New Nonfiction: The Footsteps of Giants by David James

All this is to say that pilgrimage is not for religious journeys alone, but for any act of traveling that takes us to a place of special cultural significance.

New Poetry by Lawrence Bridges: “Time of War and Exile” and “Taking an Island”

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New Poetry by Matthew Hummer: “Amortization”

New poem by Matthew Hummer: “Amortization”

New Fiction by Gordon Laws: “Make Their Ears Heavy, Shut Their Eyes”

I know a deaf man who was once shopping in a general store. A stranger in town was also in the store, and he observed that the deaf man made no movement in response to sounds or voices and hence the stranger discerned he was deaf. The stranger asked the clerk for a pencil and paper and, upon receiving them, wrote, “Can deaf people read?” He approached the deaf man and held up the paper for him to read. The deaf man was incensed at the stranger’s ignorance. He wanted to take the pencil and paper and write back, “No. Can you write?” But the deaf man had no hands and instead rolled his left eye and walked away.

***

Do you know how Tiresias lost his sight? One myth says that Tiresias stumbled upon Athena bathing and saw her naked, and she struck him blind. Other myths say that Tiresias was turned into a woman for seven years and experienced pregnancy and childbirth. Some people say that Tiresias saw the truth and it was so overwhelming that he went blind. I suppose you will remember that Oedipus Rex ground out his eyes once he learned the truth of his deeds and was forced to admit that Tiresias's explanation of his life was correct.

***

Did you know that the original Cyclopes were three brothers, each with just one eye? They were master craftsmen with their crowning achievement being the creation of Zeus's thunderbolt.

***

For the man so loved his country that he gave his firstborn son that whosoever believeth in Lincoln would surely perish *and* have everlasting life.

***

I was there when Lincoln dedicated the cemetery. It was hard to hear in the back. That land is consecrated and sacred now. I did not bury my boy there. I dug him up from a local farm, put him in a casket a local guy made, and brought him down to the rail station to ship him home.

***

I am a moulder. Or I used to be a moulder. Or actually, I am still a moulder but now have no hands and cannot mould. What is a moulder, you say? Do they teach you nothing nowadays? I create the moulds used in metalworking. That is, I used to . . . before I lost my hands. Fortunately, I am a man of means. And my children help support me.

***

In the town where Lincoln gave the speech, the town where my boy died, there's a large fellow. Name of Powers . . . Solomon Powers. Some men break rocks. Other men cut stone. Solomon Powers is a stonecutter. You have seen his work if you have been to the town. He cut and laid the stones at the entrance of the big cemetery on the hill, the one where they buried all the boys. Except my boy. They didn't bury him there. Mr. Powers is a marvelous stonecutter and a first rate gentleman. The town was full of people when I came to pick up my boy. He let me stay at his place for free even though he could have gotten money for it. Said he wouldn't dream of charging anyone who had sacrificed for the Union. We sat up together all night talking about our trades—cutting stones and making moulds. He is a fine stonecutter.

***

You know that fellow Key who wrote the poem? The one about the rockets' red glare, the bombs bursting in air? Did you know he had a son named Philip? Did you know that son had an affair with Congressman Dan Sickles's wife? Old Sickles loved to see the prostitutes in Washington, D.C., but he sure was protective of his wife who was half his age. Did you know Sickles shot Philip to death for cuckolding him? Sickles got off, but he didn't stay in Congress, so you know where he wound up? In the army. You know where he went with the army? To that town where Lincoln gave the speech. Know what happened to him there? A bursting bomb blew his leg off. See? All roads lead to Gettysburg, and everything comes full circle.

***

My son's wound was in his back. The fellows in his unit assured me that he did not have his back to the enemy. They think a piece of a bomb bursting in air might have gotten him. My son was at the Angle, the place they say was the High Water Mark of the Confederacy. There was a cannonade by the Rebels before the big charge. It could have been one of those bombs. Or it might have been later during the charge. Maybe even a Union bomb when they were shooting close range as the Rebels crossed the stone wall. His mates don't remember. It's all a blur. But his back was never to the enemy.

***

The day after Lincoln’s speech, poor Mr. Powers had a terrible tragedy at his house. There was an orphan boy living at Mr. Powers’ house. He was learning to be a stonecutter. A fellow who was visiting found a shell on the battlefield, and while handling it near the young man—Allen, I think, was his name—the bomb went off. Poor Allen got a big piece in the stomach. That’s what they tell me, anyway. He died in just a couple of minutes. Mr. Powers was so kind about it—he buried young Allen in his own family plot up on the hill where they didn’t bury my son. It’s hard to know where, though, because he doesn’t have a stone yet. Maybe Mr. Powers will cut him a special stone. Allen was thirteen, they tell me.

***

You remember Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus? You remember that he saw a light and heard the voice of Jesus, and after, he was a new man with a new mission and he took a new name—Paul. Do you remember that he was also blind for a while after and stayed that way until Ananias taught him the truth and then scales fell away from his eyes and he was baptized? That all happened because Paul was a chosen vessel of the Lord.

***

The last thing I remember seeing before my right eye went dark was a bright light. Brighter than words can describe. Sometimes, I have dreams of seeing that flash of light, and in my dreams, I try to stop time and, with my good eye, stare

into it and see if there are any figures there. And I wait and listen. If Jesus is there and wants to tell me that I am kicking against the pricks, I want to hear him. The last thing I heard before my hearing went was, “Sir! Excuse me, sir! Mister!” I am still waiting for the rest of the message. But I guess someone would have to write it out for me. Except in my dreams where I can still hear.

***

My son George is buried in the Briggs family plot. in the Mount Moriah Cemetery in Philadelphia. He gave his life for me, for you, and for all our country. The government will make a stone for him if I ask them, but I haven’t yet. He was at the fulcrum, the tipping point of the war, the place where everyone says it could have gone either way. I would like him to have a stone grander than anything they could conceive. I would like to carve it myself, but I have no hands and besides I am not a stonecutter. Or at least, I am not a stonecutter like my friend Mr. Powers. I would like Mr. Powers to make the stone for my boy. Maybe he will be able to after he does the stone for young Allen.

***

Going through an amputation is not so bad. You don’t feel it. They give you chloroform and make sure you are mostly asleep. Then they give you laudanum after to manage the pain. Eventually, it heals up and seems mostly natural. Sometimes you still think you got your hands, though. I mean, sometimes, I go to pick up something and wind up hitting my stubs against

the object because I have forgotten I don’t have hands. Sometimes, I swear, I feel pain in my hands, the sort of ache that would come after a long day of work.

Jesus was a carpenter. They put nails through his hands. That has to be worse than amputation. He showed people the scars after he rose. I don’t see why he should have scars. Why does he have to prove anything to anyone?

***

My younger son, Oliver, is a curious lad. Not curious in the sense that he is strange. Curious in the sense that he wants to understand everything. That little fellow at the Powers’ house, Allen . . . he and Oliver are the same age. Were the same age, I guess. Oliver was obsessed with all things army while his brother was in it, and when word reached us that George had died, Oliver vowed to become a soldier and avenge his brother. I tried to tell him it doesn’t work like that. There are hundreds of thousands of men. You shoot four shots per minute. Tens of thousands of men also shoot. There are rockets and bombs and shells going across the sky. You can’t know who killed your brother. You can’t kill everyone on the other side. They might get you before you get any of them.

When I went out to the Schwartz farm to find George’s remains, I found an unexploded shell. I wanted to bring it home to Oliver. I wanted to show him how these bombs work. I wanted to explain how pieces of it go flying every which direction. I wanted him to know that a piece the size of a nickel can kill you if it gets you in the back. That if it gets to your lungs,

your lungs fill up with blood until you drown. That's what I wanted him to know.

***

Do you realize how sacred it is to be a stonecutter? The name *Peter* means *stone,* and Jesus said, "Upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Mr. Powers cut rocks upon which the gates of the cemetery are fixed. They will probably stand for all time—at least longer than you and I will live. Daniel said he saw a stone cut out of a mountain without hands that would roll forward and fill the earth. It was God who cut that stone. And that stone smashed every kingdom on earth.

That fellow that accidentally killed young Allen . . . he hit the shell against a rock to try to get the stuck fuse out of it. See, he wanted to make sure it was safe for when he showed it around to people, like his kids. I think about that mistake all the time. All the time. Even the gates of hell cannot prevail against a rock. And a rolling stone will smash all kingdoms.

***

One time, in one of my dreams about the light, I was staring deep into it with my left eye and I saw a man clothed in white robes. He motioned to me to come to him. He sat on a large throne. I advanced slowly, and I started to kneel, but he said, "No, come here." I walked over to him. He held out his

hand. I took it. He placed me on his knee, and he said, “You are also my son. What would you like to know?”

I said, “I want to know the message in the light. Whatever you want to tell me.”

“Do you want the truth?” he said.

“Yes. I can bear the truth. Let me not be like Oedipus or others who cannot. Test me.”

He nodded. His smile was soft. He said, “I want the best for you, my son. But the truth is it pleases me to bruise you. I will put you to grief.”

I think that was just a dream. I am still waiting for the true voice from the light.

New Nonfiction: “A Bridge” by Kent Jacobson

Take me to the alley

Take me to the afflicted ones

Take me to the lonely ones that

Somehow lost their way

Gregory Porter

The twelve-foot chain link capped with concertina wire said, *Whoever you are, you aren't welcome.* The penitentiary sprawled on a barren hill in a forgotten tract in Connecticut, far from houses or schools or the next town. It was 1990, the dirt and rutted parking lot empty. Maximum security didn't pull many visitors, and this would be my first time inside. I recognized

no fear, not at first.

I remembered waiting as a boy in a lot outside another penitentiary. I perched in the passenger seat of the state car my father drove, the black 1950 Chevy with the siren and flashing light. Dad exited the facility smiling. The men inside fashioned signs for the Rhode Island Forest Service and were likely paid very little. The work, Dad said, was always good, always professional, and always on time.

Great oak trees surrounded that old place.

Here, there were no trees, no flowers, not a planted bush. A twilight overcast pressed down as I made my way to a squat, concrete-block building that appeared to be the welcome center, beyond which crouched the penitentiary, a low mean spread of menace which housed two thousand inmates. I explained to the officer hovering behind dark, inch-thick glass what I was there to do. He grunted.

He asked for a driver’s license and peered into the worn briefcase Dad had gifted, checking for anything an inmate might want as a weapon. He dropped the license into a drawer and extended a laminated pass through a small hole in the glass, and with the sweep of an arm, he motioned to a steel gate through the chain link.

Dad had been a hard man. While he never came clean about his earliest days, I realize now he was aware a ghetto kid like he had been, loose with brawlers on a drunk through Providence speakeasies, could have landed in a prison making signs. Possibly he smiled as he left that Rhode Island penitentiary because he felt lucky.

He’d floundered as a student and dropped out at sixteen to do piecework in a factory where he poured out work with speed. A threat to more senior men and making hardly any money, he turned back to finish school. And throughout the Depression, without support except an immigrant father’s scorn, Dad bulled

a path through college. He worked a year and enrolled in school the next.

He died a decade before I entered Osborn Correctional.

I flinched as the steel gate clanked shut behind. I crossed a dirt yard on cracked asphalt to an officer in a head-to-toe black uniform, and I flashed my laminated pass.

“Wait here.”

His glower said, *Forget it*. *We have more to deal with than you.*

“Screw ‘em,” Dad would say, “whoever the hell they are, whatever the bastards do. Sometimes, you’ve got to stand and be counted.”

Black uniform ordered me through a second, heavier steel gate where more guards lurked behind more dark glass. My Harris tweed jacket, the worn briefcase, and the evening hour said who I was.

I’d been warned about the guards.

The second steel gate clanked shut behind me. My stomach churned. Will anyone open these doors when I want *out*?

There seemed to be no laughs in this dwelling, only these cold mothers and their freaking gray walls.

“Why you here?” a voice barked from behind the glass.

“I teach in the college program.”

Books won’t help thugs, Mister, I was ready for him to say.

He gestured down the wide hall.

“Take a right down there and go till you find a guard.”

Still no waste of words.

I did what he said and took a right into an enormous, extended corridor. Voices blasted off the walls and concrete floor. Inmates exited a room far ahead, most of them bulked up bodybuilders in identical tan shirts and tan pants. They thundered toward me four abreast, one pack after another. I stepped faster and avoided eye contact.

They ran over 225. I was an Ivy League poster boy in tweed and corduroy. Their faces said, *Who's the punk? Who invited him?*

What had I expected? I'd joked the inmates might have two heads and keep cobras as pets.

A woman at a party asked why anyone would teach in a prison. Wasn't the place dangerous?

I said teacher-pals declared prison the best experience they'd had in a classroom and didn't say more. Their conviction was absolute and I bit. They'd crossed a bridge they hadn't supposed was there and learned something, though they didn't say what.

Bedlam grew as more streamed from what was maybe the dining mess. Masses of them, and too many to count. They howled.

What am I doing in this place?

I showed my pass to a guard I found. I said I taught the English course. He smiled and proceeded down one more hall to a room assigned to Jacobson.

"Is this experience new for you?" he asked.

The guard seemed curious, not at all prickly. He wished me the best.

Inmates passed and nodded to the new guy. They smiled.

I thought, I must be in a different institution.

The room that was mine had an immense oak desk and a matching

oak chair. I wasn’t going with that; I wanted no barricade. I took a plastic chair-desk from the front and turned it to the other chair-desks in neat rows facing the front, the oak desk and chair and the blackboard behind me.

I tried not to think what men had done to end in maximum security. Murder, pedophilia, armed robbery, rape, the worst crimes were the most likely. A section of my brain spat images of fiends.

Get a grip. You can’t teach fiends. Dad drank with Tommy Pelligrini, a man rumored to be in the Providence mafia. Tommy wore a navy suit and a modest tie. His memory seemed to quiet my mind.

I understood little, nonetheless, about the actual men I was teaching. I’m certain I looked grim. I picked fingernails and fooled with the marriage ring on my finger. Men were finding seats. I rooted in my briefcase for a pen, a pad of paper, for nothing. My back had a knot the size of a golf ball.

Would I recognize anyone? I scanned the roster.

An inmate asked a question and I gave a too brief answer. I didn’t initiate conversation like I usually did in a new class.

I glanced at my watch and a voice inside chirped, *You’ve crossed scarier roads than this, boyo.* A buddy remarked once on my cool in a crisis and my son, Morgen, cracked: “Dad’s good in a crisis. It’s ordinary life that gives him trouble.”

He was ribbing, though I hoped tonight he was right.

I counted twenty-three men in all. Half, I would learn, had killed someone. Most had spent their childhoods in fractured homes, abandoned by fathers whose savvy might have pointed to a better pathway.

The men sat in four straight rows, seats directed at the

teacher like we had in grade school. I didn’t ask them to form a circle because I planned to hog the talk tonight. They were black men except one, everybody in a tan uniform with a buzz-cut. White people can’t tell one black person from another, a smart observer said.

The single white sat in a far corner. Outside, darkness had fallen and inside it wasn’t bright. He wore deep-ink shades. What lay in wait there?

I’d memorize their names and offer that much consideration.

Now. Let’s go.

I called the roll and scribbled a note when a man responded. One had red hair. A coffee-colored inmate displayed freckles. One was Goliath, a second a featherweight. Another wore a bandana. Still another had a sweeping scar on a left cheek.

I went one by one, up a row and down the next. I used the scribbles and named each inmate correctly. Bodies straightened. The room perked. Two mentioned how little respect they received in Osborn and others nodded.

The next would be easier, I thought. I would describe in general terms what we’d read and their writing would analyze in coming weeks: American writers from Irving to Twain to Baldwin to Tobias Wolff, with a handful of accessible poets.

I started to speak and couldn’t get the words out. My hands shook and my voice fluttered. Fear had taken a public walk. I stopped. I couldn’t teach like this.

A hand shot up three seats away. The Goliath, maybe in his twenties and close to three-hundred pounds, a football player once, I bet. He plowed holes for running backs.

Head down, he waved a hand, hesitant.

“Can . . . can I say something?” He spoke with a stutter.

“Sure,” I said.

He held a beat, reluctant to say what he wanted to say.

“You . . . you seem nervous.”

“You got that right.”

The room exploded. Laughter, every single man, belly laughter, even No Eyes behind the ink shades.

Without a prompt except my fear, the men spilled their first hours in Osborn, last week or years before. The shakes, the diarrhea, the sleeplessness, the stares into the dark, the dread, the guards, the threat they might not live.

They did their best to talk me back from where I’d shrunk. They’d been there. They understood. Don’t be ashamed. We managed. You can too.

***

I’m old. I forget names. Days are shorter and they fly too soon. I admit it was a tiny episode in a prison, years ago, hardly worth a mention.

The moment stays.

We are you, they said. We are you. These men who were like the mill kids I grew up around, only older, and in more serious trouble. Men who brought me back to my brawling father.

They weren’t foreign. They weren’t strange. For a moment, they saw me as I was. Like them, afraid. They were me.

I came from no fractured home, I hadn’t been abandoned by my father, I hadn’t ever been so continually disrespected. Yet

here I was, at a bridge my father knew.

And there they were too, waiting.

New Poetry from Jeffrey Kingman: “Matriarch,” “Josephine Marcus Earp,” and “Marching: Sophia Duleep Singh”

OCCASION THE BELLY / *image by*

Amalie Flynn

MATRIARCH

ninth great-grandchild
spits up peas
seventh and fourth
declare themselves winners

I bundle the children into categories
high-shouldered daughters gobble minutes
trikes in the hallway

my sidewinding wisdom
laughs into a hanky

why is it I depend on the perpetual
tweed skirt

try reading
a mother
nursing triplets

attagirl

I suppose getting it right doesn’t matter
pull the flowers from the earth

an isolated pea is a tiny thing

JOSEPHINE MARCUS EARP

cowboys were the bad guys
  one cow hides behind the last one
it was a bad sum
  inaccuracies plus chickens

instead traded on horse hooves
kicked up dust and stray dogs

she wanted to be
  taken seriously
staked instead a vagabond

her husband’s posture straight to the sky
  pointing now to the headboard
the tombstone didn’t think of her

left with her own version
they rifle through the undergarment drawer
  for the sheriff’s girl

MARCHING: SOPHIA DULEEP SINGH

voice rattles
a high window
the lyric ricochets
then straightens
      to the upper register

breath comes
from the diaphragm
for the belters
on occasion
      the belly

trailing skirts out of fashion
wives sing wild
wrapped in bedsheets
to jump from a crawling baby
               is not a dance

talk of a women’s parliament
words are for lemmings
feet do the work
until the pointlessness is stiff limbed
dogged bobbys

the street scuffle an avant-garde
ballet

she fell down during the struggle
mud on her dress

New Poetry from Marc Tretin: “Justin Alter, Slightly Drunk, Addresses Maya, Who Is In Egypt” and “Maya Ricci Alter After Excavating A Pyramid South Of Zairo”

HOT WIRES SCALD / image by Amalie Flynn

JUSTIN ALTER, SLIGHTLY DRUNK, ADDRESSES MAYA, WHO IS IN EGYPT

Now as I am hungover and queasy
stumping about the tilting house
and sappy as my face is green,
Maya, your sculpture of Qetesh,
that goddess of sex and ecstasy,
whose torso of clear pink plastic
has a heart made of puzzle pieces
dangling from wires that run to an
automated external defibrillator
normally used to shock
a rapid cardiac rhythm

back to normal, stares at me with eyes
filled with both desire and despair.
Though feeling embarrassed
I touch the pink nub you meant
to be her clit and a soft whirr starts, then
puzzle pieces spin so fast they tear, and scatter
and the bare hot wires scald
the insides of her perfect breasts.
I pull the plug, but the smell of burnt plastic
fills our bedroom despite the open windows.
Why do you have to be gone so long?

MAYA RICCI ALTER EXCAVATING A PYRAMID SOUTH OF CAIRO

As I stooped beneath the
standing sun within the
meter-by-meter carefully
measured order of this
archeological dig and
brushed pottery shards
and papyrus crumbs through
a sieve to sift out the sand,
the heat’s strong hands
touched me like a half-
wanted lover, whose warmth
is too familiar with my
body to refuse and that’s
why when Jamaal, the site
boss said, “You look
overheated.
Cool off in my trailer.”
“Yes,” I said, knowing I
wanted to betray Justin
but not knowing why, so
after we had sex and while
I was thinking how can I

use this experience,
I saw Jamaal shave with
a straight edge then I saw
the dead-on right image for the God Set,
a cave-sized skull made of razor blades,
entered by stepping
over teeth made of sharp knives
into total darkness
except for a weak light
piercing this skull
through one of its eyes
and in that eye is a web
and tangled in its threads
are Zipporah and Justin.
Their faces, formless rags.
Their bodies sucked out hulks.

New Poetry by Kevin Honold: “A Brief History of the Spanish Conquest”

RADIANT AS NOON / *image by Amalie Flynn*

A Brief History of the Spanish Conquest

Tell me again of that fabulous
kingdom where a single
ear of corn is more
than two strong young men can carry, where cotton
grows untended, in colors never dreamed of,
to be spun by gorgeous slaves
into garments that lie
cool as cornsilk against the skin and shine
radiant as noon.

*

How sordid and predictable history can be.
Within sight of the prize
but out of ammunition, they
lowered three men down the volcano’s throat
to fetch sulfur for gunpowder.
                        This
was the vision
prefigured in the prophet’s eye:
three men curled in a basket peering
back across the centuries,
their dewy starving faces so
desperate with hope
as they dissolve in a yellow mist,
felons set adrift.

*

North by west toward the cities of gold,
the soldiers in rags walked half-bent
with hunger and dysentery, nursing
grievous wounds sustained in hit-and-run attacks
by moss-troopers talking Choctaw.

Beside the mother of rivers, the horses sickened and died
but the soldiers, being less reasonable,
proved less destructible.
At disobedient towns they dragged out
chopping blocks to punish malefactors
and departed in a shower of ash, their legacy
a heap of severed hands slowly
clutching at flies.

*

But the much-sought golden cities sank below the horizon
like the tall ships of fable. For the Spaniards,
the age of miracles ended
somewhere in southwest Arkansas. The palaces of silver

turned Outlaw Liquor Barns, Triple-X Superstores,
the stuff of vision a mustard-colored mix

of smoke, dust, emissions
from riverside refineries and coal
plants along the Mississippi where squadrons
of John Deere combines like barn-size locusts
roll in drill order over the dry land,
half-effaced by squalls of chaff.

At night the fields burn.
Stray flames browse the blackened
shoulders of the interstate,
crop the stubble beneath the billboards.

*

In the state park south of Hot Springs
I fell asleep in a chair in the heat and woke
to a titmouse perched on the toe of my boot
with that peculiar weightlessness
shared by birds and planets

and I searched without hope for my place in the book.
Buzzards killed time there, their shadows
slipping across the iron ground
like fish in a shallow pool
while Time gaped
      at the spiders that battened
   on the flies that
swarmed the rotten
windfall apples.

*

Tenochtitlan.
At the imperial aviary, we found
a pair of every kind of bird in the world:
parrots and finches in profusion, brooding vultures,

egrets, ibis is sacramental scarlet.
Seahawks stooped and banked

through that hostile truce and we marveled
at God’s prodigality, His exuberant
inventiveness, then piled tinder
to burn the thing to the ground.
Flames sheeted over the soaring

lattice dome like the fleet
shadows of clouds. For a time,
the structure smoldered,
a hissing wickerwork steaming as it cooled.
Here and there, a bird crashed the skein of ash

like a rogue comet bursting
the flaming ramparts of the universe.
Charmed in place, we held our breath,
beside ourselves, like couriers
trapped in a snowglobe, blinded
                in a tempest of embers,
astonished at the work of these hands,
the everyday miracle of destruction.

New Poetry by Sam Cherubin: “Don’t About Not,” “Mermaid Tavern,” and “Emerald Inula”

SUN HOLDING ME / *image by Amalie Flynn*

Don’t About Not

If I can’t or think
do it like I’m doing now

a beach
sun holding me

I am holding space
not space itself

not looking
being

gathering toward me

sun’s filaments

fluidity
is all I need

Mermaid Tavern

A night-wind touching bare backs lying down
and bare arms spooned across my bed, in blue
light dreaming over skin, light-fingered sparks
of seaweed, dendrites rippling through the room.

Scales rubbed against smooth sheets, in silver
puddled water, a smell of open
ocean, roseate tips of waves, our hips’
undulations, in my body’s rhythmic memory.

Emerald Inula

i.

Apples in Schiller’s desk, Balsam of Peru, rockrose,
rose alba, Helichrysum Everlasting, *Immortale*.
Why can’t this be enough?

ii.

Dried petals staining the pages.
Attar of cells breathing sun.
Flesh never accepting, but aching.

New Nonfiction from Philip Alcabes: “Peppina”

1. A Child

A neglected box in the back of my closet contains a contain a collection of items from my father's apartment, I find. In the midst of a stack of curling black-and-white photo prints there is one that I don't remember having seen before. About two inches by three, it's a photo from the war. My father's war, the one he referred to as "the" war. It's a picture of a girl of eight or nine or ten, a bow on the right side of her dark hair, her mouth wide, dark eyes squinting slightly into the sun. She's wearing a pinafore that is just a little too big for her. She is sitting tenuously—posed?—atop a low wall. On the back of the print, written in cursive in a feminine hand, is one word: "Peppina."

Who are you, *signorina*?

The photo is clearly from Italy. My father had been a bombardier-navigator on a B24 crew in the 15th US Army Air Force, based at Pantanella, east of the Apennines. It would be 1944, then. In the photo, the sun is shining bright, casting onto Peppina a shadow of the trunk and limbs of a tree that must have been behind the photographer. In the background, an American enlisted man in a flight cap and leather jacket is leaving a building, oblivious to the photographing going on nearby. He's also squinting against the Italian sunshine.

Who took your photo? Definitely not my father: he hated taking photographs, all his life. From the war, he kept photos of himself, his plane, his crew, some pictures of bombing targets, a few shots taken through the right-side waist gunner's window of the other B24s of his squadron, up above the Alps. But why did my father have your photo at all? And why did he keep it for so long—for the sixty-eight years remaining to him?

I wonder if you were one of those poor *bambini Pugliese*, the ones whose hunger and misery he mentioned often during my

childhood, especially when I wouldn't finish my supper. But in the photo you look clean and your clothes aren't ragged. You seem healthy.

Were you the daughter of someone who worked at the base, maybe a cook or a cleaner? My father was always at ease with children (far more so than he ever was with adults; he always seemed to feel that adults had some racket going). Children's openness to the world matched his. Children are ever on their way to becoming something but never there yet.

Or were you the younger sister of an Italian girl he loved? My father grew up speaking *Ladino* (or Judaeo-Español), late-medieval Spanish with some Hebrew, Arabic, and sometimes Greek or Turkish mixed in. His parents were Sephardim born in the Ottoman Empire, who had come to New York in the 1910s as teenagers. Speaking what his family called *Spanyol*, he understood enough Italian, and could make himself understood. And he *looked* Italian: black hair and olive skin, a slim boy with kind eyes (and a handsome uniform). So was there a girlfriend? Other, I mean, than the young woman back home in Queens who would become his wife and my mother. Were you the sister of a Laura, a Rafaella, an Antonella—someone he couldn't speak of?

Or had your photo originally belonged to an unlucky buddy of my father's? Did one of the bombers miss the landing strip?

Was the photo retrieved after the men of the 777th Squadron brought in the bodies of the dead, after someone went through the pockets of their charred uniforms and gave the snapshot to my father for safekeeping? Did he keep it for so long because it was a memorial to a dead friend?

2. Fate

Early on, I learned that a person in war needs luck. The belongings of the dead signal something about luck in the drama of Fate. To discard what the universe has touched is to

play with Fate. When I was growing up, my father had no patience for men who proclaimed their heroism in WWII. *His* treasure was, forever, a specific commemoration of the play of Fate: eating real (i.e., not powdered) scrambled eggs after returning from a mission. Eating scrambled eggs was not just a pleasure for him, but a kind of celebration of good luck. Call it grace.

My father said he had been lucky to be on a crew whose commander was a competent pilot. The man was a "son of a bitch" (the third most disparaging epithet my father could bestow, after "bastard" and "prick" but before "schmuck"), but he was a good leader. My father was also lucky not to have been a gunner. He was 5 foot 6, there weren't too many men who were shorter than he was, and the shortest gunner was generally assigned to the ball turret. Even before I read Jarrell's poem, I knew what happened to ball-turret gunners.

He was lucky that his plane didn't malfunction, drop out of the air, skid off a runway. He was lucky when cloud cover hid his plane from radar. He was lucky that the flak (he tended to refer to it with the onomatopoeic "ack-ack") never brought his plane down. He was lucky that, after his crew came back over the Alps into Italy, fighter planes piloted by Tuskegee Airmen—the Red Tails, as he called them, whose record of safely escorting Army Air Force bombers was the best of all fighter groups—brought him back to base safe.

He was lucky that he didn't fall out through the open bomb bay doors. Sometimes a bomb would get fouled on the rack and fail to drop. It was the bombardier's job to walk out on the narrow catwalk (no parachute because he couldn't fit through the hatch with it) and finagle it loose with his boot, the terrain of Czechoslovakia or Romania rushing past a few thousand feet below, just a skinny young man in a lined flight suit, freezing air, wind, gravity, and luck.

He was lucky to be a Jew. The story, which he told more than

once, was that a flight-training commander, a Southerner whom he knew to be an anti-Semite, had flunked him out of pilot training after only one trip up in the open-cockpit trainer. You were supposed to get two chances, he said, but this guy ("the bastard") had learned that he was a Jew and failed him after only one flight. The Army sent him to navigator and bombardier training instead, and then shipped him to Italy. The luck of it, he said, was that if he had become a fighter pilot, he was sure, the Messerschmitt 109s would have made short work of him.

My father's universe was thoroughly perfused with mystery, although nothing made him like religion, not even being shot at. He never prayed in any conventional way. Religious rites to him were a kind of farce: people put on costumes and bow or kneel, fast or feast—putting on the agony, he always called it, from a 1920's music-hall song: "puttin' on the agony/puttin' on the style." Making too much of yourself. As if, for *you*, the universe cares.

Fate is the universe's lack of interest in you. You do your best, you live your life, and the universe either looks after you, or it doesn't. My father's mother died of a heart condition when she was 23 years old. His mother's father had a heart attack on the stairs to the Third Avenue Elevated not long after that. He died, too. My father's aunt Fortunée, who had moved from the ancestral home in Edirne, Turkey, to France in the 1930s, survived the Nazi occupation in Paris by passing for a gentile. Her brother, his uncle Gabriel, died in the camps. My father was not yet 4 when his mother died, but he lived to age 89.

When my father did die, in a hospice in the Bronx, Hurricane Sandy blew into New York. Trees fell. The seas overtopped the land. It has made me feel that he was probably right about the universe and Fate.

3. Children

Even before I knew anything about fighters and bombers, battles, missions, weapons, camaraderie, uniforms, or luck in battle, I learned that war is about children. I learned that I was fortunate beyond measure to live without either war or poverty. I was a child myself, probably 5 or 6 years old, when my father first told me about the ragged children of Apulia. I had decent clothing and I didn't know real hunger. My father had been poor as a child—raised, as he liked to remind me, in a walkup tenement whose residents shared toilets, one water closet in the hallway on each floor, near the stairs. Those Italian children around his base were even poorer than he had been.

That my father was barely more than a child himself when he flew on bombing missions, that the bombs he dropped from his airplane onto oil refineries or marshalling yards must have injured or killed people and that some of those people were children—those things only dawned on me later. That his airman buddies would also have been barely out of childhood. The girls in Naples, where he went once on leave, must also have been children, too. Sexually knowledgeable, but still children.

When I was in my teens, "the war" was the one in Vietnam. To my view, it involved American children, not much older than me, killing Vietnamese children, as well as adults, with horrific weaponry. The son of my mother's friend, a boy two years older than me, flew with a Medevac helicopter crew; they shipped his remains home. When I played second base, the shortstop was a classmate whose older brother had died in Vietnam. Among us 9th and 10th graders, arguments for and against that war were so *personal*. War seems like something that 14- and 15-year-olds shouldn't have to know about. Yet so often it's their whole world.

Morally outraged by the war in Vietnam, preoccupied with it, and of course mortally frightened that I might be drafted and

forced to fight it, I asked my father what had prompted him to volunteer for the military in *his* war. At first, the answer was that he had always been fascinated by airplanes, and wanted to be a flier. Another answer was that he didn't want to be drafted; once the war broke out, he knew that draftees would go into the infantry or a tank unit. Later, he said that he had had to "fight Hitler." By the time he was in his eighties, the reason had been that he had felt he had to stop Hitler from killing Jews.

I'm sure he meant all of those. Motivations are complex, after all, and elusive. The poignant one, never expressed to me but always evident, was his connection to a universe that was magically full of possibility. America should stand for something—something that Europe had lost, or reneged on. Not freedom, which everyone talks about. Something more like fairness. Or just beneficence, spread as widely as could be. Which amounts, I suppose, to *hope*. Strange as it sounds, I think my father fought for hope.

I watched the 1968 Democratic National Convention on the TV in our living room with my parents and their friends Stan and June. The set was tuned to CBS; the avuncular Walter Cronkite was in the broadcasting booth in Chicago. I remember the night air, the August humidity, the front and back doors open in hopes of catching a breeze, all of us drinking the lemon-flavored iced tea that my mother let me prepare from a Lipton packet and tap water, poured over ice into tall glasses. Maybe the green floor fan, much older than I was, was moving some air around the room. The adults were talking about Hubert Humphrey and LBJ; about Allard Lowenstein, a friend of friends of theirs and a delegate at the convention; about the war.

The televised coverage cut to scenes on Michigan Avenue, where policemen were pushing young demonstrators to the ground, clubbing them—even the girls, to my astonishment— and hauling them into vans that would take them to jail. Beating American children on live television. Not Black children in Alabama,

which my parents decried but seemed to attribute to a system that they were sure would soon collapse, but *white*children. Kids who looked like me, just a few years older (indeed, some of them were the older siblings of friends of mine). Beating children not in Montgomery but Chicago.

I stood up from the floor, where I had been sitting, my mouth fallen open, speechless. My father stood from the sofa where the adults were seated. “No!,” he cried out in the hot night. “Not in America!! This is *America*! We don’t do that *here*! It’s not what we fought for!” Anguish was in his voice, heartbreak on his face.

White kids beaten by police and arrested, Black kids beaten by police and arrested. In our largely Jewish neighborhood of small private homes with neat yards, my father was among the outspoken upholders of civil rights for Black Americans. I know he was furious at the Jim Crow laws down South, lynchings, assaults on civil rights demonstrators. Among all the disturbing news in the papers in the 1960s, it was the brutality of Southerners toward Black citizens to which he always drew my attention. Separate water fountains. Beatings, dogs, and fire hoses. We studied the civil rights movement together, he and I. He explained to my friends the civic and moral value of social programs, why they weren’t just for “freeloading” by “the Negroes.” He complained to our local civic association about their pressuring homeowners in the neighborhood not to sell to Black families. When he finally moved out of the house, he sold it to a Black couple.

Yet, it took police violence against white kids to break his heart. My father and his buddies, all those middle-aged men I knew who, in their late teens or early twenties, had waged the Second World War—Irv on a PT boat, Gene in a tank, Cousin Willie with the infantry landing at Normandy, my father in his B24, and others—they saw the campaign for Black rights as akin to their own. Akin to, but not *of*.

4. Becoming

I sensed that my father and his friends had always known what they were fighting *against* in WWII. But if they thought about what they were fighting *for*—and I'm not sure it was ever a conscious thought, perhaps just a kind of embodied drive—they would have said that they aimed to uphold something that was inchoately American. Hence my father's anguish at the police riot in the streets of Chicago in 1968. But also something still incomplete. This incompleteness of the American project distinguishes it from the fully fleshed-out process that makes Germany German, France French, or Hungary Hungarian, or can seem to. An Englishman might yearn for the "sceptered isle"; Americans have nothing to yearn for, so we must hope.

I've never seen the dialectical nature of hope that white Americans, including those WWII fighters whom I came to know, have so clearly as I do today, with marches for Black Lives Matter. It's never been so clear to so many white Americans that the double edge of the hope we harbor needs to be examined. We who have been admitted to the club of whiteness are free to wonder whether the political norms, cultural traditions, and economic verities of American life really do constitute progress toward a more justice society, and therefore grounds for hope—or if no republic and no set of mores can withstand the ruthless demolition of civilization by the historical engine of capitalism, and therefore that hope is beside the point. This dialectic is a luxury, however lugubrious the debate sometimes feels.

If hope is the residue of an inner sense that the American project is incomplete, then the failure to extend that project to Black Americans—the unwillingness of the Army to integrate until it was forced by Harry S. Truman; the persistence of Jim Crow in the South despite America's ostensible victory over tyranny in the war; the even longer persistence (to this day) of unequal opportunities for education, housing, and employment between Black and white Americans; and the mass

incarceration of Black men—has amounted to a refusal to include Black Americans as fully worthy of considering hope. That is, as fully American. To say that Black Lives Matter is, in this sense, to assert not merely the simple truth that the count of Black bodies slain by police ought not to exceed that of white or other bodies, but that the meaning of American life, which is supposed to be to question whether there are grounds for hope, has been denied systematically to Black Americans.

I think it was hard for my father and his liberal friends to see how to complete the American project. I think it was hard for them to acknowledge just how excluded Blacks were, and how systemic that exclusion was. They were young, for one thing. My father and many of his friends were highly educated by the time I got to know them in the '60s, but back when they had been in the armed forces during WWII, they were just out of high school. Most had never been outside of New York, let alone North America. They thought they wanted the best for everyone, but the "everyone" they knew were Jews who had struggled, Italian-Americans who had struggled, Greek-Americans who had struggled. People who were in the process of becoming white. That Black Americans were still struggling meant, I'm sure they believed, that things would eventually turn out well for Blacks, too, just as things had turned out well for their parents, their friends' parents, and themselves.

To my father, that was the luck of being born in America: *things could work out*. You had to be on guard for hate, but the Constitution and the laws would spread justice. The system would work for Black Americans. (The truly unlucky, to liberals of my father's crowd, were the ones born in Russia, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and so forth: even those who hadn't been extinguished by the Nazis were impoverished by the broken postwar economies, subjugated by authoritarian governments, sentenced to the Gulag for crimes they weren't aware of, etc.

Theirs was the bad luck of birth.) Black Americans, to them, had been as lucky as they had. Their time would come. “Their,” not “our.”

There is also the naiveté. Not just of those boys fighting WWII who couldn’t quite see that they were not fighting for *all* Americans, but the necessarily naïve illusion behind the whole American project. There is only one way to accept America as a work in progress: that the country is essentially ahistorical, that America has no historically constituted Truth, only the remnants of yesterday and a weird, often unsatisfying, and hotly debated vision of tomorrow. To include Black Americans means recognizing multiple visions of tomorrow, differently burdened by yesterday. To include all Americans is to act like a small child, making new friends at the beach or playground, naïve to differences of upbringing because of a focus on rebuilding the sand fortress or taking turns on the slide.

To my father, the world was populated by beings who are continuously *becoming,* never fully complete. Did this come from his experience in WWII? From observing the play of Fate, the universe’s mocking of human self-importance, the seriousness of small children with too little to eat?

Beings who are always becoming. I haven’t known war first-hand. I envisage it as an elemental state, a naked encounter with an unforgiving universe. If you are not becoming something, you are dead. If you are lucky, you are alive. Nobody gets to be who they aren’t, but if they’re lucky they get to keep becoming. You live your best life and the universe does what it will.

Is this why wars are always about children? Because children are always in the act of becoming and war separates becoming from being? I still wonder why my father, believer in Fate, spoke of children and not of death. Peppina, enigmatic child of war, what were you becoming in 1944? Did Fate, in the form

of war, deal you a favorable hand? If you had the luck to survive, then you would be 85 years old today, or thereabouts. What do you tell your grandchildren about the war, the American airmen you met, their naïveté, their hope? Knowing what you know, what are you becoming now?

New Poetry from Alise Versella: “Parallels,” “Red-Breasted Sparrows,” “I Wonder If History’s Men Knew They Would Be Great,” “A Fierce Sense of Resolve”

TRENCHES OF MY LUNGS / *image by Amalie Flynn*

PARALLELS

The birds with conviction

Tap out their lyrics in the snow
And their chatter descends upon the mountains
Look how the flowers still struggle to grow
Like lungs filling with air
The soft despair
      of endings
           of so much life lived
It must be written
And then it must be sung
Like the chorus of a sun after a lightning storm
The bees like oboe players thrum
The morning sky an afterbirth of blood
This is how we love
It’s also how hate seeds in the veins
But mostly
Morning’s birthing is how the stars are made
Occasionally
The stars burn out
Like flames in church hall candles
Their ashes floating on the wind
But for centuries death is how time begins
Infinite explosions and black holes
All the songs the Earth sings that we don’t know
The words to
Like psalms in a foreign language
But they have always been my favorites
Like autumn’s blood-red season
Her heavy soil and decay
I love how a little death choreographs
The sycamores in a grand ballet

RED-BREASTED SPARROW

There’s one red-breasted sparrow and he speaks
To me of grief, how snow diseased emerald
Spring, the morning worm dying in his beak
All alone he’ll sleep between twigs nestled

As I am nestled warmly into bed
Goldenrod spears through plants on windowsills
That know not of sickness in heart or head
Mourn not, for there’s glory in winter rose

The map of my veins runs wild with blood
I breathe to fill my lungs unconsciously
Outside the beehive with sweet honey hums
Hexagonal cities, combs built between

These milk bones of mine like geometry
Have faith in the calculations a body sings

I WONDER IF HISTORY’S MEN KNEW THEY WOULD BE GREAT

In case you were wondering
If at all you do wonder
I mean stare off into the space collecting dust particles in the sun
Wonder
I hope you wander forward

Do not get stuck in the loop of reliving
All the conversations you wish you held
Isn’t it funny how we always think of the right remark after the arrow has left the quiver?
Sailed on like great fleets on uncharted seas
Circling around unknown America thinking it was the West Indies
We all just want to discover something

Like a cure for the aching
I hope your daydreams lead you to rejoicing
In the architecture of your body
A city skyline rising
How it glimmers like those dust particles in the sun
I hope you wonder about the things you could become
Not what you have done
I hope you never ruminate on anything you think you missed

That it isn’t here anymore only means there is room on the gallery walls for new art

Do you understand what I am telling you?

Your mouth is a paint brush; I want the acrylic to speak to me a new language
Teach me a new word for matrimony
That colors and my empty sighs could wed
And the canvas and I

Would bleed a glorious red
                The beautiful ruin of the withering day
How you empty it out for its worth because no gold can stay

In case you were wondering
I dream about the galaxy, turn my mind to stargazing
Believe in little green men terrorizing craters like two-year-old boys ransack the waiting room
We are all waiting for something to begin

Daydream about what that is

I know it to be breathing under water; I am waiting for my gills to appear
I want to swim, Pinocchio in the mouth of the whale

Don’t you see?
Movement is the way the lake ripples, breathing
The sky is a wave cresting
And you could be as great
As history’s greatest men
                If only you believed the way they did.

A FIERCE SENSE OF RESOLVE

Resolutions require revolution
And I have been at battle with the nation of my body since puberty
I have gone to war with my heart as it broke

And broke
And broke
Reinforced the battalions to hold the pieces up
And the bullets ricocheted off the trenches of my lungs
And I swore the fires pillaging the village of my stomach would wipe out the living

I am living like a militia razing the fields of foreign countries
I am burning the boundaries
Rewriting the policies
I am done policing this body

I am done living like I am a war-torn country
A refugee seeking refuge from my own self-pity
I am finished doubting the ability to achieve my dreams
Just because they haven’t happened yet

Civilization was not built easily
There was death in battle and conquerors invading
Trespassers trying to take away
All that I made
Of myself

How dare I
Monarch and sovereign body
Forget that I am royalty
A king
A rajah in the Bhagavad
How dare I lose faith in the ruby red of my blood
Propelling the turbines of this heart

I have resolved to tap this vein
And inundate the land
The great flood once again
Ready your ark and corral your lambs

The fox is on the hunt
I am cunning enough

To see through the lies I tell myself

A kitsune never deceives herself
Never traps herself in the hunter’s snare
She will own the year
And the forest
And the air
Breathe the freedom she pulled from his rib.

A Brief History of an Apology

Here are questions. How is it possible to engage in a process of healing for the evils of history? Who has the right to ask forgiveness for historical crimes? Who will be chosen to represent the perpetrators? Who is qualified to bring a spirit of contrition that is commensurate with the gravity of the occasion? And by whom will this person or delegation be appointed?

I have in mind, specifically, the centuries of violence committed against Native American peoples by the United States.

Of whom should forgiveness be asked? Would the request be tendered at official ceremonies, or in private, person by person by person? Who will represent the survivors of the victims and the violated, and how will these be chosen? On the point of reparations, how will historical trauma be quantified? What is the algorithm of loss, and how is loss to be tallied? In land? In memory? In boarding school rosters, on prison rolls? Along the Powder River, or the Washita? At Acoma? Near Sand Creek, in the Great Swamp, at Zia?

Other questions. What about the relocation and assimilation policies of the federal government that persisted into the 1970s, and led to incalculable destruction of culture and life? Or the poisoning of tribal land and water, which continues to this hour? The full effects of generations of uranium mining cannot be assessed, as cleanups remain unfinished and cancer rates continue to rise.

Who will determine the amount of restitution—will there be restitution?—or the protocols of apology? And if forgiveness is refused, what then?

Who will decide how, or whether, to begin?

Bartosz Brzezinski/Flickr

*

In 1990, the one hundredth anniversary of the massacre at Wounded Knee in South Dakota, members of the United States Congress drafted this expression of official regret.

HCON 386 IH

101st CONGRESS

2d Session

CON. RES. 386

> *To acknowledge the 100th anniversary of the tragedy at Wounded Knee Creek, State of South Dakota, December 29, 1890, wherein soldiers of the United States Army 7th Cavalry killed and wounded approximately 350-375 Indian men, women, and children of Chief Big Foot's band of the Minneconjou Sioux …*

It is unclear why Congress felt compelled to "acknowledge" a well-documented event. The statement confers no added legitimacy on historical truth, but only raises questions about the legislature's prior understanding.

> *Whereas, in order to promote racial harmony and cultural understanding, the Governor of the State of South Dakota has declared that 1990 is a Year of Reconciliation …*

Reconciliation is not unilaterally "declared" but, to fit the definition of the word, must be jointly and freely entered into (con, with) by more than one party.

> *Whereas the Sioux people who are descendants of the victims and survivors of the Wounded Knee Massacre have been striving to reconcile and, in a culturally appropriate manner, to bring to an end their 100 years of grieving for the tragedy of December 29, 1890…*

Here, the word "reconcile" has no object, which confuses the matter. Grammatically, the statement implies that the Sioux have been trying, since 1890, to make peace among themselves.

> *Whereas it is proper and timely for the Congress of the United States of America to acknowledge, on the occasion of*

> *the impending one hundredth anniversary of the event, the historic significance of the Massacre at Wounded Knee Creek, to express its deep regret to the Sioux people and in particular to the descendants of the victims and survivors for this terrible tragedy;*

The writer prefers ‘regret’ over ‘apology’. It is uncertain to what extent the writer or writers debated the distinction. Regret is sorrow for some past action or failure, but it contains neither an implicit admission of personal responsibility for that action or failure, nor a commitment to right a wrong. An apology assumes prior agreement, by all sides, on the terms of the issue at hand, but such an agreement has been neither demonstrated nor even mentioned.

Regret is not apology. It is as if I say, “I am enamored” to a loved one, instead of “I love you.” The former sentiment is self-centered, literally – not to say imprecise, and touched with timidity. Regret, like a hedge, is commonly a measure taken with an eye to the preservation of one’s self-interest. An apology, on the other hand, is an implicit and total disavowal of all self-interest. Its sincerity demands the courage of vulnerability. Apology cannot be faked, at least not for long; the slightest false note rings like a cracked bell. Human beings are highly attuned to dissimulation. Insincerity, whether in tone or word, is something most people are fluent in.

At this point, the resolution once more, unnecessarily so it seems, “acknowledges” the event, expresses regret yet again, and commits one further obfuscation by identifying the crimes at Wounded Knee as an “armed conflict.”

> *Now, therefore, be it Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate concurring), That– (1) the Congress, on the occasion of the one hundredth anniversary of the Wounded Knee Massacre of December 29, 1890, hereby acknowledges the historical significance of this event as*

> *the last armed conflict of the Indian wars period resulting in the tragic death and injury of approximately 350-375 Indian men, women, and children of Chief Big Foot's band of Minneconjou Sioux and hereby expresses its deep regret on behalf of the United States to the descendants of the victims and survivors and their respective tribal communities*

But the word "conflict" denotes a fight or a battle, which this was not. The resolution did not make provision for reparations to descendants of the victims.

*

Eighteen years later, the United States government tried again.

Joint Resolution 14 was introduced on April 30, 2009, during the 1st Session of the 111th Congress, and was easy to overlook, for it appears, oddly, two-thirds of the way through the 67-page Defense Appropriations Act of 2010. This resolution was intended to "acknowledge a long history of official depredations and ill-conceived policies by the Federal Government regarding Indian tribes." Though it does officially "offer an apology to all Native Peoples on behalf of the United States," there seems to have been no mechanism for Native peoples to officially accept or reject the resolution.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

April 30, 2009

Whereas the ancestors of today's Native Peoples inhabited the land of the present-day United States since time immemorial and for thousands of years before the arrival of people of European descent;

As with many such documents, the antique and ungrammatical "whereas" is again in use, in an effort to confer a degree of

authority on the pronouncement.

> *Whereas for millennia, Native Peoples have honored, protected, and stewarded this land we cherish;*
>
> *Whereas Native Peoples are spiritual people with a deep and abiding belief in the*
>
> *Creator, and for millennia Native Peoples have maintained a powerful spiritual connection to this land, as evidenced by their customs and legends;*

Here, the histories of five hundred separate nations and discrete cultures, spanning twenty millennia, vanish in an undifferentiated haze of condescension. Then the reader arrives at 'real' history:

> *Whereas the arrival of Europeans in North America opened a new chapter in the history of Native Peoples;*
>
> *Whereas while establishment of permanent European settlements in North*
>
> *America did stir conflict with nearby Indian tribes …*

The writer – perhaps a young attorney with a couple rules from Freshman Composition class still fresh in his mind – acknowledges the legitimacy of the opposing side, with an emphatic "did" that *does* reveal the speaker's fair-mindedness (because demonstrating objectivity enhances a writer's authority). This brief concession accomplished, the writer reverts, within the same sentence fragment, to his thesis:

> *… peaceful and mutually beneficial interactions also took place;*
>
> *Whereas the foundational English settlements in Jamestown, Virginia, and Plymouth, Massachusetts, owed their survival in large measure to the compassion and aid of Native Peoples in the vicinities of the settlements;*

> *Whereas in the infancy of the United States, the founders of the Republic expressed their desire for a just relationship with the Indian tribes, as evidenced by the Northwest Ordinance enacted by Congress in 1787, which begins with the phrase, "The utmost good faith shall always be observed toward the Indians";*

The quotation here is from Article Three of the 1787 Northwest Ordinance. Known as the "Good Faith Clause," the passage concludes with these words: "their [the Indians] lands and property shall never be taken from them without their consent; and, in their property, rights, and liberty, they shall never be invaded or disturbed, unless in just and lawful wars authorized by Congress." As events were soon to prove, "just and lawful" wars were by no means difficult to conjure. Good faith notwithstanding, the 1787 Ordinance established provisions for carving states from the Upper Mississippi and Great Lakes regions, and a legislative procedure for admitting those states into the union. The expansion of the nation's boundaries, not Indian relations, was the primary focus of the document.

Native peoples are mentioned only once more in the Ordinance, in Section 8, which grants the governor of each future state the power to further divide his territory, as he sees fit: "and he shall proceed from time to time as circumstances may require, to lay out the parts of the district in which the Indian titles shall have been extinguished, into counties and townships, subject, however, to such alterations as may thereafter be made by the legislature."

The wishes of the land's first and present inhabitants concerning these matters were not solicited in the drafting of the document, nor were they reflected in the final product, nor were its provisions ever acknowledged by the tribes. At any rate, the issue of land ownership was decisively resolved by the American victory at Fallen Timbers in 1794, the attendant destruction of Shawnee and Miami fields and towns,

and the subsequent forced removal of Indians from the lands in question.

In his selection of a single anodyne phrase to support his claim, the author of the 2009 Resolution commits the fallacy of suppressing evidence, cherry-picking from a document intended to set the legal groundwork for the expulsion of the region's first inhabitants.

No matter. By alluding to the "Northwest Ordinance," the young attorney has made a logical appeal and provided concrete details to support his claim, which is the first rule in college essay writing. The irrelevance of this ordinance to the events at Wounded Knee went unnoticed, apparently, by the committee. He may have safely assumed that few people would bother to check.

> *Whereas Indian tribes provided great assistance to the fledgling Republic as it strengthened and grew, including invaluable help to Meriwether Lewis and William Clark on their epic journey from St. Louis, Missouri, to the Pacific Coast;*
>
> *Whereas Native Peoples and non-Native settlers engaged in numerous armed conflicts in which unfortunately, both took innocent lives, including those of women and children;*

The second assertion is misleading. The phrases "engaged in armed conflict" and "both took innocent lives" imply an equivalence of power, a condition that ceased to obtain as the nineteenth century wore on and the United States doubled in size. By 1890, the year of the Wounded Knee Massacre, according to estimates, fewer than a quarter million indigenous people remained alive within the present borders of this country, while the US population exceeded 60 million.

By the time of President Andrew Jackson's Indian Removal Act of 1830, the eastern tribes could not mount any lasting resistance to American expansion. Prior to 1830, it was

possible for confederacies of tribes (notably under Pontiac and Tecumseh) to face the westering Americans on roughly equal military terms, and even at times to prevail in battle. The First Seminole War (1816-19), and the decisive victories by the Ohio Valley tribes over Harmar's army (1790) and St. Clair's army (1791) attest to this. But by 1830, hopes of effective resistance had faded. The victories of Red Cloud and Sitting Bull, and the defeats of Fetterman and Custer, all lay in the latter half of the century, but these events could only postpone the inevitable. The wagon trains and railroads and mining outfits would not be stopped for long.

By the time the Apache and the Nez Perce were making their final stands, in the latter half of the century, American strategy had settled into a grimly effective process of eradication, dispersal, removal, internment, and forced assimilation, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of thousands by exposure and disease. Accurate mortality figures are not known. Genocide may not have been the explicit or official goal, but it was the effective result, of a century of US policy.

> *Whereas the Federal Government violated many of the treaties ratified by Congress and other diplomatic agreements with Indian tribes…*
>
> *Whereas Indian tribes are resilient and determined to preserve, develop, and transmit to future generations their unique cultural identities;*
>
> *Whereas the National Museum of the American Indian was established within the Smithsonian Institution as a living memorial to Native Peoples and their traditions; and*

Now, because his pretenses are beginning to sound like excuses (a museum?), and because the attorney must fill the rhetorical hole with something, he invokes the only phrase from the Declaration of Independence that he can recall from high

school …

> *Whereas Native Peoples are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, and among those are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness:*

… in an weirdly improper context, before proceeding to recapitulate the main points (English 101: "How to Write an Effective Conclusion") of his Resolution:

> *Now, therefore, be it Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*
>
> *SECTION 1. RESOLUTION OF APOLOGY TO NATIVE PEOPLES OF THE UNITED STATES.*
>
> *(a) Acknowledgment And Apology—The United States, acting through Congress—*
>
> *(1) recognizes the special legal and political relationship Indian tribes have with the United States and the solemn covenant with the land we share;*
>
> *(2) commends and honors Native Peoples for the thousands of years that they have stewarded and protected this land;*
>
> *(3) recognizes that there have been years of official depredations, ill-conceived policies, and the breaking of covenants by the Federal Government regarding Indian tribes;*
>
> *(4) apologizes on behalf of the people of the United States to all Native Peoples for the many instances of violence, maltreatment, and neglect inflicted on Native Peoples by citizens of the United States;*

Finally, we arrive at the true purpose of this Resolution, which, it turns out, is not to express contrition, but to abjure responsibility and to preempt future claims for

reparations:

> *(b) Disclaimer.—Nothing in this Joint Resolution—*
>
> *(1) authorizes or supports any claim against the United States; or*
>
> *(2) serves as a settlement of any claim against the United States.*

The apology "was never announced, publicized or read publicly by either the White House or the 111th Congress," observed Mark Charles, spokesperson of Navajo Nation, who wanted to highlight the "inappropriateness of the context and delivery of their apology." In view of the document's dull-witted insolence, Charles' response is restrained. It would be difficult to find a more shameful mess of inanities than S. J. Res 14. Its mock-sonorous patronization is appalling. The arrogant tone serves only as a cheap mask for the writer's laziness and ignorance. It is an embarrassment to any thoughtful citizen.

*

Who will decide how, or whether, to begin?

It was at this time, on November 7, 2019, as our list of tough questions lengthened, that an article appeared, with all the punctuality of the universe, on the Reuters news wire.

> EAGLE BUTTE, S.D. (Reuters) – For the last 50 years, Bradley Upton has prayed for forgiveness as he has carried the burden of one of the most horrific events in U.S. history against Native Americans, one that was perpetrated by James Forsyth, his great-great-grandfather.
>
> This week Upton, 67, finally got an opportunity to express his contrition and formally apologize for the atrocities carried out by Forsyth to the direct descendants of the victims at their home on the Cheyenne River Reservation in

> South Dakota. …
>
> During an event on Wednesday on the reservation, Emanuel Red Bear, a teacher and spiritual advisor, told descendants that they deserve Upton's apology.
>
> "Only one man had a conscience enough to come here to ask for forgiveness for what his great grandpa did," he said. "There needs to be more."
>
> Upton's journey to forgiveness began when his great uncle sent him photographs of the carnage when he was 16 years old.
>
> "I knew immediately that it was wrong," he said. "I felt a deep sadness and shame."
>
> Two years later, Upton became a student of a Buddhist mediation master.
>
> "I prayed for the next 50 years for forgiveness and healing for all of the people involved, but particularly because my ancestors caused this massacre, I felt incredible heaviness," he said …

The event was reported by news outlets as far away as Taiwan. Not long after his apology, National Public Radio interviewed Dena Waloke, a descendant of Ghost Horse, a Lakota killed at Wounded Knee. "I think our kids have to know," Waloke said, "our grandchildren, that it was a massacre but still cannot be going on with anger because it happened, you know? We need to forgive and heal from all that. That way, you know, this nation, the whites and the Lakota, we can all be together, have a better world for our grandchildren. That's what we think about is our grandchild, not us." I do not know how widely Waloke's sentiment is shared.

*

The Book of Exodus speaks about inherited guilt. The

Commandments of the twentieth chapter are found chiseled on plinths and erected in town squares all across the United States. Often, these are engraved on concrete slabs formed into the shape of tablets, like the ones Charlton Heston carried in the movie. The words are usually printed in a faux-Gothic script (whereas antiquity sheds a sort of legitimacy on even the meanest pronouncement). If the Reformed Christian numbering system is followed on these public displays, you will see, for the Second Commandment, some version of this: *Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image.*

The remainder of the commandment is usually left out. Here it is in its entirety.

> You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.
>
> (*New International Version*, 20.4-6)

To a modern sensibility, there is something distasteful about punishing the children for the sins of the parents. But we see that the effects of evil do persist, passed down from parent to child, as a sense of shame, or worse. This shame may be adequately buried – even for a lifetime, even from oneself – or it may mutate, and manifest as some new form of malice or self-abuse.

Evil is viral, and those possessed of a fragile or warped sense of identity are most susceptible. It pollutes across space and down generations, infecting oppressor and oppressed alike, even unto the third and fourth generations. Some, like Upton – by some alchemy of grace and introspection – manage to

heal themselves, transmuting an inherited evil into a good.

This conception of guilt serves as a reverse image of the Seventh Generation principle espoused by many Native American cultures, which holds that every decision I make today should be determined by its impact on my descendants, down to the seventh generation. To my mind, these two ideas represent two sides of one coin. Both proceed from an understanding that the past determines the future.

Journalist Ernestine Chasing Hawk writes the story of Upton's apology for Native Sun News. Unlike the reporters of the Reuters article, Chasing Hawk – knowing the pathology of evil – is careful to detail her subjects' lines of descent.

> Bradley C. Upton and his two sisters are fifth generation descendants of Forsyth and fourth generation descendants of Brigadier General John Mosby Bacon. Forsyth was the commanding officer of the U.S. 7th Cavalry Regiment and Bacon served as a lieutenant under his command during the massacre at Chankpé Ópi Wakpála.
>
> "We have observed and experienced vividly in our family histories both past and present, the very dark shadow of the massacre and its karmic effect," Upton said.
>
> Upton said for years he and his family members have been praying in both the Buddhist and Christian faiths asking for healing, not only for the Lakota Nation but for his families "karmic debt" of commanding the Wounded Knee Massacre.
>
> Upton, a professional musician and music teacher who resides in Longmont, Colorado, said he and his family have struggled with this "dark shadow" for more than a century.

Like a secret, or like a story the children must not overhear, the evil of the past infects the air I breathe; it is diffuse and ever-present, as elemental to modern American life as

electromagnetic radiation. Evil demoralizes. It overshadows the life of a nation just as abuse overshadows the life of a family, or an individual. Left untreated, it makes a person anxious and unwell, judgmental and self-destructive, querulous and suspicious, and leads to spiritual death. Bradley Upton tells the reporters from Reuters of his belief "that the impact of the massacre can be seen throughout his family tree, which has been plagued by alcoholism, abuse and betrayal." A case history in trauma, endlessly replicable.

Northwestern Photo Company/Flickr

*

The story of Bradley Upton's apology begins, not at Wounded Knee, but at Blue Water Creek, near the Platte River in present-day Nebraska. There, in 1855, during a punitive expedition against the Sioux, 600 US soldiers (including elements of the 2nd US Dragoons, forerunners of the 2nd US Cavalry Regiment, which begot the 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment, a unit in which I served for two years, 1989-1991) under

General William Harney attacked an encampment of 250 Brulé Lakota, killing eighty-six women, children, and men and capturing seventy more. Harney Peak, in the Black Hills, a range sacred to Lakota, was named for the commander.

In 2016, after years of protest and petitioning, the US Board of Geographic Names re-designated Harney Peak as Black Elk Peak. At the renaming ceremony, where tribal members gathered to commemorate the return of the Wakinyan Oyate (the Thunder Beings) to the mountain, one of the speakers was a man named Paul Stover Soderman, a seventh-generation descendant of General Harney. Chasing Hawk covered this event as well for Native Sun News. Her story appeared on March 28, 2019, under the headline, "Ceremony welcomes Thunder Beings back home."

> "I am a direct descendant of General William Selby Harney," Soderman said, "who was the general who commanded the army that committed an act of genocide at … Blue Water Creek and attacked the Little Thunder village. He was also the third signer of the 1868 Ft. Laramie Treaty," Soderman shared.

The 1868 Treaty set aside lands for the Lakota, including the Black Hills, but contained many onerous conditions inimical to Lakota sovereignty and traditional practices and beliefs. Following George Custer's illegitimate expedition to the region in 1874, and the gold rush that began later that same year, the treaty was, for all intents and purposes, broken.

> "I found out about 15 years ago who my ancestor was and we started to take action toward anything we could do to honor that 1868 Treaty when it comes to the Black Hills and Paha Sapa [the Lakota name for the Black Hills]," he said. "One thing that we thought would be good was to make an attempt to take his name off this mountain."

Bradley Upton of Colorado learned of the Black Hills ceremony soon afterward. In the November article, Chasing Hawk writes:

> While visiting with his neighbor … [Upton] happened to

mention the healing his family must do.

"She told me about the ceremony that Mr. Brave Heart had performed, a ceremony to not only rename Harney Peak to Black Elk Peak but the ceremony of forgiveness of the carnage that Harney caused at the slaughter at Blue Water Creek," Upton shared.

Upton was brought to tears and said he immediately set out to contact Soderman and Brave Heart.

"A couple of days later I was fortunate to meet Paul and his wife Kathy who shared the power of Mr. Brave Heart's ceremony with me and invited me to their sweat lodge as both new and old family," he said.

Upton contacted Brave Heart.

The Lakota elder comforted him by telling him he was carrying a dark shadow that was not his to carry.

"He couldn't stop crying and he told me he was a descendant of Major General James Forsyth and Brigadier General John Mosby Bacon," Brave Heart said and told him, "You came to a place to heal."

*

The English historian Arnold Toynbee (d. 1975) made an observation about these matters, and I don't know whether his contention is valid, but it is often in my mind these days. He identifies the destruction of Carthage (146 BCE) at the end of the Third Punic War as a sort of moral inflection point in the history of Rome. The war with Hannibal had ended and Carthage was no longer a threat, but Rome, on flimsy pretexts, sent an expedition to besiege the city. Roman forces destroyed Carthage and scorched the surrounding lands. Some say the soldiers cast salt into the fields, and trod the salt under with their horses' hooves, to sterilize the soil and ensure

that the place might never again be inhabited.

Rome had debased itself, the historian argued. It had betrayed long-honored principles of justice and of clemency toward defeated foes. Thereafter, the empire drifted through centuries of dictatorship, foreign wars, oppression, and the extortion of conquered peoples. Cicero would describe Rome's destruction of two great cities – Carthage and Corinth – as "gouging the eyes" from the Mediterranean. As Roman imperial power apparently waxed in magnificence, Roman crimes in fact polluted the heart of the social organism. Cultural and moral decay set in and social life gradually degenerated until Constantine's soldiers, with crosses sewn onto their tunics, put the empire out of its misery at Milvian Bridge (312 CE).

The Athenian destruction of Melos (416 BCE) may illustrate the same point. Strategically unwarranted, the siege ended with the execution of the island's adult men and the enslavement of its women and children, and coincided with the beginning of the decline of democracy at Athens.

A nation rooted in atrocity will bear noxious fruit. Unless it be transplanted in good soil, how can it do otherwise than yield corruption?

*

Basil Brave Heart, teacher and healer and combat veteran, lives on the Pine Ridge Oglala Lakota Reservation. In a *Rapid City Journal* article (December 27, 2019), he was asked whether forgiveness is possible, 129 years after Wounded Knee. "Forgiveness has its challenges," he said, "but it is possible."

> Many Lakota relatives are suffering from the trauma of these actions and wondering – how can we forgive when we are still hurting and angry?
>
> Recently, historic apologies for the Wounded Knee Massacre

> have been shared with the communities of Cheyenne River and Pine Ridge. These apologies have taken the lid off of something painful, like doing an emotional surgery. The displacement, abandonment, and lies that denigrated our way of life are coming to the surface. Anger, anxiety and depression all arise as part of the process of forgiveness. These feelings come from the trauma that has not been worked through yet…
>
> Forgiveness is one of the most profound and difficult things we can do. It takes prayer and commitment. Going through this process does not mean that the original difficulty goes away. As a Catholic boarding school survivor and veteran with PTSD, I know this to be true…
>
> Back in 1938, my grandma taught me about the power of forgiveness. Her teachings have been with me throughout my life. The meetings and ceremonies of apology and forgiveness that happened in the last year are a spark to ignite a long journey of intergenerational healing. By connecting with our breath and asking for spiritual assistance, all people can return to our original human blueprint of compassion, love, and equanimity. Our challenging work of forgiveness will create wholeness for ourselves and the future generations. Forgiveness is the password to our divinity.
>
> *
>
> The crisis is one of values. It can be met … only by a radical shift in belief, a profound realignment of thought and spirit.
>
> – Elizabeth Ammons, *Sea Change* (2010)

There is a movement afoot these days. Good-hearted people, singly at first but in ever-increasing numbers, are setting about a great work. We are in the midst of one of those sea changes of sentiment, I believe, that sweep through history at

times, quickening human consciousness. These changes arrive like the rogue winds that wander desert places, descending with a swiftness to rattle the walls, and leaving in their wake a landscape trembling and bright. They are watershed events, dividing everything that has come before from everything that will come after.

One such change must have occurred in the 5th century BCE, when Moses, Buddha, Socrates, and Confucius lived and taught. Two millennia later, the telescope and the microscope inaugurated another great shift in the feeling for things. Henry Power, in his *Experimental Philosophy* of 1664, proclaimed that

> This is the Age in which all mens Souls are in a kind of fermentation … Me-thinks, I see how all the old Rubbish must be thrown away, and the rotten Buildings be overthrown, and carried away with so powerful an Inundation. These are the days that must lay a new Foundation of a more magnificent Philosophy.

Now I hear similar words spoken today, calls from every side for destruction of old modes and habits.

The change this time, unlike previous transitions, does not concern humanity in relation to physics, or to god, or to the cosmos: it has to do with humanity in relation to itself. I see proof of this in the altered trajectories of individual lives. Soderman and Upton are only two examples among many, individuals committing acts of healing, in ways unthinkable only a short time ago. Their paths to the Pine Ridge reservation were long apprenticeships for a single agonizing encounter with themselves, an encounter in which they were met—not with hostility and mistrust—but with compassion and forgiveness, almost as if they had been expected all along.

The place of this encounter—the "furnace of the truth," as bishop and theologian Rowan Williams calls it—is where one comes face to face with oneself, often the last person in the

world we care to see. To “come clean” is a common idiom, one that nicely figures the refining power of the truth’s furnace. It is painful, bitter, but the burden that awaits me on the other side is lighter, much lighter than the one I’ve carried till now. A good deal of religious truth turns on this point. Freed of that burden, I am better able, mentally and physically, to be a faithful helpmate to my brother and sister. Until that occurs, I am only a burden to myself and to the world.

Until there is a reckoning for historical evil, this nation cannot hope to steer clear of the crash pattern of exploitation of human life and of nature, too. “Here,” Linda Hogan writes in *Dwellings* (1995), “is a lesson: what happens to people and what happens to the land is the same thing.”

That the work of peace and justice is hopeless and lonely, all of history bears witness. “It sounds silly to say *work without hope*, but it can be done; it’s only a form of insurance; it doesn’t mean *work hopelessly,”* wrote the English war poet Keith Douglas, only a year before he was killed in Normandy at age twenty-four. They are difficult words, and they take on added weight every time I think of them.

*

The better part of my childhood was spent reading histories of the Eastern Woodland nations: the ill-starred uprisings of Pontiac and Tecumseh, the doomed alliances with the British and the French; canoe flotillas convening for the trading days at Michilimackinac, the seasonal dispersal to the hunting grounds. I was riveted by the tough freedoms of their existence, the harsh tuition of war and weather, and a talent for woodcraft and watchfulness that are mostly lost to this world. The harvest celebrations, too, and the somber winters of scarcity, and a relentless sense of humor that survived all of it. To wander the stacks looking for books on Indians was happiness. Shawnee and Erie, Wyandot and Delaware: I revered

their stories like living things, because they are living things.

By the time I was old enough to walk alone to the library, the people in the books had been gone from that part of Ohio for nearly two hundred years. The trees and animals that they had known remained, however, though much diminished in kind and number. Nevertheless, the woods around the neighborhood—somewhat ragged and littered—were the only connection I had to the first inhabitants. I spent a lot of time there. I remember, when I was nine or ten, setting off on a walk one early Sunday morning. I kept on for several miles, through unfamiliar neighborhoods, until I had passed well out of the suburbs, and came to a little valley where a thin black stream flowed through icy grass.

I sat at the edge of the woods and kept watch, fearful of trespassing, but all was calm in that beautiful place whose existence I had never suspected. In the black branches of a tree, a squirrel's tail flickered like an oil lamp flame. A bird perched on a broken stalk and sang, and in the winter cold I could see the tiny puffs of breath from its beak—a puff for each string of notes—backlit by the powder blue sky. Indians were on my mind that morning, as they were most days, and I imagined a band of women and men and children, Shawnees or Miamis, filing out of the treeline and down toward the stream. No doubt, they knew the place well, I thought.

Expectation faded to a nameless absence that spread across the little valley. Forty years on, I recall the stream and the sky clearly.

I could not have described on that morning the sense of something that had come and gone. And though days and months might pass in unawareness of it, still to this day that feeling has not left me. I never returned to that place.

*

It’s funny how a difficult truth has the power to single you out. Others have noticed this. “What you look hard at,” Gerard Manley Hopkins observed, “seems to look hard at you”—and has a way, I would add, of making a person feel alone. Not that you cannot forget it, but that it will not forget you. In my mind, something is watching the boy who is sitting on a hillside, waiting for people who will never return. But it was only me after all.

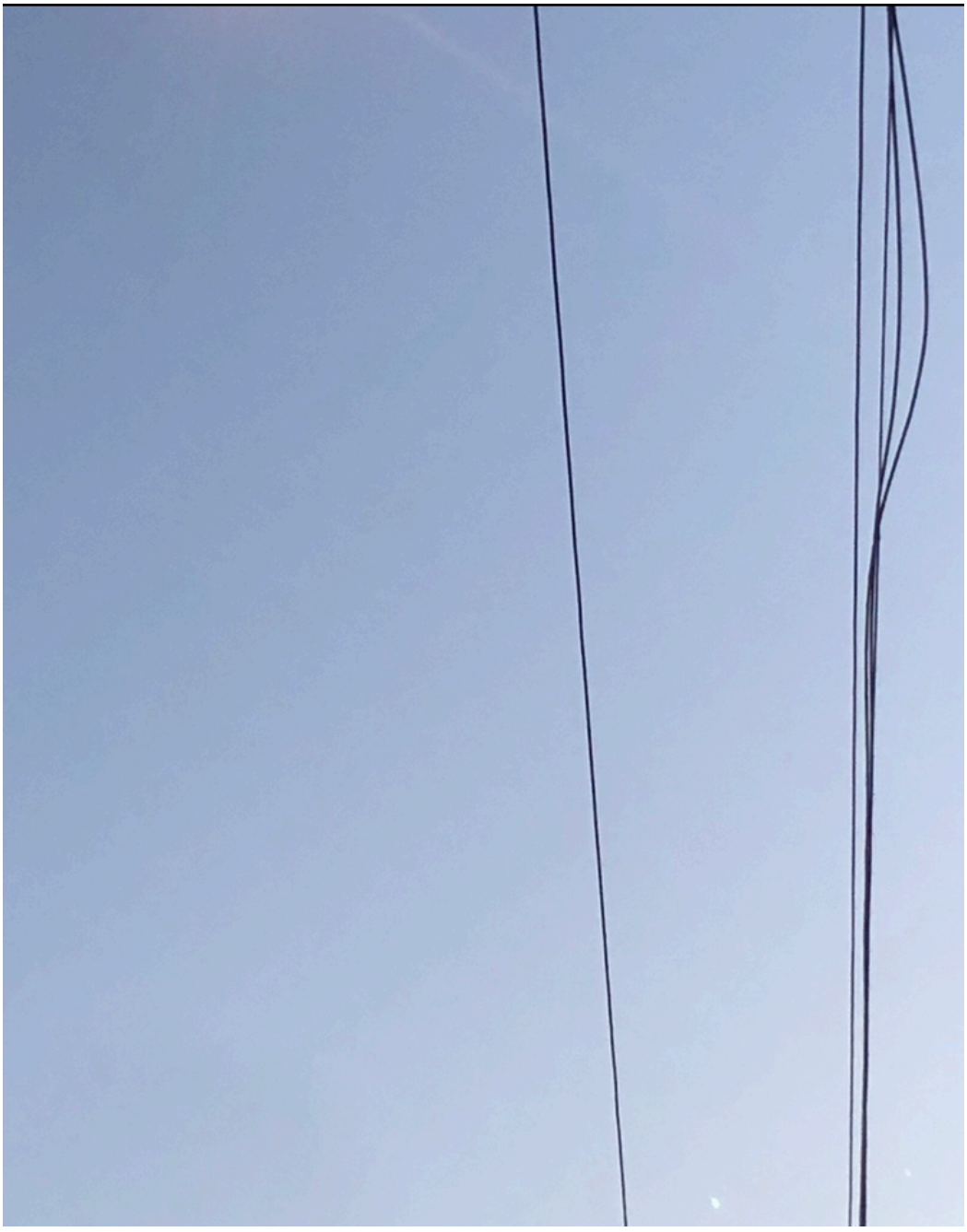
There are other times when I’ve stood looking at myself, it seemed, through someone else’s eyes. One time, when I was very ill. Once, when I was beaten by several people on a street at night. Again, when I watched the desert skyline blaze with oil well fires. And again, as I sat at a table, alone in an efficiency in a midwestern city, writing a letter of apology to someone I had wronged.

Why was it, I wonder, on these occasions that I drifted out of myself, a stranger looking on with, it seems, a kind of pity?

Illness, violence, forgiveness: these three. They have long memories.

Wounded Knee Massacre Burial Site/Wikimedia Commons

New Poetry from George Kramer: “Three Snapshots of Superman’s Mother,” “Google Earth”



ASTRONOMICAL DISTANCE OF LONGING / *image by Amalie Flynn*

Three Snapshots of Superman's Mother

Budapest, Hungary. December 1944.

This stagnant end squats over its vile start
Faster than a speeding bullet!

from the slag pile, the louse waste
More powerful than a locomotive!

the fecal secretions of war
Leaps tall buildings in a single bound!

the girl's father was sought for
It's a bird, it's a plane, its Superman!

the column of Jews being
Truth, justice and the American Way.

marched to the river.
This is a job for Superman.

It was then that God stole her belief
but left her fraught wonder.

Fort Collins, Colorado. November 1963.

The vertical hold hop-skips,
horses drawing hearses
plod inside the droning box,
fusing to the vitreous reflection
of his mother's tear-streaked face.
Preschool Superman stews.
No president calls Him to Dallas.
He was not consulted
on preempting His TV show for this
dull parade.
His caped powers, though mighty,
are no match for the elegiac bagpipes or
the morose Kennedys on this untuned Magnavox.

Alexandria, Virginia. April 2016.

Floating in my feeble galaxy of lost atoms,
I peer at an old picture frame.
Behind glass the girl’s silver halide half smile
issues a cautious greeting across
this astronomical distance of longing.
I orbit that smile’s twilight glow –
a planet where love has nowhere to go.

Google Earth

Somewhere Gerardus Mercator
met on an equator
the ragged hunter who first drew
from warm pitch and raw whisk
the rugged path she found
to the grazing grounds.

Their compasses agreed:
on friable parchment
mapmakers must have
their maniacal dragons, their
flawed seas, and their ranges
of rumpling blunders.

An old wall was woken by
a flattened paper globe,
a remnant copy etched
by an ancient calligrapher
with a cliff grip
chiseling a copper plate.

It is easy to see what is lacking here:
a map’s crinkle, or its volcanic dimples,
green alpine frock, sweat of ocean.
No chance for glass-headed pins,
and lands not thick nor lean are pliably lying
on a polarized screen.

Swipe past the displaced perspective
and its warning of the asphalt assault,
sharp canines snapping
at the ribs of gated jungles,
as the electric sky thunders
down boundless data.

In this benign monitor light I read
about the first arrow and its story
of the bloody hand that held it
and the slaughters that it stopped.
We daily stride newly into changeless air
on the journey to pixel from dot.

Not For Sale: Private Farmland in Post-Soviet Ukraine

For those Americans who think about Ukraine at all, it is no secret that the country has faced two wars since 2014. The first, most conspicuous war, exists in Ukraine's South and East, against Russia. The second, much less visible but far more important, exists throughout every city and village in Ukraine. This is the war to reform Ukraine's government and society.

Many of the reforms one hears discussed as priority items for Ukraine are useful, necessary preconditions to making it more European (which is to say, a better country). Judicial reforms to clean federal and oblast courts of corrupt, compromised judges is obviously a good idea. Transparency mechanisms that require journalists, non-profit workers and politicians to

declare all income and assets is also good, and unquestionably useful in an aspiring western-style democracy.

One proposed change to Ukraine's legal or social system that gets an extraordinary deal of attention (as these things go) is reforms to permit the sale of agricultural farmland. Take this piece published by the World Bank, by the country director for Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine. It begins: "Land reform—lifting the moratorium on agriculture land sales—is the most powerful measure the government can take to boost economic growth and job creation, particularly in rural areas." Pieces in the Atlantic Council and other western publications make similar claims.

But what is Ukraine's law about land ownership? Where does it come from, and why does it exist? What are its goals? More importantly, what about land ownership in Ukraine needs reforming—why are the IMF, EU and World Bank so fixated on this specific issue?

The History of Land Ownership in Ukraine

To understand the law as it exists now, one must first understand the history that led into it. To do so, one could go back to the fall of the USSR and the distribution of collective, state-owned land to newly-enfranchised Ukrainian citizens. Or one could go back further, to the policies of collectivization that required citizens to live on land that they themselves did not own.

To really get a feeling for what land ownership means to Ukrainians, though, it's important to consider the traumatic rending that took place when they were forcibly separated from their land in the first place. This process occurred primarily in the 1920s and 1930s, culminating with the events around what Ukraine calls the Holodomor—an engineered famine in which millions perished. Holodomor, much like the Holocaust, is perceived as a special type of outrage perpetrated

specifically against the Ukrainian people. It was very much rooted in the land, and many Ukrainian people's connection to the land, and the consequence of it was that afterwards, almost no Ukrainian owned his or her own farm. This event, or series of events, has been baked deep into the collective psyche of Ukrainians.

Ukrainians have specific and intensely negative memories of the last time individual farmers lost their land in the name of collective livelihood and national prosperity

Many Russians counter that the famine was accidental and that the millions who died in Ukraine and across the USSR did so as the result of well-intentioned tragedy.

In order to assuage that historical trauma, one of the first actions taken by Ukraine's second President, Leonid Kuchma was to privatize agricultural land held by the state. The way he did this was riddled with imperfection and the potential for corruption, but he made good on his promise to give the land

back to the people. Any Ukrainian citizen could lay claim to parcels of agricultural land sufficient for their subsistence, and many did so (some others gamed the system and were able to seize or acquire good agricultural land far less expensively than would otherwise have been possible).

The extent to which Kuchma is remembered positively in Ukraine is due in large part to these reforms (overall, his legacy is very mixed owing to charges of murder and corruption). Only Ukrainian citizens can own agricultural land, and it cannot be sold to corporations, or foreigners.

Whether one believes the Russian account of the 1930s or the account of Ukrainians, the fact remains that the famines of the 20th century and the connected process of collectivization (which involved forcibly parting people from their land) left a major, lasting impact on them. Any discussion of land ownership is guaranteed to bring up old and bad memories.

The Case for Land Sale

There are three primary reasons that one could support opening the sale of agricultural land to non-Ukrainians. First, it doesn't make economic sense to close markets off to foreign investment. Conservative estimates suggest that Ukraine could increase its GDP substantially (from 5-10%) simply by allowing foreigners and corporations to buy and sell these tens of millions of hectares.

Also, it's important to acknowledge that limiting the agricultural land market doesn't actually prevent foreign companies from using the land—it just means they have to "rent" it from villagers. The price for renting the land is not advantageous to the villagers—it can be less than $80 per year. In other words, the land laws as they exist have led to a busy, unregulated black market on what amounts to land sale. This serves to enrich some individuals or areas, but it does nothing for the government of Ukraine.

Third, land sale to foreigners would be a good move from a security standpoint, in the sense that encouraging foreign investment—specifically, *European* investment from places like the US, Britain, Poland and Germany—will go great lengths toward tying foreign interests to Ukraine. These countries will have a stake in Ukraine's survival, because they'll have "skin in the game" beyond an ethical desire to see weak protected against strong (or strong-er).

To summarize: the case for agricultural land sale is that Ukraine will get richer and less corrupt, and foreign companies will care more about the country and thus be further incentivized to care about its protection.

The Case Against Land Sale

There are logical and illogical reasons to view farmland reforms with skepticism. The logical reasons first: as things

currently stand, people are merely being exploited for their land. They still *have* land, which is better than not having it, because things can be grown on land and worst case scenario it is possible to feed a family with 2 hectares of good, fertile earth. A small family, yes, and not well-fed (but sufficiently well-fed), but human history is proof that people have been able to scrape by with less than one might think. So long as one has land, life is possible. Once it goes away—once the land has been sold—there is no going back to freedom.

Furthermore, the very things that are bad about a bunch of people owning two-to-four-hectare plots of farmland—inefficiency, less money—also make Ukrainian society more resilient than most of its western, European neighbors. It's difficult to imagine what would happen to the USA if it were to go two weeks without food being delivered to supermarkets. In Ukraine, people know—they'd just call up their friends and families who live on farms, or buy food from local markets. There is a thriving "cottage industry" of individual and collective, non-corporate farmers who would keep people fed.

For some, farmland is more than just a business—it's a way of living that goes back generations.

The Ukrainian agricultural holdings have a stake in this, too—the domestic corporations that struck the original rental agreements do not have the means to compete with foreign agricultural corporations. As things exist now they have good agreements with local villagers—and are uninterested in negotiating at terms that are disadvantageous to them.

Illogical reasons to oppose land sale both relate to history. One is the immediate history of Ukraine—the famines and/or Holodomor—which saw private land stripped from individuals wholesale, and created a large well of bitterness toward the idea of any large organization (cooperative, Kyiv, Moscow) having direct and absolute say over land use.

Another is the broader history in Ukraine of foreign exploitation, which feels worse than domestic exploitation.

Selling agricultural land to foreigners, for better or for worse, sends a very strong and negative message to Ukrainians. Populists and domestic agricultural concerns have done a great deal to stoke fears over Chinese or Russian corporations buying up Ukrainian land and then oppressing Ukrainian villagers and destabilizing its economy and security—fears that have some basis in reality, in both cases (China is still ostensibly communist, and Russia occupies large swaths of Ukrainian territory).

Who Stands to Lose What

Investors stand to lose access to markets. The nation of Ukraine stands to lose—hypothetically—increased profits generated from a more efficient agricultural sector and a less corrupt land black market. Ukraine also stands to lose the interest of European countries.

The people who have land in Ukraine stand to lose their livelihoods and freedom, irrevocably. Ukrainian society stands to lose basic food security.

In Conclusion

It’s difficult to say which idea is better. Pros and cons exist on both sides. There are good reasons to privatize the land, which would help Ukraine. There are also reasons to keep the land as it is—private, privately held. Ultimately, it comes down to whether one believes that a country is best served by collectivizing its interests and selling them to corporations for the biggest profit, or whether it’s best served by a poor but enfranchised citizenry, which tends to be exploited by domestic (rather than foreign) agribusinesses.

New Poetry by Yael Hacohen

Fortitude

Seven times I’ve been to the Wall
to scribble my prayers
and fold them into
the seams in the yellow stones.
The walls of Jericho fell on the seventh
so I elbow my way through the crowd
to put my ear to the stones
and hear the horses surround them,
but the wail of sirens drown out the hooves
the herds disperse from the plaza
and I forsake the Wall
to let it stand on its own
an ancient olive tree
straining against its plot in the dirt.

Pre Traumatic

The first time I shot an M-16
it was the heat of summer in the Negev.
Gas-operated with a rotating bolt,
five-point-fifty six caliber,
with nineteen bullets a box.
I could shoot like an angel,
I could hit a running target
at six-hundred-fifty meters.
I cried the first time.
I was eighteen.
Already, my hair in a bun.
You didn't stand
a chance.

Photo Credit: [Friends of the IDF]

Do Nazis Dream of WWII Dystopian Future Pasts?

The tired, simplistic, bargain-basement Cold War narrative of WWII sucks and it's time we got over it. According to my eighth grade history teacher, the USA won WWII by beating the

Nazis and the Japs. If we hadn't beaten them, they would've conquered the world. That's how the story goes, and many board games and video games embrace it. It's comforting, comfortable bullshit. That version of history—the $59.99 version where you get to kill the bad Nazi colonel or fight buddies multiplayer with antique weaponry—ignores basic facts that are widely available outside academia. Chief among those facts is the near-pathetic weakness of Germany and Japan heading into WWII, as well as the wholesale aggrandizement of our intervention and participation in WWII in ways that make us feel good about ourselves but also totally distorts how war looks and how reality worked and works.

Being honest about how WWII went down and what was actually at stake is important because history is important, and shapes how we evaluate our surroundings, our present, our acts and actions. This, as it turns out, is the thematic heart of Phillip K. Dick's science fiction dystopian novel "The Man in the High Castle." Dick, at his best when using strange and challenging scenarios to interrogate the relationship between individual and society, contrives an alternate reality where America loses WWII when the Germans develop and drop A-bombs, forcing us into negotiated surrender, occupation, and servitude. The novel—and the series—is an incredibly subversive take on how history operates, both in the logic of the story, and in the logic of our own reality.

Amazon (not one to shy away from a sexy narrative featuring Nazis) has taken what was in Dick's hands an interesting meditation on the nature of perception and put together a mostly-faithful rendition that promises to entertain and educate viewers with a cautionary tale about what it feels like to live under a totalitarian dictatorship in America. I watched the first couple episodes using my Prime membership. And I was mostly impressed.

The series is set in a counterfactual past—it seems to be the 1960s—and begins with a shot of two men in an old-timey movie

theater (the younger of which is Joe Blake, who promises to be a major character in the first season) watching a lousy piece of fascist, pro-status-quo propaganda. This is a subtle nod to you, the viewer of the show. Films go on to play a big role in the series, as well as peoples' reactions to film—in fact, the single greatest threat to the "Nazi" led reality is a series of subversive films showing a reality in which the Allies win, and the Nazis and Japanese lose. Both in Dick's novel and the series, this is an honest and accurate idea of how Hitler seems to have viewed narrative—a fact echoed in "Inglorious Basterds," Tarantino's masterpiece that deals with similar themes. People watching the film of Allied victory in World War II are transported, blissfully and tearfully watching and re-watching footage, in moments that are reminiscent of our own reactions to this type of video on Memorial and Veterans Day, on the History Channel. Where "The Man in The High Castle" takes flight, however, and removes itself from just another nostalgic retread celebrating victory of freedom over tyranny is in its secondary or tertiary level, wherein the critique ends up being not of the Nazis, but of ourselves and our consumption of narrative history.

The series is filled with these double-scenes, moments that have special resonance on multiple levels, which is true to Dick's vision and the intention of his fictionalized world. Things in dystopian Nazi-America are a bit shoddier than they should be, given the timeframe. There's a great deal of factory labor that's put front and center in the series as part of the economic backdrop to the Nazi-occupied society, and much of the show feels like noir. If the Nazis had won, the show claims implicitly, things would be worse in America than they are today.

But not that much worse. Noah Berlatsky noticed this same phenomenon, watching the show earlier this year. In a review for the Atlantic, he found the show to be subversive in its claim that life would have been crummier, lousier, but not

fundamentally worse than it has been for our real actual selves. There are no lines for food, no dead people lying in the streets. Gangs of Nazis and Japanese police chase down pro-democracy “resistance” advocates, but the people who keep their heads down and work hard are rewarded. It’s not difficult, in other words, to imagine that if there were a group of pro-Nazi, pro-imperial Japanese agents running around today with films showing how in *their* reality Hitler and Hirohito won, our own government would be clamping down on their activities, and would view them as a direct threat. Would our real police be shooting them down on the streets? Well—people who are devout followers of that violent brand of Islam sweeping the Middle East aren’t exactly treated with hospitality when the US security apparatus gets their hands on them.

Suburbia in Nazi-America is inhabited by Nazi party members and functionaries, but apart from kids having to wear silly school uniforms, things are about the same. Kitschy television shows the type of which people consumed in the 1950s and 1960s are on the air, but with a Nazi twist. There seems to be a functioning interstate system (Eisenhower is, after all, said to have been inspired by Hitler’s autobahn, so this is not totally surprising).

In the Midwest, the truck Joe Blake is driving blows a tire, and he gets help from a Nazi policeman who offers him help and part of a sandwich. During the exchange, Blake spots a tattoo on the policeman’s arm, and the policeman self-identifies as a veteran of the war against Nazi Germany—then claims not to even remember what they’d been fighting for. White flakes are falling from the sky, and Blake asks the trooper what they are. The policeman cheerfully volunteers that “Tuesdays they burn cripples, the terminally ill… [they’re a] drag on the state.” In this series (and in the book), people in the south and Midwest have adapted easily and enthusiastically to Nazi rule.

The resistance, on the other hand, is made up of (frankly) irritating ideologues who rant about “freedom,” which, presumably, is the kind of thing Moderate Syrians wanted in 2011, or the kind the West enjoys today—contextual freedom. “The Man in the High Castle” deserves huge credit for showing the resistance critically, and giving them real weight, real complexity, rather than simply having them be the sympathetic heroes to whom everyone is accustomed. Even though many of the resistance freedom fighters don’t know what freedom actually is, it doesn’t stop them from expressing willingness to die for the idea—to “do the right thing,” as Joe Blake says. Thus the show subtly but undeniably reinforces the notion that perhaps the world we see today—the real world—is not as we imagine. This is not what our noble ancestors fought for.

Interesting side-note—in Europe, when you talk with people it seems like everyone’s family was in the resistance in WWII. I’ve always found that fascinating, like, if everyone’s grandparents were all in the resistance, how did the Germans conquer so much territory? But I digress.

So far, the series has decided to portray the Nazis and Japanese as brutal if thuggish occupiers, with an incredibly sophisticated and all-encompassing intelligence-security apparatus. The Nazis are recognizably Nazis—tite uniforms, imposing architecture, annoying habits, and superior military-aviation technology. The Japanese, on the other hand, turn out to be eastern spiritualists who do martial arts on the side and are in the logic of the show (and the book) presented as morally superior to the Germans. Gone are the massacres they carried out against whites, Chinese, and “inferior” people in the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere—in this show, they are unwilling puppets of the Germans, occupiers almost in name only.

Which is where the show’s deviation from the book and challenge to History as we know it begins to get really interesting—in the logic of the show, Hitler is the one who

insisted on détente with the Japanese at the end of World War II, and who insisted on peace. Hitler, in other words, is the peace-bringer. In the world of the show, Goebbles and Himmler are jockeying to replace Hitler as the Fuhrer, and that's seen as a bad thing.

Another decision that's sure to bring the show in for criticism is its handling of Jewish characters. One of the main characters in the book (and thus far in the show) is a Jewish worker with artistic aspirations named Frank Fink. To begin with, he produces "degenerate" art, which is an odd confirmation of Nazi propaganda (he appears in the logic of the show's world to be guilty of the thing that Nazis expect him to be guilty of). Then, he's captured and presented with what appears to him to be a dilemma—save his girlfriend, or save his family.

And this is where things get really strange, in the show. The audience, at a certain point, understands that it doesn't matter what Fink chooses—his girlfriend is already being tracked by the Nazis. A member of the resistance, Randall, warns Fink that if he gives her up, he'll sacrifice his soul, a point that is reinforced to the audience because viewers know that whether Fink gives her up or not is completely irrelevant to her fate. The Japanese don't know this either, though, so they threaten to kill Fink and his sister and her family, for being Jewish. The Japanese claim not to be racists like the Nazis (as already described) in the sense that presumably their racism is directed toward other Asians, and not based on religious discrimination, so it doesn't matter to them whether they kill Frank or not. But they do end up killing the family—Fink's sister, his niece, and nephew, with an improved form of Zyclon-B gas. It's an accident, bad timing. The Japanese apologize, which is a neat bit of Holocaust-logic—this is how occupied people are treated, and especially Jewish citizens, as essentially expendable.

In return, Frank's character swears vengeance in the police

station. “If you need Jews, you know where to find me,” he says, enraged and embittered at the Japanese decision to kill his family (as they promised to do if he did not give over the useless information, which he refuses to do). The Japanese police chief looks him in the eye and says “I know.” Because it’s a totalitarian society! OF COURSE they know that he’s Jewish, and where to find him. The governments know almost everything about almost everyone in their societies—much like the totalitarian governments imagined in 1984. It’s also worth pointing out that the entire city where this takes place is under imminent threat of being destroyed by a hydrogen bomb wielded by the Nazis.

The decision to use a Jewish character to unpack complicated philosophical questions of causality and moral agency is dangerous and potentially offensive—maybe even certainly offensive. Because to do so puts the viewer in the role of Holocaust victim—and the dystopian future imagined by Dick (and revisited by this series) means, if there are still Jewish people alive in America or anywhere, that the Holocaust is ongoing. It also makes the subtle point that we like or should like Frank Fink, which implies that we ourselves are in a sort of cultural Holocaust, an annihilation of identity, which is an interesting thought experiment but one that doesn’t seem like it’s welcome yet in popular culture.

Another way in which the series may provoke controversy is that the basic premise—that America could have lost World War II under any circumstances—plays on bad history. Our narrative of the war overplays German and Japanese strengths while underplaying the Allies’ economic and military might. Here’s the truth: Germany and Japan were doomed to lose World War II in almost EVERY reality. Their military accomplishments despite that fundamental weakness were extraordinary, but testify more to the astonishing incompetence of American, French, British, Chinese and Russian political leadership and bad generalship early on than to any advantage enjoyed by the

Nazis or Japanese. In *The Man in the High Castle*, the Germans have developed the Atomic bomb before America—we now know that, despite provocative History Channel specials to the contrary, the Germans were nowhere near the bomb, although one of their scientists (Werner Heisenberg) got about one third as far as the entire Manhattan project with a hundredth of their budget before crapping out due to bad math. On top of this, the fact that WWII happened at all is due largely to greedy and grabbing western politicians who fucked over Germany at the end of World War I, hamstrung earnest diplomatic efforts at rapprochement during the depression, and manifested an almost-willful desire to misunderstand Hitler's intentions in the mid- and late- 1930s. Knowledge of Nazi strengths versus Soviet and Allied strengths leads one inexorably to the conclusion that our dimension must be the only one in which the Nazis weren't crushed before 1943—it's a minor miracle they lasted until 1945.

An accurate characterization of Germany and Japan in WWII is not that they almost won—it's that they almost lost, over and over again, until finally they didn't not lose. That's the true history of World War II. We fucked around and fucked things up until we decided, kind of, to sort things out, then lazily and shittly continued fucking off and underestimating the Nazis and Japanese until we eventually didn't lose, as we were always going to.

Sorry mom's dad and dad's dad. It's the truth.

The real genius of Dick's novel, and of this series, is that there was and is a fascist threat in America, and it's going on every day. Where a physical dictatorship of Hitler and Mussolini (and, later, Stalin) was defeated, the result of that defeat was not freedom, actually. What we got is the corporate dictatorship we enjoy today, the anti-intellectual monopoly that began with LBJ and Nixon and the squares of Philip K. Dick's day. These happy Eichmann-types have been replaced by well-meaning, bright-eyed Hillary Clinton

supporters, Jeb Bush (wait does anyone support Bush?) workers, and the hordes shouting Donald Trump or Ben Carson's name. They're people developing apps or leveraging synergies in New York City or Palo Alto, California in order to make a couple bucks peddling the escapist farce that a human life should be so easy and predictable that one must never encounter anything unpleasant or inconvenient. They're the social, corporate, cultural and technological fascists who will doom and damn our country more certainly than David Semel will direct himself into a box of unmet expectations from which he cannot escape by the beginning of Season Three.

End the series by (no later than) Season Two, David Semel. Don't you screw us again.

After indulging in a fantasy where one gets to rebel vicariously against Nazis in an alternate universe, viewers may consider a more modest rebellion of not supporting the shittiest cast of Democratic and Republican candidates since Rutherford B. Hayes. Otherwise, the future dystopia imagined in this series has already come to pass.

Acronyms and 21st Century Conflict

Some useful acronyms by which to understand 21st century conflict:

COIN: Counter Insurgency. Employed by ISAF in Afghanistan from 2003-2010. Broadly speaking, the strategy wherein a friendly force competes with an enemy force for the allegiance and support of a largely-neutral population. Unattractive to militaries because of the numerous paradoxes involved in

successfully pursuing the strategy. Very attractive to democracies and advocates of human rights as, ideally, COIN involves pitting humanism and liberal, western ideas against some competing philosophy, and we'd rather believe that, properly marketed, our system will defeat any competing system.

CT: Counter Terror. Employed by ISAF in Afghanistan from 2010-present. Employed around the world by America. Championed most vocally by Vice President Joe Biden. The strategy wherein intelligence (gathered directly by humans or by technological means) identifies actual or potential terrorist threats to the U.S.A. or any of its allies (or strategic interests, including Russia and China), and that terrorist threat is neutralized. With a bomb or a gun. "Taken off the board." AKA "whack-a-mole" for its apparent ineffectiveness.

DEVGRU: Seal Team Six.

GWOT: Global War on Terror. The Bush Administration's term for the overarching foreign policy strategy that included OEF (the war in Afghanistan) and OIF (the war in Iraq). Intentionally imprecise.

GCO: Global Contingency Operations. The Obama Administration's term for the overarching foreign policy strategy that includes OEF (the war in Afghanistan), and the unnamed operations in Africa, Pakistan, throughout South America and Europe and Southeast Asia. Terrifyingly, even broader and somehow more vague than GWOT.

ISAF: International Security Assistance Force. The group of mostly-NATO countries helping Afghanistan transition from tribal society into modern democracy. Also jokingly known as "I Saw Americans Fighting" among Scandinavian ISAF members.

OEF: Operation Enduring Freedom. The war in Afghanistan.

OIF: Operation Iraqi Freedom. The war in Iraq.

SOCOM: Special Operations Command (the command, now basically obsolete, responsible for organizing Delta, Rangers, Seals, and Special Forces).

TF -: Task Force [blank] – depending on the context, either a Battalion or Brigade-size effort, or a much smaller higher-echelon group of former SOCOM-affiliate soldiers performing deniable missions for which there are no names.

In 1946, George Orwell wrote an essay about the way politics was impacting the ways in which people used language. The basic idea was that unscrupulous people who had things to hide were manipulating how we communicated in order to deceive us into supporting people or policies that we would not otherwise want to support. That politicians lie was not a new idea in 1946, and is not surprising today. In a world with enough thermonuclear energy to destroy most life above cockroaches, though, the stakes are a great deal higher.

Orwell refined the ideas he expressed in 1946, and published them in a more broad fashion in *1984*, when he described the language of "Newspeak." The language (a revision of English undertaken by a totalitarian state apparatus) would shift the way people thought by channeling their ability to express certain thoughts in public, the way they exchanged information. Reading "Politics and the English Language" and 1984, it's not difficult to see how Orwell's ideas about thinking and language had evolved. Orwell believed strongly in the potential of democracy and humanism to create morally responsible, ethical, civic-minded individuals, and put his life on the line to that end in the Spanish Civil War, receiving a throat wound that kept him off the front lines of the Second World War.

One of the most important and relevant intellectual legacies that George Orwell bequeathed us was this idea that, either with or without malice, institutions routinely and *deliberately* attempt to shape public thought through language.

Nowhere is that more apparent today than in the successive American Presidential Administrations responsible for beginning what we call the “Global War on Terror” (the Bush Administration) and expanding the definition and bureaucratic entrenchment of that war (the Obama Administration). Both Administrations make heavy, almost exclusive use of acronyms to describe every aspect of the conflict, from the weapons used, to the agencies involved, to the nature and scope of the military actions. Orwell would recognize the current “Global Contingency Operations” (GCO) as the apogee of post-modern “Newspeak” in action – a war that is made up of “contingency operations,” less police action than police-intention, less of an effort and more of an idea. Something slippery, hopelessly slick, around which no counter-argument can be mustered.

The acronyms are constantly changing. When I got to Afghanistan, the Taliban were called “ACM,” or “Anti-Coalition Militia.” Eight months later, they became “AAF,” or “Anti-Afghan Forces.” A single fighter was a “MAM” or “Military-Aged Male,” though many of the soldiers called them “FAGs,” or “Fighting Aged Guys.” As earlier pointed out, GWOT morphed into GCO sometime mid-2010. The CIA, with too much baggage, has lost much of its actual importance to various TFs, the NSA, DEA, DIA, and DHS, which in their turn will likely change acronyms over the coming years.

The enemy carried AKs and PKMs and RPGs, while we carried M4s, AT4s, M240Bs, SAWs and M4-mounted 203s, which were later swapped out for 320s. HIMARS is good, but getting a GOMAR is bad, although one of the finest, most scrupulous officers I ever served with went on record saying that if you got out of combat without a CIB and a GOMAR, you hadn’t done your job properly, a commentary on the higher-level leadership in the Army’s unreliability and essential disconnect from events on the ground. One cannot understand the military without speaking its acronyms fluently—and each military branch has a separate set of acronyms, some so different as to be mutually

unintelligible.

In short – to wage war on the side of justice and good (America, the west, humanism), one must first master a shifting language of words and acronyms which themselves change every few years or so. I can testify from personal experience that the effort involved in mastering that language is great, especially when one is actually in combat (and therefore not incentivized to do anything with one's energy save decipher the enemy's intentions). Mastering military-speak is the first step in confronting the realities of the war – one cannot effectively protest or criticize without understanding what it is one is protesting or criticizing. If one lacks the proper words by which to challenge a given political institution – especially when it is in the institution's interests to keep the nature of its goals and efforts obscure – one will simply rail away in a vacuum, doomed to appear to be protesting the last war, or some archaic problem that is irrelevant.

This is why the long-haired Vietnam-era protester seems so sad, so overmatched – he's saying "no war," to which statement the Obama Administration can correctly say "we never declared war, but Iraq, which was begun on false premises by the Bush Administration, has been closed down," and ignore the ongoing engagement in Afghanistan, and the ubiquitous worldwide "Counter-Terror" operations targeting, among others, American citizens. College students and idealists who feel – correctly! – that we should be more careful about how much information we allow our government to collect have to sift through layers of obfuscation before they uncover an acronym – NSA? Not CIA, or DHS? – that gives them an entity, literally an *agency* against which to argue, with which to dispute.

And why, why does any of this matter? Because every political administration understands that if they were to place a new agency inside the Pentagon and advertise it by its true name – in the case of the NSA, for example, the "Office of Monitoring

Everything Anyone Does Online to Profile and Preempt Terrorist Attacks," there would presumably be a great deal of blowback. While some polls seem to indicate that a majority of Americans support sacrificing a certain amount of privacy to security, it's not clear to me whether Americans would support such a program or agency – supposing that the majority of the population agrees that one should trump the other, we could have (given knowledge of the NSA's programs) collectively agreed to discuss our way ahead as a nation. Even the CIA – the "Central Intelligence Agency," which I will use as an umbrella acronym for those acronyms I should not divulge to the public in the interests of national security, could at this point more accurately be called the "CIA / DDSAT," or Central Intelligence Agency / Department of Drone Strikes Against Terrorists." Again, if the public had understood – understood, that we had kill teams in many third world countries, and were targeting individual human beings for assassination, oftentimes based on patterns of behavior, there probably would have been a spirited debate on the subject. These actions were *not kept secret*, but were buried beneath an avalanche of acronyms and double-speak. Newspeak, in fact.

One should not have to offer one's credentials or explain one's love of country when making such a statement, but it still feels obligatory. In an intellectual atmosphere where substance is more important than words, I have to point out that I believe, like Orwell, so strongly in the potential for good in the west and our cultural tradition that I went to war, twice, for it – OEF VIII and OEF X (it may have been XI, I never got a clear answer on that). I believe that my country, a part of the cultural legacy of Kant and Plato, is an especially permissive and forgiving country in which to be a journalist and thinker, and despite the vitriol with which intellectuals are attacked from both the left and the right (the Williamsburg Hipsters on the one hand who see no wrong in President Obama, and the Fox News / Rush Limbaugh apologists on the right who see no wrong with anything the Neocons say or

do), you can still live freer here than in any other large country of which I’m aware in the world. We can do better, though, as citizens – we should expect better from our government. Obfuscation and deceit are rife within our political community, and should be done away with. We must begin calling things by their true names again, and if we don’t like how they look on paper – we need to be more responsible about how we exercise our global citizenship. On this, Orwell would agree.

Adrian B