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THE THIRD SIDE OF THE COIN

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts
in
The Department of Drama & Communication,
Creative Writing Program

by

Tamara Wells-Banar

B.S., Boston University, 1988
M.A., University of New Mexico, 1991

•
December, 2002

The Third Side of the Coin

Poetry Manuscript By
Tamara Wells



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If Marvin Bell is right and “good poets borrow, but great poets steal,” then I certainly have had every opportunity in the last two years to embark on a life of crime. With thanks to my committee members, Richard Katrovas, Bill Lavender and Anne Marie Macari, for their guidance throughout the manuscript process; to my fellow hyphenated students in the MFA program, Sonja Hansard-Weiner and Dana Harrison-Tidwell, for their support and encouragement; to the many talented poets and instructors with whom I’ve come into contact over the course of the program—Marvin Bell, Gerald Costanzo, Nancy Eimers, Ed Hirsch, Bill Olsen, Greg Orr, Stan Plumley, and Judith Root—they’ve led the horse to water (or the thief to the illicit goods); and finally to my husband and friends without whom I would never have embarked on this journey.

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ABSTRACT

The Third Side of the Coin is a manuscript of poetry exploring ironic distances, both physical and metaphysical, both slight and significant. It opens with a quote from Agha Shahid Ali who asked, “What then is separation’s geography?” The poems in this collection describe the geography of separation between individuals, cultures, ideas, man and nature and the physical and metaphysical realms. As the author travels deserts, oceans, and outer space, she seeks proofs of existence and questions natural laws deemed irrefutable. This questioning is reflected in the book’s title, which, on one hand, represents a state of geometric impossibility. And yet, the author contends that every coin has a third side, however narrow, marginal or fleeting it may be. It is the third side that unites diametrical opposites, that permits the coexistence of dark and the light, and that bridges the gravity and weightlessness of our existence.

INTRODUCTION: The Artist's Statement

The Venus of Willendorf and the cave paintings of Lascaux are proofs that we as a species have long been compelled to make sense of our existence. From our earliest etchings, we have been obsessed with bringing order and meaning to the seeming disorder and complexity of our universe. Thus, our works of art attempt to clarify, magnify and preserve our experience of life. In this sense, they often have become the truest and most reliable witnesses to the times we have lived.

Though H.G. Wells might argue that artistic pursuits are mere diversions, outlets for surplus energy undevoted to commerce or warfare, I'd contend that art engenders both its creators and its audiences with a sense of belonging to a group or culture. This results from the recognition that certain works of art accurately capture (through observation, intuition, metaphor and creative impulse) some aspect of our common human story. Art affirms that human goals can be imagined and achieved and that ugliness, horror and fear can be vanquished. Unlike other modes of reacting to human experience (i.e., religion, science, politics), art results in a tangible, external product that has the capacity to "speak to" and inspire future generations. While art may be produced to fulfill practical needs, it is unavoidably an expression of an ideal that withstands the ravages of time.

So what is separation's geography?
—Agha Shahid Ali

1

Proofs of Existence

the shattering of a dancer's leg

the gravitational pull of Mercury

naked arms of a stillborn's mother

blue kisses on the inside of a woman's thigh

hawthorne scars on a penitance's back

*

the hammering of a hummingbird's heart

protest of a board at the tread of a foot

unwitnessed space between a frame and its canvas

Christmas trees unsold on a deserted lot

arachnid skeleton of an abandoned umbrella

*

names never called in a phonebook

a razor blade glinting on a bathroom sink

afterthoughts pencilled in a prayer book:

if not this, then what?

the distance in meters from my house to yours

The Priest Says

There is no light in darkness
nor darkness in light,
the priest says as he tears up
my paper. This is his proof
that the yin-yang is an instrument
of the devil. His proof
that there is no evil in heaven,
nor goodness in hell.

Thirteen, I look to the night sky,
the visible blue mapped millions
of years before my birth,
I know he is wrong.
I know there is a third side
to the coin.

Daylight Savings

I was three and we were going to the circus.
 I'd only ever seen one on TV—
 clowns with billiard ball noses,
 flossed candy whipped into high bouffants,
 tightropes stretched high as telephone wires,
 striped tents billowing like laundry freshly washed.

Persistent as a seatbelt alarm I badgered:
Is it time to go yet? Is it time to go?
 Fed up, my father led me to the kitchen.
 Pointed at the clock above the fridge:
*When the big hand's on the twelve
 and the little's on the six, we'll go.*

Then he returned to mixing martinis on the patio.
 I stood staring a long while at the winking orb
 It would be another year before man rocketed
 to the moon and the eagle would land.
 But in the spirit of that endeavor I launched myself
 atop the table and moonwalked my way to the fridge.

Standing tiptoe, I adjusted the hands and then gingerly
 made my way back to earth. With a sleight of hand,
 I had altered time! Swelled with accomplishment,
 I skipped outside. It was time to be on our way.
 But, alas, when my subterfuge was discovered
 I never made it to the circus. Clowns tumbled

from their midget cars and the Wallendas walked
 their ropes without me. Even at three,
 I knew this tale would have ended differently if I had
 turned back the hands of time instead of advancing them.
 Even then I knew I had been betrayed by time.
 Ever since, it's been my mission to save the daylight.

Blessings/Curses

My mother once told me that her father chased her
 through their house in Havana with a machete.
 And I hated him, hated him right up till seconds
 before he died, when he sat crooked and bent
 as all the weapons he'd carried.

Defiant as a pope.

Shrunken in velour robes, his skin was vellum
 stretched across cheekbones. His voice rattled
 in his trachea; his head hung awkwardly like
 a marionette dangling from a toymaker's wall.

At ten, I invented a war wound for him—
 shrapnel in the knee— to explain what tormented
 and chased him across 10,000 nights. Up and down
 the cobblestones of Havana, Abidjan, Rabat,
 Montreal, Bogota, Buenos Aires, Shanghai, Bangkok.
 Places where he'd lose himself in bourbon and gin
 and in tales of his Spanish forebears'

glorious debauches.

Late some nights, I fear, what tormented him,
 torments me.

For after years of counting stitches
 & packing suitcases, my mother was dead too,
 and with her all of the things she dared not whisper
 into the night. Three days later as my grandfather
 prepared to bestow his final blessings,

all I cared to know

was how long must we carry
 our mothers and fathers?

Dígame (Tell Me)

Tell me, you who've left this world on *condorito* wings...

Do you hit your head upon the sky?
Must you look away from Jupiter's one mad eye?
Have you ever heard a *tortuga* cry, as she heaves
her body, heavy with eggs, to the shore?

How do you spend your days, *mi abuelito*?

Do you train clouds to herd horses?
Do you provide refuge for storm-battered birds?
Do you whisper in the ears of sleeping priests,
forgiving them their sins?

Must you really pluck the harp all day, *mi abuelito*?

Or can you climb Mons Olympus to trumpet
the births of new suns? Can you awaken a field
of dandelions, or tell *dichos* to astonished forests.

Dígame, por favor.

Miles from Anywhere Else

1 Bluff, Utah

Your choice: Blanding or Bluff.
What's the difference.
Only the miles from anywhere else.

At the diner where the girl
storing starch for winter
keeps mixing up orders,
I ask for a shrimp salad
and overhear from the kitchen:
"It's just like a Chef Salad,
except you put shrimp in it
instead of ham."

The fifty-ish proprietress
with a requisite bouffant
sits puffing under
the NO SMOKING sign.
She watches three J Crew types
fresh off the river
order their carbo-loads
and complain about prices.

A man chewing a toothpick joins her.
Neither smiles. Whenever someone
they know walks in, they raise a hand.
But not too high. They must conserve
their energy for late night TV.

Here they never lock the doors;
you can see right through the windows
cast in greenish afterglow
by the insect-repelling nightlights
of some otherworldly brothel.

2 Chinle

In the land of the one-eyed pickup,
we stop to ask a Navajo cop,
Where's a good place to eat?

He sends us down the road
to the lodge cafeteria we'd just left
because it had too many tourists.

3 Spider Woman's Rock

The sign at the edge of the cliff
with a thousand-foot drop reads:
"Caution: Fall May Prove Fatal."

A man in a Broncos cap laughs
and dangles his two-year old
over the chasm. Turkey vultures
jockey currents overhead.

4 The Spanish Mission

The shop sells Jesus on bookmarks,
drinking glasses and playing cards.
The clerk who volunteers
every third Tuesday
from one to three
points out
the NO SHORTS sign
to a young guy in cut-offs
and asks where he's from.

"Catholic?" she asks. He nods.
She pats his hand and tells him,
"The thing I like best
about our religion
is that you don't
have to make any decisions;
they've already been made for you."

5 **The Petrified Forest**

To whom it may concern:

You probably get hundreds of letters like this
 But none with a tale like mine.
 I know signs throughout the park warn
 to leave the wood undisturbed, but I thought
 no one would miss a tiny piece,
 no bigger than my thumbnail,
 and then one more to keep it company.
 I carried it out in my shirt pocket,
 past rangers,
 past even my wife.

I'd had the wood less than a week when

my tire went flat in the Texas panhandle
 the IRS ordered me to pay six years in back taxes
 they repossessed my Audi, my Volvo and my jacuzzi
 my son changed his name to Mohammed
 my daughter called me "Jesse" and pierced her nose
 with diamond studs I'd given her for Sweet Sixteen
 then my mama died and left my share
 to the Humane Society of Abilene

Herewith enclosed please find
 two pieces of petrified wood.
 Forgive me for taking them.
 They have been my ebony sorrows,
 my Apache tears.

6 **Saguaro in Snow**

Photographers outnumbered the cacti.
 Snowbirds who swim at Christmas
 refused to believe that the powder
 dusting the ground was the genuine article.

But high speed films documented
 this once in a lifetime occurrence
 for covers of *Sunset*
 and *Arizona Highways*.

7 Gallup, NM

Welcome to New Mexico. Bring your camera.
 See Indian City with the world's largest teepee.
 Six stories high!
 See the world's largest wholesaler
 of authentic Navajo jewelry.

The world's largest truckstop.
 57 restaurants. 24 motels.
 2 campgrounds.
 1 dog decomposing.
 Free coffee. Gas only \$1.03.
 Clean restrooms. Half a mile.
 Exit now.

8 Through Thoreau

A cluster of hogans herd together like elephants
 protecting their young from attack.
 Barricaded with tumbleweeds and used car parts,
 a mobile home stands: a lunar space station,
 its satellite dish picking up weather reports
 from Barrow, Alaska.

A weathered woman in velveteen waits
 in an arroyo. We pull over, ask if she needs a ride.
 In English as broken as her two front teeth, she tells us
 she has "three womens" and "three mens"
 she must pray for at the revival up State Route 666.
 It is only later when we pull away, I realize
 she was referring to six of her own children,
 each long dead.

9 Chaco Canyon

Where we walk, water settled
 into primordial seas, out of which
 fish crawled so we could be here.
 Where we walk, lava oozed
 and pumice burst forth—
 popcorn from a hot air popper;
 the aroma faintly burnt.

Only stone ziggurats
recall these geologic birth pangs.
Only they know the splendor
of sun at the center of the earth.

10 The Politics in Rio Arriba County

Mino Abeyta, Seferino Archuleta,
Eppie Martinez and Sammy Sandoval
are such good citizens. Together
they've been dead going on thirty years,
but they still come back to the *vecindario*
every year to vote.

11 Phone Conversation in an Española Drugstore

“ ‘Allo. Linda? God, I'm glad I got you. You know the police got your
cousin in jail... Yes! And they got my number and called me here
at the store and asked me if I knew you—Linda Chavez—and I said, yeah,
I knew you; you're my sister-in-law, but I didn't know where you were.
I hope that's okay I said I knew you 'cause I didn't know what name
you're using now. Hey, Linda, I gotta' go. I got a customer.”

12 Salsa Sabrosa

Argentina: *tango*.
Brazil: *samba*.
Haiti: *mambo*.

But Friday night at Club Alegria,
when Father Pretto plays,
all steps are *cumbias*.

In this city of faith,
only hips move.
Anything else
is an illusionist's act.

13 Sunset at Canjilon

Fingerlength trout gum at Velveeta
on the end of your line. You, a war baby,
insist that Velveeta in its foil,

(along with Wonder Bread and Spam),
is one of the greatest creations
of the twentieth century.

But the fish don't bite.
I tug on my baitless line and marvel
at the fly fisherwoman,
plunged knee deep in muck,
herding in fish like an old time *vaquero*.

A chipmunk with Betty Boop cheeks
honks for more luncheon smoked cheddar
she carries away to rot in storage till winter.

Then sun fractures the light
setting wild poppies ablaze, and
we too are carried away.

Myths of the Flat World

1

This is how it starts.
Sky bares its back.
Fireflies tattoo
its expanse,
diatoms
adrift on sea.

Nightshades in their
kabalas whisper wild
incantations. Musks of olives
awaken owls, and cicadas
flood the dark
with their voices.

We are lulled into thinking
that this is all there is—
waves of grass,
thickened air,
a capricious breeze,
our gossamer hearts beating.

But tonight, tonight,
we fall off the world.

2

If you had listened to your mother,
you would have stayed at home in Genoa.
Instead you wander bow to stern in search
of *terra infirma* and *terra incognita*,
indigo-inked gaps where four-headed
monsters skulk and narwhales and sea cows
nurse their young.

Candles wick down as you sit in the Vatican library
perusing parchments, deciphering runes,
running your fingers along gilded perimeters,
returning again and again to borders
to confirm: this world is rimless;
its edges are singing.

Age of Exploration

The blouse comes off first.
This is how it's done.

Bra and blue jeans next,
zip tonguing
 smooth flesh of belly.
 Soon replaced by fingers
 exploring edges:
 navel, aureoli, lips.

Revulsion. Fascination.
 Equinox night.

 Sea overhead,
 or below?

There are fourteen words for snow
yet none I can think of
 for my "sky sea,"
 mi cielo mare.

There isn't enough blue overhead
to rinse the world and make it fresh,
 to greet this new-eyed day

 and all the glorious creatures in it.

For the Man at the Next Table

Has your date stood you up again? Let me entertain you.
Let me be your Scheherazade and tell you stories all night long.

See, the moon still stuck in its shell. It will be a long time escaping,
but night's awakening. Shall I tell you a tale?

*

*There once was a fisherman who feared his wife planned to leave him
for another. He went out in his dinghy and vowed he would cast his net
four times, and if he caught nothing, he would throw himself to the sharks.
He tossed his net once, twice, three times—nothing, not even a tiny porkfish.*

*On the fourth throw, he heaved the net and waited. Near sundown, he'd
resolved to be done with it. But ensnagged in filament was a slender sailfin,
Alive, but very still, making no movement to save itself. The fish called out,
"Open me up. Hurry, you must open me up!"*

*

Would you care for another glass of wine? Perhaps a beaujolais? No?
Still worried about your date? I'll bet she collects men like matchbook covers.

When her plants perish, she just buys new ones. She's a riptide,
forever tearing you away from shore. But I digress from my tale.

*

*The fisherman pulled out a rusted knife and slit the sailfin's gullet.
In the belly, he found a human finger, and on it a signet ring.
He wrested the ring from the finger and slipped it onto his own,
rubbing it once, twice, three times, four.*

*A jinn appeared before him. The fisherman knew that the jinn
must grant him one wish. He was quick to make it:
"I wish this ring were mine!" The jinn grinned,
then vanished into ether.*

*

Do you tire of my story? Shall we dance?
Let's dance dangerously, Argentinian Tango...no false steps.

Look at the stars—flakes of mica in an azure pool— some nights it seems
possible to count them but I always lose my place. Ah, yes, the jinn..

*

*The man stared at his left hand and saw a blue gap
where his finger had once been. From the corner of his eye,
off the bow of the dinghy, he saw the sailfin—
in its mouth, his finger, and on it, his ring.*

*No one ever saw that fisherman again. But nine months
to the day, his wife gave birth to a girl she named
“Faith, Hope and Charity,” figuring
one could never be too hopeful in this life.*

*

Do you know, I think I dreamed of you once. It was St. Agnes’ Eve.
Of course, this was long ago, but your cologne is unmistakable:

dry rot and wood smoke. Don’t mistake me, I like it.
Can I tempt you with dessert? They serve a heavenly gateau here,

silky as the arms of a Nubian girl. Perhaps I’ll even sing for you.
It’s your night; I’m performing for you.

A Mon Seul Desir (My Sole Desire)

After the Unicorn Tapestries at the Musee de Cluny, Paris

Reveries of my desire blurted out in a crowded room
or shouted from atop the Eiffel Tower.

I shall surely scream if I hear one more harpsichord refrain,
must embroider one more mantelpiece or train.

If forced to endure one more ode to my lotus petal lips,
my tea-stained skin or the cloves in my perfume

I'll set my unicorn on you, truly I will. Tired of all this
splendor, I yearn to be an idiot savant.

People will veer to avoid me as I walk down breezeways,
muttering about waves on the moon and starships

propelled by sunveils. I'll lock myself in my chamber
and plot my journey to far Antipodes.

And in the dark quiet, I'll profess all manners of heresies
that will awake the fury of the sun.

Field Notes

Slow dancing on Birth Control Night
at the Danceteria, all the while wondering
whether the Tina Turner look-alike

was male or female
and whether we looked an odd pair
among dozens of single-sex couples.

Standing in line under an orange sky
for long candles, milk and batteries,
laughing at baskets filled with videos

and microwave popcorn,
forgetting what it was we came for.
Slamming an old four-poster into the wall

once too often. Afraid we'd wake
the neighbors. Resolving to buy a new bed,
a futon this time. Hauling to shore

the untippable kayak we'd twice rolled
in the lake. Then watching for hours as red ants
rebuilt the nest we'd trampled. Turning in time

to catch our aging shepherd rolling neck first
in fresh scat, trotting back expecting
congratulatory pats. Surveying the silence,

marveling at what we find to spend our time at.

Night Floods Canyonlands

We descend into the canyon
 where I-70 dips down to the Green.
 Acceleration blurs the scene
 like snowfall in a paperweight.

Light is lost, as science predicts it will be:
 first red, then orange, yellow and green.
 Blue is last to be swallowed
 by dusk's octopus ink.

Bubbles halo our heads as we venture into
 this dual world of atmosphere and brine.
 Transfixed by the headlights
 of a long haul trucker,

a jellyfish, suspended below the surf,
 is dumb to its final impact against our window pane.
 Ahead, a transient whale
 scrapes its belly along marl,

tracing coastline as an old Labrador
 navigates a fence, butting its weary body
 up against each familiar knot
 and indent of wood.

A Moray bears its teeth for want of a rattle.
 Assured that danger has passed, it slithers back
 to its crag, as a reef crab scuttles to sanctuary.
 We check our tanks;

they are running on empty. We begin our ascent.
 Halfway there, the dividing line re-emerges.
 Tires crunch against gravel, and
 the radio beckons.

Western Serigraphs

For my husband

*“The devil whispered behind the leaves:
‘It’s pretty, but is it art?’
—Rudyard Kipling*

1 “The Faraway”

Morning is a Martian landscape,
red, red with the blood of sand. You argue
there is less oxygen before daybreak
and light a cigarette to prolong the night.

Indigo traces sky with mares’ tails,
masking the split of heavens and earth.
Brushed in are osage, autumn aster,
Indian paintbrush and monk grass.

Stretched out they form muted layers
against sky. Too stark. Too perfect.
Some element is needed to break
the monotony. You light another cigarette.

2 Oracle Bones: O'Keeffe in Abiquiu

Earliest script known to man
scored on vertebrae, skull and rib.
Bones from deserts sea-stripped of gypsum.

Our ancestors came to know animals
by skinning them.
Simplifying forms.

But is it the form or the function
that causes her to place these bleached bones
on her windowsill,

to stare at them
till dawn breaks over the Rio Chama
and snow blues the horizon?

What is she waiting for?
What might she divine
with these bones?

3 **The Diné Art of Weaving**

Lorenzo Hubbell shows Minnie Two Goats the Oriental rugs from the Sears Roebuck catalog. It's 1897, and *this*, he tells her, is what she should be weaving. *This* is what people in Topeka and Cincinnati will buy.

She looks at the patterns and in an instant has them memorized. She has been carrying pictures in her head so long, this is easy. What really dazzles her are skeins and skeins of yarn on shelves next to tins of Crisco and boxes of Arm & Hammer.

Skeins made from sheep jewel-dipped in lapis lazuli, carnelian, amethyst, jet—hues she has never imagined possible. Her fingers tremble as she sets up her loom.

4 **At the Break of Dawn**

Reality isn't dramatic enough for you.
I have brushes. I have ink. But no color
to convey the uncertainty with which mountains
and arroyos shapeshift in thin, dry air.

This frustrates you, my indecision before
my box of hues. *Just choose one, any one,*
I can see you want to say. My brush is dipped
in cinnebar, mauve, violet, ochre. I'm watching

the sun as it inches up the canvas.
Clouds surge in
and there it is—
the brush lets go.

Somnium del Sol (Dreaming of Sun)

My father has another wild-eyed idea
he trots out like a new toy.
Light, he speculates,
might carry recordings of the past.

But how much light, I insist,
would we have to collect
to replay one instant
from 1489 or 1653?

And how would we know
which rays to gather?
Let alone how would we capture them
And secure them in our workshops?

Would it matter their intensity?
Could the light that collided with my face
and forced my eyes open this morning
have the same effect as light plunging

through layers of ocean thermoclines,
until it is stripped of all but its longest,
bravest waves? My father who collects
unicycles, waxes on and on

about the miracles of Vitamin C
and is convinced all firefighters are
pyromaniacs at heart, my father sighs,
sips his glass of wine, changes the subject.

Departure

For my mother

Each night, the pumpkin-faced moon
hung lower and lower in the sky.
Its faint heat forewarned the foothills,
prepared them for hibernation
ahead. Each night you looked from
the waves of your bed to horizon
beyond plotting your course.

On hale nights, you would recite
the ABC's of the universe: Andromeda,
Betelgeuse, Ceres, Denub... Other nights,
you'd grow tired of all this beauty and sink
deeper into the folds of your sheets,
then disappear.

2

Dog-Eared Memories

The album on my mother's bed
is dog-eared with memories
she returns to

again and again,
where she left them,
pressed between the sheets.

The clover,
its fourth leaf
glued on.

A crossword puzzle
she started & he finished
in red ink.

Fortunes
from Chinese restaurants.
One promised she'd have

two great passions in her life.
The other that she'd have
constant aches in her back & neck.

Jokes she copied from magazines.
She laughed loudest
when he told them

a third time,
getting the punchline
wrong.

Warrantees never sent in.
The Christmas he gave her
an electric fondue pot.

She couldn't cook
but she gave him
*A Complete Guide
to the Repair
of Your Fiat-124.*

He'd sold their car last April.

Wrinkled photos
of a bullfrog
in a drainage ditch.

She said it looked like him;
he said like her.
They named it Amabel.

The blanket grows heavy
upon her chest. The bookmark
has fallen out.

She forgets where she is.

Dwelling Among the Living

1 Queens of Moravia

It's noon; the town square's empty.

But the cemetery's combed with matrons,
babushkas in umbrella skirts,
sturdy knees dimpled like potatoes.

The dowagers don cardigans;

then kerchiefs knotted against wind,
they babble to chap-cheeked babes in prams,
singing them folk tunes,

feeding them crusts of bread,

telling them honeyed lies. What secrets,
I wonder, will they bear to their graves?
The third child annulled by a knitting needle...

The fourth with a cleft lip. Never baptized.

Instead they wrapped her in a cloth
and abandoned her to the elements.
The demented uncle who stopped eating,

and—*please forgive them*—they let him.

Sunflowers balk on the perimeter,
obscuring muddied paths where peasant women
staggered from harvests to give birth.

Only the scent of pollen

and sound of buzzing bees
comforted them
as they tore umbilical cords with their teeth.

Then, licking sweat from their upper lips,

they prayed yet again for sterility.
Cursing, *Jesus Maria*,
they shucked the beads of their rosaries.

2 Finding Roots

Late summer flocks of geese veed above her,
 as grandmother carried her newborn
 to the cool dark of the root cellar
 where she suckled him for the first time.

The same cellar where your father at 6
 was locked seven days straight—without food—
 for refusing to enter the priesthood,
 rejecting the honor of firstborn sons.

Your grandmother feigned anger
 but surely she was relieved
 when Josef ran away at 10,
 making his way with a pocketknife,

a felt hat and two good hands
 to Dusseldorf, then Hamburg.
 He lied about his weight and age
 and claimed to be Bohemian.

He would never pour sacrificial wine,
 uproot beets
 or see his mother again.
 She bore other children,

and they, grandchildren.
 I'm sure she walked them along these same paths,
 tickling their chins with dandelions
 that she'd place in jelly jars on the graves

of her own kin. For she distrusted the living
 and unkept promises
 but found her ease, as we do,
 among the dead.

The Salem of Growing Up

Memories round as blueberries grow up to the water's edge,
 where their roots dip in. The berries, a stain
 under our fingernails. A stain that deepens with time
 and distance from Salem, and from you, Carolyn.

At four, you talked me into taking our Monopoly money to the 7-11.
 We stuffed candy in our waistbands, then ran like crabs,
 leaving teenage clerks staring at wrinkled bits of pale green,
 blush and canary littering the counter like confetti.

Kindergarten. We crushed rose, gardenia and freesia petals into
 a witch's brew, mixing essences in black film canisters, selling them
 for a nickel on Washington Square. Offering the brew up like holy water
 at Sunday mass. Certain that one drop would ensure life everlasting. Amen.

Summers— we picked blueberries with your little brother, Dylan,
 tagging behind and stealing all the berries. The one time I remember
 your father and mother together singing *Hey, Jude* and trying
 to make it better.

In second grade, we dressed up in your mother's black lace slips,
 ones she wore to answer the door at noon, mascara caking
 the corners of her eyes, runs in her stockings visible
 below the lace of her slip.

We smoked swizzle sticks like cigarettes and munched
 cocktail onions, pimiento olives and Baker's chocolate chips
 in your foyer. Sometimes we locked Dylan out; sometimes
 we let him in, as we whispered secrets to one another—

who we loved, who we'd marry. We played *Rock, Paper, Scissors*
 and pretended to read palms by the gutter you called a creek,
 far from your father's *goddamns* and *sons-of-bitches*
 and doors slamming in reply.

Before you moved away, I came by one last time and found you
 huddled in your closet with outgrown snowsuits, mismatched
 patent leather shoes, headless Barbies and Dylan—fugitives all.
 My life must have seemed so carefree. But yours, again and again,

was flipped over like a carnival ride at the Midway. Freshman year, your parents divorced. A year later, someone told me, you found Dylan hanged in your bathroom. I can picture you finding him, nude, helpless, stripped even of shadow. I can see you lowering him to the floor.

But then my vision always fails me. Here the story becomes a tale not of your life or my own, but of the moment we as children inherit our impotence, the moment we come to realize that no one of us can sustain our world.

Psychology of Drowning

For Jim Sagel

Every year at Cochiti,
it's the same.
Some machinist
or maybe a trucker
from Chimayo
or Velarde or Santa Cruz,
after a couple of Dos Equis
and a load of shit
from his friends
about how he needs
to prove himself a man
tries to swim to the farthest shore
of the lake where the beaches
are as distant as Antares
and light years
from the barrio.

Halfway there all he can think about
is what they'll say when he's gone.
That he was never any good.
Always dumb and in trouble.
Failed Health and P.E.
Never finished school.
Couldn't keep a job at
Albertson's,
or convince his girl
to marry him. Missed
his daughter's christening
and his grandpa's funeral.

*Much better to just
give myself up
to algae-dark waters.
Much better that
mandolins play
as I go under.*

All For You, Mary

Medjugorje, Yugoslavia, 1981

Every morning, 6 a.m., she blesses herself
with holy water and kneels before the Virgin.

When she passes, hands pressed palm to palm,
the girls snigger at stigmata she cannot hide,

whisper that she carved them herself
in the girls' bathroom with a paperclip.

Yet her smile is luminous as a baby mouthing
new vowels. And in her patient black shoes

and tiny pearl earrings, she waits for mass to begin.
The boys whisper that she hears Santa Teresa

weeping in the sacristy. Sees roses erupting
from the foreheads of priests. Smells

frankincense burning beneath the altar.
Tastes the wine of the Eucharist turning

to bitter blood. We are here today to watch
her eyes roll back and see her flail to the floor.

Perhaps she'll speak in tongues this time
and news crews will come again

to try to flake off a bit of her:
glitter on their palms.

Central Station, Antwerp

Trains conga into the station,
rays high stepping to a geometric point.
Art Nouveau splendor contrasts
with tenement squalor—
balconies with decaying Sukkot huts
and ropes of bruised waistcoats
hanging sill to sill.

Wurst and rancid cabbage
mingle with diesel fumes.
Russian mafiosos draped with 24-carat chains
and baby seal furs brush up against
Bruxelles schoolgirls in miniskirts
and platform shoes. Patent leather packs
crisscross their backs like Amazonian armor.

They sashay by middle-aged men
headed for red lights behind the cathedral,
where naked women knit in windows,
biding their time between dockings.
Pimps beckon passersby: *You'll like this one;
she's a Dutch treat.* The pimps laugh and pick
flecks of tobacco from their golden teeth.

Every mafia in the world is here, a tobacconist
tells me. But what draws me here time and again?

The Wombat

Its very name conjured a whimsical marsupial,
out of Lewis Carroll or Dr. Seuss, not
an overgrown guinea pig with rabbit's coat and
woodchuck's teeth waddling along the wall
of the city's ancient zoo.

Nocturnal, this corpulent creature teetered
in the noonday sun. While trains lumbered
into the adjoining station, it hefted its weight,
back and forth like a pendulum. Treading the boards,
an actor desperate to forestall his creditors,

it ignored the shouts and jeers of schoolchildren
who clambered to offer it kernels of popcorn,
morsels of candied apple, peanuts in shells.
Their minders all too happy to abandon them,

the children reverted to their tribal beginnings.
Their pencils became spears, their coin purse rattles,
their gumballs missiles, as they ritually tortured
one another and the helpless beast. They were relentless.

Hours passed. Finally in late afternoon, the last
of the errant schoolchildren were rounded up.
The city's din and shriek subsided—save for
the occasional whistle of an incoming train.

At last, the wombat collapsed in a heap in its pen,
one wary eye trained on blue shadows
dancing in the windows
of high rises above him.

When

When did Franziska Schazkowska stop believing
herself Polish and when did she tell each anemic cell—
unite boys—*we are Anastasia, Imperial Grand Duchess!*
When did she decide it preferable to be a willful brat
of privilege who pulled her sisters' hair and tripped
hapless serving girls, rather than a daring adventuress
who survived dragging from a Berlin canal and weeks
of tubercular hospital wards?

After all those years of potatoes and hoeing wouldn't we
become Anastasia too? Wouldn't we rather walk in gardens
their leaves draped like the tiny jackets of cobblers' elves
rather than forests where gnarled roots reach out with the knuckles
of toothless crones who sputter curses and always demand more.
More porridge, more crusts of bread.

Wouldn't we rather ride in droshky drawn by Arctic wolves
whipped to a frenzy by crimsoned Cossacks? Gather rose petals.
Not smell of pigs' feet and fennel. Fold newspapers into paper hats
& charge down hallways with tin foil swords, brandishing them
against our invisible foes. Die applauded for our audacity
rather than the extraordinary ordinariness of our lives.

Pieces of Eight

This city deals in splintered coins,
fractured shards traded sunup to sundown
and well into the night.

1 Near Midnight

Near midnight, we stroll the swelter of
Albuquerque's South Valley.
A skinny-boned girl in tube top and shorts
plays hopscotch in lamplight.

"Hurry up, Mama," she singsongs,
her sneakers softshoeing sidewalk,
her braids bobbing up and down in unison.

"Hurry up, Mama, you gotta' make the rent."

2 Brown Sugar

Mama sits in a strapless dress at a café table
and trills into a cordless phone: "Well sugar,
you might say I'm mocha-chocolatta,
with an emphasis on the latta. But tonight,
honey, I'll be any flavor you want—
straight from Baskin Robbins. Any flavor."

3 Streetwalkin'

Coeds tramp from bar to bar in small packs.
On a corner, a bottle blond in fishnets and feather boa
studies them and calls out: "Four guys and one girl?
And they call me a hooker??"

4 Taking Turns

On a stoop, five guys trace
Nazca lines in powder.
One tilts back his head,
pinches together his nostrils
and holds out his razorblade:

“We’re taking turns, son,
and it’s your turn.”

5 Southern Comfort

A woman in stained calico
is framed in a doorway,
A bottle of Southern Comfort
clutched in one hand as if
she’s the night watchman,

calling out the hour, and
assuring us all is well.
But instead she yells
to the man who is leaving her:

“I hope they bring you back in a coffin!
You hear me? In a coffin.”

6 Spare Change

At the all-night Walgreen’s,
a college kid
whips out a crisp \$50
to buy a can of Mountain Dew.

The clerk looks at him.
“You have too much money,”
she says. “I’m an old woman.”
She opens her change purse,

her pieces of eight—
disks of copper and nickel
ablaze inside.
“You see all I have.”

7 Evening Prayer

Robbers, rape, raucous cries.
Birth, and always, someone dies.

Keep me safe from any harm
on my wicked, woeful street.

8 **The Writing on the Walls**

Two a.m. Reyes the King sits bent over his notebook.
Vatos surround him as if he's the Buddha.

He's got every shade of Prismacolor but hasn't eaten
since Tuesday. He's stopped coming to night school.

I ask him why.

He says he got caught tagging at the railyard.
One more time, his stepmom said, and he's out.

She's got other kids to worry about.

Since then he's been living above the Lock & Key.
Why the railyard? I want to know.

*Because stock cars go everywhere; they'll know my name
from New York City to San Francisco.*

Goin' Somewhere

*I'm gonna' take off
without no aeroplanes
without no baggage claims
without no restraining reins*

*I'm gonna' get off
where there ain't no freight trains
where there ain't no flood plains
where there ain't no blood stains*

*I'm gonna' live long
eatin' whole grains
drinkin' champagne
dancin' with top hat and cane*

*'Cause I'm gonna'
roar down life's gold brick lanes
rid small kids of pains
soar with free-flying cranes*

*Hear my loud refrain:
I'm goin' somewhere*

if the angels

on the day Katrina's father died
 she heard bagpipes wailing
 above her father's bed
 where he'd left his tired bones
 behind
 bereft as a picture book
 with a broken spine

now whenever she walks through the house
 and touches things that he had loved
 that they had loved together

the ivory pocket knife
 the lump of fool's gold they hid
 from the greedy leprechauns
 the cereal box kazoo

she croons
 and remembers

his Methuselah beard
 that reached the bottom
 of his belt buckle and the top
 of her tawny head

skipping stones
 smooth as the nesting
 of his palm and true
 as the North Star

pennies
 he'd offer to the moon
 to shine bright
 and light Katrina's night

the kilt and sporran he'd wear
*when the broom was in bloom
 and all the bairnies should be there
 to gather a sprig*

songs he'd make up
about tapdancing pancakes
and warbling waffles
that made her beg: *No more!*

but at twilight under her covers
in the hollow of echoes and voices
she worries—

what if the angels have no ears
who will hear
her father singing

Descansos (Resting Places)

1 Sombrillo Nursing Facility

Mama phones before Christmas.
 Three thousand miles away
 I hear the warring of violins;
 she tells me mi abuelita
 has “passed away.”

Given six months to live,
 this woman who’d taunted death
 one hundred years, died in three weeks.
 Each day her body becoming heavier,
 as gravity tugged at the hem of her nightshift.

Each day her voice becoming lighter,
 till hoarse as the wind, it wisped away.
 Her final request: *Please don’t let them
 cremate me. Bury me
 where I can find myself again.*

2 The Family Plot

I want to bury her on her native Cuban shores,
 But this is impossible. So instead I look for a place
 where women push babies amidst azaleas,
 and boys lean their bicycles against elms.
 Some sweet place.

3 Fin de Siecle at Coleville-Sur-Mer, France

Gravity tugs. A spider crawls from centerstage
 in its web to a shady crevice, dispelling
 the illusion that this is merely a place for the dead.

Indeed this cemetery is alive. With April’s red poppies,
 small bursts of soft thoughts. With row upon row
 of white crosses. With footfalls of young bomber pilots
 and their devout, lace-shawled grandmothers.
 With surf, always surf, crashing against cliffs

like elephants buffeting their trunks...Each retreating wave reverberating: *we shall not forget...we shall not forget...*

4 Tomb of the Unknown, Shanidar Cave, Iraq

The Neanderthals willed their dead awake with flowers—goldenrod, gloriosia and heliotrope. Scents to rouse them from shallow graves, where they would brush away rubble and thrust back boulders sealing them in their caveate tombs.

5 Old Jewish Cemetery, Prague

Petr sashays along the prescribed path
in his black leather pants, lamenting
that he used to be able to walk
among the headstones,
now staggered
against one another,
stones wetting their tongues
on slivered sun above.

Every crow in Prague must be here.
They wrap the sky in veils,
carrying hundreds of tiny messages
rolled like cigarettes.
They swallow tiny pebbles,
weighty sentiments for ballast,
as they ribbon their way
to New Jerusalem.

6 Lafayette Cemetery, New Orleans

We loved our slaves, the blue-hair tells us,
as we trip from crypt to crypt. Surely so did
Duke Wu and Duke Mu who buried their concubines
alive with them in the days of the Shangs.

But they bury their dead
above ground here, lest corpses pop up after a storm
and drift their way down Bourbon or LaSalle.

7 Day of the Dead in Las Truchas, New Mexico

Amidst all the *camposantos* stands one bleached wood marker for “MarTinez—BabY BOY.” Next to it, “En Memoria a Felipe Trujillo 1908—1983,” is a well-tended grave with a plastic wreath of roses, a votive in an old tin can, yellow marigolds in a vase and a shotglass of tequila. In the Trujillo home on this day, *las mujeres* bake *pan de muertos* and they stand tamales upright in pots, steaming little tombs. They will peel oranges and burn incense, and then inscribe Felipe’s name over and over again in cloves. But in remembrance of *pequeno* Martinez,

there are only dandelion tufts and milkweed
sprouting from the earth.

8 Instructions for the Newly Bereaved

Do not wear new shoes to funerals.
Nor dream of white moths
 or almond trees in bloom.

Hide the scissors, penknives too.

Blind all mirrors and don heavy veils.
Pluck sprigs of heather; tuck them
 along windowsills.

Smash peacock’s eggs and discard their shells.
Stop the clocks
 and reconfigure them.

Hold your breath;
 unlock the doors.
 Your time will come.

9 For Lost Souls in the Florida Keys

It is a consumptive, dangerous night,
as Voodoo gods are invoked,
one by one, from the shores of the
Tradewinds Motel.

Kouman ou ye? Kouman ou ye?
 the faithful call out to the seas.
 A mulatta swings a duster
 (the whole chicken
 or just the feathers?)
 as drums beat out the rhythm
 for the final ferry crossing.

10 Her Resting Place

The cemetery stretches out before us,
 freshly mowed, redolent with clover,
 and the tinny scent of the Intel plant
 looming on the bluff.

We watch as seams of earth
 are resown; the sealing
 of a mother's womb.
 We are *matrushka*,

Ukrainian stacking dolls.
 My mother inside hers
 inside hers. Inside me?
 What seed?

My mother realizes too late,
 as one guilty of sin,
 that *mi abuelita's* false teeth
 are still soaking by the sink

in the bathroom.
 Always in bathrooms we cry
 together. Mama hands me
 a yellow topaz I'd last seen

on *mi abuelita's* gnarled finger.
 Tells me she wants me to have it.
 She'd want me to have it.
 She tells me all of the things

people say to one another
in movies and a school child
saying catechism I repeat them
back to her.

But I can't bring myself to say
I'm sorry that she's gone.
The tyrannies of the elderly
are still too fresh.

3

Contrails

Challenger Mission, January 28, 1986

The plumes reminded me of sandhill cranes
we'd seen winging together over the bosque
near Bernalillo. Cranes stroke together for life.

Dawn widens with their litanies each January,

as they whoosh down, migrating for Alaska,
their wings brushing air in cuneiform strokes,
imprinting the season. With elaborate courtship rituals,
they pledge themselves to each other.

Their long black legs stained by peat and toes
too short for gripping, they were ungainly on the ground
but majestic in lift-off. We watched them arc again and again
into clouds. It was hunting season, so it was inevitable—

there would be a crack. Above, one crane veered quickly,
as if to intercept, extending its crown and neck in a perfect dive.
To this day, I am convinced that the crane sacrificed itself
for its mate. And as it fell back to earth

we watched its grey-white feathers cascade down
until all that remained were contrails—
wingbeats preserved in air—vestiges, ghosts—
then gone.

Gravity

A silvered rim of moon hangs in the sky,
 an architecture of clouds around it.
 The skies are silent but the earth resounds,
 panting with grave breaths
 of long distance running.

Seen from above, streets are tied
 in hopeless children's knots
 by neon coils of traffic. Businessmen behind
 their wheels disappear. From great heights,
 skyscrapers emerge dazzling—

graphic equalizers, lighting up
 in a new wave classical funk,
 each note stirring the spleen.
 Higher and higher still
 whole metropolises are no more than

clots on the terrain, halting the ebb and flow
 of rivers. Vapors writhe around the planet,
 marshalling storms from Baffin Bay
 to the Amundsen Sea.
 Away from earth's moist embrace,

we are surely colder, thinner.
 Oddly pockmarked and sterile,
 the beacon moon comes into closer view.
 Sirius, the Dog Star, burns far brighter;
 the Nile will flood its delta soon.

We forge onward until the stratosphere
 bulges along its invisible seam.
 We puncture it, releasing air
 from the balloon. First, in spurts,
 and then with a steady hiss,

reminding us that entropy
 will wear us down yet.
 Take a breath beat;
 hold it in.
 Gravity will bring us back.

Time Magazine Reports

*The verdict is in—T.S. Eliot was right.
The world will end not with a bang
but with a whimper.*

Indulge me a moment. What if we stepped
into the world after the opening credits
of some endless movie. We might never know
where it was filmed or the actors in leading roles,
but would we appreciate the drama any less?

Wouldn't we somewhere in the middle
of the flickering frames pick up the storyline
and continue passing it sprocket by sprocket,
day after day, through our lives? When we grew
old and tired and wore half-frame spectacles

and sensible shoes, would it really matter
if we fell asleep in one scene and awoke
with a start in the next, dwarf stars
blinking off, then on, but spinning
always spinning. Waves would still break,

and ships would unload their sorrows.
But the sun would rise again; the oceans too.
So until the humpback whales stop singing,
beaching their defeated grey hulks on sands,
for the last time, please indulge me

Flowering Woods

Every year the dogwoods long to tell us,
the azaleas too, their blossoms unfurling
like synchronized swimmers
in a Busby Berkeley musicale,
that it is possible to be content,
to be blissful in this world.

Destroyer God

Lilacs stroke the fenceline, their purple florets
 embedded with staurolites, tiny crosses held up
 like candles in the night. For prayer, for hope.

*

April. I step into my garden, expecting
 everything's unchanged, that buds
 will flower and harden to fruit because
 they've always done so. But where
 last spring there were emperor tulips and
 wind anemones, now there are burrows
 riddling the earth like paper accordion snakes
 that slither on tables in diners.

My plans ruined, and like an avenging
 angel, I contemplate the form of my wrath.
 Flood, pestilence, plague or famine?
 A thousand gallons of water through
 a coiled hose? Smoke bombs?
 Cyanide pellets? Baited traps?

My green-kneed neighbor endorses
 raw potato at the entrances to their warrens.
 The starch, he declares, is indigestible.
 It will ferment in their intestines causing them
 to burst. No muss, no fuss, he promises.

But I see myself as a Gestapo agent
 rationing my bullets, an officer planning
 a botanical blitzkrieg.

I resolve then to abandon my garden
 to the elements—the sun, wind, ravens
 and rodents, and other aches
 that only the earth knows.

Exercise in Faith

Does one wreck havoc
or reek havoc, asks the tree,
as I chop its limbs.

•

You've got to have faith,
I tell the tree, that you'll be
beautiful come spring.

•

The tree stares up at
the dwarf stars, challenging them
to offer it proof.

•

Grey tulle wraps above
and the insects sleep, as I
pretend to read palms.

•

Why do the stars lie
with their million-year old light?
What are they hiding?

•

What are the outposts
of the stars' last missions?
The tree grows restless.

•

The blue remains long
after the birds have flocked on,
testament to faith

Bridges Fall Down

*How much will the bridge cost?
Seven million dollars.
How long will it take to build?
Seven million years.*

It was a steel night in Boston on a dimlit bridge
when a man came at me speaking tongues,
brandishing steel. He grabbed my arm,
pulled me to the water's edge and pressed a blade

against my cheek. That night I saw stars
in the molars of his teeth. Another time,
I might have feared bone gnashing against bone.
Steel grinding against steel.

But some odd calm came over me and I whispered,
We still have work to do. He looked hard at me
and let me go. Perhaps it was no night for sacrifice,
no night to plunge into the dark void of the Charles.

It's not borders, oceans nor even darkness
that divides us. We both shall die wanting more
velvet nights, more sterling coasts, more nitrate ceilings
lit up like disco halls with celestial bodies pulsating

to grunge rock beats. A wide stage to spotlight us,
Wanting. Longing.

Skin Diving

We swim as a pointillist beast:

I, in neon spandex,
am the elongated false eye,
and they, juvenile damsel fish,
are the neural endings,
alert to sudden movements—
barracuda, black tip shark, lamprey eel.

Together we fin the water,

all luster and ripple, skimming

beyond sea grasses

where silver-needed ballyhoo

dart past by thousands,

and it becomes a night of shooting stars,

noisy with grunts and whistles.

Most primal of languages—water, fish.

Mouthed in the womb.

Faint sucks. Clicks.

Returning us to deepest blues, darkest seas.

grand fissures and sulfurous vents,

to deep currents and convections

that separate us

and bring us together.

Separate, together.

Lighthouse

For my father

Your glasses rest on the end of your nose:
twin telescopes pointed out to sea. Fresh fall

of dandruff sprinkling your collar.
Your shoulders gently humpbacked in sleep.

Even at rest—your hands are constant motion.
Treads of your fingertips sanded down,

whorls of pewter, from sculpting antler tusk
and sea mist. On winter's shortest days,

your voice wraps the dinner table
like a Tlingit blanket, striped red and black.

Your breath: cracked wheat and Athabaskan
lullabies. Your words drum the waves,

navigate tides.

Math Lessons

Didn't every child at St. Mary's
long to be the one called upon
to connect the constellations

of a^2 plus b^2 to c , and to traverse
the long strides of distance
from proofs to their theorems?

When Mr. D called for our hands
to palm the skies, we spanned
millisecond voyages between

earth and moon and back again.
Each time claiming the stardust,
leaving trails of it across the board.

Yes, it's true, each time we backed away
to admire our handiwork,
we fell to earth.

But each time we dusted ourselves off
and pulled away again
to the stars.

Walking the Bridge

Each day I walk across the Mass Ave bridge
past faces that register as pricks of light
on the retina, their features a jigsaw
as yet unassembled. I am quick to condemn
a balding driver who halts his cab to berate
an old man in a wine-stained overcoat stumbling
the sidewalk. I shoulder by a bottle blonde retracing
her stiletto steps to recover a set of keys.

But what if
the cabbie was up all night with his inconsolable
newborn or caring for a wife with a disease
slowly swindling her of sight? What if the old man
lost his eldest son in a mineshaft cave-in, his youngest
in the Gulf, and the woman rehearses a murder or
her suicide? It's always with us: what we don't know,
will never know. It plagues us, gives us circles
under our eyes, cricks in our necks. Pays us

in our own coin, with a third side. Not head,
not tail...This coin is from the middle ground.
It's the middle son born in haying season.
The one that endures.

Manuscript Notes

The quote from Agha Shahid Ali is taken from his final book, *Rooms Are Never Finished* (Norton, 2002).

Dichos are Spanish proverbs or folk wisdom. For example, “*Buenas son mis vecinas pero me faltan tres gallinas*” is a popular dicho which translates, “My neighbors are nice, but I’m missing three chickens.”

Thoreau is a town east of Gallup, NM, on Route 66. Originally named Mitchell, it was renamed in honor of Henry David Thoreau, but the locals pronounce the town’s name as “through.”

Vecindario is Spanish for “neighborhood.”

Cumbias are Latin American dances descended from 19th century slave dances.

Serigraphs are silkscreens produced by a printing process in which one layer of color is applied at a time. The process can result in any number of copies until the printer’s template is destroyed.

Georgia O’Keeffe referred to the landscape of northern New Mexico as “*The Faraway*,” reflecting her awe at being able to see for miles and miles in all directions.

Oracle bones are records of divination incised on bones and turtle shells. They are the earliest known form of Chinese writing.

Diné is the Navajo name for themselves; literally “The People.”

All For You, Mary (“Totus Tues, Maria”) is the personal motto of Pope John Paul II.

In June, 1981, six teens in *Medjugorje, Yugoslavia*, reportedly encountered the Virgin Mary near the top of Mount Podbrdo. After six years of professing daily contact with the Virgin, the teens admitted that they made it all up.

Vatos is Spanish slang for “friends” or “homeboys.”

Descansos, in the Latino world, are spots for pallbearers in funeral processions to rest. A descanso may also mark the spot where someone has died.

Camposantos are country graveyards.

Kouman ou ye is Haitian Creole for “how are you?”

And, yes, *hunting sandhill cranes* is legal in the southwestern United States.

Vita

Tamara Wells-Banar was born in Tucson, Arizona, but spent her youth traveling the world as a military brat. She received her B.S. in 1988 in Communications & Public Relations from Boston University, where she was a Boston University Trustee Scholar, and her M.A. in Training & Computing Technologies in 1991 from the University of New Mexico. She has worked in a variety of fields and settings ranging from art museums to robotics labs.

She currently teaches history in northern New Mexico, where she has lived on and off for nearly 30 years, though her mother's family hails from Cuba and her father's from Alaska. She grew up speaking both Spanish and English and is an avid painter and scuba diver.

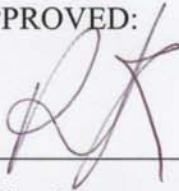
THESIS EXAMINATION REPORT

CANDIDATE: Tamara Wells Banar

MAJOR FIELD: Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing,
Low Residency Option

TITLE OF THESIS: *The Third Side of the Coin*

APPROVED:

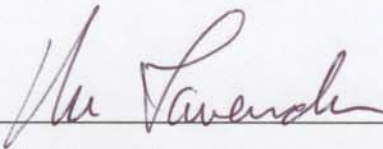


Richard Katrovas, Major Professor & Chair

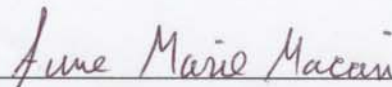


Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:



William Lavender



Anne-Marie Macari

DATE OF EXAMINATION: 11/19/2002