

**you are here**  
the journal of creative geography

Volume 9 • Summer 2007

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Volume 9, Summer 2007

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On the cover: "Safe Self Storage" by Patricia Smith, ink on  
paper, 30" x 22" (large detail).

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## Editor's Note

Welcome to the ninth volume of *you are here: the journal of creative geography*. What you hold in your hands is actually our tenth 'expedition'—owing to the fact that we published two issues one year—and this is an apt word to describe the journey the publication has taken since our last edition. We set out in the fall to expand our base—wanting to extend our call to explore creative geography to new communities of artists and writers. The response was tremendous with nearly quadruple the number of submissions. As the poems, art, and prose rolled in, the piles on my office floor grew mountainous—leaving me to wonder how we would climb through them all. But even in our marathon reading sessions, our team of explorers found time to delight in the nearly 700 visual, written, and poetic stories about the places people visit, inhabit, and imagine.

One of my own delights in working on the journal for the past two years is seeing the connections between the many pieces we receive, including often quirky coincidences. For example, numerous pieces centered on Lake Michigan last year and we had a recent spate of work dealing with buses and bus stops. Only one piece from this latter category was among our final selections, a painting by Olivia Webster that was inspired by a letter from her cousin describing a bus stop in Israel. This piece serves as a center point on a continuum between two themes that emerged for this issue: navigating through unfamiliar terrain, in this case amidst the chaos of suicide bombings, and finding a deeper understanding of one's self and place through the small, familiar moments of everyday life.

Two poems by Ellen Goldstein bookend the thirteen selections for this issue. The first leads us into the uncharted waters that were once designated by mythical creatures on ancient maps—questioning the boundaries of our hearts and bodies. Patricia Smith's fantastical renderings also draw out psychological divisions, mapping the internal rooms of the psyche on our cover image. The organic, alien feel of Smith's drawings resonate well with the ancient fossils that serve as a touchstone in Celeste O'Dell's vignette, as her young character contemplates the vastness of eastern Oregon and an uncertain world. Walter Bargen's poem also dwells on the unmentionables of

our internal and external environments, while the final Goldstein poem and six haikus from Leslie Clark reveal different takes for our familiar pictures of the frontier West and colonial South.

Even when all the coordinates are charted, it is our personal connections to place that make maps meaningful—as Jörn Seemann's essay reminds us—and several selections search for these connections in more familiar grounds. Bárbara Renaud González's poignant portrayal of a family that has lost both land and love sets her on a search to recapture a little of both in the bar where her parents met, while Amy Halloran finds what she'd been looking for in her own hometown. Several pieces give different takes on what we can discover when we stop to witness our own stomping grounds—whether it be listening to conversations on top of Snake Hill, finding love—or at least tolerance—for a pesky rooster named Victor, or learning new vocabulary for the local landscape.

All of these works find creative answers to our fundamental question: "Where are you?" As the journal nears its tenth anniversary, we've been asking this same question of ourselves and reflecting on our next decade of publication. Like the selections in this issue, we continue to expand into new areas, while staying rooted in our familiar surroundings. We are charting our future with the guidance of a newly created board of directors that includes several past editors and are considering options for expanding our distribution in print and online. In order to thrive and grow in the next decade the journal requires increased financial support and we are working to broaden our subscription base and fundraising efforts.

We are continually grateful for the support of our readers and we hope you will enjoy this issue of *you are here*. We also hope you will consider continuing your support in the years to come either through a renewed subscription or financial contribution, and by sharing with us your own visions of creative geography.

—Shoshana Mayden  
Tucson, Arizona  
32.23N, 110.95W

## Here Be Dragons

Ellen Goldstein

What land have I stumbled into?  
My lips survey the edge of your jaw,  
measuring the coordinates of intent,  
the altitudes and angles of your body.

How do we triangulate this:  
my hands on the path of your spine,  
your breath ranging in my ear,  
the woman who waits for you at home?

There are property markers staked  
in straight lines, not determined  
by the shape of our desire, as if intimacy  
is a territory that can be claimed.

What atlas will warn me  
when I traverse the lines we plot  
between want and obligation;  
when I want to see you two days

in a row, show up on your doorstep  
unannounced, or wake up  
with you in the morning?  
What compass will lead me out

when I fall in love with the blackness  
of your hair and the light  
of our wanderings, when I lose  
even the stars in this wilderness?

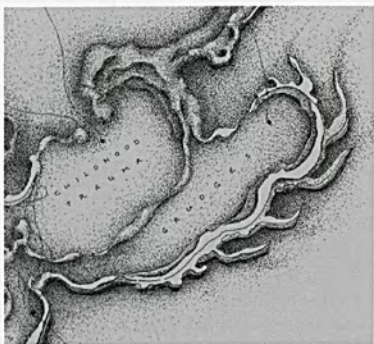
These are political borders—  
the kind partisans and refugees cross  
at midnight to enter forbidden countries,  
the blank places on the map.



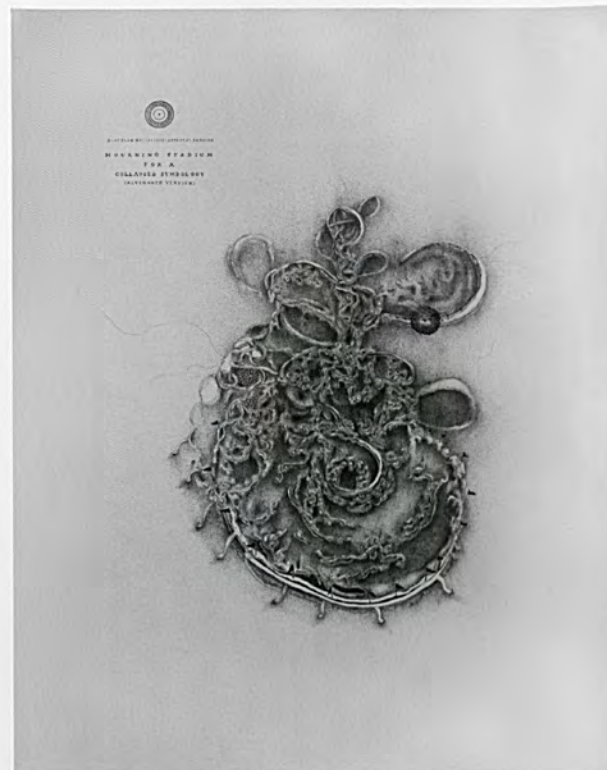
## Plot Plans

Patricia Smith

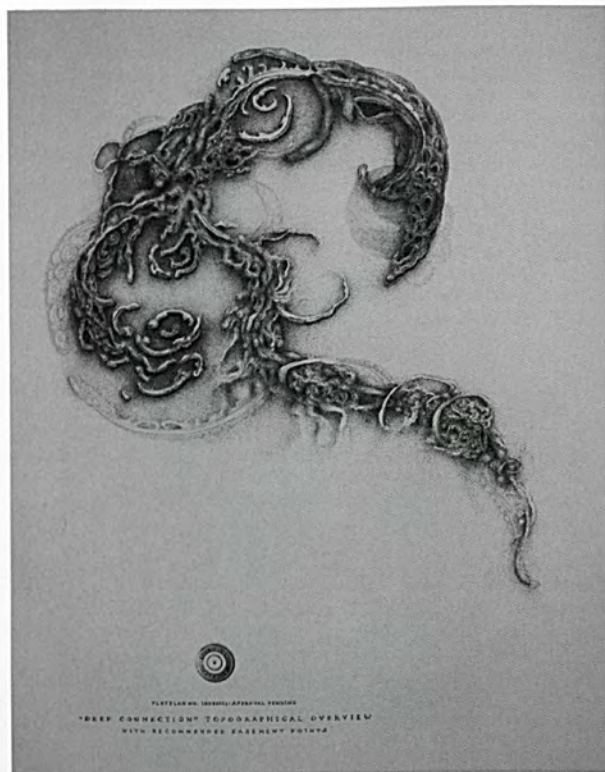
This series of artwork, "Plot Plans," draws inspiration from architectural diagrams, medical illustration, and antique maps to create fantastical structures that are host to imaginary organizations. Each work is begun with a loose gestural sketch, and then a fine point Rapidograph pen is employed to build up the image with thousands of miniscule dots. The drawing is embellished with watercolor and self-designed rubber stamps. Text captions labeling the rooms and spaces make use of puns, double meanings, and dark humor. The result is meticulous, quietly subversive works on paper in ink and watercolor. These miniature worlds articulate slightly unsettling social phenomena and psychological patterns, suggesting a depiction of both the individual mind and the broader culture.



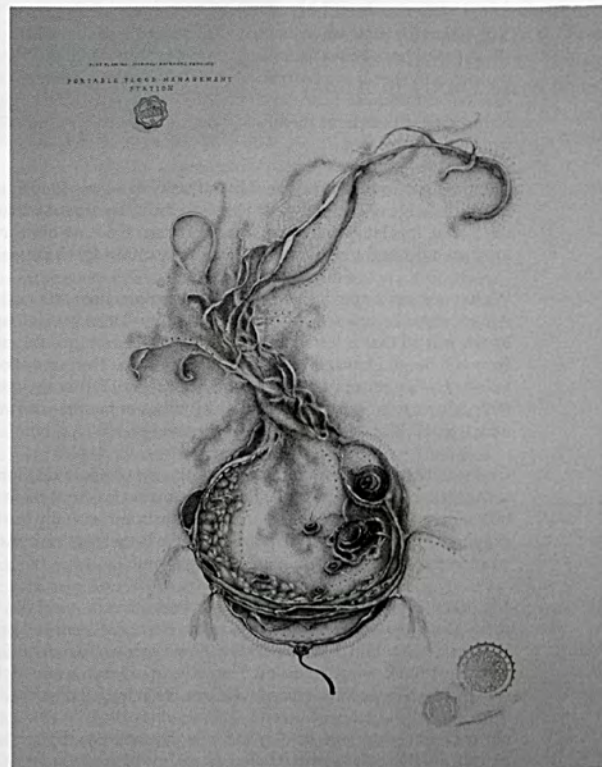
From the cover: *Safe Self Storage*  
Ink on paper, 30" x 22" (detail)



*Mourning Stadium for a Collapsed Symbology*  
Ink, watercolor on paper, 30" x 22"



*"Deep Connection" Topographical Overview  
with Recommended Easement Points*  
Ink, watercolor on paper, 30" x 22"



*Portable Flood Management System*  
Ink, watercolor on paper, 30" x 22"

*Overcrying – Flow – Counterflow – Wet Dreams – Absorption  
Drainage – Bloat – Disbursement – Discharge – Stagnant*

## Late in the Holocene

Celeste O'Dell

Where the highway cuts through gray basalt, my father points to layers of lava flows: Cambrian, Silurian, Devonian. His mysteries. My mother's mysteries are Sorrowful, Joyful, Glorious. I believe both, but I like his best because I can see them. Mother says we may believe in evolution if we still believe there was a Garden of Eden and we all descend from Adam and Eve.

We come late in the Holocene, a little family in a gray 1940 Ford, traveling to the edge of Oregon, past Farewell Bend, the nearest meander of the Snake. It is late November, Thanksgiving, 1944. We are traveling this long road through the barren hills to my Aunt Bridget's house.

We have heard some of my father's story before: how this part of North America was once a sea, with cowries and mollusks washed up on sandy banks, but all that is left is this basalt plateau. Except for the curve at Farewell Bend, I haven't seen much of the Snake. I've never been to the falls or Hells Canyon, with its rim rock cliffs. My father says there are strange pictures on the bluffs, made by tribes of people who vanished long ago. He doesn't know who they were.

Closer to home, he has found remains of ammonites and trilobites and some little creature who looks just like a snail. He found them on a desert hill, where a badger dug them up. The fossils are partially buried in a gray rock, fused grains of ancient sand. We keep them nested in cotton wool in the glass bookcase in our living room.

My parents know the names of all the creeks, rivers, and hills. We learn them like a litany: Quartz Creek, Coyote Peak, Rattlesnake Springs, Gold Hill, Iron Mountain, Chicken Creek. Some creeks are named for families we know: Ebell, Swayze, Sisley. They live in old frame houses hidden in groves of willow and cottonwood along the winding creeks.

My mother wants us to say "creek" not "crick," even though lots of other people do. I wonder about Kitchen Creek and Burnt River. "Why was there a kitchen in the creek?" "When did the river burn?" But my parents have forgotten or have never known.

The ride goes on and on. I lean my forehead on the window, stare at rock, rock, rock, sagebrush, rock, juniper, sagebrush, rock. My sister chants: Kitchen Creek, Chicken Creek, Kitchen Creek Chicken Creek,



My mother always talks of God as if He were our next-door-neighbor, gentle, interested, kind. The distances, the exploding bombs, the gaps and vanishings don't seem to bother her.

until they garble together and she can't say either. The Burnt River flows just north of the highway, rushing, harsh and brown.

Despite the stories and the questions and the lessons, I feel a sadness creeping in. At home in Elkhorn, forty miles away, there are evergreens on the hills, and the mountains are varying shades of blue with snow in the crevices. But here, the brown hills rise up, featureless, dwarfing the narrow road.

I think this must be just the opposite of the Garden of Eden, which Sister Cecelia says was in Mesopotamia, the Fertile Crescent. I'm not sure where Mesopotamia is, but I know it's far away, like the war. I think of the newsreel I saw last week before the weekly episode of *The Lone Ranger*: planes dropped bombs that fell softly toward the earth and ended in beautiful white explosions in cities and factories and fields.

At dinner, we will have turkey and dressing and mashed potatoes and things we don't ordinarily have, like olives and cranberry sauce and mincemeat pies. Someone will say grace: "Bless us, O Lord, and these Thy gifts." My mother always talks of God as if He were our next-door-neighbor, gentle, interested, kind. The distances, the exploding bombs, the gaps and vanishings don't seem to bother her.

But I can't help thinking of things that frighten me: the shakiness of the bridge we have to cross, its rattles and groans as we drive over, the gaping holes in the middle with the river rushing underneath; the red-haired man who will be sitting at the table, demanding to know my name; the uncle, who will play the violin and cry and kiss me with his awful, watery kiss.

I keep staring at basalt cliffs, the Burnt River, and the lava flows and think of the trilobites, caught in their fossil sand. Inside the car, it's warm and I can feel my sister's breath, but as the moonscape of the hills goes on and on, I feel the weight of everything I do not understand. ■

## Haiku Scenes from the New West

Leslie Clark

1 | In the golden field  
placid cattle graze next to  
a green bulldozer.

2 | A plump, sullen teen  
rounds up scarlet shopping carts  
with her lariat.

3 | Cactus, ocotillo,  
acres of grass once grew here  
now just raw, red earth.

4 | In the small-town shop  
lots of folks from New Jersey  
purchase cowboy hats.

5 | A feather of smoke  
rises from the parched mountain,  
a thoughtless camper.

6 | Where once a streambed,  
now diapers, water jugs,  
a different flow.

## Aquí Me Quedo

Bárbara Renaud González

They met at a forgotten kind of a place, a one-room bar hidden on a backroad called *Aquí Me Quedo*. A cantina sitting on this side of the Rio Grande, unless the river changes its mind. My Daddy, Lázaro, had just returned from World War II, a hero with commendations, three years in the Philippines killing the dirty Japs. *Hijole*, what a *peleonero* he was, bragging to Mami and the rest of us around the kitchen table—picking fights with his smile wicked like the farmer's hands that followed. Hell, there was nothing else to do, he had no land left. Six desperate sisters bargain-selling the last of the family acres while he was fighting for their freedom. How were the girls supposed to work the land as hard as him, Daddy, the oldest and strongest brother? The land was just a scrap, really, but in the family over two hundred years, yes, each one of those forty-eight acres a battleground after the U.S.-Mexican War.

They had lost that war, *por supuesto*, but this one, the war he had just returned from—this one he had won. Sloshing in those tropical jungles, killing slanty-eyed men who looked too much like his people back home, his sharpshooter aim was true as an arrow finding the heart.

While he was killing those men, his father died, and the swan-like sisters and widowed mother had to survive. That's why the war never ended for him. Nothing left to do but keep on fighting when he got back. Though he couldn't tell me why, only that he needed to fight like he needed to kill Japs in that jungle.

"They took our land, my father's land."

But it's really his mother's land he's talking about, because she comes from those people

who were always here, before the wars ever started. He tells me the family's story one more time on the porch steps at night after another long day as a sharecropper in the fields that aren't his, but that he loves just the same.

"What do Mexicans know about a world war? I was born on land that isn't mine anymore, *la kineña*. You know the King Ranch? You study it in school?"

A war isn't always called a war, he emphasizes, gazing at the harvest-moon. "It depends on who's winning and who's losing."

Daddy recites the names of the families who once had the land. Slowly, deliberately, like a witness on the stand. *Ballí. Cavazos. Garza. Longoria...*

"There is a family cemetery for you when you die. It's near San Perlita, a place named for a little pearl, how do you like that?"

"Like the gift of the Magi?" I tell him about the story I read in school, the one about the husband and wife who sold their prized possessions to give each other a Christmas gift. About how the wife lost her long, lustrous hair for the money to buy him a gold chain for his pocket-watch, while he was giving up that treasured watch for a special comb, imagining those long braids unraveling in the moonlight.

Daddy is trying to find the stars in the sky, squinting, like when his eyes are measuring the highest weeds in the cotton.

"Hmm, don't understand what you're talking about. San Perlita is just a little town, but it's

yours." The moon is pearling-up the sky, unforgettable as those soldier's medals he's always talking about. "The King Ranch is yours too, and we have lost more than a gold chain and a long braid of hair."



"Shamed, that's what your father is," my mother impatient with his broken-record stories while Daddy takes his Sunday nap. In between the watering of fields that keeps him awake all night. In between his hoping for rain.

Mami hates living in the middle of nowhere—she's from a big city in Mexico that we can never afford to visit. "Mexico is a paradise, not like this place with coyote-men howling for a soul, plagues of dust and rattlesnakes, and tumbleweeds attacking us like that Godzilla you watch on TV!"

She's making tortillas in the kitchen like always. Flour, baking powder, salt. "I grew up where even the wind is green, where the word for brown has more colors than the rainbow." A scoop of shortening greases her cracked fingertips. "Piloncillo, do you know how we make it?" She tells me of a childhood in the sugar cane, how the workers let her sip from the first pressing of cane juice, how it cooks into white sugar, leaving the thick brown syrup to be molded into sugar cones, the color glistening like the temptation in a man's eyes when he wants you.

Then there are the stories of the cooling of goat's milk to make crumbly cheese, the skinning of bananas for vinegar, cactus ice cream on Sundays at the plaza, the hiss of lime-rock before it's boiled with corn. The incense of cinnamon sticks dissolving into *café con canela* at dawn.

"Look, believe what I'm going to tell you." Mami's story is about land, and she's scorching

fat tomatoes for the *salsa roja*. The same tomatoes Daddy grows from the one acre that his boss lets him farm instead of salary. His big hands warm, happy, when he brings them to her.

"My father lost his land too," Mami continues, "you would call it a *hacienda*—during the Mexican Revolution. I don't remember it, everything happened before I was born."

Mami peels the tomatoes, tasting the soft mush that spills on her fingers. "Your grandfather Moisés was the youngest of five boys. Spoiled rotten. But the kind of spoiled that is good too, because he loves everybody else. Doesn't know anything but. Your *abuelito* spoiled to the bone, but the right way. An expert on horses. Never worked a day in his life. He married your *abuelita*, my mother, María de la Eulogia, in the calm before the terrible end of that civil war." My grandmother was a merchant's daughter, she explains. "Neither rich nor poor, which is a terrible thing to be in Mexico, because you can only be one or the other."

"Ay! She was ambitious." Mami doesn't like this about her mother, but she's not that different. "Which is just a pinchful away from greediness," she says with disgust. "Thought she was going to be somebody, because *Papá* inherited his father's land, which wasn't theirs to begin with anyway, which brought the Revolution, which proves my point about the stupidity of land."

Mami's spooning the just-cooked pintos and porkrinds into the frying pan, mumbling under her breath. "Your *abuelita*, brown as *la tierra*, pretending to be of royal blood as if those *españoles* who stole our land in the first place were anything but royal... *criminales*... Thought she had won the *lotería*, don't you see? Marrying that light-skinned skinny. Instead, she just got

a husband good-for-nothing...who lost his land because he was drunk during all the years of the revolution! *Jaj!*"

My mother pushes dough around one last time before the griddle. Pats it down, hard. Sighs. "Here she is, planning her society life, and *presumiendo* to everyone how she's going to have everything and more, because she is going to become a woman of high society. Shit Society!"

My mother can't resist turning *aristocracia* into a bathroom word, proud of turning the rich into excrement. She separates the dough into balls, punch-tins each one with both sets of fingertips. That's what she'd like to do to some of those high-falutin' people's faces, I think. Mami says it takes years of living to make good tortillas.

"*Caaa-gaaa-lo-cia!*"

And then the revolution comes to *abuelita's* house a year after they've married. Knock-knock! Mami raps the table with her floured knuckles, the soldiers from Villa's army—or Carranza, who knows—tell them to get out, or else! "Your *abuelo* Moisés's father, your great-grandfather, Don Hermenegildo who they say wasn't hated by his workers, you believe that? Who knows. Anyway, so what. He was generous considering he was, what? A slaveowner—*ay*, *exuuuuse* me! In Mexico we don't have slaves, we call them *campesinos*, who were rebelling and had joined Villa's—or Carranza's army. They didn't kill Don Hermenegildo. They didn't hang him, you know? Though maybe they should have."

My mother smiles, begins to smooth the *testales* with a rolling pin like she's getting ready to choke it. One-two-three quick strokes. Flattens this way, irons that way, making a perfectly round and flattened pancake.

"The revolutionaries just wanted the land. The horses. So my parents left, with me incubating in her *panza*, *Mamá* thinking she couldn't get pregnant during war, *te imaginas?*" Rolls her eyes. The first tortilla, sticky, draping off her up-turned palms, goes on the griddle. "They must have looked like Joseph and Mary on a burro with four daughters instead of a prodigal son. Your grandmother's hands clutching her rosary beads. And the few *pesos* they had left."

Mami watches the tortillas like Daddy watches the sky. She begins to slice the leftover chicken for a *guisado* with his just-picked green beans and corn. "*Mamá* never forgave him for losing the land, you understand?"

Mami says that my grandfather didn't care, that the land was for everyone.

That it was our *destino* to lose it. Because the land was to be shared. "The only thing he missed were the horses. It was much later that he spent his nights in the cantina grieving for her love, which would never come again." Mami sighs dramatically. "Because *Mamá* has never loved him. *Nunca*. This is why we understand each other." She looks over at the bedroom where Daddy's sleeping.

My mother smiles her monalisa.

"We know what it's like to be rejected."

More tortillas puff up on the griddle. Turning them over, she pats them down, flattening them. She continues. "Guess that's why he drinks so much."

Salsa is added to the onions softening in another pan, and I decide that the kitchen must be like my mother and grandfather's heart, all spicy and hot, only nobody is going to sit down to eat this plate.



"Your grandmother says *Papá* doesn't confront the reality of life. Her life has been very hard, you must understand. I know you don't like her, because she never laughs, it's just that her life has been too much hard." *Demasiada*. She repeats the veryhard over and over as she rolls out more tortillas. *Demasiada*. Reminds me of the word for masa, a mass, a mass of people. Mami's trying to find another word to explain veryhard, but it's impossible. How can one word describe the smashing of dreams? There isn't a word big enough for that. In English or Spanish.



"Yeah, old woman."

Daddy jeers at Mami that night at supper when she talks about the revolution again. He's started calling her *vieja* which is a word for old woman, ugly woman. Used up. But if a man loves his wife, *vieja* can mean precious, eternal, till-death-do-we-part woman. My woman of many years, *mi viejita* who has given me children, and who has been with me in good times and bad. But that's not the *vieja* that my father means.

"Look where your beloved revolution brought you...you had to cross that bridge to eat, didn't you? What would you do without these *gringos* you hate so much?"

My mother wasn't even eighteen when she crossed the border. She won't tell me how she did it. That's why I know she must have come with a man. No education, but real pretty. Started working in that cantina, where she met my father soon after. All because of the land. And the river that told her this was where she was supposed to be.

That's why I'm trying to find that ghost of a jukebox where my parents met. So that I can



Photo by Joan Frederick

trace their footsteps, see their skin flash-hot at the thunder crackling like a new storm from each other's voices over a cold beer that she spills on him with her warm-tortilla fingertips. Watch their eyes toasting into dark brown as they glance, then invite. Didn't know a *tejano* could look like John Wayne and speak Spanish without an accent. Never thought I would meet a woman with legs worth more than a million dollars. I want to hear them bragging to each other about where they come from. Making up stories along the way so that their lies become true, and the truth becomes a lie that their children will have to reclaim, like the land they were supposed to inherit. Following them later that night as they find a home in each other because they have nowhere else to go. They were married in three weeks.

This is why I have to find that place, that broken-down cupboard filled with my past, beckoning even as its hand-painted sign fades, almost falling with too many summers, the black letters curling into each other like the waters that flow into the Rio Grande.

Letters tumbling into each other like people searching for a new land. A place called *Here I Stay*. ■

## Bog People

Walter Bargaen

They hear it each day and no one  
talks, refusal fused to denial.  
A critical mass gathers on each street.  
The overexposed wait in glowing rooms.

Breathing stale air for a decade,  
they don't see their forearms  
and faces turn a deep leathery hue  
like the bodies found in peat bogs,

throats still freshly slit after a thousand  
years—the healing hardly begun. Close  
friends hint of it, thinking they've glanced  
a speechless shadow at the beach or under

a streetlamp. Lovers find it oddly  
fragrant and sticky on their fingers,  
as if having reached into the soil  
of the other's soul. A tourist to this city

sees its deceased inhabitants buried in the air,  
the living sleepwalking along the boulevards,  
nodding off even as they chat on benches,  
waiting for the unscheduled bus

that's always late. Tourists are caught up in a flurry  
of inactivity. The daily pall of exhaustion  
brilliantly brushes each evening's twilight  
into its frame of darkness. It is what

these citizens do not talk about in order  
to survive, that keeps them awake in  
other worlds, and what the tourists come  
to see in a preoccupied city.

## My Place on the Map

*On Sentimental Cartographies, Experience of Place, and Spatial Biographies*  
Jörn Seemann

There is something disconcerting about maps. Cartography still maintains its predominant and exclusive image of a cold and objective science that creates a distance between me and these depictions of place. "Mind the gap"—the metallic voice from the loudspeaker is not only my most vivid reminiscence of the London Underground, but maybe it was also J.B. Harley's main concern with cartographic "coldness." When he started to deconstruct the map in the late 1980s, he told us about the normative model of scientific cartography and its objectivity, technological progress and ethic of accuracy, and the personal meaningfulness of the map as a biography. Who said that maps don't bleed?

Behind the mask of its cold appearance the map hides its authorship. Despite satellite imagery and computer cartography, mapmakers are human—the maps they create are testimonies of human creativity, inventiveness, imagination, or evil. They are not a mirror of reality or a truthful image of space and place. Maps are like the human shadows that the prisoners in Plato's Allegory of the Cave can see: although they are real, they are only projections of other real things and persons. Reality is always a perceived reality, and the map is not the territory.

Maps sometimes seem like the famous blank sheet of paper that some psychologists still use in order to test the intelligence of their human guinea pigs: What can you see? A polar bear in a snowstorm? A white rabbit (with closed eyes) in a white room? Or simply an empty sheet of paper? The mapmaker's challenge is to make the map reader believe "that a mosaic of points, lines, and areas on a flat sheet of paper is equivalent to a multidimensional world in

space and time," as we are told by Phillip and Juliana Muehrcke in an essay on maps in literature. All these abstract symbols mean nothing to us when we fail to relate them to space, be it a map of my hometown or Frodo's arduous travel to the fires of Mount Doom, documented in more than 1000 pages of Tolkien's novel and nine hours of film rolls. This means that we must establish a relation with the map. When we can find ourselves in the map, it can be part of our lives, a diary, memory aid, reference to our social life, flicks of nostalgia. The reader is able to read it as a meaningful text because the map brings landscapes, events, and persons of our own past to the mind's eye and involves our own identity in the representation. Maps are a rich source for personal histories and give us a set of coordinates for the map of our memory.

Take for example this drawing. It shows three simple rectangles, deliberately and irregularly grouped together.

At first glance, it is a cold and meaningless geometry, but for me these conventional symbols are very important. I see them in the context of a map, not any map, but my map, sheet 2424 (Wedel) of the topographic map, scale 1:25 000, published in 1978.

The three supposedly senseless rectangles turn into my parents' property near Hamburg in northern Germany. They represent three buildings that can be seen in the inset of the map. In this group of rectangles, the bottom right (01) is my parents' home (or more correctly, its representation). It was my grandfather's two-story carpenter's workshop that my father converted



"Map me no maps, sir, my head is a map, a map of the whole world"  
—Henry Fielding, 1730

into our residence when he married my mother in the early 1960s. To the left is my grandmother's house (02). She was a gentle old lady who tolerated all my childish behavior and died in 1996 when she was 91. The top rectangle (03) is a wooden shack where we kept our lawn-mower, bicycles, tools, etc. The map is from 1978, so you cannot find the garage that we constructed at the entrance of our property. There was enough space for two cars, Daddy's BMW and Mummy's green Beetle that was my first car when I got my driver's license. Separated from our property by a drainage channel is the large Regenbogen house (04). Mr. Regenbogen owned grumpy German shepherd dogs, ran a haphazard business of wood log sales, and peed publicly in his backyard.

I spent my first four years of school at the large black rectangle (07) about 500 meters south of home. It represents the main school building and the smaller pavilion to its right contained the two classrooms for the third and fourth grade. The oval (08) "below" the school is the pitch of the local soccer team (ASC Estebrügge) that I played for in later years. My daily trek to school took me along the levee (05) of the Este River (06), a small dike of about fifteen feet to protect the population against a modest twenty-yard wide stream that I had never seen overflowing during my life (although my parents told me about the great 1962 flood that was devastating in our region). The white house on the levee (a reference I forgot to mark) was owned by a small family of three. Their only daughter hung herself because she could not stand the pressure of her exams. The latest (and now late) owner was an evangelical pastor, a friend of our family, who died of cancer several years ago.



Excerpt from a map of Wedel, outside of Hamburg.  
Source: Landesvermessungsamt Schleswig-Holstein.

Looking at the village center (09), there is a small iron bridge to cross the Este River. Further to the left is a circular structure with the local Saint Martin church (10) in its center. The pews are uncomfortable wooden benches, some of them ornamented with little angels' heads whose cheeks the Swedes had "leveled" a little bit during the Thirty Years War. There are some majestic trees in the cemetery (11), and somewhere near number 12 is our family grave where my grandmother rests in peace. They wrote my grandfather's name on the tombstone, but I know that his bones are not there, because he died in Yugoslavia during the Second World War. My grandmother had a photo indicating the place of his cross in a cemetery near Belgrade.

There is death and life in the map that turn human events into a "storied place." It does not only create images for me, but it depicts my place to those who have never been there—and probably will never happen to know it. If I scanned through the whole map sheet, I would probably write a complete spatial history of my childhood. Hence, it is true that maps are to be read as personal histories: an affirmation that I still belong.

My aims for tracing my own spatial biography are not sentimental, painting nostalgia on top

of black rectangles. Maps are dialogues with space and place. Like all of us, I am in a constant struggle of (re)defining and (re)inventing my places. I severed my physical relations with my home in 1994, guided by hexagram number 56 of the I-Ching: Lü, the traveler, sojourner, stranger, fire on mountain. One of the phrases in the descriptive manual was like a slap on my face: You will lose your home... Doesn't the hexagram look like a set of map symbols, like my parents' home on the topographic map?



My migrations took me to Brazil—Belém, Curitiba, Fortaleza and several other cities—and now Baton Rouge, staying at the university residences on Nicholson Drive, some 540 square-feet of living, next to the railway line, the Tiger Stadium, the Tiger Cage, and the main campus.

We can each trace our personal cartographies—be it on a road atlas, Google map, or our own doodling. The sum of my spatial experiences would result in a whole dictionary of my personal biography. Amazing how mere marks on a piece of paper can visually bring to mind a multidimensional world that contains objects and even emotions that are not perceived directly on the sheet. I am on the map—and the map is inside of me. ■

## Letters from Israel

Painting by Olivia Webster

Letters by Lauren Basson

*Through a five-year correspondence of lyrical letters from my cousin living in Israel, I was recently inspired to create narrative paintings of her accounts of life in a faraway land. This exploration became my distant interpretation of her personal, political, and cultural reflections—focusing on both her persistent sense of isolation in a metropolitan space, as well as a sense of normalcy in a sea of chaos. The painting is a triptych that depicts the moments of waiting and anticipating the commute, tinged with simultaneous angst and acceptance over what the bus ride might hold.*

—Olivia Webster

*April 26, 2002*



Yesterday, I saw a yellow bulldozer out in the fields where the sheep often graze. This morning, when I went to buy my Friday chicken at the grocery store, I noticed that it had cut a large, square swath in the fields right at the end of the road. The fresh dirt was a deep reddish brown. On my walk with Ezra a couple of weeks ago, I saw that the land surrounding the Bedouin encampment had been surveyed and marked off into little plots with wire and small, white flags. There was a big sign advertising residential building plots for sale. It doesn't seem like there will be much of the fields left soon. I wonder where the Bedouin and their sheep will go.

The chicken cutting woman was working alone this morning, chopping chickens as fast as she could with her metal glove protecting the first few fingers of her left hand. The rest of her hands looked red and raw. There were the usual lines of Sephardic women waiting for their chickens and ground beef. It seemed like they looked more exhausted and stressed in proportion to the number of chickens they were buying. The woman ahead of me bought four chickens. She didn't look too good. I bought one. It's definitely all I can handle right now.

The warplanes were ferocious today, slamming through the skies overhead, pounding in my head for hours, and I started to think, maybe I'm just not cut out for this, maybe I can't handle this as well as I thought I could. I complained about the planes when Benjamin came home from school for lunch. He shrugged and made one of his macho faces. "Yeah? So what? You just get used to it." But do you really? And if so, is that a good thing?

*May 8, 2002*





*Chaos or Normalcy: Rehovot Bus Stop*  
Oil on Board; 8' x 3.5' triptych

*May 24, 2002*

So what has happened in the last two days? Another suicide bombing in Rishon LeTzion. This one took place under the awning, near the chess tables in the central park, a place we have visited several times over the past year. It is, of course, Benjamin's favorite part of the park and each time we have gone there, he runs over to watch the older, Russian men play their games while I take Ayelet to the playground. It is a densely packed, male space. Women rarely go there. I have worried about the crowds that inevitably gather between benches to watch those chess matches and have kept a wary eye on Benjamin when he drifts over that direction—now those worries have been fulfilled. I haven't told Benjamin about the attack—and he hasn't mentioned it. I find it hard to believe that he didn't hear about it from anyone at school or his chess club, but find myself unwilling to be the first to bring it up...

Another meeting cancelled, an unusually rainy day. On Sunday I waited for the bus to take me to Jerusalem for the Golda Meir Fellowship award ceremony. A skinny little blonde girl arrived at the bus stop wearing a tight red T-shirt with the word SEX printed forward and backward in white lettering across her chest. She stood next to a large, well-covered Orthodox woman who was tending to her grandbaby while her daughter struggled to fold up the baby carriage. Another frazzled mother, dressed in a sweat suit and slippers, holding a toddler, a melting ice cream cone, and a large blue bag, rushed back and forth looking for a shirut taxi headed her direction. Pairs of religious Jews whose clothing distinguished them as members of different sects stood quietly nearby... The bus was already crowded when it arrived.

*March 9, 2005*

January 1, 2007 Monday morning. The first day of your new year... Where am I? Sitting on a train, traveling south toward the desert town of Be'er sheva...

Across from me, a young woman sits, engaged in an elaborate ritual of self-beautification that includes the careful application of lipstick, mascara, and rouge. She wears a chic gray sweater, short skirt, and dark boots decorated with a large silver buckle. She examines her facial features carefully in a pocket mirror and, apparently approving of the image she sees there, zips away her cosmetics and takes out her cell phone. Her pale, serious face grows animated as she launches into conversation in rapid Russian, interspersed with loud giggles and heavily accented Hebrew slang.

I change trains. The poised, young woman sitting across from me wears a sophisticated scarf over her hair, signaling that she is Arab. She sits quietly, intent on reading the Hebrew newspaper she holds in her hands. I think of those far away in America, reading their newspapers, full of news about this country that obscures the simple complexities I witness on my everyday commute on this train. How do you translate a place so full of the variations of life and death into words that those who have not witnessed it will understand?

I think of you, celebrating Christmas with our family in the suburban living room where your painting of an Israeli bus stop hangs, a lone figure who looks somewhat like me at its center. Alone, together. Worlds apart, yet in the same room. I stare out the window of the speeding train and see a vague outline of my face mediated by the shifting forms of the desert landscape. I reflect on your reflections of my reflections of this place that for the moment I call home. I wonder who the women who sit across from me see when they look in my direction.

Traveling north. The return portion of the roundtrip. The end of the day. The passing places outside the windows of the train are dark, invisible. The light inside the passenger cars is dim. The Israeli soldier who sits across the aisle from me in his khaki uniform, boots splayed out, carries on a long conversation on his cell phone in enthusiastic Spanish. The middle-aged man who sits across from me, slouched over a burgeoning belly, reads a trashy novel in English and rubs his eyes. His white socks are crumpled around his ankles.

Over the intercom, an anonymous voice announces the upcoming stop in Hebrew. My commute is almost over. Our journey has just begun. ■



## The Bridge Above Snake Hill

Kristen E. Nelson

Bill's dandelions could be lilies and his lilies have halos. He used to walk with his hands in his pockets, but now he's got old-man eyes that make him get closer to life in order to see it. His two milky cataracts skew his vision into a mostly more beautiful scene. Now he walks hesitantly with open palms and squints in close to plants.

"But not kids cause it makes 'em cry," he points out to me.

Bill hates wearing these big, black glasses, but wears them because the doctor told him they would help protect his eyes from getting worse. Most days, he walks around the neighborhood collecting seeds he will never plant. He intends to, but his garden is only big enough for herbs. Bill digs deep between the petals of flowers, pries open the husks of pinecones with his thick thumbnails, and sticks the seeds in his pockets. He can't watch the plants grow anymore, but he tells anyone who will listen, "It's a shame to leave that new life rotting on the vine."

Bill's hearing is impeccable as well—nature's way of saying, "Sorry for the eyes." He listens for traffic before crossing the street and isn't afraid of going out into the world, or at least not his hazy haloed version of it.

I don't worry about Bill, even with his impairment. His son is nearby and visits him once a week, takes him to the doctor, still kisses him on the cheek, changes the batteries in his smoke detectors, and tends to burnt out bulbs.

It's the days in between those visits that are interesting. Today, for example, he is determined to conquer Snake Hill one more time before the

winter comes and the roads are icy—when he can't navigate even with outstretched arms and shuffling feet and open palms.

"As open as my gnarled knuckles will open anyway," he says flexing his fingers. The movement stretches his liver spots into warped shapes—one looks like an opera house curtain when he makes an almost fist.

"There's one in every neighborhood," Bill says looking up the hill. Bill told me about a Snake Hill in the Bronx where he grew up. He and his friends used to test their courage by skidding down the hill on garbage pail lids, blindfolded. As a teenager, he used to race those same friends to the top. He almost always won. On the first night of his honeymoon, Bill carried his young bride from a taxi up a hill like this in the Hamptons and over the threshold. Happy and breathless, he dropped her on their squeaky marriage bed.

Today he will make it to the top of this hill.

"Thank God for sidewalks. Whoever invented concrete and sidewalks should be given a medal from the Senior Citizens Association of the World," Bill jokes. Lately, he's been making up the names of clubs like that, each one more ridiculous than the one before. He's been inundated with mailings from AARP and the County Department for Senior Citizens with Disabilities and the City Office of Senior Services for Veterans of Foreign Wars and the Town Committee for Elders of Italian Heritage and Jewish Eldercare and on and on and on...all stamped, "Join!"

He laughs. It's a dry laugh but not a cough. He isn't a smoker. "I couldn't smoke and walk at the

same time," he says. "I never was very good at patting my head and rubbing my belly either."

We reach the bottom of Snake Hill, and Bill stops to take a few deep breaths under a tree. There are big fleshy spheres on the ground at his feet. He bends to pick one up. "Yeah, pretty limber for an old guy, aye?" He likes to point this out to me a couple of times a day. I pretend not to notice that he's covering up for needing rest.

"You know what's inside of these things? They're chestnuts," he says. "I never knew until it hit me one day. Really hit me one day. It fell on my head. The critter was hard, so I opened it up and there it was. Undeniably a nut."

He holds his hat above his head and runs his hands through raggedly-cut, silver hair. It is still thick, even at his age, so he cuts it himself every few weeks. He wipes his forehead on his sleeve, fits the hat back on his head and looks up.

Snake Hill is a half-mile steep slope. It's the kind of hill that kids long for. The kind of hill they peer out of windows at from the backseats of mini-vans, say "Wow" at, strain against their seatbelts, and wish for once they could find a hill like this that didn't empty out into traffic. But it's really not the hill that attracts Bill; it's the bridge at the top. Don't get me wrong; he appreciates walking up the hill. "It's a challenge," he says standing up a little straighter. But the bridge is what keeps him coming here day after day.

When Bill starts walking he can't really talk anymore, so I listen to his steady breath. My thoughts race as I look at the canopy above us. I think that we are covered by leaves on trees

and veins on leaves and small bugs on veins and sometimes rainwater that pools in the veins of those leaves. And how about God? I haven't quite figured out where He is yet in this green grass picture.

So let's say the wind blows. That gets me to thinking that maybe the rainwater runs down the vein, past the bug, past God, too, maybe, and drips on Bill's shoulder. If the fabric there absorbs the drop, without him ever knowing, then is he a part of this scene? The instant is real for the tree, for the water, the bug, God, to his shirt even. But is it real to him?

**"That's the beauty of it," Bill says as he reaches the summit. "People stop. They have to."**

But perhaps his hand will brush against the dampness in a motion that has no real reason for happening except serendipity. The impulse will register wet to his brain, but depending upon how open he is able to be at that exact moment, he will either ignore or analyze that faint sensation. Is it real to him then?

"Woo," Bill grunts. "Slow goin'." He looks up again. Bill focuses on the light spaces between the dark leaves in the canopy. They are winged creatures composed of sunlight—those shapes that mostly only children notice.

If I look up I can see the bridge from here, just around that last bend. It is narrow. One car of any size fills the bridge, which sits above a thin trickle of water and a stand of pine trees. It connects the business district of town with a neighborhood of homes. The guardrails look tired, slumped with chipping white paint. There's a large block of stone chiseled with a date, 1898. That is where Bill likes to stand. On either side of the bridge is a stop sign and cars have to take turns crossing.

"That's the beauty of it," Bill says as he reaches the summit. "People stop. They have to."

It's not so much a matter of courtesy as one of safety—of necessity—people have to take a minute. Forty seconds actually. Bill has counted. Approximately forty seconds of a forced pause.

Even the monster trucks must stop, with screeching wheels and chrome and cigarette butts flying out window and rock music blasting. Those trucks—those drivers that tailgate little old ladies on the highway and flash their high beams—they come to this bridge and they have to brake. They have to wait until the driver on the bridge moseys on across before they can then mosey on across, holding up the car on the opposite side. They have to take forty seconds.

Up at the top of the bridge Bill stands awhile catching his breath, his hand covering the "1" in 1898. Then he leans his back up against the stone, and says "made it" to no one in particular. His attention has already traveled from me to the cars taking their turns.

Bill can only catch the shapes of the drivers and passengers, as if he was looking through a smoky veil of mist rolling in off warm waters. He doesn't get a clear picture, but he's paying attention to those human forms, so like his own that he glimpses in mirrors.

As we stand here, I start to pick up snippets of conversation from the cars at the stop sign directly across from us. That is why Bill comes here and stands for a time, quietly listening.

"Dear God I need some adult company!" the outburst comes from the driver side window of a blue mini-van. There is the faint sound of Tom

Chapin singing from the speakers and "MommyMommyMommyMommyMommyMommy," floating from somewhere in the backseat. The song is about the green planet, apes and bears, and elephants and kangaroos. The kid stops his mantra for a minute, takes a breath and continues as they cross the bridge, "MAMmyMAMmyMAMmyMAMmy" in tune to the music this time.

The next car is a beat-up Firebird. As the young guy behind the wheel stops at the bridge he says, "Ah, fuck!" and turns up his rock music. Bill starts laughing when he hears the kid banging hard on his steering wheel, so hard that his glove compartment falls open with a recognizable crash—eliciting a louder "Oh fuck!" once again. He is shoving the papers back in, until the car behind him beeps. Bill chuckles again.

"Pobrecita, she was in labor for twenty-six hours. Can you believe it? I know, right? Isabelle. She is an angel—all pink, cause they had to cut her out. Not with that funny-shaped head most babies are born with. *Dios Mio*, twenty-six hours. Never ever, ever, ever me. I'm serious. Don't laugh at me because I'm promising you right this second—never. OK Titi, I'll tell her. I will. I'll kiss her for you, too. I'll give you a call tomorrow with the phone number. *Ciao*." The young girl driving hangs up the phone saying, "Ay que chulo. Isabelle."

"Time to go home," Bill says. He walks down the hill slowly smelling the cold, thinking of bugs and Gods and humans, flexing the opera house curtain draped below his knuckle. With him now are forty seconds of "MommyMommyMommy," forty seconds of loud rock music, forty seconds of baby talk, and forty more, and forty more, and forty more. ■

## Victor Must Die

Bryan Walpert

Every morning, Victor wakes me. If I am lucky, it is winter. Because the mornings are dark, he lets me sleep until six, though even mid-winter—this morning, for example—he has been known to wake me as early as four for no apparent reason. In summer, as it was when my wife and I bought this house in a rural village outside Palmerston North, New Zealand, I can count on being woken by five. For an American city boy, it is like a beak to the brain.

Victor, our rooster, is a beautiful bird who is afraid of me. His charge includes four fat old hens that lay few eggs and those few merely to taunt me. Since I am awake, I walk through the cold house, exchange slippers for boots, scoop out some laying wheat and pellets and carry them beneath the stars across the wet yard. The hens, eager to eat, run to me when I open the wood-and-wire gate to their open-air enclosure, which takes up a back corner of our quarter-acre. Victor runs away and won't eat until I've shut the gate behind me. He pretends to meditate on the back fence, but he has one eye still on me. He knows. He knows that he is the only completely unproductive member of the team and that he wakes me, every morning.

Victor continues to yell for about half an hour. I hear him as I pour and eat my muesli. I struggle to catch the news on National Radio between his calls. Sometimes I reply to him: "You're the man, Victor." My wife, Nancy, shakes her head. Then I go to work. I teach creative writing at Massey University, about a fifteen minute drive along a back country road. My speciality is poetry, and lately I have been crafting a course called "Love, Loss, and Looking Around." It will ask students to place their work in the historical context of the love poem, the elegy, and the ode. Like all of my

courses, this one began with a vague idea—good in theory. But as I've tried to set my thoughts on paper, I've stumbled. The ode has been puzzling me. Defining the ode is akin to putting smoke in a box. Paul Fry, in *The Poet's Calling in the English Ode* (1980), warns, "The term 'ode' has a checkered history," adding: "Appealing to usage does not clarify matters as much as one could wish because poets have often seemed to use the word so indiscriminately that most readers pay no attention to its presence in the title." My favorite comment comes from John Heath-Stubbs, in *The Ode* (1969). He remarks, with admirable (and a not un-Kiwi like) understatement: "The term 'ode,' as applied to English poems, is, I suspect, a not infrequent source of puzzlement to the student."

Sometimes, to my relief, Kiwi colleagues stop by my office and interrupt me. As a rule, they seem to enjoy the idea of an American couple owning chickens in semi-rural New Zealand. Prior to moving here in January 2004, we had spent our lives in or near cities. My wife is mainly from Denver. I'm from Baltimore. As some of my relatives there might say, I don't know from chickens. My Kiwi colleagues are quite aware of this. *Are they giving you any eggs? Have you killed Victor yet?*

I have been counseled several times, by different people, to kill Victor. I have so far sought alternatives. My hope that the rooster might quickly die of natural causes was soon dashed. Barring its accidental death, I'm told there are several ways to stop a rooster from crowing. One is to perform an operation on its vocal cords. A second is to cram the bird into a tight space so that it hits its head on the lid, since a rooster must raise its head to crow. The first is expensive;

the second strikes me as just plain mean (and might be a joke). The third option is to cut the Gordian knot with a chop to the neck. The wife of a colleague—she's a vet—offered to lend me her nets to capture the bird; he'll go limp and compliant, she assured me, once I've grasped his feet—though I might need help holding him down while I wield the axe.

When we bought this house nearly a year after we arrived in New Zealand, we agreed to take on the chickens and Victor from the former owner, who was moving into town. My wife and I wanted a rural property. The village of Ashhurst has two convenience stores, a pharmacy, a used book store, an auto shop, a couple of artisan shops, one café and a take-out fish and chips/Chinese food storefront. Mail goes through one of the convenience stores, which will also take your dry cleaning. That's the town, a few thousand people. Our yard backs onto a series of fields, or paddocks as they're called here, populated by sheep. The police station, usually unstaffed, is a tiny cottage next to a thin paddock, also occupied by sheep. I guess we thought in part that rural meant quiet. We weren't thinking of Victor. And we weren't thinking about the fire station across the street. It calls its volunteers the old-fashioned way: an air raid siren rings through the village. On the odd occasion, we are awakened by the siren at one o'clock and by Victor three hours later.

Bleary-eyed, I continue exploring the ode. In *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, M.H. Abrams classifies the ode as "a long lyric poem, serious in subject, elevated in style, and elaborate in its stanzaic structure." In

practice, odes fail to conveniently stick by the rules. Some self-titled odes are not lengthy or elaborate. William Stafford's "Ode to Garlic" is fifteen lines, nearly as short as a sonnet, and its topic seems a stretch to describe as "serious." As for elevated diction, "It's the stink of shit I remember in the monsoon" comes to mind, the opening line of an ode by the New Zealand poet Ian Wedde. The more you look at the ode, the more its definitions falls apart. But, then, most definitions, meant for speed and convenience, fall apart under a lengthy gaze.

If I look long enough at this old house or this rural town, the vision I had for life here falls apart. The definitions, which is to say the borders, of our lives here grow hazy. Why did we come? For my job. But I might have gotten a job in the states if I had waited. For the adventure.



Charcoal drawings by Ginger Knowlton

What adventure? It's true we've walked the rim of a volcano, boated beside the blue of Lake Taupo, bathed in the mineral pools in Rotorua, hiked the striking immensity of Mt. Cook, from which climbers fall to their deaths each year. It sounds exotic when I lump it all together like that, but in truth we snatched these experiences on a long weekend here or there. Mainly we go to the bank. We hang clothes on the line. Is this New Zealand? We make dinner, do dishes, see friends, mow the lawn, go to work, feed the chickens, and contemplate killing Victor.

There are good reasons not to kill Victor. Well, there is one good reason not to kill Victor. According to my chicken sources, which largely include the Internet and my friend John, hens need a rooster to maintain the pecking order. It doesn't matter. The real reason I have not killed Victor is simply that I can't imagine myself doing it. His feathers are a striking deep red and dark blue. He is delicate, in contrast to the plump hens. He seems, to me, to have a personality. It is a fussy, anti-social personality, but a personality is a personality. In other words, my reasons for not killing him are wholly sentimental. I think of Victor as a person, and you don't go around killing people just because they annoy you. For similar reasons, I have resisted the urgings of my friends to make a soup of the old hens. They tell me to get some younger ones who will lay more eggs. Instead, my wife and I name them after women poets, calling on friends for suggestions: Emily Chickenson, Edna St. Vincent Will-lay, Elizabeth Barrett Brown-egg, Louise Clück.



This tendency I have toward sentimentality might go some way toward explaining why the reality of New Zealand does not match the expectation. I thought—without thinking, if you know what I mean—that I would be hiking up majestic mountains to crystal blue lakes. Now, winter having set in, the sentimentality extends the other way, to my thinking about home. Sometimes, it is hard to be in a place stranger for its apparent familiarity and, during these times, it becomes easy to miss Boulder, Colorado, the last place we lived in the States. Some things seem worth missing. I miss easy access to family and friends.

Other things are simply embarrassing to miss. I miss the Costco outside of Boulder. It's common here to pay \$500 for a microwave, \$30,000 for new sedan, \$15 for pancakes, \$12 to see movie, \$8 to rent a DVD. We have a dryer (purchased second-hand, thank you) but seldom use it because electricity, at eighteen cents per kilowatt-hour, is just too expensive. When we rented a condominium in Boulder, with a semi-arid climate perfect for drying clothes, we tried hanging out the washing on our deck; the president of the condo association, who happened to live in the building facing ours, left a note reprimanding us. Apparently, laundry made the place look low-class. Full clotheslines are part of the landscape here, though. Our friends duck good-naturedly under the jeans, shirts, and towels to knock at our back door. I was invited to an afternoon barbecue this summer; our host took sheets and towels off the line as the sun went down, chatting with us all the while.

The New Zealanders I've met are, as a general rule, less sentimental than I am. Perhaps this is because things are just closer to the bone. Even major highways, for example, are narrow two-lane roads, with stretches where the hills sit to one side, the sea sits to the other, no median between the lanes. If someone slips across the center line, as a result of fatigue or drink or simple inattention, there is nowhere to go. You crash.

If there is less room for sentimentality in a country like this, I think it is also because the typical Kiwi feels a closer connection to the land than the typical American. I do not mean this in any melodramatic way. This is a small country, only four million people. There is simply, quite literally, less standing between the average New Zealander and his or her food. This is no scientific sample, but a high proportion of the Kiwis I've met either grew up on farms or have relatives who did. Even those who buy their lamb wrapped in plastic at the Pak 'n Sav Supermarket have no illusions about its source, which is why New Zealanders, I've found, are wholly unsentimental about their sheep. Many New Zealanders in this part of the North Island keep a few sheep on their land if they own half an acre or more, which is not uncommon. The sheep are cute and fluffy and end up, sooner or later, in the extra meat freezer to be found in a room off the kitchen.

I started out with five hens. When one grew sick and weak (we called her "Goiter," to give you some idea), her flatmates casually pecked her to death. My Kiwi friends shrugged. "Nature, red in tooth and claw," at least two of them intoned. I was told to kill her to end her misery. Instead, I took her out of the enclosure now and then to protect her from the others, to give her a chance to eat and drink, to help her regain her strength.

Was this solace for myself ultimately cruel to her? I stood over Goiter for a few minutes when I found her. This hen who used to hop determinedly on her one good foot from the henhouse to the gate now lay motionless behind the old set of windows that leans against the fence in the enclosure, a spot she'd chosen for her last stand. A dead chicken in my yard. What do I do? "Dig a hole," John said. I dug a hole.

It is such refusal of sentimentality that I'm starting to see as key to the ode. The twentieth century Russian formalist Victor Shklovsky used the term "defamiliarization" to describe the role of art. It should, he said, help us to see familiar things in a fresh way. After we see an object several times, we stop seeing it. Art makes us look again. Shklovsky's argument about the role of

**What an ode tells us, I think, is that every detail in our lives, if truly examined, has a distinct beauty and importance.**

art would seem quite similar to Wedde's stated goal in writing his odes, to find "the grand themes in ordinary details: the emotional truth of the commonplace." Sentimentality is the biggest obstacle to defamiliarization and is therefore inimical to the ode. I'm starting to see that the ode has little to do with form and everything to do with posture. What distinguishes an ode, I think, is its careful attention to the present. It meditates on what is before us and finds reason to praise it. The ode's gaze does not waver. This is why, perhaps, an ode is always lofty, even when its subject appears insignificant. In "Ode To Garlic," Stafford looks into the spice for something more than flavor or shape. He sees "a message from the midst of life"—a "memory" that "touches your tongue." The poem concludes:

*You walk out generously, giving it back  
in a graceful wave, what you've been given.  
Like a child again, you breathe on the world,  
and it shines.*



If looked at long enough, if you stop to breathe, the world shines in its simple existence in the here and now. Odes do not flinch from either the beautiful or the nauseous. Odes are the poetic equivalent of those birds that flew around in Aldous Huxley's novel *Island*, crying out, "Here and now, boys" to return wandering thoughts to the present.

Some of my students don't want to believe this about poetry. My first year, I began with a lecture about poetry as a kind of lie. One of the adjuncts taught a class on writing about sex and violence. A student, in the course evaluation, lamented the focus on sex and lies; the student wanted "more on truth and beauty." Not wanting to disappoint, I have included in my new course another of Wedde's poems, "To Beauty." I found it in *The Commonplace Odes*, a book of poems that Wedde modeled after Horace. The poem begins:

*Hobbled to poisonous goodness, speaking in the lock-jawed cant of the sublime, beauty without Glamour will not bring this mountain Down to earth where the succulent, juicy ti Marinate in kelp-pods of salty fat,*

*Where the vagina embraces the warm, oily penis, Beds fill with the damp ammonia of sleeping Babies, sperm squirts past the grip Of the gasping artist, and it's picnics with the seared flesh Smoke of barbecues that command the view, while the mountain*

*Rises like a mere backdrop. Beauty without The woeful world in it will not be glamorous...*

Vagina, oily penis, damp ammonia, sperm. Commonplace things. What an ode tells us, I think, is that every detail in our lives, if looked at, truly looked at right now, is significant and worth praising. In even its gruesome aspects, it has a certain beauty. The ode does so by look-

ing more slowly and carefully at the simple things we often take for granted, seeing them anew—redefining them by refusing the definitions handed to us. This is how I will tell my students to recognize an ode even when it does not announce itself as such in the title, as most odes do not. Mary Oliver's poem "Blue Heron" (1994), for example, begins with an observation of nature:

*Like a pin of blue lightning it thrusts among the pads*

Her description of a specific kind of bird, though, soon moves into an investigation and appreciation of the spiritual in the material:

*but didn't Jesus say: "This is my body," meaning, the bread—and meaning, also the things of this world?*

Oliver extends her meditation, as she puts it, to "the things of this world," which are the objects of an ode's attention. Having published her poem in 1994, she must have known this same phrase from Richard Wilbur's well-known poem, "Love Calls Us to the Things of This World," which appeared in his 1956 collection entitled *Things of This World*. Wilbur's poem, too, praises the spiritual in the material. A man is just waking and, in that state, observes, "The morning air is all awash with angels." His view outside the window is confused by sleep and the early dark; what he mistakes for angels is just the day's washing, hanging on the line to dry. In that half-asleep state, he sees the angelic in the human, the spiritual in the material. The man seems to shake himself awake towards the end of the poem:

*Yet, as the sun acknowledges With a warm look the world's hunks and colors, The soul descends once more in bitter love To accept the waking body, saying now In a changed voice as the man yawns and rises,*

*"Bring them down from their ruddy gallows. Let there be clean linen for the backs of thieves; Let lovers go fresh and sweet to be undone, And the heaviest nuns walk in a pure floating Of dark habits, keeping their difficult balance."*

The man acknowledges, as he wakes, that clothes are only clothes. He must let go of his dream and live in the real world. But even awake now, he sees them differently than before. We return to the world each day in "bitter love," a love for the material that can never be spiritually pure because it is always rooted to the body. The final line suggests the line we must all walk between the spiritual and the material. Even nuns have their "dark habits." Even they must keep their "difficult balance" between the material, since they are human beings with desires, and their spiritual calling. Wilbur's poem meditates on the connections and tensions between the spiritual and material; it seeks the one in the other and finds reason to praise, therefore, the most mundane objects of the material world, even sheets and towels.

Looking at things straight on—the rejection of sentimentality—I am starting to think, is also the right approach to living in New Zealand, even in a largely uninsulated house, in a country where gale-force winds are relatively commonplace, and winters are long, chilly and wet—inside. (A Canadian told my friend John that "Kiwis hold their winters indoors.") What an ode tells us, I think, is that every detail in our lives, if truly examined, has a distinct beauty and importance. There is no beauty without the woeful world in it, as Wedde puts it. The moun-

tain, what I thought of as the real New Zealand before I arrived, is mere backdrop.

It is in this spirit that I am, on and off, writing my own ode to Victor. Is he a subject serious enough for the ode? Is there reason to praise him, as an ode must? Oddly, Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley comes to mind. Writing in 1820, Shelley heaped Pindaric-style praise in "To a Skylark," a poem that, really, is about the speaker's desire for the eloquence he hears in the bird's song:

*Teach me half the gladness That thy brain must know, Such harmonious madness From my lips would flow*

I can't imagine a bird experience more directly opposed to my experience with Victor. Victor's music, if it be music, is modernist atonality, cacophony. It jars, makes you jump, drowns out National Radio. Sometimes, awakened at the blurry border between night and day, I think to myself: Victor must die. Still, I do not kill him. Still each morning his persistent call pierces my window, wrenching free my grip on a dream: *Here and now. Here and now.* ■



## Setting My Compass Home

Amy Halloran

I was a city mouse until I was six, when my parents moved my sisters and I just north of Troy, a vanquished industrial giant along the Hudson River in upstate New York. Melrose was a fairly undeveloped and distant suburb. In the late 1800s, wealthy Trojans had built big homes and boarding houses along the Boston and Maine train line, creating an Avenue A and envisioning a summery retreat that never got past the first letter. By the time we arrived in 1973, the hamlet had its own post office and a few other streets. The last freight train went to Troy that year, but I was too young to sense the whistle cry as lonesome.

Mine was the kind of wild childhood full of outdoor rooms: the clay pit below the tracks, the abandoned turkey pens of an old farm, the hulking shapes made by trees and bushes. Across the street from our house was an overgrown tree and plant nursery that all the neighborhood kids simply called "The Nursery"—and it seems now that it cradled me. But of course I wanted to leave these outdoor spaces, and all the other spots I loved in the country, when I hit my teenage years. I no longer wanted to dig up clay or play house under the arcs of the thin, branchy arms of bushes. I wanted to sit in rooms that had been built, not grown.

My best friend Jim and I wandered through abandoned buildings in downtown Troy—houses and warehouses, factories and forges—fantasizing about the past. The current city was a shame, boasting a dead mall and its spooky parking garage. Bearing flashlights and sometimes a small crowbar, Jim and I entered buildings through loosely boarded-up broken windows. We climbed fire escapes and lifted roof hatches. Sometimes, we just opened doors.

In the dank, dark privacies of long-vacant spaces, we flipped through dusty record books at forgotten desks, searching for wild artifacts. We thumbed through address books and guest logs, read the papers stuffed in walls where the plaster crumbled away from the lath. All teenagers, I

Troy waterfront, 1909



suppose, live in their own worlds, but Jim and I lived in a ghost town populated by our speculations—spirits who settled with the dust that covered everything we touched.

We stood on rooftops and watched the sunset and thought about leaving Troy to find our lives and ourselves in other places. We were well versed in Troy's feats: inventing the detachable collar; making the ink to print American money; forming the first all-women's labor union; staging the first performance of "Uncle Tom's Cabin." We hoped that Troy could climb to great cultural and economic heights again, but the present city was too small for our big egos. We left as soon as we could.

Although Flannery O'Connor assured would-be writers that anyone who survived childhood had enough material to last a lifetime, I felt that I needed to know more than home—my parents' home in Melrose and the city that felt like home—to write. I went to numerous colleges and cities in the Northeast, seeking places that would feed my writing. I wasn't looking to settle. I was just looking.

When I was twenty-three I moved to Seattle and though I lived there nearly a decade, my restlessness persisted. Five years into my stay I won a "Looking for a New Jesus Christ Poetry Contest" and its grand prize trip to Rome. I loaned out my furniture and sold most everything else I owned, as if I were going to the moon. I spent three months isolating myself in Italy, foolishly thinking that all the great ex-pat writers submerged themselves in solitude.

Eventually, I took my lonely self back to Seattle because I didn't know where else to go.

Getting pregnant solved my indecision about place. When my first son was inside me, I wanted to be home. This shocked me even more than my parents, who were used to my self-imposed exile. I craved the climate of my childhood the way other women crave dill pickles. I wanted the familiar sky-splitting lightning and ear-splitting thunder of summer. I needed the drama of the bitter cold and the surprising release of spring. When I returned to upstate New York, everything looked right. Studying an outcropping of rocks was like seeing an old friend.

I bought a house in Troy and I live here more completely than I did in any of the cities—New Orleans, Boston, Rome—I explored during prolonged adolescence. Perhaps this sudden sense of presence is the result of being a parent, which has thrust me into the immediate moment and away from the imagined ones that busied me all those years. Whatever it is, I am here in a way I have never been elsewhere—and my writing has never been stronger.

I love knowing where I am, on my mental map and the maps I study at the historical society. These maps show the changing building-scape of the city, and I use them to plot the lives of my characters—either real people who lived in Troy or fictional lives that I fashion. Rooting myself in Troy has helped me develop these stories. Tethered in place, my words are no longer balloons floating through the sky. I position characters in old mills or buildings downtown.

Part of this rooting has been interviewing Trojan residents for my writing. I've collected oral histories from city dwellers impacted by urban renewal, members of a community that was destroyed to make way for a bridge, and 'kids' who worked in the garment industry at the turn of the last century. With the help of some illustrator friends, I used the information from this last project to write a children's book about the local history of child labor. Turning real stories into fictions is rewarding; I feel like I'm preserving and creating simultaneously.

Unfortunately, I find that my setting can be perceived as a weakness. A local authority on children's literature advised me to take the child labor book to a vanity press, as the title's only appeal would be local. Other work has been dismissed as too local. Does anybody call William Kennedy or Richard Russo's Pulitzer Prize winning fictions too local?

Perhaps I earned these blows, in a karmic sense, by running from my region. I left Troy thinking that I was not a Trojan at heart, that I was too good for my city. Now that I've chosen it as a setting and subject, my writing has gained a new authority. But it is the authority of an ant because no one can hear me.

Perhaps this is the curse of regionalism. The term when applied to literature is a dismissal of the fact that descriptions of dialect and distinct geographies cradle universal human truths. Kate Chopin's New Orleans has been dubbed "regional" but what of Kafka's Prague? And Faulkner's Mississippi? As Faulkner said of his work, "Beginning with *Sartoris* I discovered that my own little postage stamp of native soil was worth writing about and that I would never live long enough to exhaust it."

There is no such thing as writing too close to home, even if home is not as recognizable to

the general population as say, New York City. Writers know this, and, if we are lucky enough to get our work into the world, the connection to place can be acknowledged as important. Willa Cather has a whole section of Webster County, Nebraska named after her; in 1965 the state legislature dubbed the area "Catherland."

Before I came home I could turn a phrase, but I couldn't quite create a believable place. Homeless, my words wandered through places and people I didn't know as well as I know poor old Troy. Sure, writers exile themselves and render complete worlds on the page, but often they write of the worlds they left. James Joyce consulted friends for details on his native Dublin while writing from Paris.

I wasn't interested in the streets I'd left until biology set my compass to home. My son needed to know the world that was realest to me, the seasons whose scents punctuated my childhood. I had mistaken myself for a wanderer. I am now content to wander from bed to desk, pausing, of course, for many trips to the kitchen, and long standstills at the windows, where I can study the progress of the foliage, from buds to leaves that will cushion and curtain me from the traffic that travels on my street.

My house sits on a hill seven miles south of my parents' place. Our front doors face east and our foundations hug hills. The sunsets here are eye-catching, just like the ones I used to watch from my perch atop the swing set when I was a child. Back then, my attic bedroom faced the overgrown nursery that housed my fantasies; now, my office faces a treed lot. While my neighbor cuts the grass around the trees, the shrubs are big and the rooms they make, cupping their arms over the ground, remind me of the Nursery's sheltered spaces. They say you can't go home again but this native has returned, and the dirt feels good on her feet. ■

## Not Your Average Gazetteer

Book Review by Melanie Meyers

*Home Ground: Language for an American Landscape*, Edited by Barry Lopez and Debra Gwartzney; Trinity University Press, \$29.95; 2006.

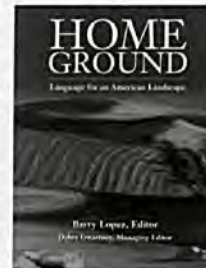
Defining and understanding the physical landscape is important to geographers and writers alike. But have you ever found yourself at a loss for the technical term to describe the debris littering a steep mountain slope where you might be hiking or the elements that created it? And have you found once returning home to search for the term and definition that a regular dictionary will not suffice? One only need consult *Home Ground: Language for an American Landscape* edited by Barry Lopez and Debra Gwartzney for the answers to these questions and many others concerning the physical environs of America. *Home Ground* serves as a useful reference for anyone—from the academic geographer to the nature writer to the outdoor enthusiast—who hopes to better understand and define the physical landscape of America.

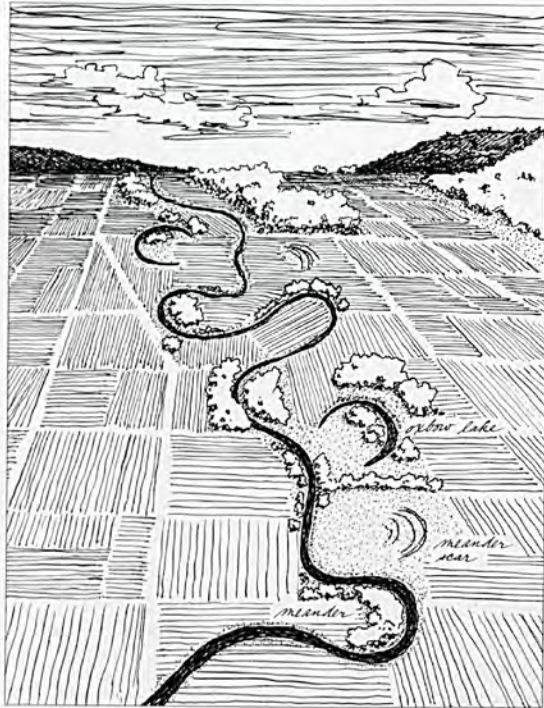
Lopez—the creator and editor of the volume—asked forty-five different writers, from Barbara Kingsolver to Arturo Longoria to Linda Hogan, to define the terms that create our American landscape. The book includes an introductory essay written by Lopez, as well as more than 850 descriptions and 100 illustrations. These are enhanced by occasional quotations—beautifully giving context to the terms—from authors such as Truman Capote and Cormac McCarthy. The book is ordered alphabetically and each definition is much more than a simple vocabulary lesson, but rather a series of mini-essays. Each not only gives literal descriptions of the features of the American landscape, but also illustrates their importance and significance to the Ameri-

can state of mind and sense of place. Each definition fills, colors, and brings to life the rich land that we inhabit.

The concept for *Home Ground* came as a result of a trip Lopez made to the University of Oregon library where he was searching for the meaning of the term *blind creek*. He left the library disappointed with the lack of resources available about the term, along with many others specific to the North American landscape. In his introduction to the book, Lopez discusses how arbitrary the naming of places and landforms has become throughout the landscape. Naming of places and landscape features used to denote a complex relationship between human culture and the places they inhabit, but now it more often than not simply seems to mark a spot on a map and indicate nothing greater about the place, the people who live there, or those who named it. In fact, so much of the American landscape is now urban, monotonous, and uniform that many of the terms and features defined in *Home Ground* will be unfamiliar for many readers. However, as Lopez notes, Americans are constantly searching for a sense of place that brings beauty and meaning into our lives.

Thus, Lopez has created a reference book that transforms the familiar, yet mundane terms for our surroundings—mountain, river, field, valley—into beautiful and evocative language. For example, Arthur Sze describes the *arête* as "a





## meander

Although humans more often name the land in terms of themselves (finger lake, headwall, a neck of land, etc.), sometimes the reverse takes place and a human behavior takes its name from a feature of the Earth. The river Menderes, which rises in what is today western Turkey and was known among the ancient Greeks and the Maiandros of Phrygia, flows to the Aegean with such seeming reluctance that it continually doubles back on itself, wreathing its floodplain in loop after serpentine loop of wandering channel. The name of the river, descended to modern English from Greek, gives us meander, which is our best verb for expressing randomness in thought and movement. —William deBuys

knife-edged ridge on a mountain formed by the glacial erosion of two or more cirques" that often takes the "sheer, dizzying fall that accounts for the feature's mystique of risk and danger." William deBuys explains how the terms for human behavior sometimes derive from the landscape, such as the to-and-fro curves of the meander or river. Antonya Nelson teaches us the value of the beaver meadow—the wetland created when waterways are "blocked or slowed by beaver structures"—and the surprising connections between this term and the naming of Las Vegas. And Luis Alberto Urrea explains that *angostura* is "a narrow way: the narrows. A tight squeeze," and reminds us that, "*El camino al infierno es ancho, pero el camino al cielo es una angostura.*" The road to hell is wide, but the road to heaven is a tight squeeze.

Lopez—a native of Port Chester, New York who now resides in Oregon—is the author of numerous essays and short stories, but originally worked as a landscape photographer. His work often emphasizes the relationship between the physical landscape and human culture, and *Home Ground* is a manifestation of these interests. Unlike the typical dictionary or encyclopedia, this reference gives the reader a deeper understanding of the defined physical features through each writer's personal connections to the landscape, their own "home grounds." The hefty volume may find its way onto a coffee table rather than the reference shelf, where readers can leaf through the exquisite passages and illustrations and be reminded that the landscape is both beautiful and meaningful for those who take the time to understand it better.

Readers will also find the work thoroughly researched. Co-editor Debra Gwartney, a writer and professor at the University of Oregon, managed the project, giving support and guidance to the writers selected to contribute to the

book. In the initial stages, she sent out packets to each writer with the twenty terms to define, pertinent research and quotations, and a long list of source materials. This latter category included some of the best existing references on landscapes—such as the *Dictionary of Physical Geography* (Blackwell Publishers, 2000)—as well as great works from American literature for inspiration. The goal was to show how the terms can be used to make sense of the complex relationship between humans and the landscape, and as such, the authors were asked not to focus on specific places—although at times they are referenced when necessary to help illustrate the definitions. Professional geographers also reviewed each of the descriptions for accuracy.

Taken as a whole, the entries in *Home Ground* bring to life the complex and vivid landscape that many of us miss as we zoom by in our technology-crazed lives. It is a reminder that in order to truly understand our connection to the physical land, we must slow down, stop our cars, and venture out-of-doors with binoculars and a burning desire to know more. Alas, there is no pocket-version yet. But the lessons from *Home Ground* will likely do more than expand your vocabulary; they could open up new ways of perceiving your environs. The landscape is more than a commodity, more than a place for recreation; it is a part of us, and we are a part of it.

So next time you see a small, low hill, call it a knoll. The debris littering the mountain slope you are hiking along is called talus. Bedrock is the solid rock that lies hidden deep beneath the topsoil of the earth and can be counted on not to change its consistency, just like the nature of your very best friend. The diversity of the landscape is waiting for you to discover it, and the first step to experiencing it is within the pages of *Home Ground*. ■

## Southern Architecture

Ellen Goldstein



The Ragged Mountains wear down after millennia of rising up, subsiding into eroded ridges, crow-harried hills crowned with sycamore peeled white as bone. In the candlelit quiet of his mansion, Jefferson drew plans for a university: pavilions and colonnades facing the library, designed to be a temple of knowledge, at the foot of the mountains.

You can still find rose-head nails in the wash behind the East Range where half-moon windows open like fans above every doorway, and buildings root into the clay as if they had grown there. Each morning Jefferson rode down to oversee the slaves who dug clay and fired bricks, which they laid in walls and paths, keeping to his plans until bricks flowed red over the land.

Pencil drawing by Abbi Holt

Aegean Sea	36.68N	25.70E
Ashhurst, New Zealand	40.29S	175.76E
Baltimore, MD	39.29N	76.61W
Baton Rouge, LA	30.44N	91.19W
Be'er sheva, Israel	31.25N	34.80E
Belém, Brazil	01.45S	48.48W
Boston, MA	42.36N	71.06W
Boulder, CO	40.02N	105.28W
Bronx, NY	40.83N	73.92W
Burnt River, OR	44.37N	117.23W
Catherland, NE	40.09N	98.52W
Chicken Creek, OR	44.53N	117.35W
Coyote Peak, OR	44.77N	117.80W
Curitiba, Brazil	24.42S	49.29W
Denver, CO	39.74N	104.99W
Dublin, Ireland	53.33N	06.25W
East Range, University of Virginia, Charlottesville	38.03N	78.48W
Ebelle Creek, OR	44.71N	117.75W
Elkhorn, OR*		
Este River, Germany	53.52N	09.73E
Estebriigge, Germany	53.52N	09.73E
Farewell Bend, OR	44.31N	117.22W
The Fertile Crescent	34.56N	43.07E
Fortaleza, Brazil	03.78S	38.59W
Garden of Eden*		
Gold Hill, OR	44.54N	117.39W
Hamburg, Germany	53.55N	09.97E
The Hamptons, NY	40.97N	72.18W
Hells Canyon, OR	45.55N	116.50W
Hudson River	42.35N	73.79W
Iron Mountain, OR	44.63N	117.45W
Jerusalem, Israel	31.78N	35.22E
King Ranch, TX	27.46N	97.91W
Kitchen Creek, OR	44.65N	117.58W
Lake Taupo, New Zealand	38.81S	175.91E
Las Vegas, NV	36.17N	115.14W
London, England	51.50N	00.13W
Massey University, New Zealand	40.38S	175.62E
Melrose, NY	42.84N	73.62W
Menders River, Turkey	37.52N	27.30E
Mexico	23.58N	102.55W
Mesopotamia	33.20N	43.70E
Mississippi	32.57N	89.87W

the following

## PLACES

appear  
in this issue of

## you are here

Mount Doom*		
Mt. Cook, New Zealand	43.74S	170.10E
New Jersey	40.07N	74.73W
New Orleans, LA	29.95N	90.07W
New York, NY	40.71N	74.01W
Palmerston North, New Zealand	40.36S	175.61E
Paris, France	48.86N	02.35E
Philippines	12.88N	121.78E
Port Chester, NY	41.00N	73.67W
Prague, Czech Republic	50.08N	14.43E
Quartz Creek, OR	44.70N	117.74W
Ragged Mountains, VA	37.96N	78.70W
Rattlesnake Springs, OR	44.53N	117.40W
Rehovot, Israel	31.89N	34.80E
Rio Grande	31.75N	106.49W
Rishon LeTzion, Israel	31.97N	34.80E
Rome, Italy	41.89N	12.48E
Rotorua, New Zealand	38.14S	176.25E
San Perlita, TX	26.50N	97.64W
Seattle, WA	47.60N	122.33W
Sisley Creek, OR	44.50N	117.37W
Snake Hill*		
Snake River, OR	44.31N	117.22W
Swayze Creek, OR	44.55N	117.42W
Troy, NY	42.73N	73.69W
Webster County, NE	40.18N	98.50W
Wedel, Germany	53.58N	09.70E

\* coordinates unknown or imagined

## Contributors

**Walter Barga**n has published ten books of poetry and two chapbooks. His latest books are *The Feast* (BKMk Press-UMKC, 2004), which received the 2005 William Rockhill Nelson Award, and *Remedies for Vertigo* (WordTech Communications, 2006).

**Lauren Basson**, PhD, has lived in Rehovot, Israel since 2001. She teaches politics and government at Ben Gurion University and is the author of a forthcoming book from the University of North Carolina Press. Originally from Seattle, she enjoys writing to her cousin, Olivia, and other family members about her impressions of Israel as a mother, scholar, and observer of everyday life.

**Leslie Clark** earned her MA in English through the creative writing program at Old Dominion University. Currently, she is English faculty at Cochise College in Douglas, Arizona. Her poetry and short fiction have been published for more than twenty years. She is editor/publisher of a quarterly online poetry journal, *Voices on the Wind*, [www.voicesonthewind.net](http://www.voicesonthewind.net).

**Joan Frederick** is a photographer, teacher, and historian living in Texas, but was raised in Oklahoma. Her photography centers on the culture of modern Native Americans and occasionally profiles her adopted homeland, the Latino world of San Antonio.

**Ellen Goldstein** was born and raised in central Virginia. Her poems have appeared in *The New Hampshire Review*, *Measure*, *The Mid-American Review*, and *StorySouth*. She lives north of Boston.

**Bárbara Renaud González** is a freelance journalist and writer based in San Antonio, Texas. She has published in diverse newspapers, magazines, and journals. Currently, she is finishing a novel, *Cotondrina: A Texas Story*, based on how her mother crossed the border in the 1940s.

**Amy Halloran** has written for *Salon*, *The Seattle Weekly*, and the *American Book Review*. Her short stories have been published online at *McSweeney's*, *Tarpaulin Sky*, and *Pindeldyboz*, and in *Gargoyle* and *Alimentum* journals. Currently, she writes opinion pieces for *The Times Union* and *The Daily Gazette*, and is working on a novel and a comic book about urban removals in upstate New York, where she lives with her family.

**Abbi Holt**, was raised in Charlottesville, Virginia. Educated at the University of Virginia and Boston University, she teaches Latin in Arlington, Massachusetts.

**Ginger Knowlton**, of Boulder, Colorado, is currently living in New Zealand as a visiting artist. Her drawings and oil paintings are held in private collections across the United States and New Zealand.

**Melanie Meyers** recently graduated from the University of Arizona where she studied geography, creative writing, and Spanish. Her interests include the landscape of the Southwest, which inspired her honors thesis in creative non-fiction. She will be continuing at the UA for graduate studies in geography this fall. Additionally, she is a professional mountain bike racer, and enjoys pedaling to places around the world.

**Kristen E. Nelson** is a writer of short fiction. She was born and raised in New York, but now lives in, and has fallen deeply in love with, the Sonoran Desert. She is the codirector of Casa Libre en la Solana ([www.casalibre.org](http://www.casalibre.org)), a writing center in Tucson, Arizona.

**Celeste O'Dell** has published several short stories, including "The Bridegroom," which was awarded the Balch fiction prize by the *Virginia Quarterly Review*. She is working on a collection of stories set in eastern Oregon, where she grew up.

**Jörn Seemann** received his master's degree in geography at the University of Hamburg (Germany) in 1994. He has been teaching geography and cartography at a small state university (Universidade Regional do Cariri) in northeastern Brazil since 2002. He will soon be pursuing a PhD in the Geography and Anthropology program at Louisiana State University where he will study cultural and humanistic perspectives in cartography and different ways of thinking, perceiving, and representing space and place.

**Patricia Smith** has exhibited her work widely both in the United States and abroad. Her recent exhibitions include a solo show at Front Room Gallery in New York City, and group exhibitions at the Stedelijk Museum in Aalst, Belgium, Ruth Bachofner Gallery in Los Angeles, and Texas Tech University in Lubbock. Her work will be shown in the upcoming Istanbul Biennial. She lives and works in Brooklyn and upstate New York. For more information, visit [www.frontroom.org](http://www.frontroom.org).

**Bryan Walpert**, PhD, is a lecturer in the School of English & Media Studies at Massey University in Palmerston North, New Zealand. His poems have appeared in poetry anthologies and such literary journals as *AGNI*, *Crab Orchard Review*, and *Tar River Poetry*. His essays on poetry have appeared in scholarly journals, literary journals, and encyclopedias of literature.

**Olivia Webster**, a recent graduate of Western Washington University with a double degree in Studio Arts and Art History, is now a practicing artist in Seattle. Her artistic passion lies in expressive and narrative explorations in oil paints. This recent collaboration with her cousin Lauren and her letters from Israel has been a fascinating journey of sensitive interpretation from a faraway land and is a continuing interest she plans on pursuing further.

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