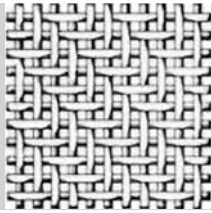




Interview Focus



Deriving from the German *weben* — to weave — *weber* translates into the literal and figurative “weaver” of textiles and texts. *Weber* (the word is the same in singular and plural) are the artisans of textures and discourse, the artists of the beautiful fabricating the warp and weft of language into ever-changing patterns. *Weber*, the journal, understands itself as a tapestry of verbal and visual texts, a weave made from the threads of words and images.

The Reality of the Imagination

Even upon a casual glance at our table of contents, readers in this issue of *Weber* will notice our usual signature offerings, which have given the journal the profile it enjoys today. Poetry and fiction, essays and interviews, visual art and a section on Reading the West — this time on the geography of fire hazards — combine into a smorgasbord of readings that have been part of the journal’s mix since its reconfiguration more than a decade ago.

Less immediately obvious — except to our most faithful of readers — is the dual double billing in the art and interview rubrics of the journal, which juxtapose a painter with a photographer and a fiction writer with a scientist. This is unusual not only because featuring two 12-page art spreads in one issue significantly increases our exhibition space and asks painting, our dominant art form, to make room for a medium which *Weber* has tended to underexpose. It is unusual also in that the journal is privileged to publish interviews with, and creative contributions by, two eminent writers in their fields. Although *Weber* is and has traditionally been at home in the arts and literature, the journal has a history of reaching across the creative aisle to acknowledge literary culture’s partnership with the sciences in the production of knowledge.

For that reason, “juxtaposition” may not be the right word in describing our mix, as it suggests an oppositional, rather than a complementary stance. “Dialogue,” “conversation,” or perhaps “assembly” might more accurately describe the joint thematic concerns that bind the visual and verbal artists gathered in this issue. Both Burtynsky and Choberka, for all their medium-based differences and their ostensible distance from political issues, offer statements — however muted and abstracted — about the ecological fallout under the current system of global consumerism. And both McCall Smith and Tattersall, in their interviews as well as their writings, variously speak about the qualities that have made homo sapiens into a species sui generis, whose cognitive reach and intellectual ambition are sometimes belied by cultural airs and atavistic posturing.

Most importantly perhaps, what truly binds the interpretive approaches of these genres and art forms is their joint origin in the (as yet) most unfathomable of human capacities: the imagination. The painter translates his view of the world into a singular constellation of color and form through the coordination of hand, eye, and tools — no matter, fundamentally, how representational or abstract the work is purported to be. Photography, for all its often documentary ethos and the optical wizardry inserting itself between object and viewer, is shaped by the vision of the artist organizing patterns into meaningful forms — no matter, ultimately, how instantaneous the triggering moment. The fiction writer, as Alexander McCall Smith so memorably puts it, inhabits a medium that can map “the utopian spectrum of life.” And Ian Tattersall describes science as a set of intellectual constructs, as “a system of provisional knowledge,” and hence acknowledges the speculative capacity of humans to craft figments of the imagination into daring and extraordinary hypotheses (often remarkably resistant to disproof). While painting is of course not identical to photography and fiction not identical to science, all not only share a more or less narrativizing impulse — the wish and need to tell stories — but also spring from the human capacity to picture and invent. The novelist E. L. Doctorow once noted that “Fiction is an ancient way of knowing, the first science.” It might not be altogether far-fetched to observe, analogously (and get the approval of many a scientist), that science too is “an ancient way of knowing, the first fiction.”

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EDITORIAL MATTER CONTINUED IN BACK

GLOBAL SPOTLIGHT/INTERVIEW FOCUS

- 3 Gail Yngve and Alexander McCall Smith, *"Dwelling on the Utopian Spectrum of Life" – A Conversation with Alexander McCall Smith*
- 15 Alexander McCall Smith, *Fatty O'Leary's Dinner Party – Excerpt from an Unpublished Novel*
- 25 Haylie Cox, Steffani Geary, and Samuel Zeveloff *"On Human Evolution, Neanderthals, and Lemurs" – A Conversation with Ian Tattersall*
- 38 Ian Tattersall, *The Great Leap Forward*

ART

- 61 Edward Burtynsky, *Nature Transformed*
- 97 Matthew Choberka, *Instability, Complexity, and Hopefulness – Making Art*

ESSAY

- 73 John Schwiebert, *Wendell Berry's Little Way*
- 86 Robert Lacy, *Reflections on the Great Wrong Place*
- 120 Luke Fernandez, *Cultural Encounters – Memories of Privilege and Deprivation in 1970's Spain*
- 131 Terre Ryan, *In the Name of the Bomb*

FICTION

- 52 Daniel W. Powell, *Life, On the Other Side*
- 109 Richie Swanson, *Rinehart's Beach*
- 142 Becky Marietta, *They Rise Up and Call Her Blessed*

POETRY

- 46 Rob Carney, *A Portrait of the Artist in the Dark* and other poems
- 51 Simon Perchik, *
- 82 Dustin Junkert, *Theology* and other poems
- 93 John Grey, *Morning of the Farmer's Wife* and other poems

151 READING THE WEST



A.M. Smith.....3 & 15

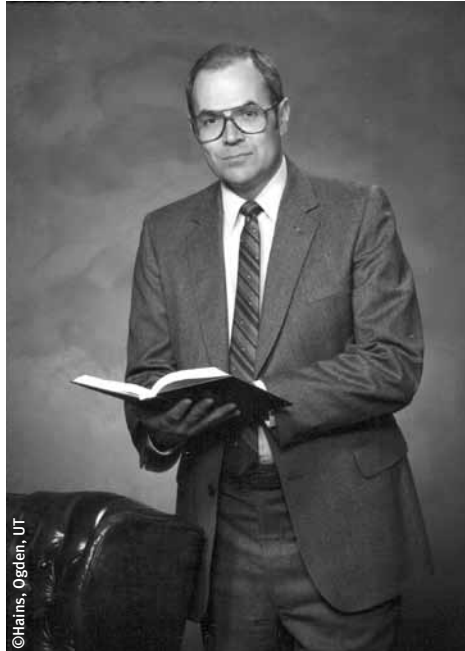


Edward Burtynsky.....61



Ian Tattersall.....25 & 38

**ANNOUNCING
the 2011
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to
Michelle Bonczek
for
“A Roadside Attempt at Attraction,”
“Yaquina Bay, and Darkness,”
and “Plotting Distance”
in the Spring/Summer 2011 issue

The Dr. Sherwin W. Howard Award of \$500 is presented annually to the author of the “best” poetry published in *Weber* during the previous year.

Funding for this award is generously provided by the Howard family.

Dr. Howard (1936-2001) was former president of Deep Springs College, dean of the College of Arts & Humanities at Weber State University, editor of *Weber Studies*, and an accomplished playwright and poet.

Gail Yngve

Dwelling on the Utopian Spectrum of Life

A Conversation with



Alexander McCall Smith

Illustrations courtesy Iain McIntosh. Used with permission

With such diverse fans as former First Lady, Laura Bush, and Flea – bassist and founding member of the contemporary rock band The Red Hot Chili Peppers – it's no wonder Alexander McCall Smith continues to portray his life-affirming portrait of the world in his writings. His choice to dwell on the "utopian spectrum of life" has attracted a massive and diverse audience worldwide. Readers feel drawn to, even "beguiled" by, Smith's cheerful writings – the comfort food of the contemporary literature scene. Enormously successful, his books have never lacked an audience, hitting the New York Times bestseller list regularly. His No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency series was even transformed into a popular HBO series that provides viewers with a warm and charming option to the usual edgy HBO fare. In these uncertain times, McCall Smith's books provide escape to an exotic and utopian place that one hopes still exists somewhere in the world today.

However, Alexander McCall Smith did not start out as a writer, though his life, like his books, has had many fascinating twists and turns. In 1948, the Emeritus Professor of Medical Law was born in Bulwayo in what was then South Rhodesia but later became Zimbabwe. His father worked as a public prosecutor in the former British colony. McCall Smith attended school at the Christian Brothers College, later moving to Scotland where he studied law at the University of Edinburgh. After earning his Ph.D. in law, he taught at Queen's University Belfast, eventually returning to Africa in 1981 to teach law at the University of Botswana. In 1984, he moved back

to Scotland, where he lives today with his wife, Elizabeth, and their two daughters, Lucy and Emily. There, he became a professor of law at the University of Edinburgh and is now Emeritus Professor at its School of Law.

McCall Smith's writing career began while still at Queen's University Belfast, when he entered and won a literary competition for children's books. He has since published over sixty books, including nineteen children's books, thirty novels and novellas, three short story collections, and has written (and co-written) twelve law books. Among his most notable works are The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency series; the Isabel Dalhousie Mysteries; the 44 Scotland Street series; the Portuguese Irregular Verbs series, and, most recently, his Corduroy Mansions series. McCall Smith has won numerous awards for his writings, including the Waterstone Author of the Year, The Crime Writers' Association Dagger in the Library Award, the 2004 British Book Awards Author of the Year, and the 2007 Martin Beck Award. He also holds honorary doctorates from ten universities, most recently from Southern Methodist University, Dallas. Given his enormous success, amazingly the most noteworthy of all of McCall Smith's attributes is his humility. This humility along with his almost boyish charm is refreshing and bleeds through to his wonderful characters readers have come to know and love.

I want to thank the Ogden School Foundation for arranging Alexander McCall Smith's visit and for making this conversation possible.

In these uncertain times, McCall Smith's books provide escape to an exotic and utopian place that one hopes still exists somewhere in the world today.

Having read some of your earlier interviews, I was glad to see that you're a Somerset Maugham reader.

Yes, I think Somerset Maugham is greatly underrated and greatly unappreciated. He was a wonderful writer.

Absolutely. His story "The Lotus Eaters" is one of my all-time favorites.

Yes, I think his short stories are absolutely superb. "Rain" is probably the one I like best, the one about the two men in the jungle who are at odds with one another. They're on a remote outpost on the river, and the new man comes and is disapproved of by the first man. Yes, Maugham was a wonderful writer, and Robin Maugham, the nephew, also wrote very well and was obviously under the shadow of his uncle, sadly. I am a great fan of Somerset Maugham's.

Well, getting to my first question, a two-parter: you grew up in Zimbabwe, later moved to Botswana, and now you live in Scotland – which of these countries do you most consider home?

Scotland. I've spent most of my life in Scotland, although I spent my childhood in Zimbabwe, but we were there at the tail-end of the colonial period and my father was Scottish. We always felt that we would leave, really, so I just spent my childhood there. Then I went back to the UK and then

I spent the rest of my life in Scotland with the exception of one or two brief periods living elsewhere. I lived for a year in Northern Ireland in Belfast at a very difficult but also very interesting time, and that year was actually an important year to me in a whole range of senses. Then in 1980, I was at the



University of Edinburgh where I spent most of my professional life. I went to work at the University of Swaziland for the large part of the academic year in 1980, and then the following year in Botswana, having been trundled to these posts by the university because the University of Edinburgh had very old and important links with what used to be the joint university

of the three so-called high-commission territories, and they had a joint university that we had a long association with, so I went to Botswana for the first time in 1981 and spent most of the year there and then returned every year thereafter for a brief period. The rest of my life I've lived in Scotland, and another period—I suppose two periods of six months—I spent as a visiting professor at SMU in Dallas, Texas, which was a very, very interesting and enjoyable experience.

Quite a different experience than Botswana.

Yes, it is quite different everywhere, really (Laughter).

It is, yes. So I have to ask: any Irish novels on the slate for the future?

I wouldn't dare to set a novel in Ireland. That would be entering the lion's cage, and I don't think I could possibly do that. Back in 1974 when I lived in Belfast, I was substantially influenced by various Irish writers that I read—Irish poets and, indeed, novelists and short story writers. I first encountered the twentieth-century Irish short story while I was living in Belfast. I had a friend who was an enthusiast for those, so I think I was quite influenced by the people like O'Connor and various others, and also I discovered a fine Ulster novelist called Mawr, who ended up in the United States. He is another of these somewhat unappreciated novelists and certainly doesn't get the just measure of appreciation. I thought he was very good.

The second part of my two-part question is, why did you choose to set The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency series in Botswana, instead of Zimbabwe?

Well, I suppose I lost touch with Zimbabwe and really was pretty much out of touch with it, and didn't feel that I wanted to write about it. Botswana was a country that, I suppose, I felt very positively about because it was a peaceful and remarkable country, and I just think that's the way that matters worked. From the ages of thirty-two, thirty-three onwards, I really found that I was done with my experiences in South Africa and was really in Botswana, and Mosuto. I spent some time in Mosuto as well, but mostly Botswana. My adult experience of an African country was largely Botswana. I enjoyed my time in Swaziland. I wrote one or two short

stories while in Swaziland, which have been published, but in Botswana is where I spoke mostly about my feelings of Africa, and that part of Africa has started to come out in my writing. I hadn't anticipated that this would happen. I hadn't really written about Botswana when I was first there, and I didn't imagine I would have a very long literary conversation with the country. It wasn't until about the mid-1990s that I started to write the Botswana novels—in about 1996-97, and the first one was actually published in 1998. That was the first of the books (series) that was published in the UK by a small publisher. It was actually in Scotland. So I find

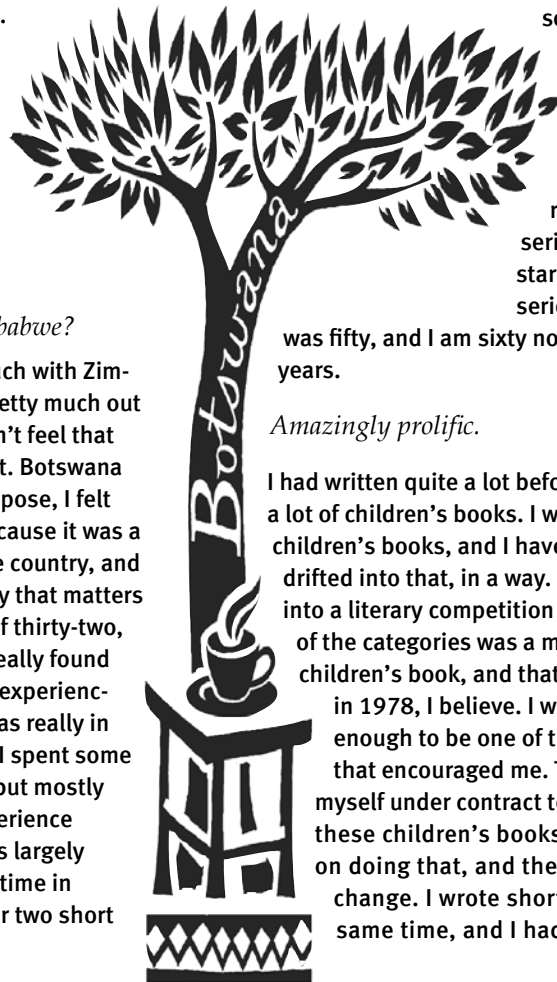
that preferably experience tends to take some time to work through the system.

Perhaps I am a late developer (*Laughter*). I really started as a serious novelist and started to write in a serious way when I

was fifty, and I am sixty now, so a nice ten years.

Amazingly prolific.

I had written quite a lot before then. I wrote a lot of children's books. I wrote over thirty children's books, and I have found that I just drifted into that, in a way. I had entered into a literary competition in which one of the categories was a manuscript for a children's book, and that was way back in 1978, I believe. I was fortunate enough to be one of the winners and that encouraged me. Then I found myself under contract to write more of these children's books, and I carried on doing that, and then came the change. I wrote short stories at the same time, and I had a collection of



short stories published, a book of collected traditional African tales, but first the children's books, and then came the change.

I wonder why two of your best-known characters are women — Mma Ramotswe and Isabel Dalhousie. Do you, perhaps, feel a special affinity for your female characters?

Well, I think it's really interesting if one reflects on the choices of characters that writers make, that many female writers write about male characters and do so extremely well, and we can all think of female writers who have a very profound understanding of male psychology, and their male characters are entirely credible. Very occasionally I have found that I have been reading a novel written by a woman writer in which the description of the man is not quite right, and in which I think the male character wouldn't really think that or say that, but that's comparatively rare. Yet, it's interesting that it's asymmetrical in a sense, that very few male writers actually do choose to write about women. I think if one did some sort of study, trying to get some figures and statistics, I suspect the statistics would come up like that.

But why do I choose to write from the point of view of women? It's because I like the conversation of women, the way in which women's conversation—of course I shouldn't generalize—is often a bit more subjective than men's conversation. Typically men talk about the external world and things of the external world, and there are an awful lot of inhibiting factors in their conversations. Men are trapped in their worlds, and I think it's

absolutely true that the liberation of women has actually lent a hand in the liberation of men from these stern, taciturn, macho roles they are expected to perform. It's very sad. I feel it's more fun in ways to write about women, but I do write about men as well. I have lots of male characters; it's just that the main ones are women.

Yes, I just found it interesting that two of your most significant characters are female. Isabel Dalhousie and Precious Ramotswe are deeply influenced by their fathers. Is this trait autobiographical of you?

I tend not to analyze or reflect upon the connection between what I write and my personal psychology because I think that once someone starts doing that it could have the effect of taking spontaneity away from what

one writes. I think that if you're aware of the fact that you're playing out some deep-rooted thing in the psyche, it could lead to a certain self-consciousness in the playing out of that deep-rootedness. (Laughter)

It could unravel.

Well, also, I think that I feel a certain embarrassment in talking

about myself and what makes me tick, and I feel a particular embarrassment or reticence rather, talking about a relationship with parents. Those are things which obviously in most people's lives can be complex and sometimes painful—certainly complex. My father was a very nice man, and I suppose, had I not had a nice father, I might have written differently about a relationship with a father, but I have been certainly quite struck by the father/daughter relationship,

Men are trapped in their worlds, and I think it's absolutely true that the liberation of women has actually lent a hand in the liberation of men from these stern, taciturn, macho roles they are expected to perform.

which is really what I write about as opposed to a father/son relationship. I don't have sons. I have two daughters, and I suppose I have never experienced both aspects of the father/son relationship; I just experienced it as a son. But a father/daughter—I have known so many good relationships between father and daughter, loyal relationships, really quite moving relationships in a way, and therefore, I think the idea of Mma Ramotswe rather worshipping the memory of her father, whom she calls "Daddy," is, I think, very moving because the idea of somebody faithfully and over many years admiring and cherishing a parent is a wonderful thing to behold.

And something that doesn't happen often any more as much as you'd expect.

Well, I suppose families—we're witnessing the destruction of the family, which I think is a tragedy, and I suppose liberal individualism is taking its toll, and people are encouraged to be more independent than they used to be, and not to cherish family, family links. Quite a tragedy, mind you.

On another topic, why do you gravitate towards the mystery genre?

I think I find the whole issue of genre very difficult. I find it in many respects unsatisfactory. I don't think that Mma Ramotswe, the Botswana books, are really mysteries in nature; you know they aren't, really.

Yes, they're certainly not the traditional form of mystery.

No, they don't have any of the traditional criteria. We don't have crimes; in fact, if we do, they don't revolve around crime-involved instances. They're just instances of bad behavior rather than crimes, so I don't really think they fit into that genre. However, I have used the device of a private detective receiving clients. The reason why I used that initially was not really for any particular attachment to the mystery genre, but actually it was a vehicle for talking about society and the psychology of the various people who

Mma Ramotswe comes into contact with. So it's a marvelous device because you can say, the doors are open, who's going to come in with a problem? Though if you were writing within the constraints of the straightforward novel, you couldn't really have all those characters coming in and entering stage left for no particular reason. It would be very unlikely, so for the large part there are no policemen in these books, and there's no bringing criminals to

justice, really. There are just solutions to human problems.

One of the most beautifully moving scenes in contemporary fiction occurs in Blue Shoes and Happiness, a scene that typifies the giving nature of Mma Ramotswe when she hugs and prays for an ailing American woman she meets in a restaurant. Then she says goodbye to the woman in Setswana because it is the language Precious Ramotswe's heart speaks. Please elaborate on the significance of this moment and explain why you refer to Setswana as the language of her heart.

Because her heart's broken. I suppose it's dealing first with Setswana. I think the hearts of all of us speak one particular language. It's the language of our mother tongue, and it's the language we would express ourselves most intimately and authentically in, and, therefore, I think that is the language of the heart naturally, so that is why I chose to use it. It's particularly in the case of someone from Botswana where people speak both English and Setswana, and English is seen as a language of formal transactions between people, but if you really want to say something which comes right from the heart, then you revert to what you spoke as a child and the language you used to speak to your grandmother, so that explains that. The actual scene with that woman was, I think, what I wanted to do there. The scene just came to me. I didn't sit down and plan it totally. I write all these books just stretched out. I don't sit there and devise very much at all.

Now let's see, you wanted to talk about the kindness that you will see in that part of Africa.

It's a very powerful and emotional scene.

Yes, and it would happen that way. Somebody like Mma Ramotswe would do that because of the kindness which people manifest in that part of the world at the drop of a hat to a stranger as well. She is so empathetic; she was able to say, "The Lord will look after you, my sister." Yes, I was almost in tears writing that.

I think it's very powerful because it's something that wouldn't likely happen in the United States. Most Americans are afraid to express emotions publicly.

Yes, yes. We are, generally, as westerners; we are more buttoned up. We would be less



inclined to do that whereas somebody like Mma Ramotswe in that particular society, in fact, would. But remember that this woman is a foreigner. Mma Ramotswe is sharing kindness with somebody who is from another culture altogether. And I've actually seen similar acts of kindness in that part of Africa shown by the local people to strangers. Sometimes people who go to Botswana say to me that the people are so nice to us, which is interesting. People who've gone to Botswana and out to the camps say they've encountered such kindness.

A friend of mine who spent a few years in Gaborone absolutely loved it there and still speaks of returning.

(Nod and laughter)

When I taught at Howard University in Washington, D.C., I taught students from all over Africa, including Botswana, and I immediately recognized the dialect in The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency. I'm amazed by the authentic sound of your dialogue – your ear for the dialect, and your ability to translate the dialect onto the printed page with such ease. Is this process second nature for you, or do you struggle to sound natural?

I try to capture the rhythms and cadence of African English, and I will thank you firstly—thank you for your kind remarks, and that comes naturally because I've heard so much of it.

Well, it truly is remarkable. What I've also noticed about your characters is that both Isabel Dalhousie and Mma Ramotswe are highly ethical women who often make mention of the lack of ethics in the contemporary world. Are you attempting to awaken a sense of ethics in your readers?

No, no, because I think the readers have that. I'm not trying to teach anybody anything; I don't really feel that's my job, being moralistic. Isabel, of course, represents a very particular situation of how we are constantly confronted by ethical issues in our day-to-day lives. All of us face the same—how we treat our friends, how we look at our obligations and so on, and I just find that fascinating. I find that intellectually fascinating. I don't really think anybody would learn anything from Isabel. Well, they might see how moral problems can be looked at, and I want to believe that people might think a bit about some of the issues, but I don't think they'd be inspired by Isabel. They'd often shake their heads and say she's getting into a terrible mess by thinking too intensely about it. But with Mma Ramotswe, what I want to show there is the wonderful quality of straightforwardness and sincerity that one finds in somebody like her and her particular culture. There are people there who strike me as just being utterly charming in that respect, and good.

The decency of the people.



Decency, yes, but that decency is everywhere. We'll find it here as well. I have been particularly struck, for example, about the Midwestern United States—that you encounter a very strong sense of decency and courtesy, quite striking; you don't in other parts of this particular country, yet you do there. But people in the United States don't necessarily see that. People say that about Scotland as well. In Scotland, they'll say, everybody was so nice. Well, I would say in Scotland everybody's normal. (*Laughter*) I think it's always the case that the exotic example is more striking.

Your books are wonderful escapes. I feel I'm being transported to some ideal spot I would like to be.

And, indeed, I think Botswana is special; yes, I do think there's a special amount of that decency there. Particularly in the case of somebody like Mma Ramotswe—slightly more old fashioned.

In No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency series, more than your other series, I've found many delightful, humorous scenes. A few examples that stand out for me are the misspelling of the word "accurate" in the motto for the Botswana Secretarial School and Mma Makutsi's often-mentioned "97%" score for her typing accuracy that she proudly flaunts whenever she's given the opportunity.

(*Chuckle*)

In addition, from In the Company of Cheerful Ladies, the Zambians, upon hearing they are stereotyped as being dishonest, respond by saying, "Everybody knows it's the Nigerians who are dishonest." Is this humor indicative of Botswana culture? Is it common, or something you exaggerate in your books?

It's a bit of both. I quite enjoy humor, which one might describe as dry. I enjoy, for example, Barbara Pym, the most wonderfully funny writer. Jane Austen is particularly funny as well. You know that dry humor is very much to my taste. So there's a bit of that going on there, but also there would be a bit of the sort of humor you would find in Botswana. You would get, naturally, some nice humorous situations.

On the other hand, there's another aspect of Botswana's culture that I find fascinating: the references to superstitions, for example, standing on one's toes for good luck, and the fear of the ground hornbill bird as being unlucky. You don't mention in the series

the origin of these superstitions. Do you know?

These are things I've just heard from people. I know the one of standing on one's toes—we cross fingers—somebody showed me that, and I just know it. I remember who told me about the hornbills. Yeah, I remember specifically where I heard about them. I tend to keep my ears open and pick up bits and pieces, but sometimes if you'd scratch at my knowledge, you'd find it quite superficial. *(Laughter)* Get below it, and then you'd discover that it peters out.

(Laughter) It certainly adds to the books to have the cultural references.

I do want to create an authentic sense of place. I'm very taken by the sense of place in literature, and that, for me, is more important than plot. I pay far less attention to plot than I do to verbal exchanges of characters, which reveal character and sense of place. Then I think, I better have some plot as well. *(Chuckles)*

Your character Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni, Mma Ramotswe's boyfriend and eventually her husband, is called "Mr." and not "Rra." Why is this the case?

Well, you know in Botswana you can use both. Mr. J.L.B. Matekoni may be regarded as more formal or as more modern, but it wouldn't matter very much in Botswana.

Interesting. I've wondered for a long time. Well, your books have been tremendously successful internationally. Were you surprised by their enormous success?

Yes, I was. I was very surprised. I hadn't anticipated the response at all. Very few people in my situation do anticipate that sort of thing. I suppose some people nurture the fond hope that that sort of thing will happen, but I didn't expect it. It's something that one doesn't dare dream about, and then when it happens, a certain amount of pinching oneself has to happen, but I've moved beyond the pinching. *(Laughter)*

I suppose in a sense I really am utopian, but I take the view that that is the voice I have. That's the spectrum of life, the experience I wish to dwell on. As a painter may choose different parts of the palette, so too writers can choose to work in particular areas.

You'd be bruised by now if you hadn't. Your reviewers like you. They've used such descriptors as "honest, beguiling, sweet, soothing poultices, contagious warmth, and life-affirming." Was it your intent to create such life-affirming books for your readers? Was it a happy accident?

That's the way I write.
That's the particular

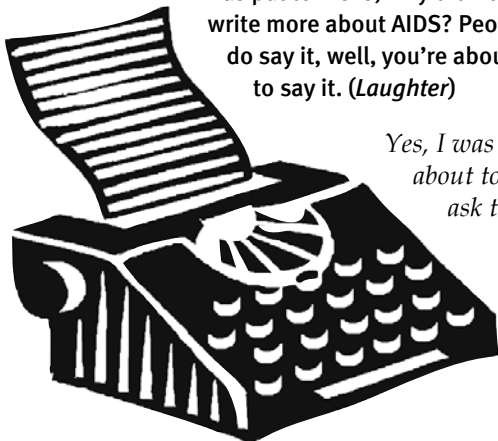
register in which I choose to write, and I'm accused of being a utopian writer; I'm also accused of being selective. I suppose in a sense I really am utopian, but I take the view that that is the voice I have. That's the spectrum of life, the experience I wish to dwell on. As a painter may choose different parts of the palette, so too writers can choose to work in particular areas. I find it curious that there is a very strong expectation that one is going to write gritty and bleak social realism, that we must be bleak. The world is obviously a very bleak place with many bleak things happening left, right, and center, and if one concentrates the world, it's very easy to see it as a veil of tears. But I don't see why there should be an expectation that writers need to deal with that territory exclusively. Because people don't say that to composers—they don't say to composers,

you should not be writing joyous music, or upbeat music. You should be writing dirges. And they don't say that to painters either. Painters are allowed to portray joy and the positive features of life, and yet if you're a writer and you do that, you do find that a lot of people ask, what are you doing?

Sadly.

And it's a really extraordinary thing that they should do it. Now, if you're pretending that you're portraying reality, and you're just portraying positive things, then obviously you are misleading. But if you don't purport to, then, well. Take D.H. Lawrence in *Sons and Lovers*, which is set in the first war, yet there's no mention of war in it. And, of course, Jane Austen didn't mention certain wars going on at the time, and yet now people would say to a contemporary writer that you couldn't write about London during the Blitz and not mention that bombs were going off. Well, in one sense you couldn't if you wanted to give an accurate picture, but if you wanted to talk about the lives of individuals, presumably people during the time were doing the ordinary human things, and if you wanted to write about the lives of these people—affairs, for example—if you wanted to write about some great romantic affair that was accompanied by buildings collapsing, that wouldn't be center stage. And with the Botswana books, one of the matters that

was put to me is, why didn't I write more about AIDS? People do say it, well, you're about to say it. *(Laughter)*



Yes, I was about to ask that

question, and you refer to it as the "horrible sickness," so I assume you're referring to AIDS.

Yeah, yeah. And Mma Makutsi's brother dies of it.

So you do have those moments, which make your work real enough.

Well, you see, it's such a complex issue. Firstly, there's a question of whether one wants to write tragedies. If I were to put AIDS center stage, the books would become tragedies. There are quite a lot of novels, and indeed, nonfiction, written about the AIDS epidemic in Africa, and there's a large amount of literature. People have done it very well. If I put it into my books, then my books would join that body of literature, and I think they would be quite different, and I don't think I could add any particular insight. I've seen it in Botswana, and I know people in Botswana who are afflicted with it. . . . When dealing with the grief of other people, you actually have to be extremely careful how you deal with it. The people of Botswana don't want the outside world to see them as sick and afflicted, quite understandably. So as an outsider, you have to be tactful about them. That's why I mention it, but mention it the way I do, because this is what they want. They want to get on with their lives, and they are. They're doing it in the face of a major tragedy. They're carrying on in a very optimistic and good way; of course, they aren't burying their heads in the sand. There's a lot of progress being made with education to try to end AIDS; the number of the afflicted is inching down. Also, the government pays for the ARVs—the citizens get drugs. The difficulty is the foreigners living there. They are the ones that don't benefit from the free drugs always, but they often get them anyway.

It's interesting that you do have some gravity to your books, and yet people focus on the positive side of them. For example,

Mma Ramotswe's adopted daughter, Motholeli, has a sad history and is in a wheelchair. Yet she has a cheerful and upbeat nature.

Yes, there's actually quite a lot of dark things in the books, but we're dealing with a lot of important human considerations there—ambitions and human nature, the struggle is quite poignant.

Also, the character Violet Sephotho who went to school with Mma Makutsi is quite the villain.

She's wicked. She's the closest I get to a baddy. (Laughter) She's back in volume 10. She gets a job at the Double Comfort Furniture Store with a view to getting Phuti Radiphoti away from Mma Makutsi.

One last question: which authors do you read most and why? Who would you consider to be your greatest influence?

I read pretty broadly. My single most important influence is W.H. Auden. I read Auden a lot, and I'm in fact writing a book on Auden. I'm also a great fan of R. K. Narayan, the Indian writer, and I (Pauses)

We mentioned Maugham earlier; would he be an influence or just a love?

I think he would certainly be an influence. I suppose I admire his narratives, his ability to tell a story, and I like the simplicity of his prose.

I think an earlier influence is a quite early exposure to *The Book of Common Prayer* and the language of the King James Bible. I obviously was exposed to that language. Many people now are not exposed to it, and the marvelous prose of *The Book of Common Prayer*, the majesty of the language, is just overpowering. I'm a great fan of James the

Sixth, as we call him in Scotland (James the First in England), who actually relegated this great gift of the authorized version to the language. I think he made more of a contribution to the English language than virtually anybody else. A poet himself, quite an accomplished poet, he had a fine humanist education—a somewhat grim one—as a boy, and he was interested in many matters of the mind. When you think of the influence of the King James Bible on the English language, it's marvelous. In African English, you some-

times get that echoing of Old Testament feel.

I wonder if Hemingway would have written the way he wrote had he never been exposed to biblical language. Another writer one can see the influence of the Bible on is Alan Paton. His *Cry the Beloved Country* is so resonant of

the Old Testament—that was an influence for me as well.

I assume people usually ask you about Achebe and other African writers that are best known in this country.

I'm not particularly well-informed about them, I'm afraid. Nothing against them, but I don't think I've gone into them in any great depth. A contemporary writer I like is J. M. Coetzee, and I like Nadine Gordimer. Her novel that won the Booker Prize way back, *The Conservationist*, is a tour de force. And Graham Greene I always liked.

A writer who is not as read as he should be.

Well, Graham Greene should have got the Nobel Prize for Literature. I think he offended the Swedes or something. (Laughter)

Thank you very much for your time.

My pleasure.



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The illustrations used throughout have also appeared in *The No.1 Ladies' Detective Agency: Collectors' Edition* and were designed by Iain McIntosh, whose work includes illustrations, book jacket designs, newspaper and online illustrated daily novels for Alexander McCall Smith. Known internationally, Iain uses both traditional and digital techniques and has created logos and line illustrations for everything from web publishing to whisky labels. His work has appeared in award-winning packaging, advertising, design, direct marketing and digital publishing, and he was both illustrator and designer for 'The thing that mattered most,' which won the UK national Centre for Literacy in Primary Education poetry book award in 2007. Iain lives and works in central Edinburgh, Scotland. His work can be found at www.iain-mac.com.



Alexander McCall Smith

Fatty O'Leary's Dinner Party

Excerpt from an unpublished novel

This is one of two novels that sits in the bottom of a drawer. Every writer has such a collection, I imagine: things that he or she has written that have never been published for one reason or another. Perhaps they are too short, or too long; perhaps the author has changed his mind. This novel of mine is one of which I am very fond and that I may one day get round to publishing. It tells the story of a very likeable character, Cornelius O'Leary, known as Fatty O'Leary, a rather vulnerable dealer in antique furniture who lives in Fayetteville, Arkansas, and who eventually treats himself and his wife to a trip to Ireland to celebrate his fortieth birthday. Unfortunately everything goes wrong. In this excerpt, they are spending their first night in Ireland at a country house hotel. Fatty's suitcase was lost by the airline and he is wearing emergency clothes, not the best attire in which to confront the arch snob and poseur, Rupert O'Brien. Poor Fatty. I cannot think of him without feeling sad for all those who want to participate more fully in the world but who find that they are thwarted, misunderstood, or snubbed. At least he has Betty by his side, of course; she is a great woman, loyal to a fault, and proud of her husband. But now to Ireland ...

Dinner at Gurtalougha House was preceded by the serving of drinks in the east drawing room. There, around a log fire set in the wide stone fireplace, the guests would assemble before dinner, exactly as had been promised in the brochure. Fatty and Betty were first down, Betty dressed in the diaphanous silk voile dress she had brought with her for just such an occasion, Fatty wearing his new pants, which were a brown, hounds-tooth check, one of the green shirts prepared for him by the village tailor, Mr Joseph Delaney, after the airline had lost his suitcase and all its contents. The overall effect, he thought, was not inappropriate. It was sufficiently casual for one who was on vacation and yet smart enough for a summer dinner party.

"You look so good, Fatty," Betty said, her voice lowered in deference to the refined atmosphere of the drawing room.

Fatty smiled. "Thanks to Mr Delaney. I wonder what happened to my clothes, though. I was fond of those clothes."

Betty shook her head. "You feel so helpless when abroad. Back home I would make no end of a fuss, but here you never know." She spoke with the air of one accustomed to overseas travel, and Fatty thought her



observation quite pertinent. He himself had been to France before his marriage and he knew all about the perils of other cultures. He had also been to London on more than one occasion for antique shows and he knew all about the English and their curious ways; such strange people, and so utterly disconcerting.

They seated themselves on either side of the fire. Although it was early summer, the evenings were still cool, and there was a slight chill in the east-facing room. Fatty cast an eye round the room, appraising the contents. At one end of the room stood a double-fronted Victorian bookcase, stocked, he suspected, with books of a hunting and fishing nature; at the other was a grand piano (badly damaged casing, he thought) and a bureau on which a large occasional lamp (Chinese base, later Ching) had been placed. There were also several low tables, an Edwardian revolving bookcase, and an interesting Canterbury. The Canterbury, which was oak, with bronze fittings, was filled with magazines, and he and Betty each picked one out to read while they waited.

Fatty's choice was a recent copy of *The Irish Tatler*. He paged through the advertisements for soft furnishings and Scotch whisky, past an article on the plans of the Irish Georgian Society, and alighted on one of the several social pages. This was interesting material. There had been a ball in County Wicklow, to which the social correspondent had gone. There was an account of the host's house—Strawberry Gothic in style “with a charming, quite charming” ballroom and minstrel's gallery. There were pictures of the guests, and a picture of a long table groaning with salmon and game. Fatty thought that it looked as if it had been splendid fun, and for a moment he felt a pang of jealousy. That was a life that he could so easily be living, but would probably never experience. He knew nobody in County Wicklow; indeed the only people he knew in Ireland were the various Mr Delaneys, and he suspected that they moved in rather different circles from those portrayed in the social columns of *The Irish Tatler*.

He turned the page. There had been a reception in Dublin to mark the opening of a new art gallery. According to the magazine, *everybody* had been there. And there they were, photographed talking to one another over glasses of wine. Professor Roderick Finucane of Trinity College was seen talking to Miss Georgina Farrell and her aunt, the well-known watercolourist, Mrs Annabel Farrell, recently returned from Bermuda. Then there was conversation between Mr Pears van Eck and Mr Maurice Shaw, both of them directors of the Irish Foundation for the Fine Arts, neither of them the sort that one finds in Arkansas, thought Fatty. Beneath that photograph, was a slightly larger picture of Mr Rupert O'Brien, the well-known critic, his wife, Mrs Neave O'Brien, the successful actress, currently appearing (as Juno) in *Juno and the Paycock* at the Abbey Theatre, and His Excellency, the Italian Ambassador to Ireland, Mr Cosimo Pricolo, all sharing what appeared to be a most amusing joke. Fatty studied the photographs carefully. What was it about these people that made their lives seem so much more exotic and exciting than his own? He glanced at Betty, sunk in a copy of *Horse*

and Hound. He wondered what he and Betty would look like on the social pages of *The Irish Tatler*. He allowed his mind to wander: *Mr and Mrs Cornelius O'Leary at Gurtalougha House in County Tipperary. Mr O'Leary, a noted antique dealer, is in Ireland to purchase fine Irish furniture for the American market. His wife, the daughter of a well-known Arkansas horse-breeder....* Chicken-breeder sounded less impressive than horse-breeder, so perhaps a little poetic licence might be in order.

Fatty's thoughts were interrupted by the entry into the room of a group of fellow guests, two women and a diminutive man in a tweed suit. The women, who looked sufficiently similar to be sisters, smiled at Betty and the small man gave a nod in Fatty's direction. They moved over to the piano and one of the women self-consciously sat at the keyboard and ran her fingers over the keys.

"Play us a tune, Ella," said the other women.

"Go on," said the man. "Satie. You do Satie so well, and everybody likes Satie."

The woman at the piano blushed. "I would not inflict myself..." she began.

Fatty rose to his feet. "It would be no infliction, M'am," he said. "My wife and I like Satie very much."

The woman looked down at the keyboard and began to play.

"Ah," said Fatty, contentedly. "*The Gymnasium*."

They listened raptly — so raptly indeed that they did not notice the couple who had come into the room. Only after the limpid notes had died away did Fatty look up and see that another couple had entered and taken a seat on the sofa by the fire. He looked at them for a moment, before turning to congratulate the pianist. But a vague sense of familiarity made him turn back and look again.

The man, who was wearing an elegant, double-breasted suit and a subdued red tie, had a look of distinction about him. The woman, who was dressed in a dark trouser suit, had high cheekbones and almond eyes. Fatty had seen them before; he was sure of it.

"Thank you so much," the man called out to the pianist. "A *gymnopedie* before dinner. A perfect start to the evening. I feel quite limbered-up!"

The woman laughed. "You play so well, my dear. Why don't you continue?"

"Because I need a drink," said the woman at the piano.

At this point Mrs O'Connor came in, wheeling a drinks trolley on which an array of bottles was placed. She looked round, as if counting her guests, and then announced that drinks would be served.

"Mr O'Brien, I've taken the trouble to get you your usual," she said to the man on the sofa. "You made me feel so ashamed last time — not having it in the house."

"You spoil me, Mrs O'Connor," said the elegant man. "If you're not careful, I'll never stop coming here. You'll not be able to get rid of us. We'll move in permanently. We'll *live* with you!"

"I don't think that the *Irish Times* would like that," said the hostess, pouring a large measure of gin into a glass. "Nor the Abbey Theatre for that matter."

Fatty listened fascinated. They spoke so easily, exchanging this subtle repartee as if they were uttering the lines of a play. But it was the mention of the Abbey Theatre that triggered the memory, and it came to him so suddenly that he almost gasped. Of course he had seen this couple before; they were Rupert and Neave O'Brien, and he had seen their picture in the *Irish Tatler*. Rupert O'Brien, the critic, and his wife, Neave, the famous actress (recently Juno in *Juno and the Paycock*).

Mrs O'Connor served the drinks and then withdrew, announcing that dinner would be in twenty minutes.

Rupert O'Brien sat back on the sofa.

"Bliss," he announced to the room at large. "A whole weekend ahead of us with no telephone."

Fatty plucked up the courage to say something.

"No telephone," he remarked.

Rupert O'Brien glanced in his direction briefly and then looked at the others.

"Such a peaceful place," he said. "Such intriguing shades of the past."

What does that mean? Fatty wondered. Did it merely mean that the house was old, in which case why was that intriguing?

Taking a sip of his gin and tonic, he plucked up his courage again. After all, why should he not contribute to the discussion? If Rupert O'Brien could say something about the house, then he could too.

"How old is this house?" he ventured.

There was a silence. The pianist and her party looked at one another, but said nothing.

"Quite old, I suspect," said Betty. "We have nothing this old in Arkansas."

"Oh it's not old at all," said Rupert O'Brien airily. "Late Victorian. Lamb dressed up as mutton, so to speak."

"That's quite old," said Betty. "In the United States everything is much newer. Victorian is pretty old."

"Age is relative, of course," said Rupert O'Brien. "Our children regard us as terribly old. But I'm not old at all."

"How old are you?" asked Betty pleasantly.

The silence that resulted seemed cold.

"I wonder if there are fish in the lake," Fatty said hurriedly.

Everybody looked at him.

"Vast numbers, I suspect," said Rupert O'Brien, still glaring at Betty. "Young fish, old fish...."

"Well," said the pianist cheerfully. "They're under no threat from me. I have never succeeded in catching a fish in my life. Not one."

"I caught a big fish last month," Fatty chipped in. "My friend

Tubby O'Rourke and I went up to one of the lakes in the north of our state and I caught a very large fish. Tubby caught quite a few, but none of them very large. I think he was using the wrong sort of fly."

"Oh," said Rupert O'Brien.

"It was delicious," said Betty. "I barbecued it. Fresh fish is delicious when barbecued with some lemon and butter."

Neave now made her first contribution.

"Poor fish. I do feel so sorry for them. One moment in those gorgeous watery depths and the next moment in the cruel air, gasping for breath."

"Oh I don't know, my dear," said Rupert O'Brien. "I expect that fish would catch us, if they could. One mustn't romanticise nature. I'm for Darwin rather than Ruskin. Survival of the fishes, you know."

He burst out laughing, and Fatty, although he did not take the reference, immediately joined in.

"Ha!" said Fatty. "Ruskin!"

At this point the pianist sat down and began to play determinately. This ended the conversation until Mrs O'Connor returned to call them in for dinner.

It was the custom at Gurtalougha House for all the guests to dine together at one large table, as they would do if they were weekend guests in a country house. Individual tables were allowed at breakfast, when the desire to make conversation might be expected to be less pressing; and again weekend guests would have been expected to come down at different times.

Fatty and Betty were the first to go through, and established themselves in chairs near the window. They were followed by the pianist and her companions, who opted to sit at the other end of the table, leaving two vacant chairs next to Fatty and Betty. Thus when Rupert and Neave O'Brien entered the room, they had no alternative but to sit next to Fatty and Betty.

Although there was no choice for dinner - the guests being required to eat what had been prepared - Mrs O'Connor still copied for each place an elegantly-written menu, which informed the guests of what lay ahead. Rupert O'Brien picked this up and read out to the table at large:

"Fish Soup, Gurtalougha-style, my goodness, followed by Scallopine alla Perugina, and then apricot tart or chestnuts with Marsala. Wonderful!"

"I wonder what fish they put in the soup," said Betty.

"From the lough, I expect," said Rupert O'Brien. "Or perhaps from the sea. One never knows."

"No," said Fatty. "But either would be very satisfactory I'm sure."

"Mind you," Rupert O'Brien went on, "there are precious few fish left in the sea. Yeats was able to write a line about the 'mackerel-teeming seas of Ireland.' He wouldn't be able to do that today."

"What's happened?" asked Fatty.

"The Spanish have eaten them all," said Rupert O'Brien. He turned to Neave. "How do you think they do their Scallopine? Do you think it'll be the same way as they did them in that charming little hotel in Perugia? With croutons?"

"I expect so," said Neave. "Such *mignon* croutons; small and *mignon*."

"Do you know Italy well?" asked Fatty.

"Tolerably," replied Rupert O'Brien. "Venice, Milan, Florence, Rome, Naples, Ravenna, Siena and Perugia. Oh, and Palermo too. But ignorant about the rest, I'm afraid. And you?"

"I plan to go there some time," said Fatty. "It's difficult for us to get away from home. We've been waiting for this trip for some time."

"And tell me," said Rupert O'Brien, breaking his bread roll over his plate, "where would home be?"

"Fayetteville," replied Fatty.

"Fattyville?"

"Fayetteville," said Fatty. "Fayetteville, Arkansas."

"Oh," said Rupert O'Brien.

"Croutons," Neave interjected. "They did use croutons. I remember now. And they served them with *crostini di fegatini*. We had them just before we were due to go off to Urbino."

"Of course," said Rupert O'Brien. "I remember that well. And we went to that marvellous little museum where they had the most surprising pictures. The Vincenzo Campi picture of the breadmaker, with all those marvellous loaves on the table and those perfectly angelic little children looking on while the baker dusted his hands with flour." He turned to Fatty. "You know it? That picture?"

Fatty appeared to think for a moment. "I don't think so. No, I don't think I do."

"Lovely textures," said Rupert O'Brien. "Lovely rich colours. Vibrant. Positively edible. You know, my test for art is this: *Do I want to eat it?* If I want to eat something, then I know it's good."

"That's a good test," said Fatty. He thought of washstands. Would it work for them as well?

"Mind you," said Rupert O'Brien, "mediocre paintings of food can confuse the test. You may want to eat them, but for the wrong reasons. Take Giovanna Garzoni, for instance. You'll know his picture of the Old Man of Artimino, of course. You know it?"

Fatty shook his head.

"Well it's a remarkable painting. It hangs in the Pitti Palace in Florence. You know the Pitti Palace?"

"No," said Fatty.

"But you know Florence, of course?" went on Rupert O'Brien.

Again Fatty shook his head.

"No matter," said Rupert O'Brien. "That's a mediocre painting of food. A lovely ripe melon, split open, a delicious-looking ham, a bird,

some cherries, everything just asking to be eaten. But the composition is most peculiar, and the perspective is all over the place. In fact, it has an almost-Daliesque quality to it. Do you know Dali?

"Yes," said Fatty, with relief. "I know Dali."

"Where did you meet him?" asked Rupert O'Brien.

"Oh," said Fatty. "I thought you meant ..."

"I met him at his villa," went on Rupert O'Brien. "Pre-Neave days, of course. She was just a snip of a thing at drama school then. I was in Barcelona for a couple of months and I was invited out to Dali's villa with some gallery friends. Peculiar place. Rather like ..."

He was interrupted by the arrival of a young waitress, one of the girls from the village, who brought in the large bowls of fish soup.

"Gorgeous," said Rupert O'Brien, sniffing at his soup. "Just the right amount of garlic, I can tell. Never put too much garlic in your fish soup. Robin Maugham told me that. You know him? Famous queer writer, and *very* queer, I believe. He learned all about garlic in the soup from his uncle, Willie Maugham—Somerset Maugham, you know. Pretty queer too, Somerset Maugham, wild enthusiast *pour les garçons*. Maugham *neveu* used to visit his uncle at the Villa Mauresque, where he had a famous cook. People used to do anything for an invitation to luncheon with the old boy because of Madame *dans la cuisine*. Apparently she used to cook for the Pope, but became fed up with all those goings-on in the Vatican and returned to France. Mind you, it's a bit of a waste of time placing fine food before a pope. They really are most unappreciative of the finer things in life. Most of them are pretty unsophisticated priests from remote villages with tastes to match. John XXIII was like that, I'm sorry to say. No understanding of art, I gather. None at all. Pius XII, may his blessed soul rest in peace, was the last pontiff of any breeding, you know. Terribly good family he came from; old Roman aristocrats. Mind you, he had a delicate stomach and could only eat polenta, poor fellow. Pity about his friendship with *il Duce*, but there you are."

Fatty dipped his spoon into his soup. He looked at Betty, who was watching anxiously to see which spoon was being used.

"Such a beast, Mussolini," said Rupert, between mouthfuls of soup. "Psychopathic braggart. And irredeemably *petit bourgeois*. I don't know which is worse, probably neither. Do you know that he tried to impress his people by performing so-called feats of bravery? He went into the lions' cage at Rome Zoo, just to show that he was unafraid. But the Italian press didn't say that they had drugged the lions and they couldn't have harmed a fly. It's all in that recent biography that Bill Holden published. Frightful rubbish. Have you seen it?"

Fatty was silent. He had finished his soup, and would have like to have more, but there was no tureen handy and he would have to wait until the next course was served before he could appease his appetite.

"Tell me," said Rupert suddenly. "What is your line of business Mr.... Mr...."

"O'Leary," said Fatty.

"Mr O'Leary. What sort of business are you in?"

"Antiques," said Fatty.

"How interesting," said Rupert. "I pride myself on my own eye in that direction. I helped old Lord Drogheda sort his stuff out. You know his place? Down near Cork?"

"No," said Fatty, adding, quietly, "I don't seem to know anyone. Except Delaney, that is."

Rupert looked surprised. "Judge Delaney?" he said. "The Supreme Court man. You know him?"

"No," said Fatty. "Joseph Delaney, the tailor. He fixed me up when my clothes were lost."

"Well, there you are," said Rupert O'Brien. "Friends are useful. I remember I was in Miami once and I lost my jacket. But I bumped into Versace at a party and I told him, and he said: *Funny - I'm a tailor! I'll fix you up*. And he did, would you believe it."

Fatty looked down at his plate, and then gazed at the houndstooth trousers which Mr Delaney had adjusted for him. They were made of cheap material and looked shabby beside the thick cloth of Rupert O'Brien's elegant suit.

"We're simple people in Arkansas, Mr O'Brien," Betty suddenly burst out. "But we do our best. And my husband is a good man. He always has been."

"I'm sure," said Rupert O'Brien smoothly. "I'm sure he is."

"And just because we don't mix in the sort of circles you mix in," she went on, "that doesn't mean to say that we don't amount to anything. We're still your company for the evening. We didn't ask to be, but we are. My husband is a good man. He may not have read everything or met everybody, but he's a good man. And in my book, that's what counts."

A complete silence had fallen over the table. Spoons, which had been dipped into soup, were stopped, poised half-way to trembling lips; nobody moved.

"So if you'll excuse us, Mr and Mrs O'Brien," said Betty. "We shall find somewhere quieter to have our dinner."

She rose to her feet and moved deliberately over to one of the unlaid tables at the other side of the room, taking her placemat and side-plate with her. Fatty, immobilised for a few moments, did nothing, but then, with an apologetic nod to the others, he too got up and went over to the other table.

"I'm sorry, my dear," whispered Betty. "I couldn't stand it any more. I just couldn't."

"That's all right," said Fatty, reaching over to place his hand on hers, his voice uneven. "I'm so proud of you. And anyway, I would sooner sit here and look at you any time, than listen to all his high-falutin' talk through supper."

Betty smiled at him. She noticed that there were tears on his cheeks. She reached into her pocket and extracted a small, Irish linen handkerchief that Mr Delaney, the outfitter, had given her.

"Here," she said. "Use this."

They sat in silence at their separate table. After a few minutes, the waitress returned to clear away the soup plates and bring in the main course. This she placed unceremoniously on the table, leaving the guests to help themselves.

"All the more for us," said Rupert O'Brien, passing the serving spoon to Neave. "Short rations for some, I'm afraid."

Fatty leant over the table to whisper to Betty. "Did you hear that, Betty? Did you hear what he said?"

Betty nodded, and they both watched miserably as the main course disappeared at the other table. There was no sign of the waitress and they both realised that there was nothing that they could do without losing face to a quite unacceptable extent.

"We shall simply withdraw," said Fatty, after a while. "I'm no longer hungry."

"And neither am I," said Betty.

But her voice lacked conviction.

Upstairs in their room, they retired to their beds, separated by a bedside table on which back issues of *Horse and Hound* and two glasses of water had thoughtfully been placed by Mrs O'Connor. They were both tired, and the light was put out almost immediately.

"Our first night in Ireland," said Betty, in the darkness.

"Yes," said Fatty. "I hope that tomorrow's a bit better."

"It will be, Fatty," said Betty. "It will be."

Fatty was silent. Then: "Betty, I felt so... so *inadequate* beside that O'Brien person. He made me feel so *small*."

"You're not small," said Betty.

"No," said Fatty. "I know."

He paused. "Come and lie beside me, Betty. Come and lie on my bed and hold my hand until I go to sleep, like you used to do when we were younger."

"Of course, my dear," said Betty, slipping out of her bed and lowering herself onto the space prepared by Fatty, who had rolled to one side of the bed.

"Dear Fatty ..."

She did not complete her sentence. The bed collapsed.



Graham Clark

Alexander McCall Smith's career has been a varied one: for many years he was a professor of Medical Law and worked in universities in the United Kingdom and abroad. Then, after the publication of his highly successful *No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency* series, which has sold over twenty-five million copies, he devoted his time to the writing of fiction and has seen his various series of books translated into over forty-five languages and become bestsellers throughout the world. These include the *Scotland Street* novels, first published as a serial novel in *The Scotsman* newspaper, the *Isabel Dalhousie* novels, the *Von Igelfeld* series, and the *Corduroy Mansions* series, novels which started life as a cross-media serial, written on the website of the Telegraph Media Group. McCall Smith holds honorary doctorates from 12 universities. In 2007 he was made a CBE for his services to literature in the Queen's New Year's Honours List, and in 2010 he was awarded the Presidential Order of Merit by the President of Botswana.

Alexander McCall Smith lives in Edinburgh with his wife Elizabeth. His hobbies include playing wind instruments, and he is the co-founder of an amateur orchestra called "The Really Terrible Orchestra."

Haylie Cox, Steffani Geary, and Samuel Zeveloff

On Human Evolution, Neanderthals, and Lemurs—

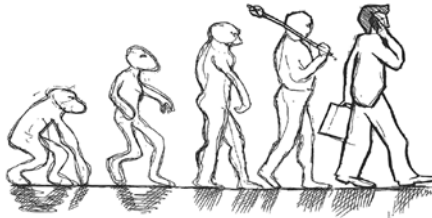
A Conversation with Ian Tattersall



Denis Finnin/AMNH

PRELUDE

*Dr. Ian Tattersall recently retired as Curator of Biological Anthropology from the American Museum of Natural History in New York City. He is one of the world's foremost experts on two topics: the lemurs of Madagascar, and human evolution. One of the most beautiful lemurs, the golden-crowned sifaka (*Propithecus tattersalli*), was named after him. Dr. Tattersall has written 16 books and over 300 articles on these subjects. He is presently working on a volume about how language has shaped humanity. In 2009, to celebrate the bicentennial of Charles Darwin's birth and the 150th anniversary of the publication of his seminal book, *On the Origin of Species*, Weber State University invited Dr. Tattersall to give a public lecture on human evolution. The following interview took place during his visit.*



*Haylie and Steffani: In light of the recent discovery of *Ardipithecus ramidus*, what impact do you think this will have on the study of human evolution?*

Ian Tattersall: So you're starting with the easy questions? (Laughter) Well, I don't think this find will have very much impact on the study of human evolution, if only because this extraordinary creature is only slightly older than a much more plausible ancestor for Lucy, and is almost certainly off on its own line. It's experimenting with its own way of being a hominid. I think it would be a mistake at this point to look upon this creature as being a very plausible direct human ancestor.

One of your specializations is Neanderthals. Why did you choose to specialize in Neanderthals?

It really wasn't a choice. It just happened. (Laughter) I studied human paleontology as an undergraduate, but then I moved into the study of fossil lemurs, and after that,

living lemurs. This I did for several years, until it became impossible for me to return to Madagascar, where they have a virtual monopoly on lemurs. So at that time I went back to human paleontology. And I became a specialist on Neanderthals basically because I perceived that there was something special and unique about these extinct humans that was not reflected in the way that people were talking about them then.

When I re-entered paleoanthropology because I was cut off from "lemurology" by Madagascar's revolution, I looked around at the field, and what was very obvious to me was that people still had the very linear view of human evolution that they had inherited from the adoption of the Evolutionary Synthesis by paleoanthropology in the 1950s. For many years after Darwin wrote *On the Origin of Species*, and then again after the principles of genetics were rediscovered in 1900, there was a lot of debate about how evolution actually worked. People didn't really begin to agree about this until sometime in the 1920s

and 1930s, when there was a sort of convergence of opinion between geneticists, natural historians and paleontologists. This was later given the name “Evolutionary Synthesis.” This view of evolution basically boiled all evolutionary phenomena down into a process of gradual change in gene frequencies in populations over long, long periods of time.

Paleoanthropology came to this view very, very late, in 1950 as a matter of fact, but when it did come it fell with a real thud. Paleoanthropologists were suddenly smitten with the linear view, and began trying to fit all the fossil evidence for human evolution into a linear scheme. In this scenario, one species evolved into another, and evolved into another, and finally we wound up with *Homo sapiens*. But with accumulating evidence it became increasingly obvious that this had not in fact been the way that our evolution had worked. It was clear that there were many more lineages out there than just one: that there was a lot of diversity, and a lot of systematic structure, in human evolution. But nevertheless people kept to the linear mindset, as many still do today. So, if they couldn’t any longer actually say that Neanderthals were archaic direct ancestors of modern humans, they still viewed them as a bizarre kind of *Homo sapiens*, and swept them under the rug of our own species. As a result, they didn’t really have to deal with them as an independent evolutionary entity. That seemed to me to be wrong. Neanderthals are extremely different from *Homo sapiens*.

So I felt that Neanderthals ought to be dignified with their own identity, and that we would never really be able to understand them properly until we gave them that identity and acknowledged they were an evolutionary entity that had to be dealt with. And quite frankly, I got fed up waiting for other people to say this, and although I was sure the shoe was bound to drop eventually, it didn’t.

So in 1986 I wrote a paper about species recognition in human anthropology, in which I made the Neanderthals the centerpiece of an argument that there is indeed systematic

structure, that there really is species diversity in the human fossil record – and we had to recognize this, and get to grips with it, if we were really ever going to understand what happened. And because Neanderthals were the best of the possible illustrations of this point, I focused on Neanderthals and so became identified with Neanderthals. Still, I don’t think that the established Neanderthal experts ever felt I was a member of the group. I had come in from the outside. I was an interloper. But I felt that there was a statement to be made here, and so I made it. And I found more and more interesting things about Neanderthals all the time.

Will you briefly describe some traits of Neanderthals and maybe contrast them with human traits?

Homo neanderthalensis is an extinct species of human that we first find in a fully evolved form about 165 to 200 thousand years ago, although they have recognizable fossil precursors much earlier than that. And they disappeared around 27 to 30 thousand years ago. Neanderthals differed in time and over space, just like any successful species with a large distribution over an extended time; but while they didn’t all look identical to each other, they nonetheless made a very distinctive group. They were very large-brained hominids, as large-brained as us, but with a skull of a very different shape. Their braincase is very long and low, with very characteristic brow ridges arching up front over each eye, and a protruding rear. Their face is hafted in front of the brain case instead of tucked underneath as it is in you and me, and it is rather unusually constructed. It is protruding, but the cheek bones sweep back, so that if you look at it from the top it looks rather like the prow of a ship plowing through the ocean. So all together the Neanderthal skull is very different from ours, although it contains a brain just as big.

During the 1990s I began a comparative study of all the fossil hominids with a

colleague of mine, Jeffrey Schwartz, and we started looking at the Neanderthals at a greater level of detail. The very first Neanderthal skull we picked up was in London at the Natural History Museum, and right away we noticed that there were some strange structures inside its nose that had never ever been reported anywhere, as far as we knew. These structures were quite unusual and very different from anything previously reported, making Neanderthals unique in their internal nasal anatomy. Then, later on, another colleague of mine, Gary Sawyer at the American Museum of Natural History, undertook the quixotic enterprise of trying to get enough bones from Neanderthal skeletons from different sites around Europe and Western Asia to actually put together a complete Neanderthal skeleton for the first time. Frankly, I thought he wasn't going to be able to get together casts of enough bones to work with on this huge project. But he did! He hung in there and he did. He got enough bones to put together the entire body skeleton – and he came up with a creature that was completely different from *Homo sapiens* in its body proportions.

We already knew that Neanderthals had differently shaped individual bones; but they had never been put together before into an entire individual. And the result was quite an eye-opener! For one thing, instead of having as we do a very narrow rib cage (which is kind of barrel-shaped because it is more or less parallel-sided but tapers inward at the top and at the bottom, where it matches a very narrow pelvis), the composite Neanderthal skeleton had a rather funnel-shaped rib cage, narrow at the top and flaring out and down to match perfectly with a very wide, flaring pelvis that stuck out to the sides. And so you had a complete creature that looked really, really different from *Homo sapiens*. So differ-

ent, that I'm sure Neanderthals and modern humans meeting each other on the landscape would have recognized each other as being really different creatures.

Interestingly, it turns out that these very wide hips and the funnel-shaped, tapering rib cage are probably primitive for the genus *Homo*. Early hominids had this form, and the Neanderthals are just being fairly typical early hominids in having this body shape. It is *Homo sapiens* that is really very different in having the kind of shape that we do. So there you go.

There are other things about Neanderthals that resemble earlier hominids. For example,

they have very big, robust bones. The bones of the legs and the arms are very strongly built, with thick walls. The shafts of long bones are basically elongated cylinders, and in us the walls of the cylinder are thin and the marrow space inside is large. In the

Neanderthals and other hominids like them the bone is thick, and the medullary cavities are narrow. This is a big difference. And the ends of the bones, the articular surfaces of the joints, are big and bulky. So there are all these differences between Neanderthals and modern humans that make it very clear, to me at any rate, that they are a different evolutionary entity, which has its own particular history that has to be understood independent of our history, on its own terms.

*There are many differences, but there are also some significant similarities, as you were saying, such as brain size, and both were present around the same time. What do you think about their significance as a possible ancestor to modern humans? Is it possible that *Homo sapiens* and Neanderthals interacted and perhaps interbred?*

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Okay, first part first: the Neanderthals were not ancestral to modern humans. They were the issue of an independent lineage of hominids that, if we can believe the dates, can be traced back to over half a million years ago in Europe. Back in this time period we also have in Europe another kind of hominid, called *Homo heidelbergensis*. This species was also present in Africa well over half a million years ago. And its African representatives were probably ultimately ancestral to *Homo sapiens*. *Homo heidelbergensis* disappeared later in Europe, probably out-competed by Neanderthals, but this species evidently did well in Africa, giving rise to *Homo sapiens* that later invaded Europe and out-competed the Neanderthals.

I don't think there was any significant intermixing between the lineages after they diverged. Of course, there might have been a little bit of hanky-panky going on—human beings are strange creatures—but I don't think any admixture there might have been was biologically meaningful. I don't think there was any really evolutionary significant interchange of genes, and we have no fossil record that really suggests this happened.

So we've never found any skeletal progeny to suggest such an exchange?

Nothing we know right now convinces me of that. I mean, I'm prepared to be convinced if the evidence came by, but I don't think we have any right now, despite claims to the contrary. There have actually been several claims of this kind in the last several years, but I don't think any of them is really credible. Neanderthals and modern humans were different species, and by the time they finally met there was no realistic possibility of their re-integrating. We know that when modern

humans invaded Europe the Neanderthal morphology disappeared, and we know that *Homo sapiens* is all over the place today. So why did the Neanderthals become extinct? Or, maybe more accurately, why did the Neanderthal morphology disappear? Well, there are two possibilities. One, there was direct conflict. The other scenario is that there was indirect economic competition, and *Homo sapiens* simply out-competed the Neanderthals for resources. Or both.

There could have been wars?

There could have been, but we have no direct evidence to demonstrate which one of these two possibilities is more plausible. It's unlikely that they did not in some way compete for resources, whether they came into contact or not. It's actually been denied that they ever saw each other, but I think that's very unlikely. Given the ways in which *Homo sapiens* behaves today, it seems likely there was some conflict, but on the other hand it's also pretty well established that the invading moderns were much more efficient users of resources than the Neanderthals were, and this was clearly a factor in what happened. So I think the truth was probably somewhere in the middle there, but I don't know, I wasn't there. (Laughter). If I had a time machine, though, I would dial it back to the time when *Homo sapiens* was flooding into the Neanderthals' European heartland.

Is there any significance of Neanderthals for human evolution? And if there is, what are the findings for that?

There is certainly some significance for human evolution, certainly so far as Neanderthals were part of the larger evolution of the hominid family. In thinking of human evolution we can't just think in terms of the evolution of *Homo sapiens*. There is only one



human species in the world today, so we tend to project that one species back into time, expecting that we just had a whole succession of ancestors that looked less and less like us as we go back. But it wasn't like that at all. Throughout the whole history of our family there were normally several different kinds of hominid on the landscape at any one time. And they managed to get along, just as you can find several different species of *Cercopithecus* monkeys in the same forest in West Africa. You typically had several different kinds of hominids, or even members of the genus *Homo*, rubbing along together somehow at any one time. And then suddenly *Homo sapiens* came along and all the competition was gone. I think that tells us something very significant about us. I'm not sure it tells us much about them.

But the dominant theme has been this pattern of evolutionary experimentation. Instead of human evolution having been a matter of a single lineage gradually modifying over time and becoming more brilliant and more wonderful and more lovely—until, *voilà*, look at us now—it's been a matter of new species being spawned here and there and everywhere. And doubtless they competed when they came together. But after *Homo sapiens* showed up all the twigs of this luxuriant bush were trimmed off, until we were the only ones standing. And the fact that we are now alone implies to me that we are very different from all of our predecessors. Including the Neanderthals.

Intriguingly, some of our earliest ancestors may have resembled those in the other group of organisms that you specialize in—

lemurs. And you've kind of touched on this before. What led you to your decision to study lemurs in the first place? What got you to Madagascar?

Well, I went to Madagascar in the first place because I was a graduate student in a geology department, and I was looking for a paleontology thesis. I happened to be interested in primates, and I learned that nobody had looked at the extraordinary cranial morphology of the extinct primates of Madagascar for

a long time. Alan Walker had looked at the postcranial skeletons of the extinct lemurs not that long ago, but nobody had recently looked at their skulls. I thought this was probably a good thesis topic to pursue, because there are many different extinct lemurs known, all of them only recently extinct, and all of them bigger than any lemurs still alive today. So they were basically part of the modern fauna, but they just happened to be extinct because of human activities in the last 1,500 years or so. But no matter how

recently they had been around, they were still extinct, known only as "subfossils," and thus appropriate for a thesis in paleontology. So I went to Madagascar to study the fossils that had been collected there. And while I was in Madagascar I took advantage of the opportunity to look around and see some of the living lemurs in their natural habitats, and it was kind of like love at first sight. (Laughter) I just became entranced with these animals. So I finished my thesis on the fossil lemurs, and as soon as I could I went back to Madagascar and started studying lemurs in the wild. And I did that until events around

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the time of the Malagasy revolution in 1974 made it impossible for me to continue.

There's a lot of civil unrest occurring in Madagascar right now. What are the implications of the political situation in Madagascar for lemur conservation? What is that going to do to lemur conservation?

The situation is quite dire for lemur conservation right now because the previous President, quite recently deposed, had made a major commitment to increase the amount of territory in Madagascar that was going to be protected. And there was an apparently sincere intention on the part of his government to protect the fauna and flora practically as well as in theory. But with the recent effective *coup d'état* by the army, the foreign donors who were a major part of the financing for habitat conservation in Madagascar withdrew their support from the country in protest. This means there is no governmental money from Europe or the United States going into environmental conservation in Madagascar right now. And this is a major problem.

The other aspect of the problem is that there has been a breakdown of civil order in certain parts of the country, whereby loggers and poachers and other illegal adventurers have been going into protected areas and cutting down hardwood trees, and killing animals and selling them for bush meat and so on. So you have those two things happening at once. The environment in Madagascar is seriously suffering.

In 2004, under President Marc Ravalomanana, the Ministry of the Environment of Madagascar issued a ban on logging per-

mits in areas that threatened the sustainability of certain forests. However, under the new president, Andry Rajoelina, illegal logging has impacted several lemur reserves. What effects will this have on lemur populations? Are there specific species that are particularly at risk?

This is going to have dreadful effects, and I understand the effects are worst in the northeast of Madagascar. On the peninsula of Masoala, with the largest surviving area of rainforest, there have been very, very substantial incursions by loggers and others, and

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this is threatening some of the last and best preserved primary forests in Madagascar. The Masoala area has many kinds of lemurs, including the severely endangered red and black ruffed lemur. In the Andringitra National Park, not too far away, there is the poorly-known and very rare silky sifaka, *Propithecus diadema candidus* (or *Propithecus candidus*). Both of these lemurs are very much affected by

what is going on. There are stories from all over Madagascar that illegal miners, loggers, and others are going in and destroying the habitat, and so you are talking about many, many species at risk. It's heartbreaking.

With all of this going on, have there been any studies that have examined the effects of low lemur numbers on their predators, such as the fossa? Are they struggling just as bad because species are essentially disappearing?

Well, I don't think anybody has actually studied this question specifically, but, yes, when the bottom of the food chain is affected, then it goes all the way to the top very rapidly.

We see this all over the world. If the lemurs become scarce there will be nothing for such predators as the fossa, a large relative of the mongooses, to eat. The fossa is Madagascar's largest carnivore, and it has specialized on a diet of lemurs, though it is a fearsome animal that will chase anything. If the lemurs disappear it will have a hard time hanging on.

It has been circulated that the new president, allegedly backed by France, has been exploiting forests to develop new oil reserves. If this is the case, do you feel that under the new government we will continue to lose lemur species more rapidly than before?

Well, we were already seeing the effects of mineral exploitation under the previous government. Ilmenite (titanium) deposits were found underneath the littoral forests of southeast Madagascar, basically the only remaining forest of its kind, and these deposits clearly cannot be exploited without affecting the overlying habitat. And last time I was in the central part of the country near the eastern escarpment, they were clearing a huge tract of forest to build a pipeline to conduct cobalt slurry from the mines at the top of the escarpment down into the port on the east coast. So the mining activity has really been affecting lemur habitat in a big way. How effective programs to re-establish the forests that have been cut down for things such as mining and illegal logging will be has yet to be seen.

The new government seems unwilling to provide funding for this program. Are we headed toward an eradication of Madagascar's last remaining forests?

The problem is that the new government is regarded as illegal by many donor countries, which have cut off aid of most kinds, including aid to help protect the forests. So private funds are still going in there, but overseas governmental funds are on hold for the time being. And every moment they are on hold, more forest is disappearing and more animals are being killed, and more damage is being done to the Malagasy environment. Whether this in the end is going to be fatal to the remaining forests remains to be seen. We don't know how long it's going to continue.

One of the great things about Madagascar is its resiliency, though. Thirty-five years ago we would look at the forest and see it disappearing in front of our eyes, especially every October when the country is on fire from end to end because people are firing the grasslands and the adjacent forests to produce grazing for the cattle when the rain comes. And

we would tell ourselves that in 35 years there would surely be nothing left. But while a huge amount of natural habitat has disappeared in the interim, the great thing is that 35 years down the line there is much more left than we would have imagined.

Still, two years ago I went down to the southwest of the country with a friend of mine to look at the forest that he had done his thesis in during the 1970s, a unique piece of preserved lowland forest. And it turned out that it had all gone, cut down the year before we went. So the natural forest is definitely disappearing – but at the same time there is also resilience, and if people have the will to do anything about it, there is habitat to



be saved and that can be saved, as long as political circumstances and the will to do the job exist. Whether that will be the case, we don't know.

What will it take to get all these outside people that were donating to Madagascar to help out again?

I think once some kind of political compromise can be worked out, then they will come back in. Whether that is possible, I don't know. I have no inside track on that, and really couldn't predict. Almost certainly something will happen eventually, but whether that will be soon enough we don't know.

We were shocked to learn that serving lemurs in restaurants has been occurring under the new regime in Madagascar. Before this it was considered bad luck to eat lemurs. Do you think we are heading into dangerous territory where there is a cultural shift in the acceptability of such practices?

I think this is putting it a little bit strongly. I don't know about serving lemurs in restaurants. I don't know whether recent reports are true or not, although I wouldn't be surprised. Years ago there was a story circulating about a guy who was in Tamatave, and he went to a hotel and picked up the menu, and it said "boiled lemur," or something like that. He was shocked, and went off to complain to the prefect, the governor of the province. And they told him in the office, "we're afraid you can't see the prefect, because he's out shooting lemurs." Probably entirely apocryphal, but certainly believable. And there's no question that people are eating lemurs in villages. Whether they are being served in city restaurants, I can't say.

There is certainly a bush meat problem, which is different in the villages than in the cities. When it's just villagers killing animals once in a while for food, it's one thing. When it becomes an industry, and hunters actually

invade the forests to satisfy city demand, that's really bad. And if that's what's happening in Madagascar now, we are really in trouble. No question, disquieting reports have been surfacing, and people are getting really concerned about bush meat.

People of Madagascar killed the aye-aye because of the way it looked, and they thought it was kind of sinister. Is that still going on? Are there people, even though it's protected, that are still killing the aye-aye because they find it devilish?

Well, that's the other aspect of killing animals. I myself have found a dead aye-aye by the road that had been murdered by somebody. The aye-aye as far as I know is the only lemur that in many places is regarded as something inherently evil. If it goes into a village somebody will die; you've got to kill it, stop it from going in the village. In other places animals are killed just for fun, or because they want to eat them.

Still, in some places animals have been protected by local belief, or what they call *fady*, basically taboos. And Madagascar is the land of *fady*. These taboos can apply to individuals, apply to families, to villages, or to people in the whole country. In some places local *fady* have protected animals, and the local villagers won't kill lemurs. But as people start wandering around the country in search of food or in search of a living, they come to places where animals are protected by local *fady* but they themselves have no compunction about killing them. So it doesn't matter if the locals aren't killing the animals, if you've got people coming in from somewhere else who don't mind killing them. The animals are in trouble.

Since a lot of countries have pulled out financially, are there any conservation groups right now that are trying to fight for the lemurs and against the deforestation in Madagascar?

Oh yes, there are plenty of private groups that are working on this: the Wildlife Conservation Society, the Madagascar Fauna Group, Conservation International, and the Lemur Conservation Foundation among them. A whole lot of small to medium-sized international conservation outfits are in Madagascar, and trying to help. In most cases they can't match the scale of funding that outside governments can. But there are plenty of people there who care, who are trying desperately to save the animals and their habitat.

In conservation you have to have tunnel vision. You can't think too much about the difficulties. You just have to do what you can, where you can, as long as you can, and hope there will be something left for somebody as crazy as you to protect tomorrow. Thank goodness, there are people like that. There are people who really care and are really, really trying.

What are some of the ways in which you are personally involved in the conservation of lemurs?

Well, I'm on the scientific board of the Lemur Conservation Foundation, which is devoted to both captive propagation and to *in situ* conservation of lemurs. But I'm not much otherwise involved directly in conservation activities. I provide whatever support I can to my colleagues who are. But conservation is not my principal focus. And remember, I haven't been a "lemurologist" for a while. I have recently got back into lemur systematics, and I really care about taxonomy because I think the taxonomy of the lemurs is pretty endangered at the moment, but I'm not really a lemur field person anymore. Where you save lemurs is basically in the field, and that's not

where my activities are right now. I am pretty happy as a paleoanthropologist, though I do think wistfully sometimes about what I might have done in Madagascar if I'd had the chance.

Do you have any suggestions on how the average individual can be involved in conservation, whether it be donating money or going there and helping with conservation. Is there something we can do?

In conservation you have to have tunnel vision. You can't think too much about the difficulties. You just have to do what you can, where you can, as long as you can, and hope there will be something left for somebody as crazy as you to protect tomorrow.

There are certainly lots of things that individuals can do. The first thing, of course, is to give support and develop an engagement. If you really care about it, there's no substitute for going there and becoming engaged on the ground. But not everybody is going to do that, and most of us will have to work through some kind of an organization that already has people and projects in place. But I'd like to think

that there are young people like you willing to take years out of your lives and go to Madagascar and really get hands on.

And Madagascar is a wonderful place. It's the most magical place on Earth for me, and not just because of the fauna and the flora, although they are unique, but it's culturally a unique and fascinating place as well. If you ever felt you wanted to do something for conservation on the ground, I can't imagine a better place to go and try and do it. And the best way to do it is by involvement with the organizations that are there already.

When I started going to Madagascar there were basically no outside conservation organizations involved. But then the problems weren't so severe at that time either. But since the 1960s a lot of NGOs have become

involved, and NGOs are sometimes quite territorial. So the thing to do would be to get involved with some existing organization. Have a fundraising campaign in the college, in the university, and make a donation for Madagascar to Conservation International, or to the Lemur Conservation Foundation, or any one of many excellent international and Malagasy organizations. They are all doing good work. The Madagascar Fauna Group is a wonderful organization which has been formed by a whole group of zoos, for example, and The Lemur Conservation Foundation supports the conservation of one of the few remaining tracts of lowland rainforest in eastern Madagascar. A lot of good work is being done in Madagascar by very devoted and energetic people, Malagasy and foreigners alike.

Many locals rely on tourism dollars to make ends meet. However, due to the political unrest, tourists have been deterred from visiting Madagascar. This unrest has led the locals to start engaging in illegal activity, such as logging. So if traveling to Madagascar supports the government, but not traveling there supports these practices, do you feel that traveling to Madagascar is beneficial or detrimental?

I feel everybody who's interested in the lemurs, and in the fauna and flora of Madagascar in general, should go to Madagascar. There is no better way of gaining perspective. And it is one way of allowing locals to earn their living by protecting the natural habitat, giving them an alternative to going in there and cutting down the trees and basically eating their seed corn, which is what is happening in many places. It gives local people an alternative: they can be guides, they can sell trinkets, they can work in transportation and hotels, and do all sorts of things to make money that don't involve going in and ravaging what's left of the forest.

Foreign aid has always been a very tricky thing, because just giving handouts usually

leads to corruption and unfortunate political consequences. If you give people a way of actually earning their living as individuals and societies, it's always much more effective. That's why I think this country should stop worrying about giving direct handouts to Third World countries, which is among other things very political and controlling, and give them better terms of trade.

Why are we spending huge amounts of money to subsidize farmers to grow sugar beet in Wisconsin, or wherever it may be, when sugar can be produced so much more efficiently and economically in the tropics? This is costing us, and it's costing them. I think better terms of trade for producers of the crops that grow best in the tropics is by far the best way for all concerned. And if anything will cut back corruption and nepotism and so forth in the Third World, allowing those countries to earn their living will do far more for them than handing out money that just gets siphoned off left and right before it gets to wherever it's needed.

Is it safe to travel to Madagascar given the recent violence and danger?

Basically, Madagascar is a pretty safe place. There has been cattle rustling here and there in various parts of Madagascar as long as I can remember. And there are places that you might not normally go. But for the average tourist this isn't a problem. What's more, most people who visit Madagascar, certainly for the first time, visit in groups. And I think this is the best way for newcomers to



Madagascar because although the tourist infrastructure has certainly improved in recent years, with some wonderful hotels in some of the most spectacular places, getting around isn't always easy, even though on balance the roads are a lot better than they used to be. At the high end, an agency will rent you a car with a driver and arrange a safe itinerary with comfortable accommodations. And backpackers can travel cheaply in great discomfort using local transportation. But in the mid-range travel in small groups is probably the best way to go. The organizers know the country well, and where to take you, and they know where it's safe and where it's not safe, and I wouldn't worry for a second going with a reputable tour group to Madagascar.

Is there anything that we've left out that you would want readers to know or understand about human evolution or lemurs?

Well, anybody interested in evolution and in understanding the structure of the living world and its history is obviously worried about political pressures to include creationism in scientific teaching. And I think part of this is the fault of science itself, which is too often taught as a kind of authoritarian system of belief. Science is actually a system of provisional knowledge that is always changing: it is a process, rather than a product, always iterating in to a more accurate but never definitive description of nature. What is taught in science classes today is very different from what I was taught in school half a century ago. Scientists aren't out to prove anything, but

rather to discard false beliefs about the world around us. To be scientific, a statement about some aspect of nature has to be actually testable by observation; and if observation shows it to be wrong, it has to be rejected. Some statements about nature have proven highly resistant to being falsified, among them the notion that the pattern of similarities we see among living things is due, as Darwin put it, to "descent with modification." But they still remain potentially falsifiable. This makes science a very particular approach to knowing about the world and the universe around us. There are of course other forms of knowledge, for example common sense or religious belief. But they are different forms of knowing, and that is why they shouldn't be confused with science. They are not necessarily in conflict with science, either. For example, science is not concerned with ultimate causation. It can't be, because you can't make a testable hypothesis about ultimate causation, and science is about testability. And if people realized that, if they were taught that in school early on, I don't think anybody would have any problem with the notion of evolution. It's only because science is so often presented as an authoritarian system of belief that people compare it with other declarative systems, and reject it because they think accepting one system means rejecting the other. So that would be my message. And I'm very much of the opinion that there really shouldn't be this conflict, that nobody should be afraid of any kind of knowledge. It's a shame that some people seem to be.



Haylie Cox graduated from Weber State University with a B.A. in Zoology. She has worked for Dr. John Cavitt of Weber State University in his study of migratory shorebirds at the Great Salt Lake, and she is currently working with Dr. Jonathan Clark, also of Weber State University, studying telomeres of different species of *Drosophila*. Haylie also plans to attend graduate school in the future.



Steffani Geary is a graduate of Weber State University where she received her B.S. in Zoology. She worked with Dr. Christopher Hoagstrom, an ichthyologist, and Paul Thompson, Aquatic Biologist for the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, on plans to develop a least chub “refuge” population at the Ogden Nature Center. The least chub, an endemic fish species, is currently on Utah’s sensitive species list. Steffani plans on attending graduate school to pursue a career in wildlife ecology.



Dr. Sam Zeveloff is Presidential Distinguished Professor and chair of the Department of Zoology at Weber State University. He has conducted extensive research on North American mammals and conservation policy. His books include *Raccoons: A Natural History* (Smithsonian Press) and *Mammals of the Intermountain West* (University of Utah Press).

Ian Tattersall

The Great Leap Forward

All other creatures we know of on Earth, even such cognitively sophisticated ones as chimpanzees, live in the world essentially as Nature presents it to them. . . . Not us . . . In a very literal sense, we human beings – and we alone – live in worlds that are at least partially of our own making.

We human beings are very peculiar creatures. For one thing, we walk upright on two legs, a very eccentric thing to do in the animal realm. We have great globular heads that balance precariously atop our curiously S-shaped vertical spines, our females conceal their ovulation, we clothe and decorate ourselves, and we make elaborate tools to accomplish tasks that other creatures use their beaks or teeth for. The list goes on and on. But most bizarre of all is the way we process information in our brains. All other creatures we know of on Earth, even such cognitively sophisticated ones as chimpanzees, live in the world essentially as Nature presents it to them. They may react to sensory stimuli in highly sophisticated ways, but they accept the world as it is. Not us. Uniquely, as far as we know, we *Homo sapiens* dissect all that impinging information in our minds, creating mental symbols that we can then combine and

recombine to create new realities, or alternate constructions of the one we are in. In a very literal sense, we human beings – and we alone – live in worlds that are at least partially of our own making. None of us interprets what surrounds us in exactly the same way.

There is, then, a great cognitive gulf between us and all the other denizens of the planet – even our closest living relatives. We are symbolic creatures, they are not. Yet only those with an axe to grind in this matter would contest that we are descended, at some remove, from an ancestor that did not share our cognitive peculiarities – an ancestor that lay on the other side of that narrow but infinitely deep gulf. So how was the chasm crossed? Well, as long as we do not know how a mass of electrochemical signals in our brains becomes transformed into what we each individually experience as our subjective consciousness, we will never be able to answer that question mechanistically. But at

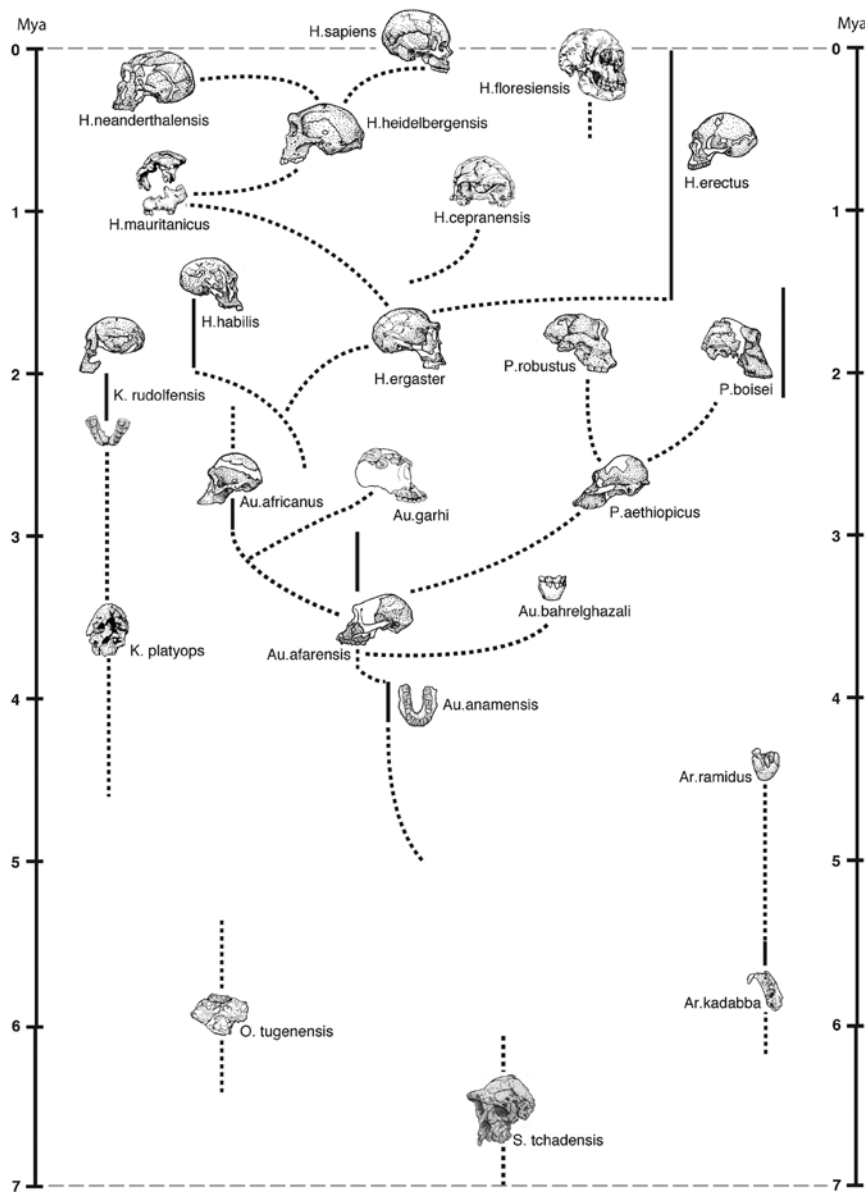


Fig. 1. Very tentative family tree of hominids, showing the variety of extinct species now known within the human family and their distribution in time, and sketching in some possible lines of descent. ©Ian Tattersall.

this point we do know enough about our biological past – about those now-extinct relatives who preceded us on Earth – to hazard at least a framework, and even a timescale, within which that fateful passage was made.

Let's first consider the starting-point. The cognitive scientist Daniel Povinelli recently proposed that a fundamental distinction between the ways in which chimpanzees and humans view the world is that, while humans

form abstract views about other individuals and their motivations, “chimpanzees rely strictly upon observable features of others to forge their social concepts. If correct, [this] would mean that chimpanzees do not realize that there is more to others than their movements, facial expressions, and habits of behavior. They would not understand that other beings are repositories of private, internal experience” (Povinelli, 2004: 33). It would also imply that individual chimpanzees do not have such awareness of themselves, either. They *experience* the emotions and intuitions that arise in their own minds; and they may act on them, or suppress them, as the situation demands or permits. But they “do not reason about what others think, believe and feel – precisely because they do not form such concepts in the first place”

This is about as much as we can reasonably say about chimpanzees’ minds from our outside vantage point. Still, even though there has doubtless been a lot of evolutionary water under the bridge on both sides since human beings shared an ancestor with any ape, most authorities find it reasonable to conclude that cognition of the kind we see among chimpanzees provides us with a reasonable approximation of the cognitive point from which our ancestors started some seven million years ago. To use Povinelli’s words, one may reasonably assume that those ancestors were “intelligent, thinking creatures who deftly attend[ed] to and learn[ed] about the regularities that unfold[ed] in the world around them. But ... they [did] not reason about unobservable things: they [had] no ideas about the ‘mind,’ no notion of ‘causation’” (Povinelli, 2004: 33). In the human sense, they had as yet no idea of self. This plausible yet necessarily sketchy

characterization of our lineage’s starting point more or less exhausts what can usefully be said based on existing studies of comparative cognition. If we wish to know how we got here from there, we need to turn to our fossil and archaeological records.

The current best estimate is that our most recent common ancestor with any ape lived on the order of 7 to 8 million years ago. In the first half of this period a handful of mostly poorly-known African species contend to be the “earliest” hominid, among them the recently ballyhooed and very peculiar *Ardipithecus ramidus*. All in all they make a very assorted bunch, with the clear implication that, from the very beginning, the history of the human family has been pretty unremarkable for a successful mammalian group. For right up until very recently, the Earth has routinely hosted a variety of different hominids, each doing battle in its own way for ecological space. Of course, many of us were brought up with the idea that (most unusually) human evolution involved the gradual modification of a single lineage that culminated in today’s lonely *Homo sapiens*; but this notion is flatly contradicted by the facts of a rapidly-expanding fossil record (see the family tree opposite). Indeed, as recently as 30 thousand years ago there were at least four hominid species on Earth; and our present solitary state, I am convinced, tells us something very significant about ourselves, about just how *different* we are from any of our precursors.

The first really well-documented hominid species is *Australopithecus afarensis*, to which the famous “Lucy” belongs. Emblematic of a whole host of species that flourished in the African woodlands between about 4 and 1.5 million years ago, the 3.2 million year-

old Lucy was a diminutive creature who would have been an adept climber in the trees even while clearly walking upright on the ground, albeit not exactly as we do today. Early hominids like Lucy are often informally known as “bipedal apes” because whatever the modifications of their hips, legs and feet, their cranial proportions were ape-like, with small braincases and large, protruding faces. There is no reason to suspect that these creatures were significantly smarter than any modern ape.

Yet at some point something happened. At around 2.5 million years ago, early African hominids started making stone tools. No doubt wooden and other tools were already used by hominids long before, as they are by apes today; but those early stone tools preserved well, and marked a major (and fateful) step ahead in hominid behavior and cognition. For even with intensive coaching, no living ape has been able to grasp the idea of hitting one carefully-selected rock with another, at precisely the angle required to detach a sharp flake. What’s more, those carefully-selected stones were often carried long distances before being made into tools as required, implying an impressive degree of foresight on the part of the toolmakers. Without any doubt, with the first stone tools we have the earliest good evidence that our ancestors had advanced cognitively far beyond the ape league.

We do not know exactly who those first stone tool makers were. But there is good circumstantial evidence that they were creatures who we would almost certainly classify physically as “bipedal apes.” Which means that, yet again, we have early evidence of a pattern that would hold throughout the rest of human evolution: the arrival

of new ways of doing things is never explained by the evolution of a new kind of hominid. Technological innovations are always made by members of pre-existing species.

So it should come as no surprise that, when a totally new kind of hominid came on the African scene at some time after about 2 million years ago, it did not bring with it a new tool kit. At the beginning *Homo ergaster*, the first hominid species to have effectively modern body proportions, made simple flake tools more or less exactly like those its archaically-bodied predecessors had been making for a million years before. Establishing a routine practice for hominids, it adapted the old tools to new ways, which would have included a life out on the expanding African savannas, away from the shelter of the trees. Adapted like us not merely to uprightness, but to a striding locomotion over open ground, these hominids would have had a lifestyle that emphasized stamina and endurance, a hallmark of hominids ever since.

Once the modern body type was established, hominids spread rapidly beyond Africa: they were in the Caucasus by about 1.8 million years ago, and in Indonesia not much later. By 1.4 million years ago they had already penetrated the harsher climes of Europe. Interestingly, this initial spread was achieved in the absence of radically larger brains or improved technologies. Still, back in Africa, and a bit later elsewhere, we do see the inauguration of a trend among hominids towards increasing brain size. This trend seems to have been expressed independently in several hominid lineages in different parts of the world, so that there is evidently something about the genus *Homo* that has historically predisposed it to increasing brain sizes. Brain is met-

abolically expensive tissue that takes a lot of energy to maintain, and it will be very important to understand just what it is that underwrote this trend if we are ever going to fully unravel the story of the evolution of human cognition. But right now what that underpinning element was remains unclear, although it must almost certainly have had in some way to do with a feedback between human lifeways and a form or forms of “intelligence” that we cannot yet specify.

Again in Africa, a radically new type of tool was invented about 1.5 million years ago, still during the tenure of *Homo ergaster*. This was the “handaxe,” a largish tool made by carefully shaping a stone “core” on both sides to flat, teardrop shape. The earliest stone tools were no more than simple flakes with a sharp cutting edge, the only feature desired. It didn’t matter what shape the tool was. But handaxe-makers were fashioning tools to a specific pattern that existed in the toolmaker’s mind before production started. This was clearly a conceptual advance, but alas we do not know to what extent it may have reflected more complex cognitive processes on the part of the hominids concerned.

The same can be said of the next major conceptual advance in stone tool making, the “prepared-core” tool, whereby a

stone core was carefully shaped on both sides until a single blow would detach a more or less finished tool with a cutting surface all around its periphery. Invented at some time after about 300 thousand years ago, following a long period of stasis in stone tool production, prepared-core tools were introduced during the tenure of *Homo heidelbergensis*. This, the first cosmopolitan hominid species, appeared in Africa

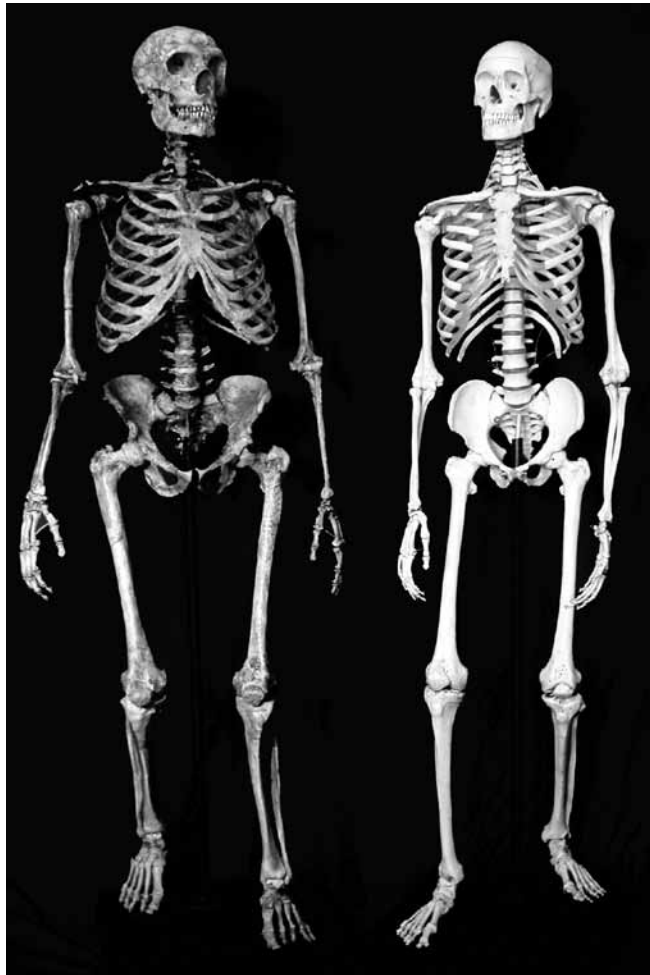


Fig. 2. Comparison of the skeletons of a Neanderthal (left) and a modern human of similar stature. Note the substantial differences in structure, particularly in the pelvic and thoracic regions. In most features the Neanderthal probably represents the primitive (common) condition for species in the genus *Homo*; it is the *Homo sapiens* skeleton that is highly derived (specialized). Courtesy of AMNH.

about 600 thousand years ago, and rapidly spread to Europe and eventually as far afield as China.

Members of *Homo heidelbergensis* had brains that lay within the lower limit of the modern size range, but at the beginning they were associated with archaic tool types in Africa, and in Europe they started making handaxes fairly late.

The earliest evidence for the sustained control of fire in hearths goes back to about 800 thousand

years ago, before we have any evidence of

Homo heidelbergensis, but the routine use of fire in this way dates only to about 400

thousand years ago, well within the tenure of this species. Also

of about this age are the first constructed shelters and the

first-known wooden throwing spears, both equally significant

technological innovations. Clearly, something was afoot cognitively at around this time; but again we are frustratingly unable to tie it in to the way *Homo heidelbergensis* actually experienced the world around it. Still, it is almost certainly significant that no symbolic artifacts are associated with *Homo heidelbergensis*.

Quite probably the most sophisticated practitioners ever of the prepared-core technique were the Neanderthals, *Homo neanderthalensis*, who flourished in Europe and western Asia between about 200 thousand and 30 thousand years ago. These hominids had brains as large as ours, albeit housed in skulls of rather different aspect and differing from us in vari-

ous aspects of body structure (see the figure). At least occasionally, and very simply, they buried their dead; and there is evidence that they looked after disadvantaged members of the social group. They were excellent craftsmen, though apparently rather unimaginative: their beautiful products always look remarkably similar, wherever they come from. It was these hominids who were apparently abruptly displaced by

the first *Homo sapiens* to enter Europe, about 40 thousand years ago – whether by direct conflict or by indirect economic competition is not known.

The contrast between the Neanderthals and the invading “Cro-Magnons” was extreme, principally because the latter had lives that were quite overtly

pervaded by symbol. By 35 thousand years ago they were carving exquisite figurines, and painting powerful animal images on cave walls; soon they were decorating everyday objects, making elegant pictorial and geometric engravings, and developing systems of notation. On the economic front they were occupying the landscape in far greater density than their predecessors, and exploiting its resources with greater efficiency and perception. In short, the Cro-Magnons were *us*, while the nonsymbolic Neanderthals remained emblematic of all the other hominids that had preceded them: clever for their times, certainly, but lacking the creative spark that makes us who we are.

In short, the Cro-Magnons were us, while the non-symbolic Neanderthals remained emblematic of all the other hominids that had preceded them: clever for their times, certainly, but lacking the creative spark that makes us who we are.

That spark was not acquired by *Homo sapiens* in Europe. Instead it was brought in with them by the invaders, from a place of origin that almost certainly lay in Africa where our species itself evolved. Fossils from Ethiopia show that, as an anatomically-recognizable entity, *Homo sapiens* had emerged by about 200-160 thousand years ago. But those early *Homo sapiens* are not associated with archaeological remnants that suggest they were symbolic. Instead, they did as their predecessors had done and adapted to changing environmental conditions by using traditional technologies in new ways. This is also true of the earliest *Homo sapiens* who penetrated beyond Africa, into the Levant at the eastern end of the Mediterranean. There the newcomers, documented by about 93 thousand years ago, did not immediately displace the resident Neanderthals, who persisted for another 50 thousand years; and they also made virtually identical stone tool kits. There is no reason to suspect any cognitive difference between *Homo sapiens* and *Homo neanderthalensis* at that time and place.

The first stirrings of symbolic behavior are found in southern Africa, and although not associated with human fossils, they are almost certainly attributable to early *Homo sapiens*. Overtly symbolic objects include a couple of 77 thousand year-old ochre plaques engraved with geometric motifs, from Blombos cave on the southern African coast, and shells pierced for stringing (hence for bodily decoration) come from that and other sites of similar age. Complex heat-treatment of silcrete from the nearby Pinnacle Point, dated to more than 70 thousand years ago, also seems to indicate very complex sequential thought processes.

Observations like this suggest that full modern humanity was achieved in two stages. First, the very distinctive modern human anatomy was acquired, plausibly as a result of a change in gene expression that had cascading developmental consequences throughout the body. If that change, minor in structural genetic terms, involved neural circuits as well as the structures visible in the fossilized skeleton, it would have created a new cognitive potential. Evidently, though, that potential was not immediately expressed. This would be nothing unusual: changes involving cognition in hominid history had, after all, always been backwardly compatible; new hominids had routinely continued with the technological habits of their predecessors before discovering new ways of doing things. Still, the new potential nonetheless had to be *discovered* by its possessor; and that had to have happened through a *cultural* stimulus (the biology was, after all, already there). It was this act of behavioral discovery that announced the second stage of becoming fully human, some tens of thousands of years after anatomical modernity had been achieved. My favorite candidate for the stimulus involved is the invention of language – which, depending as it does on the creation of mental symbols for its very existence, is the ultimate symbolic activity. What is more, language is a supremely communal attribute that, once adopted, would have very easily spread through a population with the biological predisposition to absorb it.

This puts the origin of the extraordinary and radically unique human cognitive capacity in the context of emergence, whereby something entirely new is created from a novel combination of elements. After some 400 million years

of accretionary vertebrate, mammal and primate brain evolution, the human brain had evolved to a point at which a small addition was able (somewhat like the keystone of an arch) to create a structure with an entirely novel potential: in this case, for a radically new way of processing information about the world, and about its own internal state. Many commentators, including Alfred Russel Wallace, co-inventor of the idea of evolution by natural selection, have

had difficulty imagining how selection could have driven human consciousness into existence. The substitution of emergence for selection now places that fateful event in an entirely routine evolutionary context: one that requires no special explanation. And it focuses scientific attention where it ought to be: on the precise identity of the alteration to the brain that enabled human beings to become the extraordinary creatures they are.

Raised in East Africa, educated at Cambridge and Yale, and Curator Emeritus at the American Museum of Natural History, Ian Tattersall is a paleoanthropologist and primatologist whose recent research centers on the origin of *Homo sapiens*. He has conducted fieldwork in places as diverse as Madagascar, Yemen, Vietnam, Mauritius and Surinam, and is a prominent interpreter of science to the public through exhibitions and books. His most recent titles include: *Paleontology: A Brief History of Life* (2010); *The Fossil Trail: How We Know What We Think We Know About Human Evolution* (2nd Ed., 2009); *Human Origins: What Bones and Genomes Tell Us About Ourselves* (with Rob DeSalle, 2008); and *The World From Beginnings to 4000 BCE* (2008). He lives with his wife in Greenwich Village.



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Rob Carney

A Portrait of the Artist in the Dark

She thought of herself as a great choreographer
and went about setting her vision on the yard.

To the apple, she shouted,
"More lift in your blossoms."

To the evergreen standing by the house,
she ordered, "Plié,"

and so on from morning to afternoon.
Oh, but such poor execution, as if those trees

were rooted in the ground.
As if they'd never pirouette at all.

She canceled rehearsals,
called off her upcoming concert with an axe,

just told herself, "Brush off the wood chips.
Time to move on."

Which is why she's on her ladder now,
yelling, "Relevé, blossom, turn,"
at the phases of the moon.



88 Maps

I found them rolled up, dusty, in an old armoire
too big to get out of the cellar —

no way to fit it through the door frame
and angle it up the stairwell —

decades ago he must have hauled down wood
and built it where it stands.

And it's not just a place to store winter jackets.
He was being deliberately permanent,

sawing, planing, and jointing
more than six feet underground.

•

In one he's mapped the yard's topography,
detailing valleys and elevations:

the small concavity above his cat's bones
where loosened dirt

sunk slowly in the rain,
the spire of the mailbox,

every scattered rock in the flower garden.
And somehow the scent of the peach tree. Above that,

each jut of the roof line. And higher still,
his back-porch view of the craters on the moon.

•

I've studied them all,
even hung some in picture frames:

Pathways of Wind 'Round the Kitchen,
Locations of Dishes and Silverware,

A Chronological Survey of Fire
from Timber Harvest to December Snow

with an inset map of newspaper catching,
then kindling and logs, then a dance of shadows

like a man and a woman lost in bodies . . .
then the long glow of coals,

•

though not as long as hate, and he mapped that too:
a stack of false starts crossed out.

Unless false starts *are* the landscape.
And those Xs represent years.

•

There's no way to know what he meant,
or why he built this atlas of routine:

tidal charts of his room-to-room movements,
the constellations of upstairs furniture,

mechanical drawings of going to buy more milk.
But he painted an eighth great continent,

and the name in its center is *Baby*,
and sometimes saying that word aloud,

I feel its weight.
Like a mountain range, or bird.

•

He made a color wheel of history
according to the trees —

brown, green, blossom colors,
more green, oranges, brown —

and a globe from the point of view of hummingbirds,
small as a flower.

He made a cylinder cut-out for the player piano,
claiming to recreate finch songs.

He made a scale to measure the impact
of slamming doors.

None of them maps, exactly,
not even his *Diagram for Boxes*:

a set of illustrations and arrows,
with instructions on how to unfold.

•

Why the people who sold me this house didn't want them,
I can't say.

Maybe they knew where they were going.
Maybe maps with no recognized compass

can't point the way,
at least not in straight lines. . . .

And they left me some half-full paint cans, an ant trap
under the refrigerator,

and a map of the Salt Lake metro area
in case I'd moved from out of state,

•

which I *have* used once: on a wasp in the window.
It was the nearest thing at hand.

•

Eighty-eight maps —
I know 'cause I've counted —

the exact same number as keys on a piano,
and maybe if you laid them out side by side

they'd play a song,
though of course that's impossible —

they're just maps. They're not magic.
Years ago, somebody made them . . .

a man who never signed his work,
so I don't know his name.

•

I know about maps, though:
The way they all start somewhere.

How they picture the in-between rises
and valleys —

the roof lines and kindling
and armoires and cats' bones.

But always arrive at the ocean, stars, or underground
whichever way we go.

The Fisherman Knew It Was a Strange Arrangement:

You can't catch fish in the house.
Even if he ran a river down the hallway

or poured a small ocean in the living room . . .
maybe buried the couch under sand dunes,

it wouldn't be the same. The curtains would never be seagulls.
Her closet would never be the woods.

A few nights a year, once the house was sleeping,
he'd stay up late and remember.

He'd open the faucets
just to hear the water say its name.

And sometimes he'd even feel a strike —
that live tugging —

like the nerves in his arms swam directly to his heart,
like his guts still knew where they came from

before all this. . . .
In the morning, he'd wake with his limit on the stringer:

the image of rainbow trout for his breakfast,
the memory of salmon for his lunch.



Rob Carney is the author of three books—*Story Problems* (Somondoco Press, 2011), *Weather Report* (Somondoco, 2006), and *Boasts, Toasts, and Ghosts* (Pinyon Press, 2003)—and two chapbooks. *New Fables, Old Songs* (Dream Horse Press, 2003) and *This Is One Sexy Planet* (Frank Cat Press, 2005). His work has been published in *Mid-American Review*, *Quarterly West*, *Redactions: Poetry & Poetics*, *Weber—The Contemporary West*, and dozens of other journals, as well as *Flash Fiction Forward* (W.W. Norton, 2006). He is a Professor of English and Literature at Utah Valley University and lives in Salt Lake City.

Simon Perchik

★

No, no, not the ink — it's when her eyes closed
 the page ran black — even without language
 there was room in her mouth for melting rock
 and lips everywhere following the flood
 until it sinks — the words you hold on to
 know nothing about a still warm star
 once paper, is turning over and over
 in the light shedding the color it needs
 to see in the dark, carry her along
 inside the mountain it takes to die
 — you still hide in her mouth to read
 word by word till they cover the night
 that is too heavy, not yet dirt
 for the corner where she is buried
 though you point with your finger
 the way it still imagines each sound
 is looking for her, sacrifices itself
 and stone is just another word.

Simon Perchik is an attorney whose poems have appeared in *Partisan Review*, *The New Yorker* and elsewhere. For more information, including his essay "Magic, Illusion and Other Realities" and a complete bibliography, please visit his website at www.simonperchik.com.



Rosetti Perchik, A.I.A

Daniel W. Powell

Life, on the Other Side



Sometimes, a man forgets that there was once any other — any *better* — way to live. Such was Browning's predicament on the day he'd finally reached the containment barrier. It had taken him much of a year to reach the wall. He fled Portland in early spring. Time compressed and seasons changed, but Browning persisted in his quest and, by the middle of autumn, he finally made it, exhausted from his trudge and weary with apprehension. The last of the warm winds were departing the high plains of Oregon, tarrying south and east to Nevada and Colorado.

He would require shelter soon — to retreat indoors ahead of the freezing weather.

Browning absently scrawled figures in the dust with a juniper twig, a mindless pursuit meant to occupy his hands while his mind catalogued the fluttering images stuck to the wall before him. Better than five years old, many were washed out from cycles of sunshine and rain.

Almost all of them, however, remained legible.

Alan Jenke is on the other side of this wall! He is a father to three and a diabetic. If you see him, please ask him to call...

My mother is a nurse. She went into the containment zone on February 18th, 2011. Her name is Wendy Parmenter and she is 5'4" and has brown hair and brown eyes. If you see her, please have her call David at...

Kostas Crebate is not well. If you see my brother Kostas, please inform him that he must call me as soon as possible. My name is Damion, and my cell phone number is...

There were pictures and poems and cartoons and cards. There were hastily scrawled Bible verses and nasty limericks poking fun at the plague and other things—things written in what looked like decades-old blood.

Turn back all ye who would enter here.

There was that one, and also:

Whoa! But a horseman is shown on the ridge.

Browning made his etchings in the sand and spent the afternoon studying the wall, questioning whether he really intended to scale it in an attempt to find her.

The chances were more than remote that she would be alive—they were astronomically slim. And yet, part of him was sure that if anyone still lived on the far side of the barrier, it would be his Amanda. A doctor, she had been one of the very first permitted inside the containment zone. Before he'd been imprisoned, he had spoken with her almost daily over the satellite phones. Then he'd been charged with spreading disinformation and taken away in shackles.

It had been three years since he last spoke with her.

He had learned very little in those years of captivity, stuck in that filthy jail cell with thieves and murderers and much, much worse. The government disintegrated—overthrown by those who resorted to the basest strategies of survival. Just before his escape, he had estimated that he had maybe a month left until they slaughtered him.

He had fled the cell in the middle of the night, freed by a woman named Enio. Enio pitied him. It wasn't a difficult thing to do, to take pity on Browning. He'd shed almost forty pounds from his muscular frame in the thirty-six months he'd been held. His bones showed in grotesque relief through skin that, in another life, had once been clean and unblemished. Now, he was marked by struggle, covered with scars and bruises and cuts that had never quite healed in the dank confines of a shaded cell.

He had once been a college professor.

In jail, he was meat. He had been raped and beaten. He had watched as people he knew—some of them friends—had been taken away, screaming, only to be consumed by the people now in charge of the city.

But Enio had seen something in him. Perhaps it had been the longing. Browning often sat in the corner, at the edge of the cell — just within earshot of her post. In hushed tones, he told the jailer stories of his wife. Of the life they shared before the bombs had fallen on the Umatilla Army Depot and the Silence Virus had raged through the Pacific Northwest like a wildfire on the Santa Anna winds.

Enio listened patiently. And *she* never whipped Browning. Often, she brought him extra rations. And then, on an otherwise ordinary spring evening, she set him free. She came to his cell as a shadow in the dim light. The mounds of sleeping men lay all around him. She motioned to him and he crept to the door. She unlocked the cell and pressed a small bag filled with food and silver money — what passed as currency in those dying times — into his trembling hands.

"It's been over a year since we heard anything...well, *intelligent* from inside the containment zone. People say that no one is left, but I don't believe the rumors. Go there, Browning. See if you can find her and, if you can...take her far away from this place."

"What will happen to you when they learn I am missing?"

"I'll manage," she whispered. She took his hand and rushed him through the bowels of the dilapidated courthouse. She guided him to a loading dock and he looked out on the crumbling city.

Fires burned in garbage cans throughout the West Hills. The city's skyline was in shambles, buildings eroding like so many rotten teeth.

"There," Enio said, pointing to the east. Browning could just discern the outline of Mt. Hood, purple and immense against the clouded night sky. "Cross the river and angle around the south ridge of the mountain. There are people there that might help you. Trust no one until you reach the south ridge. There are no good people left in these parts."

"Except for you," Browning said.

A tear slipped from Enio's eye and he reached out to wick it away with his dirty hand.

"I've lost someone as well, Browning. Someone who meant very much to me. Soon, I'll be just like the rest of them here. I wanted to do one last thing — one last *good* thing — before I am hardened by this world. Good luck. I hope you find her." She turned and retreated into the building and Browning was alone.

He wore rags and three years' growth of beard. His feet were bare and he spent that first night ducking behind buildings, dashing through shadows. It had taken him almost a week to flee the shanty town that had replaced Portland — to pick his way mile by agonizing mile through the cannibals and deformities and opportunists that had come to populate the city after its decline.

And for months he had walked, until finally reaching the containment zone.

The wall stretched from Klamath Falls to Boise, then north to Calgary and back west to Spokane. From there it dropped due south, effectively confining the spread of the virus the United States Government had created in the '50s, then reconsidered before unleashing on the Soviet Union. Instead, they stored the germ in metal drums in the low bunkers of the Umatilla Army Depot. When the Russians dropped nukes on Oregon in the spring offensive of 2011, the virus went airborne. 1.2 million perished within the first ten days of exposure. The United States and Canada circled the wagons quickly, throwing up a six-story fence in the space of two months. It had been a stunning achievement, one that had worked to halt the spread of the Silence Virus, so named because it robbed its victims of their voice just before it took their lives. But what did that matter? The Americans and the Russians had gone on to trade nukes like a couple of bantam fighters trade punches, and most of two continents now lay in ruins.

Browning had met many on his quest to the containment zone. Some had been kind. Others had simply ignored him. One tried to murder him while he slept. Some were from Canada, and he learned that Canada's government had also crumbled.

He learned that the world had fallen into disarray, that the despair had spread to Europe and South America.

No place was immune.

Some offered to go with him into the containment zone, but Browning preferred to travel alone, wary of the intentions – good or bad – of others.

When the gray light began to fade into darkness, he made a campfire. He kept it small and concealed it in an outcropping of juniper trees. He hunted for the tin of kidney beans he'd found in the pack of a dead man on a back road outside of Biggs Junction and spent a few moments inventorying the contents of his rucksack.

There was rope. Raingear. A shard of mirror. He had thirteen aspirin tablets. The bowie knife he had swapped for an old transistor radio. A canister of blue-tipped kitchen matches and an old Bic lighter that still had a little juice in it. A book – *Treasure Island* – that he'd scavenged from the ruins of the public library in Sandy. Almost three liters of fresh water. Half a dozen packets filled with the crumbs of broken table crackers.

He mixed two packets of cracker crumbs with the beans and ate the mixture for dinner, running his index finger along the interior of the can to collect every last drop of sauce. When he was done he stoked the fire, curled up and fell asleep at the edge of its heat.

When he woke, cold and stiff in the coming twilight, the first thing he decided was that he would climb the wall. An image of Amanda – the only image he was now able to conjure – flashed briefly in his mind. It confused him, this lack of recall. What had become of his memories? Why could he only summon that singular

static image? What had happened to the file filled with all of the little memories — the lazy Sunday mornings spent drinking coffee and reading the newspaper out on the deck? Why couldn't he see her the way she looked the first time they met, as though she existed in her own little atmosphere — stunning and seemingly untouchable?

He scooped dirt onto his campfire and hastily packed his things. Everything except the rope, onto which he fashioned a noose at one end. He went to the wall. Its rusting façade was riddled with spot-welding scars. There were joists where the panels came together — lots of little places for him to cling to as he worked his way up the face. With sunlight slowly thawing him, he began to climb. When he reached a height of twenty feet, he looped the noose over a bolt, creating a safety harness should he lose his footing.

It took him better than an hour to reach the top, where he was particularly cautious of the rusted barbed wire. He used his jacket to tamp it down, pulled himself up onto the wall, freed his length of rope and sat down gingerly on his jacket.

Browning scanned the scene before him. There was a crumbling check-point — two small buildings at either edge of the road — to process visitors to the containment zone. Beyond the entrance, a pocked black-top stretched a few miles through a ravine before gently rising to a bluff on the horizon. He would have to travel north and east. When last he'd spoken with her, Amanda had been working in a clinic in a town called Pendleton.

He studied his route of descent and, after a time, began to climb down. It was much slower going down and, when he finally hopped the last six feet to the springy dirt on the other side, he was covered in sweat and the morning had slipped away. He pulled the rope down after him, coiled it and stowed it in his pack. He tied his jacket around his waste, slung his rucksack over his shoulder and set out for the horizon.

It took him thirty-six days to reach Pendleton. He watched the moon at night — tracked it as it alternately slimmed and took on weight. Snow was falling on the afternoon he first caught sight of the town. His feet ached and he shivered in the flurries, little tufts of crystal that lazed on the frigid air like dandelion fluff.

On first appearance, it seemed deserted. Just as Ione had been. Just as Lexington and Heppner had been. He walked down Southgate Boulevard, past a row of decrepit restaurants and car washes and the husk of an expired K-Mart. When he reached the valley floor he followed the signs to the city center.

Amanda's job had been to inoculate survivors with a vaccine that had still been developing as they were administering it. Everything was trial and error, and the patients had to return time and time again as the doctors tried to remain a step ahead of the mutating virus.

He'd spoken with her the night before the troops had barged into their home and pulled him from the bed they shared. In their last discussion, she said she had not yet contracted the Silence Virus, that the vaccinations had been holding their own.

Browning prayed that she had survived, but he feared that Enio had been correct. The containment zone was deserted.

He found Main Street and walked down its center. It was surprisingly neat; the other towns had vehicles strewn haphazardly up and down the streets. Pendleton had managed to maintain a level of order, presumably right up until the end.

As he walked, he developed an odd sensation. He felt his skin crawl on his forearms and at the back of his neck. He scanned the windows of the shops, squinting in the gray afternoon light, looking for movement.

He felt certain he was being watched.

He traversed the length of Main Street without incident and, finally, he arrived at the clinic. The regional response team had converted an old library. It was a pretty building on the western bank of a large river. Thin crusts of ice were just beginning to form at the margins of the waterway. Browning stopped to regard the place. A large sign above the doorway stated:

WARNING!
THOSE WITH ACTIVELY WEEPING SORES
WILL NOT BE PERMITTED ENTRY
PLEASE REPORT TO THE CONTAGION
SHELTER AT THE FAIRGROUNDS FOR TREATMENT

He drew a deep breath of cold air and climbed the steps. The door was stuck shut but he forced his way in. The air was much warmer inside; again, he was surprised. It was cleaner than he had expected as well.

He walked through the foyer and into the main hall of the library, his footfalls echoing from the linoleum up to the high ceilings. They had pushed the stacks of books flush with the far wall and rigged up a couple of dozen hospital beds. There were desks and rows of chairs along one wall.

The beds were empty.

Browning went to the first desk, looking for clues to his wife's whereabouts. A ledger sat open on the desk blotter, a column of names in the left-hand margin. On the right was their condition. Every person listed on that page had died. He was turning the pages, looking for evidence that someone—anyone—had survived the epidemic, when there was an explosion behind him. He crumpled to the ground in fear, offering up a sharp cry of surprise in the process.

But it had not been an explosion. Instead, it had been a heavy book dropped on the hard ground. An action meant only to capture his attention.

There she was—his Amanda. She regarded him warily. In her arms, she cradled a crossbow of some sort.

And she wore a chalkboard, one of the old slate-green models, on a string around her neck.

"Amanda?" he said. His parched voice cracked and he cleared his throat. "Amanda? Is it you?"

She cocked her head at the bearded man standing before her. Browning had hacked much of the length from it, but of course she wouldn't recognize him. He'd never worn facial hair in the years they had shared before the change.

She took a few cautious steps toward him, motioning with the weapon. Browning understood and put his hands in the air. He rocked forward onto his knees and slowly stood.

She too had become gaunt. Her features were more pronounced, more severe. Yet she maintained her beauty and there was a fierce determination in her brown eyes. It made his heart ache that she did not seem to recognize him.

"Amanda. I...I came for you. Oh, my dear, I'm so sorry that we haven't spoken all these years! I was taken..."

Amanda gestured aggressively with the crossbow, motioning the intruder toward one of the desks.

"Ok," Browning said. Still keeping his hands in the air, he slowly walked to the desk and sat down in the chair. Carefully, deliberately, he lowered his hands to the desktop before him. Amanda took the seat across from him. "You can put that down, Amanda. I promise, it's me. It's...it's me. Browning."

A signal flare of confusion arced in his mind. Why was this so hard? He felt he had lost track of himself.

She put the crossbow on the edge of the desk—within arm's reach. Warily, she looped the chalkboard over her head and placed it before her and began to write on it.

"Why do you call me Amanda?"

Browning read the words and his mouth fell open. He stared at her, his features as open as the ocean. "Don't you remember? That's your name. *Amanda*. You are *my wife*."

She drew a sharp breath and looked away. Confusion swept over her features and she erased the board and jotted another note on the chalkboard. "I am called Amy. I am a medicine woman."

Browning read the words. "Oh, my dear heart," he said. "My dear, dear wife. Your name is *Amanda*. You are a research physician. A doctor. Have you contracted the Silence Virus, Amanda?"

She nodded somberly and jotted another note. "You are familiar to me. You say you are my husband?"

Browning grew excited. "Yes! Yes, I've come to take you out of here. We can rebuild our lives together, Amanda. Maybe things are better somewhere else. Maybe..."

As he spoke she erased the chalkboard and jotted another note. "The memory worm was awoken by the vaccination. We who have survived all have it, in some fashion. We have lost our ability to speak. And we are losing our memories also. You are familiar to me, but I don't know who you are."

Browning read the words and as he did, he began to cry. His tears splashed the crooked white lines of her words, further obscuring their meaning. "Memory worm? What are you talking about, Amanda? Alzheimer's? Do you mean Alzheimer's Disease?"

She listened to his words and, for a moment, a brief smile formed on her lips. It had been pleasure taken from the simple act of remembering a thing's true name. In that moment, she looked just as he had remembered her before the darkness fell across the face of the world.

Browning regarded her from behind his tears. She reached out to him and he grasped her hand. With her free hand she scrawled another note. "What is your name? What should I call you?"

"Browning," he immediately replied.

She looked at him quizzically, then wrote, "Is that my last name also?"

Browning opened his mouth to answer her, but nothing came out. He had been in jail for three years. No one had called him anything but "Browning" in all of that time. What was his full name? He squinted in concentration, trying to make the connection.

When he looked up, she was pushing the chalkboard toward him. "It was in the ground water. The vaccination was in the ground water. It was the best way to ensure exposure."

Browning stared at the words and things fell into place. Why he couldn't remember their most intimate memories. Why he struggled to recall his full name. The woman sitting across from him wept gently. She could see the realization in the intruder's features and it made her terribly sad.

"My name is...Browning," he said after a moment's contemplation, "just...Browning. Would you prefer it if I called you Amy?"

She wrote on the chalkboard. "I think my name is Amanda."

He smiled at her. She stood and he followed suit and they embraced. She traced her fingertips lightly along the side of his temple.

"Do you want to leave with me?" he asked her. "We can go where it's warmer. Enjoy whatever time we have left."

"Perhaps," she wrote, "in the spring. It is too cold to leave now."

He hugged her tight and they walked over to the window. They stood and watched the snow falling into the river.

It had taken him most of a year, but he had found her, and they were together. She could not call out to him — could not sing to him as she once had. He could not remember what their wedding had been like, or the name of the street where they'd shared their first apartment.

They sat at the window and watched the snow fall. Soon, the world as they recognized it was covered in a gray blanket that wiped out all its features and dulled the meaning of things.



Daniel Powell teaches writing at a small college in Northeast Florida. He is an avid outdoorsman and long-distance runner, and he enjoys fishing the waters of Duval County from atop his kayak. Daniel shares a small house near the Intracoastal Waterway with his wife, Jeanne, and their daughter, Lyla. His online journal on speculative storytelling can be found at www.danielwpowell.blogspot.com.

Edward Burtynsky

Nature Transformed



Urban Renewal #1, Factory Construction, Outside Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, China, 2004



AMARC #5, Tucson, Arizona, USA, 2006



Nature transformed through industry is a pre-dominant theme in my work. I set course to intersect with a contemporary view of the great ages of humanity; from stone, to minerals, oil, transportation, silicon, and so on. To make these ideas visible, I search for subjects that are rich in detail and scale yet open in their meaning. Recycling yards, mine tailings, quarries and refineries are all places that are outside of our normal experience, yet we partake of their output on a daily basis.

These images are meant as metaphors to the dilemma of our modern existence; they search for a dialogue between attraction and repulsion, seduction and fear. We are drawn by desire – a chance at good living – yet we are consciously or unconsciously aware that the world is suffering for our success. Our dependence on nature to provide the materials for our consumption and our concern for the health of our planet sets us into an uneasy contradiction. For me, these images function as reflecting pools of our times.

-Edward Burtynsky



Edward Burtynsky is known as one of Canada's most respected photographers. His remarkable photographic depictions of global industrial landscapes are included in the collections of over fifty major museums around the world, including the National Gallery of Canada, the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, the Museum of Modern Art and the Guggenheim Museum in New York, the Reina Sofia Museum, Madrid, and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in California.

Born in 1955 of Ukrainian heritage at St. Catharines, Ontario, Burtynsky is a graduate of Ryerson University (Bachelor of Applied Arts in Photography) and studied Graphic Art at Niagara College in Welland. He links his early exposure to the sites and images of the General Motors plant in his hometown to the development of his photographic work. His imagery explores the intricate link between industry and nature, combining the raw elements of mining, quarrying, manufacturing, shipping, oil production and recycling into eloquent, highly expressive visions that find beauty and humanity in the most unlikely of places. In 1985, Burtynsky also founded Toronto Image Works, a darkroom rental facility, custom photo laboratory, digital imaging and new media computer-training centre catering to all levels of Toronto's art community. Mr. Burtynsky also sits on the board of directors of Toronto's international photography festival, Contact, and The Ryerson Gallery and Research Center.

Exhibitions include *Oil* (2009) at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. (five-year international touring show), *Manufactured Landscapes* at the National Gallery of Canada (touring



Rock of Ages #26,
Abandoned Section, E.L. Smith Quarry, Barre, Vermont, USA, 1991



Iberia Quarries #2,
Marmorose EFA Co., Bencatel, Portugal, 2006

from 2003 - 2005), *Before the Flood* (2003), and *China* (toured 2005 - 2008). Burtynsky's visually compelling works are currently being exhibited in solo and group exhibitions across Canada, in the United States, Europe and Asia.

An active lecturer on photographic art, Mr. Burtynsky's speaking engagements include the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., George Eastman House in Rochester, NY, The Canadian Center for Architecture in Montreal, the Art Gallery of Ontario, the TED conference, Idea City, and Ryerson University in Toronto. His images appear in numerous periodicals each year. In the past, they have included *Canadian Art*, *Art in America*, *The Smithsonian*, *Harper's Magazine*, *Flash Art*, *Blind Spot*, *Art Forum*, *Saturday Night*, *Playboy*, *National Geographic Society*, and the *New York Times*.

Mr. Burtynsky's distinctions include the TED Prize, The Outreach award at the Rencontres d'Arles, The Flying Elephant Fellowship, Applied Arts Magazine book award(s), and the Roloff Beny Book award. In 2006 he was awarded the title of Officer of the Order of Canada and holds four honorary doctorate degrees.

Edward Burtynsky is represented by Nicholas Metivier Gallery, Toronto; Paul Kuhn Gallery, Calgary; Art 45, Montreal; Hasted Kraeutler Gallery, New York; Sundaram Tagore Gallery, Hong Kong; Flowers Gallery, London; Galeria Toni Tàpies, Barcelona; and Galerie Stefan Röpke in Köln. His prints are housed in numerous public, corporate and private collections worldwide.



Manufacturing #4, Factory Worker Dormitory, Dongguan, Guangdong Province, China, 2005



Manufacturing #17, Deda Chicken Processing Plant, Dehui City, Jilin Province, China, 2005



Nanpu Bridge Interchange, Shanghai, China, 2004



Breezewood, Pennsylvania, USA, 2008



Densified Oil Filters #1, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, 1997



Scrap Auto Engines #11, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, 1997



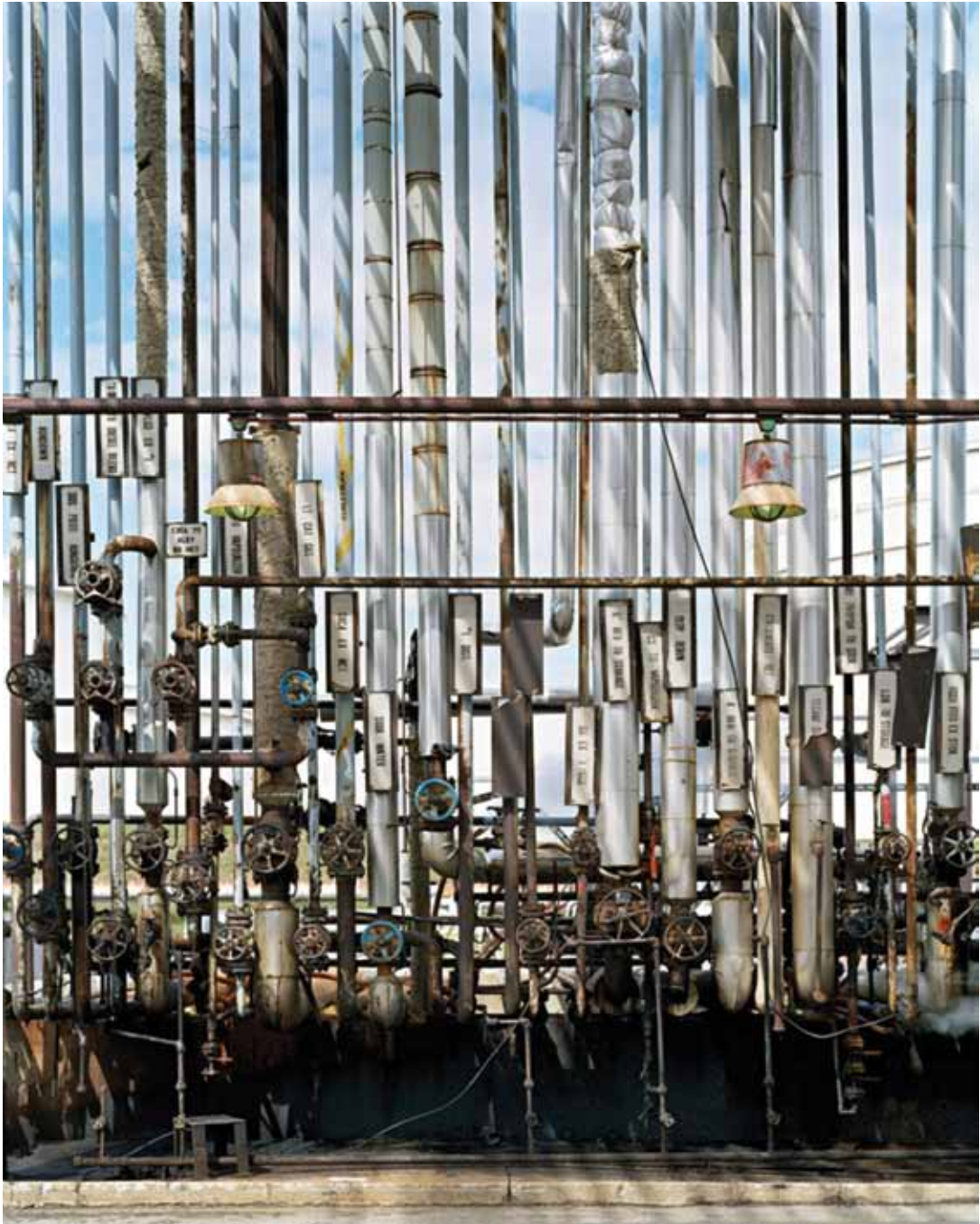
Ferrous Bushling #18, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, 1997



Oxford Tire Pile #5, Westley, California, USA, 1999



Shipbreaking #4, Chittagong, Bangladesh, 2000

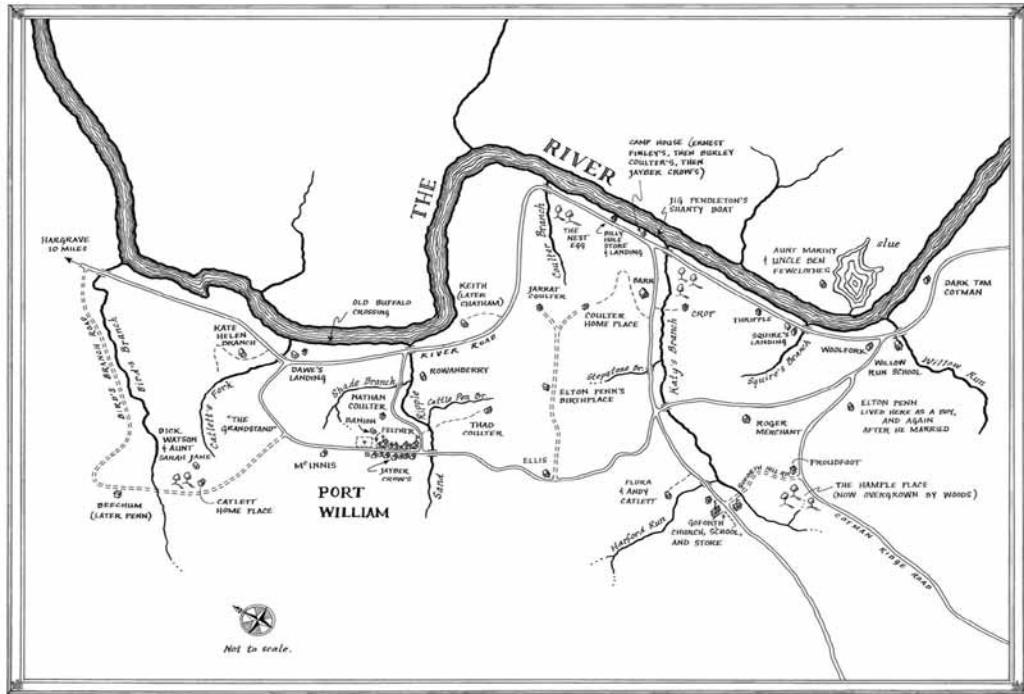


Oil Refineries #3, Oakville, Ontario, Canada, 1999

Concurrently with the publication of this edition of *Weber – The Contemporary West*, the Shaw Gallery at Weber State University will be exhibiting 30 of Edward Burtynsky's photographs (August 15 to November 22, 2011).

John Schwiebert

Wendell Berry's Little Way



© Molly O'Halloran, after the work of Wendell Berry. Reprinted by permission of Counterpoint.

Several years ago, in the midst of a conversation about other things, a good friend asked me if I had read a book by Wendell Berry entitled *Life Is a Miracle*. I had not. I knew of Berry and had browsed through one of his collections of poetry years earlier, but I had not thought about him since. The title of this book, *Life Is a Miracle*, interested me, and, acting on my friend's recommendation, I bought a copy the next day from the local bookstore and began reading. Instantly I was hooked. I sat on a stool at the window of what was then Brumbee's bakery in downtown Salt Lake City on a snowy Saturday morning unable to put the book down. I filled the margins with notes and copied out passages for future re-reading. "To treat life as less than a miracle is to give up on it," wrote Berry. *Amen*, I said, reaching for my coffee, which had grown cold, and looking out at the snow. Since that day I have read one Berry book after another: novels, short stories, poems, and essays.

Wendell Berry was born in rural Henry County, Kentucky, in 1934. His parents and forbears were farmers, and he grew up following literally in the footsteps of farm-

ers and learning their arts. He received his early formal education at a military school (where he was occasionally disciplined for insubordination) and earned an undergraduate degree from the University of Kentucky. Subsequently, he studied creative writing at Stanford University under the mentorship of Wallace Stegner, travelled in Europe, and moved to New York City. Observing him then, in his late 20s, one might have sup-

posed that Berry was advancing solidly in the direction of the American Dream—dramatically upward. He had left his farm country background behind. He had studied writing at one of the country's premier institutions of higher education and was headed toward a promising career in the literary capital of

North America. He was making something of himself. He had just about, as they say, "arrived." Then in 1964 Berry made an astonishing and life-changing decision: against the warnings of his academic advisor that he must be crazy to do so, he quit New York and returned home permanently to take a teaching job at the University of Kentucky. He gave up a big place and a big future for a small place and, likely, a small future. Soon after, he made another surprising decision. At a time when the occupation of family farming was in steep decline Berry decided to become a farmer, as his forebears had been, and purchased a modest farm. For the most part, he has resided in the same vicinity, Port Royal, Kentucky, ever since, teaching and farming, and writing books addressing most of the major topics and issues of our time: the future

of agriculture, ecology, war and pacifism, civil liberties, democracy, religion, art, racism, sex, economy, globalization, and much else. His fiction is mostly set in a place modelled after Port Royal, and virtually all of his other work, he would say, has also been inspired, defined, and indelibly stamped by the place where he lives, as he puts it, his particular "place on earth," Port Royal, Kentucky.

Why did Berry take the apparently backward step of "going home again" in 1964 and becoming a farmer, when the conventional modern wisdom says to leave home permanently behind, gain the fast track to success by choosing a "cutting edge" career, and make yourself into something "better" than your parents and grandparents

Berry was "fated" to go back; it was his place on earth; its people and history, its stories, soil, waters, plants, and creatures had woven themselves into his blood and being; they had made him who he was, had claimed him.

were? Berry discusses the reasons for his decision in his autobiographical essay, "A Native Hill." First, he says, he was "fated" to go back; it was his place on earth; its people and history, its stories, soil, waters, plants, and creatures had woven themselves into his blood and being; they had made him who he was, had claimed him. Once he had been back home a while, he discovered that, rather than simplifying his life, as one might expect with a move from a city back to a country setting, it complicated his life in a crucial and positive way: it made him acknowledge more personal accountability for his daily actions. While a person living as a transplant in a large and anonymous city like New York can act—for instance, pollute—in a variety of ways and remain happily insulated from the consequences of his acts, living perma-

nently in one small place made it harder for him to separate his personal actions and choices from their consequences. If he damaged the land, or hurt or ignored a neighbor, he himself had to live in the mess he had created and face, on a daily basis, the offended neighbor. Third, moving home reinforced his love for the embodied world and its particulars:

I began more seriously than ever to learn the names of things—the wild plants and animals, the natural processes, the local places—and to articulate my observations and memories. My language increased and strengthened, and sent my mind into the place like a live root system (“A Native Hill” 7).

Finally, it is important to note that Berry’s move home did not signal a retreat from the so-called real world (the big world of hustle and restless change) into “mere provinciality.” Being home, in his place of origin, he says, gave him a clearer vision and sense of stewardship toward the world outside his own county. “When I have thought of the welfare of the earth,” he writes, “the problems of its health and preservation, the care of its life, I have had this place [Henry County, Kentucky] before me, the part representing the whole more vividly and accurately, making clearer and more pressing demands, than any *idea* of the whole” (“A Native Hill” 5). If he was going to be any kind of a good caretaker of the world, Berry realized, he needed first and always to be a caretaker of “his native hill.” Quoting E.M. Forster in another essay, he notes, “It all turns on affection....Affection. Don’t you see?”

Berry’s move illustrates a remark once made by G.K. Chesterton: “At any instant you may strike a blow for the perfection which no man has seen since Adam.” Making his move Wendell

Berry was clearly “striking a blow”—for community, for personal accountability to place, for “affection.” Was he changing the world? In one sense, the answer seems to be “no”: the world looks pretty much the same, on the face of it, following Berry’s relocation as it did before; the event was not reported in *The New York Times* or on the CBS Evening News; but in another sense, yes, it did change the world. It decisively shaped his life’s work and writing, which in turn, have affected hundreds and thousands of people—family (Berry’s children have grown up to be farmers), friends, neighbors, students, and readers.

Berry’s decision to move home and live in and write from his particular place on earth was a personal choice—at once very *small* (the decision of one person among billions on the planet made in one small moment in history) and at the same time very *large*.

Why do I like Wendell Berry so much? I like Berry because he puts the world into accurate perspective. He reminds me that the things I usually dismiss as small, like the small place where he chose some 40 years ago to live, are actually big, important. He insists that to think and act responsibly and well is not to Think Big, as most of us assume, but, as he puts it in the title of one of his best essays, to “Think Little.”

However easily we may forget this fact in our quest for personal significance or status, our lives are unavoidably made up of countless small actions and small choices.

How much time will I spend with my children today?

How will I treat, today, the next-door neighbor whom I, speaking honestly, can’t stand?

It might rain tomorrow, or it might not; considering I live in a desert,

should I water my lawn today, or not water it?

How will I answer the streetperson at my car window who is asking me for money? Will I give him a dollar? A banana from the groceries in the back seat? pretend I didn't see him?

Will I read a book this evening or watch TV? Will I educate myself or pay someone else to entertain me?

Will I eat at McDonald's or cook from scratch?

Sitting still, contemplation, I am told, is a luxury. Will I treat it as such, or make it the centerpiece of my daily life?

I don't have time, in the sense of having time dropped in my lap: will I *make* time, or just go on losing it?

I must keep informed. Will I watch CNN? Read *The New York Times*? *Mother Jones* magazine? Am I reading too much? Should I read less, get out more and see reality—unfiltered by cameras, reporters, and editors—at first-hand, for myself?

Will I bother to ask questions like these at all, or stop thinking and be a robot?

If I know one thing about small concerns and questions, it's that I can't get away from them for more than a few minutes, *unless* I am a robot.

Small Is Important. I note that this idea is not original with Wendell Berry. It is classical, Christian; for all the questions I have listed as examples have to do with how I conduct myself—whether harmoniously or destructively, joyfully or apathetically, carefully or recklessly—in relation to my fellow human beings and the small particulars of the world. In fact, the idea of *Small Is Important* seems to have originated with God. It is everywhere in the Bible. While the power of God is unmistakably large, mysterious, and ineffable beyond human understanding, acting in this embodied world God shows a marked preference for thinking little. He

picks social nobodies to be his prophets and disciples. He produces spiritual leaders from the wombs of barren despised women. In the person of Jesus, he befriends social outcasts: lepers, the lame and blind, sinners, demoniacs, paralytics. He lives and moves among small people. Insofar as he puts people into hierarchies at all, he places children and beggars at the top and billionaires and philanthropists at the bottom. He transforms the world, not by laws or edicts or by moving at the head of an army, but one person at a time—a prostitute here, a tax collector there. Most dramatically, God becomes a vulnerable human being who is killed by the cosmic powers of darkness; but then, for his last (or penultimate) act, he rises from the tomb and defeats death. The little fish swallows the shark.

Small Is Important. Aware as I generally am of my own smallness, I can't hear this message often enough. I need to be reminded daily that my very smallness has value. What God loves—from a weak man or a broken woman to an insect or a blade of grass—he wants to keep, take care of. Wendell Berry is neither liberal nor conservative. If, in his view, there is a touchstone for determining the *goodness* of our small actions, it is that they should celebrate, honor, and contribute to the long-term wellbeing of the world—human, animal, vegetable, mineral. As rational creatures we humans are entrusted with the imagination—in the words of Genesis 2—to “keep” creation, healthy and whole, till God himself intervenes to end it.

One implication of *Small Is Important* is that we, as private individuals or communities, have more say in the way the world is than we have been taught to suppose. If you live by the rule of Think Big, believing that bigness is the measure of importance, you are apt to feel powerless in the face of circumstance. If Big is

Important, then we small ones—and who among us isn't small?—have no choice but to surrender to size. In fact this is what most of us as a culture tend to do. We feel dominated, even oppressed, by large and inscrutable forces: big money and its handmaidens, such as big government and the various other bureaucracies; the laws of physics; the forces of the unconscious; the so-called unstoppable march of progress, which permits us no alternative, we are told, but to either fall into step or lag behind and be trampled. In this deterministic worldview, an individual person has no real power to affect anything. Thought itself is discouraged, because it is futile; hence the many images of silly empty-headed looking people that appear in sales promotions for everything from cell phones and satellite dishes to vacations and automobiles. In the world of Think Big, people exist only to be bought, sold, exploited, and entertained. If there is something going on in the world we don't like, however strong our dislike, we have no real choice but to "lighten up." Spend more. Consume more. Waste more. Trust your leaders. Believe the experts. Watch TV and learn to say, *It's my own life and that's all that matters*, as the Champions of Bigness—various political leaders, economists, and salespeople—advise we must if we are to be forward-looking citizens in a future-oriented society.

However, if you Think Little, all of this changes. Your orientation is not toward a big and unreal future, which never arrives, but toward the small

and real present, which is already in hand; and you *do* have choice. Right here and now, you have an alternative to lightening up, and if you observe an instance of human injustice, arrogance, hypocrisy, or wastefulness, you can do some small thing to correct it; or, more precisely, you can do something small to correct yourself that in turn may contribute to correcting the larger problem.

Of course, in the classical Judeo-Christian view, we humans have no final control over anything; however, to the extent we control anything at all it is not the other side of the world or Washington, D.C., or the future, but the particular place and particular moment in time we are in right now. Try to change the world in the grandiose sense that most people think of—and

see how far you get. Mentor a child, feed a streetperson, or teach an illiterate adult to read, and your impact may be incalculable.

Wendell Berry's quintessential anti-determinist, stalwartly refusing to lighten up, is a poetic persona he calls "the Mad Farmer." Of course, this Mad Farmer is really the *sane* farmer, attending to the particulars of local place and present moment, doing his small work as a steward called to help take care of the world that is ours in trust. Uninterested in programs of self-discovery or self-actualization, the Mad Farmer *already knows* who he is, a person with a calling he does not shirk. In the following passage, from a poem entitled "The Mad Farmer, Flying the Flag of Rough Branch, Secedes from the

If you live by the rule of Think Big, believing that bigness is the measure of importance, you are apt to feel powerless in the face of circumstance. If Big is Important, then we small ones—and who among us isn't small?—have no choice but to surrender to size.

Union,” the Mad Farmer puts the abstract powers of bigness in their place:

From the union of power and money,
from the union of power and secrecy,
from the union of government and science,
from the union of government and art,
from the union of science and money,
from the union of ambition and ignorance,
from the union of genius and war,
from the union of outer space and inner vacuity,
the Mad Farmer walks quietly away.

There is only one of him, but he goes.
He returns to the small country he calls home,
his own nation small enough to walk across.
He goes shadowy into the local woods,
and brightly into the local meadows and croplands.
He goes to the care of neighbors,
he goes into the care of neighbors.
He goes to the potluck supper, a dish
from each house for the hunger of every house.
He goes into the quiet of early mornings
of days when he is not going anywhere.
(*Selected Poems* 162)

The Mad Farmer’s opinions echo the Sermon on the Mount, as in these lines from “Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front”:

So, friends, every day do something
that won’t compute. Love the Lord.
Love the world. Work for nothing.
Take all that you have and be poor.
Love someone who does not deserve it.
(*Selected Poems* 87)

Seen in passing, the Mad Farmer may seem quaintly or laughably quixotic, confirming popular stereotypes of farmers as “isolationist,” “provincial,” or “redneck” (all stereotypes of his own vocation that Berry has fought vigorously). It’s important to stress that Berry’s emphasis on the local and small is not a flat out denial of the Big World or of our need to live in and relate to that world. He affirms the need for us to work on the national and global as well as local levels.

The difference is that Berry refuses to accept that you can only or best care for the world through large-scale bureaucratic efforts; in fact that such efforts too often exacerbate the problems they try to address. People, like you and me, who can exert *enormous* influence over what we do in our particular here and now, give our “proxy” (Berry says) for solving problems to large bureaucracies, public and private, or their experts, over which we have very *little* influence; and the big organizations themselves and the experts, of course, are hopelessly addicted to Thinking Big. Therefore, the only sane way for us to care for this world is, yes, to support worthy large-scale causes, but only secondarily. Priority must go to the small and local actions and behaviors—in our cities and towns, our neighborhoods, in our households, and especially in our own selves.

Berry’s early essay, “Think Little,” addresses this point squarely, and is worth quoting at length:

What we are up against in this country, in any attempt to invoke private responsibility, is that we have nearly destroyed private life.... We have delegated all our vital functions and responsibilities to salesmen and agents and bureaucrats and experts of all sorts. We cannot feed or clothe ourselves, or entertain ourselves, or communicate with each other, or be charitable or neighborly or loving, or even respect ourselves, without recourse to a merchant or a corporation or a public-service organization or an agency of the government or a style-setter or an expert....
...We need better government, no doubt about it. But we also need better minds, better friendships, better marriages, better communities. We need persons and households that do not have to wait upon organizations, but can make necessary changes in themselves, on their own.
[T]he discipline of thought is not generalization; it is detail, and it is personal behavior.... The citizen who is willing to

Think Little, and, accepting the discipline of that, to go ahead on his own, is already solving the problem. A man who is trying to live as a neighbor to his neighbors will have a lively and practical understanding of the work of peace and brotherhood, and let there be no mistake about it—he is *doing* that work. A couple who make a good marriage, and raise healthy, morally competent children, are serving the world's future more directly and surely than any political leader, though they never utter a public word. . . . A man who is willing to undertake the discipline and the difficulty of mending his own ways is worth more to the conservation movement than a hundred who are insisting merely that the government and the industries mend their ways. (84–87)

What I like about this passage is that it does not take big institutions like governments and corporations off the hook for their various misdeeds; but it makes a special point of putting you and me on the hook along *with* them for our complicity.

There is only one way to “take” Berry, in the passage just quoted or in his writings generally, and that is *personally*. He challenges you and me, along with himself, to do better. Whatever problem we may be talking about—poverty, wastefulness, violence—we are all of us a part of the problem. We can only pray for the grace to be part of the solution as well.

Wendell Berry is a religious man, and I want to end by putting my remarks into a broader religious context. I'm concerned that someone reading this essay might mistakenly suppose:

1. That Berry is an individualist who puts his faith in the philosophy of “you can do it alone.”
2. That Berry believes that a few ordinary people making good small choices will create utopia on earth, and that he is therefore amazingly naive.

Berry is as far removed from either of these beliefs as a person can be.

First, he flatly rejects individualism. The individualist assumes the right to act as he wishes without concerning himself with how his actions affect anyone or anything else. In the words of John Milton's Satan (the arch-individualist), “The mind is its own place, and in itself / Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n.” For Berry, no place—mental or natural—is one's “own” in the sense of being exclusively one's own. In the first place, everything we have is ours only in trust, to be passed on to others, in as good a condition as it was when first entrusted to us. Second, who I am and what I think or do, whatever I may suppose, *is* interconnected with all other life—human, animal, vegetable, mineral. Therefore, I *must* concern myself with the effects of my actions on other people and on the world. What I do unto the world, good or bad, I also do to myself.

The second possible misunderstanding, that Berry is naive to put so much faith in small people and actions, requires a longer answer. If we look at the world realistically, isn't it obvious that Bigness is crushing smallness, as it always has and probably always will? For instance, whatever your opinion on the merits of large transnational corporations, and despite the efforts of people like Wendell Berry to Think Little, aren't these corporations bigger, greedier, and more powerful today than ever before? Contrary to the upbeat assurances of Wall Street apologists and the lies of political spin doctors, aren't the poor getting poorer and more numerous, and the rich richer and fewer? As Big goes on getting Bigger, isn't the world shrinking, becoming less diverse and interesting and more homogeneous and boring, less like a neighborhood ethnic deli and more like McDonald's? And speaking personally, if I may, about one

of my own areas of work: I am an English instructor, dedicated to doing whatever small things I can, as one teacher among many, to celebrate, teach, and pass on great works of literature, so that people will be enjoying them as much in 50 or 100 years as I do now. How can I not be discouraged when I compare my impact on students with the impact of far bigger and more public influences, such as television?

Berry is no stranger to lost causes, having been on what seem to be the losing sides of most of the causes he has undertaken — family farming, soil and water conservation, pacifism, and localization, among others. However, he has consistently said that he remains guardedly hopeful about the future. Here, as on the issue of Small v. Big, he is unabashedly countercultural. Where culture values *effectiveness* or success as the measure of a “right” or good action, Berry’s standard of measure is and always has been *fidelity*, a word that appears often in his work and is the title of one of his story collections. Fidelity — to God and creation (and all that the word “creation” entails in the way of care, nurture, and respect) — is all that matters. We can’t even know for sure whether a thing is a success or whether it is a failure, or when someone has succeeded and when someone has failed. The Roman Empire looked like a success, and where is it now? Golgotha looked like failure, but then came Easter.

The kingdom of heaven is indeed, as Jesus said, like leaven, working silently and secretly, or like the tiniest mustard

seed; its power and presence is no less certain for being unseen. When my friend suggested I read Wendell Berry, he sowed a seed, and that seed has germinated and borne fruit. English clergyman Nicky Gumbel tells a story about a British soldier in World War I. As he lay dying in the trenches in France, the soldier asked that a message be hand-delivered to an elderly man back in England, a

message of personal thanks for teaching him well as a child in Sunday School. When many days later the old man received the message he was astonished; he had long since quit teaching Sunday School because, as he said, “I didn’t think I was having any effect.”

Though he realized it late, this teacher had

succeeded and was a success. Once again, it seems to be the smallest things that matter most, and they are largely invisible.

After recounting the great Biblical narrative from Abel, Noah, and Abraham down through Moses, David, the prophets, and the Jewish martyrs, the writer of the book of Hebrews concludes:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

So far as I know, Wendell Berry has never quoted this passage in his writings,

*As Big goes on getting Bigger,
isn't the world shrinking,
becoming less diverse
and interesting and more
homogeneous and boring, less
like a neighborhood ethnic deli
and more like McDonald's?*

but he has lived and worked in its light. The Kingdom of God is among us. It was, is now, and ever shall be; therefore, let us work, in worship and praise, for as long as daylight lasts, to “keep” it.

To appreciate Wendell Berry, I sometimes think I need only walk around for a day thinking nothing but “thanks.” Thank you for this blade of grass, for that cloud, this breath. Thank you for

these remarkable hands; this child; this nourishing rain. Thanks for this smile. Thank you for this friend. Thank you for birdsong, music. Thanks. Life is a miracle. Creation is perfect. “The world,” declares the Mad Farmer, “is a holy vision, had we clarity / to see it.” We don’t yet appreciate a fraction of what we have. Everlasting thanks for the smallest things.

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Dustin Junkert

Theology

Everything will never last,
just look at yesterday, for example.

Tomorrow I'll have to talk
about what I'll do tomorrow

again – to prove my resolve.
That's called redemption.

There is, of course, no good
reason to answer 'Something'

instead of 'Nothing,' when
God asked, "What should there be?"

But years later, after all that
was decided, Adam said, "Give us

a will to borrow,
the judgment to keep."

How humiliating, in front of all
the saints lounging under the throne,

my little legs leaping to their limit
to catch the red ribbon of my love

in a gloomy forest of all places
and in such company!

screaming, Faith! Save yourself!

A Letter

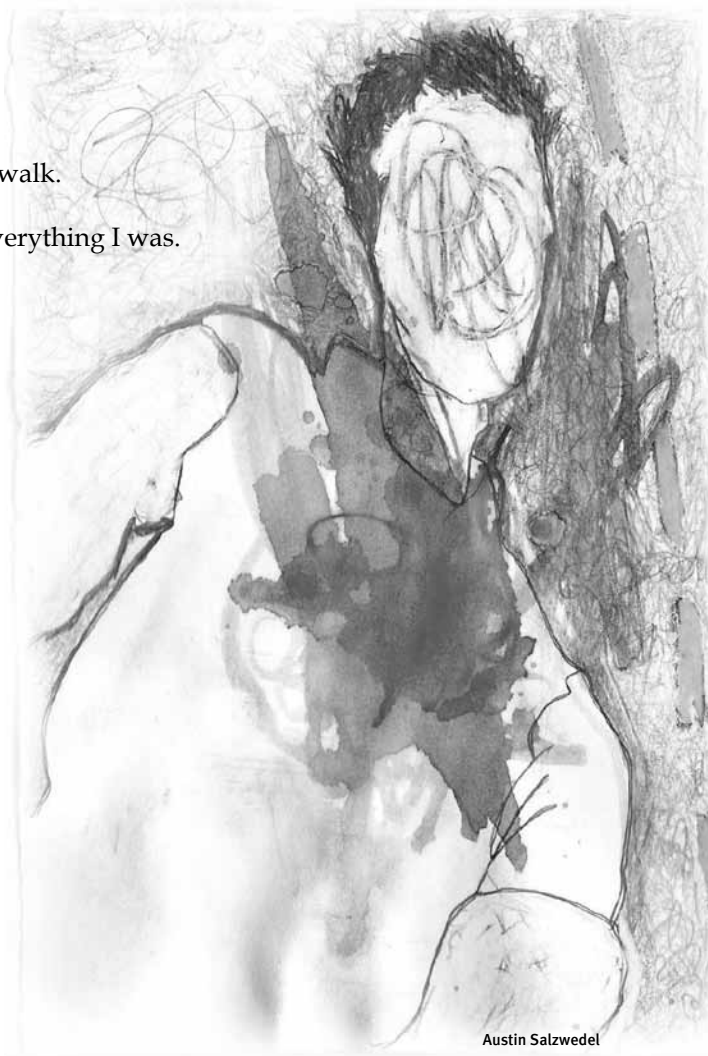
For H. Nemerov

Dear sir struck
dead crossing
the street with a wet
thump rolling
cooperatively up
the windshield,

your poor
weight.
Heavier than man,

you interrupted (you
didn't know) my
conversation on the sidewalk.

For a moment I forgot everything I was.



Austin Salzwedel

Daily Prayer

Dear Jesus, we've been wondering
What was it really that killed you,
Your Golgotha death rising from the hill?

You suffered and died
But we all suffer and die
In our own holy ways.

Was it the plainness of fact?
Nothing's more nullifying, more stubborn.

Your healing hands must still ache
From touching this unalterable carnival.
Aging is being gnawed from every direction
By the length of a day.

At times, not-knowing squeezes me
Between the tips of its fingers
But it hurts worst that I can sleep soundly in the midst.

Did you die from a mortal terror
Of picking up habits? I picture you, Jesus,
Cracking your knuckles with a shudder,

Regretting the way you always
Licked your teeth on the cusp
Of a miracle. Or

The artlessness of need,
Your disappointed first
After-fast bite, asking yourself,
This?

Perhaps you died like Marilyn Monroe
Of ideal, the dead
Weight of it.

You may have carried the whole unconscious
Mutely on your God-being back, the dark hearts
Of everyone who's sick of praying
For bread

Day after God-damn day.

Introduction to Time

I'm sure Methuselah was a chatter box until about 100
then enough's enough.
He stopped falling in love around 400,
flirted for another 30, then began counting sandgrains.
Someone would find him at 2
in the morning, at it,
winking at his fingertip, his beard taller than he.
"Mid-life crisis, perhaps," he'd reply and chuckle sadly.

After this is another minute
then another.
You can spoil a dinner but not dinner itself.
You can make love, but you can't keep it.
As with Spring, fear comes as a surprise,
reminding me of my heart
after so many untouched days.
My eyelids – fear of death – blink black at random.

Monks are so eager to live that they move
to mountain tops, growing vegetables, making all kinds of
silence.
In the back corner of my childhood
closet is the broke-off arm of a porcelain doll
next to the rest of a porcelain doll
no one noticed gone.
God said, I'll either disappear completely or let you suffer
with hints.

Dustin Junkert is a barista, musician and writer tending his little garden in Newberg, Oregon. He recently published an essay in the *New York Times* and poems in *Georgetown Review*, *Barbaric Yawp* and *Willow Review*.



Robert Lacy

Reflections on the Great Wrong Place



Downtown Los Angeles on South Broadway between West Sixth Street and West Seventh Street, circa 1938-1956. Courtesy University of Southern California Libraries.

Los Angeles loomed large in my imagination long before I ever laid eyes on the place. I can remember Bob Hope calling it “six suburbs in search of a city” on his radio show in the late 1940s. I’m not sure I knew what a suburb was back then, but I think I got the idea that the city was some sort of sprawling affair that lacked a central focus. I can remember, too, Jack Benny’s hugely popular radio show of the same period, a continuing laugh line on which had to do with an inter-urban bus route that ran through “Anaheim, Azusa and Cucamonga!” —this last being stretched out for maximum comic effect, “Cooo-ca-monnga!,” which to my twelve-year-old ears was an utterly ridiculous-sounding name for anything. What kind of a crazy place must that Los Angeles be? I thought to myself back then.

I got my first real glimpse of it at age eighteen when the DC-9 carrying me and my high school buddy Bobby Hughes touched down briefly at what is now LAX before continuing on to the Marine Corps Recruit Depot down in San Diego. We had flown all night from Dallas and we reached LA just as the sun was coming up. The

memory I have is of the plane circling out over the Pacific before beginning its final approach. Sunlight was glinting off the water down below, making it sparkle like diamonds. The beaches and the skyline of LA loomed up ahead. It was my first view of the Pacific Ocean and I was mightily impressed. Wow, I remember thinking, we don't have anything like this in East Texas.

With time out for fourteen months on Okinawa, I spent the bulk of the next four years getting acquainted with Los Angeles and the rest of Southern California. My view of it was the standard enlisted serviceman's view: the Hollywood USO, the Cecil Hotel, the Greyhound Bus Depot, Long Beach, Bellflower, the Santa Monica Pier. Bel Air and Malibu were not part of the package. I did spend an occasional weekend in a garage apartment in Pasadena as a guest of the (reluctant) cousin of one of my marine buddies from out at Twentynine Palms. In Pasadena the streets were quiet, the smog not as bad as downtown, the sunlight a bit less glaring. Still, though, I came away from my four-year exposure to the City of the Angels with a decidedly mixed opinion of the place.

Mine was not the only such opinion, of course. Los Angeles has occupied, and continues to occupy, a peculiar place in the imagination of this country. Nobody is neutral about it, and few are positive. Unlike its rival city up the

coast, it's not a place you're likely to leave your heart in. Raymond Chandler, Nathanael West, Evelyn Waugh, Joan Didion: the list of its literary detractors is long and growing. Judith Freeman, whose 2007 book *The Long Embrace* offers a searching, street-level look at LA past and LA present using the peripatetic marriage of Raymond and Cissy Chandler as its vehicle, is only the most recent addition to the chorus. (Amazingly, the Chandlers occupied more than thirty separate addresses in and around Los Angeles during their thirty-odd-year marriage, and Freeman sets out to visit every one of them.) It is Didion, however, herself a native Californian, from Sacramento, who has probably weighed in on the subject of LA the most often.

"In a city not only largely conceived as a series of real estate promotions but largely supported by a series of confidence games," she says in "L.A. Noir," one of her essays in the book *After Henry*, "a city even then [1989] afloat on motion pictures and junk bonds and the B-2 Stealth bomber, the conviction that something can be made out of nothing may be one of the few narratives in which everyone participates. A belief in extreme possibilities colors daily life. Anyone might have woken up one morning and been discovered at Schwab's, or killed at Bob's Big Boy."

I have a son who is a working actor in Los Angeles and I try to get out to

Los Angeles has occupied, and continues to occupy, a peculiar place in the imagination of this country. Nobody is neutral about it, and few are positive. Unlike its rival city up the coast, it's not a place you're likely to leave your heart in.

see him and my grandsons at least once a year. John Lacy has been out there for more than twenty years now, and while he hasn't yet been discovered at Schwab's, neither has he been murdered at Bob's Big Boy. What he has done is carve out a pretty good living for himself in TV commercials, sitcom appearances, and an occasional movie role. He likes his life and he doesn't seem to mind LA. But it has come at a cost. Although he spends his working days in and around Hollywood, he recently moved his family up to Valencia in the Santa Clarita Valley because of the rottenness of the LA schools. This means that he sometimes spends as much as three or four hours a day traversing — or trying to traverse — the LA freeway system, which, as anyone who has been on it lately knows, is as close to a working definition of hell-

He sometimes spends as much as three or four hours a day traversing — or trying to traverse — the LA freeway system, which, as anyone who has been on it lately knows, is as close to a working definition of hell-on-earth as we're likely to get.

on-earth as we're likely to get. It has gotten so bad since I was first there in the 1950s — when it was already bad enough, God knows — that these days it seems like some sort of ongoing experiment designed to measure exactly how much the human species is willing to put up with. At precisely what point, calibrated down to the nanosecond, will the entire population snap? Revolt? Take matters into its own hands?

During my most recent trip to LA, John and I visited two places we had never been to before. Usually when I'm out there we take in Venice Beach because I like to stroll the boardwalk, view the natives in their full recreational plumage. Or maybe we go to the LA

County Museum of Art if there's a good exhibit on view, or the Norton Simon out in Pasadena if ditto. This time, however, we decided to explore a couple of area attractions that, when bracketed together, seemed to me (once I was back home in Minneapolis and thought about it) to provide tidy metaphors for LA's past and LA's future.

The first was the Ronald Reagan Museum up in Simi Valley. This was John's idea. As a family man who spends a lot of time on the freeways

and listens to a lot of talk radio, he has become something of a political conservative as he enters his forties. The museum sits on a hilltop overlooking a sere Southern California landscape in serious need of watering. It is an unabashed shrine to our fortieth President. There are displays depicting his humble

beginnings in Dixon, Illinois; his not-so-carefree schooldays at nearby Eureka College; his early efforts as a radio sportscaster in Des Moines; his ascent to, and successful assault on, Hollywood; and so on. "Win one for the Gipper" ... *Bedtime for Bonzo* ... "Where's the rest of me?" ... GE Theater ... "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down that wall!" — all the familiar touchstones are there. And together they tell a touching story of one man's conquest of the American Dream. He started out with nothing and he made it — and so can you. That sort of thing. It's very much an LA story, where, as Joan Didion reminds us, "[a] belief in extreme possibilities colors daily life."



Bridge crossing the lake in Echo Park, Los Angeles, [s.d.]. Courtesy University of Southern California Libraries.

But maybe not as much as it used to. That Los Angeles's future is not likely to resemble too closely Los Angeles's past would seem to be suggested by the second place we visited: Echo Park, not far from present-day downtown. Going there was my idea. I had recently read a biography of Charlie Chaplin in which I learned that many of his early films, as well as those of Laurel and Hardy, Fatty Arbuckle, Ben Turpin, and Mack Sennett and his Keystone Cops, had been shot in and around Echo Park. That, indeed, Echo Park had been the very birthplace of California movie-making, its primary studio site and its main filming locale long before Hollywood, as Hollywood, even existed. Gloria Swanson used to have a house there. So did Tom Mix. Now, however, squeezed in between Dodger Stadium and the Hollywood and Pasadena freeways in a neighborhood made up largely of Latinos and other immigrants, Echo Park sits neglected and forlorn. It boasts a small lake with a fountain out in it, a boathouse equipped with

paddle boats, a few park benches and walkways, and dozens, if not hundreds, of ducks and geese and their attendant droppings. The boathouse needs paint, the paddle boats sit all in a row unused, the concrete walls reinforcing the lake's shoreline are crumbling away, and vagrants sleep wrapped in sleeping bags and plastic sheets on the park's grass. The day we were there not a single park employee or city worker of any stripe was anywhere to be seen.

We walked around the lake taking all this in, and as we did so my agitation slowly mounted. It wasn't just that the lake and its surrounding park were being so neglected, so poorly treated by the city pushing in all around them. I had hoped and expected to see a memorial or at least a plaque of some sort to Chaplin, Laurel and Hardy, Mack Sennett, and the others and the role they'd played, right there, on that very spot, in making movies the dominant American art form they still are today. But there was nothing. Not a sign or plaque or monument anywhere to suggest to a

visitor that anything interesting and historically significant might ever have taken place on the premises. Nothing. There was a bust of a Cuban refugee hero, Jose Marti, up in the northwest corner of the park, but that was it. Sentimentalist that I am, I was amazed by this. Also appalled.

Of course, LA County's population has been majority Latino for more than a decade now, and certain parts of downtown look more like Mexico City than, say, Kansas City, but still you'd think someone at City Hall would have the wisdom, and the vision, to know that Echo Park was worth preserving, that something pretty important to this nation's history and its cultural heritage had happened there and ought to be commemorated. (According to Wikipedia, there had been until recently an obelisk and a bronze plaque behind a neighborhood commercial building marking the spot where Mack Sennett's studio once stood, "but [it] was demolished in 2007 and the plaque stolen by vandals.")

A city that trashes its own past, particularly if a part of that past was as colorful, even glorious, as this, would appear to be courting trouble. Knowing where we've been helps us determine where we need to go. Hard to imagine Londoners turning their backs on the Tower of London, for example, or the French, Parisians included, ignoring Versailles.

Still, LA fascinates. How did Joan Didion put it? *The conviction that something can be made of nothing may be one of the few narratives in which everyone participates?* Los Angeles's population

was roughly five thousand ragged souls when a knockabout adventurer named Harrison Gray Otis began plumping in his newly purchased newspaper, the *Los Angeles Daily Times*, for public money to build an aqueduct to bring much-needed water down from the Owens River, more than two hundred miles away. This happened barely a hundred years ago. Otis didn't bother to tell his readers that his own land company had bought up much of



Midweek fishing is enjoyed by two-year-old Molly Lewis, 1756 1/2 Glendale Blvd (the redhead), and her five-year-old sister, Jane (brunette) at Echo Park lagoon," circa 1958. Courtesy University of Southern California Libraries.

the acreage over which the aqueduct would pass. The movie *Chinatown* takes its story line from this grand theft water. Fitting that LA's major industry, movie-making, should lay bare in that way the chicanery, the essential smoke-and-mirrors trickery at the heart of LA's founding. "Chinatown" in the movie acts as a metaphor for that which you really don't want to know about, that which is so hopelessly balled up that you will discover it at your own risk—such as the fact, for example, that the Faye Dunaway character that Jack

Nicholson, as private eye J.J. "Jake" Gittes, has become involved with in the movie is the mother of a daughter conceived in incest with her father, the film's archvillain and prime water thief, played by John Huston. It may have been necessary for him, but Jake didn't really want to know that. And as his police-detective friend says to

raw, ransacking spirit of Manifest Destiny that led to the taking of an entire continent, and if LA's founders stole river water, just look at what those who went before them stole. Ask the Iroquois; ask the Seminole; ask the Sioux. (Or for that matter, ask the Spanish and the French.) There are "Chinatowns" all around us, if we care to start looking for them. But we'd be doing so, like poor Jake Gittes, at our own peril.

In many ways a tawdry, compromised place, LA. There's no getting around it. Best not look too deeply, probe too far. Freeman, in *The Long Embrace*, is good on the sort of love-hate relationship the city inspires. Raymond Chandler himself felt it, as she so amply shows. On the one hand he could write tellingly about its grittiness and corruption, its tinsel-town sleaze and its soulless preoccupation with wealth and power. But on the other he loved nothing better than piling

himself and Cissy into his big Packard convertible and cruising up and down the Pacific Coast Highway as far as Santa Barbara. And when he and Cissy finally settled into their "dream house" down in staid, upper-class LaJolla, outside San Diego, he quickly began to long for the quirkiness and excitement of the smog-bound, metastasizing metropolis to the north of them. He felt cut off from his source in LaJolla, he said. And bored stiff.

"The Great Wrong Place," poet W.H. Auden, a big Chandler fan, called the LA the crime novelist depicted in his



Chinatown entrance. Streetscape, circa 1938-1956. Courtesy University of Southern California Libraries.

him at movie's end, after everything has gone completely to hell, "Aw, Jake. Forget about it. It's just Chinatown."

That may be the way official LA feels about all too much of its past, that it's just Chinatown, and is possibly why Echo Park, a positive memory amid all the less pleasant ones, is so neglected today. A case of the baby being thrown out with the bath water.

When you think about it, though, Los Angeles's past—and its gingerly treatment of it—is simply a microcosm of this country's as a whole. The city's founding was accomplished in the same

books. The British-born Auden and other Europeans have always seemed more attuned to what LA represents, for both better and worse, than have their American counterparts. To them Chandler's novels describe, as Freeman puts it, "an alluring world, more formless, more dangerous, more free and exciting—and also more depressing—than found in [Europe], a *modern* world, in other words, which seemed perfectly credible as a description of what went on out there in California, the crazy cutting-edge place that would eventually end up exporting its free-form, violent, consumer-driven, personality-obsessed, and image-conscious culture to the rest of the globe."

So there you have it. Maybe it's time for LA to grow up, accept its dodgy past, honor its genuine accomplishments, and get on with the tricky business of shaping for itself a viable

future. It's still the place where, largely due to the movies, no doubt—and despite the furrowed brows of Didion, Chandler, and their like—much of what we, and a largely admiring, not to say envious, world, think of as the American Way of Life gets its start, whether it's customized hot rods and drive-in restaurants in the 1950s, or jacuzzies and fitness spas in the 70s and 80s, or McMansion housing and hip-hugger jeans right now. Humphrey Bogart taught us how to smoke from out there. John Wayne taught us how to walk. Deborah Kerr and Burt Lancaster even taught us how to roll around in the sand and make out. With all of its problems and accumulated shortcomings it may still be the quintessential American city. If you want to know what the rest of urban America will probably look like ten or twenty years from now, get on a plane, go to LA, and take a peek.



Robert Lacy is the author of a collection of short stories, *The Natural Father*. His essays and short fiction have appeared in numerous magazines, journals and anthologies, among them *The Best American Short Stories*, *Ploughshares*, *The Sewanee Review*, *The Antioch Review*, *The Gettysburg Review*, *Shenandoah*, *The Best of Crazyhorse*, *The Southern Review*, *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, *The Oxford American*, and *North Dakota Quarterly*. He lives in Medicine Lake, Minnesota, with his wife Susan.

John Grey

Morning of the Farmer's Wife

Someone drew this in charcoal
on paper. The woman's bleached white,

gray at the edges. Winter light
x-rays the path... a long spine

of shadow. I'm at the window,
watch her keenly, but I'm not the artist.

Her shoes flee earshot, stop when
they make the break. Eyes freeze.

Bones chill tight. The fear of her own
name is the one thing that thaws.

Don't go to Miami I'd tell her
if she could hear. The heat of

the sun could kill you. And don't
move to the city. You'd suffocate

in the crowds. She's safer
where she is, on a winter's

morning, bucket in hand, on
the way to the hen house.

One woman, still for a moment.
a hundred yards from the house,

collecting herself like she's the eggs
she'll find in the straw...

someone drew this in charcoal
on paper. They left out the sky.

I've heard it was rust-colored
though it was meant to be blood-colored.

Wild Woman

Leave the wild to the wild,
anyone older than twelve
had instructed her from childhood
but she never did listen.
Without hesitation,
she scooped up the dying catbird in her palm.
Crows cawed from the boughs above.
Leave the wild to the wild, was their message also.

The creature was too limp to be afraid.
It tapped its broken wing on her palm
like a blind-man's cane.
Then it twisted its neck
for one clear, last look
at its wild god.
it opened its beak, tried to speak,
but nothing came.

What was I to do,
standing beside my wife
while a tear crept out of her eye,
more life in that drop of liquid
than in the bird's fading body.
I know enough not to tell her
to leave the wild to the wild.

The catbird was just
a small gray mound of feathery death
by this.
So dead, the crows above could taste it.
But she bent down,
dug a small hole in the earth,
buried that creature.

The crows shrieked loudly,
then, one by one, flew away.
to gather at some distant road kill.
She rose up from that modest funeral.
No, she didn't rise,
she ascended.



Mark McKie

Monday Morning, Shipping Town Funeral

By empty factories, I walk slowly.
Everything abandoned keeps to this speed.
Past alleys of nothing but the smell of linseed.
And a boarded up diner...
forever stuck in 99c specials.
What address is this? The number's faded.
And look at that burned-out tenement.
Is anyone at home? Are the ashes of
a child's toy anyone?
I need to make my way toward noises, light.
The world's a graveyard here...
broken bottle crosses
and cigarette butt tombstones.
Is that a boy in the distance swinging his pail?
Or a young girl with no forehead
but a long gold mane?
I must head toward the water,
even if it's dirty, crusting the wooden piers.
Maybe a fish will turn a trick for me,
spin on its tail, open its mouth toward me
like hand-fed Koi.
Finally, civilization, a pub on the corner,
former dock-workers drinking away their retirement.
The boy's waiting outside,
until his old grandfather gets too drunk
to realize he's not drunk enough.
The girl sings "Heigh ho heigh ho" in
a high-pitched strained voice.
Brother and sister. Prince and hand-maiden.
Queen of England and Sir Walter Raleigh.
It's just after noon, a wasted kind of hot.
I cross the empty road to the water.
It's as still and silent as an undertaker's.
My reflection's down there somewhere
though I can't see it.
A new one's arrived says the
dark grimy surface... bury him cheap.

New House

It's still love.
 Paint cans side by side
 like bodies in bed.
 Brushes splashing across shingles...
 need I say more.
 And notice how gently I hammer,
 as if it's your thumb
 with the target painted on it,
 and not mine.
 For the first time in my life,
 nails must not bend,
 should go in straight and true
 as if they were putting you together,
 not hunks of disparate wood.
 It's a new house
 because our names make love
 in two places on the deed.
 And so what if the bills pile up
 atop the kitchen table.
 Two affectionate checkbooks
 will see to them by nightfall.
 I'm on a ladder
 asking you to hand me up that wrench.
 One last thing needs tightening.
 And it's not us.

John Grey is an Australian-born poet who has been residing in the United States since the late 1970s. His work has recently appeared in *Connecticut Review*, *Georgetown Review* and *Illuminations* with work upcoming in *Poetry East*, *Cape Rock* and *the Pinch*. Currently, he works as a financial systems analyst.



Matthew Choberka

Instability, Complexity, and Hopefulness

Making Art



Narcissus, Acrylic, 40" x 40", 2006



New Worlds, Acrylic, 89" x 48", 2006



Detail from *Alternative Energy*, Acrylic, 67" x 96.5", 2008



Detail from *No Can Defense*, Acrylic, 36" x 60", 2008

My current work is focused on abstract cityscapes and interiors, essentially contemporary history paintings depicting our world as a place constantly at war with itself. The work is political, but not partisan; there is blame to go around. Bearing firsthand witness to 9/11 plays no small role in this work. The paintings embody profound challenges we face as a society. Abstract forces in the paintings interact in a fraught and even violent manner. My address to the issues of power, conflict, and uncertainty are, and must be, allusive and metaphoric, rather than discursive or didactic.

For the past several years, I have worked to create a kind of unique pictorial world, predicated on interplay between abstraction and representation, whose nature becomes clearer to me as it evolves from picture to picture. The interplay between pictorial form and content is here symbiotic, as formal invention suggests or even necessitates content, while, in turn, content mandates formal and abstract solutions. I've come to understand that recent events on the world scene have strongly influenced my imagery. As I have said, the pictures are far from overtly political, yet seem to have become filled with my unease with the world that I face, and that my children will inherit.



A Hundred Gates, Acrylic, 67" x 96.5", 2008





"Hast Seen the White Whale?" 2009, Installation at Central Utah Art Center, mixed media on assembled papers, string, tape, chair.

My most recent series of paintings, "Position Papers," engages the instability and complexity of the contemporary world by way of a serial approach to the image that hybridizes the languages of drawing and painting. The images are autonomous, whole on their own terms, and yet function together in a de-centered dialogue, maybe even an argument, in which structures fight for stability within fields of color and light, forms emerge and wane, in a search for a language to embody the world.

Incorporating ink, graphite, colored pencil, and acrylic paint on paper, the pictures are as dependent upon the sense of touch as on the faculty of sight. The abrasive movement of the pen, the rhythmic buildup a pencil marks, and the sweep of the brush condition the realization of the image. In this sense, I feel my way through the pictures. Found within these movements are echoes of war.

Equally interesting to me in these new works are the ways in which they assert both affirmation and negation. The images seem to follow a progression, but they



do not comprise a narrative. Forms gesture and move, but they are not figures. Spaces can be navigated and lived in, but they correspond to no known place. What emerges finally is not representation, but presentation, pictures of that which could not be seen in any other way.

The large-scale installation, "Hast Seen the White Whale?" addresses many formal and conceptual concerns in common with the "Position Papers," though on an immersive, even monumental scale very distinct from the other recent work. A recent reading of *Moby Dick* provided a jumping-off point for an exploration of collage-based imagery, with an approach to installation that responds to the unique parameters of site for the full realization of the piece.

Fundamentally, the content of my painting has become an attempt to find a place for myself in the world. Emotions like apprehension and anger, tempered with a kind of hopefulness have informed recent works. In the paintings, I confront both my identification with humanity, and my (sometime) dissatisfaction with it.



"Position Papers" series, mixed media on paper, 30" by 22", 2009-2011

What is of the greatest importance for me in any given painting is to create a truthful image. All of the elemental forces of painting—form, color, structure, and space—are in service to this aim, perhaps because this is what I am most able to understand. Most importantly, I want the painting to be, in a very real sense, alive—not a rendering or representation of the world, but a world in itself. An image, one that is somehow true, is what I find meaningful in art, and what I seek for myself. The uncomfortable fact is that we are never more ourselves than when we are making art.



"Position Papers" series, mixed media on paper, 30" by 22", 2009-2011



"Position Papers" series, mixed media on paper, 30" by 22", 2009-2011



"Position Papers" series, mixed media on paper, 30" by 22", 2009-2011



"Position Papers" series, mixed media on paper, 30" by 22", 2009-2011 (detail)



Matthew Choberka is a painter and Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Visual Arts at Weber State University in Ogden, Utah. He received his M.F.A. in Painting from Indiana University, Bloomington, in 2005, and previously studied at the New York Studio School, the Hochschule der Künste in Berlin, and Columbia College, Chicago. His paintings and mixed-media works engage the instability and complexity of the contemporary world by way of a serial approach to the image that hybridizes the languages of drawing and painting. His work has been exhibited nationally and internationally, with recent exhibitions at the Governor's Island Art Fair in New York Harbor, Raid Projects in Los Angeles, and Beaux-Arts des Amériques in Montreal. His work is currently represented by galleryELL in Brooklyn, New York and by Beaux-Arts des Amériques in Montreal. Matthew lives with his wife Angela, daughter Olivia, and son Luca in Ogden.

Richie Swanson

Rinehart's Beach



I shot the otter during the evening tide, and he thrashed in kelp, and when the moon finally rose, and he didn't wash up, I figured his mate had carried him like a pup on her breast out to sea, keeping him safe the way they do, so I went up to the cabin to sleep. And at dawn Old Seal Sarah was way down on the beach below, and I took my shotgun down to my hill's drop-off and fired into the air, and Old Sarah slung the otter into her burden basket like she was deaf, and she spun and raced toward Tutuma's Creek, and I aimed beside her feet. The otter might bring eighty dollars. I pulled the trigger. Sand sprayed up. She leapt. She fell, the basket heavy against her back, her legs thin as shadows. A breaker caught her, and she crawled through foam in a panic, scuttling behind beach rocks, and I climbed back to my kettle outside my cabin, beseeching myself. When my brother Charlie and I had built the cabin, Sarah had brought gull eggs to our tent. When the first soldiers, packers and miners had boarded with us, she had left black cod in the hollow-dead cedar where we fermented beer. And after Charlie had left to put up a bakery and saloon in Port Orford, she had traded me a headband of woodpecker crests to hang on my wall for travelers to gossip about.

The wort boiling above the cook-fire smelled scorched, even if it wasn't. Hadn't I learned enough about scattering shot around Indians?

I got my spyglass from the cabin and studied the mouth of Tutuma's Creek, and prints ran beside the shallow slick on the sand, and I figured Sarah had already snuck the otter back to the collapsing lodge where General Sims and Captain Gilman had left Old Blind Tutuma to die in delirium when they had cleared out Selchin's village and the rest of the Seal tribe last October. Old Sarah had hid beneath a logjam until the regulars and volunteers had finished burning things, and she had fed Tutuma flounder broth and mush from old stored acorns through the winter, or so she had claimed, speaking trade talk, making signs. Yet Charlie and I had moved onto our claims in November, and we had never seen Tutuma, though I had ridden partway up his creek this summer and had panned it and had found nothing but charred cedar boards and blackened house pits and mountains of deadfalls, and I had turned around, deciding it better to stay ignorant of him anyway.

I scanned farther along the surf, and two dragoons galloped up the beach, whipping mounts past Tutuma's Creek, showing no signs of seeing Sarah or her prints. They turned abrupt at my creek and rode direct across my cliff, and the taller handed me a letter from General Sims, and I hardly believed the last of the Rogue River Indians had surrendered, the war was over.

"General Sims says he left an old dreamer and other *si'-wash* here last fall," said the taller. "He's ordered to load them on the steamship at Port Orford and see them to the reservation."

"Maybe they're down at Mussel Creek," I said.

"Mussel Creek said up here," said the shorter.

They left for Mount Humbug and Fort Orford, and I fired my oven for bread. I counted my cattle, cleaned my pistol, buried my money box and poke, hid my gold tools in the hollow-dead cedar and tossed shrubs across the trail to it. I swept dust from bunks and counted my liquor and saw the first prisoners about mid-afternoon when the wind started flattening the sea-glitter, and the sun flooded Three Sisters Headland. Chief Jack's band came double file through my spyglass, little brown ants at first, and they wound down the saddle between the first and second Sister, disappearing behind the third, and they came down onto the beach led by Jack himself cocking his chin and strutting into the wind as haughty as he pleased, strings of shell money hanging down his chest, and I could feel his glances cool as a lion's, the battle secrets beneath his headband, all the dead whites on his fingertips.

Braves in war paint followed him, and the women and children trudged and hobbled after them, their feet bare or wrapped in furs or shreds of cloth, the squaws in dresses of torn and filthy grass and dirty printed cotton, their mouths flung open with pangs of grief, baskets overflowing with their last belongings. A string of wagons came next, and finally everyone pulled up at the mouth of my creek — near' two hundred captives, a-hundred bluecoats, a-hundred of Gilman's vol-

unteers, mostly miners skinny as Seal Sarah, their boots tattered and sun-beaten but springy with victory.

General Sims beckoned up to me, his graying hair swept back in a portentous pompadour, his eyes deep-set beneath dire-bushy brows, and I walked down, and he hunched above a squaw sitting up in a wagon-bed, not a Rogue, but a young Seal woman with a chin tattoo and basket cap like Sarah. She had pretty-round cheeks gone sallow and sunken, and she lifted dark-desperate eyes, and as her husband moaned, I near' reeled, smelling the wretched sweetness of his stomach wounds before seeing him writhing in a rope hammock tied to the sides of the wagon.

"She's been asking for the medicine man Tutuma since we turned up the beach," said Sims.

"You favor her?" I said, keeping it in English.

"This is the headman Selchin. He did what you have not. He fought for his home."

The general raised Selchin's bandage irritated: bits of skin flaked from a bulge of musket shots, and a foamy froth leaked from his swellings like a stubborn tide-rinse through the cracks of a rock. I near' recoiled. I shook my head no about Tutuma, for I did not like the prospect of trading two free lives for one with gangrene, and I eyed the squaw deep and sorry, risking no words, and then I led Sims' cooks uphill, and we butchered and roasted two steers, and afterward in the cabin I said I would take gold coin or nuggets in pay, not army scrip worth less than two cents on the dollar.

Sims glowered from my lamp and desk.

"Any news from Congress about funding war notes?" I said.

"If you cease, I will finish my letter to President Pierce," he said.

Captain Gilman raised a glass, standing in the doorway, watching the last wine-color fade from the Pacific. "Here's to the day all the savages are dead, and they cost us nothing," he toasted, and I pushed past him, wishing I had charged him more for his whiskey, he spoke so short about costs.

I walked my cliff-edge—checking and surveying things, I told myself, but I headed for the hospital wagons, thinking a few dollars in coin might buy the squaw, and then mules hawed from the beach, spooked by the night-smells of Indians, the moon sudden above the tree-line, the claps of cannon-surf creeping closer, echoing around the sand and rocks where so many people were confined, forbidden from the hill.

A hostler stepped light through a flood of milky beams down there, petting a mule's muzzle gentle like a woman, and the mules quieted as if Justina Patterson had cooed and kissed at them—Justina who two summers ago had glided out of blue-gray shadows of wagon-bonnets and had stroked the snout of an ox bellowing to the desert moon the same moment I had approached from my guard-post. She had whispered the ox quiet as I had watched from sage-shadow, her hair shiny

and fluffy after a wash day beside the Snake, rumpled from sleeping, and I sprang and clasped her mouth, catching her waist, and she bit my palm, leaning and wrestling, and her body fell easier and softer than I thought, not near' as leathery or sun-tough as her skin had seemed since the Missouri and Platte. "Sh-sh-shush, you Herman Rinehart!" she said, and I spread my fingers across her dress, and her navel rose and sank beneath linen wind-worn and threadbare, and she punched my head like an ox-brow, knocking me onto desert-grit, and then her teeth shone pert, and she smiled over her shoulder as she swished off.

The next evening I had ridden two miles ahead of the train with her father Rue, looking for a campsite, and I had asked, "When we get to Oregon, and you get your land settled, will you let Justina marry?"

"I see you favor her," said Rue, pulling reins tight, gazing at a meadow large enough for our wagon-circle, peppered with grasses for our stock. He raised his musket, aiming it up a creek at three Bannocks spearing at a fish weir, not seeing us, and I raised my barrel too, and he swung his sight to one side, and I to the other. We fired, and the braves lunged, splashed, dove, and Rue whooped and charged, and I kept pace, whooping too, galloping upon the Indians, and they slipped dripping up rocks into timber, and one fell backward across his spear, and we shot pine dust all around him, and later we laughed how fast and long a Bannock could run.

And as the dawn-glow had whitened ripples the next day, Rue and I had pulled wheels from the creek, feeling rims, and I had grinned yes to him, the wood was swollen and would hold the iron tires, and then muskets popped, smoking from the valley-wall, and we ran toward the camp circle, and Justina lay by a doubletree, and we lifted her into Pattersons' wagon, and I watched in shame as Doc Holmes pulled up her blouse, and blood ran across her stomach and freckles.

"Two weeks antiseptic rest," said Holmes, and Justina gritted her smile, wincing her bluebonnet eyes.

All of us knew Bannocks would swarm, and snows would come, and so we wove her a rope bed, and she bore the Blue Mountains silent, and then the froth had foamed from her wounds, and she had shrieked and hollered, smelling like Selchin as we had climbed toward Mount Hood—sweet and dying, destined to be laid beneath boulders at the foot of the peak rising so white and high in sky.

THEY LOADED SELCHIN IN A BLANKET BEHIND A SADDLE, and the squaw sobbed hard like Justina's mother, leaning into the wagon, and then she slumped and beat hands against sand, wailing like something I'd never known, and I fled from the cliff-edge and went way up to the stock trail past the cabin, and moon shadows from the forest-edge wrapped me dark as the ocean floor, and I sat high above the surf-rumble, brooding on a whole world of quicksilver shimmering across the Pacific, my spirit too low and foul to wait on thirsty officers, my

soul feeling the final cold ways of the Reaper and the raw-wet rains of last winter, months of no association with any white female.

Boots shuffled and stopped. Branch-tips scraped. A crane of a man was out in clear moonlight, feeling his way out from behind the shrubs I had tossed across the trail to the dead cedar, his boots sneaking around like coons' paws. Gilman. He carried a sack heavy against his chest and came my way, and I waited quiet as if hunting, not wanting to startle him, and he sat just inside the forest-shadow and dropped the sack in the moon glow, and nuggets knocked, sounding like they could be three, four, five pounds apiece — probably plundered from Jack or some other chief who had taken them from some miner — and now hidden from the general, stashed in haste when Gilman had arrived this afternoon.

Gilman heard my thought in the dark. He swung his head, drawing his pistol, and I spoke my name in an even tone and stood and walked invisible to him, and I sat out in the pulsing light, eyeing his rocks plain, the moonlight pouring down their veins and flecks like smooth white water. "Sims —"

"Sims!" Gilman hissed, pawing whiskers, shaking his head defiant, Indian scalps dancing from his hatband. "He knew Jack had us against a mountain with nothing to eat or drink or shoot, and he let his companies rest three days at Crescent City. Your precious Sims wasn't there when men took arrows for this." He put away his nuggets deliberate and tied the sack tight. "You got no wife yet, do you?"

"No."

"But you got two claims laid out, and the other ain't improved, and no one's on it."

"It's fenced proper. It's got potatoes on it."

"I seen this place just 'fore Jack started his spree, slept in the cedar you're hiding. I was 'bout to file here, but the governor made a call, and I answered."

"The other claim's my brother's. He's up at the fort —"

"Selling beer too, I hear, charging us high as rafters after he 'nored the governor's call just like you." He looked at me disgusted, holding his pistol on top of his sack. "Both of you says you don't want no pay but gold, but I seen you walk down to that squaw, and I say you're not twenty-one yet, not old 'nough to file legal, and you never had any woman at all yet, I see it in your every step!"

I flew on him instant, had him up by his coat collars, flung him downhill, and he sprawled drunk, knelt, pawed for his pistol, and I grabbed his pants-seat and pitched him into manzanita, and I tripped on branches, charging him, and he started uphill, and I tackled him, and we rolled and grappled, his teeth at my face and ears, his nails in my eyes, and I bucked him off, and then he was nowhere, and I caught myself at the cliff-edge, seeing him lying across a strange yellow glow down on the sand — a fire and circle of Indian corpses in blankets.

I lay hidden in wild parsnip, catching my breath, the beach so close here I had thought of building a ladder to it: Gilman scrambled up, limping frantic over scattered-burning logs, and a corpse rose, grabbing a driftwood club, and another and another followed, then Chief Jack—all of them alive as ever. White guards ran up, waving guns, and Gilman shouted my way, and then little balls of flames flared from his hair, and he slapped them, hopping in smoldering trousers, and Chief Jack brushed aside a regular's rifle, demanding a look, and Gilman's whiskers smoked as thick as damp-burning alder. They went *woof* like tinder from a gust, and Gilman threw himself down, yelping, and the regulars fell to him, beating out flames, tossing away coals, slinging sand on him, buckets of water, and they helped him up, and he wobbled and groaned, clasping his face, and Jack threw back his head with four or five other braves, and they yipped like coyotes over a dying elk.

Troops slung arms around Gilman, walking him toward the hospital tent, and the Indians cawed after him harsh as tide crows. "*Lam'-mi-he smoke! Co'-sho smoke! Piu'-piu smoke!*" He smelled like an old woman burning, a hog burning, a skunk, they jaunted in trade jargon.

I hid Gilman's hat and went up and put his pistol and sack on my desk in front of Sims still writing by my lamp. "I took out what Gilman's company owes," I said. "The army is due the rest."

GILMAN'S COLONEL AND LIEUTENANT SAID NOTHING ABOUT GILMAN in the hospital tent during breakfast, for fear Sims would ask about more plunder, I guessed, and when the whole lot left, the captain rode in a floppy-brimmed hat in a wagon-seat, a clean white bandage wrapped from chin to nose, looking like a masked highway robber turned into a theater mummy, or the other way around.

I followed the train with my spyglass, and I found Selchin's widow neither in any wagon nor walking with squaws. But bands from south of the Rogue straggled past for days—Chetcos with more pretty-round faces—an inland tribe with blue-eyed squaws with French-looking chins—a Pistol River band with a mink-eyed widow with a boy who might split rails or tend stock—all kinds of Indians hacking with fever coughs, speaking any number of tongues—all with thirsty and hungry escorts starved for stories of black-sand strikes on beaches, ways of clearing and planting Land Donation Claims, the cost and compliance of Chinese wives.

One day a dragoon told me the army had finished with stragglers, and the steamer had returned to Port Orford for another load of Indians. And the next morning Old Seal Sarah skittered through the fog along the mouth of Tutuma's Creek, the first she had showed herself since the otter. Another squaw followed, and I rode down, and Sarah was pulling at the flipper of a fresh-dead seal, and Selchin's widow was cutting it with an army-issue knife, her hair in new-delicate braids against her cheeks, her skin come back from sallow but not so dark

really, her chin-tattoo not so deep it wouldn't fade, her eyes the rich-brown sheen of otter fur, fixed stubborn as a church woman's on her task. Sarah cackled about the shotgun, and I asked if she had traded my otter to soldiers, and she hardened the webs of cracks on her face, kneeling beside the seal with Selchin's widow to butcher it. I tossed down a rope, and the squaws tied it around the seal, and my pinto mare dragged it out of sight into spruce beside the creek, and then Sarah signed how Tutuma would sing both seal-flippers from Selchin's grave, and Selchin would eat them in the other world across the sea.

Selchin's widow – Euchinasahata – Selchina – caught my eye, maybe half-believing, maybe just nervous about soldiers, needing protection, and a glance was all she gave, but it run sure beneath my skin, seeping real as the creek water down into sand, and I offered Sarah a longer-sharper knife and five dollars in gold coin, and Sarah looked up the creek, and I nodded I understood, I would go ask Tutuma, and Sarah answered in jargon. "He'll give his granddaughter – maybe. I snuck her to him. He knows you're good for her, she'll live at home. He won't come out. He won't let you find him. Your cabin is where we used to burn for berries. Your beach is where we played shinny and dug clams. You fed men who killed us. You make a poison he has no medicine for."

Selchina lowered her lashes, guarding against any more glances, and a bear growled in my loins, a big-bull sea lion, and I spurred my mare so she squealed on our way out of the spruce, and I reared with her in the sun on the sand, and I galloped her up and down the marks from the seal and squaws.

I checked harnesses, made a list for Port Orford, added French blue beads, mirror beads, ribbons red as a woodpecker's crests, a winter-wool dress, chocolate for a cake, a book of poems. I boiled bottles to fill and trade in town, put them on my sorrel mare and led her through the woods toward the casks, and she smelled Indians as adept as any government mule, balking as we skirted an old game pit dug by squaws, deep enough to catch elk or even cattle when the top was covered by branches.

Sarah's voice echoed faint from the cedar – the tree a towering chamber heady with beer fumes inside, wide as a burned-out redwood, its doorway a blackened fire-scar just five-feet high.

"Hal-lo!" I hollered.

Selchina and Sarah ducked out, the old squaw holding an old otter cape she had planned to leave, shiny with a fresh pelt sewed to it. "This is for your wedding," she said. "If you beat your wife, your brother pays the fine, and she leaves."

"A'ha," I said. "*Kwa'h-ne-sum.*" Yes, forever.

"You give the woodpecker crest back to Tutuma," she said. "He keeps all the seal, whales and fish on the beach."

"A'ha," I said again. "*Kwa'h-ne-sum.*"

THE OLD SQUAW SAT ME AGAINST MY CABIN'S DOOR AND MADE A BRIDAL PATH, laying down two rows of shell-money strings, and she drummed on a hand-log, humming, and Selchina walked the path, her lashes still low, her chin stiff, her hair oiled, and she sat beside me, and Sarah slipped the otter cape over our heads, saying in her Seal way we should stay under one roof, be true like otter pairs. She tossed broken bits of shell money on the fur, and she hummed herself inside, getting the woodpecker band, and I slid my hand to Selchina's waist, turning, and the cape fell off clumsy, and Sarah was already walking off, arching her head against her basket's head strap.

Selchina and I went into the cabin, and I pecked her mouth, and she smelled of the blubber she had cut a few hours ago, tasted like the seal-paunch she had blown into an Indian flask. I felt her braids greasy, and she looked away, but the bear growled strong, and I kissed her neck, rubbing her hips eager, and she pulled my hands away. "*Wake,*" she said. No. She put my fingers the places she wanted. "*A-ha,*" she murmured, yes, and I unbuttoned my trousers, and she slid on me like a great slow breaker, roiling, breathing an ocean wind, and I near' screamed, so grateful was I, but we went to my creek afterward, and she rubbed hemlock needles on my skin, and they did me no good, for we lay beneath my bearskin that night, and she rolled and wiggled like a snake shedding scales—a goby or eel leaving fish-scum—full of sin—for her tide smelled sweet, and our sweat ran like foaming froth, and I had not swum oxen and wagons and cattle across rivers all the way from Iowa, had not watched Justina and others die, so I could make seed with someone with roots so simple as seal flippers and under-worlds across the sea, someone wrong with my country's god, someone already broken and soiled by a savage headman, and unequal to make the land here grow its bounty for all who gave so much to settle her.

Yet I slept supine, and I woke woozy and wondrous, eyeing the brand on Selchina's chin, charcoal lines fluttering in candlelight, her lips and cheeks dusky but beautiful, moving so quiet in sleep she cut me deep.

"Herman! Herman Rinehart!" A voice boomed outside, a horse tramped around the cabin, I clutched Selchina. "This is Corporal Dillon Jasper, Company D, Ninth Division, U.S. Army!" He pounded the door. "*The Columbia* embarks tomorrow! I am ordered to take any *si'-wash* however old or young or crippled!" He banged the window-board, and Selchina leapt up, snatching my musket, and she pumped the ramrod expert.

Jasper hammered a notice on the door, and she stood ready, aiming at the rattling-iron bar, and I leaned up, and she aimed at me. I signed for silence, and finally the hooves went downhill. She opened the window-board expert too, and we peered out. "I'll get a wedding paper, and they'll be damned," I said.

She pressed brown-skinned breasts against my back, rubbing nipples against my skin, stirring me, her voice near' breathless in my ear. "Get a paper for Tutuma, a paper for Old Sarah. Get one for Selchin's brother, Selchin's brother's son, all the Seal who lived here. Say it's all right for everyone to come back and live with you, *everyone*."

"Can't!" I said, flinging my arm backward, and she went flying against my desk, the lamp crashing, and I shoved her as she rose, and she careened against the stovepipe, spinning away, and I swatted the back of her head, the pipe clanging, wood ash puffing, and she scuttled as if to hide beneath a bunk, and I pitched her onto my bed, and she hit the wall and stiffened, pulling the bearskin up across her body, her glare wet with terror, and I shook my musket at her, my pistol. "No, you, never!" I yelled. "Don't shoot a white! They'll hang you!"

She gawked bleeding from the chin, and I threw myself across her lap. "*Sick tum'-tum*," I said. Sick in heart. Sorry.

She yanked my hair until I shrieked, and she bit my shoulder, sank teeth to bone, and blood trickled warm down my back, and I bore it until she stopped and spat between my eyes.

"Know Chetco Jenny?" she said. An Indian agent had whipped Chetco Jenny naked through Port Orford in broad daylight, and braves had caught him later, and she had eaten his heart. "If you can't say Euchinasahata, don't say Selchina. Call me Seal Jenny, so you don't forget," said Seal Jenny.

I WROTE TO CHARLIE TO PAY A PREACHER OR CLERK. And after the steamer left again, near' emptying the fort, Jenny and I took a four-horse team, and they trotted hesitant at first, blinded by fog-pockets and shy of surf-booms and all the slippery heaps and long-tangled loops of washed-up bull kelp. But the sun came out, the tide-flat opened up, mud-clods splattered against buckboards, and the horses caught the spank and rhythm, lathering, and when a little flash glinted on a hill, we kept on, for I had told Sarah to stay hidden at Tutuma's Creek, and we would make it through the tide-tunnel in Francis Drake Rock, save five miles over cliffs and shortcut to the backside of Mount Humbug, load supplies from Charlie's wagon, make testimony and return with our marriage-paper by dark.

And then the tide-flat slanted steep with cobbles. The horses labored, veering. A rock popped loud in back-slosh, the pinto mare slid into the dappled-gray. More pops cracked, Jenny flew over the bench. My shoulder slammed backward, burning, and the wagon jerked, dragging, and Jenny slid smearing blood across the tilting bed, and my shoulder bled too.

I sat up for reins sure we weren't truly shot—cobbles popped, not muskets—but Gilman stood atop a beach rock, reloading, drawing his musket's sight to his face long, swollen, yellow, purple, and I fished for my pistol, and my arm wouldn't, and a ball banged the seat-bench,

and Jenny crawled beside a wheel, and I dropped scurrying behind horses screaming, trying to roll up from flanks, my musket back beside the seat. Gilman fired, and Jenny slapped down onto a mound of kelp, losing her feet, arms flailing, and I plunged into the seaweed, muscling through water and stems one-handed, and I sank in a deep pool of urchins and came up gasping behind barnacle rocks, and balls sprayed water, pinging and scattering shell-crust.

Gilman pried a board beneath the wagon-seat, finding some of his nuggets, my coin box too, and he strutted around the urchin-pool, pointing my musket at me, smirking, and I slumped weak, bracing myself, reaching left-handed for drenched pistol, and he cocked the hammer, and a wet-brown whip snapped his hand. The musket dropped, and he stooped for it, turning to Jenny, and a second rope of bull kelp ripped the air. The float-bulb thudded against his temple, and he turned to Sarah's cackle, and Jenny raced behind him, legs wheeling nimble, blade flashing, and Gilman and Jenny fell, and I pushed myself up. But I slumped again, and then Old Sarah hovered above me, the spyglass hanging from a horsehair strap, borrowed no doubt when I had kissed at Jenny beneath the otter cape.

I shivered in the cold water, feeling light-headed, pain against skin, insides throbbing salty, and then I saw only murk, and it seemed I was lifted past Gilman propped against a rock, his chest sliced open, and the squaws seemed somewhere ahead, fretting over horses, and I rode hollering and bouncing against buckboards, my shoulder foaming tide-water sweet, and then I lay supine again, pulsing hot, dreaming thirsty and flighty on and on.

NOTHING BUT SURF DRUMMED INSIDE MY HEAD.

Seabirds...coyotes...panthers chanted.

Brittle-little crab-claws raced across me.

Cannon-waves clapped.

Fish lips fluttered at me.

The gummy smell of spruce pitch woke me, steaming oily with elk, and Jenny rubbed the salve on my skin, plastering trillium and vine



Barbi Bell

leaves across my musket wounds, and I wasn't in fever, wasn't swollen or hurting.

Old Sarah brought a bucket of water beside my feather bed, and black worms lay like tiny gobies across the bottom. "Tutuma sang—pulled—sucked these poisons out of you," she said.

"The captain missed me." Jenny showed me scars. "Beer bottles broke. I slid through foam and got cut. I slipped on kelp, and barnacles cut me."

She took me outside, and Tutuma rose from a dome of brush-trunks behind the cabin, nodding straight into the sun, his eyes rolling behind narrow slits, pale and oozy like clam flesh. His face glistened wet on sharp-edged bones, for he had been sweating, weeping, wearing only loincloth, and I sat on his log, and he rubbed my knees with fingers long like octopus tentacles, flaky like withered bark, and I said nothing to his silence but *mah-sie*, thank you.

"Euchinasahata," he said, toothy and impossible, repeating the sounds for me slow, and then Charlie stepped from the forest-edge, wearing a new derby from Germany, new leather vest, new green-flannel shirt, and he held a shovel-handle beside mutton-chops, carrying the new spade he had used to dig a fresh animal pit farther back in the woods, big enough for three people to hide inside when the law returned.

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Luke Fernandez

Cultural Encounters

Memories of Privilege and Deprivation in 1970's Spain

I remember in the late spring of 1971 thinking about our family's upcoming field trip to northern Spain. My father had just earned a year and a half sabbatical from Dartmouth College where he was a professor of anthropology. He, along with my mother, had established a field site in the Asturian village of Felechosa during the mid sixties. We were about to return there so they could continue ethnographic work.

I could only recall fleeting memories of our previous trip in

1965—an ornery goat pushing my mother and me out of a pasture, and being given a sip of sweet black coffee in a dimly lit village kitchen. My older sister recalled a bit more, and between her recollections and my parents' slides I was able to anticipate a little of what I thought awaited me. When one of my father's students asked me whether I was looking forward to the trip, I said that I wasn't sure. Instead of Hanover's paved streets and the green lawns of New Hampshire, I knew, from looking at the slides, that we were going someplace with cobblestone streets. Not nicely laid cobblestones but un-crafted rock gathered from the local river with plenty of mud and dirt to grout the gaps. Indeed, enough mud and dirt that most of the kids, in the slides anyway, seemed to be walking around in the streets in rubber boots or wooden shoes called *madrenyas*.



Felechosa, Spain, circa 1966. Boys pretending to herd, the corn cobs representing cattle. Photograph by Renate Fernandez.

I couldn't articulate all of this to my father's inquiring student, but it was summed up in my pronouncement that we were going someplace "muddy." Left unregistered was the fact that even though my parents were giving up the accoutrements of easy American suburban living, my sacrifice, with respect to the mud anyway, was as big as theirs. After all, being only an average second grader's height, I was a lot closer to the mud than they ever were likely to be, and, knowing my parents as only a child does, I could pretty much count on them prodding me to muck about in it if I ever wanted to make friends with all the other boys.

As it happened, my trepidations were not very misplaced. My father, for some reason unfathomable to me, had chosen to study a village in the rainiest and greenest place in all of sunny yellow Spain. Most people probably think of the color yellow when they think of the Iberian Peninsula. Yellow is the color of the wheat fields on the high arid Spanish meseta. It's the color of Spanish paella, and it colors a large portion of the Spanish flag. If Spain doesn't evoke yellow, it usually evokes the color red, whether one is thinking, again, of the Spanish flag, or chorizo, or the ubiquity of red wine. But our part of Spain was really mostly green or gray — green verdant fields watered by the seemingly endless drizzles from gray skies blowing in from

the Cantabrian Sea. These colors, as they were embedded in the rain, the muck and cattle dung, became constant companions.

I remember on our first day in the village I was balancing on a fence and, spying a big mound of dirt, I jumped onto it. But the dirt turned out only to be a large pile of cow dung that had been scraped out of a nearby cattle stall. A few days of rare sun had crusted over the mound, so it looked solid to my inexperienced eyes. But when I leaped onto it, I sank at least up to my knees. My mother took me down to the river where I washed off. I'd learned an important lesson, but it was hardly my only battle to keep the muck at bay. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

It must have been right after Dartmouth's second winter quarter when we left because I remember driving south from New Hampshire to New York City and the snow-covered ground gave way in the car ride down. Being in second grade, I didn't need to travel to a foreign country to experience something novel, and I remember noting with some surprise that the climate actually seemed to get warmer as we drove south — apparently winter didn't happen everywhere at the same time, although up to that moment in my life I must have thought that it did.

Although we returned to the United States on a plane, on the voyage out we

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embarked on the Leonardo da Vinci, one of the many ocean liners soon to be displaced by the jet age. The first day on the ship was fun, and I distinctly recall steaming out past the Statue of Liberty and my mother, who'd emigrated to the U.S. from Germany at the inception of WWII, observing how happy and relieved the passengers had been to see the Statue on her voyage in. A lot of people on her ship, including her mother, hadn't been too sure whether they were really going to make it to America from war-torn Europe.

Although I'm sure our transatlantic crossing out was relatively uneventful compared to my mother's passage during the war, from the perspective of a second grader it still wasn't without incident. For one thing, the ship was big and appeared to me rather labyrinthine. More than once I got a lump in my throat while trying to navigate back to our cabin from daily wanderings. I guess my mother figured that on a ship it was ok for a kid of my age to roam freely. While I must have appreciated this freedom when wandering out, I was less happy when it came time to make my way back to the cabin. Its precise location eluded me, and it seemed that more than once it took forever to locate it. The voyage was also my first exposure to the highs and lows that so often accompany leaving home. I'd never experienced lavish food service (although having never seen a waiter or a white tablecloth before, anything

I distinctly recall steaming out past the Statue of Liberty and my mother, who'd emigrated to the U.S. from Germany at the inception of WWII, observing how happy and relieved the passengers had been to see the Statue on her voyage in. A lot of people on her ship, including her mother, hadn't been too sure whether they were really going to make it to America from war-torn Europe.

would have appeared extraordinary). But with fine food also came seasickness, that culminated, when I was lucky, with throwing up into the sea, or once, when I was unlucky, into the bed sheets.

After six days, the Leonardo anchored off the Rock of Gibraltar and we took a smaller ship to shore. As I learned later from one of my father's graduate students, in the scheme of anthropological arrivals ours was a very soft one. (As this student recounted to me, he'd made his plans to go to his field site in Indonesia with very little money, and when the time came to fly there he was running a fever of 103. He couldn't afford to delay, so he took the flight anyway and landed in Jakarta delirious, with his fever still in tow.) My parents found a hotel in Algeciras with a room that had a balcony overlooking a small orange grove. The bathroom had a

bidet, which I'd never seen before, but I didn't have the apocryphal American encounter with this curious device, very likely because of some warnings from my well-traveled mother.

Probably because I wasn't terribly literate yet, I took special note of the water fixtures which were dotted either blue or red—a much more sensible choice of signs than the “H” and “C” stamped on the faucets that we'd left back in the States. In the coming months I was to experience some serious culture shock and some acute longings for home. But the colored bathroom fixtures and the



Felechosa, Spain, circa 1966. Panorama of village. Photograph by Renate Fernandez.

more intuitively designed road signs made a lot more sense to my simple iconographic mind than the more lettered forms of bath and roadside communication common in America.

I'm not sure whether most anthropologists make a bee line for their field sites once sabbatical begins (I'd guess they might), but this didn't seem to be my parents' plan—we did a good deal of wandering. First we went to Casas Viejas to visit a friend of my father's who was researching a book on the anarchists of the region, whose uprising sparked the Spanish Civil War in 1936. For me, Casas Viejas was more significant in that it marked my first, but hardly my last, encounter with loose bowels in a foreign land. As a second grader I was naturally oblivious to Casas Viejas's historical significance. My field of vision wasn't as confined as it had been a few years earlier, but it was still very narrow. In Casas Viejas my most memorable experience was, like in Algeciras, bathroom related. Unlike American toilet bowls, the toilet bowl I used in Casas Viejas contained very little water, and the water reservoir was mounted high overhead instead of at the accustomed location directly behind the toilet. To flush, instead of pushing a chrome handle on the toilet itself, one pulled on a chain. This action released a deluge into the bowl (and was accompanied by the suction of rushing water) that was much stronger than any flush I'd

experienced in the States. This was the predominant toilet design that I encountered in Spain at the time. Occasionally when we were staying at fancier hotels, I'd come across designs that looked like American ones, and sometimes when we were at a bar or cafe I'd wander into the men's room and be confronted with a simple ceramic square with two raised footpads and a hole in the center. But the design I usually encountered had had the big reservoir overhead with a bowl that held very little water except during the actual flush.

I don't think I dwelled on these differences at the time. The toilets were simply one novelty among many others that I tried to adjust to without extended reflection—new stuff was coming at me much faster than it is now and there wasn't time for this kind of thing. But it's still a core memory and a defining experience for me in moving from one culture to another. Now that I'm 47, I tend to look for more edifying details when contrasting European living to American life, but I'm pretty sure that as a second grader, edification wasn't a concern.

From Casas Viejas in the heart of Andalusia, we drove west to Lisbon where my father was picking up a beige colored Land Rover that had been shipped there from Britain and whose purchase, I'm pretty sure, was being defrayed by some grant money. In later years my parents simply leased standard

European cars that they would pick up in Paris and drive down to Spain. I don't think we actually really needed a Land Rover to do fieldwork (I certainly don't remember a lot of off-road driving), but maybe it was just one of those accoutrements of field work, like a portable

to read in Iberia as a way of learning the language. However sunny and nice Lisbon appeared to me, my father couldn't have been too pleased in idling away three weeks, and if I wasn't tuned into the problem directly, there were at least signs of tension in the fact that

we kept moving to progressively cheaper hotels, and my father kept complaining about the "fat cat" custom agents who were waylaying his carefully laid research plans.

I was insulated from these worries, and as a result, I remember these early days in Lisbon fondly, except that it was the place where I first confronted privilege as an experience,

if not as a word, with a full panoply of academic resonances. As a seven year old, I was much too young to frame the experience in reference to a word or to the broader interpretive problems which my parents must have struggled with in their ethnography. But that didn't mean that I was oblivious to them, or that my parents allowed me to be oblivious to them, and various incidents served to introduce the problems to me.

On our way to Lisbon we stopped briefly in another big town (probably Seville), where I spied horse-drawn carriages ferrying well-clad people around the city streets. The livery was fairly ornamental and the mode of transportation novel, so naturally I expressed an interest in sampling it. But my parents resoundingly rejected the idea, probably because, as anthropologists, they wanted



Felechosa, Spain, circa 1971. The Fernandez' sporting madrenyas. Photograph by Renate Fernandez.

Olivetti typewriter, that seemed like a need at the time.

My parents ended up paying dearly for the Land Rover, if not in price, at least in time and headache, because when we got to Lisbon the Land Rover wasn't ready for delivery, and we ended up spending the next three weeks waiting for it to be processed through customs. I don't have a clue what my father did all day, but to bide the time my mother took me and my brother and sister around to different pastry shops. We hung out at the park, watched countless military parades, and began, probably at my mother's instigation, to keep scrap-books, journals and stamp collections, and to puzzle through comic books that my mother would never have allowed us to peruse when in the States but which we were allowed

to maintain some distance from an experience, which in retrospect, was oriented to tourists. My understanding of the situation was different. The people in the carriages enjoyed a level of refinement and grace, which my parents apparently couldn't or didn't want to afford. As a result I felt a sense of distance between what we were doing in Spain and what these other foreigners were doing. My parents probably felt a sense of satisfaction in maintaining this distance. As anthropologists they probably thought there were certain virtues in avoiding the experiences of tourists and travelers, but from my standpoint it simply felt like deprivation and unattained social status.

I became more aware of the real (or imagined) differences between what my parents were trying to experience (or at least record) and what a tourist was trying to experience the longer we stayed in Spain, but I certainly didn't understand these things at the inception of our trip, and since we were taking luxury ocean liners and staying (at least occasionally) in nice hotels and driving a vehicle (e.g. the Land Rover), which drew more attention than a typical Spanish car, the differences confused me. Much to my parents' embarrassment, I quickly zeroed in on the Spanish hotel rating systems and diligently recorded in my journals the number of stars that were accorded to each hotel we stayed at. It may have been that my father's National Science Foundation grant was particularly well funded, that my parents were profligate,

or that Spanish upscale hotels in the early '70s were much more affordable to the American academic class than they are now. But whatever the fiscal reasons, we did manage to stay in at least a few, and I began most of my journal entries with the proper star observations.

When we first arrived at our hotel in Lisbon, a porter no older than myself took our baggage upstairs. While this seemed curious to me, I don't think the import of it was driven home to me until my father commented on it. I don't recall what he said exactly, but I know that a bit of filial security withered in the aftermath. I might be the son of a middle-class American anthropologist who got to experience the luxuries that attend this unique place in the world, but I hadn't done anything to deserve this place. In fact, but for the grace of god or happenstance, I might have been the



Felechosa, Spain, circa 1966. Children on cart. Photograph by Renate Fernandez.

porter lugging the Fernandez' luggage up to the room. I can't say for sure whether my father's comment was sparked by a perception that a son of his was a little too interested in the finer things in life,

whether he was trying to show how culture is tied up with fortune, or whether he thought that he could reconcile his own qualms about doing anthropology and having a little luxury by asking me to tackle the problem. If it was the last of these, I probably didn't meet this challenge very well (in his eyes anyway) since I maintained the record of hotel stars more assiduously the longer we traveled.

My parents' desire to restrain the casual embrace of luxury and materialism and to cultivate its opposite was

expressed on other occasions as well. For example, my mother counseled me to enjoy our various hotels' amenities while they lasted, because when we reached our field site, things like hot water would be in scant supply. She must have been in close communication with the villagers because her predictions panned out. When we got to Felechosa, the only

flat that was available didn't have central heating or hot water. Instead of jumping in the shower, we'd heat water on the stove and mix it with cold water in the bidet. In fact, that's what I thought bidets were for: an appliance for facilitating sponge baths when the faucet with the red mark failed to deliver what it promised. The one time I took a shower as opposed to a sponge bath, my father told me how it was building character and that for sure this was distinguishing me from all of the coddled friends I'd left back in New Hampshire. The character-building must have had a transitory effect, because when I returned I certainly didn't notice that I'd become better or

tougher than my peers. Maybe if New Hampshire had suddenly lost all its hot water, I could have shown my friends my steely fortitude, but somehow this opportunity didn't arise.

Our suburban life in New Hampshire was very middle class compared to what I was experiencing abroad, and this befuddled me. Up until our voyage, I hadn't experienced (or at least couldn't recall experiencing) a hotel, let alone a luxury hotel, or a fully liveried horse drawn carriage, or an ocean liner that

was designed to lavish passengers with the accoutrements of the good life. On the other hand, I hadn't experienced the harrows of diarrhea and seasickness or the muck and dung that confronted me once we arrived at our field site. I realized that, compared to the villagers, it sure looked like we were well off. Once I appalled my mother by uttering "we're rich" in a way that

only a second grader can, before one has adopted more adult sensibilities about how exactly to speak about wealth. But if we were relatively rich in local terms, it wasn't without a set of deprivations that wore greatly on the mind of a second grader. I'd had to leave all my toys at home, including my bike. Our apartment in the village didn't have a phone or hot water, and our furnishings were very bare. Instead of a proper closet, I lived out of a steamer trunk. Once, when I grabbed some loose pesetas and attempted to go down to the corner store to buy an ice cream, I was stopped by my parents who said we could no longer afford these trivial expenses—

Instead of jumping in the shower, we'd heat water on the stove and mix it with cold water in the bidet. In fact, that's what I thought bidets were for: an appliance for facilitating sponge baths when the faucet with the red mark failed to deliver what it promised.

according to them “the dollar had dropped,” and things that had once been affordable suddenly were not. Other deprivations also were hard to endure. The lack of corn flakes and rice krispies, peanut butter, ketchup and frozen concentrated orange juice were staples of a civilized life, and I think I missed them more than I would miss a cup of coffee now that I’m an adult.

My parents themselves were used to the hardships of the field. In the ‘50s they did field work in western and southern Africa and lived in pretty trying circumstances.

One photo of my father in equatorial Africa portrays an uncharacteristically gaunt man poling a dug-out through a swamp. He looked this way, according to my mother, because he was afflicted by malaria and intestinal parasites that, again according to my mother, were particularly hard

for a man to endure because the afflicted would occasionally “give birth” to a long worm while on the toilet.

So my parents were no strangers to hardship or to primitive field sites. In Spain, my father was primarily interested in a group of people who made modest livings through agriculture or through mining, and in the differences between these two lifeways. This interest, together with left-of-center political inclinations, made him skeptical of anthropologists who made a profession of studying (and being around) the wealthy. For a time

I think he was even more comfortable around farmers and miners than around the Spanish middle class that was emerging in the wake of the Franco years. Their sensibilities were more in keeping with his than the growing number of metropolitan Spaniards who today consume Pedro Almodóvar’s racier films. All of these things (along with the vocation of anthropology itself) predisposed my parents to regard luxury and easy living with some ambivalence.

Given these commitments, I was allowed to experience and appreciate

some luxuries, but not in the full and guilt-free way that might have had more appeal to a seven-year-old. If I’d been wiser I might have been able to anticipate these ascetic challenges based on the fact that during our previous trip to Spain, when I was three, my parents had celebrated



Felechosa, Spain, circa 1966/1972. Harvesting ‘escanda.’ Escanda, the only wheat that can be grown in Northern Spain, is hard to harvest. Its yields are low compared to wheat that is grown on the Spanish plain. Photograph by Renate Fernandez.

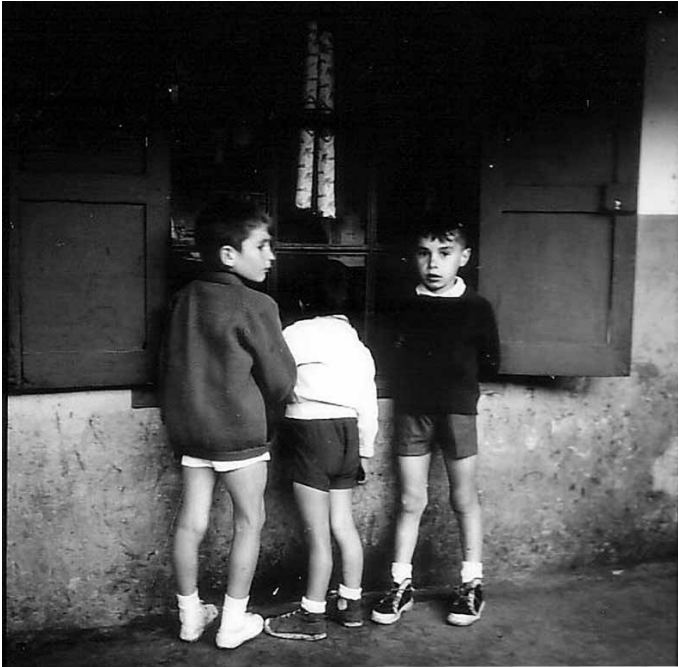
Christmas by giving me a picture of a tricycle rather than an actual tricycle. This made sense to them since we were abroad at the time and couldn’t be burdened by a lot of material possessions. The picture was supposed to stand in for the actual material item until we got back to the States. As a three-year-old I was being given a nice material good — but not before learning about delayed gratification and the difference between virtual and real possessions. During our 1971 trip I was offered similar lessons as well. Toward the latter half of our first

summer, my parents felt that I wasn't picking up Spanish as quickly as they would have liked. So to force an immersion experience, they let the local priest, Don Francisco, drive me up to a high

sympathy, she brought a mattress up the following day for me to sleep on, which definitely seemed like a privilege since everyone else in the household was sharing a bed. But somehow the father took the mattress over as his own, and I was still left sleeping with the son – as he explained it to me, he was working hard in the fields and needed it more than I did.

Privilege and hardship weren't always doled out by my parents through design. Sometimes they were experienced through happenstance. For example, when school started in the fall (a one-room affair with one "maestro" teaching first through fourth grade), beatings regularly were meted out for disciplinary infractions or whenever a teacher thought the student was exhibiting sheer idiocy. These involved slaps on the head, kicks on the butt, and general admonishments about how stupid someone was. From my

perspective, they were quite dramatic affairs to watch – I certainly hadn't seen anything like this in the States. It definitely made me watch my step. Still, one day I did commit a small infraction which my deskmate dutifully reported to the teacher, and I steeled myself for a beating. It never came, though. As the maestro explained to my deskmate, I was special and needed to be treated differently. I can't recollect exactly what made me special – maybe he said I was especially stupid – but it probably had something to do with my father's lofty educational attainments (as seen from the perspective of the maestro) and probably because my own stumbling Spanish didn't qualify as the same sort of idiocy which the maestro was interested in punishing.



Felechosa, Spain, circa 1966. Boys window-shopping. Photograph by Renate Fernandez.

mountain summer pasture where he left me for a week with a family that was harvesting hay and taking care of their cows. We lived in a summer stable which we shared with the cows and some goats. It didn't have any plumbing, and at night we burned oil lamps for light. I don't think my parents researched the situation too closely beforehand because, for the first week, I found myself sharing one bed with the father and his son. I imagine that this arrangement would have been easier for a seven-year-old to adjust to than someone who was older, but I still don't remember the sleeping arrangements as very comfortable. After the first week, my mother came up to check on how things were working out and I told her about the crowded sleeping. Taking

In the winter we moved to the city — the lack of heating and hot water was simply too much to endure over the winter months in the mountains — and there I enrolled in a much larger school where the teacher didn't care a wit who my family was. Because I was placed in second grade rather than third as a result of my still faltering Spanish, I tended to act out around my classmates, who were a little younger than I, and this provoked the ire of the professor. Unlike the village maestro, the city maestro seemed to single me out, and I received some memorable slaps across the face for various infractions. This, over the course of an entire life, has been my only experience with corporal punishment, and I think it actually did build character — for a while, anyway, I was much less afraid of physical punishment.

When we returned to the States in the fall of 1972, other things eventually subsumed the experience of privilege and deprivation. But there were two events that made me revisit it before life went on to other things. The first happened directly when coming back to our house. We'd stored all of our possessions in a locked closet so that we could rent the house out. Now that we'd returned, I eagerly asked to have it unlocked, envisioning the treasure trove of toys that I imagined I'd left behind for the last year and a half. But when we actually opened the closet, the experience was very anticlimactic. There weren't any toys — or if there were some, they no longer interested me. For a year and a half, I had looked forward to a redemptive return that would be repopulated with all of these missing material goods. But if these material goods actually ever existed, they were much larger in my

imagination than in actual fact. For a child of seven, a year and half abroad is a very long time — at that age it's more than 20% of one's life — and during the harder moments it felt like exile. I invented or exaggerated the value of these toys (and my return to them) as a way of sustaining me through this exile.

After a few months back in the U.S., I wrote letters to my friends back in Spain. If writing letters on one's own initiative seems a little precocious at the age of eight, don't get the idea that I cooked the idea up on my own. Surely my parents were interested in sustaining friendships (for one thing, future field work depended on maintaining these relationships), and I wouldn't put it past them to have attempted to do some of



Felechosa, Spain, circa 1966. Banquet for First Communion. Photograph by Renate Fernandez.

this networking through me. I remember that one letter was particularly painful to write, because my parents required me to write multiple drafts. Although there were no toys at home, my new elemen-

tary school was much better endowed financially than the schools I'd attended in Spain. For me, this was epitomized during gym class when, instead of kicking around one precious soccer ball as we did in Spain, we'd play dodge ball with an avalanche of red rubber balls. I bragged to my Spanish friends about this bounty. But my parents, sensitive to some invidious subtext I wasn't yet aware of, made me draft a new letter without the offending passage.

In my glummer moments in Spain, my parents would remind me that I'd appreciate the experience as I aged. Although they've misestimated many things about me, they were perceptive in this one respect. Forty years later I live a very settled existence in the middle of Utah. I don't travel very much and I doubt sometimes whether my upbringing has stamped me in any distinguishable way. But one thing is for sure: our year and a half in Spain in the early seventies was different from my states-side existence, and significantly so,

especially in both its highs and its lows. Sometimes there was more privilege and more luxury, but at other times I experienced real hardship and deprivation. This last awareness probably accounts for my continued reluctance to spend money. In that respect I am still a child of the sixties and seventies in the then-backward Spain. And that is so even though the Spanish village of my childhood is now integrated into a dynamic European economy that has embraced consumer culture.

Our venture abroad, at least from my standpoint, strayed very far from the comfortable and virtuous middle class of my parents. It left me with an enduring sense of unjustified privilege, the ever possibility of a sudden change in standard of living and a resulting caution about material things. I really can't be sure of the ever presence of that past. Who could be? But there is something fundamental and enduring in that long-ago experience – another time, another place – that inspires me to dwell on it.



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Terre Ryan

In the Name of the Bomb



I was traveling to this bombscape because I wanted to try to make sense of the violence enacted here in the name of peace, and of the terror that had governed my Cold War childhood clear across the continent.

At 7:00 a.m., the glitter of America's favorite boomtown had dimmed to grit. A couple of miles off the Las Vegas strip, where a Statue of Liberty stands a few city blocks from a Cinderella castle fringed with palm trees, a security checkpoint siphoned me onto a bus outside the Atomic Testing Museum. President George W. Bush was in Office, and I was making a pilgrimage to another kind of boomtown, a mission I could undertake because the Department of Energy (DOE) had determined that I am not a threat to national security. Several times each year, DOE contractor Bechtel Corporation ferries two busloads of tourists, shorn of cameras, laptops, tape recorders, and cellphones, sixty-five miles north of Las Vegas to the Nevada Test Site, which served as America's nuclear proving ground from 1950 until the nuclear weapons testing moratorium of 1992. I was traveling to this bombscape because I wanted to try to make sense of the violence enacted here in the name of peace, and of the terror that had governed my Cold War childhood clear across the continent.

ARRIVALS

My mother was a lovesick Irish immigrant on the lam from a belly-up romance when she disembarked at New York Harbor. She was not yet an American citizen when my parents married in 1956, so the authorities considered her a security risk and they fired my father from his job with the CIA three days after my parents' wedding. My mother delivered me in our nation's capital in February of 1959, just days before Mattel introduced Barbie, a doll that codified in plastic the ideals against which the culture had long

measured women: long-limbed and slender with incongruously large breasts, feet eternally arched for stiletto heels, lipsticked mouth perpetually closed but for a demure smile. Some of Barbie's later incarnations would be engineered by a former weapons designer, but her debut followed a market research study that tested an eloquent toy box of Cold War playthings—a Barbie prototype, guns, rockets, and holsters. It was an era when the power of the white patriarchy was challenged by iconoclasts like Allen Ginsberg, who howled to the music of "the hydrogen jukebox" from the urban wilderness of San Francisco or New York City. Although none of the 1,053 nuclear bombs detonated by the Atomic Energy Commission, reincarnated in 1977 as the Department of Energy (DOE), was exploded in 1959, it was, like all Cold War years, just one of many years of the Bomb.

The first year of the Bomb commenced with a nuclear dawn on July 16, 1945, when physicist Robert Oppenheimer and his colleagues hatched the egg-shaped Trinity, the world's first atomic bomb, near Alamogordo in the New Mexican desert. For humankind, the birth of the Bomb—the destroyer—was perhaps as significant as the birth of Jesus Christ—to believers, the savior. The name of Oppenheimer's bomb strikes me like a blow to the gut. To someone raised as a Cold War Catholic kid, reluctantly or not, Trinity signifies a three-faced patriarch of Father, Son, and Spirit—a force of impalpable love conjoined with formidable anger, and of authority unquestionable except by those who would court eternal damnation.

Trinity. Had technology replaced God in this nation that has, since its inception, liked to portray itself as a

Christian country? Perhaps the atom — neutrons, protons, electrons weighty as spirits — had become our new Trinity. Oppenheimer understood that he had duplicated the sexton's keys to an unholy tabernacle, and that human-kind possessed neither the knowledge nor the grace to manage what his team had released. A few weeks later, seventy thousand people died instantly when our second nuclear bomb, Little Boy, fell on Hiroshima. Another 100,000 perished when Fat Man, our third nuclear bomb, exploded over Nagasaki. Thousands suffered slower deaths from radiation sickness and burns, and 80,000 Nagasaki survivors

were left homeless. Perhaps some of Nagasaki's large Catholic population noted the cruciform figure of the plane just before it bombed them. "Both detonations were intended to end World War II as quickly as possible," the DOE advised in United States Nuclear Tests, casting the bombs as tools of peace.

Sixteenth-century explorer Ferdinand Magellan named the Pacific Ocean for its peaceful waters, but within a year of the bombings of Japan, the United States was exploding nuclear bombs in the South Pacific's Marshall Islands. In *Bombs in the Backyard*, political scientist A. Costandina Titus notes that in the spring of 1946, the 167 residents of Bikini Atoll were removed to a small island, where the fishing was poor, at some distance from their ancestral home. On July 1, 1946, the United States dropped the first of many nuclear bombs on Bikini Atoll. At a Par-

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is fashion show four days later, French designer Louis Reard ignited another kind of firestorm when he introduced the world's skimpiest swimsuit to date — scraps of newspaper-printed fabric that he called the bikini because, he said, like the nuclear bomb, it represented "the ultimate." Photos from the show portray

a bikini-clad model holding the matchbox into which she could fold her swimsuit when she removed it. Subsequent South Pacific bombings sickened both neighboring islanders and U.S. military servicemen. "By 1963, when the Partial Test Ban Treaty went into effect, 106 nuclear weapons, including the hydro-

gen bomb, had been detonated in the South Pacific," Titus observes. Congress has since made financial reparations to the islanders, but as of this writing, the Bikinians have been unable to return home because their home is no longer fit for habitation.

Pacific testing posed both public relations and security hazards for the United States, and when the Soviet Union detonated its first nuclear weapon in 1949, our government began to search for a continental test site — an operation given the homespun-as-apple-pie name of Project Nutmeg. The ensuing arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union, based upon the principle of Mutually Assured Destruction, now seems perfectly aligned with its acronym: MAD. I recall none of the religious rhetoric that accompanied representations of the Bomb. What I remember is the fear.



Nevada Test Site, Rainier Mesa

WORTHLESS LAND

I grew up in New Jersey and I live now in Nevada—two states that are geographically antithetical but that share several common problems, including the strains that overpopulation imposes on limited resources; development encroaching on ever-shrinking wild spaces and wildlife habitats; and environments perpetually threatened by industrial waste. Just admitting that I grew up in New Jersey usually draws a disparaging remark of some kind, since the Garden State is also associated with excessive use of hairspray and a discordant accent entirely unlike the nasal vowels of the real thing. Both

New Jersey and Nevada are frequently labeled either the armpit or the asshole of the nation; accordingly, the Nevada Test Site's Yucca Mountain has long been targeted as a potential national nuclear dumping ground. The American attitude toward Nevada isn't surprising; when it comes to landscape, Americans generally like their greens. It's an aesthetic taste imported from Europe and popularized throughout the nineteenth century, when landscape paintings and engravings taught Americans to categorize places as pastoral, picturesque, beautiful, and sublime. The sublime was God's territory—dramatic terrain marked by his fingerprints and no place for puny humans except as interlopers. Picturesque

and beautiful vistas promised leafy respite from the bustling world. The pastoral's farms and grazing livestock represented God's promise of Canaan fulfilled. It was the Manifest Destiny era, and the power-brokers wrote these Euro-American aesthetics into land-use policies driven by a prevailing ethos: conquer savage terrain, build an empire, use every material resource between the coasts, and romanticize the project in pictures.

Early explorers and emigrants, accustomed to European landscape aesthetics and eastern foliage, were bewildered by the Great Basin. Perhaps early Christian emigrants recalled that the Hebrews stumbled through the desert for forty years before they finally reached the Promised Land, that Jesus faced down Satan when the prophet took to the open desert for bouts of prayerful fasting, and that he agonized with thirst during his torture and crucifixion. Emigrants found the crossing of the austere Nevada landscape appropriately unholy. Nevada lacked the rainfall to render it pastoral, picturesque, beautiful, or even benevolently sublime, so it was wasteland. The spirit of the times was overwhelmingly utilitarian.

Until prospectors unearthed a motherlode of silver, early emigrants could discern little use in country like Nevada. And they had a point; Nevada's average annual precipitation is a mere eight inches, and a land with so little water was not meant to support large agricultural operations or frenetic cities. But by 1894, the State Bureau of Immigration was trying to convince prospective residents that Nevada could, with irrigation, become the pastoral promised land of Thomas Jefferson's dreams. "[S]omeday artificial lakes will dot the landscape, preserving the floods [of the

Truckee, Carson, and Walker Rivers] to make fruitful thousands of acres of land now worthless," the boosters promised in *Nevada and Her Resources*. They had plenty of biblical precedent, since several of the Psalms promised that the Lord would make streams flow in the desert.

NEVADA'S MANIFEST DESTINY

Nevada's 1894 boosters succeeded, and we have since reinvented parts of the desert as pastoral farming and range land and parts as picturesque, if only to those who live here. And whether or not God had anything to do with it, we have made streams flow in the desert. In the wake of the nuclear testing moratorium of 1992, the DOE, reinventing the Nevada Test Site as a place where corporations could store their nastiest waste and conduct their most hazardous experiments, promised potential clients that the Test Site's wells could provide up to nine million gallons of water per day. The DOE has even attempted to recast the Nevada Test Site as picturesque, perhaps because Americans find that aesthetic almost universally appealing. The first page of *The Nevada Test Site: A National Experimental Center*, a 1994 DOE brochure, features a photo of the Test Site's Rainier Mesa that is composed much like a Hudson River School painting; the main difference is that this is a shot of a desert landscape rather than a lush northeastern one. The photo features many of the tropes of nineteenth-century landscapes: a prominent bristlecone pine standing in for the snag in the left foreground; sloping mountains; roads that meander like rivers; a cloud-laden sky. What the picture doesn't reveal is that Rainier Mesa's surface conceals a network of sixteen tunnels where

roughly seventy nuclear bombs were exploded for about \$60 million a pop. Like the nineteenth century's Manifest Destiny landscapes, the photo pretifies the story of who and what had suffered, or would suffer, beneath the ideology of conquest.

Although many of us who live in Nevada appreciate its singular beauty, much of the rest of the country views Nevada as a wasteland rendered tolerable by tax laws and air-conditioned casinos. In 1940, our government figured out how to make the wasteland useful when it set aside the Las Vegas Bombing and Gunnery Range, which, a decade later, became Nellis Air Force Base. In December of 1950, President Truman designated a portion of this land as the Nevada Proving Ground—an expression that raises the question of why we must prove ourselves, or anything, against the environment—and within six weeks the Atomic Energy Commission was dropping nuclear bombs on Nevada.

THE LEXICON OF VIOLENCE

Our bus rumbled along Highway 95 toward the Test Site and I marveled at the mountains, starkly beautiful in the early morning light. Our tour guide was a 50-year veteran of the DOE whom I will call Howie. A congenial man, Howie was 71, retired, and so good-natured that he might have been born grinning. Howie played DOE

videos on the small screen at the front of the bus, and as we drove I watched mushroom clouds, one after another, blossoming from the desert floor. These were the flaming pillars of cloud that terrified me in childhood when I saw them in black and white on television and in films at school, and that even today occasionally dominate the landscape of my nightmares.

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The days of duck-and-cover drills were over by the time I reached elementary school. But the fear the Bomb inspired remained potent, and I learned to dread clouds if they blew and stretched into mushroom shapes in the New Jersey sky. My heart stopped momentarily if a siren in town bellowed at any hour other than high noon. I squirmed when tests of the Emergency Broadcast System

interrupted my favorite cartoons, and this sound still unnerves me, especially since the 2001 terrorist attacks. My parents believed in the domino theory of Communism as fervently as they believed in the infallibility of the Pope. One morning, when I was a freshman in high school, I walked to my bus stop wondering how many days I had left. My parents had reported over their poached eggs and cups of Sanka that Russian ships had been spotted off the coast of—where? I can't recall the location. What I remember is the fear. Contained within the small frame of the video screen, Howie's mushroom clouds—"Isn't that one a beauty?" he

marveled—looked like sea creatures drifting in an aquarium.

As we passed Nellis Air Force Base, Howie directed our attention eastward. “They’re testing the new Predator aircraft there,” he announced. “Maybe we’ll see them.” Predator. I cringed at the violence embedded in the word, at the brutality rooted in so much of the rhetoric of the Test Site. The penetrator bomb. The ramjet engine. But then I reasoned that, in a culture where we assign missiles names like Minuteman, Patriot, and Peacekeeper, at least we are calling the Predator what it really is. We could not see the aircraft at Nellis. We trundled on toward the Test Site, where we paused for another security check at Mercury—a town with a toxic name, christened for a nearby mine and founded by the Atomic Energy Commission in 1953.

After we were cleared, our bus lumbered past Mercury’s facilities, which include a hospital, housing complex, movie theater, and bowling alley. Mercury, Howie told us, was where “the Russians” stayed when they visited Nevada for a treaty verification check in the early 1990s.

As I listened to Howie, I noticed a particular cant to his language. Russian scientists and technicians were called the Russians, a label that fell out of common parlance only after the collapse of the Soviet Union. “We broke ‘em,” Howie explained of the Russians and the 1996 Test Ban Treaty. “We outspent the bastards.” Bombs, I understood, are devices that are activated

by mechanisms. Explosions are events. And in true utilitarian spirit, earth is real estate.

We drove through Frenchman Flat, an outdoor archive of the earliest events activated at the Test Site. It is a surreal landscape, a desert dotted with structures like a steel bridge—one side bowed in from the force of a blast—leading nowhere. The Test Site was home to a 30-acre farm from 1964 until 1981, and it was here, Howie informed

us, that experiments were conducted on pigs, sheep, goats, dogs, and monkeys to see how exposure to radiation would affect them.

“Pigs were the most common animal used in the tests because of the similarity of pig skin to that of humans,” I would read later in *The Nevada Test Site: A Guide to America’s Nuclear Proving Ground*. “The pigs were dressed in various garments,

including flight jackets, to test materials for their radiation protection.” The image unnerves me because it reminds me of George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*, in which the pigs, the most intelligent creatures in the barnyard, lead a revolution against their farm’s human owners. Toward the end of the novel the pigs are walking on two legs and wearing human clothes, and at the story’s conclusion they are brawling with humans and it’s impossible to distinguish swine from men. I’m tempted to say that we have become a nation of pigs—the United States is, after all, the most well-fed nation and the one that consumes the most energy—but the comparison seems somehow slanderous to the pigs,

“Pigs were the most common animal used in the tests because of the similarity of pig skin to that of humans. . . . The pigs were dressed in various garments, including flight jackets, to test materials for their radiation protection.”

especially to those sacrificed to Trinity's fearsome successors.

After Howie escorted us past the ghost farm, we stopped at Sedan Crater, a pit nearly a quarter mile wide, more than 300 feet deep, and now on the National Register of Historic Places. Sedan was detonated in 1962 for what the DOE calls a Plowshares project—a test for purportedly peaceful deployments of the Bomb for, say, the construction of canals or harbors. We stood on a platform above the crater. “We wanted to see how much real estate we could move,” Howie explained. The event moved 12 million tons of it. I had watched this detonation on Howie's video earlier that day; on the small screen, the cloud of earth blossomed like the marshmallows I blackened to burnt sugar on a stick at Girl Scout barbecues.

NUCLEAR FAMILIES

Our bus growled over the Test Site's gravel roads and Howie passed around binders crammed with DOE photos. There were shots of the sea-creature mushroom clouds hovering over the desert. There were photos of soldiers sent into the Test Site's trenches to determine how they would operate during a nuclear attack. But the most shocking photos were those of what I call the Nuclear Family—life-sized mannequins that look like Barbie, Ken, and their son, Howdy Doody. They were nuclear war versions of crash test dummies, set up in prototype towns and bombed so that the bombers could estimate the effects of nuclear explosions on an average American town. The photos tell their own story of 1950s culture and of who was really calling the shots. In one picture, a pony-tailed Barbie reaches toward a shelf of canned

goods in a grocery store erected on the Test Site; clad in a halter top and mini-skirt, midriff bare, she is as impossibly perfect as the Barbie dolls with which I played as a child, a version of the dolls with which my little nieces play today. Dressed like some Atomic Energy Commission guy's version of the ideal housewife, she is bombed. Another photo shows the mannequin family in flannel bathrobes, cheerfully cozing up to one another in a fallout shelter. In the most disturbing shot, Barbie, her clothes trimmed in white eyelet lace, and Ken are slumped over their dinner table, post-explosion, still grinning resolutely even though chunks of Ken's face have been chipped away. The Nuclear Family lived in a village constructed on the Test Site; we drove by what remains of the town, pausing at the Nuclear Family's house. It's a colonial, and the wood is bare because the heat of the blast, Howie told us, had blistered the paint from the exterior.

A few months before the Sedan event, the Atomic Energy Commission had detonated a smaller bomb called Passaic, which is the name of the river that threads through the New Jersey town where I grew up. My parents moved our family there around the time of these explosions. The town's two main streets grew along the lines of its churches. The Presbyterian church, at the intersection of the two roads, sprouted first, back in the 1600s when the place was called Turkey. Crooked brown headstones leaned wearily in the churchyard cemetery. According to local lore, the village was renamed New Providence after the beams of the church collapsed without injuring any of the faithful. A quarter of a mile up the road, the Catholic church fattened into an imposing, 1960s-style arena of stained glass and desert-tinted stone.

The Lutheran enclave was stationed half a mile uphill near Bell Labs, an immense research complex where, in 1963, scientists picked up the microwave echoes of the Big Bang, which, as the poet Bob Hicok writes, was “the fucking / that got everything underway.”

1963 was also a busy year for Nevada; the Atomic Energy Commission exploded 49 nuclear bombs, most of them at the Nevada Test Site. The DOE’s records indicate that fourteen of these tests released radioactivity into the air, several of them off-site; of the fourteen releases, ten are listed as “accidental.” We had not then, as we have not now, figured out how to handle all of the nasty items in God’s toolbox. And after Oppenheimer’s Trinity, the phrase “Big Bang” could easily have taken on an antithetical meaning—the fucking that could shut the world down.

According to the Center for Land Use Interpretation, “radioactivity was released into the atmosphere and detected” outside the Nevada Test Site for at least twenty-nine of the underground tests. Radiation from the 1968 Schooner test was picked up across the continent in Montreal five days after the explosion. Schooner left a crater so large that NASA used the Test Site’s pocked landscape as a moon-school to train the astronauts of Apollo 14, 16, and 17.

SUBURBAN PASTORAL

Our lunar explorations barely registered on my radar; as a kid in New Jersey, I was more preoccupied with survival in my local landscape. New Providence was a small, working-class community. A handful of elegant houses stood like ancient relics in a town full of post-war residential developments—mostly ranch houses, split levels, and



Crater from the Sedan nuclear test as part of Operation Plowshare.

Cape Cods, with a few modest colonials. Across from the Catholic church, a meadow ran wild on the main street, and in springtime cornflowers stippled that meadow as if a chunk of sky had shattered in the grass. Cornflowers bloomed out of cracks in the sidewalks and a blue ruffle lined the curbs of the valley. One of our neighbors raised ducks; another kept a hen and a crotchety rooster. Down the street, one family housed a flock of homing pigeons in a dovecote; evenings we watched them

circling over the neighborhood. It was literally a one-horse town, with a speckled mare grazing in the field of the town's single working farm just a few blocks from our house.

Our parents sent their six children to the ironically named Our Lady of Peace Catholic School, where signs posted the way toward the basement fallout shelter and the nuns prophesied our eternal damnation. A butchered Jesus hung on the front wall of every classroom. At home, our television bellowed the gunshots and war cries of cowboys and Indians, World War II movies, and the endless bad news of Vietnam, where we were fighting because, like our parents, most of the powers in Washington believed in the domino theory of Communism. The global menace of MAD loomed above our kickball games as we awaited the sneak attack of the Soviet Union. Some of our playmates' fathers worked for Bell Labs, the presence of which, our friends assured us, guaranteed that New Providence would be a top target in any nuclear attack.

At the conclusion of our tour, Howie was beaming. President Bush, he said, may reactivate the nuclear testing program, and the DOE may want "the experienced old-timers" to come back. Howie, who was about to embark on a cross-country drive with his wife of many years, had just signed the papers saying he would return to work if called. It was a troubling moment. Howie was a kindly man, about the same age as my father, and all day he

had been speaking my father's Cold War rhetoric. Howie was happy that his country still needed him. And why shouldn't he be happy? He came of age in the era of the Company Man and the long marriage. It must feel good to belong and to believe. But my years as a

Cold War kid taught me to be an apostate and an iconoclast. Violence is woven into American cultural mythology; even Nevada's state slogan is "Battle Born," a phrase that binds territory with bloodshed and liberty. Someone who gets angry "goes ballistic," and our media often reflect a nation that imagines itself as Christian and

war as holy. I could have felt happy for Howie if he had been talking about any other job.

Some time later, on the fourth anniversary of the terrorist attacks on New York City and Washington, D.C., I would read in my local newspaper that the Pentagon was revising the "Doctrine for Joint Nuclear Operations." The new language of the nuclear doctrine would empower our military, with presidential approval, to use nuclear weapons in pre-emptive strikes. Even as I have written this, the states of Nevada and Utah have wrangled with the Department of Defense over the proposed Test Site detonation of Divine Strake, a non-nuclear weapon that scientists liken to a low-yield nuclear bunker buster that could be used in, say, Iran. Las Vegas has attracted millions of tourists with the slogan, "What happens here, stays here," but the Test Site's downwind neighbors know that

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dust doesn't acknowledge the bombing ground's boundaries. Many feared the Divine Strake test would kick up irradiated dust from the decades of nuclear bombing. Some of us feared—and continue to fear—yet more war.

HOME

My friends in Reno cringe whenever I mention the Test Site. "Why did you want to go there?"

I had hoped to make some sense of the technological barbarity that was spawned of fear and a lust for power but labeled in the name of peace. I had hoped to gain some understanding of the terror and violence of the Cold War era, when the name of the Bomb replaced the name of God. But none of it makes any sense, and our current times are, on some levels, even more violent than those in which I grew up. Nuclear weapons remain "at the center of the American dilemma," observes James Carroll in *House of War*, his study of the Pentagon from the Cold War to the present. Of our nation's early twenty-first century military policies, Carroll cautions, "Beware the House of War when understood as the House of God."

At Reno's Nevada Museum of Art, there is a gallery I sometimes visit that is entirely filled with painter Robert Beckmann's eight-canvas series, "The Body of a House." Beckmann, who grew up in Las Vegas in the 1950s, based his paintings on stills from a Test Site film of the disintegration of a house taken when "Annie," a 16 kiloton bomb, was detonated on St. Patrick's Day in 1953. The Atomic Energy Commission wanted to see how such a home would weather a nuclear assault, and perhaps this house is as much the "House of War" as James Carroll's Pen-

tagon. Like those still standing on the Test Site, this house is a colonial, which leads me to wonder who chose the design of the structures erected for Test Site nuking, and why. There is an onanistic poetry to the images of this iconic American home—a colonial erected on a landscape for a technological experiment that is the self-annihilating climax of Manifest Destiny—collapsing beneath the force of the Bomb. In the first painting, the facade of the house is illuminated by the brilliance of the blast. But for its desert surroundings, the house looks very much like the one in which I grew up, and I walk around the gallery observing as my childhood home, from canvas to canvas, progressively burns, melts, disintegrates, and blows away. What remains is WAR—three letters, a trinity, an atom.



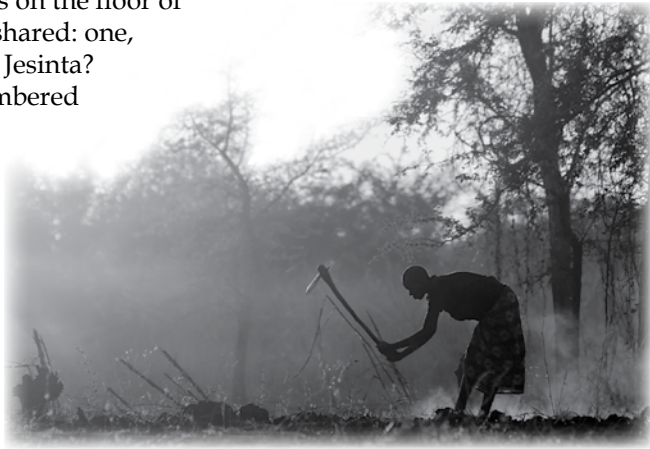
Terre Ryan is an Assistant Professor of Writing at Loyola University Maryland. Her work has appeared in a variety of journals, including *The South Dakota Review*, *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, and *Flyway Literary Review*. An extended version of *In the Name of the Bomb*, appears in her ecocritical memoir, *This Ecstatic Nation: The American Landscape and the Aesthetics of Patriotism* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2011). An earlier version of this essay received the Western Literature Association's Frederick Manfred Creative Writing Award.

Becky Marietta

They Rise Up and Call Her Blessed

Mama Juma woke in the darkness and sat up stiffly. Swinging her thick legs over the edge of her wooden bed, she perched there for a moment, listening to the murmurs and sighs of her children as they raced through their dreams towards waking. She counted their dim shapes on the floor of the sleeping room that they shared: one, two, three, four—where was Jesinta? Mama Juma suddenly remembered her youngest child had climbed next to her in the middle of the night—“bad dreams,” she had lisped as Mama Juma folded the child into her soft, pillowy side. Mama Juma now lifted the blanket and saw Jesinta curled like a rosebud at the foot of the bed. She quietly dropped the blanket back and saw the little shape shift and move before it settled again in the same spot.

“Ee-yah,” Mama Juma groaned, and heaved herself up, one hand on the edge of the bed for balance. She pushed past the rough woolen blanket that divided the circular hut into two rooms and walked slowly into the dining/sitting area, then shoved the door made of wooden planks open and stepped outside. She leaned with her back pressed into the orange-red mud wall of her home for a moment, looking up at the inky night that still clung stubbornly to the horizon, then walked over to the cooking *boma*, which stood about fifteen feet away from the hut. She gently kicked a scrawny white chicken away from her feet, and pulled the *boma*’s thorny gate open, careful not to prick her hands. She picked up her sooty *jiko*, a circular portable iron stove that was as wide as a metal drum and about two feet tall. It had an iron grate in it that sat about six inches from the top, and there was a small door on the outside, near the bottom. She unlatched this little door and began to stuff twigs and savannah grass into it. She added a lit match, and



leaned into the warmth as the fire crackled and popped and blew sweet smoke into her face.

She left the *boma*, carrying a tin pail and calling out, "Nyayooo . . ." A skunk-pelted goat came trotting out from behind the hut. She ran to Mama Juma, full udders swinging, and butted her playfully with nubby horns. Mama Juma stroked her hands along the goat's neck and side, then squatted on her bare heels and began to milk the goat, her thick fingers black pistons against the pink-fleshed udders. She filled the tin, then stood, puffing with the effort. The goat bleated and butted at her again. Mama Juma batted her away, telling her, "Be patient. Juma will soon be here with your *maize*."

Mama Juma carried the milk back into the *boma* and poured it into a cream-colored metal teapot on the now-hot *jiko*. When the milk began to send streaks of steam through the teapot's spout, she reached into a wooden box in the corner and pulled out a bag of ground tea leaves. She opened the bag, threw half a handful into the milk, then watched as the stained liquid began to boil. She added enough sugar to melt teeth, then used the long edge of her *kanga* to carry the hot teapot back to the hut.

She opened the door and set the teapot down on the short, bright blue wooden table in the sitting room, calling, "Get up, *watoto*. Time to go to school."

The children moaned and complained, but obeyed. Juma, her eldest child—the one who had given her the honor of a name fourteen years ago—ran to sit on the dirt floor beside the low table.

Mama Juma swatted at him. "Go and wash your face. You are not ready." He grinned that insolent grin of his (*so like his father's*, Mama Juma thought, with a pang) then pulled his long legs out from under him and sauntered outside to the washing tub. Mary, her oldest daughter, helped the younger children dress in their blue and white primary school uniforms, then herded them all out to join their brother. The children came back in together a moment later, their milk chocolate faces still dripping water. Mama Juma poured the sweet milky *chai* into six metal mugs. She cut thick slices of white bread and smeared margarine heavily onto each piece. She piled the bread on a yellow plastic plate in the middle of the table and knelt down beside it.

Juma took a piece and said, "Mama, when is Baba coming home?"

Mama Juma looked at him quickly. The boy sat with his head down, eating his bread with studied concentration. If she had not heard him so clearly, she could almost have imagined that he had not spoken. However, she *had* heard him and her heart ached at the question. She watched the muscles in his thin face jump with the movement of his chewing, and sighed.

"Juma, why do you ask this question every morning? The answer today is the same as it was yesterday, the same as it has always been for five years now—your father woke up one morning and decided that he did not want what he had. He looked at me, holding your newborn sister, Jesinta, and said, 'It is time for me to find another life.' Then he

walked out of the hut and was gone as quickly as a blade of grass under a locust's jaws."

"So you started working for the *wazungu*," Peter, one of her eight-year-old twins, said.

"Yes," Mama Juma said, "I started working for the *wazungu*, with Jesinta tied onto my back. And I have taken good care of you, haven't I? Aren't your school fees paid in full? Don't you have food in your bellies?" She turned towards Juma. "These things were not true when your Baba was here. He was always taking our money for food and clothes and spending it on unworthy past-times. We are better off without him."

Juma's face was now a dark shadow. He stood up quickly and walked away from the table without asking permission, then grabbed up his khaki school satchel, which was full of all those expensive schoolbooks, and flung it over his shoulder. He wrenched the door open, glared over his shoulder at his mother, then stalked out. The door banged shut behind him.

The other children sat in silence, their black, black eyes fixed on Mama Juma. She shook her head and muttered, "No matter how bad a man is, his children still want him." She stared at the closed door, imagining that she could see the vibrations of her son's anger running up and down the rough planks. She shook her head again, then clapped her wide hands together. "Hurry! It is time for all of you to be at school."

The twins, Peter and Jackson, eleven year-old Mary, and little Jesinta stuffed the rest of their bread in their mouths, then jumped up and began to gather up their own school satchels.

"*Kwaheri*," Peter and Jackson caroled as they raced out the door. Mary grabbed Jesinta's hand and began tugging her towards the door, but the little girl pulled away and ran to her mother.

"Mama," she said, "why do you have to take care of Millie? Why doesn't she go to school, like me — aren't we the same age?"

Mama Juma fixed the crooked white collar that peeked out from under her daughter's navy-blue jumper. She said, "Millie is *mzungu*. Her mother teaches her *wazungu* things at home; she wouldn't know what to do in a Kenyan school. Besides, her father is *Bwana Mkubwa* — a big man in government, a diplomat who lives in Nairobi. Millie must have a special education." She kissed Jesinta's round cheeks, soft and sweet as ripe mangos. "She misses seeing you, though; she is very sad that I don't bring you with me to work anymore. You two were like another pair of twins for me — my white baby and my brown one. On your next school holiday, I will take you with me, and you can teach her how to climb the loquat tree in her backyard."

Mary stepped forward and grabbed her little sister's hand again. "Goodbye, Mother," she said in careful English, and pulled Jesinta out the door. Mama Juma nodded approvingly. "Very good," she said. She listened to the sudden silence of the hut and chewed her bread slowly.

She sipped the warm, sweet *chai*, savoring the almost painful sweetness of it. When she was finished, she stood and tied a pink and white kerchief around her head, then walked out to the tub and splashed water onto her own face. She pulled the orange and purple *kanga* tighter around her waist, and noticed her large t-shirt clad stomach settling over the top. She smiled, allowing herself a moment to admire how good and fat (*wealthy*) she was becoming. She was no longer the painfully thin woman whose belly had roared as angrily as her voice.

What? You've spent all the money again? How will we eat – do you think food just appears like magic on plates? Do you think chai flows in the river behind our house? What kind of man steals food from his own children's lips?

What? You're too ill to go to work? It's drunkenness that makes you sick, lazy beast. If you don't work, you don't get paid. If you don't get paid, we don't eat. What a bad, bad man you are . . .

You spent the night in town – with who? To what filthy whore did you give our last shilling? Don't think I'm going to let you touch me again, you disgusting pig. You're not a man, you're a donkey – an ass! I don't lay down with asses!

You're leaving us? Fine. Don't come back – this is not your home anymore, you hear me? You are dead to us.

She headed off down the road towards the *wazungu* house, where she worked. She liked those white people—especially Millie, the little girl she helped care for. Mama Juma watched the hot African sun beating the black night out of the sky. She began to sing a hymn in Swahili, her splayed, leathery feet slapping a rhythm against red dirt.

Mama Juma pushed the door of the *wazungu* house open. “Hodi,” she called, stepping in and putting her black umbrella down in the corner.

“*Karibu*,” a child’s voice called back.

Mama Juma spied Millie sitting at the white metal kitchen table. “What? You’re still in your nightclothes?” She smiled at the girl’s blond curls, which stuck out from her head like bits of cotton fluff.

Millie looked at her and stuck her lower lip out slightly. “You’re late,” she said, kicking her legs back and forth under the table, “and I’m hungry.”

Mama Juma made a *tsk* sound, then laughed, her white teeth broadcasting her smile on the dark brown billboard of her face. “Mil-lie,” she said, as she tickled the little girl into giggles, “you have woken with the cold on your back this morning.” She pulled a large white glass bowl with a red stripe around the top from an overhead cabinet. “Go get me some flour from the pantry,” she ordered.

Millie obeyed, jumping down from her chair and walking across the hall from the kitchen to the pantry. She returned a few seconds later, lugging a flour bag as big as her torso. She staggered over to Mama Juma, who plucked the bag from her with one hand and set it on the counter. Millie pulled a chair from the table and scooted it over to the counter where Mama Juma was already busy rolling out dough for

mandazis. Mama Juma pinched off a piece of the dough and handed it to Millie, and the little girl chewed the sweet uncooked dough, watching intently as Mama Juma heated some oil on the electric stove. Millie helped Mama Juma drop four triangles of the dough into the pan. The *mandazis* made the oil spit and pop, then puffed up and began to turn a glistening golden brown. Millie nudged a bony elbow into Mama Juma's fleshy side. When Mama Juma looked down at her, she said, "What did you mean, I woke up with a cold back? I wasn't cold at all this morning."

Mama Juma smiled. "Millie, *mtoto*, if there were more children in your family, you would understand. When a girl has to share a bed with her sisters, there is always one pulling the blanket this way and that, trying to get more than her fair share. If this one bad sister succeeds and rolls away with the blanket, the other sisters must cuddle in the center for warmth. The sister farthest on the outside wakes with a cold back, and that makes her cross in the morning." She handed Millie a *mandazi*. "Careful. It's still hot."

She watched as Millie nibbled the edge of the sweet bread with the tips of her teeth, keeping her lips and tongue pulled away so as not to burn them. Millie suddenly threw out a skinny arm and hugged Mama Juma tightly. "I'm sorry," she said. "I won't be cross anymore today, I promise."

Mama Juma patted Millie's head, enjoying the sensation of the downy curls beneath her palm. "*Si kitu*, my white baby," she murmured as she stroked the girl's hair. "We're all right."

After Millie had finished eating (*Three mandazis! What a big eater – just like a hyena!*), Mama Juma helped her get dressed and sent her outside to play. She then washed the dishes and stacked them neatly in the drainer to dry. She was just filling up the big yellow plastic bucket with soapy water for the floor when Millie's mother, a reedy woman with translucent white skin and an ever-present expression of disillusionment on her face, walked into the kitchen. The woman pulled out a kitchen chair and dissolved into it, sinking down until the back of her head touched the wooden top of the chair back. She lit up a cigarette, inhaled deeply, then exhaled, blowing smoke to the ceiling like a prayer to God.

Mama Juma poured some black coffee into a Blue Willow china cup and took it over to the table. She set it in front of the almost prone woman. "Jambo, Mama Millie," she said, sliding the cup forward. She went back to the sink and lifted the bucket out, feeling sudden warmth soaking into her t-shirt as a little water sloshed over the top.

The woman, whose real name was Clare, extended her pale, pale hand with its red, red nails. The hand paused, suspended in the air for a brief moment, before settling around the cup. Clare pulled the cup to her lips and drank deeply, almost as if the coffee was cold, rather than scalding hot. "Good morning, Mama Juma," she said, finally. "Thank you for feeding Millie – *again*." She bit her lip, looking as if she wanted to cry. "That's really not in your job description, is it?"

Mama Juma turned her back to Clare, listening but not wanting to make eye contact. "It's fine, Mama Millie," she said, "I like to cook for the child. And she likes my *mandazis*."

She heard Clare say, "Well, maybe I will talk to *Bwana* about adding a few more shillings to your pay — for your extra work. If he ever comes down for a visit . . ."

"Thank you, Mama Millie," Mama Juma said, finally turning and looking at her. "It will help my children." The two women regarded each other with silent understanding.

Clare tossed the smoldering butt of the cigarette into the mug, where it hissed as the remaining coffee drowned its heat. "Why do we put up with them?" she asked, almost to herself. Mama Juma didn't reply. Clare sighed deeply, then stood up. She reached into the pocket of her peach silk robe, and pulled out a paper, which she set down on the counter. "Here is your list of chores for today. They shouldn't take very long. Make sure you ask the yard-boy to cut the weeds around the back flower garden; they are getting disgracefully long."

"Yes, Mama," Mama Juma said. She watched as Clare carefully left the room—a fragile blonde doll woman made of glass—then she picked up the bucket and the mop and began to clean.

When Mama Juma finished her tasks for the day, she set out for home. The sun was still up, though beginning to drop wearily towards earth. Mama Juma knew how the sun felt; she wanted to drop to earth for a while, too. Instead, she headed straight for her *shamba*. She pulled the old wooden hoe out from behind its hiding place under the long grass, and began to free the garden of weeds. After a few minutes, she stopped and stretched her back, which had been paining her lately. *Sweet potatoes, maize, peas*, she reminded herself, and began to dig again. The rows stretched before her, an acre of endless promise and work.

"How are you?" a sweet voice called in English. Mama Juma looked up and saw Jesinta running up the dirt path towards her.

"Very well, and you?" Mama Juma answered.

Her daughter giggled. "It's supposed to be, 'I am well, and how are you,' Mama."

Mama Juma shrugged. "Your English is better than mine. I am glad you are paying attention in school. Now go change out of your uniform." She smiled as Jesinta hurried to obey.

Mary walked up to the *shamba*. "Jambo, Mama, how was work?"

Mama Juma looked at her tall, quiet daughter and felt a staggering pride. *Did this elegant creature really come from me? How did her father and I ever create such a girl?* "Work was fine, child," she said.

Mary said, "I will go and change out of my uniform, then come and help you."

Mama Juma nodded, and then asked, "Where are your brothers?" Before Mary could reply, Mama Juma saw Peter and Jackson come

tumbling down the road, clouds of dust swirling around their quick bodies. "Jambo, Mama," they yelled, in unison as always.

Mama Juma grabbed a sweaty boy under each of her large arms and hugged tightly, then said, "Go and feed Nyayo — your brother forgot to this morning, and I am sure she will be too cross to give milk —" She stopped. "Where is Juma, anyway? He's usually home before you."

Jackson lifted his shoulders. "I didn't see him all day."

Peter added, "I'm not sure he made it to school today, Mama." Without waiting for more questions, the boys dashed up the hill towards the hut, taking the dust with them.

Mama looked after her sons, feeling uneasiness settle over her. Juma had skipped school once or twice before, but this week was testing and all the children knew not to miss during testing week — no one wanted to repeat a form. When Mary came out to the *shamba*, dressed in a green and black *kanga* and a red t-shirt, Mama Juma said, "Mary, did you see Juma at school today?"

Mary took the hoe from her mother's hand. She began to strike the earth, not looking at her mother. She said, in between blows, "No, Mama, he did not come to school today. I heard from some other boys that he went in to town."

Mama Juma gaped at her. "Why would he go to town?" she asked. "He doesn't have any money."

Mary said, "I don't know, Mama. I know he has talked before about . . ." She trailed off.

"About what?" Mama Juma asked. "Come, Mary, it's all right — tell me."

Mary stopped hoeing and looked her mother in the eye. Mama Juma was struck again by how grown up this little girl of hers had become.

"He wants to find Baba," she said flatly, and began to hoe again.

Mama Juma stood with her hands on her wide hips. *I spent too many of my days going from bar to bar, seeking that man out, dragging him home to his family*, she thought. The day he had walked away from her for the last time, she had sworn she would never go looking for him again. Mama Juma watched her daughter's bent back for a few seconds, then turned and made her way slowly towards home.

Night descended on the little hut as it always did — heavy and black as tar. Mama Juma sat on a short wooden stool just outside of her doorway. Inside, all of her children slept, safe and warm — except for one. Mama Juma's eyes searched the thick night, her heart beating too fast, her stomach rolling with anxiety. *Where?* her mind asked, again and again, *where?* She wanted to run the fifteen miles to town, screaming those words: *Where? Where? Juma — where?* Instead, she sat and watched, her eyes aching with her heart.

As the dark reluctantly gave in to the awakening sun, Mama Juma saw, from far down the lane, a tiny figure moving towards the hut. She stared hard, sure that this figure was just another trick her mind had played on her — all night long, she imagined that she saw someone moving up the path, only to be disappointed each time. Now she stood up, leaning forward a little, straining her eyes to see. The figure did not disappear; rather, it became a little larger, a little more solid. She began to run, her thick-soled feet driving into the dust. As she neared the figure, a little cry escaped her throat.

"Juma!" she cried. She grabbed the weary boy who stood in front of her and pulled him close. *Alive! Thankyouthankyouthankyou*, she thought. She held him, feeling the relief subside and anger begin to push its way up through her body. She stepped back and shook the boy, who was, she suddenly noticed, almost taller than she was now. He didn't resist, just stood with his eyes cast down as she snapped him back and forth, back and forth.

Finally, Mama Juma stopped shaking him and asked, "Why, Juma?" He didn't answer. She shook him again. "WHY?"

He lifted his head and she stumbled back, shocked. His face was no longer that of a cheeky, self-assured teenaged boy. It was the face of a man — a man whose soul was sick.

"I found Baba," he said.

Mama Juma's breath caught in her throat. "What? Where?"

Juma shook his head. "It doesn't matter."

Mama Juma grasped his shoulder and tried to look him in the eye. "Son, it *does* matter. Where?"

Juma's eyes were fixed on a point over her head. "In town," he said. Mama Juma saw the deep hollowness in his eyes and felt fear stab her like a *panga*.

"What is it, Juma? Tell me," she said gently.

Juma closed his eyes and Mama Juma saw a tear slide out from under his dark lashes. It ambled down his dirty cheek, leaving a silvery trail behind it. "He's ill, Mama." Juma lowered his head and shook it, as if trying to frighten away a buzzing, biting insect. "No. Not just ill. He's dying."

Mama Juma stared at him, unable to speak. Juma's face twisted and he began to sob, his thin shoulders shaking violently. Mama Juma watched, amazed, as he slipped out of her grasp and sank down onto his hands and knees. He cried quietly, his face turned towards the ground, his tears making tiny circles in the dust like rain. Mama Juma squatted down on her heels and pulled her son into her arms. This time, he clung to her, his tears wetting her t-shirt.

"It's the wasting disease, Mama," he sobbed. "He says —" He pulled away a little, looking her in the face. The man was gone — now she could see only a frightened child. "He says you should — should —"

"Get tested," Mama Juma finished flatly. Her mind was numb. The wasting disease was killing Africa. *Not me, she thought, I will not pay for someone else's sins. Do you hear me, God? I WILL NOT. I still have many years left and I . . .*

"Shhh," she said, rocking her son. "It's all right, Juma. I will be fine. I am healthy. I will not die." He quieted but remained pressed close to her, just as he done as a small boy. *How long has it been since he let me hold him like this?* she wondered. She wrapped her arms around him tighter, grateful for this small, precious moment. Finally, she asked, "Where is Baba?"

Juma sat back and swiped at his face. "It's bad, Mama. He lives in an alley behind the butcher's shop." His face crumpled. "He waits for the garbage to be thrown out and asks the beggar children to bring him any scraps they do not want." Juma's eyes were wild. "He stinks. He's filthy, dressed in rags, and so thin—Mama, he's just bones. He tried to hide when he saw me. He said he was too ashamed . . ." Juma stopped and pressed the heels of his hands into his streaming eyes.

Mama Juma stood, pulling her son up. "Come," she said brusquely, "go in to the house. Wash up, eat some food, go to school." She stopped her son's protest with an upheld palm. "No, Juma. You must go to school. But first, I need you to do something for me. I want you to go by the *wazungu* house and tell Mama Millie that I am sorry; I cannot come to work today. She is kind, she will understand."

Juma stared at her, confused. "But you never miss work, Mama. What are you going to do?"

Mama Juma stroked her son's face softly. *God willing, you are going to be a fine man someday, she thought. God willing, I will be around to see you become that man.* "I am going to go and get your Baba," she said. "I am going to bring him home."



Becky Marietta's short essays and works of fiction have appeared in such publications as *The Christian Science Monitor*, *Among Worlds*, and *Over the Back Fence*. Becky holds an MA from Northeastern State University and is an adjunct instructor of English at John Brown University in Siloam Springs, Arkansas. She resides in northeast Oklahoma with her husband and two kids, and is currently working on a book about life in Kenya where she grew up.

READING THE WEST

read-ing [from ME reden, to explain, hence to read] – vt. 1 to get the meaning of; 2 to understand the nature, significance, or thinking of; 3 to interpret or understand; 4 to apply oneself to; study.

THE WEST IS BURNING

In a recent article for The Nation, Randolph E. Schmid reported on the fires searing parts of the American West. His data shows that the number of large wildfires has been rising for the past 25 years, and they are lasting longer.



So far this year, 31,650 wildfires have burned more than 4 million acres of land – more than twice the area of Delaware – according to the National Interagency Coordination Centre. That's up from 27,077 fires at the same time a year ago, which burned about a third as much acreage as this year.

The number of large fires began to grow in the mid-1980s, according to research by Anthony Westerling of the University of California, Merced. His paper, published in the journal *Science* in 2006, documented the number, size and frequency of fires. The increase in large wildfires could be seen as a return to the situation a century earlier, when they were more common. The last of those big fires occurred during the drought in the 1930s. After that, a combination of fire-control efforts and social changes resulted in fewer fires.

Now, over the last few decades, there has been an increase, although not every year. The U.S. Forest Service and U.S. Geological Survey studied fires of more than 1,000 acres and found that from 1984 to 1999 an average of 2.2 million acres nationally burned each year. From 2000 to 2008, the acreage destroyed annually rose to 6.4 million acres....

Thomas W. Swetnam of the University of Arizona said frequent and extensive fires were common before 1900, and tree ring records show they occurred at the same times in many areas of the West.

"What's different about this [recent Arizona] fire is the severity, the intensity of the heat and the amount of trees that are killed," he said. It's at least partly because the lack of frequent surface fires allowed fuel like brush and leaves to accumulate over the years. Add high temperatures and windy conditions, and the scene is set for a devastating fire. Overgrazing, logging and fire prevention have also created a lot more stuff to burn. As well, global warming has been predicted to result in more wildfires by producing more hot, dry conditions.

In recent decades, the policy of attacking every fire changed and officials began trying to allow natural fires to flare up again. In remote areas especially, fires have been allowed more room, but the problem comes when that policy is taken over by sloppy campers, arsonists and lightning.

Changes in land use have also added to the problem. Cities and suburbs have expanded into fire-prone areas, and new wilderness areas provide plenty of places for fires to concentrate.

Over a century ago, massive and deadly forest fires plagued America. The deadliest wildfire in American history killed an estimated 2,200 people and destroyed more than 2,400 square miles of forest around Peshtigo, Wisconsin. But that blaze gets little attention because it occurred on the same day in 1871 as the "Great Chicago Fire," which killed 300 people.



Map produced by Predictive Services, National Interagency Coordination Center.
http://www.nifc.gov/nicc/predictive/outlooks/monthly_outlook.jpg

Source: Randolph E. Schmid, "Fire Hazard: a brushfire bonanza," *The Nation*, 19 June 2011, reprinted in *Fire Engineering*; http://www.fireengineering.com/index/articles/Wire_News_Display/1440023141.html

SMOKE SIGNALS: GLOBAL WARMING?

Writing for Salon, Chip Ward describes the massive columns of smoke from the recent western wildfires as the smoke signals warning us of a globally warming world.

Global warming, global weirding, climate change—whatever you prefer to call it—is not just happening in some distant, melting Arctic land out of a storybook. It is not just burning up far-away Russia. It's here now.

The seas have warmed, ice caps are melting, and the old reliable ocean currents and atmospheric jet streams are jumping their tracks. The harbingers of a warming planet and the abruptly shifting weather patterns that result vary across the American landscape. Along the vast Mississippi River drainage in the heartland of America, epic floods, like our wildfires in the West, are becoming more frequent. In the Gulf states, it's monster hurricanes, and in the Midwest, swarms of killer tornadoes signal that things have changed. In the East it's those killer heat waves and record-breaking blizzards.

But in the West, we just burn.

Although Western politicians like to blame the dire situation on tree-hugging environmentalists who bring suit to keep loggers from thinning and harvesting the crowded forests, the big picture is far more complicated. According to Wally Covington of Northern Arizona University, a renowned forest ecologist, the problem has been building towards a catastrophe for decades....

If you live in the West, you can't help wonder what will burn next. Eastern Colorado, Oklahoma, and the Dakotas are, at present, deep in drought and likely candidates. Montana's Lodgepole Pine forests are dying and ready to ignite. Colorado's Grand Mesa is another drying forest area that could go up in flames anytime. Wally Covington estimates that a total of about half-a-million square miles of Western forests, an area three times the size of California, is now at risk of catastrophic fires....

So although skiers are still riding the mountain slopes of northern Utah, river-rafting guides in the south, famous for their hunger for whitewater excitement, are canceling trips on the Colorado and Green Rivers because they are flowing so hard and high that navigating them is too risky to try. In our more sedate settings, suburbs and such, sandbags are now ubiquitous. Basement pumps are humming across the state. Reservoirs were emptied ahead of the floods so that they could be refilled with excess runoff, but there is enough snowmelt in our mountains this year to fill them seven times over....

In the West, we know... they go together. First, floods fuel growth, then growth fuels fires, then fires fuel floods. So all that unexpected, unpredicted moisture we got this winter will translate into a fresh layer of lush undergrowth in forests that until very recently were drying up, ravaged by beetles, and dying. You may visit us this summer and see all that new green vegetation as so much beautiful scenery, but we know it is also a ticking tinderbox. If Mother Nature flips her fickle toggle switch back to hot and dry, as she surely will, fire will follow....

On an overheating planet, if the West is still our place of desire and exception, then fire is our modern manifest destiny – and the West is ours to lose.

Source: Chip Ward, "Global Warming is Burning Down the American West," *Salon*, 16 June 2011; http://www.salon.com/news/global_warming/?story=/politics/war_room/2011/06/16/global_warming_wildfires

WILDLAND FIRES AND ACRES

According to statistics from the National Interagency Fire center (NIFC) at the beginning of July, the nationwide number of fires for the first six months of 2011 was 36,424. They burned a total of approximately 4.8 million acres, with an average of 132 acres per fire. This number marks the largest acreage burned for the January-June period since records began in 2000.

Year to Date Totals as of July 1st	Nationwide Number of Fires	Nationwide Number of Acres Burned
07/01/2011	36,424	4,795,942
07/01/2010	29,811	1,486,681
07/01/2009	48,399	1,904,044
07/01/2008	36,656	2,173,153
07/01/2007	46,368	1,837,507
07/01/2006	57,248	3,752,513
07/01/2005	29,742	1,705,654
07/01/2004	38,622	1,673,557
07/01/2003	27,286	767,018
07/01/2002	44,759	2,817,641
07/01/2001	40,837	1,094,120
07/01/2000	49,000	1,633,941
5 – year average (2006-2010)	43,696	2,230,780
10 – year average (2001-2010)	39,973	1,921,189

Source: <http://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/sotc/fire/>

LA NIÑA VISITS UTAH

As El Niño finished up a three-year run in Fall 2011, La Niña – “the little girl” – returned. La Niña affects everything from snowfall across the United States to hurricanes in the Atlantic Ocean to monsoons in India. The National Oceanic and Atmosphere Administration explains that La Niña is characterized by unusually cold ocean temperatures in the eastern Equatorial Pacific, as compared to El Niño, which is characterized by unusually warm ocean temperatures in the Equatorial Pacific. Hence, the intermountain region has had record snowfall.

PREVIOUS COLD PHASES

La Niñas occurred in 1904, 1908, 1910, 1916, 1924, 1928, 1938, 1950, 1955, 1964, 1970, 1973, 1975, 1988, 1995

TYPICAL LA NIÑA IMPACTS

La Niña tends to bring nearly opposite effects of El Niño to the United States – wetter than normal conditions across the Pacific Northwest and dryer and warmer than normal conditions across much of the southern tier. The impact of El Niño and La Niña at these latitudes is most clearly seen in wintertime. In the continental U.S., during El Niño years, temperatures in the winter are warmer than normal in the North Central States, and cooler than normal in the Southeast and the Southwest. During a La Niña year, winter temperatures are warmer than normal in the Southeast and cooler than normal in the Northwest.

Source: <http://www.publicaffairs.noaa.gov/lanina.html>

LA NIÑA WREAKS HAVOC

Writing for an East Coast readership, Associate Press reporter Lynn Debruin explains that La Niña has brought record snow and droughts to the West.

The winter and early spring have been extreme across the West, with record snowpacks bringing joy to skiers and urban water managers but severe flood risks to northern Utah, Wyoming, and Montana.

And despite all the wet weather in the Rockies and Sierra Nevada, parts of eastern Colorado, New Mexico, and Arizona are in severe drought and gearing up for what is forecast as a bad fire season. In New Mexico, some 400 fires, driven by relentless winds, have already raced across 315,000 acres.

Credit – or blame – for the extreme weather goes mostly to a strong La Niña....

Source: Lynn Debruin, “La Niña weather wreaks havoc in West,” posted 9 May 2011 to Boston.com; http://articles.boston.com/2011-05-09/news/29525687_1_colorado-river-randy-julander-flow



CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE ROCKIES

Even as Utah has had record snow- and rainfall this year, researchers have concluded that the Rocky Mountains are losing their snow.

More than 70 million people across the North American West depend on water from the Columbia, Missouri or Colorado Rivers. And 60 to 80 percent of that water originates as snowpack. But that snowpack has been declining in recent decades, a worrisome trend as Western cities continue to grow and water demand rises.

Researchers led by the U.S. Geological Survey, reporting this week in *Science*, wanted to see if these recent trends are truly unprecedented. So they created snowpack histories for three regions—the upper Colorado, the Northern Rockies and the greater Yellowstone area—by using 66 tree-ring chronologies. Trees record in their patterns of growth (i.e., tree rings) the amount of water available to them during the growing season. In the West, that water is largely controlled by the amount of water in the snowpack, and by concentrating their tree-ring data on trees from areas where the precipitation comes mostly in the form of snow and on trees known to be most sensitive to the snowpack, the scientists were able to create a good record of snowpack levels in the area going back to around 1200 A.D.

The record has plenty of variability—snowpack levels are dependent on many different variables, such as sea surface temperatures, that aren't consistent from year to year. But around 1900, two of the three regions underwent a major decline in snowpack, and then all three dropped precipitously starting around 1980. "Over the past millennium, late-20th century snowpack reductions are almost unprecedented in magnitude across the northern Rocky Mountains," the scientists write. The culprit? "Unprecedented spring-time warming due to positive reinforcement of the anthropogenic warming by decadal variability." Translation: climate change.

Source: Sarah Zielinski, "Rocky Mountains Losing Snow," Smithsonian.com, 10 June 2011; <http://blogs.smithsonianmag.com/science/2011/06/rocky-mountains-losing-their-snow>. (Published in the journal *Science*)

EDITORIAL MATTER

ISSN 0891-8899 – Weber is published biannually by The College of Arts & Humanities at Weber State University, Ogden, Utah 84408-1405. Full text of this issue and historical archives are available in electronic edition at <https://www.weber.edu/weberjournal>

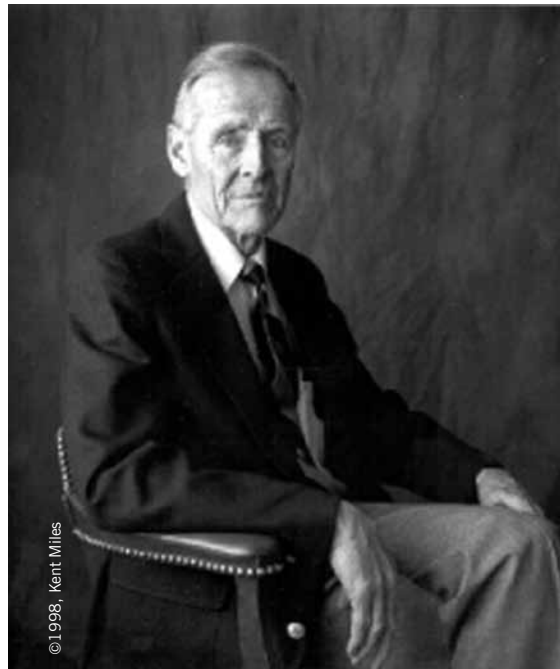
Indexed in: Abstracts of English Studies, Humanities International Complete, Index of American Periodical Verse, MLA International Bibliography, and Sociological Abstracts. Member, Council of Learned Journals.

Subscription Costs: Individuals \$20 (outside U.S., \$30), institutions \$30 (outside U.S., \$40). Back issues \$10 subject to availability. Multi-year and group subscriptions also available.

Submissions and Correspondence: Editor, **WEBER THE CONTEMPORARY WEST** | Weber State University
1405 University Circle, Ogden, UT 84408-1405.
801-626-6473 | weberjournal@weber.edu

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to
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for
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