THE REDWOOD COAST
REVIEW

Volume 14, Number 3 Summer 2012

A Publication of Friends of Coast Community Library in Cooperation with the Independent Coast Observer

ARTS & SCIENCES

At Home in Exile

Zara Raab

Edward Frenkel, mathematician and filmmaker, grew up in a town near Moscow and came to the United States as a young man right out of college, just as the Berlin Wall was coming down. Life in the Soviet Union had not been easy for a young mathematical genius, a student who showed great promise at a very young age. Now a professor of mathematics at University of California, Berkeley, and the author of over eighty scientific articles and books, Frenkel has recently turned to writing and filmmaking. His is the biography of a gifted man, a story of success against the odds.

The mathematical side of Edward Frenkel's life focuses on the central scientific concept of symmetry, and involves him in the Langlands Program's advanced system for tying together different areas of mathematics and quantum physics. My own intuitive understanding of symmetry often comes from tenth-grade geometry, but according to Frenkel, symmetry can mean different things in different fields. Most simply put, as one of the characters explains in *The Two-Body Problem,* his screenplay with Thomas Farber, "an object is symmetrical if it can be transformed in non-trivial ways without changing its shape and position." The examples Frenkel likes to give are snowflakes, butterflies and diamonds, but mathematical equations can also be symmetrical, and in quantum physics, elementary particles have the symmetries of the particle's inner world. Understanding these symmetries leads us to a much better understanding of their behavior. Working at the interface of math and quantum physics, Frenkel looks for the common trends and patterns, using symmetry.

By all rights, Frenkel should have attended the prestigious Moscow University when he turned sixteen, but was denied a place there because his father was Jewish. As Frenkel explains, "In Moscow, in those days, there was special treatment at the entrance exams for students targeted as Jewish. The exams were designed specifically to keep the Jewish students away." Frenkel had to endure a four-hour oral exam during which he was asked questions significantly more difficult than those asked of other applicants, questions that ordinary high school students could not have been expected to know. At the same time, none of his answers were accepted as correct. The examiner, for example, asked him to define a circle. Frenkel replied by saying that a circle was the set of points in a plane, equidistant from a fixed point. But this answer was judged wrong, because, as the examiner explained, "It is the set of *all* points in a plane, equidistant from a fixed point." The examiner, who failed Frenkel on the exam, later, perhaps out of a vague sense of guilt, told Frenkel that he showed an extraordinary grasp of mathematics. As Frenkel exclaims when relating this story, "It was ludicrous! Can you believe this?"

A lot of doors were closed to Frenkel in Russia. He studied mathematics in Moscow at the Institute of Oil & Gas, which had a small applied math program, where a lot of bright Jewish students ended up. While he was an undergraduate there, some mathematicians took him

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COURTESY OF JOHN FLYNN

The author's mother, Grace Marie Cerullo, around 1958

WITHOUT PAPERS

Family, immigration and identity

John Flynn

Hybrid cars, mixed messages from a mixed-race President, and a mongrel subway rider asking himself if anything was pure any longer. That rider would be me—tri-hyphenated romantic in the land of T-ball, think-tanks and triglycerides. I was Irish, Italian and American—yet if I was all three, how could I be one of them?

These were my thoughts as I gripped the handrail of the redline train into Cambridge. I was back in Boston, city of my birth, a copy of Paul Virilio's *Open Sky* in my coat pocket. It was a proudly retro moment, standing there in public with a book.

I'd been invited from LA to read my poems. Squeezed between nine-to-fivers, I fought off jet lag and indulged in the breezy sport of finding commuters who looked as weary as I felt. This sport had become habit on the buses and trains of Los Angeles. Neither tragic nor unusual, I assumed my unhappiness made me one with the herd.

A sullen young brunette sat near me, her head against the window as if preventing her from toppling over. Full-boned, her shoulders mannish, she kept her eyes closed. Her high flat cheekbones, glossy raven hair and cocoa-butter complexion suggested an indigenous ancestry from South of the Border. In her features, I saw my own mother at the same age, riding the same red line home after working in the meat department of a Cambridge supermarket.

Perhaps in the twenty-first century I could find purity, after all. Such a Latina was the face of the latest wave of new arrivals, many of them subjected to ridicule, no matter how hard they tried to belong. In my mother's era, Italians headed a similar wave. Labeled Guineas, Dagos and greasers, their numbers peaked in the postwar decades when DiMaggio and Sinatra flavored popular culture. Many —including my mother's parents—had come illegally. How else explain the label Wop (without papers)?

I thought with unease of the squawking on TV and radio I'd been trying to avoid, much of it politicized rhetoric about illegal aliens. It puzzled and angered me. This country I was born in—was it mine? It never quite stacked up against agenda-driven interpretations.

San Francisco and New Orleans came to mind, and the environs of New Jersey and Manhattan, where Italian ghettos thrived: Neapolitans and Sicilians, those from the Piedmont and the Abruzzi regions, most of them uneducated, dirt poor and fleeing tyranny, had brought with them provincial resentments. Yet they had lived together, crammed into cobbled streets lined with brick tenements.

Growing up, I seldom heard about my mother's parents. Only one photo existed of my grandfather, Eugenio. Only a handful of my Nona, who died when I was thirteen; I knew her as a long-suffering widow shuffled from one tiny apartment to the next. She was the mother of twelve, or was it thirteen children? I never got a clear answer.

Mom often complained that only her brother Richie bothered to visit her. She'd moved out of Boston and the projects where I'd spent my first five years, to a town on the other side of Worcester. For members of Mom's big family, that hour commute from Boston, which meant crossing west over Route 495, was tantamount to crossing the Rockies in the 1880s.

Mom's generation hadn't dreamed of cultivating a bilingual, bicultural identity in the New World. They'd given it all up, abandoning the lovely Italian mother tongue, insisting on English, and identifying the family as American, without hyphens.

According to the manifest of the *SS Cretic*, my grandfather Eugenio stood 5 feet 3 and weighed 110 pounds. Copies of that manifest that I'd seen proved there were hundreds listed at the same weight and height. Illiterate, Eugenio had been told to sign his name X. Page after page showed that many others had also chosen that name. It's an old story now, a display in the museum at Ellis Island, closed for so long after 9/11.

I recalled strident voices debating that the current Latin tide would bring the US to ruin. Reminded of Sacco and Vanzetti and the red scare of the 1920s, I recalled that mass deportations and public denunciations of immigrants had occurred more than once in this country, usually as part of a power grab playing on fears. Italians had been lynched in New Orleans. Africans had been lynched everywhere. Jews had been ghettoized and restricted. Native Indians had been betrayed, extinguished. Even the Irish had come over on slave ships, and were stomped on—why else go into ward politics?

Were these lessons of history still being taught in public schools? I wanted something pure. I had it. My own family history.

Mom's generation hadn't dreamed of cultivating a bilingual, bicultural identity in the New World. They'd given it all up, abandoning the lovely Italian mother tongue, insisting on English, and identifying the family as American, without hyphens. Mom married a Roxbury boy—not West Roxbury, not lace-curtain Irish, but the working-class son of vaudeville entertainers. Though Dad seldom discussed it, I knew from Mom that his father was against their marriage. I knew even less about my fractious Irish heritage than my Italian one.

What Mom and Dad had in common was Catholicism. The Flynns were Irish, indeed, on Saint Patrick's Day. One of my mother's quirkier proud moments was her acceptance, through a thirty-year marriage, into the Ancient Order of Hibernians. I snicker to myself as I remember Mom in her apron cooking lasagna each Thanksgiving, the most unlikely of fair colleens. She'd felt shame and dissatisfaction with identifying herself as Italian, and had come late to sharing her Neapolitan heritage. For Christmas the year she turned sixty, she compiled an album for each of her children. In it were all extant photocopied pictures and documents that related to her family.

There are two photos of her mother when younger, and only a half-dozen of herself before her marriage—she so comely with a lightning-flash smile. When I asked why so few, she muttered, "We couldn't afford a camera."

It bothered me to think that for most of her life she felt ashamed of her roots, and had buried them. Now, with health issues and fears of death looming, she was pursuing genealogy as if seeking to cauterize that shame. Come hell or high water, she'd show her history to her children. In some ways, given memories of abuse from her father, I think it brought her as much pain as comfort.

How could I forget the look on her face after a recent Christmas dinner when she'd tried to explain Italy and immigration while showing her notebook to my youngest brother's daughters? Both of these nieces had offered solicitous attention without genuine interest. Later, in their defense, I explained to Mom that the

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Stars, Art and Tar: Notes on a return to my native land

Stephen Kessler

On a recent visit to Los Angeles I rolled into town around 9pm and thought I might catch a movie before checking in at my Westside hotel. The Nuart Theater, conveniently located just off the 405, was showing the new Juliette Binoche film, *Elles*, an unrated contemporary Franco-Polish drama whose explicit sexual content guarantees limited circulation in the United States. The movie's brief run was ending in the next couple of days, Binoche is my favorite actress—for her subtle intelligence as well as her beauty, which only deepens with age—and I had nothing else to do, so I pulled off the freeway at Santa Monica Boulevard, parked around the corner from the theater and prepared to voyeurize some Parisian eroticism for the next couple of hours.

The movie didn't start for another 45 minutes, so I took the time to browse in a secondhand bookstore on Sawtelle, a shop I hadn't visited for fifteen or twenty years. In the 1970s I found there a copy of a rare collection of Henry Miller watercolors and I recalled many interesting hours spent in its narrow aisles over my years as a native and recurrent visitor to the city. As soon as I entered the old building I noticed something different: instead of the cluttered, abundantly overstocked and dusty bookshop of memory, the collection was pared down, with shelf space to spare, and as I scanned the titles it struck me that each book seemed to have been selected by a highly literate and discerning sensibility. For me it was an extraordinary and encouraging rediscovery, and I was heartened to be told by the fellow at the desk (there was no counter or cash register and the owner wasn't present) that the store, now called Alias Books, was doing very well and had been in business in this new incarnation for more than a decade.

I found, among other unexpected things, a copy of Camus's *Notebooks 1951-1959*, the third and final volume of the author's private musings, translated by Ryan Bloom and issued in a handsome trade paperback by Ivan R. Dee, an independent publisher in Chicago, as recently as 2010. It was a

Its soft desert air is part of my pores; its vast grid of streets a map of my formative years; its culture of accelerated striving embedded in my heart; its ring of beaches spread thickly with sand poured through the waist of some mythic hourglass of time forever running out.

book I had never seen before, and in light of Justin O'Brien's earlier version of the *Notebooks 1942-1951* (originally published by Knopf in 1965 and reissued in paperback thirty years later by another obscure American publisher, Marlowe & Company), I was happy to get my hands on this one. Camus is, for my money, one of the deepest and wisest thinkers of the twentieth century, and in his notebooks he reveals himself (at the time to himself alone) to be a touchingly vulnerable human work-in-progress, dealing with his own growing fame as a writer as well as with big ideas, cultural insights—especially about the French—and private doubts. The notebooks of such a mind at work, jotting down thoughts for essays or novels, tossing off incidental epigrams ("Naturalness is not a virtue that one has: it is acquired." "The opposite of reaction is not revolution, but creation."), observing the behavior of contemporaries, remarking on their character, acknowledging rivalries, reflecting on politics, sorting out for himself how best to live, make for provocative and thrilling reading.

And how synchronistic to find this book by this great French-language writer during a brief interlude before watching a seriously sexy French-language film. Binoche plays a middle-aged bourgeois journalist with a businessman husband and two school-age sons who is finishing an article for *Elle* magazine based on interviews with a couple of young women who are paying for their college education by freelancing as prostitutes. As Binoche's character, Anne, taps away at her laptop under a looming deadline, she visualizes scenes her subjects have described to her of encounters with their clients—dramatized onscreen in unusually graphic yet not gratuitous terms—and she becomes increasingly unsettled by the contrast between these girls' assertion of their sexual power and independence and the constraints and frustrations of her own respectable family life.

It is a very good film, and Binoche as usual is excellent in her embodiment of the complex inner conflicts of her character. It is also a strikingly erotic film, yet neither

Juliette Binoche and Albert Camus

romantic nor exploitive in its exploration of female sexuality and male sexual need. In American hands such themes would surely have been sensationalized, but the female Polish director of *Elles*, 39-year-old Malgorzata Szumowska, manages to create a broodingly intelligent investigation of the crosscurrents between desperation, desire, economic necessity and familial obligation. You could watch it, if you were so inclined, just for the sexy parts but you would be missing the deeper and more interesting existential questions it raises—about love, about work, about marriage—so beautifully enacted by the great Binoche.

Colored by the company of these artists, Camus and Binoche, Los Angeles came intimately alive for me as a landscape brimming with not just the usual urban aggravations but with vivid dramatic reality. The meals and conversations I enjoyed while there with family and select friends were complemented by time I had alone to explore the city and county, from the wilds of Malibu's Decker Canyon and the nature preserve on Point Dume at the northwest tip of Santa Monica Bay to a charmingly civilized French bistro a few doors down from Skylight Books on Vermont and across from the post office in the Los Feliz district where I had lunch one afternoon and, just like an old-school tourist in some exotic locale, took time while sipping a leisurely espresso to pen a letter to a far-off friend and then slip it into the slot across the street.

Another significant touristic stop was a visit to the La Brea Tar Pits on Wilshire Boulevard's Miracle Mile where I marveled that the ancient dinosaur graveyard, now surrounded by a safety fence and a grassy park next door to the LA County Museum of Art, was more or less the same black swamp it was in the fifties. The anagrammatic rhyme of art and tar suggested to me the curious coincidence that both have a way of preserving evidence of ancient existences: the mammoth fossils long since recovered from the gooey ooze by industrious paleontologists, and now represented by lifelike scale models rising out of the pits to catch the attention of passersby, are oddly analogous to the artifacts displayed in the adjacent museum complex, the artists' creations outlasting their buried bones.

During these leisurely afternoons I gave myself permission to do nothing, and that sense of aimlessness moved me somehow to follow my random instincts and revisit parts of a city utterly changed since I was growing up there more than half a century ago. Favorite old drive-ins and hot-dog stands, drugstores and bookstores and moviehouses, landmarks of my childhood redolent of popcorn and French fries (again the French), are gone or transformed, replaced by highrise office towers or turned into luxury shopping malls, the landscape of the past inexorably erased by time too relentless and totally lost for even Proust to recapture.

Sipping a margarita in a Mexican restaurant over a meal with my nephew Mike (a freelance journalist who has eclipsed my dubious example by becoming a first-rate investigative reporter) or having a Kingfisher beer with my old friend Bart (whom I first met when we were students at UCLA in 1965 and who is now a talmudic scholar and lawyer specializing in mediation) at his favorite Indian eatery, I can almost remember everything I left when I fled this city so long ago, everything that's too late to recollect now yet paradoxically lingers in the mind, the psyche, the soul somehow shaped for better or worse by this often exasperating environment. The LA climate, its soft desert air, is part of my pores; its vast grid of streets an infinitely associative map of my formative years; its culture of accelerated striving and glittery glamour something I hope to have escaped and yet remains embedded in my tarry heart like the fang of a saber-tooth tiger; its ring of beaches spread thickly with sand poured through the waist of some mythic hourglass of time forever running out.

And yet one thing has remained the same: The Apple Pan, that charming little diner on Pico near Westwood, just around the corner from my hotel; a greasy spoon with a U-shaped counter and two or three dozen stools and a minimal menu of burgers and fries, coffee and apple pie still served by the same old guys in their little white hats and soiled aprons and perfunctory manners—a time warp like some Hopper painting where night owls gather to be alone together in the darkness of some existential eternity. And who is that cool, vaguely French-looking couple on the far side of the grill smoking and speaking low over their coffee cups?

The Redwood Coast
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The Redwood Coast Review is published quarterly (January, April, July and October) by Friends of Coast Community Library in cooperation with the *Independent Coast Observer*. The opinions expressed in these pages are those of the individual writers and do not necessarily reflect the views of FoCCL, the ICO or the advertisers.

We welcome your submissions. Please send essays, reviews, fiction, poetry and letters to the Editor, The Redwood Coast Review, c/o ICO, PO Box 1200, Gualala, CA 95445. Manuscripts should be typed, double-spaced, with the author's name, address, phone, email and word count at the top of the first page. Postal mail only. A self-addressed, stamped envelope is required for our reply.

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READERS' LETTERS

Art is a gift that needs to be given to others

At the end of your fine survey of Vivian Maier's photos ("An Unknown Artist, Even to Herself," Spring 2012), you make some comments that I must half-disagree with. Yes, the making of art is its own reward. And yes, the loss is the world's if fine work vanishes. But I feel that the second statement doesn't quite line up with the first. Because to make art is to try both to create and to *give a gift*. Czeslaw Milosz: "[U]nderneath the ambition to perfect one's art without hope of being rewarded by contemporaries lurks a magnanimity of gift-offering to posterity" (*A Book of Luminous Things*).

In that case, the artist's efforts can succeed or fail on either count. One may fail to make art of high quality, of course. But if one makes gems and fails to give them away, the *giving* part of the intrinsic reward is missing. So here there is a loss not just to the potential recipients, but to the hopeful giver as well.

There is no reason to equate the giving part of the process with popularity, commercial success, or other goals of material ambition. There is a gift economy alongside the fiscal/economic one. (Lewis Hyde explores the relation between the two in his seminal 1981 book, *The Gift*.) Good art can survive without mercantile success; in most cultures at most times it has probably found a way of doing so, and if it hadn't, our cultural heritage would be much thinner. The question now is whether good art can even survive in the gift economy, or put a little more broadly, whether the gift economy itself can survive. If it can't, then the culture we pass down will be seriously impoverished.

Roger Greenwald
Toronto

LIFE STORIES

Believe You Me

Encounter in a Palo Alto Bookstore

Walter Martin

I have been listening for an hour to the most abject man on earth.

He walked in singing, loudly and well, from the finale of *Don Giovanni*—*"Ferma un po'. . . Non si pasce di cibo mortale . . . Che si pasce di cibo celeste . . ."*

"A white man, sir!" he said. "A man of stone!"

A ferocious face, the veins in his forehead seemed ready to burst. Tufts bristling at nostrils and ears, a terrifying scowl, and eyebrows worthy of a wild boar.

Now that he had our attention, he continued: *"Altre cure più gravi di queste, Altra brama quaggiù mi guido!"*

Many of his sentences seemed to end in exclamation marks, and very few were completed without interjection—"O Heaven forbid . . . Pardon me, sir . . . I hope I'm not wasting your valuable time . . . I'm nothing but a stupid old man . . . God forgive me . . ." and so on.

He had recently called Schoenhof's in Cambridge—"an excellent shop, sir, but believe me, not as excellent as yours"—because he needed urgently to read *De Monarchia*. They sent him their Italian catalogue and he stayed up all night going over it and marking things. One edition was in Latin and Italian, another in Latin and English. Unable to decide, not having eaten that day, having not a penny to his name, he ordered both, at sixty dollars apiece. He recommends Alighieri to all those who want to understand what is wrong with America today.

I nod, which throws him off balance.

"I'm wasting your time, sir! Tell me to leave immediately!" He makes a move for the door, and when I protest, cries out, *"Hialo didoskole!* God bless you, sir," and bangs his fist on the counter. "Give me your hand in pledge."

Then asks—"Are you familiar . . . I'm sure you must be, you're obviously a cultured man . . . with these lines from *Death on the Installment Plan*?" In French he recites the passage about renouncing medicine once and for all as so much *"merde . . . Pardon my French!"*

ROBERTA TEWES

"What a man! . . . Louis-Ferdinand Céline, God bless his soul . . . Forgive me, sir… I spent some years in medical school, so I know what he meant!"

Out of the blue he cried: *"Maledizione! . . .* I hate to mention this . . . God forgive me . . . but I held it against you for years that you were playing some piece of popular music the first time I came in . . . I can't help . . . I can't . . . I have a grudge against the modern world . . . (shifting into declamation) . . . but a tawdry cheapness shall outlast our days . . . so I fear . . . (the tragic mask whisked off and replaced by its counterpart) . . . Remember 'Young Man with a Horn'? Bix Beiderbecke? Wonderful stuff . . . *He who on honeydew hath fed / hath no need of mortal food*—don't you agree?"

Remembering Céline, he said, "And would you believe it? . . . Some imbecile in the Yale Review called him . . . (looking both ways to see if the coast was clear, and frowning deeply, pinching his nose) . . . an anti-Semite!"

I take off Sonny Rollins and put on a Haydn Mass. This has a calming effect. He closes his eyes and, grinning as furiously as he had frowned before, breaks into Italian again, reciting a long speech in a loud voice as if into a microphone.

"And do you know who *that* was? . . . (drawing himself up from his stoop at the mention of the name) . . . Benito Mussolini!" Lowering his voice to a whisper, he repeats with awe: "Benito Mussolini . . . *Il Commendatore!* . . . Oh, sir, forgive me . . . I should know better by now . . . I only pray that I will not get you arrested, get both of us arrested, sir . . . though it would be an honor to share a cell with you, certainly . . . They can torture me there as long as they want . . . I will never, never, never, *never recant*!"

He claps both hands over his mouth hard enough to snap his head back.

A long desperate sigh, and slowly—"It's a dangerous world . . . you must be very, very careful with whom you let yourself get involved, believe you me."

He asks if I have any missals, and I do. "God be praised! . . . Of course you do! . . . He told me to come in here today . . . Bless you, sir, you're a saint! . . . Oh, I shall have a mass said for you, sir . . . not a funeral mass, eh? . . . *ha, ha* . . . certainly not." He goes off to look for his missal and I grab these pages and scribble what little I am able to remember. He returns soon with a postcard of George Eliot.

"Do you know what that filthy-minded Time magazine called this noble woman? . . . (mimes the act of spitting on the floor, convincingly) . . . 'Mrs. Immanuel Chinwhisker, a fag in drag!' . . . forgive me for using that kind of language in here."

He had himself been married once—prior to the odious Council (pretending to spit again)—to the daughter of Pope John XXIII, and he wrote to his Holiness, saying: I prostrate myself in the dust every day before your image, begging your forgiveness, Holy Father.

"Do I strike you as somewhat . . . chimærical, sir?"

He leaves again and returns with a long stanza by Waldo Emerson for me to read. "When I tried to recite those lines to a certain colleague of mine, he said . . . Can you imagine such a thing? . . . He said, 'Well, Bill, everybody knows that Henry Thoreau was sleeping with Emerson's wife." This revelation was followed by a terrible gnashing of teeth, pawing of carpet, and long-drawn-out sigh.

He seemed to have an endless supply of verse for every occasion, in at least five languages, at his command. I asked if he wrote poetry himself.

"Certainly not! . . . oh, no . . . no . . . (then, shaken) . . . I showed a sonnet to a professor of mine at Yale, who praised it to the skies . . . I knew perfectly well it was rubbish . . . Why didn't he say so? . . . I never made that mistake again."

A physician, and simultaneously, since the late fifties, a toiler in the stacks at Hoover Tower, where no one ever bothers him—"I had so few patients—why not do something I enjoyed every day? something to improve my mind?"—but one day he walked into the lobby and what do you think they had on display?

Grossly offended even now, he jumps on the punchline:

"The letters of Chou-en-lai, sir! The letters of CHOU-EN-LAI!"

But not all men are bad, he assured me. There are giants who walk the earth even today, in particular His Grace Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, Superior General of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost, "a tremendous figure, rock-solid, strictly traditional. I would urge you to read his *Open Letter to Confused Catholics* . . . I recommend him to you unreservedly." The antithesis, apparently, of Ernesto Cardenal, whose book he had just found in the Stanford Bookstore . . . (retching and rolling his eyes) . . . "I love Spanish poetry, sir, but Cardenal was mixed up with the bunch of thugs who drove out that decent man, Somoza . . . I won't set foot in there again."

He jabs a finger in my chest.

"Forgive me, sir . . . I'm not jabbing, I'm jabbering, eh? . . . *ha, ha!* . . . and I'm certainly not jabbing a finger at you, sir. Never!"

He placed, last night at one a.m., a person-to-person call to Père Fallé, in Switzerland, a call that lasted a long while, begging His Worship to accept, on behalf of the Holy Ghost Fathers, as a token of his deepest respect, the gift of two volumes of Dante, for the benefit of its members . . . "if they would read them, which I doubt."

After which he called Dr. X, a neurosurgeon at the Veterans Hospital, who had once, years before, ordered—"without my consent"—a 'lamposcopy', totally unnecessary and a waste of taxpayers' money.

"And do you know what he called me?" he asked, crushed by the weight of the unforgivable. "He said, 'You're nothing but a damned fool!' and slammed down the telephone . . . like this!

"And I said to myself, now Bill, you are certainly a fool . . . he was right about that . . . but you are not damned, no, Bill, I said, you are . . . NOT . . . damned!"

Closing his eyes for a long time, the better to inhale the *Benedictus*: "No, sir, I may be stupid . . . I may be a hopeless and pathetic worm . . . but the Lord is wise . . . (eyes twinkling now) . . . the Lord is wise! . . . I don't move an inch until He tells me to."

Walter Martin is a poet, a bookseller and the translator of The Complete Poems of Charles Baudelaire *(Carcanet). He lives in Fredericksburg, Texas.*

In a Time of Wild Mustard

Segregated by family
in botany books, they crowd
together in the borders
between highway and fences
—mustard wild radish
cow parsnips—blooming fiercely
and late this year
like spring, drenched
nearly into summer.

In the parking lot
at the wharf surfers climb
from cars and pickups
and off motorcycles
to suit up and carrying
their boards go single file
down the narrow path between
the boathouse and seawall,
huge granite boulders
trucked from the mountains
after the ocean's last great
lunge to retake the land
took out the pier.

Abreast by threes
they paddle out to form
a mammoth circle in the waves
enclosing a brother and sister
like an embrace.
Above them on the pier
a voice lifts and is joined
as the words . . . *how sweet*
the sound . . . drift out over
the bobbing heads and
black-clad bodies, sprays
of wild rhododendron
falling to the sea.

Outside the windows
of the old Odd Fellows Hall
on Main Street, the day
darkens as kin and comrades
gather, an evening fog wet
and blowing spreads in over
the town, and the last of the
wild forest flowers wash
back to shore.

One by one in the big
room upstairs we are
talking talking talking
the things he did, the
things he said, telling
memories, reading his poems,
all to keep him here alive
this much longer, knowing
he left last week, the
righteous waterman,
on the one wave
he did not ride home
or after so many eons away
he was home.

—Fionna Perkins

FRENKEL *from page 1*

Edward Frenkel

under their wings and mentored him. He did some cutting-edge research and was invited to Harvard University. Suddenly he found himself a visiting professor at one of the most prestigious institutions in the free world. Frenkel was just twenty-one years old.

He remembers the journey to the United States vividly. "My plane touches down at Logan Airport in Boston. But I felt at home. I immediately felt it was my place." Five years later, his family immigrated to the Boston area. Meanwhile, he earned his PhD in one year at Harvard, and after that became a Junior Fellow and then an Associate Professor at Harvard.

Then, as Frenkel explains with a smile, "the University of California at Berkeley made me an offer I couldn't refuse."

Not only is Frenkel a mathematician, he's also a filmmaker. In recent years, he has made the extraordinary leap into filmmaking as a way of expressing his feelings for the beauty of mathematics. Frenkel's first film, *Rites of Love and Math* [http://ritesofloveandmath.com/], was co-directed with the French experimental filmmaker Reine Graves. He was living in Paris at the time, doing research under the auspices of a French mathematical foundation, when a mutual friend introduced him to Graves. Frenkel wanted to make a film about math. Graves immediately saw the potential of the project. The result is a short film, 26 minutes long, in which a mathematician, played by Frenkel himself, creates a formula of love that he tattoos on the body of his beloved. It ends in tragedy, as a kind of homage to a film by the great Japanese writer Yukio Mishima. It is part fantasy, part allegory, part meditation on what most people consider to be incompatible notions: mathematics, beauty and love. The controversial film evoked strong reactions—some positive and some negative. Frenkel admits that his childhood reading of Russian authors like Dostoyevsky and Bulgakov contributed to the writing of both his screenplays, The darker undertones of Frenkel's writing, reflected especially in *Rites of Love and Math* with its tragic ending, come, he says, from his Russian heritage.

For Frenkel, the film was a natural continuation of his work in mathematics. He wanted to dispel popular myths about mathematics, as well as build bridges between different fields. According to Frenkel, "Most people just shut down when you try to broach the subject of math. They might pretend they are listening, but they aren't, really. One reason people don't want to hear you is bad math education. The subject is abstract, so if your teacher does not find a way to explain it clearly, then this leaves you with a bad taste, and this taste stays with you. And there's fear, too. People think they will not be able to understand. But in fact I believe that everyone is capable of understanding math, if it is explained in the right way."

The idea of *Rites of Love and Math* is not to talk about the subject directly, but to let people see and feel it through the powerful images of cinema. "To most people this sounds very surprising," Frenkel says, "but I actually believe that love and math are not that far away from each other. Math requires the same kind of love and passion as poetry, art and music; it's a creative process of going against the unknown. I wanted to convey that in a more emotional way as opposed to cerebral way."

Frenkel's next film project was co-writing, with the novelist Tomas Farber, a screenplay called *The Two-Body Problem* [http://thetwobodyproblem.com/] using the mathematical "two-body problem"— finding the trajectories of two objects, which interact only with each other—as a metaphor for the problem of love between two human beings. *The Two-Body Problem* started as a screenplay that was later adapted for the stage and directed by Barbara Oliver at the Aurora Theater in Berkeley. It has also been published as a book by Andrea Young Arts.

The Two-Body Problem is partly about the connection and collision between the real world and the abstract world with the "two-body problem" serving as metaphor for male-female bonding. One of the characters, Phillip, is a mathematician. He explains in the screenplay that mathematics is the world of infinite possibilities. Nothing ever dies. You never have to sacrifice anything. Phillip wants to hold onto his former love and not sacrifice the world of possibilities of other romantic relationships. In mathematics, "the two-body problem" has a unique solution. But in the real world, that's not the case. The relationship of two people is complicated, especially if other relationships are introduced; it doesn't always have a solution. In the play, Phillip tries to come to terms with this dichotomy between the mathematical truths of his profession and human truth. He is so used to being able to solve all problems, he's a bit flummoxed at first by real-life problems.

Films and books tend to portray mathematicians as people enclosed in themselves, sometimes on the verge of mental illness, like the mathematician in *A Beautiful Mind*. Phillip, the mathematician in the screenplay *The Two-Body Problem*, is not like this. He is an intellectual driven by his intellectual pursuit, but he also has a fulfilling, albeit sometimes frustrating personal life. Frenkel wants to emphasize that there is no contradiction between the two.

Both characters in *The Two Body Problem* are looking for a deep relationship. Richard, the writer, says he is waiting for a princess who will come and kiss him and wake him up. And for Phillip, the mathematician, likewise, something is drawing him to his past lover, so he is drawn to that deep relationship with someone. This is the ideal that he wants to pursue. But at the same time he has no trouble meeting other women. *The Two-Body Problem* explores these contradictions.

Frenkel and Farber are in talks with a well-known French producer about a film based on their screenplay. Frenkel, who wants to play Phillip in the film, attended the Cannes Film Festival to mingle with producers and filmmakers. But the world of filmmaking, even independent filmmaking, is different from Frenkel's native world of mathematics, where you work by yourself or you work with one or two others, even though you depend on what other people have done. When you actually make an effort, and write up your results and your ideas, it's a solitary effort. Filmmaking involves many people working collaboratively throughout the whole process.

In mathematics, "the two-body problem" has a unique solution. But in the real world, the relationship of two people is complicated, especially if others are introduced; it doesn't always have a solution. Phillip tries to come to terms with this dichotomy between the mathematical truths of his profession and human truth.

Frenkel continues his mathematical research, and in the field of mathematical publishing, too, he turns out to be an innovator. For high-end mathematics, the three or four most prestigious publishers will typically publish a print version, putting the PDF File online and selling it for close to the full price. But with a very small effort you can create a much better product, one with links to all references in the text, so the reader can jump easily within the text or from the text to the references and back. Such documents could be available at a much lower price, accessible to students, who often don't have much money.

This is just what Frenkel created with his own mathematical text. He negotiated with Cambridge University Press to keep the rights to the electronic version of his book. Then he went to Mathematical Sciences Publishers, a small company in Berkeley, to produce a state-of-the-art, fully hyper-linked electronic version of his book. "This," says Frenkel, "is the future of publishing in mathematics. This is how scientific texts will be produced in the future. Mine is one of the first."

Frenkel put the electronic version of his book on his homepage so anyone can download it, free. Here is the link: http://math.berkeley.edu/~frenkel/loop.pdf

His book is an example of how scientific publishing should be done—especially in math, where scholars depend so much on the work of others.

Frenkel is at Columbia University at the moment, as the recipient of their prestigious visiting position the Eilenberg Chair. He is finishing a book about mathematics as a parallel universe, hidden from most people, which he wants to make accessible to a wide audience. "There is a magic world out there, which most people don't know exists," he says. The book uses a non-standard approach mixing presentation of mathematical ideas with a narrative of his own journey, his struggle with adversity, mathematical research and artistic pursuit.

The story of Frenkel's education in Moscow is a story that he thinks more people should know about. "A lot of lives were broken at that time by the system in the Soviet Union." He was only sixteen years old, but strong enough to survive. In some ways, he says, his struggles there as a student made him stronger: "I had a lot of support from my family, and I benefited from the generosity of some wonderful mathematicians. But a lot of young people suffered from this, and their careers were broken, their lives were broken. For what? Just because of anti-Semitism. There's simply no justification for this. We need to talk more about it, to prevent this from happening in the future."

Frenkel's coming of age was a time of economic crisis in the Soviet Union. He was torn, because his family was still in Russia. In the early years, when he was at Harvard before his family, too, immigrated, he missed them. He wondered if he should go back to Russia. His parents were clear: "Don't come back. This is your opportunity. You should stay." He decided to stay at Harvard. And then he arranged for his family to immigrate. They came about five years later and are still living in the Boston area. Frenkel visited his family in Boston in January 2012, when the American Mathematical Society invited him to give the Colloquium Lectures.His family came to see him give this address in front of an audience of thousands. So it was a homecoming for Frenkel.

Russia remains important in Edward Frenkel's life. He was twenty-one when he came to the United States—still growing up. But he felt at home here. In fact, he says he felt more at home here than in his country of birth. He says, "I haven't been back to Russia in twenty years. I would like to go back one day, I have friends there, I feel very connected to the culture there, and I care deeply about what's happening in Russia. But it was a good thing, my coming to this country."

Zara Raab's recent book of poems is Swimming the Eel *(David Robert Books). She lives in Berkeley and is a regular contributor to the RCR.*

In My Father's Garden

Unwatch'd, the garden bough shall sway...
—Tennyson

The unusual blue hyacinth came into bloom
unnoticed, and now the apple tree surprises me:
already in full flower.
The daffodils he planted here last fall
have all come up, bright gold in the March dusk.
He has had to leave his home, go
elsewhere to be cared for, and I've
come back here to look in on his garden.
Does the camellia care there's no face at the window?
Do the birds in the branches miss the one who watched them?
Does it matter to the tulips that they opened up, then
faded, unappreciated and unseen?
For fifty years, his eyes admired this garden, every flower;
I might expect to find their imprint on these petals.

—Carolyn Tipton

WRITE TO US

The RCR welcomes your letters. Write to the Editor, RCR c/o ICO, P.O. Box 1200, Gualala, CA 95445 or by email to skrcr@stephenkessler.com.

TRAVELS

The Artistry & the Ecstasy

MATHEW HINTON

Rebecca Taksel

Frida Kahlo wears the blouse, the *huipil,* of the women of Tehuantepec in her self-portraits. We all know the heavily embroidered floral blouse, probably because of Frida. She has appropriated the look; it is a look, and we look at it. The self-portraits are beautiful and static, her eyes are fixed and hypnotic. But the colors are riotous and wild, the flowers enormous, exuberant.

In the documentary *Blossoms of Fire* we see the *huipiles* worn by the women who make them, the Tehuanas themselves, proud Zapotec women of the town of Juchitán on the isthmus of Tehuantepec in southern Mexico. Traditionally—and the tradition has not yet died out—women make their own *huipiles* entirely by hand. Every neighborhood has a church, every church has its *vela,* or fiesta in honor of a saint, and every *vela* requires a beautiful *huipil* and lace trimmings and skirts. Making their procession through the streets, dancing, gathering to eat and drink, the women look like a flock of butterflies, in their costumes that are each a little different within the discipline of the tradition. The *vela* has Christian associations, but we are told that the celebrations predate the Conquista; it is Nature that is being honored at least as much as the saint.

In Rio de Janeiro, in the hills surrounding the city, in the *favelas* where the impoverished *cariocas* live, the samba schools work all year on their costumes for Carnival. Each school chooses a theme for that year's parade and competition. The 1959 film *Orfeu Negro* by Marcel Camus shows us a samba school costumed on the theme of Orpheus and Eurydice. The samba dancers sew their glorious costumes themselves. They are worn only for that year's Carnival.

The creation of a costume for an event that involves movement, procession, dancing, ritual—think about this, about moving in such a precious and beautiful shell, one you have created yourself, for one purpose, with great labor and expense, and which you will discard, also like a shell, after the celebration.

In New Orleans, since the nineteenth century, some African-American men have formed themselves into tribes and dressed as Indians for Mardi Gras. When blacks weren't permitted to join the Mardi Gras parades, dressing as Native Americans was a way to get around the prohibition and also a way to honor the Indians, who supported their right to freedom. The idea of the costuming for Mardi Gras came from France and the Caribbean, but the New Orleans tribes brought an attitude of fierceness to the practice. The tribes used to meet in the streets and fight; later, the fights took the form of ritual dances. The costumes are elaborate almost beyond belief, made of thousands of beads and feathers, with enormous headdresses. Run into a tribe, or a clash of tribes, at the carnival celebration, and you will not soon forget it. Each man makes his own costume from scratch; he wears it only once.

The creation of a costume for an event that involves movement, procession, dancing, ritual—think about this, about moving in such a precious and beautiful shell, one you have created yourself, for one purpose, with great labor and expense, and which you will discard, also like a shell, after the celebration.

When the moment comes for the *vela,* for the Carnival procession, for the Mardi Gras parade, when you leave your house in Tehuantepec or Rio or New Orleans—in any of these it will be a humble house—you will merge into the crowd and you will *see yourself* in the others who emerge from houses around you. You will be reflected back to yourself dozens of times, hundreds of times—flowers, feathers, beads—explosions of color. Even if you are Orpheus himself, or the Indian Chief, you will exist only in the pageant. You will be reflected in the people of your court, as your power and rank are reflected in their movements around you.

Now, you move down the street and you merge with the others: You dance, you swirl your skirts, you preen your feathers. The membrane of your own skin becomes semi-permeable. Divisions between yourself and others dissolve in the stamp and swirl of movement. The Indian feathers shake, threatening the oncoming tribe. You feel the air currents shaking around them. Your heartbeat is audible in the music. One Mardi Gras Indian chief describes it as an out-of-body experience.

Despite the gorgeousness of the embroidery of the *huipiles,* of the gold and blue of the samba costumes of Orpheus and Eurydice, of the pink and yellow feathers of the Indians, these are not performances. The spectator who remains outside the dance, outside the thousand reflections of self in others created by the dance, has only a very incomplete idea of what he is actually *seeing.* This is all about losing oneself, but in the most benign possible way. There is no demagoguery about it, no subjection of one's will to another. There is only shared joy.

Ask anyone who has learned to dance with a partner or a group, whether it's square dancing or line dancing or couples dancing. They will tell you that there is an absolutely unique exhilaration that unites dancer to dancer and dancers to music; the dancers are moved *by the dance* rather than by their conscious will. I think that's a mild version of what must go on in Tehuantepec or Rio or New Orleans.

Still, we go and we watch, those of us who cannot dance and have no costume and don't belong; we go to street festivals, parades, religious processions, occult ceremonies. We want to go, we want to step out of our everyday lives and into the magic raiment of celebration. And it happens, sometimes, up to a point. All the great writers on travel tell us that when we travel our minds and our bodies are free to make new connections and associations, to reorder reality itself. From strangeness into ecstasy, we stand, as the Greek word *ekstasis* says, as the New Orleans Indian says, outside ourselves.

This sort of ecstatic tourism is often left largely to chance. Some travelers believe that to prepare for such an experience runs counter to the spirit of the thing. Others, and I think that this second group numbers among its members many of the great traveling adventurers, prepare themselves by study. They know which saint is being honored, they know the words being sung in Spanish or Portuguese or Creole-tinged English. They don't embroider or sew but they array themselves in history and music. They are *amateurs,* those whose love translates not into a bid for belonging but only into a modest gesture of appreciation. Sometimes, for a moment that has been prepared by weeks, months, years of appreciation, the love and the knowledge, the spectacle and the music, fill up the entire being of the *amateur* and it all brims over: ecstasy.

Not participant, not amateur, without costume or preparation, the rest of us still go and we still watch. We are a larger group, the tourists, and though we may disparage the title, we spend our money and put up with considerable discomfort and we go, and we watch. We reflect the glory of what we see in our cameras, hold our cell phones up in front of us like tiny shields, filtering and miniaturizing the image of the larger splendor that we won't, or can't face directly. We go, we take pictures. We want to capture images. We don't capture them, of course: The trap snaps shut on a fleeing ghost. What we create when we get home, the trophies we mount, are *prints*, the footprints of escaped beings. We know it. We try to recreate the being, the magnificent creature that we glimpsed and heard, the composite of human beings and diaphanous clouds of fabric or brilliant feathers or flowers blooming above lace skirts, and *music*, of singing and brass and intricate percussion. We lay the prints out on a table, or pass them around in order, or create presentations on a screen, offering scraps of commentary. The momentary expressions of wonder and interest shift down to the usual travel talk, of someone else's trip, of missed connections, stomach upsets. We gather up the prints, now printed over with the fingers of our restless audience. But some rebel voice within us speaks in the shadowy room after the guests have left and we're clearing away the prints and the traces. "I *saw* something. And I will never forget it. And I think it changed me in some way I don't yet know."

RCR contributing editor Rebecca Taksel lives in Pittsburgh.

POETS & POETRY

Short Cuts

Daniel Barth

Taking Tanka Home
by Jane Reichhold
AHA Books (2011), 100 pages

Books and Habits From the Lectures of Lafcadio Hearn
edited by John Erskine
Heinemann (1922)

It was Jane Reichhold's book *Taking Tanka Home* that got me started thinking about short poems and short forms. Tanka, like haiku, is a Japanese form which has been transplanted to English-speaking countries, has adapted well and taken hold.

The Reichhold book is an excellent introduction to the form. To start with, it is very pleasing visually. Each page contains one tanka, first in one line of Japanese characters, then the five-line Japanese phonetic translation, followed by the original five-line tanka in English. I found it easy to take a meditative approach to the book, taking time to consider and appreciate each poem. Here are the first two:

a round trip ticket
the shape of a navel
promises us
at the end of this life
we come back home

small pools
high in the mountains
above the tree-line
the only birdsongs
come from frogs

These give a pretty fair idea of the possibilities and uses of the form. In her Introduction to this volume, translator Aya Yuhki speaks of "concentrated words similar to the poems of Emily Dickinson." That seems an apt comparison. Tanka are a lot like haiku, but it's amazing how much poetry can be packed into those two extra lines. They leave room for devices like personification that are all but taboo in haiku. The poet can also enter in personally, comment and offer opinion. In this way tanka are comparable to Dickinson's short poems and to others written in English.

Jane Reichhold

I enjoyed Reichhold's book from start to finish. When I compare these tanka to many of the precious ego-based poems being offered by contemporary poets, well, I'll take tanka. They are a good influence on my work. Like other good poetry, they don't always make logical sense, but they make poetic sense. They help to give form and shape to the natural world, evoking circles within circles, the connectedness of all things, long stretches of geologic time. Almost every tanka in the book uses concrete nature images, nothing fancy, but often, with a skillful twist, the energy of an image is used to flip it on its side. And the images play off of one another, blossoming like flowers, billowing like clouds. Here's another:

unreal again
the road I walked today
thick fog
whispers in the grass
for the moon to appear

As in haiku, the ephemeral moment is painted. Another person's "damned fog" becomes the poet's welcome vehicle, and she gives us a free ride away from the annoying everyday. The poem provides a window onto a moment, but the window can become a mirror, or it can look out and reflect back at the same time.

Tanka was new to me, a different kind of poetry, yet I found the ones in this book to be rich in associations. Reichhold's tanka made me think of poems by Gary Snyder, Jane Hirshfield, Jim Harrison, and Ikkyu, Basho, Cold Mountain, Homer even; also R. H. Blyth's *Zen in English Literature and Oriental Classics.* So, a rich book, well worth reading.

With all that said, my urge after reading *Taking Tanka Home* was not to write tanka, but rather to keep writing poems of all kinds, especially shorter ones. As I said, it really got me thinking about short forms in English language poetry. Why do we need to import haiku and tanka? Isn't there a tradition of short forms in English that is worth tapping into?

I began exploring this idea, and came across a worthwhile piece by Lafcadio Hearn, "Note Upon the Shortest Forms of English Poetry." It's part of his *Books and Habits,* a col-

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SHORT *from page 5*

lection based on lectures he delivered to students in Japan between 1896 and 1902. Hearn starts out, "Perhaps there is an idea among Japanese students that one general difference between Japanese and Western poetry is that the former cultivates short forms and the latter longer ones, but this is only in part true." He goes on to point especially to the Greeks, who "carried poetry to the highest perfection that it has ever attained" and "delighted in short forms."

Hearn's opinion is that writers of short poems in English and other European languages lost the way by basing it on Roman satirical epigrams rather than the more purely esthetic Greek model. He does, however, reference some very nice short poems, by Ben Johnson, Robert Herrick and Walter Savage Landor, among others, even while dismissing much of their work as "worthless satires or worthless jest."

Well, I don't know. I like a good laugh, and don't see anything wrong with using poetry for humorous as well as esthetic purposes. Hearn goes on to make his case: "It was not until comparatively modern times that our Western world fully recognized the value of the distich, triplet or quatrain for the expression of beautiful thoughts, rather then for the expression of ill-natured ones. But now that the recognition has come, it has been discovered that nothing is harder than to write a beautiful poem of two or four lines. . . . I should like to suggest, however, that it is very probable many attempts at these difficult forms of poetry will be attempted by English poets within the next few years. There is now a tendency in that direction."

Which brings us up to the present, more or less. Has there really been a tendency in that direction, and has it produced much poetry of note? William Carlos Williams's "red wheel barrow" comes to mind, and Carl Sandburg's "fog," and various couplets and quatrains by Robert Frost, but longer poems certainly continue to be more admired and

Lafcadio Hearn

imitated—Ginsberg confession, Bukowski complaint, Billy Collins cuteness.

The fact that no other short poems leap readily to mind might serve as my answer to the questions posed. Short poems don't get much respect. I can understand that to a certain extent. If a poet writes only epigrams, we might say he hasn't achieved much, though no one seems to accuse Basho of being "just a haiku poet." So some of it is culturally determined. Just as the respect accorded poets varies from country to country, the respect given to shorter forms may also vary. Here in the States, publishers are always looking for "the next big book," usually meaning a novel. But even in poetry, small is often equated with slight.

Short forms suffered something of a setback in the 1970s after Aram Saroyan's minimalist poem, "lighght," received a $500 National Endowment for the Arts award. Absurdly, Republicans in Congress made an ongoing issue of this in seeking to cut NEA funding. Did that celebrated incident create a backlash against short poems? Possibly. And possibly there was a certain amount of throwing the baby out with the bath—denigrating all short poems to justify denigrating one.

It's instructive to look through anthologies or books by individual poets and see how many short poems are included. It's surprising, for instance, how many of Walt Whitman's poems are quite short. Sandburg's books also include a mix of short poems interspersed with longer ones. They provide variety and counterpoint, a different kind of beauty. Here's one of his:

Splinter

The voice of the last cricket
across the first frost
is one kind of good-by.
It is so thin a splinter of singing.

It's hard to say anything definitive about the modern scene, because there are so many regions and niches. Some years back I contributed to a little magazine called *Ant Farm,* which was made up of very short poems. It eventually folded, and I don't know of another that has taken its place. On the World Wide Web, Wisconsin poet Norbert Blei has a site called Basho's Road, which displays and celebrates short poems in various forms. Jane Reichhold maintains a site called AHA Poetry and publishes a Web zine, *Lynx*, which includes haiku, tanka, renga, and articles about short forms. No doubt there are other Web sites and zines of which I am not aware.

An interesting recent trend is the use of short poems in works of fiction. Almost by necessity, poems used in a novel will be short, in order not to get in the way of the story. Sharon Creech, a Newberry medalist for her novel *Walk Two Moons,* has published two other novels, *Love That Dog* and *Hate That Cat,* which use short poems by Williams, Frost, Tennyson, Walter Dean Myers and others as part of the plot line. Bart Schneider has published two novels, *The Man in the Blizzard* and *Nameless Dame,* featuring a police detective who is hooked on poetry and tries to convince everyone he knows to memorize a poem or two. These novels use poems very creatively as an integral part of the story. Many poets are represented, both famous and obscure. Here are a couple of examples from *The Man in the Blizzard*:

Exercise

Just as I stood up
I sat back down
again forgetting
what I stood for.

—Pat Nolan

Learning

To believe you are magnificent.
And gradually to discover that
you are not magnificent. Enough
labor for one human life.

—Czeslaw Milosz

Something Schneider's novels bring out, with which I wholeheartedly agree, is that the world of poetry has room for almost unlimited variety of form and content. As poets, we shouldn't limit or pigeonhole ourselves, but rather revel in the variety of poetic possibilities and write what is ours to write, call it what you will. As Jack Kerouac said, "Something that you feel will find its own form."

"Tanka came through the door that haiku had opened," says Reichhold. I would like to see that door stay open, not just to Oriental forms, but to short poems and forms in the Western tradition. I love the short Japanese forms, and I'm all for cultural exchange and cross-fertilization, but let's not forget the beauty of couplets and quatrains—poets should be able to use them at least as well as hip-hop artists and country music songwriters.

Daniel Barth, an RCR contributing editor, is poet laureate of Ukiah (which, spelled backward, is haiku).

BIBLIOTECA

News, Views, Notes, Reviews, Reports and Exhortations from Friends of Coast Community Library

PRESIDENT'S DESK

Friends Indeed

Alix Levine

Friends of the Library groups exist all over the country, formed to support local libraries.

Until I became involved with the Friends of Coast Community Library (FoCCL), I was only marginally aware of Friends groups and what they do, in spite of a lifetime of constant library use. The activities and concerns of Friends groups vary according to the branch or community served, but raising funds to assist libraries is generally the common thread that runs through all.

In the last decade, major efforts have been engaged in raising building funds by Friends of Fort Bragg Library, Friends of Round Valley Public Library, and Friends of Coast Community Library.

But aside from building fundraising, Friends of the Library aid the libraries in many ways. Prior to the passage of Measure A to provide much-needed financial support to Mendocino County libraries, for several years the Friends at all the branches took on paying for supplies, such as book-covering materials, paper, pens, etc., which the county could no longer afford. Friends have purchased books, DVDs and other materials to enhance their libraries' collections. And Friends of the Library volunteers help out at their local branches in performing a variety of hands-on services.

At Coast Community Library volunteers have taken on shelving, book covering, disc cleaning, working at the circulation desk, sorting donations of books and AV materials for sale or to add to our collection, running book sales, putting on programs for children and adults, writing grant applications to fund improvements, maintaining our building (owned by FoCCL) and improving our facilities.

In the past year FoCCL has added new bookshelves in both the children's room and the main room, signed up for a subscription service to get the latest new books as soon as published (with help from a donation from Good Buy Clothes), purchased and installed a new children's computer with 50 entertaining educational programs for children in English and Spanish (thanks to a grant from the Community Foundation of Mendocino County) and is in the midst of acquiring new juvenile audiobooks and DVDs from the same Community Foundation grant.

We have also retooled our monthly book sales with the purchase of rolling bookshelves to display our wares and make shopping more pleasant and convenient for folks. Our book sales serve double duty both as a source of income for FoCCL to support the library and to put books into the hands of our community at rock-bottom prices ($5 a shopping bag full on the Sundays of the sale weekend).

Anyone can become a member of FoCCL with a $10 donation to our nonprofit, or by becoming a volunteer, receive membership at no cost. Members get to vote on the annual board of directors election in June. I am stepping down as president of the board to become a general director. A new president will have been elected by the time you read this.

I urge all who love and use our library to become a member of Friends of Coast Community Library. More volunteers are always needed to help in a variety of ways. You will be working with a congenial group of people and gain the satisfaction of benefiting a great community resource. Get involved with the library. You will be glad you did.

Coast Community Library can be reached at 707.882.3114. See page 8 for library hours.

Leonard Cirino, 1943-2012

So Long, Leonard

Marc Hofstadter

On March 9 America and I lost a passionate poet and friend: Leonard J. Cirino. Leonard, sixty-eight years old, a resident of Springfield, Oregon (following many years on the Mendocino Coast), was the author of fourteen volumes of poetry as well as twenty chapbooks. He was prolific because he breathed, ate and slept poetry. And what poetry it was! For Leo, contemporary American verse was largely a wasteland of academicism, hypocrisy and self-absorption. There were a few recent American poets who drew his approbation: Wallace Stevens, Weldon Kees, Richard Wilbur, James Wright, John Haines, Gertrude Schnackenberg. What Leo looked for in poetry was an intense involvement with things that really count: loved ones and friends, Nature, animals, death, life, poetry. He hated bullshit and wasn't shy about naming it that, confronting and exposing it. Politicians, corporate figures, poets for whom writing was just a means of garnering fame or getting laid: he despised these.

I've had numerous arguments with Leo about particular poets I admired but for whom he had only X-rated epithets. But our friendship easily survived such contretemps because we both loved the image. The image: for Leo that was the crux. Poetry that expressed opinions, embraced philosophies, was "talky," was not poetry for him. Verse is an intense, visionary, transformative foray into concrete manifestations of beauty, love, spirituality. A good poem extends a metaphor into the world until it takes on a life of its own and speaks to the parts of us that suffer, love and worship. The poets Leo admired were ones for whom images were paramount. Few of these were Americans. Most wrote in Latin America, Eastern and Southern Europe, the Far East. Neruda, Vallejo, Darío, Lorca, Machado, Jiménez, Ritsos, Montale, Bonnefoy, Mistral, Guillevic, Pasternak, Pessoa, Du Fu, Li Po, Su Tung-po, Han Shan—Leo saw in these a vision of poetry that emphasized vivid seeing, touching, hearing, smelling. To walk out into an orchard at night and smell the scent of the peaches while gazing at the moon: such was the sort of experience that most appealed to his imagination.

What Leo looked for in poetry was an intense involvement with things that really count: loved ones and friends, Nature, animals, death, life, poetry. He hated bullshit and wasn't shy about naming it that. He despised politicians, corporate figures, poets for whom writing was just a means of garnering fame or getting laid.

Or his beloved Labrador, Bessie, who died a few months before he did: the way she swayed when she walked. Leo's poetry is imagistic; he frequently takes it near the breaking point where images dominate sense. The more you read his poetry, the more you see that he uses the same images over and over until they take on the character of universals, myths. His was a sensibility deeply steeped in the physical world and, to the extent it was spiritual, expressed spirituality by means of an extreme corporeality.

Leo was also a marvelous love poet, producing a raft of love poems to his longtime companion Ava Lynn Hayes. In these he sees himself as a man who is blessed and lucky to have so warm-hearted a partner. But perhaps the most moving of all his verse are his poems to his daughter Calandra, whom he killed when she was an infant. Yes, killed. A fact that can't be divorced from Leo's attachment to life and love or from the spiritual release of his poetry, was the fact that, in a drugged state during the 1960s, Leo murdered his little girl. He didn't know what he was doing: he was found not guilty by reason of insanity and had to live for seven years in an asylum for the criminally insane. This was not something he hid. Indeed, it was one of the first things he told me about himself. I admit to being a little scared at first, but Leo's warmth and generosity soon converted me. He was a great and caring friend from the time we met about fifteen years ago to the date of his death.

However, Leo himself was haunted by what he had done. No one could ever condemn him more than he did himself, unfair to himself though that was. I think in a sense his poetry—he began to write while in asylum—was a gift to Calandra, with the hope that somehow, somehow, she would hear it. The remorse he felt was terrible, and poetry was the only way to repent. I often sensed a death wish in Leo, a desire to finally give up a life of guilt and shame and rejoin the little girl he had so painfully lost. Paradoxically, Leo learned to love as a result of having taken life. The stars, elder trees, peaches, the soil took on spiritual qualities because deep inside them lay Calandra.

Leo's experience "in asylum" was horrific. He wrote a great deal about the suffering he saw there: the cruelty of the guards, the poor living conditions, the psyches of men full of pain and madness. It inculcated in him a hatred of established institutions: the government, the prison system, the profession of psychiatry. But, when he got out, instead of leaving it behind he began to work for inmates' rights. Indeed, although from that day on he lived on Social Security disability—not a lot of money—he gave a significant percentage of it each month to prisoners he knew who were having a hard time. (He also made a point of subscribing to many small-press poetry magazines and publishers in order to help them survive.) I've never known anyone as generous.

The Instrument of Others was Leo's last book and he got to see a copy of it just days before he died. It is a masterpiece. In it, he came to a kind of simplicity that allowed him to see things limpidly and gently. Some of the short poems are incandescent:

See **CIRINO** page 8

LIBRARY LINES

Democratic Vistas

Julia Larke

Mendocino County Library is currently participating in California Reads, a new program of Cal Humanities developed in partnership with the California Center for the Book and the California State Library. Cal Humanities' mission is to promote humanities by helping to create "a state of open mind" and to "inspire Californians to learn more, dig deeper, and start conversations that matter." This year's California Reads program is part of a statewide initiative, Searching for Democracy, which is designed to lead into the 2012 elections and invites people to think about and talk about democracy and civic values.

Libraries and other institutions participating in California Reads chose from five books selected from a pool of over 300 titles. Mendocino County Public Library is reading *A Paradise Built in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities That Arise in Disaster* by Rebecca Solnit. Other titles are *The Penguin Guide to the United States Constitution, Farewell to Manzanar*, *It Can't Happen Here*, and *Lost City Radio*. Discussion guides for all of the titles are available at www.calhum.org.

Rebecca Solnit is a California writer, historian, and activist whose works include *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* and *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*. *A Paradise Built in Hell* is a thought-provoking account of disasters (earthquakes, a bombing, 9/11, a major storm) viewed with the premise that positive, socially beneficial emotions surface among citizens in response to a disaster. She speaks of purposefulness and connectedness that bring joy even amidst the chaos and fear of extreme crisis. To quote from the California Reads Web Site, Solnit "reaches some surprising conclusions about our need for community and common purpose, which she argues are fundamental to democratic forms of social and political life." [www.calhum.org/programs/california-reads]

Melanie Lightbody, Mendocino County Librarian, who was instrumental in the county's participation in California Reads, encourages people to attend "art exhibits, poetry readings, and book discussions throughout the county to be hosted by libraries in collaboration with arts and cultural organizations." At each branch, a local coordinator is leading discussions of the book and organizing other Searching for Democracy events. At Coast Branch, Pearl Watts, a longtime community supporter and library volunteer, is the person to contact.

Eliza Wingate, Ukiah Branch Librarian, who has developed various discourses and events on democracy for the Ukiah Branch, has added a Searching for Democracy tab to the County Library's webpage with postings from the five branches: www.co.mendocino.ca.us/library/democracy.htm.As part of California Reads, Rebecca Solnit will discuss *A Paradise Built in Hell* on Saturday, October 21, at 1pm in Ukiah at the Saturday Afternoon Club House.

Here on the coast, our library has a beautiful new sign on the front of the building. It is an image of the international symbol for library that is sure to attract the attention of travelers who might have missed an opportunity to visit a lovely local library and to use free wifi! Jeff Watts, a library volunteer, initially proposed the idea for the sign and it was fabricated and installed by Point Arena's metalworker Kentucky John with help from library volunteers Roger Jones, Virgil Knoche, John Bastian and Charles Stanifer. A community supporting its library, once again.

CIRINO *from page 7*

Bio

Born a small stream, bare trickle,
I grew into a storming river
but learned my place
when I entered the great sea.

Less is More—Two Geese
For Ava

Not much nestmaking left, we've had our share.
Now we're like homing geese, tipped wing to wing.

Clear Moon

Moon to light my mind, spring water
for coffee, it's autumn and I refresh myself.
My bad dreams fall from the jade cup
and I am cleansed. Clear head,
without the crepe of curled thoughts,
it's October again, and my poems return.

Leo didn't feel exactly as though he wrote his poems; he felt they "came" ("returned") to him. I never knew him to speak of God, but it's clear that spirituality played a great role in his life and writing, a spirituality that's embodied in the world of Nature. Looking at just the titles of the poems in *The Instrument of Others,* I see the moon, persimmons, autumn, a vineyard, his dog, October's light, bread, stars, maple leaves, rain. He gives the impression of living a very solitary life, walking with Bessie in a garden or an orchard, listening to music late at night, hearing birds sing, watching snow fall. Yet Leo, who often spent nights writing, was a man who loved people. When he became ill and let people know about his diagnosis, he was deluged with letters, phone calls and e-mails from some of the people he had inspired. He was a devoted

I see in his titles the moon, persimmons, autumn, a vineyard, his dog, October's light, bread, stars, maple leaves, rain.

correspondent—he and I exchanged e-mails at least once every day, frequently more than that—and, as I said, he sent money to people he felt needed it. That is why the title he chose for his last book is interesting, for no poem called "The Instrument of Others" appears in the volume. The title reflects, I think, Leo's belief that the self exists not to glorify itself but to serve others—other people, poems, gods. His gift to us lives on in his poems.

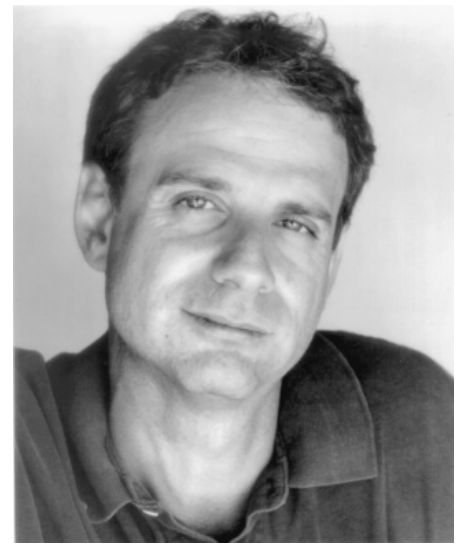
I'd like to close with an amazing prose poem he wrote many years ago in which he seems to answer the dilemma with which we, his friends and readers, are confronted by his death:

The Autopsy

Walking down the ridge, over this next hill, and around the curve, there are cherry trees in full bloom. One can barely think how beautiful the ocean is until crossing the last rise. Then, looking over the western horizon, realize that none of us will die in a subtle way. Let me rise higher and spy the beginning dawn so I can say, "I've struggled with what is and *the nonexistent." Then be content with sounds of wind-shaken blossoms, the smell of the ocean, small seeds in fruit.*

Marc Hofstader lives in Walnut Creek. His recent book of essays is Healing the Split.

BOOKS



James Gleick

Infomania

Stephen Bakalyar

The Information: A History, a Theory, a Flood
by James Gleick
Pantheon (2011), 544 pages

The most complex and vital information system is our cells' genetic code and translating machinery: DNA and the protein-manufacturing ribosome particles. James Gleick's book *The Information* describes this genome-proteome system, the result of evolution. But it has much more to say about the creations of humankind—the communication technologies developed over the last few thousand years and the new ways of thinking about communication and the very concept of information. The book's enigmatic title is clarified by the subtitle: *A History, a Theory, a Flood*, which hints at the scope, but falls short of the delightfully broad sweep of subjects: talking drums, alphabets, dictionaries, the three great waves of communication (telegraphy, telephony and radio), cryptography, symbolic logic, algorithms, computers, information theory, the nature of life and entropy, memes, data storage, and the current glut of information, to name a few.

Gleick's historical context touches base with the renowned, among them Aristotle, Newton, Leibniz, Morse, Russell, McLuhan, Einstein and Dawkins; but most interesting, at least to non-cognoscenti like me, are the less familiar: Babbage, Murray, Nyquist, Boole, von Neumann, Wiener, Lovelace, Shannon and Turing.

Many topics are well known, such as early telephone switchboards, Germany's *Enigma* code machine, and Wikipedia, but Gleick's stories are fresh and pithy. The history of dictionaries includes an account of the first (1604 by Robert Cawdrey, 2500 words, "conteyning and teaching the true writing, and understanding of hard usual English wordes"), the last printed edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1989; 22,000 pages; 138 pounds), and the current edition, beginning in 2000, of quarterly online installments including thousands of revised entries and new words. Today's OED has forsaken the original guidelines for a neologism to enter the canon—that it must be in use five years. Hence *cyberpunk*, *tighty-whities*, *bada-bing*. Remember *The Godfather*? "You've gotta get up close like this and bada-bing! you blow their brains all over your nice Ivy League suit."

The historical reports are rich in detail. For example, a ten-page narrative describes the conferences Warren McCulloch, "a dynamo of eclecticism and cross-fertilization," organized after World War II in New York City. Gleick writes: "A host of fields were coming of age . . . anthropology, psychology, neurophysiology . . . the not-quite-sciences like psychoanalysis . . . McCulloch invited experts in all these fields, as well

Some Recent Arrivals @ Coast Community Library

FICTION
Alcott, Kate. *The dressmaker*
Babbs, Ken. *Who shot the water buffalo?*
Barbery, Muriel. *The elegance of the hedgehog*
Byatt, A. S. *Ragnarok: the end of the gods*
Coover, Robert. *Noir*
Edwardson, Åke. *The shadow woman: an Inspector Erik Winter novel*
Hope, Christopher. *Darkest England*
Hornby, Nick. *High fidelity*
Houston, James D. *A queen's journey: an unfinished novel*
Martin, George R. R. *Fevre dream*
McCarthy, Tom. *C*
Mo, Yan. *Red sorghum: a family saga*
Morrison, Toni. *Home*
Parkin, Gaile. *Baking cakes in Kigali*
Pears, Iain. *Stone's fall*
Pilgrim, Kitty. *The explorer's code*
Roberts, Nora. *The witness*
Rosnay, Tatiana de. *Sarah's key*
Singer, Isaac Bashevis. *Yentl the Yeshiva boy*
Yorke, Christy. *Song of the seals*
Yoshimura, Akira. *Storm rider*

NONFICTION
Alexie, Sherman. *First Indian on the moon*
Anderson, Kat. *Tending the wild: Native American knowledge and the management of California's natural resources*
Battles, Matthew. *Library: an unquiet history*
Bausell, R. Barker. *Snake oil science: the truth about complementary and alternative medicine*
Cardenal, Ernesto. *Cosmic canticle*
Daulter, Anni. *Organically raised: conscious cooking for babies and toddlers*
Felch, Jason. *Chasing Aphrodite: the hunt for looted antiquities at the world's richest museum*
Flint, Anthony. *Wrestling with Moses: how Jane Jacobs took on New York's master builder and transformed the American city*
Foster, Lee. *Northern California history weekends: fifty-two adventures in history*
Frost, Randy O. *Stuff: compulsive hoarding and the meaning of things*
Kaku, Michio. *Physics of the future: how science will shape human destiny and our daily lives by the year 2100*
Kristof, Nicholas D. *Half the sky: turning oppression into opportunity for women worldwide*
Lazarus, Edward. *Black Hills/white justice: the Sioux nation versus the United States: 1775 to the present*
Lomborg, Bjørn. *The skeptical environmentalist: measuring the real state of the world*
McMillan, Tracie. *The American way of eating: undercover at Walmart, Applebee's, farm fields and the dinner table*
Murray, Stuart A. P. *The library: an illustrated history*
Nabhan, Gary Paul. *Enduring seeds: Native American agriculture and wild plant conservation*
Orlean, Susan. *Rin Tin Tin: the life and the legend*
Raskin, Jonah. *Marijuanaland: dispatches from an American war*
Schulz, Kathryn. *Being wrong: adventures in the margin of error*
Snyder, Gary. *Riprap; and, Cold mountain poems*
Solnit, Rebecca. *A paradise built in hell: the extraordinary communities that arise in disasters*
Steingraber, Sandra. *Living downstream: an ecologist looks at cancer and the environment*
Stephens, Autumn. *Wild women: crusaders, curmudgeons, and completely corsetless ladies in the otherwise virtuous Victorian era*
Syman, Stefanie. *The subtle body: the story of yoga in America*
Thorndike, Joseph Jacobs. *The very rich: a history of wealth*
Vann, Lizzie. *Organic baby and toddler cookbook*
Vegas, Jill. *Speed decorating: a pro stager's tips and trade secrets for a fabulous home in a week or less*
Yoshii, Ryuichi. *Sushi*

BIOGRAPHY
Carter, Jimmy. *An hour before daylight: memories of a rural boyhood*
Duras, Marguerite. *The war: a memoir*
Foster, Barbara M. *Forbidden Journey: the life of Alexandra David-Neel*
MacNeil, Robert. *Wordstruck: a memoir*
Morgan, Bill. *I celebrate myself: the somewhat private life of Allen Ginsberg*
Twain, Mark. *Autobiography of Mark Twain*

DVDs
Exploring our roots with Henry Louis Gates, Jr.
Guns, germs, and steel based on the book by Jared Diamond
North Country
The singing detective

YOUNG ADULT FICTION
Clare, Cassandra. *City of lost souls*
Green, John. *The fault in our stars*
Handler, Daniel. *Why we broke up*
Riggs, Ransom. *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children*
Stiefvater, Maggie. *Forever*
Young, Moira. *Blood red road*

JUVENILE ITEMS
- EASY BOOKS

Dale, Penny. *Dinosaur dig*
Gibbs, Edward. *I spy with my little eye*
Reichert, Amy. *Take your mama to work today*
Sayres, Brianna Caplan. *Where do diggers sleep at night?*
Sierra, Judy. *ZooZical*
Tafuri, Nancy. *Spots, feathers, and curly tails*
Willems, Mo. *The duckling gets a cookie!?*
Wing, Natasha. *How to raise a dinosaur*
- JUVENILE FICTION

DiCamillo, Kate. *Mercy Watson: something wonky this way comes*
Haas, Jessie. *Bramble and Maggie*
Howe, Deborah. *Bunnicula: a rabbit tale of mystery*
Kinney, Jeff. *Cabin fever*
Lowry, Lois. *Number the stars*
O'Connor, Jane. *Nancy Clancy, super sleuth. Book 1*
Sage, Angie. *Darke*
- JUVENILE NONFICTION

McGowan, Christopher. *Dinosaur discovery: everything you need to be a paleontologist*
Morrison, Toni. *Remember: the journey to school integration*
Wood, John Norris. *Nature hide & seek: Jungles*
- JDVD

Happy feet
The land before time, X: The great longneck migration
My side of the mountain
Three bears and a new baby

LIBRARY HOURS

MONDAY	**12 noon - 6 pm**
TUESDAY	**10am - 6 pm**
WEDNESDAY	**10am - 8 pm**
THURSDAY	**12 noon - 8 pm**
FRIDAY	**12 noon - 6 pm**
SATURDAY	**12 noon - 3 pm**

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as mathematics and electrical engineering. Throughout the conferences, it became habitual to use the new, awkward, and slightly suspect term *information theory*." We follow the arguments among participants as they wrestle with the new concepts of communication and control: is the brain analog or digital; how far can speech be reduced and remain intelligible; what does it meant to say something is random; can machines think; is entropy a measure of disorder or uncertainty, or are these the same thing? One participant concluded, "Information can be considered as order wrenched from disorder."

Gleick's style is lively, as in the discussion of electricity's early days: "But lightning did not *say* anything—it dazzled, cracked, and burned, but to convey a message would require some ingenuity. In human hands, electricity could hardly accomplish anything, at first . . . but it could be sent along wires to great distances . . . It took no time at all to see what this meant for the ancient dream of long-distance communication."

Two profound ideas of Richard Dawkins—memes and selfish genes—are woven into Gleick's cogent commentary on the transmission of information. In the chapter "Into the Meme Pool" there is wit— "For most human history memes and language have gone hand in glove. (Clichés are memes.)"—and there are many anecdotes: "Memes were seen through car windows when yellow diamond-shaped Baby on Board signs appeared as if in an instant of mass panic in 1984 . . . followed an instant later by a spawn of ironic mutations (Baby I'm Bored, Ex in Trunk)."

You may not be interested in learning about quantum computing. However, if you're unfamiliar with the weird stuff that quantum physics describes ("spooky" as Einstein said; he didn't like it!), Gleick's discussion will give you a glimpse of what the rational mind is up against in dealing with quantum physics. For a fascinating read on the same topic I recommend the recently published book *How the Hippies Saved Physics*.

A wide cross section of readers will find *The Information* enjoyable and accessible. There are a few pages with mathematical expressions: rocky for those lacking a strong interest in science or mathematical literacy. Here is an example:

$$H = n \log s$$

Where H is the amount of information, n is the number of symbols transmitted, and s is the size of the alphabet. I show this equation as a kind of truth-in-advertising; I am enthusiastic about this book, but do not wish to oversell it. However, readers can glide over this chapter without concern about comprehension, since the math is not needed for understanding the other chapters. For those attempting to grapple with the tough stuff, Gleick reviews the basics, such as a discussion of logarithms, a workhorse tool predating the pocket calculator. (When I attended Iowa State University in the late 1950s the engineering students all were gunslingers—a logarithm-based slide rule hung from their belt in a holster.) So, reading *The Information* doesn't require mathematical acumen.

What it does require is the reader's curiosity, rewarded by fascinating stories of the insights, conflicts, and victories by those of genus *Homo* who can justly lay claim to our species epithet *sapiens*, beings of intelligence. One polymath was Claude Shannon, a key progenitor of the Information Age. He coined the word "bit." His monograph "A Mathematical Theory of Communication" was in Gleick's view "the fulcrum around which the world began to turn." Gleick skillfully describes the essence of developments, such as Shannon's insight that what a relay (on-off switch) "passes onward from one circuit to the next is not really electricity but rather a fact: the fact of whether the circuit is open or closed." Another giant was Alan Turing. *Science* magazine's April 13, 2012, issue contained two laudatory articles marking his 100th birthday. He designed the first digital computer in 1945. His "universal machine" used logic, not arithmetic, as the paramount feature. His 1950 paper was one of the most frequently cited of all time: Can the computer fool a blind interrogator into believing it is human?—the famous "Turing Test." One of the most appealing of Gleick's stories is that of Ada Loveless—a brilliant, imaginative, remarkable woman—who at age twenty-seven began a collaboration with Charles Babbage, twenty-four years her senior. Often considered the father of the computer, he originated the concept of a programmable computer, constructing a mechanical "analytical engine," a device with memory and through which numbers and processes would pass to make calculations. As revealed in her letters to Babbage, Loveless often had a vision that exceeded his.

Gleick's discussion of a flood of information starts with the 1941 story by Jorge Luis Borges, *The Library of Babel*, "about the mythical library that contains all books . . . the gospel and the commentary of that gospel and the commentary upon the commentary and . . . this library enshrines all the information. Yet no knowledge can be discovered there, precisely because all knowledge *is* there, shelved side by side with all falsehood . . . There can be no more perfect case of information glut." There is much about storage: the Library of Alexandria, encyclopedias, bits-bytes-and-yottabytes (10^{24} bytes), Google, and the history of Wikipedia, in which "There are pages for every known enzyme and human gene. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* never aspired to such breadth. How could it, being made of paper?" Gleick ends with comments on the cloud. "All that information . . . looms over us, not quite tangible, but awfully real . . . All traditional ideas of privacy, based on doors and locks, physical remoteness and invisibility, are upended in the cloud."

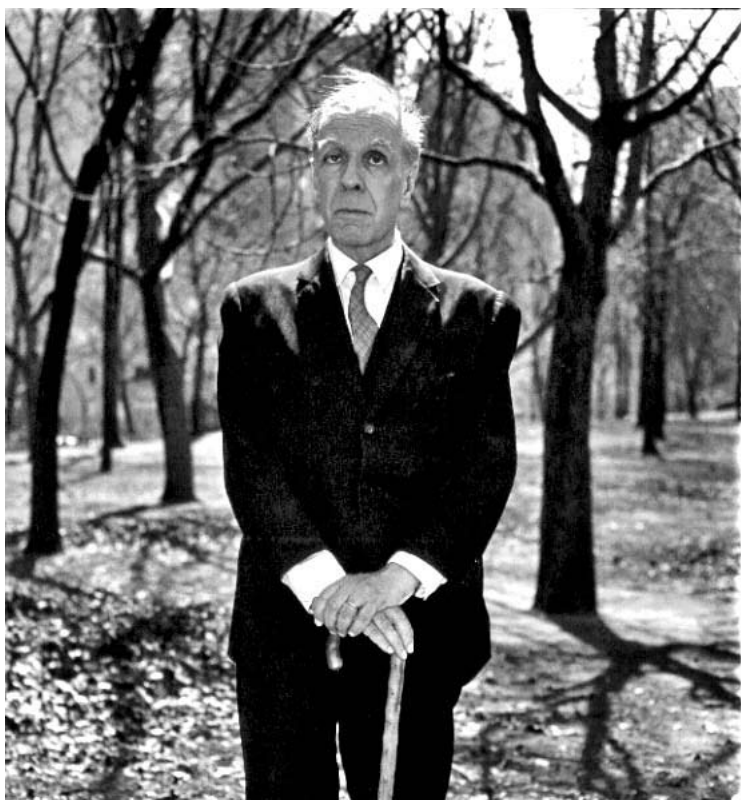
We follow the arguments among participants as they wrestle with the new concepts of communication and control: is the brain analog or digital; how far can speech be reduced and remain intelligible; what does it meant to say something is random; can machines think?

I would like Gleick to have extended his discussion of problems in communication to issues in education. For example, why is it that so many Evangelicals are refractory to the facts of evolution? (No, prehistoric children did not play while dinosaurs cavorted nearby.) A 2011 book edited by Peter Howlett and Mary S. Morgan titled *How Well Do Facts Travel? The Dissemination of Reliable Knowledge* touches on such issues.

Gleick's first book—*Chaos, Making a New Science* (1987)—displayed his outstanding ability to tell engaging tales about science, technology and culture. He continued to hone this talent in subsequent books. In my opinion *The Information* is his apotheosis. It is a comprehensive, scholarly work; there are 426 notes. He treks from the long gestation of the distant past through the exploding communication developments of recent centuries and brings us to today's information technology. Well, not quite. *The Information* went to press before announcement of a powerful new tool for the study of cultural trends, termed "Culturomics." It was described in the January 14, 2011, issue of *Science*. Here is how it works: Enter several words (or phrases) into a special Google database of books. This yields a graph of those words' frequency of appearance over time—you select the interval; the maximum is 1800 to 2000. Want to know the relative popularity of your favorite poets, what words for sexual intercourse were used throughout the 1800s, or when *your* name appeared in print? Try it: http://culturomics.org/.

Stephen Bakalyar is a writer and chemist living in Sonoma. This is his first appearance in the RCR.

Borges by Arbus, 1969



DIANE ARBUS

The Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges is standing tall and erect, more so than in other photographs I've seen of him. His suit is dark, his formal bearing almost artificial, separated from the natural environment of the woods serving as his backdrop. The light falling from above, grazing the top of his head and shoulders, functions as a spotlight but it is only bits of sunshine through the trees. He is strong yet leaning on his cane, and the light brings your eye back up to the few fragile strands of gray hair flying to your left, parallel to one of the branches, while his tie twists in an off-kilter dance to the right. The authority of his stance, the verticality of his figure paralleling a symmetrical frame of trees, is interrupted by the bottom frame that cuts off half of his legs. His gaze seems directed and, at first glance, he doesn't seem blind—and yet I know he is already blind.

Borges seems to outwit Arbus, to stare her down. "This differs from other photos of Borges I've seen," poet Robyn Bell concurs, in that he is not the shy sort of smiling guy: he's formal and strong. It also differs from her most characteristic photos in which Arbus fashions those now famous "freaks." He is a force of nature here, unlike her usual bizarre subjects, and yet the photographer has manipulated the image with her compositional skills to produce a series of uncanny and even weirdly comic effects. The symmetrical tree branches appear to enter or exit either side of Borges's head, perhaps to suggest a visualization of the fantastic, or even an abrupt fusing of mind and nature.

Arbus's hyper focus imposes the human figure here as something that wasn't there before but now stands suddenly in the forest, original and enigmatic. Her camera's intelligence captures Borges as paradox, powerful in his vulnerability. This photo also differs from most of her images, filmmaker Cooper SY notes, because Arbus chose a long lens which knocks the background out of focus, in this case the forest, making it dreamlike as it must be for the blind poet, existing now only in his memory. He looks thinner than he often appears, yet defiant, and stands out in his unreality just as one notes on the ground the shadows of the trees perhaps more than the trees themselves: fragments of the labyrinths, of the mental symmetries in the mirror of Borges's fictions.

—Suzanne Jill Levine

PAPERS *from page 1*

girls were too young to appreciate such concerns, especially since they'd never met their great-grandparents. I didn't say they were too American. Nor did I criticize Mom. Regardless of the sincerity of her intentions, she had been too eager to foist her journey on them.

As her oldest son, I was the one who thirsted to know more about the arranged marriage between Eugenio Cerullo and Rosa Maria Prisco. Eugenio hailed from Avellino, near Naples. Peasant stock. Rosa, on the other hand, raised by a guardian, was educated in a convent in the village of Castel Baronia. She loved to read and listen to opera. At the age of sixteen, she'd been given a choice. Either become a nun, or be sent to *L'America*, where per written contract she would marry her waiting husband. She presented herself to Eugenio in Boston's Scollay Square. They signed a few documents and proceeded to have scads of *bambini*.

The family started on Prince Street in Boston's North End, where my mother shared a bed with three of her sisters. Her brothers did the same. Those were tense, noisy, fly-swatting years in tiny sweltering rooms. Eugenio swore and drank, usually wine, couldn't find work and didn't speak English. Neither did Rosa, who gave up reading Dante and slaved for her husband, birthing one child after another.

Each day, Rosa encountered new cultural obstacles. For example, she didn't know how to explain to her daughters how to deal with menstruation. My mother had looked embarrassed when she shared this detail of her girlhood.

"My sister Louisa. Poor thing. She was crying. You can't imagine her confusion. And the smell," she said. "My sisters and me, so close in ages, in that same bed. This was after we moved out of the North End into a bigger place. When I think back, all I can say is that we just didn't know. Ma, God love her, did her best. She was always working. But my father, he was no help at all."

They learned. They moved from one rental unit to another in Jamaica Plain's Italian neighborhood. One by one, the brothers grew up and joined the military. None of them finished high school. By age thirteen, the sisters went to work in shoe factories. Goals were never discussed. Lucky girls married an American GI who could buy a house.

That was Dad: a 6-foot-6 red-haired Irish-American who had travelled the world in the Air Force. Nona Rosa adored him.

Today, in those same neighborhoods, the majority of newcomers hail from Spanish-speaking lands. Some would say progress has been made. There are Asians, Africans and Middle-Easterners, as well. Languages have changed, but the struggle for gold in *L'America* continues.

Like any immigrant couple of my grandparents' era, Rosa and Eugenio did not benefit from political correctness or enforcement of legal rights. Nor had they expected them. There weren't notions of entitlement that some form of help from the government would keep them solvent.

It made me chuckle to think of Rosa and Eugenio in a waiting room demanding legal or medical services, as if it were their right. I couldn't imagine them attending ESL classes, free of charge, at a community center in their neighborhood. Like others thrown out of Italy, they'd been grateful to start anew across the ocean. They'd never looked back. Some Italians returned. Not them. Italy was the past; they brooked no divided loyalties, and never talked about cultural identity. You got a job, kept it, and saved each penny. You went to Mass, prayed your rosary, and donated food to help neighborhood families that had fallen on hard times. Men came around at night and picked up that food from front steps. Shrewd Boston politicians like Mayor Michael Curley, also known as The Rascal King, courted their vote by going door to door and empathizing with their Catholicism.

It was shameful to need help, or to expect government to solve your problems. Public shame today seems a medieval concept. Yet private shame is a different matter. I disliked knowing that for decades private shame kept my mother from celebrating her Mediterranean ethnicity, but as she often said, "They were different times."

I assumed the Latina on the train worked in a low-paid menial job. Mom cut and hauled beef. I wanted to ask the Latina, strike up a conversation. I remembered the Irish greeting, *céad míle fáilte romhat*: a thousand welcomes to you. It seemed perfect for Boston, but the girl looked tired. I felt an awkward voyeurism, as if I was an outsider in my own land. It wasn't really *my* land. It was hers, too.

She wore a wedding band. Probably had children and maybe used food stamps. There was no way she was on welfare. This Latina worked hard for a living.

Unlike those shipped here as slaves, immigrants had come of their own volition. They worked because they could. Good work didn't exist in the dirt they left behind. The Italians landed jobs with other Italians: in construction, commercial fishing, and the many factories that have since moved to China. The military was a ticket out of their ghettos. Like the Irish, they resented the arrival of blacks in huge migrations from the South. Like Mexicans, they influenced the American diet and language.

Ironically, the North End ghetto with its brick walls and views of the harbor had become vaunted yuppie real estate. Once-cramped rooms were sold as condos, each a durable throwback to an allegedly simpler time. Boston's mayor wasn't Irish but Italian. The state's governor was African-American.

How was it different for Latin Americans? They had, I supposed, more services available to them. License exams, food labels, street signs and phone messages were in Spanish. Perhaps, too, they had more civil rights and easier ways to connect to their homeland through inexpensive airfares, satellite TV and the Internet. They also had more legal hoops to jump through and dodge. I remember Mom explaining that Nona Rosa never needed government documents. She was a Wop, but she'd arrived whole, and that meant citizenship, eventually.

How furtively things change. Tampons weren't mass-produced until the late 1940s. Pampers were invented in 1961. "We used cotton cloth for everything," Mom explained. "Washed diapers by hand, wrung 'em out and hung them on the line. I figured out the bleeding on my own. Just like my sisters. But we were family. We helped each other."

Everybody worked at home, cooked there, washed laundry over a galvanized bucket. Nona worked at factories well into each of her pregnancies. A month after a baby was born, she went back to work, and all sisters took turns caring for the new infant. Was it flawed, emotional, sometimes violent? You bet. My grandfather Eugenio kept drinking, seldom held down a job, and beat his wife and children without reason or mercy. I always remember this during the fallout after a quarrel with my mother.

Nona Rosa stitching soles on to shoes until another baby came along. Never owned a television or talked about the future, life fulfillment or college. In the 40s, one of her sons bought her a Westinghouse radio and she improved her English by listening to Roosevelt's fireside chats while she sewed lace doilies, and knitted wool throw rugs. For extra money on days off, she rode the train alone to Manhattan to sell those wares from a pushcart on Madison Avenue.

Was it because of shyness, fear or pride that I couldn't open up and talk to the Latina? No, it was because I believed it wasn't done. In Boston, I'd always been quick to shut myself down for the sake of propriety. This was not a cultural question, or one of class. This was pure—an idiosyncrasy; I told myself the young woman needed her stolen moments of rest on the train. I felt comfortable assuming she was thinking about her children and solutions to new problems.

In the Latina's neighborhood, did boys shriek out open windows and run wild in the streets in packs, the way my uncles did? They certainly didn't play stickball or kick the can. Nor did they stack fruit for vendors at Haymarket Square. No doubt, they lacked air conditioning, and to escape the heat they waited until twilight to swarm sidewalks. They survived through the help of their church, the kindness of strangers and family, not out of any overblown code, or dream of *la dolce vita*. To get ahead, it wasn't enough to be good. This Latina would have to be exceptional. Even then, there were no guarantees.

I assumed she was Catholic, and it pained me to consider the sex scandals, and a particular Boston diocese. Perhaps she attended one of the evangelical storefront churches popping up all over. I remembered my mother decrying the growth of these pod mall churches, and the shutting down of Catholic cathedrals in American cities. I hadn't told Mom the Catholic bureaucracy had only themselves to blame. I hadn't needed to. She never skipped a Mass, but her once exuberant piety had faded.

Mom's message to me hadn't changed. Education remained the ticket. Read. Write. Think. Save enough, live modestly. Be patient. Work hard. Love God and your fellow man.

There existed differences between all ethnic groups and their various histories in this tossed salad called the USA, but as I watched the Latina riding the T, rubbing her eyes, gazing at the choppy slate of the Charles, I felt confident believing that she was on her way, and that she'd get there. Once home, she'd prepare dinner for her family. Her fatigue and self-doubt were my own. We had that in common as something pure, and we shared a craving for a sense that we belonged and could contribute to our country, adopted or otherwise.

The adversities of economic hardship don't make people kinder. On the contrary, they can embitter the soul and implant a meanness of spirit that becomes too useful as a defense mechanism. Misery loves company; it's easy to complain among peers in your native tongue, convinced the attitudes of one speak for the whole when market jungle-law prevails, choices aren't seen as luxuries, and it's considered arrogant not to indulge in self-promotion.

Unlike those shipped here as slaves, immigrants had come of their own volition. They worked because they could. Good work didn't exist in the dirt they left behind. Italians landed jobs with other Italians in construction, commercial fishing, and in factories that have since moved to China.

Awake, the Latina stared out her window. Like my Mom, she would never read in English at the same speed as her children. I hoped that she read to them at night, purchased what they needed at school, dreamed they'd become doctors. I hoped those dreams would be realized, that her husband was a fair man who didn't drink to excess.

Did she see her children's eyes, bright with dreams that licked the heavens, just as Mom saw such dreams in me? I had an Irish name, but I was swarthy and stocky. During adolescence, I took my share of cruelty because of it. Still, I'd made my way.

Our train reached the Davis Square station. My stop. A mob of commuters exited. I filed with them into an ungainly flow. Reaching the platform, I sneaked a last glance.

Buongiorno, Latina, may you prosper in our shared experiment.

Diffused behind window glass, her face held warm calming tones. An old perceptive soul in a young body, she watched commuters jostle like electrified ants in the deranged swarm between train stops.

Like me, did she wonder where they were all going in such a hurry?

John Flynn is the author of a novel, Heaven Is a City Where Your Language Isn't Spoken*, due this year from Cervena Barva Press. He lives in Charlottesville, Virginia.*

Give Me

Give me your tired, your hungry, your poor.
I will hoe them in the cotton fields,
Spin away their lives in mills,
Reduce them to patterns in sweatshops.

Give me your brawny brave men,
I will smelt them in steel mills,
Lay them out alongside rails,
Machine them into automatons.

Give me your farmers eager for soil.
On lands fertile with Indian graves
I will plow their hearts into
Amber waves of grain.

I will grind them in the flour mills,
Cut them up in the meatpacking plants,
Flatten them in tin mills,
Bury them in mines.

I will batten on them in company stores,
Pave them into roads for my commerce,
Make them the bricks and mortar of my banks,
Rivet their attention into skyscrapers and bridges.

Tell them, across the oceans,
They will be fortunate; over the last centuries my
kindness has grown.
For they will not arrive in chains from Africa,
Or indentured from England, Scotland, Wales,
Ireland,
To be worked to death before our contract requires
My granting them freedom and a suit of clothes.

—William P. Meyers

William P. Meyers lives near Point Arena; his essays can be found at iiipublishing.com*. This poem took first place in the adult division of the 2012 Gualala Arts Creative Writing Contest.*

BOOKS

Hidden Treasure

Sandra Waller's privately printed memoir, ***Cherry and Pine***, is much too subtle and inward, too deeply perceived and delicately written to have found a home among presses large or small that might have launched it further into the world. It barely whispers its stream of recovered consciousness, its song of exquisite memory that rescues images of her growing up where her parents ran a corner store in an East Coast urban neighborhood long since demolished to make way for the Expressway. The child's senses vividly register every remarkable sensation and revive a lost time with a mythic feeling that is both intimate and archetypal, thanks to the cool precision of the author's language. The book is also handsomely produced, the modesty of its clean design reflecting that of the writer.

The RCR does not ordinarily review self-published books, but this one stands out as an exceptional example of the quality of what is being overlooked by the publishing industry. *Cherry and Pine* is available directly from the author, Sandra Waller, who can be contacted at w937124@aol.com.

—Stephen Kessler