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Editor’s Note
James R. Adair

On October 7, 1955, the poet Allen Ginsberg delivered his new poem “Howl” to the crowd gathered at the “6” Gallery in San Francisco. The next to last poem read that evening, Ginsberg had the audience on its feet from his opening words, “I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked, dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix….” A student of William Carlos Williams, Ginsberg that night set into motion a movement that came to be known as the Beat Generation, which included writers such as Jack Kerouac, Carl Solomon, William Burroughs, Neal Cassady, and Michael McClure. McClure, who was present at the first reading of “Howl,” said that Ginsberg’s poem “left us standing in wonder, or cheering and wondering, but knowing at the deepest level that a barrier had been broken, that a human voice and body had been hurled against the harsh wall of America.”

Not everybody was pleased with “Howl” or with the writing of the Beats, and publisher and poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti was put on trial for publishing “obscene” material when he distributed the book containing Ginsberg’s poem through his San Francisco bookstore, City Lights Books. Academics around the country rallied to the side of Ferlinghetti and Ginsberg, and California State Superior Court judge Clayton Horn ruled in their favor, stating that the poem had “redeeming social importance.” The ruling was one in a long line of anti-censorship rulings by mid-twentieth century courts in the U.S., taking its place alongside opinions allowing the publication of *Ulysses*, *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, and *Tropic of Cancer*.

The struggle between writers and censors continues today, occasionally in the courtroom but more often in the classroom, where dedicated teachers strive to expand their students’ minds, and self-appointed cultural police fight to keep classrooms free of “offensive” material. The works of Mark Twain, Judy Blume, Toni Morrison, J. D. Salinger, Kurt Vonnegut, Margaret Atwood, and J. K. Rowling, among many others, have been challenged or banned for use in various public school districts in the U.S. in recent years. In 2011 Arizona banned the teaching of ethnic studies in public school classrooms, resulting in the removal from the schools of books like *Curandera* by Carmen Tafolla and *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros, two local writers, among many others. In response, self-styled *librotraficantes* have organized caravans through the state to promote the books that have been banned.

Many of the pieces in this issue of *Voices* celebrate the importance of education, opposition to censorship, and the continuing influence of the Beat writers. To inspire further reading, select quotes from some of the Beats are scattered throughout the issue, starting with one from Ferlinghetti at the bottom of this column.

*Can you dig it?*

*If you would be a poet, speak new truths that the world can’t deny. —Lawrence Ferlinghetti, “Poetry as Insurgent Art”*
A native of Iran, Vida Tayyari was an adult before beginning her career in art. She very quickly became a master artist and a distinguished teacher. Her area of expertise is realistic oil painting, and her amazing ability to capture the beauty of her subject has brought her national acclaim. Vida received the rank of Superior Artist, awarded annually to one Iranian artist. In addition, she was selected as one of seven scholars in Persian Art by the Committee of Cultural and Art Preservation Foundation, and she was awarded the prestigious Medal of Abolghasem Ferdosi Tousi given by its Board of Directors.

Tayyari’s international exhibitions over the past few years include successful shows in the Middle East, Europe, and North America. Chosen from among 5,000 artists and scientists worldwide, Tayyari has been recognized as an “Exceptional Artist” by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, which allowed her to move to the United States in 2008. She holds an Honorary Masters of Art from the Department of Fine Arts of Iran. At Art Tayyari Gallery in San Antonio, her exhibits reflect her unique ability to capture the beauty of nature and bring it to life. Her paintings include landscapes, personal and wedding portraits, and animals in realistic impressionism and contemporary styles. As an interior art designer, she has designed original oil paintings and art pieces for 36,000 square feet of medical/dental offices and several private homes in the past several years.

Books That Shaped America

The Library of Congress, the world’s largest repository of knowledge and information, began a multiyear “Celebration of the Book” with an exhibition on “Books That Shaped America.” The exhibition is part of a larger series of programs, symposia, and other events that explore the important and varied ways that books influence our lives.

“This list of ‘Books That Shaped America’ is a starting point. It is not a register of the ‘best’ American books—although many of them fit that description. Rather, the list is intended to spark a national conversation on books written by Americans that have influenced our lives, whether they appear on this initial list or not,” said Librarian of Congress James H. Billington.

Curators and experts from throughout the Library of Congress contributed their choices for the list, and many worthy titles were cut in order to accommodate the physical restrictions of the exhibition space. Some of the titles on display have been the source of great controversy, even derision, in U.S. history. Nevertheless, they shaped Americans’ views of their world and the world’s views of America. To browse the list and read synopses of the fifty exhibited books, please visit the website above.

Read Voices de la Luna online at www.voicesdelaluna.com for additional content, including music & video. Archives of past issues are on the site.


Featured Poem

Helen Keller
Barbara Stanush

You lived through your skin.
Truth had no name but battered
you with sharp corners
and sharp branches
or ran away beyond your reach.
There was no rest in your
mother’s arms, stiff with fear.
You could not hear your own wails.

Then Anne Sullivan caught you railing
against the black blanket. Your
vigor coursed through her veins
as challenge. Over and over she
pressed letters into your palm.
Over and over she spelled words
into your stubborn hand.
There were no connections
until the day you felt the flow from the faucet,
and those bulky shapes in your hand
became the clear stream you could not see.
That day you held something
elusive as water.

The world no longer ran through your fingers.
You could name dangers and put them
in their place. You could name your loves.

The letters grew into gardens
that bloomed all winter,
and your skin grew a thousand faces.

Barbara Evans Stanush, a graduate of Duke University, was employed
at the Institute of International Education in New York before moving
to San Antonio in 1962. Since then, she has worked as a public school
teacher, poet in the schools, and educational consultant. She also con-
tributed op-ed columns to the San Antonio Express-News for thirteen
years. Her published works include Texans: A Story of Texan Cultures
for Young People (The University of Texas Institute of Texan Cultures),
Stone Garden (Pecan Grove Press), and the anthology Keeping Com-
pany (Pecan Grove Press).

Law and Literature
Presented by Chief Justice Catherine Stone
at Voices de la Luna’s Annual Fundraiser, 11 April 2012

The study of law and literature is a grow-
ing study in academia, including, of course,
in law schools. If you were to conduct an in-
ternet search of law as literature, law in lit-
erate, law and literature, or any variation
of these terms, you would receive as many
as two hundred fifteen million responses. In
the United States there are at least two law
journals devoted entirely to the topic of law
and literature; the most famous is published by the Cardoza
School of Law in New York City. With the subject’s growing
popularity, law schools and undergraduate programs across the
country are adding courses on the topic.

At its most basic level, the study of law and literature explores
the connections between the two topics. Professor Daniel Solove
of George Washington University Law School describes the sub-
ject as follows:
• Law as literature asks what similarities exist between legal
opinions and arguments on the one hand, and literary writings
on the other;
• Law in literature asks how law and the legal process are por-
trayed in literature;
• Law and literature asks how the two areas intertwine to in-
form each other.

According to aptly-named law professor Elizabeth Judge at the
University of Ottawa Law School, one of the goals of the study
of law and literature is to use literature to engender sympathy in
lawyers and an understanding of differences by entering other
people’s stories and viewpoints. Among the authors studied are
Charles Dickens, Herman Melville, William Shakespeare, and
Franz Kafka.

For this evening’s gathering I was asked to provide a talk on
law and literature; however, tonight I will not offer a detailed
analysis of the academic movement on this subject. I am not a
formal student of law and literature, and in fact, it was not even a
course offered in law schools when I was a law student. But I am
a lawyer, I love literature, and I write legal opinions for a living.
So I will speak about what I know best: how literature has influ-
cenced me on my journey to my current position as an appellate
court justice writing legal opinions that pronounce judgment on
the conduct of citizens who find themselves within the American
justice system.

As a child growing up in Maine I loved the poetry of Henry
Wadsworth Longfellow, a native son of Maine. I remember my
mother reading his poetry aloud to us, and I particularly liked
“The Children’s Hour”:

Between the dark and the daylight,
When the night is beginning to lower,
Comes a pause in the day’s occupations,
That is known as the Children’s Hour.

The poem, which is largely about Longfellow’s daughters and his
time spent with them is considered rather sentimental by today’s
standards. But as a child I loved the images that this poem cre-
ated in my mind. I had visions of a warm and loving home with
marital and parental happiness abounding, in contrast to my fam-
ily situation with divorced parents, a mother sadly afflicted with
alcoholism, and the poverty often associated with such a disease.

In elementary school the public library became a home away
from home for me. I was hooked on biographies of famous Amer-
icans: John Phillip Sousa, Paul Revere, Ethan Allen, Clara Bar-
ton, Amelia Earhart, George Washington Carver. If there was a
biography, I read it. The series I read was written as a largely fic-
tionalized account of the person’s childhood, with the last twenty
pages or so devoted to revealing what great things the individual
had achieved as an adult. I was inspired by each book I read.
Questions for Michael Soto
Dialogue with James R. Adair

Michael Soto grew up on the Texas-Mexico border and returned to South Texas after pursuing his studies at Stanford and Harvard Universities to join the faculty of Trinity University. He is the author of *The Modernist Nation, Teaching the Harlem Renaissance,* and numerous scholarly articles and reviews. He is currently a member of the Texas State Board of Education.

James R. Adair: You were born in Corpus Christi and grew up in the Rio Grande Valley. How did your childhood experiences shape your personal and professional life?

Michael Soto: I’m not sure how my life would’ve unfolded had I grown up elsewhere. Even so, growing up in the Valley had a profound impact on me. First, everyone—from the housekeepers to the bankers to the teachers to the politicians—was Hispanic. We knew from TV and from the books we read that ours wasn’t a typical American experience, but our experience wasn’t too atypical, either. Second, going to Mexico was less cumbersome than driving across San Antonio is today. We’d go for dinner or shopping or to get a haircut without thinking twice about it. Third, the proximity to Mexico meant that I was continually introduced to cultural continuums, so I’ve never truly experienced culture shock while travelling anywhere in the world. The language spoken just across the border was a bit different and the people were poorer, but the culture obeyed the same rules, more or less, with only slight variations. When I finally traveled to other parts of the U.S. or to different parts of the world, I always felt the experience to be just an amplified version of my routine childhood memories.

In your book *The Modernist Nation,* you quote literary critic Lionel Trilling as follows: “It seems to me that the characteristic element of modern literature, or at least of the most highly developed modern literature, is the bitter line of hostility to civilization which runs through it.” Do you agree with Trilling’s assessment of modern literature?

I agree with Trilling (and with Matthew Arnold, who previously made a similar case) more and more. I should be clear: Trilling, following the writers he studied, contrasted an artificial, superficial, and increasingly consumerist “civilization” against a more organic and traditional “culture”—culture in an anthropological sense. It’s a line of thought that’s conservative in the sense that it clings to aesthetic hierarchy, but it’s quite revolutionary in the sense that it believes in a meritocracy of ideas and tastes. The lasting influence of, say, Hart Crane as opposed to Joyce Kilmer (or more recently Gertrude Stein as opposed to Ayn Rand) tells me that Trilling was on target.

You’ve focused on authors of the Lost Generation and the Beat Generation, among others, in your studies of American literature. How do these movements compare with what many consider to be the birth of a distinctive American voice in the so-called American Renaissance of the mid-nineteenth century?

Both the Lost Generation and the Beat Generation were profoundly influenced by the so-called American Renaissance writers. In fact, it was the Lost Generation of the 1920s that first dubbed it the American Renaissance and that first brought Emerson and Melville into the American canon. And it was examples such as Emerson and Melville that taught subsequent writers that there was in fact a distinctive American voice—most mid-nineteenth century writers saw their work as an adjunct to British literature. The Beats of the 1950s picked up the banner and waved it in newer and still more interesting (and occasionally less interesting) ways.

Emerson says that each generation must write its own books, for the books of a preceding era will no longer fit the new age. Yet some books continue to speak to new generations of readers and become recognized as classics. What characteristics define a classic?

I think you’ve defined a classic in the question. I could go on to address the various institutions that mediate between writers and readers, but I like your question better.

You’ve written articles and books on the Harlem Renaissance. What attracts you to this era and its writers?

I first encountered the Harlem Renaissance when I was assigned a Langston Hughes poem in junior high or high school. I forget which—but I’ll always remember recognizing part of myself in the exploratory alienation of Hughes’s “Theme for English B” (the poem that I was assigned at the time). As a graduate student I focused on modernist literary movements in the U.S., and the Harlem Renaissance is unavoidable in such a study. More recently I’ve been drawn to understanding literature in relation to social history, and the Harlem Renaissance has proven a rich source of ideas and material.

As a grad student, you studied with Henry Louis Gates, Jr. How did that experience affect your outlook on literature and on life?

For better and for worse, Skip Gates is an academic rock star. I knew all along that intellectuals can be active voices in society, and Gates has done much to bridge the town-gown divide. Even his most brilliant and lasting academic work (in his *Signifying Monkey* and *Figures in Black*) is quite approachable, and he’s a tireless promoter of ideas. Because he was always so busy, though, as a graduate student I found him supportive but hard to reach, and he wasn’t always prepared for the classes that he taught.

You’ve served a term on the Texas State Board of Education. What did you learn from the experience? Did you come away optimistic or pessimistic about the direction public education in Texas is heading?

I’m a short term pessimist about public education in Texas, but not because of anything that took place on the State Board. I’m much more worried about two things: the legislature’s utter failure to adequately finance public schools, and the complete lack
of leadership in steering Texas away from the high stakes testing regime. Both problems speak to Governor Perry’s abdication of leadership. But in the long run, I’m much more hopeful: We’re starting to see Texans wake up from a slumber that put up with so-called leaders who are hostile to public schools. By and large, Texans know that our state’s future is intimately tied to what goes on at the neighborhood school.

I’m still working through the lessons of my term in office, and if I figure this out in the near future I may put together a book about the State Board.

If you were named Texas Public Education Czar and could remake the public education system in the state, where would you start?
I’m grateful that we don’t have an education czar—for our schools to work, we need the whole of our society to rally behind their success. Still, if I had a loftier perch, I’d prioritize the fair and adequate funding of public schools, and I’d insist on rewriting the accountability rules so that standardized tests were used appropriately, as diagnostic tools rather than to punish students and teachers. Right now, our priorities are all wrong in these areas.

Much emphasis today is placed on STEM education, in large part because of the increasing importance of technology in our lives. What values does the study of literature offer contemporary students?
We have ample evidence that exposure to the arts and humanities amplifies a student’s success in other areas such as math and science. More important, though, the arts and humanities give profound meaning to our lives—they make us human, and they deserve our attention and support on their own terms.

What research/writing projects are in the works?
I’m wrapping up a social history of the Harlem Renaissance (tentatively titled Rethinking the Harlem Renaissance) and a revised version of an instructor’s manual that I wrote for the Bedford Anthology of American Literature. As I mentioned before, I’m also thinking about whether or not the State Board of Education merits a book.

A Noiseless Patient Spider
Walt Whitman

A noiseless patient spider,
I mark’d where on a little promontory it stood isolated,
Mark’d how to explore the vacant vast surrounding,
It launch’d forth filament, filament, filament, out of itself,
Ever unreeling them, ever tirelessly speeding them.

And you O my soul where you stand,
Surrounded, detached, in measureless oceans of space,
Ceaselessly musing, venturing, throwing, seeking the spheres to connect them,
Till the bridge you will need be form’d, till the ductile anchor hold,
Till the gossamer thread you fling catch somewhere, O my soul.

51 Pegasus: An Ode
Michael Soto

As if an angel dropp’d down from the clouds
To turn and wind a fiery Pegasus,
And witch the world with noble horsemanship.

—1 Henry IV

The Shetland trot resolves itself, allows
Troubled thought to reign itself, traveling
Turward long enough to lose itself in sod.
Down here I see livid light find its way home.
What are you, there, a grail, a ghost, a god?
An aberration in our Hubble-thing
We prefer to imagination now?
Whatever you should call yourself, celestial
Wobble, deliverer of heterodox
Tidings, wherever you should choose to come,
My first, and last, and in-between thoughts
Are wholly yours. Remounting bestial
Wingless thought, I walk beside my horse, no swifter than her gait allows.

American Writers Museum Planned for Chicago
adapted from http://www.csmonitor.com

The plan for a national museum devoted to American writers has taken another step forward. The American Writers Museum Foundation, which has worked to develop a site centering exclusively on honoring writers from the United States, published a concept plan July 16 that explored how the museum might be laid out and what its focus would be.

According to Amaze Design, the company that developed the museum plan, many Americans are aghast that a facility honoring US authors does not yet exist. “The most common reaction to [the museum] is, ‘You mean we don’t have an American writers museum?’” the concept plan reads.

The stated goal for the proposed museum—which would be 60,000 feet in size when complete—includes the expectation that the first 20,000 feet would be completed by 2015. While nothing has been finalized, the museum will probably be located in Chicago, according to the foundation.

The projected layout of the museum includes an education center, theater, cafe, bookstore, and literary lounge as well as an open area titled the literary commons. Visitors would walk through the literary commons to reach the writers’ hall, which would contain various sets devoted to topics like “American Families,” “American Towns,” and “Conflict,” with each including famous works that fit the theme.

Branching off from the central writers’ hall would be focus galleries, which could center on themes such as banned books or children’s literature. For more information, see http://www.americanwritersmuseum.org.

What thoughts I have of you tonight Walt Whitman, for I walked down the sidestreets under the trees with a headache self-conscious looking at the full moon. (Allen Ginsberg, “A Supermarket in California”)

Voices de la Luna, 15 October 2012
The UTSA Creative Writing Reading Series was inaugurated in 1983 when Carolyn Forché read on a Friday afternoon to a room of 100 people. Over the years the series has hosted such writers as Mary Oliver, Ernest Gaines, Tobias Wolff, Denise Levertov, Alberto Ríos, Pat Mora, Diane Wakoski, Edward Hirsch, and many other poets and fiction writers who not only give public readings but also visit classes and meet with students about their writing. We’ve had as many as twelve readings by visiting writers in a year but have settled on three or four annually as an ideal number. This reading series is made possible through the generosity of our donors.

Matthea Harvey

October 12, 2012—7:30 p.m.
Harris Room (UC III 2.212)

Matthea Harvey is the author of Sad Little Breathing Machine (Graywolf, 2004) and Pity the Bathtub Its Forced Embrace of the Human Form (Alice James Books, 2000). Her third book of poems, Modern Life (Graywolf, 2007), was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award and a New York Times Notable Book. She has authored two children’s books, The Little General and The Giant Snowflake, illustrated by Elizabeth Zechel (Tin House Books in 2009), and Cecil the Pet Glacier, illustrated by Giselle Potter (Random House, 2012), as well as an illustrated erasure entitled Of Lamb, with images by Amy Jean Porter (McSweeney’s, 2010). A contributing editor to jubilat, Meatpaper, and BOMB, Matthea has taught at Warren Wilson, the Pratt Institute, and the University of Houston. Currently she is on the faculty at Sarah Lawrence College; she lives in Brooklyn.

Natasha Trethewey

November 16, 2012—7:30 p.m.
Denman Room (UC 2.01.28)

Natasha Trethewey is the 19th Poet Laureate of the United States. Her first collection of poems, Domestic Work (Graywolf, 2000), won the inaugural Cave Canem Poetry Prize, a Mississippi Institute of Arts and Letters Book Prize, and the Lillian Smith Award for Poetry. Her second collection, Bellocq’s Ophelia (Graywolf, 2002), received the Mississippi Institute of Arts and Letters Book Prize, and the Lillian Smith Award for Poetry. Her second collection, Breathing Machine (Graywolf, 2004), won the Foreword Reviews’ Book of the Year Award and was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award and the New York Public Library Young Lions Award. She is also the author of Every Day Is For the Thief, a novella with photographs (Cassava Republic Press, 2007). Born in the United States to Nigerian parents, Cole grew up in Nigeria. He received his M.Phil. in 16th-century northern European visual culture from Columbia University, where he is working on his Ph.D. Currently Distinguished Writer in Residence at Bard College, Cole is at work on a nonfiction narrative about Lagos called Small Fates.

Levi Romero

February 1, 2013—7:30 p.m.
Harris Room (UC III 2.212)

Levi Romero’s A Poetry of Remembrance: New and Rejected Works (University of New Mexico Press, 2008) received the 2009 Southwest Book of the Year Award. Other books include In the Gathering of Silence (West End Press, 1996; reprint 2007) and Sagrado: A Photopoetics Across the Chicano Homeland (forthcoming from University of New Mexico Press). He is the author/director of a number of ethnographic projects, including Stories Along the High Road: A Narrative Cruise Through the Manito Homeland; La Nueva Resolana: Finding the Contemporary Community Gathering Place; and two oral history documentation projects, Following the Manito Trail and Reconciliation: The Symbiotic History of the Pueblo and Hispano People of New Mexico. He is a research scholar at the University of New Mexico.

This reading is sponsored in conjunction with The Macondo Foundation, which works with dedicated and compassionate writers who view their work and talents as part of a larger task of community-building and non-violent social change. To learn more about Macondo’s Writing Workshops, Grants, and Residencies, visit them at: macondoworkshop.org.

Teju Cole

February 22, 2013—7:30 p.m.
Harris Room (UC III 2.212)

Teju Cole is a writer, art historian, and street photographer. His first novel, Open City (Random House, 2011), won the PEN/Hemingway Award for First Fiction, the New York Society Library Award for Fiction, and the Rosenthal Award of the American Academy of Arts and Letters and was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award and the New York Public Library Young Lions Award. He is also the author of Every Day Is For the Thief, a novella with photographs (Cassava Republic Press, 2007). Born in the United States to Nigerian parents, Cole grew up in Nigeria. He received his M.Phil. in 16th-century northern European visual culture from Columbia University, where he is working on his Ph.D. Currently Distinguished Writer in Residence at Bard College, Cole is at work on a nonfiction narrative about Lagos called Small Fates.
At the McNay Museum
I blinked and squinted up
past a gray silk suit into the face
of the museum director whom a kindly guard
had asked to check on me—
a woman lying motionless on the ground
who might have overdosed, might in fact be dead.
I’d sprawled out on the sweet spring grass
and followed the play of wind and sun
on a piece of mobile sculpture
until the dappling light
carried me off to sleep.

It was a cool, cloudless afternoon
but women my age don’t lie
down on the grass. With a blanket
beneath me I’d have been less objectionable.
Cowboys have bedrolls, nomads have tents.
Something, however flimsy, must separate us
from ground and sky, mark
and make our human place. I was
like a mare who simply folds
her legs and lies down in any pasture.
Momentarily at home on planet earth.

Cello and Violin
Side by side on the McNay wall
Chaim Soutine’s “The Cellist” and Marc
Chagall’s “Dream Village.” Museum notes
instruct that both were born in Russia
and lived in France, but not that
both were Jews. The cellist’s mouth
is locked tight in controlled hysteria
and his cello’s sickening reds and yellows
like the slabs of raw fat meat hanging
in his other paintings are human
torsos split open, stinking corpses, sizzling
flesh.

Brilliant red roses and forest green leaves
rise off “The Dream Village” canvas, as if
only thick paint can carry the lush fragrance.
On the right, a cow, standing on her back legs,
plays the violin. Top right, lovers talk over
a garden fence. Bottom left, they sweetly kiss.
Sun and moon, protective father and mother,
watch over the village. I am about to fall
into the swirling blues of Chagall’s sky
when the solitary male figure behind
the village suddenly strikes me as ominous.
This is Chagall’s dream village not nightmare,
I tell myself, stop thinking Cossack, Nazi,
but I too am a Jew.

Don’t Touch at the McNay
Copper, bronze, shiny stainless steel,
cast glass. Six small elegant pieces of sculpture
feed my eyes. Next, a sign beside George Segal’s “His
Hand on Her Back” tells me, “Please help us protect
the art for future generations by not touching.” Though
it’s made of lowly painted fiberglass, I obey with difficulty.

It’s hard not to stroke “Her”—what do you call it—
Choose the word that says to you no
honeydew was ever rounder or sweeter, that says
“His” hand didn’t know what it was missing,
but that George Segal’s hand loves this flesh.

A(musing)
Lost in thought, the almost life
size marble female sits
right elbow on thigh, head on hand.

A beribboned girl
pats the statue’s hair,
stakes her face then
skips off. Moments later
a scruffy little boy
cheerfully tries to twist
off her marble nose.

Pondering girl and boy,
nature and nurture,
I laugh to find I have assumed
the statue’s pose.

Red, White, and Blue at the McNay
Like teenage girls
with new breasts,
cardinals flash their wealth.

Giggly brides trail photographers,
scoffed Doc Martens
under gauzy white gowns.

Hugging the cypress,
a weathered tile roof,
deep, cloudless indigo.

Bonnie Lyons, Professor of English at UTSA, received her B.A. from Newcomb College and her M.A. and Ph.D. from Tulane University. She has taught at Newcomb College and Boston University and as a Fulbright professor in Greece, Italy, Spain, and Israel. Her primary teaching interests are 19th and 20th century American literature and 20th century literature. She has published a book about Henry Roth, co-authored a book of interviews with fiction writers, two poetry chapbooks, and a full-length volume of poems. She has published articles and interviews in many journals, including The Paris Review and Contemporary Literature. She is currently working on a second book of literary interviews.
The unemployment rate in the U.S. is creeping slowly downward, but more than three years after the Great Recession ended (i.e., the economy stopped shrinking), more than 8% of people who are looking for work still can’t find a job. The slow recovery in jobs has been caused in part because state and local governments are laying off workers at the same time as private employers are hiring them. The solution offered by many politicians on both sides of the aisle is government belt-tightening. Reducing federal deficits, according to this point of view, will jump-start the economy. Greece faces a much greater crisis, with higher unemployment and larger deficits, in relation to the size of its economy, and many Eurozone lenders continue to advocate greater austerity measures as the solution. Some economists, including Nobel prize winner Paul Krugman, say that more austerity will make matters worse, both in Greece and in the U.S., because only more spending by governments and by the private sector will revive stagnant economies (the U.K., for example, has slipped back into recession after tightening its economic belt).

During tough times it’s not surprising that interest in various economic models rises among those hoping desperately to find a way out of the economic morass. One of the most unpopular models, particularly in the U.S., is “free-market capitalism,” a scenario in which private enterprise is allowed to operate with a minimum of government regulation. The freer the markets, proponents claim, the stronger the economy. Ha-Joon Chang, a professor of economics at the University of Cambridge, begs to differ. Although he is a strong advocate of capitalism, he believes an examination of historical evidence conclusively demonstrates that some government regulation is not only helpful, but necessary to promote a strong economy, and in his book 23 Things They Don’t Tell You about Capitalism, he makes his case.

We are all taught, he avers, that “if left alone, markets will produce the most efficient and just outcome” (xiii) and that “government intervention in the markets would only reduce their efficiency” (xiv). These claims are false, he says, for the fact of the matter is, “The free market doesn’t exist” (1). All markets have some constraints on them, usually imposed by a government. Restrictions on the sale of alcohol, drugs, and firearms; restrictions on child labor; health and safety regulations; immigration restrictions; truth in advertising laws; import and export regulations—all these constrain the “free market” just like minimum wage legislation, overtime laws, and taxes.

Chang next turns to the notion that corporations ought to be run in a way that maximizes stockholder profit. This idea, which is closely tied to the concept of limited liability for corporations (an idea strongly opposed by Adam Smith but supported in part by Karl Marx), tends to focus on maximizing short-term profit, ignoring some of the company’s most important stakeholders, its employees. Furthermore, “the worst thing about shareholder value maximization is that it does not even do the company itself much good” in the long run (19), for short-term thinking too often replaces strategic long-term planning.

Free market advocates like to claim that their brand of capitalism is necessary to improve the economic status of developing nations, but Chang asserts that such policies rarely make poor countries rich. Many, probably most, countries that are now rich or that are developing rapidly have used combinations of protectionism, promotion of state-owned businesses, and government subsidies of private companies in key economic sectors to achieve their wealth. Included in the list are Japan, Finland, Korea, France, Austria, Singapore, Taiwan, and China. Also included is a country whose trade policies were the most protectionist in the world for several decades, where political corruption was rampant, and which discriminated against foreign investment, especially in the banking industry, while defaulting on an alarming number of government loans. This country was the U.S. in the 1880s, a time during which the country grew to become one of the richest in the world.

Chang covers many other topics in his book, including the fallacy of trickle-down economics (how many times does that need to be disproved?), the lack of a strong correlation between a country’s education rate and its wealth, the advantage of less efficient markets, and the proven ability of governments to pick economic winners much of the time. For U.S. readers in particular, he includes these three topics: “The U.S. does not have the highest living standard in the world,” “U.S. managers are over-priced,” and “What is good for General Motors is not necessarily good for the U.S.”

23 Things They Don’t Tell You about Capitalism is an entertaining and well-written book, replete with both contemporary and historical examples to illustrate the author’s points. Far from being a screed against capitalism, Chang’s book is a call for the educated public to discover a flavor of capitalism that is robust, full of potential, and has a track record that far outpaces its poorer cousin, free-market capitalism. He ends his book with a plea: “We need to end our love affair with unrestrained free-market capitalism, which has served humanity so poorly, and install a better-regulated variety.” There is no better time than the present, as we continue to be mired in the Great Recession and a jobless recovery, to listen to what Chang has to say.
The Pale King
by David Foster Wallace
Reviewed by Santo Randazzo

This 540-page posthumously published novel was constructed by the editor from roughly a thousand pages of manuscript, notes, and false starts. The author, David Foster Wallace, committed suicide in September of 2008. The monumental acclaim surrounding Wallace’s magnum opus, Infinite Jest, established him in many ways as the literary voice of a generation. The Pale King is the long-awaited follow-up novel, one of three unanimous finalists for the 2012 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction.

There is no denying that this novel is unfinished, as its subtitle declares. Yet The Pale King does not read like an unfinished novel. In previous works Wallace rejected linear story arches, tidy beginnings and ends; The Pale King follows suit. Considering plot, very little ultimately happens—a group of men and women, each through their organic paths, come to work at a fictional IRS Regional Examination Center in Peoria, Illinois, in 1985. In the novel, 1985 is a significant time for the IRS, which is undergoing a revenue-minded overhaul of ideology and policy that Wallace satirically refers to as “The Initiative.” There is no pinpoint rise to conflict and then resolution. That absence by no means compromises the majesty of the story, because the story lies not in the plot, but in the motley crew of characters, the majority of whom end up as employees at the 047 REC in Peoria—a place Wallace establishes as a type of primary hell of tedium and crippling bureaucracy.

In his notes Wallace described The Pale King as “tornadic.” The novel’s fifty chapters read appropriately. Each chapter jumps character and often setting, most taking place in Peoria, Illinois, in 1985 or at some tangent point in the respective character’s life prior to working at the 047 REC. Some chapters are self-contained vignettes centered on characters that range from a high school boy who develops superhuman concentration to fight off fits of socially unacceptable sweating, to a young girl in a stolen school bus, to a Chinese restaurant owner who is troubled by a recurring dream of his brother, to a group of men who discuss the subtle differences between men about “jiggering” a cow.

The majority of the novel is told from a third person perspective, though a handful of chapters are narrated by one of two characters, the primary of whom is a fictionalized David Foster Wallace. The web work of episodic chapters develops the scaffolding of the story on which the primary and recurring themes become truly evident. Three hundred pages into the novel it is clear that Wallace has written a powerful and philosophical narrative, packed with Kierkegaardian references and images of solipsism. Wallace makes real statements about work, life, government, and corporations.

David Foster Wallace is very much alive in The Pale King. This is a postmodern novel, and the world presented is bleak. It is a novel about boredom and bureaucracy, a novel about hamsters on a wheel. How then is The Pale King not inherently boring? The answer is simple: because Wallace approaches the subject with tenderness and satire and in a manner so characteristically his that it is almost beyond comparison. His is a true literary voice in peak form, and he offers up a masterpiece—albeit an unfinished one.

Train Dreams
By Denis Johnson
Reviewed by Santo Randazzo

Denis Johnson has built his reputation as a contemporary powerhouse with works such as Jesus’ Son, and the National Book Award winning Tree of Smoke. Train Dreams delivers in similar fashion. This 116-page novella was one of three finalists for the 2012 Pulitzer Prize. Though no award was ultimately given, had Train Dreams been selected, the novella would have replaced Ernest Hemingway’s The Old Man and the Sea at 140 pages as the shortest ever to receive the honor.

Train Dreams is a poignant, tragic novella. The story opens in 1917 and follows the life of Robert Granier, a railway worker in the Idaho panhandle, through the burgeoning twentieth century. He loses his family—a wife and infant daughter—in a devastating wildfire. Afterwards, Granier is forced to find his way and struggles to discover a new life in an ever-changing American West. Through various trials and interactions with symbolic characters, Granier’s life undergoes a metamorphosis while the world around him similarly shifts. By the end of the novella the reader finds Granier in a completely new America.

This novella was meant to be read in one sitting. Every sentence has been written with an energy that propels the story forward, giving the narrative a true locomotion that stirs the audience as well. From the first word Johnson’s prose reads like a siren song, luring the reader, as Robert Granier’s life unfolds like a dream. In Train Dreams Johnson examines man and nature, and their constant relationship. There are images of folklore, wolf-people, and superstition. Johnson’s signature dark humor runs throughout the novella, making hilarity out of the attempted murder of a “Chinaman” and humorously treating bestiality in conversations between men about “jiggering” a cow.

Denis Johnson is among the best living American authors, and it is his almost otherworldly writing that makes this novella. Johnson is firing on all cylinders in Train Dreams. Though your experience with this novella may last only a couple of hours out of your entire life, do not be surprised when you set the story down and find yourself altered, affected in some profound way.

If you should see / a man walking / down a crowded street / talking aloud / to himself / don’t run / in the opposite direction / but run toward him / for he is a POET! —Ted Joans, “The Truth”
Conversation with Ted Kooser
By Mo H Saidi
Transcribed by Dave Northup

This conversation between former U.S. Poet Laureate Ted Kooser (2004-6) and Mo Saidi took place at The Writers’ Center Luncheon, Chautauqua, New York, on 15 August 2012. Born in Ames, Iowa, in 1939, Kooser earned a BS at Iowa State University in 1962 and an MA at the University of Nebraska in 1968. He is a former vice-president of Lincoln Benefit Life Company, where he worked for many years. He lives near the town of Garland, Nebraska, with his wife, Kathleen Rutledge, and their dogs, Alice and Howard. He also has a son, Jeff, and two granddaughters, Margaret and Penelope. A Presidential Professor of English at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, he is the author of twelve full-length collections of poetry. In 2005, he won the Pulitzer Prize for his book of poems, Delights & Shadows (Copper Canyon Press, 2004).

Mo Saidi: Your poetry speaks so well to diverse audiences, and yet your poems are simply written and down-to-earth. How do you do achieve that?
Ted Kooser: The great majority of my life’s experiences have been shared with people who were not from an academic environment. My working career was as an executive with an insurance company, and when I wrote a poem I would invariably ask a fellow employee who did not have a college degree to read it and comment on its meaning. That was the process I used to make sure that the meaning of my work was clear and accessible to the reader. In keeping with this week’s theme of Radicalism I must add here that I consider myself a radical in the sense that my poetry flies in the face of what is termed Modernism, or the sort of poetry that is written exclusively for academic readers. I feel that many modernists have a rather arrogant attitude toward a general audience. These poets (and I’m not going to name any here) feel that it is their readers’ responsibility to educate themselves about the style and content of the work they produce. I, on the other hand, have always sought to address a diverse audience of readers by focusing on objects and experiences open to everyone, no matter what their formal educational backgrounds might be.

What is your working rhythm and creative process?
Well, I’m an early riser. I’m usually up by 4:30 am, and I write until 7:30 am nearly every day. I do my writing at home and also at a vacant store that I have recently purchased. I’m also a painter, and my method of poetic composition will often begin with my composing a few lines which I feel reflect a worthwhile beginning. Once I have those down on paper, I’ll often begin a sketch relating to the subject matter of the poem and work on that piece as a way of fostering the development of the written work. I keep a record of all the poems and sketches in unlined notebooks and use these “journals” to do further revision. The best advice I can give to someone about the creative process—whether it’s poetry, prose, or the graphic arts—is to “show up for work every day” … and I practice what I preach.

You began writing in high school but gained recognition only in the 1990s. How did this long passage of time between start and validation of your work affect you?
Well as I said, I was an insurance executive, and so I never really had a career ambition for high recognition in terms of my poetry. In fact, I feel that having such an overweening desire actually gets in the way of creativity. I believe it is crucial to have what I call a “safe center” in one’s life, whether it be family or a career outside of the art one happens to practice. An artist needs pursuits other than just his or her art. One should not attach oneself exclusively to being a poet, for example; there are just too many rejections, and that can become overwhelming. That notion also works into the subjects of my poems: I do not write about myself but rather about the world and other individuals around me that I strive to observe closely.

Given the great advances in technology, especially in writing and teaching, are you optimistic about the future of poetry?
I feel the potential for American poetry is great, and technology can be of real service here. When I was Poet Laureate, I started a website on poetry which featured one poem each week. I was also the first Laureate to address the convention of the National Council of Teachers of English on insights I thought would be helpful on how to teach poetry in the schools. I feel strongly that poetry can and should be accessible to everyone. In fact, one of the most gratifying experiences I have had as a result of reading before general audiences is to have people come up to me at the end of the presentation and say, “You know, I hadn’t heard of you or your work before tonight, but after listening to your poetry, I’m going to go out and get one of your books.”

Walking in Fog beside a Lake
New and Unpublished Poem by Ted Kooser

First, the flat thunk of a bucket, and then a man’s voice, only a few unintelligible syllables flapping in over the water, not able to see us until the last moment, then veering away.

Though we were talking a moment ago, my wife and I fall silent, nor does the man in the boat say anything more to whomever is out there with him. For a time we are all held there together, listening into the fog, and then a wave, unable to hold its breath any longer, rolls in out of the silence and splashes its voice on the rocks at our feet, and the morning starts up like an outboard and slowly moves on.
Continued from p. 5

By junior high school I was again wrapped up in poetry. Our seventh grade teacher introduced the class to an anthology of poems called Reflections on a Gift of Watermelon Pickle. I confess that I kept my copy of the book. Stamped right inside the front of my book, on my bookshelf, in my home, it says “Property of Biddeford, Maine School Department.” There were so many great poems to read and re-read that I just couldn’t part with the book. My love of literature continued in high school and college. William Shakespeare, Herman Melville, Bernard Malamud, Jane Austen, and Margaret Atwood … these were authors whose writings I devoured.

As an adult my reading for pleasure is mostly fiction, probably because my work days are filled with reading and writing non-fiction, some of which is dry and much of which offers a glimpse into sad or brutal moments of the human condition. How does literature affect my work within the law? On a large scale, my reading provides the bank of general knowledge that I bring to any given situation in my life, including my work. Materials I have read may inform me about things that I have never personally experienced. For example, when I am reviewing a case that involves a particularly difficult divorce, I might be reminded of a poem by Miriam Hershenson (found in the swiped copy of Reflections on a Gift of Watermelon Pickle):

Husbands and wives with children between them
Sit on the subway, so I have seen them
One word only from station to station,
So much talk for so close a relation.

Or perhaps I might recall Margaret Atwood’s jarring poem from Power Politics:

You fit into me
like a hook into an eye
a fish hook
an open eye

I might think of Florrie, the protagonist in Naomi Nye’s book, Going, Going. In short, the works of prose and poetry that have found their way to my table have nourished me, in both my personal and professional life. Literature has helped me to better understand the human condition and ultimately, I hope, to be more astute in my role of affecting, in very practical terms, the human condition of litigants who come before the courts.

My experience with literature is not unique, and others who are exposed to literature enjoy similar benefits. The writers and artists who participate in the projects of Voices de la Luna help introduce young people and marginalized populations of all ages to art, poetry, and prose. Through your work you allow readers and participants to relate to others, to glimpse the perspectives of others. You help people to learn things and to break down barriers of ignorance and unfamiliarity. Your work helps increase tolerance and empathy for others. Through the creative work of Voices de la Luna, whether it involves direct legal themes or more oblique writings of judgment, justice, and fairness, you help people to recognize and better understand the enduring themes of life that reveal themselves in the neighborhood houses and courthouses of our communities. Thank you for all that you do for our community.

Your images in a poem should be jamais vu, not déjà vu. —Lawrence Ferlinghetti, “Poetry as Insurgent Art”
Youth Poems

The first twelve youth poems in this issue are from students at St. Paul’s Episcopal Montessori School. They were read at “An Afternoon of Poetry” on Feb 26, 2012.

The Nothing
Cheyenna Olmedo

Flish flosch squish squash here comes the nothing
Flish flosch squish squash down the hill he comes
Splish splash he is in the water
Splish splash down the river he goes.

Bananas
Diego Villegas

Bananas are yummy,
Bananas are squashy,
I like bananas.
But there’s one thing I don’t like about bananas—the peels!

My Name is Bananas
Alexia Reyes

My name is bananas.
Bananas are slippery.
Bananas are good.
Bananas are yellow.
Bananas can be green or brown.
Bananas are squishy.
Bananas are insane.
The End.

The Paintbrush
Zofia Graham

Swish slosh slish swosh the paintbrush paints a house.
Swish swosh slish slash the house is finished now.
The paintbrush can take a rest. Yay!
P.S. No one would paint with the paintbrush
because he put up a sign that said: do not disturb.

Something Has a Color
Rose Simonson

The world is beautiful. The grass is green.
The sky is blue and the dirt is brown.
The clouds are white. The sun is yellow and
The night is dark.
Apples are red, cherries are too.
And plums are purple. Fog is wet and so are you!

The Plum and the Pear
Sophia Thompson-Arispe

A plum and a pear
Went to get some hair. You don’t need to stare,
But watch out for the bear.
I don’t care about the bear!
What?!
You don’t care about the bear
In underwear?!
The bear in underwear only eats plums and pears!
Not me!
The End of the Stream
Will Maxham

I was walking down the stream then I stopped at the end of the stream … so, I took the boat and drove down the stream.

Shrunken and Growing
James Lee

Shrunken mouse, shrunken head
I shrunk myself and the bed.
Growing mouse, growing head
I grew a plant and a bed.

Mother of the Sea
Elliott Tilton

The mother of the sea started as a flea,
and when she went to tea, she was big as me.
And then my friend Lee, and what do you know,
she’s the mother of the sea.

Where the Sidewalk Ends
Eleanor Bird

Where the sidewalk ends
The street begins
And we look for friends.

Ode to Ice Cream
Tristan Oddo

As the summer night air
settles down on me,
I feel very joyful approaching
some nice cold ice cream.

The Loved Mom
Sofia Oddo

I love my mom so much
I will give her
a dove with a beautiful
olive branch.

Select Poems

My Student Is Writing a Book
Margie McCreless Roe

It is about his mother.
Every week he brings me pages
in broken English.
Twenty-eight chapter headings
and I listen to each
and its explanation.
He is barely literate

But there are images . . .

Moonlight on the clock at four a.m.
His mother, sitting dressed,
waiting and crying.

Ten children in a tiny house.
The tree bearing breadfruit out of season,
when it was needed most.
(This chapter is called “Miracle.”)

Grandchildren she never saw
blessing her name.

It is the stuff of books.

I have listened, Juan.
You do have a story.
My teaching becomes important.
And your writing, like everyone’s
mustn’t stop.

The Wind in My Flute
Bobbi Sinha-Morey

Inside the atrium
I found a red-breasted
bird far away from its
nest and its soul fluttered
for awhile before I calmed it,
and cradled the petite
bird like a crystal in my
palm. I imagine it dreams
of sunlight when gifts of
rain on a spring day have
brought it here. I wish its
song were the wind in my
flute, but now that it’s been
captured it makes no sound.
Its nimble wings beat in the
soft voice of the wind and
in the twilit water of a basin
I let it pleasure its feathers
before it leaves.
Finding the Body, Freeing the Mind
Mobi Warren

When I watched my son cross the finish line at Big Sur, a marathoner, sun wrested free of the clouds. His legs spelled Mountain, Strawberry, Redwood, Sea, and the body that birthed him Awoke.

Fearful at first—
I am not a runner I am not a runner
I hunted my true heart
in the steady way ancestors pursued antelope,
hunger forging the human.

Now each stride re-words my body.
I am hummingbird,
stallion, gazelle,
bat beneath starlight,
whale’s long distance song.

Phoenix
Clyta Coder

Seated before a crackling campfire, my hands encircle a steaming mug of coffee boiled in an old tin pot.
I watch blue-red flames rise, flicker as I listen to the hiss and sizzle knowing smoke will drift my way wherever I sit.
Sliding my Oscar Meyer on a stick, I lower it to the blackened coals, roast it to a crispy finish, add mustard, pickles, catsup—heaven.
Charcoaled shell of gooey marshmallow tantalizes my tongue.

Breathing brisk mountain air I sip morning’s first cup of coffee.
Warmth invades my damp boots thawing frozen toes, my backside comfy then cold as I rotate to tend the bacon, eggs and hotcakes.

In the flames a familiar face reminds me of youthful fires long ago.

Mojave
Katherine Horrigan

The old couple sits on the porch
The ramshackle shanty behind
His teeth biting straw
Her hands knitting
They wait talking
About the Gila monster
Digging for insects
Climbing on cactus
Stealing the chicken eggs, chewing the dog
They haven’t seen it again.
About horned toads
Puffed up enlarged
Squirting blood from their eyes
Three feet of defiance
For dog wolf coyote
Today splayed on asphalt.
Maybe tomorrow would bring
National Geographic
A video of elephant seals in springtime
Screaming for females
A photo of snow frogs in summer
Atop one another, flying in sex.
Maybe tomorrow
But tonight they get up and go to bed
Uncertain

Clipped
Loretta Walker

This is what someone with wings does when he knows he cannot fly …
—“The Vista,” by C. Dale Young

The legs are wings.
Yet little boys flap their arms,
pump them like slats,
and create their own jet sounds.
But the propellers are in the feet
and wind is in the thighs that lift,
carry them through the clouds of their imaginations.

Morphine is the fuel dripping in Mom’s fuselage,
crippling her view from the cockpit,
skews her memory and makes her hallucinate.
My sister is “I don’t know”
and I am “The old lady in the shoe.”
Four plastic wristbands keep her grounded
in a small white room where machines debate
with high pitches over airwaves.

Her name is reduced to fit between tiny bars
in a trio of the bands.
Nurses scan them with rectangles of light
to keep record of who she is and to engineer her healing.
In bold black letters, Fall Risk illuminates from the neon pink band while she thrusts from side-to-side,
“i just want to move,” but both wings are clipped now.
As she waits for the plastic new ones,
she flies with her eyes, tears propelling her forward.
Fracking Jack
Charlotte Renk

Guarded by rigid dignity, Jack entered and left the room each day. He never smiled, never spoke, never flinched, no matter the task.

Extolling the power of words to destroy or heal, Ms. Dora implored students to wrestle truth, to tell their stories, to change the world. Despite her passion and lofty pleas, Jack sat.

She asked the class to write a narrative about an event that shaped their lives. Jack folded his arms. She asked the class to portray one who impacted their lives—parent, grandparent, partner, brother… And many wrote, courage cascading from pages floods of love and loss, everything from jobs to innocence. Jack listened, eyes, alert dark pools deflecting light unrippled by current or wind; Contained, he turned nothing in.

She taught cause-effect, logic, argument, urging students to defend positions on vital issues. No waters stirred in that still silent pool; He never spoke, never wrote.

So Ms. Dora asked him to stay after class. Jack, you’ve turned nothing in. No grade! Why? Unflappable, he replied, No point; I’m leaving. Where? Afghanistan … again. When? Three weeks. Third tour…. Then gushing forth with crushing force: Excuse my French, Ma’am, but ain’t no “word” gonna bring back my best bud and my girlfriend, so I’m p----d, you understand!

She stammered, Oh my. Why you … why again? Well, Ma’am, his liquid eyes churning as words flooded a wild torrent … Cause I’m a sniper, see, and I guess I’m too damned good at killing!

Sherlock Holmes on Dr. Watson
Nevki Worpe

Doctor Watson considers himself my friend; A delusion I have no wish to end. I rather like him, though I have to say It’s in a patronising sort of way. His mind, unlike mine, is quite pedestrian, A carthorse he’d be, were he equestrian: Earnest, honest, plodding and quite obtuse, As a detective he’s of little use.

He insists on writing up my cases As though I always hold kings, queens and aces Seen through the Doctor’s rose-tinted glasses I’m the terror of the criminal classes. Put on a pedestal by his fervent pen, I seem a constant threat to evil men. Such admiration smacks of adulation And causes me no little irritation.

“Come, come, Watson,” I’ve told him vigorously; “Avoid drama; proceed more rigorously. My cases do not come to fruition Through the lightning flash of intuition. My methods are cool, calm and clinical. Admiration leaves me cold and cynical; I’m not the genius you make me out to be: I sift the evidence meticulously Until what’s left just has to be the truth, Be it tobacco ash or broken tooth.”

Watson nods his head in apparent consent And the mood between us is one of content, But still he writes those penny-dreadful stories Cataloguing, he thinks, my mental glories. So why do I tolerate him, one may ask. Well, he can be trusted with a minor task Requiring little speed of thought or deed; A man, in short, who follows but does not lead; One, who though devoid of critical rigour, Knows when to draw his gun and pull the trigger, And, when all is done, prepares and serves up tea To greater men like, for example, me.

Yes, this Watson considers himself my friend; A delusion I have no wish to end. I use him, I confess, to sharpen my wits When trying to fit together the bits That, when assembled, begin to make sense And finally end up as evidence.

I stop and stare, pen hovering in air: What I’ve written has laid my feelings bare. I no longer feel so condescending. I have to admit, by way of ending, That Watson and I would seem to be friends. With such a startling thought my musing ends.

God Bless America
Karla Morton

She said everything was better in her country, especially the food— the eggs, for example.

In America, she said, you eat unfertilized eggs, but in her country,

they prefer the fertilized ones; the crunch of tiny bones.
Editors’ Poems

Home Grown
Joan Seifert

To bloom, you have to see it done,
glimpse eager tendrils start to climb,
watch their growth, their budding hope
go this way, and not that,
and how they strive for upwardness,
to reach what’s not been grasped yet.

Can you do more than that?
Make haven from a void?
Start with slight leafy hope, enough
to welcome just-born musing.

The sun won’t change its course for you;
don’t look for that;
it bestows on king and pawn alike.

It will touch you, maybe near mid-morn,
if you pause, yearn for a blossom, look up,
sense its shimmer, feel its ardent warmth
helping bloom you.

Teaching before the War
Carol Coffee Reposa

In a stuffy room
My students grapple with Gandhi
Stumble over soul-force
Try to pin passive resistance
On the page,

Their voices rising
In an angry hum
Like Apaches droning in the desert
Rotors whirling sand
Into cities far away.

The class can’t follow him
On his long march,
Hold the salt of Dandi
In their hands, feel the ocean
Lapping at their feet.

Instead they watch
Humvees inch down ramps
Like giant locusts
M-16s unloaded
From their crates

Laser sights fixed
Before they get on board
The Blackhawks
For another ride
Of the Valkyries.

Night Blooming Cereus
Lou Taylor

Queen of the night
Luminous
Reflecting moon beams

Dark flowering
Far from day’s brightness

Shadow’s beauty
Fades at dawn

Seen only
In darkness
By dreamers

Haywire
Mo H Saidi

The world is gone mad: drought
here, flooding there, and slaughter
in Mesopotamia. Red words
fill the air. Yet, the slow
blue glaciers move in Antarctica.

The penguins are patiently bearing
the long winter: they know
of the summer break.
Remember what the bard said,
We must love one another or die.

Rumor
James R. Adair

It starts as a whisper in the dark:
Did you know…?
Have you heard…?
Early on it could easily be snuffed out,
Like a flickering candle, but…
Oh really?
It doesn’t surprise me!
Some fan the flame,
While others stand idly by
And watch a spark become
A conflagration
Where heat extinguishes light
And smoke obscures truth,
Which really wasn’t the goal at all.
Twelve Voices from One: Poetic Responses to Art

Local poets write poems inspired by the art created by participants in the 2010 Art Cloth Mastery Program. This is the second installment in the series to be published in Voices de la Luna. See twelvevoicesfromone.blogspot.com for more information.

The first three poems were written in response to the artworks of Allison Brown-Cestero, whose pieces capture the imagery of the Bastrop County Complex fire that burned for almost two months in the fall of 2011.

**Bastrop Burning: Epicenter**

*Lou Taylor*

Deep char
In the center of our lives
White hot

Hear flames crack
Smell acrid smoke
Emanating from our core

Changed forever

**Bastrop Burning: Rift**

*Lou Taylor*

Slashing deep and wide
Destruction from all sides
Divides our world

Surrounding inferno
Leaves a canyon of death

Breathe the fumes
Sense the heat
Wait for cool relief

**Bastrop Burning: Lost Pines**

*Lou Taylor*

Gone in a flash
Eons of patient growth
Destroyed before our eyes

**Fine Feathers**

*Lois Heger*

_in response to the lovely jacket, Fine Feathered Friends, created by artist Jill Becker_

How outrageous that art could hug a woman
Patterns that dance around her shoulders
Embrace her torso with pulsing vibes
Guinea feathers that flirt with her cleavage

As if Icarus’ feathers
Fallen from their
Man-made wings
Floated down
To land in a silken shrug
Around the shoulders of a lovely girl
**International Poems**

**Nur eine Rose**
für Hildegarde
*Hejo Müller*

Schenk mir nur eine Rose jeweils, Orpheus!
Zärtlich will ich dir singen ihren Duft
Wenn morgens die Amsel mir ihre Lieder zuruft
Und abends, wenn in den Mauern des dunkelgrünen Efeus

Die letzten Sonnenstrahlen brechen. Schenk mir
Nur eine Rose! Und zur Nacht will ich
Sie staunend in den Händen halten, wenn sich
Das Mondlicht scheu ins Eichenlaub verirrt. Hier

War ich glücklich! Damals, als Fledermäuse
Im Flüstern des Windes lautlos ihre Kreise
Zogen, als Mohn und Geißblatt blühten auf jener Reise
In unser erstes kasachstanisches Gehäuse…

---

**Pensé que el Fuego**
*Maria Gabriela Madrid*

Pensé que el fuego se había extinguido
Pero mi corazón todavía desea

Ver nuevos sitios
Sentir nuevos aromas
Respirar el olor impregnado en el viento

Y es sólo rompiendo las ataduras
Que tendré la vida que deseo

Vivir en el momento
Y no esperar hasta que yo muera
Para ser un fantasma añorando la vida que nunca fué
Para ser un fantasma flotando alrededor

---

**Only One Rose**
for Hildegarde
*Hejo Müller / translated by James Brandenburg*

Give me one rose only, Orpheus
So that I can inhale her perfume
When the blackbird sings in the morning
And when evening’s last light

Penetrates the walls of dark green ivy.
Give me one rose only so that at night
when moonbeams drown the oak leaves
I can admire her beauty. It is here

I remember when bats quietly
Drew their circles in whispering winds
When poppies and honeysuckles bloomed
As we journeyed to our first home in Kasachstan.*

*I The word Kasachstan in the poem takes on a symbolic meaning: The Promised Land.

---

**I Thought the Fire**
*Maria Gabriela Madrid*

I thought the fire was out
But my heart still desires

To see new places
To feel new aromas
To breathe the scent that impregnates the wind

And it is only by breaking my bonds
That I will have the life I long desire

To live in the moment
And not wait until I die
To be a ghost longing for a life that never was
To be a ghost flitting aimlessly
**Reflexiones sobre un Samovar**  
*Alicia Zavala Galván*

Reflejo de espejos  
conducen desde aquel ayer  
quizá hasta un mañana

Imágenes de almas  
Almas con imágenes

Dejar una piedra sobre tu tumba  
es decía—Yo te recuerdo—  
luego caminar hacia el puerto

Esa tarde  
disfrutamos de un té  
preparado en el samovar  
para llenar el aire con la dulce  
fragrancia de recuerdos

En qué se piensa  
cuando no hay nada más que esperar  
la larga jornada  
hacia al otro lado del mundo

Leer y volver a leer  
las cartas contando sobre  
as ciudades con idiomas extraños  
y en ese instante aferrarse con pasión  
al sueño de sobrevivir para que  
los nuestros sigan viviendo

Cada jornada tiene un propósito  
por más absurdo que parezca

Cada duelo tiene su fiesta  
y en cada fiesta hay dolientes

Hoy descubro  
al emprender una vereda  
hacia esta nueva etapa de mi vida  
que encontrarme  
con el pasado es inevitable

Imposible de querer echarlo todo  
al baul del olvido.

---

**Reflections on a Samovar**  
*Alicia Zavala Galván*

Reflections of mirrors  
lead from that yesterday  
to perhaps a tomorrow

images of souls  
Souls with images

Leaving a stone on your tomb  
is saying “I remember you”  
then walking into the port

This afternoon  
we enjoyed tea  
prepared in a samovar  
to fill the air with the sweet  
fragrance of memories

Of what does one think  
when there is nothing more than to await  
the long journey  
toward the other side of the world

Reading and reading again  
the letters telling about  
the cities with strange languages  
and in that instant hold on passionately  
to the dream of survival so that  
our own can keep on living

Each journey has a purpose  
no matter how absurd

Each mourning has its celebration  
and each celebration has its mourners

Today I discover  
upon starting a path  
toward another chapter of my life  
that encountering  
the past is inevitable

Impossible to toss everything  
into the trunk of forgetting.
Select Poems

Thanksgiving at My House
Harold Rodinsky

My grandmother Anna died around the time I started high school
no longer a keeper for my grandfather either
She was the best of all the keepers
She could cook she liked me
Always in an apron brushing flour off her face
grey hair always perfect stout shoes rimless glasses round Slavic face
age and hard work lines etched in her forehead and on her cheeks
always smiling

My mother’s father Nathan moved in with us
cause he didn’t have a keeper any more
after he moved in all the family-gatherings were at our house
where he ruled and life flowed on his schedule

before he moved in my dad bought a beautiful cherry wood dining room table
10 feet long with chairs to match seated 10
and that’s where we sat for Thanksgiving dinner

The table was perfect like a mirror except for a 1/8” x 5” gouge that my mom made
swinging a belt at me buckle first I ducked the table got it
she was pretty mad over nothing as usual blaming me for the gouge
“look what YOU made me do”

pairs of keepers came to dinner
Celia and Jack
Fanny and Morris Albert
mom and dad
Nathan and memories of Anna
me my sister was long gone by this time in New York
the brother of my mom and his wife went to her family
he wasn’t a keeper except once in awhile on a short term deal with my mom

eight of us the women on one side men on the other
Nathan at the head my mother at the foot
I sat on the women’s side across from my dad
until Morris Albert set himself on fire
then his seat opened up and I got to move across the table

The Girl with the Jack Kerouac Book
Chris Hemingway

she’s the girl with all the answers
she spends her day drinking whiskey with lemon
she puts it all in perspective
without delay
searching for the answers in the wrong places
but she doesn’t stop at that
doesn’t know what she truly wants
except a new adventure every second
rolling with the punches
making every day seem like climbing a rollercoaster
wanting and wishing
to go home

Wolf, Raven, Grandmother Moon
Margot Van Sluytman

Poetry seemed to have left me,
But warm, wet, whispers of clarity
Felt your deep, dark eyes falling
Into my pressing hunger, eradicating
This flippant error. Poetry had not left.

Crucial and cruel complexities
Tried to bring me to my knees
In fear, in loathing, but you and
Sweet dawning dusk, swelling
With vibrant clouds, made me ally.

You rested your head in the lap
Of my heated longing, breathing
Your luxury onto my thighs,
Bringing your lips before my
Keening call like necessary rain
On parched, parched desolation.

Tonight will be long succulent dreaming,
Ghost dancing, thunder drumming our souls.
And Grandmother Moon,
Raucous, ravenous Raven, and Wolf: young, tender, and fully grown, howls life into an
Infinity deep below the bedrock
Where souls mate, where untempered
Freedom roams and feeds. And again feeds
On unmanacled sustenance that is Creativity’s
Burgeoning blessing. Creativity’s penchant
For fire. Only fire. And ice.

Censorship Sonnet No. 3
Juan Manuel Perez

Yes we can! Yes we can!
In this land! We, immigrants!
Yes we can! Yes we can!
We can do it! We’re Americans!

America, Ray Bradbury warned you
The burning of books, like the failure of schools
The banning of words, like the letdown of life
History, culture; all dictated to you by invading politicians

America, George Orwell warned you
The power of fabricated news and political agendas
Twisting the truth, ordering what you should know
Lies are the new facts because of your absence to speak out

Because we can! Because we can!
We can do it! We’re Americans!
Gilbert’s Lament
for G.L., English Major
Diane Gonzales Bertrand

Next year
I could be eating government cheese
or selling women’s hygiene products
in aisle five in Super K-Mart.

Don’t you know
I’m made for
East Coast Poetry Slams?

I want to wear tri-colored
T-shirts that read
Sip me, Slurp Me, Slap Me,
and chew skinny cigars
between my teeth.

I want to sit on the Parisian
sidewalk café where Hemingway
wrote a masterpiece for Lit 3021.

Can I sleep and get paid for it?
Or am I just a graduate with an English degree
destined to face comma splices and spitballs,
and an occasional glimpse into youthful genius?

Today I am a graduate
shaking the hand of a dean
who knows the paper he’s handing me
will get me as far as a nickel in Saks.

A Night in “The White Hart,” Lincoln
John Stocks

The view from my room, quite unexpected;
Cathedral looming, imperious
Filling my window, the darkening sky
Transcended by angles, arched recesses.
Once the tallest structure in Christendom
Standing proud in its priestly tyranny.
Instinctively I am drawn to detail
The first uneven blocks; the gargoyles.

I imagine the peasant shivering,
Stumbling up steep hill, his head bowed,
The priest; the unvarnished face of God
Oblivious to the symmetry.
The Lancaster flying back from Berlin
Or Hamburg, anxious for a glimpse of home
Finding solace in the ancient steeple
A counterweight to inner turbulence.

That night my dreams were fitful, medieval
The past tenacious, smothering,
Until at seven the church bells boomed
And life resumed its measured course.

In Anticipation of the Next Mass Killing
Darby Riley

They want what I have.
I need a drone
We hate each other.
my own personal AK-47
They’re everywhere
burglar bars mace
the enemy the other
handgun alarm system
illegal aliens
surveillance cameras
abused violent
police security guards
un schooled ignorant
border patrol
black marketers
tall border fence
kidnappers extorters
gated communities
thieves infidels addicts

Give me liberty, give me fear.
The Descending Storm
Barbara E. M. Bowen

No emerald snake coiled
around your neck,
whispering about each
savory fruit,
guiding your hand to this one,
that one,
oh—
especially that.

You stood alone, gazing
at each plump handful
that hung above you,
snapping the stem
from an aching tree,
sinking your teeth into flesh
as you walked past sullen
eyes of creatures named just
last week
and into the first cold gust—of the
descending storm.

Athens: Postcard to Socrates
Margie McCreless Roe

Ah, the light.
How could you escape Truth here?
You shuffled about in this light,
white toga over your chunky body.
You stopped in the shade of white columns,
white walls, to patter with the young men,
fat little gadfly buzzing in the blue brilliance.

I’m letting the light fall all about me.
The sea gleams in front of me—
like the blue expanse of time between me
and the hemlock.

Death of a Toy Pomeranian
Milo Kearney

Pleading eyes
One more last look
Remember
I love you
It’s time
Good-bye.

Soul Censoring
Nora Olivares

So much depends on rising
with sunlight’s first tug
waking me to another day.

But it’s too easy to go undercover
arguing that yesterday’s gravity
weighs too heavily—
her old business must prolong my stay.

Slowly, pulling back the shades,
I see the crumbs and chunks of
yesterday’s leftovers on the
countertop of my waking consciousness—
most neither savory nor salvageable.

Cautiously, I wander into the Now
only to discover yesterday’s pantry empty,
her soiled clothes jumbled in the bin,
and the page of her journal ripped out.
The new day’s page lies before me—
challenging me with her vacant stare.

But retreat to the miasma of indecision
lures me to coddle yesterday’s victories
and assuage her regrets. Suddenly,
The weatherman’s voice in the distance
interrupts my reverie—proclaiming the work
of the cosmic forces—wind, rain, sunshine, and cold
staging their drama, oblivious to my inevitable adventures.

Then, Revelation dawns on me that I am
the weatherwoman ordained to presage
the outcome of my day.
I must engage the compass of my will,
heed the warnings, and harness the winds
to forward my little ship of state
to the harbor of wellbeing.

Leaving behind the baggage of yesterday
in the antechamber of farewells,
I trust the endless sands of promise
to yield a nugget of gleaming gold
into my pan of faith and effort.
Elegies by Palmer Hall

Palmer Hall, editor of Pecan Grove Press and director of the Louis J. Blume Academic Library at St. Mary’s University in San Antonio, is currently undergoing treatment for cancer. An accomplished writer, editor, and poet, Hall decided to record some of his experiences and thoughts in a series of elegies published on his Facebook page. Here are the first four elegies.

Elegy 1
11 July 2012

And so we come to it, unwilling, unprepared. We have written elegies in the past, for others, Have seen plants ripen and die, plowed under. “I fall upon the thorns of life, I bleed.” No, not me. “That is not what I meant at all.” Love song as elegy, Lazarus returns, peach juice sliding down his cheek. “Be cool, whatever.” Listen to The Stones, rock The Who Once more at a free concert. It all takes shape. All.

Once there was a moo cow, a great white whale, A raft floating down a slow-moving river, an old Mother rocking a cradle. Fuck it. Let’s go out West To where the East begins. “East side, west side / all Around the town. / The kids sang ring-a-rosie / London Bridge is falling down.” And once upon a while I went to war Not a great war, not a war to end all wars, not war to make The world safe for democracy. War as shrug, as yawn.

Standing up takes it all out of you, last breath, last glimmer Of sight. Have I mentioned people? Those who mean so much? No. I don’t think so. We pass them on highways, watch them cope— Or not. Do you remember Otis…sitting on the dock of the bay?

Janis yearning for a Mercedes-Benz (not!). A Beckett play? Curtain rising, ash bins displayed, a baby crying and The curtain falls. No action. No plot just a scream over the ashes. I would say something real and true—perhaps in the sequel.

Elegy 2
11 July 2012

So many different ways to say it: a car drives down A country road, crashes into a ditch. A child watches the sun rise; an old man sees it descend. Nothing unusual, not really. A train speeds west from Beaumont, stops in San Antone, crosses deserts through Tucson to Oakland where ships wait for a voyage farther west to the east.

I went out to see The Amazing Spiderman yesterday, Andrew Garfield, Hap Loman just a month earlier, Swinging between buildings. His uncle killed while he went through his private existential angst. The self-Absorption of youth. The caring of the elderly. Obsession in three dimensions: dark, not somehow satisfying. Spring, summer, autumn and winter pass; rivers flow down to the sea; new trees spring up and are themselves replaced; slow moving of the earth on its axis, circling a not too special star. Should we stand up and shout, try to call attention to ourselves? Or merely be until that moment we are not. It’s all really about the same.

Elegy 3
12 July 2012

So violent. I was born during World War ii, Traveled each summer through the South To a beach in Panhandle Florida, saw too much.

And yet, can we ever see enough? The muchness Reinforces what we do, how we act. Once on a time Two boys took a boat, drifted out on the calm waters And then swam to shore, boat drifting away, blamed Two other boys, African American, confessed too late, Too much, I had not thought there could be so much.

Our first war was this: getting together in communities And then Korea, Africa, Vietnam, Bosnia, Iraq, Afghanistan And more. So much. Melville baptized his great book “In nomine diablo.” What could not be so? José y María Pray for us if at all in the small cracks in the concrete Where weeds sprout and stretch up to the light. Pray. Pray for whatever you will pray. Nothing has changed.

Elegy 4
13 July 2012

In 1922, my father, just seventeen Worked as a surveyor’s monkey In northern Florida to plan the path Of the Old Spanish Trail Highway.

90 Years later, decades, I work With the archives of the highway, Meet him west of Tallahassee In a palmetto thicket scraped clear By the highway and again grown over. In Boerne, developers want old stretches Of the highway to build new houses Protestors hatch plans, resist, march.

Saint Augustine to San Diego through San Antone, Now Highway 90 into Texas, then Alt 90 Old HWY 90, OST, Old Spanish Trail, and U.S. 290 headed west. Changing, forever gone.
**Poetry Therapy**

Poets use poetry to deal with such issues as heroin/alcohol addiction, death, abandonment, and sexual and emotional abuse. The following authors illustrate the use of writing to deal with these issues.

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**Death Awaits**  
*Alex Sumner*

Death awaits and I can say Welcome can I come home?  
This body limits me; can I not come home to dance in fields of stillness?  
I do not fear it for it is familiar to me as a blanket on cold winter nights.

Do not cry for there is a kind of beauty in death as in birth.  
I shall welcome the much-needed rest and do not shed tears in sorrow for me.  
Please dance for I will be home.

---

**Memories of a Nightmare**  
*Earl Salazar*

I sit alone in the Darkness as tears fall from my eyes, I hurt inside, I’m empty inside, I can see Life outside my window but there is none inside my room or inside me.

As the wind blows it drowns out the sobs that escape my lips. I cannot remember a day that my Heart has not hurt or last when it was whole and unbroken.  
My soul is empty except for pain and the nightmares that are my very being. I do not know Peace or Serenity, I do not know Love or Laughter, I do not know Happiness or Home, I no longer live but merely exist.

---

**Another Chance**  
*Frances Laniese Reed*

I think to myself: I am trying to ease the pain  
Re-motivate myself and deal with past shame  
I know I fell off so much  
But all I need is God, his love and his touch  
I’m a child of God who needs to give him praise  
Get on my knees and thank him every single day  
Do what I got to do and move on with my life  
He’s given me guidance and potential inside  
I’ll never feel like I’m alone ’cause I know he’s always near  
Always, forever listening—lending an extra ear  
He’s given me another chance—something to look forward to  
I won’t hold back when I feel I need to pray—  
And forever thank Him—for another chance and Another day.

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**Ashes Appeared**  
*Janie Alonso*

The ashes appeared cold, dead.  
No red-orange flame  
Flickered among the gray remains  
I stirred the fragments with my finger and wrote my name.  
It burned.  
A white-hot fiery blister  
Reminded me  
I was still flesh.

---

**Holding Back**  
*Frances R. Ford*

Why do I hold back? Why can’t  
I give to myself as I do for everyone else?  
Going above and beyond is what I do best.  
But yet, I fail miserably at giving myself a much-needed rest.  
This journey for me has been pretty hard.  
I keep struggling and fumbling constantly falling down.  
But the one thing I’ve noticed as I look back is I never stayed down.  
Each time I figured I couldn’t possibly make it through I found a way to make things anew.  
Such a little fighter they say I am.  
If only I could see myself through their eyes.  
But what does it matter what they all say.  
Because, if I don’t believe it, it might as well not have been said.

Think for a moment and learn to forgive.  
Forgive and love myself just the way I am.

---

**Eyes Open**  
*Peter Holland*

Finally, the vision is clear as I look to my feet.  
I acknowledge the path resting unchangeable behind me, but I am here now, yes, HERE NOW.  
What is around the bend?  
I do not know, and for the first time in my life I do not care.  
Life is populated by pitfalls and happy accidents;  
I know this from my past, one thing too I know I have never guessed right what lies around the bend.
Tears of a Friend
Khalilah Bilal

The pleasure of feeling
The strength of a lion
In one tear drop

Hearing the inner voice
Having the strength to follow

What your heart speaks in secret
Your tongue can never speak

Receiving your full potential
Is your Divine Inheritance

Learn to TRUST the Universe
Cause I Am YOU
A Star

Deathbed of a Survivor
Vivian Kearney

You can read the holocaust in her eyes
You can hear her running in her labored breathing
You can feel her care in her tired hands
You can witness her struggle to keep her earth identity
even while migrating to the land of eternity
inspiring us to deeds of love and survival
also

Real Me
Celeste Delarosa

Who is this person staring back at me?
Is she confident, compassionate, warm, loving?
Or does she run and hide like she always does?
Ranting and raving “Look at me!”
And going behind the scenes
She strikes a pose and
Makes sure she looks like a pro.

But the real me doesn’t show
Because I am not running the show.
The real me is scared because
I better be prepared for what’s coming next
Because I’m a wreck

Time slowly passing, each moment in time
Instills a new picture that is yet to see!
You hold your future in your hands
It’s so painful to see!
Who is the real person you want to be?

Letting Go
Robin Clark

Deep in my soul, I know I must,
but my heart argues with me.
Can I really do this?
Do I even have a choice?
Deep in my heart, the pain is scaring, knife-like.
I feel like I am drowning in my emotions, my thoughts.

But then, somewhere deep in my soul, deep in my heart,
I feel strength begin to flow,
strength from the knowledge
That I can do this, this will be good for me, for you.
I just have to take that heart-breaking, heart-aching
First step, and let go, of you.
**Poetry & Dreams**

**Poetry, Dreams, and Interpretation**

**Series of Three Dreams from July 5**

*Maria Brandenburg*

*Interpretation: James Brandenburg*

**First Dream:** I am with my mother on an open train, looking for a place to sit. The train is located in an area that is cream-colored—the color of sand. I sit on the left and my mother sits on the right. The train seems to be empty at the moment, and I do not see my mother or myself but rather a series of miniature black dots. I am thinking, “We found a place.” Then I notice that people are getting in line. Suddenly, I am no longer in a seat. Instead, I find a place for myself in the line that has formed. I am unable to distinguish the details or features of the people within the line, only round bodies. I am thinking that it is where I should be and that I have found a place. Once again, I notice that everything surrounding me is cream-colored, and rather than round bodies, I now see a series of black lines delineating or representing the people; they are without faces—featureless.

**Second Dream:** The second part of my dream involves a huge house, like a castle. The house has many windows, and I am showing the house to Jim. The house belongs to my student. He has decorated it with elephant heads, one head on each of the three doors that provide entrance to the house. The doors are framed by cream-colored wood that is etched with gold—the center portions are solid glass, there is a lot of light. I see the heads of the elephants, and notice that they are very detailed. I say, “These heads were the work of my student; he has bought this house and decorated it.” I move in to see and show the house. I have seen this house before, but it has since been decorated and improved. It has details of gold throughout and is primarily cream-colored. I notice a lot of furniture and several levels. As I ascend to the top level, I see many cream bubbles.

**Third Dream:** In the third and last part of my dream, I meet my student, and he has become a lawyer. He shows me a case that holds an elaborate program that he has studied in order to pass his bar exam. The case is black, and I open it. I see another black case and I figure that it is a recording of some kind. I think, “This is quite an improvement from the times when I had to study law.” I am in awe of all that he has accomplished.

**Interpretation:** What triggered this dream was my wife’s former student’s visit to my office for advising at San Antonio College. Her student sought me out because he thought so highly of my wife and because he had heard me speak at her school. He shared with me that he had learned a lot of Spanish and that “Mrs. Maria Brandenburg was a great teacher.” I shared this story with my wife when I came home that evening, which triggered my wife’s dream from above. She had been feeling a bit discouraged about the teaching profession, questioning the impact she was having on her students, and feeling burnt-out. She is contemplating retiring from teaching after one more year. So, she was quite surprised to hear what her former student had said about her teaching, and that same night the unconscious put everything in perspective for her.

The dream begins with Maria’s traveling with her mother on an open train in a cream-colored area like sand (unknown place). The train is a collective mode of transportation, and the appearance of one’s mother in a dream is usually significant. Her mother has been dead for a number of years. Maria sits on the left (symbolically more toward the unconscious), and her mother sits on the right (symbolically the direction of consciousness). Although the color and the sand are distinct, the features and details of the people waiting in line are not. The cream color and the sand could represent a place in the unconscious. What struck me about the setting in the collective is the statement by Maria that she had found her place. She mentions that she is where she should be. Perhaps the unconscious is relaying to her that teaching (a place that she has been for sixteen years) is the place she should be.

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**Art Therapy**

**Tangible and Intangible Images:**

**Fairy Tale of the People of the Cloaks**

*Maripat Munley, RN, MPH, ATR-DC*

Two kinds of images play a role in what we experience with our five senses and associated emotional responses. There are images that are tangible and those that are the products of our psyche and imagination. Even music can activate our senses. Experience of these stimuli often influences our feelings and behaviors. By willingly changing our images we can affect both feeling states and behaviors. The pastel painting above is an example of a physically tangible image and below is a brief Fairy Tale that is emblematic of the use of non-tangible yet powerful imagery. You might consider interacting with your own internal imagery to notice how emotive and influential it may be.

It was here in front of my hermitage, Emaus, built in the berm of the banks along the wide Mississippi, that the inner people seemed most alive. Each had a different color cape that announced the individual spirit. I often stayed here a week at a time. Always I could hear their clear voices. One or another seemed to be the strongest voice in any given moment. Here, beneath the oaks and pines, I could sense my Druid ancestors settling around me,
You have all these skills and gifts the Mystery gave you. Are waving her orange cloak to get our attention. “Well!” she cried, alongside me. With head bowed, I promised, “I will try.” CARE GIVING rested remembering that self-care first leads to healthy care of others.

you, if you try. Then you can care for no one, not even yourself. be all things to all whom I feel called to serve. “It will exhaust comes from time to time, she said, to remind me that I cannot of each other that calls us to act in response. CARE GIVING very thin, our authentic essence reveals itself. It is this experience ed me that when humans are in need and the protective veil is

knowing your fears and making friends with them will strengthen you. You will have the gift to smell fear in others and help them smell, hear, and even taste the wind, lean into me. The power of understanding and making friends with them will strengthen you. You will have the gift to smell fear in others and help them friend their own fright.” As my lungs expanded with air I had lost, FEAR smiled and faded away.

Happily, CARE GIVING, in her short blue cloak, stopped by. Together we watched the Mississippi flowing south. She reminded me that when humans are in need and the protective veil is very thin, our authentic essence reveals itself. It is this experience of each other that calls us to act in response. CARE GIVING comes from time to time, she said, to remind me that I cannot be all things to all whom I feel called to serve. “It will exhaust you, if you try. Then you can care for no one, not even yourself. Remember that self-care first leads to healthy care of others.” With head bowed, I promised, “I will try.” CARE GIVING rested alongside me.

Abruptly ANXIETY joined us standing high up on the bank, waving her orange cloak to get our attention. “Well!” she cried, “You have all these skills and gifts the Mystery gave you. Are you just going to sit there and not care for all these people that need you? Hurry now, you can do everything.” But CARE GIVING interrupted, “Doing everything, will that make you perfect? You, ANXIETY, where do you come from? The place of self-criticism? Chat you two, now, and make peace with what can be done, or neither of you will ever be calm.” ANXIETY came down the bank. She sat thinking and held my hand.

The next day PLANNING came in her verdant green cloak, bringing creative ideas of how to engage with the work and play of life. “There is excitement and pleasure in deciding how to do things creatively. But remember how large the bag of plans can get and how heavy to carry. Leave time for the soul rest that comes from clear plans that have actual potential for completion.” I could feel her wisdom as her blue cloak brushed by me when she floated back deep inside.

On the final day at Emaus, under the berm of the hill as I awoke, TYRANNY OF THE TO DOS arrived with a thump. “Get up,” she ordered. “So many things at home and at work have not gotten done while you were here in your soul’s depth conversing with all these cloaked people. If you need a cloak, wear my dirty brown one now and get a move on.” As I dressed and gathered my belongings to leave the berm and the river, I felt myself slowly breathe. All the cloaks of my inner people seemed to slip over me with quiet words: “We are here. Learn from us when we visit. Invite TYRANNY OF THE TO DOS to breathe with us together, to slow the banter and place her hand on her heart while you do the same.”

A little INSIGHT came. “Open the door of your heart, hear with the heart’s ears, see with the heart’s eye. Welcome the cloaked inner people with joy for what they can teach you. Feel their presence and remember their wisdom.”

San Antonio Small Presses
Word Design Studio

Word Design Studio, founded in 1998, is committed to publishing selected high quality poetry collections, anthologies, and other paperbacks, fiction and non-fiction. Word Design Studio is author-friendly and strives for author satisfaction through every step of the process toward the final published product. Editor Valerie Martin Bailey has been in the writing, editing, and publishing field since 1970. An accomplished writer and award-winning poet, she dedicates much of her time to promoting poetry at the local, state, and national level. The latest book from Word Design Studio is Mo H Saidi’s collection of short stories, The Garden of Milk and Wine. The latest three poetry collections produced by the Word Design Studio are Oasis in the Sky, a collection of poems and stories by Miechail L. Lamrouex; From Many Springs, a collection of poems by Joan Strauch Seifert; and WUI: Written Under the Influence of Trinidad Sánchez, a poetic tribute to the late Trinidad Sánchez by Juan Manuel Pérez. For more information, please visit www.worddesignstudio.com.
### International Poems

#### Treinta Años

*Juan Francisco Manzano*

Cuando miro al espacio qe he corrido
desde la cuna hasta el presente día
tiembló y saludo a la fortuna mía
mas de terror qe de atención movido

Sorpréndeme la lucha qe he podido
sostener contra suerte tan impia,
si así puede llamarse la porfia
de mi infelice ser al mal asido;

Treinta años háy, qe conosí la tierra:
Treinta años háy, que en gemidor estado
triste infortunio pr doquier me asalta.

Más nada es para mí la dura guerra
qe en vano suspirar he soportado,
If la carculo, oh Dios con lo que falta.

*Cuban slave poet

#### Amor

*Juan Francisco Manzano*

Azucena gentil, fragante y pura,
que das galas al vergel, vertiendo amores,
tú eres, flor, la más linda de las flores
siendo igual tu modestia a tu hermosura.

La peregrina llama que fulgura
en tus cubanos ojos brilladores,
disipa en su expresión mis sinsabores
como emblema de gloria y de ventura.

Yo te adoro, mi bien, como a la brisa
ama el gentil sonoro riachuelo,
como adora el sunsún a la floresta;

pues en tu joven frente se divisa
el timbre halagador que te dio el cielo
de hermosa, de cubana y de modesta.

#### Al Partir

*Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda*

¡Perla del mar! ¡Estrella de Occidente! ¡Hermosa Cuba! tu brillante cielo, la noche cubre con su opaco velo como cubre el dolor mi triste frente.

Voy a partir… La chusma diligente para arrancarme del nativo suelo las velas iza y pronta a su desvelo la brisa acude de tu zona ardiente.

¡Adiós, patria feliz!, ¡Edén querido! Doquier que el hado en su fúror me impela tu dulce nombre halagará mi oído. Ah, que ya cruje la turgente vela, el ancla se alza, el buque estremecido las olas corta y silencioso vuelan.

#### Thirty Years

*Juan Francisco Manzano / translated by Gerard S. Robledo*

When I look at the space in which I’ve run,
from the cradle until today,
I tremble and greet my fortune,
more in terror than moved observation

I’m surprised with the struggle I have
been able to sustain against such godless luck,
if that’s what you’d call the stubborn determination
of the wretchedness that won’t let go;

Thirty years there, and I knew the land:
Thirty years there, I groaned in pain at my sad misfortune assaulting me from everywhere.

Nothing else for me than an arduous battle, hopelessly supported,
If I figure correctly, oh God what is left?

#### Love

*Juan Francisco Manzano / translated by Gerard S. Robledo*

Gentle lily, fragrant and pure,
you clothe the orchard, gushing love,
you are, my flower, the most beautiful of flowers,
yet your modesty rivals your beauty.

Your radiant Cuban eyes
lure me in on pilgrimage and
ease my heartache in their expression,
like a symbol of praise and fortune.

I adore you, my love, like a breeze
loves the gentle sound of a stream,
like the sun loves a clearing in the woods;

but your youthful facade
is a symbol of what the heavens gave you
of your Cuban beauty and modesty.

#### Departing

*Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda / translated by Gerard S. Robledo*

Pearl of the sea! Western star! Beautiful Cuba! Your brilliant night sky is covered with its opaque veil, like it covers the pain my sad appearance.

I’m going to leave… the untiring rabble and pull myself from the native soil, raise my sails and quickly catch the breeze from your blazing land.

Goodbye, happy homeland! Beloved Eden!
Anywhere that fate takes me your sweet name will call my ear. Oh, I’ve raised my turgid sail, the anchor has ascended, the ship trembles over small waves and quietly I take my leave.
Here in Chautauqua

A Day at Chautauqua Institution, NY
Mo H Saidi

Chautauqua, shuh-taw-kwuh, or chuh-
noun: 1. lake, a lake in SW New York. 18 miles long. 2. a village on this lake: summer educational center. 3. an annual educational meeting, originating in this village in 1874, providing public lectures, concerts, and dramatic performances during the summer months, usually in an outdoor setting. 4. (usually lowercase) any similar assembly, especially one of a number meeting in a circuit of communities. adjective: 5. of or pertaining to a system of education flourishing in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, originating at Lake Chautauqua, New York. 6. (usually lowercase) pertaining to a chautauqua: a chautauqua program. from http://dictionary.reference.com.

Every summer for nine weeks from the end of June to the last week of August, musicians, artists, religious scholars, political gurus, writers, and poets participate in well-organized and coordinated programs from six in the morning to after ten at night.

The institution was conceived in 1874 when John Heyl Vincent and Lewis Miller rented the site of a Methodist camp meeting to use in the post-camp meeting season as a summer school for Sunday School teachers; this became known as the Chautauqua Institution. Now after 136 years of continuous existence, Chautauqua Institution has become a center of excellence for literary activities, artistic and musical performances, and political and religious communication. For more information regarding the June Literary Festival and the summer programs please visit: www.ciweb.org.

A Typical Day In Chautauqua

6:00 a.m. Take in a beautiful sunrise over Chautauqua Lake near the Central Dock and Sports Club.
7:00 a.m. With more than a mile of waterfront, Chautauqua’s grounds are perfect for a morning walk or run on the lake shore.
7:15 a.m. Pick up fresh fruit, vegetables, and other locally grown and made products from the Farmers Market.
7:30 a.m. The Chautauquan Daily, a perfect accompaniment to your morning cup of coffee, is delivered to your front porch.
8:45 a.m. Watch the little ones board the bus to Children’s School.
9:30 a.m. It’s Story time at Children’s School—today’s selection is Letter Birds!
10:00 a.m. The bigger kids can enjoy some friendly competition at the Boys’ and Girls’ Club.
10:45 a.m. Hear a lecture at the 5,000-seat, open-air amphitheater — and get a question of your own answered at the end.
12:00 p.m. Eat your picnic lunch on Bestor Plaza with some musical accompaniment by music festival students and faculty.

1:00 p.m. Stroll through one of Chautauqua Institution’s world-class galleries of visual arts.
2:00 p.m. Take in another lecture, one from a religious or ethical perspective, at the gorgeous open-air Hall of Philosophy.
2:30 p.m. Be one with nature as you attend a lecture in one of Chautauqua’s many outdoor “classroom” spaces.
3:00 p.m. Support tomorrow’s best singers with a visit to an afternoon voice program recital.
4:00 p.m. Spend some time on the water with a lesson from the Sailing Center.
6:00 p.m. Sit down for a delicious five-course dinner at the Athenaeum.
8:15 p.m. Attend a performance of the Chautauqua Symphony Orchestra, featuring some of the best instrumentalists from orchestras around the world.
11:00 p.m. Wind down at the end of a wonderful day with a nighttime stroll down the lake front.

Chautauqua Prize

The Chautauqua Prize is a new national literary award that celebrates a book of fiction or literary/narrative nonfiction that provides a richly rewarding reading experience and honors the author for a significant contribution to the literary arts.

Andrew Krivak Wins the Inaugural Chautauqua Prize

Andrew Krivak is the author of The Sojourn, which was the inaugural winner of the Chautauqua Prize. He is the grandson of Slovak immigrants; he grew up in Pennsylvania and now lives with his wife and three children in Massachusetts. The Sojourn is his first novel and was also a finalist for the National Book Award. It is the story of Jozef Vinich, who was uprooted from a 19th-century mining town in Colorado by a family tragedy and returns with his father to an impoverished shepherd’s life in rural Austria-Hungary. When World War I comes, Jozef joins his adopted brother as a sharpshooter in the Kaiser’s army, surviving a perilous trek across the frozen Italian Alps and capture by a victorious enemy.

A stirring tale of brotherhood, coming-of-age, and survival—inspired by the author’s own family history—this novel evokes a time when Czechs, Slovaks, Austrians, and Germans fought on the same side while divided by language, ethnicity, and social class in the most brutal war to date. It is also a poignant tale of fathers and sons, addressing the great immigration to America and the desire to live the American dream amidst the unfolding tragedy in Europe. For more information, visit www.ciweb.org/prize.
Unwanted Children
Robert L. Flynn

America has never known what to do with needy children, especially unwanted ones. "Unwanted" included children of unmarried parents, orphans, runaways who abandoned their families, those whose parents had abandoned them because they were unable to feed them, those who were physically or mentally damaged by filth and other brutal living conditions, and those who were of an unwanted color, culture, or origin.

In the 1790s, while President Washington and Congress were in Philadelphia trying to establish a new form of government, they and other citizens were appalled by a “multitude of half-naked, dirty and leering children” roaming city streets, sleeping in alleys, picking pockets and robbing stores. Girls who had seen only “eight or twelve summers” were “addicted to immoralities of the most loathsome descriptions” (Huck’s Raft, Steven Mintz).

Some boys were sternly warned to get off the street. Some were roughed up by police or other adults as a warning. Some were arrested and sent to jail where they learned survival lessons from hardened criminals. Some of the girls were abused by police and other adults. Such children needed little education; fathers or other bosses taught boys their duties and mothers or other controllers taught girls what they needed to know to survive in a world dominated by men. Boys left the farm or the home in search of a better life and girls married early to escape the drudgery. Few were successful at either.

The cornerstone for the family was a livable wage. Without it a man could not conscientiously begin a family. With no means of family planning toddlers had to work under the supervision of the mother. Children had to work under the supervision of the father until mature enough to work under a boss. Livable wages came at the price of long hours on the job: twelve, fourteen, as many as sixteen hours a day, even for children.

Sometimes work hours were determined by quotas that could mean even longer hours and seven-day work weeks with little time to spend with wife or children. Some jobs such as lumbering, building railroads, working as deckhands required fathers and boys to be away from their families for extended periods of time. Deck hands might spend months, even years at sea before returning home, possibly with enough money to begin a family or to support a family until he returned from the next voyage. Those were the dreams families were built on.

On the frontier, a hard-working man could get by with a hard-working wife and children who worked as long as there was light. Farmers welcomed children because of the need for free or subsistence labor. In the cities even good fathers had difficulty finding work that would provide the necessities for a family. Many jobs did not pay enough to enable young men to provide for families, resulting in unwanted children and unwed mothers. There was no effective family planning, and even good fathers could not watch their wives or children go hungry or naked or die for lack of nutrition and health care. Fathers abandoned the family hoping someone would take care of them until he could return with a job that would allow them to live together. To prevent the father from leaving, boys left the family or were driven out to support themselves. All too often, daughters also were forced onto the street.

Immigrants from Christian Europe and England knew that the Bible required care for widows and orphans, that the Hebrew prophets condemned those who grind the poor, and that the Gospel of Matthew quoted Jesus as saying that those who fed the hungry, clothed the naked, cared for the sick, even “the least” of them, were his followers and would dwell with him forever; those who did not feed the hungry, clothe the naked, care for the sick, welcome strangers were doomed for the alternate eternity.

However, Jesus contradicted the American Dream that with free and fertile land, clear and abundant water, anyone willing to work hard could find success, and for those who dared even wealth. Unspoken was the big IF: if they were able to kill or drive off the Indians and steal their lands and escaped injury and illness to themselves and their family and avoided too many children.

There was ample evidence that not everyone could work hard or work at all, that families burdened with a member who was physically or mentally disabled were doomed to a cycle of poverty, that many arrived in this new land already in debt and servitude, and that generally those who did the hardest and most dangerous work received the least reward.

There was no child welfare and no regard for them. They were burdens or at best, nuisances. If they were hungry they got food wherever and however they could, or they starved. If they were sick they got well or died. Thousands of children were living and dying on the streets. In New York City the number was 30,000.

Nevertheless, for the many the American Dream trum ped the Gospel, enthroning Mammon as America’s god. But it left others with a troubled conscience. Those who acted on their conscience were called reformers, progressives, and child-savers.

Robert Flynn’s Lawful Abuse: How the Century of the Child Became the Century of the Corporation is being released as an ebook by Wings Press in October. It will be available as a paperback in early 2013.

The Excuse
Clark Watts

I sat across the desk from the professor who had summoned me to discuss my grade in English: creative writing. This was a course not ordinarily available to first-semester freshmen but was offered to some through an advanced placement program based upon their high school experience, grades, and the results of a brief examination. I had accepted the program and registered for the class. It was midterm of my first semester at the University of Texas, after graduating from Buckner Academy. I had never made a C in school, much less the F, which was the reason I was in the professor’s office.

The professor was not disappointed. He was angry. Although I was handing in the assignments, they were not worthy of his time to read, much less grade, he informed me bluntly. Nervous and sweating, I couldn’t remember when I had been so criticized by an authoritative figure with such eloquent energy. My response was that I must not have been properly prepared for the course, and I was in over my head. After all, I had been raised in an orphanage, and we did not have the educational opportunities the other
students in his class received. Perhaps he should take that into consideration. His face turned red; he stood up over me, and exploded.

My response was disingenuous at best and simply dishonest. Yes, I was raised in an orphanage and went to a private school of the orphanage, a Baptist institution. When I left the orphanage I was pleased with the educational experience I had received, especially in English and in creative writing, which were taught by one of my favorite teachers. One year I had written a radio play for Homecoming about which the teacher simply raved. A newspaper article that I had written about the opening of a retirement facility was similarly acknowledged. After leaving the orphanage, I had little opportunity to talk with people about my life there, but those with whom I did converse often expressed sorrow and sympathy for me because of my childhood. They spoke darkly of orphanages in general but without specifics, just conclusions. I had no gauge with which to compare my experiences with their assessments. And since most who talked with me of these matters were adults, and I had been raised to respect the opinions of my elders, I had slowly and without much thought begun to accept that what they said might be true in other institutions, just not mine.

However, in the conference with the professor I thought I would take this generalized opinion of others, personalize it to myself, and use it to obtain an understanding from him that others wanted me to believe. Namely, it was not my fault if I failed, because my upbringing was deficient. I knew immediately when I said this that it was not true. The truth was I was not applying myself. I had made few friends in college but still had some at the orphanage in Dallas. So frequently I would drive, often with others, to Dallas to see them. The homework in other courses (e.g., math, biology) was easy to complete in the back seat of a car during the four hours it took to drive between Austin and Dallas, each way. However, one simply could not write creatively in such an environment. So I did not work at writing as I did the other courses.

In his rage, my professor informed me he did not give a hoot about my high school or other social interactions at the orphanage, or at zoos, or anywhere else. The University had determined I was able to perform satisfactorily in his course, and that was that. No one had ever failed his class, and no one would. There was a short discussion about grades, student commitment, professor evaluations, and dismissal from school. He then sat down and began to look at a pile of papers on his desk. After a few minutes it was clear to me the interview was over; he had nothing more to say.

I left his office and walked across the campus to the Student Union, in a daze. I simply had not been subjected to anything like that in my life. It was a cool but pleasant fall day, and the students passing me on their way to classes were obviously in tune with it. Most I encountered seemed without a care in the world, even spontaneously rendering statements of greetings and other pleasant offerings. But I was beginning to feel poorly about myself. I had betrayed my upbringing and the confidence others had placed in me by my dishonesty. I began to feel dirty and then sick. How could I have made those statements?

By the time I reached the Student Union, I felt totally unclean, not as when we bailed hay in the summer, but deep inside of me dirty. This would not wash off; this had to wear off over time. It would require repudiation by me of the notion that I could, in any way, adopt the negative opinions of others of my childhood environment to justify inadequate behavior, or any performance found lacking.

Thus challenged, I did recover, and I made what, under the circumstances, was a very good grade in the course. The last day of class the professor smiled briefly and nodded as I walked by his desk. He seemed to be feeling good. And without a doubt I was feeling very well. Not only had I met his expectations, I had regained my self-esteem. I never had the opportunity to take another course with him or to thank him for his attention.

I have taught a combined 55 years in medical and law schools, and I have rarely opened the first class of the semester without thinking of my creative writing professor and what he taught me in those few minutes that day in his office: while others may teach, we (as students) are individually responsible for learning what is necessary to accomplish a task, and for seeing that it is properly performed. Failure is ours, individually, alone.

Resist much, obey less. —Lawrence Ferlinghetti, “Poetry as Insurgent Art”

A naked lunch is natural to us, we eat reality sandwiches. But allegories are so much lettuce. Don’t hide the madness. —Allen Ginsberg, “On Burroughs’ Work”
I read the email a second time: “Class starts at 8:30 Saturday morning. We’ll provide coffee, but you should bring your own snacks and lunch. We have a lot of material to cover but it will be interesting. Pay attention because there is a test! The fun part is Sunday when we go to the range. Be sure to bring plenty of ammo and good hearing protection. It’s going to be loud out there. Don’t forget your glasses (plastic only), and wear a shirt with sleeves because there will be a lot of hot lead flying around…”

It sounded horrible—a concealed handgun class? William had encouraged, almost insisted, that I take it and get licensed. We’d only been married a few months, and I wasn’t sure if he was feeling protective or if he just wanted to brag to his friends that he had a tough wife. I told him I wasn’t into guns. No thanks.

Then I read an article in USA Today about a pregnant lady in Oklahoma selling puppies. A woman she met on the Internet told her she was interested in buying one and came to her house to see the puppies. The pregnant lady took her around back to the kennel, where the woman sliced her open with a knife, stole her unborn child, and left her to die in the dirt—her dogs as witnesses.

At the time, I was running an ad in the newspaper for one of our rentals. We had three, all on one property near the Rio Grande, with a field and some old apple trees in the back. I called it the ranchette. William and I had bought it together with the intention of eventually moving out there. There were tenants living in the two houses, but the casita behind them was vacant. I was fielding calls every day and meeting people, complete strangers, out there in the hope of signing a lease with a new tenant. I didn’t want to kid myself into thinking it couldn’t happen to me. I didn’t want to think about how long I might lie on the ground before someone found me, my blood soaking into the red earth—without puppy witnesses.

“I know you’re sick of hearing from me about this, but it happened again this morning. Those cholos in the rock house drove off and left the gate wide open.”

I sat at my desk as I listened to my tenant, Luz, on the other end of the phone. She was mostly talking about how big a loser she found her neighbor, Michael Christian, to be. Michael was also our tenant. He lived with a roommate in the rock house next door to Luz. I shuffled through the mail as I listened to her monologue, peppered with racist remarks. I found it odd because at the time, I was running an ad in the newspaper for one of our rentals. We had three, all on one property near the Rio Grande, with a field and some old apple trees in the back. I called it the ranchette. William and I had bought it together with the intention of eventually moving out there. There were tenants living in the two houses, but the casita behind them was vacant. I was fielding calls every day and meeting people, complete strangers, out there in the hope of signing a lease with a new tenant. I didn’t want to kid myself into thinking it couldn’t happen to me. I didn’t want to think about how long I might lie on the ground before someone found me, my blood soaking into the red earth—without puppy witnesses.

“Hey Michael, sorry to bother you,” I said when he came to the door. “I’m supposed to meet someone in a few minutes to show the casita.”

Michael Christian looked at me like he was trying to be polite. He held the door open but did not step outside, nor invite me in. “I was out here yesterday. There were no cars here and the gate was wide open,” I said. He didn’t say anything. I took a step back and looked toward the gate.

“It’s open now. I’m not sure what’s going on with you guys, but I guess I should reiterate. Your security and the other tenants’ safety and security are important to us. We would prefer that you close and lock the gate on your way in and out, but if that’s too much trouble, please at least close it.”

“You know Miss,” he said, “I really feel that people are good at heart. I’ve lived here two years now, and I know a few people in this neighborhood. I see them walking on the road with their dogs. Kids pass by here on their ATVs on the way to the arroyo. These are not people who are going to rob anybody.”

I thought of the graffiti on the wall at the end of the road. I didn’t know who owned the property, but noticed that no one ever repainted the wall. The owner had given up and left it there. At the other end of the road was the Rio Grande, moving swiftly south, and across from it, the Santa Clara Pueblo.

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“I’m glad you feel comfortable here. I think this neighborhood is safe enough,” I said, although I wasn’t sure. “But I think it can’t hurt to give yourself the extra bit of security by closing the gate.”
His windows had iron bars on them. They were there when we bought the place and I had never had them removed. I’d thought about it, but concluded that people put bars on their windows after their home has been broken into, not before. If it had happened once, it could happen again.

Michael worked at the Chevrolet dealership in Española. I had called his supervisor there for a professional reference when he submitted his rental application to us. All I was really trying to find out was if he had a job, but I was told he was the top salesperson there. Nonetheless, he was always late with his rent and often didn’t pay the full amount, paying off the balance a week or two later. The rent was seven hundred fifty dollars a month, and even though he had a roommate, it was still a stretch for him.

“I don’t have much here,” he said. “But I think that if someone needs something badly enough to steal it, he may as well just take it.”

Okay,” I said. “But I think your neighbors would feel more comfortable with the gate closed. Please just try to be a good neighbor.”

The instructor’s name was Greg Gambini. He wore a work shirt loose—not tucked into his jeans—hiding the holster he wore on his belt. He was an ordinary looking guy, but he was self-assured. He spoke rapidly and had a lot to say. Something about him made you wake up every time he came into the room. There was some shop-talk like where to buy bullets. Everyone agreed on ammo. com. Then there was some legal talk about licensing and the fact that New Mexico doesn’t recognize certain states’ gun licenses. A large amount of time was devoted to safety warnings: always treat your gun as if it’s loaded and don’t ever point your gun at anything you don’t intend to hit, including what’s behind it.

“You should always, and I mean ALWAYS, do everything you can to de-escalate the situation you are in,” Greg said. “Drawing your firearm should only be done as a last resort. If you do it, make sure you are one hundred percent prepared to shoot. Your objective is to lower your attacker’s blood pressure quickly so that he will faint. Each successful shot with a nine millimeter pistol within twenty-one feet of your target will lower his blood pressure ten percent within the first few seconds of being hit.”

Before we took a break for lunch, Greg laid some holsters out on the table for us to look over and try on. They were black vinyl or blue or tan polyester. They had the look of those old fancy packs everyone wore for a while. There was one that went inside a purse and two or three that were to be worn under a shirt. There were several hip holsters.

“How about this one, Miss. Try it on,” William said, as he helped clip one of them around my shoulders. The holster part where the gun was supposed to go rested on my stomach.

“You think I’ve been working this midriff so I can hide a gun there?” I asked him.

He laughed, “It looks alright. You have some shirts you can wear with this.”

I tried to imagine the cold steel against my sternum. I thought of the people who get up every morning and clip on holsters as they get dressed—police, detectives, FBI and CIA agents. I took it off. “I’m sorry,” I said. “I will get this license, but there is no way I’m going to be carrying a gun.”

Everyone stopped talking and looked at me.

“I just don’t see how I’m going to accessorize it.”

After lunch, Greg covered some other topics: ear protection, eye protection, and the importance of taking care of guns so they don’t jam. He said a gun should be able to shoot a thousand rounds without a jam. Then he got on the subject of what to do in the event you actually do shoot someone.

“Make sure you always have your lawyer’s card in your wallet, and the number for the police on your cell phone’s speed dial. Once you are certain your attacker has been disabled, you call the police. You say ‘I’ve shot someone. He’s bleeding. I was defending myself.’ You do not take your eyes off your attacker. You say nothing more to the police other than exactly what happened. You call your lawyer right away. The police will always act like you are guilty. It’s how they are. But they are in the same situation all the time and they get it. After that, you can expect a fifty thousand-dollar lawsuit and about two years to straighten it all out. You pay the price but you are alive, and that’s the whole point.”

Before I met Luz, I met her husband Al, who came to look at our house with one of their cousins. The house had been vacant for two and half months. Al worked as a security guard in the Santa Fe watershed. He had been a Special Forces soldier in the army for years and since then had worked for several contractors. He had participated in every armed conflict our country has been involved with all the way back to Vietnam. I learned this within five minutes of meeting him. I didn’t ask why he was on hiatus from all the adrenaline. Maybe his nervous system was frayed and needed the tranquility of the Santa Fe National Forest to soothe it. When I told William they were interested in renting the house, he asked what they were like. I told him about Al.

“He was wearing a black T-shirt and watch cap. He has a big mustache and a big gut. He talks a lot. He told me about his samurai weapons collection. He was Special Forces in the army; he showed me his ID.”

“Forget it,” William said.

I knew his reservations. William and I understood each other when it came to the rental business. I thought the best-case scenario could be that Al would annoy the neighbors with all his talk. The worst would be that he’d hoard a bunch of weapons and turn the ranchette into some kind of anarchist compound like the one the FBI invaded in Waco, Texas. Nonetheless, the vacancy had drained us. We really needed money.

“If their references check out, we’re taking them,” I told him.

I wrote a list of questions and faxed it to their landlord at the apartment complex where they lived in Santa Fe. They were the usual things you want to know about tenants. Did they pay on time? Did they ever bounce a check? The last thing I asked was if the police had ever come to their apartment for any reason whatsoever. The answer faxed back was no.

They moved into the house and hung some of Al’s Japanese swords on the living room wall. He taught self-defense classes to friends on the weekends. They turned out to be not only friendly, but good tenants. Luz tended to pay the rent in advance, sometimes two or three months at a time. This was helpful to us. If we had a plumbing problem or the roof needed repairs, we were usually prepared for it thanks to Luz and Al.
I passed my written test for the concealed handgun license.

Day two of the class took place at the Rio Grande Gun Club. There wasn’t much to the place. It was on a hillside like any other, scattered with juniper trees. There were a few straw bales that we tacked targets to and a long wood shelf under an open-air roof, like a carport. I wore earplugs the whole time I was out there and when it was my turn to shoot, I wore William’s earmuffs as well. It was baking-hot that day, but I wore a long-sleeved T-shirt anyway and plastic glasses. Everything about the guns freaked me out. I kept thinking I was going to shoot myself in the leg somehow, even if the safety was on. I didn’t do too badly with the nine millimeter, although it took me a long time to load it.

We had to do a series of drills. They were things like: load two rounds with your eyes closed, then open them and shoot the target; or run to a mark, stop, draw, and shoot. There were several of these. Each time we got ready to do another one, Greg would say something like “You’re on a dark street right now,” or “Remember your target is moving toward you; you don’t have much time,” or “You’re hiding in a closet with 911 on the line; an intruder is walking through your house.”

To get a concealed handgun license in New Mexico, the applicant is required to pass a proficiency test for each caliber he intends to carry. The final part of the class focused on testing the students with their various guns. The Los Alamos security guards went to their cars and pulled big cases out of their trunks. They unlocked the cases and opened them on the ground at the line across from the targets. The shiny steel hardware glinted in the afternoon sun.

With great relief, I passed the test for the nine-millimeter pistol. I gave it to William and went to the truck to drink some water and read the newspaper. I kept the earplugs in as shots continued to explode on the line, the sound reverberating through the nearby hills. Every once in a while I’d look up and see William and Lyle. William looked different in his safety glasses and earmuffs, a look of wonder on his face as he shared a brotherly bond with his father and brothers. My parents had decided to escape the cold and dark of the Northeast December and were in Arizona for the month, so I decided to drive down there for an early holiday visit.

I got up in the middle of the night a few days after Thanksgiving and left the house at four a.m. so I could make it to Phoenix by lunchtime. I stopped at the Giant station on St. Francis Drive for coffee and see if there were any breakfast burritos. As I went through the glass door, the bright lights made me feel alert. A tired looking man, about my age, stood behind the counter by the register next to a food warmer with a few corn dogs in it. The lottery tickets were lined up behind him. I smiled and we nodded as he handed me a box of American Spirits. I was flat-out relieved that there hadn’t been a blood bath at the ranchette, but we now had some problems, starting with a five hundred dollar repair to the kitchen door. Worse, we had to file in court for nonpayment of rent, which was simple because he had not yet paid his rent. I filed the forms, and we got a court date scheduled for ten days later. I knew the judge would give him thirty days to move out, just in time for the holidays. Merry Christmas.

I felt like a jerk. He wanted to talk to me about it but I was vague with him. What kept me focused on seeing it through was the thought of how it all could have gone differently. In my mind, I kept seeing Luz reaching for one of those Japanese swords on the wall as a dark, faceless man reached for her throat.

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“But I practiced all day with the nine-millimeter,” I told him. “I’m done. I don’t have time to learn a new gun.”

“It’s super easy to load. You can do it,” he said. He went on with a convincing argument that we were there and that this was our chance to cover as many bases as we could. We should take advantage of the opportunity. He was right. As much as I did not enjoy any of it, I knew that this was a skill I should learn and that one day I might actually need to use it. I went back out to the line. The nine-millimeter was small and black. It’s the gun that detectives carry on TV crime shows. The revolver was old-fashioned looking, with a wide cylinder and a shiny barrel, like the guns the cowboys used in the old westerns.

Greg came over to test me. I loaded six bullets into the cylinder and aimed for the target. I had on the earmuffs, but thought for sure I had taken the earplugs out. I didn’t remember the .357 to be so loud. Shots blasted through the air like crashing bombs. The cylinder was empty and I could feel the earplugs wedged in my head, yet it seemed like the desert was exploding around me. I glanced around. The security guards were all on the line in their baseball caps and dark glasses, shooting .44 magnums and .454 Casulls, guns as big as my arm. I couldn’t see how they could ever possibly conceal them.

It finally happened on a Saturday that November. Five methheads, one carrying a baby, of all things, drove an old Pontiac Grand Prix south out of Española and down Lower San Pedro Road. They took a left onto our road and another left onto our property, as it was the only place on that stretch with an open gate. Luz was home. They were so out of their heads they actually parked next to her car. One of the men got out and went around back and kicked in her kitchen door. For a moment, she thought it was Al. She went into her kitchen and saw the guy, who couldn’t have been more than twenty-two years old, standing by her open refrigerator. Enraged, more than anything, she screamed, “Get the fuck out of here!” Luckily for her, he ran.

Al had been at Hacienda Hardware buying some light bulbs, five minutes away in San Pedro Plaza. He had wanted to go up a block to the Pueblo smoke shop for a carton of American Spirits, but somehow presciently went home instead. When he arrived, it took him less than a moment to assess the situation. He blocked the Pontiac with his truck, reached under the seat for his shotgun and managed to keep the five of them at his mercy until the police arrived and arrested them. I don’t know what he said to them during those minutes, but whatever it was scared them senseless. They were all crying by the time the cops got there.

It was a glorious moment for Al. He had been out of the game for so long. All those sleepy days in the Santa Fe watershed were lovely, but so boring.

I was flat-out relieved that there hadn’t been a blood bath at the ranchette, but we now had some problems, starting with a five hundred dollar repair to the kitchen door. Worse, we had to evict Michael Christian. I told Luz we had no proof that he or anyone from his household had left the gate open. However, I could not in good conscience allow him to continue living there. The only way to do it was to file in court for nonpayment of rent, which was simple because he had not yet paid his rent. I filed the forms, and we got a court date scheduled for ten days later. I knew the judge would give him thirty days to move out, just in time for the holidays. Merry Christmas.

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I got up in the middle of the night a few days after Thanksgiving and left the house at four a.m. so I could make it to Phoenix by lunchtime. I stopped at the Giant station on St. Francis Drive to fill the tank with gas and decided to go inside to get some coffee and see if there were any breakfast burritos. As I went through the glass door, the bright lights made me feel alert. A tired looking man, about my age, stood behind the counter by the register next to a food warmer with a few corn dogs in it. The lottery tickets were lined up behind him. I smiled and we nodded.
hello. There wasn’t anyone else in the store. The refrigerators were humming and country music came from a speaker somewhere. As I walked toward the coffee pots, I realized it was Faith Hill singing “Somebody Stand by Me.”

As I was filling my coffee cup, I heard the door jingle. I looked up to see a man in a Bozo the Clown wig walk into the store. His face was painted white with blue stars around his eyes, and a big red mouth. There was no clown suit; he was wearing a Levi's jacket with ripped blue jeans and high-top sneakers. Something wasn’t right about him. Inside his painted-on mouth his real mouth was pulled into a flat line. In that split second, I felt sure something was about to go down. I had my concealed handgun license in my wallet, but of course there was no gun hidden under my coat. The last thing Greg Gambini told us in the class was that none of it was worth a damn if we didn’t practice using a handgun until it became second nature. Somehow I never could bring myself to go out to that old junkyard near Lyle’s house to fire a bunch of rounds, aiming for that old car, or refrigerator, or whatever else lay among the rocks out there.

I glanced around and realized there was no one else in the store. Bozo walked toward the checkout counter. The cashier behind it shifted his weight and stood up straighter. His right shoulder hung a little lower than his left so that his shirt looked crooked. His mouth twitched and his face cleared as Bozo approached him. I suddenly felt faced with a huge responsibility that I was certainly about to fail to live up to. I should have made for the door, but I didn’t. I took two steps forward and froze in my tracks the moment Bozo reached the cashier.

“Brother,” he said, “give me a pack of American Spirits, the blue ones. It’s been a rough night.”

“Don’t I know it,” the cashier said as he took Bozo’s ten-dollar bill. He reached above his head for the cigarettes. I saw the familiar image clearly in the moment he handed the pack to the clown. It was blue as the afternoon sky with the black profile of the Indian in his headdress, peace pipe pointed toward the heavens. My throat twisted into a knot and my eyes filled with tears as I stood there next to the Little Debbies holding my coffee cup.

The cashier glanced at me and an expression of genuine concern came over his face. “Are you alright?” he asked.

“Oh yes,” I said, “I’m just not a morning person.”

“Don’t get ahead of yourself,” Bozo said. “It’s still the middle of the night.”

I wished them happy holidays, paid for my coffee, and got on the road. I-25 is always busy around the cities, but the stretch that passes through the pueblos is dark and silent before five a.m. By the time I reached the outskirts of Albuquerque, the sky was wiped clean of stars. I could see the morning light in my rear view mirror coming over the Sangre de Cristos, about to overtake me and everything else.

**Valerie**

*Esme-Michelle Watkins*

When I come back to the dorm from winter break, the new roommate is shaving her face in a cracked compact mirror. She hums, as she scrapes the razor against her cheek, a sad Korean tune I will never know. She doesn’t wet her face or apply any cream. There is no visible fuzz on her cheeks, no discernible sound as the razor grazes the skin. I don’t raise any of these points or ask any questions because I’m trying this new thing where I don’t judge people instantly or clutter the conversation with my curiousness. The new roommate tells me she was born Woo-Kyung Cho, but prefers to be called Valerie.

“Oh, I put a hand out for her to shake,” Valerie it is. I’m Aura.”

“I know,” she smiles, waving a thin sheet of paper bearing a UC Berkeley seal. “The university told me we would be rooming together.”

Woo-Kyung Cho, who is now Valerie, turns back to her compact and rolls a finger along her chin. She puckers her lips before she applies the razor. “This is my first semester at Berkeley,” she says not to me but to the compact.

I think to ask why she’s starting classes in the middle of the year, but Woo-Kyung-Valerie interjects. “I haven’t declared a major, but I’ve got designs on ethnic studies with a focus on the modern minority in Europe.”

She snaps the compact shut and asks about my major, in kind. I fill her in on my film courses, about my love of Fellini and Visconti.

“Miracle in Milan will always be a favorite,” she agrees quickly, pinning her hair into a tall bun. “And I simply adore Italian men, don’t you? All of my boyfriends have been Italian.” There is a small tattoo on the underside of Woo-Kyung-Valerie’s wrist, an infinity sign. It’s positioned next to a horn-shaped birthmark the color of weak tea.

We’re discussing my plans to study abroad in Venice when she pitches the razor in my trash bin. “So sorry,” she winc-es, “I don’t have my own yet.” I tell her it’s no problem and offer to help unpack a box of sweaters.

“You’re a sport,” she bows.

Within minutes we develop a system, a rhythm. I put the sweaters on hangers and Woo-Kyung-Valerie arranges them in her new closet. She tells me her father is some kind of diplomat in Korea, her mother a depressed kleptomaniac who mostly takes broach-es—hoards them, actually.

I ask a few questions about Korea and she becomes anxious, puts up a hand.

“My family is Korean but I don’t really identify with that place,” she shakes her head. “I’m what you might call a citizen of the world.” She claims her family has lived everywhere: Massachusetts, Benin, and Guatemala.

I pass the last sweater and pivot to a neutral topic.

“I’ve never been to Guatemala,” I offer conciliatorily, “but I just finished reading this fantastic Rigoberta Menchú biography. Her fight for women’s rights really resonates.”

Woo-Kyung-Valerie, who considers herself a Citizen of the World, sniffs and points to my music collection. “Are those CDs yours?” I nod and she floats over to my desk, thumbs through a stack of discs.

“Soul of Mischief,” she beams. “Excellent taste!”

She slides out the cover, asks if I remember where I was when I first heard ‘‘93 Til Infinity.” I am in midsentence when she picks up a photo of my brother Ellis and me. It’s a shot where his eyes appear to be a lighter blue than mine and I’m braiding his hair into a swirl of plaits. His hair is parted in the middle, a short afro.
One side is braided flat to his head; the other is curled and puffy, awaiting attention.

“So you braid.” She sits, cool. I admire the art.

“I don’t do it a lot,” I shrug. “Only when my brother asks.”

She studies the photo with renewed intensity. “Both of you are so fair-skinned.”

There is no question pending so I don’t comment. Instead I decide to ask about the shaving, a fair exchange since she feels free to comment on my skin tone.

“Valerie, I notice that you—”

“Wait,” she stops, flicking her forefinger against the photo.

“What’s up, Aura?”

“I know! It’s a fine moment,” I say. “So you braid.”

“Be proud, Aura. It’s okay to be exactly who you are.”

I glance at her without blinking and say nothing. I don’t feel compelled to tell Woo-Kyung-Valerie—who apparently enjoys cornrows, Souls of Mischief, and blurting out whatever she’s thinking—that my mother is Sicilian. I don’t feel compelled to tell her that I’m not black or white, that my heritage spans continents and cultures.

“I don’t do it a lot,” I shrug. “Only when my brother asks.”

“Wait.” She stops, flicking her forefinger against the photo.

“Are you mixed? No offense, but you and your brother have got to be mixed. I spent some time in Africa and I’ll bet a hundred dollars you’re not all black.”

I glare at her without blinking and say nothing. I don’t feel compelled to tell Woo-Kyung-Valerie—who apparently enjoys cornrows, Souls of Mischief, and blurting out whatever she’s thinking—that my mother is Sicilian. I don’t feel compelled to admit this even though she is willing to lose money to prove it.

I inch closer and lean in until my lips nearly brush her ear.

“Same to you, Woo-Kyung,” I whisper.

Southwest School of Art Offers BFA Degree

adapted from http://www.swschool.org

The Southwest School of Art, long a San Antonio fixture along the River Walk, will begin offering a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in 2013, in conjunction with its other programs. With this move, SSA will add its name to the growing list of degree-granting institutions of higher education in the Alamo City. With its exclusive focus on art, however, the school will remain distinctive among area institutions.

According to its website, the BFA degree program at the Southwest School of Art is designed to involve students in the process of making as a form of inquiry and discovery, with equal emphasis on content and craft. Students will learn to value both traditional and innovative approaches and to move freely between the creation of one-of-a-kind works and applied design.

By learning about the materials and skills employed in 2- and 3-dimensional design and an array of art forms—including ceramics, drawing, fibers, metals, painting, photography, and printmaking—students will acquire the breadth of knowledge needed to formulate and communicate their ideas. The program will also encourage students to concentrate in one area by their senior year and will prepare them to succeed as working artists.

There was no mention of the use of “measure” in poetry; not one of them said a thing about the death of the iambic pentameter in America; they spoke about themselves, not about poetry. The Beat Generation is no longer about poetry. The Beat Generation is now about everything. —Gregory Corso, Variations on a Generation

The American Scholar (excerpt)

Ralph Waldo Emerson

The theory of books is noble. The scholar of the first age received into him the world around; brooded thereon; gave it the new arrangement of his own mind, and uttered it again. It came into him, life; it went out from him, truth. It came to him, short-lived actions; it went out from him, immortal thoughts. It came to him, business; it went from him, poetry. It was dead fact; now, it is quick thought. It can stand, and it can go. It now endures, it now flies, it now inspires. Precisely in proportion to the depth of mind from which it issued, so high does it soar, so long does it sing.… Each age, it is found, must write its own books; or rather, each generation for the next succeeding. The books of an older period will not fit this.

Yet hence arises a grave mischief. The sacredness which attaches to the act of creation, — the act of thought, — is transferred to the record. The poet chanting, was felt to be a divine man: henceforth the chant is divine also. The writer was a just and wise spirit: henceforward it is settled, the book is perfect; as love of the hero corrupts into worship of his statue. Instantly, the book becomes noxious: the guide is a tyrant. The sluggish and perverted mind of the multitude, slow to open to the incursions of Reason, having once so opened, having once received this book, stands upon it, and makes an outcry, if it is disparaged. Colleges are built on it. Books are written on it by thinkers, not by Man Thinking; by men of talent, that is, who start wrong, who set out from accepted dogmas, not from their own sight of principles. Meek young men grow up in libraries, believing it their duty to accept the views, which Cicero, which Locke, which Bacon, have given, forgetful that Cicero, Locke, and Bacon were only young men in libraries, when they wrote these books.

Hence, instead of Man Thinking, we have the bookworm. Hence, the book-learned class, who value books, as such; not as related to nature and the human constitution, but as making a sort of Third Estate with the world and the soul. Hence, the restorers of readings, the emendators, the bibliomaniacs of all degrees.

Books are the best of things, well used; abused, among the worst. What is the right use? What is the one end, which all means go to effect? They are for nothing but to inspire. I had better never see a book, than to be warped by its attraction clean out of my own orbit, and made a satellite instead of a system. The one thing in the world, of value, is the active soul. This every man is entitled to; this every man contains within him, although, in almost all men, obstructed, and as yet unborn. The soul active sees absolute truth; and utters truth, or creates. In this action, it is genius; not the privilege of here and there a favorite, but the sound estate of every man. In its essence, it is progressive. The book, the college, the school of art, the institution of any kind, stop with some past utterance of genius. This is good, say they, — let us hold by this. They pin me down. They look backward and not forward. But genius looks forward: the eyes of man are set in his forehead, not in his hindhead: man hopes: genius creates. Whatever talents may be, if the man create not, the pure efflux of the Deity is not his; — cinders and smoke there may be, but not yet flame. There are creative manners, there are creative actions, and creative words; manners, actions, words, that is, indicative of no custom or authority, but springing spontaneous from the mind’s own sense of good and fair.
The evening of his departure more than two dozen relatives and friends congregated in the living room of Maryam’s house to bid Cyrus farewell. Food, drink, music, and garrulous talk of weather and politics swirled around him while Reza drew his attention with a promise for a better chess challenge on his next visit. Cyrus asked what he could send him as a gift from the U.S. “I’d love to read English fiction, especially anything by Hemingway, and then I’d like to read about the American Civil War.”

“There are hundreds of books about the American Civil War,” Cyrus said. “I’ll send you a few. But you should know that Lincoln’s initial goal was to save the union, and the abolition of slavery was his secondary cause.”

They joined the rest of the family who were discussing Jimmy Carter’s effect on Iranian politics. Habib predicted greater freedom of the press because the Western countries exerted a lot of pressure on the Shah.

“The American President has a deep commitment to human rights,” Habib argued. “Frankly, it will be good for our country to have more democracy. That will make the arguments of radical groups less popular and limit their destructive activities.”

“Democracy will enhance the rights of women, too,” Maryam added.

“I am tired of listening to BBC broadcasts,” Bahram complained. “We need local radio or television that broadcasts uncensored local news and programs twenty-four hours a day.”

Tooraj nodded in agreement. “It’s simply not enough to hear a few minutes of unbiased news and that only in the wee hours of the morning. Besides, sometimes the signal from London is too weak and other times I don’t wake up in time.”

“Doctor, the weather isn’t the only problem,” Reza joked. “Your radio may need fresh batteries.”

Cyrus and Tooraj laughed, but Habib insisted sternly, “We have plenty of news programs already.”

The trio of Reza, Bahram, and Shirin were conversing busily in a corner about their schools and the progress of their studies for the National University Entrance Examination. Reza was confident he would be ready by summer and that all three of them would score well.

But Bahram was worried. “A good score is not enough. We need to end up in the very top percentile so we can get into the college of our choice.”

Shirin was more fortunate; her parents were willing and able to finance her university studies abroad. “I hope to score well.” She looked at Bahram. “I don’t want to go away except if you come along too.”

“Going where?” Bahram asked.

“To Europe,” Shirin said. “Let’s go away this summer.”

Reza commented drily, “She wants you to be away when the storm breaks.”

Cyrus ambled over and joined the discussion. “Having a solid grasp of the English language will help you a lot to get into an American university,” Cyrus advised them.

Shirin was already enrolled in classes at the American-Iranian Cultural Society two nights a week. “My plan is to come to America for postgraduate education after I get my engineering degree here from Tehran University,” she said.

“Great idea,” Bahram said. “We will go together.”

“How difficult is it to get accepted at a top engineering school such as MIT?” Shirin asked Cyrus.

“Top U.S. universities are very competitive and accept only the best foreign students. You have to know English very well and your academic record must be impeccable.”

“Aren’t we all excellent students?” Bahram asked Shirin and Reza, who laughed and nodded in agreement.

Cyrus turned to Reza, who had been quiet and had not asked any questions about education in America. “How about you, Reza, what’s your plan B?”

“My home is here and I’ll get all my education right here in Iran.”

“But you are always welcome to visit me.”

“I’ll be there in a flash if you send me a round-trip ticket.”

Reza was from a large family. He had six siblings and his family could not afford the luxury of sending anybody abroad. His father was a high school teacher whose salary barely covered their basic living expenses; Reza’s education in Tehran had imposed a burden on his family and had forced his father to take on extra jobs in the afternoon and evening.

The energy and vigor of these three bright teens deeply impressed Cyrus. All three were only high school seniors, but they were motivated, dreaming fearlessly about their future, and planning their lives with ambition and hope; they exuded an aura of optimism and excitement.

This was his last day in Iran, and Cyrus was overcome by ambivalent feelings. On the one hand, he was sad to part from friends and relatives, but on the other hand, he was happy to return to the States. By the end of this two-week trip to Iran he was missing his wife and family in Texas, his patients, his colleagues and employees at his medical practice, and the tennis matches with his buddies; the backyard cooking and the smell of grilled meat, the taste of the juicy steak cooked rare served with steaming-hot baked potatoes. He missed freshly cut basil, chives, oregano from his vegetable garden, and the cool swimming pool and the prized antique Texas roses in front of the house. He missed the soft aroma of those roses, the poignant fragrance of oregano, basil, and rosemary plants, and he missed the evening walks with his wife, Emily, their quiet conversations on the patio.

Some evenings when the weather was clear, Emily would arrange a tray of cheeses, and he would bring freshly cut basil, sliced sourdough bread, and a bottle of wine from their small wine cellar under the staircase. They would snack and talk about the day, while the children were in their rooms doing homework. Later after dinner when the kids had gone to bed, they would listen to classical music or soft jazz and read, and occasionally they would go to the master bedroom earlier than usual and make love. He missed all those things, but most of all he missed Emily, her soft embrace, her warm breath, and sweet lips.

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The flight from Tehran was scheduled to depart late in the evening. His plans for the last day had included some last-minute
shopping during the day and packing in the afternoon. Reza had driven him around all afternoon for shopping and filled his ears with recent and unsubstantiated news.

Reza kept returning to one ominous sounding news item. “The salaries of government employees, teachers, and workers have just been frozen. Can you imagine, with the present double-digit inflation, what a wage freeze is going to do to everybody, including my family?” he asked. “I feel sorry for my father.”

“The Shah makes these decisions based on the recommendations of his economic advisers.” Cyrus said.

“Yes, that’s the problem. Foreign advisors are dictating everything. Our problems require domestic solutions,” Reza said.

“The Shah’s finance minister was educated in the U.S. His health minister was a graduate of Johns Hopkins Medical School. His army chief was trained in Texas, and his foreign minister, a lawyer, had attended many workshops at Harvard University. They are well educated in foreign issues but have forgotten our own people and their needs.”

Cyrus did not want to discuss the value of American graduate education, but he had heard about some relaxing of political restraints. Hoping to alleviate social unrest and weaken the opposition movement, the Shah had freed a small number of innocuous political prisoners, except of course no communists or fundamentalist Islamic leaders. The Nationalist Front Party had been told that if they supported the Shah’s programs they could reopen their offices and publish their newsletters.

“What is the Nationalist Front going to do?” Cyrus wondered.

“They won’t support the Shah’s programs.” Reza dismissed the idea. “It’s too late for the Shah to put a stop to the people’s revolt. Why would he want to offer these mediocre concessions?”

“It could be a good beginning for democracy in Iran,” Cyrus said. “He still needs the support of the people for his austerity programs. By granting some political freedoms he avoids widespread opposition to his economic plans.”

“The Shah is in trouble politically, economically, and internationally. He’s seeking another chance to regain political stability, but I am afraid it is too late,” Reza said. “As has been said, the theriac arrives after the King’s demise.”

Reza was convinced the Shah was in serious difficulties; militant Marxist and religious groups were getting stronger by the month. Meanwhile, secular and nationalist parties had begun to recognize that peaceful opposition was ineffective and actually counter-productive to their own popularity and existence.

“The bubble of this Iranian kingdom that has lasted over 25 hundred years is ready to burst,” Reza announced.

“Beware of the subsequent chaos. When and if that finally occurs, neither you nor anybody else can know or anticipate what will really happen thereafter.” Cyrus said. “You may end up having a leader like Stalin or some saber-rattling mullah.”

At the traffic light, Reza pulled a copy of that day’s Kayhan, the major Tehran daily newspaper, from the pocket in the car door. “Look! It’s all about the Shah’s family and his puppets.”

On the cover, Cyrus saw a large headline announcing His Majesty’s speech about the Iranian economy. Another article described the prime minister’s speech in the Majlis about inflation. Other sections were dedicated to the finance minister’s annual report to the parliament; the visit of Ashraf, the Shah’s sister, to France; that of the Shah’s brother, Prince Reza, to Hawaii; funeral service announcements; advertisements; and a large number of bankruptcy notices. There were no editorial articles or letters to the editor reflecting the recent clashes between demonstrators and police.

At the next stop, Reza lifted up a corner of the car’s floor mat, pulled out some tightly wrapped papers, and handed them to Cyrus. “Now take a look at these instead.”

Cyrus unfolded the papers and saw a newsletter published by the Mojaheddin group: large headlines screamed about anti-government demonstrations in several Iranian cities. A front page article covered the government employee’s strike protesting the Shah’s economic policies. The back page quoted the central committee of the Mojaheddin group saying they intended to liberate Iran from the monarchy and establish an Islamic-socialist government. The editorial column warned that the only way to achieve a free and just society in Iran was to defeat the Shah in an armed struggle. The author predicted the military would fall apart and join the Iranian people in their fight against the Shah when they faced a popular uprising. He praised other underground organizations, such as the Fadayan, for staging armed raids against government buildings, bank offices, and police stations, and listed the places that had been hit by various underground organizations during the previous week. The list included the bank near Maryam’s home. An editorial on the second page promoted an Islamic government for Iran. On the last page there was an article regarding women in a free society entitled “Women Must Regain Their Proper Respectful Status.”

“This is a step in the wrong direction,” Cyrus suggested. “Such a backward movement will return Iran to the Dark Ages.”

Reza disagreed. Cyrus realized it was useless to debate this issue with him. He felt sorry for Reza’s ignorance of the dangers of theocratic societies through the ages. But Reza took the older man’s silence as a sign of acceptance.

He followed the slow traffic toward the city center and parked near a row of shops. He refolded the paper and replaced it under the car mat. They locked the car and walked to the shopping area where Cyrus bought several gifts: two silver dishes, a finely woven tablecloth, a vase, a carved wooden tray, and a beautifully handcrafted wooden chess set.

When Reza dropped Cyrus at Maryam’s home, he said, “Please, don’t tell Habib about the newsletter. He doesn’t understand the people’s problems and confuses all anti-Shah groups with terrorist cells.”

“Don’t worry; I won’t tell anyone. But beware of the clergy. They will take over at the end of the day; they’re worse than the communists.” Cyrus warned.

They are hiding in the mosques holding the Holy Book.
The mass of people are pleading for relief, for rain or snow.
The snakes are crawling into the pulpits.

Exhausted from the long day, Cyrus showered and took a long nap. It was late afternoon when he heard Habib calling him. He found Habib sitting comfortably on the sofa in the living room, reading the daily newspaper. Logs were burning gently in the fireplace, the stereo system was broadcasting a soft Persian melody, and Habib was sipping vodka on the rocks.

“How was your day?” Habib greeted Cyrus.
“I went shopping with Reza. The traffic snarled and we moved as slow as a giant turtle.”

“I’m sure Reza kept you busy with his politics,” Habib mused.

“He is a fool. He is busy with everything except his coursework. He would be far better off attending to his studies.”

Cyrus nodded.

“Don’t believe what he says about Iranian politics.” Habib reiterated. “The Shah will control inflation by punishing those usurious profit takers.” Habib’s voice was now full of confidence, authority. “My dear doctor, we have a major advantage compared to the U.S. Your president cannot implement any program without approval from Congress, and by the time it is all approved, some months later, it could be too late. But here in this country, the Shah can act quickly without any delay.”

“But also without any debate.”

“He doesn’t need one. Thanks to his advisers the Shah will make the right decisions.”

Bahram had returned from school and promptly joined their discussion. “My dear uncle, the Shah wants to control inflation by punishing the small business owners who have to increase their prices to offset runaway expenses. How can that solve our problems?”

“No, Bahram, you’ve got it wrong. These people want to unfairly inflate their profits,” Habib said. “They cheat. The Shah is going to stop them.”

Bahram’s face reflected total disagreement, but he knew it would be inappropriate to argue with his uncle, especially as a student and guest in his house, so he excused himself and went upstairs.

H habi got up to get more drinks for himself and for Cyrus. Habib took the drinks and walked back into the living room, where he and Cyrus played a game of backgammon. As before, Cyrus lost quickly and Habib with jovial hilarity advised him to enroll in a refresher course to learn the game. They had another drink and talked about investment opportunities in Tehran. When Habib noticed that Cyrus was not interested in local investments, he changed the subject back to politics. But Cyrus was more interested in the state of the arts, especially poetry and the performing arts in Tehran. He wondered what had happened to the Shah’s dream to build an opera house as grand as the Paris Opera.

Habib laughed, “Are you talking about Rooadak Hall? That was completed two years ago and they are performing theatre, opera, and sometimes classical western concerts there.”

“Have you been there?”

“Of course not. I can’t stand those fat ladies who simply park and bark.” Habib dismissed the very idea.

Habib was not really interested in any discussion but politics. Cyrus excused himself and went upstairs to visit Bahram in his room. Bahram was listening to a cassette tape. The music was very low and initially Cyrus didn’t hear it clearly, but soon he recognized the piece, Tchaikovsky’s Violin Concerto in D Major. The sound came from a scratchy monophonic record, yet with all this imperfection the music was still beautiful and gripped his soul.

“This is the best I can do in this house. Habib hates classical music, and when he is home no one can play this type of music on the big stereo downstairs,” Bahram explained.

Cyrus nodded and sat at the edge of the bed, appreciating Bahram’s love of classical music. But as before, the conversation shifted to economics and its fallout on politics.

“If anything, in my view, the Shah’s government is going to fail in curbing inflation,” Bahram speculated. “I think the current situation will get worse and super-inflation will hurt the Shah’s government more than any other issue.”

“Look, we have the same problem in the U.S.,” Cyrus argued.

“What do you mean?”

“I don’t think President Carter can win a second term unless inflation in the United States is under control and the economy improves drastically.”

“So you have no choice but to change the government,” Bahram said. “Here we can’t do that. The only solution to our social and economic issues is a revolt against the Shah.”

“But Habib claims the Shah will surely overcome the current difficulties.” Cyrus said.

“Habib is dead wrong. After all, as a senior officer at the Iranian Central Bank he has to believe the system will work.”

Cyrus brushed aside Bahram’s objection. “Come on, Bahram. Your uncle knows more about inflation than you and I together.”

“Yes, but bankers don’t know anything about the people’s social problems.”

“So the people are waiting for a big storm to wash away the Shah’s government?”

“We’ll have a revolution.”

“And who would lead it? Are you thinking it could be Ayatollah Khomeini?”

Bahram waved that off. “Khomeini is not interested in running the country. He’s just a religious leader who hates the Shah and supports any anti-Shah group as long as they back his personal vendetta against the Shah. He wants to get rid of the entire Pahlavi dynasty.”

“He’s unyielding now and he’ll be relentless later,” Cyrus said. “You see, he has pursued this goal since 1945, for thirty long years, ever since he was a young theology student.”

“He’s just an ayatollah. He can’t be a political or a revolutionary leader.”

“But what if the people ask him to lead the country?”

“That would never happen. We don’t want a religious society. Anyhow, he couldn’t govern this country.”

“You may be right, but the mullahs seem to be the most organized group around.”

For a moment Bahram struggled to describe Ayatollah Khomeini’s role in Iranian politics.

Finally he conceded, “It is true. As a religious leader he could unite the different anti-Shah groups. And yes, he could help the Iranians to topple the Shah.”

“And then what? What will happen after that?”

“He will return to his religious quarters in Qum. And we will build a democratic society run by intellectuals and secular nationalists. We will have free elections, free press, and respect for human rights.”

The only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars. —Jack Kerouac, On the Road
San Antonio Small Presses

PECAN GROVE PRESS

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Established in 1988, Pecan Grove Press is sponsored by The Louis J. Blume Library of St. Mary’s University. The press publishes books and chapbooks of fine poetry and, very rarely, short works of prose. PGP also publishes a regular chapbook series for students at St. Mary’s University in San Antonio, Texas. Among the twelve poetry collections published by Pecan Grove Press in 2011 are new books by San Antonio’s Bonnie Lyons (Bedrock), Austin’s Scott Wiggerman (Presence), Austin’s Kurt Heinzelman (The Names They Found There), and Lubbock’s Jacqueline Kolosov (Hourglass). H. Palmer Hall’s own new collection of short stories, Into the Thicket, was published in 2011 by Ink Brush Press.

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Bedrock by Bonnie Lyons

Bonnie Lyons’s first full-length book of poems, In Other Words, was published by Pecan Grove Press in 2004. Her chapbooks, Hineni (2003) and Meanwhile (2005), were both published by Finishing Line Press. She is also the author of Henry Roth: The Man and His Work and co-author of Passion and Craft, interviews with fiction writers. A professor of English at the University of Texas at San Antonio, she has received teaching, creative writing, and research awards from the university. She has taught as a Fulbright professor at the Aristotelian University in Thessaloniki and at the Central and Autonóma Universities in Barcelona, and has also been a Fulbright lecturer at Athens, Rome, Florence, Haifa, and Tel Aviv.

Presence by Scott Wiggerman

Presence is Scott Wiggerman’s second volume of poetry, the long-awaited follow-up to Vegetables and Other Relationships. Wiggerman is the chief editor of Dos Gatos Press in Austin, where he has co-edited the annual Texas Poetry Calendar for the past seven years. He has also edited Big Land, Big Sky, Big Hair, an anthology of Texas-themed poetry, and recently co-edited Wingbeats: Exercises and Practice in Poetry, a collection of poetry-writing exercises from teaching poets across the country.

The Names They Found There by Kurt Heinzelman

Kurt Heinzelman co-founded and for ten years edited the award-winning journal The Poetry Miscellany; he is currently editor-at-large for the Bat City Review as well as editor-in-chief of Texas Studies in Literature and Language (TSLL). He has been a multiple nominee for the Pushcart Prize; his first two books of poetry, The Halfway Tree (2000) and Black Butterflies (2004), were both finalists for Poetry Book of the Year from the Texas Institute of Letters. A scholar and translator, he also serves on the Board of Directors of the Dylan Thomas Prize in Swansea, Wales. He lives in Austin, Texas with his wife, Susan Sage Heinzelman.

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It is the late ’60s in Austin, Texas, and Theo Isaac is grappling with being both recently widowed and retired from a professorship he loved. Rose Davis, a student from his distant past, returns to Austin after her non-conformist life in Paris falls apart. Together they find that discovering unexpected futures is not just for the young. At the heart of it all is the Elisabet Ney sculpture museum where Theo has taken refuge from life. Carolyn Osborn is at her best as she tells a beautiful, witty tale of human renewal sculpted within a metaphor.

Sarah Bird calls Contrary People “a novel of lyrical stateliness from a master storyteller. Her subject this time is no less than that last great human lesson which we all must learn: how to face death while, as her engaging hero, Theo Isaac discovers, still embracing life.”

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every 4th Wednesday – 6 to 9 PM
Poetry & Arts Events in San Antonio

DISCLAIMER: All venue information listed has been provided by third parties. These venues have not been verified. It is the sole responsibility of parties interested in attending these venues to verify the validity of the post.


2nd Tuesdays 7-9 pm – Awaken the Sleeping Poet at the Twig, 200 E. Grayson, Ste. 124, Pearl Brewery (210) 826-6411, Featured poets & open mic. Host: Floyd L. Lamrouex.

Tuesdays 6-9 pm – Jazz Poet Society – Guadalupe Street Coffee, 1320 Guadalupe St.– (210) 573-5115. Bring poetry and songs and work with other poets and songwriters to present works on stage. A drum circle accompanies poets.


Tuesdays 10:30 pm – Puro Slam–The Heights–9315 N. Broadway (just north of 410). Weekly open mic certified by the National Poetry Slam allows poets to deliver their work and get heckled. DJ Donnie Dee spins before and after the show. Sign up begins at 9:30 pm. Slam begins @ 10:30 pm. For more information visit www.puroslam.com.

1st & 3rd Wednesdays 7-9 pm – Barnes & Noble, Ingram Festival, 6065 NW Loop 410 (same side as Ingram Mall). Features and open mic. (210) 522-1340. Host: Josie Mixon.

Every Fourth Wednesday – Barnes & Noble, The Shops at La Cantera, 15900 La Cantera Parkway, Bldg. 27, San Antonio, TX 78256. Host: Voices de la Luna: 6 pm Poetry Workshop / 7 pm Featured Guest / 8 pm Open Mic.

Thursdays 6:30-9:30 pm – South Presa Bar and Grill – Open mic: poetry, music, and storytelling Host: Andi.

Last Thursday of Each Month 7–9 pm – Awaken the Sleeping Poet – Features and open mic – Northwoods Barnes & Noble, 18030 HWY 281 N, Suite #140 (281 & 1604)-(210) 490-0411. Host: Floyd L. Lamrouex

2nd Saturday 7–9 pm – Gallista – Features and open mic, Gallista Gallery and Art Studio, 1913 S. Flores – (210) 212-8606. Host: Thom E.

3rd Saturday 1-3 pm – San Antonio Poets Association – Monthly at Bethany Congregational Church – 500 Pilgrim Dr.

Poetry & Arts Places in San Antonio

“A poem … begins as a lump in the throat, a sense of wrong, a homesickness, a lovesickness. … It finds the thought and the thought finds the words.” Robert Frost (1874–1963)

BOTANICAL GARDEN—The facility includes 33 acres of formal gardens, pools, fountains, and natural areas; Native Texas Trail, Lucille Halsell Conservatory. www.sabot.org

CARVER COMMUNITY CULTURAL CENTER—This venue traces its historic roots back some 85 years. It is both a gallery for contemporary art exhibits and a theater for performing artists. www.thecarver.org

GUADALUPE CULTURAL ARTS CENTER—The center is dedicated to the development, preservation, and promotion of Mexican-American arts. www.guadalupeculturalarts.org

INSTITUTE OF TEXAN CULTURES—The Institute is concerned with the people who produced Texas events—people who created the robust kaleidoscope that is Texas today. www.texancultures.com

JAZZ AT THE LANDING—NPR’s acclaimed radio show, Riverwalk Jazz, is produced in San Antonio at The Landing, one of the country’s oldest jazz clubs. www.riverwalkjazz.org

LA VILLITA—This restored Mexican village captures the charm of the past amid narrow streets and authentic adobe houses with arts and crafts shops. wwwlavillita.com

MAJESTIC THEATRE—Opened in 1929 and restored in 1989 as a performing arts center, the Majestic is said to be one of the finest “atmospheric” theaters ever built. www.majesticempire.com

McNAY ART MUSEUM—The mission of the McNay Art Museum is to maintain an art museum on the premises of the estate of Mrs. McNay for the advancement and enjoyment of modern and early art, and for the educational advantage of the public. www.mcnyart.org

MEXICAN CULTURAL INSTITUTE—This venue includes exhibits of contemporary Mexican artists. portal.sre.gob.mx/culturamexsaing/

SAN ANTONIO MUSEUM OF ART—This six-building complex of renovated historic buildings, opened in 1981, focuses on art of the Americas, past and present, but also houses Egyptian, Greek, Roman, and East Asian collections. wwwsamuseum.org

SAN PEDRO PLAYHOUSE—Call the box office for tickets and more information: (210) 733-7258. wwwsanpedroplayhouse.com

SAN ANTONIO SYMPHONY—The mission of the San Antonio Symphony is to inspire, educate, and entertain the people of, and visitors to, San Antonio and South Texas through the performance of live music. www.sasymphony.org

SOUTHWEST SCHOOL OF ART—Housed in the city’s only remaining example of French Provincial architecture, the Craft Center was established as an alternative art school at the site in 1971. www.sswschool.org

WITTE MUSEUM OF HISTORY AND SCIENCE—Extensive exhibits cover natural history and natural science of Texas. Rebuilt on grounds are four early Texas houses and a furnished log cabin.

For more Poetry & Arts Places in San Antonio, go to wwwvoicesdelaluna.com.

Voices Mission Statement

Voices de la Luna publishes a quarterly poetry and arts magazine in four formats, focusing on writers and artists of South Texas. The organization is committed to use its leverage to inspire the youth, promote poetry and arts through their involvement, and use the magazine as a platform for all poets and artists to share their work with others, and it is dedicated to use poetry and arts both for educational and healing purposes in the communities.