaves
my cock eyed lover swept sin away

i spread the semen out
with the worn sole of my shoe

ix. november 9, 1989

i danced the *guaguanco*
with de kooning women

by the sea they took the stuffing out of it
no one loved my penis like i did

x. december 24, 1996

dr. x did not assuage my fears
by the gray light of the moribund afternoon

you should kill your father
in your fantasies he said
you see the egg pointing to a gray slab
a cracked egg embedded in stone
you are like the egg

you are broken
you are stuck
you are nothing

ShAnnon Rheubottom

Untitled

Black & White Photography

Michael Hogan

Chaotic Self-Portrait

Black & White Photography; Collage

Lloyd Sheldon Johnson

Ran Blake at the Regattabar, Harvard Square, 17 October 02

I guess I didn't really
notice until I heard
the music
and heard the
African in the rhythm and the
soul in the sound and
the jive in the
jazz and the beats
climbing walls like words
desperate for sentences:

I sit alone,
the only black person
in a medley of whites and
a sea of black jazz.

Martha Hicks Leta

Fear and Loathing at the Mall

Back in my home state of New Jersey, after another year spent in the bucolic climes of Boulder, Colorado, I ventured to the familiar Quaker Bridge Mall to finish another season of last-minute Christmas shopping. Traversing the multi-level space, I was surprised to find how greatly it had been expanded in my absence, with bigger and better anchor stores and a double-sized food court. Blinking and spinning Christmas decorations festooned every available inch of space. In no time, I became so besieged by the jostling crowds and boundless volumes of monumental crap that I began to have a bona-fide panic attack. Pulse thready, I ducked into a nearby restroom to pull myself together. When my head cleared, I bolted for the nearest exit and laid heavy rubber down getting out of there, grateful for the relative calm of rush-hour traffic.

Since then, I've not experienced any agoraphobic episodes, though I still regard mammoth commercial spaces with a certain amount of distrust. But now, as the mother of two young daughters, I've discovered that avoiding them is no easy task. In the eyes of my girls, the mall is a prime destination. Given the choice between a hike through the woods or a trip to the mall, the latter wins almost invariably. I suppose it's my fault—when the girls were little, I found the mall as good as any place to pass an inclement afternoon. In the even, carpeted ramps and planes, they could roam freely, testing their unsure legs with relative ease. I could follow along behind and not worry about them darting out in traffic, face-planting in the pavement, or gnawing on some vile morsel found outside in the dirt.

All these years later, I can't seem to "de-mall" my girls, and all of this "mall love" seems inconceivable to me. Perhaps it's because, having been born in 1960, the better part of my childhood was mall-free. My mother bought our medicine and sundries at a family-owned pharmacy, and bought groceries at Bentley's Market, a place no bigger than a two-car garage. The market was operated by Mr. Bentley and his brother,

Tubby. The butcher's name was Francis, and he gave me free cheese. One of Mr. Bentley's two sons, Arthur or Butch, would always bag or box the groceries and carry them to our car. My mother never paid cash, but signed for the bill, as she did pretty much everywhere in town.

For "special" shopping, we went by bus to Manhattan to shop Gimbel's or Macy's. Otherwise, we bought our clothes at the local department store, owned by my friend Anne Norris's father. Mr Norris, according to everyone I knew but most especially his daughter, was a Very Important Man. He wore good clothes, drove a big car, and housed his family in a posh home with a live-in maid and a swimming pool. His importance was driven home each Christmas by the wide array of the latest and hottest commodities that Anne found under her tree.

Everything changed shortly after the day in 1973 when Anne came to school sporting a rad feathery hair-do and a brand new pair of Earth Shoes. In comparison, my penny loafers and side-parted long hair were suddenly dorky. Flush with excitement, Anne described this place she'd been to called "The Mall." She said it was this huge, incredible indoor area with hundreds of cool stores where you could buy absolutely anything, anything at all. As proof she produced a pack of garlic chewing gum and fake vomit. (It occurs to me now that the garlic chewing gum most likely would have rendered the fake vomit somewhat redundant, but the point escaped me then.)

Prior to the news of this thing called "Mall," the idea of an entirely-enclosed, enormous shopping space was completely alien to me. Even in commercial airports, in those days, people walked *outside* to get onto the plane. I couldn't even imagine what a mall might be; I was, in short, a mall virgin.

That weekend, I scored an invite to sleep over at Anne's house. On Saturday morning after breakfast, Mr. N, no doubt anxious to enjoy a day of football in peace, happily gave his wife a sizeable wad of cash and the keys to the Caddy. Mrs. N, sporting her full war-paint, a floor-length fur coat, and perhaps the slightest hint of vodka on her breath, ushered Anne and me to the big Cadillac Fleetwood and made haste for the Oxford Valley Mall.

I can't remember every detail from that day, but I know I came home with a mood ring and my first double record album. I also felt euphoria—stoned off my twelve-year old ass with the kind of wonder

and awe a smack addict probably feels with the first shot of heroin. But as the remainder of the week wore on, my mood ring went from bright blue to black. I spent my after-school hours wallowing in *Goodbye Yellow Brick Road*, trying desperately to recapture that sense of mall euphoria, as if I might jump into the lurid album-cover graphics and be transported back. The mood ring never seemed to turn quite as bright blue again.

Years later, I read David Guterson's essay entitled "Enclosed. Encyclopedic. Endured. One Week at the Mall of America." about the 4.2-million-square-foot Mall of America near Minneapolis. He quoted a woman named Laura in his piece: "Seriously, I feel sorry for other malls. They're so small and boring." I remember drawing the same conclusion about Mr. Norris and his department store. We had returned from the Oxford Valley Mall that evening to the big country manse and found Mr. Norris in his undershirt, slack-jawed and snoozing in his Barcalounger. That night, Mr. and Mrs. N got into a bitter and noisy argument, and Anne, I could tell, was mortified. After that, Mr. N and his store never regained their stature in my eyes—nor, I'm afraid, in his daughter's. In subsequent months and years, Anne's parents argued more frequently. As the mall and the many others that followed slowly crushed the family business, Mr. Norris seemed to wither to a mere husk of himself, and the vodka became a regular thing with Mrs. N.

Guterson's essay left me feeling utterly sympathetic to his not-so-subtly-disguised disdain for megalithic, enclosed commercial spaces. "The mall," he writes, " exploits our acquisitive instincts without honoring our communal requirements, our eternal desire for discourse and intimacy, needs that until the twentieth century were traditionally met in our market places, but that are not met at all in giant shopping malls." The Mall of America sounds like the Seventh Circle of Hell, or as Guterson describes it, "the vast entrails of the beast."

Though I share Guterson's disdain for such unbridled consumerism, it's true that many people derive pleasure from being in places like this. So what's the harm, I ask. What is wrong with mega-mall magic? Can it really be blamed for my panic attack or the disintegration of my friend's family?

Maybe not. There were likely other forces at play. But in retrospect I see how life's small pleasures can be dwarfed to non-existence by the

colossal exuberance of things like mega-malls. Maybe man's orgasmic Tower of Babel aspirations reduce fabulous things to ordinary status and make the ordinary seem second-rate. A quiet walk in the woods becomes a dreadfully boring thing worth avoiding, and two girls from Shakopee, Minnesota believe they're nowhere unless they're at the mall, and perhaps, if he's terribly unlucky, an idolized father is reduced to a mere mortal in the eyes of his once-adoring daughter.

Dianne M. Kirkpatrick

Urban Hush

Black & White Photography

Denise Theriault

Weaving Wo-Man

Black & White Photography; Collage

Jen Beagin

Pretend I'm Dead

Mona stood at the edge of the playground, laid out like a prison yard—a big concrete square surrounded by tall chain-link fencing. No trees, no jungle gyms, nowhere to hide. A Lutheran church overlooked the playground like a watchtower without the armed guards. She glanced at the church's steeple. It was the color and texture of sand and stood alone in a cloudless blue sky, a shade her mother would have described as "psychotic."

A bunch of stupid fourth-graders were behind the fence, poking their fingers and noses through the holes and staring at the figure lying on the playground. A few of them had climbed higher to get a better view. Mona's father was lying on his stomach in the center of the square. He'd fallen as though he'd been shot in the back. One shoe had slipped off and was lying on its side, near his good arm. His hat, a yellow mesh-backed cap with the words "Plumbers Have Bigger Tools" on the front panel, rested upside-down near his head. His bald, sunburned head made Mona think of babies being dropped from rooftops. She had always thought his head was too soft-looking, like a peach about to turn. When they left the house each morning, she often wanted to hand him a helmet.

He was making noises now. It sounded like bitter laughter, but she realized he might be crying. His expression wouldn't tell her, though—he had a way of smiling when he cried. He rolled over onto his back and called her name. Mona reluctantly shuffled over to him. When she got there, she was careful to stand so that her shadow covered his face, which he had scraped on the pavement. He looked as drunk as she'd ever seen him, as though whatever he drank that day had just now caught up with him. He was smiling and wiping tears away with his shirt sleeve, but she still couldn't tell which kind they were. "I was just thinking about your teacher," he said. He paused, then added thoughtfully, "She has the eyes of a fish."

He chuckled to himself. He seemed content to just lie there, staring at the sky. He reached for the cigarettes in his shirt pocket and shook one out. It was flattened and on the verge of breaking. "My smokes are crushed," he muttered.

"You can't smoke here, Dad," Mona said, crossing her arms.

* * *

Mona was surprised he'd come to pick her up. She usually took the city bus home and was glad to; it made her feel like an adult. Her father had been early, too—the bell had just rung and the school buses hadn't yet lined up in the parking lot. She and her classmates were just getting their backpacks on. When he stumbled into the classroom, the younger kids had rushed up to him like he was a movie star. But he was a plumber. He smelled like a mixture of alcohol and cigarettes, with a low note of refried beans and the sweat of a hundred hangovers. A red beard threatened to take over his whole face and his skin was pebble-textured, as though he regularly slept at the bus stop near their house. His mouth was a coffin she would spend her entire life wanting to nail shut, but his eyes were clear and blue and difficult to look away from. They were so animated they looked cartoonish. When he talked about money, his pupils seemed to turn into tiny dollar signs. When he talked about her mother, they were heart-shaped.

His main feature, though, was the hook he wore in place of his right arm. He'd had it since Mona was three years old. It was something she always forgot about until they were in public. His hook was made of steel, which he could open and close with his back muscles. His prosthetic arm was made of fiberglass, onto which he had someone tattoo an American flag. People assumed he was a Vietnam vet, but he'd lost his arm to gangrene after an explosion at a gas station, where he'd been working as a mechanic. Her classmates had asked him the question every kid did, "How did you lose your arm?"

"I lost it by lying," he lied.

Usually he said it was because he didn't eat his vegetables or didn't do his homework or didn't go to church. He opened his hook to its fullest capacity, then snapped it shut in front of their noses, something he thankfully never did to her. "How did you lose your noses?"

he growled, and they'd all run away, squealing.

Her heart sank when he'd made his way over to her teacher.

"I'm Jimmy," he said, introducing himself. "Mona's father."

"Hello," she said, offering her hand. He took her extended right hand in his left one, which disoriented her, then he held it for a beat too long so it looked as though they were holding hands. Mona blushed as if he had just kissed her teacher on the mouth. Mrs. O'Farrell recovered quickly, giving his hand a squeeze before letting it go.

"Is Mona a good girl?" he asked her. He was using the flirtatious voice he used on female cashiers.

"She's a good student," Mrs. O'Farrell answered primly, to which her father merely grunted. "She's also the fastest runner in the sixth grade," she added.

"Is that right?" he spun around and looked at Mona. He was beaming.

As they were leaving the school, her father had shouted, "Race you to the parking lot!" and took off running across the playground. Mona hung back. To her horror, he stumbled at full speed and fell spectacularly onto his face.

* * *

When her father finally got to his feet, he limped dramatically to the edge of the playground, dragging his leg behind him and moaning, a continuation of his performance, though he no longer had an audience—Mona's schoolmates scattered like cockroaches as soon as he was in the sitting position. Mona handed Jimmy his shoe and hat and he put them back on soberly, then adjusted his hook as he would a necktie. He patted Mona's cheek roughly, as if he were brushing imaginary crumbs off it, a gesture he often made in place of a hug or a pat on the back.

"Sorry I fell, pumpkin," he said, frowning. "My legs felt…wrong. I think my knee might be busted." He paused, waiting for a response. Getting none, he said, "I guess you think your old man is an ass."

"Why are you here?" Mona asked quietly. "I don't need a ride, I have bus money."

"I just did a bid on a job down the street and uh, I dunno! I

thought it'd be nice to pick you up for once. You shoulda seen this lady's house, Mona, you woulda been in heaven. She has a swimming pool the size of—"

"Why couldn't you just wait in the parking lot like the other parents?" Mona interrupted.

"Hey," he said, looking hurt. "Don't be so sensitive. I said I was sorry, for chrissakes. I crawl under houses all day," he said, as if that explained everything.

* * *

Mona decided not to mention her father's behavior to her mother when she saw her that weekend. Not telling her mother was essentially like tossing the experience into an abandoned well, where, without food and water and in spite of its hoarse screaming, it would eventually die. She had thrown similar horror show hi-jinks of her father's into this same well, but she was beginning to wonder if they were perhaps feeding on each other, gaining strength and intelligence in their numbers, scheming for ways to balance on top of one another, so that eventually one or all of them would be able to climb out and wander into town for everyone to see.

She thought of the naked pictures her father had taken of her while they were on vacation last summer. She hadn't wanted to pose for them, but she liked the way they came out. "See what a beauty you are?" her father said when he showed them to her. "You look just like your mother." Mona was thrilled by this prospect, since people always said she looked more like her father—she had the unmistakable nose of a Boyle, which ended mid-slope, along with the thin-lipped mouth, the slightly crooked teeth, and the mismatched thumbs.

Looking at the pictures, Mona began to see what her father saw. She and her mother had the same olive complexion, almond-shaped eyes, and dark brown hair, and—since the pictures were in black and white—her birthmark was less noticeable. It was usually the first thing she looked for in photographs of herself. The mark was the size of a plum and was on her scalp, of all places, just above her left ear. The hair that grew there was white now.

When she was little it had been jet black, seemingly in an effort to stand out better against the rest of her hair, which had been differ-

ent then—lighter, redder, more like her father's. When her father was sober, he called it "the mark of an angel." When he was drunk and mad at her, he called it "the mark of the Devil." She never understood why her parents wouldn't let her dye it. Sometimes she imagined gouging it out of her head with a pair of scissors.

In any case, the pictures were ruined for her now. Soon after her father had shown them to her, she caught him showing them to this fat friend, Fat Bill, in their living room. She watched Fat Bill run a finger up and down her black-and-white torso, and heard him comment on her flat chest and lack of hair down there. Fat Bill made these comments offhandedly and as though he thought they were cute, in the way that girls with dimples were cute. Her father had said nothing, just nodded in agreement. Mona felt dizzy and quietly backed out of the room, thankful they hadn't seen her. She spent an hour in the bathroom, alternately beating her thighs with her fists and watching herself cry in the bathroom mirror.

* * *

As they walked to his truck in the parking lot, Mona's father draped his arm over her shoulders, and leaned heavily against her.

"Remember that game we used to play in the swimming pool?" he asked.

"No, I don't remember," Mona lied. Part of her was curious to hear what new details he would make up and which ones he would leave out. But the other, larger part of her wanted to hear the story because she liked hearing about herself in the past. It was like hearing about some other person, a better version of herself.

"You were such a funny kid," he continued, clearing his throat. "You made up this game in Grandma's swimming pool…where you'd pretend to be drowning. You'd splash around and make a big scene, then you'd float face down and wait for me to jump in and save you… and I would, of course. You were so dramatic! And you could hold your breath forever," he marveled, squeezing her shoulder with his arm. He paused and Mona waited for him to continue.

"I think you liked all that attention," he said finally.

Mona bristled at the word "attention." She remembered the game, but she never thought of it that way before. She called the

game "Pretend I'm Dead," and had always played it more for her father's benefit than for her own. It gave him a chance to out-do himself—diving into the pool with his clothes on and a cigarette in his mouth, swimming noisily over to her, turning her over, dragging her by the arm to the pool's stairs. Sometimes he lifted her out of the pool altogether and carried her into the house. She thought they were both exceptional—he at pretending to be frantic, she at pretending to be dead.

* * *

When they reached Jimmy's truck in the parking lot, Mona opened the driver's side door while her father fished for his keys. She could hear rustling in the back of the truck, where all her father's pipes and fittings were kept. Her father's best friend and business partner, Tom, on his hands and knees, poked his head over the driver seat and said, "What the hell took you so long?" When he saw Mona, he winked. She could feel the red in her face spread to her chest, making her t-shirt feel too tight. She was secretly in love with Tom. He was several years younger than her father and Mona fantasized about marrying him. By the time she was eighteen, Tom would only be thirty-nine.

When Tom saw the state Jimmy was in, he climbed out of the truck and said, "What the hell happened to you, man? Did the kids beat you up or what?"

"Nooo," Jimmy said slowly. "I took a shpill, thas all," he said, purposely slurring his words. He held up a finger as if about to make a point, then lurched forward into Tom's arms.

"Whoa, Jim! Jesus!" Tom said, catching him. He shot Mona a sympathetic look, but she could tell he thought it was funny and would have laughed if she hadn't been standing there. Her father regained his balance, then playfully punched Tom on the arm.

"I'm just messing with you, Tommy. Sure feels like I got beat up. I was just trying to have fun with Mona and I fell on my goddamn face."

"Gimme your keys—I'm driving your ass home," Tom said.

"Fine by me," Jimmy said. He let out a loud belch, then handed Tom his keys and climbed into the truck. It had been a Frito Lay delivery truck in its previous life, tall, square, and snub-nosed, with a

large, flat windshield. Jimmy had it re-painted white with the words "Boyle's Plumbing and Heating" on each side in bright blue letters.

There was only one seat—the driver's seat—so one either had to stand in the stairwell next to the sliding passenger door or sit on an overturned bucket in the back. It took a coordinated—that is, sober—person to be able to balance himself on the bucket while the truck was in motion, so her father opted to lie down in the back. It wasn't the first time. He kept a pillow and a filthy blanket back there. Mona climbed over the driver seat and took her usual space in the stairwell. Tom settled into the driver's seat and started the engine. Usually she felt pretty good standing there, but her knees were shaking and she was longing for something to hold onto.

Tom pulled out of the parking lot and onto Pacific Coast Highway. They drove in silence for a while, staring at the traffic in front of them. Tom had a habit of slightly speeding up rather than slowing down when they approached pedestrians and intersections. It made Mona nervous.

"Good thing I didn't get wasted with your dad this afternoon, huh?" he said, smiling.

Mona glanced at his mouth. His lips were chapped, a little pinker than usual. She'd recently started writing about Tom in her diary and drawing pictures of him in colored pencil. For reasons she couldn't name, she paid particular attention to his mouth. He had a sizeable gap between his two front teeth, which had an inexplicable way of making Mona want to writhe around on the carpet. The rest of his teeth were of the short and sturdy variety and looked like they could crush granite. He smiled a lot—he laughed at nearly everything her father said—but when he wasn't smiling his face looked exhausted and ready for bed. His eyes were her second favorite thing. They were dark and frank in their expression. When he looked at her, they seemed to say, "You are here."

Her mother found Tom repulsive. She always referred to him as "scumbag," or "lowlife," or "pervert." This last observation had confused Mona, but rather than ask for an explanation, she wrote about it in her diary. She wanted to ask her mother if Tom's sleeping naked on the couch was what made him a pervert, but knew from the way he looked at her that she was supposed to keep it a secret.

Anyway, her father roamed around the house naked at all hours and in all kinds of company and no one said anything. In her diary, she wrote: "Tom's body: super long with lots of little muscles. He has a hairy behind. His thingee is regular-looking with black hairs around it. His balls looked purple, shiny, and wrinkly." She drew a picture of a boa constrictor around the words and meticulously covered it in scales.

Mona realized she was staring. She thought she should make conversation but she could barely speak to Tom, even under the most ordinary of circumstances. Her mind always seemed to draw a blank, and the longer she went without saying anything, the more awkward she felt. Anyway, she never liked the way her voice sounded around him—hesitant, shaky, unsure of itself. Tom's voice, on the other hand, was just the opposite. Low-pitched and sonorous, it had a tendency to echo inside Mona's head.

They were driving away from the ocean, making their way toward Torrance. Mona and her father lived on Newton Street—a street of modest one-storey homes built close together and in the Mission style, with smooth stucco siding and red-tiled roofs. Newton Street had recently become popular among Asian families, who were buying up a lot of the businesses in the area. Korean families lived on either side of Mona and her father, and a family of Samoans lived across the street. The neighborhood was nestled up against the hills of Palos Verdes, where wealthy people continued to buy property even though their houses kept falling into the ocean. These same wealthy people used Newton Street as a shortcut home, and their BMWs and Mercedes often careened at high speeds past Mona's house. Jimmy was fond of throwing things—small rocks, garbage, dirty looks—at their cars while he was watering the lawn.

Mona kept checking on her father, who appeared to be passed out cold in the back. He had a gaping hole in the seat of his jeans that she hadn't noticed before. She felt a familiar affection for him rise up in her chest, which only seemed to happen when he was unconscious. She wondered how he could sleep with all the noise. The pipes and tools were making their usual racket, rattling around like crazy on the shelves in the back. When she was in a good mood, it sounded like an aviary full of exotic birds. But when she was feeling

nervous, as she was now, the noise was irritating. As if reading her mind, Tom turned on the radio, then looked over at her and smiled. Mona smiled back, fighting the urge to kiss him on the neck.

When they arrived at the house, Tom parked in Jimmy's usual space on the street. He took the keys from the ignition and tossed them in Mona's direction. She caught them at the last second, then held them awkwardly in her hands, wondering what to do with them. Tom yawned, then turned around in his seat and yelled, "Jim! We're here, man! Wake up!" He turned to Mona and said, "Why don't you go ahead and let yourself into the house? I'm gonna help your dad put himself back together."

Mona opened the front door quickly and walked into the kitchen, anxious to spy on Tom from the kitchen window. She vaguely wondered how he planned to "put her dad back together." She imagined him slapping her father in the face, shouting in his ear, kicking him in the shins. She busied herself by making a peanut butter and jelly on Wonderbread (heavy on the jelly), and watched the driveway, waiting. The Samoans' dog, Spoon, was running in circles in the yard across the street. Mona finished her sandwich and was about to make another when her father and Tom emerged from the back of the truck.

Her father was wide awake now and Tom was laughing at something he was saying. Mona could tell her dad was in the middle of a story by the way he moved his shoulders—he shifted them to the left, said a few words, then shifted them to the right and continued talking. Mona guessed he was reenacting a conversation he'd had with someone.

As they neared the house, Mona heard her father say, "I never laid eyes on an uglier woman. She looked like she chased a fart through a keg of nails!" Tom laughed, doubling over slightly. It was the end of the story, and her father seemed winded by the telling of it. His chest was heaving a little, but his face was alert with a mixture of hilarity and rage.

The last time she saw that look, he'd just finished beating a possum to death with a tennis racket in the backyard. The time before that he'd just finished beating her mother. He'd broken her nose for the third time and put a gash in her head. She'd spent the night

where he'd left her, on the living room floor. Mona had slept next to her on the couch and in the morning, while her father was still in bed, her mother woke her to say she was leaving. "He hit me with his hook," she said. She gave Mona a meaningful look and Mona understood that there was a distinction to be made, dots to be connected. She told Mona that she'd be back for her after she found an apartment.

* * *

Mona slid away from the window. She ran down the hallway to her bedroom, shutting the door behind her. She could hear Tom and her father walk into the living room. One of them put a Fleetwood Mac record on the turntable and turned up the volume.

She opened her closet. After her mother moved out, Mona had taken everything she'd left behind and carried it into her bedroom. Tossing her own clothes into a pile on the floor, she had filled the closet with her mother's stuff—dresses, high heels, and an old box of makeup.

Mona took off her clothes and put on one of her mother's dresses. It was polyester, backless, and printed with brown and orange paisleys. It came down to Mona's ankles and was loose in the chest and hips. Mona stood with her back to the mirror and looked over her shoulder at her reflection, the way her mother used to do. Then she sat down in front of her mirror and applied eyeliner and mascara. She put blush on her cheekbones and a little on her chest bone.

Her father would be starting the barbeque soon, but dinner wouldn't be ready until it was time for bed. Fat Bill would be coming over, along with Ed the electrician, and they'd all put white stuff up their noses. ("Chinese brain powder," her father called it. "It helps with my memory," he said.) Then they'd watch a boxing match on television. It would be a typical Friday night.

When they were all drunk, her father might call her out into the living room to do something embarrassing in front of his friends. Last week he had asked her to remove his cowboy boots, which wasn't in itself out of the ordinary. She regularly did things like tie his shoes, cut his steak, and iron his shirts for him. She had approached his outstretched leg and straddled his calf as usual, while his friends

looked on, bemused. Her back was to her father's torso, and the boot between her legs looked like a horse's head. Grasping the heel, she gave it a good pull with her arms, but he flexed his toes in such a way that the boot wouldn't come off. She realized the joke, but continued the performance. His friends seemed really entertained by the whole thing. Tom was the only one not laughing.

Still, she found the prospect of being the butt of a joke preferable to living with her mother, who had moved in with a new boyfriend. His name was Manny and he was a firefighter. He lived in a tiny two-bedroom apartment with his two daughters. On weekends, Mona slept on the floor between the girls' beds. Her mother slept with Manny in the bedroom across the hall. She could often hear her mother moaning in the next room in the middle of the night. "Do you hear that?" Mona would whisper from the floor. "Go to sleep, Mona," they'd tell her. But Mona lay awake and listened.

Last week Mona had gotten up and paced the short hallway leading to Manny's bedroom. When her mother's moaning became more feverish, Mona pounded on the door with her fist, then ran into the living room and hid behind the couch. Her mother came in a few minutes later and called to her in a loud whisper. Mona poked her head up over the couch.

"Mona!" her mother said, squinting. "What's the matter?"

"Why do you have to be so loud?" Mona asked.

"I can't help making noise, honey." she said. She walked over to Mona and stroked her hair. "It's what people do when they're in love." She paused and pulled her bathrobe around her, suddenly bashful.

"You'll understand someday." Mona doubted this. She suspected her mother was losing her mind.

* * *

Someone was tapping on her bedroom door. She opened it and found Tom standing in the hall. He took a step toward her and leaned against the doorway. *He's going to tell me he's in love with me*, Mona thought. *He's going to kiss me.*

"Dinner's ready," he said. He looked her up and down and gave a low whistle. "Hot date tonight?" he asked, and winked.

Mona racked her brain, trying to think of the right answer.

"Yes?" She hadn't meant it to be a question. Tom laughed, then reached out and ruffled her hair. Mona groaned inwardly. *Stupid, stupid, stupid*, she thought.

"You look gorgeous, Mona, but you better change. I don't think your dad's gonna like what you're wearing," he said, yawning.

Mona nodded. Tom looked her up and down again and smiled, then walked away. She kicked the door closed and walked to her dresser. She removed her diary from the top drawer, then sat down in front of the mirror and wrote, "Tom's mouth is shaped like a piece of toast when he yawns." She stared for a moment at her reflection, waiting for something else to occur to her.

Meghan Marie Chiampa

Where the Green Meets the Blue on a Map

You pick up a rock that belonged
to a star nine billion years ago.

That star is dead now.
You skip the rock over the waves

and I watch a shooting star
smash into the moon's face.

There is no wind on the moon, you say.
The craters stay there forever.

You can kick them all down like sandcastles.
Nothing is holding them up.

The moon patiently sits watching as neon
green algae rings around our

ankles the way bits and pieces of
the universe curl around the waist of Saturn.

The stars glisten like silver sequins of
a gown my mother keeps in the farthest reaches of her wardrobe.

All the stars are speaking in a voice beyond our
hearing, filtered through another dimension

and spat out onto the Earth only to disintegrate
instantly in the atmosphere.

I believe the stars are broken down into grains of sand,
you say, as you kneel down in a bed of stardust.

We try to listen to the hum of the stars.
I can hear them, you whisper. They are saying nothing.

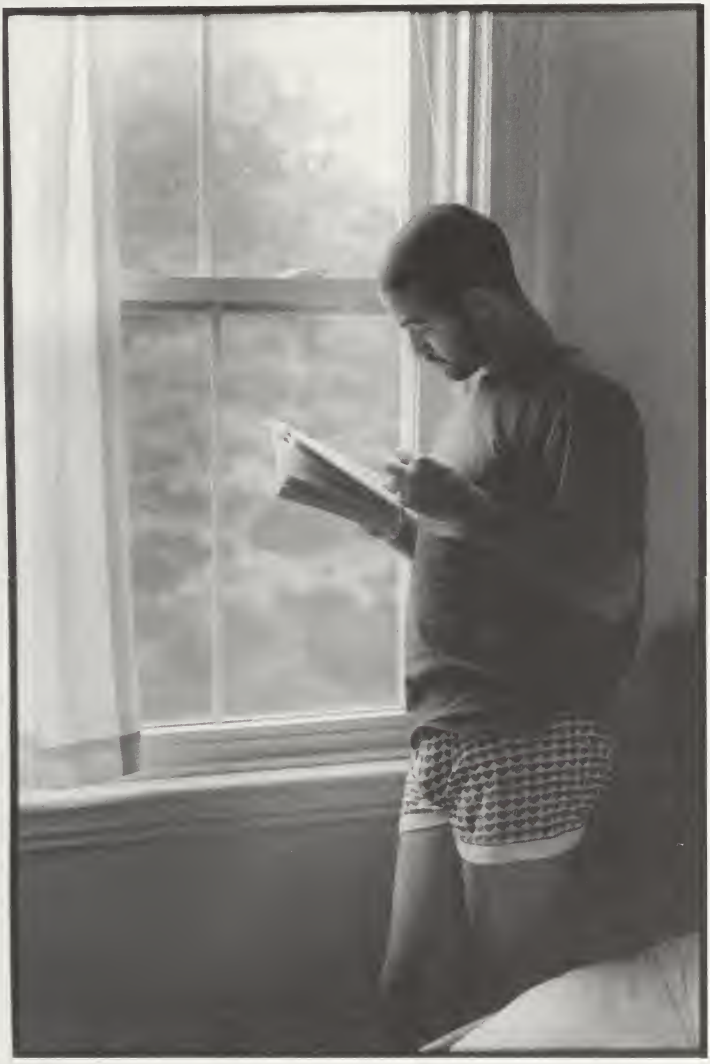
Christian deTorres

Abuela

Richard Yarde Art Award co-winner

Black & White Photography

Amber Johns



Aaron at Home

Black & White Photography

Dana Kletter

Still in Boxes

After their wedding, the house Michael and Eva rented was condemned. Problems with the foundation, they were told, or asbestos in the basement, or a hole that let something insidious percolate into the vents and ducts. They were never sure what it was, only that once the eviction set them in motion they seemed unable to stop.

They went first to a room in a friend's house, then a summer sublet, then a cottage that went on the market just as they had settled in, another apartment, another house. With each move they cast off what they couldn't bear to move again, piled it high at the curb or left it by the side of the building in garbage bags. So they lost an armchair Eva always meant to have re-upholstered, the first kitchen table they'd bought together, papers, letters, books.

"It's all ballast," Michael said, "we're lightening our load."

But Eva felt like each thing they left behind was a sacrifice, an offering to the mechanism that propelled them. Here, she thought, laying her second best copy of *Middlemarch* on top of a box of books, and take this, the black skirt she'd bought to wear to her father's funeral.

Some things she clung to with a ferocity that baffled Michael. They argued over the old Zenith Chromacolor from her parents' living room, a hulking cube that still sat on the pressboard cart purchased with it.

"A television is not an heirloom," Michael said. "Plus it weighs about a thousand pounds, and you're not the one who has to carry it."

Eva, still angry, watched Michael roll the cart to the curb.

They finally came to rest in a in a large development called Endymion Hills, a small white-brick split level on Longfellow Lane. Eva called her mother with their new address.

"Thank God," she said, "I worry so much. You are like refugees. I pray to God to give you a house."

"Michael's parents gave us the money for the down payment," Eva said.

"Thank God," her mother replied.

On moving day they rented a truck to retrieve their possessions from the storage spaces, basements and attics where they had been deposited. Michael began unloading boxes. Eva set herself to sweeping the kitchen floor.

"They said they were sending someone to clean this place before we moved in," Michael said as he stopped in the doorway.

Eva continued to sweep. Someone's mess was always left behind, even if you couldn't see it. The unseen former tenant whose mail still arrived at their door had left behind much dust, dead skin shed and crumbled. Eva could still smell him. She could still smell his dog. We clean, she thought, to mark things as our own.

For the seventh time in as many years she began unwrapping the good china. Eva called the collection of gold-rimmed painted porcelain "the good china" because that's what her mother called it. Her mother had purchased the china at Macy's but presented it as heirloom. She often tried to make heirlooms of random things.

"Come here, " she would whisper, "I want to give you something. Don't tell your sisters, they will be very jealous. It was very expensive and I want you to have it."

It would turn out to be a chipped saucer of dubious origins or a box of plastic pearls threaded on elastic with paste gems on the clasp. And on the bottom of the box a sticker bearing the word "Loehmann's" and a price tag. Her mother would press them into Eva's hands as if giving her the family jewels.

Eva could not bring herself to throw away any of these things away, even when she knew they were worthless.

"You can't make something into an heirloom," she tried to explain to her mother. It was logic, Eva thought, an object must earn its value by being passed down through a family, by being owned, loved, used, cherished or admired for generations.

In Eva's family there were no such things. Her mother came to the new world stripped of all possessions. Legacy could only consist of memories. Strangers were sipping from her teacups. Her lace and silk cloths presided at a stranger's Christmas table. What a day that must have been, an entire city like a terrible rummage sale and the more fortunate inhabitants removing coats, pianos, candlesticks, cutlery from the houses of those cast out.

How many heirlooms have been made out of what the exiled have left behind?

Still her mother persisted in creating an inheritance, forcing value into something too small or shoddy to hold it. Once she had brought Eva a terrible little lamp, cheap, brittle, blue china orb and a shade barely held together by coarse thread sitting atop it. On the shade was painted, by a shaky hand, a blue bird standing among flowers, barely better than a stick figure. Holes the size of a good sturdy hatpin had been poked, in what might have been a decorative manner, all around the shade.

"This was very expensive," Eva's mother assured her. Eva raised her eyebrows.

"It's very cu-ute," her mother sang. Eva looked doubtful.

Eva's mother looked at the lamp and then back at her daughter, shaking her head.

"It was made by a blind man," she said sadly.

Shortly before Eva's father died, her mother offered Michael all the suits her father had tailored for himself, when he was a younger, wealthier man. They were fine, handmade, and exquisite. Michael admired them and then turned to Eva.

"What do you think?"

"Someone should wear them," she said, staring down at them, hound's-tooth, cashmere and silk. They had been carefully kept and still seemed to mold to the silhouette of her father's former figure. That father was so distant. So was this one, who lay in bed with an oxygen tube looped around his ears, who asked the same questions over and over, who refused his favorite foods.

Her father seemed to take no notice as his things were dispensed. Eva's mother alternated between stroking the suits, caressing their double breasts, showing off the fine stitching and handiwork and sobbing openly as she felt the implication of her action, resignation to the inevitable, her husband would never be well again. In the end Michael had decided not to take them.

The doorbell rang, a sharp nervous ping that startled Eva. In their last house the bell softly beeped a digital approximation of chimes. This one seemed so urgent. Michael came in with a huge box and set it in the middle of the floor.

"For your new home," Eva read aloud, a message in her mother's swirling hand scrawled across the top of the box in purple magic marker. She had a sudden vision of something alive in the box, waiting for her, wanting to get out. Michael pulled a penknife from his pocket and sliced through the thick layer of packing tape at the top.

"What is it," she asked.

"Your father's suits."

They stared down into the box.

"What should I do with them?"

"We can take them to the tailor and have them fitted," she said.

"Is that what you want?"

"I don't know."

"Should I take them to the Goodwill?

"No."

"Well, what should I do?"

"Put them in the spare room," she said.

Michael dragged the box down the hall.

Later when she knew all the clothes were carefully hung in the closet, Eva could not stop herself from walking past the spare room again and again, nervously. There's so much to do, she told herself. She heard Michael somewhere in the house, steadily hammering away at some task. So much to do, she thought again.

Suddenly she was crawling on hands and knees into the closet. She pulled the clothes from their hangers. They fell down around her like suicides leaping from ledges, and she gathered them to her, pressed her face into them, and searched for a trace of her father's scent.

Abdurrahman Wahab

A Phone Call to Kurdistan

The hungry wolves of midnight
pacify when my mind beholds you.
Tears hesitate to slip on my cheeks
before they solidify
and shatter into my palms.
I revive, only when I listen to the rhythm
of your breath—a gentle blow
that restores the fire within my ruined existence.
My mystic limbs, with one touch of your skin,
dance with my heartbeat
in a wide circle
around the flames of passion.
With your lip-print, still warm on mine,
with your fingers, crossed into mine,
we swing;
like ten Sufis in the blessed nights,
we sing Rumi's
till the burning of dawn.

Your words have the taste of snow
when the days are on fire.
Your nightly whisper, a lemon balm
when heart's tears surge.
Your scent, a salve for my deep wounds
from ages of isolation.
Your look upon me, a chalice of spring water
refreshing the heart of a desert dweller, and I:
the dewdrops.

I am a dead willow, weeping with a lonely owl;
you are the moon that shines on my leafless branches
and the sun that sprouts in me buds of new hope.
I am a rusty string forsaken on an ancient Qithara;
you play me,
and give birth to the best of me.
Blood erupts into my dry veins, and my cracked heart
thrives with one word from your sweet tongue—
a solo tune of a divine violin.
Your love is my only comfort
walking through this strange city's darkness,
when the ugly demons of solitude rip me apart.
The air chokes me, spring blinds me;
snow makes me sweat, sun makes me freeze.
Yet—

once you rain
your words on my arid depth,
darkness lifts.
No more sodden pillows and frosty blankets
when clocks tick, when the sun plays with the moon,
when stars shed.

I loathe the ocean, the continents,
the hundreds of white-topped mountains
that keep me from you.
I even hate the phone—my words
are mute, my tongue imprisoned
behind ivory bars.
Silence is more fluent

Erica Mena

Identity Without Geography: Mahmoud Darwish and the Poetry of Home

Ours is a country of words: Talk. Talk. Let me rest my road against a stone.
Ours is a country of words: Talk. Talk. Let me see an end to this journey.
-From Unfortunately

A Palestinian named Mahmoud Darwish is perhaps the best known Arab language poet living today. He is widely acclaimed as the "saviour of the Arabic language."[1]

His career echoes that of Chilean poet Pablo Neruda in many ways: Darwish is considered the Poet Laureate of the Palestinian non-nation, his people's poet, and a voice for the voiceless. Also like Neruda, his work contains a remarkable universality, born from specific suffering, which reaches across language and national barriers to "inscribe the national within the universal."[2] His book of poems, Unfortunately, It Was Paradise, offers a retrospective view of selected poems written from before 1986 through 2000.

Darwish's work is rich in the deep metaphor and esoteric sensibility of traditional Arabic poetry, although his work demonstrates clear influence from Western canon poets. (He himself has cited Neruda, Lorca and Yeats.) Despite this influence of poets sophisticated in craft, Darwish's language conveys specific experiences with a simplicity that would allow him to reach even the illiterate and uneducated. As in the Latin tradition, in the Arabic world "poetry belongs to everyone—to the taxi driver and farmer every bit as much as to the professor of literature."[3]

In "I Belong There", Darwish writes "I have learned and dismantled all the words in order to draw from them a single word: Home."[4] As pure in its elegance as in its raw desperation, this poem warrants (without necessarily demanding) deeper examination of the relationship between word and place. The poet has not created the physi-

cal location but rather the word "Home," and this only through the destruction of "all the words." One can only assume that the word "Home" was among the "all the words" and therefore learned and dismantled along with them, only to be reborn from understanding what lies beneath the language, i.e., the world.

Words are our signifiers for everything: they symbolize that which they represent and create within our minds understanding of it. Darwish presents Home as the driving motivation behind all action, that to which everything returns. Only by dismantling all linguistic symbols and their objects can actual Home, i.e., that with the word signifies, be found. This urgent despair for Home arises from Darwish's own experience of exile and Homelessness, and his work addresses not only the Palestinian people, but all displaced persons.

The Palestinian nation does not for any political or economic purpose exist autonomously. This article does not propose to argue either for or against the Palestinian nation, nor am I equipped to do so. However, Palestine's circumstances bear importance to our discussion of Darwish's work, and so must be addressed.

Darwish's Palestine is in reality a memory, an imagined nation. His collected poems seem at first glance to fall purely within the concerns of the post-colonial exile literary tradition. "Another Road in the Road" speaks to the endlessness of an exile's journey—Darwish writes: "I am from here, I am from there, yet am neither here nor there."[5] The description of physical displacement in the last phrase does not diminish the place of origin in the first clause ("I am from here").

While the establishment of a physical Palestinian nation is a concern for Darwish within his work, it is no less his concern to establish at once a community that moves beyond geography and nation: "I want, both as a poet and as a human being, to free myself from Palestine. But I can't. When my country is liberated, so shall I be".[6] Palestine exists today singularly in the past, in the memory and the culture of its displaced people.

The idea of Palestine still exists because it has so far been able to survive as an abstract community, without ties to geographic reality. In many ways this means that Palestine has never gone through the post-colonial period of independence which allows countries to es-

tablish a national identity tied to geography. Yet the imagined nation of Palestine projects itself onto a physical territory and shares the same sense of history and projections of the future with most post-colonial nations. A major difference is, of course, that these ties to land have not been made materially manifest. Because of perceived constant threat to its physical existence, oft-imagined Palestine and its hold on Palestinian identity have been increasingly made a primary issue rather than a diminishing one, and Darwish's poetry plays its part.

There's a distinction between colonization and the conquering occupation of a land. It is admittedly a fine line, and the difference rests in claims of ownership. Colonizing occupiers claim ownership of land and resources, but the source of the colony's power is outside the land being colonized. The colony's gain goes to this external ruling power, so colonists are not able to develop a primary connection to the idea of a nation and its resulting psychological and emotional value.

Contrast this with the conquering occupation force, i.e., one which intends to rule the occupied nation from within its territory and perhaps co-exist with first peoples. Occupying conquerors claim possession of land and its resources, but also claim ownership of the "Idea" of home attached to that land by earlier occupants. They adopt the home they've just taken into their identity.

While many Palestinians still consider their land to be occupied, they are no longer a colony, nor part of an empire; they are post-colonial in that sense. While Palestine struggles to manifest physically as a nation, its people live in a dual state of a) exile from their imagined homeland, and b) miscarried post-colonial independence from an occupying Western empire.

Exile literature can be categorized as part of the post-colonial literary tradition because of its concern with identity in connection to national geography or the lack thereof. The experience of exile informs Darwish's work, similarly to the way in which the experience of Communism informs Neruda's. Each claims identity more from their respective experience of Islam and Catholicism. I cannot consider Neruda a "Communist writer," nor Darwish an exile writer.

Darwish is, in a different sense, a "post-national writer," although the difference is one of circumstance. His post-national identity was crafted by necessity, rather than explicit choice.

That necessity compels Darwish in his work to create and express a community without national borders. Because the Palestinian people have not been afforded the post-colonial conditions such as connection to land and historical place, they must be characterized as a post-national community. Darwish's writing is therefore primarily concerned with building a community outside of national borders (by circumstance) and outside of linear historical progression (partly by form, and partly by necessity).

With his book, Canto General, Neruda looked outside the boundaries of his own nation not only to other post-colonial nations, but also to the struggles and suffering of European nations as well. Since Darwish has no physical nation to look beyond, he carries his community within him as an imagined construct. Unable to claim ownership of place, Darwish writes without the constraints of national borders and reaches people who have no sense of being "Palestinian." He has instead created his imagined homeland through language. It is extra-temporal, beyond time, because it exists only through language and the homeland is both truthfully eternal and infinitely changing, rather than a mere static infinity projected by many post-colonial nations.

The post-colonial literary tradition concerns itself primarily with re-establishment of displaced identity through re-connection to land; the post-national moves beyond this need. The post-colonial sense of time is of progression from projected historical narrative to infinitely extending future; the post-colonial nation posits a fixed causal beginning, but no end. In contrast, the post-national community exists in cyclical time, where past and future exist simultaneously and are interconnected in a momentary eternity. Keep in mind the difference between the community and the nation; the nation, even in a wholly abstract form, relies on temporal boundaries for self and oppositional definition.

Perhaps even more than Neruda, Darwish's work displays this post-national sense of time. In "The Hoopoe"[7], Darwish writes of an "end like a beginning, like the beginning of an end". "The Lute of

Ismael" later reads "Everything will begin again."[8] An end both has a beginning and is a beginning; and it is not a fixed movement from one point to another. Rather, both are alike and all are connected.

The refrain-like phrases of "The Owl's Night" explore this shifting, momentary eternity:

> There is, here, a present not embraced by the past.
> When we reached the last of the trees, we knew we were unable to pay attention.
> And when we returned to the ships, we saw absence piling up its chosen objects
> and pitching its eternal tent around us.
> ...
> There is, here, a timeless present, and here no one can find anyone.
> No one remembers how we went out the door like a gust of wind,
> and at what hour we fell from yesterday, and then
> yesterday shattered on the tiles
> in shards for others to reassemble into mirrors
> reflecting their images over ours.
>
> There is, here, a placeless present.
> Perhaps I can handle my life and cry out in the owl's night:
> Was this condemned man my father who burdens me with his history?
> Perhaps I will be transformed within my name, and will choose my mother's words and way of life, exactly as they should be.
> ...
> There is, here a transient present.[9]

The nature of the present shifts over the course of the poem. At first, the present is "not embraced by the past," and the two cannot be reconciled. The sense of the present in the poem shifts and becomes "timeless," without erasing or changing the past, but separateness becomes unity when the present becomes "placeless" and "transient."

The shift in this poem exemplifies the shift from post-colonial to post-national writing. The post-colonial present projects itself back into the past to force agreement between the two, which distorts both present and past. Lines which reference an inability to "pay attention" and "absence piling up its chosen objects" could be read as metaphors for the distortion of the past under the lens of post-colonial identity. The "eternal tent" closes the poet off from the world, surrounding himself and his readers in the continuity of national identity through historical imagination.

There is a sense of the timelessness and changelessness in post-colonial reality. In a post-colonial sense of history, present conditions are equated to pre-colonial conditions, and also serve as an inevitable projection of future conditions. Post-colonialism requires this type of thinking to assert national identity with any authority. This authority manifests in the claim that accepted national identity has always existed (as defined by those in the post-colonial period, of course), was infringed upon by colonization but is in recovery, and will always exist. Unlike Darwish's treatment of time and place, post-colonial visions of timelessness and changelessness often tie them to geography.

With each repetition in "The Owl's Night", the present is ",here," a word emphasized by the commas on either side of it. By the third repetition, Darwish's present becomes connected to abstract space: "There is, here, a placeless present." It is physically existent , here, but placeless. Once the present is freed from projecting itself through the past, creating a continuous linear progression up only to itself, it can also be freed from the potentially devastating ties to geography. Only then can Darwish reach beyond the present and the past to his connection with his family, his community, his "mother's words and way of life, exactly as they should be."

This complex relationship with time is is difficult to relate in English, and within the constraints of Western literary theory, but is vital to understanding Darwish's poetry.[10] He returns to it in "Ivory Combs":

Would that I had a different present,
I would hold the keys to my past.
And would that I had a past within me,
I would possess all tomorrows.[11]

The present as it truly is, i.e., the post-national present, distances the poet from casual history, and therefore from any past needed as a cause of future events. This intricately interwoven relationship begins with the present—within the present past is remembered and future examined and sought; from the present all perception and understanding of past and future come. Later in "Ivory Combs" Darwish displays a sentiment that could have come directly from Neruda, in which poet becomes singer, storyteller, historian, prophet and teacher: "Here is the obsession with a song / through which I convey a repeated tragedy."[12] He conveys his own and his people's experience of repeated tragedy on behalf of anyone who has been displaced spatially, politically, or linguistically. Mahmoud Darwish walks powerfully in these shoes.

We've seen that in post-national reality time is neither a series of causes and effects, nor a linear progression; it is a constant flux. The "transient present" is the "momentary eternity." Even if they experience what Darwish writes about, a "timeless present cut off from its past," his people have as yet been unable to form his envisioned community either literally by suppression of Palestinian history, or metaphorically because the drive towards continuity of national identity erases historical reality.

The question of identity in the face of displacement continues to be central to Darwish. His work refers not to an identity with corresponding borders, linguistic or geographic, but to one rooted in community and constructed through words, and more importantly, through what words represent.

Who am I? This is a question that others ask, but has no answer.
I am my language. ...
I am my language. I am words' writ: Be! Be my body!
...
No land on earth bears me. Only my words bear me,
...

This is my language, a necklace of stars around the necks
of my loved ones. They emigrated.
They carried the place and emigrated, they carried the time and
emigrated.
...
We don't linger upon what is to come.
There is no tomorrow in this desert, save what we saw yesterday,
so let me brandish my ode to break the cycle of time,
and let there be beautiful days!
How much past tomorrow holds![13]

Without shared linear history and/or place, only language connects and builds human community. Farther along in the poem, Darwish writes:

This is my language, my miracle
...
my first identity, my polished metal, the desert idol of an Arab
who worships what flows from rhymes like stars in his aba,
and who worships his own words[14]

Language is both Darwish's home and his self—outside of place and time. With language "they carried the place...they carried the time." Unfortunately, It Was Paradise exemplifies what London School of Economics and Political Science Professor Ashwani Saith wrote about Darwish: "His poetry gives power to the tired and forlorn, to revive, restore, and relive the imagined mobile space called home."[15]

Darwish never denies that the establishment of a Palestinian nation is a concern for him, nor that the development of national identity is part of that establishment. The poet was a senior officer in the PLO for many years and continues to be vocal about this issue. But this national identity is secondary to his "first identity," one founded in language, expressed through poetry, portable and untied to nation, experientially universal and communicable to anyone reading his words.

In the poem "Mural" he similarly writes: "I don't want to return

to any country. / After this long absence, I want only to return to my language..."[16] In "The Last Train Has Stopped" Darwish asks "Where can I free myself of the homeland in my body?"[17]

The community constructed through poetry and the identity based in that community hold more value to Darwish than any nationally based one. He once said in an interview that poems "can't establish a state. But they can establish a metaphorical homeland in the minds of the people. I think my poems have built some houses in this landscape."[18] His poem "The Hoopoe" points out that a "boundary within a boundary surrounds us" and asks "what is behind the boundary?"[19] In spite of different circumstances, Darwish reaches a post-national identity similar to Neruda's, and finds the same answer to that question: language, words, poetry are what's behind.

Both poets demonstrate a commitment to furthering their communities through their words. Towards the end of "Mural", Darwish writes that "we who are capable of remembrance—are capable of liberation."[20] He also said once that "poetry and beauty are always making peace. When you read something beautiful you find co-existence: it breaks walls down."[21] Poets like Mahmoud Darwish and Pablo Neruda remember for the people their identity; their poetry signifies the liberation of their communities as well as broader communities.

Endnotes

1 Saith, p. 1
2 Darwish, Unfortunately, It Was Paradise, p. xix
3 Omer, p. 1
4 Unfortunately, p. 7
5 Unfortunately, p. 4
6 Saith, p. 1
7 Unfortunately, p. 35

8 Unfortunately, p. 66

9 Unfortunately, pp. 63-64

10 "Further, because Arabic has no tense as such, grammatical time is not, as in English, defined in relation to the moment of speech, a process that interjects an implied subject in every utterance. Arabic prose does not have to maintain the consistent pattern of tense sequence required in English. Hence it is easy for Darwish to scramble time, removing the action from the temporal sphere and placing it in a dreamlike realm." (Darwish, Memory for Forgetfulness, p. xxviii)

11 Unfortunately, pp. 79-80

12 Unfortunately, pp. 79-80

13 Unfortunately, pp. 90-92

14 Unfortunately, p. 93

15 Saith, p. 1

16 Unfortunately, p. 145

17 Unfortunately, p. 15

18 Interview, Darwish. The Politics of Poetry

19 Unfortunately, p. 34

20 Unfortunately, p. 151

21 Saith, p. 2

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Michael Hogan

Jumper

Digital/Black & White Photography

Markus Gehann

The Bathtub—Posing for Suicide

Black & White Photography

Melissa van Hamme

Me and May

May revved the engine of the borrowed Honda and threw her head back, laughing. The smell of new car made us giddy, and we felt powerful as L7 blared from the tinny speakers. "*Calgon can't take me away...*" May and I laid our heads back on the leather seats. We glided along Boylston Street in the shiny blue car, forgetting the '82 Reliant parked in front of our Brighton apartment, forgetting our place.

I glanced at May out of the corner of my eye. Her hands played guitar on the steering wheel, occasionally puncturing the air with a fist. I was filled with love and pride for this fantastical creature that rode next to me, mashing the gas and brake pedals with gusto and studied machismo. I smiled, shifting my gaze out the window to the kaleidoscope of Copley Square.

It was two days before Christmas. The square buzzed. Pedestrians clutched their Filene's and FAO Swartz bags and trudged into the December wind, avoiding the slush puddles and the homeless. Above them all rose Trinity Church, decked out in holiday splendor. Fir boughs and holly covered the graceful arches, and flickering candles glowed from behind stained glass.

I was remembering Christmas pageants in our Episcopal church in the dying town of Auburn, Maine. The wood of the pews felt cool against my sweating palms as I waited my turn to walk down the aisle. The frankincense seemed to cling to everything, to my terrycloth robe and the cardboard crown that marked me as one of the Three Kings. The organ moaned, the choir rose, "We Three Kings of Orient are/ Bearing gifts we traverse afar..." I marched down the red velvet carpet, clutching my empty gold cookie tin, a gift for the baby Jesus. Jesus was a frozen-faced rubber doll wrapped in a blanket, rocked to and fro on the altar by a pimply Joseph.

I heard the clang of bells from Trinity Church. Five o'clock. The Alphas and Omegas streamed onto the sidewalks; eyes glassy from computer screens, they filed towards the Green Line. The men were blustery, London Fogs open, ties blown back over their shoulders,

briefcases swinging. The women sped by, their Nine Wests tucked into carry-alls, wearing sneakers and white athletic socks.

"Freaks!" May sang out. I laughed, and turned the radio up.

Neither one of us saw the red Porsche until it cut in front of us, barely missing the front bumper. May slammed on the brakes, holding her arm out protectively in front of me like a mother in the days before seatbelts. She lay on the horn. A shadowy figure in the Porsche flipped the bird. May returned the gesture. Suddenly, the sports car came to a halt. There was no way around; the right lanes of Boylston Street were grid locked with rush hour traffic. We spotted the Boston University sticker plastered across the back windshield.

"Fucking spoiled brat BU student," I spat.

The driver of the Porsche revved his engine.

"What the hell is his problem?" May growled.

I shook my head. "I'm going to go ask him to move his car."

Setting my jaw, willing my face into a mask of placidity, I stepped out of the car.

"Tell his ass to move that crate," May called after me.

I maneuvered over the ice, took a deep breath, and rapped my knuckles on the driver's side window. Expecting the window to whir down, I leaned in. When the door was thrown open, it sent me reeling backwards. Two hands pushed me squarely in the chest. Without thinking I pushed back.

He was a young Asian man, dressed in a gray sweater and designer jeans. A diminutive girl sat in the passenger seat, her hands folded in her lap, eyes straight ahead. House music pulsed all around her. I thought of appealing to her for help.

I turned to the boy. "What? Are you gonna beat up a woman?" He tilted his head to smirk at me. "You don't look like any woman I've ever seen before."

We stood toe to toe. May's door opened and slammed shut. *No, no, no,* I pleaded silently.

She stormed over to me. I couldn't take my eyes off the guy. I saw May reflected in his side view mirror, feet planted apart, hands hanging loose and ready at her sides. He turned to May and looked her up and down.

"What the fuck *are* you?"

The blood rushed to my face and my arm swung through the air- it was a clumsy, ineffectual punch to the right side of his head. He grabbed May by the lapels of her leather jacket and pushed her down onto the sidewalk. When she got up, he spun on one leg and delivered a high kick to May's face that sent her crashing into the telephone pole. Her back eased down along the rough wood and she sat dazed on the cement. He was kicking her.

I stood rooted to the spot. The scene played out in slow motion, like one of those dreams where you are running for your life, yet you go nowhere. May was swinging and kicking, but her engineer boots and biker jacket weighed her down.

About ten feet away, a tall black man looked on. He wore a brown suit and galoshes over his wing tips. He was shifting from one foot to the other.

"Please help us!" I said.

The man looked steadily at me for a moment, then dropped his gaze and walked on. I could hear the cars again. May was on the ground, arms covering her head, and he was still kicking and hitting her. Crowds had gathered, watchful and silent.

Shit, oh shit, they think we are men...

I ran into the four lanes of oncoming traffic, jumping up and flailing my arms. "We're women! We are women! Please help us!"

The air was so cold and my throat so dry, only a thin sound came out. I spun in the street, a hapless ballerina. Cars crept by, bumper to bumper. The crowd was still there.

Someone pushed through. He was squat and stocky, his face red and bloated. He wore a dark green work shirt, rolled to his elbows and unbuttoned at the throat. An enormous key ring hung off his belt loop.

Finally, I thought, there would be deliverance. I moved towards him, pointing behind me, and before I could register surprise his meaty, calloused hands closed around my neck. He shook me violently and my arms hung limp. His hot breath smelled of liquor and vomit.

"I hate you fucking dykes!" he screamed into my face. "I saw the whole fucking thing!"

He grabbed my coat with his left hand, right fist cocked, dragging me across the lanes of stopped traffic. My toes bumped over a sewer

grate, and came to rest on the curb. I looked him right in the eye.

He pushed me away, turned his back, and disappeared.

May was moving gingerly toward me. We met in the middle of Boylston Street, cars moving on either side of us. May's jeans were wet and dirty. She was holding her ribs. I noticed the knuckles on her right hand were raw and bleeding.

We could hear the sirens. The Porsche was long gone. We waited. I unzipped my pocket and fumbled with stiff fingers for a cigarette. I brought the cigarette to my lips, lit it with a shaking hand, inhaled and exhaled. The cigarette had burned down to the filter when this man stepped towards us. I could tell he was gay. His hands were jammed into the pockets of his jeans and he looked back over his shoulders.

He kept his eyes averted. "Just go home before the cops get here. It's not worth it for us." He looked up from his shoes. "Please. Forget it ever happened. Go home."

He turned and walked away.

"Pussy," May hissed after him.

The lights made pinwheels of red on the snow. I felt my heart banging against my chest, my armpits prickly with sweat, my feet wanting to run. We never had much use for cops. They were unpredictable violence, wrapped in blue and gold braid and topped with a shiny badge.

The three cruisers made a semi-circle around us; sirens hushed now, lights still flashing. Four officers got out leisurely. Their staccato laughter made white puffs in the night air. One of them approached us. He smiled broadly and took a pad from his back pocket.

"What seems to be the trouble tonight, ladies?"

I was shaking while I answered his questions. The other cops leaned on their cruisers, chatting. After I'd given a physical description of our assailant, I tried to light another cigarette.

The big cop leaned in, his face close to mine.

"He sure doesn't sound as handsome as me." He grinned, pulled up to his full height, and sauntered back to his car.

We watched the squad cars pulling away. We got back into the Honda and May reached over and switched off the radio.

Mike Shick

Cowboy's Golden Note

Color Photography

Mike Shick

Government Steps

Color Photography

Niño del Sol

Richard Yarde Art Award co-winner

Color Photography

Shick

Kate Mills

Kevin

Acrylic on Canvas

Glen

Acrylic on Canvas

Kate Mills

Chicks Are Poison

Acrylic and Ink on Mesh Paper

Jim Peart

Angry Sam

Digital Video Still

Andrea Lynn Souza

Freaks

Digital Photo Manipulation; Digital Media

Top left, bottom right: *original photos by Diane Arbus, digitally manipulated by Andrea Lynn Souza.*
Bottom left, top right: *reaction shots to Photos B & D, by Andrea Lynn Souza.*

Denise Theriault

Justice

Acrylic on Canvas

Thomas Conlin

Cape Cod, MA, August 2006

Digital Photography

Shuyi Deng

Chinese Woman

Printmaking on Rag Paper

Christine Wentzell

Angry Landscaper

Acrylic on Canvas

Melissa Young

Blue

Color Photography

Christian DeTorres

Babyhead | **Mixer**

Color Photography, Multiple Process

David Graham

Girl of Summer

Acrylic Paint on Matte

Tanya Boroff

Chardonnay

You could almost start singing
some Billy Joel song
at three a.m., sitting on the floor
of your last apartment's kitchen,
surrounded by three cardboard boxes
and a few plastic crates
drinking Woodbridge with your best high
school friends, the ones you shared
Purple Passion with, in the woods
behind Building C in November
after a football game, dressed
in layers to keep out the cold—or maybe
to keep out the football players or that one
kind of freaky poet kid who smoked
clove cigarettes and made the woods stink
of sweet tabacco that reminded you
of your grandfather smoking those mini cigars
soaked in chardonnay that made the rugs smell—
and when you're sitting on the floor finishing
another glass of white wine you know
you're not really sophisticated
enough to be drinking wine but you're too old
for Purple Passion now, and you don't think
they make it anymore anyway, and you can't drink
beer the way you used to, you hate the taste—
you've always hated the taste but it used to
serve a purpose…you remember it made you
brave enough to flirt with the freaky
poet kid you never talked to in class—it's not
that you're too old for silly crushes,

it's just that now you know how
they end, in some church
parking lot, in a Honda Civic, at three a.m. after
the class reunion, with a guy you'll never see again,
who's still sort of freaky and never knew he was
your first crush but if he's as smart as he looked
in the woods behind Building C he'd know
he was your last.

Thijs Messelaar

Dead Low Tide

Donald E. Cookson Non-Fiction Award Winner

I probably wouldn't have kissed her anyway.

I mean, even if that nurse hadn't whisked her away before my eyes could even adjust to the room—I'm not sure I would have kissed her. On another day I might have for apology's sake or out of a sense of obligation or something—not for reasons of love or lust or laziness. But I didn't kiss her—I didn't have time to think about any or all that—I didn't have a chance to kiss her, even if I wanted to, before she was whisked away not to return to the waiting room for *at-about-an-hour-and-a-half-or-so*, so I was told.

I couldn't sit still, there in the jaundiced waiting room, not with my head ringing and fizzing sticky-darkly like a glass full of half-flat coke: the effervescent nag half in my head, half the driving rain echoing in from outside.

The rain had begun to come down harder in the moments since we'd stepped in through the smug crowd of picketers. I could hear it—harder on the building, slapping on the street, taunting, rubbing it all in. A faint flavor of gin and metal scraped up my throat and back down into my gut. Vague mashed up regret, rage, relief, and chickenshit—a fat sack of nothingness hung hard from my neck.

Kept raining. It kept raining. Kept raining . . . *Chhhhhhhhshhshhhhhhshhhhhsshshshshshshshhshshhhhhhhhhhh*—somehow it maddened and soothed at once. Cancelled out. Benumbed. Like soft chalk on a chalkboard writing something illegible.

It had been the rainiest day in decades, I think I heard that day—June 13, 1998—and I was alone feeling assed out but pretty lucky, which is what bothered me maybe. I had to remind myself of the alternative, even if I was too weak to imagine it very well.

I slunk out into the downpour, head down, and popped open a little black umbrella, dark as the midday sky—dark as my soul should have felt. It was a goddamn monsoon out there. Deluge of deluges. A subtly bubbling torrent ran down Comm. Ave. Trash and leaves rushed to pool in gutters and plug drains. The trolley clunked slowly along the tracks through sheets of water. I would have gotten on and gone back to my apartment just up the road, if I wasn't determined to suffer as she must have been suffering, so I figured. I skulked along pacing like an expectant father through the rain sucking on cigarette after cigarette my pant cuffs wicking up the rainstorm.

Thoughts paraded. Rain hailed down. And thought some more. And I thought some more. And waited for it to end. And thoughts.

Short with long, thick, shiny, straight black hair halfway down her back. She was wily and kind and hardy and healthy and sexual and sultry and giggly and goofy and confessional—and she possessed this soft sort of mystical high-grade-weed-smoked aura about her. Light freckles dotted her high cheeks, across her small broad nose, beneath her wide almond eyes. She was very much a "family girl," with sisters and brothers older and younger and many still sleeping in rooms beside her in her parents' calm, sticky-rice-steeped home.

The evening before she took the bus down from New Hampshire. She and I slept closely. We spooned, but didn't fuck—mourning alone, holding ourselves together till sleep, and then the tatter of rain at 8 or 9 or 10am woke us up to the appointment we'd so matter-of-factly arranged for that day.

I felt myself a distant speck from my mum, especially—though she didn't know what was happening then and still doesn't to this day—and Dad, too. My younger brother, Aaron, lived just a few blocks away from where I was ruminating in the rain, but I didn't talk to him till later that night when he dropped by my place, or maybe he was there the night before or the night after, having some beers or a smoke on the sweaty summer porch with other kids and roommates all hanging out, some knowing, some not.

Once—after the family boat had turned from a small powerboat into a sailboat and then into a sturdy, rubber, inflatable dinghy with a 15-horsepower outboard engine—as we were puttering back up Fox Creek towards the mouth of the Ipswich River to get back to Clark Pond Beach, we ran out of water. Well, the creek did.

The sun shown obliquely in the early evening summer sky. Dead low tide was probably less than an hour away. Seagulls hung above in dying breeze. The scent of salt and sweat and exhaust mingled in the air. Thick, stinking green and muddy marshlands flanked the sides of the canal looming just over our shoulders. The engine's propeller gurgled and then spat as Dad lifted it out of the water, trying to keep us moving in feet then just inches of water without running aground. Then, he killed it.

We sat in the boat stuck in the mud. We had gotten caught out.

"I told you. I told you we should have left earlier," Mum scolded. "Everyone out. We'll just have to drag it along until we can get into some deeper water," said Dad almost rosily, before shouting, "Heave-ho!" and making whip-crack sounds.

We all hopped out and grabbed sections of the line that ran along the top of the rubber gunwales. With just enough room between the mucky walls and the boat, we could slowly slide it along the creek we'd gone down and then back up hundreds of times in various boats in all sorts of weather.

Mum grumbled, sighed, and then calmly acquiesced to our fate—likely chuckling at our folly moments later. Aaron and I swatted at deer flies or mosquitoes or greenheads or midgets, and threw around some Shits! *and* Damns! *and* Aw, This Suckses!— *tired from a day of sun and tossing ourselves down the sides of the high, sandy dunes—cranky as kids get when they're sick of Mum and Dad for the day*, we *stepped gingerly, barefoot on bits of broken clamshells buried in the mud. This wasn't the swift, easy ride back up Fox Creek we were used to. Dad laughed half nervously, half happily and told us to relax. We'd be back*

on our way shortly, everything was going to be fine and then he broke into stories from when "I was your age" or otherwise these goofy tales he improvised about the Farkle family, who sounded a lot like ours just way gassier and more cartoonish, and I think theirs had a daughter named Fanny, too.

And so, for a few minutes—because I'm pretty sure it only lasted about that long—we hauled the boat to deeper waters so we could get out of Fox Creek and get back home to eat and shower and eat supper and play with our neighborhood pals. So we did, trudging together through the mud.

Rain spat up at me from the sidewalk.

Invisible to the world, I dragged along feeling like a dumb adult, trying to worry as I imagined a 22-year-old man in my wet shoes was supposed to worry. Cars lumbered by like fat ghosts, slashing big cuts of water across the sidewalk, leaving trails of oily wake in the giant pools along the avenue.

The rain fell harder and thicker and greyer as I pulled the umbrella down lower over my face, tilting it into the windblown water: water like gravel. At times looking like it was heading back up into the sky.

After what felt like *about-an-hour-and-a-half-or-so* had passed, I turned and headed back to meet her—me, numb, dumb, and half-blind with rain and pounding brain.

And so here we are, I thought—since we'd awoken together that morning—so here, so here. So here we were four hours, 400 bucks, and 400 billion raindrops later.

I entered the lobby, drenched to the skin (despite my umbrella), and peered around the dimly lit room of long-faced youth, limp and murmuring. My face flushed.
I drip-drip-dripped on the floor. A deep full–body pressure drop hit me, bringing a little gasp of relief—like when blood runs back into an

arm slept on all night—when she shuffled out into the waiting room.

I sensed her wooziness through mine. Smelled the musk of loss. Swallowed hard and finally felt it.

She looked pale, dazed, sweaty, a bit like a spider caught in a bath drain—maybe like me. I asked her if she felt okay, all things considered, she nodded groggily, unspeaking—I took her hand, glanced into her milky eyes, kissed her slowly on the side of the mouth, squeezed her hand a couple of times, held it, and stood stark still for a moment—and breathed. I was just able to make out a voice crackling behind us talking softly and quickly about things such as *potential-for-hemorrhaging...failure-rates...bouts-of-exhaustion* and to *take-the-pain-pills-whenever-you-need-to-honey-but-not-too-much*—and

"Well—thank you—goodbye—. Stay dry—."

With that, my gut half-settled, enough so I could sigh. We stepped onto the empty sidewalk, my arm draped loosely around her now. I forget whether the rain had kept on, or let up a little, or stopped completely, or not at all. I do remember the done-over sheen of the wide streets, glistening dully under lightening skies and reeking vaguely of that morning's wash.

Pablo Neruda

XI

Translated from the Spanish by Erica Mena

I hunger for your mouth, for your voice, for your hair
and in the streets I go without nourishment, silent;
bread does not sustain me, the dawn disturbs me;
I search for the liquid sound of your feet in the day.

I am hungry for your slippery laughter,
for your hands the color of fierce grain,
I hunger for the pale stones of your nails,
I want to eat your skin like a whole almond.

I want to eat the light burned in your beauty,
the sovereign nose of your arrogant face,
I want to eat the fleeting shadow of your lashes,

and hungry, I come and go smelling the twilight,
searching for you, searching for your hot heart
like a puma in the solitude of *Quitratúe*.

Tengo hambre de tu boca, de tu voz, de tu pelo
y por las calles voy sin nutrirme, callado,
no me sostiene el pan, el alba me desquicia,
busco el sonido líquido de tus pies en el día.

Estoy hambriento de tu risa resbalada,
de tus manos color de furioso granero,
tengo hambre de la pálida piedra de tus uñas,
quiero comer tu piel como una intacta almendra.

Quiero comer el rayo quemado en tu hermosura,
la nariz soberana del arrogante rostro,
quiero comer la sombra fugaz de tus pestañas

y hambriento vengo y voy olfateando el crepúsculo
buscándote, buscando tu corazón caliente
como un puma en la soledad de Quitratúe.

Madlyen Suprun

Bikes Party

Black & White Photography

Jen Beagin

Bull's Blood

Chet Frederick Fiction Award Winner

They'd moved to Bakersfield from L.A. to run a motel Kurt inherited from his father. As soon as the old man had died, his staff—the manager, housekeeper, and gardener—left without warning. It was no wonder; the place was surrounded by fruit farms on a forgotten highway on the edge of nowhere, and the rooms were overrun with carpet beetles. Kurt's father had bought it off the original owner, a Swedish immigrant, who'd named the motel "Little Sweden," but there was nothing about the place which brought Sweden to mind.

Kurt ran the front desk and Mona cleaned the twenty-two rooms, although not for free—she was no sucker. She made Kurt pay her fifteen an hour under the table, not that there was anything to spend it on. The change in ownership went unnoticed, and the motel continued to serve the unremarkable needs of its regular customers: truckers mostly, along with fruit pickers, Jesus freaks, speed freaks, and "nooners"—couples from town who came in separate cars and rented a room on their lunch hour.

On bad days Mona talked to Bob, her nickname for God. She did this privately, usually while vacuuming. She wasn't raised with religion and her acknowledgment of Bob was a recent development, inspired, she thought, by living in the Central Valley. There was something about the place that reminded her of an enormous hand. "The Hand of Bob," she called it. In the summer, the hand held its cracked and sweaty palm wide open and people lived in the dirt in its creases. In the winter, the tulle fog settled thickly into the valley, the palm began to close, and she would hear cars crashing into each other on the highway. If she stepped outside and found herself "in the tulle's," as the saying went, it would just be her, with her hand cast out in front of her, fumbling.

In spring there was no sweat, no fog—just clusters of black birds. They were everywhere. There were lemon, apricot, and peach trees on the property and when she walked from their apartment to the mo-

tel she could hear them chirping—not sweetly, but frantically, as if warning the others of her presence. One day one of them landed on her head. She swatted it off and watched it fly into a tree, then looked around to see if anyone was watching. There was no one around. She started walking again, keeping an eye on the ground and, seeing her head's silhouette, thought: Maybe it's my hair-do. She had short hair dyed an inky black and her cowlicks looked vaguely wing-like. Maybe they're mistaking me for another bird.

Seconds later she caught the shadow of the bird swooping down from behind. It went for her head again, but this time only clawed at her hair. She made a strange yelping noise and, running for cover, ducked and looked up. She could see the little fucker making circles up there.

From then on she jogged from the house to the motel with her hands hovering over her head, not caring that she looked insane. Although she knew they were just protecting their nests, she couldn't help taking it personally. Why the hell do they single me out, she wondered. They never bother anyone else.

* * *

Bird season was underway and Mona was stripping the bed in room twelve. It was one of her bad days. A sustained blast from a truck horn had woken her up the previous night and, unable to sleep, she'd sat near the window in the living room, alternately watching the dimly-lit parking lot, where the speed freaks from room five were taking their motorcycle apart and putting it back together again, and a Merchant Ivory production on cable, breaking her rule of never watching a period drama unless she was on her period. She'd remained dry-eyed throughout the movie and thought everyone looked ridiculous in their costumes, especially Helena Bonham Carter. What's with her hat, she kept thinking irritably.

As she put fresh sheets on the bed she asked Bob for patience with Kurt, who'd been calling her "Momma" lately, despite their ridiculous difference in age—she was twenty-three, he was thirty-nine. Since moving he'd begun talking like a hick in general, especially in the bedroom. It had turned her on a little at first, but was now getting out of hand.

He was doing it in front of customers, as well as at the pizza joint, and pretty much everywhere they went. He was also letting himself go in the looks department.

When they'd met, he'd been one long sinew with a decent haircut. Now his hair was too long for Mona's taste and made worse by his goofy mustache. He was also starting to soften around the edges, which was fine—he'd needed to put on a little weight, but she was sorry to see his cheekbones go. They'd been as sharply prominent as coastal cliffs a year ago, but were now buried in sand. She wondered what would happen if she left him stranded here and moved back to L.A. Would he buy a truck, become disgustingly fat, and let his teeth fall out? It was entirely possible. He was happy here and obviously desperate to fit in.

The phone rang just as she was about to vacuum her way out of the room. As usual, it was Kurt, calling from the front desk.

"Momma," he said when she picked up.

"Kurt," she said. "You need to stop calling me that. My name is Mona…M-o-n-a," she said.

"Aw, Momma," he said, sighing. "I don't mean nuthin' by it."

She relented when she heard him sigh. Before he started talking like a redneck, sighing had been their secret language.

"Do you need something?" she asked, changing the subject.

"I have to go to the hardware store," he said in a normal voice. "So I'm locking up the office."

She left the room, looked for birds overhead, and then trotted toward the apartment, which was in a separate two-story building across the parking lot. The front desk and office were on the first floor, and she and Kurt lived in the crummy apartment on the second floor.

They ran into each other in the parking lot. He was wearing her least favorite outfit—a pair of cut-off jeans that were too short and too tight, an ill-fitting plaid cowboy shirt, a mesh trucker hat, and flip flops. He put his arm around her and then leaned down and kissed her wetly on the mouth. She kept her eyes open while he kissed her—something she'd been doing a lot lately and which she considered a bad sign—and stared at his eyelids fluttering behind his glasses.

He was wearing his emergency pair, which were unstylish in the extreme, as if issued by the military. "Birth control glasses," he called them.

"It's been slow today," he said. "How about a siesta later?"
She knew what that meant. "We'll see," she said. "I just finished cleaning and I still want to work on my painting...," she trailed off. She was doing a landscape of the view outside their bedroom window. It was the most boring picture she'd ever painted. Still, it was preferable to sleeping with Kurt lately. She wondered if that was just par for the course; she'd never stayed with anyone longer than three months, but here they were, two and a half years later, practically married and living in outer Hicksville.

"Well, maybe you can squeeze me in," he said, touching her shoulder. "It might help you...relax," he said and shrugged.

He climbed into their car, which she still thought of as hers, a '64 Ford Fairlane, painted charcoal grey with an electric blue stripe. Interior upholstered in matching blue velvet. She'd bought the car in high school, named her Maxine, and had routinely used her as an acid test whenever she started dating a new guy. If the guy wasn't sufficiently appreciative of Maxine, she knew it would never last between them. Kurt had passed the test but he still didn't know how to drive her properly. He stalled as he backed out of the parking space.

"Just tap the gas!" Mona yelled.

"How 'bout I tap yer ass!" Kurt yelled back, smirking.

Mona rolled her eyes. He got her started again and managed to peel out of the parking lot without stalling.

She trudged upstairs to the apartment and ran a bath. In an effort to get herself in the mood for sex later, she thought of the day she and Kurt met while she shaved her legs. It was a day she often replayed in her mind, especially since moving to Bob-forsaken Bakersfield. The scene typically opened in her apartment in L.A., in the middle of a Friday night, with her lying awake in bed. She'd been crying, though she couldn't remember why, and couldn't get to sleep. Her mind seemed intent on exhausting itself by thinking the same small, tired thoughts over and over again, and she could hear them tumbling around up there like loose change in a dryer.

Next she recalled having been distracted by the drapes at her

window, which appeared to be vibrating. As she was squinting at them she felt her mattress shift slightly, as if an invisible person had climbed onto it. There was a moment of stillness before the invisible person started jumping up and down on the bed, knocking her mystery novel to the floor. For a second she thought an evil spirit was paying a visit.

She didn't realize what was happening until the walls cracked. Her whole room was rocking by then and there was something like thunder coming from the garage beneath her apartment. She jumped out of bed and stumbled to the doorway, bracing herself against the door jamb. She could hear someone screaming hysterically.

The next thing she knew the guy from next door was in her apartment. He had her by the arm, which he was nearly pulling out of her socket. He dragged her outside and down the stairs to the courtyard. As they ran past the swimming pool the bottom seemed to drop out of it, leaving the water suspended in air for a second before hurling itself against the side of the building and drenching them from the waist down. Mona was startled and irritated, as if she'd been vomited on without warning.

The earthquake was over by the time they reached the street, where the rest of the tenants were huddled together. Mona and her neighbor joined them and they all stood in silence, gazing at the building's façade.

She'd been living there less than a month. It was one of the few buildings left over from the thirties, and she liked how starkly it stood out among the cookie-cutter condominiums lining Catalina Avenue. The other big draw was that the rent was free; the apartment belonged to her mother, who lived down the street with her controlling third husband, but kept the place as an emergency crash pad.

There was no damage to the exterior that Mona could see, and yet the building looked different. Its pink stucco suddenly struck her as tacky, its arched windows weak and inferior, its wrought-iron railings cage-like. Some of the ivy on the walls had fallen down, exposing a deeper pink underneath, as if the building were blushing from embarrassment.

The sound of sirens approached. Her neighbor let her hand drop, which he'd been holding absentmindedly. They all looked around at

each other, suddenly realizing they were practically naked. Mona, the only woman living in the building, was shivering in her t-shirt and covered her chest with her arms. The rest of the building's six tenants were in boxer shorts, except for her neighbor, who was wearing leopard-print briefs two sizes too small. His hands were hovering over his crotch.

"Nice undies," she said.

"You should talk," he said.

Her eyes dropped. She was wearing what she called her grandma underwear. They were polyester, flesh-colored, and enormous. She folded her hands and casually rested them over her plainly visible pubic hair.

"We haven't met. I'm Kurt," he said.

"Mona," she said.

They didn't shake hands. She stared blankly at his bony, slightly concave chest for a moment. He had the words "A Steady Diet of Nothing" tattooed in gothic letters underneath his collar bone. When she looked at his face again, he was smiling at her.

"How'd you know I was home?" she asked.

"I could hear you screaming," he said.

She shook her head. "Wasn't me."

Kurt laughed. "Who was it then?" he said, looking around.

Mona glanced at the other tenants. "That guy, probably," she whispered and pointed at Frank, the personal trainer who lived on the top floor. She'd met him in the mail room the previous week.

Kurt snorted. "You don't have to be embarrassed for screaming." He frowned briefly then smiled, as if changing his mind about something. "You're a girl," he added, looking away.

Mona felt her face redden. Until then, she hadn't realized that it had been her up there, screaming her head off.

"You shouldn't leave your door unlocked, either," he said.

"It's a bad habit," she agreed. She left it unlocked for her mother, who sometimes came over in the middle of the night seeking psychic refuge from Mona's stepfather.

Mona hung back as the men started shuffling into the building. She didn't want them looking at her ass. Unfortunately Kurt was hanging back, too, as if waiting for her to lead the way. Perhaps he

didn't want anyone looking at his ass, either. He was carrying himself stiffly, as though he had whiplash. She felt him looking at her face again and her cheeks burned in response.

They climbed the stairs and he paused outside her open door, poking his head in to inspect her living room. Her bookcase was lurching to one side and the carpet was covered in glitter, which had apparently fallen from the textured ceiling.

Mona entered her apartment and crossed the living room tentatively, as though it were a crime scene. She stopped in the middle of the room and looked back at Kurt, who was still standing awkwardly in the doorway.

She couldn't remember what made her do it, but she invited him in, even though it was five in the morning. He seemed nervous suddenly and excused himself, backing into the hallway, mumbling that he'd be back in a few minutes.

She put a bathrobe on and called her mother while she straightened up the living room. "Are you all right, Mom?" she asked.
"You know that lamp with the flowers on it? It fell over and broke and I—,"

"Do you know the guy who lives next door?" Mona interrupted.

"He's too old for you, honey," she said.

"That's a laugh, coming from you," Mona said. Her father had been twenty years older than her mother.

"Are you okay, honey?" she asked.

"Actually, I'm trapped under some rubble and I can't move my legs."

Then Kurt had knocked on her door. "Call you later," she said and hung up. He'd gotten rid of the Tarzan look and was more sensibly dressed in a plain white t-shirt and jeans. He looked a little shorter with his clothes on, though he was still tall, over six feet. He had big hands and a square jaw; the sort of ice-blue eyes she usually associated with hummingbirds or Russians; full, slightly chapped lips, and neatly trimmed brown hair. There was some blood on his chin.

"Did you just shave?" she asked.

"Yeah," he said sheepishly, sitting down next to her on the couch.

"Did you brush your teeth?" she asked.

He nodded.

She leaned over and kissed him. It took him by surprise, but he kissed her back then stopped for a second.

"How old are you?" he asked.

"I'll tell you later," she said.

They ended up rolling around on the living room carpet. He handled her with a scary sort of precision she wasn't used to. He also paused occasionally, right in the middle of things, and made some comment or other. She remembered him telling her she had wings at one point, in reference to her back muscles. Then he ran his fingers over the scars on her arms and asked, "Where'd these come from?"

"Teenage angst," she mumbled.

He'd been hesitant to take off his t-shirt and she found out why a few seconds later. He had an enormous crucifix tattooed on his back, which he seemed a little embarrassed by, and which he'd managed to hide from her when they'd been outside.

She said something about it afterwards, told him she thought it was beautiful or interesting, or something.

"It's a little over the top," he said. "I was young."

They were silent for a minute.

"Have you found the Lord?" he asked suddenly, looking her in the eyes.

"Uh…," she hesitated, trying to think of something to say.

"Just kidding," he said.

Mona laughed out loud. "You scared the crap out of me," she said, out of breath. "All I meet lately are Jesus freaks. I swear there's like, something in the water. You're sure you're not Born Again?" she asked.

"I'm positive," he said.

"Not that there's anything wrong with that," she went on. "I'm just not attracted to happy people. I mean—well, you know what I mean."

"It's from a painting by Emile Nolde."

She took a closer look. "Huh," she said. She knew her art history but didn't recall the painting.

"So what's the story behind this one?" she asked, pointing to his hand. He had the letters H-O-S-S tattooed across on his right

knuckles.

"I got that in prison," he said. "Back in '84."

Mona made her face completely impassive, like she did when she found herself at a poetry reading. Please don't let him be a sex offender, she thought. Let it be breaking and entering...or petty theft.

Kurt was silent, but seemed amused. "You're so gullible," he said finally, and laughed.

Mona sighed. "You're so deadpan," she marveled. But it was true, she was gullible. It was a quality she hated about herself.

He explained that Hoss was an old nickname, short for Hospital Boy. "I used to be kind of crazy," he said. "When I was a teenager," he added quickly.

"Crazy how?" she asked.

"Oh, you know, just your garden-variety-daredevil-type-crazy," he answered. "With some drugs mixed in."

Ok, she thought. *So he's been to rehab, maybe more than once.*

"What did you do?" she asked. "Drop acid and jump off a roof?"

"Close," he said. "I dropped acid and did 360's on my skateboard while wearing a homemade straightjacket and ended up breaking my arm in six places and fracturing my skull."

"Oh," she said.

"But that only happened once, of course. Mostly I just smoked a lot of pot and did stupid stuff on dirt bikes."

Then he told her he'd been watching her.

"Watching me?" she asked. She could hear her creep alarm ticking in the back of her head, warming itself up in preparation of going off.

"I've noticed you, that's all," he said, shrugging. "I've watched you from my window. You know, leaving the building, walking down the street...."

"Oh," she said, relieved. "For a second I thought you meant you'd been stalking me."

"No, no," he said.

Then they'd moved to the bedroom and rolled around some more on her bed. She fell asleep afterwards and he left a note on her night stand, which she still had somewhere, even though it was nothing special:

Dear Mona,
Let's do this again.
Curt.

She remembered being disappointed that he spelled his name with a C. He should spell it with a K, she thought, because a K has a spine. He'd been Kurt to her ever since.

A rumbling horn blast from a passing truck jarred Mona out of her daydream. She climbed out of the tub, put her bathrobe and boots on, clomped into the guest room, which doubled as her studio, and stood staring at her canvas. She wondered what to paint next. She'd already put the single story, mud-colored motel in the foreground with its doors painted Easter colors, the motel's pink and blue neon sign right next to it, and the grape farm stretching out to the horizon, but there was nothing to anchor the stupid thing, nothing to command any interest, and it was her third try. It had occurred to her that the picture might need some people in it. Some grape pickers in the field, perhaps, or a farmer on a tractor or some such. Some birds wouldn't hurt, either.

The problem was, Mona couldn't paint out of her imagination; she could only paint from photographs. Needing inspiration, she went into the living room and dragged a chair over to the closet. Kurt's father had left behind a towering collection of National Geographic's, and she grabbed a handful of them. She saw an old shoebox wedged in behind the stack and pulled that down too, then sat down on the couch and opened it.

She assumed the box belonged to Kurt's father and expected to find letters in it, but it was filled with photographs. There were some pictures of Kurt as a kid wearing a cowboy hat and waving a toy pistol. They must have been duplicates because she'd seen them before. She flipped through them quickly, put them aside and grabbed another handful. When she came across a naked woman, she was startled at first, then amused. Aha, she thought, the old man had a perverted streak, or at least wasn't the saint Kurt claimed he was. He was always going on about what a great guy his dad was, how he was the model family guy, and had never slept with anyone but Kurt's mother, and blah, blah, blah. Poor Kurt, she thought.

Not that they were beaver shots—they were actually fairly tasteful. His father had an eye for composition, in Mona's opinion, and the woman had clearly wanted to be photographed, since she didn't seem to mind how close the camera was. She was one of those skinny, bird-like women with red feathered hair, a beaked nose, and thin lips. There were a couple of shots of her from the waist down and then several more from the knees down. She was wearing dark green, patent leather heels and standing on yellow shag carpeting. The pictures were almost too interesting not to share with Kurt. They were so tame and old-fashioned, like porn from the forties. She found them kind of endearing.

Mona continued flipping through the photographs and found a black-and-white series of a different woman. This one was a little younger, too young for Kurt's father, and had the body of a stripper, minus the fake tits. Mona was baffled by the woman's facial expression—she was clearly in love with the person behind the camera. She tried to envision Kurt's father getting it on with this woman, which took all of her imagination. Mona stared at the woman's vagina, which was completely shaved except for a tiny patch. It looked like Hitler's mustache.

The next woman hadn't posed for the camera. She was a peroxide blonde, fully clothed, and obviously wasted, passed out on the bed. Except Mona saw now that it was Kurt's bed, with its tacky mirrored headboard, back in his apartment in L.A. She began flipping through the photographs more quickly. He'd taken long shots of her from every angle, then moved in for close-ups of her legs. She'd been wearing a mini-skirt and had a run in her stocking that he was apparently fascinated with.

The next few were of yet another woman, again passed out, with her mouth hanging open. She was lying on Kurt's old couch, fully dressed and clutching a handbag. It looked as though she'd been ready to go somewhere—out for beer or cigarettes—but never made it out the door. Kurt had zoomed in on the leg area again: fishnets and red Mary Janes. Her ankles looked swollen.

Mona paused and realized that her shoulders were up around her ears. She took a deep breath, looked at the ceiling and tried to formulate some kind of prayer to recite but could only think, *"Dear*

God, I'm sorry for calling you Bob. Help me."

She returned to the photographs and shuffled through them, checking to see how many other women there were, not expecting to find herself at the bottom of the pile. He'd taken some blurry photographs of her out by the pool at their old place. She could tell by her haircut it was before they'd met and her first thought was that she looked scary in that bathing suit. Red and white horizontal stripes—what was she thinking?

Now there were some other pictures of her sleeping. She was wearing her cherished flannel, high-collared, spinster nightgown. He'd taken a bunch of long shots, then had apparently lifted up her nightgown to photograph her legs. She kept going through the roll—he'd taken pictures of her sleeping a couple of different times and always with just her legs exposed. She was baffled by his leg fetish; he'd always told her he was an ass man. Who was this person, she wondered.

The last several photos were close-ups of her face. She realized suddenly that she looked better when she was asleep. More innocent and approachable. Less judgmental and cranky. Seeing her sleeping face reminded her of a childhood memory she called the Doll Incident. She hadn't thought of it in years, mostly because it made her feel like a head-case, but also because she never remembered the reasoning behind the Incident, only its main themes—Loss and Panic.

The Incident took place when Mona was seven years old.

While in kindergarten, Mona was given three exquisite dolls by her grandfather. He'd bought them in Madrid and they had porcelain faces and limbs, real hair, and dresses trimmed with Spanish lace.

Mona had lived happily with the dolls, had cherished them for a good period of time, and then something happened: she remembered waking in the middle of the night and the dolls' eyes were different. They were staring at her. Mona panicked. "Why are you sleeping in the closet, honey?" her mother asked her the following morning. Mona told her about the dolls. "They're not staring at you," her mother said. "They're staring into space. They can't see you."

After a number of sleepless nights, Mona took matters into her own hands. She brought the dolls into the garage, laid them down on the cement floor, and smashed their faces with her father's ham-

mer. Anxious that the dolls would somehow reassemble themselves, she put the broken faces and the bodies in separate trash cans before going back to bed.

She looked at the pictures again. It seemed Kurt had consciously made them flattering, so she tried to imagine that the photos were the result of his love for her. Granted, it was an obsessive, fucked-up love. She thought of the other subjects—the passed out girls— and felt the sort of rising anxiety she remembered accompanying multiple choice exams. She always picked the wrong answer, was always somehow convinced that they were all trick questions.

The phone rang.

Startled, she quickly dropped the pictures back in the box, as if someone had suddenly walked into the room. She answered the phone before the machine picked up, anxious for a distraction. But it was her mother. Mona sighed inwardly.

"How's Bakersfield, honey?"

"It's boring," Mona said, pretending nothing was wrong. "But I'm painting a picture of it anyway," she said brightly. She covered the shoebox and carried it into her studio.

"You're so talented," her mother said wistfully.

Mona mumbled in agreement, waiting for the conversation to take a turn down memory lane, which it always did.

"You got your talent from your grandfather, you know," she said.

Here we go, Mona thought.

"Except he painted the same picture over and over, poor guy," she said and sniffed. "Must have been the vodka," she added. "He put it in his coffee."

"Speaking of Grandpa," Mona interrupted.

"That's where your dad got the creepy gene," she said.

"Mmm-hmm," Mona murmured. "Anyway, do you remember those dolls he gave me when I was little?"

"I remember they scared the shit out of you."

"Why do you think that is?" Mona asked, fishing for more.

"You probably saw some horror movie or something. What's that one called? Chucky."

"No, this was pre-Chucky, and besides, I never watched horror films."

Her mother paused. "Well, you thought they were staring at you. If I was your shrink, I'd tell you that it had something to do with your grandfather. I mean, I never liked the way he looked at you," she said. "I get goose bumps just thinking about it."

Mona heard a rustling noise on the other end of the line and imagined her mother actually rolling up her sleeve, checking for goose bumps. But she was only lighting a cigarette. There was a sharp intake of breath.

"I never really trusted him," she said, exhaling.

"Good thing you left me alone with him so often," Mona said. While her parents were busy ruining their marriage, Mona had spent most of her weekends at her grandfather's house. He'd taught her all the important stuff: how to mix a stiff drink, how to mix paint, how to take a good photograph, how to drive, how to bake a cake. He'd even taught her how to play Beatles songs on the organ he kept in his basement. He'd been a quiet man, an avid reader and alcoholic, and—it was true—he'd had something of a staring problem. Mona thought it was part of being a painter. He didn't just look at things, he studied them. So what? A fixed gaze was the hallmark of an intense personality—a deep thinker, or whatever.

"It's not fair to blame me," her mother said. "You remember how fucked up I was."

"So, what's new, Mom?" Mona asked, changing the subject. She ran her hand over the top of the shoebox and found herself simultaneously itching to tell her mother about the pictures and wishing she were more like Mrs. Cunningham on Happy Days.

"Nothing's new," her mother said. "I was just calling to say hello. How's Kurt, by the way," she asked, clearly not caring one way or the other.

"He died in a motorcycle accident. It was really sad."

Her mother was silent and Mona listened to the static on the line. She thought she could hear the ocean, which made her heart pound.

"That wasn't funny," her mother said, finally.

"Sorry, I've got a lot on my mind. I guess I'll talk to you later."

Mona said goodbye and hung up the phone, then glanced at her grandfather's painting hanging in her studio. Her mother wasn't ex-

aggerating; he'd spent the last years of his life painting the same picture over and over, a total of fifty-seven times. It was of a bullfight.

He painted it from memory and his own photographs taken in Mexico, but the composition was always the same: there was the exhausted-looking bullfighter on one side of the canvas, the fallen horse with its blood and intestines spilling into the dirt on the other side of the canvas, and the bull, also bleeding, in the middle.

It was a gory picture, but it wasn't the blood that made the painting interesting, it was the bull's eyes. They were brown, bloodshot, and watchful, and painted to look human. They were her grandfather's eyes.

She wondered if she, too, was destined to paint the same picture over and over. The thought of painting Little Sweden fifty-seven times made her want to kill herself. She took a palette knife and started mixing paint then stopped when she heard Maxine's dual exhaust grumbling into the parking lot. A door slammed outside followed by Kurt's flip flops on the stairs. He burst into the apartment and called out, "Momma?"

"In here," Mona said. She made no move to hide the box, which was sitting in plain view on the table next to her canvas.

He stood in the doorway of her studio and grinned at her. He looked windblown, as usual, and had one of his stupid toothpicks in his mouth.

"You look like an angel," he said. "Did you take a shower?"

"Yeah," she said.

He wagged his eyebrows. "Ready for bed?"

Mona shook her head. "I'm going to paint," she said stiffly.

He looked deflated for a second then seemed to get over it. She knew then that he'd had a few of what he called "road sodas" on the way back from town.

"Listen, hon," he said, fingering his mustache. "I went ahead and bought a 'For Sale' sign at the hardware store."

Mona gaped. "You're selling the motel?"

He laughed. "Hell, no. It's for Maxine. I think we should sell her and get a truck."

"No. Way," Mona said, shaking her head. "That's my car." She said it as though he were suggesting she sell her child.

"Yeah, I know, but it isn't working for us here."

"That car is worth way more than you'd get for a dumb truck."

Kurt smiled patiently. "She's got rust on her belly."

"Yeah, and?"

"And it's like cancer. She'll be completely rusted out in six months. It makes sense to sell her now while we can still get some money—"

"Kurt, we're not selling my car. So you may as well stop thinking about it."

He held up his hands. "All right."

She couldn't believe he hadn't noticed the box. She stared at it, wondering if he would follow her gaze, but he was looking past her and out the window.

"I'm gonna to take a nap, Mom—Mona," he said.

"Go ahead."

He shrugged his shoulders and began undressing on the way to the bedroom, another of his irritating habits.

Mona turned to her canvas and decided her painting didn't need people in it—people were stupid, and besides, they lacked the volume to provide a center. It seemed suddenly obvious to her that a large block of color was needed to anchor the composition. She glanced out the window and began sketching the tail end of Maxine in the foreground, which was all she could see from the studio. Drawing her from above, the foreshortening gave the illusion that the car was slouching forward, either gaining traction or about to stall.

Mona finished the sketch and painted the taillights bright red, as if the headlights were on, then starting mixing colors for the body, but she could hear Kurt snoring in the next room and felt drawn to the box. She put her brush down and removed the lid, then searched through the pile for a photograph of her sleeping. She was getting paint from her fingers on some of the pictures, but she didn't care.

She grabbed her camera and went into the bedroom. Kurt was naked and sleeping on his back, on top of the bedspread. Mona placed the picture of herself on the pillow next to Kurt's head, then took a photograph of both, but she was having difficulty containing her laughter. It was swirling around in the pit of her stomach and kept rising up without warning. She clapped a hand over her mouth and waited for it to pass.

When she saw that he didn't stir, she took another picture. And then, a few more, alternately zooming in on the hair sprouting out of his ear, his open mouth, the hairs on his chest, his flaccid penis, his kneecap, and his dirty, calloused feet. She felt on the verge of erupting and left the room quickly, shutting the door behind her.

Shuyi Deng

Bridge

Charcoal on Paper

Jean Dany Joachim

The river calls your name

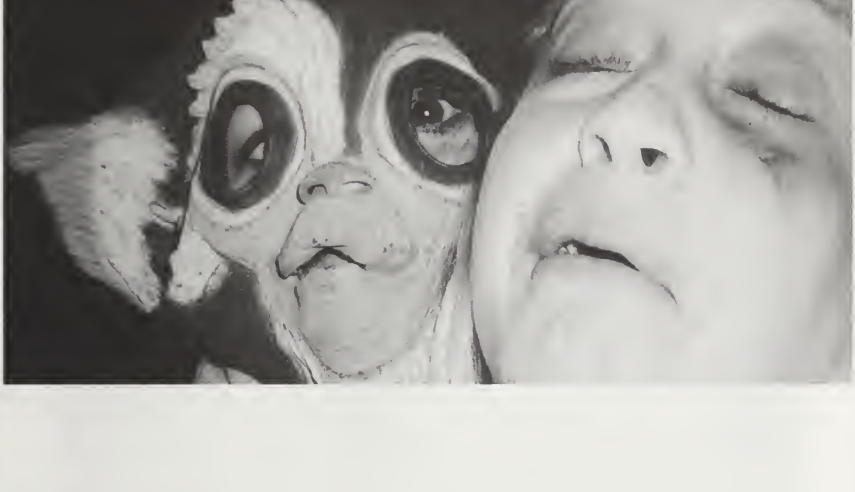
Even now, after storms
have covered the path,
even now that the city itself,
drowned in its exuberance,
has forgotten your stay,
even that the academics
will not print your pages,
the river over and over
spring after spring keeps on
whispering your name
Negrita, Negrita.

Madlyen Suprun

Tideland

Black & White Photography

Stephanie Fail



Hard Living

Digital Photography

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From The Dark Room to The Maverick Room: An Interview with Poet Thomas Sayers Ellis

By Shea Donovan Mullaney

This fall The Watermark interviewed poet, professor, and self-described "genuine negro hero" Thomas Sayers Ellis.

Born and raised in Washington, D.C., Ellis co-founded the Dark Room Collective in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1988 and earned a M.F.A. from Brown University in 1995.

Ellis turns musical scores into words and phrases with his pen. His work lives on rhythm and has appeared in many journals and anthologies. His work is racially conscious, but to suggest that he limits the political content of his poems to the issue of race is to fall into a trap of skin-deep analysis—something his writing works hard to defy.

Ellis has received fellowships and grants from The Fine Arts Work Center, the Ohio Arts Council, Yaddo, and The MacDowell Colony. He's currently a contributing editor to *Callaloo* and a contributing editor to *Poets & Writers*. He's also an Assistant Professor of Creative Writing at Sarah Lawrence College and a faculty member of The Lesley University low-residency M.F.A program in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

His first full collection, *The Maverick Room*, was published by Graywolf Press in 2005. He is currently at work on his next manuscript, *Colored Only: Identity Repair Poems*.

The Watermark thanks Elsa Dorfman for allowing us to re-print this wonderful portrait, and we thank Thomas Sayers Ellis for sharing his provocative black & white photography with our readers.

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SM: When you visited UMB last year, you told the audience ""Boston is where I learned to be a writer...where I learned to be hungry." Please tell us a little more about the kind (of kinds) of hunger you felt, and what led you to them?

TSE: I arrived in Boston/Cambridge with a camera, a few books, and a heavy passion for cinema. The first films I saw were at the Brattle Theater in Cambridge and they were *Rashomon* and *Fires on the Plain*. I lived at Harvard Film Archive, The French Library in Boston, The Brattle and the Coolidge Corner Theaters. I met David Lynch at The Boston Film Festival in 1987 or 88 when he introduced *Blue Velvet*. I love images and imagery and there was a dark room in our house at 31 Inman Street in Central Square in Cambridge. I think the history of the development of my work can be viewed as a study of the way I share seeing. I eventually got a job at the Carpenter Center for Visual and Environmental Studies where I was surrounded by drawing, painting, sculpture, photography, video and film. I write about this in "Spike Lee at Harvard." I have been taking photographs and coming in contact with photographers for years. I've been photographed by Amy Arbus, Kwaku Alston, Bruce Weber and Elsa Dorfman and her giant Polaroid. I don't think I could write poetry if I didn't also take pictures. I no longer even make distinctions anymore. My camera, a Leica Digulux 2, has become my wrist of eyes. I shoot from there. I rarely even raise it to my face. It's like I don't want to see, not from my face, that prepared place. I flick my wrist and I have motion, perspective, etc. I also try to get this into my work. How boring it can become to enter stanzas and lines the same way all the time. A great example of the matrimony of photography and cinematography is Gordon Willis' work in Woody Allen's *Manhattan*.

SM: "Ways To Be Black in a Poem" raises an interesting question of culture and internal way-of-being versus skin color in creating poetry. Do you really believe that a poet of another race can be "black in a poem"?

TSE: We live in an age when, when it comes to culture or cultural selection, it really is up to the individual. I mean there's more choice and room for exchange, culturally, so it is really is up to the individual, the desire of the seeker. Everything is for sale and anything can be adopted. Whites sold blacks. Blacks sold blacks. Whites purchased blacks. Blacks purchased blacks. I think poets have been given the organic and technical devices to adopt any persona, mask, attitude and vibe. I can be white in a poem; haven't I many times? Let me clarify: I am white in a poem (regardless of my blackness) when I allow the behavior, style, rhythm, history and cultural nuances of my particular category of blackness to take a back seat to the flatness of rules that are in historical disagreement with my own human interests. The lesson of the tar baby in the briar patch is a gift for all of America, for everyone to consume and learn and to become a part of. To be black in a poem might just mean to struggle to be free in the selfhood of your work. I am choosing to further explore the aesthetic possibilities of struggle and the Black literary tradition, the whole thing. The writers who came before me, the ones I thank by reading their work a lot, are in me and don't want to die. Blackness locates my specific meal. The title of the poem is also a challenge to myself and to my contemporaries. I am trying to start, to restart, something: a style that does something other than prove "we" are equal. In America, (for many blacks) equal has a ceiling on it. My new manuscript is called *Colored Only* and here are two couplets from "My Meter is Percussive"—

I no longer write
white writing

yet white writing
won't stop writing me.

SM: *When you spoke last year about starting the Dark Room Collective, you mentioned that part of your motivation was to fill the void in African-American literature left by the death of James Baldwin. With poets such as yourself, Harryette Mullen, Claudia*

Rankine, and Major Jackson, as well as the popularity and prominence of African-American writers such as Alice Walker, how far do you feel American literature has come in filling that void?

TSE: Here's a speculative fiction, a truth. When you do you and your work becomes a part of all the people who've read you, who love you and who are courageous enough to continue you, some of you, is born again in them. In this way you are not lost or gone...Baldwin is alive, made living always by the he in each of us. For instance I am part *The Evidence of Things Not Seen* and *If Beale Street Could Talk.* The void splinters from silence into a multi-aged, multi-genre, multi-gender, multi-cultured human arsenal...The soil of African-American literary practice was strengthened by Baldwin. Find his much overlooked poem "Stagger Lee Wonders" from his collection *Jimmy's Blues* and then check out Cecil Brown's recent book *Stagger Lee Shot Billy* (Harvard University Press), then read Baldwin's indictment of Hollywood racist imagery, *The Devil Finds Work.* The void was filled by the hard work of many cultural workers: parents, activists, artists, folk. I thank life for literature not literature for life.

SM: You've spoken about not selling out, what advice would you have to emerging writers about that? What does selling out look like?

TSE: To rush and to run is to sell out.
To imitate successes (other contemporary poets) is selling out.
To pimp your own house style again and again is selling out.
To champion yourself as the leader of an 'ism' is selling out.
To accept anyone else's version of eloquence is selling out.
To ignore your ghosts is selling out.
To stay in stanzas when you feel like pajamas is sold out.
Sold out doesn't look or sound or mean like you do.

SM: Tell me more about the "Identity Repair Poems" in your chaplet, Song On, *such as "No Easy Task" and "The Return of Colored Only."*

TSE: The poems in *Song On* are all from the full length manuscript *Colored Only*. In this work I practice my own brand of "genuine negro heroism" in order to imagine the repair of my own identity and the identity of current Black literary practice, whites included. Expect me to be way more percussive than I was before—might have to hurt somebody.

In "No Easy Task" I try to lay to rest the silly argument/riff between Spoken Word and Academic Writing. Nothing doing because both camps need it. I'm obsessed with time travel so expect me to travel throughout the many styles of the American literary tradition starting fights, signifying, dissin', cursing, playing the dozens, and out right lying. Okay, maybe not lying.

SM: Of course I'm going to ask you what reaction you've had to the "Oprah Vendler" remark in "All Their Stanzas Look Alike."

TSE: Academics laugh, sometimes. Most folks, though, don't get it and not because of Oprah. The name Vendler throws them off. Who dat? I wish she would just go on Oprah so I can see them side-by-side and so I can take credit for their coming together. I must admit that the whole poem seemed quite silly when I scribbled it. I didn't expect to keep it—shows what I know. Maybe I was scared of it. I read it to an audience once that included Robert Pinsky and I winked at him when I got to "All their Poet Laureates." I have fun with it now...the cadence...the voice...the dancing through literary segregation, past and current. A new verb: *Bojancking*. To move like Bill "Bojangles" Robinson.

SM: You talk about funk and rhythm in poetry often, saying that "all poems perform...but I don't see myself as anything finished. It's Important to have a sense of how things evolve." How do you see Amercan poetry evolving in the next fifty years?

TSE: The problem with American Poetry is there's not enough Africa in it. Yes, it is important to have a sense of the past but I don't think it's such an equally good thing to be able to predict the future. I love that the air surrounding so-called American poetry is not perfectly solid. I hope evolving will evolve back down to the level of honest-folk expectations and folk standards. I really do want to de-decorate intelligence. It's time for the whole body to simultaneously reign in life and in art. Well, it's already happening in fiction.

SM: Among the poetry you've written, what makes you feel most proud, does anything make you wish for a "do-over" and why?

TSE: I am excited about the poems I am working on now because they fill me, and surprise me, and because I've surrendered to them. I am happy that I am writing and that I have written. I feel fortunate. As for *The Maverick Room*, I think I turned a corner with "Marcus Garvey Vitamins." I am proud of it because I think I got the conversation between the 'I' and the 'we' of my specific 'community' right in that poem. Clarence Major once told me that there wasn't any way around that first embarrassing book, so I had to accept that before I let it go. The do-overs are aesthetic choices that I will correct in the next manuscript. So, I don't have any do-overs, but in many ways *Colored Only* will be a repair-kit of *The Maverick Room*.

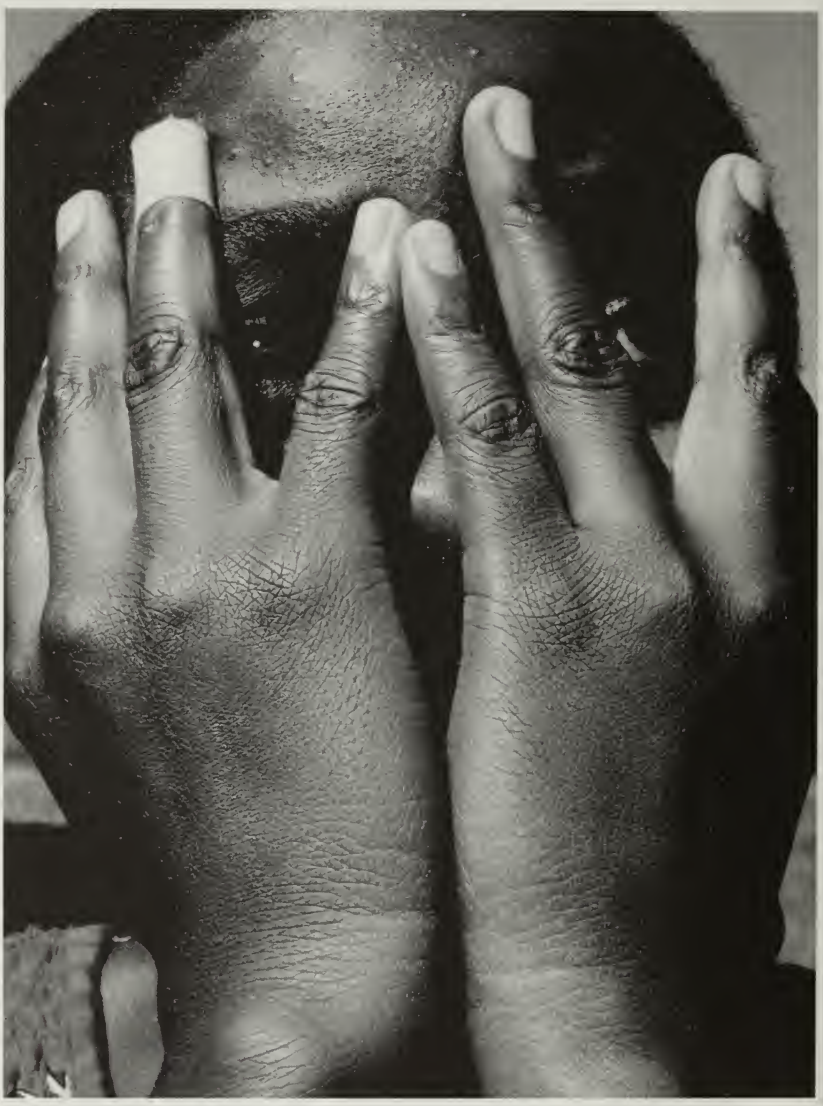
SM: What's next for you?

TSE: This week: the Rejection-Epigraph, *uh-oh*, and that's all I'll say about that. I am also looking to replace metaphor, simile and that overworked crew with a few more personal stylistic moves. I'm also writing about photography and exploring my own creative process through the images I've been collecting for years. Poetry needs a few good striking sanitation workers with cameras. My main man Mr. Drum is also coming.

Black & White Photography
by Thomas Sayers Ellis

Black Boy

2006



Their Eyes Were Watching God

2006

The Autobiography of An Ex-Colored Man

2006

The Dutchman

2006

About Our Awards & Award Winners

The awards for each issue are independently judged by a guest writer or artist. Each prize comes with a monetary award of $100.

Chet Frederick Fiction Award

The Chet Frederick Fiction Award honors the best work of fiction published in each issue. Former UMB English professor K.C. "Chet" Frederick recently published his fourth book, Inland. Both poet and novelist, Mr. Frederick has received numerous awards, including a 1993 fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. He has contributed short stories to publications such as Epoch, Shenandoah, Kansas Quarterly, Ascent, and Ohio Review.

This semester, the Chet Frederick Award goes to Jen Beagin for her story "Bull's Blood," starting on page 79. This is Ms. Beagin's first published work. Jessica Treadway judged the fiction prize for this issue. Ms. Treadway is the author of a collection of stories, *Absent Without Leave*, and a novel, *And Give You Peace*. She is an associate professor at Emerson College. Her stories and reviews have appeared in Ploughshares, The Atlantic Monthly, Glimmer Train, and The Hudson Review, among other publications.

Donald E. Cookson Non-Fiction Award

The newly-named Donald E. Cookson Non-Fiction Award honors the best work of non-fiction published in each issue. The Award was named for a man with an abiding love of all types of non-fiction. Among other things, Mr. Cookson has been a sportswriter in Massachusetts and Maine, a cartoonist, an educator, an insurance executive, a marketing guru, and selectman. Mr. Cookson's son attended the University, and this award has been endowed by colleagues, friends, and family of Mr. Cookson to honor a life dedicated to education and excellence in non-fiction communication.

Mr. Cookson guest-judged the inaugural non-fiction award. Future issues will be independently judged by a noteworthy guest writer. This semester, the Donald E. Cookson Award goes to Thijs Messelaar for his non-fiction piece, "Dead Low Tide," starting on page 71. This is Mr. Messelaar's first published work.

Martha Collins Poetry Award

The Martha Collins Poetry Award honors the best work of poetry published in each issue. Ms. Collins established the creative writing program at the University of Massachusetts Boston and currently holds the Pauline Delaney Chair in Creative Writing at Oberlin College. Her honors include fellowships from the National Endowment of the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, as well as three Pushcart prizes. Collins is the author of a book-length poem, Blue Front, as well as four other books of poetry. She has also published a chapbook, co-translated two collections poems from the Vietnamese, and edited a volume of essays on Louise Bogan.

This semester, the Martha Collins Poetry Award goes to Jorge Albarez for his poem "My Life In Tongues and Seaweed Twisters" starting on page 2. Thomas Sayers Ellis judged the poetry prize for this issue. You can read more about Mr. Ellis in our interview starting on page 101.

Richard Yarde Art Award

The Richard Yarde Art Award honors the best work of visual art published in each issue. Richard Yarde was born in Boston and lives in Northampton Massachusetts. He's been a presence in the New England art world since the mid-1960s. Mr. Yarde has trained generations of young artists at a succession of colleges and universities, and has been Professor of Art at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst since 1990. Solo and group exhibitions throughout the country have featured his paintings, which reside permanently in public collections that include the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; the National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution; and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. The prize comes with a monetary award of $100.

This semester's prize is awarded jointly due to a tie between two pieces: "Abuela" by Christian deTorres on page and "Nino del Sol" by Mike Shick on page 57. The award for each issue is independently judged by a noteworthy artist; this year's prize was juried by Hope Klebenov, a local artist living in Cambridge, MA. Ms. Klebenov has lived and studied around the world, including North and South America as well as Sri Lanka. She completed her post-baccalaureate from the School at the Museum of Fine Arts in 1998, serving as darkroom assistant to photographer Jack Leuder-Booth and exhibiting her own work around Boston at the Barbara Singer Gallery, the Alpha Gallery, First Expressions, and the Cambridge Arts Council.

The First Annual Watermark Writing & Art Scholarships

The Watermark has launched two annual contests for college-bound high school juniors and seniors who attend public schools. College applicants with GEDs also also encouraged to apply. One scholarship is for creative writing; the other is for visual art.

Winning submissions in both the writing and art contests will be published in the May 2006 edition of The Watermark and receive $500 towards college tuition, books, or art supplies. The aim of these scholarships is to provide an opportunity for public high school students to publish their work, provide additional material for their college applications, and receive financial assistance toward their higher education. By introducing talented local students to the art and literary communities at UMB, the scholarships will also work to expand the University's urban mission.

The primary selection criteria will be the quality of the submitted work and the demonstrated financial need of the applicant. One contest winner, one runner-up, and three honorable mentions will be selected for the contest. Name and high school of all thus selected will be published following the contest winner's submission.

Contest winner will receive 7 copies of the edition of The Watermark in which his or her work appears. Runner-up and honorable mentions will each receive 2 copies.

Deadline:

Postmarked by March 1, 2007.

Note: We prefer to receive submissions directly from the authors/artists themselves, rather than from their teachers. While we encourage teachers to work with students on their submission, we discourage teachers both from submitting work on behalf of their students and from asking students to submit work as a class assignment.

Eligibility:

- Students must attend a public high school and have junior or senior standing.
- Preference is given to students who attend public schools in Massachusetts; however, students from out of state are still encouraged to apply.
- Students must demonstrate serious intent to attend either a two-year, four-year, or vocational college.
- Family-members of The Watermark staff and/or contest judges/jurors are not eligible to apply for this scholarship.

Submission Requirements:

Writing Contest

- Submit 1 to 3 poems (5 pages maximum); a short work of fiction, creative non-fiction or journalistic non-fiction (2500 word maximum), or an excerpt of a novel (1500 word maximum.)
- Electronic submissions are encouraged at watermark@umb.edu; however, we also accept hard copies. Please mail to The Watermark/Office of Student Life, UMass Boston, 100 Morrissey Blvd., Boston, MA 02125.
- Please see our Web-site—www.watermark.umb.edu—for complete submission guidelines prior to submitting work.

Art Contest

- Submit 1 to 3 works of art in one of the following visual media: pen and ink, charcoal, collage, painting, photography, sculpture (submitted via photograph), and digital art.
- Format: Original pieces may be delivered to our office. We also welcome electronic submissions on a CD inscribed with artist's name.
- Please see our Web-site—www.watermark.umb.edu—for complete submission guidelines prior to submitting work.

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Linh Dinh
Robert Creely
Demetria Martínez
Martín Espada
Barbara Tran

Tuition: One Week $220
Two Weeks $400

To apply, interested writers must submit the following by May 15, 2007: a letter of interest, appropriate writing sample, and a $25 non-refundable deposit.

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"Every issue of this feisty, ambitious journal seems to set a new standard. The poetry, fiction, essays, and art can't be contained by the harbor where they first docked. The tides are rising. Rising? Readers, this is a flood! Look for the highest Watermark yet."

—Askold Melnyczuk

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