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NDQ
NORTH DAKOTA QUARTERLY

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On the cover: Photograph by Wyatt Atchley. Taken in spring 2018 at Wesley College, University of North Dakota. Used with permission.

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Editor's Note

For almost a century, *North Dakota Quarterly* (*NDQ*) has stood as a monument on the North Plains. Started in 1911 and anticipating the Little Magazine movement, *NDQ* has remained committed to publishing the best fiction, poetry, and essays submitted by its diverse contributors. At the same time, the tastes, interests, and opinions of its editors have shaped the journal. Bob Lewis produced regular volumes dedicated to Ernest Hemingway. Sharon Carson produced a volume that reflected her interest in transnationalism (84.1/2). And Robert Wilkins' term as editor saw regular contributions on the history of the state and region.

The first volume of *NDQ* under my editorship seeks to continue in this tradition while also following the lead of Gilad Elbom, my extraordinary fiction editor; Paul Worley, poetry editor; Ryan Stander, art editor; Sheila Liming, nonfiction editor; and the editorial board. Past editors Sharon Carson and Kate Sweney as well as university attorney Jason Jenkins and copyeditor Andrea Herbst also offered steady hands to guide my work and helped *NDQ* navigate exciting challenges—from finding new storage for 20,000 back issues, to a new office, a new publisher, and a new funding structure.

This group of editors and our patient contributors have brought together fiction and poetry for a single volume in the 2018 calendar year. At my suggestion and with the help of the editorial board, we also collected a special section of art, poetry, and essays on the humanities in the age of austerity. Over the past three years, *NDQ* directly encountered the impact of fiscal austerity on higher education and humanities funding in North Dakota, and it seemed fitting for these challenges to manifest in the pages of the journal itself.

Volume 85 also marks another major change for *NDQ*. Starting with this volume, we will be published by the University of Nebraska Press, and this partnership will change the working of the journal in exciting ways. Already, we have made it possible to subscribe and submit to *NDQ* online. We have redoubled our efforts to produce weekly content on our website: https://ndquarterly.org. We also look forward to new opportunities to increase the visibility and reach of *NDQ* among creative writers, discerning readers, and our longstanding national audience.

We hope that you enjoy Volume 85 (2018) of *North Dakota Quarterly* and look forward to continuing to share exceptional content with you.

WILLIAM CARAHER

Evening

and it's finally light out
but I have nowhere to be
so I'll just sit in
just like I did all winter.
the radio is good
but the dj keeps talking about
what a beautiful day it is
and I get tired
of reminders that I'm
wasting it
and bang it off.
in india my sister
says she's sick of being sunburned
and my brother says
he'll summer in Chicago.
I was there once too
but it was winter wet and miserable
so I spent all day in bars and bad museums
and not seeing
anyone goodlooking
anywhere I looked.
saw some good
art though.
I keep thinking I should
kick my legs up and go out
but look at that
it's evening
and I feel pretty relaxed. I haven't traveled anywhere
in 6 months or more
and don't think I will for a while
though if the green card comes through
those plans will change abruptly.
I want to go to New York,
baby, skyscrapers and pretty girls
and a little bit of sunshine

just enough for a minute outside.
it'd almost be enough
to get me out of bed,
New York.
in the meantime though
the sun can track
over the sky
and make all
the glorious light it wants;
I'll still
sit inside
and waste it.

Dog day afternoon

that was a good one
the way
they really got in
the nibbles
at people not being very smooth with what they were doing
all over anxiety
fumbling eye contact
which is the way it is
with most things;

sonny
not quite getting the package off his machine gun
and sal
yelling
going from loud to quiet
in a way that said
yeah
this guy's scared and he's a fuckup
and he knows he's a fuckup
and he's scared because he knows it
but a very specific way

and especially
that one kid
at the start
who was so damn
quiet
with his little five-dollar line: "I can't do it
I can't do it sonny"
as if he were more scared
about disappointing the guys
not because he was scared of them
but because they
were friends
and maybe had a few beers together sometimes

and they say it all really happened;
sonny yelling "ATTICA",
the business with the bus,

all of it

and I watched it one afternoon
hungover all to shit
in july
hot as hell as they must have been in that bank
getting
    sonny and sal
getting it
    when I missed getting my piss in the toilet
and getting it
        when the water went down my chin
getting
    what they got
the little unintended humanities

like not quite knowing how to hold a register to burn
or how to spend a summer day
of 30 degrees
dogs dying on the pavement
except inside
drinking the rest of my beer
watching movies.

Rivals

I saw him
hanging around a healthcare protest
at 3 in the afternoon
outside of the dail.
there were 10 there in total
including the people who'd pushed the wheelchairs.
he told me he was working on a thesis
on William Carlos Williams.
his life in poetry.
in college I'd considered us rivals
even though I don't think he'd considered me
at all.
I'd read Spring and All on trains to work in Canada
for all of a week
and liked some of it.
I'd lived on 3 continents in 4 years
and now I was back
and he was still taller than me,
better known
and well respected
in the poetry community.
I wonder if he still writes poems-
no matter.
I have books in shops on 2 of the continents-
they don't sell much
but still give me a comfortable lead.

Snapchat

the thing is
you turn it on
and there you are
like a box
with all the world's diseases
except it's just your face
flung at an unflattering angle
you can see the lines there
and the
turning way of the strange light shadows.
it's not exactly piano music
more
a bit of badly tuned guitar
on a song you already like,
still good
but ruined
by your ability
to spot the problems.
anyway
you're only on it
to talk to people
and you slide sideways
doing that.
she is still a little charmed
you hope.
she hasn't had to see your face.
the best thing
about text
is that it's super easy.
to be charming over.

DS MAOLALAI is a poet from Ireland who has been writing and publishing poetry for almost 10 years. His first collection, *Love is Breaking Plates in the Garden*, was published in 2016 by the Encircle Press, and he has a second collection forthcoming from Turas Press in 2019. He has been nominated for Best of the Web and twice for the Pushcart Prize.

Green Scarf

In the car on the way there, the young man with the blond sideburns said, "The doctor always tells me I can take the prettiest girls out to dinner." This, she guessed, was supposed to put her at ease. She was not at ease. He was smiling. She was not. She returned her gaze to the buildings that moved in and out of the car window's frame: a Howard Johnson's motel, a Texaco gas station, cars parked everywhere along the busy streets. Black, silver, red, blue. She couldn't have said the color of the car she was in. All she remembered of the walk across the parking lot was the dark asphalt that had glinted here and there in the waning sunlight, those unexpected sparkles, and her own slow feet in their scuffed white sandals. The sound of the car door opening. The sound of the linen fabric of her new green dress sliding against the car seat. Nor could she have told anyone the name of the scrawny young man who was driving, although he'd said his name when he'd picked her up. If that really was his name.

She would have been more scared if she hadn't resigned herself to the likelihood of her death. There was a strange empty peacefulness in that. Like Novocain. It had made it possible for her to get up that morning, get dressed, and keep moving into whatever would be.

Like bungee jumping, she supposed. Or skydiving. You travel to the highest point. You close your eyes and you jump. Falling, you have no more choices.

She'd sewn the green dress with the thought that it would be the last she would ever wear. She'd done a damn good job, too. The dress was perfect, a graceful A-line with cut-in shoulders. Fashionable, very short. That morning she'd added white lace hose and a white straw hat. Wrapped the hat with a green chiffon scarf, knotted it at the left side and let the scarf ends flow down to her shoulder.

She'd always had a flair for the dramatic, and a tendency to commemorate important dates with food, costumes, poetry. She always bought herself a pomegranate on the first official day of winter, eating the seeds a few at a time over the whole month, in honor of Persephone and the promise of spring. She'd written a poem on her birthday every year since she was ten, even her most recent birthday, when she'd turned 21, drinking cheap marsala alone, waiting for her lover to call. He had not called.

The green dress, she thought, was versatile. It would be equally suitable for her wake or for annual celebrations of her survival.

Bring someone to drive you home, they'd said. She hadn't asked her lover; she'd demanded. She never made demands of him, but this time, yes, she had. He'd agreed, although she knew he didn't want to go, almost as much as she didn't want to.

They'd followed directions, driven 100 miles to register in a midtown hotel. He'd paid for the room. Besides the ride in his rusting station wagon, it was all he could afford. They'd lain in each other's arms on the double bed three hours waiting for the call. When it came, the voice instructed her to come alone to the lobby. She'd put her sandals on, untied the green scarf from the hat, and placed the naked hat on the bed. She loved the hat and wondered if, because she loved it, it could somehow pull her back here. After. Alive. Safe, despite the odds. She loved the man, too, but knew there was not much there for her to return to. The hat, then. And the memory of who'd she'd been when she'd tied the scarf to it that sunny morning. Would it be enough?

In the car, she wove the scarf between her stiff fingers and closed her hands tight, in fists, as if the scarf were a rope, like the ones spelunkers use to find their way back out of unmapped caves.

The car radio burbled news: Neil Armstrong had just walked on the moon; people in the background cheered; President Nixon said something about America being proud. Sideburns tried to talk to her about how cool it all was. She didn't find it especially cool. She wondered how Armstrong would get himself back home.

The man with the sideburns parked the car, asked her to follow him, please. And now, different from the way she'd walked *to* the car, seeing only the ground, she noticed everything. This, despite the fact that nightfall had wiped out the summer sun. She noticed that the sky was not yet as dark as it later would be, that Sideburns had parked at the back of the hotel where there was no neon sign announcing the hotel name; that his shirt was blue and his shoes were black ankle-high boots with pointed toes, the kind her older brother wore. She noticed how brightly lit the interior hallways were and how the walls, papered in dense flowers, seemed to sway in toward her as she walked.

They stopped at a door. She would remember the number always: Eighteen.

"Your delivery is here," Sideburns said to the closed door. She heard a security chain slide out of its track, a deadbolt turn. The dark-haired man

who stepped aside to let them in wore a red, short-sleeved golf shirt. A small black-and-white television on the dresser at the foot of the bed was turned on. The bed was covered with a clear plastic sheet. The bed sheets, blanket, and bedspread lay crumpled on the floor. A stack of white towels, all carefully folded, lay on the dresser beside the TV.

"Do you have the money?" the dark-haired man asked. When Sideburns had met her in the hotel lobby downtown, he'd asked immediately if she had the money. Yes, she'd had it, but only $600. "The fee is $700," Sideburns had said. She didn't have a dollar more, not one. Not in the woven rattan purse that hung from her shoulder, nor back in her small apartment, nor at the bank where they charged another overdraft fee every day that her account was empty. Not in her lover's bank account either. He was in graduate school and living on loans.

"I was told it was $600."

"It's gone up since."

She stood, just inside the closed door, with the green scarf stretched tight between her hands.

"This is really all you can pay?" the golf shirt man asked. For a second, she hoped they would send her away. But in the next second, she remembered what that would mean. It was not bearable.

"He said it would be enough. It's what I was told to bring."

The two men went into the bathroom and talked quietly. No words she could pick out.

"Okay, then. I'll make an exception," the golf shirt man said, as he came out drying his hands on a towel.

She took off her clothes when she was told to. The two men waited again in the bathroom.

Framed inside the TV screen, a cartoon fish wearing glasses swam happily in a gray sea. "I wish, I wish, I wish I was a fish," sang a chorus in the background. She recognized the movie, *The Incredible Mr. Limpet.* About a disappointed man who became a fish to escape his life. The music was merry, silly. As she slid nude beneath the white sheet, her scarf clutched in just one hand, she heard the voices sing, "Cause fishes have a better life than people."

Amen, she thought. *Amen.*

"Give me that," Golf-shirt said. She didn't want to, but already she'd surrendered her will to such an extent that she could no longer locate it. She gave up the scarf. She gave up everything and closed her eyes.

She would always remember the return of the sight and sound of Mr.

Limpet. As if the TV had been dampened and then returned to normal, although she hadn't noticed anyone touching its dials. Other things she remembered: the smell of her blood, a metallic smell like rusting iron; the flush of a toilet; the new song on the TV, "Be Careful What You Wish." How the men retreated again to the bathroom so she could rise and dress. She didn't rise or dress. She rode waves of pain and dizziness. She'd particularly remember the pain and the dizziness.

Watching the cartoon fish unmoored her even more. She wondered if she'd ever be able to stand up again. She shut her eyes. She moaned. A voice from the bathroom: "Hurry now. We need to be leaving."

It was perhaps the anxiety in that voice that made her finally push the sheet off and reach for the Kotex. What had just been done here was a crime. What if someone called the cops? Would they arrest Sideburns and Golf-shirt who had just now saved her, saved what was left of her? And how, without them, would she find the hotel where her lover waited? She didn't remember its name or what street it was on. She still needed these men. Protecting them was also protecting herself, and her newly returned, tenuous life. She stood up, shaky, pulled her underwear over the bulky pad, fastened her bra, pulled her dress on over her head, had to sit for a little while before she could risk bending over for her sandals, for the green scarf that was coiled on the floor beside them.

What she'd also remember: how her vision narrowed again but not from fear this time, more from dizziness—blood loss, she supposed, as well as her body's finally registering what had happened to it, the assault, for sure, but also a swell of relief. She wouldn't remember getting into Sideburns's car and leaning her head against the cool glass of the car window.

At the hotel where her lover waited, she stumbled crossing the lobby. Sideburns grabbed her elbow and whispered, "Don't faint on me now."

"I'm not a fainter," she told him and steadied her weak knees to prove it. At the elevator, Sideburns pressed a packet of pills into her hand—antibiotics, he said, and something to stop the bleeding, and told her he would call tomorrow to check on her. He let go of her elbow then, wished her luck, and was gone before she could push the Up button.

The instant her lover opened the door, she ran to the bathroom and vomited, gagged and spit until there was nothing but bile. She was embarrassed for him to see her like that. Later she'd think it was good that he'd seen the impact. Without that, it might have been too easy for him to forget. She didn't want him to think it had been nothing.

He leaned on the bathroom door frame, asking *could he help*. He held her arm and led her to the bed where she rested for an hour before she trusted her legs not to buckle on their way down to the lobby and out to his car. Once again, she kept her eyes on the ground, steadying herself on the solidness of the parking lot. She looked for the sparkles but didn't see any. The asphalt now was the black of a starless, moonless night.

They didn't speak as he drove. She dozed but woke each time he paid the tolls, one-two-three of them. Two hours later he stopped in front of her apartment building and she got out of the car. When she turned to pick up her purse and her hat, she saw that the car seat was soaked with dark blood. He saw it, too, and his face went white. Out of fear for her? Maybe. Or maybe out of fear that he'd be unable to clean the stain before his wife saw it.

He told her the back of her dress was soaked, too. "Try not to let your roommate see," he said, though later she wondered why he'd thought that so important. Maybe because he couldn't bear looking, himself. Or was he worried he'd be implicated? "Can you walk on your own? Should I help you?"

She reached for the green scarf he held out for her. "No," she said. "You don't need to help. I'm okay."

She wrapped the scarf around one wrist and walked slowly up the stairs. She passed the dark square of her roommate's bedroom, washed up in their shared bathroom, wiped up the drops of blood that escaped onto the white hexagonal tiles of the bathroom floor. Crawled into bed and slept fitfully. The dress lay in a tired, ruined heap in the corner of her bedroom. She woke again and again all night, amazed that she was there, still there, and safe, with the hat and the scarf—and the dress that in the morning she would push down deep into the trash bin in the alley behind her building.

The End

JUDITH FORD, a retired psychotherapist, has published fiction, nonfiction and poetry in many literary journals including *Connecticut Review, Quarter After Eight, Southern Humanities, Sulphur River Literary Review,* and *Willow Review.* Ms. Ford lives half time in Wisconsin and half time in Santa Fe, New Mexico with her husband and dog.

coop

two sparrows dip into the water
of the trash can's lid,
then feed their children,
and i think
the kindest thing
i've ever seen was yesterday
when a middle-aged man
picked up one of his chickens, gently,
to see if it was putting on weight.
his wife told me
it had the wasting disease,
"some strange happening
when grains or rocks
get stuck in their throat, and so
they can't get any other food down."
the man had a little, round belly,
he rubbed it and said:
"it'd be like when you're full,
but you're always that way—
you'd never want to eat."
the poor bird crawled on its elbows,
and i—dumb and sorry—didn't say
a thing. there was enough sadness then
to fill the quiet surrounding us.

clutch

at the transmission shop talking with an old man
who tells me about his bad hip, the pipe that blew
from his semi and knocked all his teeth out, his boy
running a crotch rocket into a van, steel rods
screwed into his legs, then riding again.
none of this amazes me as much as him telling me
how he microwaves his cigarettes for ten seconds
to make them burn better, and how his wife microwaves them
too long and the nicotine drips down on the plate.
i'm just here to get a quote on a clutch, but it's cold
and snowy out, a slow day, so he keeps me
every time i motion to leave with another story.
listen here, bub, he says. we've all got problems.
how right he is, i think, even as the plows outside
clear a path for us laden with salt.

elegy for hot wheels

last night we learned
the local roller skating rink
is closing to become
another warehouse. in a town
full of empty warehouses,
it is hard not to feel insulted.
my daughter, seven, has been working
on her speed, her hair swaying
behind her like the shadow
of the woman she'll become
dragged behind the child's face.
on the brink of marital issues,
on the brink of moving, on the brink
of change and hope and falling
down and weeping i fall down
and let the pain
sort of settle in my wrists
and back. the lights
color the floor with a spectrum
of patterns running away
from the center. it will be sad
to go, it will be sad
to lose something as simple
as this, each of us
working on crossing over,
learning to skate
backwards through space.

CLAY MATTHEWS has published poetry in journals such as *The American Poetry Review*, *Black Warrior Review*, *Kenyon Review, The Southern Review*, and elsewhere. His most recent book, *Shore,* was published by Cooper Dillon Books. His other books are *Superfecta* (Ghost Road Press), *RUNOFF* (BlazeVox), and *Pretty, Rooster* (Cooper Dillon).

Bighearted

The blood trips over a loose valve
as it gushes from ventricle to auricle,
causing a dull pain between my sloping breasts,
an awareness of my irrhythmic heartbeat
and an overabundance of emotion
pumping out of the trash can of my heart
like rotten bananas, used tea bags
and notebooks with scribbled thoughts—
unusable, inedible and incomprehensible,
yet following that haphazard tempo,
the ebb of which tells me, in furtive tones:
be still, be still, be still.

RUHI JIWANI's poetry has appeared in *The Eclectic Muse*, *The Binnacle*, *Off the Coast*, *Muse India*, *The Four Quarters Magazine* and *Femina*. She has published a romance titled *Miss Jane's Undoing* with Bookstogonow.com and a young adult fantasy called *Dial "O" for Olympus* with World Castle Publishing. She has a Master's degree in English and Comparative Literature from Columbia University.

Overlook

East Eleventh Street had the mephitis of transience
and guilty memories; that is, until its backroom
trick rooms became the best deal posh
money could buy. And so
East Eleventh Street became
the sidewalk for clear-skinned
graduates, their gadgets, their brewery
redolence, and their dogs.
No one remembers its origins,
as if the new balmy whiffs always were.

Then there are the Heights and its Private Road, not
too far away but up a very steep and segregating hill.
The residents had it declared a historic zone, meaning
it cannot change without consensus and permission, so
history has stopped in the Heights.

The third neighborhood is out there too, hard
to find, unnamed. It's the one where
the houses make rusty creaking noises, rodents
claim the crawl spaces and paint flakes off constantly.
It's built on the edge of a granite overlook
with a panorama of the on-and-off
lights of the city.
It wants neither reinvention nor conservation
because its perspective is constantly focused
on the vibrancy below. And when people finally
discover it, they like those already there,
won't even consider the quiet leaning of its timbers.

Make-do night

It's make-do night again at the bowling alley.

The fried pickles are dying
in the window like always while the orders keep churning—
soggy and cold with the batter sliding off.
There's a quick reheat

button on the microwave in the bar
that's a make-do solution but
really just a way to concentrate the staling
verjuice.

What other choices could we, should
we, make during those 30 ephemeral
seconds of the reheat timer?

For starters let's not let the dinger sound,
like always, before
the answer.

STEVEN RAY SMITH's poetry has appeared in *Slice, The Yale Review, Southwest Review, The Kenyon Review, New Madrid, Tar River Poetry,* and others. New work is in *Barrow Street* and *Guesthouse.* A complete list of publications is at www.StevenRaySmith.org. He lives in Austin.

Snapshot

In the snapshot, Ben and the girl, who is not yet on her vivid trajectory of fame, are seated side by side on the trunk of a fallen birch tree. It is an actual photograph which can be held in one's hand. The shot was taken over two decades ago at a lake house in Vermont owned by Ben's parents. The log where they sit in the picture is located along a narrow path leading from the cottage to a stretch of rocky beach where there is a wide-plank wooden pier.

From this pier, every day for two weeks, Ben and the girl have cannonballed into the freezing spring-fed water, fished for smallmouth bass, and watched the sunset from two unsound Adirondack chairs. In the photograph, they are turned vaguely toward one another, and the girl, who for purposes of discretion shall hereafter be referred to as Veronica, looks as one would expect, even at this age: poised, confident and disturbingly beautiful. By contrast, Ben sports a stricken expression on his plain, smooth face, at once injured and remote, as if he has already left the frame of the picture.

It is the August after Ben's high school graduation, but Veronica is set to return to the school after Labor Day for her senior year. She has just turned seventeen. She and Ben have been friends (without benefits, as a later generation might assert) since their participation in a deeply flawed production, even by secondary school standards, of a lesser known Neil Simon play. When they meet, Ben is on the stage crew and Veronica has scored one of the leads. An unlikely camaraderie is struck, manifesting itself in snarky backstage observations and a shared antipathy for the show's director, Irene Pill, a dour and emotionally troubled Language Arts instructor.

Though mesmerizing to most who encounter her, Veronica is surprisingly unpopular with her peers. It seems her remarkable beauty has a polarizing effect. Boys hold lofty, unreal expectations of her and as a result are often profoundly intimidated. Girls, on the other hand, tend to dismiss her entirely (when not simply hating her on sight) as if she is only a shiny object with nothing of consequence to offer anyone. She is rarely approached for inclusion in social gatherings, but is nevertheless judged to be aloof, cold, and conceited.

Veronica accepts these traits, even wears them in defiance, though casually, as if they are bracelets dangling from her wrist. It feels good to be separate and superior, to be watched from afar and envied for qualities she has not yet cultivated. She grows used to being the object of grudging and lethal admiration. But when she meets Ben backstage, halfway through her junior year, his stocky, jovial presence has a restful effect on her. He has a clear-eyed sincerity, which she spots right away. He doesn't appraise her in the nervous, hopeful way most of the other boys do—not to mention some of the teachers. Instead, he gives the impression that he is actually listening to her when she speaks and not just inspecting the shape of her mouth as the words are being formed. If not exactly inseparable, they become steadfast companions, much to the amazement and chagrin of their classmates.

When Veronica is asked to join Ben's family on vacation that August, it is only after the slightest hesitation (and perhaps a rapid inventory of her other options) that she courteously accepts. Ben's parents are durable and forthright. They remind Veronica of solid oak furniture. They are kind and accommodating to her, almost deferential, and slightly bewildered too, as if she is a visiting princess. She has had a pleasant, restful holiday. Ben's little brother, Rory, is the one who snaps the photograph, sneaking up on them, which is his habit that summer, with a newly acquired Nikon. Before the photo is taken, Ben is talking and talking. Mostly about his future. In a few weeks he will be starting at Boston University, and already he has decided on a plan, though he refers to it as a calling. For Veronica, this term conjures images of chanting, robe-wearing monks and medieval castles.

"Foreign Service," Ben explains. "International Relations."

Veronica offers an indulgent smile as Ben proceeds to illustrate his future in global diplomacy, using descriptions gleaned largely through spy novels and old films concerning Cold War espionage.

Nine days after the snapshot is taken, Veronica is discovered by an agent from a top-tier modeling agency while she and her mother are in Manhattan for their annual trip to purchase school clothes. Veronica's mother is a tall, brittle woman who takes great pride in her daughter's appearance and the seismic impact it has on others. Veronica's parents divorced when she was an infant and her father is no longer on the scene. Veronica's mother is protective yet practical when it comes to her daughter's raw potential and gauges most details in Veronica's life as to

how they will shape and influence her own. She does not, for instance, particularly like Ben, and is confused by the girl's friendship with him. But he is harmless enough, Veronica's mother concedes, rather like a merry lapdog, a term she uses privately to describe him.

In New York City, a man wearing an expensive suit, brandishing a grin as if it is a weapon, leaps out of a taxi. He hands Veronica a card, as she and her mother stand on a sidewalk outside of Saks. Her mother takes the card and examines it. Once she determines that the man is not a garden variety predator and that the agency highlighted on the card is legitimate and actually rather famous, she is savvy enough, when the question is poised, to shave a year off her daughter's age in deference to the youth-obsessed modeling market.

The next thing Ben discovers (he will get occasional postcards from Veronica throughout much of his college career) his old friend is chucking high school altogether and flying off to the Bahamas for a magazine photo shoot, where, unbeknownst to him, she feels compelled to lose her virginity to the middle-aged and amorously persistent fashion photographer. Success ensues, or at least a marginal enough version of it for Veronica to move to New York City and rent a tiny, bleak apartment near Tompkins Square Park. She goes on daily modeling auditions, or Go-Sees, as they are called, and soon her image is gracing, if not yet *Vogue*, then the higher-end department store catalogues. This is before Veronica realizes she doesn't really like modeling at all and decides, despite her unhappy high school experience with Ms. Pill, to turn her attention to the stage.

She takes drama classes at a famous studio presided over by a collection of show business lost souls and switches to a theatrical agent. She goes on more auditions until in swift, almost unprecedented fashion, she finds herself playing Natasha in a well-regarded Off-Broadway production of Chekhov's *Three Sisters*. One minute Veronica is frolicking for the camera, posing for sales circulars with a gaggle of mopey, underfed girls, and the next she is getting raves from a hardnosed *New York Times* reviewer who describes her debut performance on the legitimate stage as *luminous, spellbinding and enormously promising*.

If Ben had been the theater's publicist he might have made more of Veronica's strange segue from paid mannequin to performing Chekhov six nights a week—some zippy article or press release about her reinvention seems called for, but Veronica feels (perhaps wisely) that the less revealed about her modeling days the better. Communication

between the two is infrequent by this time, but Ben still gets an occasional peak into her new life.

He comes to see her late in the run of this play, in fact, taking a train down from Boston. He feels awkward in the backstage flurry, with a surplus of fussy theatrical types streaming by him after the performance, curling their lips (when they notice him at all) as if he is the only one not dressed for a masquerade ball. He's wearing a tweed sport coat, beige Dockers and a burgundy tie borrowed from his father. Someone delivers Veronica a note on Ben's behalf and still he waits a long time for his few minutes with her, as if she is a dignitary on a tight schedule.

At last Ben is ushered into a small, austere dressing room by an exasperated and exhausted-looking older woman. And here is Veronica, still in costume and made up for the stage, looking gorgeous, vaguely familiar, but also as if she belongs to a separate species altogether. He is flustered and stammering, and after some graceless attempts at conversation—mostly compliments aimed at her performance, because she really *was* quite good—he asks her out to dinner, an invitation she politely refuses. This is a crushing blow, as he had informed her weeks before of his visit.

"I have another engagement," Veronica says with a prim and cautious smile.

Engagement is an oddly old-fashioned word, Ben silently observes, especially for a girl he has arm-wrestled with and with whom he has baited hooks, a young woman who is not yet twenty.

It is the last time in his life that he will see her in the flesh.

This is before the West Coast casting agent attends the play and Veronica is whisked off to Los Angeles to read for what becomes her television series—with its ludicrous premise (college student by day, psychic crime fighter by night), which she nevertheless pulls off. The show runs four popular seasons and she even collects a television award for it, but eventually she leaves the show because she is getting a steady stream of film offers and her lovely face is beginning to show up regularly on the covers of various celebrity magazines and in advertisements for a famous cosmetics company. Her career is, as they say, on the rise. At the grocery store, Ben stands in the check-out line, and suddenly there's Veronica, popping out at him like a signal flare from the racks. She strikes flattering and sensational poses for these magazines and when profiled within the glossy pages she often mentions braving a lonely childhood in a charming, bucolic town—describing their affluent and bustling

Massachusetts suburb as if it is a cross between *Grover's Corners* and *Li'l Abner's Dogpatch*.

Ben follows her early movie career with some interest. He admires the rather smart way she builds it, one block at a time, though perhaps a more accurate image would convey a house of cards. At first she does one of those big budget action films, shot on four continents, where everything in sight is blown to bits. She plays the lead's girlfriend, a part that can scarcely exist on the page. All she is required to do is look ravishing in the costumes and scream effectively during her inevitable rescue in the last scene.

A meaty role, however, follows. Veronica is a pregnant, delusional waitress in a nothing budget, independent film, the type of movie which cynical reviewers adore and audiences stay away from in droves. For a number of years she repeats the pattern, back and forth, from the commercial to the artistic, cross-stitching her way to both public and critical recognition. Ben often travels to a dilapidated art house in Harvard Square to watch her in the poorly lit indies where she plays a drug addict or a prostitute or a serial killer. In one movie she plays a character who is all three at the same time and wins a prestigious critics' prize.

By now, of course, Veronica is surrounded by a gaggle of handlers and professional kibitzers, people who sometimes morph and blur before her eyes. The fussy maintenance of her professional life makes her impatient and tired. There is a moment in her career when she wants to go back to New York to do an Off-Broadway revival of Arthur Miller's *After the Fall*. She envisions herself playing the "Marilyn Monroe" role to great acclaim, walking home alone to a small apartment near the theater district after performances, having no responsibilities other than immersing herself in the part. This would be bliss and much the way she remembers those early days, back when she was doing *Three Sisters*. However, when she mentions the idea to her agent and manager, they both respond as if they believe she is experiencing some kind of Tourette's induced tirade.

This is when Veronica realizes that she's on a runaway train. From here on out, escape (even manifested in safe-bet theatrical revivals) will seem like the wildest of fantasies. Too many people count on her for their paychecks and livelihood. She's like a public utility. She can't stop delivering.

Until, after a while, it all starts to crumble.

A tempestuous liaison with a mercurial baseball pitcher (who years later will find himself front and center during the steroid scandal) may be the turning point, when coverage of Veronica's personal life begins to

overshadow her genuine acting ability. Certainly, her move to London and a swift, head-scratching marriage to an aging and rowdy British rock star, garners more attention than the films she is making at this time. After the divorce, Veronica returns to the States where she discovers her *A-list* potential is badly tarnished after the failure of her last few projects. She goes for a casting meeting with the producer of an upcoming film about a spunky suffragette and overhears him whisper to his assistant, "What the fuck is *she* doing here?"

She reads for the "girl" role in a cop movie, but the director thinks she's too old to play Harrison Ford's love interest. Losing her status in the Hollywood firmament proves far more humiliating than she would have expected, and she begins to show signs of temperament. She stomps off a movie set in Mexico and is fired for unprofessionalism. She appears incoherent in a television interview, which she blames on medication after a root canal. Her estranged mother gives an angry, bitter interview to a popular women's magazine for its Mother's Day issue. The spiral continues when Veronica is linked to a former child star, an OxyContin addict, who sells a story about their sex life to an online tabloid. Her career, which has been slipping gears for some time, is now sputtering and nearly stalled. Veronica turns forty-three or forty-six (depending on the source) and is seriously considering an offer to hawk designer jewelry on *The Shopping Channel* when she snags the lead in a *Lifetime* television movie, where she plays an ex-stripper with a heart of gold who goes back to school to pursue a medical degree. It's called *The Same Old Grind* and somehow scores huge ratings. There is even talk of developing it into a series, news that fills Veronica with nothing but a sense of gratitude and sweet relief.

Ben observes Veronica's evolving existence as if from a great height, as if it is a carnival encased in a snow globe. But he has his own crooked journey. He never pursues his dream of Foreign Service, for instance, as the plan loses some of its luster after that day by the lake. He chooses law school instead, though his legal education feels like a vaccination that doesn't take, so he tumbles through a few more careers, before landing haphazardly in hospital administration, a stressful but lucrative living. He settles outside of Boston, two towns over from where he grew up. His first wife leaves him for a roofing contractor who comes to inspect leaky gutters above their vestibule. But his second marriage, to a peppy accountant, fares better, despite her struggles with vertigo and an OCD ailment requiring her to avoid geometric patterns in carpets and floor tile.

Ben has fathered no children, a fact that gnaws at him occasionally when he is stuck in traffic on Storrow Drive or can't sleep at night. This is also when he thinks of the lake house, which is now gone, as are both his parents, who were taken too soon by cruel and lingering illnesses. He and his little brother Rory, no longer a smart-aleck kid with a crewcut and a Nikon but a portly investment banker with a divide and conquer attitude, fight bitterly over their small inheritance and are forced to sell the cottage and share the profits. They no longer communicate.

Ben keeps the snapshot hidden in a sock drawer. He often thinks about that afternoon by the lake, when he outlined his future, and afterwards revealed his true feelings for Veronica, all the things he felt from their first conversation backstage—and even before that, as she sat in the cafeteria or stood by her locker, oblivious (or so he believed then) to the attention she elicited from everyone in her orbit. Veronica was a sensation, a rare astronomical occurrence. Even after they sought out each other's company and became fast friends, he'd sometimes catch his breath when he glimpsed her in unguarded moments, while the rest of the world slipped by.

It is their last day of vacation, and as they sit on the log, Ben talks rapidly, trying to outpace his own awkwardness as the lake shimmers through the trees in the middle distance. First he discusses his plans for college and his career, but he's promised himself he won't leave here without telling her everything, so he makes a sudden shift. He is afraid he sees a flicker of disappointment in Veronica's big green eyes, but he goes on anyway, confessing it all, relentless as a seizure.

Ben sometimes wonders if Veronica has her own memories of that day.

And so she does. But the memories are vague. She remembers there had been a thoughtful, chubby boy who professed his love for her while they sat near a pond. That's what she recalls. They had known each other in high school, she thinks, but his name escapes her now. He was rambling on about his feelings for her that day and it was really quite embarrassing. She even lost track of what he was saying in the middle of it because a hummingbird was buzzing and hovering near the boy's head for a while and she began to focus on that instead—its back and forth motion. In this way it seemed to her that the bird was experiencing the past and the future at the same time.

When the boy had stopped talking, she hadn't known how to respond, so she said something from a movie she'd once seen about a popular girl

who was always breaking boys' hearts. In a slow and deliberate voice, Veronica told this boy that they would always, always be friends. But that it could never work out between them in any *other* way because he was destined for a bigger life and far greater things—and she was, after all, just a simple girl from the suburbs who craved a quiet, ordinary existence. Then she remembers there had been a click of a camera. Someone had taken their picture. She can't imagine who would have done this or why. But it's something that might still exist somewhere—this mystery photo. And she finds this quite amusing, a snapshot from so long ago, from her other life, before she was anyone at all.

BILL GAYTHWAITE's short stories have appeared (or are forthcoming) in *Subtropics, Chicago Quarterly Review*, *Grist, Oyster River Pages* and elsewhere. His work is also included in *Hashtag Queer: an LGBTQ+ Creative Anthology, Vols. I and II* and in *Mudville Diaries*, a collection of baseball writing published by *Avon Books*.

Migration

I wanted you to be the first to know
that I saw a monarch butterfly descend
into the creeping shrubs behind the house.
She flashed her speckled wings, set them shaking
in the breeze, just two fleshless glints of light,

like stained glass windows in a silent church.
She flittered past the lawn, rolled into the scent
of blossoms bending back against the fence,
and found a place to swoop her body into.
It looked like breathing, her curling on the branch,

the way she smoldered, the world a dark feature
beside her. I recognized her solitude,
that longing for a place, and when she burst
into the air, the sky, at its end of spring,
reached down from the north to call her home.

After Dark

I duck into the bar
on the corner of Adams and Fenton,
slip in below the green neon sign
peeling on the wall,
and drag a stool beside the window
where night enters on a breath of heat
and cigarette smoke.
I watch them sipping their craft beers,
these manicured hipsters,
knitting conversation about communism and death,
oblivious to the owner's tabby cat,
who falls off the shingled roof,
does two summersaults in midair,
then disappears into the black eye of an empty pot.

late at night in the living room

it's been two months since i texted the woman
you swore was just a friend
and I'm ripping up carpet with my bare hands.
there's sweat on my neck
as I stagger toward the hammer.
this is how you'll be erased,
pried from my skin,
one by one,
like these strips of tack.
the blue stained pad
unfurls itself into a corner,
and i wonder about the geometry of marriage,
how angles fall apart,
while some lines go on forever.

i stand back,
shake off these layers of loose dirt and rust,
watch the cold cement rise
beneath my clammy feet.
this emptiness feels like progress,
and as morning pushes in from the yard
there's only the sound of our son
in the bedroom down the hall
breathing in his sleep.

CINDY MARESIC is a Chilean American poet who lives in San Diego, California. She works as an elementary school teacher and supports her district's writing needs. She has an MFA from San Diego State University, and her poetry has appeared in *Glass: A Journal of Poetry*, *Apeiron Review*, *Mapping Me: A Landscape of Women's Stories*, *Belletrist Magazine*, *Synesthesia Literary Journal*, and *Goldman Review*, among others. Her poetry has been nominated for the Best of the Net award. When she is not writing poetry, Cindy is working on her first, young adult novel.

How to Make It

Dance on glass shards
until your feet bleed
and the blood crusts.
Lie down on a bed of nails
and rise full of holes
and let the wind play
its melody through your body.
Sing the words and ask
everyone to sing along with you.
Steal the emptiness from your pockets
and plant it in the dirt.
Toss it into the open mouths
lying on the ground,
covered in newspapers
or wilted cornstalks.
Toss it into the crowds
as they clamor for more.
Toss it into the throats
of the wild animals who follow
you in packs. Chew it
yourself until emptiness
blossoms on your lips.
Stab the ghosts that swirl
around you, even though
the ghosts will never bleed
or stop swirling around you.
Take off your skin
and shimmy your skeleton,
waiting for applause or laughter.
Rub your bones together
until they burn.

JEFF FRIEDMAN's seventh book of poems, *Floating Tales,* was published by Plume Editions/MadHat Press in fall 2017. Friedman's poems, mini stories and translations have appeared in *American Poetry Review*, *Poetry, New England* Review, *Poetry International, Plume, Hotel Amerika, Flash Fiction Funny, The New Republic and numerous other literary magazines.*

Operation

i.

They said I couldn't live without one,
that a replacement was needed,
a shiny new part
to replace the old.

You know the feeling—

no tickets left,
another spatial configuration
calling for order,
dire diatribes disrupting
the body's business, then
a sudden desire for the worst.

ii.

The man carrying a box of pills from the pharmacy
ignored the warning signs—
the spot on the universe.

He was learning how to live
& wanted to know
if there was anything I could do
to ease the pain.

I told him
I loved him.

I lied.
I lied because I loved him—

a nuance
that exploded beside us
like the box mine
we couldn't detect
or find any part
of Sgt. Parker
who stepped into history
& disappeared
on a day like any other.

AL NYHART received an MFA from the University of Montana and has been a painting contractor for over 40 years. He lives in White Sulphur Springs, Montana with his wife Cheryl.

Nixon for President

I stared out the car window at the Santa Monica Freeway, wondering how to change the subject. Nothing I could say about Richard Nixon would convince my father to support him, and what I really wanted to talk about was girls, as in why hardly any of them would go out with me.

It was Sunday morning, June 2, 1968. My father and I were heading to East Los Angeles, where he would speak at a rally for Senator Robert F. Kennedy's presidential campaign.

Senator Kennedy's campaign staff had invited him because my father, Gerald Mohr, was a celebrity, a B-list character actor. Unlike me, my father adored the senator. As we sped past downtown Los Angeles, my father said that with "Bobby" as President, "We can lick poverty and get our priorities right. He can restore our prestige in the world. Tony, do you think Nixon can do that?"

A week earlier I'd finished my junior year at Wesleyan, and on June 10 I would join the Nixon for President Committee as a paid staff member in their Washington, DC headquarters. I didn't get the job on my own. Richard Nixon and Stan, my Republican stepfather, shared the same insurance broker, Republican State Chairman V. John Krehbiel, whom Nixon would name ambassador to Finland.

My father and I left the freeway and rumbled through the potholed streets of East Los Angeles. As I looked at the Latinos on the sidewalks, my father asked me to translate into Spanish some phrases he could use to bond with his audience.

I taught him to say, "Are we all going to vote for Kennedy?"

"Good," he said.

"How about," I said, "'He's the best candidate'?"

And so the newest Nixon intern fed lines, as they say in campaign parlance, to one of Robert F. Kennedy's surrogates.

I'd thrown in my lot with Nixon because the job his campaign staff had offered me presented a research opportunity, a close-in vantage point to help me write my senior thesis on the 1968 presidential campaign. I could live with his politics; I abhorred Lyndon Johnson and distrusted Hubert Humphrey, whom I was sure the Democrats would nominate.

What's more, I believed there was a "new Nixon," a calmer man, free from the snarling paranoia that had characterized his earlier career. The "new Nixon" talked of rebuilding cities and involving the young. He went on *Rowan & Martin's Laugh-in* and said, "Sock it to me." He almost was cool. He promised to use "business techniques" to revive the inner cities. For ten years I'd watched my stepfather employ business techniques in his company, a world hardly as romantic as my father's. But Stan had become more successful than my father. Also happier. He called his marriage to my mother "storybook" and I believed him. Business techniques seemed to work, even if they flattened life's sine waves.

I was summoning the courage to bring up my flat sine wave of a love life, but my father puffed on a Virginia Round and started reminiscing about his acting career. Several times he'd verged on true stardom before the inevitable something had gone wrong. Years earlier, after a producer had called him "another Humphrey Bogart," the studio had prepared a contract.

"The next day," my father said, "I was drafted into the Army."

On another occasion his car broke down en route to a callback for a major part.

But now he had a new chance. In the fall he would travel to Sweden to film *Private Entrance*, a pilot for an American television series starring my father as Fritz, an apartment house manager through whom the tenants' lives would crisscross.

"I've got a good feeling about this one," he said, lighting, as he drove, another one of the cigarettes that before long would kill him.

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The park where the rally took place was mostly dirt, with islands of grass and a few trees. My father and I walked to the picnic area, long tables covered by waxy paper with red and white stripes. About eighty people milled around.

The Kennedy campaign had sent a second speaker to the rally, an actress who looked my age with several television shows to her credit. Her name was Diane, and she had wavy brown hair, freckles, and a charming voice. When her charming voice said hello, I was stuck for an answer. I'd won medals for impromptu speaking, but that talent escaped me when it came to girls. As the sun baked what was left of the lawn, all I could manage was, "Where are you in college?"

"I'm not in college," Diane said.

"Where did you go to college?"

She hadn't.

"Where do you live?"

She said, "Santa Monica."

"Where—"

Diane turned to my father, who was clad in a brown jumpsuit with a gold belt buckle. He was six foot two, and I was five foot eight. His graying hair lay just so on his scalp, unlike mine, a curly black thicket out of control. "Interesting about your son," Diane said. "He asks you twenty questions, and if you don't get them right, you don't pass."

I stood there frozen, as if she'd slapped me. My father didn't move either.

Fortunately, my father and Diane were called to the rickety stage just then, and I drifted toward the food table. Smoke billowed from iron griddles covered with slabs of meat. Voters spooned dollops of potato salad onto their plates. A short woman poured ketchup onto her hamburger and said it was "bueno" that I was there. Speaking Spanish, I asked why she'd come to the rally.

"Our country needs help," she said.

I said I agreed.

She said, "Necesitamos a Kennedy."

I asked what she thought about Eugene McCarthy, George McGovern, and Hubert Humphrey.

She bit into a potato chip. "They're okay," she said, "but I like Kennedy."

Then I asked about Richard Nixon.

The woman glared at me. "No me gusta," she said. "Por nada."

I forced a smile and finished my hamburger. Whoever was emceeing announced my father's name. I moved to the shade of a scrawny tree and waited to hear the Spanish phrases I'd taught him.

"Vamos a votar por Kennedy?" he said.

The picnic failed to quiet down. An infant's cry grew louder. Dad asked again, pronouncing Bobby's name with a poor Spanish accent. Still hardly anybody was paying attention.

I felt bad for my father. He was bombing. Any other Nixon supporter who happened to be there would have laughed. I still wonder why the Kennedy campaign had asked my father to speak at a rally in East Los Angeles. He didn't know the language or the culture. Other than a college summer service project in Peru with twenty other white kids, neither did

I. But my father, ever the professional, switched to English and shouted, "Are we all gonna vote for Kennedy?"

"Yes," the audience thundered back in English, and then they cheered. They were with him now, ready to be spurred on. But my father veered into some obscure policy issue that meant nothing to the audience. When the murmurs started again, my father jettisoned the rest of his remarks and urged the crowd to go to the polls. "Just get out and vote," he said and then closed with one of his trademark lines: "Thanks a million."

We didn't wait to hear whatever Diane had to say.

On the way home my father rhapsodized about his candidate. "Bobby's so full of life," he said. "Did you see last week's picture of him on the beach?" My father was driving in the fast lane, next to the chain-link fence separating eastbound from westbound traffic. He talked with such enthusiasm that he forgot to smoke.

"Yes," I said. Kennedy walking barefoot in the sand, his pants hitched up to his calves.

"And the picture of Bobby on the car."

I'd seen it too, RFK standing on the trunk of a convertible, reaching out to voters whose arms stretched toward him.

Richard Nixon's campaign poster offered a stark contrast to the Kennedy photos. *Nixon's the One* it read in red letters, and below those words, at a desk, sat the candidate in suit and tie, a smile stitched onto his face, and in front of him, an open briefcase. The image would work its way into my senior thesis. Nixon conveyed no glamour, just like Stan and just like me. I'd slouched toward the insecure person, the one hard-pressed to make small talk, like me.

"Think about voting for Kennedy," said my father. "That's all I'm going to say."

But there was plenty more I wanted him to say—about girls, not politics—especially after my embarrassment with Diane, yet I couldn't bring myself to ask. When it came to romance, I was as shy as my candidate. At least Richard Nixon had a plan, albeit a secret plan, to end the Vietnam War. I had no plan at all for finding a girlfriend, and I wanted to learn my father's secret—whatever had made five girls in my sixth-grade class shriek when they saw him at school, made a nineteen-year-old model show up naked on his doorstep at midnight, made my eighth-grade literature teacher say she adored him, and made the mother of a girl I'd liked in high school exclaim, in front of her daughter and me, that she had a crush on him. For every A I'd received in history, government,

English, and French, I'd received an F from a woman. I hoped my father might help me raise my grades. Miles of freeway lay between East Los Angeles and my father's home, plenty of time for me to wade into the subject, but I didn't work up the nerve until the drive was almost over. Finally, I asked him what I should have said to Diane.

"She was right, Tony. You can't just ask a woman twenty questions. I've seen how you are with girls. You treat a woman as though"—my father finally lit a cigarette—"as though she's just another guy."

"What do you mean?"

"Cultivate the woman in her."

"How do I do that?" I asked, but we had reached my father's apartment, where my grandmother was waiting to join us for dinner. We didn't get a chance to resume our conversation and I drove home frustrated. My father had raised a curtain only to reveal another curtain, the real secret safely hidden backstage.

I decided to broach the subject again a few days later, on Tuesday night. We had plans to meet at the Ambassador Hotel, where Senator Kennedy was scheduled to address his supporters following the California primary vote. My father also had a dinner party that night, so he wasn't planning to arrive at the hotel until after the polls closed.

A friend of mine, Gary, wanted to attend the party too, so on my way to the hotel, I stopped by his house to pick him up. We were getting ready to leave when Senator Kennedy appeared on television to make his victory speech and we stayed to watch. After Kennedy delivered his last line—"So it's on to Chicago and let's win there"—Gary and I said good night to his parents.

Before we reached the door, screams poured out of the television. The black-and-white picture was blurry; the camera jerked about. People were running and the words at the bottom of the screen read *Kennedy shot*.

For at least an hour, Gary and I stared at the television, trying to spot my father in the crowd. I called my mother and Stan to say I was safe. They'd been sleeping, which wasn't a surprise. Nixon had had no primary opposition in California, and Stan had scant interest in watching Bobby Kennedy speak.

"Have you heard from your father?" Stan asked in a drowsy voice.

"No," I said, staring at Gary's television set.

***

I called my father every few minutes until, around 2 a.m., he answered. I told him I was coming over. My father didn't budge when I walked into his small apartment. The lights were off and he was slumped in his deep living room chair. In the ashtray a cigarette burned. His second wife, Mai, must have been sleeping.

"Isn't this the worst thing in the world?" he said in a flat voice. His question floated through my mind. The worst thing in the world was not supposed to happen in Los Angeles. Dallas or Memphis, maybe, but not LA Not twenty minutes from Beverly Hills.

The black telephone next to him rang. "He's got to pull through," he said to the caller. "He's got to." He lowered his head.

Despite my preference for Nixon, I was miserable, convinced Kennedy would die, another assassination to roil the country. I tried to convey my sorrow to my father, but I doubt he heard me. He was sobbing too hard. Eventually his cigarette went dark. He was still in his chair when I let myself out. It was shortly after four.

***

The DC branch of Nixon's national headquarters was a white, three-story townhouse at 1726 Pennsylvania Avenue. Inside that narrow structure the atmosphere was strictly business. A library contained volumes like *Precinct Victory—1968, The GOP Handbook, State Headquarters Research Manual, County and City Research Manual, Political Profiles of the States '68, Metropolitan Areas and Key Counties in the Presidential Election of 1964*, V.O. Keys's article "A Theory of Critical Elections," and the Scammons's *America Votes*. My office mate smoked cigarettes, churned out polling data, and, in between assignments, reminisced about fishing in a Rocky Mountain lake near his home. Hardly anybody wore a Nixon button. A secretary told me that although she would vote for Richard Nixon, "My affections lie elsewhere."

I found myself at the nerve center of Women for Nixon, a key part of the campaign, working with people who were polite and bright: Eleanor Smith, who'd mastered public relations; Jean Hawkins, there via Kansas and Wellesley, an expert in voting behavior; Beth Bardwell, who would land at the CIA following the election. I reported to the top, the woman with the office on the third floor, Patricia Reilly Hitt. Known as Nixon's "other Pat," she had become California's Republican national committeewoman in 1960. Four years later she gave the opening address

at the Republican National Convention in San Francisco. Besides heading Women for Nixon, Pat Hitt had been named national co-chair of the entire campaign, the first woman in either party to hold that title. Following the election she would become an Assistant Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, and she was honest enough to remain free of any taint from the Watergate scandal. Pat Hitt was a third-generation Californian who, at the University of Southern California, had been freshman class queen and student body vice president. In other words, had my father been able to stomach her politics, he would have tried to seduce her. She was fifty; he was fifty-four. Had she been my age, and had we met on the sand at Zuma Beach, Pat would have rolled her eyes at my twenty questions.

Instead Pat became my surrogate mother, and she made good things happen for me. She arranged for me to attend the Republican National Convention in Miami Beach, where she cleared me to the top floors of the Hilton Plaza Hotel, the campaign's most rarified space. She admitted me into meetings with Nixon's top advisors. She slipped me aboard the campaign plane. She shared with me the buy list for Women for Nixon's television commercials, scheduled for afternoon and evening soap operas. She also gave me the scripts: In one, Julie Nixon, David Eisenhower, Tricia Nixon, and Oklahoma University's head football coach, Bud Wilkinson, sat around a small table with a centerpiece full of flowers. Julie Nixon said her father's position papers contained the "ABC answers" people demanded.

I quickly learned that women voters wanted ABC answers to four questions, not twenty. Whenever I wrote a press release, I had to keep them in mind: Will it ever be safe to walk the streets at night? Will my children get a college education? Will my son ever return alive from Vietnam? What is going to happen to the value of my house?

The irony was not lost on me. The former USC class queen was enlisting the help of a geek with no idea what to do on a date with a girl. Suddenly I was supposed to know how to attract women, how to work Richard Nixon's themes into their minds and then lure their bodies to the polls. Pat said I did a spectacular job. Thinking back, I did so by scaring women, by putting them off, a talent I'd displayed so well with Diane and others. For example, I researched statistics about the rise in crimes against women and presented them to Pat in a "Special Report on Law and Order as it Affects Women." She read the report, organized a "briefing for the ladies of the Washington press corps," and invited former First Lady Mamie Eisenhower to attend.

At least forty reporters, mostly women, filled the downstairs space in our headquarters. At the front table, next to Mamie Eisenhower, Pat Hitt rose, thanked the group for coming, and addressed the television cameras that lined the wall, reading my report word for word: "The information presented here is only a brief glance at crime statistics showing that in the last eight years—and especially since Lyndon Johnson became President—crime has increased not only in general, but also against women in particular." She led off with the number of forcible rapes, 27,620 in 1967, almost ten thousand more than in 1963, when Johnson took office. She recited the rise in murders—almost four thousand more than in 1963—and aggravated assaults: 174,210 in 1963 versus 257,160 in 1967. On she went. Robberies. Burglaries. "Violent crime" in general.

Sitting off to the side, I watched the rolling cameras and the reporters taking notes, and I felt wonderful and worthy.

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After the briefing, as the sun went down, the wunderkind of Women for Nixon stepped onto Pennsylvania Avenue and reverted to a diffident twenty-one-year-old drenched in hormones with no girl by his side. Pat Hitt may have been teaching me to cultivate the women's vote, but I still hadn't learned to cultivate the women. I remained the American naive, awaiting the secret of his father. I turned northwest toward my dorm room at George Washington University and the anti-war girls wearing love beads. My short hair and suit from Carroll & Company set me apart from their men. The anti-war girls—all of them, it seemed—had lissome bodies and milky complexions, full lips, and hair that reached to their narrow waists. They judged me in a second and glided by. Whenever I ended up next to them, usually at the food table at some party, I dropped a *groovy,* a *right on*, a *far out* into my speech, but coming from me, the words were phony, and the anti-war girls knew it.

Meanwhile their music swirled, down from their dorm windows and up from the couples who sat on the stoops near DuPont Circle. The tunes from their transistors were dreamy, their lyrics a tease, telling me to love—every day and all the way. I was sure every girl and boy I saw had indeed loved all the way. They sniffed each other out in Georgetown, on the Mall, and at concerts by the river near the Watergate. They raced into bed with a speed to match my father's while I returned to my room alone.

I called my father in Sweden from the Miami Beach convention the night the delegates nominated Nixon.

"The Republicans have committed suicide," he said in a withering tone.

I ignored the comment and asked about his pilot.

"We're in principal photography," he said. "I think this one's going to go. I'm already writing another script where Fritz has an affair with a tenant."

Before I could turn the conversation to women, an aide walked into my room and said, "Tony, Pat Hitt has a question for you." I had to hang up.

***

My fall evenings became lonely, the price I paid for staying with the campaign through the November election at Pat Hitt's request. My intern friends had returned to school. When the regular students came back to GW, I had to leave Thurston Hall. My new home was a cell-like room at the McLean Gardens with barely enough space for a single bed, a peeling wooden desk, and a stained sink. I paid eighty dollars a month for the privilege of trying to sleep there. I often stayed late at the office, writing into the night, one index card after another, each a factoid for my senior thesis. I put my name into the queue to use the campaign's Wide Area Telephone Service. When the switchboard operator paged me—"Mr. Mohr, I have a green WATS for you"—I called my Wesleyan roommate. When the yellow WATS line became available the following evening, I called home, where my mother and Stan had emerged from the swimming pool. Seated at the patio table next to the koi pond, watching the sun go down over the Santa Monica Mountains, Stan said how proud he was of me, and my mother said she loved me.

A week before the election, I paid for another call to my father in Sweden. He asked, "How do you like working for Tricky Dick?"

I let the question pass, not wanting to argue. I'd been feeling sorry for myself after the barren autumn and wanted more advice about "cultivating the woman in her."

My father said, "You have to learn how to make small talk."

"Like what?"

"Like anything," he said.

We got no further. The base rate on calls to Europe jumped after three minutes.

***

For three days following the election, I said my goodbyes and packed my campaign materials. It took four banker boxes to hold my strategy memos and press releases, the source documents for my thesis. The campaign, still awash in cash, was happy to pay the shipping costs. I thought back to August, when a member of Eugene McCarthy's staff had telephoned me from Chicago and asked if he could reverse the charges because his candidate had run out of money.

Saturday, November 9, broke cold and gray. The drizzle began while I waited at the bus stop, and by the time I reached 1726 Pennsylvania Avenue, it had turned to light rain. The headquarters was locked but someone must have been there earlier because taped to the inside of the glass door was a pink message slip for me. I unlocked the door and read the note: "Call 213–477–3157." The phone number for Mom and Stan.

Something had to be wrong. It was 6 a.m. in Santa Monica. My hand shook as I punched in their number. Stan answered. When he heard my voice, he called, "Rita."

My mother picked up an extension.

Stan said, "I got a phone call from Sweden. Your father passed away last night."

I stared down at my empty desk.

"He had a heart attack," Stan said.

Into the silence my mother said, "He'd finished the pilot. It was in the can." The filming, the editing, the post production. Everything. He was about to come home.

Stan said, "When a parent dies, it's normal to think, 'What's going to happen to me?' We're always here for you, Tony. Nothing is going to happen to you."

And nothing did, at least for a while. Within moments I started minimizing the loss, shutting down. I didn't cry. I said, "Actually I'm only losing half a father," because Stan would fill the void. Before the month was out, he invented a business trip to New England, and we drove to Booth Bay Harbor in Maine, where he took me out to dinner and told me about his newest company. "It's a winner," he said as we picked apart our lobsters. Stan was as tall as my father but heavier and almost bald, a businessman who looked like a businessman. At meal's end he announced that he'd made reservations to take my mother, his two children, and me to Cabo San Lucas for Christmas.

I refused to let my father's death interrupt what promised to be a superb Christmas trip and the rest of my senior year. I didn't tell my roommate what had happened. I didn't tell my senior thesis advisor. I wandered outside alone during the wet Wesleyan nights. When the weather turned too cold, I shambled through the tunnels under the dorms, explaining to my roommate that I needed some exercise after working all day on my senior thesis.

With a trace of a sneer, he asked, "So now can you tell me Nixon's secret plan to end the war?"

"No." I still didn't know the secret.

One night I attended a birthday party at Wellesley, hosted by close friends. Halfway through the evening I slipped away without saying goodbye and without telling them about my father, even though they deserved to know. So did the slight, friendly man at customs following my return from Cabo San Lucas. After inspecting my passport, he said, "A well-known actor by that last name died recently. Were you related?"

"No," I said. Now I'd lied to a federal agent.

***

In June 1969, my senior thesis adviser, who in 1960 had chaired Students for Kennedy, gave me an A. I graduated with honors in government. Not once did he ask why I'd voted for Nixon.

I'd planned to join the Committee to Re-Elect the President in June 1972, after law school, but never did. In Stan's words, the job they offered me "didn't sound right," and he warned me away. Reluctantly, I agreed. Eventually, the FBI interviewed my would-be boss at length, and his boss went to prison. I wrote Pat Hitt a letter to let her know I would not be rejoining the campaign. She answered and said I'd made the right choice.

Despite the telltale signs in Pat's letter, it would be two more years before I abandoned all hope about Richard Nixon. By 1974 the proof of his crimes was overwhelming. The night he resigned, even Stan called Nixon a crook.

A decade passed before I could talk about my father. His last movie, *Funny Girl,* had been released six weeks before he died. I didn't go see it because I was waiting for Christmas vacation, when I would be home from school, Dad would be back from Sweden, and we'd see the movie together, sitting next to each other in the theater, just as we had with *Terror in the Haunted House* (1958) and *The Angry Red Planet* (1959).

Ten years would go by before I'd see *Funny Girl* or anything else Dad had appeared in. When friends called to say one of his films was on Channel 9, I would thank them and click to another show.

My father never came home. He remains in Sweden. In 1998, I visited the little ground-level crypt Mai bought for my father in a cemetery on one of Stockholm's islands. I had to use my hands to tear away the brush that had obscured his name and the dates of his life. "Dad," I said, "you were right about him." I showed him the badge that identified me as a Los Angeles Superior Court judge. I imagined my father lighting another cigarette, sipping his coffee, and saying, "It's about time you believed me."

I also imagined telling my father about another event that happened shortly after the election and less than a month after his death. I met a girl. Whether or not I "cultivated the woman in her," I really couldn't say, but I did skip the twenty questions and instead made small talk, followed by deeper talk, and learned that no secret lay behind the curtain—just instinct and rapport, respect and kindness.

ANTHONY J. MOHR's work has appeared in, among other places, *DIAGRAM*, *Hippocampus Magazine, Superstition Review, War, Literature, and the Arts, ZYZZYVA*, and several anthologies. A five time Pushcart Prize nominee, he received honorable mention from *Sequestrum*'s 2016 Editor's Reprint Award.

Death of a Famous Singer

I no longer play your CDs
but I did when I was younger.
I hope I wasn't responsible.
Like it was suicide on my account.

The cops aren't saying anything
I'm anxious to hear
the cause of your death.

Cancer would make you more human.
An overdose would only have me saying,
"What a waste."
A heart attack—
ironic after all those songs of the heart.

Strange how
I'm addressing this poem to you
though there's no way
you'll ever be reading it.

But this is more for my benefit
than yours.
I played the albums.
I wore the clothes.
I went to the concerts.
I bought the posters and the t-shirt.
I sang the songs in the bath
and backed the vocals with my air guitar.
Truth is,
I was more you than you were.

So now it's over.
And they still haven't told me
what I died of.

From Her House to Death House

She's wrapped in shawls,
imprisoned by her chair.
He's picking out his last meal
from the death house menu.
Her world of books and photographs is in range
but arthritic hands and legs deny her
everything but eye contact.
He's got steel bars, a bunk, a toilet,
and a battered Bible.
When were details ever so thin?
She does nothing for pleasure,
not even breathe.
He chooses Coca-Cola, candied yams and grapes.
Why not. He has an eternity to starve in.
The wait to die is wrinkled, painful.
Or it's angry, regretful.
It's in a chair,
cane-backed or electric,
rocking or shocking.
People say you go to a better place
or it was a better place until you got there.

JOHN GREY is an Australian poet, US resident. Recently published in the *Homestead Review*, *Harpur Palate* and *Columbia Review* with work upcoming in the *Roanoke Review*, the *Hawaii Review* and *Seems*.

What Sorrow Lives In

The fat man is doubled over, the pain
in his gut wrenching him out of himself.

Or so he would say, if he could. Too much
isn't said. The way a shy woman bares

her breasts for the first time to a lover
who stammers, language lost to awe, before

the clams the two had shared hours before,
clams that had been bad for days, ruin this

naked moment, first as raw sound and then
the kind of spilling out the body is

capable of. Clams, bad or not, are not
what the fat man wants to think of. Her breasts,

bare, the vague tremor light casts over them
in that perfect pause before the lover

moans and loses it, they are what he wants
to cling to so he can forget what would

have him doubled over, forever, poised
in rough stone, a statue to remind us

what sorrow lives in flesh. Forgetfulness
is necessary, the fat man believes,

to alleviate the raw suffering
memory likes to cling to. The woman

still worries it was her breasts, and not clams
gone bad, that made her lover sick. Better

he had laughed, she thinks, at her naked breasts,
the nipples, rigid, a taut plea for touch,

which surprised her, since she'd never been touched.
How can we long for something we haven't

known? The fat man doesn't have an answer,
but desire is something he knows well.

And clams, he knows, cannot give good advice
on matters of the heart. Bivalved, they are

only half a heart, and, doubled over
in their shells—some pain or half-forgotten

sadness held tight to their viscous bodies
as if believing that to hold it in

is the only way to ensure it means
anything even close to what could be

called precious and worn as decoration—
the salt on their lips can't slake any thirst.

GEORGE LOONEY's novel *Report from a Place of Burning*, co-winner of The Leapfrog Press Fiction Award, was published in 2018. *What Light Becomes: The Turner Variations*, won the Red Mountain Press Poetry Prize and will be published in spring of 2019. Founder of the BFA in Creative Writing Program at Penn State Erie, he is editor of *Lake Effect* and translation editor of *Mid-American Review*.

At the Museum with You

He didn't know
your knees clattered like marsh reeds

when you kissed,
how you were

drowning
with the armless

Venus
in your crisp white shirt,

or see you pause
in the shade

beneath a tree on your way
there, it was the hottest day of the year

and the air
hung

bated
as a breath.

He wouldn't know
how you had arrived

at the museum, cool somehow
and casually late.

He saw the strap
fall from your shoulder, your

whipped cream
breasts: not that there was

or then wasn't
any baby.

He brought you flowers.
You never said

what you wanted:
was it escape

into or from
the languid summer heat? Did you want

to be known
or just touched? You didn't

believe
beauty excused

anything but
briefly, nothing

was better than to be seen
and reduced to expression.

Necking,
licking

sweat from your neck
like so much sea foam.

ELIZABETH O'BRIEN is the author of *A Secret History of World Wide Outage*, a chapbook from Diode Editions. Her poetry has appeared in many magazines, including *Massachusetts Review*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *Diagram*, *Sixth Finch*, and *Radar Poetry*. She lives in Minneapolis.

Post Zara

She died the day before your thirtieth birthday. For other people, Zara's death was a tragedy but it wasn't for you. You were happy Zara was finally dead, even though you couldn't say that at the burial. You felt as if you were ten pounds lighter, as if you could get up now without your heart hammering or the sensation of guilt when you poured your morning coffee or flipped through *The New York Times*, pretending to read, pretending you still cared about international and national news.

I'm pretty sure I'm the only one who noticed some things. How you wore navy blue, instead of black, to the funeral. How you ate your routine scrambled egg with raw onions that morning. The tiny juice stain above your moustache.

Things no one noticed except for me. Secrets we shared or I thought we shared, until you told me otherwise.

Zara didn't look like Zara. I think we all were thinking that, but again, that isn't something you say. You bury it inside of you, let it churn inside your stomach, pretend you are alone in this thought. Pretend it doesn't matter.

You tried to convince them to have her body cremated, the way she would have wanted. I'm sure you're right, there is no way the Zara I knew would have wanted everyone to look at her body after her soul had already departed. But Zara never made that clear: like most twenty five years olds she had no will, no instructions. So ultimately her parents decided, and they decided they needed to see their daughter a final time. Even if it was only her body.

You remember how they did her hair? It was awful. Straightened, even though she'd always worn it natural. Flat against her skull. Her eyes heavy with mascara and her cheeks painted with blush. I don't ever remember the real Zara wearing makeup. The first time I met her (and this one thing I never told you), she told me I wore too much makeup. Asked who I was trying to impress.

Zara's parents leaned over to kiss her, before they closed the casket. I can't remember if anyone else did, but I know I didn't. I stared at her for too long, could feel the line behind me getting impatient. Could feel ev-

eryone wondering what I was going to do. But, as you told me, that was probably my imagination.

I wanted you to go ahead of me. It seemed fitting, since she was your cousin and she never liked me anyway. But you made me go first, and I can't say I'm surprised. I think you went behind me so I couldn't watch your reaction like everyone else was.

I still don't know if you were trying to hurt me more, or give me a gift.

You're thirty five today. I know it's pathetic, but I still keep track of it, still have the date circled on my calendar, as if there's a possibility I might forget.

I drove nearly twenty miles to Baked and Wired. Funny, how, after trying to get me to go there with you for years, I went for the first time today. It was a lonely ride, the kind of drive you have to turn the radio on, even though it seems hardly anyone I know does that anymore. I turned to the classical station, sure that at least Mozart was safe from you.

I get it. I get why you like this place. I've been here nearly three hours, whittling away a Saturday afternoon as people come and go. Mostly couples: arguing middle age couples, couples holding hands, teenage couples that still believe first love lasts.

Everything smells like coffee, but not the Starbucks vibe. Deeper, more pungent, forcing its presence in your nostrils. Like you're bathing in espresso. I still can't decide if I like it, but I can imagine how it must have been for you, sitting here, typing your novel on that horrid seven year old Toshiba you refused to relinquish, even when Zara bribed you with a brand new MacBook Pro. I wonder if you ever finished that novel, if you still come here to work.

I tried it, finally. The Elvis Impersonator. I remember telling you it was an abomination for a cupcake. No cupcake should have candied bacon. And with the bananas, I still swear that means it has to be classified as banana bread.

But I tried it, for you, and it was both delicious and nauseating, that thick whipped peanut butter icing. I felt full and empty after I finished, and now, sipping Columbian roast, I wonder if my heart feels like it's skipping because of the sugar and caffeine overload, or because I wonder why I never came here with you.

I am too old for this sort of thing. Too old to be wearing a floral print dress and oversized aviators, too old to buy balloons for a birthday I'm not supposed to be celebrating.

Too old to be walking down Jefferson alone, as the sun sets, imagining something like hope will keep me company.

If Zara was still alive, she would tell me that. Or maybe not. Not in those last months, that Zara wouldn't have. She would have just watched me, with those silent hazel brown eyes, that perfect complexion, knowing in a way that hurt her more than even you could understand.

She would have told me to run when I can, but maybe I'm just saying this now because I want that to be true. I'm romanticizing her death, the way I once accused you of doing and I don't want to be the kind of person that does something like that.

The pastor made a long speech at the funeral, using attributes that could have described a gentle grandmother. Kind, Compassionate. Loved her family. Graduated Cory High with honors.

They left the other parts out and I know you noticed, because even though we hadn't shared the same bed since Zara's death, you reached over and squeezed my hand so hard it hurt.

You had something in your carefully trimmed mustache, but I didn't have the heart to tell you, or the courage to say you were hurting me, hurting my hand so I let us stay like that for forty five odd minutes, listen to Zara's life being constructed into something else. A life without the year she dropped out of college. A life without her brother being shot when he was pulled over, purportedly, for a speeding ticket.

I think you asked me what I thought about the service, after. A half hour before the burial and nothing to do but watch other people talk with one another. People I didn't know and people you pretended not to know. I imagined everyone was staring at us but I don't think that's the case, looking back. Maybe they didn't notice at all.

I told you the ceremony was nice, and I think you understood the irony.

Isn't it always, you muttered, and offered me a Cinnamon Altoid which I took, feeling repulsed and feeling a need.

I wonder if they still sell those. I've looked for years, for those Altoids, and I can't find them anywhere.

I'm not sure if that's irony or a way of life working itself out.

I am nearly home when something veers in front of my car. I manage to steer to the side of the road just in time, my hands shaking as I try to

make sense of what happened. I get out of the car, slowly, surprised to find myself bleeding on my arm but unable to find the laceration.

Otherwise, I am unhurt. My car looks unhurt, too, but I am still breathing hard, unable to cry or to even think, just leaning against the car door trying to catch my breath as headlights of other cars approach and pass.

Then I see it: a flicker of motion beside me, the wooded path a hundred feet away. A doe, with beady brown eyes, walking cautiously with her fawn. Both of them looking at me as if waiting for me to attack. We stare at each other, the deer and I, and it's impossible to say who is more afraid.

The doe is limping. Acid fills my stomach as I shine my cell phone light on her lower leg: a healthy, gleaming gash, where some part of my car must have hit her. She is walking poorly, but walking, an aggravated limp while her baby looks to her for guidance.

I am still watching as a cop car pulls off, and it is only then when I cry, even as the cop explains he is here to help, even as I am told I am free to leave, even as I pull away and watch the doe, the fawn.

The vulnerability in their eyes.

How can I not wonder about Zara?

It took you long enough, you told me when I confronted you.

I don't know what shocked me more: the brutality of your words, or in the inexplicable sadness in them, as if they'd been soaked in regret.

You wanted to stay home, talk in our tiny kitchen, with those awful striped tile floors, but I didn't want our home contaminated. Silly, since it already had been.

I convinced you to go out to a park. We knew it wouldn't be busy, since it was the dead of January, and no sane person goes to a park in the evening in Washington in the dead of winter.

You dressed carefully, the way you did on our first date. Button down light blue shirt, navy slacks, your dress pea coat. I didn't bother with makeup, or from changing from the sweats and ice cream dribbled t-shirt I'd worn since breakfast.

The gazebo was lit, but I remember wishing, unreasonably, that it hadn't been. I wanted to let shadows overtake our skin, let the night bleed into our minds and bodies so it might have been any couple or would be couple and not us. Not you. Not me. Not Zara.

We didn't talk for a while. I think you were the first to speak, and that

in of itself seemed like a surrender for you. You told me the how: the first non-work date, the first time Zara told you the truth behind the finger tattoo with her brother's initials. How you felt she needed someone to talk to, since the police didn't believe her, since her own family didn't believe her.

I think I stopped you there. Just held up my hand.

You aren't saying the why.

The why?

Why her, I said, when I meant was, Why not me, anymore?

You tried to kiss my cheek, which hurt more than the weeks of not touching did.

I think I shoved you away. Told you to get the hell away from me. That I never wanted to see you again.

I think I revise the old me all the time. I think I make these things up, because you're no longer around to.

Two weeks before she died, Zara knocked on our door. You'd moved out, in a hotel you told me. Temporarily, that was all. I know you'd moved in with her, that you were always a liar and never would stop, maybe not even for Zara.

Keeping myself busy wasn't hard. Between the Bible Study my mother had convinced me to go to every Tuesday and Thursday and the hours of studying for the LSAT, and figuring out how to pay off my student loans on a waitress salary in the meantime, there wasn't much room for thought. It had been like that before, only then, when I was with you, I pretended for both of us. I cried in the shower as you made your morning coffee and hard-boiled egg. I stopped wearing makeup, because I knew you'd notice if my mascara was smeared and you'd tried to convince me everything would be fine, and that would have only made us both feel worse.

For more reasons than I first understood.

But those days it didn't matter how hard I cried or how often. Only at Bible Study did I repress those tears, and I'd let them spill the rest of the time. Spill on club sandwiches and slices of dense cheesecake, on cloth napkins and at home, on study sheets and that horrible oatmeal colored sofa you convinced me was a good investment.

So naturally, when Zara knocked, I didn't exactly look put together. Okay, I looked horrible. A bubble gum t-shirt my father bought me when I was eighteen, a t-shirt I'd always hated. The slouchy gray jeans I know you always hated. Hair pinned up like a child's doll trying to obscure a

bad scissor cut. No makeup, dark circles under my eyes and a day and a half without brushing or flossing my teeth.

This is one of the moments in movies where the woman gets strong, yells at the other woman to go away, decides she won't take any more shit from anyone.

But I cried, okay. Maybe it's taken me this many years to admit that. Before Zara could even speak, I started sobbing against the wall, showing her how pathetic I was. I should have wanted to throw something, call the police, anything but that.

When I finally caught my breath, she was still in the doorway, and I hated her for that. Any decent person, I thought, would have left. I thought maybe she'd had a miscommunication with you, and that's why she'd come in the first place.

Now details stick out to me, details that were meaningless in the moment of my humiliation. A tiny line, a scar just at her jawline. How she wouldn't take her winter coat off. A bold lip. Yes, she was wearing lipstick that day. Maybe you don't believe me, but she was.

I hoped you would be here, she told me.

Only then did I say what I should have in the first place.

Go away. Get the hell away from me. More of a whimper than a shout.

Zara didn't go away but she didn't approach me either. I admit I know what you saw in her. Those intelligent eyes, that quiet confidence. Something impossible to look away from.

You lost a sister.

You must have told her, about Jayla. That was the ultimate betrayal, and it still is. Worse than sleeping with Zara. You gave her a part of me.

And you, were my last words to her, can go to hell.

I was raised in a very religious household, with a strong sense of the importance of faith, the consequences of Heaven and Hell. By the time I was seven I knew the books of the Bible in order, backwards and forwards, could recite over seventy verses verbatim.

But Jayla was terrible at it. She knew a handful of book names, out of order. She could barely recite John 3:16 to save her life (literally, and in my mother's mind, well, literally). She had always been different than me: impatient, strong willed, certain. When I asked her, when we were ten, why she didn't care about studying the Bible, she told me that her faith wasn't anyone else's business, and she didn't think God cared how much she could recite upon command.

The day she died I felt something. I know that sounds silly, especially since it had been years since we'd really talked. When we both went off to college, we let our relationship fade in a way that felt natural. We talked when we were forced together, at Christmas or Easter, went on living our lives.

I told you all of that. What I didn't tell you is how she died. Walking on a road alone, off campus. Later and drunker than she should have been. A car picking her up, frat boys offering her a ride. Five of them.

She wasn't raped. She wasn't murdered. She was coerced into drink after drink, pretending not to mind as the guys commented about her ass, her "thick hair". The cellphone recording of one of the men would later tell us they'd thought she was "pretty for a black girl".

I don't know if she made some of the decisions herself that night. We never have been able to separate it out. Only later would I learn how hard it had been for her, as one of only fifty black girls on campus. Jayla, who had always said people made too much of a big deal of that sort of thing.

I'm not saying anything, maybe. I don't even know why I'm telling you this. Maybe it's because you can no longer give this story to anyone else.

I'm meeting your mother today. I thought you should know. It's the reason I've driven to these streets I promised I would never visit again. Visited your favorite coffee shops and the little parks with the splintering benches. I even threw pennies into the wishing fountain. The one where you told me you loved me for the first time.

I don't want to talk to her about you, or about us, though that will inevitably come up. She never liked me, did she? I think she didn't want you to be with someone like me. Someone too cautious and scared of life, someone who risked little but loved too deeply for her own good, who had suffered too little maybe. Before my sister's death, anyway.

I try to ignore the stares as I approach the house you used to live in, the house you came back to for holidays and summer vacations. The house where you hid the ring you would eventually slip on my finger, and the house where you hid the ring you never had a chance to give to Zara.

Yes, I knew about that, too.

There's a woman sitting on the porch next door. Not young and not old, bright red hair that reflects the sun's light. She's trying not to look at me closely, and I can feel that, her trying, and I wish she would stare instead. No one remembers me, even though we spent several Thanksgivings and

Christmases at this house. Maybe people stared then, too, but maybe I was too stupid to notice.

When your mother opens the door, she folds me into an embrace. Smells like the type of coffee you'd hate, Folgers or maybe something even cheaper. She stopped smoking, but like you warned her, it's still aged her, made her cheeks gaunt and wrinkled beyond her age. Her teeth are still stained despite the whitening treatments she'd gotten.

You're late, she jokes.

By a minute.

Forty five seconds, on my watch. She sobers when she sees what's in my hand.

I can do this some other time, I tell her.

Now is good, your mother says.

You lied about paying for the funeral, but I knew. You paid for almost all of it, because Zara's parents could barely afford the coffin, let alone the service and the burial and the food afterwards. You denied it when I asked, but I found the checkbook you'd hidden from me, found the transactions.

Here's what I didn't tell you: you did a beautiful job. And both Zara before and Zara after the shooting would have loved it, though we know she never would have admitted it.

Completely inappropriate for a funeral, I heard someone say. Disrespectful. Sunflowers in full bloom and blue wildflowers, and I can't imagine how you got them. And the balloons. Dozens of bright yellow balloons. It was the only thing that reminded me that this was Zara, the Zara you had loved more than me, the Zara I had, at different points, respected, cared about, admired, hated, helped, harmed. The Zara in all her beauty and her pain, a bundle of light and the feeling that the light was for others more than for herself.

When I sank to my knees before we got into the car, after the burial, it wasn't because of you or Zara or even me. It was a feeling not of grief, or joy, but understanding.

I told you I felt sick, and this was the last thing I said to you.

I didn't stop answering your calls and texts after the funeral because I was angry, as you assumed. It wasn't even about being hurt or feeling betrayed.

It was a sense that Zara's death had changed both of us, more than the affair had, that we both understood things we had not, accepted things

we never would have. It was you seeing that Zara and me and our families had been vulnerable in a way yours had never been, it was seeing you look at me with a sense of grief that you could not have just about me or Zara.

Your mother doesn't know what to make of it. She places the bracelet on her slender wrist, twists it to read the inscription.

Her parents didn't want it, I tell her. When she looks at me in confusion, I add, Too much to think about. I think they want their little Zara, not. But I stop myself.

She doesn't need to hear the rest, anyway. Why did you have this?

So I tell her, how, when I moved away, our stuff got mixed. I had your socks and you had my jeans. Neither of us bothered much to fix it. But I only found the last gift you gave to Zara a few weeks ago. Slipped in that dusty copy of *Great Expectations*.

Did you ever expect me to look there? Or did you think it would slip out and I'd lose it completely?

I can't read Latin, your mother says.

I can't either, I say, and maybe this is my last gift to you. A lie, a secret for you to keep or share, whenever you see your mother again.

If.

He was going to leave her, you know.

I stand, feeling dizzy. I am angry, angry at you for the first time in years. I am angry that your mother believes this and angry at you for feeding her this belief. Maybe I am even angry that you hurt Zara too, that you didn't understand or see what was wrong, that you hurt her almost as deeply as you hurt me.

I am angry that you told her the truth.

A day before Zara was found, you came over, spent the entire day with me. Her death had nothing to do with that: she'd already told you she was leaving you, had not even touched your hand for over two weeks.

It was just life. How it all worked out.

We spent the day baking lemon squares, dusted with granulated sugar because I hadn't been to the store in weeks and that's what I had.

I wanted her to have that. As a parting gift. I'm sorry if it hurts you more, you told me when you showed me the bracelet.

I was silent for a minute as I turned it over in my hands.

You finally did a good thing, I told you.

I don't know if you believed me.

I stay for longer than I should. Sit on the front porch as evening shadows your mother and me, both of us drinking tall glasses of milk. And I remember a moment, then, a memory without you or Zara. My life pre Zara, pre you:

I am sitting on our splintered porch, almost thirteen, praying someone will ask me to the dance. My sister is wearing a floral dress she hates, one that hits below her scraped knees in ruffles. She calls it her granny dress, because she swears our mother bought it so no one on earth would ever be attracted to her.

A crooked smile, because we didn't have the money for braces then. She tells me she's sneaking out tonight.

Don't, I say. Mom will kill you.

She purses her lips. Anything can kill you.

I feel myself sweating, even though it's a cool early spring evening. I tell her she's being ridiculous.

I just want to be like the other girls, she says.

Mom doesn't want you to date John if that's what you're talking about.

Her hair, tightly bound in cornrows, a pale pink bowed headband that doesn't suit her at all.

In the real world, she says, you don't stay with people that are like you just because it makes you feel comfortable.

There's plenty of boys she'd let you date.

She tilts her head. Not the one I want, though. Not the one I want.

I never told you that I loved Zara too. Even as your body tangled with hers, even as she won over your heart in a way that had taken me months and months. That she reminded me of my sister, was my sister. The way she was unafraid, unabashed.

The more cautious sister. The sister who thought she was breaking ground by marrying a white man, just because she could. I have loved others in my life, but I think I love the idea of people. I think I loved the idea of you, the possibility that my sister was right, that two people from different backgrounds could learn to love each other.

Viribus. Semper.

Strength, always.

Strength in loving you and strength in knowing we could love each other and strength in knowing it was not us and it was us and it was Zara

and my sister and this messed up world that takes our lives and takes our skin and makes it into something that both bridges and separates us.

Your mother kisses my cheek before I leave. She understands I will not return. She understands that I have passed her a burden that she does not yet know how to carry.

In the moonlight I can be anything. A young girl, bent on being everything that she is told she cannot be. A lover, a sister, a friend, a wife. A very single woman.

A traveler, wandering until she understands what she is looking for, or at least, until day breaks.

ERIN JAMIESON holds an MFA in Creative Writing from Miami University of Ohio. Her writing has been in *Evansville Review*, *Canary*, and *Foliate Oak Literary*, among others. She teaches at the University of Cincinnati Blue Ash and freelance writes. Her short fiction has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

american idols

“is there still more?”

asked the tired mother to her tired daughter.

as they empty out
the last of four
washing machines
the next american idol
sings a song
we cannot hear.
we do not feel.
we do not care
about their white teeth
about their tired melodies.

number thirty-four and thirty-five start to leak.
we lift up our feet when the man passes
with his tired mop.

our idols beg for votes.

last of the polka dots

we are hummingbirds
last of the polka dots.

people walk through waves
the same here as in Berlin.

if god exists
god is a woman
god is ashamed.

i think to myself
while fighting off
weeds in my garden.

they say herbicide
is linked to cancer.

we have this honor
to wear among our stripes.

EVAN ANDERS brews coffee for mass consumption in Philadelphia. Evan released a chapbook of poems titled *Smoke Rings* in 2016. His poems have appeared in *Five 2 One Magazine* and *California Quarterly*. He changes diapers, thinks Bob Dylan was best in the eighties, and makes his own spaghetti sauce.

Drop Above

Out
for a walk I

see in aqua blue wavering
skies an invitation to float
like moon in night's pool,

like balloon in water.

Humid engulfed
where gravity
holds on in iron fists,
holds on as if welded,
holds fast like airtight.

But I jump up into the clouds but
I'm dragged back again and again
to the hot gripping earth.

JANE AKWELEY ODARTEY is a Ghanaian-American poet, writer, photographer, artisan and a Teaching Artist based in Queens, NY. She blogs at janethroughtheseasons.com and her verses are forthcoming or have appeared in *The Malahat Review*, *Juked*, *Really System* and elsewhere.

Unready

A cry swerves into sleep.
    You wake
a parent.

Two Ultrasounds

i

Through lunar weather,
a light
flashing distance.

Here
and still to come.

ii

Rippling hints
and shadow-guesses:

a gh st of fl sh,

a sp n l tra k,

a fl wer ng f st.

AIDAN COLEMAN's two collections of poetry, *Avenues & Runways* and *Asymmetry*, both published by Brandl & Schlesinger, were shortlisted for national book awards in Australia. He is currently writing a biography of the poet John Forbes, with the assistance of the Australia Council.

Fairleigh's Hollow

Turned out, the two does creeping through the thick trees atop the farm didn't have a flair for suspense. They could have crept through the thicket, forced Lauren down from the stand into a foolish stalk. Instead, they just kind of waltzed into the clearing she and her father had cut out of the greenbriar, then stood broadside. Just as Lauren noticed the first banner of orange light zipping out from the horizon she also heard timid brush chatter in the woods beneath her deer stand, the animals close enough to smell, a rising pleasant soil and dog odor. Sunset meant she had a half hour to shoot and still be within the law, and also that she had only thirty minutes before doe season came to a close and, with it, her last chance to bag her first solo deer.

One big, one smaller, a mama and a child she figured. She raised the rifle to her shoulder and lined up the bead, settling it in the notch of the rear sight, focusing the whole deal right on the dark hollow behind the bigger deer's front shoulder. A lung shot would kill safely, even if startled deer often took a few steps afterward, shocked and pumping futile blood through a body really already dead.

Lauren steadied her breath, just like she did on the high school rifle team. She held it briefly and squeezed the trigger smoothly. The .30–40 Krag leapt back, a hard press against the folder she had tucked in close to the stock. The report echoed through the quieting woods, and both deer jumped and were gone. Seemed about right to Lauren. The deer wouldn't get far.

Always give it a minute, her father had taught her years ago, when she'd turned twelve and started hunting with him. So she did, unwrapping a peanut butter sandwich from its wax paper, taking three bites from the cold bread. She cranked open her thermos and poured a cup of hot chocolate, zipped that down. She pretended her heart wasn't beating fast, that she wasn't terrified that the deer had run already half way to Ohio.

Long enough, she decided. Removed the magazine on her rifle and tucked it in her orange snowsuit. Opened the bolt to check the chamber, ejecting the spent casing and a small puff of smoke. She gloved the shell into her other pocket, a memento, then slung the rifle across her shoulder and climbed carefully from the tree.

In the clearing, she bent low in the fading light to check the briar. At first, she found nothing, but she remembered her father's directions about care and attention, to keep looking until you see something not quite right. A broken twig, fresh green wood, and there beside it a couple of splashes of blood on the browned leaves. Snow would have made it easier to track the deer, but all she had that December was frigid dry winter. It was enough, and it took her just a moment to find the next few drops, suss out a direction for the deer's escape. She slid the magazine back into the Krag, chambered no shell, made sure the safety was on. She wondered about state law, knowing the season ended a half hour past that day's sunset. But what if she found the deer after that moment, half alive but suffering? Could she finish it off and still be legal? She thought so, wished for the first time that season that she was still hunting with her father. Going solo seemed like such a grownup thing to do, until you realized you needed someone else.

Lauren pressed through the greenbriar snags, a small rip opening at the shoulder of her snowsuit, following the trajectory of the blood until she reached a rusted barbed wire fence maybe fifty yards into the woods. She knew it as the border, the separation point between the farm and elsewhere, and she hoped she wouldn't find what she knew she would. There, caught on a barb, she saw a tuft of brown fur, more spots of blood, and clear evidence that the deer had passed through here. Beyond the fence lay Fairleigh's Hollow, a straight drop into the neighboring property, steep hillside that bottomed out in an overgrown trickle of water.

Atop each fence post, one of the Fairleighs had stapled bright yellow signs, *Posted: No Trespassing*, their message the same as the one her father had taught her over and over since she'd been a little girl roaming these hills: *don't go into Fairleigh's Hollow*.

A dozen years had passed since Lauren moved to the farm with her parents, a flourish of ecstatic foolery that made little financial sense but mattered more than anything in the world. Her mother would only live there for two of those years, able to walk the hills she'd longed to own for half that before the balance of days tipped to a growing mysterious exhaustion that kept her in the living room chair, afghan around her knees, book in hand. At least on the good days. Some, more as that second year passed on, were spent in bed, the book lying across her chest, or splayed open beside her on the sheets, her eyes glazed and moist.

Fairleigh had been the last of the neighbors to stop by and welcome

them to the Valley, a few months after they'd moved in. And then, it had just been Old Man, who gruffly demanded that he'd left some things in the upstairs of the barn. Had come to get them. Lauren's father had gone outside with him to supervise the removal of a dusty cardboard box, just one more pile of junk from a space mounded with the refuse the old farmer who had sold them the farm had stashed in the hayloft. Lauren had overheard her parents hush-whispering about the box that night, something about nudie mags and stale beer, *that Junior scares me*, and Lauren had known enough to ask no further questions.

That was the first night her father sat on the edge of her bed and offered his primary rule for life on the farm: *do not go into Fairleigh's Hollow*. Lauren nodded, this conversation one of the snippets of memory that persisted from the first year on the farm, when she had been four years old. Most had been lost to the dimness of childhood memory. She had the afghan, the splayed book, her father's warning.

In the passing years, the Fairleigh's persisted as a dark backbone to life in the Valley. When Lauren's mother finally succumbed to the unnamed malady that stumped the local doctors, they appeared in stories only in negation, the only neighbors who didn't stop by and wish her father well, who didn't fill their refrigerator with green bean casseroles. In later years, when Lauren's father leaned into the open windows of neighbor's pickup trucks and shot the breeze about this and that, Fairleigh appeared often as the subject of something wild. The time Junior set the hayfield on fire. The rotting horse Old Man chucked into the creek. The sore-ridden yellow dog that chased the University Track and Field team down the road halfway back to campus.

She remembered most of all the year her father had seen the albino doe, a magical creature that at first seemed like a lie. Her father rushed into the kitchen one summer afternoon. He'd been cutting brush up near the deer stands, Lauren not yet interested enough to help. She had been ten, margining between cabbage patch dolls and a growing interest in the tonic smell of her father's guns. She'd not yet caught the eye of the high school coach, a balding man who at first had no interest in a *little girl* distracting the young men on his team and then, later, had marveled at the tight group she poked through a target, freehand, when her father had invited him over for a beer. Her father had always been good like that, indirect ways of making sure people understood who Lauren was.

I saw her, her father had said, about the albino doe, that afternoon, July, hot and humid but still somehow no threat of rain.

Who? Lauren had asked.

Her father had gone silent, sat hard into the old recliner by the fireplace. His hand brushed the afghan folded on the arm. Lauren remembered the look in his eye when he told the story, about turning off the chainsaw and there she was, this glowing ethereal deer, standing and watching. He had explained a feeling of peace, something breaking free that had weighed him down. He had not been ashamed to tell Lauren that he had wept, struck by a moment in a way he had not expected. He had told her something about myth and imagery, professional language from his life as a professor that she had not understood, other than to recognize that he had been telling her a story about the albino deer and something else. For the rest of the summer, the deer had been the talk of the Valley. It had been generally agreed that only an asshole would shoot it that season. Might be different if it were a buck, that kind of trophy meaning something. But an albino doe, well if she could make it in these woods, then she should be left to do so.

That fall, a few weeks before Thanksgiving and the coming deer season, one of the men from the Valley pulled up in his rusted pickup. Her father took his position at the window, taking a break from stacking firewood to lean in and talk. Lauren sat close enough to hear that conversation, the sweat from chucking wood adding chill as she took a break from the work. No one had seen the albino deer for almost a month, the man said.

Check Fairleigh's freezer, was how he left it, cranking the motor to the pickup and rattling away.

Well, it wasn't like she was going to leave the deer down there, suffering and mostly dead. She'd shot it, so it was her duty to follow things through. Still, when Lauren ducked through the barbed wire, she felt a tumble in her belly. She was glad for the darkening woods, the sun sliding beneath the hills quickly now. She hoped that even her fluorescent snowsuit would dim, hide her at least long enough to find the deer.

Halfway into Fairleigh's Hollow, her eyes adjusted enough to see the brush around her. The farm at the top appeared like a glowing line, sun bright enough there to see clearly even if the Hollow had dipped into gloam. The deer had run downhill, or rather had stumbled and rolled. Lauren could tell this from the broken twigs. She found a small pool of blood, smeared from where the deer had fallen, risen best it could, and kept seeking shelter. It shouldn't be long now, and it wasn't. At the bottom of the hollow, in a thicket of gathered brush, she saw two hind legs stick-

ing in the air, a moment later the white outlines of the tail appearing in the dimness. The deer had fallen headlong into the stream bottom, ended buried in a pile of deadfalls that it might have hoped would hide it.

Lauren stepped forward slowly, knowing dead deer had the habit of reanimating. She remembered stories the men told, about deer awakening in the back ends of station wagons, kicking hell out of the hunters who thought they'd finished the job. She thought also of the smaller deer, wondered if it lay hidden nearby watching her as she approached the body. Lauren rolled her boot on the tail of the doe, a trick her father had taught her. Any life in a deer, and it will jump from that pressure. Nothing, so the doe was dead. Now, all Lauren had to do was figure out how to pull it free from the brush and up the slope to the farm, the faster the better. She wondered if she'd need to fetch her father, and the tractor, maybe get some ropes.

"Well now," a voice said, gruff and loud, making Lauren jump. She looked behind her. Nothing. Then to the other side, deeper into Fairleigh's Hollow, she saw a figure who quickly resolved into Junior.

"I tracked it here," Lauren said.

"Signs is clear enough, up top," Junior said.

Lauren said nothing. She felt the weight of the Krag on her shoulder. Noticed Junior had no rifle, hadn't been out for the last day of doe season. Just walking. Maybe heard her shot, came up to check it out. Junior skidded down the rest of the way to the edge of the stream, now just ten feet or so from Lauren. He clicked on a flashlight and shined it in her face.

"You sure look a lot like your mama," he said.

"I didn't want it to suffer," she said.

She squinted, not wanting to look away but blinded by the beam. She sensed a strong odor, aftershave or liquor. Junior. He lowered the light and played it slowly across the body of the dead doe.

"Hmph," he said.

The light stayed focused on where the head was, deep in the wood pile. Lauren couldn't see it, but Junior probably could from his angle.

"Maybe you could help me drag it out," Lauren tried.

She shifted her weight, the Krag clacking against the curve of her backside, which she hoped remained hidden and nondescript within the snowsuit. Junior raised the light again, held the beam on her chest. She tried to think of it as an old miner's trick, lower the light so you don't blind the other man. A courtesy, really.

"Your mama always was the prettiest girl in school," Junior said. "Couple of years younger than me, though."

Junior took a few steps. Lauren noticed he was wearing rubber barn boots, not hikers or hunting ones. In the leftover light, she could see tiny patches of dried manure and straw. His pants were pajamas, loose baggy green flannel covered with images of tiny duck heads. Atop that, he wore a thick black barn jacket, soiled and frayed at the cuffs. No gloves, despite the cold. A dingy yellow and blue striped knit cap sat atop his head, greasy strands of hair sticking out below. He hadn't shaved in several days.

"Wouldn't take but a minute," Lauren said.

"No, I don't think we could do that." Junior said.

Another step. He was close enough that she could feel the warmth of his breath in the air, the weight of his body. His flashlight moved, exploring the leather strap of her rifle, then the muzzle rising above her back. She knew the stories: moved away, back living at home, hinted comments about *hunting out of season* and *bag limits* and *legal size*.

"Like I said, you're really starting to look like her. Beauty, really. Why you out here so late beauty?"

Lauren thought about how fast she could run, understanding the slope was too steep and too covered in brush. She'd trip, and Junior knew this hollow better than she did. She thought about how fast she could spin the Krag, not to shoot him but to at least scare him. She wondered why she felt like she did right now, this man just making conversation probably, reminiscing about high school. Maybe she had the Fairleighs all wrong. She knew she didn't.

"Only difference," he said, somehow having closed the distance between them in just another snaking movement, stepping clear over the stream to her side, "is you've already given me more time a day than she ever did. A bit stuck up, your mama."

Lauren imagined the pinch of Junior's cold hands against her wrist, closed her eyes. He shone the light in her face again, orange erupting behind her eyelids.

"Junior, what gives," a new voice said, similar timbre but with more gravel. Cigarettes and whiskey. Must be Old Man.

"Just saying the girl here looks a lot like her mama, don't she," Junior said.

And Lauren felt something for real then, a brief touch on her wrist, gentle and cold.

"Well, what's she doing here?" Old Man said.

Lauren opened her eyes, the light having moved away. From across the stream, Old Man danced his flashlight on the deer's body. He made noises with his gums, surprise or admiration, maybe both.

"I shot her on our farm," Lauren said. "She tumbled here. I just need to drag her out."

"Lotta effort for a little girl," Old Man said.

"The three of us could make short work," Lauren said.

"I dunno," Old Man said. "We ain't much for helping poachers."

"Poachers," Junior repeated.

He winked at her, and the chillest wind shook the empty branches above them all.

"Poachers?" Lauren said.

"Ain't buck season," Old Man said. "He's big, though. Not much to the rack. Woulda been bigger in a year."

Lauren did not understand. She'd checked, made sure the deer had an empty skull. Hadn't she checked? She protested, explaining that Old Man must be mistaken.

"See for yourself," he said.

She stepped across the stream, Junior offering his frozen hand as aid, which she took, otherwise she might have stumbled.

"That loaded?" Junior said, thumbing toward the Krag on her back.

"No," she lied, still feeling guilty. It wasn't safe to jump creeks with a loaded gun. At least the safety was on, the chamber clear.

"A spike," Old Man said.

His light held steady on the deer's head, tucked beneath the girth of a fallen oak limb. Lauren knelt, looked closer. He was right, two thick antlers rising from the deer's skull, a spike buck, probably a yearling. Not legal in doe season. She thought about Mac, the Game Warden, calling him and explaining, apologizing. An honest mistake.

"Heh heh," Junior said. "Quite the pickle. Not so high and mighty, the professor's daughter."

"Maybe you aimed bad," Old Man said. "Missed. Buck fever. Bad shot. That rifle's awfully big for a little thing like you."

She hadn't missed. She never missed. That was why she'd already gotten college offers, to shoot for West Virginia. The coach there had said words like *Olympics* and *National Champion*.

"Shit happens," Junior said.

His hand had found the small of her back, steadying her. His breath came hot, in her ear.

"Now Junior," Old Man said. "Leave her be."

Junior retreated, kicked a stone into the stream water. Lauren reached forward and touched the antler spikes, first one then the other. She wrapped her hand around that exposed bone, pulled a little. The deer's head lifted, lighter than she'd thought. The tongue lolled out.

"So we ain't much different," Old Man said.

He held the light for her, showing the dead eyes, open, the brown and white of the antler. She removed a glove and touched the hair around the base of the antler, said she was sorry.

"I can't drag it myself," Lauren said.

"No. Wouldn't say so. Leave it be. No use trying. Junior and I will take care of it, make some good use of that meat."

"It's my deer," Lauren said.

"No. It's on my land, so it belongs to me. And he ain't legal. You don't need that kind of trouble. Me and Junior, we'll help you out. Neighbors. That's what we are."

Lauren rose, resettled the weight of the Krag. She couldn't see the wound on the deer beyond a small reddened hole, the entry. She knew the other side must be blown open, the shot having been true. Junior breezed past, knelt and withdrew a long hunting knife from his waistband. He clipped the scent glands from behind the buck's legs, saving the meat. Then he set to gutting it.

"You should stop by the house someday," Old Man said. "Come have a look at the big albino. Quite a sight, big pretty deer like that, killed dead."

Lauren remembered the stories of ice crystals in the meat, how the taxidermist had said he'd had to warm towels to loosen the muscle enough to work with the deer. He hadn't wanted to, but a full mount was money you couldn't ignore. And it had come to him when the season was open, so who was he to second guess.

"Maybe," she said.

"We're neighbors," Old Man said. "Two peas in a pod. Come have a look one of these days."

"Neighbors," Junior said.

He grunted, yanking the guts out through a slit in the deer's belly.

"What do I tell my father?" she said.

He would have heard the shot.

"You missed," Old Man said. "Everyone misses."

Lauren climbed the slope up toward the farm.

"Don't she look just like her mama?" Junior shouted. "Spitting image. Growing up fast."

Her father wouldn't believe that lie, not his daughter, who'd clipped five bullets right through the center ring, so tight you could hardly tell which shot was which, made the coach say, *well now*, had a spot on varsity by the time she was in eighth grade. She hoped he wouldn't ask about the rest, about Fairleigh's Hollow, Junior's scent, the rising bone of twin antlers. Atop the hollow, the evening held just enough light to see the roof of their house, tucked below the curve of the hill. She chambered a shell, just in case, and walked through the dry grasses as if hunting game.

MATTHEW FERRENCE is the author of the memoir *Appalachia North* (2019, WVU Press), and a book of cultural criticism, *All-American Redneck.* His shorter work has appeared widely in literary journals, including *Gettysburg Review* and *The Fiddlehead,* and has been anthologized in *Best American Travel Writing 2018*. He teaches creative writing at Allegheny College.

Wyoming Pastoral

We sit by his van in folding chairs. I don't know
a word of Quechua, he doesn't know any English,
so we drink Coors Light in the silence.

I admire the over-under for coyotes. A breeze
ruffles the new grass. The cherry stock gleams.
I don't have to ask why he came to Wyoming

to herd sheep, or what country in the Andes
he hails from—those aren't mysteries for a day
like this—but how good the afternoon smells,

how the air sighing over the damp spring turf
is enough. Around men like us, before nightfall,
memories hover in the mute air, bemusing us.

And I realize that what I've been listening to
isn't a breath of silence but the draining away
of the music on his stereo, the wistful chorus

fading out, a tremble of seeds in a dried gourd.
A song about love, or absence, or for all I know,
a drinking song, reminding me of Harold, who doesn't

drink, and of his love for Sara and her death, which left
all of us bereft. I think back to the shepherd who came
from so far to herd sheep browsing near nightfall.

How the light clings to those forests of wool
so they glow among deepening shadows.
How the air swells with a savor so sweet
it would have broken Harold's heart.

Desert Whispers

1.

Still t-shirt weather in this makeshift place,
a corrugated roof with I-beams,
a desert foundry full of sand.

I stare through gaps and rust holes,
beyond rimrock and cactus. Outside,
the shadow of Camelback Mountain
darkens a line of palms. Each frond
waves in a slow waltz on this calm
late afternoon. Rush-hour traffic dies away.
Coronas of blue fumes still circle creosote,
that greasy plant, and choke the leaves
of fleshy aloe vera. So much pain and sacrifice
soaked up by desert flora.

Somewhere in the background,
the carriage of a crane sings over rails, grinding wheels
hiss sand, a furnace arcs and rumbles
like the earth was gnashing its teeth.

The day cools. The light beyond the foundry
dissolves into a mid-December sky, a sheen
of desert turquoise, a glow that lingers,
reluctant as the last words of a dream.

2.

I spend Christmas in a hospital,
stare through the window as the valley sun
falls behind a hump of Camelback, vanishes
with the last brisk winter light. A slice of moon
rises above the map of Arizona,
over Buckeye and Surprise and Tombstone.
My hand explores my body, down to my toes,
and I discover that I'm still all there, or almost.

The night sky floods my room, bathes monitors and tubes
in waltz-time gray, sweeps over the see-through
bag my morphine seeps from, splashes me
with light from neon stars and dying galaxies,
where boom towns come to life and long-dead
miners prowl the dusty streets of Bisbee.

An Old Man Who Believed in Math

Archimedes works by the breakers
writing formulas in the sand, stands back
to admire his work. The surf comes in from Africa,
wave after wave, swirling around his ankles.

A Roman soldier interrupts this scene
as if he, also, has something to prove.
"In the name of The Empire—
erase those formulas!"

The old man refuses. "Only the sea
can erase my formulas." So the soldier
buries his sword in the mathematician
and feels much better, triumphal, even,

for serving The Indispensable Nation.

Centuries pass, and the Empire crumbles.
It was more of a herald than cause and effect.
But still, an old man who believed in math
defied a Roman soldier on the beach.

DAVID SALNER has worked as iron ore miner, steelworker, machinist, bus driver, teacher, librarian. His writing appears in recent issues of *Threepenny Review, Ploughshares, Salmagundi, Beloit Poetry Journal, The Moth* (Ireland) and many other magazines. He is the author of *Blue Morning Light* (2016, Pond Road Press).

The Good Fight

The fight against bitterness
cost him his hands
blown off their wrists
like dandelion fluff.
But in his waking dreams he still
fingers the dull brass keys
blows a smoky Body and Soul.

The fight against cynicism
cost him his skin
it hangs from a low branch
the tanners are scraping the hair off
bleaching out the heart-shaped tattoo.
And he feels cold and foolish
on sticky red feet
and he'd like to buy his skin back
to cover his grumbling organs
but the price is much too high.

There are other battles
have cost him blood and teeth
and the easy vanities of youth.
Despair is relentless
comes back hungry again and again.
He tosses it toes and eyeballs
retreating from its jagged mouth
defending his genitals until the end.

They buried him under an inch of sand
that blew away in hours.
The sun and maggots worried what was left
until he was all bones and light.
The coyotes squat over him
and sing about all he stood for
though they don't understand it.

But the song spreads out anyway
sticks to the landscape
like a fine dust.

And everywhere for miles around
mothers make their children wash
as though their lives depended on it.

MICHAEL PEARCE's stories and poems have appeared (or are forthcoming) in *The Gettysburg Review*, *The Threepenny Review*, *Spillway*, *Epoch*, *The Yale Review*, *New Ohio Review*, *Conjunctions*, and elsewhere. He lives in Oakland, California, and plays saxophone in the Bay Area band Highwater Blues.

Apartment Windows in January

No matter the hour
four blinds remain pulled.

    Trees reduced to gray bones
        have their own
            beauty
        is in the little things
    on a snowless winter day:

    a gutter full of leaves,
    for instance, ice-encased,
    glittering in the sun. I
    wouldn't want not
    to view this.

Sun's gone, day's done.
Along with street lights
four candles come on,
each glow a veiled blur
with no flicker.

    Imitation flames
    still spark real hope.

MARJORIE POWER's newest poetry collection, *Oncoming Halos*, was published in 2018 by Kelsay Books. Her poems also appear in six chapbooks from small presses, as well as many journals and anthologies. She lives in Denver, Colorado, with her husband, after many years in the Northwest. She can be found at www.marjoriepowerpoet.com.

The Paper Man

One day he came home and said, "I bought you a gun."

"A gun!" I said. I didn't go to see the gun. I think I spaced it off.

Then I thought, what would I use a gun for? It can only be used for one thing. There is only one thing you can use a gun for. That would be to kill something. I don't want to kill anything.

Then I thought, well, that is not true. I kill the flies. I kill them mercilessly. When I am stuck in my work I walk outside on the patio and I kill flies. They don't know I'm coming and I sneak up on them and I smash them with a flyswatter. Sometimes I get two with one swipe. My mother always said the flies are full of germs. They sit on everything and then there are germs everywhere. And then disease is everywhere. So I don't care if I kill the flies.

Once I killed a bee. That is a very bad thing, to kill a bee. There are bees on the endangered species list, so you shouldn't just go around killing bees. But this bee came to a party. It circled the table and scared my son's girlfriend and made her leave the table. My husband chased it away with a towel. When he left it came back. It wanted my drink. It wanted everybody's drink. So I folded the cardboard carrier from a six pack of beer and started waving it around. I was trying to scare the bee away with the cardboard, but it kept coming back. Then I took a giant swipe at it and it fell to the ground. But it was still breathing. Then my killer instincts took over and I smashed it with the cardboard. I looked around to see if anybody noticed that I killed a bee. I wasn't sure if anybody was on my side or not on my side. But nobody noticed there was suddenly a dead bee on the patio.

Once in pharmacology lab I killed two mice. I wasn't supposed to. The mice were there to be injected with drugs and then observed. I honestly don't know if the mice were better off dead or injected with the drugs. So there is a slight possibility that I did a kinder thing. The mice should have been afraid of me, but I was afraid of them. I couldn't bear to touch them so I used a great big mitt like a huge oven mitt to pick up each mouse. One at a time I picked them up with the gigantic protective mitt, and one

at a time, I accidently held them so tight they stopped breathing. After two times the professor said let someone else pick up the mice.

So you see I am already a killer.

My husband said, "You need a gun to protect yourself."

And I immediately thought, yes! Rattlesnakes! I need protection from rattlesnakes. Terrifying creatures. I once saw a man jump out of a car and pick up a rattlesnake right out of the middle of the road. He picked it up by the tail and it swung its head around and tried to bite him in the leg before he flung it into the ditch. I was never sure if he was trying to help the snake by getting it out of the road or to hurt it by throwing it. Once I was face to face with a rattlesnake, too. It was curled up like a kitten on a bale of hay in the barn. I stared at it for a second while my heart jumped and my mouth went dry. Then I ran to get a shovel. When I returned with the shovel the snake was gone. I was upset and happy at the same time. Upset because now there was a missing rattlesnake somewhere in the hay stack. But happy because even though I had seen people kill snakes, I couldn't imagine having the nerve, what with my shaking hands and panting breath, to bring the shovel down at the right angle to dissect its head from its body. One doesn't just practice these things. Besides, a snake is such a big thing. Not like a mouse. It would want to fight back. There would be blood. I didn't want to kill a snake. Thinking about it, a rattlesnake would even be a tough shot with a gun. I mean you would have to hit it in the head while it was doing that snake thing, waving around from side to side.

Then he said, "I will teach you how to shoot your gun."

And so he packed up my gun and we went to the gun range. The gun range had bars on the door. Inside were cases full of guns with smiling/unsmiling men standing behind them. One of the men said, "Can I help you?" so I asked him where the bathroom was, not because I needed it but because it's always a good idea to be prepared when you are in a strange place. He pointed down a hall. I didn't leave. Instead I signed my name on a paper that said: RELEASE, WAIVER, HOLD HARMLESS, AND INDEMNIFICATION AND ASSUMPTION OF RISK AGREEMENT. My husband gave me ear muffs and goggles. I put them on and we took my gun through the double doors into the gun range.

Inside was a row of wooden booths facing a gray berm. There was carpeting that was mostly grey concrete gaping through brown striped fibers. There was a fan in the ceiling blowing cold air all over the place. There were guns booming at random intervals. He said, "Pick a booth."

I picked the closest booth to the door. He unpacked my gun and showed me the parts. The sights, the slide, the magazine release, the safety. He said, "Always keep the muzzle pointed toward the berm." The gun was very black. Everything on the gun was all one color, which was black. I couldn't remember the parts. He kept showing me the parts of the gun. I strained to hear his voice through the ear muffs and the random booming gunshots. I couldn't remember the parts.

He hung up the target. All along I thought the target was going to be a bullseye, but no, the target was the outline of a man. It was the head and torso of a man. I mean, it had to have been a man's torso because it didn't have any hair on its head, so probably not a woman. This was what he meant by "protect myself." He would teach me to protect myself from this paper man. He showed me how to stand and hold the gun with my hands wrapped around the handle like a cup. To look down the barrel and line up the sights. He said, "Do not shoot at the head. Don't ever shoot at the head. Aim at the middle of the chest." He said that like it was so obvious, like it was some unwritten rule. Like at the gun range it was generally known to be bad form to shoot at the head. Maybe you would look like a serial killer if you shot at the head. Maybe one of the gun range people would come over and tell you to get out if you shot a hole in the head.

I said, "What if I accidentally shoot the head?" After all, it wasn't like the paper man was a snake. It's head wasn't moving around anyplace.

He said, "Aim at the middle of the chest because it's your easiest shot to do the most harm." Most harm? What I was really hoping for was to hit a foot or a leg, so as not to do any irreparable damage but still look like I was serious. But the paper man didn't have a foot or a leg, only that gaping head and torso.

I said, "You go first." He looked so calm. He looked so composed. He fired the gun. The metal bullet casing popped out of the gun up in the air and hit me in the chest. I jumped back. There was a hole through the middle of the paper man's torso. Then he handed me the gun. I stood with bent arms and held the gun in both hands. I lined up the sites. Everything on the gun was black. It felt like a heavy weight in my hands. It felt like a lit stick of dynamite in my hands. Everything inside and outside of me was shaking and so the gun was shaking too. The sights on the gun kept moving around with my shaking hands. Then I squeezed the trigger with my right index finger. Nothing happened. The trigger was hard to pull. I squeezed tighter with my finger and closed my eyes. The gun fired like a small explosion in my hands. It felt like fifteen firecrackers going off in my

hands. The sound of the blast rang through my muffed ears. My hands jerked backward. The bullet made a hole in the paper outside the torso of the man. I laid down the gun with the muzzle pointing at the berm. He said, "Try it again."

I did not want to pick up the gun again. I did not want to try to remember the parts again. But I also didn't want to be an ungrateful person. Because, after all, he bought the gun for me. I told myself I could just put my mind away somewhere in my head and shoot the gun with the paper man staring at me and be someone who shoots the gun at the paper man just for fun and maybe if I put my mind away it could be some kind of a sport to shoot at the paper man. I picked it up. The gun was black and cold. He said, "Pull back the slide." I took my finger off the trigger and put my hand on top of the slide. He said, "The other hand." The slide was hard to pull. Especially with my other hand. I struggled with the slide. He said, "Keep the muzzle pointed at the berm." So many things. And the gun was so stubborn. It was stubborn and rigid and cold. Finally the slide clicked into place. And I stood and fired six more shots. Then there were six new holes in the side of the paper man. And there were eight brass bullet casings all over the floor at our feet. The gun left a mess of casings all over the carpet by our feet.

"That was good!" he said. "Even if you didn't hit the middle, you still would have killed or severely wounded him."

Killed or severely wounded the paper man! Such a harmless thing, not spreading disease around or landing on my drink. And now it was possibly dead.

He showed me how to load the magazine with eight bullets. Then he pulled back the slide and said, "Try again." I picked up the gun with the muzzle pointed at the berm. My arms and my hands were shaking. I wasn't sure if I was shaking from the constant cold air blowing through the gun range or from touching the cold gun. Then I shot the gun eight more times. Every time I squeezed the trigger my shaking moved the gun off the target. Every time I squeezed the trigger I closed my eyes. But then somehow there were eight more holes in the paper man's torso.

He cranked the pulley and brought the paper man back to our booth. Then he gave me tape to cover up all the bullet holes. I taped over every bullet hole so the paper man looked like new again. The paper man was all fixed up again. Then we pinned the paper man back up on the pulley

and we cranked it back out for another go. We sent the killed or severely wounded fixed up paper man out for another go.

End

PAULA BROWN is a retired pharmacist and perennial student of the Writers Studio in Tucson, Arizona. Her work has been published in the *Whitefish Review*, *South Dakota Magazine*, *War, Literature, and the Arts,* and *The Phoenix Soul.* She lives in Tucson with her husband and six dachshunds.

For One Who Had Emphysema

Walking by I saw you
looking out your window
at the old oak on your lawn.
There were just a few leaves left on it
as if a dream of spring
still bewitched them
and they weren't crinkly yellow
but newly green in warm sunlight
giving back to the atmosphere
something you were in
short supply of those days.
I don't think you saw me
but I saw you
or at least your picture
a few weeks later
in the obituary which said
Please, in lieu of flowers,
plant a tree.

WILLIAM CULLEN JR. is a veteran and works at a social services non-profit in Brooklyn, New York. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Blue River Review*, *Gulfstream*, *Lake Effect*, *Poetry South*, *Spillway*, *The American Journal of Poetry* and *Written River: A Journal of Eco-Poetics.*

Not Enough, Too Much

Carved from silence, I return to it.
They say *not enough, too much*,
never to meet. My tongue craves salt,
flesh seasoned with longing and dust
and the burdens of two separate
exhaustions. They hand me sticks
and say *eat*. I dip the fork into the
bowl, and looking to the earth
see no roots, only brown feet
refused at the surface. They say
you are the vacant temple. I close
my eyes and sing, become that
unseen pity, that burnt green descent
withering in the lull of the moment before.

February 6, 2018

Today every song is a diary of lost dates,
moments cured in precision

and stowed away on a train to the next town,
always yearning the beyond, around that precious bend.

Or, a funeral for tomorrow, processing the improbable
present. Lights, flickering. The starling's first peep.

All urgency dies. Outside, leaves float in the fog
as I drive away to a finite point.

Now, a whistle mourns the day's broken
surge; never having said goodbye, you move on.

Texas Flood

Sunlight sneaks through a crack, feathering
the overgrown lawn, electric blues in the air.
I have forgotten everything I once was.
An uprooted tree, the abandoned
steeple, a lone dog chained to a pole.
The uncertain puddle in a memory of howls.
Last night's midnight ochre, in spades.
It lives behind me, like the wind.

ROBERT OJAKI is the author of five chapbook collections, three micro-chapbooks and a mini-digital chapbook. He lives in Texas with his wife, two dogs and some books. His work has also appeared in such publications as *MockingHeart Review, Crannóg, Reservoir, Vox Populi, Panoply, Boston Review, The High Window, Oxidant|Engine* and elsewhere.

Profane Elegy

I spent my childhood
trying to fit
into your clothes.
I loved to receive
your hand-me-downs,
their warm scent.

The next third of my life I ran
from you, monument
of straight A's, lab reports
meticulous as a medieval scribe's,
your violin ignited
by Brandenburg Concertos.

You won everything,
burned all.

I hadn't seen you
for more than five years
when you died.
How did you end up
too steeped in zolpidem
to know up from down?

Who's the smart one now?

I don't know when I lost you
the first time. What happened
between us playing
dolls and barely speaking?

That hasn't stopped me
from placing a palm-sized stone
beside your name
in Haym Solomon Memorial Park
in Frazer, Pennsylvania,

speaking words I've held for thirty years—

I love you.
Forgive me.

Take my place.

—but no one can heft
this slab
of bluestone
from my chest.

Talking to My Mother on the Phone, Two and a Half Years After

Twig by twig and stone by stone
she's built a dam to impound the flow
of any mention of my sister's death.
One week, one month, one year, two years
into the loss, she packs her ears
with mud if I ask questions, mortars
her mouth against answers. We converse
around the confluence but never venture
near those swifter waters. I am inured
to logjams our conversations strike,
how she blocks me, with, "It's late,"
or "Nice to talk to you." Tonight, before
we said goodbye, she opened a spillway,
saying, "Your dad and I are thinking of you.
Take care of yourself. We're running
out of daughters."

Grief

In middle school wood shop, my sister jigsaw-cut
a slab of mahogany into a pig.
That cutting board saw heavy use
in our farmhouse kitchen,
for chopping hazelnuts, zucchini, apples.

After her death, my parents ship it.
I hoard the memories I can.

It fails to reach me.
The post office manager says
it's been scanned at the sorting station,
days ago. Probably stuck
on the belt, riding around,
around, around.

What do I do?

"Wait." He shrugs.
"All you can do is wait."

JANNA KNITTEL is from the Pacific Northwest and now lives in Minnesota. Her chapbook *Fish & Wild Life* was published by Finishing Line Press in May 2018. Her work appears in *Cold Mountain Review*, *Split Rock Review*, and *Whale Road Review* and *Waters Deep: A Great Lakes Anthology*.

The Baptism

The priest lived a relatively long life but for many of those years he was tormented by the nagging fear he would die a horrible death. Nothing in his life throughout that dark time supported this notion but in one of his more down in the dumps moments, he confessed to a fellow priest that it would be so profoundly twisted that after living a purposeful, at times genuinely righteous life that he would die in some ignominious manner, his end of life decided at the hands of some anonymous low-life who would drag him into a dark alley, stick a knife to his throat and demand his old wristwatch and the contents of his wallet which rarely contained more than twenty or thirty dollars. Upon realizing that the haul was considerably less than he imagined it would be in this pricey part of town, the vile thief would madly twist the knife into his heart in some inexplicable sense of street justice.

That is not the way he died, yet his eventual death was equally shameful. His desire for the way in which he would die was not so much a product of trying to be heroic but of hoping that he would go out of this ungrateful, dispirited world in a proverbial blaze of theological glory, perhaps a modest martyrdom of sorts, drawing his last breath in the service of salvation, guiding some poor soul to the clear path of grace filled redemption by demonstrating God's unconditional love, in a spiritual as well as a physical sense. He thought of this often and was determined for it to be so. His priest confidant suggested he focus his attention on the poor in spirit as well as the poor in material wealth and not worry so much about the endgame.

Jesse Cairo could hear footsteps behind him as he sat in the third pew, awaiting the start of the Funeral Mass for Father John. He turned his head slightly and saw an elderly woman perform a perfunctory half genuflect at the paschal candle, then proceed directly to the Virgin Mary's altar. She bowed before the statue, knelt down, made the sign of the cross, stood up and dropped a coin into the slot at the base of the rack of candles. It was obvious the coin had little company in the cashbox, as the singular sound of the coin dropping to the base of the metal box was the only noticeable sound in the cavernous sanctuary**.** She lit a candle and as she rose. She

blessed herself again quickly and returned to her pew in the far reaches of the once thriving church. Just moments later, Jesse turned his head as before to witness a second elderly woman perform the exact ritual. Moments after that, as the second woman headed toward her seat, yet a third woman acted out the identical routine.

The three older ladies lived much and lost much in their many years, but did not share their lives with one another. Jesse turned completely around and observed that the three women sat far apart from each other, each working her rosary beads, with heads solemnly lowered, bony knees firmly locked together, pressed upon the kneeler. They attended the seven a.m. Mass every morning as well as all special masses that had communion on the program, including the Funeral Mass that was just about to begin. Whether they knew the deceased priest was doubtful, as Father John was never assigned to this particular parish.

Other than the church ladies and Jesse, there were three other people in attendance for the Funeral Mass. Jesse assumed they were related to Father John, cousins from out of town perhaps. The man, woman and young girl sat in the front pew across the center aisle from Jesse. As the celebrant priest entered the altar area through a side door, he headed directly to greet the family seated up front. The man started to rise, but the priest put his hand on the man's shoulder, allowing him to remain seated. Jesse noted, that although seated, the man could look straight into the priest's eyes without so much as stretching his neck an inch.

At the beginning of the Mass, the priest swung the thurible, murmuring incantations, blessing the casket. The aroma of incense, while pleasant to most, sent one of the old ladies into a hacking coughing fit. She left the sanctuary. On the way out, she dipped two fingers into the holy water basin near the door, blessed herself and left the building.

Communion was offered to the family and the two remaining elderly ladies. Jesse passed on partaking of the Eucharist. As the ladies returned to their seats, they cast subtle looks at Jesse over their cupped hands. Jesse made eye contact with each one and returned each one of their stares with a pleasant smile.

The priest spoke kind words about the deceased. Jesse listened intently, and determined that the officiating priest never knew the former priest being buried today, whose body lies within the unadorned coffin. The celebrant read the epistle and the Gospel with due reverence, sprinkled holy water upon the casket's white pall, reminding the faithful of the

hope promised at the occasion of their own Baptisms, though most had no concrete recollection of its occurrence as they would have been just a few months old at the time.

When the service came to an end, the family up front arose. The man, dressed in a gray sealskin greatcoat, with a vented shoulder cape, stood up first, rising as in sections to his full height, just a few inches shy of seven feet. He stepped aside to allow the woman, seemingly half his height, and the girl nearly as tall as the adult woman, to walk in front of him.

The funeral home's black suited pallbearers wheeled the pop-up church truck bearing the coffin through the narthex, down the marble steps and loaded the casket into the hearse with the church truck collapsed beneath it. The priest greeted the family of three and Jesse as they left the church. Jesse shook the priest's hand and asked him if he knew the relationship connection between the family of three and the deceased. The incurious priest shrugged and said that he had no idea.

The two remaining church ladies stayed in their pews, blessing themselves repeatedly. No announcement was made concerning the trip to the cemetery but Jesse followed in his Ford Ranger, with hazard lights blinking. He followed the hearse and black limousine for some forty odd minutes, until the vehicles stopped near a bench along the side of the road, just short of a Route 94 underpass. The drivers of the two vehicles and the tall man unloaded the church cart, propped it upright, and placed the coffin on top. The church truck was situated adjacent to the bench with the wheels locked in place. The drivers got back into their vehicles, made a U-turn and headed back in the direction from which they came. The man, woman, and the girl, holding a fast food restaurant paper bag on her lap, sat close to each other on the bench.

Jesse assumed for a moment that this was some kind of transfer point and that another transport would soon arrive. The man undid the bottom button of his greatcoat, and meticulously picked miniscule pieces of lint off his slacks, then folded his hands upon his lap. He appeared to be as fastidious in his sartorial splendor as a younger, much taller version of the very crisp and precise Karl Lagerfeld. While the man made sure his slacks were without imperfections, his wife attended to the back of his greatcoat, searching for any evidence of dust or stray pieces of lint and picked them off as she spotted them. The girl put the paper sack aside and performed the same service for the woman, finding and destroying whatever strange particles appeared on the overcoat.

Jesse observed this wordless ritual for fifteen minutes. It reminded him of a *National Geographic* photo he once saw of a pack of grooming Barbary macaques. He diverted his gaze for a moment, looking in the direction of the horizontal crease where the underpass meets the sloping concrete footing. This part of the structure arcs from street level up to the underside of the highway, forming a narrow platform where the overhead highway supports a constant drumbeat of rumbling tractor trailers, buses and cars travelling at breakneck speeds. He saw, in this protected space, what appeared to be a makeshift homeless shelter, its blue tarp shield shivering with each passing truck, draped alongside a random assortment of milk crates, supermarket carts and piles of green contractor bags.

After what seemed like too long of an embarrassingly mute span of time, Jesse decided to break the silence. He got out of his truck, crossed the road and stood about eight feet in front of the man, saying, "I can take you to the cemetery." The three groomers looked past him to some distant point on the horizon. Jesse continued, saying to the man, "You can sit up front with me. There are two pullout seats for the ladies. The coffin will fit in the bed. No problem." No response was forthcoming from any of the three. After a moment, Jesse noticed something moving against the tarp, bulging in spots, most likely a body poking around in earnest. Still no response from anyone in this tight-knit family. Not one to give up easily, although annoyed, he spoke again in as helpful a voice as he could manage, "I can take you to Gate of Heaven or Valhalla. They're both over the rise there," he said, pointing, "along the river bluff. Maybe twenty or thirty minutes from here. Max. Which one is it? I know the way to both."

Jesse sensed that the man was not interested in the things of this world yet Jesse was bursting to reveal certain truths in order to dispense them into the world *he* inhabited.

The tall man turned his head momentarily. A sudden audible rustling noise on the ledge above caught his attention. He looked up. Jesse's eyes followed the same visual path as both men studied the activity taking place on the ledge as the blue tarp was now being drawn aside.

Remembering a saying on a greeting card once given to him by his girlfriend, 'You've never been ignored until you've been ignored by a cat', Jesse decided he needed to establish himself more strongly in the presence of these felines. "Look," he said, "I was subpoenaed by the District Attorney of Ramsey County to testify at Father John's trial. I put my hand on the Bible and told the truth."

At the mention of the word 'truth' the man looked intently at Jesse, staring into his eyes for an awkward five seconds. In the next moment, a human figure emerged from the highway shelter, a heavily bearded man dressed in torn, dirt-caked clothes. The homeless man waved to the people on the bench who returned the silent greeting. The tall man again turned his attention to Jesse, who spoke haltingly, "I . . . I identified myself in the court, told them of my relationship with Father and answered the attorney's questions as best I could."

As the homeless man rummaged through the crates above them, the seated man again started picking dust particles off his trousers and the females robotically joined in the grooming routine. Jesse returned to his truck and parked it on the shoulder, to get out of the way of the occasional car that travelled along the rural road.

Before he ever thought of joining the priesthood, John LeBarron took a church organized pilgrimage to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil to visit the Christ the Redeemer statue at Corcovado. Like everyone else on the journey, he was awestruck by its beauty but that wave of enthusiasm could not outweigh his discouragement at having to contend with the crowds forming at the large number of gift shops at the base of the mountain, each selling an infinite variety of Christ the Redeemer T-Shirts, Flip Flops, magnets, mugs and Baby Bodysuits.

There was another monument back in the States that drew him closer to the feeling he indeed had a calling to the priesthood. It was experienced on a different kind of pilgrimage, a basely secular and familiar one, to Atlantic City, New Jersey. In fact, he rarely missed any of the weekend bus junkets from St. Paul to Atlantic City. The modest forty-dollar fare was reimbursed soon after boarding, with the reward of a roll of quarters, unlimited drinks, two meals and snacks.

After spending most of the day at one of the hotel casinos, mindlessly feeding coins into the slots, pulling levers, consuming free drinks offered by the cheery cocktail waitresses, he took a stroll on the boardwalk, grabbed a bacon and egg sandwich and walked aimlessly down several side streets until he spotted a concrete bench beneath a large elm tree in the courtyard of a church. He drank some coffee and took a few bites out of his sandwich and saw a statue of Christ very unlike the imposing one he saw on the mountaintop in Brazil. He was inspired by the subtle imposition of the statue's holiness and humility. It stood life size just a few feet from the bench. It was the figure of Jesus Christ with a sparrow on his head, another on his outstretched finger, and a third one lying on its

side at the base of the statue. It was an unusual sight, in that he was accustomed to seeing statues of St. Francis interacting with birds and animals. He noticed the details, especially the birds' eyes. There were tiny black bead eyes embedded in each bird's head. Could they be onyx? Or ebony? Not quite bearing the awesome splendor of the Christ the Redeemer in Rio, Jesse was overwhelmed by the artist's attention to detail.

There was a pine board at the base, bearing words carved in English, Spanish, and Chinese, possibly appealing to the different ethnic groups who frequented this gaming town. It stated, "Seventy times seven I forgive you. If God so loves the sparrow, how much more does he love you?" As a young man in his early twenties, he gave up his gambling trips to Atlantic City and applied to the seminary within his hometown in the Archdiocese of St Paul and Minneapolis.

Jesse opened up to the tall man on the bench and told him the following story: "I was in my last year of elementary school. I don't even remember how we met but one of the first things he asked me—he was in seminary then—if I wanted to go swimming with him and some other boys. It was winter and he said he was a member of the Y and they had a specific time on Saturdays where it was a time set aside for young boys, just like myself."

Jesse hesitated; making sure the tall man was paying attention. The woman and girl turned their gazes upon each other, trying not to intrude upon this part of the conversation. Assured the man was listening intently, maintaining eye contact, Jesse continued, "I thought that was odd because I had just met him. He singled me out for some reason, I never thought about swimming in wintertime, only in summer, in the lake. But then it got even stranger when he said, quite matter-of-fact, that I could choose to wear a bathing suit or nothing at all. It made me feel uncomfortable, yet on the other hand, he said it in such a natural way, that I didn't feel threatened."

On the night Father John died, he sat at the neighborhood all-male bar, as a defrocked priest, convicted felon and regular patron of cranberry juice mixed with two shots of vodka. Once a week, he brought a supply of a special brand of unsweetened juice to the bar. The bartender kept it refrigerated for him. Recently released from prison, having served one third of his original sentence, there was little reason to celebrate. His reputation had been ruined. He had no fight left in him. That is why he told his attorney that he wanted the trial to stop so he could plead guilty to all of the charges piled up against him.

At the time Father John admitted his guilt, the newspapers quoted the Ramsey County District Attorney as saying: "Typically defendants aren't going to plead guilty once the trial is already under way, but this is what this particular defendant did. He expressed great remorse about putting his accusers and their families through this ordeal and said he took full responsibility for his shameful actions." The D.A. further stated that the Archdiocese of St Paul and Minneapolis responded quickly to the allegations. The Archdiocese released a statement that said it "deeply regrets the pain inflicted by a member of the clergy."

By the time he finished two of the cocktails, and was working on his third, two men in their forties entered the bar and sat on either side of the former priest. One of the men, dark-haired, tall, with a trim physique, put his arm around John and, with his free hand, picked up the cranberry vodka cocktail, sniffed it and pushed it along the bar to his friend's waiting hand. The shorter man, balding, with a faint hint of red hair, also smelled it and said to John: "What the hell are you drinking, Padre?"

"Do I know you gentlemen?" John asked, a little bleary-eyed.

"I wouldn't exactly say we're gentlemen. Let's just say we're still boys at heart," muttered the dark-haired man.

"Then who are you?" John asked, slurring his words.

The shorter man laughed, moving closer to John, "Remember Mrs. Duffy?"

"I don't think I do," John answered.

The other friend moved closer, whispering, "She was the Irish biddy. The bitch the three of us paid back one early morning some years ago."

"The three of us? Paid back?"

The bartender came over to check on the new customers. The shorter man asked if he could order a tall glass of Manischewitz Concord Grape. As the bartender arched his eyebrow, the two buddies laughed and ordered two beers instead. A faint hint of recognition started to seep into John's alcohol impaired brain. He picked up his cranberry concoction and took a big swig.

The trim man continued with the story, "Of course the three of us. We planned it in the sacristy before the seven a.m. Mass. C'mon, you gotta remember that. It was a classic."

Seeing that John was struggling to bring that occasion to the front of his memory bank, the balding man filled in the blanks. "Mrs. Duffy, that Irish bitch, the meanest witch in all of St. Paul, took communion every single morning. You gotta remember that time we sent her flying."

"Flying?"

"Man, when we came up to you with the water and wine, you skipped the water altogether, then forcefully guided my hand to the other cruet. Together, you and me just emptied that consecrated cruet of Manischewitz into the chalice. A Saint Kilian's special—cheap kosher wine—Classic! You always had the best taste." Pointing to his friend, he added: "Your turn."

"Like every morning, you were half in the bag by seven twenty. When you and I walked along the communion railing, nigh approaching the fat, stuffy and fully pious Mrs. Duffy you gave me the clue and I knew what to do . . . according to the plan we all made before Mass. I was holding the paten right against her throat. You winked as you placed the host on her swollen tongue. I rubbed my foot as hard as I could on the carpet and the sound of that tsk tsk was music to my ears."

"That bitch reeled backwards and fell on her fat ass," added the other altar boy. "I wish we had a video of that."

The two friends, laughing so hard, were incapable of putting complete sentences together, sputtering their beer all over John's jacket, who remained silent throughout the episode. Starting to sober up, he remembered, not so much that particular event with Mrs. Duffy, but began to envision the two men as twelve-year old acolytes in their angelic cassocks and surplices.

"No one came to help that biddy. She just lay there. Her skirt was half way up her thighs. You could see the thick hose rolled up to mid-calf, not making it past her varicose veins." Patting John heartily on the back, he maneuvered his face so he could be nose-to-nose. "We never lost stride. I was proud of you, Father. We just kept on truckin' along that rail and let her lay where she fell, moaning like a sick cow. Not one of the other altar rail biters came to her assistance. She laid there a good two minutes before the custodian came over. It was his job to clean the garbage off the floor."

John pushed away from the bar, trying to get down from the stool, but his foot missed the bottom rung. The men pushed him back up. They were not done with him yet. "Let's go to the pool," one of them suggested.

"What pool?"

"The pool table in the back," the other one whispered, nearly kissing the ex-priest's ear.

"I don't know that game," John protested, feeling the sweat run down his sides, now fully aware of the danger lurking within such close prox-

imity. He could smell the hot breath of both men, blowing at him from either side.

"We'll teach you. It's the perfect game," the taller man said, his face turning into an insistent grimace. "It's got nice long sticks and hard balls. By the way, one of those balls has your number on it. All played on a table with soft holes everywhere."

The short man grabbed the front of John's shirt, "And a sacrifice altar made of green felt."

Jesse's mother was impressed with Father John, though he was not yet ordained. On the day of her son's graduation from St. Kilian's, he came to the apartment and presented a gift to his protégé. It was a black hardcover book, slightly smaller than a missal, with gilt lettering: *The Imitation of Christ*, by Thomas a Kempis. Still a seminarian, but wearing simulated priestly garb, he inscribed it to Jesse: *What you do for the least of these, you do for me*. *Congratulations, John LeBarron*. The gift brought tears to the mother's eyes. Jesse still treasures the small book.

The homeless man came down from his ledge and spoke loudly to the family of three, "You've come to the transfer point, Zach. Soon you will cross the border." The woman nudged the girl who stood up and handed the bag she was holding to the homeless man. He grabbed it and opened it quickly, devouring the sandwich it contained in three voracious bites.

When Zach stood up, the whoosh of his sealskin greatcoat could be heard by Jesse, sitting in his truck. The tall man turned his head skywards, the shoulder cape broadening his shoulders even wider, raising both arms to full extension. When he spoke, the words sounded deep and throaty, rising and reverberating above the din of the cars and trucks rumbling overhead, even muting the noisy diesel horns. Looking straight at the man, still holding the bag, which contained some fruit and granola bars, "Man, when it is our time to leave, I command you to guard this bench. People may sit on it, but let no one defile it." The homeless man returned to his abode behind the big, blue tarp, munching on an apple.

For a moment, Jesse thought this might be a dream, for he possessed an active dream life. The inner worlds of dreamtime, daytime flights of the imagination, coupled with the present reality of the macadam roadway upon which he stood informed his being. They were the three primary tributaries that did not collide or conflict with each other but flowed like the Big Black, Red and White rivers into the nearby Mississippi, perfectly blending into the constant flow and rush of his life. He invited himself into this circumstance of Father John's funeral. He was fully aware of

what was taking place but it disturbed his psyche that Zach would dignify the homeless man with spoken words but thoroughly ignore his own attempts at conversation. He never experienced anything this strange. It was an otherworldly situation but he was impelled to persist in its unfolding.

Standing numb and helpless, he started to daydream in the face of an unwelcome situation. He felt he was being forced through the womb of his existence, even pre-existence, pushed through the chamber of blood, fluids and bone, where his flesh was rendered asunder so that he may experience previous generations of his being, not intellectually or emotionally (for that will come later) but viscerally, his shoulders crushed and force-gripped, head pounding through the tight canals of his family's past, as if it were a present thing. This is the real interior life, he thought, where the tributaries of his being spooled into an eddy, spinning out of control. No more trees and sky. Is he now consigned to living life in his mind only? Or, is he now an inhabitant of a parallel universe, solely the prisoner of the dreamtime component, the real world of *no* death and *no* taxes. The manner of the death of Father John might have been justified. He should just be able to live with the results.

When Father John met Jesse and his girlfriend one day outside the supermarket, he did not know how to behave. He reflected on the encounter and regretted not being gracious to her. He knew nothing about her, but immediately determined she was not right for Jesse, whom he adored. Jez was a purple rage rebel in her home. She smoked pot, drank excessively, cursed incessantly, slept around, told stories to her cousins who gathered round her whenever she decided to show up at family gatherings, captivated by her foreign to them tales which were all true. Father John knew nothing of this but sensed a certain power within her.

Jesse was instantly attracted to Jez. He felt that he could eventually tame this wild child. It was always difficult for him to fool her or pretend to be somebody he was not. She possessed the ability to size up anyone. Plus, she could pump you for all the information she needed in order to peg who you are for all you are in her eyes. The moment she realizes that you are not at all authentic, she loses interest in going any further in pursuit of a relationship, even a casual one. If she spent more time with people, then, glory be, she might even grow to like them some day in the distant future, but pity you if you stay the same. If Father John had met a less imposing young woman that day with Jesse, he might have acted differently.

When Zach sat down, Jesse approached. He again made eye contact,

making sure that Zach heard him and understood what he was saying. "When I got to the pool, there was no further mention of swimming without bathing trunks. That was a relief. I still think that was odd. I remember later on asking someone who would know if the Y had that policy and he said no. As you may or may not know, Father did not have an athletic physique. He was kind of built like a barrel. Not fat, just round with sparse hair on his chest. He wore a whistle around his neck, as if he were a swimming coach but he never did blow it." Jesse sensed that Zach wanted Jesse to return to his truck by the way he kept diverting his eyes to every vehicle coming over the rise. However, Jesse needed to tell him one more story while it was still fresh on his mind.

"There was another instance when I believe Father John acted strangely," he began. "I was in my second year of High School when we met outside the supermarket. He was coming out as we were going in. My girlfriend Jez and I."

This time, Zach focused intently when Jesse spoke. "I introduced Jez to Father and all of a sudden he is speaking, not to her, but to me in a voice I never heard before. It was shrill almost; words hopping out of his mouth at a rapid clip, varying from normal speaking voice to a falsetto high-pitch and then his voice would crack. I don't know how else to explain it. He rocked from side to side as he spoke, telling me silly things he did as a child, mixed in with telling me all the groceries he carried were for the poor. Then he stopped in the middle of a sentence and gave us a hurried goodbye. It was then that I noticed he wore open-toed sandals without socks. It was the middle of winter! The cuffs of his shirt and hems of his pants were frayed. He never once looked at Jez, but only for a quick glance as he rushed to his car. Jez asked me afterwards, Who was that? and What was that?"

Zach then located another speck of lint on his trousers, removed it, as the woman and girl resumed their grooming assignments.

Suddenly, the homeless man pulled aside the tarp and ran to the base of the ledge. He pointed to the road as he bellowed in a rapturous voice:

"Zachariah, look! I tell you
It is Elijah's chariot coming down the hill.
His body will rest between the cushioned rails
Lined with velvet as plush as the pillow
Upon which his head must lie.
The wide whitewall tires will be washed clean again

Before the sun-drenched trip to the heavens
And the winged angel upon the hood will hold
That victory wreath with outstretched arms
Charging up one hill and down the other.
The strips of gold that line the chassis vents
Will drive the engine to its ultimate power
As the seraphim and cherubim songs inside
Embrace his soul in the harmony of the universe."

Zach and the two females jumped up to meet the white stretch limousine as it pulled alongside the bench. The driver opened the door for the ladies, then sprayed each whitewall tire with a bubbly cleanser. The driver and Zach next opened the back gate and placed the casket and cart inside. Jesse did not get a good look at the interior but he expected to see either a pimp wearing a jelly roll hat passing champagne flutes to his hookers or a group of teenage prom girls and their dates swaying to raucous music.

The limo sped off. Jesse followed, trying to stay within fifty yards of the limo as it streaked along the winding river's bluff. As he drove, with much gratitude to the poet, Wallace Stevens, Jesse desired to know not the idea of the thing but the thing itself. He so yearned to delight in the 'new knowledge of reality', to dispose of the unreality that persisted in dominating his being, a person tossed into circumstances he never once controlled. He struggled to recall the moment when he turned away from feel and touch to think and conjure. In this very present, his hold on reality was tenuous. There was no one to talk to, only things and people and situations to talk about. As he drove, he reviewed the few conversations he had with Father John LeBarron. If he knew him better, there is more he could have said at the trial.

After his visit to the church courtyard in Atlantic City, John LeBarron never looked back. His passion for serving God by serving others simply blocked out all other needs and desires. He quit gambling and smoking immediately. He let go of his fondness for drink for long stretches, then periodically slipped back into that habit for equally long periods. That tormenting cycle repeated itself for the rest of his life. His bouts with sexual desire were just that, bouts, not the fullness of exploring his identity through the physical union with another human being. He was not sure who he was. Sexuality more confused him than tempted him. It was not as clear-cut and tangible as gambling, smoking and drinking. He strived to be perfect like his heavenly father is perfect but he was overly con-

scious of how far short he fell. His knowledge of his many failures and shortcomings depressed him greatly. No professor at seminary or colleague in the priesthood convinced him that he could actually be of great help to people despite his flawed, imperfect self.

Although they lived in the same city, Jesse and Father Johns' paths had not crossed in many years. But cross they did at Father John's trial. The following is the official transcript of the testimony given by Jesse Cairo at the trial of Father John LeBarron.

JESSE CAIRO, DEFENDANT'S WITNESS, SWORN

The Clerk: State your name and spell it for the record, please.

Witness: My name is Jesse Cairo, C-A-I-R-O.

The Court: Mr. Pointer, you may proceed.

Mr. Pointer: Thank you, Your Honor.

DIRECT EXAMINATION
By Mr. Pointer

Q Good morning, Mr. Cairo.

A Good morning.

Q Do you know Mr. John LeBarron?

A Yes I do.

Q How long have you known Mr. LeBarron?

A Since I was in the eighth grade at St. Kilian's.

Q Have you ever attended the YMCA swimming pool in downtown St. Paul?

A Yes.

Q When?

A During the Christmas break in 1988.

Q Did anyone invite you to the pool?

A Yes.

Q Who?

A John LeBarron.

Q Were you alone or with other people?

A With other people.

Q Who were the other people?

A Two other boys.

Q Anyone else?

A Well, Father John. I mean John LeBarron. He wasn't a priest yet.

Q Were you friends with the two other boys?

A I met them for the first time that day. They were in the pool when I got there.

Q What were their names?

A I don't know. John LeBarron never introduced us.

Q Can you describe them?

A How so?

Q Tell the court how old they were and what they looked like.

A They were about my age, I think. One boy was tall with dark hair. The other boy was short, kind of chubby, with curly red hair.

Q How old were you at the time?

A I was eleven.

Q How long were you at the pool?

A I think about an hour. John LeBarron told me that we would have the pool to ourselves for an hour.

Q You had the pool all to yourselves?

A Yes. Me, the two other boys and John LeBarron.

Q Were you wearing a bathing suit the entire hour?

A Yes.

Q What about the others?

A Everyone was wearing a suit.

Q Did the defendant touch you in anyway while you were at the pool?

A Yes.

Q Can you describe to the court how he touched you?

A He was standing in the four-foot area of the pool and asked me to come close to him.

Q Did you?

A Yes. I swam over to him.

Q Did he also ask the other boys to come to him?

A No. They stayed at the deep end, just horsing around in the water.

Q What happened next?

A He took me by the shoulders and turned me completely around. He then told me to cross my arms and use my left hand to support my right elbow, then pinch my nose with my right hand.

Q What did he say to you then?

A He told me to keep my mouth closed because he was going to dunk me and didn't want me to swallow water.

Q Did he handle you in an aggressive way?

A No. He grabbed me firmly but I didn't feel that he was being aggressive.

Q How did he grab you?

A He supported my back with his left arm and held his right hand across my hands when he dunked me.

Q Why did you let him do this?

A I thought it was a game.

Q Were you afraid?

A Not at all. I trusted him

Q How many times did he dunk you?

A Three times.

Q Did he say anything as he was dunking you?

A I could see his mouth moving when I was under water so I only heard a few words when I came up for air.

Q What words did you hear?

A Three words. Father. Son. Holy Spirit.

Q After swimming, did you shower and change in the locker room?

A No. John LeBarron said another group had the next hour and we just had time to towel off and put our street clothes on.

Q How did you get home?

A John LeBarron drove us home in his car. He dropped me off first.

Q Where did you boys sit?

A We were all in the back seat.

Q Did you boys talk to each other?

A They played rock-paper-scissors the whole time.

Q Why didn't you play?

A It's just a hand game for two people.

The blinding late afternoon sun became a safety hazard for drivers, including Jesse. The road they travelled was a single lane in either direction. There were several blind turns that caused havoc when Jesse drove out of them, heading in a westerly direction, unprepared for the sudden burst of blinding sunlight coming in two streams through his windshield. He reached over and grabbed his sunglasses out of the glove compartment, pulled down the peak of his baseball cap and dropped the sun visor each time he came out of a turn. He thought the limo driver was going too fast for the likes of this country road. Tractor-trailers whizzed by, heading in the opposite direction toward Route 94. He accelerated so he would not lose sight of the white chariot.

This harrowing part of the drive lasted a full fifteen minutes before Jesse started to feel confident again that he held the limo within his sights. He was about seventy-five yards behind the limo, and needed to catch up. As he approached the next westerly turn on an uphill grade and was just about to pull the visor down, he could see a semi swerve over the dividing line and shear the side view mirror off the limo. Shaken, the limo driver jerked the steering wheel, trying to turn sharply away from the truck. The vehicle fishtailed. Trying to compensate and regain control, the driver braked hard, causing the back gate to pop open. The driver of the truck never knew his trailer hit anything and just kept rolling along. The coffin, momentarily still on the cart, came flying out of the limo, bounced several times on the pavement, with chips of wood filling the air with a spray of splinters. On the second bounce the body rolled out of the coffin and fell into a gully beyond the shoulder. Then Jesse, frightened, saw the cart cascading toward him. He swerved to the right and stopped on the shoulder. He took several deep breaths and thought his pounding heart would explode out of his chest. He took another deep breath and saw Zach and the limo driver pick up the open casket, put it back into the vehicle, then drive off.

Did they not notice that the occupant of that casket was now lying in a ditch? Jesse had a decision to make, quickly. Catch up to them on this perilous road or recover the body. He made his decision. Driving slowly on the shoulder while looking to his right to see the spot where he thought

the body rolled into a ditch. He had made a mental note of the roadside sign that advertised the distance to several cemeteries. He knew with certainty that the body flew out of the coffin a few feet shy of that sign.

Jesse shut off the motor and sidled down the gully. For over an hour, the glaring sunlight beamed ahead of him every step he took, several particles of dust invaded his eyes and mouth, bent reeds smacked him in the face, and he had great difficulty navigating the uneven ground made hollow in places by voles digging holes. Despite the barriers, he trudged forward. The searing image of the man he once knew bounding and rolling on the asphalt assaulted his senses, yet he persisted, combing the area on foot, through thick, prickly brush, part of it marshy, his feet sinking into the moist earth every few steps as runoff water flowed between his unsteady legs through the culvert, toward the big river.

At this moment he made a conscious decision to abandon his fantasies, choke off the less concrete tributaries flowing into his being, to dam them up and grasp what is real and lasting. Exhausted, still shaken by what he just witnessed, he gathered himself and covered the same ground two more times with the same discouraging results.

He sat down on the water and picked the sticker burr weeds off his ankles, then realized he had lost one shoe in the marshy terrain. He was too tired to retrieve the shoe and too emotionally spent to hunt down the limo, which now transported an empty coffin. The sun that caused so many near misses on the road that afternoon started its descent. Jesse returned to his pick-up and headed back to the transfer point.

When he arrived, the homeless man was waiting for him, standing next to the bench. "Ecce homo," he said to the man.

"What does that mean?"

"If you know enough to call out Zachariah and Elijah, you know what those words mean."

The man looked at Jesse's feet and asked, "What happened to your other shoe?"

"It's a long story."

"Can I have that one?" pointing to Jesse's right foot.

"What good is one shoe?" Jesse inquired.

"One is better than none."

Jesse looked down at the man's feet and saw the man's swollen, fungus-infected toes poking through crudely made footwear, cobbled together from truck tire shards he salvaged from the highway overhead.

"Can you tell me anything about the people in that family?"

"A little bit, maybe. Which one?"

"Zach?"

"He is very tall."

"And dresses nicely," Jesse said.

"I guess you're right about that."

"How about his wife?"

"That's not his wife," the man said in a manner suggesting he expected Jesse to know the answer to the question beforehand. "She's his sister."

"How about the little girl?"

"I know her best," the man said, his eyes tearing.

"How so?" Jesse inquired.

After a moment's hesitation, the man lowered his head and cried, "I was hungry and she gave me something to eat."

With that, Jesse lost his composure and wept. He hugged the man, embracing him closely, despite the homeless man's noxious odor and head-to-toe filth.

When the men broke their embrace, Jesse looked at the bench. It was hand crafted out of alternating horizontal planks of cedar and cypress. There was no metal on any part of the bench. It was supported underneath by thick olivewood planks that were cross-beamed on either end. All joints were held together with hand carved wood pegs. Gourds, palm trees and open flowers were delicately carved into each plank, outlined on the edges with gold paint.

There was just a little light left to the day as Jesse noticed that one of the cedar planks was bereft of any carved figures. He looked at the man and, pressing his palm down upon the intended spot, asked, "May I carve some good words into this plank?"

"No you may not," the man said firmly. "This bench cannot be defiled".

"If I can guarantee you that it will be an improvement and not a defilement, will you trust me to do it?" There followed a moment of silence, indicating it was not worth considering rather than any actual consideration was even taking place. "You have no reason to trust me. That's why I'm giving you the keys to my truck," he said as he held out the keys, "and I'll walk home barefooted if you're not satisfied. Not only that. I'm a woodcarver, not by trade, but a pretty damn good one. It's too dark to carve now. I'll come back tomorrow with food, a pair of boots for you and I'll bring my tools along with a can of gold paint."

"Before we waste any more of each other's time, tell me the words you want to carve," demanded the man.

Jesse retrieved a piece of notepaper out of his truck and wrote these words for the man to approve: *The word of the Lord in your mouth is truth*. The man nodded his approval and handed the truck keys back to Jesse.

"I told you I would walk home so you would trust me," Jesse said, seriously.

"Keep your truck. What would I do with it? I got everything I need up there," he said as he pointed to his blue tarp home beneath the highway. "Besides, I don't think you'd last longer than two miles before you'd be pissing and moaning about your sore feet." The man turned and headed up to the incline. He turned around and asked Jesse, "So, did they find the cemetery all right?"

"Father John is right where he always wanted to be," Jesse said. "See you tomorrow."

The End

JACK DONAHUE is a poet, short story writer and playwright. His works have appeared in: *Bindweed* (Ireland); *Prole* (U.K.)*; Poetry Salzburg Review* (Austria)*; The Main Street Rag; Armarolla* (Cypress); *Opossum*; and others throughout North America, Europe and India. A number of his plays have been staged in several U.S. cities.

Is Not

a parliament is not democracy
a courthouse is not justice
a hospital is not health
a school is not education
a barracks is not security

institutions are but peopled rooms
malleable people, willful people
successive people manifesting
the soundness of their society
fortifying or undermining
the status received

- people who form the bricks
that vault them upwards
people who form the bricks
that bash them down -

stasis does not stand still
what is not broadening, shrinks
what is not ripening, rots
resting is not invigoration
catching our breaths
catches us red-handed

progress is not stable
wisdom is not fixed
safety is not inherited
renewal is not bequeathed

tradition is not guarantee
promise is not perpetual

LAURO PALOMBA has taught ESL and done stints as a freelance journalist and speechwriter. Approximately seventy of his stories and poems have appeared in American and Canadian literary journals.

Strawberry Wine

I have met myself again & this time I am just looking,
looking at it in Blaine Lesser Street, Montana. In our days
in green uniforms or something similar like slaked lime
with Jack-o'-lantern & Jack Russell the pure terrier in many questions
& song thrush, we pushed ahead, looking at ourselves together. But now, I am looking
at myself alone it swallows the clouds & the histories in the woods
& everything I am now, including small parcels of counties

it swallows shadows off-reservation trust

& swallows itself, I am just looking with Big Sky Country, a new lens,
I am this strawberry wine, looking at myself from The Treasure State,
I am back in the dark in the deep of my mind, my terrier starts the jarring
& the jaunt is shortened with private means, I am principal boy & the pantomime,
yes, I remember, I must remember, you end the son et lumière with song cycle,
the little white days among green ash, quaking aspen, Manitoba maple, American elm,
paper birch, bur oak, & balsam poplar, the vertical drops of 250 feet,
I stop here, where wild rice still growing in many of these waterways,
no lucrative pemmican, I am off the reservation roll,
I am landless & Blackfeet is not far from here

& the street is missing I am lost
maybe I am living inside its belly, this skull of strawberry flower smells

& finding a way out I dig for it & can I buy it? can I rebury a mind on Sitting Bull
when everywhere I dig it is too soft for the young parents who are stirring & leaning
forward on their chairs to look & listen to excel, has just seven times as much as to learn
as a native, there is a huge well I am filling it with my body maybe I am blown glass earrings
miniature statue or rug or our crude & garish climate having neither taste nor tact

I find myself standing elsewhere between memory & imagination
eating my rice and soup I carry I see this moonlight floating in this street it
swallows itself it
swallows everything this shampoo this shaving cream

it is dressed in shirt jacket trousers and shoes still standing in front of the library.
Wieviel kostet der Eintritt? Es ist besetzt. Ist es eine direkte Verbindung?
Ich möchte aussteigen. I still see with your eyes going blind
& shall my pot-pourri outgo me when it plants its sore in my throat?
I am just looking outside my body where it is still raining

It is raining, yes, it is raining & I am just looking at myself in front of myself.

Notes

"it swallows shadows off-reservation trust" is changed to
"it overstretches everything beyond the reservation trust"

"yes, I remember! In fact, I must remember your end, the son et lumière with song cycle," is corrected.
"son et lumière" is a noun, origin, French, "sound and light", meaning: "an entertainment held by night at a historic building, telling its history by the use of lighting effects and recorded sound", according a dictionary.

"Wieviel kostet der Eintritt?" is in German, meaning: "How much is it to get in?" I use a bit of German in my work for the readers in the North Dakota, especially, for those in the Turtle Mountain.
"Es ist besetzt." Meaing: "It is engaged."
"Ist e seine direkte Verbindung?" Meaning: "Is it a direct route?"

"Ich mochte aussteigen!" Meaning: "I want to get off!"

"pot-pourri" is a noun, origin, French, "rotten pot", meaning: 1,"a mixture of dried petals and spices placed in a bowl to perfume a room", 2,"a mixture of things"

Relief, a Sculpture

Rocks flower, wrapped in cocoons,
anthills bleed honey & all belly wetting
& stinking in bum, a different body,
a different state of light, glistening.

Rivers on the feet running
into the same tones
as the heart beating in the clay
along the side of breathing roots,
shades are dragging down down
down & the whole day is
replacing
the broken floor,
my memories become stones',
the whole town
is flooded.

I am waste water,
I am full,

acquaintance develops & I cannot stretch
my body bending,

I am not sure
how long

I am staying here,

it is Tuesday morning
& the room needs

to be cleaned

in the room I am.

Mid-August, Turtle Mountain

A street, the mammoth size.

Black rainclouds.
Dawn has been broken.

A bridge,
lying between
the two preceding days rises.

Over the little dooryard in the light breeze
the reaming hours follow,

a wooden door creaking
and I am at home.

JACOB KOBINA AYIAH MENSAH is the author of new hybrid works, *The Sun of a Solid Torus*, *Conductor 5,* etc. His poems are recently appearing in *Rigorous, Beautiful Cadaver Project Pittsburgh, The Meadow, Cathexis Northwest Press, etc.* He is algebraist and lives in Ghana, Spain, and Turtle Mountains, North Dakota.

Chronoscope 126: The moon, the closest orbit

The moon, the closest orbit
shines Mercury dime bright:
a highlight of clouds.

Soon it will pass
right behind us:
soon it will jaundice:
soon it will be
like it won't be again
for eighteen years:
you, seventy-two,
me, sixty-seven.

Soon we will step outside
every fifteen minutes
to watch our shadow turn
the moon sepia and sanguine.

And we will listen:
the sweetgrass you planted:
the big pot that guards
the patio edge:
the way the heads feather
topheavy, soft
almost purple:
a sway of autumn weight:
like underwater
like caressing
like stream stone polish sand
like sifting rice
like breathed deep medicine:
the burden of cycles.

JOHN WALSER, an associate professor of English at Marian University-Wisconsin, holds a doctorate in English/Creative Writing from UW-Milwaukee. His poems have appeared in numerous journals, including *Spillway, Mantis* and *the Normal School,* as well as in the anthology *New Poetry from the Midwest 2017*. A three-time semifinalist for the Pablo Neruda Prize, he is currently submitting three full-length manuscripts for publication. His *Edgewood Orchard Galleries* has been a finalist for the Autumn House Press Poetry Prize (2016) as well as a semifinalist for both the Philip Levine Prize (2016 and 2017) and the Crab Orchard Series First Book Award (2017 and 2018).

SPECIAL SECTION

Humanities in the Age of Austerity

Images of Austerity

In an era of legislative cutbacks in higher education funding, universities such as the University of North Dakota (UND) adapt and persevere under the shadow of austerity. The photographs that interleave with the essays in the final section of this volume of *North Dakota Quarterly* offer a view of the impact of austerity on the buildings associated with Wesley College, once located on the UND campus. Formerly, Wesley College was a thriving Methodist institution that cooperated with its neighbor, UND. In the 1960s, Wesley College sold its campus to UND, which maintained the buildings until 2018 when they became another victim of campus downsizing. Throughout their century of use, the Wesley buildings experienced a series of transformative changes. In advance of the buildings' demolition, a small team dedicated itself to recording their history and architecture.

The Wesley College Documentation Project focused on documenting the changes to Sayre, Larimore, Corwin, and Robertson Halls. I was tasked with taking film photographs that encapsulated their story. The idea of using film for this project was fitting to capture the old buildings with an old-fashioned, yet charismatic format. On the one hand, I wanted my photographs to capture the last breaths of Wesley College and showcase their awkward limbo between abandonment and demolition—not necessarily gone, but at the same time a shadow of their former selves. On the other hand, I wanted to capture how these buildings represented or embodied austerity amid the ever-changing cogs and gears that make up a university campus. The outcome was a semi-coherent blending of the two ideas that paints a picture of an evolving campus. The collection showcases a feeling of abandonment, as there were still so many signs of life in the buildings before their destruction, and also communicates the tangible connection to Wesley College that our team felt by the end of the project.

The university could not reshape the Wesley College buildings into a useful space on campus amidst increasing budget cuts. The burden of their cost outweighed their rich history. In the small time frame between its abandonment and its destruction, Wesley College displayed to us what it truly was—a place of beauty and excitement scarred by the passing

of time. I intended for these photographs to be *doing* something: telling their unfinished story. Although the buildings may be gone, it is the hope of many that their history will live on through the material we gathered, the photographs we took, and the stories we uncovered.

WYATT ATCHLEY was born and raised in Cambridge, MN and is a student at the University of North Dakota studying history and Classical studies. This is the first published collection of his photographs.

Citizen Vova

An inexhaustible curiosity, as I saw it, kept him alive. Everyone, including me, called him Vova. During the winter of 1993, I lived as part of his family in the Moldovan city of Bălți, where I was a guest professor at the State Pedagogical University, Alec Russo. As I creep nearer to a sixth decade and continue to fill my shoebox of obits, I return to that winter and, more often than I like to admit, to what I think of as my Hamlet question. I suppose I must. Cogito, ergo sum and all that. Thing is, does one person's life even matter? Such a query was one Vladimir Aladin, ever curious, would have very much appreciated.

Recovering from pneumonia, I slept in his son Sasha's bedroom as if it were an infirmary. As a way to tutor each other, everyone in the Aladin family spoke only Russian on Tuesdays and Thursdays. On Mondays and Fridays, we spoke Romanian. English was reserved for Wednesdays and Saturdays.

Languages were not Vova's métier, but as loyal husband and father he gave it his best shot, mumbling at dinner to say "friend" in English, or "acquaintance" in Romanian. A math whiz who tinkered with small appliances, Vova could comfortably argue Lenin versus Stalin in Russian, and it was impossible for me to beat him in games of chess, but I sensed he didn't value those skills as necessary for his children to excel in future endeavors. When it came to English, however, he was happy to see his children gain fluency.

After serving a required two years in the Soviet army and graduating from Moscow State University, Vova met Elena, his future bride, while vacationing in Saint Petersburg. She was studying languages there and would graduate with fluency in Russian, Romanian, English, German, and French. During the summer after Elena's graduation, they married and moved to Moldova where they had both been born, and Elena was hired as an English professor at Alecu Russo State University. This was a hopeful time for newlyweds, both of them entering the work force as Mikhail Gorbachev was coming into power. After teaching for two years, Elena took maternity leave and gave birth to Sasha. A year later, Katrina, was born. To marry young, Vova explained, was the norm. Three years older than Elena, he had married at twenty-five.

Vova expressed his endearing intellectual curiosity in subtle ways. At the dinner table by candlelight, he would challenge Sasha by jotting out trigonometry problems on a scrap of paper. The unflinching intellectual curiosity that I saw in Vova burned just as brightly within his son. The pair would get lost solving a mathematical problem I couldn't begin to decipher. There was no TV in the apartment, and unannounced power blackouts happened at all hours and never lasted the same amount of time.

With his thorough knowledge of physics, chemistry, and mathematics, it seemed to me a waste that Vova's first job in Moldova was as a tractor mechanic. Once the Soviet Union dissolved, so did Moldova's tractor factories. Vova then worked briefly as a farmer in his mother-in-law's village—yet who *didn't* in an agrarian country where nearly everyone grew their own food? He then became a welder and did that until acetylene and electricity, both shipped in from Russian-controlled Soviet-era plants, became as rare as gasoline, meaning they were impossible to find outside of a black market controlled by an increasingly militant and growing Chechen mafia. Vova admitted without pride that he was employed as an engineer at a small factory that didn't design or make anything. He wasn't even sure if the factory had a name.

Individuals, especially men of Vova's age, were getting piled on the post-Soviet scrap heap like so many corpses at a mass grave. Vova was expected to show up at the factory that employed him whether or not there was electricity or work to be done. In his unassuming way, he went on foot or took the trolley bus if available. He explained that his job was a twisted game. If he didn't show up to do nothing, he'd be fired. Nine months might pass before he was paid, yet why should he be paid, he asked me, for doing nothing?

Even if paid, his salary would not cover his debts and basic expenses. Elena suffered the same treatment, earning about $40 per month, while Vova's salary was closer to $60 per month. They were supposed to pay rent, but Moldova had no currency, only coupons, and none of its banks had money, and privatization wasn't in place yet, so to whom would they pay rent? They were supposed to pay for electricity they didn't have, too, but they wouldn't have it until they paid for it. Natural gas was out of the question because Russia had decided to shut off all supply lines. Elena likened all this to theatre of the absurd.

It wasn't lost on me that they were spending hard-earned coupons to have a fresh lemon with tea each morning, if they could find either of

these commodities. Borscht and a loaf of bread, if available, meant a big dinner. One of Vova's duties was to spend hours each day bundled in his Soviet-issue blue coat and rabbit-fur hat waiting in line to purchase that bread. On many nights he arrived home empty-handed, looking morose, his face bleak with cold.

I tried to give Vova American dollars. He refused them. So did Elena. Rather than embarrass them, I left Moldovan coupons around the apartment and pretended they weren't mine. I think Sasha scooped them up and stored them in a jar.

Vova was unusual in that he drank rarely and only cognac. He didn't like vodka and he never faltered in his hyper-alert attention to acting as a role model for his children. I saw in him how unjust many stereotypes of the Soviet citizen had been. I found it easy to see the light that shone in his rheumy gray eyes when he arrived home after a long day spinning his wheels in a dank chilly factory. He enjoyed listening to spirited conversations between his wife and children. Sometimes, not often, there was laughter.

Before each dinner, we practiced a ritual of moving furniture to set up the table, turning living room into kitchen. Afterwards, the table was folded and stored against a wall. The couch was later opened into a bed. Normally, this was where Katrina slept—essentially her bedroom. During my convalescence, she slept in her parents' bed with her mother. Vova moved to the small living room and shared the pull-out bed with Sasha.

In that three-room apartment this was an uncomfortable arrangement for the family, but none complained. I felt guilty about this and told Elena, who told me not to worry, that she and Vova had experienced much worse and I should respect just how ill I was.

Elena was right. For my first two weeks in her apartment, I had seethed through a prolonged fever nightmare in Sasha's bed, shivering, boiling, sweating, and lacking enough strength to walk out of the room. Few things are worse than getting seriously ill alone in a country far from home. Elena nursed me back to health, burying me under as many blankets and small carpets known as *kilims* as she could find, forcing me to drink hot tea and a Moldovan remedy of heated red wine laced with sugar.

As I began to recover strength, eating steamy hot bowls of kasha with salt, I ventured out with Vova to walk Independence Street, a wide pedestrian concourse that up until 1991 had been called Lenin Street. Bălți epitomized the Soviet planned city, and the fountain that centered wide Independence Street stood as a showpiece in front of the former Soviet

headquarters that still had the faces of Marx, Lenin, and Engels in stone bas-relief above its broad-shouldered pink limestone entryway.

The fountain didn't function. Nothing did. Like most city residents, Vova walked the concourse daily. Neither a tall nor imposing figure, he stood upright, arms locked behind his back, and greeted politely every passing resident he was acquainted with. His apartment building, built pre-Khrushchev era and one of the more solid limestone blocks in a city roughly 700 years old, occupied one corner of Pushkin Street and Independence Street, not far from where a new landmark, Andy's Pizza, draws many young residents today.

Once bundled up, he'd hazard the treads of a frigid stairwell and venture out with his kids until satisfied that they were safely off to school on foot with other classmates. He'd then walk to his trolley bus stop. Elena would leave a short while later, walking one block to her job at the university. The idea of a car, or to even talk of one, struck me as sadly ridiculous.

Still prone to shivering while sheathed in layers, when I walked with Vova he would take my left arm and link it firmly to his right arm, keeping my body snug against his. I found this remarkably comforting, an intimate sexless old-world way of expressing publicly our solidarity and budding friendship.

Under his outsized brown rabbit-fur *shapka*, his pink features never seemed to mind the cold. Introducing me as if I were family each time he greeted friends and acquaintances, he displayed such care in his use of Russian and courtesy, extending to the public arena his parental example of behaving as a model of propriety. In this way, I came to meet many city residents in a short period of time. They often asked how I liked Bălți. Rarely was anyone indifferent or in too much of a hurry. There were never smiles or big handshakes in these daily interactions. However briefly expressed, there was an intensity of interest that I found disarming but never offensive. This was how one learned one's community. I was the disoriented one, not any of them, and so what if they were suspicious of my intentions. I did my best to answer a variety of questions. A few who spoke English did not ask if but *when* I'd come to their apartment for dinner, applying the guilt-inducing reminder, "We're waiting for you."

Vova never spoke for me. Nor would he correct my errors in Russian. He'd remark to others how impressed he was with my Romanian. He'd seen me so weak I'd been unable to stand. He knew I wore a brave face in public as the city's first and only American resident. I'd been told one other American had been to the city, a missionary, and one of my students

had been his translator. I felt uncomfortable with and undeserving of this minor claim to fame.

What helped was that I embraced meeting strangers and stumbling through either Russian or Romanian, depending on the stranger's politics or ethnicity. Though I wanted to project an image of healthy good will, my runny eyes and perpetually sore throat made that impossible. Everyone, it seemed, knew who I was, yet I believed I was nobody. Did these people really hold the United States in such high regard? I felt like the product of an infatuation which I suspected would not last. I heard often that with my dark hair I looked like a young Moldovan, which given my Italian heritage was understandable. To the students, Kevin Costner from *The Bodyguard* I was not, but they didn't seem to care. My being there, I suppose, smelled of hope and confirmed that their little republic was not going to be the iron-walled behemoth it had been for their parents.

I shared these observations to Vova one morning. He nodded sedately, walking close to my side, taking my arm. He guided me along, protecting me from the wild dogs that ran the streets in packs. We saw them daily. Sometimes, they'd rear up on their hind legs and fight each other, gnashing their fangs. Other pedestrians would gather and watch in horror. Vova would coolly steer me in another direction.

He asked me about family life in America. "A man without family is nothing," he said.

So, a person must play a role. One must work, create, or else manage and instruct. Otherwise, of what value did one possess? This question plagued me then, still plagues me now. I did my best to dissect and approach it in Russian. I was more comfortable in Romanian, but Vova hadn't mastered that language, though in his newly independent Moldova, he now needed it to keep his job. This troubled him. All his life, Russian had been Moldova's official state language, not Romanian. Many Soviet Russians had denounced Romanian as *Moldavski*, calling it a kitchen language, using Cyrillic for all municipal signs in Romanian and hence bastardizing the language in ways that native Moldovans and Romanians found offensive.

West of the Dniester River, newly democratic Moldova had declared Romanian its mother tongue. Starting in 1991, on August 31 each year they celebrated Day of Our Language. Once known as Bessarabia, Moldova had a tortured history of being forced to accept conquering cultures and tongues. Vova spoke about how his lack of Romanian shamed him and many of his Moldovan-born friends. Many ethnic Russians had

intermarried with Moldovans, but many also labeled Moldovans goats and pigs, idiomatic slurs that translated to shitheads and fat slobs. Centuries before, Moldova had been part of Romania, its blood ancestry tied to Rome. It had also been ruled by Ottoman Turks, so it was no small act to speak Romanian as a declaration of independence from its most recent conquerors, the Soviets.

Vova would get philosophical and ask me if America was really independent, and if such a state for any nation was even possible. He hoped for his children's sake that it might be, but he confessed to being a realist. Throughout its long history, Moldova had never known true independence. The country lacked a seaport, a big military, and it offered few raw materials. The Soviets had annexed it for exotic fruits, nuts, brandy, cognac, and wine. In exchange, needing support, Moldova enjoyed the benefits of Russia's inexpensive and diverse raw materials.

When I asked Vova to tell me more about his job, he dismissed the topic. I never learned what his factory made. Maybe he wasn't joking. Maybe they didn't make a thing.

He spoke fondly and with a trace of nostalgia about inexpensive rail travel, vacationing in the Crimea and Odessa, his younger days in Moscow and Saint Petersburg where he'd soaked up Russia's great culture and traditions, and how hard it was to hate Russians, even if both his parents had died by Stalin's hands. He couldn't say with any certainty how they'd died. They'd just disappeared one day. He'd been a child. His brother and grandmother had raised him, both of whom were now dead.

Hate simply wasn't in him. Throughout the Cold War, he never felt hate for an American.

"Then what did you feel?" I asked.

"Curiosity."

"That was dangerous then," I said.

"I know, and it still is."

He didn't say anything more. He didn't need to. Curiosity was a source of heat, a big part of what defined him, along with his steady practice of fulfilling duties, playing his role in the family, holding to the shredded remains of Moldovan customs. There weren't very many nights when he came home with two loaves of bread, known as bricks, in his cloth sack. Still, he remained animated, removed coat, gloves, and hat. Rubbed his hands to warm them before he took off his boots and placed them by the door with everyone else's shoes. This was Moldovan custom, rigidly upheld. He'd fulfilled his duty, and on some nights when there was bread, he

had to slice at least one "brick" he'd brought home while his children did homework and his wife set the table. Would I like to join him as he treated himself to 100 grams of cognac?

Most of the time, no matter how long Vova waited in line, there wasn't any bread. This meant returning his cloth sack, empty, to its place near his coat. Still, the children did their homework. Still, he remained animated. Was this the promise of democracy? Why had his country been torn apart by a civil war? His duty as a father was to procure bread. A man hunted and gathered. As long as he had duties, he felt important, necessary. I thought of my own father who struggled to find time for us while growing up. He was working constantly to provide, justifying his existence.

If Elena wanted a luxury such as butter, either she or Vova had to hike out to the *tolchock* (the black market) held once a week at the edge of the city. Due to the fuel shortage, buses didn't run there. They had to get lucky there, as well, and nothing was guaranteed. Vova often made this journey alone on a Saturday. Though both of them were professed atheists, with religion coming back into vogue and talk of churches getting rebuilt, they adhered to resting on Sunday. We'd take two walks that day. One with the kids before a mid-day dinner, and one after without them.

Elena, like most Moldovan women, shopped almost daily and made small purchases. Without electricity or reliable fridges, stocking up on perishable food wasn't common practice. After teaching, she purchased in the afternoon what she hoped to prepare that evening. We sat through many dark nights and ate from jars of tomatoes that Elena had grown and pickled at her mother's house in the country. In the central market, Elena bought when possible a salty white cheese called *brînză* made from sheep's milk. She'd buy jars of sour cream, if available, made by village women. This went with the potatoes she and Vova had grown at her mother's. She kept a bucket of them, along with homegrown onions, garlic, beets, carrots, and cabbage on the tiny balcony that acted as a refrigerator.

Once a month she and Vova would ride the one diesel train that ran to her mother's village to re-fill large sacks with more of such food. The train stopped running, though, so they'd taken to walking the twelve miles if only to check on Elena's mother, who had no phone or indoor plumbing in her home. If Elena stocked up on anything, it was the bags of kasha and rice she'd find at the central outdoor market. If she bought beef or sausage, she'd cook it as soon as there was electricity, no matter the time

of day. Forget about milk. There wasn't any. I'd insist on giving her money. At first, she'd refused, but with time she softened her stance.

Staying warm without electricity meant keeping the floors and walls, if possible, covered with Moldovan-made wool carpets. Once a week, Vova would roll them up and carry them one at a time out to the square courtyard between his block building and those that neighbored it. There, in full view of all neighbors, he hung the carpets over a raised steel bar and proceeded to whack them with a large round paddle. This was routine practice. Not a day passed when I didn't hear the sound of repeated whacks rising out of the courtyard to echo off the walls between grey multi-storied limestone buildings all the same height. If not a dutiful Moldovan man or woman, sometimes a boy or girl was spanking those carpets. Everyone did their part.

Again, purpose. Duties. Curiosity. Reasons to stay alive.

Vova also checked to make sure the natural gas tank for his building hadn't rusted to the point that it might leak. All such tanks remained empty. He shared a rumor that only one building in a city of roughly 200,000 had natural gas. It was home to a despotic former KGB operative with ties to the Russian oligarchs. Essentially, a new Democrat by name.

"You see," he told me. "This is how independence works here."

Water was another issue. At sunrise and once again after dark, Vova walked to a well in the center of a neighboring courtyard. He carried a galvanized metal bucket. He'd fill it from the well, no matter how cold or windy. I'd join him sometimes, the wind whistling and slicing through the alleys between buildings, and dogs in feral packs snarling out of the darkness.

With no light except for the moon on clear nights, Vova lugged his two-gallon bucket across the hardpan of the courtyard encased under layers of ice hidden under layers of snow. Each time I joined him, no matter how careful, I either slipped or wiped out completely. He never laughed at me. Nor did he ever insist I join him. "Winter," he explained, "is even harder in Russia, but that's how I learned."

Complain? Never. Elena often told me he was a good man, that he'd been punished by political winds of change. The more I saw Vova in action, the better I came to understand this. How did he do it? In his professional life, he had to feel unfulfilled. Did countries collapse or did they endure shifts in their power bases, ideals, and methods? Studying Vova, I saw that what collapsed and provided the most danger was the spirit

inside a person, proving that people and not their governments defined a country.

Through his diligent show of integrity in the face of tectonic political shifts, Vova reinforced libertarian seeds in me. All of thirty-two at the time and in the first blush of any interest in geopolitics, I began to experience a slow turning away from liking the idea of a maternal government, no matter its allegations of generosity. As an individual I had to find self-worth in supporting loved ones, a career, or a spiritual life. No nation could be a guiding hand that replaced family or God.

Citizens like Vova, once touted and lionized as Working Men in the Soviet machinery and all the propaganda that went with it, had become dispensable cogs. As a globalized new century approached, nations would become increasingly interconnected and therefore would have no use for solitary actors, no matter how dutiful or honest. They would have to be part of an institution or a corporation.

Unless he or she found gainful ways to create or repair something, or else filled a role that defined reasons for living, no one person mattered. Naturally, this thought provided little comfort. I began to feel what I see in retrospect was an irritating shift, a maturation that I tried to fend off. I was moving away from youthful left-leaning naïve political beliefs grounded in assumptions that the best governments of any kind anywhere served as benevolent caregivers. Decades later, I remain irritated and conflicted when it comes to thinking maturely about governments and ideologies and their roles in any empirical or practical sense. My rugged individualism, I suppose, has firmly defined me as American. I'm not prone to jumping on bandwagons or supporting trendy programs that will feed us all and pave our roads at the same time. Nor am I enamored with the endless and bloated military-industrial-paranoiac funding to extinguish amorphous global enemies such as drugs, dictatorial threats, and terrorism. Frankly, I'm still not sure what I believe about politics, though I never think along party lines. I trust my skepticism, and I doubt that entirely benevolent governments exist at all, anywhere on the globe. Some government employees, be they senators or governors, may be kind and incorruptible. Some PR machines and propaganda campaigns are better than others at creating an illusion of caring stewardship that provides solutions which might transcend any existential threat. If I take a more adult view of geopolitics now, it's simply because my experience, starting with my close observation of Vova, has taught me to lower expectations and to respect the ways any individual achieves peace of mind, an edu-

cation, and any form of status or advancement within a society in spite of the political situation. Could a small nation state such as Moldova do anything more than erode, if not perish, without being attached to, dependent on, and indebted to a larger one? Without a friendly relationship to Russia, where would Moldovans turn to for help? To Romania? Perhaps, and there was a Big Romania political party that wanted this, but the Romanians had their own excess of messy problems.

So the Soviet Union was no more. Fine. Big ideological theories didn't matter. Not true. They had to matter. In Vova's case, one governing idea had changed, and he had to adjust to not knowing what it was going to be replaced with. As if he mattered. As if he was doomed to fail—and I think he sensed this—because any nation-state fails its citizens when it neglects to celebrate them as worthy individuals and doesn't offer at least primary ways to gain self-respect. I told Vova I envisioned Moldova as drowning in its uncertainties, a puppet trapped between emptiness and empires, needing to find either a Russian hand to assist her or a European one. He agreed with me, calling independence both a curse and a deception.

"But I don't want to go back to what we had," he said. "Nobody here does. We want to make something new and better."

Vova thought tirelessly about these large complex issues. When we discussed them it was on a primitive level. I could open up more with Elena in English, but she preferred American literature and English grammar to ruminations on political science. At the same time, she translated for me when Vova was burning to share some doubts and insights. As much as rest, hot tea, and friendship, it was this concerned thinking, these big-picture discussions with Vova and Elena, that helped me return to health.

As I grew less dependent and started teaching again, I saw each night in Vova's face less certainty, less calm, and less of a sense of wellness. Here was T.S. Eliot's patient etherized on a table—one who had realized his life, as dreamed of, was over, even while he clung to hopes that life would be better for his children. So much despair, I thought. Who back in the United States will get this?

Vova also began to share a reasonable nostalgia for certain reliable if not primitive elements of the old Soviet Union. He hadn't had any way of life to compare to his own, so he'd never known what he'd been missing. Now he wasn't sure of what he had. For his generation, stability had vanished. I saw in him a profound sadness as if he knew he'd outlived his era.

This is how I'm feeling these days, and what's led me to these recollections of Vova. I've been back to Moldova a handful of times and seen its

changes, some for the better, some not. Many young people live for one thing—to get the hell out. The more I study other nations, the more I realize young Moldovans are not alone in this desire. I need look no further than the recent floods of refugees to Europe.

Vova was wise to know that larger geopolitical issues might cease thwarting his ambitions, but they would not, as they'd done to some of his friends, lead to self-destructive impulses. I watched him seated at dinner and I saw a man enduring a winter that had made him grow increasingly pensive and sullen. Yet in spite of disappointments, he and his ever generous and adorable wife had jobs, and his children were healthy.

He wasn't the last man in that country to tell me, "This democracy, I fear all it means is we'll soon be forced to think about nothing more than money."

So cold indoors and no electricity. Candles burned on the table, casting our faces in a honeyed glow. Vova asked for the word for bread in English. His eyes sharpened as I told him, but he didn't repeat the word.

Elena woke me early the next morning and hurried me to dress and join Vova, who was already bundled up.

"Bread," said Vova. He repeated it twice, as if pleased to display he'd summoned the will to risk embarrassment. Elena, standing near him, rose to her toes and caressed his cheek.

Vova adjusted his fur *shapka* until it fit tightly on his head. He sat on the family stool where he put on his boots. He opened the apartment's thick door padded in black vinyl on both sides. The hallway, still dark and cold, smelled of boiled cabbage. We heard a cat meowing. Vova blushed as Elena fussed with his blue overcoat to make sure it was buttoned all the way. She told him in Russian his English pronunciation was good. She didn't correct it. She asked him to say it again, and he said "bread" one more time.

I shot him a thumbs-up. He appeared to like this gesture, but he didn't smile. Striking a deadpan note infused with wisdom, he said in Russian, "Bread in life, it's not a false equation. We have bread today, so I can think for now that we have everything, even if we don't."

That was Vova—everyman, realist, father, husband, and gently stoic agent of endurance and frustration. I didn't weep in 2011 when I learned he'd died. His life was tragic, but the way he'd lived it, ever curious, unwilling to shut himself down, raising two children, befriending someone like myself, loving Elena in a marriage he'd nurtured for multiple decades in the face of so much raw discomfort—all this made him a hero to me, and

I'm not one, as you might guess, who believes easily in heroes. I lack his obit for my shoe box. I don't know where Elena and the children live. Perhaps in Chisinau, Moldova's capital city. Perhaps somewhere in Europe. Not in Bălți, since during my last visit I asked around and learned the family had left the city and Elena's mother had died. No one could tell me where they had gone. I also don't know where he's buried or how old he was at his death, maybe sixty but not sixty-five. That age seems young to me now, and if I weep eventually, it will be over the cruel way his life devolved, making him in so many ways dispensable. I can't weep now, and I may never, and I don't think he'd want me to. So instead, in my mind I not only remain curious about everything, I host parades each day, along with firework displays and all-night parties in his honor. He and I attend these fabulous ribbon-cutting ceremonies that I invent to honor imaginary new factories where each worker will have to do more than show up and sleepwalk through a shift. These workers not only know, they cherish the products made there.

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Creative Writing in the Shadow of Austerity

On April 15, 2018, Andrew Sean Greer received the Pulitzer Prize in Fiction for his novel *Less*, which the Pulitzer website praises as a "generous book, musical in its prose and expansive in its structure and range, about growing older and the essential nature of love." Only a day later, Greer's MFA program at the University of Montana was on the brink of death. The university's president, Seth Bodnar, announced a tentative "Strategy for Distinction" that would slash program budgets and eliminate at least fifty faculty positions over a three-year period. The strategy's preliminary recommendations would reduce the English department's faculty from 21.5 full-time equivalent positions to 15.5. While none of those reductions specifically targeted Montana's creative writing program, the reduced faculty wouldn't bode well for a rapidly greying program. The *Missoulian* summarized the dire prognosis delivered by Montana creative writing professor Judy Blunt: "In the past, 10 full-time faculty taught three genres of creative writing: fiction, non-fiction and poetry. In the fall, Blunt said, just one fiction professor will teach half time, she will teach one non-fiction course and try to direct the program, and one faculty member, a poet, will teach full time" (qtd. in Szpaller, "University of Montana"). Blunt came shy of confronting a grim truth: if the university wants to cut faculty, retirements would only help their cause.

In short, the creative writing program at Montana—one of the oldest in the nation and once a top-ten program—is two retirements from dimming its lights and shuttering its windows.

This sends a disturbing message about alumni success: in short, it doesn't matter what students do after graduation. (Although, there are universities that would salivate over having a Pulitzer Prize-winning alum. I can attest to that: I have an MA in English from Bucknell, which made much over the mentor-student dynamic between Jack Wheatcroft and Philip Roth, may they both rest in peace.) It's not as if Greer is the only marquee writer to graduate from Montana. Amongst others, their alums include Amanda Eyre Ward, J. Robert Lennon, Sandra Alcossar, and *The New Yorker*'s William Finnegan. By cutting its ties with alums and dismantling a program that prepared so many writers for success, the

university also undercuts recruitment efforts, preemptively signaling to prospective students that support for their ambitions is negligible.

Faculty at Montana have already panned Bodnar's "Strategy for Distinction" as a "strategy for extinction"—which it certainly is. The dark humor of academics aside, the strategy functions to preserve the university's corporate existence, rather than its role as a purveyor of knowledge. Capital and production have replaced the human component of the university—a fitting prelude to our present era, in which the sitting American president touts his record of railing against the arts and basic human rights on a daily basis.

But the strategy is hardly new. Bodnar's recommendations to decrease the faculty and effectively sunset academic programs mirrors the austerity rhetoric that administrators, bureaucrats, and elected officials have adopted since the 2008 financial crisis. Reporting for *The Atlantic* in 2013, Heidi Tworek applies a subtle skepticism to the austerity politics of Patrick McCrory, then the governor of North Carolina: "McCrory stated in January 2013 that he planned to change the state's legislation on higher education funding so that 'it's not based on butts in seats but on how many of those butts get jobs,'" Tworek writes. "Like other critics, McCrory did not want taxpayers to subsidize subjects that did not *seem* to lead directly to students securing a job" (emphasis mine). These arguments have a bit of inside help from faculty in management, econ, or business. Take, for instance, this fine bit of pandering from Douglas Reynolds, Professor of Economics at the University of Alaska-Fairbanks: "When severe budget cuts are needed due to financial crises, then all institutions are forced to cut back and reduce their scope of work. Such budget cuts, then, require that society question the purpose of institutions, such as universities" (146).

More recently, in a crisis spanning late 2017 and 2018, Governor Matt Bevin of Kentucky delivered a state budget that threatened to wipe out the University Press of Kentucky, one of the primary (and essential) publishers of research on the state's history, culture, and literatures. (Longtime readers of *North Dakota Quarterly* know that administrative threats like this have teeth: in August 2016, the University of North Dakota eliminated the journal's entire operating budget, despite its eighty-three years of success.) According to Rick Seltzer of *Inside Higher Ed*, Bevin urged cuts to programs that don't graduate students in high-income career fields; he reportedly told the Governor's Conference on Postsecondary Education

Trusteeship to "[f]ind entire parts of your campus . . . that don't need to be there."

The same principles have blighted the University of Wisconsin system. Wisconsin-Stevens Point has proposed a plan that would slash thirteen majors, including history and English. Wisconsin-Superior has initiated phase-outs of two dozen programs for the baffling reason that robust course offerings riddle students with too many options. Here's Katherine Mangan, reporting on that for the *Chronicle*:

> The programs were being phased out, the university said, as part of a streamlining process to make it easier for students to graduate on time. First-generation students, who make up 46 percent of the student body, tend to get overwhelmed by too many course offerings, university administrators said. As a result, they added, students often make bad decisions that cause them to take too many credits, incur too much debt and take too long to graduate.

Foisting debt and what are, frankly, academic advising questions onto students: this is the moment in a faculty meeting when someone would kick a table leg and string together some choice epithets. Yes, the American university has long modeled itself after the production line, as if you can "streamline" the student experience as if it were an automotive assembly line. But streamlined knowledge is surface knowledge only. It does little to outfit the mind for the complex, mutable economy of the twenty-first century.

The peril of Montana's MFA program follows these recent trends, but that doesn't forgive Seth Bodnar's ambivalence—if not antipathy—toward the values expressed in creative writing pedagogy. In a May 2018 statement, the Association of Writers and Writing Programs (AWP) came to the Montana MFA program's defense and championed creative writing "as being of vital importance to our social identity, cohesion, and flourishing." Without explicitly offering this directive, though, AWP alerted allies of the humanities to remain vigilant. The situation at Montana could escalate, or that ideology could spread, if humanists and artists stopped advocating for the values of creative expression, inclusivity, and a democratic civil society. AWP's May 2018 statement reads:

> This is not only about the University of Montana. Cuts to creative writing programs threaten our collective efforts to cultivate an articulate, expressive, enlightened, and engaging national culture—a

> culture of decency, creativity, delight, and dignity—in which creativity and expression across all of the arts is an integral part of who we are and what we value. The place of quality in creative writing in North America calls out for a robust defense, and AWP looks to our membership to make our voices heard.

AWP's statement, signed by interim director Chloe Schwenke, is right to mention values. Because that's precisely what's at conflict *and* at stake: the corporate university's attachment to the bottom line versus the humanities' dedication to citizenship, education, and lifelong learning.

The repercussions of this clash of values shudder throughout the university in the form of debates on faculty size, hires, student-to-faculty ratios, course offerings, mandatory enrollments, and the future of programs. It's no different for creative writing programs. Indeed—as Judy Blunt suggested in her comments to the *Missoulian*—it takes very little to contaminate the fragile ecosystem of a creative writing program, of any program. A few years can destroy a program built up (and celebrated) over decades.

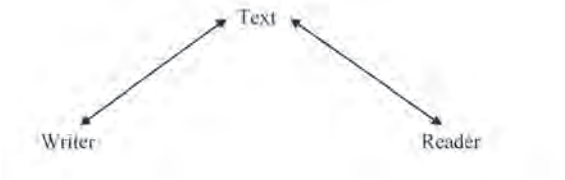
My contention here isn't that creative writing programs differ in kind from other humanities initiatives. But the creative workshop is my environment: I'm a fiction writer, critic, and editor who has experienced some rewarding, inspiring moments in the creative writing classroom. Those moments arise from the values of creative writing, literary studies, and the humanities—the capacity for language, art, and text to network the experiences and thoughts of writers and readers. "The humanities teach what it means to be human," writes Cynthia Nazarian, an early modernist at Northwestern, in an op-ed for *The Hill*, "and the liberal arts can still teach what it means to be free."

In the syllabus for each of my creative writing courses, I include a reference to these values in the course description and the learning objectives. The language might refer to "literary citizenship," "the workshop community," "a community of writers and readers," "service to the literary community," or some other variation, depending upon the exact class. Skeptics—administrators, non-readers, students enrolled for a fine arts requirement—usually fire off an entire clip of snark at the sound of phrases like "literary citizenship" or "literary community." Depending on the source of the snark, the word "literary" draws their ire: in America's culture of anti-intellectualism, "literary" evokes suspicions of gatekeeping,

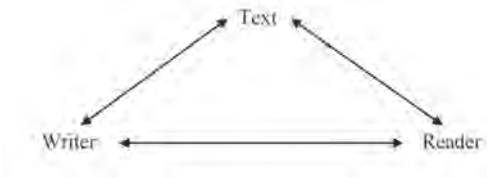
while "community" suggests attachments and affects, at odds with the corporate university's careerism.

But, as Nazarian argues, an education in the humanities—and, by extension, active citizenship even in the classroom's literary community—provides students with skills and competencies that *benefit*, rather than diminish, their career prospects. She cites a 2018 study by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, which indicates that humanities majors have comparable employment and job satisfaction rates to those in STEM fields. Moreover, she points out evidence from studies conducted by the Association of American Universities and Colleges, which highlights how "employers in the business and nonprofit sectors identify the critical thinking, analytical, and communications skills that a humanities education provides as more important than a candidate's choice of undergraduate major." Professional programs and industries recognize how a humanities education complements their students' training: it allows doctors to diagnose patients, engineers to detect and correct flaws. Yet, administrative rhetoric and program cuts prioritize a zero-sum careerism and profitability at the expense of critical reasoning, empathy, and problem-solving.

These skills and values, though, are fostered in the creative writing classroom and the community of writers. Here's Margaret Atwood, explaining the mysterious communications that span the literary community: "The writer communicates with the page. The reader also communicates with the page. The writer and the reader communicate only through the page" (125). She establishes a transactional relationship between writers and texts, readers and texts, and she suggests that we can view it something like this:



Creative writing programs maintain that transactional dynamic, but the classroom experience and one-on-one mentorship erect additional scaffolding, uniting writers and readers. As such, here's Atwood's model, modified for the workshop classroom:



In each case, the relay of information is personal, the transaction is direct. The relationships between writers, readers, and texts are always personal, but the workshop model opens up a possibility not permitted by the usual distance between writer and reader. The text remains an intermediary, but for once all three presences—writer, text, reader—can communicate directly with one another.

The nature of language itself accounts for the individuated nature of our communications with texts: the same novel can evoke widely different emotions and ideas in two readers. But student writers often need this encounter with texts, alternate interpretations, and other writers in order to cultivate a personal aesthetic and a defense of their craft decisions. Walter Pater's *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* gives us a fine scholarly rationale for this approach: "in aesthetic criticism the first step towards seeing one's object as it really is, is to know one's own impression as it really is, to discriminate it, to realise it distinctly" (3). Pater suggests that the artist and the critic's tastes have been shaped by their encounters with different works of art. However, without formal study, the individual remains ignorant of how one's impressions are the product of exposure to certain works. The young creator—whether artist or critic—needs to study and critique these influences, then practice that mode of expression. The host of *This American Life*, Ira Glass, puts it in a way more likely to bolster the uncertain student's confidence. Discussing the gap between the young artist's tastes and their creative output, Glass says this: "But your taste, the thing that got you into the game, is still killer. And your taste is why your [early] work disappoints you. [. . .] It is only by going through a volume of work that you will close that gap, and your work will be as good as your ambitions."

By placing student writers in direct conversations with writer-teachers, creative writing classrooms practice Atwood's model of communication-via-text, as well as Pater and Glass's approach to shaping the young writer's aesthetic. That is, workshops rely on a student's *access* to the writing

teacher's practice, experience, and mentorship. In doing so, students are directed to discover how texts operate and how to craft them, which in turn enables them to discuss and defend their tastes. Workshops model for students a version of the writing life, which in turn trains students for a lifetime of creative and critical praxis. But it's not only about cultivating students' tastes. Both Ursula K. Le Guin and Wallace Stegner liken the creative writing instructor to a navigator, responsible for directing the workshop through peer submissions to safe harbor. In this capacity, Le Guin notes, the teacher-navigator provides other writers with "a community of people all working at the same art [. . .]. A good peer group offers mutual encouragement, amicable competition, stimulating discussion, practice in criticism, and support in difficulty" (xi–xii).

These values of mentorship, community, and creative-critical praxis are manifest in AWP's guidelines for creative writing programs. In 1979, AWP released a committee report that issued a set of teaching guidelines, which remain key recommendations for developing programs. An MFA or PhD should be accepted as an instructor's terminal degree, and creative writers should have parity with other full-time faculty in terms of tenure, promotion, and renewal in order to maintain program offerings. Further, courses should have relatively low caps: "AWP recommends that workshop size not exceed 15, and that 12 be viewed as desirable and most effective."

AWP reaffirmed this standard in its 2007 revision of writing program guidelines. AWP tempers this expectation with pragmatism: the organization recognizes "that the majority of workshops have a class size of 11–20." Still, AWP maintains that workshops begin to lose effectiveness once the fifteen-student threshold is passed. Some writers would like to see this number chipped even lower. Le Guin, for one, said that her "optimum number [. . .] is probably six or seven up to ten or eleven" (128). Regardless, the low number reflects one of the workshop's central missions—affording equitable workshop time to each writer and ensuring that all students receive sufficient attention from their faculty. But it also reflects common sense, in managing both student and instructor workloads. If a workshop has fifteen students and each student submits two stories, the class will have to workshop *thirty* pieces of writing—which eats up the clock. And that time isn't just a non-renewable resource. It's the fuel we burn to demonstrate our respect for student writers, to power them in their study of literature and literary craft.

But is there any evidence that universities have imposed crippling caps on courses? Is there any evidence that creative writing instructors have been over-burdened in the classroom? And is there evidence that creative writing instructors commit themselves to a student-focused pedagogy?

On its surface, the data seems to signal that there's no immediate cause for concern. In its 2015 "Survey of Creative Writing Programs," AWP reports some promising findings about faculty workload and class sizes in creative writing programs. Across all program types (ranging from associates to PhD programs) and institution types, tenure-track faculty teach on average a total of 6.2 courses per academic year, or roughly three courses a semester. (The breakdown of the data offers an essential caveat—type of institution. Teaching colleges average eight courses per year for tenure-track faculty, while research universities have an average teaching load of 5.3 courses per year.) Creative writing programs also tend to have an average of four to six tenure-track faculty, who teach approximately 67% of all creative writing courses. Further, those faculty members supervising student theses will oversee no more than four such projects during the academic year (7).

So far, this data seems reassuring, especially for students. It would seem that most creative writing programs have robust rosters of faculty, each teaching a suitable number of courses, thereby granting students significant access to their teachers and mentors. Students might also find themselves bolstered by AWP's brief remark on the average size of workshop classes: "The average class size varied from type of program: 14.5 students for AA programs; 14.6 BA; 13.5 BFA; 11.5 MA; 10.2 full-residency MFA; 6.5 low-residency MFA; and 9.5 PhD" (3). Administrators could similarly latch onto this data. Look, they could argue, workshop sizes across the board *on average* enroll below AWP's recommended cap of fifteen students!

On average: that's precisely the peril in seeing these numbers and heaving a sigh of relief. Teaching loads vary widely across institutions and degree types: in an associate's program, tenure-track faculty may teach upwards of ten courses a year, while the faculty in a PhD-granting program may teach 3.5 courses a year (8). Full-time, non-tenure-track faculty have also increased in all program types, up 18% over the past year; the number of all adjuncts also has increased, with the highest rates—32% of program faculty—in associate's programs and low-residency MFA programs (13). Typically, this contingent faculty labor force would receive lower pay than their tenure-track counterparts, reducing program

expenditures. This change in the work force could also limit mentorship opportunities, as students may have more courses taught by a rotating string of faculty.

The disparity in teaching loads and the changes to faculty aren't the only complications to the data. The notion of an average class size is also suspect. First, the average includes *all* creative writing courses, and the data therefore cannot discriminate between a section of Introduction to Creative Writing that enrolls twenty-five students and an Advanced Fiction course that enrolls ten. (Given the differences between program structures and course sequencing, it would be virtually impossible for AWP to track enrollment data in this way—especially with over 1,000 creative writing programs in the United States alone. The statistical average might be the best we can do.) So, the numbers don't reveal anything about how an intro-level student's workshop experience might differ from the upper-level student's. It also doesn't provide us with a meaningful student-to-faculty ratio, or details on how faculty might spend their time in the classroom, in mentoring/advising, in service, or in the pursuit of their own craft.

Hence, why AWP raised the alarm at the news of Seth Bodnar's academic extinction plan at the University of Montana. The data may show that the population of creative programs is healthy, with most maintaining sound health. But others are barely respiring. That's a breach of the trust and respect owed our students, our discipline, and our colleagues.

Thinking about the circumstances at Montana, I'm reminded of Flannery O'Connor's observation about the fiction writer's country: "When we talk about the writer's country we are liable to forget that no matter what particular country it is, it is inside as well as outside him" (34). The writing teacher's internal country founds itself on deep-rooted values. The external country is a far more precarious terrain—a fertile prairie of university promises, threatened by the desertification of austerity politics. This is the strange terrain of today's humanities programs, and many of us in creative writing know its inhospitable geography well.

The perils of this treacherous territory are amplified by the solitary nature of writing and teaching: both necessitate labor that is largely invisible to others. Colleagues, administrators, students, and readers often glimpse the surfaces alone—the finished text, the classroom teaching. (A colleague of mine once described this reality as "Kafka rewriting Hemingway's iceberg principle—you see the 'dignity of movement

[. . .] of one-eighth' of the thing, and nobody wants to talk about how exhausting the other seven-eighths are.") Since students confront the effects of austerity measures in workshop classes, those spaces have to be discussed, even if briefly.

That is, increased numbers and reduced course offerings transform the classroom in a way that's visible to students, even if they don't realize what they're being deprived of. In my professional career, I've experienced the effects of program cuts firsthand: I first started teaching creative writing while a graduate teaching assistant at the George Washington University, because austerity measures forced many programs in the university's College of Arts and Sciences to cut adjuncts. (GW's PhD in English only includes a critical option, but some of us—myself included—had MFAs, so we were called upon to take on some of the creative writing classes previously taught by adjuncts.) Even with the staffing shift, the program lost *five* sections of Introduction to Creative Writing. The program had to compensate by increasing course caps from fifteen to nineteen students. The staffing cuts imposed a further burden on the full-time tenure-track faculty, who became responsible for additional mid-level workshops, special topics in creative writing courses, and a host of additional mentorship responsibilities. In response, poet and professor Jennifer Chang made this remark to GW's student newspaper, *The Hatchet*: "The core of creative writing pedagogy is mentorship and working close with creative writing students who want to write that thesis or have a career with a creative writing focus, and it will be hard to do with full-time creative writing faculty when they're covering so many bases."

I would more fully appreciate Chang's remark only a few short years later, when I accepted my current position in the English Department at the University of North Dakota. As an instructor of creative writing, I'm currently the only full-time faculty member dedicated to teaching creative writing in my department. On a 3/3 schedule with courses that cap at twenty students per class, I can find myself working with sixty students in any given semester, in coursework alone. The number rises further if I include other advising and service work: undergraduate honors projects, informally advising undergrads interested in creative writing, undergrad and grad student independent studies, PhD exam committees, and co-chairing or serving on numerous creative dissertation committees.

Some rough math will indicate how the increased course loads compromise a creative writing program's values of mentorship and literary citizenship. In the average semester, my Intro to Creative Writing students

will submit the following for in-class workshops: a packet of three to five poems, a five-page story, and an eight-page podcast script. (To keep this brief, I'll ignore grading other assignments, like revisions, book reviews, or peer critique letters.) The instructor must still read each submission, which may require twenty-five minutes per manuscript. For a single class of fifteen students, the three assignments require a total of 18.75 hours of evaluation time over the course of the semester—equivalent to half a work week. Three classes at this cap would result in 56.25 hours dedicated to evaluating student manuscripts. What happens with a class of twenty students, just five over AWP's proposed outer limit? The obligation for three classes leaps to seventy-five hours spread throughout the term—an increase of 19.25 hours of instructor labor. And this doesn't account for post-workshop conferences or preparing students for on-campus readings, which many creative writers (myself included) require of students.

This obviously curtails the time that a writer can dedicate to creative and scholarly activity. But the students suffer from reduced access to their instructor, and they further receive a diluted—if not compromised—version of workshop instruction, which usually involves an instructor moderating a full-class, peer critique of a student submission. As early as 1991, Eavan Boland recognized that the formal, moderated workshop should provide "all the elements [. . .] for a short-term, effective mimesis of a critical community" (45). Boland elaborates on this:

> Good workshops have the power to become powerful corporate tools. If properly developed, they are well able to make difficult distinctions between autobiography and poetry, between experience and its expression. In making those distinctions they have the ability to speak with two voices at once: the poet's voice, arguing back and forth about his or her work. And the reader's voice, debating and criticizing. The critique formed by an effective workshop, because it incorporates both of these, is a unique dialectic—and uniquely helpful to the emerging writer, who learns how to distinguish and listen to these voices in his or her own sensibility. (45)

My hackles rise a bit at seeing workshops labeled as "powerful corporate tools," but that phrase could tickle a few administrative ears. What matters most, though, is Boland's characterization of the workshop as a forum that champions the individual "sensibility" of student writers and outfits them with the critical reasoning skills desired, as Nazarian has noted, across disciplines.

However, Boland's description of the workshop presupposes a manageable class size and constant moderation from the instructor. We don't need more of my off-the-cuff math to put paid to the theorem that these benefits are fully attainable in an overfilled class: more in-class workshops means less time for evaluating the craft, technique, and interventions of assigned readings. This imposes some unwelcome questions on writing faculty. Do you scale back on assigned readings, thereby denying students access to models and craft lessons? Do you reduce the frequency of in-class workshops and devise other writing assignments that provide instruction on craft? Or do you find alternative workshop strategies, like small peer groups, that can keep the course running on time at the cost of the classroom community?

None of these are satisfying solutions. Scaling back the assigned readings runs contrary to Boland's contention that the workshop provides a critical *and* creative community; it also undercuts the workshop's ability to promote a dialogue between student writers and texts. Reducing the number of in-class workshops makes the format largely performative. Asking writers to turn in stories or poems to a single reader as per a humanities seminar reverts to a pedagogy imbued with institutional authority and control. (This is especially problematic now, when writers like Claire Vaye Watkins, Viet Thanh Nguyen, Sabina Murray, and Ocean Vuong have rightly called for a creative writing pedagogy that supports the writing, cultures, and experiences of women and people of color.) Small workshop groups can encourage cliques, and an instructor cannot simultaneously moderate three or four simultaneous student workshops. But the instructor can move from group to group, peppering these mini-workshops with questions or micro-lessons on craft.

You'll notice I've made no mention of other acts of instructional labor: course prep and lesson planning, student advising, letters of recommendation, events like visiting author readings or open mic nights, responsibilities to the program, guiding students in traditional and new media productions, department and university service, and so on. In a recent guest spot in a colleague's course in literary studies pedagogy, I discussed some of these behind-the-scenes activities and emphasized that a quality writing course requires structure—even if the in-class workshops and conferences create an informal or relaxed atmosphere. The students initially expressed their shock, but we then approached the question from their vantage point as readers in a workshop environment. One student commented that the workshop instructor has to prep for the conversa-

tions that *could* arise from a story, and the instructor had to consider the needs and attitudes of the class in doing so. It's not as simple as reading a story and making annotations in the margins, which—the student confessed—was the primary responsibility she felt in workshop. Creative writing pedagogy requires sensitivity toward each individual student's needs, an attention to the craft lessons that will benefit that student's work, and a vigilant eye and ear to ensure that the class remains constructively critical.

This blind spot to the scope of instructional duties is only one concern amplified by the increased labor demanded of faculty in an austerity-driven university. Creative writing pedagogy suffers from a misconception common to university teaching: that the hours of in-class teaching constitute all the labor we perform. This myth exacerbates another problematic fantasy of the full-time creative writing professor as an aloof loner, who spends just enough time teaching to justify his salary. This cardboard cut-out has gained some notoriety from its appearance in literary fiction's satires of writers in academe. The ineffectual Grady Tripp of Michael Chabon's *Wonder Boys* springs to mind, as does Swenson from Francine Prose's *Blue Angel*: both are past-their-prime novelists who view teaching as an irritating interruption from their writing lives. John Gardner's *On Becoming a Novelist* also implicitly endorses this attitude, when he offers a lenient schedule as a perk of the teaching position:

> College teachers get the summer off and even in winter are likely to find more time for writing than almost anybody else except the full-time hobo. One teaches, say, three classes, each three hours a week, sees students for several hours a week (with luck, one can bunch up appointments so they all come on Tuesday or Wednesday), spends a few hours preparing classes (if one is unusually conscientious), and the rest of the time is his own. (114–5)

In Gardner's universe (or Grady Tripp's, or Swenson's), there are no other distractions: no summer programs that require the writing teacher's attention, no service, and very little advising. Just classes, "and the rest of the time is his own." Even Gardner's claim that college teachers get "summer off" is laughable, and not only because summer is the scholarly season of research. Increasingly, summer programs and courses tie faculty to campus; other times, our commitments to students linger into the summer. (I can only speak for myself: even though I was "off contract" and working part-time during the summer, I was still directing an indepen-

dent study and communicating with graduate students about exam and dissertation prep.) Gardner is guilty of perpetrating a criminal fiction, especially when program cuts and financial precarity necessitate even more labor from fewer faculty.

Gardner's blasé attitude toward the writer-as-teacher fits hand-in-glove with an administrative ethos of cutting apparent waste. If writers are such luxuries and view their time as such a treasure, then why should the university sponsor their craft and promote their discipline? In such a serious moment, I would direct you to Oscar Wilde's "The Soul of Man under Socialism" for a counterpoint: Wilde coyly professes his creed, that art's lack of utility situates it as the only medium that can truly critique and chart modernity. I'd urge you to take up Virginia Woolf's essay "Modern Fiction" and meditate on her claim that fiction can "record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall" or "reveal the flickerings of that innermost flame which flashes its messages through the brain" (9, 10). I'd encourage you to spend a few hours with Robert Penn Warren's *Democracy and Poetry* and Claudia Rankine's *Citizen: An American Lyric*. I'd mandate that you spend ten minutes with Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's TEDTalk "The Danger of a Single Story," with her laser-focused message that learning to read and write from a capacious worldview has become an act of political necessity. It's foundational to being a writer—whether that's a storyteller, a poet, or a critic—in global modernity. And a good creative writing workshop can provide students with that training. In an economy in which products are prized over people, perhaps a vision of the humanities that emphasizes *craft* and *creation*, as modes of civic engagement and invention, may be the perfect sleeper agent.

Creative writing hasn't fully crossed the threshold into crisis—yet. But the situation at Montana and at other universities across the United States provides us ample reason for concern. The assault on public knowledge and the arts won't halt in the near future. Matt Bevin's ludicrous desire to defund the University Press of Kentucky and the current presidential administration's constant war on the National Endowment for the Arts and the National Endowment for the Humanities makes that clear. What we can do in the interim is remain vigilant; we can defend humanities programs like creative writing as value-based enterprises, which can only enhance the education that students take from the university. We can remind them that distinction resides not in the bursar's office, but in the

alumni who graduate and become citizens of local, national, and international communities.

But in the end, maybe there's a one-word argument for preserving creative writing—indeed, for preserving all of the humanities—against austerity, its impulse to slash the budget and hoard any tiny resource it can. Here's that one word: respect. For whom? For the students we teach, for the people who read our words, for the marketplace of ideas. Respect of course costs nothing and will never accrue any capital or interest. But it deposits something of inestimable value in the soul, just as the best stories and poems always do.

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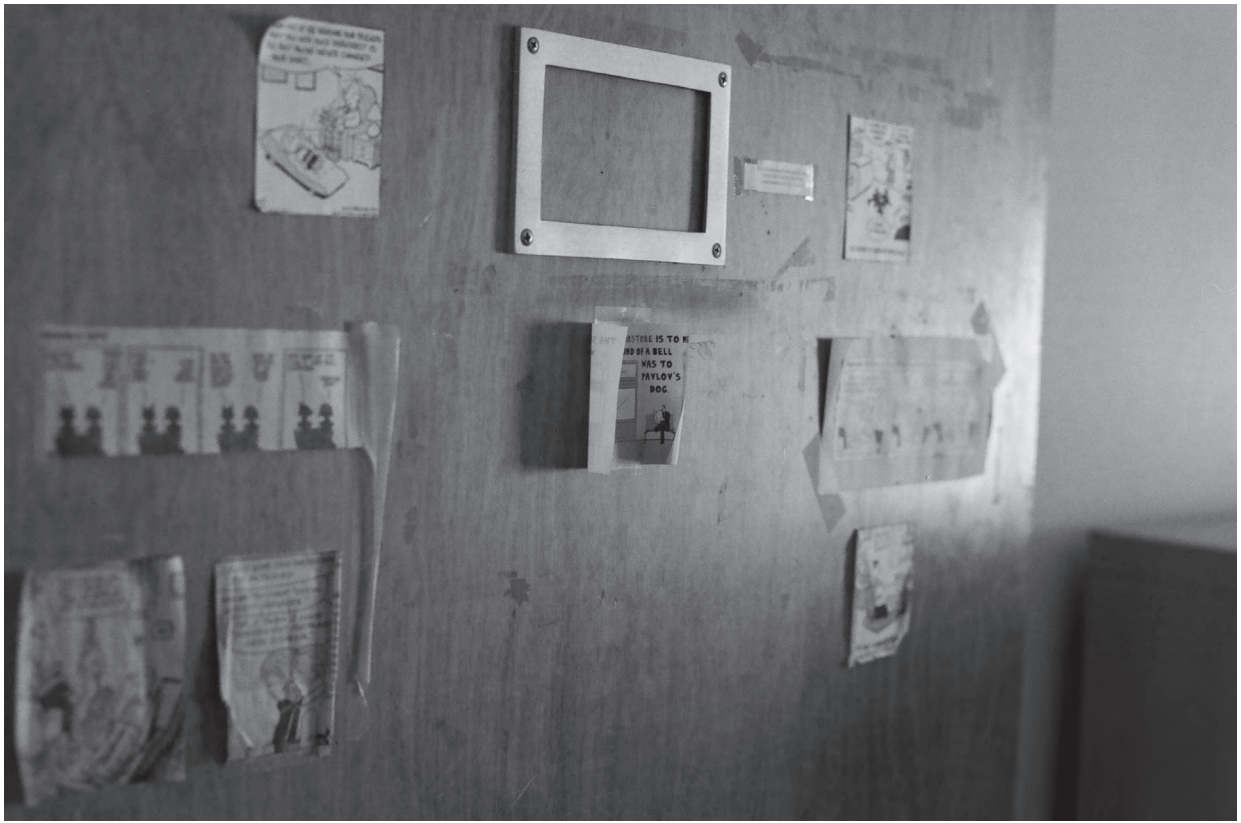
ASTOLE IS TO H
AD OF A BELL
WAS TO
TAYLOY'S
DOG

History and Prehistory: My Father's Bureau Drawer

In the family album, no photographs
From the Thirties, no farm
Outside Mission Lake, Oklahoma,

No flatbed Ford filled
With furniture, nor three of them
Up to their ankles in dust.

It takes me a while to uncover
These birds of passage, wedged
Between paycheck stubs

And shotgun shells:
My grandmother's furrowed
Forehead, skin so sapped

It's pleated; my grandfather,
Gaunt against a fender,
Dragging a Lucky—who left

Oklahoma, lived
In that Ford—a banjo, a pair
Of shoes that didn't fit.

All they had left
To leave this snub-nosed
Kid in overalls, my father

Who "did right, made
The grade, loves this farm,"
Who saves arrowheads,

Mercury dimes, the baby
Teeth of his daughters,
Who presses these artifacts

Into my palm, hard,
As though they are answers:
"Here Cumberland, Edina,

Lost Lake," tribes whose lives
Were spent before history,
A narrative we fail to deconstruct.

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"The mediocre teacher tells
The good teacher explains
The Superior teacher demonstrates
great teacher perspires!
is the feeling you
No matter how much

Faculty Navigating the Age of Austerity: Affirming Roles and Renewing Alliances

Following the 2008 financial crisis, editors in the United Kingdom responsible for the *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* feared that austerity measures in the form of defunding traditional liberal arts disciplines in England would force a privatization of humanities and social sciences teaching, in contrast to funding STEM fields of pure and applied sciences and engineering. This in turn would squelch the diversity of universities and threaten autonomy and pluralism in the academy in research, teaching, and learning. Thus they posted a call in December 2010 for discussion pieces to address the issue, which they would publish the following year in the form of roundtable responses to the evolving state of affairs of European higher education, crisis, and austerity.[1]

As 2017 drew to a close, the *North Dakota Quarterly* editorial board called for a similar examination of the field of the humanities in the context of higher education and the public sphere in the United States. Editors in the 2010 call from the UK had noted that the humanities, particularly vulnerable minority disciplines such as area studies and languages, were in peril at that time and place in Europe. Eight years later, the discourse about higher education in North America retains a "crisis" tone as core academic values are perceived to be under attack on multiple fronts. Some humanities disciplines and their relevance to twenty-first-century problems have been repeatedly called into question by internal and external forces as administrators balance budgets and stakeholders from disparate political, economic, and structural arenas debate the value of higher education.

Amid that cacophonous debate, this article focuses on faculty work in an age of austerity. It offers an insider's view on higher education, particularly on the role faculty service work plays relative to the future of the humanities and the notion of a liberal arts education. We argue that this often overlooked aspect to faculty work may be critical to advancing the cause of the humanities and humanities education. Because faculty service responsibilities include a formal expectation related to running the institution in partnership with administrators—in addition to teaching

and research—they are well-poised to counteract the impacts of austerity by the nature of their employment expectations. This type of faculty work is characterized broadly as "service" and often remains invisible or undervalued in the entire portfolio of faculty job responsibilities; however, because of the way the work contributes to the complex job of managing the institution's affairs, it is also described as "shared governance" as an indication of the value of the contributions.

Our argument, anchored in the belief that faculty are crucial for effective institutional decision-making and informed by our experiences in formal governance leadership roles in our institution, is that strengthening both existing shared governance structures and the quality of faculty engagement in the academic community is critical if faculty want to continue to have an effective voice in the debates related to austerity and its consequences for higher education.[2] This essay begins with an abbreviated look at neoliberal influences on the academy, consequential actions to counter the effects of those prevailing forces, and points of deliberation for administrators, students, and the public as ways to contextualize the opportunities for faculty engagement on these issues. We then suggest nine tactics in response to austerity pressures that bolster faculty involvement on our campuses. Ultimately, our purpose is to consider how faculty participation in institutional governance might protect the humanities in this age of austerity.

Setting the stage

What is the state of affairs in higher education after the millennium shift? While the situations on either side of the Atlantic are not the same, some commonalities are present in the language of crisis and austerity since 2008. The notion of "neoliberalism" surfaces often in academics' conversations about austerity and the present state of higher education, and scholars agree that this trending worldview has hijacked longstanding conceptions of academic mission within colleges and universities. For American higher education scholars Adrianna Kezar and Jamie Lester, neoliberalism is "the ideology that privatization (being run by corporations and business) of public operations that have traditionally been run by government, such as medicine or prisons, better serves the public interest" (11).[3] Another definition, favored by psychology professors Joseph Ostenson, Joseph Clegg, and Bradford Wiggins, focuses on "the trend for market values to

more frequently define the direction of colleges and universities" (510).[4] Both definitions signal a clear change in societal perceptions about higher education.

While many point to 2008 as the pivotal year for recent austerity measures, Larry Gerber, in his history of shared governance in American higher education, identifies a longer arc of austerity trends in previous decades as universities reacted to budget shortfalls and began to take steps toward "efficiencies" in operations. Gerber marks the 1970s as a watershed era in the United States, where management principles from government and business were first applied to higher education. "One lasting legacy of the growing acceptance of the need to be responsive to market forces of supply and demand led administrators increasingly to treat academic departments as 'cost center and revenue production units' within a system of 'academic capitalism'" (121–22). And in the decades since, the language of revenue generation has maintained a grip on the academy and altered institutional focus.

Fast-forwarding forty years, it becomes easy then to see the logic in Christopher Newfield's claims that in the absence of another shared value metric, the American universities' new "default lingua franca is money, so that the value of teaching is measured by student enrollments and the value of research is measured by the cash value of extramural grants" (144).[5] Because the humanities do not always win in these administrative calculations and numerical competitions between disciplines, they (and the faculty that comprise them) have an increasing tendency to be viewed as the expendable units within an institution. Of course, these trends do not exist in isolation; internal pressures remain in dialogue with external forces. For instance, Peter Scott elaborates on the consequences of this neoliberal development in the public sphere and how it has altered the collective societal understanding of the meaning and worth of an advanced degree. "In the United Kingdom, there is now a strong, if contestable, belief that the ideals of mass higher education—democracy, social justice, individual 'improvement' in a still recognizable Victorian sense—are out of sync, out of sympathy, with the dominant ideas of our age: wealth generation, growth, and competitiveness. In a global setting the same has happened" (16).

This point of view seems to ignore the chicken-and-egg matter of whether a focus on "market forces" has caused a change in societal understandings about the value of higher education, or vice versa. After all, a key population embedded in that opinionated public sphere is, of course,

prospective and current students and their parents who may be increasingly inclined to calculate the costs and return on investment before embarking on advanced study. Future successes may be paramount, but for some in this population *bildung* is likely a foreign word, as is the significance of subjects beyond technical competency that comprise the self-cultivation processes that were once seen as critical to any education.[6] Michael Shattock writes that the "economic downturn will affect student choice, and governments looking to achieve value for money in hard times are also prone to favor subjects which have a demonstrable relationship with the economy" (28). Students and their parents want a good educational bargain that ends in a degree that will guarantee employment in hard times. Degrees that cannot fulfill that promise, or are perceived not to be able to ensure a lucrative postgraduate career, are overlooked and marginalized.

Issues of students' equitable access to high-quality education are also highly relevant concerns for faculty. Consider the point made in a May 2018 joint statement from the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) and Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U), in which it is noted that, "All college students and not solely a privileged few . . ." should have the opportunity to have the benefit of a liberal arts education. The matter of austerity is thus bound up with the issue of which students have access to which types of educational experiences. Americans' conception of a level playing field and the opportunities that come from hard work may become increasingly ill-matched to the realities of a twenty-first century in which austerity's effects have become broadly felt.

The polarized version of this debate pits a purely market-driven higher education system against a system whose essential functions relate to societal benefits, a well-functioning democracy, and the opportunity for self-betterment. Key players (lawmakers, taxpayers, families, students, faculty, staff, administrators) may be assumed to favor an either/or standpoint when the reality is much more complex. As usual, extremes avoid the consideration of clarifying nuances. For instance, what are the limits to the current trend toward market forces' prominent role in charting the future of higher education? Where might it be natural (and responsible) to draw a line between what the "market" wants and what higher education should provide?

Our answer, not intended to be comprehensive, is focused on what faculty can provide—and in particular the role faculty judgment and direct

activity should play in shaping the present and future. A central premise is that not everything should be subject to a "crowd sourced" or market-oriented approach; professional judgment must be relevant in coming to certain conclusions. We want to call attention to the agency faculty have to meet austerity challenges directly, countering contingent forces from inside the academy through service work. Both by tradition and in their role as academia's professionals, faculty are formally authorized through shared governance systems to engage in decision-making to protect the quality and health of their institutions and the higher education enterprise as a whole. And although it is naïve to believe that faculty participation in governance will reverse or fix all that ails universities and colleges at this present moment, we believe that this endeavor is still worth faculty time and energy, and represents a concrete and plausibly effective way to reframe the present predicaments faced by the humanities, liberal education, and to some degree higher education generally.

Faculty across disciplinary boundaries have a stake in bringing their professional judgment to bear in supporting the role of the humanities and the liberal arts. It would seem natural to place the greatest expectation on humanities faculty, yet countering the threat posed by austerity and neoliberalism in higher education is not a battle that faculty in any one discipline can tackle alone—the power here is in solidarity. But why should non-humanities faculty engage, and what possible role could or should they play in responding to the current hostile climate? As suggested above, the key lies in the need for professional judgment to temper purely market-based considerations. One instance of this comes down simply to the faculty's shared conception of what a higher education should mean; is it a place for primarily technical training, or does it serve the "higher purposes" necessary for effective citizenship, and the opportunity for self-betterment? However, another aspect—which may be of primary relevance for those in traditional liberal arts disciplines, including many categorized as STEM—relates to whether trends toward specialization may put them next in line for austerity measures.

Although it is generally unquestioned that students in technical fields require training in the natural sciences and mathematics, the matter of the nature of that "training" may be less well specified. Consider, as an illustrative example, the way ethics training for students in scientific and technical disciplines has become less and less the purview of faculty in philosophy and more something taught by practitioners—say in health

care, business, or engineering. Now replace the word "ethics" with the word "mathematical," and ask if it seems farfetched to imagine, a decade hence, mathematicians lamenting their decline in the face of austerity. In cases like these—philosophy, chemistry, or mathematics—faculty in these disciplines are providing a "service" by teaching coursework for other fields, much like the humanities historically have done. And to the extent that this service does not "meet the needs" of those disciplines, it may be that even faculty in liberal arts STEM fields find themselves marginalized by a need to teach more focused versions of their courses for specific students.

Call to Action

So if broad-based collective faculty involvement that taps into both self-interest and widely shared public conceptions of the role of higher education is a viable response to austerity, what form should that response take? What follows is an attempt to address concrete steps that faculty can take to counter the negative impacts of austerity measures. In the remainder of the essay, we articulate a short list of strategies that faculty can employ, individually and collectively, in the realms over which they exert control and influence in teaching, research, and service, to take back and counter the morale-breaking message of "crisis" that is reiterated so frequently. Faculty in the humanities disciplines are at the fore of the charge, but observations such as those made above should prove motivating to colleagues from across academia, including staff and administrators, and perhaps even to alumni, advocates, and community members who—through their support of faculty prerogatives in the area of their professional expertise—can further validate the message coming from voices within academia.

- Teach
    - Insist upon variety of thought, learning, and discourse.
    - Support robust general education programs that encourage discovery.
    - Champion students' equitable access to higher education.
- Research
    - Retain research freedom as a core element of academic freedom.
    - Integrate curricular reforms that align with research avenues.
    - Cultivate an active, engaged citizenry by conducting public outreach and public scholarship.

- Serve
    - Train faculty leaders to interact effectively with administrators and external market forces.
    - Sustain strong shared governance structures to ensure faculty voices contribute to meaningful decisions.
    - Build faculty community and strengthen academic citizenry.

Teach

When an institution believes it must narrow its scope to remain competitive, the faculty must safeguard the curriculum and insist upon multiple methods and even dissonance of thought, learning, and discourse. The university curriculum must retain equal strength within the graduate and undergraduate degree programs and within the undergraduate general education program. Majors should include courses that reflect the breadth of the field, from historical roots to current branches. Faculty must teach those courses in ways that generate transformative experiences for students because of the level of engagement they are required to reach. Colleges and schools should strive to maintain departments and centers that reflect a level of breadth consistent with an educational experience that is truly transformative, and not simply technical.

Parallel to the work in the major, the students at the undergraduate level must have access to a rigorous general education program whose foundation rests on a meaningful sampling of interdisciplinary knowledge traditions, grounded in the liberal arts, and scaffolds the critical skills that lifelong learners and informed citizens exhibit outside the walls of classrooms and learning spaces. Employers seek out graduates who can articulate the benefits of their student engagement in coursework, opportunities often generated by faculty who integrate high-impact practices in the classroom.[7] It goes without saying that internal institutional barriers ought not impede the students' ability to select from the entire spectrum of an institution's offerings. Not only does this mean that all departments should regularly evaluate their contributions to the campus general education program as a part of their curricular maintenance, it also means that degree programs should treat their students' general education as coequal in importance to the education offered within the major and recognize cross-pollinations. This attention to the curriculum bolsters disciplines such as the humanities not simply

as service departments, but also as gateways for curious students and their integrative learning.

Faculty governance plays a critical role here, for curricular work in the major and general education is determined by the faculty at the department, college, and university level before it lands on administrators' desks. While there may be other administrative checkpoints along the way, the intellectual work behind a robust curriculum is traditionally the responsibility of the faculty and it should remain so. Curriculum and general education committees must wrangle with big-picture ideas about the composition of the curriculum for each tier of the system. On the level of individual course work, distinct offerings must be delivered in a range of methods in order to speak to the wide range of learners in any given classroom. Faculty governance contributes to this framework as well, for shared governance committees on online and distance learning, library offerings, assessment, and pedagogical and technical support contribute to the quality of work that faculty and students are able to do within the classroom setting. Faculty must engage in this curricular work at all levels of the institution, for if they do not, the forces embodied by neoliberalism will likely hold sway, and outcomes that have little to do with educational quality are often likely to prevail.

These matters of curricular oversight and maintenance meld with access and equity, safeguarding the institutional diversity available to incoming students. During economic downturns, awarded research funding creates discrepancies between the institutions of the haves and the have-nots, according to Shattock, and many of the have-nots are regional institutions that are economic drivers in their districts and gateways for students who struggle for access to higher education. The affirmation of an institution's lowered or falling status, or even stable (perceived: flat?) status at an institution that cannot compare to a top-ranked research powerhouse, increases the susceptibility of the university to enrollment declines as students select their institutions of choice. Shattock warns that "rendering vulnerable institutions more vulnerable can have an impact on their market with consumer (student) confidence falling, thus increasing the risk of encountering severe difficulties" (27). Difficulties result in decreasing enrollment trends where students "vote with their feet" to select institutions and majors perceived to benefit them the most in the global marketplace. In their introduction to *Austerity Blues*, professors Michael Fabricant and Stephen Brier contend that the "fiscal landscape of continuing disinvestment is neither preordained nor natural. It is a

consequence of a politics of austerity that disproportionately denies the poorest students, especially those of color, quality higher education. We are faced with a series of political, economic, and structural choices regarding the future of public higher education" (4). Attention to equity issues for enrolled and prospective students must be a concern for faculty, as for a public whose children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, and friends may otherwise be left with no choice but to settle with subpar educational opportunities.

By making common cause in ensuring curricular breadth, even in times of austerity, faculty can make structural choices that help avoid the downward-spiraling feedback loop of lower status leading to lower enrollments, and thence to greater levels of austerity—ones which inevitably will reach disciplines well beyond just those in the humanities. If small disciplines are terminated for low enrollment, perceived expense, or ostensible disinterest, they will be elevated to elite status available only in universities and colleges across the nation of a certain size that have the financial wherewithal to commit resources to ensuring their survival. This curricular responsibility must be visible to all faculty as well as made part of the narrative faculty share with students, especially those in professional fields.

Frank Donoghue in *The Last Professors: The Corporate University and the Fate of the Humanities* is one of the scholars who has warned of curricular diversity in times of austerity, with an eye to the humanities. "I argue that the liberal arts model of higher education, with the humanities at its core, is crumbling as college credentials become both more expensive and more explicitly tied to job preparation. With every passing decade, the liberal arts education will increasingly become a luxury item, affordable only to the privileged" (xvii). This is a dire problem for average state universities and the citizens they serve. If only the wealthiest students have the capacity to enroll in and complete majors of languages, philosophy, and indigenous studies, for example, then what will the long-term impact be for economically disadvantaged students' liberal arts foundation, self-realization, and overall understanding of the world? Donoghue warns that this development will cripple the large American state universities and university systems, who he fears have "lost their way" as they diverge from their missions and try to compete for relevance with the "winning" institutions such as the for-profits and the elite universities. "Each of the schools in between will be pushed to define itself either as a proving ground for the business community or as

a place where students can acquire a prestige marker, an index of their social status" (92–3). Newfield paints no rosy picture in his view of how we broke the American university system, and what will remain for future students wanting an affordable education close to home. "Downsized public universities are perfectly appropriate for the second- and third-class citizens from whom plutonomy withholds the spoils" (301). So as well as a matter of survival for smaller or more regionally-focused institutions, maintenance of curricular breadth facilitates equitable access to higher education's full range of benefits for students and citizens as a public good. Faculty must continue to advocate for equitable and broad-based access to quality education, and put that advocacy into action through their teaching methods and the oversight and development of the curriculum.

Research

On the research front, governance issues within faculty control are fewer but no less important. Faculty must retain research freedoms, integrate curricula with research endeavors, and perform outreach that cultivates an informed public sphere. The forces opposing this work are fierce, and in many cases lie outside the scope of faculty influence.

Joseph Ostenson, Joshua Clegg, and Bradford Wiggins made a compelling comparison of higher education and industry, with several strong arguments for the parallels. Whereas the *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* editorial board spoke in broad strokes about funding patterns referenced in the introduction, Ostenson et al. confirm the influence of funding and successful grant proposals in the fields of health, industry, and the military as contributing to the industrialization of the curriculum. Funding patterns oftentimes presage the academic offerings at the most prestigious and successful universities, and the most important research becomes those projects most likely to bring grant money to the institution. These projects often exclude the humanities researchers, who generally do not have comparable pools of funding as those available to STEM faculty and do not need expensive equipment to complete their research. Based on his analysis of University of California, Los Angeles, Newfield hypothesizes that humanities research will persist only at the elite schools that can afford to teach humanities disciplines, diminishing universities' relevance in solving the world's problems as expertise in the humanities becomes further detached.

All is not ideal for researchers in STEM disciplines at present, either, for competition grows stronger as funding pools diminish and new political pressures interfere. The AAUP issued a report entitled "National Security, the Assault on Science, and Academic Freedom" in 2017 that addresses the American government's hostility to international scientific exchange and climate science.[8] "These two trends together threaten not only the academic freedom of scientists but also the ability of American science to maintain its international stature and continue to contribute to the improvement of American lives" (2). Faculty working within existing governance structures that influence internal research grants must be vigilant in awarding seed money and other meaningful awards to scholars that better prepare them to compete externally and to speak courageously against censorship in all disciplines. Serving as readers on state and national granting agencies is another key way for faculty to influence research directions. External influences on the direction of faculty research are inevitable, but they must be balanced against the collective judgment of the faculty and the institutions of higher education that support them.

The natural bridge back to the classroom is then to be able to make curricular reforms that correspond to faculty research interests, which enables faculty to integrate students into ongoing research projects that position them to be conversant in research methods and scholarly conversations as they near graduation. Students who are not engaged in research become taxpayers who do not value research. Cultivating the students' ability to disseminate research findings and their value to the general public is critical, and indeed these skills surface in two of the AAC&U recommendations for high-impact teaching practices.[9] The above-mentioned AAUP report references dissemination concerns for STEM, particularly in how the media reports scientific issues and demands governmental accountability, but there is room for improvement for academics from all fields. Students can partner with faculty to communicate the value of their research experiences for citizens and taxpayers, in addition to scholarly peers, and investigate alternate avenues for publication to reach other audiences.

Within the humanities, this historically meant to do the work of the "public humanities" beyond the walls of the university. Robyn Schroeder, scholar at the Center for Public Humanities & Cultural Heritage at Brown University, defines the public humanities as the "work of moving humanistic knowledges among individuals and groups of people. Some of the most common variety of that work are translational scholarship; cultural

organizing; production of programs, plays, performances, tours, festivals, or other audience-oriented humanistic activities; and maker activities, particularly making art, music, writing; and generally ways of making meaning socially, or making personal meaning in public space."[10] That inside/outside divide is breaking down in practice—not in contrast to the work of academics inside the university—but instead to engage non-academics in the discovery of humanities production and interpretation in everyday life. Academic reward structures within promotion, tenure, and evaluation systems however have not kept pace with this evolving definition of outreach, and thus many faculty are hesitant if not unwilling to commit time to these endeavors. Valuing this work within the institution and within the community elevates the quality and quantity of research contributions that humanities faculty make to the public sphere. These considerations should be at the forefront of faculty efforts to establish standards for evaluation that make "public facing" work valued as a category of scholarship and recognized for its generative impact on communities. Indeed, here again the public's role in supporting this type of faculty advocacy has a direct societal benefit through cultural, entertainment, and social activities in cities home to colleges and universities.

Political interference also threatens national support for practitioners of academic and public humanities. The National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act of 1965, which established the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), included this language from lawmakers of the age. "Democracy demands wisdom and vision in its citizens. It must therefore foster and support a form of education, and access to the arts and the humanities, designed to make people of all backgrounds and wherever located masters of their technology and not its unthinking servants."[11] The NEH is the sole entity charged to ensure financial support for the humanities to reach all American citizens, and it continues to be one of the primary sponsors for humanities education and academic research across the nation. Yet national funding has been threatened during several of the recent political administrations in the United States, reflecting again the neoliberal tendencies to privatize and to undermine the age-old tenant of humanities education as a public good. Faculty must help reject those forces and unite to cultivate an active and informed citizenry through integrated research and public scholarship.

The imperatives outlined above pertain across the disciplines even if primarily couched in the context of humanities scholarship. Fundamental

research will rarely be seen as directly connected to the everyday aspects of an increasingly technical society, and without advocates for the full spectrum of fundamental scholarship—in the humanities, social sciences, STEM, etc.—university research will generally increasingly appear to non-academics as an expensive extravagance. Faculty should endeavor to ensure the availability of research opportunities that are available to students to demystify the process and the publication of findings. Examples of influential research must be readily available to citizens, with scholars willing to engage in dialogue and public exchanges of information across multiple media in order to captivate an increasingly distracted public. Through the faculty's collective voice, which should resonate directly in the public sphere and indirectly through the generations of students who graduate from universities and colleges, the importance of research autonomy and breadth must be heard.

Serve

The previous sections have considered the critical roles of teaching and research within faculty job responsibilities. Our argument focused on aspects related to faculty service in these two areas—e.g., curricular oversight and public scholarship. But in addition, there is the less celebrated but no less important category of "service" that constitutes the proverbial third pillar of the academic's professional trinity. This is a critical juncture for re-investing the faculty in the workings of the university; similarly, engaging and investing in the faculty of an institution is a powerful way to turn the narrative in times of crisis.

Service in this sense includes a prominent role in institutional governance, and governance determines direction. Faculty must adapt existing structures to remain partners in institutional decision-making. They must insist that multiple voices be heard during university decision-making processes that seem increasingly dominated by administrators. Emerging faculty leaders must be trained to dialogue with administrators and external market forces, learning the inner workings of campus and other relevant higher education governance structures. Collective action such as this will lift morale across campus when competent leaders make good decisions. Faculty must come together, find solidarity in common cause, and build community that strengthens academic citizenry. This is not a call for faculty to do more work, but to prioritize the kinds of work that best serve their own professional development, the students' person-

al and intellectual growth, and the health and longevity of the institutions of higher education. This essay argues that by re-assessing academic engagement in governance structures spanning all three realms of responsibility, faculty can be change agents in this age of austerity.

Complicating this picture is the undeniable fact that the composition of the faculty has changed, and not all faculty are tenured or in a tenure-track position that includes an explicit expectation of service as part of their contract. Gerber suggests a correlation between the university's responses to labor needs and the market forces of neoliberalism. In contrast to the long-term goal of professionalizing the faculty through most of the twentieth century, which carried with it a strengthening of the principles and practices of strong faculty governance, the 1970s again proved a turning point that altered the composition of the faculty. "Over the last several decades, however, the growing tendency . . . to treat higher education as an industry that should be subject to market forces like all other industries has led to the implementation of a variety of policies that have contributed to the growing deprofessionalization of the faculty" (146). This deprofessionalization has come in the form of increasing numbers of "contingent" faculty—those on year-to-year contracts with only teaching responsibilities—who are neither expected nor paid to do service work.

Ostenson et al. draw attention to the ways this trend creates a more fluid, less connected faculty workforce. In their words, "large-scale production requires an efficient, independent, roughly interchangeable work-force—employees that can be quickly moved from place to place (or simply fired and hired) as market and production demands shift. We should expect, then, that as university management falls more and more into the hands of corporate and market oriented managers, tenure and other forms of distributed, community-level organization will come under attack" (515). They go on to argue that growing numbers of administrators (and their growing salaries) have an indirect relationship to the same statistics of faculty, influencing morale and loyalty of the faculty as a body. They identify these evolutions as most advanced at public institutions, where decreasing influence in governance matters has the dual effect of demoralizing the faculty and diminishing the will to engage. This ultimately results in less diversity of perspectives amid the decision-makers and stifles faculty voices. It is not surprising that Ostenson et al. continue with the assumption that the "result of these trends is that faculty have less influence in their institutions and over their own work, including control over educational areas like curriculum" (517). Facul-

ty disengage, retreat to their disciplinary communities and international connections outside the campus, and administrators' voices carry the arguments.

Faculty must counteract this tendency, change the narrative, and genuinely engage in the work necessary to sustain shared governance. Earlier in this essay, we made a plea for collective action that would unite the faculty to preserve the liberal arts directives of universities and colleges, defend the humanities disciplines in the teaching and research missions of post-secondary institutions, and advocate for the humanities and liberal arts in the public sphere. Gerber recognizes that some faculty feel they cannot justify the risk of supporting fields outside their territorial turf even if they have personal convictions that it is the right thing to do. "The lack of institutional recognition and reward for such work and the pressures on faculty members to focus on disciplinary activity rather than on service to their home institution if they hope to gain promotion and salary increases (which in recent years have not kept up with inflation) help to explain the widespread lack of interest in governance activities among faculty members" (168–9). The stakes are even higher for contingent faculty on part-time appointments, who may be balancing onerous teaching loads spread over multiple institutions with no remaining hours left in the day (which is not to mention the possibility of no formal expectation, invitation, or remuneration to do this work in the first place). This may become perilous for humanities departments who rely upon contingent labor and are left without faculty able to commit time to mission-critical work such as curricular maintenance and research advancement.

Yet we appeal to faculty to engage, to prioritize protecting systems of campus governance, and to work to turn the narrative in disruptive times. Joan V. Gallos argues that reframing the work of faculty governance from political (and often adversarial) to collaborative would resolve the occasional stalemate between administration and faculty. Gallos recognizes that the changing face of the university will necessitate an increase in the number and type of administrators, but that shift also asks faculty to reconsider the ways in which they engage with institutional decision-makers as the institution adapts. For Gallos, that leadership revolution happens within established governance channels such as faculty senates. "Beyond the traditional, political senate focus of guarding against errors and misdeeds of administrative others rests a powerful and generative faculty role—the opportunity to initiate, propose, and lead campus change" (137). Thus, it is here that the mechanisms exist through which

collective action will have an effect. Administrators must establish and maintain intentional faculty development opportunities that offer governance training and mentoring channels that prepare incoming cohorts of faculty to be conversant in university politics and operations. Governance bodies such as senates and key faculty committees must utilize the power with which they are endowed to pass legislation that streamlines procedures and maximizes impact. As with any powerful team, faculty must "develop the bench" and groom emerging leaders to become involved in governance and work side-by-side with administrators, staff, and strong advocates.

Administrators who recognize this potential, invest in the faculty of an institution, and incorporate their passion into the hard decisions facing higher education will reap benefits. Steven Bahls trusts in shared academic vision and sustainable strategies to carry universities through tumultuous times. A strong advocate for the hard work and risks of shared governance, Bahls contends that "service as a faculty member is much more satisfying when shared governance works effectively. Faculty members want to have as much control over their work as possible. To the extent they are respected by the board and president, listened to, and considered a vital part of decision making, they tend to have greater job satisfaction because they feel a sense of control over their own destinies" (15).[12] Employees' job satisfaction improves campus morale. Ensuring faculty are integral to meaningful decisions builds confidence. The pressing need for faculty engagement in university service in the entire governance spectrum is clear and compelling, and perhaps thereby the pillar most in need of serious attention in the current austerity climate because of the dire consequences of inaction.

Conclusion

The *NDQ*'s call comes at what seems a perilous time for the humanities—and perhaps no less for higher education in general. Although the immediacy of the concern may seem less acute for other disciplines, a central point of this essay is the importance of a broad-based and academia-wide effort for action in key areas within faculty teaching, research, and service responsibilities. Faculty have power individually and collectively to affect change, and investing in governance opportunities has the greatest potential for the return on the investment of faculty time and intellect. Tendencies to narrow the curriculum and decrease equitable access must

be avoided at all costs, especially at state institutions that serve a stratified public. Diverse research activity must be maintained and encouraged through efforts that communicate and demonstrate its value to the citizens of the state and nation. Institutional understanding about individual colleges and universities should be cultivated through training in the ways of governance and institutional decision-making so that faculty expertise is utilized in the best possible ways on every campus. The forces that have led to the contemporary climate of austerity are not an inevitable part of higher education's destiny. The current time of crisis for the humanities should be seen as a collective call to action for faculty and the enterprise of higher education as a whole, for efforts to strengthen the future of the humanities may just be the actions that save us all.

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Notes

1. Interestingly, we were unable to locate answers to the call published in the journal as promised. Leaman's editorial to the March 2011 journal (vol.19, no.1) speaks of the core theme of the special issue as "crisis management"—but economics dominates the issue's articles, and no singular attention is called to the case of higher education as the original call requested.

2. Zerr chaired the campus governance body (our University Senate, comprised of faculty, staff, students, and administrators) in 2013–14 and Gjellstad in 2014–15. Including the three-year term with Vice-Chair, Chair, and Past Chair responsibilities, the authors served on the University Senate leadership team spanning the years from 2012–16. Both continue shared governance engagement as elected Senators via Senate committee work.

3. They reference Sheila Slaughter and Gary Rhoades as critical voices working to parse the commodification of higher education, identify the growing neoliberalism,

and explain the resulting academic capitalism in their 2004 book *Academic Capitalism and the New Economy: Markets, State, and Higher Education*.

4. They cite Apple, 2006; Deem, 1998; Gildersleeve, Kuntz, Pasque, and Carducci, 2010; Thrupp and Willmott, 2003.

5. Newfield writes more on his view of the consequences of neoliberalism for higher education, namely that "public universities are routinely dreaded as intrinsically extravagant and inefficient without the logic or evidence to support such an accusation. It means too that public colleges' all-consuming—and costly—struggle to be efficient will never change the *perception* of inefficiency, no matter how cheapened public education becomes" (144).

6. *Bildung* refers to the forming of the self and the journey of self-realization, primarily through education, in the German philosophic tradition.

7. George D. Kuh and Ken O'Donnell articulate several in their list of High-Impact Practices (HIPs) published and endorsed by the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U). https://www.aacu.org/publications-research/publications/ensuring-quality-taking-high-impact-practices-scale

8. The report concludes with a set of six recommendations that they urge the broader scientific community to endorse and reaffirm as a means of counteracting the disturbing trend in the United States. https://www.aaup.org/report/national-security-assault-science-and-academic-freedom

9. The aforementioned HIPs include "opportunities to discover relevance of learning through real-work applications" and a "public demonstration of competence" as two of the possible avenues to deepen learning.

10. https://dayofph.wordpress.com/what-is-public-humanities

11. https://www.neh.gov/about

12. "Leadership in disruptive times should be about aggressive steps to identify and implement sustainable strategic direction through aligning the interests of stakeholders in shared academic vision. The hard work and risks of sharing governance, however, are justified by six important and tangible results: 1) a shared understanding of the deep consequences of transformative change, 2) a shared sense of urgency, 3) a shared commitment to do strategic planning in a timely way, 4) a shared commitment to implement strategic plans in a sustained and timely way, 5) a deep pool of trust, understanding, and goodwill" (9).

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Beyond Apologetics: Restructuring the Humanities for an "Age of Austerity"

There are plenty of soliloquies on the importance of the humanities, and the benefits are well-argued. This is not that kind of paper. Rather, it is a response. What is often found within the apologetic literature is the juxtaposition of the lofty (and prosaic) purposes of the humanities with the hard economic and social realities of the twenty-first century (Hart Research Associates; Commission on the Humanities and Social Sciences; Fabricant and Brier 204–248; Morson 200–242). This paper attempts to move beyond the arguments and to advocate actions that realize the broad purposes of the humanities into the context of the twenty-first century. We have argued long (and well) for our right to exist; whether published as a book via Johns Hopkins University Press or as an opinion piece for *Business Insider*, the justifications are doing little to impact enrollments or the popular sense that the humanities are less relevant than "practical" majors. We must actively make the case via programmatic design and our communications, marketing, and networking within and outside of the institution that the humanities serve as a valid path for workforce training.

This paper will take the form of three parts. In the first, I review the various factors that impact the condition of the humanities in higher education, discussed largely from my experiences. I will then summarize the broader defense of the humanities, drawn largely from the corpus of apologetic literature, opinion pieces, and popular press. While many of these points will not be new to some, they provide context for understanding the final section, which is an active response to these issues based largely upon our own work in the Department of Classics at the College of Charleston.

My argument is based largely upon my own experiences, drawn from years of building and managing programs in the humanities and social sciences; sitting in meetings with deans, provosts, students, and fellow faculty at my home institution; and conversing with colleagues and students at other institutions. My perspective is decidedly pragmatic, focused on the goals of maintaining and developing strengths in my domain in regard to program size, diversity, and the success of its faculty,

students, and alumni. I care about enrollments, the number of majors and minors, improving the teaching and research effectiveness of faculty and students, the success of our graduates, and the overall positive impact that our team can bring to the institution and wider world. I share these perspectives with the hope that it cultivates discussions that lead to action.

In order to contextualize my perspectives, it serves to describe my current position. I am a full professor, who in the past fifteen years (most, if not all my career) has been alternatively engaged both in the development and direction of the Archaeology Program and in chairing the Department of Classics at the College of Charleston. "The College" is a four-year public institution of approximately ten thousand undergraduates and two thousand graduate students (predominately MA students) with a wide array of major programs. Our size is such that we can hardly be called a small liberal arts college, but our limited graduate programs and traditional focus on teaching mean that we don't consider ourselves (nor are we labeled) as a research university. That is not to say that extensive research does not occur, but rather that it is encapsulated within the undergraduate mission of the university.

Thinking positively, the institution is in a "Goldilocks" position in terms of size. It is big enough that there is a diversity and scale for innovative discovery, but not so large that there is a siloing of resources by department or discipline. If a significant piece of equipment or research/programmatic initiative is desired, the most likely means of success lies in working across departmental boundaries to secure the necessary critical mass for support. This environment can, if managed well, lead to a vibrant condition of collaboration for education and research that responds to changing needs while maintaining disciplinary expectations. However, if communication is hampered or stresses that affect departmental goals are introduced, the result is stagnation and rigidity.

Economics and Trends in Higher Education

PAYING FOR COLLEGE

In terms of financials, the College of Charleston, like any institution, is funded by three main income streams: state/federal appropriations, grants/philanthropy, and tuition. A decrease in one area requires increase in the others. Over my time at the College of Charleston, I have seen state appro-

priations decrease from 21% of my institution's budget to 9.5%. Grants and philanthropy have remained relatively flat as a percentage of the overall budget (Office of the Controller 2004, 2005, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2017). As appropriations across the academy have declined, competition for grants and donations has also become increasingly competitive. Since funds from appropriations are reduced and grants/philanthropy is static, this leaves the third income stream—tuition.

Setting the price tag for tuition can be a necromantic operation. At the College of Charleston, tuition (and any changes) is set by the state-appointed Board of Trustees. As other forms of revenue have decreased, raising tuition to meet the needs of the institution has been hard-fought, given the political need to keep the cost of education manageable to the electorate.

The increasing reliance upon tuition has had profound effects. Enrollments are now essential to fiscal stability; a miss of the College's enrollment target can demonstrably affect the institution's operation (Jaschik). As a public institution, the College has different rates for in-state and out-of-state students. Typically, the college holds to a mix of 60% in-state and 40% out-of-state students. This balance can be adjusted only so far before being called out by the state legislature and public pressure for not holding to the task of contributing to the education of South Carolina residents (Huckabee). This creates a conflict between a perceived state need and institutional solvency—with too few in-state students, the College is not holding to its charge as a public good, but with too many South Carolina residents, the institution cannot perform its duties.

The College is not alone in these problems, which are well-known throughout higher education. Students are in demand, and current demographics show that the supply of students is either flat or shrinking (Bransberger and Michelau 1–6; Hoover and Supiano) while colleges are increasingly dependent on their tuition dollars. Simply put, there is less pie all around, and there is increasingly little else on the menu but pie. That's not healthy.

Internal Shifts in Needs and Priorities

In addition, the internal budgets of institutions are increasingly diverting funds (as a percentage of the budget) from core educational tasks to elements that used to be viewed as peripheral. Despite the prevalence

of Advanced Placement and other courses that can carry college credit, students are increasingly perceived as unprepared for college. In some cases, fingers point to shifts in K–12 education that emphasize instruction tied to standardized tests and assignments that are less open-ended than what is normally found in post-secondary education (Strauss). In others, the need for revenue has led to expanding enrollments and relaxing admission standards (Fabricant and Brier). In either case, there is rising demand for remedial coursework and mentoring in basic math, writing, and research skills at the college level. Pressure from the public and state legislatures seeking data to justify the rising private expense of college has led to intensifying program assessment, oversight, and reporting, adding to the administrative burden of institutions (Desrochers and Kirshstein). As competition for resources increases, at a premium are high-quality deans, provosts, presidents, and vice presidents who are capable of energizing and creating a vision for the institution, enabling it to sail through the morass (Desrochers and Kirshstein). As the budgets of colleges and universities are increasingly dependent upon tuition, there is greater competition for students. To attract students, further investments are made to enhance the quality of student life in the form of state-of-the-art dormitories, recreation facilities, and other similar facilities and programs (Rubin). The cost of college is going up, and less of the overall budget is going to the central focus of the university—research and education. Educators are required to do more or the same with less.

The Great Recession has played a part in these trends. It was during this period that state appropriations—already in decline—became more pronounced. Most notably to me as chair and program director, the Recession created a constriction in the job market that affected both recent graduates and their parents, who began to emphasize the need for tuning education to specific outcomes that would provide the best opportunity for employment. Questions from incoming students were increasingly tied to questions about scholarships, internships, and success rates in job placement. When personal costs are on the rise and the job market is constrained, the world is no longer a place where education for education's sake is allowed.

Meeting the Needs of the Twenty-First Century

It is within this context of decreasing funding for education, increasing competition for students, and further emphasis upon work force devel-

opment that institutions are retooling missions and resources to meet the needs of an increasingly interconnected and digitally driven twenty-first century. The world is warming, the roads are crumbling, health care is in constant flux, and we are ever more bound to our devices for information. The use of "big data" is progressively playing a role within economics, politics, and our social systems. Our condition creates a resounding call for the needs of STEM, and universities, secondary schools, and federal/state legislators are heeding the call.

At the College of Charleston, the turn towards programs that supposedly ensure quality employment are being felt. Supplemental funding has been appropriated by the state legislature to the Department of Computer Science for several years, and movements are under way to establish a PhD program in computer science. Since 2007, South Carolina students majoring in STEM and health fields have received enhancements to state scholarships of $2,500 per year (South Carolina Commission on Higher Education). Majors in public health, marketing, and exercise science are on the rise, while majors in French, religious studies, and art history decline as students—sensitive to the job market—look for majors that appear to directly translate to career opportunities. The size of the institution, in these contexts, becomes a liability to some. Neither a "Research I" nor "liberal arts" institution, the College faces steep competition from larger universities with greater research profiles and smaller liberal arts institutions providing personal, "boutique" educational options. The institution is faced with identity and mission issues, often poised as diametrically-opposed options—to expand professional, preprofessional, and continuing education programs and develop along the lines of a regional comprehensive institution to meet the workforce needs of the local region, or to hold onto the liberal arts core, focus on distinctive programs, and possibly contract into a liberal arts institution on steroids (Gardner).

As recently as January 2018, the University of Missouri, facing severe financial constraints, received the recommendations from a Task Force on Academic Program Analysis, Enhancement, and Opportunities to deactivate MA/PhD programs in classics and art history and to consolidate foreign language departments into a single department, while simultaneously investing in big data analytics, health industries, and sustainability.[1] While the suggestions do not direct the investments towards any one department/program/college, on the surface, they point the institution away from certain fields and towards others.

These are not isolated events, as actions at the University of North Dakota (Caraher) and at the University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point (Zamudio-Suaréz) indicate. Institutions look to trim, making the business of the institution more efficient. Often this appears to come at the expense of consolidating departments, insisting upon self-sustaining programs, shifting faculty lines based upon student demand, and/or replacing retiring lines with contract employees in areas that suffer low enrollments or are viewed as nice enhancements to the curriculum, as opposed to central to the demands of modern society.

But, as the apologists note, the questions and issues that the humanities address *are* central to the demands of modern society. Humanists ask the hard questions for which there are seldom straight answers. The problems of this world—war, famine, pestilence, environmental degradation, religious or political fanaticism—are not STEM problems. Humans created them, and humans are going to have to solve them. Our STEM colleagues are hard at work in tracing the effects of global warming and many other ills, but a technical solution for our problems counts for very little if it cannot be implemented within a socioeconomic—a human—construct. Rather than spectators and critics, humanists are (or should be) the ones leading and guiding the debates, developing solutions, and driving positive change in the world around us.

Yet, many do not view this as our purpose. As institutions become more tuition-dependent, and those paying the tuition are ever intent on visualizing a pathway from education to career, the humanities must be more proactive in making the argument for *why* what we teach makes students better prepared for the future.

Whither the Humanities

The arguments for the humanities are extensive, ranging from full-blown scholarly treatises, policy statements and research by the academy (Hart Research Associates; Commission on the Humanities and Social Sciences; American Academy of Arts and Sciences), and opinion pieces by scholars, business leaders, and journalists (often flooding social media feed at the beginning and end of the academic calendar). I will indulge the reader with a synopsis of three of the main arguments.

The Good Life: Within this class of argument lies the notion that the greatest gift of the humanities is the ability to think and reason. These

are the skills of the enlightened citizen, capable of critically evaluating information, debating productively with those of opposing viewpoints, and in general possessing the capacity to lead a life with a moral center honed by interrogation of cultures from across time and space (Burriesci; Stover; Connolly).

The Big Questions: Humanists have the ability to ask the right questions to answer to the probing problems of society. Having learned about societies from a variety of perspectives, humanists have tremendous capacities in cultural literacy which enables them to see solutions to the big structural and social questions of our age (Olejarz; Hartley 15).

Transferable Skills: Humanities allow a person to develop critical thinking, communication, and analytical skills, and other soft skills. Their diversity of approaches allows people to think laterally and creatively. Humanities teach one to learn, an imperative in a quickly changing society (Marcus; Appelbaum; Feloni).

Each of these arguments holds valid reasons for studying the humanities; none of them on their own have shown widespread changes in attitude. Part of the reason is that the humanities are not perceived to be the sole provider of these qualities—just ask a climate scientist about the big challenges and questions of our age. Nor are we viewed as the only source for practical, transferable skills—the courses at the nearest technical college also hone transferable skills. We may be a repository for pondering the good life, but making the case that you can live off your knowledge of Voltaire is a hard sell. One can easily see intersections between the three arguments that also resonate in the ways in which the humanities are presented, pursued, or perceived, but an emphasis in only two of the three elements fails to reach full potential:

Good Life + Big Questions: The humanities can be viewed as a place where the big issues in the world can be explored, both in terms of the day-to-day mechanics and the higher philosophical elements that promote an "enlightened" society. This allows one to identify problems potential solutions. The more prosaic skills of communication and persuasion to others beyond those similarly educated, however, are viewed as tasks that sometimes cheapen the endeavor.

Big Questions + Transferable Skills: One can mine examples from the humanities to explore the structural elements of society, and with the employment of writing and communication skills, institute changes. Without the interrogation of those components that explore justice, truth, and other elements of moral philosophy, those changes can be

ill-conceived. Studying the Augustan building program can provide fruitful insights into how marketing can be used to promote an idea or position. Without a grounding in the concepts of moral philosophy, those applications can lead to unintended consequences.

Transferable Skills + Good Life: One can focus on the humanities for pondering the deep meanings of humanity and for honing soft skills in communication, engagement, and life-long learning. This provides excellent skills for a wide array of careers, and the ability to have a healthy personal approach to life. I view this as a very popular perspective of what we produce—people well-prepared to engage in a productive and rewarding life with a healthy knowledge of eighteenth-century landscape painting. Certainly, there is more to what we are attempting to accomplish.

On the other hand, an appreciation of all three arguments provides the capacity to identify the problems and issues of the world, develop a plan and team to meet those challenges, and effect changes within the broader contexts of society and in line with the public good (Commission on the Humanities and Social Sciences). This is our goal. If there is a consistency throughout the apologetics, it is the firm belief that the study of the humanities is useful and transformative to society. Transformation requires an incorporation of each of these elements. I do not deny that humanities in higher education are bringing these elements to students. I would suggest that we are not doing a good job of communicating this to relevant stakeholders.

A Call to Action

If the arguments for the humanities hold merit, we should develop programs that inculcate all three of these elements. We need to seriously look at what we do, and retool as necessary. We should not do this passively, with the expectation that students, administrators, and the public will intimate our intent. Instead, we must be explicit and direct. Our efforts at renewal should extend beyond the classroom to include mentoring students with an eye toward career development. Finally, our work needs to extend beyond

the academy to building relationships in business, K–12 schools, and the legislature. If our goal is to reinvigorate the appreciation of the humanities, we need to engage with the world. The reemergence of the humanities is made easier when the leaders of society—the captains of industry, political elite, and social leaders—are products of humanistic study, and understand that their successes are owed in part to these pursuits.

To provide an example of these ideas in practice,[2] I provide the work in progress conducted by me and my colleagues at the College of Charleston, who have engaged in the revision of our major in classical civilization.[3] The Department of Classics offers two major tracks, leading to either the *Artium Baccalaureatus* (AB) in Classics or a BA in Classical Civilization. The AB track in Classics focuses upon ancient languages, requiring a minimum of two years of study in one language (ancient Greek or Latin) and three years in the other, nine credits (three courses) in classical civilization, and a research seminar taken in the fall semester of the final year. Until fall 2017, the BA in Classical Civilization required two courses in introductory classical civilization (introduction to Greek civilization, introduction to Roman civilization, or the commensurate courses in history), fifteen credits (five courses) in classical civilization (no more than two courses at the introductory level), two courses at the advanced level, and the research seminar. In addition to the major programs, the Department manages minors in Greek, Latin, and co-coordinates a BS in teacher education (classics-focused) that meets South Carolina licensure requirements for teaching Latin in middle and secondary schools. Lastly, the College of Charleston offers an AB degree in addition to the BA and BS, which requires the completion of two advanced courses in an ancient language and two courses in classical civilization, in addition to major and general education coursework. The AB degree is open to all students of the College, regardless of major.

In 2011, the Department had nearly fifty majors, split equally between the BA and AB tracks. Three years later, the number had dropped to the low thirties, with the greatest loss occurring in the BA track. Our numbers for the AB in Classics were relatively unchanged, but we had taken a significant hit in the civilization track. Our interpretation of these data suggested that the AB was more desirable, given that it was considered the harder of the two programs. Pursued by those preparing for graduate school, this tract was attracting bright, engaged students. People pursuing the BA track were decidedly heading somewhere other than graduate

studies, but that "somewhere" was not defined. In an environment where students (and parents) sought a defined pathway through the educational process to potential employment/placement, the BA in Classical Civilization was not delivering.

Being Explicit

The core purposes of the program must be explicitly stated and clearly realized within the curriculum. In many cases, there is a core belief in the value of the humanities and the disciplinary goals among faculty. Often, these tenets are well-displayed in websites and in marketing literature. However, these values and goals are not often explicitly found within the structure of the curriculum. Sign-posting assists in making the abstract explicit. If we claim to provide analytical and communication skills, where does this happen? Where do we discuss the big questions? If the answer is "everywhere", we have lost the argument. If something is everywhere, it is nowhere.

In redesigning the BA program, explicitness began with directly stating our department's goals and purpose for the major among the department's faculty. We asked ourselves what we wanted students to get out of four years of study in classical civilization and where we expected our graduates to go. This visioning process was provided an essential baseline understanding among the team. We held it important that students:

- know the basic cultural and historical narratives of Greek and Roman civilizations.
- develop strong research and writing competencies.
- establish analytical skills—both in the exegesis of specific types of evidence and in the process of synthesizing different types of information.
- recognize the study of classics as the contribution of literary, archaeological, and historical information.
- understand the lingering impacts and uses of classical civilization in cultures/movements of later periods.
- consider the big questions and concepts of humanity, whether that be structural (e.g., political-economic systems) or more esoteric (e.g., sexuality, family, personal ethics).
- have a high-impact experience that provided application of these concepts.

This exercise explicitly associated our expectations of what students were to get out of the program to the actual courses. For some, this may seem as excessive "billboarding" and commodifying the "product" that our department is "selling" (Caraher). We view it as explaining how our vision for the study of classics is expressed within the curriculum. In decades prior, we seemed to operate with the assumption that the value of humanities was a given (at least to a sufficient number of legislators, administrators, parents, and students to adequately justify our existence). Those days, if they truly ever existed, are over.

Mentoring Students toward Their Future

In my early years of advising students, when asked what could be done with a classics degree, I would respond with an enthusiastic "Anything!", direct them to literature and websites prepared by the Society for Classical Studies and others, and finally refer them to the College's Career Center who, in turn, would direct them to resources on how to break into career tracks that were less than glamorous or high-paying. By and large, this method was effective enough and paralleled the level of advising I saw provided by others. It is reflected in the experiences of many successful humanities graduates, who note that they fell into a position by happenstance. Unless the trajectory is graduate school (my own professional path), most faculty are unnerved by and woefully unprepared for assisting students with alternative directions. Until very recently, this was also the case for graduate students who decided to pursue career paths different than the expected roles of newly-minted PhDs. While this status quo serves the 15% of our students heading to law/grad/other professional school, a strong humanities program will have a large majority of students angling to do something else after college. Unless one works at an Ivy League school, most students likely need mentoring to transform their education into food.

We first approached this need by broadening the capstone experience from solely the research seminar to a variety of high-impact experiences which could manifest as the seminar, a research assistantship, an independent study, or an internship. The expansion allows students to tailor this activity (often in their junior or senior year) to career interests while placing controls in place to ensure that the student reflects upon that experience relative to their classical education. Internships are encouraged and are not tied to the traditional experiences such as museums or other

opportunities often directly associated with classical studies. While these types of culminating experiences are not a new concept, the shift from the research seminar to a suite of options was one of the more heavily discussed components of our revisions—both within the department and at the wider institutional approval stages. This was especially the case given that we proposed to encourage internships that had no direct content relevancy to the major. Shifting from a pure research capstone to one that allowed for applied experiences—in classics—was a concept that raised some questions. However, if one of our arguments for the relevancy of the classics (and the humanities writ large) is that we make highly productive employees in a variety of industries, then we must facilitate these initial relationships.

In addition to curricular changes, we bring the subject of strategic minors into the advising process. This recognizes several conditions. First, while business leaders call for the skills found in humanities majors (Hart Research Associates 4), it is a perceived expectation that the well-trained classicist will lose out to someone who holds a relevant degree or training directly appropriate to the position. Secondly (and related to the first point), entry-level positions are often emphasize skills and tasks that are not readily visible on the classicist's résumé. Minors/double majors in computer science, marketing, finance or certification in GIS/data analytics provide a means by which classicists can show both a direct real-world skill for a given industry and the broader applications as well as a perspective that comes from a humanities education. One who majors in humanities with a knowledge of informatics (or other marketable skills) is an agent of change.

Relationships beyond the Ivory Tower

Within academia, service is not well-rewarded. Extremely rare is the case that someone who is average in teaching and research but exemplary in service will receive tenure. Yet, engagement with the community is essential. Changing the attitude of society about the value of the humanities requires engaging and meeting the needs of society. This effort requires developing networks with K–12 educators, guidance counselors, and administrators; business leaders (and their HR departments); and elected officials. The ivory tower will endure, but we need to open the windows, throw down the drawbridge, get out occasionally, and invite people over

for coffee. Knowledge that is not shared widely is wasted and given over to suspicion.

At Charleston, we are reinvigorating our connections with K–12 educators in Latin, the most approachable gateway subject for our field. This includes the sponsorship of an annual Classics Day at the College for all Latin programs in the state, socials for local educators, and the development of an annual workshop for K–12 educators to share pedagogical successes and failures. Borrowing an idea from the Classics Department at the University of Cincinnati, we are also designing an outreach program for local schools, providing opportunities for faculty to engage with local high- and middle-school students. Strong programs in classics within the high schools translate into college students predisposed to cultivate their love for classics in college—especially if they have an understanding that such a pursuit is not a dead end when it comes to job prospects.

As we develop our internship program, we are coordinating our efforts with the College's Career Center, which has many contacts in the Charleston region. However, we are also making a point of managing and coordinating the relationships from our office. Our goal is to make the connection between business and classics real, and to develop the association of high-quality interns with the discipline—i.e., brand recognition.

Within our institutions, deans, provosts, and presidents need to be reminded which programs on campus drive the big questions and deal with huge datasets full of fuzzy data. We need to see our work as part of larger conversations and engage. Cultivating conversations across disciplines create collaborations. Collaborations create nodes of teaching, research, and a network of associates who realize the value in our work. In turn, realizing value of the work in other academic units and the interdependent nature of knowledge creation creates allies and broad support among departments; significant cuts to an art history department can affect faculty and students in geology if there are connections via interdisciplinary research, teaching, and curriculum development. The same report at Missouri that called for the deactivation of Art History and Archaeology and Classics graduate programs also called for the investment and encouragement of big data analytics and interdisciplinary programs and research. As a classical archaeologist, I know that those are exactly the areas in which we work. Rather than cut these programs, Missouri (and others) would do well to invest.

The Department of Classics at the College of Charleston is fortunate

to have a group of active donors and allies in the community. In the near future, we anticipate organizing an advisory board. In many instances, establishing a board is viewed as a means of providing contact and communication with regular donors. A broader vision would include classically inclined business leaders and officials, capable of providing guidance on networking opportunities for students and alumni. In doing so, we would build beyond a traditional vision of giving to include actions related to mentoring and advocacy.

Concluding Remarks

By providing examples from our work in Classics at Charleston, I by no means intend to exclude other examples. Indeed, our own sister programs in German and French have internship programs abroad, placing students with French and German companies (French Francophone and Italian Studies; German and Russian Studies). Our colleagues in Hispanic Studies recently instituted an advisory board consisting of business and other community leaders; they launched their Career Seminar Series in spring 2018, providing the opportunity for the community to see the power of a humanities education in the real world (Hispanic Studies). The ideas that we have instituted within Classics hardly come from a vacuum.

Our responses to our condition are purposeful and designed to meet the challenges before us. Revising our curriculum provides clarity to students on the goals of the major; our broad platitude-filled rhetoric is paired to a clear curriculum. Rather than seeing this as selling out to the market, the structure has strengthened and clarified our purpose to faculty, administrators, and students. Students are reticent about humanities because of the nebulous job market that awaits them as well as the general perception that departments and faculty are ill-prepared to chart a path outside that of academia and professional schools. We have instituted internships and other opportunities to show a viable "life after classics." Our program and institution as a whole are reliant upon enrollment; cultivating relationships with high-school programs in the state develops a pipeline from secondary schools to our institution. Looking beyond the state, we are teaming with the Office of Admissions to target demographic audiences that match the strengths of our program, creating a win-win relationship with what is now one of the most influential offices on campus. Finally, we are creating allies internal and external to the institution. Research and educational collaborations across campus

create an environment of interdependence and counter the inclination to seek a defensive posture against competition for enrollments and majors. Developing friends and allies in the community not only provides examples for current, prospective, and past students, but reinforces the message that classics is a viable pursuit, worthy of support. By engaging with the administration and the community, clarifying our educational program, and providing clear guidance to both postgraduate education and direct employment, we do nothing by way of sacrificing our programmatic rigor, nor do we cede to a neo-liberal agenda of making the university a workforce creator for industry (one of the goals of the university has always been to produce productive members of society). If anything, our curricular rigor is improved, our goals clarified, our research made more visible, our financial standing enhanced, and our relevance demonstrated in word and deed.

Higher education is in a state of flux, brought on by a variety of factors, many of which are outside our control. However, we can control our reactions and response. One strategy involves shouting our good qualities into the wind from the mountaintop (Connolly; Hartley; Feloni; Morson). Regardless of their veracity and appeals to a range of audiences, the numbers of declared majors in history vs. finance suggest that they are being lightly heard and ill-remembered. A second strategy could see us relent to the needs of modern society and market our soft skills, eventually reducing our various disciplines as functionary to more important pursuits. I tire of the former and fear the latter.

The third option requires aggressive engagements, restructuring, and marketing. It is not something that many in the humanities were built or trained for, but I have confidence in our training as humanists to see the big picture, think creatively, communicate effectively, and institute changes that improve our condition within the academy and the broader condition of society. It is, after all, a task for which we profess to be aptly trained.

One could argue that I am suggesting that we accept the premise that the university has been transformed into an institution whose purpose is to produce suitable members of the workforce, and that in the face of increasing competition, the university as "billboard" is the new normal (Caraher). I do. What I advocate is to engage in actions through which the message on that billboard is changed. I am by no means discounting the arguments for the value of the humanities, but for those arguments to be heard, they must be reinforced with curricula and communications within our programs. That action does not weaken or destroy the central

rigor and heart of the humanities, but rather clearly communicates and structures the experience to a world that has largely accepted different expectations for education. Resetting those expectations will not be done by argumentation alone.

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Notes

1. The report also suggested investment in interdisciplinary programs and research, diversity, and pedagogy.

2. In presenting our work, I lay no claim to anything outside of the fact that this is our response to the conditions enumerated within this paper. It was tuned to the needs of our students, faculty, and institution. This is by no means laying out what *needs* to be done, but rather what we have done. To the extent that our work can provide ideas and suggestions, we will consider it work well-spent.

3. These efforts are the production of the entirety of the Department of Classics under the leadership of Tim Johnson as chair. This was and is a team effort, and the extraordinary work and dedication of Andrew Alwine, Sam Flores, Jennifer Gerrish, Tim Johnson, James Lohmar, Allison Sterrett-Krause, and Noelle Zeiner-Carmichael must be fully acknowledged.

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PSYCHOLOGY
STUDENT LOUNGE
HOURS: 8:00 - 5:00


Worship = Worth Ship
Anglo-Saxon

Austerity

struck just before we cried out
"start the reformation now!",
somewhere between TR,
Tom McGrath's death

the cloud of unknowing
streamed in from the bush
where the Governor and crew
hide out on line for our surrender

North Dakota may be everywhere,
but anywhere nowhere can be anyplace that
it matters more to pipeline the fracked souls
than it does to remember ourselves in dance and song

the cattle are sculpting the insides of hay stacks-McGrath
the snow owls arrange the insides of rabbits-Harry Turtle
while somewhere out past the wide misery,
old Rosco is cleaning his gun-Old Woman Magic

so now austerity comes
while we live on body and blood: homemade,
while the governments
slide into riots and parades

Thus we are seeking to rebuild the
promise on cave walls and screens
while the Cons try to sell us this "buffalo
roam" and Rome belches gas oven fumes

down in the cottonwood church by the river
we dance, pass the pipes, clean the rifles
and dream to remember old Bull, Crazy Horse
Langer and the poets of starving hearts

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SAYRE·HALL


SAYRE·HALL

Humanities in the Age of Austerity: A Case Study from the University of North Dakota

Introduction

In January 2018, I took the helm of the *North Dakota Quarterly* (*NDQ*), a public humanities journal based at the University of North Dakota (UND). In the previous year or so, we had seen our funding eliminated, including the funding for our long-serving managing editor and our subscription manager. This occurred amid a series of budget cuts across the university, a change in university leadership, a new budget model, a new strategic plan, and a newly clarified set of institutional priorities.

The changes at UND were both predictable and shocking. On the one hand, the cuts to the *NDQ* were not a surprise. We had been operating on borrowed time for a few years and had struggled to adapt our venerable publication to the changing landscape of publishing and higher education. On the other hand, the immediate cause for the cuts was a drop in oil and agricultural prices which led to a reduction of state funds appropriated to UND and increased scrutiny of the budget across campus. This brought unsettling new attention both to academic programs and to the work rhythms of faculty and staff, and it threw the largely peaceful culture of university life into tumult.

As someone who had worked at UND for almost fifteen years, nothing prepared me for how quickly campus culture changed. I was not prepared to compete with my colleagues in other colleges for resources and students. The sudden attention to such minutia as the percentages in faculty contracts, enrollment numbers in upper-level classes, and the square footage of offices seemed misplaced and distrustful. The growing use of digital tools to measure and document faculty productivity and student progress seemed intrusive and, at best, redundant with longstanding practices and, at worst, reductionist or crassly corporate. It felt like certain members of the administration had committed to replacing the longstanding North Dakota practice of doing more with less with an insistence that we do what the administration expected with less. Whatever collective spirit and camaraderie that the former developed, the

latter undermined. In just under two years, the university culture seemed to shift from one of creativity and collaboration to one of compliance and coercion.

Like many of my colleagues, I looked both locally and nationally to understand the context for these changes. I read widely in both the latest and classic books on higher education policy, criticism, and history. I taught a class on the budget cuts, openly mocked administrators, co-directed a conference on outrage, served as chair of the University Graduate Committee after our graduate program in history had been defunded, and agreed to represent the Graduate School on the University Senate Budget Committee. As someone with a very limited range of responses to crisis and change, I did what I knew and engaged the budget cuts as an intellectual problem. I gave serious effort to understand the shifting culture of academia at UND and nationally, and I looked to turn the increasingly sour campus culture into the refreshing lemonade of field study.

Austerity, State, and the Market

A casual reading of recent literature in public higher education introduces the word austerity to describe cuts to public programs (Blyth; Fabricant and Brier). The term has acquired ideological and intellectual baggage, but the kind of austerity that this article will focus on is the main expression of a larger neoliberal package of ideas that privileges the market as the dominant force in producing wealth and value in society. Neoliberal ideas initially developed at a macro-economic scale in the immediate post-war period, both as a challenge to Keynesian economic models and as a critique of mid-century political views of the statist projects and economies of the Soviet Union, Nazi Germany, and Fascism in Europe. As David Harvey explains, neoliberalism became a cornerstone of Thatcher's and Reagan's reimagining of the national and then the global economy. In this context, neoliberal thinkers and politicians argued that state institutions impeded a person's economic (and even social) freedom, and this ultimately undermined innovation and entrepreneurship which should serve as the engines for economic growth. Neoliberals argued that the state's control over resources and bureaucratized regulation stifled individual creativity and competition as well as insulated certain sectors of the economy into complacency.

These political attitudes also supported an economic view that saw the flow of state funds into the economy as producing inflationary conditions

which dampened markets, weakened the private sector, and impaired economic growth. Austerity, then, represented a strategy to reduce the economic influence of the state over the economy, to forestall inflation, and to allow for markets and the private sector to produce growth. Whatever the economic merits of this approach (and recent work has cast significant doubts on whether austerity does stimulate growth), in the American context, these policies have weakened the social safety net created during the Great Depression, turned significant quantities of public assets over to the private sector, and shaped global political and economic policy.

My interest is on how these measures have impacted higher education and, in particular, played a part in the defunding of the *NDQ*. Three elements of neoliberal policies have ultimately come to shape a certain moral view of the world: (1) the belief that markets and competition provide the best context for the expression of individual freedom, (2) that success in the market reflects the value of the individual (and the institution), and (3) that market competition produces efficiencies by undermining the complacency of entrenched publicly funded interests (which also erode the opportunities for freedom).

The impact of these three attitudes on higher education in the US has been dramatic. This is partly because neoliberal faith in market competition has certain parallels with the long-standing belief in the free interplay of ideas and meritocratic competition within academia. In recent times, however, faith in the academic meritocracy has become elided with neoliberal rhetoric on the moral good of market competition and the market as an expression of individual freedom. This combination has produced an almost hegemonic commitment to the market practices. In other words, individuals within and outside of the academy, both in the administration, in the legislators, among alumni, and in the classroom, have seen market forces as beneficial agents of change and as justification for wholesale revisions in curricula and educational policies. These attitudes reflect certain hegemonic aspects of neoliberal thinking that makes it very hard for us to imagine alternative ways of doing things (Harvey).

These forces played out in the recent history of the *NDQ* in a number of intriguing and informative ways. The *Quarterly* lost funding amid a series of rather dramatic budget cuts at the state level. Many in the legislature privileged a desire to keep the state friendly to business by cutting taxes and regulation (and, ideally, allowing market forces to generate growth rather than direct state investment in programs). They coupled

this with a tendency to see public higher education as an expensive luxury that had been too long protected from market forces and therefore inefficient (by definition). Raising taxes to support state programs, then, would have made the state less friendly to business and limited the freedom of individuals to use their funds to pursue whatever education they desired.

At UND, the proximate causes for cuts to the *NDQ* stemmed from the dean of the College of Arts and Sciences urging us to produce a "sustainable business model" for the journal. Apparently, the existing model for the *NDQ* which combined funds from the College of Arts and Sciences with income from subscriptions was no longer sustainable, despite being in place for over sixty years. Its lack of sustainability, at least in the rhetoric of our administrators, reflected an expectation that projects like the *NDQ* should be able to subsist largely on private funds. In other words, this new definition of sustainability was something that existed only in the private sector, rather than as a shared commitment supported by public and private resources. This, of course, parallels the larger trends and attitudes toward public higher education more broadly, which has long relied upon both public and private sources of funding.

At the same time, the expectation of sustainability coincided with a rhetorical position that sees the arts and humanities at state universities, in particular, as luxuries (see Kleinman). The critique of this position is well-known, so I'll address it here only briefly. Politicians inclined to attack the arts and humanities have tended to argue that they are not only useless degrees that produce students who are a burden on society, but also that the character of a humanities education is the deeply suspect hotbed of post-modernism, anti-nationalism, liberalism, and other nefarious positions that undermine the shared values of the community. The merging of moral judgements on the humanities in higher education and the purported lack of viability of graduates with humanities degrees in the marketplace is consistent with the larger ideological project of contemporary neoliberalism. The market is not only the source of resources, but also operationalizes the *opinio communis*, reflects the values of a society, and optimizes the flow of resources to areas best suited for the future.

This tendency to diminish the prospects of the humanities and humanities graduates among political and campus leaders invested in austerity appears to be largely a rhetorical one in which the usual line of causality is reversed. The moral economy of neoliberalism has tended to see failure in the market as a moral failing. In the case of the humanities,

however, the critique of the market and neoliberalism by scholars of the humanities represents a moral failing of these individuals (even though the lines between neoliberalism and certain kinds of post-modern critiques, for example, are well-known among scholars [Harvey]). Following this logic, scholars and students of the humanities appear less likely to be successful in the private sector, despite a substantial body of evidence to the contrary (see, for example, Humphreys and Kelly). These attitudes appear to be shared by students as well as is visible in the declining number of majors in the humanities.[1]

Reducing funds to the humanities and redirecting them toward practical and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields is seen as a way to make the university more responsive to the marketplace on the basis of a kind of moral reasoning rather than practical data. That the humanities have seen declining numbers—in part as a result of this inversion of neoliberal logic—has become the evidence that students are "voting with their feet" rather than the result of critical attention in the media or among legislators or funding cuts to promoting the humanities on campus. In this context, defunding a project like the *NDQ* becomes an opportunity to demonstrate a commitment to practical education and short-term workforce development as well as a rejection of morally suspect fields of in the arts and humanities. The argument that the *NDQ* did not develop a sustainable business model (i.e., a model that relies more on the market for sustainability) is both true and confirms the larger perspective that the humanities are not viable fields in the contemporary economy and do not deserve continued public support.

This is, of course, largely theater, but a particularly pernicious kind of theater that reflects the internalization of certain aspects of neoliberalism among faculty and administrators (in a way that suggests Antonio Gramsci's idea of hegemony). Moreover, it confounds the efficient operation of a university (which confirms the argument that the public sector is intrinsically less efficient than the private sector) and replaces the aspirations for a genuinely meritocratic kind of competition—a marketplace of ideas (Menand)—with a crasser, less productive, but far more public, race to the bottom.

Performing Austerity

Advocates for austerity see the state as morally corrupting, as limiting individual freedom, and as stifling to economic growth, which is best

achieved by allowing market forces to play out in an unconstrained way. These attitudes have particularly negative implications for state universities, because as state institutions they are intrinsically inefficient and undermining the competitive function of markets. Cutting higher education budgets, then, pushes these institutions to exist in a market-driven world which should improve efficiency by fostering competition for resources and ensuring that capital does not get bottled up in supporting institutions that reflect values that run counter to the market ethos. Most of these changes at UND, however, (and I would suggest nationally) amount to a kind of theater designed to align the appearance of competition and market-driven policies with a series of outcomes deemed desirable by local stakeholders.

To be clear, higher education has always cultivated this kind of theater as a way to normalize the ascendency of certain groups and to produce outcomes that appear to be a natural result of broader social competition. Historically, higher education has used competition as a way to demonstrate the supposed superiority of white, upper- and middle-class, males and promoted traditional liberal arts and humanities degrees as exceptional in content and rigor. David Labaree has summarized a particularly obvious expression of this kind of competitive theater in the long-term persistence of the academic hierarchy among colleges and universities in the US (Labaree). A relatively small number of schools and their products tend to dominate the intellectual landscape of American higher education. Not only do top tier schools hire faculty from other top tier schools, but lower tier schools also tend to hire a disproportionate number of faculty with degrees from traditionally elite institutions. Lower tier schools see this as a way of imitating the practices of more elite institutions and moving up. In reality, it tends to reinforce the difference between the top tier schools and their lower tier numbers as faculty from elite schools tend to privilege their colleagues at elite schools over students that they produce at lower tier institutions. This bias toward the traditional centers of higher education in the US reproduces itself in competition for grants, fellowships, and even in peer review despite historical efforts to present these competitions as meritocratic. The long tradition of a kind of theater of competition in higher education produced a culture that is particularly susceptible to types of dissimulation at the core of neoliberal thinking.

It seems to me, however, that the conventional theater of competition in academia (while no less problematic) is similar on the surface to what

David Harvey recognizes as the internalization of certain aspects of neoliberalism. The idea that competition and the market dictate the value of intellectual or academic work extends across contemporary society to include faculty and administrators in a way that suggests Antonio Gramsci's idea of hegemony. The most visible expression of this is "zero sum" thinking that organizes campus priorities into winners and losers. Winners get funding (because they've won) and losers lose funding with the result that the winning ways of the winners will, over time, come to dominate the losing ways of the losers.

As a result, there already were winners and losers in higher education produced by generations of historical forces which are not necessarily unproblematic or somehow ideally suited (by dint of their co-evolution with market, social, and cultural forces) for efficient education, new knowledge production, or social good. Neoliberal priorities, at least to those viewing higher education from the perspective of an external stakeholder, nevertheless required a kind of change that reflects the conspicuous pivoting of higher education toward assumed market needs, toward the methods of the market, and, at very least, away from disciplines overtly critical of the market. In other words, whatever the processes that created the current landscape of higher education, neoliberal policies push us to align more clearly with methods and outcomes that reflect contemporary political and economic priorities and, perhaps more importantly, expectations.

The language of these priorities and expectations are well-known. Many in the public sphere view the humanities and arts as inefficient, antiquated, or a luxury, despite the emergence of a somewhat disappointing (and perhaps ineffectual) counter-discourse that argues for the economic importance of the degrees in these fields. More importantly, university and state leaders have regularly put forward STEM fields, with their sometimes overtly vocational goals, as a more efficient way to address the economic needs of local communities and, as a result, a better use for limited public funds. Moreover, public support for these fields both drives and ultimately parallels student interest in these economically productive disciplines (and students and tuition dollars will follow). The emphasis on STEM also attracts visible support from the private sector and federal grants.

A secondary challenge, and one that is of more interest to me, is whether it is possible to make the rise of STEM in higher education appear to be the historical result of market competition within the institution. It seems to me that this has some value because it allows administrators to tout and stakeholders to recognize the synchronization between market effi-

ciencies within and outside of these institutions. The rise of STEM fields, in this instance, allows higher education administrators to point to the efficiency of their institutions, because ultimately the same results suggest the same internal mechanisms.

Elsewhere I've called this move replacing the university as a knowledge factory—based on the historical affinities between university curricula and the assembly line (well described by Louis Menand)—with the university as a billboard. The university as a billboard represents the growing desire to demonstrate to the public that universities are responsive to market forces and have internalized the values of the marketplace. The university as a billboard also reassures an anxious public (or at least a certain sector of stakeholders) both that the university is an efficient institution deserving of the continued investment of resources and that public resources will attract outside investment through tuition, grants, and private donor contributions.

Returning to the fate of the *NDQ* and considering it in this context, I'd contend that there is little room for a public humanities quarterly because it does little to reinforce public view of higher education, which expects it to align with the public's own understanding of market forces shaping public (and private) institutions. If the university is a billboard, then, something like the *NDQ* is a distraction. The priority both internally and externally is to stay on message and on strategy, and if we take the logic of the market to its natural conclusion, the risk of straying from the message is existential.

More Billboard than Factory

As part of the effort to produce a compelling billboard for various stakeholders, universities have started to privatize core functions in order to demonstrate a willingness to optimize their operations and to promote their operational model as one that rewards competitive, efficient, and socially responsible activities (at least within a neoliberal model of society that views with a jaundiced eye all state-sponsored activities). On a superficial level, this is not entirely objectionable. After all, creating a metaphorical or real billboard for the activities at a university celebrates the impact and significance of faculty, students, and staff, builds a sense of community and pride, and attracts resources to the university from a range of sources including alumni, prospective students, and legislators. Intercollegiate athletics is perhaps the best example of this kind of bill-

board, where the presentation of the product on the field or court obfuscates the complex processes that allow this product to exist.

At the same time, the view of the university as a billboard can spill over into the internal workings of the university as a factory. Because state universities receive funding from a range of sources including state legislatures, alumni, students, and granting agencies, there is a wide interest in the process that creates the well-educated student or faculty research. In fact, the process is often easier to evaluate than the product of a university education. The latter tends to be subject to myriad variables and continues to accrue value over a lifetime. As a result, the billboard tends to promote processes that reflect the latest in market-hardened efficiency in place of the difficult to understand product of higher education.

In this context, the elusive rhetoric of a sustainable business model is less about ensuring that the *NDQ* survives into the future and more about consigning a public humanities journal like the *NDQ* to the ranks of inefficient and complacent university functions. Successful competition within the crucible of the market represented the only way in which a journal like the *NDQ* could contribute to the university billboard. In fact, a sustainable business model that included state funding was impossible within the set of expectations that motivated austerity. In contrast, the value of the journal as a critical product was simply irrelevant to its sustainability.

Unfortunately, the simplified message of the billboard too often spills over into the inner workings of the university. As faculty, administrators, and staff internalize the spirit of competition across campus in an effort to demonstrate that the university is subject to the same kinds of market forces as the private sector, the institution is as likely to produce inefficiencies as to streamline processes. Competition for students tends to lead to duplication of marketing and outreach efforts. Funding models that seek to recognize research or teaching excellence or even rein in wasteful competition between programs or departments become systems to be gamed. The long-standing and historical divisions on campus—colleges or departments that serve to protect academic and intellectual freedom and distinct disciplinary traditions—become barriers to cooperation and collaboration rather than efficient incubators of distinctive methods, practices, and approaches to problems. As a number of recent commentators have noticed (Hall), by projecting the billboard internally and promoting the appearance of competition, we distill the dynamism and diversity of higher education (or as David Labaree calls it, the "perfect mess") down to two closely related metrics: dollars and enrollments (which are really

just another measure of dollars). As Gary Hall has recently considered in his work on the "uberficiation" of the university, the growing ability to precisely trace the flow of capital—whether it is student tuition or faculty labor—has created a system that is pennywise and pound foolish in the largely historical organization of the university (Hall). In fact, our quest to use dollars, enrollments, and other easily measured indicators as markers of efficiency at the individual and department level has superseded the messier project of attempting to understand the product of the higher education factory, whether that be new ideas or high-quality students and graduates.

At its worst, the billboard approach to higher education promotes efficiency and competition at the expense of learning and discovery. And, as much as competition evokes longstanding fantasies of the academic meritocracy and satisfies the hegemonic attitudes that equate all waste with indolence and sloth, it rarely corresponds neatly with the actual work of students and faculty at a university. For many stakeholders, however, there is a strong temptation to see the product of the university as a factory as only as important as the revenue it can generate. Learning, discovery, education, and knowledge making are difficult to measure. Enrollments and revenue, in contrast, are obvious metrics for accomplishment, but poor surrogates for the ultimate goals of the university.

Conclusion

The ultimate goal of the university as a billboard is complex and, I'd contend, not fully understood even by its advocates. If we assume that the spread of neoliberal attitudes has more to do with a kind of deep-seated, Gramscian hegemony than a series of compelling arguments, then it is hardly surprising to find that assumptions of (in)efficiency drive policy more than any well-defined interest in outcomes. At the same time, the decline in resources of the humanities both on UND's campus and nationally as well as the defunding of long-standing projects like the *NDQ* represents more than just public relations gambits designed to make higher education look lean and market-savvy.

The humanities have always served an important role in developing the leadership class in the US and as a result, elites have always sought ways to limit and influence access to education in the humanities and liberal arts. Historically this has manifested itself in competition between universities and colleges, as historically elite schools have tended to cel-

ebrate a broadly liberal arts curriculum as a hallmark of their elite status. At the same time, schools looking to ascend the rankings have had to balance the desire to imitate the schools at the top of the higher education pyramid with the need to cultivate stakeholders through billboard-style claims to their efficiency and immediate economic benefit to their communities and students (Labaree). From its earliest days, UND has demonstrated a push-pull of support for the humanities as both a key aspect of democratic higher education and a wasteful extravagance best left to more well-heeled universities designed to produce the next generation of elite leaders (Geiger). Despite the historical parallels, I'd still contend that the current version of this debate grounded in neoliberal attitudes toward the function of the state and the goal of education has transformed the conversation. If throughout most of the twentieth century, a liberal arts education with a strong emphasis on the humanities was a hallmark of the leadership class, in the twenty-first century, the political elite have come to question this very formula. Talk of preparing leaders while endorsing approaches to higher education that shift resources from the humanities to other fields suggests a significant change in priorities.

More importantly, this shift in the basic expectations for the functioning of higher education presupposes an outcome. As the de-emphasis on the humanities has served to limit access to the leadership class by shifting resources elsewhere under the guise of efficiency and competition, it has also served to reify the existing social order as the product of similar forces. By privileging competition in the present, the current leadership presents disciplinary priorities and even the larger social order as the outcome of similar competition and similar ground rules. Part of the hegemonic character of neoliberalism is that it presents itself as a historical reality rather than a set of constructed expectations in the present. In this context, the defunding of the *NDQ* not only demonstrates a renewed commitment to efficient education, but also the historic failure of the traditional humanities project at UND.

Whatever the long-term goals for higher education, the billboard constructed by current leadership is not only an argument for how much more efficient a university can become, but also for their own position of authority. Diminishing the role of the humanities becomes not just a result of present policies and practice, but also the natural result of past competition which has forged the current leadership as well as their ideas. While this might represent my descent into a position of pure cynicism, the consistency of the rhetoric both on campus and in the larger public

sphere hints otherwise. The ultimate goal of neoliberalism is not to make the public sphere more efficient, but to fortify the position of private capital in society.

Epilogue

There is hope.

By continuing to edit and publish the *North Dakota Quarterly*, we offer a space of discontinuity to the prevailing direction of the modern university in two ways. First, the *NDQ* presents a counter-billboard to efforts to paint the university as the rational outcome of market-driven competition by coopting and using the very logic of neoliberalism to complicate its own outcomes. If resources at the university tend to flow toward programs, degrees, and projects that have practical economic value, then a successful, sustainable public humanities journal shows that the work of the humanities can generate economic value. In other words, the persistence of the *NDQ* gives lie to the idea that it is not efficient or reasonable for the university to help promote and sustain the humanities in the current economic climate. More than that, by loudly persisting, it refuses to be an example of how a commitment to efficiency at the modern university should exclude the humanities. The best counter-argument to defunding the public humanities because they are not competitive is by simply refusing to lose. The fact that you're reading this volume of the *NDQ* allows us to point out that a journal like this can survive in the competitive space of the modern market even under changing conditions of sustainability, whereas other priorities, whether in technology, professional programs, or other highly funded initiatives, require a constant stream of public investment for the same outcome. The persistence of the *NDQ* alone demonstrates that the public humanities can find partners and models that will provide sustainable funding for these projects when other fields of much greater interest to the private sector continue to rely on public funds. The place of the university in providing public subsidies to bolster the technology and workforce needs of the private sector complicates a simple view of the neoliberal economy functioning outside of the inefficient and interfering influence of the state.

Setting up the *NDQ* as a counter-billboard offers a sense of ironic satisfaction, but such gestures of resistance are hollow if resistance alone is the goal. After all, the need for thoughtful, public interventions in the humanities goes well beyond complicating a neoliberal worldview. The

NDQ's continued significance depends upon its ongoing, substantive contributions to the world through the thoughtful creativity and criticism of our authors and editors. In recent years, the *NDQ* has explored the character of transnationalism, the potential of the slow moment as an antidote to modern acceleration, and the spirit of defiance in the works of Thomas McGrath, alongside a regular stream of poetry, fiction, and art to enliven a world increasingly defined by fake news and clickbait. My editorial board has reinforced in me over the last year that the sustaining motivation for a journal like the *NDQ* is to make the world better by amplifying the voices of new writers and old hands, of indigenous communities, of overlooked groups, of students and their teachers, of big thinkers and tinkerers, and most importantly, of our readers.

Thank you for reading and sustaining the *Quarterly*.

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Note

1. https://humanitiesindicators.org/content/indicatordoc.aspx?i=34

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