

A woman with a large green turban and a matching green dress stands in front of a blue wooden door. The scene is framed by lush green ivy leaves. The magazine title 'she:iff' is at the top left, with 'UNBOUNDED' below it. The date 'OCTOBER 2010' is at the top right. The main title 'IDENTITY' is on the right side, followed by the subtitle 'blows to the head' and the article title 'anti-twitter'. The author's name 'PAM GRIER' is at the bottom right, and a tagline 'what to read next in independent publishing' is at the very bottom.

she:iff  
UNBOUNDED

OCTOBER 2010

# IDENTITY

**blows to  
the head**

**anti-twitter**

**PAM GRIER**

what to read next in independent publishing

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chowders. In short, he plainly hinted that we could  
not possibly do better than try pot-luck at the  
Try Pots. But the directions he had  
given us about keeping a  
yellow ware-  
house on  
our star-  
board

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## IDENTITY

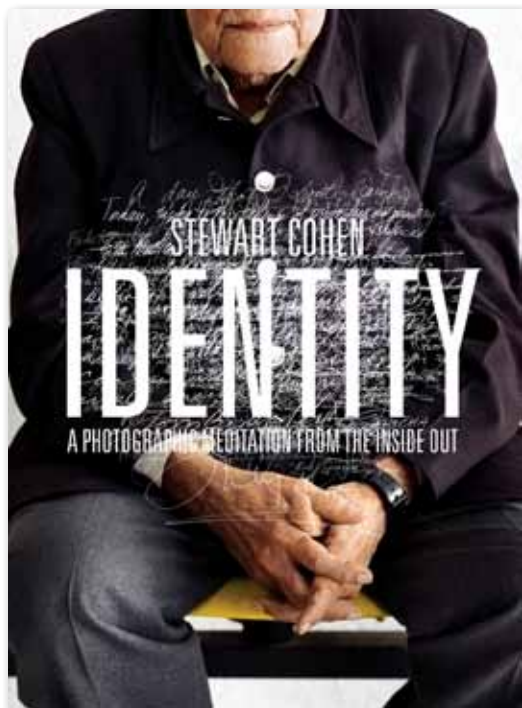
came out to my mother on a park bench the summer before I was to start law school. It was a beautiful August day.

“I’m shocked but not surprised,” she said. “The women in our family have always had a special female friend that is closer than all the rest. But you should never act on it.” With neither one of us completely sure of what the other was trying to say, we took a walk. She drove home with my father. I thought it was a relatively auspicious start to a new chapter in my life; in fact, it was the beginning of a long decade of estrangement.

Since then, I’ve been a lawyer. A professor. An editor. A grieving daughter. A proud sister. A significant other. I stopped being a poet. I became a Texan. I returned to tennis. I learned to make cheese. Some roles indelible, others ephemeral. At any given moment it can be hard to know which is which.

This issue of *Shelf Unbound* is about identity. How we see ourselves, how we are viewed by others (Stewart Cohen turns a probing lens on writers, artists, and musicians, page 8). How we sometimes find a need to redefine self and defy expectations (like women taking up boxing mid-life, page 30). How some excel at staying true to their roots while perpetuating a larger-than-life public persona (Pam Grier is *still* a cowgirl, page 78) and others are never able to escape the roles that were orchestrated for them from the very beginning (Michael Jackson as Peter Pan, page 22). As readers and voyeurs, we’re fascinated by the lives of others. And with any luck, they’ll teach us a thing or two about our own.

Kathy Wise  
editor in chief



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“Our true identity probably lies at a midpoint between who we think we are and how others perceive us,” says photographer Stewart Cohen, whose new collection of portraits, *Identity*, finds the midpoint of subjects from T. Boone Pickens to Ed Ruscha. We visited Cohen in his studio and talked about identity, reality, humanity, and that curious dude turning himself into a lizard.

—Margaret Brown



*Shelf Unbound:* You've spent your career as a commercial photographer. What was the impetus for *Identity*?

**Stewart Cohen:** I wanted to make a statement outside of the commercial advertising world, something different. I love biographies and I thought, What if I shot portraits and had the subjects write something about what makes them unique? I'm interested in what makes people tick.

*Shelf:* Your subjects range from an Elvis impersonator to Stephen Hawking. How did you decide on the mix of people?

**Cohen:** I first thought I would do “outsiders” like the tattooed and pierced crowd, which was new at the turn of the century. Some are still in the book. After I shot the first batch, I was with a producer on a project in Venezuela and we started throwing ideas around and writing them down on napkins. Gorbachev was on the list. We got a lot of rejection letters.



"I have a gift,  
The gift of breathing freely."

Eykan Baku, Artist

e. bod



Every day I wake up and  
Make something with my hands



Campbell Bousquet

*Shelf:* The book includes a photo of the girl from Ipanema, who I didn't know was an actual person.

**Cohen:** I read an article that the girl from Ipanema actually existed and I found her and photographed her in Brazil. She was 55 at the time. She's a national icon. It's the kind of thing that inspired me to do *Identity*: How often am I going to get to spend a day with someone like the girl from Ipanema if I don't make that happen?

interest in meeting people from all walks of life and seeing what makes them tick. I've learned that reality is weirder than I can ever be.

*Shelf:* Hell's Angels' Sonny Barger? And that lizard guy?

**Cohen:** I was sitting on an airplane reading *Rolling Stone*, and it said that Sonny Barger of Hell's Angels had been released and was living in Arizona. Holy shit—that's the guy that started Hell's Angels. We looked him up and got to spend an afternoon with him. Sometimes the selection process was that random. I read in a back page of *Forbes* that Erik Sprague was turning himself into a lizard, so I looked him up. It was all an adventure.

*Shelf:* You worked on *Identity* for 10 years. What's your perspective on the completed project?

**Cohen:** The photographs in the book bridge the arch of time between film and digital. It is nice for me to see that despite a total change in technology my style and vision stuck together.

*Shelf:* Learn anything about humanity?

**Cohen:** As somebody who loves biographies, in photographing all these people I could really see that if you put your mind to something, that's who you become. That was the lesson for me.

*Shelf:* You became a photographer because ...

**Cohen:** I wanted to travel, see cool things, and meet interesting people. And that's pretty much what I do.

*Shelf:* The obvious question: What makes you unique?

**Cohen:** I didn't realize how hard that question was when I started asking it. It's much harder than I thought.

*Shelf:* Got an answer?

**Cohen:** I think what makes me unique is my natural curiosity and



A day that I don't learn  
something new, is a "wasted day."

G.L. King  
9-20-03

When I was a 10 years old I dreamed  
of going to Africa, living with animals,  
writing books - and I was encouraged by  
my wonderful mother. So now I want to  
urge young people to follow their own  
dreams.

Vane Godall

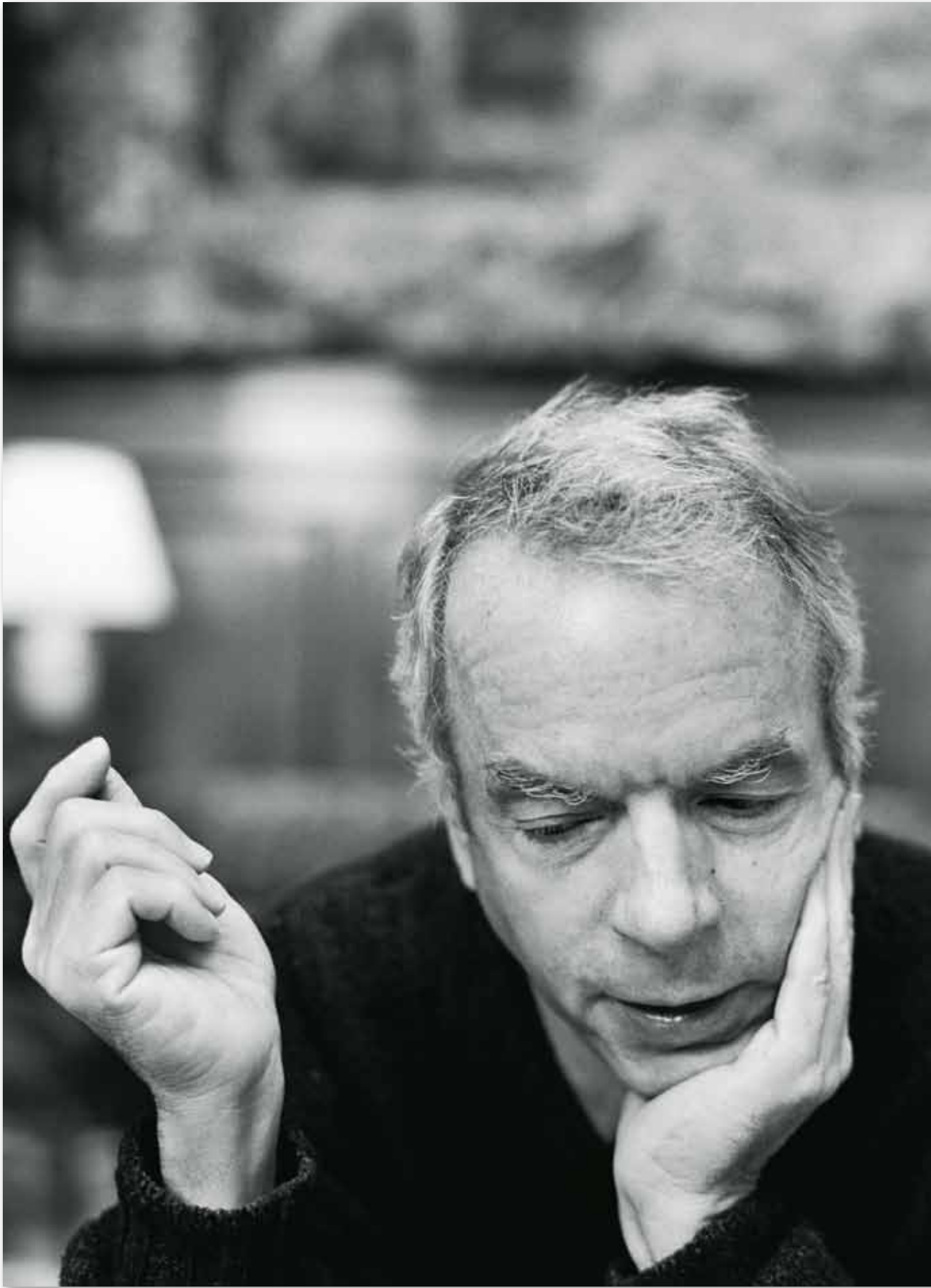


I feel blessed to start my  
ballet lessons with prima bale  
rina Olga Preobrajenska and work  
with the greatest choreographers,  
MSOKIN, Balanchine, Massin,  
Nijinska, and many others.  
They coached me all the principal  
roles and made me what I am  
now. Presently, in my Dallas  
Studio and still traveling to  
other Ballet co's, to teach and coach  
these wonderful experiences to  
younger dancers

Nathalie Leslie Krassovska

NATHALIE-LESLIE-KRASSOVSKA  
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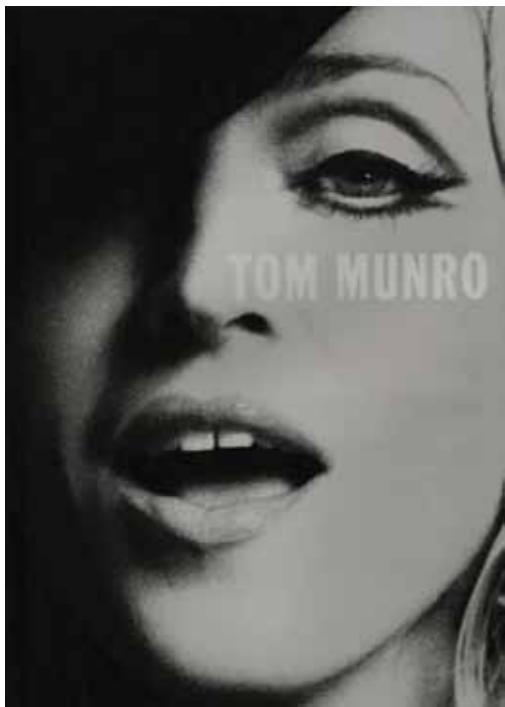


Since I've recently become a father, late in life, at 52, I have felt, more or less, like an everyman. In the face of that everymanness, I think what makes me unique is when I talk publicly about my personal experience of that. When I do that I become a unique everyman.

I am passionate about NOT littering. When I see litter anywhere, I feel hopeless. It's such a sign of carelessness, ~~lack~~ <sup>LACK</sup> of love and respect for this place we all inhabit.

For me, God is in the details.

Paul H. Jones



Damiani  
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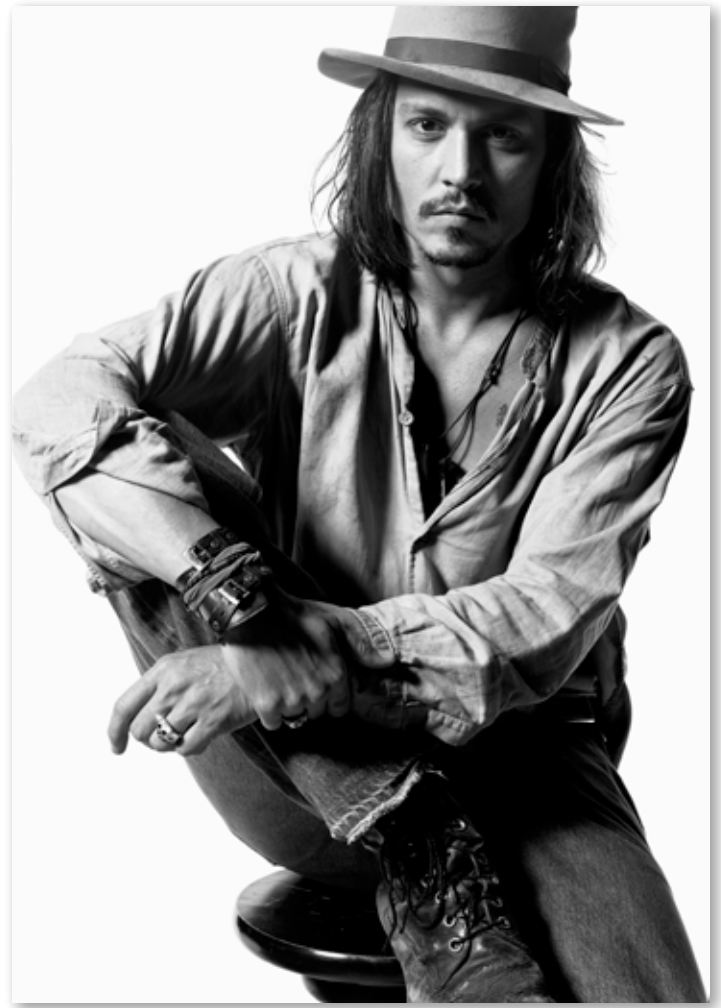
**O**ftentimes to look at a Tom Munro photograph is to glimpse what seems to be a private moment of a not-so-private person. Images of Daniel Craig, Courtney Love, Leonardo DiCaprio, Christina Ricci, and Justin Timberlake transform viewer into voyeur. Yet despite the illicit feel, the images are extremely personal. Munro is able to get his subjects to make eye contact with the camera in a magical way, so that you feel like they are looking right at you.

Munro made a name for himself in fashion photography, but when he got the opportunity to photograph Johnny Depp in Montreal in 2001 it marked a turning point in his career. The shoot led to countless opportunities to photograph the best and brightest from Hollywood and beyond. In her introduction to the book, Madonna describes being photographed by Munro as “kind of like smoking a bubblegum cigarette. You can strike a pose, look cool, get all of the sweetness, not suffer any of the side effects.” *Tom Munro* brings together those sugary, cavity-inducing images in a gorgeous, made-for-your-coffee-table tome that aims to satisfy what seems to be our insatiable desire for celebrity.

—Dean Hill

# TOM MUNRO





*Photos from Tom Munro by Tom Munro, Damiani 2010, [www.artbook.com](http://www.artbook.com). Reprinted with permission. All rights reserved.*



a shirtless Paul Neuman with a Star of David around his neck. A bespectacled Gregory Peck tucking Mary Badham into bed on the set of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Rock Hudson parading around in nothing but Doris Day's fur coat. Audrey Hepburn's doe eyes peering over a screen of leaves. Leo Fuchs captured them all as the "special photographer" for Universal Pictures from 1961 to 1965, working on the sets of such classic films as *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Strange Bedfellows*, *Bedtime Story*, *Cape Fear*, and *40 Pounds of Trouble*. The stars trusted him implicitly; as a matter of courtesy he would show them the proofs before publishing the images, sometimes going so far as to purposefully throw in an unflattering picture or two, then tearing up the offensive prints to dramatic effect.

Considered a Hollywood "outsider," the Austrian immigrant who landed in Brooklyn at the age of 10 was a natural behind the camera. When he was barely a teen, Fuchs saw an announcement in the Yiddish paper that Eleanor Roosevelt was coming to his borough; he showed up and took a snapshot, later selling it for \$5. By age 14 he had quit school to apprentice with Globe Photos, and by 16 he was on his own taking celebrity shots at the Zanzibar nightclub. He later spent two decades shooting everyone who was anyone in Hollywood before going on to produce more than 14 films, beginning with *Gambit* starring Shirley MacClain and Michael Caine.

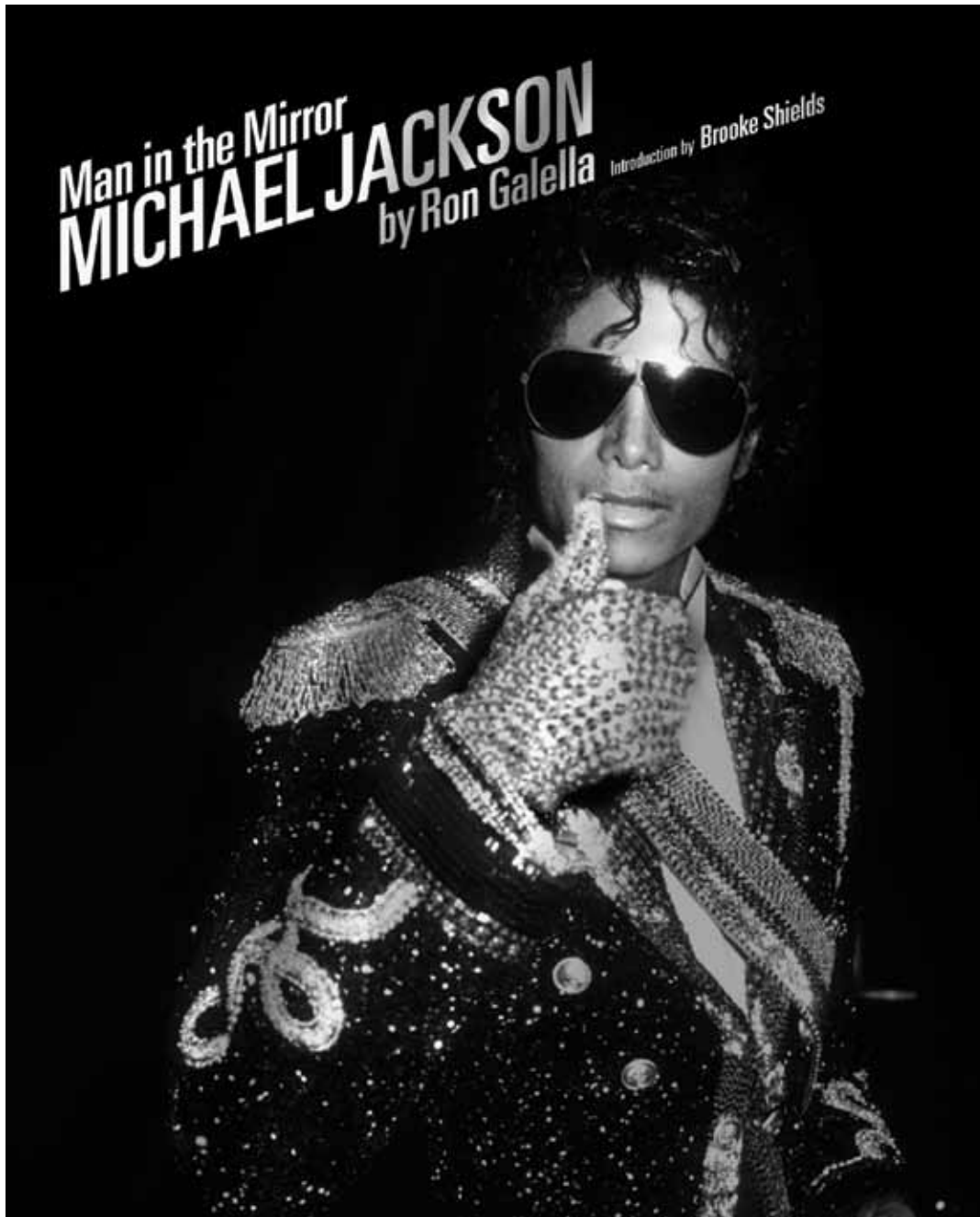
These never-before-seen black-and-white images will transport you back to Hollywood's Golden Age, making you feel like you were in the middle of it all as history, and immortal film, was being made.

—Jack Rubenstein



*Photos from Leo Fuchs: Special Photographer from the Golden Age of Hollywood, text and photographs by Leo Fuchs, powerHouse Books 2009, www.powerhousebooks.com. Reprinted with permission. All rights reserved.*





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**B**ack in March of this year, Sony's Columbia Epic Label Group announced what is likely the largest music deal in history, a 10-project contract with Michael Jackson's estate worth up to \$250 million dollars, with the first album—which will include previously unreleased material—set to release in November. Will.i.am. decried the deal as “disrespectful,” arguing that his friend had already contributed so much to the pop canon and to squeeze out more without the star's consent or artistic oversight would be a sacrilege.

But Jackson has always been at the mercy of his own fame, something that other child stars like Brooke Shields and Emmanuel Lewis inherently understood. Which is why they made a natural, if visually arresting, threesome. And why Jackson selected Shields and Lewis as his escort for one of the biggest nights of his life, the 1984 Grammys, when he won eight awards for *Thriller*. Notorious celebrity photographer Ron Galella was also there to commemorate the night. Dubbed Paparazzo Extraordinaire by *Newsweek* and the



Godfather of U.S. paparazzi culture by *Vanity Fair*, Galella captured Jackson throughout his career, with the likes not only of Shields and Lewis, but also Ted Kennedy, Diana Ross, Liza Minnelli, Sophia Lauren, Eddie Murphy, Stevie Wonder, The Jackson 5, Jackson's own oddly named children, and even his chimp.

Galella is (in)famous enough in his own right. He has been sued by Jacqueline Kennedy-Onassis (twice), had his jaw broken by Marlon Brando, and received a memorable beating by Richard Burton's bodyguards before being jailed in Mexico. *Smash My Camera*, a documentary of his life and career by Oscar-winning director Leon Gast (*When We Were Kings*, 1996), premiered at the 2010 Sundance Film Festival. As Galella's punch-inducing work proves, identity can be elusive and difficult to protect. But we demand the images still. For better or worse, we rely on the paparazzi to capture them by any means necessary, still feigning surprise at the often tragic ends.

—Chico Valdez

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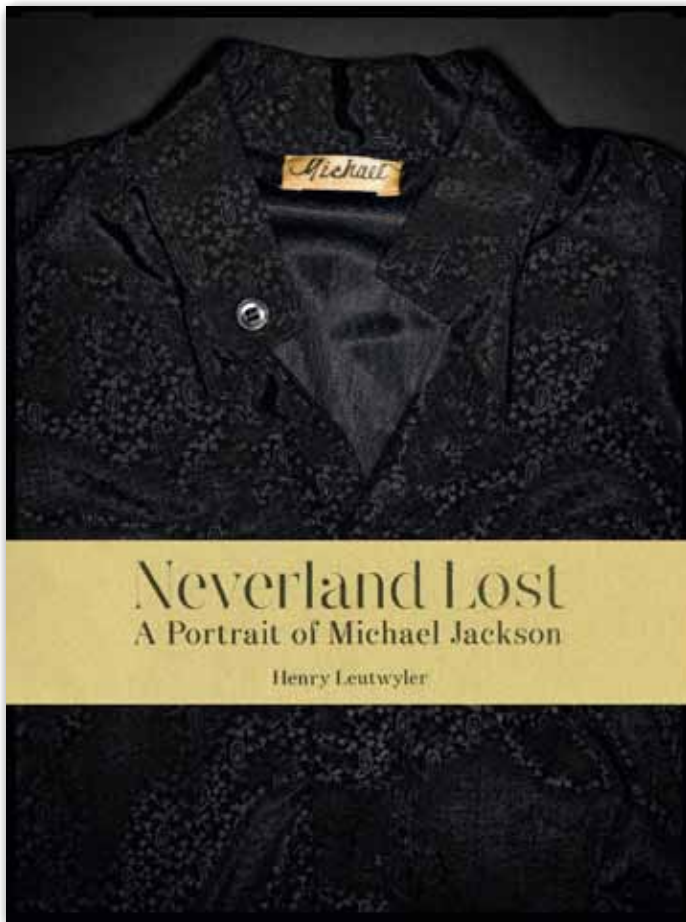
*Photos from Man in the Mirror by Ron Galella, powerHouse Books 2009, www.powerhousebooks.com. Reprinted with permission. All rights reserved.*





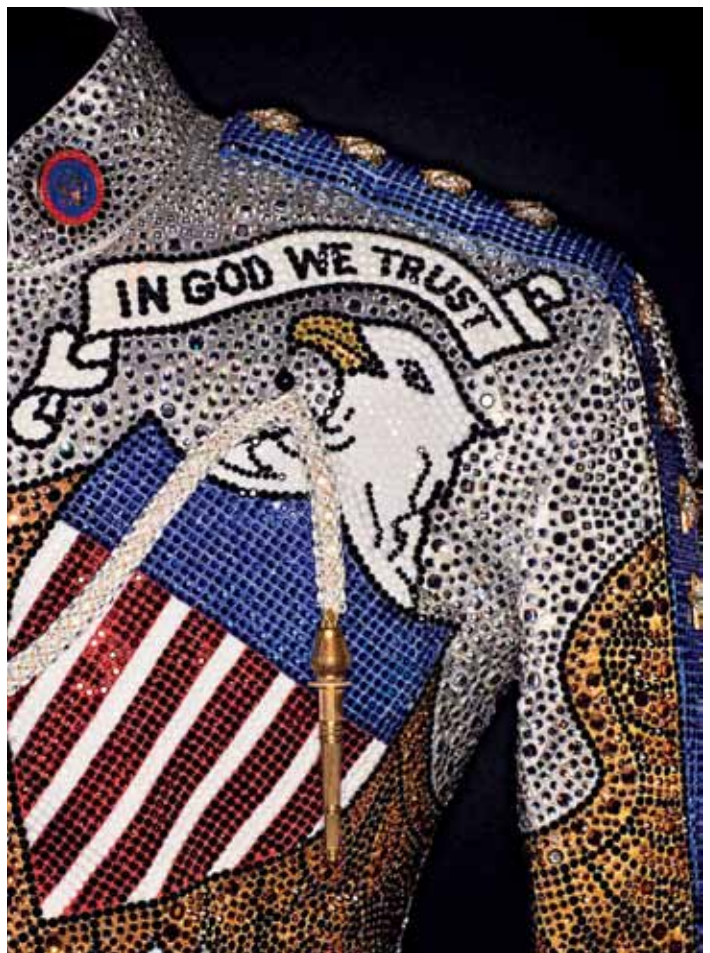






Steidl | [www.steidlville.com](http://www.steidlville.com)

In February of 2009, just four months before the King of Pop's death, photographer Henry Leutwyler flew to California on a magazine assignment to photograph Michael Jackson's iconic white glove. At the time, Jackson's home at Neverland had been vacant for several years, and his belongings were packed in storage crates awaiting public auction. Leutwyler finished his assignment in a couple of days but remained on location for another 24 hours, unable to walk away from the shrouded museum of oddities. He returned again in April, granted one last access, this time assembling a collection of photos worthy of the Tower of London's Jewel Room. Capturing pillowed crowns and scepters, feathered angel's wings, tube socks encrusted in rhinestones, sequined shirts stained with makeup and sweat, and childhood relics acquired in adulthood, Leutwyler's stunning photos are both intimate and eerie. "It is said that the Pharaohs built tombs to reveal their lives to future generations," Leutwyler writes in his book. "Michael Jackson sacrificed his childhood to the calling of his musical gift. Neverland was the pyramid he constructed to a lost childhood." —Chico Valdez

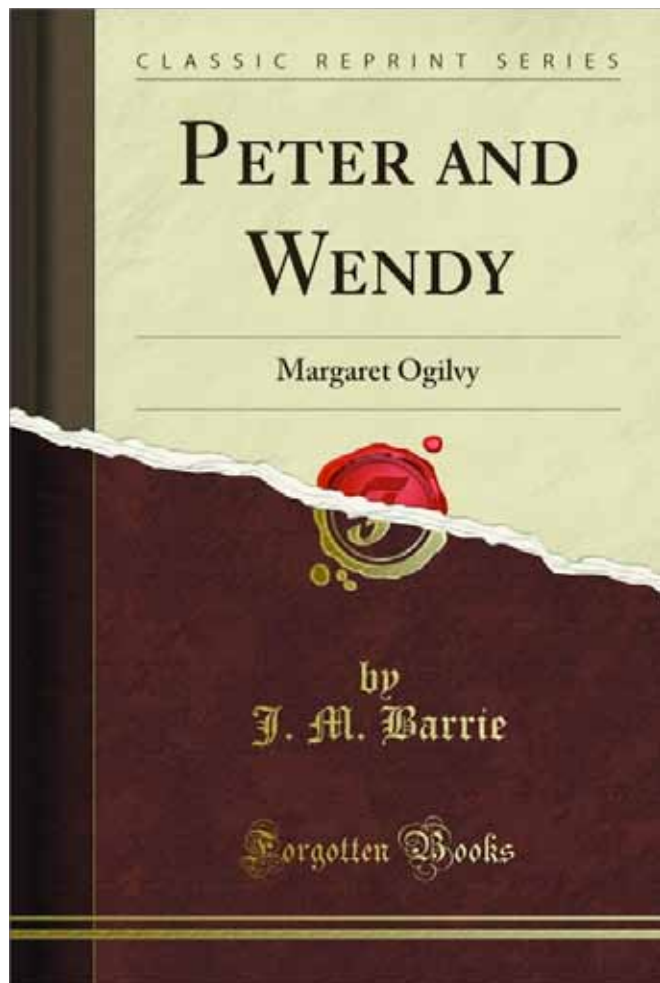


Photos from *Neverland Lost: A Portrait of Michael Jackson* by Henry Leutwyler, Steidl 2010, [www.steidlville.com](http://www.steidlville.com). Reprinted with permission. All rights reserved.

*Michael Jackson has been repeatedly likened to Peter Pan, the boy who never grew up. He named his home Neverland and built an amusement park in his backyard complete with pirate ship. His obsession with all things childish begged speculation about his sexual proclivities, just as Scottish author J. M. Barrie's inspired similar gossip. Both were accused or suspected of child abuse, as well as impotence and homosexuality. Where Jackson was waifish and*

*surgically altered, Barrie was child-size. While Jackson tried to create the fantasy childhood he never had, Barrie wanted to extend the childhood that his older brother, who died at 13 in an ice-skating accident, never experienced. In the end, both discovered what Wendy was quick to learn in her escapades with Peter, that when make-believe is made real, the fantasy can turn dark.*

—Chico Valdez



## EXCERPT

"Second to the right, and straight on till morning."

That, Peter had told Wendy, was the way to the Neverland; but even birds, carrying maps and consulting them at windy corners, could not have sighted it with these instructions. Peter, you see, just said anything that came into his head.

At first his companions trusted him implicitly, and so great were the delights of flying that they wasted time circling round church spires or any other tall objects on the way that took their fancy.

John and Michael raced, Michael getting a start.

They recalled with contempt that not so long ago they had thought themselves fine fellows for being able to fly round a room.

Not so long ago. But how long ago? They were flying over the sea before this thought began to disturb Wendy seriously. John thought it was their second sea and their third night.

Sometimes it was dark and sometimes light, and now they were very cold and again too warm. Did they really feel hungry at times, or were they merely pretending, because Peter had such a jolly new way of feeding them? His way was to pursue birds who had food in their mouths suitable for humans and snatch it from them; then the

birds would follow and snatch it back; and they would all go chasing each other gaily for miles, parting at last with mutual expressions of goodwill. But Wendy noticed with gentle concern that Peter did not seem to know that this was rather an odd way of getting your bread and butter, nor even that there are other ways.

Certainly they did not pretend to be sleepy, they were sleepy; and that was a danger, for the moment they popped off, down they fell. The awful thing was that Peter thought this funny.

"There he goes again!" He would cry gleefully, as Michael suddenly dropped like a stone.

"Save him, save him!" cried Wendy, looking with horror at the cruel sea far below. Eventually Peter would dive through the air, and catch Michael just before he could strike the sea, and it was lovely the way he did it; but he always waited till the last moment, and you felt it was his cleverness that interested him and not the saving of human life. Also he was fond of variety, and the sport that engrossed him one moment would suddenly cease to engage him, so there was always the possibility that the next time you fell he would let you go.

He could sleep in the air without falling, by merely lying on his back and floating, but this was, partly at least, because he was so light that if you got behind him and blew he went faster.

"Do be more polite to him," Wendy whispered to John, when they were playing "Follow my Leader."

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"Then tell him to stop showing off," said John.

When playing Follow my Leader, Peter would fly close to the water and touch each shark's tail in passing, just as in the street you may run your finger along an iron railing. They could not follow him in this with much success, so perhaps it was rather like showing off, especially as he kept looking behind to see how many tails they missed.

"You must be nice to him," Wendy impressed on her brothers. "What could we do if he were to leave us!"

"We could go back," Michael said.

"How could we ever find our way back without him?"

Well, then, we could go on," said John.

"That is the awful thing, John. We should have to go on, for we don't know how to stop."

This was true, Peter had forgotten to show them how to stop.

John had said that if the worst came to the worst, all they had to do was to go straight on, for the world was round, and so in time they must come back to their own window.

"And who is to get food for us, John?"

"I nipped a bit out of that eagle's mouth pretty neatly, Wendy."

"After the twentieth try," Wendy reminded him. "And even though we became good at picking up food, see how we bump against clouds and things if he is not near to give us a hand."

Indeed, they were constantly bumping. They could now fly strongly, though they still kicked far too much; but if they saw a cloud in front of them, the more they tried to avoid it, the more certainly did they bump into it. If Nana had been with them, she would have had a bandage round Michael's forehead by this time.

Peter was not with them for the moment, and they felt rather lonely up there by themselves. He could go so much faster than they that he would suddenly shoot out of sight, to have some adventure in which they had no share. He would come down laughing over something fearfully funny he had been saying to a star, but he had already forgotten what it was, or he would come up with mermaid scales still sticking to him, and yet not be able to say for certain what had been happening. It was really rather irritating to children who had never seen a mermaid.

"And if he forgets them so quickly," Wendy argued, "how can we expect that he will go on remembering us?"

Indeed, sometime when he returned he did not always remember them, at least not well. Wendy was sure of it. She saw recognition come into his eyes as he was about to pass them the time of day and go on; once even she had to call him by name.

"I'm Wendy," she said agitatedly.

He was very sorry. "I say, Wendy," he whispered to her, "always if you see me forgetting you, just keep on saying 'I'm Wendy,' and then I'll remember."

Of course this was rather unsatisfactory. However, to make amends he showed them how to lie out flat on a strong wind that was going their way, and this was such a pleasant change that they tried it several times and found they could sleep thus

with security. Indeed they would have slept longer, but Peter tired quickly of sleeping, and soon he would cry in his captain voice, "We get off here." So with occasional tiffs, but on the whole rollicking, they drew near the Neverland; for after many moons they did reach it, and, what is more, they had been going pretty straight all the time, not perhaps so much owing to the guidance of Peter or Tink as because the island was out looking for them. It is only thus that any one may sight those magic shores.

"There it is," said Peter calmly.

"Where, where?"

"Where all the arrows are pointing."

Indeed a million golden arrows were pointing it out to the children, all directed by their friend the sun, who wanted them to be sure of their way before leaving them for the night.

Wendy and John and Michael stood on tip-toe in the air to get their first sight of the island. Strange to say, they all recognised it at once, and until fear fell upon them they hailed it, not as something long dreamt of and seen at last, but as a familiar friend to whom they were returning home for the holidays.

"John, there's the lagoon!"

"Wendy, look at the turtles burying their eggs in the sand."

"I say, John, I see your flamingo with the broken leg!"

"Look, Michael, there's your cave!"

"It's a wolf with her whelps. Wendy, I do believe that's your little whelp!"

"There's my boat, John, with her sides stove in!"

"No, it isn't! Why, we burned your boat."

"That's her, at any rate. I say, John, I see the smoke of the redskin camp!"

"Where? Show me, and I'll tell you by the way the smoke curls whether they are on the war-path."

"There, just across the Mysterious River."

"I see now, Yes, they are on the war-path right enough."

Peter was a little annoyed with them for knowing so much, but if he wanted to lord it over them his triumph was at hand, for have I not told you that anon fear fell upon them?

It came as the arrows went, leaving the island in gloom.

In the old days at home the Neverland had always begun to look a little dark and threatening by bedtime. Then unexplored patches arose in it and spread, black shadows moved about in them, the roar of the beasts of prey was quite different now, and above all, you lost the certainty that you would win. You were quite glad that the night-lights were in. You even liked Nana to say that this was just the mantelpiece over here, and that the Neverland was all make-believe.

Of course the Neverland had been make-believe in those days, but it was real now, and there were no night-lights, and it was getting darker every moment, and where was Nana?

To download a free copy of the entire book, go to [www.forgottenbooks.org/info/9781440048241](http://www.forgottenbooks.org/info/9781440048241).

# On Boxing

**Let me be clear:** I have never punched anyone. In grade school, I was a kicker. Short and slow and perpetually shod in hard-soled shoes, I went for the shins. Later, as an adult, I learned to raise the volume of my voice and widen my stance to protect my personal space. My body was never a tool or a weapon, but a source of constant confusion that did not seem to reflect or respond to the inner me. Now, nearing 40, I am discovering for the first time a sort of peace with my physical self, finding that it is in fact capable of responding in ways I never dreamed as a kid, finally running farther and training harder than ever before. Which may be why I found the mid-life stories of Mischa Merz, an Australian journalist turned amateur boxing competitor, and Binnie Klein, a 50-something psychotherapist with a boxing obsession, so compelling. As Merz points out, the sport is a writer's dream. It is drama and romance, horror and brutality. It is underdogs and champions. It is loss and victory. It is evasion as skill, not fear. It is a fair fight. It is women succeeding in a venue they were never supposed to set foot in. It is cause and effect. It is redemption. It is bloody and irresistible. And, as the following authors prove, it makes for a great story.

—Kathy Wise

## Mischa Merz

A self-avowed boxing addict, Mischa Merz began her amateur boxing career Down Under in 1998. She retired four years later, but found herself once again lacing up her gloves in 2009 to fulfill a long-held dream of competing in the United States. Her latest book, *The Sweetest Thing* (which will be released by Seven Stories Press in March), documents the Australian journalist's journey across the U.S. as she competes in a series of amateur boxing tournaments and meets her idols, including Laila Ali and Lucia Rijker of *Million Dollar Baby* fame, along the way. Merz took off her gloves to talk with *Shelf Unbound* about her knockout punch, studying at the Harvard of boxing, and finding love in the ring.



### INTERVIEW

**Shelf Unbound:** *Why boxing? Why writing? Why writing about boxing?*

**Merz:** Writing is my job as a journalist, but I've always been a "writer" in the sense that I need to write to make sense of things. I started boxing first to get fit, and then when it became more serious, writing about it was the best way to process all the intense feelings I was having and the dramatic events taking place. Writing about boxing helped put it all in perspective. Plus, boxing is a writer's dream. The sports writer Hugh McIlvanny said once that boxing was more of a writers' sport than any other because "You have courage, romance, skullduggery,

excitement, and moments of unspeakable horror." And actually, that's just the tip of the iceberg.

**Shelf:** *What surprises you most about the sport? About yourself?*

**Merz:** I am always being surprised by boxing, the heights it can reach and the depths it can sink to. I am often moved by the extent to which as a fighter you have an instant family anywhere in the world where there is a boxing gym. There is a lot of warmth and kindness despite the brutality and the toughness

inside the ring, I have been helped by people for no other reason than I am a fellow boxer. And for myself, what has surprised me most is the extent to which I have managed to become reasonably competent at it having shown no early signs of potential.

**Shelf:** *What was your proudest win? Your hardest loss?*

**Merz:** Losing is always hard and I lost quite a few close fights early in my career when I was boxing in Australia. But I think it helped me in the long run because you tend to reflect a lot more when you lose than when you win, then you're too busy celebrating and feeling good about yourself to think about how you might have improved your performance. It also meant that my recent wins came with a little more circumspection than if I had not had the experience of losing those earlier fights. I was the most proud to beat a woman called Jackie Atkins because she was an amazing looking athlete, a lovely person and everyone, I think, assumed she would wipe the floor with me. It's always good to come from an underdog position.

**Shelf:** *You've written about how when you started boxing your pride was your knockout punch, but that when you started sparring you found one of the most magical aspects of the sport to be the skill of evasion. Do you think if more women realized that the sport wasn't just about brute strength they would be more or less apt to try it?*

**Merz:** I think the sport is actually ideal for women, because you don't necessarily need brute force so much as smarts and agility and speed. Naturally, you do need to be pretty resilient and tough and the idea of being hit is quite terrifying for women because they connect it so much with rage and lack of control. But in a boxing ring it's about keeping emotion out of the equation. And once that happens being hit becomes a lot less potent.

These days I don't have such a high regard for my KO power as when I started. I think when I began a lot of men told me I hit hard because they had never been hit by any other women. In actual fact I think there are plenty of women who

hit harder than me. I've managed to get a couple of stoppages among my wins but have never KO'd anyone outright, so that big punch hasn't lived up to its potential. Also you're right, I fell in love with the idea of being hard to hit and so I have concentrated a lot more of my energies on being defensive. Still, I'd like to knock at least one person out before I hang them up. Maybe from a body punch —that would be ideal, because it's quicker to recover and there would be no long term harm done.

**Shelf:** *When you started boxing, what scared you about your own strength?*

**Merz:** That I would hurt someone. Or that they would hate me because I hurt them.

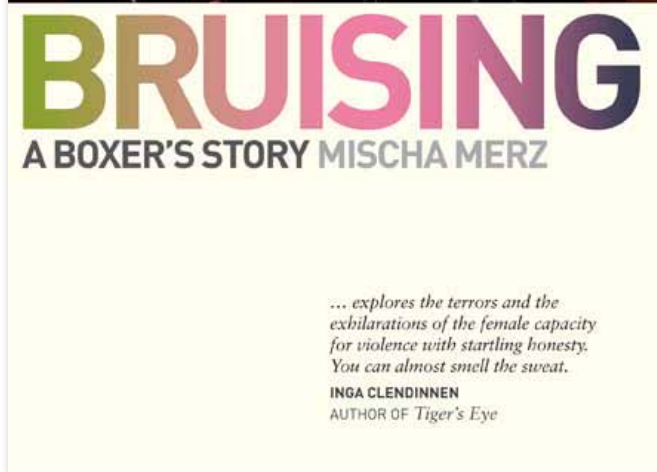
**Shelf:** *For women, fighting, like being a lesbian, is often fetishized or turned into a punchline. It entails scantily clothed females wrestling in a pool of Jell-O or pulling out their earrings before grabbing someone's hair at a bar. What do you see as the best route to the continued legitimization of the sport?*

**Merz:** I think there'll always be an interest in foxy boxing and strippers in Jell-O. But the better that women boxers become, the wider the gap is between the fetish market and the real thing. But you do get the occasional Facebook and YouTube stalker asking you breathlessly to fight them. It's a little bit icky but what can you do? They seem to have the fetish and the sport confused, but they

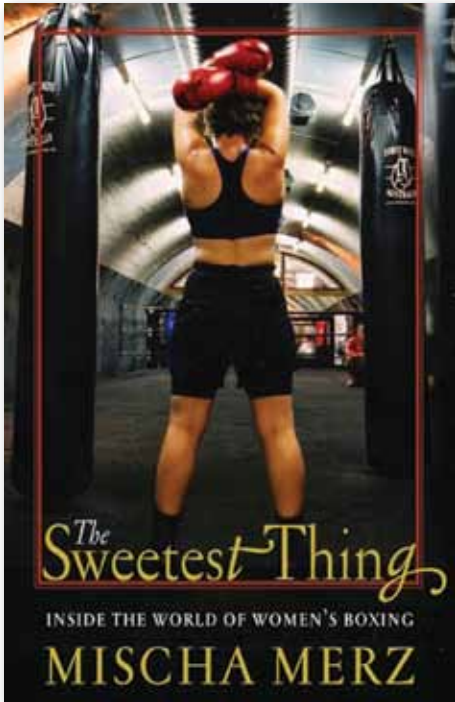
are often set right by the women themselves.

**Shelf:** *How was fighting at Gleason's in Brooklyn different than fighting in Australia?*

**Merz:** The best thing about Gleason's was all the female fighters there, from the elite professionals like Alicia Ashley, Belinda Laracuent, Melissa Hernandez, and Ann Marie Sacurrato, to the aspiring amateurs and the many Golden Gloves champions. And they all seemed to work together well and they had the respect of each other and of the men in the gym too. Other than that, the big difference



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### A One-Two Punch

*On Boxing* by Joyce Carol Oates, Harper Perennial 2006, www.harpercollins.com. Better known for her fiction, Oates has been a fight fan since her youth, learning her love of the sport, as many women have, from her father. Her essays on boxing have become classics of the genre.



*The Sweet Science* by A.J. Liebling, North Point Press 2004, www.us.macmillan.com. Merz's book *The Sweetest Thing* is an homage to Liebling's work (named the greatest sports book of all time by *Sports Illustrated*), which she says "evokes a lot not just about boxing but about New York during the 1930s and '40s."



was the sheer scale and overall standard which was so much higher than it is in Australia. It was inspiring. I call it the Harvard of boxing.

**Shelf:** *You first published **Bruising in 2000 and will soon be releasing **The Sweetest Thing**. What changes have you seen in the sport and in your personal goals in the intervening decade?***

**Merz:** The past decade has really seen the biggest growth in female boxing in the history of the sport. I think it reached a tipping point about four or five years ago and it has answered a lot of questions about what women are capable of and how good they can be as fighters and the connection between that and ideas of femininity. Whereas once it was an area of speculation and theory, now the answers are there for all to see.

Personally, I knew I would always be involved in the sport in some way. But the greatest gift of all has been the ability to fight again when I thought I was over the hill, and to find that to my delight and surprise, I wasn't too bad.

**Shelf:** *Who has been your biggest influence?*

**Merz:** I am essentially a kind of Frankenstein's monster of boxing, taking a little bit from here, there, and everywhere. But maybe the biggest inspiration for me has been the first really impressive female fighter of the contemporary era, a woman called Lucia Rijker. I watched her from the time I first laced on the gloves and thought she was everything I wanted to be but probably had no chance of being. She was like the female version of Muhammad Ali or Sugar Ray Robinson. She embodied what I believed was the perfect balance of strength and grace. She was a brutal fighter and so focused and precise in her movements. I was lucky enough to finally meet her and spend a few days training with her, and I suppose it was the culmination of a decade long journey for me because I never imagined such an encounter. She was great. We got along very well, she was funny and insightful and intelligent and best of all we got a chance to hit each other, although we didn't spar, we just did some drills. But I was so happy that she shared her knowledge with me and turned out to also be such great company and the kind of person I would gravitate to regardless of her fighting abilities. It was a double bonus.

**Shelf:** *You married the man who taught you how to box. What makes the sport an intimate one, in spite of its inherent violence?*

**Merz:** When you learn to box there is a lot of attention focused on you by the teacher and it's very much about the body. Sometimes when you spar also you get very close to the other person, not for very long, but you can be almost in an embrace at times and you are both breathing heavily and sweating. Is that analogous of something else? I couldn't say. Maybe sometimes it is but other times not. It can be the start of another kind of intimacy or it can end right there in the ring, which mostly is the case. But there are so many women who are married or partnered to their coaches that there must be something in it.

And on an emotional level, anyone who works closely with you is going to learn a lot about your fears and aspirations and will see you in a very vulnerable state. You see a lot of raw emotion in the fight game. I used to know a guy who would weep if he lost but he'd weep also if he won, he was a real crying machine. It's a sport that can be hard on you physically and emotionally. And sometimes it just comes down to practical issues, like when you are gloved up ready to fight and you feel you need to take just one more trip to the bathroom. Sometimes that's not possible with gloves on so you need someone to help you do the business. I've been on both sides of that equation too. It's certainly a bonding experience.



# Blows to the Head

## How Boxing Changed My Mind

by Binnie Klein

A 50-something psychotherapist in New Haven, Connecticut, Binnie Klein found herself middle-aged and at a loss, not yet used to the fact that she was no longer a “promiscuous young rock’n roller.” So when she received an American Association of Retired Persons newsletter featuring a cover story on local women who were working out with a real boxer named John, the unwelcome publication served as unlikely inspiration. Initially drawn to the challenge and the promise of improved fitness, Klein quickly discovered that the sport was not only a way for her to get in touch with her body but a surprising means to her Jewish roots.

### EXCERPT

#### A Dirty Sport

“Come on baby, that punch wasn’t sexy—put your hips into it.”

I am learning how to perfect my jab in an inner-city gym where you can work out for \$9.95 a month and then pop next door to the unemployment office to pick up your check. One of a chain of low-cost fitness centers, it is homogenized, no-frills, and this branch is especially low on the chain. The first time I bounded into the gym, hoping to convince John to “take me on,” a scrawled sign on an easel warned me that there were to be positively, absolutely no “doo-rags.”

Doo-rags?

I was relatively sure I wasn’t wearing one.

John “The Punisher” Spehar, my coach, is a 200-pound unusual brute, physically a cross between Bruce Willis and Tony Soprano. His hobby is studying the French Revolution. My

Venus of Willendorff belly is flopping as I lurch forward and try to make contact with his leather punch mitts, brown cushions around ten inches wide; up by his shoulder height, they make him look like an angry bear coming out of hibernation.

My hobby is boxing.

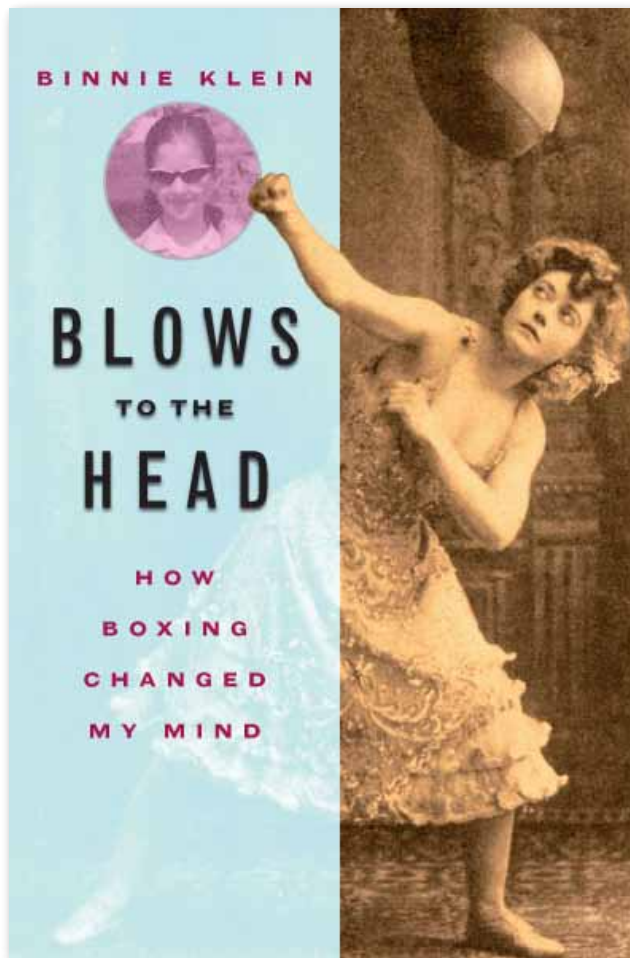
I’m mesmerized by my coach, perhaps because he is a happier and more vigorous version of my father. On the road as a traveling salesman, with his Oldsmobile trunk stuffed with sample cases, Julius Alexander Klein (a.k.a. Jay) was funny, warm, clever—beloved by the brokers he visited all over his territory—but at home he left the personable “Salesman of the Year” at the door and in came “Sullen Man,” full of fury at being exploited

by his cousins who ran Phoenix Candy company, and exuding the malignant depression that fell over my mother, my sisters, and me like a moldy blanket.

Given their strong resemblance to thugs from B movies of the 1940s, I can see John and my father hanging out together. As a teenager, my father drove the family bakery truck in the immigrant neighborhoods of Brooklyn and knew many shady characters. I can imagine him regaling John with his bombastic tale of the day he got a gun from “Ike the Toad” (ah, such names!), and I can hear the theme from *The Sopranos*—*woke up this morning/ got yourself a gu-un*. My father was infatuated with “Alice the Moll” who belonged to Louis “Lepke” Buchalter’s gang, Murder, Inc. (The nickname Lepke means “Little Louis” in Yiddish and Murder, Inc. was known as the Jewish Mafia.) Lepke started out pushcart shoplifting, a particularly heartless crime, since pushcart peddlers often had just one pan to

sell, one egg, one chicken. He had a henchman, Abe Reles, who did most of the dirty work. Peter Falk played Reles in the movie, *Murder, Inc.* Buchalter was the only major mob boss to have been executed by government authorities for his many murders. In the first season of *The Sopranos* HBO series, Dr. Melfi listens as another psychiatrist talks about his own family’s ties through Buchalter to Murder, Inc. The writers had done their homework.

Alice’s job for Murder, Inc. was to lure unsuspecting men into parked cars on Pitkin Avenue, where gangsters crouched silently in backseats waiting to beat and rob them. She got unlucky,



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though, when one of her targets turned out to be a plainclothes cop. When she got out of “stir” she and my father began a tempestuous affair. This was 1932—they were both twenty-one years old, and by then Buchalter controlled a huge assortment of industries and unions in New York, including bakery drivers. My father’s family was surely the victim of Buchalter’s extortions.

The mob wanted Alice back—she’d been a good earner—and word spreads that they’re coming for her. My father has decided to boldly protect Alice, so when the gangsters’ ominous black limo arrives, he courageously protests: “She stays where she is!” But it turns out the “Toad” was running late, and when he finally did show up, he shoved a lumpy handkerchief at my father, who looks inside for his means of protection. It’s a gun, but it’s all in pieces. As the story goes, the gangsters all found this dilemma hysterically funny. I guess even they could appreciate the irony of my father’s predicament, and somehow, miraculously, decided not to hurt him, and even Alice got away unscathed. My sister Susan remembers Julius reassuring us that he would never have used the gun; it was just for show.

It return, John could tell my dad about how boxing saved his life, the day a Hartford, Connecticut, police lieutenant said, “Well, kid, you’re pretty good with your hands, but if I have to see you again you’re going to jail.” John was getting into trouble constantly. He was perpetually angry, beating people up, and stealing. So the cop offered a few unappealing options: John could be tried in juvenile court or he could be sent off to the army. John was glum at these prospects. And then the cop had a brainstorm.

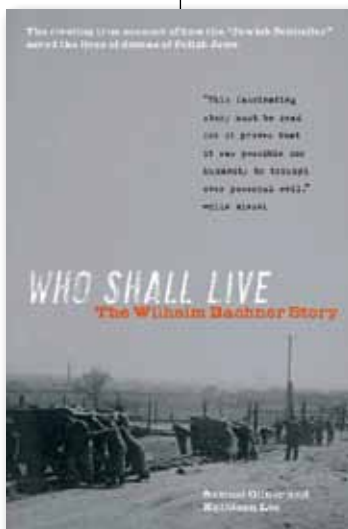
“You can box, you’re angry enough; it should work.” When John finally started training at Johnny Duke’s gym, he was the only white kid, and a mere thirteen years old. Duke, chain-smoking and bedecked in cowboy boots, had a classical approach—when a white kid came to the gym, making his way as John did by enduring two long bus rides, he’d ask how much you weighed, how many fights you had behind you—and he’d immediately set up a sparring fight with a black guy. You’d be told to go work with Hector, whose dad was in prison for killing a white guy. If you came back the next day, that was impressive, although Hector still beat you up. Hector was *there* to beat you up. It was a carefully constructed trial by fire, and John endured it until *he* became the guy to beat.

“Jab, one-two. Jab, jab, blow to the body, blow to the head. There ya go,” John is saying to me.

“The Punisher” is teaching me to crouch like a Ninja, slip and weave, keep my hands up, and send force up from my heavy legs into my middle and out through my arms, using my body in ways I never thought possible.

## Fighting Back

Binnie Klein grew up hearing the oft-repeated question about Jews in the Holocaust, “Why didn’t they rise up and fight back?” Researchers Samuel Oliner and Kathleen Lee were investigating a similar question in 1983 as part of the Altruistic Personality Project—what led certain gentiles to save Jews—when they interviewed Wilhelm and Cecile Bachner of Moraga, California. The questionnaire was quickly set aside when the researchers realized that the Bachners had not in fact been saved by gentiles, but had saved themselves and many fellow Jews with a subversive fight of their own. In *Who Shall Live*, the authors piece together the narrative of Wilhelm, a Polish Jew who posed as an Aryan, hired dozens of Jews as construction workers, and



supplied them with false identity papers, thus saving them from certain death. As Elie Wiesel says, “This fascinating story must be read for it proves that it was possible for humanity to triumph over powerful evil.” *Who Shall Live: The Wilhelm Bachner Story* by Samuel Oliner and Kathleen Lee, Academy Chicago Publishers 2010, [www.academychicago.com](http://www.academychicago.com).

It’s a surprise to feel so exhilarated by my own body and its abilities. *My body*. What a drag it’s been—what a disappointment! Sometimes it just seemed like a necessary oversized backpack for my brain. My body has been, um...*sensitive*. Asthma and allergies as a teenager, lifelong irritable bowel syndrome that started at twenty-one after a particularly pernicious GI infection involving salmonella while living in New York City (not even after exotic travel), migraines and chronic headaches *forever*. Not to mention the dark cloak that swathed my whole family with a swirl of odd feelings, anxieties, phobias, and panic attacks. At times we’ve been like throwbacks to Freud’s hysterical patients who couldn’t lift an arm after seeing a snake or became obsessively aware of their tongues in their mouths.

So it’s utterly new to feel my power, hear the propulsive sound of my own grunts, and experience such a delight in making this kind of physical contact. My body is bringing me *joy*. I’m also blinking desperately because my eyeballs are sweating. That’s how *serious* an initiation I’m enduring—my *eyeballs* are affected.

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## Glorious

by Bernice L. McFadden

**B**ernice L. McFadden's latest novel opens with the "fight of the century" between Jack Johnson, the Galveston Giant, and James Jeffries, the boxing legend who came out of retirement in a final failed attempt to resurface as the "great white hope" and defeat the untouchable Johnson. On that fateful Independence Day in 1910, Johnson emerged triumphant and race "riots" (more often than not open celebrations in the streets) erupted across the country from Texas to New York, resulting in the deaths and attempted lynchings of close to two-dozen African Americans.

This historical victory sets the ironic stage for Easter Bartlett, who must flee her native Georgia in the wake of family tragedy. But she herself is no victim. Her travels take her from the Jim Crow South to the Harlem Renaissance, and along the way she discovers what happens to a dream deferred.

### EXCERPT

If Jack Johnson had let James Jeffries beat him on July 4, 1910, which would have proven once and for all that a white man was ten times better than a Negro, then black folk wouldn't have been walking around with their backs straight and chests puffed out, smiling like Cheshire cats, upsetting good, God-fearing white folk who didn't mind seeing their Negroes happy, but didn't like seeing them proud.

If Jack Johnson had given up and allowed James Jeffries to clip him on the chin, which would have sent him hurling down to the floor where he could have pretended to

be knocked out cold, then maybe Easter Bartlett's father wouldn't have twirled his wife and daughters around the house by their pinky fingers and his son John Bartlett Jr. wouldn't have felt for the first time in his life pleased and glad to be a black man. And if Jack Johnson had let the shouts of "Kill that nigger" that rang out from the crowd unravel him or the Nevada heat irritate him, maybe then he would have lost the fight and things would have remained as they were.

Things could have gone a different way if Jack Johnson hadn't gotten the notion some years earlier to cap his teeth in gold, so his smile added insult to injury when he was announced the victor of the "The Fight of the Century," and that glittering grin slapped white folk hard across their faces.

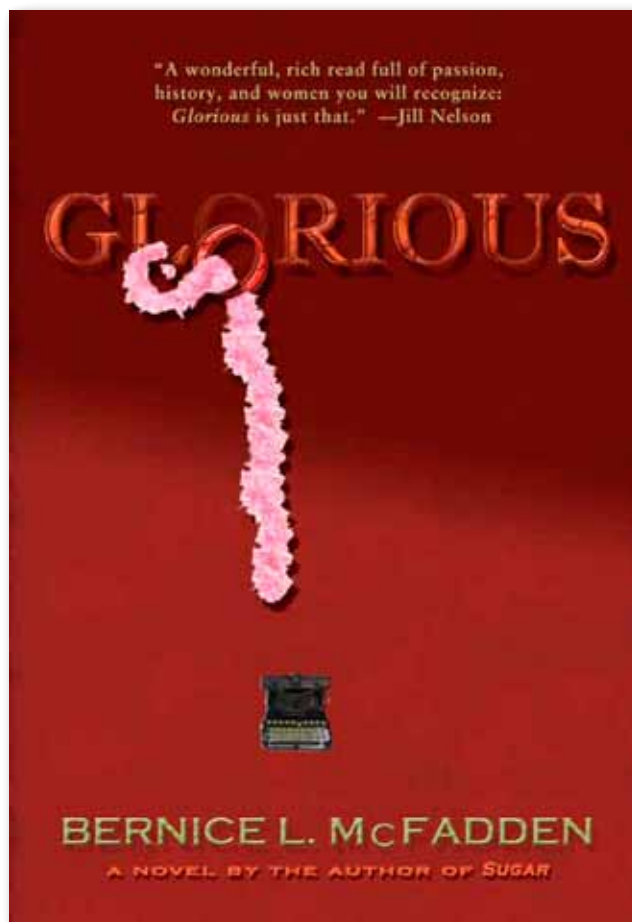
And if John Bartlett Sr. hadn't bet on Jack Johnson to win, then he wouldn't have had the extra money to buy his wife and two daughters new dresses from the most expensive dress shop in town, and the older of the two girls called Rlizbeth wouldn't have let her hair down and donned that brand-new yellow dress that made her look like an angel, so those white boys wouldn't have noticed her, wouldn't have called out to her from across the road, wouldn't have followed her and jumped her just as she reached the bend and dragged her into the brush, where they raped and beat her.

If all of that hadn't happened, then Easter wouldn't have looked up to see her sister crawling home on all fours

like a dog, with a bloodstain shaped like the state of Texas on the backside of Rlizbeth's dress. Easter wouldn't have bore witness to the bite marks on Rlizbeth's breasts, and wouldn't have heard the silence that streamed out of Rlizbeth's mouth when she opened it to scream.

*No sound at all.*

Because after the first boy rammed his dick inside of Rlizbeth, her voice floated up into the sky never to be heard from again. And Easter wouldn't have had to accompany John Sr. down to the sheriff's office because her mother wouldn't let him go alone and wouldn't—couldn't—send



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*continued on page 37*

## Boxing on the Waterfront

“I could’ve had class. I could’ve been a contender. I could’ve been somebody. Instead of a bum, which is what I am.”

—Terry Maloy

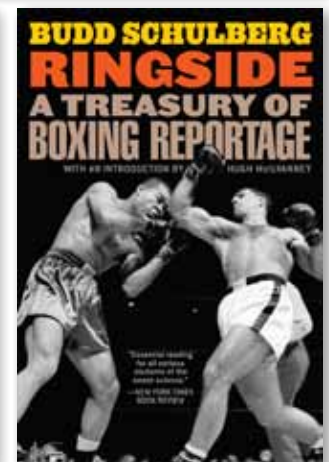
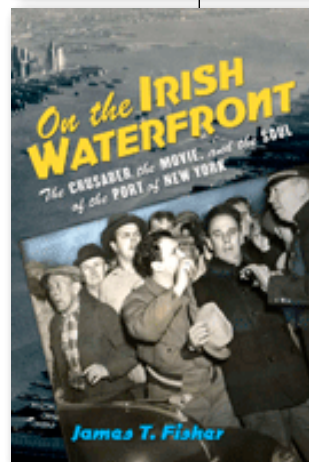
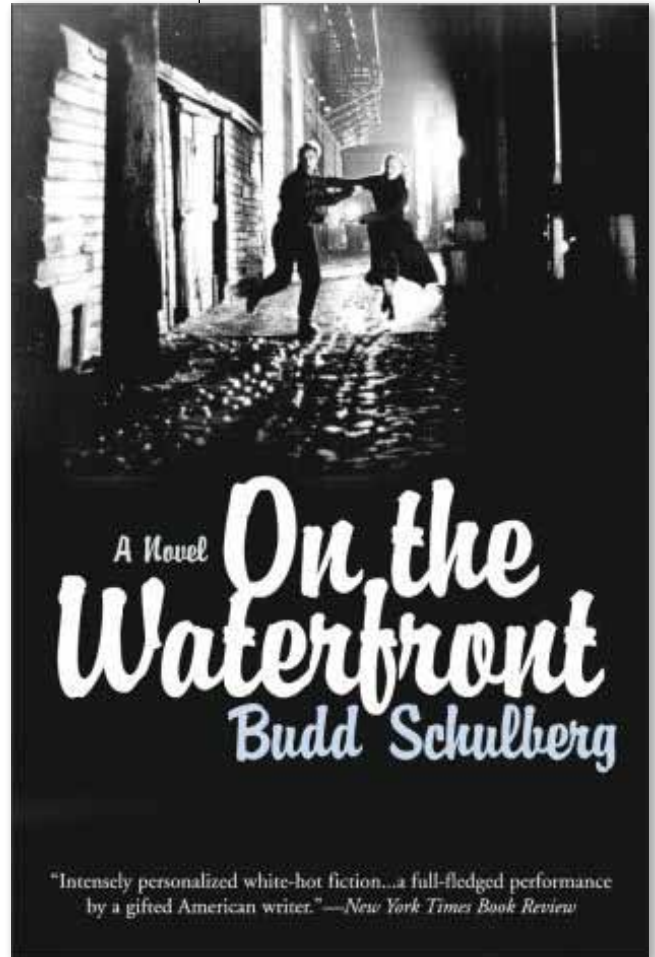
Budd Schulberg spent years of his life absorbing everything he could about the New York waterfront, from drinking boilermakers in the Westside Manhattan and Jersey bars that were home to waterfront racketeers and Irish and Italian “insouigents” to sharing meals in the cluttered kitchens of longshore families in their railroad flats. He became obsessed with Father John Corridan, “a rangy, ruddy, fast-talking, chain-smoking, tough-minded, sometimes profane Kerryman” who served as the inspiration for the character of Father Pete Barry. Schulberg took it all in then wrote the Academy Award-winning screenplay for *On the Waterfront*, but even after Marlon Brando delivered his famous line, with all of the anger and regret generated by a fight thrown and a boxing career lost, Schulberg still had so much more to say.

With his Oscar perched on his mantel, having attended all of the hearings on the State Crime Commission on waterfront crime, and surrounded by bulging scrapbooks full of newspaper clippings and notebooks filled with Irish slang, he decided to write the novel. The movie’s advantage? Focusing on a character. But as Schulberg found, the novel can be “both an X-ray and a wide-angle lens,” the better medium for exploring larger social themes. “In the great novels *Moby Dick*, *War and Peace*, *The Red and The Black* we see how the action and the ideas are able to flow together with no violence from one to the other,” Schulberg writes. “There you have the glory of the novel, the reason why, in this age of supercommunication, we should never forsake it.”

*On the Waterfront* by Budd Schulberg, Ivan R. Dee 2010, [www.ivanrdee.com](http://www.ivanrdee.com). This reissue of the 1955 novel includes Schulberg’s 1987 introduction, which provides fascinating insights into the transformation from screenplay to novel.

*On the Irish Waterfront: The Crusader, the Movie, and the Soul of the Port of New York* by James T. Fisher, Cornell University Press 2009, [www.cornellpress.cornell.edu](http://www.cornellpress.cornell.edu). Fisher, a professor of theology and American studies at Fordham University, goes beyond the waterfront of Elia Kazan’s film to research the real characters who fought for control over the nation’s busiest port and the souls that lived there.

*Ringside: A Treasury of Boxing Reportage* by Budd Schulberg, Ivan R. Dee 2007, [www.ivanrdee.com](http://www.ivanrdee.com). Schulberg, who died in 2009 at the age of 95, takes boxing fans back to an epic bare-knuckle fight in England 200 years ago through to the careers of Tyson, Holyfield, De La Hoya, and more in this comprehensive collection of the writer’s best boxing stories.



John Jr. because that boy hadn't unclenched his fists or his jaw since it happened, and besides blood was swimming in his irises and he claimed to hear it thumping in his ears, so Easter went and then watched her father change from a man to boy right before her very eyes.

And if Sheriff Wiley had not forced Easter and her father to stare at the filthy soles of his boots, because it had not suited him to remove his feet from atop the wooden desk, and if Wiley had looked them straight in the eye like he would have his own kind instead of watching them from beneath the shade of the wide-brim hat he wore, and maybe if he'd believed John Sr. when he said, "I knows it was white boys cause we found tufts of blond and red hair clutched in Rlizabeth's hands," and Wiley had just gone out and found those boys and arrested them instead of suggesting that Rlizabeth had torn her *own* dress, bit her *own* breasts, and broke her *own* hymen all in order to cover up the somewhere or someone she had no place being or seeing—then maybe life for Easter would have been different.

But Wiley didn't do the right thing, and Easter looked up at her father who sat next to her with his head bowed and she heard his timid voice say, "Yes suh, I suppose you could be right, but how do you explain the hair? The red and blond hair?"

Wiley said he couldn't explain it and then dismissed them by tugging the brim of his hat down over his face and bid them a good day. If he hadn't done that and Easter hadn't seen the tears welling up in her father's eyes, she wouldn't have turned into the snarling howling thing and her father wouldn't have caught her by the waist just as she leapt across the desk intent on tearing out Wiley's throat.

If Jack Johnson hadn't been quite so dark and hadn't pumped his fists in the air like the champion he was then maybe . . .

If Rlizabeth had just put on one of the old, worn dresses she owned and kept her hair pulled back in a tight bun, Easter probably never would have written the word *HATE* on a piece of paper, crumpled it into a ball, dropped it in a hole in the ground, and covered it with dirt, and her mother wouldn't have tried to go back to living as if that awful day hadn't happened and those boys weren't walking around as free as birds, and she never would have had the strain of pretending that everything was normal even though Rlizabeth had lost her voice and John Jr. had taken to staring down every white man in the town and John Sr. was intent on trying to make himself grow big again and thought that taking refuge in the arms of another woman would help him do that.

And if Zelda hadn't found the love letters pressed into the pages of her husband's Bible, letters written on fine onionskin paper that smelled of rose water, then John Jr. wouldn't have caught her crying, wouldn't have seen the

letters scattered on the floor, and wouldn't have hit his father so hard that it knocked the wind out of both men. If all of that hadn't happened, then John Jr. wouldn't have had to leave the house, the town, and the state, and Easter might have gone on loving and respecting her father. But it did and Zelda's heart snapped under the strain, pain, and betrayal, and she died.

If there had not been a funeral, there would not have been a repast, so there would have been no need for Easter's father to wait patiently for the last mourner to leave the house before he changed his clothes, mounted his horse, and galloped off into the night leaving the scent of his pipe tobacco hanging in the air. And if he hadn't left, then he couldn't have returned with the wide-eyed, milky-brown woman who smelled of rose water and wasn't much older than Rlizabeth. He couldn't have brought her into their home, told Easter and Rlizabeth her name—which was Truda—and then informed them that she was his new wife and their new mother.

If Jack Johnson had just thrown the fight and Rlizabeth had maybe walked down a different road and not have been so pretty, everything would have remained the same in their small home and Easter would not have known the aching sadness of a dead mother, gone brother, and mute and ruined sister. And if there were no ache and no sadness then Easter would not have taken the gown that her mother died in, laid it across the dining room table, and arranged the china, crystal, and the silverware with the scrolled handles on top of it as if it was a special holiday and the family was expecting dinner guests. And she would not have placed bunches of flowers at the neckline, hemline, and sleeves—but she did, and when Truda walked into the dining room the next morning she forgot to breathe.

And if Truda hadn't forgotten to breathe, then maybe she wouldn't have screamed, which of course brought John Sr. into the room to see what was the matter. After that he kicked in the door to Easter's bedroom and found her sitting at the edge of the bed staring at her palms. He charged in and loomed over her like a great black hawk and hollered that he should have drowned her at birth. And if he hadn't said those hurtful words, Easter would have stayed in Waycross, Georgia, married, had children, grown old, and died.

But on that summer day in 1910, Jack Johnson did beat James Jeffries and Rlizabeth did put on that yellow dress that made her look like an angel and nothing and nobody was ever the same again.

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## Working Backwards from the Worst Moment of My Life

by Rob Roberge

**R**ob Roberge knows what it's like to be sucker punched in the ring. And by ring I mean publishing world. His short story collection, which had been a finalist for both the Drew Heinz and Flannery O'Connor awards, was first accepted by an indie publisher for release in 2006. Said publisher then went bankrupt. Roberge picked himself up off the mat and tried for another round, this time with a promising new press that decided to make Roberge's collection its first single-author book. They too went belly up. But third time's a charm, and thankfully the ought-for-two author gave it one more shot, this time with the nonprofit Red Hen Press, which publishes his book this month. It's a good thing Roberge kept coming up swinging, because his story "A Headache from Barstow to Salt Lake" is a perfect example of the power of a punch.

### EXCERPT

#### A Headache from Barstow to Salt Lake

Clarence "Box" Templeton was a two weight class Marine boxing champion during an amateur career that spanned from the start of the Korean War to one year after when, in 1954, he turned pro and had a more- or less-good five year run that included a night at the old Felt Forum where, in a loss on points, he rattled Archie Moore with body shots so hard and strong that "The Mongoose" ("You feel it when a rib goes," Box once told Coleman. "It's

hard and then it's soft.") told reporters he couldn't sleep right for a month.

"Watch out for that boy," Moore said back in 1955. "Learn to spell his name. He's here to stay."

But Box Templeton was not there to stay. A year after the Moore fight, he'd become nothing more than a side of beef club boxer, propped up and pieced together enough by Wednesdays to be beaten on Fridays for fifty dollars a fight.

He married Coleman's Aunt El in 1958, and ended up at the Long Beach shipyards. There may have been a decent piece of him left—Coleman has always thought

there must have been for El to take him in—but by the time Coleman arrived in 1970 after his parents died in a car wreck, all that was left of Box was hatred and scar tissue. A head more full of lumps, stitches and revenge than ideas, El once said. So when El fell in love with Mavis Clemont—who taught fifth grade math at Coleman's school—he knew where his loyalties fell and he never said a word to Box. When El and Box moved to the desert, Mavis sent Coleman her letters, and he'd hand deliver them to El, so Box wouldn't open her mail and find out. When El died, Mavis sent letters to Coleman. "Men ruined our lives," she wrote in the last one. "And we let them."

**B**illy Pritchard, who Uncle Box says is dumb enough to think that the driver's test is hard and mean enough to drink shooters of rattlesnake poison and grow an inch each time, is at the front door to

Box's bar when Coleman pulls up. Get the money and get out is what Coleman's thinking. The ground crunches, hard and dusty, under Coleman's feet and he wonders, as he does every time he comes to visit, how anything or anyone can live on, in or on top of all this. The earth, sucked dry, split, puckered and cracked—like El's bloody knuckles, flaky as pastries, the year before she died—spits up plants short as tongue depressors with root structures so stubborn thick and expansive that even a creature like Billy



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Pritchard couldn't yank them up.

"You're here," Billy says.

Coleman looks up and squints; heat waves quiver and spasm off the metal roof. He sees the sign with the typo above the door—the sign they never changed that reads *Trucker Welcome*, left from the Chinese couple El bought the place from when she and Box packed it up, called it quits and left the rat race when Box's lungs started to bleed and the shipyard gave him the early retirement, wished him well on his way to healing or death—whichever he might find—out in the desert.

He walks towards and into the bar, brushing by Billy. "I am here," he says. "Where's Box?"

Billy grabs Coleman, turns him around. "What do you do?" he says. "For him. What do you do?"

Coleman lights a cigarette, wishes he was inside with a beer. *Coldest taps in the desert*, that's what El told him when she bought the place. Coleman looks at Billy Pritchard, then at Billy's hand still on Coleman's arm—the hand with the gouge from the meat-packing plant—the hand that's not really a hand anymore.

"Box?" Coleman says.

Billy releases his grip, shakes his head. He points inside. "His business why he thinks you're worth two shits."

"He doesn't," Coleman says.

"So you know?" Billy says.

"Know what?"

Billy looks surprised—like he's a kid caught shoplifting. He looks out at the desert. "You better talk to Box."

Uncle Box has big, dry, cool hands that swallow yours whole the way snakes and their hinged jaws take in rodents. Box gives you a handshake, it's like you're in some prehistoric petting zoo and touching something that was dead before your kind were born. The palms still glow silver from the years at the shipyards—the same metal fragments that make the hand glisten are the chips and fragments that sent his lungs over the edge and made them drown in their own blood. Once a week, someone—first El, and now Billy—takes Box to the hospital to get his system flushed and his lungs and liver checked out. He looks up from his wheelchair at Coleman.

"Why did you come," Box says and snorts.

"You asked," Coleman says. He turns to the entrance to the bar and sees Billy Pritchard looking as if he's waiting for someone.

Box talks like he's got permanent phlegm in his throat. Most times, he snorts and swallows. When he's drunk, he gets lazy and spits blood clots into a beer glass. By the end of the night, the clots, oily, purple and dense, settle at the bottom and the spit floats on top so the beer glass looks like a Lava Lamp when it's shut off. Little air bubbles cling to

the clots. You watch it long enough, and one'll release and climb its way through the spit to the surface.

"You came for her money," Box says.

"She left it to me," Coleman says.

"True," Box says. "She did."

A car pulls up and Billy Pritchard and a thin man Coleman has never seen come into the bar.

"You know Billy," Box says and nods. "This is Tommy Nova. He's been helping out."

The thin man shakes Coleman's hand. "My real name's Tommy Davis, but everybody calls me Nova because I drive a Nova." He motions toward the parking lot. He looks at Box. "We'll shoot some stick. You'll tell us?"

Box looks hard at him. "I will."

They walk to the pool table at the back of the bar. "Tommy Nova's gonna kick your ass." Tommy says to Billy.

"Come back to the office," Box says.

He spins his chair and wheels ahead of Coleman into the office.

Here's the deal," Box says. He drops an envelope on the table that separates them. "Ten grand in there and it's yours. But I know what you did to get it."

"I didn't do anything," Coleman says.

"You lied." He snorts and swallows. "She lied to me. And you lied for her, Coleman. And now I know. And someone's got to pay for those lies."

"Wait," Coleman says.

"Shut up!" Box says. "In a perfect world, I should kick your ass bloody for this. But I'm not the man I was, so Billy and Tommy Nova will do it for me. One beating for your lies, and one for hers."

"You know," Coleman says. "How?"

"How is not important and it's none of your goddamn business," Box says. He takes a couple of deep breaths and snorts. "What you need to know is that justice must be divvied out." He holds his hands apart. "And with El gone, you're what's left."

Coleman shakes his head. "Keep the money," he says and gets up.

"Don't run," Box says. "If you run, they'll kill you." Box takes a sip of his drink. "And the money's yours. Those were El's wishes and I intend to carry them out."

Coleman looks at him.

Box smiles and coughs. "Those boys are loyal to me. Dumb, but loyal. The way you were to your aunt. It's a good quality—you just put your money on a loser." He shakes his head. "Don't run. I don't want you dead."

Box picks up the office phone and punches line two. He calls a number and Coleman hears the phone ring out in the bar and sees line one light up on Box's phone.

"This is my Kingdom," Box says into the phone. "And

my enemies shall burn.” He hangs up the phone and looks at Coleman. “I got that from her. From one of her books. Never forgot it.”

**B**illy Pritchard starts it with a right hook to the stomach that makes Coleman drop to his knees, throw up and heave for air. Tommy Nova kicks him in the ribs and Coleman hears one or two of them give—hard and the soft, just like Box said. Coleman collapses and rolls on his side in his puke. He feels his bladder release and his piss spread in a pool around him. After Tommy Nova’s kick, there’s no way to tell who does what. The world alternates between bright colors and blacks and, every once in a while, Coleman catches blurry sight of Box sitting above him.

**C**oleman wakes up in a chair in front of Uncle Box. Billy Pritchard and Tommy Nova are drinking at the bar. Box gives Coleman a beer and a glass of water.

“That one was yours,” he says. “You’ll have a headache from Barstow to Salt Lake and you’ll piss blood, but you’ll heal. That’s for lying to me. You understand?”

Coleman fades in and out. Each breath stings. “Understand,” he says.

“You did wrong,” Box says. “Admit it. Say it.”

Coleman looks down at the ground and sees his blood splattered on the wood. He did the right thing, he’s sure. Wrong to Box is not wrong in general. But he’s where he is, and there’s only one answer.

“I did wrong.” He holds his head in his hands, elbows at this knees. A couple more drops of blood fall on the floor and it looks to Coleman like a Rorschach test. *What do you make of this?* it says. *What do see here?* And you give your answers, knowing there’s no single right one, but there are any number of wrong ones.

Uncle Box wheels up close to him. “You’ll live” he says. “The next one is for El, understand?”

“I understand,” Coleman says.

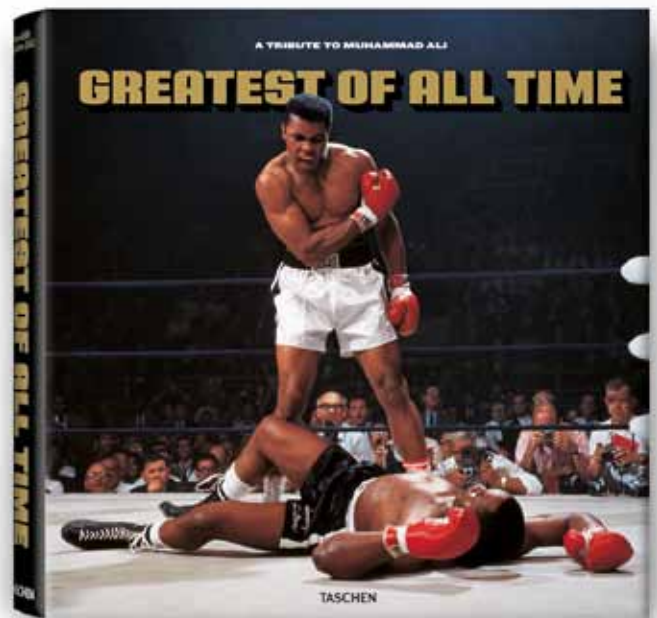
Billy Pritchard and Tommy Nova come over to Coleman.

“Go easier,” Box says. “Give him the beating she would have had. This is hers.”

They nod. Coleman looks down and spits out a chunk of his cheek. *What do you see here?* The blood says. *What do you make of this?* This one is El’s and he can take this for her. Maybe this one can have a reason that works for him, he thinks, and Tommy and Billy lift him from the chair and knock him to the floor again.

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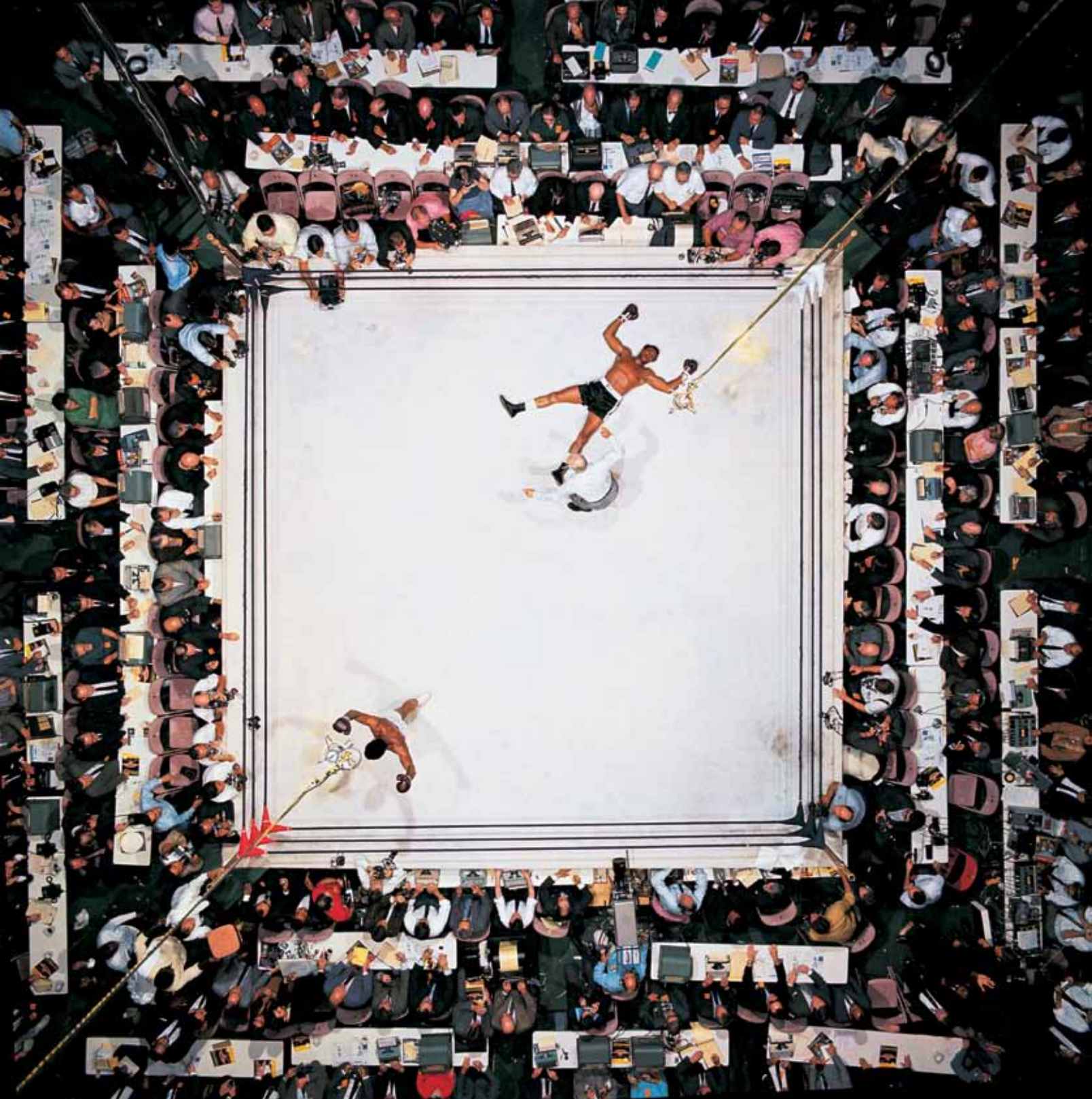
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**M**uhammad Ali is known as the greatest sportsman of all time, and this powerful knockout of a book serves as a fitting tribute. Previously available only in limited edition versions signed by both Ali and artist Jeff Koons that ranged in price from \$4,500 to \$15,000, the volume has just been re-released in a more affordable format (\$150) that is smaller in size but not in impact. Even if you’ve never set foot in the ring, these images by Neil Leifer, Flip Schulke, Carl Fischer, and others will take your breath away.



Distant view of St. Dominic’s Arena  
Copyright Neil Leifer, 1965





A dramatic and perfect overhead shot by Neil Leifer, generally regarded as one of the greatest sporting images of all time, featuring the prostrate form of Cleveland Williams and in high contrast, Ali in victory pose, during a knockdown in their 1966 title fight. Leifer captured the shot at the Houston Astrodome from 80 feet above the ring, correctly estimating the increased likelihood of capturing a perfect square of the ring from that height. With equally unique good fortune, he then activated the remote control camera at the perfect moment. Leifer himself regards this as his favorite photograph from a 40-year professional career.

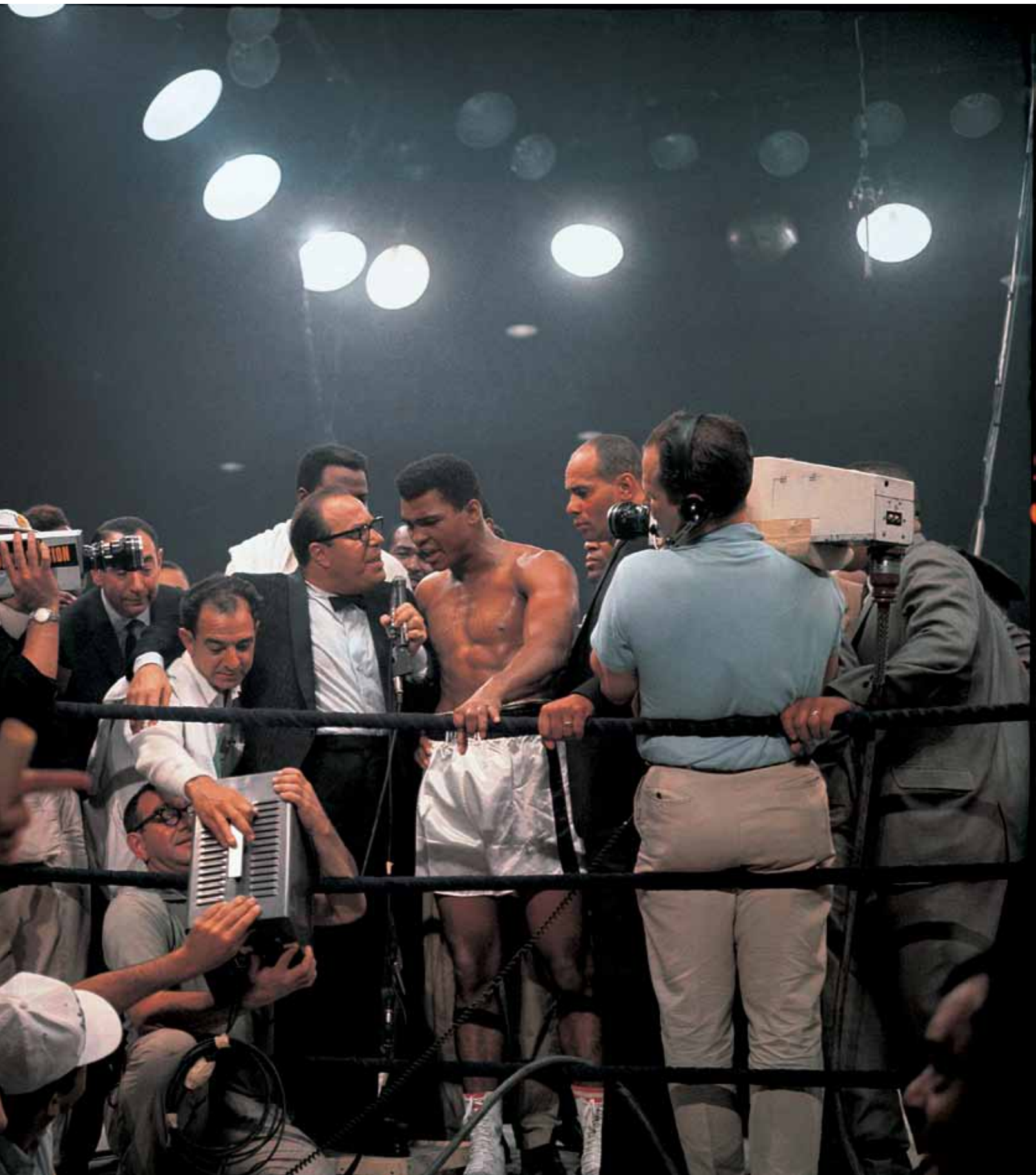
*Copyright Neil Leifer, 1966.*



At Miami Beach Fifth Street Gym, 1961  
*Copyright Flip Schulke*



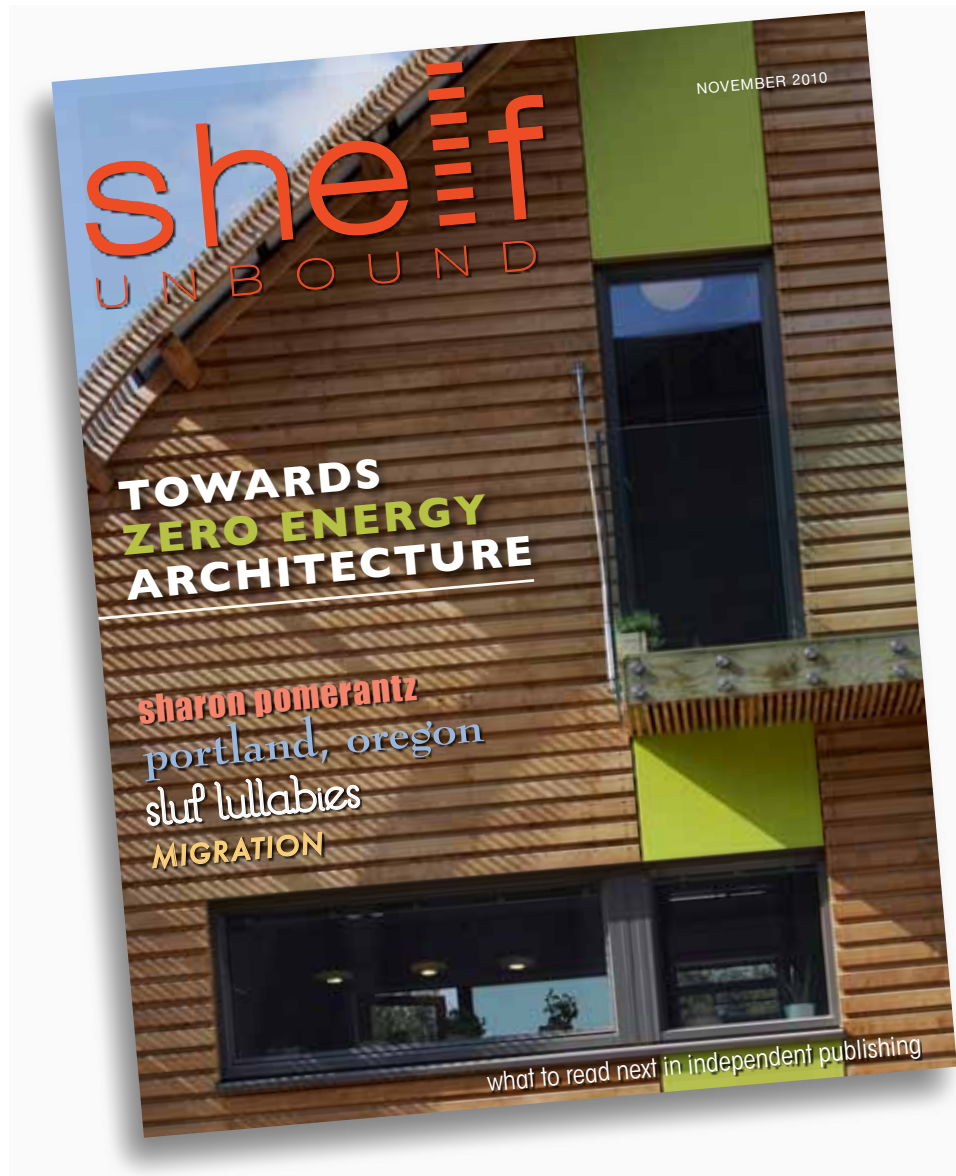
Ali vs Liston II, 1965  
*Copyright Neil Leifer*





The photo-shoot was based on Andrea del Castagno's painting *The Martyrdom of St. Sebastian* and led to a much-discussed April 1968 *Esquire* cover. The photo was intended as a comment on Ali's religious refusal to be drafted and fight in Vietnam, sacrificing his championship title and income at the peak of his career.  
*Copyright Carl Fischer, 1967.*

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# LUNCHTIME LOMOGRAPHY



THE RANDOM PHOTOGRAPHY  
OF EVERYDAY LIFE IN AND AROUND  
NEW YORK CITY BY

**DAVID THOMPSON**

DESIGNED BY BILL JUDKINS



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**DAVID THOMPSON**, also known as David 23, documented his daily commute in to and out of New York City with a variety of low-tech cameras, including a Holga 120N, a Colorsplash Chakra, the cultish Lomo Supersampler, even a pinhole camera from a kit. His goal was to make photography a part of his everyday life and to capture what he saw as he saw it. His images of spilled coffee, pigeons, and glimpses through train windows are familiar and nostalgic, blurry and overexposed, looking like snapshots from the '70s, somehow timeless yet current. The images remind me of an admonition from working class poet Timothy Russell to “Live your life and take notes.” Point well taken.

—*Jack Rubenstein*



**Shelf Unbound: What is Lomography?**

**David Thompson:** Lomography is a style of photography that embraces the use of old film cameras and their imperfections. It frees you from trying to get the perfect shot. With a Lomo camera you never really know what you get until after the film has been developed.

I also like the instant nature of a Lomo camera. With digital cameras you need to power up and focus before you can take a picture. With a Lomo camera you can take a picture in the blink of an eye. Just set how far away the subject of your image is and click.

**Shelf: You're a native New Yorker, but you recently relocated to Chicago. What precipitated the move?**

**Thompson:** My wife and I recently had our first child, a girl named Lily. We decided to move to Chicago so she can grow up close to my wife's family.

**Shelf: How do the cities compare from a photographic perspective?**

**Thompson:** There really is nothing like NYC. I don't think any city can compare. However, to be honest I haven't gotten to take enough time in Chicago to be fair. I am looking forward to doing some photowalks this fall.



**Shelf:** *Do you think the Lomo is particularly suited to cityscapes?*

Yes, but not exclusively. I think Lomography is suited for street photography because of its instant nature.

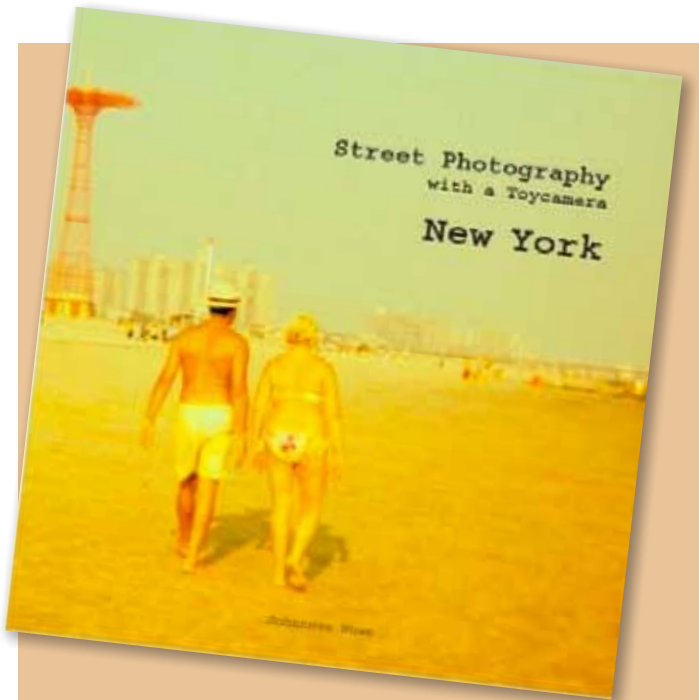
**Shelf:** *What's the significance of 23?*

**Thompson:** It all started back in my Unix group. I had to come up with a username and for some reason I said David 23.

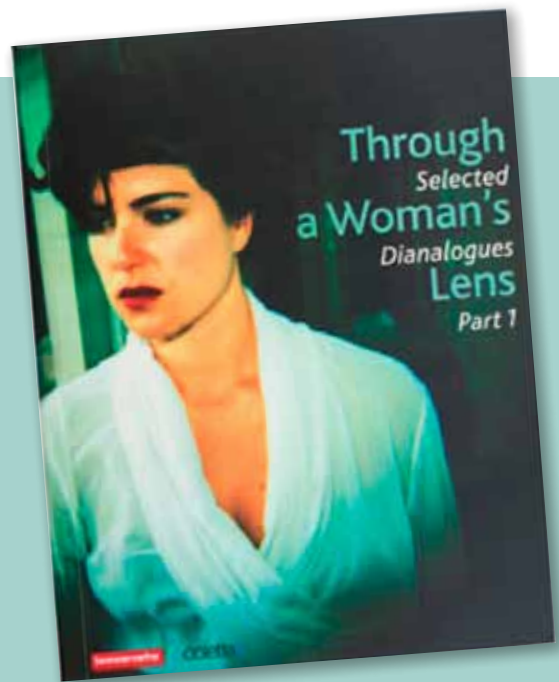
The “23 Enigma” as discovered by William S. Burroughs presents itself as a good omen for some, disaster for others. The 23 Enigma can also be found in Robert Anton Wilson’s book *Cosmic Trigger I: The Final Secret of the Illuminati*.

David 23 is the pseudonym I generally use in all my artistic endeavors. Occasionally I am known by the pseudonym Odiemonster. You almost never see my real name attached to my artwork, photographs, or music. I like being anonymous. ■

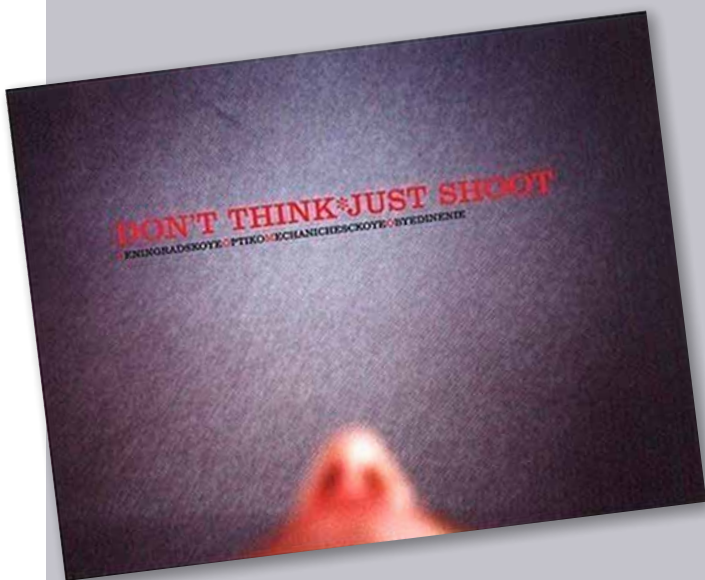




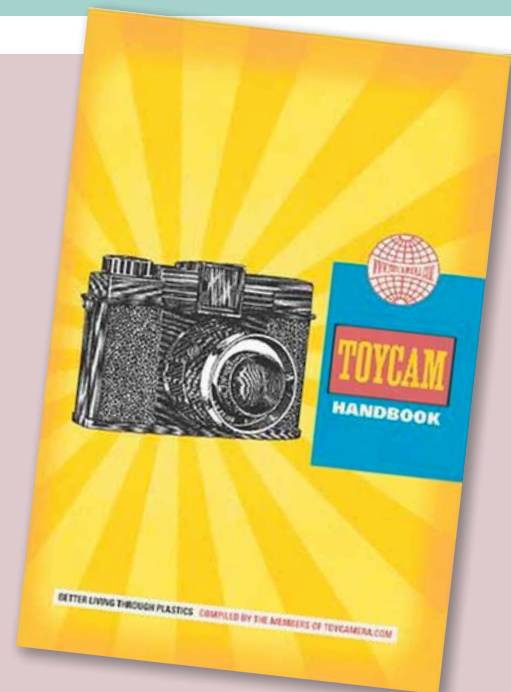
This portfolio features fascinating images taken in the New York City area with a Holga toy camera. *New York Street Photography with a Toy Camera*, Johannes Huwe, [www.lulu.com](http://www.lulu.com).



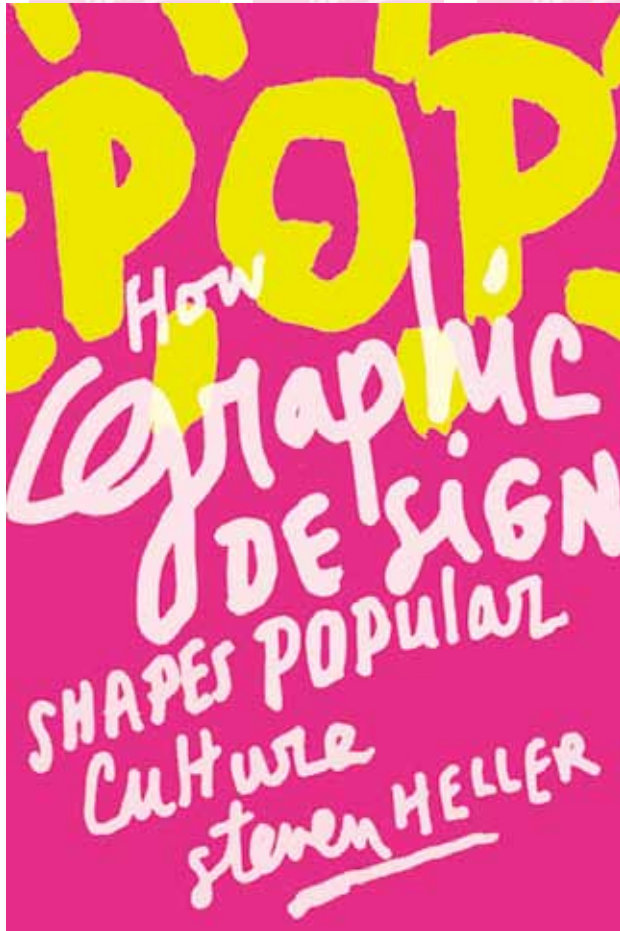
Lomography and the Paris-based boutique Colette have brought together the uniquely female perspectives of a select group of Lomographers in this special collaboration. *Through A Woman's Lens: Selected Dialogues Part 1*, Lomography and Colette, [www.lomography.com](http://www.lomography.com).



With a title befitting the Lomo motto, this coffee table book offers a variety of inspiring off-the-cuff photography from around the world. *Lomo: Don't Think, Just Shoot* by Fabian Monheim, Booth-Clibborn Editions, [www.booth-clibborn.com](http://www.booth-clibborn.com).



The members of [toycamera.com](http://toycamera.com) share their collective wisdom and experience, from in-depth descriptions of new and vintage toy cameras to tips, tricks, and tutorials for every enthusiast. *The Toycam Handbook* by various authors from [www.toycamera.com](http://www.toycamera.com), [www.lulu.com](http://www.lulu.com).



“POP CULTURE IS OFTEN MALIGNED as fleeting,” writes essayist and design guru Steven Heller in the introduction to his book, “but history shows that sometimes what is pop in one culture has time-honored resonance in later ones.” Meaning that pop culture—part illustration, design, satire, and political art—can help show us not only who we are, but where we are going. In his quest to divine our cultural future, Heller explores everything from the return to the use of hand lettering in digital media to the impact of Shepard Fairey’s Obama posters, from Andy Warhol’s *Interview* magazine (for which Heller worked as designer) to the ill effects of bad corporations on good logos (Enron, for example). Just as the pop of Rice Krispies (his analogy) tickles your ears, nose, and mouth, the creative and insightful essays in *Pop* will tickle your imagination, forever changing the way you look at your cereal box, and your tweets.

—Dean Hill

# FATHER OF SHREK, GRANDFATHER OF TWEET

INSTANT MESSAGING IS THE MOST POPULAR COMMUNICATION TOOL TODAY, AND TWEETING IS ITS offshoot. The word itself, silly though it sounds, is now embedded in pop culture. But decades before cell phones cartoonist and illustrator William Steig (1907-2003) was way ahead of the curve. His book of drawings, *The Lonely Ones* (1942), prefigured the now common practice of satirizing personal neuroses; his children's book, *Shrek* (1990), anticipated Disney's success with slimy green Ogres; and his *CDB!* (1968) not only predicted vanity license plate abbreviations, it also suggested the rise of Instant Messenger, SMS, iChat, and Twitter shorthand. Although the last was his most prescient work, Steig never got the credit as grandfather of the tweet.

Those who missed his hilariously morose graphic commentaries in the *New Yorker* (starting in 1930 he created over 100 covers and countless cartoons) may remember Steig as a children's book author and illustrator. He won the Caldecott Medal with *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble* in the early '70s and other honors quickly followed for his quirky takes on the venerable children's picture book. He often focused his pathos and bathos on innocent young folk and young folk-like animals as they routinely ran into problems and obstacles in their quests for happiness and fulfillment. Roland, of *Roland the Minstrel Pig*, narrowly misses being crushed; Sylvester, a donkey, is turned into a rock. Amos the mouse in *Amos and Boris* falls overboard mid-ocean while Boris the whale is beached on a beach after a hurricane. Abel, another mouse in *Abel's Island*, is marooned for a year, and Pearl, a very young pig in *The Amazing Bone*, is almost cooked by a pesky fox. Shrek was, of course, a poor, misunderstood ogre, who rises from the muck to become a wealthy, better-understood ogre. Eventually all find redemption, but you'll have to read them yourself to find out how (and why).

Steig had a keen ability to combine innocence and menace, and, like James Thurber, his sketchy line between the two captured the essence of emotion. His drawings were shorthand for expression; similarly, *CDB!* was shorthand for conception. For over forty years this book has both perplexed and excited its young and old readers, offering challenges and frustrations with a satisfying punch line. In the original Windmill paperback edition, a summary of the book reads as follows: "Letters and words are used to create the sounds of words and simple sentences 4 u 2 figure out with the aid of illustrations." This is a fairly accurate description of SMS-speak. Yet since the digital-age human capacity to perceive such word games without visual aids has evolved to such a high degree of mastery, pictures are no longer necessary.

Nonetheless, in this earlier stage of development (since this was, after all, a picture book) Steig's pictures were necessary. *CDB!* begins with a sketch of a boy and girl looking intently at a flower, as the boy says: C D B ! (see the bee) / D B S A B-Z B. (the bee's a buzz bee) / O, S N-D (author's note: this phrase has always confounded me). While the word games are not always easy (particularly if English is not your first language), solving them is habit forming. Here's another showing two boys in bed together (they're brothers!!): R U C-P? (are you sleeping?) / S, I M. (yes, I am) / I M 2 (I am too). Here's another with a picture of a proud chicken: D N S 5 X (the hen has five eggs). And here's my favorite—because it is so true—showing a little boy looking longingly up at a bigger girl who says: I M 2 O-L 4 U (author's note: you figure it out, I can't translate everything for you).

When SMS and Instant Messenger came to my household in the late '90s, I wondered how my son (who was then in his early double digits) picked up the abbrevi-language so quickly. Had he been reading the real estate classifieds (drmn bldg w/ rivr vw), or was it just in the air? I only realized recently, as I was re-reading *CDB!* (and was very proud of myself for deciphering I M N A T-P—okay, it's one of the easy ones), that this was the holy grail of this digital generation's mode of communication. It only goes to prove what the writer Wolcott Gibbs said about William Steig in his foreword to *The Lonely Ones*: "For a good many years, William Steig has been drawing rational, though occasionally disconcerting, pictures...It is hard to define the special quality of these works since so many warring elements have gone into them—cruelty and compassion; burlesque and acute social perception." Or maybe it doesn't prove that. But it does prove that Steig was the grandfather of social networking. A N E I AV A P-LM W TH-T?

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**B**ASED ON FOUND NEWS ITEMS FROM MAINSTREAM SOURCES AND public sites, Jaffe's succinct "stories" demonstrate that amid the often senseless digital information overload, there are countless absurdities, and injustices, worth pondering.

## EXCERPT

### Mem=ory

He remembered his name, nothing more. After undergoing eye surgery as an adolescent he lost the ability to form memories. For the next 58 years, each time he met a friend, each time he ate a meal, each time he walked the streets,

It was the first time.

### Ultra-Orthodox

newspapers altered a photo of Israel's new cabinet, deleting two female ministers. The females were grouped with the 30-member cabinet for their inaugural photo. The papers digitally changed the picture, replacing them with two males.

Ultra-orthodox Jewish sects view images of women as a violation of female modesty.

### Auschwitz

A message in a bottle has been found in a concrete wall on the site of the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp.

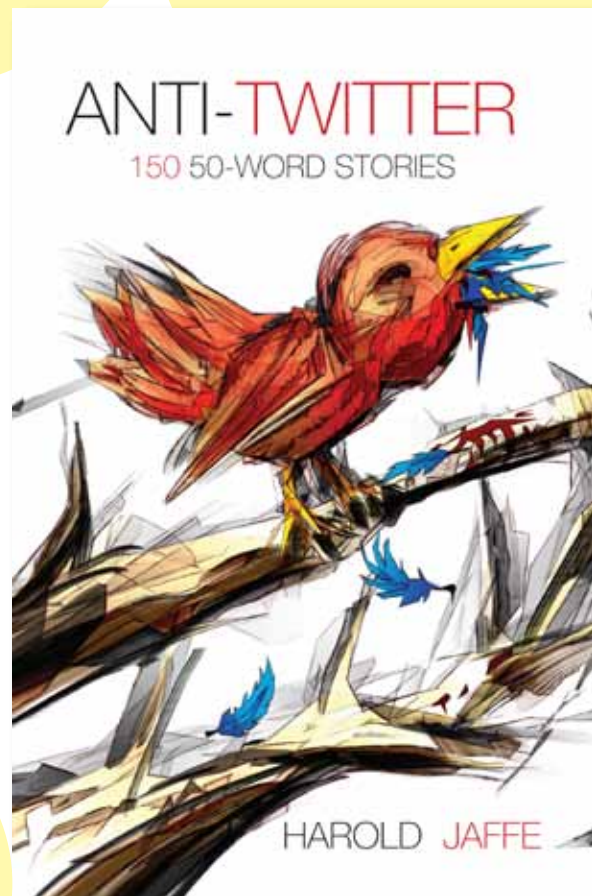
Dated 9 September 1944, the message, in French, contains names, numbers and home towns of 11 Jewish inmates.

*We are between 17 and 20-years-old*, the final sentence reads.

### Geronimo

US officials have blocked a bid by Apache leader Geronimo's Descendants to have his remains reburied near his New Mexico birthplace.

Descendants claim body parts were stolen from Geronimo's Oklahoma grave nearly 100 years ago by Yale University's elite Skull and Bones Society and displayed as a satirical relic.



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# 275K TWITTER FANS CAN'T BE WRONG

ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR AUTHORS ON TWITTER IS CHUCK PALAHNIUK (*Fight Club*, *Tell-All*), who was at 275,222 followers and counting at press time. Palahniuk's official tweetmaster is Dennis Widmyer, who talked with *Shelf Unbound* about tweeting, film-making, and The Man himself.

**Shelf Unbound:** *How did you become the voice behind the highly read @chuckpalahniuk?*

**Dennis Widmyer:** Well, it goes back much further than our Twitter page. In 1999 I attended a reading for *Invisible Monsters*. This was about a month before *Fight Club* hit the theaters, so Chuck was very unknown still. After the reading was over, some friends and I approached him and he was quite shocked, I think, that he had fans at this point. On the spot, I simply asked him if I could create a fan site for him, since at this time there was virtually no information about him on the net. He was flattered and allowed me to go for it. A few weeks later we had the nuts and bolts of a website online with pictures, news articles, and links to book reviews. Over the years, the site grew and grew. And 10 years later, it's perhaps the largest author website in the world.

When I decided to start Chuck a Twitter account, I spoke to his publicist about it, to gauge whether or not Chuck would want to host it himself. We both agreed that this probably wouldn't happen just yet, as Chuck literally still has a 56K dial-up connection and prefers to spend as little time on the computer as possible. So I turned the Twitter page more into a news portal for the site, so fans would know about tour dates, new media, and anything else exciting in the world of Palahniuk. But for now, I'm just keeping the seat warm for when he decides to jump into the driver's seat himself.

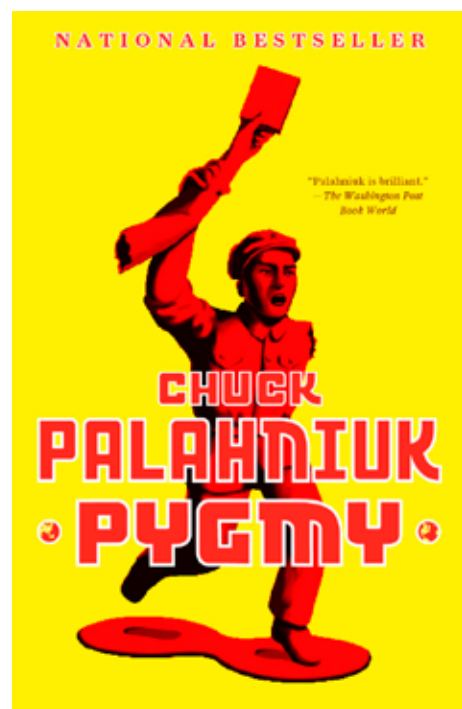
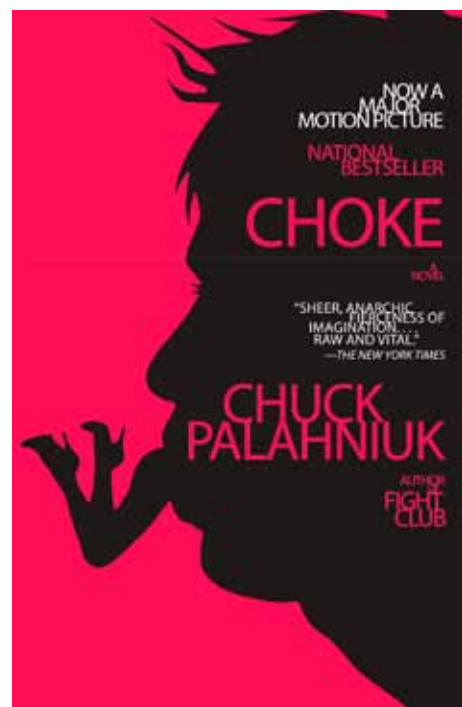
**Shelf:** *Most interesting tweet @chuckpalahniuk has received?*

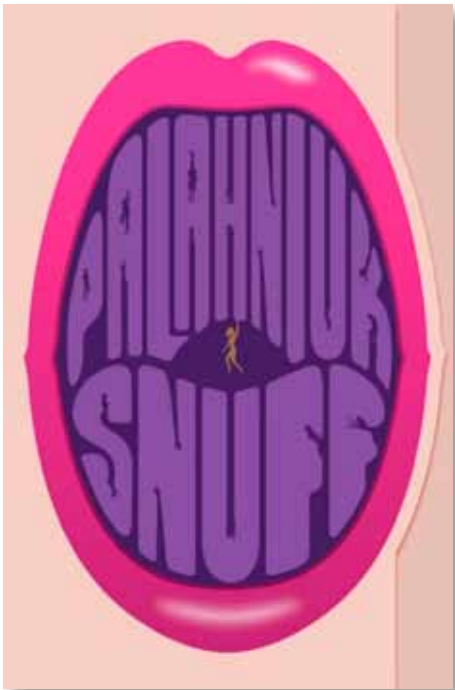
**Widmyer:** We get hundreds of tweets a day sometimes. Managing that Twitter account has almost become as full-time a job as managing the actual website is. So it's tough for me to narrow down the most interesting tweet we have received. Something fun that we did though a couple months back as a promotion for the new iPhone audiobook apps that a company called Blackstone Audio was launching was hosting a contest where fans had to tweet us pictures of themselves performing scenes from Chuck's books.

Here were the winners of the *Invisible Monsters* iPhone audiobook app: <http://chuckpalahniuk.net/news/invisible-monsters-iphone-audiobook-app-winners>. All of these pics were tweeted to us over the course of a week. Never have I been so busy on Twitter, but it was probably the most interesting thing we've done with the account so far.

**Shelf:** *You produced Postcards from the Future: The Chuck Palahniuk Documentary. What do you find most unique about the man?*

**Widmyer:** The thing I always tell people about Chuck is just how humble and real a guy he is in person. The *Postcards from the Future* documentary chronicles an extended weekend where he attended a university in Pennsylvania to host a conference. The conference consisted of lectures he would give, readings, Q&As, book signings...he even taught a live Writer's Workshop, similar to what we offer on our site. Throughout the course of these events, we conducted





our ongoing interview with him—and Chuck just had a blast. He spent every waking moment he could with his fans. At the first conference (yes, there were two), he was invited to a student’s backyard keg party...and he actually showed up! Chuck is the real deal. He loves and respects his fans.

**Shelf:** *How did you get into filmmaking, and what is your current project?*

**Widmyer:** Filmmaking is my passion in life. It’s what I want to do as a career. I attended film school and, upon graduation, was soon working as an art department PA on films like *Zoolander* and the little seen Heather Graham sex comedy *The Guru*. I quickly realized I wasn’t going to rise from a PA to a writer/director this way, so upon being offered to work on *The Royal Tennenbaums*, I abruptly quit and started my own company with my friend and cowriter/director Kevin Kolsch. That company has become Parallactic Pictures, which is the independent banner we use for all of our film projects. Between the two of us, we’ve directed four short films, a dark mystery feature called *Absence* about a young model who gets kidnapped and held in a basement in the suburbs, and, of course, the Chuck documentary. Currently, we have two producers attached to our next feature. It’s a horror film called *Shed* that we consider a throwback to the more character-driven thrillers of the ’70s. We are presently in the process of polishing our latest draft, which we then aim to use to raise the budget via private investors. You can read more about our ventures at [www.parallacticpictures.com](http://www.parallacticpictures.com).

**Shelf:** *You tweeted that an anthology of best stories from the Palahniuk Writer’s Workshop is in the works—what’s the status of that?*

**Widmyer:** In 2009, Chuck emailed me one day with an idea. He wanted to transform our already existing Writer’s Workshop on the website into something that could provide writers with a giant opportunity. His idea was that every month we would select and nominate the top story submissions in our workshop. This list of about 18 stories would then be sent up the ladder to moderators who would read them all and narrow the list down to the top six. Then this top six would be emailed directly to Chuck, who would read them, critique them, and type up thorough feedback, weighing not only their pros and cons but suggesting insights into how they could possibly be improved.

To make an analogy, picture a band like Radiohead asking fans of theirs (who are also musicians) to send them demo tapes, and then giving feedback on the music. Never before has another author of Chuck’s caliber offered something like this.

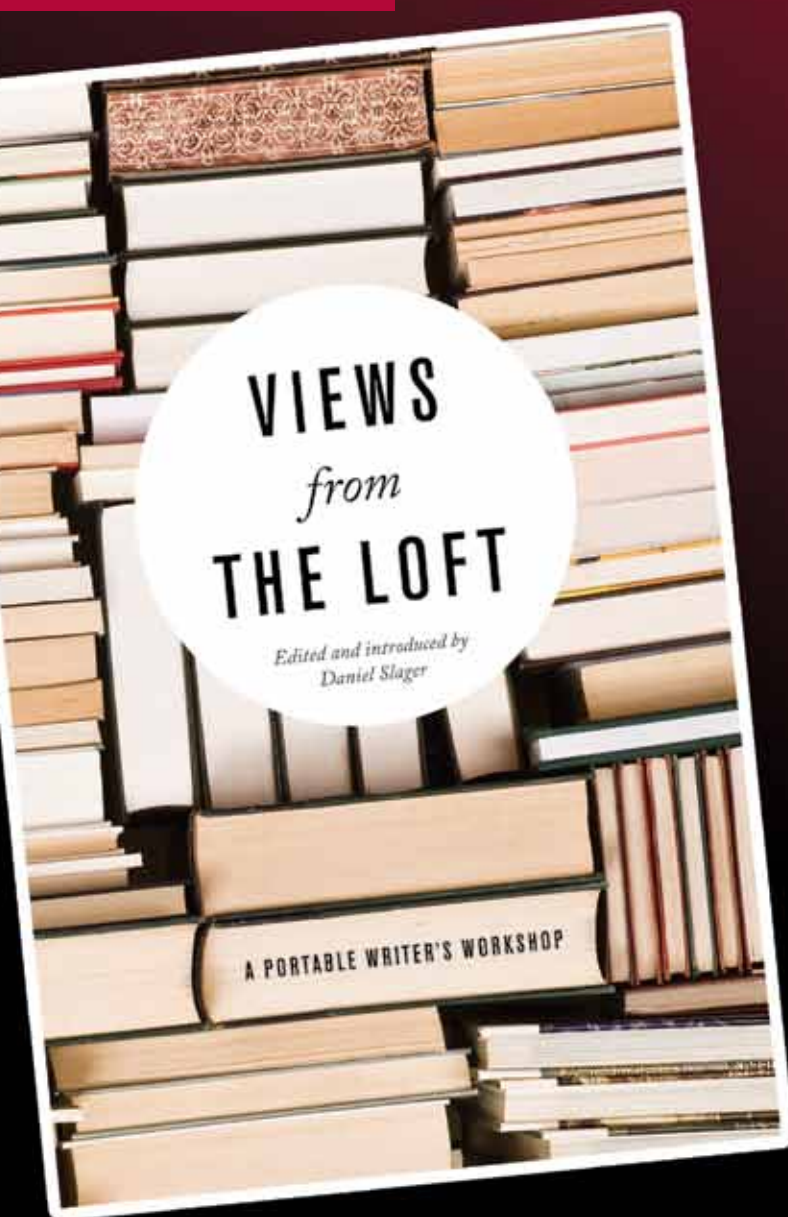
But Chuck has gone further, for he intends to then take the best stories at the end of the year and edit them into an anthology which he will help publish himself, as well as write the foreword for. While all the details aren’t ironed out yet, we think Chuck’s intention is to merge this anthology idea into his long-awaited how-to book on writing. Therefore, every chapter would begin with an essay/lecture by Chuck on the craft of writing and would then feature one of the winning stories a fan from our workshop had written, as an example of that craft in play.

Right now, the submission process has ended and we are sending Chuck the remaining finalist stories for him to read. He then aims to begin editing the actual anthology in the fall/winter. Beyond that, we have no set date for the release of the book, but keep an eye on the site for more details!

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*For the Tell-All audio app, go to <http://blackstoneaudioapps.com/2010/tell-all-palahniuk>.*

# For Readers, Writers, and Those in the Making



## Jump Start Your Writing

### The new anthology *Views from the Loft: A Portable Writer's Workshop*

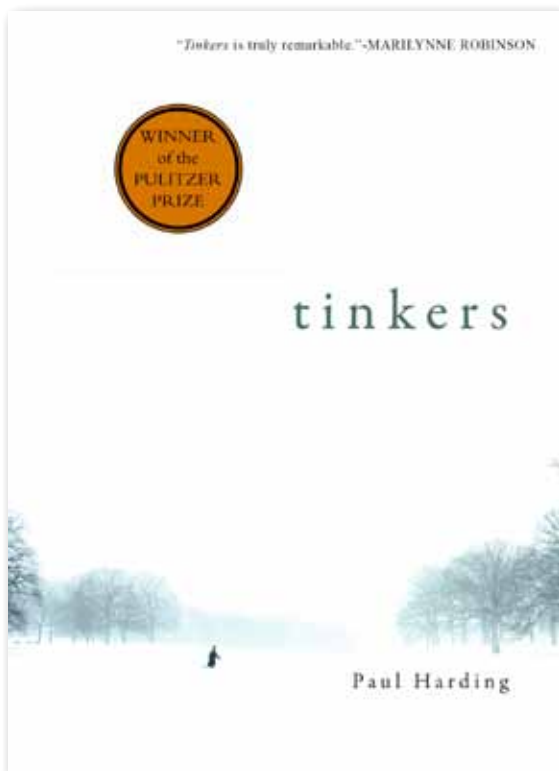
gathers 35 years of wisdom from the largest literary center in the country—its authors, students, and editors—providing anyone the tools and inspiration they need to sustain and enhance their own writing.

## Get There (from anywhere)

### Mary Carroll Moore's online class *Your Book Starts Here—How to Plan, Write, and Develop a Book* starts

September 13 and runs through December 6. You'll get to know your book—its form, function, and how to finish it!

More Information at [www.loft.org](http://www.loft.org)



Bellevue Literary Press  
www.blpbooks.org

**T**HE NAMING OF TINKERS as this year's Pulitzer Prize winner for fiction was a win not just for first-time novelist Paul Harding but also for indie publisher Bellevue Literary Press, an arm of the New York University School of Medicine that gave small publishing its first win in this category since 1981. It's a win for readers as well: *Tinkers* is a fantastically inventive piece of literature. *Shelf Unbound* recently talked to Harding about transcendentalist thinking, *Moby Dick*, and what it feels like to be the poster boy for independent publishing.

—Margaret Brown

**Shelf Unbound: What first planted the seed of *Tinkers* in your head?**

**Paul Harding:** My maternal grandfather's stories about growing up in Maine. Like George Washington Crosby, his father had epilepsy and abandoned the family when my grandfather was 12, after discovering his wife's plans to have him committed to an asylum. Whether out of generational tact or something like simple grief, my grandfather would not elaborate on these facts, which made them all the more irresistibly fascinating to me, concerned as they were with my begats, so to speak.

**Shelf: The Pulitzer Prize for Fiction is awarded "for distinguished fiction by an American author, preferably dealing with American life." What about this story most reflects or reveals American life?**

**Harding:** I can't say. I did not write it with "America" or "American life" in mind. It might be that that is what allowed whatever people find quintessentially American in it to permeate the material, though. Certainly, a book that has a protagonist whose first two names are George Washington is going to set some associations in motion, but I just picked the name George as an obvious fictional replacement for Paul, which was my grandfather's actual name. He was Paul Washington Crosby. I think that the book is steeped in pretty thoroughly American literature and thought as well, given its proclivities with transcendentalist thinking.

**Shelf: The novel begins with George Washington Crosby, a clock repairman, imagining the house that he built by hand caving in on his failing body. It's fantastic imagery of the literal dismantling of his carefully constructed life. Where did the idea for this scene come from?**

**Harding:** Well, I put the poor soul on his deathbed, alone, and had the idea that he was hallucinating about cracks in the house he'd built himself and spent his life meticulously maintaining. It seemed a kind of obvious emotional reaction, a fear he'd have as he felt things and himself slipping away from one another. Then, I just sort of applied a principle I most admire in *Moby Dick*, which is to extend metaphors to their logical ends, until they collapse, give way. The metaphor in this case was a bit more literal than usual, I think, though. Once the scene is framed in the context of a hallucination, I just wrote out the house collapsing, stage by stage, as if it were literally true. Then, I just left it alone. I didn't want to over-determine the image; just describe the thing as precisely and as vividly as possible, as palpably as possible, and hand it over to the reader and her own imagination.

**Shelf: You've become the poster guy for small presses and independent bookstores. What did Bellevue Literary Press see in *Tinkers* that the larger publishing establishment did not?**



**Harding:** Certainly, larger publishers and more commercially oriented agents look at every manuscript with the very real concern about whether they can sell 10,000 copies of the thing in hardcover. There's a real bottom line with which everyone struggles. I don't begrudge people the parameters of their jobs and economic reality. I think that someone who reads a zillion manuscripts a year might find *Tinkers* in the middle of the pile and think, What the hell is this? The real misfortune is that quieter, more meditative books are tougher to evaluate, or even to become implicated in, in such a profit-oriented environment. Anyway, it was my still unbelievable good fortune to somehow have Erika Goldman at Bellevue come across the manuscript. From there, it was a classic case of the right book finding the right editor. Since Bellevue is non-profit, I imagine that Erika had the good fortune to be able to read the book without certain, er, financial necessities tugging at her brain as she did. She just plain liked it, I think, and was able to publish it on that basis alone. Lovely!

**Shelf: You've described yourself as a "self-taught modern New England Transcendentalist." How does this personal framework inform your writing?**

**Harding:** It's just a habit of seeing. I mean, I find the New England transcendentalist thinkers—among whom I include, in addition to Emerson and Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville, Dickinson, Whitman, Wallace Stevens, and even John Cheever, to an extent—experience their own perceptions and relationships to the world and to other human beings in a way that deeply resonates with me, impresses me, challenges me, gives me joy, and so forth. This kind of thinking arose directly out of the thinking of the Protestant Reformation, of course, and I find the relevant cosmologies, morality, and so forth to simply be

the most beautiful impulses and ideas across which I've come.

**Shelf: Which came first for you in writing *Tinkers*, the use of the clock as a metaphor or the idea of exploring the fluid nature of time?**

**Harding:** It's funny, the clock metaphor arrived as a non-negotiable dramatic premise of the book, because my own grandfather repaired and traded clocks and I apprenticed with him for several years. So, I didn't think of it theme or symbol first. It was a literal, concrete fact, out of and through which I subsequently evolved some of the novel's themes about time. Of course, I'm obsessed with being in time, with our experience of it, how it foreshortens and elongates and doubles back on or ahead of itself, and so forth, and I think of all that experientially, which as a fiction writer means in terms of character and also in terms of narrative. So it all harmonized in a beautiful and pleasing way; I was able to swim around in all sorts of temporal realms and luxuriate in all sorts of non-linear, associative states of mind. It's all about mind and consciousness, and those are all about the essence of being human.

**Shelf: You studied with Marilynne Robinson, who won the 2005 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for *Gilead*. Where do you see evidence of her teaching or influence in your writing?**

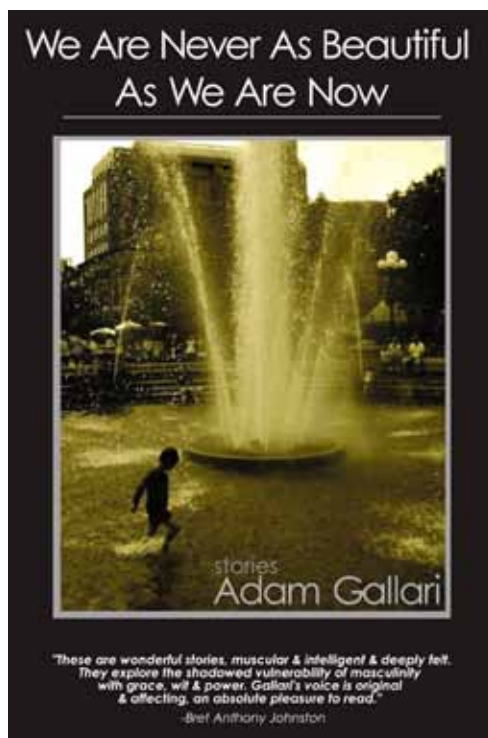
**Harding:** In all of the above. She is a kindred spirit. Within 10 minutes of meeting her, I recognized her as a dear friend whom I'd not previously met. I can just sit with her for hours and hours on end and talk about art and music and philosophy and theology. In terms of writing, from my point of view, I feel as if we're members of the same family. I experience her influence as a joy and as great good fortune.

**Shelf: Near the end of his life, George dictates his memories into an old tape recorder. You write, "He imagined that his memoirs might now sound like those of an admirable stranger, a person he did not know but whom he immediately recognized and loved dearly. Instead, the voice he heard sounded nasally and pinched and, worse, not very well educated, as if he were a bumpkin..." What does the dissonance between his imagined voice and his actual voice say about his sense of identity?**

**Harding:** I guess it says something about the discrepancy between how we perceive or want to perceive ourselves and how we actually are. My immediate impulse while writing that passage was just derived from how much I hate to hear my own recorded voice. It makes me cringe. I feel the same way about seeing photographs or film of myself. I always think, Terrible; that's not how I'd like to think of myself at all. So, it's a pretty usual bit of human mortification. There's some Emerson in there, along the lines of each person thinking he is misunderstood, is better than he acts or is perceived as being.

**Shelf: You were a drummer in the rock band Cold Water Flat. I hear all kinds of rhythms in *Tinkers*. Are you conscious of the pattern or meter of your language as you write?**

**Harding:** Absolutely. I am wholly committed to writing lyric prose, which is the term I use for writing that falls just the other side of prose poetry. I think of my writing in terms of things like tempo and time signature and rhythm, the musicality of language, its incantatory properties. These things are also, of course, other ways of thinking about the ebb and flow, catch and release of time held by or inside narrative. ■



[www.ampersand-books.com](http://www.ampersand-books.com)

**A**DAM GALLARI'S DEBUT collection of nine short stories ranges from the pitching mound to the poetry bargain bin, from major league dreams to ex-girlfriends just out of reach. His descriptions of Brooklyn coeds in love, New School-style, and minor league ballplayers warming up their arms with an ever-diminishing game of catch are equally disarming and familiar, effectively reminding those of us who haven't held a baseball or a new girlfriend's hand in some years what the power of throwing sidearm and the poetic sting of a first lost love once truly felt like.

—Dean Hill

### Reading Rilke

You bought a book of poems today, by Rilke. You're not as well read as you want to be, but lately you've been trying to remedy that. You frequent the library. You peruse the aisles, hearing only the click of your feet against the cement floor. You pick authors with exotic names—Flaubert, Maupassant, Pushkin, Turgenev—and you read them when you can. You don't hang around bookstores much, anymore. They remind you of days spent milling about and wasting time while you listened for the sound of her laugh, throaty and crisp and a touch too deep for her tiny frame, the laugh that informed you she'd stumbled upon another perfect sentence.

Today, you would have kept walking if the large, green sign announcing a discount hadn't caught your eye. So you paused, stopped to take a look at what was in the bin outside the store. You only went inside because you had to. That's where the cash register was. And you bought a book of Rilke's poems today. You'd never read him before.

Here the bookstores don't have selections like the ones in Manhattan. At least you presume they don't. Here they seem to carry only books with an "O" patch next to the title or reprinted editions bearing covers with Hollywood stars, their faces pensive and rapt. And you think of how she said she would never buy a novel with one of those covers—the ones on which stickers reading "Now a Major Motion Picture" blot out half the author's name. How she combed aisles far from the display tables to find new volumes to add to the pile beside the bed: Voltaire, Tolstoy, Goethe, Camus, Proust.

Maybe that's why you chose Rilke as he lay there in the bargain bin. He didn't try to court you with anything more than his name and *New Poems* written in simple, white letters beneath it.

Reaching for the book, you wondered how you ended up here, not in the bookstore, but in California: drafted by the Dodgers out of high school, blew out your shoulder, got released and then, for no reason, stayed. You told yourself the warm weather was better for the joint. Heat wouldn't constrict the rotator cuff; it would be loose all the time; you'd never have that crick that signaled the turning of the seasons because in Southern California the weather never changed. Plus, going back with nothing to show for your time here except an uneven tan never appealed to you much. True, you might have been able to tell some woman in a bar that you played pro-ball once, for a bit.

Maybe she'd go home with you if it was that type of bar and she was that type of woman, but you haven't been to that type of a bar in a long time. Not since you started working at the Pig and Whistle, the one Irish Pub in all of Riverside where every bit of wall space is covered by beer paraphernalia and where you say, matter-of-factly, to the people who ask you if you like working there, that it's a job. But the truth is that you like it because it reminds you of a place you might find down on Delancey Street even if you won't admit that to yourself. The irony is that she moved to New York City.

It's actually Brooklyn—Williamsburg—but when you tried to explain the distinction between the five boroughs and New York City she never

seemed to comprehend that New York City was Manhattan alone. You tried to draw a map on a bar napkin with a blunt pencil and when the napkin ripped you constructed the whole area—Manhattan, Staten Island, the Bronx, Brooklyn and Queens and the rest of Long Island—with French fries you pilfered from the bucket in front of her. And when she asked where you were from you pointed to Nassau, a square just to the east of Queens boxed in by two fries with lopped off ends.

You smiled when you gave her each drink, even though you thought her the kind of woman who would be on guard against a smiling man full of saccharine promises that would eventually dissolve like sugar into coffee. But you've never made a habit of making promises, so when she waited for you after the bar closed, you walked out with her, and you didn't mind when she lingered in front of the door to your studio, and you didn't mind when she invited herself in. You didn't mind when she kissed you, when, once inside, she took off your shirt, when she climbed on top of you. You told yourself that you could learn to love her, eventually, but you pushed those thoughts from your mind and told yourself instead that you should be happy with the elementary bliss birthed from the fact that a woman formerly unknown to you had graced you with this opportunity.

Damn your sense of Romance. Besides, you told yourself, she wouldn't be here in the morning.

But when you woke to the smell of eggs frying you realized that you had been wrong and that now, as you watched her slide from the stove to the sink then back to the stove again in your poor excuse for a kitchen, something seemed different. The way she moved through it effortlessly, with grace and familiarity, fooled you into believing, almost, that she belonged here, that the apartment was hers and that you were the one intruding. The room felt bigger with



her in it. It felt like a place that could be lived in. So you didn't object when she kept coming back.

The sex was good. You enjoyed seeing the strain of pleasure in her eyes, but you preferred lying next to her and feeling the heat emanating from the back of her thighs. Staring at the slope of her back, the slight dip in her hip, the two, distinct, dimples just above the rise of her behind, you liked to listen to her talk of how she graduated from USC, how she studied English and Drama, how she wrote and acted and how she wanted to move to New York



because they did Shakespeare in the park there.

It was during those moments that you knew it couldn't last — though you were never certain, then, that you wanted it to. You saw the eventuality of her leaving as something obvious and concrete because you knew who you were. She knew what she wanted to be. Because, secretly, you knew that your way of thinking was smaller than hers. You wondered if, secretly, she knew it, too.

Maybe that's why you picked that fight in the car on the way home from Disneyland after you both had spent the day holding hands and wearing the hats with the mouse ears and carrying balloons, because she was singing along to "Penny Lane" by the Beatles and they weren't *blue superb skies* they were *blue suburban skies* and so you told her you hated it when people sang songs they didn't know the lyrics

to and you pressed on and you didn't drop it until she told you that you were being just like Ian.

Ian.

It was the first time she mentioned him to you outright. She'd alluded to him before, even the evening she accompanied you home from the bar he'd hovered over the bed when she asked you to keep the lights on during sex because, upon leaving her, he'd spat that she meant nothing, because in the dark all women looked the same. His presence haunted you ever since, but you never told her that.

Yet as the car hurtled down the freeway you asked where he was now, where he lived. She answered Silverlake too easily, too quickly, and it unnerved you because, then, you still thought in baseball terms. How, even though you might be the one starting at short and hitting .340 today, the moment your average dipped there would be someone ready to take your place, ready to do the job that you couldn't do. Normally you wouldn't have bothered to glance over your shoulder, but that night you turned your head completely around.

You didn't apologize. You didn't acquiesce. You kept at it; you told her she had a great track record of men, then. One she could be proud of. And you hoped it stung her as

much as the image of her writhing under the weight of this Ian character stung you.

You wanted to see pictures of him. You thought that doing so might assuage the fantasies that accompanied the realization that the woman sharing your bed hadn't fully divorced herself from the man whose job you took. You felt like you were replacing Ruth or Gehrig or DiMaggio. No matter what you did, you suffocated in the shadow of a god.

So your mind took its liberties with the lump of clay named Ian that had been handed to it and sculpted it so that it became tall and slender, slightly feminine, the type of man capable of donning Capri pants and a ponytail in an attractive, European kind of way.

You sculpted, waited, listened to John and Paul sing over the stale silence between both of you until you real-

Portrait of Rainer Maria Rilke by Paula Modersohn-Becker, 1906.

ized that something changed. That you enjoyed her company because you *thought* you were involved in something where the investment was quick and superficial, the kind of relationship where you both could say *I never* cared with ease and wholeheartedly believe that you weren't lying to yourselves. Except, maybe, for her, it was true.

When she pulled up to your apartment she didn't turn off the engine, didn't undo her seatbelt, and you thought, if this was high school, if this was another time, another circumstance, the tension might be coming from her waiting for you to kiss her, waiting for you to bolster your nerve. But it wasn't one of those times. You stared straight ahead and resigned yourself to ask, before you got out, about Ian. You wanted to know how you compared to him, so you asked, but it came out wrong: Why me? And she sighed—as though anyone could ever answer that question—*Because you smiled at me when you gave me my drink that first night*. It was so simple that you wanted to believe it was the real reason, so you didn't push. You let it lie and you told yourself that you could just ask her tomorrow, even though you knew she wouldn't be coming to the Pig and Whistle to sit with you. She was already gone, and watching her pull away you sensed a twinge in your shoulder and your body experienced a sensation that it hadn't felt since you moved out here: cold.

The book was thick, the Rilke, but not heavy. You barely felt it in your hand as you carried it with you today. It made you feel important, as though the eyes of those you passed turned from their own concerns, for a moment, and ever so slightly explored you, tried to discover what you had tucked in the curve of your palm, but it was your secret. You weren't sure why it was so imperative no one know, but you made sure that your fingers hid Rilke's name. You didn't want to share him with their gazes. Maybe it was because you were afraid someone who'd actually read Rilke might notice, stop you, want to chat.

Inside were the poems, German originals and translations—the unfamiliar and the recognizable side-by-side—and you thought it strange how easy they were, the poems on the right, the ones in English, as she'd have said, to *parse*. “Over here,” they called, imploring your attention even though your interest and your glances returned, always, to the German—words with density, *gravitas*—a car crash of letters piled across the white of the page. Foreign and unreadable, yet engulfing. Their meaning laughing at you from behind their veil, laughing as though Rilke, dead in his grave, lay laughing too. His revenge for your hiding his name.

You've tried not to think about her. You've tried to think of everything and anything else, but even filling your head with thoughts of possible distractions leads your mind to realize that it's doing so just to distract itself, so you wonder if, now, it would just be easier to think about her. For a

while you'd been on a streak. You spent days, weeks, never months without thoughts of her, until you got a postcard bearing a photo of the New York skyline—the kind of postcard tourists buy ten-for-a-dollar from the rotating racks outside the stores that sell shirts and hats and anything else that can carry “I NY.” You were happy when it came; it proved to you that she wasn't in Silverlake. You'd like to think you helped her move on to better things.

She wrote that the winter was approaching and that she had yet to find a place that could offer both quiet and warmth, which is probably why, when you think of her now, she's always in coffee shops. You know it's cliché to think that in Manhattan coffee shops are the spots that young actors and writers and artists congregate, but, in your mind, they're places of quiet and warmth. So you imagine her in those locales: daytime bars where soft music plays and plush, pastel couches invite her to relax and sit in a place where no one smiles when they hand her a drink and no one judges her if she drinks alone.

What if you were to meet her a year from now, maybe two, after a period of silence? Would you reminisce? Speak of the events of a communal past as though they belonged to other people, as though now you were merely watching them from seats in a movie theatre, enthralled and anxious and trying to anticipate what might come next even though you already know? Her asking *Do you remember that time at Disneyland when we rode Peter Pan and how there was that handicapped boy in front of us and how they kept letting him ride?* And your response—yes or no depending on her tone—chosen with care, tapered and measured and half-heartedly stoic, hoping it won't betray how you're wondering if her overture is meant to gauge whether your train has pulled from the station, if she's been left, bags in hand, standing on the platform.

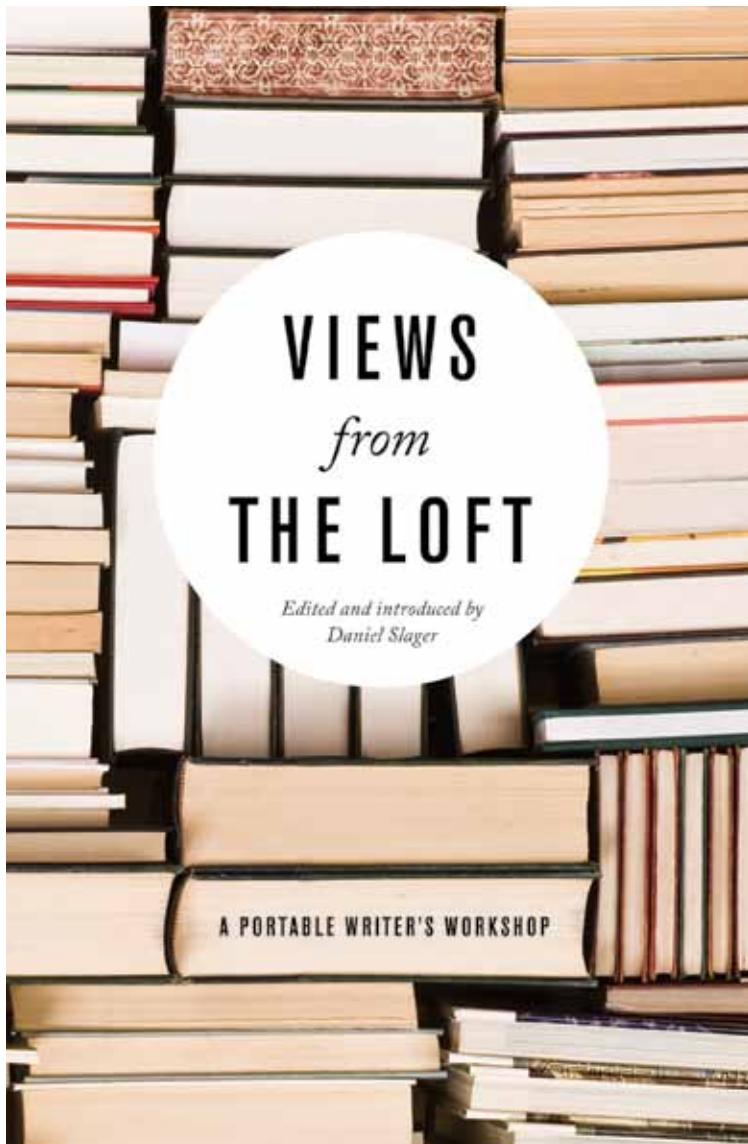
You think how such a question could be asked over dinner. A place on the Lower East Side or in the Village. A place of her choosing. The bottle of wine and the votive candle in the middle of the table acting as referees between you until the last dregs of Merlot are spilt into glasses and you raise the bottle into the air and gently jingle it in the hope of hearing the sloshing of liquid, exhausted, before offering, with a demure smile, *We drank all the wine*, as though the subtext would be negated by her saying that the candle still had a flame, wax ready to melt and a wick ready to burn.

You've been reading a lot, lately.

And, today, you bought a book. That was all. A book. Some poems. By Rilke. And it was foolish of you to think these things because you never saw Rilke in the pile by the bed. She never read Rilke. If she did, you never knew. ■

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Milkweed Editions  
www.milkweed.org

## Views from the Loft A Portable Writer's Workshop

Edited by Daniel Slager

IN THE SPRING OF 2000, THE OPEN Book first opened its artful space made up of three renovated 100-year-old buildings on the eastern edge of downtown Minneapolis. Dedicated to the book as art form, from conception to binding, the physical space was intended as an inspirational and collaborative home for a variety of nonprofit organizations, including The Loft Literary Center, Milkweed Editions, and the Minnesota Center for Book Arts. It was only a matter of time before The Loft Literary Center, the largest literary center in the United States, and Milkweed Editions, the largest independent nonprofit literary press, would join forces on a publishing endeavor. The result is *Views from the Loft*, an insightful and engaging collection of essays culled from the Loft's monthly newsletter and covering such topics as teaching, writing, critique, and publication. The best of a writer's workshop with none of the cross talk.

—Ben Minton

### EXCERPT

#### *Teseros*

By Sandra Benítez

I came to writing late. I was thirty-nine before I gathered enough courage to begin. When I hear other writers talk about writing, or read what they have to say about their art, I am amazed by those who say they always knew they had to write. When I was a girl, I never wanted to do it. It was a doctor I dreamed of being, but I frequently had a book in my lap, and so I was linked, even then, to writing and to the spell that stories cast. My favorite book was *One Thousand and One Nights*, the tale of Scheherazade, whose stories, night after night, kept the executioner's scimitar in its scabbard

and away from her dewy neck. Oh, the power explicit in this: Stories can save our lives. Is it any wonder that I did not burn to write? I compared my stories to Scheherazade's, and mine seemed paltry and contrived. No question, making comparisons is the first step on the road to writer's block.

But time passes, and if our love for the written word has been constant, the want to write, the need to tell stories, may beckon. Sometimes we cannot resist.

Let me tell you a few stories.

It is 1967. I am twenty-six and living in Saint Louis. I have two sons under the age of five. One of the things I like to do when I have time and extra money is shop for antiques. Right now, I have a mission. I am searching for a trunk, the flattop kind. I want to use it for a coffee table. This is something I have seen in magazines: You take an old trunk, clean it up, top it with glass.

One day, I am in an antique store, and I am discouraged because for a long time I have not found the trunk I want. I have seen numerous humpbacked trunks, and even some flattops, but these have been too weathered to redo. This time, however, I spot just the one. The shopkeeper is in sight, so I stifle a shriek of delight. The trunk is flat, all right, and well preserved. Brass fittings hug the corners, leather straps hang at the sides. The wood appears to be oak. Canvas stretches under the strips and forms rectangles over the trunk's surface. The canvas is soiled but looks scrubbable.

"How much for that one?" I ask, too excited to play the I'm-just-looking game.

The shopkeeper scratches his head. "There's a little problem with that one," he says. "It's locked and there's no key."

I give the trunk a close inspection. A brass key plate shaped like a fat exclamation point is fitted into the front of the trunk. There is a hole in the plate for a key to slip in.

"No key?" I say.

"No key," he says.

It takes me a moment to grasp what this means. "So how much?" I ask, trying not to think that the trunk might be filled. I try not to picture coins, jewels, priceless oils. *Teseros*. I fear he might look into my head and see the treasures too.

"Forty bucks," he says, "but since there's no key, give me thirty and it's yours."

This time I pretend to think it over, but then I say "okay," and soon the man and I are duck-walking my find out to the car.

That the heft of the trunk is less than I had hoped is not lost on me, but I smile brightly at the man as I lower the car's hatchback. "Enjoy," the man says. He gives a wave and I drive off. I feel that somehow I've been had.

It takes me a week to pick the lock.

I am careful because the key plate is scrolled and I don't want to mar the design. Into the place where a key would fit, I introduce the tip of a knife, a screwdriver, a hairpin. I worm these around, holding my breath, waiting for the little click that will tell me it's done. My children watch the lock picking with an eagerness of their own, but toward week's end their interest droops. Down in the basement where I've set up shop, they ride their trikes, circling me and the trunk. Christopher, the oldest, pedals by. He says, "Mom is a burglar." "Burglar," Jonathon, the little one, repeats.

Between lock pickings, I scrub the canvas, sand and revarnish the oak. I saddle-soap the leather,

paint the canvas the color of oyster shells, polish the brass until it gleams. From time to time I raise the trunk on end, hoping to catch the sound loot makes as it rolls from side to side, but there is silence each time I raise it. It is then I picture bills, of the one-hundred kind, stacked so tightly they cannot be moved.

In the end, it is a metal nail file that does the job.



**I**t is 1951. I am ten. I am living in San Salvador, El Salvador. Dad and I are in his Ford pickup. We bounce over a gravel road that leads up the side of an inactive volcano to the place where Dad's gladiolus grow. Dad harvests flowers and has hired Chema and his family to oversee the crop. Dad maneuvers the truck up the ruddy path, and the landscape around us is lush and green. We drive up into mists and around *campesinos* trudging evanescently up and down the mountain. I am thrilled to be with Dad. In the cab of the truck, the smell of cedar and sweat commingle, and this excites me too. I feel like Dad's assistant, like maybe for a moment I will share a life with him.

We come up over the lip of the volcano and stop to look out over the crest of San Salvador, lying way off beyond the fringe of trees and scrub. San Salvador is an ochre and saffron quilt thrown, it seems, almost carelessly across the lap of the valley below us. Dad's gladiolus patch is small. When we drive up, I take it in at one glance. Orderly rows of knife-edged stalks rise up, dark green and defiant, like the hue and stance of *Guardia* who post themselves on street corners in the harsh sun and deep shadowy doorways up and down city blocks.

Dad brakes to a stop, and Chema comes running. He is a small man but solidly built. He runs agilely despite the encumbrance of sandals with square soles cut from rubber tires. I jump out and call "hola," but Chema says nothing to me. Dan and he go off, and I stay near the truck.

I have been here before, but today a stillness comes over me. I feel strangely disconnected, as if somehow I am floating up and over the volcano and can look down at myself, a small, slight girl, hair parted severely down the middle and gathered in two braids at the sides. I am walking toward the men when a child, three years old or so, steps out from behind a hut set at the edge of the flower patch. The child is naked, and I see she is a girl. Her belly is huge and distended. She stops short when she sees me, but I walk slowly over.

I am only ten, but I feel a rush of new emotion that later, when I have my own sons, I will recognize as that sheltering kind of mother-love. I want to scoop the girl up. Though her face is smudged and her nostrils caked, I want to hold her close.

A woman emerges from the hut and calls the girl's names. The girl turns and runs off and only once looks back at me. She and her mother disappear into the hut, and I am left, longing to follow after, to go into the hut and penetrate the secret reality of their lives.

**I**t is 1956. I am fifteen and living in Unionville, Missouri, on the farm of my paternal grandparents. The farmhouse, built around the time of the Civil War, is two-storied and narrow. Its façade is rough to the touch and is the color of pigeon wings.

Sometimes, when Grandma has gone to town and Grandpa is farming the fields, I lift



aside the length of fabric that curtains their bedroom and step inside. I rummage through their dresser, fishing past underwear and the stiff squares of never-used hankies until my hand falls on the dresser set put away in the third drawer. I take out the oval hand mirror. It is edged in mother-of-pearl and has a silver handle and is just the size to reflect only my face. It is my twin's face that I pretend to see—my sister, identical to me. "Hello, Susana," I say to the mirror. "If you were alive, this is how you'd look." After a time, I look away, across the room and through the window to the pasture and the puff of smoke rising up from Grandpa's Farmall traveling slowly across his land. I look back into the mirror. I think, "if that is you, Susana, then who am I?"



The trunk. When I pick the lock, I discover this: burnt-wood boxes for scarves and gloves; hand-embroidered handkerchiefs, lace blouses, a silky slip; a small leather purse, a beaded bag. There are letters with two-cent stamps and postcards with one-centers, all postmarked in the 1920s. There are dozens of valentines, some from Ina and Imogene, some from Wilson and Carl, all addressed to Helen Miller. One card has scalloped edges and features an accordion-folded heart that pops out when opened and is, most sincerely, from Tashido Sonada. In addition, there are granny glasses and lorgnette. A collection of thimbles. Seed packets of alyssum, dwarf petunias, blue-nosed peppers, regal pink larkspur. Wrapped in yellowed tissue is a square of silk, an inky background sprinkled with red and blue flowers. Helen Miller's treasures. For twenty-five years I have held them close because fragments of her story are contained in them, and I have honored that.

I think of my family. Objects passed from hand to hand. Stories told, others not talked about but known. Dear friends and acquaintances recount stories of their own. In public places, behind walls and doors, voices rise. Stories float up and are deposited into the trunk of our collective unconscious. We have only to pick a lock to set our stories free.

When I write, I touch the core of the girl I've always been, and with this heart I try to access mythic stories. When I write, I allow my mind to travel. Crossing time and space, I stand once again on the threshold of a Salvadoran hut. In my stories, I do not hold back. I step inside a simple hut and am surprised by *tesoros*.

For a long time I forgot the tale of my flattop trunk, but one day I showed up at a friend's house wearing a silk scarf with an inky background and red and blue flowers. She remarked on how striking the scarf was. I unlocked my memory and told the story of Helen Miller's trunk.

In *Crow and Weasel*, Barry Lopez says, "Sometimes a person needs a story more than food to stay alive."

These days, I stay alive by placing fragments of my story into other people's memories. I do it by writing.

Writing stories is the mirror that tells me who I am. ■

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*From Views from the Loft: A Portable Writer's Workshop, edited by Daniel Slager, Milkweed Editions 2010, www.milkweed.org. Reprinted with permission. All rights reserved.*

Ingrid Schaffner  
 DelMonico Books/Prestel  
 prestel.txt.de

# maira kalman

Various Illuminations (Of a Crazy World)

**“Who’s Maira Kalman?”** was the question most asked of senior curator Ingrid Schaffner as she was preparing a traveling exhibition of the artist’s work. You may not know her name, but you know her illustrations. She’s the author of 12 children’s books and the creator of Max Stravinsky, the dog poet of *Ooh-la-la (Max in Love)*. Maybe you own her luscious illustrated edition of Strunk and White’s *The Elements of Style*. Or do you know her from her column for the *New York Times*, or is it your shower curtain? Her now-ubiquitous cartoon map of New Yorkistan showing the boroughs divided into tribes of Taxistan (the Bronx), Pashmina (the Upper East Side), and Irate and Irant (Brooklyn) originally ran on the cover of the *New Yorker* and now appears on everything from umbrellas to jigsaw puzzles.

From childlike images of Dolce and Gabbana’s golden lab puppies on cheetah-print bedding to the shadows of two black planes flying across a flat blue September sky into the World Trade Center, her works are profoundly moving and quintessentially New York.

Visit the corresponding exhibit through October 26 at the Contemporary Jewish Museum in San Francisco ([www.thejcm.org](http://www.thejcm.org)), from November 16–February 13 at the Skirball Cultural Center in Los Angeles ([www.skirball.org](http://www.skirball.org)), or from March 11–July 31 at The Jewish Museum in Kalman’s hometown ([www.thejewishmuseum.org](http://www.thejewishmuseum.org)).

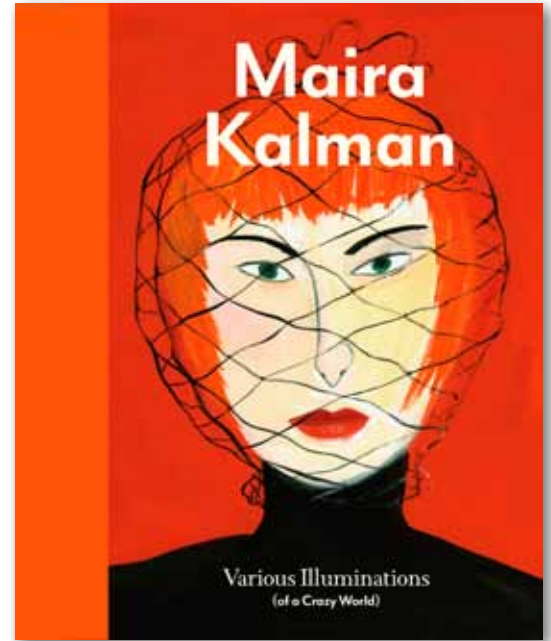


—Anna Nair

Self-portrait With Pete



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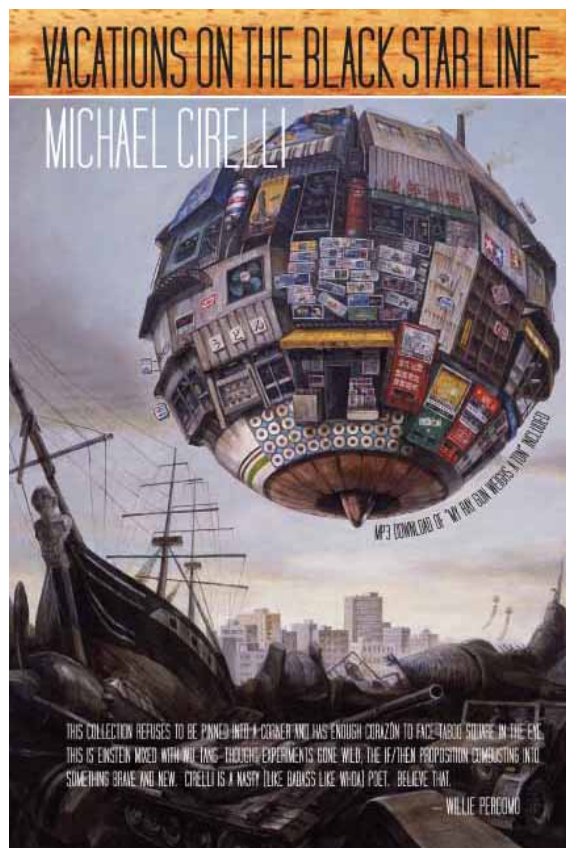
4

1. Crosstown
2. Book Cover
3. Susan
4. Snickers

**Tawk**

by Michael Cirelli

You know, when you talk,  
 but if you're from where I'm from  
 you may be "tawking,"  
 and depending on who you're  
 tawking to, and where they're from:  
 which bend of road  
 or angle of sun or moon-  
 light hits the dark room  
 of throat, informs  
 the way they say what they say,  
 which side of lip  
 the words plummet from or how tongue  
 strings 'em together chops  
 'em screws 'em,  
 how Mona is from a below  
 place where the speakers  
 speak like they're pulling up  
 word anchors from the deepest  
 depths of Mouf, or in some parts  
 more salt, and others more peppa:  
 whether cayenne or corn—  
 I'm in love with a boy  
 from East Oakland whose word is  
 stretched longer than  
 twelve hearses,  
 and his Dickies are starched.  
 In Texas, it is the vibration of  
 the dinner bell, in Kansas  
 something different.  
 In New Yawk, Nueva Yol,  
 Brooklawn-Vietnawm,  
 where the tongues pulse like  
 marquees, talk keeps the lights on!  
 When T-Pain dissected  
 the tone of Flux  
 Capacitor, of E.T.'s grand  
 piano, and named his album  
*Rappa Ternt Sanga*, he wasn't being  
 ignorant, or ignant at that, wasn't bad  
 at spelling (maybe bad  
 at rapping which is why  
 he turned singer), but he was



accounting for the texture of the dirt  
 in his teef. He was showing it off  
 in his smile. This makes sense to me.  
 Because I want everyone  
 to see the Rhode Island in my elbow.  
 I want everyone to know  
 I was born in a kawfee mug  
 floating down Narrangansett Bay  
 and raised by a Lion.  
 And by kawfee mug I mean:  
 I was born in an alphabet that left its R  
 on the dressa—and by Narrangansett Bay  
 I mean: an estuary flowing with wrenches  
 and ratchets and uniforms—and by Lion:  
 I mean my mother, who's been serving  
 breakfast to regulars since 1975  
 (when I showed up),  
 and to this day they still come to see  
 her, my ma  
 who tawks to each and every one  
 of them cuz she's *gotta hotta-gold*.

From *Vacations on the Black Star Line* by Michael Cirelli, Hanging Loose Press 2010, [www.hangingloosepress.com](http://www.hangingloosepress.com). Reprinted with permission. All rights reserved.

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**A Grim Place for Ponies**  
*South Pole Expedition, 1910*  
by Elizabeth Bradfield

The men wrap burlap over splitting hooves  
and rig wide shoes to fool the ice. The men  
fill diaries with haunch and hoof,  
quirks and favorites. With frostbit hands  
the men brush their ponies twice daily.  
Stroke and groom.

*Punch, Nobby, Guts, Blücher, Blossom,  
Jimmy Pigg, Weary Willie, Uncle Bill*

Nightly, the men hack shelters in snow  
to protect them. Which are nightly  
bucked down  
then rebuilt as tents fray.

*I must say that the abandoning of the ponies  
was the one thing that had never entered my head.  
Their implicit trust in us was touching to behold.*

Misplaced, mis-engineered and miscast  
as steeds for these knights—or so  
the men imagine themselves, trudging  
toward a goal found only by magic,  
lodestone bowing to earth’s nadir—

it’s the ponies that pull this tale,  
make them blusterers attendants:

*The poor beast was barely able to struggle out  
of the holes it made as it plunged forward.*

Choose only white ones, Scott ordered.  
But what do ponies know of Empire and the National  
Effort? Of stiff upper lip and steely jaw?

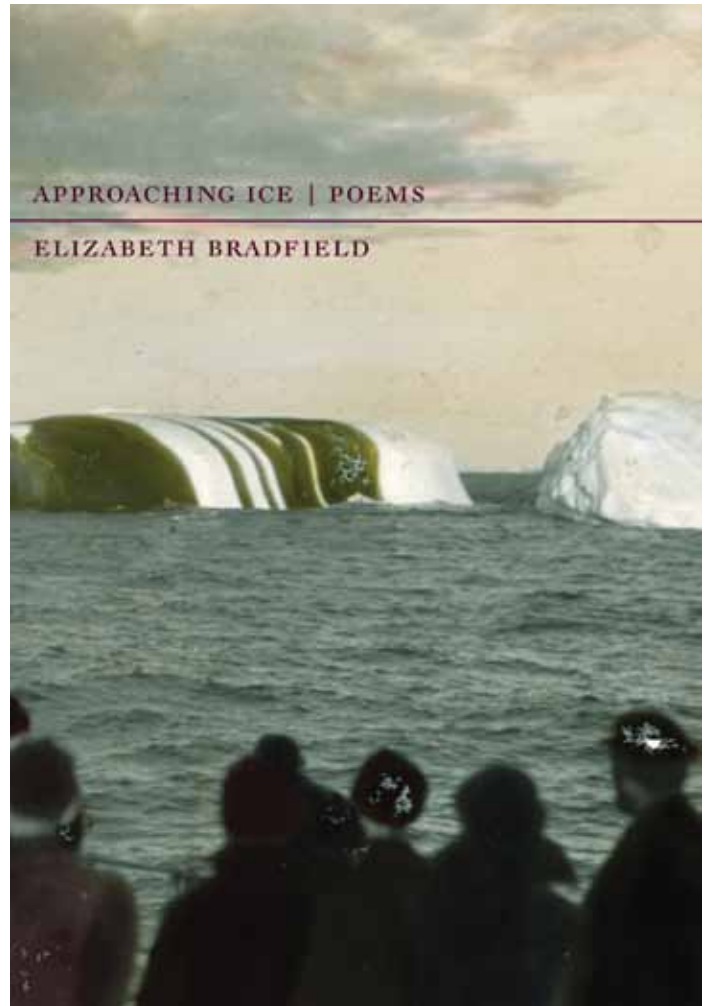
*Guts himself had gone, and a dark streak of water along  
showed the place where the ice had opened under him.*

Braided tails brittle with ice. Tack tattering  
in katabatic winds. Ideas of care were rent.

*Poor trustful creatures! Getting the pick I struck  
where Titus told me.*

Feed bag now lining boots. Flank meat  
for stew. A mound of snow  
blown over the remains.

poetry



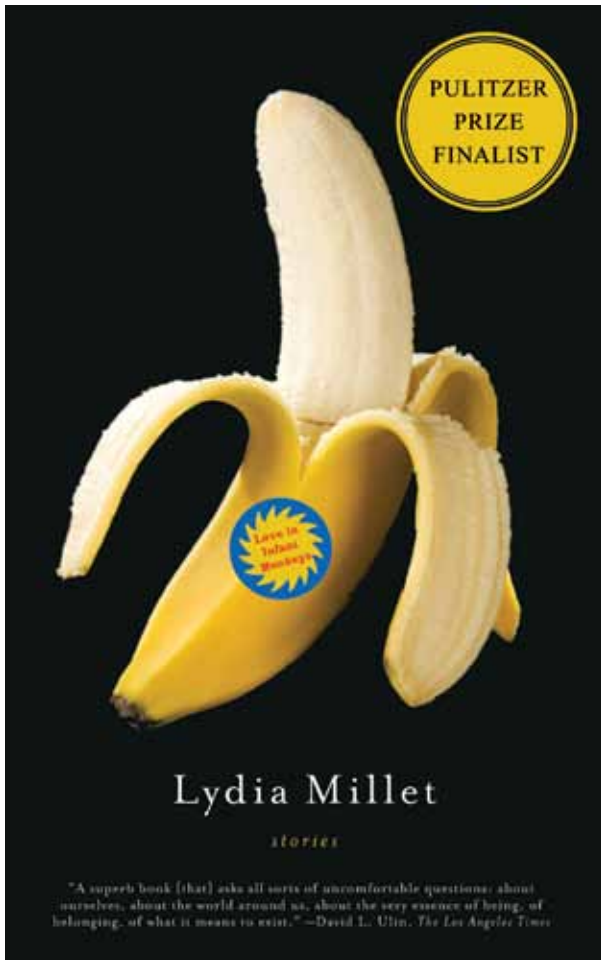
Italicized phrases are from Apsley Cherry-Garrard’s *The Worst Journey in the World*, Carrol & Graf 1922. Excerpt from *Approaching Ice: Poems* by Elizabeth Bradfield, Persea Books 2010, [www.perseabooks.com](http://www.perseabooks.com). Reprinted with permission. All rights reserved.

**Love in Infant Monkeys: Stories**

by Lydia Millet

Soft Skull Press

www.softskull.com



The author of six novels, most recently *How the Dead Dream*, Lydia Millet has charted new territory in her first short story collection, *Love in Infant Monkeys* [which was a finalist for this year's Pulitzer Prize for Fiction]. Drawing on an eclectic set of celebrities that includes Thomas Edison, Jimmy Carter, Madonna, and Sharon Stone, the stories take a factual nugget from their lives and weave fictional musings around them that are in turn hilarious, taunting, and achingly beautiful.

Each tale reduces the celebrity's public persona to a level of ordinariness by focusing on a specific, mundane event involving an encounter with an animal. The interaction between animal and human is a foil to examine larger issues of love, cruelty, and death. Whether wild creatures, domestic pets, or captives, the animals all ultimately provide insight into the fallibility and faults of the human species.

Some interactions are transient and violent, as in "Sexing the Pheasant," which places Madonna in the English countryside on a shooting expedition. Here she has time to muse about her own self-importance as she tries to assuage her boredom and complete lack of interest in her human companions, whom she considers beneath her. Madonna's self-obsession is highlighted not through human interaction, but through an interior monologue about the dying pheasant she has just shot: "She should step on its little head and crunch it. But the boots were Prada."

Other encounters are full of deeply committed love, as in "Tesla and Wife," where the main character, once the toast of *Time* magazine, spends solitary days in his room in the

Hotel New Yorker devoted to his pigeons: "He called the pigeons his friends. 'His most sincere friends,' as he said." This pure and devoted love is in stark contrast to the violent relationship that his cleaning lady, who is in love with him, has with her husband. While each story features a very different type of character and scene, in the end they all employ animals not merely as devices to help crystallize a human's capacity for love and cruelty, but also to show that the animal kingdom is far superior in its ability to give respect, even in the face of death.

For all her virtues as a storyteller, Millet's collection is disappointing and frustrating because she insists on endings that are overly vague and unresolved. Despite this, her imaginings linger for their beauty and for the fact that although the human protagonists are often painted harshly, the reader is never allowed to judge but is instead brought back again and again to the potential of his own shame and human imperfection.

—Maureen Sullivan, [www.internetreviewofbooks.com](http://www.internetreviewofbooks.com)

## Snaketown

by Kathleen Wakefield

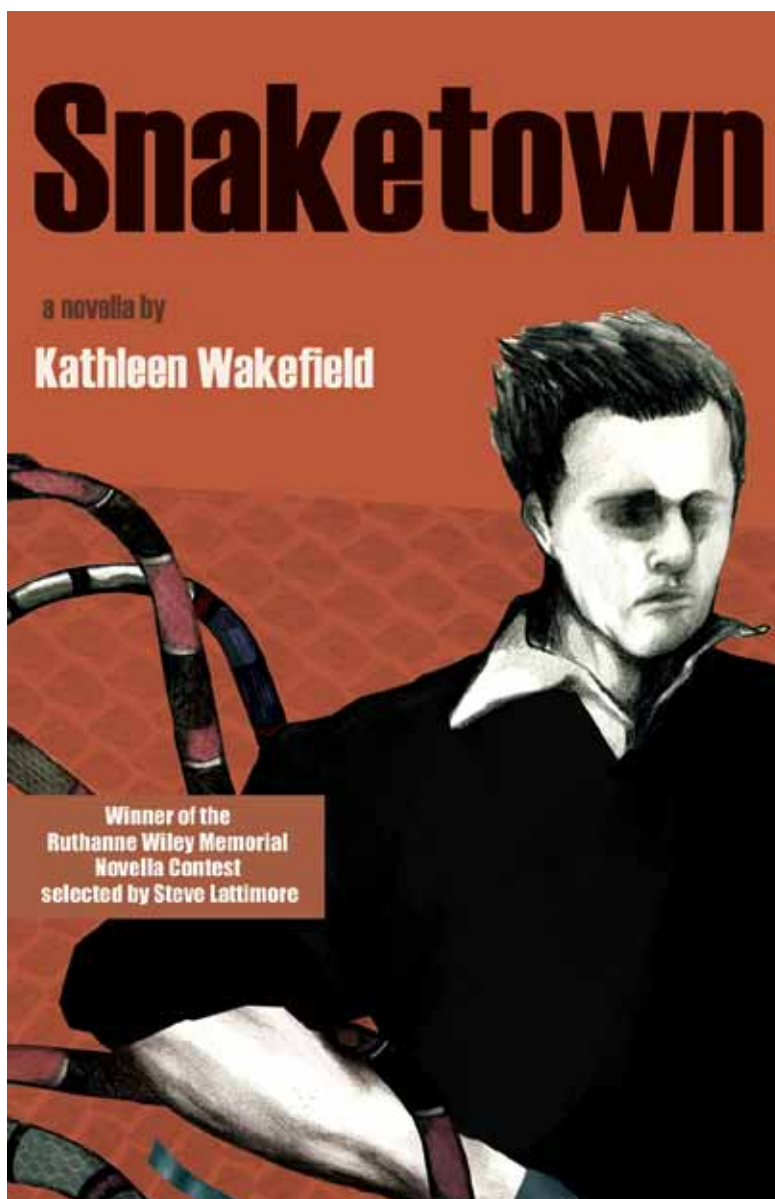
Cleveland State University Poetry Center  
www.csuohio.edu/poetrycenter

The short chapters of Kathleen Wakefield's *Snaketown* read like a series of microscope slides. Ostensibly the story of a family's search for a missing child, the novella also serves as a naturalist study of life in off-the-grid rural America. On every page, the author examines the relationship between setting and character, between the barren landscape of a largely abandoned mining town and its denizens, and, ultimately, between the world and humanity.

*Snaketown* begins with the disappearance of Caytas Buck, the youngest child of the Sibel clan, an allegedly inbred family scraping by on government handouts and odd jobs in their own little closed-in corner of the universe. "They seem confined within boundaries," Wakefield writes of the Sibels in the precise diction of a sociologist or anthropologist, "as if on an island where only certain things grow, other things three-toed instead of five, winged instead of gilled, the Sibels moving within a range of their own isolation, their own limitations, the roads narrowing, the slant of the sun, their valley, their bend of the river, hogbacks, Mingus Mountain." Even the disappearance of Caytas does little to bring the family out of their isolation as a mix of destitution, alcoholism, religion, and (curiously) pride keeps them from interacting with the outside world. Indeed, one thing that makes *Snaketown* so enchanting is Wakefield's uncanny ability to move seamlessly from the perspective of the Sibels to that of outsiders, thus giving her readers a complex, layered vision of the family and its tragic relationship with the world at large.

To describe the novella solely as a naturalist study, however, is to do it somewhat of an injustice. While the first two-thirds of the book linger largely (and poetically) on the Sibels and their history in relation to the town, the last third of the book sees the narrative morph into something of a page-turner, with the Sibels and the local sheriff racing against the clock and each other to discover what really happened to the missing Caytas. Blending hints of John Steinbeck and *Deliverance*, *Snaketown* is that rare gem of a book that is both poetic and gripping—not necessarily a "fun" read, but certainly thought-provoking, heartfelt, and compelling.

—Marc Schuster, [www.smallpressreviews.wordpress.com](http://www.smallpressreviews.wordpress.com)



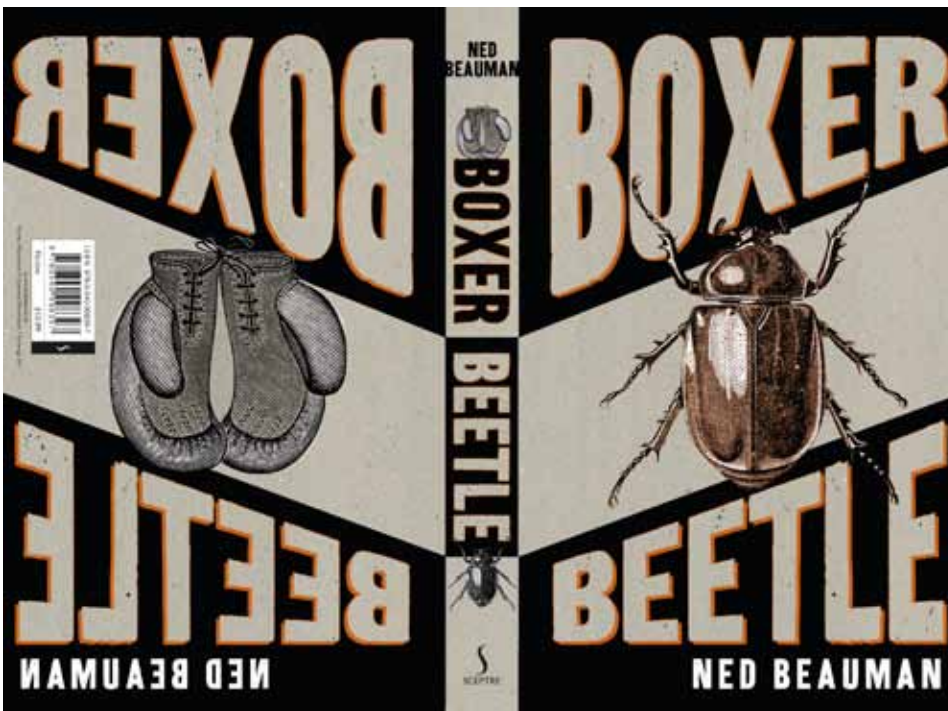
**Boxer, Beetle**  
by Ned Beaman

Sceptre Publishing  
www.hodder.co.uk

**K**evin Broom is a Nazi memorabilia collector and an awkward sufferer of trimethylaminuria, an illness that causes him to smell strongly of fish all of the time. Seth “Sinner” Roach is a pre-WWII Jewish boxer, short, nine-toed, alcoholic, and the best fighter in England. Philip Erskine is a collector of beetles, a devout follower of eugenics, and a bumbling and incompetent fascist who is mostly deplorable, except that you feel some mild pity for him for being a bit pathetic—and he wants to conduct tests on the one-of-a-kind Sinner.

As Kevin deals with an alarming beetle-related kidnapping in the present, he pieces together how Sinner and Erskine, 70 years before, have brought him to the point where a graceless shut-in like himself has to deal with a gun-wielding member of a

long-dead Nazi society. The narrative runs smoothly from Kevin’s present-day machinations to the remarkably gritty past of Erskine and Sinner, and it surprised me completely as I generally avoid historical novels (it’s not something I’m proud of, but I am much more likely to read something set right this very moment than something pre-1990s, even though I grew up before that), yet I was much more excited reading their story than Kevin’s. Which isn’t to say that Kevin’s thread wasn’t interesting—of course it was, this whole book is great—but perhaps I learned a Valuable Lesson About Reading: i.e., that I should stop being fussy about stories set before the glory times of *New Kids On The Block*.



Ned Beaman manages to deal with the serious—anti-Semitism, eugenics, fascists—yet produce a smart book that manages to completely engage by virtue of its characters. From Sinner (small yet alarmingly intimidating even in paper form) and poor inept Philip Erskine to foul-mouthed pre-teen fibber Millicent Bruiseland and sarcastic social darling Evelyn Erskine, everyone is wonderfully drawn and fantastically entertaining. Even London itself, and the buildings we visit, are as alive as the people, with Erskine’s family home Claramore a frightening place full of oversized appliances that may electrocute anyone unlucky enough to be existing nearby.

*Boxer, Beetle* is a brilliant, fun-in-a-dirty-way read by someone who has the nerve to be youthful and beardy and intelligent. It’s written in such an immediate, realistic style—despite the level of farce, Beaman doesn’t hold back on the stark violence of the era—that sometimes I had to remind myself in the ’30s-set scenes that it was just a well-researched novel and not a well-told historical document. With jokes.

—Fiona, [www.read-watch-listen.blogspot.com](http://www.read-watch-listen.blogspot.com)



An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris  
by Georges Perec (translated by Marc Lowenthal)

Wakefield Press  
www.wakefieldpress.com

This is the third book from Wakefield Press: It presents a full translation of Georges Perec's *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris*. At 55 pages, it is short enough for me to read on the brief flight from Norfolk, Virginia, to Baltimore, though it's a book that demands re-reading.

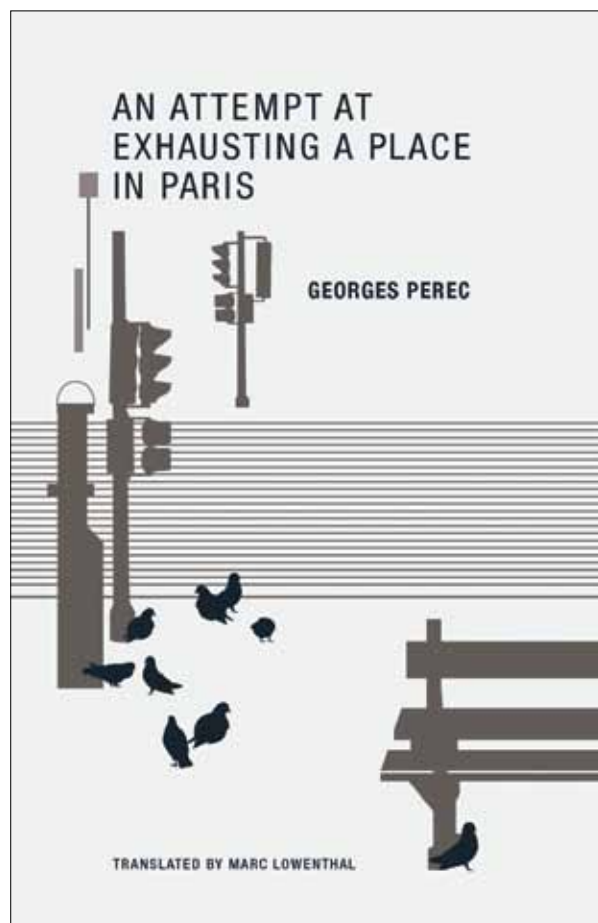
As the length suggests, this is a self-consciously minor work; it might even be considered an investigation in boredom. Perec chose a place in Paris—Place Saint-Sulpice—and visited it nine times from the 18th to the 20th of October, 1974: four times the first day, less on the following ones, attempting to write down everything he saw. The results are this book.

There is nothing particularly remarkable about the location, and in his introduction Perec makes clear his intention not to write about Saint-Sulpice's notable features. Rather, Perec was attempting to find something interesting in the ordinary, a project that he'd soon expand (restricting the span of time but increasing the space to an entire building) into *Life: A User's Manual*.

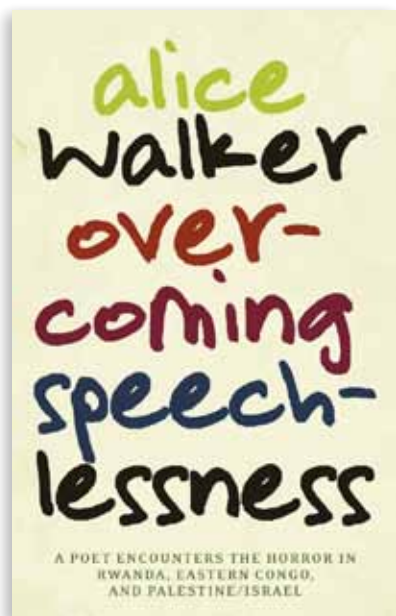
This is a personal exercise, and because it follows his attempts over time it feels very much like a series of notes: The reader observes the observer and how he begins to notice things. Perec starts his first session by writing down all the text that he can see, then moves on to different sorts of categories ("fleeting slogans," "ground," "trajectories," "colors"). Things start quickly—he's trying to get everything down—then there's a slowing as he tries to note what changes over time. For a while he's preoccupied with the many buses that pass through the square, then he gets bored and realizes that he can describe a bus not simply by the number of its route or where it's going but by how full it is. It's a tiny moment of revelation, of looking at something ordinary long enough to see something new in it.

Perec's project is a generative one, of course. Reading it I found myself thinking most often of Daniel Spoerri's work, first his "snare paintings," where he'd glue down the detritus of a meal to the table and exhibit it on the wall, and later his literary equivalent, *An Anecdoted Topography of Chance*, mentioned in Marc Lowenthal's very nice translator's note. In both, Spoerri was attempting to create meaning from trash. *An Anecdoted Topography* uses trash on a table to generate narrative, albeit a narrative more personal than Perec's because the trash itself was personal, providing inherent details about how the trash got on the table, where the trash was from. Lowenthal also mentions Joe Brainard's *I Remember*, another generative exercise that relies on the personal. What Perec does in *An Attempt* might be something trickier: He's trying to make an utterly anonymous public space personal. It's a difficult job. Ultimately this is more of a record of Perec's time in Place Saint-Sulpice over three days than a depiction of the place. Perec isn't describing the square, he's exhausting it (as well as himself), and by the end he clearly wants to go home. This is a lonely book.

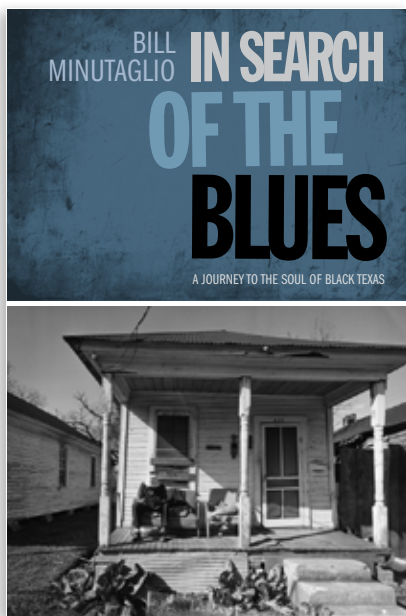
Lowenthal's translator's note helpfully explains the text without lapsing into the overly academic, which is the kind of attention to detail that is important and makes Wakefield's work worth following. I'm particularly interested to see how their forthcoming volume *The Hierarchies of Cuckoldry and Bankruptcy* by Charles Fourier turns out, but that will be next year.



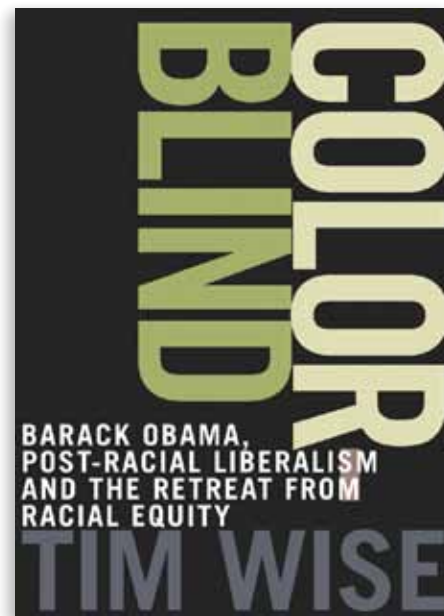
—Dan Visel, [www.withhiddennoise.net](http://www.withhiddennoise.net)



**Overcoming Speechlessness: A Poet Encounters the Horror in Rwanda, Eastern Congo, and Palestine/Israel** by Alice Walker, Seven Stories Press, [www.seven-stories.com](http://www.seven-stories.com). Alice Walker visited Rwanda and the eastern Congo in 2006, then the Gaza Strip in 2009. What she discovered often exceeded language, with victims rendered mute by virtue of relentless tragedy. In this brief but pointed collection of essays, Walker bears witness to the devastation as only a poet can.



**In Search of the Blues: A Journey to the Soul of Black Texas** by Bill Minutaglio, University of Texas Press, [www.utexas.edu/utpress](http://www.utexas.edu/utpress). When Minutaglio—a white, Italian American from New York City—first began writing for local Texas newspapers in the '70s, there wasn't much reporting being done on the black Texas beat. This diverse collection of essays gathers together the best of his award-winning writing about the African American soul of the Lone Star State.



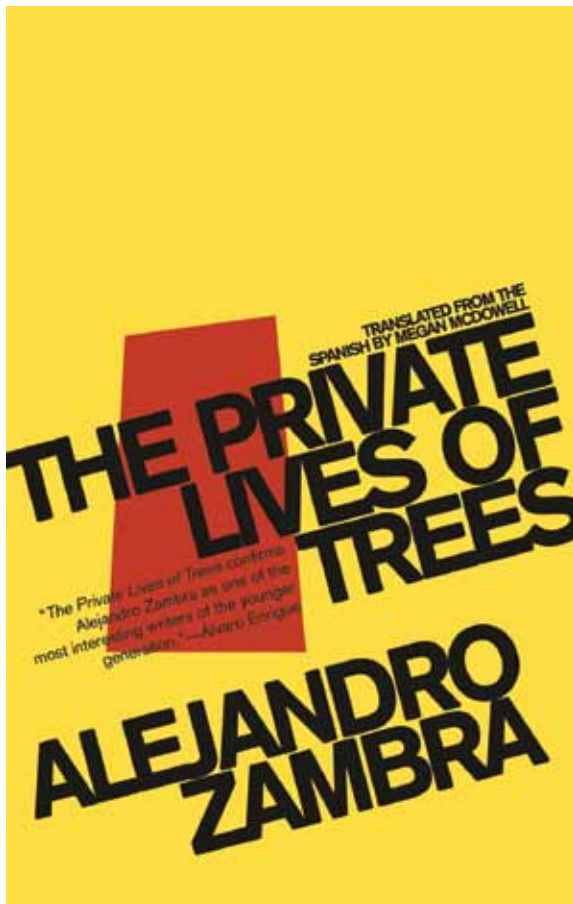
**Colorblind: The Rise of Post-Racial Politics and the Retreat from Racial Equity** by Tim Wise, City Lights Publishers, [www.citylights.com](http://www.citylights.com). The author of *White Like Me* returns with the timely and provocative *Colorblind*, examining the ongoing racial disparities in all aspects of American life in the age of Obama. Wise convincingly argues that by turning a colorblind eye, we not only fail to achieve equality but in fact worsen racial injustice.

## THE DOCK BOOKSHOP

Owned by sisters Donna and Donya Craddock, the Dock Bookshop is the largest African American owned bookstore in Dallas-Fort Worth and the second largest in the whole of Texas. And they have an equally big goal: promoting both the literary arts and literacy. “I can’t have literary arts—which is the written word, somebody’s artistic expression—without literacy.” Donya says. “We have to constantly cultivate new readers.” And that’s just what the Craddock

sisters are doing, in multi-lingual fashion. In addition to boys and girls reading groups and after-school history programs, the Dock offers a Uhuru summer camp where kids can learn Swahili. But they’re not just about the kids. Recently hosted celebrity authors include “Foxy” Pam Grier and Ladies Love Cool James. 6637 Meadowbrook Dr., Fort Worth, 817.457.5700, [www.thedock-bookshop.com](http://www.thedock-bookshop.com), [www.dockpages.com](http://www.dockpages.com).

—Yolanda Higgins



## The Private Lives of Trees

by Alejandro Zambra  
translated by Megan McDowell

Open Letter  
[www.openletterbooks.org](http://www.openletterbooks.org)



*Alejandro Zambra is the Gen X hotshot of the Chilean literary scene, and you'll see why when you read The Private Lives of Trees, recently translated into English by Megan McDowell. We were so enthralled with*

*this 98-page gem that we wanted to learn more—so we turned to McDowell for her thoughts on the book.*

Allow me to make a generalization: Much of the contemporary literature that moves us today revolves around the idea of The Futile Search. A maximalist approach to this theme is a sprawling, detail and dead-end riddled quest for something that is always just out of reach (think Pynchon, think Wallace). A minimalist take is a smaller, domestic, more quotidian tale,

where the tragedy is implied, shadowed, always just beyond the superficial trappings of modern life. Two Chilean writers are exemplary of these extremes: Roberto Bolaño of the former, Alejandro Zambra of the latter. And that's my last mention of Bolaño.

As a translator/reader, I was drawn to Zambra's writing by the mix of familiarity and surprise that his work holds, a kind of honesty that is both brutal and tender. Zambra writes like someone you know might write, or like you might write if you could strip away all the excess information and get right to the core, or lack thereof, of a middle-class, comfortable existence in the midst of a violent and confusing world. *The Private Lives of Trees* is a bonsai-book in which every carefully crafted sentence marks you, leaving a wake of awareness behind it. To say that nothing actually *happens* in the book is technically true, but not faithful to Zambra's achievement: the creation of an interstitial book that spotlights the absurdity of a search for meaning with concision and pathos.

Few Latin American writers have the chance to see their books translated into English concurrently with their publication in Spanish, but Zambra's first two novels have had that honor. His first novel, *Bonsai*, was the winner of Chile's Literary Critics award for Best Novel in 2006, and the English translation by Carolina de Robertis was a finalist for the Best Translated Book award in 2009. The fact that presses like Melville House and Open Letter exist and are willing to take a chance on a young writer like Zambra is a boon to English-speaking readers, and Zambra in English is a gift I hope they will take advantage of.

—Megan McDowell

**T**HE WEEK BEFORE MY SCUBA CERTIFICATION I read *Shark Girl*. My luck. The image of sharks lingered in my mind the whole time I was on the boat preparing to dive.

I wasn't that afraid. Well, kinda. I began to think about the movie I watched about a month before that had scared me out of my mind. Yes, it had to do with the ocean. Yes, it had to do with scuba divers. And yes, it was about sharks. It was the one and only *Jaws*.

I'm glad to say that despite my fears, I passed my test and am now a certified scuba diver. But back to the book, and to the main character, Jane, who was *really* brave.

Jane gets in an accident where a shark attacks her and bites her arm. Her brother manages to apply a tourniquet to prevent blood loss and gets her to the hospital. When she wakes up, her arm has been amputated. I don't want to share all the details, but Jane is forced to live either with no arm, or with a fake (prosthetic) arm.

She is embarrassed to go to school, as a high-schooler would be. She wonders if boys will like her with an artificial arm. But she is brave and joins clubs, volunteers at the hospital, and meets a lot of new people with problems like her.

I'm not sure about you, but I have these things I call "book moods." The name kind of explains itself. I can be in a really serious book mood, or a comic book/manga mood (those are fun), or I can also have a feel good book mood when I want to read a book that is just good, fun, and has some depth or meaning. *Shark Girl* is a feel good book.

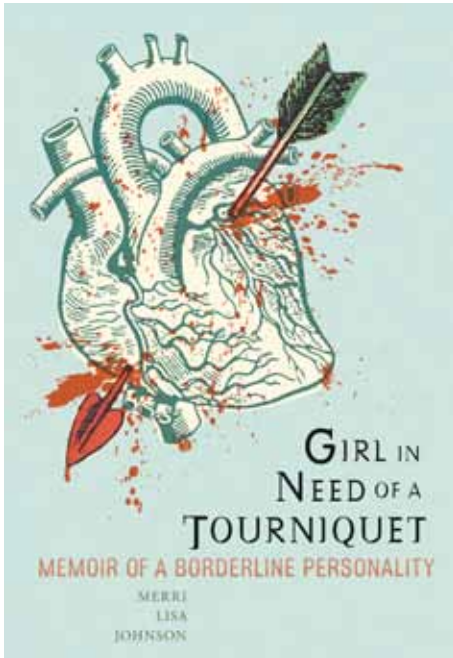
I read it and liked it. It is written in the style of the main character, Jane, who writes in a kind of weird poem-diary format. It takes a few chapters to get used to how the pages are set up, but then you'll like the style.

In our lives, we all have imperfections. Jane's imperfection is really visible, while maybe yours and mine aren't. But, how we deal with them and still have a good life is what makes us, well ... us, right?

— Julia Basile, age 12, [www.theipadkids.com](http://www.theipadkids.com)



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### BORDERLINE PROSE

The cited soundtrack to *Girl in Need of a Tourniquet* is the soundtrack to my own coming out in the early '90s, minus the borderline personality disorder. It is the shaved-headed power of Sinéad O'Connor, the burning passion of Lisa “Left Eye” Lopes, the bi-ambiguity of Ani DiFranco, and the Juliette-Lewis-in-a-mental-hospital video drama of Melissa Etheridge. An angst-filled mix-tape of a story, Johnson’s memoir serves as a beautifully crafted prose poem about unrequited love, sexual identity before *The L Word*, and mental illness, begging the question of where sane (or youth and a lack of consequential thinking) ends and crazy begins.

—Kathy Wise

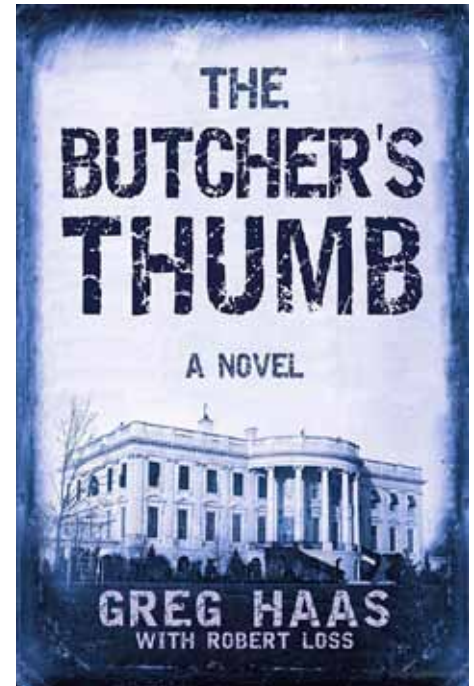
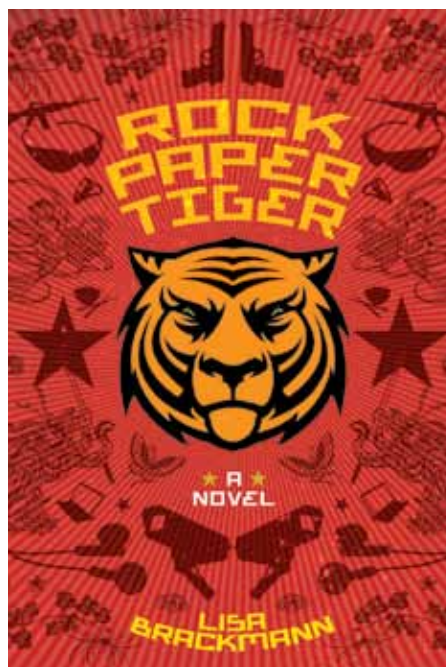
*Girl in Need of a Tourniquet: Memoir of a Borderline Personality* by Merri Lisa Johnson, Seal 2010, [www.sealpress.com](http://www.sealpress.com).

### GAME ON

Lisa Brackmann’s debut novel *Rock, Paper, Tiger* moves like a thinking reader’s *Da Vinci Code*. Ellie Cooper, the Iraq vet protagonist of *Rock, Paper, Tiger*, stumbles through China’s underground art scene, encounters nefarious and variously aligned agents, flashes back to Abu Ghraib-like prisoner torture, and gets caught up in an avatar adventure game—a seemingly convoluted journey that Brackmann weaves together seamlessly, providing more detail on the subjects and locations than *Frommer’s Beijing*. Her everywoman Jason Bourne limps through China and away from her pursuers on a war-wounded leg, endearing herself as a believable heroine who finds herself unexpectedly redeemed by adventure’s end.

—Anna Nair

*Rock, Paper, Tiger* by Lisa Brackmann, Soho Press 2010, [www.sohopress.com](http://www.sohopress.com).



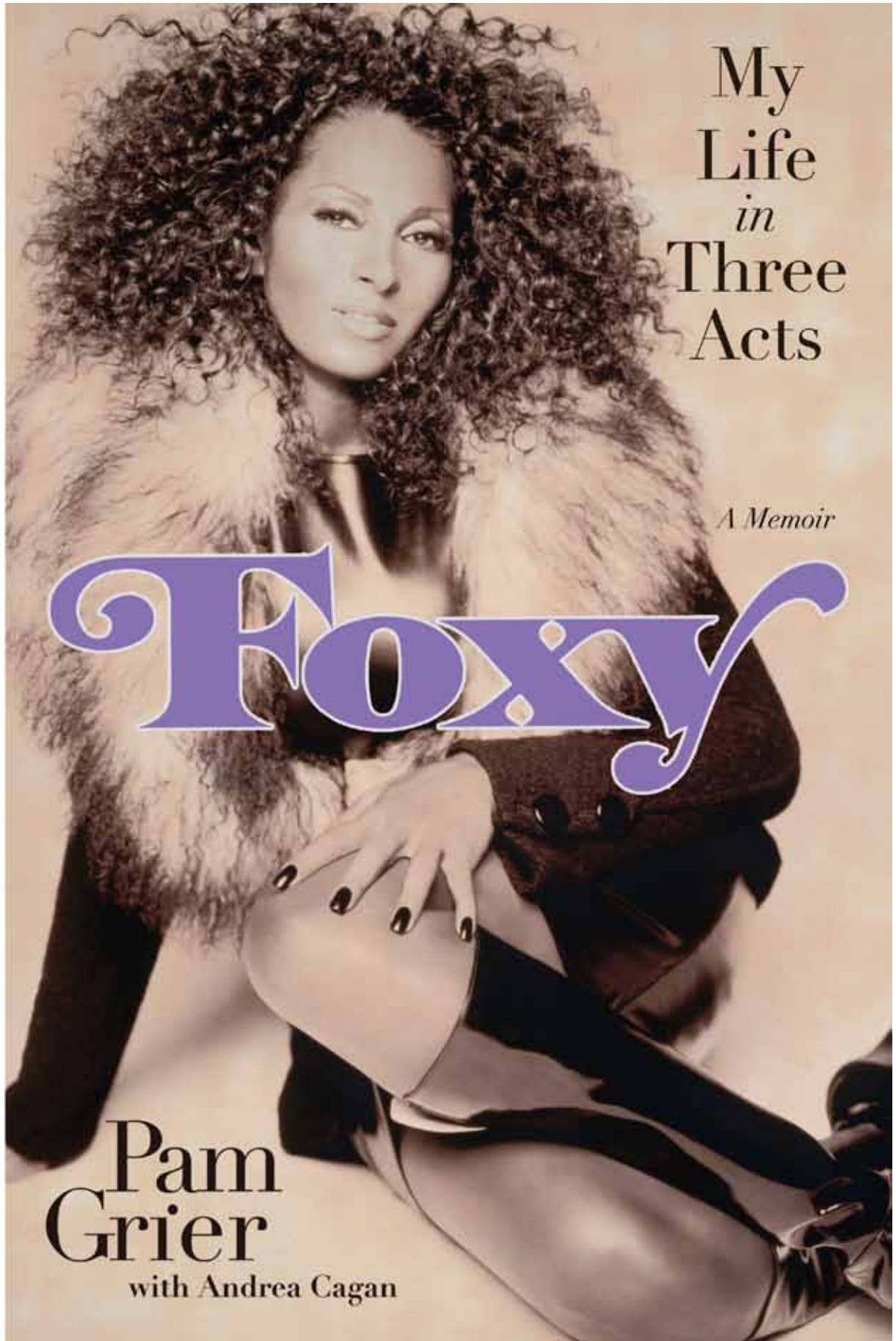
### POLITICAL INSIDER

Packed with political intrigue, back room barbers, rogue operatives, and Republican idealism, *The Butcher’s Thumb* is a fast-paced political thriller taken from the headlines of the 2000 and 2004 elections. Cliché? Not in the hands of veteran campaign consultant Greg Haas, who revisits the era of the hanging chad with an eye toward dastardly conspiracies involving terrorist plots and unsavory politicians. For those who like their spies Russian, their martinis shaken, and their heroes flawed with a dash of conscience, this entertaining and thought-provoking novel gets a big thumbs-up.

—Ben Minton

*The Butcher’s Thumb* by Greg Haas with Robert Loss, iUniverse 2010, [www.iuniverse.com](http://www.iuniverse.com).

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My  
Life  
*in*  
Three  
Acts

*A Memoir*

Foxy

Pam  
Grier  
with Andrea Cagan

## Foxy: My Life in Three Acts

by Pam Grier  
Grand Central Publishing  
www.hatchettebookgroup.com

a gentleman answers the phone.  
“Hello?”  
“Hi, can I please speak with Pam Grier?”  
“Just a minute.” Strains of opera music can be heard in the background. About a minute goes by, then faint shouting can be heard in the distance.

“Pam!” There is a long pause. “Pam!” Another pause. “Pam!” Another long pause. “Hurry up!” There is the sound of a ranch house screen door closing, then the male voice returns to the telephone.

“She must be down at the barn with the horses. Let me go git her.” There is the sound of heavy boots crunching on gravel, traveling a distance.

A muffled voice can be heard through the telephone: “It’s the lady from the magazine.” There’s some shuffling. The phone is handed over. Then the voice I’ve been waiting for can be heard clearly over the line. Coffy. Foxy Brown. Sheba. Jackie Brown. Kit Porter.

It’s Pam Grier, baby.

And she’s got a new book—her first—documenting her famous relationships (from turning down Kareem Abdul-Jabbar’s marital ultimatum to the unique medical hazards of dating Richard Pryor), her miraculous recovery from cancer, her sexual abuse, her life growing up on the Colorado range, racism, resilience, and the extraordinary healing power of both horses and books.

We managed to catch up with her out in her barn, surrounded by said horses and rescue animals (“Come here, Zsa Zsa!”) just before she headed out on a cross-country trek with her nephew, all the way from her ranch in Colorado to Duke University, where he will be attending law school this fall. There can’t be much better than being dropped off on the steps of Duke Law by Auntie Foxy.

—Kathy Wise

### **Shelf Unbound: Is it true that you taught Richard Pryor how to read?**

**Grier:** I worked with him on his reading, but he did not completely learn under my watch. Through the light of his friends and family, he was learning to read phonetically. He wanted to read *War and Peace*, that was one of his life goals. He had a sixth grade education and he learned his scripts phonetically. But as talented as he was, learning to read was one of his greatest, greatest dreams.

That’s a personal dream for many people. To promote literacy, I encourage people to host book readings in their homes. Whether it’s my book *Foxy* or a book by Terry McMillan or another author, reading aloud brings books to life. I’ve read my book to several of my mom’s friends and I acted out the parts, giving a performance to these seniors who were waiting for the audio book. And it was a thrill just to see them enjoy my reading to them. I tell people read to seniors. Read to children. Read aloud.

### **Shelf: Your book tour has really focused on community bookstores as opposed to big box stores. Is that intentional?**

**Grier:** I want to keep our community bookstores open. Afri-Ware [www.afriware.net] is a wonderful

store in Chicago, then there's The Dock Bookshop [www.shop.dockbooks.com] in Fort Worth, Texas, and we have Eso Won [www.esowonbookstore.com] in Los Angeles. They are using their bookstores not only as churches on Sunday and as daycare, but they are supporting their communities and promoting literacy. The Dock even offers a Uhuru summer camp where children can learn Swahili.

So I see our communities knowing where we need to go, and we're trying to fill in the gaps. People say we're in a recession. I say, "So?" African Americans have understood squeezing a dime for the last 400 years. So we understand recession. We're going to make it through this.

**Shelf:** *Many people don't realize that you grew up in Colorado, riding the range on horseback. Do you think that experience helped shape your sense of community?*

**Grier:** My grandfather would come home from a fishing trip with buckets of trout and share it with the neighborhood. Deer from the hunt or vegetables from the garden, we shared. We didn't have access to hospitals. If an ambulance knew where it was going, it wouldn't show up in a black community. Emergency rooms? No, we got fixed in someone's kitchen. We got taped up, broken bones set, tooth pulled, all in someone's kitchen. My mama was always taking care of someone in her kitchen, all of the nurses were. "Let's go see Miss Davis," they'd say, and you'd get your tooth pulled or your eye fixed or scab closed up. We took care of each other. And now all of a sudden we got so wealthy we don't need each other?

Communities are starting to come together again and stand up for themselves. I have seen it happen for myself. It has been the big hug of healing story. That's why I had to get out and write my book and be enriched by my community.



**Shelf:** *So what did you think when Quentin Tarantino told you he was writing a movie for you?*

**Grier:** I thought, Yeah right, you just want to get in my thong. Sure, okay, he's going to write about me, a movie. Yeah, okay, I heard that. He wants some, too.

So seven months later, what shows up in the mail but a yellow notice from the post office. I have an envelope, 44 cents due. I figure they're selling mattresses or something. Then the next day, here it is again. An envelope from L.A. with 44 cents due. Who doesn't have 44 cents for stamps? Go in your drawer, your pockets, find 44 cents. So I say okay, someone's persistent about

this 44 cents. So I taped the money to the sticker, they dropped off the envelope, and in the corner it says "Q. Tarantino." I opened it. I pulled out *Jackie Brown*.

There's a note: "Please read it, call and tell me what you think. Q. Tarantino." It says it's going to be low budget—he didn't have stamp money— I'm doing it for scale with a back end of beer. I start reading it. The character of Jackie Brown is all the way through. It's wonderful—look at the story, the scope, the twists and turns. It's fantastic. And it's been in the post office for three weeks?

It took him two years to write that movie. I didn't do anything to deserve that. He said, "Yes you did. You did theater. I saw *A Soldier's Story* at the Negro Ensemble Company the last year it was in existence in New York and I was moved. You did plays, the best and most difficult plays. You did *Fool for Love*, it's 90 minutes with no intermission. And in *Frankie and Johnny in the Claire de Lune* you're nude on stage. You did the most wonderful plays, and I decided I wanted people to see your talent."

I do a movie every 10 years if I'm lucky, but getting that film written by this incredible pop director of the world was something special.



**Shelf: Why did you decide to write Foxy?**

**Grier:** Before I wrote my memoir I read 20 books by others, from *The Legs Are the Last to Go* by Diahann Carroll to *The Measure of a Man* by Sidney Poitier. And, of course, I read *Stormy Weather*, Lena Horne’s memoir. They all have something very special to share. And I realized for me, for my legacy, I wanted to humanize that advertising poster, that placard, all of the enigmatic characters I have become associated with. I wanted to humanize myself.

I knew I made the right move writing the book when I went on the book tour and found that many men were purchasing the book and reading it not only because they have daughters, but they also confided in me their stories of abuse as children. And it is quite interesting because we are talking significant numbers of men who have suffered abuse from family members, which I had suffered and describe in my book.

I don’t know what the men were expecting when they bought the book—there are no pictures like in *Maxim* or *Playboy*, nothing even close. They say they just want to see the intimacy of my life. And the fact is that they’re not buying bass fishing magazines or car magazines, they’re buying my book and saying, “Now I don’t feel so alone.” I think when people share their healing and their knowledge, others are able to heal.

In the book you read about the first traumatic event I suffered at 18 and the one at 21 years old, from a family friend who was coming to “guide me.” That day that 300-pound man could have broken my neck. And I fought him off. I walked on back to my job at lunchtime with my clothing torn, my hair disheveled. Scratched and bruised and battered, but alive. That was the day that I guess I became Coffy and Foxy and Jackie Brown and any woman who wanted to survive. I fought for my life.

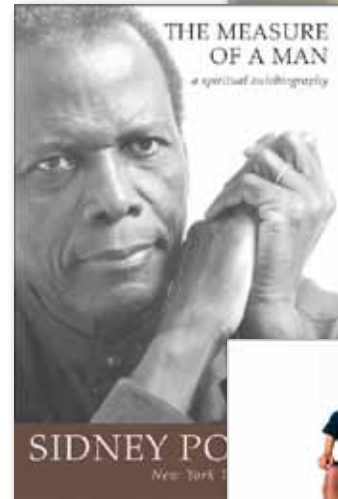
**Shelf: You write in the book that after the rape at age 6, “I found my only comfort zone was being alone and reading fantasy books like *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* and *Alice in Wonderland*. I liked nothing better than disappearing into my room and diving into a book that featured somebody else’s story and had nothing to do with me and my life.” What have books meant to you over the course of your life?**

**Grier:** Education and escapism. Continued education and self-improvement is so important for your self-esteem. I found from reading I could go off to a place where I could just be. I could talk, I could speak, I could be beautiful, I could wear beautiful dresses, I could be a little girl again. I could do things without judgment, without kids picking on me.

You know, in my mother’s generation, my mom was turned away from so many things she wanted to do. Whether it was ballet school or music school. Thank God my music teacher came to our neighborhood. She took the bus to teach me. After my test she said, “You are wonderful, I will come to you.” I couldn’t go to her school. She would take the bus and walk from the stop and my grandfather would take her home at night. But she was willing to come across town to teach me.

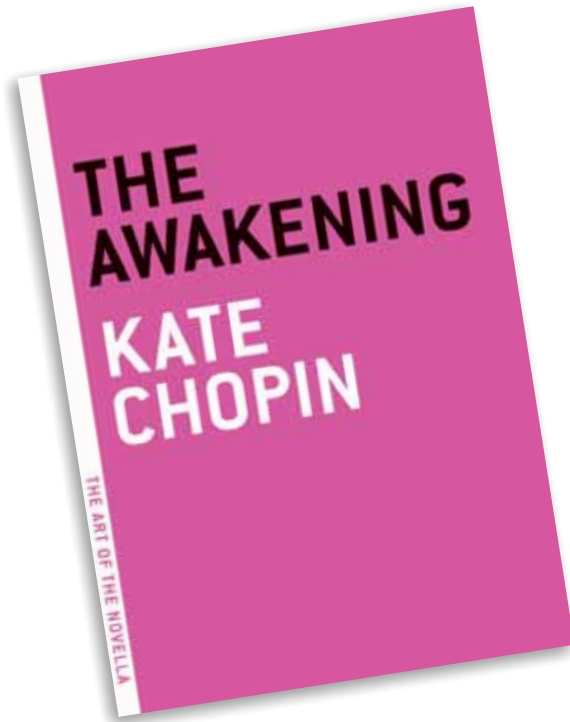
Young girls today don’t realize how difficult it was, even for my mother and grandmother and great-grandmother. They didn’t get to go to architectural school, they couldn’t get into universities. It was a time when women couldn’t vote or drive, and if you were a woman of color forget it. All those lost opportunities growing up. I endured what my mom had endured. How the women in my family struggled just to get what degree they could get. My mom wanted to be a doctor. My aunt, Foxy Brown, she wanted to be an architect. Those doors were closed to them.

When I was reading, I could fantasize about where I could go and what I could be and how I could look and who I could talk to. There would be music and sound and color. A child could use, as I did, their imagination, and that was a form of freedom. ■



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# LAST WORDS



**The Awakening**  
by Kate Chopin  
Melville House Publishing  
[www.melvillehouse.com](http://www.melvillehouse.com)

**e**xhaustion was pressing upon and overpowering her. “Good-by—because, I love you.” He did not know; he did not understand. He would never understand. Perhaps Doctor Mandalet would have understood her if she had seen him—but it was too late; the shore was far behind her, and her strength was gone.

She looked into the distance, and the old terror flamed up for an instant, then sank again. Edna heard her father’s voice and her sister Margaret’s. She heard the barking of an old dog that was chained to the sycamore tree. The spurs of the cavalry officer clanged as he walked across the porch. There was the hum of bees, and the musky odor of pinks filled the air.

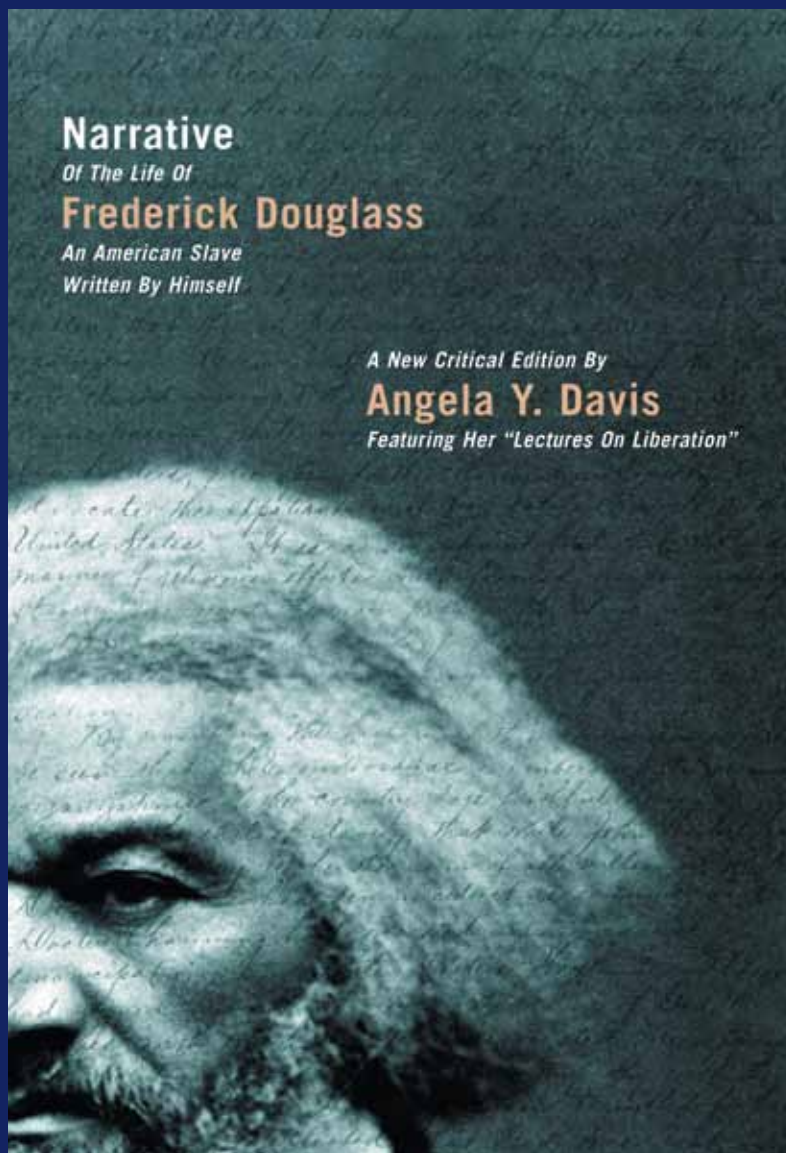
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**Angela Davis and Toni Morrison to Speak Together**  
at the New York Public Library on  
**Frederick Douglass: Literacy, Libraries and Liberation**

Join City Lights Publishers to celebrate the release  
of Angela Davis's new critical edition of  
*Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: An American Slave.*

Public conversation and book signing  
**WHEN: Wednesday, October 27, 2010**  
at 7:00PM

**WHERE: New York Public Library,**  
42nd Street, New York, NY  
Celeste Bartos Forum



Tickets are \$25 general admission and \$15 Library donors, seniors, and students with valid identification, and are available through by calling 1.888.71.TICKETS or <http://www.showclix.com>



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**SANDRA BENÍTEZ** is the author of four novels: *A Place Where the Sea Remembers* (Simon & Schuster, 1993), *Bitter Grounds* (Picador, 1998), *The Weight of All Things* (Hyperion, 2002), and *Night of the Radishes* (Hyperion, 2005).

**KATE BERNHEIMER** is the author of two novels and the children's book *The Girl in the Castle Inside the Museum*, a *Publishers Weekly* Best Book of the Year. She is also the editor of *Fairy Tale Review* and three anthologies, including the forthcoming *My Mother She Killed Me, My Father He Ate Me: Forty New Fairy Tales*.

**ELIZABETH BRADFIELD** is the author of *Interpretive Work*, which won the Audre Lorde Award for Lesbian Poetry and was a finalist for a Lambda Literary Award. As a naturalist, she has worked in Alaska and the Eastern Canadian Arctic. Her poems have appeared in *Atlantic Monthly*, *Poetry*, and other publications, and she is founder and co-editor of Broadsided Press.

**MICHAEL CIRELLI'S** first poetry collection, *Lobster with Ol' Dirty Bastard*, was a *New York Times* bestseller from an independent press and was featured in the "Debut Poets" issue of *Poets & Writers* magazine. He is the executive director of Urban Word NYC and has been featured on HBO's *Def Poetry Jam*.

**STEWART COHEN** has been recognized by both the advertising and photography communities for his extraordinary ability to shoot people and lifestyle moments. His motion and still assignments have taken him to 40 countries on all seven continents. Born and raised in Montreal, Canada, he now resides in Dallas with his wife Kimberley and their two daughters. *Identity* is the first publication from his self-founded Dream Editions Press.

**ADAM GALLARI** grew up on the outskirts of Manhattan and received an MFA from the University of California, Riverside. He currently lives by a train station in Exeter, England where he is pursuing a PhD, listening to train whistles blowing in the night, and working on a novel. *We Are Never as Beautiful as We Are Today* is his first book.

**PAUL HARDING** has an MFA from the Iowa Writers' Workshop. He has taught writing at Harvard and The University of Iowa, and he lives near Boston with his wife and two sons. *Tinkers*, his first novel, received the 2010 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction.

**STEVEN HELLER** is the co-chair of the MFA Designer as Author program and co-founder of the MFA in Design Criticism and MFA in Interaction Design programs at the School of Visual Arts, New York. For 33 years he was an art director at *The New York Times*, and currently writes the "Visuals" column for *The New York Times Book Review*. He is the author or editor of more than 130 books on design and popular culture,

including *Design Literacy* and *Design Disasters*.

**HAROLD JAFFE** is the author of 15 volumes of fiction, docufiction, and nonfiction, including *Jesus Coyote*, *15 Serial Killers*, *Beyond the Techno Cave*, *A Guerrilla's Guide to Post-Millennial Culture*, *Terror-dot-Gov*, *Mourning Crazy Horse*, and *Dos Indios*. He is editor in chief of *Fiction International*.

**BINNIE KLEIN** is a psychotherapist in private practice in New Haven, Connecticut, and a lecturer in the Department of Psychiatry at Yale University. She also hosts a weekly music and interview show on WPKN radio.

**BERNICE L. MCFADDEN** is the author of six critically acclaimed novels, including *Sugar* and *Nowhere Is a Place*, which was a *Washington Post* Best Fiction title for 2006. Her sophomore novel, *The Warmest December*, was praised by Nobel Prize-winning author Toni Morrison as "searing and expertly imagined." McFadden lives in Brooklyn, New York, where she is working on her next novel.

**MISCHA MERZ** has worked as a journalist and author of fiction and creative nonfiction since the mid-1980s. Her book *Bruising* was shortlisted for the Dobbie Award. In 2002, her essay "Body Blows: Sport and the Threat of Female Muscularity" was included in the Overland Lecture Series, presented at Trades Hall, and published in *Overland 166*. She is the 2001 Australian Amateur Boxing League women's welterweight champion.

**ROB ROBERGE** teaches writing at the Antioch University Los Angeles MFA in Creative Writing program, UC-Riverside's Palm Desert MFA program, and the UCLA Extension Writer's Program. His stories have been featured in *ZYZZYVA*, *Chelsea*, *Other Voices*, and *Alaska Quarterly Review*. He plays guitar and sings with several LA bands, including the punk pioneers The Urinals.

**DAVID THOMPSON** is better known online as the artist David 23. He is a musician, a painter, an audio engineer, and a cog in a corporate machine. *Lunchtime Lomography* is his first publication to display his photographic work.

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