To Dr. Merlin Cheney
**Mission Statement**

*Ælurus* was created to recognize work of the highest caliber from the graduate students and alumni of Weber State University’s Master of Arts in English program in the fields of fiction, creative non-fiction, poetry, and scholarly criticism. *Ælurus* also provides student staff the opportunity to immerse itself in the publication process, while also providing WSU’s students the opportunity to publish their work. The ultimate aim is to reach out to other, equally-dedicated and talented scholars throughout the state, region, and country.

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Ælurus in its simplest form stems from the Greek name for wildcat. Yet, as with all things ancient and venerated, its origin is perplexing. The mythical cat is an Egyptian deity held to the greatest sanctity due to its innate need to nourish and protect its offspring. The Greeks gave the name Ælurus to their hunting goddess Artemis after she took on the head of the cat in order to shield herself from giants. So it was with the naming of this journal, that as a Wildcat and graduate student at Weber State University I wanted to uphold the sacred art of creation and the ever crafty pursuit of inspiration, from the prodigious obstacles that we often come to face as writers.

To the hunt.

- Chelsi Archibald
In the Fall Semester of 2010, I was sitting in Dr. Ramirez’s class looking at my midterm paper grade. I had been given a high score and even heard the magic word “publishable” used in connection with my short story. However, when I asked where I could publish the story, all I got were sympathetic nods and noncommittal grunts. Though it is important for graduate students to be published, no publication existed on campus that we were eligible to publish in at that time. So, I decided to do something about it.

Looking back, what has surprised me the most has been the overwhelming response and support the MENG student body has provided. When I sent out emails looking for student support, the response was an resounding “YES!” From the very first meeting, I have had a great deal of dedicated help from both current students and alumni. My editorial staff has taken my vision upon them and improved it in ways I would have never considered. Without their help, this venture would not have happened.

Likewise, the support I have received from the University can only be labeled as inspiring. When I asked Dr. Victoria Ramirez whether she would support a graduate student literary journal, she jumped at the opportunity and has been a tremendous source of advice and support. Dr. Merlin Cheney has mentored me patiently, even when that spilled over into his personal time. Dr. Kathleen Herndon has helped to provide perspective on the inner workings outside of this department with relation to the creation of Ælurus. Most of all, the MENG faculty have provided invaluable support by encouraging their students to submit stories and papers to be critiqued and published by us.

Ælurus consists of five genres: Fiction, Flash Fiction, Creative Non-Fiction, Poetry, and Scholarly Criticism. Using blind submissions, our staff of peer volunteers reviews each submission using a standardized rubric. We then have faculty advisors review our selections to ensure only the best works are published. My hope is that this idea will help to spark a critical dialogue between the students here at Weber State University and, in the future, other graduate students in the state and nation. I encourage you the reader to enjoy the submissions with that thought in mind and to consider reacting to what our authors have to say.

Welcome to our idea. Welcome to Ælurus.
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Flash Fiction

Rumination, Lindee Anderson
“You a gay Angel?” Jason asked the stranger.

The stranger raised his eyebrows. “Why do you ask that?”

“Well I know you’re an Angel, cuz your wings. Mrs. Jenkins got a picture of Angels hung over her trailer door and they all got wings. Bucept their wings is white and yours is black. And I know you’re a gay cuz your muscles. Carl says only gays, queers, and fighters got muscles.”

“Did Carl give you that?” The Angel touched the bruise below Jason’s eye.

“Ya.” Jason pulled away. “I asked for it. Mom said I asked for it. Cuz we don’t got money for a new bike, but Mom bought it
with her own money and you’re only seven once, and he should mind his own business and he shouts at Mom and ... I asked for it.”

“It will be alright now Jason. That is why I have come to take you away.”

Jason scrunched up his face and looked down at the dirt. “I know you say you’re gonna take me away, but what if I don’t wanna go?”

“You would rather stay here?” The Angel waved his hand at the piles of rusting junk and clumps of dusty yellow grass.

Jason leaned against the hot trailer, put his hands in his pockets, and kicked at the dirt. The grasshoppers screeched and the air shimmered in the heat.

“We do not have much time,” the Angel said, “the Rapture is upon us.”

“I know, Mrs. Jenkins told me all about Rapture, but why can’t Mom come?”

The Angel did not answer but stood up straight and held out his hand.

“Mom’s not that bad,” Jason said.

“She let Carl hit you.”

“Is it cuz she’s a harlot?”

“Where did you hear that?”

“Mrs. Jenkins said Mom’s a harlot and I’m a bustard.”

“A bastard,” the Angel corrected, “but that is not your fault, and Mrs. Jenkins is not being saved either.”

“Who’s being saved?”

“The pure in heart. The innocent like yourself.”

Jason dug his toe deeper into the dirt and smiled. “I’m not all that innocent. Me and Jorge killed a cat. Jorge shot it with his pellet gun and I smashed its head with a shovel. All kinds a brains come out.”

“Still, you felt remorse. You buried the cat by the creek and even cried over it.”

“Who told you I cried! I wouldn’t cry bout no dumb cat.”
“Jason. It is alright. Here,” The Angel reach out his hand again. Jason kept his hands in his pockets.

A rush and a crack. Jason pushed away from the trailer. A ball of fire split across the sky. Jason stood, mouth open, as it tore into the trees beyond the creek.

“Jason!” his mother yelled from inside the trailer. “Jason what you doing out there?”

“Come Jason,” the Angel said.

Jason looked from the Angel’s hand, to the burning woods, to the trailer door.

His mother looked out.

“Jason!” she cried.

“Jason,” the Angel said quietly.

S. Winston Conner is working on his Master’s of Arts in English degree at Weber State University and hopes to teach high school or ESL in the US or abroad. He is a fan of Latin-American magical realism, a major inspiration for this story. He is currently looking for a publisher for his speculative fiction novel, Stryker.
“Mrs. Johnson, I should have called, I know,” began the blushing young woman on the stoop of the pastor’s house when the door opened.

The pastor’s wife gave the girl a warm smile and opened the door wide to invite the girl in. “There’s no need for that, Andrea. You aren’t in a hurry, are you? I made bread this morning and it’s still warm. I need someone to try a slice and make sure it goes well with tea on sunny afternoons.”

“Oh, no, Mrs. Johnson, I just couldn’t take up your time—”

“If you don’t, I’ll have to dust the living room and not only will I be mad, but my husband will be offended.”
“Oh, but Mrs. Johnson, I was just driving by—”

“Over a cup of tea, Andrea,” the pastor’s wife said, stepping back from the door so Andrea could enter. “I assume you have your books from Bible study class in your book bag?”

The girl’s blush deepened. “Well, seeings how I’m new in Pastor Johnson’s congregation, I was hoping…”

When the girl trailed off, the pastor’s wife finished for her, “that he would help you catch up with the rest of the Sunday School and worship service readings. Of course. The pastor isn’t home now—he’s at the homeless shelter on Tuesdays from three to ten. If you aren’t busy tomorrow, he welcomes the congregation between noon and four for personal Bible study.”

“I work during the day,” Andrea said as she followed Mrs. Johnson through the foyer and into the kitchen. “Oh! Mrs. Johnson, is this the congregation in the Congo that the pastor talked about last Sunday?”

“Yes,” she nodded, turning to stand by the girl as the girl gazed in awe at the sixteen-by-twenty picture of the pastor surrounded by a smiling group of Congolese men and women.

“That was just incredible that you guys went and helped those people for so long,” Andrea went on. “My mom said she read an article about what you did. You guys were supposed to go on a humanitarian mission with a Christian group for like six months and ended up staying two years. I can’t even imagine, Mrs. Johnson.”

A timer buzzed. “Excuse me, won’t you?” the pastor’s wife said. “I’ve just got to go change the laundry.”

“Can I give you a hand?”

“Oh no, but thank you. If it were our laundry, I’d love the help, but the washing machine broke over at the Williams’ house and the pastor offered to let them use ours. The pastor feels bad enough that they have to bring dirty clothes over. It’s more private for the Williams if it’s just me who handles their clothes.”

“Sure thing.”
“Go have a seat in the kitchen. I’ll be right back.”

When Mrs. Johnson returned, Andrea was examining a shelf of keepsakes behind the kitchen table. “Oh my god, Mrs. Johnson—” she broke off and flashed an embarrassed smile. “Sorry. Guess taking the Lord’s name in vain in a pastor’s house is a double-bad whammy.”

The pastor’s wife gave her a gentle smile, then nodded at the small cross made of woven branches that Andrea had spotted. “You were saying?”

“Is that the cross that the kids in Nepal carved for the pastor?”

“Yes, it is,” she replied, reaching into the cupboard for teacups. “The pastor taught literacy there for three years.”

“I read all about it in the write-up for that award he got for it. I could not believe he donated your house to the Homeless Veterans Association while he was gone.”

“I have fresh mint leaves. Would you like mint tea or regular?”

“Mint please. Was it weird coming back after a bunch of other people had lived here?”

“It broke the pastor’s heart that they moved out when we returned.”

“Is that when he built the shelter down on Sixth and Thompkins Street?”

“Yes. I have strawberry jam or apple butter for the bread.”

“I went by it the other day and read the plaque on it. It says Pastor Johnson mortgaged your house in order to get the shelter—is that homemade?” she asked when she saw the pastor’s wife set the jars of jam and butter on the table. “Oh my god. The lady teaching Sunday School last week said that you guys grow everything you eat except flour and sugar but I thought she was just making it up.”

“The pastor hates to waste money on things we can make ourselves. Have a seat, Andrea. Here’s a knife for the tea loaf. Help yourself.”

“So what’s it like being married to him?” Andrea asked as she spread apple butter over the bread.

“It’s—excuse me,” she said with an apologetic smile when the doorbell rang.
“Oh, Mrs. Johnson, this bread is to die for,” Andrea said when the pastor’s wife returned.

“Thank you,” she replied.

“Was that the Stevens family?”

“Yes.” Mrs. Johnson went to the window, checked the back yard, and then sat at the table. “John and Patti Stevens have had some health problems and my husband didn’t want them to worry about paying for daycare or babysitters while money is so tight. So the children started coming here after school during the week and most of the day on Saturday.”

“Wasn’t Mr. Stevens diagnosed with cancer like a year ago?”

“Yes. My husband thought it would be best for the children to keep coming here so there wouldn’t be any more turmoil than necessary in their lives while their parents are working to pay the bills and settle back into a routine. Here, let me get you another slice of bread.”

Andrea passed her plate, smiling gratefully for the second slice.

“Can I ask why you two never had kids?”

“My husband feels that his calling is to serve in other ways. His congregation is his child. He nurtures them and they are better able to nurture their own children. He feels this is where he can do the most good.”

“Did you always want to be a pastor’s wife?” Andrea asked, sipping her tea.

“As a girl, yes.”

“Was your dad a pastor? Is that why you wanted to marry one?”

“No, my father didn’t attend a church. I wanted to marry a pastor because I’d always loved the book Jane Eyre—have you read it?”

“Yeah, I started it in high school but I got so mad at that man—what was his name? Rochester. I got so mad at him I threw the book out. I’ve seen a couple of the movies, though. There was that pastor guy that wanted Jane to go with him and be a missionary.”

The pastor’s wife set her tea spoon on the saucer and lifted the tea
cup for a sip. “Jane lived with him and his sisters for a while. Then the pastor wanted her to be his wife and go with him.”

“Oh my god—sorry—I hated that in the movie. It was like he wanted Jane to give up her life for him when what he really needed was a servant for work, a dog for affection, and a mother to listen.” Andrea shrugged, then added, “I had to write a paper about it.”

“You’re smarter than I was at your age. I was sure Jane should have chosen St. John.”

“Is that part of the reason you married the pastor?”

“I didn’t see what Jane saw…I was too young to realize—” The phone rang. She reached for where it rested on the wall. “Hello, Jeremiah. Yes, the pastor has everything ready. The casseroles are in the fridge at the church. There are fresh juices, rolls, and salads for fifty people. Of course, Jeremiah. Anything for the volunteer appreciation lunches. Thank you. You too.”

Andrea stood up quickly, gulping the last of her tea. “Mrs. Johnson, I completely forgot, I’m supposed to be at the volunteer appreciation lunch this week. I signed up to help serve.”

“If you’re on your way over, would you take that last casserole with you? I just finished putting it together before you stopped in.”

“Of course! Oh, I just love the stuff you make for these lunches. Tuesday is my favorite day of the week now. Well, except for Fridays when you cook for the friends and family dinner and on Sundays when you do the pastor’s Sunday brunch. I love those Sunday brunches.”

The pastor’s wife retrieved the casserole from the refrigerator. “Heating instructions are written on this paper on the top.”

“Sure thing. But Mrs. Johnson,” Andrea went on as she headed for the door. She turned to throw her arms around the pastor’s wife. “Thank you so much!”

“Anytime—”

“Oh! But you didn’t finish telling me about Jane Eyre and why you married the pastor.”
“When I was younger I thought that Jane should have chosen St. John,” Mrs. Johnson said. “That was why I chose to marry my husband.”

“Maybe marrying St. John wasn’t right for Jane, but look how great it’s been for you…traveling all the time, helping people every day. Wow. Talk about neat.”

As Andrea hurried down the steps, the pastor’s wife looked over at the small bookshelf in the corner where her copy of *Jane Eyre* was lying under a stack of her husband’s theology books. “Foolish me,” she said quietly.

The washing machine buzzed and then children knocked on the back door before letting themselves in. She waved one more time to Andrea, then called for the children to wash their hands before she set the table for their snack. Closing the front door, she went to the laundry room to put in the Williams’ next load.
It was already two o’clock when they finally came to let me out. The bull came to my cell and said that my paperwork had gone through and it was time for deprocessing. I applauded him for his paperwork going through, and followed him out into the main hall with all of the other guys cheering me on. On any other day a smart-ass remark like that would’ve gotten me a verbal warning, but this time he just smiled and led the way like he was the maitre d’ at a fancy restaurant. They led me to a room where I took off their prison blues, then they handed me a dusty box full of my personal clothes and belongings. Four years ago, almost to the day, I was wearing a
clean white t-shirt, Levi’s, and a pair of Tony Llama boots. Now, I was going to wear these clothes again and it felt damn good. The boots fit like a dream, of course. The pants were as broke-in as I remember, but they fit me a little loose on account of all the prison food. The t-shirt felt cold at first. A good kind of cold that you get when you haven’t worn something in a while. Like it has to get used to you all over again. There was a pack of cigarettes that had probably gone stale, and my snakeskin wallet. Inside the wallet was my good old credit card and forty bucks that had gone untouched all this time. I wanted to get my razor back, but they told me they got rid of that.

Outside, the cab was already running and ready to go. I climbed in and told the driver to make for the city and I’d tell him to stop if I found something worth stopping at. He gave me this big white smile. God, he was beautiful. The whole damn world was beautiful. We made the city in another half an hour and I had him drive around the neighborhood near the off-ramp. Nothing changed in this town; still a whole lot of nothing going on. I saw some autoshops that I could apply at, just to keep my parole officer off my ass. But I wasn’t doing anything like that today. Tonight, I was going to get good and loaded. I was going to find me a little party girl to help me spend my money. I could get a cash advance if that credit card still worked. That’d buy me a case of beer and pay my little party girl for her trouble. I could probably get something stronger if I wanted to. Party girls always came with party favors. For now all I wanted was a cold beer and a quiet place to drink it in, maybe something to eat too. I thought of the perfect place to pass the time.

“Driver, take me to Fast Lanes Bowling alley,” I said. I always wanted to say something like that; to call the driver “driver,” and tell him where to go. Fast Lanes was where me and the boys used to go. Mostly for business, but we did a hell of a lot of bowling there, too. I got to be pretty good at it. Those were good times. I was glad to see the
place hadn’t changed a bit. They still had skee-ball and arcade games
for the tourists, though the games all looked a lot newer. Same ugly-ass
orange carpet. Same ugly marble walls like the place was trying to be a
bank instead of a beat-up old bowling alley. Same old Leroy.

“How’s it hanging, Leroy,” I said, trying to sneak up on him. Leroy
was the old Negro who ran the beer counter. Another guy ran the shoe
counter, but beer and snacks was all Leroy. He’d done it for years. His
eyes got all big and buggy looking at me.

“Well, lookit this here,” he said. “How you been, my man? I been
looking for you all over. I ain’t seen you in forever. You get a steady job,
or get married or something?”

Memory loss is what happens to old folks. Old Negros, especially.
“I been up at Lodge Creek, Leroy. Been there for four years. I just
got out today.”

He looked sorry as hell for forgetting.

“How ‘bout a cold Bud and a large order of chili cheese fries on the
house?” he said.

I took his offer and sat down at one of the little tables near the
lanes. The beer was cold, alright. It tasted damn good. I started wolfoing
it down at first, because it had been so long. I stopped and took tiny
sips, letting the bubbles pop on my tongue. I tried to take it easy on
the fries too, trying to savor them, but it was no use. I shoveled them
in. It felt good to feel full again. The food at Lodge Creek never made
you feel that way, no matter how much of it you ate. One more beer
and I’d be doing alright. But first, I got a pack of Winston reds out of
the machine. Goddamn, cigarettes were expensive now.

I lit up and leaned back in my chair. I took a good pull and I let the
smoke roll out of me nice and slow. God, I love a bowling alley. Fast
Lanes was the best there ever was. My favorite part was when I heard
the ball making its run down the lane. A lot of people got a kick out of
the ball crashing into the pins, but for me it was the long, cool sound of
the ball running down the lane. I was never real good at it, like enough
to be professional. The real good players had a way of just sliding the
ball through the lane without rolling it. The way that they did it made
the best sound in the world. I imagined a little cushion of air under the
ball and just a tiny part of the ball touching the wood so you could hear
that smooth sliding sound. I liked to imagine my whole life taking the
time that it takes for one of those balls to run down the lane. Starting as
a little baby I could hear the ball make contact with the wood and start
to roll, and my whole life, from a little baby to a little old man ready
to die, I would get to hear that steady sliding sound. I would hear the
sound not as a short note that would end in a minute, but a long ever-
lasting humming sound, almost. Then, when the ball hits the pins;
that’s when I take my last breath. That’s what I liked to think about.

Ever since I was a little kid I liked to think about one little thing,
like a bowling ball noise, and expand it into one big thing. I’d just keep
blowing up that little thing until it took up all the time and all the
space that there ever was. Sometimes, it was hard to do. First of all, a
man’s got to have enough time to make it work. You can’t have a boss
with a necktie breathing down your shoulder or a wife squawking at
you all the time. You have to give yourself time to concentrate. Then, if
you’re lucky, you go into this kind of trance. It feels like a good drunk,
but different. Everything’s more clear. It’s like you’re more sober than
ever, but it feels all warm and you feel a little sleepy.

I never could get to feeling that way when I was in the joint. Even
at night there’s always something that’ll interrupt you. That’s the whole
point. That’s the biggest thing that they take away from you. It’s not
just that you can’t screw, or get drunk, or get high, though that’s a big
part of it. They never give you enough time to stretch out the minutes
into hours. You never get time to focus for a minute and look at time
for what is. Time is not what everyone thinks. A moment can take a
lifetime if you look at it hard enough. Moving from one thing to the
next, that’s what hell is. That’s what death is. And no one can stop it
all the way.
In the joint, you might think you get all the time in the world, but they know how to take even that away from you. Believe me. I tried again and again to stop time, but they always got me. It’s like they can smell you doing it, and that’s how they know it’s time to get in your face again. They’ll get you every time you try it.

But I’m not worried about it. I believe in living life through the windshield, not through the rear-view. In fact, I could feel that same old feeling coming on, just sitting here smoking my cigarette and hearing all the balls slide down the lanes at once. I could listen to the whole world happening around me now. I was free at last.

Then, I saw them. Three of Diaz’s boys walking down ahead of me. Now, what the hell were they doing on my old turf? They were all bald-headed and tattoo sleeved, and dressed all the same, just like women who read the same damn magazines. They started whispering and giggling to one another when they saw me. They were a happy bunch, the Diaz kids; always laughing about something or nothing at all.

“Howdy,” I said as they walked by. Then, they started getting pouty. They started putting on their mean faces to try and scare me. I’d love to take it to the next level, though. I’d love that. I never got a chance to finish off any of those Diaz screws in prison, and now that I was out I was all jumpy and anxious to make one of them hurt. It was nothing personal, you understand. They never did anything to me. I just liked the way it made me feel. That’s all. That’s the only way I can feel real sometimes. A man needs to find a chance to feel real, to stand apart. I was no different. If they all left me alone there’d be no need for any of it.

Yeah, they’ll get you all right. You never can be left alone to stretch the seconds out, and hear that old humming sound. You just want to be still and hear the world make that sound, but you never got the chance. It gets to be so you just can’t stand it anymore. First, it’s your parents, then it’s your teachers, then it’s your boss or your old lady.
They just never stopped beating down your door. That’s what got me in the joint, I guess. I just wanted to be quiet, and this other guy had to come along and make it all about him. He was always jacking his jaw about something. I warned him, but he never shut up long enough to hear me. He probably never heard the humming in his whole rotten life. Anyway, I snapped. I made it so he couldn’t jack that jaw anymore. They had a machine that breathed for him for three days before they finally pulled the plug. They told me I took it too far, and maybe they were right. I really couldn’t say.

Now the first day that I’m out they find me and make it hard for me to be quiet again. Maybe, someday I’ll go back to the same place inside myself as I did on that night four years ago. It could happen. Not just with a Diaz, but with anybody. What was a person anyways? Just another dumb animal running around in the forest. Everybody treats people like they’re something special and when one of them gets it the hard way they act like the whole system will grind to a halt. It won’t. The quiet can never last long enough. Soon, the system wakes up and starts chasing it around again.

I looked at a group of girls giggling and granny throwing their balls down the alley. They were all the same, too. They thought everything and everyone around them needed them in order to work. It was all about them until the day they died. Everybody else told them that, too. They would never hear the humming. They would never be quiet enough to let it happen. I made my finger into a gun and sighted each giggly one of them and fired off a round. All I had to do was wait for it to happen, now. Soon, it would all come back to me.
They take us early for the starships. I went just after my seventh birthday, even though my mama told everyone I was really eight. But I remember the candles on my birthday cake. Seven white ones, one red. I saw mama looking at the cake as if she’d forgotten something. She reached in a drawer and pulled out the red candle from a pack of six. Mama said the red one was special. A birthday gift. She said I got to skip seven and go right from six to eight.

Mama always took me to see the shuttles take off. Every morning we went to the market for bananas and carrots and tomatoes and bread, and we would stop to watch the
shuttles. I remember the weave of the chain-link fence as I pressed my face against it to see the launchpad. The shuttles would sit on the blackened concrete, their assist packs venting white clouds. Mama said they were keeping at equilibrium. I asked her what that meant, and she said it was too hot outside for them. I brushed my bangs back and felt the moisture run down my back under my shirt. I thought the ships must have to sweat, too. Maybe that was the smoke and clouds. Sweating, breathing, panting like my best friend Sari’s dog, it’s pink tongue hanging out and its eyes half closed like it was content to sit on the cool ground.

The shuttles always vented in the warm mornings. I thought they could be moved to Alaska. I heard it wasn’t so hot in Alaska as it was in Arizona. They would be more comfortable there and wouldn’t have to pant to stay cool.

When I was five I remember my mama giving me a book of the stars. It had pictures traced between the dots of light. One was a dragon, long and fiery. Like the ships when they took off. I asked Mama if dragons panted like dogs or if they sweat like me, water running down their scaly backs. Mama said she didn’t know. She said if I met a dragon, I should ask it. Mama took me to see the dragon take off every day, but I couldn’t get close enough to ask and Mama shushed me the time I tried to call to it.

When I turned six, I had a fun birthday. Sari came over with her parents. We ate cake and ice-cream, and I got the rose made out of frosting. It was red frosting. After Sari and her mom and dad went home, Mama said she had to talk to me. She said I was old now, old enough to make big decisions. Mama asked me if I wanted to fly. I asked her if she meant in one of the dragons. She gave me an odd look. She said I didn’t have to answer right away, that I could think about it first. She said all my teachers said that I had learned enough. Mr. Bury had said I was very good at physics, better than all the other children. I said I didn’t know if I wanted to fly the dragon.
Mama and I went to the market the next day and stopped at the chain-link fence. I pressed my face against the fence hard and looked at the panting ship, smooth except for the bulge of the assist pack at the back. I looked at the dragon. It would fly up into the air, up into the stars I could see at night like the dragon in my book of stars.

I told my Mama I would like to fly up above. Very much.

Next week Mama got me a game. It had a joystick and a screen. It made me turn and dive and roll as my dragon flew up into the air to the stars. After a week, it was too easy, and I started reading a book on lights that Mr. Bury gave me. Particle and wave. Sari didn’t like my game or my book. She said they were too hard. We went to see takeoffs together and played with her dog.

Mama said I was very clever with the game, and she gave me another one. I beat that one, too. The whole year I got new games and books on light. I beat the games quickly and went back to the books of light.

Sari and I would go to the launch pad at night, especially when the stars were out. The dragon ships didn’t pant then. They took off on a tail of fire and smoke. Roaring, too. Once we wriggled under the fence and crept toward the dragon. Sari was too scared to touch it. She wouldn’t get beyond the concrete edge. I tried to get her to come, but she wouldn’t move. Said we shouldn’t be there.

I walked across the concrete in my bare feet. The pad was warm like sleeping against Mama. The dragon lay against it, its feet curled under its long body. Its glass eyes half-lidded. I reached my hand out slowly, not wanting to disturb it. I brushed my fingers against its scales, six-sided and white and cool. More cool than the night. I put my palms against it and under the coolness I could feel the dragon coiled and ready to jump, to fly. I looked up and saw the lights of suns far away. I put my cheek against the dragon and closed my eyes. Dragon, I said. Take me to those lights. I want to fly with you dragon.

I heard a soft rumble from its belly. I patted it gently and went back to the fence with Sari. She asked me what I was doing. I told her I was talking to the dragon. She gave me a funny look.
Aelurus

After my eighth birthday was over, even though I was only seven, Sari and her parents had gone home. Her parents had hugged me especially tight, and told me “goodbye” instead of “see you tomorrow.” I asked Mama what they meant.

Mama said she had a special present for me. She gave me a box and told me to open it. The box didn’t have any writing or wrapping on it and fit on my lap. I thought it was a funny kind of birthday present. I opened it and saw a grey uniform. It had the dragon on the left breast and a flag on the arms.

Underneath it, said my mama.

I pulled the uniform out of the box and laid it on the couch next to me. I opened the envelope in the bottom of the box. It had an official paper in it, a seal worked into it. I read it aloud. It said I was commissioned to be a pilot in the National United Space Corps. I was to report to Mars in a week. Mama smiled and said that I got to fly dragons now. I saw from her look that she wasn’t coming. The box fell to the floor as I stood up and hugged my mama. I cried to her and said I didn’t know if I wanted to leave her. She calmed me and said that it was time. I was seven years old plus an extra year so that I could legally join the corps. She caressed my long hair and pulled me onto her lap. She said I didn’t have to go if I didn’t want to, but I had to decide by tomorrow morning because that was when my dragon took off for Mars.

I didn’t say anything. I just stayed curled up in my mother’s warmth.

Mama said that it would be hard for me if I stayed. Since Daddy was gone, she couldn’t afford a school for me anymore. She said that her own job wasn’t enough. She told me of the stars I would go see and that I could sometimes come back and sit on her lap if I did well. I told Mama I would tell her before I went to bed.

I went alone to watch the dragon take off. I called out to it. I asked it if it knew where my father went. I asked it where it could take me and if I should leave my mama to go there. In a cloud of fire and
smoke, the dragon shot into the night sky, a tail of red followed it until it was out of air and into space.

I went home and changed into my pajamas. Mama wasn’t there. I brushed my hair and my teeth and got into bed. When Mama came in, she said she had something for me. To help her little girl be brave. I asked her how she knew I was going to go. She said she just knew.

She handed me a small metal cylinder. I unscrewed the top and a little of the red dirt spilled onto my bed. Mama said that Mars’ red wasn’t like Arizona’s red. I hugged her with one arm, careful not to let more dirt spill onto my Mr. Mouse sheets. Mama helped me make sure the cylinder top was tight before she kissed me with her warm, moist lips and turned out the light.
The lieutenant squeezed his eyes shut against the ghostly gleam of moonlight hidden behind the heavy clouds of a week-long rain. When he opened them again, he was looking up—a direction he’d carefully avoided during the last five days that he’d spent huddled in the mud while the Germans shot every limb that showed itself above the trench.

The private next to him glanced over, face pale, eyes dim, breathing shallow and slow.

The lieutenant was sure the boy hadn’t noticed the tree above them and hadn’t wanted him to.

Something about looking at it and being unable to get to it seemed too cruel to share.
But now the lieutenant nodded upwards. Better the boy next to him
die looking at something good that was out of reach than the mud he
was stuck in, the lieutenant thought.

The private’s neck tilted slowly, following the gaze of the lieutenant.
“Ch-ch-cherr,” the private whispered through his chattering teeth.
“R-rr-eal…r-real ch-err-ies.” His eyes were wide when he lowered his
gaze back to the lieutenant. “A-ain’t s-s-een ch-cherr-ies s-s-ince—”

Hadn’t had cherries since he’d left home, the lieutenant was sure.

The lieutenant unfolded his arms and lifted his rifle onto his lap,
barrel pointed skyward. He breathed on his fingers several times to
thaw them, then fired.

The single blast burst through the night’s frozen silence, followed
by the crack of a breaking tree limb. On the other side of the lieutenant,
a soldier swore, then took aim and shot upwards to dislocate another
branch of the tree overhead. Another followed suit.

Across the muddy field, enemy fire rang out. Above them, cherries
fell from the sky.
It won’t be long now. Once the Board makes its decision it’ll all be over.

Shuffling around the house, Reggie looked at the faded photos on the wall. There was Jimmy Osterleider, standing outside that brothel in Saigon. Bobby Higgins on patrol. The whole platoon standing in formation, just off the plane in ’68. So long ago … He looked at the photos, smiling at how young and innocent they all looked. That certainly had changed in a hurry. Endless patrols and an interminable series of uncertain minutes had a way of aging a man that civilian time could never hope to match. By the middle of ’69, Higgins was dead, Osterleider was dead on the inside—his eyes as unfocused as
a corpse’s, going on patrol and back to base without saying so much as three words—and Reggie wasn’t far behind either of them. He caught his reflection in the picture’s glass.

Where once had stood a six-foot-two, two-hundred-twenty pound high school athlete, perfect blond hair and piercing blue eyes, now there was only an old man, blond hair now white – not even grey – with a stoop that made him seem five-foot-five, with the pain of forty years visible in his clouded eyes and lined face, and even in every movement he made. *I just wish it didn’t hurt so much.*

He heard the mail drop through the slot in his front door, and made his way slowly over to get it. Only two pieces today. He picked them up. The first was from the VA—that would be his disability payment—as if money could somehow compensate for the pain that racked his body and soul, and the other from the Board.

*Finally, an answer.*

Dropping the envelope from the VA onto the coffee table, Reggie sat down on the couch and looked at the envelope. The postmark was December 18, 2015.

*That was fast.*

He sighed as he struggled with the envelope, cursing softly to himself at the paper cut he received in the process. Finally extricating the single sheet of paper, he grabbed his glasses so that he could read it.

*Dear Sir, blah, blah, blah …* he moved through the opening paragraphs summarizing his request. *Damned form letters.* Moving quickly to the heart of the message, he read *Due to the severity of your case … traditional methods of treatment are not considered a viable option … stress on the national health system … the requested alternate procedure is authorized … scheduled for December 25, 2015 at your local VA facility.*

*Wait—December 25? That’s tomorrow.*

He couldn’t believe how quickly everything was happening now. *That’s the new health care system, I guess. Even us vets are getting different*
treatment than we used to. And on Christmas, too.

Finally, though, the pain he’d lived with for so long would be gone. Moving to the bedroom, Reggie looked around and decided that there was nothing that he needed to take with him to the facility, so he went back out into the kitchen and made supper.

After dinner, he watched some TV and fell asleep in his favorite chair. Just before his eyes closed he thought about James and Bobby and all the others.

I miss you guys.

The next morning, he moved with a sense of purpose. He combed—or tried to—his bushy hair, but didn’t even consider trying to shave. That would have taken him an hour at least.

You can’t grow it for six months and then expect it to just come off when you want it to.

Grabbing his VA ID card and transit pass, he shuffled off to the bus stop with plenty of time to spare.

He certainly didn’t want to be late—not today.

As the bus finally stopped and he got off and began to walk the one block to the facility, Reggie began to feel better. The stress of years of pain and solitude lifted and he even managed a smile for the people passing him on the sidewalk.

They must think I’m a real kook, smiling at them like this.

He entered the facility and was immediately struck by the smell.

No matter how they organize health care, they’ll never be able to change what a hospital smells like. God, I hate this smell!

At the admitting desk, a thirty-something, neo-hippie volunteer pulled up his name in the computer and pointed him down a red line painted on the floor. He didn’t see the look on her face as he turned away. He wouldn’t have cared if he had. Her sympathy didn’t matter to him.

Reaching the end of the red line, Reggie was greeted by a nurse who had him sign a few forms and then change into the still-too-small, ass-exposing hospital gown before walking him down a freezing hallway to
a small room with a gurney.

Getting settling on the gurney under the warmed blanket, Reggie couldn’t help but smile again.

The doctor walked in—some twenty-odd-year-old fresh out of med school working off his scholarships with public service, no doubt—and asked how Reggie was doing this morning.

*If I was okay, would I be here?*

Doogie Howser just shook his head and made a few notes on the chart. “… about half an hour …” was all Reggie caught as the doctor turned and left the room.

Half an hour. What to do for half an hour? Read magazines older than his doctor? *No thanks.* He turned on the TV and found some inane morning talk show. A bunch of people who had never done anything but talk about work and real life were pontificating again on how they knew what everyone else was doing wrong.

*You’re what’s wrong with this country, you little weasels. Get a real job.*

The screen flashed and a large “Breaking News” graphic appeared.

*Probably just some kid got lost on the way to school again and they’re making a fuss about it. Kid’s probably just at the mall playing hookie.*

The scene that appeared wasn’t anything resembling a crying mother looking for her child. Instead, Reggie saw a huge crowd gathered around what was being identified as a hospital in Washington, DC. Apparently, the rioting was getting worse, and a doctor had been shot on his way in. Signs were being waived by the crowd—“No socialist medicine,” “Don’t ration my Healthcare,” and others that Reggie couldn’t quite make out. He didn’t condone killing a doctor, but the crowd was nice to see.

*At least people are getting involved again; not being led around like sheep anymore, right or wrong.*

Finally, after watching the scene for a while and recognizing that the police seen standing off to the side in their riot gear would be seeing action soon enough—mobs this big and angry never went home
without a little persuasion—an orderly came in and wheeled Reggie down the hallway into an even smaller room. When he got there, the door closed and an IV was inserted into his arm. The saline solution dripped rapidly from its hanging bag into the tube, like it was somehow aware that it didn’t have long to do its work.

As he watched the doctor inject something into the IV bag, Reggie smiled and thought again about the letter he’d received yesterday, and the promise of relief it had finally brought him ….

Due to the severity of your case and its terminal prognosis, traditional methods of treatment are not considered a viable option. Any experimental treatments would place too high a stress on the national health system. Therefore, the Review Board for Care Acquisition has determined that the requested alternate procedure is authorized to be performed. Your termination therapy has been scheduled for December 25, 2015 at your local VA facility.

As the IV dripped into his arm, Reggie smiled, eyes closing.

At least the pain is gone … see you soon, fellas …
Shattered

Sarah M. Gawronski

She was pleased to see her old friend. A long forgotten smile lighted upon her lips as she embraced him and covered herself in his warmth. The warmth spread through her deadened limbs faster than the champagne she consumed earlier, and there was no violence in this warmth as there was with the champagne, only comfort, a long forgotten comfort. He was her single ally against a world that deceived her. Tricked her. He didn’t pretend. There was no façade to break through for he was a true friend. A friend of a forgotten age and the kind the world no longer produced. He held her tight whispering old desires into her ears making
her long for him as she had never longed before. She desired to stay in
his embrace forever, but more sinister forces beckoned her away, and
she had no choice but to heed their call.

Champagne bubbled violently over the sing-songy crystal rim of
her glass onto her pale satin dress. She could feel the bubbles pop as they
slid silently down her hand trying to escape the confines of the glass. All
she could do was stare in wonder, pondering how they got there – how
she got here. She longed for her old friend, but he disappeared amidst
the lights and chimes of crystal toasts. She could still see his shadow
as he faded from her vision, and his warmth faded from her skin. The
only thing surrounding her now was the icy coldness of fake laughter
and faithless friends. It was no longer the champagne she tasted on her
lips but a salty tear, a familiar enemy.

This party was like any other. Was there any other kind? It was
simply a nightmare transposed upon reality. People. God forsaken
people everywhere. They knew she didn’t like people but didn’t care.
Her friends didn’t care. Oh they pretended to. They said all the right
things: “How are you, today?” “Let’s do lunch.” “I’m here if you need
to talk.” But they didn’t want to talk, they wanted to gossip. They
didn’t even notice as her eyes glazed over, her mind slipping away as
her body stayed captive. They didn’t care. They pretended to because
etiquette required it of them. The world is a place made up of fools and
pretenders, and those who say they are not are the biggest frauds of all.

The party swirled on around her without her comprehending it.
Without it comprehending her. A panic attack reduced everything to a
nauseating swirl of colors and noises. And still nobody noticed; nobody
cared. This was supposed to be in her honor, and yet nobody noticed.
Nobody noticed the guest of honor. They were too busy flirting with
the staff, with each other, with their drinks, with themselves to notice
the guest of honor. They were too busy to notice the tears staining her
pristine face, the champagne staining her flawless gown, the nightmare
staining her shattered soul. All they saw was her painted smile.
Fiction

They mocked her with the party. Even the violent tendencies of the champagne seemed to be mocking her. Yes, even the champagne mocked her just as the halo of lights that turned her world surreal mocked her with their hints of deception. The perfumed air deceived her senses. The deception was so great she could not even distinguish between the truth and her own mind. She knew her own mind never gave her the truth. But did the world ever tell the truth? These were the thoughts that made her head hurt. That made the tenuous walls inside her mind slip just enough. Usually thinking of something pretty, like sparkly champagne, mended the slip. But tonight it was the violent, frothy bubbling of the expensive champagne that caused the slip.

Usually the slip scared her. But tonight she longed for it. She begged for it. She just needed to get out, to get away from the lights, the music, the perfume, the champagne, the people. She stretched out her arms, beckoning for freedom, beckoning for the return of her friend, for he always told her the truth. He was truth. She could see the doors and the blessed darkness beyond, but she had to transgress the gauntlet of lights and noise to reach its beckoning embrace. Courage had never been her strong suit and fear was now coursing through her blood. She pulled on her single strength: the ability to disappear. She held her head high, pasted on her smile, and with the breath stuck in her throat, she reached the door. She had finally escaped the kaleidoscope of façades and nauseating banalities of people.

As she looked around the dark street, her panic seeped away into the sewer. Breath came back to her lungs. The sweat dried from her upper lip. She didn’t fear the streets, for he was there. Her face was flushed, and she felt feverish when she returned to his embrace. Darkness caressed her with his gentle touch. He guided her down the streets and alleyways she had always been taught to fear. Taught by her mother, by her friends, but in the end who were friends to tell you what was safe? It was in the penthouse party where she felt most vulnerable.
It was amongst those who called themselves her friends that she felt fear. It was as the guest of honor where she felt most abandoned and terrified.

Here the streets felt friendlier than anything she had experienced in months, maybe years. With Darkness as her companion, she never felt safer, more loved. The dark, dirty streets gave her peace. The streetlights caused her to pause but Darkness was with her, beckoning her to continue. He beckoned her as the true friend she never had but always dreamt of. In the darkest corner of the world her hunger was sated. She sobbed into his enfolding embrace, and drifted into a dreamless sleep. She was safe, comforted, and at peace.

As her mind slipped the confines of reality for the last time, she heard the words which would forever ground her to her new world: “Welcome home, my love.”
Never had she seen so many hummingbirds on the honeysuckle. She counted nine hovering along the fence, though it was hard to be certain. They moved so busily. Still, she took it as a good sign.

She was planting her petunias, one of a long list of chores and activities planned for the day. Organizing the garage was next. She had tried to get Gary to do it, but he was out the door at 7 a.m. with their neighbor Rick, slinging his golf clubs into the back of the Subaru.

“Gotta go, Honey. Hit the links before the crowds,” Gary said. Then in a whisper: “I’m helping out Rick. His mother-in-law’s
coming to town today and he wants to be out of the house. Remember I mentioned it to you?"

“You were gonna straighten the garage,” Rebecca said.

“Rick needs my help.”

“It’s okay. I’ll see you when you get back.”

“Thanks, Honey. You’re the best!”

It was just as well. Gary had no organizational skills. After they had wed, he decided to remake their bedroom closet. He bought shelving, rods, hooks, a few drawers and baskets. He took down the traditional rod that had held their shirts, dresses, pants and skirts, and placed the clothes on a bedroom chair and chest at the foot of their bed.

Two days later, he had hung two rods and assembled a rickety stack of drawers. The remaining apparatus lay strewn around the bedroom. At least she was able to hang the clothes, until one of the rods fell from the weight. She called a closet organizer and $500 later had a finished compartment with all the accoutrements Gary had planned. The problem was deeper than mere organizational skills, she thought.

Organizing the garage would give her the opportunity to discard some of Gary’s keepsakes, such as the mounted deer head he bought at a garage sale or the table saw that lacked a motor and hadn’t been used since 1998 or Gary’s dresser he had used as a kid and kept for sentimental value, even though the back leg had fallen off and he propped it straight with a cinderblock. She could jettison the 1972 fridge on wheels which Gary kept and said he would modify to keep beer on tap, and their companion set of bicycles, one which lacked a chain and the other that needed a rim. The National Geographics had to go, as well as the pile of firewood Gary had kept for camping. They hadn’t camped since the ‘90s.

By noon, a massive pile was assembled at the curb. Kids and passersby were diminishing its size. Bobby Kindle grabbed the deer head and took it home. His mother would hate it, Rebecca thought. So what! At least now the garage had room for a car.
Fiction

She next went to run errands: dry cleaners to pick up her dress for the celebration, the bank and the legal office.

“That’s a beautiful dress,” said the clerk. “I’m glad we were able to get that spot out.”

“Me too,” she said, paying the clerk and taking the blue chiffon cocktail dress from off the rack. “I can’t wait to put it on.”

She arrived at Chase bank, parked and entered. There was no line at the tellers.

“May I help you,” a young woman with blonde hair and blue eyes said from the third teller window. Rebecca asked to close out her account and handed her debit card to the teller.

“It appears your husband’s name is also on this account.”

“That’s right, but it only needs one signature for withdrawal,” Rebecca said. “I’d like a cashier’s check.” Rebecca folded the check in half and tucked it into her pocketbook. She headed for the offices of Schumer and Solomon.

The receptionist led Rebecca to a back office and a paralegal in her mid-30s, dressed smartly in a blue business skirt and blouse. She extended her hand to Rebecca: “How are you?”

“I’m great,” Rebecca said. “Are we ready?”

“I have all the paperwork right here. Just a few signatures and we’ll serve the papers this afternoon.”

“That’ll be fine,” Rebecca said.

Driving home, she felt lighter than she had in years. A grin crossed her face as she pulled into the driveway and parked behind a white van. Painted on its side was a company name: “Keys to Happiness, Locks, Safes and Repair Service.”

A burly man with a beard, wearing blue pants and a collared shirt with a name tag that read “Frank” stepped from the van. “You Mrs. McMurray?”

“That’s right,” she said, taking the chiffon dress from the car and slinging it over her shoulder.
“We got an order for new locks on all the doors.”
“That’s right,” Rebecca said. She smiled at him.
A hummingbird whizzed by, hovering at the honeysuckle for a long and luxurious drink.
Creative Non-Fiction

Saturday Market, Tagen Towsley Baker
Getting a pedicure is a relatively new extravagance for me and probably my single indulgence. I always feel a little self-conscious having someone trim my toenails and shave my calluses. It runs contrary to the rest of my life: I clean my own house, tend my own yard and seldom rely on outside help. Hana is my regular girl. She gives particularly lengthy calf and foot massages and she is not afraid to use pressure on the soles. I don’t imagine that Hana is her real name — it’s probably an Americanized version of whatever her Asian name is, but there are no Asian customers at Hana’s Nails and I have grown surprisingly comfortable with her skilled use of sharp
instruments to keep my feet groomed. Hannah is also the name of my nineteen-year-old daughter. She lives somewhere in this same town where I drop my cleaning, pick up groceries and have my toes painted. I do not know where that is.

I was feeling good about my decision to turn a cheek to the popcorn chicken and grab a healthy snack after my rare attendance at a ten o’clock yoga class. I arrived about ten minutes early with a book and a crisp, red Brayburn. The Complete Poetry and Prose of Walt Whitman bulged out the sides of my purse, reminding me to resist the gossipy magazines dedicated to the exploitation of rich, beautiful and tormented people I don’t know. If necessary, I was content to wait.

I apologetically acknowledged my somewhat early arrival and a girl I’d never seen before gestured at the wall of shiny colors as a signal for me to make my choice. I proceeded to turn the jars upside down and to make my selection based on the color name. I usually pick up one or two repeats. “I’m Really Not a Waitress” and “Tasmanian Devil Made Me Do It” often make it to the finals. This day, an interesting shade of russet caught my eye. I flipped over the jar and chuckled at the name: “Magnifico Mexico.” My husband knows that there is little he can do to change what has happened to our family, but he still tries to protect me. His first inclination, when he senses that I am about to crash, is to book an escape. He had reminded me, just that morning, that there were only twenty-two days until our next get away and I immediately thought of San Miguel when I read the nail polish bottle. A tiny, olive-colored hand motioned for me to take the second to the last chair furthest from the door and I headed back, pink apple and orangey lacquer in hand.

As I approached the end of the row, I noticed an enormous pair of feet elevated on the tub’s edge adjacent to the chair reserved for me. Each big toe was at least the size of a narrow kiwi. I quickly ran my eyes upward the length of the dark, sweatpant-covered legs and took in the whole of the person seated in the chair. I put my purse on the
ground in between our two chairs, next to his huge, white tennis shoes and balled-up socks. Each shoe was a small dinghy and I was morbidly awed by the enormity of the man next to me.

On the side we shared, his armrest had been lowered but still, his mass spilled over and under concealing the mahogany from view. I wondered if it was painful to be smashed like that and I strained to look across his immensity. The other arm of his chair had been left up and the cargo of his body overflowed toward the next empty chair. I then noticed that with the exception of our two seats, not a single chair was taken. I tried to disguise the fact that I was looking over his gut-heap at all the empty chairs available to me, but I am fairly certain that my look of disappointment betrayed my thoughts. I gave a quick glance around the shop to see if anyone of authority had noticed my discomfort. Frustrated, I thought I might quickly devise a plan to reschedule when the new girl I’d never seen before took a seat at my feet and went about her work, filling the water with Eucalyptus Sea salts. By then I was trapped.

I lowered the arm that divided my neighbor from me and chose a full back, gentle roll massage. The massage controls are on the left arm of each chair, but the giant’s chair arm remained raised. The situation was pathetic, as it was apparent he was denied the option of selecting a massage because of his inability to fit in the chair. I wondered if it would be insensitive to dial in my own pleasurable vibration or if it would be more likely to attract his attention if I didn’t. Would the sound remind him of what he could not experience? I was caught in a limbo of indecision before I decided not to let his limitations become mine. I needed one hour of reprieve from thoughts about his or anyone else’s self-inflicted problems! I tried to shut my eyes and pretend that I was alone but I kept opening them to look at the man next to me. Obesity is simultaneously repulsive and intriguing and I couldn’t help but stare

“I thought of Whitman’s democratic emotion and I knew I had failed him.”
Aelurus

at this colossal man whose bulk nearly quadrupled mine. Settling into
the leather massage chair, I allowed my eyes to revert back to the man
on my left and thought, “I’ll never even open my book now.”

This Goliath had shorn, grey hair and a backside that mimicked a
snow-covered hill. The slope cascaded straight from the crown of his
head down to his back without demarcation of a neckline. I could
see crevices where his neck should have been and wondered how, or
if, he could reach behind himself to adequately bathe. I shivered at
the thought and then noticed with horror that his tarp-like T-shirt
was nearly the exact color of my Mexican vacation-inspired nail polish.
The bloat of his stomach hung over his thighs so that they too were
impossible to distinguish. His posture and loaf spread beyond the
arms of the chair and I wondered if the tiny Asian girl tending his feet
would be expected to help him rise after his pedicure. Would all the
giggling girls gather to crane him up and out of the chair? How had he
managed to lower himself into the position to begin with? I was sorry
to have missed that.

Smeared handprints covered the side of his pant leg closest to me
and I assumed he had no idea they needed washing. I studied the smear
and it reminded me of maple icing from one of those log-sized donuts
the secretaries share at early morning staff meetings. The exposed lower
legs were the same massive diameter from knee to ankle, and they were
the grey-white color of a flounder’s underbelly. One more quick glance
at his feet and I decided to divert my attention to my book after all.

I had made it about half way through Whitman’s “Song of Myself”
and having rediscovered where I left off, I began with the line, “I am
not stuck up, and am in my place.” Surely this was a coincidence. Still,
I did not look at the man next to me. I read on and smiled when I
came to the line, “In all people I see myself.” I forced my eyes to shift
back toward the human heap to my left and shuddered at the thought
of being trapped inside such a swell of fat and flesh. It was just then
that I noticed a wedding ring cutting into his Ball Park fingers and
had anyone seen my face, they would have detected evident surprise. I looked down at his toenails, thin and white, like the plastic lids on drinks they hand you at the drive through. When I turned back to my book, I realized that I had lost my place while wondering if his wife was equally rotund. I reread the line, “these are the thoughts of all men in all ages and land; they are not original with me.” At that, I looked around the salon and tried to gauge whether anyone else was watching the obese man in the orange T-shirt or if he was just the object of my obsession. I was still thinking about his wife when I reached the line, “Who goes there! hankering, gross, mystical, nude?” and then I realized I no longer had an appetite for the apple I had stashed in my purse.

I gave up on the book and reclined, eyes closed, while a pretty Asian girl massaged my feet. I thought of Whitman’s democratic emotion and I knew I had failed him. I immediately associated the thought of failure with my own Hannah and wondered how much more either she or I could handle. I was angry at the silent, fat man for this reminder of my daughter and then I was angry at myself for allowing him to point my thoughts in a direction I longed to avoid….just for one hour. I glanced at the cover of my book and felt my face warm with shame as I looked into the eyes of America’s Poet. The instinctive reaction I had tolerated and then indulged for the last thirty minutes was not one of contemplated likeness but of difference. I gave over to the elitist emotion and “I beheld the picturesque giant and [did not] love him.” I tried to forgive myself and shrug off my guilt as I returned to “Song of Myself” and the line, “What is a man anyhow? What am I?”

I closed the book again, shook my head and thought, I am the mother of a 19-year-old heroin addict whose identity is lost inside an eighty-five pound body, marked with tracks and bruises. I wanted to lean over to the mountain next to me, lay a hand on his fleshy arm and tell him who I am but “my foothold was tenoned and mortised in granite” and “I knew perfectly well my own egotism.”
Aelurus

As he was preparing to leave, I pretended not to notice him struggling to put on his shoes. I could feel my heart beating fast inside my chest and when I sensed he was almost ready to stand, I turned my head to look directly into his grey eyes, inches away from mine.

“My stuff isn’t in your way, is it?”

He smiled shyly and in a voice that betrayed only kindness and patience, he answered, “Not at all. Not at all.”
There are certain things one is supposed to know about one’s spouse after 22 years of marriage. You know, intuitively, when he rolls over, that he’s simply readjusting his sleeping position, and you can tell the difference between these moments and those when he rolls over to see if you’re “awake.” So I should have known, or been made aware of his intention to turn, look me straight in the eyes and say, “So, do you have an Edward Abbey quote for us?”

Any other day and I could have come up with something. But in this case, I came up dry as the Javelina Wash in the West Tucson desert in June and I was surprisingly irked at having been put on the spot. It was a
chance to come through in the moment, be the clutch player, catch the unexpected around-the-back toss from my teammate and be his hero. High five. Chest slam. But I failed him and it was his fault.

In my own defense, I might suggest again, that one should expect more from her partner of 22 years. A conversation beforehand would have prepared me for the perfect catch.

Right before I do it—right before she goes over the side of the mountain—I’m going to turn and ask you for a quote—So, be ready. One of your favorites: Shakespeare, or Cervantes or whatever—no, something more appropriate to the place—Edward Abbey. I’ll say, ‘So, do you have a quote for us?’ and you pause—look pensive—like you haven’t thought about this very moment every single day for the past several years and say something profound….Then over the side she goes. It’ll seem so spontaneous.

Later, I would recall the quote I wanted to recall at that moment. I could see it on the page. Right side of the book, lower half. Something about landscape and women. In “The Sorrows of Travel,” Abbey writes, “So many of my own journeys have been made in pursuit of love. In pursuit of pain. And in flight from both.” That’s his introduction to the chapter. But the line I wish I could have recalled at that particular moment, atop Wasson Peak, was the very next line: “Landscape and women…how clever of the inventor of this scheme to create from such abundant, glorious materials so tangled a web of confusion and misery” (181). That would have been my flying-leap-into-the-air catch, my Sports Center play of the day.

Chris suggests that we take the back way to Tucson and stop at Casa Grande. My spirits lift and because it’s a rental, I put my bare feet up on the dashboard. We cross from Maricopa County into Pinal County and Chris explains the connection between this fertile land and the Pima cotton industry. I look around at what appears to be the ground literally sizzling and I do not know what fertile means in this
place. I try saying Mary-I-Cope-Ah the way the prison warden says it in *Raising Arizona*. I listen to Chris talk about the cotton and all that, but I’m trying to remember whether or not we own the movie while also trying to get my Maricopa mimic down pat. A tamale tent and a sign that reads, “12 for 12” makes me wish I were someplace else.

It’s the weekend following the devastating tornados in Alabama and the frequent sight of dust devils in the plowed fields is juxtaposed against the radio reports of devastation in the South. Here, the funnels are peach-colored and they appear and disappear with frequency and variety. They’re cute and fun to watch. They pop up out of nowhere, spin like antique wooden tops and then poof, disappear. The cylindrical shapes dance rather than destroy and sway rather than slash. The kids and I are having fun spotting the dust devils when Chris tells us that Indians think they’re evil spirits. A chindi, he tells us, is the ghost left behind after a person dies. It is believed to leave the body with the deceased’s last breath. The dust devil represents everything that was bad about the person. The vortex is the residue that the dead person was unable to bring into universal harmony. Traditional Navajo believe that contact with a chindi can cause illness or even death and it is best to allow the chindi to disperse. The car is now silent and Chris is smiling.

Two grey haired old men in Western-style shirts stand between a mailbox and a “Move in Specials” sign poked into the hard, dry ground in front of one of the many trailer parks between the towns of Florence and Coolidge. We pass and they stare without waving. Chris calls them “fringe players” and I wonder what there is to play with out here. My husband, an only child, drives onward toward ruins in the middle of the desert while his own, grown son sleeps open-mouthed and childishy content in the back seat. This stretch of the highway is maintained in memory of James L. Lopez, loving father.

At Casa Grande, we marvel at the concrete-like hardpan texture of the ruins and I shout across the empty compound that the stuff is called caliche. It’s a fun word to say, so I repeat it to myself over and
over until one of them turns around and acknowledges my discovery. “The stuff is called caliche! Hey, Guys! Do you hear me? Cuh-LEE-cheel.”

I amuse myself in the museum while the kids and their dad finish exploring the compound. I am drawn to the artistic renderings of ceremonial burial rites and the pieces of pottery believed to have been used in such rituals. The heading above the display reads, “Those Who Are Gone” and my eyes keep coming back to the line, “Many questions remain unanswered.” We’re all quiet as we load back into our rented Chevy Traverse: they are drenched in sweat; I am deep in thought.

As we pass the monstrous Picacho State Prison, Hannah asks, “Where are we?” Conor is asleep again. I tell her that we are on a road maintained by Willie Jimenez. Chris tells her that Picacho Peak is the halfway mark between Phoenix and Tucson and that it was the handoff point for the custody swap between his parents when he was growing up.

Conor is awake and singing along to Bill Withers’ “Lean on Me” when Chris points out the Tucson Mountain District and Wasson Peak in the distance. It seems that all of a sudden dirt devils appear everywhere and I am gloomy as I stare at the peak. I want to turn back and feed the critters at Cogburn’s Ostrich Ranch. I want to pull over and sample mesquite honey and barrel cacti jellies at the roadside stand a few miles back. Maybe we should stop in Marana and all get cowboy boots. In this instant I know that everything leading up to this point has been a diversion and that the real reason we are here centers on that perpendicular protrusion in the distance and what it holds in store.

In the morning, Chris wakes more eagerly than I would have expected and he mumbles something about getting this “freak show going.” The sky is Kashmiri blue and there is not a cloud visible for miles. As we drive toward Saguaro National Park, I scan the solid blue sky for a single white wisp and I try to heed the advice from Paul
McCartney: “Picture yourself in a boat on a river.” The landscape is upside down. The blue river floats above us devoid of a single whitecap and the marmalade sky is the terra cotta ground we are about to cross. From the back seat, Conor, unsure of the correct word, announces, “I love these cactus…es.”

These “Sentinels of the Desert” greet us in the many poses of outstretched arms and towering extensions that the years have allowed. Conor and I mimic unique poses that we are determined to spot before the day’s end. Staring out across this strange ecosystem, I ponder the notion of desert survival for the cacti and the human. A faded sign near the visitor’s center reads, “Where there is a balance of life and death, saguaro thrive.”

Chris’ best friend Matt, and his wife, Jessica, arrive in their Prius and go about slathering on the sunscreen and loading their packs with high-energy snacks. They arrive a few minutes early and seem eager to begin this simultaneous celebration of their 10th wedding anniversary and 1st desert funeral. Matt has lost 50 lbs. within the last year and I can’t seem to process the change as real or permanent. It’s as if he’s shown up in costume and now that I’ve had a good laugh, I’m ready for him to take it off. I warned Conor about Matt’s weight loss prior to our arrival and his immediate response was, “What if he’s not funny anymore?” We all know that fat people are funnier than skinny people and I share Conor’s fear as I half-hug and half-feel-Matt-up to see if it’s really him under the shorts and T-shirt. I’m making too big a deal about the weight loss, I know, but despite the closeness of our friendship, the gathering is awkward and I have limited tolerance for unexpected change at this juncture. Jessica applies sunscreen to her new Double-Ds and complains about not having the right clothes anymore, given her latest additions. They are beautiful, cloud-like protrusions but they...
too signify a change that I was not anticipating. I am lost among friends I have neglected and I am angry at myself for allowing that to happen and resentful of the situation that has brought us together after too long a separation.

We tread the longest trail in the Tucson Mountain District, the Hugh Norris Trail. There are switchbacks that climb to multiple ridges overlooking the cactus forest of sentinels and their flower-bearing wives. After several miles we reach Wasson Peak, the highest point in the Tucson Mountains rising 4687 ft. above sea level. Unlike Edward Abbey’s unmarked, unsanctioned, illegal burial site in this very same desert, Wasson Peak is easy to find. The same year of my marriage, 22 years ago, a tight knit group of four interred the sleeping bag-wrapped body of Edward Abbey in a remote location, in accordance with his wishes, and in secrecy from the public. A big quartzite rock lies next to a basaltic boulder. On its brown patina is etched: “Edward Paul Abbey 1927-1989. NO COMMENT.” The public would feel slighted by the private burial and they would demand a more public farewell. There would follow, at least two subsequent wakes in his honor at which were read many significant passages, some Abbey’s, some those of his fans, followers and family.

At the top of Wasson Peak, Chris unfolds a document and in the middle of a small group of friends and family, he reads Section 18 of the Additional Provisions Specific to Saguaro National Park:

In accordance with the United States Department of Interior National Park Service Special Use Permit related to ash dispersal, ashes will be scattered so that they blend with the natural earth and do not leave an obvious visual concentration in one spot.

Choosing that as his offered eulogy, Chris turns to me and says, “So, do you have an Edward Abbey quote for us?” In retrospect, I should have just said, “No comment.” An only son walks to the edge
of the mountain alone and releases grey ashes into the wind. All those present watch, with unmistakable clarity, the departure of an orange dust devil as it rips across the canyon, against a cloudless Tucson sky.

Works Cited

Poetry

Pieces, Lindee Anderson
Apple Picking with Robert Frost
Tagen Baker

I.
Deep in the bramble
balancing on the final rung
un-earthly still.
The worn wheelbarrow
below the eaves sits
half empty - with swollen apples
freckled with bug bites, scented with chlorophyll.

Fingers of frost,
reach up rusted metal legs.
Tiptoeing winter,
grasps fall labors.
The last fruits.

II.
Sweetened harvest, raw air
chills the inner rooms of the farmhouse.
On a tired left knee I creep out of the rooms
into the dawn.
I stare into the depths of the giant.
She withholds her power,
curling her delicate golden fingers,
holding the last warmth.

At my cold feet lies an apple.
Perfectly crimson.
Un-bruised.
It’s a sensitive area for me
as I stand, stripped in front of you
with every tip and curve of my mind exposed.
You must know delicate nerves fill
every sentence and every word.

That single word or phrase you want to move
took me countless hours to set in place.
It’s not the perfect size or shape, I know,
but touching will cause me to blush
and rearranging often tickles.

Prodding here may cause me pain.
I’ll lash back at you in a defensive rage,
pointing out how you lack understanding
and your opus isn’t so spectacular either.

And though I’d like to know what you think
I want you only to speak good things,
for if naught but a gentle touch causes it soreness,
criticism’s kick will have me rolling on the floor.

So please be gentle with my opus.
It’s meant to be handled softly.
In fact, it’s better not handled at all.
I suppose what I really want
is for you to just put your hands down,
take a step back,

and admire.
Building Fences

You can tell after building a few fences
That poetry is a lot like that.

The words stand up in their even spaces.
All of their sounds feeling like the cedar
Of good posts.

Your arms and back
Get to aching like your heart
After hoisting the spooled wire
Of so many sad inflections.

But it’s good to look at when it’s finished
Knowing that it will protect
Maybe a spring that has suddenly
Created itself out of the hard mountain
To feed the greenness of its own meadows.

Your work has saved these founts
From people and machines
That would trample them.
Not out of anger. Not out of carelessness.
But just because their living must persist.

Your fence will protect and make shrines
Of those dark, steaming gardens
Where the snakes have learned
That they must devour
The mice and all of their families.

Then one man takes all of his fences
That he has built in a lifetime
And binds all of them
Around his mute desert.
To prevent it from being misused
By all of the big people and the big machines.

But when the day’s work has ended
He walks along their clean highways
And can only hear the blunt drums
That sound from the old posts.
Mary had a little lamb
with an academic bent
and documented
joie de vivre.

In the thirties,
both Mary and her pet
were commissioned
for the town center.

In the nineties,
hoodlums cut the lambkin
off at the ankles
with a reticulating saw.

Mary was stone-faced.
Hooves stayed behind,
exposing rebar bones.
The trail was cold.

Local officials heard
young mothers and the elderly
calling out lamb sightings
at town meetings.

Bounty hunters scouted
ungulate wandering the dark,
whimpering under
whickering maples.

Soon dog-walkers found
pitted parts on roadsides,
so a Spring lamb was poured
in quickset concrete.

The hardened lamb
looked up at Mary, learning
to love that stoic shepherdess,
that promise-breaker.
Poetry

“HELP”

Lindee Anderson

The technology was brittle
and I knew better
than to poke it with
that stick.

Instinct, or call it intuition
whispered,
“don’t. touch. it”
despite my curiosity.

Some genetic anomaly
gave you the impulse
that day to say,
despite your ignorance,

“I think I can fix it
if I can only take it apart.”

So you did.
And it has
never worked
the same since.
Aelurus

**Video Game**

Michael Gillham

From the cliff he looks out at the alien surf
And I see the twin suns shimmer on the waves
White foam surges on the rock.
I watch the pattern of the splash
And await another
The foam is evenly arranged, but I note

A different matrix of splash for each event.
Out here the sea has been made smooth, unpixelated.
He stands there while
I contemplate the craftsman
Laboring at his cubicle
To charge this code with meaning.

We head down the path where we are supposed to go.
Just ahead there are crates
Of some space-age, disposable medium
Placed for me to dive for cover
To be tested by an onslaught of drones.
And there,
I see him. An offworld sniper in the shimmering trees.
I arm the hotkey with the ammo
Of his particular undoing.

Afterward, on the sidewalk
I spot you
crouched in the pre-made, municipal shade
Built by the city wisemen
In their many slotted temples
To give our encounter a more sylvan mien.

I arm my hotkey
With a handshake.
I have a muse…
Muted subtle tones
that shoot like silver stars
across the night sky,
showering love down
upon unsuspecting lonely hearts.

I have a muse…
Creating, destroying, rebuilding,
stirring through the wind,
your breath, your voice;
A coquettish glance that
drives fire, desire, birth,
growth.

Bellowing forth new beginnings,
new endings, new everything’s—
it’s in everything you do
my muse, it is every thing—
your fuse—that ignites, that excites
that tempers life true.

There! In the blowing wind,
the shooting stars, the burning fire-muse
She longs as she waits
for the longing in you.
So don’t want—choose! Or
Whatever it is you do.

For I have a muse,
She lives and breathes
in you.

Michael Ilk
As I watch the four of them play
I am struck by their variety.

The Vietnamese girl, with her smooth
black hair and bright smile
is engaged in conversation
with Princess Jasmine
who, apparently,
would like some birthday cake.

Next to her is a fiery young boy
—American by way of Africa—
who is busy ramming a truck
into Barbie’s dream house
—a favorite pastime of my own.

To his right sits my daughter
—dull, stock Caucasian—
and next to her a giggling girl,
the product of Saudi Arabia.
She is displaying something on her finger—
A treasure painstakingly mined
from the caverns above her mouth.

As I watch them play I am filled
with a sudden sense of elation
for my daughter has achieved Diversity!

Diversity. That elusive ideal, that pinnacle of society
glimpsed on campus recruitment brochures
is alive, here in my own living room.
My enthusiasm soon falls flat, however.
I watch my daughter laugh at a silly word
and realize she cannot appreciate
just what she has accomplished
for she sees her friends not as places
on a map or boxes to be filled.
No—she sees them as people.

She sees Mia, who shares her enthusiasm
for princess dress-up and whose laugh
she thinks sounds like tiny, sparkling bells.

She sees Junior who can draw butterflies
and Reem, whose mom makes food
that is much too spicy.

Abashed, I sit back in my chair,
emit a sigh, and mourn for the day
they learn from the adults
and playtime is no longer so simple.
Pushed up by Serpentine Gods
Shadow’s blossoms of inner Earth
Rise from deep soil
Entrails of plastic crust
Thrust down by Ancient Giants
Designed within the mire of Celts
Monuments balance horizons
Colored ashen, golden, and crimson
Granite washed in dew
Transition the readymade day
Majestic realms embellish
Nature’s gossamer skirt
O thou, child of my left hand—
Of fiercer elements I thee formed
Than mere, crude, mortal clay.
Th’art no golem, in conception made servile
To but drudge, carry wood, fetch fire.
Hate thy birthright, spite thy nursing father.
Rage the while dread reiving Prospero
Thy inheritance maintains.
Though cramps cripple thee and fell forces
Pinch thee blue and black, back
To hate, to spite, to rage and rancor, back
To schemes and plots full nefarious
So all must attest, though herself bound,
Here, thy Dam Sycorax, her prettiest poetry found.
The House that Never Was

Tagen Baker

They were walking down the hot pavement, leaving the noise, the clicking of neon lights. Buzzing like a million watt firefly—haunting their memories.

Peeling red damp sunburnt skin, lying in a pile of rotting garbage. They try and scrape off the damaged surface of what they have become.

Choosing their weapons wisely, a glittering gold—they begin their work.

A small farm-house. Hidden from time, surrounded by yellow grass, deep rooted rose bushes.

They leave the pavement, the heat murmuring delight as soft gold mist feathers lightly across the brick, an old apple tree, sticking to their hands, numbing. The aches of their bones from sleeping in a pile of trash.

Disappearing into their art.
You meet, again, the pale man upon the stair.
“The earth is a factory of pain and waste,”
Says he, the lilacs winking in his white hair.
There is a familiar madness in his face.

“The earth is a factory of pain and waste,”
You whisper as you continue to climb.
There was a familiar madness in his face
Like a noted statesman grown mad over time

You whisper as you continue to climb
“Madness is the indulgence of childish men.”
Like a noted statesman grown mad over time,
You repeat old speeches again and again.

“Madness is the indulgence of childish men,”
Bellows yet another stair-climbing friend
“You repeat old speeches again and again!”
Oh, will these meddling people ever end?

Bellows yet another stair-climbing friend,
“You have almost reached the very final floor!”
Oh, will these meddling people ever end
“You must bravely open the golden door!”

“You have almost reached the very final floor,”
You say, the lilacs winking in your white hair,
“You must bravely open the golden door—”
You meet, again, the pale man upon the stair.
Handbooks tell you
that life can stay scenic
when a raging wave cracks
over the bow, tossing a neat life
and vigilant captain from the helm.

Only on stormy Wednesdays,
flashes of recognition
flirt with delusions of goodness
followed by wet doses of compulsion
and deceit.

Thoughts topple on your rocks
like a weathered,
teetering lighthouse constructed
by a two-year old
architect.

My wreckage floated to the surface on
such a cool mid-week Wednesday.
You believed I could manage
your tempest mania,
that I could take your hand, gently,
and lead you through the
breaking waves of torment, along
a current of tolerance—through an eddy
of reason.

My failure was less a lack of compassion
but more the absence
of such a compass.
Litany of the Itinerant Firefighter

Maria Marsello

In Utah, Kentucky and Centralia, PA,
claims are made in unconventional ways.

Crisp turf crumples, swallows boys whole.
Now and again a tree explodes.

Spring burn, you might think, nothing new.
Smells like dead Joe-Pye, sticks and dew

when columns of carbon rise across the valley,
pitchforks work culverts and weed shoots rally;

the land rich singe fingers, tamp their hair,
call it tradition, a firebug affair.

Folks pick produce grown winter fat, yet,
watered by snow and singed worm sweat,
tomatoes taste mealy as wet cigarettes—
like masticating marrow of bones, at best.

For this is the burning of coal underground
in seamy tributaries of mercury bound.

Sunken fuel wakes in intractable veins.
Pastures turn barren and stone remains.

New moonscape smokes at clinker crust
and embers beneath glow lusty rust.

Versus such ignobility, vocation is lark.
How can we foil such bitter root-spark;

a fire that eats without respite,
sucks air from vents in creeping blight;

ever outmatched by colliery’s witch
and toxic fumes of firedamp pitch.

For now we spread loess, blanketing farms,
’til the devil snares us in adamant arms.
PACKING HEAT

Logan Mickel

The man in the corner, flipping through Field & Stream?
I bet he is.
Look at the way he sits, solid and commanding,
his limbs set like his hair—rigid right angles,
the tell-tale bulge in the small of his back
burrowed in like a tunnel spider waiting to pounce.

If the bad guy I’ve been warned of burst in,
spewing nonsense and bullets, nonsense and bullets,
choosing a dentist’s office as the stage of his fury,
Butch here’d protect us.
He’d kick aside the end table, launching the vase
with its fake peonies and river rocks
into the air.
Three quick cracks, the villain staggers back—
Butch’d never have to pay for teeth whitening again.

Or what about him, over there on the right?
I bet he is.
Boots and Wranglers—all that’s missing is the hat.
Young, perhaps, but you learn to shoot in the country.
He’d whip it out of a hidden holster on his belt
and shoot straight from the hip. The madman would turn,
stunned, eyes wide and mouth open,
as though a tooth had been pulled without gas.
Tex would empty his six-shooter then blow smoke from the barrel
before twirling it fancy-like into the holster while we all cheered
and the hygienists in the back sprayed their water jets in salute.
What about her, the woman with the green knitted sweater?
She might be.
She doesn't seem the type, but in this state you never know.
Perhaps she's a modern day Annie Oakley.
Her eyes would narrow as she drew it out of a lace garter—
black and white, like the keys on a saloon's piano.
A small one-shot job it would be, for she likes her weapon
the way she likes her men: small and dangerous.
She'd execute a perfect roll over the coffee table,
Scattering old issues of Better Homes and Gardens.
Her shot would take the madman between the eyes
and she'd blow a kiss as he slumped, cross-eyed, to the floor.

Though I know I should feel safe with these guardians about me,
some part of me—my yellow belly perhaps
squirms in the midst of all this latent assertion.
And when my name is called, it is with relief I rise,
replace my magazine,
and go to meet the man who will drill my teeth.
We thought he might be frightening so we snagged him off the neighbor’s dumpster.
Carrying him like a fifty pound bag of dog food his armpits leaked.
We knew this would only leave a trail to our crime scene so we duct taped them shut.

Lying in bed we giggled like little girls waiting for her to scream, to find our frightening duct taped friend sitting on her bed in the dark, wearing her hat.
She screamed alright.
Not because of his appearance.
But the smell.

The smell we failed to notice as we patched his armpits and hugged him, as we carried him down the stairs.

The pungent smell of urine,
Un-noticed, infiltrated the basement.

Burn him, we thought, lifting him to the station wagon, tying him on top.
Driving him out to the country, where he wouldn’t be noticed.

He burned so hot we had to turn our faces from him.
Sparks flew like fireflies as he glowed and vanished into the sky.
She doesn’t have my nose
and didn’t get my lips.
These are her Dad’s.

Her eyes and ears—mine.
I see it in the way she listens.
Stubbornly.
Those eyes sparkle and jump
when she tells jokes.
Without punchlines at first, they’ve
evolved through the years
—now she’s smarter
And more funny than I am.

In the morning, she likes her pants and socks
warm from the dryer
but doesn’t know I know.
Nor does she know
how much I love
that she still calls me, “Momma.”

I trap her youth,
like fireflies in my lens,
holding on to it,
feeling the motion of time passing, like wings
or wheels
on the pavement.

Here we talk about Maslow
and sometimes the Monarchy
or how a 9-year old thinks
a divorce is her fault.

She didn’t know better back then
and the dusty hurt is finally brushed off.
She also doesn’t know that
at the beginning,
the very start,
the pure moment of my knowing her,
and the hour I heard she was coming to stay,
she saved me
from myself.
Deep dewy grass wets bare toes—
Wisteria conceals a secret world—
Furry brown Cattails fight lily pads—
Yellow tall grasses, Burning Bush red—
Dare not disturb the diamonds
Hanging in the spiders web—
Friendly company follows to the cabbage patch
Gone their own way now, seeking shade—
Upon a step several spring to life
Disappearing camouflaged—
Another step closer they jump again—
I laugh!
How blessed to see God
In my own backyard.

I am a small Daisy
At the foot of an Oak,
My hair—rain soaked dirt
Of the forest floor,
And—my eyes—are
The Louisiana Bayou.

I watched a small bird on the Butterfly bush
Bouncing thin branches
up and down
The bird is orange I see
With wings still outstretched
But, no, it’s a Monarch
Big as a Sparrow
Gleefully bouncing away.

Sun long set,
Silent darkness holds
bright stars billions of miles
away in distant galaxies.

Full round moon
lights the way home
I bid the evening goodnight.
Do you remember
this weedy patch
was where the red wheelbarrow
used to be?

And dad’s old chair
was right here
where this pile of trash
is now.

Before the street
was just a street
we rode bikes with hair whipped back and eyes closed
until we were nothing.

We knew how
to make the nothing into
brave impossible things
then.

I remember one night
standing in that street
The lamps on every dappled lawn,

Being dazzled
by the order
of things.

Now it is night again.
I stand near our house that
now belongs to the bank.
The house our father bought and paid for.

A cat is sleeping
on the steps
his eyes wink like seeds of uranium
and I am dazzled again.

Michael Gillham
Borrowed Floors

It doesn’t matter anymore
that it’s not my house.
Familiar gusts in the eaves tell me
that I live here.

These loose stairs and uneven flooring
creak as I walk through—
room by room as each season shifts
its own weight.

This old house that speaks,
Grandma had a house like this.

We huddle on the back porch
after snapping, plucking, crushing,
from the garden.
A garden takes time.

Over years I’ll plant these seedlings.
I’ll nurture the roots
and hope they grow upright—strong
—nutrients for our bones

and soul.

I think I’ll borrow these floors
and wait.
A sailor in training—
Summer Whites and Impending Liberty
Calls his mama before bed.
“Do you wanna hear the books?” he asks.
The names precede her answer.
Gabriel Garcia Marquez—He stumbles over the pronunciation.
Flannery O’Conner—He guesses she’s Irish.
Arabian Knights—He thinks of Aladdin.
Othello—He makes her wait for this one,
Anticipating her excitement.
Some Other Title—But she is dreaming a Noble Warrior,
Innocent and Unpracticed in Love,
Destroyed by one who refused to Speak.
Mightily Vulnerable,
He is ruined by loyalty.
She loves the story. She loves the son.
He knows both.
We hold the chilies, tenderly.
We peel off the charred flesh,
purifying the skin in cool water.
unraveled fire, imperfections.

Bringing the slimy green skin to our mouths,
I breathe,
before I bite the flesh.

Our eyes water.
My throat tightens,
fighting for clean air.
Purged.
Scentless.
Flight of the Seraph

Lindee Anderson

Last night I saw the Seraph sweep swiftly upon you. Your caving shape lay small and hollow, bones fragile with years.

“Not to fear,” he whispered “You are an infant within the warmth of an eternal womb.”

Tenderly, he enfolded your weightless form with the strength of His golden veil.

Calm settled. Burdens melted.

Then, heavy wings trembled with thunderous echo. A massive spread of glistening down—

And lifting to the sky, his flight took you home.
Hotel chain call centers
hire managers to tally
merits and demerits
using corporate rubrics,
counting upsells,
quelling upstarts.

In break rooms,
foreign franchisees
serve hors d’oeuvres,
touting how precious
bedding down in Dallas
or Dayton could be.

Incentives are low
thread-count t-shirts,
ribbed hot-cup sleeves,
Burbank Airport pencils
and Corn Palace magnets,
made and given cheap.

Staff track low lights
doing three point turns,
flashing the glassed entrance
and the splendor in the grass
strip where girls gather
to smoke before clocking in.
Back on the sales floor,  
night shift cubicles buzz:  
a crazy old lecher  
is making rounds again,  
his voice dirtying  
the antiseptic hall.

Girls press open ears  
like hollyhock flowers  
to hummingbird's flicker.  
But when they ask the man  
to buy a room, he becomes  
obscene and hangs up.

Thwarted, girls spin seats  
and monitors glare.  
Sweet and sour tongues  
ply tri-tip from molars,  
until some mom from Billings  
or dad in Duluth chimes in.
I carved into my chest,  
and plucked out the awkward stone—  
throwing it deep into the desert  
Never to beat again.

One-hundred seventy-three days passed,  
the water trickled from my hollows  
into my chest and paved a pathway—  
Seeping deep into the bonds and vessels.

I lay my head onto my arm  
Who needs the beat and the thump?  
I wander the city and hear the  
steam surrendering from the subterranean pipes

—Then, just now, I find another stone, just as awkward, lying in the bookstore window.
Scholarly Writing

Passage, Tagen Baker
In his autobiographical account, Mohandas Gandhi observed that “those who say religion has nothing to do with politics, do not know what religion is” (Gandhi 271). The relationship between religion and politics is a poignant subject in the literature of the era of Indian independence and the pursuant partition. The following novels have been chosen as a study of the period: Waiting for the Mahatma (Narayan), Kanthapura (Rao), Train to Pakistan (Singh), Midnight’s Children (Rushdie). In these novels a vivid illustration is made of the transformation of religious icons into places where politics reign and violence rules. The four novels rely heavily on religious buildings in the course of depicted events. In each of them, the innuendo, implication, and even overtly abusive description and usage of
the religious symbols form a clear statement of the failure of religion to maintain tradition, to act in a time of need, and to offer physical protection to victims of war.

The first reference to a temple in R. K. Narayan’s novel *Waiting for the Mahatma* is made by the main character’s grandmother. Granny’s character provides an important initial understanding of the traditional role and purpose of the temple during the time of Indian independence. Through her eyes, Gandhi “was one who preached dangerously, *who tried to bring untouchables into the temples*, and who involved people in difficulties with the police” (Narayan 61, emphasis added). Granny’s sentiment forms the image of a temple as a place of rigid traditionalism, which is not to be tainted by politics or social activism. The novel offers no contradiction or challenge to Granny’s sentiment until the narrator and main character, Sriram, introduces the reader to “a person called Jagadish, [who] dropped in very casually one day and introduced himself as a national worker. He said he was a photographer … and claimed he had a formula for paralyzing Britain in India” (143). However “casual” his entrance into the novel, Jagadish cannot be overlooked. Jagadish “was soon converting the temple into a fortress” physically as well as ideologically (146). He camouflages the temple to hide it from law enforcement, and then installs illegal radio transmitters behind the statues of gods (147). Through Jagadish the heavy symbolic undertones of the temple are voiced. During his physical remodeling of the temple, he says:

“The advantage of this place, do you know what it is? Except for a few antiquarians, no one knows of its existence. And it is not visible from outside. I’ve observed it from various points. It cannot be seen from the road down below. I wonder why anyone built a temple here at all. I believe it must have been used as a place for conspirators a thousand years ago,” and he laughed grimly. (146)

This statement by Jagadish carries with it innuendo as it describes the temple as abandoned, forgotten, and useless. The undertones are best understood when examined as a motif in the larger context
of R. K. Narayan’s works. Critic G. S. Amur provides just such an analysis in his essay on symbolism in Narayan’s novels. Amur writes,

In Narayan’s novels the temple is often a ruined or a neglected temple ... The ruined state of Narayan’s temples ... is indicative of the erosion of Hindu religious culture which has survived through the ages but has lost much of its glory.”

He later summarizes the temple motif as “a static symbol of an eroded religious culture.”

Through the character Jagadish, the reader is shown an image exactly as Amur describes: an abandoned and forgotten temple, not insignificantly used by “conspirators” and now used by two apostates involved in a political war. Jagadish reinforces this motif in the following conversation:

“Don’t think this is always going to be safe,’ [Jagadish] said. ‘Sooner or later the police will find it.’
‘There is an underground chamber,’ Sriram began.
‘Yes, where I know aged cobras live, if you prefer them to the police.” (146)

The temple, therefore, is a temporary refuge, not a permanent protection from the destruction of war outside its walls. Through the ruined temple and the voice of Jagadish, Narayan makes a clear statement that the physical value of the temple is only temporary and the religious value of the temple has been cast aside by the derelict state of the building, leaving the reader with a useless building and potent metaphor disparaging the utility of religion.

Raja Rao’s novel *Kanthapura* traces a similar literal and metaphorical transformation of the temple. The narrator—a Brahmin widow named Achakka—recounts the last three years’ history as she witnessed it in her village, Kanthapura. The account begins with the return to the village of a man named Moorthy, a member of the Brahmin caste and a political activist. The narrator explains Moorthy’s conversion to Gandhism and his hopes of dissolving the rigid Hindu caste system in the village. He founds a local temple as the first step towards the goal of mixing Brahmin and
Pariah castes. Describing the temple, Achakka says, “To tell you the truth, that’s where all the trouble began” (Rao 7).

In Kanthapura, as in Waiting for the Mahatma, the temple begins as a place of strict traditionalism. As Moorthy attempts to propagate social change by meeting with people of the Pariah caste, the village religious leader declares that he will outcast every Brahmin who follows Moorthy’s example and mixes with Pariahs (30). When Moorthy attempts to talk about Gandhi in the Brahmin temple, a village woman is outraged. Her son, “who too has been to the city,” says, “but, Mother, [Gandhi] is...a holy man”; to which the woman declares, “Holy man or lover of a widow, what does it matter to me? When I go to the temple I want to hear about Rama and Krishna... and not all this city-nonsense” (11). The Gandhian ideals of social change were clearly unwelcome in a village held by tradition.

Critic Meeta Chatterjee provides more understanding of the context of Gandhi and the changes he promoted. Chatterjee explains, “The erosion of hierarchy, the breakdown of “caste pollution” rules and the disregard for the occupational stratification of the caste system is a threat that Ghandi’s ideology in general posed.” As a Gandhian representative promoting Gandhian ideals in the village, it is Moorthy who poses the direct threat to the tradition and hierarchy of Kanthapura. Moorthy is both a physical and metaphorical representative of the modern ideology which is battling the inflexible creed of tradition.
After the story establishes the stoic ideal of the temple and its activist threat in Kanthapura, the transformation of the temple begins. Two crucial events illustrate the change: a three-day period which Moorthy spends in the temple fasting, and a violent clash between villagers and English law enforcement in which the village women take refuge in the temple. The first event—Moorthy’s three-day fast in the temple—is the first time in the novel that external politics are allowed to enter the internal space of the religious building.

The ideological and physical invasion, however, does not occur without confrontation. As Moorthy fasts and meditates in the temple, a village woman “roused him with her loud laughter: ‘Ah, the cat has begun to take to asceticism…As though it were not enough to have polluted our village with your pariahs! Now you want to pollute us with your gilded purity!’” (66). The insults are not the only rebukes Moorthy receives. Another woman “laughed and mocked at Moorthy”; a village leader, “furious that Moorthy was pretending to be pious … insulted him and [swore] he would … denounce [his] conversion” (69). As Chatterjee explains, “The internal confrontation between high caste Hindus who want to preserve their status, and Moorthy is a power struggle.” Through Moorthy, then, modernization directly challenges the traditionalism of the village. The location of the temple as a battlefield makes the confrontation a metaphor for all social activism in India that opposes a religious tradition. Unsurprisingly, it is Moorthy that emerges as the victor, though not until several days after his fast is completed.

The conflict determining the future of the temple—whether it will maintain its rigid traditionalism or succumb to the modern activism Moorthy brings into it—is not settled until several days after Moorthy’s three-day fast. Because of Moorthy’s unwavering love towards the villagers, the people decide that he “is grown-up and great, and he has wisdom in him” (79). He then gives a speech declaring his social and political intentions. Previously, villagers were vehemently opposed. After Moorthy’s speech, they respond, “He will be our Mahatma” (79). While analyzing this event, critic Anshuman Mondal writes, “This binary opposition between orthodox…and modern is settled decidedly in favor of the modern.” In the literal
center of the building which embodies inflexible tradition, Moorthy is hailed as a sage and leader. Losing the ideological battle against Moorthy, the temple then becomes a platform from which social activism is preached and directed.

The second crucial event of Kanthapura that occurs in the temple demonstrates the drastic ideological and physical transformation of the temple. During one of the villagers’ final political marches, violence erupts between demonstrators and authorities. Many of the village women take refuge in the temple. Outside the temple, an opposition policeman seals the door closed, trapping the women inside. The narrator, Achakka, recounts: “[W]e cry out hoarse behind the door, and we cry and moan and beg and weep and bang and kick and lament, but there’s no answer…and…as the afternoon drew on, our stomachs began to beat like drums and our tongues became dry” (160). The women suffer through the rest of the day and all through the night. The next morning a Pariah woman steals a key to the temple and “[rushes] up to the temple to unlock it” (162). The critic Paul Brians writes of the significance of this event in his essay, saying: “How drastically the village has changed is illustrated when a pariah frees them from the temple that in former times she would not have even been allowed to enter.” A lower-caste woman as a savior to the Brahmin women demonstrates the complete revision of the local social standard. In the beginning of the novel, a Pariah woman would have been scorned and rebuked for even nearing the temple; at the end, she has saved the women from the very temple they would have earlier denied her.

Notably, the entrapment of the women in the temple also makes visible the deficiency of the temple as a physical protectorate, similar to what was seen in Waiting for the Mahatma—The women enter the temple seeking refuge, but the immediate threat of starvation is presented. As in Waiting for the Mahatma, the temple can only offer temporary assistance, suggesting through both occurrences that temples and religion are interim and incomplete.

In Khushwant Singh’s novel Train to Pakistan religion, not caste, is the central source of conflict. The intertwining of religion and politics is set in a fictional village named Mano Majra in 1947. Critical to understanding Singh’s use of the temple in the novel is
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an understanding of the environment in which it is set. Biographer Marian Aguiar describes the village, the role of the temple, and the temple’s caretaker, Meet Singh:

Mano Majra exists as an “oasis of peace” until relations break down between Sikhs and Muslims as India moves into Independence and Partition. There is relative peace between villagers of different classes and religions, and Singh represents their commonality as they encounter an outsider from an urban area. The villagers all revere a sandstone slab that is the local deity … and they gather in the Sikh temple, where Meet Singh presides but even the Imam is welcome.

As an “oasis of peace,” Mano Majra contains within its borders representatives of the major religions and castes of India, who have lived in peace for generations. Inside of Mano Majra, Muslim and Sikh leaders are not only neighbors, but friends, and it is inside this village that the enormity of contemporary politics plays out on a local, comprehensible level.

Significantly, the reader approaches Mano Majra through the eyes of the “outsider,” an urban social worker named Iqbal. Upon arrival in Mano Majra, Iqbal is told that there are no hotels or inns in the village. When he asks to stay at the temple, Meet Singh, the representative of the temple, agrees and adds, “… anyone may stay here. But you must have your head covered and you must not bring in any cigarettes or tobacco, nor smoke” (33-34). The temple is clearly nondiscriminatory in whom it allows to enter. In a conversation that follows, Iqbal tries to engage Meet Singh in activist conversation, but Meet Singh “did not seem interested” (35). Thus the novel begins with the temple and its representative, Meet Singh, in a state of disinterest.

The evolution of the temple from a disinterested and passive gathering place to its climatic failure is marked most strikingly by a day when Meet Singh, himself a metaphor of the temple, goes out of his temple in order to protect Iqbal. When Meet Singh approaches the police on Iqbal’s behalf, he receives a sharp rebuke
from the constable, who says, “You are a simple bhai of the temple. Go and pray” (119). Meet Singh’s decision to leave the sanctuary of his unbiased location and situation is indicative of a philosophical transference within the premise of the temple’s symbology. The temple has now engaged in the activism in which it was initially uninterested. The transformation continues until Meet Singh is no longer offering unbiased housing to strangers, but actually protects the life of Iqbal.

Meet Singh’s protection of Iqbal occurs after Iqbal suffers a lengthy incarceration in the village jail for falsified religious accusations. When Iqbal returned to the temple, Meet Singh “spoke to Iqbal before anyone else could start asking questions,” and “deliberately” added a Sikh surname to Iqbal’s name in order to suggest that Iqbal was a Sikh. Iqbal notes that after Meet Singh declares Iqbal’s religion “he could feel the tension relax” in the room around him (166). Meet Singh comes to Iqbal’s aid again in the conversation when Iqbal is in danger of betraying his lack of religious conviction during a time when all non-Sikhs are in danger of persecution and death. A man asks Iqbal, drawing attention to the important determining factor in Sikhism:

“Was it in England you cut your hair?”
No, sir,’ answered Iqbal, completely confused. ‘… I am just a Sikh without long hair and beard.
‘Your parents must have been unorthodox,’ said Meet Singh said, coming to his aid. The statement allayed suspicion …” (166)

The conversation makes visible a stark transformation: what was an ambivalent temple is now assuming protection of not only a non-believer, but a social activist and outsider. What follows is the final downfall of the iconic building of peace and tradition. Meet Singh explains to Iqbal recent developments that occurred while Iqbal was incarcerated:

‘But there will be [killing in the village].’
‘What do you mean—there will be killing?’ asked Iqbal … ‘All Muslims have left, haven’t they?’
‘Yes, but they are going to attack the train … Can’t
Meet Singh knows of the plan by the military and villagers to attack and massacre a train loaded with Muslim refugees, but he refuses to do anything because he believes that “all one can do is to crouch in a safe corner till the storm blows over.” Thus, through Meet Singh, as the symbol of the temple makes a fatalistic return to its previous ambivalence, therein sealing its utter failure to protect the lives of its villagers. Indeed, while Iqbal lies drunk on the floor and Meet Singh sweeps around him, a train of passengers is en route to the trap lying in wait to murder them. Confronted with the opportunity to act, the temple refuses. The temple then becomes less of a religious icon than an object of readers’ disgust and loathing.

The same disgust and loathing for religion or the religious is not portrayed with subtlety in Salman Rushdie’s novel *Midnight’s Children*. Rushdie writes of many events that take place “in the shadow of the mosque,” which is the location of a significant number of critical events. While living in a house that lies “in the shadow of the mosque,” Saleem announces his love to Jamila, who wreaks her “vengeful abandonment” by sending Saleem into the army—all but killing him herself (403). “In the shadow of the mosque,” Saleem watches a bomb fall on his family home during Pakistan’s war with China in 1965 (378). Among those killed are his father, mother, aunt, and grandmother. Saleem is also standing in the shadow of a mosque as a bomb explodes near enough to him that he suffers a traumatic head wound and loses all memory of his previous life (391). These events, a few among many, make a stark portrayal of the author’s opinion of religious buildings. None, however, is quite as potent as a concluding scene of the novel in which the Communist character Picture Singh is “urinating on the wall of the mosque” (493). The brutally irreverent act is the final religious statement in the novel. Critic Ian Almond states in his examination of Rushdie’s work that the “representation of Islam in India…is aggressive and uncompromising.” The descriptions, locations, and use of religious
icons are both aggressive and uncompromising from the beginning of the novel to the end. With certain pessimism, a reader will expect that something unpleasant will occur in any scene in the novel containing a religious symbol.

The pessimism Rushdie so boldly displays in *Midnight’s Children* is, in fact, a motif that is carried through the works of Narayan, Singh, and Rao. Though the implication is often subtle, the message remains the same: religion has failed. In *Waiting for the Mahatma*, the temple is derelict and forgotten, the only good use of the building is for conspirators, and even though it is hidden from view it will not offer any more than a temporary protection from war. Raja Rao’s novel *Kanthapura* shows the conversion of the temple from a place of protected traditionalism to a place where political speeches are given, and, ultimately, where activists take refuge from war. Again, as in *Waiting for the Mahatma*, the temple is a temporary refuge but cannot protect the people; the clear failure to do so mimics a reality in which religion cannot save its worshippers from the chaos of social upheaval. In Khushwant Singh’s *Train to Pakistan*, the temple is ambivalent and disinterested towards politics. Allowing an icon of change to enter, the temple then begins to engage in the activism occurring around it, but to a horrible failure of an end. As the temple extends beyond its traditional bounds in order to engage in the stage of events around it, the temple’s caretaker ultimately refuses to act in a moment of crisis. Because the caretaker returns to ambivalence, a train full of refugees is headed into a massacre. In a stylistic contrast to Narayan, Rao, and Singh, Salmon Rushdie portrays no evolution of religion in *Midnight’s Children*, but begins the novel with a debasing description of the temple and concludes the novel with a character urinating on the walls of the mosque. The clear connection between politics and the failing, transformed, and abandoned temples is reminiscent of Gandhi’s observation that “those who say religion has nothing to do with politics, do not know what religion is” (Ghandi). Unfortunately, the painful conclusion drawn from the literature is that in the relationship between religion and politics, religion is incapable of withstanding the pressure of change around it and is, ultimately, no more than a failing icon of past centuries.
Works Cited


Carlos Fuentes discusses the crossing of many different borders in his novel *The Old Gringo*. There are, of course, the national borders of the United States of America and Mexico that are crossed by the Old Gringo and Harriet Winslow. These necessarily include distinct cultural borders of mannerisms, living standards, diet, etc. There are also borders of generation. The elderly Old Gringo is old enough to be Harriet and Tomas’ father, if not their grandfather. Other borders of education, language, ideology, and class exist as well. Of all these borders, however, the most important crossing occurs not from country to country, race to race, or gender to gender. It occurs within the psyche of the characters. As the Old Gringo states as he is crossing the deserts of Mexico, “I’m
afraid each of us carries the real frontier inside” (Fuentes 12). It is not until each of the three main characters (Harriet Winslow especially) cross the borders of their own minds that reconciliation takes place.

In psychoanalytic theory it is necessary to understand and mediate the entirety of the mind in order for an individual to reach full potential. This includes understanding and coming to terms with the darker side of one’s nature. Fuentes hits on this theme throughout *The Old Gringo* and fills the book with psychoanalytic symbolism. Each of the three main characters, the Old Gringo (Ambrose Bierce), Harriet Winslow, and General Arroyo, can be seen as representatives of the psychoanalytic designations of the human psyche: the superego, the ego, and the id.

General Tomas Arroyo and his native country, Mexico, represent the id. Freud defined the id as “the dark, inaccessible part of our personality … [it] knows no judgments of value: no good and no evil, no morality” (Wolozin 861). It is the seat of emotion, impulse, appetite, and sexual energy.

The parallels with the young General Arroyo are apparent; Fuentes describes him in terms of virility and robust, manly energy. When the Old Gringo first encounters him, Arroyo “plant[s] himself, fists on hips, before the stranger” who “from that instant…knew that all the commonplaces of Mexican machismo would be rained upon his white head” (Fuentes 24). Arroyo is a reservoir of violent energy, delighting in the destruction of his father’s estate “they knew this was his pleasure, that he should arrive as the hacienda was going up in flames” (31). He kills without remorse, having no compunctions about shooting the fleeing Colonel in the back (something the Old Gringo refused to do). The sexual scenes between him and Harriet are explicit and awash in explanations of his virility. Even his personal train car “remind[s] the Old Gringo of the interior of one of the whorehouses he liked to visit in New Orleans” (26).

Perhaps most telling, however, are Arroyo’s two defining acts: his sexual intimacy with Harriet Winslow and the killing of the Old Gringo. It is no coincidence that Fuentes identifies Arroyo with anger and unbridled sexual energy—the exclusive domain of the id.

If Fuentes uses Mexico and General Arroyo to represent the dark side of human nature, he sets up the United States and the
Old Gringo are their counterpart, the super-ego. The superego is the portion of the psyche which counsels and inhibits the ego from acting on the id. It seeks to maintain behavior consistent with the morals and norms of society. It is passionless and rigid. Freud defined the superego as “man's conscience, the voice of morality and guilt” (Freeman 112).

This is the role—the voice of morality and guilt—that the Old Gringo plays for Harriet. He is a father figure who at first feels a need to suppress the paternal feelings he feels for the young school teacher. He chides her for her naiveté in assuming she must teach Arroyo’s people about proper living, “They would likely educate you first, Miss Winslow, and not in a very pleasant way” (Fuentes 42). Additionally, he warns Harriet against getting involved with Arroyo and later, once she has become involved, forces her to face her weakness. In their conversation just before the Old Gringo is shot she says, “You want me to tell you I didn’t go to bed with Arroyo to save your life and to feel virtuous, but because I wanted his body, and that I enjoyed it.” The Old Gringo responds, “Yes, I would like that. Even though our other national pastime is to tell the truth, we can’t keep a secret.” Then comes her tacit admission, “I liked it” (148). The Old Gringo, acting as the voice of conscience, forces Harriet to admit the nature of her intercourse with Arroyo: a surrendering to the id.

Further parallels between the Old Gringo and Freud's concept of the superego can be seen in the way Fuentes describes the character. The dark skin and hair of Arroyo—darkness is a symbol of the id—is continually contrasted with the white hair and pale skin of the Old Gringo, which “would glow at night like a white flare” (Fuentes 23). The elderly Ambrose Bierce is nothing more than a withered, passionless soul seeking release from his mortal body. Indeed, the Old Gringo is almost entirely removed from bodily appetite and response. He has no reaction to the food he is given after his first

“Of all these borders, however, the most important crossing occurs not from country to country, race to race, or gender to gender. It occurs within the psyche of the characters.”
meeting with Arroyo “swallowing the chilis whole; his eyes didn’t water and his face didn’t turn red” (25) and his romantic passions lie mostly dormant. While Arroyo boldly pursues the affections of Harriet, the Old Gringo is indecisive about his feelings about her and ultimately assumes a fatherly role. The Old Gringo is placed in opposition to General Arroyo; he is Fuentes’ personification of the superego.

Harriet Winslow is torn between these two opposing forces, making her Fuentes’ representation of the ego. The ego “integrates, unifies, and mediates” (Wolozin). It has the unenviable task of trying to appease both the id and superego while fulfilling its own needs and dealing with reality. If the ego, which could be termed the conscious-self, is given over too much to either the pleasure impulse or the moralistic puritanism, it becomes conflicted and neurosis ensues.

When the character of Harriet is introduced to the reader, she has a narrow view of both the world and herself. This view has been cultivated by her native country and the influence of her mother. At the burning of the Miranda estate Fuentes describes her as “a young lady with proper manners trying to follow her mother’s instructions and become a cultivated woman. A young matron, before long” (Fuentes 33). She first views the Mexican people as disordered, dirty, and ignorant: “Look at them, what these people need is education, not rifles. A good scrubbing, followed by a few lessons on how we do things in the United States, and you’d see an end to this chaos” (41).

Despite this influence from her mother she is haunted by the actions of her father, a soldier who has committed prior infidelities and eventually abandons his family for the affections of a Cuban woman. Harriet has buried this truth deep inside (Freud would call it repression) and, while she abhors it, part of her is intrigued. Just as the ego is pulled by the opposing forces of id and superego and becomes defined by its decisions, Harriet is pulled by the two forces: the paternal guidance of the Old Gringo and the carnal forces of Tomas Arroyo. Her ultimate decision determines who she becomes.

Fuentes further compounds this Freudian theme by giving each character the Oedipal desire for patricide. The Old Gringo’s tension with his father is alluded to throughout the book, perhaps most
poignantly in Fuentes’ mentioning of Ambrose Bierce’s short story “A Horseman in the Sky.” After defeating the Federales and being hailed a hero, the Old Gringo is haunted by the shadow of his father “riding a white horse along the ridge of a high cliff.” Ignorant of the cheers of his comrades, he utters only the cryptic “I have killed my father” (Fuentes 56). As mentioned by Chrzanowski, Harriet Winslow kills her father symbolically to gain financial well-being, “We killed him, my mother and I, in order to live” (13).

General Arroyo’s desire for patricide is the most obvious, both in its expressed wish and symbolic fulfillment. Chrzanowski describes how the Old Gringo’s burning of Arroyo’s papers is a repetition of the bastardization done by Arroyo’s real father. By taking his papers away, the Old Gringo has reduced Arroyo once more to a “nonperson.” The trauma created by this

“is symbolically recreated and relived [by Arroyo] on an unconscious level. The destruction of the papers provokes the hatred underlying Arroyo’s previously mentioned patricidal wish and is externalized and expressed through his murder of the “gringo Viejo” (Chrzanowski 15).

Having set up the three main characters as the three segments of the human psyche, as well as bestowing unresolved filial conflict upon each, Fuentes is ready to take the reader across that final and most important border—the conscious-self acknowledging the darker side of its nature. Fuentes achieves this quite simply. Harriet comes to terms with her father by first identifying with him and then uniting with a separate, ideal father.

Arroyo facilitates the first portion of this, the identifying stage, by providing Harriet with an experience paralleling that of her father. “Harriet sees herself reflected in the image of her father as a free, sexual being. Harriet’s father represents desire—desire of the Oedipal father and the embodiment of Harriet’s desire” (Dobrian 70). Just like her father, Harriet gives her passions over to an exotic, passionate foreigner with darker skin.

This vicarious experience helps her come to terms with the portion of herself, her id, that had been repressed for so long. “Yes!”
as she had said to Arroyo when Arroyo had made her feel like a whore and she had reveled in being what she despised” (Fuentes 147). Through her sexual crossing of borders into the id, she comes to understand her father. It is through this understanding—not approval, but understanding—that acceptance and catharsis comes.

Once Harriet has examined her darker nature by identifying with her father, she is ready to unite with a different father. She uses the Old Gringo to accomplish this. “Don’t you know that with Arroyo I could be like my father, free, and sensual, but that in you I have a father. Don’t you know that?” (147). Although her image of the Old Gringo as a father figure is romanticized, he serves as an adequate vehicle to reunite her fragmented self.

The Old Gringo notices this change in her. “He had been the privileged witness to the moment when a person, man or woman, changes forever … his daughter changed in the arms and between the legs of his son” (147). Harriet’s acknowledgement of her father (and, by extension, the id) through Arroyo and her unification with the Old Gringo as surrogate father (the superego) complete her redemption as a character. She has become whole, complete.

Harriet Winslow’s transformation is a literal fulfillment of the Old Gringo’s statement at the beginning of the book, “I’m afraid each of us carries the real frontier inside” (Fuentes 12). By presenting a psychoanalytic allegory, Fuentes has shown that most imposing borders and limitations exist not in the world around us, but within our own psyches. It is through crossing the borders in her own psyche that Harriet Winslow becomes complete. Her response to the news reporters near the end of the book encapsulates Fuentes’ theme. When asked if she thinks the U.S. should save Mexico, she replies “I want to learn to live with Mexico. Not save it!” (187). Harriet Winslow is not just referring to a country in this statement, but to the hidden part of our psyche.
Aelurus

**Works Cited**


Although Thomas Hardy is well known for the morose, pessimistic tone of his poems and novels, in his later years he came to believe in a philosophy that championed the ability of humankind and espoused hope in the universe. Behind the gloom and doom evident in earlier works such as “Hap” and “To an Unborn Pauper Child” existed a small but strong belief in the power of humankind and a hope in the eventual amendment of the world. Hardy himself rejected the labels of pessimist and nihilist, insisting instead that he was an “evolutionary meliorist” (Hardy 557). Stated briefly, a meliorist is one who believes that the world can be improved through human endeavor and that, generally speaking, the universe is on an unalterable track towards improvement. This paper will
explore the existential roots of Hardy’s personal philosophy and the meliorism evidenced in his works “A Commonplace Day,” “Men Who March Away,” “Coming of the End,” and “In Time of ‘The Breaking of Nations.’”

Before exploring the above works, it is first beneficial to further define the somewhat obscure philosophy of meliorism as well as understand the context behind Hardy’s claim to be an adherent. Defined by Oxford, meliorism is “The doctrine that the world, or society, may be improved and suffering alleviated through rightly directed human effort” (Oxford English Dictionary). Oxford further states “As used by some writers, the term implies further the belief that society has on the whole a prevailing tendency towards improvement.” In other words, a meliorist believes the universe is gradually becoming better and that humankind holds the power to either speed up or slow down the process. This is a surprising sentiment coming from the man who penned “Hap” and “To an Unborn Pauper Child.”

Hardy’s claim to be a meliorist comes in the preface to the collection *Late Lyrics And Earlier* published in 1922. Regarding the label of “pessimist” assigned to him by contemporaries, he states the following: “…what is to-day, in allusions to the present author’s pages, alleged to be ‘pessimism’ is, in truth, only such ‘questionings’ in the exploration of reality, and is the first step towards the soul’s betterment, and the body’s also” (Hardy 557).

Hardy believes the ‘questionings’ mentioned above are crucial to true meliorism. He further goes on to explain in *Apology*:

Let me repeat what I printed in this relation more than twenty years ago, and wrote much earlier, in a poem entitled ‘In Tenebris’: If way to the Better there be, it exacts a full look at the Worst: that is to say, by the exploration of reality, and its frank recognition stage by stage along the survey, with an eye to the best consummation possible: briefly, evolutionary meliorism. (557)

Hardy believed that for the world to be made better, humankind must first acknowledge its deplorable and fallen state. This realization
will produce not only clarity of thought, but sorrow that can serve as catalyst for change. As stated by Dostoevsky in *The Devils*:

> And surely a real genuine grief is sometimes capable of transforming even a phenomenally irresponsible person into a resolute and determined one, for a short time, at all events; and what’s more, genuine grief sometimes turns even fools into wise men, also for a time, of course; that is the characteristic of such grief. (208)

The world cannot be changed without first identifying what is wrong with it and the first step of meliorism is a healthy pessimism. It is perhaps the vigor and melancholy relish with which Hardy sets about this first step, the “exact[ing] a full look at the Worst” that has earned him the reputation as a pessimist and nihilistic. Behind that pessimism, however, is a fledgling gleam of hope for humankind that is as unexpected and surprising as the joyous song of the darkling thrush.

It should here be noted that Hardy’s belief in meliorism was the end product of decades of thought and searching. His philosophy on life and the nature of the universe was itself evolutionary. As Bailey states, Hardy’s philosophy evolved through four major stages. The first was characterized by typical, contemporary Christian beliefs common to most who had his upbringing. The second, arising in the 1860’s when Hardy first read Darwin, was characterized by a loss of religious belief and a reluctant surrendering to evolutionary principles. The third, roughly from the mid1880’s to the turn of the century, were influenced by the writings of Arthur Schopenhauer and Eduard Von Hartmann who introduced the idea of the Unconscious Mind and Universal Will (Bailey 570). The fourth and final stage, beginning around 1908, gave rise to the refined belief of natural law Hardy called evolutionary meliorism. As a lengthy discussion of the evolution of Hardy’s philosophy is beyond the scope of this paper, the reader is...
directed towards the writings of Bailey on the subject.

“A Commonplace Day”

Meliorism is the central theme in “A Commonplace Day” from Hardy’s collection Poems of the Past and Present. The poem finds Hardy lounging at home, prodding the last dying embers in the fireplace. The day is coming to a close: “The day is turning ghost / And scuttles from the kalendar [sic] in fits and furtively” (1,2). He describes this day as just another in an endless stream of days, saying it is about to “Join the anonymous host / Of those that throng oblivion; ceding his place, maybe / To one of like degree” (3-5). The days trickle onwards and become part of a bland, faceless mass, like a drop of water melting into a lake. Time flows on and this day will be replaced with another day.

However, the passing of this particular day is morose for Hardy. He explains why in stanza 3:

Nothing of tiniest worth
Have I wrought, pondered, planned; no one thing
asking blame
or praise,
Since the pale corpse-like birth
Of this diurnal unit, bearing blanks in all its rays –
Dullest of dull-hued Days! (T. Hardy 11-16)

The day has been wasted. The poet had extended no effort to accomplish anything noteworthy, not even “one thing asking blame / or praise” (12,13). He hadn’t “wrought, pondered, planned” (12) an action of the “tiniest worth” (11), and this omission on his part has rendered the day bleak and vapid, the “Dullest of dull-hued Days!” (16).

At this point Hardy personifies time, capitalizing ‘Day’ as though it were a living entity and referring to it with the personal pronouns ‘he’ (22) and ‘him’ (21). In doing so he also imbues Day with that most unfortunate of human traits, mortality. This is apparent in stanza four, where the poet mourns “Here, while Day’s presence wanes / And over him the sepulcher-lid is slowly lowered and set / He wakens my regret (20-22).” It is only at the end of this day that
Hardy realizes the lost opportunity. He uses the simile of droplets of rain sliding down a window pane to describe the pointlessness of the thoughts which had occupied him that day: “Wanly upon the panes / The rain slides as have slid since morn my colourless thoughts” (17,18). Hardy reinforces the idea of time’s mortality with an abundance of death imagery throughout the poem: the day is turning “ghost” (1), “oblivion” (4), “twilight” (9), “beamless black” (10), “corpse-like” (14), “sepulcher-lid” (21), and “decease” (26).

Hardy’s regret and mourning for the passing of the day isn’t simply a product of boredom or unproductiveness, however. It is sorrow at the passing of unfulfilled potential. In short, he had the opportunity to improve the world but neglected to take it. He can only hope somebody else took better advantage of the opportunity than he did. He explains this in the sixth stanza.

—Yet, maybe, in some soul,
   In some spot undiscerned on sea or land, some impulse rose,
   Or some intent upstole
   Of that enkindling ardency from whose maturer glows
   The world’s amendment flows. (T. Hardy 28-32)

Possibly some other soul, more aware and assertive than he, had caught the impulse to do good and acted on it. The tone in this stanza shifts from the dark, almost macabre imagery of the first five to bright, energetic words like “glow” (31), “enkindling ardency” (31), “flows” (32), and “rose” (29). Amendment is the removal of faults, correction, reformation (Oxford English Dictionary) and Hardy states quite clearly the belief that “the world’s amendment” is to be accomplished through humans following that unseen, supernal “enkindling ardency” that grants the impulses mentioned (32, 29).

We see the deepness of Hardy’s regret in the final two lines, where he chastises himself for the missed opportunity: “And undervoiceings of this loss to man’s futurity / May wake regret in me” (36, 37). Not only did Hardy believe man held the key to the world’s amendment, he took a personal responsibility for doing so. This is hardly the remorse felt by a nihilist.
“A Commonplace Day” shows Hardy’s belief that the world can be made better through humankind’s effort. The poem expresses his regret and sorrow at human indifference—in this case, his own—and is in fact an elegy for the multitude of faceless days that pass with their potential unfulfilled.

“Men Who Walk Away”

Hardy’s works during World War I originally published in Poems of War and Patriotism are another rich source of meliorism. Interestingly enough, this meliorism is accompanied by subtle deference to a higher power of sorts. This deference challenges the assumption that Hardy believed the cosmos indifferent and uncaring towards the affairs of man.

Consider “Men Who Walk Away,” a poem dedicated to the English soldiers of World War I. The poem begins with and is centered around this question posed in the first two lines: “What of the faith and fire within us / Men who march away” (T. Hardy 1, 2). The soldiers are about to head off to war and inquire of the reader—Hardy’s intended audience would have been the British commonwealth of World War I—what to make of their intent. The soldiers then define their actions for the reader, claiming that their act is one of “faith” (1) and requires great sacrifice “Leaving all that here can win us” (5). Hardy addresses the next stanza to the naysayers.

Is it a purblind prank, O think you,
Friend with the musing eye,
Who watch us stepping by
With doubt and dolorous sigh? (8-12)

There are doubtless many skeptics in England at the time of the writing who, whether through fear, cynicism, or some other factor, are not completely supportive of the war effort. The response of the soldiers to these doubters comes in stanza three. “Nay. We well see what we are doing, / Though some may not see” (15, 16). The possible sacrifice of their lives is for a higher purpose, a nobler cause: “England’s need are we / Her distress would leave us rueing” (18, 19). The soldiers have seen the need of not only their native England,
but the entire world and are marching forward to insure that fairness be installed and tyranny put down. They face the uncertainties of battle not with fear and pessimism, but with the “faith and fire” of the first line.

It is in the fourth stanza that Hardy’s stance towards the cosmos takes an interesting turn.

In our heart of hearts believing
Victory crowns the just,
And that braggarts must
Surely bite the dust. (22-26)

Here the soldiers—and by extension, Hardy—are trusting to a higher ethical principle, in this case justice, to intervene on their behalf. This is not just a distant hope, but an absolute act of faith that an unseen power will intervene (22,23). What is more, the conditions of the intervention are not random or coincidental, as Hardy suggested years earlier in “Hap,” but rather earned and merited due to the rightness of their cause. Though Hardy makes no reference to God or even the Universal Will, instead assigning the higher power the vague and amorphous title “Victory”, it is clear in lines 22 and 23 that a power higher than man is being appealed to.

The poem itself is a melioristic vision of the noble, “just” portion of humankind quite literally stepping forward to quash the tyrannical element in order to make the world a better place. It is noteworthy that Hardy, a celebrated pessimist, is here trying to mobilize public sentiment in support of a grand cause and is invoking faith, fervor, sacrifice, and a belief in the justness of the world to do so. “Men Who Walk Away” is another example of Hardy’s meliorism.

“Coming of the End”

If Hardy only hints at the interposition of a higher power into the affairs of man in “Men Who March Away”, his poem “Coming of the End” gives a more robust declaration. This poem deals with the end of World World I and the joyous period of relief that follows. The first four stanzas mention the celebrations after the announcement of peace and detail the numerous wearying tasks required of a nation at war that will no longer be necessary. These stanzas are full of light
and cheerful imagery: “the love-looks and laughter unpenned” (3), “welcoming, feasting, and jaunting” (14), “bright weathers” (19), a rare celebratory moment for Hardy. However, it is the final two stanzas that are the most interesting. The fifth stanza reveals a question Hardy had asked himself during the times of trial.

‘How will come to an end
This orbit so smoothly begun,
Unless some convulsion attend?’
I often said. (21-24)

After witnessing the senseless violence and ugliness of war, the natural human response is disgust and hopelessness. Hardy’s despair shows he was subject to this and had begun to lose faith that the war would ever end. He claims to have no comprehension of how it could stop short of an extraordinary event, “some convulsion” (23), occurring.

Stanza six answers the question.

Well, it came to an end
Quite silently – stopped without jerk;
Better close no prevision could lend;
Working out as One planned it should work
Ere it came to an end. (26-29)

Here Hardy admits that the end of the war came as neatly as could be hoped. Indeed, “Better close no prevision could lend” (27). Prevision means to have anticipatory knowledge or foresight of (Oxford English Dictionary), and Hardy is here saying that no human vision or ability could have brought it about the same way. Instead, it all occurred as “One planned it should” (28). The capitalization of the word “One” signifies deity or a higher, unseen power. England and her allies had won, righteousness had prevailed, and victory had crowned the just. Here we have a rare instance of Hardy openly attributing a positive happening in the human world to a higher power.

**In Time of ‘The Breaking of Nations’**

Though war, sorrow, and pain exist in the world, Hardy’s
melioristic belief stated that this was a temporary condition. War would not go on forever. This process was slow and would take time—thus the evolutionary in evolutionary meliorism—but ultimately things would be made right. This is the theme of “In Time of ‘The Breaking of Nations.’”

The first item of interest in the poem is the scriptural reference Hardy provides, Jeremiah 51:20. A reading and brief description of the verse provides a deeper understanding of Hardy’s poem. In this chapter from the Old Testament the prophet Jeremiah is acting as voice for God to the Israelites. The verse reads “Thou art my battle axe and weapons of war: for with thee will I break in pieces the nations, and with thee will I destroy kingdoms.” The “thou” in the verse is referring to the covenant people, the Israelites, who, as God’s “battle axe” and “weapons of war,” are to destroy not only their captors the Babylonians, but all earthly empires. This is the source of the term “breaking the nations.” The verse is a statement that the covenant people, acting as agents of God, will eventually dissolve the boundaries formed by man—in this case the political and geographical borders necessary for nationalism—and usher in the Christian Millenium. The verse shows that the world can be made better by the efforts and actions of humankind—the fundamental tenet of meliorism.

With that background, the poem itself is given a deeper meaning. It starts with Hardy walking along the countryside. The environment is stark and plain—the typical sights one would find in a rural setting.

Only a man harrowing clods
In a slow silent walk
With an old horse that stumbles and nods
Half asleep as they stalk. (1-4)

“Harrowing clods” refers to the act of breaking apart clumps of earth (Lancashire), an action performed by farmers to insure more productive soil for their fields. This particular farmer makes his way in a “slow silent walk” (2) next to an aged animal companion. Both are “half asleep” (4). These words and images evoke a peaceful, pastoral calm. The second stanza continues the pastoral imagery,
mentioning the “thin smoke without flame” rising into the air from a burning pile of weeds (5,6).

It is in the next two lines, however, that the statement of the poem is made: “Yet this will go onwards the same / Though Dynasties pass” (7,8). The “this” in line 7 refers to the simple rural scenes: the old man and his horse, the harrowing clods, the wispy string of smoke from the burning weeds. He contrasts these with “Dynasties” in line 8, stating that despite the riches, power, and glory of human empires, it is the simple wholesomeness of daily life that will endure. This thought is enlarged in the third stanza.

Yonder a maid and her wight
Go whispering by:
War’s annals will cloud into night
Ere their story die. (9-12)

The reference to the “maid and her wight” (9) brings the image of youth, of love and even procreation into the setting. The war that has encompassed the world will rage and storm, but it will eventually give way to innocence. Naïve youth with all its passion, hope, romance, and promise will outlast the ugliness of war and human ambition, whose “annals will cloud into night” (11). In this work Hardy states that misery is temporary and fleeting while youth and innocence are immortal. There is hope in the universe.

While this poem was written during World War I, the inspiration for it had actually come some time before. According to biographer Florence Hardy,

“[Thomas] Hardy confided that this poem ‘contains a feeling that moved me in 1870, during the Franco-Prussian war, when I chanced to be looking at such an agricultural incident in Cornwall. But I did not write the verses till during the war with Germany of 1914, and onwards” (F. Hardy 378-379).

Many other examples of meliorism and hope exist in Hardy’s works. “The Darkling Thrush,” briefly describes a nameless hope Hardy experiences at the break of the new century. “I Met a Man” describes a God who is not only aware of human suffering, but feels
deep sorrow for it—a striking contrast to the sentiment expressed in “Hap.” Similar themes are also contained in “A Call to National Service,” “Often While Warring,” “His Country,” and “The Last Chrysanthemum.”

In *Dirty Hands* Jean-Paul Sartre makes the statement, “As far as men go, it is not what they are that interests me, but what they can become” (233). This statement from the prominent existentialist expresses the fundamental philosophy of meliorism, a philosophy shared by Thomas Hardy on account of his meliorism. Though Hardy’s poems generally have a morose and gloomy tone, he also wrote many works containing optimism, hope, and a fundamental belief in humankind. Hardy believed in the capacity and ability of man to improve the world and even took a personal responsibility to do so. This belief formed and evolved over time, but in his later years Hardy believed in the eventual amendment of the universe. Though he wrote many poems exploring meliorism and hope, these are generally overlooked in favor of his darker and more pessimistic works.

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**Works Cited**


The Symbiosis of Nationalism and Transnationalism in Naipaul’s A Bend in the River, Fuentes’ The Old Gringo and Gordimer’s The Pickup

Kristin Millard

In the field of social theory, there exists powerful association between nationalism and transnationalism. Many theorists and annalists focus on the dichotomy separating the two ideals and claim they cannot coexist. Human nature, they contend, insists on a choice between nationalistic patriotism and global citizenship. In their prize-winning novels, V.S. Naipaul, Carlos Fuentes, and Nadine Gordimer turn their attention to the complexities of this ongoing debate. Naipaul’s A Bend in the River (1979), Fuentes’ The Old Gringo (1985), and Gordimer’s The Pickup (2001) all grapple with the paradoxical nature of nationalism and transnationalism. The novels challenge the incompatibility of these two theories by demonstrating that international identity formation is only
successful for individuals with a strong sense of nationality. The narratives of Naipaul, Fuentes and Gordimer firmly maintain that nationalism and transnationalism exist in a fundamental, necessary, and symbiotic relationship.

The concept of nationality is an essential component of social and cultural identity formation. In his book, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (2006), Benedict Anderson suggests, “in the modern world everyone can, should, will ‘have’ a nationality, as ‘he’ or ‘she’ has a gender” (5). Further, as Anderson opines, citizens of individual nations belong to “imagined” communities, wherein they will never meet every member of the country, but will always perceive their nation as a “deep ... comradeship” (7). Citizens of individual nations feel a connection with each other, which creates a sense of national and cultural belonging. A strong sense of national affiliation is a necessary component of identity formation; it creates a confident and enduring cultural connection. The importance of nationality intensifies in relation to transnational self-identification.

International social scientist Brett Bowden offers a unique perspective on the relationship between national and transnational identity formation. He opines, “without a sense of belonging or national identity, [individuals] may also be incapable of identifying and opening ... up to externally received (foreign) additions to ... respective personal and national make-ups” (245). As Bowden proposes, a sense of national belonging is a requisite factor in transnational cultural identity formation; it is the stepping-stone to global citizenship. In this sense, nationalism is a fundamental component of transnationalism. The novels of Naipaul, Fuentes and Gordimer substantiate this claim as they demonstrate the necessity of forming a national identity before becoming a citizen of the world. In each work, the characters’ ability to develop an international identity is contingent upon their sense of national belonging.

In Naipaul’s *A Bend in the River*, Fuentes’ *The Old Gringo* and Gordimer’s *The Pickup* the central characters embark on a journey of self-discovery. Gordimer explains it as a quest to “discover the exact location of a person: where to locate the self” (47). The characters, Salim from *River*, Harriet from *Gringo* and Julie from *Pickup*,

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travel between two nations and face the challenge of building a new identity in a new country. Their journey toward international identity formation begins in their native lands.

V.S. Naipaul’s principal character, Salim, begins his life on the east coast of Africa. He is Arab by ancestry; however, his family has lived in Africa for generations. Once the ruling class in his country, the Arabs have become “indistinguishable from Africans” through intermarriage and the merging of cultures (Naipaul 14). Salim lives with a significant amount of uncertainty regarding his cultural identity. At an early age, he analyzes his culture from a detached distance, and, from this perspective, he notices the community of Arabs is changing and is no longer as powerful. This realization marks the “beginning of [his] insecurity” (Naipaul 16). Salim’s insecurity gives way to constant nervousness and fear. His closest friend, Indar, reinforces his fear, saying, “We’re washed up here, you know. To be in Africa you have to be strong. We’re not strong. We don’t even have a flag” (Naipaul 18). Indar believes the only security lies in leaving the country. The political and cultural uncertainty in Salim’s nation makes it impossible for him to develop a sense of belonging. He does not know his place in his homeland, and decides to seek greater security in a new place.

Heeding Indar’s advice, Salim embarks upon his journey of self-discovery by leaving his nation and traveling inland to an unnamed town in a new country. He purchases a small shop from Nazruddin, a family friend, and begins selling and trading goods with others in his town. Though many Africans live in his new city, Salim only befriends people who, like himself, are of a non-African ancestral origin. He enjoys weekly lunches with his Indian friends, visits with his European acquaintance, Father Huismans, plays the European game of squash at the Hellenic Club and collects American

“As Bowden proposes, a sense of national belonging is a requisite factor in transnational cultural identity formation; it is the stepping-stone to global citizenship. In this sense, nationalism is a fundamental component of transnationalism.”
technology magazines. Critic Surjit Dulai calls these international characters “archetypes of individuals adrift and fending for themselves in ... unsettled conditions” (306). Salim connects with these people because they are foreigners, and, because none of them have a strong cultural affiliation with his small town, his identity is not strengthened through his relationships.

Salim’s inability to integrate himself with the African population is a result of the insecurity he developed in his homeland. He feels distant from his only African acquaintance, Ferdinand, Zabeth’s teenage son. Salim remarks that he has “no means ... of exhibiting [his] true self” and thus feels continually isolated from Ferdinand and others like him (Naipaul 42). Just as he was isolated and detached in his home country, Salim holds his new nation at a safe distance. The insecurities of his former life make it impossible for him to create a new identity. Erica Johnson observes that Salim’s “past is never safely locked away, but rather forms a distinct thread in the fabric of the present” (215). Though the city and its inhabitants are different, Salim faces the same fear: that he is not strong enough to survive in his new nation. His sense of uneasiness stems from the constant threat of war, unrest, political uprisings, and, as Dulai points out, “utter disruption of law and order which require the use of armed force and violence to reestablish control” (306). In his new country, Salim’s town journeys from war to war, and he never feels secure enough to find belonging.

Even during short periods of peace, Salim does not identify himself with the others in his town. He feels separate from everyone and still thinks of himself as a visitor. Perhaps the most revealing comment on his lack of identity comes as he ponders the possibility of marrying and settling down in another place. He reflects, “it was a comfort on occasion to play with the idea that outside this place a whole life waited for me, all the relationships that bind a man to the earth and give him a feeling of having a place. But I knew it wasn’t like that really” (Naipaul 95). Salim has grown accustomed to not belonging anywhere; hence, he is certain he will never have a place.

Possibly the most detrimental event in Salim’s identity formation occurs when the Big Man creates the myth of pure Africa. The Big Man wants to unify the nation by “going back to the old ways.” Indar
describes him as the “modernizer and ... also the African who has rediscovered his African soul” (Naipaul 138). The President’s plan to revitalize the nation by returning to its pure roots ostracizes people like Salim whose ancestry is not African. As Johnson contends, the President’s “agenda of nationalizing his country ... seeks to create a nation by excluding all non African populations” (Naipaul 223). This magnifies Salim’s sense of fear and displacement and prompts him to leave the country and create a new life near Nazruddin, in London.

Unfortunately, Salim’s inability to create an identity in his native land and in his new African country prevents him from developing a sense of belonging in London. Everywhere he looks, he sees his homeland, “they traded in the middle of London as they had traded in the middle of Africa” (Naipaul 230). As Johnson observes, “Salim suspects that the great, modern city of privilege exists, but what he experiences is a repetition of the town at the bend in the river” (219). Not only does Salim observe cultural similarities between the two countries, but he struggles with the same isolation he felt in Africa. He feels despondent each night as he leaves Nazruddin and Kareisha and returns to his hotel. He remembers, “I always had to go back to my hotel ... and there I had to face my solitude, the other man that I also was. It made me feel I was nowhere. It forced old anxieties on me and added new ones ... about this bigger world where I would have to make my way” (Naipaul 231). Clearly, Salim does not embrace the culture and develop a transnational identity in London.

Salim’s insecurity speaks to the accuracy of Bowden’s philosophy that without a sense of national identity, it is impossible to have “a true appreciation of what it means to have a global consciousness” (Naipaul 245). In A Bend in the River, nationalism and transnationalism cannot exist one without the other. Salim never finds his place in Africa; hence, he cannot develop an international identity. His journey of self-discovery begins and ends with insecurity, vulnerability and lack of identity.

Across the globe from Salim’s Africa, in early twentieth-century Mexico, Carlos Fuentes explores international identity formation in The Old Gringo. Like Naipaul, Fuentes explores cultural identification
by introducing transnational characters who ponder what it means to belong. Harriet Winslow, one of Fuentes’ primary characters, leaves the United States and travels to Mexico at the height of the Mexican Revolution. She had lived a typical, yet routine life in Washington DC, but she was not content. Every morning she sat before the mirror “in her tiny bedroom on Fourteenth Street, and there came a day when she admitted that her face was telling a story that didn’t please her” (Fuentes 47). Critic J. Douglas Canfield explains that Harriet’s “struggle for being involves escaping from spinsterhood in subsistence living with her mother” (184). Seeking greater adventure and a deeper sense of accomplishment, she applies for a job as schoolmistress to the Miranda family. She arrives at the Miranda hacienda at the same time as Thomas Arroyo, a general in Pancho Villa’s army. The family has fled, knowing the army would destroy them. Arroyo burns the estate, sparing only the mirror-filled ballroom. Undaunted, Harriet prepares to teach the basics of an American education to the children of the families living near the estate.

Harriet’s family roots lie in New York, where sixty years before, her uncle had been one of the richest men in the city. A succession of poor decisions forced her family to move to Washington DC where her father joined the army as a part of the Spanish-American War’s Cuban Campaign and never returned. The hurt from her father’s abandonment does not dampen her patriotism and loyalty to her country. In discussing the United States with the cynical old gringo, she proclaims, “I am not ashamed of our nation or our forefathers” (Fuentes 76). The gringo recognizes immediately that while Harriet does have a sense of identity, she has come to Mexico “attempting to come to terms with herself ... fighting for her very being” (Fuentes 35). Harriet begins her journey of self-discovery knowing she belongs to one country, but eager to discover how she can integrate with another.

Unlike Salim, Harriet enters her new country with a strong sense of loyalty and patriotism for her homeland. Her first response to the threat of Arroyo’s troops is to demand her rights as an American citizen. After observing the destruction of the hacienda, she tells the old gringo that what the children from the village need is “a good
scrubbing, followed by a few lessons on how we do things in the United States” (Fuentes 41). Harriet believes in the customs and traditions of her native land and feels it beneficial to share these with the Mexican people. This is the beginning of Harriet’s cultural identity formation. As the narrative progresses, she discovers the importance of accepting Mexican culture as valuable and separate from the customs of the United States.

Harriet’s sense of national identity allows her to explore and appreciate the international identification she gains in Mexico and she changes from American native to citizen of the world. For Harriet, part of developing a transnational identity is moving beyond the pain of the past, specifically her father’s abandonment. Her love affair with Arroyo helps her to let go of the hurt and find strength within herself that she had not recognized before. Canfield attributes the “fire in her that lay smoldering” as being “rooted in her American experience” (187). Her identity as an American allows her to find strength in the transnational identity she develops in Mexico. Unlike Salim, she does not wander through Mexico wondering where she belongs; she makes herself a part of the culture surrounding her and, in so doing, becomes more capable, more stable and more secure.

Harriet’s new identity endows her with strength that will stay with her throughout her life. Arroyo hopes that when Harriet goes home she will remember Mexico and say, “This land will always be a part of me now,” and, indeed, living in Mexico changes her forever (Fuentes 113). She tells Arroyo, “When I talk about going home, I don’t mean I will do the same things again .... I shall grow more beautiful and happier; as I stroll with your times” (Fuentes 112). When Harriet returns home, she is no longer timid and demure. She is possessed of a new strength derived from the transnational cultural identification she gained in Mexico. She demonstrates her strength and confidence when she returns to the United States and appeals to the government to take action against Arroyo for shooting the gringo in the back. Assertive and insistent, her demands result in an honorable burial for the gringo and the death of Arroyo at the hands of Pancho Villa.

Harriet completes her journey toward transnational identity formation when she returns to Mexico to claim the gringo’s body.
When she crosses the border back into the United States, she professes to carry a part of Mexico in her heart. When she begins her journey as a transnational, she wants to instill her cultural beliefs into the Mexican children. Much later, when asked by reporters if the United States should save Mexico, Harriet replies, “No! I want to learn to live with Mexico, I don't want to save it” (Fuentes 187). With the realization “that what mattered was to live with Mexico ... that each of us carries his Mexico and his United States within him” (Fuentes 187), Harriet understands that transnational identification means valuing all cultures for their differences, while appreciating their similarities.

Harriet begins her journey with a concrete sense of national belonging. She has abiding cultural ties to the United States, complete with strong feelings of loyalty and patriotism. With a firm grasp on nationalism, Harriet becomes a transnational citizen of the world. She demonstrates the accuracy of Bowden’s claim that becoming a global citizen occurs when “local (national) and global mind-sets meet” (245). She leaves Mexico wanting to preserve the uniqueness of both cultures.

Like Harriet, Nadine Gordimer’s Julie exemplifies Bowden’s philosophy connecting nationalism and transnationalism. In The Pickup, Julie’s sense of belonging in her own nation aids her ability to become culturally adaptable in her new country. Her journey toward transnational identity begins when she meets Ibrahim, the Arabian car mechanic.

Julie and Ibrahim live in South Africa, but only the former is a native of the country. Ibrahim lives on an expired visa, desperate to escape his nation, an Arab country where “you can’t tell religion apart from politics” (Gordimer 12). Conversely, Julie’s home has always been in what critic Emma Hunt calls an unnamed Johannesburg (105).

Born into a wealthy family, Julie has comfort and security and the freedom to decide how to spend her time, as she tells Ibrahim “this [South Africa] is home” (Gordimer 12). Julie understands that because she is a free citizen of South Africa, she has the opportunity to choose how she will live. She feels her parents are superficial and frivolous and decides to abandon their lifestyle and live on her own.
She adopts a group of friends as her “elective siblings” and embraces a bohemian way of life (Gordimer 23). Emma Hunt observes that “when the novel opens, Julie ... has taken on a new identity by renouncing the life of ‘The Suburbs,’ represented by her wealthy and well-connected father and his new wife (107). Her friends live in opposition to everything her father stands for, wealth, economic order and stability.

Critic J.U. Jacobs contends that Julie “disidentifi[es] herself from middle-class, white South African culture” (127). Her disassociation from her family demonstrates her security as a citizen of her country and is the most convincing evidence of her confidence in her national identity. With a firm understanding of her place within the boundaries of her country, she is able to choose how and where she fits. Though she chooses not to identify with her family’s culture, she creates an identity within her friend group based on shared beliefs and values. This is only possible because she knows her place within the boundaries of her nation and is able to choose who she wants to become.

If the first half of Gordimer’s novel illuminates Julie’s confidence in her national identity, the second half of the narrative confirms its importance in a transnational setting. Julie’s successful integration into the culture of Ibrahim’s country is only possible because of the strong identity she created in South Africa. Ibrahim tells her that there is nothing for her in his country, shouting, “you cannot live in my country, it’s not for you, you can’t understand what it is to live there, you can wish you were dead, if you have to live there” (Gordimer 95). His words mean little to Julie, who follows him home and immediately begins to create a cultural identity within his nation.

From the moment they arrive, Julie begins to see things differently. Her identity shifts, and she becomes a part of this new culture. As Emma Hunt writes, “traveling to this impoverished country gives her a consciousness of self that makes her seem ‘strangely new to herself.’ Here she has found a home” (109). Julie finds an entirely different way of life, one that measures time by the call of the muezzin five times a day. Ibrahim feels embarrassed by his country, but Julie is fascinated and reminds him, “I am not a tourist” (Gordimer 125).
The strong sense of independence and belonging she felt in South Africa allows her the confidence to create an identity as a member of Ibrahim’s family and a permanent resident of his nation.

Once at home with Ibrahim’s family, Julie decides to begin learning the language. She agrees to teach English to his sisters in exchange for lessons in their language. “Why sit there among his people as a deaf-mute,” she reasons to herself (Gordimer 143). Her desire to speak with her new family in their own language is evidence of her burgeoning cultural identity. It demonstrates that she does not think of herself as a temporary visitor, but as a long-term resident.

In addition to learning the language, Julie exhibits her ability to create a cultural identity by choosing to join the family in fasting for Ramadan. While Ibrahim scoffs at Julie’s efforts to find acceptance within his culture, his antagonism does not frustrate her efforts to belong. In defense of her quest to become a part of his family, she remarks, “Since we’ve been home here. You must understand .... There are ... things ... between people here, that are important, no, necessary to them” (Gordimer 187). Living in Ibrahim’s homeland, Julie discovers the importance of close and meaningful relationships. Working alongside his sisters, she finds acceptance “as one of the women who share household tasks” (Gordimer 169). She is confident in her own identity; hence, she reaches out to others and develops deep and lasting bonds.

Julie’s transnational identification results from the confident and secure sense of belonging she had in her homeland. She demonstrates her international identity formation by becoming a part of Ibrahim’s culture in a much deeper sense than he believed she would. When he announces his plans to move to America, she informs him she will not be going to the States or returning to South Africa: “I’m not going back there, I’ve told you, told you. I’m in your home” (Gordimer 261). She has found a new identity in his country that brings her more satisfaction than she felt in her homeland. As Jacobs pens, “the ‘cursed village in the sand’ ... provides her with the ties to other people that she had not known in South Africa” (129). Julie exemplifies Bowden’s theory that with a strong national affiliation, it is possible to open up to a transnational identity. Julie, a citizen of South Africa by birth, becomes a citizen of the world by choice.
In *A Bend in the River*, Salim begins his narrative with these words, “The world is what it is; men who are nothing, who allow themselves to become nothing, have no place in it” (Naipaul 3). The truth of this observation echoes with resounding clarity throughout the novels of Naipaul, Fuentes and Gordimer. Doubt and fear beset Salim at every turn and destroy his ability to create a national, and hence, a transnational identity. Overwhelmed with insecurity, he allows himself to become nothing within his own country, and in so doing, finds he has no place in the international world. Harriet, armed with confidence in herself and loyalty to her homeland, opens her heart to Mexico and learns the value of its culture. Her national belonging facilitates the development of her transnational identity. Likewise, Julie’s concrete sense of national affiliation enables her to create a satisfying transnational identity in her new country. *A Bend in the River, The Old Gringo* and *The Pickup*, examine the enduring relationship between nationalism and transnationalism and verify their necessary, significant and vital connection. By establishing nationality as a prerequisite for global citizenship, the novels proclaim the unequivocal symbiotic relationship of these two far-reaching philosophies.

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**Works Cited**


**Works Consulted**


In early twentieth-century Ireland, British suppression led to Irish uprising and increased bloodshed. The Easter Rising of 1916 figures prominently in this time period, and Sinn Fein persisted in its goal for complete Irish independence. In the midst of this, Irish drama boldly reflected Irish nationalism through the Abbey and other Irish theaters, to the point that British officials sometimes attempted to close them down. Authors such as Yeats, Lady Gregory and Synge produced plays along political lines and contributed to Irish nationalism to a similar degree as political action. One such author, Sean O’Casey, wrote his plays along similar lines, but early on traded his nationalistic ideals for Marxism. Instead of speaking out against the British, O’Casey denounced class; instead of
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encouraging new leadership, he defended the working man. By the 1930s, O’Casey had committed to Communism, although he never joined the party (Murray 3). Curiously, no criticism exists that analyzes The Shadow of a Gunman from a Marxist approach.

O’Casey’s transition from nationalism to communism can be traced to his roots. He grew up in a Dublin tenement house and at one time was believed to be a gunman on the run from British authorities (22). Many critics argue, therefore, that The Shadow of a Gunman (Shadow) is autobiographical in nature; thus, the main character of Shadow, Donal Davoren, would in fact represent O’Casey. While there are some gaping holes in this argument, evidence of autobiographical material exists. For example, O’Casey was the secretary of the Irish Citizen Army, responsible for keeping notes of meetings (22). One night, the tenement he lived in was raided by Black and Tans, British ex-service assigned to assist the Royal Irish Constabulary, and he had those minutes in his possession (22). A very similar event occurs near the ending of Shadow, when Donal realizes a letter he has been carrying is authored by a member of the Irish Republican Army, followed by the discovery of the bombs in Seumas Shields’ partner’s satchel (O’Casey, Shadow 143, 144). According to one critic, Sean O’Casey “wrote [Shadow] out of his own experience; and it has the spontaneity of truth” (Atkinson 104).

There is plenty of evidence discussing the contended autobiographical information and its relation to the fact that Sean O’Casey was communist. Although he was not a member of the Communist party he was a committed activist; why not analyze his work through a Marxist lens? While his critics accept the fact that he was communist, they only comment on the biographical or historical influence O’Casey has on Shadow. The answer to why this has not yet occurred may lie in the political unrest of Europe and its effects in America during that time period. The general attitude towards Communism has been negative, starting with Lenin-Marxism and later with Joseph Stalin. The first “Red Scare” from 1919 to 1920 increased that fear and was followed by the Cold War; this, along with the second “Red Scare” and McCarthyism can easily show why critics may have hesitated to consider Shadow in the form
it was intended. However, the Marxist influence in this text simply cannot be ignored.

This paper will show the hero of the play to be the poor, unintelligent young Minnie Powell and not the intellectual Donal Davoren or the religious Seumas Shields. Seumas relies on the crutch of religion to the point that he appears to be primitive, almost a caveman in his approach to the world around him. Donal relies on his intellect, more to O’Casey’s liking, but describes himself as a poltroon poet who would rather run from danger than show loyalty to his friends (O’Casey, *Shadow* 157). On the other hand, Minnie belongs to the working class that O’Casey defended so consistently (Malone ix). The bravery, loyalty and decency that she shows reflects the disgust O’Casey “felt towards those who...betrayed the nationalist dream to mediocrity and the ideals of labor to bourgeois self interest” while affirming “his own faith in the decency and courage of the oppressed people of the slums” (Coston 2). Minnie also reflects O’Casey’s conflicting social and personal ideals: on the one hand, he attempts to “assert his continued faith in socialism and mass action,” while on the other “proclaims the individual’s right to discover his destiny independent of social demands” (3). In short, Minnie Powell represents the proletariat oppressed by the primitivism of religion and the cowardice of philosophy within the bourgeoisie of corrupted Irish Nationalism and British Oppression.

A curious character in *Shadow*, Seumas Shields depends on those around him for just about everything. In the opening stage directions of the play, O’Casey describes Seumas as having a “congenital slovenliness” (O’Casey, *Shadow* 93). Ronald Rollins states in his article “Dramatic Symbolism in Sean O’Casey’s Dublin Trilogy” that

> “Minnie represents the genuine hero in Shadow and sets the stage for a discussion of what characteristics make up the proletariat.”

The (absolute untidiness) of the tenement room shared by the cowardly poet Donal Davoren and
the garrulous pedlar Seumas Shield in [Shadow] provides the first hint that these are two careless talkers and idlers with little inclination or talent for assuming the double burden of maintaining private and public order. (53)

O’Casey leaves no doubt that Seumas is a religious man by describing the various relics around the tenement room and that he manifests “the superstition, the fear and the malignity of primitive man” (O’Casey, Shadow 94). Instinctual and almost animalistic, Seumas does not show the educated discipline of intelligence of one like Donal. He enjoys watching others fail or be condemned, even great ones such as the author Percy Shelley (97). Ignorant and unintelligent, he resorts to useless expletives to bolster his confidence as in the conversation with his landlord (103). O’Casey equates religion with primitivism, and shows the author’s complete distrust and dislike for it. Although he was self-educated in the Bible, O’Casey believed that religion was enemy to his principles. He particularly hated the Catholic Church, which he denounced for being “conventional, pietistic and hypocritical” and “aligning itself with capitalism” (Malone x). In essence, O’Casey makes Seumas the worst of mankind in Shadow, a degenerate who relies on instinct and superior leaders for his faith.

The play quickly illustrates this by starting with Seumas having overslept, requiring the whole neighborhood to come and wake him so he can make an appointment with a business partner (O’Casey, Shadow 94). He proclaims “I’m beginnin’ to believe that the Irish People are still in the Stone Age. If they could they’d throw a bomb at you” (95). Ironically, Seumas callously allows Minnie to take a literal satchel of bombs for him to escape punishment at the hands of the authorities. What’s more, Seumas doubts Minnie’s abilities in a comment to Donal where he claims that he would not want to depend on her for the protection of his life; yet when she offers to take the satchel, he does not hesitate. This hypocrisy can be seen in a number of different places throughout the text.

Another example of Seumas’s hypocrisy manifests in his comments on the increasing violence in Ireland:
The country is gone mad. Instead of counting their beads now they’re countin’ bullets; their Hail Mary’s and paternosters are burstin’ bombs—burstin’ bombs, and the rattle of machine-guns; petrol is their holy water; their Mass is a burnin’ buildin’; their De Profundis is “The Soldier’s Song,’ an’ their creed is, I believe in the gun almighty, maker of heaven an’ earth – an’ it’s all for ‘the glory o’ God an’ the hour o’ Ireland.” (131)

When Donal reminds Seumas that he himself had believed in the gun, he responds by asserting that the Irish cannot win, so they should just stop fighting (132). Seumas argues that the civilians are the true victims in that war, saying that they have nowhere to run. Either they will be “shot in the back to save the British Empire” or “shot in the breast to save the soul of Ireland” (132). He claims that nobody cares to obey the Ten Commandments; the only commandment an Irish man would listen to is “Put your hands up” (142). He scoffs at the revolutionaries when they claim their willingness to die for the people, because the civilians die for the gunmen, not the other way around (132). He states “with all due respect to the gunmen, I don’t want them to die for me,” meaning that he does not want to give up his life for someone else (132). He is a coward, which explains why when Millie offers to take the bombs that would mean Seumas’ death, he allows her die in his place.

When Millie is caught, he responds “Holy Saint Anthony, grant that she’ll keep her mouth shut” (152). He does not care about her, he only cares about whether or not she will lead the Black and Tans back to him. When Mrs. Grigson announces her death and Donal realizes Seumas’ and his own cowardice, Seumas stupidly asks “Is it my fault? am I to blame?” (156). Of course he is to blame and he must realize it, but cowardly makes a scapegoat of Minnie so that he can go on feeling sinless and pious. When Minnie and Mrs. Henderson fight with the Black and Tans, Seumas can only voice his concern that “innocent people” (i.e. himself) would be shot (153). After the Tans have taken Minnie and Mrs. Henderson away and
the raid has concluded, Seumas experiences a euphoric relief that he has escaped harm, and rejoices with Adolphus Grigson, a neighbor. When Mrs. Grigson worries that he was scared and hurt, Adolphus lies to save face in front of his friends. He lays out a story that has him stare down a gun and calmly diffuse the situation, when in fact he cowers on his bed singing a hymn in the hopes of not being killed (154). Seumas immediately follows suit, claiming that he handled the Tans in a similar manner, coolly and without fear when in fact he and Donal did everything from feigning ignorance to changing their names to sound more English (155). This cowardice and hypocrisy stem directly from Seumas’ religion, and this can be seen through his superstitious nervousness. When Donal rebukes him for laughing at Percy Shelley being tortured in hell, he uses the Church as a justification for doing so (97). Donal shows that Seumas only uses the church as a crutch, forcing him to be a good Christian, saying “your religion is simply the state of being afraid that God will torture your soul in the next world” (97). He goes on to show that Seumas fears the Tans as much as he fears God, showing one form of control that religion has over him (97). British oppression represents another form of control, albeit one that Seumas does not enjoy or approve of. He does approve of his church, however, rejoicing in the “great comfort in religion; it makes a man strong in time of trouble an’ brave in time of danger. No man need be afraid with a crowd of angels round him” (133). Seumas tries to scare the hell out of himself, to play on the phrase, in order to be a good person. Unfortunately it does not work. He ends up scaring himself so well that he begins to see warnings out of nothing. At the beginning of Act 2, Seumas hears a mysterious tapping that Donal does not hear and determines that to mean something bad will happen (128). He even claims that his family has a history of hearing strange noises before a family member dies (128). Whether this is to be taken seriously or not does not matter, though; this tapping controls his attitude, and he immediately looks for the danger so he can run away. It becomes cold quickly, and Seumas attempts to take his mind off the danger to assuage his fears, but this fails because the very last sentence of the play has him saying “I knew something ud come of the tappin’ on the wall” (157). The stage directions indicate that he should say this solemnly, almost
as though he is giving a testimonial to the validity of the power of supernatural tapping (157).

Shadow shows that religion, specifically the Catholic Church holds a major control over most of the characters; in fact, the only characters that do not manifest an outward connection towards the church are Donal, the Tans and the Auxies. Adolphus uses the Bible to control his wife, and therefore becomes controlled himself within that perceived instruction (139). Seumas, though, is the most outspoken and active participant in this form of control, using his superstition/faith to allow Minnie to die, excuse his own role in the raid and escape any sort of punishment that he does deserve. Shadow supports the need to remove that kind of control from the bourgeoisie and remove such oppressive behaviors towards members of the proletariat. Seumas shows the audience that religion results in cowardice, self justification, hypocrisy, unrighteous domination and fear. This and the fact that he views religion as primitive, helps to explain why Donal Davoren prefers to rely on philosophy as his belief system.

At the beginning of the play, the stage directions indicate that Davoren is to be a character of conflicts. On the one hand, he gives the “indication of a desire for activity while on the other showing an “unquenchable tendency towards rest” (93). His life has been hard, but it results from having “been handicapped by an inherited and self-developed devotion to the might of design, the mystery of colour, and the belief in the redemption of all things by beauty everlasting;” in other words, intelligence (93). Intelligent but also consistently attempting to be self-expressive, Donal’s religion of philosophy reflects the opposite of Christianity and finds its witness in abstract reflection, art and youth (94). When Seumas extols the virtues of Catholicism, Donal replies “You’re welcome to your angels; philosophy is mine; philosophy that makes the coward brave; the sufferer defiant; the weak strong” (133). While Seumas has slept through most of the morning, Donal has been typing for some time as the play opens (93). His intelligence manifests in his diction throughout the play; whereas characters like Minnie, Seumas and the landlord constantly say meaningless words such as “interpretate,” or “argufying,” or “parratox” (122, 101, 121). He uses clear and concise
diction while the others speak in dialect, without using proper grammar and style, yet shows the same dishonesty and ignorance as the rest of his neighbors. It becomes apparent early on that his neighbors believe him to be a gunman on the run, but rather than correct the mistake, he allows it to grow and manipulates Minnie into a relationship with him based on that fact. In pretending to be dangerous, he endangers and ultimately becomes partly responsible for Minnie’s death.

A better understanding of Donal’s character as a man can be seen through his interaction with Minnie on their first meeting. When Minnie expresses the desire to write a poem about the revolt of 1798, Davoren responds by saying “Oh, we’ve had enough of poems, Minnie, about ’98, and of Ireland, too” (107). Minnie misunderstands him and assumes that he means it is no longer time for writing, but a time for action by taking “up the gun” (107). Donal clarifies his cowardice later in that same conversation when he promises to write a poem about Minnie. When she assumes that poems about sweethearts reflect biographical information about the poet, Donal corrects her by saying that “Every girl a poet writes about isn’t his sweetheart” (109). Minnie responds by saying a man would only die for his sweetheart, not even his wife (109). The following dialogue ensues:

DAVOREN. No man, Minnie, willingly dies for anything.
MINNIE. Except for his country, like Robert Emmet.
DAVOREN. Even he would have lived on if he could; he died not to deliver Ireland. The British Government killed him to save the British nation.
MINNIE. You’re only jokin’ now; you’d die for your country.
DAVOREN. I don’t know so much about that.
MINNIE. You would, you would you would – I know what you are.
DAVOREN. What am I?
MINNIE [in a whisper]. A gunman on the run! (109)
This helps to explain why Donal would sacrifice another person in the pursuit of personal safety, even when that individual was his sweetheart. Donal exhibits as much hypocrisy as Seumas in that he allows his friends to think him a rogue gunman, but he takes it further and uses that misconception to selfishly manipulate others with it in order to benefit from them.

When Donal has successfully won Minnie’s heart, he proclaims to her that the two of them are pioneers: she a “pioneer in action” and he “a pioneer in thought” (111). This statement reveals his dishonesty because he obliquely admits to being a fraud; Minnie considers action to be important, being the true rebel, whereas he only thinks about acting. To be mistaken for a gunman is allowing Donal to be what he has imagined without having made the choices or dealt with the consequences. This misperception leads him to the realization of his mistake at the end of the play, but it does not benefit him even then. There are two reasons, the first being Donal identifying himself as a potential accomplice with Minnie when he gives her a slip of paper with their names typed onto it as a token of his affection (123). When she leaves he remarks to himself that “Minnie is attracted to the idea, and I am attracted to Minnie. And what danger can there be in being the shadow of a gunman?” (124). Ironic because of what happens in the end, this statement also shows a major error in judgment on Donal’s part and further proves that his concern is for his own well-being rather than Minnie’s safety.

When the Tans raid the tenement house, Donal’s true character manifests once again and shows the second reason, as he nearly faints with the realization that he has a contraband letter and a satchel filled with bombs in his room (146). With the understanding that he has endangered his life, he reverts to an attitude of survival, and becomes “semi-conscious” to those around him (146). Therefore, when Minnie comes in and offers to take the bombs, it does not come as a surprise when he accepts without hesitation. He becomes immediately compliant when the Auxies come to interrogate them and search their living quarters, even scolding Mrs. Grigson for allowing her husband to bring home a bottle of whiskey (150). Not until the immediate danger has passed does Donal realize what he has condemned Minnie to. However, each comment he makes
focuses more about what will become of him if Minnie were to be punished (152). When he hears the news that Minnie has been shot, Donal mourns her death, but only to pity his own self, and not for her. Here Donal shows his complete failure by showing no indication that he has actually had a change of heart (Murray 37). No clear statement resolves this in the text, but by gauging Donal’s remorse the inference that he has not had a change of heart, and only feels sorry for himself rings true.

Donal Davoren’s actions show the important distinction between action and thought. His intellect allows him to consider himself above religion and therefore the rest of the characters in the tenement. This leads him to accept the rumor that he is a fugitive gunman, along with the help of feminine adoration. His philosophical reflections control his actions, along with his superiority complex. He allows this to direct his thinking, and when danger emerges, it guides his instinctual desire to survive. By setting himself above his peers, he sets himself up for a greater fall, and when it happens, the effects splash among them as well. When the paper slip is found on Minnie containing her and Donal’s name, ink blots his name out, showing the fragility of their relationship, and serves to blot out his identity permanently (28). This loss of identity can easily be paralleled with the loss of moral sense, but in this instance is also literal. The authorities have that slip of paper from Minnie’s body, and it is conceivable that they will be able to determine Donal’s name (O’Casey, Shadow 156). Therefore, Donal turns into an actual fugitive if he wants to avoid association with the satchel of bombs and Minnie’s death (Doherty, 47). He realizes that he has actually lost control of himself and can no longer lead his life the way it was led; the nationalistic ideals that were ascribed to him are all false because he is false. He has become a poltroon poet, a shadow of a gunman turned real fugitive, and he does not want to be one. He realizes Minnie as the true hero and recognizes her bravery.

Despite the bravery and obvious role that she plays in Shadow, Minnie does not appear a likely candidate as a heroine. First of all, she has very few lines compared to Donal and Seumas and is therefore only in the action directly or indirectly for a third to a half of the play. A beautiful young woman in the lower working
class and uneducated, she is obviously quite ignorant. However, she quickly becomes the moral ruler for each of the other characters to be measured against. Described as having a “force and an assurance beyond her years,” and having “lost the sense of fear” she does not realize it (O’Casey, Shadow 105). She is also described according to her class distinction as being unable to “converse very long on the one subject,” evidence of her lack of intelligence (107). Being stricken by the idea of Donal being a patriot fighting for Irish independence, she attaches to him naturally. As they converse, she also manifests some hypocrisy, but only in the sense that she does not realize her own strength. For example, when Donal claims to never be afraid in a gunfight, she declares “I’m all of a tremble when I hear a shot go off, an’ what must it be in the middle of the firin’?” (110) This proves inaccurate when she takes the bombs and hides them in her room, followed by her rebellious struggle against her captors, singing “Up the Republic” until her death (152). Minnie is obviously the real independent patriot in this play, and she constantly proves herself.

Along with her patriotism comes a sense of self reliance. When Donal worries what people might think about Minnie spending so much time at his room, she declares “an’ do you think Minnie Powell cares whether they’ll talk or no?” and explains that she can take care of herself (111). Her peers respect and like her as opposed to those who quarrel with Seumas or silently respect Donal for what he is rumored to be. The confidence that comes from such independence also leads her to be bold with Donal in initiating a romantic spark. When she asks him to type her name on a slip of paper, she directs him to first put her name and then his directly beneath hers (123). She loves the idea of Donal being a gunman on the run as much as Donal thinks she does and this idea and Mr. Gallocher’s letter strengthens this. For her, though, the relationship and affection is real.

Truly interested in participating in a revolution, Minnie becomes so excited that she takes up a daily watch from her room in order to pass the word along and in order to join the action (146). When she realizes that the raiders are making their way to the tenement, and then notices Donal’s state of fear, her instinct does the exact opposite of Donal’s, by turning away from fear. Realizing that he
has bombs, she immediately formulates a plan to divert the raiders from her hero, and thus offers to hide the bombs in her room (146). When she says goodbye to Donal, she acts as though she knows her fate and will not see him again (146). Unfortunately, Donal lies in a state of near unconsciousness with fear, and Minnie leaves to die. Her sacrifice, although based on a lie, and motivated by romance, is nonetheless genuine (Murray 30). Minnie faces her death like Donal should have and their roles reverse. She realizes her true strength and lack of fear while Donal succumbs to that same fear that he boasted to have never felt.

The unfortunate reality is that Minnie’s death is ironic in that she dies for a man that she thought was a patriot when in fact she just dies for a coward (28). She does not go without a fight, rather fighting hard against the Auxies and shouting bravely (O’Casey, Shadow 152). Her bravery inspires another lady, Mrs. Henderson to join the fight (153). When she dies, Minnie becomes a martyr, although the question of who killed her may fog the idea, especially since the Irish Republic Army may have fired the shot. She sets the example that Donal claimed to have lived by and shows him to be a fraud. Inadvertently forcing him to run, she rights his wrongs for him. The irony lies in the fact that the participants in the raid, all three men,—Donal, Seumas and Adolphus,—talk a big fight but shrink from danger at the first sign of it while the women,—Minnie, Mrs. Grigson and Mrs. Henderson—all attempt to help in some way.

Minnie represents the genuine hero in Shadow and sets the stage for a discussion of what characteristics make up the proletariat. First of all, Minnie represents the lower working class. Uneducated, Britain and nature force her to survive on her own without many resources. Second, she reflects honesty. When she associated with the other characters, she was humble and recognized her limitations while the others tended to promote themselves. Third, her innocence, bordering on naivety, shows her integrity. When she hears that Donal is a gunman, she assumes that it must be true, and goes to him to be around such an independent mind and to be able to get into the fight. She does not ever give any indication that she thinks he might be lying, even when he makes subterfuges of his
fraud. Finally, she is brave. When her opportunity presents itself to her, she does not shrink from it, but rather runs towards it shouting bravely “Up the Republic!” Minnie does not fear sacrificing her life to further the cause of Irish independence.

In *The Shadow of a Gunman*, Sean O’Casey denounces the hypocrisy of nationalism and religion and lauds the superiority of communism. The fact that no one has commented on the inherent Marxist features of the play becomes hard to believe, especially since the themes of classism are so clear. O’Casey shows religion to be a crutch that eventually removes any sort of intelligent control from the user, reverting that individual to a primitive non-entity. Seumas Shields exemplifies such primitivism, being so superstitious that he senses danger from a tapping on his wall and then condemns someone to death if it means his safety. He shows an animalistic, instinctual and vicious side of humanity. Philosophy and nationalism ring no truer because they raise an individual like Donal Davoren above his peers and delude him into thinking that he can be someone other than himself. Like the crutch of religion, eventually such a belief system ends up destroying Donal thoroughly, leaving him in the exact position he had pretended to be in, this time with all of the consequences of those actions. Only Minnie, the working class, unintelligent, brave and innocent Minnie shows the best manifestation of what mankind can become, and it must take her death to help the world understand that. Through Minnie, O’Casey showed the possibility of what communism could be, and even he recognized that such dreams cannot always be possible.

**Works Cited**


In analyzing the genre of transnational literature, many approaches can be taken. The interplay of different cultures and characters, the transcending of national borders, and even the idea that transnational literature can in some way challenge traditional ideas of individual and national identity, of home, and even of nations are all part of the Transnational pantheon. In his novel *Voss*, Patrick White casts the titular character of Johann Voss as the outsider in a new nation: a German who wishes to explore the interior of the Australian continent. As the novel progresses, Voss demonstrates, through his interaction with the British colonists and Australian natives, a key aspect of transnational literature: how borders are
defined and destroyed, established and eliminated, leaving only a solitary truth: humanity is divided only by its own designs.

As with any piece of transnational literature, *Voss* contains border upon border, both physical and intangible, overlapping and enhancing one another for the author’s use and the readers’ interpretation. With *Voss*, Patrick White provides readers with a cast of characters whose internal and external borders provide the basis for White’s exploration of how those boundaries are seen by those both within and outside them. Simultaneously, *Voss* demonstrates the breakdown of those boundaries, whether such breakdown is desired or not. In his 2008 introduction to *Voss*, Thomas Keneally notes that, following White’s involvement in World War II, he felt the irresistible pull to return to Australia, and that desire “drove me to burn my European bridges” (xii). Already intimate with the idea of separation, White simultaneously erected a border around himself and his presumptive home of Australia, while destroying the connective border between himself and the land of his education, England, and the nations for which he fought in the war. This intimate familiarity provided White with the insight to demonstrate the phenomena through the characters of Voss, Laura, Mr. Bonner, and other members of the doomed expedition into the heart of Australia.

Beginning not with Johann Voss but with Laura Trevelyan, White establishes the first of many boundaries: the separation of Laura from her family. As an orphan, Laura has already been shed of one set of encapsulating borders: the physical link to her parents. Under the protective scrutiny of her aunt and uncle, Emmy and Edmund Bonner, Laura is engulfed in a new and unwelcome set of barricades: her inclusion in a family not her own. Even though Laura clearly appreciates the idea of her inclusion in the Bonner family, she is hesitant to immerse herself fully into it, preferring instead to seek out her own place, instead of one chosen for her. Indeed, White the narrator insists that “there was no evidence of intellectual kinship in any of her small circle of acquaintance, certainly not in her own family, neither in her uncle […] nor her Aunt Emmy, […] nor her Cousin Belle” (3). Laura’s isolation is nearly absolute, save for her affection for Belle, “with whom she did share some secrets, but of a
hilarious nature, for Belle was still young” (3). Regardless of Belle’s physical age, Laura’s isolation keeps her at a distance.

After she meets and begins to know Johann Voss, however, Laura’s feelings of isolation begin to change, if only marginally. Upon their first meeting, Voss immediately recognizes something of a kinship between them. After he realizes that she is the niece of Mr. Bonner, Voss lowers his guard, his borders, by “unlocking his bony hands” because in Laura he sees something of himself: a stranger to Australia (6). It is this perceived idea of a shared unpleasant situation that allows Voss to include, or at least not exclude, Laura from his idea of the world. As both feel they are outsiders in the world in which they find themselves, they establish a tenuous connection that allows them to feel less isolated. This connection to Laura is independent of Voss’ general disregard of companionship, as with his fellow adventurers. By his own admission Voss “was indifferent to other men” (15). This self-imposed isolation from his fellow men is a perfect example of an artificial border, one existing only in the mind rather than a physical boundary. Laura even refers to Voss as an “enclosed” man (9). This perception of Voss is echoed by Mr. Bonner on the day of the expedition’s departure when he says Voss “is different from other men” (98). Mr. Bonner has, by this time, encompassed Laura as family and Voss as an investment, but excluded Voss as a social associate, preferring to keep him at arms’ length except as necessary for appearances’ sake.

Voss’ isolation is not meant to last, however. As Voss and Laura’s relationship develops, it becomes as John Colmer asserts: that Voss expounds on the themes that false pride (as Voss often displays) and love can supersede the reality of separation (193). Voss’ pride is displayed early, when he replies to Mr. Bonner’s question of whether he has looked at the map: “I will first make it” (17). This simple declaration draws a line in the sand between Bonner’s reality and Voss’. The distance between them could not be greater, and
is indicative of Voss’ normal sense of separation between himself and other men. The barrier that this sense of pride creates is only undone by Voss’ relationship with and love of Laura. As they realize their kinship and eventually their love for one another, they create a border around themselves to insulate them from the intrusions of those who would denigrate Voss’ effort at exploration. Knowing that people cannot understand the nature of their relationship, Laura feigns indifference towards reports about the expedition, preferring instead to wait for her own letters from Voss. This idea that their love is able to overcome the physical barrier between them—the sheer physical distance—is representative of the dissolution of barriers attributed to transnational literature. Laura’s attempt to exploit the perceived ability of their love to transcend the distance between them is demonstrated through her adoption of Rose Portion’s baby, Mercy. Her attachment to the child is as strong as her attachment to Voss, and just as seemingly unexplainable to her aunt and uncle, who chafe when Laura refers to the still-unborn child as “my baby” (217). Laura erects a border around herself and Voss through the child, without anyone else knowing her true motivations.

Adding to the complexity of White’s novel is an idea put forward by Anne Fernihough, who cites Bergson’s theory that everyday life is no different than the lives presented by actors on a stage (65). This idea of the flexibility and mutability of the boundary between “real” life and “art” is put to use by White as the relationship between Laura and Voss grows ever deeper and more complex. As Voss travels across the interior, his visions of Laura accompanying him, prodding him on, are just as real to him as any of his flesh-and-blood companions. This is most dramatically demonstrated when—somehow superseding the limitations of distance—at the moment of Voss’ death at the hands of the aboriginal Jackie, Laura—gripped by a fever—cries out, “It is over. It is over” (386-87). Distance no longer holds any power over them. Their love has beaten back the reality of such mundane limitations.

Fernihough goes further and argues that literary historians must somehow reconcile Bergson’s distinctions of the overlapping borders between the ideas of “real” time and “unreal” space (79). In the case of Voss, as it is so openly based on an actual person—Ludwig
Leichhardt—this distinction is made more critical because of the relative celebrity of the source, while simultaneously acknowledging the fantastical elements attributed to Voss and Laura’s relationship. This barrier, at once real and unreal, is demonstrated in Voss’ belief that his expedition is more real than the lives of those who remain behind in New South Wales. Thinking of “the terrible simplicity of people who have not yet been hurt, and whom it is not possible to love,” Voss can barely comprehend the lives of those remaining behind as being worthy of his concern, while the importance of the upcoming expedition is paramount.

Finally, as White leads us farther and farther into the relationship between Voss and Laura, he presents us with the final border which must be overcome: Time. Both Voss and Laura know that, though they have known each other for only a short time, it is the time that they will have after the expedition is through that is the most important thing. Lyman Tower Sargent argues that, in Colonial Literature, which Voss is as much as it is transnational in nature, the utopian state sought by the characters is not a true utopia, but rather a euchronia, or a utopia that will exist in some future time. It is the vision of what might someday come to pass (205). White uses this boundary of time throughout the novel. Mr. Bonner thinks of the profit to be made off of Voss’ expedition. Voss, himself, sees his own future in the bush, and eventually comes to see a future with Laura if only he can cross the only boundary that he feels stands in his way: Time. Voss never assumes that Australia can stop him from completing his expedition; it is only a matter of Time. Laura, too, can think only of the Time that must pass until she will be reunited with Voss. Though it takes twenty years, Laura is indeed reunited with Voss at the dedication of the statue to commemorate his expedition. Confronted with the memories of Mr. Judd, Laura finally learns something of the hardships encountered by Voss. Even now, however, White is not through placing barriers between Laura and Voss, as Judd’s faulty memory confuses Voss’ death with Palfreyman’s (435).

And even this final barrier of Time is not absolute, nor is it confined only to the future, as Colonel Hebden explains in an earlier conversation with Laura concerning his own investigation into what
happened to the expedition led by Voss. Pushing her to answer questions, Hebden states:

“It is not for my sake. It is for Mr. Voss.”
“Mr. Voss is already history.”
“But history is not acceptable until it is sifted for the truth. Sometimes this can never be reached” (404).

So, Voss’s final boundary, Time, is ultimately the border which can never truly be breached. It is the one which can—and does—hold humanity in its grasp despite its best efforts to escape.

Clearly, then, the story of Voss is one of borders: borders at once separating, connecting, and protecting those within them. Voss, Laura, and Mr. Bonner, amongst others, all encounter them whether they are perceived or not. While some are more successful at escaping those which limit them, as Laura was in escaping her family through the adoption of Mercy, most remain trapped within them forever.

Works Cited

Interview

Sentinels, Lindee Anderson
An Interview with

Dr. Merlin Cheney

Born just outside of Rexburg, Idaho, Merlin Cheney began his collegiate career at the University of Idaho in Pre-Med. Thankfully, he discovered the joys of literature and changed his Major. Coming to Utah, he was quickly recruited by Weber State College in 1965. Obtaining his PhD from Bowling Green University on a leave of absence from Weber State College, Dr. Cheney returned to Utah. He has taught in the Department of English at Weber State University for 47 years, retiring after the summer of 2011.

Those of us who know you know that your Ph.D. dissertation was on Thomas Hardy. What was it about Hardy and his work that made him so appealing to you?

There are a lot of kinds of answers to that, but I think the thing it comes to is that yes, he’s a great artist and he’s stood the test of time. Beyond that, Hardy was a realist, he was a great humanist, he cared about people. He had a tragic vision, but he couldn’t stop caring—he couldn’t lose hope. By the time he finished writing, the writing movement had become a very cynical one, but Hardy wasn’t a cynic. I guess that connected to me and my attitudes and I think that’s probably why I stayed with Hardy.

You said that Hardy has stood the test of time. Why do you think he’s still relevant today?

Because Hardy understood human nature and he paints it for us in a way that we can see ourselves in it now as well as we could in 1867 when he wrote his first novel. His poetry was collected right after he died in 1928. By 1930 there was a Complete Poems of Thomas Hardy printed and it’s been in print continuously since, which is a pretty good trick. They had to finally throw the typeset away because it was falling apart.
At what point did you feel that Weber State needed a Master’s of English program?

I’ll be just a little facetious and say: About the second year I was here I thought we needed one, but nobody was interested in even thinking about that. But let me go back a little because this has a lot to do with what I think a university should be about. I think universities have been inventing themselves in ways that don’t meet the idea of what they should be. I think we’re all aware that universities have become their own separate world too much, but I want to start with the idea that the human mind is not just a resource to be strip-mined—we don’t say we want the coal and take it all out and leave the mess when we’re done. The mindset right now, if you go to the Legislature, is: “What job does this get you?” But they want that in pretty narrow terms. The bigger and the more important question, long term, is: “What kind of human beings should make up our culture and how can we make that better with education?” Plutarch, the Greek philosopher, said the mind is not a vessel to be filled—it’s a fire to be ignited. That’s what makes a human community. […] Well, that’s a philosophy discussion, but we had wanted a Master’s degree but with no thought that it was a possibility. Twelve years ago, Dr. Dohrer became chair of the English Department. He was a great guy to work with. He knew he didn’t know enough about everything and he was okay to let somebody who knew do things. We got out of a meeting after he’d been chair about two months and I said, “You know, we need to get going on a Master’s degree.” He said, with that kind of innocence and goodness in him, “That’s a good idea. Why don’t you get going on that?” I thought to myself, “Merlin, you darn fool, what have you said?” I hadn’t thought about it ahead of time, it just came out. I’d created a lot of programs at Weber State by then—that’s the tenth major program that I created at Weber State and I knew what I was in for. I knew that if Utah State and the University of Utah didn’t want us to have it, then we wouldn’t have it. I’d watched the fight to get an MBA and they got it on the Davis campus and the U still ran the one on this campus; they’d pulled in every marker they had in the state to get that MBA program and that was business—I knew no one was going to do that for English. People would say, “Do you think we can really get this?” I’d say, “Oh sure, let’s keep going! If we hit setbacks, we’ll just work around them.” I’d go home at night and say, “Not only am I a darn fool, but now I’m a liar—I’m telling everybody this story and they believe me.”
Interview

With all of the expectations of the program, has it developed the way you would have liked and hoped for?

Yes. I said earlier that I’ve developed a lot of programs. This one comes the closest to achieving the ideal of anything I’ve done. It’s just sort of that magic combination and I’m not taking a bow for that because all of the pieces and people have to be there for it to work. But I can go to faculty and say, “Pick something you’ve got a passion for and design a class.” We’re trying to cap classes at fifteen and the professor will have fifteen students who are hungry to learn and who want this. And these classes are not a kind of hoop that you jump through; we go and we work and when we finally go home, we go home high. We talk about literature and the humanities being a great power in the community, but we usually talk about that in public speeches and then the legislature says, “Yes, but we’ll fund the engineering.” But this one is really doing that. Half of the people in this program have no plans to teach. They’re not teaching now. They’re doing all kinds of jobs where research and scholarship and critical analysis and writing skills are valuable. But they want this for their own fulfillment and they take it back to the community and their own families. So yes, I can’t imagine anything coming closer to what I’d imagined it to be.

With all the work you put in to get the program established, did you expect to be made the head of the program?

I did, but not for the reason you might think. Nobody else was willing to do that kind of work. The first four years of the program—I have a half-time assignment to run that program—and that half-time assignment averaged forty-five hours a week. Nobody else wanted to do that. And in fact, as we’re changing the program director now, it was interesting who didn’t want to apply for it because it was too much work. It’s a lot less work now than it was.

What is your proudest moment with the Master’s program?

It’s hard to pick a moment. In terms of development, that moment with the Regents was a great moment, but that was just the green light to move. In terms of the program, I think the best answer I can give is a moment that recurs: there is that moment when students walk across the stage and we put a hood on them and we throw our arms around each other and we try to pretend we’re not weeping. We’ve connected in a way that will have a part of my heart for the rest of my life. I know that sounds kind of schlocky but it’s why it all matters. I’m proud of students who have papers in regional and national conferences and students who write original things and get them published, but it still comes down to that moment that represents that culmination.
Do you have any regrets about the program?

Yes—that I got old. [Laughter]

Overall you’re proud of the program and how it’s turned out?

It’s the greatest professional thing I’ve done. If I was going to finish with something great, this would be it. There are now about one hundred and twenty-five students in the program. We’ve graduated almost eighty. I don’t remember the numbers. There may be a few more graduations this semester because of students saying, “Let’s get out of there before Cheney’s gone.” [Laughter] But yes, I’ve loved it and it was a great way to finish up. I didn’t know I was going to finish now, but I’m ending with two writers that I love: John Fowles and Thomas Hardy.

You talk about that moment at graduation when students walk across the stage and you give them a hug: Who’s your favorite student in the program?

Oh don’t go there! [Laughter] But I have an answer for you: it’s whatever student I’m holding on to right that minute.

When the idea was brought to you of starting a graduate journal for the Master’s program, what was your first thought?

I thought this is a neat thing and we need to do it. My second thought was what you’d expect: “Okay, what are the obstacles? What are we going to have to overcome to get this to happen?” Since my plate was kind of full right then, I looked to Ryan [Evans] and the staff he has assembled. But this is the marvel of the program—these are adults with tremendous initiative. If you run a program and say to the students, “You’re in charge of making things happen and you’re free to do it,” then they do. They do more than I could ever possibly do by myself and they do better in a lot of ways. I was worried about the obstacles of money and time. I know you all put a lot of time in, but I don’t know how Ryan has survived. But the journal is a great thing. Papers aren’t just to satisfy a teacher, they’re part of the ongoing conversation. The great literature is what we study and that’s the best that’s been thought and written. We read it and we talk about it and we write about it and then we write some of our own. That’s the real thing.

What are you going to miss most after you retire?

The students. That’s an easy answer.
**What are you going to miss least?**

The administrative bureaucracy that doesn’t respond to real needs. I’ll try to keep it generic. It’s the obstacle of any endeavor human beings do that has any social element. I won’t miss endless department meetings where people wrangle endlessly with something that didn’t matter to being with.

I didn’t set out to do any of this so that my name would appear somewhere and I don’t really care a lot about that now. It was the students whose lives I wanted to better. It was the community. I’m part of that community and I’m part of the lives of the students and I’ve had my thanks.

Merlin Cheney, an oral history by Ruby Licona, Mark W. Woodring, and Sarah M. Gawronski, 9 February 2012, WSU Stewart Library Oral History Program, Special Collections, Stewart Library, Weber State University, Ogden, UT.