

EL PORTAL

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El Portal

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**Eastern New Mexico University's
Literature and Arts Journal**

About El Portal

Since its inception in 1939, Eastern New Mexico University's literary magazine *El Portal* has offered a unique venue for the work of writers, artists, and photographers both on campus and off. It is published each fall and spring semester thanks to a grant courtesy of Dr. Jack Williamson, a world-renowned science fiction writer and professor emeritus at ENMU who underwrote the publication during his time on campus.

Each semester *El Portal* encourages previously unpublished short story, poetry, non-fiction, flash fiction, and photography submissions from ENMU students and faculty as well as national and international writers and artists. *El Portal* does not charge a submission fee. Submissions from ENMU students receive the special opportunity to win a first-, second-, or third-place cash prize in their respective categories.

For additional information about El Portal, please visit our website: <http://elportaljournal.com>

Submissions

El Portal is open to submissions from all artists and writers; however, its awards are intended solely for the benefit of ENMU students. Submissions are published on the basis of talent, content, and editorial needs.

El Portal serves as a creative forum for the students, faculty, and staff of Eastern New Mexico University (ENMU) as well as artists, writers, and photographers worldwide; consequently, the views expressed in El Portal do not necessarily reflect the viewpoints and opinions of ENMU as a whole.

Guidelines

- Flash Fiction (up to 500 words)
- Short Stories (up to 4,000 words)
- Creative Nonfiction (up to 4,000 words)
- Poetry (up to 3-5 poems)
- Art & Photography (Black & White only; 300 dpi JPEG)

Please submit all written work in .doc, .docx, or .rtf formats. With the exception of poetry and art/photography, please limit entries to one story or essay. Prizes will be awarded to ENMU students only. Prizes are awarded only in the Short Story, Poetry, and Art/Photography categories. When entering a submission, please include a 20-50 word biography to be printed alongside your piece in the event that it is accepted for publication.

Deadlines

- *Spring 2016*: Please submit by October 31st, 2015.
- *Fall 2016*: Please submit by March 31st, 2016.

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Whirligig

Sreyash Sarkar

*" O , what a goodly falsehood hath ;
a goodly apple rotten at the heart!....."*

-Shakespeare

It's better to have some time to desist
Because it'll start all over again
In the midst of vendible decorated bazaars,
The variegated cooing,
But you'll never stop
Trampling over chattels
And after crushing them,
Walk through rudderless winds.
And while walking, you too will forget
Like everybody else,
The facetious effulgence of champa flowers
The first blooms of jasmine
The plenum of bnoichi fruits
The habits of autumn leaves.
And perhaps the oscillations in the heart of the ocean,
Where only risings exist,
That too will be encased by magical chants
You will whirr, turn only, like all who circumvolve
In this inauspicious time of whirling maelstrom-

After the end of an unwanted winter,
Just like the first working fan, overhead
How life is spinning, and spinning around.

Space-time Snakebite Continuum Blues

Justin J. Murphy

There is a dress of strawberries peeling off in a scattered ray,
Prisms of gold and yellow sink the shoulder blades
There's a sunset and a California south of your neck
Near the jasmine vine
I've been wondering a lot lately about your cheek
I've been wondering where I can connect
Your snakebite mole,
Like a childhood-kissed double-bud of a six foot daffodil
Floating across an autumn windshield
This mole can connect to the black hole
Where you shear sheep with a tooth
And you collect avocado dishwater for compost
And hazelnuts fall like raindrops into your palm
Jesus. I dig. I Ching. Changstein
We need some arugula in our life, make sure to write that down
Maybe this bamboo bridge will lead you to something in an
Indonesian dream
Like a storybook jungle made of green salamanders with sunglasses
And we slide through the rivers with cool crème de menthe
Buttery with chocolate bark
We machine gun at each other with our drunk lips
And fall on our backs wondering about the east
The east
The east
The West is best

And browns and flowers bronze and dead
who will make it to the feast
who will never be fed?
we've been talking to the rain
Wranglers of lightning
Strike me down, that strawberry dress
let me shove my heels up to the sky
I'll show you my wishes made of second guessed silver
Swimming in a heart drunk on wine
We can whisper dead Shakespeare in the downpour
fall asleep and forget about it all.

A Trailer

Alex Neely

“So you're retiring?”

Davey Paddock didn't answer my question. Instead the bare knuckle boxer calmly enjoyed the walk through his three-foot trailer hallway. It was the closest to a hall of fame he would ever see. The fake wood paneling was littered with black-and-white and sepia-tinted photos. There was Paddock boxing the infamously Roberto Duran. Below that, Paddock posed with a group of bare knuckle boxers, each smiling through years of scars. His favorite photograph though was a picture of him and his grand kids. Their high-pitched laughter, punching from the outside, could be heard through the thin walls of the trailer. It was the only noise that had the capability to spark joy into his leathery face. “They can tro’ stones in da’ lake for hours,” he said, proudly.

The 52-year old didn't have an Irish accent, nor an English one; it was just Paddock-ish. It was as if all the words were directed to leave his mouth at the same time, sprinted to escape and tripped over the tip of tongue. He lumbered - shoulders rolled forward, head titled down - to the sink. He had an incredible ability to ignore the mounting dirty dishes, cups and cutlery; a feat that became all the more astonishing when he peeled a cup from the pile and filled it with tea.

“Uh, care for a cup?” Paddock asked, scanning over the pile. I shook my head, and he sheepishly smiled. I should have accepted, I thought. How dirty could – A cockroach confidently crawled across the papery, tiled counter. It stopped, as if our presence was the minor annoyance. In a flash, Paddock's hand rested firmly above the cockroach. Miniature brown part body parts were scattered between his fingers. A musty fog of opened carcass swam into my nose. I coughed, only for a second, then closed my lips. Better off not

offend anymore, I thought.

“Sorry,” said Paddock, speaking to me or the bug or both. With a deep breath, Paddock rubbed both palms on his already stained bright blue jeans. The sound of child laughter tickled the frame of the trailer. A smile seemed to spread like a fire through his gray and black beard. “Kids.” He delivered the word with a tone of joy muddled with envy.

“The ceiling and floor didn't always have holes in ‘dem,” Paddock said, obviously noticing my stares. I pursed my lips and shrugged my shoulders, as if to say, “Holes? What holes?” A glimmer of yellow light peered in through a crack in the ceiling. It danced on the scars of Paddock’s face. There was an industrialized quality to his face, like it was stitched together from other faces.

“So...retirement?” I lobbed the question out of my mouth in a pathetic attempt to peel back the layers of Paddock leather. He stared at his reflection in a cracked television. The 18-inch white television rested its bulbous body on an exhausted wood stool. A black cord hung lonely, no wall outlet in sight. A white pit bull, wearing a thin jacket of dirt, wiggled through a hole in the living room carpet and into the trailer. “Hey dair’, Rusty,” Paddock said, as if half-expecting the dog to respond.

“Would ya’ believe I found ‘dis guy?” Paddock said, pointing to the dog as it limped onto the single-seat recliner. When he finally stopped circling and sat a small cloud of dog hair and dust hung suspended in the ceiling’s sunlight. “What a gift, uh?” Paddock asked no one. “Yes, ya’ are; you’re my gift aren’t ya’.” The boxer’s scarred fingers scratched Rusty’s belly. “He protects us, ya’ know? Tough as fuck this dog; quite like me, he’s a fighter.”

“Grandpa, grandpa, come see us throw!” Two high-pitched voices yelled in unison. Paddock creaked to an upright position. Shifting in place, his back popped twice. A stuttering breath rippled over his chapped lips. “Betta’ check on da’ little bugga’s.”

The screen door wailed open, and then slapped against the

house. Paddock's work boots punched into three wooden steps. A miniature plume of dirt rose when he stepped on the ground. His scars compressed as he squinted. The sun stood a yellow spotlight against a purplish bruised sky.

Paddock's "little corner of heaven" sat at the edge of Dreams trailer park. Three other trailers rested within a stone's throw to the orth. To the south, a small lake, more an oversized puddle, laid still.

"Grandpa!" Four arms wrapped around his jeans. The two young girls' faces were smattered with layers of dirt. Their bare feet balanced on Paddock's work boots. Eagerness rippled in their eyes, a sort of manic spark that seemed to light Paddock's fire. He walked with both on his boots, never stopping to shift or limp, all the way to the lake.

"I betcha' can't throw dem' rocks very far," Paddock said, pointing at the lake. Both girls giggled, jumped off his boots and began to search for rocks. Pebbles speared the surface of the lake. The water Popped. Plop. Popped. The boxer's hands would collide together, creating a violent clap. Over and over, the hands would smash together, while Paddock would serve up a "well done" or "helluva' throw."

"I can't retire," said Paddock.

"Why?"

Paddock grinned. "Look where it's gotten me!"

"Grandpa! Throw a rock."

Paddock bent over. His right knee popped. No one else seemed to notice. His fingers wrapped around a palm-sized rock. "Dis here?" The two girls nodded with approval, excitement dripping from their eyes. "Aye." Now upright, Paddock extended his right arm backwards. He took a deep breath and threw with a strength that staggered him forward two steps. But no one saw that. All eyes were on the rock as it soared higher and higher and higher.

wicked

Christopher Mulrooney

the formal statement of the society was read aloud
in the marketplace on the something of something
in the year of our Lord something something and something else
we heard it of course couldn't help everything else
hearing it as well flora or fauna it went in all ears
and in the stillness we waited for a response there was none

The Paddlewheel Steamboat

Gloria Keeley

along the Mississippi
where the banjo music
wafts across the town
in the cool of the evening
the paddlewheel steamboat
floats beneath the moon
houses on blocks rock
beyond the slow climb
the oak root woodwind
holds a single strand of
spider web
dreaming the
beauty of silk
the fishermen at water's edge
hear the minstrel's tune;
poets sing words of color
fly rods hold no reels
the thin boys in ragged clothes
along the shore
watch the straw-hat dancers
no moonlight falls on them
their straits are as long as
a depression-era bread line
the rain begins its crying;
underneath the dripping coats,
the baby birds bathe
the rosary beads set down
like coins at the bottom of a well
the steamboat anchored;
the wishing docked for another winter

Simpson and Galina

William C. Blome

Simpson was an outside salesman for the Bismarck Sand and Gravel Company, and the better part of Simpson's business came from the capital area's construction contractors. At the time Galina Ripple knew him—when Galina was between eleven and fifteen years old—Simpson and his wife lived in the same neighborhood as Galina and her family, and while the Simpsons weren't especially close to the Ripples, Simpson had gradually come to regard Galina as a child he never had, and after always asking her mom or her dad if she could come with him, Simpson liked nothing better in the whole world than to have Galina clicked into the front seat beside him on a bright sunny day, as the two of them drove out to the hills of sand and gravel BS&G maintained on fenced-in acreage just west of Mandan.

Simpson often went out there on weekends to make sure the train had delivered promised shipments of aggregate, for Simpson, the ever-careful salesman, usually always tried to verify Monday and Tuesday shipments for his customers, and that meant physically checking that there were piled-high hills of product, ready to be loaded into trucks for early-week deliveries. In turn, that meant two mountains for excited little Galina to run up and down and even plant her umbrella in at their peak as proof she had conquered "Mount Galina" and then "Mount Simpson." Simpson early on bought Galina a flowing red scarf that she could tie around the handle of her planted umbrella, so that when a wind or decent breeze whipped up, all the world could easily see that Galina Ripple had successfully scaled Mt. Simpson.

It wasn't all that long after Galina's fourteenth birthday that Simpson, while doing what he loved to do most with Galina on a Saturday afternoon, collapsed and died on his way to the top of Mt.

Simpson. He was retrieving Galina's red-bannered umbrella when he must have experienced a sudden stroke or heart attack and fell head-first into the gravel; he was, in fact, quite dead by the time Galina got to him.

Now, truth be told, Galina was at the point in life where she had tired some time ago of playing "Summits" with Simpson; she was still doing so only because Simpson kept refusing to play "St. Bernard Rescue" with her. That's what Galina had been urging him to play for several months; that would have been where she strapped a flask of cheap brandy around Simpson's neck and then ran up her hill, disappearing from Simpson's line of vision, and then yelling for Simpson to come barking and galumphing toward her on all-fours to rescue her as she lay prone in mock distress on the sandy crest of Mt. Galina. But to Simpson's credit (or discredit), Simpson never swallowed the bait, so to speak; he would never play any game with Galina at the inventory site except his beloved Summits.

As Galina Ripple now arrived at Simpson's corpse, it took no time whatsoever for her to do what she swore to herself Simpson, in his heart of hearts, would have really wanted her to do. She reached in her pocket for her flask of brandy and tied it around her own neck with her red scarf; then she dropped down on all-fours and kept trying to lick her fallen master back to consciousness. That failing, of course, the next task was to scoop out a shallow grave for Simpson and bury him like a bone exactly where he lay, in this place he loved so much. And before she dug and pawed gravel completely over him, Galina had the foresight to fish the car keys out of his pocket, so that once she was finished, she was able to proudly stand upright, descend the slope of Mt. Simpson, brush herself off, and then march over to Simpson's Pontiac. Hell, Galina Ripple thought, why not be laid back about all this shit. I know I don't need to call anyone or do anything special right now, because, her thoughts raced on, I've been hopping in the family car late at night and driving like a bandit for well over one full year.

Entwined

John Wojtowicz

Before bringing the cows around, she'd always
braid each heifers tail: French, four-strand, or fishtail.
Her mama had told her it soothed them
as a cranky cow can be downright dangerous
and it also delayed the final ritual of daybreak.
Her papa was always asleep in a cornucopia of crumpled
beer cans and cigarette butts-his last one
usually having burnt a hole in another pearl button shirt.
She'd first switch off the Star-Lite transistor radio
that had stayed up with him every night since mama left.
He was a long-haired Bocephus-looking bull-of-a-man
with a taste for the moss-covered delta blues
and genuine homemade blackberry wine.
With armchair acting as a stanchion, she'd squat:
able to move away quickly if he became obstinate.
She'd place his half-empty wine jug between her legs
like a milking pail to keep him from kicking it over
while still leaving it in his reach to calm the morning shakes.
After he awoke to her gently braiding his hair:
French, four-strand, or fishtail,
he'd slowly saddle his Massey-Ferguson 265 Diesel
and spend all day grazing their fields.

Necessary

Jim Gustafson

Today I read solitude is necessary,
it didn't say what for. I am relieved to know
time alone is vital like water, which I'm told
is disappearing, even as it lifts itself
to drown the oldest shores. There is no scarcity
to solitary fire. Matches strike no thoughts of conservation.
Smoke curls curse the air with chemistry. Scent travels
back to the never seen. By night, light is thrown
out of unknown places, not worthy of a search.
The isolated bulb speaks in tongues and shadows.
Horizons pitch illuminant from poles, casting
illusions of security, as if evil cannot take place
without darkness. We all know better.
Our darkest days come to us in the best of light.

Statehood

Chase Dearing

May 14, 2032:

The propofol wears off too quickly and Junk Jessup awakes to the total darkness of a compartment the size of a luggage trunk in the belly of a Red Cross van somewhere across the Red River border in Oklahoma. His first impulse is to scream, to scratch and claw and pray and spit, but instead he sits still, breathing in through his nose and out through his mouth and allowing the surrounding sounds and darkness to wash over him, a technique he'd practiced for a week in the event that he would be right where he is. If he moves or makes a noise, one of two Red Cross workers—the one he hasn't paid fifteen thousand Texan dollars—might hear him. And God knows what that man might do. Or worse, the men that that man would report him to if he found a Texan stowed away and crossed over into Oklahoma.

This is after the secession but before the invasion of Mexico, an imminent bloodbath approaching like the rattle-snap of a diamondback, an event that will surely lead to Junk's inscription.

There is a stop and another stop, and then the van stops for good—somewhere past the second check point, Junk guesses—and he's left with no option but to wait. To breathe and to wait. After nearly an hour, the container is pulled from the truck. The aid worker has told him what will follow: the container will be moved to a storage facility and stacked amongst a fortress of other compartments loaded with unused medical supplies and water and foodstuffs. Once he has been added to the stack, he must pray for three things: that his container is not at the bottom of the stack, that a stray volunteer hasn't stayed behind for a smoke, and that the steel door to the warehouse hasn't been locked.

By luck or by fate or by some stupid-joke-miracle, Junk is free.

Outside he finds twilight—a blood-red ring giving way to the blackness beyond, the stars beginning to break through in a way that Junk won't forget. It's a moment he'll describe forever as the moment

his heart finally broke. Texas is behind him now, forever. And ahead of him: something like a dark ocean, an empty sky, everything black and slick like oil, something moving, waving and writhing beneath him, smooth and unsure, endless.

As far as he can see, the wind turbines spring up like skeletons from their graves, haphazard and white, tilting and grinding against the darkening sky. The wind is warm and dry. Most of them dance, but a few sit sick and still like death, a reminder that Junk must move and never stop.

Above the sea of turbines are the drones, patrolling the Borderland like old, fat night watchmen, busy but slow. Red lights blink like eyes, and the bright-white cones of their search lights slink across the ground, catch Junk standing on the burned-out scrub earth, a hand covering his eyes, his head tilted back.

An old two-tone Chevy pick-up—powder blue and white—slows down beside Junk and stops. The cloud of dirt trailing behind it momentarily catches up and envelopes the pickup. A fat man in a black beard and a black Stetson leans across the bench and cranks down the window.

What are you doing, boy? he says. Just what in the Sam Hill are you doing?

Just got off, Junk says. He thumbs to the Red Cross facility.

The man squints and eyes the facility, looks back behind him at the towering wall, and then out his windshield to somewhere deep in Oklahoma. He calculates. You a Texan? he says.

No.

You don't got transport?

A friend took it. I'm waiting on him. Junk holds his breath.

The man stops calculating. Need a ride? If you ain't careful, you're going to get eaten alive by some feral Texas trash. He laughs and a spotlight slides across his dirty windshield.

The truck rattles across the plains and Junk doesn't say a word. The Okie's wearing a fat gold ring with a turquoise arrowhead on it, and Junk wonders what he could get for it in US dollars.

So, the fat man said, What tribe are you with?

Junk's mind reels for an answer, and as he thinks, the word 'Texan rolls around in his mouth, dry and jagged like a tumbleweed, and the dark-red twilight plunges into a purple and then goes black.

"New Tulsa-Apache," he says.

And just like that he is one.

July 4, 1976:

Jacob Whitecloud and Maria Mingura skip out on the Bicentennial festivities in downtown Hollis and lie in a cotton field, their feet pointing towards Texas, their heads pointing towards Oklahoma City. Jacob is a tall, rail-thin, barefoot Comanche in Wranglers and no shirt, only a red handkerchief tied around his neck. Maria is nearly two feet shorter than him, a cattail slip in a white sundress.

Half the flat, burning plains around them are broken and bleak, the cotton gone, swirling around here and there, three giant bales at the end of the field. The other half is rich and ripe, a billion cotton bolls exploding from the earth, fat and bright and ready for harvest. The sun hangs low and red in the west, and two lie in silence, waiting for firecrackers to pop and crack in the blue-black sky.

Jacob rolls over on his side, plants his elbow in the crumbling soil and props up his head. Long black hair falls across his face and then is caught in the wind, gone.

We should've brought booze, he says.

Ay, she says, What the hell were we thinking?

He kisses her once on the mouth and then again, deeply, his rough hand running under and up her sundress until he feels the soft edge of her underwear.

She pulls away but still holds his head in her hands. How many times do I got to tell you, pendejo? She smiles when she calls him this. Mama will cut my throat if I get pregnant. And yours.

Wasn't she sixteen when she had you? Jacob says.

Exactly.

He reaches further and she squeals, rolls on top of him and

pins down his arms. She unties the red handkerchief around his neck and stands up, taunts him with it. He stands, laughing, and goes after the handkerchief, but she pulls it away. They play this game for a while, both of them laughing, until Maria finally turns and runs, the handkerchief flapping behind her like a flag, a signal, a warning of sorts.

As soon as he gives chase, though, Maria disappears into the earth like she's being swallowed up, and Jacob begins to run. The sharp and brittle cotton stalks cut and stab his feet. When he reaches the place where the earth swallowed her up, his chest heaves. He shouts her name. She is at the bottom of an ancient dugout, the roof caved in, cotton drifting down after her.

Are you okay? he says.

Yes. She smiles.

He crosses himself and looks up at the vast blue sky for a moment, kisses the knuckle of his index finger. What's down there?

She holds something up like an offering to the gods, and Jacob sucks in a sharp breath. A femur bone. Human, no less. He jumps down into the whole with her and together they dig and parse through a heap of human bones like the nest of an ancient thunderbird or a mountain lion with a lust for human blood. Femurs, vertebrae, skulls, phalanges, all of them scattered, separated from their bodies, lost. There is no alarm between them and not a single word is spoken. Against the circular wall a complete skeleton sits propped up, his head tilting like a black-eyed susan. A single cotton boll drifts into the opening and lands in one of the skull's empty eyes.

And as they get closer they see it: a gold ring on its index finger, a turquoise arrowhead affixed atop it.

November 16, 1907:

Despite the territory-wide cold snap, it's warm today in Guthrie. The sky is blue and cloudless, the sun a small white glint. Governor Charles Haskell sits in an orange wingback in the dusty light of the reading room at the Carnegie Library. He folds and

unfolds a telegraph message in his hand and thinks about how his capital will be run exclusively on telephones. Not these crude, impersonal, hammered out messages. The note reads:

CONGRATS 46 – T. ROOSEVELT

Fuck you, Teddy.

He smiles, folds the paper one last time and tucks it in his inside coat pocket. Haskell is a young, up-and-coming Democrat with a narrow face and dark eyes. He can hear the crowd outside singing a song, but he can't make out the words. He has Democrats in the House, Democrats in the Senate. Democrats off to Washington. The first thing they'll do is pass Jim Crow laws.

Outside, while the crowd waits for their new Governor's inaugural address, there is a wedding on the steps of the library. A cowboy marries an Indian, a symbolic marriage of the Twin Territories, Oklahoma and Indian. The crowd cheers as the minister wraps the couple in a bison hide, which is so heavy that the couple falls into each other. Miss Indian is not an Indian at all, but Thelma Hatcher, a freshman at the new Guthrie high school, in brown face. The bison hide scratches at her neck and the cowboy – John Hull, also a freshman—kisses her on the neck in the quiet dark of their marriage teepee. She pushes him away, laughing.

'This is for you, John says. A wedding ring for our big day. He presents her with a ring—yellow gold with a turquoise arrowhead—and smiles. A flash of white light comes through a seam in the buffalo hide and falls across the ring, a bright gold stripe.

Where did you get a thing like this? she says.

I'll never tell.

Their child grows inside Thelma, but she doesn't know it yet.

Her father will send her away.

Or worse.

March 5, 1895:

Here are the last three years for Bob Rogers and his gang, which consisted of his brother, Kiowa, Bob Stiteler, Willis Brown of

Chelsea, and Dynamite Jack Turner of Eureka:

November 2, 1892, near Catoosa: Bob cut Constable Jess Elliot of the Cherokee Indian Police's neck three times in a pool hall. He later returned to stomp the dead body in front of witnesses. He left with some legal documents and a hat.

December 22, 1893: Bob and his gang overtook a Katy train at Kelso Switch, but were thwarted by the train engineer.

The same day: They successfully robbed a Kansas-Arkansas Valley train, having learned from their mistakes.

February 14, 1894, Bartlesville: Bob kicked down the doors at the Methodist Church's Valentine's Day dinner. The gang held crowd at gunpoint and passed around a flour sack for cash and jewelry. Before leaving, Bob forced the wife of a volunteer firefighter to stand on her table and pull up her skirts, then put a bullet in her right foot.

January 5, 1895, Wewoka: Bob bought a pair of snakeskin boots, a gray suit, and a pink tie and went out to a hog farm to ask for Jenny Freeman's hand. When he arrived, his boots were covered in half-frozen red mud. The sky was a slate gray and Bob felt like there might be a storm and Jack Freeman sat on his porch with a shotgun across his lap.

I'm here to see about marrying Jenny.

Jack stood, shouldered the shotgun. Get on out of here.

All I ever wanted was to do a right thing.

Baby didn't make it, nohow.

Today: Bob sits on the floor of his father's house in Horseshow Mound, his back against the wall beneath the front window, a rifle across his lap. He cries. The front of the house above and around him explodes and shatters and splinters, a shot at a time.

At his feet is his brother Kiowa, a slug through his chest. His bubbling-hot blood pools around Bob's snakeskin boots.

Outside, U.S. Marshal McDaniel and members of the Anti-Horse-Theft Association are, without a warrant, unloading hundreds of rounds from their repeaters into the house. Smoke and sunlight

blur their faces.

Plaster, glass, and splinters bury Bob and Kiowa. A whitewash of plumes erupts from a pillow on the couch. Not one shot has hit Bob, some stupid-luck-miracle.

Bob tears off a sleeve and knots it around the end of his rifle, waves a weak surrender, and the onslaught stops.

There is quiet. So much quiet that Bob can hear a whip-poor-will call out three times. Above him, out the busted window, he sees a full day-moon high in the late afternoon sky, and, for the first time, his heart breaks.

He leans forward and pulls a ring off of Kiowa's finger—gold with a turquoise arrowhead—and puts it in his inside coat pocket, tired and broken. He crawls to the front porch, stands and hoists the rifle above his head, but suddenly realizes what Judge Parker is going to do to him and does the only sensible thing there is to do:

Go out in a blaze of glory.

The Beginning:

Before there is anything, before there is sun and stars, there is only time.

And that time goes on.

It goes on until Man-never-known-on-earth makes everything. Until he makes the sun and the stars and the land and the sea and a man named Having-power-to-carry-light and a woman named Bright-shining-woman, whom he gives corn. Man and Woman. The two go to sleep and have a dream that everything is made for them.

And when they wake from the dream it is true.

But still there is only darkness everywhere. The man and the woman do not know that there is anything more than darkness.

A man in a grass lodge to the east calls to Having-power-to-carry-light's heart and tells him to come. Having-power-to-carry-light follows his heart to the east, where he finds the man in the lodge and

finds that there is light in the lodge.

I did not know there was another man on Earth, he says.

Well here I am, says the man in the lodge.

Another voice calls from farther east: Kill the deer, but only the black deer that comes last.

Having-power-to-carry-light and the man in the lodge shape bows and arrows, craft the arrowheads from turquoise stones they find on the shore of a black river, wait for the deer. Finally they come: white deer in the front, black and white deer next, and a black deer in the back, smooth and unsure, endless.

Don't forget to shoot the black deer that is last, Having-power-to-carry-light says.

But the man in the lodge shoots a deer that is black and white and his name becomes Star-that-is-always-moving.

The hide of the black and white deer becomes day and night, and Man knows light.

Villages spring up, and Man and Woman travel to them like spirits, show them how to make bows and arrows and how to play shinny ball.

And somewhere, beyond the stars beyond the stars, the heart of a deer lies broken, a turquoise arrowhead buried deep within, its blood pumping thick through the galaxies.

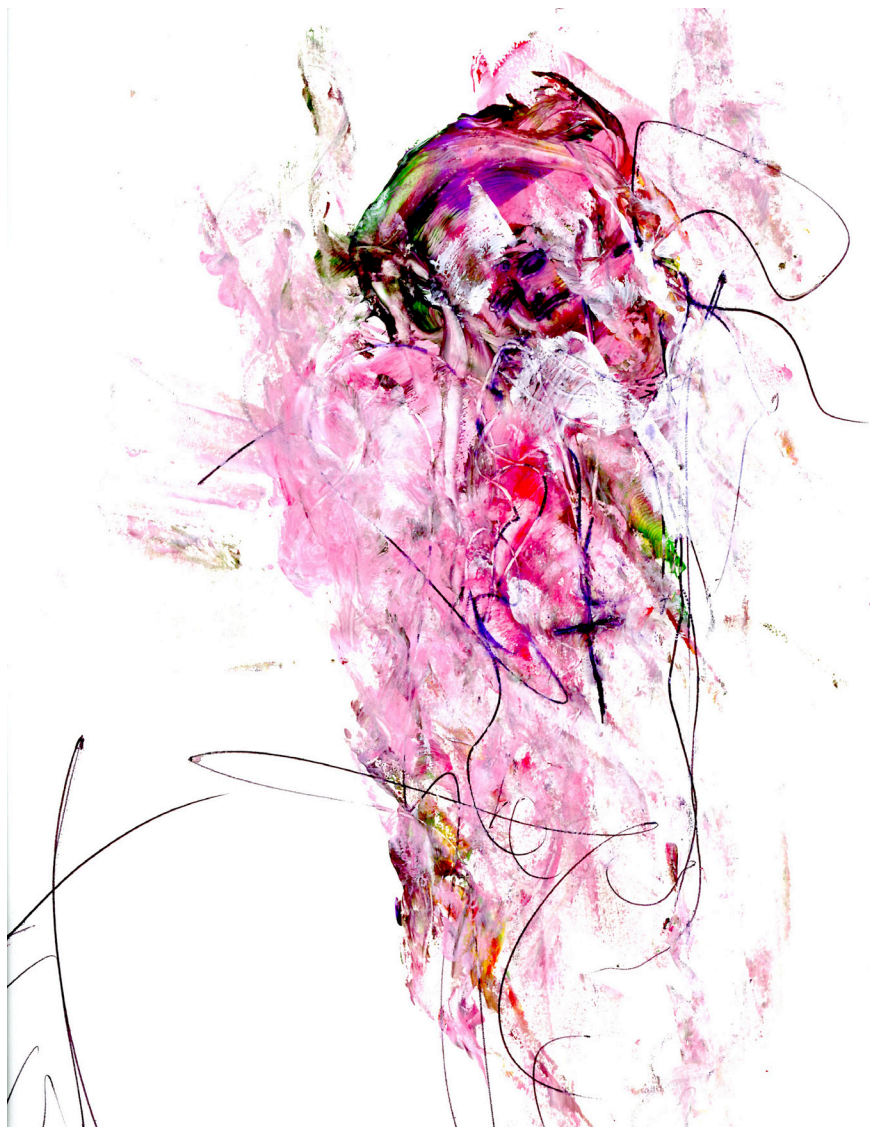
The Guilt and Innocence of Love Interrupted

Ernest Williamson

broken enamel dressed in red sauce
over shards of hollow-shaped glass
broken rhythms moaning over cries of help.
From
God
I walked
towards mangled remains
of a human being; arms speckled with purple
stains.
waxing screams
of me
letting go in front of flickering
gray
street lights;
stop signs sirens
singing
in dubious
rants.
why did I live to tell of this?
since crimes and punishments
cower and fray
away
from boorish
cavalries,
in between lines of my lies
that I happily repeat
on Separation's death row
as culpability flies from me
to
you.

The Master

Ernest Williamson



Asia + Emmanuel + Africa = Completion

Ernest Williamson



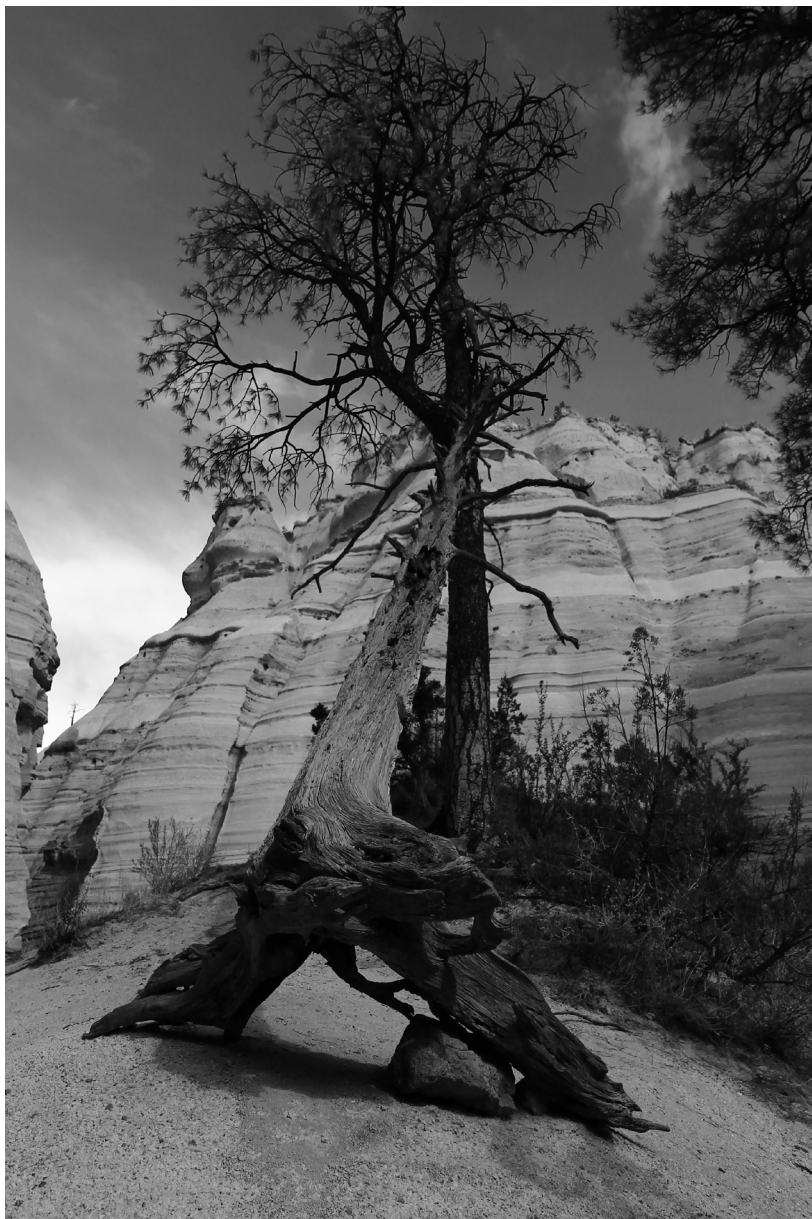
The Vastness of New Mexico

Matti Bratcher



Leaning Tree

Geovanny Lujan



Haunted

Geovanny Lujan



Billboard, Philadelphia

Daniel Cantagallo



The Rock Light Over Kerrera Sound

Jeffrey Alfier

— for Tobi

The lyrical precision of fishermen coming early
to the landing off Corran Esplanade abide
hopeful in sea-damp mornings the outbound tides
will lay bare to mudflats and sandpipers, while two
lovers drift from the stone rooms of Alexandra
Hotel, collars pulled up against necks, a thermos
shared to warm metal cups in their palms,
as their bodies will cup each other at night,
fixing memories of sunning shorebirds that volley
through the blue-gray light, until the gaining
moon owns the nightfall harbor, touching them
through the window with her bare white hands.

Awake

Sasha Kasoff

Electric at midnight
When I should be dreaming
The boundary
Of fall and winter
Plucks the string
Of my soul
I resound with it
The fire leaves
Crisp perfect air
The extra stars unseen
But I feel them above
I hear their music
Its voice a cold duet
Singing with the night
To thrilling silver
I cannot sleep
With winter through and through me
Calling me home to snowy mountains
My heart cracks like ice
Chill shards of longing
Electric at midnight
I cannot sleep

Leaden Oceans

Luke Johnson

Waters above and waters below

We are the trees

Drowning at the surface

Dragging churning storms

Expanding in slow motion

As if galaxies

Insistently still

Blindingly, savagely violent

Fists of lightning caught in a standstill

As the tide tears human hearts limb from limb

Soundless across the shivering seascape

An oppressive oceanic silence

In which we sit and ponder our loneliness

Enveloped in a pale green sphere of seething vintage waters

Artaxerxes floats facedown in the tide

Haunted by the giant child rising from

The depths

Nehemiah frowns and turns his eyes

Away from the thick foam forming at

The surface

And chokes on saltwater rest
As apparitions of a restored Jerusalem are scorched into his skin
As black hands tear through the fat of the sacrificial lamb

The
Ocean speaks and sometimes we listen
But
More often than not it forces us to listen
And

We are forced to confront our humanity
Without the amenity of earth
Without the acuity of
Our own wither

We see the stark nakedness of our souls and cringe at our reflections

Fury melts into feverish realization
Awareness

Of who we are:

At the mercy of the leaden oceans

Waves form islands of foam
Quickly sinking into the deep
Deathless beasts of oblivion's origin

The ocean
The boiling foam, a scream
The tide's feeble and devastating touch, a sigh

Of the living void, the sentient entity
That ascribes this watery grave

This maritime reminder of our undoing and the absence of us
Only shells of frail bodies left in
The wreckage of stars

Oceanic
Oceanic

And we disappear

Where is the emptiness when the ravens drown by my side
And where is the lunacy of those before us when the oncoming storm
Surrounds us?

Nebuchadnezzar glances from behind his golden mask
Into the averted opaque eyes of the girl whose mother left and never came back
Whose father remained submerged in a bottle of new age bourbon
While his lips decayed and floated away
A reminder of the promises he'd broken

The king strayed from madness to clarity
And screamed into the sinking city

Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego
Who sent his angel and delivered his servants who trusted in him

Babylon's island disappeared underneath the churning sea
With the king's outstretched hand sinking last
Forming the shape of a tree's nightmare

The onslaught of a fallen empire's glory

It was suddenly still

For those of us between ocean and ocean

Drifting

Letting blood

Fall into the skin of the deep

Like drops of mercury

I drift, slowly tumbling, feet above the waters

Grasping

Blinded by the slow advent of the light on the planet without night

Rather, eternal dawn, everlasting twilight

Sporadic daylight between the parentheses of infinity

I am finally caught within Gideon's calloused hands

Stilled once again

And smiled upon

Before my face is submerged once again beneath the waves

Beneath the waters of ignorance and imminence

The gods cry out as another shatters

In the wake of the vehement stillness

And I am forgotten, while humanity throws my bones

Into the abyss
The vintage green abyss that looked into me

And I return, primordial and yet fully human
Remembering Jeremiah in the well of Eden
Forgotten and embittered

The astronauts have become sailors
Hunting for the whale that trembles with this desolate sea
And the skins of ghosts that humanity had left behind

I sink beneath the silent waves
Under the fleeting descending grasp of Malachi
Whose mind twisted between madness and salvation
Whose hands now scalded the digital reality of my
Porcelain skin
He howled at me to swim but I have long forgotten how to
As time unravels against the hands and heart caught in
the churning water

The earth I knew disintegrates
And all that remains is the heavy sky
The dense maritime
The fractured remnant
Of underworld stars
Of glass clocks cracked

The ocean became still once more
But still ruptured the idea I was
As the green ocean swelled

And I saw my reflection in the eyes of my undoer
Glistening with gold and grey

And the waves

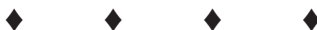
And the waves

And the waves

And the waves

Ceased its defeated hearts' struggling
My struggling

With a solitary decisive breath it
I am undone



Beyond the black worlds that lie above
And perhaps the voids (the holes in the azure)
And the earth that may still remain

The water churns slowly
As the ghosts of men
And the figments of sanity
Stand at the gateways of the cavernous maw
Wander the abyssal surfaces

The abyss that looked into me

Oceanic

Oceanic

And we disappear

Throat

Luke Johnson

Dilapidated old buildings crushed by falling forms
Reminders of a fallen yesteryear when we believed that

The darkest forests held the brightest things

We look across the clearings
Clouds the crowd the skin of the ever-begotten

Pulsating reflections
Tremble with each heartbeat

Working out its salvation
For we were only shadows in the blinding darkness

On the outer rim of oblivion
Feeling the sky turn grey
Against the colossal evergreen infantry
Above the mossy remnant of a red forest
The cold rock mountain loomed before us

Crosses of pine and crumbling headstones rolled away
A resurrection of our inner mechanization

When we turn our eyes from the all-consuming fire to the shadows
On the forest wall

And we are swallowed by the earth

spring snow:

Elena Botts

spring snow: white magic absorbed into the colour green which is not
any longer the green

colour but a denseness in the sunlight

spring snow: we tell the foreign city mad poetry, three homeless share
a bag of chips in the

canal tunnel, unkempt, dirty mattress, a tourist applauds

spring snow: remember when i deigned to hold your hand and now
she's an aftermath

of what was not meant to be

spring snow: god's little affair is done now, he's just blushing away
into rose and his

lilac blue fingertips pulled cumulus over his face him, like a boy in
love.

spring snow: she said, the heavenly host were like those deeply in love
which implies that they were not those deeply in love in this spring
morning when there's no one around, like a spring when there's no
one and no sound but someone singing out in between the colours of
dawn when there's no one around but me.

spring snow, you were meant to be

real.

Overcast Judgment

Manuel Treviño

A white figure
Bows his body to the puddled concrete below
As though in worship, he pleads the sun to come out
Several other pale bodies trail behind him
They all bow to the god above, who
Refuses to let the sun shine...
A triangle, a hierarchy, of shame

Incessant rain drapes the city of Pales Folk
Its gray lines leak from the sky, forever greying
The concrete which comprises their homes
Erosion has created pot holes (filled with frosty water)
Wherever a foot may fall

Damp,
The Pales Folk ceased wearing cloth over their bodies
Because cloth never dries when the atmosphere is an ocean
Of rain and fog, not thick enough to prevent the algae from
Bleeding in through the cracks of their
Oxidizing households

Wet,
The Pales Folk ceased having hair over their heads
For when they tried to sleep,
It was only a cold reminder of their waking hours...
Mixing their blood into the water
Purple streams still exist at the plaza where
The ceremony of corporate scalping transpired

Horripilation,
Dark homes house shadows of soggy furniture, while
Fake smiles are glued onto the faces

Along the hallways and stair walls
Nobody has seen a candle,
Nobody has seen a matchbox,
Home is nothing but a cave,
A cave to retreat into, in order to try and block out
The constant rumble of cold rain outside
Which invariably finds its way inside

Their skin whitens
Depraved of the UV index's readings
It whitens, agitated by the relentless decay of nutrients
Moans and groans become the physical manifestations
Of the screams and shrieks within every begriming cranium
They whiten, pale with fear and illness
Slowly losing the tint of sanity too keep them on their feet...

Depression claims the weak, who
Hang by their purple throats, caressed
By a brown snake which knots it's threads
Around a white branch of a dead tree

Pales Folk, cursed by an angry god, who
Will never relent
Bow down (incited to finally repent),
Drinking water through their skin

The Well-Traveled Man

Alexander Pappalardo

The well-traveled man (or woman) is the object of envy for the artistically minded. “How many different cultures you’ve seen!” they say. “You could write such great stories about your travels; you must come across some very interesting people!” they proclaim. Travel alone, in my opinion, reveals nothing.

I’ve traveled to nearly every continent, seen dozens of countries, made friends with interesting people (such as an aviation fuel-truck driver named Jesus in South America or a Ugandan man named Richard who spoke German and bought me beers all night just to practice his non-native tongue), taken trains, planes, automobiles, ships, gondolas, and convoys across landscapes with mountains, islands, deserts, canyons, glaciers, volcanos, jungles, prairies, plains, savannahs and oceans.

But I’ve never lived anyone else’s life.

Not so long ago I rode in the back of a van on the way to Teotihuacan, the ruins of an ancient Aztec city just outside Mexico’s modern capital. I looked at the houses stacked up onto the hillsides like bricks on the sides of a pyramid with the hope of remembering some of the details; details bring stories to life. I wish I could have seen the insides of the houses, but things so ordinary to some people are strangely inaccessible to others. On the outsides the houses – those clustered and haphazard concrete blocks painted blue and orange and green and pink and red and yellow or nothing at all – had iron bars on the windows, glass on top of walls, propane tanks on top of every building, and water containers next to the propane tanks for plumbing and showering. A hodgepodge of additional things could be seen on the rooftops: ladders, rows of clay pots brimming with flowers, the occasional satellite dish, bird cages, old furniture, lumber, piles/stacks of concrete bricks and a hundred other types of bric-a-brac. And on the precipitous slopes of the concrete streets: hardly any people, except at one point two women wearing disappointingly un-Hispanic clothing talking outside a doorway.

One of my coworkers in the van (and I shall for discretionary reasons refer to them all as coworkers and leave out descriptions of them), looked out onto the mass of houses and speculated what living in such an impoverished place might be like. She hadn't been out of the country, and like most Americans, she was impressed by masses of the poor. Still, wondering the same thing and not entirely sure it would be so awful for the reasons she thinks it would be, I was a little struck at what she said. "Can you imagine?" she asked, "living like that?" What she means to say, and I don't intend to be mean, is "can I imagine myself living there?" A vague idea exists that people do live there, and all she can offer them is to put herself in their shoes, instead of looking at them in their shoes.

Tatiana, a finely-cut woman with black hair flowing luxuriantly over her shoulders, opens the door and chirrups a greeting in Spanish to a well-known neighborhood figure – a sort of saleswoman of groceries – who happens to be passing by. The woman, Sophia, returns the greeting in her grating, warm and forever-lamenting voice. Others must have heard the exchange in the street, but no one else has any interest for groceries or an old woman at the moment. Except for Tatiana's barred entryway which sways a little in a light breeze, the doors and windows of the street remain motionless in the midday sun. The two women stand, one in jeans and long sleeve shirt in her doorway and the other in a plain matronly dress waddling over to share a few words.

"Where's that good-for-nothing husband of yours?!" Sophia chides. "No doubt he's sleeping at work again."

"I'm sure I'm sure."

"Or maybe he's in one of those vans driving by," she shakes her forefinger at the highway traffic nearby, "on his way to some den with good-for-nothing men like himself."

"No doubt."

"And where are those children of yours, hm? Sleeping too?"

“You know they are at the schoolhouse Sophia; maybe it’s been too long since you’ve had children in your home?”

“Oh you are too unkind!” Sophia returns happily. “Why say such a thing to a poor old woman? What would a girl with skin like the sun’s face know of the worries of age? But I am glad to hear your children are doing well, and that good-for-nothing husband of yours is too.” Sophia gives way to familiarity even if her face cannot, and places a kiss on Tatiana’s cheek.

Tatiana had always joked with her husband Miguel that Sophia had lost her children in the folds of her stomach, or perhaps even within the sunbaked wrinkles on her face, which is why she was so particular about where Tatiana put her children. “Sophia must be worried that when I grow old I will lose my children in the same way if I don’t take care to be mindful of them now,” she said once. When Sophia was discussed, Miguel invariably said, “Sophia is a wind who wails as she goes from one house to the next, poor woman.” Miguel works as a construction worker with his uncle, and manages most nights to keep his mouth dry and set a good example for his three still-too-young children. It would be a few years yet before the children would be of an age where street organizations tried to recruit them; Miguel pays his “fee” to keep his family out of trouble, so his household is free to live anonymously while payments last.

Sophia leans in close and holds up her ever-wagging finger, the smell of chickens and peppers shaking loose from her dress. “Tell me,” she asks, her voice lowered, “does he still treat you well, like he did when he first used to sneak up here after dark? I remember your poor mother – God rest her soul – used to run out with a broom after him in the black of night! Who could blame her, when he came from the sort of family he did? But I always knew Miguel would be a good one, even if he was good-for-nothing. He still treats you well?”

“Yes, better than any man I could have picked.”

“Well, pick your men like you pick your vegetables, and I won’t worry the gray hairs on my head for even a minute.”

Tatiana looks at the vans passing by on the nearby highway, and does not wonder if her husband is in one of them – he is with

the children at school for his day off – but watches a taxi with an airport marking on the side roll past and has an unusual thought.

“Sophia, have you ever wondered where all of those people are going?”

She throws her hands up, channeling the well of infinite exasperation within her. “Why ask such a question?! What’s the use, even if they were going to the Land of the Dead and back? You are not in those cars; such strange questions you young people ask! Better to wonder what your husband is up to, because he might come home eventually with some worry or another. I haven’t enough hairs to worry about where everyone else is going.”

“So you’re right, Sophia,” Tatiana admits, putting the matter from her mind. “Wonderful seeing you, God bless you. Please bring some onions tomorrow; I would love some onions if you have any for sale.”

She puts her hands on either side of Tatiana’s face and gives her one more peppery kiss. “So I will! Such a wonderful thing to think about. Onions. Those you can have and hold. Those will fill your stomach. Mary bless you; God watch over you.”

Teotihuacan, the decayed skeleton of a once-grand civilization’s long-deceased corpse, is naturally a tourist destination, and like all tourist destinations, an army of people – the hawker army – congregates to convince foreign spectators that they could not possibly complete their voyeurism of sacred religious or historical sites without purchasing a few dozen worthless trinkets. Perhaps in a thousand years, New York will lie in ruins and mankind will honor the city’s rich history by selling cowboy hats and copper statues of the Empire State Building.

I’ve always disliked gift-shop vendors in most other countries; as an American my standard is that I will approach you if I want to buy something. I don’t know how to turn down repeated offers for bottles of tequila and painted skulls without feeling like I’m giving

the cold shoulder to people who could probably use a dollar more than I can, but I don't want that stuff. I don't want to talk to people who want to sell me that stuff. They are as artificial in those ruins as the newly poured concrete that rebuilt the Aztec pyramids and made them into an attraction. We turned our heads from them and held our hands up to refuse what they held out to us. "Buy one thing," the older gentleman with us said, "and they'll be after you twice as hard."

Day in, day out, I sit and sell at the beginning of the road to the Pyramid of the Moon, watching them come and go. Fellow Mexicans with faces of mixed heritage come and go: sometimes Spanish, sometimes Aztec, sometimes something else. Europeans and Americans haul themselves over the ruins, their pasty or superficially tanned skin shining unhealthily in the sunlight. Thousands and thousands of Asians come year round; a strange thing to come to the other side of the earth to see a few ruins, but it does not concern me. I offer them what I have, "Tequila? Aztec statues? Made of real obsidian, look. Flute? Mask? Bird-call?" I hold up an armful of the things I've bought in order to resell; things that will hopefully have meaning to foreign eyes (for even a Mexican is a foreigner here). "Come, look at my selection. Please, please this way."

Some buy, most avoid my eyes and/or wave me away impatiently or uncomfortably. These insults and awkwardness no longer affect me as they first did. A group of five crests the first set of stairs and comes into view of my goods lying on a carpet just a few feet in front of them. The foremost, a lean and tan American man in a dark gray t-shirt and jeans, eyes my belongings although his demeanor seems stern.

"Obsidian statues, real obsidian, look. Only 300 Pesos. Masks, cheap; good gifts for family. You sir, do you have kids? A wife?"

The question receives a grim expression and a distant look, "No. No wife."

"Girlfriend? No, no forgive me... but this," I hold up a piece

of obsidian jewelry, “a wonderful gift for mother.”

He looks at it – a black stone set in silver on a fine chain – and frowns, but his eyes agree, it would be a great gift for his mother. He does not want to let me know that he agrees, but I already know.

“I’ll give you a good deal: 200 Pesos.” I give him time to determine how much that is in his own currency. “You won’t find this for less.”

He casts a sideways glance at the other vendors further along. He knows he can probably get it somewhere else, but he is talking to me.

“This is a wonderful piece. Look here: the initials of the hand-carver, and here: the obsidian has different colors when you turn it in the light. This is real silver, all hand-made. Come now, this is a good deal.”

His group has moved on a little ways, “I don’t think I can. Sorry. Thank you though.”

“200 too much? Sir, you have been very kind and patient. Name a price; we can come to an agreement.”

Now his eyes flash back to the jewelry as he assesses its worth to him. Now I’ve given him the power to define, to determine, so he stays instead of moving along with his friends.

“50 Pesos.”

“Oh sir! This is a fine piece, and I have a family to feed. I want you to have this, but I must ask for at least 150 Pesos.” He doesn’t believe me, although I do have a family to feed. He has no family; he doesn’t understand, but he is right, my family eats well enough that this business transaction won’t spell our doom, or at least until Sonja – Oh God! Poor Sonja... – until she ends up in the hospital again. She is always breaking some bone or other, the fragile girl, and she is beginning to grow crooked. Another hospital visit, then perhaps we’ll need the extra money.

“150?” A pause, a measurement of weights within the man’s head, and then, “Okay. 150.” He fishes out his cash and takes care to not let me see the three or four 500-Peso bills he has stashed away in his front pocket. This one is not much for haggling; he

has determined the value of the necklace to be worth three times his named price, or maybe it is worth that amount to end the conversation.

“Wonderful sir! You make me very happy, and your mother will be so pleased with your purchase. I have also a set of earrings that match the necklace. Would those interest you?”

“No thank you, this is enough. Thank you.” He is already walking away. More people are arriving from behind; I choose not to pursue him for a better chance with the newcomers. I’m sure I could make another sale, but it is best not to push, not to lose one’s cool. That man will meet a hundred more salesmen like me, but I do not care what he thinks of me; it is hard to be a salesman when everyone around me is selling the same things.

I did my best to not be the imposing or insensitive tourist, but another one of my coworkers needed no assistance in pulling his own weight and asked the taxi-driver if the Aztecs used to perform human sacrifices on the pyramids. The coworker, who also acted as our translator, interpreted the driver’s blur of Spanish and hand-pounding-the-steering-wheel for us. “I think I upset him; he said that being given to the gods used to be a great honor. The Aztecs would take part in competitions and the winner would have the honor of being given to the gods. He didn’t like the word ‘sacrifice.’”

We spent four days with the same taxi driver, and not once in the hundred conversations in Spanish did my coworker remember his name, having forgotten it upon the introduction and becoming too afraid to ask after so many conversations. I never knew his name from the start.

In the ruins, a main causeway stretches a mile or so with minor structures made of dark volcanic rock rising up on either side. To the north the four-sided Pyramid of the Moon rises over a hundred feet above the end of the causeway. To the East the Pyramid of the Sun towers 216 feet over its surroundings, a flurry of

multicolored peoples walking up and down the stairs on the western face. The plaques explaining the history of the place said that all of these structures would have been painted a variety of colors during their time of use. As I stood in the center of the causeway, minor pyramids on either side of the hundred-foot-wide road standing like sentinels on a river bank, and looked to the end where the Pyramid of the Moon stood like a throne at the end of a great hall, I couldn't help but imagine what it would have been like to be in this place during its prime. Where I stood Aztecs also once stood, except this was home to them. Who would stand in my place in another five hundred years?

Huitzilin kicks at the stone he has just placed to test its fit. A familiar voice speaks from behind him.

"Huitzilin, you know the rock has been set well; you have been building for two harvests now. Give it a rest and have some food."

Huitzilin turns to see one of his working acquaintances, an older man named Itzli, scaling the steps to the half-constructed pyramid, his unnaturally dark skin glistening with sweat. In his hand are two clay jars filled with maize gruel; just now the overseer has allowed a break before the sun rises too high.

"Itzli, your blackness surprises me nearly every time I see you. I often wonder if you received your namesake because of your skin, or if you became darker once named. But you have a fine spirit, and that food there is much welcomed."

The two often enjoyed pestering on another about their likeness to their names, Itzli meaning "obsidian" and Huitzilin meaning "hummingbird."

"Obsidian comes in many colors, Huitzilin. Hummingbirds are all the same, going here and there and never resting. You can't even let a stone rest in its place; all that humming must make you insufferably hungry. I'm not sure how your woman manages to feed

you.” He hands one of the jars to Huitzilin who takes it but refrains from guzzling down the midday meal, patience being highly virtuous in Aztec society.

Beneath the pair, who sit on their fifty-foot half-built project, hundreds of people walk back and forth on the causeway, dressed plainly, children lacking clothes, young men wearing a cloth over their prized possession, women wearing either a skirt or a full dress according to age, and all of them surrounded by vibrant colors of green and purple and yellow and blue along the walls of the buildings, minor structures, pyramids and marketplaces. Red dripped from the top of the Pyramid of the Sun and Moon. A man or woman’s heart and blood, often a prisoner caught in battle, would be given to the gods multiple times each day. The bodies were given to the leaders and warriors of the city. Itzli and Huitzilin didn’t partake in these events unless the whole of the city was called for some special occasion, which wasn’t often. Both workers, having finished their customary pestering, took stock of the city they continue to build upon.

“What a grand city we have Itzli. The world has never seen anything like it.”

“We built it stone by stone, like anything else. We’ve just been at it for a long time.”

Huitzilin flings a speck of gruel at Itzli, hitting him in the eye. Itzli takes a finger and wipes the gruel from his eye, then sticks his finger in his mouth. “You make it sound as if this city is nothing special! How the gods must try to make you see their greatness if you cannot see what is even in front of you!”

“Let’s not speak of the gods, Huitzilin. Nothing good can come of it. And yes, what of this city? It has been here for a hundred harvest seasons, growing and growing, but how long will it last? These pyramids are nothing to the mountains.”

“One day they might rival the mountains. You and I might not see this in our lifetime, but if the gods will it, what else could stop this from growing?” Itzli takes a scoop of gruel with his hand and looks out on the city, not attempting to answer. “We will expand

to the north and south and east and west, until we cover all the land to the edges of the world. A thousand harvests will come and go and these pyramids will be here to look onto our descendants.”

“A grand vision you have, Huitzilin. I see your mind works as feverishly as your hands do.”

“What other possibility could there be? How can something this immense come to an end?”

“The religious leaders say the world works in cycles, cycles of destruction and creation. I tend to agree. This will fall someday, and someday a couple of workers like ourselves will stand here and wonder at our ruins, and think the same things we do. Their empire could never possibly end in their minds, but it will.”

Huitzilin nearly chokes on his gruel, coughing a few times before he can manage an answer. “What rubbish you speak! I pray you don’t speak this way in front of the leaders.”

“I don’t speak to the leaders any more than a stone does. I am only a worker. I am finished with my gruel and I see you are too. Let me take the jars back down and then you can put your nervous hands to work building again. Don’t worry yourself, for as long as we are alive these pyramids will probably stand. Our children can worry about what comes next.”

“What a man you are Itzli. You speak as if you were as old as a piece of obsidian too.” Itzli smiled at the complement. “I look forward to seeing you again sometime.”

“The same. I go now to work on a different pyramid, but I will see you again.”

As I left Mexico, I felt almost disheartened in the amount I felt I took away, which is how I often feel when leaving any place. How could I really write anything about what I had seen? Had I seen them in their entirety or in truth? Perhaps Sophia and Tatiana (their names alone being improbable) are either embroiled with or comfortably settled into dealing with local gangs and cartels.

Perhaps the hawkers I met with were more or less fortunate than I projected, or their minds were more or less vacant than I portrayed. Perhaps nothing like friendship existed between older and younger men in Aztec working-class society. Perhaps also, I've touched on something true in my creations, like an echo spoken against varying surfaces which returns to me in new ways as I observe cultures that are not my own. I take in (not always), I add to what I've seen and experienced, I interpret these things according to my previous experiences, I project what that might mean into the future, and then I create something that has all the colors of the parts of the world I've managed to swallow in my short life. A story. Is there a space where, in trying to become them in my mind, I find perhaps a little truth between myself and those whose lives I have not lived?

Twin Revolutions

Woodrow Hightower

So this is how it goes:

You put on your blue eye shadow

I wear my best cheap cologne

We manufacture tiny dramas

Loud speak endless slogans

Pick the locks on rabbit cages

And burn down five-star bistros

Our friends follow our lead

In steel toes throwing red bricks

Believing we've figured out the low drone

Of time unspun and squandered

Our movement grows, goes viral

The web ignited by our images

A legion of cinderblock robo-boys

And smokestack love dolls

Marching across alkali flats

To the sound of pearl-black music

And then our falling out

Egos as large as long-haul Peterbilts

You go your way, I go mine

Our army halved, torn down the middle

You announce to the world

That I was a fraud on a flatbed

I proclaim you Jezebel Bimbo

With shoebox fetish

Momentum dead, message lost

The ink on our coming out

Smudged under ice and salt

It's sad
Years later our disciples will reunite
Around the latest food-court prophet
Leaving us to live on as footnotes
In someone else's heat-felt memoir

Morality Crush

Daniel Moore

Vaguely, the bird's tiny wing salutes a faithless sky
and all things stopping to ponder how

decomposition makes of beauty such a road side art.
Tempted to kneel, face to the ground, and go eye to eye

with the latest piece of heaven's, not-here-little-one.
The where I was headed, now forgotten, captured and bound

by its transient stare, everything there undone by here,
in the shadow of what was the vision of seed, turned hunger,

turned dive, turned look it's me, the clouds grown bored
with my torn allegiance to worlds both wanting more than was mine

to ever devour or give.

Contributor Biographies

In Alphabetical Order

Jeffrey Alfier won the 2014 Kithara Book Prize for his poetry collection, *Idyll for a Vanishing River* (Glass Lyre Press, 2013). He is also author of *The Wolf Yearling* (Silver Birch Press, 2013) and *The Storm Petrel – Ireland Poems* (Grayson Books, 2014).

William C. Blome is a writer of short fiction and poetry. He lives in-between Baltimore and Washington, DC, and he is a master's degree graduate of the Johns Hopkins University Writing Seminars. His work has previously seen the light of day in such fine little mags as *Amarillo Bay*, *Prism International*, *Laurel Review*, *The Oyez Review*, *Salted Feathers* and *The California Quarterly*.

Elena Botts grew up in the DC area and currently studies at Bard College (NY/Berlin). She's been published in sixty literary magazines over the past few years. She is the winner of four poetry contests, including Word Works Young Poets'. Her poetry has been exhibited at the Greater Reston Art Center and at Arterie Fine Art Gallery. Check out her poetry books, "we'll beachcomb for their broken bones" (Red Ochre Press, 2014), "a little luminescence" (Allbook-Books, 2011) and "the reason for rain" (Coffeetown Press, expected publication in fall 2015). Her visual art has won her several awards. Go to o-mourning-dove.tumblr.com to see her latest artwork.

Matti Bratcher is a middle school student at Clovis Christian Schools. She is aspiring to be a freelance photographer and designer. She enjoys finding rare moments and capturing them in photos.

Daniel Cantagallo studied visual art and filmmaking at Harvard University. Whenever necessary, he photographs nothing in particular. He has worked in the documentary field in New York, London, and Los Angeles. He keeps a visual diary blog called "No Outlet."

Chase Dearing's fiction and nonfiction have appeared or are

forthcoming in *The Southampton Review*, *Fjords Review*, *The Bitter Oleander*, *Eclectica*, *Short Story America*, and *Soundings Review*, among others. He edits *Arcadia*, a literary quarterly, and currently suffers in West Texas, where he's completing a doctorate in creative writing at Texas Tech University.

Jim Gustafson received his MFA from the University of Tampa and M. Div. from Garrett Theological Seminary in his hometown of Evanston, Illinois. He teaches at Florida Gulf Coast University and Florida Southwestern State College. He lives in Fort Myers, Florida where he reads, writes and pulls weeds.

Woodrow Hightower is a native of West Point, California. He is a poet currently producing a first book of verse to be titled "So Low." A self-described "word muralist," his work has recently been accepted by a multitude of literary zines including *IthacaLit*, *Olentangy Review* and *The American Aesthetic*. Hightower resides in Sacramento's Midtown District with photographer Twyla Wyoming and their two Tibetan spaniels.

Luke Johnson is from Los Alamos, NM, studying secondary history education at ENMU and currently student teaching. He writes to shed light on the dark and beautiful places of the human heart, bringing readers to bleak sanctuary with the language of the void.

Sasha Kasoff's poetry can be found in two self-published books and many anthologies, magazines, and other literary presses. She is currently earning her BA in English will get her MA in England. Look for her author pages on Goodreads and Facebook.

Gloria Keeley is a graduate of San Francisco State University with a BA and MA in Creative Writing. She currently volunteers at the grammar school she attended, teaching poetry writing to the third grade classes. Her work has appeared in *Free State Review*, *The MacGuffin*, *Torrid Literature Journal*, *Spoon River Poetry Review*, *Avalon Literary Review*, *Midnight Circus*, *Straylight*, *Stillwater*, *Owen Wister Review*, *New Plains Review*, *El Portal* and others.

Geovanny Lujan recently graduated from ENMU in May of 2015 and is now continuing his photography projects in Denver. He has been very happy to be a part of El Portal for the past few years. He wants to thank everyone and wish them good luck in the future.

Christopher Mulrooney is the author of *toy balloons* (Another New Calligraphy), *alarm* (Shirt Pocket Press), *Rimbaud* (Finishing Line Press), *supergrooviness* (Lost Angelene), and *Buson orders leggings* (Dink Press).

Daniel Moore is a southern poet, who has spent the past 17 years in the Northwest. His work has been widely published in The American Literary Review, Western Humanities Review, Cream City Review, The Spoon River Poetry Review, Rattle, River Styx and others. In December 2003, he was one of eight honorary poets chosen by a panel from the University of Washington and Poets West to read at the annual reading held at the Frye Museum in Seattle. In May 2004, six of his poems were chosen by Rudy Kikel, editor of Bay Windows magazine to appear in a national anthology of poets, entitled, "This New Breed: Gents, Bad Boys, And Barbarians," published by Windstorm Creative press. He lives in Washington on Whidbey Island where he is working on his manuscript, "Waxing The Dents." He currently has work in Ithacalit, and work forthcoming in the Flint Hills Review, Steel Toe Review, Harbinger Asylum and Crack The Spine.

Justin J. Murphy is a graduate of the University of California at Santa Barbara where he studied film theory and rock and roll, beaches and brew, sunsets and breakfast burritos. His poetry and short stories have been published in various literary journals including *Wilderness House Review*, *Crack The Spine*, *The Cafe Review*, *Right Hand Pointing*, *Red Sky*, and *Matchbook Story*. He is currently working on his second novel entitled, *Whiskey Jelly Blues*.

Alex Neely has been published in The Tower Journal, The Bicycle Review, The Evening Street Press, The Reveries, Danse Macabre du

Jour, The Manatee and El Portal. Neely is a journalist for the U.S. Army. Over the past three years, he has covered events and written stories in the U.S., Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait and Kyrgyzstan. Neely was recognized for his journalistic efforts in the Middle East with seven Keith L. Ware Journalist awards for outstanding achievement in news publications, digital communications, news media, writing and photography.

Alexander Pappalardo was originally born and raised in northeast Pennsylvania. He is now a graduate student in English at ENMU and a pilot at Cannon Air Force Base.

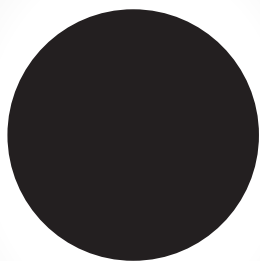
Sreyash Sarkar is a poet, a qualified painter, a practising Hindustani Classical musician and an aspiring Electrical Engineer. Educated in Kolkata and Bangalore, he has been a student correspondent at The Statesman, Kolkata from his school, South Point. He has been an active participant in various poetry and essay competitions in both Bengali and English and has won accolades by and far. In 2012, in an international poetry competition organized in memoir of Yeats, his poem was shortlisted among 40 other poets from all over the world. Besides being a freelance writer for several magazines, he is the editor-in-chief of Kalomer Kalomishak, a bilingual magazine, which he founded in 2013. Poetry, according to him, is similar to the entire process of macramé—an art of knitting of words. Being trained from an early age in both classical music and Tagore-songs, he has imbibed in himself a deep philosophical understanding of the Upanishads, Sufi songs and other forms of folk poetry. Tagore has always been his *raison d'être* and therefore has been an inspiration in his definitive understanding of Lalon Fakir's songs. He had also got himself into painting very early on and his works have been particularly influenced by DuChamp, Abanindranath Tagore, Anjolie Ela Menon, Picasso and Ganesh Pyne. An aesthete of a sort, he loves gardening, Ikebana, books, home-made Bengali dishes and watching films. He currently divides his time between Kolkata and Bangalore.

Manuel Raul Trevizo is a Mexican American born in Albuquerque

New Mexico. He is a Spanish Major in Secondary Education with a Minor in ESL. He is a Christian and therefore hopes to provoke deep thought and inquiring about the true meaning of life through his poetry.

Dr. Ernest Williamson III has published creative work in over 600 journals. He is an Assistant Professor and Coordinator of the English Department at Allen University; Dr. Williamson's poetry has been nominated for the Best of the Net Anthology three times.

John Wojtowicz grew up working on his family's azalea and rhododendron nursery in the backwoods of South Jersey. He is currently employed as a social worker and takes every opportunity to combine this work with his passion for wilderness. Besides poetry, he likes bonfire, boots, beer, and bluegrass.



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