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Traveling Music

by Dale M. Wood

A Creative Writing Project
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
through Literature and Creative Writing
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts at the
University of Windsor

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Dedication

For Jean, my life's partner and fellow student/pilgrim in the journey. Thanks for your love, patience and understanding.

For Sebastian, thanks for the surprising new tangents of inspiration. Thanks for the fun and laughter.

Di, thanks for all your efforts to help me to see more clearly into my work, for sharpening my lens.

Drs. Chin, Dilworth, Quinsey, and Whetter- thanks for a great and challenging year of refreshed insight and expanded horizons.

My fellow students in 590, Aaron, David, Delilah, Jessica, Lindsay, and Sean- thanks for taking the time all year to read and respond with honesty and grace.

Preface

Traveling Notes

My first long-term experience overseas began on my twenty-third birthday, as I left the United States to become a teacher in what was then Czechoslovakia. The opportunity for a foreign adventure was afforded me because I spoke English and due to the eagerness of the Czechs to move their country back to democracy and a free market economy. Yet privilege was not part of my teaching contract; I lived in a small village with a Czech family and taught in a Czech secondary school, earning the equivalent of one hundred forty American dollars per month. Although I lived a mere kilometer from the former East German border, it was difficult to justify crossing over and purchasing a Diet Coke for a dollar, a trifle I would have taken for granted back in America. In fact, when the East Germans, financially bolstered by the recent reunification with the West, would cross the border and flex their newfound economic muscles, I identified with the Czechs, feeling anger and resentment toward this pushy and arrogant flaunting of “new money.” I even drove a second-hand Trabant that had literally been discarded on the Czech side on the border by a German who no longer wanted it. During my one-year stint, I learned to speak Czech fluently through a combination of necessity and desire, and was so fully immersed in the culture that a part of me still feels like a Czech.

My second international teaching job, four years later, was in Bahrain, educating the children of the wealthy ruling class, mostly Sunnis, so that they could study at American universities and return to eventually inherit their parents’ positions of authority. While I was still working directly with a certain class of nationals, the relationship we shared was quite different. English again had opened the door to adventure, but my status as an elevated “hireling” to a large extent defined and limited my contact and level of intimacy I enjoyed with the Bahrainis. In addition to the separation created by class, this society was generally less open to foreigners, to non-Muslim men in particular. In spite of my desire to learn about the culture, the only time I was invited into a Bahraini home was to work as a tutor.

Over the past seven years I have taught in so-called “international” schools in Belgium and Korea, which are essentially small English-speaking enclaves set apart from

their host cultures. I have worked to educate the children of ex-patriot businessmen, diplomats, and missionaries, in essence serving Western commercial and cultural interests. We work very hard and are afforded travel opportunities within the region because we live there. Due to proximity, we have been able to return to certain countries repeatedly and visit different regions within them. Now my wife and I earn enough money to stay in resorts and often choose to do so with our infant son. Yet I feel the burden and guilt of privilege more than ever as we stay in places where a night's accommodation costs more than the monthly wage of the employees who work there. Furthermore, I am troubled by the lack of genuine discourse our community of foreign teachers enjoys with our host country. Although we are a multi-national faculty, many of the teachers confine themselves to our English-speaking fortress, even segregating themselves into their own national "clans". While we learn only enough Korean to satisfy our needs, such as giving taxi directions or ordering a beer, we then feel free to criticize our host nation. I often wonder if we are there for any reason other than to facilitate the exploitation of these foreign nations.

"Traveling Music" is an exploration, through poetry, of the international encounter. It centers on the traveler who comes into contact with another culture, and involves bearing witness to what has been learned from that encounter. There are basically two prongs to the project, encounters with cultures to which I am not native, and encounters with my own culture that have been at least partially colored as a result of those trans-cultural experiences. Another way of putting it is that there's an outward vector of travel and an inner reflexive vector; furthermore, there is the additional dimension of these two vectors in relationship with each other. Since the traveling experience for me has involved over ten years of international living, I have come to identify strongly with Salman Rushdie's notion of "home" as a scattered, damaged, various "concept". While Rushdie is certainly speaking of the plight of political refugees who have been displaced against their will and for whom home has literally become damaged, he is likewise referring to the psychological trauma of the Indian shopkeeper who has migrated to Vancouver to improve his financial prospects, but then finds himself displaced from the space to which he still feels a sense of belonging. My generation of teachers can be seen as migratory refugees in the sense that the prospects for employment

within our vocation have been very limited. By contrast, the jobs overseas are plentiful and well-paying. After ten years, home for me has acquired this “scattered” quality of which Rushdie writes. I freely identify myself now as a third culture person, a kind of cultural double agent who finds himself in-between cultures, neither fully a member of the host culture in which he is living, nor fully a member of his own culture, in so far as he’s been changed by the encounter. Home changes for the witness who enters into honest dialogue with the other, and reciprocally, the contact alters him.

A plethora of post-colonial theory has been produced that could be brought to bear in relation to my work, and unsurprisingly, Edward Said’s *Orientalism* is paramount in providing a theoretical foreground for my collection. Two other texts building on Said’s foundation that have relevance for my project are *Imperial Eyes* by Mary Louise Pratt and David Spurr’s *The Rhetoric of Empire*.

Said defines the “Orient” as a European invention constructed to serve a western purpose. The depiction of the Orient in literature has been primarily based on the convictions of the perceiver’s world, the foreign place measured by European presuppositions. Said writes of Orientalism, as an aesthetic movement expressed through the arts and literature, as “ultimately a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, us) and the strange (The Orient, the East, “them”)” (Said, 43). Orientalizing, however, involves more than just recognizing the legitimate differences that exist between us, for acknowledging another’s difference could be seen as a positive validation of it. Said points out that the European framework has used this difference as a measure of Western “sameness”, and thereby as a means of justifying the exploitation of people who are distinct from us in some way. European fascination with the Orient created another negative form of exploitation, absorbing the exotic “difference” and exploiting it to satisfy cravings denied within Western culture. Furthermore, negative “othering” can also facilitate the exertion of hostility toward the strange culture with a feeling of impunity if the structures we create define it as inferior in some way. According to Said, the depiction of the Orient became a “set of structures inherited from the past, secularized, redisposed, and reformed” by a range of academic disciplines whereby all contact with the East became accommodated to those structures (Said, 122).

The poems in this collection address the issues of othering common to the cross-cultural encounter. A poem like “Bahrain” confronts what Said refers to as the Western representation of The Middle East as a region of violent and irrational mobs. It actively seeks to provide the context behind such acts of violence. Certainly there is violence in the poem, as indeed there is violence in the real world and particularly in this region of the world, but this violence needs to be understood within a context so that the perpetrators are not automatically “othered” due to their strange culture. Porrick, the Westerner, enters the Bahraini village as an oblivious other, carelessly offending their moral code, specifically with regard to the covering of the body. This poem works as a dramatic monologue, as the speaker seems to lay the blame at the feet of the Arabs, while the reader is cued, through details in the text, to recognize Porrick’s culpability. The speaker’s tone, from the first line, is poignantly ironic, as he perceives Porrick as the “victim” of the encounter. In one sense, the speaker could be said to represent the attitude of the West toward the Middle-East in general, as he projects our self-absorbed and righteous naiveté onto their distinct cultural milieu, then wonder why and how we have managed to incite their anger. Just as Porrick is presented as a kind of blundering hero who doesn’t understand what he’s done to deserve this response, the speaker blunders alongside him in a similar sense. In addition, the black flags outside the mosque deliberately serve to signal that the men who stone Porrick are not representative of all Arabs. Rather, these flags identify them as Bahraini Shiites who are protesting against the oppressive Sunni regime within their own country. Again there is a failure on the part of the speaker to recognize the diversity within a culture distinct from his own. The violence toward Porrick is largely a product of the seething anger directed against the oppression the Shiites have endured at the hands of their fellow countrymen who happen to be more West-leaning.

I am trying to neither justify nor condemn the attempted stoning of the Irish expat, but rather to relate the event. These are the realities of what Homi K. Bhabha calls the “contested territory” created when disparate cultures interact. It’s also crucial to remember that these poems are meant to work together as a collection; “Bahrain” directly follows “*I want to remember Bahrain*”, where the disparities between the various

members of Bahraini society, as well as the American ex-patriot, are addressed, but in which there is peaceful negotiation of those differences.

In her book *Imperial Eyes*, Mary Louise Pratt refers to contact zones as the “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination.” This is at the heart of what I am trying to address in my outward travel consideration, the examination of contact zones in the modern age characterized by globalization. The contact zone today takes on many different dimensions, including military war, capitalistic enterprise and investment, to tourism, and travel which is not touristic in nature. While Western exploitation at times is aggressive and blatant, at other times it takes more subtle forms. Economic and cultural subjugation, however, is only superficially more subtle until you begin to examine the landscape. In a very real sense the domination is more complete than ever before as “independent” nations find themselves economically and culturally overwhelmed by the West. The modern tourist only has to jet in and reap the benefits of decades of groundwork already laid down for him. Poems such as “Parasites” identify the tourist as exploiter, the promise of money from the tourist attracting the urchins, who are swatted away as they try to sell them water.

One major concern in these poems takes us back to the question of motivation: why it is that people travel, and why the traveler is willing to risk “hardship” within the international encounter. Pratt considers the travels of Alexander Von Humboldt in her conceptualization of travel as triumph. The traveler is able to accomplish a kind of conquest in the journey, which is linked with the romanticizing of the new place to be conquered. Another example Said uses to establish the link between Orientalizing and conquest, is Arthur James Balfour’s 1910 speech to the British House of Commons on the problems of England’s relationship to Egypt. Instead of allowing a measure of heteroglossia in his depiction of Egypt, he “plays the part of, and represents, a variety of characters” (Said, 34), essentially high-jacking the agency of the parties involved. Ultimately, Balfour categorizes the Arabs as a “subject race, dominated by a race (the English) that knows them and what is good for them better than they could possibly know themselves” (Said, 35). This belief in the necessary subjugation of an “inferior” race for its own good helped to create and calcify the justification of Western conquest over them.

It needs to be clarified here that I am not at all advocating such a traditional imperialistic travel posture, which will be later discussed at greater length. The speaker in my poems often struggles with the temptation to essentialize and romanticize the places and people he encounters, but since he recognizes this tendency, he at least is able to attempt a conscious resistance against it. Rather than possessing, distancing, and "othering" foreign places, cultures and people, the subject in these poems strives to recognize and empathize with the shared humanity of the peoples he encounters. However, the structures that are in place eliminate the possibility of the subject's innocence. The traveler with the purest motives is nevertheless implicated by the exploitative structures that have authored and now work to sustain his privilege. What I am attempting is a positive encounter with the other, where the suffering or triumph of the other becomes accepted as the suffering of the self. The groan of the human sibling from a different culture becomes the groan of the speaker, and conversely, the speaker willingly surrenders the privilege that serves to separate us. I am trying to remove the distance between the speaker and the subject of observation, and the vehicle for creating this empathy is love, that is, the decentering of the self, and an active sensitivity to the needs of others even at the sacrifice of one's own needs.

In my poems the romantic frontiers are regions such as Cambodia and Mongolia, destinations perceived by Western tourists as being off the beaten track, where the questing traveler with a myopic vision senses the possibility for a fresh and pure experience. Of course this romanticism is grounded in a perspective that classifies these places and people as unknown, an exoticism completely represented by Western mediation. These places are only exotic and unknown because of the West's limited encounter with them, not from any inherent quality. Bringing in the people, the inhabitants for whom these romantic landscapes are not exotic at all, but for whom these places are home, removes the romantic edge from the depiction. A poem such as "Wadi Rum" provides a poignant example of this, as the travelers set out on an epic and romantic journey into the wild and uninhabited space where "red rock spouts tolkeinesque" and "the wind licks smooth the notes of passage without prejudice." Other details throughout the poem, however, work deliberately to undermine the romantization of the frontier landscape, such as the tour guides being pre-teen kids on flip-flops, more

comic than heroic, or the graffiti on the rock walls, the Zippo lighter, and finally, the oil rig that chugs to life within the “isolated” splendor of the desert. A further level of irony is achieved through these elements, as they all suggest the incursion of Americanism within the landscape.

The romantic sublime is evoked repeatedly throughout the collection, as the speaker’s attraction toward the remote and the exotic landscape to create lasting experience and feed poetic inspiration is presented. The speaker is attracted to the quest for the unknown frontier, the awesome power of nature and the absence of people. For example, mountains appear quite often in the poems, which can be viewed symbolically, as mountains are both geographic impediments to be conquered, and simultaneously provide vistas by which the exotic land is subjected to the possessive imperialistic gaze. In these poems, however, this movement is also undermined, such as in “Parasites,” in which the travelers pursue a romantic “oriental” vista oblivious to the reality of the exploitation that they are engendering through their desire to conquer and possess the landscape. The depiction of the tourists as a “pudgy cavalcade” and “drunken sherpas”, coupled with the repeated gesture of swatting the urchins away, strips any sense of the romantic from this adventure, despite the beauty of the view with which they are rewarded at the end. Even this “successful” conquest is depicted as being somewhat disappointing, as the temples of Angkor Wat are described from the hilltop as mere “shadow shapes a mile away.” Furthermore, the poem’s witness to the presence of the children hawkers and the travelers’ treatment of them draws attention to the tourists’ unwillingness to acknowledge or come to terms with this inevitable corollary of the tourist industry. The desire for the sublime experience draws privileged Westerners and their cash, and consequently attracts the hawkers who hope to benefit from this attraction. It is not the fact that the hawkers hope to benefit from this encounter per se, that falls under scrutiny here, but rather that the structures which are in place push them to pursue economic betterment in such a degrading fashion.

“Traveling Music” repeatedly addresses the problems of observation and the influence of the camera in our perception of the world. Travel in Western culture has historically been and continues to be intrinsically associated with seeing, the visual encounter with the foreign and exotic. American culture perpetuates the romantic idea of

“seeing the world.” Often the tourist venture amounts to the ticking off of country after country on a list, keeping a record of individual conquest which the traveler can proudly use to impress others with the countries he has “seen.” Often the camera becomes a device on which the tourist depends to mediate the contact zone. It has become so much a part of our lives that critiquing it draws criticism towards myself as well. We all take photographs with a view to capturing our experiences in lasting images. The point I am trying to make about the camera is that this mechanical eye can be seen as interposing one more barrier between the observer and the subject in the moment of encounter. Susan Sontag wrote that the camera serves to interfere with, interrupt, or ignore experience (Sontag, 1977). In addition, the camera possesses in a way that memory cannot, in that it creates a tangible relic of the experience. Several of these issues are present in “Parasites”, in which the flabby tourists are “hauling the rolls of film and fat”, corresponding features of their privileged status, well-fed to the point of excess. At the top of the hill they hope to capture an image that will provide a perpetual possession of the experience, perhaps as a means of nourishing the ego. In “Our Lady of Antwerp”, the speaker’s voice is conspicuously eclipsed by the video camera as the tourist experience is “documented” on film. The lines, parallel to the video clips, are quick and dynamic, so as to keep the prospective viewers back home entertained; capturing the “experience” again appears to be a form of invasion and possession. Ironically, the camera man is more concerned with capturing images of the cathedral than allowing this encounter to affect him. A cyborgian element is also introduced here, as the human eye comes to see only through the agency of the mechanical lens. When the lens at one point is covered by its cap, the text pauses correspondingly.

“Mark’s print” presents one of the most ironic critiques of the use of the camera. The group of rafters is struggling to survive the hazardous and literally life-threatening rapids. Perhaps this could be seen as another version of conquest over the landscape, notwithstanding the fact that the encounter takes place on the river’s dangerous terms. In the heat of this struggle, one of their rafting party attempts to record the event on camera. In the end the memory is indeed preserved, complete with a few “strategic drops” from the raging cataracts, but this record has only been attained through jeopardizing the others’ safety, by ignoring the elemental fury that confronts them as a group. The camera,

using this as a symbolic example, is depicted as a selfish and possessive prosthetic. The individual ignores reality and experience in order to capture a static portrait of that experience. This collection suggests that the camera can function as an imperialistic device, not simply in the sense that it gazes, but that the gaze is mechanical. While it can be seen as dispassionate in its objectivity, it is likewise impersonal and unresponsive to the human concerns with which it comes into contact.

One might counter that travel writing, including poetry, serves the same function, that it selects and represents an image of the encountered. The poem from this stance could be viewed as a photograph in words. Poetry can also be seen as self-serving, while photography certainly has the potential to create empathy. Tourists hardly ever use the camera in an empathic way, however, and this is what my poems emphasize. That is why these poems, by contrast, strive to portray three dimensional individuals and scenarios, including those aspects which, from a Western cultural framework, might seem unpalatable. They do not present the image Spurr describes of natives in colorful and charming costumes, nor do they attempt to carefully frame or manipulate the landscape in order to project an aesthetic idealization. The photograph facilitates the creating of a unified image to encapsulate a people or culture. A nation's homogeneity, however, can never be assumed, nor, as Homi Bhabha explains in *Nation and Narration*, can the holism of a culture. In these poems I have sought to allow the encountered individuals to speak, to preserve their agency. The reader is able to observe them, and the speaking subject for that matter, and witness the interaction in a way the camera may only suggest, but may also interfere with or misrepresent. The poems attempt to transcend the images presented, in order to come to grips with their meaning.

Again, "Our Lady of Antwerp" provides a clear example of this, as the way the images are presented is intended to make the reader uneasy about the bland objectivity of the video camera eye. The point is not to denigrate the camera in general, but to critique tourists who take photographs or video footage in lieu of experiencing a genuine encounter with the foreign place or people. "In Time" addresses the irony of the camera as witness, as the photographers portrayed in the poem all attempt to capture the violent action in the scenario. It is their professional assignment to take advantage of the aggression they witness, for that is what justifies their salaries, the photographic

documentation of “newsworthy” material. The irony is of course that they simultaneously ignore their human duty in the face of such brutality at the same moment they document it. While the poem likewise presents the images of the skinhead’s violent expression of xenophobia, the text, by forcing the paparazzi from the periphery to the center, indicts them and emphasizes the irony of all the witnesses who, in capturing the killing on camera, simultaneously fail to prevent it. These poems don’t just present images, but also encourage reflection on these images captured by the witness eye.

Each of these poems can be seen as a translation of my experience, distilled and brought back to America as a means of vicarious bridging. In contrast to the National Geographic approach as identified by Spurr, in which “every article about the Third World is essentially the same article about the same country” (Spurr 51), these poems, rather than attempting to homogenize the Western experience of the rest of the world, seek to construct bridges which allow the reader to enter into encounters where the parties are engaged relationally. I am deliberately working against the traditional postures identified by Spurr, such as Aestheticization and the non-realistic and idealized portrayals of the colonized land. Spurr again refers again to National Geographic, where the images are crafted to depict an exotic version of whatever culture is under study.

Yes, these poems are translations, taking what I have seen and felt from my relational encounters with different cultures, bringing them back as a gift to my own culture with the hope that there is something we might learn from them. Part of what makes these translations different, I hope, from the superficial tourist or National Geographic approach, is the longevity and intensity of my experience in the contact zone. Rather than a reporter or scholar who documents or studies a culture, I have become a co-inhabitant, and living within the cultures presented in these poems has given me, I hope, a more three-dimensional understanding of the people’s lifestyles and cultural concerns. Conversely, the changes produce by this prolonged contact has also allowed me to look back on Western Culture with greater distance, and consequent clarity.

In the first poem of the reflexive section, “Ex Patria”, the American journeyman returns to the imaginary homeland. In spite of the desire to travel and expand our horizons, there is nevertheless a tendency to create in the mind a romanticized image of the homeland, as Salman Rushdie explains, “to create fictions, not actual cities or

villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands” (Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands*, 10). Yet this poem speaks of how the returning ex-patriot, rather than constructing an imaginary homeland, has found this romantic ideal dispelled by close scrutiny. A naïve love of nation often blocks objectivity, but for this speaker dialogue and experience within the contact zone has intensified it. In this poem the blue veil has been stripped from the mountains, the misty romantic covering removed through his expanded perspective, so that he can see his own country more for what it is. Many of the poems in this second section are intended to show America what it is, to translate what I have seen of Western decline and decadence from the perspective of one who has physically, emotionally, and spiritually removed himself and present these observations as a mirror for my own people. For me listening to other peoples and cultures has demystified America so that she has ceased to be the mythic “Columbia”, and I am addressing my country through the eyes of someone who has gained a point of reference beyond the structured bias of nationalism.

Another rhetorical posture Spurr identifies that has been used to both serve and rationalize imperialistic enterprise is that of “surveillance”, the construction of the Western gaze and the appropriation of agency. Rather than a subject who is denied agency and is not permitted a gaze at all, I am striving for dialogue, to allow for “heteroglossia” in these various moments within the “contact zones”. In one sense the gaze cannot be truly mutual, as the poems are mine, the diction and the idiom formed from my consciousness. A poem such as “Sapa” encapsulates this struggle to allow agency, as the speaker asks to know the names of the village girls. Here we glimpse the speaker’s guilt at what he observes, and the consequent desire for a kind of mutual exchange, but the little girls retain no voice of their own in this contact zone. The only English words they know are those mimicked from the wealthy tourists, these envoys of economic imperialism, as a means of selling their souvenirs. The privileged gaze, as described in Spurr, is replaced in this collection by a subject witness who experiences a doubleness. While his ability to travel testifies to his privilege, there is a sensation of guilt because of this privileged position and how that has affected the people, as seen in “The Storm”, “Water Puppets” and “Phnom Penh”. The speaker recognizes that he is part of the problem. He also at times experiences the sensation of being the other,

ostensibly an alien in the foreign space. In his desire to understand and love the people he's encountering, a desire to develop empathy, there is also the painful awareness that his culture is responsible for that pain. The speaker is implicated, and his privileged presence within the foreign contact zone serves to confirm his anxiety.

A poem like "The Tour" demonstrates that "orientalism" is not exclusively a Western-Eastern concern, but an attitude common to human nature. The temptation to use privilege and difference as a means of justifying exploitation is one to which human beings are generally susceptible. The position of privilege that allows the traveler to encounter and conquer another culture is essentially a feature of financial power. In this poem the same individuals who have been historically victimized by a Western simplification of the Middle East, in turn take precisely the same posture toward Thailand, which is perceived as a romanticized landscape, the place of sexual adventure and experimentation. Just as, according to Said, the Orient has been depicted in Western literature as a place of sexual liberty, Thailand becomes that space for the Saudis, where experiences forbidden within their own rigid culture can be enjoyed.

Whether or not we are aware of it, and whether we are directly involved, the problems commensurate with an increasingly globalized economy are ones that citizens of privilege cannot separate themselves from. Our Nikes are made in The Philippines by workers who earn a fraction of their labor's true value. Ironically, Chinese factories produce children's Bibles for American markets while it imprisons and tortures Christians amongst its own populace. Whether we are directly culpable in that we work for companies that build factories in the third world to exploit cheap labor, or harvest poorer nations' natural resources, or directly enjoy the benefits of the sex-trade in Thailand, we are part of the consumer cycle that perpetuates these injustices. These poems testify to the fact that we are implicated as well, in that we benefit from the privilege created through exploitation. Knowing how to respond ethically is the challenge, but I believe the place to begin is by developing empathy for the people affected by our misuse of power, and struggling with these structures by risking real encounter within the contact zone.

On Poetic Craft

Poetic language negotiates a synthesis where the body and the mind co-exist, interact. There is something Gestaltist about the way the poem becomes more than the sum of its syllable parts. The brain does not register sound in isolation, but as a meaning making entity, seeks to interpret the elements of sound down to the very building blocks of consonant and vowels. Sound mixes into the brick of word, and these bricks become the poet architect's tool for the monument erected on the page. In fact poetic language is more selective and compact than prose, and conveys its message more intensely. The compactness of the poem, the imagination evoked through the tools of imagery and metaphor, pushes the language of great poetry to a level of higher octane. This is why, as Richard Gray identifies in his article, "Verse broadens the mind, the scientist find", recent neurological studies have determined that poetic language is able to stimulate more regions of the brain than other literary forms (Gray, 2005). The fact that so many syllables in the English language shimmer with phonetic intensive quality indicates this desire of language to suggest its meaning beyond the cerebral level alone.

We are wordwrights, making paintings with words, not simply chaining words together which seem to bear the connotations we hunger after. The cadence of the line should appeal to the ear, though at times the pleasure might not be bound within positive emotions. Some of the most potent music is far from pretty. There is pleasure in the constructive pain of self-knowledge, in the melancholy of reflection.

In terms of style, William Butler Yeats is one of my muses, as I have been significantly impacted by what he was doing poetically. Yeats referred to himself and his associates as "the last romantics" long after the romantic period had been concluded. Yeats recognized that an essential part of Irish culture and national identity was in jeopardy and he sought to reclaim it and resuscitate it in a world where romance was dying. There is likewise for me a romantic propensity and a strain of high romance in my diction which I make a concerted effort to keep reined in. Furthermore, Yeats addresses issues of spirituality and politics in the midst of an era similar to our own in many ways, in which "things fall apart" and "the center cannot hold." There is typically a melodious

cadence to my poetry, as I continue to strive for create beauty and meaning within the text.

I believe that sound should intimate the poem's soul, that is, the entire poem should work to move the reader and open him up to the encounter experienced within the text. Sound and imagery allow this to occur within the piece of art at least as much as the overt content, more so when done well, as they function at both conscious and subconscious levels to convey meaning. Let us not overlook the potential of the wordsound, and its collaboration within the line, as a powerful force in moving our spirits and reinforcing the poem's essence. If words can be chosen which, through their phonetic intensity, suggest the meaning we seek to convey, then another level of engagement for the reader is accomplished. These phonetic intensives charge the language with an immediacy of experience- the reader re-experiences the content through the reading of the poem. Good poetry involves a fusion of the objective and subjective aspects of knowledge or experience. Good communication informs. Great poetry transforms. Art is not thesis, but synthesis. Rather than telling us about the subject under consideration, poetry allows us to enter into various dimensions of experiencing that subject. "Prague, 1990" to use one example, allows a full sensory tour as the poem is read. In two pages the reader undergoes a journey through Prague, day and night, and this involves far more than a measure of its physical dimensions; we are provided with a glimpse of its essence so that we can appreciate the young traveler's sense of awe and wonder in his encounter with this unfamiliar place. The phonetic intensives within the diction serve to heighten the poem's drama and allow the reader's experience to mirror that of the speaker. For example, the description of Charles Bridge as "bristling with black quills" and the river as "rippling glass" do indeed make the speaker's vision living and active for us. We too can hear the "wheezing accordion," the "crystal tinkle," and the Vltava's "gurgle" as we trace the speaker's steps through the city streets.

Metaphor provides further room for exercising our spiritual nature, and for the poem as an experiment in creation. When I speak of spirit here, I am referring to the idea of things being connected to some transcendent whole, as opposed to existing in isolation. Recent studies in the field of education by Dr. Robert J. Marzano and others have determined that there is an enormous increase in student learning if metaphor is

used to teach concepts. Current brain research confirms that the brain seeks to make new learning meaningful, that our dendrites literally seek to make connections whereby new knowledge becomes grafted to the hardwiring of prior knowledge (cf. Marzano). If the dendrites connect, they fuse and the concept is learned. If the brain cannot make the connection, the dendrites physically withdraw from each other. Rather than seeing the world as a string of unconnected empirical data, the brain is actually constructed as a relational organ that functions more efficiently when making meaningful connections as opposed to making impersonal observations. This brings us back to the notion of spirit and empathy raised earlier, and the heart can be connected here as a complement to the brain. As we may describe spirit as the state of being connected, and love as nurturing a healthy relationship with another, they are both linked with this discovery of the brain as a connected organ. Two primary effects with regard to this notion of the brain's meaning-making, particularly when speaking of metaphor are: it provides a bridge for making meaning by linking the unknown to the known; it may also serve to disrupt hard-wiring that may be faulty, causing the reader to reconsider something thought to be understood.

Returning to "Prague, 1990," carefully chosen imagery and metaphor coalesce with the sound devices as a way of translating the speaker's impression of Prague as it was just after the fall of communism. The city is metaphorically compared to a fairy tale princess roused from a frozen spell, while at the same time the atrophy of decades of neglect, her "scars and bones," and "hollow eyes" counterbalance the romantic vision with an aspect of realism. The island where the speaker sleeps is described as a jade pendant, the river a chain from which it hangs, creating a heightened sense of beauty and magical possibility. In the final movement of the poem, Prague at night is transformed to the level of romance through the allusion to Wagner's Rhein maidens, the Vltava nymphs singing for their gold as the tourists on the island enjoy their play. Yet the sunrise at the end begins to pull away night's cover, suggesting that this state can not be sustained.

In a poem like "Ex Patria", the metaphor serves to clarify the speaker's feelings toward himself, and the relationship between the individual and his country. Becoming a teacher at twenty three in the name of "democracy," he describes himself as water that has strayed so far from its source it has dried out. America is described as a green spring, allowing for simultaneous but contrasting evocations of both fertility and avarice.

America can be thought of in either of these ways, but the metaphor forces us to consider both. Throughout the collection, metaphor is used as a catalyst for breaking through our static understanding, to create new possibilities as the speaker's perspective develops.

Many of the poems in the collection, as was mentioned in the first section of this preface, employ dramatic monologue as a way to see beyond the narcissism of the personal lyric that has come to dominate post-modern poetics. I am seeking to reclaim this form as a means of creating ironic distance and to create a space for poetic reflection on the contact zones being explored. Often the speaking voice in my poems makes observations predicated by the "Orientalizing" structures that are in place, all the while manifesting a noticeable lack of awareness of those structures. As I pause to process the overflow of powerful emotions which I have experienced, reflection in tranquility allows me to create a speaking voice who mouths the thing I do not feel in order to evoke the things I truly feel. For example, the speaker in "Parasites", while noticing the children who hawk water bottles and including them in the poem, nevertheless seems to be oblivious to their tragedy, oblivious to the fact that he is responsible to some extent for this situation. The speaker in "Addison's Flat" is one of a group of dead miners who came to the western coast of New Zealand in the nineteenth-century gold rush. In an ironic twist, rather than achieving a conquest over the land, this speaker has ultimately become absorbed by it; it is he who is mastered by the landscape he has come to exploit. Rather than acquiring the wealth and power that makes gold so alluring, the only gold that remains in his "possession" is the veneer on a lead sign that marks his grave. In both of these examples, the speaker's persona helps to create a distance from the event and gives poetic reflection a chance to function. Similarly, the speaker in "Phuket" is one of the victims of the recent tsunami, and relates the trivialities he witnessed on the morning just before the disaster struck. This puts a personal face on the disaster at the same time we are shocked by the ironic realization that this speaker is one of the victims. In each of these examples there is a search for an ethical position in light of the events and injustice encountered in the contact zone, and the dramatic monologue helps me to explore and voice that ethical struggle.

Another effective example of the use of dramatic monologue is "Our Lady of Antwerp," where the speaking voice in the poem is actually the video camera, the "I see"

device which observes in the place of the witness, or it could be understood as the vehicle mediating what the speaker sees. The dramatic monologue helps to intensify the irony as the camera dispassionately records the central physical features of the cathedral, and its impersonal tone toward the powerful images is intended to make us uneasy. This dissonance culminates with Rubens emotive painting of Christ's deposition from the cross, as the camera pauses on the painting, recording without passion or reflection. The prosthetic speaker has eclipsed the personal witness and interfered with the experience, as the objective of the camera is not to learn or dialogue, but simply to possess. Again there is an ethical struggle taking place beneath the poem's skin, as I try to respond to the "deadening" power of the mechanical prosthesis and the willing surrender of agency to it.

There are basically three poetic forms presented to the reader within this collection. In the poems where my subject travels, which is to say, explores, discovers, or awakens, the line staggers horizontally, simultaneous to its vertical development. This innovation in structure was initiated by William Carlos Williams, developed extensively through his poetic journeys such as "Patterson." Williams, in his short and famous essay "On Measure," writes of the need to find a new measure to meet the reinvented sensibility of the modern mind, in that "the very grounds for our beliefs have altered" (Williams, 337). Yet Williams also acknowledges that "no verse can be free," and advocates discipline so that our poetry may continue to be beautiful, continue to be art. In this essay he furnished no formula for delineating this new measure, only the commission to discover it. In fact, Williams suggests that this measure must be "a purely intuitive one which we feel but do not name" (Williams, 339). For me intuiting the new measure has to do with the gradual unfurling of thought, as each clause of the line is spoken and breathed. The visual fracture of the line corresponds to the musical cadence of the breath, the measure determined here by the natural breath divisions of the line. Each break in the long line and the subsequent vertical shift corresponds to a breath movement, which Olson later describes as the essence of the line. The speaker in these poems doesn't pause in the middle of the thought, but continues to experience, continues to develop the thought, and discovers, when the thought reaches a sort of resolution, that he has arrived at a different location on the field. The poems are properly described as traveling music, as opposed to static reflection.

I see and employ the left margin as a symbol for the speaker's starting point; it represents the psycho-socio-religio-historical foundation that has nurtured him up to the point of this encounter. While we, as conscious beings, to a large degree are forced to begin at this foundation, representing what we have been molded into thus far, the authentic journey plunges us over that secure threshold, and places us in a disruptive space. At times the poem's speaker isn't certain of where the line might next direct him. For just as in the physical process of walking, the horizon doesn't remain static, the speaker moves through the field of the page as the experience unfolds. The staggered line also allows for a more dynamic physical link between the related segments of a lengthy thought. Rather than returning all the way to the left for the continuation of thought after every line break, the reader's eye descends as the process of realization unfolds. Subconsciously, because such a radical physical reorientation isn't required, we don't register as forceful a break in the midst of the thought. We can observe a further aspect of verisimilitude in this presentation of line as it corresponds to the poem's nature; the reader actually enters into a simulation of the speaker's experience. Just as phonetic intensives create a sense of immediacy through the replication of sound, this use of spacing in the poetic structure is intended to invite the reader into the experience of the subject. We reincarnate the poem as we read. We appropriate the vulnerability of the speaker as he negotiates the disruptive territory.

In a poem such as "Disaparis", it is easy to sense the impact of this form in practice, as the subject travels through Paris via memory, and simultaneously undergoes a parallel inward journey of realization. The two journeys are at work throughout the poem, contrasting the speaker's idealized expectation and realization. The initial stanzas establish the subject's romantic expectation for Paris as constructed by cinema and literature. Our anticipation accompanies the speaker's as we move toward this fabled territory, this Mecca for poets and students of literature. The final movement shifts from the past to the present, experience having stripped away the legendary romance of Paris. While the neophyte traveler desires to see the famous Bastille, and trusts that he can do so because a subway stop still bears its name, the experienced traveler has learned that Paris is not the same city depicted by Dickens, even when the names continue to honor the historical significance of such places. Right from this first poem in the collection, the

romantic image, as represented by a “Paris of the mind,” is dispelled by the encroachment of reality.

“Windows” serves as another example to justify this poetic form through the effects created. In this poem the tourist subject gazes through a series of windows in his discovery of this unknown space, the city of Antwerp, Belgium. First he visits the zoo, then stops to survey the curious differences of the Hassidic Jews of the diamond district. Finally, the speaker has an unexpected encounter with a victim of the sex trade behind a window, bearing an uncanny parallel to the first encounter at the zoo. On the one hand the prostitute in the window, like the caged monkey, depends on the possessive gaze for her livelihood, but naturally, she also despises such degradation and imprisonment. This final encounter catches the reader by surprise, and at the end we share in the conflicting emotions experienced by both the prostitute and the tourist. While the gaze at the scantily clad woman contains a degree of pleasure for the speaker, and furthermore provides the joy of novelty, yet he is cognizant that he is witnessing a form of exploitation, and becomes aware of both her shame and his own. The reader also becomes implicated through the poem, as he has now also become a witness to this encounter.

Other poems in the collection remain tethered to the left margin, the beginning of each successive line moving back to that known starting position. This form is used when the poem is more of a reflection rather than a physical or emotional journey into a disruptive space, such as in the example of “Tuol Sleng”, where the photograph of a Khmer Rouge victim inspires the speaker’s poetic reflection. This traditional form is also used in poems of cross-cultural encounter where the subject clings to the known and refuses to engage with the person or place with any sensitivity or vulnerability. Often this corresponds with the use of dramatic monologue, and in such cases the static form serves as a subtle self-indictment of the speaker. For example, “Shangri-la” displays a portrait of the resort traveler, for whom the foreign country is simply a place of warm temperatures, sandy beaches, and speedy service. This kind of travel poses no threat to personal or psychological security, as there is no foray away from the known into a real contact zone. For this speaker, the natives who work at the poolside are essentially invisible, only acknowledged for their ability to take care of him. “Parasites” likewise accentuates this dismissal of the native inhabitants; the tourists seek to capture memories and photographs

while they swat the local hawkers away like flies. Because these subjects seek the foreign encounter entirely on their own terms and refuse to acknowledge the people who are an integral part of understanding the disruptive space they have entered, they are never able to move away from the left margin. In “Our Lady of Antwerp” the entire poem contains the physical movement through the vast space of the cathedral, but because the subject isn’t even seeing the place, there is no corresponding movement on the page. The camera prosthesis becomes a kind of usurper that doesn’t learn from the contact, but instead only collects images.

Finally, in the poems where my own, which is to say, Western, and more specifically, American culture, is under the examination of the poetic eye, the form is radically different. Here I experiment with post-modern “free-play” as a way of dealing with the post-modern situation my speaker encounters in his homecoming, his “broken nostos.” In some of these poems an open field approach, as described by Charles Olson in his influential essay, “Projective Verse”, is used to lament a culture that has come to repudiate its historical and spiritual heritage, which is as much to say, has come to despise itself. While Olson was not intentionally the author of chaos, his radical new open-field poetics created a form which other poets used to that end. My poems in this section play with chaotic structure as a means of exploration; each poem becomes an objective correlative for a trend in thought, an intellectual presupposition that has contributed to our arrival at this unhappy morass. The poems turn the critical finger of deconstruction back upon itself, and suggest that if everything is too open, the poem breaks down, as does everything else, including the self. I would say, however, that these poems intentionally seek to be anti-entropic even as they appear to deconstruct, in that they seek to direct us toward the massive rebuilding effort so desperately needed by our culture. In clear contrast to the staggered poems where the speaker travels outward, displaced from the left margin, yet retaining that zone as a kind of spine or foundation for the journey, the open field poems can begin anywhere on the page as a means of revealing the ungrounded or unanchored presuppositions of post-modernism.

For example, a poem such as “Creation Dream”, explores the presumptions of materialism. My point is to demonstrate how this position is essentially one based on faith; thus after a third-page of silence, the white space inexplicably issues forth a

“BANG”. Following this comes “in the big”, clearly evoking the Genesis account, balancing the materialistic creation story against the traditional “faith” narrative of Western culture. The random pattern of the poem reflects the impersonal explosion which “miraculously” produced the universe of order and complexity we observe. Words are broken down into phonemes, and are misspelled or misused in order to accentuate the absurdity of the position, so that the vague presence of a ‘something’ here becomes the “sum” of things, from eyes to apes, which curiously emerged from nothing. This breaking of language allows the wordsound in the poem to be maximized. A corruption of amino acids into “amigo ass ids” exposes another level to the debate, calling into question the motivation of so-called “objective” scientists in promulgating a world view that is “friendly” to the id, thereby condoning the pursuit of desire, a framework where self becomes the only reference point for morality. That the second law of thermo-dynamics, which states that all things tend toward entropy, poses a serious challenge to materialist theory is indicated by the broken words and what those syllables suggest. That the “thermo die” leads to the corrosion of “name” into “ick” points out the problems of human identity given such a materialistic framework as a final explanation for our existence. The word “die” here evokes both the notions of termination and chance, simultaneous facets of this world view when carried to its logical conclusions.

The use of puns help to highlight the multiple meanings of language and serve to further disrupt the reader as he attempts to navigate these demanding poems. The reader is not quite certain of how to read certain lines because of the various meanings suggested. For example, in “supposed mod urn” a series of puns is strung together, in which Gospel word is spelled “God spill whirred” as a means of identifying the dismissal of any meta-narrative from a post-modern framework. As a result, morality becomes “methics”, determined by the self, and knowledge becomes “me phist amology” suggesting the centrality of self and power in a system with no transcendent reference. At the end identity has been broken into an “id entity”. With these examples, the reader is kept off balance, never quite sure what he’s reading. bpNichol depicts the pun as a kind of trapdoor that deposits the reader into a new level of possibility beneath the layers of denotation and connotation. Sound play coalesces with the open field to open the door to further dimensions of potential meaning. Language becomes a kind of game rather than a

system for understanding, and yet these tricks are intended to open up the possibility for meaning, so that perhaps language as a game can be a vehicle for discovering meaning.

Even within the earlier travel poems of the collection, puns are used to excite potential meanings in the lines and provoke the reader's imagination. Right from the earliest poems these puns emerge within the diction, as in the final stanza of "Disaparis", where the speaker sits on a plastic chair across the rue from McDonald's. "Rue" is, of course, the French word for street, but in English it means regret, which is the prevailing mood of the poem. The title of the poem itself is a hybrid creation, a combination of Paris and either disappointment or disappearance, or perhaps both. "exposexposureure" depends heavily on puns as the text challenges us to make sense of the photograph in the Saigon museum. Even the wonderful possibility of Saigon's wordsound is used, as breaking the word into Sai gon (sigh gone) evokes the traumatic memories of the past.

Of course the open field poems, through their conspicuous defiance against any straightforward meaning, work to deliberately convey the meaning that I seek, the danger of losing any stability through an outright rejection of the left-margin, the grounded zone of the known. I am writing from a post-post-modern vantage point here, borrowing from the past wisdom of Williams' modernist innovation and recapturing it to apply to the present. In between the conservative security of the left margin and the potential chaos of the open field, I see that a middle ground of the staggered line is possible, where the subject risks leaving the known and makes himself vulnerable in an encounter with the unknown, yet retains an anchor to help process the experience. The plain fact is that none of us are without our presuppositions, and thus each of us does have a margin grounding our experience. In Arabic cultures the margin is on the right, while in East Asia, the margin actually spans the top of the page. The position of the margin is relative to the culture, but the existence of a margin in expressing thought on the page seems to be a trans-cultural phenomenon. This universal margin serves to underscore my point, that there is a margin for each of us, though its specific orientation might not be identical. Williams described what I am striving for in the staggered line as the "relatively stable foot," one that corresponds to our epistemic uncertainty but hasn't lost faith in knowledge utterly. I think the responsible intellectual and emotional position today seeks to locate a

place of equilibrium between the two extremes of absolutism and relativism, both of which ultimately amount to different forms of absolutism.

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Prague, 1990

in those early months
 of Prague Spring
 roused from her frozen spell

 you could still see
 her scars and bones
 if you knew the right chinks
 in the castle parapets

 you could glimpse
 her hollow eyes
 gaping from the backsides
 of houses painted in front
 to beguile her guests

 we were amongst the first
 to sleep in the old manor
 stolen by the Reds
 now quickly altered to a hostel

 for an endless party
 fifty to a room
 on a tear drop island
 jade strung on the river chain
 where willows dip their whips
 into the split Vltava

 from the island tip we surveyed
 the ancient master bridge
 bristling with the black quills
 of martyrs' hands and crosses
 across the river's rippling glass

 the streets by day
 serpent streams that double back
 lose you in their arms

 until a flagstone meadow
 lined with cotton candy houses
 opens like a secret vault
 whose soaring towers draw the eyes
 black slate tipped by golden balls
 and slender crucifix spears
 and over all
 the compass point
 the castle sprawled along the bluff

at night a kafka maze
 gas lit cobblestone
 spires transformed to shadow apparitions
 portholes at your feet blink
 lenses where the faces mime
 and rusted strings hammer ballads
 and an accordion wheezes sadly
 to crystal tinkle
 and garbled laughter slosh

and a silver garden on the island
 misted with absinthe
 stroked by night's soothing palms
 all tonguefree talking under stars
 muted by wreaths of smoke
 the lyric gurgle of Vltava nymphs
 singing for their gold
 until the summer sun
 so soon begins to pull
 away the covers

Coming to you now my fifth time

I'm no longer shocked by your

ugly string of suburb roundabouts

turnstiles overhung with modern signs

and Texas petrol stations on the road

I'm no longer looking for the Bastille

near the metro stop

drinking in the plastic café chair

across the rue from golden arches

a beacon bright even in rain

always rain that seems to walk

with you my fallen friend

while the radio crackles a tinny

Frenchified version of "Yesterday"

it's Atlanta, it is Buffalo

it's the world

Our Lady of Antwerp

track forward
 along a cobblestone plain
 and a few well worn steps
 to her arch
 of lovely rippled stone lips

zoom
 on squatting faces blunt
 from centuries of rain and smoke

cut

left
 to buttress base
 and pan up tower
 slowly scan lace crystal
 close on filigree tips
 that prod the grey bellied sky

pause

forward
 breach the threshold
 into cavern dark
 where lens reshapes
 to eyedrop
 periscope her nave
 a deep murky aisle
 and stretch of shapely ribs

cut

half turn
 to slow zoom
 stalk the rose
 window where the sun
 bleeds through her fractured pane

pause

slow out and back
 to capture every facet
 of the bloody bloom

pan stone lining
of colossal stomach
trace a slender bone from vault
back to slate floor

lens cap
darkness

blink open
track toward cross hair
the altar where the nave
and transepts intersect

pan from center point
down every vaulted channel
back again to the rose
still bleeding fire

pause

zoom to the plaque
left of altar
Pieter Pauwel Rubens
Descent from the Cross
Commissioned blah blah

cut

frieze
on the ancient canvas
where every saint's hand
reaches out to catch
the drooping corpse
even the women
crumpled on the ground
each eye down cast
and weeping
hold the
hold the famous Lord
by famous Flemish hand
a moment

cut

Unknown

your garden's birches
 are much sadder than the trees
 who stand along the Moskva slick
 the gravel leads through yellow grass
 under limbs drooped with spotted leaves
 to a marble monument
 that spouts a wispy flame
 against the Kremlin's back

the people's tears are shed
 for cares more pressing
 than your threadbare skin
 that guarded the eastern front without a gun
 your blackened fingers
 clawing on the Volga banks
 flesh ribboned on the wire
 or skull mashed
 under panzer treads

you marched staccato
 toward the line
 to keep your people safe
 held your helmeted ears
 praying for the crashing shells to end
 until a Betty plopped into your lap
 shredding your tunic and scream
 across the stumped waste

golden arches glow at the Kremlin's front
 your paths are empty
 except for a few curious strangers

only birch bones seem to understand

I want to remember Bahrain-

sky bruised ever darker purple
 gulf water alchemied
 from mint to slate
 under the evening's layered veils

my Bahraini students and I
 lounging on long benches
 each of us propped on one elbow
 water bubbles in the belly jars
 as we puff arabic
 smoke plumes out of ciphers
 coal medallions bleed
 their heat through membrane foil
 to brass tobacco bowls

we are the only customers
 in western clothing
 roasting in our jeans and polo shirts
 in the open air café
 between the freeway and sea

beside our benches
 ringed together in a small stockade
 our white robed neighbor
 in red and white checked gutra
 cinched by a black cord
 his chin stubbled salt and pepper
 taps my shoulder, playfully nods
good? he asks smiling through smoke
mumtaz, my response muffled by my cloud

the muezzin echoes
 from the missile minaret behind us
 back on Exhibition Road
 mosque bright lights and Tit
 Lounge side by side

God's name crackles
 canned and amplified
 a flock of white robes
 slip into the night pleats
 my student friends and I remain
 and still my neighbor stays beside me
 laughs, sucks deep, slurs *good*
 the cloud of dragon smoke
 around our heads

Wadi Rum

we set off four
 teachers on our Christmas break
 on camelback from Rum town
 where the road ends in sand
 led by pre-teen flipflop guides
 deserters set to flight by
 the burden of being "sir"
 pushing rebellious rocks up hills
 broken love back in America
 the thousand daily decisions
 all the startling noises

 untethered global bastards
 set to flight
 not to but from
 trapped in our own mir (or) age
 seeking solace
 where the wind licks smooth
 the notes of passage
 without prejudice

 we wobbled a long twenty miles
 the measure of a day
 through shifting ground
 and a maze of canyon walls
 long ago beneath the sea
 now a rock manhattan
 withered petroglyphs
 carved over by graffiti

 at last we dismounted the lathery camels
 grunting in a cleft at mountain base
 the red rock spouting tolkeinesque
 from waves of desert white
 then scattered through the desert labyrinth
 to gather kindling
 in the bone brush before darkfall

soon night entered deep and full
no moon or light
from the cinderblock shacks of Rum
the nearest town
a full day away and shielded by the walls
just the campfire sparked by Zippos
dancing shadows on the stone

the sand a dark sea now
we nuzzle up against
the safety of the red rock
the cold clear light
of condescending stars
stirs a glimmer of home

somewhere in the stillness
an oil rig begins to whirl and chug

Mount Pisgah

we budgeted some time to kill
 driving back to Amman, Jordan
 the day before our flight
 after a weekend touring Petra
 and a camel trek in Wadi Rum

we turned west toward the border
 toward the mountain peak
 where Moses surveyed the land
 promised to his people

perhaps the trail was easier in Moses' day
 or maybe he was better led
 instead of switching back and forth
 around the spiny crests
 our little Daewoo chugging
 up the steep gravel roads

tired of bickering and wasting gas
 we finally ditched our quest
 killing the engine on a stony slope
 flecked with clanging sheep

at first we didn't see the tent
 a sail of canvas stretched across
 a little hillside cleft
 until a girl of maybe twelve
 emerged all dressed in black
 followed by a full-grown boy

she came down to meet us
 smiled crooked teeth in an unwashed face

the older boy waving us over
 and they led us
 up the hillside to their tent

we sat on mushroom cushions
 their father eager to entertain
 with his broken English
 while the mother served us tea
 in blackened tin cups

soon a hoard of children had converged
and hovered at the canvas edge
the smallest boy- maybe three years old
cradling a lamb in his filthy hands

we stayed with them all afternoon
in this their winter camp
nestled away from wind and rain
sipping tea and sharing broken stories
about the size of their flocks
the names and ages of their kids

they gave us a tour of the surrounding slopes
vistas stretching far to the west
across the Palestinian hills

we took some photos of the family
but they had no address
for us to mail them to
we embraced them as we rose to leave-
to return to Amman before dark
despite their protests
left the children chewing gum
and ball point pens

they watched us rumble back down the road
kicking up clouds of dust
knowing we could never find them again

even if we returned

The Tour

They flew from Riyadh

amber prayer beads squished
 in a Hugo Boss pocket
 stifled like kerchiefed coins

lulled in Thai

Air cachet class
 and Remy Martin veil

father's hand

on untouched son of sixteen
 coming for the first time
 to Bangkok

After dinner prayer they rolled the rugs
 provided by the Ritz

and shopped the streets
 where dimpled ankles
 sugar in high heels
 that boost slender legs
 thrusting silk flesh straight
 to their skirts' chiffon flutter
 bosoms swell the lacy hems
 all twinkly in the lamplight
 stroked by smooth pink cuticles
 at the end of satin arms
 their cocked heads luring kisses

the boy's hand sweats

in his dad's meaty grasp
 they haven't even reached
 the real girls yet
 still free to taste
 sexual as they like
 on this bold maiden voyage

Mark's print

Mark hands me the print
 once home within the border
 of the compound walls

The Marsyandi, "raging river"
 dappled with a few strategic drops

her gush breaks frothy
 on the boulder banks
 hippo marbles
 tumbled to this valley vein
 from steep green
 terraced rice fields
 pimpled with brown huts

Dead ahead
 mad river hurtles forward
 gloss skin breaks boils
 bubbles iceberg tips
 bursting mines

she now
 a stal lion
 pissed from last night's rain
 her whole pour shafted
 crashes through
 the pinched
 stone rectum

just beyond
 erupts in rapid called "The Flush"
 a frenzied dynamo
 turbine
 cisors gnash

If you knew this river's body
 you would know the need to ride
 her heart surge
 to catch her in cross hairs
 freeze her spittle spray-

 The Flush one cataract away
 no reset button
 Min, our Nepal guide
 screaming through the roar
 Harder! Harder! Pull Harder!
 All of us digging
 in her flesh as best we can
 for a life-saving purchase
 as we plunge into
 that thrash of ruptured flood

Mark cocks his head
 smiles knowingly
 the perfect shot
 framed in my white hands
 perfectly tamed

Parasites

all the guidebooks testify
Phnom Bakheng, this termite hill,
as the only place to truly capture
Angkor Wat in afternoon soft light
so we the pudgy cavalcade
haul our rolls of fat and film
up Shiva's lion backside

waddle up the pebbleskitter slope
above the tangled vines
stumbling drunken sherpas
heavy laden, swathed in sweat

trailing a retinue
of nimble-footed urchins
barely clad in dust and rag
who foist water bottles
in our dripping faces
dance among our bodies
as we swat them away

even at the top they buzz
about our heads as we rest
swat them swat them away
to gaze in peace
over fecund plains
at the temple ruins
that nipple up
in shadow shapes a mile away
reddish brown in the setting sun

print the perfect memory
capture proof on kodak skin

Phnom Penh

his body well-rehearsed
 in sleight of hand
 he slips from the inky street fissure
 to our café corner glow
 his ratty sleeve flapping hollow

he bends over his crutch
 palm uplifted to us
 whiter than his arm

and lowers his sullen eyes
 that witnessed fields flooded Khmer red
 ears that heard the tortured
 pleading cries and soldier laughs
 and his stump of hand
 that still feels the burn
 of skin unraveling over a bone
 splintered like bamboo

he waits a bowed reed moment
 to give us a chance
 his abject face hopes nothing
 from us and our French wine
 course spread on the table

we who are stuffed with money steel ourselves

he the sixth
 to trouble our tranquil evening
 by the river side

Tuol Sleng (Guilty Hill)

Little girl, could you know
what the rough soldiers had in mind
when they sat you down,
forced your camera pose
to document you
one more clit on a cold cement wall?

Your adult eyes search hard
for courage these many years
tired ice in your half-turned shoulders
and just below the surface calm
a tempest of wail and scream.

Poor child, sullen angel
of the disappeared,
what could your parents have contrived
heinous enough to deserve this scourge?
A naughty word, or job, or dirty gene?

Whatever wrong they died accused of,
the bloody current swept
your sad defiance up
and once the soldiers drained
the poison from your veins
they threw your solemn eyes
into an unmarked grave.

Tuol Sleng was a prison in Phnom Penh operated by the Khmer Rouge.

Siem Reap, Cambodia

how beautiful, dear, of you
to take notice this morning
of Vanak's lotus petals
sculpted into floralgami

though we had many sites to see today
you spoke in your gentle way
with the coffee-skinned Cambodian
like a good friend

you asked her to teach you
how to shape the central blossom in a diadem
though she couldn't help you fold
the flimsy skirts quite right

you watched and listened to her
fingering the flower's flesh
saw her beauty and her craft
the other tourists at their tables
brusquely took for granted
as they hurried through their breakfasts

you spared a little time
before our busy tour of Angkor Wat
spoke eye to eye
traded hugs and broad smiles

how beautiful she was

how beautiful you are

Shangri-la

Relax, my dear,
our children here
are sheltered and secure.

Enjoy the solitude.

The servants are swift
to attend every need
whenever a little ass demands a wipe.

They hustle poolside cocktails
and beer five times as dear
as in the shanties
down the road
a universe away.

Eat as much as you
like my dear
it's paradise
and we're the chosen few.

Have a Mai Tai,
another Anchor Beer;
they really take care
of you here.

Phuket

I was lying in a hammock
at that last resort
they keep showing on the screen

the slim pineapple girl
with her wide Thai
smile carved the fruit right there
on the lip of shade
deftly honed her eyes
in case I wanted more

a British couple was waving
hands wildly at the ocean's edge
boiling from some breakfast
crisis over water
and his harshness to the waiter
whom, she scolded, wasn't at fault

I watched a boar bellied
tourist two loungers away
take the fruit girl's
hand and walk her
back along the flowered path
to where it disappears

then fell asleep
under the crush of waves
floating in my web cocoon
rocked in the murmuring wind
before the sea
came to find me there

Banda Aceh

She came in yesterday morning
a hammer cloaked in sunrise:
now everything is gone-
washed away, they say,
but really most is still here
and there in pieces adrift
mud gorged wedged
open eyed beneath the heaped debris
we wade to our waists in
broth we don't dare drink
this morning unfolds the faint
first stench of flesh decay

The storm

Saigon is a parched lap
 where ochre grass and wilted streams
 rasp, ache for rain

I walk holey uneven streets
 where once embattled skies
 chattered with mortal arguments
 uniform lead driven home
 bludgeoned blind behind collaplaster walls
 grenades like dice rolled
 into their safe ditches

morning birds twitter in the limbs
 cradled in heat
 risen from the old grave plots

I scan the people as they pass
 drop my face if they return
 this bastard's blue eye gaze
 a son of butchers
 yet many smile
 warm past me on their way

flocks wobble by on bicycles
 and some plod shoeless through dust
 some are armless, frayed sleeves dyed dirt
 a torso, rubber tied
 around his set of stumps
 paddles one good arm
 across the swarming road

a sudden horde of cloud
 overcomes the canopy
 opens belly doors
 to sting both good and wicked
 I seek shelter in

a tailor shop
 grave little door exhumes
 a mender, apron aged but lovely
 gently pulls my arm
 to come more deeply in

she shows me her designs
 the qualities and price
 I own this shop, it's mine
 she says, a die-hard
 red we died to fight

her daughter still in a long
 white student gown
 smiles demurely, lowers her almond eyes
 brings us tea, milk
 and honey with seed cakes

it comforts me after the hard rain
 to rest with them
 warmed by their charity
 we visit for an hour
 she uses English well
 impossible to tell
 whether learned from a lover
 or to betray an enemy

the bullets on the tin roof stop
 she lifts a wooden shutter
 to show the last platoon of cloud
 receding north to bombard Laos

the storm has gone
 touch the fingers of resilient sun

back in the steamy streets
 buzzing with fly and people life
 some hobble, and the young stride
 hand in hand with joy

 a man on splintered crutches
 returns the stare I can't control
 gives the best smile his half
 flesh face can twist

I shiver in this spreading light
 of morning, Vietnam
 and tremble in your warmth
 remarkable daughters and sons

Water Puppets

up from the Water Puppet Theater
 where the dim cavern light
 is swamped by the stage
 a dark shallow pool
 that hides poles and wires
 the puppeteers tickle monkeys
 up to palmtree tops
 jerk a dozen plastic peasants
 by zither strings and spread their seed
 then the climax
 dragons writhing through the water
 snorting streams of flame

 we surfaced under a lantern aureole
 lacing light mist after rain
 in Hanoi's crumbled heart
 urchin boys hawked postcard sets
 scampering after us

 had we shut them outright
 turned stern away
 without decorum's double mask

 perhaps they wouldn't have thrown
 their wares in fury
 on the rain slick tar
 waved oaths and fists

 their screams stalking us
 through the forlorn city streams

Christmas Morning, Sapa

Who knows these little girls

 these pretty ravens hovering
 in clouds of winter breath
 outside our hotel lobby windows
 covered all in Hmong black
 red and silver stitched
 gypsy hoops dangling
 beside their dirt smudged cheeks

every dawn

 in sandals on the mountain paths
 where black pigs shit and scurry
 fetching little girls
 some with brothers sisters
 (soon to be their own)
 on their backs
 tramp down from stone villages
 to Sapa, tottery
 on the ruffled hem of China skirt

“friend, friend, you buy from me!”

 bundles full of hand-embroidered
 cloth, shirts, blankets
 silver threaded shoulder bags

we don't really want another souvenir

 “why you no buy from me?”
 pouted expertly

we want to know their names

 “me no have name”

 one giggles through white perfect teeth

“me cheeky monkey”

Baby and the bathwater

I've waddled the muddy ruts
of the chic hutong-
one of a thousand Chinese
siblings huddled on the urban ring-
seen the cemented eye slits of
a red brick factory mile
that spawned this rubber
Peking duck dyed clown yellow

Wetback bobs in the great lake
water paddled by my son's plump hand
between his water gulps
I pretend not to see

A China faucet spills
a rusty cloud of water drops
and drops and drops and
the stream bleeds chemical rainbows
slick through streets
where yellow children splash

The duck's my decoy as I
lather my son's yellow hair
with Body Shop shampoo
Dear? Oh yes, humane-
no more tears
carefully American made
without animal testing

Shanghai

Under the mild paternal
Mao eyes huge upon the wall
pipe cleaner bodies
in a windowless cave
bow under the buzzing light
fixtures lodged on cement
their twisted stick fingers scuttle
and pass quickly through
the colossal champing jaws
of the printing presses

Each cardboard sheet is cut and dyed
into a hundred identical twins
laminated with a blast of plastic breath
and bound with twine and glue
a thousand little red books
the tale of Daniel in the lion's den
with pop up doors
stacked on a pallet bound for foreign ports
for children in America

Shanghai II

den den den den den god-den
den den god-den den god-am
den den god-am god-am god
-am god-am den den god-am
den den god-am turbine blade bobbin
whir and spin the flap of paper wing and s
ss kinslap sinew sheet and stitch stitch stitch
stitch heads on pipe sticks bobin threadend to
god-am den god-am go den den god-am
the whirring shuttles lowcuss buzz and damn
scarrd fingers scuttle over press teeth champ
den god-den god-am de den
the god-am face god-den looms cinder wall
and many mene mene books the little books
in den-den roar and levers snap with steel ear
rect and shuttle steam singesear twine stretch
theden god-am den den god-am
the sinew string and heavy buzz of lights and
weaves the dust that gasps and coroner clutch
a dyeing blastic breath elaminate the tinyblue
covers of the den god-am books of "Daniel"

Mongolia Storm

the horses smell the storm's breath
 brewing miles away
 they whinny and hoof her name
 the herdsmen sense her closing too
 mumble together and thumb
 the tourists resting from the day's ride
 in our circle of tents

the storm blows a kiss ahead
 panics the horses' manes
 rattles branches, strips leaves
 makes the saplings sway
 like fishing rods

too late we glimpse
 the looming shadow of her skirt
 and black veils dangling from her brow
 her silken tendrils
 wisp along the ridge
 swooping down the velvet slope

and she breaks on us
 bursts her first gobbet
 fists upon the camp

we scramble to our tents
 dented by the gusts
 wrestle ropes and fight
 to keep the frenzied poles straight
 reining in the frantic canvas
 against her bluster rant
 our shouting tug of war shapes
 devoured in her howl

the coquette blows and batters us
 smacks her lips
 then turns a cold shoulder
 and huffs away
 dragging her skirts to other hills

she leaves us drenched
 and ravaged in her wake
 lashing tattered flaps of slashed holes
 tent poles fractured bones
 jutting through fabric skin

At the Seoul orphanage

dear little innocent sigh
resting in my arms
you nuzzle my humanness
the comfort of flesh
though I'm not of your flesh

I'm here
not that I'm a better man
or wiser or more sensitive
only as a weekly volunteer
because the world has shut
its eyes on you
and would prefer to believe
that you never were
much easier to brush
the aborted remains
under the plastic sheets of Seoul

these antiseptic walls are a blank slate
but you, pulsing engine in a purple skin,
your vessels outlined
through translucent flesh
are more than just the number on your crib

today's your first, I pray,
of many days in this cold world
and you will cry again again
but now milk-fed by my alien hand
your eyes grow heavy
satisfied as you rock
in the comfort of my arms
like you an orphan brother
thrown upon these rocky shores
crying out indignant for a grain of love

Parallels

Thirty Eighth

I've seen the DMZ
 the hairline margin on the map
 that carves this rocky
 old peninsula in half
 twisting like a skewer
 from sea to sea

up close it is a belt of green
 not Cain's gnawing splinter
 a corral of razor wire
 between two versions of "the people's" flag
 blown huge and lolling
 like heavy sheets of skin
 yearning to be reattached

the ash of Seoul still rains here
 toxins bead into vital holes
 to nurse a few dying trees
 no boot encroaches
 in this forest sown with mines

the deer and other hunted things
 such as quail and boar
 in time have crept back
 from their shrunken habitat
 cut back by progress
 have crept back to this slender womb
 where they suckle well

those cranes across the meadow
 might be farmers clothed in white
 bending over work
 till some scent or rustle
 launches them to pound
 their wings against the sky

Addison's Flat

Gold! that word alone
lured us across the feral seas
from home and family
to stake a claim in an alien soil
the emerald child
beyond Van Dieman's Land

we bore into the stubborn ground
drank our guts out every night
dodged bullet and plague
bedded down in kennels
and shuddered through long
murderous storms
all day sucked the crust in frenzy thirst
till vein after vain was siphoned dry

and now we lie beside the gale-pitted stones
under the bones of ghost towns
on the wild New Zealand coast
chinamen yanks dubliners danes
who traded our youth for riches
that moth and rust destroy
and haunt this sad memorial
a lead sign painted gold
for passing tourists to enjoy

Tech tonic pressures I

Somewhere here and there

below the silver

shellacked sea

the wake of our sonic Boon

reverb berates

a shelf spine

shivers

skull plates

on which the nations teeter

grate

the wave lengths

intercede

to chop

water ripples

tiny from the moon's

eye swelled to a dam

a wall smashes down

frail coastal villages

and swallows them raw

Tectonic Pressures II

Palm Springs, CA

The drought has scratched us
with her keen jagged screw
we shorten our showers
and feed our lawns sparingly
brown petals crepe
and crack in the pallid shade

we suck water now
from feeble streams that trickle
past indignant sandhills

this sun winks no reprieve
soon the spring will squeeze dry
and then we'll have to leave
paradise behind

Tech tonic pressures III

Arizona desert rats
mad for endless sun and green lawns
have siphoned veins
that once surged miles away
now sucked dribble thin

the aquifer bled ever shallower
slowly turns to dust
the crust cracks
and parched Gebels buckle

Tech tonic pressures IV

the chubby wide-grinned child
rattles his five-thousand year pride
while the hungry mouth
on his face's other side
gobbles steel from every mine
the pores that sink deeply
in the skull crust

he twists his rod in Krakatoa's heel
spoons out her marrow
to erect a tower to the clouds
like the boys in the west

till the bitch bites back

Tech tonic pressures V

spiders swelled in gabardine
weave a wire web
around the earth's shores

whipping spirals crackle from the wires
tingle the surrounding air

voltage sizzles through the grid
until the current overloads
and life goes dark

a widow on the twenty-third floor
tugs her window frame
grunting and clawing at the deep
blue lake beyond her pane

in the summer swelter squeeze
she collapses on the sweaty kitchen tile

Ex Patria

still wet behind the ears at twenty-two
 they called me to teach
 the world democracy

I took my water skin
 far from my source
 the filtered spring
 of green America

and cut off
 ran and ran
 until I strayed
 so much I dried

then gasping back
 a withered shrunken skin
 but favoured now
 with unprotected eyes

I saw Columbia's mountains
 nipples stripped
 of the blue veil

so stark denuded
 under a pale red sky
 all her wells
 poured over desert clay

Parallels

Pelee

some mad attraction draws us
 to the proud slender prick of sand
 a haywire compass
 that flicks its barb of bird
 stones and sea grass
 down toward our obese shadow
 our misshapen glass

we flirt as south as possible
 to smell the sweaty
 flank beneath us
 nearly close enough to glimpse
 her bulk of greazy fat swells
 just beyond the Pelee Island tufts
 and the labored flutter
 of a massive Maple Leaf

where is the line the map
 dashes to divide the us
 from them
 no lake floor rift
 disturbs the carpet muck
 beyond the lighthouse piercing eye

we huddle crouched
 beneath her obscene hedge
 of money
 and keep our flags stitched tightly
 on our backs

Modurn Roamins (7: 14-25)

I do

the very thing I hate I
 do a gain
 the vary thing
 I do not wish I
 love to do
 the vow undone
 re man a cle
 not me but flesh win
 terra in me
 agree re strain to
 not do
 what I hate
 me hurt
 me in me
 wife and son
 who frees??
 re solve
 re lent new vow
 but win tear wins again
 skin so s killed
 to sin tax
 a derme
 vow el move
 and law wars
 verses law
 eve
 in spring not sparing
 sparring spring
 sin k cirque
 to fall once more
 but deep sin sear
 in human hature

sum err

what I've done

and will again

un do my self

and do

re sine

and I

Crèche

Giddy-up giddy-up
 through the graying slush
 with a blink and a nod
 to the haloed crèche
 on the virgin lawn

Our SUVs
 and our Kenny G's
 spin the tinsel of our dreams
 in a grumbling growl
 as we jostle through sleet
 for a mall parking slot
 and the joy of a glance
 at the garland frills
 and the blinking lights
 on the plaster walls

Oh it's lovely weather
 for the children listen
 and count down the days
 the feeding frenzy
 of a million prayers
 the morning revelation
 of a wallmart sweater
 one size too small
 to swaddle a swollen
 sugar plum paunch

A merry smile
 it's the thought that counts
 the colored crepe
 crushed in the can
 and the shallow glee
 at the heaped debris
 all snuggled beneath a plastic
 pine what never lived
 can never die

Creation Dream

BANG

In the big

was not
hinge th air

so

ape or eyes

from sum
naught thing

mater eel eyes

gall axe see

see burst?)

hoke us

poke

amigo ass

ids

thermo

die

name ick shift
ill logic

hap pee call
ax I dent

the first step

Bran chez

I
 lucky lucy
 Oh to lie
 in Leaky
 gorge where dig dirty
 facile fossil
 to patch work
 tree of life tree
 man douse
 Har Har
 word anth
 apology
 dar dar
 win us de
 cline de fine
 a skull 'a tin
 bone a stone ag(u)e
 gap a t(r)ooth gap
 jaw ag
 ape

II
 Freud u
 Father
 lent us psycho
 path sub con
 sequence dis
 crim in
 ration the
 rapist verse us
 us
 in part
 we stat ick
 babble in

III

to dis

puke

p (r) ablum

psycho

(in) phant

prod

duct

us

endoc

try

nation

try

nitty

shingle

sell

deter

mind

fare

tree well

dig

nitty gritty

heal

in vet

ebrate

last

long

full phil

Child

Beloved

brown eyes heavy
nestle in my arm crook
by fire warm and light

Trust that I
will never leave
you dark outside
in the park alone

I watch your lying down
your room suffused
with heavy lamb breaths
I wait and pray
rooted in your doorpost
and watch you wake

When dreambeast snaps
files teeth sharp in shadow
I remain to carry you
to your mother's breast

When you wobble
puncture tired life-drunk
I mosey with you
hands a steady hedge
my fingers training wheels

When you climb stairs
I rise every step
with you

Rest and sway beloved
nestled in my arms
by firelight
brown eyes secure

Roe bodics

so mother
some other

tiss you miss took
my hands some
 how a body
 bag whose cord
you loosed or
 smothe red

I am the same
other body

torn upon
 a count her steel
butcher apron
 splat heard
 screeching red
 your rights
 and free
dumb choice
 for ever
 drained to
 sew her
wound dead slit

supposed mod urn

never meta

narrative i def end

tu es

chew them up

liber ra
live ra ra

no sir

text

no con

test

: don't a fense a me in

by nary

go spell
hys story

no

God spill

whirred

to hair ass

multi
placidy

only be

leave methics

me phist amology

wealed no

(s) word to pierce my (he)art

(s) take my sin

use

cleave bones

to marrow

still

safe

safe

ill us ions

id

entity

St. UrBarney's Version

Head buried in the text

lines leaping off the page

to drown out the singing lizard

as the video bubbles on

You know Hersch wanted to fuck

Bitch took my roger in her hand

smacked me on the ass

punched a bloody parcel in my lap

penis and penetration

the magic words

in the morning and even at night

cause that's the best way to be polite

if you want nice things to happen

the words that should be heard

Used to feel me up at the movies

girls moaned, shrieked ai aii aiii

called an orgy, taking part

oh we take turns at school or play

so we all have fun

and we include everyone

Jake laughed and pounded buttocks

a moist sticky leg against his cheek

mounted her absently, eliciting orgasm

fly button done but ambition showing

and went at each other with knives

we grow when we sleep

and even when we play

so we can do more things

grow a little friendlier too

Vagina mossy and glistening

still wet from her last customer

singing happily to the raindrops

kerplink, kerplop

Cr (l) it

de ride

da da

dare I

da da

si(g)n if I

re claim

re sine

to fool

fou cult

destroy

strut

deacon

struct

im

hymn all
bibe

be lank
b lank

opine

s(u)pine

Valley

Today snow sifted

down on evergreens

I hadn't seen since years

before you came to me

that first December

in times I skied these trails

with my best friend

and the girl

they all expected me

to come to vows with

but never caught love's flame

the way your firestorm

scorched through the winter ice

I pause with you, my wife,

shrouded under pine boughs

in the hushed mountain air

fleece muffles the forest creaking

on the secret backside

of the valley walls

beneath these trees that

once knew another me

VITA AUCTORIS

Dale M. Wood was born in Buffalo, New York in 1967. He graduated from City Honors High School in 1985, earning a New York State Regents Scholarship, and went on to complete a B.A. in English Language and Literature from The State University of New York at Buffalo (magna cum laude). He completed a Masters Degree in Education from Plymouth State University (New Hampshire) in 1997. He has spent ten of the past fourteen years teaching in international schools in Europe and Asia, which has afforded him the chance to visit approximately fifty different countries. He is currently a candidate for the Masters Degree in Literature and Creative Writing at the University of Windsor and plans to graduate in the summer of 2005.