Drummond Views (DV) is published three times a year by Drummond Institute, an educational and literary Montana nonprofit corporation that seeks to foster a deeper understanding of the rich culture(s) of Montana and the broader American West.

The editors welcome proposals for essays and reviews on cultural manifestations— including film/video, visual arts, literature, performing arts, scientific inquiry, food, architecture and design—created in Montana and the broader American West. Please send all queries and submissions to info@drummond.org.

We are not currently accepting unsolicited fiction, poetry, creative nonfiction, or portfolios of visual art.

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Welcome to the first issue of *Drumlummon Views*, the online journal of Montana arts and culture published by the newly formed Montana nonprofit corporation, Drumlummon Institute. Actually, you are reading the first and second issues (Spring/Summer 2006) of *Drumlummon Views*. We offer this double issue of *DV* as clear evidence of the wealth (and breadth) of our regional culture.

First, a few words about the name DRUMLUMMON: In 1875, Irish immigrant Thomas Cruse discovered a fabulously rich mother lode north of Helena, Montana, near present-day Marysville (for more on Marysville, see Darcy Minter’s essay, “It’s Not a Ghost Town ’til the Last Dog Leaves’: The Ghosts of Tradition in a Montana Mining Camp” in this issue of *DV*). The gold and silver mine that he established at the site Cruse called the Drumlummon, naming it after his native parish in Ireland.

One of the grand strikes of the American West, the Drumlummon Mine produced at least $30 million in bullion, making Cruse a very wealthy man indeed. Here at Drumlummon Institute, through *Drumlummon Views* and the books we publish, we are seeking quite different forms of wealth—cultural riches of infinitely various sorts—among Montana’s hills and broad river valleys, towering mountains and endless prairies. We hope you’ll join us (and find pleasure) in the search.

As you can see by scanning our table of contents, the Drumlummon Editorial Board defines Montana arts and culture extremely broadly. We’re not limiting ourselves just to the usual suspects—literature and the visual and performing arts. We’re also looking at such cultural expressions as food, scientific inquiry, architecture and design, and new media. We are especially interested in the intersections between nature and culture, science and the humanities, the past and the present, folklife and the avant garde.

As the Drumlummon team thinks about regional culture (and specifically Montana’s culture), we are informed by two concepts that we find usefully stimulating. The first emerges out of literary studies and goes by the name of cosmoregionalism. As one scholar has written,

In recent thinking about cosmoregionalism, critics have intensified the questioning of regional insularity and boundedness through attending to the interdependence of the local and the global. Far from a simple reclaiming of regionalism from perceptions of backward provincialism, such an approach has sought to explore the ways that local communities are formed and sustained through transregional connections.

This way of thinking about our place in the larger world touches everything we publish in *Drumlummon Views*, but our “Travels
& Translations” section directly addresses our connections to elsewhere, highlighting work produced by Montana artists, scholars, and translators who venture far afield.

The second regionalist concept we find congenial has emerged out of architecture and is known as critical regionalism. Critical regionalism simply means that incorporating regional differences and traditions, while at the same time taking into account broader trends within a given discipline, can be an effective deterrent (form of resistance) to the negative effects of globalization. California architect Hamilton Harwell Harris has written:

Opposed to the Regionalism of Restriction is another type of regionalism, the Regionalism of Liberation. This is the manifestation of a region that is especially in tune with the emerging thought of the time. We call such a manifestation “regional” only because it has not yet emerged elsewhere. . . . A region may develop ideas. A region may accept ideas. Imagination and intelligence are necessary for both.

Kenneth Frampton, a key theorist of the concept, notes that, in critical regionalism, the principal aim is “maintenance of an expressive density and resonance in an architecture of resistance.”

Of course, theories only go so far (and certainly both cosmoregionalism and critical regionalism are the subjects of intense debate). Though we may champion a Regionalism of Liberation and encourage the “maintenance of an expressive density and resonance” in all Montana cultural manifestations, we also want to explore, with clear eyes, the culture as we encounter it, in all its contradictions, complexities, and mood swings. We want to showcase our richly textured culture and, at the same time, take an in-depth, truly critical look at all this richness. We will not shrink from controversy and divergent viewpoints—we welcome your letters to the editor. Most of all, we hope the journal will afford its readers, both inside and outside Montana, a more nuanced understanding of our place in the world.

We plan to publish three issues of *Drumlummon Views* per year: Spring, Summer, and Fall/Winter. This year, because we’ve made our first issue a double, watch for our third issue in November 2006.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Rick Newby
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Acknowledgments

The launching of Drumlummon Views has benefited from the help of scores of generous individuals, organizations, and institutions. First, we want to thank the Drumlummon Institute board of directors, Jeff Williams, Matt Pavelich, Patty Dean, and Niki Whearty, four remarkably able, passionate, and thoughtful human beings who have made all the difference with their unwavering support, marvelous ideas, and steady governance.

We also want to acknowledge the unstinting generosity and enthusiasm of our Founding Donors. These wonderful folks include Joan T. Holter, Margaret and Joe Freeman Gans, Lee and Phil Rostad, Jeff and Martha Williams, Bill and Helen Ballinger, Joan and Don Bishop, Sara Scott and Carl Davis, Bruce and Judy Meadows, Alan and Nancy Nicholson, Ron Lee and Sue Clarke, Teresa Olcott Cohea, Mary Jane Davidson, Christian Frazza, Scott and Gretchen Hibbard, Barry Hood and Eliza Frazer, Bonnie Lambert and Marshall Mayer, Sue and Jeff Miller, Dan and Sarah Sullivan, Patty Dean, and Jim Reynolds and Niki Whearty. To see a complete listing, visit the Drumlummon Institute home page (www.drumlummon.org) and click on Drumlummon’s Funders.

A journal with as diverse a table of contents as Drumlummon Views needs many eyes out there scanning the landscape, and we are fortunate to have both a cadre of committed and astute Contributing Editors and our Drumlummon Board of Advisors. To date, our Contributing Editors include Randall Green, Adventure; Patty Dean, Architecture & Design/Material Culture; Tom Foor, Archaeology; Florence Williams, Environment & Science; Nicholas Vrooman, Folklore; Max Milton, Food/Agriculture; Gita Saedi, Media Arts; Roger Dunsmore, Nature & Culture; Bill Borneman, New Music; Melissa Kwasny, Poetry; Ron Lee, Theater; Gordon McConnell, Visual Arts; and G. B. Carson, Roving Arts Correspondent.

Thus far, the members of the Drumlummon Board of Advisors are Sandra Alcosser, San Diego, CA and Florence, MT; Ralph Beer, Wellington, CO; Betsy Baur, Helena, MT; Mary Clearman Blew, Moscow, ID; Robert Bringhurst, Heriot Bay, BC; Audrey Cameron, Helena, MT; Deborah O’Connor Clow, Missoula, MT; Gary Ferguson, Red Lodge, MT; Michele Foyer, San Francisco, CA; Sue Hart, Billings, MT; Peter Koch, Berkeley, CA; Laurie Mercier, Vancouver, WA; Lynda Bourque Moss, Billings, MT; Richard Notkin, Helena, MT; Paul S. Piper, Bellingham, WA & Condon, MT; Bob Putz, Seattle, WA & Canyon Creek, MT; Lee Rostad, Martinsdale, MT; Chris Schwarzenbach, Pasadena, CA and Helena, MT; Chris Staley, State College, PA and Helena, MT; Guy Vanderhaeghe, Saskatoon, SK; Carroll Van West, Murfreesboro, TN; and Griff Williams, San Francisco, CA. To see a complete listing of our Board of Advisors, go to the Drumlummon Institute home page (www.drumlummon.org) and click on Drumlummon Board of Advisors.

We also wish to thank all of the writers, artists, curators, translators, and other cultural workers who have graciously contributed to this first issue. You will find their biographies by clicking on About Our Contributors in the DV table of contents.

Our gratitude, too, goes to the following individuals and institutions who have helped in myriad ways: Mark Sherouse, Kim
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Finally, we offer our thanks to two individuals who assisted us in the drafting of our application for federal tax-exempt 501 (c)(3) status, Carleen Layne of the Montana Arts Council and Adam McLane. Their guidance was invaluable. And our heartfelt gratitude goes to our stalwart proofreader, Bergetta Hubbard, Write On, Inc., for keeping us on our toes, and to Geoff Wyatt of Wyatt Design, Drumlummon Views’ Art Director, who has done such a marvelous job of designing this first issue.
This Issue’s New Work
from “The Waterfall”
Melissa Kwasny

Note: Sections 8–12 of “The Waterfall” are the last sections of a long poem with the following epigram from Ezra Pound’s Cantos: “To have gathered from the air a live tradition.” The poem is an attempt to give voice to the living and the dead here in Montana often expressed in the soundings of water. The first seven sections were published in Bellingham Review, Fall 2005.

8.
The giveaway dance

May your nephew from Fort Peck be healed from the leukemia
May your sister find her courage and drop her crack head boyfriend
May Sam get a kidney he goes three times a week for dialysis
May your grandson who has started to have seizures from the Ritalin
May the young man who was stabbed—a good ranch-hand they say
May my aunt with diabetes give up her Carlo Rossi
May my uncle survive his heart attack he is only thirty-seven
May the nurses have pity on him and treat him well
And if he does go—because we don’t want to challenge the illness—
May his spirit find his people and not linger
Here where it is harsh may the slum lord fix the plumbing

Here what the young ones have left for the cities
May those three old men the healers who now stand for the people—
see how they struggle to stand up—
Here is a jar of wild chokecherry jam
Here is a pouch of Old Red Man Lucky Strike
Here is a dollar bill for each of your fifteen grandchildren
see how they dance with empty hands
Here is the fish tank the rest of the bannack toilet paper army jacket a Pendleton blanket
Here in the old days grandpa gave away the car and the furniture
and finally he gave away the house
Here in the trailer house on the reservation
Here where the ragged last of the tribe come with ribbons
Here where the medicine man hangs them in the bundle and sets the bundle swinging with a stick
Now since the black spades of aspen have hit the ground
Now because the drum beat has not changed and has not stopped
We hold the gifts behind our backs and the snow field darkens
May the wind scour the treeless plastic caught in fences
May the man who walks the blizzard not be an apparition
May twenty below on the highline may the loud crunch of tires
May your mother at the cemetery her white cross made of plywood
May the lit cigarette help us to go back
There where the berry soup the rendered lard and raw kidney
There where the tripe apples cookies and white bread
There where the coffee on early and the water for tea
May those watching us may the old men not forget to name them
May the tree people the rock people the kingfisher the eagle
May the dead who are just one threshold between us may their fugitive voices

find us

9.
A Madonna sits in a painting in the Castelvecchio in Verona, a tapestry deep with scarlet and gold hung behind her. It is meant to be a garden, but without Renaissance perspective, the blue-winged angels seem to eat from her hands. Joggers cross the Medieval bridges over the Adige. Six o’clock traffic stalled by the Roman arena, now the opera. 
Time is everywhere / unmoving / in the evenings of the world.

I wake at four a.m. in an ancient room in the Hotel Scalzi, one with twenty foot ceilings and bare walls. There is a window over the alley which I kept open even as I slept. Students drinking wine below. Time is a cloud above me, dissolving into faces, voices, sinking and rising the duomos, palazzos, and under them, as part of the apse, the stonework of paleo-Christian basilicas, and under that, the temples and the baths.

There’s nothing interesting on this path, the Indian boy says back in Montana. The dogwood buds are turning red, leaf of strawberry. The land is soft again, after rain, as we step on moss and lichen. But where is his ancestry in this? The loggers have painted blue streaks on the trees to be saved. There is honey, what the boy calls the tree’s sap. He has never learned the language his great-grandfather speaks—

What if a bear came, he jokes. What if great-grandma did? If there are thresholds on this earth beyond our ability to apprehend them, the quality of the affection in the end that has carved a trace, the marble threshold of the cathedral worn halfway down by the pious, this footpath, the evening sweat rocks, the name for bear—evening, we like to call it, an evening of the glare of day, a force somehow opposite to gravity.

10.
No water falling.
No water to cross over the damp sand between rocks.
Moss on the rocks still green yet.
After that, the jam scorched.
Guests came with lice in their thick braids.
The motorcycle was stolen from the backyard.
A young rodeo rider who got drunk at the bar, forgot his horse was still tied to his trailer.
Seventy miles an hour down the freeway that night.
After that, the fires began in earnest.
We hear that firefighters stumble
into abandoned mines
that have since become the refuge of snakes.
Yellow. Dark. The winds pick up.
Can any of us run fast enough?
Squirrels, rabbits, the small ones die.
A black bear leaves paw prints on the front door.
Large toad on the road which we run over.
By now the woods are closed to us.
We have packed and left twice,
each time taking different things with us.
We hear the deer
as we try to sleep in the heat, their small cries,
the scuff of their hooves.
If we leave the door open: webs, dust, hair,
the dead bodies of grasshoppers and flies.
We used to be full of the beauty of the world,
to be full like that the accomplishment.
Now, the smoke and heat deafen us.
No water falling.
No stars on the gray limbs of willow, alder.

II.
Instead, green bleeding down into the industrial parks, strewn
with the remnants of teenage luck: used condoms,
contraband beer, with the useless prohibitive next to the
cement plant. There is a water line drawn on the land. We
often cross it, run into it, a sluice through the salt ditch
and blue yarrow.

The miners swarm like ants, dirty, hungry, having left their
homes and families in the east. It is not food or shelter
they are after—you’ve heard they feed dead cattle and
poultry bedding to their cows—but the commodities, the
art and furniture, the peccadilloes: lava lamps, infinity
pools, pink flamingos.

There is a certain emptiness between the ancient years of
roaming and the end of roaming, the old song and dance
gone, the gods waiting for their complements. How huge
this country is and how we’ve filled it. The woman in the
desert subdivision leads workshops in correct listening,
although it would be a different place here, blue dragonfly,
dry species, without the Roman columns, without the
irrigation.

Whether or not we are part of this, should we still feed their
angels, we who love our quick summers of breath? Fog by
the wayside, freckled and blue. If we forget the new series,
the undercoat of lupine, and have to piece it anew day by
day? If profit isn’t involved, should we be interested?
Obviously,
we are bent over in the dark, rocks gloved with the earth’s heat.
Spirits buzzing. And the water pails clanging. Cotuminous
with three blue grouse
who heave themselves up from their cotes, launch their
frightened
bodies through the air.

The first answers
are often surface ones. Though death has a feel to it, we are
home here with leaf and dark trunk. Leaf
shaped like teardrop, heart, scallop, wing,
tongue, arrow, flesh, feathers, star. Unlike the needles
which form a curtain here.

No answers,
only the names of things, burdock and rue, the creek bottom
gulch
draw darkening. We’re not to pray after dark, if you believe what
you’re told, and you do.
Oh, grandfather, you’re almost blind but it’s not late,
only the shadows gathering in afternoon.

See the lights there, below us, past the trees—sheer water, all
shine

. . .
**The Other End of the World**
(from the novel-in-progress, “Hidden Birds”)

Deirdre McNamer

They were gauchos of the Argentine, horsemen to their bones. Wanderers, survivors, riders and lovers, their life the life of cattle and horses and stars. The broad grasslands, hum of the stars, meat on a spit. The knife on the belt. The boleadoras, a hiss through the air. Long rawhide, three stones, the horseman’s long snare. Child of God, child of the pampa, child of himself. Lover of the long ride.


It was an easy dream and they fell into it together. Don Fierro and Don Sombra. Sir Fierce and Sir Shadow. And their faithful mounts, Mancha and Gato. A man in the news was riding from Buenos Aires to the Washington White House on horses with those names, and so they renamed their own fresh-broke sorrals to send luck to the man and his 10,000 miles. A year and a half out, the newspapers had the rider in Mexico.

Don Fierro was eleven, Don Sombra thirteen, and if he, the older, was beginning to see girls and his friends in place of the gaucho life, he didn’t tell that to the younger boy because there was no point. Riding north on the plains to the Sweetgrass Hills, they never encountered a fence. Hunting knives on their belts. Coiled ropes. Big lunches from their mother in their saddlebags. Shotguns to hunt birds to roast on a spit. Saddles their only beds, beneath the starry vault.

They were a pair, the younger wiry and gap-toothed and quick; the older darker and solid, well into his growth.

Yes it was September and yes there was school. But Senor Olafson, the Spanish teacher, had so praised Sombra’s paper on the Argentine and its dazzling, incorruptible gauchos that the writer’s parents had set him loose on a long ride with his younger brother, the other horse lover in the family. They’d done it before, on their own, the hundred-mile circle. See you in a few days, the parents said. Adios. Keep your powder dry. They really did. It really was like that.

And there was another reason to make the ride now. Lindbergh’s triumphant tour would carry him, the next day, from the mountains of Glacier Park onto the plains and straight over their heads. They would see the plane up close. They might see the man himself, squinting into the blue. He might wave down at them and tip his wings.

All quiet but for the barking of a dog and the grass-rustle of the low wind. All dark but for the light of the depot, the light of the mother up with the sick child. Their horses, picketed in the field behind the house, were warm and grassy-breathed, and they snorted and stamped a little when the stiff saddles went on. A last gear check, a piss in the weeds, and they were mounted and off, the hooves tocking on the hardpan street, the leather squeaking, their breath and the breath of their animals visible, but barely, in the neardark.
And as the sky began to lighten into the lilacs and the pinks, they snapped into a dreamy valorous state, and the bony prairie, dotted here and there with an oil well, scraped and frank, became something undulating and out of time.

“The stars fell toward the other end of the world,” Aidan, the older, said. It was one of the dozens of lines he’d marked in the novel he’d got from Senor Olafson for his translation project. *Don Segundo Sombra*. That was the title of the book. Gaúcho extraordinaire. This, said Olafson, holding it up, is Huckleberry Finn with horses. With grasslands like Montana’s. And with a comrade for the poor orphan who is the embodiment of competence, style, fortitude, and calmness in the face of any fate. The utterly unflappable Don Sombra.

Don Sombra kicked his horse into a singlefoot and reeled off more. “The immense night frightened me as if it were full of my secret.”

“The stars,” he repeated, “fell toward the other end of the world.”

He said it again in Spanish. “Las estrellas cayeron al otro lado del mundo.”

The younger boy, Neil, laughed at the oddness of the sounds. He made up his own Spanish on the spot. “Dee ah deh dah, kee air lee ho vo, Pecker deh lah dah!” And laughed so boisterously at his fine, brash ear that his horse, the just-broke three-year-old, did a little crowhop and a fast dance sideways, as if a newspaper sheet had blown up from the ditch in all its rustling horror, which made both horsemen laugh and they left the road then, gave their animals their heads, and took off in the new light at a lope.

It was good to leave the road, graveled and straight as it was, because it would, when full light came, interrupt the feel of the pampa. There would be farmers on it in their wagons and the occasional flivvers, and the oil boys too, heading for the fields. Not many, but some. Enough to matter. Enough to break the spell.

Forty-five miles ahead, the three mountains stood above the grass, full of birds and waiting. They would camp there, roasting their kill on a spit.

But first, miles and miles of prairie. Where you squinted against the wind and the sheeting, unmediated light, the gaze stretching long before it met something that stopped it.

There was the sense of being seen. Of yourself through a high hawk’s eye, one that noticed you but didn’t care. Still, it produced a small quiver of self-consciousness. As you moved, two flies across a table, you were watched.

From a distance, the Hills floated above the plains like an idea that was easy to understand. Up close—among them and on them and up them—they would be different. The light there became dappled, variegated. The summer’s last leaves, very thin leaves, maroon and apricot, flickered on the chokecherries. There was shelter: hollows and coulees and lees. So the wind became an unsteady thing, starting and stopping and starting again. In the suspensions, there was the sound of birds at rest, birds perched and adjusting and talking. You gained cover. You became unwatched. You moved into and out of the dappling and the pinewater smell of leaves. Sweetgrass. Kinnikinnick, snowberry, Oregon grape, cinquefoil, creeping juniper, lodgepole pine. And if you climbed high enough to survey the scraped plains, you became the hawk.

They would camp at the base of the Tower, the perfect cone. The one that seemed always very still.
To the Tower, they said to themselves. *Childe Roland to the dark tower came*, thought the younger boy, also a memorizer.

At its base, he, Neil, wanted to separate for hunting advantage and meet in a couple of hours at the camp spot they knew. It was mid-afternoon and they had five hours of light, easy, and he wanted very badly to do this, though it was the single rule from home. Stick together.

The boy made his case in his fake Spanish, lifting the palms of his hands to the summery sky. Aidan had to laugh. He was charmed. What, really, was the harm? The kid, Neil, sat his horse like a burr. He knew what he was doing. They both knew where they were, and where they would meet in a couple of hours, when the sun was three inches above the far-off line that separated the light blue from the tawny. The crease that opened upon the other end of the world.

The boy could handle himself and he needed this. He needed this knowledge that he could handle himself on his own. And the horse, Mancha, was all right. Quite the self-spooker, quite the dramatist, but surefooted and strong.

“Si, si, Don Fierro,” Aidan said.

“I will si si you at the camp,” Neil said, and he was off with a clatter.

He had his shotgun in a scabbard on his saddle. He had his hat pulled low over his eyes. He followed a game trail through the creeping juniper and the kinnikinnick, across an expanse of yellow grass, through more brush. He got to a copse of quaking aspen—animal tracks here—and he had a drink of water and the last of the sandwich his mother had packed in waxed paper. He thought about birds. Pheasants and grouse. Where they were hiding. He’d have to picket Mancha and set off on foot, to sneak up on a pheasant. He thought of a low place with cattails, maybe a mile ahead. He remembered it now. He seemed to see the very tree where he’d tie his horse, and he seemed to see many bird wings rising in the late-afternoon light. The wizard green of the pheasant’s neck.

He knew exactly where he was going. He urged Mancha into a trot, then a lope. He ducked when the trail took them through a thicket of chokecherries and was glad he wore his chaps. Mancha seemed to know where they were headed. He stepped up the pace. Neil gathered himself low on the big red back.

He heard a gunshot, somewhere off to his right. He stood a little and turned in his stirrups to see.

And then he fell out of time.

And when he returned he was on his back and felt that he had perhaps been on his back for many hours, many days. His hand covered an eye and his head felt axed in two. A fly crawled along the top of his hand and his hand didn’t seem to be listening to the signal he was sending it to move. Finally, the fingers curled. Finally, he could lift it off his face. He felt detested by some large force, some borderless fist that had knocked him to the earth to be broke. He brought his fingers to his head and felt the sticky blood and the shocking lump. His face felt bathed in blood.

There was a red horse standing in willowlight. Its head was lowered but it didn’t eat. It seemed simply to think. One stirrup had flung itself over the saddle. Reins fell to the ground. *Horse*, he thought. *Come here horse. Tell me your name if you have a name.*

The red horse walked toward him out of the green. It had a long scratch on its wither. It walked with a slight limp. It huffed, disgusted at something that had happened, something the boy had missed.
Horse, he said. Come here. And he thought about the process of getting to his feet. He sat up. His head lolled to the side and he puked a little. Horse. Come here. To me. He couldn’t recall his name. He knew that he had a name but he couldn’t, at the moment, know what it might be.

He stood still until he felt his weight evenly distributed between his wobbly legs and he gathered the reins of the red horse and led him under the big branch that had knocked him off. What the horse had experienced, he couldn’t know. Had the animal’s head been pulled around so fast and hard that he’d fallen? Who could tell? What was the horse’s name? What was the name of the person trying to retrieve the horse’s name? It made him want to cry, the effort of it and the fact of the big hand that had thrown him onto the ground, so unfairly, so without warning.

He led the horse and watched its careful steps, then hauled himself into the saddle. He would go home. He looked at the sun and started to remember something about it, where it appeared and disappeared. He looked at the conical mountain, got his bearings, and turned in the opposite direction. This way is home and I will now go home. And so he rode, his horse’s long shadow stretching to the east and the meadowlarks curling and piercing the air. As he left the mountain behind, a stiff little wind picked up. An owl, somewhere, began to hoot him onto the huge landmarkless night.

If he had possessed his faculties entire, he would have remembered that he had ridden away from town with his older brother, Aidan. And he might have remembered, too, that Aidan had, on their long rides, told him the stories that now squeaked and babbled in his head. The horse will know the way. He said it out loud, trying to impose an interior silence, and brushed his fingertips across his face and tasted them. Blood, dirt, the tears he couldn’t seem to stop. His mother was waiting for him in a bright kitchen pouring him a glass of milk.

As the day darkened, Neil moved onto the silver-tipped prairie utterly alone with his calmly breathing horse. There were no lights to aim for, but there was the feel beneath him of an animal that had an idea about where it was going. There was the feel behind him of the mountain. There was also the growing sense of himself in some afterlife. He wondered if he had perhaps died.

The tumbleweeds began to look bony and white and phosphorescent. Coyotes yipped and chattered behind him and were answered by something low and harrowing, a long long way away. A wolf.

They traveled carefully, he and the horse whose name he didn’t know, while the sun drifted off the far edge of the prairie, leaving a red line, then a deep blue one. Stars began to sharpen themselves, a few and then many, and a moon came up that looked like a dead eye. Clouds floated across it from time to time.

Something large flew by him, by his face. He saw nothing, but he heard it. He felt its slipstream; he felt its tug. He could have reached out and touched it with his hand. The horse felt it too. It skittered sideways and Neil had to grab the horn to stay on, and when he did, all the ribs on his left side cried out. He kicked the horse forward and yelled at it—go!—because they were traveling too slow and his mother wasn’t going to wait for him in the kitchen forever. They loped now in the dark. He had tied the reins together and let them flop on the horse’s neck and held with both hands to...
The horn. The sage, the tumbleweeds had taken on an evil light. The bones of the dead. Evil lights that wanted to lure him to a buffalo jump, where he and the horse would sail into the air like the hundreds of buffalo roaring down to their deaths. He wouldn't let that happen. He would keep his head. He would stop running and start to wait, as Aidan would have waited, for daybreak.

There it was, his brother's name. He remembered it before he could remember his own.

The clouds moved off the moon and he noticed a curving line on the grass, which turned out to be a dry creekbed. A shallow indentation. The suggestion of a cut bank. He could huddle against it and think about what to do next. There was nothing he could build a fire with. There was his saddle for a bed, his saddle blankets for cover. He made his bed. He had his rope but there was nothing to tie it to, so he worked off one of the saddle cinches and fashioned crude hobbles for his horse, who stood quiet while he knotted them, then crowhopped gently to a better patch of grass and began to eat. The boy remembered water and gave the horse half of what was in his canteen, pouring it into the tin pie plate he'd brought along for a reason he couldn't remember now.


So he did. He lay down and closed his eyes. He could feel the ground move gently beneath him, a low, syncopated sway beneath the tiny clatter of the stars. He listened to his calmly breathing, calmly chewing horse.

Mancha. There it was.

Mancha! he called. His voice sounded very high and thin. He was only eleven. The tearing sound of grass stopped for a few moments, then started again. It occurred to him again that he might be dead. It occurred to him that this was the aftermath. So when the wind switched in his direction and he began to hear gunshots, up near the hills, his gaze fell on his own gun, but it didn't occur to him to fire back because the shots he heard came from someplace that was not, in this new life, a possibility for him.

Sometimes, on their trips, they were Meriwether and his horsemen, riding this very prairie, just twenty, thirty miles to the west. They liked the ominous and fateful nature of the side trip Meriwether took with his three best men on the way home, a loop straight into the heart of Blackfeet country. They passed twelve miles of unbroken buffalo, a river of them, the wolves haunting the border of the animals, lolling and howling. They camped with some nervous Blackfeet teenagers they met, and then bad things happened. One of the boys tried to take guns and horses in the night, and there was a melee and they shot the boy dead. Another too. And then the explorers ran from the spectre of avengers, of howling and brilliant warriors bearing down on them. But not before Meriwether put a peace-and-friendship medal with George Washington's profile around the neck of the first teenager who was shot and left him there for the crows or his comrades. Neil and Aidan didn't like that part of the story much. There was bluster and unease in it, a preening that they didn't much like.

The Meriwether party ran all day and night across the prairie, this prairie, to arrive stupefied and sore and panting at the Missouri at the very moment that their comrades fired a gun to announce that they were there in their boats. Aidan and Neil liked that, the idea of high adventure culminating in such a neat and fateful way.
Neil sometimes got the moonlit ride away from the young dead Indians conflated with a story he’d heard from an old cowboy in town, an old rummy who’d wrecked his leg in a horseback accident years earlier and gimped around the horse sales, ready to tell stories to the kids. He’d been riding one night, drunk, heading in a direction he thought was the ranch where he worked, yelping and howling. Alone and on fire with the booze and riding across the world, breakneck, barely able to stay in the saddle. His horse, out of sheer disgust with him, he said, threw him off and thrummed away into the night. When he woke in the pink and frosty dawn, his entire body an ache, he found himself—

At this point, for the benefit of his young listeners, who couldn’t hear it enough, he slowed the story way down.

The cowboy felt his moving fingers scout the terrain, any question of opening his eyes still ludicrous. His fingertips felt his face, his head, and moved down his neck. There. There. Everything here, it seemed. He felt, then, a twig, a stick, on his chest. An arrangement of sticks. Sticks with nodules. With knuckles. He flattened his hand and lowered it very slowly onto the sticks. He lifted his unbroken neck, sweat bursting from every pore, and opened his eyes upon his hand atop a hand of bones. He lay in a shallow, open grave. Like lovers they were, he said. His own ear, the cowboy’s whirled and gristled ear, rested a scant inch from the hole in the skull that had once held the ear of his new friend.

The boy thought about that story. **Hang on,** he thought. **Keep your head, Neil.**

Neil. The name came to him in a burst of insight and now he knew he could lie down and sleep because he knew the name of the person who was going to go unconscious. But the story of the cowboy in the grave had come back to him fully in all its detail, and he had the terrible sense that if he moved his hand in any direction on the ground, he would feel bones. Neck bones hung with a government medal. In the far distance, he heard another shot.

They shot me, Neil, he heard someone say. I lie here shot.

He woke to two short whistles and a long swooping one. His horse’s ears flew forward. And out of the dawn there grew a horse and a rider, small and then not small, and a call.

Aidan had his hat pulled low over his eyes. He rode his horse at a singlefoot, that go-forever step between walk and trot, and he posted easily. He looked as if he could have ridden a day like that, or two.

He dismounted. He looked tall and exhausted and happy.

“He, Neil,” he said. “How you doing out here?”

The boy drank in his brother’s face. “Fine,” he said, hating the crack of grief in his voice. Aidan examined the head bump and Neil’s ribs, his touch light. He examined Mancha’s hobbles approvingly and removed them and reattached them to the saddle. They’d head for Portugal, he told his brother. It was a little rail stop, and not far. Their mother’s brother, a doctor, had a little egg-colored hospital there, and he could check Neil over and they could stay the night.

“What about Lindbergh?” Neil said, everything coming back to him now.

“We’ll see him from there. He’ll pass over. And you know what? You’ve been riding this nag long enough. Sorry, Mancha. Your rider is done for awhile.” The horse whickered contentedly as if it was going along with a bad joke. “You lost your hat when you
got knocked off by that big branch,” he told Neil. “I found it just when it was getting really dark. You were gone. I fired some shots.”

He reached out and touched the boy’s forehead, where the big egg was. Tears started, but the boy stopped them by thinking about Lindbergh. Lindbergh all by himself in the night over the endless water. Feeling lucky.

Aidan saddled Neil’s horse and mounted his own, offering an arm to his brother to pull him up behind him. Neil put his arms around his brother’s hard waist. They moved off, Aidan leading Mancha. Neil rested the side of his head against his brother’s warm back. He could feel the muscles moving neatly. They traveled quietly for a few hours, saying nothing. Sometimes Neil slept a little. Waking, he breathed his brother’s strong back, then dozed again.

Finally, there was the scrabble of a town ahead. It glinted in the morning light. When they moved into it, down the graveled main street, people milled around them excitedly, as if they’d been eager for the boys’ return. But they were watching the sky. Dogs and children ducked among the taller, watching ones. A murmur grew. The sky returned a high, thrilling drone. And out of the west, lit by the climbing sun, came a bright little monoplane. Neil couldn’t sit still. Hands on Aidan’s shoulders, he pulled himself to his feet atop the steady horse. He watched the growing plane, the high metal bird in the morning light, hands on his brother’s hat.

He cheered with the rest, with Aidan, and waved an arm to make Lindy tip his wings. On the sidewalk, a sour-faced woman in a nurse’s cap called to him and shook her finger at him. The horse was stepping in place, nervous now, and so he sat. The little plane tipped its wings and the crowd cheered. Neil yipped like a coyote, and then he turned to the woman in the nurse’s hat and shouted a string of fake and bawdy Spanish at her, laughing as he yelled, laughing so hard he could scarcely make the words.
from “In the Lay of the Land,” a novel-in-progress
Matt Pavelich

Burdened by his equipment and the heat of the day, Calvin Teague walked out of Red Plain at four-forty-five of an August afternoon carrying an old Boy Scout backpack to which he’d strapped a loosely rolled flannel sleeping bag. Weeds rattled in dead still air—grasshoppers—and the tar of Highway 200 was soft underfoot. Too shy and too well brought up to hitchhike, he marched through an indifferently farmed mountain valley with his back turned to oncoming traffic to discourage the offer of a ride. Sweat rolled down his neck. A road map of Montana showed at his hip pocket. Teague had no hat for his freckled head and hadn’t thought to bring any water.

For some miles he continued to smell cut alfalfa, but as he walked he never actually saw this harvest. Pastel homes had been trucked in and flung around the landscape to subsist on ten-acre plots in gardens of dead machinery; they were, some of them, also beauty salons or second-hand stores or shops for small engine repair. Concrete figurines of Mother Goose and Snow White were offered for sale on someone’s tiny lawn where a hand-lettered sign said, U paint or We paint
Always You’re Choice

He passed a herd of squat black cows, several grain fields plowed under. From the shade of a fading barn a barnyard dog fired out to bark and bare teeth at him. Teague retreated through the far borrow ditch. Drenched in a new, clammy sweat, and extremely alert, he went on, and when he came to an astonished cat lying flattened on the road he raised his eyes for relief, for the larger vista. Even the mountains had been molested. Square tracts had been cut into the mantling forests; in the clearcuts gray undergrowth was revealed, and gray shale and gray dirt; the clearcuts looked, in fact, like vast incrustations of mange. The people who lived on this land were corrupting a great beauty, and Teague, raised on judgment and forgiveness, could not help but dislike them for it. Time and again cars bearing local license plates politely slowed for him; time and again, also politely, he waved them on.

His legs, unaccustomed to much light at all, soon tinted pink, and he ducked into a culvert to change back into his long pants. In the pipe Teague smelled wet loam, and he supposed this was it, he thought this must be a piece of the adventure he’d vaguely intended. On the strength of this notion he went on, his own man now, and he achieved a certain hardihood, a pleasing, groundeating lope that brought him quite late in the afternoon to the mouth of a long canyon at the valley’s western end. Here the highway and a railroad track converged to run close along the north bank of a river. On either side of him slabs of rock reared thousands of feet out of the scree, massively the broken crust of the earth. In the canyon he smelled creosote, a field of mint, alfalfa still, and even the rocks seemed to breathe some cautionary odor. He walked under, and then into the sun for hours, storing the day for use against all those impending beige days, all the plodding days and years that lay just ahead of him. He must be certain to remember exactly how far he’d walked, how tired he’d been, remember how once, one endless day of his twenty-fourth year, he’d exceeded himself out in a wild place where nature held him in benign contempt. So Teague was proud of himself, proud even of his raging thirst until he realized that the answer to it had been with him all day, that he’d been walking
beside the river, more or less, for about as long as he’d been walking. Adventurer? Not really.

He crossed the railroad tracks and climbed a high mesh fence; he caught on its top strand and fell to the other side to lay for a long moment on his back, on the railroad’s vicious red roadbed rock. He crossed a field that caked his socks with burs. The river at this point was a solemn green thing sliding by like muscle under flesh, and there were no easy approaches to it. Hips working like a skier’s, Teague slid down a steep gravel bank, his shoes filling intolerably with sand and small pebbles. He stood one-legged on the little bit of beach and had removed a shoe and was brushing at his foot when he lost his balance; the naked foot escaped his grasp to rest very briefly on a round, slick stone in the river. Then he was sitting in the river, chest into the current and cooling rapidly.

The water didn’t bear him away at first, but he found he couldn’t stand. Each time he scrambled and fell back he landed a little farther into the current with his mouth a little nearer to going under. Then he was flailing, his butt bumping backward on the rocks, so Teague, not quite gone to panic yet, slipped off his backpack. Away it went, the weight of that wet sleeping bag, away the backpack and the sleeping bag, and his shoe, and, as would soon come to light, everything, sinking out of sight, sliding downstream. Teague rose only to fall back again. He fell hard and deep and then, breathing river, finally managed to collect his feet under him and stand. He could only just stand at first, the current was to his thighs and powerful here, but then, with much the same caution with which he’d taken his very first steps, he took the few steps to the treacherous little beach where he climbed the crumbling bank.

He lay down in knapweed, a new misery. Thirsty. Worse, much worse than before. The turban he’d made of his tee shirt was still wrapped round his head. So thirsty, but with every searing breath he was freshly resolved not to try the river again. Limping a bit for want of the shoe, he made his way back to the road. He thought he was between fifteen and twenty miles from Red Plain and about that far from the next town on Highway 200, a town whose name he had already forgotten. He’d retained his roadmap, but it was useless, fuzzy and illegible when he peeled its leaves apart. He could locate himself to the extent of knowing he was at some far edge of Montana. His eyes, he thought, might be just a little out of focus. He stood at the side of the road in his wet shoe, and his crotch was wet and chafed him, somehow, even standing stock still. Usually no one’s fool, Teague hoped and expected that this would serve as the worst moment of his life. Nose blistering, lips pale, he was filled with all the old doubts and many new ones. He’d confirmed himself now as a little hometown fellow fit only to run a small circuit through thoroughly expected events, to live a prudent life. Why had he ever made himself available to all these accidents? Teague recalled his mother mentioning that as a toddler he’d suffered night terrors, and he remembered them, the feel of them at least, because they were all he’d known that might compare with being so much alone. He prayed, but not for deliverance, as he wasn’t sure he deserved it. More sunset. It seemed stalled. For as much as he feared the coming dark, he liked the long and lengthening shadows even less.

From the direction of Red Plain an engine labored toward him, the first familiar sound since he’d been standing by the road. A truck came out from the pines to the east of him and onto the open flat, a ponderous load of cordwood cinched to its bed. A chainsaw and a gas can and a mongrel rode on top of the load. Teague raised
his arms like a referee signaling a touchdown. He felt foolish about
the gesture, the extent of his problem. The truck came on—behind
the wheel, under a black baseball cap, a pretty mouth round an “o”
of decent concern. Someone female. The truck slowed, accelerated
again, passing him, then stopped a hundred yards down the road.
Weaving half on and half off the pavement it backed toward him,
and very fast for reverse, and the big load rocking laterally, and if
Teague had been healthier then, or more capably concerned for
his survival, he'd have been running well before it finally, abruptly
stopped, its bumper not ten feet from his knee. A bumper bent by
previous misuse, a mottled dog grinning down at him. The driver
leaned out. “Hey,” she said. It was a statement, a question, whatever
he wanted it to be. She seemed friendly.

She stepped out and came back to him. Teague's throat was
parchment and he could not trust himself to speak. A woman, a girl,
a person of about his own age, whatever that made her, she closed
the small distance between them. Wide suspenders framed her
breasts and she wore heavy boots that made her throw her legs in a
rolling gait. Some kind of logger’s get-up. Over her right shoulder
lay a thickly plaited chestnut braid. There was a pack of Marlboros in
her tee-shirt pocket, and she walked like a tough at the county fair.
Two-cycle gas, sawdust, beer—he smelled her drawing near. “Hey,”
she said again. Gently, so gently. Her hands were larger and rougher
than his own, but for all that she conformed to some very latent and
very odd idea of femininity he'd been carrying around with him, and
he never knowing or so much as suspecting his own secret tastes.
Accustomed to the company of plainer, softer women, Teague could
think of nothing to say to the handsome one now regarding him like
a found lamb.

“You okay, honey?”

Teague's instincts, such as they were, were never of much use
to him, but he was ready to trust the belief he'd instantly formed,
more than that, he meant to rely on it, that the girl was the soul of
kindness.

“I saw you when I was going into town,” she said. “What
happened to all that stuff you had? That pack and . . . where's your
other shoe?”

He'd wet his tongue enough to ask for, “Water?”

“Don't have any. Except in the radiator, which has probably got
some antifreeze in it. Got beer, though.”

“I'm a pharmacist,” Teague declared. “Or I will be. And
alcohol, if you're already dehydrated, alcohol . . .”

You better have some.”

His education fell away from him, useless. Teague reached for
his wallet. He'd left it in his cutoffs, and his cutoffs were in the pack,
and the pack—“I couldn't pay you anything, I lost all my money in
the river. I'm really getting to be in a bad spot.”

“Pay me? What kinda person you think I am?”

He'd never seen anything like her, eyes as beautiful as Easter
eggs, and sweetly and cautiously glancing off Calvin Teague as if
he were someone of interest. In the cab of her truck she pulled two
sweating bottles from her cooler, twisted their caps off. She toasted
him, and the report of that faint collision traveled well up Teague's
arm. This girl was the biggest surprise he was ever likely to encounter.

“Where you coming from?”

“Courville, Iowa.” How fondly he said it. How fondly he
meant it. Home. “And Iowa City, too. School, you know.”
“So, whadda they say? In Iowa?”
“Say? About . . . ?”
“Cheers? Or, Here’s to Mabel? Or, what?”
“Oh. To good health?”
“Sure. You could use some.”

It tasted, he thought, like superior bread, and felt like quicksilver at the back of his throat. Teague tried to savor it, but his thirst wouldn’t let him. He drained the bottle in three long pulls, burped in rapture. “Oh, excuse me. But that is quite the . . . Are you Mabel, then?”

“Am I . . . oh, no. That was just an example. Of something they might say.”

“Well, you’ll think this is kind of funny, but I took a vow. When I was thirteen. I was at church camp, and I told Pastor Stenvold I’d never touch a drop. Of alcohol. And I haven’t, either. Until now. You wouldn’t believe the grief I sometimes took at school. Even the real Christian guys in the house, everybody, they all loved this stuff. Now I see why. But, anyway, I wasn’t too good at baseball or camp crafts, so I just took that vow. I was sort of caught up in the Spirit.”

“What that preacher don’t know, can’t hurt him.”

“No,” said Teague, “They say at home, what my folks always say, anyway, is ‘Ignorance is not bliss.’ So I think I’ll have to tell him, if I can still find him. I think if you make a vow, and then break it, you have to tell the person.”

There was wonder in the girl’s eyes. “You are a square shooter,” she said. “I like that. Or I think I do.”

Teague’s hands felt as if they were floating above his lap.
“I’ve never met a pharmacist,” she said. “Except for the ones in the drugstores, when they hand you your pills.”
“If I’ve passed my boards.” Teague, gaudy in his honesty now.
“And then when I’m certified, then I’ll be, you know . . .”
“Certified. Wow. I’ve never met anybody from Iowa, either. Where’d you say you were goin’?”
“I wanted to see the ocean.”
“The ocean? The Pacific?”

The girl opened each of them another beer and drove off with him, her wrist hooked over the steering wheel. Some of her braid had worked free and issued like vapor from behind her ear. Everything he noticed about her was new to him, and extravagant, and sweet. It occurred to Teague that if she was tender at all it must be because she thought him an idiot—Calvin Teague, the third generation of Teague Drugs in Courville and Handy, Iowa—he expected eventually to live in a brick residence on Mill Pond Lane and to serve on the school board and the boards of the better local charities, and he thought he’d probably marry the deeply loyal Janice Hartnett who stood to inherit Hartnett Seed; Calvin Teague, whose shapely and placid life had rarely needed explaining. He was unfailingly pleasant and utterly obvious and, really, there was not much to be explained. But he urgently wished he might convince this girl what a capable fellow he was, despite present evidence to the contrary, in spite of how she’d found him.

“You know,” he said, “I had it all planned out. Everything. I checked all the fluid levels and belts and the spare tire and everything before I left home. It was going along fine, too. Until this morning. I stopped to take a picture of an eagle I think it was, a real big bird—oh man, the camera’s gone, too—but anyway, when I got back in to go, the K car wouldn’t start. So there I was, middle
of nowhere, about a mile the other side of that Pair O’ Dice bar. Must've had three cups of coffee before the tow truck finally came out from Red Plain. There was some old guy, didn't even work there, an old farmer who kept filling my cup; such a nice guy you couldn't say no to him. While I waited."

“K car? That’s one of those old . . . what is it? They’re those real ugly Plymouths, huh?”

“It was a Plymouth,” Teague conceded. “But mine’s been . . . it’s held up really well so far. I’ve made zero major repairs to it. Until now. Then in Red Plain I find out it’s the wiring harness, a fuse failed and the whole thing burnt out, the wiring harness did. They said it might be as long as a week before they can get another one. Because of the age of the car, which is not so old, or so I thought, but it seems there’s so few of these left on the road they’re like antiques already—you should’ve seen the rubber on those wires.”

“I bet you went to Larry’s Conoco, didn’t you?”

“They were the ones that sent out the truck. The only ones in that little phonebook who had a tow truck.”

“And I bet you talked to Larry.” She was finally dumbfounded at his haplessness.

Teague had been captive in Red Plain to a man with a prominent adam’s apple, a grave manner, and his name stitched on his shirt. Larry. It had never occurred to him to disbelieve the mechanic. Now if, along with everything else, he’d been swindled, he didn’t want to know about it. It seemed he was an oaf in nature, lost in the lay of the land, and also, possibly, a poor judge of character. “I only had a week and a half to make this whole trip. So I thought I’d just set out kind of hiking.”

“To see,” she said, “what you could see?”

“Exactly.”

“But you’re still quite a ways from the coast. Especially without your shoe.”

“Well, I wasn’t . . . I didn’t intend to . . . As I said, I’m in kind of a spot.”

She hummed a tune having to do, he thought, with a faithful dog, something numbing from kindergarten or Bible school, barely audible over her ratcheting engine. She turned off the highway and onto a dirt road threading first through birch and cottonwood and then into an endless stand of ragged pine that crowded the road so closely as to form a corridor. A girl in huge boots. He never would have imagined. He was enveloped by her.

“Sorry,” she said. It did not seem to him that she was yelling, though she was. “Scraped the muffler off last week. I got kinda high centered. It’s pretty loud if you’re not used to it.”

Less anxious about love than anyone he knew, Teague had always expected that it would come to him, eventually, in some stately way befitting his patience. A comfortable, durable love. He leaned out his window to clear his head; the air was turpentine. His sober self floated near, there in the gummy ether with Janice and his mother; and they were all disappointed in him. He was another man entirely than the boy he’d been this morning, but he knew that if he said so the girl would think he was getting carried away. As he happened to be.

“Are you married?” she wondered as if from far away. “Got a girlfriend or anything?”

He felt much as he had felt while sitting in the river; the girl had asked a simple question, she’d want a simple answer. “No,” he said.
“Any kids?”

“Kids...” She was in earnest. “What?” Teague could not remotely see himself as a family man, but this girl seemed to think it feasible. Girls. Women. They were to him the farthest, strangest end of biochemistry. This girl, at least, did not seem deliberately to confuse. He liked her very much. She made a second turning and they began to mount a road that had in some recent season been a streambed, the surface was still channeled and the truck wallowed over it like a boat. “Forest Service always wants to close this road,” she said. “But so far they can’t. Cause it’s our access.”

“You sure have a lot of privacy.” He failed to ask how much. Could she be alone here?

“Yeah,” she said, “I’ve always lived somewhere off in the woods. Always will, probably.”

“That’s good.”

“Oh? Why’s that? Good?”

“It’s sort of everybody’s dream,” though it was not particularly his own. “Off on your own, like Walden Pond.”

“Never heard of him.”

“Make your own rules, be responsible just for yourself. That’d be pretty ideal for a lot of people.”

“Oh,” she said, “that. I think it’s been way overrated.”

They came to a small clearing where an antique bulldozer stood mired at the end of its ugly work, the end of the road, the utter end of civilization. The girl’s dog flung itself from the top of the load, and Teague flinched as it flew past his window. The dog buckled on landing, bounced up, and pranced to meet three penned goats, and these, in their own odd, stiff friendliness, pressed themselves to the edge of their enclosure in greeting. “Ethel, Gene, and Victoria,” said the girl. “You just hate to get too attached to the little buggers, cause they don’t survive real good up here, but they get to be pets anyway. And then, the minute you’re a little bit sweet on ‘em, then along comes a cat and chews ‘em up for you. Those cougars got long memories, too, they’ll come fifty miles outta their way once they’ve had a nice snack on Fitchett Creek. Cats, coyotes. Man, we even lost one of these little guys to a hail storm.”

Teague, unequal to so elemental a place or to her great pride in it, followed the girl’s magnificent back and backside as she walked him toward the old travel trailer that had to be her home. There was a considerable garden enclosed by chickenwire strung on tall poles; he recognized staked tomatoes and feeble stalks of corn. There was a great pile of cordwood on a pitch of high ground, better situated than the trailer and about as big. “Fifteen cord,” she said, “give or take. And I’ve already sold quite a bit right off the truck, too.” She said she dealt only in larch, that even partly cured larch would fetch ninety, a hundred dollars a cord. “Bought a winch last year, and it’s been the best investment I ever made. I can go after the downhill stuff now, snake it right up on the road. I’m dumb as a post, really, but I do know where to find the premium firewood. Keeps me in beer and Cheerios all year long.”

Her residence, parked in mud, was thirty-eight feet long, eight feet wide, and sheathed in naked aluminum. Once it had resembled a bullet, but now laying coops were built along its flanks. A sleeping porch also sagged alongside, a slapdash of gray plywood and green plastic netting; the girl led him into it and offered him the use of an aluminum chaise lounge, and when he settled on it she stood above him, her fist on her hip. “You hungry? You like venison?”
his pleasure in it often cost him the thread of what she was actually saying. It didn't matter. And if his legs ached for having walked so many miles on asphalt, that was also of no account. He was soaring; least of all was he hungry.

“Don't go to any trouble. You've already been so nice. I should probably try and call my folks, see if they'll wire me some money. I'd call collect, of course.”

“You're miles from the nearest phone, honey.” As if he were a child wanting comfort and direction. “Why don't I just feed you? Myself, I've been dreamin' since noon about some fried spuds and a little bite of backstrap. Also, I forgot to mention, there’s that outhouse if you need it.”

The girl went inside the trailer and shortly, through the open door, Teague heard ironware resound dully on a burner. “We run most of our appliances off propane,” she called, “the rest off the generator. When you hear that motor kick in every so often, that's the generator keepin' the meat and whatnot froze. People don't know how good they got it, just bein' able to hook up to the power line.”

She began to hum again. He heard chopping, oil spitting; then there was the odor of frying onions. “This guy's quite lean,” she said, as if in courtesy to narrate what he couldn't see from the porch. “I took him outta season, poached him. You don't mind eatin' illegal?”

Teague had never even legitimately shot a deer, though he'd been on several expeditions for that purpose in which he and all his party had happily failed. He recalled himself walking through stands of brush in the narrow ravines that drain upstate grainfields, dutifully, dubiously manful—Calvin, clumsy and loud, his borrowed rifle sleeping like a babe in arms.

“I was out fishin’,” she said, “and there was this little spike buck, and he kept hangin' down by the creek; I drowned a couple three worms, and there he still was; so I walk up to the truck for my .270, and when I get back down to the creek, he's still standin' there, not even browsing, just standin' there kind of waitin' for me. So I shot him. Heart shot. Felt like I 'bout had to.”

He tracked the sound of her boots on an insubstantial floor, heard her perform some rasping or grinding chore, heard a wood partition slide open at the far end of the trailer, which was not so far from him. The girl quietly lay down a scolding in terms he couldn't make out. Her voice. No answer. Her voice again, a long pause, no answer. Talking to herself. Terribly, terribly lonely. He hoped so.

Taking herself privately to task. But why? A cat, he thought, she must have a naughty cat, or perhaps a captive forest rodent living back there.

Teague's thoughts veered wretchedly then toward Janice. His Janice, more or less, lodged in his imagination wearing a peach pants suit she'd undoubtedly sewn herself, and serving coffee and sandwiches to ladies they'd both known all their lives. She stood behind some endless, paper-covered serving table, offering food and pleasantries and subsisting nicely on her sense of duty, in her fog of old-fogey cologne. Because she was a nice person. A very nice person. Janice, who deserved better than his slim enthusiasm for her. Guilt rose up and sloshed back to the floor of Teague's being, all muffled. He felt very well. Drunk, perhaps. Unafraid, and yet acutely aware that he'd got himself pretty far into the wilderness.

“We,” the girl had said. She'd said it several times. Or, “our.” “Our road,” “Our appliances.” There was a car parked in the clearing with the trailer, one more vehicle than she absolutely needed, especially if she lived alone. But why should it matter if they were
alone? Acts of civil kindness, that was all. And though he was in love with her, he was in love so preposterously he wasn’t about to reveal it. So they had no need for privacy. Teague craned to see her. He saw more of the trailer—black pots, an enameled kettle, blond cabinets. A half-finished cigarette, a half-finished beer. Neither Teague nor anyone he’d known had ever lived so austere as this, and he ached at seeing her so meagerly provisioned, but then it must be thin living that settled the girl so wonderfully within herself; she was, he believed, of some slightly different species, one better evolved for having never lost sight of its origins. He smelled the onions caramelizing. This girl, it seemed to him, could make a home anywhere. Be a home. She’d claimed the very word and slipped it off its mooring.

She appeared at the door, all but blocking the lamplight from inside. “How bout another beer?”

“I’ve had enough. For me.”

“Yeah, I forgot you’re kind of a teetotaler. I know you’re still thirsty, though.”

Moving quietly now, she’d removed her boots to walk around barefoot, she went back into the trailer and brought him out a tall glass of tea. “Sun tea,” she said. “You put the bags in a glass jug and let the sun color it up. Somethin’ about it, you just get a real nice do this way, maybe it’s more natural. You like?”

He liked the curvature of her jaw, the way her neck swelled from her shoulders. And her eyes, of course, though their particulars, color and so on, were mostly memory in the new, diminished light. Before he said another word he should really ask if they were alone. The girl wouldn’t be frightened or offended, no, the girl, bless her heart, would hear any question he might care to ask in exactly the spirit he intended it. But what, exactly, did he intend, or want to know? Do you live by yourself? Are you alone? Are we alone? His intentions had always been so plain to him, and his motives and his curiosity always entirely manageable; and, for all its color and novelty, he was none too fond of his present confusion. “It’s good,” he said, raising his glass. “My mom makes it this way, too. I’ve always preferred it this way.”

She fed him a meal swimming in grease and salt, and powerfully savory. The venison, his first, was as dense as liver and tasted like the decaying floor of the forest. They sat knee to knee on lawn furniture, their plates balanced in their laps, and they ate without much comment. Teague was entirely sober again, beginning to see how the beer had never been all that responsible for his glow. The girl sopped primitive gravy with bread. He did the same.

“What was that song you were humming before? In the truck? That was so familiar.”

“Oh,” she said, “I don’t even recall. They kinda spill outta me. I remember every tune I’ve ever heard, to hum it, but usually not the words. Hardly ever the names of ‘em. Strange, huh?”

“No, I don’t think so. I’m not too musical myself. Not at all, really. You should be grateful for whatever little gift you’ve got that way. I mean, they kicked me out of the church choir, if you can believe that. Tin ear.”

“That was mean. You’re big on that church thing, aren’t you?”

“My family is. No,” said Teague, “I guess I am, too. Or at least I try to be.”

“That’s wild.”

“Wild?”

“Different. Than me. Around here, seems like it’s mainly
assholes that pack them churches every Sunday. Aw, that’s not quite it either. But you know what I mean.”

“Maybe. But I have to say, the majority of the people in our church are really nice. It was the same in Iowa City. I’m a Congregationalist.”

“I probably don’t know what I’m talkin’ about,” she said. “I just don’t like bein’ looked down on. If I think of it, though, there’s plenty of other assholes, too, the kind who don’t go to church. My family, for instance. You must think I’m pretty bad, the way I talk.”

“You’ve been very nice to me,” he said. “Very Christian, I might say.”

“I’ve got somebody you really oughta have a little chat with. ’Cause, with your education you could sure tell him—some of these people, you know, they give out them pills like they were candy. Real expensive candy. Never saw a pill cure anybody of anything.”

“Deeply Christian,” Teague emphasized. “I’m humbled.” Her mention of someone else had brought him up short. It implied a future. He was not interested in her future, or his future, or anything beyond this moment and its lovely dyspepsia, this perfectly populated world. He did not wish to know who she knew; nor did not want the day or even the hour to end.

“You’re what? Humbled, did you say?” The girl was satisfied, entertained. “I never had that effect on anybody before. You’re a lotta firsts for me. That what I said about my family—I don’t want you to get the wrong impression or anything, or take it the wrong way. I really do love ’em. Most of ’em. But, religion-wise, you know, I’m nothing. Must be nice to be a believer. If you really believe.”

Gently she was invading the borders of his cosseted life. All his easy decency was built on second hand assumptions, he saw that now, and he knew he’d never again be just as he had been; but how, exactly, he’d changed was not yet clear. The girl undid her braid and ran her fingers through it, and it was a wave, unbelievably abundant, nearly a cloak on her shoulders. Teague was forming a new faith.

“Love,” she said, “is a very tricky deal.”

“I’ve heard that. But for me it’s been just Mom and Dad and the grandparents. My little sister. Pretty straightforward stuff.”

“Some guys have a way of keeping things simple. I bet you’re one of ’em.”

“I was. Simple. But that might be a nice way of saying stupid. Because, I think if I’d been paying attention, I would have known better. I would have known that things are not simple.”

“No. I meant nice,” she said. “You seem very nice.”

“Oh, gee.”

“Well, what’s wrong with that?”

“Nothing. But it doesn’t seem to count for much, either. Especially if you don’t know any other way to be.”

“I can’t believe you don’t have a girl.”

“I do and I don’t. I guess I should have said so before.”

“Oh.”

Teague wallowed in. “I don’t love her, is the thing. We’re friends. Or just companions you could even say.”

“I’m never sure if guys even need to be in love. I think that’s way down the list of what they’re looking for.”

“I’d need it,” he said. “I see that now. And with Janice—that’s her name, Janice—we’ve been off in different schools, and we always see each other when we’re home, summer and the holidays, but . . . we don’t date anybody else, at least I haven’t . . . but . . . and we have a lot in common, you know, we’re both going back to good jobs
in Courville—she’ll be teaching kindergarten—and she’s a very admirable person, and sort of attractive, I think. Really, I’d always thought this whole ‘love’ idea might be a load of hooey, or certainly not something you’d need to get quite so worked up about. I was wrong.”

“You’ve had quite a day,” said the girl. “You should have seen yourself, standin’ there by the road—one shoe off and one shoe on, diddle-diddle-dumpling, my son John.”

“My mom used to sing that one.”

“You must be awful tired,” she said.

“No. I could go on quite a while longer. I like talking to you. A lot.”

“I’m kinda bushed. Usually, by this time of year the woods are closed. Fire danger. But it’s been a rainy summer. Means a hard winter’s on the way, probably. And, greedy me, I’m gettin’ in all the wood I can. Hauled two loads today all by myself. ’Bout wears you out.”

He heard for the first time a sorrow or reluctance in her voice, something not to do with what she was presently saying. She leaned down to take up his plate and her face hovered near him a beat longer than necessary, within reach he thought. His heart bumped in him, amplified almost to menace, and as the girl went into the trailer with their dishes Teague thought to offer her his help but found that he was mute again, just as he’d been in the moment they’d met. He imagined watching her from behind, that her hands would move with the economy of feeding birds, that living, shining fall of hair would be swaying in the rhythm of her work. He heard her at the sink, and very shortly she had finished up and he heard her move off to the back of the trailer, back to where she’d been angry before.

She hadn’t said good night.

She hadn’t put out the lamp in the trailer.

The moon began to float up over the trees and shine in at him through the plastic screening. A breeze, waxing and waning in the pines, whispered, “Fooohl. Fooohoohl.” He strained to hear anything else, anything of her, but from where she’d gone there was only that silence, and it persisted so long and was so complete that it seemed to him it must be intentional. He’d have heard the water running if she’d brushed her teeth or washed her face, he’d have heard the bed springs if she lay down—he was that close and that attentive, but instead he heard nothing at all. In high country. Nightfall had already brought a penetrating cold. Teague curled in on himself, held himself. He thought God must be offering him a miserable night so that he might remember himself, his entire sense of himself, and quit wanting what was not his to want. He threw his arm over his eyes and could only too easily imagine how silly, how pathetic and melodramatic he must look.

“You asleep?”

The girl had floated to the door. Her whisper brought him well up off the chaise lounge.

“Sorry,” she said. She stood in the doorway, blankets draped over one arm, towels over the other. “Didn’t mean to scare you or wake you up or anything.”

“I was just laying here, thinking. Kind of thinking over the day.”

The girl didn’t move. She didn’t speak, though she seemed to want to.

“I was thinking about you. Mostly.”

She wore a long tee shirt for her nightgown. It bore the
ghostly imprint of a frolicking unicorn and was so threadbare he could see through it, there was a remarkably detailed shadow between her legs.

“I’m just filthy,” she said. “How bout you?”

Teague yawned, or faked a yawn to keep from panting.

“You one of those morning shower people?—Cause I like to take my shower at night. Hate to go to bed dirty. All sticky and, you know.” She lay the blankets over the back of the chaise lounge.

“Come on.”

He followed her out of the sleeping porch and over a short wooden walk to a shed; she cast a flashlight on the shed, and a fifty-gallon drum was mounted on its roof, and a garden hose fed into that. “If you fill this thing in the morning, by night the water’s nice and warm. Specially on a day like this one was. Some people’ll go to quite a lotta trouble for a warm shower.”

“That’s very clever,” said Teague in a voice he’d never heard before.

“Oh, yeah. One of his . . .” The girl lay her towels and the shining flashlight on a rock near the door of the shed. “Wasn’t my idea. Come on, I’ll show you how to work it.” She drew the tee shirt up over her head and lay it on the towels. Revealed she was unearthly, suffused with the same interior light as the moon. Teague’s legs threatened to give way beneath him. His eyes strained as the girl entered the gloom of the shed. “All you do,” she said, “is pull on this deal.” Her hand moved to a sort of lanyard, seized it. A trickling sound. She swept water over her face. “Come on,” she said. “There’s room for two, and only so much water.” Then she demanded it.

“Come on.”

Teague stepped into the shed, partly under the fall of the water.

“Well, you’ll have to take your . . . you’ll get your things all wet.”

He would need at least a moment more to overcome a lifetime of modesty. This was a thought far too complex for his present powers of expression. His clothes began to cling to him.

“You goof. Well, if you’re . . . Here, soap me up, okay?” She put a bar of soap in his hands, turned her back to him, reached behind her to find his hands again, drew them up and around and placed them on her breasts. The home of all promise. He soaped them. And breathed, and the roar of it was beyond disguising now. The water seemed to have found a particular course down the inside of his right pant leg, he was slightly aware of its tickling. “Rub-a-dub-dub,” she said, and he regretted it, but then she sighed enormously, and the top of her head drifted back until it touched his chin, and he moved the soap lower, circled her navel with it. She pressed back at him until his arms were full of her. She owned him. Their ragged breathing was everything until, from just behind him, he heard another voice, a third voice, raised in fear or pain.
**Butte’s America: A Portfolio of Photographs**  
David J. Spear

**In my work I become engaged in the coming in and then the going out, the coming in and the going out of making photographs, even with things and subjects that know me.**

In the process of these pictures I travel to this foreign land; like all outsiders after arrival I feel an urge to belong. But American culture often defines us with the question, “Where were your parents born? Where are you from?” and I utter inwardly, “If you’re from here you can’t be from there.” So I travel to this place, with each trip arriving an outsider, but with each departure I leave in a small way distantly connected to the things and these people in this place I’ve come to know as Butte’s America.

The coming in and the going out I suspect will reoccur here for a time.

*March 15, 2006*  
*Strike West Pictures*  
*Pablo, Montana*
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FROM THE ARCHIVES
Cabin O’Wildwinds: The Story of a Montana Ranch

Installment One

Ada Melville Shaw

Illustrations by Irvin “Shorty” Shope

Note: While researching farm home designs and interiors in The Farmer’s Wife: The Magazine for Farm Women, Drumlummon Institute board member Patty Dean came upon a marvelously literate first-person narrative written from the perspective of a woman homesteading alone near Billings, Montana. Ada Melville Shaw, writer and editor, suffragist, and author of the lyrics to the hymn, “All the Day” (ca. 1900; music by James M. Black), had staked a homestead claim in Yellowstone County in late 1915. Shaw would later serve as an editor at (and frequent contributor to) The Farmer’s Wife, a popular magazine devoted, in Dean’s words, to “providing a forum for farm women, actively soliciting their ideas, letters, and experiences, employing a crew of field editors who traveled across the United States, encountering and reporting on the farm woman in her many work roles.” With paid subscriptions numbering more than one million, The Farmer’s Wife brought Shaw’s account of her homestead stay to its readers in several installments in 1931–1932. We reprint here the first installment, published in the February 1931 issue with illustrations by Montana artist Irvin “Shorty” Shope.

Cabin O’Wildwinds was the very appropriate name I gave to the tiny something-between-a-shack-and-a-house in which, when well past what is usually understood to be the prime of a woman’s years, I settled alone, a homesteader on semi-desert land with only the snow-crowned Rockies to relieve the flat stretches north, south, east and west of cactus, sage, and greasewood country, not a neighbor close by and stores very far away.

“But how did you ever come to do such a foolish—crazy—thing?”

This question has been thrust upon me times without number by very sane friends who never could have been persuaded into any such adventure. However, while preparing to take up the new life—a vivid chapter in my hitherto well-ordered, if not humdrum, existence, I felt—though I could not explain my feeling—that I was neither foolish nor crazy; now that I can look back upon it all, weighing
and measuring this with that of the total outcome, I know that the adventure was one of the richest and most lastingly valuable chapters of my now nearly seventy years of life.

There are those who tell us that, definitely and inevitably, we draw our experiences to us and therefore each of us alone is responsible for whatever of good or ill may overtake us. Be that as it may, this much I know: From tenderest years, even while yet the child of a great city, minus any acquaintance with untamed Nature, outside of books, I secretly yearned, dreaming and awake, and genuinely suffered, to escape from streets and houses and people—to be somewhere free and alone with sky, sun, moon, stars, clouds, winds, waters, rocks, and a Silence of which I knew nothing in experience, but of which my spirit seemed to have understanding.

This hidden, perhaps inherited “homesickness,” persisted in me through the years. The odor of rain-washed grass, the fingers of the wind upon my cheek, the soft beauty of a cloud against the blue, the mystery of a tree, would drive the yearning pain through my heart till the tears came, when, if not alone, I would be well scoffed at for a mood no one understood. Then, when half a century had slipped away and my feet still were strange to the delicious springiness of natural sod, a door of escape opened—a door that led away from cities and towns, away from everything with which I was familiar—to the untamed plains that thus far had been the haunt of wild life, then of herds of cattle and sheep, but now were to be invaded by homesteaders bringing with them their ploughs, their barbed wire, their families.

As it happened, this door of escape opened before me at a time when all other doors of egress from a rather bad aspect of my temporal affairs had slammed shut in my face. So, as Ben King very simply puts it, since there was “nowhere to go but out,” out I went to “... where the west begins . . .
... where the sage is plenty,
(only mine happened to be greasewood which is to sage as cactus is to a cultivated rose!)
“... where there ain’t no subways,
Nor no forty-story shacks,
Where they shy at automobiles,
Dudes, plug hats an’ three-rail tracks;
Where the boys wear shapps for britches,
Flannel shirts an’ Stetson felts . . .”

Receiving an invitation to be the companion of a woman friend, who, with money in her purse, had gone a-pioneering for health’s and wealth’s sake, into territory newly released for agricultural purposes, I burned my city bridges behind me and struck trail from a Chicago boarding house for the Unknown, never dreaming how far afield the trail would lead. For Fate evidently did not propose to let me off with a mere timid nibble at the edge of the cake I had so long cried for—ah, no! Very cleverly, most relentlessly, she set a thorn here and a lure there until she at last drove me out of a comfortable environment in which I had thought to rest for a time, to take up and live upon a quarter-section homestead of my own.

And that is how it all began!

When I was planning to put on paper, at least a part of my experiences covering six years on the plains, I wrote to a teacher friend who had spent one summer vacation with me in Cabin O’Wildwinds and asked her, “What shall I tell and what shall I leave out?” Her answer came back promptly:
“Write about the triple rainbow arching above the snow-capped mountains.

“The dreadful hailstorm when the little rabbit and the meadow lark sat close together in the shelter of the log and looked each other squarely in the eye.

“The terrifying approach of the storm which sent us to the root cellar for safety.

“The snake at the doorstep which we killed with a hoe and a rake.

“The longing for the fleshpots of Egypt that Sunday afternoon when, succumbing to the heat, we lay on the bed and took turns building menus of delicacies we should ‘order’ when we returned to civilization—as I recall, a most unbalanced ration.

“The frightful hailstorm in the night that sounded like machine-gun firing and which peeled the weathered gray from the exposed sides of the house so that next morning it shone yellow in the sun like new lumber. Your fright at my illness (for A. was almost overcome with the shock of the impact of that unearthly—hellish!—bombardment on our frail walls) and that fiery dose of Jamaica ginger you forced me to drink, which not only had ginger in it but something even more potent which no loyal druggist now will sell—without a prescription!

“The trips past the wheat field to Lizzie’s home protected from the hordes of mosquitoes by raincoats, gloves and mosquito netting veils (and the thermometer running up to three figures).

“The always wonderful snow crests west and north and south, which your field glass brought so near and of which we never tired.

“The long days of writing, while we sat back to back in the hot little cabin and let genius—and the sun—blaze.

“The strange desert-island feeling when (mail still reaching me but semi-occasionally) we wondered, scarcely daring to trust ourselves to think whether there was War or would be War—here at home.

“The nights when we had to sit in the dark to keep the mosquitoes out—the thin ones that could be in nowise deterred by your good screens—blood-thirsty, persistent villains. (And one night when I, at least, exhausted for sleep, went to bed in full regalia of straw hat overdraped with netting so as to save my face during a hoped-for period of unconsciousness!)

“The long, lovely, peaceful days when nothing hurried, nothing worried, nothing interfered with friendly interchange of thoughts about things ‘in heaven above, in earth beneath and in the waters
under the earth’—and—then—some!

“The last day, when from the Optimist’s quaint old surrey we looked back with tear-dimmed eyes at little Cabin O’Wildwinds that for you had spelled rest, shelter and home scarcely noticing, for tears, the thick cloud of mosquitoes that hummed along in our wake as we were carried away toward the new chapters in our lives.

“And, of course, you might tell how we took our weekly bath in the washtub in the little kitchen, using more or less water as the case might be—if you thought it would interest the reading public—and it might!—who knows?” (If this friend had visited me during the regime of the vinegar barrel there could scarcely have been even the semblance of a weekly bath!)

So wrote my guest of a few weeks who had not wintered and summered, alone, in the Cabin she so dearly loved. But if I, who knew the environment, year in, year out, and had intimately wrestled to conquer its problems and its pains, had imbibed its delights and learned deep and sacred lessons at the book it held before me, were to set down all or half that there is to tell, no publisher would so much as look at my voluminous manuscript! So I shall try to sketch in here and there the outstanding features of an experience which I would not spare from my life for bags of gold.

The day I left my friend’s home near the little new town of Nesterville, and “hit out” for my homestead miles across the level country, is graved deeply in memory—a picture of light and shade, of laughter and tears, of fear and high courage. I had engaged a fellow-homesteader to haul me and mine out to the waiting Cabin, up whose brick chimney no smoke had yet felt its way and to whose door no friendly trail was as yet beaten out on the virgin sod; my beautiful, intelligent shepherd-collie, Lassie; my winsome and no less intelligent little black cat, Betsy Bobbett; a huge vinegar cask for water, since I had no well and no money to sink in the gamble for one; my trunk, filled mainly with books; a few simple and essential furnishings such as bed, stove, etc.; a three-month’s supply of food, all canned or packaged.

It was anything but a “nice” day. Clouds hung low and the greasewood flat was dressed in tones of black and gray—a grim challenge to the tenderfoot and a very lame foot at that! While still far off I spied the Cabin, its new lumber shining against the dun background, looking very much like a carelessly abandoned pill-box which the wind would one day toss out of its path. But it was mine!

With high heart beats I climbed stiffly down from the wagon, my driver looking at the house with a wise eye.

“So you’re goin’ to try to make it here alone? Some guts fer a woman, I’ll say! An’ you ain’t so young neither!”

With feelings I cannot even now reveal, I put my new key in my new door and slowly turned the new knob. I was very sentimental about it—should have liked some sort of ceremony. I looked in—I had not seen the place since the first stringers had been laid above the sod. And this is what greeted me: floors strewn deeply with shavings and other builder’s litter, egg shells, bacon rinds, empty tomato cans, sardine cans, fruit cans, tobacco quids, meat bones, discarded rags. A mess where I had visualized a clean waitingness; stale odors where there should have been the clean breath of pine. I think Madam Fate snickered in her sleeve. Did she think I’d weep? For once, she was disappointed.

My mover and I worked hard and fast and before darkness settled down, a stove was up, the water barrel was filled from a
neighboring well, lamps were filled with oil, bed ready to make, boxes of food opened, coffee simmering, bacon sliced and waiting for the pan. How I loved it all! Then my first companion at the first meal in the new home drove off, and I watched him disappear in the thick gloom which was fast settling on the land, swallowing me up. The only sign of other human habitation was a distant log barn and beside it a dreary-looking squat hut built of stone; there, I learned, sometimes stayed over night a homesteader who earned his bread—since his land had turned out to be non-arable—by hauling logs from the far distant foothills. Aside from this, empty, treeless, lightless, pathless gloom stretched away to the encircling horizon. And the rain came down.

As a matter of fact—a fact I seriously understood later on in my mad career—that rain was a life-saver to the homesteaders on the new land, that semi-arid territory on which they had cast their lot. But that night, in my ignorance, I hated it, for I had but the narrow personal outlook—what was it doing to me! After all, it is that same narrow personal outlook that is the seat of most of our miseries. A year later, rain, no matter what passing personal misery it inflicted, was matter for the deepest thankfulness and joy. So we learn—so the soul is trained!

But then, I shivered away from the chill of the elements, shut the doors and locked them, albeit there was no one to lock out, looked around and whispered to the crass ignorance of me, fool! fool! fool! I did not like the voice of that coyote “singing in the rain!” I did not like the unshaded windows beyond which lay black, impenetrable gloom! I did not like the discomfort, the strangeness, the silence! I did not like to think that no matter what might be my need, there was no human help within call! I did not like to face the untried future! In fact, for a bad ten minutes I did not like any of it and had there been way of escape . . . But there was none—yes, there was!—a flour sack of mail picked up en route from town to homestead. Two or three books sent by knowing friends, magazines, newspapers, letters—a fat package of them. After all, I was not wholly cut off!

Clasping the material evidences of friendship and love to my heart, I proceeded to indulge in what women understand as the relief of “a good cry.” Then I dried my eyes and began to read, and as I read these messages from here and there, one even from across the sea, my courage returned. After all, this was going to be all right! I was just tired. Blow wind, out there on the flat! I’ll give you fields of grain to blow over, in time. And who really fears darkness—the merciful veil of night? There is a light that never goes out—the light of love! I finished my letters and the wee Cabin was filled with a glory that surely must have shone out through its windows to the farthest rim of the world. For love was with me and where love is, all is. Oh, it was going to be—it must be great! great! great!

I sat thinking. The fire burned out. The damp chill crept through the thin wooden walls. Utter weariness took hold of me. I must go to bed. I looked around—bed? At that first slight move away from my letters and the friendly lamp, the happier spell broke. Primitive fear and utter loneliness again swept over me. Lie down in that unprotected place? Sleep—with those windows staring at me like the dark eyes of some monster waiting to pounce? . . . Many nights of many weathers and moods I spent in Cabin O’Wildwinds but that first night remains in a class of its own. What says Millay?
“He whose soul is flat—
The sky will cave in on him by and by.”

Well, what of soul was mine was flat indeed, prone, and all the demons of self-pity were prancing on it. It had neither strength nor desire to
“... split the sky in two
And let the face of God shine through.”

So I lay awake, tense, numb with cold, quivering and afraid. Lassie, who liked the new home just then no better than I did, took advantage of my state of mind and leaped upon the bed, tucking her wet nose into my neck for comfort. As for Betsey Bobbett, who was half-mad with hatred of the “strange garret,” had not once permitted me to detach her from my person and now lay upon my shoulder with all of her claws hooked anywhere they might happen to be.

“And the rain beat upon that house!” The weather god pulled out all the stops of his vast organ and the winds of the universe made their music through them. There had been one coyote singing when the lamp was lighted—now there was an army of them; or was this vast plain the gehanna of lost souls wailing for their sins? Every now and then, Lassie would raise her head, the hair lifting along her spine, and with a deep-throated growl seemed to be warning Something to keep off. And there I lay whispering to my flat soul, fool! fool! fool!

But morning came—morning always comes! There was much to do. I was at length a sure-enough pioneer.

“But what did you get out of it, after all? Not money—you are not the money-getting type. What did you get out of it?” my loyal but disgusted friends have asked me.

Fortunately for most of us in this world of uncertain and uneven distributions, there are solid values quite apart from money. What did I get out of it? Much, every way—more than I can convey in words. It was an investment of spiritual capital, the interest from which has never ceased to accrue.

Then and there I began to lose a certain helplessness and nesbness, to use a graphic word of my old grandmother’s, bred of city life and a desk job. Then and there I began to work out the truth of the paradox that it is possible for one to do what is to be done whether one can do it or not! In other words, I began to discover within myself, power, strength, ability, which I should never have known existed in me but for the tremendous situations of need which uncovered them to me. Then and there I began the search within myself for that mental and spiritual equipment which I had to have if I were to go through with the Adventure; patience, perseverance, endurance, courage, initiative, humor, uncomplainingness, optimism, dauntlessness, inventiveness.

There was no bakeshop within reach and I must have bread! To have bread, I must have money for flour, yeast, salt, water—for even water had to be hauled and paid for; I must find someone to haul the flour and the water to my door and pay for the service; I must find someone else who would go to the timber, bring logs to me at so much per haul and then find another someone else with time from his own acres who would cut the logs up for my stove; I must know how to build a bread fire; I must learn how to make the bread and, while I was learning, eat with more or less relish my own sorry experiments. No use making a fuss about it—fussing only intensified matters.

On many a winter morning, when I reluctantly turned back the covers, the thermometer beside my bed registered 10°—15°—20° below zero, for I had neither fuel nor stove which would “keep” fire
all night. As the dry air shrunk the boards of my walls and made incursions in my poorly built roof, cracks came and the snow drifted in and sometimes lay on my bed covers. There was no one to shake down the stove or turn on the steam! Whether I liked it or not the fire had to be built, the ice in the barrel broken, the bread fished out of the foot of the bed where, securely wrapped up, I had kept it unfrozen with the warmth from my feet. The frozen bacon had to be chopped out for the pan, the frozen eggs (when there were eggs!) had to be cooked in the best way for edibility—and I had to discover that way for myself. I drank my coffee clear because one thing I never did attain was a liking for frozen canned milk.

The winds that whirled across the unbroken miles shook the Cabin till sometimes I stood ready to fly for the open. When I set out to walk to the nearest neighbor’s and range cattle bunched between me and my goal, it was my job to find out how to go ahead just the same. If a rattle snake gave me “good hunting!” as I passed by, still it was my job to know what to do and how to do it.

There were long lonely nights and long lonely days—and Sunday, had I permitted, would have been the worst of all. There was mental poise to sustain, inward calm to attain and preserve, fear to be turned away, laughter to be put in the room of tears, cheer to be substituted for gloom, hope to be drummed into line in place of despair. These things had to be done unless one were to be ignominiously beaten and no real woman wants that to happen.

So fate and I reasoned together. Had I not always yearned to be free from certain shackles and restraints of city living? Face to face with Nature? Well, here you are; now live up to the game! And there was a bit of mockery on the Old Dame’s face. But she was right. I was free! Free to rave to heart’s surfeit over star or snow crystal, wild flower or rainbow, racing clouds, snowy peaks, miles and miles and miles of clean land, moon rises, star rises, sunrises, moon sets, sunsets, silence. Twice a day only the distant whistle of a steam engine broke the quiet. There was no one to protest or scoff when I got up in the middle of the night to stand on my porch and view the midnight skies. Or, feeling chilled to the bone, hours before dawn, to brew coffee and fry bacon and then with the dog, out of doors to watch the morning star lift the sun over the horizon while the mountains shoulders, draped in dusky velvet, ermine trimmed, glimmered against the purple night sky of the west.

For half a century, life—that is to say the organized, standardized manner of living prescribed by civilization—had not been any too kind to me. I had felt bruised, starved, deprived, cheated, but could not shake loose. But now here I was—free—a homesteader, a pioneer. I could work in my own way, play in my own way, learn the secrets of nature, do without what I could not get, enjoy what I had, read, think, shout, sing, pray, laugh, weep, without let or hindrance. I was independently alone with Nature, had all the absolute necessaries of life—with one exception. Water! The cup of freedom was at my lips, but the cup was dry. For the barrel my mover had filled would soon be empty and I did not know where to get more. And even the bravest, the patientest, the most inventive, cannot do without water.

Across a stretch of very rough land lay the homestead of a lone man whom I shall call A. Q., a one-time country school teacher from a far eastern state. He had a well but as he was very seldom at home, his cattle ran loose on the place (and it was going to take me some time to lose my fear of cows) and, as my lame feet and city-flaccid
muscles could not possibly manage the carriage of pails full or even partly full of water, that supply was practically out of reach. And I had to have water!

One morning, scanning the distant road through my good field glasses, I saw some men evidently at road work. I set out through the hot sun to interview them. I had to have water! I found a group of five, all busy with shovels and picks. They did not greet me enthusiastically—I suppose I looked as if I needed something and in that country at that time everyone needed something and it did not pay to be dependent. Moreover, lone women homesteaders were a nuisance.

However, I stated my need. Apparently none of them had time or strength to spare. I made it very plain that I would pay—anything—for hauled water. Grim indifference. I felt as if they shouted at me: “What did you come to this country for? If you can’t take care of yourself, you should have stayed back where you belonged!” One of them said: “There’s a woman two miles up the road has a horse—she hauls her own water. Ain’t you got no horse?”

I—a street-car habitué—a horse!

I shook my head and was turning away when the least-attractive looking one of the company straightened up from his work and regarded me severely.

“I’ll fetch yuh a bar’l first thing in the mornin,” he said, “but that’s all I kin do. Got enough of me own. Old woman, she keeps at me mornin’, noon an’ night about her damned bar’l. How in time she gits away with so much water, beats me—must drink it or water this here cactus with it or somethin’! I’ll be around early. You be up—I ain’t got no time to waste on no wimmen homesteaders!”

I swallowed my feelings—water is water—turned about for the long trail home, and with some long, long thoughts dipped a cupful of warm fluid out of my vinegar cask, sipped it and shuddered.

The next morning, at dawn, appeared my recalcitrant knight with a water barrel in his wagon, his well-fed horse trotting vigorously, the priceless fluid slopping out at every jolt. Gruffly he disclaimed my offers of help in transporting it pailful by pailful from his barrel to mine, and when he had finished and I handed him a silver dollar with words of genuine thanks, he glared at me as if he would like to kill me, pitched the coin across the room to my bed, let out an oath, leaped to his wagon, shouted to his horses and was gone.

But water is water! I drank. It was “sweet” water—heaven’s own gift. I filled the animals’ dish. I took a bath. I washed up a collection of dishes. I reveled otherwise until some of the fearful dryness in me seemed assuaged. Then I put the problem away for a day or so. Sufficient unto the day is the moisture thereof!

But, as the days passed, unlike the widow’s curse, my supply grew fearfully less. I had not neglected a single opportunity of interviewing such people as I chanced to meet, but no help came.

One evening I was preparing my supper of canned tomatoes, as the wettest food I had, when Lassie’s bark announced a caller. Gladly I hurried to the door.

Approaching at a sedate pace was a huge, gaunt, gray horse mounted by a small, thin, ragged, fair-haired boy with wide blue eyes and a sensitive, even high-bred face. His air was timid, appealing.

“Good evenin!” he piped, reining in the enormous animal and pulling off his tattered straw hat. “I come over to see could I git to haul water for you?”
Now I had been under the impression that hauling water—or anything—was a man-size job and this child, why, I wanted to hold up my arms, have him slide down into them, carry him into the Cabin and minister to his very evident physical needs—and mother him.

“You?” I asked. “Can you haul water? And where do you come from?”

“Yes’m. I kin do it.” There was resignation in his voice. “I’m amin’ to go to school all winter an’ I have to earn my books an’ clo’es. . . . You want water, don’t you? A man told me.”

“Why—yes!” Pitying amazement made my words come slowly. “I need it badly but—how will you manage it?” I did not know country children then.

“My grandfather says I kin use his stone boat an’ old Doll here. She ain’t no good no more for hard work, but he says he’ll keep her for me if I use her right and ‘tend her myself. She pastures on the range so she don’t hardly cost nothin’. We just had us a well drilled and the water’s good and Grandfather says it has to pay for itself. I’m used to haulin’. I hauled all our folks used for a year before we got the well, from a spring ‘way over yonder.”

“And where do you live?”

“Bout a mile n’ a half over that way,” gesturing into the deepening night. “It’s more’n two and a half round by the road but there’s a man lets me come through his place—he lets me let down the wires if I put ‘em back right.” He sighed faintly. Letting down barbed wires and getting them back right was not so trivial a task for such slender, ill-nourished muscles as his.

“And what shall I pay you?”

“I don’t know,” his clear eyes studied the distance. “Bout whatever you think right, I guess. Would fifty cents a haul be too much?”

“All right, sir! Can you come tomorrow? And won’t you come in now and have some hot toast and jam with me? It is good jam—I brought if from Chicago!”

But he shook his head, replaced his hat, and, quite with the air of a man putting temptation behind him, gathered up the reins. “No ‘m! Thanks awf’lly. There’s chores to do yet. I don’t like to do ‘m after dark but there’s some moon tonight if it don’t cloud over. I thought I better git over before you got someone else. Only way I can see to earn my books and clo’es. . . . You don’t need to come down to the gate—I’ll put it up all right—I’m used to gates. Good night!” Again that faint sigh. He was evidently tired to the bone—perhaps to the young soul of him.

At the gate the child climbed down—there was no spring in him. He struggled with the tall gate pole and the twisted wires. Wise old Doll sedately paced out to the road and stopped for him. He climbed to the high saddle and his thin young voice rang through the night, “Git up, Doll!” The darkness swallowed them up—the wornout horse and the baby pioneer earning an education in the wilderness. As I nibbled my cold toast, the story of Elijah the Tishbite to whom the ravens brought “bread and flesh in the morning and bread and flesh in the evening,” recurred to me. There are ravens and ravens. And water is quite as necessary as bread and flesh. The day of miracles, it is indeed past?

Hedrick was the youngest of three orphaned children who had come with their grandparents to the plains. The others were girls who hated books and helped the Grandmother about the house, gladly playing off from school whenever possible. But Hedrick had
begged so to be allowed to study that he had been offered this way to get text books and clo'es.

Promptly at the time agreed upon the little fellow arrived with his first consignment of water. The tightly closed barrel was full to the brim. Through the little square opening in the head, only a two-quart pail could be introduced. With this he filled the big pail I held and when it was full I lugged it into the house and transferred the precious supply to my barrel. For all his appearance of frailty the child worked briskly, assuring me that I was getting an alkali-free product, perfectly clean, meanwhile blissfully unconscious that at each plunge of his arm his grimy hand and dirty sleeve dipped into the water. But—what price moisture? Never have I parted with my fifty-cent pieces so willingly as when I laid them in that thin little palm, and never did simple word of thanks rush home so warmly as his, the while, with huge satisfaction, he tucked away his earnings in a dirty cotton tobacco sack.

Thereafter, for many months, this little human raven of mine, illy protected from the cold by his scant and ragged clothing and as illy equipped for work by his scant and ragged strength, kept his appointments through all weathers and nearly always in darkness, for they would not let him earn his pittance until all the home chores—by which he earned his "keep"—were done. I forget just how many cows he milked, how many pigs he slopped, how much wood he split and carried in, how many weary steps he ran while the child in him sighed unavailingly for its right to laughter, play, enjoyment, comfort, rest and good food.

Once I ventured to increase the little sum per barrel but firmly he "reckoned not." “Water don't cost nothin’an’old Doll she pastures on the range.” Water don't cost nothin’! To get old Doll up from the range, harness her, pump the water, lift the heavy pailfuls up to the barrel head, open and close the devilish wire gates—I hate the memory of those wire gates to this day!—let down fence wires and put them back right, steer old Doll over the rough ground with cactus thorns ever ready to pierce worn boots,—for he walked beside the horse most of the way, dip the water back out, then the lonely trip back, unhitch old Doll and give her human 'tending . . . No, water don't cost nothin’!

“Yep! It sure do git lonesome out here sometimes,” Hedrick admitted to me wistfully when he had arrived one evening later than common, making his solitary trip in almost total darkness and through a wild wind. “But I reckon 't aint no one's fault. When I'm grown up and have an education I'll have it easier maybe—Gra'ma says so. I thought I'd like to be one of these here writers for the papers—that wouldn't be so hard, would it? I'd like it. You'd git to know a heap.”

Resolute and industrious to the core, the boy also had the sensitive nature of the artist. He passionately worshipped beauty. When the moon rode amid her chariots of clouds overhead, he forgot the chores at home in his rapture at sight of her. He loved to sing, his teacher told me, to read of beautiful things and places; he craved gentle amusement, shrinking from rough companions, though there was no shred of “sissy” about him; he loved order, cleanness, seemliness; he was sincere, loving, unselfish, dreamy, emotional . . . “One of these here writers!”

When it grew so cold that the water froze around the edges of the barrel and pail, turning his ragged gloves into icy mail, I bought extra pairs of warm mittens and made him change them frequently.
as he worked, drying the wet pairs in my oven. I gave him a pair to wear away but he turned them back with a wise shake of the head: “I’ll wear them here this way, if you don’t mind. If I take them home, the girls—"

Whenever he would stop for it, I insisted on a big cup of rich hot cocoa. Drawing his sleeve appreciatively across his mouth after the last sip, and looking at me solemnly, he would say, “That there’s sure good stuff—we don’t never have nothin’ like that at our house!” Then I would tuck his thin little scarf in snugly, pin the worn coat collar more securely, pull the old cloth cap down over his ears, pat his thin shoulder for good-bye, and, as I closed the door behind him, shout to heaven to witness that it was surely up to all the gods, known and unknown, to do something about this and do it soon! My little brother pioneer!

Such was our mutual “trial by water” on the semi-arid plains. I have given this full-length portrait of him because he typified many young lives that were in process of being deprived, stunted, hardened, warped, perhaps embittered, because “too early doomed to go in company with pain,” the pain of cheated childhood. Do we not need to be reminded that even to “the least of these,” our great country owes no small debt of gratitude, for they too helped to bring about the cultivation of her barren lands.

The water problem solved, I was well launched on my high emprise. Cabin O’Wildwinds more or less sheltered me from the elements, I had dog and cat for company, letters from distant friends whenever I could get someone to bring the mail, and out there and all around me lay my own one-hundred-and-sixty acres of virgin soil—if gumbo can be called soil!—to engage my skill, two willing hands, a head willing enough to learn but at first practically empty of even the simplest knowledge of agricultural procedure. How would it all come out? I faced the future with a smile and pinned on my building-paper covered wall a word from Rabbi Ben Ezra:

“Then welcome each rebuff
That turns earth’s smoothness rough,
Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand but go!
Be our joys three part pain!
Strive and hold cheap the strain;
Learn, nor account the pang; dare, never grudge the throe!”

Yes, there were rebuffs, stings, striving, throes, sufficient and to spare, but they came with a magnificent accompaniment of encouragement, inspiration, satisfaction, happy discovery, clear joy—and swiftly increasing health and strength, physical, mental and spiritual.

With water in the barrel, I looked hopefully ahead.

(to be continued in the next issue of Drumlummon Views)
When she first married Henderson Coates and moved with him to the little town of Martinsdale, Montana, Grace Stone Coates wrote her father that she had come into an alien land. For the next half century, she lived the life of a shopkeeper’s wife in this land, but there was another life in writing. After twenty years of marriage, she wrote of herself:

Her occupation is housewifery: her delight, writing; her passion, music. All she has learned in 20 years of housekeeping drops from her in one half-hour’s intense writing, so that she has to learn her business of housewifery each morning anew; and all she knows of anything is drowned in one half-hour of music.

Fortunately, her husband is sane. He keeps her outdoors, fishing, duck hunting, and deer hunting; and when she is away from her Martinsdale home, she remembers, never the dingy meanness of a western village but the tremendous sweep of valley from the Belt mountains to the Crazies; or the Musselshell [river], swimming in moonlight, below Gordon Butte.

In the 1920s and early half of the 1930s, Coates had over a hundred poems and short stories published, edited seven books for Idaho’s Caxton Press, wrote the local news for the county newspapers, wrote historical essays for state-wide papers, and published a novel—Black Cherries (1931)—and two books of poetry—Mead and Mangel-Wurzel (1931) and Portulacas in the Wheat (1932). During her most productive period, the annual Best American Short Stories cited twenty of her tales as Distinctive or Honor Roll stories, and John Updike chose her “Wild Plums” for his Best American Short Stories of the Century (2000). Coates also served as Assistant Editor for The Frontier, the remarkable regional magazine started and edited by H.G. Merriam of the University of Montana. And she wrote letters. She corresponded with William Saroyan, Frank Linderman, James Rankin, and many other authors and writers, with many friends (see Lee Rostad’s Grace Stone Coates: Her Life in Letters [Helena, MT: Riverbend Publishing, 2004], one of two honored finalists in biography and memoir in the 2005 Willa Literary Awards).

During these years, Coates had periods of deep depression and periods of unbounded energy, possibly indicative of manic depression—a condition shared by many people who have created the great paintings and literature over the years. In about 1935, Coates stopped writing—except for the local news and historical pieces. There were no more revealing glimpses into her soul and the events that shaped her work.

Grace Stone was born in Kansas on May 20, 1881, the youngest child of the Henry and Olive Stone family. She said of her parents, “My mother was of the blessed company of martyrs; my father, in her eyes, the devil’s advocate. She bore her children in the fear of the Lord, and the more immediate fear that they might be like their father.” Memories of growing up in this contentious

In 1900, Grace and her sister Helen were in Montana teaching in Hamilton. By 1904, Grace had moved to Butte, where she taught until 1910. In that year, she married Henderson Coates and moved with him to the little town of Martinsdale, where he and his brother built a general store.

When *Mead and Mangel-Wurzel*—honey-wine and hunger-root—was published in 1931, the publishers said, “Grace Stone Coates offers love, the food of gods and starvelings. To what thirst the wine was poured, to what famine the coarse beets offered, is any reader’s guess; but here *entre vous*, you will find all the calories you can digest. . . . ”

Although most of her writing was in the 1920s and 1930s, Coates’ poetry can still offer today “love, the food of gods and starvelings.” Here, we offer a handful of the poems that will appear in “Food of Gods and Starvelings: The Selected Poems of Grace Stones Coates,” to be published by Drumlummon Institute in 2007.

**At Breakfast**

“Where were you, last night?”

“I was in bed . . . sleeping
Beside you . . . of course!”

“And I was leaping
Broomsticks, and burying Jesus,
And pating Godiva’s horse.”

(from *Mead and Mangel-Wurzel* [Caldwell, ID: The Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1931], p. 17)

**Conclusion**

Do not be kind to me;
It is too late to be tender.
It is too late to rant
And accuse. Can you restore
The trampled grape to the vender,
Or water a dead plant?

I tell you quietly
Our life together is closing.
If I lied to you
Saying I was happy,
I deceived myself,
Supposing
Steadfast lies
Must make themselves come true.

(from *Mead and Mangel-Wurzel* [Caldwell, ID: The Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1931], p. 38)

**The Hardness of Women**

There is a hardness in woman like the hardness of falling water
That repulses what it compels; her life is barred
To man by her moving purpose. Who has caught her?
Though she curve to him like a wave her strength is hard.
And a woman can leave a man, without quitting his dwelling,  
To loneliness deeper than night with no star-spawn;  
The dearth he has of her is beyond his telling.  
In the crook of his arm she is gone from him, she is gone.

(from *Mead and Mangel-Wurzel* [Caldwell, ID: The Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1931], p. 41)

**Village Satiety**
Satire sits on a satin cushion,  
Cups her chin, and looks at the street;  
Questions: lethargy—or devotion?—  
Prisons me here on this window seat.

To watch the villagers empty ashes,  
A wagon rattle to two white horses,  
Purse-gut grocers strut like Pashas,  
And willows stagger the water courses.

Satire broods at the empty window:  
I will be *thus*, and I shall do so,  
Hug my knees as wise as a Hindu,  
And watch stupidity come and go,

While I live a hidden life more sparkling  
Than lights that scream on a city street,  
With secret ways of thought, more darkling  
Than crypt where cavern and river meet.

Ergot is on me. I shall be festive  
While life conceived in me is dying.  
When I sit passive I shall soar restive  
Till I look down on great birds, flying.

I am deception to those who see  
Only coifed hair and tints that perish,  
A flat bosom and crooked knee.  
In me is what the gods cherish.

(from *Mead and Mangel-Wurzel* [Caldwell, ID: The Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1931], p. 70)

**To H—**
Only to the simple or the very wise  
Or those who, having hungered long, are fed  
Does Heaven open this side paradise  
And give its glory to their daily bread.  
Of these am I—never wise, my candor gone,  
But one long hungered, now in you content;  
And I have seen God moving in the dawn  
When our communion was His sacrament.  
My silence would more fitly meet your own,  
But the words press—that you will leave unread  
Though not unsmiled at. Never am I alone  
When you are whom I seek. Uncomforted  
You do not thrust me out. If nights are deep  
I care no longer; on your arm I sleep.
(from *Mead and Mangel-Wurzel* [Caldwell, ID: The Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1931], p. 149)

**Portulacas in the Wheat**

My mother was a woman rich in life  
Wisely controlled, renewed abundantly  
For others; vivid till subdued  
To her surroundings; limpid, loving Truth,  
Worshiping Right, a living loyalty!  
She gave me all I know of honor, faith,  
Hatred of lying, scorn of littleness;  
She gave me all I cherish, save two things:  
A sensuous joy in life that she half feared  
For me, and pagan gladness in the sun  
Even when I sinned—most, when I sinned, I think!

One hot, late morning, sun high overhead,  
(Having sinned and being well rebuked,  
Closeted, sentence served, and so, relaxed)  
I watched the binders drop their yellow loads;  
And, pushing farther in the wheat, achieved  
The shivering ecstasy of mimic fear,  
Pretending I must hunt all day, all night,  
A thousand, thousand miles to find my home!  
The wheat was higher than my head, that year;  
It caught my hair, I know, and tangled it;  
So, bending to avoid the tugging stalks,  
I came upon a wonder at my feet.  
I looked and held my breath, and looked again,  
Then raced to find my mother!

Past the hedge

The panting path had never seemed so long,  
Till crowded to her skirts, and looking up,  
Ankle in hand—a much-corrected trick  
That deep excitement always reinvoked—  
When breath came back, the words came tumbling, too:  
A miracle! A marvel in the wheat,  
That she must see!

She answered, not unkindly,  
(For she was courteous even when she spanked)  
“I have no time to listen, child. Sit down!”  
—She held a heavy platter in her hand—  
“Now keep from under foot till I have served  
The dinner, for the teams are turning in!”

I sat and swallowed tears—not bitter ones;  
Mine lay behind the lashes, quick to ease  
Grown-up rebuff or happiness that hurt.  
The men came streaming in, and last, my father.  
He bent to wash; so, slipping down beside him,  
Confident here at least, with breath restored,  
Both feet on floor, and words more ordered; eyes—  
Who doubts?—as wide and eager as before,  
I told him of the marvel I had found.  
Without a word he leaned to take my hand,  
And went to read my riddle of the wheat.
Blossoms! A myriad of them, flaming silk, 
Of colors flaunted by the Sun! They glowed 
Clear yellow, red, and splashed and blended orange, 
Massed till we dare not step, then scattered out, 
Each one a passionate discovery! 
How long he shared them—minute, hour, 
Who shall gauge delight!—a brief eternity 
He gave my gladness perfect right of way 
While men and harvest waited. Turning home 
He talked of leaves so modified to meet 
Our arid climate, reservoirs to hold 
The moisture, little surface to the sun; 
I trotting by him, deeply satisfied.

My mother told me they were portulacas 
Gone wild, once planted by an earlier tenant. 
No! They were rich enchantment, silken flame, 
A whole new continent in Fairyland! 
That timeless, golden afternoon I held 
Grave converse with my Fellows of the Sun, 
Companionship beyond the need of words. 
Deep in the sun-drenched wheat, content, I heard 
The whirring binders drop their tawny loads 
Nearer and nearer, clanking nearer still; 
A pause, a question, then my father’s voice, 
Abrupt, imperative, “Swing out, I say! 
The child shall have her flowers! Swing around!” 
So past my seignory the shining swathes 
Whose mile-long straightness was my father’s pride 
Veered suddenly, and made a vexing end. 
While drivers muttered, brothers jested, gay 
Unstricken blossoms bravely cupped the sun.

(from Portulacas in the Wheat [Caldwell, ID: The Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1932], pp. 13–16)

Hills
I have found peace 
Walking the quiet hills; 
Quick release 
From truculent ways of men. 
When life’s feverish hurry 
Returns and fills 
My breast, I shall walk them again, 
And again and again.

Before I had striven 
My heart had abandoned strife; 
Now I have given 
Over effort and pain; 
Why should a dusty desk 
Command my life, 
When God is offering hills 
Washed clean with the rain?

(from Portulacas in the Wheat [Caldwell, ID: The Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1932], p. 38)
Tramps

Their faces are blurred with living,
Like hills obscured by rain;
They rise in the morning, early,
From corners where they have lain
Beside the traveled highway
Or empty shacks in town,
Before starched wives can shame them,
Or hustling husbands frown.

They roll their meager bedding,
Then stare at weeds they have pressed,
And twitch their coats around them,
And scowl, and have had their rest.

They take the road: where timber
Stands vigorous under flood,
And slopes man has denuded
Are gravel and gullied mud.

(from Portulacas in the Wheat [Caldwell, ID: The Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1932], p. 52)

The Cliff

Peace has left my heart,
Driven by dull chatter
On dingy street
To a place apart;
But I know where she is hiding.
There’s a cliff where pines are riding,

And exultant winds confiding
Strange intentions of their own.

I shall make my way alone
Past the green alfalfa tillage
At the far end of the village,
Skirt the coulee, dropping down
Till the rounded knolls behind me
Hide the chimneys of the town
With their small insistency,

And no curious eye can find me;
Only then shall I be free
For the prairie and the foothills
And the cliff that summons me.

Free! To run, and free to loiter,
Free to follow out of sight
Startled rabbits’ headlong dash
And the screaming curlew’s flight
As they wheel and reconnoiter
And protestingly retreat
I shall climb the lichen-daubed boulders,
Studying red and black and orange
Mantling their aggressive shoulders;
Lean against their warmth to trace
Lovely gray-green lichen lace
Edging every scarlet splash;
Throw myself full-length to drink
Icy, bubbling springs that wink
From the shaley hill.

Leading upward from the rill
Is a deer trail hunters follow,
That winds high above a hollow
Where the bluebells are a lake.
One quick, stinging breath I take
Coming near.
I shall stand there long, and gaze,
And go softer on my ways
From that passion of blue flame.
Once so quietly I came
That I glimpsed a wary deer
Marshalling her baby fawn;
They were there—and they were gone.
I shall climb the steepening ledge
With its fern and cedar scent
Into timber; almost blind
To the painted cups and lovage
For the bluebells in my mind.

On the cliff’s sheer eastern edge,
With the valley wide below it,
Stands a tree that loves the granite
And the cloud-sweep and the wind.
Its grim roots to me are kind.
I shall so sit so quietly
Chipmunks think I do not matter,
Scampering like mad across my feet.

I shall neither feel nor think,
Nor with teasing values reckon;
If I sleep I shall not know it.
I shall rest; and cease to be
All that people know of me—
Idly glad of gay beletus
Netted curious underneath,
Of the drifting vapor wreath,
And the pine cones’ deadened patter
On the needles and detritus.
If shy orioles reappear,
Patridges resume their drumming,
Glowing cedar birds flash free,
I shall smile, for peace is near;
But I shall not look or beckon
Or entreat her swifter coming.

When the wind has hushed its story,
And the rounded moon swims pale
To confound the western glory—
When her mysteries prevail,
And squirrels quit their firs,
And haunted birds fall dumb,
Peace will know that I am hers;
Peace will touch my breast, and whisper,
“Come!”

(from Portulacas in the Wheat [Caldwell, ID: The Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1932], pp. 67–70)
from “Notes for a Novel: Selected Poems of Frieda Fligelman”
(Drumlummon Institute, forthcoming 2007)
edited by Alexandra Swaney & Rick Newby

Introduction
(Excerpted from “The Queen of Social Logic: The Life and Writing of Frieda Fligelman,” by Alexandra Swaney; originally published in Writing Montana: Literature under the Big Sky [Montana Center for the Book, 1996])

Frieda Fligelman was born January 2, 1890, in Helena, Montana, to Herman Fligelman and his first wife, Minna Weinzweig (who died shortly after giving birth to their second daughter, Belle). Herman Fligelman, a Jew, had fled the pogroms of his native Rumania in 1881 when he was twenty-two years old, arriving in Boston with twenty dollars in his pocket. He eventually headed west and settled in Helena, where he started the New York Store, a department store that prospered with the mining on Helena’s Last Chance Gulch.

Frieda and Belle often reminisced about how much their father loved learning. They grew up consulting Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary at the dinner table and reading Shakespeare in the evenings. Herman allowed his daughters to leave the state to get a first-rate education. Frieda attended the University of Minnesota from 1907 to 1909, and then moved to the University of Wisconsin. After graduation, she moved to New York for graduate study in sociology, economics, and anthropology at Columbia University. She also studied for a year at the University of California, Berkeley.

Her first anthropology professor was Alfred Kroeber; she also took classes with Franz Boas and A. A. Goldenweiser; the historian Charles Beard; sociologists Lester F. Ward and Franklin H. Giddings; and philosopher M. R. Cohen. Anthropologist Paul Radin was an admired friend and colleague. Her first sweetheart may have been Hu Shih, a fellow Ph.D. candidate at Columbia, who would become China’s most famous modern scholar during the pre-revolutionary literary renaissance. Frieda later told a friend she had been very much in love with him, but because of his childhood betrothal to a Chinese girl at home, they did not become further involved. In any case, they remained friends, and he visited her in late 1937 when he returned to the United States to lecture on the devastation of the Japanese invasion of China. He later became Taiwan’s ambassador to the United States. This was the first of numerous passionate interests Frieda developed in scholarly, but ultimately unavailable men.

After passing her oral and written Ph.D. comprehensive exams at Columbia and spending a few years working as a sociologist, Frieda went abroad. Freed from working by a stipend from a trust fund set up by her father, she sailed to Europe, where she spent the years between 1920 and 1931, living mostly in Paris. In Paris, Frieda continued her formal studies. She attended the National School of Living Oriental Languages, taking classes with Professor Henri Labouret, a linguist and ethnologist.

Sparked by her studies with Labouret, especially a class in the Fulani language of West Africa, she conceived of a way to demonstrate that a non-western language was as complex as modern European languages. Labouret would later write of Frieda’s
work: “[T]hese are the first studies of their kind regarding a language of Negro Africa, or for that matter, the language of any other so-called primitive people.” Frieda’s scholastic preparation, as well as her ease with a statistical way of approaching data, had come together in a unique study that was ahead of its time. Sadly, in 1931, when Frieda presented her published papers on Fulani to Columbia to fulfill the requirement for the Ph.D. dissertation in sociology, her original advisor had left and the current chair of the sociology department refused her work, saying, “This is not sociology, it is linguistics.” In fact, it was not until 1974 that Frieda’s achievements were adequately recognized; in that year, the World Congress of Sociology dedicated a volume entitled Language in Sociology to this Montana scholar. The dedication called her,

a precursor who, more than four decades ago, was received by closed minds when projecting an inventory of investigations which today largely coincides with areas of academically accepted and financially supported sociolinguistic inquiry—and who, nevertheless, never lost her vision but lived to see it vindicated. . . .

The twenties were a heady time to be in Paris, especially for a young woman interested in ideas and culture. One can imagine all sorts of interesting encounters that Frieda might have had, but one in particular unleashed a different sort of writing in her. She turned to poetry for expression when she found herself hopelessly in love with a married colleague. The relationship, consummated or not, did not last long in its romantic phase, to Frieda’s great sorrow. It is impossible—and unnecessary—to know the identity of her beloved; from inferences in the poems, he was someone with whom she worked closely, perhaps even Labouret.

In the year that this happened, sometime in the mid-twenties, Frieda composed half of her nearly 1,200 poems, initially writing them out by hand on small notepads. Later, when she returned to the United States, she compiled a 270-page typewritten manuscript of 930 of these poems, which she variously referred to as Notes of a Lonesome Woman, Notes for a Novel, or Warning to Youth, dedicated to “all sorts of men, in thankfulness to some, in distaste of others.” In her preface to the poems, she says she has labeled these poems notes, even though they look like poetry, because

the linear form is a dress that can be worn by any idea. What is important about these pages is precisely that they are notes. Random notes are an aspect of life. They are just as legitimate a form as Alexandrines or sonnets. . . . these are the notes of a lonesome woman.

One can well imagine that loneliness could have overtaken sanity, especially for a woman who had so deliberately removed herself from the familiar surroundings and support of friends and family in the pursuit of knowledge. Frieda spent a great deal of time alone in her lodging, “keeping constant watch upon the scattered shop of fugitive ideas.” But at last she managed to take the white heat of grief and longing and transform it into a desire to
be useful, to help humanity, and into her singular poetry, sometimes full of despair and futility, and just as often filled with wisdom and spirit and her irrepressible wit.

In 1948, Frieda returned to Helena to care for her ailing stepmother. Feeling the pull of age and family, she decided to stay. She moved all of her papers, books, and other possessions into the then-new Hustad Apartments. From that time on she was a beloved and essential citizen of Helena, Montana. A founding member of the Montana Institute of the Arts, she also belonged to the Montana Academy of Sciences, the League of Women Voters, and the American Association of University Women. She attended public meetings and cultural events tirelessly and supported libraries and other cultural institutions financially.

Frieda succeeded at life’s most challenging task: becoming completely herself. Here follows a selection of her poems:

**Nature & Culture**
I have an impulse to write:
Sir! You are crazy!
Go to Hell!
Bang!

But four thousand years of culture
Stand beside me smiling
And I write suavely:
Sir, would it not be possible
To reconsider the matter
From another point of view.

**Hall Bedroom Scholar**
Longing for plentiful shelf-space,
The mind roams in wishful expectation
Among well-ordered drawers and card-catalogues,
Like a pioneer who gazing on broad prairies
Sees the clean-laid furrows of plotted fields
As ripening grain.

**Narrow Streets I**
Our only view
In looking out on nature
Is seeing neighbors
Going through the necessary
Stupid things of life—
Eating and dressing
Shaving and playing cards.

Oh gosh! I'd give my bath-tub
For ten miles of straight-lined prairie!
**Perversity**
I venerate so much the mystery of the mind
For all the comfort it has given me,
For all the pillows it has laid on rocks,

Sometimes it seems to me:
I carry my mind about upon a tray,
Like John the Baptist
Being brought by Salomé.

How strange and fair that suddenly my friendship
Turned to Love,
Love so elemental
That I would die in joy
For one long day with you.

**Dantesque**
I am too catholic
And thus I suffer from lacunae,
Condemned for warmth to gather
Only the passing sparks
From far-off fires.

I could easily give you a kick
Into perdition, had I the skill.

Not that I care the least
Where you might land
But only to clear my way
Of useless nettles.

**Unrequited**
I am the paradox that must be solved
If there is any decency in nature

I am the moving finger of an evil fate
That will write boldly to protest its chance.

I am the warning
That each must be God!

**Offer**
I could consider you
A bird of passage,
A sight to lift the eyes a moment
And remark, “Bound South,
The winter comes,
Snow will be early
If there is no change of wind.”

Oh bird of passage, I had
built for you a nest
To shelter through the roughest days,
If you had early learned
to brave my tenderness.

Let us take comfort that another age
More learned in reason than in custom
Will scorn to waste such love,
Recoil before brutalities
Whose only purpose
Is a cloak for vanity.
How foolishly I cry,
Oh may the time
Make haste to show itself
While youth is still with me.

**Solitude**
(Silence is Thought)
Dear Friend, do not misunderstand the silence.
Round About
So you send strangers
To gather news of me—
And send me news by strangers!
Like a perverted husband
Who sends his wife upon the streets
To whet his appetite.

I have not wept
But now it seems to me
My rest is after long, long
Weeping in the dusk,
And I so weary, I have
Forgotten why I wept,
And wonder that you're gone.

Refusal
I can not meet you cordially as a friend.
You are a snarling beast
In wait for peaceful prey,
And I too much in love with life
To waste it in a futile match of wits.

Solution
Now at the end,
I find me how to live.

Now at the end,
When there is no more time to live.

You offer me the wreck of your life;
You offer me your responsibilities;
Elegantly, graciously, bestowingly,
As if a crown!
But I tell you it is a crown of iron;
It gives me a headache.

Realism
If we decide to live together
As two friends,
It is no longer love
But fear of solitude,
And, above all,
The housing crisis.
Theology
And I, if I were God,
Would I, too, forget compassion
And confuse philosophers
Till they found reason in my whims,
My hit or miss of hurricanes.
Or would I still remember
There is pity in the human heart.

If I Were the Queen of Sheba
I can imagine
Being the Lady Sultan
Of Arabia
With something like a harem
Full of lovers—

But they would not be slaves
No more than doctors
Are slaves to suffering patients
Or professors to eager students
Or actors and performers
to our need of re-creation.

And I would send
for Ahmed or Abdullah
And then for Ali, Shem and Japeth,
Yakut, Iram, Bouverkr, Es-Saheli,

And then exhausting memory for names
Call for the one who’s gentle as a hound,
And then the one who’s timid as a doe
That hardly dares to come
And lick the hand for salt;

If you should come again
And find me waiting,
Would you be glad
I cared so much?

Or would you be moved to scoff:
Women are fools for being
So specialized.

I, too, have become ruthless:
Not wantonly, as they who seek
A small illusion of importance.

But to preserve the dearest gifts
Fortune has given me:
Freedom from malice; longing for love.
Then I would call for him  
Who loves to strut,  
Thrusting his head about  
Above his beautiful shoulders  
Like the huge-antlered deer,  
Who seems to wave a proud and graceful flag  
As he runs lithely forth  
To seek his food;

And then perhaps,  
The beautiful youth  
With resolute noble eyes—  
I would not touch him  
Save to stroke his hands,  
Enquire of the progress of his plans  
For an attack to conquer  
Some rude problem  
Of the universal pain.

And all would come  
With firmly glistening limbs,  
Clean from cool baths  
Or working in the breeze.

They would be glad to come,  
As glad to go;  
Returning to their fascinating art or craft  
Where some fair damsel  
Is their bright companion.

For they would not be slaves  
Locked for my pleasure,  
Waiting in anxiety  
The imperious call of master.

They would come gladly  
As a beautiful pause  
In their beautiful work—

Our caresses  
Would be the joining limbs  
of comrades creating beauty;  
Our curving arms  
Against the pillows  
And each other  
Would make designs  
To rival autumn trees.

And as the leaves dropped  
From our longing  
And a short winter covered us  
With gentle snow,  
Slowly we'd melt away  
Into delicious drowse of passing winter  
And after half-an-hour  
Spring would come again.
The birds, and singing youth
At charming tasks
Outside the windows
Would wake and call us
Not to waste in an unconsciousness
The little space of life
Which must be used to hold
So many joys.

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She had made of her loneliness
So great an art
That now its hurt had become a melody
And she was lost in wonder
And a strange delight
At the abundant charm of her desires.
ESSAYS: FOLKLIFE
“It’s Not a Ghost Town ‘til the Last Dog Leaves”
The Ghosts of Tradition in a Montana Mining Camp
Darcy Minter

Marysville, Montana, sits four miles below the crest of the Continental Divide just west of the state capital in Helena. It is a mountain village of fifty or so homes amidst the debris of a once-thriving gold camp. In the late nineteenth century, this village housed about 5,000 residents; now its numbers total 76. This is the way of mining camps; they rise and fall with the presence of ore. Today, many of them have completely vanished, others are simply deserted and are called ghost towns. Though it has been branded a ghost town by the tourism industry, on the surface, Marysville defies this classification. It is a living community whose residents share a powerful connection to their place shaped by a long history there and an intimate relationship with the land and its natural resources. Its residents resent being labeled a ghost town. As one informant remarked, “It’s not a ghost town until the last dog leaves.” And yet, I found Marysville to be a town alive with ghosts, a community where the places and the people of the past are visible to its residents and present in their stories and behaviors. Marysville redefines the popular notion of what a ghost town is: it is a vital community where the living coexist with the spirits of the past.

To the touristic imagination, the town’s dilapidated buildings, empty lots, vestiges of mining cabins, and crumbling mills articulate an anonymous past. To outsiders, it is obvious that someone struck it rich here, a town emerged to service the miners and then receded when the mine played out, leaving its scars in the creekbeds and hillsides. For Marysville’s long-time and returning residents, this same physical landscape holds layers of additional meaning; it recalls the people who left their imprint here and evokes stories of what was once a thriving community, infatuated with gold and the possibilities it offered.

Kent Ryden calls this the invisible landscape. “It is as though there is an unseen layer of usage, memory and significance—an invisible landscape, if you will, of imaginative landmarks—superimposed upon the geographical surface and the two-dimensional map” (Ryden, 40).

Ruth O’Connell, who lived in Marysville with her husband’s family in the 1950s, took me on a tour of the town. She pointed out places that were long gone, kept alive only through stories, maps, and memories. As we passed remembered places, Ruth recalled them to me: This is where the BonTon Hotel and the Drumlummon Hotel used to be. This used to be the O’Connell Bar. This is where Kate
Sullivan had her candy store. Here is where the turntable was where the train turned around. Here is where the livery stable sat, and the red light district was over there.

Earl Fred returned to Marysville to live more than twenty years ago after a long absence. He remembers what the place looked like when he was growing up there in the 1930s and 1940s. “I used to sit on the rock piles over there by the cabins and watch the trains come in because they came in right underneath where our home was. I watched the engines turn around down at the turntable. At that time . . . every place you looked there was a house in these hills, practically on top of each other. But as you can see there’s nothing left.” These missing landmarks are as much a part of Marysville to Ruth and Earl as what remains there.

A knowledge of the invisible landscape is an indicator of sense of place, that distinctive feeling for or attachment to a place that evolves through intimate experience of it. The sense of place, explains Ryden, “results gradually and unconsciously from inhabiting a landscape over time, becoming familiar with its physical properties, accruing a history within its confines” (Ryden, 38). Sense of place also arises from a familiarity with the history of a geographic area. It comes from an understanding of what occurred there and an affection for the people who came before. It is this affection that Ruth and Earl feel when they look upon the invisible landscape.

Cultural geographer Yi-Fu Tuan stresses the importance of history in shaping the sense of place felt by aboriginal tribes. He says, “Landscape is personal and tribal history made visible. The native’s identity—his place in the total scheme of things—is not in doubt, because the myths that support it are as real as the rocks and waterholes he can see and touch. He finds recorded in his land the ancient story of the lives and deeds of the immortal beings from whom he himself descended, and whom he reveres. The whole countryside is his family tree” (Tuan, 157–58).

The Marysville family tree is composed largely of miners. As members of an industry of transients, miners seldom put down roots. Towns came and went with the presence of ore, and so did their residents. Current inhabitants of Marysville do not share in the rootlessness of the mining lifestyle, but they have certainly been affected by it. It has created in them a need for stability, to be a part of a continuum of history, and to carry on the legacy left to them by the miners who preceded them there. Marysville is a community that is literally surrounded by and holding fast to a past defined by impermanence.
Most of the people I interviewed grew up in Marysville in the decades before the major mine finally closed down in the 1950s. They are children and grandchildren of miners, but most of them never were miners themselves. They left the village after high school to attend college, join the service, or earn a living and raise a family, and they have returned in the last twenty years to live out the rest of their lives. Unlike their parents and grandparents, they were able to choose their place, and they chose to return to the place where they grew up. In exploring the attachment to homeland, Yi-Fu Tuan considers the nomadic lifestyles of hoboes, migrant workers, and merchant seamen and asks, “What are the consequences of rootlessness? Do they long for a permanent place, and if so, how is this longing expressed?” (Tuan, 158). In Marysville it is expressed in a nostalgic attachment to a place and its history, vocalized through stories and performed through participation in traditional mining activities. It is as if the descendants of the miners that moved on have reclaimed the place and are keeping its vision alive.

When asked why she remained in Marysville when most other residents left, eighty-seven-year-old Ann Korting responded: “We wouldn’t have wanted to live any place else.” Korting is the former Marysville schoolteacher, and the daughter and wife of miners. She has lived in Marysville her entire life. Jim Wilhoit and Earl Fred are both Marysville returnees. Earl explains: “I’ve been all over the United States and other places and I never found any place I’d rather settle than Marysville. . . . This is where my roots were and all my family was here.” Jim adds, “There’s something about the place, but if you lived here for a while it seems like you always come back.”

That something that brings people back to Marysville is difficult to define, but it is made clearer through an exploration of vernacular expression, of the local lore that is a vehicle for communicating the consciousness of a community or a culture. In Marysville, personal and traditional narratives help reveal the distinct relationship to place experienced by these descendants of miners.

Kent Ryden calls folk narrative a vital and powerful means by which knowledge of the invisible landscape is communicated, expressed, and maintained. In fact, the sense of place—the sense of dwelling in the invisible landscape—is in large part a creation of folklore.
and is expressed most eloquently through folklore. It is through traditional narratives, both personal and communal, that the human meanings with which the landscape is imbued are given form, perpetuated, and shared; the meaning of a place for the people who live there is best captured by the stories that they tell about it, about the elements that comprise it, and about the events that took place within its bounds (Ryden, 45).

Stories of Marysville’s history paint a picture of a typical gold-mining camp, one of the richest in the West. Everyone has a tale about Irishman Tommy Cruse who first found gold here in 1876. As a placer miner downstream on Silver Creek, Cruse figured there had to be a “mother lode” in the mountains upstream that was responsible for the gold being recovered along the creek bed. Considered crazy by his fellow miners, Cruse persevered and eventually became a multi-millionaire. Figures vary, but during about thirty years of production at the end of the nineteenth century, approximately $30 million in gold and silver was recovered from Cruse’s Drumlummon Mine (named for the parish in Ireland where he was born), and another $20 million was recovered from twelve additional mines in an area that is approximately twelve square miles (Walker, 1–2).

The town of Marysville, which Tommy Cruse named for its first female resident, Mary Ralston, was by far the largest mining camp in the area, and in the 1890s it supported sixty businesses, including twenty-seven bars, seven hotels, and three newspapers. The town was serviced by two railroads—neither of which exists today. Rocks were extracted and pounded twenty-four hours a day in three mills with 120 stamps. All this started with the efforts of one man.

According to Earl Fred, “Tommy Cruse was flat broke. He borrowed money from everybody in the country to do his work trying to find gold. . . . The last money that was ever loaned to Tommy Cruse was [from] a gal that lived there [Silver City], a Mrs. Brown. And she said, ’Tommy, this is the last of it. I’m not loaning you no more money.’ And he took that last little loan that he got and just then, it just happened he found this [the Drumlummon vein] and became a multi-millionaire.”

The idea that anyone can strike it rich with luck and perseverance is one that still persists in Marysville. It was not that long ago that a man like Tommy Cruse, who was flat broke
and considered crazy, could become a millionaire by digging a hole in the ground. Miners were single-minded and tenacious in their quest for gold. Ruth O’Connell tells a story of a miner who tunneled underneath the town of Marysville in pursuit of a vein. “Dan [Sullivan] ran a tunnel from their house and meandered under the town and it was not unusual to waken in the night to hear his ‘bussey’ [sic] drilling. He changed shifts just as if he were working in the mines—one week days, one week swing, etc. It was always a puzzle to us as to what right he felt he had to mine this way, but I guess no one ever questioned it.”

Despite their tenacity and the millions of dollars in gold that were extracted from the mountains, “They never did find the mother lode,” explains Earl Fred. My other informants all agree that there is more gold left in those mountains than was ever recovered. Speaking of the Drumlummon Mine, Ruth O’Connell claims: “My husband was the last one to ever work there inside,” says Ruth O’Connell, “and he always maintained that there was more ore left than they ever removed.”

They say what gold is left in the Drumlummon cannot be removed because the mountain will collapse. It is essentially hollow; miles of internal tunnels are stabilized by large columns of rock marbled with veins of gold and silver, says Frank Warburton, one of the youngest to ever mine the Drumlummon. He now lives in Kalispell, Montana, but frequently returns to Marysville to visit his childhood home.

According to Frank, the miners would tunnel “so far and then they’d leave part of the lead. If they took the lead, the ground would come down. So they’d leave that solid ground there and go around it and just keep a going. . . . There’s all kind of pillars left with solid gold in them. Except you’d be dead if you tried to take one out. We’re talking six-foot-wide leads of gold. That’s why we keep going back. We’re still trying to live back then.”

Marysville residents keep going back to the hills to try and recover what was never found. Motivated by tales of quick prosperity and the universal assumption that gold still awaits them in the rocks, these modern-day prospectors maintain the traditions of their mining culture. This is their legacy. Earl Fred and Jim Wilhoit have built wooden boxes behind the seats of their ATVs so they can bring back gold and silver when they find it as well as other mementos from the abandoned mines. Says Earl: “We’ve got a lot of active miners like us. We mine it every day we go out. We’re still looking for rocks. . . . I carry a pan and a miner’s pick. I’m always looking. [Jim’s] always looking. And you find little stuff now and then. . . . Once you’ve got it in your blood you don’t get it out. All you’ve got to do is find that one nugget and you’re hooked.”

Prospecting in Marysville is not limited to the old-timers in the community; newcomers can catch gold fever too. Oftentimes, they forego picks and shovels in favor of expensive metal detectors. But for the descendants of Marysville miners, the prospector impulse is their inheritance. They were raised with it. It’s in their blood and it’s central to their identity. Though most of them have never worked in a mine, their identity is bound to history, to the land, and to mining. Feeling connected to the history of a place contributes to a strong sense of self in that place, says Kent Ryden: “if we feel that our present selves are inextricably bound to our pasts—that our lives have historical continuity, that we are the products of our past experiences—and if we tie memory to the landscape, then in contemplating place we contemplate ourselves”
People look back for various reasons,” says Yi-Fu Tuan, “but shared by all is the need to acquire a sense of self and of identity. To strengthen our sense of self the past needs to be rescued and made accessible [and] various devices exist to shore up the crumbling landscapes of the past” (Tuan, 186).

These Marysville residents are actively reconstructing their past by continuing the prospecting traditions of their mining ancestors. As such, they are placing themselves in the continuum of history, creating stability and permanence out of a past that was insecure and transitory. In effect, they are changing the paradigm of mining culture by maintaining its traditions in place.

However, they are still not satisfied with the present. They yearn to return to an earlier time. Mining was a dangerous—sometimes deadly—pursuit. There were few luxuries or modern conveniences, and winters could be brutal, yet Marysville residents carry the belief that life, despite its hardships, was better then. “Everybody was in the same shape and nobody thought anything about it,” explains Earl. “Everybody was happy. We had a great time. We made our own fun. It was good clean fun. I wish we could have lived 100 years ago. I would have loved to have lived in those early, early days. . . Because that’s what I enjoy—doing what those guys did without tools. No luxuries.”

Frank adds, “We try to make it that way by going out looking for bottles or gold. We’re trying to relive it.”

According to Yi-Fu Tuan, “whenever a person (young or old) feels that the world is changing too rapidly, his characteristic response is to evoke an idealized and stable past” (Tuan, 188). These residents are feeling insecure about Marysville’s present and future. Their place is threatened by government officials who want to pave the six miles of dirt road that lead to the village and also dig up the creek bed to retrieve the environmental waste they say remains there. Real estate developers are buying what land does not still belong to mining corporations and planning subdivisions there. Newcomers are hoping the nearby ski hill will be purchased and expanded—a psychic friend told Ruth O’Connell that Marysville would be like Park City, Utah, one day.

Afraid of losing their place, residents are clinging to it with even more resolve. They are trying to slow time and recreate the past by idealizing it and carrying on its traditions. As long as that time lives in people’s memories, stories, and customs, the past will survive in the present. Barre Toelken states that “the long-range...
tendency of tradition is to continue articulating the values of the
culture: the mountain cabin is not lost if even the best exemplar of
the type burns down, for the plan is in the culture, not in the item”
(Toelken, 15).

Marysville’s mines and most of its buildings may be gone,
but the plan is alive in the culture. It lives through the residents
who have inherited the stories and the impulse to search for gold.
These residents share a powerful connection to their place shaped
by personal experience and by their close identification with the
miners who came before them. Though they long to live in the past,
they—unlike their predecessors—have found their place in the
present and staked their claim there.

When one considers the popular notion of a western ghost
town, Hollywood images prevail: an empty main street lined with
vacant storefronts, tumbleweeds, and silence. Marysville has its
share of abandoned buildings, but it also has people whose vision
of this ghost town’s past is alive and well. It is their vision that
makes Marysville a ghost town, not the fact that it is included in
the state’s tour books. Its people keep its ghosts alive—they dwell
in the invisible landscape apparent only to those whose lives are
historically and intimately connected to the place.

Earl Fred, Jim Wilhoit, and Frank Warburton tell of a
gentleman who, in the 1930s, built several miles of the Marysville
road with only a pick and a shovel. On one of their recent
prospecting trips down the gulch, they found his old mining cabin
and the tools he might have used to build the road. In recalling
the incident, Frank remarked: “He was sitting right there on the
stump too, wasn’t he? We couldn’t see him, but he was sitting there
watching us.”

“I’m sure he was,” replied Earl.

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**Sandra Alcosser: An Appreciation**  
Melissa Kwasny

Sandra Alcosser, Montana’s recently named first Poet Laureate, grew up thirty miles from where I did, in South Bend, Indiana. In many ways, our lives have paralleled. We both grew up working class in Midwestern farming/industrial towns. Her father owned a body shop, my parents and grandparents a Polish bar. We both loved and feared our people and found refuge from them in the lilac trees and “fields of wild asparagus” and in books. Alcosser received her M.F.A. in Poetry in 1982 from The University of Montana, where she studied with Richard Hugo. I graduated from there in 1977. We were both influenced by and, in a way adopted by Hugo, unlikely girl poets from the backwoods of America. We both stayed in Montana, went off to California, returned. We have both worked inside and outside the academy as poets in the schools and communities.

I met Sandra Alcosser in April 2000 when she came to the Holter Museum of Art to read in a series Rick Newby and I were curating. I wish I would have known her sooner. Hers is a quicksilver intelligence, generous, wide-ranging, and deeply concerned with our place as humans in the world. Much has been written about her work as an educator and her environmental activism. Yet, it is as a poet that one gets to know her best. Her voice is such an intimate, honest voice that it seems as if a sister speaking in a dream language of memory and image—fields of geese, goats, sugar pear trees, “grass grown crystalline through cracked windshields.”

There are many ways to approach the work of Alcosser: through the lens of working class people and the “contemporary fables” she uses to paint their portraits, through her investigation of the particularities of place, whether it be Louisiana, Montana, or the Midwest, or through her striking use of image, how, as Judith Moore writes in *Poetry Daily*, some poems “serve as tiny museums to store domestic details that otherwise might be lost to us.” In this essay, however, I would like to focus on Alcosser’s exploration of the erotic—as method, as politic, as battlefield between nature and culture, and, ultimately, as guiding force behind a form.

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A body grows from its erotic entanglement and then is reprimanded as if nature and culture were opposed.

Thus begins the third and last section of Alcosser’s book *Except by Nature*, a highly erotic, disruptive, even wanton collection of poems exploring the relationship between the land and the human. Eros. We know it as the principle of attraction, of movement away from the self toward another, of dis-equilibrium, what another poet, Anne Carson, calls a “reaching out from what is known and present to something else, something different, something desired.” As humans, it is through our five senses that we reach: touch, sound, sight, smell, taste. It is through the experience of the body that we know we are alive, through which the world becomes alive to us.

Alcosser’s images are intensely sensual. “I have touched everything,” she writes in a lovely poem about preparing herself and her rooms for the return of a long-absent husband. The sensuality is honeyed, heightened: “The white hibiscus / hover against the window, / their red stamens craned like candlewicks.”
These are poems of knowledge gained, gleaned, gleaming through the body, knowledge of sweat, sex, tingling blood, “a woman’s buttery breast, a man’s of cumin.” This intelligence—the intelligence of the body—is something Alcosser celebrates. It is also, in a culture which has grown increasingly disengaged from the body as a site of knowledge, where daily life has become more and more instrumentalized, a transgressive stance.

Man and nature. Mind and body. The spiritual and the physical. Inherent in any duality, the cultural critic Susan Griffin writes, is an implied hierarchy. Eros inhabits the space between, ungoverning and ungovernable. It bleeds into, over, propelling us beyond the borders of gender, race, religion, even species. “How could I convey that curious and erotic moment when a body is attracted to another body for nothing more than its vitality, its beauty, the intricacy of its ritual,” Alcosser asks in her essay, “The Autumn Courtship of Surface-Feeding Ducks.”

_A body grows._ It is entangled in other bodies, bodies of water, thickets of willow, fields of wild asparagus. Alcosser describes temperature in Louisiana as “heat rising / like wet crepe from silt and muck,” and we can feel that day as something tangible, the stressed one-syllable words hot and crowding the mouth. Azaleas there are “sisters [who] climb the bedroom window, lay themselves on the night table like pink fish, like negligees and soap slivers.” In these poems, eros is a presence and a power, inhabiting the space between woman and man, woman and flower, poet and cougar, duck, cloud, even the weather:

Thirty-one days of rain, like making love again, again with no release.

In the poem “Thirst,” one feels the drought as a condition both of the human body and that of the earth’s:

clouds stretch over the tinder forest,
they flirt and roll their moist shoulders.
I remember when I had no lover,
how my every motion was thirst.
I curl beside my husband tonight under the motley sky.
Our bodies rub together, powder like dirt.

This knowledge, an intimacy with nature and our place within it (“Sometimes I don’t know who I am— / my age, my sex, my species— / only that I am an animal who will love / and die,” Alcosser writes in the poem “By the Nape.”), seems crucial in a time when warnings come from our wounded earth, waters, skies, bodies, speaking of mutual alienation. Everything seems suddenly at stake: “If human consciousness can be rejoined not only with the human body but with the body of earth,” Griffin writes, “what seems incipient in the reunion is the recovery of meaning. . . .”

_A body grows from its erotic entanglement and then it is reprimanded._ Eros disrupts. Lush, overripe, “wispy, drooping, damp,” it speaks of the body and the body’s needs. Therefore, though eros is pleasant, it is also dangerous, a threat to what has been established, a threat to peace. “It was for me, a very troubling place,” Alcosser says of Louisiana in the previously mentioned interview
with Judith Moore. “I felt really uncomfortable, almost ashamed, that I had that information, that I witnessed it.” In the section of Louisiana poems, entitled “Sugary Heat,” the heat, the swamps with their “potential for evil and irrational growth,” her friends who “cultivated a madness of operatic proportion” threaten her physical as well as mental safety. At the same time, she is lured into its otherness, its strangeness. “I want to be brave, to bathe / myself in the humid night / . . . to let the air penetrate at last,” the poet writes, and admits, “But I am afraid.”

Lure and hesitation, the draw and drawing back from the foreign or strange are intrinsic to the movement of eros. There is, of course, real danger—“I have placed / a hand on blind branches, / felt it flame with fire ants”—and there is the punishment we imagine we will incur when we venture past the boundaries of self and culture, what Alcosser, in another poem, refers to as “the space defined by taboo.” In “Azaleas,” two women drift through the streets of New Orleans “eating buttery pastry and oysters,” “dressed in white gauze.” It is obvious that they are drawn to each other. “Tell me about a lover,” one says, “causing a lip of wine to sing under her index finger.” Though their desire for one another is not enacted, it simmers and surfaces in the images they share—“sugared heat,” “opulent clouds of steam,” “black coffee with thick cream”—and the extended metaphor the poet uses to link the women to the azaleas which are “flagrant and profuse.”

Illicit fantasies serve as subject of many poems in this book. In “Taboo,” a stranger enters a woman’s home to watch her and her lover while they sleep, sweaty and exhausted “like a pair of white summer shoes.” The potential danger is explicit: “I knew if I moved, I would jeopardize my lover’s life, the stranger’s, mine.” Yet, when the intruder leaves, the woman follows him out to the front stoop. Though she cannot see him, she knows he is there, perhaps on the other side of the fence, breathing the same scent of spider lily. “I can see you,” the woman whispers into the dark.

In “Maximum Security,” a woman hears on the radio news of an escaped prisoner and fantasizes his intrusion, “unraveling / the lace—pink / like crepe myrtle, pink / like raspberry sorbet” of the lingerie she is wearing and that we are given to understand plays its part in the fantasy of his arrival. “Who does not pray,” the narrator asks, “for the deadly dangerous?” In “Wildcat Path,” a woman who has barely escaped death by a cougar who followed her home, tearing her nylon dress to shreds, is fueled by the idea that the cat wanted her. In “Sweat,” the author remembers the men who worked in her father’s bodyshop, how they would “line the shop sink, naked / to the waist, scour down with Ajax, spray water / across their necks and up into their arms.”

The poems in Except by Nature tell again and again stories of people and animals refusing to be reasonable, refusing to be safe or saved, risking all. A boy is caught on an ice floe and when Search and Rescue arrive, he tells them he wants to be left alone. An abandoned mallard would “rather freeze than take grain” from the speaker’s hand, though it probably means certain death. In “Woodpecker,” Alcosser asks:

After all, have you never wanted
to drive top speed,
to slam into a tree or dive
from a ledge or catch fire
or slit your wrists
and let the fluids geyser?

Not suicide, but its burning.

To even voice these desires is to risk reprimand—from the culture, from the family, from the self. As readers, we are shocked at this voicing, discomfited, uneasy. We are shocked into a recognition of ourselves.

A body grows from its erotic entanglement and then is reprimanded as if nature and culture were opposed. And could this not be said, too, of a poem? What form, then, might a poem take that grows from its entanglements, that acts (enacts) a reconciliation of nature and culture?

In the aforementioned essay, Alcosser relates a discussion with poet Pattiann Rogers wherein they “considered ways that one could apply the laws and patterns of nature (random branching, explosions, meanders) to the creation of form.” Form in English poetry is usually described as either traditional (with rules of meter and/or rhyme imposed by culture) or variously as open, free, organic, meaning a form that grows out of the poem’s own necessities. Is it, I wonder, possible to speak of erotic form? And if so, what is the form eros takes when it is reprimanded, stilted, silenced, repressed? And what form might possibly free it?

One might argue that the forms of postmodern literature—disjunction of image, sudden turns and reversals, syntactic displacement, the dispersal and accumulation of various and conflicting voices—are efforts to circumvent, rupture, subvert the structures of being and thinking that have alienated us from the body and thus, from the earth. “The alienation of human society from nature has led to many different kinds of destruction,” Griffin writes, “not the least of which has been the fragmentation of consciousness.”

In many of Alcosser’s poems—and I would like to look particularly at “Skiing in Moonlight,” the poem from which the title of the collection is taken—the movement of the lines and images are themselves erotic, by which I mean unguided by logical expectations. One might call this kind of writing free association, but that would limit the knowledge gained to the mind’s. One might call it surrealistic in its juxtaposition of what at first seem discontinuous images. Although Alcosser acknowledges the importance to her of surrealistic method, she also states that “reality is slippery and whimsical enough.”

The poem begins with an image of the fading day and a moon occluded by clouds “like a sweater pulled over the heart of the moon.” Right away, the moon and cloud are humanized and, if one considers that one pulls a sweater over one’s breast rather than heart, eroticized. The next image is disembodied, seemingly dislocated: “Why are so many friends / Leaving or getting left behind?” What precipitated this turn? Is the line the sounding of a thought generated by seeing the light withheld? Is it a comment on the moon leaving, the clouds being left behind and thus a kind of metaphor of perpetual arrival and departure? In the next stanza there is a statement: “Mao’s anti-sparrow campaign: to kill and eat the birds / that were eating the grain.” The poem has jumped ship—country, century, tone. It will do so again, later, speaking of
Mother Theresa. There is no effort by the poet to connect the dots. Yet, in between the evening light continues, the skier continues, the moon and clouds continue. The landscape is not a backdrop but an unstable force.

“The word landscape itself becomes problematic,” Rebecca Solnit argues in *As Eve Said to the Serpent*, her collection of essays on landscape, gender, and art. “A landscape is scenery, scenery is stage decoration, and stage decorations are static backdrops for a human drama.” In “Skiing in Moonlight,” the individual human drama is subsumed, reflected, occluded, and re-emerging in relationship with the non-human dramas unfolding. What inhabits this landscape, and thus, the landscape of the poem? A fox “walks over hoarfrost not breaking / morning’s delicate lace.” Is this a metaphor for the woman skiing or a fox that exists in its own right, who happens to share this landscape? Later, she will ask, “What is the bearing weight of an ice crystal?” Is she speaking of the fox now or herself or the moonlight shed on the snow?

In this poem, everything is drifting away. The words “leaves or leaving” occur three times in the first three stanzas. Sparrows, Mother Theresa, the moon, friends, the fox who leaves no trace, the winter sun that drifts away—absence inscribes the world. The trouble with eros is that it is slippery, it slides, it will not be governed by traditional form or linear patterns of thought. It makes its own patterns—the lace with its absence, an x-ray held to the light, vole tracks under the snow—then disregards them.

“That godlike silk, never known before, now comes into focus and vanishes again in one quick shift of view,” writes Anne Carson. “To feel its current pass through her is what the lover wants.”

“Eros is the wound,” the poet answers to the question “Why will a person freezing to death / Inch into the false warmth of the moon?” Does it answer the question? Is the speaker starving? Starving for what? Is eros the wound or the salving of the wound? Is eros the symptom of our disconnection from the body’s experience or the cure for it? In many of Alcosser’s poems, the procession of images often resists discursiveness. Nothing is pinned down: “Except by nature—as a woman, I will be ungovernable.”

The poem ends with this remarkable syntactical inversion, a line that enacts reconciliation. Here, there is no division between the woman’s nature and the earth’s, and the possibility of a government we might place our trust in.

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All My Stories Are Here: Four Montana Poets
Ed Lahey, Vic Charlo, Mark Gibbons, and Dave Thomas
Roger Dunsmore

Preface

There are many strong poets writing in Montana, John Haines being the master among them. There are far fewer Montana poets writing here, people in whom the place itself resides at a level of deep necessity. Montana is a place where the continent collides with itself, dry plains meeting the uplift mountains, rivers flowing to the three oceans (Atlantic, Pacific, Arctic). Salmon. Bison. Great Bears. Gold and silver, copper. Weather like you’ve never seen: eighty-below chill-factor winds that blow locomotives off the tracks. Primordial flyways for birds going from the Arctic to the tropics to Antarctica—and back again. Glaciers, the ancient shorelines of glacial lakes. And First Peoples living here tens of thousands of years—Salish, Cree, Kootenai, Blackfeet, Métis, Assiniboine, Sioux, Crow, Northern Cheyenne, Chippewa, Gros Ventre. You can still hear half a dozen different languages spoken in a sweat lodge in the state prison in Deer Lodge, still feel that we are living close to something here in Montana, to our history, but also to our geology, to the aurora borealis, to mountains and rivers as a place of refuge.

Four poets, Ed Lahey, Vic Charlo, Mark Gibbons, and Dave Thomas, all have been here for three generations or more (a thousand generations, at least, in Charlo’s case), and been here in elemental ways. Their identities are not separate from the place. In Mark Gibbons’ words, he has “worked most of the physical labor jobs available to ‘blue collar descendants’ determined to stay in Montana ‘at all costs’” (back cover, Circling Home, 2000). These are not people who came to Montana to teach or to study writing or to write or have a Montana “experience.” One can imagine a poet like Dave Thomas somewhere else, say, in North Beach, but he would always be a Montana poet there. There are many other strong Montana poets, to be sure (John Holbrook, Tami Haaland, Lowell Jaeger, Sheryl Noethe, and Patrick Todd come to mind), but these four seem to me to be the strongest who have not yet received as much attention as, say, that erudite barbarian, Rick Newby, or the late Blackfeet, Gros Ventre poet James Welch, who went on to write a handful of highly acclaimed novels, or that environmental-cowboy-clown-curmudgeon, Wally McRae, or Sandra Alcosser, that widely regarded poet of many places, now honored as Montana’s first Poet Laureate. And there are poets who have come into the state as outsiders and embraced it rapidly at such a deep level as to become adopted in a decade or two. Paul Zarzyski is a prime example. So is Melissa Kwasny with her primal “entwinements” to native plants and Native people. I have left out that Emperor of “Goofy Gas,” Greg Keeler who, of course, is in a league all by himself, and no doubt others who deserve attention.

But these four, Lahey, Charlo, Gibbons, Thomas, each individually, give expression to this place in ways that are unmistakable, necessary, and earned. Reading their poetry, we discover who they are as we learn what it is to live here, economically as well as emotionally. It would be, however, a mistake to consider them to be merely regional poets, unless by “regional” one means those who have found in the particulars of their own place and history the wherewithal to speak to/for us all.

Albert White Hat, Sr., in his book, Reading and Writing the
Lakota Language, describes the concerns Lakota tribal elders voiced before a written form of the Lakota language could be pursued. Given the long-term, significant and continuing presence of indigenous cultures in the life of this state, White Hat’s perspective on language creates a useful context for examining these four poets. “First, elders reminded us that the language is wakan, ‘very powerful.’ . . . We talk to the wamakaskan, ‘living beings of the earth’ through spiritual communications. Language must be taught with this in mind. Second, when teaching the language to younger people, both its good and evil powers must be taught. If you teach only the good, children will be ruined when they become adults. They need to understand that language contains . . . the power to give life or to take it away. As a result, it must be used respectfully” (4). And, “Whether listening to Lakota or English speakers, you can tell when they effectively use their language because you can feel their feelings . . . when we teach a language to a student, we should develop in that student another heart and another mind. . . . Every word must be felt and understood so that when we speak, true emotions are expressed” (6–7). “I have to demonstrate Lakota values and morals in my own life so that students learning Lakota words will see examples of what I am teaching. . . . Our language was invaded, just as our lands were. We need to bring back our language with the strength of its spiritual values and the power of its moral force, just as we fight to reclaim the Black Hills and the other sacred sites within our domain. Our language is wakan. It is our bloodline” (10–11).

I have quoted Albert White Hat, Sr., on reclaiming the Lakota tongue because the power and importance of language expressed by him is what these four poets (and perhaps all poets, though they might not put it quite this way) are trying to accomplish: to restore and maintain the qualities of feeling, spiritual reality, respect, and morality that are the life blood of their-our-any language.

Ed Lahey
On more than one occasion, and in print, I have called Ed Lahey the Defacto Poet Laureate of Montana, the place, not the state, apparently offending a gabble of other writers here. Even Richard Hugo’s poetry, as fine as that can be, sometimes has a “touristy” feel to it in comparison to Lahey’s gritty poems about mining and his painful/lovely family and aging poems. A main reason Ed’s grandfather was hired by the railroads was that he got along with the Indians so well. Ed continues that gift. There is the story of him as a young man attending a powwow near Deer Lodge. The Indians complained about the local butcher, how he had cheated them by taking half the buffalo he butchered for them, after offering to do it for free. Hearing this, Lahey went straight to the butcher shop and shamed the man by calling him a disgrace to his own kind and demanding the return of the half buffalo meat he had confiscated. Which he did. The Indians gave Lahey the name “silvertongue” for his effort on their behalf, teasing, too, about this whiteman’s ability to effect change with his tongue. But it was an auspicious name, for Lahey is the hands-down best reader of poetry I have ever heard, his rich Irish voice resonant and trembling both at once, the words made more real in the grip of his sweaty face. I think of him as the Jack Dempsey of Montana poets. Lahey’s elemental sense of justice, for which he was jailed during the Vietnam War protest years, comes also from his family’s close
association with one of the last of a handful of Chinese herbal doctors who served the substantial Chinese community in Butte. This is especially important given the virulent forms of racism Chinese people in Butte and all over the American West were subjected to.

Ed’s mother was the first (second?) woman pilot in Montana, as was necessary during Prohibition when she would air-drop all the ingredients for the family moonshine operations into the ravines outside Butte or Helena, with little chance of being discovered. Ed himself flew from an early age, and his experience of being lost over the mountains with night coming on and the gas running low, and finally landing at the airport in Butte in the blaze of car lights from friends and family in the fifties before there were landing lights there, is not far beneath the surface of these lines from the poem “Icarus Plans to Land Tonight”.

....

What I will do for the sake of fashion
is simply set fire to my wax wings
then land and blow away the smoke

and carefully brush the ashes
from my legs which I keep for walking
on such occasions.

(Birds of a Feather, 34)

As a result of the family history of mining, his own years spent in that work, and his first book, The Blind Horses, which won the first-ever Montana Arts Council First Book Award in 1979, Lahey’s poems have been closely associated with Butte and with mining. But his poems go well beyond narrating the dark/light of the miner’s world. They skillfully use that world to speak about the life many of us might struggle with. He makes explicit that a poem he wrote to honor his miner father is also a poet’s statement about the difficulties and values necessary to carry on the work of writing.

Gimp O’Leary’s Iron Works
(for Big Ed)

You hear a lot of lies about O’Leary
but he could seal a crack in steel
no matter what the size.

His arc welder would strike
white fire and a bead
of blue-black rod would slide
along between cherry streaks,
and acrid smoke would curl away
to leave clean married steel,
not too frail, or buttered up
but straight and strong,
hard as mill forged rail.

Of course you might say,
“don’t use that example
as a metaphor for poetry.
Welding is a matter of utility.”

And you’d be right. Still,
I remember the look on his face
when he’d lift his great helmet
and sneak up on the finished
job with unprotected eyes.
It was always between him
and the piece of steel—
a struggle of molecules and will.

Often others would say to him,
"Damn good job," or some such thing.

If it was, he’d grin, and look again,
as if he thought the natural light
would show a flaw, or bridge
that didn’t fuse—convinced, I guess,
that in his struggle with the steel
he could seldom really win.
He knew perfection could
conceal the wound
beneath the arc of his art.
I liked him for that.

(full poem, *Birds*, 32–33)

The honoring of muscular but also delicate artistic work,
and the attitude toward what one might accomplish, knowing
the tricks one plays on oneself in order to maintain the illusion of
wholeness or competence, knowing that men’s lives depended on
the soundness of the weld, and the poet’s affection for O’Leary’s
humble, clear mastery and acceptance of the limits of his craft,
make this a powerful and necessary poem on the craft of poetry.
And the metaphor for poetry contained in it never violates,
abandons, or sacrifices the sheer reality of O’Leary. Seeing in the
work associated with mining the dignity and worth of ordinary
men who find in ordinary work something extraordinary in
themselves (and in the work) gives to this poem and others like it
their range and ring. This poem for Gimp O’Leary is made even
more powerful when we learn, two poems more on into the book,
that O’Leary is dead, buried in a cave-in in the Minnie Jane:

We will uncover the mucker’s bones,
dig them up for Mary.
And the company will pay us big money.
Goddamn it. Come on. Let’s dig up O’Leary.

(*Birds*, 35)

I would also call readers’ attention especially to “The Orphan
Girl Prospect,” “In My Three Act Dream,” and “Contributor’s
Note” as other fine examples of Lahey’s mining poems (*Birds*, 1,
19–20, 46).

Lahey has suffered from an increasingly intense case of the
shakes since he was a young man. They became so extreme that he
could not hold his hands still enough to write, to hold a pen or use
a typewriter. At readings he would joke about his shaking hands
as butterflies that some day would simply flutter off away from
him. After months of being unable to do the thing that mattered
most, writing, he sought out a new neurologist. The good
doctor asked if he had ever worked around manganese. Yes, as a teenager
he had been paid ten dollars a day for several months to crawl up
into “empty” manganese gondola cars with a five-pound sledge and
hammer on their sides until all the dusty manganese residue came loose and slid. “I have never seen a patient with your symptoms who hadn’t worked around manganese,” the doctor told him, and prescribed a beta blocker that reduced the shaking enough that he could return to his writing. This is the kind of legacy carried when one is the Butte mining poet of Montana, a part of the dues paid.

But it has been a mistake to see Lahey’s work primarily in terms of Butte and his mining poems, fine as they are. Especially in his later work, Lahey expresses an emotional capacity in poems about his grandchildren, a meeting with his ex-wife, his dying mother, a cold pony in a field outside his apartment, a torn orange in the street, the chewing power of beavers, that balances the tough reality of the mining poems.

**A Blue Saucer**

It has been cold, and I have been ill,
forced at the same time
to pull my own tooth.

I had the urge
while out walking
to rescue a torn orange
open to the sun
lying in the snow,

to take it in
wash it in cool water keep it on a blue saucer.

I know the sad side of the street
to look for the value
the taste of true winter.

(Birds, 141)

This poem has about it a Japanese, zen-like quality of pure emotion, the sadness of aloneness, aging, illness, but also the insight, child-like, reaching out to the torn orange, to rescue it, the hopelessness and rightness of that urge. One is left with the feeling of the colors, orange on blue, the cool warmth of a tenor sax, the bite of true winter accepted, brought home, honored. There is nothing intervening between the poet’s feelings, simple actions, and the words on the page. As Albert White Hat, Sr., writes, “Every word must be felt and understood so that when we speak, true emotions are expressed.” The poems of family, friends, and the inwardness of his more recent work continue the emotional honesty and direct experience of his mining poems. They come from such things as a decades-long study of Buddhism, and four tours in the state mental hospital at Warm Springs.

Of course this latter item is unmentionable, something to speak of in whispers beyond the hearing of the poet. And yet poetry and madness have a long and distinguished career together. One thinks of Christopher Smart’s consideration of his cat Jeoffry, written while Smart was confined for insanity in eighteenth-century England, or of Ezra Pound and Theodore Roethke in the last century, to name just a few. If poetry is a form of madness, what does
that mean? Clearly that is not to be romanticized. To know these terrifying trips, one only has to listen to Lahey recount his fears during months spent in the over-crowded Montana State Mental Hospital trying to avoid seriously psychotic inmates.

I have always considered poetry a form of sanity, perhaps the only form of it I am comfortable with. How can it be both a form of madness and a form of sanity? Its sanity is the sanity one can craft or discover out of the chaos of a life, something to cling to, something that one is lucky enough to find to do in this life, something with a reality beyond dollar-power. If one does not belong to the Church of Commerce, then one had better have something besides drugs, alcohol, sex, Jesus, patriotism, or workism to hang onto. All poets are not madmen (or madwomen) and all madmen are not poets, but the connection between the two is an indication of the real-life risks many artists take, not because they are more courageous than the rest of us, but because they have to, because they cannot help it. I want to honor rather than hide Lahey’s struggle with what has come to be called “mental illness,” because I believe it informs the sensitivity, the risk, the deep necessity out of which his poetry is written. It is part of the price he has paid in the process of earning his poetry, part of the price of creating a poetry that is as real Montana as the mines, the magpies, or the Salish. And it is part of our sanity, like Blake’s “higher innocence” beyond the chaos of experience. One thinks of Leslie Fiedler’s (an important mentor for Lahey) comments on “the Western” and the West in his essay “The Higher Sentimentality”:

> [I]t seems clear that in it [One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest] for the first time the New West was clearly defined: the West of Here and Now, rather than There and Then—the West of Madness. . . . It is only a step from thinking of the West as madness to regarding madness as the true West . . . but only in Leonard Cohen . . . and in Kesey is the final identification made, and in Kesey at last combined with the archetype of the love that binds the lonely white man to his Indian comrade—to his mad Indian comrade, perhaps even to the madness of his Indian comrade. . . .

After all, the West remains always in some sense true to itself, as long as the Indian, no matter how subdued, penned off, or costumed for the tourist trade, survives. . . . If a myth of America is to exist in the future, it is incumbent on our writers, no matter how square and scared they may be in their deepest hearts, to conduct with the mad just such a dialogue as their predecessors learned long ago to conduct with the aboriginal dwellers in the Western Wilderness.” (A New Fiedler Reader, 254–56)

Although I would dispute Fiedler’s claim that our “predecessors” conducted an exemplary “dialogue” with the “aboriginal dwellers in the Western Wilderness,” some of Lahey’s poetry can be seen as a beginning of such a dialogue with madness that Fiedler calls for.
**Birds of a Feather**

(for Marylor)
A woman I love, my ex-wife
with our infant granddaughter
rounded an aisle
in the new Safeway
where we were shopping.

“There’s a sparrow flying overhead,”

she said, when she saw me.
We both looked upwards.
I wanted so badly
to tell her something
she could cherish, so she
would know

that I love her, like her even,
more than I hate her, but all
I could think of was a bird
I once saw shredded
by an exhaust fan.

Feathers floating willy nilly.

She looked so fey
upon hearing my story, shyly,
so shyly, walking away,

pushing the stroller down
another aisle.

Leaving me again, again,
dead feathers gathering
about my feet.

(Birds, 145–46)

When I came back from my first teaching stint in China, in July 1991, Ed was up in the mental ward on Three North. I visited him often, feeling desperate too, having nearly died of pneumonia in a Chinese hospital and falling in love with a Chinese woman whom I had to leave behind and who was much too young for me. Then one day he wasn’t there. The nurses said he had been released and was living downtown on Pine Street. I was worried. I did not think he was ready to leave the hospital, did not know how he would manage with himself. But he surprised me. He immediately began revising a novel he’d been working on for a few years, about a group of people at war with the mining company setting up a bootlegging operation during Prohibition. During the next year or so I witnessed the strongest act of self-healing through the creative process I ever expect to see. Ed literally brought himself back, through the work of finishing that novel. Just now as I write this piece, this novel, *The Thin Air Gang*, has found a publisher in Russell Chatham of Clark City Press. Clark City also has published a “dignified, well thought out,” hardbound, elegant, collected edition of Ed’s poems, *Birds of a Feather*, 2005. Thanks to Russell Chatham, these two volumes will confirm Ed Lahey’s reputation as Montana’s Deep Poet of voice, spirit, and place.
Victor A. Charlo

When Buffalo Tiger, Tribal Council Chairman of the Miccosukee Indians of Florida, told a U.S. Senate subcommittee on the education of Indian children, in 1967, that the Miccosukes taught their children to have “two minds,” he made it sound easy:

We try to teach our Indian children, do not be ashamed, even though you are Indians. You are Indians, therefore you should realize you are Indians, nothing else but Indians. Think like Indians, be like Indians, but learn English, learn how to write, be educated. You are Indian, you have other ideas. Be educated. You have somebody else’s mind. You have two minds and you can work with both. You can have three languages, if you want, or two... .

(I Have Spoken, 156)

Vic Charlo’s poetry is testimony to the difficulties many native people, even “successful” ones, have living with two minds, one for navigating in the so-called “dominant” culture, and one for the continuance of traditional tribal culture. Victor is the Great-great grandson of Charlot, the holdout chief who was finally forced to lead the last Salish people out of their ancestral homeland in the beautiful Bitterroot Valley in western Montana in 1891. Vic expressed the ongoing pain of that removal in remarks he made to the Twenty-second Annual Wilderness Lecture Series at the University of Montana in 2001, “... even though the Bitterroot is really a part of us, a lot of us never grew up there.” He also spoke about removal from the language,

My name is Chetleh Skyeeme, that means Three Eagles... . I hope. After all these Salish speakers. ... I’m not a Salish speaker. My folks, when they grew up, they experienced a lot of problems going to school, just knowing their native languages... . So when we were growing up, one of the things that they made sure was going to happen in our family was that nobody was going to learn the language. And isn’t that too bad... . just to listen to Louie Adams talk about those place names, it makes me really sad that I don’t know those names also. But that’s the way it is. You make the best of it. (Proceedings: 22nd Annual Wilderness Issues Lecture Series, 72)

And make the best of it he did, graduating as the salutatorian of Sacred Heart Catholic High School in Missoula, and as co-captain of the football team, going six years to a Jesuit seminary, then graduating from the University of Montana and becoming the principal of the Two Eagle River School up at the old Dixon Agency. But his poetry tells of the trickiness and difficulty of such living in two worlds. It contains a rhythm that is different, odd even, that does not lay on the ear the way most of the poetry I read does. I have to reach further than I normally would in order to hear it for and as itself. There is something fractured in these rhythms, something that inhabits a space in between the unrealized memory of the Salish his parents purposely chose not to teach him, and the English of the reservation and the white school, and the Latin of the Church and the Jesuit seminary where he spent those six
years. It is just this space in between, this need to do well in the world that has come to them, while at the same time remembering, honoring, and continuing the older world of the ancestors and spirits here, that gives to his voice its fractured courage. His exclusion from The Last Best Place is ironic, given the significance of his voice and the importance of First Peoples to Montana.

A poem from his early experience of the white world and how every gain in it entailed a loss of something else, something from the world of his ancestors, makes clear this difficulty of living with Buffalo Tiger’s “two minds.”

This poem expresses the loneliness of facing the lie of, what is it? His identity as a white person? The lie that nothing will be at stake or lost in taking up with white culture?

I realize now if you
sing Gregorian chant,
you forget the stickgame songs.

(from the poem, “St. Francis Xavier Novitiate, Sheridan, Oregon 1957,” unpublished manuscript)

It is in his family, in other elders, in the lives of his children, and of his students that Charlo is able to discover and foster a continuity between past and future that allows him to recover from the trauma of this life lived in-between the cultures. That recovery probably never will be total or complete in a person of his honesty and courage, but more and more the poems express an acceptance and an understanding, a net gain in the ability to live with the trickiness of being in-between, and to do this with some grace.

Last Leave of Loyola
For twenty years this poem hangs like these last leaves and twenty years this need to write.

I was afraid to write, to fall, to face the fact that talking to Sacred Heart girls in fantasy was not the same as me.

Leaves are falling like they sing in song yet my song doesn’t sing. This school strange and I need friends and places that have heart. I’m caught by priest and parent who want me here.

I want to quit this football, this lie, and lonely wind should blow me from this tree.

(full poem, unpublished manuscript)

Moving In
(fast wind)
Three times now I have read white stories where folks take old houses or towns in disrepair and build them back to what they were, and better. The thought makes me feel whole.

The first time in fourth grade reader a family
moves into an old abandoned farm house, and they fix everything up, get things going the way they want them. I remember in awe when the young boy gets the dynamo started and they have electricity. We had kerosene lamps then.

I have new house that is half-assed put together, half-assed moved into and half-assed lived in. I'm trying to get my second wind after eleven years of rapid experience, yet after four years here, it's hard to find my winter wind.

Children, goats, pony, winter wood, coyote song and trail of grizzly at our front door are richer than all need since we touch ancestors living here and I must live perfect fantasy and find fast wind.

(full poem, unpublished manuscript)

The old rhythms and cycles of life, the ancestors, right at the front door are “richer than all need,” even though the place is “half-assed.” Even so, at times, the lessons and presence of a respected, beloved elder, the process of renewal of the old ways, ironically, deepens the sense of in-between existence:

**Agnes, 1979**

We hide tan here at Agency Creek and at Valley Creek. Hard work that lets your mind go as you wait for the rest of your life. Soft hide, so soft wind blows like cloth. Hair white with hide.

She, Agnes, watches and lets us know in old Salish tongue. Word for scraper that I remember now. So hard. So to the point.

Why did I learn how to write? Why did I want to? Is it worth the loss of your world going away?

(full poem, unpublished manuscript)

That last stanza is worth pondering. These questions coming in the midst of tanning hides at Agnes Vanderburg’s camp up Valley Creek, “as you wait for the rest of your life.” This dilemma is what it means to be the Great-great Grandson of the holdout chief, Charlot, right here where we newcomers live now too. (Once, after both of us had had a couple of drinks, I remember Vic saying to me, “You’re all just a bunch of damned carpetbaggers anyway.”)

Part of what accentuates the whole in-between situation for Victor is his role as the son and grandson, the Great-great Grandson, of chiefs. Being in a position of leadership during a time of rapid, confusing, forced change has to be radically unsettling. What does it mean to be a leader of the Bitterroot Salish people in western Montana today? Vic turns to his father in poems that honor his capacities as a gambler and that suggest the gambling
skill itself as a metaphor for the luck, risk-taking, and ability to lose without becoming lost that he embodied, as a form of leadership.

The Chief
The Chief, my dad, was a gambler at nine.
He was the “Montana Kid” in Arlee rodeo.

With a nickel or dime he would win a fortune,
then travel in style to Missoula by free train
to stay in the best hotels and buy right clothes
for his young bride, then stay ‘till they were broke.
They were rich.

Once he won a pool hall gambling with a dime,
then drank his hard pool hall cider with friends. Next morning, when he remembered he owned the pool hall,
he gathered friends over for candy. The pool hall owner’s wife chased them off. He laughs now
at his loss and he could lose in those days, and still,
he is Chief gathering right bitterroot
for us all.

(full poem, unpublished manuscript)

This ability to lose big, to laugh at that, to go on leading the people in traditional ways amidst the loss, this form of richness is his responsibility to continue in his own generation, and hand on to his children.

In the following early love poem we hear the desperation of love-loss opening onto all the other losses they have sustained, and the struggle not to be swallowed up by them, a certain “hard core” of survival that contains anger and tinges of self-pity:

Poem
Listen, Ann Marie, the grizzly sleeps with snow
and we are bound for Canada or Mexico depending
on where little blue might go. I think of you
asleep and keep fire to warm tribal stories.
The night is cold and I should hibernate soon
yet I hear Great Northern pull, a short whistle
and I have a need that listens for no one.

Again, I feel great plain call yet I’m not there
to ride to buffalo yet who will brave the storm?
These roads are Indian trails glorified for tourists.
Let them eat four lanes while I carry bittersweet lodge pole or swallow the loss. This could be a love poem if I could only forget the loss. We are safe
yet could I invite you to tipi without that need
to know if cowboy rides the range at the Dew Drop Inn? Listen, I am the hard core who will leave you laughing at the door. We need a guide
to follow the middle fork or ask salmon to run
or let fear carry us to that place we need

You can go to Buffalo that is home and me,
I’ll roam the great plain looking for enemy sky.

(full poem, unpublished manuscript)

There is a different feel to this poem; it is less accessible, strange but enticing. The “loss” of this poem, love-loss, pulls with it all the other losses they have sustained. How dark is dark? Dark as a blizzard is white? The depth of desperation in this poem seems less controlled than in others, closer to that self-questioning at the end of “Agnes, 1979.” But there is always the gamble to make, the risky hope for luck, the taking on of one’s place in the life of the people, and the Chief, one’s father, winning as well as losing, and knowing what to do with it.

Children, his own four children and all the children of the Bitterroot Salish, are the other side of the continuance he seeks and expresses in his written work as well as in his life. When Vic looks at his son’s face he sees the faces of all the old chiefs in him. He says about a poem written from this experience, “. . . when he was small I used to look at him. And those days I used to think about the old folks, my grandparents. And all those old people, and used to wonder what it would have been like if they journaled. . . . And so I wrote this poem. . . . And I dedicate it to my son, ‘for Martin Antoine Victor Paul Charlo. . . .’ What I did, what I realized is I named my son after all the chiefs, all my grandparents. And I call it ‘Generations of Need’:

Generations find focus in my little boy’s face
when thoughts of old times and old folks creep
into that need to delve deep into who

we are. He is the little chief without saying.

I read worry of Moiese who states that we have too much schooling, and now we think more than we should. He says the people used to send a young boy to the top of Red Mountain for the good of all of our people and we were well. I follow DeSmet’s dream as I try to freeze a focus on unfamiliar feelings except that we do belong to mountains and my boy is the face of all of our grandfathers who hold both of us true to cottonwood and stone.

(full poem, Proceedings, 74)

The need for continuity, for old ones to keep coming back to them in the children, to recognize and honor the gift of that stream of old/new life flowing through them, carrying them, the presence of that read in his child’s face, this Martin, Antoine, Victor, Paul, Charlo who has come back to them and who at the same time is new. “[W]e do belong to mountains // and my boy is the face of all of our grandfathers / who hold both of us true to cottonwood and stone.”

Charlo’s 1987 trip to Churchill, upper Manitoba, in the sub-Arctic with renowned polar bear expert, Dr. Charles “Chuck” Jonkel, was a turning point for him. His poems take on a new confidence and expansiveness. He asks in his great Arctic poem, “Churchill Bear Jail,” “What about all of us who know jail for
bear / is truly bizarre, do we know that spirit is on trial...? It is a
decisive question and expresses a departure from the earlier trouble
at living between the two cultures. Of course it is rhetorical, for the
evidence of “spirit on trial” is the history of every empire for the
last eight thousand years. He leads us with a new sureness in his
identification with the imprisoned bears:

... .

But what is bear’s offense? That he can smell
food for twenty miles? That a town is built on ancient
rendezvous ground that was his so long that genes
are imprinted with a map where every stone is turned?
That he can be trapped because there is ring seal
meat in bear trap and he is hungry before the hunt?

Is this justice? You can’t help but think of all native
people in the same fix. You hear odd story about
a three, four time, many time loser bear who would
stretch his neck and close his eyes waiting for the dart.

What do bears dream of when they are all tranked
up? Dreaming of ancient ice to cover Hudson’s Bay?
Can they be let out when ice does come before
their thirty, sixty days are up? What about incorrigibles?

...(Swift Current Time, 10–11)

That last question is a dead giveaway, for Charlo himself
is the incorrigible, as was his father before him. Their genes are
imprinted with maps of old gambling songs that allow them to win
with a dime, to lose big, and not to get lost. Being incorrigible, in
fact, is a survival necessity, just watch out for the bear traps. And
know how and when to come in under the radar.

True memory is more than a remembering of something
past. True memory is the capacity to presence what has been
experienced before, and must be experienced again, to call up into
the present older states of mind, being, spirit that one must never
relinquish, but always renew. This occurs most clearly in Charlo’s
work when, during a reading and before the “Walking Bear Song”
poem, he closes his eyes and sings an old Salish song, the voice
coming through him every bit as much as coming from him. It
fills the auditorium with a sound as old as Red Mountain. Vic’s
face, too, changes as the song pours from him, changes to look like
the face on a Mayan stone carving. Listening, we know we have
witnessed something ancient called up into this time, something
that can be made present as long as there is someone who can
sing it with the sort of connection coming through much more
than their voice, coming through everything that they are, through
everything that the Salish people here have lived and dreamed. It is
the kinship with mountains and bears being sung out. It is geologic
memory.

In two short poems Charlo expresses a sureness about
continuance and direction and life that were not easy to come by,
and that have been earned through living the fracture-lines of his
life with an incorrigibility that is as necessary as rain:
Dixon Direction
Directions are simple here.
Geese know where to go and eagles fly. Yet sometimes you get lost on wrong roads.

Then

when you come to school, you seek from this high window and find living river, red willow, white aspen, old juniper and pine.

This is you.

And bright, clay cliffs fix the stars.

And:

Flathead River Creations
You say old days fold into one another and new days seem the same.
Yet each moment shifts with the sun, nothing will be the same as this:

when wind breathes the Flathead alive, you are the center this instant for all, you are the creation of the universe one more time.

(both full poems, Dancing on the Rim of the World, 27)

Victor A. Charlo is our holdout poet, holding out for imprisoned polar bears, for the mountains so close they are relatives, for the generations who find focus in his son’s face, for the holy incorrigibles of any time. He has hidden the black bone in the East in this gambling game called life, has found the old songs that are the “scratches on glacier polished granite,” as true as Indian mint. His poems honor the pain and “deep joy in smooth hard stone,” flowing water, and “the bitter root that sings them food, serious as meat.” They are the creation of the universe, one more time.

Note:
The creation of a theatrical group, The Open To All Possibilities Players Native American Acting Troupe, in 1991, in full collaboration with Zan Agzigian of Spokane, Washington, has been another aspect of Victor’s writing. Trickster at Dirty Corner and Moon Over Mission Dam, the first two plays co-authored by Charlo and Agzigian, premiered at the Met, in Spokane, 1996. A second group of four short plays, Bitterroot, Berkeley, Belfast, Beta, also co-authored by them, form a dramatic unit called “The Beta Cycle,” and premiered at Evergreen State College, in Olympia, Washington, in April of 2001.
Mark Gibbons

Western Montana has changed rapidly in recent years: four lane highways in place or on the drawing boards from Whitefish to Darby, population growth in the Bitterroot Valley, 44 percent in the last ten years, real estate booming, trophy homes smearing the ridge lines, fights over access to stream-beds, tourism and the influx of strip malls, box stores, and fun hogs everywhere with their various toys of recreation, the exponential growth of Cowboys & Indians magazine on both coasts. Elk hunting, fly fishing, wilderness: the commodification of these is only outdone by the making of American Indian spiritual life into the ultimate commodity. It’s called “progress,” or Cowboy Chic. A recent buyer of a Montana trophy home was quoted in the New York Times as saying, “We aren’t doing the grunge part of the Western experience. We’re getting the best of the culture, without the worst of the culture. We don’t have to get our hands dirty.” A slick magazine like Big Sky Journal has an “advertiser index” on its final pages containing seventy-two items: expensive ranch and recreational properties, “visions of the West” art galleries, and hot pools from heaven. Fortunately, a smart editor has placed Ed Lahey’s “A Note From the Third World” in a strategic location. But the question remains as to how the older, more rural, less populated, small town Montana survives in the midst of all this marketing of the “Montana experience.” And how might an artist who knows it, who has grown up in it, who still inhabits it, how might such a person continue it in his life and work?

Mark Gibbons’ people came into Montana nearly a century ago with other Irish, Slavic, and Finlander immigrants in search of “a fair living.” They found a vestige of it in industrial labor, on the railroads, in logging and mining, in sheepherding and in Butte. His grandmother Delia Joyce’s brother Tommy was killed, along with 165 other miners, in the infamous Speculator Mine disaster, June 8, 1917, the worst mining accident in the history of this country. His grandfather would have died there too, but was too sick with the flu to pull his shift that night. Mark’s father, Vincent, was born a month after that disaster, and six weeks before the half-Cherokee, Wobbly organizer Frank Little was dragged through the streets of Butte behind a car, bludgeoned, and hung by his heels from a wooden trestle on August 17. But it took Delia two years to talk her husband into quitting the mines and moving to Dillon, where they lived in the Cabbage Patch, a section of log cabin shacks that housed a few black families, the Chinese, and shanty Irish.

Grandpa Martin couldn’t get the “striking it rich dream” out of his bones, kept digging for silver and gold like a “fucking badger.” Ironically, he ended up digging most of the sewer system of Dillon too. Mark’s father found work in Alberton, a job with the railroad, where he traveled the section between Deer Lodge and Avery, Idaho. The librarian claimed he read every book in the Deer Lodge Public Library. The towns were small, the distances far, the family didn’t own a car until the 1950s, and Mark’s mother took the train into Missoula once a month to shop. Relationships were close in the small towns, even if you didn’t like each other. There was a sense of interdependence. The land and weather demanded it, the population spread sparsely over a rugged, northern landscape. And there was a savvy sense of self-deprecation, the glue of how communities hung together. Mark’s poem, “Spoiled Rotten,” from Something Inside Us, 1995, gives it to us, growing up along the tracks, and celebrates every gritty bit of it:
Spoiled Rotten
I was a rich kid in Alberton, pampered inside
an old two-shack, ship-lapped, slapped-together house
right beside the Milwaukee Railroad. Creosote ties
footed faded linoleum floors—they supported us like trains
to the splintered end. Barren beaver board walls

Bled frost and our dreams.

. . . we were spoiled most long summer days
tormenting rattlers and climbing castle rocks, skinny
dipping and fishing up Petty Creek from the narrows
To the old goat farm. We swam the Clark Fork like beaver,
circled and slapped, threw hoots and full cannon balls.
We gorged ourselves daily like Romans or kings
eating filthy-rich feasts, everything in season: green apples,
ripe plums, wild onions, and garden-raided dirt-sweet carrots.

We discovered the neighbor’s basement, ate jars
of silver salmon and gagged smelling limburger cheese.
We sipped on sour dandelion wine, felt our way up the
dizzy stairs.
Through a door left ajar, fully framed in a mirror, we saw
nipples
round as our mouths—secrets—only told to our dogs.

We lazed under lilacs, read clouds going by, never denied
we were flat spoiled rotten and ruined for good like Huck
Finn,
our hero back then. We, too, would have settled for a raft
and Jim,
but we damn sure didn’t want to run away. Those days are
still
a toy chest so filled—that the lid can never be closed.

for Burt Cole

(Something Inside Us, 14–15)

Mark’s poems are filled with what Paul Zarzyski has aptly
called “blue-collar light.” Mark paid the late Richard Hugo the
highest compliment when he said that Hugo had made him realize
that lives like his, ordinary working people’s lives, “common and
marginal,” were worthy of being written about, were worthy of
poetry. That awareness alone is a major source of the power of
Hugo’s legacy here, and Gibbons is a direct descendant of that
legacy. One aspect of Gibbons’ “blue-collar light” is the depth of
anger felt and expressed in his earlier poems. It is anger at the way
these “common and marginal” people who do the hand work of
this society are ignored, looked down upon, devalued. It is an anger
that has piled up for three, four generations, until there is someone
who can express it other than through alcohol or violence. In an
interview with James Jay at the back of his latest book, Connemara
Moonshine, he tells a revealing story about that anger:

. . . my wife worked with a baker, a German baker
who survived the Holocaust. They both worked
at Safeway, and he was just a fuckin’ workaholic. He and his wife had survived the Holocaust, were separated for 12 years after the war, and they ran into each other in Canada and got back together. They came to Missoula, settled down and had children. He got laid off by Safeway, hired by Eddies, which was mass produced shit bread. This guy was a baker! He did pumpernickels and shit everyday. Well, he got laid off then by Eddies making that industrial bread. He got laid off there. They found him 6, 8 weeks later. He killed himself in his car. He committed suicide. This guy was 50 some years old. He’d survived the Holocaust, and he wound up committing suicide because he was laid off and he couldn’t work. So I wrote this poem that was indicting American Industrial Fucking Whole System. I was just so fucking angry.

(Connemara Moonshine, 132)

For years Gibbons has worked as a mover, moving other people’s furniture. In this poem for a hammered-out old moving van we get his whole knowledge of those “physical labor jobs available to blue-collar descendants determined to stay in Montana at all costs” (Circling Home, back cover). We see the aesthetic control and sophistication brought to bear on that earlier anger, and without the loss of the energy it contained. And we see his enormous capacity for affection:

Mayflower
The loading address was a cul-de-sac along the seventh fairway.
I parked her, my Mayflower forty-five foot drop frame trailer. Her air cushioned ride, lopsided & bleeding; wiring, soft and dry as crumbling mud-dust, won’t conduct legal signals anymore, but her slivered wood-plank walkboard hangs on, provides a bridge to her open doors, begs oversized Baldwin uprights and one-piece slate pool tables. They’re a rehab pair. Started over the road together in sixty-four, they’ll hold or go down together.

This bed-bugger van’s no beauty anymore. Rattling the phlegm in her lungs, she leans unsteadily, shuffles, dips off-balance. Her jagged breathing shudders to a coughing fit, chokes off, then wheezes air. Opening her robe to foster the plunder most shippers call their lives, she accepts all burdens—the passage of transient soles. Her splintered floor gives & creaks from frost boil miles, salted streets. It’s only a matter of time.

This old girl’s delivered her goods,
never rat-holed a dime on maintenance
to restore her failing health. Each trip, a gentle
pulling in, followed by the letting go.
She fills her hollow loss with another
load. Her wheel wells & rivets rubbed raw,
scabbed brown as the barked knuckles of furniture
lumpers she watched die in motel rooms
from easing too-many awkward, all-there
hide-a-beds up narrow nightmare stairways.

Next time she loses her bearings
they’ll put her out in the bone yard behind
the warehouse at the end of the railroad spur,
use her to shelter work gear and supplies
till she dissolves on the oily ground. If left
alone, scars fade away. Promises
like recaps & gratitude are short term,
but rust lasts forever in the garden of bones
eating half-buried axles, spindles, and leaf
springs, broken and twisted as weathered wardrobes
barely standing, aslant, on the verge of collapse
into the awful brittle silence of weeds.

(full poem, Connemara Moonshine, 90)

The “light” of this poem comes from the unsentimental,
sad affection for and identification with this old van which has
seen the worst that a life of hauling furniture can bring, and will
go on hauling until she “dissolves on the oily ground,” “into the
awful brittle silence of weeds.” It is the worker’s closeness to his
tools and machines, those with whom he shares the life of labor.
It is the knowledge of what the conditions of that labor over the
long haul do to machines and to men and women. The anger at
“American Industrial Fucking Whole System” is subdued here,
into affectionate sadness, but also into a respect, celebrating the
endurance of the “old girl,” the ironic toughness of this May flower
and the immigrant sons who’ve sailed her.

The rough love of “Weeds,” for those men asleep on the lawn
along the tracks, speaks the same affection for human dissolution
too, echoing the used-up moving van. The “blue-collar light” mixed
with the knowledge of blue-collar dark in the oily ground. (Mark’s
comment, “These are the lives worthy of poetry: uncorrupted by
power or money.”)

Weeds
That was no bum sleeping on your lawn,
bottle tucked under his arm.
Didn’t you recognize his Red Ball tennis shoes,
remember the fish stories he told
with his hands, the toothless smile, that time
he danced a jig at Chadwick & Boyd’s Tavern
clowning for rowdy plaid-clad loggers?
A gandy dancer turned choke setter,
became a Zen cat skinner
before he retired to booze,
had a home but never claimed it,
one of those tarpaper shacks on Rose Hill.
He had to stop eating at the Silver Grill,
shook so bad he had to drink beer through a straw.

You thought he’d been dead for years
like Gabby Hollow, Indian Rock and Cherry Springs,
all lost in the flood of sixty-four
or the interstate highway construction.
Don’t be afraid to wake him, the sleeper,
deaf-mute and drunk. We are all
sleepers whether we like it or not.
And isn’t this your dream, the old man’s
polio knees bent back the wrong way,
the rusty shotgun in the corner
of the sheepherder’s shack—skull
fragments like egg shells scattered
on the floor? He sips the pint
of Mad Dog 20/20, watches a cross
burn Hell-fire on the Catholic church steps
as sheeted shadows fade into trees.

He nurses his leprosy, the jug,
acceptance of what is, the caked dirt
he doesn’t try to wash off.
You’ll take his unshaven face to the grave.
Name him Kelly, Cookie, Blackie Marquette,
Jimmy de Banda, Orie Sizemore.
You know this sleeper could be Nine Mile Bill
or Freddie Lavois. Still, you must wake him
before sunrise, rouse him from the weeds,
serve him sourdough pancakes, bacon & eggs.

Listen for the signs, the wind in your blood,
swim the deep, night–black in the bottom
of his eyes, and slip him a five
dollar bill before he goes. You know
this dream, this ghost can save you.

(full poem, Connemara Moonshine, 22)

Poems such as this one, filled with pain and darkness, save us
from the too–easy view of only the light in blue-collar life. The poet
not only has no barriers between himself and this kind of on-the-
skids everyman, he is saved from his own comfort, security, his own
“sleeping,” by attending to the darkened lives around him.

The affection and loyalty in these poems is as deep as a well,
and as reassuring. It is in the blood. The next poem, by that title,
gives us an exact sense of connection, relationship, identity here,
not as something that can be understood, but as something that
flows through the fibers of the brain, body, and bowels like a steady
mountain breeze.

In the Blood
I.

Waving beside the mullein, spindly
scarecrows of the barrow pit & shale
cut slopes, cattails beckon me like fingers
to settle with red wing blackbirds
rocking on stalks green from rain. Billowing
clouds hang low, white, black & gray,
curling twispy as an old man's beard,
perhaps my father's—gone now seven
years. Have these shadowed blue
mountains put a spell on me?

All I know I don't understand:
the cottonwood grove on the Nine Mile ox bow;
a coyote pausing at the edge of the road
& smiling before padding up the draw;
these nesting swallows that pop from the clay cutbank.

Somehow this ground inhabits me.
For no reason, I refuse to leave
like the Ponderosa snapped off at its trunk.
No wind, no storm can drive me away
from this place I call my journey.

My grandfather crossed an ocean,
a continent to settle this land
of rattlesnakes, sagebrush & snow.
What was it that drew them & snuffed wanderlust
in one generation? Maybe the endless fields
freckled by sweet wildflowers,
low ceilings of sky, abundance of water.
Could it have been the blackness
of moonless nights, a reflection of their immigrant souls?

For some time I have told myself
I am comfortable with these mysteries:
the lion on my porch, raccoons in my yard
& decapitated house cats littering the alley.
All my stories are here. Why do I think
if I left, I would leave them behind,
as if I could lose dirt & memory like luggage.
When I'm alone I hear voices whisper.
I'm afraid of losing my grip.

II.

Right now I float the Clark Fork,
climb Plateau in my mind, follow the game
trail that leads me up Gobbler's Knob
& back to the pact I made with the deer:
my hands covered with his blood, slippery
& hot, I worked the knife inside his chest,
cut free the entrails and claimed his bones.
Before I was through his agate-black eye
faded milky gray-blue. I cannot
shake it, my pledge to a dead deer,
like my dad's ashes I poured into this ground.
I need this story to haunt my dreams,
to explain in words what I can't—
my attachments to dirt & blood & ghosts.

The buttercups & arrow leaf balsam root,
dewy on the rocky hillside; wood
smoke hovering in a stand of lodgepole pine;
cold creek water gulped and swallowed,
slaking an August afternoon thirst;
distant gunshots up Fahley Basin;
the squeaking crunch of snow under my
boot sole, followed by silence only broken
by blood ringing in my ears.

The ospreys have returned to their nest.
Even they would move on if the river ran dry.
Have I become the blood of the deer?
Tied to a rhythm I cannot name?

Stay, stay the course, the buck whispers,
We are waiting in the river,
your father and me. We are
shimmering in the aspen leaves.
 Listen to our voices, the water and the wind.
Close your eyes and you will see.

(full poem, Connemara Moonshine, 42)

This poem, more than any other, serves as a credo for what I
want to say with this whole piece: that in these four poets there is
a fusion of identity, poetry, and place that few poets achieve. “All I
know I don’t understand: . . . Somehow this ground inhabits me./
For no reason, I refuse to leave/ like the Ponderosa snapped off at
its trunk./No wind, no storm can drive me away/ from this place
I call my journey./ . . . When I’m alone I hear voices whisper./ I’m
afraid of losing my grip.” When Gibbons says he hears voices and
is afraid he is losing his grip, he is not posturing. His imagination
works directly with his experience to lend it a transcendence of the
ordinary and real world. But a transcendence that carries within
it every bit of the “work, dust, weather, and family” necessary to
life here near the “backbone of the world,” as the Blackfeet refer
to the mountains along the divide. It is clear that the mutual ties
of affection he carries are a communal thing. Beyond families,
communities, and work, he is bound to the natural elements of this
place—to “all our relations.”

Leaving behind the life of working and drinking, becoming
a high school English teacher for nine years, having two sons
born, the deaths of four people that were very close to him, these
events of the late 80s–early 90s changed Gibbons, brought a
maturity to his work, gave him perspective on his deeper themes.
Of course it isn't all about the gritty life of Irish immigrants and
growing up along the tracks, working as a furniture mover. There
is the wonderfully funny poem of early eroticism, “Swinging For
the Fences.” And that tremendous reach into the darkness of the
French-Irish, Modoc writer Michael Dorris’s suicide in “Suicide
Note.” There is the honesty of confessed lust amidst the warmth
of a strong marriage in “Smothered In Ash,” and the great poem
at the birth of his son, “A Letter To My First Born Son,” among
others. There is the astonishingly deep affection for his sister,
suffering from Parkinson’s Disease, but giving him music as
basic as clean water in “Music My Sister Gave Me.” And there
is the gallows humor and love of “Pissed At Potter’s Funeral,”
or the love/hate relationship to a brother expressed through
the death of their dog in “Still Waters,” all poems I regret not
having the space to present in this piece. But the backbone on
which all this richness of spirit in poetry is hung is that great-
heartedness and blue-collar light which he wears so well. I breathe a little easier knowing that Mark Gibbons is there, writing his honest poems into the teeth of those trophy houses and hot pools from heaven searing the Montana landscape. Irish Catholic immigrant blood and whiskey coursing through his veins, this English teacher, mover of furniture, descendant of miners, sheepherders, back alley brawlers and railroaders brings us blue-collar light, blue-collar dark, in poem after poem that reveals the continuance, the real Montana. (Note: A new collection of Gibbons' poems from Camphorweed Press, blue horizon, is forthcoming this year, 2006.)

David E. Thomas

Dave Thomas is, like his close friend, the late ceramist and printmaker Jay Rummel, a Montana original. This means that the place is etched so deeply into him that it moved the novelist James Crumley, in his “forward” to Dave’s book, Buck’s Last Wreck, to call him:

the national treasure of our small, but extended nation, a nation founded on those sixties ideals of a love of language, a respect for hard work, friendships closer than blood, and a refusal to live by the bankrupt middle-class economic standards of greed and prejudice that had clearly destroyed America. With his poems and through his life Dave Thomas has been our saint. . . . has created a body of poetry that marks him as the last and best of the hippie, working class, street smart poets.

Dave Thomas was born on the Hi-Line in Havre in north-central Montana. His father was the district judge in Chinook, in the shadow of the Bears Paw Mountains where Chief Joseph and the Nez Perce had been forced to surrender to the U.S. Army just miles from the Medicine Line, aka the Canadian border, in 1877. Dave came down to the University of Montana in 1965 as an enthusiastic ROTC cadet and won an Army scholarship for his junior and senior years. But the Vietnam War pricked his conscience and his classes in political science raised questions about both the morality and the rationality of the war. His unpublished prose piece from 1987, “The Walker,” gives a retrospective account of the events in Seattle leading to his watershed decision to leave the path of the military for the psychedelic movement on the streets of San Francisco.

In a shabby studio below the Pike Street Market he saw paint stroked on canvas to create something both behind the eye and in front of it. His dreams had a different flavor now. Jack Kerouac made more sense than the Officer’s Manual. . . .

After his return James Earl Ray shot Martin Luther King. There was a spontaneous demonstration in which he figured prominently and the next Monday he was summoned before the major, his class advisor, who informed him to either get with the program or get out. He got out. . . .

. . . and remembered years ago three days of continuous walking, his only food oatmeal, rice and raisins, climbing past lakes jumping with trout
in weather like this day so clear and full of color
pursued by mosquitoes, deer flies and horse flies.
He spent a night with a porcupine and when he
got back to town he knew he'd been somewhere.
   “I remember that moment up there when
a clump of cumulus in the northeast formed itself
into three crosses then quickly became cloud again.
No, I've never been to war but I've been some
other places.”

Hard work has been one of those “other places,” work on
railroad gangs or big construction projects like Libby Dam, but also
picking cherries on Flathead Lake, painting houses in Missoula,
and odd jobs out of the Labor Hall, wheeling endless barrows of
concrete. In his most famous poem “The Ten Thousand Things”
(read by Garrison Keillor on his National Public Radio show, The
Writer's Almanac), a poem which purports to be a list of all the things
a common laborer on the Libby Dam must move amongst, sort out,
keep track of, the poet-worker’s attitude is fundamentally Taoist.

. . . .

There's times when I wander
 about picking up
  and sorting bolts
there's times when a chance glance

at a star
trying to outshine
the lamps
is all the rest I get . . .
Oh damn! I forgot nails! 16 common 16 duplex 8's the same roofing nails and blue heads
There's just no end to it
Sorting bolts on the edge
of artificial light
the tune of an engine
the shadow of the dam.

(Buck's Last Wreck, 26)
A gandy dancer poem from eighteen years later celebrates the feeling for heavy work going on into middle age, no white-collar position for this poet, and few regrets either.

**Close To Halloween**

....
bone chilly
   as we stretch
our muscles
hoisting railroad
ties
to flatbed truck
   we've
loaded fifty when
a Rail Link foreman
tells us
—wrong ones these
   are oak
still good wood
the ones
you want are out
by De Smet—
our boss the contractor
says—I thought
   these were awful
heavy—
hardwood ties
used on curves
up in the mountains

years ago
I recall my first
   gandy dancer
spring
sliding down river bank
   mud
trying to hold tie high
   enough for the diesel
   machine
   the “scarfire” to pull
   beneath the rail
now the weight
no longer a surprise
middle aged
muscles and joints
   creak
in crisp air
the heavy breathing
of being still alive.

*(Hellgate Wind, 140)*

All of Dave’s work wasn’t in Missoula or on the railroad or some big construction job. There are a number of poems from his work up in Glacier National Park, digging holes for outhouses or working for the carpenters at McDonald Lake Lodge and Sperry Chalet. The mountain sense in them is strong as only a person of “prairie blood” can muster. The most well known of these is:
Face To Face On Apgar

a nameless
terror grabs
me as I stand
with more
before my eyes
than I can
stand to see
a closeness
that threatens
my civilized
mind so used
to four walls
now this huge
circle
beyond my possible
self
a sky so blue
my name
is lost
peaks so jagged
I have no mind
I want
to escape
this voidness
the beauty
it holds
is more
than any word

The Ground
Squirrel Buddha
of this place
keeps an eye
on us all
I am nervous
from last night’s
beer breakfast
coffee sex thoughts
beside the point
this wind
this wind!
keeps us
all alive
like a broken
down medicine
man I can hardly
stand
I must bow
to the Four Directions
and love
the wind

What?
this radio
antenna?
this lookout
shack?
the repeater
station with its
tower? These
things? Parkside
communication: Mount
St. Nicholas
talks
to Mt. Brown
in cloud
language
the sun listens
like chlorophyll
coursing leafy veins
in a huckleberry
patch grizzly shit
on the switchback
trail. 8 June 1980

(full poem, Wreck, 68)

This poem actually does begin to “ef” the ineffable. The line-breaks and overall structure are such it is as if the pressure of overwhelming feeling and power and immensity squeezes the language into a tight wall of terror, thought, and devotion, dense in the sense of its own limits in the presence of the seemingly limitless mountains, sky, sun. After the overwhelming experience of the voidness and beauty of these mountains, this wind, which takes him beyond his own name, mind, beyond language itself, a ground squirrel brings him back, hardly able to stand but able to enact the simple ritual of honoring the Four Directions in a bow.

The key word in this last section is, strangely enough, “chlorophyll,” from the Greek words for “green” and “leaf.” Chlorophyll, the mother of photosynthesis, the quiet ability of plants to take hold of all this terrifying-beyond-voidness of beauty, wind, sky, mountains, unnameable light, and to earth it, make the food that makes the shit of the Great Bear, or the Ground Squirrel Buddha, or the poet. There is an intensity of engagement with the mountains here so deep as to represent an indigenous, populist Buddhist experience. And few white poets could get away with the “medicine man” self-reference, but Dave does it perfectly, partly by virtue of his deep Montana roots which of necessity include all sorts of life with Indian people, but also his poet’s savvy in the line breaks here: this wind/this wind! keeps us all alive/like a broken/down medicine/man I can hardly/stand/I must bow/to the Four Directions and love/the wind(.) This wind keeps us all alive. Like a broken down medicine. Man, I can hardly stand. I must bow to the Four Directions and love.

An aspect of Dave’s life and poems that bespeaks the old north-south movement on the continent are the winters he traveled in Mexico, and Central and South America. The best-known poems from these journeys are “Santos Going Fishing,” “At the Ruinas,” “Mexico City The World Map,” “The National Museum of Anthropology, Mexico,” “Quito,” “Reading Aime Cesaire In Quito,” and “The Way Home.” These poems move between the discovery of the whole ancient, magical, volcanic, tortured world south of our border and visions of home back up in Montana working on the dam or hearing the Bitterroot Mountains singing “a fire of rocks . . . grandmother of sweat lodges/ tempting me to die/ tempting me to live(.).
Right At Home In Cuenca
sad streets weary with people
paved with hard-eyed sympathy
quarried from a hot moment
this burden of old rags breathes shit
and envies dogs
a haughty student flashes red stars
from eyeballs
of socialist fancy
this burden of old rags teems lice
and begs volcanos to erupt
sad streets paved with cripples
a squashed avocado
slick seed in the gutter
of empty cigarette papers
old eyes blank
stories of pain etcht
in outstretched palms
it is too bad whole streets of people
are born without newspapers
taking note
that hordes live and die anonymous
like mosquitos in a snap frost
what is this human crying for alms?
moaning chant of old women
besieging cafes with their sagging flesh

a rattling of small coins starts a riot
of hungry eyes
insulation of money belts
sensitive fat of good leather
on sad pavements made dangerous
by a barricade of eyes
inarticulate termites gnaw
huge rolls of newsprint to dust
cities of the famished are built
from discarded corn flakes

a fierce telepathy of howling drums
paints a slogan on starving walls
everyone hears it pulls
in their heart a beat of pure space avenging
delusions of skyscrapers
and freeways
there is a fast council of beggars and buses
to decide a treaty
with the wind
dark clouds move to adjourn
but no vote is taken
there is a damp hand on my sleeve
and a wide-eyed kid
wants to see a movie

(full poem, Fossil Fuel, 27–28)

The compassionate sadness of these observations of the
grinding poverty of this Latin American city, and the title's
connection of that to the poverty in the inner cities of the north, the wide-eyed vulnerability of the kid who “wants to see a movie,” make this one of Dave’s most heart-breakingly realistic poems.

Dave Thomas’s life, work, and poems have taken him outside the box of conventional American culture. He writes truly about old Indian hippies like “Grandpa Adam Gardipe,” the demolition of the Orange Street Bridge, Eddie’s Club, the legendary Missoula bar of the 1960s and 1970s, now Charley B’s, the burning down of the Roxy theater, the “Rough Morning” of a wicked hangover, the deep friendship of “Designing A Hole” with Jay Rummel, or a poem like “Industrial Meditation,” “sprouting / new feathers / of life and death.” His poem on the abandoned lumber mill yard just off the Orange Street Bridge contains a certain affection for what is passing, has passed, for an older Montana, but also a sense of what continues. His clarity about money-driven changes here is tempered by acceptance, but his pain and anger come through too.

The Intermountain
The corpse
of this old mill
sits quiet
but the days
when it breathed
smoke
around the clock
are an easy reach
for my memory
the log yard
piled full

of fallen trees
waiting
the whine
of the saws
the clank
and rattle of the green
chain
a crow’s caw
breaks
the dull roar
of traffic around
town
a hint of sun
atop Lolo Peak
stark as the bare
river trees
this gray December
nothing
but wood
chips
turning to mulch
and yellowed
weeds
populate
this graveyard
of machinery
fresh tire tracks
a prowl car
maybe
the “No Trespassing” signs
lie face down
by the railroad bridge
I can hear
the Clark Fork’s faint
whisper
beneath the drone
of a single engine plane
trees grow slow
in this climate
and money moves
fast as smoke.

17 Dec 93

(full poem, Wind, 42)

When James Crumley says that “with his poems and through his life Dave Thomas has been our saint,” “the national treasure of our small but extended nation,” I think he means there is a quality to Dave’s writing that goes beyond literature, that contains the reality, the gratitude, and the coyote-devotion of a person who has found something worth doing in this buzzing, puzzling life. And the dues paid are in every word. (Dave’s final note to my manuscript: “But I’ve learned time and again that I don’t live in complete isolation from the aspects of this society I most despise. More like I live in a kind of dirty symbiosis with it all and finally I’ve got to eat, do laundry, and have someplace warm to sleep like everybody else—keeping that in mind, thanks for the kind words—Dave”).

Conclusion

Albert White Hat, Sr., working from within the effort to restore and maintain the Lakota language, has given us several new/old ways to consider our own language too. He reminds us that language is wakan, very powerful, that we [should] use it to communicate with “the living beings of the earth,” that both its power for good and its power to destroy must be taught, that it must be used respectfully, that learning it should develop another heart and another mind in us. He reminds us that our language has been invaded, just as our lands, and that it is our “bloodline.” His remarks are pertinent to anyone concerned for the fate of their own language, especially in these times of “doublespeak” by politicians and advertisers. Poets are those especially responsible for the language itself, they are its most important “keepers.” The echo of the old phrase, “In the beginning was the word,” is in them. They are condemned to it. These four poets of Montana, this place of continental collision and embattled refuge, Lahey, Charlo, Gibbons, and Thomas, are the poets of HERE, past, present, and future. None of them speaks from within the secure confines of the major institutions or recognitions of this culture, which is perhaps as it should be. They may be mad, impoverished, Indian, alcoholic, laborers, or they may be saints, teachers, chiefs, creators, sane, or all of these things together. Mostly they have been found by language, by the mute/muse, that dark/light daimon lady that sucks their throats and quickens their brains. They are the unlucky/lucky ones who cannot help themselves. They know the mines, the dams, the lumber mills and moving vans, as well as the mountains and old ones, the coyotes, Chinese herb doctors, butchers, and cold rivers. They know the Cabbage Patch and the railroads too, and cold
and heat and fast money and northern lights. They are the gandy
dancers of the throat. The coyote skins of the fence. The booze
bottles of Buddhism. The lookouts of deaf. They keep the stories in
the mind in the belly. Come join us, they say. Leave your fiberglas
sailboats and moose antler chandeliers. Yes, you will have to get
your hands, even your pretty souls, dirty, bloody, or perhaps broken
(like Dave Thomas’s broken hand swollen up like a softball when
a compacter slammed it against a ditch wall when they were too
rushed on a job with a green crew) if you are to experience the best
of the culture here. The innocence of the notion that we should
or can separate the best from the worst is disastrous. Mountain
blood, plains blood, mixed blood, Frank Little’s blood, Nez Perce
blood, buffalo blood flowing like rivers on the steel rails, Black Irish
blood soaked into copper ore, snow geese poisoned in the bloody
Berkeley pit, blood on the moon, the stars, the snow—the real
Montana, lovely and fierce way out beyond the myth of the old or
new West or the last best anything—this is the bloodline these four
poets continue to follow.

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Mapping Montana’s Poetic Past
Tami Haaland

Note: Poet Tami Haaland is director of the Montana Poetry Project, Montana State University–Billings, an initiative devoted to creating an accessible record of Montana’s poets and their publications. The Montana Poetry Project will establish a website containing pages of Montana poets—defined in the broadest of terms—both past and present. As part of the project, the MSU-Billings library is in the process of collecting all work in print by contemporary Montana poets and will host the website of Montana poets’ biographies, photos, poems, and links. For further information, contact Tami Haaland, thaaland@msubillings.edu.

Since early in the twentieth century, individuals within Montana have advocated the literature of this state and of the Northwest. In 1931, H. G. Merriam, chair of the English Department at The University of Montana, published Northwest Verse, which featured many of the writers who regularly appeared in his journal, The Frontier (later The Frontier and Midland). Rufus Coleman, who taught at The University of Montana during the same period, also served as an advocate of regional writing in his anthology, Western Prose and Poetry (1932). In Montana Margins (1946), Joseph Kinsey Howard of Great Falls created the first, all-Montana anthology. He favored prose over poetry and included only a handful of poets in his 511-page volume. During the time between Kinsey’s anthology and Richard Hugo’s arrival in Montana, even less attention was given to poetry and its publication within the state. Then, in 1978, Where We Are: The Montana Poets Anthology emerged from Missoula. Edited by Lex Runciman and Rick Robbins, it focused on contemporary authors who had “lived and written” (xi) in Montana.

The Last Best Place (1988), edited by William Kittredge and Annick Smith, included a significant collection of both historical and contemporary poetry. During the past twenty years, this edition combined with work on single poets (Lee Rostad’s research on Grace Stone Coates, Alex Swaney and Rick Newby’s focus on Frieda Fligelman’s poetry, and Sue Hart’s research on Gwendolen Haste) have done much to bring the poetry of Montana’s historic writers into the late twentieth and early twentieth-first centuries. Yet many poets have disappeared entirely from sight or have not been recognized in the first place.

“To Look Once More”

In rereading poetry from earlier periods, I am often struck by how familiar it sounds, perhaps because of the way landscape helps to shape the imagination. Consider “On the Two Medicine River,” for example, written by Ralph Micken of Great Falls, whose work first appeared in The Frontier and Midland in summer 1937. “A tolerant, lazy rattlesnake/ Flowed from his coil at sound of our approach/ Leaving his warm place on the cattle trail” (6–8). Gnats, cottonwoods, rainbow trout, grasshoppers, nighthawks, and frogs also populate the scene.

Like Micken, other voices of this era surfaced and then receded. Among them was Marion Lemoynée Leeper, who taught at Northern Montana College. Her slim volume of poetry, entitled
Once Heaven Was Music (1939), contains poems that previously appeared in Harper’s, The Frontier and Midland, and the Breadloaf Anthology. Her poetry often focuses on the loss of someone close to her, presumably R. D. L., to whose memory the book is dedicated, but it explores characters as well, most noticeably, Judas Iscariot, who says: “I was a simple man and plain/ Who had not lacked an honest name.” In her poem, “Advice to Shepherds,” she appears to be offering wisdom for writers:

Most words are sheep  
That softly go  
In two’s and four’s  
As shepherds blow;  

But now and then  
A Lion Word  
Roars and snaps  
And will be heard;  

(t–8)

Another eastern Montanan, Dorothe Bendon, moved from Glendive to Claremont, California, in her youth and published her first and only volume of poetry, Mirror Images, in 1931. In the foreword, Gertrude Atherton celebrated this relocation and called Glendive “hardly a poetic background.” In his review of the book, H. G. Merriam, while praising her “fine sense of phrase and . . . image,” says “one feels, however, that she writes too infrequently out of realized experience.” He indicates that she was influenced by the “unseeing ideas” of people such as Atherton to “see beauty in acquired information, about Dionysius, classical music, Chillon, and the conventional paraphernalia of ‘culture’ rather than in rooted life experience” (The Frontier 12.1.87). The criticism draws attention to the standard advice, “write what you know,” which was apparently as much an issue for discussion in Bendon’s day as in ours. The book contains twenty-three sonnets in forty-three pages, and despite Merriam’s criticism, Bendon’s rural upbringing is sometimes evident:

The prairie, yellow as a meadow-lark,  
Sings no more the shimmer of wild oat,  
The wind that ruffled feathers on its throat,  
The blond fox-tail combed out beneath the dark.

(“The Sacramento,” t–4)

In another sonnet, we see some of the conflict—the work ethic of rural Montana against this author’s desire for a different kind of life:

I’d like to sit all day beneath a tree,  
Like Buddha, hunting in alert repose,  
Though busy people called me slovenly  
For not remaining home to mend my hose.

(“I’d Like to Sit All Day,” t–4)
And in “Glass House” we see the subtlety of her imagery:

Since we have chosen to be more discreet,
Let us withdraw and watch our passions coil,
Blue, naked, glistening, like fire on oil,
While we remain aloof above the heat.

(“Glass House,” 1–4)

Bendon was young when this book was published, only twenty-four. Afterwards, she turned her considerable talent to fiction and criticism, focusing on Keats and Cather, among others. Her most successful volume appears to be a textbook: The English Novel, Form and Function.

In 1932, Marjorie Frost, daughter of Robert and Elinor Frost, married Willard Fraser and the couple settled in Billings (where Willard would later serve as mayor). In 1934, after the birth of their first child, Marjorie died a slow and painful death of childbed fever. Two years later, her parents published her poetry in a slim volume entitled Franconia, named after the Frost family home. The Frost children were trained in writing from an early age, but Marjorie and her brother, Carol, showed real promise as poets. Robert Frost praised Marjorie’s work and intended to write a preface for the book. He said her “poems are good enough for publication regularly [that is, not only in a memorial volume], though I doubt if we would have the heart to submit them to public criticism” (letter to Lesley Frost Francis, December 1934).

The only copy of Franconia available in Montana is in the Billings Public Library Montana Room, and it is otherwise in the catalogs of thirty-nine libraries throughout the U.S. While her mother hoped that some of the poems might appear in The Atlantic and The Yale Review, three were published by Harriet Monroe in Poetry magazine. At first glance, many of her poems, like this one, seem childlike.

**Coming Away**

I meant to walk once more
On my old, old lawn,
But it began to pour,
And I had no rubbers on.

I meant to look once more
At my old, old place,
But the taxi window wore
A veil of liquid lace.

The sound of regret emanates from these three-beat lines and rhymed quatrains. “If I Should Live to Be a Doll” opens the volume, and Frost originally planned to call the book by this name. Something about her work is reminiscent of her first teacher’s poetry; “A Road Not Taken,” for all its simplicity, doesn’t yield easily to criticism.

**Poems of an Earlier Period**

Though translations of American Indian poetry appear in The Frontier and early anthologies, there are few examples overall. During the 1920s and 1930s, some historians and writers feared the loss of traditional Native songs and poetry and made efforts
to translate or to approximate the originals. Among these writers were Eda Lou Walton, Mary Hunter Austin, and Lew Sarett, who also served as a contributing editor to *The Frontier*. Their approximations—poetry written in the style of Native poetry—were interesting attempts to preserve a poetry they felt was vanishing.

More than forty years later, W. S. Merwin published excerpts from Robert Lowie’s *Crow Texts* in his *Selected Translations 1968–1978*. Taken from an oral tradition of poetry and song, the following is the first in an untitled series of eight poems:

Whatever place
I come on trouble
my death will not be there

I shall pass through

though there may be many arrows
I shall reach
where I am going

as the heart of a man should be
mine is

Overall, there seem to be few translations of Montana’s Native poetry. Recent and older anthologies contain only brief samples of Crow, Assiniboine, Chippewa, Salish, and Blackfeet poetry and prayers. In 1930, H. G. Merriam published a book entitled *Tseeminicum: Snake River People*. The author uses the pseudonym, “Donald Burnie.” He writes: “The essential purpose of the poems which follow is to bring out the spirit of pioneer times, to catch that *élan* which has disappeared forever under progress.” It was an age when “passions ran hot and fierce. There was no place for the coward” (Burnie, 6).

The poems from this book are set in Idaho, “at the junction of the Snake and Clearwater Rivers” (Burnie, 1). In this setting, Burnie gives voice to historical figures such as Meriweather (sic) Lewis, but he also gives us aging characters with names such as Cherokee Bob, Ah Chung, and Wild Moll, who may be composites of historical figures or entirely fictional.

**Wild Moll**

Stabbed to my molten heart
With the long, keen dagger of life,
I danced in the lean, blue flames
Of the passionate bonfires of the Frontier
To the applause of barbaric, epic men,
Twisting the poniard and tasting
Of the delicious pain of living.
Even now, in my conventional old age
The dagger still lies hid
Beneath the folds of my stiff, black dress. (1–10)

Some of the poems were subsequently anthologized by both Merriam and Coleman. Who was Donald Burnie? So far, I don’t know. Merriam published the book, held the copyright, and sometimes autographed copies.
An Overlooked Modern

J. V. Cunningham was raised in Billings from the time he was four until he was twelve, and he claimed Montana quite publicly. A prominent classicist, Renaissance scholar, and poet, Cunningham may have been overlooked because he moved on to Denver and lived outside of the state for the rest of his life. The Academy of American Poets website lists him as one of only nine poets associated with Montana. In an interview with Timothy Steele, Cunningham indicates that his family lived in four locations on the south side of Billings, but says, “a most important part of our lives was the summers we spent—and we went out every summer—on a dry-land ranch, thirty-six miles from Billings, over the rimrock in the Wheat Basin country” (Steele, 3). Cunningham indicates this country is “exactly” the setting of his well-known poem, “Montana Pastoral,” which he refers to as a “curt autobiography” (Cunningham, 140).

Montana Pastoral

I am no shepherd of a child’s surmises.
I have seen fear where the coiled serpent rises,
Thirst where the grasses burn in early May
And thistle, mustard, and the wild oat stay.
There is dust in this air. I saw in the heat
Grasshoppers busy in the threshing wheat.
So to this hour. Through the warm dusk I drove
To blizzards sifting on the hissing stove,
And found no images of pastoral will,
But fear, thirst, hunger, and this huddled chill.

Hayden Carruth, Robert Pinsky, and W. S. DiPiero all refer to this poem in their analysis of Cunningham’s poetry. Written in 1941, and published in his book The Helmsman in 1942, “Montana Pastoral” has not appeared in any of our state anthologies.

What We Can Learn From the Past

What is a Montana poet? What is Montana poetry? Are these categories legitimate? Should we count people who passed through? People who lived here only a short while? Where should lines be drawn?

When I started this research project a little over a year ago, it felt as if there were pieces scattered and they needed to be collected. There is still much more to be uncovered in The Frontier and The Frontier and Midland, CutBank, Montana Arts, Montana Review, Alkali Flats, and other journals published in the state, as well as in anthologies, public libraries, and universities. Until we know what we have, it’s difficult to answer any of these questions. But it is certain the mix of poetry that emerges will contribute to the history of this region.

The canon of literature is semimalleable, and certainly many of our contemporaries are engaged in canon-making. In reading through volumes of The Frontier, I am struck by the activity within the literary community of that day. Merriam, Coleman, and their peers were attempting to create a canon of Northwest literature, an engagement that involved reviewing, publishing, anthologizing,
and establishing camaraderie among the writers of the period. Beginning in 1930, Grace Stone Coates wrote the “Literary News” for *The Frontier*, a column that contained news of publications, such as can be found in the *State of the Arts*, and advice of the sort one finds in *Poets & Writers*.

Certainly engagement and camaraderie are good for poetry, and our book festivals are among the events that have allowed contemporary poets to gather and reflect. Beyond connecting, however, it seems a healthy response to discuss questions that concern poetry, review new work, and write about the poetry of one’s place.

**Works Cited**


Writing History Vs. Writing the Historical Novel

(a talk presented at the Montana Historical Society
as part of the Helena Festival of the Book, October 21, 2005)

Guy Vanderhaeghe

I would like to begin my remarks today on history and the
historical novel by thanking the organizers of the Helena
Festival of the Book and the Montana Historical Society for the
opportunity to participate in this year’s festival, not only because
it provides me with chances to meet Montana writers and be
introduced to their work, but also because it offers the occasion to
revisit a state for whose landscape and people I have developed a
great admiration and fondness.

Having said that, I must also confess a certain uneasiness at
this moment, the uneasiness of the interloper and trespasser. After
all, I have written two novels, The Englishman’s Boy and The Last
Crossing, which are set in part in Montana, a place that is not mine
and which as a Canadian I cannot pretend to know intimately, or
inhabit imaginatively in the way that would be second nature to
a native Montanan. For someone in my position, there is always
the feeling that the three-legged stool you thought you had sat
down on has proved at best to have two legs, and maybe only one.
So I tender both an apology and an excuse, my only justification
for invading your turf is that although my characters
start their
journeys in Fort Benton, Montana, I get them across the border
and into Canadian territory as quickly as possible.

I wish to make one other point, and that is that in the time
in which my novels are set (the 1870s), the border between Canada
and the United States was a work in progress, remarkably fluid and
remarkably porous. The American historian, Paul Sharp, argued
this over fifty years ago in his book, Whoop-Up Country, which
explored the economic and political connections that existed
between Fort Benton, the head of navigation on the Missouri, and
the hinterlands of present-day Saskatchewan and Alberta, an era
in which taxes in Fort Benton could be paid in either American or
Canadian currency, a circumstance that, for a Canadian living now
with the burden of an eighty-some-odd cents dollar, seems too
marvellous to be credited.

The great American writer, Wallace Stegner, in his wonderful
memoir Wolf Willow, also dwells on the mingling of American and
Canadian culture he experienced during homesteading days when
his family shifted across the border with the frequency and alacrity
of nomads. And, of course, the Canadian historian Hugh Dempsey,
among others, has also written extensively on the Montana/Canada
connection.

It is in this tradition that I have worked for the past decade
and I provide it as context for my struggle to become an historical
novelist, to attempt to understand what I was doing, why I was
doing it, and what obligations I owed to the rendering of the past
to history or to the novel.

At one point I aspired to become an academic historian,
but strayed and fell by the wayside. This apostasy started in
graduate school, where I stole time that was supposed to have
been used to research a master’s thesis and frittered it away
by guiltily writing short stories—a warning for anyone who supervises graduate students. Watch them closely; otherwise they may end very badly indeed.

By the time I had completed a master's degree in history—just a teeny bit late due to extra-curricular literary activities—I realized I was temperamentally disqualified from becoming a professional historian. In his famous essay, “The Hedgehog and the Fox,” Isaiah Berlin quotes a line from the Greek poet Archilochus: “The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing.” What had originally attracted me to the study of history was the wide-ranging nature of the discipline, touching on so many subjects: economics, politics, philosophy, sociology, constitutional studies, art, science, military matters, diplomacy—the list is endless. History had seemed the ideal match for someone like me who was constitutionally a fox, or perhaps more truthfully, a dilettante. What I failed to recognize back then was that while the reading of history is the activity of a fox, the writing of history is essentially the activity of a hedgehog, an attempt to use the tools of analysis to make intelligible a myriad of detail and to synthesize it into some over-arching meaning. Wallace Stegner put it succinctly in discussing the work of his good friend, Bernard DeVoto, who wrote both fiction and history.

The historian reserves the right of judgment, the right of manipulating time, the right of doing things simultaneously, of being in all minds at once, of being, in other words, omniscient….

A novelist these days is seldom judgmental or omniscient in the historical sense. [Bernard DeVoto] was much better at the historical judgment, holding a lot of facts in his head, seeing the whole picture, making these pieces fit the picture, and being a god manipulating the machine, than he was at being a ventriloquist and speaking out of a single mouth, or, as he would have to, if he were a real fictionist, speaking serially out of many mouths. Faulkner could speak out of any mouth and still be absolutely right. That’s a major difference between a Benny DeVoto and a Faulkner.

I was more suited to play ventriloquist than adopt the single, rational voice of the historian. This was not a matter of choice, of deciding one point of view was better, grander, more worthy than the other, but a simple recognition of what I could and could not do.

So history and I parted ways and I commenced to write short stories and novels which one reviewer recently characterized as “dark, claustrophobic, domestic dramas.” Nevertheless, while toiling away in the satanic mills of dark, claustrophobic, domestic drama, I retained my love of history, and in an amateurish fashion continued to read it. For fifteen years, I made no attempt to manifest this interest by incorporating historical matter into my fiction. The simple reason was that I suspected that the historical training I had received would tie me up in knots, that I would be too concerned with accuracy, fairness, and rigorous interpretation to reconcile
these elements with the aesthetic demands of the novel.

However, in the 1990s on an excursion to the Saskatchewan Archives I stumbled upon an intriguing sentence in the Annual Report of the Saskatchewan Department of Public Works, the government body charged at the beginning of the twentieth century with the administration of the North Battleford Asylum for the Insane. That sentence acknowledged the assistance provided by patients who had taken over many of the duties of the medical and support staff during the Spanish flu pandemic of 1919. This one cryptic remark became the basis for a play that featured a shell-shocked veteran of the Great War, his struggles with the rigid Superintendent of the Asylum, and the devastation visited on patients and those in charge of the asylum by the outbreak of the flu. In trying to research the play, I discovered that there was very little material to draw on; most records from the period had been lost, destroyed, or were otherwise unavailable. The little that was extant provided some arresting material, rumours of scandal in the running of the institution, an investigation into the death of an inmate that hinted at abuse, some insight into treatments employed. I supplemented this information by reading works on the evolution of psychiatric treatment, a few standard medical textbooks of the time, as well as histories and memoirs of the Great War to provide background and context. In the end, however, the play was almost totally imagined, filled with invention and speculation. Despite being in some sense “historical,” the writing of the play relied on instinct, and was fuelled by guesses about the meaning of that single sentence that appeared in the Annual Report of the Department of Public Works. There were too many gaps in the record for me to be contradicted, and the unknown provided me with a measure of confidence, soothed my conscience over the matter of fidelity to the historical record.

This initiation was liberating, and I began to see the past not so much as a daunting minefield, but a fertile pasture of rich incidents and stories that could be exploited by a novelist. The play, “Dancock’s Dance,” was followed by two novels, The Englishman’s Boy, a book loosely based on the massacre of Assiniboine Indians by a band of wolfers in the early 1870s, and The Last Crossing in which Jerry Potts, a figure out of Montana and Western Canadian history and closely identified with the North-west Mounted Police, makes an appearance. Despite my experience with the play, writing these books proved to be more difficult than I had anticipated. The residue left by my historical training led me to be suspicious of the impulses of the novelist, and the novelist resisted what remained of the historian. One part of me agreed with those historians who see “faction” or “fictory” as the work of magpies who pick all the shiny, entertaining bits from the past, tart them up a little more, and then try to pass these gaudy trinkets off as the real goods—Gresham’s Law at work, bad currency driving out good. The other part of me kept whispering that my duty was to serve the characters; the story came first, to hell with considered judgment. I found I was constantly asking my divided self what I was up to, or should be up to.

The first question I had to attempt to answer was: What defines the historical novel? The easiest answer is a novel whose action is set in the past. But the passage of time ensures that this is a description that will, inevitably, apply to all novels. For Jane Austen’s first readers, Pride and Prejudice was contemporary fiction, but from our standpoint her characters live, breathe, and scheme in
a world far removed from our own. At some point, even the work of relentlessly contemporary novelists such as John Updike will inevitably find itself embedded like a fly in the amber of the past. Eventually, I concluded that what distinguishes novels merely set in “long-ago days” from true historical novels is the consciousness of, and concern for the subject of history itself that such books display. They are written out of a belief that the unseen hand of history is everywhere at work in the present, that history is one of the ways by which we come to understand ourselves, not only as beings in society, but also as individuals. In this way, paradoxically, historical novels are also modern because they are interested in discovering how and why we have become what we are—perhaps to an even greater degree than conventional history—and they tend to blur the emotional distinction between past and present. To quote T.S. Eliot’s poem “Burnt Norton,” “Time present and time past/ Are both perhaps present in time future, / And time future contained in time past.”

In an attempt to support this proposition, I will have to refer to my own novels, *The Englishman’s Boy* and *The Last Crossing*, for no other reason than I have access to the motivations behind the writing of them. I apologize for this since most of you will be unfamiliar with these books, but this puts you in good company—the vast majority of humanity isn’t. So I hope you will bear with me.

When I embarked on the writing of *The Englishman’s Boy*, I was not completely conscious of what I was up to—novelists seldom are. But in retrospect, it’s not surprising that living in a media-obsessed age I should write a novel chronicling the beginning of the Hollywood dream factory, or that faced with daily evidence of the resurgence of fascism I should reflect on the political uses of film in political propaganda, two strands present in that novel. Or that living in Western Canada where the relationship between First Nations’ people and those of European descent is presently so fraught, that this novel should consider the political consequences of the Cypress Hills Massacre, a scarcely remarked incident in Canadian history that, I believe, had momentous consequences for the future of my country. Likewise, *The Last Crossing* contemplates a moment in Western Canadian history that decisively marked the passing of the old way of life for aboriginals, and tries to employ the figure of the scout and mixed-race Blackfoot warrior, Jerry Potts, as the embodiment of what I consider to be the shared history of whites and natives, not a story of two races inhabiting absolute, separate, and remote existences in the West.

With time, I also came to believe that one of the truly distinguishing features of most historical novels is that capital H History, directly or indirectly, achieves the status of a character. This is most apparent in Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*, animated as it is by Tolstoy’s mystical notion that it is the common people, attending to their daily lives and unaware of great events, who further the unknowable, unconscious motions of history, rather than the Napoleons who vainly believe they control historical forces but are, in reality, no more than history’s puppets. While this tendency to “characterize” history is most marked in Tolstoy, who appended a theoretical essay about the nature of history to *War and Peace* just in case anybody missed his point, it is also true of all the great classic historical novelists, those who set the standards for all who followed. As the Marxist literary critic
George Lukacs pointed out, Walter Scott conceived of the history of the British Isles as the triumph of a “middle way.” In *Ivanhoe*, the struggle between Saxon and Norman achieves reconciliation in King Richard, foreshadowing the founding of a nation that will be neither Saxon nor Norman, but English. And by implication, Walter Scott may also have optimistically anticipated the fusion of Scots and English into a nation that would be neither, but simply British. Stendhal, whose historical consciousness was formed by French Enlightenment and Revolutionary thought, views Italian political intrigue in *The Charterhouse of Parma* through the lens of the *philosophes*, and Napoleon hovers over every one of the hero’s actions as a presiding spirit, and guide. The work of Pushkin, Gogol, Balzac, and James Fenimore Cooper all demonstrate similarly strong, personal conceptions of what history is and how it is to be understood. Among our contemporaries, Gore Vidal is possessed of equally passionate notions. His certainty that the United States turned its back on republican virtue for the blandishments of imperial glory is an argument that runs through all of his historical novels set in America.

Even postmodernism’s version of the historical novel, labelled by some critics as historiographic metafiction, places history at centre stage, even though centre stage often holds a prisoner’s box. Sceptical about master narratives, the objectivity of history and the coherence of identities, postmodernists typically rewrite the past from the point of view of those who have been victimized (women, native peoples, gays, etc.). The postmodern attitude has greatly influenced all current writers of historical fiction, often nudging them to be the first into fields that were largely ignored by historians.

Adopting an even more radical stance, some historiographic metafictionists go one step further, knowingly disrupting chronology, introducing supernatural occurrences and obviously historically inaccurate elements to remind the reader that history is a relative construct, riddled with subjectivity. The more wild-eyed of the postmodernists refuse to admit any real separation between fiction and history since both, in their view, are human-made “ways of world-making.”

Now it comes as no surprise to any historian (unless his name happens to be Rip Van Winkle) that history is in some sense “subjective.” Jacob Burkhardt conceded the point over a hundred years ago. But because history, like the novel, displays subjective elements does not necessarily mean they are one and the same thing. While it is true historians are not granted exemption from the cultural conditioning undergone by novelists or even barroom raconteurs, surely the stories they create are significantly different because historians, unlike novelists, rest their cases on something called evidence. Like evidence offered in a court of law these proofs may be partial, flawed, or distorted. Differing interpretations are likely to be drawn from them. But once entered into the record they become the subject of scrutiny, debate, and revision in the way novels seldom are, or should be. If history is simply a subjective construct and nothing but, all argument about the validity of the claims of a book like *Mein Kampf* appear to be pointless because, after all, it too is a “way of world-making.” Yet some historical novelists make a further, unreasonable claim that their representations are “truer” than standard histories because the artist’s intuition, or supposed mystical insights into the nature of the past are more likely to be “correct” than mere facts. This is an attitude so incomprehensible to me that
my only reaction to it is a dropped jaw. I made a feeble attempt in *The Englishman’s Boy* to parody this attitude. A movie producer, Damon Ira Chance, gives another character, Harry Vincent, a long lecture about how to make successful movies. At the risk of boring you to tears, I would like to offer an extract from Chance’s monologue to Harry Vincent, a young scenario writer. The encounter is described in Vincent’s words:

Chance announces, “Americans are a practical people, they like facts. Facts are solid, they’re dependable. The average American feels foolish when he enjoys a made-up story, feels sheepish, childish, a mooner, a dreamer. But entertain him with facts and you give him permission to enjoy himself without guilt. He needn’t feel swindled, or hoodwinked, a hick sold a bill of goods by a carnival barker. He prefers to feel virtuous because he’s learned something useful, *informed* himself, *improved* himself.

“You mark my words, Harry, there’ll come a day when the public won’t swallow any of our stories unless they believe them to be real. Everybody wants the real thing, or thinks they do. Truth is stranger than fiction, someone said. It may not be, but it’s more satisfying. Facts are the bread America wants to eat. The poetry of facts is the poetry of the American soul.

“Of course,” he qualifies, “the facts in picture making must be shaped by intuition.” He pauses dramatically. “I learned that at the feet of Bergson. I am a Bergsonian,” he declares, a little like Aimee Semple McPherson might declare she is a Christian.

I haven’t the slightest clue what a Bergsonian is, but it sounds vaguely like Theosophy, or something worse. “A Bergsonian?” I say.

Chance answers, “…Bergson taught that received ideas, habit, routine, turn a man into an automaton, a robot. What distinguished a man from a robot is not intelligence—presumably a machine might some day be constructed that could outperform a man in the rational faculties—but intuition. The intellect, Bergson says, is designed to apprehend the external world but cannot plumb the inner world of things. It’s the wrong tool, Harry. Intuition has its roots in our deepest being, a being that we are scarcely aware of, and because we are scarcely aware of it, it remains our truest, most uncorrupted self. My intuition, my will, is the clue to my hidden self. Through intuition it is possible for me to penetrate whatever shares my fluid and changeable nature—other human beings, all art (and here Chance takes a lengthy pause for emphasis) history. Analysis puts a man outside the things he studies, while intuition puts him inside. Analysis therefore renders partial knowledge while intuition renders absolute knowledge.”
Chance’s admiration for facts was intended as a tongue in cheek warning to my readers to be aware of treating historical novels as being accurate or reliable as sources of information. There was, I thought, another caution embedded in Chance’s lecture. I had also hoped to signal my disapproval of the movie producer’s celebration of the primacy of intuition by depicting him as half-mad, messianic, and a megalomaniac. However, I failed miserably, at least with “artistic” types. On a number of occasions, individuals have approached me to congratulate me for arguing that intuition is a higher form of knowledge, a more perfect tool to grasp the real meaning of all human enterprises, including history.

Now while I would be the last person to argue intuition is inessential to any human activity, I am leery of the metafictionists’ assumptions about the nature of history and believe they are mistaken to muddy the very real distinction between history and historical fiction on the grounds that both are “subjective.” I also wish to raise the obvious point that historical novelists are very much indebted to historians, an intellectual debt they seldom acknowledge. Few historical novelists engage in primary research, but rely on works that are the fruits of historians. We are the pilot fish that circle the sharks, and nibble on the morsels left trailing in the water after the historians have taken their big bites from the subject.

On the other hand, I think it equally wrong to dismiss the historical novel because it does not employ the methods that apply to the writing of history proper, just as it would be wrong to complain that a history does not read like a novel, a frequent complaint of people who accuse historians of seizing on a vibrant subject, sucking the blood out of it, and offering nothing but a grey corpse to the public, a corpse so dissected and autopsied as to be frightening in its lifelessness. To compare the two is to compare apples and oranges. They are not the same thing, and should not be. One of the obvious examples of difference is the approach that the historical novelist takes to research. As a writer of fiction I live and breathe minutiae, quirky odds and ends of information. For a novelist, it is not the devil that is found in the details. The details are where God resides. A novel cries out for texture to lend it verisimilitude. Characters need to wear clothes, eat, sit on furniture, read books, use tools, and have occupations. So I have spent innumerable hours searching out material on nineteenth-century firearms, medical treatments, reading anthropological monographs on native culture and religion, researching the cut and appearance of the uniforms of the Iron Brigade that saw action in the American Civil War on the side of the Union. A friend and I have bounced a four-wheel drive between Fort Benton, Montana, and the Cypress Hills of Saskatchewan trying to approximate the likely route of the wolfers involved in the Cypress Hills Massacre, and I have tramped the ravines where the Battle of Belly River was fought, trying to form an impression of what it might have been like for the Cree and Blackfoot warriors who met on that field, to see the terrain they encountered, the sky and the river.

I have watched videos of all the films of the early American film maker D. W. Griffith, the infamous director of the racially charged Birth of a Nation, who naively believed that film would settle all historical disputes because every significant event would be recorded and preserved in vast archives of celluloid and hence argument and interpretation could be dispensed with, banished by fact, making history finally and irrevocably “democratic.” Griffith
prided himself on historical accuracy in his movie making, and in
the controversy surrounding the release of *A Birth of a Nation*, a
film President Wilson was reported to have described as, “History
written in lightning.” Griffith offered a considerable sum to
anyone who could point out a single error in his depiction of
Reconstruction and the rise of the Ku Klux Klan. When a member
of the fledgling NAACP asked him when did a black legislator in
the South ever kidnap a white woman in an attempt to force her to
marry him, Griffith failed to pony up the cash.

*The Englishman’s Boy* is composed of two narrative strands,
one set in the year of the Cypress Hills Massacre, 1873; the
other, for the sake of symbolic resonance, half a century later in
Hollywood. In that novel, I intended to have a movie producer
assassinated outside a landmark theatre during the premiere of
his film. What better choice than the iconic Grauman’s Chinese
Theatre? The problem was that I discovered Grauman’s Chinese
Theatre had not been built in 1923. However, I learned that
Grauman’s Egyptian Theatre was actually in service that year. I
seized on this as a second choice. Unfortunately, it proved nearly
impossible to find a picture of the movie palace that could provide
a basis for my description of it. Obsessively, I searched for weeks,
and finally discovered a reproduction of a postcard in a movie
history that gave me enough details to sketch a portrayal.

Just as I felt I was required to visit the site of the Battle of
Belly River, I felt it necessary to hunker amid the lodge pole pine
in the Cypress Hills for several hours one night to listen to the
wind in the trees, the sounds of small animals creeping about the
undergrowth, to regard the prairie stars, and suffer a swarm of
blood-thirsty mosquitoes to write a scene for *The Englishman’s Boy.*

Historians may absorb such details as background and context
for their work, but the novelist *foregrounds* these things, shifts
them to centre stage, and spotlights them. I doubt that a historian
of medieval religion would be prompted to scourge herself to
understand the sensations of flagellants, but perhaps I am wrong.
I do suspect if she took such drastic steps she would be an item of
discussion among her colleagues.

Yet no matter how masochistically conscientious some
historical novelists may be in their peculiar forms of research,
they seldom treat research and sources in the scrupulous fashion
of the professional historian. In fact, novelists have traditionally
skirted the problem of evidence and accuracy by focussing on some
dramatic, little-known incident whose principal figures remain
largely unknown to the public, which is the strategy I adopted, by
chance, after working on my play about the Spanish flu pandemic.
The lack of evidence provided me with freedom. Lacunae provided
room for fictional manoeuvring and invention. At heart, this choice
is dictated by aesthetic considerations. A novel written about
say—Abraham Lincoln—has the problem of struggling against
widespread conceptions of who Lincoln was and what he signified,
and any departure from the general view has enormous obstacles
to overcome to become convincing. So my subjects have been the
Cypress Hills Massacre and Jerry Potts, an incident and a person
that have never been much documented or written about.

There is another consideration that claims the attention of
the historical novelist—believability. In some instances, research
provides a gift to the fiction writer. An account of a herd of buffalo
crossing the Missouri in the 1870s could be incorporated into *The
Englishman’s Boy* with scarcely any alteration. On the other hand,
Donald Cameron, who travelled with the wolfers involved in the Cypress Hills Massacre and, who much later became a successful Canadian politician, offered me a first hand account of the men in his party firing on a bull buffalo, simultaneously breaking all four of its legs, and still being charged by the enraged beast. I wanted this incident in my novel, but I thought four broken legs would stretch any reader’s credulity. I settled for one. I didn’t want Cameron’s report to seem so outrageously fictitious.

No conscientious historian would do what I did, that is doctor and amend a source. As a writer of fiction qualified by an adjective—historical—I was confronted with the problem, To what do I owe my primary allegiance? The demands of history, or the demands of the novel? In the end, I clearly opted for what I felt was necessary to ensure the artistic integrity of the novel. I entered the camp of Mark Twain who said, “First get your facts. Then do with them what you will.” I decided the noun novel was more important than the adjective historical.

There are other instances of my choices being governed by the requirements of the novel. Early accounts of the Cypress Hills Massacre describe the Assiniboine chief Little Soldier’s head being triumphantly paraded around on a lodge pole after the victory of the wolfers. Later writers discount this. But as a novelist, pursuing drama, it was the earliest account that I chose to use in The Englishman’s Boy. More recent historical work suggests that a number of Assiniboine women were taken captive by the wolfers and raped, but in my novel I visited this indignity on a single young girl, chose to focus all the violence on her because given the constraints of space and the pacing of the narrative, it struck me that this would create a stronger, more horrific moment. These are clearly artistic, not historical decisions.

Another matter that concerns the historical novelist is the language he deploys in portraying the past, whether or not it will seem to the reader as being true and authentic. This is not the concern of the historian, who has no need to draw the veil of illusion over his judgements, or to masquerade as an actor present at the events he describes and discusses.

When reading bad historical fiction what often struck me was how the characters often sounded ludicrous, wrong. Queen Boudicca in a metal brassiere, talking like Andrea Dworkin. How was I to avoid that pitfall in creating those serial voices that Wallace Stegner maintained were essential to effective fiction? While researching The Englishman’s Boy I naively assumed that all those memoirs by cowboys, trappers, and traders that I had devoured would give me a model for my dialogue, but when I began to write the novel I was left with a sinking feeling. A passage from L. A. Huffman who arrived at Fort Keogh, Montana, in 1878, to take up a position there as post photographer will probably communicate my reservations. It’s his description of someone riding a recalcitrant horse named Zebra.

Next thing we see is this wild man leadin’ old Zebra out of the bunch with this hackamore of his. Now, Zebra, he’s one of these splay-footed old hellyans that’ll stand kinder spraddled, thoughtful and meek-like for saddling, never making a flounce until his man starts swingin’ up; then of a sudden he breaks out er-rocketing’, hoggin’, sunfishin’ and plowin’ up the yarth for about seven jumps, when he
changes ends, caterpillers, goin’ over back quicker’n lightnin’ . . . He gives Twodot a savage look like a trapped wolf, tucks the loose coil of that hackamore rope into his belt, and just walks onto that hoss; never tries to find the off-stirrup, but stands high in the nigh one, a-rakin’ old Zeeb up and down and reachin’ for the root of his tail and jabbin’ him with his heel every jump until he goes to the earth, feet upwards like a bear fightin’ bees.

Now a good many of those who published reminiscences of the old West, such as Andy Garcia, spout language remarkably similar to Huffman’s. They may have been influenced by dime novel Westerns they undoubtedly read, or perhaps average Montanans of the 1870s actually talked this gibberish. At this distance it is difficult to know. The problem is that this speech, even if it is authentic and correct, can only strike modern readers as parody, leaving them feeling like they’ve been dropped into the Mel Brooks’ movie Blazing Saddles to be harangued by actors cranked on hallucinogens and mimicking Gabby Hayes, Walter Brennan, and Slim Pickens. As a literary language it is worse than inadequate, it is laughable.

What I settled for was an illusion of authenticity. So my characters all talk an artificial, invented language that I hoped the reader would swallow as historical. At one point in the novel the observation is made that nobody could place the Englishman’s boy’s accent. Little wonder, since he speaks a dialect that owes a little to Huffman and a little to Huckleberry Finn; just as my Hollywood scenarist, Rachel Gold’s speech is an amalgam of Dorothy Parker and Anita Loos; and my movie producer Damon Ira Chance’s voice echoes Henry Adams’ at his most magisterial, with an occasional shot of verbal laxative derived from H. L. Mencken.

When I came to write The Last Crossing, the problem was even more acute since most of the novel is constructed in the form of a series of first person narratives by an Irish immigrant, an American veteran of the Civil War, an Oxford-educated English painter, and an American frontierswoman. Again, I had little to go on in many of these cases, but in others, for instance the cultivated Englishman, I could make use of nineteenth century British novels and memoirs, etc., for a tentative model of articulation. But again, even Charles Gaunt’s way of expressing himself had to be tempered and diluted, in a sense “modernized.” To pattern myself too slavishly on even a great writer such as George Eliot, would inevitably read as noticeably artificial. So why did I run the risk of multiple first-person narratives? Because in my mind, at its heart The Last Crossing was about clashing perspectives conditioned by race, education, culture, and class, and to convey that convincingly I felt it necessary that all the characters, in Stegner’s phrase, be “absolutely right,” at least in their own minds. That is, they needed to see the world only with their eyes, and shape what they saw with their consciousnesses, to announce their judgements with conviction, and to appear to speak without mediation. It seemed necessary to me that their assumptions be individualized, expressed in the terms of their own lives and experiences. Although I hoped my hand in all this would remain hidden, I admit I was attempting to guide the reader’s responses, but indirectly, not in the fashion of historians by laying bare their conclusions in summary, or by
weighing all pertinent evidence and subjecting it to rigorous, logical scrutiny. The historian is mostly interested in causation and consequence, the novelist in depicting these forces as they impinge on individual characters that are, in all probability, unaware of what is happening to them in the larger sense.

So what, if anything, is the justification for the historical novel? All I have for an answer is a handful of maybes. Maybe the role of historical fiction is simply to present the past as a textured, lived experience, experience from the “inside.” The single, authoritative voice of the historian is the voice of abstraction, analysis, generalization. It gives us what the nineteenth-century Italian historical novelist Manzoni described as what “men have performed.” But how they revealed their individuality, he says, “all this history passes by almost in silence; and all this is the domain of poetry.” In other words, this is the arena of serial, multiple voices that insistently remind us that historical abstractions were once acted out by flesh and blood, and that historical struggles were also once human struggles with much at stake. This view, I would argue, helps promote a stronger emotional identification with the past and encourages the feeling that history is not broken up into then and now but can also be regarded as an experiential continuum.

Centuries ago, the Italian philosopher of history, Giambattista Vico, posited a radical idea for his time. He stated that history derived from humble human origins and not divine providence. Historical fiction reminds us of these humble human origins. Or as the epigraph to my novel The Englishman’s Boy, plucked from the Canadian historian Donald Creighton states, “History is the record of an encounter between character and circumstance . . . the encounter between character and circumstance is essentially a story.” Some historians might dispute Creighton’s characterization of history as too simplistic, but for me it is the most apt description of the sort of fiction I endeavour to write.

For me, the historical novel is an idiosyncratic way of contemplating history and its possible meanings. The voices of the historical novel, in succession, and sometimes in opposition, ask us to remember that the past was never as clear, or as simple for those who had to live it as we might nostalgically imagine. The lesson of the historical novel simply may be that the past was every bit as problematic as the present, and why shouldn’t it have been—since past and present are so intimately linked? As well, the clamour of voices in the historical novel, all speaking their own brand of the truth, may prompt us to the realization that our understanding of the past needs to be won by our own efforts, that history is a subject to be thought through and pondered upon individually. In writing The Englishman’s Boy I had hoped to issue a warning: beware of anyone who hands you history too neatly packaged whether it come wrapped up in histories, films, or historical novels.

And yet, despite the differences in approach, perhaps historians and historical novelists share more common ground than might be supposed. We both turn our eyes to the past because we think there is actually something valuable to be discovered there. When I was a student at the University of Saskatchewan, Hilda Neatby, the head of the history department, was a fierce critic of progressive education and its tendency to dismiss historical knowledge. In a polemic she posed this rhetorical question, writing, “It is the pride of the machine age that we can now understand, manipulate and control men as we do machines. Why should we look at the evidence of human
joys, sorrows, failures, and achievements in the past? It would almost be an admission of defeat.” In an age in which mammoth bureaucracies, faceless corporations, and vague concepts such as globalisation adopt the robes of divine providence and increasingly act as if human beings are machines, powerless to influence their destinies, history and historical fiction may help provide a sober second voice by reminding us that we live by our choices, both past and present. In an age in which political rhetoric and national diplomacy has become increasingly Manichean, increasingly simplified and reductionist in outlook, to insist on the complexity of the past is to insist on the complexity of the present. Perhaps the “evidence of human joys, sorrows, and achievements in the past,” whether expressed by the different means chosen by historians and historical novelists, is a worthy, and necessary work of the present moment.
ESSAYS: FILM (& LITERATURE)
**Brokeback Mountain’s Montana Slope**  
Karl Olson

“Where is the ranch boy who thinks he may be gay?” Melissa Kwasny asks in her critique (published in *Writing Montana* [Montana Center for the Book, 1996]) of the epic anthology of Montana literature *The Last Best Place*. That ranch boy—born dirt-poor just south of Montana’s border, bred in Annie Proulx’s rich imagination, and conspicuously missing from the western canon—is now sauntering twenty-five feet high across America’s multiplex screens. His newfound visibility, at odds with his taciturn instincts, is another phenomenon—not unlike killer blizzards or same-sex desire—best handled with Ennis Del Marr’s classic stoicism: “If you can’t fix it you gotta stand it.”

According to Kwasny, canon can be problematic: “It has an unspoken message that comes with it.” But lay a graceful tilde over the word, thereby transforming sacred text (canon) into geographical trope (canyon), and we stumble upon the “control zone” for many a sexually curious westerner. For while both wilderness and wilding sexuality have been largely bulldozed by the hetero-industrial complex, historically Ennis and Jack Twist and their ilk have always been kicking around this region, heading for the slopes and loving in the canyons. In 1908 Edward Stevenson, the first American to publish a defense of homosexuality, declared: “The wide agricultural ‘West’ . . . is pervaded with uranian [homosexual] tendencies.” Forty years later, Kinsey would note, “the highest frequencies of the homosexual which we have ever secured anywhere have been . . . in some of the more remote sections of the country. . . . [T]here is a fair amount of sexual contact among the older males in Western rural areas.” In his study of nineteenth-century western fiction, Chris Packard confirms that the cowboy is fundamentally queer: “His code permits few ‘norms’ . . . but his popularity grants him wide latitude in terms of exercising his queer power.”

Proulx’s observation of a sixty-year-old ranch hand in a bar in Sheridan inspired *Brokeback’s* tale of displaced desire. Proulx is a former technical writer who researches the hell out of her subjects. It’s likely that the real-life surveillance and imagined scenarios unfolding in Proulx’s landscape are augmented by ample readings in the western genre. From Wister’s *Virginian* to Missoulian Kim Zupan’s story “The Mourning of Ignacio Rosa” (published in *The Best of Montana’s Short Fiction* [The Lyons Press, 2004]), ranching literature is bolstered by a solid (if unappreciated) sidebar of homoerotic-tragic fiction. Proulx must surely have tapped some of these queer reserves.

In fact, I view the Montana-based, genre- and gender-transgressive fiction of Thomas Savage as both literary ancestor and companion pieces to “Brokeback Mountain.” When Savage’s 1967 novel *The Power of the Dog* was republished by Little Brown in 2001, it featured an analytical afterword by Proulx. Proulx categorizes Savage’s work as a late entry in the “golden age of landscape fiction” alongside Cather and Steinbeck. For readers who hunger for more of *Brokeback’s* air, Savage’s fiction is a perfect—though no less tragic—counterpart. While Proulx’s protagonists in “Brokeback Mountain” enter and leave this world inauspiciously—impoverished and orphaned, undisciplined and victimized—Savage tells the stories of Montana’s landed gentry, the concerns Jack and Ennis would work for or (if they were lucky) marry into. Savage’s
men are not immune from falling from grace however, and given their inherited advantages, they fall hard.

In 1863 Thomas Savage’s ancestors struck it rich in southwest Montana mining districts, developed the area, and launched a ranching dynasty that straddled the border of two states. His grandmother Elizabeth Yearian, “the sheep queen,” was Idaho’s first woman legislator, and his grandfather, Jack Brenner, was a Montana legislator. Savage was born in 1915. When he was five, his mother remarried. Mother and son moved to the Brenner ranch in Horse Prairie. The adult Savage worked as a riding instructor, dude ranch operator, railroad brakeman, shipyard welder, and English professor before turning to writing full-time, and migrated from West to East Coasts with his wife Elizabeth (also a novelist). In 1944 Savage published his first novel, *The Pass*, and launched a forty-plus year investigation of queerness in the Beaverhead Valley. Even after reissue of *The Power of the Dog* and *I Heard My Sister Call My Name* in 2002 (as *The Sheep Queen*), Savage’s apparent betrayal of western myth excluded him from that circle of writers who are celebrated for elevating Montanans’ self-esteem and property values. After Elizabeth’s death, Savage moved to San Francisco to, as his family puts it, “take part in the lifestyle there.” Thomas Savage died in 2003.

On the surface Savage’s Montana is a world of “the usual and the expected, the appearance of the sun, the chilling voice of wild geese wedging south, the breakup of the ice, the shy green grass on the slopes, the heady breezes that disturb the purple camas. Sun, geese, and waving camas all point to the knowable future, and the world was well” (*Power*, 265–266). Characters preside over sprawling ranches, build the infrastructure that links the Beaverhead Valley to Salt Lake City stockyards or Butte’s amenities, and attempt to keep the valley “beaten, roped, and hog-tied.” But the cycle of seasons and work belies darker currents. Nature does some wrangling of its own. Sometimes a man loses his land, or a lover. Sexually ambiguous ranch hands find their voices, and introverted, ostracized youngsters save the day.

In the mythic West Savage unravels, manhood is defined by one’s ability to control land—and sexuality. In *The Corner of Rife and Pacific* (1987) John Metlen’s ranch—where “damp soil exuded seminal odors and the air was rich with the promise of growth”—is his identity. “Such aristocracy as existed in the West was based squarely on ownership of the land,” Savage explains. “It’s a privilege to able to piss on your own land. If you can’t piss on it, you don’t own it.” John worries that his son Zack will not take over the ranch, and his wife responds, “Why should a man be trapped because he’s a man?” When the Metlen ranch is finally repossessed, John is emasculated. Forced by economics to move to Dillon, where the eyes of close neighbors “cast a lien” on one’s property, he begins to rethink the “hidden contours” of his life.

John is haunted by the memory of his childhood association with the outcast David Lubin, and conflates this memory with his son’s unconventional traits. As a youngster John had “taken a new gun to bed, but only because his father had given it to him.” David, on the other hand

played the piano, which is a thing usually done by your mother or your aunt. He was of fragile build,
they called it scrawny, and his eyes were careful not to meet anyone’s . . . David knew the social order on the playground and in the halls of the high school. And David had accepted that order, every bit of it, and dismissed it as a cripple dismisses his clubfoot—simply a part of him (52–55).

Social acceptance of David “could not be granted in that town, in that day, or in any town, in any day. Sheep steer clear of goats . . . .” John is shocked when Zack, now a soldier, bounds from a train and hugs him “in public, in town, in a country where it is understood that no man touches another man.” In time that shock is absorbed by John’s own quiet defection. Looking back, he regrets not befriending David Lubin: “Maybe if he had, things would have been different for them.”

Written twenty years earlier, The Power of the Dog provides an example of how “things could have been different” for two males in the rural West—and brings us closer to Brokeback’s shadow. Middle-aged bachelor brothers George and Phil Burbank run the family ranch south of Dillon in the 1920s. George marries a widow from a nearby railroad town, and inherits her twelve-year-old son, Peter. George’s desertion brings out an animosity in Phil that leads to a series of showdowns between Phil and those whom he believes are encroaching on his all-male idyll. Phil is rude, a misogynist, a racist, and he takes pleasure in belittling his intellectual inferiors. But Phil also has a capacity for passion and a vulnerable past, subtler qualities that tend to wither in the clashes generated by Phil’s villainy.

Savage uses geology to reveal Phil’s softer side. A hillside serves as a gauge for a mystical gift—the ability to “arrange the facts of Nature into patterns that would stir the senses.”

In the outcropping of rocks on the hill that rose up before the ranchhouse, in the tangled growth of sagebrush that scarred the hill’s face like acne he saw the astonishing figure of a running dog . . . in pursuit of some frightened thing—some idea—that fled across the draws and ridges and shadows of the northern hills. But there was no doubt in Phil’s mind of the end of that pursuit. The dog would have its prey. Phil had only to raise his eyes to the hill to smell the dog’s breath. But vivid as that huge power was, no one but one other had seen it . . . (66–67).

Phil discovers that Peter, like “one other” before him, sees the running dog.

Phil, at that moment in that place that smelled of years felt in his throat what he’d felt once before and dear God knows never expected nor wanted to feel again, for the loss of it breaks your heart. . . . The boy wanted to become him, to merge with him as Phil had only once before wanted to become one with someone . . . (262–263).

Encoded in Phil’s “Hound of the Hills” is the memory of an older cowboy pursuing, and catching, the ranch scion. Bronco
Henry was “that best of cowboys” who “made one of the prettiest rides a fellow ever saw.” He also broke from “the usual tribe of men,” both by loving men, and by defying death in the corral. Phil returned Henry’s affections, but he could not prevent Death from reciprocating Henry’s scorn. A young Phil had watched helplessly from the top rail as the only person he thought he could love was trampled. Twenty years later Phil takes up Henry’s mantle, trains his desire on Peter, and sets in motion his own demise and Power’s breathtaking finish.

Savage’s and Proulx’s stories are not “gay” in the pop culture sense; they are run through with homoeroticism, but they are contextualized more by homophobia than idealized homosexuality. Proulx’s stark “Brokeback Mountain” delivers the sex, but withholds an ultimate ride into the sunset. Savage, a more lyrical writer, whose oeuvre is rooted in a less tolerant time, conceded, “the thing unsaid is more potent than the thing said.” Together, these innately western fictions do not aspire to uplift or console. But they are pragmatic. If the gay lives of Jack, Ennis, Phil, and Bronco Henry end unhappily, they do so to remind Montanans of our constitutional obligation to restore the dignity of even the queerest “tough old birds.”
“Unique and Handsome”: Cass Gilbert’s Designs for the Montana Club

Patty Dean

On a snowy Monday evening in late April 1903, a fierce fire raced through all six floors of the Montana Club in downtown Helena, Montana. Within three hours, the stone and brick structure, considered by a local newspaper to be the “most magnificent building this side of Chicago devoted to club purposes,” was a total ruin with losses of $150,000.

Twelve years earlier, in 1891, the members of the fledgling Montana Club—after meeting in members’ offices and business blocks for six years—had launched a subscription drive to raise $75,000 to build a permanent clubhouse.

In 1891 the Club purchased a triangular lot for $45,000 in downtown Helena from Samuel T. Hauser and hired German-trained architect John C. Paulsen and his business partner John LaValle to design its first permanent quarters.

As distant in time and space as the new Montana Club building might have seemed to be from early eighteenth-century London, it nonetheless shared a common male “domesticity” in form and function with Boodles’, Brooks’, White’s, and other “gentlemen’s clubs” clustered around that city’s St. James Street. London’s first gentlemen’s clubs had grown from informal coffeehouse gatherings of men assembled for leisurely conversation, gambling, and dining in the late seventeenth century. The first buildings constructed expressly as clubs resembled the townhouses they had originally been housed in. The interior plan of the men’s club manifested strict physical, hierarchical, and social separations between men and women, “stranger” and member, and staff and member. The club represented, in the words of one historian: “a domestic side to public patriarchy. By offering a private environment without the stresses of family life and a public realm without its political responsibilities, occupying a clubhouse suggests both the comfort and the freedom of being ‘at home’ but in the public spaces of the city.”

Like that of the late eighteenth-century Brooks’ club in
London, the Montana Club’s Main Hall was also two floors high with an adjacent staircase and a symmetrical arrangement of rooms off to both sides granting them an equal status. Other rooms in the building’s upper four stories included card rooms, reception rooms, library, and “bachelor” apartments for non-resident members or Helena members who preferred to live at the club. The Mutual Life Insurance Company and Helena Water Works Company occupied the first floor offices. Women could only enter the Club proper, however, with a club member and then only at specific times: “When ladies are present on reception nights, no drinks except lemonade or claret punch of any kind shall be mixed or served under any circumstances upon the second and the third floors of the club and the bar shall always be closed during the hours of the reception. Drinks may be served on the fourth and fifth floors during reception nights. . . . Ladies can use bowling alley when with members on Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m.”

The conflagration of 1903 began on the building’s top floor, and efforts to battle it were unsuccessful due to the fire’s extreme heat and speed. Happily, the few club members in the building and Toy, the Chinese cook who discovered the fire, were able to escape, with some carrying the Club’s early member and guest registers. The building was a total loss.

Reaction to the Club’s misfortune was swift with its Wall Street lien holder immediately telegraphing: “Very sorry. May Club rose [sic] phoenix like what is insurance.” The secretary for the Silver Bow Club, seventy miles away in Butte, consoled: “Words
cannot express our sorrow for the loss of your beautiful club home.”

While an investigation was being made, member Charles M. Webster at the Office of the Collector of Customs in Great Falls hypothesized as to the fire’s origin: “[Perhaps] the seed sown by our friend Bovard [the minister at St. Paul’s Methodist Church] found root in the shallow pate of some fanatic who thought he was especially called to rid the community of that ‘hell-hole of vice’ so feelingly referred to by the Rev B—.”

The morning after the fire, the Club’s president, E. C. Day (whose “bachelor” apartment at the clubhouse was a total loss), met with several other members at a nearby office block and decided to lease a vacant mansion owned by the widow of a former member. The minutes of the meeting also recorded that the fire had begun in the northwest corner of the club building’s top floor at 10:35 p.m. and concluded with a note on the formation of a committee to raise funds for its rebuilding.

Clark, Dodge and Co., the Wall Street lien holder, once again telegraphed the Club on May 2, asking what the building’s insurance coverage was and if it would cover the cost of a new building. Unfortunately insurance covered approximately $62,000—not even half of the $150,000 loss. Nonetheless, the Club had already raised $32,000 in subscriptions and announced that another $19,000 would be secured. A subsequent meeting noted that the “sentiment was to retain good features [of the] old Club, especially general features of main floor and half floors and putting bar in basement.”

In the meantime, an investigation into the conflagration revealed that Harry Anderson, the fourteen-year-old son of the club’s black bartender Julian Anderson, had set not only the fire
that destroyed the clubhouse but also an earlier one that had been discovered in its basement and quickly extinguished. Harry admitted to setting a third blaze that engulfed a private stable and that he had actually ridden to the site with the firefighters.

Under the chief of police’s questioning, the teenager confessed, “all that I intended to do was to have the horses run. I thought that they [the firemen] would be at the place before any damage was done.” Anderson was sentenced to the state reform school until he reached adulthood. While it’s not clear what happened to Harry following his term, the elder Anderson continued to work at the Montana Club for another fifty years.

One week after the calamity, the Club’s Board of Governors assembled a five-man Building Committee to “negotiate with architects and secure preliminary sketches for [the] new club.” The committee approved a motion that the new building’s cost be limited to $80,000 and recommended renowned St. Paul and New York City architect Cass Gilbert as their choice. The committee’s head, E. C. Day, an attorney, might have been familiar with Gilbert’s work from his late 1880s tenure in St. Paul working as an editor for West Publishing. But another committee member, John Neill, had a long-standing friendship with Gilbert that dated from their adolescence at a St. Paul prep school (later Macalester College). After graduating from Delaware College and studying law at Columbian University in Washington, D.C., Neill was appointed Surveyor General of Montana by the newly elected President Grover Cleveland in late 1883. He eventually purchased the *Helena Daily Independent* newspaper and became deeply involved in community affairs.

Although Cass Gilbert had recently established an office in New York City, hoping to augment his dwindling St. Paul practice and garner more East Coast commissions, he was no stranger to Montana. Born in Ohio in 1859, Gilbert had grown up in St. Paul and studied at Massachusetts Institute of Technology for a year before traveling to Europe in 1880. Upon his return, in 1883, McKim, Mead and White of New York had hired him to execute their Minnesota, Dakota, and Montana Northern Pacific Railroad projects. Eager to begin his own practice, Gilbert left New York City and started his own firm in St. Paul. By the summer of 1883,
McKim, Mead and White began directing their Northern Pacific Railroad work between St. Paul and Helena to his fledgling office. Among the designs Gilbert executed was the railroad’s depot in Helena and a railroad hospital in Missoula. Eventually becoming one of the nation’s most famous and prolific architects, Gilbert is frequently credited as the “Father of the Skyscraper” for his design of the fifty-five-story Gothic Woolworth Building in lower Manhattan, the world’s tallest building until eclipsed by the Chrysler Building in 1929.

He also designed a shingled Queen Anne house in Helena for international banker A. J. Seligman in 1887, submitted entries in competitions for the Montana State Capitol in 1894 and 1897, and drew up plans for a warehouse in Great Falls in 1901. Gilbert was familiar with the Montana Club, recalling in a letter, “I remember with much pleasure having enjoyed the hospitality of the Montana Club in years past.”

Gilbert was interested in the commission and, in a letter written one week after the fire, proposed that one or two committee members “visit St. Paul and go East with me to inspect clubs in Chicago and New York preliminary to beginning your own work. I am sure it would be advantageous [sic] to it.” One of the clubs he no doubt wished the Montanans to scrutinize would be his newly completed Union Club on Fifth and Fifty-First in Manhattan.

The committee was evidently in greater haste. They urged Gilbert to travel to Helena right away, but, as he telegraphed John Neill, it was inconvenient for him to visit at that point and that he would be glad to send an “experienced competent representative . . . [to] obtain [the] requirements.” Gilbert would visit later.

Neill immediately telegraphed his friend back, saying: “Think it essential that you should come personally and at once. You are first choice of committee if terms within our reach. Wire probable terms and if you will come.”

Gilbert capitulated to his friend’s entreaty, noting he would “come to Helena at once on the understanding that the club engages my services as architect at usual schedule,” charging the Montana Club the same rate he had charged for the recently completed Union Club. The Montana Club’s representatives met with Gilbert on May 11, 1903—only two weeks after the fire—and
discussed the new building and its furnishings.

Approximately six weeks later, Gilbert sent copies of his preliminary drawings to Club members, noting that a lack of information on the foundation’s depths had delayed their preparation. His floor-by-floor description retained aspects of the old building while incorporating improvements the club members desired, such as a vestibule door to keep out the winter chill and street noise and a basement bar, a “Rathskellar,” a feature he had also included in his designs for the Minnesota State Capitol.

The second floor remained the Club’s main floor and housed the Reception Room, Main Hall, Billiard Room, all with soaring twenty-foot-high ceilings as well as the Drinking Room, Guest’s or Stranger’s Room, and Office.

A mezzanine floor contiguous with the high-ceilinged rooms provided two “conversation rooms” and a loggia from which club members could overlook the Reception Room, Billiard Room, and Main Hall—“in this respect similar to the old Club House,” Gilbert wrote. Such an arrangement again echoed the private/public spheres found in the earlier London clubs as club members’ comings and goings could be easily seen on “public” stairways. Those wishing to engage in private social, business, or political discussions could easily step into alcove-like “conversation rooms” just off the more public areas. The loggia, lit by an open light shaft extending up to the roof, four stories above, opened into the Governor’s Room where the club’s officiating members were to meet.

The third floor included a Card Room (although he suggested it be switched with the second floor’s Billiard Room to gain the latter additional space) and six bedrooms for resident or non-resident members. The third floor mezzanine was all

bedrooms and also contained the upper portion of the Card Room’s seventeen-and-a-half-foot ceiling. The fourth floor was designated entirely for bedrooms and bathrooms with either light from the light court or the exterior. Gilbert took extra care to explain that the thirty bedrooms, for the most part, were accessed from private corridors, “so that the noise and usage of [the] Club will disturb the occupants as little possible.” Due to the bedrooms’ small size, he deemed them more suitable for transient use rather than permanent residency. The entire fifth story was designated for the dining room with seating for as many as seventy-five people at separate tables, as well as a kitchen and commodious serving room “important in the case of banquets, which I understand [are] occasionally given at the Club.” He also included two servants’ rooms in the attic space per the Building Committee’s requirements.

Gilbert proposed to use “the old stone work of the first story as far as practicable—above this to use brick and terra cotta. The style of the building will be in the Spanish Renaissance with a wide, over-hanging cornice. It will make an ornate building, and one I think that will be satisfactory to the club.” He admitted the possibility that some of the ornamentation might be reduced due to cost but nonetheless believed that if the design were executed as stipulated that “it will present an appearance that is essentially that of a club building, and one that will be unique and handsome.” He closed his seven-page letter, “I have [found] the subject one of great interest, and while the form of the lot makes it a difficult problem to design, nevertheless, I believe the result will meet your own expectations and desire.”

The Building Committee telegraphed their general
acceptance of Gilbert’s proposal on the fourth of July 1903, followed with a letter from President E. C. Day: “The drawings have been exhibited in the club rooms for the last four days and have been examined in detail by almost every resident member of the club, and we have yet to hear any adverse criticism upon them. The Board of Governors at its meeting last night unanimously approved the plans.” The Rathskellar had “met with very favorable comment, except that all are afraid of the ventilation,” suggesting that a fireplace from the main, i.e. second floor, be included and “a large open fireplace be arranged for this room.” In addition, the Board determined to leave the Billiard Room on the second floor, but use only two tables, and decided to eliminate and/or expand some of the bedrooms. Gilbert replied that he believed their alterations could be accommodated in the working plans.

On July 17, the Club contracted with E. W. Fiske (who was superintending the construction of the Reed and Stem-designed United States Public Building up the street) to remove the rubble and, for $460, to dismantle all the remaining cut stone, number the pieces, and pile them on the vacant lot west of the building to await reconstruction.

In an early September letter accompanying the drawings, Gilbert revealed his anxiety at staying within the $70,000 appropriated for the building’s reconstruction and “have therefore modified the design where it seemed practicable, to reduce the expense without impairing the effectiveness of the building.” Moreover, Gilbert’s examination of the old, “badly done” masonry in the debris had caused him to advocate for a complete new foundation. The original above grade stonework that was salvageable was to be augmented with new stone. Another cost-saving measure was to use the local Kessler brick and “only such terra cotta ornamental outside trim as necessary to give a suitable appearance to the building.” Gilbert reiterated his concern at the building’s cost and formulated alternative schemes based upon specific omissions. Nonetheless, he remained committed to providing the Montana Club membership with a quality building as he suggested that the “best general contractors in Helena and several from St. Paul or Minneapolis should be invited to bid upon the work. Several Chicago contractors have also asked an opportunity to bid upon the work and we might find it desirable to deal with them.”

Gilbert’s original design specified ornate terra cotta ornamentation for the windows on the Sixth Avenue side, perhaps as much Flemish/Lowlands as Spanish in inspiration. It also included the recreation of the original all-granite first story, the Club entrance under an angled hood, and a curved corner entrance to the offices for lease at the intersection of Sixth and Fuller Avenues. A brickwork lattice rail was to run the length of the second story. The fenestration of the Sixth Avenue elevation’s upper stories was varied but no less dramatic. The Fuller Avenue elevation retained the same motifs as the Sixth Avenue one in its first- and second-story details and materials.

Still apprehensive about the “disturbed condition of the building market at the present time” and the building’s cost, Gilbert decided to offer two alternatives to his original design. Alternative “B” retained the original proposal’s ornamentation and materials but omitted the entire fourth floor, greatly reducing the number of bedrooms. The architect gamely observed that such an elimination would not “impair the appearance of the building, in fact it might
even look better from the exterior without the fourth story.” The very flamboyant terra cotta ornamentation incorporated the club’s initials into a terra cotta cartouche.

Alternative “C” retained the omission of the fourth story and also flattened the building’s curved corner into a chamfered one, and omitted the second-story balcony and nearly all of the terra cotta ornamentation. In addition Gilbert simplified the original specifications for the Library but “leaving it a very effective and picturesque room.” Such revisions must have been a concession for Gilbert, however, given the club members’ wish that the new interior’s configuration be the same as the old building’s. His creativity and vision were therefore confined to exterior and interior materials and detailing.

The Montana Club Building Committee agreed with Gilbert’s suggestion to proceed with an advertisement for general construction bids on September 30, 1903, in John Neill’s Helena Daily Independent newspaper and the Pioneer Press in St. Paul. At the same time, the Committee advised him, “The sentiment of the committee is adverse [sic] to accepting the changes or alternatives, designated by you as ‘B’ and ‘C’ and the committee is inclined to indulge in the hope that bids may be received at such figures as to permit the carrying out of the original design.” The Club was too reliant on the twenty-six bedrooms’ rental income for its future economic viability. In the end, bids from the Congress Construction Co. headquartered in Chicago with branches in Seattle, New Orleans, and Norfolk, Nebraska, the Butler Brothers of St. Paul, and Lease and Richards of Great Falls and Helena were opened and revealed to be nearly double the $80,000 budget. With these discouraging results, the Club invited the architect to return

George Carsley, circa 1895. Photograph by Taylor, Helena, Montana. Courtesy Montana Historical Society, Helena (Pac 87.11.2).
to Helena so they might modify the plans together.

Gilbert, however, was still learning how to coordinate the work at his original office in St. Paul and his new one in New York City. His expanded firm also had a number of ongoing major projects—not the least their continuing work on the Minnesota State Capitol—and suggested that George Carsley of his St. Paul office make the trip in his stead. A Trempeleau County, Wisconsin, native, the thirty-three-year-old Carsley had lived in St. Paul as a boy but lived in Helena for a few years in the early 1890s when his carpenter/draftsman father had relocated there. The younger Carsley eventually returned to Minnesota to attend the university, obtained an architecture degree, and went to work for Gilbert. Their professional association would continue off and on throughout their lives. (In fact, Cass Gilbert was an honorary pallbearer at Carsley’s Helena funeral in 1933, one year before his own death.)

The Building Committee telegraphed Gilbert in early November: “Have your Mr. Carsley come at once consult about reduction in cost of building.” Working together on November 10, the committee and Carsley identified nineteen cost-saving items that included using native stock in place of Washington fir, using native-stock millwork, and omitting some vaults, the terra cotta ornamentation, and marble in the toilet rooms. The two lowest bidders received these revised plans and resubmitted their bids, but the lowest of these was $100,000 for the building’s construction alone. In early January 1904, the Board authorized building costs not exceed more than $105,000, as the “building [embodied the wishes] of members.” No provision was made for furniture in the budget, and the Board felt it was “not advisable to try to raise more by subscription but [agreed] construction should be started.”

Nearly a year after the fire, on March 17, 1904, the Board reviewed bids from general contractors in Butte and Spokane and from Congress Construction in Chicago and awarded the contract to the Chicago firm, the only bidder from the first round. Subcontractor bids for wiring, plumbing and heating, and the elevators were quickly advertised, received, and awarded with Butte Electric for the wiring, John Sturrock of Helena for plumbing and heating, and Otis Company for the elevator.

In the meantime, Gilbert had contacted T. Kain and Sons who operated a granite quarry west of Helena near Ten Mile Creek. The company promised, “we will furnish new cut granite for the first story of the new club building . . . and the privilege [sic] of using all old cut stone now on site, according to plans.” But the revised plans required “considerable less granite,” and the architect advised: “The old granite work may be used as far as possible: where one-half of the arch stones for the main entrance is in good condition they may be jointed and [a] new piece used to take the place of the broken part.”

Carsley described the design and materials for the building as finally approved:

The building will have an exterior appearance something of the north Italian or Sienese style of architecture, the broad projecting cornice supported on timber brackets, together with [a] plaster frieze, loggia, and the pointed arches, being characteristic of the architecture of that country. . . . brick courses will alternate with granite above
[the] impost line in [the] first story to the window sills of [the] second story. This brick work, together with the brick of the main body of [the] building, will be of local paving brick, with thick mortar joints. The ornamental brick around window openings will be somewhat lighter in color, in moulded forms, giving interest to the otherwise simple character of the work.

As he had done with the Minnesota State Capitol, Gilbert intended for the Montana Club’s exterior to change as the weather and light changed:

The color appearance of the building has been given quite serious study by the Architect, and the combination of different materials has been made with that object in view. It is expected that in the clear bright sunny atmosphere of Montana there will be a continued varying effect of color and a pleasing display of light and shade, the cool, deep shadows being lit up and warmed by reflected light. This will be particularly noticeable in the stained effect of the timber cornice, on [the] plaster frieze and under the hood over the main entrance.

As the architects developed this option, the building’s revised design recalled two of Gilbert’s Twin Cities projects. His design for the 1892 Conrad Gotzian Shoe Co. building in St. Paul’s Lowertown incorporated a similar chamfered corner and entrance. Horizontal stone bands segment both buildings’ vertical mass into thirds, a favorite Gilbert device.

The recessed Gothic arches and fenestration of the Minneapolis Realty Company Warehouse Gilbert remodeled in 1902–1906 are very similar to the multi-story, slightly pointed arches on the Montana Club’s second story. (Gilbert also designed a warehouse for this same company in Great Falls, Montana, in 1901–1905.)

The location and configuration of the clubhouse entrance remained essentially the same as before, just uphill from the leased offices’ entrance. A note on the drawing specified: “Old stone work of entrance to be used again, damaged pieces to be replaced[,] carved stone to be same as before.” Unlike the original club, which had an all-granite foundation and first story, the new clubhouse alternated the stone courses with local Kessler brick to reduce cost. The peaked hood above the entrance was supported by carved wood brackets and roofed with pinkish-grey Ludovici “tiles with the underside to show.”

In the clubhouse’s entry, the carved oak wainscoting with plaster wall and encaustic tile floor previewed the mixture of materials and motifs that awaited inside. Initially, for the entry floor, the architects specified vitrified four-inch red tiles with a single white-dot one-inch tile and meandering Greek key border for the main entrance and vestibule. At some point, however, the specification must have been changed to a new design incorporating a left-facing swastika, a Sanskrit device meaning, “It is well.”

With construction finally underway, Gilbert’s office advertised for bids for the Club’s decoration in September 1904.
Some of America’s most renowned decorators had anticipated this announcement. These included Herter Brothers of New York City, who had gained national fame twenty years previous with their published designs and furniture for W. H. Vanderbilt’s Fifth Avenue house as well as their recent work for the Minnesota State Capitol; Chicago’s Tobey Furniture Co. (who had furnished the dining room of a Helena house that became the Governor’s residence in 1913); the newly established Gustave A. Brand Co., also of Chicago (whose principal had worked with Gilbert on the decoration and furnishing of a Summit Avenue residence in St. Paul when Brand was the head designer of Marshall Field and Co.’s decorating department), and the L. P. Larson Decorating Company of Minneapolis.

But, in the end, Gilbert awarded the contract to Mitchel and Halbach, another Chicago firm. Otto Mitchel and Frederick Halbach had started as decorative painters in the early 1880s, but by the time they decorated City Hall in 1885, their business had expanded to include art glass, woodwork, wallpapers and textiles, and the design and manufacture of furniture. Their work on Marshall Field, Jr.’s, Prairie Avenue mansion in 1891 had garnered them additional acclaim. In the case of the Montana Club’s furnishings, however, they subcontracted the manufacture of the furniture, writing Gilbert, “we wish to state that the people we intend placing this order with have executed some of the finest furniture in the hallways of the Imperial Hotel in the City of New York, and these people are Messrs. Karpen Bros. of this City. We have their guarantee that all work to be made for the Montana Club will be of the highest order, both as to quality of wood selected, workmanship and all materials to be employed necessary for same.”

The decoration and furnishing of the first story’s main hall presented a rather masculine appearance with its paneled wainscoting and balustrade, substantial beams, molding and doorframe, and wrought iron lighting fixtures. The Karpen Brothers’ early-twentieth-century furniture line included a wide range of styles and forms: upholstered Art Nouveau settees, lodge furniture, Morris Chairs, and quarter-sawn oak settees such as the Mission-style ones specified for the Club’s Entrance Hall and Billiard Room.

As noted previously, club members wished to retain the configuration of the original building’s major spaces. However,
one addition they made was a bar in the clubhouse’s basement, the “Rathskellar.” Gilbert had just designed a Rathskellar for the Minnesota State Capitol with a vaulted ceiling, tiled floor, and frescoes with German drinking mottoes.

But because the Montana Club’s cellar in this portion of the building had low ceilings, a more cozy, even mysterious, ambiance was the result. Stained Washington fir boards boxed in the room’s cast iron columns and structural steel beams. Most of these pillars featured decorative polychrome heraldic shields above shelves to hold members’ beer steins. A fireplace of red and black brick (probably the local Kessler brick) anchored the corner of the room formed by the building’s chamfered corner. E. C. Day asked Mitchel and Halbach to have the finish on the Rathskellar furniture “harmonize” with the embossed leather panels from the Leatherole Co. that lined the room’s walls and sent them a sample. A newspaper description of the room attributed the millwork to the Capital Lumber Co. of Helena “finished in the Dutch style of architecture.” The bentwood chairs were manufactured by Heywood Bros. and Wakefield Co. of Chicago. The Rathskellar’s below-grade faux diamond-paned windows were passively illuminated by seven-inch-square sidewalk lights embedded in the sidewalks along Fuller and Sixth Avenues.

Morreau Gas Fixture Mfg. Co. of Cleveland, who supplied the light fixtures for the Minnesota State Capitol, also provided those for the Montana Club. Wrought iron and art glass fixtures were specified for the first floor main hall, Rathskellar, Drinking Room, Billiard Room, and Dining Room. The company was dedicated to producing a high-quality fixture, as they wrote Gilbert shortly before the Club’s June 1905 re-opening: “There only remains one shipment yet which consists of the Wrought Iron goods, which we are hurrying through the factory as fast as we possibly can. . . . it takes longer to finish up Wrought Iron goods as the process of the blackening, etc., is very tedious and we have to take all the necessary time in order to do the work well.”

The social hierarchy of this private club is evident in the plans for its main floor, the second story. Public and “service” staircases continue from the first floor. When a non-service male (since women’s access to the club was restricted to specific times and conditions) reached the top of the public staircase, he was able to proceed in to the clubhouse’s sanctum sanctorum only if he were a member. The “Guest’s Room,” also referred to as the “Stranger’s”
Room, was placed outside the members’ sphere. If a non-member somehow arrived in the members-only sphere, staff in the office just to the left inside the hall could intercept and direct him accordingly.

One of the new club’s grandest spaces was the hall identical in scale (one-and-a-half stories), placement, and function to that in the old clubhouse. The most evident difference between the versions was that the new decoration abandoned the somewhat exotic nature of the old loggia and lunette transoms with curvilinear ornamentation. Gilbert’s design retained the hall’s seating and assembly function and rendered the hardwood and
Gilbert's original design called for a sawed-out balustrade, but the budget constraints on the overall decorative scheme led to its final, paneled appearance. In the hall itself, the spaces between the heavy beams were to be painted an “old blue color” “to give a rich effect as seen in some of the halls of France, Italy and Belgium” with walls of “old red.” The tallcase clock in the hall’s corner is now on the landing between the first and second floor stairway.

At a May 1904 meeting of the club’s board, building committee member and hardware supplier/retailer Anton M. Holter presented a letter from the Union Stock Yards of Chicago offering to furnish a room in the new building. A number of the Stock Yards’ board of directors knew “what the hospitality of the Montana Club means” [and commissioned furniture from Duryea and Potter, a Chicago company, for the Drinking Room just inside the second floor Main Hall].

The English hunt scene wallpaper frieze, faux timbered dado, tiled fireplace, wrought-iron art glass wall lanterns, and sturdy Mission furniture lent the Drinking Room the “dainty and handsome” ambiance the stockyard directors had promised.

The one-and-a-half-story Billiard Room, easily viewed from one of the conversation rooms on the mezzanine above, housed two Newport pool tables and one Saratoga billiard table from the Brunswick-Balke-Collender Company of Chicago. The heavy velvet portieres ordered from Schuneman and Evans in St. Paul were secured with twisted gold cords. The multi-story skylight with a six-pointed-star leaded-glass design illuminated one of the conversation rooms and the interior rooms above this level.

The wall treatment in the Billiard Room consisted of burlap panels framed by lengths of Washington fir stained to resemble oak. On the east wall, leaded-glass transoms above the sash windows and below the clerestory windows provided visual interest. The ceiling and frieze above the wainscotting was covered with Japanese gold paper with a brownish tinge.

The Library, also one-and-a-half stories high, served as a reception room and completed the functions of the main second floor: drinking, playing pool, and reading. Even with the simpler ornamentation and elimination of the curved corner, it retained an expansiveness and elegance. The Library’s south orientation...
and large one-and-a-half-story windows provided copious light, anticipating Gilbert’s later designs for Detroit’s public library (1913–1921) and St. Louis’ Central Library (1907–1912). The room measured approximately thirty by forty feet with an arched ceiling, tinted in canary yellow. Its walls were covered in a brocade-pattern wallpaper, possibly of a grey color. The built-in bookcases, “Canyon Green” marble fireplace, and classical ornamentation were enameled in white.

As previously noted, there are specific similarities between the Minnesota State Capitol, completed in St. Paul in 1905, and Gilbert’s designs for the Montana Club completed in the same year. In comparing drawings for the furniture of both projects, some identical seating furniture and tables were specified, although not always executed, for both buildings. The Gilbert office used two letter codes for furniture they designed and sent out to potential bidders. The quarter-sawn oak library table identified as “AG” in the Montana Club plans and presumably manufactured by Karpen Brothers was also designated as table “GG” in Gilbert’s designs for the Minnesota State Capitol’s Senate Retiring Room. The Minnesota table, however, was of mahogany and manufactured by Herter Brothers.

The Montana Club’s shorter version of this table, an extant example of which can now be found in the club manager’s office, omitted the center pedestal of the Minnesota version. The “AL”

Minnesota State Capitol Senate Retiring Room with table style "GG" nearly identical to Montana Club library table style "AG"; both designs by Cass Gilbert, 1905. Sweet, Minnesota Historical Society (Loc# FM6.15S rt Neg# 13234).

Extant example of Montana Club library table style "AG" in club manager’s office. Photograph by Patty Dean.

Armchairs used in the Conversation Room overlooking the Billiard Room are the same as the four “AN” mahogany armchairs by Marble and Shattuck of Cleveland, used in the Minnesota State Capitol’s Governor’s Reception Room.

Other major rooms at the Club included the Card Room on the third floor with burlap wainscoting and striped green wallpaper. The room’s mantel and hearth was specified to be a “Vermont White” marble strongly veined in black.

The fifth floor, like the others, had member, non-member, and service areas. A serving pantry, kitchen, and smaller service areas were located at the rear or north of the building while a Ladies’ Retiring Room and two dining rooms quite different in their scale and decoration inspiration were located at the front.

The ivory ceiling, enameled woodwork, “old rose” painted walls, and birdseye maple tables, chairs, rockers, and cheval mirror in the Ladies Retiring Room imparted a femininity alien to the remainder of the clubhouse.

The private oval dining room’s proximity to the Ladies’ Retiring Room likely provided an intimate venue for engagement parties or other gatherings where women were to be present.
six-foot dining table could be expanded to fourteen feet with the insertion of fourteen leaves; the chairs were of a mahogany finish with Spanish leather seats. This private dining room also offered Gilbert a forum to demonstrate his mastery of decorative schemes. Subdued Colonial Revival molding and details painted white enamel and the pale lemon ceiling, a shade lighter than the walls, contrasted with the more virile details and palette of the Club’s other rooms.

At some point, possibly around 1915 or so, a hunt-scene wallpaper was added and it is likely the more appropriate silver chandelier replaced the wrought iron one originally specified. A recessed loggia accessible from the dining room’s double doors was described in a 1905 newspaper article, “and here, perched high above the noise and bustle of the city the visitor may look out and drink in the beauties of the mountains and the city round about.”

A second door exiting from the loggia opened into the Main Dining Room, which measures thirty by sixty feet. Like the Billiard Room, this dining room incorporated Washington fir with an oak stain, burlap on the walls, and a Japanese gold paper on the ceiling and cove. The centerpiece of this room was the Jacobean-Tudor fireplace, “[which added] to the homeliness of the place,” just as the fireplaces in the original clubhouse had.

The twenty-five art glass windows in the Main Dining Room were designed to represent “the progress of civilization in Montana. . . . Every stage of the march of civilization is pictured here, from the time when the red man was monarch of all he surveyed down to the present day when Montana stands proudly up in the great sisterhood of states.” The windows depicted miners, sheep ranchers, farmers, timbermen, railroad expansion, and the

Mitchel and Halbach presumably made these windows as art glass was one of their specialties.

Although the Montana Club re-opened in late June 1905—with its total cost amounting to $125,000—its appearance continued to evolve as needs dictated. Two major projects were undertaken by George Carsley, who had relocated to Helena permanently as of 1911. In about 1914, the Banking Corporation
of Montana leased the front office on the Club’s first floor and Carsley furnished drawings of a grillwork entrance and balcony as well as interior fittings.

Carsley’s second alteration was to the Guest’s or Stranger’s Room adjacent to the Main Hall on the second floor, adding an ornate molding to the ceiling and paneling the walls.

Today, Gilbert’s “unique and handsome” Montana Club building is 101 years old. The Club’s fortunes have ebbed and flowed as Prohibition and illegal gambling came and went, the membership rose and fell (in accordance with the state’s boom-and-bust
economy), lifestyles and leisure activities changed, and convenience and safety features were mandated. Its membership now includes women, and the first female president of the Board of Governors was elected in the mid 1970s.

When the Montana Club opened to its membership in the early summer of 1905, the Helena Daily Record, the newspaper owned by Cass Gilbert’s boyhood friend, John Neill, headlined it as “[a] Dream in Architecture . . . [the] handsomest building in Montana . . . [a] magnificent structure complete in every detail of furnishing and equipment from Rathskellar to ‘sky floor.’”

At the Club’s first smoker in their new building on New Year’s Eve 1905, Major Martin Maginnis, its resident poet, commemorated the event:

So now tonight we dedicate our new palatial home.
And hope that, blessed by happy fate, we nevermore need roam
Daddy Day will make some speeches, the Major make some rhymes;
And Cory make some sketches lest we forget old times;
And we’ll sing farewell to the old year and hail his lusty cub.
May this be done for a thousand year in The Old Montana Club . . .

Maginnis’ cozy sentiments aside, the opening of the new Montana Club, with its design by one of the nation’s most famed architects and construction and furnishing executed by Chicago and Twin Cities firms, reconfirmed Helena’s stature at the dawn of a new century as a cosmopolitan center and the state’s political and economic hub. The Montana Club had indeed proved to be a phoenix.

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Trustees for Those Who Come after Us
Chere Jiusto

It has been most truly said . . . that these old buildings do not belong to us only; that they have belonged to our forefathers, and they will belong to our descendants unless we play them false. They are not in any sense our property, to do as we like with. We are only trustees for those that come after us. So I say nothing but absolute necessity can excuse the destruction of these buildings; and I say, further, that such a necessity has never yet existed in our time.

—William Morris, 1889, to the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings

More than a century has passed since William Morris and his peers at the Society for the Preservation of Ancient Buildings in England faced squarely an all-too familiar threat, the loss of history and human expression that comes with the demolition of landmark buildings. And although our generation has learned some hard lessons in what not to lose through the wholesale destruction of Urban Renewal, the loss of Montana's history and culture marches on at a slower, but steady, ongoing and avoidable rate.

It happens in rural places, at ranches, ghost towns, and abandoned rail lines where keeping buildings like barns and grain elevators is tough when such structures fall behind the times. It happens in communities, where abandoning or replacing schools and courthouses is sold to officials as newer, greener, cheaper, and easier.

And it happens at the state level, where a cogent policy
governing the preservation of even the most outstanding historic buildings is lacking. This truth was brought to public attention last winter, when the Montana legislature was asked to appropriate $180,000 to demolish one of the state’s most elegant buildings, a stately Renaissance Revival building at the heart of the campus that is now the Boulder Developmental Center. The building, now abandoned, began its life in 1897 as the Montana Deaf & Dumb Asylum, designed by our first State Architect, John C. Paulsen. In response, the Montana Preservation Alliance, of which I am the director, raised our red flags. “Penny Wise, Pound Foolish” was the message we took to our legislators; that demolition of this building not only would erase yet another historic treasure from our landscape, it was not in the long-term interest of the state or the Boulder community in which it resides.

We were not the only ones alarmed by the thought that this building was no longer fit even for pigeons, and that the best solution the state could come up with was to destroy it. State administrators too had been trying to avoid that path—the director of the Boulder Developmental Center had offered to give the property to a civic group who would take it over and rescue it; while the State Architecture and Engineering division had met with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) to alert them to the fact that the building was in jeopardy. In fact, staff of the SHPO had identified the building as one of two-dozen back in
1980 that, even then, were cited as priority properties due to their historic and architectural qualities. The recommendations came out of a systematic inventory of more than 1,700 state-owned buildings, more than 400 of them historic. Of those, they highlighted those two dozen as historic properties of the highest pedigree, that our state should strive to preserve. On the list were some of the best and boldest—the State Capitol, Western’s Old Main, the Boulder Asylum Building, the Galen State Hospital. Others were more humble but representative—early ranches, the agricultural experiment stations, the first State Forest Ranger’s Station near Olney, the fish hatcheries at Anaconda and Somers.

Instead of enticements for agencies to act as stewards of state heritage, administrators live with a lack of funding to maintain any of their buildings, and little incentive or reward for doing right by their historic stock. Failure to encourage agencies to rejuvenate or reuse buildings of this caliber led to demolition by neglect. Now, a quarter of a century later, a review of the track record is mixed. Montanans valiantly rallied to restore our Capitol in 2000, and purchased Virginia City to save it in 1997. But other buildings suffered: some were lost, some unloaded, and some such as the Boulder asylum and many buildings at Warm Springs Hospital, simply left to stand vacant and deteriorating for decades.

The Tenderest Interest and Care

In the early years of statehood, community and political leaders laid the foundations of the institutions of Montana society. Courthouses, libraries, schools, and colleges took front seat, but there were also hospitals, poor farms, asylums, and prisons built to provide for the state’s less fortunate or less functional citizens.
These institutions were built to the same architectural standards as loftier state establishments, often on campuses that were intentionally planned as places of healing or rehabilitation. Warm Springs, Boulder, the Orphanage at Twin Bridges, Galen, Pine Hills Correctional Facility, and the Mountain View School for Girls all were designed to be not places to warehouse the “indigent” or “feeble-minded” among us, but places where those less fortunate citizens of our state could live with some degree of dignity.

As Montana Governor Preston Leslie noted in 1889,

Montana’s people following in the light and example of older governments, and animated by the same Christian spirit, have in former years enacted laws showing the tenderest interest and care for the poor and unfortunate afflicted; in fact, offering to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, heal the sick, give sight to the blind, speech and hearing to the deaf mute and employment to the willing worker. Every child is the ward of the territory, and its treasury is open to its educational necessities.¹

The Boulder building is a case in point. Erected at a time when a belief in government and the power of its institutions to lift society for the betterment of all people informed our architecture, the building is an architectural masterpiece that would have satisfied Governor John E. Rickards’ position that “In the higher interest of humanity, the Orphans’ Home and the Deaf and Dumb School can not be too liberally treated by the State.”² Cut stone, molded brick, wrought iron, and carved wood were all shaped by the knowing hands of experienced craftsmen. Pride in construction was evident right down to such details as rusticated foundations and ornamental radiators.

In 1915, reporter G. E. Pinto (who was himself deaf and semi-mute) visited the Boulder campus and gave a glowing account of the place. “Anyone taking the time to visit this school,” he wrote, “will go away with the feeling that this is a mighty good world to live in, and especially the section called Montana, since she treats her unfortunates in such a splendid manner.”³

Thankfully, when asked to authorize its demise, our Montana legislators both heard our plea to save the Boulder asylum and responded. They had no wish to see this grand building reduced
to a pile of rubble. In a dramatic turn-around, the Long Range Building committee recommended that the same funding earmarked to demolish the building be appropriated to save it. Our legislators did us all proud when they voted to spend that demolition money to instead drive out the pigeons, stabilize the building, and repair the roof whose leaks threatened the structural integrity of the building more than anything else. In the end, they granted the old Deaf & Dumb Asylum a reprieve.

Now the stage is set for the next phase of life at the Boulder Administration building. And in the future of this building, in some ways, lies the future of this community.

Saving Communities

There may have been a time when preservation was about saving an old building here and there, but those days are gone. Preservation is in the business of saving communities and the values they embody.

—Richard Moe, President
National Trust for Historic Preservation

The Boulder community grew up around the School for the Deaf & Dumb, after town leaders determined in the early 1890s to secure a state institution within their valley. Since the doors opened, the institution has provided employment to many a Boulder resident. By the 1910s the Boulder school encompassed at least half a dozen large institutional buildings, a 400-acre ranch, and additional smaller outbuildings. A second building as large as the school for the deaf and blind was attached to the original campus building, erected for what were then called “feeble-minded” or “backward children.” Known as the Montana
State Training School, the program grew and eventually took over the facilities when the Montana School for the Deaf and Blind moved to Great Falls.

The landmark historic buildings remained the visual and functional centerpiece of the campus until the later twentieth century, when a chronic lack of funding at Boulder and changing program needs led to charges of inadequate care for these wards of the center. The campus again evolved, with cottages and stodgy institutional structures built to take over from the soaring Victorian buildings of the past.

Through the decades, the town of Boulder remained small, and like many rural Montana towns in the latter 1900s, its downtown withered as local businesses lost out to bigger stores and towns up the road. The Boulder Developmental Center is still one of the town’s biggest employers, and in a replay of history, recently the county has successfully lobbied to have a new meth treatment center located there, to boost the economy and community stability.

Today Boulder stands in need of new businesses to reinhabit its commercial buildings, and a renaissance to breathe new life into the town. While this may have seemed a long shot just a few years ago, the prospects for rebirth may just center around the building that many have considered a white elephant for so long. As those in the historic preservation movement have learned, adaptive reuse of historic buildings can be the catalyst that restores old buildings and the neighborhoods and towns surrounding them. The old Boulder asylum may be a key to the town’s rejuvenation, just as restoration of the historic Billings railroad depot was the ticket to turning the city’s historic downtown around.

Will that happen? It is now up to preservationists, the
Boulder community, and that inspired investor who we know is out there, just waiting for a project like this one. When visiting Helena last fall, Donovan Rypkema, the nation’s leading spokesperson on the economics of historic preservation, had this to say about the building: Renovating a building like the old Asylum for the Deaf & Dumb “can be daunting. But daunting is not the same as impossible.” We at the Montana Preservation Alliance believe that preserving historic buildings is the pathway to saving communities, and we have helped that to happen time and again across our state. It is our experience that, when enough people believe it’s important, everything is possible.

Notes
The Presence of Absence
The Regardless Sculptures of Richard Swanson
Ben Mitchell

Note: This essay first appeared in the publication accompanying Richard Swanson’s solo exhibition, “The Regardless Series,” mounted by the Holter Museum of Art, Helena, Montana, in 2005. It is reprinted here by kind permission of the author and the Holter Museum of Art. Our thanks to the artist and to the staff of the Holter Museum for their invaluable assistance.

I wish I could have seen it. Richard Swanson’s Balance and Bounty (1996–1997), ten large-scale dervish–like shapes constructed of straw and wire floating across the sere emptiness of a Northern Rockies foothills field outside Drummond, Montana. Balance and Bounty is a work simultaneously mobile and yet solidly rooted to the earth, each piece delicately poised on its narrow earthward end. The whole of the effect (sadly, I only know this from the photographs)—the broad sweep of land, arcing bowl of sky, and the utterly surprising presence of those sculptural forms—is elegant and profound, a potent visual mediation on space, landscape, gravity, animation, energy, and human presence.

I first met Richard in late 1999 and during subsequent studio visits over the years I learned much about his working methods, the challenges he accepts, his willingness, indeed his courage, to experiment with materials and forms, to often fail, and yet to press on. And then there was the day—easily three or four years ago now—that I walked up those dark, rickety stairs to his spacious Helena studio and found not the works that I had become familiar with and loved: the vessel–like forms fashioned out of barb wire like sonar (1998) and radio (1997); dryfall’s (1995) Rocky Mountain maple branches gracefully flowing outward from the wall; the lovely straw and wire constructions Balance and Bounty and Prairie Totem (1995); rope and copper constructions like argentina (1998). Rather, what I discovered that day on the studio’s north wall were stark, flat, flowing black shapes cut out of roofing felt, a group of enormous, sweeping graphic forms like line drawings marking out the evocative interplay of opposites: the black presence of the felt against the negative white space of the wall’s surface. And on the
studio’s floor there was a group of wildly colorful metal sculptures, stripped-down forms far more industrial-like and abstract in their approach and form than any of his earlier works.

At first I didn’t much like this new work—and I was honest with Richard that first day. How much we hold on to the familiar, cling to the proverbial. Those new works were vaguely frustrating to me, yet somehow stayed with me in the following months, mysteriously compelling. So boldly different than anything Richard had made before, a virtually complete departure in approach, form and aesthetics by an accomplished mid-career artist. That took guts. Now, these years—and hard work—later, we arrive at this moving and fully accomplished body of new work: Regardless, Rambunctious, and Abrakadabra. This work—withstanding its roots sunk firmly in those first experiments—is marvelously and deceptively simple. Comprised of a single material, welded aluminum, and an almost monastically limited economy of means, in this new work there is an essential visual vocabulary of form: basic rectilinear shapes all connected by elegantly curved lines in space.

_I think of these new sculptures as ink drawings_, Swanson says. _The gallery is the space in which these three-dimensional drawings exist._ I also think of them as jazz. . . .

That’s no mean boast. In these new works the encounter, the _experience_, of sensing three-dimensional form as a drawing is acute, and yet at the same time disconcerting in the most delightful of ways—like sensing music in the aura of Rothko’s saturated colors. There is a sense of the _presence of absence_ in these works, a delicious tension between the seen and the sensed. And the interplay of weight and airiness, of animation and poise, of vitality and delicacy, and the simple apparition and resonance of beauty is achieved through an astonishing sense of play, of joy.

The trails that Richard followed to arrive at these works include, most obviously, Alexander Calder’s mobiles and large-scale stabiles. Richard says, _Calder is the artist whose work has defined everything that I find admirable in sculpture—innovation, a sense of play, simple color and form, an ability to create forms that bold and transform the space around them._ There’s an important key here: the transformation of the space that surrounds us. As you walk around, in and through Regardless, Rambunctious, and Abrakadabra, the physical forms change relationships, the visual field is expanded and contracted (like breath), rhythms

are established and then altered, replaced by new variations, visual riffs. Jazz. For over a decade, Richard has collaborated with dancers and choreographers. In these new works it is as if the pieces have become the dancers. Balance is so subtle and precarious that the viewer's movement among the works—the slightest nudge of the body, a change of weight on the gallery's wooden floor, a breeze from an open doorway—creates vibration that travels out along the lines of the work and, the farther out the vibrations travel, the more movement is magnified. There's the presence of music again, the accruing of visual and physical relationships into something unexpected and new.

In Richard's work there are also strong echoes of Joan Miro's surrealistic and spontaneous lines and shapes, of Stuart Davis's sculptural abstractions and innovations, and, importantly, Matisse's late paper cutouts which we know were also mimetic of dance and jazz improvisation. I am for an art that takes its form from the lines of life itself, Claes Oldenburg said. In a fundamental way, Richard's new work is exactly that, a constructed space, a gathering of experience and possibility from life, from nature itself.

One of art's enduring mysteries—like nature's—is that it is apart from us, yet somehow art retains the remarkable and ineffable power of drawing us into its separate world. Walking among these free-standing sculptural pieces and through the open doors to the adjacent gallery walls from which the Jambalaya cutouts extend toward us, we are invited into a new place, a place where, Alice in Wonderland-like, the two- and three-dimensional worlds shimmer and oscillate and dance, ultimately creating the sense of a new dimension, a dimension of the eye and the body made welcome by the delightful artifice of the art.
Potter and sculptor Richard Swanson has exhibited his work widely, including shows at the Plains Art Museum, Boise Art Museum, and the Eiteljorg Museum. His large-scale works have found permanent homes in many locations in Montana—including the Engineering and Physical Sciences Building at Montana State University, Rocky Mountain College, Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art, and the Holter Museum—as well as at the Buffalo Bill Historical Center in Cody, Wyoming. His figurative clay vessels have homes in such prestigious institutions as the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Mansfield Center for Pacific Affairs in Washington, D.C. His works can be seen at www.richard.swanson.com, www.ferringallery.com, and www.guild.com.
Dust to Dust
The Art of Tracy Linder
Patricia Vettel-Becker

Note: This essay first appeared in the catalog accompanying Tracy Linder’s solo exhibition, Dust to Dust, mounted by the Yellowstone Art Museum, Billings, Montana, in 2000. It is reprinted here by kind permission of the author and the Yellowstone Art Museum. Our thanks to the artist and to Carol Green, the Yellowstone’s interim director, for their invaluable assistance.

As a young girl growing up on a farm, one of the most profound moments I experienced was watching Scarlett O’Hara in Gone with the Wind clutch a fistful of red dirt in her hand and vow that she would triumph, that she would never go hungry again. That sense of rootedness, of deep connection to the actual material of one’s ancestral home, is rarely given cultural expression, yet for those of us bred on a family farm, we know that it forms the very core of our beings.

I am forever rooted to the land on which I was raised. My connections to place were generated early in my childhood as my folks included my sister and me in all the daily routines. This attachment developed over time as we each took on individual roles of irrigating, driving tractor and truck and tending to the cattle. This place embodies my understanding of the subtle intertwining relationships necessary for survival as land, body and spirit become a whole.—Tracy Linder

Montana artist Tracy Linder was raised on a farm just west of Billings, Montana, where her family raised sugar beets and
Linder and her older sister, Natalie, were the only children in the family, and according to the artist, they did everything with their mom and dad, from pulling calves to cultivating fields. The artist pays tribute to her father in Dad’s Coveralls, 1994, which is rendered in oil over a black and white photograph. In a barren gray space hangs a lone pair of worn coveralls, to the right of which Linder has threaded strips of animal sinew, a reference to the laces of her father’s boots. Suspended from the sinew strips are rusty nails that Linder found in her garden, remnants from a building that had burned down, and thus a tangible link to the past. Like religious relics, these nails take on the aura of the sacred, as does the image of the coveralls itself, which seems to radiate divine light. Coveralls evoke fond memories for the artist, especially the aroma of corn silage that clung to those worn by her father. I, too, remember the scent of sweat mixed with the loamy black soil of eastern North Dakota that emanated from my father’s skin. This overt sensuality associated with the materiality of the farm, and by extension, the farmer, is what comes through in Linder’s work—the inextricable connections between family members on a farm, between bodies and the earth.

This visual homage to Linder’s father also functions as a haunting memorial to a way of life. Much of Linder’s art functions to negotiate this profound loss, a process of both mourning and fetishization, a simultaneous letting go and holding on to the past. The enforced need to let go is evident in the ephemeral, almost ghostly, photographic images of farm life that she prints on her paintings and sculptures, whereas the attempt to hold on explicitly reveals itself in her use of actual farm matter as the physical support for her works of art. This emphasis on materiality,
the plant and animal matter that formed the very lifeblood of her family for generations, is at the core of all of Linder’s work, as is the haunting sense of transience and vulnerability evoked by the spectral photographic imagery. For example, her 1997 installation Conversations with the Land consists of seven monumental sheets made from animal collagen, upon which she has printed black and white photographs of such scenes as David Chopping Corn and Larry and Ryan Opening Fields. Baling twine falls from the ends of the wood dowels upon which the translucent sheets of animal flesh are suspended. As the very fabric of physical life, flesh is a prime signifier of our strength. Yet it is also the site of our vulnerability, subject to destruction from both internal and external forces.
Flesh is a universal phenomenon not unlike the earth itself, which is also a fabric that binds all living things in a precarious web of life and death. For Linder, death, like flesh, works on two levels: death as an essential component of the seasonal cycle that characterizes life on the farm, and death to family farming at the hands of industrial agribusiness. Death is thus both celebrated and mourned—artistic expression is given to the beauty of the life-and-death cycle, as well as to the individual and communal grief involved with losing a traditional way of life, one tied to the rhythms and matter of nature.

After receiving her bachelor’s degree in art from Eastern Montana College in Billings in 1988, Linder completed a Masters of Art degree in sculpture at Eastern Illinois University in 1989 and a Masters of Fine Art degree at the University of Colorado in Boulder in 1991, the same year her family lost their farm. During her tenure at the University of Colorado, where she studied with John Wilson, Garrison Roots, and Antonette Rosato, she produced such fetishistic objects as *Rainmakers*, which were made from farm materials—irrigation tubes, bones, nails, sinew, leather, corn, rice and raffia. According to the artist, she wanted to demonstrate that ritual and the use of hallowed objects were primary components of farm life, an automatic assumption about ethnographic cultures, but not about modern agricultural practices.

_I grew up understanding relationships between people, machines, animals and crops, where the daily routines became nearly ritualistic, with their implications of hope, faith, and fortune. At a very young age my sister and I were trailing in my father’s footsteps carrying irrigation tubes in the corn field. We would improvise minor mechanical repairs and assist in all aspects of the farm process. In this environment, I learned that the demands of everyday life require a sense of resourcefulness in order to survive. It is a life where existence depends upon the goodwill of neighbors, weather, and ‘the bank.’ In certain respects, a farming area becomes an ethnic community._—Tracy Linder.

The sanctification of the utilitarian is also the theme of *Shovels*, 1999–2000, which addresses the earth as simultaneously womb and grave. The shovel is an icon of continuity, an implement that has traversed the ages, playing an integral role in both agricultural and burial practices. Historically, it has also functioned as the primary mediator between the laboring body and the earth. Linder’s thirty beeswax shovels exhibit five motifs: farm machinery, hands, grain, hair and bones. Photo-emulsion images of machinery and hands, both gloved and ungloved, speak to the issue of sustenance, the turning of soil to raise food, which is literally present in the stalks of oats, barley and hay that the artist has suspended in the beeswax. Hair is a dead substance, yet one associated with life, for not only does it grow, but it protects animals and humans from the harsh elements. Linder used horse hair in her shovels, thus honoring an animal that has shared with humans the turning and traversing of the earth. Bones signify burial, the returning of animal matter to the soil, so that the life cycle may begin anew. One shovel contains a photograph of a ram’s carcass decaying into the land. The artist aestheticizes this image of decomposition by imbuing it with light and color, which works to foreshadow the life that this animal matter will, in turn, foster. Although death represents the end of the life cycle, to Linder, it also contains a nurturing element, a lesson she learned as a young child. When a calf was stillborn, her family would buy another calf, skin the dead one, and then wrap the skin around the live one, so that the mother would nurse it in place of her own. The artist believes that her
experience of this practice is one of the reasons that she is so at ease working with flesh.  

Throughout the Shovel series, the intricate relationships binding soil, animals, plants, machinery and physical toil are emphatically conveyed. The artist took malleable beeswax harvested by local farmers and then used her own hands to form the sculptures using actual shovels as molds. Linder claims that she is drawn to this process of transmutation, in which stable objects are transformed into fragile and vulnerable ones, for it is a process not unlike that of family farming. The continuity inherent in seasonal cycles and in the permanence of the land itself coexists with abrupt and often
cataclysmic changes due to uncontrollable forces—drought, hail, disease, accident, politics, and the marketplace. Indeed, the manner of display itself evokes trauma. Because they lack handles and seem invisibly suspended from the ceiling of the darkened gallery, the spotlighted shovels resemble two long rows of floating decapitated heads that still glow with life. This sense of the uncanny permeates Linder's work, forcing both a physical and metaphysical reaction in the spectator.

Perhaps the eeriest of all are Linder's Tractor Hides, 1997–1999, which, like Conversations with the Land, are constructed of animal collagen. Lit from within, these human-scaled pod-like sculptures seem ethereal, ghost-like icons to the agricultural life Linder venerates and mourns. Yet under close examination, they are strikingly visceral; like insect cocoons, they appear ready to burst forth with new life, to foster physical rebirth from out of dead matter. The simultaneous strength and vulnerability of flesh is again conveyed, for the tractor treads function as skeletal frameworks supporting the thin layers of tissue that bear photographs of day-to-day life on the farm. These barely discernible images flicker in and out of view as one moves around the tractor hides, not unlike a rapid series of film projections onto a movie screen. In this way, the hides function as photographic archives, ones that convey the transitory nature of their subject matter through the very manner of their display.

As the disappearance of family farming becomes imminent, I believe it is important to document daily processes as a matter of record. The photographic element in my work, in effect, both represents a moment of historic reality and a recognition of fate. These images are situated on non-traditional materials in a manner that reveals the psychological artifacts of this way of life. These skin-like apparitions recall ceremonial rites while retaining aspects of an unhealed wound. I am interested in what will be the remains of this once vital lifestyle as the ritualistic elements are being sequentially removed.—Tracy Linder.

Linder's use of flesh, especially in these upright corporeal pods, evokes a sense of violence and pain. Indeed, the “unhealed wound” to which the artist refers is not exclusive to farmers. For millennia, humans have been alienating themselves from the natural world, a process that has accelerated at an amazingly rapid pace over the past hundred years. We have yet to understand the
ramifications of this estrangement on the human psyche and soul, yet the symptoms of it are undeniably present: ecological crisis, unchecked materialism, depression, selfish individualism, emotional and psychological isolation, malaise, spiritual vacuity, even our nation’s apathy over the increasing loss of family farms, long a potent symbol of humanity’s symbiotic relationship with the rest of nature.

The balance between growth and decay, between life and death, that structures Linder’s work is more characteristic of the family farm model of agriculture than that of industrial agribusiness, the model towards which agriculture in the United States has been progressively moving. As Marty Strange, a cofounder and co-director of the Center for Rural Affairs, argues: “Family farming has a seasonal, rhythmic quality to it. Production is sequential: planting precedes cultivating, which is followed by harvesting. Breeding, birthing, nurturing.” Family farming is small-scale, diversified, and resource conserving. The agribusiness model, on the other hand, encourages large-scale farms that are industrially organized, financed for growth, specialized, capital-intensive, standardized in their production processes, and resource consumptive. The overall contrast is between farming as a way of life and farming as a business.

Linder’s 1996 Who’s Counting? series addresses this contrast, but also points out the ambiguous line dividing the two. In Roger Combining and Harley Applying Anhydrous, the left half of the painting displays an image of a farmer at work in the field, and the right half exhibits a series of tally marks. Although these marks can be understood as an indication of the mathematical repetition inherent in the cultivation of row crops, they also serve as a visual reminder that small independent farms are continually being lost. What is unclear, however, is whether the farmers pictured on the left represent the traditional family farmer, or the more contemporary corporate farmer. As Strange reminds us, “the family farmer is an institution eroding from within,” because in an economic climate increasingly oriented to industrial agribusiness, many independent farmers believe they must transform their operations in order to survive. In fact, the combine and tractor pictured in Linder’s paintings could be read as harbingers of death. Combines, of course, harvest the crops, and thus signal the end of the life cycle, and anhydrous ammonia, although it serves to increase nitrogen levels, which leads to higher yields, also kills insects and worms, and eventually “burns” the soil, depleting it of nutrients. Anhydrous ammonia is cheaper than most other
commercial fertilizers, and therefore signifies a mode of farming that prioritizes economic gain over stewardship of the land. Moreover, with new combines and tractors costing more than most people pay for their homes, such sophisticated machinery indicates an agricultural model closer to that of corporate, rather than small, family farming. Like the traditional figure of Death with a scythe, these modern agrarian monsters invoke fear. Indeed, much of Linder’s work recalls the horror film genre, from her use of flesh and pod imagery, to these monstrous machines, foreboding skies, and tally mark slashes, which resemble knife wounds that someone has tried to bandage with straw, which is in turn dead matter, a byproduct of the harvest and thus death.

With industrial agribusiness now dominating food production, the intricate web of connections associated with family farming is also dying. Not only are the links between generations of farm families being eradicated, but so are the immediate bonds between humans and the climate, vegetation, animals and soil. Linder recalls incidents at the Plains Art Museum in Fargo, North Dakota, in which women began to cry as they viewed her art on display. Not only did some of the women want to engage her in discussions about their own lives on the farm, but they begged her to allow them to touch the works themselves. This experience reveals the physical relationship that so many of us have with the farm, the deep connection that works on a sensual, thus bodily, level.

This anecdote also raises questions regarding personal and communal identity. For example, what is the specificity of a farmer’s subjectivity? Is it more enmeshed in matter, with the materiality of that which is paramount to farm life—the soil, the crops, the animals? Bombarded with the touch, smell, and taste of the farm, such a subjectivity might be a more corporeal one, one more dependent on the body and its senses. Moreover, the privileging of one’s interconnectedness with other material forms—other bodies, animals, vegetation, and soil—might serve as a source of strength and a means towards social agency. The specificity of place would thus serve as an anchor, the relationship with place a signifier of physical affinity with one’s environment. Linder’s work is in keeping with such a model, for she fuses visual representation with sensual experience and memory, thus accessing something that may not be best understood through language alone—the complex connection between body and place.

Precedence exists for such an artistic practice. In the 1930s and 1940s, Mexican painter Frida Kahlo produced a series of small self-portraits that explored her personal relationship with the land of her birth. Drawing on Mexican folk traditions and symbolism,
Kahlo rendered her often nude or broken body as literally connected to the earth itself. For example, in *Roots*, 1943, leafy vines spring from her open torso and creep out onto the barren and cracked soil upon which she lies. This image foreshadows Linder’s *Dad’s Coveralls: Rooted Connections*, 1994, in its linking of organic life to the earth and its ability to provide sustenance. Likewise, during the Great Depression, Iowa artist Grant Wood painted jewel-like images that evidence an eerie tension between life and death. In such works as *Young Cows* and *Fall Plowing*, 1931, the agricultural landscape is rendered both active and inert, for although a warm amber glow infuses the fertile fields of corn and grain, the scenes appear amazingly still, as if the earth and its vegetation were constructed of stone. For both Kahlo and Wood, their work functioned as a source of empowerment by proclaiming their affinity with a specific place and its traditions when both seemed threatened by political, economic, and natural forces.

Linder’s aesthetic is also informed by her heritage and connection to place. Indeed, little distinction can be made between her artistic practice and agricultural traditions. The aesthetics of order and repetition that structure the cultivation of row crops reveal themselves in the artist’s obsessive production of multiples in her sculptural installations. Thus the spectator is forced to enter into a relationship with her work that emulates the physical movement of the farmer through the field. For example, *Conversations with the Land* reproduces the sensation of expansive flat fields with regularly spaced furrows through which one must navigate in a methodical manner to experience the work in its entirety. Appreciation for the single form coexists with appreciation for the many, as in farming, where individual plants and animals

*Tracy Linder, Dad’s Coveralls (Rooted Connections), 1994, oil stick, graphite, photograph, 40 x 29 inches, © 1994 Tracy Linder.*
carry aesthetic appeal, as does the entire field or herd. This emphasis on multiples and repetition recalls the artistic movement known as Minimalism, which erupted in the 1960s in opposition to the tenets of high modernism and its emphasis on the pure opticality and autonomy of the individual piece. Minimalism prioritized materiality, the physical environment of the work, and the interaction of the audience, thus the spectator’s body as well as the eye. In asserting the work’s “objecthood,” Minimalists rejected the traditional categories of painting and sculpture, as well as illusionism and direct references to the external world. Artists like Donald Judd displayed identical geometric units of galvanized iron or aluminum at regular intervals, which signaled not only the exhaustion of traditional artistic subject matter, but an interest in achieving aesthetic wholeness through repetition, symmetry, and order. Linder’s installations bear similarity to Judd’s work in terms of serial order and modular repetition, yet her approach to materiality is more in keeping with artists like Eva Hesse and Magdalena Abakanowicz, who explored the nature of malleable materials in a visceral relationship with the human body. Moreover, like Abakanowicz, who addresses the issue of political torture by using plant fiber as a metaphor for living human skin, Linder situates her work within the context of larger social issues. Rather than participate in the nihilism of much postmodern art, she has chosen a path of commitment and responsibility to the values and traditions in which she was raised. Although a full-time artist, she lives and works on a farmstead near Molt, Montana, thus choosing to retain as much as possible those intimate connections between body and soil that her art so eloquently and poetically reveals.

This complex integration of plant, animal, and soil is also evident in Linder’s newest work, *Cultivator*, 2000. Seventeen sculptural forms constructed of polyurethaned animal collagen over armatures of baling wire are arranged in two rows on a sheet of bronze glass, which bears a photo emulsion image of wheat stubble. Each form is a hybrid combination of cultivator sweep and hoofed animal leg. *Cultivator* draws attention to the farm as a site of cohabitation, one crossed by both wild and domestic animals. Antelope and cattle graze together in fields cultivated by humans and their machines. All depend on the soil and its fruits for survival.

*Now, living out on the prairie among farms and ranches, I am able to witness the crossing of many paths both wild and domestic. In this crossover are unique relationships between animals, people, machines, and land. Within this interconnectedness exists a tenuous balance that requires careful nurturing; a certain strength and vulnerability lies in this balance that is the core of day-to-day sustenance. By focusing on this balance, I am able to reveal some of the intangibles that are being lost as we continue toward a more corporatized America.—Tracy Linder*

This delicately balanced interdependence, which has evolved over thousands of years, is now in danger of sudden extinction. *Cultivator* is a chilling reminder of this threat, a haunting vision of life desperately trying to stave off death. Precariously poised over fragile glass, these ghostly fragments could be seen as the offspring of the *Tractor Hide* pods. Life has sprung forth, but tragically, it may be already dead. Its appearance is merely an illusion, one as fleeting as the endangered connections reflected in the mirror-like glass below.

*The Book of Isaiah reminds us that “all flesh is grass.”*
Accepting this knowledge “is a hard truth,” according to the writer Kathleen Norris, and one that “has real meaning for people who grow grass, cut it, bale it, and go out every day in winter to feed it to cows. They watch that grass turning into flesh, knowing that they in turn will eat it as beef. They can’t pretend not to know that their flesh, too, is grass.”

Unfortunately, as we increasingly move from a nation of food producers to food consumers, this existential awareness is being lost. Resistance to this loss is a function of Linder’s artistic practice, for her works seek reunion with nature, not its “framing.” They signify connection, rather than distance. In fact, her three-dimensional works literally “embody” nature, rather than offer scenic views. Thus they are not in keeping with traditional landscapes, which as Lucy Lippard points out, “are still perceived as trophies from the battle of culture with nature.”

Linder’s works do suggest a battle, however, for they function not only as archives, but as cadavers, the material remains left behind in the struggle between nature and agriculture, between the family farm and industrial agribusiness. The need to halt this process and preserve a balanced interconnectedness might be the most important message of Linder’s art.
Tracy Linder’s work is informed by her upbringing on the family farm and her ongoing experiences as she now resides out on the vast prairie of south-central Montana. Linder received her Masters of Fine Arts from the University of Colorado at Boulder in 1991. Her exhibition record includes shows in New York, St. Louis, and Indianapolis, as well as numerous shows throughout Montana and North Dakota. In 2000 she had the solo exhibit at the Yellowstone Art Museum, Billings, discussed above.


Notes

This essay is dedicated to the memory of my father, Richard John Vettel (1925–1999), whose life was inseparable from the land he nurtured and loved.

2. Interviews with the artist, May 24, 1999 and June 3, 1999.
3. Interview with the artist, March 15, 1999.
4. Interview with the artist, June 3, 1999.
5. Tracy Linder, Artist’s Statement, 1997.
6. Interview with the artist, March 15, 1999.
7. Interview with the artist, May 26, 2000.
8. Tracy Linder, Artist’s Statement, 1997.
11. Strange, Family Farming, 1.
12. Strange, Family Farming, 40.
13. Interview with the artist, June 3, 1999.
Illustrations for a Text That Does Not Exist
Doug Turman’s Watercolor World
Rick Newby

Many watercolors and all sorts of other things. Most of it inside me, deep inside, but I’m so full that it keeps bubbling up.

—Paul Klee, upon departing Tunisia, 1914

Trout of astonishing colors, classical figures of the whitest marble, Islamic star charts, geographers imagining new continents, Renaissance maps, fragments of Dante written in a gorgeous cursive, 1920s aeroplanes, mid-century Italian postage stamps, western landscapes populated by cacti, quotations from paintings by Paul Klee, Henri Matisse, and Charlie Russell, portraits of a weeping Meriwether Lewis, green peas, and footprints leading nowhere: What do these seemingly disparate images have in common? They all leap from the brush of prolific and prodigious watercolorist Doug Turman (who also happens to be an accomplished printmaker and painter in oils and acrylic).

One small Turman watercolor will include several of the images listed above (or others from Turman’s vast repertoire). Turman, based in Helena, Montana, works this swarm of images into a composition that seems to tell—begins to tell—stops in the middle of—a lovely and humorous story. The story line may not be readily apparent, but somehow this doesn’t matter. Like Persian miniatures torn from the pages of the narratives they illustrated, or like Kurt Schwitters’ self-sufficient collages, Turman’s watercolors lead vibrant and very full lives, separate from any text.

Like the best modernist art, they are infinite, suggestive rather than explicit. And like the Persian miniatures Turman has studied passionately (he devoted his master’s thesis to them), they form perfect patterns, brilliantly colored and harmonious. They are rich in allusion, but it is an allusiveness that is more playful than laden with meaning. These watercolors take us on delightful journeys, suggesting that their creator is a seasoned traveler who cannot help but share the sights he has encountered along the way.

Doug Turman is a peculiar sort of traveler. By his own
admission, he’s “never been anywhere”—though recent sojourns in Great Britain, Germany, and Italy suggest otherwise. Raised in Missoula, Montana, in a family that might serve as model for a Norman Rockwell painting—“my father was the mayor, we had a dog”—this third-generation Montanan did leave the West for a few years, attending undergraduate school at Ohio’s Oberlin College and spending some time in the museum world, working at the Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C.

But for the bulk of his adult life, Turman has lived and painted in the American West, in Arizona and Montana. “I do my traveling through my work,” he says, and with a wry grin, he allows as how he may be one of the few artists (if not the only one) who has work on all seven continents—he’s even placed a watercolor at the South Pole Station in Antarctica.

And it is in his watercolors that Turman does his most adventurous traveling. These (usually) small and magical works somehow make visible a vast and richly textured universe, one that we recognize instantly as home. It is a dream home, to be sure—our best and most yearned-for habitation, where pleasure reigns and we are safe from sorrow.

Following the example of Matisse, Turman consciously—and no doubt out of a deep need—refuses in his art the negative, the ugly, the very real sadness that afflicts every life. His work has been accused of being escapist, “too rosy,” merely decorative. But,
he counters, why not celebrate pleasure, the beautiful—so that the artist offers the viewer, as Matisse said, “an art of balance, purity and serenity, devoid of troubling or depressing subject matter”? Just as Matisse was out of step with the other great modernists, because of his insistence on rendering the voluptuousness of life, so Doug Turman is a maverick, following his own joyous and quirky path.

Turman is no stranger to sorrow. His first-born son died in his arms, only three days after birth, of a rare genetic disorder, and that tragedy was, in Turman’s words, “in some ways, both the best and the worst thing that ever happened to me.” He found strength in the act of painting and in the steadfast love of family and friends, and though he suffered from clinical depression for a time—and through a divorce—his work continued to celebrate beauty, a beauty “tempered by grief.” Reassured that his belief that art should instill pleasure was not skin deep, was in fact something fundamental to his nature, he entered the discipline of painting even more rigorously, pushing himself technically, extending his insights into ever more articulate series of paintings.

The notion of the series is integral to Turman’s work, and many of the watercolors he’s created are linked—by repeated images, shared size, and reiterated themes. He began his first major series, “Love Letters,” in the mid-1980s. His smaller “Love Notes” developed alongside the “Letters,” and these postcard-sized images continue to proliferate (he has painted well over one hundred to date). His “Trout Dreams” series stands complete at thirty-nine paintings, each containing at least one trout—amid ceaseless streams, mysterious earths, spirals of constellations. Other Turman series include “Conversations with Paul,” an homage to Paul Klee, “master of the small painting,” and “The Geographer,” a tribute to a geographer friend who—like the artist—unifies the world “by human logic and optics, by the light and color of artifice, by decorative arrangement.” Turman has recently begun a new series he calls “Glimpses of the World Unseen,” and in an as-yet unnamed new series of watercolors, he animates a world that is more loosely painted and more melancholy in tone than any he has previously explored.
In the context of Montana art, Doug Turman refuses all the usual tropes—even more so than many of the state's abstract painters, whose works may still make oblique reference to the natural world. If landscape appears in a Doug Turman painting, it is more often vaguely European, and especially Italian, than it is a portrayal of the vast panoramas of western river valleys or mountain ranges (those trout are an exception). Indeed, in some of his watercolors, he will X-out an identifiable Montana mountainscape, a clearly conscious negation of his homeland's traditions. And again play is Turman's watchword, as he takes beloved historical figures—in, for example, his large-scale oil, *Lewis & Clark Lost in Montana*—and turns them into objects of a sly and seditious satire.

Perhaps the Montana tradition to which he is closest is that embodied by Rudy Autio, the great Montana ceramic sculptor (and fellow Matissean). As art historian Harry Hamburgh has written, the images Autio traces on his massive and energetic sculptural forms delineate “an uncomplicated world of pleasure that is beyond our grasp, and perhaps exists only in imagination and art.” And Rafael Chacón might be speaking of the feeling we encounter in Turman’s most recent watercolors when he writes that Autio’s figures “probe the complex relationship between an Arcadian vision of the celebration of sensual beauty and an almost baroque sadness about the transience of life.”

Sometimes working with obsessive precision and sometimes with extreme looseness and daring, Doug Turman is a master of his chosen medium. It is only through his playful and densely textured sensibility that he creates works—these miniature fables, histories, and romances—that we can read almost as we read a text. Every Turman “Love Letter” or “Trout Dream,” every “Conversation with Paul” or session with “The Geographer,” takes us to another place (that hitherto unseen world), where things form a perfect pattern, and we can escape—joyous as carefree travelers—from the “troubling or depressing subject matter” of our daily lives.
A jazz drummer as well as a visual artist, **Doug Turman** is represented by Lorinda Knight Gallery, Spokane, Washington; Shack Up, Bozeman, Montana; and Jest Gallery, Bigfork and Whitefish, Montana. In addition, he is proprietor, with his wife Mary Lee Larison, of Turman Gallery (www.turmangallery.com), a leading contemporary art space in Helena.
Local Landscapes/Local Food
Max Milton

Last October, southwest Montana producers, suppliers, chefs, and about 200 diners (mainly from southwestern Montana, but some from as far away as New York City and San Francisco) gathered on the upper Yellowstone River at Chico Hot Springs. The occasion was a Montana Harvest Celebration dinner convened by the Corporation for the Northern Rockies (CNR) headquartered in Livingston. The dinner was co-sponsored by Chico Hot Springs Spa and Resort, Deep Creek Green, and Chefs Collaborative.

An aspect of CNR’s mission is to “advance sustainable choices through preserving the region’s landscape and quality of life for present and future generations...” One way to accomplish this is to highlight local ranchers and growers who are using sustainable practices and to thereby create demand for their products—ideally local demand that keeps food dollars in local communities.

The gala event at Chico featured local, sustainable producers and regional and national celebrity chefs committed to sustainable cuisine. The idea was to increase the visibility of both the local producers and the chefs who use their products.

Co-sponsor Chefs Collaborative joins CNR in celebrating local food, and the national organization aims to “foster a sustainable food supply by embracing seasonality and preserving diversity and traditional practices” (www.chefscollaborative.org).

Chefs Collaborative national chair Peter Hoffman, owner of the renowned New York restaurant Savoy, was the only non-Montana chef to prepare a dish at Chico.

There is a growing awareness of the connection between a healthy local food economy and sustaining healthy local landscapes. Evidence can be seen for this in the popularity of farmers markets, in the rise of restaurants using local suppliers, and in the growing Slow Food movement. Started in Italy to celebrate that country’s rich local food heritage and to preserve it in the face of globalization, Slow Food has expanded to include organizations in fifty countries. There is even a chapter—or convivium—in Montana in Bozeman, with other convivia planned elsewhere in the state.

In Montana, the Corporation for the Northern Rockies is a key player in this savory revolution. To learn more, visit CNR’s website—www.northrock.org—and especially their Sustainability Marketplace, an “online catalog of sustainable products & services”—www.northrock.org/marketplace—where you will find sustainably produced Montana mushrooms and melons (and many other fruits and vegetables), wines, goat cheeses, flours and grains, herbs, and lamb, beef, and poultry.

CNR’s commitment to these issues can also be seen at their annual Sustainability Fair held in Livingston. Their Market Connection Program© connects qualifying sustainable producers with appropriate markets. The program offers services to both producers and markets in order to increase consumer demand for these products.

Another Montana leader in this movement is the Alternative Energy Resource Organization (AERO), whose Abundant Montana program has served as a model for several other states. Visit their website to order the fifth edition of their Abundant Montana catalog, which includes more than eighty producers listed by region and by name. In addition, the AERO site features
a 32-page downloadable (PDF) guide to Montana’s farmers markets. For both, look under “Publications”—www.aeromt.org/publications.php—on their excellent site.

Even the Montana Department of Agriculture nurtures local food culture with its annual Montana Culinary Excellence Awards, which honor chefs who use Montana-grown ingredients (see http://visitmt.com/virtualvisitor/06recipe.htm).

To whet your appetite, following is the menu for the 2005 Montana Harvest Celebration dinner—followed by contact information for the producers and chefs involved (please note that CNR plans to host its 2006 annual Harvest Celebration on October 6. Check their website for details: www.northrock.org).

2005 Montana Harvest Celebration
The Inn at Chico Hot Springs
Dinner Menu

Corporation for the Northern Rockies
(www.northrock.org)

Appetizers
Lamb Terrine with Blue Potato Salad & Green Tomato Relish
Chef Jeff Miller, Papoose Creek Lodge, Cameron
ET Farms, Spring Creek Farms & Gallatin Valley Botanical

Flying D Bison Triangles with Wild Mushrooms & Amaltheia Cheese Dip
Chef Eric Trager, Bridge Creek Backcountry Kitchen, Red Lodge
Flying D Ranch & Amaltheia Dairy

Seared Montana Legend Beef on Buckskin Cakes with Trinidad Pepper Sauce
Chef Peter Hoffman, Savoy, New York
Montana Legend Natural Angus Beef Co.

Entrées
Cuban Boliche with Kobocha Squash & Kamut Salad
Chef Eric Stenberg, Community Co-op Deli, Bozeman
B Bar Ranch, Geyser Farm, Garden City Fungi & MT Flour & Grain

Smoked Steak Carpaccio with Goat Cheese & Beet Ravioli
Chef Wick Kreig, Crazy Mountain Chef, Big Timber
Indreland Ranch Angus Beef, Amaltheia Dairy & Gallatin Valley Botanical

Il Pasticcio Di Verdure with Sunshine Squash, Leeks and Spinach
Chef Jim Liska, Adagio, Livingston
Deep Creek Green & Geyser Farm

Slow ‘n’ Low Roasted Pork Loin with Zac’s Yellowstone Kitchen Sauce
Chef Zac Kellerman, Zac’s Montana Kitchen, Livingston
Miller Natural Pork

Japanese Breaded Whitefish with Saffron Aioli, Fried Leeks & Stewed Lentils
Chef Jim Chapman, Xanterra Parks & Resorts, Yellowstone
Mountain Lake Fisheries, Timeless Seeds & Miller Natural Pork
Roast Montana Poussin with Cracked Wheat & Roasted Root Vegetable Salad
Chef Ian Troxler, *Lone Mountain Guest Ranch*, Big Sky
Chef Matthew Fritz, *By Word of Mouth*, Big Sky
*ET Farms, Timeless Seeds & Gallatin Valley Botanical*

**Dessert**
Chocolate Truffles
Chef Cynthia Downs, *Bittersweet*, Livingston
*Montana Flour & Grains*

Montana Tiramisu
Chef Kristen Robinson, *Cannon Creek Catering*, Bozeman
*Amaltheia Dairy, Yellowstone Coffee Traders*

Heirloom Pumpkin & Chocolate Mousse
Chef Matthew Fritz, *By Word of Mouth*, Big Sky
*Gallatin Valley Botanical*

Sour Apple & Lavender Tartlet with Pecan Crust
Chef Mike Showers, *Gallatin Gateway Inn*, Gallatin Gateway
*Gallatin Gateway Garden & Orchard*

**Montana Harvest Celebration Chefs**

Chef Jeff Miller, *Papoose Creek Lodge*
1520 Hwy 287 North
Cameron, MT 59720
888.674.3030

info@papoosecreek.com
www.papoosecreek.com

Chef Eric Trager, *Bridge Creek Backcountry Kitchen & Wine Bar*
116 South Broadway
Red Lodge, MT 59068
406.446.9900
bridgecreek@eatfooddrinkwine.com
www.eatfooddrinkwine.com

Chef Peter Hoffman, *Savoy Restaurant*
70 Prince Street
New York, NY 10012
212.219.8570
http://savoynyc.com

Chef Eric Stenberg, *Community Co-op Deli*
908 West Main Street
Bozeman, MT 59715-3248
406.587.4039
huh@bozo.coop

Chef Wick Kreig, *Crazy Mountain Chef*
Big Timber, MT
406.930.2254
crazymtnchef@yahoo.com
www.uspca.net/mt/crazymtnchef
Chef Jim Liska, *Adagio*
101 North Main Street
Livingston, MT 59047
406. 222.7400
jimliska@livingstonpizza.com
www.livingstonpizza.com

Chef Zac Kellerman, *Zac's Montana Kitchen*
P.O. Box 975
Livingston, MT 59047
406.222.4892
info@cookingontherange.com
www.cookingontherange.com

Chef Jim Chapman, *Xanterra Parks & Resorts*
Box 165
Yellowstone National Park, WY 82190
307.344.7901
info-ynp@xanterra.com
www.travelyellowstone.com

Chef Matthew Fritz, *By Word of Mouth*
P.O. Box 160760
Big Sky, MT 59716
406.995.2992
bwombigsky@montana.net
www.bigskycatering.com

Chef Cynthia Downs, *Bittersweet*
121 South 2nd Street
Livingston, MT 59047-2603
406.222.5593

Chef Kristen Robinson, *Cannon Creek Catering*
Bozeman, MT
406.581.7587
kristen@cannoncreekcatering.com

Chef Mike Showers, *Gallatin Gateway Inn*
P.O. Box 376
Gallatin Gateway, MT 59730
406.763.5314
www.gallatingatewayinn.com

Chef Ian Troxler, *Lone Mountain Guest Ranch*
Lone Mountain Ranch
P.O. Box 160069
Big Sky, MT. 59716
800.514.4644
www.lmranch.com
Montana Harvest Celebration Suppliers

ET Farms
7259 U.S. Highway 89
Belt, MT 59412
406.788.9901
enrique@3rivers.net
www.mtcountrymarket.com

Spring Creek Farms
5885 Stagecoach Trail Road
Manhattan, MT 59741
406.282.6026
njv@montanadsl.net

Gallatin Valley Botanical
3400 West Dry Creek Road
Belgrade, MT 59714
406.284.4159
M_Rothschiller@msn.com

Flying D Ranch
Gallatin Gateway, MT

Amaltheia Dairy
3380 Penwell Bridge Road
Belgrade, MT 59714
406.388.5950
Info@amaltheiadairy.com
www.amaltheiadairy.com

Montana Legend Natural Angus Beef Co.
115 South Broadway, Suite #1
P.O. Box 209
Red Lodge, MT 59068
406.446.4000
800.838.5657
www.montanalegend.com

B Bar Ranch
818 Tom Miner Creek Road
Emigrant, MT 59027-6013
406.932.4197
www.bbar.com
www.whiteparkbeef.com

Geyser Farm
Livingston, MT

Garden City Fungi
West of Missoula, MT
406.626.5757
info@gardencityfungi.com
www.gardencityfungi.com
Montana Flour and Grain
2500 Chouteau Street
P.O. Box 517
Fort Benton, MT 59442
406.622.5436
www.montanaflour.com

Indreland Ranch Beef
170 Glasston Road
Big Timber, MT 59011
406.932.4232
iaranch@3rivers.net

Deep Creek Green
90 Deep Creek Road
Livingston, MT 59047
406.222.7109

Miller Farms Natural Pork
Livingston, MT
http://stores.ebay.com/Miller-Farms-Natural-Pork

Mountain Lake Fisheries
P.O. Box 1067
Columbia Falls, MT 59912
406.892.2247
mtlkfish@whitefishcaviar.com
www.whitefishcaviar.com

Timeless Seeds
120 Fourth Ave. S.E.
Conrad, MT 59425
406.271.5770
www.timelessfood.com

Gallatin Gateway Garden and Orchard
Gallatin Gateway, MT
TRAVELS & TRANSLATIONS
Meditations on the Space In-Between
Julia M. Becker’s Flowweb
Jessica Hunter Larsen

Photography: McMillan Studios, Daniel Biehl &
Julia M. Becker

Note: This essay first appeared in the catalog accompanying
Julia Becker’s solo exhibition, Flowweb, mounted by the
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director, for their invaluable assistance.

“The process and work are not linear for me. It is cyclical, radiant,
layered, woven, linked, merged. It is all happening at once, rich and
vital.”

There are moments in our lives that are electric, charged with
possibilities. The breathless instant between the fading of the
symphony’s last note and the thunder of applause; the split second
on the beach when you aren’t sure if the water swirling around
your ankles is pushing you toward shore or tugging you out to sea;
that deliciously anxious moment between wondering if he will kiss
you and knowing that he will—these are the moments when all
sure bets are off and everything is possible. These moments form
the space in-between, where magic and science dance. In between

Julia M. Becker, Flower Chandelier (detail) with floor sculptures, 2005, ©
2005 Julia M. Becker.
creation and destruction, sleep and wakefulness, ebb and flow—this is the place where art lives. This is the place Julia M. Becker calls home.

“Breaking down, tearing through, obliterating, removing, cutting through, revealing and concealing, wiping off, wiping on . . . the process of destruction is equal to the process of creation.”

In Hindu cosmology, creation and destruction are faces of the same god. God is everywhere, in everything, and transforms continuously. As every gardener knows, this cycle of birth and death constitutes the essential process of life—all must die to be reborn. Transformation is a constant for Julia M. Becker as well. She creates a drawing, only to paint over it. Cutting the painting into stencils, she makes a hand-rubbed print. Layering the print with dressmaking patterns, maps, or EEG readings, she transforms the print into a collage. By suspending multiple collages from the ceiling, she gives them a new life as a hanging tent. Metamorphosis plays out in Julia’s video paintings as well. Ephemeral images—created of light and transmitted through light—flow freely from one to the next, in a continual celebration of the impermanence of this life. Julia admits that she is often more invested in the process than the product. Creating, contemplating, re-creating—all are part of the same whole, as natural as breathing. In this evolutionary artistic process, meaning is inextricably tied to making.

“In the effort to move away from our inherent materialistic tendencies my working process involves tearing down the methods/techniques/processes that can obsess us and take us away from drawing deeper, past surface.”

The continual evolution that characterizes Julia’s creative life flies in the face of what we think of as “making art.” Isn’t the end result of an artistic endeavor a precious object, one to be revered, protected, marketed, possessed? In our relentless consumer culture, where we judge our social status by our ability to acquire the right material objects (anything but Manolo Blahnik shoes simply won’t do), Julia’s pursuit of art as a catalyst for transformation, rather than a commodity, becomes a perplexing, if not downright radical,
proposition. How can we assess something’s value if it won’t sit still long enough to be weighed and measured, classified and appraised?

“Sometimes the work is a meditation, a prayer, a discovery, a practice. It is letting go, trusting, allowing intuitive knowing to do its work. Sometimes the images come quickly and solidly. Other times it is vaguer and requires more play, more layering, more time, more evolution.

And yet, while process and performance are undeniably part of the whole, Julia’s artwork is rooted in substance. In fact, the sheer joy she takes in her materials is palpable and contagious. We as viewers revel along with her in the delicate weave of a handmade paper, the
sensuous curve of a found tree-branch, the solid comfort of a lump of clay. So how do we account for art that simultaneously celebrates the essential qualities of its materials, while continually evolving away from materialism? To appreciate Julia’s work, we must step outside the world of fixed and immutable things to become part of the metamorphosis. For a moment, we must live in the space in-between the material and the idea.

“The work is informed by a personal connection to what I understand of Hinduism from my experience in India. God is everywhere, everyone is god, god is always transforming. Life is but a fleeting moment. Anything can happen. Your experience is unique and valuable and

universal. Death is always present. Life is a gift and a duty.”

When Julia’s artworks do pause long enough in their evolutionary journey for us to admire them, they are magnificent. After so many incarnations, these wise old souls have stories to tell. This is sacred art for a vehemently secular age, and as such, it demands our active involvement. Images weave together to form visual narratives of personal and spiritual quests that compel us to embark on journeys of our own. We don’t merely look at the images Julia creates— we inhabit them. Many religions embrace the notion of metempsychosis, the migration of consciousness or the soul from one state of being to another. Julia’s artworks encourage a kind of
visual metempsychosis; by inhabiting a sequence of images we, too, participate in the transformative process. Identity becomes fluid as the boundaries that separate animate from inanimate dissolve. Swaying dancers plant tree-roots, swimmers become one with the waves, and girls grow wings. Everything is evolving all the time and we are along for the ride.

"The hand-sculptures are created out of lumps of clay that fit in my hand. I’ll start and finish with the same amount of clay—nothing is added, nothing is removed. I make these without looking, often with my eyes closed. Or sometimes I’ll make them during a meeting, under the table."

She may be on to something. The constant transformation that characterizes Julia’s art may, in fact, describe the world better than a fixed, precious object ever could. Quantum physics tells us that, at an atomic level, all objects are in a constant state of flux. In fact, the act of looking at something changes the way it behaves. Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle states that the presence of the experimenter changes the experiment. For example, since light affects the behavior of electrons, they behave in a fundamentally different manner under experimental conditions than they do when left alone. Julia knows this intuitively: she often will create drawings or make clay sculptures with her eyes closed. There is a moment, in between looking and not looking, when the world may be fundamentally different than you know.

"The 'other' imagery, the awareness of what I’ll call energetic imagery, is what my work is about. We know more than we know. There is more than we see. If we let go of our assumptions, our judgments, and allow


While engaging larger universal ideas of spiritual evolution and growth, Julia’s artwork is also deeply personal. Every facet of her life permeates every aspect of her art. Her experiences as an artist, an observer, a citizen, a traveler, a musician, a teacher, an athlete, a partner, and a mother are woven throughout her art. At its core, Julia’s work is about intimacy—with oneself, with others, with spirit, with humanity. So it is not surprising to find her working on the floor, squatting directly over the paper, creating an intimacy with the work that only immediate, physical contact can provide.

“Sometimes I paint with both arms, moving like a dance over large paper on the floor. Other times it is a quiet meditative miniature-painting mode, like Persian paintings. Some of the small paintings have been an attempt to bring the immediacy and spontaneity of my sketchbook paintings and drawings onto the wood panels.”

Challenging, forgiving, deeply humane, rooted, and ephemeral, Julia M. Becker’s artwork may be the perfect antidote for a world that seems hopelessly entangled in materialism. In celebrating the moments in between the flow and ebb of our daily lives, Julia’s artwork helps us forge connections to other people and connect to something greater than ourselves.

“Just this morning I was thinking how the work is about intimacy, with place, each other, with the universe; about practicing it, and passing it on…I ask myself, ‘why do I do this?’ It is my prayer for the world.”
This exhibit is dedicated to my father

Flavian T. Becker
1929–1983

Whose heart sang through music,
And whose love will always sing through me.

And especially, my soul mates,
Daniel and Eula.

Julia Becker has been making images for as long as she can remember. Her daily life and immediate environment, including travel and living experience throughout the world, inspire and inform her work. In 2002 she traveled to South India on a project exploring sacred sites. After her return, Jessica Hunter Larsen, Curator at Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art, invited her to share her India experience in an exhibit of her current work. Julia spent a couple of years working on the multi-media works that became the installation of Flowebb and Nonstop India (video installation). During that time other influences continued to make their way into the work, including current social/political/environmental issues and events as well as physiological and medical imagery and feelings as an outcome of her daughter’s ongoing medical issues. There is also always the inspiration and influence of music, as related to body, memory, presence, and connection. Julia spent twenty-one days installing the elaborate installation, which involved building a flower chandelier (with flowers grown in her garden and donated and harvested from other gardens in the area) and layering and sewing translucent paintings and hand-prints on the walls. During the course of the installation, there were collaborative performances in the exhibit space, filming, and readings.
from Death in Persia, a novel
Annemarie Schwarzenbach (translated from the German by Chris Schwarzenbach)

Note: The daughter of a wealthy Swiss textile family (her mother was a Von Bismarck and a Nazi), Annemarie Schwarzenbach rebelled against the rigidities of her background. A lesbian, a drug addict, and a passionate anti-fascist, she was, as Thomas Mann put it, “a ravaged angel.” She was also an extraordinarily talented writer and photographer, producing more than ten books, both fiction and nonfiction (most of which remain in print in German, from Lenos Verlag [http://www.lenos.ch/]), and nearly 3,000 photos (held in the Swiss National Archives).

Best friends to Thomas Mann’s children, Klaus and Erika, she has become, in the words of Amy Winter, curator at the Godwin-Ternbach Gallery, Queens College, “a cult figure in Europe similar to Frida Kahlo in America. She was an exquisite if tormented individual who held fascination for many of her contemporaries . . . Roger Martin du Gard . . . thanked her ‘for walking the earth with the beautiful face of an inconsolable angel’ . . . while others described her as a ‘noble being of captivating charm.’”

During a visit to the United States to photograph the effects of the Great Depression in the American South, she met Carson McCullers, who promptly fell in love with her. In 1941, McCullers would dedicate Reflections in a Golden Eye to her Swiss friend. Always struggling with depression and addiction, Annemarie died in 1942, after a fall from her bicycle in the Engadine. She was only thirty-four. Two films deal with her life and writings, the documentary, A Swiss Rebel: Annemarie Schwarzenbach 1908–1942 (2000), and the feature, Journey to Kafiristan (2001).

Annemarie spent considerable time in the Middle East, and her Death in Persia, though labeled a novel, appears to straddle the divide between fiction and autobiography. Translator Chris Schwarzenbach, a part-time Helena resident, is Annemarie’s first cousin. He is dedicated to making her work more widely known in the English-speaking world.

Part I:
In Teheran

The heat was so great in Teheran that it seemed to breed in the walls, as in earthen ovens, and to emerge in the evenings, saturating the narrow alleyways and the new, wide, shadeless streets, preventing the entry of even a breath of night-cooled air. The gardens of Shimran stayed a little cooler. Leaving them, one was immediately assaulted by a white and shimmering light veiling, due to the heat, the rising mountain wall of the Tauschal in a light gray transparency. Veiled also was the far too white sky, and the plain below was cloaked in a
white haze. Just a month ago the plain of meadows, ploughed fields and fields of grain had still been light-green, yellow and earth-brown. Now it was a barren desert. And, beyond Teheran, where you find the ruins of the old city of Rhages, a dust cloud billowed up and down. There, the camel caravans stretched out on the road to Qom, bells still chiming. . . .

Qom is a holy city. If you are driving from Teheran to Isfahan you can see, across a broad expanse of water, its golden mosque, but the highway makes a detour around the city, so you cannot enter its bazaars and courtyards. Another golden dome can be seen in Shah-Abdul-Azim, an oasis village next to the ruins. But the most golden and holiest is the dome of Meshed, far to the Northwest, on the age-old road to Samarkand.

A few weeks ago the Shah forbade the wearing of the Kulapahlevi—named after himself—and recommended instead the wearing of European hats, but he then also allowed women to dispense with the Chador and even to appear unveiled in the streets. One heard about protests here and there, particularly in the holy cities. Although the Kula was a very unprepossessing, indeed ugly, visored cap making the wearer look like a tramp or criminal, it allowed the wearer, when praying, to turn the visor around to the back and then touch the ground with the forehead, without uncovering his head, as was officially required. That was simply not possible with a European felt hat, or a little straw cap, or a derby—and therefore the Mullahs thought their moment had arrived, and they preached the holy scriptures in secret meetings and also quite openly, in the mosque courtyards.

One read in the newspapers of how joyously the people greeted the civilizing innovation, and ministers and governors of the provinces gave dinner parties at which the invited wives were compelled to appear without the Chador. The multitude crowded around the entrance to see the spectacle of the arriving coaches from which the shamed and confused ladies descended. During the dinner the servants removed the invited guests’ Kulas from the cloakroom. So, when the guests then departed, they had no choice but to put on one of the conveniently provided Farangi hats, so as not to return home bareheaded. That was indeed a perfectly planned, one might say Western, operation! Just the way Peter the Great had removed the beards from the Boyars! Those beards lasted longer in Persia; instead the Iranian diplomats may henceforth wear a bi-point, which the progress-frenzied West reintroduced only with the French Revolution, together with Human Rights: one can see from this which has greater longevity. The Magyars in Hungary are required to grow long mustaches, if they wish to sit in Parliament, and thoroughly wax the boldly up-twirled tips, and thus prove their patriotism. But where could the Shah have found a model for the introduction of the good, old Human Rights?

The Bazaar in Teheran had to remain closed for three days because of the Kula Pahlevi. Was there really gunfire in the holy mosque in Meshed? One hears that the soldiers refused to shoot at the sanctuary, and at those of their own faith, and that they had to be replaced with Armenians and Israelites. The number killed is mentioned.

Those were the hottest days of the Persian summer. Some of the gardens of Shimran, surrounded by walls that were too high
and choking with dense vegetation, became stiflingly hot, as in a greenhouse. Mosquitoes swarmed over rotting pools. I became ill with malaria for the second time. When later I first left the garden, the surroundings of Teheran seemed scorched. In the uniformly leprous-yellow of the city, the gardens lay like dark islands. A young officer was walking ahead of me on the country road, his shoes and puttees white with dust. He was carrying a handbag and a box with his helmet. I stopped and let him get in. He smiled, sweat running over his suntanned face. We drove through the trembling air, between the withered fields and through the small bazaar of Dezashub, which seemed pitch black except for the faces of the salesmen, the children, the women's white shawls, shining like patches of light. The square in Taedshrish was large and empty, except for the coaches and their thin white horses, standing as if drugged, under the sun. I watched the officer walk away, through the empty square saturated with dust, and through the vibrating light. A policeman showed up at the other end of the square and signaled with his arm, apparently to me. But surely he didn't expect me to respond. In this heat everyone had enough to do just looking out for himself. . . .

Next I turn through the large gateway into a garden. Darkness and shadow roll over me like waves. A scent of coolness, earth, foliage; an avenue and the root of a tree leaps up ahead, and, if one tries to enter the curve too fast, bumps the car to the side. Now in third gear, up to the house! I park the car in the shade, get out, walk across the terrace, past the double doors made of fine mosquito screen. A piano can be heard, coming from the living room. I think: Zaddika is still practicing. Nothing has changed here—and I breathe more easily, relieved of the nameless fear, the result of the long drive through the open countryside, exhausted and transformed by the relentless sun.

Zaddika is thirteen years old. She is one of the most beautiful creations in this world. A band, like a hoop around her forehead, holds her dark hair back: a combination of an old-fashioned girl's haircut and a Nubian small child's head. Large, soft, gold-colored animal eyes in a delicate brown face. Her nose starts out wide, as if Zaddika always breathes with open nostrils. She sniffs eagerly and her voice is tender, flattering, with child-like enchantment. Like the little heads of Echnaton's perfect and charming daughters, Zaddika also has a bud-like, slightly opened and protruding mouth, a chin full of child-like and defiant resolve, a very thin throat, a neck, curved as if a little proud or in light sorrow. She is more child-like than her years, yet serious, attentive, reserved and affectionate far beyond her years. Each encounter with her brings renewed delight.

Zaddika's oldest sister is lying next to me under a large tree. They have brought us cushions and ice-cold water in frosted glasses.

"I am leaving," I say.

"To your English friends?"

"Yes. To their camp in the Lahr valley."

"When?"

"Tomorrow."
We are silent for a while. One hears calls from the tennis court, and the dry impact of the balls.

“And if you get fever again up there?”

I looked at her. She was resting on her elbows, and her hair fell like a shield over her face. She was beautiful, but she did not resemble her little sister at all. I thought that she had Circassian or Arabian blood. Her face, much too pale, was drawn from exhaustion and her eyes had a feverish glitter.

“And you?” I asked.

“I don’t keep track of it any more,” she said. “I always have a temperature. But my case is different. Nothing can be done about it.”

“The climate is bad for you,” I said.

She shrugged her shoulders. “For all of us,” she said, “but look, I can’t climb up into the Lahr valley! I wouldn’t survive the trip.”

“Shouldn’t one try it at least?”

She slid her hand gently across my mouth. “Forget it,” she said, “you will feel great up there!”

Climb up into the Happy Valley

The mules were waiting in Abala. It was eight o’clock in the morning; the sun slid down the pass towards us. The road from Teheran was behind us. It ran from Teheran through the stifling desert plain; then onwards into the congealed sea of hills, up and down through the yellow dunes, up to the top of the pass, at which point it drops precipitously, with frightening curves, into the Rudahand basin. Two hours in the car, but now everything was far away, now everything vanished—a new day lay ahead.

At first our trail took us through a valley, nestled between hills. The green banks of the brook seem to overflow, as over the edges of a basket, until they met the descending hillsides. Eventually we came to a grove of nut-trees, soon after that, grapes.

Then the pass started. I watched Claude lead off, his pith helmet pushed into his neck. The mules patiently dug their little hooves into the scree. The pass took us up high; into wind and racing clouds. And once up there we could look back, over the distant plain, and watch the clouds, dissipating, leaving only the sky and the barren earth, in a suffocating embrace. We turned and looked ahead: —there, on the far side of a valley, lay one of those extraordinary mountain ranges, consisting of sand, and only sand, steep, broad, with perpetually rippling slopes, reminiscent of snow slopes. Any minute a slab could come loose and plunge into the valley, or the uncanny rippling might coalesce into an avalanche. Crowning the sand slopes, a silver-colored rock band stood motionless in the blue sky.

From the top of the pass we climbed down into the valley, which was almost an abyss between two mountain ranges. It was a dead valley, far removed from the earth, far removed from plants and trees. Instead, it was all stone, saturated with gripping heat. Gray vipers,
gray lizards, motionless and coiled up delicately: —only their eyes were alive, black pinheads and a little tongue . . .

Even in the dead moon-valleys there must somewhere be a spring. What we found was a circular depression; within it a quiet water surface, stirred only faintly by the entry of a tiny stream of water, as by a bird’s beating heart.

We drank, resting on our hands. The mules stood next to us, half asleep, and sheep waited in a circle on the stony slope, all heads down and turned inward, seeking their own shadow. They were waiting for the end of the day.

We started the climb to the second pass, like sleep walkers. Not even the drivers were singing now, even though their song had been surprisingly similar to the sleepy pace of the mule caravans in the midday mountain wind.

We are far above the tree line. Still further up, cliffs plunge from the sky, like seashore cliffs into the sea. And suddenly we see camels, like legendary animals, their stretched-out necks strangely parallel to the narrow grass bands along which they are striding. They pluck grass and raise again the long necks, in rhythmical cadence. They stand still above, and are so big and threatening that we fear they are about to fall heavily through the sky down upon us. Instead they trot downward with swaying humps and dangling legs, and we meet, exactly at the top of the pass. And there, behind them, the cone of the Demawend emerges, an enchanted image.

We now proceed, always toward the Demawend. The pass drops gently, leading through a stone ravine and runs out into a broad valley. It takes us an hour to traverse it; the Demawend at its end does not become smaller; it is like a moon, a smooth cone seen from any side. In winter it is white: a supernatural cloud-white. Now in July it is striped, like a zebra. Above you can see the gentle plume of sulfur vapors emerging from the age-old crater of the Bikni-Mountain. The Assyrians gave it that name, as they recorded that a new people, the “Distant Meder,” had spread out up to its base. But they did not know that it had been a fire-sower. Now extinct since three thousand years! Since time immemorial!

This wide basin is not yet the Lahr Valley. Many valleys, some with names, others nameless, with foaming brooks, end up here—upstream they merge into the blue mountain ranges. Nomads are camping in the green grassy bottomland through which we are passing. Their black goat-hair tents are the same as in the deserts of Mesopotamia, the Kurdish mountains, in fertile Syria, in Palestine. Ahead of me I look at the route which I took through the old lands of Asia Minor. . . . at its end I find this valley floor! Burnt, yellow! The black goats and yellow cattle move across it, a fluffy mass, and the sound of their thousand pattering feet is like a rustling wind. A different rustle comes from the several thousand scarecrows—one is walking over the dry stalks, over their parchment wings and bodies, over living matter, reminiscent of a widening conflagration . . . .

My mule stumbles and falls. The Pustin slides down over the neck; I leap to my feet. Was I asleep? The drivers curse. We go on . . . .
Eight hours have passed when we finally reach the rim of the depression, and a narrow pass, a gateway between rock outcroppings. Behind the bend in the trail the white tents await us.

**The white tents of our camp**

The white tents are lined up on the grassy banks of the river. They come from India and are called “Swiss huts,” and have a double construction, with a sunroof over the smaller interior which is lined with a stretched yellow material. This creates a sort of shady porch in front of every tent, where one can sit in the mornings with books and writing materials, and the river flows by our feet, rapidly and peacefully, down the valley. And down there, at its end, the steady, brilliant pyramid of the Demawend rises. On both sides of the valley: the gray, rocky mountain range, gray: so light that it is almost silvery, and above that, to the south, the dark blue sky, spotless and incredibly bright.

In the afternoons the sun causes the valley to look white. Towards five o’clock, when the shadows become longer, we retrieve the fishing rods from behind the tents. The water is still silvery, soon it will be black. It is still a pleasure to undress and climb into the river and to let oneself be carried away by the strong current. One must cling tightly to the round, smooth stones. . . . There is always a wind on the riverbanks; one dries quickly, feels the sun’s heat on the nape of the neck, and shivers at the same time. . . .

The Tschaikhane is on the other riverbank, opposite our camp, on top of a gravel mound. Built like our huts in the Alps, on the highest sheep pastures along the Julier pass, the rounded stones are placed under the protection of the slope, so that roof and hillside merge. That’s where the Afje pass ends, an old mule-track leading from the valley of the Djarder Rud into the Lahr, and from here, around the Demawend, down to Mazanderan.

The sound of that name is wonderful: Mazanderan, a land of the tropics on the Caspian Sea. Jungle, primeval forest, humidity, malaria are in command down there. In Gilan, in the province to the west, they drain the rice fields and the Chinese teach the malaria-peasants the age-old art of cultivating tea. The Russian caviar fishermen live in the small coastal villages.

To the east the steppes begin, grazing lands for the Pendinic and Theke-Turkmenic people, with their red- and camels-hair-colored carpets, their tent rows, their saddlebags. They breed horses; in the fall seven-year old boys ride them in the great horse races. The Russian railroad begins in the port of Krasnowodsk, a lonely thread of rails running through the steppes: to Merw, Bukhara, Samarkand. And there we are already near the curly-haired Tadjiks, living up there in the Pamir in their soviet state. Asia. . . .

From our tents we watch the activities on the other side of the river. Mule caravans come around the corner, with jingling bells and driver calls. Others are coming up the valley, and one sees them from a long way off. Donkeys and riders are coming and sometimes camels. Caravans, nomads, soldiers. The soldiers, slit-eyed and deeply tanned, sit in their saddles, stretch their legs forward and

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1 *Tschaikhane: a caravansary*
gallop, with flying reins. All stop in front of the Tschaikhane; many spend the night there.

The animals graze along the river where the grass is abundant or they roll in the sandy banks. We see over there in the darkness a red fire. It fills the doorway of the Khan, where men sit around the samovar.

**Memory of Moscow**

Beginning of August. One year ago I was in Russia. It was hot, the streets of Moscow were burning, white clouds were always in the sky, and the aviators were cruising over the airport, tumbling and recovering, like sailors before the outbreak of the storm. The parachute jumps excited the young people; the jumpers threw themselves into the dizzying void from five thousand, six thousand meters, falling like stones and singing, to avoid being killed by the air pressure. Scraps of their heroic songs reached us. Then, already very low, already down to the silver tips of the radio towers, they yanked the parachute open and descended slowly to the ground. How long did it take? Minutes? One watched them fall, terribly slowly, and then just floating. All in a fraction of a second. A seventeen-year-old working girl jumped from three thousand meters and was killed. Later she was found, her hand clutching the shoulder harness instead of the ripcord, which should have opened the parachute. Would she be declared “heroine of the people”?

The young people were driven with ambition, filling the streets in white overalls or in the oily uniforms of the metro workers. Until late at night. On “youth day” it took ten hours for all of them to move across the Red Square. And they crowded around the entryway to the Hall of Congress and in the corridors of the old house of the aristocrats, to get a glimpse of the poets. First Gorki, then all the younger ones. Books were asked of the poets: about Russia, about the sailors, the fliers, the scientists, metro workers, Kolchose workers—about the women and the school children, the parachute heroes. One might well become alarmed about the art. . . .

Malraux asked me: “What is it you seek in Persia?” He knew the ruins of the city Rhages. He also knew about the passion for excavating. He had thought deeply about human passions and could see through them, and he was inclined to hold them in little esteem, except for what ultimately survived: suffering. He asked: “Just because of the name? Just to be far away?” And I thought of Persia’s terrible sadness. . . .

At that time I was often together with Eva. Her husband was a party member and spoke sternly and passionately about the need, also in modern times and especially today, to fight for a community which would be the society of the future.

He called himself Comrade (Tovariche), and yet his loneliness among them was much as a man with exceptional gifts might stand apart and still yearn to be accepted. He had been a Jesuit apprentice, had rejected the “credo quia absurdum,” bitterly disappointed. He had given up lofty spiritual satisfactions and had refused the compromise which accepts the shortcomings of the world by condemning them, rejecting the compromise which holds the obedience of the suffering masses while rejecting their claim to happiness in the afterlife, and is even able to misdirect the revolutionary impulse of youth (always
a guarantor of humanity’s quest for progress), into the service of the ruling power, by military discipline and idealizing their sacrifice. He had rejected all of that, as he became aware of the severity and urgency of the distress of his companions, and of the abuses to which they were subjected, and to their increasing resistance and suffering.

“Heave you read Spengler’s years of decision?” he asked. “So much wisdom, so much foresight . . . but why does this ‘brave pessimist’ side so unequivocally with the dying world? Why does he hate everything that is new and progressive, everything having labor-pains and growing-up problems? The workers, the part of the world which is Asia, its populations awakening to an awareness of history. Why should the ever-so-constitutional monarchies, unable, despite their officer corps, to prevent the revolutionary change in history, get preference over all innovation? He is rigidly, nauseatingly and subserviently dedicated to that part of the world which rules. We, on the other hand, a generation destined to fight and to die, wish at least to be on the side of the future.”

He worked day and night. Exhausted, emaciated, smoldering with an inner fire, he resembled a militant monk, and at times, an intellectual. He was dressed in bourgeois clothes, carelessly wore dark blue suits, a tie. His wife was delicate, blond, quiet, consumed by homesickness. She had grown up in a farmstead in Holstein, and she should have spent her whole life there, with younger brothers, and busy with making fruit preserves, baking, chickens and a huge flower garden. Her husband now would go to Siberia for six months, and that really frightened her.

“What do you expect,” he said (the three of us were having dinner), “a revolution is not for fun, and is not created at a convention for poets.”

“Couldn’t you take me along?”

“Impossible. You would only get in my way.”

“Then maybe—in Switzerland?” she asked shyly.

“In Switzerland,” he repeated angrily, “to Ascona, to friends—why not straight to Germany? Are you serious?”

She was crying.

He turned to me. “Couldn’t you explain it to Eva?” he asked. “I’d like her to stay in Moscow and become a worker in a weaving mill. Try to explain it to her: my responsibility to my comrades won’t permit me to have a wife who travels to Ascona for pleasure. I must have a wife who contributes her share.”

“She is homesick,” I said.

“And you?” he asked roughly, “maybe you’re not homesick? Why did you choose an uncomfortable life?”

He left, to some kind of night meeting. Eva and I remained seated at the table. She’s thinking of a meadow in Holstein, I thought, with spotted cows and red currant bushes. And I: of a lakeshore at home . . .
Eva had stopped crying.

One day I found myself, alone, on a small Russian steamer on the Caspian Sea, and the next evening we landed at Pahlevi. It was raining. A white-tailed eagle was squatting on the rain-whipped sand and was gazing across the sea. It was September, the summer was over, and Russia too was behind me: I watched the vineyards, the green hills of Georgia disappear and then came the semidesert between Tiflis and Baku, the return of Asia, and far away a camel caravan track and the first camels.

The Grusinian Military Highway is now already nothing but a memory. Gorges with cool, rushing waters and high rocky ranges behind them, then, suddenly appearing out of the clouds in the blue sky, the Kasbek’s pointed summit. The summer evenings in the villages.

A friend met me in Pahlevi. We drove along the beach, so near the water that occasionally a wave rolled under the wheels and soared high into the air like a flag. The wet sand was heavy, like snow. Darkness descended upon us, and behind the dunes lay the jungles of Rescht, in fog and twilight. Fires glowed through the fog, in open huts where the farmers of Gilan were sitting under thick straw roofs—one could see their ghostly pale faces next to the reddish lamps. The wind was blowing through the trees which had become parched during the summer and were now shedding their leaves. The bazaar alleys in the villages were illuminated: a lamp was burning in every store, the bakers stood in the glow of their round ovens and threw the lightly-browned flat bread on a cloth to dry. One could buy melons and eggplant, violet and dark green, and hundreds of vegetables and spices. There was Vodka and Arak in white bottles. The merchants squatted quietly behind their baskets.

We spent the night in Rescht. The next day it didn’t stop raining. We drove through the valley of Sefid Rud and up the high Kaswin pass. Beyond it lay the plain with the city of Kaswin in an oasis. Behind its colored gate the plain stretched out, down to Teheran.

End of the world—
Sometimes we call this valley “end of the world,” because it is well above other high earthly plateaus and we cannot be led any higher, except by the super-terrestrial, super-human, something that touches the sky,—the smooth cone of the giant. He blocks the exit from the valley. Yet when one moves up closer to his snow-striped body, even though remote as the moon, he remains an overpowering presence.

I said “exit from the valley”; —it must therefore lead down to somewhere. Its water must flow down to somewhere. The shepherds point with their hand: to the right, around the foot of the Demawend. (How big might his foot be? Down there where the water flows, might there still be fire and molten rock?)

Indeed, the valley leads down to Mazanderan, at first through green alpine meadows, then through woods that soon become a primeval forest. Bears, wolves, panthers and wildcats live there. Then come the tropical jungles, the dunes, and finally the Caspian Sea, gray between wind-ruffled patches. The villages are bewitched, animal skulls bleaching on the slopes, surrounded by their territory in a windless
silence. Yet, protected by the dunes that wall them off from the sea, one can imagine the restless murmuring of the waves and the cries of the birds, migrating to the easterly steppes.

Where the river narrows and divides into different branches the Lahr Valley gets lost among the black crags. Then its branches emerge again into a plain, a wide basin, where nomads have pitched their tents. In the evening the water lies still, mirroring, like silver veins in the shaded grassland. The cliffs tower behind. Oh, to climb up there! To look beyond the roof of Asia, with its rim of mountains and precipices! Down the pass of the old woman, to the blue of the Persian Gulf, to the narrow streets of its harbors: Bender Bushire and Bender Abbas. That's where you find the decaying consulates of the Europeans. An English civil servant, left behind, enters the bar of a harbor hotel in the evening, around seven, and sits among the smugglers and port police in a white dinner jacket, sipping his gin-and-vermouth. It's hot down there. The ships entering the port have purple sails. Sometimes one sees a fire on the black horizon and thinks it is a burning ship. But it is only the rising moon. Sometimes the coast, languishing in the heat, is enveloped by a sandstorm. The same storm had torn through India four hours earlier, was observed in Karachi, flew across the sand deserts of Baluchistan. Now the sand covers the houses of Bushire, like snow. Outside, the Bakhtiari wait in their mountains, and the Arabs stand by, their Kufija tied over their mouths and ears. Sand-spouts wander around, erratically and hurriedly, through the night; entire hills are blown away. Suffocated animals lie in their tracks. Gazelles with their beautiful eyes broken.

“And he viewed the beauty of the world,”—outside, from the last street opening to the sea, you can see the island Ormus, once a jewel defended by the Portuguese. The ruins, ashlars in thick brush, are reminiscent of fortresses and churches in Mexico.

Far away from there, in the high plains and surrounded by mountains, the columns of Persepolis still stand, like ships under sail. The royal terrace rises to half the height of the mountains, an expanse of ruins, testimony to a perished nobility. Sometimes it is covered with snow. Further up, over the graves of the Achaimenides, there are herds of ibex and mufflons with thickset bodies and strong horns, twisted backwards like curls. At night, watchmen live in the tombs, and the light of their torches sliding down the high walls brings the relics to life: ghostly processions of hunters, shepherds, bearers of tribute, kings.

The great shepherd dogs and woolly herds of sheep sleep in the plain below, bathed in white moonlight. A modest Tschaikhane of unbaked clay stands on the road to Schiras; trucks and stacks of gasoline drums crowd the courtyard. The chauffeurs, workers and one opium smoker are seated there as well. They look up toward the Terrace where, at one time, the palaces of their kings could be seen. Alexander, drunk after a festive meal and in love with the treasures of Darius’ library even while hating them, had the palaces set on fire. It was like the end of the world, as the roof, carried by the gigantic columns and animal bodies, started to collapse. Smoke and flames were picked up by the mountain wind and carried, as a dark cloud, across the terrace and out over the plain. The youthful king was delighted by the spectacle of destruction as his soldiers, in uncouth greed, hurried like shadows through the flames, robbing and snatching what they could, only to
be struck down by the collapsing roof.

The inhabitants of this country are so terribly lonely! You would have to wear seven-mile boots to get to one village from another; and what separates them is desert, rock, some kind of wasteland. In the thirteenth century the Mongols arrived from the plains of Asia and overwhelmed the Persian cities. Arab writers narrate that in the blooming city of Rhages one million people were killed. In the mountain village of Demawend the peasants fled to the Mosque. It did not help them; the Mongolian riders stormed through the streets and destroyed everything. They even found Alamuth, the castle of “the old man of the mountain,” hidden away on a cliff from where the Ismaelite would send his hashish-eating youths down as assassins to carry out his murder contracts; all the way across the desert, as far away as the crusader town Antioch, as far away as Egypt. The castle Alamuth had already become a legend; the only way up the cliff was on rope ladders. But the Mongols found the way and obliterated it.

In those days people fled from the flat lands into the mountains—as they did when the sword of Islam overran Persia—and now in the most remote valleys the villages have Persian names, and their inhabitants had neither mixed with Arabs nor with Mongols. High mountain ranges separated them from the others. In the plains it is the empty semi-deserts, rolling moonscapes, that undulate under the wandering light, like the sea. And the road runs straight across them, endlessly straight. On the top of a hill, far to the south, one finds the city Jäzdi Chast. It rings the hilltop, house next to house, like a castle, and casts the shadow of its fantastic silhouette down onto the plains. But the houses are dilapidated, the masonry crumbles between the wooden beams, and the wind whistles through the empty windows. And, below the town, sheep graze on a broad, light-green strip of grass running around the cliff, providing a touch of charm.

Those are the people from the villages, the high plains, the dunes and swamps of Mazanderan, from the port cities on the gulf. Those are the nomads from the Bakhtiari range, the shepherds, the horse breeders in the Turkmen steppes, the caviar fishermen. Those are the farmers and traders in Basar and the craftsmen: bakers and coppersmiths, lacquer artists, carpet washers. Those are the caravan drivers, the truck drivers, the workers and soldiers, the beggars. I once asked in Moscow why the communists did not propagandize Iran. The Persians must be the poorest of all people. . . .

“It’s impossible,” they told me, “the people there are not cohesive, no common consciousness. They are so alone that they are not even aware of their poverty and misery. They don’t even know that life can be better and happier; they think god has hit every individual with his misfortune.”

But much lonelier than Jäzdi Chast and the lonely mountain villages and the tents of the nomads of the steppes, much lonelier still is the Lahr Valley: already superhuman, like being above a treeline. Even the nomads and donkey drivers who pass through the valley in the summer leave it after a few months, and then the winter snow covers it over.
**L. A. Huffman: Photographer of the American West**

Larry Len Peterson


More than 500 images, 308 pages. $45 (softcover edition)

Reviewed by Mark Browning

If this book is someone’s first exposure to the labors of Laton Alton “L. A.” Huffman, it’ll be a sweet surprise to experience the fifty-plus years of his career that he dedicated to capturing his new-found love: the cowboy west of southeastern Montana upon its birth. This book was first created in 2003 as a low-number, pre-sold edition hardcover (with a few special leather-bound copies) that quickly became collectible before the softcover was printed to satisfy demand.

On the heels of the 1876 Battle of Little Bighorn, Fort Keogh, Montana Territory, was established and the nearby town of Miles sprang up shortly after that. The lure of legends and exploration was too much for the young midwestern photographer Laton Alton Huffman to ignore. He arrived to assume the “post photographer” position at the fort late in 1879. He wasn’t the first hire there, but unlike the others, he came and stayed. He witnessed, captured, and collected the transition from native-controlled buffalo ground to open range for sheep and cattle, and later fenced ranches and farms.

Huffman realized this was a changing era unfolding before his eyes and, more importantly, his lens. The excitement was doubled because of the ever-changing methods being experimented with in the relatively new photographic process. Of course, neither full-color film nor paper was available yet so hand coloring, when desired, was carefully applied. He had a professional relationship with several other notable and little-known photographers, and some of these people’s efforts pop up in the “Huffman Collection.” His own work was widely published or borrowed in that period, sometimes without credit that today is done as standard courtesy if not by requirement. It appears that little importance was given to the captor of the negative compared to whoever produced the tangible, viewable image positive, especially if it was altered to a new, unique image.

This is the first biographical and pictorial history of this figure in half a century. Oddly enough, it’s also the first book on this subject using digital imaging, the latest major development in photo technology. Two 1950s books by Mark H. Brown and W. R. Felton, *The Frontier Years* and *Before Barbed Wire*, provided the basis for some of what is related in the new book. Having the images replicate the vintage prints (many hand tinted) from which they were copied—rather than using new prints off the old negatives—adds to the historical flavor of the book. This collection also reduces the amount of yarn spinning that Huffman developed to help sell his product. It’s a large volume with over five hundred images, many not published previously. You’ll see only part of Gene and Bev Allen’s large private collection that also provided written reference material.
But where those early books retold the same story Huffman presented of this romantic western adventure, this new one also mirrors the daily life of his subjects. Yes, the reckless, horseback cowboy, the manly hunters, and bare-chested “noble savage” are still front and center, but you will see something fresh and new, such as a farmer on a horse-drawn potato-digging contraption while hand-pickers fill gunny sacks with this new crop. A somber yet defiant mood is often evident in the portraits of the displaced native residents. Typical of this genre, these individuals were often carefully posed and costumed for their sitting, and the indignation thrust on some is clear. L. A. Huffman: Photographer of the American West is primarily a wonderful picture book that reflects what Huffman was most interested in and includes enough stories to give the viewer a good point of reference.

This is still not the definitive biography of Huffman that is deserved or, even better, the history of these intertwined early photographers of the “This Last West” area of southeastern Montana. That history is yet to be thoroughly researched or gathered. L. A. Huffman: Photographer of the American West does parallel or presuppose another book that I would recommend, Photographing Montana (Knopf, 1990; Mountain Press, 2001), about the career of Huffman’s contemporary and sometime associate, Evelyn Cameron (see also www.evelyncameron.com/).
Given the dearth of existing titles on the Métis in the United States, it is a real pleasure to read Martha Harroun Foster’s new book. Her work has untangled and explained pieces of a little-understood yet central story to Montana history. When Anglo society took hold of this state in the late 19th and early 20th century, it committed a huge error—the aggressively unjust treatment and tragic denial of our Métis population. This book is a story of one group of Métis families who became sedentary in a specific place upon the demise of the buffalo; the town which grew around them is now known as Lewistown. Foster does a superb job of recounting those families’ struggle to maintain their distinct identity amidst a most often uncaring society. Yet I have serious concerns. Foster names her group the Spring Creek band, saying they belong to the state’s “longest continuously occupied Métis settlement” (p. 4). Determining “continuous occupation” is a highly charged notion used against Aboriginal peoples (Montana Métis specifically, to this day) throughout the colonial and national period as a judicial determinate to divest land and ignore prior rights of habitation. Historically, native communities shifted in co_relation to ever-changing environmental conditions. Is this how we want to speak of Indigenous community status of land tenure in this era? It also projects, from an external source, the “We’re #1” syndrome of individual supremacy onto one native community. Even applying the insatiable American and Western craving for exceptionalism, Lewistown still is not the “longest continuously occupied Métis settlement in Montana.” Suffice it to say, Métis have been living “continuously” throughout Montana since at least the 1830s and probably before.

I love Lewistown. It exists because it fits within the intrinsic unifying flow of river valleys and ancient roadways through permeable pulsating ecosystems to and fro’ areas of seasonal sustenance and power on an east/west and north/south axis across the Northern Plains. Throughout these environments Aboriginal communities, including the Métis, have long lived and continue to circulate. It is all related. It still exists. It is there to be known. The Medicine Line remains mysterious.

Foster, currently Assistant Professor of History at Middle Tennessee State University, relies heavily on the work of University of California anthropologists Robert Franklin and Pamela Bunte. They were hired by the Little Shell to write the Supplemental Evidence and Analysis in Support of Federal Acknowledgement of the Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians of Montana in 1994. They missed crucial historical relationships and primary sources; their analysis was premature and incomplete. The Little Shell petition is unresolved today. Franklin and Bunte devised a construct they named the “Havre–Wolf Point–Lewistown Triangle” (Supplemental Evidence, p. 41) to describe a strong pattern of Métis family
relationships in towns across Montana’s Hi-Line and down to Lewistown that “qualify” as “Indian.” It formed the basis of their petition rationale. Foster takes their idea, renames it, and says, “The Spring Creek families and their relatives who remained on or returned to the Milk River formed the kinship network that has come to be known as the Lewistown/Havre/Glasgow triangle or Lewistown/Milk River triangle [italics reviewer’s]” (p. 4). She uses this construct of relationships as the basis for her analysis. First, the (uncited) use of this anthropological consanguinity model is not in general parlance among Montana Métis; and, secondly—even if some few who’ve read the Little Shell federal petition might use the words made by an academic—it is a structure superimposed on a portion of the Métis community, not one that came organically from within the whole. That conceptualization of native community did not exist among Montana Métis until Franklin and Bunte put it forth. Foster, following Franklin and Bunte, perpetuates an external perception.

This book’s value far outweighs my concerns. But We Know Who We Are will have a real impact on our interpretation of Montana history. Foster mentions that Vern Dusenberry’s 1958 article, “Waiting for a Day That Never Comes: The Dispossessed Métis of Montana,” in Montana The Magazine of Western History, “was the first scholarly work to call attention to the Montana Métis experience.” She continues, “Unfortunately, it is also the only historical work devoted to the Montana Métis” (p. 12). Yet Dusenberry, himself, in that piece acknowledges Joe Howard’s inspiring Strange Empire (1952) as a “remarkable book.” And Foster, too, uses Howard’s book extensively. Agreed, Strange Empire is more than just about Montana’s Métis; that story cannot be told separate from its full cultural milieu. I sense the case the author builds embodies not only an American and Western exceptionalism in perspective, but also a personal exceptionalism. The University of Oklahoma Press notice on the book’s release in February 2006 states We Know Who We Are is “the first book-length work to focus on the Montana Métis.” Exceptionalism pervades and limits this story that, as Joe Howard and Vern Dusenberry both knew, is communitarian at heart.

Foster goes on to name others “who have studied the Little Shell Chippewas, a group that is closely related to the Métis” (p. 12). My gosh, they are the Montana Métis, along with many descendants of the Little Bear and Stone Child bands of Cree and Chippewa, and numerous Montana Assiniboin, Blackfeet, Crow, Gros Ventre, Salish, and Kootenai. Many of these people’s ancestors were part of a larger, fully integrated cultural, political, and economic alliance, based on family ties and known as the Nehiyaw Pwat (in Cree). Foster misses the Aboriginal take completely.

The introduction to her study closes with what’s been done to date in the field by stating “no work has examined the Montana Métis at length or explored the relationship of their history to that of Canada or the United States” (p. 13). Beyond the long existence of Strange Empire, which is heralded as the book that put the story in international perspective, there is in fact a major cooperative Canada–United States publication titled, Métis Legacy: A Métis Historiography and Annotated Bibliography (Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications, 2001, 512 pages) that covers exactly that ground. In it, Foster has a short essay on the Lewistown Métis. She includes it in her bibliography (though never footnoted).
Additionally, *Métis Legacy* is of, by, and for the Métis and scholars, published by Canada's premier Aboriginal press, with funding from numerous high profile U.S. and Canadian cultural and educational institutions.

I emphasize the introduction in this critique because it’s there that Foster sets up her take on the topic. Her closing paragraphs are telling. After explaining her use of lower case “métis” as meaning “all people of mixed American Indian and European descent,” she states that

The term “Métis” with a capital “M,” refers, more specifically, to an ethnic or social group that is, or is in the process of becoming, distinguishable from others. I do not intend to make a statement as to the date that the Métis people became an identifiable ethnic group. Ethnogenesis is a process, and I find it counterproductive to attempt to determine an exact moment when a group fits a specific definition and qualifies, in some way, as an ethnic group. Therefore, in this paper, “Métis” is used to refer to those people of mixed-Indian descent who take part in the process leading to a distinct Métis ethnic development (p. 14).

I think this is the crux of my discomfort. She mistakes national for ethnic identity. What distinguishes upper case “Métis” from all other mixed Indio-Euro-Africans in the North American experience is that this specific group of mixed bloods on the Northern Plains at the turn of the 18th to 19th century came to nationhood right in the midst of the hemispheric independence movements. Just as Americans (comprised of numerous ethnicities) came to be at “an exact moment,” July 4th, 1776, the Métis (also a people of multiple ethnicities) came to be on June 19th, 1816, at a place called Seven Oaks, outside the settlement of Red River, now Winnipeg. A battle occurred there that coalesced Métis political identity. It was Canada’s Lexington and Concord. The Métis sided with the Canadians (Nor’West Company), in opposition to the Crown (Hudson’s Bay Company). Later, in 1869–1870, the Métis created their own independent nation, the New Nation, that subsequently secured Canadian Confederation when they negotiated terms for inclusion as the Province of Manitoba. Again, in 1884–1885 the Métis sought to gain territorial enfranchisement in Saskatchewan through the misunderstood Northwest Rebellion. More accurately it was a resistance by a sovereign people in defense of their human as well as citizenship rights. The Métis are not “those people of mixed-Indian descent who take part in the process leading to a distinct Métis ethnic development.” The Métis are, and have been “distinguishable from others” for almost 200 years, as a sovereign people. Their ethnogenesis was the two hundred years prior to that. That is what the Little Shell fight is all about: sovereignty, not ethnic identity. They have long known who they are.

Yet *We Know Who We Are* is a noble work. It moves the discourse of Métis rights and aspirations within the United States to the next level. In this era of Montana’s “Indian Education for All,” Foster’s book is timely, important, and extremely helpful as evidence reinforcing policy decisions to include the Métis—still shunned. We have direly needed a clear and cogent telling of who,
what, why, when, and wherefore the Métis in Montana. Here is a significant piece of the story.

In praise of Foster, this is great micro-history with hard-working top-notch analysis of local records, census data, treaties, and genealogy. She does an amazing job telling the story of central Montana’s Métis. Furthermore, she has made an incredible contribution by clarifying a century’s worth of confusion surrounding the debacle of governmental dealings with American Métis. As all politics are local, all history is personal. Foster’s tracking a group of families from the late 18th through the early 20th century gives us one of the best historical accounts we now have of the movements of peoples over time and place that came to comprise a root element of Montana society. There is astonishing work here. Don’t let my rant keep a soul from picking up this book. To everyone interested in the missing link to the formation of our society: Go get Martha Harroun Foster’s *We Know Who We Are: Métis Identity in a Montana Community*. It has just taken its place as a “must read” for Montana history.
Another Attempt at Rescue
M. L. Smoker


Reviewed by Bill Borneman

Another Attempt at Rescue. What can it mean? A title at once obvious; yet ambiguous. Who is to be rescued? By whom? How many attempts have there been? Why have earlier attempts failed? Is the situation dire? How much time do we have?

M. L. Smoker’s first volume of poems is full of questions. Uncertainties abound. She evokes a doubt-drenched world. Simultaneously, it is a remarkably self-assured voice that speaks in these precisely crafted poems. Even as she voices her misgivings about where to begin and how to proceed, the reader is immediately drawn into the very heart of her concerns.

Consider the title poem, which includes an exact date:

Another Attempt at Rescue
March 20, 2003

The time is important here—not because this has been a long winter or because it is my first at home since childhood—but because there is so much else to be unsure of. We are on the brink of an invasion.

The situation may be unclear but Smoker is not about to hide behind obfuscation. It is her unstinting honesty that forces her to pose so many questions. Like it or not, as citizens we are all forced into reflections on war, on a personal and political level. For her part, Smoker continues:

When I first began to write poems I was laying claim to battle. It started with a death that I tried to say was unjust, not because of the actual dying, but because of what was left. What time of year was that? I have still not yet learned to write of war.

Yes, how does one write of war? It is not a trivial question. Let’s look at one example of considerable importance: President Bush sent the following letter to the two houses of the United States Congress on March 18, 2003:

Dear Mr. Speaker of the House (Dear Mr. President Pro Tempore of the Senate):

Consistent with section 3(b) of the Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Iraq Resolution of 2002 (Public Law 107-243), and based on information available to me, including that in the enclosed document, I determine that:

(1) reliance by the United States on further diplomatic and other peaceful means alone will neither (A) adequately protect the national security
of the United States against the continuing threat posed by Iraq nor (B) likely lead to enforcement of all relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions regarding Iraq; and

(2) acting pursuant to the Constitution and Public Law 107–243 is consistent with the United States and other countries continuing to take the necessary actions against international terrorists and terrorist organizations, including those nations, organizations, or persons who planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001.

Sincerely,

George W. Bush

In other words, we have still not yet learned how to write of war. The language in this letter is opaque, evasive, perhaps deliberately misleading. An exact date is invoked, but does it really pertain to the situation at hand? It never seemed likely, and seems less so now. Meanwhile, how is it possible to calmly proceed with life on a daily basis—let alone take the time to sit down and write a poem—confronted with this crisis?

I have friends who speak out—as is necessary—with subtle and unsubtle force.

But I am from this place and a great deal has been going wrong for some time now.

The two young Indian boys who almost drowned last night in the fast-rising creek near school are casualties in any case.

There have been too many just like them and I have no way to fix these things.

“This place,” is the Fort Peck Indian Reservation. Notice here the fine example of what Vine Deloria, Jr., called “Indian humor”? Essentially, Smoker is saying, Did you think things were going badly in Iraq? Try looking in on some of our Indian reservations. Today we can imagine an Indian talking on a cell phone with an Iraqi: “War going on three years now? That’s nothing. Call me when it’s going on 300 years.”

One man’s rescue mission is another’s imperialist invasion.

In 1969 Deloria writes: “The current joke is that a survey was taken and only 15 percent of the Indians thought that the United States should get out of Vietnam. Eighty-five percent thought they should get out of America!”

From the Indian point of view, it is undeniable: “...a great deal has been going wrong for some time now.” History is hard to fix. Language suffers physically by genocide and psychologically by assimilation and oblivion. In the poem, “Casualties,” Smoker writes,

“My grandmother was told that the only way to survive was to forget.

Where were you?

Where were you? Speaking of myself, for my own neglect: too often
I was nowhere to be found.
    I will not lie.
    I heard the ruin in each Assiniboine voice.

I ignored them all. On

the vanishing, I have been mute. I have risked
a great deal.
Hold me accountable because I have not done my part
to stay alive.

Again, the poet is mercilessly self-critical, which is another theme that threads through the book: personal accountability. Yes, these poems are deeply personal; however, they are not at all self-involved. Her self-examinations always have a social or familial orientation at their core. She concludes this poem with a stammering stanza that goes:

Sound is so frail a thing.

() hold me responsible,
in light of failure
    I have let go of one too many.

I have never known where or how to begin.

Nevertheless, another poem will be attempted. I suspect that a poem is a makeshift construction in which to preserve fleeting moments of meaning. Poetry is a survival skill. Like a tent on a mountainside in a blizzard, it can save your life, although it is not a place to set up permanent residency. But this is what makes meaning in poetry so incisive, bristling with electric charge.

How else could something so inconsequential be so essential? Poetry is not an escape into fantasy but an engagement with reality. Thus can a mere handful of poems bound into a book actually contribute to “fixing” things that have gone deeply wrong.

An early volume of verse by Frank O’Hara has the beguiling title, *Meditations in an Emergency*. It’s a good description of the poems in *Another Attempt at Rescue*. There is always a sense of urgency, yet the tone is casual. Quickly and quietly we are ushered into a vividly sensual world. Three examples of first lines:

We are the kids outside the bingo hall.

But on a train between Browning and Izaak Walton Inn. . . .

We pull into dirt driveway in Lara’s blue Celica.

With simple, deft strokes Smoker draws the reader into the Montana landscape. Often that means the strange in-between world of “the rez.” The term “reservation” is a troubling signifier. What should be the ultimately comforting concept, “Home,” is always surrounded by parenthetical cupped hands shouting silently, *remember*. (Or is it, *forget*) Remember what? One’s “place” in the world? History? Whose history and how far back? Who came here first? Who feels more at home on the range? One has to have
reservations about the whole situation. I think of James Welch’s “Riding the Earthboy 40”:

Earthboy: so simple his name should ring a bell for sinners.
Beneath the clowny hat, his eyes so shot the children called him dirt, Earthboy farmed this land and farmed the sky with words.

The dirt is dead. Gone to seed his rows become marker to a grave vast as anything but dirt.
Bones should never tell a story to a bad beginner. I ride romantic to those words,

those foolish claim that he was better than dirt, or rain that bleached his cabin white as bone. Scattered in the wind
Earthboy calls me from my dream:
Dirt is where the dreams must end.

“Dirt” appears four times in two brief stanzas. How could dirt die? What is more vast than dirt? None of us is any better than dirt? Dirt is the end of all dreams? Much as Smoker presents a vision of the world by means of questions, Welch posed questions about the world in cryptic affirmations. “Dirt” is kind of a foul word, while “earth” has dignity—“Earthboy” is downright lovely. However, “Riding the Earthboy 40” is only briefly a pastoral ode to farming the sky with words. Mostly it is a sober look at an existence that has trouble as a birthright, which is true throughout Welch’s book of poems. It is also true of this collection by M. L. Smoker.

The truly poetic utterance provokes perception more than describes or recalls it. Smoker does not write to titillate the intellect, but to dissect it. Her questions are not rhetorical or metaphorical but direct interrogations of lived experience. To think of this book merely as a collection of first poems is not sufficient—terms such as “testament” or “manifesto” come to mind. Another Attempt at Rescue heralds the arrival of a new voice of clarity and sincerity that is sorely needed in the literature of our time. Of this there is no doubt.
At heart, Jim Harrison is the purest combination of romantic and critic. He cares so deeply for the things he values—wildness, food, sex, and proletariat uprising—that his defense of these themes has become comically epic. His latest offering, *The Summer He Didn't Die*, is a dense collection of novellas peppered with discord, tongue-in-cheek subterfuge, and outright hilarity. Overall, it is a bag of mixed delights, with definite high points and glaring slumps. Arguably, even Harrison at his weakest is formidable. His readers have come to expect so much from him that the stakes are continually high, raised by the successes of each previous original contribution to literature.

Harrison has returned to the form of the novella periodically, a form he first made popular with the success of *Legends of the Fall*. Novellas are structured slightly erratically, with the start and stop of multiple stories comprising a book, but they support the terse pieces about revenge, affluence, and sex at which Harrison excels. None of the stories in *The Summer He Didn't Die* are related, but they allow for a wide range of experience to be packaged into a tight form—enough room for things to really swing. Unfortunately, the reader feels as if they don't quite reach the momentum needed to pull us through into belief.

It is often the fictional Harrison I most often have contention with, in characters that are stupidly libidinous, overly dramatized, or plainly flat. It seems that Harrison is at his best moving through the familiar ground of nonfiction. His essays are complete, gem-like in their clarity and obscure focus, wildly enjoyable, and expertly crafted. In *Just Before Dark* or *The Raw and the Cooked*, the reader is given a straightforward look at Harrison the person—in all of his eccentricity and idiosyncrasy. His most admirable qualities move between genres, like his stunning observations of the natural world, adolescent-like swoons concerning food, and startling insights into people’s behavior. These observations are worn on his shirtsleeve, drawn from over seventy years of quirky observation. That he brought the novella back from the edge of extinction and made it acceptable—even popular—is beside the point. For a writer described as dealing “with great vistas and vast distances” by the *New York Times Book Review* and moving with “random power and reach” by the *Boston Globe* (in blurbs from the back of *Dalva*), short narratives don’t give him the space—both physical and conceptually—to create greatness. Which returns us squarely to *The Summer He Didn’t Die*.

The title piece puts the reader in familiar territory with a farcical yarn about the misadventures of a miscreant Yooper (an inhabitant of the U.P., i.e. Upper Peninsula of Michigan) and ex-pulp logger, Brown Dog. This installment of the ongoing Brown Dog chronicles seems tamer, if possible, with the rampant libidos and ethical fudgings that ensue, but one that has heart. Brown Dog is tempered by his role as a family man, taking on the responsibility of raising his lover’s two children while she is jailed. Largely a canvas that reflects Harrison’s infatuation with the fringe elements of society—dropouts, smugglers, alcoholics, and gluttons—this look at domesticity is a folly in the making. Mix in a handful of
spiritual totems (garter snakes, ravens, and bears), not to mention a slew of Indian activists, misguided journalists, Gabriel García Márquez quotes, lesbian love swoons, and comp dental work against the backdrop of the celebrated small towns of Northern Michigan, and the ambling plot begins to boil delightfully. This is the novella I bought the book for, and despite the material feeling slightly worn, it kept me transfixed, while still wincing occasionally. *Republican Wives* is less successful. Still character driven, though by people we care nothing for—the overly spoiled, senseless heroines of the title—it is told in three parts. Each story is told by one of three close friends who have all shared the same lover at one time or another, beginning in college. Satirical and wryly written, the novella draws us into a world of class distinctions that uses the benchmark of their high school children’s spring break trip (skiing in Vail) and first-class seating to remind us how much these people are worth. Harrison relies on the conventional indicators of wealth and class, but in a way that leaves the reader unable to sympathize. Their plight, like many people’s, is self-inflicted. The lover is a bitter, idealistic leftist who uses the women at every turn through manipulations that are largely voluntary. When one of the three attempts to neutralize the uncaring lover with an overdose, the three rendezvous in Mexico running from the law, trying to formulate a plan. Harrison doesn’t pull off snippy female dialog or the cool disdain that he tries to impart to these Republican wives. Everything rings hollow, but again, maybe that’s the point.

The third installment, *Tracking*, is a windfall. Walking us through autobiography much as in *Off to the Side*, Harrison revisits his earlier attempt at memoir with fresh vitality. It still assumes the largely chronological pacing of a life lived, but is told third person and is filled with insight, balanced by its reliance on the fact and circumstances of Harrison’s life. It is a long line of well-written remarks strung together by a wealth of far-reaching and lucid quotes by the authors Harrison admires. As much a reflection on the act of writing as it is on the events of a life, *Tracking* has a clarity and grace that exhibit the writer’s inherent strengths.

In the Author’s Note that serves as an epilogue, Harrison talks about the need to revisit this material. He writes,

> Several years ago I wrote a memoir called *Off to the Side* (my favored place to be) and after it was published I began to question how much of the true texture of life it contained. We are born babies and what are these hundreds of layers of clothes? The sheer haphazard and accidental nature of life overwhelmed me from the lucky meeting of the girl I married to the fact that if my father and sister had begun their fatal trip a second later they wouldn’t have died in a collision. All of this can become the stuff of insanity or greater mystery, as if the crisp scissors clip of the umbilical cord begins a journey into chaos.

Filled with Harrison’s now familiar mythology, *Tracking* seems as if it is the answer by which he is able to greet the chaos. At once tragic, mysterious, down-to-earth, and insightful, this last novella feels as if it hits the mark wonderfully. It comes closest to why reading Harrison is so compelling and seductive, and ultimately so satisfying.
Changing Hands: Art without Reservation 2
Contemporary Native North American Art from the West, Northwest and Pacific

Edited by David Revere McFadden and Ellen Napiura Taubman


Reviewed by Alexandra Swaney

This catalog issues from the second in a series of three exhibits at the Museum of Arts & Design, New York City (until recently the American Craft Museum) and is aimed at celebrating and documenting the rich flow of contemporary art created by Native peoples of the United States (including Hawaii) and Canada. David McFadden, chief curator and vice president for programs and collections at the Museum, has collaborated with Ellen Taubman, an independent curator, to produce an exhibition and book saturated with ravishingly beautiful, highly skilled, creative, complex, and tangible ruminations on identity, history, and loss.

The publication features color images of the works of 183 artists, short bios of the artists, and quotes from many, as well as an introductory essay by the curators and twelve essays from a variety of writers reflecting on aspects of the exhibit, the history of Native arts since European contact, and the subsequent destruction of much of the traditional cultures.

Jackie Parsons, traditional Blackfeet artist and chairman of the Montana Arts Council, likes to say that Indian people had no word for art. Rather, art imbued every object and way of doing things of tribal peoples. Both beauty and functionality were necessities.

Tradition is a word that can be used as a weapon, as in “it’s not traditional,” or “it’s too traditional,” or “it’s my tradition, not yours.” The word carries an inherently dialectical charge and could be expected to be especially edgy for Indian artists. On the substantial evidence of this exhibit, however, the answer to this conundrum is that the strongest element of Native American tradition is creativity. These artists engage with their traditions in 183 different ways, some looking to carry forward the formal elements of the past with stunning skill and intelligence, some electing to use some of those elements in totally new ways, and some adopting “traditional” techniques of contemporary art to express their philosophical positions on the state of their identities as artists and Indians, and their responses to five hundred years of struggle.

The multi-wood (birch, mahogany, ebony, bird’s eye maple, etc.) sculpture of Northwest Coast artist Yaya (Charles Peter Heit) entitled Tele Box, is a striking example of the juxtaposition of modernity with traditional form and materials. The carved and decorated wooden box was a staple of Northwest Coastal art. The beautifully made maple box is open, and within is seated a telephone receiver made of ebony, next to a keypad on which the keys are made of abalone. The artist says, “I think tradition is continually in state of change, or innovation, constantly being altered to reflect the artist’s life experiences. Sometimes I think I
have a duty to show the world something. Our art and our culture and our language have always been changing. Innovation is the second oldest form of tradition.”

Beadwork is of course a prominent element in many of the pieces shown here. An entire essay is devoted to examining the history of beadwork and its uses in traditional and contemporary Native art, from adornment to social commentary. It is almost synonymous with a stereotype that most of us, Indian and non-Indian alike, have in our minds about Indian art. Yet people worldwide have been using beads for millennia, and the kind of beadwork we see today is really the result of the adoption of European (and perhaps Chinese) trade beads by Native Americans, early on, applied to an ongoing production and decoration of all kinds of objects needed for daily life, warfare, and celebrations. This association makes for some wonderfully beautiful and lighthearted, yet serious, pieces of art. Consider the common tennis shoe, an icon of the Indian love for sports, sports attire, and especially here in Montana, basketball. Wind River artist Teri Greeves has dressed up a pair with solid blue seed beads, red shoelaces and beaded powwow dancers. They make you smile.

Jackie Larson Bread of Great Falls is also widely known for her amazingly intricate portraits, often done on the outside surfaces of buckskin-covered boxes. She was much influenced by her Blackfeet grandmother’s beading, but she also references the recent popular poster style that is another powerful stream among the artists shown here. Her main color is blue, true to the historic usage of colors favored by most tribes. She, along with Oklahoma artist Marcus Amerman, is among those who have pioneered the use of beadwork as a primary element in contemporary Indian art. Like many others of these artists, Jackie attended the I.A.I.A. (Institute of American Indian Arts) in Santa Fe, New Mexico, subject of one essay, The I.A.I.A. and the New Frontier, by Richard Grimes. The importance of this school in the development of contemporary American Indian art cannot be overstated. Founded by visionary Cherokee-Irish artist-designer Lloyd Kiva New and supported by early stellar faculty Fritz Scholder and Allan Houser, the school, originally a B.I.A. high school, became one of only three congressionally chartered colleges in the United States. (Montana Blackfeet painter Neil Parsons was also among the early faculty at I.A.I.A.). It has produced four thousand graduates and a steady stream of positive influence on the careers of Native American artists, providing them with the freedom to dream and express countless forms of their tradition—or not. With its progressive faculty, the school gave permission not to be an “Indian” artist, not to have to follow strictly the expectations of the dominant culture as to what exactly an Indian artist should be.

Bently Spang is Montana’s international postmodern art warrior: sculptor, visual and multimedia-performance artist, and writer whose creativity shrinks before no challenge. He has exhibited postmodern, clear plastic versions of his native Cheyenne attire in an Italian gallery and created and performed the collaborative multimedia piece Techno-Powwow while in residence at the Montana Artists Refuge. Spang was also a player in the postmodernist multimedia production Geyserland, during which stereotypic images of Indians were projected on rock faces from a moving train traveling from Livingston to Bozeman, Montana. “Real live” Indian Spang roamed through the train acting as (traditional) clown and counterpoint to the images being projected.
both by the train and its mostly non-Indian passengers.

In this exhibition and book, Spang’s ironic warrior is represented by *War Club #1* from his Modern Warrior Series, 1998, a more-or-less life-size war club made of glass, moss, brass, mirror, hot glue, and rawhide, an intriguing and ultimately mysterious object. His other piece is *The Four Stages of Dried Meat*, in which he transforms the cultural “trait,” to use the anthropologist’s word, of drying meat into a piece of art. Four pieces of silicone imbued with reservation dirt are hung from commercial pant hangers on the wall. Spang notes,

> By juxtaposing natural sculptural materials with artificial, I am able to create a metaphorical and symbolic representation of myself. The tension that inherently exists between the natural and the artificial characterizes the difficulty of finding a balance between the two worlds that I exist in. Achieving that balance becomes the ultimate challenge. The specific materials I use also serve a metaphorical function in that they support the layers of meaning built into each piece.

Molly Murphy is a young Montana artist who is using her (traditional) skills as a seamstress and beader to create more contemporary images that, in their construction, reflect past cultural practices, patterns, and materials in a new light. Her *Six Horses Courting Blanket* is a beautiful fusion: beaded horse heads-as-chevrons cascading wavelike across a silhouette landscape of black wool against red.

In her essay, “The Edge,” Jennifer Complo McNutt discusses the art of Montana artist Corwin “Corky” Clairmont, among others. Currently chairman of the Art Department at Salish Kootenai College, Clairmont attended art school in Los Angeles in the 1980s. His recent pieces successfully fuse elements of traditional Salish culture with use of contemporary materials, often making statements about what McNutt calls “the edge,” which she defines as the sometimes-painful interface between cultures. In the three-dimensional work *Split Shield*, Clairmont references the traditional element of a shield, but the piece is constructed of paper fiber made to look like torn fragments of tire track and eagle feathers. A zigzag of white runs down the center of the shield, evoking the controversy when the Confederated Salish and Kootenai tribes protested the State of Montana’s plan to widen Highway 93 through the Flathead Reservation. Clairmont says,

> My ultimate goal as an artist is to remind people of our shared humanity. I wish to give Indian culture back the humanity that has been taken from it by stereotypes created over the past five centuries. Neither the super-shaman nor the drunken Indian do anything to convey what we as a people feel. I want to express the passion, pain and reverence I feel as a contemporary Native person.

No one could have better expressed the impact of this exhibition and publication.
Headwaters Dance: The Premiere Performance
Reviewed by Caroline Patterson

Previously known as Mo-Trans and housed at the University of Montana for twelve years, Headwaters Dance Company, under the direction of Amy Ragsdale, made its debut appearance on February 22 to 25, 2006, at the Missoula Children's Theatre. This performance was the company's first appearance as an independent company. The performance featured six pieces as well as the first installment of the Montana Suites project in which a guest conductor is selected to choreograph a piece about Montana.

This debut bears the stamp of Ragsdale's international vision—with pieces about or from around the world—and features Ragsdale's full flowering as a choreographer and as an artistic director. While her work has always had a striking combination of intensity and whimsicality, pieces such as “Oops” exhibit Ragsdale's understanding of the inherently comic nature of formality. To the music of “Palenque Rain Song,” by Kan ‘Nal, three prim female dancers in suits—Sarah Bortis, Anya Cloud, and Kaila June Gidley—are perched on stools crossing and uncrossing their legs as a male dancer, Kevin Wall, tries to join in. In between each piece, an Italian-speaking clown brings the performance down to the audience with imitations of audience members looking for seats or by staging a mock dance audition. In the curious love story, “Dance for a Girl,” choreographed by Terry Dean Bartlett and Katie Workum, dancers Anya Cloud and Kevin Wall face each other, Cloud seated behind a cello, drawing out a slow note with her bow, while Wall flops his body down on a mat, the violent slap of his body making the audience increasingly nervous until, at last, Anya reaches out to comfort him.

Ragsdale's overtly political piece, “Caged,” makes a statement about the relationship between isolation and violence—which reflects her experience of watching the United States' action in Iraq from Mozambique, where she lived last year. One dancer (Anya Cloud) surrounds herself with wire boxes as the others (Sarah Bortis, Brian Gerke, Kaila June Gidley, and Kevin Wall) push and shove around her, growing increasingly violent.

Ragsdale says in her program notes that she is interested in working collaboratively with her dancers, using them to help “generate the movement for each piece,” which in turn, she says, “stretches her movement ideas.” Her “Upsurge 2006,” set to the driving music of Steven Reich's “Electric Counterpoint,” features just such a celebration of sheer movement. The spectacular piece, “Naranj 2004,” choreographed by Felecdia Maria, is a celebration of movement virtuosity. Danced brilliantly by Brian Gerke, the piece is a combination of Thai dance, American street dance, and head-bobbing East Indian dance that dazzled the audience with its complexity of movement and intensity.

Finally, the featured Montana Suite Part I: Boulder Batholith 2005, was choreographed by New Yorker Jane Comfort, with an original score by Charles Nichols from the University of Montana Music School. The piece featured a trio, Maxine Ramey on clarinet, Margaret Baldridge on violin, and Christopher Hahn on piano, with vocals by Beryl Lee Heuermanof. Inspired by a trip Comfort took through the Boulder Batholith and around Butte, the piece contrasts the “overworld and the underworld” of a mining...
community. As the piece opens, we hear the pounding, ear-piercing sounds of heavy machinery and the whistles from underground; then, by the headlamps on the dancers’ foreheads, we begin to see their machine-like movements, from the rattling ore carts to the steady movement of the picks. Comfort contrasts the dark, claustrophobic world of the mine with the chaotic spinning of the world above ground as images of Butte landmarks, such as the M & M Café, flash in the background. The movement of the piece spins faster, as the dancers portray the increasingly frenetic dancing in the honky-tonks and the violence that produced the natural landscape. Then, in the last scene, we see three women and a man in a grouping reminiscent of a turn-of-the-century photograph. With the flash of a gun, then a camera, the figures disappear, one by one, till we are plunged into the darkness and silence.

The debut performance of Headwaters Dance Company was huge, varied, and energetic. With pieces ranging from the comic to grave, and the Italian clown in between to eliminate any self-seriousness that might develop, the new company had a charged and exciting launch.
In Memoriam
René Westbrook

Jack Fisher, Jr., lived life large, made art, nurtured creativity from his students, and danced his way through forty-nine years of exuberant giving to his family, friends, and community. Jack died in the early morning hours of February 1, 2006, of cancer.

Jack was born in Spokane Washington, on March 31, 1954. His family moved around a bit, but eventually settled in Great Falls, Montana, where Jack graduated from Great Falls High School in 1972. He went on to study art and education at Montana State University and returned to teach in the public schools, eventually to become chair of the art department at Great Falls High. His teaching, his creative impulse, and his infectious laughter will sound in the ears of everyone he came in contact with for years to come. Jack simply was life, and the world seems much lesser with his passing.

Jack was a brilliant educator, good friend, and beloved family member, as spoken of eloquently at his memorial service on February 5, 2006. Nearly five hundred people attended this service, and family, friends, co-workers, students, and art collaborators lined up to speak of Jack’s amazing ability to help everyone to Just Be Themselves. He invested his students with the courage to put aside any expectations, loosen up, have fun, and create from the heart. He had real ability to give people a sort of permission to bravely experiment with their creativity and just enjoy themselves.

Jack’s art was lively, entertaining, and thought-provoking. Humorous in appearance, he brought people to his work by using colorful mixed media and found objects in witty and visually interesting ways, and once you were really looking at his art, the serious underlying themes became evident. He used repeated images to create his own vocabulary: peanut butter sandwiches were not only about home and childhood, they were about poverty. The images of his animals were joyful and playful, but look closer and you notice that flames surround them and some have angel wings or halos; Jack lost his home, his possessions and most of his beloved pets in a terrible fire one year. Jack repeatedly used the theme of the sanctuary of home in his work. One of the last large mixed-media pieces Jack completed is entitled Home Is Where the Heart Should Be, serigraph, n.d.
Where the Heart Is and featured images of himself with his animals, under a sheltering roof, with an escaping Peter Pan shadow-self climbing out of the image. He had this persona that was generous, gregarious, and public, but he also had his home and his well-tended privacy. For Jack, the unconditional love he got from his pets became the peaceful place he could count on to regroup, so he could go back into the world and be the warm giving person he was so well known to be.

Jack was a vital part of the collaborative contemporary artist group known as the Caravan Project. Jack loved the Caravan Project and its mission of bringing contemporary art to rural and isolated Montana communities and interacting with people without the constraints of formal art gallery settings. Jack would disappear into his animal-print contact-paper-decorated RV at night and emerge in the morning with new outfits for his “performing dogs.” His laughter would ring out across the Caravan’s camping and show spots, and kids would flock to his display. He was a fun magnet.

Jack empathized deeply with everyone he came in contact with and connected with the human core in people he met. He was the opposite of intimidating. His emails were entirely done in capital letters with too many exclamation marks to count; exactly the same way he talked and lived.

Jack had numerous solo and group exhibits during his career and will be honored in 2007 with a show at Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art in Great Falls. Curator Jessica Larsen is mounting this show and seeks loans of Jack’s art for the exhibition. For more information or to arrange a loan, please contact her at 406.727.8255.

Jack is preceded in death by his beloved brother and leaves behind his family and very special friend in Caroline Street. If you have thoughts, memories, or condolences you would like to share with Jack’s family and Caroline, please write:

Mr. and Mrs. Jack Fisher, Sr.
3805 Seventh Street N.E. #13
Great Falls, Montana  59405
In Memoriam Reverend Bob Holmes (1925–2005)
Compassionate Listener, Prophet, and Peacemaker
Frank Kromkowski

The Rev. Dr. Robert M. Holmes, known as Reverend Bob to hundreds of Montanans, died at the age of 80 in the arms of his family and his God Saturday, Sept. 24, 2005. . . . Rev. Bob was an outspoken advocate for education, low-income people, single mothers, gays and lesbians, children in poverty, people in prison, the elderly and other people whose voices are not heard by the political system. He wrote, spoke, organized, testified before the legislature, and often stood alone to speak the truth out of his understanding for Jesus’ message of compassion. . . . Rev. Bob modeled his life after three heroes: Jesus, Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. . . . The attentive compassion of Christ was his model, his strength, and the path he followed to his last breath.

~ Helena Independent Record, September 25, 2005
www.blueuniverse.com/thsculptures/film.html

To write a memorial essay on Bob Holmes’s contributions to Montana and its culture and life is more than a daunting task. In writing a memorial tribute to anyone we want to do justice to their lives and memory—however, in remembering Bob Holmes we are confronting and remembering a spiritual, cultural, moral, and intellectual giant, whose “main mentor,” as he often said, was Jesus Christ. Bob Holmes was not just a student of Christ—he was a profoundly attentive, conscientious, faithful student of his main mentor and we are forever grateful that the following statement from his obituary is true and we can stake our lives on its insight into his life: “The attentive compassion of Christ was his model, his strength, and the path he followed to his last breath.”

I can speak for many of us who knew Bob, as I did for the past twenty-five years, and say without the slightest hesitation that Bob Holmes was one of the greatest people we have ever known—a profoundly compassionate person, a man whose tough and creative mind and tender heart nourished us and hundreds of others in amazing ways and whose loving presence we still feel and follow. We who were blessed to know him know that Bob Holmes was a man whose heart and mind were overflowing with a beautiful music of love and intelligence and transformation and empowerment that got deep into the secret parts of our souls. He loved so many of us so deeply and made us clearly feel and know how much he loved us that we knew that in Bob Holmes we had found a second, beloved father to whom we could turn at any moment. The fruits of Bob’s love and generosity and encouragement to so many people in encounters that were far from the public eye will always be remembered in secret. But they are
secrets that we will always be ready and willing to share—humble of heart, following his main mentor, he would never broadcast his actions, but we will always treasure and share the secrets of those moments and times when he was there for us in our darkest nights, those times when we needed him most and when he passed over sympathetically into our lives, when he was there with us shoulder to shoulder like one person, as our profound companion who shared the good news, the life, love, and light of his main mentor.

The range of Bob’s more public contributions to Montana and Montana’s people is also vast—they range from his day-in-day-out work as an ordained minister and as a college chaplain and teacher, to his important stands on issues of war and peace, human rights, poverty and the needs of low-income people, single mothers, gays and lesbians, children in poverty, people in prison, the elderly and other people whose voices are not heard by the political system, to his planting of life-lifting seeds, seeds of compassion and transformation and creative possibilities.

At the time of his death at the age of eighty, Bob was a retired Methodist minister who had served St. Paul’s United Methodist Church in Helena for many years. A week before the fall that led to his hospitalization with a broken neck, with his long-time friend Rev. George Harper and many Helena friends, he was making plans to launch a new Helena television program in which he and George would reach out to Helena citizens looking for a progressive Christian perspective on the weekly news. This proposed adventure would have been a refreshing alternative to the “television evangelist” of the sort that preaches a gospel of bondage and subservience while asking for money and would have continued Bob’s work over the years in radio and television as the author of a popular radio and TV series of one-minute “Lifelifters.”

As a chaplain of the Helena Police Department for twenty-two years, he rode shifts with Helena’s peace officers, stood in solidarity with them in their difficult and trying work, listening to them and encouraging them to do their best with honor and respect for all the troubled and dangerous people they had to deal with.

He listened to Helena’s police officers and gave untold numbers of hours to this work. While he was famous for his speaking abilities and in constant demand as a speaker across Montana and across the nation, he really should be famous for his listening. He listened and listened for untold numbers of hours not just with Helena’s police officers but also to hundreds of others and spread the gospel of listening. In one of the greatest gifts he gave to Montana, Bob Holmes shared and taught the art of empowering listening. He was the Montana initiator of a profound form of counseling (called Co-Counseling or Re-Evaluation Counseling) in which counselors learn to listen, profoundly listen to others, and use the Co-Counseling process in which people of all ages and of all backgrounds learn how to exchange effective help with each other in order to free themselves from the effects of past distress experiences.

Bob was rightly known as a great speaker, preacher, and teacher. He lent his speaking gifts to the Montana Committee for the Humanities Speaker’s Bureau for many years and was in constant demand as a speaker at the local, state, and national level. Preaching for Bob Holmes was always also teaching with profound respect for his hearers. Whenever he preached and taught, he lived by the words of Chaucer—“all gladly learn and gladly teach.” Whether he was leading his “Heretics Club” seminar or presenting a keynote speech at some national or state conference, he was
always trying to share his insights by laying out for consideration the evidence that he thought backed up those insights, respecting his hearers and their questions and intelligence.

He was invited to deliver a series of sermons for the national Protestant Hour broadcast and he worked those into a book entitled *Why Jesus Never Had Ulcers and Other Thought-Provoking Questions*. Bob could speak with and did speak with and respect people of all social classes and levels of education. Bob Holmes was a scholar and published author (of the book of sermons just mentioned and of *The Academic Mystery House: The man, the campus and their new search for meaning*—and two unfinished books). Bob was one of the people we call a “zetetic”—a person with an active and persistently inquiring mind. He was a voracious reader (of newspapers and books, and journals on all sorts of topics in politics and culture and economics and the arts—not just on traditionally “religious topics”), and was always ready to dialogue with anyone from the standpoint of his original research and study.

Bob Holmes also held many academic degrees (bachelors and masters and doctoral degrees from Illinois Wesleyan University, with graduate degrees from Northwestern University, Garrett Theological Seminary, and the Pacific School of Religion). But unlike many academically oriented persons and ordained ministers, he regularly used his studies to prophetically speak out against the injustices of our lives and times when faithfulness to the truth meant that silence was a sign of complicity with injustice. He spoke out and spoke out often—whether it was President Reagan’s “contra war” against the people of Nicaragua or President Bush’s invasion and military occupation of Iraq—or the neglect of the needs of the children and the poor and of women and of workers denied their rights to fair pay and decent working conditions—or of injustices against our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters—or against the United States’ threatened use of nuclear weapons.

Bob combined his profound knowledge of the Bible and that Bible’s God’s concern for justice and the cries of the poor and the oppressed with his constant study of the news and of the reality of what was happening that wasn’t being reported adequately in the daily news. He and his wife Polly Holmes traveled to Nicaragua in the 1980s to see for themselves what was going on in that country—and Bob came back to help lead the opposition to the United States’ illegal war against Nicaragua.

While some in the Christian community in Helena and across Montana wished he would keep quiet, he did not. He often said, “You have to get people to believe absurdities to get them to commit atrocities” and he fought for truthfulness even if it meant going against popular opinion. He apologized in a sermon—entitled “Why I’m Only 70% Christian”—for not having spoken out even more strongly against U.S. foreign policies and the U.S.’s support for repressive military regimes in Latin America and across the world. However, the historical truth is that Bob Holmes often stood alone to speak the truth out of his understanding of Jesus’ message of compassion for all.

He was an active member of innumerable organizations working for social and economic and social justice—including the Montana Low-Income Coalition, Montanans for Social Justice, WEEL (Working for Equality and Economic Liberation), the Methodist Federation for Social Justice, the Montana Workers’ Rights Board, the Helena Service for Peace and Justice, and the Helena Peace Seekers, to name just a few.
This Harley-riding chaplain of Rocky Mountain College from 1965–1981, born in 1925, in Mitchell, South Dakota, is now at rest. As the obituary written by his family says:

He was a Navy ensign in WWII, a big band leader, vaudeville comic, jazz pianist and arranger, rock climber, model train buff, honorary elder of a band of Lakota Sioux in South Dakota, personal counselor, radio show host, author of two published books, reader at Montana Talking Books Library, and deftly played the musical saw. ... Yet it was Bob’s personal relationships that transformed people. His caring, compassion, attention, and personal generosity changed the lives of many people who encountered him. Because of him, people have joined the ministry who otherwise may not have. Because of him, people quit drinking or became better parents who otherwise might not have. Because of him, there are many who believe in their better selves who might not have seen their own inner light if Bob had not seen it first.

He led us in prayer and in action to a deeper sympathy and response. He often said as he led us in prayer, “Lord, a lot of your people are suffering today.” With his life and his last breath, he seemed to say (if I may borrow words from Bruce Cockburn and the Benedictine Monks of Weston Priory in Vermont):

Lord, let me be a little of your breath moving over the face of the deep—I want to be a particle of your light and love and life flowing over the hills of morning to your people. Everything you see is not the way it seems. Tears can sing and joy can shed tears. You can take the wisdom of this world and give it to the ones who think it all ends here, not knowing that You—the freshness of birth every morning, the grace that encircles our days—are here with us now and forever with your lovingkindness, asking us to follow you as your sons and daughters. You search our hearts and You know us. Our lives lie open to You. Waking or sleeping, in the dark and in the light, Your friendship enfolds all our ways. Lead us in paths that are faithful, And call us from death into life.

Bob Holmes once suggested a spiritual breathing exercise, to think these words as we breathe rhythmically: “I’m breathing out old memories, I’m breathing in new ideas. I’m breathing out old prejudices, I’m breathing in new truths. I’m breathing out old fears, I’m breathing in new courage. I’m breathing out old resentments, I’m breathing in new forgiveness. I’m breathing out old obsessions, I’m breathing in new freedom.” And he commented:

You can write your own rhythms, for that’s how life is lived, rhythmically. But I think it’s safe to say that the person who lives deeply breathes
deeply. When you’re sick, concentrate on each deep breath bringing new health. When you’re tired, concentrate on each deep breath bringing new strength. When you go to bed, concentrate on each deep breath bringing rest and relaxation. Breathing is fundamental. And it’s not by accident that the ancient Hebrews thought of breath as the soul.

Bob wrote in a sermon on August 26, 2001, entitled “Beyond Change to Transformation”:

Jesus’ objective was to call people to a new vision of the way things ought to be with themselves and with the world. He called it the Kingdom of God and he said it is “at hand,” “within you,” “in your midst.” The only thing standing between you and its final arrival is your need for transformation. Now, if you have a bunch of untransformed people together, you have an untransformed society, and it doesn’t take many reads of a newspaper or viewing of TV news to see how radically our society is in need of transformation, needing not just some changes here and there but transformation. A nation like ours—the wealthiest in all history, where one-fifth of our children don’t have enough to eat—is in need of a moral transformation. A nation like ours—capable not only of solving our own social problems but easing the pains of much of the rest of the world as well, but where the desire for profits supersedes the desire to help—we are a nation in need of a moral transformation.

As Bob Holmes now breathes in new freedom at a cosmic level, we still down here are in need of a moral transformation. Following Bob’s lead, we can discipline our minds and cultivate a tender heart, the better to reach out to those who are left behind by and are of no concern to the so-called rulers and powerful leaders of our lives and times. With Bob Holmes’s passing we say goodbye to a person who leaves us a legacy of kindness and compassion and an invincible commitment to seeking peace and truth. I thank God for the privilege of knowing this great man. Knowing that our dear friend and mentor Bob Holmes is now on an even more cosmic adventure thrills me to the bone, for the rest of the universe now gets to know a great person who was always glad to learn and glad to teach. Peace be with you, dear, dear friend, now and forever.
In Memoriam Polly Holmes (1923–2005)

Joan Uda

When I was a law student in Missoula, in about 1974, a friend and I came to Helena to testify on a Polly Holmes bill. Polly was a member of the Montana House, a Democrat from Billings. The bill was, I recall, about spousal assault, and was intended to address the problem of abusive husbands raping their wives. Not the kind of thing the legislative old guard was likely to support; the traditional view was that husbands owned their wives’ bodies, and that was that.

This was my first encounter with Polly, a kind-faced and diminutive woman. She thanked us effusively for making the trip and testifying. I can’t recall the fate of that bill, but Polly remained in my mind, a big-hearted female David to a gaggle of legislative Goliaths.

In 1976 I became staff attorney in the Governor’s office of Budget and Program Planning. By then Polly was in her third term, and I had heard about her from two sources. One was my church, St. Paul’s in Helena, where people knew her because her husband was a United Methodist minister, then chaplain at Rocky Mountain College in Billings. The other source was legislators and budget office staff.

At church Polly was known as dear but a bit eccentric; in the old days clergymen’s wives didn’t run for the legislature. She raised some eyebrows, but that never stopped Polly.

At the capitol, Polly was not popular in many legislative circles. Remarks about her often started with, “That @%&# Polly Holmes.” For one thing, she had a firm grasp of her legislative mission and couldn’t be bullied, bought, or confused. For another, she violated the unwritten rule that first-term legislators should keep a low profile and not sponsor many bills. Her daughter Krys suggests that she wasn’t aware of that rule, but I wonder. I can see Polly saying quietly to herself, with that sweet smile of hers, “I’ll just introduce a few little bills and see what happens.”

The thing is, Polly ran for the House the first time from the south side of Billings, a district with a lot of poverty, because she wanted to speak for the disenfranchised. One of her campaign slogans was, “Polly for Unpowered People.” When she was elected, she was besieged by individuals and groups who wanted her to speak for them. She introduced twenty-one bills her first term, ranging from defense of low-income benefits to creating smoke-free work environments.

Polly had a vision. Her vision was bright, beautiful, uncompromised, and uncompromising, centered as it was entirely in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Her faith was rock-solid, and she knew what compassion looks like in daily life. She simply did everything she could to bring more of that into the world.

Polly’s vision and values made her utterly incorruptible, though her incorruptibility had its cost. People got angry at her because of her staunch courage, and her Polly-way of getting in your face with the sweetest smile, the softest voice, and unshakeable determination.

Her opponents, even some who should have known better, stooped to ridicule. Polly introduced too many bills, they said, she was a do-gooder liberal, she was a lightweight, totally impractical
and a little wacky, and she refused to acknowledge when she was beaten.

Her supporters had a vastly different view. Polly was undaunted by conflict, and willing to stand patiently for unpopular causes even in the face of indignation and outrage, and to keep going as long as necessary. As a friend said, “Polly was like a glacier; she moves very slowly and she’s unstoppable.”

I wondered how Polly had handled the ridicule, since I’d never seen her angry at anything other than injustice and cruelty to others. Her adult children Tim and Krys agree. Tim said, “She thought that what people did to her was no worse than what they did to others.” She never seemed to take it personally.

One of the favorite family stories about Polly in the legislature happened when she sponsored Montana’s very first bill to ban smoking in public places. When she rose to support her bill, the opponents all simultaneously lit cigars. With that amazing Polly aplomb and sense of humor, Polly finished her pitch with a medical mask over her face.

Polly was in the legislature for ten years, 1970–1980. Montana was richer for her presence there, though not in terms that everybody appreciated at the time. As Krys pointed out, from the 1880s through the 1950s, Anaconda Copper pretty much owned Montana public opinion, in the form of owning all or most of Montana’s daily newspapers. Only in about 1960 did they sell those papers, and Montana started emerging from under the company creed. Ten years later, amidst a new wave of progressivism and promise in Montana politics, Polly showed up in Helena, where she was intent on doing, to paraphrase John Wesley, Methodism’s founder, “all the good she could, in all the ways she could, in all the places she could, as long as ever she could.”

Polly’s vision was global as well as local, and sometimes the projects growing out of her vision of peace and justice were huge. In recent years she wrote letters to many world leaders, urging them, under the auspices of the United Nations, to establish councils of the wisest and best people in their countries who would have absolute veto power over war. Polly thought always in terms of what was possible, and this might not be likely, but it was possible.

Polly was also a writer of articles, plays, prayers, a novel, and any other form of writing that drew her interest. When her children were young, Polly wrote and produced plays, and members of Bob’s congregations provided the actors. Krys says, “Things seemed simpler in those days. Somebody would have an idea, Mom would write a play very fast, and they’d just do it.”

One of the stories I like best about Polly’s productions was the time the family plus a bunch of Rocky Mountain College students piled into a college bus and toured one of her plays to churches all through the West, ending up in Carmel, California—an instance of Polly’s positive focus coming real.

Polly’s plays always arose, like her other writings, out of the great wellspring of her faith, the prime mover in everything she did. According to Krys she looked for ways that her plays could help others, not just in their content but in how they were produced. When Bob was an Air Force chaplain, Polly saw clearly the segregation of the black members and their families. She wrote roles for blacks into her plays so that black and white families would be brought together both in the productions and socially.

Polly never seemed to pass an opportunity to do good to the planet as well, in both large and small ways. I remember how she
would save old envelopes, and by cutting and folding she would make new envelopes. In such ways her frugality became an art.

Yet with all the things she did on a wider stage, if Polly were sitting here telling me about the most important things she ever did, my guess is that she would say, “Being Bob’s wife and mother to Steve, Tim, and Krys.” In a way, the remarkable Holmes children are Polly’s greatest legacy: Steve, the United Methodist minister; Tim, the internationally known sculptor, and artist; and Krys, the poet. Steve and Tim are both part of the Montana Logging and Ballet Company, the music and comedy group that is hilarious with a bite. Anyone who hasn’t seen them on stage has truly missed out. More importantly, Polly’s children are as centered in what is good, right, and just as their mother was. She did that mother job very well.

I think there’s more to Polly’s legacy, though. The main theme I find in Polly’s life, and it’s remarkably consistent, is that she was a faithful follower of a loving Jesus, modeling her life on his. He was the source of her courage, her glacier-like unstoppability, her sometimes astonishing unflappability, and her marvelous sense of fun.

Polly is one of the people who made God real for me, by showing me how a life looks when someone walks in Jesus’ footsteps. Tim commented, “I think she was a saint. Not that we Methodists have saints, but I think she was one of those people who, when you look back at her life, you know she was a saint.”

Polly was a remarkable role model for how to live close to God. Krys told me her mother’s prayer life was about intimacy with God, and that was my sense too, that her prayer life was about being wrapped in God’s love and internalizing so much of it that she was loving to everyone she met.

Another part of Polly’s legacy is legislative. Because she was in it, the legislature was a better place. Some of her bills passed, many didn’t, but Polly gave some their first legislative outings so that they could become familiar, and years later they passed. More than that, her focus on political possibilities makes her another kind of role model, of one who refused to be discouraged by opposition or defeat and just kept working.

A week or two before Polly’s death and not long after Bob’s, I saw her one day at St. Paul’s, and I said, “Polly, you look remarkably well.” “Oh, I am,” she said, smiling that lovely Polly smile. “I guess there really is something to this God thing.”

I was so grateful that, though Bob was gone, we still had Polly. Then that virulent, fast-moving infection invaded Polly’s pancreas and killed her almost overnight, on November 25, 2005, at the age of eighty-two. I have no doubt that God was with her in her dying as in her living, inspiring her to write these words that she left by her bedside:

To our dear and trusted friends . . . . You have surrounded us with gentle, loving confidence that has made this a holy, meaningful time for our family. Thank you for all the ways you have served our physical needs and for the love and support in which you hold us all.

I have to agree with Tim. To me Polly is a saint, beatified not by a church process but by the way she spent her lifetime following Jesus. Her legacies are great, and many people loved her. She is sorely missed.
Brian Shovers

Bill (also known as Willie) Walker was born on February 11, 1949, in Fort Worth, Texas, but in 1967 his family moved to Three Forks, Montana, and Bill graduated from the high school there in 1968. After working for a time for the alternative newspaper, The Borrowed Times, Walker attended Montana State University, graduating from the nursing program there in the 1970s. After completing his practicum at St. James Hospital in Butte, Walker began his career as a registered nurse in Butte.

Walker became interested in the city’s records during 1978 when the city moved its offices from City Hall to the Silver Bow County Courthouse, and he rescued boxes of early city records destined for the dump. Walker lobbied Butte’s Chief Executive, Don Peoples, for a home to deposit the town’s earliest records. When Walker wasn’t nursing, he was collecting material to establish a Butte archives and refurbishing the Quartz Street Fire Station for use as a city-county archives. When the Butte-Silver Bow Public Archives opened in the fall of 1980, Walker became its first director, answering questions and arranging materials Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday afternoons. As the new director of the Butte Public Archives, Walker combed the community for important manuscripts, photographs, and records, to build the collection.

When Walker left Butte for San Francisco a year later, the collections included the records of a number of Butte labor unions, a wide assortment of city records, 1879–1920, and bound volumes of the many Butte newspapers. After leaving Butte, Walker’s interest in the archives profession blossomed. He helped establish the San Francisco History Project and was one of the founding members of the Gay and Lesbian Historical Society (GLBT) in 1985. For the first five years, Walker housed the growing archives in his apartment. In the late 1980s, Walker attended the University of California–Berkeley, earning a masters degree in library science.

The contribution made by Willie Walker to the Butte-Silver Bow Public Archives cannot be measured solely by the number of years of service. Walker, with professional training in health care and a love for history, had the vision to realize the importance of Butte’s past to its future, and acted to inspire others in the significance of what the city was poised to lose. Although Walker’s involvement with the Butte-Silver Bow Public Archives only spanned two years, he did galvanize the Butte community and local government around the preservation of its primary records. Walker successfully garnered $12,500 in federal revenue sharing funds from the local government to pay for insulation, new wiring, and smoke-burglar alarms to the refurbished fire station, as well as a $9,700 grant from the Montana Committee for Humanities to gather and catalog archival documents. Walker’s intercession on behalf of Butte’s documents came at a crucial time in the city’s modern history: in 1976 the Butte City Council voted against relocating
the town to the I-90 corridor to make way for open-pit mining by the Anaconda Company in the historic commercial district uptown, recognizing the significance of those structures to Butte’s self-preservation.

When the Butte Public Archives opened its door to the public on September 20, 1980, Bill Walker and a small group of volunteers from the Butte Historical Society, the World Museum of Mining, and a group of historians and architects from the Historic American Engineering Record survey team had spent the last year negotiating with the local government to rescue the turn-of-the-century Quartz Street Fire Station from the wrecking ball and applying a federal grant and local government appropriations to the retrofitting of an important historic Butte building and creating a vital public institution. Over the past twenty-five years, the annual Butte-Silver Bow Public Archives budget has grown from less than $10,000 a year to over $100,000 annually.

Since 1980, dozens of important articles, books, and films have been produced, relying at least in part on the vast collections of the Butte-Silver Bow Public Archives. A diverse group of scholars have relied heavily on sources at the Butte Archives to produce the following works: *The Gibraltar: Socialism and Labor in Butte, Montana, 1895–1920*, by Jerry Calvert; *The Butte Irish: Class and Ethnicity in an American Mining Town, 1875–1925*, by David Emmons; *Mining Cultures: Men, Women, and Leisure in Butte, 1914–1941*, by Mary Murphy; and *Tracing the Veins of Copper, Culture, and Community from Butte to Chuquicamata*, by Janet Finn. During the last fifteen years, materials found at the Butte Archives proved crucial to the creation of films for public broadcasting on the Butte Irish, Columbia Gardens, and Frank Little, and a forthcoming PBS documentary by Pam Roberts and Ed Dobb entitled “From Their Labors”; plus films by British Broadcasting on World War I; Arts and Entertainment on Evel Kneivel and Martha Raye; and an Irish National Television program entitled, “From Beara to Butte.” The records and maps of the Anaconda Company have been used in a number of Superfund court cases by both the U.S. Department of Justice and ARCO. The archives collections have proved invaluable to environmental engineers and construction crews in their rehabilitation of the landscape throughout the mining district in the past twenty years. A good number of graduate students from Yale, University of Pennsylvania, and colleges throughout the West have used the collections to write their theses and dissertations. The voluminous Butte, Anaconda, and Pacific Railway Collection at the Archives provided the basis for Charles Mutschler’s *Wired for Success: A History of the Butte, Anaconda, & Pacific Railway, 1892–1985*.

Willie Walker continued to support the activities of the Butte-Silver Bow Public Archives, returning to Butte on several occasions during the 1990s and donating his time to catalog and process new collections. On September 29, 2004, Walker died in Spokane, while visiting his sister, after a several-year struggle with cancer. The city of Butte and the people of Montana have benefited greatly from Walker’s passion for history.

For more about Bill Walker’s life and works, visit www.historians.org/Perspectives/Issues/2005/0505/0505mem9.cfm
Cross Talk: Our Readers’ Letters

We welcome your thoughts and comments, exhortations and praises, regarding this first issue of Drumlummon Views.

Please direct them to
Editor, Drumlummon Views
at
info@drumlummon.org

We will publish a selection of letters to the editor in all subsequent issues of DV.
About Our Contributors

Bill Borneman lives in Helena, Montana, with his wife, Patti. He works as a contract painter, dabbles in the “book business” (www.bedrockbooks.com), and plays Lo Prinzi guitars. His degree in philosophy from The University of Montana aids him in each of these endeavors. Borneman is currently a member of the poetry performance quartet, The States of Matter, a group devoted to the sonic realization of poetic occurrences. He is perhaps best known as the genial host of the literature reading series, “Naked Words,” held in the Rathskellar of the Montana Club, Helena.

Mark Browning is a third-generation Miles Citian whose family, in 1898, was among the hundreds that sat for their family photo portraits in front of L. A. Huffman’s lens. Since 1979, Browning has owned or directed art galleries and museums in addition to his own work as a studio artist in painting and wood constructions. As director of the Custer County Art and Heritage Center in Miles City, he began and continues to gather, research, and present the largest public collection of vintage Huffman photographs in Montana. He also co-directs the Miles City Speakers Bureau that sponsors a forum for artists, authors, humanists, and scholars.

Grace Stone Coates (see editors’ introduction to the selection from “Food of Gods and Starvelings: Selected Poems of Grace Stone Coates”).

Patty Dean received her A.B. in history from Carroll College and an M.A. in History Museum Studies from the Cooperstown Graduate Program/State University of New York. In the early 1980s, she was Curator of Collections at the Montana Historical Society and later founding curator of the Arkansas Arts Center Decorative Arts Museum in Little Rock. She worked at the Minnesota Historical Society for sixteen years, first as Museum Collections Manager and later as Supervisory Curator, and was thrilled to return to Helena this past summer.

Roger Dunsmore came to The University of Montana—Missoula as a freshman composition instructor in 1963, and he continued on in the Humanities Program until 2003. He received his MFA in
Creative Writing (poetry) from UM in 1971, under the guidance of Richard Hugo and Madeline DeFrees, and was a founding member of the Round River Experiment in Environmental Education. From 1976 to 2003, he taught in the Wilderness and Civilization Program in the Forestry School at UM. In 1991 and again in 1997 he was the exchange fellow between UM and Shanghai International Studies University in mainland China.

Roger’s many books include On the Road to Sleeping Child Hot Springs (1971; revised edition, 1977); Lazslo Toth (1977); Bloodhouse (1987); The Sharp-Shinned Hawk (1987); and Earth’s Mind: Essays in Native Literature (1997). In 2001 Roger ran the twenty-second annual wilderness lecture series, “The Poetics of Wilderness,” the Proceedings of which (edited by Dunsmore) were published by UM in 2002. Most recently, Camphorweed Press has published Roger’s third volume of poems, Tiger Hill: China Poems (2005) and the Montana Arts Council awarded Roger an Individual Artists Fellowship in 2001 for a selection of these poems. After two years of retirement, Roger resumed teaching in the English Department at UM–Western, Dillon. In 2005, he was selected as one of three finalists for the post of the first Montana Poet Laureate. He is married to the painter, poet, and Yoga teacher, Jennifer Fallein. Between them they have five adult children and two grandchildren.

Frieda Fligelman (see editors’ introduction to the selection from “Notes for a Novel: Selected Poems of Frieda Fligelman”).

Tami Haaland’s first collection of poetry, Breath in Every Room, won the Nicholas Roerich Prize from Story Line Press. Her work has appeared in Calyx, 5AM, The Florida Review, Rattapallax, and other journals, as well as in several anthologies, including Ring of Fire: Writers of the Yellowstone Region. She teaches creative writing at Montana State University–Billings.

Brynn Holt is a stonemason and poet and the principal voice of States of Matter. He won the Helena Festival of the Book Poetry Slam in 2004, and again in 2005.

Martin Holt is a legendary Montana ceramic artist and filmmaker. His many credits as documentarian include Rudy Autio Makes Night Music (1994); Dzintary, the Home Movie (1991); Summer of Mudders (1988); and Akio (1986), all from Montana Art Works (576 Third Street, Helena, MT 59601; 406.442.6331).

Martin writes: “My video work pursues the music of what happens. My influences range from Stan Brakhage to Andy Warhol. The topics that interest me are time, space, light, and music. Movies are not necessarily stories for me. They evoke activity and interaction. At least half of the movies I make are documents of a particular event. I want them to stand alone as if they were a fossil record.”

Chere Jiusto is the Executive Director of the Montana Preservation Alliance, Montana’s statewide non-profit group dedicated to preservation of Montana’s historic places, heritage, and culture. Based in Helena, MPA conducts outreach on community preservation, threatened sites, heritage education, and places of cultural significance. Chere came to MPA by way of the Montana Historical Society where she was Curator of History with the
museum and later served as the National Register coordinator and community preservation historian with the State Historic Preservation Office. Throughout her career, she has worked with members of Montana’s rural and tribal communities to preserve Montana’s traditional heritage and cultural landscapes.


Frank Kromkowski lives in Helena, Montana, where he is a member of the Helena Peace Seekers, serving as their co-chair from 2002 to 2006. He is a co-founder and co-coordinator of the Montana Peace Seekers Network and of the Montana Chapter of the Episcopal Peace Fellowship. Since 1963 he has been actively involved in the work of peace and justice organizations in Indiana, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Montana. Frank and his wife Carol Kopec have been married for thirty-nine years. They have three daughters and five grandchildren—ages 15, 8, 4, 3 and 15 months.

Prior to working for the State of Montana for the past twenty-seven years, Kromkowski was for ten years a college teacher in philosophy, humanities, and environmental studies. From 1969 through 1972 he taught at the University of Notre Dame in the Collegiate Seminar great books/humanities program, and from 1972 through 1977 at Carroll College as Assistant Professor of Philosophy and Humanities and Director of the Carroll College Integrated Humanities Program. From 1977 through 1979, Kromkowski served as Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, where he taught courses in philosophy and environmental studies. In 1966, he received a Bachelor of Arts degree in the Program of Liberal Studies from the University of Notre Dame, and in 1969 received a Masters Degree in Philosophy from Boston University.

Melissa Kwasny is the author of two books of poetry, Thistle (Lost Horse Press, 2006, Winner of the Idaho Prize) and The Archival Birds (Bear Star Press, 2000), as well as the editor of Toward the Open Field: Poets on the Art of Poetry 1800–1950 (Wesleyan University Press, 2004). Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in Seneca Review, Ploughshares, Bellingham Review, Three Penny Review, and others. She lives outside Jefferson City, Montana.

Jessica Hunter Larsen has been Curator of Art at Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art, Great Falls, MT, since 1996. She also served as Interim Executive Director of The Square from 2000–2003. She earned a BA in Art History from The Colorado College in 1990 and an MA in Art History from the University of Colorado in 1995. Exhibitions curated by Hunter Larsen include: Wild Beasts! Roy DeForest and Gaylen Hansen (1999); Material Culture: Innovation in Native Art with co-curator Bently Spang (2000); Patrick Zentz: Landscape Re-Defined (2002); West by Northwest (2003); A Patchwork of Cultures (2004); and Tracing Journeys: Maps as Metaphors (2005).

An adjunct instructor of Art History at the University of Great Falls, Hunter Larsen teaches introductory courses and gives general public lectures on contemporary art topics. Recent
lectures have addressed issues of postmodern culture, Self-Taught Art, and current interpretations of Surrealism. She has also presented research at several regional conferences including the Western Humanities Conference and the Denver Art Museum College Symposium. Hunter Larsen is a member of the Great Falls Museums Consortium and the Great Falls Arts and Culture Council, and is currently President of the Board of Directors of the Museum and Art Gallery Directors’ Association of Montana, a statewide professional development organization.

Deirdre McNamer grew up in Conrad and Cut Bank in north-central Montana. A third-generation Montanan, she lives now in Missoula, where she teaches creative writing at The University of Montana. She has published three novels—Rima in the Weeds, One Sweet Quarrel, and My Russian. Her shorter work has appeared in the New Yorker, Ploughshares, Outside, and many other publications. This excerpt is taken from her fourth novel, “Hidden Birds.”

Max Milton is curious how local economic and cultural choices impact local landscapes. He is interested in the emerging thinking about local food systems and the integration of community and environmental values. He lives in Helena.

Darcy Minter is communications director at the Western Folklife Center in Elko, Nevada. She has an M.A. in public administration and nonprofit management from Seattle University and is completing an M.S. in folklore from Utah State University in Logan, Utah. Prior to returning to school to study folklore, she lived in Bozeman, Montana, where she worked as a researcher and consultant for arts organizations nationwide. Darcy is fascinated by “ghost towns” in the West and feels grateful to have had the opportunity to get to know the residents of Marysville during a summer working for the Folklife Program at the Montana Arts Council in Helena.

A curator and writer, Ben Mitchell is currently the director of exhibitions and programs at the Nicolaysen Art Museum in Casper, Wyoming. He will assume the curator of art position at the Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture in Spokane, Washington, in late summer 2006. Mitchell’s essays on art and culture have appeared in Artweek, New Art Examiner, Metalsmith, Reflex, High Ground, and other journals. Mitchell recently curated Andy Warhol’s Dream America: Screenprints and contributed to the exhibition catalog. He is also the author of the catalogs Play Disguised: The Jewelry of Ken Cory; Brad Rude: Original Nature; and Into the Horizon: Theodore Waddell, 1960–2000.

Rick Newby is executive director of Drumlummon Institute and editor of Drumlummon Views. Trained as a poet at The University of Montana, Rick is the author of four collections of poems, most recently The Suburb of Long Suffering (2002) and Sketches Begun in My Studio on a Sunday Afternoon and Completed the Following Day Near the Noon Hour on the Lower Slopes of the Rocky Mountains (forthcoming 2007). A member of the Montana Center for the Book's statewide advisory committee, Rick has edited—among many other books—The New Montana Story: An Anthology; Writing Montana: Literature under the Big Sky; and The Rocky Mountain Region volume in the Greenwood Encyclopedia of American
Regional Cultures.


For a complete listing of Rick’s publications, visit www.zadig-llc.com/publications.html

Karl Olson was born while his family inhabited a teacherage in a tiny mining camp off the grid in central Idaho. He lives in Missoula with his partner David and spends his days on both sides of the Continental Divide advocating for LGBT civil rights. He welcomes feedback at karlpride@aol.com.

Caroline Patterson is an editor at Farcountry Press, Helena. She has published fiction in journals including *Alaska Quarterly Review, Seventeen, Southwest Review,* and *Epoch* and nonfiction in magazines including *Seventeen, Sunset,* and *Via.* She lives over the mountains in Missoula with her husband, Fred Haefele, and children, Phoebe and Tobin.

Matt Pavelich was born and reared for the most part on the Flathead Indian Reservation where he now works with the Tribal Defenders office. He lives in Hot Springs, Montana, in a household of steaming teens (Nick, Riley Jane, and L.T.). In 2004 Shoemaker and Hoard published his novel, *Our Savage,* of which Evan S. Connell has said, “*Our Savage* is an extraordinary book. I don’t know of anything like it in our literature. . . . Matt Pavelich is uncommonly vital and original.” Owl Creek Press published Matt’s collection of short stories, *Beasts of the Forest, Beasts of the Field,* winner of the Montana Arts Council’s First Book Award. Matt has been a Michener Fellow and received an Individual Artist’s Fellowship from the Montana Arts Council in 1998.

George Prudden plays the flute. He currently is a member of Marathon Dance Band, The Edgewalkers, and *States of Matter.* He can also be heard collaborating with many musicians in Helena.

Brandon Reintjes, Curator of Exhibitions and Collections at the Holter Museum of Art in Helena, MT, received his BFA in Studio Art from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where he was introduced to museum studies. Brandon has actively organized, lectured and written about exhibits at the Holter Museum, directed arts education projects in Montana and Michigan, and organized numerous exhibitions in Michigan and Chicago. He has demonstrated his commitment to artists and community by organizing numerous exhibits at non-profit arts institutions, volunteering at arts organizations, teaching children’s art classes, presenting workshops, and participating in community-based arts initiatives. He has participated in conservation internships, as well as worked as a conservation assistant on the Poindexter Collection of Modern American Art. Currently, he sits on the Helena Public
Lee Rostad is one of our most important Montana scholars and champions of Montana literature. Lee and her husband Phil are ranchers—third generation on the Rostad Ranch near Martinsdale. A graduate of The University of Montana, Lee did graduate work at the University of London as a Fulbright Scholar. And as a scholar, she has contributed greatly to our understanding of Montana’s culture, writing a biography of Charlie Bair and a history of Meagher County.

But it is as a champion of, and informal literary executor for, the works of Grace Stone Coates that Lee warrants our most humble gratitude. Previously she compiled a collection of Grace’s wonderful poems in Honey Wine & Hunger Root and brought to the attention of Mary Clearman Blew, and thereby the University of Nebraska Press, the astonishing manuscript of When Montana and I Were Young, by that shadowy Grace Stone Coates protégée, Margaret Bell. Most recently, Lee has crafted out of the vast correspondence of Grace Stone Coates an award-winning biography of this fine Montana writer. Grace Stone Coates: Her Life in Letters (Riverbend, 2004) illuminates Coates’ roles as writer, as editor, with H. G. Merriam, of the seminal western literary journal Frontier and Midland, and as confidant of other writers, most notably Taylor Gordon, Gwendolen Haste, and William Saroyan. Grace Stone Coates: Her Life in Letters was one of two honored finalists in memoir and biography in the 2005 Willa Literary Awards.

For her efforts on behalf of Montana history and literature, Lee received an honorary doctorate from Rocky Mountain College and in 2001 she was honored by the Governor’s Award in the Humanities. And in 2006 Governor Brian Schweitzer designated her the resident historian on the board of the Montana Historical Society.

Annemarie Schwarzenbach (see editor’s note to Chris Schwarzenbach’s translation from Death in Persia).

Born in 1918, in Long Island, New York, Chris Schwarzenbach lost his father in 1929 to a strep heart infection. His mother decided to move the family to Switzerland, partly motivated by the effects of the Great Depression. Chris attended boarding school in the Engadine in Switzerland and received his Swiss and German baccalaureate in 1937. He skied for the U.S. Ski Team in the world championships in 1938—and received his pilot’s license the same year. After studying civil engineering in Zurich, Chris returned alone to the United States in 1940. He was elected a member of the U.S. Ski Team for the 1940 Olympics, but with the start of World War II, the Olympics were cancelled.

Chris earned his M.S. in Aeronautical Engineering from California Institute of Technology in 1942, and after putting his engineering skills to use at a propeller manufacturing company (which he purchased), he entered the Navy as an aviation cadet. After the war, Chris owned and ran several aerospace companies, ultimately joining Paschall International in 1965, becoming sole owner in 1980. In 1997, he sold the company and retired.

Chris writes, “Having owned a small aircraft since the summer of 1940 I had done most of my traveling in the Americas as pilot and
continued to do so until 2002 when a rather delicate hip replacement operation and a realization that my passengers seemed increasingly apprehensive to travel with an 84-year-old pilot seemed to suggest it was time to stop. Unhappily, he adds, that was when he and his wife Katherine “started to commute between Pasadena & Helena, an ideal small plane application. But you can’t have everything.”

Ada Melville Shaw (see editor’s note to the selection from “Cabin O’Wildwinds”).

When he was still a young artist, Irvin “Shorty” Shope showed his work to Charles M. Russell. Like Russell, Shope lived in Montana and worked as a cowboy before beginning his artistic career. Unlike Russell, who moved to Montana as a teenager, Shope had grown up there, worked on his family’s ranch, and decided at an early age to combine his love of the West with a career in fine art. He attended Reed College in Oregon and graduated with a degree in fine art from The University of Montana.

In 1925, Shope, who was then twenty-five years old, visited Russell and cautiously showed him a portfolio of his drawings. Russell was impressed, and wrote on the back of one of the drawings, “These drawings of Shope’s are all good.” He signed the inscription with his trademark buffalo skull. That simple sentence became one of Shope’s most treasured possessions. Russell also offered some words of advice. He asked Shope if he were intending to head east to further his artistic education. When Shope said that he was, Russell said, “Don’t do it. The men, horses, and country you love and want to study are out here, not back there.”

Shope did study in the East for a while; but remained a resident of Montana until his death in 1977. Throughout his career, Shope received encouragement and instruction from some of the West’s greatest artists, such as E. S. Paxson, Will James, and Harvey Dunn, who was both his teacher and mentor.

Like these artists, Shope took whatever artistic work was available to him; illustrating books and calendars (and magazine articles), drawing maps of western exploration for school classrooms, while continuing to paint the men and women of the historic West. A longtime resident of Helena, Montana, Shope died in 1977 at age seventy-seven.

Brian Shovers has been a Reference Historian at the Montana Historical Society Research Center since 1993. Shovers lived in Butte for ten years during the 1980s, which sparked his interest in the town’s mining history and alerted him to the good work of Willie Walker. During his tenure in Butte, Shovers penned a Master’s thesis describing the influence of technology on working conditions in the Butte underground and edited a journal of Butte history entitled The Speculator.

Since arriving at the Historical Society, Shovers has written articles for Montana The Magazine of Western History on Butte’s mining history, Montana water rights, and the history of the Montana Historical Society. Shovers is co-author with several other MHS staff members of a forthcoming guide to Montana place names. He is president of the Montana chapter of the Society for Industrial Archaeology and spends his free time watching birds and touring abandoned mines and smelters.
Photographer and educator **David J. Spear** currently works in western Montana on the Flathead Indian Reservation developing outreach projects for rural youth. He is a Montana Arts Council teaching photographer and a part-time instructor at Salish Kootenai College where he has worked with students, faculty, and staff on the construction of *Camp Crier*, an online newspaper. David also developed *Our Community Record* at Two Eagle River School, now in its fourth year; the project encourages students to explore and document their community, culture, and history through storytelling and photographic studies.

In 1985, David developed the International Center of Photography’s Community Outreach Program for underserved communities of New York City and was its primary instructor through 1997. Author of the monograph, *Gas Smells But Not Like Skunks* (1991), David has exhibited his work in Europe and throughout the United States. His publication credits include, among others, *New York Times Magazine, German Geo, Columbia Journalism Review, Granta Magazine, and Ode Magazine*. In 2002 he received a Puffin Foundation Grant, in 2000 the Howard Chapnik Grant for the Advancement of Photojournalism, and in 1995 the Ernst Haas Photography Educator of the Year Award.

**Alexandra Swaney** was born and reared in Helena. After attending Mills College, and completing her Ph.D. in anthropology at the University of Colorado, she returned to Montana, and ever since has engaged in a variety of pursuits having mostly to do with culture, music and the wellbeing of Montana’s peoples and landscapes. For several years, Alexandra was keyboardist-singer-songwriter in popular Montana-based bands Cheap Cologne and the Jane Finiigan Quintet and continues perform as a jazz pianist and composer. As a youngster, she was much influenced by Helena resident, sociologist, and poet Frieda Fligelman. Her article “The Queen of Social Logic: the Life and Writing of Frieda Fliegleman,” in *Writing Montana: Literature under the Big Sky*, describes this extraordinarily intelligent, often thwarted but delightful scholar, student of cultures, and author of 1,000 poems. In the position of folklife director for the Montana Arts Council, for the last ten years Alexandra has concentrated on outreach, documentation, and support for the many ethnic, regional, and occupational cultures and artists across the state. She curated and toured *Bridles, Bits and Beads*, the first statewide exhibit of folk and traditional arts. Comprising some seventy pieces, the exhibit featured pieces of cowboy gear, Hmong and Norwegian embroidery, and fine handwork from Montana’s Indian people. More recently, she has presented Montana performing artists at the Library of Congress and the Seattle Folklife Festival, produced a CD of the original songs of Chippewa Cree elder Pat Kennedy, and together with Leni Holliman, a radio series, *Montana Living Treasures*. The six-part half-hour series documents individuals such as rancher-enviromentalist Bill Ohrmann and Cheyenne flute-maker Jay Dale Old Mouse.

**Joan Uda** is a retired United Methodist minister, and she regards both Polly and Bob Holmes as mentors in her ministry. Prior to seminary, she was an attorney in private practice, and once was an English and literature teacher. She and her husband Lowell, also a United Methodist minister, have four wonderful children and five entirely remarkable grandchildren. She spends her days writing and gardening.
Novelist Guy Vanderhaeghe is the author of Man Descending, The Englishman’s Boy, and The Last Crossing. A #1 bestseller in Canada and winner of the Canadian Booksellers Association’s Fiction Book of the Year Award, The Last Crossing is a sweeping tale of breathtaking quests, adventurous detours, and hard-won redemption. Set in the 1870s in Whoop-Up Country, from Fort Benton north to Edmonton, The Last Crossing is, in the words of novelist Marina Endicott, “an absolutely wonderful book, the kind of literature that reminds other writers of why they want to create, and convinces readers that the world is a vast and mythic enterprise, larger than our individual crises or triumphs.”

Richard Ford has called Guy Vanderhaeghe “simply a wonderful writer,” and in its review of The Last Crossing, The New Yorker reported: “In a panorama of late-nineteenth-century Montana and western Canada, Vanderhaeghe details the lawlessness of the early frontier towns and the desperate ferocity of the dying indigenous tribes. He dwells with particular pathos on the children of white traders and Native American women, who are caught between two cultures. . . . [A]s the various searches for revenge or redemption get underway the writing achieves unforced grace and power.”

Guy makes his home in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

Patricia Vettel-Becker is Associate Professor of Art History at Montana State University–Billings, where she has taught since completing her Ph.D. in Art History and Archaeology at Washington University in St. Louis in 1998. MSU–Billings awarded her the Faculty Achievement Award in 2005, and the Winston and Helen Cox Fellowship for Faculty Excellence in Arts and Sciences in 2002. A scholar in the field of American art and visual culture, her articles have appeared in such journals as Art Journal, Men and Masculinities, American Art, and Genders. Her book, Shooting from the Hip: Photography, Masculinity, and Postwar America, was published by the University of Minnesota Press in 2005.

Nicholas Vrooman is one of the few scholars in the United States working in Métis studies over this last generation. He brought back to print and wrote the new introduction to the seminal book of Métis history, Strange Empire: A Narrative of the Northwest, by Joseph Kinsey Howard. He produced the award-winning Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, Plains Chippewa/Métis Music from Turtle Mountain. Additionally, he was a principal essayist and editor for Métis Legacy: An Historiography and Annotated Bibliography, for Pemmican Publications, Louis Riel Institute, and Gabriel Dumont Institute. Vrooman will publish the essay, “Echoes of Discovery: The Métis Role in Northwest Expansion,” in Lewis & Clark: The Unheard Voices, forthcoming from the University of Nebraska Press, 2006. He currently teaches in the History Department at The University of Montana while completing his doctorate and serves as Indian Education Specialist to the Montana Office of Public Instruction on issues of the “Indian Education for All” constitutional mandate.

René Westbrook graduated from Montana State University in 1990 with honors and a degree in ceramic sculpture. From 1991 to 1993 she was long-term artist-in-residence through the Montana Arts Council for Great Falls Public Schools and Paris Gibson Square Museum of Art. For several years following, she worked as
traveling artist-in-residence for the state art agencies of Montana, Wyoming, North Dakota, and Alaska and has taught workshops in Nevada, California, and Arizona. She is the continuing artistic director, arts administrator, and a participating artist in The Caravan Project, a collaboration between fourteen Montana artists, (including the late beloved Jack Fisher, Jr.), whose goals include their continuing efforts to create alternative art experiences for the public.

René currently lives at the south rim of Grand Canyon National Park with her husband Dan and their daughter Annabelle. She works in her studio, teaches free-lance art workshops, and is a seasonal program assistant for Grand Canyon Music Festival.
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