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Ageing and Immortality

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Editorial Introduction: Who are 'The Aged'?

This year, *Transverse* has assembled many exemplary academic, fiction and poetry submissions from a diverse group of contributors. The writers range in professional stage, area of expertise and geographical location, but the common thread among all the published pieces is our special issue theme of "Ageing and Immortality." Beginning with academic articles, followed by fiction and poetry, this twelfth issue addresses some complicated perspectives on ageing and the identity politics that come with that inevitable process.

Natalie Childs compares a film with a novel in the first article. The 1975 documentary, *The Beales of Grey Gardens*, by Albert and David Maysles replays a story of decay in relation to shifts in American class descriptions over the past hundred years. The Beales are a family of mother and daughter who were once part of an aristocracy that aligned them with the likes of Jacqueline Kennedy—who is, in fact, their cousin. As Childs is careful to note, retrieving the memory of the high-class society with which these women once identified is not necessarily part of the filmmakers' agenda. Rather, hints of their upbringing appear in spite of their current, much downgraded lifestyle. Childs compares this film with W.G. Sebald's 1993 novel, *The Emigrants*. Sebald's characters all survived a trauma unnamed (which would logically be the Holocaust). As Childs asserts, it is not the trauma itself that is at the crux of this story, but the troubling way in which traces of the trauma surface in the characters' words and actions involuntarily. Childs draws a parallel between these two very different works which both dig at something covert: the symptom of loss. In her analysis, she reveals that this symptom is often the last strand of decay. Although the Beales' society life has ended, although the emigrants' traumatic event is over, the remnants of these are carried into the present by the people who survived them.

In the second article, Ernest A. Hartwell undertakes a crucial study of marginalized bodies of the aged in two Argentine novels through the lens of bio-politics. In his article, he identifies the discourse surrounding older bodies by contrasting the references that qualify them. In one novel, *Diario*, the older men are ironically called "the boys," a self-referencing term which sheds light on a kind of denial that accompanies the loss of youthful vitality. In *Tierra De Exilio*, the "seventy-year-old man" is the main character, but he is defined by his age, and only his age. Marginalized by his seniority, he is devalued for seemingly taking up space and yet no longer producing. By incorporating theorists like Agamben, Foucault and Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, Hartwell locates a narrative of monstrosity within discourses on ageing. He suggests that the elderly are divided from the rest of society not only because of their difference, but because they "de-*monstr*-ate" that which we all become.

Fiction pieces, *Night* and *Old Sins*, by Cyril Dabydeen and Sara Erdmann respectively, each deal with an ageing protagonist's attempts to settle their differing outlooks with the young people around them. In *Home Care*, Patricia Life isolates specific moments in conversations between an elderly husband and wife, Bill and Ruth. She shows that even for the aged, the future can feel uncertain but, for the present, this couple still has love. In a final fiction piece, Matt Tompkins experiments with structure to evoke the whirlwind "time lapse" of a man's experience from birth to death, to tragicomic effect.

Poets Joan Crate, Andrei Guruiano and Nina Kaye each contributed more than one poem to elaborate on themes of ageing through rhythm and imagery. By exploring love, loss and death, these writers evoke certain universal emotions tied to ageing that can be at once painful and heart-warming thanks to the clever aesthetics of their written words.

And now, I send you to the next page and—thank you, in advance, for reading!

Natalie Pendergast
Editor-In-Chief,
Transverse Journal

Academic Articles

"A dweller in the garden, an ornamental hermit": The obsolete subjects of *The Emigrants* and *Grey Gardens*

By Natalie Childs

In a poignant scene from the 2006 film *The Beales of Grey Gardens*, Little Edie Beale explains to the camera: "There's one thing that remains the same . . . nature. Man changes and is variable. But nature remains the same. The sun and the moon and all the things go on, in spite of man: he crumbles." This pronouncement comes directly after Little Edie's discussion of the wedding of Jacqueline Bouvier to John Kennedy ("20 years ago now,") to which she and her mother were invited. This sense of man as the being who "crumbles" is a historically situated one, and it is echoed in W.G. Sebald's *The Emigrants*, a book filled with crumbling works of man: cities, buildings and paintings are all in various stages of decay throughout the novel. In the introduction to *W.G. Sebald, Image, Archive, Modernity*, J.J. Long theorizes Sebald's artistic project as an attempt to deal with the loss engendered by the project of modernity: "The continual production of the new in capitalism has as its concomitant destruction of the old and the acceleration of obsolescence itself. In this light, modernity [is] understood as something that produces loss" (4). This sense of the old as obsolete, and the loss which accompanies that sentiment, are central both to *The Emigrants* and *Grey Gardens*. No longer functional and deeply archaic, the protagonists of these works serve as limit cases for the impact of modernity on the ageing subject.

Representatives of a world in which the aged are useless, the Beales of *Grey Gardens* and the men of *The Emigrants* appear as relics of a different time, isolated from social ties and disconnected from the world in which they live. Without connections to the contemporary world, they reinscribe the traumas and the patterns of their world in a concentrated form. The way in which the excesses of memory and history continually return becomes evident when comparing the ageing subjects in The Emigrants and Grey Gardens. While the survivors of *The Emigrants* live in the wake of an unspeakable historical trauma, the Beales endlessly reinscribe their past in speech, constantly reiterating their former glories and failures, along with the minor injuries they have caused to one another over the years. As ex-

treme case studies for the way modernity produces loss, these characters make visible the major difficulties and the minor beauties of life as an obsolete subject.

Grey Gardens

Grey Gardens is a 1975 documentary by brothers Albert and David Maysles. The film documents the private lives of seventy-nine-year-old "Big" Edith Beale and her fifty-six-year-old daughter "Little" Edie. The women, close relatives of Jacqueline Bouvier, live in near-isolation in a twenty-eight-room home in East Hampton (named Grey Gardens) that was at one time the family's summer cottage. The contrast between the family's past and the women's present is part of what makes the documentary so compelling: they were born into an American aristocracy which no longer exists, one in which Big Edie's debut into society was covered by national newspapers. The family's money was slowly lost and after Edith Beale's divorce, the women were left only with Grey Gardens. Little Edie, who had always been close with her mother, moved back from an attempted stage career in New York to live at Grey Gardens. Cut off from family money and unable to find sources of income, the enormous home fell into decay around the women, was investigated for safety reasons by the town of East Hampton, and in the mid-1970s the Beales were threatened with eviction. Jacqueline Kennedy and her sister Lee Radziwill helped the Beales with some renovations to the house, allowing them to remain in their home.

In *Representing Reality*, Bill Nichols argues that in documentary film, history is always in excess, "that which escapes the grasp of narrative and exposition" (142). In *Grey Gardens*, which is shot in the then-innovative *cinéma vérite* style, little is offered by way of plot or interpretation of the women's eccentricities. The story of how two women who once belonged to the upper class of American society came to live in isolated squalor is never made explicit in the film. Instead, snippets of that society continually return, in distorted form, through the actions and speeches of the women. Nichols argues that "as the referent of documentary, history is what always stands outside the text" (142). In *Grey Gardens,* history and the glory of the past are everywhere, and yet irrevocably lost. Informed by the same modern

American world that produced the Kennedy administration, the Beales show the shadow side of this system in decay. As Big Edie explains, "'eccentric' is a lack of money."

The Emigrants

The Emigrants is the third novel by German author W.G. Sebald. Published in 1993, the book is divided into four chapters, each of which traces the life of an emigrant from a German community in the early 20th century. An unnamed narrator, who acts as a type of witness and recorder of the histories of each man, links the four chapters. *The Emigrants* details four lives in the wake of the Holocaust, which is obliquely referred to but never explicitly addressed in the text. All four lives have been irrevocably shaped by this cataclysmic event, and yet the inexplicability of the traumatic moment is shown over and over in small moments of the novel.

In *On the Natural History of Destruction*, a collection of essays and lectures on the bombing of Germany during the Second World War, Sebald describes how many characters in the novels of Heinrich Boll, written in the wake of the bombings of Germany, evidence the loss of any will to live: "This deficiency, clinging to them like a stigma in the new world of success, is the legacy of an existence among the ruins that was felt to be shameful" (36). In his description of German lives after these bombings, Sebald looks for an understanding of why the history of that period has been represented so little. Describing survivor accounts of the bombings, Sebald writes: "The accounts of those who escaped with nothing but their lives do generally have something discontinuous about them, a curiously erratic quality so much at variance with authentic recollection that it easily suggests rumor-mongering and invention" (24). Although the scale of the traumatic events survived by the characters of *The Emigrants* and *Grey Gardens* are incomparable, it is the "curiously erratic" character of their accounts, stemming from a historical wound that links these works together. This "discontinuity" produces opposing forms of subjectivity and memory in the Beales and in the emigrants. Crucially, their different modes of remembering are closely tied to subjectivity. Although protagonists of these works serve as holders of memory, they

have a complex relationship to this memory and to the world they come from. The emigrants are unable to access traumatic memories, yet they are influenced by the past in every action. These are historical figures disconnected from the historical moment that formed them. For the Beales, by contrast, memory and history are everywhere, constantly rehearsed and reimagined, "concentrated" in their ageing bodies. Presented without this context, the figures become absurd and shadowy: their motivations are unknowable to us.

Time and artistic technique in *Grey Gardens*

In "The Crystal Formation: Narrative Structure in *Grey Gardens,*" Kenneth Robson describes the filmmaking technique of the Mayles brothers in comparison to the modernist style of Virginia Woolf: "Like Virginia Woolf, the Maysles ask us to forego the pleasures of the conventional narrative in order to experience the satisfaction of perceiving the embedded stories, often linked more through atmosphere or attitude than through causality" (43). This description also maps perfectly onto the style of *The Emigrants*: although the narrator of the four stories is the same, he himself remains nameless and shadowy. The relation of the four stories is never made evident and within the stories causal relationships are often absent or unclear, with connections being based more on mood and atmosphere.

Stylistic film and literary techniques are used to illustrate the odd place occupied by these ageing subjects; appearing through a documentary lens, the Beales open themselves to the camera in a performative way. They present themselves in all their glorious strangeness, which is left uncommented upon by the makers of the documentary. Paula Rabinowitz critiques the ethics of the Maysles brothers' *cinéma vérite* approach in *Grey Gardens* precisely because it dehistoricizes the events it presents:

> As "star" of the documentary, the presence of the body, especially the body in pain, signifies a truth and realness that seems to defy contextualization. Without the filmmaker's body present on screen, however, the camera's view is dehistoricized, while the filmed bodies are simultaneously over-invested with meaning and deprived of agency. (125)

Through editing, the story of the Beales is presented without historical context, and their performing bodies are shown trapped within the domain of their crumbling home.

The history of conflict between the four co-editors of the film comes out in an interview with Ellen Hovde, who discusses the alternative beginning she and another editor wanted for the film: an opening shot that pans down the road where the Beales lived:

> On that road are enormous houses with espaliered trees, and fancy gravelled driveways – they are very elegant. And we thought it would be wonderful to just go right past those houses and come to the Beales' house … Al said, "I don't care where this house is, it could be in the middle of Harlem, and the story would be the same." Muffie and I don't agree at all; we think the story has very much to do with the society, and the place, and the contrast of the way they live with the way people live around them, the class they come from and how they deviated from that. (Hovde 13)

The conflict over whether or not to include this opening shot speaks to the differing ways of viewing *Grey Gardens*: is this the story of two women in isolation from the outside world, recluses who have been untouched by their circumstances? Or is the highly classed, aristocratic world of the interwar period relevant to their story? The decaying opulence that surrounds them is indeed part of the intrigue and mystery surrounding the Beales, yet by deemphasizing the social circumstances of the film the Beales themselves are allowed to come to the fore.

Robson describes the effect of this lack of causality as creating *Grey Gardens* as "an aesthetic labyrinth of sorts" (43). He traces the minimal reference points in the film, especially with regards to time - the film details the lives of "women adrift in time . . . more comfortable with the past than with the present" (43). Near the beginning of the film Little Edie describes the layout of Grey Gardens, including where the former maid's quarters are situated. Her speech trails off into the pronouncement that

"it's very difficult to keep the line between the past and the present." John Rhodes reads from that scene "an acute awareness of the traditional nature of things and spaces and their uses, but also an awareness of the fluidity of all these and a confident nimbleness in subverting these traditional uses . . . the poetics of Little Edie's discourse . . . is one with her awareness of the slipperiness of time" (94). Little Edie is indeed aware of the looseness of her grasp of time. She asks the filmmakers' advice on whether she should begin caring for her mother more closely, but feels it is too difficult because of "timing": "Perhaps I ought to start giving Mother cooked meals, and taking care of her . . . you know, meals at certain hours. The problem is I don't have a clock, I never know what time it is . . . She should have chopped meat and a baked potato for luncheon. But that takes timing."

Photography and palimpsestic narrative in *The Emigrants*

The interspersion of photographs is one of the most innovative aspects of *The Emigrants*, as well as one of the most puzzling. Timothy Dow Adams reads the photographs of *The Emigrants* as

> a metaphor for memory: they combine specific details with a limited time frame and a vague sense of location, they provide fragmented images that supersede other memories, they appear enigmatically out of order, and even as they establish evidence, they also document coincidence and undercut the process of coming to terms with repressed memories. (192)

While evocative, these photographs are not easy to read as part of a traditional narrative. Long's introduction to his book on Sebald links memory, melancholy, and modernity through the medium of the photograph. Long reads the combined use of photographs and narrative in *The Emigrants* as "an attempt, at the level of form to counteract the dispersal, dissipation and rupture inherent in the history of modernity" (127). Yet these unmarked photographs preclude any possibility of our finding their point of origin, leaving the work of remembering troubled at best.

The protagonist of the fourth chapter, Max Ferber, is a painter to whom it is of the greatest importance "that nothing should change at his place of work, that everything should remain as it was, as he

had arranged it, and that nothing further should be added but the debris generated by painting and the dust that continuously fell and which, as he was coming to realize, he loved more than anything else in the world" (Sebald, *The Emigrants* 161). As we learn later in the chapter, Ferber's parents were Jews murdered in the Holocaust shortly after they arranged for their son's escape to England. With that knowledge, the narrator's description of Ferber's paintings takes on a new significance. In speaking of one of Ferber's portraits, the narrator suggests that "an onlooker might well feel that it had evolved from a long lineage of grey, ancestral faces, rendered unto ash but still there, as ghostly presences, on the harried paper" (162). These erased, ashy faces evoke those lost in the Holocaust, unreachable except through the piles of dust that gather in the corners of Ferber's room.

Metonymic homes

In both *Grey Gardens* and *The Emigrants*, the figure of destruction and ruin comes in the return of the natural world, through reclamation by the earth of the human-built spaces of civilization. The house covered in vines, half-pulled down by the plant life which parasitically grows on it, is the dominant metaphor for the grotesquely natural process of ageing in *The Emigrants* and *Grey Gardens*. These houses prefigure the inevitable pull of death and disease, and the cyclical replacement of human life by other life: the insignificance of the individual in the face of larger systems of existence. The destruction wreaked by the natural growth around the Beale's home prefigures the decline that slowly takes apart the ageing subject; the slow dismantling of the social structures which have built the human individuality of the subject. Discussing the gardens and plants surrounding the house, Little Edie tells the camera: "Eventually everything will grow back. And then they'll rush in and pull it all down again. They do it to everybody: they want everybody to be the same. You can't have anything different."

John David Rhodes traces the history of building many of the East Hampton cottages to the turn of the century. Grey Gardens was built in 1897 during the "first wave of gentrification in an area south of the highway leading into the village of East Hampton . . . called 'The Summer Colony.' Its residents

were upper-middle class New Yorkers who built summer 'cottages' there" (Rhodes 89). Rhodes' article describes the incredible hugeness of Grey Gardens (28 rooms) as follows:

> The cognitive dissonance that is generated by the sheer size of the house as viewed from the outside and the very few number of rooms that the film (or the Beales themselves?) allows us to see charges the whole of the film with an excess that is more felt or sensed than seen. Though we do not see the other rooms, we sense them as a potentiality, a kind of imminence. (90)

These homes were built for the new American aristocracy to represent the strength of man in the face of the natural world. Yet the immense weight of the history of this place makes its maintenance impossible and its decay inevitable.

The homes and buildings in *Grey Gardens* and *The Emigrants* can be seen as standing metonymically for the society which built them, a world which is no longer. In "Concentrated Ground: Grey Gardens and the Cinema of the Domestic," John David Rhodes calls Grey Gardens, the house, a "fantastic catalogue of desuetude" (1). This sense of a place outside of time, standing in for the outdated world which created it, resonates through *The Emigrants* as well: the novel is filled with unoccupied buildings, "haunted" in a variety of ways. The sanatorium that plays a prominent role in Ambros Adelworth, is figured in just such terms: it is "the dried-out shell of [a] building" (Sebald 112) and its caretaker describes his fantastic dream of its destruction:

> Nowadays I place all my hope in the mice, and in the woodworm and death-watch beetles. The sanatorium is creaking, and in places already caving in, and sooner or later they will bring about its collapse…[I] see everything simultaneously, the building as a whole and also the minutest detail; and I know that the woodwork, the roof beams, door posts and paneling, the floorboards and staircases, the rails and banisters, the lintels and ledges, have already been hollowed out under the surface, and at any moment, as soon as the chosen one amongst

> the blind armies of beetles dispatches the very last, scarcely material resistance
>
> with its jaws, the entire lot will come down. (113)

I quote extensively both in order to demonstrate the tone of Sebald's work, full of meandering monologues which shift (often imperceptibly) between the narrator and other characters and to show the "minutest detail" with which these characters detail their dying world. The caretaker of the sanatorium, once a doctor in the mental institution, now "no doubt . . . in some sense, mad" (110) gives an account of the history of the place that is at once highly specific and missing large elements. He can recall specific dates and patients but is vague when called to account for the frequency of the shock treatments given to Ambros Adelwarth: "When treatment was so frequent, there could be no question of proper documentation or assessment of the therapy . . . Besides . . . all of the material on file . . . ha[s] probably long since been eaten by the mice" (112). Yet Dr. Abramasky is filled with grief at the history of the institution, and indeed seems to have been driven mad by it. He has become separated from the world as the bearer of the memories of the place, but wishes for release: "I do not expect anyone can really imagine the pain and wretchedness once stored up in this extravagant timber palace, and I hope all this misfortune will gradually melt away as it falls apart" (110). Abramsky's dream is for the sanatorium to disperse, leaving in its place "merely a heap of powder-fine wood dust, like pollen" (113).

The Beales of *Grey Gardens* as "concentrated" subjects

In a scene near the end of *Grey Gardens* the camera pans over the Beales' bedroom. The camera takes in the filth that covers everything, such as the newspapers laid on top of the bed as cat litter and focuses on a cat defecating behind a portrait of Big Edie as a young woman. Our gaze turns back to Big Edie, in bed, who tells her daughter, the Maysles, and the viewers: "I'm not ashamed of anything! My body is a very precious place. It's concentrated ground." In his essay John Rhodes reads this line in terms of life in the house, thinking of the way the Beales inhabit Grey Gardens: "The lives of these women in this house, and the film itself are all studies in an intensity, density, and specificity of being in

one place in a particular time in a particular manner" (99). The squalid decadence of the Beales also provides a "concentrated" view of the aristocratic American world from which they have made only a partial escape. Both women had dreams of performing – singing and dancing – that were made impossible by the standards of the upper class in which they were raised. Here we see a resonance with Freud's essay "The Uncanny" through the uncanny doubling of mother and daughter. The women who share a name and have been linked their whole lives are identified with one another throughout the film, and it is made clear at some points that Big Edie has forced her daughter to live through her dreams and aspirations while at the same time attempting to keep her close by. The psychological danger of this doubling is evidenced in "the constant recurrence of the same thing – the repetition of the same features or character-traits or vicissitudes, of the same crimes, or even of the same names through several consecutive generations" (Freud 356).

The trauma endured by the Edies is historical in a very different way from that of the emigrants in Sebald's work. Their disappointments are small by comparison, but nevertheless real. The aspirations of the women were halted both by the expectations of their upper class, American-aristocratic circles and by the missing father/husband figure. Without husbands, the women retreated to Grey Gardens; a space outside the "real world" and outside of chronological time. However, the disappointments of the past still loom large in the home. In "The Uncanny" Freud describes the way unrealized dreams come back to haunt us in later life; speaking of "all the unfulfilled but possible futures to which we still like to cling in phantasy, all the strivings of the ego which adverse external circumstances have crushed" (358). While Big Edie, at the age of 79, has outwardly reconciled with her past ("I have had my cake and eaten it,") Little Edie remains obsessed with her missed moments. Accordingly, it is Little Edie that we most often see engaged in mirror-gazing and sometimes painful self-reflection. Speaking of the filmmakers, Little Edie explains: "They don't see me as I see myself . . . I see myself as a little girl, you know . . . they see me as a woman, but I don't see myself like that at all. When I go to New York I see myself as a woman, but in this house I'm just Mother's little girl." The uncanny doubling of mother and

child within the space of the home has left Little Edie unable to move past the disappointments of her early life, leaving her stuck in the delusion of childhood.

The "Evacuated Subjects" of *The Emigrants*

The first section of *The Emigrants*, subtitled "And the last remnants/memory destroys," details the narrator's meeting with Dr. Henry Selwyn, the estranged husband of the narrator's landlady. Selwyn is first described as "an old man . . . his movements seemed at once awkward and yet perfectly poised; and there was a similar courtesy, of a style that had long since fallen into disuse, in the way he introduced himself" (Sebald, *The Emigrants* 5). This sense of a man and a place that are no longer useful is emphasized by Selwyn himself, who introduces himself as "a dweller in the garden, a kind of ornamental hermit" (5). The garden he mentions is vividly evoked in the first pages of the book, a Victorian kitchen garden which now grows untamed and out of control. Selwyn explains that he has "the sense that Nature itself was groaning and collapsing beneath the burden we placed upon it" (7). Selwyn's aged body is drawn with precision, and yet the descriptions always hint at a feeling that he is outside of time: "His short collar was too large for his scrawny, wrinkled neck, which emerged from it accordion-style . . . his head was small, seemingly faintly prehistoric, some kind of throwback" (12).

Max Ferber, protagonist of the final chapter of Sebald's novel, provides the best explanation of the disjunction between chronological time and historical memory: "Time . . . is an unreliable way of gauging these things, indeed it is nothing but a disquiet of the soul. There is neither a past nor a future. At least, not for me. The fragmentary scenes that haunt my memories are obsessive in character" (181). Although traumatic life events are rehearsed and revealed in *The Emigrants*, these confessions come too late or in the wrong way. In the work of Kathleen Woodward, confession and the telling of the life narrative is figured as potential moment for resolution in old age, but in *The Emigrants* and *Grey Gardens* this possibility is refused. There is no hope for catharsis or even forgiveness. As Long interprets: "Confession [in *The Emigrants*] leads not to the pronouncement of truth – let alone to a diagnosis or cure of

mental pathology – but rather to a hollowing-out or evacuation of subjectivity whose issue can only be death" (116). This "evacuation of subjectivity" stands in dialectical opposition to the "concentration" of memory in the Beales - the excess of history in both cases produces the inability to escape memory. For the women of *Grey Gardens*, this means an endless rehearsal of recriminations and lost loves. For the men of *The Emigrants*, this excess leads to suicide, mental illness or simply disappearance. In both cases, the excess of history in the aged subject necessitates a near-complete break from the society in which they live. The incongruity of these lives in the modern world makes these damaged subjects obsolete.

Age in Modernity

An exploration of ageing in our society can thus be linked to a critique of industrialism - at the end of *The Emigrants*, it is the world of "work" in the ghettos of Lodz that are evoked, and now it is Manchester, repeatedly called the "centre of industrialism" which is empty and falling apart. The useless – the painter who erases his work and the butler to the aimless man – are the heroes of Sebald's novel. By way of partial explanation for this emptiness, I link the production of obsolescence in modernity to the condition of the aged protagonists of *Grey Gardens* and *The Emigrants*. By virtue of modern capitalism's obsession with the manufacture of the new, the old (whether commercial product, individual, or way of life) is pushed aside before it has naturally passed away. Long's statement that modernity can be understood as a movement that "produces loss" (Long 4) is thus applicable to the aged subject as well as the system of capitalist production. In a world where the new and the young are the most valued commodities, history and age are always in excess, unable to be reconciled to the world in which they exist.

With this reading of modernity as a society that produces the old as obsolete, I end with a reading of the final scenes of *Grey Gardens* and *The Emigrants.* It is crucial to note that this world produces its own destruction through the process of constant innovation and denial of the past. This is clearly seen in the chapter of *The Emigrants* entitled "Max Ferber," where the ageing painter who con-

tinually produces dust describes his connection to the city of Manchester, "the birthplace of industrialization" (192), once "the industrial Jerusalem" of the world (165). The city is now described as empty, "in the grip of decay" (139). It is through the processes of production and innovation that the city rises, and through the same processes that the city falls into disrepair. In the same way Little Edie, whose subjectivity was constructed in a world that values the young and the beautiful, now has no place in this world.

The final full scene of *Grey Gardens* is a shot of Little Edie performing a dance in the front hallway - an echo of an earlier scene in which she danced the "Virginia Military Dance" for the camera. This time, she is not performing for the camera, but is watched from above, her legs tied with ribbons. There is a note of hope, or at least peace, in this scene. However, after the credits comes the real last scene of the film: the conversation between Al Malyses and Little Edie, which takes place years after the movie was filmed. Big Edie died shortly after the release of the film, and her daughter sold Grey Gardens two years later, in 1979. Throughout the film, Little Edie had complained that she had to move out of the house, that it was "driving [her] crazy," implying that things would be different if only she escaped her mother's grasp and the decaying world of the family home. Yet as the final conversation makes clear, Little Edie's state was not caused by the home, or her mother's interventions. She occupies an uncomfortable space in the modern world: although she attempted a stage career after the film, it was widely panned by critics. Safer in memory and on screen, Little Edie has now been firmly ensconced as a relic.

The Emigrants ends with a description of a photograph that never actually appears in the text. The photograph portrays "three young women, perhaps aged twenty" in a textile factory in the ghetto of Lodz in 1940 (Sebald, *The Emigrants* 237). The identity of these weavers is unknown, but in the final sentence of the book, the narrator of *The Emigrants* "wonder[s] what the three women's names were – Roza, Luisa and Lea, or Nona, Decuma and Morta, the daughters of night, with spindle, scissors and thread" (237). This invocation of the Fates at the end of the book offers potential support to Long's the-

sis that the metaphor of "suturing" the traumas of modernity ("the attempt to create some form of bond in the face of a perceived historical or post-traumatic fragmentation" [Long 127]) is one goal of *The Emigrants*. Yet the appearance of these fated women also allows for a critique of industrialism that disallows the possibility of a new world. What the picture portrays is the sense of the world that is dying here in the ghettos. The pictures described were taken by a photographer and bookkeeper Genewein, and were meant to demonstrate the "'industry', the ghetto works that were essential to the wartime economy" (Sebald, *The Emigrants* 236). The women who look at the author "with so steady and relentless a gaze that [he] cannot meet it for long" (237) address the reader, too, with this gaze. There is an appeal and a question in this look across the decades, and we know what their fates likely are. Unable to grow old, these women, with the Beales, represent the extremity of the rapid production of obsolescence in the modern subject.

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Bodies (un)made: Languages of Ageing and Violence in Two Argentine Novels

by Ernest A. Hartwell

Tierra de exilio by Andrés Rivera and *Diario de la guerra del cerdo* (in translation, *Diary of the War of the Pig*) by Adolfo Bioy Casares are two late 20th century Argentine novels that recount tales of violence against older men, violence executed by gangs of youths. From the two texts, one can glean certain notions of ageing, dynamic representations of the body with monstrous implications. The violence that frames these novels is not simply a theme, but is also present throughout the architecture of the phrases, in the words, the tone. The representation of ageing functions as a vehicle of violence, thus illustrating how a society marginalizes its citizens and how a body in decadence can marginalize itself.

Tierra consists of the fragmentary tale of a nameless man, a man simply qualified by his age, "el hombre de setenta años." The course of the novel is limited to one winter afternoon in which the seventy-year-old man does little beyond reminiscing about times past. The plot is sparse; the man's monotonous daily ritual is interrupted by a gang of boys knocking on his door, asking for food. Lucas, the hyper-sexualized pre-teen leader, kills the seventy-year-old man when the man comes back from his ice-box empty-handed. The mysterious and barren plot is given depth by the older man's scattered contemplations of ageing and the isolation that it implies, a separation that drives him and his narrative to the verge of schizophrenia.

On the other hand, *Diario* relates the story of a man no longer home in his city. The Buenos Aires youths have initiated a propagandistic war on the ageing, a war whose words quickly precipitate into physical violence. Even the protagonist's son passively condones the violence and killing that terrify his father. However, the ageing hero resists the threat of attack in the streets in his own serene way, refusing to give up his *truco* card-game gatherings with friends where they reflect on the process of ageing. He also finds love and refuge with a younger woman, a capital transgression in the rabid city of war. Then,

without any explanation, the war dissolves like a dream, the city returns to its pre-war state (if this return is possible), the forgotten bloodshed implicitly augmenting the damage of the violence.

Through the representation of ageing, marginalization becomes a central condition of these novels. In this process, the representation of the body plays a starring role. These texts render visible the process by which language is capable not only of describing bodies, but also constructing, circumscripting and destroying them, a process relevant throughout both literature and society. The body, thus, is not simply a physical or literary presence in the novels, but also a bio-political one, a liminal object, constructed through language, that blurs the boundaries between political power and nature.

In this article, I will explore the means by which these texts represent ageing with the goal in mind of analyzing the political and representational confines of the body. Towards that end, I will analyze the linguistic processes of marginalization, the representation of the body and the *mise-en-scène* of death, in conversation with various theories of bio-politics. By doing this, I aim to excavate from a specific problematic in these texts, that of ageing and the decadent body, resonances of more general and genealogical problems in contemporary Latin American literature: complicity between language and the living world, the predominance of violence in the articulation of culture, the aggressive effacement of the boundaries between disciplines (biology, politics, art) and the central importance of the margins of society and self in the understanding of the post-colonial condition of being.

> *La vejez, piensa el Viejo, es té con leche y pantuflas de abrigo. La vejez, piensa el viejo, es un aliento con olor a cloaca. La vejez, piensa el viejo, es una suma infinita de prohibiciones* (Rivera 52).

> *Old age, thinks the old man, is tea with milk and warm slippers. Old age, thinks the old man, is sewage breath. Old age, thinks the old man, is an infinite list of prohibitions* (my translation).

What is an Old Man?

In *Diario*, "Los muchachos" (5) or "the boys" (*Diary* 3)[ii], the protagonist Isidoro Vidal's friends gather for a wake in Palermo, a northern neighborhood in the war-ridden city. The deceased is a victim of this war. The occasion of death brings them to question their own identity: are they old men or in "la flor de la edad" (81), in their "prime" (*Diary* 85)? Are they, in the terms of Farrel, the ideologue of the juvenile revolution against the ageing, in "no man's land" (*Diary* 96), no longer young, but surely not yet old? And the old, what are they? Are they "pigs" ("cerdos") or "hogs" ("chanchos") or "owls" (*Diary* 85, *Diario* 92)? These words are not caprices. They are capable of transforming the reality of the people who are defined by them.

Defining an old man is therefore an issue of utmost importance in this war. It conjures the distinctions between the forces of violence that propagate the struggle. It is a language that speaks in terms of the body and of its politics, a language that throughout *Diario* affects those who use it and those against whom it is used. It determines who sleeps in the attics, who crosses to the other sidewalk for fear of an approaching group of youngsters. It is a language that projects itself on reality, enforcing its power by estranging the ageing from society, from themselves, even condemning them to death.

Symptoms of Ageing

Tierra de exilio, the novel by Rivera, progressively loses its specificity and any coherent or chronological system of reference. It begins to consist of a long enumeration of "current symptoms," existing symptoms of ageing: memory loss, bodily clumsiness, disheveledness (27-28). These are some of the symptoms that characterize the condition of the seventy-year-old man. He is defined, therefore, in terms of his decadent body, that is, his body in the process of deterioration, no longer vital or productive.

The seventy-year-old man's lack of productivity is thematized in the penultimate scene: he does not find anything in the refrigerator to offer to the youths who beg at his door. He no longer produces and is therefore reduced, in a way, to a charge of society, a reduction imposed by social prohibitions. At an-

other point, he looks lustfully at a young woman, but dares not touch her. Ageing has made of the protagonist a uniquely nostalgic character, his life consisting uniquely of unrealized desires, glasses of whiskey and dubbed movies on television.

"Viejo entreabre la boca. Viejo quiere fumar. Viejo quiere que la tarde no termine"[iii] (52). Time is all that is left for the seventy-year-old man of *Tierra.* In a way, time is his primary adversary and his last friend; while everything else that was his (friends, rituals, beliefs, spaces) are disappearing, time proves to be his most faithful companion and the constant reminder of his impending encounter with death. It is a fascination that ends up confusing the seventy-year-old man; he recognizes in every moment a series of references to the past. The novel adopts this form and playfully distorts the linearity of time (or lack thereof).

Living, for the old man, becomes a ritual of "speaking about the dead," the chief exercise of the protagonist's enduring mother.[iv] She has survived all that once was her world; nothing remains of the familiar (her possessions and customs and friends all erased by time), except for memories. And for her, memory and death are almost indistinguishable; she can speak of nothing but the dead. To grow old means to estrange oneself from the world and from life. It is a process of discovering oneself in a world where nothing is recognizable, everything foreign, a "tierra de exilio."

This term, land of exile, from which Rivera derives his title, is provocative in that it is oxymoronic; the land of exile is a homeland for those who no longer have one, refuge for the excommunicated. The existence of the old man, resident of this land without residents, is ontologically confusing. To continue living is to remember all that had been his and subsequently lost. It is, paradoxically, a slow memory of his future death.

Likewise, in *Tierra*, the verbal tense shifts incessantly. Accordingly, there is little differentiation between the present and the past. Furthermore, the events of the plot revolve around various characters who share the first person narration, the plot, therefore, seeming to lose coherence. This has to do with another symptom of ageing, "ensimismamiento" (28).

While the term suggests a turning inward, an isolation of oneself from the world around him or her, in the context of the seventy-year-old man, it also curiously indicates a process of projecting something from within upon that outer world, an act of transforming the outer world into a sort of living memory. He withdraws into his memory world with the same gesture that projects his intimate self-hood outwards onto the world, confusing interiority and exteriority, a confusion that is underlined by the narrative's own perplexing structure. Within this network of memories, time triumphs, locking the old man within a realm of pure reminiscing, space therefore being neutralized.[v]

Mechanisms of Violence

Returning to the idea of "tierra de exilio," it is clear that a central problem of ageing is marginalization; one's path towards the margins of life takes him as well towards the margins of society, the margins of understanding. Ageing implies not only isolation, but also a distancing from society, a political *and* biological distancing. He loses political agency and, thus, control over his own body, as well. In this sense, this representation of old age I analyze is a literature that is in large part regulated by bio-politics, a concept that Giorgio Agamben defines, summarizing the idea from Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, as "the growing inclusion of man's natural life in the mechanisms and calculations of power" (Agamben 119). In other words, it is the ideological space in which the difference between nature and culture, between "bio" and "politics" is essentially deconstructed (Giorgi 25).

The seventy-year-old man's social, biological life comes to be dominated by the structures implied by power politics, leaving him—even in his own home—estranged and without agency, a helpless victim of domination. While the body of the ageing decomposes, so do many of their social rights. In this context, the central task of politics is to demarcate, divide and regulate the rights and behaviors of the population.

In *Tierra*, the seventy-year-old man does not interrupt a young couple embracing in the park, but rather leaves them be, a fantasy, an ex-reality: "Muchacha de cabello corto y rubio (…) Tetas macizas.

Erguidas bajo fina textura de pullover gris (...) Muchacha no mira a viejo sentado en banco de madera pintado de verde mustio (…)" (52). He subconsciously compares his body not to the young man's, but rather to the bench, green and dusty.[vi] This verbal slippage suggests that the old man perceives himself to be a prisoner of his lifeless body. He almost voluntarily subjects himself to the laws that bind his body to the social norm and the stereotypes from which that norm is derived.[vii] By maintaining a safe distance from the object of his desire, he acquiesces to the demands of the bio-political code. This code asserts itself by means of a threat both inexplicable and unimaginable, yet nonetheless real, projecting itself upon the most intimate of surfaces, the old man's sex life, or violent lack thereof.

On the other hand, Vidal, in Bioy's novel, goes against the prohibitions that his age and the youths that define it hold him to. He escapes with a pretty young neighbor, Nélida, who provides him with refuge both from the rules he is subject to and the threat of violence for transgressing those rules. Having won her over from one of his young adversaries, Vidal reinforces both the youths' claims against the ageing (they are society's vice-ridden charges, requiring its *goods* of without producing capital themselves) and his own independence from them. However, his hyper-awareness of the potential danger, and furthermore his willingness to hide, reinforce rather than subvert the bio-political code his acts seem to contradict. It is only the mysterious end of the war that makes possible a non-verisimilar, unnervingly happy, "fairy tale" (*Diary* 195) ending with his younger mistress.

Bio-politics implies the irruption of the threat of political action—violence—upon one's socio-biological life with the aim in mind of creating order, *vis-à-vis* the body. It implies, thus, the marginalization of certain bodies and the destruction of those that resist the sought-after order. This call for elimination often comes in the form of eugenical desires, or what Gabriel Giorgi calls "sueños de exterminio" (12), dreams of destruction that imply more than the elimination of the weak for social fortification, as eugenics promotes. Rather, the old man, upon being killed by the young boy, executer of society's shared dream of violent subjugation, ceases to be simply an individual; he begins to reflect and refract traits of all society. He becomes the residue of a bio-political desire for order, in other words, a monster.

Because the seventy-year-old man "polices the borders of the possible" (Cohen 12), he becomes, to a certain degree, monstrous. He is hated, feared and punished not for any damage he has caused, but rather for the confusion he causes in those that see him, the difference *and* the similarity he represents to them. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, in *Monster Culture: Reading Culture,* says that the monster "arises at the gap where difference is perceived… the criterion of this division is arbitrary" (11-12). Cohen continues, "the monster's destructiveness is really a deconstructiveness: it threatens to reveal that difference originates in process rather than in fact (and that 'fact' is subject to constant reconstruction and change)" (14). Cohen emphasizes that the term "monster" etymologically implies an act of showing (it "de-*monstr*-ates"). Thus, any monster bears a trace of the society that produces it.

What, then, does the seventy-year-old man's monstrosity show about the society from which he is produced? Can this seemingly random murder *mean* something? Perhaps some answers can be found in the very process of ageing. Can ageing not be considered a sort of common monstrosity? It is feared by most, a means by which people divide society, a division that, like Cohen says, "originates in process," not in essence. The fact that it happens to almost everyone does not make ageing less monstrous, rather more so, more threatening, frightening. Old age becomes, in these novels, an enemy that is at the same time exterior and interior.

When Lucas kills the seventy-year-old man, he also kills the man he will almost inevitably resemble. He identifies a similarity within the difference. To recognize the monster in the old man is to recognize the arbitrary nature of the distance between that monster and the monster latently resting inside oneself: the promise of death. The same is suggested in *Diario*, where one of the old-man "boys" flatly says, "In this war, what drives the youngsters to kill is their hatred of the old people they will become themselves. A hatred that is mostly fear" (*Diary* 99).[viii] To kill that monster is to try to defeat the promise of decadence and death, but, at the same time, the young men from both novels reaffirm that promise, killing the image of themselves found in the old man.

This resonates with Michel Foucault's explorations on the "abnormal." Foucault uses the term "abnormal" to categorize the part of the population that occupied the attention of 18th century French literature and law, the people who contradicted a perceived political and biological order, thus, helping to reify that order in the form of political and natural laws and institutions. A specific category of the "abnormal" is the "individual to be corrected," a person is like and unlike a monster in that he or she is "an everyday phenomenon… typically regular in his irregularity" (58). He or she is a trivialized monster possessing some trait or tendency deemed damaging to the social order, one who must be corrected, but yet is "incorrigible." The protagonists of these novels are monstrous in that they are similarly "abnormal." That is to say, they represent a pallid, uncertain difference, concretized only by the enforcement of a law against that difference.

"Abnormal" indicates, of course, the opposite of the normal. However, in the context of the two novels I'm analyzing, this idea of the "normal" is not based uniquely on that which is "usual," but more so on that which is desired, namely the "normative" impulse. This is why Foucault's lecture can serve as such an effective point of entry to the condition of these older men; the central "abnormality" present in these novels—that is, ageing—is not something that is unnatural, but rather an event that dramatically contradicts a common, and yet mysterious, inner normative urge; the youths seek to eliminate the elderly, seemingly aiming to efface that less-than-desirable aspect of life.

One interesting difference between Foucault's concept "individual to be corrected" (55) and *Diario* and *Tierra* lies in the result of the correction. Foucault suggests that the correction causes the structures of society to mirror those of the institution. However, while variations of this correction are very present in the novels, they lead not directly to institutionalization. Nevertheless, they do highlight a central aspect of it. The act of "correction," as seen in the context of Rivera's and, especially, Bioy's novels, is played out to the violent extreme. Thus, showing how correction can become murder, *Tierra* and *Diario* render opaque a more concrete mode of power, a more concrete violence that can be found at the core of the similar impulses to correct that Foucault analyzes in his lectures at the Collège de France.

Language

To further understand the "sueño de exterminio," the traces of which I have found in *Tierra*, I will contrast them with Bioy's novel, which transforms the problem of bio-politics into an issue of words. Throughout the novel, the characters spend their time trying to define *what* old age is and *how* one should age. In this way, the novel places an emphasis on words and language's capacity to create, transform and destroy physical realities.

> *- (...) Dicen que los viejos –explicó Arevalo—son egoístas, materialistas, voraces, roñosos. Unos verdaderos chanchos.*
> *-Tienen bastante razón –apuntó Jimi.*
> *Dante le previno:*
> *-Vamos a ver qué pensás cuando te agarren.* (*Diario* 92)

> " (…) *They say," explained Arévalo, "that old people are greedy, selfish, materialistic, and eternally grumbling. Real hogs."*
> *"They have a point," said Jimmy.*
> *"We'll see how you feel when they nab you," said Dante.* (*Diary* 85).

The meta-discourse about words and arguments ("they say" "they have a point") generates a grammatical ambiguity that makes possible two interpretations of this passage, two possible subjects for the verb "agarrar," to nab or take hold of. Both the youths who assault the ageing and the words that they use can be considered guilty of the violent action. In fact, both possible subjects work together; the weapon of the young is language, their fight, a war of words.

The war of Bioy's novel, like many, is justified through the particular language of wars- a language that differentiates and divides. It is a language disseminated through the radio, where Farrel makes polemical war cries, in the paper, where these words begin to materialize, and in the fight itself. The elderly are almost literally trampled by words. Verbal and physical violence become progressively more difficult to differentiate throughout the novel.[ix]

Giorgi claims that the violence that words realize is a result of a "política de representación" (19), a politics of representation based on an arbitrary and produced system of identification. This nominating system he calls a "ficción normativa," a normative fiction that becomes reality, "que se hace cuerpo e identidades, que se reapropia y diversifica en culturas, lenguajes y prácticas, que instituye, en fin, una representación social y un regimen de cuerpos" (19). Words, thus, take on body and transform social desires, through violent representation, into flesh-and-blood body regimens.

Calling the protagonist of *Diario* an old man, even though he is only sixty years old, produces for him a new reality. Coupling this naming with the threat of violence, the normative fiction these youths use defines and prohibits with the same gesture. It gives Vidal an identity that is called to existence to delimit that which should not exist; as Giorgi says, his fate is ontologically paradoxical[x] (18).

This confused production, which directs itself towards destruction, is key to Giorgi's idea he calls the "sueño de exterminio," the final solution in which destruction takes the form of a revolution based on a normative fiction. One proposes a vision of the world through words and proceeds to seek to realize it violently. Giorgi calls it a privileged example of the function of fiction: an exercise in the flux-space between the real and the virtual (12-13).

This dream takes root in Vidal's situation in the "tierra de nadie" (*Diario* 104), no man's land: "You couldn't be called young, but you're certainly not old either"[xi] (*Diary* 96). This zone of exception, as Giorgi calls it, where language proves incapable of specifying, is the aperture where the normative fiction is born. This abyss between words and bodies, between signified and reference, where the arbitrarity of language, its pure abstraction and the necessary violent attribution of referent, Giorgi says, is the very material of the political (111).

It is this linguistic abyss that pushes the protagonist toward the periphery; just as the signified distances itself from the signifier, Vidal distances himself from society, from the center of the Bioy's narrative. Words, instead, take his place at center stage. They are no longer simply the medium of dialogue, but also its subject. Speaking about words, the "muchachos" declare that they are much more than "the

whim of one journalist"[xii] (*Diary* 84). They are transformative forces. Vidal thinks, at one point, that "*an old man is old age, and there is no other way out but death*" (175). Through this thought, one can determine the essence of the war in *Diario*; man ("el viejo") molds himself to the concept ("la vejez") and thus, words occupy a body. They transform it. As Giorgi affirms, they render residual and monstrous what had been previously a benign joke about age. The joke becomes an error, and the old man, a casual victim of a fiction that realizes itself by means of destruction (111).

Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer* seeks to explore this violated body by means of its ideological and historical context. He reaffirms Aristotelian theory when he claims that what differentiates a human being from an animal is that his body is necessarily political. Thus, humans have the capability to objectify the self and submit them-*selves* to, as Agamben says, a power of exterior control, that is to say, politics (151-152). Politics, in turn, functions as a regimen of bodies, the proof being found at the root of Western government: the Writ of Habeas Corpus of 1679.

The Writ constitutes as the "new subject of politics" and democracy "not the free man and his statutes and prerogatives, nor even simply *homo,* but rather *corpus"* (Agamben 124). Modern politics is born as a manipulation, coordination and, etymologically, exposition of the body and bodies. Therefore, the modern body is developed from this paradigm whose most advanced state is regulated by biopolitics. The body's politics and life, Agamben claims, have come to intertwine themselves in the most intimate way (125). It is here that I find resonances to the central problem of the texts by Bioy and Rivera: the body of the old man. Through the representation of these marginalized bodies, the novels manage to highlight three points of chief importance. A central ontological condition of the body is that it exposed, represented and looked at-all acts that are highly political and potentially violent. Furthermore, as I have assured before, the novels make it very clear that the body is the setting of a crisis where life and politics are hardly differentiable, the bio-political coincidence realizing itself throughout the languages of the texts. Lastly, the mode of politics represented in these novels (controlling, self-control, fear of punishment and institutionalized violence) leads one to question, as Agamben suggests, whether

there is any way to differentiate at all between "politics" and "bio-politics." Are they one in the same? Is there any politics that is not executed by means of the body?

One should consequently ask: if modern democracy bases itself on the body, what does the body base itself on? To shed some light on this question, Giorgi describes the body as the opaque and residual object which reflects and refracts collective representations and identities, bearing, in a most obscene way, the trace of the operations of inscription, constitution and production that brought it into being[xiii] (not unlike Cohen's monster: is every body monstrous?) (107). The body can be understood, therefore, as an arrow that refers to the mode of formation, in the case of these novels, a formation wrought by subordination and violence.

These forces can be traced back to the discursive levels of the languages used to conjure and, throughout both novels, control the bodies. That is to say, the form of literature these novels assumes is, as Giorgi suggests, the exercise that gives testimony of the passages and mutations that take place at the limits of reality, between the latent and the manifest, between dream and catastrophe. These texts, thus, render visible the "plasticidad de la realidad," the process by which the imperious force of languages claims dominion far beyond the confines of literature (Giorgi 13). To study the body in these texts, therefore, is to seek a glimpse of the social language, or perhaps the linguistic reality, which bore it into existence.

Textual Bodies

The bodies in these texts are, as I asserted before, bodies in decadence. One finds the body in *Tierra* in such a fallen state that it has retired from the scene. The old man's body is a presence marked by its absence, its manifestation taking, instead, the shape of a weave of memories and prohibitions. The only body thoroughly mentioned is that of the young antagonist, Lucas. This description, which centers on the youth's virility, sexuality and physical prowess, negatively reflects the traits that the 70-year-old man no longer has.

The old man's body is, thus, the physical manifestation of his social loss. It is at the same time physical and conceptual, a body and an abyss in which the body is lost. The old man no longer identifies with his body; it is already an estranged "other." When his mother reaches to embrace his body, the 70-year-old man gets confused, narrating the situation with great clumsiness: "Mamá agita los brazos en el aire, y va, gozosa, los brazos abiertos, hacia alguien que no soy yo" (Rivera 15). His mother, waving her arms in the air, lunges toward someone he is not, even though they are the only two in the room.

Ageing, in this sense, means estranging oneself from the body, or rather, recognizing alterity in one's own body. The seventy-year-old's body becomes, itself, a literature. It vacillates between presence and absence, between possession and lack, between the present and the past. Its decadence and its marginality form the core of its "literarity." The crisis of the body and its instability transforms its material presence in a sort of confused dream. It casts doubt upon the seventy-year-old man's property, his personality, his friends and the fruits of his labour, rendering them, in a sense, fictional.

In *Diario*, the body also functions linguistically. It forms the basic unit through which the narration of violence unfolds. Not unlike the body as seen in *Tierra*, this one is situated in a liminal space, between vital "definitions"; is Vidal "young" or "old"? What does it mean to be young, to be old? What, then, are the implications of finding oneself in no-man's land, the "tierra de nadie"? Giorgi insists that this in-between state brings about an unnerving uncertainty with regards to the nature of the body; what was once a joke, that is the difference between the old and the young and the typical behaviors of each, quickly becomes an issue of life and death (108). This seemingly arbitrary distinction, Giorgi continues, develops into a decision about the value of life and the "necessary" elimination of certain bodies (108).

The body can, therefore, be understood as the intersection of language and life. Bioy's text transforms the body into something fictional, not in that it is not real, but rather in that it represents a realm of possibility, as opposed to a fixed entity. This body, after all, occupies the border of myth (realized through each character's desire) and one's lived reality, blurring the distinction between the two modes of being. In this way, *Diario* actively deconstructs the false dichotomy of reality and fiction, showing

how "reality" can be constructed by means of various "fictions" and how "fiction" is necessarily composed of things typically perceived as "real." Furthermore, the novel illustrates how politics functions by manipulating this borderline (politics generates unquestionable realities by means of carefully crafted fictions), and how in this process, the body becomes a mere pawn, if not an outright victim, in the calculations of power.

Death

The victimhood of the body often, if not always, implies its death. At the climax of *Tierra*, Lucas's innate mortality is both combated and reaffirmed as he stabs the seventy-year-old man. In scattered moments throughout Bioy's novel, death is an occasion the "muchachos" take once again to re-reflect on, re-define and re-regulate their own lives according to the senseless rules of the rabid youths. Death is at the same time the point of departure and the destination of bio-politics, both the threat against which bio-political forces struggle and the threat they wield to realize their desires.

The close of *Tierra* stages a curiously conventional, yet unpredictable and unsatisfactory resolution to the novel: death. The seventy-year-old man knows who has rung the bell and checks the refrigerator before answering the door. Nothing there. His home is one that only houses little notes, upon which he writes his memories and his desires, and these are of little value to the youths awaiting him across the threshold. He repeats to himself, looking through a window into the winter night, "Eso también fue previsible" (18). This, too, was predictable, he laughs.

Lucas, who awaits him beyond the door, does not act irrationally ("piensa como piensan los hombres sensatos y prudentes de su país" [106]). He acts "predictably," according to the logic of the seventy-year-old man, and consistent with the behavior of a sensible and prudent citizen. Lucas, a delinquent, paradoxically realizes a social duty and vindicates himself upon killing the old man. And the old man, by dying, realizes his own. He has no fear, for his death is not random, but orderly. It follows a certain code.

He does not hesitate on the path to the death he knows awaits him.[xiv] His only detour had been nostalgia, embodied in the little notes he momentarily contemplates before advancing to the door. They were his defenses against hopelessness, little anachronisms that had provided him refuge through the final years of despair. But he turns his back on them, too. The novel that remains is the collection of those "fichas," scattered, lonely and true, but it, too, is left behind. One can bring nothing into death. The book, while lifeless and, as established earlier, body-less, is the lonely signifier that remains after death. It points, albeit indirectly, to that life and body that had brought it into being and bears witness to their trials and the violent pursuit of order that brought them to their end.

Death in *Diario* comes to form in the shape of a surrealist war, a war in which the soldier fights against himself. The only rule of this war is, as Giorgi subtly puts it, the imagination, which allows death to acquire a civic sense, the legitimacy of a defense, of a need to return to a "natural" mythical and normative order (23). Although these scenes of war and death might appear fantastical, more sensual than factual, like dreams and thus free from temporal and spatial restrictions, the characters of the novel never doubt the existence of the war. They are absorbed within its fantastical structure and live by its laws, choosing their paths according to its rules.

This order, on the other hand, is more complex than at first it appears. Many reasons for the violence against the ageing are offered (they are too heavy a charge on society, dumb, clumsy, vice-ridden), but none are verisimilar explanations of the level of violence propagated by the young. Rather, Giorgi explains the root of this violence as something much less logical, a "sueño compartido," a shared dream. That is to say, the killings and war present throughout Bioy's novel stem from a eugenical design, an ideology enunciated by means of bodies, not words (Giorgi 115).

A perverse complex has taken over the Buenos Aires youths. Their dream of betterment seeks to realize itself not on the basis of ideas, but rather upon the structure of the body. The war can be understood, like Giorgi says, as a "maquinaria bio-política." It does not merely divide groups, zones and types of bodies. It separates each body from itself, turning the body against its own residuality, against its pos-

sible fall from the order that permits it its social and cultural inscription (117-118). Not unlike the murder that closes *Tierra*, the war in *Diario* entails a fight that is realized both externally and internally. It dissolves the confines of the body to such a point that the assassination of an ageing person implicitly reinforces the murderer's inevitable future death. His fight has paradoxically turned against his own body, against the threat of it, too, betraying him and ageing.

Just as the bio-political machinery depends on one's fear of the threat of falling out of one's social and cultural inscription, the society and culture that Bioy depicts are, at least in part, negatively constructed. That is to say, they define themselves not by what they are, but rather by what they aim not to be. That is the nature of the normative fiction that Giorgi studies at length; it is the conjuring of an existential definition to delimit the parts of society that should not exist.

In *Diario*, the youths' act of determining who is old and whom then should be controlled and killed underlines the fact that their desired society, as well as perhaps many others, is articulated on the structure of exclusion. This is also true to a limited extent in *Tierra*, limited in that the view of the violence in Rivera's novel is microcosmic as opposed to Bioy's bird's eye view of the problem. The marginalization one finds in these texts aims not to eliminate concrete groups of people, but rather the monstrous tendencies that exist within most, if not all, members of society, a perversely quixotic dream of betterment that could only be truly realized through murder. In this way, ageing in these novels can easily be compared, as Giorgi does in the case of *Diario*, with other pariahs of society, other perceived "monsters," namely gays and transgendered individuals, whose presence in our societies often tends to unnerve and disturb people's notions of "normalcy" and self, regularly causing similar narcissistic and destructive dreams.

Once again, I compare the course of action in *Diario* with a dream. It should not come as much of a surprise, then, that like a dream, the war that saturates this novel with intrigue and humor, comes to an abrupt and unexplained end. The protagonist escapes without harm and his life returns to a state even better than normal. However, this return is almost as unsettling as the war itself. How can things return

to normal when such violence has occurred? This forgetful plot twist does not seem to suggest that such a return is impossible, commenting, perhaps as it could, and as many Argentine books written during and after the dictatorship had, on the importance of memory in the process of coping with atrocity. Nor does it claim the opposite, that forgetfulness, or wishing the painful memory away, represents the solution. There are no clear explanations of this end, and from this fertile ambiguity, it derives its poignancy. Perhaps, in the end it could be an optimistic attempt on behalf of the author to sidestep coyly the ultimate question of death, the protagonist's age ceasing to be a question. Instead, he lives on with his prize, the young girl, the timely end of the war and the novel affording him the archetypical sunset to ride off into.

Reading Languages

After the death represented in these two novels, and in the case of *Diario*, the evasion of death, one is left with the text. Just like the "fichas," the notes *Tierra*'s protagonist turns away from just before his murder, the text in both novels, which depict the harsh realities of ageing, desperately grasps on to life at the same time that it points towards an inevitable death and the enigmatic violent circumstances that bring that death about. Although these two books portray the lives and deaths of older men, the deaths are unique in that they are violent ones, as opposed to what would seem more "natural," that is, deaths by "natural causes."

But in fact, it is the language that is present in both of these novels, a language that at times is saturated with violent impulses, that aims to complicate the reader's understanding of what is "natural," as it does with the "normal." Perhaps the choice to depict violent deaths is an attempt to emphasize the naturalness of this violence, to assert that no death is peaceful and no classifying language is innocent of barbarism. Giorgi suggests this when he speaks of two levels of discursive violence in *Diario*: el lenguaje lleno y el lenguaje hueco, dense language and hollow language.

Dense language is exemplified by phrases such as "Old men like him shouldn't be allowed to live, not one of them"[xv] (*Diary* 38). There should not be any more old men like this one. It is a language that explicitly demonstrates the blatantly violent capabilities of the word (Giorgi 115). It is a means by which one aims to realize the desires he enunciates simply by speaking them. Thus it opens a space of possibility, the space of fiction, a subjunctive tone whose footing remains uncertain in between what has been said and what is to be done (Giorgi 116). This dense language is present throughout Bioy's novel in the youths' propagandistic threats, but hardly in Rivera's, where Lucas scarcely speaks at all.

By contrast, hollow language can be found in phrases like the following, spoken to Vidal by a younger adversary: " (…) we pointed out that one of you hasn't a single grey hair, and that the other one still seems quite robust"[xvi] (*Diary* 105). In such phrases, the breach that opens is not one between desire and action, but rather a deeper, more semiotic gulf between what is said and what is meant. Figurative speech, of course, is not so novel, but this is one that aims not to cleverly nor poetically say-without-saying. Rather, the violence in this phrase depends on the unclear nature of, as Giorgi points out, whether the youths express respect or promise. And within the irony of such formulaic language, death seems all but assured (116-117). The threat burrows its way into the formula of the social convention it defends, asserting the possibility of violence within not only the blatant threats, but also the most seemingly-benign of phrases.

The effect of hollow language is mirrored in *Tierra*, when the seventy-year-old man recalls with disgust Natalia and Claudia, a pair of ageing sisters living together, never married, active, never fearing death nor, from what it seemed, show signs of nearing it. He remembers and recites, with a great deal of angst, the mantra of the sisters, "No producción. No productividad. Productivo" (75). This mantra represents not only the philosophy of the vigorous sisters, but furthermore demonstrates a sort of allegiance the 70-year-old man pledges to the same social order that eventually will toast his assassination.

By reconceptualizing and appropriating the term "productive," the sisters seem to blatantly wave in the face of society the same word that could be used to judge their lifestyle. They were never married,

never mothers and lived together, refusing to age or conform to an archetypical family structure, in a way that threatened what society traditionally considers "normal." By repeating their words in disgust, the seventy-year-old man exercises the hollow violence of language, inverts the irony the women's statement was built upon, consequently reasserting, not unlike the tongue-in-cheek youths of *Diario*, the social order that condemns those who no longer produce. In a way, he enunciates and condones his own death sentence, using hollow language, contextualizing perfectly his later declaration, standing before his pubescent executioner, that "eso también fue previsible."

Throughout this essay, I have examined the ways in which these texts explore a complicity of language and violence. I have always believed that language, which essentially communicates, should not be left alone or taken lightly or one-sidedly. It should not be taken for the thing it says, but rather really *read*, that is, dug up and wrung out to do justice to the countless thing*s* it speaks, murmurs and resonates. Thus, this essay should not conclude without mention of another aspect of language: its redemptive capability. For while both *Tierra* and *Diario* bear witness to the violent aspects of language, they too are texts composed of language providing voice to characters violently ignored and pushed aside. In this way, they are testimonies that, albeit bleakly, communicate, that is connect, disparate segments of the population. Like all literature, these two texts bear the promise of articulating community, a community of readers, but this community is paradoxically centered on the margins of society, margins often determined in today's society by issues of the body (womanhood, homosexuality, disability). These two novels confirm that ageing is but another part of the struggle which tests the limits of what it means to be human, a struggle that has formed the core of the humanities' inquiries for many years, but has proven more and more relevant of late.

Notes

[i] This title is inspired by a beautiful and disturbing quote from Mario Bellatín's *Salon de Belleza*, a novel which similarly explores the constructive/destructive/deconstructive capabilities of language with regards to the body ("una situación íntima con aquel *cuerpo deshecho*"). –Another quite fascinating study could analyze, in comparison to the two novels I research, the complicity of body and literature in Bellatin's novel, which represents both at the furthest extreme of decadence. In fact, in the first edition of this essay, I included Salon de Belleza as an extended point of reference throughout my analysis. However, unfortunately such exploration does not fit into the length restrictions of this paper and I have had to remove that segment from this work.

[ii] Rivera coyly assures the reader, planting from the very beginning the seeds of the novels chief linguistic problematic, "The expression 'boys', which they all used, did not indicate (whatever Isidorito, Vidal's son, might say to the contrary) any complex and unconscious need to pass for young men; it is explained rather by the fact that once they were young and had then justifiably used the term with one another. Isidorito, who never expressed an opinion until he had checked it out with a lady doctor, would shake his head and refuse to argue the matter—as if abandoning his father to his own false reasoning. Vidal conceded that his son was right in avoiding argument: talk never leads to understanding. People are either for or against, like packs of dogs attacking or driving off a chance enemy."

[iii] "The old man opens his mouth. The old man wants to smoke. The old man wishes the afternoon won't end" (my translation).

[iv] "De qué puede hablar mamá que no sea de sus muertos, y de los míos, ella que se niega a morir?" (15-16).

[v] Furthermore, ageing locks *Tierra*'s protagonist in a network of questions he endlessly asks himself, questions with no answers. The seventy-year-old man finds himself constantly imprisoned by these questions: Is there class struggle? Why did he sleep with so few women? …questions that "están con él, duermen con él, caminan con él, Envejecen con él" (47). As he grows old *with* these questions, he sees his life ending without answers, without explanations. The only thing the questions, the curse of ageing, permit Rivera's seventy-year-old man is a sort of indirect, emotional expression of ageing. His life and his investigations in the end prove rounded, tautological.

[vi] *Viejo verde*, or green old man, can be translated into American English as "dirty old man."

[vii] This illustrates a problem both Agamben and Foucault analyze, that is, the growing importance sex has assumed as a theme of political confrontation (Agamben 154).

[viii] "En esta guerra los chicos matan por odio contra el viejo que van a ser. Un odio bastante asustado... " (*Diario* 95).

[ix] Furthermore, the words prove capable to convince their listeners; many of the "muchachos" begin to believe they are old, that they should begin to act like society believes they should. These rules regulate, in no unclear manner, the body and its behavior. They suggest an intimate and complex connection between the body and the word, a play of cause and effect. Words are emitted from the body at the same time that they conjure the body and its behavior. Words conjure the body at the same time that they, as one can clearly see in this war of words, lead the body to its decadence.

[x] ."..el suyo es un destino ontológico paradójico" (18).

[xi] "…no se le puede llamar joven, decididamente, pero viejo, decididamente, tampoco" (Bioy 104).

[xii] ."..capricho de un periodista" (*Diario* 91)

[xiii] ."..materia al mismo tiempo opaca y residual respecto de las representaciones colectivas, las identidades, las subjetividades: un resto que refracta, de manera obscena, irrepresentable, las operaciones de inscripción, constitución, producción de sujetos" (107).

[xiv] The *mise en scene* of death in Rivera's novel implies a simple recounting of the facts; the events that constitute this scene form the first direct and uninterrupted narration of the novel. The man hears the bell. He checks the ice-box. He looks at the little notes he has used to bolster himself against desperation. He laughs. He opens the door and the youths see he has nothing to offer and one kills him. He stares, laying on his back, at the knife in his chest and the night sky behind it. It is the first moment of clarity, of simplicity, of immediacy of the novel, death wiping away the layers of defenses the old man had built up between himself and his vulnerability.

[xv] "Viejos así no habría que dejar ninguno" (*Diario* 45)

16 "Hicimos notar... que el señor no luce una sola cana y que el señor se mantiene vigoroso" (*Diario* 104)

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Fiction

Night

By Cyril Dabydeen

A loon's cry in the lake, Fancy heard, and maybe Jimmy Whitecloud heard it too. But something else stirred in the night air, Fancy thought, or just imagined. His bones creaking, as he listened to the others inhaling hard, wheezing, their being asleep at the camp at Trapper Lake. Once more he looked across at Jimmy, the only Cree at camp with them; and both men turned on their beds simultaneously. Fancy coughed; and, maybe, the others yet wondered why he never wore a net to protect his face from the insects that swarmed all around when he planted the trees.

What if he didn't mind the blackflies? *Go on, tell them*.

Maybe he commanded their respect, grudgingly–he figured--because of his age, being over sixty and all, but still planting trees with the "younger crowd"? When Jimmy hummed again in his sleep, Fancy felt the sound was closing the gap between them. Silent rhythms, then the image of breaking the topsoil and scuffing the hard ground as they planted. And Fancy did only about five hundred trees a day, as he painstakingly planted. A frog's croaking noise next he heard, then the loon again crying. Oh, Fancy replayed in his mind the younger planters whooping it up; and one or two had asked him how much longer he intended being in the forest.

Yeah, tell us!

"As long as I can."

"Will you really?"

Jimmy Whitecloud, in his late forties, often planted near him. Now Fancy turned on his bed once more and looked over at the Cree in the darkness. Jimmy was awake, too? What was he thinking anyway? About *Fancy*...not being his real name? Why wasn't it a name sounding like Harluk...or Lubchek? Would Fancy say that he'd come from the Ukraine: there where he'd fallen in love with a young girl long, long ago? Oh, Fancy remembered her as if it was only yesterday? Yes, a healthy farmer's daughter who'd first called him by that name, was it?

Fancy let out, "Ah"; and again the image of blackflies and mosquitoes by the millions came to him. And, see, the younger planters wanted to quit working because it wasn't natural for so many flies to be around; what was going on? Fancy figured that they only wanted to go bar-hopping in Thunder Bay and chasing after "panties on a hockey stick," one youth bawled out.

"Let's get the puck outa here," another hooted.

"Why plant the fucking trees anyway?" rasped another.

Fancy dug his shovel hard into the hard ground, his angular body tightening. Head tilted, he moved forward in the precise raking motion as he planted the next spruce seedling.

Again he looked over at Jimmy Whitecloud on the opposite bunk. A frog croaked louder, the night indeed closing in on them like a heavy cloak or tarpaulin thrown round the entire camp. Oh, Fancy imagined giving his freshly planted tree a tug, convinced no strong Northern Ontario wind would blow it away. One day this same tree would rise up from the ground and grow tall...taller than the rest of the trees around, maybe in the entire region. Imagine, eh? He smiled. Jimmy also smiling?

And the girl he'd left behind in Ukraine also smiling, long ago as it was: like eternity. The night air whirring. He heard another sound, a strange bark. A timber wolf, maybe. He heard Jimmy fidget in his bunk. And wild horses were known to tramp around in the dead of night. One distinctly neighed, troubled by something or the other? Yes, it'd be like this again the next night: with more trees in his mind's eye: as he kept planting in the acrid burnt-out area.

Fancy inhaled. Again the particular image of the farmer's daughter came to him, keeping him going in the backbreaking work of planting trees, no? Yeah, old as he was. *Dammit*!

Jimmy Whitecloud turned on his bunk, and maybe looked at him.

Fancy also turned.

Jimmy moaned, experiencing his own special pain, it seemed.

Somewhere an omen?

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A swathe of sunlight cut through the morning air; and the young planters were as brash as ever, as one pretended to be Fancy, as he sang to the others. He mimicked pain too, writhing more or less. *Aaaaggh*! The others turned to look at Jimmy Whitecloud, maybe expecting a shaman's spirit, somewhere. Jimmy glared back at them. Another youth twisted his face, gargoyle-like. And was a genuine Great Spirit around?

Fancy thought about this. Not what Jimmy also thought?

Fancy instinctively recreated the familiar image he carried of a bullock cart packed with hay trundling along a winding road in far Ukraine. Didn't he? "Who're you really going to marry?" the local girls teased him.
"Not any of you," Fancy grinned.

"Oh, tell us, eh?" Their voices, accents: all with an unmistakable country lilt. One special farmer's daughter: this one with ample thighs tapering down to well-formed knees, ankles. Yes, one special night in a haystack. Fancy He dug harder into the ground as he planted the next tree. His bones yet creaking? Jimmy moved closer to him, not saying a word, and also planted, deliberately. The younger planters watched them on the sly, see.

"They're up to no good," Fancy heard Jimmy say. He meant the young planters. Fancy scuffed more topsoil, the ground pebbly hard.

"They don't belong here, not in the forest," Jimmy growled.

"Why not?"

The youths' laughter rose; and insects whirred everywhere amidst the scent of spruce and balsam. Cicadas cheeped. An acrid smell of decaying leaves next, sage brush and vine with nerve-endings, like capillaries running through them: all came to Fancy's nostrils; and his eyelids quivered. Yes, he'd slept so little last night.

Tell Jimmy.

"You okay?" Jimmy asked, pulling a strand of gnarled brush from his face. Fancy swatted more flies, mosquitoes. Voices of the youths became a clamour.

"How come the insects don't bother you, Fancy?" one long-haired youth snapped.

"Yeah, why you don't wear the net over the hard hat, like we do?" another chided.

"Gawd, there are more insects than ever now!" shrieked another.

Other youths leaned against a tangle of stunted trees and looked up at the sun shining through the cirrus clouds. Jimmy eyed the youths from an embroidery of leaves, like latticework. A tuft of spruce seedling he gripped next. The youths, just eighteen or nineteen, kept sneering. And nearby Fancy was starting to feel really tired; yet he must finish planting his trees, same as he did every day. The loon's cry again rose...he heard, didn't he?

"You won't quit on us now, will you, Fancy?" taunted another youth.

Jimmy stiffened, spat.

Fancy looked around with a dizzying sensation.

"You will plant the fucking trees, rain or shine, eh?" cried another youth, and he laughed; as the other long-haired ones laughed with him.

Jimmy fidgeted, thinking he should be trapping–not be here planting trees with these youths. White kids all, he gritted his teeth His skin darker, the sun deep in him. Not in Fancy, too? *Yeah, why did they call him that name*?

"Hey, Fancy, did you work like this in the old country?" drilled another.

"How cold does it get in Siberia? Is it where Stalin sent your family and why you're here now with us?"

Fancy's teeth with yellowish stains shone against a blotch of insects.

Determinedly he bent down to plant another spruce; yes, real pain he felt. And Jimmy knew how he felt, maybe. But not these youths?

"You got Indian blood in you too, Fancy?" hollered another.

"Eh?" Fancy let out, brushing away more insects. And he should use insect repellent like the rest of them, he thought. He wiped perspiration from his forehead, his neck, and looked around. He inhaled, hard. Wheezed next.

"How can you stand blackflies like that, Fancy?" heckled a youth with a freckled-looking face.

Fancy tugged at the spruce he just planted. A deep whir, his heart rattling. Jimmy instinctively came closer. "You will talk to Jimmy Whitecloud only because he's Indian, not us?" grated the same freckle-faced one. Jimmy looked up. An eagle...or a bear in the clouds: yes, the Great Spirit. Fancy bent down to plant another spruce seedling, but not before removing the dead vegetation. Imagine the spruce growing high, one that would withstand any logger's chain-saw. No Northern Ontario snowstorm would blow this tree away!

Tell the youths this and hear them laugh again.

Let them!

The crickets and cicadas kept up a din. Once more Jimmy looked at the older man as last night's thoughts kept meshing them, strange as it was. Their closed eyelids in the night's darkness. The loon still crying in the middle of the lake. *Oh*? That young girl yet in Fancy's past, in Ukraine or somewhere like it. A far country.

How special was she?

Jimmy forced a smile.

Fancy nodded, and bent down to plant another tree.

Flies skirted the air, still ominously, maybe.

***

The next night, and again being awake: with the forest all around closing in on them. Fancy and Jimmy heaved in their respective bunks. Lake water kept lapping. The loon, where was it? Then Jimmy got up on the pretext of going for a pee; he slowly walked out of the tent, stumbling forward. He heard the loon cry in the lake.

Jimmy stepped back in, a few minutes later. "The forest has its own spirit," he hummed.

"But not during the day, eh?" replied Fancy.

Jimmy waited. He said, "My wife, she used to go fishing and hunting with me when we were together." The Cree's face in dim light, Fancy watched; and again Fancy thought of the one special tree he'd planted rising up to the moon and stars.

"Maybe not," said Jimmy.

Fancy wanted to tell Jimmy something else; he saw a gleam in the Cree's eyes. Jimmy added, "My wife's in Longlac or Sioux Lookout, somewhere. It's hard to tell with her–she goes an' comes, from one place to the next. Maybe she's in a hotel in Fort William. Now I hardly ever hear from her. No good that kinda woman."

"Is that right?" Fancy searched the Cree's craggy face for a deeper meaning. "Back in the ole country it was the same with me. She never wanted to come to Canada." The farmer's daughter, Lyla, whom he'd married, no?

Jimmy whirred, like a bee. "It's sometimes like that," Jimmy added, unable to think clearly. Then, "My wife, maybe she's with other men now, white men who just want to make it with an Indian. Christ, they keep coming after her," he chuckled. "We married young, see. We used to live on the reservation not far from Mount Mackay. But before long we started fighting. We fought all the time.

“One day I hit her; but I shouldn’t have. I moved out, I couldn't stand it any longer. Wanda wants to be free, she tells me. But how free?” Jimmy heaved in again. “She hates the reservation, hates being Indian. Wants to be in the city to drink all day to live like white people, she said," Jimmy’s voice petered out.

Wild horses. Blackflies kept swirling. The image being all in Fancy’s mind. A faraway country, in a whirl.

"Do you think about women sometimes?" Jimmy whispered, as if youths were listening in.

"Not anymore...old as I am," Fancy said. He felt a sharp pain in his chest. "But *it* still stands up you know." It wasn’t his own voice talking.

"Mine's almost dead," Jimmy said dryly.

The farmer's daughter who used to bring him eggs, large shiny ones, the biggest eggs he ever saw, Fancy thought... as the pain subsided. Eggs which she might have polished before giving them to him. And his mother would ask him where he got such large shiny-looking eggs from, eggs looking like bulbs. He laughed. Jimmy laughed, too.

The stars outside seemed brighter, the northern lights, seen from a hole in the tent. The pain again in his chest, Fancy felt. Ah, morning would come again soon...and the burnt-out areas awaiting to be planted. The wayward youths would work harder now, maybe, with the crew bosses being after them. *Shit*!

Jimmy whirred again. Fancy was dead-still.

Really? The hard ground: here where ancient spirits lingered, what Jimmy now wanted to say on an impulse. *Did he?*

Their planting trees now, together...as they heaved the bags tighter on their shoulders; yes, about three hundred seedlings in each bag yet to be planted. No sound...save for their heavy breathing as they worked. Across the brush one youth shouted, "Sure, we’re here on sacred ground; maybe we have Indian spirit too.”

A loud guffaw rose up.

"Big deal," rasped another.

"Let's ask Fancy, sure!"

"From Siberia he is an' all?" heckled another.

"It's Jimmy Whitecloud we should ask, asshole," grated the freckled-faced one with a pony tail.

"Indians only plant trees to reclaim their lost spirit," another argued.

Mock vehemence, oh.

"It's what the coyote ordered them to do, no?"

"Really?" the freckle-faced youth yelled behind a cluster of sage brush. Then, laughter.

Another grated that Indians came here to work, but they didn't have to pay taxes like the rest of them did. *Rez Indians, yeah*. Words petered out. Fancy stood about twenty yards from them, alone.

Another youth asked why Indians were sometimes given white men's names. *Why, eh?* Laughter, crazy-like. The mid-morning heat rose. Another said Fancy and Jimmy Whitecloud could plant the trees all by themselves if they so wanted...despite their being awake all night, no?
"The loggers will cut the fucking trees down anyway. What's the point of *planting,*" hissed another youth leaning against his shovel.

Fancy again scuffed the hard ground, then whipped out a pine seedling from his bag. Horses tramping in the forest during the day, he thought. Jimmy heard them, too? Fancy tugged at the stiff tree he planted; it had to be snug in the ground. Over his shoulder he looked...he figured Jimmy was hidden by a spruce tree a few yards away.

Fancy felt his vision become blurry; and he rubbed his eyes with soiled shirt sleeves. A million flies started hovering. Where did so many insects come from, so suddenly? Maybe Jimmy would tell him– Fancy thought...and tell him too about how he used to trap beavers and skin them. Imagine the animals making weird sounds because the spirit was coming to them. More blackflies swirled.

Involuntarily Jimmy moved close to Fancy again and began muttering something about his wife Wanda. But he also wanted to hear Fancy talk about that special girl in Ukraine who'd kept bringing him eggs that were shiny-looking. *Is Fancy really his name*?

The image of he and Wanda going there... to where Fancy came from, Jimmy imagined...and then presenting Fancy's people with a beaver pelt as a gift. *Like making a pact between them.*

Fancy looked across at Jimmy and forced a smile.

Now let the kids holler all they wanted across the entire forest of Northwestern Ontario. And the clouds moving...and Wanda not being far away. And why didn't Fancy bring his one special woman to Canada for the Native Spirit to welcome her, ah?

Above the trees woodpeckers throbbed in a regular *rat-tat-tat* on beech bark. Jimmy kept looking around...for Fancy, who drifted away, out of sight? Another young planter hollered, "Here in the forest we can do anything we like. Christ, sometimes I really like being in the forest alone...only for camping!"

"Yes," echoed another behind a twisted oak.

Jimmy imagined looking into the lake-water.

A mirage...seeing trees, with shadows around them. And the one loon yet crying. Jimmy suddenly wanted Wanda close to him. Was she now in really in Wawa, Geraldton...Winnipeg? *Where*?

Noises...where?

Jimmy figured it was just the youths' eagerness to get back to camp early...as hotter it kept becoming. Christ, where was Fancy now, if not among the low brush, somewhere: alone...fighting off the flies?

Jimmy saw the other planters coming out into the open with snarly faces; they formed a knot. Alarmed they now looked.

Jimmy looked at each one. One stammered...about to tell him...W*hat*?

Yes, last night's omen?

"It's Fancy, no?" Jimmy's pulse quickened.

"The blackflies, see," the youth with freckles said.

"What?"

"He was an old man."

"Old man?" Jimmy looked aghast.

"He was dead before we knew it."

Jimmy looked down; he kicked a tuft of dirt. Then the youths began moving away, single file...leaving Jimmy alone in the expanse of burnt-out trees...and the clouds moving above. He figured that the loons in the lake were crying again. Fancy, yes, he could still hear them, no?

Did Fancy die because a million blackflies had swarmed him?

The girl Fancy might have reminisced about too, the farmer's daughter. Jimmy lowed his head, and again thought about Wanda. He hummed to himself, as the one freckle-faced planter stood near him. A woodpecker more loudly throbbed against beech bark; and maybe the flies kept coming closer. And lake-water rising...and a million fishes moving in a dizzying spiral. A lone wasp circled a burnt-out stump of a tree, then zoomed away. Ah, Jimmy figured Fancy was still with him...closer as they'd become.

The other planters began heading back to the camp, as the crew-bosses ordered them to do. Jimmy merely thought of the Great Spirit, his night-thoughts being all: what he and Fancy had genuinely shared. Strange voices calling out next. More fish swimming back and forth in the lake.

What for?

The young planters would now use Fancy's death as an excuse to leave the camp for good. The horizon closing in. A fresh gust of wind rose and swirled among the trees, with one particular tree rising up...like a monument. Jimmy rubbed his eyes, the way he figured Fancy often did.

Night being all.

Old Sins

by Sara Erdmann

It should have come as no surprise when Mathilda's daughter appeared at her house and announced that she would be moving across the country. Kate had always romanticized the west coast in the way of a New Englander, and it seemed fitting that she choose to move to Seattle, a city where she didn't know a soul.

"All the rain's an exaggeration, if you ask me," Kate said, setting her purse down on the kitchen counter. She was dressed professionally, in grey slacks and a lavender sweater. She had just come from the office. Mathilda poured Kate a glass of water from the tap, trying to maintain a neutral expression as she watched the water rise; she felt the glass grow cold in her grip. She'd only been to Seattle once herself, during a brief layover on her way to Vancouver with Bill. It had, indeed, been raining.

"And the housing market is solid right now," Kate said. "I have a friend who grew up there and says the school systems are good."

Of course, Mathilda agreed, and they would finally be able to have a dog once Kate left her job and could afford to stay at home. That was why they were moving, wasn't it? So Kate could stay at home?

The conversation ended in disagreement, and Mathilda apologized that she'd gotten a bit of a headache, and maybe Kate could show herself out.

It was a fact that Mathilda had never gotten along with her daughter, who had, since she was small, insisted upon rejecting everything her mother found reasonable. It wasn't as though Mathilda was particularly conservative, a word that had long since taken on the weight of an insult in their part of country. The nightly news provided far greater horror than she could find in the old sins: divorces and abortions and women going to war. She remembered one story about college students out west hanging a cardboard cut-out of the president from a tree. "Imagine! Hanging the man from a *tree*," she'd said to Bill as they sat on the sofa drinking wine from tumblers. ("A cut-out," Bill had corrected her.) "And here we are, worried about teenagers on the pill."

She would have been pleased if Kate had a career, if she worked as an environmental lawyer or provided medical services to needy communities, did something she'd been educated for, something that justified her four years at Vassar. Mathilda would have been proud. But her daughter sold houses. Mediocre, one-bedroom places, with leaky fireplaces and discolored siding, and for this she chose to leave her children in the care of some strange woman down the street. Verna was her name, a woman hardly over forty with a long neck like a ballerina. She had thin black hair that she gathered into a loose bun on the top of her head that resembled a Hershey's Kiss. "She's Canadian," Kate had told Mathilda once, as if this made Verna superior in some calculable way. But now Kate was moving, and she couldn't as well take Verna with her.

Alone in the kitchen, Mathilda awaited the familiar weight in her chest, the place where all of her great sorrows had always settled, leaving her feeling as though her lungs had collapsed and been encased in eggshells. It didn't arrive. It wasn't as though she saw much of the children anyway. Kate came by the house every couple weeks, offering news and trite commentary on the real estate market or something she'd read in the paper. When she opened the front door, Mathilda often caught herself looking just past her daughter, down by her waist, in hopes of seeing the two little ones with their wispy

brown hair burst past their mother's legs and into the living room. But they never did. It was always, "Oh, no, I left them with Verna." Or, when Mathilda offered to take the children for a few hours one afternoon: "That's all right. They'd rather just be with Verna." Even when Kate had a day off from work or Erik was on vacation from the university where he taught microbiology, the children went to Verna. Mathilda had made a comment that winter—in jest, of course—asking why Verna wasn't included in the family Christmas picture. After all, even the cat had been placed carefully in one of the children's laps, included in the list of names at the bottom: "*And Millie!*" Kate had gone flush and pursed her lips. Now Mathilda, standing helplessly in her own kitchen, took the holiday photo down off the refrigerator. It was May, after all, and it wasn't as though there weren't pictures of Kate and her family all over the house. It was silly to highlight that one, with its garish red border and disproportionate clusters of paper-white snowflakes. In it Kate was nice looking, plain and symmetrical, but Mathilda was disturbed by the way she parted her hair so severely to one side. It made her look serious and inflexible. In fact, Kate looked like her father, but she had gotten her mother's anxious disposition. Maybe the worst combination, although Mathilda wouldn't dare say so.

It had always struck Mathilda as odd that Kate had so little need for guidance as she raised her family, although it shouldn't have, not after the way Kate had been as a child, aloof and disinterested in adults and their intractable demands. Mathilda had plenty of friends her age who complained about being stuck babysitting on the weekends, who hated the expectation that they were happy to give up their plans for New Year's Eve or Valentine's Day, that they wanted a phone call every time a child lost a tooth or had a fever. She didn't think she would have minded that, but then she could hardly even imagine it. Kate would no more call her for a lost tooth than she would when she menstruated each month. Did Mathilda give the impression that she didn't care?

She rinsed Kate's glass and set it down inside the sink, hard. For a moment she wondered if she'd broken it but she held it up to the light from the window and couldn't find a crack. She and Bill had gotten those glasses as a wedding gift and not a single one had broken. Not a single glass in thirty-five years.

It was late afternoon now and the sun hung low in the sky. Mathilda's book—a desultory biography of Mark Twain—was closed over her finger and she looked out the window over the hill and down into the trees that flickered their leaves. If she watched carefully she would see Bill's car when he pulled onto their street, the mud from the driveway splattering the fender. She could have watched Kate leave but she hadn't. She had closed the door and turned away.

She crossed and uncrossed her legs, trying to find comfort in the sofa's uneven cushions, the throw pillows that forced her to sit upright, at attention. In a way it was as if she hovered outside of herself, watching her own agitation, the way she cleared her throat and opened the book for a moment before closing it again and letting her eyes settle on the wooden end table beside her. It held a white porcelain bowl filled with pastel-colored Jordan Almonds and she could taste them, their perfumy nougat and thick, heavy shells. Had she purchased them? She faintly remembered putting them there in ignorance, like a grandmother who rarely saw her grandchildren—any children at all—or else would have displayed something safer, less chokable. She felt, for a moment, as if she had been sitting in the exact spot she was now for as long as she could remember.

It would be another hour before Bill arrived. There were a few errands she could do, a book she'd ordered from Wellesley Booksmith that was ready to be picked up, a package she could mail from the post office. They had run out of coffee beans and had been using instant for the better part of a week. She could get more.

The station wagon—a relic from the days of the kids learning to drive—sat in the garage where it had begun to rust around the wheel wells. It had never occurred to her that they ought to replace the car since it ran fine, and Kate and her brother Benny had both practically grown up in that car; Mathilda allowed herself to place on it some measure of sentimental affection, as though it alone harbored elusive memories that would otherwise vanish altogether. It started up easily and she was pleased with herself for deciding to go out. There was no reason she shouldn't, really. Bill was usually the one who made dinner, and it wouldn't faze him to find her out when he returned home. She would pick up the new book and give up on Mark Twain. There was no reason not to—she was long past the age where abandoning a book carried with it some kind of shame or disappointment. She maneuvered out of the garage and down the slope of the driveway. They lived in a small cape—it looked even smaller from this angle—with three bedrooms and a sun porch where Bill read the paper after work. There used to be an expansive garden around the side of the house but it had died gradually over the years, slowly enough that Mathilda had failed to notice as each plant withered and curled in on itself or simply stopped appearing each spring. The truth was that the house didn't look all that different without it. So much work for so little in return. And the flowers had always seemed a bit ostentatious to her, as if they were straining in a sign of desperation for attention, an insistence that someone cared deeply about the property, right down to the soil.

Mathilda drove past side streets where a few of her and Bill's friends lived: Juniper, Radcliffe, Woodridge. Soon she was on Central Street and wondering what would still be open; she always did her errands in the morning just as her mother had, leaving plenty of time to enjoy the house's yawning silence before Bill's return. Maybe she ought to drive to Kate's house, apologize for her assumptions about their move. It wouldn't take her more than twenty minutes to get there, even with traffic. What did she know, really, about Kate as a mother? The children seemed perfectly happy. They had decent manners and looked as healthy as Kate or Benny ever had. Jillian was going into the second grade and was easily one of the smartest children in her class. Andrew was potty trained before he turned three, which was saying a lot for a little boy. What did she know, really?

Kate's red station wagon was parked along the side of the road and for a moment Mathilda wondered if she was imagining things. To have been thinking of Kate and to see her car parked right there, nestled between a pick-up truck and a mini-van, gave her a start. She was still in Wellesley, and had not, in fact, driven to Newton, the small, forested neighborhood where Kate and Erik had settled after Jillian's birth. Mathilda scanned around her to see where Kate might be, but there were shops all along Central Street, clothing boutiques and cafés and a hardware store that sold home goods. Brake lights appeared; someone was leaving. The driver waved, thanking Mathilda for stopping even though she hadn't yet thought to do so. She immediately put on her blinker and decided to find her daughter. She would say she was sorry and that would be that. There was no excuse to dwell on things. After all, Kate was still in town; Mathilda could relieve herself of this inchoate burden of guilt.

Mathilda put coins in the meter and looked to her left and right, as if expecting someone to tell her the way. She decided to move toward the small copse of red maple trees at the intersection of Central Street and Grove. On her right was a new kitchen store with a French name that sold brightly colored cookware; red iron skillets and orange strainers hung like poppies in the window. She caught her reflection as she peered in at them, eyeing the deep creases that cut into her cheeks and around her eyes, and moved on. She decided to try one of the cafés, hoping that Kate had stopped to get a cup of coffee. That was something Mathilda and Bill could never do, drink coffee after lunchtime. Kate drank coffee well into the evening and looked at her mother like she'd lost her mind when she asked whether it didn't keep her up all night.

Mathilda saw her grandson first, followed by her granddaughter. They were visible through the picture window, fiddling with a candy machine in the corner of the café, twisting its silver knobs, pushing a tarnished quarter into its slot. It looked like they were beginning to argue, like one of them was tired of waiting their turn for a handful of sweets.

She stepped inside and cushioned the door with her hand, letting it close gently against her palm. Something made her hesitate in getting their attention. Perhaps it was because they were occupied and she didn't want to get in the middle of their argument. Maybe she was afraid that their squeals would break the calm of the café, drown out the soft jazz that came from the speakers overhead. Either way, it was only a moment before she saw her daughter, sitting with her back to Mathilda in one of the first booths lining the wall. Her hand was outstretched and across from her sat Verna, fingers in hers, her face warm with an expression of love. It was a look Mathilda had never seen before except on Bill's face, bathed in a tenderness that made her skin go cold.

Home Care

By Patricia Life

She could feel the sheen of sweat on her face, and her elbow was really smarting from where it had smacked into the wall. They were both half headed for the floor and half propped up by the wall. His breath against her neck was quick but not deep, and she knew he was in discomfort.

"Bill, did you hurt yourself? Is it your back?"

He spoke at the same time. "I'm going to push you back onto the bed." He moved his legs further apart and braced against the wall. "Ready?" With a grunt and a twist from him, she dropped back onto the sheets, hands braced behind her. He staggered a little and put one hand out towards the wall again to steady himself. She sat and breathed for a minute, and then leaned forward enough to put her hands on his waist and look up into his face.

"I'm alright now. Are you?" Her eyes were anxious. "When I stood up I started to get really dizzy, so I guess I just lost my balance." She squeezed his waist with her hands. "I'm so sorry Bill. I didn't mean to hurt you. I must be weaker than I thought."

He raked an arthritic hand through his disheveled mane of hair. "When you tilted, I tried to shift, and then I got a twinge in my back and it just refused to function, you know?" He half laughed. "I guess we're a pretty pitiful pair." She knew he was trying to make her feel better, but his eyes didn't match his smile. "So now we're back where we started from, eh?" He was slowly rubbing the small of his back as he spoke. "Did you hurt your incision?"

"No. Well, just a little." She fingered her belly and then looked up at him. "When the nurse helped me this afternoon I guess she was holding me up more than I realized."

He ran his hand down her silver hair and cupped the back of her neck, same gesture he'd been making for all the years of their marriage. His voice was rough, "Ruth, I'm sorry I've gotten old and useless on you. There was a time I would have been able to just pick you up and carry you in there." He

rubbed the back of her neck and then said, "I'm afraid to even try to help you again because I don't think I'm strong enough to keep you from falling. The last thing we need is to both end up on the floor with broken hips."

They were silent for a moment and then she sighed and twisted her lips. "The problem is I still have to go to the bathroom." She chuckled but her face was strained. "I'm not going to be able to last until she comes back tomorrow."

He leaned back against the wall, aligning his back with care. "Could we call the lady to come back over to help you?"

"No, she said if I had any problems I should phone the doctor on call."

"We're going to call the hospital because you need to go to the bathroom?" He snorted. "That would be a bit ridiculous don't you think?"

His tone was ever so slightly sarcastic and Ruth's face flushed. They had been married for decades but that didn't make it any easier for her to discuss toileting needs with him. In all those years they had both always politely shut the bathroom door behind them. As far as she was concerned, he really shouldn't have to know exactly what she did in there. And now, she could sense frustration and a bit of irritation in his voice.

"Yes, it's ridiculous." She knew he was more irritated by his own limitations than by her problems, but she felt guilty all the same for having put him in a situation where he felt inadequate.

He stood looking at her for a moment. She sighed and turned her face, studying the dresser on the other side of the bedroom. Out of the corner of her eye she could see him folding and unfolding his hands in front of his body.

"Ruth?" She looked up at him and could tell that the irritation had passed. His words were hesitant. "What if I brought you some kind of dish to put under you? You know, like a bedpan?"

She flushed even deeper and looked to the side again. For a moment, she struggled with humiliation. This was her husband. Is this what they had come to? That he should start carrying her urine around?

"Ruth. That would work don't you think? It would be stupid to head off in an ambulance to the hospital so somebody can look after you. All you really need is for me to help you go to the bathroom." He stepped closer, picked her hand up off the bed and squeezed it. He knew her well enough to know that he had embarrassed her. "I don't mind honey. You'd do it for me right?"

She glanced back at him. "Yes, of course I would. You're right. I'm just acting foolish." She sighed, "That's the obvious solution."

"So what should we use?"

Keeping her eyes on the dresser, she considered her options and then suggested that he get one of the Tupperware containers out of the cupboard below the microwave. He nodded and headed off downstairs. Shortly, she could hear him crashing around down there for a while. He had never been too sure of what lived where in the kitchen cupboards. After a while, he came back upstairs and rather gingerly offered her a large shallow bowl.

"Do you need me to help you? Uh, with your panties or . . ." He swallowed once and then started again. "Will you be able to lift your hips up . . . or should I help you to uh get ready?" They were both a little flustered and she had trouble forcing herself to look him in the eye.

"No, Bill. I really think the best thing you could do at this point is just to go – out there." She gestured to the hall. "For about five minutes."

He pursed his lips and creased his brow for a bit, as if considering whether he should insist on staying in case she would be at risk in some way but then just nodded and slipped out of the room, closing the door behind him. Once left alone, moving slowly and holding her breath over the parts that hurt, Ruth was able to position herself awkwardly over what she hoped was the centre of the dish. Relaxing enough to let go took a while longer.

When she called out for Bill to return, he just nodded his head at her and reached for the container. "Well that's good then." She could hear him in the bathroom, rinsing and flushing. He brought the container back and set it down beside her without any further comment. Then he went off to get into his pyjamas and brush his teeth and make all the usual familiar sounds of bedtime routine. She could hear the rattle of the Tylenol-with-Codeine bottle and knew he'd decided to take the edge off his back pain.

She laid back with her eyes closed and thought that she really didn't have much to complain about. Her sense of humour began to return, and she started thinking that from now on she would advise young girls to check prospective husbands for bedpan skills before committing to them in marriage. There was no doubt in her mind; she had made the right choice in Bill. Her original decision though had had a lot more to do with his sparkling blue eyes and smiling dimpled face. Her face creased into a half-hearted grin.

Eventually, Bill turned out the light, pulled back the covers and joined her in the bed. He adjusted his pillows a bit and then cautiously eased his back into a comfortable position. Ruth reached out and laced her fingers through his. They lay still, their eyes adjusting to the dimness, both on their backs, both staring up at the ceiling, holding hands. Two paper dolls connected at the hands and feet.

"Bill?"

"Um."

"I like it a lot better when you help me move my hips for other reasons."

She could see him turn his head towards her. He was smiling. "Ruth!" he admonished with feigned shock, squeezing her hand while he said it. "I take it your restored joviality means that you've gotten over feeling embarrassed."

She turned her head to look at him too and sighed. "Yes and thank you."

"You're welcome."

They lay in silence for a while longer but then Ruth spoke again. "Do you think we've already made love for the last time, Bill?"

She heard him exhale his breath, and then she could see him pursing his lips and chewing on them, trying to decide exactly what to say to that. "Ruth, if we have, I don't want to know it. For now, I think we should concentrate on you getting over this surgery." He chewed his lips a little more, "And my back just needs some time. I've got to get going on those exercises again. We need to take life a day at a time and just make of it what we can. One day at a time." He watched her face while he spoke and then looked back up to the ceiling. When he spoke again his voice was very soft, "If I've already made love to you for the last time, that doesn't mean that I haven't still got the rest of my life to love you."

"And for me to love you back."

They lay in silence again for a while, still holding hands on top of the covers. She could tell by the regularity of his breathing that he was pretty close to drifting off.

"Bill?"

"Um." He yawned. "What, Ruth?"

"Do you think we should put our name on some waiting lists for nursing homes? Well, retirement homes."

"What!" He half sat up and then immediately cursed, either at the pain in his back or at nursing homes in general. Possibly both. "Jesus H. Christ, Ruth, where did that come from?"

"I was thinking that maybe we need to plan for the future. The Stapletons went and toured some places, you know."

"Walter went?"

"Yes, he did."

He made a muffled snorting noise. "Why do I have trouble picturing that?"

"Well, they did and I think maybe we need to start thinking about it. When Jack Wyatt had his stroke, he and Edith got placed in a home, and they weren't even on the same floor." She watched him as he watched the ceiling again for a while.

"I don't think we're quite at that stage yet." He turned to her. "Do you, honestly?"

"I don't know." They studied each other's faces for a while.

"How about if I promise to worry about it with you tomorrow, Ruth?" He was peering at her with a scowl on his face. She smiled at that.

"Okay." She squeezed his hand and he squeezed hers back.

"Good night," he said, settling back again. "Things will get better, Ruth."

Maybe, she thought, but maybe not.

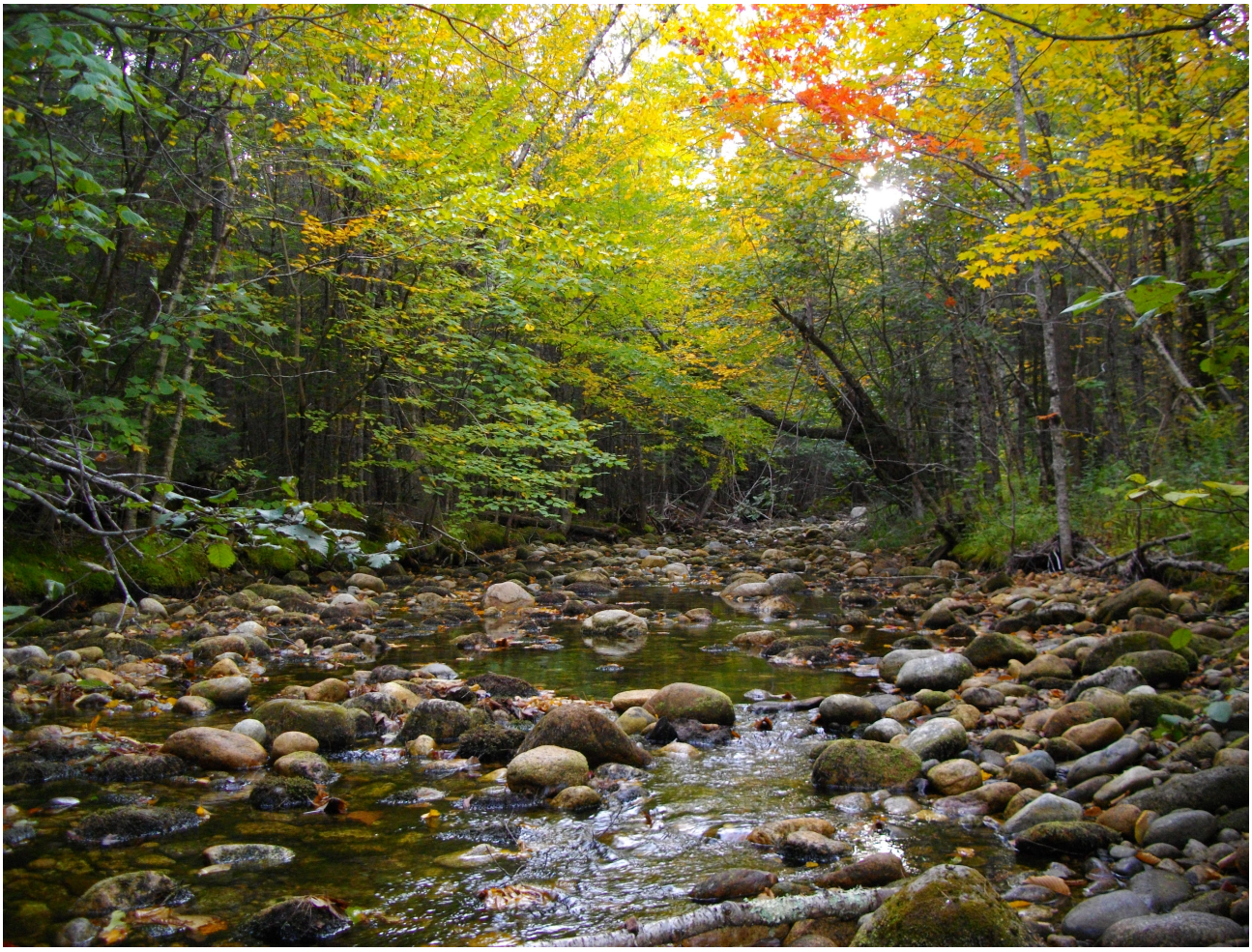
Time Lapse Images from the Life Cycle of the Common North American Male

By Matt Tompkins

Aaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhwwwwwahhhhhhhhhhhhhhwahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhheeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeheeeeeheeeheeheeeeeeeeeeeooooooooooooooooooooooommmmmmmmmmblblblblblblblblblblblblblmamadadano no no me me mine no mine ba ba bankie keecat keecat doggie ba mine no mine dada mama bayyyyybeeeeeee unh unh huh I see baby I see banoon I see laydeeeee I want banoon I have banoon? I have banoon. Mmmmm. Banoon is bue. I hug banoon. Owieeee! Banoon hurt me! Bad banoon! Banoon is bad, yight mommy? Banoon is so bad. You pway game wif me? I go peescoo? I go peescoo wif uvver kids? Hi. I yike you. You my fwend? We fwends. Heyyyyyyyyy. You took my toy! Teacher! Teacher! He taked my toy! Him bad! Him is bad. He is bad. So bad. I good? I am good? I am good boy? I love you. I play bayball. I playing ba-yis-ball. I hit the ball. I hit the ball good? I playing bayisball with uvver kids. I is having so much fun. I am having so much fun. I is not know that. Is you know that? Look a frog! A froggie! I am in kidnergardin. I'm big. I'm so big now. I ride on the bus. I ride on the bus wivvout, without mommy or daddy or anybody. I know my ABCs. Want to hear them? I know them all, except sometimes I get stuck on the en-en-em-oh-pee part, that's hard. I like dye no soars and aminals. Aminals are my fayyyyvrit. I can read. Want to see? The little boy ran down the hill and played with the puppy and then they went back home and had lenomade. That's what the pictures say. I went to the movies with my mommy. The pictures was sooo big! I don't read picture books anymore. Those are for bayyyyy-bies. I read chap-ter books now. With only a few pictures, or even without any pictures. I like to read about kids from different places. When I get big I'm going to go to lots of places. Like Africa and Ahstrayleea. Kids there talk different than kids here, but they still play games and read and do the same things. Did you know that? Do you know my teacher? His name is Mister Hanford. We can call him Mister H if we want to. Do you know him? He's probly the smartest person in the world, except for my parents. Did you know next summer I get to play outside until the streetlights come on. That's gonna be so great. And I get to have sleepovers! Awww, Mom! Cut it out, you're embarrassing me. I'm not a little kid anymore, you know. Jeez. My teachers are sooo dumb. Yeah, I went to the dance, but I didn't dance. I just hung out. Yeah. OK. Cool. That's awesome. That band is awesome. Yeah. Totally. Cool. Oh, yeah, physics is a pain in the ass. I know what you mean. No way. I don't believe it. You what? Touched her… OK, sure, fine. Sure you did. OK, whatever. Yeah, I have. Yeah. Once. Who? Somebody you don't know. Shut up. I said, "Shut up." Whatever. I think I'm going to major in History. Yeah, I mean, I like to read about the past, and you know, if we don't learn from it, we're bound to repeat it, you know? I think that's true. Plus, I can always be a teacher if I don't find something else I want to do. Yeah. Why not, right? You've got to go to college. Got to get that degree. I know, I'm so pumped! It's gonna be so much fun. I have never drunk so much in my life. I was hung over for a week! I know, right? Oh, yeah, that paper, I got that done, no problem. Oh, yeah, I think I got all my requirements completed. I know, can you believe it? Graduating already? They say it's the best four years of your life, you know, and it went by so fast! Sure did. I know. Do you? I do. I do. Well, can't be a kid forever. Got to grow up some time, right? Got to be a man. A good man. Got to be a good husband. Got to get that job. A real job. A good job. Got to put something away for a rainy day. I know, it's not what I was hoping, but I've got to pay the bills. Car payment, mortgage, insurance. You know how it is. I know you do. But there's still Friday, right? Hell, yeah. Still know how to have a good time. Me and the missus, we still know how to party.

Hi, Mom. I know. I know you don't live so far. I know. Yes. I know we don't see too much of each other. I should be a better son. I should. The kids. The kids are good. Ginny's good, too. Yeah. Of course, yes. I love you, too. I'm telling you, these kids. They grow up faster than you can say… well, faster than you can say "look how fast they grow." The time is precious. Even more precious now that that promotion is in sight. It's so close I can taste it. You know how nice it'd be to have that extra money around. A vacation. Braces. It's always going somewhere. I can't afford to be the last one in the door, or the first one out. Got to show that dedication. Got to put in the time. My belly's starting to remind me of a sundial. Shadow just keeps getting longer. Burning the candle at both ends. Got to do what you got to do. Keep the cars in the driveway. Keep the kids in their clothes. Don't want people to think I'm a bad father. Damn, but they just keep growing out of them. Damn if they don't just keep wearing out. I knew it. I knew when the company expanded I would be at the head of the line, ready to take the reins. Here I am. Bigger office, bigger paycheck. Bigger stack of papers on the desk. Bigger bags under my eyes. Bigger things to worry about. College is not cheap. Not as cheap as it used to be. And it wasn't cheap then. I hope those kids get some scholarship money. Honey, I know we talked about a timeshare. I know. Honey. I'm glad you understand. You always do. Would you believe that? My own daughter getting married. A father-in-law. Me. A what? A grandfather? Oh, my. I never thought. Well, there'll be a big sheet cake in the office tomorrow. Big, big. I've got more employees under me than I used to. More mouths to feed, haha. Re-what? Oh, come on. I'm not that old. Early retirement. I suppose. I can always find something to do part-time. Take up golf. Take up fishing. Take up a post at Wal-Mart as a greeter. It's good to see people, see fresh faces, keeps my spirits up. Ever since Ginny passed. I know, I can't believe it either. Some days I still wake up and reach across the bed to touch her shoulder. Don't see the kids and grandkids as much as I'd like. They're busy. I know. Believe me, I know. They grow up so… I know, it's a cliché. I don't say hardly anything that I haven't already said a hundred, a thousand times before. But still, I learn something new every day. See? A cliché, too, but it's true. God, but my joints make a lot of noise. I tell you, everything has shrunk except my knuckles. They just seem to keep getting bigger. Bigger and bigger. Soon I'll be all knuckles. Just a pair of ragged claws. I've started reading a little. Never had time before. Now nothing but. So long as my eyes can stand it. And reading's about all I can do. God, just to get out of a chair, you never heard such a racket, between the creaking joints and the grunting and groaning, straining just to stand up. I never thought. Oh, come now, I'll walk you to the door. Eeeeeeeeeeehhhhhh. Heeeeeeughhhhhhhhhh. Errrrrghuuuuh. Hmmm. Hmmmmmmmmm. Hmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm. Aaaaaaaahhhhhhhhh.

Poetry



The middle-aged couple

by Joan Crate

on a busy Santiago street
cling to each other, eyes closed, lurching
raft in a flesh and polyester sea.
People rush by—blustering, shoving—
their proof of direction, of significance
and purpose. But these lovers

stop.
In the shadow of Santa Maria,
they press mouth to mouth dry as summer dust,
offering a prayer for more of the little
they've made too little of in their lives.

The crowd pushes by. She stumbles
and he steadies her, his old muscles quivering.
They will not open their eyes.

Church bells wring out a melody
from the hot afternoon, their determined
abandon, the rattle of hope in all
arid hearts.

Nervous, exalted, worn-out and arthritic
they stop.
They hold each other and kiss.

Snow Angel

(for F.M.)
by Joan Crate

Winter

for a deciduous tree
is a near-death
experience.
At minus forty
when skin freezes, bark thickens.
When ice crystals drape the face in a sheet of pain,
sap skitters from branches,
blood rushes the trunk
and sap engorges heart, roots, lungs.
A young man straight and strong
can overcome doubt, blizzard, anything
he thinks.
Down the street he fights razor wind—
arms, legs, thoughts bleeding
precious heat.
While wind tears at branches and chews
his senses raw
the game
of cards and matchsticks begins.
He bets
skin, toes, fingers, tomorrow—
begs for intervention: *Dear God, if you're really there*—
bangs on a door screaming

but it's 2 a.m.

and no one will answer.
Numbing, stiffening, his body
turns in on itself, executes
a swan dive.

Wood
splinters . Ideas flutter like a flock of birds
leaving. A nest
shatters on the ground
and an egg cracks open.
He watches his life hatch, grow wings of ice
and glide from him rising,
falling, rising to sky-blue infinity.

snow angel
still life/
less.

A Short Biography of Raindrops

by Andrei Guruianu

Every day another one appears in the countryside,
skin tight to the bone, face down in the dirt,
one good ear turned to listen to the sad biography of raindrops.

Each wrinkle of this hard ground weeps,
each crack splits and runs into a hundred other memories.
It has been like this for weeks—a roar that bends the tall grass,
then an after-quiet stillness without rain.

It passes us, bleeds the ground dry.
The old women pray for rain but there is only thunder in the valleys.
The sky a battered shade of indigo.
And everywhere piles of ash, dead leaves waiting for another match.

When the skyline is always burning, no one is afraid of the wind.
They know which way the weather blows
long before the storms have gathered in the treetops.
Before even the horizon starts to look like one long band of smoke.

Oscar Wilde at the Fruit Stand

by Andrei Guruianu

For company, a few *great shadows*
I'd bargained from a gypsy peddler
who smelled of rotting peaches and tobacco.

He sold fruit and poetry by weight along the sidewalk,
with the caveat, *"They aren't mine."*
(Imagine, whole bags of no possessions!)
And I wondered if he knew how right he really was,

how dark the many doorways of this Lazarus city,
this Paris of the East in beggar's clothes
where evil is alive and well, and everyone,
as the old saying goes, is still a poet.

There were tired faces everywhere you turned.
The bags I carried rustled in the wind,
whispering kind nothings to the sympathetic lilacs.

Outside the martyrs' shrine a one-armed beauty
scrubbed the soot of burning candles,
her eyes looking past me as if I was already dead.

Portrait Without a Mouth

by Andrei Guruianu

City of dust,
dashboard icons
and keychain saviors.

Storms about to break
that never do
but grumble.

Bad luck
teasing her eyelashes
in the rearview mirror,

waving to old women
trading speculations
by the roadside.

How and When We Got Sold

by Andrei Guruianu

Supermarket shelves where childhood dreams
become promises marooned on tabloid covers.

High crimes and petty affairs with the verdict still pending.
Less than it costs to light a candle for all that is ruined.

When the day breaks it begins again.
Only by departing do we get closer to where we are going,

to when we must leave again.
We are the mirror's own far-flung reflection.

You will find no clemency for the homesick here—
the ones who lug furniture through trains and buses,

because you can't be exiled from a place that doesn't exist.
We are experts in imitations, dead men crawling.

Because We Were Taught to Love

by Andrei Guruianu

Mrs. Ivanov and the many rows of the anonymous for company.
So many familiar names.
Carnations on every grave, red flags brushing the ground.

***

Someone played a toy bugle with murder underneath his breath.
It came out as the happy song of May.
Girls with big blue eyes fidgeted with the folds of their skirts.

***

Before it even got started the road to glory ended abruptly.
It was full of potholes someone had filled in with dirt and gravel.
Avoiding them made the road seem that much longer.

***

The Mrs. kept standing in the crowd smiling and singing.
She was by the roadside holding a red carnation and a flag.
It was also red; it wrestled with its own conscience.

Old Habits Do Not Die With the Dead

by Andrei Guruianu

I see you're getting all worked up again about the weather.
That storm that never came.

Go on then, point your finger and waggle your head.
After all, this is the church of crumbs and contrived gestures.

Imaginary crucifixions just below the breastbone
as one passes the big house on the day of the dead.

Good people getting robbed in broad daylight,
stabbed in the back with a smile.

And the old women in black in the front row
nod their covered heads in agreement,

Yes, Yes, that is so. What can you do—
but call the stars out of line for failing to show at the funeral?

Time's Waltz
(To the tune of Strauss' Tales from the Vienna Woods)

by Nina Kaye

She loved to dance the waltz all night
She hoped she'd find her own white knight.
All night she danced, all night she whirled;
The fairest maiden in the world.
A dozen eyes turned round to stare
When she came waltzing down the stair.
She always had full complement
Of beaus to fawn and compliment.
They promised stars, the moon, the sun,
And still she married no man's son.

She traveled through life in a daze
Not counting minutes hours or days.
The old maids stopped to scold and warn
Her that her looks would soon grow worn.
They cautioned that she would stay chaste
When only Time pursued and chased.
She did not care; 'twas not her wont
To think about what she might want.
She flirted, never choosing one;
Her heart was never lost nor won.

Drifting along without insight
She never had her fate in sight.
One moment was of no great weight
She had no reason not to wait.
She played her beaus with craft and wile
But she was ageing all the while.
One day she found her looks had passed;
The beaus at balls glanced then looked past.
Time had flown past and she'd loved none.
She had no choice but to turn nun.

The moral of this poem goes
That what one reaps one also sows.
Make a choice or you may soon miss
All of life's chances for a kiss.
Time's waltz is measured at a run;
Act now before the dance is done.

Disintegration
(Meditation on a Ruined Mouth)

by Nina Kaye

You wouldn't know it to see her now, this old woman with her fetid
breath. Yet once she was belle of the ball, comely, gay, and often fêted.

Asked to dance, she would ne'er refuse
the handsome beaus who stood in line.
Now, unwanted, she is the refuse
swept from the ballroom floor.

Old maids once warned her to marry and not to tarry
long until her looks were gone.
"Grab one and hold him!" they cried, as her generous arms opened to a World
which dallied briefly and then hurried on.

She twirled and glittered in those bygone days
passed hand to hand like the prized baton at a relay.

Try as they might, the old bitter dames could not relay
their cautions, so the girl did not know to steel
herself when Time approached like a thief to steal
her beauty away.

Transverse Journal

Contributors' Bios

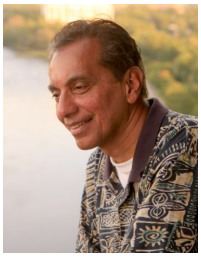
Natalie Childs is a recent graduate of McMaster University's MA in Cultural Studies and Critical Theory. Her major research project

was entitled "An Opening into Awe: Wilderness and Home in Don McKay's Ecopoetics", and focused on the ethical questions raised by living together with other human and non-human animals.
Her research interests include the intersections of literature and philosophy, ecological theory, cultural criticism and, most recently, food politics and systems. Natalie currently lives in Victoria, BC.

Joan Crate is author of the novel *Breathing Water* and three books of poetry, *Pale as Real Ladies,* (now in its sixth printing), *Foreign*

Homes (named as a "Book of the Year" by *Vue magazine*), and *SubUrban Legends* (Alberta Poetry book of the year, 2009). She is a winner of the Bliss Carmen Award for Poetry, several literary competitions, and has been shortlisted for many literary awards including the Pat Lowther Award for poetry, the Commonwealth Book Award, the Books in Canada First Novel Award, and the CAA Poetry Award. She has four children and teaches English at Red Deer College.

Cyril Dabydeen's recent books are *Beyond Sangre Grande: Caribbean Writing Today* (TSAR Publications, Toronto) and *The Short Stories of Cyril Dabydeen*/



Guyana Classics Series (The Caribbean Press, University of Warwick, UK). A former Poet Laureate of Ottawa, he has published poetry and prose in over 60 literary magazines, including the *Critical Quarterly*, *World Literature Today*, *The Fiddlehead*, *Descant*, *Prism International*, *The Dalhousie Review*, *Canadian Literature*, *Grain*, *Wascana Review*, *The New Quarterly*, and in the Heinemann, Oxford, and Penguin Books of Caribbean Verse. He has written 20 books of poetry and fiction. His last novel, *Drums of My Flesh,* had been nominated for the IMPAC/Dublin Literary Prize, and won the Guyana Prize for Fiction, 2007. He teaches Creative Writing, University of Ottawa, Canada.

Sara Erdmann is a Ph.D. candidate in Literature and Creative Writing at Binghamton University where she studies marriage, motherhood, and sexuality in literature. She has recently been published in *Adbusters* and *Offcourse Literary Journal*. While working on her creative dissertation, she writes short stories and teaches writing to undergraduates at BU. She is also the co-editor-in-chief of *Harpur Palate*, a graduate-run international literary magazine published biannually. Originally from the

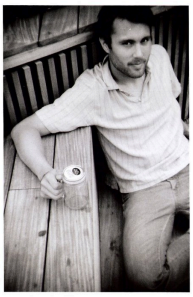
seacoast of New Hampshire, Sara received her MFA from the University of New Hampshire and spends her summers teaching at the Advanced Studies Program at St. Paul's School in Concord, NH. Her favorite writer and greatest inspira-

tion is Alice Munro, whose writing has only reinforced her desire to someday live in Canada. She would like to thank the editors of *Transverse Journal* for sharing her work. She can be reached at serdmann@binghamton.edu .

Andrei Guruianu lives in New York City where he teaches in the Expository Writing Program at New York University. He is the

author of a memoir, *Metal and Plum* (Mayapple Press, 2010) and four collections of poetry, most recently *Postmodern Dogma* (Sunbury Press, 2011). More at www.andreiguruianu.com

Ernest A. Hartwell is seeking his PhD at Harvard's Department of Romance Languages and Literatures. His interests are in Latin American literature and Philippine literature written in Spanish (which he argues are *essentially* the same thing, right?). He likes



thinking about translation, language, bio-politics, issues of the post-colony, travel, nation-hood and pirates. Mr. Hartwell received his Bachelor's degree from NYU in Spanish Literature and Religious Studies, where he wrote his honors thesis on Jewish mysticism as a form of linguistic play in Borges's short stories. He also studied for a year at the University of Buenos Aires.

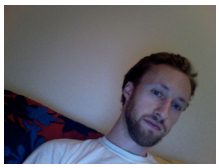
Nina Kaye completed her Honours Bachelor of Arts in English at the University of Toronto, and is currently completing her Masters in Drama at the same institution. She has extensive theatre experience and is the

founder of Unspoken Theatre Company in Toronto. Her creative writing takes many forms, but she is most fond of poetry and playwriting. In 2012 she was awarded first prize in the Hart House playwriting competition for her play, *Unspoken*, which was produced in May 2012.

Patricia Life is a 5th-year English Ph.D. (A.B.D.) candidate and a part-time instructor of English at the University of Ottawa. Her current research is on Canadian literary depictions of late life in long-term care institutions, and the working title of her thesis is "Long-Term Caring: Personal Agency, Identity, and Late Life in Canadian Literary Narratives." This thesis identifies dominant age narratives of Western society as discussed by relevant social theorists, explores the interconnections amongst these narratives, demonstrates how they are illustrated and resisted and/or perpetuated

by specific literary texts, and argues for the importance of an increased public understanding of their significance. Literary narratives dealing with late life and long-term care are central to the analysis. In her own creative writing, Patricia explores the lived experience of transitioning from what our societies consider to be young to what they consider old.

Matt Tompkins is a graduate student in English/Creative Writing at Bing-



hamton University. His primary area of study is the writing of fiction, with a particular interest in experimental and unusual narrative forms. Among many other things, Matt is interested in literature's potential as an agent in the development of such qualities as empathy and wisdom. He is very pleased to have his work included here in *Transverse Journal*.