

# Literary Matters

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ASSOCIATION OF LITERARY SCHOLARS, CRITICS, AND WRITERS



*Aut nuntiare aut delectare*

## FROM THE EDITOR

Whenever the New Year approaches, people begin taking stock, reminiscing, and finding ways to evaluate what progress has been made over the many months since the last time they performed this same routine. With all of the ushering in of the new and different, we must be cautious not to overlook the value of the old; we must avoid the temptation to prioritize change over and above maintaining what still works; we must consider the benefits of retaining some of what was in favor of any and all glittery *could-bes* we think await us. That is not to say change is bad—quite the contrary, change is necessary and has the potential to be wonderful. For instance, in our very own organization, some substantial evolution is in progress, and the outcome promises to be a better, stronger association with greater staying power. We are all indebted to the officers and executive council, along with those at the Catholic University of America, for the bright future they've constructed for the ALSCW.

Those acknowledgements now made, I return to the initial project, which is the assessing of past attitudes, behaviors, and lessons, and figuring out what to keep, not only what to change. In a sense, we could consider this "macro-editing," an effort to fix what doesn't work and keep what does, with some polishing up along the way.

In a previous issue, unrelated to concerns inspired by flipping to another page of the calendar, I addressed the notion of why we, as practitioners of the literary arts, move forward while also respecting and admiring what was generated in the past. This is, in fact, a critical point that our work requires:

There's a reason the canon continues to grow; a reason why we keep considering the styles, techniques, and impacts of long-completed texts; a reason why people keep writing poems, plays, and prose in spite of all those who were already deemed masters and all the works previously declared superlative; and a reason why we will never all agree on or be satisfied with any universal methodology for the teaching of literature in schools. The reason? Well, it would put a period at the end of our professions. If we found the perfect roster of books that a person should be versed in, determined what the best poems and stories ever written were, or declared a particular parsing to be the definitive and authoritative analysis of a certain text, we could all take a breather and stop working, but the hiatus would perhaps be a permanent one. The literary arts are a quest not for the scholarly or aesthetic Holy Grail, but for continued exploration. We explore and create in order for there to be a greater need to explore and create, so that there is more out there

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for us to explore. We search so that we may prolong and expand our search.

There can be no new without an old, no establishment for artists to rebel against if we dismantle the infrastructure every time we want to freshen things up. We could not have experts if we invalidated everything that came before the moment something else arose to become adept at. Lucky for us all, there isn't a limit to how many theories can exist or a maximum capacity for the number of books that can be written, which is why we shouldn't be satisfied to stop where we are now anymore than we should permit the culling of all that proves where we've been.

If we were to forget where we came from, we would not only do a disservice to the hard work of those whose achievements preceded our own, but we would also lose so much of what makes the present special. When we read a book, we would do well to think of all the drafts that came before, how what we are reading was not a single moment of Creation, but was instead a long journey. A lone word grew into a sentence. That sentence joined up with some others to form a paragraph. Many of those came together to create a chapter, and so on. Once the entire composition arose from what could have otherwise

been a soup of unconnected phrases and unrelated chunks of words, there was still much grooming ahead.


Writing of all forms is a bit like the entire process of evolution played out in a far shorter span of time in an albeit smaller arena, but the analogy hangs together nonetheless. Evolution itself doesn't only entail doing away with old species in favor of newer models—sharks have been in our oceans for over four-hundred million years, and mammals made it through several mass extinctions, to name but a paltry few out of the whole array of examples. Likewise, some literary works fall out of favor while our appreciation for others has only grown more substantial and more complete. The passage of time is a means of *refining* not *rewriting*. We renovate rather than bulldoze.

Sometimes, the past can be more honest than the present. Imagine times when ruthless censorship, purported to be for the “greater good” [read: strengthening authoritarian agendas, something reminiscent of Orwell's “Newspeak”], clouded people's view of reality. If those in power succeeded in erasing the past and keeping society focused only on what was ahead, well, we'd be evaluating our present in a very different world.

A compelling literary issue related to these concerns is the debate over whether to revise classics to remove racially insensitive language. Some oppose the initiative on the basis that it would whitewash history, while others insist that these works are offensive and shouldn't be taught unless they are altered to meet contemporary standards of what constitutes acceptable language. These books offer a window into the societal mores that existed when they were written. To bring them “up to code,” so to speak, by exchanging slurs for terms that are less hateful, while motivated by good intentions, would destroy the authenticity of the texts. Avoiding acknowledgment of the past does nothing to change it, nor does it contribute to the creation of a better future. We can amend or sanitize a work all we want, but all that will come of it is a devastating blow to the credibility of education. Attempting to improve an older work by altering it to fit modern standards will not make for a better book anymore than would lopping out chapters from the history book whenever wars ended or alliances changed.

In another past editor letter, I described how we in the literary arts are what I termed “agents of re-.” At the time of writing that—and even as I first delved into this letter—I did not anticipate how that would emerge from the recesses of my memory to say, “hey, I'm still relevant,” but somewhere along the way I got to thinking I should travel even further back into my files to find that piece. What follows is an excerpt that I feel further substantiates my call not to forsake the old when embracing the new:

The strength of our discipline—what will give it longevity, what makes it so important—is bound to this very idea that we are all “agents of re-,” and for good reason. Because we acknowledge that...there is never a definite point at which we are “finished” with a text or literature in general, we develop and foster the creativity and flexibility to sustain what we love—the study and creation of literature. In linguistics, there is a concept called *recursion* that explains how users of a language are able to produce an infinite number of unique, felicitous sentences in spite of the constraints imposed by vocabulary and grammatical rules...I want to suggest that recursion applies to literature as well: if we wish to use everything at our disposal, we can repeat close readings of a great many pieces or adhere to certain patterns without ever running out of groundbreaking insights, singular compositions, and pioneering work.

Again, there is profound importance in returning to the past, sometimes to understand context so that we may understand what is immediately before us, sometimes because we want to experience for ourselves what others have already had the chance to encounter. The crucial takeaway is that the ushering in of another year shouldn't mean the eschewing of what preceded. So during this time of the year when magazines endorse a “new year, new you” mentality, when the expression “out with the old, in with the new” seems to follow us wherever we go, let's remember that the past needs to remain a part of the “now,” and the real goal should be to use what was to help us on the quest for a better, more whole future. 

## LITERARY MATTERS

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The Association of Literary Scholars, Critics, and Writers (ALSCW) promotes excellence in literary criticism and scholarship, and works to ensure that literature thrives in both scholarly and creative environments. We encourage the reading and writing of literature, criticism, and scholarship, as well as wide-ranging discussions among those committed to the reading and study of literary works.

# FROM THE PRESIDENT:

January 15, 2016

I am pleased to announce that the new ALSCW office is now in operation on the campus of the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC. Our new telephone number is (202) 319-5650. The e-mail address is [ALSCW@cua.edu](mailto:ALSCW@cua.edu). Our new postal address is

Association of Literary Scholars, Critics, and Writers  
Marist Hall  
The Catholic University of America  
620 Michigan Ave. NE  
Washington, DC 20009

The new website will come online in the following weeks. Ernie Suarez, our Association Vice President, is supervising the transition, catching up on a backlog of business, and taking the lead in the planning for the 2016 ALSCW conference.

Our annual conference will take place October 27 to 30, 2016, on the Catholic University campus. Outstanding volunteers from DC and around the country are already helping to organize panels and seminars. There will be a prominent keynote speaker and musical performances by a two-time Grammy winner and other artists. Please watch for the call for papers, which will go out in February.

You will soon be receiving information about how to renew your membership/subscription. Once the new website is up, there will also be a credit-card portal for contributions to our general fund, which will enable the national office to expand the work of the Association.

Happy New Year.

*John Briggs*

ALSCW President





# News & Announcements

## VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR PENCIL'S PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

*Calling all professionals looking  
to make a difference in NYC  
Public Schools!*

The PENCIL Partnership Program pairs professionals from all fields with public school principals to develop long-term capacity-building projects to improve student achievement.

Architects are designing school playgrounds, lawyers are coaching mock-trial teams, composers are teaching songwriting to students, investment bankers are enhancing math curricula, and HR directors are working on staff-retention plans. There are so many ways to use your skills and expertise to help improve our schools.

We're looking for NYC volunteers to engage in year-long, customized partnerships that match the skills of the professional with the specific needs of a public school. PENCIL's dedicated team makes the match, helps in the project planning, and provides partnership support every step of the way. We have found that the partnerships that have the greatest impact take a minimum commitment of forty hours over the course of the year.

Check out some of PENCIL's great partnerships at <http://www.pencil.org/category/partnership-program/>!

For more information, visit [www.pencil.org](http://www.pencil.org) or contact [eloubaton@pencil.org](mailto:eloubaton@pencil.org).

## REVIEW-COPY DATABASE GOES LIVE

In response to the enthusiasm among authors and contributors alike generated by the initiation of the Book Review section in *Literary Matters*, a new program has been established. A database of books that have been made available for review by the authors can be accessed online, and anyone wishing to write a review can browse said list to determine whether any of the options are of interest. To view the listings, please visit <https://app.box.com/reviewcopydatabase>. The PDF can be opened directly in your web browser, though you also have the option to download it.

**For reviewers:** If, upon surveying the list, you discover a publication you wish to review, you can contact the editor of *Literary Matters*, Samantha Madway, at [literarymatters@alscw.org](mailto:literarymatters@alscw.org), and she will facilitate having the work sent out to you.

**For authors:** If you have recently published a book, wish to have it reviewed in an issue of *Literary Matters*, and are willing to provide a copy of your work to a potential contributor who volunteers to read it and write a review, please contact the editor of *Literary Matters* at the email address noted above. All genres, subjects, styles, and so forth are welcome. Please note: choosing to include your book in the list does not guarantee that it will be selected for review. This will be contingent on the predilections of those who visit the database.

This system is being set up to address the many inquiries that have been sent in by both recently published authors and parties interested in writing reviews. It is, however, important to emphasize that the intention of this service is not to provide assured positive reviews to all who make their works available. Honest, insightful evaluation is the ultimate goal.

Please do not hesitate to contact the editor if you have questions or need clarification about any of the procedures detailed in this announcement.

November 24, 2015

Dear Members of the ALSCW,

I am writing with good news about our Association's future. It is a great pleasure to report that through the efforts of the executive committee and the ALSCW Council, the Association has secured a new home on the campus of the Catholic University of America. Ernie Suarez, our Vice President, has provided crucial assistance in arriving at this agreement. CUA will provide us with an office, salary for an office manager, and backup services. The office manager will be hired and supervised by the ALSCW. The move to our new home, which has been approved by the ALSCW Council, will give us the financial foundation we need to maintain and enlarge our role as an international scholarly association focused on the love of the written word. The move will take place at the beginning of the new year, after which planning for our 2016 Annual Conference to be held in Washington, DC, will begin in earnest.

I would like to thank Ernie Suarez, our Vice President and a CUA faculty member, for his role in the negotiation of these arrangements with his provost and dean. His office in the CUA English Department will be next to the Association's new offices, enabling him to provide on-the-ground direction as we move forward during the transition.

Without the long-standing leadership and support of our friends at BU, and the support of BU itself, our Association would not have come as far as it has. We owe more than can be said to Christopher Ricks for enabling the Association office to prosper at BU's Editorial Institute these many years. We are grateful to Ben Mazer and Allison Vanouse for their years of dedicated service in the BU office, particularly for their crucial contributions during last year's membership and fund drives.

In addition to our agreement with CUA, we have entered into a new understanding with Oxford University Press, which publishes our journal, *Literary Imagination*. Our tighter partnership should help us strengthen our membership operations, enlarge our membership rolls, and expand *Literary Imagination's* circulation. It will also free the ALSCW office to devote more energy to current initiatives while continuing to respond to members' questions, suggestions, and requests. One of our most important new initiatives, facilitated by the new office, will be the 2016 conference in DC, which will celebrate the Association's two decades of accomplishments, assess current challenges, and look to the future of our work for the sake of the humanities.

We have overcome a number of difficulties this year. I re-assumed the Association presidency by vote of the Council a few months ago (in accord with bylaw V.2) when our president could not continue in office, and it was necessary to cancel the 2015 conference. The Council also filled a vacancy in the vice presidential chair, appointing (through bylaw IV.2) Ernie Suarez for the remainder of that term. Ernie and I, along with the rest of the Association's leadership, have since then dedicated ourselves to placing the ALSCW's finances on much firmer footing. Now, with these new agreements with CUA and Oxford University Press, we will be able to pursue the goals of the Association for years to come. In accordance with our bylaws, I will stay on as President until I formally pass the gavel to our Vice President at the Association's next general meeting, which will take place at our conference in Washington, DC.

2016 promises to be a year of renewal and growth for the Association. We are confident that the conference in DC (date to be announced soon) will attract a number of prominent guests and old friends, as well as many of our newer members. It will be a newsworthy event. The program for the conference, which will include guest speakers and many opportunities for members' participation, will be announced in the coming months.

Finally, I would like to thank all the members of the ALSCW, whose continuing support has made it possible for us to sustain and renew the Association. It is now time for us to pursue the goals of our founding with renewed vigor. There is much to celebrate, and there is much to be done. I hope to see you in Washington this coming year.

Sincerely,

*John Briggs*  
ALSCW President

## A FRIENDLY REMINDER TO RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP

Dear Friends of the Association of Literary Scholars, Critics, and Writers:

I joined the ALSCW twenty years ago when I was looking for a professional organization dedicated to literature and the literary imagination. I discovered what I was looking for among the scholars, critics, and writers dedicated to the goals of the Association of Literary Scholars, Critics, and Writers:

- To promote excellence in literary criticism and scholarship;
- To work to ensure that literature thrives in both scholarly and creative environments;
- To encourage the reading and writing of literature, criticism, and scholarship;
- To foster wide-ranging discussions among those committed to the reading and study of literary works.

I write to you now as president of the ALSCW with an urgent message: **The Association must expand its membership in the following months if it is to prosper in future years.** I urge you to join or rejoin the Association. Help us maintain and strengthen its rejuvenating annual conferences, its local readings, its excellent online newsletter, *Literary Matters*, its *Forum* publications, and its premiere journal, *Literary Imagination*, published by Oxford University Press. Begin receiving your copies of the journal and the newsletter, preferential registration rates at the annual conferences, and news of local ALSCW events. Join our collegial pursuit of the Association's founding goals.

**Your decision to become a member of the ALSCW this year will be crucial to the future of the Association.** In the coming weeks and months, members will be contacting graduate students, former ALSCW members, friends of the Association outside the academy, and other colleagues to tell them about the work of the Association and the urgency of increasing our membership. I hope that one of them will be able to reach you. Please look over the membership materials and join us in our pursuit of the Association's goals. If the spirit of the ALSCW moves you, please forward this message to others along with your endorsement. Help us preserve and strengthen this worthy organization.

Sincerely,

John C. Briggs, President of the ALSCW  
Professor of English, University of California, Riverside

The ALSCW membership year is based on the calendar year (January–December). When you join as a new member, Oxford University Press will begin to send *Literary Imagination* right away. You will also have access to the online archives of past issues of our journal and our newsletter, *Literary Matters*.

Premium memberships are \$150 annually; Regular memberships are \$100 annually; Senior memberships (for those 70 and above) are \$50; Reduced-price memberships are \$50 annually. (Those eligible for reduced-price memberships are members in their first year, students, and those earning less than \$50,000 a year.)

To join, renew, or donate, please use the copy of the membership form included on page 50 of this issue of *Literary Matters*. We accept checks and all major credit cards. Checks can be made out to CUA with "ALSCW Dues" or "ALSCW Donation" in the memo line. Mail the completed form, along with your check if applicable, to The Association of Literary Scholars, Critics, and Writers, Marist Hall, The Catholic University of America, 620 Michigan Ave. NE, Washington, DC 20064. Please note: CUA does not collect any portion of the funds the ALSCW receives; the university simply helps with processing the payments that are sent in. Please direct all questions to [ALSCW@cua.edu](mailto:ALSCW@cua.edu) or call the office at (202) 319-5650.

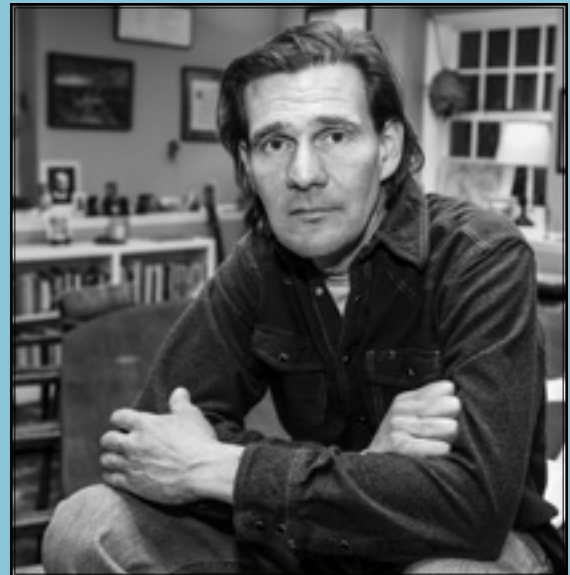
# TODD HEARON NAMED AS THE 2015 DARTMOUTH POET IN RESIDENCE AT THE FROST PLACE

Todd Hearon takes his place among them as the thirty-ninth resident poet for work that has garnered numerous awards. He is a prize-winning poet and dramatist, and is both cofounder and artistic board member of the Bridge Theatre Company in Boston. His first book of poems, *Strange Land* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2010), won the Crab Orchard Series in Poetry Open Competition, judged by US Poet Laureate Natasha Trethewey; his full-length play, *Wives of the Dead* (2002), was winner of the Paul Green Playwrights Prize and was subsequently produced at the Boston Playwrights' Theatre. *Strange Land* was noted in *Poetry* magazine and other journals for its "poems of uncompromising beauty" (David Ferry); former US Poet Laureate Robert Pinsky called it "a first book of rare mastery." For these poems, Hearon received a PEN New England "Discovery" Award and the Friends of Literature Prize from *Poetry* magazine and the Poetry Foundation.

Since that time, for poems from his book *No Other Gods* (Salmon Poetry, 2015), he received the Rumi Prize in Poetry from *Arts & Letters* and the Campbell Corner Poetry Prize from Sarah Lawrence College; additionally, he was a finalist last year for the May Swenson Poetry Award, the Vassar Miller Prize in Poetry, and the Lexi Rudnitsky/Editor's Choice Award (Persea Books). He received a Dobie Paisano Fellowship from the University of Texas in Austin and devoted his time there to the completion of his first novel, *A Little Space*. His poems and plays have appeared in numerous literary journals including *AGNI*, *Arts & Letters*, the *Cincinnati Review*, *Harvard Review*, the *Kenyon Review*, *Literary Imagination*, *Memorious*, *Ploughshares*, *Poetry*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, *Poetry London*, *New Ohio Review*, *Salamander*, *Slate*, the *Southern Review*, and *Southwest Review*. He lives and teaches in Exeter, New Hampshire.

Upon receiving news of his selection as the 2015 resident poet, Hearon said, "This is such an inspiring and invaluable opportunity—an investment of trust and rich boost in confidence—to be able to live and work where life and work have for so long been meaningful to poets and writers. The fellowship is intended for a poet 'at the crossroads' of a career; I certainly find myself there and intend to use my time at the Frost Place to drive my work to the utmost extent of my capabilities—wherever that may lead me. For this opportunity, and for the faith invested, I am unspeakably grateful."

Mr. Hearon describes how he plans to spend his residency at Robert Frost's former home: "During my residency at the Frost Place, I will be working to complete my new book, *Crows in Eden*." The book—a hybrid project that mixes poetry, drama, and prose—grows out of my interest in and research on American 'sundown towns,' towns and communities across the US that have been made and maintained all-white, often by sudden and violent displacement of their African American citizens (though not limited to this group). Taking a small town in southeastern Tennessee as my focus, and expanding to consider other similar communities, I explore the physical, psychological, and economic consequences of such an act, not only among the victims of it, but among the remaining community then and in successive generations."



The Frost Place and Dartmouth College are pleased to welcome Todd Hearon to the Frost Place and are looking forward to hosting his poetry readings. Featured readings by Mr. Hearon at the Frost Place are scheduled for July 5, July 13, and August 6. The Abbie Greenleaf Library in Franconia, NH, will host a welcome reception for Hearon, as well as one of his readings on a date to be determined. The date of Mr. Hearon's reading at Dartmouth College will be announced in the near future. A full list of events and readings at the Frost Place can be found at <http://frostplace.org/>.



## JEE LEONG KOH'S *STEEP TEA* HONORED

ALSCW council member Jee Leong Koh's new book of poetry, *Steep Tea* (Carcanet Press, 2015), has been picked by the United Kingdom's *Financial Times* as one of the best books of the year.

Maria Crawford of the *Financial Times* writes, "the Singapore-born poet's first UK publication is disciplined yet adventurous in form, casual in tone and deeply personal in subject matter. Koh's verse addresses the split inheritance of his postcolonial upbringing, as well as the tension between an émigré's longing for home and rejection of nostalgia."

This recognition came after Carol Rumens picked a poem from *Steep Tea* as "Poem of the Week" in the *Guardian*. About all of these recent accolades, Koh had this to say: "I'm thrilled, and humbled, by the nominations."



### The Victorian

This journal is a new contribution to Victorian studies that emphasizes the eclectic nature of this period. The *Victorian* neglects neither theory nor practical criticism; neither the popular nor the arcane. It is a response, in part, to the present dearth of journals that deal with this important period in a generalist manner instead of in particularist ways.

We request articles relating to all aspects of the Victorian period be they literary, historical, theoretical, anthropological, philosophical, or textual. Although the orientation of the *Victorian* is literary, there is an emphasis on the essential overlapping of all the disciplines belonging to the "Humanities"; the journal and its editors value cross-fertilization from other intellectual traditions and unusual and diverse approaches to literary matters. There will also be a section for unpublished conference papers—an area that has not been addressed by the present literature.

We do not insist on any particular length of article but judge each submission on its individual merit. Above all, it is our aim to produce a regular, well read journal which reflects the tumultuous diversity of this crucial period.

All articles will be rigorously peer reviewed by two experts in the field. We aim to get back to authors with a decision within two months of submission.

<http://journals.sfu.ca/vict/index.php/vict/index>



# *The Collected Poems of John Crowe Ransom*, Edited by Ben Mazer



Robert Graves: "The sort of poetry which, because it is too good, has to be brushed aside as a literary novelty."

Howard Nemerov: "His verse is in the best sense 'private,' the judgment upon the world of one man who could not, properly speaking, be imitated."

Robert Lowell: "so many lyrics that one wants to read over and over."

So many? But there exists a greater yield than was preserved by Ransom himself. For the poet, in a fierce act of purgation, force-slimmed his poems to sixty-eight pages. Selected with a vengeance. Presented here now is the first-ever complete edition of the poems of John Crowe Ransom, restoring to the world—in the name not of mercy but of justice—a great many poems that Ransom himself had once (and quite rightly) judged perfectly worthy of publication, poems that, joining now his select poems, will enjoy a renaissance.

John Crowe Ransom (1888–1974), poet, critic, and teacher, was born in Pulaski, Tennessee. He entered Vanderbilt University at the age of fifteen, received his undergraduate degree in 1909, won a Rhodes Scholarship to Oxford, and crowned his academic career at Kenyon College, where he founded and edited the *Kenyon Review*. His criticism—the New Criticism—was revered and feared. His poems are at once ancient and modern while never modernist (T. S. Eliot: "I have probably a higher opinion of your verse than you have of mine"). They won high esteem and deep delight for their fineness, their humor, their individuality of manner and movement, and their unforced poignancy.

*Poems About God* (Henry Holt and Company, 1919), *Chills and Fever* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1924), and *Two Gentlemen in Bonds* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1927) led in due course to Ransom's *Selected Poems* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1947), the revised reissue of which won the National Book Award in Poetry in 1964.

Ben Mazer was born in New York City in 1964; he now lives in Boston, Massachusetts. His poems have been widely published in international literary periodicals, including *Verse*, *Stand*, *Leviathan Quarterly*, *Harvard Magazine*, *Jacket Magazine*, *Fulcrum*, *Pequod*, the *Boston Phoenix*, *Thumbscrew*, and *Agenda*. He is a contributing editor to *Fulcrum: an annual of poetry and aesthetics*. His first collection of poems, *White Cities*, was published by Barbara Matteau Editions in 1995. His most recent collections of poems are *Poems* (The Pen & Anvil Press) and *January 2008* (Dark Sky Books), both published in April 2010. His edition of Ransom's poems was effected at the Editorial Institute of Boston University.

Pulitzer Prize-winning poet John Ashbery has said of Mazer's work: "Like fragments of old photographs happened on in a drawer, these poems tap enigmatic bits of the past that suddenly come to life again. To read him is to follow him along a dreamlike corridor where everything is beautiful and nothing is as it seems."

*The Collected Poems of John Crowe Ransom*, edited by Ben Mazer, is now available for purchase for \$75.00. This first edition is a cloth-covered, sewn hardbound book.

Orders can be placed by visiting <http://www.un-gyvelimitedgroup.com/literature/r2thrw7yjrqbfdxl7t0isle8fuceqs>.

Orders can also be placed by mail (please make checks payable to Un-Gyve Limited, 139A Charles Street No. 393, Boston, Massachusetts 02114, USA), or payment details can be provided to the Un-Gyve Press by telephone (617-350-7884), by fax (617-482-2339), or by email ([info@un-gyve.com](mailto:info@un-gyve.com)).

*The Collected Poems of John Crowe Ransom* will be published in cooperation with Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. / Knopf Doubleday Publishing and by CO-OPPRODUCTION.

# IN MEMORIAM: MILLICENT BELL

By Bonnie Costello

I was very fortunate when I arrived at Boston University in 1977 to find Millicent Bell among my colleagues in the English Department. She was welcoming and supportive toward younger faculty and eager to converse with us about texts we were teaching or writing on. Collegial toward all, she often hosted faculty parties in her home.

What was most important for me, however, was that she was an ideal model of the successful teacher-scholar, and a woman with an authoritative voice in a profession still dominated by men at that time. BU was not the world-renowned research university it is now, but Professor Bell already had an international reputation for her books on Hawthorne, James, and Wharton, and for her prize-winning biography *Marquand: An American Life* (Little, Brown, 1979). American literary studies was still somewhat of a new field when Millicent wrote those books, and she was one of its pioneers. Fluent in French, she shared her scholarship abroad as an active member of the European Association for American Studies.

At a time when literary criticism was turning inward, she deliberately wrote for a wide audience, publishing regularly in the *New York Review of Books*, the *Yale Review*, *Raritan*, the *Hudson Review*, and other journals reaching beyond the halls of academia. Writing was clearly her life's blood, and during her retirement, her scholarship flourished. Millicent's interests and talents were wide ranging; she published a remarkable book on Shakespeare (*Shakespeare's Tragic Skepticism* [Yale University Press, 2002]), a topic arising out of her teaching in BU's introductory literature course, EN 220. I wasn't surprised that she would publish outside her field—she was fearless and unintimidated, and when she had an idea, she followed it out.



Perhaps this instinct came from her early days as a journalist. Hers had not been a privileged or straight path to university teaching, and her worldliness was one of the first things I admired about her. She knew all sorts of people, in academic circles, in science, politics, business and the arts, and she conversed vividly on all these subjects. That worldliness showed itself as well in her life-long activism and philanthropy. The last time I saw Millicent was a couple of years ago at a fund-raiser for the ACLU. She was ninety-three! In all of these activities, she left an indelible legacy.

Rosanna Warren added that Millicent Bell was one of the earliest members of the ALSCW, always loyal and buoyant; she was a generous teacher and friend, delighting in literature and spreading that delight around her. She was an intensely productive scholar who was passionately dedicated to Henry James, Edith Wharton, and Nathaniel Hawthorne, among others.

## By Cecelia Tichi

Tributes to the late Millicent Bell have chronicled her stellar career as a prolific author and philanthropist. Rightly so. Few literary scholar-critics' endeavors have proven to be so wide ranging. Fewer still have been blessed with such generosity of spirit and the imagination to create, as did Millicent with her late husband Eugene Bell, a foundation that supports biological and literary research and underwrites public projects in science and public affairs.

From the mid-1960s to the opening years of the twenty-first century, Millicent Bell has been admired nationally and internationally for her fresh interpretations of "classic" canonical writers. Her most recent enterprise was a book on Shakespeare, but prior to that, she produced works including a biography of the twentieth-century American novelist John Marquand and analyses of the artistry of Nathaniel Hawthorne and Henry James. Altogether, Bell's oeuvre totals some dozen of authored and edited volumes and numerous essays in such forefront literary periodicals as the *New York Review of Books*.

For this former Boston University colleague of Millicent Bell, I see Bell's *Edith Wharton & Henry James: The Story of Their Friendship* (George Braziller, 1965) as the hallmark of the intellectual independence and courage that was requisite for a woman's success in the academy in the post-World War II decades. To be blunt: along with her lovely, brilliant smile, her good cheer, and her unfailingly gracious demeanor, Millicent was tough. She had to be. Her PhD from Brown University notwithstanding, she entered the academy in the era when the professorial literary critics were overwhelmingly male, especially those who focused their attention on US literature.

In her graduate school years, Millicent doubtless studied the compendious *Literary History of the United States* (LHUS) (Macmillan Company, 1948), the "bible" of American literary history, to which fifty-five scholar-experts contributed—all males. Certain scholars, what's more, had proprietary claim to individual authors. For instance, the biographer Leon Edel "owned" Henry James. A young woman in a graduate program was welcome to expound on the work of a male writer—say, Nathaniel Hawthorne—as long as her views parroted those of the male scholars whose work held sway in the field. As for Edith Wharton, she appeared as a mere baguette in the august LHUS. (One major mid-nineteen sixties critical study of US literature by R. W. B. Lewis was titled *The American Adam* [University of Chicago Press, 1959]). There was no Eve.) Bell's venture into the work of Henry James and Edith Wharton thus staked the claim of the scholar-critic as "New Woman."

Pioneering work can too easily elude memory. Path-breaking work, if not forgotten, can be so thoroughly assimilated into the mix of received knowledge that the identity of a founding figure becomes blurred. When Millicent Bell's *The Cambridge Companion to Edith Wharton* (Cambridge University Press, 1995) appeared, the scholarly and critical books and articles on facets of Edith Wharton's work were a mainstay of later twentieth-century feminist scholarship, a trend that continues in the twenty-first century. (Post-1995, my university library holds some fifty-three volumes devoted solely—or in the main—to Edith Wharton.)

Thirty years earlier, however, the American literary landscape was very different. Male or female, few undergraduates were asked, at that time, to read the socially incisive Wharton (1862–1937). Nor did her work appear on graduate students' reading lists for doctoral qualifying exams. Library shelves held a mere handful of published books on the work of this Pulitzer Prize-winning and Nobel Prize-nominated female author whose novels, *The House of Mirth* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905) and *The Age of Innocence* (D. Appleton & Company, 1920), now routinely appear on syllabi in American literature college courses. This radically new appreciation for the literary importance of Edith Wharton is not, I hasten to say, the inevitable outcome of the post-1960s feminism, which has inspired numerous women's writings on both sides of the Atlantic. The fact is, Millicent Bell invigorated intellectual interest in Edith Wharton even as she launched her own career in academia. By including the august Henry James in her first book, Bell boldly cleared the space for her future consideration of male writers and implicitly beckoned women critics to make their own independent claims. Bell's crossover work on Hawthorne (and later on Marquand and Shakespeare) signaled that gender was a critic's choice, not an obligation.

We who had the good fortune to be Millicent Bell's colleagues in the Department of English at Boston University, together with friends and colleagues who have long admired her work, now have the pleasure of recollection: when viewing a public television documentary, we see the name of contributors scroll across the screen, among them the Millicent and Gene Bell Foundation.

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# REMEMBERING BRETT FOSTER

By Jacquelyn Pope

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I met Brett twenty years ago when we were both in the graduate writing program at Boston University. It was a small group, and a number of us became friends in the time we were there (and remain so). Like the rest of us, Brett knew that brief period of immersion in writing and reading was a rare opportunity and wanted to make the most of it. His enthusiasm remained intact throughout. From the first days there, Brett stood out because of his openness to others and his willingness to listen.

Competitiveness and rivalry seemed not to have occurred to him. He seldom talked about himself, not that he was taciturn or hard to get to know; rather, he was more likely to be asking others questions or talking about his enthusiasm for a particular book or poet. This might be why it took some time before I registered how important his faith was to him. It, too, was quietly there, and clearly fundamental to his intellectual and creative development, existing side by side with a very earthly mischievousness.

During a break in the school year, Brett went home to get married, and his wife Anise came to Boston, where she quickly became part of our group of friends.

In the spring, we took Rosanna Warren's translation seminar. I think the work of translation really triggered something important for Brett; I was grateful for his introduction to the work of Miklós Radnóti. By the end of the year, Brett received the Robert Fitzgerald Translation Prize for his translations of Radnóti's poems. Brett would go on to translate Cecco Angiolieri, Guido Cavalcanti, Joachim Du Bellay, Persius, and Antoine Girard de Saint-Amant.

Our group graduated, jobs ended, and we all moved on. Brett became a Stegner Fellow at Stanford, his children were born, he completed a PhD in English at Yale, he began teaching. We lost touch for a while, until I moved to the Chicago area and discovered Brett was here, too, teaching at Wheaton. When I learned he liked to take the train a few stops east to Oak Park and grade papers at a coffee place adjacent to the L, we made plans to meet there.

When I walked in, I was struck by how much he looked the same as he had back in school: same posture of steady concentration, same type of plaid shirt, and later, when he laughed, I was delighted to be reminded of how wonderfully goofy his laugh could be. We spent several hours catching up, talking about poetry, translation, and teaching. His family was thriving, and he felt very much at home at Wheaton, both with his colleagues at the school and in the community. He did make a joking aside about some of the more conservative perspectives to be found there—clearly, he still embraced people and ideas rather than rules and rigidity.

That was our last lengthy conversation. Though we ran into each other at readings and other events, we never again had the chance to really talk, and I regret that enormously. Returning to the poems in his books *The Garbage Eater* and *Fall Run Road*, and recalling the stories his friends shared at his funeral, it's clear that Brett loved his life and language, and that the warmth he extended to others was given back to him. That was Brett's grace.

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## IN MEMORIAM: DR. BRETT FOSTER (1973–2015)

Dr. Brett C. Foster, age forty-two, died Monday, November 9, 2015, at his home. He was born April 9, 1973, in Wichita, KS. Brett was an English professor at Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois. He earned bachelor's degrees in English and journalism at the University of Missouri, where he met the love of his life, Anise Mathis. He then received a master's degree in English at Boston University and his PhD in English at Yale University. He was also a Stegner Fellow at Stanford University. He was an avid collector of English literature and poetry books.

"Wheaton College mourns the death of Professor Brett Foster, who has been a good, true friend to his students and colleagues on campus," said Wheaton College President Dr. Philip G. Ryken. "Dr. Foster's exceptional poems will be a lasting treasure for all who read them, both inside and outside the church."

"While we rejoice that Professor Foster's earthly struggles are over and find comfort in the promise of his eternal life with Christ, we grieve the loss suffered by his wife Anise, his children Gus and Avery, and his many friends among the faculty, staff, students, and alumni of Wheaton College," Ryken said.

Dr. Foster's award-winning publications include *The Garbage Eater* (Triquarterly Books/Northwestern University Press, 2011) and *Fall Run Road* (Finishing Line Press, 2012). Beyond campus, Dr. Foster shared his poetry and expertise at readings at the Poetry Foundation in Chicago, the Chicago Shakespeare Theater, and elsewhere.

His poems have been published in *Anglican Theological Review*, *Books & Culture*, *Bostonia*, the *Christian Century*, the *Harvard Review*, the *Yale Review*, and other journals, as well as in the anthologies *And What Rough Beast: Poems at the End of the Century* (Ashland Poetry Press, 1999), *American Religious Poems* (Library of America, 2006), *Best New Poets* (University of Virginia Press, 2007), *Imago Dei* (Abilene Christian University Press, 2012), *Before the Door of God: An Anthology of Devotional Poetry* (Yale University Press, 2013), *The Gulf Stream: Poems of the Gulf Coast* (Snake Nation Press, 2013), and *St. Peter's B-List: Contemporary Poems Inspired by the Saints* (Ave Maria Press, 2014).

Dr. Foster received grants from the PEN American Center and the Illinois Arts Council. He was awarded the Willis Barnstone Translation Prize and the Baltimore Review Poetry Prize, among other honors.



## LOCAL MEETING REPORT:

### EDWIN FRANK AT THE EDITORIAL INSTITUTE

Boston, April 22, 2015

The Boston-area chapter of the Association of Literary Scholars, Critics, and Writers closed Boston University's spring semester with an engrossing poetry reading by Edwin Frank.

Author of the March 2015 collection *Snake Train: Poems 1984–2013* (Shearsman Books) and editor of the *New York Review of Books*, Mr. Frank read and spoke at the Editorial Institute on April

22 to an appreciative crowd. First published in 1985, the title poem was heard as a mystical surprise, from the beginning of

the voyage in a faded train car to the shocking appearance of an imagined transubstantiated dragon. As if constructed from the elements of the contemporary and medieval cityscapes flashing by, the dragon races along the train before shearing the top off the observation car and interrupting the journey. From travelogue to psychic transformation, the poem meditated on “the strength of signs seen and unseen.”

The ensuing discussion covered a range of topics including the influences of George Woodman's photography and the beauty “that does not exist elsewhere” in pure mathematics. Mr. Frank's writing career has been sustained by inspiration from phrases and sounds in ordinary life, arriving like “something that forces the hat off [his] head,” which he records in a notebook and then transcribes for poetic use. He also noted Robert Fitzgerald's Prosody course at Harvard, the art of allusion, and various translations and translators that have appeared in the *New York Review of Books Classics Series* as early and continued sources of inspiration.

By Jillian Saucier

## *We invite writers and translators to apply for the 2016* ALSCW Fellowship at Vermont Studio Center

This fully-funded, four-week residency at VSC is awarded to a current member of the Association of Literary Scholars, Critics, and Writers (ALSCW). This fellowship is open to all of the Association's creative writers and literary translators.

The ALSCW is devoted to the reading and writing of literature, criticism, and scholarship. A first-year membership costs only \$50; current non-members are warmly invited to join in order to become eligible for the VSC residency.

ALSCW members who apply will be considered for the ALSCW Fellowship and any other VSC award for which they may be eligible. Applicants who do not receive a Fellowship will also be considered for partial grant and financial assistance towards the cost of a VSC residency.

To apply, visit <http://vsc.slideroom.com>



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# LOCAL MEETING REPORT:

## DAVID MICHAEL HERTZ ON MONTALE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

Chicago, April 22, 2015

By Michael Autrey

The second meeting of the Chicago chapter of the ALSCW was held on Wednesday, April 22, at 5:00 p.m. in Foster 505, a seminar room on the University of Chicago campus, to hear a talk with an intriguing title: “Eugenio Montale and the Great Modern Cycle of Love Poetry.” The occasion was prompted by the release of David Michael Hertz’s most recent book, *Eugenio Montale, The Fascist Storm, and the Jewish Sunflower* (University of Toronto Press, 2013).

In her introduction, Rosanna Warren called Professor Hertz a polymath. He is a composer, a pianist, and cofounder of the Center for Comparative Arts at Indiana University, where he is also chair of the Department of Comparative Literature. The three other panelists were affiliated with the University of Chicago, where Rosanna Warren is Hanna Holborn Gray Distinguished Service Professor in the Committee on Social Thought, Rebecca West is William R. Kenan Jr. Distinguished Service Professor Emerita of Italian Literature in the Department of Romance Languages and the Department of Cinema and Media Studies, and Silvia Guslandi is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Romance Languages.

Hertz’s book is the first systematic study of the Clizia sequence in English, tracing the development of Montale’s lover Irma Brandeis from beloved into incarnate goddess. Clizia is a figure of enormous importance in Montale’s poetics, “named after Ovid’s Clytie, a nymph who, because she suffered for the love of the sun god Apollo, was eventually turned into a sunflower.”<sup>1</sup> Irma Brandeis, a Dante scholar and an early translator of, advocate for, and critic of Montale’s poetry, is the “Jewish Sunflower” of Hertz’s title. Hertz argues that there are seventy Clizia poems. Though the name Clizia appears for the first time in the poem “Hitler Spring” in Montale’s third book, *La bufera e altro* (*The Storm and Other Things*) (W. W. Norton & Company, 1985), she figures in the Motets, the cycle of lyrics from Montale’s second book, *Le occasioni* (*The Occasions*) (W. W. Norton & Company, 1987), which is dedicated to I. B.

Hertz characterized Montale’s love life as “intimate and unusual.” This remark, unsurprisingly, provoked chuckles. Brandeis (1905–1990) met Montale (1896–1981) in the 30s, and they fell, according to Hertz, “violently in love.” At the time, Montale was involved with Drusilla Tanzi Marangoni, an older married woman. After Brandeis returned home, she and Montale corresponded. Their correspondence, which has been published in Italian, is central to Hertz’s project. The letters are part of a cache Brandeis donated, late in her life, to Montale’s former place of employment, the prestigious library and archive Gabinetto Scientifico Letterario GP Vieusseux. It was in the reading room of the Gabinetto that Brandeis first met Montale, who was then the director of that august institution. Having read his first collection, *Ossi di seppia* (*Cuttlefish Bones*) (W. W. Norton & Company, 1992), she sought him out. Hertz points out that this must be one of the few instances when a future muse introduced herself to the one who would make her immortal. Stranger still, the muse, spurned in life, went on to be a passionate advocate for the poetry of the man who could not escape his entanglement.

Tanzi, nicknamed *La Mosca* (fly), protagonist of Montale’s late great “Xenia” sequences, must have seemed to Brandeis more like a spider. Hertz quotes Brandeis on the subject, astute and sorrowing: “I am tired of

<sup>1</sup> David Hertz, *Eugenio Montale, The Fascist Storm, and the Jewish Sunflower* (University of Toronto Press, 2013; 2015), p. 8. All further citations from this edition are provided parenthetically in the text. References are to page number. Quotations that are not accompanied by a page number were taken directly from Hertz’s presentation.

being asked whether I am, told that I am, Clizia in E. M.'s poems. Those who do so seem not aware of Clitie [Clytie] as Ovid tells her. She is a villainess, a woman suspended in love, and vengeful. She brings about the death of her innocent rival and is cursed by the god whom she continues to love in her heliotropic transformation. This is not my story. It resembles far more that of Xenia's except that Xenia succeeded in all she desired: blaming me, slandering me, returning herself to favor both in respect to her rival and to herself" (224).

The letters make clear that Montale vacillated, making plans to join Brandeis yet never following through. As a student of Montale's work, it seems to me that his departure from Fascist Italy would have been portrayed as a defection and a defeat. His political stance was clear—he had signed Croce's *Protest Against the Manifesto of the Fascist Intellectuals* in 1925—and the risks were grave: Montale's first publisher, Piero Gobetti, was "beaten senseless by Fascist thugs" and died shortly thereafter. Hertz's argument that Montale remained in Italy for complex personal reasons is persuasive. He was entangled, living in the basement of the house where his lover Tanzi, her husband, and her son resided in the upper floors. The details are sordid, but the poetry is exalted, elevating.

Montale was fired from his job as director of the Gabinetto Vieusseux in 1938. During the war, he eked out a living as a journalist and a busy translator with Catholic tastes: "Working with the help of his assistant and collaborator Lucia Rodocanachi, he rendered into Italian Christopher Marlowe's *Faust* and a story by Dorothy Parker. Elio Vittorini edited Montale's translations of Hawthorne, Melville, Twain, Fitzgerald, Faulkner, and others the following year" (170). Hertz's book discusses fascinating connections between Montale's translations of Shakespeare's sonnets and Emily Dickinson. Notably, Hertz connects Montale's translation of Dickinson's "There came a wind like a bugle," published as "La Tempesta" in 1945, with "The Storm," the title poem of what many consider to be Montale's most profound collection.<sup>2</sup>

After Hertz's talk, professors Hertz, Warren, and West read three Montale poems each, with doctoral candidate Guslandi reading every poem in Italian. Hertz's work makes abundantly clear that Brandeis deserves more credit than she has received as both a translator and a crucial advocate of Montale. Professor Warren read "News From Amiata"<sup>3</sup> in Brandeis's very fine translation. In response to a question, all three panelists commented on the difficulty of translating Montale and mentioned specific instances when they felt the translations they had read fell short. Guslandi, a native speaker of Italian, offered a welcome contrast. Hearing them in translation for the first time, she felt that the translators had done a remarkable job of capturing the density and sound patterning of Montale's allusive, metamorphic verse.

Rebecca West, who visited Montale near the end of his life, reminisced. According to West, Montale was a wonderful host who enjoyed visits, especially when the visitors were young women. Montale's apartment was modest and elegant. There were paintings by Morandi and a housekeeper who was always busy in the kitchen. Montale, who would give no straight answers about his poetry, did tell West that he could have used the money he received with his 1975 Nobel Prize earlier in his life.

The formal presentation ended with another vivid anecdote: In answer to a probing question from the audience about Montale's religious beliefs—which were as complicated and unusual as his love life—West said that Montale asked her during her visit for books about snake handling as a religious practice in the American South; when she returned to the States, West tracked down some titles and mailed them to the poet.

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2 Emily Dickinson, "There came a wind like a bugle," *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, (Boston: Little, Brown, 1924); originally published in the *World*, April 7, 1945 (Florence); Eugenio Montale, *The Collected Poems of Eugenio Montale, 1925–1977*, ed. Rosanna Warren, trans. William Arrowsmith (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2012).

3 Hertz, *Eugenio Montale, The Fascist Storm, and the Jewish Sunflower*, p. 149–151; Eugenio Montale, "News from Amiata," *Selected Poems*, trans. Irma Brandeis (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1965).

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Michael Autrey is a poet and freelance book reviewer. He works part time as a writing tutor at the University of Chicago Laboratory High School. His first book, *Our Fear*, was published in 2013 by the Cultural Society.

# MY ULYSSES

By Annie Diamond

topics Seidman returned to throughout the talk were the experience of reading *Ulysses* and the structures that define it. He spoke about his personal experience with *Ulysses*, how he first read it in a hospital in New Jersey fifty-two years ago while recovering from a motorcycle accident. Seidman also spoke about the ways in which *Ulysses* characterizes Dublin, in both the authorial and character-driven senses, and called it a “truthful epic” and a “self-conscious literary epic.” In talking about why the novel so quickly became—and is still today, almost a hundred years after its publication—such a defining text in the landscape of modern literature, Seidman said, “*Ulysses* suggests how rich and interesting life can be.”

He began the talk by introducing himself as Bob and pulling out a James Joyce finger puppet, which he proceeded to put on and take off throughout the talk. These two factors immediately brought a genial atmosphere to the talk; there was no sense of academic stuffiness in Sulzberger Parlor that afternoon. Seidman clearly knew some people in the audience, but he also introduced himself to me before he began the talk, probably because I was sitting in the front row, and I was the youngest person in the room by a margin of at least twenty years. He did not hold himself apart from his audience but engaged with us directly, in keeping with the spirit of *Ulysses* as a text that comprises all kinds of people and attitudes.

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On May 11, 2015, Robert Seidman gave a talk on James Joyce at Barnard College. The talk was entitled “Inexhaustible *Ulysses*”; Seidman began by saying, “I’m going to talk about the whole novel, which is not done often enough.” Rather than concentrating on recurring symbols or a specific theme in the novel, he spoke about Joyce’s 1922 text more generally. Some

## TWO TAKES ON A TALK:

ROBERT SEIDMAN AT  
BARNARD COLLEGE

New York City, May 11, 2015

Picture a charming restaurant in the Paris of 1965 where a young writer named Robert J. Seidman is waxing enthusiastic about a novel he’s just read. “Isn’t *Ulysses* great?” he says to his companion, a considerably older gentleman of Irish extraction. “I think it may be the best novel I’ve ever read.”

Alas, the individual to whom this question was put happened to be in the possession of a mouthful of

## DINING AT THE JOYCEAN TABLE

By Walter Idlewild

Guinness, which at once entered a state of aerated propulsion across the table. Seidman recalls the response that ensued: “He spun toward me and said, ‘I hate that.’ He didn’t say ‘God damn book.’ It was a little stronger.”

“Why?” Seidman responded. “It’s the most inventive and ambitious novel I’ve ever read.”

“No, I don’t hate it because of that,” was the retort. “I hate it because it’s so real. I feel like I’m back in Dublin, and that’s the one place I always wanted to get out of.”

In the more than half century that has passed since that Parisian conversation, Seidman has devoted much of his life to the close reading of *Ulysses*. His years of study have confirmed the moral of that Parisian encounter: James Joyce’s novel provides just as dependable a picture of early twentieth-century Dublin as it does of the human heart. “People who believe *Ulysses* is not realistic,” Seidman said, “are not correct.”

Seidman is in an excellent position to know. He and Don Gifford are, after all, authors of the most detailed encyclopedia of Joycean esoterica ever published: “*Ulysses*” *Annotated: Notes for James*

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This piece was originally published under the same title on the website *Language and Philosophy*.



"My *Ulysses*"

Continued from previous page

Since Seidman spoke about his personal experience with *Ulysses*, I will too. I first read the novel in a book club two years ago; it was summer vacation, and none of the members was in the same place, so we had a Google Group. We took turns posting questions and discussion starters in the group, and out of maybe ten or twelve people involved in the group initially, I think only about three of us finished the novel. The year after that summer, my junior year of college, I went abroad to Oxford and took a Joyce tutorial with an incredible professor. Our tutorial was one-on-one, and I ended up rereading *Ulysses* in its entirety. My friend who had started our *Ulysses* book club was studying abroad in Dublin, so I visited her there, and we went on a *Ulysses* walking tour of the city, covering a small part of the route Leopold Bloom and Stephen Dedalus take in the novel. Then this past year, my senior year at Barnard, I wrote my thesis on *Ulysses* and some of Joyce's earliest published letters (in perhaps the least-surprising turn of events ever, I am an English major). The last three years of my life, therefore, have largely been defined by the time I spent with *Ulysses*. When I had almost finished the novel for the first time, I remember thinking that it was a book I would probably never feel done with, either academically or emotionally, and so far that has proven true.

Seidman's talk contributed important points to the academic discussion of *Ulysses*; primarily that we cannot forget to think of the novel as a whole. When discussing the novel, we often overlook or set aside its larger themes and plot structure in favor of thinking about specific words or scenes. All of these kinds of considerations are valid, but the analysis of smaller details often seems to take precedence, and Seidman's focus reminded us that even though *Ulysses* is a remarkable novel—perhaps one of the best and most innovative English-language novels of the twentieth century—there are many ways in which we must still think of it as we would any other novel. Seidman's admiration for Joyce and *Ulysses* was palpable throughout his talk, which made it extremely enjoyable as well as academically thoughtful and rewarding.

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Annie Diamond is a recent Barnard College graduate (class of 2015). She majored in English with a concentration in creative writing, and she is a prizewinning poet both at Barnard and out in the real world (most recently, she was the winner of the Helene Searcy Puls Prize at Barnard and the winner of the Cargoes National Undergraduate Poetry Competition based at Hollins University.) She plans to read *Finnegans Wake* (Faber and Faber, 1939) this year and to apply for MFA programs in the fall.

"Dining at the Joycean Table"

Continued from previous page

Joyce's *"Ulysses"* (University of California Press, 1988).

Earlier this year at Barnard College, in a presentation entitled "Inexhaustible *Ulysses*," Seidman treated an enthusiastic audience of some fifty people to his reflections about a novel that many people feel is the greatest ever written.

"*Ulysses* is a dauntingly ambitious book," he opined to the crowd. "An attempt to write a modern epic that captures the simultaneity, confusion, and layered nature of what it's like to live in a small, yet highly complex, early twentieth-century urban setting. The novel is hilarious, sexy, moving, intentionally encyclopedic, and perversely erudite. At its best, which is most of the time, *Ulysses* suggests how rich and interesting life can be, how varied and various human possibilities are."



And yet, who has the time? *Ulysses* is notoriously challenging for any but the most-dedicated reader. And in the age of Twitter, is there room for the elaborate musings of an author unschooled in the rhetorical power of the 140-character proposition? Even today's longer-winded novelists have abandoned the formal experimentation of the early twentieth century in favor of the greater accessibility—to say nothing of the greater sales potential—of plain talk.

"Disgruntled critics have argued that *Ulysses* is forbiddingly modernist, demands too much effort, and is willfully difficult," acknowledged Seidman. And it's true, he added, that "the novel demands a good deal of effort to dig out several of its tastiest morsels."

But therein lies its value. "Why is difficulty bad?" posed Seidman. "All art demands some knowledge or application to appreciate it. The more informed insight you can bring to a fine work, the more you fathom its context and its references, the richer it becomes. Since art isn't fast food, it needn't be instantly consumed."

Patient souls who attack the Joycean meal are treated to plenty of nourishing details. Indeed, many attribute the novel's difficulty

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"DINING AT THE JOYCEAN TABLE"  
Continued from previous page

to Joyce's "perverse desire to lard the text with everything he ever knew," as Seidman put it. Even so, anyone feeling adrift on a sea of allusions can restore their bearings by utilizing the aforementioned encyclopedia. Far more confusing, in Seidman's estimation, is Joyce's decision to eliminate the narrator and that ghostly presence's helpful habit of shepherding the reader through the events of the narrative. "Joyce steadfastly refuses to comment on his story most of the time," said Seidman. "There is almost no intervention, no editorializing, and no setting of the record straight." What's left on the page is the "ideal artistic detachment" reminiscent of Joyce's archetypical artist from *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (B. W. Huebsch, 1916) famously trimming his fingernails. The result isn't difficult to foresee, noted Seidman: "Since the reader isn't told how to respond to events, characters, or crises, it's easy to get lost."

Joyce wasn't the only writer to abandon a tour guide. Stripping art to its core was part of the larger modernist movement. "Everybody—Pound, Eliot, Stevens—plunged you into the experience," said Seidman. "They didn't tell you what was going on. They didn't erect billboards that pointed the reader's way or editorialized about what the author believed was significant." This was partly a reaction to the intrusive narrator of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. "Think about Dickens, for example, and as wonderful as he is, how often he tells us where we're going," said Seidman. "I think that modernists said, 'We're not going to give you the guideposts that you had.' It's as simple as that." Making art more difficult, more esoteric, was part of a larger issue in the air at the time, an attitude of "screw the bourgeoisie" and that class's love of accessible art. In the place of middle class values, artists offered a kind of mystery cult conflating spirituality and high culture. "This was a new and secular religion," said Seidman. "Artists in many fields were saying 'I'm not going to explain this stuff for you. It's like jazz: either you dig it or you don't. If you don't get it, get lost, get away from here. We don't want you as a reader or auditor.'"

There was another formal reason for the forced retirement of the narrator: For a writer with a desire to replicate the honeycomb of connections among a city's disparate detail of character and event, the narrator can be in the way, get a bit underfoot. Seidman: "Joyce needed speed, and the ability to talk about the city in terms of simultaneity, with overlays of sound and movement." That led to his use of multiple styles to reflect the multiple worlds that exist on one imagined mid-June day in 1904. Seidman expressed the rigorous energizing excitement of experiencing such a style in these terms:

As readers, we are danced and spun and whirled, and sometimes shimmied and schlepped through a linguistic phantasmagoria in which a master wordsmith regales us with a welter of metaphors, a plethora of puns, effervescent and seemingly inexhaustible wordplay.

The verbal pyrotechnics never cease, as the reader is given gouts of slang, a thieves' cant, snippets from a dozen languages, a capsulated history of English prose, and, in the penultimate chapter, is plunged into the rigors of scientific inquiry in the form of an extended, mind-stretching question and answer exchange based on and parodying the Roman Catholic catechism.

Energizing it may be, but this riotous rainbow of style allows for no slack in the acolyte's devotion. In the negotiation of form and the making of meaning, *Ulysses* demands equal workbench time for audience and author. Is it all worth it? Seidman says yes. *Ulysses* has attracted loyal followers in its near-hundred-year history for its clear evocation of the human condition and its aura of life's humor and pathos. "When a reader does penetrate to the essence of the experience, Joyce's master work offers enduring, life-enhancing pleasures," said Seidman. "It's a bit like eating Chesapeake Bay hard shell crabs, or successfully extricating the body meat of a lobster. It's an exquisite harvest for those willing to do the digging."

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Walter Idlewild is a New York City-based author. His book, *The Aesthetikon*, analyzes the forces driving the abstract imperative in a variety of artistic media including the novel, painting, and dance. He posts his musings at [www.languageandphilosophy.com](http://www.languageandphilosophy.com).



# ON *BOOK SEVENTEEN*

REVIEW BY EAMONN WALL

*Book Seventeen*<sup>1</sup> is Cork-born poet Greg Delanty's tenth collection, an impressive output of work that includes a substantial retrospective volume of *Collected Poems 1986–2006* (Carcamet Press, 2006). Delanty's poetry, steeped in the work of Vaughan, Herbert, and

Traherne, has always been notable for its elegant and deep formal textures, as well as for its wide thematic range. In general, the Delanty lyric is no longer than twenty lines, though the subject matter is broad. Among his subjects are poems about Cork and his father's work as a compositor for Eagle Printing (*The Hellbox* [Oxford University Press, 1998]); ecological poems that explore the landscapes and wildlife, bird life in particular, of Vermont and Kerry; poems of child birth and fatherhood (*The Ship of Birth* [Carcamet Press, 2003]); poems of political engagement; a superb poem about baseball ("Tagging the Stealer" from *The Blind Stitch* [Carcamet Press, 2001]); and a volume of immigrant poetry (*American Wake* [Blackstaff Press, 1995]).

Features of Delanty's techniques are his incorporation of a complex and musical syntax—reminding readers of Hopkins's sprung rhythm—and his use of a wide register of diction, ranging from the elevated to the demotic. The diction and syntax of Delanty's work pay homage, I suspect, to Cork City's unique linguistic inheritance, wherein many verbal shades remain in free play: Irish and English, modern and Elizabethan, as well as echoes of other languages that travelers have brought with them into the port, and which have subtly endured. Quick linguistic and tonal shifts, along with a wide gallery of allusion, are other aspects of Delanty's work; these produce a delightful tension:

We, a bunch of greencard Irish,  
vamp it under the cathedral arches  
of Brooklyn Bridge that's strung like a harp.  
("We Will not Play the Harp Backward, No")<sup>2</sup>

The original Greek anthology, which Delanty's volume responds to, comprises sixteen books of short poems composed between the seventh century BC and the tenth century AD. The poems are attributed to a variety of authors who wrote on an array of subjects that includes boats, kings, religious leaders, Gods, hair combs, and other poets. The poems are amatory, satirical, humorous, dedicatory, hortatory, sepulchral, and declamatory. Delanty's *Book Seventeen* is a fictional poetic work that adds to and updates the original anthology by situating it in a contemporary setting. Here, Delanty "translates" into English work by contemporary authors. An Irish literary counterpart to *Book Seventeen* is Brian Moore's novel *The Great Victorian Collection* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1975), in which Tony Maloney, a young assistant professor at McGill University, checks into the Sea Winds Motel in Carmel-by-the-Sea, dreams about a vast collection of Victoriana, and, upon waking the next morning and looking out of his window, finds this collection assembled in the motel's parking lot. The collection, among other aspects of the novel, is a vehicle for Moore's many-sided exploration of the forces and myths that guide contemporary life.

It is likely that Delanty's highly imaginative creation, like Moore's, owes much to Borges, Cortázar, García Márquez, and Nabokov, all of whom have used similar approaches, inventions, tropes, glosses, and literary assemblages. It is interesting to note how many of these authors who departed from traditional form—Borges is an exception—are also authors who lived great portions of their lives as émigrés. It is as if departure from one's homeland prefaces departure from traditional modes of composition. Brian McHale points out how Cortázar superimposed twentieth-century Buenos Aires on nineteenth-century Paris in "The Other Heaven,"<sup>3</sup> and Borges, in his fiction and poetry, is renowned for such inventiveness. In Delanty's new book, contemporary Ireland and America are superimposed on the classical world—though one could argue that the reverse is equally true. In the original *Greek Anthology*, Roman writers wrote about their own world in Greek, a language they thought to be superior to their own, while retaining the Latin names. Even in the original, a certain superimposition is at play.

This review originally appeared in the *Irish Literary Supplement*, ed. Robert Lowery.

1 *Book Seventeen* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015); this collection was originally published under the title *The Greek Anthology, Book XVII* (Manchester, UK: Carcanet Press, 2012).

2 Greg Delanty, *Collected Poems 1986–2006* (Manchester, UK: Carcanet, 2006), p. 109.

3 *Postmodernist Fiction* (Methuen, Inc., 1987), p. 45.



Readers of contemporary poetry will recognize many of the “authors” whose work Delanty “translates” in *Book Seventeen*: Longlius (Michael Longley), Montagus (John Montague), Billius the Laureate (Billy Collins), Terence of the North (Terence Brown), Kincellas Major (Thomas Kinsella), Adrienne (Adrienne Rich), Muldunus the Magister Grammaticorum (Paul Muldoon), Grennanus (Eamon Grennan), and Gregory of Corkus (Greg Delanty), among others. Two poems are “translations” from Heanius (Seamus Heaney), and it is notable that “Sweeney Out-takes” from Heaney’s *Human Chain* (2010) is dedicated to Gregory of Corkus.<sup>4</sup> For the most part, Delanty’s poems do not imitate the style of the poet to whom the work is attributed, although Heanius’s “Concealment”<sup>5</sup> might be an exception to this in how it connects to Heaney’s “Punishment”<sup>6</sup>; instead, Delanty, by including all of these poets and writers in his anthology, honors his contemporaries by “translating” their work.

Many of Delanty’s favored themes are present here, although they are given fresh life by how they are cast and decontextualized from their Irish and American origins. The various authors’ personae that have been chosen allow Delanty to take flight to great effect. Present throughout *Book Seventeen* are poems of quiet celebration, as exemplified by this short translation of a poem by Frankos Kavalaris:

We think too much of what people think, the shadows  
                   they cast that we see as our own,  
 imagined or true. Horses galloping the beach  
                   aren’t bothered by their dark reflections on wet sand.  
 They don’t need shadow-blinds like highly strung thoroughbreds  
                   for fear their adumbrations will scare them.  
 Let’s forget the umbras cast by ourselves and others.  
                   Let’s drop the shadow-blinds.  
 (“Reflection,” p. 5)

There is a stripped-down quality to this poem that is highly effective, and which allows its wise depth to emerge. *Book Seventeen* is a book of experience; its wisdom has been earned from the business of living, the fruits of which are best expressed simply because they need to be revealed and not concealed. Simplicity and directness are also features of translated poetry, and these aspects are accommodated and embraced by Delanty. Even when the poems reach for the sublime, they do so simply and effectively:

The ocean wraps its surf scarf round the shoulder  
 of the shore. Everything’s in touch with everything else:  
 The sky with the sea, the wave susurrus.  
 (“Resort,” p. 32)

Classical literature is often concerned with warfare, and Delanty makes good use of this source material in his exploration of the fallacies that led to the Iraq invasion:

Many declared the gods decreed this war to lighten  
 Gaia’s burden, the weight of ever-increasing humans.  
                   A nation played its part—converting a lie into truth.  
 Blind shrewd Homer played his harp to that fabricated story.  
                   The phantom that launched a thousand missiles.  
 (“The Bombshell”)<sup>7</sup>

*Continued on page 25*

4 (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010), p. 66.

5 *Book Seventeen*, p. 31.

6 *North* (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), p. 30.

7 This poem appears in the British version, but not in the US edition: *The Greek Anthology Book XVII* (Manchester, UK: Carcarnet, 2012), p. 66.

# ON *THE REPUBLIC* OF *VIRTUE*

Paul Lake has one of those sharp, clear minds that prefer allegory to symbolism, formal verse to free verse, pure diction to private language, and the demands of grammar to the dislocation of syntax. He inclines toward the beast fable: his monkeys, bees, and dolphins have things to tell us about the use and abuse of words. In his thinking and writing, his affinity is to the first name in the following pairs: Skelton and Wyatt, Jonson and Webster, Defoe and Pater, Frost and Stevens, Wittgenstein and Heidegger, Ricks and Bloom. He is literal, logical, and full of play.

It is easier to stereotype Paul Lake than to do him justice. His first allegiance is to the primary emotions, to home and family, but those of his poems that express this allegiance show only decent, wholesome strengths. At first glance, Lake appears to be what we Americans call “The Little Guy”: virtuous in writing as in life, but by no means “The Boss.” In this instance, though, The Little Guy has a wily and potent pen. The poems deepen and strengthen as we find him fiercely maintaining his integrity in a world where “it’s better if you bend / Whenever truth confronts raw power,” where we “surf the Net above the deeps of thought,” and where one’s fellow citizens are so thoroughly brainwashed that they’ve “learned to adjust / Perception to correct mere seeing.”<sup>1</sup> If you do not recognize this world, *The Republic of Virtue* is probably not up your alley.

It never surprises me when a dull critic impugns a sharp formalist for vulgar displays of competence. Lake has a funny, balladic poem called “Pro Forma” (59), which argues that such brainless responses can best be appreciated through the antiformalist effects of bad architects and bad cooks. The first question is, of course, does form contribute to what the poet has to say? Here, it does so constantly. Lake has an aptitude for fine reversals, for the sport of hoisting the engineer by his own petard, for the savage and delectable

machinery of fate. “Underdog and Overlord” (56) sticks to surface action, to facts and straightforward narrative.

But the form is always integral to the message. Working in dimeter quatrains, Lake shuffles a small set of prefixes and suffixes to guide us toward the climactic recognition of a master-slave role reversal, as if he had used Aristotle’s *anagnorisis* and *peripeteia* from *Poetics* as an interpretive guide to Nietzsche’s transvaluation of values from *The Genealogy of Morals*. He wields the inevitabilities of form to unmask and decode who The Boss is and what The Boss has to say. “Underdog and Overlord” does not readily lend itself to excerpts. Like a wildly extended volley at Wimbledon, it is a work you have to take in as a whole. But you can get a feel for Lake’s technique in “End of the Road,” a poem that plays more openly with form while displaying the measured articulations of Lake’s signature wordplay:

When all roads led to Rome,  
unRoman ways  
made inroads  
into Rome  
so Rome’s ways changed.  
Now when strangers go  
to Rome,  
to do what Romans do,  
neither they  
nor Romans know  
what Romans do, to do,

some even deeming  
it unRoman  
they once knew.

(32)

The short lines pull at the reader’s eyeballs, as every word does its work in exacting relation to every other word. The stanza break holds our gaze at a critical juncture like a blank street sign. The fact that we are reading fourteen lines heightens the effect after the break of a turn, or *volta*.

## Review by Lee Oser

<sup>1</sup> Paul Lake, *The Republic of Virtue* (Evansville, IN: University of Evansville Press, 2013), p. 24; 25; 23. All further citations are provided parenthetically in the text. References are to page number.

In Year One, the month of *Vintage*, time began.  
Fog hovered above the earth, like an emanation  
Of spirits underground. The scents of rosewater  
Sprinkled on sawdust, bird lime, blood and fungus  
Commingle in the air, like a chimera  
Exhaled from broken mouths. The word *Virtue*  
Rumbled above the roar of distant cannon  
Like muffled drums, drowning our lamentations.  
Nude women promenaded down the streets  
As the Marquis de Sade stepped blearily from prison  
To raucous cheers.

Lake packs three similes into this passage: “like an emanation,” “like a chimera,” and “[I]like muffled drums.” As the poem unfolds, he will recount how the Marquis de Sade, the author of *Justine, or the Misfortunes of Virtue*, abducted and abused “a young beggar named Rose Keller” (18), a case of life imitating art that prophetically blurred the line between text and reality. In his opening lines, Lake’s preference for simile (*a is like b*) over metaphor (*a is b*) marks his firm grip on reality even as the French Revolution slips toward chaos. Lake asks us to honor the limits of language, the distinctions between words and things, between art and life, between hallucination and reality, because these limits guard against the revolutionary logic that frees the spirit only by killing the letter. His eloquent rhythms, caesuras, and weighty pauses likewise resist the perverse freedom that leads modern individuals to commit acts of terror *in the name of virtue*.

you are nothing more  
Than a de-centered and fragmented subject,  
A point or node within a fluid of skein  
Of many texts and contexts, the product of  
Immense impersonal technologies  
Of control—powerless, insignificant—  
And not a sovereign “self” that I’ve “debased.”

What pains me most in this grotesque affair  
Is how you’ve spurned such hard-won, painful knowledge  
To play the innocent, forgetting how  
Language, like your languid female body,  
Can by its very slipperiness betray  
Unauthorized desires, exposing itself to fresh interpretation.

If the speaker's power and confidence recall Browning's Duke of Ferrara, we may notice that Lake, unlike Browning, is not the least interested in moral ambiguity or in the rupture between ethics and aesthetics. The argument of his script, of his ferocious metalanguage, is that, for the sake of moral sanity,

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# ON INNOCENCE, OR, MURDER ON STEEP STREET

## Review by Kelly Cherry

Soho House used to publish a wider range of genres. It once published a novel of mine. As publishing became a more difficult way to earn a living for both the publishers and the authors (a result of the arrival and ensuing ascendancy of digital technology and self-publishing, along with an influx of agents hawking entertainment rather than literature), Soho narrowed its focus to crime novels. Happily, the house has a liberal interpretation of what makes a crime novel. This May, for example, it will publish *Burning Down George Orwell's House*, a first novel by the ingenious and notably intelligent Andrew Ervin. Ervin's book is wonderful but not especially "crimeful." I recommend it highly. The same month will bring the first English translation of a novel by a Czech writer who had herself worked as a translator and particularly enjoyed Raymond Chandler's detective novels. *Innocence*<sup>1</sup> is dark, surprisingly informative about life under Communism, touching, and, on occasion, funny as hell.

In the 1950s, Czechoslovakia was under the thumb of the Soviet Union. In the introduction, Ivan Margolius, the author's son, tells us that his mother's first husband was imprisoned in Dachau and her parents were gassed at Auschwitz. Heda Margolius managed to escape from a death march and returned to Prague, where she was rejoined by her husband, who had survived his internment at the concentration camp. Alas, her husband was the victim of a show trial, and he was executed in 1952. As a result, she and her son were treated as outcasts. Eventually she remarried to a scholar named Pavel Kovály, who encouraged her to translate. And translate she did—a long line of books, in some of which she encountered Chandler's hero Philip Marlowe. Her use in *Innocence* of tough-guy diction and hardboiled, sinister characters makes *Innocence*, withal, rather charming; it is also lovely that some of the toughest of the tough-guy talk falls to female characters. This layering of charming language, brutal Communism, desperate citizens, and small kindnesses makes this novel a more complex construction than it first appears.

The story is launched when a young boy is found dead in the projector's booth at the Horizon Cinema, where the manager and most of the staff are women. Helena Nováková serves as Heda's alter ego (her son reveals this in his foreword). Helena's husband (in *Innocence*, his name is Karel) is in prison. She's not—she's "just" ostracized—and thinks she should not complain. "There's so much suffering in the world," she thinks, "and everyone's suffering looks different, but it's always the same story in the end: life just glides along, until all of a sudden one day everything goes off the rails."

The investigation into the young boy's death takes us on a circuitous journey that introduces us to a varied and fascinating cast and exposes us to further complications. Kovály's wit is sharp. After the women from Horizon bury a cop who is also a reckless adulterer, the author reminds us of "the slightly exhilarated mood typical of people who have just buried someone they aren't too close to."

Kovály must have been a woman of exceptional emotional strength. To say this is not to disrespect other strong women but to shine a light on Kovály's fortitude, her ability to enjoy life even when it was most precarious, and her fondness for American literature. *Innocence* somehow conveys this portrait of the author. I'm not sure what specifically to link it to—maybe to the way she balances horror and wit, tragedy and comedy, the ridiculous and the serious. I would like to have known her, and I believe other readers will feel the same way.

The translator, Alex Zucker, has surely done an excellent job. Kovály lived to be ninety-one and died in Czechoslovakia. *Under a Cruel Star* (1973; Plunkett Lake Press, 1986), a memoir she wrote about the concentration camps she spent time in and the beginning of Communist influence in her country, has been very widely translated. After my experience with *Innocence*, I intend to get a copy.

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<sup>1</sup> Heda Margolius Kovály, *Innocence; or, Murder on Steep Street*, trans. Alex Zucker, with an introduction by Ivan Margolius (NY: Soho Press, Inc., 2015). Originally published as *Nevina* (Köln: Index, 1985). Page numbers for the quotations that follow are not included because the text consulted was a Kindle edition, which does not provide page numbers.

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Kelly Cherry recently published *A Kelly Cherry Reader* (Texas A&M University Press, 2015); two other titles have just come out: *Twelve Women in a Country Called America: Stories* (Press 53, 2015) and *Physics for Poets*, a chapbook from Unicorn Press. She and her husband live in rural Virginia and share their home with two incredibly sweet Bichons.



"ON THE REPUBLIC OF VIRTUE"  
Continued from page 23

we *ought* to restore literal meanings  
to their just eminence. The conceits  
and puns are cogently marshaled,  
deployed, and detonated with obsessive precision, as the  
poet subverts the professor's lesson that "facts are fluid  
texts" (41).

Lake never succumbs to the popular vice of moral  
grandstanding. He prefers to lament his lack of professional  
savvy. In "Testament," he writes, "had I...shown a higher  
aptitude / For essaying in Theorese,"

I'd teach at Yale—or Kansas State;  
I'd spend my summers in Milan;  
I'd edit, collate, annotate,  
And publish work in *Raritan*.  
I'd have a house, a minivan,  
A Macintosh, and two grants pending.  
Returning from the Caribbean,  
I'd vow to cut back on my spending.  
(50)

One thinks of Pope expressing his chagrin, "On her white  
breast a sparkling cross she wore."<sup>2</sup> Good satirists do not  
exempt themselves from the satire. And this self-awareness,  
this irony implicating the poet, is a clue that we should  
hesitate to classify such writers immediately in political  
terms. Pope was a conservative, Lake is a conservative, but  
that is hardly the most central thing that we can say about  
them.

Higher education may be no friendlier to the true poet than is  
any other walk of life. The sensitivities of the more prestigious  
universities may preclude their hiring the best writers. Lake  
has survived in the academic hinterland, writing poems  
that renew important possibilities in American expression.  
It is good to be reminded that poetry can have a salutary  
connection to public speech and to public virtue. To rebuild  
this connection, while revitalizing American formalism with  
fresh wit and energy, is a no small accomplishment.

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2 "The Rape of the Lock" (London: Leonard Smithers, 1896), canto 2,  
stanza 1.

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Lee Oser's most recent book is a novel, *The Oracles  
Fell Silent*, published by Wiseblood Books in 2014.  
Over the years, his poems have appeared in *National  
Review*, *Literary Imagination*, *Southwest Review*, *Com-  
monweal*, *Spiritus*, and other publications. He teaches  
religion and literature at the College of the Holy Cross in  
Worcester, MA. Since 2010, he has been Secretary of  
the Association of Literary Scholars, Critics, and Writers.

"ON BOOK SEVENTEEN"  
Continued from page 21

A vibrant book of  
life, *Book Seventeen*  
includes explorations  
and examples of both  
the sacred and the profane—and everything  
in between. Arguably the most hilarious  
piece in the collection is a "translation" of  
a poem by the generic Allofus entitled "The  
Most Neglected God of All" (p. 52); it is a  
celebration of masturbation:

Now let us praise the most neglected  
god of all,  
the god of the Hand Job, Hand  
Shandy, Master  
Spank the Monkey, Madame Frig. The  
god  
that everyone: housewives, presidents,  
gurus, Zen monks—so that's the One  
Hand Clap—rabbis, nuns  
have been possessed by, ever since  
it was handed down.

The many voices employed in *Book Seventeen*  
allow Delanty to speak widely and variously.  
In the English tradition, this approach is  
reminiscent of Robert Browning's use of  
monologue. At the same time, it calls to mind  
Fernando Pessoa's personae poems in the  
modernist tradition. The work throughout  
is uniformly strong and always engaging,  
and in its conception and execution, it is  
convincing, successful, and often moving.  
A complete original, there is nothing like  
*Book Seventeen* in contemporary poetry,  
and it finds Greg Delanty reaching for and  
achieving new heights as a poet.

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Eamonn Wall's recent books include  
*Junction City: New and Selected Poems  
1990–2015* (Salmon Poetry, 2015) and  
*Writing the Irish West: Ecologies and Tra-  
ditions* (Notre Dame, 2011). He edited  
two volumes of James Liddy's prose for  
Arlen House/Syracuse University Press,  
both published in 2013: *On American  
Literature and Diasporas* and *On Irish  
Literature and Identities*. He is a profes-  
sor of international studies and English  
at the University of Missouri, St. Louis.

# On in Prose

## Review by Alex Shakespeare

Is this a book of poems in prose? A book of vignettes or “short takes,” as Rosanna Warren has called them? A book of dreams, fairy tales, observations?

The easiest answer—and I think the truest—is that Kasia Buczkowska’s *in Prose* is all of these things. Each one of the book’s forty-two patchwork pieces is brief, but the effects are wide and deep. Here is one of these pieces, titled “Open Book,”<sup>1</sup> in its entirety:

A crowd of people flowed down the street. They walked in a hurry, closely, one next to another to make it on time, to reach their destination, as cascades of new pedestrians joined in the stream. A woman walked against the current with a steady, dignified step. She did not look ahead, or to the sides, or at her shapely-heeled feet. A flowing skirt reached her slim calves, embracing her thighs. The afternoon rays stroked her face. Her eyes rested on the page of an open book that she was carrying. The crowd parted before her.

A paragraph such as this, compressed and complex as any poem, is a delight to the ear and the eye. Its prose sings, but it also makes us see: the crowd flowing, the woman’s dress flowing. The sentences—calm, insightful, precise—rush onward, as though inevitably, to their visionary rush-hour revelation: “The crowd parted before her.”

The world, as seen by Buczkowska, is rich with such revelation. She looks at the everyday chaos of elements, and she discerns the elemental:

The summer heat stabs the skin with needles. The usually assertive acacia tree, sky-gazing with its leafy symmetries, looks resigned. A man’s hand glistens with sweat-beads as he scrolls up and down on his tablet. A little boy dressed in tennis clothes practices rotating-the-ball movements with his racket.  
 (“In Transit,” 76)

But she is not merely a talented “noticer.” She is a storyteller, and this is a brilliant book of stories. In its pages, we meet a parrot with a perfect memory who overpreens its feathers (so neurotic it seems almost human); a woman attempting to live in peace with a mouse who has taken up residence in her apartment; a mortician laid off from her job for trying to minister to the wishes of the dead, which only she can hear.

Many of the tales that Buczkowska tells are tales of miscommunication—between humans and animals, women and men, grandchildren and grandparents, and even, in the case of the second-sighted mortician, the living and the dead. Yet no matter how gross the miscommunications, her language remains always attuned to imperfect correspondences. She provides us with plenty of the “pleasure which the mind derives from the perception of similitude in dissimilitude”<sup>2</sup>

A cow stood on the grass. Grandma was milking the cow. The milk was flowing into the bucket. A fly was cruising around the cow. Granddaughter was chasing the fly with a birch branch.  
 (“The Fly Bit the Cow,” 16)

In the door of a shady building, a girl stands, all dolled up, dressed in a skimpy sequined top, and a boy in a baseball cap, bare feet, with a guitar slung across his naked chest. She fixes her hairdo; he pulls up his low-hanging pants.  
 (“Hobby: A Life,” 38)

1 Kasia Buczkowska, *in Prose* (Boston: Un-Gyve Press, 2014), p. 73. All further citations are provided parenthetically in the text. References are to page number.

2 William Wordsworth, preface to *The Complete Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, vol. 10 (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1911), p. 31.

Buczkowska's compositions are rarely more than a page or two long. She gives us glimpses of places, situations, characters. And often we sense that she deeply cares for these characters, that she feels a warmth toward them—whether strangers on the subway or remembered relations, imaginary beings or recreations of self. And we sense this, I suppose, because we also feel a warmth toward them. We understand the grandfather in “Blind Love” who appreciates but does not want the new watch or the “state-of-the-art bicycle” that his children foist on him (63). We recognize the beggar's impulse in “A Piece of Your Orange.” “Could you share a piece of your orange?” he asks:

“Sure,” I said.

“Oh, no, thank you,” he demurred with an easy smile.

“Here you are,” I said, stretching out my hand with the offering.

“Thank you, really. I just wanted to check the state of your heart.”

(43)

These people, sketched in a matter of moments, come home to us more vividly than many characters drawn out in big, bulky novels. This exercise of sympathy, as well as attention, distinguishes Buczkowska from Lydia Davis, whose short stories have probably inspired Buczkowska's own. Buczkowska's prose is as precise as Davis's, and she is just as capable of making the short form come alive, but Buczkowska is far more open to surprise.

Buczkowska herself has said that she started writing these pieces as if by accident, as a result of living in New York City. (“A Piece of Your Orange,” in particular, seems as if it might be a slice of city life.) But her prose is too imaginative, too beautiful, to be thought of as merely a series of fortuitous journal entries worked up into publishable form. In its clipped parataxis and penetrating perceptiveness, there is something of Isaac Babel; in her whimsy, something of Kafka; in her penchant for the unpredictable word and image, something of Rimbaud. She is a ventriloquist who can give voice to a man weeping over the horses he has sold:

“I am modest, resistant to cold and vermin, like topinambur; I can live on every soil; I am knowledgeable; I like ironing my shirts; I love women and I admire breasts of every size, I'm looking for a woman who can carry my crying over horses.”

(“Sly Animal,” 17–18)

She is a storyteller who recounts the lives of Soviet prisoners, twenty-first-century scientists, panhandlers, and children with a few careful strokes of the pen:

This child is brilliant but difficult. She learns easily, but does not listen. She frolics when the hour is not for it. Contrary, disobedient, merciless. You wilt.

At night, when she is falling asleep, she says: “I love you so much like from here to the sky.”

(“Size of a Feeling,” 26)

She is an observer on whom nothing is lost and a seer who urges us to look (and think) again:

The ocean flows eternally. Constantly, yet not monotonous. Consistent, yet unpredictable. It fights, struggles, tears itself to smithereens. It crashes against rocks, spatters into droplets. It reclines gently on the sand. With its waters it sculpts mountains, with a thunder it smashes them into rubble. It disguises itself as an avalanche, burns in a white smoke, crawls like lava to the shore. It roars, hisses, murmurs, quiets down to whisper, and recedes into the abyss. It never falls into habits.

(“Oceanness,” 78)

If it's true that Buczkowska began writing as if by accident, let us be thankful for accidents. Sometimes they produce a writer blessedly untouched by literary fashion, one who composes fragmentary, gorgeous, memorable prose freighted with the weight of the past and animated by the fluctuating pressure of the present—prose shaped by a thinking, feeling, perceiving mind which never seems to fall into habits.

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Alex Shakespeare is currently a visiting assistant professor of English at Skidmore College. His translation of part 1 of François-René de Chateaubriand's *Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe* will be published next year by New York Review Books.

# ON NO OTHER GODS

In the epigraph to "Vestigial"  
from his second collection

of poems, *No Other Gods* (Salmon Poetry, 2015), Todd Hearon brings the early Renaissance poet Fulke Greville to the forefront with four words followed by an ellipsis: "Absence my presence is..." Foregrounding one of the primary concerns of lyric poetry, Hearon leaves unsaid (unquoted, alluded to by virtue of the ellipsis) the other half of that line: "strangeness my grace." "Absence my presence is, strangeness my grace." A line from a poem beginning "When all this All doth pass from age to age."

I call attention to Greville's full line—and the context of that line—because it so aptly embodies the impression I get from reading Hearon's work, whose poetry grapples with devastation of land and devastation of psyche, whose temperament urges him to orchestrate moods and timbres suffused by a dire sense of doom, the semi-spoken woe and grief of the title poem of his new collection, and whose sensibility just as strongly drives him to affirm his own unfolding being and the world's multitudinous forms—in praise, in song.

His poem "Singing Boy" characterizes the metamorphic quality of mind and nature, and moves by morphing sound and image, following a volatile lyric logic reminiscent in places of Dylan Thomas:

for I  
have witnessed in the room the crack  
of dawn beneath the door within  
the deepest gloom, have felt  
my own dark lightened time to time  
by the burden of that tune.  
(lines 11–16)

A bracing toughness of intellect counterbalances the romance of catastrophe, as we hear in "Vestigial": "No way to know the thing but through the thing the thing / has left" (lines 1–2). This choral quality arises from Hearon's interweaving many voices while maintaining their distinct contours, as in "Palimpsest," a title illuminating the essence of lyric strategy, a poem ending with a question that underlies so many of Hearon's pieces.

If we could scrape  
back bone, back blood, back breath to the original  
dust the dreaming god himself has long  
become  
.....  
would we find ciphered there the DNA  
relation to the tongues we speak today  
when we want words to say what words can't say?  
(lines 7–10, 12–14)

*This text was originally a spoken introduction provided by Phillis Levin on April 4, 2015, at the Poets House in New York City during a reading to honor Todd Hearon after he was awarded the Campbell Corner Poetry Prize.*



Perhaps more obviously than is the case with most works of literature, *The Great Gatsby*<sup>1</sup> is clearly related to a sense of wonder. In fact, the relationship is made quite specific on several occasions. Nick's fascination with Gatsby in particular is closely linked to his perception of Gatsby's capacity for wonder and the way in which such a propensity has become unusual, almost unique, in the modern age of the 1920s. Of course, it is the green light at the end of Daisy's dock that best represents Gatsby's aspirations—and perhaps the quality of reaching for the moon that an earlier America possessed, but which has been lost sight of in the staggering materialism of the modern world.

Although in one sense Gatsby achieves the “American dream,” his success is ultimately empty, for he is unable to satisfy his own personal dream: a life with Daisy as his wife. The money, the wealth, the power, and the influence were only ever for Gatsby a means to an end—never the end in themselves. It is that which most endears him to Nick, who comes from a narrowly upper-middle-class and materialistic background himself. In Gatsby, he recognizes the man he would like to be: someone with the capacity to dream big and stake everything on being successful in an emotional

# ***The Great Gatsby* and the Wonder of the Green Light**

## **By Dr. John Wallen**

sense. Instead of this, Nick has agreed to “go East” and learn the banking business, putting his dreams aside as unsuitable for a responsible man. He sees in Gatsby, however, a person who is wildly successful yet has managed to keep his sense of wonder. A famous passage from the end of the novel underscores these sentiments:

And as I sat there brooding on the old, unknown world, I thought of Gatsby's wonder when he first picked out the green light at the end of Daisy's dock. He had come a long way to this blue lawn, and his dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it. He did not know that it was already behind him, somewhere back in that vast obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night.

(9)

Gatsby risks everything on a dream and loses. But we should remember that he doesn't know at the beginning that he will eventually lose—and he goes into it prepared to face long odds in the attempt to realize his most precious dream. It is this that Nick admires so much in Gatsby, and the famous ending of the book seems to suggest that “one fine day,” even the most extravagant of dreams might be successfully realized. Nick even seems to connect Gatsby with the early American pioneers who came to the New World with nothing except a sense of wonder and hope.

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<sup>1</sup> F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (New York City: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925), <http://genius.com/albums/F-scott-fitzgerald/The-great-gatsby>. All citations are provided parenthetically in the text; references are to chapter number.

And as the moon rose higher the inessential houses began to melt away until gradually I became aware of the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors' eyes—a fresh, green breast of the new world. Its vanished trees, the trees that had made way for Gatsby's house, had once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams; for a transitory enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent, compelled into an aesthetic contemplation he neither understood nor deserved, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder.

(9)

It is only Gatsby in the novel who possesses this profound sense of wonder. All the others, including Nick, have been corrupted in one way or another: materially, emotionally, or both. Tom and Daisy Buchanan are totally materialistic and cynical about life and relationships, while Nick, though he longs to follow his own vision like Gatsby, is an observer of life who is constrained by his

upper-middle-class background, which keeps him from attempting to attain the dreams he truly wishes to realize.



Even the minor characters seem lost and without hope—Jordan Baker is a cynical product of a modern age that lacks morality and ideals, while Wilson and Myrtle are manipulative, self-pitying, and directionless. It is only Gatsby who possesses an extraordinary energy which seems to imbue him with a real sense that he has the potential to change the world around him. Despite this, he is ultimately unable to realize his essential dream of a life with Daisy—but he comes close.

This is an aspect of the story that is often overlooked in the innumerable analyses of the novel that have been written. We know that dreams are bound to fade away, and we see Gatsby's final failure as being inevitable.

But consider for a moment how excep-

tionally more proactive Gatsby is than anyone else in the book. Coming from a poor midwestern background, he achieves enormous success for himself at an early age (even if that success is tainted by illegal activities) and determines to reach for the stars by vying to win a rich married mother as his spouse. No one else in the book has that level of “can do” spirit, and Nick—and Fitzgerald himself, I suspect—recognizes and pays homage to a rare soul. It is in this sense that Gatsby is truly “Great.” Smaller men and women watch his titanic struggles from a distance,

fascinated by the audacity and hubris they could never exhibit themselves due to their more constrained spirits.

Let us return to the green light. In order to have a sense of wonder, there must be something ahead of us that we want to reach out and possess. For Gatsby, the green light at the end of Daisy's dock is representative of this ineffable desire. The light symbolizes all of Gatsby's inner hopes and wishes; it is also a beacon of hope for the future. When Gatsby seems to have successfully repossessed Daisy, Nick makes the telling point that Gatsby's store of enchanted objects has been diminished by the loss of the green light.

"If it wasn't for the mist we could see your home across the bay," said Gatsby. "You always have a green light that burns all night at the end of your dock."

Daisy put her arm through his abruptly, but he seemed absorbed in what he had just said. Possibly it had occurred to him that the colossal significance of that light had now vanished forever. Compared to the great distance that had separated him from Daisy it had seemed very near to her, almost touching her. It had seemed as close as a star to the moon. Now it was again a green light on a dock. His count of enchanted objects had diminished by one.

(5)

In contrast with the multilayered symbolic splendor of Gatsby's green light, Daisy's transitory dream is to push Gatsby around in a pink cloud, already seeing her ex-lover

as something to be tamed and domesticated within the confines of her somewhat mundane everyday world.

In conclusion, it can be said that *The Great Gatsby* is a rich and multifaceted novel full of semiotic significance—and the powerful symbols create both hope and a sense of wonder. The novel still resonates with us so profoundly today because of its freshness and the belief it gives us that life must be about more than the mere acquisition of material things. And Fitzgerald achieves his central novelistic purposes through the reverberation of powerful symbols in the book. Gatsby himself is the embodiment of an earlier American attitude that was ready to "reach for the stars" on a new and dangerous continent. He eventually fails in his quest not because of the inadequacy of his vision but because the people around him have outgrown what they regard as the childish and outdated dreams of the early American pioneers and refuse to embrace Gatsby's sense of wonder and "anything is possible" philosophy. In a sense, the main characters of the book, with the exception of Gatsby, have too much to lose to invest themselves wholeheartedly in Gatsby's schema of things. This is true of Nick too—although he admires Gatsby's capacity for wonder from a safe distance, he is unable to change his own mundane life in any significant way as a result of Gatsby's example. It is only Gatsby who is different, and he must pay the price for that difference. Consequently, Gatsby dies, whereas Nick, the sophisticated emotional voyeur, merely goes back West, albeit a sadder and a wiser man.

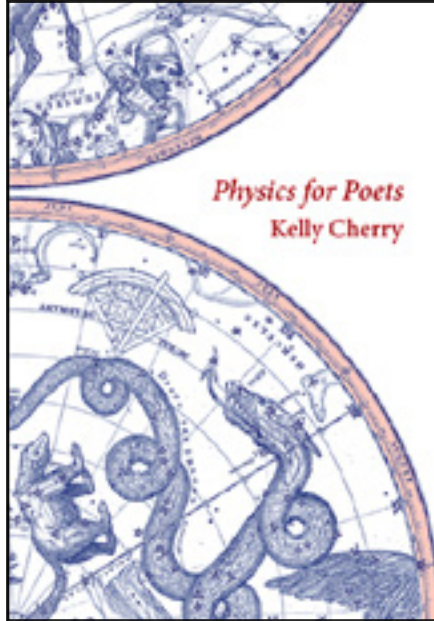
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John Wallen has taught in the Middle East for more than fifteen years. He is currently a professor at Sharjah University in the United Arab Emirates. Previously he worked at Bahrain University and Qatar University. He has published two books of criticism, a novel, and several books of short stories. He received his PhD from Royal Holloway, University of London in 2011.



## NEW PUBLICATIONS BY MEMBERS

### Kelly Cherry, *Physics for Poets* (Greensboro, NC: Unicorn Press, 2015)



Kelly Cherry is the author of twenty-two books of fiction, poetry, and nonfiction; nine chapbooks; and two translations of classical plays. Cherry's twenty-second full-length book is a collection of linked stories titled *A Kind of Dream* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2014). Forthcoming from Stephen F. Austin State University Press this fall is *A Kelly Cherry Reader*, containing stories, novel excerpts, essays, and poems, with an introduction by Fred Chappell.

Cherry is the former Poet Laureate of the Commonwealth of Virginia, and she was awarded the Carole Weinstein Prize in Poetry in 2012. Other honors she's received include the Hanes Award for Poetry from the Fellowship of Southern Writers, fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Rockefeller Foundation, and a USIS Arts America Speaker Award to the Philippines. Cherry serves as a member of the Electorate of the American Poets Corner at the Cathedral Church of Saint John the Divine in New York City. She and her husband live in rural Virginia near the North Carolina border.

### Piotr K. Gwiazda, *US Poetry in the Age of Empire, 1979–2012* (New York and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014)

Examining poetry by Robert Pinsky, Adrienne Rich, and Amiri Baraka, among others, this book shows that leading US poets since 1979 have performed the role of public intellectuals through their poetic rhetoric. Piotr Gwiazda's argument aims to revitalize the art of poetry and reaffirm its social value in an era of global politics and culture.

"Gwiazda has accomplished something remarkable in *US Poetry in the Age of Empire, 1979–2012*: he has taken a period often seen as the triumph of 'language centered' poetics and redefined it as the age of civic poetry." —Robert Archambeau

"With admirable precision and care, Gwiazda tracks a shift over the past few decades from skepticism over a Cold War–era fiction of the United States as a bringer of peace, freedom, and democracy to a cautious critique of twenty-first-century America's 'preemptive' wars and global promotion of an unjust economic order." —Brian Reed

"Gwiazda's work is theoretically well grounded in the political philosophy of Michael Hardt, wide ranging and open in its considerations of competing poetic claims, and well informed about the current situation of poetry." —Leonard Schwartz



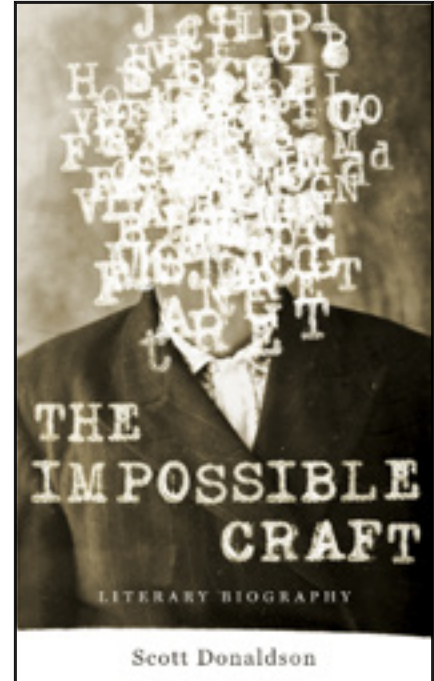


**Scott Donaldson, *The Impossible Craft: Literary Biography* (State College: Penn State University Press, 2015)**

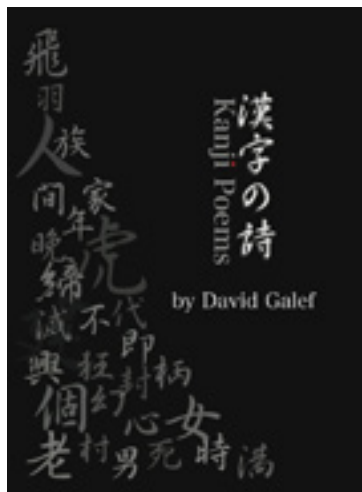
In *The Impossible Craft*, Scott Donaldson explores the rocky terrain of literary biography, the most difficult landscape that biographers try to navigate. Writers are accustomed to controlling the narrative and are notoriously opposed to allowing intruders on their turf. They make bonfires of their papers, encourage others to destroy correspondence, write their own autobiographies, and appoint family or friends to protect their reputations as official biographers. Thomas Hardy went so far as to compose his own life story to be published after his death, while falsely assigning authorship to his widow. After a brief background sketch of the history of biography from Greco-Roman times to the present, Donaldson recounts his experiences while writing biographies of a broad range of twentieth-century American writers: Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, John Cheever, Archibald MacLeish, Edwin Arlington Robinson, Winfield Townley Scott, and Charlie Fenton.

Donaldson provides readers with a highly readable insiders' introduction to literary biography. He suggests how to conduct interviews and what not to do during the process. He offers sound advice about how closely biographers should identify with their subjects. He examines the ethical obligations of the biographer, who must aim for the truth without unduly or unnecessarily causing discomfort—or worse—to survivors. He shows us why and how misinformation comes into existence and tends to persist over time. He describes “the mythical ideal biographer,” an imaginary creature of universal intelligence and myriad talents beyond the reach of any single human being. And he suggests how its very impossibility makes the goal of writing a biography that captures the personality of an author a challenge well worth pursuing.

Scott Donaldson is an accomplished biographer and the Louise G. T. Cooley Professor of English at the College of William and Mary, emeritus. His publications include *Fitzgerald and Hemingway: Works and Days* (Columbia University Press, 2009), *Hemingway vs. Fitzgerald: The Rise and Fall of a Literary Friendship* (Overlook Books, 1999), *John Cheever: A Biography* (Random House, 1988), and *Fool for Love: F. Scott Fitzgerald* (Congdon & Weed, Inc., 1983). His book *Archibald MacLeish: An American Life* (Houghton Mifflin, 1992) won the Ambassador Book Award for biography.



**David Galef, *Kanji Poems* (Cincinnati, OH: WordTech Communications, 2015)**

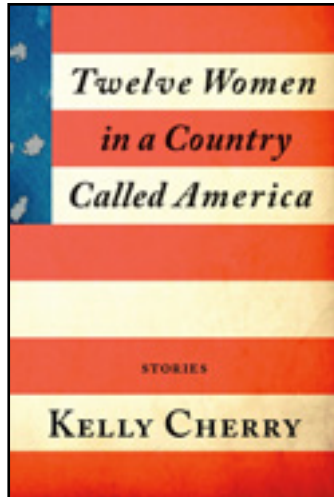


What links the heart, a wick, and a sense of duty, or religious austerities, with a column of print? David Galef finds character in Japanese characters, and narrative in the bridges between their definitions. The short pieces in *Kanji Poems* take us on a journey to a Japan of many times and places.

“David Galef’s *Kanji Poems* is a delightful playground of surprises. Each poem begins with a kanji definition, and the various, often-contradictory meanings give rise to image-rich, word-chewy, corner-turning poems. Kanji 4105, for example, is a character with the meanings ‘tiger; drunkard.’ The two confront each other in Galef’s nimble mind, birthing a poem that concludes, ‘As they pad along / the street, one of them growls.’ These are wise, sly, inventive, very funny poems.” —Beth Ann Fennelly, author of *Open House* and *Unmentionables*

**Kelly Cherry, *Twelve Women in a Country Called America: Stories* (Winston-Salem, NC: Press 53, 2015)**

Kelly Cherry's tenth work of fiction delivers twelve compelling stories about women of the American South. These are women struggling to find their way through the everyday workings of life, while also navigating the maze of self. From a young woman's nightmare piano lesson to an elderly woman's luminous last breath, *Twelve Women in a Country Called America* takes readers on a journey sometimes dark, sometimes funny, and always enlightening.

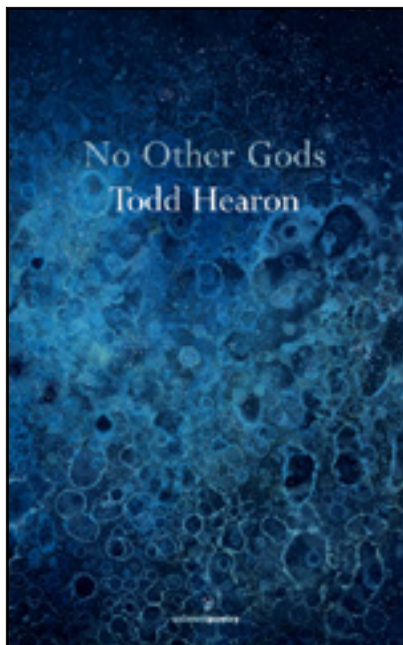


"These stories are thrilling to read. They are bold and exploratory, truthful and unflinching. Kelly Cherry is a magnificent storyteller!" —Bobbie Ann Mason, author of *In Country* and *The Girl in the Blue Beret*

"Kelly Cherry is a writer's writer, a master storyteller who writes about people we recognize in a style so easy we're surprised to find ourselves suddenly in deep, deep water. The past often collides with the present in these complicated families, almost-families, and relationships; many of the stories turn on those moments when we find out who we truly are, or who we will become. I found myself wondering, how does Kelly Cherry know so much? Deeply psychological yet compulsively readable, these stories are like real stories told to us by a trusted friend." —Lee Smith, author of *Guests on Earth: A Novel* and *The Last Girls*

**Todd Hearon, *No Other Gods* (County Clare, Ireland: Salmon Poetry, 2015)**

Todd Hearon's second collection of poems, *No Other Gods*, draws richly on his gifts as poet and dramatist. From the sonnets and nonce forms interspersed throughout, to its central thousand-line verse monologue, *No Other Gods* strikes the full octave with jazzed, symphonic roots-music. In its play of masks and voices, one meets a pantheon both sacred and profane—Mnemosyne (memory) and Priapus (desire)—from Pasiphaë, "that daughter of the sun," to a junked-out "toothless whore named Cookie" of our own century. With mythopoetic propulsion and expanse, *No Other Gods* is, ultimately, a paeon to the human imagination, the force that, in the face of negation and nothingness, "sings well into the night."



"The mastery displayed in Todd Hearon's poems—in the complexity and clarity of his rhetorical frames, the beauty and balance of his artifacts, the power and freedom of his imagination, the precision of his music, his anthropological stringency—is astonishing enough. Astonishing beyond hope is the commitment to reality, the developed vision, that this mastery serves."

—Vijay Seshadri

"*No Other Gods* is the carefully orchestrated, richly fashioned, thoroughly enjoyable collection of a poet coming into the full exercise of his powers."

—Eamon Grennan

**Greg Delanty, *Book Seventeen* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015)**



Purporting to be a “lost” seventeenth book of the sixteen-volume *Anthologia Graeca* (The Greek Anthology), Delanty’s *Book Seventeen* uses the themes and images of ancient mythology to conjure a new way of looking at our modern world. Gods of all types line the pages of this collection, from those deities that only operate in our personal spaces—the poet’s companion, the demigod Solitude, as well as the elusive god of Complicity—to more familiar divinities in unfamiliar roles, such as Helios shopping in an outdoor market in Paris, or an aging Aphrodite in a short skirt chatting with visitors to an unfamiliar city.

Pithy and humorous, reverential and impudent, Greg Delanty’s poems showcase the author’s keen eye for the mythologies on which we depend to make sense of our messy, bewildering lives.

Greg Delanty was born in Cork City, Ireland, and maintains dual citizenship in Ireland and the United States, where he now lives. He is the author of *The Ship of Birth* (Carcanet Press, 2003) and *The Blind Stitch* (Louisiana State University Press, 2002), among many other books. He has received numerous awards for his poetry, including a 2008 Guggenheim Fellowship. Delanty is currently the Poet-In-Residence at Saint Michael’s College, Vermont.

**Peter Cowlam, *Across the Rebel Network* (Nelson, NZ: CentreHouse Press, 2015)**

*Across the Rebel Network* is Peter Cowlam’s latest work of fiction. Its central character is Anno, who centers a federated Europe in an uncertain—and not-too-distant—digital future, when politics, the media, and mass communications have fused into one amorphous whole. Anno works for the Bureau of Data Protection (BDP), a federal government department responsible for monitoring the full range of material, in all media, posted into cyberspace. The BDP is forced to do this when rebel states are seceding, once small satellites of the federation now at a remove from it, economically and socially. A handful of organized outsiders threatens to undermine the central state through a concerted propaganda war using the federation’s own digital infrastructure. It is this climate of mutual suspicion that to Anno makes inevitable decades of digital guerrilla warfare. While his department takes steps to prevent this, he doesn’t reckon on the intervention of his old college sparring partner, Craig Diamond, who is now a powerful media mogul. The two engage in combat conducted through cyberspace in a rare concoction of literary sci-fi.

“*Across the Rebel Network* is a worthy successor to Peter Cowlam’s *Who’s Afraid of the Booker Prize?* (CentreHouse Press, 2013). The two novels together compose a single narrative: a dazzlingly inventive, biting satirical, and savagely funny critique of postmodern culture and society. They are an *Apes of God* for our time.” —Jon Elsby

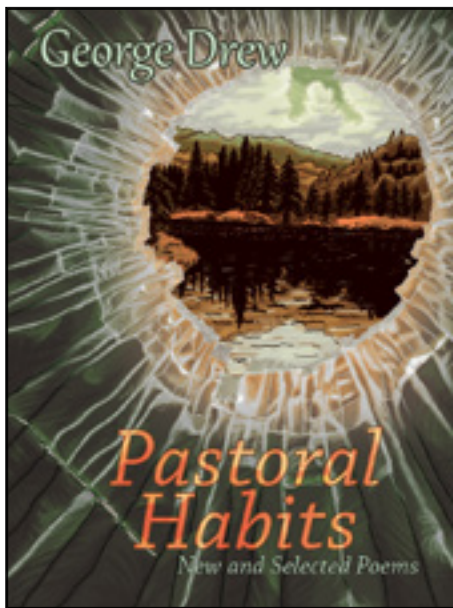
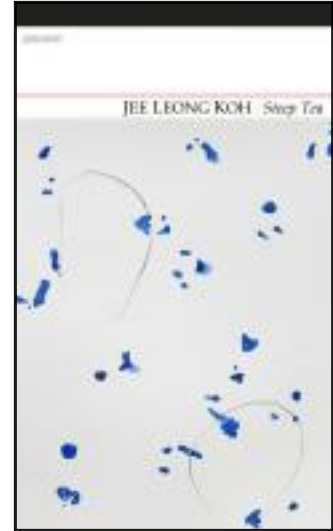




## Jee Leong Koh, *Steep Tea* (Manchester, UK: Carcanet Press, 2015)

Singapore-born poet Jee Leong Koh's first book to be published in the UK is rich in detail of the worlds he explores and invents as he follows his desire for an unknown other, moving tentatively and passionately, always uncertain of himself. His language is colloquial, musical, and aware of the infusion of various traditions and histories. "You go where? / I'm going from the latterly to the litany, from writs to rites." The poems share many of the harsh and enriching circumstances that shape the imagination of a postcolonial queer writer. Taking leaves from other poets—Emilia Lanyer, Eavan Boland, Xunka' Utz'utz' Ni', Lee Tzu Pheng—Koh creates a text that is distinctively his own.

Jee Leong Koh was born and raised in Singapore. He moved to New York in 2003. He has a BA in English (with first class honours) from Oxford University and an MFA in creative writing from Sarah Lawrence College. He is the curator of the website Singapore Poetry, and he was the cochair of the inaugural Singapore Literature Festival in New York City. This is his fifth book of poems and the first to be published in the UK.



## George Drew, *Pastoral Habits: New and Selected Poems* (Huntsville: Texas Review Press, 2016)

Just as an orchard grower, when harvesting his fruit, discards the tart, the bitter, the overripe, and the stunted, so, too, does any poet try to judiciously reject less than sterling poems when assembling works for an edition of his selected poems. *Pastoral Habits* is a "selected" of carefully chosen poems from fifty years and five volumes of poetic harvests. If "pastoral" connotes good shepherding, or good harvesting, then George Drew's collection—which includes poems about Michelangelo, physics, Russia, all things American, and the natural world—will resonate for those who value the worlds of poetry, from lyric to dramatic to narrative, and the pastoral, whether as background or central.

## FORTHCOMING PUBLICATIONS BY MEMBERS

Tim Jackson, ed., *Selected Poems of Edna St. Vincent Millay: An Annotated Edition* (Yale University Press, 2016)

John Wallen, *New Perspectives on Sir Richard Burton: Orientalism, The Cannibal Club, and Victorian Ideas of Sex, Race, and Gender* (Academica Press, 2016)



# Helaine Smith's *Teaching Particulars*

In *Teaching Particulars*, Helaine Smith engages her students, grammar school through twelfth grade—and any avid reader—in the questions that great literature evokes. Included are chapters on Homer and Genesis; plays by Sophocles, Shakespeare, and Beckett; poems by Jonson, Donne, Coleridge, Browning, Hopkins, Yeats, Bishop, Hecht, Dove, and Lowell; essays by Baldwin, Lamb, and White; and fiction by Flannery O'Connor, Dickens, Joyce, Poe, Tolstoy, Mann, and Kafka.

Whether Helaine Smith is talking to students young or old, she shows how any devoted reader can uncover all sorts of subtle beauty and meaning by reading closely and by assuming that virtually every word and phrase of a great text is deliberate. The question-and-answer form of these jargon-free dialogues creates the feeling of a vibrant classroom where learning and delight are the watchwords.

The book presents, in chapters detailing class discussions of great literary works in the Brearley curriculum, how students learn through such discussion to value and develop the very things that the Meringoff contest rewards: “lucid and lively expression, conceptual maturity, and argumentation that is developed from compelling and careful attention to specific passages.”

“After her forty years of teaching, Smith’s keen understanding of the literary canon makes her the perfect candidate to write this humorous and insightful book.” —*Foreword Reviews*

“*Teaching Particulars* is an exemplary series of literary conversations by a master teacher on a great variety of important, life-shaping books. The guidance is unfailingly humane, the essays thoughtfully presented by someone who cares as much for the written word as she does about her classroom and her subject matter. Her commentary on Hecht’s ‘Rites and Ceremonies,’ the poet’s complex response to Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, ranks among the very best anywhere, as is true for her reading of Hecht’s ‘Devotions of a Painter,’ which has the further advantage of illuminating that work in light of Elizabeth Bishop’s profound meditation on painting in her ‘Poem.’ Reading *Teaching Particulars* makes me wish that all of my students could have had Helaine Smith as their teacher.” —Jonathan F. S. Post, Distinguished Professor of English and former chair of the Department of English, UCLA

“There’s simply nothing else like *Teaching Particulars*, a book packed with so much wisdom and practical advice about teaching literature that every instructor of grades 6 to 12—and of

college classes, too—will want to get a copy right now. Even if you’re not a teacher, I highly recommend it. The love of books pulses through every page Helaine Smith writes, and her passion is infectious. She opens our eyes to the pleasures of reading in a way that few critics can, and she does it all in a book whose style is both elegant and friendly.” —David Mikics, John and Rebecca Moores Professor of English, University of Houston, and author of *Slow Reading in a Hurried Age* (Belknap Press, 2013).

“*Teaching Particulars* is a bounteous resource for all teachers, as well as a pleasure just to curl up with and read away.” —Susan J. Wolfson, Professor of English, Princeton University

“Helaine Smith is a genius of a teacher: witty, imaginative, precise, intuitive, and gracefully learned. Now anyone who opens her *Teaching Particulars* can have the rare privilege of learning from her how to read, in the truest sense. It’s never too late to be startled into delight by the power of language, and that is the experience offered on every page of this book. It’s a book not only for the schoolroom, but for the school of life.”—Rosanna Warren, Hanna Holborn Gray Distinguished Service Professor, The Committee on Social Thought, The University of Chicago



Helaine L. Smith has, for forty years, taught English to students in grades six through twelve at Hunter College High School and at the Brearley School in Manhattan. For ten years, she was a Reader of English Composition Essays and AP Essays in Language and in Literature for the College Board. She is the author of two volumes for high school and college English and humanities instruction: *Masterpieces of Classic Greek Drama* (Greenwood, 2005) and *Homer and the Homeric Hymns: Mythology for Reading and Composition* (University Press of America, 2011). Smith has written articles for *Arion*, *Semicerchio*, the *Classical Journal*, *Style*, and *Literary Matters*, and she recently completed eight adaptations of Aristophanes’s comedies for middle school readers. She received the Sandra Lea Marshall Award at Brearley in 2005, and teaches Brearley’s senior Shakespeare elective.

# QUESTIONS OF HOME

“Questions of Travel” by Elizabeth Bishop explores her relationship with home and travel, discussing her ambivalence about the inclination to travel, her attraction to Brazil, her lack of home, and the inability truly to know anything.

In fact, over the course of the poem, Bishop questions the very terms “home” and “travel.”

Bishop depicts the instinct to travel as innate human nature, claiming, “while there’s a breath of life / in our bodies, we are determined to rush / to see.”<sup>1</sup> The second stanza, however, is mainly critical of the instinct to travel. Bishop expressly asks, “Is it right” to observe “strangers” (16), as if the act of observation were intrusion. She summarizes her internal debate in the proposal, “should we have stayed at home and thought of here?” (14). The

idea of whether or not imagining a place is equal to its reality

recurs in the line, “Oh, must we dream our dreams / and have them, too?” (26–27). The “must” implies that the answer is yes. In the “Oh,” Bishop is sighing over the

human craving to consume experiences. Bishop elaborates on this desire to see striking sights, asking, “have we room / for one more folded sunset, still quite warm?” (28–29). The sunset seems like a baked good, fresh out of the oven and already being packed away in the cupboard of memory without time to savor. Why does one seek out new experiences when often still absorbing others? Furthermore, Bishop cannot understand the sights she is seeing. She describes “star[ing] at some inexplicable old stonework, / inexplicable and impenetrable, / at any view” (22–24); vision is not the same as comprehension. Bishop’s reiteration of “inexplicable” emphasizes the fact that she cannot discern any meaning in the stonework. If all one can do is see, but the sight is inscrutable no matter the angle, what good is seeing?

BY SOPHIE STARCK

Storing these memories somehow enriches the traveler. The third stanza begins, “But surely it would have been a pity / not to have” (30–31), an anaphora that is repeatedly completed in each item of her answer. The conjunction “but” indicates that this stanza will contradict Bishop’s previous idea that perhaps we should not travel. This stanza is by far the longest of the poem, indicating its relative importance to Bishop. By a convoluted logic, the idea that it would have been cause for regret not to have these experiences is Bishop’s justification for being there in the first place. She is glad that she

pondered,  
blurr’dly and inconclusively,  
on what connection can exist for centuries  
(47–49)

between two wooden objects. It would have been a cause for sorrow “not to have” thought deeply about that connection—albeit without figuring out what it was—and so Bishop feels improved by

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<sup>1</sup> Lines 18–20. Citations were cross-referenced using *Elizabeth Bishop: The Complete Poems 1927–1979* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1984), pgs. 93–94. All further quotations will be cited parenthetically in text. References are to line number(s).

her experience. The verbs beginning each experience progress from seeing, to hearing, to pondering, to studying, to listening, in effect becoming increasingly active on Bishop's part. She shifts from passively absorbing her surroundings to scrutinizing and reflecting on them.

The first question in the fourth stanza proposes that one leaves home for "imagined places" due to a "lack of imagination" (61, 60); one's own deficiency and inability wholly to picture another place prompt one to seek out those places in real life. In this situation travel seems necessary, but for an undesirable reason, while home is fixed and boring. New places provide an escape from one's normal world. The second question is a reference to Pascal's *Pensées* in which he declared, "All of man's misfortune comes from one thing, which is not knowing how to sit quietly in a room."<sup>2</sup> Pascal's postulate paints travel as detrimental to the traveler and home as the safe option. Bishop asks, "or could Pascal have been not entirely right" (62), hinting that she believes that man can learn and grow from exploring the world. The repeated "just" qualifies the act of staying home as "merely," or not enough, and makes it seem less desirable and important.

Bishop finally suggests an answer to why she travels: the stonework is "always, always delightful" (25). She gets pleasure out of exotic sights like the stonework, as well as "the tiniest green hummingbird in the world" (21) and "the sun the other way around" (20). The former is extreme and exciting to Bishop, and the latter—seeing the sun from South America as opposed to North—is a new perspective. Bishop's examples are random, yet vivid. While Bishop is equivocal about travel, she is clear about details of a place she finds lovely.

Her tone is assertive as she lists mundane Brazilian things she finds beautiful: trees with

pink flowers, clogs with different pitches, a songbird, rain. She speaks of the "two-noted, wooden tune/ of disparate wooden clogs," each making a different pitch (36–37). Bishop says that "in another country," (i.e. Sweden), the clogs would have "identical pitch" because of quality control (40–41). Bishop finds the Brazilian version of clogs more interesting because of their unfamiliar lack of uniformity or perfection. A songbird lives in a birdcage that resembles a "bamboo church of Jesuit baroque" with "three towers" and "five silver crosses," reflecting the ornate and elaborate local taste (45–46). It is "whittled" with "finicky" (over-delicately wrought) "fantasies" of the carver, and Bishop perceives the beauty of his "careful" dreams (52; 51; 52; 51). She appreciates "stud[ying] history" (53) in the songbird's cage. Bishop, herself an artist of words, is drawn to artistic tradition, whether in the form of music or physical art. Personification allows Bishop to exclude other people from the poem. For example, since Bishop gives sadness to the clogs as opposed to their wearer, she can abstain from interacting with the wearer and focus solely on her personal experience.

Bishop's perpetual travel is a manifestation of her continual yearning to feel at home, as is demonstrated by her detailed descriptions. The vivid imagery of the first stanza is meant to demonstrate Bishop's intimate knowledge of her location in Brazil. She declares, "there are too many waterfalls here," as if in this particular place the "crowded streams" are excessive (1). She shows a stereotypical New England reserve in her landscaping taste. Although seemingly overwhelmed, Bishop also seems to revel in the differences between Brazil and New England, using poetic devices to bring alive the scene. The enjambment from "streams / hurry" (1–2) mimics the "[rapid]" flowing of the streams. The sibilance in "spill over the sides in soft slow-motion" (4) sounds like water rushing by. She delights in foreign environments and moreover can explain the local phenomenon, ascribing the streams' overflowing to the "pressure of so many clouds on the mountaintops" (3). Bishop then explains that although the streams might not be waterfalls yet, they will become so "in a

<sup>2</sup> Pascal's *Pensées* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1958).



quick age or so, as ages go here" (8). She not only can predict the landscape changing but also can differentiate how time passes here as opposed to elsewhere. "Quick age" is an oxymoron, as by definition ages are centuries long; Bishop's rationale might be that since the mountains "here" have endured for millennia, the time it will take for a stream to turn into a waterfall is relatively short. An alternative future is for "the mountains [to] look like the hulls of capsized ships, / slime-hung and barnacled" (11–12). In this simile the mountains become manmade vehicles of transportation that crashed long ago, ending their metaphorical journey to settle in Brazil. In Bishop's eyes, everything is searching for a place to settle down; even the "streams and clouds," other inanimate parts of the natural world, are recounted as "travelling" (10).

Notwithstanding her familiarity with the region, Bishop's vivid imagery also attests to the enduring gulf between Bishop and Brazil. The more detail she gives, the more she knows the place, but knowing a place is not the same as belonging there. Play imagery illustrates the tension between Bishop and her setting. Bishop calls her surroundings the "strangest of theatres" and the trees "exaggerated," while the participants in this play of life are "strangers" and "pantomimists" (17; 32; 16; 34). "Exaggerated" makes the beauty seem beyond reality and idealized, just like a stage set. Bishop's lack of insight in stanza three further demonstrates her detachment. "Blurr'dly and inconclusively" mean only slightly different things—dimly and without a decided end, respectively—yet together they illustrate the idea that there is a limit to a foreigner's comprehension of the local culture. That she struggles to feel a connection to the songbird's home is an example of her lifelong struggle to feel grounded in a true home.

Bishop is haunted by her lack of a true home. She begins with the inconvenience of travel, reminding the reader of the "long trip home" (13). The journey is "long" not only physically, but also metaphorically; despite all her voyages, Bishop might never find a true home. In the last stanza, her tone is melancholy and pensive as she says, "the choice" of where to make one's home "is never wide and never

free" (65). Her limitation is perhaps a reflection of her lack of contentment in previous homes. One believes one has "continent, city, country, society" (64) to choose from, yet in fact one is limited. The alternating hard "c" and "s" sounds as well as the poem's first rhyme in "society / ...free / ...be" (64–65, 67) bring the last stanza closer together, giving it a sense of constriction. Bishop cuts off the unfinished thought of "and here [Brazil], or there [home]" with "no" (66), leaving the reader to imagine the completion of the sentence. It's a nagging thought Bishop cannot let herself voice—perhaps that she doesn't belong anywhere? The poem seems to end with, "should we have stayed at home"—a familiar question—but then adds on a searing half line, "wherever that may be?" (66–67). Bishop's home is forever in flux and indefinite. This last question calls into question the entire meaning of travel, an action typically understood as leaving home. But, if one does not have a home, then how can one travel?

In "Questions of Travel," asking questions is more important than coming to a definite conclusion. The ending, typically the unambiguous revelation of a poem's insight, instead adds a new layer of complexity. Finding an answer is not Bishop's aim in this poem. It is difficult to assert anything; one can intuit ideas as Bishop toys with her questions, but cannot articulate a definitive answer. This attitude of inconclusiveness is evidenced above all by the title of the poem, "Questions of Travel"—not "Answers of Travel." The focus is on contemplating ideas, raising theories, and doubting them. In this context, Bishop's aim seems to be a self-aware exploration of one's uncertainty. The beauty of "Questions of Travel" is that it leaves one with more questions than when one began.

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As a man previously marked by brutality and irascibility, King Lear demonstrates his transition to gentleness and serenity in his speech to Cordelia as the two are led off to prison. In this speech in 5.3.8–14 of *King Lear*, Shakespeare uses polysyndeton and anaphora to portray the tranquility of the scene.<sup>1</sup> In lines 11–12, when Lear tells Cordelia of their future, saying, “so we’ll live, / And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh,” the polysyndeton in this line slows down the pace of the whole scene and brings the audience into Lear’s state of mind. At this moment, all Lear sees is Cordelia. He shuts out the turmoil of reality, if only momentarily and the tempo of Lear’s language, created by his polysyndeton and anaphora, reflects his calm state of mind, particularly in contrast to the frenzied spurts of madness he has become prone to throughout the play. Each “and” in line 12 is followed by a simple verb (“pray...sing”) or simple phrase (“tell old tales...hear poor rogues” [12–13]). While the simplicity of Lear’s language in this line conveys his peacefulness in this scene, the same simplicity also represents a naïve optimism in Lear, for he describes how he and Cordelia will live simply, disconnected from the madness of the world. His simple language mirrors that intention. Therefore, the plainness and slow tempo of Lear’s speech reflect his emotions and peaceful state of mind in the scene, in contrast to his state of mind elsewhere in the play.

## SEEKING OUT SOLACE

BY SYLVIE THODE

Throughout his speeches in this scene, Lear uses imagery that acts as a continuation of earlier images in the play. In 5.3, Lear tells Cordelia of the life he hopes for them to have together, a life in which they will “hear poor rogues / Talk of court news” (13–14). The diction of “poor rogues” calls to mind one of Lear’s earlier speeches, in 3.4.28, in which he appeals to the “poor naked wretches” of the world, but shows an advancement of the humble attitude he begins to adopt there. In that earlier scene, after an apostrophe to the “poor naked wretches,” Lear laments his ignorance of the fate of those people, saying “O, I have ta’en / Too little care of this” (3.4.32–33). And so begins Lear’s transformation from a pompous king to an empathetic man who identifies with the “wretches” of the world. By the time Lear is with Cordelia and speaks of the “poor rogues,” he himself has become one of the poor rogues of the world, since he has lost all of his power, and has traipsed the land trying to find solace. Ironically, as he is led off to prison, Lear has fulfilled his own words and “Expose[d] [him]self to feel what wretches feel” (3.4.34). He even tells Cordelia that “we’ll talk with [the rogues] too” (5.3.14), completely dropping his role as king, and associating fully with the commoners. Thus, in this scene, Lear’s imagery and diction illustrate his transformation from foolish king, who cares little for the general population, to one of the “wretches” himself.

Some of Lear’s imagery in his speeches does reflect his regality, but is inverted to show his transformation. For example, in 5.3.12–13, Lear tells Cordelia that they will “laugh / At gilded butterflies.” Gold and gilded items were typically associated with kings, since only they could afford such opulence. The beautiful dreaminess of “gilded butterflies” evokes Lear’s serenity in this scene, and the fantastical imagery highlights his childlike qualities. The word “gilded” represents Lear’s role as king, while “butterfly” represents nature and Lear’s role in it. The combination of these two

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<sup>1</sup> William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, ed. R.A. Foakes (London: Bloomsbury, 1997). Citations were cross-referenced using *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1974). All further quotations will be cited parenthetically in text. References are to act, scene, and line number of *The Riverside Shakespeare* edition.

important aspects of Lear's persona suggests that he feels whole in this scene, and highlights the scene's overall sublimity. It also continues the theme of nature mirroring Lear's emotions. When, for example, in 3.2, Lear first shows signs of madness, the raging storm on stage reflects his emotional upheaval. Similarly, in this scene, the sublime butterfly image reflects Lear's bliss. The "gilded butterfly" also calls to mind an earlier image in the play. In 4.6.112–113, in the midst of a fit of madness, Lear cries, "the small gilded fly / Does lecher in my sight." Although the "gilded fly" is nearly identical to the "gilded butterfly," Lear uses it very differently as an emblem of the world fallen into sin. The sharp contrast between these two uses of nearly identical imagery highlights the change in Lear's emotions and state of mind. In the earlier scene, Lear is full of wrath and despair, whereas in 5.3, he is peaceful and loving.

In his speech, Lear's command to Cordelia to "wipe [her] eyes" brings together several different themes. In 5.3.23–25, Lear comforts Cordelia, saying,

wipe thine eyes;  
The good-years shall devour them, flesh and fell,  
Ere they shall make us weep!

The words "devour," "flesh," and "fell" (an archaic term for "fur" or "hide") call to mind the recurrence of animal imagery throughout *King Lear*. There are repeated references to humans treated less well than animals, such as Kent's rejoinder to Regan in 2.2.136–137, "Why, madam, if I were your father's dog, / You should not use me so." Animal imagery is also used to liken human nature to the brutish nature of animals. For example, in Edmund's soliloquy in 1.2.127, Edmund calls his father's lustful disposition "goatish." Such use of an animal to convey human sin runs throughout the rest of the play, until Lear's speech in 5.3. But by using animal imagery to comfort Cordelia, Lear changes the negative, brutish connotations that had been associated with it through the play. Instead, his use of "devour" as a promise of future comfort creates a kind of beautiful sadness; Lear uses imagery that recalls all the savagery that has been inflicted on him and Cordelia throughout the play, but recasts it instead into something reassuring.

Lear's command to Cordelia, "wipe thine eyes," recalls similar instances of weeping throughout the play, in which Lear implores himself or others not to weep. In his speech in 2.4.264–286, after Goneril and Regan have fully revealed their betrayal to him, Lear condemns his daughters, and is overcome with emotion at their deception. Twice he must ward off tears: in 2.4.277–278, when he states, "[L]et not women's weapons, water-drops, / Stain my man's cheeks," and then in 2.4.282–286, when he declares,

[Y]ou think I'll weep:  
No I'll not weep.  
I have full cause of weeping, but this heart  
Shall break into a hundred thousand flaws  
Or ere I'll weep.

Lear's view of tears as shameful is a quality that remains constant throughout the play; it is one of the few characteristics of Lear that does not change as he evolves from proud king to abused commoner. Weeping often conveys weakness, particularly in a man of such power as a king. It

implies that the man is not in sufficient control of himself enough to hold back his own emotions, and therefore discredits his right to rule over others. Thus, when in 5.3.24–25 Lear declares that “The good-years shall devour them... / Ere they shall make us weep,” he displays a lingering impression of his rightful kingship. The word “us” in Lear’s declaration is also significant, because it conveys Lear’s desire to share this aspect of his kingship with Cordelia, a reminder of his failure to do so in the opening scene of the play. Rather than using “me” in 5.3.24–25, Shakespeare instead unites Lear and Cordelia by using the inclusive pronoun “us.”

As with references to weeping and to animals, the reference to kneeling in Lear’s speech calls to mind previous instances of kneeling and demonstrates the evolving symbolism of the act itself. In 5.3, Lear tells Cordelia, “When thou dost ask me blessing I’ll kneel down / And ask of thee forgiveness” (10–11). This line recalls, and even looks ahead to a perpetual reenactment of, Lear’s actions in 4.7.58, when he is reunited with Cordelia. As she kneels to ask Lear for a blessing, Lear himself kneels, to which Cordelia responds, “No, sir, you must not kneel.” Both of these instances of kneeling occur late in the play, and are physical emblems of the humility Lear has gained as the events of the play run their course. Lear’s willingness to kneel is particularly important in the context of his kingship. Kneeling is the primary method through which subjects show their deference to their king. Therefore, Lear’s kneeling highlights his mental and physical transition from responding as a ruler, to responding simply as a man. Another important aspect of the kneeling in 5.3 is its demonstration of the role-reversal between Lear and Cordelia from the beginning of the play. In the first scene of the play, in their sycophantic speeches to him, Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia presumably kneel to Lear. Therefore, in 5.3.10–11, Lear’s blissful

references to kneeling recall the earlier scene and signify the complete change in Lear’s attitude toward Cordelia.

The kneeling in this scene also signifies a change in Lear’s role in the play as a whole. In 4.7.57, Cordelia kneels at Lear’s feet and asks him to “hold [his] hand in benediction o’er [her.]” Her request for a blessing is one a child would ask of a father, and denotes Cordelia’s pardon of her father, even after she is disowned. However, by 5.3, Lear has instead taken on the role of the child, when he says, “When thou dost ask me blessing I’ll kneel down / And ask of thee forgiveness” (10–11). These two acts of deference mirror each other, and the difference between them reflects Lear’s transition from a regal figure to a child naively trying to comfort its parent, whose role Cordelia takes on. However, Lear also acts like a comforting parent in the scene, such as when he beseeches Cordelia to “wipe [her] eyes” (5.3.23). The complex of roles he and Cordelia take on in the scene is strikingly chiasmic, in that both act as parent and child, and each role seems to overlap the other. In conclusion, as Lear is led off to prison with Cordelia, his serene speech recasts recurring imagery from *King Lear* to reveal his evolution from a severe king to a compassionate “poor rogue.”

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Sylvie Thode is a senior at the Brearley School in New York City. Her favorite subjects are English and Latin; she is fascinated by and passionate about all topics related to classics and literature. Thus, some of her favorite works include *Beowulf*, *The Iliad*, *The Odyssey*, and Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. This year, she was chosen to be the cohead of her school’s Classics Club. Sylvie also loves reading and analyzing Shakespeare, and she is looking forward to taking a class devoted solely to studying his plays in her senior year at Brearley. Sylvie is an accomplished athlete: a tri-sport varsity captain, she excels in field hockey, basketball, and softball, having received a total of four MVPs and five All-Star awards across all of her sports. Additionally, she plays on a softball travel team; she was excited to attend the National Championships this summer with her team. Most importantly, she is very grateful to all her teachers this year for pushing her to be her very best and inspiring her daily.



## SPRING THAW

For the seventh day in a row  
I left my room on Panic Street  
melancholy, tango-like,  
walking into the crisis that  
pulled existence from under  
my feet.

In an attempt to fetch  
merriness I ran like mad  
to the Pernod Palace  
to have a glass, some glasses,  
that is. It did not help.

When my then almost-dissolved self  
half stumbled out of the Palace  
and by pure chance ended  
in the park across the street  
came the revelation—and the miracle.  
A generous, unsuspecting  
fauna of toothless crocodiles,  
vertiginous condors, stooping giraffes  
and aqua-phobic carps suddenly  
showed up between the elm trees  
and conferred upon me  
power to pull myself  
by the hair out of the cesspool.

There is room for everybody  
in Grandfathers garden  
was the message that ticked out  
in my new high-spirited heart.  
A Tibetan laughter (that in my  
bewilderment I hid inside my hand)  
surged from the brim of being  
to my lips. This must be what they call  
a walk in the park, I thought  
as I stood extant under the sky's  
vast circus dome

—Erik Frisch

Originally published in Erik Frisch, *The Literary Cat & Other Poems*, trans. Nail Chiodo (Lyrical Translations, 2013).

## MOON'S NIGHT

It was as if when sky  
Gave earth a soundless kiss,  
The blossom's twilight luster  
Imported dreams of bliss.

A breeze moves through the fields—  
The crowned ears, yielding, sway—  
It murmurs softly in the trees  
So star clear was the spouse of day.

And now my soul awakened  
spread wide its feathered comb,  
Coursed through the sleeping country  
as though in search of home.

—Ed Block

## MONDNACHT

Es war, als hätt' der Himmel  
Die Erde still geküst,  
Dass sie in Blütenschimmer  
Von ihm nun träumen müsst.

Die Luft ging durch die Felder,  
Die Ähren wochten sacht,  
Es rauschten leis die Wälder,  
So sternklar war die Nacht.

Und meine Seele spannte  
Weit ihre Flügel aus  
Flog durch die stillen Lande  
Als flöge sie nach Haus.

—Joseph Freiherr von Eichendorff

Works published in the Poets' Corner  
are selected by Greg Delanty, former  
President of the ALSCW (2010–11),  
who reads the submissions without  
knowing the identities of the poets.

## PROMETHEUS

Some people think that man first stood erect  
To carry simple tools, or throw a spear.  
The fossil record proves this incorrect:  
Walking predates tools two million years.  
Others think that walking freed the hands  
To gather and to carry precious food,  
But this selects the group and not the man,  
And won't select at all when times are good.  
I think 'twas fire that taught the ape to stand.  
It's fearful, but it's pretty, warm, and bright.  
One stooped ape picked up a fire-brand  
And banished cold, and predators, and night.  
Encumbered, thus unfettered, torch in hand,  
An ape, tempered by fire, became a man.

—Kevin Sterner

## ECHO AND NARCISSUS

I dreamt one night that scientists had found  
Encoded into metal, rock, and glass,  
An unexpected form of fossil sound,  
Which cooling solids captured in their mass.  
Numerical reagents were applied,  
Precipitating meaning from the noise:  
Roman blacksmiths from their shackles cried;  
A Glass Armonica held Franklin's voice.  
Three seconds long! Yet Franklin's trifling quote  
So captivated man's nostalgic heart,  
It prompted him, enraptured, to devote  
His world's resources towards his new-found art.  
And yet, for all the effort that it spurred,  
Nothing more of note was ever heard.

—Kevin Sterner

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Kevin Sterner, a particle physicist by training, is the Principal Data Scientist at BDP International in Philadelphia. He is a student of Pennsylvania Dutch language and literature, currently researching the writers Alfred D. Steckel and Thomas Hess Harter, as well as the playwright Clarence Iobst.

## THE SEA AT TRIESTE

You  
infinitely  
rolling  
floor  
of grey green  
glass

with spray  
from Aeolus's  
siphon bottle

snort away  
at the sun  
setting west

—Erik Frisch

Originally published in Erik Frisch, *The Literary Cat & Other Poems*, trans. Nail Chiodo (Lyrical Translations, 2013).

## PEONIES IN FALL

In autumn, after the cold September rains  
have browned their beds, the peonies  
are left alone, leaves tarnished silver,  
stalks now thin as spinsters' legs.  
They hang over their metal rings  
in tangles, seeking anyone to hold them up.

All fertile fullness gone, their seed pods—  
shriveled vulvas of old maids—  
hang exposed to cold October winds;  
their fancy dresses from June a distant memory  
of pink and white.

With bees  
and other suitors gone, the flowerbed  
becomes a home for ghosts and other haunts—  
the summer's last cicadas hidden there,  
and spiders in their tattered webs,  
too cold to move beyond their vortices.

—Ed Block

## SPRING FLOOD (Aldo's Carp)

In rows  
now flooded by the river,  
carp swim happily.

They wriggle through  
the drowned cornstalks,  
rubbing scaly sides  
against the green,  
and whisper to each other.

Spring explorers, these,  
they kiss the mud  
with baby mouths.

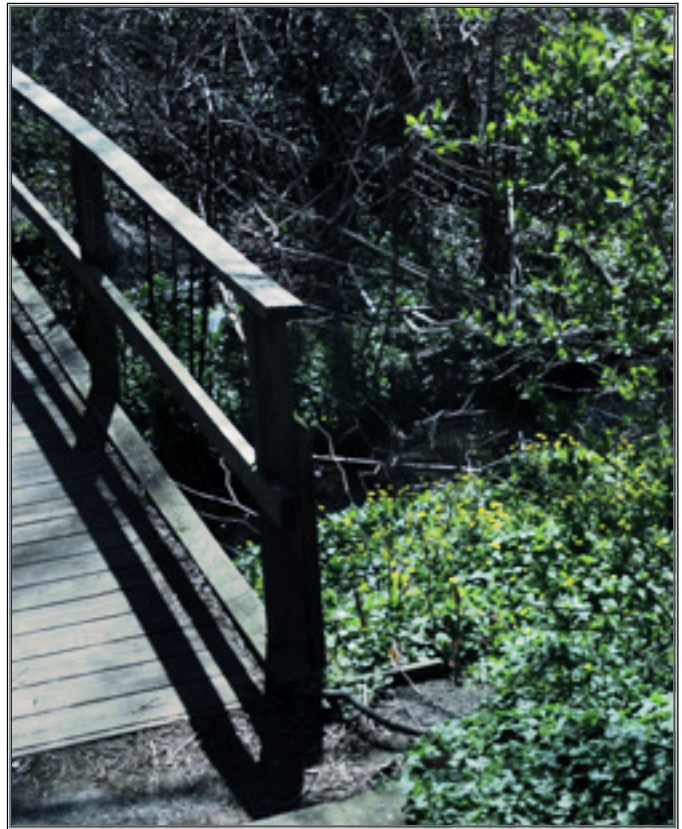
But interlopers, they churn  
up the water, finding  
leaves and cobs left  
from the fall.

Till water  
recedes, carp frolic  
in forbidden fields,  
making fun  
of patient farmers' plows.

—Ed Block

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Ed Block Jr. is Emeritus Professor of English at Marquette University (Milwaukee, WI), where, most recently, he taught courses on Denise Levertov and Czesław Miłosz and workshops in creative writing. His poems have appeared in *Cross Currents*, *Spiritus*, *Parabola*, and a variety of other venues.



## HOTEL MALAWI *Homage to Charles Simic*

I liked my digs, they faced the jungle.  
At dusk, the monkeys stared at me.  
Outside, the villagers walked  
down the clay path, through the dambo  
to the tea plantation. A crippled woman  
carried a suitcase on her head.

Mostly, though, I sought the quiet after dark;  
the rooms, with spiders, fleas and roaches  
that wore brown jackets, underneath the iron bed;  
the geckos dreaming on the walls; a night so black  
I scarcely looked outside, lest horrors  
meet me in the windows' mirror.

At 5 A.M. the voices in the dawn,  
the bare feet souging in the dark—  
imagined women, Dar-cloth skirts,  
baskets on their heads. Going to the john—  
another night of native beer—I heard  
a baby's cry; pictured it tightly wrapped  
on mother's back, and thought  
I heard a months old homesick cry.

—Ed Block

## RENDEZ-VOUS

If it is  
a fact  
I thought  
the other day

that my mind  
enables me  
to think  
about the cosmos

is it not then likely  
that a possible  
or contingent  
cosmic mind  
is thinking about me  
at the same time

If this is indeed the case  
what would happen  
were these two thoughts  
to meet there  
and then  
in the self-same moment

or what if it  
has already taken place  
I thought

not without  
a certain embarrassment

Originally published in Erik  
Frisch, *The Literary Cat & Other  
Poems*, trans. Nail Chiodo (Lyri-  
cal Translations, 2013).

—Erik Frisch

## EXISTENTIAL PAS DE DEUX

I am  
no one  
but still have  
a weird  
inexistent  
feeling of  
being someone

whatever  
no one is not  
*id est*  
according to  
no one's  
mindless mind

so  
no one has  
nimblely escaped  
from  
no man's land  
the way no one  
often does

and  
dressed in  
someone else's  
unsuspecting skin

plans to  
finally tell  
the world  
who no one is not...

...or  
maybe those  
shameless philistines  
are right  
to try to console  
no one and to tell  
no one no one can be  
no one *hic et nunc*

—Erik Frisch

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A novelist, short-story writer, dramaturge, poet, inveterate raconteur, and visual artist, Erik Frisch often accompanies presentations of his literary works with illustrations from his own hand. He has traveled extensively and intensively about the globe and resides on Asmaløy, one of the Hvaler islands in southern Norway

## THE THIEF'S DAY OFF

Just between us,  
today I shall  
steal a piece  
of my life  
as a thief  
and that is all  
I shall steal

today

I shall pay dearly  
for goods I don't need  
I shall also give tips  
generously  
yes overtly  
to the point of folly

I shall help  
white-haired ladies  
to cross the street  
and willingly carry  
their bags that  
yesterday I would have  
snatched with a wry smile

all at the risk  
that my life as a thief  
may never again be  
what it once was

Originally published in Erik  
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Poems*, trans. Nail Chiodo (Lyri-  
cal Translations, 2013).

—Erik Frisch



## WHY

Why:

One simple three-letter syllable,  
Instinctual slip of the tongue,  
Can spell destruction for a king:  
Exalted vanquisher of the unyielding guardian  
Divine liberator “surest in mortal ways”  
With one word his thunderous word  
Dissipates into an ineffable whimper,  
Small and fine.

With one word it comes *plunging* down  
 (“Why have you strewn yourselves before these altars?”)  
Curiosity unleashing a torrent of revelations  
Out of a fragile glass casket  
 (“Why are your eyes so cold?”)  
The agony of the truth dampened only by  
The quenching of your insatiable thirst for it  
 (“Why have you come? What have you to say to us?”)  
Until the current becomes so overpowering  
That it thrusts you to the crossroads  
Where reality and destiny barreled into each other  
And pulverized everyone into rubber ashes  
Of a foretold prophecy  
 (“Then why did he call me son?”)  
When olive boughs to the altars cannot  
Reverse your indictment in the folly of your innocence  
Dislodging you from the chariot upon which  
Your former kingship gleamed  
 (“Why did I not die? I would not have shown the world  
my execrable birth.)

The path to ruin begins with one question  
Why?  
 (“And I of dreadful hearing. Yet I must hear.”)

—Kenneth Shinozuka

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Kenneth Shinozuka, 17, is a senior at Horace Mann School in Bronx, NY. In addition to writing poems in his free time, he is an inventor, researcher, and entrepreneur whose Safe-Wander sensor for detecting the wandering of dementia patients won a top prize in the Google Science Fair ([www.safewander.com](http://www.safewander.com)). He is also an Eagle Scout committed to community service and an avid public forum debater passionate about global current affairs. A diehard film buff, he serves as the editor in chief of his school's film magazine.



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