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A J o u r n a l O f W e s t e r n O k l a h o m a

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Editor Fred Alsberg
Managing Editor Joyce Stoffers
Copy Editor/Webmaster C. Michael McKinney
Publications Manager Joel Kendall

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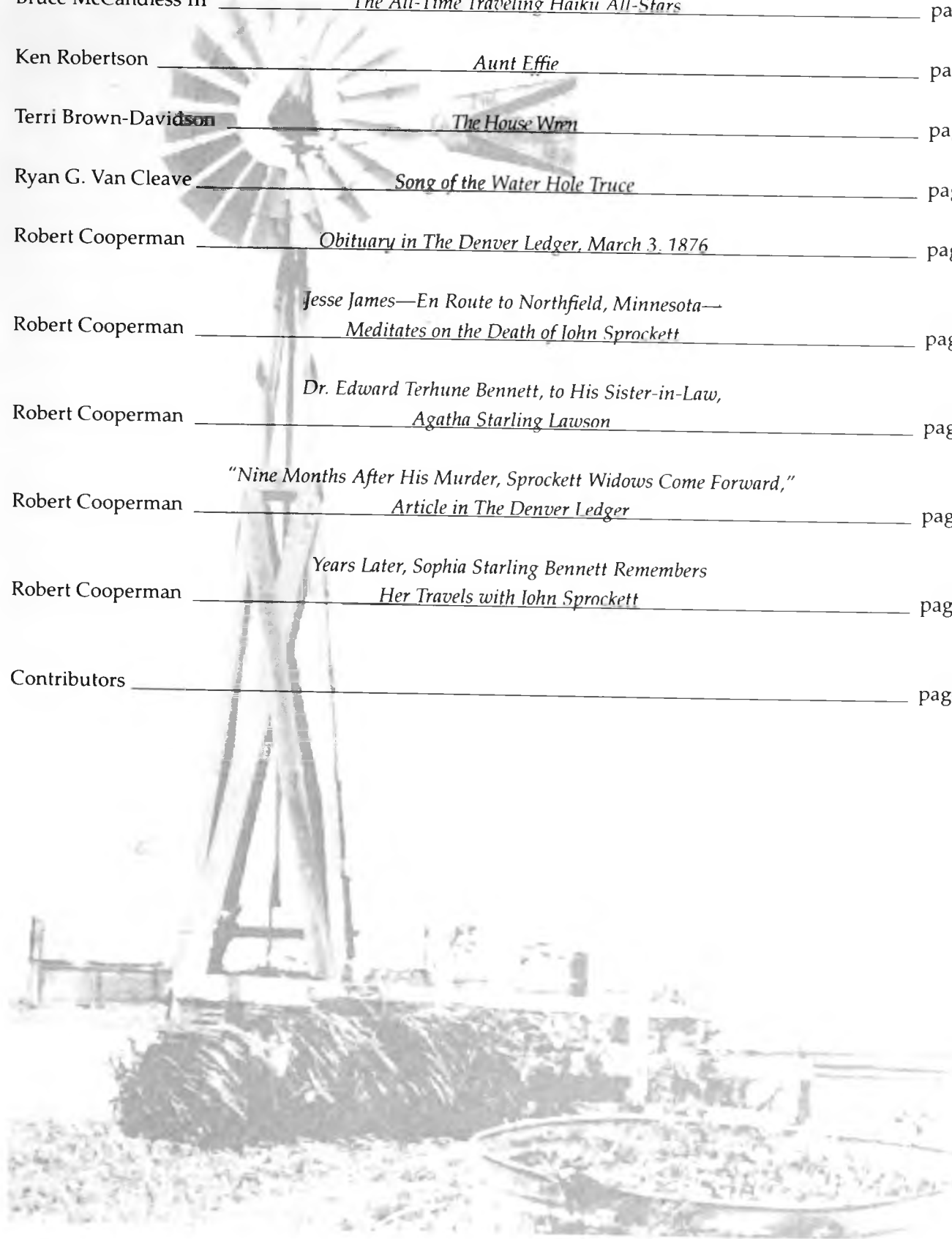
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Southwestern Oklahoma State University
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Cover artwork, "The Joy of Life" by Wendy Lu

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Interview with Carolyn Wright

by Fred Alsberg

FRED ALSBERG:

You've traveled rather extensively. How have these other places provided material for your poems? How has travel changed you as a person?

CAROLYN WRIGHT:

Travel takes me out of my routine, my American existence, and prods me to see the new locales and their inhabitants, to experience their cultures and languages, in a fresh way. Such fresh seeing is a major source of creative stimulus—I love to encompass new places by writing about them, and to make my own contributions to that quasi-genre, the so-called travel poem, of which Elizabeth Bishop was such a fine practitioner. My poem, “Studies with Miss Bishop,” in the *Under the Sign of Cancer* manuscript, is immediately preceded by a poem which Bishop might have enjoyed, had she lived long enough to read it—a sestina entitled “If This is Wednesday, It Must Be Vienna.” The title is a spoof on the film title, “If It’s Tuesday, It Must Be Belgium,” a comedy about European travel via package tours. (I haven’t seen this film, but the title always amused me.) “If This is Wednesday, It Must Be Vienna” explores, both humorously and seriously, the ways in which travel changes the traveler—and it also questions the ways in which travelers change the places they visit: the affluent travelers (the “ugly Americans” especially) who “complain loudly about everything” and demand that “the world change for us!”; the consequent proliferation of tourist accommodations “that crowd more local people out of the city”; the Americanization of so much of the world that it becomes harder and harder ever to get away from our own consumerist reflections; the way Everywhere Else seems to be gradually evolving into one standardized MacElsewhere, a sort of www.stripmallworld.com. The sestina concludes, “Who then, by travel in those days, will

be changed?” Bishop’s poem, “Questions of Travel,” lurked somewhere in the recesses of my consciousness as I wrote this sestina. One of the purposes of travel is to change ourselves, to grow and extend our understanding of ourselves and others in their cultures and languages and geographies. I hope that that will always remain possible.

ALSBERG:

Some of your poems deal with the way political realities affect people’s lives. Do you consider yourself a poetic activist?

WRIGHT:

Poetic activist—I like that term! Yes, I suppose I am one, owing to major transformative experiences early on in my life as a poet. On September 11, 1973, the government led by Chile’s President Allende was overthrown by the military forces of General Pinochet. Thousands were killed, and thousands fled in exile. My most recent book, *Seasons of Mangoes and Brainfire* (Lynx House Press, 2000), is in part a poetic memoir of the year I spent in Chile, and travelled elsewhere in Latin America, on a Fulbright Study Grant during the presidency of Salvador Allende. This book is, so far, the most representative of the poetic activism in my work. These poems are haunted by memories of a Chile that is no more, and by the poet-speaker’s questions about what became of the acquaintances and companions she left behind—at least one of whom, the popular composer and singer Victor Jara, was tortured and murdered by military guards in Santiago’s National Stadium within a few days after the overthrow. The speaker attempts to recollect and re-establish connections with those missing, departed, silenced, or lost in the drift of years; to re-enter her relationships with the people who inhabit them; to recreate lives and situations in the context of the overwhelming national events in





which human connections were formed and then cut off, events that would disrupt and destroy many individual lives and relationships. Other poems deal with the speaker's experiences with marginal conditions and people in her own country—on reservations, in small towns, among Holocaust survivors—conditions which prevent her from ever wholly identifying with her country's dominant culture. The book's second section, "Flowers in Winter," consists of one long narrative poem set in Europe at the height of the Iran-Iraq War. It chronicles an American woman's encounter with a Near Eastern man, tracing the interaction between these two lovers of opposing nations, and the cultural and political forces that draw them together—and ultimately drive them apart. The book is comprised primarily of narrative poems with a lyrical

element, what have been called imagistic narratives: poems moved not only by the pressure of events from history and individual memory, but also by the images and music inherent in the voices of the poems' speakers. This sort of lyrical/imagistic narrative poem—informed by memory, imagination, and landscape both physical and psychological—hopes to give voice to individuals whose private lives have been deeply marked by larger public events of history. Agreeing with W. H. Auden, a poet very much affected by the public, historical events of his day, I think that poetry in itself doesn't make much happen, but through the arts we still must try, as Rainer Maria Rilke said, to change our lives. I don't think that poems themselves can change much, but I have hope that reading or listening to such poetry can make us more sharply aware of how others live, can hone our empathy for others by awakening our imaginations to their lives. Then we can treat others more humanely, and if everyone acted in accordance with their most humane selves, then how conflict at all levels would diminish!

ALSBERG:

Is open form a hybrid of form and conversation?

WRIGHT:

I've never thought of open form in this manner before, but the question makes me re-think this issue. I would say that all poetry is a form of conversation, whether it's written in so-called free verse--open form--or in form. In fact, many of my most formal poems--sestinas, sonnets, double abecedarians--are the most conversational, attempting to talk to the person to whom the poem is addressed, to resume communication after long silence or clarify some misunderstanding of many years' duration. I suppose that the ostensibly informal structure of open form gives it the appearance of conversation's spontaneity, the impromptu



turns and shifts of unscripted dialogue. Of course, most open form is not as free as the term free verse might suggest. It adheres to the poet's internal sense of rhythm within each line, or within each phrase as that phrase enjambs from one line to another. It strives for various similarities of sound--alliteration, assonance, consonance, etc.--within lines and groups of lines and phrases. It uses line breaks to underscore meaning or enhance nuances of meaning. I could give any number of examples to illustrate how these formal considerations function within free verse. And most human conversation also has an underlying structure, and follows various rules of verbal and oral give-and-take, depending on the relationship of the speakers to each other. There's an exercise I call "The Poet Writes Back / Strikes Back," which I give to students, and which I have "committed" myself several times. It's another form of poetic conversation. You take a poem or body of work by another poet, and write a reply to it. An early example of this is Christopher Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love," which Sir Walter Raleigh critiqued in "The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd." Another pair is Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach," whose sentimental ideals are savaged in Anthony Hecht's "The Dover Bitch." Like Raleigh's poem, this exercise can be a witty riposte in the same form as the original, or a parody that makes a serious point, like my own reply to James Wright's "As I Step Over a Puddle at the End of Winter, I Think of an Ancient Chinese Governor." My poem is called "As I Drive Over an Irrigation Ditch at the End of Summer, I Think of a Small-Town American Preacher," and it's seriously silly in all aspects, a great hit at readings on Midwestern campuses. The poem closely parallels the form and rhetorical progressions of Wright's poem, but it questions religious bigotry, technology's control over our lives, and the scary realities of living in the shadow of the mushroom cloud. Audiences laugh, then wince. I'm mentioning only humorous examples here, but serious or

silly, it's a great exercise for students, because it compels them to read a model poem closely, then they learn from that poem by incorporating elements from its language and structure in their own reply. The student's poem gains in authority, too, because it makes close allusions to another work of literature. And in a more basic way, we all learn to talk by imitating what we hear people say, and then creating our own variations from our ever-increasing stock of imitated sounds and words and phrases.

ALSBERG:

What do you think of prose poems? Are lines and line breaks too useful to be dispensed with?

WRIGHT:

I haven't written that many prose poems, though I'm not sure why. Probably because yes, I do feel the need for lines and line breaks, for that tension between the rhythm of the line and the rhythm of the phrase as it moves athwart the lines, enjambs from the end of one line to the beginning of the next; and the turns that line breaks give to phrases, the nuances of meaning that are heightened by these sorts of shapings. In fact, "The Room," one poem in the selection published here in Westview, was a prose poem in its early drafts. But I felt that the drama, the significance of many phrases, got lost in the block of double-spaced prose text. Without the white space to set the figure (the poem) off against the ground (the white space), the distinctive graphic shapes as well as the rhythm and sound-driven narrative force of the lines were dissipated, and the page was too crowded with words! So I broke "The Room" up into lines.

ALSBERG:

Does writing poetry heighten your consciousness? If so, in what ways?

WRIGHT:

Absolutely! Or, more precisely, I'm on a life-



long search for heightened consciousness, ever-deepening awareness--whatever one prefers to call it--into the mysteries of the human heart and psyche, the nature of life in all its multiplicity and wonder. Poetry, an art form I practice because nothing else gives me such profound aesthetic and psychic gratification, is my principal means of inner discovery. Sometimes there are truths I don't know until I have written them, and suddenly I understand: that "Ah-hah" moment. That's the exploratory quality I seek in language as I write. "Celebration for the Cold Snap," for example, is a poem in which the speaker is trying to withdraw from "the Big World / and its confusion of envies," to give up the sorts of expectations about other people that lead only to disappointment. As I wrote, I was looking for items for the speaker's list of "things / [she] can do without." The image that came to me in response was "gifts / and their impossible demands." I had been experiencing a similar psychic process for the past several months, but until then I hadn't really understood the quality of emotional exhaustion or need for withdrawal that would make a gift feel like a burden, the ways in which a gift can impose obligation on the recipient. Even if that gift were a new suitor's offering of love. Although I may write poems with speakers expressing their losses, I have managed to keep my own ideals and sense of wonder, without getting jaded or embittered by life's inevitable disappointments. I've been fortunate to keep my optimism, in part because writing has given me the means to see more deeply, past mere reactive behavior and thinking (my own angers and disappointments at certain people or situations), into a deeper view of "the dream the world is having about itself," as one of our greatest poet-sages, William Stafford, called it. But I have to say that the practice of writing poetry heightens my consciousness through language above all, through working and playing with language.

ALSBERG:

How do you as a poet transform the language we all speak into poetry? In other words, can you shed light on the mystery of composition? Your methodology?

WRIGHT:

What I say here is in a sense an extension of the previous response. I play with language to heighten it, make it do more than the everyday tasks; I try to make it sing, shout, growl, laugh, even gesticulate wildly! And of course I want to echo other poems and make allusions to history, mythology, science, contemporary culture--so that the total effect is nuanced and layered in all aspects. I don't have any particular methodology except to listen inwardly, when I feel a nibble of language on the mental fishline--there's a piece of figurative language. The language has to be allowed to come into my awareness. Very occasionally I receive a great gift--a poem, usually a shorter one, comes to me whole, often as I'm falling asleep; it presents itself as a sort of silent stream of words in a half-waking dream. At times it's a sequence of lines, part of what will be a longer poem. What's really happening, I think, is that as I relax and drowse into sleep, part of my brain begins to practice poetic composition. It's a wonderfully effortless process, without the usual distractions and hesitations that the waking mind can throw up as obstacles, and the poems usually cohere in their language and rhythms as unified wholes. Sometimes I can see the lines form in my mind's eye, as if I am just then writing them; sometimes they present themselves as if already written down, in a sort of large scrawled handwriting. But then I must pull myself up from the drift into sleep, and really write the lines down, or else they're lost forever in the receding tide of sleep. Of the poems published here, "Stealing the Children" came to me in a sort of waking dream. One summer afternoon, while visiting Cheyenne, Wyoming, I took a walk from one end of town to the other as a thunderstorm



brewed on the horizon, and a dusty wind blew through the sage-colored grass. Cheyenne is a major rail freight depot for the Mountain states, so I found myself walking along and across railroad tracks. After I returned to the house where I was staying, the poem presented itself to me in its entirety, and I wrote it down, making only a few changes and additions later before I typed it up as you can read it now. Let me stress that this effortless, whole-poem-at-once method of composition is unusual. Most poems come to me one line or a group of lines at a time. I write poetry at any time of the day or night when I'm moved to do so, or have free time. The best time, though, is in the morning when I wake--before I even have the first cup of coffee!--or at night in the hour or so before sleep. I start by reading a few poems by someone else--Pablo Neruda, César Vallejo, or Jorge Luis Borges in the original are good; or any English-language poet or poetry in translation that I'm reading at the time--then I read the earlier lines of whatever poem I'm working on, revising as I go. New lines arrive to add themselves to the existing ones; I look for lines and images that surprise me, and when the first language that comes isn't so interesting, I just write it down and go on. Later on I will "beef up the lingo" in weaker passages, make it stronger and sharper, imagistically and rhythmically more powerful. That's more or less how I wrote "Love Affair in a Small Town," in increments of several lines per night over the course of a week or so; perhaps the nostalgic, dreamy tone of the poem reflects the process of its creation.

ALSBERG:

How does figurative language function in your poems? At what moments do you like to employ it and for what purposes? Ideally, how should it work?

WRIGHT:

My watchword: "All figurative, all the time!" Just kidding, but I do believe in the precision of

detail to illuminate the truths the poem conveys. "No ideas but in things," Williams said, or was it Pound? Anyway, for me that's a key principle and strategy in all my poems. I avoid the big abstractions, except when they're embedded in a figurative matrix. I have a warm-up exercise I use and give to students, called "The Green Sky of Regret." The adjective noun of abstraction. The name itself is one of the images--I can use an abstraction that denotes an emotion, regret in this case, because it's placed with the odd and unnerving green sky. Now that I live in Oklahoma, I know that a green-tinged sky signals tornadoes, it's a storm warning, but I didn't know that when I invented the image. What is the relationship between a tornado warning and regret? I don't know, at least I don't consciously know, but it's an image that teases the imagination, draws us into the mystery of a feeling like regret, as given figurative embodiment in concrete, specific language. Any such image will do, if it has grace, inventive energy, and a bit of mystery that prevents the intellect from figuring it out immediately: the taut clothesline of memory, truth's sodden shoes. Your glittering disco-ball heart! Whatever--I just made those up, now I have to use them in a poem. Watch for it!

ALSBERG:

Love in your poems is often pleasingly episodic and mourned for later. Is that the inherent nature of romantic passion?

WRIGHT:

I can't speak categorically about the nature of romantic passion, since I have only my own experiences to go on, and to some extent, the experiences of friends, based on what they choose to tell me. Wise advice I've received from older mentors, counselors, and some intelligently written books has also helped to extend and enrich my understanding here. And since I'm single and not seeing anyone at present, I have a renewed interest in the subject! What I learn from future experience may



alter what I say here, and may lead to new poems with more universally applicable insights. As I said earlier, I haven't lost my optimism about life, that it can continue to surprise and delight! But back to poetry that deals with these matters: most of it is not straightforwardly autobiographical, and it's a mistake, I think, to go to such poems for the real-life "goods" on some affair. It's probably impossible for a poem to convey precisely the significance that a relationship had in real life, though certainly Ted Hughes made a valiant and heart-rending attempt in *Birthday Letters*, the poetic memoir of his marriage to Sylvia Plath. In some of my poems, the romantic relationship is somewhat fictionalized--to protect the guilty!--in others, the affair gains more dramatic importance than it had in life just by getting a whole poem to itself. (Sorry, guys!) And one doesn't write about every human interaction in one's life. Why poems emerge about some friends or family members or lovers, and not others, is a mysterious interaction in itself between the poet's life and the creative process. I haven't finished any poems, for example, about the longest partnership of my life so far (one of two de-facto marriages), or about a recent and intensely significant, still-evolving relationship-turned-to-friendship. I may need to process more before writing about this one, and the long relationship isn't interesting enough at this point to engage with it in poetry. (Sorry, guy!) The relationships that have become occasions for poems tend to be those which interest me dramatically, but from which I have some aesthetic and emotional distance. They can be either happy and positive, or difficult and troubled--each presents its own dramatic challenges for poetry. In "Love Affair in a Small Town," for example, the speaker expresses a deep and affectionate appreciation for all the details of the affair: intimate, humorous, poignant details. In reality as well, the poet had a lot of affection for the lover, but she wasn't in love with him, or, more important, she wasn't interested in staying with him

long-term. So she could savor the affair with a certain compassionate and cheerful detachment. Since both lovers were still involved long-distance with other people, and not certain about commitment to either, neither lover in the poem is hoping for the other to be "any more or any less than what we were." The lovers' expectations were quite open-ended: "We never even asked What next . . . and we had a whole continent / in which to change our minds." The real-life relationship was still underway as the poem was composed, and the poem is quite faithful in tone and detail to its source, except that the speaker's feelings for the lover may be more heightened in the poem than in actual fact. I suppose another question would be: why write about passion and romance, why not something less revealing? If I felt I had anything to hide, perhaps I would shy away from such intimate topics, but I think my experiences are not unusual, and in fact are probably pretty representative for American women who came of age from the 1960s through the 1990s. What really interests me in any kind of human interaction is what interests me about travel and discovering other cultures: the adventure of trying to understand those cultures or those persons on their own terms, not as I want to see them, but as they really are. So it's not as much about romance and passion by themselves as it is about a larger human understanding. Other than family--parents and siblings especially--whom do we get to know as closely as a lover or mate? What interests me for the future is what I would write about a really long-term relationship, an enduring marriage, for example--if I have the good fortune to meet someone with whom there's romance and passion, and also the mutual desire to make a realistic commitment based on solid affinities, common goals, and values. That for me would be a new frontier for poetry: the adventures of continuity in one long partnership, of exploring depths and nuances that don't have the scope to develop in most shorter relationships--I want to



learn and write about those.

ALSBERG:

How would you like to see your work evolve in the coming years? Any current dissatisfactions?

WRIGHT:

First, I'd like to finish a few projects currently underway. I've recently completed a manuscript of poetry long in progress, entitled *Under the Sign of Cancer*, which has a different voice and somewhat different thematic concerns than *Seasons of Mangoes* and *Brainfire*. It's a book of exploration of self and of dynamics between friends and family members and lovers. Several poems are set in Europe and other locales of "Western Canon"-type High Culture, and most of the poems' allusions and references are to figures of Western literature and history and aesthetics. I jokingly call it my "artsyfartsy" collection. Many of the poems are in form: sestinas, pantoums, an acrostic, a three-sonnet narrative poem, a few double abecedarians, and one "ghazaloid"--not a true ghazal by Agha Shahid Ali's rigorous Arabic-Persian-Urdu standard, which I highly respect, by the way--but one which bows deeply to the form while politely flouting it. This book is scheduled for 2002 publication by Invisible Cities Press, in a series edited by Roger Weingarten. I've been sending out various incarnations of the manuscript for years--I won't say how many!--to most of the publishing competitions and poetry series, and finally an editor invites me to send it for a series. One major project is to complete the investigative memoir of my experiences in Chile during the presidency of Salvador Allende, *The Road to Isla Negra*, portions of which have received the PEN/Jerard Fund Award and the Crossing Boundaries Award from *International Quarterly*. This book grew originally out of the narrative poems in the new poetry collection, *Seasons of Mangoes* and *Brainfire*, because there were so many stories to tell, details and social nuances, which I could not convey fully in the po-

etry. I hope to finish this book in the next year; I made two return trips to Chile in 1999 and observed the presidential election in December 1999--the first Socialist to head the country since Allende was freely elected. The other major project is a "memoir in poetry," entitled *Reflections in Blue*, a series of lyrical-narrative poems set principally in New Orleans and involving an interracial couple, artists and writers. This is a deeply felt and nuanced series, involving all those negotiations between race, history, society, expectations from family and self, the challenge of finding a place together with both races, both families, shiftings and dislocations both personal and political--and ultimately the personal conflicts that pull the couple apart. This collection should take the previous question you asked here in new directions, but since it's very much in process, I won't say more now. One African-American poet said to me once that the relation between the races was America's most important subject. I think he's found it ironic and disconcerting that this has become one of my subjects, with the larger socio-political and racial issues embodied in microcosm in the dynamics between two individuals. It's still fairly uncommon, I think, to explore these dynamics from the perspective of the white, female member of the couple. Other projects are the manuscript of "Eulene" poems, the anthologies of translations of Bengali women poets and writers, the memoir of the years in Bengal, but these are more or less on hold at present. I suppose one dissatisfaction is that I haven't got all these books completed yet! The major reason is that with a series of one-year or even one-semester university teaching positions over the last decade or so, I have had to move for every new job. Moving is not the same as travel! Moving means perpetual transition, spending lots of time packing up and unpacking my entire little household, making all the arrangements for such moves, giving my change of address information to everyone, closing down old and setting up new



bank accounts and phone service and utilities and health-care providers and car registration, then getting to know new towns and university communities and sets of colleagues and local-area friends, in the few months before I have to start the whole process again. Certain research and writing materials simply don't get unpacked, because it's more efficient to work on the books that require less research and no research assistants--whom I wouldn't be able to use anyway because much research assistance isn't available to visiting faculty. Or if it is, I don't have time to avail myself of it because I must use much of my non-teaching time to apply for next year's job! Such disruptions have delayed the prose memoirs and anthologies especially. I have been glad for the richness and diversity of experience in living and working in so many places, and I confess that I haven't really been ready to stop and stay in one place, until recently. But now I'm hoping that I can trade this itinerant, academic-migrant-worker life for the next adventure--the new frontier called continuity! One ongoing job in one community! I love teaching, it's what I'm meant to do along with writing, and I want to stay with it, not give it up—which would mean an even more intensive starting-over in a new career. Notice, however, that my dissatisfactions are with the vagaries of "po-biz"—not with poetry itself, not with the wonderful vocation of writing it and sharing it with others.

ALSBERG:

Any advice for young writers concerning the drafting process? Or anything else concerning the craft?

WRIGHT:

After the last response, you might think that my advice would be to groan with Shelley's *Ozymandias*: "'Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!'" But seriously, I'd say to read as much poetry as well as prose--fiction, creative nonfiction, works of science and history and biography

and fine arts and music--as you can. Learn another language and translate some of its poetry--for your own edification, to get close to those poems, even if publishing the translations isn't possible. Write every day, revise if nothing new comes to you, write prose if no poetry comes. Keep a journal of notes and images and possible titles for poems, also dreams and narratives of interesting interactions you observe or take part in, reconstruct dialogue, whatever. This will be your source material for future poems, a sort of hopper, as one poet-friend calls it, to draw from. Keep the journal (or a few blank pages from it) with you at all times, so you can note down any line that comes, and not forget it. Who cares if people think you're obsessive! You learn to be unobtrusive and matter-of-fact about making notes, and people finally don't even notice. I use loose ruled notebook paper, 8 1/2" x 11", which I keep in a ringbinder of the same size; I've been using that size of paper and ringbinder for more than twenty-five years now. It's a very organized system, it's easy to store the filled pages (with division markers for each year), and I can find anything I'm looking for in the carton filled with all those pages. I love browsing through it, "shopping for images," as Allen Ginsberg said of Walt Whitman cruising through "A Supermarket in California." Cultivate a few other skills and areas of interest besides reading and writing—fishing or tennis or investing in the stock market or Chinese calligraphy or jazz, whatever—activities that connect you with the wider world and provide imagery and terminology for your writing. Make up poetic exercises for yourself, if your creative writing workshop is over or the teacher doesn't give exercises; there are any number of good books published in the last few years which are full of exercises to generate poems and prose. Don't try to publish too soon, complete a strong group of a couple dozen poems before you open yourself up to the stress, the rewards and disappointments, of "po-biz"; and then, don't send first to The New



Yorker! Read a book or two giving practical guidelines for submitting to appropriate magazines, and study your market--buy literary magazines at your local bookstore or read copies in the library. Support your local libraries and bookstores, too, especially independent bookstores, and let them know of your reading interests so they keep those shelves well stocked. Get involved with literary activities in your community--if you're not currently enrolled in a course or workshop, open-mic readings and peer workshops are good. Make friends with poets and writers you meet at these gatherings; find a few with whom you can share your work, and give

each other feedback. Weekend and week-long writers' conferences, many of which charge tuition, are useful, because you can study for short periods with well-known poets and writers, but be careful here, because not all famous figures are dedicated teachers. Attend local readings by well-known and up-and-coming younger poets, and buy and read books of theirs. If you follow all of these suggestions, you'll have made writing poetry an integral part of your daily life. And these suggestions apply to aspiring prose writers as well.



Stealing the Children: After a Big Wind in Wyoming

by Carolyn Wright

It's not the kind of country where you can walk
dry-eyed. An olive-green wind blows
dust up and down the alleys,
gathers dry leaves in its fists for storm.
It's the kind of town where,
if you leave your children unattended,
the wind drives up for them
in its long, black station wagon.
They go so willingly they leave their tricycles
scattered over three backyards.
Later, you roam the feedlots,
poking among freight rails that writhed
like wounded serpents while the twister
passed over. Your own mind
is blown so dry it can't recall
who they were, those who left in mid-gale,
clambering into the front seat of the wind,
not even waving goodbye as they blew down
the street, leaving only scraps of their voices,
like strewn toys, on your lawn.

©1978 by Carolyn Wright;
from *Stealing the Children* (Ahsahta Press)



Farm Outside Oswego

by Carolyn Wright

Amidst the jumble of half-lived lives—
gutted chairs, rusted Westinghouses
piled in sheds, cattle shelters crumbling
under half a century of wind—
the fat farm wife plays Scrabble,
selecting each piece carefully
as if she held it up to an egg light.
Her grown son, out from town,
lounges with his coffee
in the playroom, cranes
to watch words branch out on the boards.

Begging their pardons, we have stepped in
from the stable, asked to use the john.
We wipe our hands on streaked towels.
The Franklin stove glowers as we pass.

The farm wife picks another letter
with a connoisseur's deliberation.
Outside, flatbeds—driven into pasture
for the last time—drown in the timothy,
and rusted tractor hulls
surround the new, flame-red John Deere
like chokecherry on the apple trunks.
Holstein heifers stare
from hock-deep mire by the barn,
and the farm cur grovels, the whipped look
white in the corner of his eyes.

We visit the crippled pony last,
gaze at his curled, Aladdin-slipper hooves,
the stagger as he weaves, barn-bound,
from side to side of the stall.
As we leave, we do not pat him:
what would change it?



In the house, Scrabble fragments
jostle for attention—
strangle-vines for the sun.
The woman remembers, moves
for the stove, the clumsy loaves
hot on her reddened hands.
At the back door, oat mash for the Angusses,
supper sandwiches arranged like letters
on the smorgasbord. After the animals,
they'll eat in silence, farm-style.

We start down the dirt track to the car.
The son slips out the back door with the pail,
past pine poles stacked
fresh as a vocabulary of good intentions.
He gazes after us, his face blank
as the spaces between words.
We wave. He raises one hand slowly
and gabbles once, as if the wooden letters
were log-jammed in his throat,
then turns and trudges toward the pasture
along fences downed years ago by the wind.

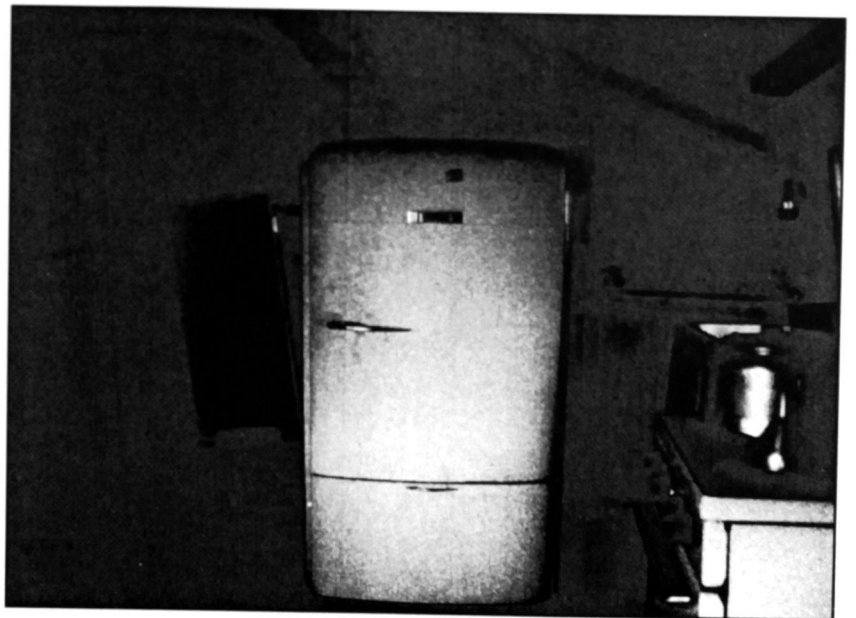


Photo by Cheryl Semarge Moody

©1982 by Carolyn Wright;
from *Premonitions of an Uneasy Guest* (Hardin-Simmons University Press)



Love Affair in a Small Town

by Carolyn Wright

That was the winter we clung to each other
in a bed that obeyed too well
the laws of gravity, in an apartment
big enough for someone who was always out.
It was Anywhere, USA, and always snowing,
like those Norman Rockwell cards that urged us
to put the Christ back in Christmas.
We X'd ourselves out of the landscape.
How else to silence the tales
boots tell, in a town that only had words

for denial? We were each other's
best-kept secret, as snow drowned out
the traffic, and neighbors trudged by,
scanning mailboxes for names to match
the lights in upstairs windows.
What did we have to hide?

©1985 by Carolyn Wright;
from *The New Generation* (2nd) (Doubleday & Company)



The Room

by Carolynne Wright

She stood in the room where Allende died.
It was two months later,
Armistice Day, 1973,
and she was on a package tour
for which all refunds had been cancelled.
Below the bombed-out windows
with their twisted grillework,
Pinochet's troops patrolled the streets,
and she wore a scarlet poppy
for that other war—Flanders Field
and the black-edged telegram
that had stopped her father's face
in its frame on the mantelpiece.

For years she would not tell this story:
how she walked through Santiago's
rubble-strewn streets until soldiers
leaped from a van with naked bayonets
and surrounded her, ripping her camera
from her shoulder. All afternoon in the *cuartel*
she showed them blurry Polaroids
of palm trees and big hotels,
and told them she knew nothing.
She wasn't working for anyone.
As late sun slanted through the one window's
iron bars, the *comandante* suddenly
relented. "We have something special
to show you." His tone said
You'd better not refuse.



A guard led her through cratered beds
and shattered statuary of the garden,
into the high-ceilinged room
already beginning to fill with twilight.

Everything was as they had left it.
She gazed a long time
at the red plush chair,
the heavy desk with bullet marks,
scorched books piled knee-deep
on the floor.

“Communist books,”
the guard said, shifting
the rifle on his shoulder.
There was a battered telephone
on the desktop, and a letter
handwritten in Spanish,
the fountain pen lying across it
where the words trailed off.

She knew no Spanish.
The guard stepped to the window.
She wanted to take the letter
or engrave it in her thoughts
for her friends outside, but the guard
turned back and there was no way
she could go beyond this warning.
She studied the prescription bottle
by the inkwell: nitroglycerin
he took for his congested heart.
On the floor under the sideboard
a whiskey bottle on its side, cracked open,
a spill of dark residue beside it.
“*El Presidente* liked his booze,”
the guard smirked, as if
that justified everything.



Her eyes had been saving the blood
for last. In the failing light
the dark stains stood out black—
his last call to his wife,
his farewell to Chile on the radio
when he knew they were coming for him.
Spatter on the walls still echoing
the burst door, the rifle barrels
raised, automatic fire going on and on.
Vanishing in shadow the pool
of himself into which he fell.

Outside, wail of the curfew sirens,
footsteps of those who could be shot
on sight for delaying. "Don't worry,
we escort you back," the guard said.
"We know how to treat our friends."

For years she would feel the click
of the safety catch, chill of steel
at her temple, the poppy's crimson
deepening on her breast.
She said *No thank you*
and walked out.
If soldiers tried to stop her
she would turn and face them
as she still wanted to believe
he had.

for Margaret Gibson, R.N.

©1998 by Carolyn Wright;
from *The Iowa Review* (Vol. 28, No. 2)



Celebration for the Cold Snap

by Carolynne Wright

Pre-dawn's pilot lights
glow under the burners
like the vigil lamps of runways. Not one
but has kept the faith all night.

At six the window squares
go blue, the first commuter
trains clang by, full
of people with bills to pay,
important telephones to answer,
custom-made ornaments
for their office tree.

I labor alone, draping tinsel
on my foot-high pine,
turning the world news
down to a simmer. I parse words
together, make lists of things
I can do without: gifts
and their impossible demands.

Old lovers' faces rise and set
in my dreams. Their hands
reach for me, toadstools
that spring up in one rain.
I glue their greeting cards
to the windows, the year's
discarded printouts.

I wrap presents to myself.
Free of the Big World
and its confusion of envies,
I stand at the window,
watch trains crawl past: everyone
I've had to let go of,
sleepwalkers lost in the heart's
subzero weather.

©1981 by Carolynne Wright;
from *Poetry*, December 1981



Tahoe

by Joann Gardner

Across the valley, they are watering the greens—tiny men with giant hoses that arch and spray and soak.

Threading a dun-colored line through the pines, a caravan of horses patiently plods, selection of anxious tourists bouncing on their backs.

The sky's glass has been cracked; now wispy, tie-dyed clouds trace stress marks on the blue, and below me, almost out of sight,

a woman smokes and sits, the scant scent of tobacco mixing with fresh air.

I rise and clear my head; my nose, bloodied from altitude.

I sit on a rock in the middle of a stream and watch the water feather, weave, in its long cold journey around mountains.

There are bugs at work: beetles, rock crawlers, ants;
a water strider balances on the fretted surface.

I press my pen against the page, push a narrow line from its tip (spider spit, bolus of sense appearing).

The spotted minnow in the shallows shoulders the current.
Sometimes, his tail propels him suddenly upstream.



Photo by Carlos Gauna



When an Okie Goes Fox Hunting

by Richard Hathcock

My old Oklahoma friend "T.J." Porter went "riding to the 'ounds" last year, joining the Pembroke Fox Hounds in England in a lengthy chase of 'Brer Fox' across the moors.

It cost him a pretty pence, which he could afford and didn't mind, and it gave him a look inside Britain's ancient field sport which is indulged in by that country's "upper crust."

It also gave him a candid peek inside that "upper crust."

He was invited to the "Run" by his European business partner, a member of one of London's semi-royal families—a gentleman who later regretted offering the invitation.

"What happened was . . ." T.J. explained, but we'll get to that in a moment.

First, I asked him to describe that day with the fox and the hounds.

"Well, it's a hell of a lot more complicated than you might imagine," he said. "It's *not* just mounting a horse and following some dogs chasing a fox. The dogs come in several categories . . . a Dog Pack consisting of all males, a Bitch Pack of all females, and a Mixed pack, and any of these Packs may have 'Entered Hounds,' those which have hunted for more than one season and which have been 'up at a kill' and eaten their share of a fox.

And you have to know the terms for all the things the dogs do while chasing the fox. There's 'speaking to a line,' for example, which means the hounds barking on a scent, and 'feathering' which is sniffing at a scent and whimpering.

There's 'marking their fox to ground,' or hounds baying around the mouth of a hole, and 'full cry' when the entire pack is 'speaking to a line,' and finally, the 'find,' when a fox has been found.

Hounds which have killed recently are 'in blood.'

On the fox's side of the picture, there's the

'sinking fox,' one that is tiring, and the 'ringnecked fox' is one that runs in circles while being hunted.

One of the most important things you must know about is called 'heading the fox,' which means that you've gotten in the way of the fox and turned him away from his intended line.

You'll be extremely unpopular if you commit this unforgivable blunder. It's right next to what I did . . ."

We'll get to that, I told him.

"And, don't 'coffee house' either. That means that you're talking when you should be paying attention."

But, it was the dress . . . the *formal* attire required in order to participate in this fox chase, that gave T.J. the most trouble. You see, he was raised on a ranch, broke broncs, rode the bulls in rodeos and generally was attired in comfortable, unpretentious cowboy boots and bluejeans . . . except, of course, when involved in the intricacies of his "beef" business.

T.J. is such a down-to-earth, unassuming, *ordinary* character, even though he inherited 50,000 windswept acres and a big herd of white-face cattle in what once was known as Indian Territory.

He never flaunted his wealth.

So, when he learned that he would have to get all duded-up in the fox hunt's *pink coat*, white breeches, topped boots, spurs and a velvet hunting cap, he considered passing on the deal. The coat, actually scarlet in color, is named for the tailor . . . a guy named Pink, who was the original designer of the coat worn by the fox hunters.

There are three types: long, short and swallow-tail.

T.J. is tall, so he chose the tall coat.

It came with a hunt button with the hunt's insignia engraved on it, and it was attached to the collar of the coat.

Some of his hunt companions wore silk top





Photo (detail) by Joel Kendall

hats, and one elderly Brit sported a flat-brimmed, cork bowler hat.

Some hunters wore top boots, black with tan tops, and several wore butcher boots, plain black boots, or polo boots, plain brown in color.

All, including my old pal, were decked out with a stock . . . a hunting cravat, and each carried a hunting crop, a whip complete with thong and lash. These are equipped with a crook-bone handle to facilitate the opening of gates.

A couple of the hunters were outfitted with the Ratcatcher type of hunting attire: breeches, colored stock, butcher boots, spurs and gloves. Gloves are optional.

Oh, it's all *so traditional*, you know.

The fox hunting season runs from May first to May first, and it is organized by the Master, and conducted by his assistants, the Huntsman, a man of great experience, and *his* assistants, the Whipper-In, who disciplines the behavior of the hounds, and the 1st Whipper-In who rides with the Huntsman. Prior to finding the fox, he will be ahead of the hounds and the Huntsman to view the fox.

There is also a Field Master, responsible for

the behavior of the field . . . the people who pay a subscription or cap for the privilege of hunting, and an Earth Stopper, a man who is responsible for covering all open holes into which the fox might dart. He opens these hiding places after the hunt.

Fox hunting has a vocabulary all its own. A "fox's line" is the route by which the critter travels from A to B; "casting" is the action carried out by the Huntsman to recover the line of a fox which has been lost; "bolt a fox" means to force the animal out of a hole; "chop a fox" refers to killing a

sleeping fox; and a "view" is the sighting of a fox.

A "Thruster" is that man or woman who goes in a straight keep with the hounds, taking the fences as they come, and a "lark" is fences when the hounds are not running and you are on your way home.

The "hunt breakfast" is served after the hunt is concluded, and the "hunt ball" is the formal dinner-dance held under the auspices of the hunt, and those who attend wear pink swallow-tail coats.

"I skipped that social event," T.J. told me.

"Actually, I wasn't invited," he admitted.

"Why?" I asked. "Was it because of the swallow-tail coat?"

"No. It's like I started to tell you. You see, according to ancient tradition, when you're 'riding to 'ounds' and you sight the fox, you sing out 'Tally-Ho. There goes the fox.'

Well, I was leading the hunters over a hill when I saw the damned fox just up ahead, and I got excited.

Without thinking, I yelled: 'There goes the sonofabitch!'"



the grandparents

by Cole Rachel

so undisturbed they might as well have been nothing more
than hillbilly salt and pepper shakers, bought probably
for too much money at dogpatch usa, dollywood
or any gift shop in branson, and it's as if *they* live on a shelf
surrounded by theme parks represented in china
plates and an enameled cedar plaque which read
 if momma says no, just ask grandma
i'm warmed by the idea of family hee-haw,
that i could come from those who would buy their own likeness
in tableware, those whose only advice for me when leaving is:
 it's really all about the right gun, or like squirrel hunting
 you make the wrong choice and all you have left
 is one front foot and a little piece of tail



Photo by Joel Kendall



How We Piped Clean Water to the Camp

by Walt McDonald

Deep in the rain forest, down steep mountains
east of Lima, vines and sword grass
bordered switchbacks hacked out of cliffs
a thousand feet straight down.
Meet rebels with machetes and prepare to die,

unless they let you back down
with your hands out pleading *Wait*.
For days we dug up crumbling pipes
and ditched. Scores of dark-eyed orphans
from the streets of Lima ate

in the messhall and slept on cots—
what bony shoulders and hugs, what eyes.
We pried out boulders round as skulls,
chopped roots that oozed, growing back fast
like lizards' tails. After hours of sweat,

after shots that echoed like bells,
we fitted water-tight plastic pipe,
rolled it slowly and dumped it.
Dusk, we put away picks and shovels,
stone-breaking bars, and clawed

through tangled vines and leaves
the size of heads toward the roar,
the tumble of water never tamed—men first,
then women behind us. If rebels passed,
we wouldn't see them. We ducked

under a waterfall and danced alone
in slow motion, surrendering to the splash,
lifting up sunburned arms to a stream
washing us deaf. We crawled
to a rock ledge to bake, lay still

and shivered ourselves dry, fatigued
with joy we couldn't put into words,
alone and far from home, watching stars
and listening to water, and orphans
laughing downhill at the hall.



Real Life Episode

by Christopher Brissom

At Florence and Bob's surprise anniversary party (fiftieth!), my Aunt Blanche gets a little tipsy as she is wont to do at large social occasions. The food, prepared by daughter-in-law Ruth, is quite delicious: Waldorf Salad, marinated chicken, a vegetable lasagna, tiramisu. The open bar leads naturally to

Blanche donning my cousin Rachel's six-foot long mermaid wig, all tangled cheap blonde nylon atop her frowzy perm, as she sashays queen-like to the center of the conservatory. En route, someone offers a purple boa found aimless on a coatrack in the back foyer. Yes Sir, a big musical number

is imminent. Cousin Richard waits ready at the organ and with the first ripple of insistence, Blanche Constant (nÉE Dubois--I kid you not) age 84, bewigged, off-balance, steadies her voice across a few husky scales, croaky and soulful as always. It's about 4 P.M., the light cooperates

beautifully on a crisp October Saturday, and we gaze, four generations of continent-strewn relatives, intact, sitting Indian-style on Ruth and Richard's hardwood floor. We have arrived, many of us, from far away. Even Eric (former daughter Laurie), the tall, infamous and fully

mustachioed child of Florence and Bob, is here toasting champagne after twenty years of low-profile. In fact, he hands Blanche another glass as the room hushes beneath the ballade and as I regard my aunt's lack of inhibition, her glorious afternoon cleavage, the keen love of singing

in front of people, I think, I smile, this—*this is my family*



The Pearl of the World

by Brian Ames

I remember the classroom of my eighth-grade English teacher, Mr. Holmberg. The desks were small, close, cramped in the way I imagined the cockpits of World War I trainers would have been. Their surfaces suggested wingforms, canted planes, cambered for the airflow of education. The desk-top contours invoked the foils of biplanes. In the same manner we possess quadrad faith in the mechanics of flight—lift, gravity, drag, thrust—faith drove Mr. Holmberg's classroom, and thousands of eighth-grade classrooms across America. Better people through education.

On a spring morning our teacher commenced class by lifting an object or, rather, two half objects, for his students to see. His hands trembled slightly. He held two paperbacked halves of *The Pearl*, Steinbeck's novella of evil springing forth from unearned good fortune. The book had been torn in half.

As Mr. Holmberg held the bookhalves forth, he sputtered through tight lips, a red face: "I know who did this." He glared across the classroom of two dozen innocent and one guilty. "I want the person who did this to own up to it. I know who you are, and I want to see you. After class will be fine."

"Rest assured, I know who did this," he promised, and inherent in this twice-repeated phrase was an oath of consequences both terrible and imminent.

My insides crawled not from shame, but from the embarrassment of having been found out, and the surety of pending punishment. I glanced over to the receptacle where I'd dumped the two halves of the paperback after my minor act of vandalism. My eyes snapped back to Mr. Holmberg, knowing he had seen me steal a peek at the trash can. I was relieved to discover him looking elsewhere at the moment. Still, I grew hot in the face, on my neck, chest. But then thought, "If he knows who did it,

why this display for the entire class?" Of course he didn't know—he was on a fishing expedition.

Today, twenty-two years later, I imagine him entering the classroom that morning. It might have been the beginning of the most pleasant day of his life. Or he may have been laboring under untold stresses, exigencies. He may have been evaluating his career as an educator at that exact moment, wondering whether a small paycheck and the long hours were worth it, whether his additional duties as basketball coach would mean utility bills could be paid on time.

I imagine him walking down one of the aisles between desks, looking down at nothing in particular. The opening of the trash can is suddenly in his field of vision. I imagine he sees something bright inside—orange and white. He recognizes it as the cover of *The Pearl*, wonders *What's that doing in there?*

I imagine he stoops to retrieve it and as he lifts, sees the second, bifurcated half underneath the first, surrounded by the plasticine liner and other refuse. He sees the ragged edge of the tear along the paperback spine; for a microsecond, he is confused. *What?*

He thinks. And as he is retrieving first one half of the book and then the other, confusion morphs into comprehension and anger. He holds a small atrocity in his hands. His anger subsides after a few minutes, slides a long, deep distance into sadness, perhaps corrupts into depression.

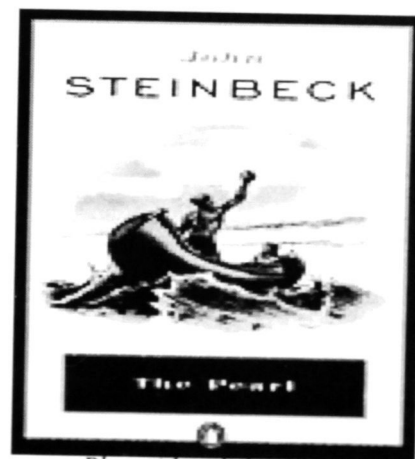


Photo (detail) by Joel Kendall





Photo (detail) by Joel Kendall

In his hands, I imagine the abomination.

My birthstone is, of course, the pearl. I wrote a poem about how pearls are formed. Its first line functions as its title as well, so it reads like this:

"There is a pearl/In my eye that used to be a grain/below the surface of the ocean, the grain/a bit of quartz moving from time/in shifting current./The revolving of the planet and/conditions on the sea's face caused/the current to eddy and pull/the grain into the maw of a shell./Where it was beached on a tender/membrane, which protested the intrusion/and drowned it—an innocent/enough act of self-preservation./In time a woman found the shell, /pinching the meat from inside and noting/the orb, which had grown into/pearlhood. It shone like a small nova."

Stated scientifically, a pearl is the defense of certain types of bivalve mollusks against an intrusion. Unwanted, unasked for, a grain of sand slips across the orifice of one of these shells—that of an oyster, for example. The mollusk reacts by secreting nacre—mother of pearl—the lustrous substance that layers the inner walls of shells. Mother of pearl is composed primarily of aragonite crystals, a mineral form of crystalline calcium carbonate. (The

crystal is orthorhombic—shaped like a rhombus, or, geometrically, as crystals are often described, as an equilateral parallelogram. Which could be a square, and give rise to the succulent notion that from a series of austere squares might derive some object of circular beauty—a sphere of pearl.) A film of nacre coats the grain of sand. Then another, and another, until the sphere becomes stratified like our own earth. A pearl, thus, is a concretion of scar tissue, exactly like a person, me or you. Other concretions in nature: stalagmites, stalactites, finger- and toenails, carcinogenic tumors.



When Kino found the Pearl of the World, he uncorked all kinds of trouble for himself, Juana and little Coyotito. That is one of the lessons of *The Pearl*. When I vandalized a paperback copy of Steinbeck's book in the eighth grade, I uncorked, unwittingly, a heretofore-unknown sort of trouble in my own life—the coil and strike of an Unanswerable Question.

I keep wondering why I did it. I wish I could remember the reason. I have a feeling it is important.

There's a story told by Marines who were present at the fall of Saigon, those last two days,



April 29 and 30, 1975. We all are familiar with the pictures—defining images of rooftop helicopter evacuations that seem to encapsulate the frustration of Vietnam. Operation Frequent Wind was the name given to this military procedure, the evacuation of the U.S. Embassy under Ambassador Graham Martin.

The story goes that Martin wanted to return to his apartment to destroy some sensitive documents, and by this time, Saigon had gone berserk with panic. In spite of the counsel of his security detail, the ambassador insisted on returning to his flat. There, he instructed bodyguards to destroy classified files with thermite and frag grenades. Then Martin turned the grenades on a grand piano that stood in one of the apartment's rooms. He couldn't imagine the ivory keys caressed by the fingertips of North Vietnamese soldiers, fallen into the hands of the enemy. What kind of hideous music would they have made?

The piano, a neutral object and wellspring for the creative, forever silenced. Like my eighth-grade paperback copy of *The Pearl*. At least, ostensibly, Martin had his reasons. I'm still looking for mine.

When a Swissair jetliner, Flight 111, crashed into Peggy's Cove, Nova Scotia, on September 2, 1998, it carried a rare painting in its cargo hold. Pablo Picasso painted *Le Peintre* in March 1967. There's a picture in my mind of the painting, a yard high, a little over two feet wide, supported with framing and soft, protective wrap, in the hold. The picture disintegrates into scraps of canvas and oil paint as the airliner breaks apart. I can see the bits of canvas floating in seawater like disturbed dust, spinning slowly through detritus of the aircraft, through lifesblood. A million and a half dollars worth of canvas and oil enters the food chain.

And no one ever again will stand before and admire the soft blues and earthtones of *Le Peintre*. The voice of this work is forever silenced; only its echo remains in the electronic pixels or dot matrices of reproduction. Like this, of one copy of *The Pearl*, the copy I shorn in half, only an echo re-

mains. It pounds in my ears.

I think of book- and record-burnings and porcelain smashed to shards in bombed-out rubble. Artworks that will never again enervate. I wonder why and come up with no answer at all.



I have seen the Hong Kong pearl markets, which flourish in tight, neon streets. I've walked there in Tsim Sha Tsui and taken the Star Ferry across bright green waters packed with junks to the Central District, lifted strands of pearls to admire them, to feel their coolness, their smoothness, cascade across my fingers and forearms.

I've bargained with the vendors there.

In Nagoya, I once walked five miles across Japan's second largest city to visit the Noritake factory and see how bone china is shaped, fired, painted, glazed. All across this metropolis, every third shop featured cultured pearls.

I purchased a pearl ring for my spouse one day,



Photo (detail) by Joel Kendall



at SeaWorld in San Diego, of all places. It was an act of contrition, tangible evidence of an amends.

Back in the long, insouciant days of the eighth grade, I joined with a classmate in a dangerous prank. After school one day, we slung a single strand of heavy-gage electric-fence wire across a road near our school, then hid in the drainage ditch to see what would happen when an automobile ran through it.

We waited in hiding, keen with anticipation and sprung to run. Then we heard the sound of a low-cycled scooter motor from the end of the road and saw, to our horror, the approach of the school's librarian on a moped—his head and neck unprotected by a windshield. We froze where we should have leapt up to stop him, then we closed our eyes expecting, I suppose, a horrific decapitation. When we opened them, he was through the wire and up the road, no brakelights, no pause, no indication that we had committed potentially lethal mischief. The wire lay at the side of the road, thrown back a little by the force of its snapping, into the ditch. We assumed him oblivious, and ourselves lucky.

No harm, no foul.



A review of Steinbeck's *The Pearl* from Amazon.com's website: "This book couldn't be worse; don't even use it as a doorstep; it'll scare away your visitors. I agree with the other 'pearl haters' anyone who reads this must be fully caught up with their sleep not to drowse off. Do not get the book unless you need firewood! Got it? Okay, if I see another person buy this book, I know the world has problems."

I also thought *The Pearl* was boring in the

eighth grade. I suppose I needed the kind of more direct stimulation provided by literature like *Eerie*, *Famous Monsters of Filmland* or *Vampirella*. Maybe I tore *The Pearl* in half because I was merely restless and had some sort of deficiency of shiny objects, at that moment, with which to distract myself.

Another Amazon.com review: "I had to read *The Pearl* for school and until now all the books I read for school were horrible, but *The Pearl* stood out. I didn't want it to finish. The worst thing about the book was that it was so short. I feel Steinbeck did such a great job, if he was still alive I would shake his hand."

To what can be ascribed the difference? Personal taste at fourteen years old? Perhaps Reader No. 2 discovered something shiny therein to pique his or her interest; something that escaped me at the time. You say to-may-to, I say to-mah-to. Let's call the whole thing off.



I recently re-read *The Pearl*, found it terrific. It made me want to reread all of Steinbeck. It made me wish I had written it, to write something one-twentieth as good myself.

What can I do but say that I am sorry I tore *The Pearl* in half? A pearl wraps beauty around a core of grit. At the center is a black secret. Without it, there is no luminescence. I open my pearl's ink core and show it to all of you. Can I bargain with the act, as if it were a strand of pearls, the price of repatriation negotiable?

So much time has passed; it's *okay* now, isn't it?



Knucklehead Anthem #69: Truisms

by Jarret Keene

I. True Romance

My mistress eyed my nine-year-old son, nude
on the internet, for a dollar bill.
So much for a romantic interlude.
But who can resist taboo-breaking thrills?
Here, where nothing remains confidential,
the terrain is marked with subtle alarms.
Don't trust appearances; superficial
regard masks a face that will do you harm:
The mature babysitter slips your tyke
drugs. The trusted chiropractor stretches
your vertebrae until they pinch like spikes.
Devoted husband? He's a deranged letch.
Sit down at the table, enjoy the feast.
Pick through secret terrors that need release.

II. True Crime

The assassin is a reader of books,
crude and select; unlike other gunmen
he shows a literary acumen.

The quiet wiretapper has deadly looks
and a love of the use of brute force.
She granted her ex a shotgun divorce.

The impostor is an uncertain soul:
He always dons a convincing guise,
yet knows not himself. Just look at his eyes.

The writer drills each thug an inner hole.
Why must characters bare trademark quirks?
Distract from the fact: the plot doesn't work.

III. (The Ballad of) True Confessions

Forgive me, reader, for I have sinned.
I loved someone who sought to do me in.



West Texas Postcards

by J. Greg Young

red tail hawk
side to side
behind the shredder

sirocco wind through
six strand, barbed wire,
e minor chords

midday heat,
windmill stops
to change direction

front porch evening,
thunderhead rumble,
mother shelling peas

October moon,
dead tree fork,
amber coyote eyes

morning snow blanket,
the bobwhite calls
goodnight, goodnight



Photo by Joel Kendall



Wish You Were Here

by H. Bruce McEver

Your first view of the Alps
stepping from the clean Swiss train
proclaims arrival at the very gates of heaven.

Sublime steeples and stupas,
the birth pangs from aeons of geological agony,
command the clouds.
in summer's sun their snow fields and glaciers perspire
spilling a chalky-blue melt
over falls and down cobbled streams.

On a slope below the timberline,
a tanned, gaunt farmer and his wife
turn fresh-cut hay with big-toothed rakes;
their cattle and goats graze high pastures
secure with simple collar bells.

In the village, chalets with geranium boxes
under every window welcome all.
Remember when we were first here
and tried our stumbling student-German
on a friendly innkeeper?
She took one look at us
and offered us a room
for a couple of hours!

Recall the mountains,
us snuggled under a decke,
from the window . . .

like angels
bathing bare-breasted
with their sisters
back at the Frauen Bad
by the Zurichsee.



Donatila's Victory Orchard

by Virgil Suarez

My grandmother keeps order in her garden,
even when the guinea fowl get loose & run
amuck, pecking at the worms in the furrows,
plucking insects from her tomato plants.

This is 1968, nine years after the Revolution,
and my grandmother, Donatila, refuses
to believe this is the way it'll be, such constant
lack of vegetables, meat, the way produce

reappears in the marketplaces. "*Basta ya!*"
She shouts at nobody, except me. I am there
with her when she brings out the bowl
of old rice to feed the chickens, which come

when called, a flutter of wing, a scattering
of feathers. My grandmother stands arms
akimbo, looks out beyond my grandfather's
tin roofed green house, where he keeps his tack,

the one he uses to ride his horse. He's been
gone three days now, out working sugar
cane. She cooks for her children & grandchildren,
and I am standing next to her when she leans

over, praying mantis fast, snatches a chicken
by its neck, wrings it; a storm of ash-gray
feathers explodes into the air, and when she
lets go, it jumps like crazy, *muy loca*,

like *mal de sambito*, a Cuban saying for fits,
some form of the jerks, or something,
and I remember asking why, and she simply
looks at me and says, "*Hay que comer, no?*"



True, we have to eat, but this chicken? Now.

She picks up the bird as though she is picking
up a feather duster, walks inside the house,
boils water, floats the dead bird in the roiling

pot and plucks the feathers. Gold coins, I think,
she is pulling gold slivers from this bird,
some ancient trick I'm now privy to, white
skin showing through in the balding spots.

You will learn to do this, she says. You will learn
to kill what you eat, and once you do, you cannot
forget it. I reach over and pick a clump of wet
feathers, they come off and stick like dead leaves

to my fingers. I am thinking dinner. I am hungry.
My grandmother Donatila keeps the food coming.
My grandmother Donatila gardens in Cuba.
It is 1968. We wait for something to happen.



The Pear Tree

by Charles Edward Brooks

The truth is, that the possession of a grievance is the one state of human blessedness. (Anthony Trollope: The Vicar of Bullhampton)

"But Miss Irene, we don't *want* the pears. We've tried and tried to tell you that, but you just don't believe us. You act like you think we're not tellin' the truth," Lucille Cheek's croaky voice quavered.

"Lucille, it don't have a thing to do with you personally. Nor with Cornelia, either. It's not persons I'm interested in; it's principles. It's justice." Over the low stone wall, Miss Irene Gledge peered through the spinster Cheek sisters, as though focusing her vision on the very Platonic Idea of justice somewhere beyond their corpulent bodies. Over her head, ripe fruit hung on a knotted pear tree. A few heavily laden branches extended over the Cheek property on the other side of the wall.

"Well," Cornelia remarked with a tinge of sarcasm, "it's Lucille and myself *personally* who have to pay our lawyer's bills and get up in the witness stand. We *personally* might have to pay you damages one day—"

Lucille squealed and clapped both hands over her mouth.

"—and see our names in the paper like convicted criminals. Not your principles and high-soundin' ideas." The sarcasm sloughed down into maudlin. "And we were both lookin' forward *so much* to a happy retirement when school lets out next year."

Mutilated by years of litigation, the post-retirement tomorrows that had stretched out before the schoolteacher sisters like a bright plain had long since retreated to the realm of the unreal.

Lucille Cheek tore her hands away from her mouth. "The law is: the pears that fall on our yard

are ours, Miss Irene. No matter where the tree is. Not that we want 'em—we've told you a thousand times that we don't—but they *are* ours!" An angry vermilion surged through the rice powder on the woman's puffy cheeks.

"No, ma'am," retorted Miss Irene Gledge, still looking through and beyond the increasingly agitated sisters. "They are *not*. That's a wrong interpretation of the law. I'm gon' establish that if I have to go to the Supreme Court of the United States to do it."

"Miss Irene," exclaimed Cornelia in a loud voice, "the Supreme Court of the United States has more important things to do. They don't *care* about a fruit tree in a wide spot in the road in North Carolina. For heaven's sake!"

"We'll just see about that, ladies. Good afternoon to you."

"Cornelia, the woman's stark ravin' mad!" wailed Lucille as their neighbor stalked off.

"That's the Lord's truth!" agreed her sister. "But if she keeps goin' on like this *we're* gon' be in the insane asylum long before she is!"



On the second floor of her prim Victorian house, in what had once been her parents' bedroom, Miss Irene Gledge sat on a wooden stool disentangling a thicket of Manila rope. As she gradually freed the rope, she wound it tightly onto a spool. From time to time she paused, leaned toward the window, and squinted down at the Cheek sisters' back yard. Although the high summer day was sweltering outside, the gelid presence of times past chilled the room like a block of ice.

Concentration sharpened the hatchet-like features, which hinted at an admixture of the Native American in the woman's ancestry. Seventy-five years of living had etched a network of lines in the florid face, framed by dishwater-gray hair pulled back in a severe knot. The arthritic fingers still



worked deftly.

Faded blue overalls and a blue calico shirt encased Miss Irene's rugged physique. On a winter's day two decades earlier, her father had donned these very garments to prune the pear tree, fallen from a high limb, and met his death. Both the apparel and the body inside it were clean as a snow-drop.

Next door, Lucille Cheek scudded through the cellar door into the yard. After scrutinizing the walls of Miss Irene's house at some length, she

sidled toward the stone wall dividing the two lots and scooped up two pears from the ground.

"Uh huh!" grunted Miss Irene before raising her voice to a high whine: "No, ma'am, Miss Irene, we don't *want* your pears. We really *don't*." She attacked the last gnarl of rope with gusto. "I'll show those hussies who they're dealin' with, Papa. You can count on me."

A photograph of Judge Gledge, flanked by one of his late spouse, formed the sole adornment of the room's wall space, otherwise covered by stacks of cardboard boxes, spools of rope and cable, lumber, magazines, and books. Twine, scraps of fabric, old clothing packed in mothballs, tidy bundles of letters, sachet bags gone odorless, out-of-fashion shoes polished and stretched on trees, empty medicine vials, chunks of minerals: A miscellany of enormous span filled the boxes, each one labelled clearly in India ink.

The magazines reached back into the first half of the nineteenth century. On the four volumes of Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England* reposed a column of the *Westminster Review*. Some fifty case-books on the law of torts braced up crumbling pillars of century-old political and legal journals.

The five other rooms on the second floor and four of those downstairs possessed a similar topography. All through the house, the silence of stalactites reigned over stockpiles of tools, building materials, disassembled furniture, printed matter, and what-have-you.

When a metallic rapping broke the silence, Miss Irene raised her eyes to Judge Gledge's stern countenance and shrugged, as though disclaiming all responsibility for the disturbance. Her brogan shoes banged hollowly on the stairs



Photo (detail) by Joel Kendall

as she made her way downstairs.

"Miss Irene, I hope I'm not interrupting your afternoon rest."

"No time for rest, Preacher. I'll be restin' soon enough for good—in my grave. So come in."

Dr. McCutcheon, the Presbyterian minister, fixed a determined smile on his features before opening the screen door and passing inside. His hostess led him through the barren hall to her sitting room—less cluttered than the remainder of the house and equipped with a few pieces of fully assembled furniture.

Motioning the visitor into a wicker chair, she asked him point-blank: "What can I do for you?"

The man's smile tautened. "Miss Irene, it's about the pear tree."

"What about it?"

"It's causing a schism in the church."

"The *tree* is?"

"*You* are, Miss Irene."

The woman looked steadily into the minister's eyes and said nothing.

The man went on. "What I'm talking about is *Gledge vs. Cheek*. It's been going on for years now, and there's no settlement in sight. Our communicants have started to take sides. The animosity between the two groups has gotten so bad that it's affecting the life of the church."

"Which side is bigger?"

"That's neither here nor there. The point is that you're treating two fine Christian women cruelly and sowing dissension in Christ's church. Miss Irene, if you had to stand before the throne of God tomorrow, what kind of account of your actions could you give?"

Miss Irene's ice-blue eyes narrowed. "In the first place, Preacher, you can leave the accountin' to me. I'll draw up a balance sheet that'll do me proud, on this earth or anywhere else. In the second place, people who steal are not fine Christians. And remember: We're talkin' about two women with a good education and responsibility for the minds of the young. In the third place, *Gledge vs.*

Cheek is a civil, not a criminal suit. It don't concern a soul except the parties to the action, their lawyers, and the bench. Other folks can mind their own blessed business!"

The man of God's smile sagged. "Well, since you mention the lawyers, Miss Irene: Your nephew Tom isn't a bit enthusiastic about this idea of yours to go see the State Attorney General. There're already too many people involved in the suit without bringing *him* in. And Tom'd be mighty glad if he didn't have to spend so much of his time representing your interests in the litigation."

"Did *he* tell you that?"

"Not in so many words. But that was the impression he gave the last time I talked to him."

The woman stuck out her lower jaw. "I don't believe for a minute that he feels like that. If he did, he'd be unworthy of his grandfather. Unworthy of the family name."

The preacher raised his voice in desperation. "Miss Irene, we all have to learn to rise above petty things. To ask questions about the meaning of life and God's will for us. How else can we get through the days, the years that we're allowed—or condemned—to spend on this earth?"

"How indeed?" Miss Irene rose from her chair with the agility of a much younger woman. "Preacher, I've got a lot of work to do, and I know you'll excuse me. But wait here just a minute. I'm gon' fetch a jar of pear preserves for Miz McCutcheon."

"Folks, this is Merry Oaks. We'll stop here for ten minutes. You can get yourself a drink or whatever you want to do." The ancient sound system rendered the bus driver's voice even more twangy than it was in nature.

The score of passengers filed obediently out of the bus and into the Merry Oaks General Store, which also served as the community's post office and bus station. The aroma of freshly ground coffee spiced the forlorn smell of chicken feed hanging in the air.



As soon as the first passenger crossed the threshold, the storekeeper began to call from behind the counter like a circus barker: "Miss Irene Gletch. Miss Irene Gletch. They's a telephone call in the office for Miss Irene Gletch."

A robust septuagenarian, as proud as Lucifer, stepped up smartly. "The name is Gledge. D G E."

"Yes, ma'am, Miss Gletch. It's in thar." The man pointed to a door at the back of the premises.

A chair and a rolltop desk constituted the only furnishings of the storekeeper's tiny office. The single window looked out on a desolate array of weeds and dismantled cars. Above the desk, the drawing on the wall calendar depicted a pear orchard in blossom. A pile of chewing tobacco lying just beneath the calendar scented the stuffy atmosphere.

"Irene Gledge!" the woman barked into the telephone.

"It's Tom, Aunt Irene." An unaccustomed sharpness edged the words of her nephew and attorney.

"Is somebody dead?"

"No, nothing like that. It's good news. Wonderful news. You can take the next bus home. There's no need for you to bother the Attorney General now."

"What on earth?!"

"The Cheeks have conceded."

Within seconds, the woman's ruddy coloring shaded off to a livid pallor. The mouth fell open; saliva trickled over the hanging lower lip onto her cotton print dress. Her free hand clutched at the rim of the desktop.

"Aunt Irene?" On the battered telephone, the lawyer's mellow voice sounded tinny.

"What did you say?" Miss Irene screamed into the mouthpiece. "Conceded?"

"Why, yes. They've agreed to the damages we've been trying to get out of them for years. It's

all over. Now we can turn our attention to other things."

"Other things, indeed!" She threw the instrument onto the desk and began to rock back and forth in the swivel chair. The tinny voice contin-



Photo by Joel Kendall

ued to issue from the telephone, but the woman's shrieks overlaid it.

"So *Gledge vs. Cheek* is finished, just like that. A tissue of mist and nothin'. In a back room of the Merry Oaks General Store. At eleven thirty on a summer mornin'."

The storekeeper jerked the door open and gawked at the raving woman. A knot of curious locals and bus travellers quickly formed behind him.

An ancient black woman articulated what all of them were thinking: "She done lost her mind."

"It's old Judge Gledge's daughter," explained the bus driver with a perky smile. "The Gledges always *was* kindly peculiar."

"My own nephew!" raged Miss Irene, jouncing in the chair and beating on the desktop with her fists. "He settled. He just left me here like to die for hunger in the place where I am: for there is no more bread in the city."

"They's somebody talkin' on the phone," observed the black woman.

Falteringly, as though expecting to be attacked, the storekeeper edged into the office. With a quick lunge, he grabbed the telephone receiver and re-



treated as far from the screaming woman as the length of the cord permitted. Rolling his eyes at the silent audience, he pressed a palm tightly over one ear and began to speak with the man at the other end of the line.

The bus pulled away from the Merry Oaks station ten minutes late. Trussed up with manila rope like a calf on the way to market, Miss Irene Gledge occupied the long back seat all by herself. She no longer ranted and raved, for wide strips of white gauze had put her mouth out of commission. The sturdy body lay slumped in utter passivity. The ice-blue eyes, like a light bulb going dead, flickered with occasional, ever rarer coruscations. Their expression bespoke the confusion of someone listening to echoes in a labyrinth. The passengers who looked at her shuddered. From a seat in the next row, the black woman watched to make sure that the prisoner did not budge.

On the outskirts of the capital, the bus made an unscheduled stop at an ornate cast-iron gate. Beyond the bars, a drive swept up a hill to a grim brick building. The driver and two male volunteers removed Miss Irene from the bus and hustled her toward an entrance in the building with a sign reading *ADMISSIONS* above it.

Once through the double glass doors, the driver hurried to the counter. "Delivery from Merry Oaks," he announced cheerfully. "I reckon her nephew's called by now."

"We're expectin' her," said a woman in white.

Very quickly, other figures in white uniforms seized the delivery and disappeared into the bowels of the building with it.

"Let's go," cried the driver to his two passengers. "We're late already. Course, now we won't have to make a detour to let anybody off at the



Photo (detail) by Joel Kendall

Attorney General's office."

Early the next morning, when the bus driver reported for work, he was handed a hand-knitted shopping bag. The cleaning staff had found it under a seat in his vehicle the night before.

"Well, now," he grinned at the maintenance manager, "let's see what we got here."

Pulling out a thick sheaf of legal-sized paper, he perused the first page. The heading, in heavy type, read: *Gledge vs. Cheek*.

"It's hers," he announced. "That woman that went crazy yesterday. I'll take it down to her nephew on my run this mornin'."

Reaching once more into the knitted bag, the driver extracted two quart-size Mason jars. Even without reading the labels, neatly lettered in India ink, he saw at once what they contained: golden, sugary home-made pear preserves.

The Seamstress (After Roethke)

by Rynn Williams

She unrolls bolts,
lets down cuffs, tacks on snaps,
tucks and shirrs piqué into place.

Oh how she can snip
errant threads and taut armholes,
firm the bust of a tired jacket,

or make a skirt sing
with a sprinkle of sequins,
pressing life into remnants

with her battered machine.
Or sit all night sewing schoolclothes,
her houseslippered foot fast on the pedal.

One patch of cloth
jams at the feeder tread,
gnarls from the hidden spool

a thick, thread-mangled clot;
yet still the cool hands
keep kneading in velvet;

the bright shuttle bobs.
The Singer clatters all night
in her lair of lost pins

and discarded snippets,
swaths of sewn fabric
pulse down like a waterfall,

down past the table legs,
quaking with motor-force,
close to her bare knees

(that right foot treading wildly)
banners of red silk
swirl and billow,

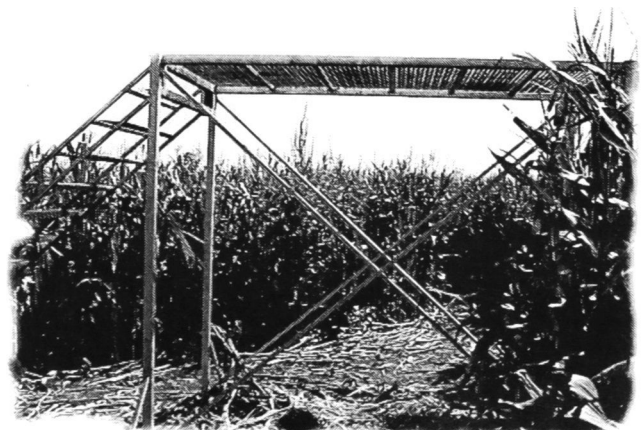
and everything,
everything
shines.



Weatherford's Corn MAIZE



The maze, operated by Liebscher Farms of Weatherford, stood just north of I-40 for the summer and fall of 2001. The maze, consisting of 9-foot tall corn stalks, contained 2.5 miles of twists and turns. For most people, the maze took an hour to complete.





*all photos by
Carlos Gauna*



Belle Starr

by Richard Dixon

As mean, lowdown and cutthroat as they come,
she gave as good as she got. Just ask
husband Sam, who for thirty years bore
the scars of her slashing knife.

Hidden back in the hard reaches of Robber's Cave,
she harbored outlaws from three territories.
The caught ones got hung by Judge Parker over
to Fort Smith. Homely, harsh face a liability,
it didn't stop Cole Younger. She once killed a man
who joked about putting an American flag over
her head and give her a poke for patriotism.

When the time came and the laws had infested
her once-safe haven, she packed up, moved north
50 miles to Whitefield. In February of '89 she turned
up murdered, her killer never identified. In April
that same year the government opened up
the Oklahoma Territory for settlement, the beginning
of another end.



Photo (detail) by Joel Kendall

Shooting a Monkey

by Jerry Craven

One afternoon I discovered the Andes Mountains. They sprang from the savannah like a dim mist, ephemeral and ghost-like, only a weak shadow darker than the sky. Sue laughed in disbelief when I told her I had seen the mountains.

Dad had said they were out there in a place called Columbia. He pointed beyond the back of our house. "They're out west. Some natives in the village claim that on a clear day you can see them from here." He said it like he knew they were liars.

Felez had never lied to me, and in my mind Felez represented the natives. So I trusted natives more than Dad seemed prone to do. Just a year or so older than my brother Carl, Felez was our best friend in El Tigrito. He knew everything about the savannah and, I discovered later, everything about the river jungle at the other end of the village. He taught me and Carl how to eat snake fruit and other weird berries that grow among the savannah grasses and down by the river.

I told Carl my opinion on the matter of trust, and he said my faith didn't show good judgment. "Felez speaks no English," Carl said, "and we know only one word of Spanish. He could lie until he was blue in the face and you'd never know." Carl looked smug.

I believed him in most things, so I didn't argue. But it seemed to me that if Felez ever turned blue in the face I would pick up on the fact. And now that I knew what the color change meant—if

he ever had one—I would know him for a liar. Never before had he turned blue, so Carl's assessment did nothing to shake my belief that neither Felez nor the other villagers lied near as much as Dad seemed to think.

It wasn't too much to believe Carl about Felez turning blue. After all, there had been lizards in our yard in Corpus Christi Texas that would be brown one minute and green the next.

Carl thought we knew only one Spanish word: *mira*. It meant *lizard*, the special kind that needed to be killed. Felez taught us that word when he introduced me and Carl to the joys of lizard hunting in the savannah grass. Armed with stones, we stalked lizards like cats. Most of those we found were good ones, or so I assumed from the admonition of Felez's emphatic "No, no, no." He always wagged his finger like the windshield wiper of a car during a rainstorm. Dad said that finger wagging was the Venezuelan version of shaking your head, meaning *no*. No, do not kill this lizard, for it is a good one, he meant.

I counted wagging my finger as the second Spanish word I knew, after *mira*, for bad lizard. But I didn't tell Carl because I knew he would say sign language didn't count.

Most lizards scuttled off into the grasses, eager to avoid us, but not the special kind that we pounded to death with stones. Whenever Felez spotted a bad lizard, he became excited and pointed. "Mira, mira, mira!" he always shouted. That meant

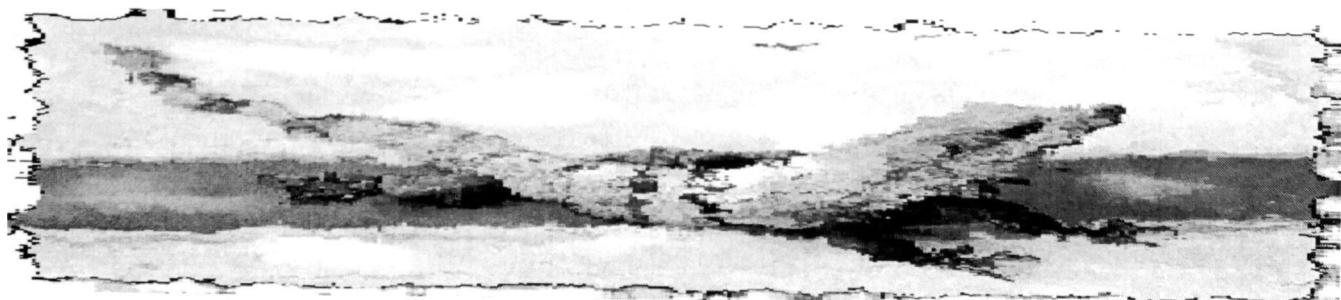


Photo (detail) by Joel Kendall



we had found one of the bad kinds of lizards, and it was our duty to kill it. More often than not, the bad *mira* turned toward us and opened its mouth as if it meant to tell us something. Carl thought maybe it wanted to bite one of us. As soon as it stopped and opened its mouth, we got it with the stones.

Felez called the *mira* something else that I couldn't make much sense of. It sounded like "quaint mother" to me, which was stupid. Every time Sue or Mom used *quaint* they meant a native house made from palm fronds. "How quaint," they liked to say whenever they saw one. They never said that about the houses with corrugated zinc roofs and painted walls, and they never used the word when they spoke of lizards.

So why would Felez accuse a *mira* of being the mother of one of those funny houses? Maybe, I reasoned, *quaint* meant something else. So I asked my sister, Sue.

She was always glad to teach me words. There was a catch, though: she'd want to know where I heard the word. Every time she asked, I got a little jumpy, for there were words she didn't like, ones she said I ought not ever use. Carl said not to ask a girl about those kinds of words. The words that drew Sue's ire, the ones that made her turn away in a huff were ones Carl always knew. He told me about them away from the house or else in hushed tones. Then later he and I could hurl the nasty words at one another like grassburrs when we were out of hearing range of our family. The nastiest words we knew were *gorilla grunt* and *pickled assholes*.

We learned those words from Uncle Ray, who wasn't our uncle even if we were supposed to call him that. We learned them on a quail hunt when two birds that Uncle Ray shot fell into a bushy place at the edge of the river jungle. Carl and I couldn't find them, which was okay by me since it was our job to get them and wring their necks if they were still flopping. Uncle Ray came over to help look, and he couldn't find them, either, and he got a little out of sorts over the loss. That was

when he said the nasty words:

Gorilla grunt fried in snot;
three pickled assholes tied in a knot.

Carl and I laughed. Uncle Ray glanced back toward the pickup at Dad. "Don't say those words around your daddy. He isn't so fond of swearing in any form. And your mother would have a conniption fit if you said bad words."

I got Carl aside and asked what a *conniption fit* was. He looked at me like I was the dumbest little kid who ever lived. "It means she would get real upset and maybe grab you up and give you a good shaking."

Mom had never done that to any of us, and I for sure didn't ever want to get her mad enough to go into one of those strange fits. I watched my language around her and Sue.

So when I asked Sue about *quaint*, and she demanded, "Where did you learn that word?" I flinched, thinking maybe I said something like *gorilla grunt* that would get me in trouble. But my panic lasted only a moment, for I remembered where I had heard the word, and it wasn't a source that supplied me with words nasty enough to cause anyone to have a conniption fit.

"I heard it from Mom. And from Felez."

"No. Not Felez. He doesn't know any English."

I explained about the bad lizard, *mira*, about how it tried to talk to us or maybe bite us, about how we killed it with stones, and about how Felez called it a quaint mother.

"*Mira*," Sue informed me in the special tone she used when she believed she'd caught me being stupid, "means *look*."

"Nope. It means lizard. A bad lizard. One with stripes, and it's a little bit fatter than most of the lizards around."

"Don't be silly. When Felez sees one of those lizards, he says, 'look, look, look,' only he says it in Spanish, and he points where he wants you and Carl to look."

"Bad lizard. It means bad lizard." I'd had enough misinformation for the day from Sue, so I



ended the conversation by stomping away. She laughed in a loud mean way, and I could almost feel the barbs of her cackle digging into my back.

It was that kind of laugh she attacked me with when I told her about the Andes Mountains sticking up from the savannah behind our house. "Clouds. You're seeing clouds. The savannah doesn't have any mountains."

It was over in those mountains that Uncle Ray had watched native people hunt monkeys. He said they ate them, though that didn't seem likely to me. Nobody could eat a monkey, even a roasted one, because they are too hairy to make a good meal. Uncle Ray didn't try to eat the one he killed.

It was a red howler monkey. I didn't see him kill it, which is a good thing. Just hearing about it gave me nightmares for weeks.

"They started howling," Uncle Ray said, "just

as I put my sights on a ten-point deer. It ran away the second the noise started, and my temper flashed at the monkeys. Without thinking, I raised my rifle and popped off a shot at a movement high in a mango tree." His voice became thin.

I nudged the door open a tiny bit more, hoping to be able to see his face, not wanting to miss any part of his story. Uncle Ray had great facial expressions when he told stories, only usually the stories were funny. This one scared me.

Earlier, he had made it clear that Carl and I needed to trundle off to bed before he launched into his hunting tale. Mom made us go to our room and told us to go to sleep. Carl obliged fast enough, but I wanted to hear the story. So I had slipped out of bed and knelt beside the door, working at opening it just enough to hear but not enough to get caught.

"It was an unlucky shot," Uncle Ray said. "I couldn't have picked off a monkey like that if I had been trying. But a quick shot from the hip knocked that monkey out of the tree. I went for a closer look, still mad about missing the deer and not a bit sorry for having shot the monkey."

Uncle Ray's voice cracked. "It sat on the ground, muttering like a child. Blood ran from a hole in its side, and it picked up bits of leaves and twigs, stuffing them in the hole like it was trying to stop the flow of blood."

"I thought you used to watch natives hunt monkeys," Dad said.

"I did, up in the Andes Mountains. But that was different. Those boys were very good. When they brought down a monkey, it landed on the ground dead. I had never seen a wounded one before. I felt terrible. Hell, I still feel terrible. I'll never hunt deer again. I'll never hunt anything larger than a bird, so long as I live. Monkeys can howl in the river jungle all they want, and I'll never complain about it."



Photo (detail) by Joel Kendall

Our house sat on the top of a slope, a long gradual incline that lifted from a jungle like the one where Uncle Ray shot the monkey. The slope ran through the village and peaked in what I regarded as just the right place. We could look down—sort of—at the village that Dad said was named after a baby tiger, El Tigrito. And we could look down the other direction at a vast expanse of savannah grasses into what Sue said was a valley. Our back door opened in the direction of Columbia. Outside our back door was some bare dirt we called our yard, a fence, and just beyond the fence stood a bent little tree called a chaparro. It grew leaves rougher than sandpaper. Dad said the native women in the village used those leaves for scrubbing dirty pots, though I never saw anyone do that. He also said some people used the leaves for toilet paper, which made no sense to me at all. Beyond the chaparro was nothing but prairie, a sea of savannah grass that in my mind ran all the way to Columbia, to the tribes of people who killed monkeys with such efficiency that they hit the ground dead.

After we heard about the mountains, Carl and I took to climbing the chaparro to study the horizon for signs of the Andes. Then one day I saw them, vast and blue, shimmering in the afternoon heat above the sea of savannah grass. The sight filled me with awe and with a wild kind of excitement, like I had just caught a glimpse of God or maybe the tooth fairy.

But Sue laughed when I told her about the mountains.

She did go to the back door for a cursory glance toward Columbia before dismissing my information and my enthusiasm and me with a sharp peal of laughter. But I knew what I had seen. Carl saw it, so that made it real beyond question. Dad would see it when he came home from work, and I would have the last laugh at Sue.

But she spotted the Andes before he got home, and when she seemed as awed as I had been, I forgave her on the spot for ever laughing at me about

anything. Dad saw them, too, as did Mom. We gathered beside the chaparro and looked at the magic mountains pushing up from the savannah, Carl, Sue, Mom, Dad and me. We all made sounds of amazement and appreciation, and we drew together in what had to be the best moment in my life since arriving in Venezuela.

That evening, Ray Bays came over. He was Dad's best friend, or so Carl and I figured. Dad is the one who told us kids to call him "Uncle Ray." While we sat outdoors and watched the night hawks flip through the twilight like pointed shadows, Sue said, "Daddy, what does *mira* mean?"

"Look. It means look," Uncle Ray said.

"It doesn't mean *lizard*?" I asked.

"Nope."

"Is that right, Dad?" I asked, though it wasn't necessary. Uncle Ray knew almost as much as Dad, I had discovered.

"*Mira*?" Dad said. "It means look. *Mira las montañas*. Look at the mountains."

I pondered the information, realizing that I knew only one Spanish word, after all—the sign language of finger-wagging that meant *no*. "Then what does *quaint mother* mean? Does it mean bad lizard?"

"Quaint mother?" Dad sounded astonished. Sue laughed, but this time it didn't sound mean.

"That's what Felez called a *mira*, uh, I mean a lizard. The bad kind that has to be killed with rocks. It likes to stop and scare me by opening its mouth, like it wants to say something."

"Or bite you," Carl interjected.

"Yeah. Or bite. It has stripes."

"I know that lizard," Dad said. "The natives call it *cuarenta matas*."

"Felez says *quaint mother*," I corrected.

"*Cuarenta matas* means forty murders," Dad said. "The people around here think the lizard is so poisonous that one bite will kill you forty times over."

"Good lord!" Mom said. "Are there poisonous lizards around our house?"



Dad said there were not. He said one of the cuarenta matas bit him once and he hadn't died a single time, yet. "They only kill people who die easy," he said.

"You boys might ease up some on killing those lizards," Uncle Ray said. "They're harmless, even if they try to scare you by opening their mouths. The only reason to kill a wild creature is if you need to eat it."

"Eat a lizard?" I said. "Nasty!" I imagined picking up one of the flattened lizards, bloody and spiked with dirt and grass, and taking a bite out of it.

"He means cooked," Carl explained. "You clean and cook something you kill before you eat it."

Later, when Dad showed us how to gather cashew nuts and roast them in their shells, I remembered Carl's explanation. I figured I could wash a squashed lizard, put it on a stick and set it in the fire beside the nuts, then rake it out when it was good and brown. It sounded edible enough. I'd eaten worse things.

Such as the snake fruit, for example. Felez showed me and Carl how they grew on twiggy little plants among the savannah grasses. When they were ripe, the outside turned bright yellow. You could pry them open to get to the dozen or so red berries inside, which Felez said were good to eat. He said it with sign language, anyway. I didn't like snake fruit much, but they were interesting to eat, so I always tried a few when we came across them.

On a family picnic at the edge of the river

jungle, I tried to show Mom how to eat a snake fruit. That's what Carl called them. The fact is, we didn't know the proper name of the yellow globes. "You crack it open with your fingernails," I said, showing Mom the technique for getting at the red berries inside.

"What do you do with them?" she asked.

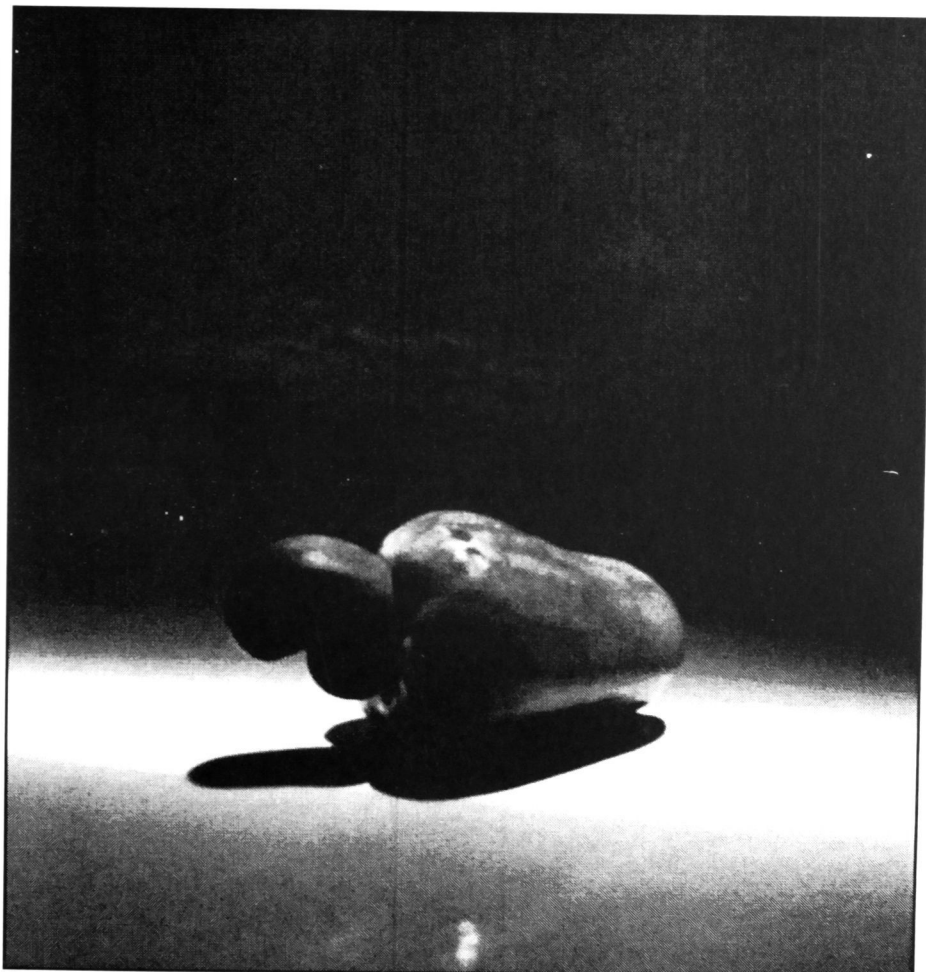


Photo by J. Stoffers

"Eat them." I popped the berries into my mouth. "No! Spit those out. Now."

I swallowed. "They don't taste too good..." I said. Mom cut off the words by snatching me up, flipping me upside down, and trying to put her finger into my mouth.

"Open your mouth," she said over and over. "I have to make you vomit. Those berries might be poisonous."

I wanted to tell her that I had eaten them plenty of times, that if they were poisonous, they only killed people who died easy. But if I opened my mouth, she would get her finger inside to touch my throat and make me vomit.

"Gorman," she called to Dad. He must have heard the panic in her voice, because he got over to us fast. So did Carl and Sue. "Tell him to open his mouth. He just ate some poisonous berries."

"Mmmmpht, Nnnnnhh," I said, dangling upside down, struggling to keep her finger out of my mouth. I held out the fruit for Carl to see. "Tttttlllll," I said.

"Snake fruit," Carl said. "He ate a snake fruit. We eat those all the time. Felez showed us."

"I think it's okay, honey," Dad said.

"Snake fruit?" Mom set me down. Her voice came out shaky. "Are they good to eat?"

"No," I said. "They don't taste good at all."

"I like them," Carl said.

It took me some minutes to recover from being snatched up like that. Mom had scratched my gums with her fingernail and I had to contend with the gross taste of salty blood. But I didn't dare tell her or she would probably put some icky medicine in my mouth or maybe try to put a bandage across the top of my teeth.

"Jerry," she said, gripping my arm in a way that meant I needed to pay close attention, "don't ever eat berries unless you ask me or your dad if it's safe to do so. Do you understand why?"

"Yes. I should never eat strange berries, or you will have a conniption fit."

"That's not what I said." Mom shook her head. "But it's close enough."

Dad tried a snake fruit. He was of the opinion that only a starving man or a little boy could stand to eat them. Or maybe a snake. "They're almost as bad as cashew fruit," he said. He had once proclaimed that cashew fruit tasted like a cross between green persimmons and kerosene.

But he was wrong. Cashew fruit were good. Puckery, maybe, and sour—but good. They grew

on bushes where the savannah and the river jungle met. The fruit looked like Christmas bells, red and yellow, with gigantic brown clappers hanging on the bottom. The clappers were thick husks that housed the cashew nuts.

Dad showed us how to pluck the husks from the fruit and put them into the embers of a campfire. When they began to crack and pop, we raked them out of the fire and cracked them open. Inside was the best-tasting nut ever to grow on the earth. It seemed to me that they might go pretty well with one of those quaint mother lizards, if it was roasted. Dad said the natives ate iguanas, and they were nothing but over-grown lizards. Probably they roasted them.

Eating cashew nuts was a delicious ceremony when we did it as a family on weekend picnics beneath gigantic mango trees and river palms. Dad drove us across the savannah, we kids bouncing about in the back of the pickup, watching for a good spot of shade among the trees where the river jungle thinned out to meet the great savannah. Sometimes while we ate, we looked to the west to see if the day were clear enough for us to get a glimpse of the blue outline of the Andes Mountains lifting Columbia high above Venezuelan savannah.

I always kept a watch out for red howler monkeys, but never saw any. Maybe after Uncle Ray shot one of them, all the monkeys moved deep into the river jungle. I told Carl that if I could just find them, maybe I could figure out a way to tell them how sorry Uncle Ray was and that he would never shoot a monkey again.

Carl said it was a dopey idea, that I could no more talk to a monkey than a quaint mother lizard could talk to us, that the monkeys would see my mouth moving the same way we saw the lizard open its mouth, and like as not, Carl said, the monkeys wouldn't know I was trying to talk to them. "They'd think you wanted to bite one of them," he said.



Wildlings

by Lois Beebe Hayna

Gratuitous gardens of scrawny sunflowers,
purple asters, prickly poppies,
and goldenrod blaze the roadsides.

Thousands of outcast flowers
bloom their scruffy hearts out
for the pleasure of insignificant
butterflies that hover
like unstemmed flowers above
the tethered petals.

Brash as in-your-face
little kids who never know
when enough's enough,
they scribble the summer fields
crayon-bright, tucking
stowaway seeds
in the wind's pockets

making certain their next
and yet the next
generations of brazen waifs
inherit the earth.



Photo by J. Stoffers



The All-Time Traveling Haiku All-Stars

by Bruce McCandless III

Turns out heaven runs
390 to center, on
grass grown soft as silk.

You pick your own squad
from the best that played the game.
I call dibbs on these:

LF *Ty Cobb*

Buy him his own bus.
His hook slides scarred third basemen:
Spit has more remorse.

3B *Pete Rose*

Used extra large face
to knock down infield screamers.
Tough. (Could room with Cobb.)

CF *Willie Mays*

As near perfect as
anyone sans wings can be.
He had magic bones.

RF *Babe Ruth*

Cuchulain reborn.
Invented long-ball, made game
home for hero-feats.

C *Josh Gibson*

His shots never soared:
they cleared fences on a line,
telegraphic truths.



Photo (detail) by Joel Kendall



1B *Lou Gehrig*

The gamer's gamer.
Hammered baseballs daily, for
almost fourteen years.

2B *Rogers Hornsby*

His '24 mark
may be expansion-proof, the
horse-hide minded crank.

SS *Ozzie Smith*

At short, he covered
more earth than the average
ice age. Hit some, too.

P *Walter Johnson*

Idaho's phenom
threw faster than eyes could see.
Some elbows are blessed.

Power. Pitching. Speed.
Everything a great club needs.
With Ruth away from

nightclubs, whiskey, dames,
this nine could take on seraphs,
battle every frame:

barring rapture or
odd home field hops, might even
force a seventh game.



Aunt Effie

by Ken Robertson

"Clem took advantage of me," Effie explained
the bulging taffeta folds of her wedding gown.
Conceived in the soft hollows of the haystack
behind Grandpa's ramshackle barn,
that early child became the first
of nine born to their union.

At holiday family feasts,
after the men and youngsters were fed
and the women sat to eat and gab,
Effie complained to Clem's sisters,
married with families of their own.
"Clem took advantage of me," she said.

At forty-one, freed by early menopause
from her biennial birth cycle, and restless,
Effie bobbed her hair and took a job in Lawton,
working weekends while her girls kept house.
Clem, quietly nodding his agreement,
gave her his best team to travel to and fro.

In town, she met a twenty-year-old soldier boy,
trim and tanned from the Field Artillery,
whose hungry look and urgent needs
refired the passion of her lost youth
in short, intense liaisons after work
in a cut-rate room at the Hotel Geronimo.

"I love him, Clem, and I'm a-leaving you," she said,
"and taking Annie with me"—the youngest, not yet four.
Clem glared at her like a caged eagle
with talon hands clenching and unclenching
on the worn top rung of the kitchen chair,
gulped down his fury and fled to stride the fields.



He returned at dusk, grim-faced with his decision.
"Take little Annie, the rest will stay with me.
Get your things together. I'm taking you
into town this very dad-blamed night.
Don't want no common slut a-sleeping here,
corrupting these fine younguns."

Harvest over, Clem hired a Frisco boxcar and
moved his possessions three counties north to the
red plains that split the Canadian River branches,
far from the reminding sight of Fort and soldiers.
He worked rented land until his offspring scattered
one by one like thistle seeds on sweeping prairie wind.

Trained, the soldier boy was shipped to fight,
to fire the French field guns in Meuse-Argonne.
"Effie, we'll marry when I get home," he wrote.
Back home in South Carolina, he forgot his promise
after bedding an eighteen year old virgin girl
impatient to leave home and start a family.

Around the corner from the Hotel Geronimo,
catching a break from the laundry's steamy heat,
a lined and painted Effie coughs lungs clear,
stamps out a cigarette, and huskily explains
to the gossip young presser's curious ears.
"That soldier boy took advantage of me," she claims.



The House Wren

by Terri Brown-Davidson

I remember when Lulu Mae was born. There was nothing to her, Momma said. A little scrap of a girl with a face like a wrinkled sausage-case and a clean bald sweep of a head oversized, painfully swollen, as if the brain were struggling to escape from her skull. Which turned out to be true, didn't it?

This story begins in winter, when the snow around Yaddo melts into the slushy awful yellow dogs leave sometimes in urinating trails. This story begins in winter, when the brilliant bursts of crimson roses shut their mouths, bow their heads, wither and go black and die. This story begins in winter, when the river freezes over and Carson huddles on the bank in her baggiest pair of jeans and a faded, ivory, fisherman's sweater, her pasty face bumpy from cold, the thermos of hour-old sherry trembling in her strong, veiny hands.

This story begins in winter because in winter I was born.

I don't know what made me hate her. I do know that I loved her, too. Though Linda doesn't believe that. Though Carson hadn't spoken to me years before she died, not since she sent me that postcard from New York with a greenshadowed Statue of Liberty, perfectly eyeless, gazing off into some netherworld of space. She'd had another stroke and I saw once the photo with her hunched over like a sparrow fluttering into spasms, her gigantic head shaking, her eyes hooded, luminously dark with a suffering I'll never be able to imagine. I heard the photographer had to prop her up, again, again, again, for that shot, because her crippled body kept slipping down. But she didn't look propped. Still, that's ice water under the bridge, isn't it? Since she's dead and Linda has to feed me hot spoonfuls of bourbon every night and still I can't forget.

This story begins in winter.

This story ends in winter.

Or will end when I'm dead.

But there are unfathomable mysteries attached to the human heart. That's what Linda says and Linda should know because she's a licensed therapist, an M.A. in sociology and psychology too, with a burgeoning family practice. And she possesses exactly the perky attitude that makes patients love her. I watched her work, once, behind a one-way mirror, when I was still strong enough to climb out of bed without help. Linda was counseling a family where the youngest girl, a fifteen year old, claimed she was addicted to sex. Linda seated the family in a circle of folding chairs and made them confess their deepest, most impenetrable secrets connected to envying their daughter, who, at fifteen, was a precociously beautiful girl, and within the hour Linda had the entire family sobbing out their mutual forgiveness, mutual dependence, the mother and father clutching hands, uttering *mea culpa*'s, the beautiful, tear-wracked daughter vowing she'd renounce men and sex forever to regain the love of her family.

That's what Linda does. Some call it a living. But I know it's not reality.

Reality is this king-sized bed which Linda bought for us when we were young and passionate and I'd wake to her mouth pressed tightly over mine, like a cat's sucking lifebreath from an infant. Now, when Linda accidentally touches my arm, I freeze like Nanook of the North and burn like a dozen devils at that brush of skin against skin, which the doctors claim is a strange symptom for my disease, though, in my mind, the larger disease is *life*. Reality is lying in this bed day after day, hour after hour, until the sky goes dead, leaden, and shineless as warped tin, the mustiness of my body rising to layer my face, and then Linda arrives home at five, cooks us a copper potful of bean-with-ham soup, and, with a single, powerful grunt, lifts my bird-weight body in her arms, carries me out to the living room couch, watches TV with me



quietly, respectfully, though, to me, it's a little like enjoying the company of a corpse for the little I have to say and Linda would be better off with someone younger, stronger, healthier, *purier*, yet Linda mutters only "hush" when I say such things, tells me she loves me, tells me I'm uttering nonsense, and we sit that way for three hours or more until Linda, still silent, wipes my mouth, brushes my teeth, sits me on the toilet, carries me back to bed.

And oh God I wish it hadn't happened and oh God I wish she'd forgiven me when she was alive but it doesn't really matter now because Carson's been dead for years and still I can't forget, still I can't forgive myself, and, though I know Carson herself never felt this way, sometimes I pray I'd never been born.

And sometimes I tell Linda it's the rosebushes that led me astray and sometimes I tell her it was Truman or those long walks Carson loved to take through the woods or my momma's favoring Lulu Mae but when I say such things, when I become particularly excited and repeat "I wish I were dead," Linda gets depressed and is likely to bear me back to our room, tuck me into bed, slam or close softly the door.

So I've learned to shut up about that part of my life.

But I'll never forget, not even when I'm dust.

It was winter and the rosebushes which, in spring, had bloomed in riots of yellow or pink or scarlet, their fat mouths popped open in Bacchean shouts, were bagged silent, tied with cords. Carson was there, though it was unusual for her to travel in winter because, while she loved and exclaimed over snow, she reacted toward subzero temperatures more finickily than a cat. Carson was at Yaddo, sans Reeves, to finish *The Member of the Wedding* and all of us, including Truman and Katherine Anne, were convinced it would be her masterpiece, despite its abbreviated length: I'd read portions of it in manuscript, and, like most of Carson's work, it struck me as splendidly lyrical,

perfectly odd, joyous and chantlike and true. But Carson was feeling poorly that spring, her tissuepaper chest wracked with a cold seguing into pneumonia, communal breakfasts and seven-course dinners alike punctuated with the rasp of her cough.

And me. What was I doing there? At Yaddo, for God's sake?

Now, with the goosedown comforter heaped over me because, though it's seventy-five in this house, Linda's convinced I'll die of the cold, with my feet in their booties pressed down beneath the three sheets, one blanket, and comforter, toes purple at their tips from lack of circulation, isn't it difficult to remember? Because I'm not a writer and never aspired to be and yet there I was, sharing eggs over easy and oilblack coffee with Truman



Photo (detail) by Joel Kendall



Capote, who kept tugging, with elegant fingers, his duckfluffed head of hair; with several dark-eyed poets, perverse in their silences, I couldn't identify then, can't recall now; with Katherine Anne Porter, who dressed regally as the queen of Egypt, that blonde, patrician head set off on a white-column neck and oh the flowing jewel-toned dresses and oh the silk scarves she flung around her throat to make a "fashion statement," though I couldn't translate for anyone to save my life what that statement might've been, except "Ouch: my scarf's too tight"

No, I wasn't a writer, yet I'd wrapped up a little handwritten manuscript of poems, mostly doggerel, verses with titles like "Autumn Dusk" and "Morning-Glory Rapture," scrawled my name on a cover sheet, then, beneath it, wrote in clearer, larger letters, "the sister of Carson McCullers," and sent that manuscript in to the Yaddo residency-fellowship committee, begging abjectly for admission.

At least they had the decency to let a month pass before they telegraphed their congratulations.

Now, for some people the idea of Yaddo is akin to Heaven in that near-silent, white-uniformed people prepare fabulous, exotic meals at any writer-in-residence's request, and the Mansion akin to Heaven because, in its austerity, squareness, brown-bricked grandeur, it's truly a visionary sight, a magnificent edifice towering up, though it's not exactly a Frank Lloyd Wright *chef-d'oeuvre*, though there is something musty about the whole affair; and there's something wonderful, true, about gazing across that vista of fabulous, winter-browned lawn toward the Mansion or sitting on the squat brick wall surrounding the Mansion to think and think and think. But there are drawbacks, too: in winter the Mansion is closed, and people are herded into smaller rooms and studios such as those in West House, studios so

cramped I nearly went insane day after day, pretending to be a writer but actually lying for hours on that dumpy yellow recliner which only stared up at a low-sloping ceiling or sitting in a battered easychair by the window, watching snow waft in bursts of dazzling white while I drank black bitter coffee from a red thermos top.

So the worst part was that I didn't know why I was there. I had an inkling, though. And Carson did too. That winter she sat slumped in her dinner chair, muttering about the "we of me" in a sing-song voice while all of us, including Katherine Anne, who clearly thought Carson was too peculiar to be admitted into that august and stalwart roster of Yaddo writers, pointedly ignored her or listened, respectfully, to the bone-dry, deepening coughs which, in no time, had turned her into a baritone. But Carson ignored me, even when I sat next to her, and though I understood that she had



Photo by J. Stoffers

perfect contempt for my work—I *wasn't* a writer, after all—really all I wanted was a little of the attention she'd received her whole life; a little taste of her fame; a little perfunctory respect or, sadly, that's what I believed I wanted then, though it wasn't true—not one impulse connected to my journeying there had been true.

So now I can say I've had a stroke. And that

makes me like Carson. And now I can say I lie in a king-sized bed, staring up at ceiling stains because I'm too weak to move my arms, legs, head. And that makes me like Carson. And now I can say I lie here and dream up all kinds of complicated narratives in my mind when really, despite Linda's most beautiful efforts (and they have been beautiful over the years—they *have*), I'm lonely, sick, tired, and I'd rather be dead. And that makes me like Carson. But the strangest aspect about my situation is that I wanted so fervently to be like Lulu Mae and here I look like her, with my hunched and battered body, horsy face, blunt-cut, old woman's bangs, but never was I anything like her, really, never a Doppelgänger or a psychological twin but more like these house wrens I see building nests of straw and string up under the eaves as I lie flat on my back in bed, and they're so busy I imagine their little hearts close to bursting from all their frantic, home-building exertions but they're tiny, actually, crushable as thin bones, and they're weightless, creating no physical impact upon the Earth, and they're purposeless in the sense in which I like to think of that word, building and building without having the slightest idea *why*.

But there's one story I remember which almost explains it. What happened next, and all the years that followed. One story I remember that Carson might be proud of. Carson was five. I was ten. Momma was taking us to the carnival. Carnivals were different in those days, but maybe not so different as we'd like to believe: between the World's Largest Steer and the Sword-Swallowing Freak and Gigo, the Hermaphrodite Boy, they were—are—damned disturbing places. But every year, Lulu Mae clamored to go. And, since Lulu Mae was Momma's pet, every year we went, though that year I was feeling too mature to do more than glance at the pop-a-balloon booths, cotton-candy machines that spun wild blue fluff, the mountainous Fat Lady Lulu Mae gaped at as we passed.

There was one smaller tent at the end. One tent smaller, darker, than the others. "In you go, girls,"

Momma whispered, as if she sensed the sanctity of the place. She lifted the tent flap with two trembling fingers; her auburn hair shone, set so neatly, beautifully, in its permanent wave; her crimson-bow lips were like a slash of startlement across her acne'd, pale face—poor Momma, dead for so many years now, though maybe, in some respects, the dead never do leave. "In you go, girls," Momma muttered, and Carson and I went. Lulu Mae, then, was a spindly girl, all elbows and knees, with big dark eyes that swallowed a person whole in a glance. She preceded me into that red-brown gloom and the whole place, bedded down with straw, luminescent with canning jars arranged row upon row on low-lying tables, glowed with the phosphorescent eeriness of a fish tank.

And Lulu Mae stepped ahead of me then, strolled with as much dignity as her tiny self could muster toward a row of those aquarium-bright jars. And I noticed the way the light-brown hair lay in shining disarray along the back of her slender neck, the way her too skinny waist hitched up on the left as she moved, the way her slightly bowed legs buckled when she reached the first row of jars. And that noticing was the beginning of my love for Lulu Mae, which was the beginning of my love for women, though I didn't know then because I didn't let myself know because I wanted to be either exactly like everyone else—a "normal" in the small-town U.S.A. sense of that word—or exactly like Lulu Mae, and for me there was no in-between state, no comfortable method for admitting that tenderness which pressed against my insides harder and harder as I grew, pressing first, with Carson, like the gentlest of palms but later, when I was a teenager, later, when I felt I had to go to Yaddo, prove I was as much a freak as Carson McCullers, smacked like a fist so angrily, insistently, against my gut that it punched a hole, finally, in my spleen, stomach, intestines, a wound from which no one could recover.

And Carson stood, admiring those jars. Lulu Mae stood, admiring those jars, her thumb creep-



ing toward her bunched-up mouth, her thumb sliding smoothly into her bunched-up mouth before she thought better of it, yanked it out. And as she stood, gazing at the fetus floating big-headed and bobbing in its wash of fake amniotic fluid, everything passed over her face and I saw it and Momma saw it, too, but she didn't understand it the way I did, I'm sure of that now, didn't glimpse the rage and terror melding abruptly into a mirror-smooth blankness as Lulu Mae straightened her features, tucked down her dowdy dress at the hem, started her strange, clipped-tone litany.

"Momma, why did it die?"

"Baby, it was never born."

"But it looks so ugly. And dead."

"Everyone looks ugly when they're not alive."

"Will I look that way, too?"

"Everyone does. Everyone."

"Then I never want to die," Lulu Mae announced, turning her back with all the solemnity her five-year-old self could summon on those hideous jars.

Momma, half-secretly, smiled. "Baby, maybe you never will."

For me—for the world—Lulu Mae never has.

But in all the space and motion of time itself, that afternoon will never be erased. That afternoon at Yaddo when I crouched outside Carson's studio and listened to her movements within, waiting for her walk, dreaming of an act so huge, significant, I believed the entire world would feel its repercussions.

I huddled outside her door. Let my hot moist mouth breathe circular patterns into the battered wood. Inside, I could hear her pace: her wont when she was submerged in an intensely creative moment "Fragile Francine," she laughed, "you are the we of me," then, "Oh Katherine Anne, Katherine Anne, I do admire you so," a revelation completely unsurprising to me and to all of Carson's other cohorts at Yaddo, who knew Carson was infatuated with Katherine Anne, who'd heard the sad twisted tale from The Lady herself of how Carson

curled into a fetal position outside her door waiting for admittance until Yaddo security dragged her away. Katherine Anne thought Carson was a lesbian but maybe I was the lesbian and—how paradoxical—no one wanted to see it. For, though Carson and I bore a strong resemblance to each other, both possessing the same boxy face, jutting jaw, sad o'possum eyes, militaristic bob, no one thought of me as "different," "strange," simply because I wasn't an artist.

But I wanted to be. I wanted someone to notice that I was unique. I wanted the world to stop dropping bouquets of yellow roses at Lulu Mae's feet. I wanted a woman with strong shoulders and skin like cream skimmed off the bottle to hold me and kiss me so passionately I forgot all my envy, forgot how I hated my baby sister, who'd committed no sin in the world except being more talented than me.

Leaning my shoulder against the door, gently I pushed it ajar. The wood swung open on its dangling hinge into a rush of must: the mossy odor of boots uncleared after a tramp through misty woods; of cigarettes lit frantically, one off the other, and then buried in the ash pile in a tray; of a body too long unwashed; and, layering the rest, the sweet, smoky smell of fear. Carson was pacing. Carson didn't notice me. She was wearing only her white-cotton bra, with the half-deflated baby cups, and a pair of motheaten brown trousers, men's trousers, with a belt. She was speaking so quickly to herself I couldn't follow the rush of ideas or wild exhalations of breath, but her eyes shone black-gleaming as midnight oil and I could tell she was excited, furiously excited, by something that had occurred in her story. "Justin Henry," Carson murmured, standing still suddenly in the center of the studio. "Justin Henry and the ferris wheel. Carson, you're a genius." As she paused, the wooden-wall studio awash in dusky shadows that made everything shine rustic, warm, as if the room were swimming in luscious chocolate tones, I admired the set of her head, her oddly manlike chutzpah, and I



thought, for a second, *I should leave now—find a woman—go away and marry her*, but of course this wasn't the 1990's and there were penalties attached to such absurd actions, though if I were an artist, like Carson, more of my oddities undoubtedly would be forgiven, and seeing her stand white-faced and stalwart and lock-bodied there, like her own little temple of doom, I loved and hated her so intensely I knew I had to move forward or die.

But now Carson dashed forward. Yanked a faded fisherman's sweater off the windowsill glinting pale beneath mounded-up snow steaming against the glass. We were in the middle of a three-day thaw, and only in isolated pockets—piled against windowpanes—did the snow still shine crystalline and blinding and beautiful. Everywhere else—by the East House, Pine Garde, the woods, the Mansion, the lake—it had assumed the black-streaked yellowish ugliness of oatmeal. Carson tugged the fisherman's sweater over her head, snatched a yellow rainhat off the coatrack in the corner. I knew where she was going. To the lake, frozen though it was, the bank a mass of hardening and melting ice and mud, to sit on a rock, hugging her knees, gaze across a sunsplit vista of cracking ice, sit and sit and dream and dream, working out the details of the story in her mind until, when she arrived back home in her studio, the words, dynamics, characters, plot, would catapult her to the end.

I crept behind the door. And now Carson darted outside. On her face glimmered the translucent loveliness that is the result of pure joy, exaltation, such as only young children experience, when sunlight wafting across an African violet's dusky purple petals, or a prism irradiating a dusty corner with a red-tinged streak of sudden rainbow, is enough to transport them out of themselves in an intense spiritual flood of self-awareness, self-abandonment, that withers in adults or is revived through the near-sexual pleasures of art. I followed Carson at a distance of three or more yards as she stumbled downstairs through the West House, all

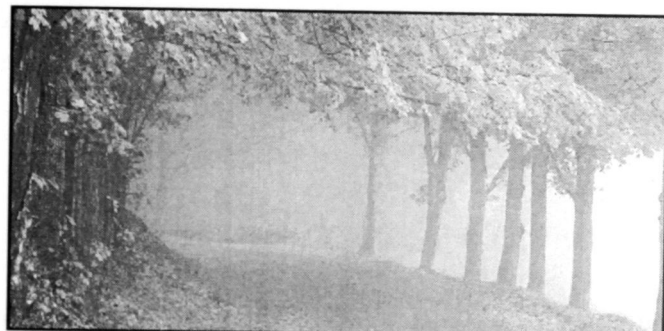


Photo (detail) by Joel Kendall

those antique busts, scowls of white marble, and sumptuous emerald tapestries gazing on in a kind of mock classical horror at her precipitousness. And, as I tracked her, I was angry, yes, that I'd never experienced what she'd experienced. That I'd never dreamed of the opportunity. For, where Lulu Mae could peer into a canning jar at a preserved but indisputably dead fetus and glimpse, amazingly, manifold possibilities of life; where her imagination opened and opened and opened until, avaricious as a Great White Shark, it threatened to swallow the world as we've discovered it whole, I looked into that glass jar and saw a dead, ugly, repulsive fetus bobbing and stewing in its juices: I saw the world shut down, the world shut against me, and never in my life would it be any different.

Carson hurried across the lawn, the grass dried, brown, wreathed with melting snow. Hurried toward the woods, gleaming violet now with the first uncertain shades of a dusk that would spread, soon, into the black certainty of night. She looked absurd in her oversized sweater, the glossy yellow hat tugged over her ears: but I knew she wasn't feeling her ludicrousness, grotesqueness, sorrow; she was lost in the personable, pleasurable throes of her art and couldn't see, then, though I saw with a clarity that seared into suffering so many years later, so many years after she was dead, that she was grotesque, yes, but she was enlightened, she was beautiful, as Bienchen was beautiful, Mick, Mr. Singer, Miss Amelia, Cousin Lymon, and Frankie; Frankie, with whom I identified Carson most closely that day, for Carson was the "we of us," the tangible spiritual being beating inside us



all whom I had to smother, to crack apart in my hands, for a dream is more dangerous than any reality, a dream furnishes, sometimes for long seconds in this awful existence of ours, remnants of hope.

And Carson wended through the woods where the brown and white deer loved to graze, their sleek hides spotted with moon. And Carson tramped in her thick-soled winter boots along the trail she'd refashioned after it'd grown over, a raggedy path toward the lake that never abandoned completely its wildness, so both of us snapped twigs and branches and crushed brambles as we hastened along. But, for some reason, she never heard me. Or—more likely—never let me know she did. And a pale, pock-faced moon glinted through the overhang of branches as we neared the lake, and Carson located her favorite flat-topped rock and settled there, tipping her body back, her face a mirror for happiness and clouds disappearing from the tempestuous, black-dappled sky and white shining moon that wrapped her whole body eventually, layered her with patches of light, so she rocked there all aglow.

And if I can't remember exactly what happened after that, perhaps it's the kindness of my own mind protecting me, the benediction of merciful memory shutting down. But when I grasped her by the shoulders, wrenched her around to look, she scarcely seemed surprised. Her great, luminous eyes were calm, and I thought suddenly, of Judas, of Pontius Pilate, though I wasn't killing life but art, though I wasn't killing life but a festering hope I needed to be gone that winter I was born, that later winter at Yaddo, and her huge, dark eyes shone as I pushed her forward over the rock, as she sank with a bleeding face and garishly scratched forehead into the dark water that lapped and lifted and buoyed her up, and though I wanted to believe she was dead, though she floated, unconscious, with the limp-limbed acceptance I'd always prayed for, imagined, in the end, I was the one who dragged her limp body onto the bank, I was the one who

swiped her mouth clean of debris, I was the one who resuscitated her then fled through the woods knowing the other Yaddo guests would find her in hours, in days, slack-bodied but alive, alive, alive, though sicker than ever before, her pneumonia so acute she spent weeks in the hospital before she could walk again, before she could limp into a room and not feel suspicious toward every stranger sitting there, for, if her own sister could betray her, how could she consider the rest of the world a friend?

So, in the end, I didn't destroy her but stripped her innocence. Or thought I had, though, truly, the joke was on me, for it was I who suffered the greatest loss, it was I who felt the final, beautiful, indefinable *something* inside me shut down and die.

And Carson?

Carson recovered, as all great innocents and visionaries will. Went on to write many more splendid books, for, though she was sick her entire life, though her sister nearly killed her, there is a quality about that kind of woman that will not admit defeat. Finally, paralyzed with strokes, hunched over so horribly the photographer almost despaired of acquiring a usable shot, I can imagine her laughing. At me, and at a world that finds it so impossible to embrace life wholly, to love. And when that terrifying, final brain hemorrhage stained her world red, when she went out from this life in a floodlight of color, I like to believe that she was happy. That she forgave me. That I can forgive myself, finally, or that I've offered penance through the three or four or fifty strokes I've suffered. For, in the end, nothing else matters, does it? This world. This beauty. This love, which I feel again as I lie in my bed, staring up at the ceiling lavendering with evening shadows, and, outside my window, house wrens settle in for the night, stir and coo and get sleepy in a warm, dusty rustle of feathers, and Linda comes in with another bowl of soup and, propping my body until it remains stationary against the pillows, feeds me, kisses me.



Song of the Water Hole Truce

by Ryan G. Van Cleave

A rank of impalas slake their thirst at the sun-cracked dirt
periphery of this mud hole, where water bleeds from the deep,

cool belly of the earth, dark and mineral-rich, still it wets
their cracked lips. The stuporous heat of midday works straight

to the bones, chews at the marrow, sucks the moisture
from every bit of exposed skin. A trio of lions stride straight past,

intent on their own thirst. Such are the truces of water, of water
holes here in Botswana, the simple earthen heart of Africa.

On the clay pans of the northern woodlands, trails lead like spokes
to hubs that hold water, but pans, unlike the lagoons and delta,

run dry, leaving only animals such as the springbok, which do not
need water daily. The delta knows catfish that escape dryness

of evaporating ponds by burrowing in the bottom mud, and it knows
antelope escape predators by submerging up to their nostrils.

Always close at hand, a wilderness so unfettered it can swallow
a herd without a trace. So it ends, here, this day, as a flock of ibis

wing back to their nesting grounds like ghosts at nightfall,
their fish-bone eyes, for an instant, reflect like strobe lights,

blips of white that, though vanished into dark, last and last.



Obituary in *The Denver Ledger*, March 3, 1876

by Robert Cooperman

"John Sprockett was killed yesterday
in a livery-stable shoot-out
in the mining town of Gold Creek,
by William Leeson, trying to enhance
his reputation as a fast gun
at the expense of the older, slower killer.
The homily concerning living by the sword
could not have been more apt.

"Sprockett was born in Dido, Missouri,
his father a Presbyterian minister,
his mother a school-mistress
from whom he learned a love of poetry.
Once, he bet a crowd in a Salida saloon
that for every poem he recited from memory
he would be paid a drink; for each verse
he failed to render, he would stand a round.
His performance was flawless.

"It is to be pitied that he never learned
a similar regard for his father's Book,
for Sprockett was credited with the deaths
in gunfights of no less than fifteen men.
How many others he casually murdered
it cannot be calculated,
but he was known to take quick, fatal
offense against any who remarked
upon the scars inflicted in his face by a bear.
To add to his sordid career,
he was henchman to Colonel William Quantrill,
the privateer of Bloody Kansas infamy,
whose predations exacerbated our tragic Civil War.



"Sprockett's exploits were celebrated in dime novels,
but we can only be saddened that a man
of so poetic a soul saw fit to destroy it
in drink and mayhem. He left no family,
was buried without fanfare or mourners.
Let that lack be a lesson to all deluded
into the belief that a life spent
in disregard of the Rule of Law can earn any
but the most dire and violent rewards."



Photo by Gerald Wheeler

Jesse James—En Route to Northfield, Minnesota— Meditates on the Death of John Sprockett

by Robert Cooperman

He never kept his mind to business.
Maybe that bear that ripped his face open
let his brains leak out too.
The Colonel would've had him shot
for not executing that female Yankee spy,
but Sprockett had a talent for leaving.

He shied away from chasing girls
squealing like sows soon to be bacon.
When Frank closed in on one pretty thing
who sobbed for him not to kill her afterwards--
"No witnesses, no hot trails,"
the Colonel would preach--
Sprockett cold-cocked my older brother.
"Scat!" he shouted at the Yankee filly
(or maybe she was Stars and Bars).
She ran like a mare spooked by a grizzly.

He let himself get gunned in that stable.
You'd think he was tired of rot-gut
and spouting the poetry he wore me out with
when I wanted to think of home and victory
while dusty miles piled on us like rocks
over a body in ground too hard to dig a grave in.

I asked him to join our bank business--
Frank bearing no hard feelings for the welt--
but Sprockett preferred his trap-lines
and shooting up saloons,
whenever the devil scratched his bad eye.
Well, the Great Grizzly-Snare's got him now;
Frank and me'll be flush as Kentucky Colonels
once we open this Northfield vault,
northern squareheads too stupid
to guard it like their prettiest daughters.



Dr. Edward Terhune Bennett, to His Sister-in-Law, Agatha Starling Lawson

by Robert Cooperman

My Dear Agatha,
We have received dreadful news from America,
thrusting Sophia into a pit of depression.
I desperately entreat you to come at once:
her companion on her jaunts
in the Colorado Rockies is dead.
I can hear you exult, but his passing--
as violent as one would expect
from her tales of his savage exploits--
has immortalised him in her tender heart.
Though I never shared your detestation
for the man, I can understand it now:
alive, she would have forgotten him;
dead, he has become her idol, my demon.

She weeps as if I lay dastardly hands on her.
Besides, my patients--the London destitute--
require my professional vigilance.
She mumbles, "Had I stayed, he'd be alive,"
or similar rubbish, blind to his depravities.
And yet, a debased Raleigh of chivalry,
though I can hear you snort, "Piffle!"

Had I been squeamish for my honour,
I might have questioned their intimacy.
But she has been all I require in a wife:
knowing my mind before I do,
agreeing our lives be given to the poor,
a splendid mother to our infant,
before this incapacity struck her
like a blow from a thief's truncheon.

Again, I beg you to come at once,
our house, my life, rudderless
while she mourns this man she sensibly left,
forsaking the selfish pleasures of travel
when she agreed to honour me
with her hand, her heart, her sacred soul.



"Nine Months After His Murder, Sprockett Widows Come Forward," Article in *The Denver Ledger*

by Robert Cooperman

"Skunk fumes flower in the Rockies:
no less than five women now claim
to be lawful widows of John Sprockett,
stating that their infants were sired
by that notorious gunman and drunk.

"It is ironic that while he lived,
Sprockett--his face hideously carved by a bear--
was spurned by women, some fainting
at his slashed visage and the empty
eye-socket he paraded for spite;
daughters of joy refused his trade.
But dead, his ruthless gun assures him
the belated affection of bedazzled females;
their illegitimate offspring, spawned
in ditches or against the walls of saloons,
claimed as lawful products of his infamy.

"Lust for gain can be dismissed as a motive,
since he left only a horse, saddle, traps,
and a dog-eared collection of verse--
stolen on his one stage-coach robbery attempt--
this last item he willed to an Englishwoman,
Sophia Bennett, for much of 1873 his employer.
Perhaps the thrill of danger prompted these females
to invent a bond to one who ravaged
Bloody Kansas like a booty-crazed Mongol,
half pauper, half rabid mastiff.

"In a related series of incidents,
at least 41 infants have been named for him.
That so few mothers honored martyred President Lincoln
and so many paid homage to this outlaw is shocking.
The best that can be said for Sprockett
is that his unquiet soul is finally at rest;
but judging from his life of combustible violence,
it is doubtful he sleeps with the angels,
or even the penitent toilers in Purgatory."



Years Later, Sophia Starling Bennett Remembers Her Travels with John Sprockett

by Robert Cooperman

It wasn't landscape I went after,
but adventures big as my dreams
of escaping the kitchen gardens of England.
My two sons and daughter would be horrified
that I longed to shrug off duty,
the prospect of family, for the specious joy
of traveling with a half-corsair, half-poet.
I told the story of our sojourn to my granddaughter,
a new woman learning the typewriter,
each key clattering, "Freedom!"

All I can now recall of Mr. Sprockett's face
are those terrible scars, lightning-blasts
seared into his cheek by the bear he slew,
or so the saga grew before I met him.
I dared not stare at their grim artistry;
had I a daguerrotype of the man
I would have destroyed it when I wed Edward,
out of respect for the institution
and for his calling as healer to the poor.
Besides, the time for journeys was over;
England had won, and duty, and usefulness.

When I learned that John had been murdered,
I sat for days in darkness; Edward, for once,
unable to ease the pain of another.
Memories shimmered, of kissing dreadful, raised skin:
for an instant, the beauty of Michaelangelo,
the saintliness of a man--lethal as a mountain--
who would have gladly died to see me smile.



I never regretted marrying Edward
and giving our lives to the care of the poor,
not even when my heart was ripped by John's death.
Yet, some nights, I can still hear him
reciting Keats, the Bard, his own rough rhymes,
his voice intoxicating as rare champagne,
his hands gentle as if with an unnested owlet.
Early on, I forgave Edward for reserving
that touch for his most pitiful destitutes,
just as he never asked about John Sprockett
and our nights of holy flames amid the snow.

This concludes the series of *The Badman and the Lady*.

Westview thanks Robert Cooperman for his participation in this series.

The poems that comprise *The Badman and the Lady* are part of *IN THE COLORADO GOLD FEVER MOUNTAINS*.
Purchase information may be obtained from Western Reflections Inc., P.O. Box 410, Ouray, CO 81427.



Contributors

Brian Ames's work has appeared in *American Jones Building & Maintenance* (a literary journal), *Happy*, *The Melic Review*, *South Dakota Review*, *Snow Monkey*, the short-story anthology "Unusual Circumstances" (Pocol Press), and has work forthcoming in *Glimmer Train Stories*, *The Massachusetts Review*, *Wisconsin Review*, *RE-AL*, and the *Dan River Anthology*. He is the former editor of *Wind Row*, Washington State University's 1983-1989 award-winning literary journal, and he is also working on short story collections and a novel. He also recently won first prize for fiction at the Whidbey Island (Washington) Writers' Conference.

Christopher Brissom, born and raised on Buzzards Bay in Massachusetts, is a graduate of Tufts University and Sarah Lawrence College. A writer and actor, he divides his time between literature, theatre, architectural history, and film work. He is happiest when going to the movies, riding his bicycle, visiting the zoo (his favorite: the Bronx Zoo), or walking his dog (sly, old golden Crumpet) along the beach and through the neighborhood. He recently relocated to Los Angeles in October 2000.

Charles Edward Brooks was born in North Carolina and earned advanced degrees from Duke University and the University of Lausanne. He is a Fellow of the Society of Actuaries. His work has appeared or is scheduled to appear in *AIM Magazine*, *The Distillery*, *Lynx Eye*, *The Orange Willow Review*, *Owen Wister Review*, *The Pacific Review*, *Pangolin Papers*, *The South Carolina Review*, *Wellspring*, and other publications. He makes his home in Zurich, Switzerland and a village in the mountains of northern Portugal.

Robert Cooperman's second collection, *The Badman and the Lady*, is part of *In the Colorado Gold Fever Mountains* from Western Reflections, Inc., P.O. Box 410, Ouray, CO 81427. His work has appeared in *The Centennial Review*, *Cimarron Review*, and *North Dakota Quarterly*. His first book, *In the Household of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, was published by the University Press of Florida.

Terri Brown-Davidson holds the PhD, MFA, and MA in creative writing. Recently she was a 1998 *The Literary Review*/Web del Sol Featured Writer. She published an additional chapbook of her work in the spring 1998 *The Literary Review* "Emerging Writers" print issue. Her collection *Rag Men* won *The Ledge* 1994 Annual Chapbook Competition. Individual poems, short stories, and novel excerpts have appeared in or are forthcoming from more than four-hundred national and international journals, including *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, *TriQuarterly* 86, *TriQuarterly* 90, *The Literary Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, and *Puerto del Sol*; twenty

pages of her poetry are featured in *TriQuarterly's* first anthology of emerging writers, *TriQuarterly New Writers* (Northwestern University Press, 1996).

Jerry Craven has published twenty books, including three collections of poetry, four ESL textbooks currently in use in Japanese universities, and nonfiction for children. His latest book is *Tickling Catfish*, a collection of creative nonfiction (humor) from Texas A&M University Press, and *Snake Mountain*, a novel from TCU Press. Mr. Craven has also published twenty-six short stories in literary magazines and anthologies as well as the major science fiction magazines.

Richard Dixon lives in Norman. He has spent the last thirty years teaching school, the last fifteen of those as a high school teacher working with students with learning disabilities. He is also a tennis coach. His published work is included in anthologies of poetry and fiction of the Individual Artists of Oklahoma, as well as various other anthologies and chapbooks.

Joann Gardner, a native of Maine, now lives in Tallahassee where she is an associate professor of English at The Florida State University. She is the director of Runaway with Words, a poetry workshop for runaway and homeless youths in Florida's youth shelters. She has published in *Jeopardy*, *Louisiana Literature*, *Madison Review*, *Small Press Magazine*, *Seneca Review*, *The South Carolina Review*, *Sun Dog: The Southeast Review*, and *The Tampa Review*. She recently published an interview of Grace Paley in *The American Poetry Review*.

Richard Hathcock, a native Oklahoman, was raised in Pryor, Catoosa, and Tulsa. He worked as a correspondent for the *Tulsa Daily World* for several years before putting in twenty-six years with Hearst and ABC-TV News all over the world. Mr. Hathcock has been to 102 countries, but he has never forgotten Oklahoma. He even discussed Oklahoma with Sir Winston Churchill many years ago in an interview.

Lois Beebe Hayna's work has appeared in a number of publications including *The Bridge*, *Visions/International*, *Echoes*, *North American Journal*, and the *Plains Poetry Review*, as well as three anthologies. Her fourth collection of poems, *View from Behind the Mirror*, won the Colorado Author's League Top Hand award in 1999.

Jarret Keene teaches at Florida State University, where he also serves as editor of *Sundog: The Southeast Review*. His Pushcart-nominated stories, essays, and verse have appeared in over 50 literary journals, including recent issues of *ACM*, *Chelsea*, *The Laurel Review*, *The South Carolina Review*, and *River City*.



Bruce McCandless III, a freelance writer and editor living in Austin Texas, has published fiction, poetry, and essays in a variety of venues, including *The Asia Wall Street Journal*, *Louisiana Literature*, the *Texas Observer*, and the *Austin American-Statesman*. His poem, "The Death of a Liquor Board Agent" appeared in *Westview*.

Walt McDonald's latest book is *Counting Survivors* (University of Massachusetts Press). Two other books are *After the Noise of Saigon* (University of Massachusetts Press) and *Night Landings* (HarperCollins). He has published fifteen collections of poems and one book of fiction for presses such as University of Pittsburgh Press, University of North Texas Press, University of Massachusetts Press, Ohio State University Press, Spoon River Poetry Press, and Texas Tech University Press. He has published more than 1,700 poems in journals and collections, including *American Poetry Review*, *The American Scholar*, *The Antioch Review*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The Georgia Review*, *The Kenyon Review*, *The Missouri Review*, *The Nation*, *New England Review*, *Poetry*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Prairie Schooner*, *The Sewanee Review*, *Shenandoah*, *The Southern Review*, *Southwest Review*, and *Westview*. His awards include three National Cowboy Hall of Fame's Western Heritage Awards, two National Endowment for the Arts Creative Writing Fellowships, and four Texas Institute of Letters Awards.

H. Bruce McEver's poetry has been published in *Ploughshares*, *Berkshire Review*, and *Connecticut River Review*. He has taken poetry workshops at Sarah Lawrence College with Tom Lux and Kevin Pilkington and in New York City with Brooks Haxton, J.D. McClatchy, Kathia Pollit, and Pearl London. During the day, McEver is the president of an investment-banking firm, and he and his wife live on a farm in Salisbury, Connecticut.

Cole Rachel is a poet and freelance writer whose work has appeared or is forthcoming in the *Ontario Review*, *Westview*, *Sierra Nevada College Review*, and *Illumination*. A native Oklahoman and SWOSU alumni, he now makes his home in New York City.

Ken Robertson grew up in Blaine County, Oklahoma. His poetry has appeared in *Hard Row to Hoe*, *The Oblong Page*, *Light*, and *images*. He has degrees from Purdue and Illinois State and lives in Decatur, Illinois.

Virgil Suarez was born in Havana, Cuba in 1962. Since 1974 he has lived in the United States. His poetry, stories, translation, and essays continue to be published in journals and reviews such as *TriQuarterly*, *Field*, *Cimarron*, *Meridian*, *The Caribbean Writer*, *Callaloo*, *The Ohio Review*, *Salmagundi*, *New England Review*, *Ploughshares*, *The Mississippi Review*, *The Kenyon Review*, and *Prairie Schooner*, and many others in the United States. Abroad his work has been published in Argentina,

Australia, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, England, France, Germany, India, Israel, Japan, New Zealand, and Spain. His poetry and fiction have been nominated for over twenty-five Pushcart Prizes, and he received one this year. He's also been nominated for the Pulitzer Prize twice. He is a recipient of an NEA and a Florida Individual Artist Grant. He is a professor of English and Creative Writing at The Florida State University.

Ryan G. Van Cleave is a freelance photojournalist originally from Chicago, whose writing has appeared in recent issues of *Shenandoah*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *Quarterly West*, and *American Literary Review*; new work is forthcoming in *TriQuarterly*, *The Journal*, and *Southern Humanities Review*. His most recent books are *Say Hello* (Pecan Grove Press, 2000) and the anthology *American Diaspora: Poetry of Exile* (University of Iowa Press, 2001). This fall he will be the Anastasia C. Hoffman Fellow at the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Institute for Creative Writing.

Rynn Williams is a poet and freelance writer/editor. Born in New York City, he has lived there his whole life, with the exception of one year spent in an Ecuadorian cloud forest, where he lived without electricity or indoor plumbing, one hour's walk from the nearest road. He is currently building a house in the same cloud forest, with the hope of living there a portion of every year. He received his master's degree in creative writing from New York University, and he has published poems in *The Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Bellingham Review*, *Cimarron Review*, *Confrontation*, *Crazyhorse*, *Greensboro Review*, *Gulf Stream Magazine*, *High Plains Literary Review*, *Manoa*, *Nassau Review*, *The Nation*, *New Orleans Review*, *Pernafrost*, *Poem*, *Prairie Schooner*, *So To Speak*, *Southern Poetry Journal*, *The South Carolina Review*, *The South Dakota Review*, *Spoon River Quarterly*, *Tampa Review*, and *Wisconsin Review*, among other publications.

Carolyn Wright has six books of poetry, including *Premonitions of an Uneasy Guest* (AWP Award Series) and *From a White Woman's Journal* (Water Mark); a collection of essays, *A Choice of Fidelities: Lectures and Readings from a Writer's Life*; and three volumes of poetry in translation from Spanish and Bengali. Her most recent collection, *Seasons of Mangoes and Brainfire*, won the 1999 Blue Lynx Poetry Prize (selected by Usef Komunyakaa), and was published by Lynx House Press in 2000. It has also received the Oklahoma Award in poetry for 2001, and an American Book Award for 2001 from the Before Columbus Foundation. Wright is working on an investigative memoir of her experiences in Chile during the presidency of Salvador Allende, *The Road to Isla Negra*, which has received the PEN/Jerard Fund Award and the Crossing Boundaries Award from *International Quarterly*. She spent four years in Calcutta and Dhaka, Bangladesh, collecting and translating the work of Bengali women poets and writers for an anthology in progress. These translations, from which Wright has



received a Witter Bynner Foundation Grant and an NEA Grant in Translation, include *The Game in Reverse: Poems of Taslima Nasrin* (George Braziller, 1995), the dissident Bangladeshi writer living in exile with a price on her head. Another volume of translations, *In Order to Talk with the Dead: Selected Poems of Jorge Teillier* (University of Texas Press), received the American Literary Translators' Association Award. She is Visiting Associate Professor of Creative Writing at the University of Oklahoma

for 2001-2002. In 1999, she returned to Chile for the first time since the Allende years.

J. Greg Young lives with his wife Beth and two children in Abilene, Texas. He is a pharmacist for a large hospital and is a 1988 graduate of SWOSU. His poems have appeared in a number of publications including *Owen Wister Review* and *Lilliput Review*. He has work forthcoming in *Windhover*.

Illustrations

- | | | | |
|----|--|----|---|
| 15 | Photograph (detail) by Cheryl Semarge Moody.
Moody, an art teacher and a native of Buffalo, N.Y., resides in Connecticut. The picture is from a rustic camp in Maine, where she and her husband live in the summer. | | Gogh's "Small Pear Tree" |
| 21 | Photograph by Carlos Gauna, northern New Mexico river in winter | 42 | Photograph by Joel Kendall, Belle Starr |
| 23 | Photograph by Joel Kendall | 43 | Photography by Carlos Gauna |
| 24 | Photograph by Joel Kendall | 45 | Photograph (detail) by Joel Kendall, South American lizard |
| 27 | Photograph (detail) by Joel Kendall | 47 | Photograph (detail) by Joel Kendall, South America grassland |
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| 32 | Photograph by Joel Kendall, farm near Roll, Oklahoma | 51 | Photograph by J. Stoffers, Oklahoma sunflowers |
| 37 | Photograph (detail) by Joel Kendall, pear tree | 52 | Photograph (detail) by Joel Kendall, all pictures courtesy of Baseball Hall of Fame, except for Pete Rose and Ozzie Smith |
| 39 | Photograph by Joel Kendall | 57 | Photograph (detail) by Joel Kendall, house wren |
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| | | 65 | Photography by Gerald Wheeler |

An Invitation

Westview Writers' Festival

7 p.m. Thursday, March 26, 2002

Southwestern Oklahoma State University Conference Center

Featuring: *Carolyn Wright*

Carolyn Wright is Visiting Associate Professor of Creative Writing at the University of Oklahoma for 2001-2002. Wright has six books of poetry, including *Premonitions of an Uneasy Guest* (AWP Award Series) and *From a White Woman's Journal* (Water Mark); a collection of essays, *A Choice of Fidelities: Lectures and Readings from a Writer's Life*; and three volumes of poetry in translation from Spanish and Bengali.

and *Cole Rachel*

Cole Rachel is a poet and freelance writer whose work has appeared or is forthcoming in the *Ontario Review*, *Westview*, *Sierra Nevada College Review*, and *Illumination*. A native Oklahoman and SWOSU alumni, he now makes his home in New York City.

also: A Special Art Exhibit by Southwestern Oklahoma State University's Art Department

This event is free and open to the public.

For further information, call

Fred Alsberg
at (580) 774-3168.



WESTVIEW



Arts Calendar 2001-2002

Music, Theater, Art, and Literary Events

All events are on the campus of Southwestern Oklahoma State University unless otherwise noted. Panorama events are free.

November

- 3 Miss Southwestern Scholarship Pageant, Fine Arts Center, 7:30 p.m.
12 Panorama Event-Dr. Bernard Harris, Astronaut—Biological Researcher- Fine Arts Center-7:30 pm
16-19 *Medea*, directed by Steve Strickler, 7:30, Old Science Auditorium
29 American College Theatre Festival, SWOSU

December

- 1-2 American College Theatre Festival, SWOSU
3 Panorama Event-Gary England, KWTU-9 meteorologist, Fine Arts Center, 7:30 p.m.

January

- 21 Panorama Event-Jahruha and the Legendary Street People, Fine Arts Center, 7:30 p.m.

February

- 16-19 *Ancestral Voices*, directed by Steve Strickler, Old Science Theater, 7:30 p.m.
19 Panorama Event-Dancing on Common Ground, Irish dancing troupe-Fine Arts Center-7:30 p.m.

March

- 26 *Westview Writers' Festival*, Southwestern Oklahoma State University Conference Center, 7 p.m.

April

- 17-21 *Colors*, directed by Steve Strickler, Old Science Theatre, 7:30 p.m.



SW Texas Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association Regional Conference

February 13-17 2002, Albuquerque Hilton Hotel, New Mexico

Featured speakers will include Tony Hillerman, author of the "Navajo Mystery" novels; Ray and Pat Browne, founders of the national popular culture movement; Kathy Merlock Jackson, President of the American Culture Association; Jim Welsh, Editor, *Literature/Film Quarterly*; Paul Rich, Universidad de las Americas (Cholula-Puebla, Mexico).

The Popular Culture Association's mission is to promote an

innovative and nontraditional academic movement in Humanities and Social Sciences, to provide an outlet for scholars, writers, and others interested in the popular culture, to share ideas in a professional atmosphere, and to have papers presented at meetings. Please visit the conference website for registration and additional information: <http://www2.h-net.msu.edu/~swpca/>.



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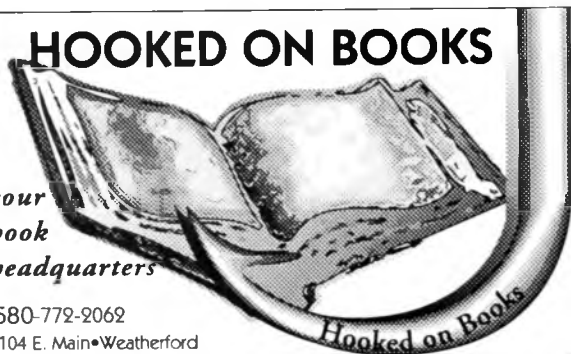
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