ARCHIPELAGO

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Contents

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Contributors

Kathy Callaway <kathyjcallaway@apexmail.com> is working on a trilogy about the Baltics after spending a year in Tartu, Estonia, as a George W. Soros Fellow, and another in ·iauliai, Lithuania, as a Fulbright Senior Scholar. She hopes to spend next year in Kaliningrad. Publications include HEART OF THE GARFISH (Pittsburgh), a book of poetry that won the Agnes Lynch Starrett Prize, and THE BLOODROOT FLOWER (Knopf), a novel. Previous articles in *Archipelago*, to which she is a contributing editor, are "Estonian Letters" in the inaugural issue and "Little String Game" in Vol. 1, No. 2. At present she lives in northern Minnesota.

Rosita Copioli, born in Riccione, Italy, in 1948, is a poet, teacher, and literary critic. She took the Ph.D. at the University of Bologna in classical studies with a dissertation on "The Idea of Landscape in Leopardi." Her books of poems include SPLENDIDA LUMINA SOLIS (Forlí, Forum, 1979) and FURORE DELLE ROSE (Ugo Guanda Editore, S.p.A., Parma, 1989). Her books of essays include I GIARDINI DEI POPOLI SOTTO LE ONDE (1991) and IL FUOCO DELL'EDEN (1992).She has been editor of the journal of poetry and poetics: *L'altro versante*, and guest editor of *Il crepuscolo celtico* and ANIMA MUNDI (Guanda Editore). In 1979 she won the Premio Viareggio (First Work) and in 1989 the Premio Montale.

Hua Li, formerly a reporter for Radio Beijing, earned a graduate degree in political science in the United States, where she has lived for the past ten years. She imports furniture from China. "Hua Li" is a pseudonym. Part 1 appeared in *Archipelago* Vol. 5, No. 1.

Samuel Menashe was born in New York City in 1925. In 1943 he enlisted in the Infantry School at Fort Benning, Georgia. After training in England, his division (the 87th) fought in France, Belgium (the Battle of the Bulge), and Germany. in 1950 he was awarded a doctorat d'université by the Sorbonne. His first book, THE MANY NAMED BELOVED, was published in London in 1961. In 1966, his poems were featured in PENGUIN MODERN POETS, Vol. 7 (London). His latest volume is THE NICHE NARROWS: NEW AND SELECTED POEMS (Talisman House).

Michael Rothenberg <walterblue@earthlink.net> is a poet and song-writer and the co-editor and -publisher of *Big Bridge* <http://www.bigbridge.org>, a journal of poetry on-line. He is co-founder of Big Bridge Press, which publishes chapbooks and handsome botanica. With Mary Sands, he also co-edits *Jack Magazine* <www.jackmagazine.com>. Michael Rothenberg is the editor of OVERTIME, Selected Poems of Philip Whalen (Penguin, 1999), and author of PARIS JOURNALS (Fish Drum, 2000), poems, and PUNK ROCKWELL (Tropical Press, 2000), a novel.

Cynthia Tedesco <cynick@earthlink.net> is the author of a collection of poetry, LETTERS FOUND AFTER… (Sesquin Press, 1997). She is a former editor of *Barrow Street*, a bi-annual journal of poetry. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in: *Apex of The M, Barrow Street, Columbia Poetry Review, Talisman, Gargoyle,* and *The Montserrat Review.*

Renata Treitel <Rtreitel@aol.com>, a teacher, poet and translator, was born in Switzerland, and educated in Italy, Argentina, and the United States. She has published GERMAN NOTEBOOK (1983), a chapbook of poems. Her translations include Susana Thénon, distancias/distances (Sun & Moon Press, 1994); Rosita Copioli, SPLENDIDA LUMINA SOLIS/THE BLAZING LIGHTS OF THE SUN (Sun and Moon Press, 1996); Amelia Biagioni, LAS CACERIAS/THE HUNTS (Xenos Books, forthcoming). Renata Treitel has received two Witter Bynner Translation Grants and in 1997, won the Oklahoma Poetry Award Winner. Her villanelle "The Burden of Silence" appeared in *Archipelago* Vol. 4, No. 3.

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News of our Contributors

Jane Barnes <bygud@aol.com> is the recipient of the Writer's Guild Award for her documentary screenplay for *John Paul II: The Millennial Pope*, shown on Frontline, PBS. As Jane Barnes Casey, she is the author of I, KRUPSKAYA, MY LIFE WITH LENIN (Houghton Mifflin) and as Jane Barnes, of DOUBLE LIVES (Doubleday). She is a Director of *Archipelago*.

Martin Goodman's <http://www.martingoodman.com/> I WAS CARLOS CASTAÑEDA: The Afterlife Dialogues (Three Rivers Press, p.b.) has been published. His "Testimony," from an interview with James Broughton, appeared in *Archipelago*, Vol. 4, No. 1.

Norman Lock <NormanGLock@cs.com> is the author of JOSEPH CORNELL'S OPERAS and EMIGRÉS, a collection of extended fictions drawn from his series "History of the Imagination," published by elimae books <http://www.elimae.com>. Copies of this hand-made volume may be ordered from Deron Bauman <deron@elimae.com>. Norman Lock's "The Elephant Hunters" appeared in *Archipelago,* Vol. 3, No. 3.

Katherine McNamara <editor@archipelago.org>, editor of *Archipelago*, is the author of NARROW ROAD TO THE DEEP NORTH, A Journey into the Interior of Alaska (Mercury House). Reviews and information may be seen on the publisher's website <http://www.mercuryhouse.org)>. An excerpt, "The Repetition of Their Days," appeared in *Archipelago*, Vol. 2, No. 3, and is in the current *Jack Magazine* <http://www.jackmagazine.com>.

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Letters to the Editor

Regarding Hubert Butler:

To the Editor:
A friend in England contacted me to say
1.Neil Ascherson did foreword for GRANDMOTHER AND WOLFE TONE, not Eoin Harris, as she said you had written.
2. That Kilkenny castle was a "generous gift to the people of Kilkenny," not "sold for a song."
3. She really liked *Archipelago*, and Chris Agee's essays.

Julia Crampton
via electronic mail
Chris Agee's "The Balkan Butler" and "The Stepinac File" appeared in Vol. 5, No. 1. The Endnotes "A Local Habitation and a Name," about the Hubert Butler Centenary Celebration in Kilkenny last October, appeared in the same issue.

Mid-summer's Eve in Ireland:

June 21, 2001

To the Editor:

I had the most wonderful mid summers night. I'm staying here at the Tyrone Guthrie Centre, Annaghmakerrig, in the northern county of Monaghan here in Ireland. It is an artists retreat where writers, composers, artists etc. come to work. I have come to concentrate on my own work, without having to thinking about organizing group exhibitions, catalogs, photographing other people's work, mowing lawns, feeding chickens, and answering phones and all that life in the real world entails. Yet, am meeting interesting people over the evening meal once a day, taking beautiful gardens and glorious walks around the lake and through wood land, coming across deer, badger, hare, herons, and wild swan.

Last night a group of us went up into the woods on the hilltop and built a bonfire in the center of an old ring fort (a Rath). At the crest of the hill the view is of rolling distant hills quilted with fields, hedge rows and forestry, coming down to Annaghmakerrig Lake, a still deep green glass, its surface reflecting the colors of the evening sky ruffled only in the wake of a small family of swans. Then rising up the hill across the park land are mature copper beech, oak, scots pine, silhouetted against the sky like a Japanese painting, towards the house with its arched angles, pale yellow walls, and red-sashed windows. Behind the house, a sloping field yellow with buttercups and soft purple-topped long grass, still in the evening calm. We stood before the forest taking in this view before the mid-summer night's royal velvet blue covered us in its dome. No moon; but stars. No light from any source for miles into the distance.

Turning into the forest we clambered over the ancient prehistoric moss-covered walls into the woods. Earlier three of us had come across this location on our daily walk and felt it perfect for a mid-summer-night celebration, and had built a bonfire. All we had to do now was to light it. A Forester had kindly been during the year before and had cut

down some nice sized trees and cut the trunks up, which made perfect dry moss-cushioned seats. The stillness of the night descended on a laughing, singing, drinking, smoking group of people around a fire covered by a canopy of beech, surrounded by prehistoric stone walls. Someone had brought up candles, which we lit and planted along the trunk of a fallen tree. The songs sung were American folk, blues, Gershwin, musicals, Irish folk and modern, some French, Spanish and even a lovely Greek one.

Through the canopy of leaves one could see the royal blue sky which never darkened into night. As the night went on the party of people thinned till there were only four of us. Finally in silence we sat on our logs staring into the orange flames, lost in thought and listening for the first bird to sing its morning song.

"Oh beautiful, beautiful day you have come, this is the land and sky, I'm alive, alive, alive to live another day and find my first worm."

The log I was sitting on was opposite the opening into the Rath. As the blue of mid-summer's night faded into dawns gloaming I could see out into the world outside our room in the woods. A world of mist rising like a tide, rising up so that tree tops and hills floated darkly like islands in swirling waters of soft white. The birds singing glad to be and the dew heavy we walked out of our wooded den, having stamped our fire out, into a field white with dew and a view that transported us all to another time and place.

Walking down the hill towards the house all congratulating each other and thankful that we had stayed up for a masterpiece of nature. Arriving back at the house we settled into cooking ourselves a huge fry-up, eggs, rashers, sausages, black and white pudding, toast, tea and orange juice. To bed we all went exhausted and happy to be alive.

Suzanna Crampton
<suzanna@crampton.com>
Three photographs by Suzanna Crampton appeared in Archipelago *Vol. 5, No. 1.*

LITHUANIAN LETTERS

Kathy Callaway

This landscape: modest, flat to rolling, sea-influenced with heavy mists and fog, even sixty miles inland, here. Forests and farms – Lithuanians are said to have a deep love of the land and growing things. It is a quiet country. *Lietuva* is once again its name and may mean "rain." Šiauliai, pronounced *show-lay*, the fourth-largest city, is near the eastern edge of Samogitia, or Zemaitija, a deeply traditional area running westward to the Baltic Sea. It has been the main market-town in north-central Lithuania for several centuries, with a population 85% Lithuanian. By contrast, Riga, the capital of Latvia – sixty miles to the north – is half-Russian. So is Tallinn, in Estonia. The Russian military enclave of Kaliningrad starts only seventy miles south of here, on a bus-line that runs straight up to Šiauliai and on to Riga and Tallinn. Lukashenko's Belarus is a mere twenty-six miles from Vilnius, three hours southeast of Šiauliai.

Still, Šiauliai seems comfortable with itself, is easygoing, pretty in its way and, from what I've seen, tolerant and good-natured – I've already been shown real kindnesses by strangers. There are some parks, a few nice churches, tree-lined streets. No cars allowed on the main shopping street, Vilinaus, which is tree-lined and handsome. Nothing especially historical here, most of it blasted away in centuries of wars, Šiauliai flattened in both World Wars, for this has always been a military city. One of the USSR's largest strategic-bomber bases was just outside of town. This was an officially closed city, for residents only, most of whom worked at plants producing military technology. The unemployment rate here was 50% with the shut-down of those industries. The air is cleaner now but the groundwater seriously polluted with heavy metals and airplane fuels.[1] Bath water is sometimes the color of tea – it's like bathing in a tea-pot. The Danes provided some millions to replace the sewer-system of the city, but the money was "used for something else – we don't know what," as someone told me. Water a plant and it may die, unless you first let the water settle in a container for a day or two, the method also used for shaking down the drinking-water, a little trick which costs nothing. At the university, we are not to drink it in any case, or rather: "We're used to it – you'd better not."

For almost fifty years this school was a Soviet pedagogical institute, a language-center in a restricted military city. The Russian faculty still has considerable power. Valentina – former Dean and still head of the Russian Department – is also the only elected member of Šiauliai's Russian Opposition Party and sits on the city council. I knew of her. In the first article I had found on the web under "Šiauliai," I read that a year earlier, the bodies of six Russian soldiers were removed from their showcase graves in city-center by Lithuanians and reburied outside city limits. Šiauliai's mayor refused to come out and console the Russian community, who gathered angrily in front of the empty graves. Valentina came instead, giving a speech of apology to her outraged constituents. At the university's outdoor opening ceremonies the other day, a large, close-cropped woman in a pink suit rose with majestic irony when it was her turn to speak, cracked a joke to roars of approval from the students and took her time sitting down again. This was Valentina.

There has been a pitched battle for control of the Graduate Division between Valentina and R., the new Lithuanian power, the woman who arranged my stay. It began three years ago, when the only advanced degree possible was still in Russian. The next year, R. wrenched it into English only. Last year, a draw – no program at all, and this year, a desperate compromise: a forced double major in both, so in my small graduate class today I met four smoldering Russians and four uneasy Lithuanians, all compelled to study the enemy language: the Russians English, the Lithuanians, Russian. Five of them teach in the local schools. I asked them to jot down any concerns they might have about our writing class:

"I'm a pessimist and you'll feel it. I hate writing. Horrible, terrible."

"I'm not ready to hear critiques by my friends and you after sitting a long time and writing my abnormal poems."

"I feel embarrassed in this class, as if standing not in my shoes."

"Not poetry – I BEG YOU." I looked up in dismay. What was all this? An overweight blond in the front row stared up at me for two solid hours with a fixed and unreadable expression, then announced it was her lunch-time and left.

Four dozen 3rd–year students in three sections, looking like colonies of meerkats on the alert, were simply frightened. It was they who told me the workshops had all been made compulsory – I almost laughed. Then, late in the afternoon I had my first coffee with R., the woman who invited me to teach here. I'll tell you about it later. Most disturbing.

Walking home disheartened, I saw another side of Lithuania – what it once was, perhaps still is. A country family had gathered under a large tree. The adults spoke quietly, apparently waiting for someone. Soon I noticed a small boy just behind them, his arms flat against the big trunk, his cheek pressed to its bark, his eyes closed in concentration. Normal enough for a three-year-old, I supposed, but I slowed in amazement at the behavior of his family, for no one told him to 'stop that nonsense' or to hurry up. They glanced over now and then to see if he had finished yet, kept their voices low and simply waited. At the light on Traku Street, I looked over my shoulder again. Nothing had changed under that dappled tree. There they all were, waiting for a small boy to finish his moment of ecstasy, as if they and the afternoon were the spokes of a great wheel turning around this boy-tree, for surely he wished himself into it, an experience they recognized, even respected. It seemed an almost religious scene.

As I headed down the hill to my apartment, to my right were the walls of a large prison. To the left over some trees, a kind of witch's hat on top of the church-steeple – at the bottom of the hill, a golden archer on a very tall pillar, erected by the Soviets for Šiauliai's 750th birthday; beyond it, a graveyard tucked into the trees behind a low stone wall. Then a lake, very blue, with forest to the horizon – also the view out my bedroom window. From my kitchen, I see the red-walled prison at the top of the hill. And hear it, too.

I'm reading E. C. Davies' book of 1926, A WAYFARER IN ESTONIA, LATVIA, AND LITHUANIA. The Baltic countries she traveled through will never exist again in such purity. What she describes has mostly been destroyed by the Germans or the Soviets, even to the local legends. Here is the lake out my bedroom window, which on my map is called *Talšos Ežeras:*

> The lake of Šiauliai, one of these 'travelling' lakes, has a legend, too. One morning long ago, the people of the town woke up to find a brand-new lake hovering threateningly over their heads, which had apparently arrived during the night out of the blue. The lake was in a thoroughly bad mood, too, and threatened to drown the whole town if it were not respectfully addressed by its correct name,

> which, unfortunately, no one knew. As the lake itself refused to disclose its name, the position was serious, and the priests ordered prayers and processions. Things were getting desperate, but an old Jewish woman who had prayed and wept with the rest, thought at least there could be no harm done if she addressed it by a few pet names. So she began beseeching the lake: 'Oh, Bitmelis, Bitmelis' she cried, and this was the name of the lake, which had been christened 'Little Queen Bee.' It was pacified and at once settled down amiably, and there it is, even at the present day. Now this legend is of particular interest because it links the Lithuanian belief in the idea of the Word being all-powerful – and of such power residing in the correct use of the name – with a similar idea which holds good in certain Eastern Faiths…

When I asked about it, no one had ever heard the lake called by this name. No one knew anything of this legend.

Only bread, cheese, coffee, in the apartment – no time to shop…

*

I sat exhausted on my front steps this evening – hauling boxes upstairs – when a funny thing happened. There are quite a few dogs in the neighborhood, with personalities and grudges to match their owners'. People shout at loose animals – there are frequent dog-fights. I could hear them tonight but was too tired to think where I was sitting. Here came a big young boxer prancing down the drive and not on a leash. Just over my head, its owner, Regina, watched carefully out her open window. The dog's name is Laura, or as she says it in her Polish accent, *Lauw-ra*. The dog spotted me sitting on *her* step and came to full attention. Regina bellowed in warning, *"Laura!"* The boxer hesitated – and came for me at a run. Regina hurried for the door but I just sat there, too tired to care, so when the dog reached me and I still hadn't moved, it only shoved its face into mine and slobbered on it, knocking me over. I shrieked with laughter – Laura barked noisily, but now Regina arrived. The poor dog got hauled inside to a terrible scolding.

The whole neighborhood had seen me carry boxes up the stairs, then sit there exhausted like any workman with my legs sticking out. Ladies do not do this in Lithuania. I could see them glancing out their windows to see if it had all come to a bad end, yet, so when Regina shouted, everyone saw Laura make a run for me, and when I didn't move, they braced for disaster. But the unexpected happened. That a dog had sized me up first was a big plus: warm smiles from the matrons on my street next day. Grins from the men. You can't fit in – they have to fit you in, in such places, and the surest way is to end up the subject of a funny story, because being in the right kind means safety. Regina and I both knew it had been a close thing, though. Her face was ashen when I stopped by to thank her – the door open only an inch or two, Laura blowing at the crack, grinding her hindquarters and that stub of a tail.

Regina sits at her open window on the ground floor and hollers at every child who passes, keeping an eye on things for the building. She's a big, warm-hearted Pole – actually, a doctor of some kind. I seem to have been dumped on her. She is the only one to help me, and though she speaks no English, she comes to the rescue every time. When she learned I wasn't English but American, a small cloud crossed her face for a moment but, whatever the hesitation, she let it go.

Every night at my kitchen window, I can hear a man shouting from the prison on the hill: *"Yoo-liee!"* Brando-like, until Julie comes. She stands below to call back up to him, and this is how they visit. When she doesn't come, he shouts to the neighborhood his entire frustration at his circumstance, his life's story at many decibels, with pauses, side avenues and a main theme he returns to. Prometheus chained to his rock, his spleen torn out every night, it can go on for an hour. No one stops him.

*

On my way to do some shopping, I climbed the long, sweeping flight of steps to the top of the hill to see the 16th-century church of Saints Peter and Paul, *Šv. Petro ir Povilo Bažnyčia*, as the sign on the gate reads, a massive white structure, visible for miles around with its tall steeple. The church had been an easy target in the closing days of World War Two but survived, was repaired, and the interior was now being re-plastered, I discovered. No entry. I walked around the walled courtyard, instead, and found some curious things. Off to one side, a ten-foot stump of a tree wearing a huge metal hat which came to a point with a cross on top, like a fairy-tale come to life, and some twenty feet in front of the building, a large boulder, its flat surface uniformly pocked with indentations. I walked to the far side of the church and discovered some of those big, powerful Lithuanian crosses, bristling with smaller ones that radiate from a central aureole, ironwork topped by crescent moon and twisting spikes. In front of each was a life-sized plaster saint but they looked almost threatened by their settings, didn't seem to match these crosses. Around to the back of the church, I discovered something much more peaceful: under the linden-trees a very old cross, the gray wood cracked and neglected, on its top a small roofed porch with filigreed railings. A whir of wings from it…

Tonight I read in E.C. Davies' book that this was a soul cross:

> Since the old Lithuanians believed strongly in the transmigration of souls, it is not surprising to find that a special provision was made for the departure of the soul from the body at the moment of death. Hence we have this most interesting type of cross known as the 'soul cross', which is distinguished from all other types by having a little umbrella-like top, the idea being that the soul can shelter under it on its journey upwards if the weather is inclement. On the upright are a series of notches. The soul is typified as a small winged creature with gossamer wings, and, should its wings get wet as it leaves the body, it will naturally have more difficulty in rising; so it can rest on these notches and dry its wings before soaring upwards into the ether….

There must have been two pagan Lithuanias. This one, which could add a soul porch to the top of a foreign cross with little fuss, and the other one, iron suns and moons, ominous spikes, a hostile struggle. Or, perhaps this is what it came to. Lithuania was the last country in Europe to be Christianized – in the 14th century, a thousand years after the Council of Nicea had codified Christian practice for the rest of the post-Roman world. Pagan elements remain strong for Lithuanians even now, stopping only at the doorstep of the church. Witness this courtyard.

A bakery nearby. To my amazement, on display was a tall cake much like those crosses in spirit, the *sakotis,* Lithuania's national cake: a narrow spiral of spikes, layers of sharp-toothed wheels – a stack of suns. Glazed, not frosted. In church, then, the body and blood of Christ, wafer and wine. For weddings, they eat the sun.

Wheels, spirals, spikes – carved wood, wrought iron. No frosting.

I made my way down Vilniaus Street, searching for simple things I needed for the kitchen. No time today for the big crafts outlet, the amber jeweler, all these deli's, but I paused to smile at the titles in the bookstore window: *Deividas Koperfyldas. Oliveris Tvistas. Robino Hudo. Šerlocko Holmso.* Lithuanian is full of these strange endings, most of them sibilants. You hear *-as* and *-os* and *-is* peppering their sentences at every turn. Late afternoon – street and shops crowded – still no kitchenware… I headed for what looked like a big department store at the end of the street and, just before reaching it, happened to notice a wooden news-stand neat as a small carved house. I stopped in surprise, for at either end of

its roof were the stylized, crossed horse-heads in an X seen all over Estonia on older houses and farm-buildings, meant to keep evil spirits from flying under the eaves. But of course, this has to be their home – with the Balts, not the Estonians, an entirely different people. The horse has been central to Lithuanian culture for thousands of years, and I've heard they still have a great reverence for them. These X's on gables, and the sun symbols found everywhere in the Baltics, are from the Balts' homeland somewhere further to the east and south, where sun and horse were sacred. Old Lithuania is a heartbeat away from the Vedas, and so is its language. Some years ago in India, I heard of an extraordinary ancient ritual, the *ašvàmedha,* which means mare-sacrifice. Tonight while paging through a book by Marija Gimbutas, the great Lithuanian scholar of Central European and Baltic prehistory, I saw that the Lithuanian word for mare, old text, is *ašvà.*

In the crowded, ex-Soviet department store, where they still used the abacus, I had a stunning encounter. Just before closing-time, my arms full of kitchen things, I maneuvered my way towards the cashier, trying not to collide with anyone. Suddenly, black cloth swept by. And again. I turned with caution. Not far away stood two magnificent monks, tall and strong-looking, hoods thrown back on tonsures, the wool of their black robes of the finest homespun. The change in atmosphere took your breath away. They looked at no one as they swiftly selected things, and no one in that crowd looked at them. The monks did their shopping without the slightest self-consciousness, which made their presence all the more electrically felt. No one stared at them as I was doing because they didn't have to: in Lithuania, these were heroes. In the long struggle against communism, it was the Catholic Church and monks like these who led the resistance against the Soviets in a pitched ideological battle, with a dozen underground newspapers. Many monks and priests were imprisoned, a number executed. In this ex-Soviet store, they were an explosive presence. When they finished their shopping and stood behind me at the counter, I could hardly manage my purchases. In a daze I watched the clerk's fingers flying on the abacus.

The wind was up, the sun low as I left the store, making my way carefully down the broken steps with all my packages. Around the corner came two more monks, moving sharply as swifts, their black robes boiling….

On my way home, along the wall of the churchyard and under a line of trees, I thought I heard singing. A distant radio – but the voices seemed to come from overhead. I stopped to peer into the branches and, after a moment or two, found several children hidden there, quietly singing along with the radio. They didn't stop or smile but only watched me, in that absent-minded way that children have of claiming their own privacy. Down the long flight of steps to the bottom of the hill, the moon just clearing the woods on the far side of the lake, I kept waiting for a mother to call those children down from the trees, dark as it was, but none did.

Much can be learned about a country by watching how its children play – and whether adults interfere. From what I've seen in Lithuania, children to the age of about three are smothered in affection by adults, who meet their every wish – we'd call it "spoiling them." Beyond three or so, they're given complete freedom to learn the hard way, are left entirely to their own devices. They have *time* to play, freedom to imagine. My university students here are extremely sensitive, perhaps even too vulnerable for our modern world; but this rests on an impressive inner stability.

The neighborhood children spent some time the other day making a large, very smoky bonfire. This alarmed me: they're only eight or nine years old, but nobody scolded them or paid the least attention as they passed, simply avoided their smoke. When the fire had barely settled down, the children took turns leaping over it. Now I understood. This

was all to do with Midsummer's Eve; they were imitating the adults, who have leapt over bonfires for thousands of years in the Baltics, and still do, on what is now called St. John's Day – *Jannipäev* in Estonia, *Joninas* here – but it's really part of their old religion. Lithuanians have another word for it: *Rasa*, which translates, "the dew is falling." Nothing to do with St. John – it's an old fertility celebration.

Poinga, poinga, poinga… A little squirt spends hours each afternoon going back and forth on his new pogo-stick outside my window. Envy of the neighborhood...

Traku Street, I read on the Shtetlinks website before coming here, was the location of one of Šiauliai's two ghettos during World War Two. The Red Prison is mentioned. Where was the Ghetto? It must have been very nearby. I watch the children on that vacant lot out my window and wonder. I've located old foundations on its periphery – but these could be anything. There is a drift of spirit over this neighborhood like a cold ground-fog.

*

Coffee with R. – I have delayed telling you – it was troubling. She chose an outside table and collected two cups for us, but the moment she sat down, and before I'd even had a chance to stir my sugar, she began to tell me an anti-Semitic joke. A very long one. She followed it with a second one, short and brutal. At the end she said matter-of-factly, "Well, you know, Jews are the brunt of all jokes, here," – that such jokes were very common. She moved on to Lithuanian literature. It was my first day on the job. This was our first coffee. I found myself completely bewildered.

I could see that if someone like this woman could tell such jokes – a university official, highly cultured, well-traveled – that anti-Semitism must still be very widespread in Lithuania. That was my first thought. And she knew of my interest in the Shoah. Was this some kind of test? A warning? Before changing the subject, she added if I wanted to know about the Jews in Lithuania, I should talk to Elke the German teacher from Cologne, because "she's also interested in such things as you are." I watched her red mouth move and didn't know what to say.

This is how the Jews are remembered, then, I thought to myself: as the butt of jokes. As if still here. *"Sarah, Sarah!"* says the elderly woman through the wall to her neighbor, in R.'s longer one, pronouncing the name *Sadah, "Tell Avrihim the debt is not cancelled!"* R. explained, "She knew that by putting pressure on the wife instead of the husband, her own husband would get paid faster!" She threw her head back in a low laugh. But it occurred to me when I thought about it that, in fact, this joke showed a fairly close knowledge of Jewish life, some cultural savvy. This wasn't so much an anti-Semitic joke as a *Jewish* one, but the people who should be telling it were gone. She had no right to repeat it but didn't see this, had told the joke as though she'd just overheard it from a Jewish neighbor across their adjoining fence, he and the uncle laughing over it while their women washed up after supper in the 1930s because *this joke was not without affection.* I was ready to leap to my feet and throw the table aside, my own thoughts so alarmed me. What had I been hearing?

The names she had used were real Jewish names, surely pronounced just this way: *Avrihim* and *Sadah.* How could she know this joke unless it had been passed along without a break since it was last told in Jewish Šiauliai? The parts she spoke for husband, wife and their two married neighbors had been done in familiar, even in comfortable character. Was this some Lithuanian way of saying, *We miss you?* It seemed an impossible thought, given that ninety-three percent of all Jews in Lithuania had been killed in the Shoah, a quarter of a million people, more than a few of them by the Lithuanians themselves, according to

painfully emerging evidence. Such an enormous loss does not go unrecorded on a nation's psyche. There has to be an outlet.

"Very common, here," she had told me – *very common* – the warm cultural life of the missing Jews reconstructed by Lithuanians every day all these years in this strange and chilling fashion? There is a terrible poignancy to these jokes and in the fact that Lithuanians are so fond of telling them, even to a visiting scholar from America, even on her first day, even the very moment you sit her down for coffee. I do not think this woman is hard-hearted – she's the mother of two polite young boys, has a distinguished and devoted husband, knows perfectly well what constitutes a tasteless joke. I think she wanted to talk about the Jews. I think she did it in the only way so far psychologically available to most people in countries like Lithuania, where an entire culture and its people were suddenly erased, leaving an enormous vacuum.

Walking home from the café sick at heart, I came across the little boy and the tree. There seemed to be two Lithuanias, two sides to the national character, a sweet side, full of light, and a darker one. An upward movement – a counter-pull. Prayers, and curses. Two worlds contending. Some kind of dualism not much to do with ethnic background, as if it came with the territory, with Lithuania.

All day I couldn't remember her second joke, short as it was. Tonight, I see why. It took the form of the currently popular Russian type which is lightning-fast, a little blitzkrieg, very ugly. "A Jew opened a shop," she began. But that was it. She threw her head back in silent laughter. No echo of Jewish humor, here. No warmth at all. This was a Holocaust joke for anti-Semites, so unlike the first that I thought perhaps it wasn't Lithuanian, at all.

Late at night, some kind of unrest among the prisoners. Terrific howling on the hill, along with banging of metal in an insistent rhythm. Guards on the roof with sub-machine guns, pointing them into the prison-yard….

I couldn't dislodge them. *Tell Avrihim,* I thought again for the hundredth time… *debt not cancelled.*

*

In my food-store at the top of the hill, where everything is behind long counters – nice pastries – dark breads – those perfect Baltic potatoes, yellow inside – I purchased again the excellent white local cheese, pointing to what I wanted, and some pastries. As I turned, I noticed something I'd failed to see before. Near the window, a cubicle about six feet square like a free-standing ticket-office and, inside it on a high stool, a middle-aged man bent over his work, wearing a magnifier in one eye, a fixer of watches and other small things, the parts littering his bench like a Lilliputian scrap-yard. When he glanced up he didn't quite take me in but merely returned to his work, concentrating carefully, with a halo of light warming his bald head and his beautiful long fingers guiding the small tool. In this dim and shabby place, he was a sight as old as trade itself in Europe, a man exquisitely immersed in his craft in the midst of busy market-sounds – in this case, just an old Soviet food-shop with a game-arcade right behind him, four teenagers hip-shooting the enemy and whooping it up. He seemed not to notice.

Outside, just beyond the steps, two pensioners. Their basic pensions are 138 *litas* a month, only $34, so they are often to be found like this, selling whatever they can. A large and dignified man in coveralls stood holding one beautiful onion, the pride of his small allotment garden. Next to him crouched a woman with three tomatoes. He brushed off the onion and held it up for my inspection in his red hand, turning it this way and that.

When I said "Yes," he thought about the language gap then held up his finger – one lit – twenty cents. And so it goes. I opened my backpack and he placed the lovely onion in it carefully, as if he did this all the time. We smiled. I would have bought the woman's tomatoes, too – she had inched them in my direction during the onion purchase – but the man gave me such a nice bow in parting, just the right size for his large self and the small occasion, that I would have spoiled it by staying.

*

A second coffee with R. – I couldn't refuse. Her subject this time, thank heaven, was neutral: older artists. "They've suffered terribly since independence," she said. " Nobody wants them. For a few years they simply reeled, some went mad." She explained that Lithuania has always been famous for drama and opera and, now that the theater was picking up again, parts were being found for these older actors and singers, who were also teaching an occasional class at universities or in the schools. "Like your visiting artists," she said. "Except they're not teaching their subjects. A famous actor from Soviet times is offering a course in algebra… another tutors in chemistry..." I was glad for this conversation. We needed to locate common ground – the arts would do. Her attitude was in all likelihood widespread in any case, I decided, if even she couldn't see how revealing those jokes were. No doubt I was just as blind in other ways. She talked passionately about the arts in Lithuania…had been a music major, the violin her instrument…both sons studying it, now… We talked for a while about the importance of a musical education for all children but, for me, a worm had crawled into the apple. I felt I was learning something here I didn't like the thought of, which undercut everything I believed in and set me adrift in my own life, a lesson now hardening by the hour: that art is not enough. It will not answer. She had moved on to Baltic languages and the history of her people. Some minutes later, as we prepared to leave, I asked if she employed any of those artist-pensioners at her university. "A few," she said, but didn't elaborate.

Lithuanians, unless they're Russians or Poles, would be quite offended to be called Slavs, she'd told me. They are Balts, as I knew. Or even, a little wildly, Celts: on my first visit to the Teachers' Room, a young instructor who had studied abroad marched over to me and said, "So! How am I to consider you?" Fists on hips. What could she mean? "Where did your ancestors come from?" I laughed a little – must not know many Americans, I thought. Assumes mine are all from one place.

"We're Celts," I offered, though this hardly covered the whole story. She brightened at once.

"Ah!" she cried, "Then I know you. We're Celts, as well!" She ticked off "our common traits" but the only thing I could remember about "us" was Tacitus or someone remarking that Celts were fond of bright colors and incapable of prolonged thought. I wanted to ask her by what possible adventure Balts were Celts but didn't get the chance – she'd flown out the door. Word for word, we could have had this same exchange, it seemed to me, four thousand years ago.

What's outside your tribe is unknowable, where 'knowing' means to acknowledge mutual humanity. The names for any of the tribes I know all translate as 'mankind' or 'people.' Fine, when no other humans have ever been spotted in your world, but that was half a million years ago. Handy when others did appear on your horizon – they weren't 'mankind,' thus easier to dispatch. This atavistic application of language, voodoo labeling, has been cleverly tapped into ever since, right up to the present day, wherever and whenever interests overlap. First, a campaign by increments to dehumanize. Then, do what you want, it doesn't matter. They're Not Us, they're Other. Less than human.

"We have a term here for someone who doesn't fit in – for outsiders," one of the students told me yesterday, gloomily referring to herself. "We call them white crows." *White crauws* is how she said it. I had to smile.

*

The key to the Teachers' Room is kept in a locked box by the hallway receptionist, a thin woman of about fifty with a beehive hairdo. She knits and smiles, tends the ancient Bakelite telephone, which hardly ever rings, and plays Gregorian chants on an old reel-to-reel for the students, who are fond of her and squeeze onto the couches near her desk. She knows who I am by now, so always has the key ready when she sees me coming in the door. On Saturday, I stopped by to do some quiet work but, instead of our peaceful regular, found a large, sullen man of about eighty with thick white hair and a scrutinizing face, far too powerful a presence for a receptionist. An opera played on the reel-to-reel and he was reading a newspaper. Nor did he look up, strange behavior for somebody new on the job. "Could I have the key for the Teachers' Room?" I asked, though there was faint chance he'd know English. No response – maybe he was hard-of-hearing. "Excuse me," I said firmly. He studied me a moment over his half-glasses then returned to his paper. "Key," I said, thrusting my fist forward in a turning motion, unlocking an invisible door, feeling like a fool, but it was my own fault for not knowing Lithuanian. He finally gave it to me.

Down the hall, the music cranked up a notch or two as I stayed for a while correcting papers – it sounded like FAUST. I smiled to myself as it got louder, but by the time I was ready to go, a bass voice had joined in – he was singing. I found him at the window with his back turned, one elbow out and his leonine head tucked in, his beautiful voice low on the register in Mephistopheles' aria about the golden calf:

Le veau d'or est toujours debout!
On encense sa puissance. . . .
d'un bout du mond à l'autre bout!

Commenting on the world that had overtaken him: "The golden calf is still standing…one adulates its power…from one end of the world to the other"…. He didn't see me. I set the key down quietly. She'd given him Saturdays, when his duties would be light, when no one would be here. It did show a nice sensitivity. *"Et Satan conduit le bal…!"*

*

Today our beehive lady approached me in the Teachers' Room carrying a bag of large books, her sideline to augment what must be dreadful pay. "You want buy?" she asked, like a little girl selling her toys half-heartedly. I helped her to lay them out on the table. Two were collections of black-and-white photos of Vilnius and Kaunas, the bleary, high-in-the-chest views typical of Soviet photography. She turned the pages hoping to interest me, but I said No, not these, thanks. What about this one? *"Gintaris,"* she sighed, smoothing the cover of a large black-and-gold book, which showed three amber teardrops falling from a woodcut tree. The title – Russian above, English below – was: THE TEARS OF THE HELIADS. I paged through it. Imprimatur: Moscow, 1991 – all about amber, glorious color on black pages. I hoped to visit Palanga soon, if I could figure out the buses…amber museum there…the Baltic Sea…. "Yes, this one, please," I said, closing the cover. Though

it must have amounted to half a week's wages, she accepted the money sadly. She had not wanted to sell this book. The others were failed decoys.

Took it to bed with me last night – propped it on my chest. The English was overdone, too muscular: in short, fun. Amber is associated with the Lithuanian sun-*goddess*, but in this Russian book, the weight was on the Greek myth, where Phaeton, son of Helios, the sun-god, convinced his father to let him drive the great chariot of the sun for a day, but quickly lost control of it, the horses plunging too close to the earth, scorching everything. To save the world, Zeus killed Phaeton with a thunderbolt, near the river Oder or, in another version, the Vistula, where amber abounds. The Heliades were Phaeton's three sisters who came to mourn him and were turned into weeping willows, their tears into those amber drops. A nice story, but not the one extant in Lithuania. Here it is in ripping Moscow English:

> One folktale related by the Lithuanians, whose home is by the Baltic Sea that so often casts up blobs of amber after storms, tells the sad story of the sea princess Jurate, who enamoured of the handsome young fisherman Kastytis takes him to her amber palace at the bottom of the sea. However, in his rage the thunder-god Perkunas – twin to the Zeus of the Greeks and the Perun of the pagan Slavs – hurls a thunderbolt at the amber palace, wrecking it to its very foundations. Grieving for her dead lover, the inconsolable princess continues to this day to shed many a bitter tear, which the sea casts up as beads of amber. Meanwhile the larger chunks are believed to be remnants of Jurate's ruined amber palace….

In the British Museum, on a clay Sumerian tablet from the 10th century B.C., is the oldest known reference to Baltic amber. The poet tells of the search for this "gold-tinted gemstone in Arctic seas"… An old photograph of the missing Amber Room, now reconstructed in the Ekaterina Palace in the town of Pushkin… Snuffboxes…diadems… chess-sets…pipe-stands…. Stradivarius is thought to have coated his violins with amber resin… You can still buy amber 'physicks' bottled in Poland. Good for gout.

*

Located the Post Office today by stopping different people and simply holding up the parcel I wanted to mail. "Ah, *Pashta!"* they'd cry, pointing the way each time. It's a fine stone building, mahogany partitions inside, desks for writing, also long queues and disappearing clerks. After some reconnoitering, I joined the right line and found myself behind a small, brown-coated woman, perhaps too poor, too hidden-away in life to venture out much, maybe too damaged by Soviet times, for when we neared the front of the line and she turned her head a little – I think to gauge if she could safely take out her coin-purse – I got the impression this was one of the few people in Šiauliai who had never encountered a foreigner, or a stranger's smile.

The smile had been nothing much, merely a reflex, but she kept looking at me. To my astonishment, her face now began to soften into sadness. She stared as if she recognized something but couldn't quite remember where in the past she'd seen it. She took her time adjusting to this memory, all the while with her dim eyes fixed on me. Then she did something extraordinary. She stepped out of line and pushed me gently in front of her, making clucking sounds, completely surprising me. She flagged the attention of the bored young clerk for me, too, but when I'd bought my stamps and turned to thank her, she was gone. I caught sight of her hurrying out the big front doors and down the steps. Had it all been too much for her? Somebody gives you her place in line, I thought: what is that? I looked at the stamps in my hand, feeling a small, indefinable grief. This middle-aged, brown-coated woman, who in fact couldn't have been much older than I was: what

tectonic plates of history had collided, catching the hem of her life to crush her? But they hadn't, quite. In the provincial post office of a small, Baltic country, a woman covers *versts* of frozen terrain and half a century of terror to help a stranger. The scrap of space she occupies, she gives to you. She'd left in triumph.

*

No one has time for my questions. Quite understandable, as I have a lot of them. I've now been asked to please direct them all to our department secretary, a languid beauty slow of movement. Wednesday, this exchange: "Edita," I said, "to mail a letter, do I have to go all the way to the Post Office?"

"Yes."

"There's no post-box here at the university?"

"No." A sub-tropical smile, the kind found in hammocks.

"Well, where do you mail the letters you type, then?" I said a little too sharply, not realizing she didn't type many. "Do *you* walk all the way to the Post Office?" Edita pouted – a cloud threatened her holiday. Once outside, of course, I found a post-box just around the corner, attached to our building.

Friday, I had another question. This time, the long table was lined with teachers busy correcting papers. I asked her where I could find the big Saturday market. She looked seriously puzzled. "I don't know of any market," she said.

"There isn't one?" But of course there was. Edita frowned as if checking her memory for any possible oversight, then shook her head.

"Hm-mm," she said sadly.

"Edita!" cried one of the teachers. "You *know* there's a market. It's been there for seven hundred years!" Smiles along the table, but no one could tell me where the market was. "Oh, you'll find it," said one of them, flicking her pencil. "Can't miss it."

Questions are not the way, here. Nor are they in Estonia. Nor – an Asian connection to Baltic peoples lost in time – are they among Native Americans, either. No one tells you anything. To learn, first observe. When ready, imitate. You're then sharply, cleanly corrected, humiliation being the oldest teacher. This approach is pan-Asian, perhaps universal, so archaic it involves no language and probably pre-dates our use of it. Think how the animals learn.

Last summer in the north woods, I awoke to the brief whistle of a bald eagle – a pair nested nearby. I rolled over to watch for them in the first gray light. The storm had moved on but the gale continued. There, an eagle – then another – and a third, this year's awkward teenager, in a ragged brown coat. Over the next several minutes, I witnessed an amazing sight. All three sailed by not once but several times, upwind and down. Taking advantage of the gale, the adults demonstrated how to fly straight *into* a high wind *without once moving your wings.* One flap at the end to bank and come again, calling to their offspring, chiding him as he struggled to get the hang of it, rocked awkwardly, made little chalkboard cries. Oh, how he fought the temptation to flap those wings going upwind! On the fifth run, he got it: the moment he did, the adults left him.

The difference in how childhood is regarded, East and West, is Rousseau,[2] whose influence never crossed the Oder or the Vistula. East of there, it is not Romanticized, remains indigenous, even Darwinian. To us, this looks cruel.

*

I stood inside a vast food hall, so crowded it was difficult to inch along and see what was being sold. A long line of counters with only sausages, hams and smoked meats. Another section with tongues, hearts, livers galore, even pig-tails sprigged upright in a bucket or two. Three cases with skinned animal heads in a row at eye-level, ghoulish but fascinating, their eyes bulging in flesh, like the heads of enemies displayed on a castle wall. Beyond the sea of shoppers I could see men in white coats sawing away at dozens of large carcasses. I escaped to a side-room to find myself surrounded by thousands of eggs, a room oddly empty of people. I rested here, then jostled my way upstairs to the balconies. Buckets of honey in the first corridor – curiously, like the eggs, nobody buying any, but the next corridor was too crowded even to enter, the delicious aroma of fresh-baked breads coming out of it. I ended up by default in a room full of cheese where you could hardly move at all, quickly joining a queue in self-defense. When I reached the counter, mangling the name of the cheese I'd written down, the woman behind me suddenly said: "Good!" I turned in amazement. So little English is spoken here. "Good, you try!" she urged me, showing me what she'd just bought at another counter. She held a soft cheese the size and shape of a collapsed heart with caraway stuck in it, as if the idea of all that meat had penetrated the dairy products. "Lovely," I said. "Very nice." Time to leave.

Resting with a cigarette just outside the back door, I contemplated the great open market itself, social event of the week in Šiauliai for the last eight centuries. An enclosed acre, the center filled with covered green tables, the entire area teeming with people but in a relaxed manner, crowds always being much more bearable out-of-doors. After my break, I headed to the left where I could see horse-carts, passing on the way tables and tables of chanterelles; whole aisles of herbs; of fruits; of vegetables. Half a row with coleslaw piled high in buckets, sold in paper cups. Aisle upon aisle of the sort of clothes manufactured all over Eastern Europe, cascading from hangers. There was another area for tools, farm implements, machine-parts. Tucked around corners were thieves selling stolen goods, shady deals over the shoulders of leather jackets – their market, too. Along the edges, people crouched next to open suitcases of whatever they had to sell that week, and throughout the market were vendors without a stall or suitcase, standing with their goods draped on their arms and shoulders, everything from underwear to fine hand-crocheted tablecloths. Near the farmers' section, I stopped to watch a large old fellow seated on a bench with his wife, assembling twig-brooms from a pile of long dark branches. When he glanced up at me, his eyes were a stunning periwinkle, a gaze clear to infinity. Only once before have I seen this – in the eyes of MaryAnne, a New York painter just in from six months alone on the Sahara, the same look of wise contingency.

Just beyond some cages of chickens and ducks and a few indignant geese, I found a line of farmers and their kerchiefed wives lounging against their wagons in the sunshine, Breughel-like, chatting with each other while selling apples and potatoes. A younger man gave me a hard little apple to sample. I bought some of these, enjoyed myself looking at the animals, including a row of piglets asleep in a car-boot, then headed for the herb-sellers' row in the center, looking for chamomile.

Quieter in this row, aromatic, peaceful. I felt swept away into Old Lithuania, surrounded by bundled medicinal herbs and women with an almost pagan distance to them, who took my measure and made no move to sell me anything. I didn't recognize much. No labels, no prices. Finally, at the table of an old woman with just a few herbs in front of her, I spotted some chamomile. To find out what it might cost, I pointed to it, took a small notebook and pen from my pocket, made writing motions – handed these to her. Slowly she reached out for them, glancing at her neighbor, who had been watching all

this – they had a short exchange. Then she settled on her stool to think about it, notebook and pen in hand.

She took a long time. I began to worry this might be an embarrassment for her, perhaps she was illiterate, but now she wrote. Not the price, though. In a wavering, flowery script, it read: *Ramunėlėi.* My cheeks went hot. She assumed anyone must want to know its name first, what you called it, but I had only wanted to know its price. With one word she had skinned my values and pegged them out to dry. *"Such power residing in the correct use of the name,"* I suddenly recalled... "Ra-mu-*nay*-leh," she said with a great rolling *R*. No, not enough to put the word in one's pocket! You're meant to say it, give back, *speak, child!* "Ramu*ney*leh," she urged me again, her eyes fierce pinpoints. "Ra-mu-*ney*-leh," I said from a terrible distance, my heart sticking at each syllable. Not until I had the name right would she sell it to me.

She wrapped the package carefully. I thought: Ramunelei. Chamomile. Her *R* is rolled. If you aspirate our Ch at the back of the throat and bend your ear a little, the two words are very close. Ramu-*NAY*-leh. (C)ha-mo-*MIL*-le. The tongue merely moves from the back to the front of the mouth. Was I hearing the same word?

At home, I checked on "chamomile." In our language it's straight from the Latin *chamomille,* via the Greek meaning "earth apple," from the scent of its blossoms – "like windfall apples rotting on the ground." I took down the Lithuanian dictionary. Wherever the Balts' homeland had been, I thought as I looked up words beginning with *Ramu,* it must have been devoid of chamomile. They must have borrowed the word from the Romans, somehow. Or the Greeks. But no, a complete surprise. *Ram // us* in Lithuanian means "calm, quiet, tranquil." I shut the book. Quite the opposite. Our word had lost its root meaning somewhere along the way but had kept the memory of the sound. Standing behind "chamomile" was the ghost of the much older word from proto-Indo-European, so appropriate for the little daisies that bring sleep that its very sound made the eyes heavy. *Ramunelei.*

*

Lithuanians and Latvians are the only remaining Baltic peoples, both East Balts. The last of the West Balts, Old Prussians – who had lived in "Little Lithuania," now Kaliningrad (formerly Königsberg), and to the south along the Amber Coast – died out in the early 18th century. The Germans who conquered them appropriated their name but weren't Prussian in the least. Three small and priceless dictionaries from the 18th century were the only repositories of Old Prussian, but one of these was lost in the destruction of Warsaw in WWII. Jotvingians, on Lithuania's southern border, also West Balts, had thrived until the Teutonic Knights overwhelmed them in the 13th century and were all annihilated by the 14th. Quite a few other Baltic tribes survived into historical times, too, but are known only by their names in a few classical references, from chronicles of the time and from local hydronyms and toponyms. Samogitians, Semigallians, Selonians, Curonians, Latgallians, Sudovians, Galindians, Nadruvians, Scalovians, and more. All their Baltic languages were direct descendants of *proto*-Indo-European, with Old Prussian by far the most archaic, thus the value of those two small, extant dictionaries. Lithuanian, influenced as it was by Old Prussian to its west and south, is just as important now to linguists and historians. Latvian has leaned somewhat to the north, one ear picking up the Finnic love of the galloping trochee. Latvia is only thirty-nine miles away from us, so the Šiauliai dialect feels the pull of the first syllable, too. Shopkeepers taught me my first words, here, but when I tried them on the teachers, they had a great laugh over it. "You sound like someone

from Šiauliai District! That's not the way to say it!" On a word with three syllables, I'd stressed the first. I'm keeping it there, too.

*

Eight miles out of Šiauliai on a quiet secondary road is *Križių kalnas,* the Hill of Crosses. No one's buried here. It's no longer even a hill, thanks to the Soviets, but large mounds covered in crosses of all sizes, some fifty thousand of them. I've been wanting to see it so, last Sunday – a bright but very windy day – I took a cab there. The effect as you approach is like a sea of spikes, an almost military sight. It looks at first like an army of Roman standards on the march with sun and moon prominent; but I could hear the sound the moment I stepped from the car, the chick-chicking of rosaries in the wind, a million of them knocking against each other from every possible cross-beam. Little else, here – a row of trinket-sellers in the parking-lot, their tables full of Catholic bibelots; a covered wooden podium built for the Pope's visit in 1993. Only three other people here… On the far side, a rivulet hidden in long grass with a few willows pendant. Cow pastures beyond. The clicking of rosaries in the wind – otherwise, silence.

"The story of this hill," says E.C. Davies,

> is that there was once a church built there which, by reason of the wickedness of the worshippers who came to pray within its walls, sank in shame underground, leaving only the cross on its steeple to show where it had been. After this, people were afraid to come near the hill, but an old blind woman dreamt that if she went to pray at the foot of the church cross and then bathed her eyes in the rivulet at its foot, she would regain her sight. This miracle happened, and in gratitude the old woman planted a cross on the little hill. Other people for some vow or penance did the same.

The larger crosses are magnificent, many of them beautifully carved, most spiked and haloed with the sun and crescent moon of pagan Lithuania. Quite a few are soul crosses, like the one I had seen behind the church. Wherever you turn, more crosses, of all sizes down to the tiniest, with rosaries draped from every possible horizontal as well as spread over the rocks, piled in crevasses. But it is the other objects here which are so amazing: propped and tucked into every square inch of space are pictures and trinkets and mementos – photos, drawings, flowers, toys, fruit, rings, bracelets, anything. Surprises in any direction. Up a narrow, goat-like path, I found a small, tin church on a pole, with pews and a tiny rusty altar inside. Low to the ground elsewhere, the framed photo of a bearded man playing a cello in his living-room, a plastic German shepherd leaning against it. And despite all the crosses, there's a whiff of the East, here: it reminds me of the fetish-groves of India, where small objects are left behind as tokens of an experience, until the place looks like the aftermath of a carnival. The location is the point: the rock, the tree, the cave. *Kriziu kalnas* is known to have always been such a sacred spot too and, as such, it is an *active* domain. The pilgrim comes here to undergo an experience and leaves behind some small item in thanks. Three times the Soviets bulldozed this site, taking the original hill on the first effort but, of course, it made no difference. New crosses appeared, rosaries and mementos piled up again. The spirit of place is not subject to bulldozers.

Some *loci* in the world are gentle, some joyful, some are violent. The one at *Kriziu kalnas* is for sorrow. One of the carved figures here is the "Lamenting Christ," seated with his head in one hand and wearing an expression of deepest melancholy. These once dotted the countryside, the originals pre-dating the arrival of Christianity, before which he was *Rupintojelis,* "The Man of Sorrows," an old man in exactly the same posture and with the same expression. Few people were here today, but the faces passing me were suffused in

grief, no matter where encountered along these tracks or how many times I passed them. They were not to be disturbed in their mourning. Sorrowing for a Balt is an indigenous event, the expression of a nation, located and ritualized. Lithuanians aren't sad people at all, quite the contrary. There's a time and a place for sorrow in Lithuania, and *Kriziu kalnas* is its omphalos.

E. C. Davies on what she saw in the early 1920s: "The whole of Samogitia is a treasury of these wonderful crosses, which are peculiar to Lithuania, and it has been estimated that of the more than three thousand examples which have been photographed and tabulated, no two are alike. As a new house is built, so a cross goes up to guard it. On the road-side: on the hill-tops: you will find them everywhere…" No more. The Soviets destroyed them – very few were saved. But new ones are appearing across Lithuania again, especially in Samogitia. *Rupintojelis* is back, too.

As we were about to leave, my driver pointed out a plain wooden cross near the gate, chest-high, with "1997" carved on it, a girl's name and that of an American man, with small flags of each country at either end of the cross-beam. The word joining the two names was *"ir."* What did it mean? I put my finger on it. He hesitated – pointed at me, at himself, and then at the distance between us (not much). I said, "Near?" Not knowing English, he couldn't tell if I'd understood. That night, I saw that *ir* simply means "and." I sat back in wonder at our differences. I had chosen a preposition, my driver a conjunction. I had gone for a juxtaposition, he a connection. In my world view, a preposition was as close as you could get to someone, living or dead, but my driver had assumed a simple continuity.

I walked some twenty yards to the edge of the rivulet where the old blind woman had bathed her eyes six hundred years ago. A winding, fast-moving, grass-lined little stream, going off into the trees then skirting a cow-pasture. When I crouched down only to see if I could spot any watercress, my driver hurried over. "No good!" he called. "No to drink – " Polluted. He offered his hand to pull me to my feet again.

On our return to town, we passed a large, white complex. I pointed to it – "What is this?" A factory. The one polluting the holy stream behind us. Makes watches – no – time-pieces. *Timers. For munitions.* Or, it used to. Empty, now. For only a heartbeat, I thought he looked upset. Perhaps he'd worked there.

*

Lithuania is the only nation ever to defeat the Teutonic Knights. When Hitler took Lithuania seven hundred years later, he announced from a balcony in Klaipeda that it was in retribution for the Battle of Tannenberg (Žalgiris to Lithuanians, or Grunwald), though the Germans had lost it in 1410. Lithuanians overwhelmed them in an earlier conflict too, the Battle of Saulė in 1236, which saw the demise of the Sword Brothers from Riga – more properly, the Brothers of The Militia of Christ, who wore white tunics marked with a long, red, vertical sword which looked from a distance like a narrow cross, a confusion that was deliberate and wholly appropriate: they were much hated for their brutality. *Saule* means sun, and is the name of a Lithuanian goddess; "Battle of Saule' was Šiauliai's original name – it took place in a nearby field. The ferocious Duke Mindaugas, a few years later the first king of Lithuania, was the victor, here.

I located the Aušros Ethnography Museum on Saturday, the 19th of September, but found the cavernous old museum strangely empty of visitors. One by one, rooms were unlocked for me by a suspicious matron with a big iron key, who switched off the lights and locked doors behind me as I finished each century. Peering into the badly lit cases, I

wondered why I was the only person there. No English on the cards, so most of it was lost on me; but now and then I was able to match things to the little I did know. In a case on Šiauliai's early history, a red X on a hand-painted map with the word *Saulė* marked the Battle of Saule. The date read "September 22nd," three days from now. Perhaps a celebration? Knights jousting? Natives piping? I strolled into the next chilly room as another door clanged shut behind me, not knowing that along the entire length of Vilniaus Street this morning, the Battle of Saule festival was in full swing and I would miss it all.

An hour later I was in the 19th century, in front of a small display on something else I'd read about: the Peasant Uprising of 1831, when Lithuanians rose against the Tsar in a bloody revolt that failed. A few years ago, I happened to visit an American friend near Pärnu, in the south of Estonia, by chance on St. George's Day, April 23rd, her birthday. Together with her Estonian neighbors, we witnessed the re-enactment of the St. George's Night Rebellion of 1343, *Jüriöö Mäss.* Estonia has always commemorated this and did so right through the Soviet occupation, the Soviets having no idea it signaled the beginning of a bloody uprising against foreign control. Children of about eight and older in white tunics gathered in groups on a dark country road, at intervals of a mile or so. One at a time, each child was given a burning torch of reeds and sent running into the dark alone. In just this way, the peasants of 1343 had alerted most of their fellow Estonians and, over the next two years, killed nearly every German in the countryside. Horrified, the Danes sold Tallinn, or Reval, to the Teutonic Knights and sailed home. Thousands of peasants were slaughtered in retribution. But *Jurioo Mass,* marking this furious uprising against impossible odds, was faithfully celebrated for the next 656 years, only 30 of those in freedom. It was an eerie scene, those bobbing torches receding into the night in silence. Just an old folk-custom, to the Soviets.

Five hundred years later, in Lithuania, the Peasant Uprising of 1831. For several minutes I studied the rebels' faces in the old engravings – fascinated, especially by the last of the group, a black-haired young woman in an officer's jacket, wearing a look of deadly calm, or was that hatred. She reminded me of someone. I scribbled her name down on a shopping receipt, but lost it immediately. The door to the 19th century swung shut behind me, and I moved on to the 20th.

The exhibit on the Deportations seemed to me strangely skimpy, considering its importance to Lithuanians. A few documents – stunned passport photos of the already-arrested – some yellowing letters from Siberia. Snapshots of smiling women on a *kolkhoz* somewhere far to the East. Not very much about Jewish Šiauliai, and nothing on the Holocaust. But this was an old Soviet-era museum. I knew that another building was being prepared for the Ausros collection, and very likely much was in storage. What you *could* surmise from this, however, was the atmosphere for the last half-century until independence, and what children who were now adults had been taught about Lithuania's history, at school. But anyone could read between the lines, here. Those smiling women on a vast state farm – where were the men?

In Stalin's Gulag. In Brezhnev's, too. Major deportations of the Baltic peoples took place from 1941 until 1959. From Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, the entire professional class, along with anyone else with a skill or who knew how to manage something, like a factory or a farm, were packed into cattle-cars and deported to Siberia in staggering numbers, the men to the prison labor-camps, the women and children dropped on the empty taiga, often with no supplies, no housing. The smiles in the photos are of women who survived it. No, this exhibit didn't even begin to tell the story. It has yet to be fully told. Part of the anguish for Balts is that their own tragic, recent history has yet to be assembled. NKVD and KGB archives have just recently opened for partial public access.[3]

Some of the records of the Vilnius NKVD/KGB are behind a sealed cement wall[4] in the basement of their former headquarters, now a chilling museum.

*

Last week, I read C.P. Cavafy's "Waiting for The Barbarians" to the third-year students, along with some other poems. Today I collected their written responses to any of these, the choice was theirs. Only one person had taken on Cavafy – Dovilė. Thin, dark and intense, she'd stormed the class by overriding my refusal to take her – the course was full – had shown up anyway and slapped the permission-slip on my desk. She didn't speak the first week, but her eyes burned holes in me all the way from the back of the room, where she sat gripping the desk trying to understand my spoken English. The first time she spoke was in a tense discussion about safety for women at night in Šiauliai (they choose their own subjects). Pranas, our banty rooster from Panėvežys, scoffed at the notion. He was out late all the time, he said, adding something about women just asking for it, anyway. From the back of the room, Dovilė suddenly rounded on him, in a run of good English. He said no more. Her essay showed the same reckless courage. We have a number of Russian students in each class, protégés of Valentina's, but this didn't stop Dovilė:

> The time of communist collaboration was a time when most people thought that everything is already decided for them, that there is no point in doing anything. 'Once the barbarians are here, they'll do the legislating.' It was a time when we were not supposed to have opinions, thoughts. The 'barbarians' raped our country. Though everyone knew that the change of power would be a great calamity to our nation, our leaders waited for the 'barbarians', ready to give them a 'scroll, loaded with titles, with imposing names.' These were the years of hypocrisy….

Only tonight did I make the connection. The black-haired rebel of the Peasant's Revolt of 1831, the woman with the deadbolt eyes in that museum engraving, looked just like Dovilė.

*

A revealing exchange today with the Ethics teacher, a large Lithuanian woman with the aspect of an eagle. She cornered me on the subject of weaker students, wanting to know what I would do with them, obviously aware that I had some. I said something about inclusion and non-threatening engagement, but she waved these aside. "Not I!" she cried. "Let them founder! Some are born to be left behind, it is God's will, not ours to meddle with. The best will naturally rise to the top – *that* is where your attention should be." A quote by St. Augustine followed – in Latin, so I had to ask for a translation, but it was a famous line: "Charity is no substitute for justice withheld," she intoned, fingers to her chest, the way people do when repeating famous quotes. But didn't this go against her point? Liberation theologians used this frequently, in the sense of *Charity will not substitute where justice has been withheld,* or simply by leaving off "withheld." But that's not what he says, nor would this woman be consorting with socialist priests, who must be very thin on the ground in Lithuania. A City-of-God Augustinian for an Ethics teacher! And a strict Darwinian. She'd gone, now – I gathered up my folders.

My new motto, taped to the refrigerator:

ART IS NO SUBSTITUTE FOR CARITAS DENIED

*

Elke, the teacher from Cologne, took me for a long walk today to the other side of the lake. She's been here three years – knows Šiauliai well. The dark brick building we passed on the south side of the lake – derelict-looking, surrounded by broken-down fences and rusting barbed wire – is still producing shoes, she told me, as it did when it was owned by Mr. Frankel, a prominent member of the large Jewish community that was Shavel until World War II. Once it was the largest leather-goods factory in the Baltics and employed five thousand people. His big wooden house still stands across the road from the factory, and he had built a small stone synagogue.

There are six surviving Jewish elders, here. She's been trying to tape their testimonies, is a friend of their leader, a Mr. L., but he's been ill and has just had triple bypass surgery. She hasn't heard from him in some time. Six men – not enough to form a minyan, a religious quorum, and, in any case, there's no longer a congregation, here. No religious practices are followed, he has told her, suppressed as were all forms of religion during Soviet times. No child or grandchild speaks or writes either Yiddish or Hebrew, though the elders do. Mr. L. has spoken publicly about the Holocaust here in Lithuania for years, apparently to no effect; she says he is discouraged. He has material, history, archives to do with Jewish life in the Šiauliai region which he can't find a home for. A year ago, Elke gave him a tape recorder and blanks to record what he knew but, so far, nothing.

She didn't know about the Shtetlinks web-site or its pages on the Jewish history of the city, which I had brought with me to Šiauliai. I said I'd bring her a set. "Available in German?" she asked. Mr. L. could read German. "No? Well then," she said, "you bring them. I'll translate for him when he's feeling better." "The Jewish Community of Šiauliai" by Jeffrey Maynard[5] is the only history in English of the life of this community, which began in 1776 and once numbered close to ten thousand people. Five small chapters, some 35 pages, sketch out in warm detail the life of the people, here. In Chapter 5, for instance, are listed the many places of worship and Torah-study in Shavel, including the "Kloiz de Sandlarim – Shoemakers Kloiz":

> Here the worshippers also included more prosperous heads of households, and there were many pious men among the shoemakers. They prayed three times a day, hired a Rebbe from another Kloiz who taught them every day between afternoon and evening prayers.… The community had a Jewish Hospital, an Old People's Home, a Guest House for traveling peddlers and honored guests; a Talmud Torah school; a Hebrew School for Beginners; another for girls; a Linas Hatzedek Society to benefit all residents of the city whether rich or poor – with medical equipment and drugs; a Savings and Loan Co-op; a Bais Hamidrash Hagadol (Great Study House). The Landremer Kloiz was a yeshiva without a leader, but where many who became Rabbis later, taught themselves. There was the Kloiz Desocherim – the Merchant's Prayer House, and kloizes also for the Psalms Society, the shoemakers (as mentioned), for tailors, for carters, butchers, gravediggers and several others, each a separate prayer-meeting society….

From Maynard's article and elsewhere, I have gathered these few facts about Šiauliai:

1902 – Jewish population 9,848, out of a total of 16,968, or 58%.

1928 – Jews, 5,338; total population, 21,878. (A 46% drop in the Jewish presence, from pogroms in the Russian Pale,1903-21, and mass expulsion of Jews from northern Lithuania in June 1915.)[6]

1939 – Jews, 8,000; total population, 32,000. Jewish community growing at the same rate as the non-Jewish, having stabilized at 25% of the total.

1945 – Number of Jews, 500. (Most were returnees from Russia.)

A handful from Šiauliai survived the war hidden by Lithuanian friends. Only a very few returned from Auschwitz or Stutthof to live here again after the war (Mr. L. was one of these). Others emigrated from Displaced Persons camps in Germany to South

Africa, England and the United States. The Shoah is covered in a very short space in Maynard's article – only two inches. The living history of the Jewish community of Šiauliai is what he means to help preserve, its cultural legacy, and this is also the wish of most of the small numbers of Jews now left in Lithuania. They would like to make their 700-year contribution to the country known, and most would rather not stress the Shoah and their almost total population losses for a very good reason: they have to live here.

But Elke was more strident. Did I know about the *Kinderaktion,*[7] she asked me at one point. Yes, I said – that is, Maynard had one line on it. She now told me more. On November 5, 1943, while their parents were out on forced labor, as they were each day, all the children in the Traku Ghetto under thirteen, five hundred and seventy-four of them, along with two hundred and forty-nine of the elderly and infirm, were forcibly removed, taken to nearby woods and shot. A few children had been tossed over the fence and saved by Lithuanians. Yes, I knew. Every time I watched those children play outside my window, I thought of it. How could one not.

I told her about the jokes and that R. had said they were very common. "Yes, these jokes are everywhere, all right," she said with disgust. I mentioned my theory about them, but this she scoffed at. "You're mad! Lithuanians don't miss their Jews – not for a minute. They're not sorry in the least!" She told me about the "quid pro quo." "They call it the dual-Holocaust theory. The quarter of a million murdered Jews, here, equals the same number of Lithuanians shipped to Siberia. It's the Jews' fault, all Jews are communists, didn't you know? Quid pro quo!" she said angrily. "Some six percent of the Lithuanian population was killed or deported to Siberia in 1941. Yes, it's tragic. But *ninety-three percent* of the Jews were murdered here, not a small number of them by Lithuanians, the highest percentage of any country in the War. They refuse to look at what happened! It's straight denial." Still a lot of prejudice here on all fronts, she said, and not just toward the Jews.

Elke's been here for a while and is surely aware which way the wind blows in Lithuania, but I marveled at who was saying this and with what indignation. I took a deep breath and asked her about it, but she spoke willingly. We had a long talk about what had helped the German people to face what they had done. "It took a long time," she said. "Thirty years of relentless K-through-twelve re-education, every child, every grade, every year. School visits to the camps. Survivors' visits to the schools. Research by the children. Writing projects, films, books, discussions. We saturated an entire generation to adulthood with the truth, because we had to."

On the resurgence of neo-Nazism in Germany, she said that most of its members were from the uneducated, disadvantaged classes and most were from East Germany, "…where, for the same reasons, we have the same problems as do Lithuania, Latvia and Poland. No information about the *Jewish* Holocaust during Soviet years. The fall-out has been tragic. Sixty percent of teenagers in the former GDR believe Hitler was a good thing, *sixty percent*!" she said. "The solution is the same. An entire, K-through-twelve, saturation-approach to education, straight through to adulthood. I don't know how to help the older ones – you have to start young. But farther east, in places like Lithuania, where's the money for such programs? And what about their teachers? You have to re-educate them first, fly them out for special training and workshops, they can't take a bus a few miles to Berlin. There's just no money for it. But, do you know, they've started anyway. At the national level, they're doing everything they can."[8] She talked about this for a few minutes more then ended with: "Did you know that Šiauliai is home-base to the National Socialist Party of Lithuania?[9] Thank God, they're not allowed to register, but their leader lives here. Mindaugas Murza, lovely chap. Mayor agrees with him. Let's get out of here."

As we started back, the view to the far side of the lake was spectacular, with my pink apartment-building at the base of the long bluff, the golden archer on his pillar no larger than a hood ornament from here; the dusky-rose walls of the prison at the top and, over to the right, the brilliant white Church of Saints Petro ir Povilo, its tall spire visible, said Elke, far into the countryside. I was surprised to hear she attended Mass there every morning: during the week, our schedules are ferocious. Her explanation startled me. "Halfway through my first year, I nearly packed it in, almost went home. Instead, I joined the Catholic Church." I was busy working out this puzzle, a piece in each hand, when she fiercely placed them for me: "If you've come to Lithuania just for yourself, you won't survive. You'll need more than that, my friend."

As we passed the former Frankel Shoe Factory on the south side of the lake again, she pointed behind us. "Cat Museum up there – if you like that sort of thing." Kitsch museums happen to be my favorite cup of tea. I made a mental note of this one.

*

Yesterday, half the police force was here at the Humanities Building, sirens wailing. We had to shut the classroom window, couldn't hear ourselves. A squad-car again today. Later, when I walked towards R.'s office, a man in a uniform with bars on his chest strode past me looking livid. *Polizia,* his arm-band read. No idea what's going on. When I asked the students about it, they only smiled in a sour way and said: "Normal."

Because the Ruble has fallen, there are some obvious crooks in town doing *biznez* who were not here when I first arrived. Upstairs at "The Black Cat" two days ago – just across the cul-de-sac from our school – six of them crowded their bellies around a marble table near mine. They knew I was American, though I hadn't spoken to the waiter yet – when one of them leaned over to ask for my sugar-bowl, he did it smoothly in perfect English. Otherwise, they ignored me. Muscovites, probably. On my way home, I stopped at Elke's to give her the Shtetlinks pages and told her about these men. She said she'd noticed them, too, adding that corruption was anyway so pervasive in Lithuania, in everything and at all levels, that only the highest clergy of the country were exempt. "A bishop or two," she said. "Everyone else can be bought." Advised me to trust no one.

*

Saturday I walked over to the English Office to collect my BALTIC TIMES but found the building cordoned off. A fire truck, police cars, a few people idling by the ropes – whatever had happened must have taken place some time earlier. I approached two well-dressed men. Any English? No, of course not. So I pointed. "*Bombe*," said one. "*Terroriste*," added the other, who pretended to dial a phone and then said, "Phoooof!" throwing his arms up in the air.

R. had no information on the bomb. Said only she *did not know* if it had gone off (though she'd been in her office Saturday, her secretary told me), but when I questioned her further about the general picture here, she said that "things are generally smoother, now." Previously, they were not, so the police respond now with alacrity even to a bomb *threat*, she explained. "Two years ago, the whole population was in great fear because there were so many actual bombings. And several deaths." The target? "Mostly the Tax Office. Also the main police station." I knew about that one, but it wasn't two years ago – only three months. It was the second news item I'd found on the web under 'Šiauliai': four policemen killed. I said nothing, hoping she'd tell me more. She did: "A secretary was killed at the tax office two years ago. The bomb was in the ladies' room and she'd gone in

there. Also," she added, "large houses of certain businessmen were blown up. In one, only two small children were at home. When they answered the door, well … along with the entire house. Nothing left." Who was responsible? I asked. Any arrests? "The extensive shadow economy, here," was her answer to my first question. "They don't like attempts by the government or the authorities to rein them in or to tax their profits." She answered the second question only obliquely. The town's solution had been to implement a Draconian arrest-without-evidence decree. "Not very legal. Not democratic. We have now rescinded it." But it had apparently helped.

*

Brought down by flu and dismay. Unplugged phone, crawled under quilts. In short, hiding.

*

Elke has been trying to reach me. Mr. L. came to visit her, even though recuperating from his surgery. Together they tried to call me to come join them but my phone was off the hook. I've missed him. He was overjoyed with the Shtetlinks pages, she said, wanted to know how to use the Internet and whether anything on it was in German or Hebrew or Yiddish. Asked her urgently to find out if I had brought, or could find, any pages on Linkuva, a village to the north of Šiauliai. Apparently, something happened there during WWII. She will invite him again in three or four weeks when he's feeling better…

At the ex-Soviet department store – upstairs this time, in yard-goods – I found some traditional Lithuanian sashes, the kind worn diagonally on the chest, hand-woven with names of towns. I chose two. Expensive, 25 *litas* apiece – six dollars. Upstairs, you pay Soviet-style: leave item, take chit to cashier, pay her, return with receipt to counter, pick up item. I handed the young cashier my chit. She stared at it – here was a foreigner in need of rescue. She pointed to the price in disbelief, raising the chit so I could see it better. Did I really understand how much these cost? I nodded. The girl became incensed. She banged up the total on her till and pushed the receipt across the counter at me, her cheeks burning. Fifty *litas* for sashes! A week's wages.

*

Vilnius yesterday – unfortunately, mid-week. School Mercedes plus driver to a meeting along with R., and a very speedy trip it was. Five hours' travel for one session and a quick dinner, so this will not be much of a sketch. After two and a half hours of blurred and placid countryside, suddenly over a hill and across a long bridge, you're in Vilnius. I twisted my head this way and that as our driver sped to the meeting-place, impossible to see anything. Old Town and much of the city Baroque in architecture, handsome. Old Town done up in fresh pastels. Hills, glorious churches, not much explained, though R. did say the largest church – that blue one just receding out the back window – had been used for storing horse-fodder during Soviet years. Or was it munitions?

You know how cities have personalities, or they do not: Tartu, in Estonia, has its own feel, even though one-tenth the size of Vilnius, which seems to carry no firm stamp of who or what it is. But Vilnius has changed hands many times, so this is surely the result of its see-saw history. It has a lulled quality to it as if its central mechanism is out for repairs: something is missing, and after Šiauliai, somehow this did not feel like Lithuania. Given a trip like this one, though, how could you really tell?

On our return that night, R. put her head around the front seat at one point to ask if I was "having trouble with any of the students?" Cautiously I described a few difficulties, not mentioning any names, but it all turned into an interesting exchange. I had some concern about one young man, I said – very weak in English – perhaps this was the problem, the class simply over his head, because – and there I stopped. "Ah," she said. "You mean Dimitrijus."

Older, taller than my tall Lithuanians, his thinness a different shape from theirs, with the triangle chest of a black-vase figure from Attic Greece, Dimitrijus had loped like a wolf to the back of the room the first day, and slumped there. The others pulled away uneasily. He looked about to explode and, over the next weeks, often bolted out the door after a few minutes or didn't come at all.

"Close to being a displaced person," she told me now, "without a proper home or even a real language." He comes from a formerly disputed area of Lithuania, a thin strip on the eastern border with Poland, where only a patois is spoken – part Polish, part Belarusian. The borders of his home territory have shifted twenty times this century and are once again in Lithuania. With Independence, she said, its citizens now need to learn Lithuanian, "to be full members of the new democracy," as she put it. To accomplish this, university places are reserved for such students far from home: "deep in traditional Lithuania," *i.e.,* here in Šiauliai. In other words, Dimitrijus is being Lithuanianized. It was all too familiar. We did the same to Native Americans until only thirty years ago with forced boarding-schools far from home, and nearly destroyed them. I learned this firsthand, teaching in Alaska. "The students from this area don't consider him a true Lithuanian," she said, "and the Russian students certainly don't consider him Russian. He speaks Lithuanian not very well, has no one with whom to speak his native patois and is very poor in English." Two generations of Native Alaskans in a certain few villages near the Arctic Circle grew up feeling just like Dimitrijus, with no complete language at all, no way to express what was happening to them. She finished with, "He's also something of a disciplinary problem." Which would hardly surprise a flea.

*

I don't care what language Dimitrijus uses, if only he'll stay. We put no pressure on him. Recently, there's been an excellent development. A Russian strawberry, Ina Petrovna, has taken up his case. She's a serious girl – tall as he is, long legs and enormous eye-glasses – but is also a drop-dead beauty with a reddish-blonde ponytail. She sits next to him and "fronts" for him throughout the session. Fine with me, seems to have a calming effect: Dimitrijus still stalks out the door, but he's staying longer.

Friday, for the first time and quite by chance, we snagged his attention. I tend to use whatever floats by – this time it was a local news item. Before class, they'd all been arguing in Lithuanian about something; it turned out that a local doctor had just been found guilty of the murder of her son, who'd been horribly burned in an accident. She was on duty at the hospital when they'd brought him in, saw he couldn't survive and gave him a lethal injection. They began to argue again. Dimitrijus listened to all this with his chin in his hands, looking puckish. "All right" – I said now, and banged the desk three times. I had an idea. "The court is now in session." Dimitrijus sat bolt upright. Courts, he knew. We figured out the parts – they leaped at them. He took prosecuting attorney; Ina, the doctor's role. For an hour their court deliberated the doctor's case, while I shoveled in advice like a stevedore, struggling to remember how courts are run, cases presented. Ina the doctor gave her prosecuting attorney English as needed, but nobody minded.

Dimitrijus won his case. Guilty as charged, but I mention all this only because of what he did next.

Our workshop is three hours long. We're often exhausted before the end of it and, when this happens, I have them work quietly on a draft to take away and finish at home; so now I said: "Write in the voice of anyone from this situation – in the first person – poem, story, essay, your choice. Doesn't matter. Start here, finish at home," and sat down, quite worn out. From the corner of my eye, I saw Dimitrijus snatch some paper from Ina. Cadged a pen, too. So far he'd written nothing for our class at all, but for the next twenty minutes, his hand flew across the pages. He borrowed Ina's dictionary several times and consulted her frequently. We still had ten minutes to go when he marched to the front, thrust the pages at me, and left the room. It was a two-page poem entitled "Monologue." I glanced through it for a minute then looked up at Ina in astonishment. The man without a country, raised only on patois, had chosen to write in the voice of God. *Life still surprises you?* said Ina's shrug, exactly the one that goes with the Yiddish: *Nu?,* the human condition in half a peanut-shell.

I waved him over when he came in next time. "Dimitrijus," I said quietly, holding the sheets of paper on my palms, "Would you read your poem for us? You don't have to. You can say no." He gathered up the pages shyly.

"When?"

"Well – what about now?"

"Okay," he answered. "I do."

Ina watched all this with a dropped jaw.

He waited for the others to settle then planted his feet like a Cossack, one bony hand on his hip, and read seven stanzas on the badly burned son from God's point of view, holding the pages at arm's length, giving them a flick now and then to keep them straight. Everyone listened in stunned silence – it was also about Dimitrijus:

I see screams of pain when one can't speak
He's tied to the bed, he's alive by machine
I see friends losing hope week after week
and relatives reading the Bible they would
never have read just for fun or to
keep their soul clean.
……
I see questions in his eyes: how long will I live,
shall I walk, and what should I believe in?
……
I see the thing that I can't understand
All want to live but this man wants to die?
……..
I see man proud like a god,
I mean like me….

*

At two in the morning the same prisoner begins tearing his heart out. Julie no longer comes – he's reduced to merely shouting his story these days, but tonight his long soliloquy is cut with a strange refrain from all the other prisoners, the old saw so familiar they know it in their sleep. *"Hoo-ooo!"* they call by the hundreds at intervals, an eerie call and response, like a priest with a derisive flock. Pretty soon, Laura begins to moan one

floor down because Regina's on night-duty at the hospital, and the noise frightens her. But now she's growling – and nervously. I slide out of bed to have a look from my kitchen window. The prison is lit up in search-lights – and, what's this? Guards running on the roof…a break-out.

*

The trouble is in the timeline.

In August of 1939, Hitler and Stalin sign a protocol to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, secretly dividing spheres of influence in the East. Stalin, after some delay regarding Lithuania, gets all three Baltic countries. Ominously, Hitler now orders the evacuation of all Balts of German descent from Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, though they've lived here since the days of the Teutonic Knights. He sends ships for them. They're gone in days. In June of 1940, very rapidly, Stalin takes the Baltics. One year later, on June 14, 1941, he sends half a million of them to Siberia in cattle-cars. *One week* after this, the Nazis invade.

The time between the Soviet deportations and the German invasion is seven days.

It is during this traumatic week, and with a blind fury, that most of the atrocities against Jewish neighbors take place in Latvia[10], Lithuania, and Poland.[11] The Nazis arrive, startled to find their work in the villages already begun and sometimes even completed. (This is fiercely denied by most Balts but no longer by every Pole.) The German *Einsatzgruppen* now organize and implement the rest of the genocide, sometimes with local help. Two years later, in 1943, the job is finished. Five hundred thousand people are missing from Lithuania. Half of them were removed by the Soviets in 1941 and sent to Siberia, a cross-section of Lithuanian society which included Jews. The other quarter of a million people, all Jews, were killed between 1941 and 1943, most of them by the *Einsatzgruppen* machine. In August 1944 the Soviets invade again, occupying the Baltics for the next half-century. During the first year, hundreds of thousands of Balts and Estonians flee to the West. In March of 1949, hundreds of thousands more are shipped to Siberia, deportations which continue on and off until 1959.[12] By the time Lithuanians gain their independence again, they have been subjected to forty-five years of state terrorism. Nearly half the population is missing from these years, murdered or deported by the Soviets or escaped to the West, replaced by millions of Russians at all levels; but the first question the world wants answered when at last a Lithuanian steps from behind the Iron Curtain is, *Where is your brother Abel?*

Lithuanians are a calm and steady, a courageous people: not given to hysteria, the least likely in the world to have turned on their neighbors with such ferocity. Any of them will tell you the Jews were always welcome in this country, that their own Grand Duke Gediminas invited them in the first place in the 14th century, to lead a reasonable if separate existence here for the next 700 years; and that a great Jewish culture flourished in Vilnius specifically under Lithuanian protection. Fast-forward to the 20th century. What little was left of this culture after WWII was suppressed during the Soviet years. Victims of the Shoah were cited only as "Soviet citizens." Two generations in the Baltics grew up with the Jewish Holocaust publicly erased, privately never talked about, and with the deportations of family members ever-stressed at home. The atrocities they were raised on are the ones they want addressed first or at least equally: those done by the Soviets to all Lithuanians. The people responsible are still among them, however, are still a power in the Baltics, holding local positions of influence and sure to protect their own. Nonetheless, some of the deportation records are opening, now. They're not in Moscow, but in Riga and Šiauliai.[13]

Balts need us to understand what happened to them; but, as Elke said, the average Lithuanian makes a fatal tactical error. Though his national government is working to change this misperception, he still blames all Jews for the Deportations, thereby forfeiting his credibility. Even when it's demonstrated not to be true, he won't let go of this argument: it is the only one he has. For him, beyond this after all else he and his family have been through lies the unthinkable; for if the Jews weren't responsible for the Deportations were not all Communists, were not all collaborators and traitors then there's no reason left to have killed them except that they were Jews.

The pressure is on. How can he answer for what his grandfather might have done along with other villagers in 1941, when forty-five years of state terrorism and the loss of many family members all go unpunished, thanks to the power of those responsible? For, if atrocities by Lithuanians are uncovered and proved before their own tragedy is addressed, who will care about it? So he clings to the sinking raft of his quid-pro-quo argument in growing desperation. If he should let go of it, as thinking Lithuanians have begun to do, seeing they must; and when crimes of the past on all sides in Lithuania have been aired and answered for and laid to rest, he and his children remain in the selfsame jeopardy, because anti-Semitism, as only one example, still abounds. Few can guarantee, in any case, what they might or might not have done in a desperate week, if the shoes had been on their feet instead of a Baltic villager's in June of 1941.

I'm in my kitchen having a morning coffee, listening to the BBC World Service. An author is being interviewed, Philip Gourevitch, whose book has won an award and is just out in paperback. The title gives me pause. WE WISH TO INFORM YOU THAT TOMORROW YOU WILL BE KILLED WITH YOUR FAMILIES: STORIES FROM RWANDA.[14] He begins to read from a section – I put my cup down in sudden grief.

*

A demographic map of our county in the Upper Midwest shows ninety-seven nationalities represented, pretty much town by town. Ours was Old Bohemian. There was no "melting-pot" – the term's a misnomer. Away from the cities, it congealed into its separate puddles again like mercury from a broken thermometer, just the Old Country reconstituted, nation by nation and town by small town; gossip, silences and all.

Three DP families, Displaced Persons, were assigned to our small town in 1952 – one family from Estonia, one from Latvia, one from Lithuania. Their children were my classmates, quickly leaders in everything. My Estonian friend's father was our town's first real doctor. Where they might have come from, or why, was never mentioned. There was no discussion. Our town had just won a cultured middle class, a windfall not to be sniffed at. We never knew that three small countries had just lost one.

*

Kristina's missing. Has been cutting all her classes – was about to be thrown out of school. I have only this fragment from her:

The sea's so angry this evening
And the wind's so cold and gusty.
Waves are fighting with the shore like enemies,
It's going to rain and sky is dusky…

– Rain it did.

Siaulai, Lithuania September 2, 1998 —
Grand Rapids, Minnesota, March 22, 2001

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[1] For a startling tale, see this site: <http://www.digitaljournalist.org/issue9909/pollution08.htm.>

[2] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, EMILE, OR ON EDUCATION; also see On Education.
<http://www.infed.org/thinkers/et-rous.htm>

[3] An important and careful article on the Baltic Deportations is now in translation:
<http://vip.latnet.lv/LPRA/priboi.htm.> The USSR MBG s Top Secret Operation Priboi [Surf] for the Deportation of Population from the Baltic Countries, 25 February; 23 August 1949, by Dr. Heinrichs Strods, Head of Research Programme, The Occupation Museum of Latvia, who recently obtained access to the Soviet military documents on the deportations.

[4] In the spring, I stood in front of that wall. Behind me, a Lithuanian State tour-guide, a middle-aged woman, gave a speech to a group of Japanese educators. The deportations were the fault of the Jews, she said, who were all Communists, and deserved what they got [and similar]. She was not an employee of the museum. Its director, fluent in English, stood near me with his head lowered but did not correct her. Later, I called him over to a photo-display, officers of the Vilnius NKVD/KGB. Who was the worst? I asked him (would he tell me, I wondered?). He swung an arm from behind his back to tap a photo. Only this one picture carried no name, no caption. What s his name? I asked, pushing my luck, I knew, but he told me. Major Vokulov, he said, and swung his arm out to tap another picture, this one with a name and dates: *E. Eismuntus, 1987-89* . The Last KGB Chief of Vilnius. He s still alive. Living in Lithuania. More on the KGB s activities in Lithuania at this site: <http://vip.latnet.lv/LPRA/TerrorVilnius.htm.>

[5] The Jewish Community of Šiauliai : <http://www.jewishgen.org/Shtetlinks/shavli/shavli2.html#fn0.>

[6] <http://www.heritagefilms.com/RUSSIA1.htm>

[7] For an eye-witness report by one child who survived it, see this site:
<http://www.vancouverprovince.com/newsite/features/holocaust/03_01.html.>

[8] Cf., Lithuania to Look Into Crimes of Nazi and Soviet Occupation:
<http://www.bafl.com/lithuanialook.htm.>

[9] Recent news on this and on similar issues in Lithuania can be found at
<http://www.fsumonitor.com/indices/Lithuania.shtml>, specific article
<http://www.fsumonitor.com/stories/092100Lith.shtml> article 122700 for news on Murza.

[10] For Latvia, see Modris Eksteins WALKING SINCE DAYBREAK: A STORY OF EASTERN EUROPE, WORLD WAR II, AND THE HEART OF OUR CENTURY (Mariner Books, 1999).

[11] For Poland, see: NEIGHBORS: THE DESTRUCTION OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN JEDWABNE by Jan Tomasz Gross (Princeton University Press, April 2001). News on Jedwabne
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/world/monitoring/media_reports/newsid_1249000/1249210.stm.>

[12] The international legal definition of genocide, with links to five other definitions of genocide, is here:
<http://www.preventgenocide.org/genocide/officialtext.htm.>

[13] *Op. cit.*, <http://vip.latnet.lv/LPRA/priboi.htm.>

[14] Picador USA, 1998. National Book Critics Circle Award for Nonfiction.

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SIX POEMS

Samuel Menashe

O Lady lonely as a stone
Even here moss has grown

*

Western Wind

One hand cold
One hand hot
One turns pages
One does not
As I lie in bed
Reading poems. . .
Remembering how
You love this one
I've come to now
My arms are numb

*

The Oracle

Feet east
Head west
Arms spread
North and south
He lies in bed
Intersected
At the mouth

*

Take any man
Walking on a road
Alone in his coat
He is a world
No one knows
And to himself
Unknown

Yet, when he wanders most
It is his own way, certain
As spheres astronomers note
In their familiar motion

*

Transfusion

Death awaited
In this room
Takes its time
I stand by
Your deathbed
Making it mine

*

The Offering

Flowers, not bread
Cast upon the water—
The dead outlast
Whatever we offer

from
FURORE DELLE ROSE/
WRATH OF THE ROSES

Rosita Copioli
tr. from the Italian by Renata Treitel

Mater Matuta

Madre mattutina, dalle porte
dei tamerici, nata dal tessuto
della pietra serena,
madre antica, ora remota, che mi appari
dalla finestra d'alba d'un treno
precoce
che corre sul mare, prima del risveglio
del sole, si alza appena il primo
taglio grigio dell'acqua, e non è ancora
luce, e come allora, ricordo,
mi custodivi il sonno, entravi
a guardarmi, sentivo dallo specchio
una luce, avevi dita di mandorle
e carminio, e ora, nel buio più alto
in cui sei, forse dischiudi altre porte,
sei custode di porti, mutata d'egida
come la vedetta prima, con gli occhi
di rapace; i piedi ti fremono
sul mare stellato.

Madre mattutina, da queste pozze
algide che fuggono, dove la terra
perduta pare donarci le stelle,
ricordi, sussurri ancora:
« inizia »,
e mi prendi sul fianco,
e spingi il mio piede:
« va'? »

Entravi così piano, occultatrice
delle tristezze, madre delle
carezze, mi portavi
il caffè e le vesti, spalancavi
la luce. Lontana, lontana,
madre di maggio, delle ombre de delle rose,
mare dei princìpi,

hai ancora la mia bocca
come la tua? Ho pensato
all'areola del rovo oltremarino
per l'amarezza, ti ho visto
architrave delle fiamme grigie,
mandorla del fuoco inconsumabile,
per il sostegno,
t'ho sentito
ombra dell'orizzonte
non ancora lacrima, per la speranza,
t'amavo
mola della rupe gravida
e non molata, per la gravezza.

Ma come un manto di sabbie nere
il tuo volto che il tempo ha denigrato
avvolge la mia anima
in una pelle d'aurora negra.
È il tempo, è il tempo
che l'ha fatto, che ha tolto l'oro
e che ci ha mascherato.

Un giorno come questo, velo mio,
dall'aurata fresca primavera
sul fondo della terra e delle tombe
mi fu covato il petto in nero,
covato il cuore, tintinnò
come un gabbiano incarcerato;
inarcavo le ciglia, ad archi e ad ali
battevo con il becco contro il sole.
Il cuore crucciato fu pugno che mi caccia
ancora sugli asfalti, ancora vedo
che mi guardavi, ansiosa.

E m'affacciavo
alle estati saline innamorate.
Nel nuoto azzurro delle isole,
nei gridi delle barche solitari, nelle
salite dei colli sbiancati di stoppie
esangui, salate, crude
di voli e di venti assolati,
era l'estate vorace, già divorata
di miele. E mai
sguscivo dal mare, ala della siepe
posata sui sonni, protettrice.
Eppure paresti aprire soltanto
dimore di piombo e di piume, per me.

Da quella sponda di perla e di viola
in cui la tua parola vibra,
pianta meravigliosa
non ancora risorta dall'onda
amara della memoria,
da quella bocca, d'onde allo specchio
mi parlo, con occhi arsi, e non mi vedo,
la prima onda della veste delle maree
ritorni, notturna aurora piegata
come da questo sfinestrato sguardo
in cui compare e scorre il mare
che ho perduto, in me.
Onorata di lacrime, e di canto
di un più radioso aprile, allora
davant ai pini e alle vertrate, alle quattro
dell'alba, acclamata da ricci di gole
di merli, e da fiori dischiusi, come
di rose, la mia gola anche salutava
un'aria candida e vermiglia.

Madre mattutina, all'ora bianca
come nube di pane, ti facevi
ghirlanda, eri una tela bianca, eri
come la Carna che all'ora dei fischi e
delle acque si appresta, si dà; eppure
dall'Adriatico che si dilama
come una tavola, da questa tolda oliata
che il senso e il desiderio vapora nei precordi,
mi si sfilava il cinto dove s'adorna
l'impazienza tenera, che l'iride recluso
dell'amore intimo fa suasivo
nell'illusione;
si levigava
su quella tela bianca; essa era la
superficie elisia e immobile del
liquido dell'anima, Carna, e senza
battenti d'onde, priva di frangenti, come la
Strige stigia che ti spezza il becco
nelle viscere, piomba
sullo scricciolo semi addormentato, tu
mi hai ucciso.

Madre mattutina, madre del focolare,
nutrice delle acque stigie,
coraggiosa,
anche in te era la Nemesi
che volava sulle acque altissime,
e fu coperta, e sgrondò
come un sole nuovo

l'uovo di giacinto
rosso
sull'obliquo albore del mare
trattenuto
dal tempo.
Ma su questo lido vedo
la bellezza bianca
della colomba, la
prima ala più vasta
che l'ha recata, il vivo
serpe sdipanare dal mare e dalle
piume bianche il suo smeraldo,
e non so, se come il
drago d'aria o l'ofide che sbocca
dalla sabbia algosa, lei vada
verso il sole o tramonti
alla terra, o guereggi,
in morte molle, senza speranza.
Anch'io nell'illusione del mondo,
violenta, raddoppio le vendette
contro di me.
Come dall'oblò d'uno specchio cavo
lucidi i miei sogni e di amnii non lievi,
ma così simili
all'essenza d'ala di libellula,
Nemesi,
slitto dal litorale lastricato
senza che l'alba fasci una speranza.

Madre della morte.
Guerriera altera, senza fortuna
che non sia di canto, qual è il sole
contro cui si drizza
il tuo cuore?
Sono adesso nel punto che sospende
una frontiera sola, scalpitano gli
zoccoli d'arancio e di cinabro
del risveglio, navicelle di velluto
e di fucsie tralucono dopo
le nottiluche, veleggia
l'anima del mondo
e si riespande,
vacilla il vino profondissimo
del calice
marino.

Così vacilla nel profondo
tormentato l'Oriente del mare blando.
Brillano risonanze di martelli,

campane concordano maree, rifonde
la luna bianca il sangue la furia il fango
delle nostre vene.
Tra la superficie e l'abisso
trapassa un'agonia di fiamma,
un'agonia di danza,
un'agonia di forza,
la danza del fosforo
che ingialla in un ovario immenso
il globo.

Madra mattutina, madre della morte.
Speranza vana del travaglio, opale freddo
e lontano come la luna amareggiata.
Quale, quanta la distanza,
fra la vita e la morte che continua
e ci conduce?

Donna morte, madre di morte. Remota, remota
madre ottobrina delle prime brume,
mare delle fini,
non è il luogo la tua bocca
del mio tempo rovesciato?
In quante vesti atroci, io ti ho pensata.
Oh, ma pure, se penso, a come sempre siamo state
su questo golfo sole come ora,
e ora sola com'eri, ti vedo, e
come sono, i tuoi occhi li rivedo
caldi, e un'ambra di mora rosata
sfiora le tue guance,
o spinosissima, o donna dura
di rovo.

Madre mattutina, evoco
le tue labbra d'iride morte, il
simulacro che avanza sulle acque
nude, sulla natura che ancora trema
dei geli della notte.

Madre mattutina, madre della polvere
del latte e dell'argento,
che fai nascere il sole dal cavo
della notte delle onde
infinita,
guardami, con te sulle sponde
di questo vetro
dove seguo un nastro di luce,
luce,
ti inseguo.

L'Arco di Giano

Perduta una sera, sotto la luna di marzo
bianca come una cialda, batteva come il glutine
traslucido, come una Venere, una cera di latte
sospesa sui nostri passi lentissimi, a
scendere il crocicchio sotto le quattro parti
del Palatino.

« Padre, chi sei? O madre mattutina? » Spalanchi
le vie tritando il sale e il grano per metri
di mani, di piedi, di teste contate in parti, e
il sangue solo corra, scenda, s'arrontondi in
tromba di primavera e mormorii d'archi,
fiottando nei rigagnoli dell'argilla rossa:
colmava il San Giovanni, era uno specchio nero
dell'Isola Tiberina, a Roma.

Tu avevi una via. Si puntava come l'ariete
fra le ciglia con gola di narciso; verde liocorno
fra le ciglia. Spalancata dalla soglia
che la saggina rossa e oro spazza vorticosa,
ripete d'ora in ora le sue voci,
dà i balzi, rotola, rintocca.
Peggio che fango. Spazzato ogni teatro con
quattro assi perduti e contro il buio.

Discende dalla luna l'agnello che saltella
con il ciuffo molato, con il collo sgozzato.
C'era un odore di latte e di vento, quella
sera. Io non sapevo avanzare, fra l'arco di
Giano e il Velabro, con te.
Io non sapevo che verità e luogo
fosse allora. Ma la luna mi succhiava
dentro un fango bianco, un sangue d'astragalo
sibilava: « Ordine »: le quattro zampe
ficcate nel suolo, grondava ghiaccio
di cadavere e marmo maestoso.
Come la più grave delle bellezze,
la belva massiccia aveva oculi arcuati,
statici, selenii.

Così soli, eravamo. I rifiuti,
transenne. Sotto guizzavano le strade
laminate. Di là non più
asfodeli o lecci. I pini.
Nel sapore di ferro di quel seno sgusciato
di cielo, si agitava una matta fra i soffi dei
gatti di pelo rancio. Che tesoro gratti
su queste soglie grasse?
Dove ingabbierai gli uccelli, il sangue, le acque,
e ti farai moneta? Una battuta sfoglia,
o questa luna? Oh come soli,
come soli allora, tu e io.

Qui cominciava l'ordine.
Non era una candela esposta agli uragani.
Non era una battaglia per le onde.
Dalla cornucopia gonfia della terra,
infinite le lingue nei millenni,
rese pure dal taglio e dalla fiamma,
risalivano buie. Sentieri di grotte
nella memoria in trecce di mormorii,
gorgoglii di vero sotto la luna,
tornate ad ogni luna. Un'argilla
che oscilla come un orologio.

Io le sentivo. Ti guardavo, dicevo: « Perché
qui ci sono voci, troppe, e il silenzio.
è atroce? Questo gesso
che mi perfora il cuore, meraviglioso,
mi inchioda:
è un terrore? Io l'ho sognato.
Mutato; era un giardino quadrato
strappato da popoli dentro le onde.
Era verde, mutevole, nobile.
Qui è l'orrore del candido, la calce
dell'anima ».

Oh, quelle lingue annerite! Balbettano
come tamburi, battiti di terra.
E questa luna, che le attira e
le alimenta!
Lo sanno ora che il fuoco che le mosse
alla bestemmia e al canto, che le schizzò
dal ceppo,
va per il vento come la maree,
è una pelle d'aria,
è l'estasi più tarda della luna di marzo?

III. La Fonte

Quando bevi a un'altra fontana, o vuoi farlo,
scoprono gli occhi la lora caverna.
Inizi a ruotare, centrifugato
come un astronauta o un cencio.
Dove vedesti gli occhi che ti mossero?
Fu colpa di chi non ti ha voluto bene?
Dicevi: « Tu mi dici che mi ami,
ma lo negano i tuoi gesti ».
E: « Una sola persona che mi ha amata
senza illusioni c'è, ma non la posso avere ».
E ruota allora, di centro a periferia
di serraglio. Sosta solo alle fontane
dove ti muti come primavera,
risperimenta il sapore fuggente
dell'alternanza. Così presa, prendi,
del martirio ripeti la vittoria
circoscritta: non lo sapevi tu che
« Amore ha questa legge e tal statuto
che ciascun che non ama, essendo amato,
ama po' lui né gli è amor creduto,
acciò che 'l provi il mal ch'egli ha donato »?

V. Euridice

Teneva in mano la foto di lei, sussurrava:
« Benché la strada sia impercorribile,
ti strapperò di dove sei ».
E le labbra mute di lei mormoravano:
« È tua la notte invincibile,
è morte sposata. I tuoi sogni
si disfano come la carne ».
« Arcuerò una musica stregata
venendo a te, la parola
che ti ricondurrà
alla nostra casa. »
Ma lei disse, allo scoccare del sole:
« Ormai io sono dove non guardi. E poi,
verresti a me con legacci e fardelli,
con la tua gabbia indosso? »

from
FURORE DELLE ROSE/
WRATH OF THE ROSES

Rosita Copioli
tr. from the Italian by Renata Treitel

Mater Matuta

Morning mother, from the doors
of the tamarisks, born from the tissue
of the threshold stone,
ancient mother, now remote, you appear to me
from the dawn window of an early
train
that runs along the sea, before the sun's
awakening, the first gray edge of the water
is only just rising, not yet
light, and I remember how in the past
you watched over my sleep, you came in
to look at me. I could feel from the mirror
a light, you had fingers of almond
and carmine and now inside the highest darkness
in which you dwell, perhaps you disclose other doors,
you are keeper of ports, changed to aegis
like the first watch with rapacious
eyes. Your feet quiver
on the starry sea.

Morning mother, from these algid
pools that flash past, where the lost
land seems to bestow stars on us,
do you remember, do you still whisper,
"Begin,"
and hold me by your side
and push my foot,
"Go?"

You entered so softly, concealer
of sorrows, mother of
caresses, you brought me
coffee and clothes, opened
wide the light. Remote, remote,
May mother of shadows and roses,
sea-mother of beginnings,
do you still have my mouth

the same as yours? I thought of
the areola of the ultramarine bramble
because of your bitterness, I saw you
architrave of the gray flames,
mandorla of the ever-burning fire,
because of your support,
I felt you
shadow of the horizon
not yet tear-drop, because of your hope.
I loved you,
grinding stone of the gravid not yet
ground cliff, because of your heaviness.

But like a cloak of black sand
your face, which time has denigrated,
wraps my soul
in a skin of black dawn.
Time, time
did this, time took the gold away
and disguised us.

On a day like today, o my veil,
of breezy cool spring
against a background of earth and graves,
black smoldered in my bosom,
my heart jingled
like a jailed seagull.
I arched my eyebrows. By arches and by wings
I knocked my bill against the sun.
The troubled heart was a fist that even now
drives me away onto the pavements. I still see you
gaze at me, anxious.

And I leaned
over the salty lovesick summers.
In the blue swimming of the islands,
in the lonely cries of the boats, in the
slopes of the white-stubbed hills
bleached, briny, poor
in flights and sun-drenched winds,
stood the hungry summer, already stripped
of honey. And I would never
slip out of the sea, hedge's wing
wavering on sleep, defender.
You seemed to open only dwellings
of lead and feathers, for me.

From that pearly and purple shore
where your word echoes,

wondrous plant
not yet reborn from memory's
bitter wave,
from that mouth in whose mirror
I speak to myself with burning eyes, and yet don't see myself in,
you return first wave of the tides'
robe, nocturnal dawn folded up
as the sea I lost
ebbs and flows,
from this defenestrated gaze.
Then, honored with tears and with song
of a most radiant April,
facing the pines and the tall glass windows, at four
in the morning, cheered by throaty
blackbirds' whorls and by half-open flowers, like
roses, my throat too greeted
a clear, vermilion air.

Morning mother, at the hour bleached
like a cloud of bread, you changed
to wreath, you were a white canvas, you were
like Carna who gets ready and gives herself at the hour
of hissings and floods; and yet
from the Adriatic that stretches
like a table, from this oily deck
which breathes with the sense and the desire inside the heart,
my girdle, trimmed with tender impatience, slipped off
in the illusion that innermost love
makes tempting to the secluded
iris.
One became refined
on that white canvas. It was the
Elysian and still surface
of the soul's liquid, Carna. And with no
pounding of waves, devoid of reefs, like
the Stygian owl that sinks its beak
into the entrails or plummets
on the half-asleep wren, you
killed me.

Morning mother, mother of the hearth,
wet-nurse of the Stygian marsh,
brave mother,
Nemesis too was inside you
flying on the high waters,
and she was drenched and dripped
the hyacinth egg
red
like a new sun

on the sea's sidelong dawning
held back
by time.
But, on this shore, I see
the white beauty
of the dove, the
larger wing that first
brought it here, the live
snake uncoiling its emerald
from the sea and from the white plumes,
and I don't know whether, like the
dragon of air or the serpent that slides out
of the algae-covered sand, the dove flies
towards the sun or sets
on earth, or wages war,
hopeless, in gentle death.
I, too, violent in the illusion of the world,
redouble the many revenges
against myself.
My dreams, lucid and amnia-heavy,
as if reflected from the porthole of a concave mirror,
yet so much like
the essence of a firefly wing,
Nemesis,
I glide from the flagged littoral,
and dawn holds no hope.

Mother of death.
Haughty warrior, with no fortune
other than song, against what sun
does your heart
rise?
I am at the place now which suspends
only one frontier. The orange
and cinnabar hoofs of the awakening
are beating. Velvet and fuchsia-hued
nautilus shine in the wake of
the noctiluca. The world's soul
sails
and swells again.
The deepest wine
of the sea chalice
wavers.

In the same way, the Orient of the calm sea
wavers in its tortured depths.
Echoes of hammers sparkle.
Bells pacify the tides. The white moon
melts again the blood the wrath the mud

in our veins.
Between surface and abyss
flashes an agony of flames,
an agony of dance,
an agony of might,
the dance of the phosphorus
which turns the globe into a huge yellow
ovary.

Morning mother, mother of death.
Vain hope of our affliction, cold opal
and remote like the embittered moon.
Between life and death
how far is it, what is the distance,
that pulls and leads us on?

Dead woman, mother of death. Remote, remote,
October mother of the early mists,
sea-mother of endings,
isn't your mouth the place
of my reversed time?
In how many atrocious garments I have imagined you!
And yet, when I consider how we've always stood
alone on this gulf as we stand at this moment,
and now alone the way you were,
the way I am, I see the warmth
of your eyes again, and a berry-pink amber
brushes your cheeks,
o thorny, thorny, o bramble-hard
woman.

Morning mother, I evoke
your lips of dead iris, the
unreal likeness that moves forth on the naked
waters, on nature still shivering
with the chill of the night.

Morning mother, mother of the dust
of the milk and of the silver,
you make the sun rise from the hollow
of the night of the waves,
infinite,
look at me, here with you on the shore
of this boundless glass
where, following a ribbon of light,
light,
I chase you.

The Arch of Janus

Lost one evening under a wafer-white March
moon beating down like translucent
gluten, like a Venus, a milky wax
hanging on our gradual steps
down to the crossing under the quadrangle
of the Palatine.

"Father, who are you? Or morning mother?" You open
wide the roads grinding the salt and the wheat
for layer upon layer of hands, of feet, of heads counted apart.
May only blood run, flow down, round off
in spring cloudbursts, in murmuring arches,
streaming out in rivulets of red clay:
the San Giovanni was cresting, black mirror
of the Tiber Island, in Rome.

You had a road. It pointed like the battering ram
between the lashes, narcissus-throated; green unicorn
between the lashes. Wide open from the threshold,
which the red and gold broom sweeps in a circle,
the road echoes its voices hour after hour,
leaps, rolls, tolls.
Worse than mud. Swept out every theater of four
useless boards, and against the dark.

The skipping lamb descends from the moon
with its shorn tuft, with its gushing throat.
There was a smell of milk and wind that
evening. I could not move on with you
between the Arch of Janus and the Velabro.
I did not know, then, what truth and place
that was. But the moon was engulfing me
inside white mud, a blood of astragalus
hissed, "Order": the four paws
pinned to the ground, the lamb was dripping ice
of cadaver and majestic marble.
Like the most solemn of beauties,
the huge wild beast had arched eyes,
motionless, moon-like.

We were so alone. Trash,
barriers. Laminated streets
darted underneath. No more
asphodel or holly up there. Pine-trees.
In the iron taste of that drifting inlet
of sky, a mad woman was stirring among whiffs
of rancid-furred cats. What treasure do you scratch
on these fat thresholds?
Where will you cage the birds, the blood, the waters,
and make yourself money? A counterfeit gold leaf,
this moon? O how alone,
how very alone at that moment, you and I.

Order began here.
It was not a candle exposed to the hurricanes.
It was not a battle for the waves.
From the swollen cornucopia of the earth,
infinite through millennia and
purified by blending and fire,
the tongues rose again dark. Paths of grottoes
in the memory, in braids of murmurs,
gurgling of truth under the moon,
meetings with every moon. A clay
swinging like a clock.

I could hear those tongues. Looking at you, I said, "Why
are there voices here, even too many, and yet the silence
is dreadful? This chalk
stabbing my wondrous heart
nails me here:
is it terror? I dreamed of it.
Different. It was a square garden
snatched from the people inside the waves.
It was green, changeable, noble.
There is the horror of the white here, the whitewash
of the soul."

O those charred tongues! They stammer
like drums, throbs of earth.
And this moon draws them
and nourishes them!
Do they know now that the fire that drove them
to curse and sing, that cast them forth
from the tree,
moves with the wind like the tides,
a skin of air,
the belated ecstasy of the March moon?

III. The Fountain

When you drink, or intend to drink, from another fountain,
your eyes discover their cavity.
You start rolling, spinning
like an astronaut or a rag.
Where did you see the eyes that moved you?
Was it the fault of the one who did not love you?
You said, "You tell me you love me
but your gestures deny it."
You said, "Only one person, whom I cannot have,
loved me without illusions."
Roll then, from center to periphery
of harem. Stop only at the fountains
where you turn like spring,
taste again the fleeting flavor
of alternation. Thus absorbed, grab,
repeat the circumscribed victory
of martyrdom: didn't you know that
"love has a statutory law
that one who's loved, but does not love,
must then love, but not be believed.
Thus he feels the distress he gave."

"love has a statutory law/… distress he gave." From Charles Ross's translation of Boiardo's *Orlando Innamorato,* Book 2, Canto 15, Stanza 54 (where Amore appears to Rinaldo and castigates him for not reciprocating Angelica's love), Oxford World's Classics series, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, p.562.

V. Eurydice

He was holding her picture in his hand, whispered,
"Though the road is arduous,
I'll snatch you from that place."
And her silent lips murmured,
"The invincible night is yours,
wedded to death. Your dreams
decay like flesh.
"I shall stretch a spell-binding music
when I come to you, the word
that will take you back
to our home."
But at sunrise she said,
"By now I am where you don't stare. Besides,
would you come to me with strings and bundles,
wearing your cage?"

Note to these translations:
Rosita Copioli is a poet of nature and myth. "Mater Matuta" and "Arch of Janus" are the two opening poems of her collection *Furore Delle Rose / Wrath of the Roses.* She invokes a female goddess and a male god to resume a thread that comes from her first poetry collection *The Blazing Lights of the Sun* (Los Angeles, Sun & Moon Press, 1996). From her concern for the vegetable world and the origin of life in *The Blazing Ligths of the Sun,* Rosita Copioli moves to the origins of civilizations and man's position in the order of things: from chaos to some form. –R.T.

SUITCASES

Cynthia Tedesco

That night, between courses of fine Bolognese cuisine, Lella and I played in the kitchen of her family's restaurant, running in and out, through the swinging oak doors. All I remember when the doors swung open that last time was Cook's horrified face, and water, boiling water endlessly pouring over me out of the big, black cauldron Cook and his assistants were carrying from the hearth.

As I lay waiting in his arms for the car to be brought around to take me to the hospital, I thought, "I must tell Cook not to worry, I don't feel any pain, none at all," but I could not catch my breath to form the words.

§

My mother screamed at the doctors. My father held her back, keeping her red-painted nails from scratching the black-bearded faces of the white-coated doctors.

She yelled, "Life is hard enough for a woman with two legs, even if she is beautiful! Imagine having only one! I'd rather have a dead daughter than a daughter with one leg, she will live or she will die with her two legs!"

"Yes Mama, please Mama, don't let them cut off my leg!" I cried.

My parents took me to our home, which was on the grounds of the minimal security prison of Bologna where my father served as warden. I knew then I was dying.

"Please Mama come to Heaven with me, don't make me go all alone," I implored.

My mother said she would come. To prove she really meant to make the journey with me she took out her suitcase and before my eyes she packed a sweater; a skirt, her lace night-gown, her best pearls, and I reminded her to bring the amber comb set so I could brush her beautiful hair as I always do.

Yesterday, before going to the restaurant, we visited Mt. Rosa at Varalla Sesia in the Navarra Province. Mama took me to see the Stations of the Cross. Poor Jesus. How I wept for Him in His stone robes.

Now as I toss and turn in bed, I dream terra cotta wings flutter over my cities of Bologna, London and the Borough of Queens. Three Angels come for me. Their robes are of alabaster with coral tips at the outskirts of their feathers. They shine so luminously that I bow my head before them. One of the Angels holds a cup just like the one Jesus took. It's gold with studs of amethyst embedded in its curves. The Angel who holds the cup begs me to drink from it, but I'm afraid and do not drink. I have insulted Him, and oh I'm so ashamed! Yet this Angel approaches me and gently pushes the bangs away from my eyes. I can tell He is warning me. I see a spiral of light. I feel a great warmth emanating from Him when suddenly all is absorbed into the vortex of my dream. The Chalice once full, is now empty, and is drained with or without me.

I tell Mama about the Angels and the Chalice but it is her warrior's hands I see before me keeping me safe and whole.

My parents decide to send for Alemanno, my father's most trusted and favorite prisoner, to keep me company. The hours become days and my fever rises. Papa can no

longer stay away from his duties at the Prison. My mother can no longer resist the urge to fall asleep. Her body is so very swollen with that pesky baby brother yet to come.

Alemanno tells me that he has been in the prison so long that he and no one else can remember his crime. When Papa offered him an "Official Prison Pardon," Alemanno said he refused. Laughing and with a wink of an eye, he said he's too old for such drastic changes, that his world had vanished.

"So they think the prison's garden can make do without me! So they think the prison's cook actually orders the groceries! So they think the laundress will iron if I'm not around to tell her what to do!" Alemanno certainly grumbles a lot.

Yet for now, Alemanno makes dolls of great beauty out of bread for me. He makes flowers: roses. The prisoners are not allowed any knives or scissors or paint-brushes so he must wet red tissue paper and rub the finger-molded dough forms with the run-off dye. I play with my bread-dolls and wear the flowers strung up as necklaces about my neck. Alemanno does all that I ask as I order him around relentlessly.

Though talented in telling fortunes and interpreting dreams, Alemanno refuses to read my palm or cards. My tea-leaves hold no interest for him. My death is final; until one day while playing with my dolls during my long hours of dying, Alemanno whispers into my ear, "A very important visitor is going to come here soon. Be a good girl and do not boss me around in his presence. Pretend I am a Government Official as grand as your own Papa. You will have to call me Rabbi Alemanno, and the visitor, Rabbi Patista. Or if you wish, and I would prefer you do so, you can call your visitor 'Great-grandpapa'."

"Is he my *real* Great-grandpapa?" I ask wide-eyed, "and if he is, where is my Grandfather?"

Alemanno, I mean Rabbi Alemanno, tells me, "It is no use trying to understand the ways of the grown-old heart." He uses words like, "Sitting Shiva" and says, "Your Papa's dead to Rabbi Patista because your Papa's father married out of his faith, married a girl of a different religion."

I ask, "What exactly is faith and why are there so many religions?"

Rabbi Alemanno says, "Faith is the one way to trust and love G-d."

"Why is there only one way?" There are many more questions I want to ask but I am becoming exhausted. Rabbi Alemanno seems to read my mind and tells me, "You must not worry about that which is a pure gift."

I hear noise. I hear greetings. I hear my parents crying and laughing. I hear a much deeper voice. It is muffled but strangely familiar. I hear many feet running up the marble staircase as they approach my room. I can no longer sit up in bed for the fever will not break and as it rises and rises my scalded leg begins to fester as the surgeons swore it would.

Great-grandpapa now sits beside me wearing a long black coat and a small, black, round cap upon his head. A basket of figs is next to him and he begins to eat them. I see a white light glow from the center of his forehead. The light grows brighter with each bite of fig he takes until my room is totally engulfed in white light. My parents sit near my cherrywood canopied bed. Above the bed is a chandelier, its crystals chiming to what my mother assures me are the loud eruptions of near-by Mt. Rosa. My bed moves as a ship at sea. No one pays any attention to the chandelier keeping time to the voices of my new Great-grandpapa, Rabbi Patista, and Rabbi Alemanno who are chanting "The Story of the Golems" to me.

All the bread dolls Rabbi Alemanno made when he was "Alemanno" are now on the floor in a circle. As the Rabbis begin to chant once again, my parents stand and join them in the circle. Amazed, I see them all dance around the dolls, moving and whirling

faster and faster until there is a pause and I can see them again. Then faster and faster they whirl, madly, in the other direction. I hear a chorus of voices chanting what Great-grandpapa says are *The Sacred Combinations* to create *An Influx of Wisdom* that will grow with the speed of *The Dance.*

Great-grandpapa opens a suitcase and removes a silk sack of *Pure Virgin Soil* and a *Vial of Living Water.* He sprinkles both earth and water over my dolls. They dance again and when they've circled the dolls seven times, the dolls glow red as burning coals and the voices grow louder while *The Dance* creates a wind so strong it raises the Doll-Golems to their feet.

Great-grandpapa orders me to say, "And G-d blew the soul of life into his nostrils and man became a living thing."

Rabbi Alemanno tells me, "Do not be afraid. You must do and say what Rabbi Patista commands."

But I am terrified and I do not speak. Rabbi Alemanno lifts me into his arms and turns and whirls, slowly whispering each word. He waits for me to whisper back to him. We turn. We turn in circles as I say the great words from Genesis. My dolls stand before me breathing as living men and women.

They bow to Great-grandpapa and to Rabbi Alemanno who tells the Golems – once dolls – "Go and bring back the fruit from the Garden of the Ancient Two Trees. It must be the one that will cure this child." Into each Golem's mouth he places a tiny scroll of paper with the secret name of G-d written on it. The Golems vanish.

My mother is on her knees with her rosary beads, carved from walnut shells, in her hands. My breath is fast and shallow. My flat little chest is covered with the crocheted blanket that the nuns of San Genesius made for my family.

The Golems return dragging bushels and bushels of cabbages. Great-grandpapa tells Mama to undress me and leaf by leaf they all help to make a poultice of cabbage leaves to place on my scalded leg. The cabbage leaves begin to cook from the heat of my burning body. The room fills with the odor of cooked cabbage and meat. When the leaves wilt they remove them, replacing each one. The cabbage leaves lie on the floor like a wreath of daisies, pure white with a bright yellow center of my flesh and pus. All night the Rabbis, the Golems, and my parents work on my leg.

In my delirium I see my three children: Daniel, Edward and Charles emerge from the future like photo negatives or delayed echoes that hover in ether. They shout at me and demand, "Mother you must not die, you must live, do not fail those who love you from what is yet to be!" Their bodies were as transparent as the nuns' embroidery lit by the candles of the chandelier.

In the morning when I awaken I find my leg does not pain me. My fever is gone along with the Golems and Great-grandpapa. I can stand and move about freely. I creep silently out of bed without waking my parents or Rabbi Alemanno. They are asleep and scattered around the room like gigantic unstrung puppets. From the suitcase beside my bed I take out and put on my mother's lace nightgown, her white sweater and brown skirt. I slip her pearls over my head.

Silently I tip-toe out of my bedroom in my bare feet, holding the hems of the nightgown and skirt above my knees so I do not trip. Passing through the corridors of the Villa I make my way to the front door. Once outside I run, still gripping my mother's hems, to the prison's kitchen because I am hungry and want to show off my grownup clothes.

The kitchen staff weeps when they see me. Everyone hugs and kisses each other. I sit on the lap of the chief cook. Biscuits and espresso are served to all.

"She has experienced a great miracle because of her father's goodness," one cook whispers. Another speaks of the terrible bombing that took place this past week during my illness. Still another says, "Few know her parents are secretly protecting our Italian Jews and Resistance Workers within the walls of the Prison." I am confused by all I hear but I remember every word. When I finish eating the biscuits I slip off the lap of the chief cook. The staff is so busy talking amongst themselves that I manage to hoist the hems up and quietly slip away unobserved.

I run back to our house, still alert to the danger of letting go of Mama's skirts. To the side of the front door, on the branches of a lilac bush, a rosary and the small round black silk cap I saw Great-grandpapa wear glimmer in the morning sun with more life than the purple blossoms. I put the rosary around my neck along with the pearls. On my head I place the black cap. Quietly I sneak back to my room. I remove the cap and rosary and hide them in the lining of the suitcase.

Hoping to wake up my parents and Rabbi Alemanno I begin to speak in a loud voice, pretending to read from the Book of the Golems, which Great-grandpapa had also left behind.

When they arise, they find me standing on my two legs atop the closed suitcase beside my bed, wearing my mother's clothes.

Rabbi Alemanno points to the suitcase upon which I stand. I step off. Mama undresses me and puts me back into my own nightgown and robe. Into the suitcase go my mother's beautiful clothes and her pearls. My parents are silent. Even I am silent.

Papa nods his head to Rabbi Alemanno who takes the huge Book, the vial of Living Water, the silk sack of Virgin Soil, and puts them into the suitcase as well. He closes the suitcase with reverence. He turns to me and lifts me up and onto my bed. He gently pulls the covers over me.

"We will never speak of this to a living soul. Do you understand what a promise is?" Unsure, I nod my head as Papa did. "You must swear before G-d who hears and sees all we do that you will never break our silence." I did not know of what I should or should not speak, for what is a secret and what is a promise? I am thinking of what I overheard in the kitchen and I tell my parents and Rabbi Alemanno what I remember. My father leaves the bedroom, running. Mama has her hands over her mouth to stifle a scream. Rabbi Alemanno puts the suitcase down and goes to cradle and comfort her. I sit in my bed watching them rock back and forth in each others arms.

My father finally returns. His face is pale and sweating but he is smiling. "All is well, the others are waiting," he says softly as he opens the suitcase and puts several small rectangles of gold along with many papers and a small stone into it. Words are whispered: blackmarket, ghetto, safety, passports, borders, prison, cornerstone and the name of a ship, *The Rose of the Sea*.

Rabbi Alemanno stands up and retrieves the suitcase. He kisses my mother and hugs my father. He pulls himself up to full height and turns to me. At that moment he appears a giant of a man. I tremble as he points his finger at me, "Remember what happened! Always remember what happened to you here!" Then he put the suitcase down, swept me out of my bed into his arms, and we held fast to one another, not willing to let go, but having to let go. Several months later my father told me *The Rose of the Sea* safely reached England. "Silence Papa!" I whispered.

Part 2: CHANCE FOLLOWS ITS OWN PATH

Hua Li

Late February–early April 2001

You can often hear your own heartbeat; you might also sense the pulse of a chance. How would you feel if the two vibrations became one?

I jumped back again across the Pacific into the turbulent water of the Beijing stock market. I wanted to see how the Chinese people would seize the new opportunity that had suddenly come into their own hands. How would they face the challenge of their fate?

Let me first tell you an old Chinese legend. One day, two country brothers, one a bit tricky and covetous, the other honest and hard working, find in the mountains a cave of treasures. A fairy by the gate allows them to go inside, but tells them to take only what each wants the most without lingering, for a heavy gate would shut down at any moment and seal the cave. The honest brother goes in first, takes for himself a golden hoe, and then comes outside right away. Next the tricky brother goes in. He likes everything. One thing after another he picks up; he desires just one more thing. He forgets about time. The gate falls and there he is, inside forever.

China's B-Share

As our world was turning, the stock market in the United States went South and other markets followed. On the opposite side of the globe, however, more and more Chinese ("more and more Chinese" means millions upon millions of them), after a lot of tasting of Coca Cola and Big Macs, have come to recognizing a great power called "Capital." Particularly, they see its magic strength in the securities markets. "B-Share" is a class of stocks in China formerly designated for overseas investors and traded only in foreign hard currency, which the majority of Chinese supposedly do not possess.

After the government's slow, long wooing of foreign investors, it turned out that B-Share had unfortunately chased a lot of those foreigners away because of its poor transparency, inept management, and mediocre yields. Besides, foreigners have never easily comprehended China and the Chinese. As a result B-Share prices had remained as low as twenty or thirty cents per share, and were stagnant. In comparison, the "A-Share" market, open only to Chinese investors, was booming.

One morning, having been working successfully on the economy, and noticing that sitting in the central bank were seventy billion U.S. dollars in personal deposits owned by domestic Chinese, the government pronounced a *fiat* and broadcast it to the nation and the world. It came as a shock and was implemented that very day. On February 19, 2001, the B-Share market wold halt trading completely for reform and reopen one week later to all citizens in the world.

Chinese citizens from far and near, from all walks of life, each carrying "a little bag of money" earned at work and kept for years if not a lifetime, are approaching the gate of B-Share ownership with tremendous enthusiasm, hope, and caution.

In the first two days after the government's pronouncement, over 340,000 new B-Share trading accounts were set up, waiting for the market to reopen, surpassing the total number of accounts opened in the previous ten years. The telephone company's statistics showed that the number of daily long-distance calls from all over China into Shanghai, where the B-Share headquarter is located, rose to 100,009,000 per day versus an usual daily number of 45,000 calls. I landed in Beijing on February 24, two days before the reopening. I felt the pulse of the Chinese dragon and dove into the water where he is without any hesitation.

Real Tests Inside the Gate of the Cave

Greed

No sooner had I squeezed into the B-Share market then I found that I had come upon a fantastic bonanza. Stock prices were soaring ten percent day by day. (Within ten weeks, the B-Share index would double, then triple.)

I was restless, rushing about Beijing, chasing big money, scolding myself and blaming mistakes on others. To my great regret and dismay, during all of the sleepless weeks to come, I would come so very close to grabbing a million U.S. dollars, yet would be kept a fingertip away. How come? Because I got inside the gate of first opportunity late, because I picked two wrong stocks based on others' opinions, and because the trading house used a computer system that responded too slowly. If only...

Quietly listening to me tell my experiences, a B-Share fellow trader said something I would not forget: "It is fate that does not permit you to win those million dollars. That money is destined not to be yours. It's all determined by your past, your current psyche, your characteristics, your capability of operating stocks, your attitude toward winning and losing. And right now, please be very careful not to overreact to this hot market, you could be badly burned.

"So calm down, remain in your usual position as an ordinary citizen, and try again when the next chance comes. In the meantime, you need to change and grow, do your homework in market research, and do it diligently. Be careful of the level of your desire and keep it constantly under control.

"Over several years in the stock market, I've seen many people who learn their lessons too slowly. These are the lessons of life, too. Playing stocks well is just as hard as being a good human being. I am not perfect, but if I win thirty thousand in one day, I don't act extremely happy, doing nothing but celebrating; and if I lose thirty thousand in a blink, I am just as calm as if no big deal has happened. The important thing is not to stop learning and to correct yourself tomorrow."

This is a young man in his thirties, Mr. Li, who was laid off several years ago from a factory, and since then has evolved into a full time investor in the stock market. An old Chinese saying goes: One conversation with a wise person is worth more than ten years of reading books.

Fear

Mr. Zhuang, a retired taxi driver in his late sixties, has never dreamed of playing with his life-long savings using a high-tech electric box. When he approaches a computer and reaches out to the keyboard, his fingers are shaking. A younger fellow sees his shaking hand and kindly offers to help punch in the numbers on the keyboard. Mr. Zhuang does need more money to "fill up the vegetable bucket"-- a Chinese expression meaning "bringing food to the table." Additionally, the recent mandatory changes in the medical

care system (somewhat similar to that of the United States), mean that his health insurance will no longer be covered completely by the government. So many things make him afraid of this B-Share market: major stock traders might be manipulating the ups and downs of prices; foreign investors might suddenly withdraw from the market for some unknown reason. What if a computer virus should launch an attack? What if a fight between the Mainland and Taiwan blazes into the fire of war? For most Chinese small investors, fears like Mr. Zhuang's could easily overwhelm their confidence or desire. They are vulnerable in the face of various unintended and unforeseeable possibilities. Their personal financial conditions have limited their perceptions, understanding, and capacities for risk. Nevertheless, they've made their individual decisions based on various personal situations and have entered the B-Share market.

It is a matter of surviving and learning to punch those keys on their own and they must use their own heads now! Confronting the weakness of human nature, you always need support and encouragement, and there's plenty of that in Chinese society, inside securities houses, for instance: they are so much different than in the independent and individualized western world.

The trading houses every day flock with the movement of black-haired heads. You hear heated discussions, concerned suggestions, provident warnings, and valuable advice. Arguments born of disagreement fill up the halls with their noise. With mutual help, traders combine their strengths and wisdom, hanging on for the long-term and growing gradually, using special strategy when wrestling with bigger guys. Every one is becoming less fearful and more tenacious as a result. They still need to be protected just yet, though.

Trust

In whom? Policy, Policy, Policy.

Teacher Pan is respected by many for his insight into macro- and microeconomic movements inside and outside the nation. He was a math teacher in a middle school; and now involved in trading stocks, he has quickly mastered the most sophisticated models of financial analysis, using the best computer system on the market.

Often, his enthusiastic analysis and freely-offered advice produce great value. Very often, by the end of the trading days you see him circled by men and women seeking his thoughts and opinions.

On one occasion, Teacher Pan asked me how I invested in the stock market in the United States. I told him, "You sit down in a nicely furnished office in your financial institution. Your financial advisor cordially brings you a cup of coffee with just the right amount of cream and sugar. Not like you guys: everyday you bring your own water or tea bottles from home. Your advisor is usually equipped with the most advanced financial software system. Instantly he can get the necessary data. Several times a day, he can hear on the wire top financial experts on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange talking about trading developments. Answering your questions, considering your requests, the well-trained advisor patiently explains strategies and scenarios, draws charts and calculates data, indicates all sorts of possibilities and solutions – and then together you work out your investment plan. Of course he's well paid for all of this..."

"What is the difference in terms of basic mechanisms, between their stock markets and ours?" Teacher Pan asked intently. Several people were drawn into our conversation from their computer screens. "There's a fundamental difference between us," I replied, "and that is the degree of government or administrative control imposed on the market. In their markets, the types of stocks and bonds, volume, and prices – all decisive moves – are determined by the 'market forces' – this means economic measurements such as

productivity, profitability, positive environments and so on, influence supply and demand. Political influence is kept at minimum; stock performances are ruled by the mechanism of the market. Whereas the stock market here is indeed a market in the Chinese style. The government by far and large controls various aspects of all stock operations, which are coordinated with the Five Year Plan. The government uses administrative means – it regulates the movement by which stocks are offered to the public, their distribution, scale and speed, rather than allowing a free market operated by industries, investors, financial forces, and their interactions." I can feel that my speech sounds convincing, since I'm from the United States.

"What you just said is a fact, not a solution." Teacher Pan sank into deep thought and continued, "We are all facing a series of tests inside the Chinese stock market, a test of the government, of our economy, of the B-Share, and of every one of us. And an unprecedented solution is by no means easy to figure out. China is now destined to transform herself into a market economy, but only in a different manner, not just a copy of the West.

"Obviously our stock market is still young, immature, even distorted from time to time. It cannot be compared with the well-developed Western markets. What the West cannot match is the size of our potential market. We have tremendous room for development. Foreign capital is increasingly attracted to us, and domestically, we have the expectation and vigor of 1.3 billion people. Chance follows its own path. 'When the sun isn't in the West, it's in the East.'

"Naturally, a course of transition is needed, during which there are going to be structural reforms at all levels, pain and confusion, many successes and failures. Therefore, during this period positive, effective control and regulation by the central government is crucial. I'd trust the current government and its policies, because they have helped boost our economy. Their reforms have corrected mistakes and protected the market and its benefits to small investors like us. At present, there are about thirty million investors – about one in every four Chinese is here. Our government is the biggest player, far more powerful than George Soros and the other financiers. We know there are distortions, we know their 'black hand' is manipulating prices. Our future is still not completely certain. Regardless of all that, we must trust the government. All this growth, all these promising changes have created a good leadership. 'Sometimes a structure creates a hero.' So we should have trust in our leaders. Their policies will protect us from being eaten up by greedy evils..."

"Teacher Pan," I interrupted, "But this trust in the government is the biggest test of all."

Read Part One in *Archipelago* Vol. 5, No. 1

The Persistence of Ectoplasm

Michael Rothenberg

Let me touch you there blue warbler
Something to beware of coming under-wing
That cage and mirror, cuttlebone maze
Fast approaching end of free days
I heard the hole in the ground, slit drum sing:
"Where is the real bird, real song, the real?"
In the mirror reading each line backwards
I thought I thought I was never afraid, or blush
Hunters come to lock the day in a library
Ink-stained thumbs, permission clipped tongue
Peace be with you naked in razorwire thornbush
Transcendent in being, let it rain, but if it die
The blood orange, strawberry stain
If not for that I'd be ashamed of speech
What's your name darling? Verse! *Peach*
Outcome of fleshlight falling midnight moon
Written in sand, hand-written, tidal wave
Remains tattooed to memory, a wind birth

April 6, 2001

A Conversation about Schocken Books
Part I

with ALTIE KARPER
and the Editor of *Archipelago*

Since 1997, I have been asking notable publishers and editors, a bookseller, and a journalist who follows these topic about the book business and the remarkable, disturbing alteration we have seen in its structure. Generously, they have told me how they entered the book trade; spoken about writers they've published and declined to publish; described the (changing) class structure of their domain; talked straight about money, commerce, and corporate capitalism; described their way of practicing responsible publishing. They have taken us into the precarious business of selling books, and have traced the advent and threat/promise of electronic publishing. Without exception they have been serious readers, usually of more than one language. They have recognized that times have changed. They have observed with wary friendliness the generations coming up. They have spoken out of the old values and honorable traditions of book-publishing. They, and I, have wondered whether these can still exist in corporate publishing. Several eminent editors recently published books doubting it. It's been difficult not to agree.

I thought it was time to look closely at a single publishing company, one that had played a significant role in European and American Jewish – and non-Jewish – culture. I would follow its fortunes from the days of its cultivated founder, through his death and the sale of his company to a privately-owned corporation, to its being re-organized as a small sub-division of a gigantic media conglomerate. Its existence is full of twists and ironies, of displacement across continents, its founder's intention revered but re-interpreted in a new time. Its story is corporate but, also, is composed of the intersection of enlightened personalities and the works of great writers with the most awful events of the twentieth century. Following it, I would examine the play of high culture with corporate mind-sets and see how it worked.

These new conversations will appear in the next three issues of Archipelago, *culminating this series that may serve as an opening into an institutional memory contrasting itself with the current corporate structure, reflecting on glories of its own, revealing what remains constant amid the flux. The people speaking here are strong-minded characters engaged with their historical circumstances. Out of that engagement have appeared, and continue to be published, a number of books that we can say, rightly, belong to literature.*

-KM

Schocken Books

Salman Schocken, a German Jewish magnate and philanthropist, established the Schocken Verlag in Berlin, in 1931. In the seven years his company existed – was allowed to exist – in Weimar, then Nazi, Germany, it published 225 titles of classic Hebrew works important to the educated, assimilated Jews of its founder's class and generation. Owner of a chain of department stores – the stores were devoted to mass merchandizing but many of the buildings were designed, handsomely, by the Modernist architect Erich Mendelsohn – Schocken was a man of wealth and leisure who devoted himself to collecting fine art and literature. His interests were in "Jewish liturgy and sacral poetry Biblical and midrashic texts; medieval secular Hebrew poetry; Yiddish literature from the 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries; rare and original first editions; illuminated Hebrew manuscripts, and ancient Jewish coins." While re-investigating his Jewish roots – he was "greatly influenced" by the TALES OF RABBI NACHMAN OF BRATZLAW, translated by Martin Buber – he became convinced that the great works of sacred and secular Hebrew writing

should be translated into German and published for the sake of his fellow believers. "We have no working scholarship and no books," he is said to have lamented.

> To Schocken, who found his spiritual and intellectual strength in these ancient words and ideas, this lack of books and scholarship was unbearable. So important to him were they that in the course of his World War I relief work – helping resident German Jews with Russian citizenship interned in provincial towns, Jews in areas of Lithuania and Poland occupied by the German army, and Jewish prisoners of war – he provided them with books and teaching materials, in addition to food, blankets, and medicine.
>
> In 1916, Schocken helped a German Zionist organization, the "Zionistische Vereinigung für Deutschland," establish a fund to subsidize Jewish scholarship. His hope was that some of the work produced by the recipients would be suitable for publication. When the funds proved insufficient to encourage a meaningful "arbeitende Wissenschaft," Schocken founded an academy of Jewish scholarship and a research institute for Jewish poetry, gathering around him the leading Jewish scholars of the day – including Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig.
>
> Yet neither the fund nor the academy produced many books….
>
> In 1928 Schocken thus decided to establish his own publishing house. His decision gained urgency when the Nazi regime revoked the German citizenship of Jews in 1933; every Jew who had considered himself a true German was suddenly stripped of an identity. Schocken was now fully dedicated to spreading Jewish knowledge and culture by publishing books in a popular and accessible vein, for a Jewish audience that needed these works more than ever.
>
> One of the first works was by Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, who had been commissioned by the publishing firm of Lambert Schneider to produce a new German translation of the Old Testament. Schneider's financial difficulties gave Schocken the opportunity to acquire the rights to this project, and indeed to invite Lambert Schneider himself to join his new firm.
>
> Buber and Rosenzweig's DIE SCHRIFT ("The Scriptures") formed the heart of Schocken's German publishing program. its overall goal was to bring centuries of Jewish culture and history to a German-speaking audience. Eminent scholars such as Leo Baeck and Hermann Cohen contributed titles on Jewish history, theology, and philosophy. Buber continued his work in Chassidic and kabbalistic mysticism.
>
> Along with titles in German, Schocken published classical and modern Hebrew poetry in Hebrew with a facing German translation. In addition, he began a series of *Jüdische Leserbücher*, intended for use in Jewish schools, unions, and adult education institutes.[15]

In 1933, Schocken Verlag also began publishing an annual *Almanach*, an "anthology of Jewish literature dealing with diaspora existence. It included texts from all periods and places in Jewish history, describing collective suffering but emphasizing the national salvation of the Jews, whether through the prospect of a Messiah or a Jewish homeland." The first Almanach also included a calendar for the forthcoming year, 5694, and information about contemporary Palestine; it continued to appear each year at Rosh Hashanah, until the Verlag was shut down in 1938.

In 1934, Salman Schocken emigrated to Palestine, while Lambert Schneider, his managing editor, and Moritz Spitzer, editor-in-chief, remained in Berlin, operating the company by virtue of an active exchange of letters with him. "The Verlag's final ambitious vision was called 'Gastgeschenk.' If, as the Nazis claimed, the Jews were a 'guest people,' living parasitically off their German 'hosts,' Schocken wanted to show the gifts that the guests had brought to the great body of German literature and culture. He found it particularly important that these books appear while the Jews were being closed out of German intellectual and spiritual life."

In Palestine, Schocken established the Schocken Publishing House, Ltd., under the direction of his son Gerschom. "But the climate and the political realities of life were at odds with the intellectual Zionism he had cultivated in Germany; the builders of a new state were by and large more concerned with the practical demands of agriculture, urban

planning, and social welfare. There was little demand for the treasures of ancient Hebrew literature."

In 1940, Schocken and his family – except for the one son – took ship for the United States, where he immediately joined the widening circle of brilliant German Jewish refugees adding their luster to American cultural and intellectual life. Five years later, enlisting the aid of Hannah Arendt and Nahum Glatzer, he founded Schocken Books in New York.

Like many of my generation in the late Sixties, I had any number of Schocken books of literature and social thought on my shelves. Their authority was grave and unassailable. When in Paris several years ago, I learned that there were in fact two publishers called Schocken – the second being in Israel, the name pronounced with a long o – I became interested at once in the fate of these companies and deeply curious about their founder. As a result, this serious – though, alas, hardly definitive – look at the history of Schocken Books, to appear in the next three issues of *Archipelago,* will bring the series "Institutional Memory" to a fitting, although I think disturbing, close.

The first of the conversations is with Altie Karper, the managing editor of Schocken and Pantheon Books. We spoke twice in New York, in the editorial offices of Schocken Books – located between those of Pantheon and Knopf – in late January and early May. with further correspondence by e-mail. I am indebted to her for invaluable background materials, including the pamphlet quoted in this introduction, and for her generous and open professional hospitality. Her love and respect for the legacy of Salman Schocken was moving and will be apparent in her discourse.

Salman Schocken and Schocken Verlag

KATHERINE McNAMARA: The history of Schocken Books is a remarkable story of a publishing house, from the Schocken Verlag of Berlin, founded by Salman Schocken, to the Schocken Books that is now a division of the Knopf Publishing Group, which is part of Random House, Inc., which is owned by Bertelsmann, the enormous German media corporation. Let us begin at the beginning: Salman Schocken was born in 1877, in Posnan. His father had been a small merchant…

ALTIE KARPER: …and Salman and his brother, Simon, decided to do the same thing on a grander scale, expanding from one department store that they started in 1901 eventually into a chain of nineteen, and they became very successful. He was also a man of letters and a book collector, and in the early part of the century he became a committed and active Zionist. All of this resulted in his decisions to start publishing books of Jewish interest in Germany, because he felt there was a need for educated German Jews to learn about their heritage and culture. He was busy with his department stores while he was doing this, it was a kind of avocation, but he founded Schocken Books in 1931 because he felt that there was a need that had to be filled, to publish serious works of literature and philosophy that spoke to German Jews and informed them about their heritage, about where they came from: that's why Schocken Verlag came into being.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: In THE INVENTION OF HEBREW PROSE, Robert Alter traces the development of the Hebrew novel after the Haskalah, the Jewish Enlightenment. The movement of Hebrew from a sacred into a modernized secular literature began in about the 1880s, Alter writes, when all these bright young men from the *shtetlach,* the small villages in the outreaches of the empire, came to the cities and decided to write novels; and it continued, not without harsh setbacks, into the 1930s, when it was stopped for good in European catastrophe. He says, "In Germany, two fine Hebrew publishing houses were

active, Stybel … and Schocken (the latter also having a German-language operation), which in the quality of their literary titles and the elegance of their typography and bookbinding would not be surpassed by any of their Israeli successors."[16]

There is also a small essay by Anthony David Skinner, called "Salman Schocken and the Jewish Renaissance."[17] Let me read from it, as well, because it leads to a question I want to ask about Schocken's intentions. Skinner writes, "A cultural movement that absorbed Kafka's METAMORPHOSIS into the Jewish canon offered a Judaism more defined by the tastes and judgments of writers, editors, scholars, and entrepreneurs than by tradition. Hence the irony that one of the leading figures in the Jewish renaissance was the department store magnate Salman Schocken. Through the media empire Schocken established in Berlin, Jewish culture left the arena of the sacred and entered into the mass market." It's a provocative statement. As I understand it, Salman Schocken was interested in Hebrew literature – the *necessary* books of Hebrew literature – but he thought that an increasingly assimilated population that spoke German, needed access to these books. He published in translation, in German: did he publish also in Hebrew?

ALTIE KARPER: In Germany, he published classical and modern Hebrew poetry in Hebrew with facing German translation. But he didn't undertake a major Hebrew publishing program until he moved to what was then Palestine, in 1934. In Germany he published in German; but the kinds of translations he was interested in publishing in German were the Bible and classic works of Jewish philosophy, to make these volumes accessible to assimilated German Jews. He was interested in acquainting German Jews with the Jewish philosophers of the day – Buber, Rosenzweig, Gershom Scholem, and Walter Benjamin – and in publishing contemporary secular Jewish intellectuals.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: Let me make a little diversion. America during the '20s and '30s saw the beginnings and rise of important publishing in New York by Jewish publishing houses. The fortunes that founded the New York Jewish publishing houses also came from dry-goods merchants. Why was this so: the great fortunes built upon merchandising coinciding with Jewish secular literature being published by means of those fortunes?

ALTIE KARPER: I think it's as basic as the fact that there were professions that were just not open to Jews at this time: in banks, in law firms, in publishing houses. There were quotas for law schools and medical schools. But no one said you couldn't open up your own dry-goods business, so that's where many of them went.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: Of course. And then they used their fortunes for this great cultural work. Perhaps there are books on the subject in English, about the Schocken Verlag and its milieu? The Verlag was founded in 1931. Hitler came to power in 1933. We know from many sources what the atmosphere in Berlin was like at that time, but, specifically, what sort of an environment did Schocken and his circle live in?

ALTIE KARPER: I think that they were aware that this was not going to have a good end; that it was going to have a horrible end. In fact, I think it was a combination of his awareness of what was going on in Germany and his Zionism that made him, very shortly after he founded Schocken Verlag, move to Palestine and get involved in publishing there. He ran Schocken Verlag pretty much from afar from about 1934 to 1938, when Schocken Verlag ceased publishing.

Interestingly enough, after '33 was when Schocken began publishing Kafka.[18] Kafka had been published by a number of secular German publishers. Then along came the rule that Jews could be published only by Jews, and Christians only by Christians; and that's how Schocken acquired Kafka. What's even more interesting is that one of Kafka's

publishers was Verlag Kurt Wolff, which was the predecessor of Pantheon. It is kind of nice that we're all back together again, here.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: Also, the obvious irony is that you're all owned by Bertelsmann.

ALTIE KARPER: Well, I'll tell you something, on a personal note, which I think will interest you. When Arthur Samuelson, Schocken's editorial director from 1993 through 1999, announced that he was leaving, and Sonny Mehta *[president of the Knopf Publishing Group and editor-in-chief of Alfred A. Knopf]* started looking for someone to replace him, the people who called him most often were from Bertelsmann: "Are you finding somebody who will be good for Schocken, because it's really important to us. Schocken must continue, and it must continue the way it is, and can we help you look for somebody?" All the signals that we get from them are positive: "We want this to continue, and we want it to be what it's always been and to keep getting better."

KATHERINE McNAMARA: Who are the writers Salman Schocken published during that period? The first and obvious one is not Kafka, but S.Y. Agnon. They met in Berlin in 1914, introduced by mutual friends in the Zionist movement.

ALTIE KARPER: Right; he so valued what Agnon was doing that he offered him a subsidy, he kept him going while he was writing. While he was not being published by Schocken at the time – because this was before Schocken Verlag was established. Salman Schocken was so impressed with what he was doing that he decided to find some way of getting Agnon into print. Eventually, Schocken did get to publish Agnon, but their relationship started out as someone who was interested in literature helping out someone who created wonderful literature.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: Schocken must have been part of an intellectual circle. Do you know what salons he went to, who he dined with?

ALTIE KARPER: His friend and spiritual mentor was Martin Buber. That was a great intellectual relationship and a great publishing relationship. Schocken credited Buber and his writings — specifically Buber's TALES OF RABBI NACHMAN— with reawakening within him, in the 1910s, an interest in Judaism. He believed that his primary responsibility was to bring the works of people like Martin Buber and Gershom Scholem to the attention of educated, assimilated German Jews who didn't know about their work. He thought that this would be valuable, which indeed it was. I don't know that he saw himself as much of a fiction publisher, or a political publisher, because he didn't publish many books about Zionism, or advocating Zionism. He was more interested in Jewish philosophy, in acquainting people with their heritage and their culture. That's where the works of Scholem, Buber, Rosenzweig, and Benjamin come in.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: In that circle of educated German Jewish intellectuals, would they have talked with non-Jewish intellectuals, as well?

ALTIE KARPER: I'm sure that they did, especially during the Weimar years. There was a great hothouse of intellectual and cultural creativity and there weren't barriers, really; those were set up later. So I'm sure that they did. What they were interested in was literature and art and everyone participating equally.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: From 1931 to 1938, Schocken was in Berlin. How big was the publishing company?

ALTIE KARPER: It looks like they published about forty books a year. That's a goodly size for what sounded like pretty much a mom-and-pop operation. There was Moritz Spitzer, who was editorial director, and Lambert Schneider, managing editor.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: There were two editors: Lambert Schneider and Moritz Spitzer. I understand that it was Spitzer who persuaded them that they ought to publish

Kafka, even though he didn't look "marketable."[19] Obviously, they thought as publishers. I wonder, then, how were they capitalized, and what sort of return did they expect?

ALTIE KARPER: What I've seen in some of the literature is that Schocken Verlag was incorporated as a division of Salman Schocken's department store empire. It was not its own independent operation. Because he was so successful – and this is kind of an irony – it seemed as though the Verlag, which was not as profitable as it might have been, was used as a kind of tax write-off, as we'd call it nowadays. Some of the profits from the stores were used to subsidize the Verlag. That allowed them not to have to pay so much in taxes on the stores. There is a small pamphlet about Salman Schocken that was published by the Harvard Library in 1973 that describes this.[20]

KATHERINE McNAMARA: And so, they published forty-some titles a year. For the first three years, till 1933, he lived mostly in Berlin. Then, he moved to Palestine.

ALTIE KARPER: With the rise of Nazism, he just didn't see why any Jewish person would want to live in Germany.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: But wasn't until 1938 that Schocken Verlag ceased publishing in Germany.

ALTIE KARPER: It was right after *Kristallnacht*.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: But until then he was allowed to publish.

ALTIE KARPER: Under restrictions. That's what they did: gradually ascending levels of persecution. You start putting the screws on, and then you turn them tighter, so that the people have a chance to get used to what's going on, and then you just ratchet it all up to the next level.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: During that time, Max Brod offered them world right to the entire *oeuvre* of Kafka, and they decided to take them on.

ALTIE KARPER: Yes.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: But the Nazi's eventually banned entirely the publication in Germany of works by Kafka.

ALTIE KARPER: Yes, so Schocken Verlag made arrangements with a publisher in Prague, called Heinrich Mercy Verlag, to publish its Kafka titles with them. Of course, after Czechoslovakia was invaded by the Nazis that was the end of that.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: Do you know much about the actual operations, the day-to-day operations? Did they have their own printing companies, for example? I am thinking of Robert Alter's remarking how beautiful the volumes were.

ALTIE KARPER: I'm pretty sure they subcontracted out their printing and binding, as most publishers do.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: Salman Schocken left for Palestine in the '30s.

ALTIE KARPER: He left Berlin in December 1933, spent a month in Switzerland, and arrived in Palestine in 1934.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: So that he was effectively gone. And yet, people stayed and carried on.

ALTIE KARPER: Yes. He would come back to Germany and offer the people who worked for him in his publishing company and department stores an opportunity to leave. He offered them subsidies to go to Palestine or go to America, and offered them classes. But they said, "Well, we don't think it's so bad here, we'll just stay here for now," which astonished him.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: Yes, that must have been astonishing. I wondered, because the Schocken Institute, with his library, is in Jerusalem.

ALTIE KARPER: He was able to get all that out because he left in '33, when you could still do that.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: And his family got out?
ALTIE KARPER: Yes.

Schocken in Palestine

KATHERINE McNAMARA: Shall we talk about Palestine and Zionism? I noticed, for example, that his son was called Theodore, and his son-in-law was called Herzl.

ALTIE KARPER: Herzl Rome. He took over the running of the firm upon Salman Schocken's death in 1959; he died in 1965. Ted Schocken was publisher of Schocken Books, until his death in 1975. Bonny Fetterman, who worked at Schocken in the 1970s and then returned to be a senior editor here from 1982 to 1996, remembers him. The Schocken family members involved in the publishing operation whom I know are David Rome, the son of Herzl Rome, who started in 1983 and was there when Schocken was bought by Random House in 1987. David came along as a consultant and performed valuable services for us for several years. I continue to be in touch with him. Miriam Schocken, another grandchild of Salman Schocken, was an editor here in 1986-'87.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: Let us go back. Schocken and his family are in Palestine.

ALTIE KARPER: And he brought interest in a newspaper called *Ha'aretz*, which is in Tel Aviv.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: Yes, it is still a great newspaper.

ALTIE KARPER: And he did start a publishing operation there, and started the Schocken Institute, and created the Schocken Library by having all his books shipped there. He joined the board of Hebrew University. He jumped into the intellectual life in Palestine as soon as he got there.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: And then left.

ALTIE KARPER: Yes. Interesting.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: He must have been a very practical man, as well, and he must have had a very good eye for the way political movements were going. So, he came to New York.

ALTIE KARPER: He didn't start Schocken Books until '45, but he came here in 1940. He left a great par in Jerusalem: his eldest son Gershom, for one, and Gershom's family; and the Schocken Archives, and the Schocken Library. He brought the rest of his family, and he did bring books. I remember that, during one of our moves, there were a lot of books in the basement at Random House, and some of them looked to be family property so we just put them in boxes and sent them to David Rome and Miriam Schocken. I'm sure he had a great personal library here which is now with the family.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: There's now no official institutional relationship between the publishing branches?

ALTIE KARPER: No, none. In fact, they pronounce it Schocken, long o, and we pronounce it Schocken, short o, so there you go.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: But is there an informal relationship, at all? Do you publish any of the same titles, for instance?

ALTIE KARPER: Not really. In fact, when Arthur Samuelson was considering publishing Leah Rabin's memoir a lot of publishers came and paid court to her and did their little song and dance, and then when Arthur was introduced to her as the publisher of Schocken, she went into this whole diatribe about *Ha'aretz* and how they didn't do right by her husband, and going on and on, and he just said, "Sorry, wrong Schocken. Not us."

Schocken in New York

KATHERINE McNAMARA: So his son Gershom stayed in Palestine, to run the publishing company there, and Salman Schocken left for New York.

ALTIE KARPER: He was on the board of directors of the Hebrew University and traveled widely for them, doing fund raising and public relations, which took him to the United States in 1940. There might be in an article about this, though it's not one that I've come across: he was such an ardent Zionist, and then, after having spent time in the United States, he decided that he'd rather live here. That, I'm sure, is a very interesting chapter.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: In 1945 he founded Schocken Books, the American publishing company. Again, with his own capitalization?

ALTIE KARPER: Yes

KATHERINE McNAMARA: And he enlisted Hannah Arendt…

ALTIE KARPER: …and Nahum Glatzer …

KATHERINE McNAMARA: …who was his first editor-in-chief. Can you tell me anything about him – in fact, about that whole establishment?

ALTIE KARPER: This is part of the establishment of German Jewish intellectual life in this country. There have been many fascinating books published about the contributions of German Jewish refugees intellectuals in the United States.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: The New School for Social Research had been organized on these shores.

ALTIE KARPER: They were part of that world of performance and music and literature. They sought in some ways to recreate some of what they had in Germany on these shores.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: When he founded the American company, what did he mean to publish?

ALTIE KARPER: Well, once again, he came here and saw an American Jewish society that was quite similar to the German Jewish society, educated and literary, but not as acquainted with their heritage and culture as they might be. He saw it as a similar opportunity here, now publishing in English instead of in German – all the people he had published in Germany he could publish now in English – and acquainting American Jews with the works of great philosophers and great writers.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: And so, 1945 was the launch. Their first book was about Mark Chagall.

ALTIE KARPER: BURNING LIGHTS, by Bella Chagall, his wife.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: And it didn't do well.

ALTIE KARPER: I guess the world wasn't ready for Chagall yet; but then the world caught up with us, and it then became a very successful book for Schocken in the '60s when it was relaunched.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: Can you tell us about the beginnings of that new institution, Schocken Books? He capitalized the firm from his own fortune. How did it happen that he still had a fortune?

ALTIE KARPER: Well, I think he had probably left early enough so that he was able to get his money out, in 1933.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: I suppose he would have had to sell his department stores?

ALTIE KARPER: This is probably part of the historical record. The department stores were sold to non-Jews after *Kristallnacht*. I don't know what kind of return he got on

his investment, what he was able to do, but it was sold, so that might have been where some of his capitalization came from.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: Was he the sole investor, do you think?

ALTIE KARPER: I don't have any information about anybody else being involved in it. In contrast, we know that Helen and Kurt Wolff, who founded Pantheon were capitalized by a number of investors, and we know who most of them were. But there isn't anything on the record about who might have been involved with Schocken, which leads me to think that perhaps there wasn't, or we'd know who they were.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: The Wolffs came here ..

ALTIE KARPER: Also in 1940-41; Pantheon was started in 1942. There's an interesting synchronicity.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: They'd have known each other.

ALTIE KARPER: Oh yes, they all knew each other. When I was looking through some old Pantheon files, I saw that they had a pub[lication] party for DR. ZHIVAGO , in 1959, and Salman Schocken and Alfred and Blanche Knopf *[of Alfred A. Knopf]* and Bennett Cerf and Donald Klopfer *[the founders of Random House]* were on the list of people whom they were going to invite. That was one fascinating piece of onion-skin paper.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: In their first couple of years, how big was their list, whom did they publish? They published in translation?

ALTIE KARPER: Yes, they did publish some German volumes, but mostly in translation and once again, that was when they published the Buber, TALES OF THE HASIDIM, and the works by Gershom Scholem, and works by Franz Rosenzweig, and Kafka, and Agnon. That, I think, was the core of the list.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: How big do you think the house was?

ALTIE KARPER: They probably did about twenty books a year, I would think, based on what we see on the back list. Half of what they had done in Germany.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: By then, it wasn't unusual for there to be a Jewish publishing house, but were they unique in concentrating on what they did?

ALTIE KARPER: That's an interesting question. I think "Judaica," or books known as Judaica, became categorized as such in the 1950s when works by people like Isaac Bashevis Singer first appeared. I don't think that there were books marketed as "Judaica" until the '50s, after the war.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: Except that Schocken had already done this, but in a different way.

ALTIE KARPER: Yes, and the Jewish Publication Society – but I mean by mainstream publishers like Viking and Simon & Schuster.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: But Viking was founded by Harold Guinzberg.

ALTIE KARPER: Yes. But I don't think that there was something that was consciously known as Judaica publishing until after the war. I worked at Viking in the early 1980s. When we were going through the old rejection files I saw a reader's report for Isaac Bashevis Singer's IN MY FATHER'S COURT. It was the funniest thing that I have ever seen, because the person who read it didn't get what it was about, and couldn't imagine who'd be interested in this, and then, in the last sentence, wrote, "And isn't his older brother the more famous one anyway?" And he was, at the time! Israel Joshua Singer had been published in the United States before I.B. Singer. I don't think people were aware of the market until they actually started publishing these books and saw that there were people who were interested in buying them.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: In a way, the readers were there before they were.

ALTIE KARPER: Yes, exactly.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: How did that influence then what Schocken published in the '50s?

ALTIE KARPER: I think that Schocken felt there were books that should be published that weren't being brought out by secular houses, and that he was there to do that, as he had done in Germany.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: There was still enough capital?

ALTIE KARPER: Apparently they were encountering financial difficulties, and it was at that point that they decided to expand the list beyond Judaica. That was where you see Schocken going into other fields, into the Montessori books, educational publishing, women's studies, history and literary criticism, even some titles on yoga and natural living.

Also they had this idea: a number of the books we have as paperback backlist books were published by university presses. Schocken bought the rights, and then a whole course-adoption market came to be developed. In the '60s and '70s the Schocken list was perhaps thirty or forty percent Judaica, and the rest were books in other disciplines that were course-adoption books used by universities. It really depended on who was on staff there at the time. Books in the field of women's studies and books about English literature were done then too. Between the Judaica volumes, which also were beginning to be adopted by universities – books by authors such as Cecil Roth, Elias Bickerman, Nahum Sarna, and Simon Wiesenthal – and books in other fields, they got by.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: How many people do you think they had on staff?

ALTIE KARPER: They probably had three or four acquiring editors, I would say.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: Salman Schocken was growing old.

ALTIE KARPER: He died in 1959. Herzl Rome and Ted Schocken took over at that time.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: Ted Schocken kept on through the 1970s.

ALTIE KARPER: Right, until he died in 1975.

After the Schockens

KATHERINE McNAMARA: By the decades, how did the Schocken list change?

ALTIE KARPER: Interestingly enough, one of my college professors, Emile Capouya, was editorial director of Schocken very briefly, though I don't know exactly when that was. I was looking through the Schocken files one day and I was astonished to see a contract for a book that had been signed up by him. I had him as an English professor at Baruch College in the late '70s; I think he was at Schocken before that. He was probably responsible for the literary works and the works of literary criticism that we have on our backlist.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: Did Schocken have editors who were noted, in the way the well-known editors were noted?

ALTIE KARPER: You mean editors like Pascal Covici and Maxwell Perkins? I guess the Schocken equivalents would be Hannah Arendt and Nahum Glatzer.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: It is worth noting when a family concern can bring in more family members and they go on. But then Schocken was sold to Random House.

ALTIE KARPER: I think what happened was that after Ted Schocken died the heirs kept it going and had some success at it, but then they started getting on in years, too, and decided that they didn't quite have the energy and resources to keep it going on their own and they let the word out that they were interested in selling. A couple of publishers had expressed interest, André Schiffrin, at Pantheon, most particularly. Schocken was

bought by Random House and placed under the direction of André Schiffrin, who was managing director of Pantheon, in 1987.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: Random House had been bought by the Newhouse family.

ALTIE KARPER: That was in 1980. When Random House bought Schocken, the Newhouse family already owned Random House. I don't know how much was paid for Schocken; but I'm sure that André and Mr. [Robert] Bernstein *[then president of Random House]* had to get the approval of the Newhouses for it.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: During the '80s, did Schocken have a real identity, do you think, or was it in sort of a holding pattern?

ALTIE KARPER: Schocken continued to publish terrific Judaica titles during that period – Susannah Heschel's anthology ON BEING A JEWISH FEMINIST, JEWISH MEDITATION by Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, Rachel Biale's WOMEN AND JEWISH LAW, Primo Levi's THE PERIODIC TABLE, Hillel Halkin's translation of Sholem Aleichem's TEVYE THE DAIRYMAN AND THE RAILROAD STORIES, I NEVER SAW ANOTHER BUTTERFLY, a collection of poems and artwork by children in the Terezin concentration camp, Elie Wiesel's titles in paperback – those are the ones that spring most readily to mind. But there were two books that Schocken published in the 1980s, WHEN BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE, by Harold S. Kushner, in 1981 and MASQUERADE, by Kit Williams, in 1980 that were phenomenally successful.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: MASQUERADE?

ALTIE KARPER: This was a storybook that had imbedded in it clues to the location of an actual gold treasure. Whoever could figure out where the treasure was, would get it. It sold something like a half-million copies, as did WHEN BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE, in its initial run.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: What happened, then, when the house became absorbed into Random House?

ALTIE KARPER: Well, I think André was particularly interested in reinvigorating the Judaica part of the list. He looked at the backlist, and looked at what was in the hopper, and decided that Schocken should really be a premier publisher of Judaica, as was the founder's original intention.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: What happened during the '90s?

ALTIE KARPER: Bonny Fetterman was senior editor for Judaica at Schocken from 1983 to 1996. She had started at Schocken in the early '70s as an editorial assistant, and was so enamored of the kind of publishing that they did that she went off to get a masters degree in Judaic studies because she really wanted to do justice to the kind of publishing that Schocken did. After she had gotten her degree and spent some time at other publishing houses to learn her craft, she came back to Schocken about seven years before. Schocken was bought by Random House. She was really the primary acquirer and editor during the 1990s and brought to Schocken excellent books by authors such as David Ariel, Barry Holtz, David Hartman, Samuel Heilman, Joan Nathan, and Lucy Dawidowicz. Then Arthur Samuelson was named editorial director in 1993. He repackaged and freshened up our core backlist titles, put new Kafka translations into the works, and published an excellent series of Jewish lifestyle books by Anita Diamant. He also brought Aharon Appelfeld to Schocken. One of his accomplishments was bringing out Everett Fox's magnificent translation of the Bible, called THE FIVE BOOKS OF MOSES, which was as extraordinary publishing event.

One of my favorite titles on our backlist was a book edited by Bonny – a magnificent translation of SEFER HA-HAGGADAH, The Book of Legends, which was

originally published in Hebrew by Chaim Nachman Bialik and Yehoshua Hana Ravnitzky in Odessa in 1907. SEFER HAGGADAH extracts from the Talmud stories related by the Rabbis who compiled the Talmud, their discussions of the Bible and the Midrash, and their moral and ethical teachings, as opposed to the parts of the Talmud that deal with the legal discussions and the legal backing-and-forthings, such as what happens if your ox gores my camel, and so on. Schocken commissioned a translation by William G. Braude, but unfortunately Braude died just after he completed his final draft in 1988. We published it in 1992. It has a superb index where you can look up "childhood" or "parenthood" or "rabbis and teachers" or "relations with Romans" and it will give you everything that's in the Talmud on those subjects: aphorisms and stories and history and discussions between the rabbis on what is the best way to raise your child, and what kind of respect should be accorded to one's parents, and how does one deal with the Romans when they're sacking your country. It's all of the wisdom of Talmud distilled into this amazing book. That was a work that we were really proud to publish.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: Yes, I look at your list and see so many books there that are on my shelves When I lived away at college, probably in 1968-69, my parents sent me a copy of AMERIKA. So, one of the first books on my old bookshelf was a Schocken book.

ALTIE KARPER: So many people tell me that. What Arthur and Bonny were doing throughout the '90s was keeping up the tradition of publishing classic Judaica, works of philosophy, fiction, non-fiction, of interest to people who were interested in Judaic culture.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: And so, is Schocken is able to continue on the basis of its own developed and alert readership.

ALTIE KARPER: Oh yes. It's amazing. All the Bubers and Scholems that we have on our backlist – we reprint them every year, there's an interest in these titles which form the core of our publishing program, to which we of course add new titles. But the titles that we publish just don't go out of date, they're books for eternity, and the books that form the core of our backlist are books that were on the Schocken list ten years ago and twenty years ago and thirty years ago and forty years ago. It's wonderful to see new generations who become acquainted with these books, and new professors assigning them to courses.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: Arthur Samuelson and Bonny Fetterman both left.

ALTIE KARPER: Yes. Bonny's mother became ill and she left to take care of her in 1996. Arthur is married to Molly O'Neill, the food writer; she was planning a website that would focus on food and entertaining, and he left Schocken to become involved in that, in the fall of 1999. When Bonny left, Arthur had hired an editor named Cecilia Cancellero, who's area of interest was in women's studies and ethnic studies, to replace her, but Cecilia had a baby in the summer of 1999 and decided that she wanted to do freelance editing instead.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: And you were here. When did you come?

ALTIE KARPER: I was hired by André in 1989 to be the managing editor of Pantheon and Schocken. André had said, "I know that you've got this Judaic background" – I'm observant, and in addition to my yeshiva education, I spent some time in a post-graduate Jewish Studies program, and this is a passion of mine – "and if you ever come across anything that you'd like to sign up for Schocken, feel free." But I was busy being managing editor. Then, ten years later, Arthur told me one day that he was going to tell Sonny [Mehta] that he was leaving. I said, "Well, you know, Arthur, he's going to ask you to think about somebody to succeed you, so just give it some thought, and think about the people you're leaving behind, and recommend somebody *good*, because I'm going to be working with this person, and we want Schocken to continue and thrive in your absence." He kind of smiled and said "Oh, yes, I'll recommend somebody good." And they go off

and they have their meeting, and then he comes back a couple of hours later. I said, "Well, how did it go? Did Sonny asked you for suggestions for a successor?" He said, "Oh, yes." "Well, did you suggest anybody?" And he said, "Well, yes." I said, "You don't have to tell me if you don't want to, that's fine. Well, is it somebody good?" He said, "I think so."

The next day I get a call from Sonny's assistant saying that Sonny would like to have lunch with me, which is not a regular occurrence, he's a very busy man, and I thought, "Uh oh!" He took me to a kosher Indian restaurant, so I knew this was serious, because both of us were going to be able to eat and to enjoy what we were. eating. Somewhere around dessert he said, "Why don't you acquire books for Schocken?" I said, "Well, because I've been kind of busy and you never really asked me to, and I thought Arthur was doing a fine job." He said, "Well, Arthur is not going to be here any more, so why don't you start doing this? I think you'd be good at it." I thought about it and figured that if the smartest guy in publishing thinks I should be signing up books for Schocken, I guess I ought to give it a try. So I said, "Okay."

I continue to be managing editor of Pantheon and Schocken, but I've got a little more help now with that side of it. And at the same time that I became a Schocken editor, Susan Ralston was named Schocken's editorial director; she's been a Knopf editor for many years and also has a Judaic background. She's a great colleague and a terrific person to work with and to bounce ideas around with. Our mandate is to acquire the best Judaica, which is what we're trying to do.

I've been lucky in that I've worked for fabulous people. That's really how you learn about publishing: you apprentice yourself to someone who really knows what he or she is doing, and you learn by watching. At Viking I worked for Elisabeth Sifton. Then I worked for Susan Hirschman at Greenwillow Books, a children's imprint which was at the time a division of William Morrow and is now part of HarperCollins. The lesson I learned from them is that you acquire what interests you, what you yourself would like to read. You don't waste your time worrying about what you think *they, out there* want to read. Acquire what interests *you*, and if you have an instinct for this sort of thing, you'll find that *they*'ll want to read it, too. That's what I've been trying to do. It's worked wonderfully well for Elisabeth; and for Susan, and of course it's Sonny's publishing philosophy as well. He's said it on many occasions: "I just acquire books that I'd be interested in reading myself." That's what Susan Ralston and I do.

Acquiring books

KATHERINE McNAMARA: What have you acquired since then?

ALTIE KARPER: Ah! Well the first book that I acquired for Schocken was by Ari Goldman, a former *New York Times* reporter and currently a professor of journalism at Columbia University. He had published about ten years ago a book called THE SEARCH FOR GOD AT HARVARD, about his experience when taking a sabbatical from *The Times* as religion reporter and getting a divinity degree at Harvard, because he wanted to learn more about his beat – and, also, he thought that in learning more about other people's religions, he'd learn more about his own. He wrote a book about spending a year in divinity school and what he learned and how he grew. It's a good book, still in print in paperback, and in paperback it was on the bestseller list for a couple of weeks. We'd been friends for years – I'd actually met him and his family at a hotel in the Catskills one Passover – and I'd been saying to him for years, "You're going to do another book, you have to do it with me, you have to do it with Schocken." And then around the time that this whole Schocken transition was happening, he called me up. I think he needed some

sales figures. I said, "Okay, Ari, it's time to do your next book." He said, "Well, actually I do kind of have an idea for it." We went out to lunch and he told me his idea for the book. On the day that he turned fifty, last September, his father died. He spent the last year saying Kaddish for his father, and this book would be his journey through that year. The best way to describe it, I think, is to describe what it isn't: It isn't – I don't know if you're familiar with…

KATHERINE McNAMARA: … Leon Wieseltier's KADDISH…

ALTIE KARPER: Yes: it's the mirror opposite of Leon Wieseltier's book. His was the intellectual journey into saying Kaddish for your parent for a year. Ari's book is the emotional and personal and spiritual journey into saying Kaddish. I think it's a perfect complement to Leon Wieseltier's book.. He's in the middle of writing and is supposed to deliver it next fall. I'm so excited about this.

Another book that I've signed up is a book on the Chabad Lubavitch, the Lubavitch Chasiddim. This was a subject that I was always interested in reading about. They're ubiquitous, and yet, with the Rebbe's passing six years ago, one would have assumed they were going to disintegrate, because there was no head. There was no new Rebbe named after he died; but in fact they haven't folded up and gone away. They're even more vibrant than ever, and they have all these terrific emissaries in all corners of the world setting up houses and synagogues, conducting Passover seders in Nepal… It seemed a natural subject for a book because they have such an influence, even to the point of starting up non-sectarian drug treatment centers in Los Angeles. They have a program where, for the children who are victims of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, they airlift these kids out and pay for their treatment in Israel. I thought, "Well, whom should I get to write it?" I opened *Moment*, a monthly magazine of Jewish concerns, and saw this terrific article on the Chabad Lubavitch by a writer named Sue Fishkopf. I thought, "My God!" and got her address and phone number. I called and said, "I really liked your article, and I think you'd make a terrific author for a book about them." She said, "I was actually thinking the same thing."

Just recently, I was reading in *The Jewish Week* an interview with Sid Caesar about his having received a lifetime achievement award from the National Foundation for Jewish Culture. The article was so warm and so affectionate, talking about his career and American Jewish comedy, that I called the reporter and said, "There's a book here" – the history of American Jewish comedy, which has never been done. He said, "You know, I was thinking the same thing."

It's going to be a history of American Jewish comedy: the Marx brothers and George Burns and Jack Benny, Mel Brooks and Woody Allen and Sid Caesar, and Milton Berle, and Fanny Brice and Carl Reiner and Jackie Mason, all the way down to Jerry Seinfeld and Jon Stewart and Ben Stiller. It will be the history of all these extraordinary people and the evolution of American Jewish humor as it mirrors the twentieth century American Jewish immigrant experience. What did they think was funny in the 1920s and 1930s? What did Jewish comedians make jokes about then? How was that different from what Alan King or Henny Youngman made jokes about in the 1950s and 1960s? You know, as Jews became more comfortable in America, their humor changed: the subject of their humor, whom they were directing it to. It's fascinating when you look at it from that context, and you see what Lenny Bruce and David Steinberg and Jerry Seinfeld make jokes about is really different from what George Burns and Jack Benny made jokes about, or Buddy Hackett, or Myron Cohen, or Totie Fields. It's a fascinating way of looking at the American Jewish experience in the twentieth century in this country: through the prism of humor.

KATHERINE McNAMARA: Yes, that sounds interesting, because it's not a history of, say, vaudeville, although it is that, also, perhaps, but is kind of an intellectual history.

ALTIE KARPER: Or part of our cultural history; yes.

"I can't think of anything I want to do more than work in publishing."

KATHERINE McNAMARA: Would you tell me about your own interest in publishing and how you came into it?

ALTIE KARPER: I was an English major in college, because as long as I can remember I loved books and loved reading, and I loved writing about books, and I like talking about books. I grew up on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, and I started at Brooklyn College as an English major. At some point I thought, "Well, I can't just be an English major for the rest of my life." My cousin Daisy Maryles works at *Publishers Weekly*; she's the executive editor there. My family was so worried about what I was going to do with my life, they said, "Maybe you could do something like what Daisy does." I thought, "Hmmm." I called up Daisy and we talked about what she does for the magazine. I went to the college library and took out a book on the subject, Chandler Grannis's WHAT HAPPENS IN BOOK PUBLISHING. Then I asked around about how one gets a job in publishing, and everyone told me that you really have to know how to type, which I didn't know. I thought, "Well, I guess I had better learn how to do this."

By then I was a junior and had pretty much finished up my requirements, but I just had electives, and I thought, "Why don't I take typing?" But Brooklyn College didn't offer typing – but Baruch did. So I spent my last year at Baruch College. That's where I met Emile Capouya, who was formerly with Schocken – he was my thesis advisor. I took a couple of typing and shorthand courses, and that was really what got me my job. There were all these finely educated young women and men who'd taken the Radcliffe course and knew more about publishing than I did – but none of them could type worth a damn, and I could!

KATHERINE McNAMARA: Where did you start?

ALTIE KARPER: My very first job was at Plenum Press, a scientific and technical publishing house. I was assistant to the managing editor and worked for production editors. I learned copy editing, proofreading, and the whole production process. Then I went on to work for an editor who acquired psychology textbooks. I could have stayed, moving into the acquiring end of things, but I was really interested in trade publishing, so I left Plenum and wound up at Viking. I was Elisabeth Sifton's assistant and worked for her for four years. Then when she became Elisabeth Sifton Books at Viking, I was assistant editor for her imprint. And then – you know that period when you hit a certain age, and you think, "What do I really want to do with my life?" I hit that point. I left Viking. I thought, "Do I really want to stay in publishing? Do I want to go off and be a teacher" – because that was something that I had really thought about – "or do I want to go to law school" – my dad was a judge, and that was also in the back of my mind. So I went off for my year of what I call "retrenchment." I spent a year out of publishing – I was working in public relations, actually – and I decided, "You know what? I can't think of anything I want to do more than work in publishing. In what capacity I don't know, but that's what I really want to do."

Then I got the job at Greenwillow. I was executive editor, working for Susan Hirschman. I fell in love with children's publishing. But it just didn't work out for me there. After three years, I came to Pantheon/Schocken as managing editor. I liked it, and I still do, because you're the liaison between the acquiring editor and production and design, and you work with the publicity, advertising, and sales and marketing people. Your

job is to keep an eye on the whole, to make sure that it all flows seamlessly: *This* is when we get the manuscript, *this* is when they want the books to be in the warehouse: okay, how do we do this? That's my job. It gives you a bird's eye view of the publishing process. You see the manuscript come in, then you send it out for copy editing, and then you watch as the design is approved, the galleys come in, and then the jacket is created. You do this for the whole list. This is something I continue to enjoy doing. But when Sonny asked me if I wanted to get involved in acquiring books for Schocken, all of a sudden there was this *click!* and I said, "Oh, of course, why didn't I think of that?" *(laughter)* It all just kind of fit into place.

End of Part 1.
In Vol. 5, No. 3, the editor talks with Susan Ralston,
and, in Vol. 5, No. 4, with Arthur Samuelson
about the history, the present, and future of Schocken Books.

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[15] The People of the Book: Jews in German Publishing, 1871-1938, n.d. New York: The Leo Baeck Institute, pp. 16-19. Information and quotations in this Introduction are taken from this source.

[16] Robert Alter, THE INVENTION OF HEBREW PROSE Modern Fiction and the Language of Realism (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988), p. 75.

[17] Anthony David Skinner, Collecting Memory: Salman Schocken and the Jewish Renaissance, National Foundation for Jewish Culture <http://www.jewishculture.org/1998/schol_schoken.htm>.

[18] After Kafka s death [Max] Brod took it upon himself to have Kafka s work published, so he had to convince publishers that Kafka s work was worthy. One such publisher was Salman Schocken. Schocken was convinced by one of his editors that Kafka could give meaning to the new [post WWI] reality that had befallen German Jewry and would demonstrate the central role of Jews in German culture . Philosopher Martin Buber wrote to Brod that Kafka s novels were a great possession and that they could show how one can live marginally with complete integrity and without loss of background . While Kafka did not actively represent the Jews, it was a part of himself that came out in his writing, just like his relationship with his father. Arthur Sameuelson, A Kafka for the 21st Century, <http://www.jhom.com/bookshelf/kafka/intro.html?&printable=true.>

[19] When the Nazis introduced their racial laws they exempted Schocken Verlag, a Jewish publisher, from the ban against publishing Jewish authors on condition that its books would be sold only to Jews.

Max Brod offered Schocken the world publishing rights to all of Kafka s works. This offer was initially rejected by Lambert Schneider, Schocken Verlag s editor in chief, who regarded Kafka s work as outside his mandate to publish books that could reacquaint German Jewry with its distinguished heritage. He also doubted its public appeal. His employer also had his doubts about the marketability of six volumes of Kafka s novels, stories, diaries, and letters, although he recognized their universal literary quality as well as their potential to undermine the official campaign to denigrate German Jewish culture. But he was urged by one of his editors, Moritz Spitzer, to see in Kafka a quintessentially Jewish voice that could give meaning to the new reality that had befallen German Jewry and would demonstrate the central role of Jews in German culture. Accordingly, BEFORE THE LAW, an anthology drawn from Kafka s diaries and short stories, appeared in 1934 in Schocken Verlag s *B cherei* series, a collection of books aimed to appeal to a popular audience, and was followed a year later — the year of the infamous Nuremburg Laws — by Kafka s three novels. The Schocken editions were the first to give Kafka widespread distribution in Germany. Martin Buber, in a letter to Brod, praised these volumes as a great possession that could show how one can live marginally with complete integrity and without loss of background. (From THE LETTERS OF MARTIN BUBER [New York: Schocken Books, 1991], p. 431)

Inevitably, many of the books Schocken sold ended up in non-Jewish hands, giving German readers — at home and in exile — their only access to one of the century s greatest writers. Klaus Mann wrote in the

exile journal *Sammlung* that the collected works of Kafka, offered by the Schocken Verlag in Berlin, are the most noble and most significant publications that have come out of Germany. Praising Kafka s books as the epoch s purest and most singular works of literature, he noted with astonishment that this spiritual event has occurred within a splendid isolation, in a ghetto far from the German cultural ministry. Soon after this article appeared, the Nazi government put Kafka s novels on its blacklist of harmful and undesirable writings. Schocken moved his production to Prague, where he published Kafka s diaries and letters. Interestingly, despite the ban on the novels, he was able to continue printing and distributing his earlier volume of Kafka s short stories in Germany itself until the government closed down Schocken Verlag in 1939. The German occupation of Prague that same year put an end to Schocken s operations in Europe. Arthur Samuelson, *op. cit.* <http://www.jhom.com/bookshelf/kafka/intro.html?&printable=true>

[20] Originally the Verlag had been organized as a division of the Schocken department store chain. This step may have been taken at first as a matter of administrative convenience, but it offered great fiscal advantages as well — advantages that were decisively important after 1933. As long as the Verlag was just another division of the concern, its profits and expenses were reckoned in with the whole. As it happened, the expenses of the Verlag far outweighed its receipts, and in effect the Verlag operated on the surplus funds produced by the profit-making divisions of the firm. Furthermore, despite nazi attacks on Jewish businesses, and on department stores in general, whatever their ownership. the Schocken firm continued to prosper. Moreover, the diminution of the firm s profits by the amount of the Verlag s expenditures reduced it taxable surplus. To a certain extent, then, the Verlag ran at the expense of Nazi tax receipts .

Nevertheless, these factors do not detract from the magnitude of Schocken s personal generosity. The money that he assigned to the Verlag came out of his own income — or, what was the same, was never added to it. This consideration stands despite Nazi restrictions on capital export, since Schocken did continue to transfer funds abroad, and these were reduced by expenditures for the Verlag. Furthermore, Schocken s financial basis in Germany was increasingly jeopardized, and he faced further drains on his capital in the future. Therefor, his outlay at this time was all the more striking in view of the fact that ordinary business sense would have dictated thrift. Stephen M. Poppel, Salman Schocken and the Schocken Verlag: A Jewish Publisher in Weimar and Nazi Germany, *Harvard Library Bulletin*, Vol. XXI, Number 1, January 1973, p. 31.

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THE GATES OF THE FOREST
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TWILIGHT

Simon Wiesenthal, THE SUNFLOWER

Leon Wieseltier, KADDISH (Knopf)

Kit Williams, MASQUERADE

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Schocken Books <http://www.randomhouse.com/schocken/>

A List of Books Published by Schocken Verlag, Berlin1933-38 <http://www.nunbetbooks.co.il/schocken.html>

"The Schocken Institute for Jewish Research <http://www.jtsa.edu/academic/abul9798/isrprog.html> of The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, housed in the Schocken Library building in Jerusalem, is a research institute dedicated to the exploration of Hebrew liturgical poetry. The Schocken Library Building is an architectural masterpiece. Upon his arrival in Israel in 1934, Salman Schocken, the publishing magnate, commissioned the German-Jewish expressionist architect, Erich Mendelssohn, to design a building for the purpose of housing the collection of books, manuscripts and incunabula that Schocken had brought with him from Berlin."

Zalman Shocken, mécène et collectionneur <http://www.col.fr/arche/9704_art1.htm>

Salman Schocken's Department Stores <http://members.tripod.de/h2o/summary.html>

Erich Mendelsohn, Architect: Façade of Schocken Department Store, Chemnitz <http://www.meachams.com/scott/darch/berry/imgs/schocken.html>

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Anthony David Skinner, "Collecting Memory: Salman Schocken and the Jewish Renaissance," National Foundation for Jewish Culture: Jewish Scholarship <http://www.jewishculture.org/1998/schol_schoken.htm>

A Kafka For The 21st Century by Arthur Samuelson, publisher, Schocken Books <http://www.jhom.com/bookshelf/kafka/intro.html?&printable=true>

"On the occasion of the publication by Schocken Books of a new translation based on the restored text of The Castle, PEN … sponsored an evening of tribute, reflection, and re-examination of the work of Franz Kafka. The evening, directed by Tom Palumbo, took place on Thursday, took place on Thursday, March 26, 1998, 8:00 p.m. in The Town Hall, New York City." *Jewish Heritage Online Magazine* broadcasts recordings of that evening. <http://www.jhom.com/bookshelf/kafka/index.html>

Sotheby's Tel Aviv: auction of Judaica <http://www.sothebys.com/liveauctions/sneak/archive/ah_telaviv_0401.html> "Manuscripts are among the

oldest extant artifacts to have survived the often troubled history of the "people of the Book." This sale features several whose provenance is the renown Schocken collection, originally formed by Salman Schocken (1877-1959), the successful businessman and publisher who devoted much of his means to assembling one of the most important arrays of Hebrew books and manuscripts ever put together. In 1934, with the Nazi onslaught he managed to transfer his enormous library from Berlin to Jerusalem, where he reestablished his publishing company and became the owner of the country's prestigious Ha'aretz newspaper. Among the Schocken manuscripts on offer in this auction is a domestic item used at Passover, the Nuremberg Haggadah on parchment from Germany before 1449, richly illuminated in sepia by the itinerant German scribe and illustrator, Joel ben Simeon, sometimes called Feibush Ashkenazi. This completely preserved manuscript is of great importance and is one of the few remaining in private hands. (Est: $600,000-700,000) Another, on paper, filled with decorative amulets and charms, is a circa 1600 Miscellany of Magical Texts, Kabbala and Literature, written and illustrated in various hands, (Est: $12,000-14,000) while a fine 14th to 15th century example on parchment of a Pentateuch with accompanying commentaries in the margins comes from either Spain or Provence. (Est: $300,000-400,000)"

S.Y. Agnon: Agnon, Shmuel Yosef (1888-1970) <http://www.jajz-ed.org.il/100/people/bios/agnon.html>
"Agnon was the first Hebrew writer to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. One of the central figures in modern Hebrew fiction, his works deal with the conflict between traditional Jewish life and the modern world, and attempt to recapture the fading traditions of the European shtetl, or township."
Also: <http://www.jpost.com/Editions/2000/03/06/Tourism/Tourism.3630.html.>
"Die Judenbuche" – verboten und eingestampft. Ein Beispiel nationalsozialistischer Zensurpraxis
<http://www.akademie-rs.de/publikationen/chronik98/bt98_judenbuche.htm>
The Leo Baeck Institute for the Study of the History and Culture of German-Speaking Jewry
<http://www.lbi.org/>
Kurt Wolff Archive <http://webtext.library.yale.edu/sgml2html/beinecke.wolff.sgm.html>
The Helen Wolff Papers <http://www.library.yale.edu/beinecke/blapr96.htm>

"In 1942 Helen and Kurt Wolff, having fled Hitler's Germany, founded Pantheon Books, which published the Bollingen Series and such popular works as the American edition of Doctor Zhivago and Anne Morrow Lindbergh's Gift from the Sea. When Random House acquired Pantheon Books in 1961, the Wolffs were invited to join Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, where they had their own imprint. After Kurt Wolff's untimely death in 1963, Helen Wolff continued with HBJ until her retirement, overseeing Helen and Kurt Wolff Books until her death in 1994.

"Helen Wolff's papers contain correspondence from the early 1950s through the late 1990s, financial records, readers' reports, and some manuscripts. These files reflect Helen Wolff's distinguished career as an international publisher based in New York and the friendships she formed with writers and colleagues. Among the correspondents represented in this archive are Joy Adamson, Hannah Arendt, W. H. Auden, Heimito von Doderer, Umberto Eco, Günter Grass, Arthur Koestler, Anne Lindberg, Konrad Lorenz, Ralph Manheim, Herbert Mitgang, and the family of Rudolf Serkin.

"The Helen Wolff papers join the Kurt Wolff archive, which has been part of the Yale Collection of German Literature since 1947."

It is like what we imagine knowledge to be:
dark, salt, clear, moving, utterly free,
drawn from the cold hard mouth
of the world

Elizabeth Bishop
"At the Fishhouses"

&&&&&&

Sasha Choi In America

Just when I was thinking about having met my double, I was someone else's, nearly. The year was 1996, the day a clear one in April, the beginning of the county Dogwood Festival. My neighbor, who worked for the city, reminded me, in tones that implied it would be approved if I was a good citizen and went, that the parade was about to begin. I set off up the street to the park about two blocks away, where the parade would pass by; but it wasn't in sight yet, so I wandered downtown to the pedestrian mall. In the air was the distant racket of a marching band. I stationed myself a block away and across the street from the wine store that I wanted to stop at afterward, at a good place to stand and watch. And here came the small town American parade. Leading off were the heavy armaments, military and police. The color guards of the police units couldn't seem to march in time. Indeed, marching in time didn't seem to matter to them. My mind had nothing significant to fasten on until the Living Stones Christian Motorcycle Club rolled by, looking a little bit like Hells Angels on their Harleys with teddy bears on the postern. Then passed lots of twirling girls managing batons, some tossing them high and doing handsprings before catching them perfectly. And so on, until a hand tapped me solidly, yet not familiarly, on the shoulder and a voice asked where I got my dress. I turned and saw a young woman looking at me intently. My first impression was that she was Yup'ik. I named the store and remarked that they had nice linen dresses but most of the clothes were for older women, meaning older than myself. She asked if I was twenty-seven. Forty-nine, I said, gently. Her eyes widened. Surgery? No, grandmother's genes. Your face is so smooth. How old are *you*, I asked, thinking I ought not go on with this conversation, but wanting not to be rude and to see what would come of this.

She asked another question, and I asked one. She said she was a children's book author. Her manner was all rapid speech, intensity, stiffness even, as if she *had* to speak; yet she was calm and very alert. She said: "We were sisters in a past life. You were a warrior in your past lives, a man and a woman, in many countries in Europe; you were beheaded many times, and stabbed in the heart, that is why you feel grief so often. You've lived many lives, but this is your last, and you will put all of those lives together. You'll live forever, and you'll be free and you'll fly everywhere, fly above everything and see all. You'll live to be 115, then you'll be burned, cremated, and your ashes will be scattered over the ground, you'll enter the ground and live forever. Flying, moving swiftly, traveling."

She said, twice, that she was manic depressive; had slept with forty-five men; was raped in this life and past; now had a soul mate. Her father was a Methodist minister who wanted to direct her life. She was Korean, though identified herself as Russian ("we can choose"). Sasha Choi was her name. She came to our town at fifteen and was now thirty-two. She had a special affinity for children with autism and Down syndrome, she said:

because of the rapes her seed was split and cursed, and her children would have these conditions.

She rocked slightly even while greeting people she knew, and spoke firmly. She "read" people. Often they didn't like it and did not want it, she said; she did not do it for money. Her father had tried to prevent her. She went in cycles, rising and falling; when she fell she was weak and people tried to eat her. "I can tell by your teeth that you're not a vampire. There are many vampires in the world; not all of them are bad, or want to be bad, but many are. They are people who had no light in their lives and are cursed.

"People want to touch you, they want to console and nurture you," she said to me. "You don't have to be afraid of it."

I asked if she had been a shaman.

"Yes, in past lives."

Korean? Korean shamanism is the province of women.

"No, Russian" (a slight hesitation here, or slight insistence, an intervening consciousness) "or Siberian."

Was she a shaman now?

"Yes. The spirits of the animals and trees come and talk to me, and tell me about people. I can read people, but not everyone likes that." Abruptly, straight at me: "Do you have a special feeling for Africans?"

In general I wished them well, I replied, but I didn't know Africans or have a deep knowledge of Africa, so I supposed I didn't feel a special or particular concern. She was surprised.

"But they were your servants! They braided your hair and made your dresses! In Denmark!"

This odd conversation continued in stages. It occurred to me that often in Alaskan villages Native people were equally direct, and at times visionary; I decided to unbend. I raised my eyebrows and asked if her children's books were available. No. She made books about the various members of her family; they weren't for sale. Later I realized they were about her families from past lives. Meanwhile, the parade was going by. I turned back to it. She stood behind and to my right. Suddenly: "You were my sister in a past life." I felt sympathy for this; quite reasonable people say such things; sometimes people "recognize" a familiar quality in a stranger. She said, "I'll fix some stir-fry for you one night." She glowed with a sweet generosity; a sense of giving, drawing me toward her without threat. She wanted to give me her phone number; I did little to encourage it, but she found a piece of paper attached to something, tore it off, and wrote her name, then looked expectantly at me, so I told her mine and gave my second phone number. (Why that one?) She had two hard-cover notebooks in her pack: "This is what I write my stories in." And so I took her slip of paper, then turned back to the parade.

A little while later, I heard echoes of bands from behind me, down the hill past the pedestrian mall, and turned to see if the parade were still coming from that direction. She tapped my shoulder again, a kind of prodding, but with no emotion or urging to it – not comforting, not threatening; affirming. Later she said, "In Zen they hit you hard on the back." To make you think? I asked. "And to drive out spirits," she said, and hit my back. All this was non-aggressive. That's when she said that people want to touch me.

To a friend I wrote: *I think I'm going to see her again. I want to know more about this curious person and her fascinating state of mind/being. The gift of "reading" is, I think, genuine – she's like an entranced, archaic seer, or a pre-Homeric poet: the imagery she uses about me is recognizable, metaphorically. The explanation of it (past lives) is not what I would*

have chosen, but, oddly, I've been finding it rather comforting. It accounts for my martial energies.

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In June of that year, Sasha Choi phoned to invite me to dinner. She had moved, she said. She and her boyfriend, who wasn't good for her, had broken up. Now she lived in a single room over near the university. Her voices sounded dulled.

I looked forward to stir-fry, and was curious to find out what she had to say. Would she talk about our past life, when we were sisters? But I wanted to hear more about her: what the plant and animal spirits were telling her. I reflected and decided to wear jade earrings and a pendant, both of Chinese origin. These were given me by a beloved friend. The Chinese esteemed jade as pure and protective precious stone.

Her street was dismal, lined with shabby student-apartment buildings. Her room was in a shed-like addition to a house now divided into studios, and was hardly bigger than a dorm room. It looked out on gravel and weeds. Her paintings hung on the wall and showed energy and talent: images of intense sun, trees, water; brilliant colors. "I was thinking about global warming and how the trees will suffer without water," she said.

She was grave and self-contained. Dinner was prepared, and was awful, overcooked minute-steak and chopped frozen asparagus and indifferent noodles from a packet. Cold water to drink. She hardly spoke, but let me settle in before telling me why she had moved. She had left her boyfriend; he was a dour sort. He was unhappy without her, though. "This is going to be a hard time," she said. "I realized I had become dependent on him. For the last two years I've been with him alone, not making any friends. So I have to begin doing that. I know it will be hard at first, but then it will get easier, and I'll be all right."

I was casting about in my mind for conversation. "You said we had been sisters in a past life: what was that life?"

She laughed. "Yes, sometimes I talk that way. I told you, didn't I, that I'm manic-depressive?"

"Yes. But what made you tap on my shoulder?"

"I was feeling confident then, and you looked confident. When I feel that way I can talk to anyone. I prefer it. Now I'm feeling weak. That's what I call it when I'm depressed. Do you sleep much?"

"Six or seven hours a night, but sometimes I take a nap during the day."

"That's not much. I sleep twelve hours. It's the medication, I need sleep."

She received disability payments, six hundred dollars a month, from the government; thus, she could afford to live on her own. The lithium was good, and she had felt good, until 1989 (when the world changed), when it didn't work anymore. "They're still testing to find the right dosage, but haven't succeeded. My psychiatrist is brilliant," she said sympathetically, "but he has so many patients to see every day that I only get about fifteen minutes, every two weeks.

"You've traveled a lot. I have, too; the government lets me, with this support. I can go anywhere – I don't want to be in just one place, or from just one place. I think I've lived, as man and woman, in Russia, for many generations. I liked it there. That's why I've named myself Sasha."

About past lives and our having been connected she said no more. She needed my attention and would answer questions.

The doctor was intelligent about the physiological basis of her disease, she said, but she thought there was another level to it, as well, which she had studied and reflected on for years. She was born in Korea. Her mother's mother had felt contempt for her – the birth was difficult, her mother was sick for a long time afterward – and had taken the baby Sasha to a "witch-doctor who cursed my life. She invited the spirits of generations of dead people to live with me. They weigh me down, and keep telling me to come join them, that life is full of suffering. For a long time I carried them, and was pulled down by them. But my life-force is very strong, and sometimes I felt myself rising above them, and lifting them up with me. They were happy! They were glad to rise; but then they would sink, and pull me back down with them. Fortunately, I'm strong; otherwise, I'd be dead by now.

"Scientists tell us that human life on this earth is 50,000 years old, or 150,000 – whatever their numbers are. But I believe we are much older than that; that life itself is much older. I can see this as if I am remembering. You know, I feel such affection for human beings. We can do so much. For instance, a tree is sick: we can find a way to heal it! The tree can't do that. I think we all were together once, we were – globules, that's the best way I can describe it, we were little globes floating around, bumping against each other, streaming along. We knew each other; but most people forget this, I guess. They don't pay attention to it, and don't remember; they don't try to remember, or don't want to remember. But I remember: we were all connected, we were all floating around together. Now when I walk down the street and pass so many people I am thrilled, because I've known all of them! We walk right by each other now, but we all came from the same source. This makes me so happy!

"My boyfriend didn't like it when I talked this way. He believed, like the doctors, in the physiological basis of my disease. He was very scientific. I couldn't talk to him. Then, I began to go to church again; but he didn't like to talk about that, either. That was hard for me; it made me feel weak. But he was kind, too, and he did support me – he supported me for seven months while I was in the hospital, and other times, when the medicine didn't work. He was good, in that way. I tried to explain this to him last night, about why I needed to be away from him, but he wasn't very mature, and didn't care about what I needed. He turned it around and sent it back at me, talking about himself, and what he needed. He wouldn't listen. This made me sad.

"Do you know what he said? He said Jesus, too, must have been manic-depressive! He said, In the Bible it tells how Jesus tried to bring different kinds of people together, preached to them, fed them – he could reach all of them, as if he were above them and could see everything. And then, he'd be depressive, angry, go into the desert and be alone. Sometimes I feel like Jesus: I could do that, bring all different kinds of people together. It's my assignment," she said simply.

"A few weeks ago I went to a Black church near here. The minister was a woman. I enjoyed the church, and enjoyed listening to her, and I kept going back. But then it became confusing. They talked about bad spirits, and how people might be possessed, and how those people had to be sent away. But I've known people who talked to spirits – were they 'possessed'? – and they were good people. I couldn't see why they had to be ignored, or sent away; this was confusing. So now I don't know whether to go back to that church.

"I am an old soul, and can remember back to before we were human; but in one way I'm disconnected, or not grounded. I only knew one of my four grandparents. My father's parents are in North Korea; he would never tell me their names, he wouldn't speak about what had given him pain. But he abused us, and abused his wife; isn't that strange, when he was a Methodist minister? How could a man who believed in religion turn around

and be cruel to people? He didn't like it when I talked about spirits; he tried to beat them out of me. Finally, four years ago, I had to run away."

I asked about her mother's father but didn't hear her, if she did answer.

"Maybe there is some hope: two years ago, my mother sent me a letter giving me the names and addresses of my father's parents. They are still in North Korea."

"Do you ever think of going back to visit Korea?"

"Yes; but I haven't got the resources for that yet."

What about the grandmother: was she still alive? I had the sense that the mother was not well, mentally or physically. I asked about the Korean shamanic tradition: could the curse not be lifted?

"After I realized what had happened, I was exorcised several times. I've been able to do it myself, but not completely; some of the spirits of the dead have dropped away over time. I feel lighter. But I realized, too, that this disease is not only physiological. About ten years ago I said what I still believe: that my depression is also the world's."

Her lovely skin, body, features; her bad experience with men, at least one brutal rape. Was there no self-protection? She talked about floating, about wanting to be free of the weight of these spirits, yet I sensed she didn't want to lose them completely. I asked if she liked being in her body.

"No, I don't like this flesh. It holds me down, and it is in the body that there is such great suffering. The spirits tell me that: it's the flesh that causes all this suffering: be free of it! But I can't; and I don't want to, yet, because I love life. I love this world. I would love to paint it! I think that if I had enough energy, I could bring everyone together, and persuade them to stop all these wars and this hating, all this suffering. But you know, the lithium doesn't let me be as confident as I'd like to be; it gets in the way, like a cloud in front of my eyes and I have to fight my way through it to see properly. And I still have something to do here, I believe I must try to being people together. My time is not finished; I can't separate myself from this flesh, I can't pull free. Gradually; gradually. In time, I'll be entirely free of it, and be able to see everything!"

Thunder rolled. My car was a few blocks away. We walked to it to get an umbrella. Along the way I offered refreshment and we entered a coffeehouse, where she ordered iced tea and cheesecake. She drank and ate with pleasure. Again she talked about religion, and how she thought that her disease really existed at this level, and that until she could address it there, she would not be free of it. Of course, the psychiatrists didn't want to hear about that; they believed in the physical side, of course, that was their specialty. Her face looked happy. She became a young girl, a teenager, as if going back into a happier, secure time. I felt old, and asked if she knew about Sufism and its joy.

"It began in Turkey, didn't it? I saw those spinning dancers once on TV." Her ex-boyfriend used to talk about them and had their literature.

I spoke about their joy, their ecstasy, and their acceptance of the large Mind or Intelligence. I mentioned the poet Rumi.

She shone. "I've held his books in my hands. Isn't that interesting? I've picked them up and held them. Maybe I should look at them now.

"I'm so happy to be able to talk about this, about religion, with someone. I don't have anyone to talk about this level of my disease with, and yet I think it's the most important level. I think I've been lucky, in that I'm able to see things from different perspectives, at different levels." – graceful hand play – "First I see things this way; then I move to another level, and see from another angle. This is a long pilgrimage I must take through this world, but I'm happy with it, because finally, when I'll have seen it from every

possible angle, it will all come together in my mind, and I'll understand everything. Then I can leave the world!"

We went to the car, and I unlocked the door. She didn't want a ride back. Hesitantly, she said she had called the Boys and Girls Club, trying to volunteer; but they had not responded. She asked if I thought she should try to do this; she was persuading herself not to volunteer.

"I've worked with children, especially little black children; I've felt a great connection to them, because I was treated badly, and I see that so many of them are treated badly. You see parents slapping a little child, if he does something they don't like: they slap and slap him, even though he's crying! They don't know what to do; they don't know how to be good parents. I know what that was like, my father didn't know, either. But I could help them.

"But maybe I shouldn't do it – when I've done it before, they haven't been very nice to me. I want to give them something, but they don't give me anything back, and I'm feeling very weak now. Do you think I should wait until I feel more confident? Maybe I shouldn't have to feel as though I have to bring everyone together: what do you think? I should stop thinking I can heal the world. Do you think I should do that?"

Yes, I said; also, you should stay away from men, until you're strong again. You must take great care, and take care of yourself.

******

In March of this year I was thinking about Sasha Choi, and about the little story I had written years before about her and our meeting. One night, the phone rang. A very young, uncertain voiced asked if I were Katherine McNamara. I said I was. The voice said: "This will sound strange. Are you the person I met about four years ago? My name is Sasha Choi..."

"Sasha, of course I remember you."

She wept. There was the same old directness. She remembered a great deal (until later, when she began to drift away): our last meeting, in 1996, when I went to the little efficiency apartment she lived in, and she cooked – over-cooked (she remembered) – wagon-wheel pasta. She had then spent three years in Western States Hospital; she was bi-polar (she was a shaman, also). She had come out in January, and now lived in a supervised apartment in a group home in a poor part of town. Her mind was flying. She talked, I think, for about an hour and a half. I said I was glad to hear from her; I could say this truthfully. She had suffered a great deal, yet, she maintained through strength of will a resolute sense of joy. But she also said she thought it might be time to think about going to a higher plane. She didn't dislike this earth but was growing tired. She was thirty-nine; "that's old enough, isn't it? I've lived for thousands of years." The wars and killing in the world were pressing on her. Every day, her mind flew on a journey.

There were long moments – minutes, tens of minutes – when she sounded strong and coherent, though still in her hyper-sensitive world, and I felt I was being told something, that she was revealing or seeing something; but her sadness rose. She felt she had no friends, and that she was controlled by the supervisors, who knew everything about her, even her thoughts...

She asked if she could call me in a month. Maybe we could go to the Thai restaurant on Fontane Avenue. Yes, I said, I wanted her to phone, and I wanted to try the restaurant, too.

About two weeks later she phoned again. I said it was a busy time, but she asked for a moment. She said she was leaving the guided-living residence, because she couldn't get along with the rules of the house and the other people in it. She wanted to store her notebooks and journals with me. Of course, I said. Could I pick them up early the next morning, she asked? We made an appointment.

I arrived on time the next morning. The house was at a busy intersection, but it had a yard and pretty plantings and looked clean and well-cared for. Her room was a one-bedroom suite near the entry.

I had not seen her for five years. She remembered exactly when we met, at the parade for the Dogwood Days celebration. (I wondered if the county still did this; if so, I had missed it consistently.) She looked perfectly coherent and was nicely, even stylishly, dressed, but her face looked somewhat blunted, whether from sadness or medication I could not know. Her smile was still brilliant. She still reminded me of Yup'ik women.

We loaded piles of journals into two cartons I had brought, then carried them, and three sitting-pillows she didn't want to abandon, to the car. She was curious about my new book and wanted to go to the bookstore to find it. In the bookstore she picked up the book, held it, then replaced it. "I don't need to read it now, I know what's in it," she said kindly.

We had only about an hour before she was due back. She said that in the house there were many meetings and one meal in common required every week. "But I'm an artist, and I need time alone, I need to think and not hear all this noise." I agreed; of course she was right. She mentioned the traffic and how that exhausted her, too; she was terribly sensitive to ugliness and loud sounds, and bewildered because it was so difficult for her to find a place of loveliness. We drove to my house because she wanted to see it. "It looks familiar. Maybe that's why I knew so much about you when we met," she said as we entered. She walked from room to room and peered at furniture and pictures and bookcases. Gently, she lifted a curtain and remarked that curtains must be very useful, although she seemed to be saying that, really, they were an unfortunate necessity.

On her door was taped a drawing of a lovely woman, and she had given it to me, because – she said – it resembled me. She spoke again about my beauty as being startling and special.

She drank a glass of water, then another. Soon it was time to leave. She was quiet, sad, very angry, I thought. Several times since her first phone-call she had mentioned having been gang-raped. She had used terrifying imagery: "like being inside a Dumpster, treated as garbage." She mentioned it again and said, "This town is my grave yard." I asked if she could go to her mother, who was in California. No, she said, paused, and then: "Your family can be your enemy." All she had offered to the community had been refused and rejected. This puzzled her. Angrily, bitterly, though softly, she said, "I give service. I've given so much service. But why...?" As we pulled into the driveway of the residence, she was in tears and nearly trembling. I had the sense of her inner speed, as if some huge energy were cycling through her. I put my hand gently behind her shoulder and tried to send calm into her body. I told her I loved her. She was facing something that interested and frightened her. She said, "America is a big country and there is still a lot I haven't seen." She was going to travel light. I asked when she was leaving. She was already distracted when she got out of the car. I asked her to call me over the weekend to let me know where she was going; I said I was going out of town on Monday for seven days. But she didn't call.

******

Two weeks later, Sasha Choi phoned from Colorado. That was as far as she had gotten on Amtrak. She had caused a disturbance on the train, passing back and forth from car to car talking to people, commenting on articles and headlines in magazines and newspapers in such a way that they knew she was not one of them. She began predicting. The train had stopped at a small town and put her off, and the police had met her. She was calling from a state mental institution. She had about ten minutes left on her phone card. She wanted to keep in touch; she had written me a short letter.

It was late and once again I was packing for a trip, and I did not listen closely, until I heard tears in her voice. I asked if she was physically safe; I could hear a babble of voices in the background and was sure that emotionally and aesthetically she was in hell. She said that, after all, she hadn't gotten very far, because she was back in the same kind of place she had left. The people even had some of the same names, only they were meaner; this was like the basement of our town.

She said that she had been thinking for a while that maybe she was going to leave this world and this life; thirty-eight or thirty-nine years was plenty long to live in this body, though she felt she was much older than the numbers of her years. She felt she wouldn't mind leaving. She had been feeling sensations lately, pricks and jabs, and she thought they were a signal. She felt like General MacArthur; she felt he was in her body, giving orders. This was good, because people obeyed; but she felt he was giving her directions also. "It's the whole Korean conflict," she said.

She asked if it was all right if she kept in touch. I said yes. She asked about my earlier trip to New York. I said it had been good. She said she had felt herself there, although she had never been to New York, felt herself in the bad parts of the city. She wished me well for the next day's travel. She said everything was becoming more difficult, but that she had a strong spirit and it would see her through.

I asked if she would mind if I wrote about her. "In your magazine?" she asked. Yes, I said. She seemed satisfied. "Then I could read it on a computer in a library somewhere?" Yes, I said.

******

By the end of May, Sasha Choi had phoned again, twice. Lately she had realized that, after all, she might be going to live for a very long time, although earlier, she reminded me, she had sensed that she might not remain long in this body or on this earth. She said, too, that she expected to be able to leave the institution in Colorado, where she was presently – what? incarcerated? – to go to her mother in San Diego. I asked if this would be all right, going to her mother. "Yes," she said, with some surprise.

Once more she called, collect, saying she wanted to hear my voice before the phone was shut down for the night. Big things had been happening nearby, tornadoes, which she thought were not necessarily bad, as they drew down energy and got people organized to help each other. She was still trying to persuade the overseers to give her a pass to visit her mother, if she promised to return. She said she had decided to conduct this as a military campaign in order to get out.

She depends on me for something I cannot or will not give. It is as if I am a vessel, and my voice is a conduit over which I have no authority.

-KM

Previous Endnotes:
A Local Habitation and A Name, Vol. 5, No. 1
The Blank Page, Vol. 4, No. 4
The Poem of the Grand Inquisitor, Vol. 4, No. 3
On the Marionette Theater, Vol. 4, Nos. 1/2
The Double, Vol. 3, No. 4
Folly, Love, St. Augustine, Vol. 3, No. 3
On Memory, Vol. 3, No. 2
Passion, Vol. 3, No. 1
A Flea, Vol. 2, No. 4
On Love, Vol. 2, No. 3
Fantastic Design, with Nooses, Vol. 2, No. 1
Kundera's Music Teacher, Vol. 1, No. 4
The Devil's Dictionary; Economics for Poets, Vol. 1, No. 3
Hecuba in New York; Déformation Professionnelle, Vol. 1, No. 2
Art, Capitalist Relations, and Publishing on the Web, Vol. 1, No. 1

Recommended Reading

As a teenager did you ever search through books for the "good parts"? Now a group in Fairfax [Va.] - Parents Against Bad Books in Schools - brings those to you [<http://www.sibbap.org/booksas.html>] on the web without even having to search [although some searching might be involved if you were to actually try to find them in the books]. See <http://www.loper.org/~george/trends/2001/Jun/67.html> [including links].

Then, if you are of a mind, send in your own list of "good parts," with their complete location in the books you read and I will consider putting some of them on my web site. Alternatively, rate the books which are mentioned by PABBIS and I will post your votes on my web site with full attribution.

George Loper
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<http://sand.loper.org/~george>

&&&&&&

Calvin Reid *("Conversation with Calvin Reid on Electronic Publishing,"* Archipelago *Vol. 4, No. 4) writes to us about two comics artists:*

"**Jessica Abel**'s comics offer a subtle anthropology of her own generation of socially audacious, mildly bohemian post-feminists. She uses comics like a tool, observing, documenting, examining the social dynamics of a free floating crowd of young, urban, pleasure seeking bar hoppers. Her writing, in combination with her crisp, precise, stylishly assured drawings, chronicle the shifting relationships between the young and unfocused; men and women who aren't necessarily what they would like to be and haven't quite figured out how to become it. She's a reporter of sorts, and emotional veracity is her beat.

"Her deft accumulation of the social details of these relationships, friendships and dubious one-night stands, can be seen as artful dispatches from a thoughtful correspondent on contemporary manners."

Jessica Abel, ARTBABE <http://www.artbabe.com>

Comics: SOUNDTRACK: Short Stories 1989-1996. MIRROR WINDOW: an Artbabe Collection. ARTBABE Vol. 2, Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4. (Fantagraphics <http://www.fantagraphics.com>)

JESSICA ABEL, INTREPID GIRL REPORTER: "20 page photocopied digest-size minicomic collecting various journalistic comic strips from other publications." ESCUADRON RESCATE/ASI PASAN LOS DIAS: "Adventure story about the amateur Rescue Squadron that lives on my block, backed with a melancholy tale of being an ex-pat in Mexico by Matt Madden. (Highwater Books <http://hightwaterbooks.com> P.O.Box 1956 Cambridge, MA 02238)

"Eyes Only" : Three Panels by Jessica Abel

©Jessica Abel


Failed, utterly.
Failed.


Failed, utterly.
Failed.

"**Matt Madden**'s comics can also recreate a vivid sense of a generation lingering in a pleasant social limbo, suspended eternally between renting and owning. His characters are young, sporadically ambitious and heavily attracted to bars, loud bands and minimum wage jobs. But Madden is a formalist trickster disguised a quirky realist. He revels in the idiosyncrasies of comics styles past and present; in the syntax of words and pictures seamlessly combined. His comics generate surprising perspectives in apparently naturalistic stories that can focus on a human guinea pig-for-money or, as in his forthcoming graphic novel ODDS OFF, a dislocated, disaffected foreign-born graduate student who finds herself lost in a battle between language and sub-language. His drawings are simple, engaging the eye and the mind with expert, telling social details. But they are also strategically and semiotically elastic, offering both a sense of irony, a deep poignancy and a playful rearrangement of the elements of comics style."

Matt Madden <http://www.mattmadden.com>

ODDS OFF (Highwater Books <http://www.highwaterbooks.com/matt/archive.html>)

"Exercises in Style": "a work in progress based on the work of the same title by the French author Raymond Queneau, a member of the experimental literary group Oulipo." On the Web in English <http://www.indymagazine.com/comics/style.shtml>

Exercises de style *version français* <http://www.pipo.com/du9/du9/expo/expo_madden.htm>

Esercize di Stile versioni italiano <http://www.fumetti.org/esercizi/default.htm>

Matt Madden : Three Panels from "Exercises in Style"


What time is it?
It's 1:15.
Thanks!
What the hell was I looking for, anyway?!


I was working at the computer
and I got up to get something out of the fridge.
I went into the dining room.
From up in the studio, Jessica asked me what time it was.
I told her it was around one...
I heard her say thanks from upstairs.
I guess I got distracted because when I opened the refrigerator door ...
I couldn't for the life of me remember what I had come looking for!

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