CROSSTIMBERS
A MULTICULTURAL, INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL

THE UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND ARTS OF OKLAHOMA
C H I C K A S H A
In the Cross Timbers region the hardwood forest merges with the Great Plains. In this band running down the middle of the United States, flora and fauna of both areas can be found in surprising proximity. Only a few feet from tall bluestem grass are members of the orchid family. Dark oak trees with mossy bark flourish over prickly pear. Unlike that abrupt change where the last of the trees disappear as the mountains rise beyond where things will grow, the Cross Timbers is often mile upon mile of alternating woodland and grassland terrain. But the region is not limited to these natural phenomena. The cultural development of any such area will reflect both environments.

In Oklahoma the mixture is peculiarly rich in that Native Americans from the eastern United States were forcibly relocated to what was then called Indian Territory while native tribes of the northern plains were pushed southward by the destruction of the buffalo herds which had sustained them. Black slaves, now freed, found their way westward in hopes of finding freedom to build for themselves a place in the sun. Then, at the opening of the twentieth century, a European-based culture with its newly created upheavals of steel age technology entered the plains. In the last third of the century, people from Asia began to form substantial communities in the urban areas, and Mexicans and Mexican-Americans became an increasing factor in the work force.

The Cross Timbers, a land of mixture, in which ecologies and people mingle and connect, makes a good metaphor for a certain kind of education, one in which disciplines cross and enrich each other, art and ideas are welcomed from many cultures, and the liberal arts find rich soil in which to flourish.

END MATTER

80 Contributors, Editors, Call for Submissions
Editor’s Introduction
BY INGRID SHAFER

No matter what the content of any particular issue of Crosstimbers, the overall approach is always interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary, a weaving together of various colored strands in an attempt to illuminate that which can only fleetingly be captured in word, formula, dogma, or image. We seek to show unity beneath diversity, to lay bare the connecting pathways, the “synapses,” to explore countless possible responses to the question of what it means to be human and equally countless ways human beings have defined themselves, their worlds, their purpose, and the Infinite throughout the ages—issues that get at the core of the liberal arts.

We are not embarrassed to ponder the “Big Questions” or to offer diverse and even contradictory responses to those questions. Fundamentally, Crosstimbers is a journal of thought, expressed in poetry, story, scholarship, science, and the visual arts, a publication that seeks less to offer permanent answers than to open windows to expanding horizons.

This issue of Crosstimbers began with our call for contributions somehow related to the general topic of “beauty” from a broad spectrum of disciplinary perspectives. At the time, we had already accepted Ling E. Teo’s story “In Transit,” her companion piece to “Handicap,” a story we published in the previous issue of Crosstimbers. We had also asked Cecil Lee, founder and long-time editor of Crosstimbers, to write an op-ed article based on his decades of teaching. We had decided to combine disciplines in an interview with Oklahoma artist-poet-sculptor-dancer Dena Madole, photographs of Dena’s sculptures of mythic female figures, and poems that had been inspired by her work.

After Zeina Beck submitted a series of wondrous Beirut poems and suggested Rola Khayatt’s photographs to complement the poetry, our theme began to broaden beyond beauty, though the poems and images were certainly beautiful. By then we had realized that our “real” theme was what it had always been—the meaning of being human, with all that entails—beauty, love, change, and loss. Rob Vollmar suggested a review of Rabih Alameddine’s 513-page novel The Hakawati, as well as an interview with Yahia Lababidi, an internationally acclaimed aphorist, poet, and essayist with roots in Lebanon and Egypt.

As Beirut came into focus, we saw that this city, along with The Hakawati, could serve as a master metaphor for this entire issue. In fact, I wished I were still teaching a course in US-AO’s World Thought and Culture sequence, so I could have students do research on the Phoenician city of Beroth, now the capital of Lebanon, with a name that can be traced to the Canaanite word for “wells.” The city was already mentioned in a letter by the king of Byblos to Pharaoh Akhenaten in the 14th century BCE. We could talk about the connections between “city” in general, and civilization. An entire term could be spent exploring, and enjoying Alameddine’s novel, a multidimensional tapestry, woven on the warp of Osama al-Kharrat’s return to his native Beirut, after a quarter century abroad, to join family and friends at his dying father’s hospital bed. Their stories provide the many-colored threads of the weft, along with fairy tales, legends, and myths from the Middle East and beyond, the whole spanning the globe and ranging across the millennia, from Abraham to the present.

“In Transit” complements The Hakawati. The story focuses on Kirk Chuan, a Malaysian who has studied law in England, remained in London, and become a successful lawyer. He considers himself an “outernational” whose original nationality now feels alien, one of “the new people in the world—the people who did not carry with them the weight of family histories and social ties—the people who could live free and make their own lives.” Like Alameddine’s Osama al-Kharrat, Kirk travels home in order to be at a dying parent’s bedside. Unlike Alameddine, Teo introduces no vast cast of characters. This is the story of Kirk coming to terms with mortality: “Like his mother, Kirk was in transit, both traversing planes they barely knew, infiltrating places of discomfort, being reshaped into new, unknown entities.” Kirk watches in horror as coffins are being fed into furnaces in the Buddhist cremation ceremony and thinks, “So this was what life had come down to, . . ., fragile shells destined for the burner.”

“In Transit” is the final work in this issue of Crosstimbers. It brings to the surface an underlying theme of the issue—change, transition, loss. If we read the journal in a linear fashion, from page 3 to page 79 (temporarily forgetting the “End Matter”), especially after a section on war, the end may seem grim.

However, we can also read the text as if it were presented in a circle, and return to the first story, River Adams’ “She will be Rose,” another family history, this time of a Jewish protagonist continued on p.55
She Will Be Rose

BY RIVER ADAMS

I knew this thing today, this thing that would define the rest of my life. I knew it in the sharp light of mirror lamps, this morning in the bathroom, staring at my own face. We rarely see the whole of our faces. Mostly we come to a mirror through the day and check—hair looks funny after the night, another gray on the temple, teeth mercifully clear of dinner spinach, skin tone, mascara goop. Details. But today at the mirror, I stopped to listen to my body, as I’ve been doing lately, and got to thinking about her face, and suddenly saw mine. I carry her under my heart. As of this morning, that was all I knew of her. But trying to feel her heartbeat, softer, quicker than mine inside me, I was drowned again—only the second time in my life—by the thought of continuity. Continuity of blood, a concept so ancient and obvious, a truth so primordial that it has become one of the greatest clichés of human civilization. With good reason, and thank God. It is the clichés that bind together the fabric of our existence. The truths that always hold. We tend to discover them in a great flash of revelation in the fog of an experience that especially fits, and there’s an explosion of meaning, and we run to tell it—run to everyone—but they laugh or shrug because it’s a cliché.

Usually that’s what happens. But Continuity and I are a special case. I’ve always wondered about it, you see, because my hair is straight. Light, as Jewish hair goes, with a tint of red. Green eyes with a spill of hazel. I am a daughter of Leah, as the saying goes—only one in the family. My sister is a spitting image of Dad: the richness of a Brazil nut under the black flame of eyebrows, wild coarse hair darker than tar, deep easy tan. Mother’s curls rival Dad’s. They are children of Rachel.

As a girl, long enough ago that the memory of it is vague, I used to think I was adopted. A child’s fears and fantasies, not even I took them seriously. It didn’t really bother—yet the hint of mystery was always there, surrounding my face in the mirror, and I used to study its lines and wonder.

My revelation came several years ago, as Mother and I sat cross-legged on Dad’s bed amidst piles of old photographs that had lived for years in bags at the bottom of the closet. The idea was to go through them all, sort them and put into albums. The pictures were mostly gray-looking, some sepia with age, stiff and curled up from improper storage, and the king-sized sea of them emanated the smell of dust and moldy paper. Streaming through my fingers black-and-white faces, some vaguely remembered, and scenes from a life on the other side of the Earth, I came upon a portrait of a couple. I recognized my grandfather—he must have been no older than 30 in the picture, but the woman next to him was unfamiliar.

“Who is this, Mom?”

Mother took the photo, looked, then handed it back to me. “That’s your father’s mother. Her name was Rose. Your grandmother.”

I held the picture in both hands, mesmerized. My grandmother had died in the War when Dad had been barely three. He remembers nothing of her and has only an inkling of an image, too long ago been and gone. Subsumed by the minute-to-minute business of survival—and the practical creature that he is—he never asked his father for much, never learned about her, and then all who had known her were gone, and there hadn’t been frequent mention of her in our family talks, and I’d rarely even thought that far back, to my father’s
Rose of Sharon

Mowing in midday heat, I veer too close, clip the trunk of a blooming bush whose roots wrap rocks chipped from mountains worn down to ridges. July is the dry season, drought never more than two weeks out in Ozark lore. Stooping, I check the marred bark of the Rose of Sharon, note purple petals drooping like weary single mothers whose names dot my class rolls. Months ago I taught The Grapes of Wrath, stressed some Ozarkers had been Okies too, swallowing gall along the length of the mother road until they spilled spent selves into the green womb of the San Joaquin. Hearing this heritage, even the hard cases leaned forward, hands leaving pockets to squeeze desk corners, sometimes wave for attention. What they told me they told each other, that the look which passed between Rose of Sharon and her mother at the end of the book was a woman’s blessing on the best thing her daughter would ever do.

Remembering, I drip sweat to parched earth and finger broken bark, note the gashed shaft, the subtle listing from center that is unlikely to cure itself with time. Lacking a gardener’s gift for care, tempted by the cooling balm of central air, I follow the graveled path to the shed, search out twine and stake, heft an old hammer and return, determined to discover what good, if any, my hand might do.

C.D. ALBIN □

mother. And now, staring into the past unknown, I heard my mother’s voice. “Ally, you look exactly like her! Look. Exactly like her.”

She led me to the mirror in the hall bathroom and called out to Dad in the kitchen. He walked in a moment later, as we were shifting our glances from my face to a face in an old photo, then back, and back again.

“Honey, look. Ally looks exactly like your mother.”

Mother handed him the picture, and he took in the sight of both of us.

“She really does,” he said, and his voice trailed off. “You really do.”

I didn’t look exactly like her. I looked like…we could be sisters. I held up the picture so I could see it in the mirror and turned my head the same angle as Grandmother’s was. Her eyes had a more elegant shape to them than mine, her nose was smaller, just a bit. But the curve of our chin and cheekbone, the fullness of our lips, the slow wave of chestnut hair… I looked exactly like her.

I don’t know what precisely my father felt that day. He can be closed as a clam when it comes to deep emotion. But over the years I’ve figured just how much this means to him from the absolute regularity with which all new friends are informed that I look exactly like my father’s mother. As for me… That day in the hall bathroom of my parents’ house, I found unexpectedly a groove to settle into, a place in the family I didn’t know I was missing.

They seem rightly unimportant most days, our physical features—and yet, through the grand span of generations, my face became the final piece to be connected. Without origin no more.

From that day on, my grandmother has asserted her presence in our family. I restored and blew up that portrait of her with her husband, and in a silver frame it stands next to my father’s bed. He’s been mentioning her, too. We still know nothing of what she was like, what talents she passed down to us and what aches, but she is here now, and it is my face that connects her to her son. It’s the continuity of visible features. The continuity of blood.

A woman had died 30 years before I was born, but she managed to leave something behind, and an occasional morning in the mirror I see my face and love her. How fitting that I knew at a moment like that, in the shadowless light of bathroom lamps, what I was carrying under my heart… I don’t need doctors to tell me. She is a girl. And her name is Rose.
Goddesses All

Proud, they stand in the studio
in silent conversation too finely-tuned
for human ears, draped in white
and well-traveled in a plaster-of-paris
sort of way

There’s radiant Aphrodite, secure in her beauty
and heady for romance

huntress Artemis, cocksure
she slightly bends an ear for the call
to forest floor and miracles of birth

stormy Athena, ready for armor
and prepared for war, fools not suffered

sweat-streaked, smiling Demeter
just in from another bountiful harvest
ready to wash for dinner

Eos, with her beatific countenance
filled with hope
for each new, promising dawn

witchy Hecate, secretive
in her sorcerous ways
privileged guardian of entrances and crossroads

lastly, but wait—a muse
has wiled her way into this circle—
sensual, voluptuous Erato,
grown bored with dullards
and ready to gratify
her indulgent appetite with this current company

No one seems to object.

RICHARD DIXON

Photographs in the "Goddesses" section
were taken in Dena Madole’s studio by
Ingrid Shafer and Sarah Webb
It Begins in Movement: An Interview with a Friend

BY SARAH WEBB

In her long career in the arts, Dena Madole, an Oklahoma City artist, has crossed many disciplinary boundaries—dance, visual arts, sculpture, fiber, poetry, film making. One of Crosstimber’s editors, Sarah Webb, interviewed Dena about this multidisciplinary approach to creativity, which Dena has found fruitful in her own work and in the classes she teaches, which help women explore their lives through art.

Sarah Webb: Right now, what are the disciplines you are engaging in?

Dena Madole: The newest one is watercolor. I am taking a class which lasts three to six weeks every fall and spring for the last three years, I’ve found watercolor is so different from what I’d been doing before, primarily with acrylics, that I had to start all over in watercolor to find what I really wanted to do because it’s very clear that most people expect realistic … a realistic something. (laughter) If there’s a tree there, it’s a lot better than if there’s no tree. But I really enjoy the colors, the textures, the juxtapositions of things, in and of themselves. I get turned on by that. I get turned on by color. I get turned on by design. It’s immaterial to me if there’s a tree there, whether it looks like anything. So that’s not fun for me,
to try to get into that. Fortunately, my teacher has been very accommodating in that respect. But it’s interesting, the mindset of most people as they look at art, at least this is what I’ve observed; they aren’t very secure in what they’re looking at it so they want something to hold onto.

**SW:** They want an object there they can identify.

**DM:** And the same has been true with poetry. (laughs)

**SW:** Well, it’s true that in your poetry in particular you have a lot of atmospheric effects. Would you say that’s true?

**DM:** I think to create a mood is more fun for me than to tell a story. A lot of people do that very, very well. I don’t. I don’t have a lot of stories. I grew up as an only child. The people in my family were not keen on telling stories. I know I was read to, but stories from their background … it was not a habit in our family to tell stories.

**SW:** You do tell some stories, comic stories.

**DM:** Yeah. It’s hard to do comedy without a context. (laughter)

**SW:** Yeah, yeah. Would you say your goddesses would be from that ... playing with form or would they be more grounded in the specific? I’m not sure that’s the right contrast, but …

**DM:** I understand the question. I was trying to think this morning when I actually made those. They were shown for the first time as a set in 1987. And it took me, oh, probably a year and a half before that to complete them. You know, the same thing exists in sculpture, the problem of how realistic do you want to be with something, what you want to have as your goal. I think it’s just a wonderful experience to reproduce a bust of somebody’s head. That has to be realistic. For most people. If they’re paying you to do it.

**SW:** At least enough that you can recognize the person.

**DM:** Yeah, or it has something, enough of their character to recognize the person. So I didn’t try to abstract anything with that. But the question does come, how
Female Antelope
Inspired by Dena Madole’s white sculpture forms

A gesture. Movement.
Your rapturous bones spring
into air
where you swim
as though none of us matters, and we do not

Antelope-bird, were you sent from paradise, loosed like mercury from a tube

or is this flash of flight a dream?

Dear fabulosity!
Hoof, breath, heart-leap
and here!

SANDRA SOLI □
you progress, how you grow in sculpture, how you find new forms. I was struggling with that, wanting to do some dancing figures since movement was my background.

I was kind of stuck because I didn’t know … the forms I was finding that seemed to be representative weren’t really … I couldn’t get enough action. Without the thing falling over. The balance problem. So when I started thinking a little bit more laterally and understanding I could use plaster and if I was smart enough I could get things to go in almost any direction I wanted, that gave me a lot of freedom in terms of how I structured the dancing. We call them goddesses, but originally they were just dancing figures. I made some small wax maquettes of dancing figures in a circle. So that was my initial thing, and then when I started using the fabric as part of the structure, they got stronger and I could go out more, in different directions and stay there. So that was a great opening for me. And that was very, very heavy work to do those.

**SW:** In the sense of lifting and holding?

**DM:** Yes. It took a lot of strength.

**SW:** Because plaster would be really heavy, right?

**DM:** Once you dip the fabric in it you have to hold it until it sets.

**SW:** Ooh. (laughter)

**DM:** That was a bit of a challenge, and one reason I didn’t do a lot more sculpture in that vein. By the time I got through with seven I was …

**SW:** They’re a little bit more than human size, right?

**DM:** Yeah, they’re about six feet. They’re higher than I am. So some of the work was on a ladder, off of a ladder.

**SW:** Hard on the back.

**DM:** Yeah, but it was interesting, because then I got to see them from the top. Which not too many people do, unless they’re really tall. So it was a different experience to see them that way.

The comment I got about those sculptures that I valued the most was from Joe Taylor, who taught sculpture at OU for many years. And I’d had a class with him, oh, a long time ago when I was very young. We were doing figures and very sedentary, in the mode of the moment, which was ala Henry Moore. I have a few of
those sitting around. I wasn’t … I couldn’t get with it in the class, and Taylor tried hard … I mean, he’s a very good teacher… and I admired his work a lot, but I … it couldn’t translate to me. Anyway, he came to that exhibit.

It was at the … it was then the Kirkpatrick Center—it’s now the Science and Arts, out by the zoo … There was a gallery then, and it was an invitational. I don’t know how many of us, maybe 25 artists. And I had started by offering one piece. The director said, well, tell me about this, and I said, there’s six others, and she said, bring them all. I was a little leery about that because everybody had been asked to bring one piece and I thought, oh, I can’t bring seven! And she said, well, it’s all one piece, isn’t it? and I said, yeah. So they ended up out there in a straight line going into the gallery.

It was cute. That’s all I can say, it was cute idea.

And Joe Taylor came by, and I thought, oh, oh, woe is me! (laughter) And he looked at me and said one word. Fresh. That was I think the nicest compliment I’ve ever gotten about anything. So I felt very good about those pieces.

Certainly I felt that they were the best I could do in sculpture that would approximate some of the women figures that I had danced about. I had a solo concert that I toured with towards the end of my dancing years, and one of the last pieces that I choreographed was a ten-part evening piece. There were ten feminine figures, and seven [of the sculptures] certainly came from those, from all of that material that I had been thinking about for a long time. So though they became known as the goddesses because … oh, somebody called them that … they originally were from those dance figures.

And they ranged from, oh, the idea of woman emerging and the whole idea of innocence as she began to grow, to as she got older the connection with the earth and the animals and all of the instinctual nature is very very close. She knew all the signs, she knew all the sounds, she knew the language and all of the nature world.

SW: That’s in your figure?

DM: That was in the dance.

SW: Things are going to have to be more sequential in the dance.

DM: Yes, and I think the other figures were the virginal woman and the woman who comes of age and begins to know a little bit more in a different way. Then the kind of ego growth that becomes with the wild and eventually has a self-destructive
aspect. Then out of that, growing into a wiser, older figure. So those were the dance ideas. The very last figure is where the feminine merges back in fire and birth and so forth. So those kinds of things were still very much in my wanting to express in some way, and that was kind of the beginning. Even though so much is unconscious. You understand after the fact. I understand now what that was about, but I didn’t at the time. So the kind of poses that I chose, I don’t know why I chose them but they seemed to be related to each other, and there was the idea of them dancing in a circle and just what was interesting visually. But later on as some of my movement students started working with them as beginning points, I realized they’re archetypal reality. You know, some people think they are beautiful and some people think they are not, that they’re interesting, whatever—it’s unimportant. It’s where you are and how you know what to look at and see. But for me they are filled with potential energies about to burst out of there, out through the skins at any moment. And they are aspects of all women. All women know this very, very well.

SW: When you are doing the movement with students, are some students drawn to one figure and other students drawn to another?

DM: Absolutely. And it totally depends on what they’re dealing with in their lives. Because the problem-solving aspect of movement, if you let it, allows people to move in the way they need to, and supports them in what they need to do rather than trying to teach them—that’s the goal—they will go to the place they need to, to where they need some understanding to solve the problem they are dealing with. They will very naturally go the place that offers the answer. And that can change. I’ve had the same people do the same exercises, sometimes years apart. They don’t go to the same figure. They’ll go to where it is now, what speaks to them now. Which I think, has to be part of the artistic endeavor, whether you are looking or doing.

SW: They’re both a very instinctual intuitive, producing or choosing of symbol. It’s almost like you enter of course, they are creating as they’re dancing, but it’s also as they react to it, they’re also inside that symbol.

DM: That’s right. They’re inside the actual dynamic. And it’s that dynamic, if you begin to move in it, that gives you feedback on what your issue is or where you are.

SW: But you use more than dancing in the classes, right? I mean people write and …

DM: Journaling is a big part of it. I like to think of those classes are problem-solving classes and that I’ve just set a problem. It’s just amazing. You can start anywhere, I’ve discovered, and people will take it for what is—if you’ve established a working situation where that is not
In the Artist’s Studio
(a work in progress for Dena Madole)

In her studio
colors vibrate
and sculpted dancers, life size, wait
to share mysteries
I walk slowly
pause in silence
while in another sphere
my spirit dances
round and round
until dizzy with delight
I take flight
to stars
and still more stars
until in my dark universe
brilliant light
and spirit and I
dance as one

CARL SENNHENN □

Powers of the Earth

Their drapery rasps the hand.
Faces beak, wings fixed stiff in their flight,
they are more ugly than beautiful,
not Venus elegant in foam and shell
but crone.

They bend and dance.
That is their grace.
But they care nothing for grace.

The powers of the earth are not lovely.
At most they assume
a guise of loveliness.
And these old women—not women, beyond women—
disdain such masks.

Their is not the easy way
of communion or forgiveness.
They may give you light
or rend to darkness.

Praise them as you will:
they are indifferent.
Dance with them
at your risk.

SARAH WEBB □
only accepted but is encouraged. So my first thing is, if you find yourself thinking about it, stop. Keep going back to what your body is telling you. Those ideas are not anything new with me. For sure. I was lucky enough to study at the University of Wisconsin with a woman named Margaret H’Doubler. She started the dance program at the University in the 1920s, something very unusual at the time, but she provided such an intellectual background and support for the study of dance that they finally bought it. So when I went to school I had to study not just dance but anatomy and (laughing) physiology and I had to take kinesiology and all kinds of sciences as well as the humanities because she felt you really had to do it all. Her way of teaching was to start with the body on the floor and to move, let’s say, an elbow and pay attention to what happened in the rest of the body. So you began to have some real clear idea how body parts were joined, not just intellectually, we knew that—she always taught us the skeleton—but you got the sense that when you moved there was a feeling associated with it.

SW: I was about to ask, if it was more than just what happened in the rest of the body, if it was what happened emotionally inside.

DM: Absolutely. You might not be able to tell anybody what it was, but you would know. You would feel it. We have a lot of feelings for which there are no words. So paying attention to that connection, to the feeling-state that came out of the movement and what happened when you changed the dynamic of the movement, if you went from slower, sustained movement to abrupt, fast movement, if that changed what … where the feeling was. The study in that slow way was sometimes excruciating, but the message I found many, many years later was that was the perfect way to find out what actually is going on inside yourself in a situation. When you take the thinking part away, and say, well, look in this situation, get in the position that you feel like when you’re in this situation. It’s an odd request, but people always know. They always know the position they need to get into and how to get out.

SW: But from the outside you might not look at that and think, oh well, that means …

DM: I have no idea what they’re doing, when I watch. It’s the most interesting, wonderful experience to watch a group of people begin to solve their problems through movement. There’s no way you can tell what’s going on. But to get in that position and ask the question. To not think about it. Pay attention to your body—how is that you need to move? that you need to move.

SW: Then next is the movement that grows out of it?

DM: That’s right. So if you keep
asking that question and keep your mind open to the information that the body is going to give you, that’s great. Because as long as you think the situation through, then you’re going to have different information, which may or may not go along with what your gut is telling you. We have a lot of psychosomatic illness because we go against things that are impossible for us. Our body knows instinctually when to go toward something that’s going to be fulfilling and nurturing and when to go away from something that’s going to be harmful. We override that all the time because we think we should. I should go to this party because. I don’t want to go to this party—it’s making me sick—but I’m going to go anyway. So it’s that not trusting.

SW: It’s that whole stance where we look at the world objectively and treat ourselves as objects from the outside as opposed to coming from within and letting it grow.

DM: We’ve learned in this society that that’s really not bad. We’re looking at the dollar signs, how much money you make, what kind of car you drive. Those are, for most people, the telling signs of success.

SW: You’re saying, take an entirely different position: come from within.

DM: If you want to know yourself, yes.

SW: And if you want to get unstuck, what else is there?

DM: You can take somebody else’s advice. Or you can listen to yourself. And I think, who knows yourself better than you do? Nobody can tell you, if your guts are in a knot because of a situation. And it does no good to hear from somebody, oh well, you ought to do something else.

But if you go into it, you begin to understand what it is you need to do. It comes to you.

SW: It seems like a key part of that is that you are attending to what’s there. You’re like, okay, what is it? I’m listening. Or I am it. Are there people who have trouble getting to where they are listening?

DM: Absolutely. There are some people who don’t want to.

SW: Maybe there’s something there that’s going to be hard.

DM: I’ve found there are many people who think if they go inside, if they allow themselves to go inside, there won’t be anything there. And other people are afraid of what is there. I would not deny that this is hard work. You have to be honest with yourself. You can’t have one bodily experience and say I don’t want that, I’ll do something else. That will lead you further astray. You have to be honest enough to stay with the feelings as they come.

There are some psychological types who are wired a different way. They do not want to do this kind of work. They can’t make sense of it. So most of the students I have had over the years are very courageous,
open, intuitive. Creative—though many of them would not dream that they are creative, they discover that they truly are. It’s been hammered out of them. That opening of the creativity is wonderful to see. Sometimes it takes a long time. …

**SW:** So it’s primarily movement, but you use other things?

**DM:** Journaling. Sometimes they draw. It’s not like drawing a picture of your family or whatever. It’s doodling. You doodle. And then on the basis of your doodle, you can ask this kind of question. Looking at your doodle, is there some pace there that is really disturbing to you? There always is. Then the question would be, now listen to your body. What do you need to do to that place? Do you need to cut it out? Do you need to color it? Whatever your body says, do it. And it’s amazing. They begin to understand what it is in their real life that they need to stop or deal with or say something to or whatever. So the understanding of what’s going on comes almost automatically, casually.

There’s music and just moving to the music, which I do a fair amount, primarily to provide some variety of movement, because the tendency is to go back to a comfort routine, so you have to have enough background to experiment with movement before you are free to go to where you want to go. But as they move, they’ll stop and write, what will come, what they want to remember, a fragment. It’s not uncommon that during the movement sequence they may stop four or five times to write.

The important thing is to not think, and that is a skill in all creativity. You have to have a certain amount of cognitive (laughs) and doing, but if you let that take over you get bound up, turn it to what you think it should be, or what you want it to be, and you don’t open the door to other possibilities.

**SW:** That’s true not just with the dance but with all the different modalities that you use. And also for you, when you create things.

**DM:** We were talking about the watercolors earlier and what happens when you let the water and paint flow, when you don’t know. You might have an educated guess, the more you work, the more you’re tuned into it. If you let things happen or you make it happen, you get two different kinds of results. But there are lots of different kinds of people. People who want that tightly controlled creative effort have one kind of joy in doing which I do not share. Mine is different.

**SW:** Yours is more of a process?

**DM:** I’m willing to make hundreds of things to get one that I think is wonderful. That I think is wonderful—it doesn’t matter what other people think.

**SW:** Why is it that you keep going on to new artistic disciplines? Right now you’ve taken up watercolor. It started with dance, but you’ve moved through a number of different ones. I’m not sure if you’ve kept them or if you’ve moved on. Do you continue these disciplines or try a new in order to refresh things and move on?
DM: As you get older, I think you become naturally restricted. I still move. I still move with my students. If they’re moving to music or if there’s a group thing I join into that, so I’m still moving a fair amount. But dancing or using dance as an expressive tool, no. Except in these very gentle ways, the body doesn’t want to do it.

SW: That’s something very different though. You could still sculpt, you could still paint. Do you?

DM: Sculpture, there’s no way I could do, like the goddesses.

SW: There’s a physical restraint.

DM: I could do small things. Which are not a lot of fun. They are and they aren’t. Sculpture is by and large dirty. Messy. Hard. (laughter) Unless I do very small things—I could still get a charge out of that. I just haven’t done it.
I probably will go back to it, someday. The painting—I like to go big, I mean really big, and I have a lot of really big things that I’ve done, but again, the body says, oh, I’d rather not. I still work with acrylics. I took one acrylic class with Bert Seabourn this summer. Since we were working with portraits, that put me into a different mode of dealing, which I haven’t done in a long time. And I enjoyed it. So I’m probably going to do more of those. Though I don’t really have to have a class for motivation.

One of the things I was missing with sculpture was color. So I went to fiber. I did a lot of work with fiber, and it let me play with texture and color and still be three-
Dancers in White

motion
high and low
undulation
under, over
rhythms of dancers draped
dropping, rising
dripping with life's gaps
voids, valances
alive
absent
sly, hiding
energy's movement
freedom on hold

run, slide, quickly away!
but
stay, gently glide with one
in this silent world
where
all color flows
together
where
all is white
and
peace is the only
music

ROCKFORD JOHNSON □

dimensional. The painting actually came a lot later. And all along I taught. I was trained as a teacher, that may be my most central thing, and as I moved from one art to another, it showed up in my teaching.

To return to your question, it’s what your energy and ability make possible. I’m not working with great big acrylics anymore, but I’m working in acrylics. And water color. Poetry came at a time when I just needed something new to work at. That was at 65. At 65, you don’t start something new and expect to do something spectacular.

SW: I liked your poems!

DM: Well, thank you. I like them too. I took a lot of joy in writing, and certainly the opening of the door to poetry and reading poetry and listening to poetry — I find that the most difficult of disciplines, to listen to poetry. It’s just hard to listen ... unless it’s a story (laughs).

SW: Frankly, I have a lot of problems listening unless it’s a story or a clear line of thought. If I’m hearing it out loud, it’s hard for the brain to process it as quickly as people present it.

DM: It helps if I’ve got it on paper, and I can see it as well as hear it. At any rate, I enjoyed doing that until I realized I’d pretty much said all I wanted to say. For the moment, at least. So thanks to you and a couple
of other people I have a few writing tools if I want to go back to that. But it was taking a lot of energy, and I was getting less pleasure out of it.

SW: I’m less interested in why you might drift away from something and more in why you keep taking on new ones.

DM: Oh, just for the fun of it. You have to learn new things. And I don’t like to learn new math skills. (laughter) The area where I can make something appeals to me. A lot. Maybe I’m not answering your question.

SW: Yes, but I was wondering maybe if it renews you.

DM: It does. It does, it does renew you, because it forces you into a new perception of life.

SW: Like with the Bert Seabourn thing, now you are stretching and going out of your comfort zone and you’re doing faces and you probably wouldn’t have done that on your own.

DM: I wouldn’t have, but I have to say, whether you keep going with something depends a lot on the teacher. I can understand if there had been a teacher less generous than Bert, I could have been put off and never wanted to do another portrait.

SW: For one thing, if you’re going to come in and try something new, you’re not going to be as good at it as someone who’s been doing it for fifteen years.

DM: I think you have to be happy with just the fun of doing it, just the joy of doing it. That really is enough. After a while. When you’re my age, that certainly is enough, just to have a wonderful exploration of a new material. There are so many different kinds of paints on the market—just to explore what kind of paint goes well on what kind of paper, what you can do with this kind of paint on that paper that will not work on that other paper, that definitely will not work on that paper. All of those … I don’t really want to be taught that. I want to find that out for myself.

SW: It’s making me think of that process when you first were learning dance where you went into a movement and then you attended to what happened. It seems similar. Maybe it’s a stroke with a new kind of paint on a new kind of paper and you look and you say, okay, what happened, what do I feel about it.

DM: It’s pretty darn close. Because—when you look at it in a different way—because I like to move. If a certain brush with a certain paint on a certain paper allows me freedom to move, if I get a nice flowing line, why, that makes my day. That is just the most fun. And when you find a way to use it in a larger context like a painting or a watercolor, then that’s fine too. It is that flow of movement. I remember once when we were photographing some kids for a film I was making, and the kids wanted to ask some questions once it was over. One girl asked, when you make a painting where do you start? I was really not prepared for that question from this little kid. I thought about it a minute, and then I said, “I start by making lines I love to make.” And I think I still feel that way about the … the moves I love to make. So those early movement experiences were very powerful.

SW: I was wondering what was the common denominator, what was the root that showed itself in so many disciplines, and one thing I kept hearing from you was the actual movement of your body.

DM: That’s right. Even in poetry. I

Whispers

the Keepers of the Myths
silent travelers locked in eternal dramas
move quietly through night skies
but beyond them the cosmos churns
and we understand
time is inexorable and indifferent
with nothing guaranteed

and yet
in these soft days of April
tiny fingers of spring
grow again
wild and green
full of hope and promise

go to them
let them touch you
MADOLE □
think that when I got it to flow, when I got the words to flow in a certain way, then I was happy whether anyone else was or not. That was satisfying.

SW: Was rhythm part of that?

DM: I wouldn’t call it rhythm as much as flow. When you start injecting rhythm then you’re dealing with things like rhyme.

SW: Meter and all that.

DM: Linear organization and all that. It’s got to be there but …

SW: OK. Drop that, and think, the root there is movement, whether it’s the movement of a brush or an arm or the whole movement of your body. What’s below that?

DM: The best I can say is the organism has some urgency to grow. I think we are all on the verge of needing to move in some way, to satisfy something. I did write one poem—I don’t remember the exact words of it—but it was a repetitive idea. Something is stirred inside from a … some source you do not know. You either respond to that, or you don’t move.

SW: T.S. Eliot said there’s a frog voice calling in the gloom wanting to be born. Some unnameable thing that wants to come.

DM: That’s right. And I do think it was an unfolding of the self. We listen to what that voice is calling us to do. That’s the way you begin to sprout the leaves.

SW: You do it in your own art, but you also do it in your class. You’ve created this situation where everyone can do that. They can listen and move or draw or …

DM: Hopefully. Each of them comes, no matter how difficult their lives have been, with that potential for growth, for understanding themselves. I can’t give them that. I can only open the door and say you are permitted to pick up the crayon and tear off the paper and make whatever strokes on this old brown paper. Please do what you need to do. ☐
The Path

This body is home, my childhood is buried here.
Lisel Mueller wrote those words, her Pulitzer hanging around the corner. The cold bottle of wine in the refrigerator calls to me, and I struggle to stay on the page, knowing my Pulitzer is not around the corner.

Poetry matters I tell myself, like I tell myself love is more than a four letter word on a Scrabble board. Instead, ask the body what it is doing here in Eliot’s Wasteland, in Whitman’s Leaves of Grass and Mueller’s Alive Together.

The ink dries up in my pen and I think it is time to explore the option of wine or poetry, poetry or wine, maybe both, Alive Together.

AUDREY STREETMAN

Chipita Park, Colorado

I sit in a green plastic chair, my feet propped on the wooden bench of the cabin deck.

Nearby a dead tree – close enough to reach out and touch – a reminder that death is part of life. Against

a backdrop of pines and cedars, it stands – naked of leaves – a dirty brown crust coating its ancient limbs. My eyes move

upward to the lush green of the mountains, a majestic monument to the eternal. In the face of such grandeur how does one speak of death.

AUDREY STREETMAN

Hermit

He hears the traffic hiss the secret song of the snake.
And the blue dome of sky spins above his head, home to Masonic constellations.
This is how he searches, even among the scattered gold leaves he hoards like currency, for codes, messages engraved in vein and palm alike, the world writ burning in the face of October light. And children climb the trees to peek in on this madman muttering and wandering through the barrels and rakes and car carcasses piled in his guarded yard, a freak more strange yet familiar because he lives alone and shuns the hungry ghost community outside. But from time to time he peers through his hubcap fence into the world at large, at the families performing in their picture windows, at thugs and roaming dogs, his prophetic gaze igniting everything he sees.

DOUGLAS COLE
TEAM TEACHING IS HAVING MORE THAN ONE INSTRUCTOR IN THE ROOM: BUT INTERDISCIPLINARY TEACHING IS MUCH MORE THAN THAT

Toward A More Integrated World View
BY CECIL LEE
Op Ed Columnist

The idea that multitasking is the same as being comprehensive is a common fallacy in our present world. We take it as fact—and despite saying that we admire those who see the wholeness of things—we actually greatly admire those among us who can compartmentalize their routine activities and we generously reward such people. President Clinton is widely praised for his ability to separate the various compartments of his life. Therefore, he could regularly engage in contradictory activities at the same time. Often we reward specialists (those who cannot see the wholeness of a thing because of their devotion to detail.) This is simply the old tree/forest dilemma. In America, we have a shortage of family physicians in large measure because we pay specialists better than we do generalists.

While I was completing my undergraduate degree at Ohio State University my advisor and mentor, Frank Seiberling, advised me that if I wanted material success in the academic world I should specialize in a very narrow field and become widely known in that field of Art History. He gave such examples as George Henry Nettleton, the scholar known for his work on English Restoration plays, or Emil Kaufmann, who spent ten years writing the definitive work on Post-Baroque architecture. Both of these authors played a substantial role in my later research, but I fear that Professor Seiberling was wasting his time with me. I greatly admired Seiberling, but he himself was a generalist. He was widely known and highly esteemed for his breadth of understanding but not for any notable specialization. His major book *Looking into Art* (Holt, 1959) is a very perceptive introduction to art appreciation. Here I wish I could say that I have always been devoted to seeing the world as interdisciplinary, but that would not be true, although by the end of the 1950s I had become a believer.

Since starting my academic career, I have team taught over a hundred courses and seminars with over fifty different colleagues. It is from these experiences that I speak. It is from these experiences that I have gathered much of my knowledge and understanding of the complexity of the world. One of the major rewards of interdisciplinary teaching is prolonged contact with knowledgeable scholars from diverse areas, scholars who are skilled in presenting their knowledge in a form understandable to the beginning student.

It was with some trepidation that I read the Editor in Chief’s suggestion that the Crosstimbers writers relate their respective fields to the concepts of beauty and creativity. For the herpetologist or the nuclear physicist this is probably a reasonable five-page project, but it is one dreaded by artists and art historians. For the consideration of “beauty” and “creativity,” two subjects that are obligatory in panel discussions, an artist must be on board before anything is said. Yet they are simply too central to the topic of the arts to be treated sufficiently in even lengthy works, such Leo Tolstoy’s 1896 treatise, *What is Art?*

According to a prevalent popular idea, all art is creative and everything that artists have ever done is cre-
ative. I have taught art and the history of art for some fifty years and know from repeated experience that this is not true. In addition, creativity is certainly not limited to the art world. If we use Thomas Kuhn’s definition of creativity found in his seminal Structure of a Scientific Revolution (1962), we find a usable concept of creativity. Central to the concept is that it brings about a paradigm change. Periodically, according to Kuhn, there are scientists such as Thales (624-546 BCE), Isaac Newton (1642–1727), and Albert Einstein (1879–1955) who exemplify this characteristic to the highest degree. There are, of course, many others in the discipline who are genuinely creative, but the vast majority are standard scientists working according to an accepted paradigm.

In each century there are a handful of creative makers of art. These are the pride and joy of art historians. In between the appearance of these geniuses are great multitudes of practitioners who expand the quantity of artful objects, if not the quality. However, the subject before us is not only creativity, but primarily beauty. Despite the many pleasing objects made by members of Paleolithic and Neolithic society, the concept of beauty had not developed yet. It was not until the Greek philosophers that we have a consideration of beauty, and this was by an individual whom today we would classify as a scientist and mathematician.

Many members of our society have made questionable assumptions about art. First of these is “having art is a virtue,” and second—in a democratic spirit—“all societies have art and all have culture and therefore all art is equal.” All examples of art must in some way be equal since culture is the product of the community and serves the communal needs, thus functionally are equal and must be held as equal. To believe otherwise is elitist. Moreover, to be elitist is politically incorrect. This sequence of assumptions has become dogma, and thus the field of art becomes overwhelmingly cumbersome, leading to the practice of evaluating everything by its marketplace reward. When all else fails to convince, I can always point out to the art appreciation class that a Jackson Pollock painting sells for over a million dollars. However, I digress.

There seem to be several explanations for the division of the body of knowledge into separate components. The FIRST of these is readily understandable. After we were well into the industrial revolution, the development of skills by the traditions of the community was no longer possible. Until then the farm boy could learn to milk cows, shear sheep, tend to poultry, and plow fields from his father. Daughters could learn spinning, weaving, cooking, and general housekeeping from their mothers. The children of skilled workers—blacksmiths, woodcutters, carpenters, and those providing other community needs—would be taught by their parents or by substitute parents through apprenticeships. Even the art world functioned this way. Artists were simply highly skilled laborers until the Renaissance. As the demand for quantity increased with urbanization and a suddenly growing population, factories were required to produce industrial and farm equipment and mills were needed to make cloth.

Vocational training became essential. Underlying most of the complaints about education in the popular media is lack of useable, practical skills. We are short on technicians. Despite applying a generous sum of money, our support personnel for research is inadequate. There is possibly no ready solution to this problem. As long as the financial rewards are limited for technicians, it will remain hard to attract the young to these fields. And furthermore, the rapid changes in technology needed to feed our expanding economy make the future for the individual technologist unsure.

A SECOND reason for dividing the body of knowledge is that it makes it more functional. But it didn’t start that way. In the past the understanding of things was much simpler. The details of the body of knowledge were neither as large nor as complex then as they are now, although the answers to life’s questions were adequate and complete for the needs of antiquity. As Keats said when contemplating a Grecian urn,

“Beauty is truth, truth beauty,” —that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.
John Keats (1819)

The connection between truth, goodness, and beauty precedes the idea that they are separate. Pythagoras (c.570–c.495 BCE), the Greek mathematician and philosopher, founded a school of mathematics in Cortona, a seaport in southern Italy. Pythagoras’ most famous mathematical contribution is the theorem named after him. It has been traditionally held that Pythagoras saw this as a divine revelation. The Pythagorean Theorem is that “the area of the square built upon the hypotenuse of a right triangle is equal to the sum of the areas of the squares upon the remaining sides” (See Stephanie J. Morris, The University of Georgia, Department of Mathematics Education.) However, the relation between music and cosmology is, in its way, equal-
The Pietà

The Black Madonna wears a red hat
her name monogrammed with a thousand lights
her history carved on cave walls
recovered in cathedral basements.

She lives in Van Gogh’s Starry Night,
The Yellow House, The Chair.

She is The Chair.
She carries the soul of the world in her hands.

She tips her hat and smiles like the Mona Lisa.
In white marble Michelangelo
carved the Pietà–
Mary, holding the dead Jesus in her arms.

A trained humanist and true Renaissance man, Alberti
was as accomplished an architect as he was a humanist,
musician, and art theorist. Alberti’s many treatises on
art include De Pictura (On Painting), De Sculptura (On
Sculpture), and De Re Aedificatoria (On Architecture). All
of his art and principal theories center on proportions.
Thomas Jefferson showed his agreement with Alberti’s
ideas when he introduced neoclassical architecture to
the American soil. Likewise, the balanced form of gov-
ernment follows the same guidelines. After the Civil
War, the capitol was, through constant remodeling and
expansion, changed from a set of simple, harmonious
proportions to a Neo-Baroque monstrosity. Certainly,
today the tie between democracy and classical beauty
can be seriously questioned. We seem to have neither.
The golden mean—balance between excess and inadequacy—is lost. We have the extremes but not the
center, as William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) opens his
poem, “The Second Coming” with

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blooddimmed tide is loosed, and
everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

In fact, the whole Greek tradition of beauty is derived
not from pleasure but from the balance and harmony
received from mathematics. When Polyklitus (a Greek
sculptor [fl. 450-420 BCE], who worked mostly in bronze
and was widely seen as one of the best artists of his age)
developed his theory of human beauty, it was purely
a matter of numerical relationship of the parts to the
whole. Today we still use a modified version of this con-
cept. Diets and exercises are commonly used to achieve
these “ideal” proportions. The Greek attitude was that if
you did not derive pleasure from these proportions your
understanding was simply wrong. The Athenians also
believed that truth could be stated only in Greek. Toler-
ance of other cultures and other ways of thinking was not
among their virtues. Young Athenian males were seen as
the prototype for all human beauty. It was a matter of
mathematics and mathematics for them was absolute.

What happened to this noble concept? Hidden in the
depths of the details was a fatal shortcoming. If we mea-
sure the difference between the basic tone and the har-
monic major third, we find that it is a 5-4 relationship—
that is, two octaves and a third. On the other hand, we
can get there by adding together four 3-1 intervals—that
is the harmonic musical fifth. All of the string instru-

ly important. In this case, Pythagoras observed that
when a string (as on a harp, though he actually used
a monochord) is set into motion it produces a sound.
The pitch of this tone is determined by (1) the diameter
of the string, (2) the tension on the string, and (3) the
length of the string. If the first two properties are con-
stant, a string exactly half of another in length will be
exactly an octave higher; a string one-third the length
will be an octave plus a fifth higher; one-quarter the
length, being one-half of one-half, will be two octaves
higher; and one-fifth higher will give an octave and a
third higher. This goes on until the full major scale is
created. Pythagoras saw this as the mathematical secret
of the universe. Since the heavenly bodies were thought
to circle the earth, Pythagoras believed he had discover-
ered the harmony of the spheres. Mathematical truth is
seen in the formula upon which the world is created,
the source of true pleasure. Beauty, moral judgment,
and goodness, are all the same thing found in diverse
manifestations—somewhat like the Holy Trinity.

After the disintegration of the Roman Empire, fol-
lowing the millennium dismissed as the “Dark
Ages” by the Renaissance humanists, the classical
principles were rediscovered. Leon Battista Alberti
(1404-1472) worked as an architect from the 1450s on-
ward, principally in Florence, Rimini, and Mantua. As
ments in the modern orchestra are tuned in intervals of the fifth (e.g., C, G, D, A, and E). The difference between the ways of measuring these tones introduces the historic dilemma. To be specific, $\frac{3}{2} \times \frac{3}{2} \times \frac{3}{2} = \frac{81}{16}$, while $\frac{2}{1} \times \frac{3}{2} \times \frac{5}{4} = \frac{20}{4}$ or $\frac{80}{16}$. The tone created by an 81 to 16 ratio is not the same as the tone created by an 80 to 16 ratio. When both tones are played simultaneously at a high pitch the sound is most offensive. The result is that a keyboard set up for one key must be retuned for another key. Since there are 24 major and minor keys, this is a real problem for the performer. The solution was to adjust the tuning so that the chords were uniformly off. Of course, string players objected, but since they could readily adjust the tone, they could use the “well tempered” tuning when playing.

And the chemicals react...

I lie in a puddle of octagons, formulas draped over practice sheets
Eyes playing jump rope
Hopscotch, tango dancing with salsa-bopping solvents
Blank canvases fill up with reactions
Hot, cold, fast, slow: activation energy, Mark’s rule
Zaitsev’s, Grignard reagent
I doodle squiggly lines, eraser tears clinging to my paper

A symphony of sharp shrieks and rustling pages, rise and fall
As students frantically attack their papers with indentations of ink
Black boards drooling with numerous nomenclatures
Eyes collectively swaying like windshield wipers

After the first exam, the students look changed
Girls discard their tiny purses for hefty backpacks
And well-groomed boys are unshaven in large t-shirts and sweats
Styled hair melts to 2-minute tie-ups

Snap-snap
Hot steamy choke inhalations of acetic acid: organic lab
Elastic, plastic, gloves
Snap-snap, on, off, on, off
Foggy goggles with nostrils stuffed with propionic acid
Broken beakers are taken to their heaven in purple latex gloves
Fingers swelling allergy
The end of lab
I reflect on stories told by my teacher and see it flash before my eyes
Sulfuric acid + water
Ether vapors cloud
A flame is ignited across the room
Mushroom

Cough-cough
Sunlight filters through as I opened the pages of my dusty organic textbook
A heavy wheeze escapes from its wizened pages
I sit in my living room with strewn papers, holding my pen posed to draw more reactions

SADIA FARAH □
Astronomy Elegy, or “In Da Club”

I sip Woodchuck and this 29-year old Navy intelligence officer or whatever keeps talking about the little pop-top cans of saké you could buy in Japan. A carlight illuminates the window from the street and I am reminded of Giotto’s star, Halley’s Comet before Halley, illuminating the sky every 75 years. Fielding here & myself will be old men when it comes by again. May even be dead, cluthing our beverages in heaven, discussing how the Oort Cloud expels icy skin shards which soar indefinite in the dry absolute lack of color or love that is space. Where is heaven relative to space? If the universe keeps expanding, it must be farther away every second. So they do drink Sapporo and Asahi there? Cool, man. There’s one Japanese Hipster who listens to Neil Young and drinks Pabst, stole an Anthony Ausgang painting from an exhibit, a star-studded background, a stretched purple cat. Neon lights, chemical rave green, turn our corner into a hookah den, smoke filtering aurora borealis glow. On the floor, girls from Mars or maybe just Dallas display the mating dance dialects of their people. It is all too much, their curvature, the pull of their orbits, celestial bodies colliding. We sit tight, make use of the atmospheric lack of silence to form our conversation, two remote islands of talk relaying radio waves. Even so close, we’re just now getting I Love Lucy telecasts out of the way so we can get down to the good stuff. Uh-huh, used panties, sure. Somewhere near Chicsxulub, Mexico, a pile of cremated dinosaurs salts the crater margarita of history. A moon girl tilts, sucks the salt from my margarita, drifts away. My tides rise and fall. Uh-huh, yeah, bullet train, so fast, 65 million years ago, a two-story McDonald’s with tofu burgers, Chofu Sea, Sea of Tranquility, elder porn, hentai, yowie, ecchi, panspermia, Jupiter, Fat Man, Pluto, Little Boy, big weird bang.

Seth Copeland

with a keyboard instrument and revert to the purer form when playing only with other strings. The brass instruments faked the difference as best they could. Johann Sebastian Bach (German, 1685-1750) supported the new direction by composing 24 preludes and fugues for the Well-Tempered Clavier (plus another set of 24 for a second volume).

This new direction made possible the music of the next 250 years. But it was at the cost of music being considered the basis of the spheres and the support for the mathematics that gave us a measurable ground for reality, even moral behavior. Similarly, Albrecht Dürer (German, 1471-1528) abandoned the mathematical harmony for the human form and used direct observation; that is, he went from the laws of nature to empiricism. For the sake of efficiency and the development of useful produce, the arts lost their connection to any greater order.

Reconsidering the role of education, especially postsecondary education, we find that despite the need for technicians, vocational training is held in contempt. It is believed to be suitable only for the working class.

In my essay on the modern university in the previous issue of Crosstimbers, I wrote,

The pride and joy of Jefferson’s later life was this University of Virginia he had fostered for the young men of the new world. His school was in no sense the first in America but the earlier ones were mostly ordered primarily around religious needs. Clearly Jefferson was devoted to human freedom and the understanding of those matters and principles required maintaining it. He believed that only through an educated public steeped in a secular liberal education could citizens have suitable ability to guide the nation. (p. 29)

Since vocational training is to train students in skills rather than ideas, Jefferson’s role of the university in a democracy is lost. But even for those higher on the social scale, who may be receiving an education supposedly broader in scope, the university does little better. Finding a suitable means of developing a career and earning a living has become for the wealthy less a matter of what you know than whom you know. If Colin Dexter, (born 1930, English crime writer, known for his Inspector Morse mysteries, set on the Oxford campus) is to be believed, this is especially true in the prestige schools of Europe. Contacts and connections are the major reason for seeking an education on an important campus. Forbes Magazine in the August 20, 2012, issue, tags articles under the general
promise of The Colleges That Matter: Is Higher Education Worth It: “Exclusive Rankings,” “20 Schools For: Entrepreneurs,” and “These 50 Schools Are No Brainers.” In the August 20, 2012, issue of *Time* in an article by Justin Berman, “A U.S. Degree at any Cost,” we find the following:

[A]dream his parents have had for him since they started saving a $157,000 nest egg for his education. Zhu’s family felt that an American college degree should help give him an edge over the tens of thousands of Chinese students pouring into the country’s overcrowded universities. Because his English is limited, however, Zhu may not have been accepted without a little assistance. His family spent $4,000 to hire a so-called education agent...to help with his application.” Some students write essays themselves” says Zhu. Others are “written by the company.”

Harvard, Yale, Oxford, and Cambridge are considered in China and India the world’s most prestigious universities, although any of Forbes’ fifty would probably do. It is the cost of attending these institutions that makes the difference. They become displays of financial prestige. Fifty thousand dollars a year for tuition is not uncommon in distinguished private schools. It is obvious that families that can afford these tuitions are among the upper 1% income. Were we to assume that money is where the real action rests, is this not a reasonable price to pay?

Kevin Williams, a Deputy Editor of the conservative *National Review*, wrote that he essentially thought all women were gold diggers and we were genetically programmed to only be able to vote for Mitt Romney, because he’s rich. According to Williams, Romney’s $200 + million “make him a stud. He is basically a tribal chieftain.” Williams further writes that “[if] you want off-the-charts status, [c]heck out the curriculum vitae of Romney: $200 million in the bank. He’s a boss. Given that we are no longer roaming the veldt for the most part, money is a reasonable stand-in for social status.” (Jason Linkins, *Huffington Post*, August 23, 2012)

We are marching head on into a social structure where the wealth—the basic division between classes—becomes increasingly significant. The intention of education as developed by the enlightenment thinkers such as Jefferson has no real value for enhancing the position of the social elite. Colleges themselves—indeed, colleges believing they are dedicated to the liberal arts and the search for truth, justice and the “good life,” independent of money—are responsible for much of the problem. Recruiters for universities regularly use the promise of greater incomes in attracting students. There is a general public response when these promises are not kept. Reducing the family savings to create the illusion of wealth offends even the indiscriminate followers of fads.

**Snow White**

She was the Maltese Falcon in reverse, a pure white hawk who posed serenely as a statue on power poles and tree limbs staring sternly down on us lesser creatures who could only peregrinate and never fly.

She preferred to perch on a white-capped utility pole against a white sky disguising herself from our hungry eyes. She could have been a figure from a fairy tale possessed of magical powers or a spirit bird to evoke for guidance.

But magical as her appearance seemed she was not immune to death which came man-made not from hunter’s gun or falconer’s snare but from high-voltage wires that took away her wings.

Now her pale mate hunts alone but we still scan the tops of trees hoping for a glimpse of white forgetting for a moment that she is gone.

**JENNIFER KIDNEY**

This poem is about a female Red-tailed Hawk who was, in fact, completely white or “leucistic” and who made the area around the city dump in Norman her territory for almost eight years until her untimely demise late last year. We called her “Norma.”
One of the unsuspected curses of the late 1950s was the rise of post modernism. With the success in recovering from the war there was a widespread confidence in the future. There was a faith in science. We were promised a “better living through science.” The universities were thriving with the overabundance of students. There was trust in the government. But, at the same time, contact had begun to change general perceptions of the world. I know of an Appalachian evangelical who for the first time in his life met Roman Catholics. I was told that he was not surprised that they existed but he was surprised that he had been with some Catholics for months and had not recognized them as different. Despite bombings and devastation the high culture of other countries was overwhelming.

After World War II, there were book clubs, music record clubs, poetry clubs, etc. I can recall college students who were delighted that I would loan them a new recording of Bach’s Mass in B-minor. Even ballet dancers were popular TV stars. The Saturday afternoon radio broadcasts were widely heard—even by army foot soldiers. There was a general acceptance of established values and standards. Then something began to happen. I can recall intellectuals—especially intellectuals—saying that they did not believe in “Truth with a capital T.” By the fifties, the very tolerance that came from wide exposure to different cultures led to the collapse of universal values. At its best, this led to the expansion of civil rights, the acceptance of minorities, and gender equality. However, this acceptance ran amok. All that was left of the pursuit of truth was the sharing of opinions. Even Socrates was misunderstood. I had colleagues who offered what they called So-

Tennessee Williams Slept Here

Though I did not know it until afterwards

When I found his hand-rolled cigarettes
Snuffed out in the cheap, aluminum ashtray

On the nightstand near the bed. His liquor bottle
Keeping watch over us like a statuette of Our Lady of Tequila. On the pillow where he had laid
His sweaty, golden head I found his note

It was a queer thing, full of references
From Desire and allusions to

Some slow but present
Madness within him

He signed the note, Blanche
With a strange and telling flourish

As though what he had said about
Insanity and the way it comes upon

A young woman like age upon a rose
Had somehow been something worth

Leaving us. As though only the most
Beautiful people went mad. I kept the note

I kept the note neatly folded
In the wooden box on my wooden shelf in

My wooden heart. And when I go about my day
And that image of him reposed upon

My bed in full, three-piece linen suit smoking
His hand-rolled cigarette sears itself into my head,

I take the note from the box and watch that flourish of his pen
Curl up and out like the wave of his soft, pale hand.

GABRIEL “G” GARCIA □
dox Christian nation.” Rushdoony estant feudal system and an orthoenvisioned as a decentralized Prot-early American Republic, which he ther argued that the constancy was the common religion. Fur-ment only in appearance. Christian-Constitution was a secular docu-ther argued that the United States  to preserve American liberties from Britiss John Rushdoony (American, 1916–2001). The American Revolu-tion, according to Rushdoony, was a “conservative counterrevolution” to preserve American liberties from British usurpation and owed noth-ing to the Enlightenment. He further argued that the United States Constitution was a secular document only in appearance. Christian-ity was the common religion. Fur-ther, Rushdoony argued that the American Civil War “destroyed the early American Republic, which he envisioned as a decentralized Pro-estant feudal system and an ortho-dox Christian nation.” Rushdoony saw the North’s victory as a “defeat for Christian orthodoxy.”

In politics—discussed in his three-volume, 1,894-page work, *The Institutes of Biblical Law*, arguably his most influential work—he proposed that Old Testament law should be applied to modern society and that there should be a Christian theocracy. Under such a system, the list of civil crimes which carried a death sentence would in-clude homosexuality, adultery, incest, lying about one’s virginity, bestiality, witchcraft, idolatry or apostasy, public blasphemy, false prophesying, kidnapping, rape, and bearing false witness in a capital case. While he supported the separation of church and state at the national level, Rushdoony understood both institutions as under the rule of God, and thus he conceived secularism as posing endless false antitheses, which his massive work addresses in consider-able detail. In short, he sought to cast a vision for the reconstruction of society based on Christian principles. Home schooling was another facet of Reconstructionism, also known as Dominionism—a title eraced every statement with “as a Christian theocracy. Under such a system, the list of civil crimes which carried a death sentence would in-clude homosexuality, adultery, incest, lying about one’s virginity, bestiality, witchcraft, idolatry or apostasy, public blasphemy, false prophesying, kidnapping, rape, and bearing false witness in a capital case. While he supported the separation of church and state at the national level, Rushdoony understood both institutions as under the rule of God, and thus he conceived secularism as posing endless false antitheses, which his massive work addresses in consider-able detail. In short, he sought to cast a vision for the reconstruction of society based on Christian principles. Home schooling was another facet of Reconstructionism, also known as Dominionism—a title based on chapter one of Genesis and chapter eight of the Psalms. Man is given dominion over the creatures of the earth in these two passages. Traditionally these lines have been understood to mean the plant and animal world.

The Dominionists interpret them to mean that the Christians—the rightful heirs of Adam—should assume all position of power in the world, including in non-Christian nations. A sub-belief is that when 80 percent of the world population is Christian the “second coming” will occur. Rushdoony fostered home schooling, often appearing before state legislators to change state laws. He believed that in early America all education was done in the home. The purpose of home schooling is to avoid the secularism of liberal history and science.

Following the chronology in the 2000 pages (in Latin) of *The Annals of the Old Testament* by the seventeenth century Irish bishop James Ussher, paleontologists’ finds were discredited. Tracing back the events of the Bible, the earth was created in October of 4004 B.C. (also see Doug Linder, “Bishop James Ussher Sets the Date for Creation” [2004]). Four of the candidates for the presidency in 2012 were Dominionists. They are creationist and oppose evolution. They do not believe that dinosaurs existed, or, if they did, it was during the period between Adam and Noah. Such beliefs are common in the South. Chickasha pastors have urged students at USAO to walk out of class if Darwin is mentioned.

Rushdoony was also critical of democracy. He wrote that “the heresy of democracy has since then worked havoc in church and state. Christianity and democracy are inevitabably enemies.” Elsewhere he wrote that “Christianity is completely and radically antidemo-ocratic; it is committed to spiritual aristocracy,” and characterized dem-ocracy as “the great love of the failures and cowards of life.” The influence of Rushdoony on Far Right Conservatives is self-evident.

The failure to recognize the im-pact of the Enlightenment on the modern world leads to some serious problems in epistemology. The less mature often mistake the sciences to be totally empirical and rational. I recall an older lab as-sistant in a class of mine. He prefaced every statement with “as a scientist.” Regrettably he was not acquainted with cutting edge the-ories. Since René Descartes (and, later, David Hume) we find serious
The Plants at Butler Ruins

Introduction.

Butler Ruins is a prehistoric site located on Route 95, 10 ½ miles west of Route 191. Route 95 begins three miles south of Blanding, Utah, cutting west from 191 to Hanksville, which is just east of Capital Reef National Park.

The ancient people lived here from about 6500 B.C. to 1300 A.D. They used to be called the “Anasazi,” but this Navajo word is objectionable to their descendants, the Pueblo Indians, because it means “ancient enemy.” So the leaflet for the site says “Puebloans,” but, presumably for budgetary reasons, the signs still say “Anasazi.”

The prevailing rock, Navajo sandstone, was probably formed from wind-blown sand. This was the basic Puebloan building block. Over thousands of years, seeps and springs dissolved the cement that bound the grains of sand, hollowing out alcoves in which the people lived and built structures such as kivas (worship pits) and granaries. Sandstone was also used to make matates (flat tools for grinding corn and other seeds), to sharpen tools, straighten arrow shafts, and provide surfaces on which to paint and peck out images.

Plants were the shopping malls for these hunter-farmers, their grocery and hardware stores, pharmacies, shoe and clothing stores, lumber yards. Difficult as it is to imagine living in this often-harsh high-desert environment, it is impossible to imagine human life here, at all, without the plants.

First, to name some: Colorado Pinyon, Utah Juniper, Utah Serviceberry, Big Sage, Cliffrose, Narrow-Leaf Yucca, Little-Leaf Mountain Mahogany.

We deck these plants with descriptive adjectives: aromatic, gray, ubiquitous, crooked, spreading, fibrous, nutritious, stiff, common, useful, lovely, durable, rich.

Among their uses: food, hoes, digging sticks, arrow shafts, bows, pot and basket repair, cradleboard padding, bonding (paint to rocks), roofing materials, even toilet paper.

They also inspire lyrical paeans: Colorado Pinyon: the tree of life; Serviceberry: you shall know it by its leaves; Yucca: the most important cultivated plant; Little-Leaf Mountain Mahogany: its loveliness is trumpeted by its name.

Notable among willows is Narrow-Leaf Coyote, or Salix exigua, so-called, perhaps, because coyotes hide in its dense thickets, and/or because it attracts coyote prey, such as rabbits, birds large and small, or because it creeps, stalker-like —though the name also evokes its brush-like buds and catkins. Whatever the case, cartoons and jokes aside, Coyote is known for airiness and grace.

Coming back to the Serviceberry, its fruit was eaten raw, cooked, dried. The ancestors may not, ultimately, have survived, but they certainly tried.

A final word of admonition: if you plan to visit Butler Ruins, I assume you respect tradition and are habitually circumspect. But a human footprint takes twenty years to disappear from the crust of the soil in areas of higher rainfall; in lower, as long as three-hundred fifty. So, as you enjoy the plants, watch your step!

RON SINGER

Note: The introductory information and many parts of the plant descriptions follow closely from a pamphlet I found at the site in April, 2011: D & K Ambrose, Jim Jorgensen, and John Dткиcher, Butler Ruins Trail Guide, Bureau of Land Management, Monticello, Utah, Field Office, n.d. —RS
problems with simple empiricism and logic; without Enlightenment thought we are limited to revealed truth as found in various scriptures and esteemed authority.

As an example, I recall one Friday where, in passing, I mentioned that in the Protestant version of the Bible, God was not mentioned in the book of Esther. On the subsequent Monday a student came up after class and said that she had discussed the matter with her pastor and he thought I was wrong. I asked in what verse “God” was to be found. She seemed shocked that I would expect her to have read the rather short volume when an outside authority was available. This dependence on authority has been heightened by the use of the computer. If it is in print (even in an online blog) it must be true. Or, if a celebrity endorses it, it must be desirable. While some are celebrated for wisdom, celebrity talk shows on television suggest that this is the exception. Worse yet, if an elected senator says that evolution is a wrong-minded theory—or that global warming is a hoax designed to get government money—how could he be wrong?

The major perception (even as touted by the colleges themselves) is that by pursuing education, students enhance their material being. At the moment it seems to be somewhat true. However, nearly every major magazine has asked the question, “Is that true anymore?” The answer may be “no.” So, if there is any doubt that an education will bring in wealth, what is a college education for? It is unethical to promise riches when a student attains a liberal arts degree when we can clearly see that it is not true. Then, what can be promised? As a last resort: what about an education?

This is where quality interdisciplinary teaching becomes vital. Interdisciplinary is not just having multiple teachers with a smorgasbord of topics. Rather, it is an attitude in which all knowledge is understood as ultimately one. The reflection on the meaning of life may be its own reward, as well as the realization that there are a few things that can be known with certainty, while others we cannot know. Plato held that ultimate knowledge was ineffable. Saint Paul said that “now we see through a glass darkly.” Such realizations may be frustrating, but they give a basis for a richer understanding. They lead to tolerance and a desire to see justice in the world. It is the role of the interdisciplinary team to lead the student out of the cave and into the light. We do not need more data. We need a better understanding of the unity between us and our world.

African Treasure

The fog parted and she saw a glimmer of light among the rocks.

A piece of gold foil the wind had probably carried inland from one of the safari camps along the Skeleton Coast.

It glittered in her fingers like a small piece of the sun.

Some day she’d twine it in her braids, but for now she’d keep it in the hut to look at from time to time.

How curious the tourists who had discarded it.

Interested in the ribs of old ships, bones of animals, graves of sailors along the shore

careless with beauty they held in their hands.

CAROL LAVELLE SNOW □
“If It Weren’t For My Wound...”

The Artist as Mystic and More with Yahia Lababidi

AN INTERVIEW BY ROB VOLLMAR

Yahia Lababidi’s ability to traverse cultures, disciplines, and even time itself has garnered him considerable attention and praise. His published works include a collection of aphorisms, *Signposts to Nowhere* (Jane Street Press, 2008), a book of essays on a startling array of topics, including literature, popular culture, and the Arab experience, *Trial by Ink* (Common Ground Publishing, 2010); a book of poems, *Fever Dreams* (Crisis Chronicles Press, 2011); and, most recently, *The Artist as Mystic* (One Such Press, 2012), a collaborative conversation with fellow aphorist and writer Alex Stein. The illustrations that accompany our own conversation with Lababidi are visual conceptualizations of a few of his newer, yet-to-be-published aphorisms.

Rob Vollmar: You grew up in Egypt, and your family is of Lebanese descent. How long have your parents lived in Egypt?

Yahia Lababidi: My father is Lebanese, and my mother is Egyptian. They were based in Lebanon and left around the time I was born. I was born in Egypt. They left because of the civil war. Their house was taken over, and my dad still speaks of how the family photo albums were defaced. Recently we went on a visit. We went by to see this idealized, fantastic place that I grew up with. It was conveyed to me by my father and the stories that he would tell me how it was the Switzerland of the Arab world. You could go skiing and then drive down and be at the beach. I don’t know Lebanon. I only visited it as an adult when I was working with the UN seven or eight years ago. I was sent there on a trip, and that was my first proper understanding of it as an adult. I remember thinking, “Good god, it’s so physically beautiful” in comparison to Egypt, which has an austere beauty with the desert. I liked the more relaxed morality of Lebanese

"To struggle is to get further ensnared: Surrender."
culture. The piece I wrote in *Trial by Ink* ["Dancing on the Graves"] was my love letter to that experience as I was able to acknowledge that side of my background.

RV: I thought the premise of *The Artist as Mystic* was provocative because it draws a bond between two ideas that both resist easy definition. We’re left at the beginning with something of a cypher, like “X=Y”, but with only a hazy sense of what data we might use to solve that equation.

YL: That’s exactly how the project began. Alex was kind enough . . . and you must remind me to talk about him more as we go along because I wouldn’t have been able to do this book without him. He gave me the permission, unlocked something, that allowed this to come out because I was thinking about these things in a way that was too intimate, too shy to venture out—especially a concept like mysticism. I mean, good God, I come from a culture where I was forced to resist this type of thing because it was so loud and clumsy. I thought, “No, this is something private. You keep it to yourself.” So when I found that I was having my own thing to say about it, I couldn’t imagine saying it in a public way. As a result of this project or experiment that he and I had, it seemed safe to come out.

RV: We normally draw a circle around mysticism as something belonging to spirituality, more broadly, but to religion, more specifically. The majority of the writers that you are taking a look at in these conversations are people who have almost aggressively rejected that but still maintain—and you talk about this with Nietzsche and Kierkegaard—a religious timbre to what they are writing.

YL: Yes! They are denouncing, overthrowing. People who are not so familiar with these writers and who are strictly religious find this to be the height of arrogance that I dare to present these particular guys as mystics. I think, if I’m allowed to say this, that mystics are rebels. They are certainly the rebels of the religious community. That’s why they have been denounced as heretics. Whether they are coming from a philosophic tradition or a mystic tradition, they are going further than orthodoxy permits. They are saying things like “I am God,” but they are not saying it in an irreligious way. They just don’t want any intermediary. They don’t want any dogma. They don’t want any middleman. They are lusting for that contact and the immediacy. The meshing. The union. Nothing less will do. They brandish the faith of the heretic. These are people who found that everything around fell short of their exacting standards.

RV: Every religion has its mystic strain. I think of it, then, that a religious system has space in it for people who want to intersect with its ideas on a number of different levels. Some people may just need it to order their daily lives and give them meaning. It’s almost like the way we use the internet. Some people want to use it to keep track of what their cousin is doing in another state. Others may want to use it as a tool for discourse. Rather

"The air is dense with spirits swarming for soul."
than saying, “This way is good and this other way is more shallow somehow,” instead we can just recognize that this is the richness of the religious experience. It has built into it the nuances that can feed these different hungers.

YL: Yes, and different degrees of hunger, too. The mystic is someone who is interested in interdisciplinary ideas. In the larger sense of the word. Religion is a guidebook or an alphabet, but the mystic is one who scrambles all of that to create new words and new sequences. It becomes a launch pad into a greater unknown. Religion might be the runway and the mystic has taken off. This might sound condescending, but I don’t mean it in that way. The mystic is much messier also, but in that messiness he is intensifying what it means to wing it on your own. That’s the path of someone who is picking up ideas in an interdisciplinary way here and there versus the security of knowing, “I am here. I major in this and only this, and this represents the truth and this is how it is.” There is a security in that, to be sure, and certainly there are values and goodness too. Once you decide that the open sky is your home, then it becomes trickier to find somewhere to perch and make your nest.

Kafka and Baudelaire: The Invalids

RV: In the conversation, Kafka and Baudelaire are grouped together. You refer to them as The Invalids. This took me on an interesting train of thought as I was reminded of shamanic traditions in pre-civilized cultures. The shamans are people who have typically been wounded themselves. In recovering from that experience, they are given the tools to help people who haven’t wandered into this territory get back to a place where they can function, even though the shaman may never return to that place where they can function in a traditional societal sense.

YL: What you were saying about the shaman, I think is true for this lot, for this bunch of the wounded. There a quote from Jung: “It is only the wounded physician that heals.” Jung is certainly someone who is susceptible to pre-civilization thinking, as you call it. He is someone who speaks of our “archaic residue.”

Whether it’s Pascal, who is another great thinker/mystic type, or where Kafka found himself—most of these guys are, for some reason or another [wounded] . . . I mean, Kierkegaard speaks of his wound in a very enigmatic way in his correspondences. “If it weren’t for my wound . . .”

Another part of it . . . and maybe this is simplistic way of saying it but also, I feel, true— is that it accounts for their great sensitivity. We tend to heal—all of us—and part of healing is a kind of deadening to feeling. But to live as an open wound is to always be hypersensitive.

RV: The conversation that you have with Alex about Baudelaire reads like a cautionary tale about what happens to those who are clearly called to this mystic state of being and yet won’t or can’t surrender themselves to it. A quote from your conversation reads that “before approaching that mystic condition, one must accept the diminution of the constructed self. The dissolution of the personality that comes with honest admiration, that diminution was too high a price. In the end, he would not pay it, not even though

“The great whale hunt of the spirit life is also pursued in dreams.”
the alternative was madness."

YL: That’s what drove Alex and me mad about Baudelaire, each in our own way. We both wrestled with him. When it came time to do this piece, to have this conversation about him, in this context, that was the great waste and the great pity. Sartre, for example, has his own take. Who else—who is that French maniac?—Jean Genet has his own take. Everyone has his own take on Baudelaire. They all wanted to claim him, as a philosopher or as something else. For this project, to claim him as a mystic is to realize the great loss which he realized if you read him as we read him. One can, of course, read him however one chooses to read him. He is a bit of a cautionary tale because it ends badly. It ends with someone struggling desperately towards the light, asking to be whipped (a friend of his is the one who whips him). He is speaking to himself at a feverish pitch in his diaries to transform. To finally take what Kafka calls the “point of no return,” that is, the point that must be reached. In Baudelaire’s case, he is cheated of that because of syphilis, the degenerative state he arrives to, He doesn’t recognize himself in the mirror anymore. He is basically losing his mind. And to see what sort of a pathetic struggle was taking place, yeah, it is a cautionary tale, but at the same time, who is to say that the struggle itself is not the utmost that a person is capable of? So when you very kindly said he didn’t or couldn’t make this commitment, maybe he did just by struggling wholeheartedly. Maybe that’s the most that can be asked of him given the circumstances.

Nietzsche, Rilke and Ekelund: The Exquisites

RV: As you move into the next section of the conversation, you begin talking about another group, The Exquisites, beginning with Nietzsche. Structurally, it feels like the conversation moves into another territory. It feels like we are talking about people who more fully inhabit this archetype of the artist as mystic.

YL: I thought it was useful, in this conversation, to regard them as one because of their great affinity. I find these slightly hokey affinities. Oh, these two guys they were both born the same year. Oh, they were both Libras. I’m susceptible to this kind of nonsense too! With Nietzsche, Rilke, and Ekelund, it’s quite deep. In Rilke’s case, they share a girlfriend, and it’s beyond a girlfriend with these guys. It’s beyond a soul mate. It’s very deep. Salomé is endlessly fascinating for me, and, in the case of Ekelund, who, in many ways, was not participating with the world at large, he was talking to Nietzsche in a way that you don’t necessarily speak. Even for a dead relative, you wouldn’t necessarily assume that kind of familiarity. There is something about those three, when I throw myself in the mix, that makes a particular kind of sense. If nothing else, it crystallizes the type that I’m hovering around in trying discuss the artist as a mystic. Ekelund spells it out. He says the real poet is a mystic and no less.

RV: It is interesting that with Nietzsche, more so than Rilke or Ekelund, the end of his story is really not that much more uplifting than what we got from Baudelaire. Even though the mechanisms of that dismantling were different. He does spend the last ten years of his life—

YL: And it may also be syphilis. We don’t know definitively but it may well have been syphilis. It’s certainly a humiliating madness if nothing else.

RV: So we look at Nietzsche’s progression through his mystical experience. Is that a positive story? Is it another cautionary tale?

YL: With this particular one, yes, it is a cautionary tale, but there seems to be more to it. He took on so very much, or so it seems to me. There are some, like Tolstoy, who just dismiss him as stupid and mad. Just like that. And that’s the end of it. There’s no more. He’s not interested in the nuance. For me, there is something heroic about Nietzsche that is not
heroic about Baudelaire. Baudelaire is a terrific poet. Nietzsche was not. Nietzsche was something else. There is something heroic about the spirit even with its nonsense and noise—and there’s plenty of that—and that’s my difficulty now with him is how he was stuck on a certain rebelliousness even if it meant cutting off his nose to spite his own face.

In spite of himself, though, he took on a great deal more, so that you can almost set the person aside. If you were just going in there with your archeologist’s brush to excavate this site, there’s so much more there that you can take and run with in so many different directions. As people have done. I mean, he’s been claimed by everyone of every persuasion possible. Yes, it is a cautionary tale because it ends the way that it ends. It’s full of noise and nonsense. You were asking me about Baudelaire, if I could sort of take him and rewind him or make another story of him. In Nietzsche, I see Rumi. I see Rumi in him. It’s odd perhaps to say that. Whatever that means. Maybe I’m back to my hokey horoscope thing. Maybe it’s a Libra thing. His version of contradictions, his version of radical ecstasy, his version of scholar become poet is realized in a Rumi.

RV: You actually go into much greater depth about Nietzsche in *Trial by Ink* than in these conversations with Alex. I wonder if you could lay out what you see as the connections between Nietzsche and Rilke?

YL: I did have that monstrous essay, and by monstrous, I mean in terms of the demands that it places on the reader, in *Trial by Ink* about Nietzsche and Wilde. That was just me getting that out of my system so I didn’t feel like I needed to do it again. Nietzsche and Rilke, if I had to sum them up—and I have the mind that, whether or not I like it, tends to collapse things, distill them into a handful of words—I’d say it’s an aesthetic ecstasy and that’s what Ekelund . . . he can tag along for aesthetic ecstasy. He can hitch a ride there. He arrives at the same place taking the same caravan that they ride. For them, beauty is not a skin-deep thing. They arrive at this place which demands transformation.

Nietzsche talks about the Overman as the necessary...if it wasn’t for overcoming, he wouldn’t have bothered. This is someone who would have, as he perceived it, would have checked out a long time ago. Transformation is the bait that keeps him going. He believes in it, and he believes in it in a big way. He believes in it through the aesthetic experience—even though he’s very conflicted about the aesthetic experience and [thinks of] the artist as inferior to the philosopher because he’s sort of stuck on beauty. He’ll never clear that hurdle, but then there’s a deeper beauty past the music of the language or particular images that they create. It’s this deep belief in beauty as their way out. Their way to mysticism really and nothing less. Their ecstatic experiences are aesthetic ones.

You have Rilke in a much quoted poem “Archaic Torso of Apollo” saying that even in admiring a work of art, the art demands that you must change your life. If there’s one thing—and it goes beyond connective tissue, it’s an umbilical cord that snags tight between these two—is this idea that it is not possible [just] to admire beauty, and they were both gonomers for beauty. The manufacturing of beauty and the observation and distilling of beauty. But once they’d begun that, it had to end with, “You must change your life.” That’s the higher law of beauty.

**Kierkegaard**

RV: Kierkegaard has an almost messianic quality about him. I was interested in the sections where you talked about how he was so engaging in public and then would have these brooding, intensive periods at home.

YL: That really fascinated me as well. I will say, again since he’s not here, Kierkegaard is probably closer for Alex than any of these other fellows. He’s the one that Alex has studied the closest and, I think I can say this, that he feels the greatest affinity for. After our conversations, I did read Alex. I’m reading him now among other things. It’s interesting to me, after the fact, to read that he’s been talking to them, throughout his books, but in another way, in another language. So Kierkegaard meant a great deal to him. I could tell that he was happy to do Kierkegaard when I suggested him. I could see that this was one that meant a lot to him. The messianic side is one that he admires him most for.

It was really Alex’s conclusion, not mine, when he says, “What a great loss for the pulpit not to have had him.” I never thought it through to that extent. What would he have looked like actually within the system? When Alex wrote that—I have to say, the way we do this is I get his stuff and print it out. I curl up somewhere in the corner of the room, under my bed, in the dark, and I read them. And re-read them. And I imagine what I felt and what he’s thinking. In my innate, snooty rebellion, I stopped at that. The continued on p. 45
The City and the Sea

I cannot imagine a city without a sea.

I cannot imagine a city without windows that echo stories like seashells. I can imagine a city without clocks.

I cannot imagine a city without a language that breaks on the streets, like the waves against the rocks. I can imagine a city without statues.

I cannot imagine a city without memories that flicker in the moonlight like sea salt. I can imagine a city without traffic lights.

I cannot imagine a city without dance planted in its soul like a huge rock in the Mediterranean sea. I can imagine a city without skyscrapers.

But not without a sky invented by the sea. Not without a sea.

ZEINA HASHEM BECK
In Beirut

Like the meaning of poems, they unfold inside my mind, like rain they inspire me to welcome the day, it is they that wake me, not the sun.  

_I didn’t care much for the sun when I had the streets of Beirut._

The balcony on the tenth floor towers over the ugly roofs, (is there a tender word for ugly?) and yet the moon steps down and chooses to dance and flicker upon the roofs, the gray moon-glazed roofs, there are more roofs than buildings as I look from the balcony with autumn in my palms.  

_I didn’t care much for beauty when I had the balconies of Beirut._

Rain in Beirut is Beirut rain, café lights glimmer in the rain, how hypnotic they are, like drowning yellow gods who summon us for coffee, how elastic time is and how irrelevant.  

_I didn’t care much for the hours, when I had the rain of Beirut._

ZEINA HASHEM BECK
The Old Stairs of Beirut

They are definitely female. 
I imagine them as an old woman 
with fat knees, faint tattoos, 
and the smell of piss. 
I imagine them 
as an old woman not afraid 
of the memories written 
across her skin, 
of baring her breasts 
to the night sky, 
of climbing stairs. 

They do not mock the world 
for not knowing it is round, 
for not knowing it turns 
around itself, 
for being fickle and so young, 

and even in their old age, 
even though they know 
they are the opposite of time, 
they forgive. 

They conspire only with the city, 
for only the city understands 
pale graffiti and chipped stone, 
only the city understands 
their descent into its heart, 
only the city understands 
not being tired of being 

an immortal old woman 
resting between garbage and art, 
in the sun-punctured shade 
that is almost a night 
sky perforated with stars. 

ZEINA HASHEM BECK

Page 40
CROSSTIMBERS, A Multicultural, Interdisciplinary Journal
White Magician

On summer nights my dad wore his oversized abaya which hung like a white valley between his thin knees. I ran and sat inside it, and he swung me left and right, and I forgot that there was no TV, no light but that of the melting moon and candle.

On summer nights my dad would keep slapping his arms and legs, cursing the mosquitoes that only liked his blood, because his blood was salty, and I would scratch my hand and say that mine seems to be salty too.

On summer nights my dad would dip his index inside his Cognac, then turn it around the edge of the glass making that sound that made me laugh, saying, “Do you hear that? I could do magic.”

On summer nights my dad yes, was a white magician with salty blood, and it made perfect sense to be that, and it made perfect sense for the world to turn around the rim of a glass.

ZEINA HASHEM BECK
Coloring with My Daughter

She only knows
color, doesn't understand lines,
invents and reinvents the borderless:

the teeth, green, the face, green,
the gaps between the fingers,
green. Color pours from her paper and floods

the living room. Soon my hair is green,
my soles, my soul, her smile, the day.

I wonder when
she will learn
to be blind like us.

No.
I wonder how.

ZEINA HASHEM BECK
All the photographs in the Beirut section are the work of Rola Khayyat.
The illustrations in the Lababidi interview are the work of Shayna Pond.
apartness of [Kierkegaard’s] mysticism and then to imagine him within the system, I’d never gone so far as to do that until I came across this book, this journal, by a cousin of his that was not meant to be published during his lifetime. For some reason, George Washington University library has a hold of it. It was just good luck that I found it right before the conversation with Alex. And, in reading it, the way that books can do if you read them closely enough, if you lean into them, he came to the fore.

I’d read in his journals about how he was the life and soul of the party. Everyone hung on his every word. Witticism was just pouring from his mouth. But then he goes home—and he wanted to kill himself. I understood that. I was 18 at the time, and I had this juvenile affinity with the masks we put on. You go out. You’re in company. You have fun. You’re excited, but you go home and you are existentially alone and brooding and you’re deep and the rest of it. It was interesting, though, to see to what extent that he was good company. He took it upon himself to keep this wound of his to himself so that even those closest to him were very surprised in reading his papers to come across that. He was always available.

Even when he had become a figure of public ridicule, he’d set himself for this with the local paper by presenting himself so that they could take him on for his views and caricature him—this negative attention or publicity that he got—even then the street was a kind of theater for him. He had one of those personalities, extroverted personalities, gregarious personalities, exhibitionist also, that liked to play with people the way that Socrates liked to play with people. The difference was he also had enough of, whatever this was, discipline, self-discipline, compulsion to write it down in his brooding moments. He could have been another one of these people who just took it to the street, just challenged people with these verbal and mental games. He seemed to pretty much live this way. Perfect strangers he would approach and “hook them with a look” as he was fond of saying. He had enough faith in human nature, whether it was a child because he was very much a child himself, he could find a way into them. Find a point of contact to speak and engage with them. His business, his great existential quandaries was really his business and that’s probably why he couldn’t share this with Regina, because once you let someone in, a spouse or a partner or a lover, it’s hard to keep yourself from them that way. But he could do it with everyone else.

**The Art of Conversation**

**RV:** It’s tempting as we are drawing that comparison to Socrates to recognize that Socrates didn’t write anything down for us. It’s entirely possible that he had that same kind of internal dialogue that was very different from his external dialogue. The external dialogue is, perhaps, the symptom by which we can diagnose the internal—

**YL:** Condition! No, I’m writing this down. The external dialogue is the symptom by which we can diagnose the internal condition. That’s a neat little aphorism for me, right there.

In Socrates’ case, whatever the internal condition was, you have to think, however gregarious the public figure was, you have to think that he didn’t believe in language. Even in himself. He believed in the thing as a breath that challenged and, potentially, nourished, but he’s also a person who concludes in this very sublime manner by saying, “I go to death and you go to life and who knows which is the better of the two? That’s an enigmatic thing to say. The fact that he didn’t write is not for lack of thought. To arrive at that condition means that, for some reason, he must of thought it not worthwhile.

**RV:** I look at the ancient Greek tradition, between Pythagoras and Socrates, and I find it curious that many of those thinkers found language to be almost too debased. It was untrustworthy. As soon as we fix something into words—

**YL:** It’s lost in translation!

**Aphorisms**

**RV:** One of the things that you touch upon in the book and in the format of *The Artist as Mystic* is that conversation
brings out aspects of communication that we don’t get through an e-mail interview because you have a certain degree of preparation that you do in advance of an interview in planning but conversations have a way of evolving.

YL: I’m a huge fan of conversation just because of the spontaneous aspect. Whatever it is that you’ve been thinking and being, you can put in your mouth in the moment; then it also surprises you because the other person draws out things that you can’t get to by yourself. The dead interview is the one that is flat on the page. For me, a conversation is full of surprises.

RV: Given that both you and Alex are aphorists, what did you discover in your conversations about the essential nature of the aphorism serving as a bridge between poetry and philosophy?

YL: That’s a good question. Let me start with Ekelund. The form you choose, or the form that chooses you, the form that presents the idea best, is not incidental. It carries significance. The fact that he chose to express himself in aphorisms means that not only did he share Nietzsche’s way of thinking but . . . the aphorist mistrusts language and self on a deeper level. The aphorism is something that you can rescue from both the mistrustful self and mistrustful language. This is really the first time I’m saying this, so
I’m thinking it through with you. That is what aphorists have in common. It’s not the philosopher’s certainty to sit down and lay out systems. It’s open-ended, like has been said earlier. It’s the person who, even if the thought itself is devastating, would like to tickle it and twist it at the end before they send it out. So there is something of the short story writer there. Because it’s so condensed, you have to, of necessity, have something of the poet’s ear for language. If poetry is considered prose—that is, prose that is considered, then every word has to count in an aphorism as a vehicle for the idea to take off or to be sent out. It has to stand on its own. It really has nothing. There is no introduction to it. Nobody comes in and says, “I’d like you to meet my friend so-and-so the aphorism.” It just arrives, unannounced, and then leaves unannounced too.

**RV:** The aphorism doesn’t leave you an avenue for argument. You can’t go through it and discuss or even dismantle it structurally. It just walks into the room, makes a statement and then leaves. And it leaves you with yourself.

**YL:** And leaves you with yourself! It walks in and ruffles the room. Where there was complacency, where there was apathy, where there was disinterest, suddenly you are asking, “What was that?” or “How do I feel about that?” Lots of times, aphorisms—and certainly epigrams, maxims, whatever you like—are half-truths. They are clever, witty, dressed-up jokes with a mind on them. They are not absolute truths. They are just enough of a truth that they can, as you say, get you to think for yourself about where you stand in relation to them. If they can stir thought, that’s all they really aspire to. The enemy of the aphorism is the cliché, the ready-made idea. That’s where aphorism are, by their nature, slightly subversive. They have that twist. They take received wisdom and flip it on its head. They show the opposite of what you thought was truth, the underside of it.

**RV:** When I think the presentation of Socrates that we get from Plato, it’s rare when he goes on a diatribe and says, “This is how this thing is.” It is more common for him to take something that someone has just said, reformulate it as a question and then hand it right back to them.

**YL:** It’s this open-endedness. More and more, I’m finding that it’s the rigidity of conclusion that one wants to avoid, especially in the larger conversation. If you want to leave room for others, any others, do leave room for them to participate.

**Interdisciplinarity**

**RV:** I wanted to speak with you about *The Artist as Mystic for Crosstimbers* because I felt like it cut to the core of interdisciplinarity. In specialized education, you are being trained to think as one kind of person. You are one thing or another. Not even literature is immune to this.

**YL:** I’ve always been a generalist at heart. Interdisciplinarity is huge because it saves us from specificity, which is nice but only for a short while. The idea of only one way is no good. It’s no good in religion. It’s no good in nationalism. It’s no good in literature. It deprives you of the multiplicity of possibilities. Interdisciplinarity says, “There is truth here and here and also over here.” You can make a dense weave of these different strands and bring them into agreement in a larger conversation, a larger sense of possibility. That’s something I believe in and I believe in it deeply. Whether it’s literature or beyond, I could never choose one way or the other.
A hakawati, in general, is an historic figure in Arabic culture—a storyteller who enjoyed a privileged position prior to the advent and proliferation of radio, television and other modern forms of entertainment. There are several important hakawatis who haunt the pages of Rabih Alameddine’s book of the same name, not the least of whom being the author himself. Alameddine is a Lebanese-American writer who came to the United States in the 1970s and earned degrees in computer programming and business before emerging as an artist (both a painter and a writer) in the early 1990s.

The Hakawati meshes the historical, the personal, and the fantastic with such elegant precision that the receptive reader is able to abandon all expectations of the many genres that swim within its pages and revel in the joy of witnessing a master storyteller at work. It is a book about storytellers and storytelling that never loses sight of its own obligation to weave a narrative compelling enough to propel the reader through 520+ twisting pages.

One of the simplest ways to describe the story is in a description of its layers. Hovering closest to the top is a narrative about a Lebanese-American man, Osama al-Kharrat, who returns to Beirut to be by his father’s side while he slowly dies in a hospital. The scene is occupied by a daunting array of characters, family members, and close friends of the family who cycle in and out of the hospital room as the patriarch descends from illness towards his final passage. Alameddine is content to leave this aspect of the story sparse in comparison to the rest of the book. Not much is said or done that might distinguish the al-Kharrat family’s experience from any death vigil. It’s a universal story, and its specificities are slyly tucked away in long-standing lines of tension that flare and recede, mostly without explanation.

Cultural identity is a major theme in The Hakawati, and Alameddine establishes it in his primary narrative. Osama has lived in the United States since going there to study in the 1970s and expresses a sense of alienation both from the city of his birth and, to a lesser extent, his family. As al-Kharrat visits the building where he grew up, he remarks that “I felt foreign to myself,” adding later that he “felt like a tourist in a bizarre land. I was home.”(7) His family echoes this cultural distance upon his arrival, his cousin remarking after an awkward moment, “You’re so American . . . . Why is it that you are quiet all the time but when you speak all you do is irritate people?”(28)

This theme resonates throughout several layers of the story. The second narrative emerges as we learn more about the al-Kharrat family legacy. Osama’s grandfather, Ismail al-Kharrat is at least one of the titular hakawati referenced in the book and, perhaps, the most important. The offspring of a European missionary and his Armenian servant, the elder al-Kharrat is a product of two cultures and embraced by neither. Raised culturally Christian in Muslim-dominated Turkey, Ismail inhabits the nether space between

The Hakawati by Rabih Alameddine
(513 pp., Alfred A. Knopf, 2008)

A REVIEW BY ROB VOLLMAR
multiple worlds simultaneously and, in it, discovers his calling as a storyteller.

Alameddine uses his introduction into the book as occasion to spin off two more important threads: one which traces the family’s lineage along the spine of Lebanon’s history over the past 100+ years and a second that draws upon the rich Arabic storytelling tradition to interlace fable after fable to complement and obliquely comment on the other whirling narratives. The stories are drawn from cloth spun from the three intermingling Abrahamic faiths—Islam, Judaism, and Christianity—and the polytheistic beliefs that persisted before their rise. This dizzying palette of faith is reflected in the past and present narratives of the al-Kharrat family. One salty anecdote about a great uncle demonstrates this theme at work in the story masterfully.

Aref studied hard, but he also played hard. Rumors of his mad conquests trickled to the village.

To his impressionable teenage brother Jalal, he said, “All women are different. A Druze woman tastes like half-cooked lamb with rosemary and peppers, a Maronite tastes like beef marinated in olive oil, a Sunni girl like calf’s liver cooked in white wine, a Shiite like chicken in vinegar with pine nuts, an Orthodox like fish in tahini sauce, a Jewish woman like baked kibbeh, a Melchite like semolina stew, a Protestant like chicken soup and an Alawite like okra in beef stock.”

And Aref tasted them all and more. He wanted a bite of each sect of his land, and that desire developed into a gastronomical obsession. (232)

As illustrated above, Alameddine is not afraid to address the sexual mores of his characters. The Hakawati is filled with love and sex, as one might expect in a story about family. What may surprise some readers is the subtlety with which Alameddine addresses homoeroticism in Arabic culture. Only in fable are the stories of lovers of the same sex allowed to express themselves. Within the narrative of the al-Kharrat family, it can be interpreted that two generations of gay men, both signified as heir to grandfather Ismail’s gift for storytelling, develop their sexual identity in stories that are not told by the narrator but only hinted at in reflections. Given the almost matter-of-fact placement that same-sex partners are given in the fables, the manner in which Alameddine makes the reader deduce orientation by the lack of lovers and the lack of children seems meaningful even if he lays down his cards in a pair of scenes near the end of the book.

Osama’s mother recounts on her death bed

“Do you think for a moment that Jihad fell in love with me or I fell in love with him? Please. No matter what Farid and Jihad might have ardently wished to believe, no one was ever fooled. I recognized—oh, what shall we call it?—his special ability to be best friends with women, the instant I saw his impish grin from across the room. My God, how could I not, given the way he crossed his legs or what he did with his hands? No one would talk about it, but that didn’t mean anyone was fooled.” (418)

And, earlier, from Osama

I walked into the den, and the movie wall was still up...Through the years, Uncle Jihad had cut out images from movie magazines, particularly Italian ones and had pasted a collage onto the whole wall.
A window had been broken in the den, and a piece of glass had embedded itself in a picture of the Ferris wheel in *The Third Man*. I picked it out and cut my index finger. I shoved my finger in my mouth and sucked on my wound. . .(365)

But in the lower right corner, one image was scraped away, with the wall’s plaster showing through. I didn’t have to be told who scraped it off or what picture it was. After Uncle Jihad’s death, my father wouldn’t have wanted anyone to see the image of Alan Bates and Oliver Reed kissing fiercely. My father must have spent quite a bit of time scraping.

My finger still bled. I dabbed the blood around my lips and kissed the forlorn space. The red imprint of my lips matches Marlene’s. (366)

“Core texts and core ideas inform our humanity. What does it mean to be human? It is a never-ending quest that threatens to vanish in the present climate of sound bites and slogans that produce only the shallowest of perspectives.

We have a mission to transmit the best that has been wondered, and to elicit serious and thoughtful responses from our students. Let us proceed with passion.”

John Dexter Marble
Vice President for Academic Affairs
University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma

Even with the embarrassment of thematic riches on display in *The Hakawati*, the take-away is all about the importance of storytelling and, by association, storytellers. If I had to draw a parallel between this and any other book, it would be another book about storytelling, Margaret Atwood’s *The Blind Assassin*. The similarities were surely not lost on Alameddine as he planned and plotted this masterpiece, even offering a nudge and a wink at one point as he casually allows his narrator to reveal that “while my parents napped, I stayed in the kitchen reading *The Handmaid’s Tale.*” (449). Memorable quotes about storytelling abound throughout every narrative.

Here’s a sample:

“Listen. Allow me to be your god. Let me take you on a journey beyond imagining. Let me tell you a story.”(5)

“Why do people always believe liars?” I asked. “We all need to believe. It’s human nature.”(93)

“It’s because you should know that, no matter how good a story is, there is more at stake in the telling.”(96)

“So, you ask, why am I telling you a story without a great ending? Because, as in all great stories, the end is never where you expect it to be.”(344)

“The tale, even during its inchoate years, was never about Baybars, but those around him. The story of the king is the story of the people, and unfortunately, to this day, no king has learned that lesson.” (441)

If we are coerced into believing that the saga of the al-Kharrat family has its roots in Alameddine’s own experiences, one cannot fault the storyteller’s mastery for creating a fiction so complex that we discover a need within ourselves to believe that it is real.

After all, as Uncle Jihad himself once was reported to say, “Never trust the teller. Trust the tale.” (206)

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Sally arrived in our town the summer I turned sixteen, and that three-months’ stretch of heat burned up what was left of my childhood. She had that kind of wrecked voice that made her sound like a pack-a-day smoker, a woman with a story to tell in what my granddad, Sloane Hale, called a whiskey voice. She looked to me like she might be as old as twenty-five, the perfect older woman to train me for what I hoped would be a lifetime of pleasing women.

Earlier, in the spring, I’d made a very bad start on this with Mary Elizabeth Wilkins after the Junior prom when I kissed her on the nose and not in a cute way. The look of disgust on Mary Elizabeth’s face said she could tell what a clumsy idiot I was. That had been the close of an almost interminable year, 1957, which yielded only one thing of any value. In American Lit class I read a quote from Benjamin Franklin about older women being grateful for the attentions of younger men. This, of course, was not a passage assigned by the teacher, but the fruit of my habitual prowling outside the designated pages looking for richer material.

Sally lived with relatives by the name of Lancaster, a kind but childless couple, whose only distinction in town was raising peacocks on a heavily treed acreage a mile or two out of town. I was surprised when Sally got a job as the Methodist church secretary, and I let myself imagine that this job—keeping attendance records, paying utility bills, and writing notes to shut-ins—was a cover, a kind of recompense for the former, racy life her husky voice suggested. Sometimes I’d feel ashamed of this fantasy when I’d see her in town modestly dressed and minding her own business. But she was one of the few good-looking single women in Cadillac, and I finally convinced myself that seeing as how I was from a good Baptist family, it would be a step in the right direction for her to get to know me.

I devised a plan. My summer job was making the deliveries for McCall’s Grocery. I had fixed a large sturdy box to the front of my bicycle and pedaled around town in 90 to 100 degree heat trying to reach the housewives before the milk and eggs got warm. So it was easy for me to pedal over to the church office and pretend I had a delivery for the pastor.

Standing in the doorway, grinning, my tall gangly shadow making the little room even darker, I held up the bag of onions a housewife had changed her mind about. “Your grocery delivery, ma’am.” The office wasn’t much more than a closet and smelled of dust. It was hot as hell. There was a high window in the back, but it looked like it was painted shut. Stacks of hymnals were stored on the floor. In the dim light Sally was typing at a table just big enough to hold the huge typewriter.

“I’m sorry. What did you say?” She looked at me politely, like maybe I wanted to join the church. “You could use a fan in here.”

“Did you need something?”

“Whatcha typing?”

“Rev. Morgan’s sermon. Can I help you?”

Just hearing that tragic voice made me sure I’d chosen the right woman, but the fact that she was encircled by hymnals and typing a sermon set me back and I left.

It took a week to come up with a new plan. I spent all the tips I’d earned since the first of June to purchase a small black electric fan at the second-hand store. I hid it in the stock room at McCall’s until I had a delivery in the direction of the church.

That night I overheard my aunt tell my mother that Sally had been married very briefly to what she described as a “clean cut young man from a good family.” The two women went on to speculate about what went wrong, and I pretended to shine my shoes.

“Perhaps he didn’t want children,” mother offered.

“Well,” said my aunt, always one to darken any discussion, “perhaps it was her who didn’t want children.”

“Nooo,” mother said. “Not that sweet thing. There she is working for Reverend Morgan. He wouldn’t hire a woman who didn’t want children.”
“Three months they were married,” my aunt said, her eyebrows up. “A woman always believes that she can bring a man around to children over the years. Right? But a man would act swiftly if his bride said, absolutely no children. No man would stick by a woman like that even though she is a pretty little thing.”

My whole body was heating up at the idea of Sally having been married, and my mind pressed her against the wall of the church office. “I’ll just finish these on the back porch,” I told the women as I clutched my shoes in front of my zipper.

When I took the fan to Sally, I insisted that she let me plug it in. With the seriousness of a man installing an electric dishwasher, I instructed her to sit at her desk while I sat on the floor and adjusted the direction of the airflow until it fluttered her skirt. Still sitting on the floor, I schooled her on the importance of using the oscillating option. “You want the fan to blow away from you for a second or two, so you can start to sweat again. That makes it cooler when the fan hits you.” She nodded politely and thanked me, her husky voice making me sweat even more. I gazed at the bare pink toes in her sandals until she said, “Now that I have all this cool air, I know my work will go faster. Thank you again. This was very sweet.”

This was as close as I’d been and if I left now, I had no idea what I’d do next to get inside this room. I backed two steps to the door. “Do you have a car?” I blurted. She put her head to the side like she was on to me.

“Never mind,” I said, “I just wondered how you got to work and back out to the Lancasters.”

“Sometimes I have a ride. Sometimes I walk. It’s not very far.”

“Seems far to me. A mile or two.”

She shrugged and turned to her work. The sting of this rejection sent me into a week of despair mixed with moments of wild elation. The image of the married woman pressed the accelerator on my heart, and I prayed for inspiration. Meanwhile I decided to attend the Methodist services. The next Sunday I sat directly behind her. That was a mistake. I could smell her flowery fragrance and was soon in no condition to be in the company of God and the Methodists.

Nights were torture. My mind would fly into extravagant fantasies of running away with her, me improbably at the wheel of the Lancaster’s Dodge, and then everything would crash in sweaty, unsatisfying attempts to satisfy myself. I slept little and my parents eyed me with suspicion and concern.

From behind the parsonage’s forsythia hedge, I spied on Sally and discovered that she left the church every day at 3:00 on the dot. My deliveries were usually over by 2:00, and the obvious solution finally dawned on me. Rt. 201, the road to the Lancaster’s, opened before me, the path to Paradise.

Clean and pressed, I showed up at 3:00 Friday afternoon to walk her home. She was putting a stiff, black cover on her typewriter. “You’re in high school, aren’t you.” It wasn’t a question. “You’re the Lawlor’s boy.” I nodded and added that I was a senior and liked walking and talking. I let on that I was well-read in current events and literature and had a lot to talk about. She shrugged. And we began our first walk together.

I talked about Sputnik, Dream interpretation. The sorry state of education in America and a whole lot of other stuff I’ve forgotten now. A nervous kid talking big and not stopping to take a breath, I didn’t inquire about her and where she came from and what she liked. When the Lancaster’s farm suddenly loomed before me, I realized I’d wasted my first opportunity to learn anything from this woman or make myself desirable to her. She thanked me for seeing her home, an old-fashioned phrase even then, and the gulf between our ages widened.

There’s always a price to pay for trying something new in a small town, and sure enough, a friend of my aunt had seen us as she’d driven past. The sound of the car had probably been drowned out by the raving idiot who didn’t notice.

“Are you getting a little ahead of yourself?” my aunt asked in a voice overflowing with insinuation. “Why don’tcha tell that girl she needs to clear her throat.”

“Margaret!” said my mother, always one to protect me. “Did you know that McCall’s put their mayonnaise on sale?”

“No one else in this town has much to say,” Sally said after we’d started walking regularly, and I’d calmed down. “To me, I mean,” she added.

I thought about this, then asked, “Haven’t you made any friends here?”

“I get the idea that a divorced woman is a little suspect.”

In one fell swoop Sally had opened up a real conversation, and I felt I was in way over my head and just listened to our footsteps on the gravelly shoulder of Rt. 201. Finally I asked, “What’s it like, getting divorced?”

She turned her head away. “Divorce is just a legal term. It doesn’t mean you stop loving someone.”

This was unexpected. I wanted a story about a rotten guy who hit her, and she was too proud to stay with such a man and got a lawyer. “So why’d you get divorced?
Didn’t he want children?”

“We both wanted children very much.” The farm was in sight, and she thanked me and took off walking fast. I watched her head for that house where two dull old people waited, people who hadn’t, as my mother had reported, introduced her to potential friends at their church. But I didn’t want her to have friends. I needed her to be so desperately lonely that she’d value the company of a high school boy.

By the end of July the heat stayed through the night, the leaves on the trees drooped, and the grass turned brown as usual. Sometimes old Mr. Lancaster was waiting out in front of the church in his Dodge, so I didn’t get to walk Sally home. But when I did, she smiled like she was glad to see me. My aunt kept teasing me about her, but that got easier to ignore. I also gained a little more control of the conversation about the divorce.

“What was it like being married?” I asked near the end of August.

“He’s a wonderful man.” Her raspy voice caressed the words, and I despaired.

At least she hadn’t given his name. I didn’t really want to know anything about him. I just wanted to know her. “So why did you get divorced?”

She didn’t say anything for most of a mile, and my heart ached a little for her because I knew some big thing had happened to her, and she’d had to leave her hometown and had no one to talk to. No way to work it out of her system.

She gave me a sad look. “You’re so young.”

“Oh Sally, please don’t say that. Just talk to me. You know you’ll feel better if you talk to me.”

She thought about this for another quarter mile, then without any prompting from me said, “I didn’t want to leave him, and his parents said if I stayed with him, they’d put me through school at the university. Pay for everything.” She glanced at me to see how I was taking this.

“You loved him. You wanted to stay. You could have had a college education. So?” I could have mentioned I’d heard he was clean-cut and from a good family too, but she was praising him enough, and besides it would hurt her to know she was talked about.

“Let’s rest a minute,” she said. There was a big cottonwood tree surrounded by bushes on the right side of the road, and we sat down in some dead grass beneath the tree. We were close enough to the farm that I could hear one of the peacocks screaming, like the squall of a wildcat.

Sally sat with her legs bent, pulled her dress down tight and crossed her arms on her knees. Looking off toward town, she rested her chin on her arms. “I left Stillwater because I couldn’t bear to run into Stephen. Just seeing him burned a hole in me. I couldn’t live with him in the same house and not really have him as my husband. Don’t you see?”

“Didn’t he love you?”

“He will always love me.”

“I didn’t want to hear any more about these people. Wasn’t love what made it all work? What had happened to her? She was so small and in so much pain. I put my arm around her and leaned my head against hers. “I’d do anything for you,” I said.

She turned and put her hands on my chest and pressed me to the ground and let her little body down on me. I got my arms and legs around her. I knew what to do. She didn’t have to tell me. One hand behind her head and the other across her back so as not to hurt her, I rolled us over. She had two hands full of my shirt. She was trembling. “I begged him!” she cried. She had wanted Stephen and he hadn’t wanted her, and her body bucked with the grief of this. “Please,” she sobbed and I slid my hand up between her legs but she pushed me away and sat up, leaned her head on her knees and sobbed. Though I was burning, I sat up and rested my hand on her back. Panting, I waited.

Finally Sally turned to me. “I’m sorry. I’m so sorry. It’s just I always thought Stephen would be the first.”

What could I say? I’d been so close. Life would never bring me another woman like Sally. I swallowed hard. “It’s okay,” I muttered and softly patted her back. “It’s okay. But I can’t imagine a man not wanting you, so maybe he was queer? Was that it?”

“Don’t tell anyone.”

“I won’t,” I said and flushed under this sign of her trust.

“I couldn’t figure out what was wrong with me.” She began to cry again.

“Oh, Sally, nothing, nothing in the world is wrong with you. You just need a different man. One who’ll love you completely.”

“You think I’ll find one?”

“Sure you will.”

She sniffed and with a sad little smile she said, “And so will Stephen.”

“I guess so.” Now I wanted to cry cause I’d lost my chance, but also because I knew I sure hadn’t been offering complete love.

“And you’ll find a girl,” she said. “And she’ll be so lucky to have a boy who is driven to pursue and win her.”

That day I took her words as a promise, and through the years I’ve always been grateful that, whatever she thought of her clumsy, relentless suitor, she had never laughed at him. Some of the details of her unique prettiness have faded, but not the memory of us sitting there under the cottonwood, two virgins picking grass out of each other’s hair, me and the woman I’d wanted to teach me about love.
In The Words Of The Beholder

BY RIVER ADAMS

The morning sky
Is a conversation
Between You
And me.
Every unsaid thing
I exhale
In one ecstatic breath
After another.

I find special beauty in the sky. A cliché to many, it is not to me, and that beauty stuns me every time anew. I raise my eyes to the heavens, often, in a habit that never becomes routine, much like a mother’s gesture to touch her child’s forehead to tell a temperature: it seems to an outsider a passing thing, but in that moment her whole being is tuned to it, sensing, connected. Drinking in her own wellbeing from another.

I look up at the sky when I rise in the morning and stand by the window to greet the new day, and when I walk out of the door. When I travel home, tired of my restless mind, and the mind quiets in the gliding spans of the heavenly line. When I want to share celebration or to ask for consolation. Because the heavens—the beauty of the sky infinitely changing in its fluidity and infinitely enduring in its constant presence—take my breath away.

To me, the sky is the smile of God, His conversation with me—a touching, subtle play of hues so inimitable that its poignancy boils tears in my eyes. An outpouring of glory so spectacular, so symphonically grandiose that only a gasp and a whispered prayer dare accompany it. A pattern of wispy or doodly clouds so obviously facetious that any burden I carry slips off my shoulders, any mood turns into laughter. When I look at the sky, my soul sings and feels the touch of my one Love. When I look at the sky, nothing else exists but its unequaled beauty, and we are one.

It was not always so. I am what people tend to call a “convert”—a conscious discoverer of faith. I’d lived a long time in darkness and torturous loneliness until the day I saw God smile. But on that day, in the whirlwind of my changing life, He lifted up my face and showed me the sky—the perpetual miracle of His beauty, the sign of our covenant. And He promised it to me.

In place of a promised land, I have a promised sky.

It had not always been so, but, of course, I’d always loved the sky, especially sunsets. So many people do, that such a statement no longer tells us anything about one another. Who doesn’t like sunsets?

I used to drive home on the highway, and, marveling at a particularly gorgeous horizon, I used to think that, if there’d been a god, he’d probably communicate this way with humans. It was but a poetic expression to me then. I didn’t realize there was anything more to see in what I was seeing.

Who likes to think she lacks in appreciation of beauty? And is there really such a thing? Can we point to something and tell our friends it’s more beautiful than they think? We see in what surrounds us as much as we recognize, and no more. No less. People say that beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and that’s true. That’s what makes us different, diverse, complementary—and it’s a wondrous thing. I keep telling myself this because I am tempted to keep pulling my friends’ faces up. I keep wanting to beg, “Look! Look, can’t you see? Look at this wonder, the glory! The beauty… How breathtaking… What treasure…” I keep wanting to feel them dissolve into it next to me, all boundaries shimmering outside of time.

I did that again and again when this was all new to me, and they obligingly looked. They said, “It’s really nice.” They said, “Wow. That’s a beautiful sunset.” They said, “Ummm. Yeah, clouds.” Then they looked down and talked. If I kept pushing, I felt their resentment at an implication that I was somehow more sensitive to nature’s beauty than they. Of course, this wasn’t so.

It’s taken me a while to understand why there is such a difference between the ways they and I see the sky, and it’s not about beauty. It’s about love.

All of us are taken with beauty, but we are taken also with the roller coasters in our minds—my friends and I, then and I now. We are busily processing people, constantly defining ourselves by what we know, remember, and think. By what’s important. All of us see beauty in different ways.

Almost all of us appreciate aesthetically pleasing sights, so when you and your friend stand on a mountain top surveying a majestic landscape below, if both of you have any
sense at all, you will probably have reactions of similar magnitude. You both will gasp, you both will smile. You both will want to stand there for a certain period of time, snap pictures, commit the sight to memory. Perhaps, you’ll point out landmarks to each other. Perhaps, you will whisper in awe.

Unless one of you loves the land you are seeing.

You both might smile and chat, unless for one of you this land is homeland, the land made fertile with his ancestors’ sacred bones—his childhood, his dearest memories, where his mother’s cooking awaits him and the smoke rises from his house chimney. Where he knows every path, every hill, the scratch on every tree, every ant hill and old bear, every nook. Where every smell tells him the story of primeval rising and every sunray falls upon a healing herb, nurtured by the ancient recipes. Where he cares to labor all his life or to lay it down for the thriving and protection of what is holy. Where he stands. Lives. And dies.

When we look at the things we love, our hearts are filled with more than aesthetic appreciation—they are filled with every meaning those things carry. With the meaning of life itself. When you stand atop that mountain, one of you might cry, for love overwhelms.

The ways my friends and I look at the sky, the way I used to look at it and the way I look at it now . . . There’s a difference. Imagine a generic picture of a handsome man that pre-fills a store-bought frame. Now imagine a portrait of the love of your life, as he is bursting with laughter, on the happiest day in your memory, and you can discern each freckle on his cheekbones, sprinkled by the sun, so dear to you that your heart spasms at the sight. It is the difference between a beautiful face and a beloved face.

We are together always, my Love and I, but when I look at the sky, I see the line of His smile, the shine of His eyes. I can almost hear His voice, whispering to me that which He wants me to know. It is our embrace. His song. The play of His brush. Our silent conversation.

When they say that beauty is in the eye of the beholder, they are talking about love. ☐

Shafer, Introduction, continued from p. 3

who discovers her connection with her grandmother in an old photograph: “A woman had died 30 years before I was born, but she managed to leave something behind, and an occasional morning in the mirror I see my face and love her. How fitting that I knew at a moment like that, in the shadowless light of bathroom lamps, what I was carrying under my heart . . . I don’t need doctors to tell me. She is a girl. And her name is Rose.”

In the first paragraph of his memoir, “Rebecca’s World,” Edward Ziegler could have anticipated one of the primary themes of this issue of Crosstimbers: “Beginnings and endings in life are sometimes hard to distinguish. One easily becomes the other, especially when enfolded in the memories of our dreams.” Later he writes, as though he had read “In Transit,” “So much can vanish from our lives—people, places, and sometimes large parts of our selves, even our memories. The Sanskrit-Buddhist text the Diamond Sutra tells us that life is like ‘so many phantoms in a dream.’”

In Douglas Cole’s “The Direction I Needed to be Going,” we enter the world of a man looking for low-cost housing amidst memories of nasty arguments. The narrator tells of walking “down a street disappearing into gray, as if anything beyond my vision just dissolved into uncreated dream.” He ponders, “Worms crawling out of the wet earth have more direction than a man searching for lost paradise along the edge of the boardwalk.” After discovering two dead men on a ship and talking to the police, he “went back to looking for rent signs, drifting along. Something good had to appear sooner or later.” Here is a man in the midst of loss, of an ending that has not yet turned into any beginning.

In his review of Jason Poudrier’s Red Fields, a volume of war poetry, Matt Higdon notes, “Red Fields is certainly macabre, as well as chaotic, but there is a kind of music to the chaos. Like the pitch in a musical number, these words rise and fall as they wind their way through love and loss, fondness and regret, laughter and tears, life and death.”

Carson Strigham’s “Invisible Man in the Black Bag” and Poudrier’s “Subjects Of Merriment” and “Iraqis” capture the absurdity, the horror, and the heroism of war.

This issue of Crosstimbers contains a hoard of topics to explore, thinkers to meet, questions to ponder, mysteries to solve. Disciplines merge. Poets sing of Grignard reagent, Chicxulub, Fat Man and Little Boy, the Pietà, Keepers of the Myths, Aphrodite, Demeter, Erato, Salix exigua. Storytellers take us from womb to tomb. Academics ponder the purpose of education and discuss such iconic figures as Kafka, Baudelaire, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, and Ekelund.

And where words don’t suffice, there is a chance to feast on Rola Khayyat’s stunning photographs, smile at Shayna Pond’s art work, note how Rabih Alameddine saw himself, imagine visiting the goddesses in Dena Madole’s studio, or look up at the sky with River Adams. ☐
One Hundred Years of Marriage: 
A Novel in Stories, by Louise Farmer Smith
(CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform [April 10, 2012])

A REVIEW BY BRENDA GABIOUD BROWN

How many times have you wanted to turn to your long-suffering friend who is once again complaining and ask, “So, why, exactly, did you marry Jim or Betty or . . . ?” Good manners usually precludes doing the actual asking, but the bewilderment remains. It is this kind of bafflement that led Louise Farmer Smith to research and write One Hundred Years of Marriage. The 210-page “novel-in-stories” examines several generations of the narrator’s family’s marriages, paying careful attention to the individual childhoods that preceded these unions.

Delving into this familial history is the perfect way to spend a hot, oppressive Oklahoma summer afternoon. With wit, detail, and honesty, she shares the reality of wedded bliss in the last century and a half. The first story (there are a total of six), “The House after It Was Leveled,” is dated 1960 and shares the story of the narrator’s parents’ marriage. Central to this tale is Daddy, always referred to as “The General,” who has returned from Korea and has replaced soldiers with family members. In response, “Mother” has taken to her bed, deeply depressed and unable to do even the simplest of chores. Only after seeing a therapist is she able to rally enough to understand she needs to escape the relationship. But, as is the case in reality, marriages are not that easy to end.

The next two chapters take the reader back to 1934 and 1923 and examine the families from which sprouted the General and Mother. Dan Hale, her father, was above all a conversationalist. He had no plans, no ambitions, just the land he inherited. Victoria, her mother, was a hardworking seamstress and milliner who struggled to keep food on the table—occasionally taking a moment to think about the reliable German baker whose hand she had turned down. While the lives described are detailed in their austerity, Smith continually enlivens the text with secondary characters, usually members of the community. Portly, uncivil Mrs. Wagonard drops “crumbs down the cushions as she Hoovers up . . . delicate biscuits.”

So, why was Dan the way he was? Why was he incapable of making his life progress? In 1894, he, his father, and his mother make their way across the Oklahoma prairie. But life is especially difficult for his mother, who has lost several children in infancy. Daily confused by the actions of his mother and father, who has lost several children in infancy. Daily confused by the actions of his mother and father, it is only when Dan actually sees his mother attempt suicide that he understands the situation. Finally, his father bluntly explains, “We’re taking your mother to the state insane asylum in Lincoln.”

And, why did Victoria choose Dan? In the second to last chapter dated 1887, her mother tells her, “find a husband who will talk to you.” This from a woman who has been silenced by her husband’s actions. This from the woman who had been a bride at 16, rescued “from the ashes of a small farm near the Smoky Mountains.”

Abruptly, the concluding chapter takes us back to 1970, and we are looking at the narrator’s wedding. Confused by the organized chaos and expectations, her best friend (who is not from Oklahoma) asks, “So why are you doing this? Putting yourself through an exhaustive ritual you don’t even believe in?” In a truly circular manner, she concedes she is doing it for her mother . . . and her father. But, once again, things do not always go according to plan.

One Hundred Years of Marriage examines family and culture and the expectations inherent in each of these. It seeks to reveal what is usually kept hidden, those family secrets that one covers so tightly. It is not a warning; it is not an epitaph. It seeks to enlighten and to expose—with humor, understanding, and sympathy. □
Rebecca’s World
A Memoir of Swirling Blue Snowflakes, Haviland Tea Cups, and Magical Canyons
BY EDWARD ZIEGLER

Blue here is a shell for you
Inside you'll hear a sigh
A foggy lullaby
This is your song from me.
Joni Mitchel — Blue, 1970

Beginnings and endings in life are sometimes hard to distinguish. One easily becomes the other, especially when enfolded in the memories of our dreams. It’s a little like the weather at my mountain home. One season can open before another closes. Winter often comes early in these high mountains, and the first snow can arrive even on days when the stands of aspen are still aglow in their autumn hues of yellow and amber. Then there is always that October day when the fading warmth of the sun is followed by the cold brush of late day snow in the thin mountain air. Soon my house will be bundled in deep snow that may last till May. It feels like a natural miracle when that happens here each year, and I always try to think of it as a new beginning. But with the magic of that first snowfall, Rebecca nearly always drifts into mind.

I first met Rebecca in the winter of 1972. I was 23 and in law school at the University of Kentucky in Lexington. It was a difficult time for me, and that winter was unusually cold and dreary. I had little money and was in transition from one world to another. I knew her only briefly, but meeting Rebecca became a gentle blessing in my life. All of that, of course, was a long time ago.

After leaving Lexington, I managed to find my way. I became a law professor, raised a son, and managed to live most of my life in a house high in the Rocky Mountains. That was a dream Rebecca and I shared at the beginning of this journey.

I am now 64 and winding down a long law teaching, writing, and lecturing career. My life is in transition again, and I am not sure what lies ahead. I’ll make espresso at dawn, take long walks, do tai chi, and maybe write a little. I might even travel back to Kentucky and live for a time on a farm in Jasmine County. Who knows what might turn up?

I am finally learning to accept the fact that I will probably not find Rebecca just by chance someday in a shop in the mountains near Denver. Sometimes I actually thought that might happen. Perhaps, writing this is my way of finally saying goodbye. I never realized the last time we parted and spoke those words, nearly a lifetime ago, how final they might be. Whoever does with friends like this? This, as I remember it, is Rebecca’s story, and mine.

I had gone to law school after a football career as a running back at the University of Notre Dame and, following knee surgery, failing my physical exam to play football with the New York Giants. I studied hard and did well in my first year classes. My bonus money from the New York Giants eventually ran out at the beginning of that first winter, and I was living out of my Volkswagen red beetle convertible and showering mornings at the law school. My life was more than a little disheveled, but that first autumn without football I felt liberated.

I was drawn to radical left politics. Revolution was in the air (for many people my age) and thinking deep
thoughts seemed serious business at the time. It was also great fun, at least for a while. I drank at bars pretty much every day and often smoked pot with friends. In my second year of law school I wrote an article titled “Jurisprudenz and the American Elite: Bye, Bye, Miss American Pie.” The article advocated the overthrow of the United States Government, and I polished the piece for days. It was written for the university’s left-leaning law and policy journal Kentucky Law Commentator. The art for the piece was a full-page head and shoulder sketch of Nixon in a regal robe, wearing a crown and holding a gavel with the word “justice” engraved on it. I loved it.

That article was my first published piece, but that issue of that journal was the last ever published by the university. Alumni outrage about my article and others like it (students protesting the Vietnam War had been tear-gassed on the Kentucky campus around that time) led the law school to abolish the journal.

About this time I moved to a new apartment. I didn’t know Rebecca, but my small apartment was across the hall from her at the back of a two-story old red brick building near Limestone Street and Broadway. The neighborhood included tobacco warehouses, business offices, a few rooming houses, and some railroad tracks and crossings. The area had little student housing, but it was just a short walk to the main Kentucky campus. I later learned that Rebecca was studying English literature and art, though she was not actually enrolled in classes.

I was both a romantic and a realist, and I was finding it difficult to cobble together a life vision around the existential humanism that I embraced at the time. As a result, I felt increasingly clueless about my place in the world. I had abandoned Catholicism at Notre Dame, believed that death was absolute, and was now emotionally rebelling against the cold reality of the eternal order. My anchor during those Notre Dame years may have been just the periodic discipline of athletics and the promise of a professional sports career. That life vision had vanished, and that winter I clearly felt I had lost my way.

My mixed feelings about the future led to my struggling with finding a suitable professional life. I had seen enough of the ills and embarrassments of growing up poor in Kentucky not to know the importance of achieving some financially rewarding lifestyle. That path, whatever it was, would hopefully not exclude the beauty and joy that I also wanted in my life. I feared becoming like Tolstoy’s Ivan Ilyich, dead before death in a lawyer’s life. All my instincts were against it.

My first real contact with Rebecca came when I found a small bag of chocolate cookies at my apartment door on a snowy day in January. A note invited me to stop by her apartment for hot chocolate. Before that, I had caught glimpses of her in the hallway, leaving our shared bathroom, and sometimes from a distance entering and leaving our building.

Rebecca was my age, about 23 or perhaps a year or two older. She was not unattractive, but she was not a classically pretty woman. Just over five feet tall and a little heavy in stature, she had a small angular nose, a lovely full mane of wild and long kinky blond hair, and big watery light-blue eyes. She loved scarves and often wore bright paisley flowing blouses and long peasant skirts, belted at the waist, with high boots. In cold weather, she wore a Western fringed and colorfully beaded tan suede jacket that had been a family gift from Santa Fe. She also walked with a slight hitch.

That winter my life reached a low point. I stopped socializing with my drinking and pot companions and started spending more time alone. I frequently cried in bed at night without knowing why. I felt like my own ghost, an intruder in my own life, and disconnected from the world. Feelings of dread shook me to the core. My depression may have been some kind of mental chemistry gone temporarily haywire, perhaps from some kind of emotional overload. Who can know for sure about these things? It would eventually pass, but it was hell waiting for that to happen.

I would stay in my apartment for days reading writers like Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Dostoevsky, Herman Hesse, Henry Miller, Norman Mailer, and Kurt Vonnegut. I would take breaks from my reading in the afternoons and walk for hours through Lexington, just wandering and thinking, often returning to my apartment after dark, to spend most of the night with my books again. I thought about leaving law school and becoming either a monk or a cop.

In the next few weeks Rebecca sent me more bags of cookies, though now without notes. One Saturday afternoon I decided to visit. When the door opened, Rebecca said, smiling, “You’ve been expected… for a while actually.” She laughed, stepped back, and invited me in.

Inside her apartment, two large cushioned chairs fronted a red brick fireplace. On the fireplace mantel, there were books, photos, and a few tea tins. A large faded and tattered green and tan oriental rug covered most of the wood floor, and green pillows and oversized stuffed animals were scattered about. Coffee table art books were piled high.
on the floor and wood shelves of books and records completely filled one wall. Lovely potted plants and hanging herbs filled the street side windows, and art posters covered the walls. I remember a blue Mont Saint Michelle and a bright yellow Van Gogh Sunflowers. The kitchen, like my apartment, was no more than a large closet with doors. A small table for two stood by the window near the kitchen. On the table was a large green glass vase with an array of giant white daisies.

While the chocolate heated, we made small talk about the cold weather and about our problems with the landlord. I thanked her for the cookies and apologized for not stopping by sooner.

“When I never heard back from you, I thought that maybe I had poisoned you,” she replied, smiling. She stood facing me leaning with her back against the stove. “I was worried you might sue me, being a law student and all.”

We both smiled as she sat down across from me. “How did you know that?” I asked.

“Some of your mail from law school got put in my mail slot a while back. Have you paid your tuition for this semester yet?” Rebecca asked.

I smiled, and sipped my hot chocolate. “Well, I am still debating paying my tuition. I’m not sure I really want to be a lawyer.”

Straight faced, she replied, “God, I’ll bet that’s a relief. Why would you anyway?” She smiled, and we both laughed.

I liked this woman. We sat and talked, and shared more hot chocolate. We both liked history, biography, and poetry. She had a framed copy of Dylan Thomas’s poem “Fern Hill” on her wall. I told her it was one of my favorite poems. She asked if I had a favorite verse.

“Not really. What’s yours?” I replied.

She thought a moment, smiled, and quoted the last verse of the poem. “Oh as I was young and easy in the mercy of his means, Time held me green and dying...” She paused, waiting for me.

“Though I sang in my chains like the sea,” I finished the verse for her.

We both smiled.

“Sometimes that poem makes me cry, Edward.”

“Me too,” I replied.

We built a fire and made pasta and vegetables for dinner at her apartment. Rebecca had grown up in a wealthy family in Texas. She loved art, music, books, and flowers. She didn’t have a phone or own a car, and she had a number of problematic health issues (I don’t recall understanding exactly what they were). She also was estranged from her family in Texas.

That evening she shared with me that she was a clairvoyant, an astrologer, and a Wiccan witch of some kind. None of that seemed much out of the ordinary. Those were strange times, and Rebecca was not the first clairvoyant or witch that I had met in Lexington.

I often visited Rebecca’s apartment that winter. We would read, talk, and listen to music. We both liked James Taylor, Cat Stevens and Joan Baez, and Joni Mitchell’s album Blue was a favorite of Rebecca’s that winter. She talked about writing children’s books and about her Buddhist studies. We also talked about how we both hoped to live someday in the Rocky Mountains. Neither of us had ever been there, but we both loved John Denver’s song Rocky Mountain High, and Rebecca often told me there were magical high canyons and meadows there.

Rebecca was bright, well read, talented poet or painter, or that thinner, and prettier or a famous and talented poet or painter, or that I didn’t ever have to worry about money, sure that might be nice. But I’ve never had those things, so I don’t really miss them. What would be the point anyway?”

The snow had tapered off to a light flurry as we stood at the Broadway rail crossing, waiting for a Norfolk Southern train to pass. It grew colder, and the wind picked up. The rumbling of the freight train seemed to add to the cold. Rebecca leaned her face against my shoulder and locked her arm around my waist. “I wish the world could be a little dreamy and otherworldly with her astrology and Wiccan interests. She seemed to embrace the simple Buddhist tenet to do no harm. She knew I was down, and encouraged me with thoughts about tomorrow and seeing the good things already in my life. When I got in a funk she could usually cajole me out of it.

We occasionally walked together at night in the snow. Sometimes we would have serious talks about life, family, and the future. One night, we walked along the railroad tracks by Lexington’s old tobacco warehouses as snowflakes fell in the dim light of the street lamps. I mentioned to Rebecca that she seemed happy and that I wished I could be more like her, more content with things. Rebecca leaned her face against my shoulder and locked her arm through mine. “Yes, I suppose I am happy. I try to be,” She replied. “Of course, I’d like to find love in my life. What woman doesn’t? If you’re asking me do I wish I was taller, thinner, and prettier or a famous and talented poet or painter, or that I didn’t ever have to worry about money, sure that might be nice. But I’ve never had those things, so I don’t really miss them. What would be the point anyway?”

The sometimes walked at night in the snow. Sometimes we would have serious talks about life, family, and the future. One night, we walked along the railroad tracks by Lexington’s old tobacco warehouses as snowflakes fell in the dim light of the street lamps. I mentioned to Rebecca that she seemed happy and that I wished I could be more like her, more content with things. Rebecca leaned her face against my shoulder and locked her arm around my waist. “I wish the world...
were different. But it is what it is. In the end, I think it’s all just so much cosmic dust. Eventually, I think we all lose everything. I think we need to enjoy the little things we cherish and that make us happy. Life is short. What do you think?”

“I’m not sure,” I replied. “You are probably right about the cosmic dust thing. I do know there’s part of me that’s ambitious, that needs to have adventures, slay dragons, and change things.”

“That’s probably just a male thing.” Rebecca said as she stopped to tighten her scarf. “Think about this, Edward. Had you been born just a little earlier in cosmic time, you’d be storming castles in France this weekend. You don’t want to be poor, and you want to shape your own destiny, so you’re ambitious. There’s nothing wrong with that. You’re a dreamer, but you also make things happen in your life. Just remember that adage about being careful about what you wish for. Whatever it is, I suspect you are going to find it.”

“I certainly hope so,” I replied, with a loud and emphatic tone in my voice. We both laughed. She tightened her arm on mine, nudged me, and said smiling, “Don’t be such a brat, Edward!”

Though it was all platonic, we shared an intimacy that’s hard to explain. I think we both made an effort to be gentle with each other, perhaps recognizing that we were both still trying to find our way. Rebecca seemed especially vulnerable, perhaps even fragile. She was clearly not a weak woman, but the truth is I also probably felt that Rebecca knew but never shared that there were things about her health that were more than an exploration. I think Rebecca felt that too. It turned out well the way it did. Rebecca became a unique friend. When I left her apartment, she always put her arms around me, hugged me tightly, and said goodbye. She also always had faith in me, and that was a huge ray of sunshine in my life.

At the beginning, the door was probably open to our becoming more than just friends. The chemistry wasn’t there, though, and it would likely have been no more than an exploration. I think Rebecca felt that too. It turned out well the way it did. Rebecca became a unique friend. When I left her apartment, she always put her arms around me, hugged me tightly, and said goodbye. She also always had faith in me, and that was a huge ray of sunshine in my life.

I wondered sometimes whether there were things about her health that Rebecca knew but never shared with me. I may have felt it too intrusive to directly ask. Perhaps I didn’t ask because I was afraid of having my suspicions confirmed. In any case, if my suspicions were true, she didn’t share that burden with me.

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In May, I moved into a large Victorian house with a group of law students on Transylvania Park in Lexington, about two miles away on the other side of campus. I had found a great job that summer as law clerk for John Breckenridge, the Attorney General of Kentucky. Though we promised to keep in touch, we didn’t, and the fault was mine. Rebecca had left me a card and a note a few weeks later at my house on Transylvania Park, but neither of us had a phone, and I never managed to get back to her. I was busy with school and work, but the truth is I also probably felt Rebecca’s world of “little things” less important than before.

More than a year later I met Rebecca again. It was the summer of 1973. I had just graduated from law school and would be leaving later that summer for a law teaching fellowship at George Washington University. Incredible as it may seem, I had found two mentors, professors at the law school, who were in some ways even crazier than I was. They encouraged me to become a law professor. The teaching fellowship could help make that possible. The world had opened for me.

I was also spending part of that summer with my friends, Willie and David, on a beautiful farm in Jasmine County south of Lexington. The farm was only a few acres of cleared land at the top of a hill overlooking some woods and a limestone creek. It was a primitive place, a weathered gray plank house and a large barn, with an outside well and water pump. It had no electricity (except in the barn) or indoor plumbing. There were spectacular views of the nearby hills and farms, though, and large patches of orange day lilies and blooming honeysuckle bushes everywhere. A favorite memory of the farm is my sitting naked outside in foamy hot water in a small aluminum tub on the high ridge near our house, smoking a Tampa Jewell, drinking a beer, listening to Bob Dylan, Neal Diamond, and Van Morrison songs (played on large outdoor speakers Willie had jerry-rigged from inside the barn), and watching the sun slowly set over the deep green hills of rural Jasmine County. At night, stars lit up the sky. It seemed like paradise.

I found Rebecca, or rather she found me, on a June afternoon when I was walking home from law school to my house on Transylvania Park. She was sitting on the front porch steps of a small yellow house only a few blocks from mine. She was cutting a pile of green beans in the lap of her long paisley cotton skirt when she saw me and called my name. I stopped, and we shared cookies and cold herbal tea. Rebecca seemed well; it was good to see her smiling and to hear her laughter again.
Rebecca had a small apartment that included a little garden at back of the house. Not much else had changed. Her children’s books had not been published. She didn’t have a phone or own a car, and she still walked with a hitch. She was now, though, absolutely delighted with my prospects. No one I think has ever been quite that happy for me. We visited often that summer.

Later in August, I visited Rebecca for dinner. I found her sitting on the front steps at the yellow house reading her neighbor’s Rolling Stone magazine. We sat for a while and then took a short walk before starting dinner.

As we walked, I said to Rebecca, “I am getting a little worried about whether I can really do this Washington thing.”

“Do what, Edward?” Rebecca asked, turning toward me.

“You know, teach law school,” I replied. “I’ve never stood in front of a class before. I’ll have about 120 students. It’s a little scary. And these are going to be really smart kids. I probably couldn’t get in George Washington law school. Now I’ll be their professor. I am not sure I can pull this off. Maybe it will all be a terrible joke, and they’ll fire my ass.”

“I don’t be silly, you will be great!” Rebecca replied. “Your professors love you; they believe you can do it. You’re a late bloomer with this academic stuff. Just keep working hard and you’ll be great.” Rebecca continued. “I can’t believe you’re worrying about this bullshit. Half those kids will probably just be book morons, you know, just book smart. Edward, you’ll eat them alive.”

“I hope you’re right,” I replied.

When we returned, we started dinner in Rebecca’s small kitchen. We made corn chowder. Rebecca sat at the table across from me and cut corn with a small knife from the cobs piled in front of her. She had James Taylor’s Sweet Baby James album playing. The sun partially lit her kitchen with a soft yellow glow on the high walls and ceiling.

“Can we talk about Washington?” I asked.

“What about Washington?” Rebecca replied still cutting corn.

“I’m thinking, maybe I’d really be happier just staying here in Lexington and forgetting about Washington. Jobs are easy to find here, and I really like my life here.”

“What are you talking about?” Rebecca asked.

“I could hang out on the farm in Jasmine County with Willy and Dave. This is where my friends are. Besides, I don’t know a soul in Washington.”

“You’re kidding aren’t you?” Rebecca replied. She wasn’t smiling.

“I’m just saying, maybe I need to give this more thought.”

“That’s such bullshit. Edward, I love the farm too. But that kind of thing just doesn’t last. The whole farm thing will be over before winter. Willy’s at the end of a small inheritance and could be gone tomorrow, and David’s about to get his master’s in social work. Your future’s in Washington. You told me that.”

“Maybe, but I am happy here and thinking why leave, really?”

“You’ll be bored to death here in just a few months,” Rebecca replied.

“You need this adventure. I thought you told me once that being a law professor was your path, what really inspired you about the law.”

“I’m not sure what my path is now. It’s really difficult to know,” I replied.

Rebecca stopped cutting corn, paused for a moment, and then replied. “Knowing your heart may not be that difficult sometimes. The hard part may be having the courage to follow your heart. Not everyone does, and they usually end up miserable. Sometimes we find our truth, our path, just by taking responsibility for the things we feel or believe in. It may just be that simple.”

“You may be right,” I replied.

Rebecca stood up, swept the cut corn from the table onto a tray, turned away into the kitchen and slowly put the corn in the pot cooking on the stove. She said quietly, her back still towards me: “If you stay here in Lexington, Edward, I am afraid that decision might be one that you come to regret for the rest of your life.”

That evening Rebecca lit candles in the garden and made herbal tea. While the water was heating, she brought out a small box with some pieces of old Haviland china she had recently bought at a junk shop. We drank tea that night with these small cups and saucers. Rebecca delighted in showing them to me. The dishes were a white creamy color with soft pink and green apple blossoms around the rims of the saucers and on the sides of the cups. She told me the story of David Haviland, the New York City porcelain dealer in the 1830’s, who, after coming across a broken china cup with a unique translucent quality, traveled to France and spent months searching until he found the china being made from Kaolin white clay in the city of Limoges.

“Really, that’s a cool story. He was sort of a china freak.”

“Yes, but here’s the interesting part,” Rebecca continued. “He was unhappy with the china styles there, so he moved his family and business to France and began making china at Limoges with his new American designs. The rest is history. Haviland china became the favorite of European royalty and American presidents.”

“That’s kind of amazing.” I said.

“Yea, it really is,” Rebecca replied.

“I wonder if Nixon uses Haviland china.”
china at the White House."

“Maybe you’ll find out in Washington,” Rebecca said, and we both laughed.

After taking a sip of tea, I remarked, “Mr. Haviland was certainly a man who found his path in life.”

Rebecca smiled. “Yes, he certainly did and aren’t we happy tonight that he did?” Rebecca held the tea cup and saucer in both hands on her lap, her eyes gazing down for a few moments. When Rebecca looked up, our eyes met, and I returned her smile. Rebecca’s kinky blond hair seemed aglow in the moonlight and her blue eyes, for just a moment, flashed silver in the candlelight. Rebecca’s appearance at that moment unsettled me. She appeared unearthly and enchanting, and, to this day, an early evening bright summer moon easily stirs that memory.

That summer I realized how much Rebecca’s life involved the little things she loved: her books, poetry, flowers, teas, art, music, Buddhist studies, and astrology. Her celebration of the beauty of everyday living was, to some extent, a female type at the time. In no young woman, though, did that virtue shine more brightly. She loved to cook and bake, and she delighted in walks in the neighborhood park and in the fields and woods outside the city. She loved visiting the farm in Jasmine County. She also seemed to have no pressing wish for major changes in her life. Unlike many people I knew, Rebecca had no ambitious plans for future fame or success.

I remember thinking that Rebecca might be the happiest person I knew. Though I knew she had her own dreams and disappointments, Rebecca’s ability to find joy in all the little things she treasured was a genuine awakening for me at the time. That summer, I saw Rebecca’s world as artful, astute, and farsighted. It was a version of happiness I had not imagined, but felt the truth of in my heart. Despite all my new plans and ambitions, I knew that evening walking home from Rebecca’s house that I needed to embrace Rebecca’s secret.

There were no long farewells when I left later that summer. Standing on her front porch, I said goodbye and added, “You have been a good friend.” Rebecca replied. “We will always be friends, Edward.” Then, on the front steps at the yellow house, she hugged me goodbye. As I walked away, Rebecca called after me saying she hoped that we might meet again someday in the Rocky Mountains. I returned her smile and called back, “I’ll see you there.” Then I turned and walked away. A few days later I left for Washington. We never saw each other again.

Over the years, I have wondered how Rebecca’s life played out. Did she find love, have children, did she change with the years? Did she publish her children’s books? I tried to contact Rebecca later that summer after I settled in Washington, D.C. I lost Rebecca’s address, so I wrote Willie at the farm in Kentucky. I never heard back. He had already left for his home in Atlanta. That chapter in my life closed, and Rebecca slipped away.

When we are young, it’s easy to forget that our life journey is not only about all that we achieve as the years go by, but also about all the people and places that we lose, and then forever miss with the passing years. I feel that way when I remember Rebecca. So much can vanish from our lives—people, places, and sometimes large parts of our selves, even our memories. The Sanskrit-Buddhist text the Diamond Sutra tells us that life is like “so many phantoms in a dream.” That sounds about right.

For most of my life, Rebecca has existed for me only in memory. After I left Lexington, I tried to hold close that spirit she shared. More than any books I read during those law school years, Rebecca’s life became a shared vision for my own. Once, a few years ago, after a lecture in Louisville, Kentucky, I visited Lexington. I couldn’t find the farm in Jasmine County where I lived for part of that last summer. It disappeared in the clutter of the suburbs south of the city. In Lexington, I barely recognized my old neighborhoods. The red brick building near Broadway where Rebecca and I had shared apartments had been torn down and replaced with a modern glass building with lofts above boutique stores. I stood looking at the new building and, as my mind’s eye drifted back in time, I almost expected to see Rebecca coming out of the side door of the building. But there were no ghosts at play that day. I turned away thinking just how lucky I had been to know Rebecca (she once described our meeting as “a magical coincidence in cosmic time”). I thought my wish for her would be that she never managed to unlearn what she once knew so well. I also wished for her the friendship we shared when we walked together that winter. I miss her still.

I like to think there are connecting threads in our lives that eternally bind us together. It’s a nice thought, but I know that’s probably just wishful thinking. Our hearts, no doubt, want what the world denies us. Rebecca was probably right about all of us losing everything. Time may put eternity between us, and maybe all we ever hold in our hearts are some fleeting moments and a few
memories. That’s a heartbreaker but probably closer than we like to the truth.

I know the reality of this world is that Rebecca and I might be strangers today, perhaps unrecognizable each to the other. Everything changes, I know, but, then again, change isn’t always everything. I used to see Rebecca when she visited my dreams when I was young, but that doesn’t happen much anymore. I suspect she still visits but just slips by me unnoticed now. Sometimes we can know something just by feeling it, and when we do, it can seem more real than anything we have ever touched or seen in this world. Memories can be like this, and my memory of that young woman I once knew still lies before me. Maybe that’s as close to an eternal embrace as we receive in this life.

Joni Mitchell’s album *Blue* is still my favorite music when it’s snowing. I love snow and welcome it back like an old friend every year. I hope that Rebecca eventually made it to the Rocky Mountains. I like to think I somehow have shared that magnificent white whirl of early season snow that blankets these high mountains with that smiling young woman I knew in law school a long time ago. Sometimes I like to sit quietly and just watch through my windows as these ancient pines and cliffs near my Colorado home receive that first embrace of early season snow. I am not sure how she knew, but I remember Rebecca once telling me that the best time to watch snow fall in these high mountain canyons may be on late afternoons when the sweep of evening slowly begins to extinguish the last slanted rays of the sun. I watch closely then and, as I catch glimpses of the ghosts that stir in the long shadows of the snow, I feel sheltered for a while.

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**Blowing Bubbles**

I watch toddler fingers dipping the wand in soapy solution twirling it around and around and up then down

I watch toddler fingers bringing the wand up to pursed lips where with certain care tiny cheeks puff and blow and blow until the perfect bubble rounds off the tip of the wand floating up and up getting higher and higher on tiny tip toes stretching reaching finger

pop

DEVON SHANNON □
The Direction I Needed to be Going
BY DOUGLAS COLE

A pigeon fluttered onto the upper edge of the broken window. I never would have seen it if that flapping hadn’t caught my eye. And I watched for a moment as other wings flashed inside the abandoned rooms. I completely forget about looking around for rent signs. I forgot about worrying where I would live, about what would work for my two boys, what would work for Carrie and her daughter, the complications and the usual morning stuff that passes for thought. It all disappeared. And for a minute or two I did forget myself and everything else. I know I did. And I really looked at those boarded doors, the broken windows, the empty building here on the waterfront facing north, prime real estate someone would say, now looking like a depression-era flop house with only bird eyes within.

We moved along the boardwalk beneath a low-crawling gray drizzle sky, and I drifted back from Carrie. Gracie was riding ahead on her bike, training wheels rattling. My boys were at their mother’s house. And I felt my head buzz with left-over fight energy. The images Carrie dragged up were coming to me now uninvited because she had drilled them into me so fiercely with her mad words. As with most of our fights, I couldn’t remember what started it. My brain felt like a fuzzy hammer. I watched her walking ahead of me, the flex of her hips. She had a mix of the athlete she once was (as a track star in high school and then college, before a degenerative bone disease ruined her ankle) and the easy strut of the saucepot. She’d kill me if she knew I said that—literally. The fight and its images last night—what had been just a few before were now many in a drunken night with the devil at the Ranch—how many versions had I heard? Truth was then screaming out of her as she clawed at her chest and spit at me and drove me from the room. How did Gracie sleep through that? Then I just went out and stood on the porch, smoking as the quiet rain fell.

I picked up the pace to catch up. Where was I going to go if not to follow? Every glance took me down a street disappearing into gray, as if anything beyond my vision just dissolved into uncreated dream. We walked around the concrete barriers and the chain fence where they were digging a new sewer line on the ocean side of the street. Runners passed with wet hair and squishing foot-falls, the stride of healthy, hopeful good lives. I went back to looking for rent signs, even though Carrie and I were barely speaking, planning my life on the brink of a vaguely terrifying series of conflicts. I had not even told my sons, yet, that we were thinking of moving in with the girls. A car hissed by, music loud booming from big speakers embedded in the doors. Two guys stood on the rooftop of a house, smoking, looking out at the sea.

Worms crawling out of the wet earth have more direction than a man searching for lost paradise along the edge of the boardwalk. And the waves slid in over the black rocks, white foaming and then slipping back. Across the waters the city floated in the mist, a downtown crowded with high-rises. A ferry boat went gliding west, heading for the islands. And out there farther still and barely visible the mountains hovered along the coast that really did represent the end of the world dropping off into nothing. She wants to be near water. Water calms her. I wanted to move up beside her and take her hand, but she was in her trance and my skin was electrified. I was an eel on two legs, land-bound when I should have been sliding through the lightless deep.

Gracie circled back, the tassels on her handlebars shimmering like fish scales. Innocent child with evil father, my lover’s ex-husband, sex addict, heroin addict, addict addict I would have to know in this life. Energy like air runs between us all so that the
furrowed brow of that woman fast-walking is rippling through my friend Jeff who is feeling the first wave of a heart attack that will snap him right out of this world, the same energy flaring in the kiss between my ex-wife and her hair stylist back before I even felt the truth of it triggering me to light a cigarette and look out from the sun-hot deck I called Hawaii, toasting an Eden already fading as I came most fully into it—that’s the great dream of the butterfly, and that’s where the candle flame meets the sun flare meets Augustine thinking yes beside Kierkegaard dreaming no and opening a door in the void I fly through before I am born—“What’s going on over there?” I said, pointing at a boat drifting up onto the shore.

Two men were standing next to the path. One was talking to the other, the other pointing down at the boat. We walked up to them, and she said, “Something going on?”

They both looked over at us, at her more directly. “Strange,” the first man said. He was tall with black curly hair and glasses, a touch of the academic about him or the civil servant. The other man was a bull-knecked, buzz-cut backhoe driver—on this you can trust me—I had seen him in the cage of the backhoe tearing up my backyard behind the shack I was renting. That’s the way it works when you rent—one day you are measuring oil in the underground tank with a bamboo stick, the next day a man in an orange vest shows up to ask you to move your cars so he can bring in the heavy equipment. I hadn’t even locked the front door before the warped windows were rattling from the force of the big machine engine and its teeth carving into the ground.

“It doesn’t look right,” the backhoe driver said. “Yeah,” she said. “The outboard motor is still down.”

“It could have drifted away from the dock,” I said. “Maybe I should call someone,” the clerk said, his glasses speckled with rain.

“I think someone went overboard,” the backhoe driver said, grim and in love with his insight. “Not right. Definitely not right.”

“I should go call…someone,” the clerk said, and I could see he wanted to walk away and couldn’t.

I dropped down, sat on the edge of the walkway, my hands on the ground, and lowered myself onto the rocks below. The waves were rolling in. The tide was slack, though, and I stood on a sliver of wet sand and took off my shoes.

“Throw a rock at it,” the backhoe driver said.

I ignored him.

The boat was up on the sand, the prow wedged in with the stern cantilevered out there, each wave driving it in more. I rolled my pant legs up and stepped into the water. I only had to take a few steps to reach the boat. I pulled myself up and climbed onto the deck. It looked clean. Then I pulled back the hatch door with tinted glass and leaned into the cabin. I smelled beer. The cabin was dark. I smelled beer and gasoline and…something else. Instinct made me go slow. I saw two men lying in the V-birth. They were both on their backs. I had never smelled death before, but I knew it immediately.

I went back out onto the deck and breathed fast and deep. “Better make that call,” I shouted up to the clerk. But apparently someone else had already made that call because a fish and wildlife boat now appeared. They had one of those boats decked out with winches and pulleys and gaff hooks and nets and a glassed-in tower with a man at the wheel and another man in all-weather gear leaning forward with one hand holding onto a guy wire. They slid in behind the boat I was on, somehow keeping themselves from running aground, and the man leaning out stepped quick and easy onto the deck beside me.

“This your boat?” he asked me.

“No. I just came on. I was walking with my girlfriend and we saw it drifting here.”

“Anyone on board?”

I nodded, and he looked past me and into the cabin. Then, he went inside.

He wasn’t in there very long before he came out and jumped back onto the other boat. I heard him say to the other man, “Call it in. We have two bodies, here.” He came back and brought a rope with him and tied the two boats together.

“Can I go?” I asked. Did I have to ask? Did he have any authority to keep me from leaving? I felt like I was in a movie.

“You know anything about this?”

“No. Like I said, I just climbed up here,” and I pointed back at the shore where Carrie stood with Gracie and the other two men.

“All right. But stick around. The shore patrol will be here any minute, and they might want to ask you a few questions.”

“Okay,” I said.

I climbed back over the side of the boat and waded through the water to the shore. I grabbed my shoes and pulled myself up onto the walkway and sat there.

She came over and leaned down and asked me, “What did you see?”

“Didn’t you hear?”

“No.”

“Two guys,” I said. “I’m pretty sure they’re dead.”
She froze. I had seen her do this before. She was trembling slightly. She turned slowly and went over to Gracie. The shore patrol boat was coming. I could see it. I just sat there, witness in the wild dream.

“Come on,” I heard her say to Gracie. “Come on, honey. Don’t look.”

The patrol men arrived wearing black, and they climbed aboard the boat and looked inside. Then they talked to the men on the fish and wildlife boat, and the one I had talked to pointed up at me. One of the patrolmen waved for me to come over, so I climbed back down to the strip of sand and stood there and waited. I wasn’t sure if he wanted me to come out to the boat or not. He and the other patrolman talked and went back into the cabin and came out and talked some more. One of them went back onto the patrol boat and the other climbed down into the water. He was wearing waders.

He came up to me with that big authority barrel of energy all bristling like his short-cut mustache and asked me what I saw, what I knew. I told him the same thing I told the fish and wildlife guy. I didn’t know anything. I was just an innocent bystander, as they say. I thought that, but I didn’t say it. I tried to seem normal. He didn’t seem to think I wasn’t. He asked for my name and address and phone number. He said they might have to contact me again, but most likely they wouldn’t.

I’ve never liked talking to the police much, on land or water. I always feel a little like a criminal. What does that mean, I wondered as I climbed back up onto the boardwalk. Nothing, I told myself. Nothing at all. And I looked down the boardwalk to where Carrie and Gracie had gone far ahead. Carrie hadn’t wanted to wait for me, and I didn’t blame her. I don’t blame anyone. I just went back to looking for rent signs, drifting along. Something good had to appear sooner or later.

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These Ghosts from a Season of War
A Review of Red Fields by Jason Poudrier

BY MATT HIGDON

Jason Poudrier’s Red Fields is a collection of poetry from his experiences as a soldier during the invasion phase of the Iraq War. It gives the reader a look into a restless mind, one filled with haunted memories and vivid details, from which images and sounds and feelings seem, at once, both to tumble onto and to jump off the page, invading the reader’s thoughts and coming somberly to rest upon the heart.

In the first poem—which shares the title of the book—Poudrier skillfully weaves together the activity and imagery of very different places: Midwestern soil and Middle-Eastern sand, both tractor and tank slowly rolling along, each breaking new ground on the “unplowed field” of the farmland and the foreign land.

“Dear Mr. Sandman” runs almost like a eulogy, remembering and retelling the story of a man killed and left in a ditch. The memory is deeply troubled, remorseful, intimate and resigned: “…then I’ll hold you briefly in my arms / and know you forever.”

Here is a place where memories invade dreams, dreams invade reality, and reality collapses back into the memory once again; such is the case in “Post-Gratification Disorder,” as an intense combat dream fades into a midnight bedroom scene, and the naked woman whom he has just frightened leaves—and the door that slams behind her, reawakens the combat nightmare.

Amid these ghosts from a season of war, death runs amok. In “A Corpse Walked Into the Bus Station Today,” a dead sergeant asks for a one-way bus ticket back to Iraq, and we get the feeling he has unfinished business there. “Fort Sill’s New Housing Division” summons memories of fatal wounds, dismembered soldiers, and bloody field bandages. Another poem, devoid of emotion, explains in nine short lines how easy technology and the mission have made the taking of life (“Artillery Kill”). Later, “Blackhawk Medevac” recalls the memory of seeing a fellow evacuee flinching and bleeding and yearning to reclaim lost flesh and limbs. We see, in “Baghdad International,” that even those who survived their deployment, when they arrived home, “entered another damnation, full of divorce decrees, drugs, and broken bank accounts.”
Subjects Of Merriment

I was pretty well through with the subject. At one time or another I had probably considered it from most of its various angles, including the one that certain injuries or imperfections are a subject of merriment while remaining quite serious for the person possessing them . . .

Undressing, I looked at myself in the mirror . . . I suppose it was funny.

—Hemingway, The Sun Also Rises

“So you were wounded?”
“Yeah.”

He scanned my body with bold eyes, taking inventory of every limb, wondering if he miscounted when he first saw me, and almost as if without control, his widening pupils move southward, pulling his whole head down until his gaze is upon my pant-legs.

I want to tell him the right one’s gone, watch those eyes expand waiting for me to lift the shroud, as if the sight of a titanium rod would somehow allow him to experience the war and connect us like brothers so he could tell the stories of war tomorrow at work.

But I think of LT, now legless, and how unfunny, and unfriendly, friendly fire is.

“No, you can’t see my wounds,” I tell him, considering making reference to Jake Barnes. Not wanting him to get the wrong impression, I tell him Forrest Gump. And he asks, “So you got shot in the ass?” with a smirk.

I explain that it was shrapnel, entered the side and went out the back.

“No, exit only,” I tell him. He laughs, and I recall watching LT on TV sprinting down a field on two rods that matched the one he gripped in his hands as he played lacrosse in the traditional scrimmages match between the Army and Navy alumni teams—he was captain when he was at West Point.

During the post-game interview, the camera panned out to capture LT’s full figure as he responded to the reporter’s question about the Army Alumni’s recent loss. “I’ve never been too quick on my feet anyway,” he replied, and for a moment, I laugh a little too.

—JASON POUDRIER □
Dark as these recollections are, memories of better times and lovelier things lighten the load and brighten the journey, at least a little bit. “Nanna’s Blackberry Cobbler” vividly conjures the taste of warm cobbler pie and the summer scent of dusty Oklahoma fields, while “Damned Kids” recalls artificial-looking green fields and the more reality-grounding smell of freshly cut grass. Written from a woman’s perspective, “Your Voice” glimpses the love of two hearts separated by the miles, and maybe by something else, too. Yet the memories and yearnings for reunion are authentic ones—full of tenderness and passion.

“Where the Veterans Are” peers into the post-war lives of veterans, and the various activities in which they are now engaged. It is the only time we really see them, because the rest of the time they just blend into the masses. We see them: those who waitress, who mow lawns or do the thankless work of janitors—those who are haunted, homeless, or just plain tired.

One of the best poems, “Tainted,” seems to defy any attempt at categorization. It stitches together a wide array of images and experiences: of bad feet and prescription Lamisil; of fatigue and sleeplessness; of a father watching TV and a barking dog (possibly) warning of danger; of a man and wife drifting apart, together; of scathing winds and burning sand, constricting body armor and slipping boots. It takes us on a rapid-fire walk-through of life’s varied tiring experiences. Red Fields is certainly macabre, as well as chaotic, but there is a kind of music to the chaos. Like the pitch in a musical number, these words rise and fall as they wind their way through love and loss, fondness and regret, laughter and tears, life and death. Jason Poudrier has opened for us a window into the heart and soul of an American soldier, writer, and poet. Here is someone with the courage to open up, to become vulnerable.

In Red Fields we are invited not merely to read about, but also (on some level) to share in these hopes and fears, in these strengths and weaknesses, in these triumphs and failures. Is that not, after all, part of what it means to be human?
Invisible Man in the Black Bag

The other day I decided to clean out my closet. I cleared everything out until only one hanger remained in the very back corner. On it hung a black travel bag, and inside was my old Desert Combat uniform, the only one I had kept of the four I had worn during my first combat tour. I took the bag off the rack and sat down on my bed, wondering if I was ready. Hesitantly I clutched the zipper and slowly pulled it along the length of the bag. I reached inside for the hangar, working it carefully through the top of the bag and pulling the uniform free. I unbuttoned the jacket and laid it on the bed. I positioned the pants underneath the jacket. Stepping back, I gazed at my invisible man, lying on the bed, full of nothing, and unmoving. I moved forward and lifted the jacket to my nose, inhaling deeply. Even after all this time, I could still smell the Iraqi dust. I looked the uniform over, moving my fingers across every inch. I found the ink blotch on the left breast pocket where my pen had burst while I was wrestling with PFC Smith. I touched the hole in the left elbow from when it had snagged on a nail during a night raid. I found the grouping of holes on the back from when the mortars had hit our laundry area and all the clothes that had been drying on the line were strafed with shrapnel. I found the bloodstains on my right cuff from when SPC Lopez was hit on the convoy, and I had been the one to apply pressure to his neck in a futile attempt to stop the bleeding. My palms moistened, my heart raced, my eyes misted. Quickly I re-hung the pants and threw the jacket back onto the hangar. I stuffed the hangar back in, grabbed the zipper, and closed the bag with one swift motion. I threw the bag into the back corner of the closet, hearing it bounce off the wall and come to rest on the floor. How strange to realize that I envied the bag.

CARSON BRIANT STRINGHAM

Truce

He turned the car, not toward home, said, “I want to show you something.”
I fidgeted, muscles tensing. Another sports car?
A bigger house? Another money fight.

He parked beside a field strewn with purple, tall, fuzzy blossoms, a whole lake of flowers, crowned in sunlight.

MARIA VERES
The University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma (http://usao.edu/) is a small, state-supported liberal arts institution, offering programs leading to Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science degrees. In 1965 a new set of official guidelines was put into effect which specified that USAO should identify fresh and viable approaches to the problems of higher education, and employ interdisciplinary methods of instruction. As part of an extensive institutional revision begun at the time, a forty-one credit hour interdisciplinary core sequence was developed to be completed by all graduates. Theoretically, all courses within the IDS Program were team-taught, but occasional deviations from this pattern occurred, particularly in evening classes and during the summer when enrollment was relatively small.

Teams are constituted of instructors from different academic fields who bring a variety of perspectives to the subject under consideration. While some problems have been experienced, team-teaching has generally been successful both in terms of faculty response and student acceptance. By the time I retired in 2009 I had participated in two to four team-taught courses per trimester since 1968, and found this method of instruction particularly suited to my temperament and educational philosophy.

While team-teaching may seem new and experimental, it actually has a long career ranging from the Socratic dialogue to public medieval disputations. There is no more effective method of simulating in the classroom real life conditions of conflicting demands and competing values. In this paper I am going to attempt to assess relative advantages and disadvantages of team-teaching. I am also going to offer a number of concrete suggestions for successful implementation.

Let us first define the term. Team-teaching is open to several interpretations. For the purposes of this presentation I am assuming the following: Two or more instructors are involved in the same course. Team members may come from closely allied disciplines, or they may derive from fields as disparate as art history and theoretical physics. Thus, while team-teaching is frequently connected with an interdisciplinary approach to learning, the mere presence of a teaching team in a classroom does not by itself indicate a crossing of disciplines.

Given the two or more instructor model, two versions of team-teaching in the strict sense can be identified.

(A) All instructors are jointly responsible for course content, presentations, and grading. They interact in front of the class, discussing specific topics from divergent perspectives.

(B) All instructors are jointly responsible for course content and grading. However, they take turns presenting material appropriate to their individual areas of specialization. At the times when they are not called upon to lecture, other participants remain in an essentially subordinate role, contributing no more than occasional comments and questions.

A third model is occasionally called team-teaching, but lacks the shared responsibility and coherent structure of the first two. In this version, one coordinator alone is responsible for course content and grading. Extensive and regular use is made of guest lecturers and panels, and the material presented in this manner is an integral part of the overall course design.

In order to discuss relative advantages and disadvantages of team-teaching, I am going to construct a fictional dialogue involving a proponent (P) and an opponent (O) of the method. The opposition speaks first:

0: How can any responsible instructor be in favor of team-teaching? All it does is confuse and frustrate students. They leave these classes not knowing whom to believe and what to think. Respect for learning is sufficiently low without adding fuel to the fire by permitting ourselves to be publicly humiliated. Students come to us expecting answers, not double talk;
solutions, not problems. Of course, scientists and scholars disagree among themselves, but they are mature experts capable of handling ambiguity, not undergraduates in need of firm guidance.

0: Isn't it common for some team members to carry the major burden of a particular class while others fail to show up, or arrive ill prepared? What happens if the team members cannot agree on grading criteria and students become aware of the fact that some individuals are considerably more lenient than others? Occasionally one team member may be genuinely more competent and responsible than another. Also, if team members are ill matched or psychologically unsuited for the method, open hostility, ad hominem attacks, and behind-the-scenes backbiting may result. Surely any or all of these problems would tend to interfere with the effective implementation of a team-teaching model.

P: I agree. By itself team-teaching is certainly no panacea and cannot automatically eliminate all vestiges of human imperfection. There are people who are simply not meant to serve as team members. An instructor who is incompetent, irresponsible, and personally insecure is not going to function well in any classroom, alone or with others. Even competent individuals who are uncomfortable with
having their assumptions challenged or those who thrive on adversarial modes of communication will disrupt the team-teaching process. Team-teaching does not cause these problems, it merely puts them on public display in a court of one's peers. While this is a painful process for everyone concerned, at least it is self-correcting by ensuring that certain individuals either develop their ability to engage in genuine, non-adversarial dialogue, or accept other assignments in the future. In these cases, students are surely going to benefit from a team which permits compensation for personal shortcomings by adjusting responsibility to match capabilities. Fortunately, extreme instances of this kind are relatively rare. Generally, team-teaching encourages faculty to perform exceptionally well. The presence of professional peers serves as subtle reinforcement to keep lecture notes current, grade conscientiously, and resist the temptation to get by with a minimum of effort. Most interpersonal difficulties are merely the result of insufficient planning and lack of coordination. These are minor irritations which can be alleviated with a minimum of effort.

This concludes the dramatized portion of this presentation. Given the possible advantages and disadvantages of team-teaching as discussed, the following suggestions for successful implementation come to mind:

A. Team-teaching should not be left up to chance. Careful planning is essential, even more so than in a classroom left to one individual, since team-teaching—like marriage—depends on the compatibility and mutual respect of those involved. Participating faculty must be carefully picked and allowed to choose their team members. No one should be required to participate. Only individuals who volunteer and are competent in their fields, professionally and psychologically secure, and comfortable with spontaneous public debate are suitable.

B. Students in a team-taught course should be carefully and continuously reminded of the purpose of the experience. They should be encouraged to seek help if they are frustrated and confused. They should be reassured that papers and essay examinations will be graded on the basis of internal coherence and not agreement or disagreement with a particular instructor's hypothesis. In other words, students will be encouraged to think for themselves and construct the best possible argument consistent with the data.

C. Faculty should avoid competing for student approval and applause. Team-teaching is not a political campaign, and cooperation combined with empathy and the willingness to represent controversial positions, are valuable characteristics of the individual team member. Instructors who are familiar and comfortable with the method are best qualified to introduce others to the art of working as a team. While permanent incompetence and irresponsibility are fortunately rare, new members are frequently insecure and in need of guidance. The classroom itself provides apprenticeship opportunities.

D. Once a team has been constituted and classes are in session, sufficient time must be allowed for planning and division of responsibilities. It is imperative that relative strengths and weaknesses of participating faculty be assessed objectively. Team-teaching is exceptionally flexible and offers the unique opportunity of compensating for individual idiosyncrasies in such a way as to have instructors function at their very best. It is helpful to have one team member in charge of mechanics, such as arranging for planning sessions and keeping records.

E. Administrative support is essential for continued success of a team-teaching model. Faculty participants must be compensated equitably. If instructors are expected to be present whenever a particular class is in session, they should be given full credit for the course despite the fact they do not necessarily lecture themselves each time. They must prepare in order to be able to respond, and listening may occasionally prove more taxing than talking. Large enrollments common in team-taught classes should make this a financially viable option.

In conclusion, I hope that this brief presentation has helped to demystify team-teaching. There is nothing mysterious or unique about this approach. It is simply an instructional model which lags behind in popularity. This, I believe, is unfortunate, because it can be one of the most effective methods of dealing with certain topics, particularly those involving cross- and multi-disciplinary inquiry, conflict resolution, and value formation.

This paper was originally presented at the National Meeting of the American Culture Association, Wichita, Kansas, 23-26 April, 1983. Since I posted it in my USAO website some two decades ago, it has been reprinted annually for instructional purposes by US Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Team-teaching is still used at USAO in our interdisciplinary core courses, and it seems even more relevant today, as it is becoming ever more apparent that the future of humanity may come to depend on our ability to view issues from multiple perspectives and go beyond debate to genuine dialogue and learning, as we wonder, question, explore, and come to realize, with Socrates, that “the unexamined life is not worth living.”

Page 72 CROSSTIMBERS , A Multicultural, Interdisciplinary Journal
Kirk Chuan returned home in a mad rush, getting on the first direct flight to Kuala Lumpur from London, after his older brother had told him in an uncharacteristically soft croak that his mother was slipping fast. They were waiting for him to come home and say his farewells, so that they could pull the plug. At the news Kirk had wept long, loud and inconsolably – his cat, unused to his despair, had resorted to cheering him up by dashing around the Bijar rug, trying to engage him in play. For once, Kirk was blind to her kittenish ways. He googled flights to Malaysia, found one within the next two hours, booked it instantly, called a cab service, threw a few black items of clothing and his toothbrush in his backpack.

He paused at the door, thinking that his girlfriend had told him never to leave without kissing her goodbye. I can’t think about that right now, he said to himself, and fumbled down the stairs without bidding adieu to his partner of seven years.

The taxi ride to Heathrow felt impossibly long—too much time to ruminate on the unrelenting grip of cancer that had laid claim on his seventy-two year old mother. She wasn’t even that old, and had always been healthy—while he was always down with colds and allergies, she was going for tai chi sessions in the morning and brisk evening walks. Even in her autumnal years, she’d bathed the dogs with the vigor of a twenty-something. He could not believe the havoc a few irregular cells had wrecked on her body, which he remembered had felt so slight the last time he’d hugged her goodbye. Since he was the youngest, Kirk’s mother doted on him. She called him every Saturday at 9 pm sharp, and he knew that throughout the week she’d looked forward to hearing about his news. She lived vicariously through him. He could just hear her say with precise, deliberate pacing, to anyone who would care to listen, “My youngest son is the Head of Legal Affairs with a talent assessment firm in London. He has extensive experience in advising large international clients on infrastructure and outsourcing projects.” He knew that her heart swelled with pride as he related to her the mergers he’d formed between Barclays, Coca-Cola, Marks and Spencer, and other firms. Since it’d hurt her that he chose to live so far from home, Kirk tried to repair the damage in any way he could.

When he’d decided to stay in London after college, his aunts felt that he was abandoning his mother. But Kirk Chuan did not want to live at home. Backpacking in Glasgow as a sophomore in college, he’d read some graffiti on a wall at Queen Street station, “Once you leave, you just can’t return,” and he resonated with that sentiment. While studying for the bar, he’d had wild periods of bacchanalia with friends who were in the same boat—international nomads who voluntarily, often painfully, felt the need to uproot themselves in order to find themselves. They were the new people in the world—the people who did not carry with them the weight of family histories and social ties—the people who could live free and make their own lives. Kirk Chuan felt this as an age-old need: even though the basic drive was towards survival, the first people—anatomically modern humans who originated in Africa about 250,000 years ago—must have felt the same urge as they left behind the old world in search of new continents. The uncertainty, danger, and difficulty were sacrifices Kirk happily accepted for the sake of his freedom and sanity. Amidst bouts of drinking in the pub with friends, he’d even felt, with a blind masseuse’s acuity, that there could be no other existence. Sometimes, milling in the crowd in Piccadilly Circus, where everyone was simply going about his or her own business, gave him an inexplicable joy. No one interfered with his life or told him what to do, and that was the way he wanted it. All humans were trying to do the same thing—survive—and that was the most powerful denominator, rather than creed or tribe. He was an outernational international, or more
accurately, simply an *outernational* since his Malaysian nationality was beginning to feel alien to him. His heart felt closest to the 11:52 train on Friday nights from Charing Cross to Forest Hills, something South Londoners of varying shades and color collectively understood: it was that woozy feeling on the last train heading home, when everyone had had just a little too much to drink, and was quietly rejoicing or quietly mourning, threading through the city on the fast train that would soon deposit them on a blustery platform. Then muscle memory would walk each one of them safely home. Once, on the train in Sydenham, he wanted to shout, “I love you all, I love you all, I love you, all,” but at the time being by himself and therefore reserved, he could only pipe out the sentiment in the train carriage and hoped that others were in the state of mind to receive it. When he’d landed his first job as a lawyer in London six weeks before graduation, Kirk felt the unmistakable release of a tight fist in his heart. He was finally earning his keep. His mother’s hen-like anxiety swelled into pride, his relatives’ dissatisfaction was instantly mitigated and they stopped using hypothetical wishes of his dead father as emotional blackmail. Then, at a Christmas party in the second year of his career, Kirk found what he’d thought to be true love—“the one”. Adele was a poet who moonlighted as a proofreader. She was so exotically pale with those blonde lashes and wisteria eyes, and yet there was a deep melancholy in her which Kirk respected, even revered. Most of all, he loved how she never made him feel different—even her bedhead was so exotically pale with those blonde lashes and wisteria eyes, and yet there was a deep melancholy in her which Kirk respected, even revered. Most of all, he loved how she never made him feel different—she never made him feel different—she never made him feel different—she never made him feel different. However, in her which Kirk respected, even revered.

In their third Christmas together, Kirk surprised her with the kitten, a tawny Occident which they loved as much as each other.

But after seven years, Adele was feeling her creative spirit being stifled. While Kirk was on his third job as a lawyer, each one a promotion, Adele was becoming more the proofreader who moonlighted as a poet. For two months, they’d had outbursts, heated quarrels that involved plans that never came to fruition and dreams discarded by the trivial necessities of life: the mountain cabin they’d dreamed about, rented but never went to because of an important case at his work, the friends they’d lost, the times he’d failed to show her affection when she needed it—at a New Year’s party, a friend’s wedding. These were minor disappointments that amounted to a big upset, but at the root of it, an artist’s failure had the force of a hurricane, and Kirk knew better than to wrestle with it. He intuited that Adele’s creative output had reached a plateau. He was also beginning to understand that love took effort. Love was something built on a flimsy premise of attraction which then needed upkeep and sacrifice—or in the case of family, it was an indissoluble tie that bound one to kin. It seemed ironic that he should so spectacularly fail in his own private life something he did so well professionally—merging lives and businesses. He expected that he would return to London orphaned, find that Adele had packed all her things and left. If he were lucky, the cat would still be there to greet him.

Caught in forward motion since the time he’d taken the taxi ride to Heathrow, Kirk found the mobility strangely comforting to the emotional limbo in which he resided.

It wasn’t limbo, more an abyss, but he was so weary, so stretched, as if he’d been electrocuted or had a lobotomy, that his pain had taken on a numbness. After the tears in his London flat, Kirk had gradually found himself in a cool, dark, tearless room with all its existing, finely-etched details bent into one wall. It was a quiet place in which he dwelled as long as he could, because it had a strange way of calming him. He was petrified of what awaited him at the hospital. Sure, he’d witnessed the death of a parent before, but at six years old, he’d been too young to understand the demise of his father.

Kirk had no idea what day or time it was. He did not recognize the roads that took him to the hospital—even the Petronas Towers looked unfamiliar, like something out of a fairy tale. In the two years since he had been away, much had happened in Malaysia. A new life had been born—his niece’s—while his mother’s had been slipping away. Somehow, the air seemed more polluted, and Kirk assumed it was the forest fires in Indonesia that’d caused this. His brother, Ming Chuan, had warned him that the sight of the tubes and life support machine would upset him, but strangely, they didn’t. No one was in the ward at the time, and as he walked Kirk had the uncanny feeling of walking into a chapel. Immediately the room seemed too bright, and instinctively he lowered the shades and switched off the lights. He walked up to his mother. In the grey light, she looked thinner, even gaunt, and the white of the hospital gown seemed to neutralize her identity. Someone had attempted to comb her hair, and done a poor job.

He took her hand and squeezed it. She did not, or could not, show her response. He spoke slowly and
clearly into her ear, “Mummy, it’s me, Kirk. I am home now. I am sorry I couldn’t be here sooner. Don’t worry about me, I am doing well.” He paused, “I love you very much.” This was the first time he’d expressed his love to his mother directly—his heart fell at the realization that it would be one of the last times. “I love you very much, and thank you for everything you’ve ever done for me. You’ve sacrificed so much for my sake.” Kirk took heart that he was expressing these thoughts; he wasn’t as fortunate with Adele, didn’t have to time, space, mind nor heart to articulate his emotions. The stress over his mother’s sickness had only added to the unraveling of their failed relationship. His memories were now bifurcated, his notions of reality refracted, and yet everything was painfully, confusingly familiar, down to the humidity and smell of tropical air before sunrise, and the freckles on his mother’s forearms. Two nurses slipped into the room and politely asked him to leave so that they could perform their duties.

In the fluorescent-white, antiseptic corridors, Ming Chuan showed up and silently gave Kirk a hug. They were so alike, the two brothers Ming and Kirk, and yet miles apart. Years ago, when they were in their mid-twenties, Ming had gone to London to visit Kirk. They had gone to Prince Charles Theatre at Leicester Square and watched The Fountainhead on the big screen. The experience had bonded them. Ming had been impressed with Howard Roark’s Will to Power—and treated it like a delicate Western value that most Easterners would be afraid even to touch. Afterward, drinking ruby-colored Porters at The Porcupine, Kirk, for the first time, felt that his brother understood his need for individualism. Now, looking at Ming, overrun by fatigue, responsibility, fatherhood and impending death, Kirk saw that Ming’s bumpy edges had been sanded clean. Kirk surprised himself with new respect for his brother’s smooth edges—something that once would have irked him. Unlike him, Kirk’s brother had always played by the rules—and having done so—appeared to have matured into manhood. “Has Mum shown a response to anything?” Kirk ventured.

Actually, now that you mention it, when you spoke to her on the phone from London, the graph on the life support monitor showed a sustained spike,” his brother said, “even though you wouldn’t know it to look at her.”

Emotion swelled to the surface and Kirk could feel himself drowning in regret. Over the years, his mum and he had shared many moments on the phone, but the last few calls were the most raw and painful, when she’d been irritable and angry—helpless that she had no control over what was happening to her body—and he’d realized that she was slipping away from him into another world. Kirk knew he was to blame for the physical distance between them—and the idea that he had not been there for her when she most needed him swamped him with contrition. His brother’s observation about the graph—an affirmation of his mother’s love—made him feel at once better and worse.

“How’s Adele?” Ming inquired. “She’s probably going to her mother’s as we speak,” Kirk whispered, “I hope she left me the cat.”

Ming Chuan looked surprised and asked, “What’s that all about?” “Not the usual quibbles, but something deeper and more potent—an artist’s fragile ego.” As he uttered these words, Kirk knew there was hope for Adele’s ambition and creativity if she could just find the time and place to channel it. She could create something lasting through diction and syntax—but not while she was with him, that much was clear. Kirk’s career as a successful lawyer was a track too antiseptic and clean, too Apollonian for the Dionysian chaos poets thrived in. “She dreamed bigger mountains than I could provide,” Kirk whispered. “Just as I had bigger dreams than living at home, he thought quietly to himself.

Ming squeezed his brother’s arm more tenderly than usual. “Sorry,” he said. “Yeah, I hope she was rational enough to remember to find someone to cat-sit … if she was kind enough to leave her to me,” Kirk laughed. “’Nuff about how’s fatherhood treating you?” “Love it!” Ming beamed for the first time. Kirk had never seen his brother like this, so proud and egoless. “Apart from the colic,” he was quick to revise. “Even the neighbors in the house can hear her howling in the middle of the night.” “Like a werewolf, or a fire alarm …” Kirk said.

“Right,” Ming laughed. “And one that just doesn’t stop. My wife doesn’t want to wake the maid to take care of her, so we put up with the sturm und drang. Though they’re both at the in-laws’ now—you know, with Mum’s condition and all.”

In Kirk’s mind, the baby was expressing their collective helplessness at the looming event. After their father’s passing, their mother had been the pillar that kept the family going. The status quo would soon change dramatically, and Kirk felt a sudden nostalgia for the shared family history. They’d been very comfortable growing up—almost too comfortable. Their father
had been a successful businessman, and their mother kept an orderly, pristine house, always with house help. Their father used to refer to the house help as “the servants”–one “servant” to do the cleaning, washing and ironing, the other to do the cooking and child-rearing. There was always a chauffeur, always someone of a different race—a Malay, and the house help who cleaned, also a Malay. Their nanny was usually an old Chinese lady who cooked the food and changed the nappies. Growing up, Kirk had been hypersensitive to the social class structures within the household, unlike Ming, who now employed maids from Indonesia and Burma to help with the housework and babysitting. As soon as Kirk had fled the nest, he’d revealed in unmade beds, dirty laundry, unwashed cutlery—most of all, the privacy of a space that was his and his alone. He was merely his own master—no one else’s.

His mother would have called his London flat a pigsty, but it was Kirk’s heaven. When Adele moved in, she created a semblance of neatness in their shared space and frequently ironed Kirk’s work shirts. Still, mini-tumbleweeds made of human and cat hair inhabited behind the back boards of his furniture, underneath the carpets, and sometimes in the corners of his rooms. The drawers in his desk were filled with the dregs and morasses of his past lives—letters, stationary, tools, pills, photographs—once he even found a miniature monkey wrench and had no memory of what it was or how it got there. Kirk saw his life reflected back at him in the quagmire of mystery tools, unkempt drawers and burgeoning hairballs—maybe his mother had been right after all, the haphazard mess he called home had stretched into other aspects of his existence. What Kirk was most afraid of was that he might find, at the center of his organized chaos, a remote and unfeeling nothing—a void.

A nurse hurried by the two brothers into their mother’s ward. Ming and Kirk followed her instinctively. She glanced at the machine and bolted out to get a doctor. Ming held his mother’s hand and Kirk grabbed the other and squeezed it. It was still warm, and Kirk was afraid that if he pressed too hard it would transform in some way—crumble into ashes and take wing.

Her breathing had become irregular and labored. The monitor indicated that her pulse had weakened dramatically—the thin, shaky green line on the black screen a harbinger of Kirk’s half-buried fears which now resurfaced. Kirk was doing his best to contain his tears because he didn’t want to make it any more difficult for his mother to leave, or he was hoping that through his sheer force and will, she could delay her passage a little more. But her breathing was so painful, Kirk thought he couldn’t bear it for an extra second. But he had to. He remembered his mother telling him when he, as a boy, had witnessed his father’s inanimate body for the first time, “Do not cry—his spirit is still here, Father wouldn’t want to see you cry.” Kirk noticed his brother’s bravado—or was it real courage?—as Ming tightly interlaced his fingers with his mother’s. It resembled a still-beautiful rosebud on an uprooted bush.

Kirk readjusted his body on the bed to lend his mother strength. She hardly took up any space, and he felt, by contrast, enormous and redundant. He turned over her hand and kissed it gently. Kirk fought back waves of panic as he took leaden breath after leaden breath. The end was evidently painful and protracted—Kirk didn’t know when it would come, and between each bittersweet breath he saw flashes of their lives together as mother and son. After twenty minutes—or was it two hours—Kirk’s mother’s body lapsed in stillness.

At first Kirk thought death had played a trick on him, then he felt a strange release. At the same time, he sensed with a desperate gravity that his world had just imploded around him—his mother’s absence was now official. He hid his face in her neck and breathed in her scent, something he’d done many times as a child, So this is how life passes into death, and the suffering that surrounds everything, Kirk thought, this is Buddha’s first noble truth. Kirk wept noiselessly. As a boy, he had been around altars and incense offered to Buddha, but he’d never really thought about it till recently, when his relationship with Adele had been waning, and his mother’s health had faltered. Religion was no longer the hollow, superstitious rituals Kirk had witnessed at home as a rebellious teen. It had become a universal truth that could not be denied. Now that she was gone, so was his reality. The tenants of his world dissolved in an instant. Like his mother, Kirk was in transit, both traversing planes they barely knew, infiltrating places of discomfort, being reshaped into new, unknown entities. It was as if his and her existences were eliding into unformed masses, most definitely away from this shell of his mother’s body, so vividly delineated before his eyes. She even looked different—not like herself. Her hand was slowly losing its heat, and when he kissed her forehead, its coolness surprised him.

An urge to leave the room...
overcame Kirk, and he took flight. Ming followed and wrapped his arm around his brother. Ming then said words that only added to his stature, which had been growing since their reunion, “It’s all right. I can stay and deal with the relatives and the undertakers. You must be tired, jet-lagged and all, go home and have a rest.” Lost in the dimensions of time and space, Kirk’s only concrete action was to nod his head. Then he picked up his backpack, and left.

Kirk’s bedroom door caught against something, what he did not know. He pushed it lightly and a new dollhouse gave way. Looking around, he saw that his room had been cluttered with unused furniture, a bookcase, suitcases that had seen better days, a pet carrier. Alien boxes filled with detritus sat on top of the single bed, which looked submerged in the sea of objects in the narrow room. Like an automaton, he created a path to his bed by moving the pieces of furniture out of the way, or by piling them on top of each other, forming an avenue that led to his place of rest. The bed from his teenage years appeared undersized, and he had the uncanny feeling of Gulliver on Lilliputian soil. Yet when Kirk laid his head on a pillow, he was instantly greeted by moist, humid sleep.

In his dreams, the unfamiliar furniture in the room bore down on his subconscious—his father’s dark olive suitcase from the sixties, his niece’s doll-house in bright, primary colors, the rows and rows of books they’d read as children and adults. These artifacts became impossibly-angled, shifting planes impinging upon one another, their perspectives becoming warped like Escher buildings or Feininger sculptures. Submerged beneath these protean structures, Kirk was brought back to the time he was bawling his eyes out in the school auditorium when Ming didn’t return like he said he would, or the time when his mother came to pick him up from school because he was soaked in cold sweat. This cut directly to a scene where his mother was holding his hand … he was two or three … as they went down the alleys to visit the lady with the rabbits in cages, or to the pond to feed the fish with bread crumbs. Then his mother’s visit to London when he’d graduated from the bar: he could see the way she’d stood up so tall next to him for the photo. Finally a scene that Kirk did not recall experiencing in his life … an uncanny vista … they were on an escalator in a typical shopping mall, going up, his mother telling him she would be on the top floor where all the books were, and he could find her there afterwards.

When Kirk emerged into wakefulness it was not yet dark, but getting there. His first instinct was to call Adele, but he did not have the conviction to. He figured if she were still there when he returned, she could again share his dreams and fears. Then he heard the not unfamiliar ponderous chanting of Buddhist monks and the dampened conversations of relatives, enmeshed with familiar tropical birdcalls out of his window. Realizing his mother’s funeral was taking place, Kirk scrambled out of bed and found a suit of black clothes. He put them on, washed the sleep out of his eyes, combed his hair and hurried downstairs to join the sea of people who had congregated at the family home. Some were blood ties, others he had never met. The maelstrom of tradition and superstition. One minute he was at the altar on his knees behind the monks, bowing, kowtowing and holding incense, weeping uncontrollably; the next minute he would find himself swamped by aunts and uncles on both sides of the family, expressing their condolences and asking him a myriad of questions: how long he was staying, his work, his life in London, his salary, Adele. His mother’s friends from school—all of whom he had never met—especially demanded his attention since his mother had given them glowing annual progress reports of Kirk at their reunions. It was bizarre, hearing back what he’d meant to his mother—the most intimate details revealed, just that once, between strangers who were unlikely ever to cross paths again.

Strangers floated in and out of the rooms in the house he grew up in. The maids knew where everything was, while Kirk felt like an intruder and an imposter, fumbling to find a mug to get a glass of water. An uncle and aunt who might have harbored ill will toward his mother prostrated themselves before her casket, emitting a kind of demonstrative braying. Someone played a prank on the incense urn by placing two broken, snuffed out joss-sticks in it. Kirk was unsure of the symbolism of the act—his rational side condensed it as a stupid act but his emotional side was deeply unsettled by it. At times, Kirk thought he’d been transported to a different planet.

Amidst the circus-like bustle of the funeral, there was simply no time to mourn.

Kirk kept this up for how long, he wasn’t quite sure—it was three days and two nights, or longer—until the day of the cremation. Early that morning, there was a purging
of all the flowers, wreaths and structures that had been put up, so that his mother’s soul would have no reason to linger in the mortal world. The exacting nature of the act of purgation—not one thing to be left in the house—left Kirk feeling as if he’d been violated or robbed, as the maids were harshly instructed by relatives he hardly recognized to dispose of every remnant of the funeral.

Kirk tried to ignore what he saw as superstitious, overly efficient cleansing and volunteered to travel with the hearse to the temple. He would have preferred to keep the white lily wreaths. Memories could not be wiped so clean. The bales and bales of paper money which were to accompany the cremation, folded to look like ancient Chinese currency, had no relevance in the metaphysical world in which Kirk dwelled. Kirk wasn’t sure if his mother believed in it, either. But Ming had made sure that his mother’s favorite book and sweater were to be cremated that morning, and Kirk thought it considerable of his brother. He remembered seeing, in the British Museum, cat mummies buried with Pharaohs, the female cats being sacred to the Goddess Diana and the males to the Sun. And in Highgate Cemetary in North London, a faithful dog buried under an eccentric Victorian wall. The rest of the drive to the temple on a hill, in gentle rain, was without incident, only too short.

When they arrived at the crematorium, Kirk was not at all prepared for the alarming sight of the colossal, hungry furnaces with blue and yellow flames leaping from their mouths, nor the oppressive heat that emanated from them. He wasn’t quite sure what he’d expected of a cremation—his mother had sheltered him from his father’s, leaving him with friends since he had been running a high fever, and he’d been overseas during his grandmother’s funeral. But whatever he’d thought cremation was, it wasn’t this: the fleeting, strange odors wafting occasionally into the atmosphere; the three, or was it five, giant furnaces sitting side by side under the pavilion that occupied the entire side of the mountain. The sight of monks in bright sienna robes giving final blessings, dwarfed by the hefty silver machinery, resembled a dystopian scene he’d once imagined in a science fiction story. It was so alien, indifferent and yet so definitive, all-consuming and latent with horror. The light rain had ceased, and now the tropical sun, in its midday vehemence, beat down on the earth.

Kirk’s heart pounded deafeningly in his ears. Wide, keen-edged vistas of light and heat were devouring him in waves. He wondered if he was going to faint, and willed himself not to. He wasn’t going to add another layer of anxiety to an already stressful situation. But the ground beneath his feet was surely shifting and Kirk, thinking he needed the shade, made the mistake of taking cover under the only shelter available: the pavilion, where the scene of the apocalypse unfolded before his eyes. He witnessed coffins being fed into furnaces, and other mourners breaking down, crying, some fervently praying. The neat compartments in Kirk’s brain broke down rapidly as he teetered on the brink of realization. So this was what life had come down to, he thought, fragile shells destined for the burner. The explicit horror before his eyes tore away the cloak of invulnerability, and reduced all life to infirmity. The center of life was now naked, coreless, and it appeared that no one around him understood what it meant—not the mourning relatives, nor the monks who were simply paid to chant. We are just shells, waiting for the inevitable. Kirk’s horror was exacerbated by the delay—the previous cremation scheduled before theirs was taking longer than expected.

Memories of his mother blazed and dwindled in his mind. Ever-enlarging nets of fear and pain ensnared him, and Kirk felt like a fish on a boat’s deck, baking in the sun. This must be what purgatory feels like, Kirk thought, this protracted trepidation, this stinging agony before finally facing the unknown. People try not to recognize it, but
that’s what life is. Life is purgatory... Kirk envisioned the future months in London. Regret and sadness would involuntarily erupt to the surface in the most awkward of spaces—on the way to work on the Holborn line, or in the middle of a conversation with a sympathetic client. The fast-paced, forward motion of London would be out of sync with his heart swathed in confused horror. The swift-flowing Thames would not concern itself with his repressed emotions; and he could see himself going underwater for months, maybe years, unable to surface. Adele, if she were there, would neither be able to absorb nor penetrate Kirk’s guilt. Kirk knew, as surely as he was his mother’s son, that his life was perfectly poised to be overtaken by death.

“Kirk, are you alright, Kirk? You don’t look too well,” Ming said. “It’s hot here, and you’re probably still dehydrated from the flight.” Ming disappeared and then re-appeared magically, like an angel. “Here, take this pill, and drink this bottle of water.” Kirk did as his brother instructed. The ice-cold liquid had the effect of buoying up Kirk’s body, which had felt close to collapsing. “Alright? Okay. C’mom, tractable child,” Ming said firmly, as he was wont to call his brother sometimes, usually during times of averting crises. “It’s time now,” He cradled his arm around Kirk and walked him to where their mother’s coffin lay. Kirk did not know whether to laugh or to cry. A cauldron of emotions threatened to spill over and consume him. Everything had changed, was changing, would always be changing.

Kirk did his best to keep in step with his brother and the encroaching reality. They took their place kneeling in the first row, directly in front of the teak coffin positioned to enter the furnace. The monks began their monotonous, drawn out chants in Sanskrit and strange musical half-tones. In Kirk’s apocalyptic state of mind, love and hate, duress and freedom were embroiled with one another. The noise, the heat and the smoke did not affect him now. Instead, Kirk was deleting his life’s memories one by one with the hope that the space each one occupied would exist elsewhere in the universe: it didn’t matter one whit whether he considered himself free or chained; his work, which he had taken seriously, had become irrelevant; and whether Adele remained in his life or not was moot—these realities had taken on the same value as the bales of paper money that will soon be reduced to cinders. His mother’s spirit was hovering tantalizing in another stratosphere, unreachable and remote, and Kirk balked at the knowledge that he might never see her again. Painstakingly and meticulously, Kirk did his best to erase the multiple layers that surrounded his existence—truth by truth, lie by lie—until his idea of the world became no more than the hot, gigantic, metallic mouth that yawned before his eyes. □

Great Grandmother
Like bare trees veined
against March sky
her face speaks
of more than endings.

MARIA VERES □
CONTRIBUTORS

River Adams came of age in the 1980s Soviet Union, where she was a classical pianist, and watched the collapse of a civilization. She now teaches Religion and Dialogue to college students and on occasion puts all things away to write that which bears no footnotes. Her work has appeared in such publications as *descant*, *The Long Story*, *The MacGuffin*, *Phoebe (Oneonta)*, *Workers Write!, Quiddity*, *RiverSedge, Out of Line*, and *The Evansville Review*.

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Sadia Farah is a biology major at Cameron University. Her earliest aspiration has been to be an accomplished writer, and with this publication, she has taken one step closer to her dream.

Gabriel “G” Garcia is a writer of poetry, short stories and plays, as well as a photographer and painter. Among other journals, his work has appeared in *Burning Word, Willows Wept Review, Creations Magazine, Danse Macabre du Jour*, and is forthcoming in *The Whistling Fire, Abramelin*, and in *Black Lantern Publishing*. His play *Picnic For One* premiered at The Roy Arias Theater.

Matt Higdon was raised in an Air Force home in Maryland, Ohio, and California. He completed a six-year enlistment in the Army, working as a graphic designer. Following tours in Germany, Iraq, and Fort Bragg, he left the service to return to school and to change careers to focus on writing. Currently he lives in Rock Hill, South Carolina.

Rockford Johnson experiences life mostly in Chickasha, Oklahoma, noticing through the seasons, perceiving through the days, writing poems, “to do” lists, and essays.

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Carol Koss, by birth a New Yorker, has lived in Oklahoma City for more than forty years. She has
taught English, Creative Writing, and Remedial Reading to students from middle school through college; and in venues that range from wealthy suburbs to the South Bronx, from churches to prisons.

Dena Madole has recently revealed that she is a long-time Oklahoma City artist.

Shayna Pond has worked as a professional freelancer of design and illustration since 2007. Her work has been published by *World Literature Today*, Yale University Press, and the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education. Shayna is the Graphic Artist in the Media and Community Relations Office at USAO.

Jason Poudrier, an Iraqi Freedom veteran and Purple Heart recipient, published two collections of poetry, *Red Fields* and *In the Rubble at Our Feet*. In 2012 he hosted a workshop at Eastern Kentucky University’s Military Experience and the Arts Symposium, and participated in the Kurt Vonnegut Memorial Library’s Healing Through the Humanities event in Indianapolis. He teaches Pre-AP English at Lawton High School and resides on a 20-acre ranch in Rush Springs, Oklahoma.

Carl Sennhenn served as the 2001 and 2002 Oklahoma poet laureate. In 2007, Sennhenn’s third book of poetry, *Travels Through Enchanted Woods*, was awarded first prize in poetry by the Oklahoma Center for the Book. In retirement after more than 50 years as a professor of English and humanities at Rose State College, he teaches creative writing for senior adults through Rose State and gives workshops locally and nationally.

Devon Shannon resides in Lawton, Oklahoma, with her husband T.W. and their two children Audrey Grace and Tahrohon Wayne. Currently, she is working on her bachelor’s degree from Cameron University.

Ron Singer (www.ronsinger.net) has sojourned in the Four Corners region on several occasions since 1969, producing stories and poems about the people and land. These and other poems have appeared in publications including *alba*, *Anemone Sidecar*, *Borderlands: The Texas Poetry Review*, *elaine*, *Evergreen Review*, *Grey Sparrow*, *New Works Review*, *Windsor Review*, and *Word Riot*.

Louise Farmer Smith, an award-winning short story writer, is the author of *One Hundred Years of Marriage: A Novel in Stories*. She has been nominated for a Pushcart (*Bellevue Literary Review*) and won the Fiction Prize from *GlimmerTrain*.

Carol Lavelle Snow, a former college English instructor, has published fiction as well as poetry, most recently in *The Lyric*, *The Texas Poetry Calendar*, and *StepAway Magazine*.

Sandra Soli’s work is widely published. She enjoys collaborative projects with artists in many disciplines. She has been Tokyo Rose for U.S. military training tapes and facilitates readings that benefit children facing hunger issues in Oklahoma.

Audrey Streetman is a retired banker and recently published her memoir titled *The Well*. She is a regular contributor to *Crosstimbers*. She has published three chapbooks: *The Train*, *A Gathering of Bones*, and *Keeper of the Dream*.

Carson Briant Stringham served in the US Army for ten years, with two tours to Iraq. He now lives in Lawton, Oklahoma, with his wife Jennifer and four children.

Ling E. Teo grew up in Singapore and has lived in England, where she won an Asham Award for writing. She is currently a Humanities teacher in a New York City public school.

Maria Veres published poetry, fiction, and nonfiction in more than fifty magazines, including *The Lyric*, *Mid America Poetry Review* and *Country Woman*. Her first chapbook, *Waiting for Miracles*, was released in 2007 by Village Books Press. She teaches at Francis Tuttle Technology Center and is a former officer of Oklahoma Writers Federation, Inc.

Edward Ziegler is a professor of law and the Robert B. Yegge Memorial Research Chair at the University of Denver. He has published in professional journals throughout the United States, Europe, Asia, and Latin America.
ORIGINS

During the 1990s, USAO’s Vice President of Academic Affairs John Feaver proposed writing a grant to rework one of the unused USAO campus buildings, making it into a museum to house the collection of art and other items stored in various locations. Regents Professor Cecil Lee was charged with supplying the details of the ambitious new enterprise. After studying the Santa Fe museum structure, Lee decided that the best unifying concept for such a museum would be the location of the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma, that is, the Cross Timbers. While Chickasha is at the western edge of this region (Arkansas is at the eastern edge) the metaphorical value of the location was of greater importance than geographic accuracy.

Oklahoma had its beginning in the midst of two major cultures—Native American and European. The former represented a complex gathering, sometimes by choice, often through force. Some tribes were from the north, others from the southeast. The Europeans came with diverse intentions. Some were farmers seeking a place to raise a family and start a new life; some were missionaries; some were criminals; and some were businessmen with high hopes. Later, they were joined by Latinos and Asians. A unique culture emerged, marked by a great deal of diversity. A century ago, for example, Oklahoma had the largest number of socialists in the United States. Today, with the strong right-wing component, “Oklahoma Socialist” sounds like an oxymoron.

As a part of the grand proposal, Lee envisioned the publication of a magazine to be called Crosstimbers. The proposal as a whole failed. It was too broad, too far reaching, for the campus. However, the idea, a dream really, was still in the air. During the hoopla of the Centennial celebration, Lee proposed going ahead with the journal. By that time Feaver was president of USAO, and he enthusiastically embraced the idea. The spring of 2001 saw the first issue. Members of the USAO community contributed both content and support. Lee was editor in chief and did most of the technical work. As of summer 2009 Ingrid Shafer, Professor Emerita of Philosophy and Religion and Mary Jo Ragan Professor of Interdisciplinary Studies, serves as both editor in chief and technical producer of the magazine.

EDITORIAL BOARD

EDITOR IN CHIEF AND EDITOR OF NONFICTION (ihs@ionet.net)
Ingrid Shafer, Emerita Professor of Philosophy and Religion and Mary Jo Ragan Professor of Interdisciplinary Studies, taught at USAO from 1968 to April, 2009. In 2002 she was honored with the 16th annual Oklahoma Medal for Excellence in College/University Teaching, at the time the only recipient in the award’s history not on the OU or OSU faculty.

She has published five books, some 100 articles and poems, lectured all over the world, and created dozens of web sites.

After retiring in 2009 she moved to her son’s family home in Lafayette, California, where she continues her scholarly and creative work. She also teaches an online graduate course on world religions and global ethics for the University of Oklahoma. In general, she hopes to remain true to a promise she made to herself as a child in postwar Austria after reading about the horrors of the Holocaust, to do her best to work toward a future in which people all over the world would view themselves as members of one big family and treat others the way they would expect to be treated by them. She can be reached at 925-954-1862.

EDITOR OF POETRY AND FICTION (bluebirdsw@earthlink.net)
Sarah Webb began teaching English at age 20 in the public schools and continued in the college classroom through her retirement from USAO. In addition to serving as an editor for Crosstimbers she co-edits the Zen journal Just This, published by the Austin Zen Center. Her essays and poetry have been published in a variety of journals, including Zen Gong, Zen Bow, Westview, The Magazine for Speculative Poetry, Apalachee Quarterly, Passager, The Enigmatist, and others. Her poetry has been painted, danced, and set to music. Webb is a member of the choral poetry group Quartet.

EDITOR OF POPULAR CULTURE AND MEDIA (rvollmar@usao.edu)
Rob Vollmar graduated from USAO in 1995 and is currently a staff writer for the University’s Media and Community Relations department. Rob worked exclusively as a professional musician for several years before returning to his first love, writing, in the late
1990s. In addition to co-authoring graphic novels and comic books, he contributed to the Comic Journal and several websites, including Comic Book Galaxy and The Ninth Art. In 2010, he was named an associate contributing editor to World Literature Today. He is serializing his latest comic, Howling @ the Gates online.

EDITOR AT Large (clee@usao.edu)

Cecil Lee was educated in public schools in Ohio. He served in the U.S. Army in 1952-54. He earned the BFA and MA from Ohio State University and studied in the graduate school of the University of California, Berkeley. Named Emeritus Professor (1988) after 29 years at the University of Oklahoma, Lee was appointed Regents Professor of Art and Director of the Art Gallery at the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma, where he developed an interactive TV course on “Native American Art” and a course with Cameron University on “Art as Propaganda.” In 1991 Lee directed a special OU seminar at the Oxford Rewley House, on “The Rise of the Augustans,” team teaching with Oxford scholars. He has participated in over sixty such interdisciplinary seminars and courses over the years.

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS: VOLUME 13.1 (SPRING-SUMMER 2013)


Crosstimbers is a publication of the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma and reflects the school’s mission as a public liberal arts college with a team-taught required interdisciplinary core program. USAO is one of only 27 member institutions of the exclusive Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges (COPLAC). Crosstimbers explores the liberal arts and liberal arts education.

We welcome contributions by faculty and students at liberal arts institutions (along with other contributors). We hope to examine the teaching of the liberal arts and the role of liberal arts in society. We seek to represent the range of disciplines in the liberal arts and encourage submission of essays and articles from a broad spectrum of disciplinary perspectives. In addition, we are interested in high-quality visual art, creative writing, and cross-genre work. We are particularly interested in work that draws insight from the crossing of disciplines.

Guidelines for Submissions

Crosstimbers is a magazine of ideas rather than an academic journal. Articles should be free of discipline-specific jargon and extensive scholarly apparatus. Any appropriate and internally consistent documentation style is acceptable. Essays, creative nonfiction, reviews, interviews, and articles grounded in research but accessibly written are all welcome.

Articles, essays, short stories, and mini-plays should not exceed 5000 words.

Poems may range in style from formal to free verse.

Creative work may be submitted simultaneously if the fact is noted at the time of submission.

For visual art we seek photography and photo essays, painting, ink drawings, computer art, cross-genre art, etc. Most images will be rendered in grayscale, but a few are chosen for color reproduction. Images should be sent electronically as JPG, PNG, or TIF files.

The Summer 13.1 edition of Crosstimbers is unthemed. Manuscripts must be e-mailed by May 31.

We ask for electronic submission. Submissions may be sent as Word attachments to the appropriate editor or to Editor in Chief Ingrid Shafer, ihs@ionet.net. Queries may also be sent to Dr. Shafer. Crosstimbers is a primarily a print publication, but our production requires electronic files.

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Please read the online editions of previous issues to become familiar with our magazine. These issues may be found at http://www.usao.edu/crosstimbers/ or http://projects.usao.edu/crosstimbers/

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