FROM THE EDITOR

Dear readers,

I hope that your new year has gotten off to a spirited start, and that the holiday season was joyous and safe for you all. With the ticking away of those last December days and the renewal that comes every January 1, we are overwhelmed with traditions. Though some may be frivolous—forming New Year’s resolutions comes to mind, as it has been reported that 92% of people ultimately abandon them,
 and thus it is hard to reconcile the seeming perpetuity of this ritual with its inefficacy—they are all, at their core, inventions borne of good intentions. In the literary field, we are inherently sensitive to the flux between tradition and transition, and the motives behind our embrace of each: we are concerned with both creating the new and maintaining the old, sensitive to the idea that in order to secure the future of reading and writing, we must protect the past while plunging forward.

This issue of Literary Matters is rife with examples of how those in our fellowship find a way to balance expectations and experimentation, and what efforts are being made to save the future by keeping the past from being swallowed up by the present. We begin with the inaugural President’s Column from Sarah Spence, who assumed the role of ALSCW President in October. She offers a pointed look at the climate of literary studies today, speaking to some of the concerns that precipitated the recent issue of Forum. Her words make it clear that as those involved in the study, practice, or consumption of the literary arts, we must guard the status of literature, and help it to gain ascendancy whenever possible. In an effort to do just this, one of our recurring segments has been retooled. The “New Publications by Members” section has been expanded to include descriptions and cover shots of the freshly minted works of these authors. By remodeling this feature, I hope to provide our writers with the opportunity to be recognized for their achievements. It is our goal as an Association to help our members flourish, and these spotlights are another way in which we hope to support the larger literary community by fostering the growth of the individuals who compose it.

The News and Announcements section abounds with examples of the steps the Association is taking to fortify the literary tradition and shore it up for its strides into the future: the release of Forum 5, which highlights the endangered status of literature in education and offers responses to the assertions of the Council on Foreign

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while the latter appears to revolve around adherence to and respect for the standards of the academe. But what a rarity it is to find two human inventions that conform to such a scientific standard of delineation! Much about artistry depends upon boundaries: to call a work a novel, a play, or some other genre, we must first reify what we mean by each identification (and, voila, we have some “rules,” even if loosely wrought). Likewise, scholarship is not as controlled as it may appear. There is potential for invention on the scholar-critic’s part: one may, for example, form hypotheses that upend present conceptions of how literature is experienced, such as the Reader-response theory, which suggests that the onus of imparting meaning upon a text falls on the reader.² Much like the task of protecting the status of literature, the project of authorship itself—whether of intellectual or artistic intent—requires finding a comfortable balance between forging into the unknown and clinging to the conventional. The important thing is that there remains a shared goal, a sense of the common good: to keep literature alive.

The two feature articles in this issue attest very firmly to the view that creativity and criticism, artistry and analysis, are not so disparate as some may initially deem them. First, we have a stirring portrait by Caitlin Doyle, winner of the 2012 ALSCW/VSC Fellowship, of her time at the Vermont Studio Center, giving us a glimpse of how the creative process can be both challenging and surprising. During her residency, Doyle encountered the work of a painter, which led her to revelations about her poetry, and compelled her to push her own boundaries not by eschewing them, but by embracing them. Her experience taught her that playing by rules, especially those she set for herself, enhanced her creativity because accepting certain confines stimulated her ingenuity—how better to test one’s limits than by seeing how many ways one can fulfill Pound’s imperative, “make it new,” under a rigorous rubric? The second feature is a paper by John Freund, which sets out to examine how Othello undertakes his suicide after being disarmed twice in the play’s final scene. Though scholarly analysis typically relies on the text and research for answers, in this instance, Freund must look beyond it, to the space he creates for himself. For those who stage or study Shakespeare’s tragedy, there is no clear guidance from the stage directions or dialogue, which is exactly what piqued Freund’s interest, and inspired him to come up with his own explanation for the series of events that give Othello a third opportunity to take his own life, even though he is seemingly weaponless. Thus, Freund, armed with several theories about Othello’s state of mind, plunges into an unknown, and resolves a question many over the years had not even thought to ask. Even in dealing with a piece so widely studied, there is still room for novel insights, thus illustrating how artistic an endeavor analysis can be.

It is clear that the job of the writer is not so far removed from that of the scholar or critic after all, and surely, the intentions of both are the same: to get and keep people reading. And to acquire and preserve readers, which ensures there will be consumers of literature for those of us who write it (or write about it), we must balance touting the merits of the old masters while encouraging innovation. Invention, and the investigation of what it was inspired by and what it will in turn inspire, must cooperate rather than conflict. It is my hope that this issue of Literary Matters stands as a testament to the complexity of our calling, and provides hope that much is being done to maintain its stature.

I invite you all to submit your work, share your opinions and insights, and send news of your achievements so that we can continue to celebrate, inform, and inspire all of those in our Association. Thank you to those who contributed to this issue of Literary Matters, and thank you all for your readership.

Very best,

Samantha Madway
Editor, Literary Matters

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At first glance, the ultimate banner news event of the Renaissance and recent reportson education may not seem closely connected, but both past and present invite further reflection about the place of literature in our lives. On October 7, 1571, Spain, Venice, and the Papacy achieved an unexpected victory over the Ottoman navy at Lepanto, an event that inspired an unprecedented and still-unsurpassed outpouring of poems in print from Italy to Spain, and even to Spanish America. At the moment when the new technological advances of gunfire were changing the landscape of battle forever, the development of another kind of transmission, the printing press, would forever change the place that news—and poetry—would occupy. Many of the poems were anthologized less than six months after the battle by Pietro Gherardi, a lawyer from Borgo San Sepolcro (d. 1580), and evidence suggests that this was actually a second printing for many of these poems: a long Latin epyllion appears in an even earlier edition, prefaced by a dedicatory letter dated the ides of November, 1571, i.e., just over one month after the battle. The victory at Lepanto was reported and examined in print with astounding speed, and its immediate international resonance, amplified through broadsheets, letters, and printed poems, is the Renaissance news story that comes closest to a “news event” of our time, surpassing earlier news sensations in the Mediterranean, such as the Siege of Malta and the Fall of Rhodes.

The issue of when, how, and why these poems were published is particularly pertinent in the context of today’s internet culture, something I have been discussing at length with my collaborators, Elizabeth Wright and Andrew Lemons, in preparing our forthcoming edition of Latin poems on the battle (I Tatti Renaissance Library, 2014). In a sense, we seem to live at the other end of this phenomenon, as print publication is rapidly being challenged by the even greater immediacy of the internet. Yet, as the recent issue of *Forum* shows, there is still tremendous power in print publication—and it can happen with a swiftness that the poets of Lepanto would have appreciated.

That *Forum* 5 appears in print, and not online, connects it palpably with the works of these earlier poets. But it also offers something else: a clarion call for the importance of a tradition that spans centuries, for an understanding of the centrality of the humanities in all its aspects, with roots that reach back, unbroken, across centuries. This latest issue addresses a recent study by the Council on Foreign Relations entitled “U.S. Education Reform and National Security,” which claims that “America’s educational failures pose...distinct threats to national security”; as a consequence, the council proposes severe changes to the curriculum, expanded support for alternative schools, and a “national security audit” to hold schools and policymakers accountable for results.” The study raises fundamental questions about the

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The Association will again offer the ALSCW/VSC Fellowship in 2013, thanks to the generosity of an anonymous donor. The ALSCW/VSC Fellowship provides a month-long residency for writers of poetry, prose, or translations at the Vermont Studio Center—situated in the Vermont countryside—to become immersed in the craft of writing without the distractions of ordinary life.

Residents at VSC have private studios in the Maverick writing building, which is devoted entirely to writing studios—all of which are furnished, equipped with internet access, and networked to communal printing facilities—and live in single-occupancy rooms in one of ten residency houses. In addition to the environment and facilities, Writing Residents are able to take advantage of the two Visiting Writers VSC arranges to have at the Center every month. These Visiting Writers not only give readings and a “craft talk,” but are also made available for individual conferences with residents who have been accepted in the same genre. Past Visiting Writers include professor, poet, and longstanding champion of the ALSCW Rosanna Warren; poet Adam Zagajewski, whose poem, “The Piano Lesson,” graces the first broadside printed as part of the ALSCW Broadside Series; and Jane Hirshfield, another poet to contribute an original piece—titled “For the Lobaria, Usnea, Witches’ Hair, Map Lichen, Beard Lichen, Ground Lichen, Shield Lichen”—to the ALSCW Broadside Series.

The ALSCW/VSC Fellowship was first awarded in 2010 to Kami Corban for her manuscript “Little Lives,” which was recently published under the title Ex-Rich Girl Tells All (BookBaby, 2012). The 2011 Fellowship went to poet Joshua Weiner, whose time at the Studio Center is chronicled in Literary Matters 5.1. This year’s Fellow, Caitlin Doyle, completed her residency early this summer; an account of her experience is featured in this issue of Literary Matters.

Those who are interested in applying for the ALSCW/VSC Fellowship can visit the Center’s website at http://www.vermontstudiocenter.org/ to get more information about the Vermont Studio Center and the programs offered there. Additional details will be provided as the February 15, 2013 deadline approaches.

Literary Matters will soon feature a section for short book reviews of recent publications. If something you encounter moves you, please consider sharing your reaction with the readers of LM. Book reviews may be sent to literarymatters@alscw.org. Those received by February 15, 2013 will be considered for publication in Issue 6.1.
nature and purpose of education, and the role it should play in shaping citizenship and individual personhood—questions, in short, that are central to the definition of the humanities.

Literature and the humanities are more and more under attack. Our organization works on many fronts to stem this tide, since we believe that slighting the humanities diminishes the intellectual capital that distinguishes a great culture. One of our most important challenges lies within the academy, since, increasingly, programs such as the graduate programs—or whole departments of Classics—are under siege. As reported in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, MLA president Michael Bérubé recently lamented the state of graduate education in the humanities: “It is like a seamless garment of crisis, in which, if you pull on any one thread, the entire thing unravels.” The image of the text, with its etymology of weaving, lies behind this comparison: the fate of the book and the fate of the humanities are deeply intertwined. The picture Bérubé paints, especially for newly minted PhDs, is bleak, as he points out that “[w]hen we look at the academic-job market for humanists, we can’t avoid the conclusion that the value of the work we do . . . simply isn’t valued by very many people, on campus or off.” Math and science may be in the news, and that news may be immediately available on the internet, but the humanities are what make the news meaningful. Acquiring the tools to confront, analyze, and present the affairs of the world in terms that are captivating and persuasive is precisely what the humanities make possible; in these days of information overload, skills of close and careful reading are more important than ever.

I look forward to my year as President of the Association. A year that starts with the thoughtfulness of *Forum* promises to be a good one. *Literary Imagination* is entering its fifteenth year, which, as its former editor, gives me great pride. I encourage you to participate as much as possible in the varied opportunities the ALSCW offers, from local meetings and gatherings, to the Annual Conference in April, which will showcase many of our strengths as an organization. As the hectic season of paper grading and conference attending threatens to cloud our vision of why we do what we do, or the deadening force of imminent handoffs cuts into our ability to finish a thought, I urge you to take a moment to stop and reflect on the history and significance of the printed word and the importance of not just reading but re-reading.

Sarah Spence
President, ALSCW

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Dear friends of the ALSCW,

In his Nobel Prize speech, William Faulkner argued that it is a writer’s “privilege to help man endure by lifting his heart, by reminding him of the courage and honor and hope and pride and compassion and pity and sacrifice which have been the glory of his past.”¹ I write during the holiday season to thank you for past gifts and to request continued support for our efforts in this enterprise. The mission of the Association of Literary Scholars, Critics, and Writers, as you know, is to promote excellence in literary criticism and scholarship, and to work to ensure that literature thrives in both scholarly and creative environments.

Literature and the humanities are more and more under attack in academia and even in the press. Our organization works on many fronts to stem this tide, since we believe that slighting the humanities diminishes the intellectual capital that distinguishes a great culture. Our triquarterly journal, Literary Imagination, publishes creative and scholarly works of literature—essays, poems, fiction, translations—from antiquity to the present. Our occasional publication, Forum, responds to pressing problems in the public sphere; the latest issue addresses a recent study by the Council on Foreign Relations entitled “U.S. Education Reform and National Security,” which raises fundamental questions about the nature and purpose of education and the role it should play in shaping citizenship, individual personhood, and the character of the United States. We encourage the reading and writing of literature, criticism, and scholarship, as well as wide-ranging discussions among those committed to the study of literary works. David Ferry’s latest book, Bewilderment (University of Chicago Press, 2012), was awarded the 2012 National Book Award for poetry. Translations, such as those of members Clare Cavanagh and Rosanna Warren, help bridge gulfs between cultures. Literary analysis, as practiced by Michael Putnam and Christopher Ricks, provides tools for interpretation across the board. In these days of information overload, skills of close and careful reading are more important than ever.

We ask for your support at this time to help us maintain our mission to keep the study of literature—all literature—alive and well. We depend on your contributions and compassion to keep our projects thriving, whether they be the local meetings, the journal three times a year, the quarterly newsletter Literary Matters, the publication of Forum, or the annual conference. The 2013 Conference will be held in Athens, GA, April 5–7, with a reading co-sponsored by The Georgia Review on the evening of April 4. Sessions will cover topics ranging from Ovid to the Blues; we hope you can join us.

Let me conclude with Faulkner, who proclaimed that the writer’s voice “need not merely be the record of man, it can be one of the props, the pillars to help him endure and prevail.” Please help us reinforce these pillars with a gift of any size. Today the work of the ALSCW is more important than ever, but memberships and grants can pay only for part of it. Like all independent nonprofits, the ALSCW depends on annual support from its members to maintain and advance our programs. Your gifts allow us to continue to promote excellence in literary scholarship, criticism, and writing. Please consider making the largest contribution you comfortably can. Three-year pledges make significant contributions surprisingly affordable. For example, a $1,000 gift costs only $28 per month if made as a three-year pledge; a $100 gift would be only $3 a month if made as a three-year pledge. This option makes it easier to give a more substantial gift than you may have thought possible. The ALSCW Staff can help you make a gift that suits your needs and interests. Visit our website (www.alscw.org) for a link to donate electronically, send me an email at sspence@uga.edu, or write me at the ALSCW office. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Sarah Spence
President, Association of Literary Scholars, Critics, and Writers
Distinguished Research Professor of Classics and Comparative Literature, University of Georgia

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Preparations for the ALSCW’s 19th Annual Conference are nearly finalized, so be sure to check the website (http://alscw.org/Conference2013.html) for updates on the schedule of events, as well as lodging and travel information. The gathering will take place from April 4 to April 7, 2013 in Athens, Georgia. A registration form for the event can be found on page 30 of this issue of Literary Matters, and can be accessed online at http://alscw.org/events/conferences/registration/index.html. We hope to see you there!
Press Release for Forum 5:
What is Education? A Response to the Council on Foreign Relations Report, "U.S. Education Reform and National Security"

Forum is an occasional publication of the Association of Literary Scholars, Critics, and Writers (ALSCW). In this issue of Forum, twelve prominent authors reflect on a recent study by the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) entitled “U.S. Education Reform and National Security.” The CFR study claims that “America’s educational failures pose five distinct threats to national security: threats to economic growth and competitiveness, U.S. physical safety, intellectual property, U.S. global awareness, and U.S. unity and cohesion.” As a consequence, it proposes: 1) severe changes to the curriculum to emphasize “subjects vital to protecting national security”; 2) expanded support for alternative schools, whether charters or through voucher programs; and 3) a “national security audit” to hold schools and policymakers accountable for results” (p. 5). The CFR study may be downloaded here.

The CFR study raises fundamental questions about the nature and purpose of education, citizenship, individual personhood, and the character of the United States. The


ALSCW, as an organization, takes no position on this report or on any other. But since we are a group of teachers, scholars, and writers dedicated to literary studies, our members take a lively interest in the debate about how (or whether) to reform education in the United States. The contributors to this issue of Forum represent divergent views, and are university professors (including faculty from Berkeley, the University of Chicago, Harvard, West Point, and Yale), scholars, and high school teachers from both public and private schools. The issue is edited by Lee Oser of the College of the Holy Cross and Rosanna Warren of the University of Chicago. Common themes do emerge. Our authors note the severely utilitarian view of education in the CFR report; the subordination of all cultural goals to the aims of national security; and controversial assumptions about human nature and about democracy in the United States.

Forum 5 sets the CFR report in a wider context of the history of educational reform in this country, and should provoke further debate about these urgent questions. We hope you will help to publicize both the CFR report and the responses collected by the ALSCW. Now available as a PDF.

If you would like to see news of recent honors or awards you have received, notices for upcoming events of interest to ALSCW members, or information about Local Meetings you have hosted/are hosting included in Literary Matters, please send materials (photographs, text detailing all relevant information, and so forth) to literarymatters@alscw.org by the submission deadline for Issue 6.1: February 15, 2013.
Kami Corban, *Ex-Rich Girl Tells All*, (BookBaby, October 2012)

Kami Corban grew up in San Marino, California, a city that *Forbes Magazine* ranked as the sixty-third most-expensive area in the US. The author has a BA in psychology from Duke University and an MA in English from the University of California, Davis. She is the recipient of the first ALSCW/VSC Fellowship, awarded to her for her manuscript, “Little Lives.” Her recently published memoir, *Ex-Rich Girl Tells All*, is the final incarnation of that initial manuscript. She lives in Oregon and is working on a novel.

*Ex-Rich Girl Tells All* lays bare the high life and dark times of a Los Angeles girl who had every possible advantage, only to see it ripped from her in record time. What was left in the place of privilege and promise takes her on a journey of survival, resilience and mystery. As Kami sets out to graduate from Duke University and live happily ever after with her college boyfriend Tucker, she finds herself instead at the receiving end of a letter from her mother declaring divorce, and her own prospective husband decamping to England. This quickly propels the author into an onslaught of misadventures that span the resorts of England, the mountains of North Carolina, and her lavish hometown.

Derek Furr, *Suite for Three Voices*, (Fomite Press, August 2012)

Derek Furr is an associate professor of Literature in the Master of Arts in Teaching Program at Bard College. He has been published in numerous journals of creative writing, and is the author of a book of literary criticism, *Recorded Poetry and Poetic Reception from Edna Millay to the Circle of Robert Lowell* (Palgrave, 2010).

*Suite for Three Voices* is a dance of prose genres, teeming with intense human life in all its humour and sorrow: A son uncovers the horrors of his father’s wartime experience, a hitchhiker in a muumuu guards a mysterious parcel, and a young man foresees his brother’s brush with death on September 11. A Victorian poetess encounters space aliens and digital archives, a runner hears the voice of a dead friend in the song of an indigo bunting, and a teacher seeks wisdom from his students’ errors and Neil Young. By frozen waterfalls and neglected graveyards, along highways at noon and rivers at dusk, in the sounds of bluegrass, Beethoven, and Emily Dickinson, the essays and fiction in this collection offer moments of vision and aspire to the condition of music. The opening essay of the book was recently nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

If you wish to have news of your recent publications featured in the list of new publications by members, please send the relevant bibliographic information to literarymatters@alscw.org. Those who are interested in doing so may also submit a blurb about the work (no more than 250 words) and a photo of the book cover. Submissions about articles published, journals edited, and so forth are also welcome.
What’s the meaning of the Japanese proverb “Deru kugi wa utareru” (The protruding nail will be hammered), and what does it say about Japanese society? A Western equivalent exists: “Don’t make waves,” but without the same impact as the Japanese saying. Many of these proverbs have been around for millennia, providing an invaluable record of history and customs. *Japanese Proverbs: Wit and Wisdom* is a lively collection of 200 Japanese proverbs, each illustrated and paired with a Western equivalent for cross-cultural comparison.

Based on two popular, earlier volumes also published by Tuttle-Periplus—*Even Monkeys Fall from Trees* (2000) and *Even a Stone Buddha Can Talk* (2000)—this expanded edition features short explanatory paragraphs and links to even more proverbs. Readers can guess which of their own proverbs pair with those from the other language—and vice versa.

Rika Lesser, twice the recipient of translation prizes from the Swedish Academy, is the author of four books of poems and seven books of poetry in translation. She resides in Brooklyn, NY. Cecile Inglessis Margellos translates works from French, English, and ancient Greek, and is a scholar and literary critic. She divides her time between Geneva and Athens.

According to the publisher, Kiki Dimoula’s poetry—the most praised and prized in contemporary Greek literature—is a paradox, both mysteriously intricate and widely popular. Exacting and oracular at once, Dimoula superimposes absurdity on rationality, caustic irony on dark melancholy. This first English translation of a wide selection of poems from across Dimoula’s oeuvre brings together some of her most beguiling, arresting, and moving work. The demands on her translators are considerable. Dimoula plays with the Greek language, melds its levels of diction, challenges its grammar and syntax, and bends its words by twisting their very shape and meaning. Cecile Inglessis Margellos and Rika Lesser, Dimoula’s award-winning translators, have re-created her style’s uncanny effect of refraction: when plunged into the water of her poetry, all these bent words suddenly and astonishingly appear perfectly straight.
The October 24 Boston local meeting of the ALSCW was held at the library of Boston University’s Editorial Institute. Daphne Kalotay—who has taught at BU, Middlebury, and Skidmore, and is the author of *Calamity and Other Stories* (Doubleday, 2005)—read an excerpt from her first novel, *Russian Winter* (Harper, 2010). Sassan Tabatabai, who teaches humanities and Persian literature at Boston University and Boston College, read poems and translations from his book *Uzunburun* (The Pen & Anvil Press, 2011). While there are natural differences in the technical address to fiction and poetry employed by these two writers, there were also common thematic threads of distance—temporal, spatial, and emotional—which made their presentations a fruitful pairing, and which were brought up in the discussion that followed.

Daphne Kalotay began by explaining briefly the context in the novel from which her excerpt was drawn. The setting is contemporary Boston; her central character is a retired Soviet-era ballerina whom we encounter in her old age, after she has decided to sell jewelry she brought with her when she defected many years before. Among the technical challenges presented—and surmounted—in the excerpt were managing the character’s voice through flashbacks to her childhood and youth in Russia and maintaining a qualitatively different feel in the narrative from the politically charged reality of the 30s to the very changed emotional situations of the character’s old age in contemporary America.

Some of the discussion of her work was concerned with a question asked about the nature of rhythm in the prose: since dancing was to be a lifelong passion and discipline for the character, and since we see her unable to get around easily in old age, was there any attempt to vary the pace and rhythm of the prose between the flashbacks and the modern episodes to show how her sense of time and rhythm might have been changed as her practice of expression was driven inward from full body motion to interior thoughts and external speech? Kalotay explained that she was guided by other objectives: her method of working involved careful planning and an emphasis on historical accuracy, with a focus on the personal truths of characters in action, conversation, and dialogue in a society where any open expression was severely constrained by the Soviet regime. She also gave some insights into her process of basing some characters on relatives, and using some elements of her own family background and experience while making substantial changes to suit the narrative.

Sassan Tabatabai read a number of poems and translations, which were richly grounded in the physical world and manifested the nature and value of emotional warmth and acceptance. He spoke of the enduring theme of exile in Iranian literature, of the need for the exiled to carry what means most along on the journey—to keep a movable sense of home by internalizing the value of tradition, history, and language—while always remaining aware of a longing for what has been left behind. The warmth of fulfillment consistently trumped the sense of loss that might otherwise swamp the characters and situations, which ranged far and wide historically and geographically. In a poem written in the voice of Adam to Eve at the end of their lives together, for example, the focus is not on the lost Eden, but on the rich and unique meaning of the love Adam feels for Eve through their shared experience—a redefinition of “home.”

It was mentioned in the discussion that such a focus is not only rare in the modern world but vital, because it supplies an example of how redefining home and modeling the warmth of human contact can nourish those who feel progressively more rootless and alienated in their fragmented lives. Mr. Tabatabai also consistently radiated in person the calm and emotional fullness encountered in his work.

Al Basile is a poet, singer/songwriter, and cornetist. He began his career as a cornet player with Roomful of Blues in 1973, and has worked with the Duke Robillard Band since 1990. He has nine solo CDs out; the last five reached the Top 15 on the *Living Blues* airplay charts. He was nominated in 2010, 2012, and 2013 for a Blues Music Award as Best Horn Player. His poetry and fiction have been published in recent years. He taught at the Providence Country Day School from 1980 to 2005, and has since concentrated on his writing, performing, and recording.
Saskia Hamilton hosted a local meeting of the ALSCW on December 13 at Barnard College entitled “Fictions of Fiction.” The scholar-critic Morris Dickstein (a former president of ALSCW) spoke about My Life in Fiction, a memoir of growing up as a reader, from boyhood infatuation with stories about history and sports, to the adolescent’s discovery of complex plot and language in Dickens, to the young man’s passion for Conrad, James, Joyce, and Kafka. The novelist and essayist Darryl Pinckney read from the first chapter of his novel High Cotton, which brings fully to life the character of the black preacher-intellectual grandfather as seen by his resistant grandson. In exhilarating and rich diction, and in sentence rhythms that bound over ditches and fences and swerve unexpectedly, Pinckney’s prose is a performance of a high order.

The combined offerings of Dickstein and Pinckney provoked an hour of vivid discussion in which everyone participated, and which no one seemed to want to arrest, although we had to call a halt at 8 p.m.

Morris Dickstein is Distinguished Professor of English and Theatre at the CUNY Graduate Center. His most recent books are Leopards in the Temple (Harvard University Press, 2002), a study of postwar American fiction; A Mirror in Roadway (Princeton University Press, 2007), a collection of literary essays; and Dancing in the Dark (W. W. Norton & Company, 2010), a cultural history of the Depression era, which received the Ambassador Book Award in American Studies and was nominated for the National Book Critics Circle Award in criticism.

Darryl Pinckney, a long-time contributor to the New York Review of Books, is the author of a novel, High Cotton (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1992), and a book of essays, derived from his Alain Locke Lecture series at Harvard University, Out There: Mavericks of Black Literature (Basic Civitas Books, 2002). He is at work on a study of African American literature in the twentieth century.

Rosanna Warren is a poet and a professor at the University of Chicago. She served as President of the ALSCW from 2004 to 2005.
On November 9, 2012, under a clear sky in the cool late-autumn air, the Association of Literary Scholars, Critics, and Writers held an interdisciplinary symposium entitled “Transatlantic Relations: History, Legacy & Perspectives” in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Juxtaposing European and American scholarly thinking, the symposium took place at two locations on the LSU campus—the Howe Russell Geoscience Complex was reserved for the morning, and for the afternoon, the historic Hill Memorial Library.

Every year the Program in Comparative Literature hosts a regional meeting of the ALSCW, which affords graduate students the opportunity to present their work.

This year we decided to combine the meeting with a symposium made possible by a grant from the German Embassy’s “Think Transatlantic” project, organized by faculty in the German department: Gundela Hachmann, Harald Leder, and John Pizer. We thereby provided a full-day conference featuring Lawrence Kritzman of Dartmouth College as the ALSCW keynote speaker, who also served as moderator of the graduate student roundtable. Four scholars were invited to participate in the symposium, and three graduate students presented papers in addition to the ALSCW keynote and round table. This gathering entailed a series of timely examinations of transatlantic culture and literature from German, French, and American perspectives. The day ended with a reception and poetry reading.

Professor Günter Bischof of the University of New Orleans opened the symposium with a discussion on geostrategic parameters of transatlantic relations in the post-World War II era. He examined the American involvement in the restructuring of Germany—from a macrocosmic historical perspective—both politically and geographically (with the elimination of Nazism and dismembering of the nation) through the implementation of NATO forces and policies, which pacified the Prussian spirit. Bischof structured his presentation around the assertion that the goal was to rebuild Germany in a manner that both punished the defeated nation for its inhumane actions during World War II and, at the same time, allowed it to re-establish itself rather quickly in Europe.

Harald Leder, Director of Academic Programs Aboard at Louisiana State University, offered a parallel treatment of German-American relations at the grassroots level in the second lecture of the day. Leder focused on the microcosmic aspects of rebuilding Germany, relating the American efforts to both indoctrinate and rehabilitate the German youth through a series of programs, among which the German Youth Activities (GYA) figured prominently. This organization, created by Major Seltzer of the US Army, re-established library systems in Germany through donated books from America, and opened youth centers where children could play in a safe, heated environment and were fed when food was scarce.

Leder humorously related how, in many cases, the US GIs were babysitters in some capacity, and how these centers even provided day care, as was depicted in several editorial cartoons of the day. Moreover, American GIs encouraged the first soapbox derbies in Nuremburg, and influenced German enthusiasm for basketball and American radio (in particular the AFN radio transmissions). While touching on the subject of racism in transatlantic exchanges, Leder briefly addressed the topic of interracial relations between black American soldiers and white German women, the children of whom were subjected to a considerable amount of discrimination in both American and German society, and were never fully accepted by either.

In the later morning hours, LSU’s Jesse Russell discussed the transatlantic nature of Ulysses’ and Dante’s sea journeys, while Amy Catania’s portrait of “Global Greece” eloquently examined questions of translation techniques and choices in Chapman’s, Fitzgerald’s, Keats’s, and Vladimor’s treatments of Homer’s seminal work *The Odyssey*. In Catania’s study, she approached the question of readership along the lines of culture, time period, and accessibility based on the translator’s intended audience. She relayed the inability of a translator to assimilate a text fully into another culture owing to language differences, and how transmigration of such a text establishes a somewhat stereotypical
knowledge of another culture. Russell’s discussion, on the other hand, expounded upon the question of immortality implicit in Dante’s neologism “Trasumanar” (soaring beyond the human), and Dante’s rewriting of the sea voyages represented in Homer’s Odyssey in The Divine Comedy.

In the early afternoon, LSU professor of History David Culbert advanced a discussion entitled “Social Engineering and Prosthesis: The Best Years of Our Lives (1946), for German Audiences,” which featured an excerpt of the film as a platform for approaching the subject of film distribution in foreign markets. The film treats the fictional readjustment of three American soldiers to civilian life after the War. While the stories of the men are entirely fictional, the film appealed to German audiences on a number of fronts, particularly with the casting director’s choice to include a real amputee as a main character. Culbert described the film as a means of social engineering, spinning an undesirable situation into a desired social outcome by the use of mass media, which in this case, took the form of an American film in Germany. It appealed significantly to Germans, especially German women, and the film ran for two years in German cinemas. Culbert argued that the film’s commercial success was a source of closure for the German people in the post-War era because of its portrayal of American adaptation to post-War realities.

LSU’s Brian Daigle examined both the New Critics and the Southern Critics by analyzing the correspondences of the Catholic-French intellectual Jacques Maritain and the agrarian Southern poet and critic Allen Tate. In his presentation, entitled “Fugitives and Frenchmen,” Daigle centered his lecture on the reasons why a conservative agrarian intellectual community in the southern United States would espouse the kind of Christian humanist thought found in the philosophical writings of Jacques Maritain. Following Maritain’s life and geographical displacement in the 1930s, 40s and 50s, Daigle traced the Maritain family’s role in the Renouveau Catholique (the revival of Catholic Letters in France), and described Jacques Maritain’s contribution to Christian humanism in American literary circles.

Maritain’s life was peppered with remarkable success in academic, cultural, and religious spheres. He was appointed French ambassador to the Vatican in 1948, and was instrumental in drafting the United Nations’ “Universal Declaration of Human Rights.” He held posts at Princeton and Columbia, and frequently lectured at the University of Notre Dame and the University of Chicago. His most influential literary works—Art and Poetry (Philosophical Library, 1943), Art and Scholasticism with other essays (Sheed and Ward, 1947), The Range of Reason (Scribner, 1952), and Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry (Pantheon Books, 1953)—his religious affiliation, and the transatlantic dialogues he maintained with Allen Tate were fundamental to the establishment of an Anglophone intellectual dialogue in the southern United States. Tate invited Maritain and his family to attend
his Catholic baptism and requested an essay from Maritain on poetics and religion for the first issue of the Sewanee Review, which Tate edited in 1944. The attitudes of the Southern Critics, Daigle argued, were formed, at least in part, because of the interactions between Tate and Maritain.

Paul Michael Leutzeler of Washington University at St. Louis discussed American writers in Europe, and the distinctions between visions of Europe offered by a variety of American writers. Beginning with the conceptions of a new republic under construction described by political figures Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, Leutzeler compared the travel writings of each abroad. He continued by following the histories of American literary figures Margaret Fuller, Walt Whitman, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Mark Twain, and Henry Adams in an argument contrasting the Old World with the New along a vast array of subjects.

Leutzeler continued his examination of the next generation of authors, including Henry James and Edith Wharton, who guided their readers towards a curiosity about Europe, which differed from the view of America as exceptional that Franklin and Jefferson transmitted to the first American literary greats. Leutzeler used Gertrude Stein, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, and Henry Miller to argue that the vision of America as compared to Europe had changed to the point at which America was seen to offer no new alternative to Europe. The novels of Richard Wright and James Baldwin juxtapose the American and European views of race relations in the 1940s and 50s. Leutzeler’s examination of the subject depicted the history of trends in American transatlantic literary thought.

The symposium concluded with a roundtable, led by Lawrence Kritzman of Dartmouth, with panel members—Lazara Bolton, Pengyi Huang, Jingyuan Liu, Carrie O’Connor, Guillermo Severiche, and Jacqueline Zimmer-Salen—taking a comparative approach to thinking transatlantic. Each of the panel members, all graduate students in Comparative Literature and French Studies at LSU, posed questions to Kritzman about his latest work, The Columbia History of Twentieth Century French Thought (Columbia University Press, 2006), a compendium of over two hundred entries by an impressive collection of leading intellectuals on French thought from Europe and North America covering the most diverse topics in any such publication.

Several members of the panel provided additional remarks in addition to asking Professor Kritzman a question. Lazara Bolton presented a commentary on Solimar Otero’s recent transnational study, Afro-Cuban Diasporas in the Atlantic World (University of Rochester Press, 2010). Carrie O’Connor inquired how, as educators, it is possible to reinvigorate students’ knowledge of and interest in the literary canon; and, further, whether the canon of comparative/world literatures is still relevant today. Pengyi Huang commented:

In American Literature today, we see a large number of writers with different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, yet they all use English to write. Many of their works are focused on their own ethnic communities in American cities, such as Hispanic communities, Asian communities, and Islamic communities and so on. By writing about their ethnic communities in English rather [than] their own languages, are those writers losing their cultural heritage[,] or are they helping to preserve the cultural heritage in the communities in America? And what is the influence of this practice on transatlantic literary studies?

Guillermo Severiche directed the discussion toward the body, asking how it can be inscribed as an element of transaction in transatlantic discourse and transatlantic studies.

The debate carried on long afterwards at the reception that followed the symposium at the International Cultural Center. MFA student Victoria Mansberger gave a poetry reading of new works inspired by her reflection on the theme of “Transatlantic Relations.” Symposium organizers Gundela Hachmann and Adelaide Russo, Director of the Comparative Literature Program, concluded the ALSCW regional meeting by thanking all who participated in and attended the event.

Brandon Thomas is a PhD candidate at Louisiana State University. He completed his undergraduate work at the University of Texas, Austin, and his master’s thesis was published in book form under the title Representation and Stereotype in the Comics: Images of Near and Middle Eastern Arabs in the Franco-Belgian Bande Dessinée (VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, 2010). His dissertation will approach the subject of history and politics in travel literature and in the bande dessinée. It is scheduled for completion in September 2013.
During the first week of my month-long residency at the Vermont Studio Center, I sat at a dinner table with the Taiwanese artist Jui-Pin Chang. Her paintings were on display in the gallery next to the dining hall. Whenever I passed the building, I found myself compelled to walk in and look at her images. Chang’s Bucket Men series combined the vivid whimsy of illustrations in a children’s book with a darkness springing from the fact that all of the human figures in the images wore black buckets over their heads.

As a group of us newly arrived writers and artists sat around the table getting acquainted, Chang, who had already been in residence for a month, told us about the impetus behind her Bucket Men project. She described a dream she had one night in which a crowd of small men with buckets over their heads surrounded her. In a panic, she reached out and covered her own head with a bucket. A surge of courage replaced her fear. Though the bucket blocked her view of everything around her, she could see, understand, and explore the world in a fuller way than ever before. Chang described the feeling as “a miraculous surprise,” an unexpected discovery that the bucket over her head, by limiting her vision, had set her free.

Chang’s dream and the paintings it produced lingered in my mind as I prepared to enter my own artistic dreamtime. I had come to the Vermont Studio Center, supported by the generous aid of the ALSCW/VSC Fellowship, with the goal of spending June focused on my first book-length poetry collection. Feeling a need to connect with the people and place around me before I could plunge into my work, I spent the first few days exploring the world outside of my writing studio. I had been to residencies before and found that they often operated in some degree of self-contained isolation from their surrounding communities. But I quickly discovered that Johnson, the town in which the VSC is located, serves as an extension of the residency itself.

Most of the buildings in town—a series of colonial-style New England houses, churches, and mills that have been converted into working and living spaces for artists and writers—belong to the VSC. The local businesses, including two pubs, a coffee shop, and a bookstore, rely significantly on the patronage of VSC residents. I’d never before found myself in an environment so infused with the spirit of art making, a town that seemed to vibrate with the presence of people committed to creative work. Never mind that the whole of Johnson can be traversed in only a bit more time than it takes to stroll two New York City blocks—the place and its implications felt vast to me.

That sense of largess extended beyond the environment to the people occupying it with me, a much bigger and more diverse collection of individuals than I’d ever encountered at any previous artists’ colony. There were nearly sixty residents in total for the month: writers, sculptors,
painters, printmakers, photographers and new-media artists from all over the world, including Turkey, Israel, Bolivia, South Korea, and New Zealand. During my first days at the VSC, I threw myself as much as possible into an active engagement with the other residents, relishing mealtime discussions, daytime hikes, visits to the painters' and sculptors' studios, and evening hangouts at “The Hub,” the pub across the street from the residency. I found that my job writing copy for a media marketing company had left me ravenous for conversations of the sort I was having at the VSC, discussions with other artists about process, inspiration, frustration, failure, and the nuts-and-bolts realities of building and sustaining a life rooted in creative work.

Soon the time had come for me to pull inward from the expansiveness of the place and people, shutting the door of my studio behind me. As I embarked on my first full day of writing at the VSC, Jui-Pin Chang’s Bucket Men paintings surfaced in my imagination. I thought about the dream she described, which had served as the inspiration for the project. My thoughts floated back to that moment when she covered her head with a bucket and felt an unexpected rush of fearlessness and freedom.

I had come to the VSC craving a breakthrough of some sort, a broadening of perspective that could extend and embolden my territory on the page. I arrived feeling as if I’d entered a transitional phase as a poet, a period marked by both the excitement of not-yet-tapped possibilities and the discomfort of growing pains. One of my most native ways of working, up until then, centered on the goal of creating tension between form and content by frequently writing within limitations (rhyme or meter, for example) or playing with self-imposed patterns within a free verse structure. I had found that composing inside of parameters that did not allow me full expressive latitude led to surprising discoveries in the writing process.

But more and more, I felt eager to spend time working against the grain of my sensibilities, questioning my natural tendencies as a writer. The image I’d held in my mind, as a guidepost on how to proceed, was one of tossing off restriction, the opposite of Chang’s Bucket Men dream. Yet, as I sat in my VSC studio and readied myself to start writing, my mind kept returning to the way that her dream and the art it produced held the push-and-pull between freedom and limitation in such a powerful relationship.

As my time at the VSC unfolded, I found myself reflecting on the same sphere of inquiry in life as in art. It was hard not to see the VSC residents as living versions of the Bucket Men figures. We were individuals who had chosen...
to limit our purviews for a period of time, to cover our heads, in a sense, from the outside world, directing our focus as much as possible toward the universe within our minds and studio walls. Each of us had come to the VSC on the premise that, in order to capture, explore, and enlarge the world through art, it is sometimes necessary to retreat from it, to hope that temporarily narrowing the range of one’s reality will result in a broadening of imaginative scope.

Our self-imposed limitation was both complicated and enlivened by the freedoms beckoning us away from it. The sunny Northern Vermont summer landscape called from outside of the window, inviting us into the area’s rivers, waterfalls, and stunning hiking trails. In the evenings, the VSC hosted lectures, slide shows, and readings by visiting artists and writers, as well as opportunities for the residents to share our work through open studio hours and readings. The VSC never lacked for social goings-on among the residents: movie nights, bonfires, impromptu dance parties, ping-pong tournaments, day trips to surrounding areas, and karaoke nights at the “The Hub.”

I’m certain that I’m not the only resident who struggled on a daily basis to hold the most effective balance between focused solitude and involvement with the compelling activities and people beyond the studio door. On occasion, my work suffered because I welcomed too much distraction. At other times, my writing stagnated because I holed up in the studio and tried to force progress instead of listening to the voices urging me away from my notebook.

But when I managed to get the balance right, my poetry took off in ways that it only could have done within the buzzing atmosphere of the VSC. There are events that I absolutely don’t regret missing because having the luxury to choose poetry over other obligations led me to creative breakthroughs. Likewise, there are hours of productivity that I don’t lament losing because the experience that drew me out of the studio ultimately fed my process more than if I’d stayed in my chair.

Abandoning my desk to go to readings by Galway Kinnell in nearby St. Johnsbury and Kathleen Graber at the Vermont College of Fine Arts charged up my pen for days. Attending visiting artist Odili Donald Odita’s presentation extended my questions about freedom and limitation in art. Back in my studio, I kept returning to something he said, which I’d scribbled in my notebook: “Color in itself has the possibility of mirroring the complexity of the world as much as it has the potential for being distinct.”

Odita’s statement about color seemed to pertain to words as well, spurring me to reflect on language’s potential to mirror the world while remaining distinct from it at the same time. In some sense, the desire with which I’d arrived at the residency, the urge to loosen my pen-grip and eschew limitation in favor of a freer process and product, came from a belief that doing so would allow me to engage a larger amount of the world’s complexity and messiness. Yet the more I labored in my studio trying to achieve that effect, the more my imaginative energies dwindled. I was producing work that gestured toward mirroring the world’s sprawling complications but, in the absence of restraints pressuring that sprawl, it failed to contain any sort of distinction. My language had scope but it contained no “color,” as Odita had defined the term; it lacked the ability to both reflect the world’s complexity and exist as a distinct and distinguished entity beyond the world.

I took a break from a frustrating morning of
writing to listen to visiting poet Matthea Harvey give a talk to the resident writers. One of the poems about which she spoke was Wallace Stevens’ “Tea at the Palaz of Hoon.” I’d encountered it before, but coming across it again amid the current set of questions orbiting my work made the piece crackle with an urgent new electricity. The poem details the experience of a man named Hoon as he discovers and expresses the extent to which his reality is fully his own creation. What gripped me most was the notion conveyed in the last line. Describing the self-defined world in which he moves, Hoon says, “…there I found myself more truly and more strange.”

Back at my desk after Harvey’s talk, it occurred to me that what I wanted was not to break away from some previous version of my writing self, but to become that self “more truly and more strange.” Stevens’ words helped me clarify what I’d sensed about my current project but had not yet fully articulated to myself: my hope was to challenge my tendencies as a writer, not to abandon or replace them, but ultimately to strengthen them, to make them more nuanced and dexterous, more resolutely themselves. In an attempt to write with greater freedom, I had forgotten that limitation, for me, is often the most freeing force of all. The thought had not occurred to me that going deeper into limitation rather than farther from it, like Hoon in Stevens’ poem going deeper into himself, might in the end bring my process the increased expansiveness I craved.

It struck me that the way to move forward in my work might be to move back, diving again into my fascination with the sonic and emotional tension that comes from self-imposed limitations in a poem, but increasing the stakes, subtleties, and surprises of those limits. In attempting to write with no tensions of restraint checking my expressive urges, it was as if I’d tossed off too thoroughly an intrinsic aspect of my process, thus failing to enact in language the kind of dynamism that Odita ascribed to color in visual art. I realized that I had been trying to achieve what Chang experienced in her dream, that sense of liberated and expanded perception, without the modulation of vision provided by the bucket.

I remember reading in Richard Ellman’s biography of James Joyce that Joyce felt as though, whenever he was stuck on a problem with his writing, he would go walking down the street and trip over the answer. He had an unshakeable sense that the universe would send him signs and all he had to do was stay open to receiving them. Like most people who do creative work, I’ve experienced this sensation in my own life at times, those fortunate instances when you’re casting...
around for a solution and a certain galvanizing event, object, image or person crops up in your view exactly when needed. The beauty of the VSC is that it creates an intensification of the potential for such moments to occur, mainly by offering residents two crucial gifts: a constant flux of highly charged input and an unimpeded stretch of open hours in which to process that input.

It is possible that, in another setting, I would have progressed to similar realizations about my work, without the sparks set off in my imagination by Chang’s Bucket Men imagery, Odita’s presentation, and Harvey’s use of the Stevens poem in her discussion, and without the liberty to write all day, unfettered by other obligations. But the VSC, through the concentrated alchemy of its various elements, saved me time, bringing me to those discoveries in a much faster and clearer way than if I’d been working toward them in the context of regular life.

By the end of my stay there, I had finished several poems and started on others, feeling as if my poetry had gone in fresh and unexpected directions throughout the residency. I left bolstered by a sense of having entered an exciting new phase of my artistic life. Equally important, I made bonds of friendship with other writers and artists that will remain in place for a long time, including some poetry-exchange relationships that have already proven invaluable as sources of feedback.

The most sustaining product of my month at the VSC was the clarification of something I’d sensed but hadn’t yet fully trusted: the best way to challenge, expand, and reinvent my writing self is to venture deeper into that self, with all of its strengths and flaws, rather than trying to step outside of it. After returning to regular life, I printed out a copy of Stevens’ “Tea at the Palaz of Hoon” and an image of Odita’s work, its brilliant hues reminding me of his statement about color, and thumbtacked them, along with a photo of one of Chang’s Bucket Men paintings, on the bulletin board above my desk. They are like breadcrumbs on a pathway leading me home, bringing me continually back to myself, but prompting me to arrive there in a manner more truly and more strange with each return.

Caitlin Doyle’s poetry has appeared in the Atlantic, the Three-penny Review, Boston Review, Black Warrior Review, Best New Poets 2009 (University of Virginia Press), and elsewhere. Her honors include a Tennessee Williams Scholarship through the Sewanee Writers’ Conference, an Amy Award in Poetry through Poets & Writers, and a MacDowell Colony Residency. She has taught as a lecturer in Creative Writing at Boston University, the Writer-in-Residence at St. Albans School, and the Emerging Writer Resident at Penn State University, Altoona.
I want to address a question that confronts anyone who plans to stage Othello, but one that critics tend to ignore: Where does Othello get the weapon with which he kills himself? And I will suggest that the answer may well lie in what critics have by no means ignored—his last speech.

Now although the critics seem disinterested about what weaponry Othello may have on his person as he is being led away, Shakespeare certainly does not, for on two prior occasions in the scene, he calls special attention to Othello’s weaponless state: first, when Montano disarmshim after his attack on Iago (“I am not valiant neither / But every puny whisperer gets my sword” [5.2.252–53]1); and again after he has re-armed himself with a sword secreted in the room and has wounded Iago with it (“Wrench his sword from him,” Lodovico commands [5.2.296]).

Then, after a brief interlude, Lodovico turns to Othello: “You must forsake this room and go with us. / Your power and your com-

Othello’s Last Speech: The Why of It
by John Freund

mand is taken off, / And Cassio rules in Cyprus” (5.2.339–41). But he will shortly discover that it is one thing to take off Othello’s command and quite another to remove his power, for when he tells him he “shall close prisoner rest” (5.2.344) and gives the order, “Come, bring [him] away” (5.2.46),2 Othello stops the general exodus by employing, for one last time, the “Othello magic,” the spell his spoken words evoke: “Soft you; a word or two before you go” (5.2.347). Then in the eighteen lines that follow, he charms his listeners with his words, as he has done before when quelling the incipient brawl that Iago was stirring up among Brabantio’s followers with the single line that manifests the power of his presence: “Keep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust them” (1.2.60), and again in the “round unvarnish’d tale” that enchants his listeners in the Duke’s council as it had enchanted Desdemona earlier (1.3.130–72).

Now, at the present juncture, his calm cadences weave their spell once more before they culminate in the “bloody period” in which tale and teller merge in a sudden crescendo of violence: “I took by the throat the circumcised dog, / And smote him, thus (stabs himself)” (5.2.364–65). Moments later, Cassio remarks, “This did I fear, but thought he had no weapon” (5.2.369).

Didn’t we all?

This article, with several additions and some minor alterations, is a revision of a paper delivered by the author in 2008 at the Pennsylvania College English Association Conference in State College, PA. It never appeared in print, and was itself a considerable expansion of the section on Othello, “The Turk Within,” in Freund’s Broken Symmetries: A Study of Agency in Shakespeare’s Plays (New York: Peter Lang, 1991). 144–48. That treatment—as is the present one—was partially indebted to the late Professor Edward Callan, a former colleague from Western Michigan University. In the early 60s, he advanced the theory in a never-published paper that Othello’s last speech was—contrary to the opinions of Eliot and Leavis—for the purpose of freeing himself from the grip of his guards, one arm at a time, as suggested by the text of the speech itself. 1 This and all subsequent quotations from Othello are taken from David Bevington ed., The Complete Works of Shakespeare, 3rd ed., (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, and Company, 1980) unless otherwise noted.

2 This is the reading given by the First Quarto, one that has been adopted by at least one modern edition—Hardin Craig and David Bevington, eds., The Complete Works of Shakespeare, rev. ed., (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, and Company, 1973), 978—which makes explicit that it is Othello who is being compelled to leave.
Despite the emphasis on weaponry that we have noted throughout the scene, critics have been strangely silent on the subject. Where did he get a weapon, though? Comments from those concerned with staging the play are dismissive of any problem. Harley Granville-Barker, for example, wrote in 1945 “twice they have disarmed him, but he has kept a dagger.”

His view reflects what had been normal stage practice for many years. Most strictly literary critics, however, simply ignore the whole question, choosing to focus on the rhetorical dimension of the speech, and on what it reveals about Othello’s character. T. S. Eliot may have been the first to do so in his 1927 essay, in which he frames the speech as an instance of the kind of declamation employed by other Elizabethan dramatists, who were influenced by Seneca:

What Othello seems to me to be doing in making the speech is cheering himself up. He is endeavoring to escape reality, he has ceased to think about Desdemona, and is thinking about himself....Othello succeeds in turning himself into a pathetic figure, by adopting an aesthetic rather than a moral attitude, dramatising himself against his environment. He takes in the spectator, but the human motive is primarily to take in himself.4

Whatever we may think of this deflationary appraisal of Othello’s motives, it struck a chord with F. R. Leavis, who ten years later launched his own attack on what he called the “sentimentalist’s Othello,” the dominant view at the time that had been most-fully expressed around the turn of the century by A. C. Bradley, who, in the tradition of Coleridge, had seen Othello as the utterly noble victim of Iago’s devilish machinations.5 The essence of Leavis’s argument against the idea of a “noble” Othello may be seen in his comment on the success of Iago’s insinuations about Desdemona:

And it is plain that what we should see in Iago’s prompt success is not so much Iago’s diabolic intellect as Othello’s readiness to respond. Iago’s power, in fact, in the temptation scene is that he represents something that is in Othello—in Othello the husband of Desdemona: the essential traitor is within the gates....Bradley’s Othello is, rather, Othello’s; it being an essential datum regarding the Shakespearean Othello that he has an ideal conception of himself.6


6 Leavis, 140–41.
There is much that is sound in Leavis’s view of Othello as a victim of self-idealization, as later critics have often conceded. But what I would urge is that both Eliot and Leavis err in regarding Othello’s last speech as arising from a “histrionic intent.” Theatrical it is, but self-dramatization, “cheering himself up,” is not his motive in speaking at this point, and only by ignoring what obviously is his motive—to kill himself—could they fall into this error.

Consider this: Lodovico has not left Othello as a loose cannon free to roam about the stage, but a weaponless prisoner in the grip of guards who are about to lead him away. It is not an easy task to commit suicide under such conditions! Why does he speak? To halt the sudden exodus and free himself so that he may die as he chooses to: “upon a kiss” (5.2.368).

His immediate motive is to free himself. Freedom, of course, has been an abiding concern of his throughout the play: “The Moor is of a free and open nature,” Iago muses as he devises his plan of attack at the end of Act I (1.3.400), and everything we have witnessed of Othello up to that moment inclines us to agree. Yet his “free nature” is not marked by a carefree outlook; on the contrary, his need to feel unconstrained is so powerful that preserving his freedom appears always to be on his mind. Of his marriage, for instance, he tells Iago, “But that I love the gentle Desdemona, / I would not my unhoused free condition / Put into circumstance and confine / For the sea’s worth” (1.2.25–28).

To view his marriage as “circumscription and confine[ment]” implies a somewhat claustrophobic fear and points to the means Iago discovers to bring him down. “The essential traitor,” as Leavis remarked, “is within the gates,” and it is by directing his remarks to that “traitor” that Iago is able to “circumscribe and confine” his victim. “Circumscription,” we should note, is but one of a rather astounding number of “circum-” words—seven in all—that Shakespeare employs in this play, all creating the sense of enclosure. “Circumstance,” for instance, appears in the opening scene when Iago is explaining to Roderigo how Othello rid himself of those seeking to advance Iago’s suit:

But he, as loving his own pride and purposes, Evades them with a bombast circumstance Horribly stuff’d with epithets of war.... (1.1.13–15)

Kittredge glosses “bombast circumstance” here as “bombastic circumlocution,” and we see that Othello is employing language to confine his listeners’ purposes before they can restrict his own. And note how well Iago’s description of this initial use of the “Othello magic” accords with its use in his last speech, for do we not see him there again deploying “bombast circumstance” to further “his own pride and purposes”?

“Circumstance” appears most famously, of course, in the “[p]ride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war” (3.3.359), a phrase that speaks revealingly of what Othello values in his “occupation.” And that “circumcised dog” that must not go unmentioned suddenly becomes the focus of his wrath in his last speech, directing it against his own breast (5.2.64).

The only discussion of this “inner Turk” of Othello’s that I know of comes from a post-colonial critic, Ania Loomba, who sees Othello as “a near schizophrenic whose last speech graphi-

7 Barbara Everette was one such, but nevertheless felt the view that Othello is “noble” is not sentimental (“Reflections on the Sentimentalist’s Othello,” Critical Quarterly, 3 [1961], 127–30; repr. in Shakespeare: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory: 1945–2000, ed. Russ McDonald [Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004], 152–63). Others, like Robert B. Heilman in Magic in the Web: Action and Language in Othello, (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1956), cite Leavis’s views with approval (145ff.). Actually, Leavis’s theories remained influential for decades; Joan Lord Hall points out that the National Theatre production of the play in 1964, with Lawrence Olivier as Othello, was heavily indebted to his outlook, as was Stuart Burge’s film version in the following year (Othello: A Guide to the Play [Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999], 170ff.).
cally portrays the split—he becomes simultaneously the Christian and the Infidel, the Venetian and the Turk.” Her insight here is sound, but I cannot conclude, as she does, that his suicide results from his “increasing racial isolation,” nor that he is a “lonely figure” in the last scene “desperately recalling his service to the state...and delivering his own eulogy.” And if we seek a psychological explanation of his conflict, self-alienation seems the appropriate diagnosis rather than schizophrenia.

In the early 1960s, Frederick Weiss, in discussing three types of self-alienation, labeled the most active form “self-idealization,” where the authentic self is replaced by an “ideal self,” a fantasy that represents what the individual feels he should be. His description of the dynamics of that process throws considerable light upon Othello, whose behavior throughout the play—but especially in his last speech—requires this clinical definition of what Leavis called his “ideal conception of himself,” for it is more than just that: it is a “willing to be someone else.”

This process leads, in two ways, to steadily increasing atrophy and paralysis of the self and interference with its further growth. The first factor is the result of a kind of “inner deprivation.” All available energy is used in the compulsive attempt to actualize the other, the ideal self. Too little energy is left for the developing of the real potentials of the self. The second, much more active factor is the destructive force of contempt and hate which is generated incessantly by the omnipotent, idealized self-image and directed against the despicable, actual “self that failed.”

Weiss’s clinical description of “self-idealization,” I would suggest, permits us to understand Othello’s swift descent—under Iago’s sinister provocation—from the calmly majestic figure who can say of himself, “My parts, my title, and my perfect soul / Shall manifest me rightly” (1.2.31–320), to the savage creature that cries, “I will chop her into messes” (4.1.199).

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10 Loomba, 811.


12 Weiss, 470.
Despite Othello’s deep-seated fear of “circumscript,” which arises from his confined, authentic self, he has surrounded himself with the pageantry, the “pomp and circumstance of glorious war.” Without these idealized images of chaos as aids, he could not sustain the image of his “perfect soul,” which walls off the true chaos at the core of his being, the unbridled ferocity of the “circumcised dog” he thought he had been converted from when he embraced Christianity. We catch a glimpse of the cold, protective prison in which he has encased himself in his image of an ideal, artificial world, “[o]f one entire and perfect chrysolite,” which he now realizes cannot compare in value to Desdemona’s love (5.2.150).

Earlier we said that Othello’s last speech arises from his need to free himself so that he may die. More accurately, it is so that he may avenge Desdemona’s death. He wants to kill his hated self. Let us look more closely at the speech now to see how the lines themselves point to where he first frees one arm, and next the other, until, with the sword or dagger he seizes from one of the transfixed guards, he can plunge the blade into his own breast:\footnote{13 Lines addressing the two points in question have been marked with marginal asterisks by the author.}

\begin{quote}
Soft you; a word or two before you go.
I have done the state some service, and they know ’t.
No more of that. I pray you, in your letters,
When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,
Speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate,
Nor set down aught in malice. Then must you speak
Of one that lov’d not wisely but too well;
Of one not easily jealous, but, being wrought,*
Perplex’d in the extreme; of one whos hand,
Like the base Indian, threw a pearl away
*Richer than all his tribe; of one whose subdu’d eyes,
Albeit unused to the melting mood,
Drops tears as fast as the Arabian trees
Their medicinable gum. Set you down this;
And say besides, that in Aleppo once,
Where a malignant and a turban’d Turk
\end{quote}

Beat a Venetian and traduc’d the state,
I took by th’ throat the circumcised dog,
And smote him, thus. \textit{Stabs himself.}
(5.2.347–65)

There are, of course, subtleties in the construction of this magnificent utterance that permit individual actors to vary their interpretations in significant ways as they make it their own. But I think few would dispute that the gesture of casting aside, a pearl arises naturally at the point the words refer to the act, just as the raising of his other hand to cover his face seems appropriate for the lines that follow his reference to his “subdu’d eyes.”

Then, following the natural break that occurs with “Set you down this” (5.2.360), there are numerous possibilities, but the one that suggests itself to me as the most dramatically compelling is for Othello to take “by the throat” one of the guards with his left hand, seize that guard’s own weapon with his right hand, and—holding this posture between “smote him” and “thus” as long as is dramatically feasible—on that final word, simultaneously release his grip on the guard and sink the blade into his own breast instead. This act, after all, has been his motive for speaking from the moment at which his “Soft you” halted his forced exit; this has been the “very sea-mark of his utmost sail” (5.2.27), though he had not realized it until now, and this is what the “magic” of his eloquence permits him to achieve.

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Poets' Corner

Silent Flame

Friends, we two at a pleasant bar that Sunday early in the time between my arriving by bus and departing by train. Good Guinness and a baked potato, shared.

When a change: And so simple: Suddenly our eyes opened to each other—our faces, unmasked, then learned the gravity of this wonder.

In any season the trembling drop into belief. Even for me? The immaculate truth of love. Silent as flame: Newly native, anywhere, agelessly.

Shared, this moment: Rare and here come to us—and baked-potato-real—timed through passages known only to itself: This silent flame.

What then? That truth, its risk once taken, is at least ever that. Forgive all else that is not that.

- Carol Rubenstein

Carol Rubenstein holds a BA from Bennington College and an MA from the Writing Seminars at Johns Hopkins. From 1971 to 1989, she received Ford Foundation grants for several years at a time and an NEA Fellowship in Literary Translation to collect and translate oral poetry in Sarawak, East Malaysia. Some of these poems are published in *The Honey Tree Song: Poems and Chants of Sarawak Dayaks* (Ohio University Press, 1985), with the epics and rituals yet to be available beyond the Sarawak Museum’s two volumes of them. At present, Carol is developing a poetry manuscript based on visits to Auschwitz and other related places.

Creed

The way puddles dry after a night of rain.

The way I reach up and balance the moon on the tip of my finger.

The way a clock proceeds in pointless circles.

The way your ribs, without thought, mimic the tides while you sleep.

Perhaps, this is all

I know about eternity.

- Daniel Thomas Moran

Works published in the Poets' Corner are selected blindly by Greg Delanty, former President of the ALSCW (2010–11).

To contribute poetry—original pieces or translations—to the Poets' Corner, please send your submissions to literarymatters@alscw.org by the submission deadline for Issue 6.1: February 15, 2013.
You came to my home because I had asked you to, because, at least the spontaneity felt right.

The very pink of courtesy.

Only two nights prior, during our first immersion into an us, I took your hand shyly during the second act of Romeo and Juliet, and held on as those two fools fell dead into a heap, the slowly cooling detritus of passion. Even Shakespeare could grasp that happy endings don’t sell.

*Tempt not a desperate man.*

Still, Sunday at four, I greeted you at my tender threshold, relieved you of one crinkly sack of Aldo’s best chocolate-dipped biscotti and the mute glory of two dozen tulips. Far too many for a man of meager vases. So we together filled a red can with them, their amputated ends clipped clean and plunged. And soon, the miracle of unfolding, their most delicate parts exposed to the evening, until everything in the room was humbled.

*This bud of love, by summer’s ripening breath, may prove a beauteous flower.*

We ate the fish I had prepared, assuring you it had swum up from Chile just for this.

*O flesh, flesh, how art thou fishified.*

You measured each morsel as the fire snapped and Stephan Grapelli drew his jazzy bow.

*Like softest music to attending ears.*

I suggested the sofa for comfort.

*The time and my intents are savage.*

Your mouth was warm and tasted like fifteen. Before long we were peeled and joined (as if it could have been otherwise).

*One, two and the third in your bosom.*

Until we fell heavy and damp with exhaustion and you remembered you should have been fled two hours ago.

*For you and I are past our dancing days.*

After the red of your taillights had extinguished beyond the turn,

*Eyes look your last, arms take your last embrace.*

I sat amid the ruins and considered, how some beginnings must be content to end. But alas, in the morning I phoned you to inquire if we might continue or perhaps venture to begin again. You said you would get right back to me and most surely you did, three days later.

*O! True apothecary! Thy drugs are quick!*

If I had anticipated that it would all conclude with poisons, I would not have pretended you were a great lover.

*At lovers’ perjuries, they say Jove laughs.*

~-Daniel Thomas Moran~

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Poem from *A Factory of Ideas (A Madman’s Monologues)*

ioporto il quarantuno
di scarpe ma ho imparato
che se le porto un tanto più piccole quaranta
a volte trentanove
che così fanno male
con la testa sto meglio

my size for shoes is eight
but I have come to learn
that if I wear a smaller size just a little smaller
seven and a half six
sometimes so that they hurt
my head feels so much better

- Antonello Borra
Ess-a-Bagel
for Scott Stein

We have surely been here before, and many times. In this brief enclosure where bagels are birthed all day and night and not just any bagels but thoroughbred bagels, crown jewel bagels, the bagels Abraham prophesied for the Chosen People of Stuytown.

Before its door, the great broad expanse of First Avenue, rises gently toward midtown. The forever of it rolling out from Hellgate to The South Seas.

Yet, in this place, everything is shoulder-width and no more. Brown top table squares where the faithful hunch in quiet worship, before tubelights in a chilled case of fish corpses and cheese.

The little men in their Ess-A-Hats squeeze by again and again and again, dissecting sighs of steam from bagels pursy flesh, opened like oysters to be schmeared with delicacies beyond poetry.

Taste and texture and Kosher perfumes painting the dense air with life.

You and I, once more sitting, our knees meshed like primitive gears, we lunge forward and back, capture the overflow with each considered bite. With an ancient rhythm we speak our prayers to wealth and abundance.

- Daniel Thomas Moran

GOD

He is the beginning, and the end. The bearer of all forevers. His finger tips swirl galaxies. His eye sees the very codes of life. With his mercy He brought forth purgatory, and men with two cheeks. In His wisdom, He wished a deluge upon the Earth, and fashioned Darwin from the muck. He is more than we dare know, and yet less, than we can imagine. He made tinmen and popes. Black holes and the aurora borealis. He is love and love is blind. He loves a good fight. He enjoys His fame. He had me fail geometry and made trees which became the masts of ships and the bunks in the death camps. He conceived of hummingbirds and nuclear physics. He is indeed most righteous. In His firmament evil never triumphs. He makes plaster madonnas weep and causes deserts and cancer and snowflakes and stillbirths and fireflies and widows and shadows and the apocalypse. He knows everyone by name. He listens to prayers. He is the landlord the taxman and the concierge. He is surely one of us.

- Daniel Thomas Moran

All poems by Daniel Thomas Moran were published in his collection From HiLo to Willow Pond (Street Press, 2002).

Daniel Thomas Moran is the author of seven collections of poetry, the latest of which, A Shed for Wood, will be published by Salmon Poetry, in Ireland, in 2013. His previous collection, Looking for the Uncertain Past, was published by Poetry Salzburg in 2006. He lives in Webster, NH and Boston, MA, where he is a Clinical Assistant Professor at Boston University’s School of Dental Medicine.
INCIDENTAL OR ACCIDENTAL

A non-believer and a believer
It was their story.
When the Bible served as a reference
When November came and did not end
When sandstone turned pink in the flow of the orange sun
The princess left the toad for a prince.

Sweet November brought bitter black gall for some.
When the clothes wore off and the heart had broken
When the momos went cold and the orange sun died down
When November ended and the journey began
She could smell the colours and see the words and feel it all in a surge.
Green as the new born lilac could never be she was.
Brown as the crushed walnut can ever be he was.

Incidentally or accidentally, the toad who really was the prince
Had introduced her to the toad dressed as a prince.
Matter recedes and proceeds and accedes.
When the swallows sat on electric wires and turned into char
When the coffee shops shut down and so did the green leaves of indramalti.
There is no one left to take stock of the loss.

It is bitter December now.

- Anjumon Sahin

Anjumon Sahin is currently pursuing her M.Phil degree in English literature at the University of Delhi. A passionate lover of books and animals, she is currently camping in Delhi and working as an Assistant Professor in Gargi College until the winds fly her to a new land. Writing is the magic bond that helps her negotiate the real and the reel. Anjumon can be contacted at anjumon.sahin@gmail.com.

Poets’ Corner Submission Guidelines:

• You may send up to five poems during each submission period.

• Please submit poem(s) via email as an attachment. When submitting multiple poems, please include all pieces in one file.

• You are encouraged to provide a biographical note (100 words or less) with your submission, which will appear alongside your poetry if it is accepted for publication.

• In order to transition the Poets’ Corner into a forum for emerging poets, we will now ask those featured in the Poets’ Corner to refrain from sending in further submissions for one calendar year.
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