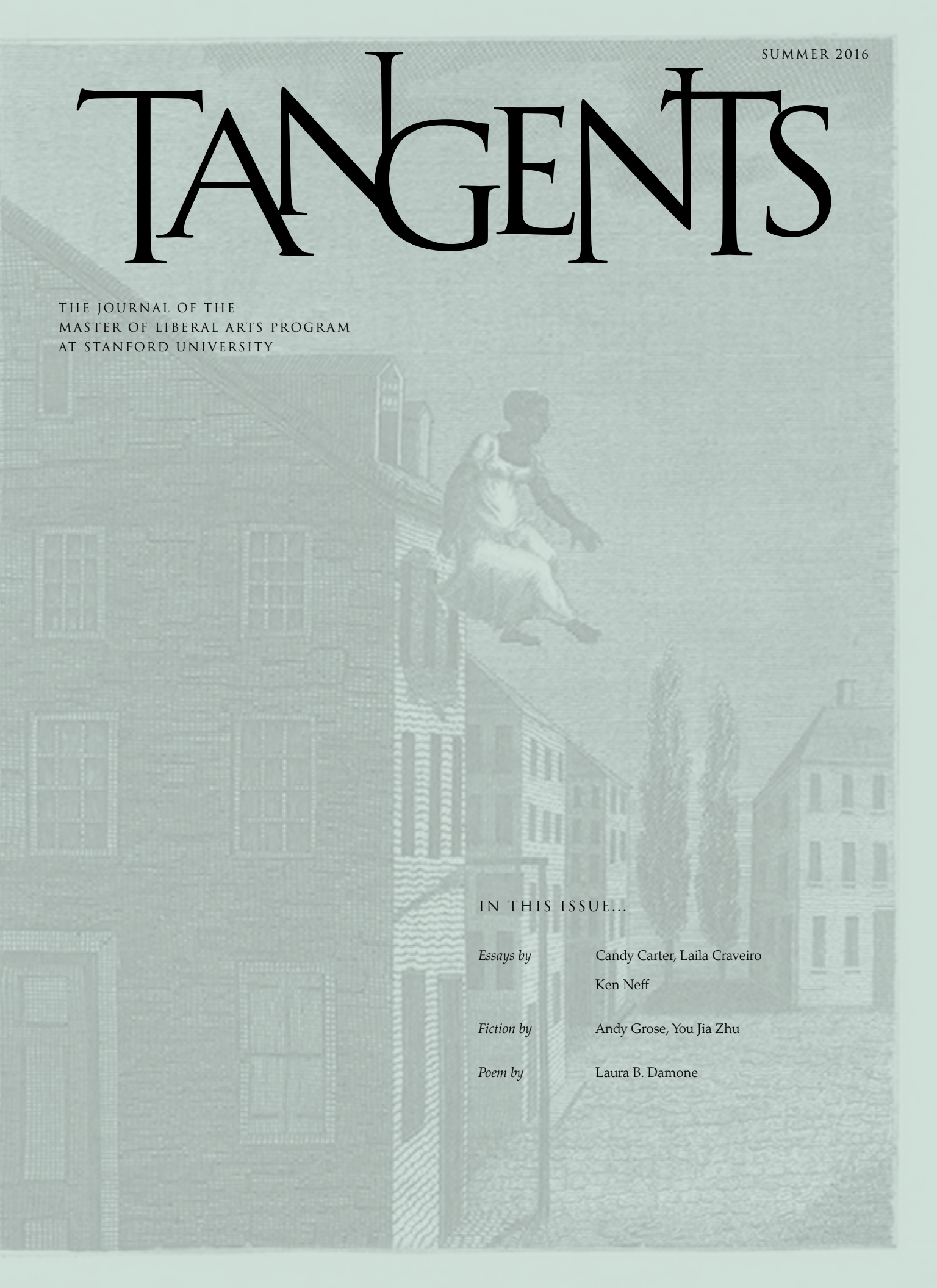


SUMMER 2016

# TANGENTS

THE JOURNAL OF THE  
MASTER OF LIBERAL ARTS PROGRAM  
AT STANFORD UNIVERSITY



IN THIS ISSUE...

*Essays by*

Candy Carter, Laila Craveiro  
Ken Neff

*Fiction by*

Andy Grose, You Jia Zhu

*Poem by*

Laura B. Damone

## PUBLISHING NOTES

This publication features the works of students and alumni of the Master of Liberal Arts Program at Stanford University.

### *Editors*

Roxanne Enman  
Oscar Firschein

### *Reviewers*

Roxanne Enman  
Oscar Firschein  
Theda Firschein

### *Faculty Advisor*

Dr. Linda Paulson

### *Original Design*

Suzanne West

### *Layout of Current Issue*

Jill Kadlec, Principal  
AKA / Ahmann Kadlec Associates  
Palo Alto, CA  
[www.akacreativegroup.com](http://www.akacreativegroup.com)

### *Financial Contributions*

Contributions to support the production of *Tangents* can be sent to the attention of Dr. Linda Paulson, Stanford University, Littlefield Center, 365 Lasuen Street, Stanford, CA 94305-3004. Please make checks payable to Stanford University and clearly mark "*For Tangents.*"

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The first image of "The Seventeenth Century Sephardic ..." is an author's photo of an original map by Claes Vissches II (1586-1662) showing the Dutch warship fleet entering the port of Recife in 1630. The map is in the Instituto Ricardo Brennard in Pernambuco. Back cover is a street view of the Kahal Zur Israel synagogue. Reproduced with permission.

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VOLUME 15

## IN THIS ISSUE...

- 2 Letter from the Editors  
*Oscar Firschein*  
*Roxanne Enman*
- 4 *Story*: The Memory of Ditches  
*Andy Grose*
- 8 What Happened When Anna Jumped  
from the Window: The Domestic Slave Trade  
in Antebellum Washington, D.C.  
*Candy Carter*
- 15 *Poem*: The Last Blackberries  
*Laura B. Damone*
- 16 H.G. Wells: From Prewar Statesman to  
Wartime Atrocity Propagandist  
*Ken Neff*
- 23 *Story*: Lift  
*You Jia Zhu*
- 28 The Seventeenth-Century Sephardic  
Jewish Diaspora in Brazil: Twenty-Five  
Brief Years of Religious Freedom  
*Laila Craveiro*
- 33 Contributors

## LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

We are proud to present this issue of *Tangents*, the Journal of the Stanford Master of Liberal Arts Program. For the fifteenth volume, we have chosen a diverse group of works by students and alumni, including:

- ✦ two stories, one about childhood in Utah and the other about a startling event seen, but not understood, by a young boy;
- ✦ the attempted escape of an enslaved woman in 1815 and what followed from the event;
- ✦ the transition of H.G. Wells from pre-war statesman to wartime atrocity propagandist;
- ✦ the history of the brief period in the first part of the sixteenth century when Jews in Recife, Brazil, experienced religious freedom; and
- ✦ a poem entitled *The Last Blackberries*.

✦ ✦ ✦ ✦

Please join us in congratulating two MLA graduates on their recent publications:

Sarah Anne Cox, MLA '12, published her new book of poetry, *Super Undone Blue*, with Dusie Press in April. Author Kate Colby describes *Super Undone Blue* as "all at sea, teeming with ghost ships and marine voices, mythic and historic, while contemporary children with ancient names skirt the edges." For more information, contact Ms. Cox at [sacoxf@sbcglobal.net](mailto:sacoxf@sbcglobal.net).

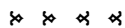
Barbara Wilcox, MLA '15, published her MLA thesis in January as an illustrated trade paperback from History Press. *World War I Army Training by San Francisco Bay: The Story of Camp Fremont* explains how the camp, on land leased from Stanford and nearby owners, brought the war and its controversies to the Bay Area's back yard. Stanford adapted to the proximity of 28,000 soldiers, and the foothills acquired munitions grounds where dugouts and unexploded ordnance still emerge decades later. Peace broke out before most Camp Fremont troops saw battle, but the skills they acquired helped transform the West. The book is available on Amazon and in Bay Area bookstores.



We are indebted to Theda Firschein for her contributions as a reviewer.

Be sure to learn about this issue's contributors, highlighted on the last page.

We hope that our choices will give you hours of enjoyable reading, and that they will inspire future contributions.



The editors would appreciate any feedback on the contents of this issue. Please send comments to [oscarf1@earthlink.net](mailto:oscarf1@earthlink.net) or [enman@alumni.stanford.edu](mailto:enman@alumni.stanford.edu).

# THE MEMORY OF DITCHES

by Andy Grose

## I WAS BORN TO DITCHES. I LOVED MUD.

Before the ditches there was only desert.

By the time I was born, central Utah was spider-webbed with waterways, a network dug into the ground by Mormon pioneers long dead and buried. A network fed all summer by the crystal runoff of the Wasatch Mountains to the east. The desert valley of the Great Salt Lake had, as Scripture promised, "blossomed like a rose."

But I didn't know that history as a child. I only knew the ditches.

Even now, I remember how I longed for the ditches to fill each spring.

I ran naked in their water. Wet mud gave me modesty. In the hotness of summer, it would wrap me in, surround me, cool me, kiss away bee stings. There was pure pleasure in it, like running break-neck down a grassy hill, or laughing hard when I was tickled.

We lived on five acres on the west side of the valley, out where the land still held a wildness. When city and country were still as sharp as yes and no. Where the works of man stuck out from nature, scapegrace afterthoughts. Roads and fences awkward, not quite able to fit in.

My boyhood world was marked by sharp divisions, clear limits. The edge of town was a border I could ride my bike to. A place where the pavement stopped abruptly, and the sagebrush rolled on in its place, a vast blanket of bone-dry bushes, stretching like pebbly toad skin to the mountains twenty miles away. Home to rabbits and snakes, toads and things foreign to a town.

The seasons, too, were sharply marked. Winter's ice-brown snapping into soft spring green.

Summer's abundance falling to earth in a sudden blaze of autumn color. Orderly, each waiting its turn.

Not confused about their place in the harmony of nature. Not subject to the struggles of man.

In summer, the sun rose hot and proud over the long horizon of jagged granite peaks guarding our valley. At the end of the long days, it set over the western salt flats, hiding itself slowly in a sea of pinks and reds. Then finally dark, bruise purple.

In winter, it rushed across the southern sky, quickly, as though fleeing the steely wind.

Social lines of Mormon and non-Mormon, palpable, so you knew where your neighbors stood.

Where each of us belonged. So I could keep my place.

Four-square streets and houses, rough but regular. Yards, gardens, fields plowed straight row by row. All placed on, and yet not part of, the timeless desert. Precarious and tentative, still trying to take root, trying to hang on.

And the ditches, hemming it all together. Making life possible.

Their water set the pattern of my childhood, by where it could and where it could not go. Moving as it must, always downhill, as surely as time moves forward.

Our family's half-mile of ditch was at the very end of that complex web of ditches, the water's last stop before draining off into the salt sink north of town, where even gravity submitted to the majesty of the desert.

By the time the water reached us, it had flowed for many miles and many days. It was a shared treasure, the polygamist water of irrigation. It had seeped through many farms and it was full of odors, traces of the lands it had been with. It had lost its mountain purity, but I didn't care. It was all mine.

I was born to ditches. I loved mud.

•••••

A good mud-fort takes all summer to build, squatting with warm ooze between your toes, wrestling handfuls up onto the lumpy walls. Picking out the worms, for later, to go fishing.

The mud cracks off like snakeskin when you crawl onto the grass. When you run into the house for a cold drink, or to tell mom how much you've built, happy grey scabs cling to your ankles before falling off to dance over the kitchen floor.

Irrigation water is muddy, muddy and brown with where it has been. When you live on a farm that muddy water is like blood that pulses each time you irrigate. Each time you "take your share" of the water making its way through the town, yard by yard, only to start again at the beginning.

Dad would irrigate faithfully, our water turn marked in exact minutes on an ornate Catholic calendar, each turn tucked in among the saints and martyrs in mom's indelible black ink. The water had its own rhythm, ignoring the time of day, the day of week. Blind to weekends and holidays. Marching across the calendar, Friday morning, Tuesday midnight, Sunday afternoon. It didn't care about the fast days marked by tiny golden fishes, or feast days, or Lent. The water made its own Holy Days.

Between the fold-down ironing board and the square, wall-mounted telephone—a "party line," one ring for us, two short rings for one neighbor, one long ring for another—hung the timekeeper of my childhood. Irrigation and church set the tempo of our family's life.

The length of our water turn, whenever it fell, was always the same, ordained by our number of shares. We had eighty-four minutes; four shares. Never more, never less.

"Water ---2:22-3:46 a.m.," as if an angel had spoken.

•••••

At first the ditch water was just a puddle on a low part of the lawn. Shallow, but moving. Constantly flowing away from what seemed like forever, toward the long white picket fence that guarded us from the street. I jumped and played in it, cheered on by my older brothers. Coached by their example in splashing and sliding. Or sitting still, just to feel the water holding me, slipping over and around me.

We made little boats and sailed them across the yard. Leaf boats, bug boats, twig and apple rafts. Anything to float. Bottles, beer cans, the bathtub's yellow rubber duck.

As I grew older, the ditch seemed to grow longer and deeper. Dad would clear the places where the "shipwrecks" happened most often. Places where the water hesitated, and swirled back on itself, before moving on.

I saw the way the water acted, how it seemed to be alive.

When we flooded the orchard, the ditch became a lake. The water stood a half-foot deep beneath the

apple trees and cherries, caught by dikes we built of sod and cinderblocks. Our private lake all afternoon. Safe for bigger boats, more complex ones, rigged out with rubber-band paddles, insect sailers. Pine planks swarming with black ants. Safe to pull our baby sister in her wagon. Her water carriage.

It was as though the water sensed our moods, played all our games, never tired, never scolded.

The ducks we raised for food would splash and quack in the standing water, and so would we, my younger brother and I, waving our arms in time with their wings.

We raced our bikes on the submerged cement sidewalk around the house, chased by rooster-tails of water, giggling. The water let us feel out of reach.

Water didn't have a bedtime. Irrigation was our chief night-time adventure. Hiding to spy dad's flashlight, moving like a firefly far out in the fields, and listening for the suck and splash of his boots as they broke through the cricket song. Watching the stars. Waiting for the swish-swish . . . swish-swish of the shift workers' truck tires telling us that the water had made it across the whole farm, into the street.

The screen door slamming as he came in. Mother whispering.

Knowing dad would tell us at breakfast that the farm "got a real good soaking."

Then dreams of finding any fish the water might have brought.

•••••

Our garage was square and white, just like the house. Dad had built them both by hand. The garage was an enchanted place to play. It tempted his hip-boots and shovel, held pitchforks and horse collars.

We would sit in the car for hours, taking turns pretending to drive. Or trying to understand the tools stored there, tools we longed to use ourselves someday. Farm tools and building tools. Saws and drills and awls. Tape measures, levels, squares. The mysterious transit, atop its spidery legs.

Standing in his hip-boots, which came to our shoulders, we did not feel small. We became grown-up in our childish way.

Beyond the garage sat the square, concrete head gate, marking the southwest corner of our safe world. It was rough and solid, poured in place with hand-mixed cement. Slots on three sides for thick planks to guide the irrigation water to the proper ditch. With all the planks in place, it became another fort. Indestructible and permanent.

"You boys can go up to the head gate," meant mom was setting a limit. She never put in words that we

must stop there. But we knew, even then, that things weren't always said.

That trip might take my younger brother and me all day. Playing our way up the ditch by inches, for fifty yards. To the limit of the familiar, to the brink of curiosity.

She might bring us lunch there, and sit to visit, knowing that we saw ourselves as being very far from home. Knowing it would take time for her children to grow up.

A rusty, three-strand barbed wire fence guarded the next door neighbor's yard, with its strange basement house—a roofed earth-cellar—where the people lived underground, without windows. A Jack-and-the-Beanstalk world where magic seemed very much alive. A world where spirits—trolls and ghosts—might be playing the strange music we heard at night. But a world of temptation, as well, with its fragrant strawberry patch, which seemed to call us by name. Challenging us to be bold. To defy the rules. To taste the thrill of risk and reward.

"Never, ever tell her," I would caution my brother, each time we dared to take the chance.

"Cross my heart," he'd say, solemnly.

But I would always wait until he added the foreboding, "Hope to die."

Mom would sew our torn shirts without question, check us for scratches. Never ask about the fresh red stains. Never let us know how much she knew.

•••••

When I was old enough, I'd go with dad right past the head gate, through the barbed wire fence he taught me how to spread, using the shovel and one foot, hardly breaking his stride. We would step through that frontier, from our yard and on up the ditch. All the way to the canal, the source of the ditches, a half mile away. I would study our path, mapping it, waiting for the day that I could go alone.

He worked his way up the ditch, checking it yard by yard, pausing often to clear debris.

He worked with a rhythm like saying the rosary, steady and reassuring. Portions of the ditch were paved, but longer parts had to be shoveled clear each time. I felt he could dig a whole canal if he wanted to.

Here and there, a neighbor might give us fresh tomatoes, some news, some gossip. Others saw us and went back into their house without a word.

He explained that many people stole a little water, a sort of venial sin, to keep their gardens green without getting up at night. How they put a rock under their gate to make it leak a little. Or notched the gate itself. He taught me which were midnight "water hogs,"

stealing their neighbor's entire turn, then playing innocent. More of a mortal sin, in water terms. Who was friendly. Who had dogs. Which dogs only barked. Which would bite. Which rules mattered, which I could bend.

We shoveled a scoop of dirt in place to stop most leaks.

But, he might say, "Don't bother there, son. Let it run. She's ill."

"Take this squash to your mother for me, boy," a shameless water hog might say.

"No thanks," he would smile, "we have our own," as he blocked their head gate with shovelfuls of mud.

•••••

Brigham Young said, "This is the right place." He should have said, "Here we'll have water."

Water was the first thing Brigham baptized, sending missionaries to every water source in the Great Basin within a year of his arrival. But I didn't learn that until decades later, after I left Utah, and looked back.

The water was a faithful servant of the saints. As surely as their elders could lay on hands to cure the sick, the water raised healthy crops from their bed of former desert. It blessed the fields of sugar beets and alfalfa. It filled dry gullies with watercress. It transformed the dark ground into bushels of white potatoes.

Religion and nature and magic were all tangled up in the Utah of my youth. Did water turn manure into earthworms? Could horse's tail hairs become snakes? Had the Mormon prophets really talked to God? Would their golden angel, Maroni, come to life soon, to blow his trumpet and wake the dead? Why did the Pope have a tail, like the devil? Why did some Mormons have horns? People I knew and trusted believed each of these things. But they all believed different things. Different truths were always in contention.

I was confused, but I had to believe in something. I knew I couldn't count on guardian angels, no matter what the priest said. Our little sister often fell and hurt herself. No angel was ever around to guard her in her innocence. I never saw a miracle.

In a way, I came to believe in water. Right there in the ditch where I could touch it.

Everyone needed it. Water was good. Water was real, even if the Catholic priest could make it holy. Water was something we all had in common, the Mormons and the Catholics. Even the town's few Masons and Jews. All the neighbors, the good and the bad, were somehow able to share it. Losing water would be hell.

Water was a belief I could handle.

I had faith in irrigation.

•••••



The ditches of my youth were fed by a narrow canal scratched across the desert valley, struck ruler-straight, from east to west. Most of its water was intended to process copper ore. But that, too, I would not understand for a long time.

To me, the canal was a fact of nature, a sharp dividing line between green and brown, between agriculture and desert, between the haves and have-nots of water.

A place where my father sat to hunt doves as a boy, with his brand-new 410 shotgun. Where a generation later, I hunted with him, using the same gun. The ditches could be changed, but the canal seemed timeless.

Now it is hidden, largely forgotten. Time has blurred the boundaries of my childhood reality, and wiped away the landmarks. Progress, with its pipes and culverts, has defied gravity. It has brought water to the highlands. Has stretched an urban carpet to hide the toad skin sagebrush valley I loved.

Yet, some things abide. The mountains still stand majestic. The crystal snow melt still dances down the rocky canyons, bringing water, the everlasting mountains' tithe to the people of Utah, Mormon and Gentile alike. The Jordan River still flows north from Utah Lake to the Great Salt Lake, latter-day Zion's Dead Sea, even if no one is baptized in its water these days, as my Mormon mother was, years ago.

The gentle slope of the valley floor still guides the flow of the canal. It still crosses the hidden desert. It can still be found, if you know where to look, among the roads and housing tracts. Not a pioneer as much as a survivor. A few ditches still spring from it, here and there, to run downhill through old farms, grassy yards and flower beds, before they disappear into the salt flats.

No doubt, little Catholic boys and Mormon girls, alike, still play in the muddy water.

•••••

In that world of vanishing ditches, directions are given, to this day, not so much by "right or left" as by "up or down." Turn up at the stop sign and go a mile or so. Turn down after the high school. I believe it's down there.

But, I didn't need directions for my visit.

Ditch, once more, we are together. Can you feel me standing near? Does this modern landscape please you? Are you happy? Do you cry?

You shared my childhood. Mud forts, twig boats, flooded meadows. The vast, star-blessed summer sky. Cricket music, rising, falling, steady, as though nature breathed there. Your muddy water always moving. Making poetry of life.

You hid pheasants, bright red roosters. I would kick them from your stillness, from your grass-ribbed, sheltering flanks. They jumped wildly from your silence, squawking explosions of flight.

Who could shoot them as I once did?

Father taught me in your water. Mother how the dry earth sighs. All those million hissing bubbles, as the ground sucked you inside. No one told me how I'd miss you. Told me, back then, we were friends.

I've crept past these sleeping houses, as we did, not long ago. When we were alone together, irrigating in the night.

I have come back to say thank you.

Know you are alive within me. Pulsing calmly, flowing free. You soaked deep down inside me, keeping youthfulness fresh.

In a way, we both have children. I, a son. You, many deeply-rooted trees. Those lives will go on without us. Somehow life itself endures.

Yet, into the earth all go someday. Always downward, no escape. We cannot know how or when. There your cool wet mud will shroud me. Beyond that last barbed wire fence.

Like the mountains and the snowmelt, permanent and fleeing blend.

It is more than I had hoped for, but I have a wish, my friend.

If you dream, remember me.

WHAT HAPPENED WHEN  
ANNA JUMPED FROM THE WINDOW:  
**THE DOMESTIC SLAVE  
TRADE IN ANTEBELLUM  
WASHINGTON, D.C.**

by Candy Carter



FIG. 1. Alexander Rider,  
"But I did not want to go..."  
from Jesse Torrey,  
*A Portraiture of Domestic  
Slavery*, (42). Stanford  
Special Collections.

## THE OBVIOUS ANGUISH OF THE WOMAN IN THE ENGRAVING MADE ANNA INTO A SYMBOL FOR THE FLEDGLING ANTI-SLAVERY MOVEMENT.

The woman known as Anna awakened at daybreak in November 1815 and jumped from a third floor window of the Washington, D.C., tavern where she was being held. Anna's facial features in the arresting engraving that depicts her desperate act are shadowy, yet her dark, tightly-curved hair and the contrast of her skin against the simple white muslin dress make her racial identity unmistakable (Fig. 1). Her anguished leap put Anna's image and story in one of the earliest anti-slavery writings of the new United States. By putting a face on the inhumanity of the domestic slave trade, Anna indirectly launched court cases, started the American Colonization Society, inspired congressional speeches, permitted her tavern-prison to burn to the ground, and put her jailer out of business.

We have only an outline of the events that put Anna on the window ledge that morning. Born into slavery in Maryland, Anna later married an enslaved man at a nearby plantation, had two daughters, and was subsequently sold with her children by her "old master" to her husband's owner as a payment for debts. According to an interview with Anna conducted several decades later by anti-slavery writer E.A. Andrews, Anna was "treated unkindly" in this new setting, and as before, the master had debts. After sending Anna's husband to work at the plantation outer perimeter, the planter sold Anna and her daughters to "men from Georgia," who took them to Washington to await further transportation.<sup>i</sup> It was here, warehoused in the garret of George Miller's tavern on F Street, that Anna jumped from the window. Miraculously, she survived, although she broke both arms and badly injured her back.

A few weeks before Anna leaped from the window, Jesse Torrey, a young Philadelphia doctor touring Washington, had experienced a *road-to-Damascus* epiphany when he observed slave traders force-marching a sorrowful procession of manacled men, women, and children past the Capitol. Torrey was struck by the irony of humans in chains being paraded in full view of the proud structures of a new republic founded on ideals of liberty and equality; he immediately canceled his Congressional visit and determined instead to create a "faithful copy of the impressions...which involuntarily pervaded my full heart and agitated my mind."<sup>ii</sup> At the same time, Anna's story reached Torrey's ears as it circulated through Washington's rumor mill. Deeply troubled to hear about what he later called her "frantic act," Torrey immediately set out to understand what had motivated such a desperate move. Perhaps he recognized instinctively that the tale of one mother's anguish fully captured slavery's brutal reality in ways that reduced other discussions to mere abstractions. Anna's story inspired Torrey further, and hers is the first of several accounts that Torrey documented after interviewing enslaved persons, slaveholders, slave traders, and kidnapped free African-Americans for *A Portraiture of Domestic Slavery*, a slim, 84-page leather-bound volume Torrey published within two years of meeting Anna, ensuring his position as one of the earliest writers of the American abolitionist movement. (See Fig. 2 next page)

When Torrey met with Anna, she was lucid but bedridden, and once again confined to in the third-story garret of Miller's Tavern. Miller had purchased her for the bargain price of \$5, presumably enough to cover the cost of her care until she recovered.<sup>iii</sup> Torrey's interview with Anna does not reveal whether she was trying to escape or if instead, she had intended to take her own life. Nevertheless, the reason Anna "did not want to go" is pervasive in slave narratives and literature: the casual manner in which plantation owners, who held absolute

control over every aspect of life, dissolved families in bondage. Anna was one of nearly a million American slaves who was forcibly separated from her family and “sold down the river” during the first six decades of the nineteenth century. The narrative accompanying her illustration quotes Anna directly: “They brought me away with two of my children, and wouldn’t let me see my husband—they didn’t sell my husband, and I didn’t want to go. I was so confused and ‘istracted that I didn’t know hardly what I was about...they have carried my children with ‘em to Carolina.” Torrey expressed the futility and hopelessness of Anna’s situation, commenting, “Thus her family was dispersed from north to south... without the shadow of a hope of ever seeing or hearing from her children again.”<sup>iv</sup>

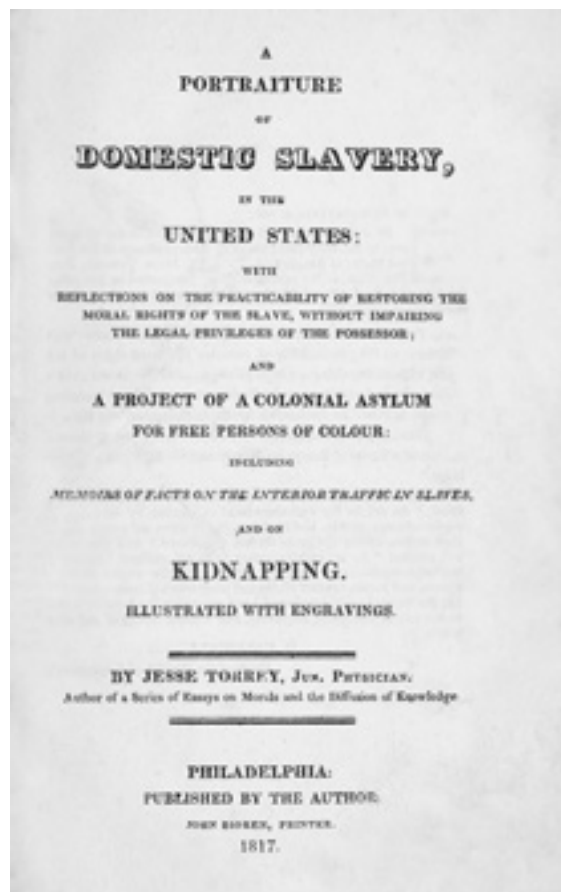


FIG. 2. *A Portraiture of Domestic Slavery in the United States, frontispiece, book cover and pages. Author's photos. Stanford University Special Collections.*

Torrey's sympathetic narration of Anna's despair exposed the human toll of the domestic slave trade, but it was Alexander Rider's engraving that firmly secured her place in history. The obvious anguish of the woman in the engraving made Anna into a symbol for the fledgling anti-slavery movement. The illustration is inexpert and almost childlike in its inaccuracies, yet its crudeness is precisely why it is so haunting. Undoubtedly following Torrey's careful description, Rider included other features of the F Street neighborhood: the spindly trees, the cobbled streets, and the dim sky of a cold November morning. The streets are empty and lifeless, as though the entire world has turned its back on Anna's plight. The caption informs viewers that she "jump'd out of the window," yet Anna's position is discordant with the physics of a human body falling through the air. Perhaps Rider intended to convey the woman's resignation: she wanted to die because life was simply not worth living any more.

During his meeting with Anna, Torrey discovered three more prisoners held in the same room. The image of the conversation that followed shows Torrey interviewing these cellmates as Anna lies under the dormer (Fig. 3). One of them is a 21-year-old "mulatto" man who is "thoroughly secured in irons..." The other two people are a "widow woman with an infant at her breast" (unrelated to the mulatto man) who had been "seized and dragged" out of bed in her home. Torrey is outraged to learn that—unlike Anna, who was a "legal" slave—the man, woman, and child were all free-born Americans kidnapped from Delaware

homes.<sup>v</sup> As Torrey soon learned, any person of color, regardless of status, was vulnerable.

Anna's story and those of her fellow prisoners inspired some unusual alliances. The first of these connections was with *Star Spangled Banner* lyricist and attorney Francis Scott Key. With Key's help, Torrey obtained a court injunction to forestall the continued captivity of the free man and the woman and her infant who were being held with Anna. The petition was successful, and all were eventually returned to their free status in Delaware.<sup>vi</sup> Key's name appears frequently over the years as attorney for enslaved people petitioning for free status, and indeed, Anna herself later benefited from Key's advocacy. However, hundreds, if not thousands, of free people of color were less fortunate.

Torrey gained a second ally in John Randolph, a Virginia slave-holder and congressional representative, who had once depicted slavery as a benign institution. Once Anna's story was made public, however, Randolph realized that the image of a desperate woman jumping out of a building made a mockery of his earlier claims

that slavery was benevolent. Randolph was also painfully aware that European visitors were writing home with horrified reports about the omnipresence of people in chains in the capital of a nation founded on freedom and equality. The congressman tried in vain to convince colleagues to honor Washington's "federal" nature by banning the slave trade within the capital's jurisdiction. Randolph also joined Torrey as one of the earliest proponents of what became the American Colonization Society. As historian Nicholas Wood explains in his biographical study of the legislator, Torrey's book—and Anna's act in particular—exposed the depravity of the slave trade in the capital city in ways that even a slavery apologist like Randolph could not ignore.<sup>vii</sup>

Despite Randolph's congressional speech-making, the selling, trading, abduction, and forced movement of African-Americans was commonplace business in Washington. Indeed, the slave trade continued as big business in the capital city until the eve of the Civil War. Half of the 750,000 people in bondage in America in the early nineteenth century lived in the Potomac region.<sup>viii</sup> Located between Maryland and Virginia with easy access to seaports and rivers, Washington, D.C., was the ideal depot for warehousing slaves en route to plantations to both the south and the west. Washington residents like the tavern owner George Miller profited from holding human chattel in their custody; they also served as brokers for traders, as intermediaries for owners looking for escapees, and as bankers for anyone participating in the slave trade.



FIG. 3. Alexander Rider, "The author noting down the narratives..." from Jesse Torrey, *A Portraiture of Domestic Slavery* (46). Stanford Special Collections.

Washington's African-American residents—enslaved as well as free—also formed the backbone of the work force that built the city as it emerged from the banks of the Potomac in the early nineteenth century. Plantation owners of nearby properties were compensated for "Negro hire," and enslaved workers of color—who outnumbered their manumitted counterparts five to one—were sent to construct the new republic's iconic federal structures.<sup>ix</sup> Planters whose enslaved workers labored in the city received monthly compensation at \$5 per laborer. This arrangement was a bonanza for slave-holders, who profited from their slaves' labor without having to house and feed them; indeed, all planters were expected to provide was a blanket for each slave they hired out.<sup>x</sup>

Nevertheless, Anna and her two daughters were not in the capital city as part of its construction crews of forced labor; rather, they had been sold as part of what historian Edward Ball calls "Slavery's Trail of Tears."

This forced migration of enslaved people from the Upper South to the “Old Southwest” made Washington a hub for a rapidly expanding domestic slave trade that emerged to life when the legal importation of enslaved workers from Africa ended in 1808. For more than six decades, approximately one million enslaved people traveled overland in coffles or by water, chained and manacled in riverboats and ocean-going cargo ships. Their numbers exceed those of the native tribes in the infamous “Indian Removal” campaigns of the 1830s. Likewise, involuntary migrants in bondage who had been uprooted from homes and families outnumbered their free and predominantly white American counterparts who had voluntarily joined wagon trains to head west. Ball, himself the descendant of a slave-owning family, reports that “this movement lasted longer and grabbed up more people than any other migration in North America before 1900... ‘Sold down the river’ labels a raft of loss.”<sup>xi</sup>

Ironically, in the engraving of her leap from the tavern window, Anna wears the source of her own misery on her back: cotton. Light, washable, easily dyed, cotton fabrics triggered the rage for “Grecian robes” coveted by Enlightenment-era fashionistas from Paris to New York. The invention of Eli Whitney’s cotton gin and the availability of new lands in the south and west following the Louisiana Purchase of 1803 converged to meet consumer demand. Planters could trade their increasingly unprofitable tobacco fields—and their workers in bondage—for cotton plantations.

## MILLER CLAIMED ANNA AS A SLAVE AFTER HER JUMP FROM THE WINDOW.

But what of the enslaved men and women like Anna, whose lives were permanently disrupted when King Cotton turned the United States into a key player in the economic marketplace? The cotton gin did not reduce the demand for enslaved people; instead, it simply re-distributed the way planters used the labors of men and women in chains. In 1820, Thomas Jefferson referenced this trend when he wrote optimistically to the Marquis de Lafayette of slavery’s expansion into new areas: “All know that permitting the slaves of the South to spread into the West will not add one being to that unfortunate condition, that it will increase the happiness of those existing, and by spreading them over a larger surface, will dilute the evil everywhere, and facilitate the means of finally getting rid of it...”<sup>xii</sup> The familial and community connections that would forever be torn apart as part of this “spreading” seemed not to have crossed Jefferson’s mind—or the minds of his slave-holding colleagues. In addition to guaranteeing slave owners the labor needed to expand and diversify property, slaves served as collateral for paying debts, extending holdings, and balancing books. Anna’s narrative, of course, reflects this practice, as both of her masters settled accounts through the sale of her and her children.

The dreaded prospect of being separated from family members or sold into even harsher conditions gave slave-holders additional social control over their enslaved workers. Anna’s suffering was not an isolated incident: historian Walter Johnson, for instance, estimates that fifty percent of domestic slave sales in the antebellum period divided a family.<sup>xiii</sup> We see such subjugation when Anna describes her terror in learning that she and her children could be sold to pay her profligate owner’s debts; as she told abolitionist writer E. A. Andrews in an interview in 1836, Anna “fell upon her knees to her young master and begged him that she and her children might not be separated from her husband and their father.”<sup>xiv</sup>

The fear of being uprooted had a far-reaching socio-political impact: historians speculate that the relatively low number of slave revolts in the United States (in comparison to other slave-holding regions such as Haiti and Brazil) is due to the threat of being sold away. As Walter Johnson explains in his study of the antebellum slave market, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market*, “under the chattel principle... every reliance on another, every child, friend, or lover... held within it the threat of its own dissolution. Slaveholders used that threat to govern their slaves.”<sup>xv</sup> Continually anxious about the separation from loved ones (as Anna was) or sent to harsher surroundings (as her children were) kept enslaved people on a knife-edge of fear and suspicion.

Although King Cotton kept Washington's slave pens and taverns open until the eve of the Civil War, the stories of Anna and her jailer, George Miller, provide a more satisfying conclusion to an otherwise sorrowful narrative. Torrey's book and the unsettling illustration of Anna jumping from the garret window secured her place in neighborhood lore, making the illiterate and now-disabled African-American woman a local legend. An exchange of letters in the *City of Washington Gazette* and an account by Washington historian Wilhelmus Bryan tell us about what happened when, two years after the publication of Torrey's book, a fire engulfed the outbuildings of Miller's Tavern. As the tavern burned and the neighbors in local fire brigades arrived with buckets to douse the blaze, they talked about Anna and other involuntary tavern "guests." Many, like post office clerk William Gardner, announced loudly that they would do nothing to help the "Slave Bastile." They turned their attention to nearby properties and allowed the tavern to burn to the ground.<sup>xvi</sup>

Miller did not prosper after the fire that destroyed much of his operation. Articles in Washington newspapers from 1819 onward carry frequent notices of property seizures for payment of his debts and back taxes. By 1824, a front page *National Intelligencer* notice announced that a new owner had restored and re-named the tavern as Lafayette House, although it continued as a slave-holding site.<sup>xvii</sup> An article in the May 30, 1829 issue of the *National Intelligencer* identifies Miller as one of three individuals indicted by the Grand Jury of Savannah for false imprisonment of Rowland Stephenson.<sup>xviii</sup> Stephenson was, interestingly, not enslaved nor even an American. He was a slippery English banker on the lam whom Miller and a fellow slave trader William Williams had abducted in hopes of receiving reward money for his return to angry investors. Miller and Williams both pled guilty, were fined, and imprisoned.

We learn more about Anna's life from E. A. Andrews's interview. According to Andrews, Miller claimed Anna as a slave after her jump from the window. Her husband "[continued] as a slave," but he was able to join her in Washington.<sup>xix</sup> Anna and her husband had more children, two of whom were living at the time of Andrews's interview. In the meantime, according to Washington court documents, and perhaps because of Miller's legal and financial troubles, Anna resided "at liberty" in the city. Furthermore, Andrews's account shows that, in 1828, Miller and his son George Miller, Jr., attempted to claim Anna's surviving children as slaves. Francis Scott Key served as Anna's attorney when she petitioned for manumission of both herself and her children. The court found in their favor, and Anna and her children were freed.<sup>xx</sup>

Anna did not know what she was starting when she jumped from the third floor window of Miller's Tavern on that cold November morning in 1815. Her story, whispered among white citizens in the new capital, challenged slavery's defenders, like John Randolph, and galvanized Jesse Torrey to expose the evils of the domestic slave trade in print. Her white neighbors remembered and avenged her when they let George Miller's tavern burn to the ground. From *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to *Huck Finn* to *Beloved*, both white and African-American authors draw on Anna's story, making the family separation trope a common thread in American literature. Like her oversized silhouette on the tavern wall, Anna continues to cast a long shadow.

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## THE LAST BLACKBERRIES

*by Laura B. Damone*

For months the thorny tangles  
have been resplendent,  
heavy with fruit,  
bent beneath its weight.  
And each day as I passed  
I thought "tomorrow...  
tomorrow..."

But today the air is crisp  
and the branches brittle.  
The last crop of berries  
has dried upon the vines,  
shrunken and shriveled,  
heralding the fall.  
Even the birds  
will only eat so many.

But not my little bird, my cheeping chick,  
his appetite insatiable.  
Some he gobbles whole  
others he dissects, squeezing the  
juice from each flush cell  
and smearing it carefully up  
one arm and then the next.  
He is indiscriminant,  
loving sweet and tart alike,  
none passed up  
none left until tomorrow,  
living only and deliciously  
in today.

# H.G. WELLS:

## *From Prewar Statesman to Wartime Atrocity Propagandist*

by Ken Neff

GREAT BRITAIN DECLARED WAR ON IMPERIAL GERMANY ON AUGUST 4, 1914, one day after German armies invaded Belgium en route to France. Learning that Germany had an official Propaganda Agency, Britain quickly reacted and created its own War Propaganda Department under Charles Masterman, a Liberal Member of Parliament. This department, nicknamed Wellington House after the building that housed its offices, initially focused outward to “[rally] support for the war on idealistic grounds” (Wollaeger 17), to convince the world that Britain’s cause was just. There was no precedent for such an undertaking, so Masterman had a free hand, a “completely blank canvas” (Downing 279) in the early days of the war. Where the Germans spent large sums of money creating and distributing officially-sanctioned propaganda that went largely ignored, Masterman decided that articles, essays and books published independently would carry more weight. Operating in complete secrecy, Masterman enlisted “as influential a group of writers as the world has ever produced” (Messinger 35), including such notables as Sir J.M. Barrie, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Rudyard Kipling and H.G. Wells. As these men began to publish articles and essays justifying Britain’s entry into the war, a revolutionary propaganda machine was born.

At the beginning of the war, H.G. Wells was already world famous as a novelist, historian and futurist. He had long anticipated the war, foretelling many of the scientific and mechanical advances that would make this war different from any the world had yet seen. Afraid that “he would be only an observer of the war, not a participant who would directly influence great events” (Messinger 188), Wells was quick to publicly support the British war effort. In “The War That Will End War,”<sup>1</sup> a hastily-written article published just ten days after Britain declared war and long before anyone could possibly have imagined the ultimate size and scope of the conflict, Wells called it “the vastest war in history. A war not of nations, but of mankind” (*End War* 9). Staunchly internationalist and opposed to any form of nationalism, Wells believed that the war was ultimately “a war for peace” (11); only by defeating Germany could Europe usher in world peace and an end to war on Earth. Wells emphasized that he was not in any way anti-German, saying, “We are fighting Germany, but we are fighting without any hatred of the German people” (8). Wells’ fight was for world peace, not against Germany.

Wells later expanded his article and made it the centerpiece of a book with the same title. There, Wells makes it clear that—for him, at least—this was an ideological war: a war to rid the world of the very idea of war. Warming to his topic, Wells declares, “Rifles do but kill men, and fresh men are born to follow them. Our business is to kill ideas” (91). Where other British writers were prepared to write what was asked of them, Wells avowed from the outset that he would support the war on his terms. He agreed to work *with* Wellington House, but he wouldn’t work *for* Wellington House. He would write what he believed, without censorship, and he would pursue his own lofty goals independent of official British policy.

## WELLS IS CALLING FOR REVENGE: DESTROY GERMAN LAND AND SPILL GERMAN BLOOD

At about the time that Wells’ first article was published, Belgian refugees began to arrive in France and Britain. These refugees brought with them horrifying stories of atrocities committed by German soldiers: tales of “the rape of young girls, the cutting off of infants’ hands, and the execution of priests and nuns” (Strachan 52). When Belgian atrocity stories began surfacing in the British press, they “raised dark fears that England might face a similar fate should it be overrun by German invaders” (Bostridge 235). Overtly, these stories helped cement popular support for the war; war protests dried up and military enlistment spiked. Covertly, both the tenor and the target of British propaganda changed. Wellington House began focusing inward, to win the hearts and minds of British subjects. Atrocity stories proved to be “the simplest, quickest and most vivid means of appealing to the public” (Monger 115). By early 1915, atrocity propaganda had taken root in Britain.

One assessment of the atrocity-creation phenomenon is that these accounts “represent a kind of ‘narrative truth’ whose function was to make sense of deeply shocking events” (Horne and Kramer 201). In an odd way, the more fantastical story—one woman whose breasts were cut off, rather than fifty villagers shot—can be cathartic. Making an image personal may help one begin to make sense of something otherwise unfathomable. German soldiers shot thousands of Belgian civilians. For an eyewitness, tragedy on this scale must have been overwhelming. One fictionalized baby bayoneted by one demonized German soldier is just as terrible, but far more personal and thus, perhaps, more comprehensible: “myths reduced a complex and emotionally charged situation to an emblematic person or action” (Horne and Kramer 204). A personalized atrocity story offers both understanding and release. In this way, as a form of self-therapy, atrocity myths came into being.

Once invented, Belgian atrocity myths quickly spread, gaining credibility with each retelling. There are two compelling reasons why such lurid stories were accepted as fact by an otherwise discerning British public. First, the Bryce Commission—formed to study the veracity of Belgian atrocity stories—ultimately determined that systematic civilian killings had been committed. Published in early 1915 and translated by Wellington House into thirty languages, the Bryce Report “made mutilated Belgian children as real as the actual brutalities the Germans committed”<sup>iii</sup> (Wollaefer 133). Acting on Masterman’s sense that people were more likely to believe something they paid for, the Bryce Report was sold for the same price as a daily newspaper; it “sold sensationally well” (Stevenson 223). The report lent powerful credibility to atrocity stories, however lurid. The second reason why the British public readily accepted Belgian atrocity stories as fact is simply that they wanted to believe. These stories fell on ears “all too willing . . . to believe the worst of their one-time friend and ally” (Downing 274). Britons wanted to view Germans as evil aggressors and Belgians as innocent victims.

Propaganda is a three-step process: a picture or story captures our attention (horror, sympathy); a message, explicit or subliminal, tells us what to feel (fear, hatred); someone—a government, a company, a lobbyist—tells us what to do (enlist, fight). With the publication of the Bryce Report, British propaganda began to lean heavily on atrocity stories: witnesses saw, embellished and recounted; propagandists co-opted, repurposed and published. The wholesale reproduction and publication of atrocity stories is a unique product of World War One: cartoons depicting German soldiers with babies spitted on their bayonets; stories about Germans haunted by the ghosts of murdered Belgian children; caricatures of the marauding Hun. Drawing on the credibility of the Bryce Report, British propaganda soon revolved around this sort of imagery, teaching Britons to hate and fear Germans.<sup>iii</sup>

H.G. Wells, though, continued to maintain his above-the-fray demeanor and to follow his own path independent of the rapidly maturing British propaganda machine. In May 1916, weary of the war but still optimistic

about its outcome, Wells published his next book, *What is Coming?* In this book, Wells makes a series of predictions about life after the war: he opines on socialism, education, racism and women's rights. More specifically, and in significant detail, Wells ends the book with a chapter on the future of Germany. He takes a strong stance against "passionate outcries and wild accusations against Germans" and reiterates that "this is a war not of races but ideas" (264). He is clearly not immune, though, to the toll this war has taken; perhaps the proliferation of atrocity propaganda has affected even Wells. He closes the book with this statement: "None the less it is true that for me for all the rest of my life the Germans I shall meet, the German things I shall see, will be smeared with the blood of my people and my friends that the wilfulness of Germany has spilt" (294). Wells was no longer able to remain completely objective; he now blamed both Germany and Germans.

By mid-1916, many British writers had toured the Front as war correspondents. Wells had long resisted doing the same for two reasons: "partly because he feared that what he saw might unbalance his attitude towards Germany, partly because he did not want to be seen as a government propagandist" (Sherbourne 232). His final sentiment in *What is Coming?* shows that the first of these reasons was well founded. While Wells still did not support blind nationalism, he was rapidly becoming anti-German. His second reason was evidently mirrored within Wellington House. Concerned that Wells might see and report more than the government wanted people to know, Wells' tour was "engineered to ensure that he spent very little time in France, where the bloodiest fighting was going on" (Messinger 191). Worried that they wouldn't be able to censor what Wells said, Wellington House instead censored what he saw. In the end, though, both Wells' reluctance and his superiors' censorship backfired spectacularly. Wells didn't see the horrors he feared, but he very much feared the horrors he saw.

One biographer said, "If Wells' life constitutes a kind of modern epic, the Great War is his descent into the underworld" (Sherbourne 234). That descent began with Wells' tour of the Front. His travels through Italy and France are chronicled in his book *War and the Future*. Wells opens this book as he did his earliest war writing, calling for an end to all war. But where Wells was once adamant that he did not hate Germany or Germans, he now—just as emphatically—does "hate Germany, which has thrust this experience upon mankind, as I hate some horrible infectious disease" (*Future* 12). Many years later, Wells recalled his tour of the Front as "an interesting but rather pointless trip" (*Autobiography* 582). In 1916, though, *War and the Future* tells a different story: in these pages Wells descends into the underworld and a much-changed man emerges.

Wells began his tour in Italy, well away from any active fighting. In his accounts of this part of his tour, Wells seems most affected by material loss: destroyed buildings and abandoned railway stations. He recognizes human sacrifice only impersonally and en masse: "the Italians are fighting upon what is technically enemy territory" or "if the Italians will not face such sacrifices, the Austrians will" (*War and the Future* 42, 61). Wells continues to focus on places and things, rather than people, as he moves on to France. There his minders carefully steered him clear of Verdun; as a result, he did not see the fields of bodies he anticipated and feared. Instead, Wells saw two things that captured his attention: mechanized war and wholesale destruction of the land. The first of these fascinated Wells and the second horrified him.

In *War and the Future*, Wells describes an airfield with a "hospital for damaged machines and the dump to which those hopelessly injured are taken," where airplanes are "interesting patients" (118-9). It is clear here, as it was in his earlier science fiction, that machines appeal to Wells in a way that people do not. Wells had long been fascinated with the ascent of artillery, airplanes and machine guns and with the descent of cavalry and set-piece battle. Having written and thought about the increasing role of machines in war, Wells had a deep understanding and affinity for mechanization. People were more difficult for him to comprehend, which helps explain why, writing about a war that claimed millions of lives, Wells focuses on machines of war rather than men at war.

Wells offsets his fascination with horror, and that horror is reserved for the land. He describes German trenches as being "like the work of some horrible badger among the vestiges of what were pleasant human homes" (*Future* 87). Wells went to the Front expecting to encounter fields strewn with dead and decaying bodies. Instead, crossing into No Man's Land, he stumbled upon a denuded landscape—more surreal than real—devoid of both death and life and eerily reminiscent of Paul Nash's battlefield paintings. Nash, a landscape painter turned battlefield artist, bristled at British censorship, saying, "I am not allowed to put dead men into my pictures because apparently they don't exist" (Knightley 105). Nash's wartime paintings, therefore, feature cratered fields, shattered tree trunks and little else. Wells' description of No Man's Land, in *War and the Future*, sounds remarkably similar:

There are no more reapers now, there is no more green upon the fields, there is no green anywhere, scarcely a tree survives by the roadside, but only overthrown trunks and splintered stumps; the fields are wildernesses of shell craters and coarse weeds, the very woods are collections of blasted stems and stripped branches (126).



FIG. 1. Paul Nash. *We Are Making a New World*. 1918. Oil. Imperial War Museum, London.

Wells “had been led to believe that No Man’s Land was littered with the unburied dead” (*Future* 131); instead, he gazed upon a dead land. Wells, who had once been convinced that this war would bring an end to all war, now saw what much of Europe would look like when the war finally ended. The land needed to grow food for survivors of the war was being destroyed by the war. Wells’ exaggerated reaction to this destruction—imagining monster tanks capable of “destroying the land for all ordinary agricultural purposes for ages to come” (*Future* 175)—mirrors Belgian refugees’ reactions to the invasion of their country. In the pages of *War and the Future*, Wells transforms an actual event—land scarred by trench warfare and artillery barrages—into an atrocity myth that is both powerful and personal.

Wells devotes an entire chapter of *War and the Future* to tanks. At first, this seems odd; Wells can’t have seen a single tank on his tour of the Front, because tanks were first deployed only after he returned from his tour. But Wells had long been fascinated with tanks. Many years before the war, he wrote a short story, “The Land Ironclads,” about tank warfare.<sup>15</sup> Returning from the Front in late 1916, Wells toured a military proving ground where he was able to see and ride in one of Britain’s prototype tanks. While he doesn’t claim to have invented the tank, he is clearly full of pride as he calls these fledgling tanks “my grandchildren” (*Future* 160). More comfortable with tanks, which he had prophesied and now seen, than with artillery barrages, which he did not actually see, Wells proceeds to create his own personal atrocity myth, combining his recalled—real—horror with these new—imagined—monster tanks.

Like Belgian atrocity stories that grew more horrific with each retelling, Wells “grows” his own atrocity story in “Tanks.” First, he imagines enormous tanks that “will develop steadily into a tremendous instrument of



FIG. 2. C.R.W. Nevinson. *A Tank*. 1917. Oil. Imperial War Museum, London.

warfare . . . tracking on a track scores of hundreds of yards wide and weighing hundreds or thousands of tons." Next, combining the size of his imagined tanks with the wholesale destruction he's seen at the Front, Wells envisions a tank "mak[ing] wheel-ruts scores of feet deep; it will plough up, devastate and destroy the country it passes over altogether." Finally, leaping from image to action, Wells exhorts Britain to "get the war on to German soil" so that "It will be the German landscape that will suffer" (*Future* 173-4). Believing that Britain has a short-term technological advantage in tank development, Wells wants to take the fight to Germany and wreak havoc there.<sup>v</sup>

Following the same three-step process, Wells' own propaganda unfolds in "Tanks": a picture, a message, a command. Having vividly described the horror of a scarred, lifeless land, Wells embeds a terrifying message: huge, lumbering tanks will ravage the earth. Finally, Wells tells us what to do: turn these monsters on Germany. Building on horror, fascination and fear, Wells abandons dispassion and embraces hatred in this masterful crescendo:

For forty years Frankenstein Germany invoked war, turned every development of material and social science to aggressive ends, and at last when she felt the time was ripe she let loose the new monster that she had made of war to cow the spirit of mankind. She set the thing trampling through Belgium. She cannot grumble if at last it comes home, stranger and more dreadful even than she made it, trampling the German towns and fields with German blood upon it and its eyes towards Berlin. (*Future* 176)

With these words, Wells completes his atrocity myth. In these final, frenzied sentences he evokes an inhuman monster, little Belgium and revenge.

Elsewhere in "Tanks," Wells personifies Britain's war machines, but in this passage he demonizes Germany's. Where prototype British tanks were "as amusing and disarming as a litter of lively young pigs," with armor "rather like the integument of a rhinoceros" and "guns that look like stalked eyes" (*Future* 164-5), here Germany's technical prowess is a "new monster." Wells makes clever use of a Frankenstein analogy—likening Germany to a reckless Victor Frankenstein creating a monster war machine—at precisely the point where he proposes

unleashing his (Britain's) own uncontrollable monster. Was that irony lost on Wells, or was he intentionally drawing on Mary Shelley to incite fear in his readers? The imagery here is far more typical of British propaganda than anything Wells wrote before or after: more sensational, more graphic, darker and meaner.<sup>vi</sup>

Looking more closely at this passage, why is Germany's monster "trampling through Belgium?" Wells had just returned from the Front, from a France torn apart by machines of war. Why, then, draw such an overt connection to Belgium rather than to France? Two reasons present themselves. First, Wells the propagandist wanted his readers to believe his story as deeply as he did; linking his atrocity story to the plight of Belgium might elicit the same emotional response. Next, Wells the man might genuinely have felt—like most Britons—a natural affinity for small, vulnerable Belgium. From the start of the war, British propaganda had drawn heavily on Belgian suffering; as a result, "Belgium became a symbol of Britain" and Britons wondered, "Once Belgium fell, could Britain be far behind" (Silbey 108-9). This Belgian connection serves both Wells the man and Wells the propagandist.

And finally we come to revenge. In his earlier writing, Wells maintained clarity and dispassion; he was adamant but never hateful, committed to victory but strictly opposed to vengeance. Though Wells consistently supported the war, his ultimate goal was to bring about world peace and an end to all war. In his earlier books, Wells took pains to emphasize that he was anti-militaristic, not anti-German. But in *War and the Future*, having lived through two long years of war and newly returned from the Front, Wells abandons dispassion. He has developed a genuine hatred for Germany; in "Tanks," with "Frankenstein Germany," that hatred boils over. For Wells, this is no longer a war to stop the German war machine. Wells is calling for revenge: destroy German land and spill German blood. We (Britain) should do it to them (Germany) because we can. Wells devolves from an optimistic internationalist into an angry, vengeful Briton.

"Tanks" is Wells' only atrocity story; it is the only graphic, sensationalist propaganda piece he ever wrote. Having worked himself into a fever pitch with "Tanks," Wells closes *War and the Future* with a polemic against conscientious objectors.<sup>vii</sup> With this book, Wells was done with war propaganda. Shortly afterward, he parted ways with Wellington House and turned his focus to life after the war: The League of Nations and an internationalist world government. In his autobiography, Wells says that his "mind did not get an effective consistent grip upon the war until 1916," and that it was only then that he could "face the unpalatable truth that this . . . 'war to end war' . . . was in fact no better than a consoling fantasy" (*Autobiography* 571-2). In Wells' 1903 short story about tanks, the main character is a war correspondent who witnesses a tank battle from the losing side. As he flees the all-conquering tanks, he ponders titles for the article he's constructing in his mind. In the end, he settles on "Mankind versus Ironmongery" (Wells, *Stories* 309). Here in the real world, back from his personal underworld, Wells is very much afraid that ironmongery will win and mankind will lose.

In wartime Britain, everything—articles, books, paintings—was censored. Wells, though, had always been determined to maintain his own standards and publish his beliefs without censorship. When *War and the Future* was reviewed, Wells burned the censor's notes, assured the publisher that the book had been reviewed and approved, published his unedited and uncensored book, and then lied when asked what had happened to the censor's notes (Wells, *Autobiography* 591). We'll never know which parts of *War and the Future* offended the censor, but we do know that Wells went to great lengths to make sure "Tanks" paints exactly the picture he wanted us to see.

During the First World War, H.G. Wells was many things: an impassioned writer, a gifted storyteller, an official eyewitness, a mythmaker and a propagandist. As a famous novelist, Wells' words carried great weight. As a member of the intelligentsia and an unofficial representative of the British government, Wells had a responsibility to the British people. He also found that he had a responsibility to himself, to recognize and reconcile the horrors of war. In *War and the Future*, Wells tries to accommodate all of these responsibilities. Through that effort, through one man's descent, we see the insidious power of propaganda: the power to heal and the power to harm; the power to attract and to repel; the power to seduce and the power to overwhelm. Initially an idealistic war supporter, Wells despised atrocity propaganda for the fear and hatred it promoted. But in September 1916, Wells met his own horror at the Front. From that experience, we have "Tanks," Wells' deeply disturbing atrocity myth. Many years later, looking back on his wartime writing, Wells expressed remorse for his lack of restraint. In his autobiography, he apologizes for his "pro-war zeal" and his "propagandist and practical drive" (*Autobiography* 579-80). He goes on to criticize *What is Coming?* as "very loose-lipped indeed," and he calls parts of *War and the Future* "unforgivable" (580). In 1916, though, "Frankenstein Germany" and monster tanks were every bit as powerful as any Belgian atrocity tale. Wells the statesman descended into the underworld; Wells the atrocity propagandist emerged.

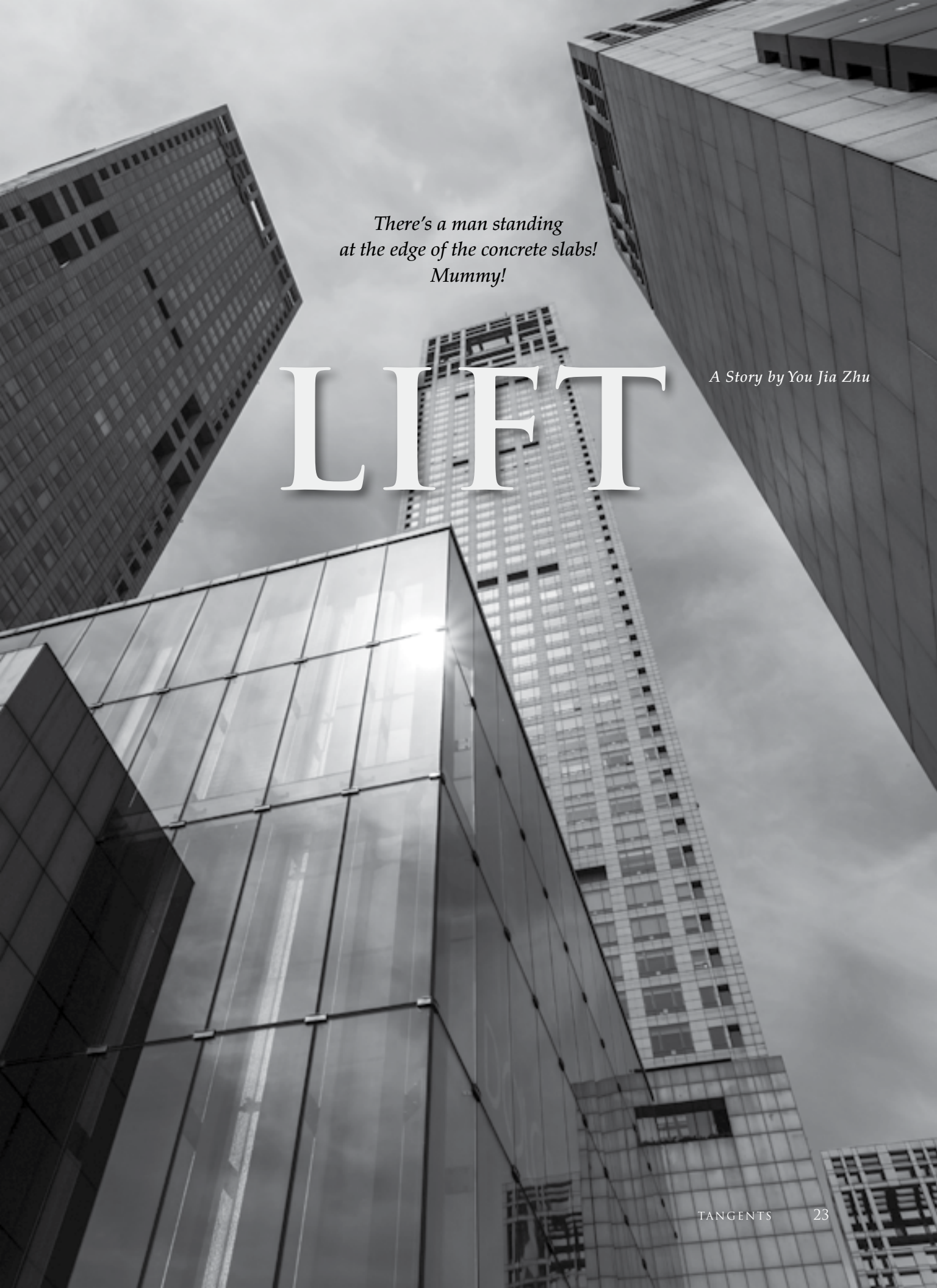
## NOTES

- <sup>i</sup> It was this article that popularized the phrase “the war to end all wars.” Proud of his “first-class slogan” at the time, Wells would eventually “[look] back on his initial reaction as embarrassingly naïve” (Sherborne 226-7).
- <sup>ii</sup> The Bryce Commission’s conclusion, though widely seen as confirmation of Belgian atrocity stories, was really an indictment of the German High Command for systematic civilian killings. The Commission was “not concerned with mutilation and rape but with the ultimate responsibility of the German command for widespread brutality towards civilians” (Horne and Kramer 237).
- <sup>iii</sup> Perhaps the best example of a Briton who wanted to believe the worst of Germans is Rudyard Kipling, who not only believed hate propaganda but created his own. In the book *France at War*, Kipling attributes these words to a French woman: “This is not war. It is against wild beasts that we fight.” Further emphasizing this sentiment, Kipling says, “This is the one vital point which we in England *must* realize. We are dealing with animals who have . . . removed themselves inconceivably outside civilization” (28).
- <sup>iv</sup> In “The Land Ironclads,” written in 1903, Wells describes tank warfare in terms that sound remarkably similar to today’s drone warfare. Riflemen hidden within tanks kill enemy soldiers without either directly seeing the enemy or physically touching the rifles they use to kill: “they had the most remarkable sights imaginable, sights which threw a bright little camera-obscura picture into the light-tight box in which the rifleman sat below. This camera-obscura picture was marked with two crossed lines, and whatever was covered by the intersection of these two lines, that the rifle hit. The sighting was ingeniously contrived. The rifleman stood at the table with a thing like an elaboration of a draughtsman’s dividers in his hand, and he opened and closed these dividers, so that they were always at the apparent height . . . of the man he wanted to kill. A little twisted strand of wire like an electric-light wire ran from this implement up to the gun, and as the dividers opened and shut the sights went up or down. . . . When he saw a man he wanted to shoot he brought him up to the cross-lines, and then pressed a finger upon a little push like an electric bell-push, conveniently placed in the centre of the knob. Then the man was shot. If by any chance the rifleman missed his target he moved the knob a trifle, or readjusted his dividers, pressed the push, and got him the second time” (28 *Science Fiction Stories* 303).
- <sup>v</sup> “It is doubtful if the Germans can get anything of the sort into action before six months are out, and by that time we should be using vastly more formidable Tanks than those we are making now. We ought to get the war on to German soil before the Tanks have grown more than three or four times their present size. Then it will not matter so much how much bigger they grow. It will be the German landscape that will suffer” (Wells, *Future* 174).
- <sup>vi</sup> Just a few months before going to the Front, Wells lashed out at exactly this type of “hate” propaganda. In *What Is Coming?*, Wells speaks harshly against “manufactur[ing] race hostility” to “persuade the British people the Germans are diabolical as a race” (266). Isn’t that precisely what Wells is doing in *War and the Future*, with “Frankenstein Germany?”
- <sup>vii</sup> Wells later apologized, saying, “I was in the wrong and some of the things I wrote about conscientious objectors in *War and the Future* were unforgivable” (Wells, *Autobiography* 580).

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*There's a man standing  
at the edge of the concrete slabs!  
Mummy!*

# LIFT

*A Story by You Jia Zhu*

# LIFT

A Story by You Jia Zhu

Lu Wei, known as Reed in England, was back in Beijing with her eight-year-old son Tommy in tow and the goal of ending a fifteen-year-old marriage. The timing was spot-on. The accounting firm she worked for in London had decided to exploit the fast-expanding business base in China by opening a local office. Who better to set it up than Reed, who boasted as many old school connections in various departments of the government as in the private sector? The divorce could conveniently happen after a suitable period of separation, much like her marriage after a suitable period of cohabitation.

Since returning to Beijing, Reed had gained more than fifteen pounds, though she continued to walk and carry herself like a collegian with a sylphlike body. With the help of custom tailors, she now dressed alluringly with more flare than ever, on the cheap. At a recent class reunion, noting Reed's roundness and fullness in a body-molding dress, Wang Tianjing commented—to no one in particular—that Reed had ripened. A few days later, he sent Reed a text message that simply read “requesting your company to munch and lounge at the ‘Wing of the World’ tomorrow at noon.”

That message arrived mid-sentence during one of the weekly chats Reed had with her husband. “It's up to both of ... Now what's that beeping sound?” Reed's husband asked, without halting his habitual pacing in their London living room, still attired in pajamas although it was close to dinnertime.

“Oh, just a text message.” Reed stood by the window of her corporate apartment in Beijing, sparsely furnished in peroxidized Danish Modern. Distance had detached her heart. She had been reexamining her relationship to relationships—significant and minor, romantic and practical, permanent and transient. Her kisses for Tommy became tenderer and more heartfelt than before. Her conversation with her husband became as distant as their current state of residency. She no longer saw him in Tommy.

Reed had met her husband on an unexceptional drizzly London day. Arriving from Beijing, a city of sharp angles and uniformed grids, the streets of London felt like a madman's creation. She was near Marble

Arch, disoriented and miffed by the encircling traffic when suddenly the sky darkened. The drizzle turned into a downpour and a sea of umbrellas sprouted up like mushrooms in springtime. It seemed everyone in London could produce an umbrella at the first drop of rain. The pavement, slaked with water, glistened in a thin film of grease. Reed gazed at the arch and saw a man in an electric blue suit, umbrella-less. He appeared obstinate and out of place like the ornate monument in the center of swirling cars. Reed crossed over, intrigued by the melodic blue. Yves Klein blue, he later told her, IKB, International Klein Blue. That day when he turned to smile at her, the rain stopped long enough to produce two rainbows in the sky. “Double rainbows lead to double happiness,” he said while flipping wet hair away from his forehead. Reed was charmed; conversation flowed like a torrent in the Thames. Both were new arrivals in London to study, he art, she commerce; both came from musty and exhausted families of scholars, shoved aside, first by the Great Leap Forward, then by the appurtenances of the great, modern economic leap that favored materialistic opportunists over romantic idealists. Both were of modest means and in need of someone to share the loneliness and expenses, hopes and disappointments.

Now, back in her Beijing apartment, Reed thought about new hopes and different flavors of loneliness and disappointments. In an effort to appear engaged in the conversation with her husband, she continued, “Now it's you who keeps saying we need to ‘resolve’ this. Do you have a plan?” Reed saw a red car, twenty-six stories below, circling the giant roundabout that fronted the u-shaped apartment compound.

“We should talk about this face to face.”

So that's it, he is coming to Beijing, Reed thought. Her eyes followed the circling car. Is it waiting for someone? She wondered.

“You know I care about you,” her husband declared in a flat tone.

Reed pondered whether an affair was in the air. She rummaged her brain for something adoring to say, but the only word she found was “oh,” and the only image she unearthed was the yellow-striped pajamas, his daily uniform since he was made redundant from the art department of *Creative Journal*.

“Mummy, mummy,” Tommy's high-pitched voice called from the other room. “I can't reach.”

“Oh. Tommy wants to talk to you.” Below, the red dot continued round and round the roundabout. If he had had an affair, Reed believed she would not oppose it.

Inside his room, Tommy was stacking his collection of game consoles onto the bookcase. Reed handed the phone over to him. "Let me do this and you say hi to daddy." She rearranged the games in alphabetical order and the consoles by size while Tommy chatted with his father. She forgot about the text message on her phone.

## II

Like the capricious wind that blows into Beijing during late spring, there was a sudden change in the government policy regulating foreign accounting firms. Reed hit a hitch in the bureaucratic machine.

"Did you hear," Reed complained to a friend over lunch, two tennis ball-sized, sesame-covered, airy *ma tuan* resting in front of her. "The Municipal Finance Bureau decided to double the capital requirements for all the accounting firms." She punctured one sesame ball with her chopsticks and it deflated like a tired balloon. "Also, registration with the Department of Industry and Commerce is now a prerequisite for obtaining an operating license."

"These things are always unpredictable. Policy comes and goes. It just means the city is trying to balance its budget."

"Budget. Where does all the money go? All this land they grab and develop?"

"Into the pockets of the well-connected?"

"I wish I was as well connected as some." Reed was annoyed and envious of the few in her circle with personal connections to the princelings, children of the ruling red dynasty. If only she had not been so particular in her choice of friends in university, she might be better positioned to profit from this prolonged economic boom.

In the end, she spent a good two months unhitching the complications. Additional funding arrived from London after a month, which padded a few bureaucrats' stomachs. A friend of an acquaintance of an old schoolmate who worked for the Minister of Commerce further assisted by expediting the issuing of the registration with a bottle of 2006 Château Margaux. When finally there was a moment to breathe, summer had arrived. Tommy's international school was out, but Reed had yet to find a summer program for him. Tommy became an extension of Reed. He followed her around town like a tail.

Meanwhile, Wang Tianjing was also busy with his own business ventures and travels. He heard about Reed's troubles and remained silent. He did not forget the slight from her; there had been no reply to his text invitation to munch and lounge at the "Wing of the World."

At one dinner Reed was heard saying to another friend. "Another new regulation just popped out of nowhere. It now requires everyone in foreign firms to have a Chinese accounting qualification as well. This is rather bothersome for us." Reed picked up a miniature, golf ball-sized *ma tuan* from the plate. "This means we have to have local staff. But this is not the worst. The worst is we have to host regulators coming to audit." Tommy was sitting next to her playing videogames.

"You should talk to Wang Tianjing. He can get just about anything past the bureaucracy," her friend said.

"That's the guy who munches on the 'Wing of the World,' mummy," Tommy jumped in.

"What are you talking about, dear?" asked Reed.

"He sent you a text message a long, long time ago. It was on your phone. I read it. And I read that to daddy, too."

"Oh."

"Mummy, can I go as well?"

"Where?"

"To the 'Wing of the World'."

## III

The "Wing of the World" was a lounge on the 80th floor of the China World Trade Center in Beijing. Tommy imagined a dining room much like the business class cabin on the aircraft, but brighter and roomier, that extended into the sky like a torpedo. For tea with Uncle Tianjing, he decided to put on a costume of white polo shirt, blue jeans, and distressed-leather aviator jacket. He went to his mother's room where Reed was buttoning a pink blouse.

"Mummy, you look precious."

Reed laughed. "Precious?"

"The book says that fathers and mothers are the most precious things in the world."

"Which book?" She drew him into her bosom and kissed his hair. Tommy's spindly back felt delicate and innocent against her palms. Worried that he might lose fluency in English, Reed insisted that he read books like *The Happy Prince* and *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, in addition to all the Harry Potter books.

"I don't remember."

"Let me look at you." Reed pushed Tommy away to an arm's length. "Handsome outfit. But how about wearing the new navy suit?"

"But this goes well with my aviator sunglasses," Tommy put them on. "See?"

"But I think a suit would be a better choice for tea today. You are now the man of the house escorting mummy on the town." Reed adjusted his glasses. Then she turned to look at herself in the mirror and took off the pink blouse. It was too early in the season for pink.

Their table on the 80th floor was substantial and round, roomy enough so that the three of them could sit facing the window and look out over the uneven roofs of Beijing. Uncle Tianjing claimed they could see all the way to the Forbidden City. Tommy decided he exaggerated. The sweet sticky rice bun was not as sweet as he claimed, nor was the sponge cake as buttery and airy as he described. Tommy couldn't wait to go down to the lobby store to buy the newest *Legend of Zelda*.

His mother, who sat on his left, put her arm around his shoulder for emphasis, and said, not to him, "Even with so many returning to work here I still can't find anyone." Her warm breath, a little stained with tea, blew on Tommy's cheek. "I mean, anyone. I just need a warm body who has passed both Chinese and UK qualifications." A heavy jade pendant rocked back and forth as she spoke, knocking into Tommy's hand on the table, which was holding a spoon. To his right, Uncle Tianjing calmly sipped tea in his gray suit. His mummy was right, the navy suit was the smarter choice.

The panoramic view in front of them and the cushioned seat made Tommy feel like he was sitting in an Imax cinema. He put down the spoon and took the aviator glasses out of his breast pocket and put them on. The sky changed from pale blue to a slightly intense slate and the rooftops from slate to dark bluish green. What a perfect pitch to play *Quidditch*, he thought to himself. He spotted a swallow gliding among the roofs. He followed it as it dove and soared. Suddenly it changed direction and flew out of his sight.

His mother and Uncle Tianjing were still talking. Adult conversation is so long and so boring, he thought. He excused himself to the loo. When he came back, his mother was sitting in his chair and saying, "Tommy has a piano lesson tomorrow."

"But, Ms. Tang is on vacation," Tommy cut in and sat down in the empty seat.

"You still have to practice," Reed said with a smile. Her heart lightened its beat.

"Shall we?" Tianjing stood up and swirled behind Reed to ease her chair back.

Tommy also stood up, grabbed the last piece of sticky rice bun and stuffed it into his mouth. He ran, dashing past his mother and Uncle Tianjing towards the lift. He smiled as he thrust his sticky thumb on the DOWN button; a film of glutinous sticky rice dulled the letters. With one ear pressed to the lift's door he listened to the rumblings of the gears and imagined the drive sheave and cables lifting the all-glass cage up to the 80th floor to receive and deliver him down to the grand lobby where the new *Legend of Zelda* awaited him. He heard his mother say, "Thank you for the tea."

"My pleasure."

"Tommy, come away from the lift's door and say 'thank you' to Uncle Tianjing."

"It's all right. Where are you going after this?"

Since the question was not directed at him, Tommy stayed where he was and shut his eyes behind his aviator sunglasses. The rasp of hoisting ropes and counterweights rumbled up the shaft. He waited for the lift's door to open.

"I need to go in this afternoon," Reed said.

"Where is your office? My driver can drop you off," Wang Tianjing persisted.

"I need to drop this trailing coattail first." Tommy felt his mother's hand on top of his head and heard the smile in her voice. He liked it when she ruffled his hair.

When the lift's door opened, Tommy pitched forward into a burst of sunlight. Reed almost caught him by the shirt collar. He laughed as his face hit the glass pane of the lift with a soft, muffled thud.

"Wow!" He opened his eyes. The sun was low in the sky. The view from the 80th floor seduced him anew. He took off his sunglasses and kneeled down. He was floating.

"Mummy!" Tommy turned to wave at Reed, "Come and see this!"

Reed whirled into the lift. Buoyant and flit, her silk skirt, the color of Brighton Beach, bloomed like the dome of a jellyfish and swaddled Tommy. For a moment he was buried inside the soft, cool gossamer. He brushed aside the fabric and looked up. Her pale-green, teardrop pendant caught the fire of the sun. He reached for his mother's hand, "Mummy, I want the *Legend of Zelda*."

Uncle Tianjing followed her in. He reached to touch Reed's jade. "Is this a dagger?"

Reed touched it, too. The ring on her finger sparkled. Tianjing's mind dazzled with possibilities.

Tommy turned to take in the cityscape. Amidst rough stubbles of high-rises was a half-constructed building some stories below. A tall crane with a latticed boom in sunflower yellow rested on its unfinished top floor. A stack of concrete slabs dangled from the crane's giant hook and swung slightly like a swing in a park. Tommy saw a man standing on the edge of it. Still holding Reed's hand, he stood up and felt infinitely superior as he looked down at the man on the concrete slab.

"How about a drink at the M? My driver can drop Tommy at home," Tianjing said as he pushed the LOBBY button.

"I really should go in and finish a few things."

The lift door closed and began to descend. Tommy focused on the crane that now appears to be rising to meet them.

"Mummy! Look!" Tommy cried and tugged Reed's hand.

"Can't your work wait till tomorrow? I have cleared my calendar for the rest of the day," said Tianjing. He felt the glow from Reed's body.

"I have not done any work today," said Reed.

"There's a man standing at the edge of the concrete slabs! Mummy!" Tommy looked up at Reed. Her white cotton blouse stretched across her chest. Its tiny pearl buttons—three open, three snapped shut—appeared translucent in the light. He snuggled up to her.

"Mummy! Look!" Tommy cried again. "Look! The man!"

"Are you all right?" Tianjing asked Reed.

"I'm feeling a little dizzy," Reed said. "It must be the acceleration."

The crane began to hoist the concrete slabs with the man still standing on the edge. The lift, speeding down towards the LOBBY, came to level with the rising slabs in mid-air. The man edged closer to the verge. As the lift descended farther and the crane raised the man appeared to look down. Tommy gazed up at him and waved, thinking the man would see him. The man waved back.

"Mummy! Look!" Tommy cried. "He waved!"

"I have an idea. Let's go to M and talk it over," Tianjing said. "I know people there."

Tommy cranked his head to watch the man, who was now waving at him with both arms, high above. Suddenly the man plunged forward and was airborne. The concrete slabs continued to rise without him. Tommy now waited for the floating man to catch up with them, and when he did, Tommy saw his eyes were closed and his face wet.

"Mummy! Look!"

"M is at the other side of the city," said Reed.

"Or my flat. It is on your side of the city," said Tianjing. "I like to practice calligraphy and read classics in the evening to cleanse my mind."

The floating man passed Tommy. Tommy willed the lift to descend faster to catch him. A piece of paper fell from the floating man, sailing away. It lifted, rising above the concrete slabs. It bobbed sideways for a while until the wind lifted it again. It became part of the cloud.

Tianjing reached to hold Reed's free hand, "Have you seen *The Pillow Book*? It's about a woman who writes calligraphy on the human body." He slid the other hand around her waist and whispered, "It is all right, we will soon be on the ground." He felt the pressure of Reed's body pressing closer.

The lift door opened. Tommy let go of his mother's hand. Reed felt Tianjing's arm guiding her into the grand lobby. Turning to look at Tommy, she whirled her body slightly away and felt a tinge of excitement reverberating throughout, infusing the hollowness of her chest with longing. Tommy was still glued to the window. On the ground was the flying man, sprawled and alone. Scattered nearby, fallen on the ground like a tableau vivant scene Tommy saw at the National Revolutionary Museum, were a chisel, a hammer, a hand saw, a broken measuring stick, and a carved head of a dog on a wooden block. The flying man's jacket fluttered in the wind; a few red paper bills flitted out. They danced and darted and hovered around the man before gliding away. Tommy's eyes followed them. The lift had arrived too late. He turned to look for his mother and saw Reed's body tilting as Tianjing whispered something into her ear. The lift door closed. Tommy returned to keep watch of the flying man. The swirl of air now picked up other light debris and loose papers surrounding the man, sweeping them away.

UNDER RECIFE'S DUTCH RULE,  
JEWISH LIFE WAS CHARACTERIZED  
BY CONSTANT CULTURAL AND SOCIAL  
INTERACTIONS WITH NON-JEWISH SOCIETY...



**THE SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY  
SEPHARDIC JEWISH  
DIASPORA IN BRAZIL:  
TWENTY-FIVE BRIEF YEARS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM**

*by Laila Craveiro*



**DURING THE FIRST HALF OF THE 1600S**, two-and-a-half centuries before European Jews started landing at Ellis Island to begin a new life in America, a wave of the Jewish diaspora set sail for the New World. Brazil, the land of parrots and dyewood timber, would become the setting for the first openly Jewish community of the Americas. Jewish life emerged on the easternmost tip of the South American continent in an Atlantic port-town called Recife, hugged by forests, swaying green arms of sugar cane plantations, and beaches gleaming in tropical sunlight.

In such an unlikely scenario, we find a remarkable Jewish tale of exile, social mobility, and identity. In Brazil, as early as 1630, religious acceptance by the Dutch conquerors of the Portuguese empowered Jews to see the Americas for the first time as a homeland abroad, a place for true Jewish enterprise, instead of another temporary dwelling for their uprooted community, originally expelled from Spain and Portugal during the summer of 1492.

Brazil had earlier been a Portuguese colony since its discovery by Europeans in 1500. The new, visible Jewish community in Recife was an integral part of a momentous time in Brazil's history during a quarter century of Dutch colonial rule (1630-1654). A booming sugar trade helped to move economic and political power from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic, luring Jewish Sephardic men and women from their homes in Amsterdam.

Brazil was a Portuguese possession that fell through the cracks of Spain's colonial defense during the Iberian Union, a period of sixty years (1580-1640) when the Habsburg's dynasty ruled Spain and Portugal in a worldwide empire. Portuguese America was the weakest link of the Spanish military, and a lucrative colony ripe for invasion. That fact did not go unnoticed by the Dutch after its independence from Spain, who turned to the Atlantic as the next battlefield against Iberian power. But it was sugar, the white gold from Brazil, that led the Dutch maritime charge specifically to Recife.

While the Spanish harvested mineral wealth from their South American colonies, Portugal had established in Brazil a major agro-industrial system, organized to produce and process a single crop—sugar—in great demand and short supply in Europe. Sugar had evolved from being a pricy item on the tables of European nobles to a popular staple among the regular population, opening a large consumer market that was supplied by sugar plantations and African slavery in the New World.<sup>1</sup>

As overseas extensions of Europe, the American colonies reflected the changing European politics and alliances. Dutch interests (independence from Spain, territorial expansion into the New World, creation of globalized commercial ventures) had a lot to gain from the Jewish community. Sephardic Jews were the allies they needed to succeed, not only in Europe, but also in the New World.

#### PROFIT OVER PIETY: ADJUSTING TO A CHANGING WORLD

The Iberian Peninsula expulsions brought about an unexpected emancipation for many Jews, who fulfilled an economic role in an age of mercantilism. The displaced Jews became cross-cultural contacts who could work across geopolitical, linguistic, and religious boundaries. Jews expelled from the Iberian Peninsula and disguised from the Inquisition as Catholic converts called New Christians managed to keep trade relationships with Portugal, Portuguese colonies and far-east lands. They followed the economic potential of port cities to which they brought capital, skills and global relationships. The Jews' lack of affiliation to a specific nation allowed them to bypass economic embargoes and freely import to Europe items such as brazilwood, tobacco, and sugar from Brazil.<sup>2</sup>

Regardless of their growing importance in commercial spheres and in banking activities, the emerging Jews were still outsiders in Europe. The Dutch tolerance was "a paradoxical policy"<sup>3</sup> that allowed for the exercise of a dissident religious practice, but rarely involved "a deliberate suspension of righteous hostility and, consequently, [caused] a considerable degree of moral discomfort."<sup>4</sup> The Jews' enhanced freedom in Amsterdam remained intrinsically related to their role as commercial agents of stabilization for the New Republic's economy. It is more than plausible that Jews had an underlying quest for a free Jewish identity among the different motivations to build a Jewish community away from Europe.

The Dutch lure was to offer a new form of association with the international Jewish communities through a colonial policy of tolerance that surpassed the offerings in Amsterdam. Motivated by economic pragmatism, the Dutch Republic established an unprecedented period of religious tolerance in Brazil.<sup>5</sup> In October of 1629, a year before the *West Indische Compagnie*, WIC, moved to conquer northeast Brazil, WIC's governance body drew up a proposal for religious tolerance applicable to all its conquests in the New World. The Heeren XIX, the Central Board of Directors of WIC, recognized communal rights, including liberty of conscience, to "Spaniard,

Portuguese, and natives of the land, whether they be Roman Catholics or Jews” as a strategic politico-economic measure.<sup>6</sup> The *Regulation of Government of Conquered Squares* addressed all who might be oppressed under Spanish and Portuguese colonial rule. WIC’s possible ambition was to create operative alliances to provide military security to its conquests. The Dutch targeted Native Americans and Iberian New Christians, “predicting that these groups would eagerly and whole-heartedly support the Dutch in any ... of the WIC attempts ... to wrest Ibero-American territories from Iberian hands.”<sup>7</sup> The Dutch were betting on the fact that a common foe—Spain—would unify minorities in their favor.



**ZACARIAS WAGENER’S WATERCOLOR OF *JODENSTRAAT*, “THE JEWISH STREET”  
IN RECIFE (CIRCA 1640), WHERE KAHAL ZUR ISRAEL,  
THE FIRST SANCTIONED SYNAGOGUE OF THE AMERICAS, WAS LOCATED.**

#### THE EROSION OF SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS BOUNDARIES IN RECIFE

One of the first ways Jews carved a place in Dutch-Brazilian society was by finding living space in the city. The prolific cartography of the period documents how people lived, moved around and conducted business during the Dutch period in Brazil. Drawings blending art, geography and history illustrate that Recife was built differently from European cities. The spatial boundaries were as permeable as the society was complex. The Jewish population, for instance, lived throughout town. That is unusual compared to the organization of most European metropolitan spaces of that same period.<sup>8</sup> In European cities, Jewish housing and business were rigidly coded into one fixed urban plot. The state allocated a specific area and the buildings within it for the establishment of a Jewish quarter where residents did not have property rights.<sup>9</sup> Recife did not have such a buffer zone to isolate Jewish religious and cultural practices from the rest of the population. On the contrary, Recife’s *Jodenstraat*, or Jewish street, was nothing less than a natural continuation of the main street. The houses of successful Jewish merchants made an obligatory corridor of passage for all coming and going by land to rural sugar plantations, to the Recife *slavenmarkt*, “slave market,” or yet to the defense fortifications closer to the harbor.



The Jewish Street grew organically, as Recife itself grew. *Jodenstraat* was the result of sequential real estate purchases at the north side of the village's original settlement, an area known by the Dutch as *bochenwacht*, "goat guard," due to the many herds of goats kept there. Unimpeded from owning property, prosperous Jews started buying land to build *sobrados*, two- to three-story homes with residential accommodations on the upper floors and a commercial business at the street level. Historian José Antônio Gonsalves de Mello, one of the foremost Brazilian authorities on Dutch Brazil, lists by name sixteen preeminent Jews who owned homes on that street. He singles out one of the most important recorded real estate purchases by a Jewish merchant in that area: in 1635, a plot of approximately four-thousand, eight-hundred square feet was "sold to Duarte Saraiva ... for the construction of a house as per his taste, or to sell later, grounds or house, for his own profit."<sup>10</sup> Duarte Saraiva, also known as David Senor Coronel,<sup>11</sup> was a Portuguese Jew with family and commercial relations from the diaspora in Hamburg. Coronel's son, Rabbi Isaac Saraiva, was a schoolmaster in Amsterdam.

#### THE FIRST SYNAGOGUE OF THE AMERICAS

At David Senor Coronel's home, a primitive synagogue, Kahal Kadosh Zur Israel, "Holy Community Rock of Israel," was established. From that organized community flourished the first sanctioned synagogue of the Americas under the shorter name of Kahal Zur Israel.<sup>12</sup>

Unhindered by state authorities, Jewish enterprises thrived, governed by the same colonial legal system that applied to the community at large. A letter of complaint addressed to the Dutch governance in Recife gives historical confirmation that Kahal Kadosh Zur Israel synagogue had frequent assemblies in 1636. On July 23, 1636, Daniel Schagen and Cornelis Poel signed a heated dispatch in the name of the Counsel of the Reformed Church, mentioning the existence of a synagogue at the main street and denouncing the Jewish community's plan to build a permanent house of worship around the same location.<sup>13</sup> The dismay of fervent Calvinists did not halt the construction of a "great temple" between 1640 and 1641, made with "mortar and stone," as described in administrative documents of the Heeren XIX.<sup>14</sup>

#### THE JEWS OF MAIN STREET

The existence of a non-segregated Jewish Street in Recife is a testimony to the material and immaterial transformations in the organization of this New World landscape. There were no cities in Europe, regardless of the size or relevance of their Jewish constituency, with a synagogue on the main street. Dutch law in the colony made room for a Jewish concentration generated by the immigrants themselves. This miniature community in *Jodenstraat*, "Street of the Jews," was the heart of Jewish life in Recife, but it did not represent an ethnic enclave or a self-contained Jewish living space. The Jewish community expanded its circle of influence in the colony. Recife's *Jodenstraat* was more than just a rare Jewish settlement in a non-Jewish community; it was also an emblematic sign of Jewish mobility within the social strata.

There is a vexing discrepancy among historians about how many Jews made their home in Recife—the numbers range from hundreds to thousands in the literature. The variance reveals the high flux of population movement during the Dutch period. In 1645, based on a Dutch census conducted that same year, at the height of Jewish presence in Dutch Brazil, the community consisted of approximately 1,450 people.<sup>15</sup> By this account, Jews constituted half of the white, civilian population of Recife. In less than fifteen years of Dutch rule, the Jewish population of Recife was approaching in size one of the most dynamic Sephardic communities of Europe: Amsterdam had about two thousand Jews.<sup>16</sup>

The Jewish population in Recife increased steadily from 1630 to 1645, and then plunged when the Portuguese rebellion against the Dutch started. Instability ended the influx of immigration to the South American colony. War among the Dutch and Portuguese colonial powers created a steady departure of settlers; some went back to Europe and many left to the Caribbean. A group of twenty-three Jews returning to Amsterdam wound up in Nieuw Amsterdam (New York) after a series of hair-raising adventures with pirates at sea. There were also many casualties of the war, famine and disease. The Jewish population decreased to about 720 in 1648 and to about 650 in 1654, when the Dutch finally surrendered to the Portuguese.<sup>17</sup>

## THE RUPTURE OF A CATHOLIC COLONIAL EMPIRE

The Dutch incursion into the Southern Hemisphere did not merely break the congruity of Brazilian Portuguese colonization; it also ruptured the Iberian model of building Catholic empires aligned by religion, politics and language.

The success of Recife's Jewish settlement did not happen in the absence of prejudice or even social instability. The first Sephardic Jewish community of the New World was formed under an all-encompassing paradox of "old" and "new" blended in the transition between colonial powers (Portuguese and Dutch), occult and rational thinking (mystical and pragmatic politico-economic approaches) and a strong process of Jewish self-conceptualization. Under Recife's Dutch rule, Jewish life was characterized by constant cultural and social interactions with non-Jewish society, whose tolerant policy was markedly driven by economic pragmatism and not ideology. Tolerance disappeared when the Portuguese resumed control of Recife.

The synagogue Kahal Zur Israel is today a landmark in the enduring Dutch urban landscape that defined the crisscross of Jewish life in the historical old Recife. The synagogue building became a museum and not a congregation after its physical rehabilitation in the late 1990s. The building was repurposed, demolished, forgotten and reclaimed, but never again housed the very religious institution that made Jewish presence remarkable at that corner of the world.

It is important to not let the scattered physical evidence of the Jewish experience in Recife betray the power of that community's legacy. While the Jews of Recife carried that legacy with them back to Europe and throughout the Americas, the remaining bricks of Kahal Zur Israel reveal a deeper understanding of their story. A single wall remains from the original building, in which Jews and non-Jews alike place prayer notes between the cracks and crevices. It reminds us of a brief time when the Jews enjoyed remarkable religious freedom in Recife hundreds of years ago.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Robert Edgar Conrad, *Children of God's Fire: A Documentary History of Black Slavery in Brazil*, (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1994), pp. 97-99; W.R. Aykroyd, *Sweet Malefactor: Sugar, Slavery and Human Society* (London: Heinemann, 1967); Cornelis Goslinga, *The Dutch in the Caribbean, and on the Wild Coast, 1580-1680* (Gainesville: UP of Florida, 1971).
- <sup>2</sup> Evan Haefeli, *New Netherland and the Dutch Origins of American Religious Liberty* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), p.54.
- <sup>3</sup> Christine Kooi, *Calvinists and Catholics during Holland's Golden Age: Heretics and Idolaters* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2012), p.90.
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>5</sup> Dutch Republic (1581-1795) was the union of the seven northern provinces of the Low Countries that declared independence from Spain during the reign of Philip II, creating the foundation for the Netherlands.
- <sup>6</sup> Jonathan Israel, and Stuart Schwartz. *The Expansion of Tolerance: Religion in Dutch Brazil (1624-1654)*. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP, 2007), p. 38.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 17.
- <sup>8</sup> *Jewish Space in Central and Eastern Europe Day-to-Day History*, ed. Jurgita Šiaučiūnaitė-Verbickienė and Larisa Lempertienė (Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), pp. 2-4, and 7-13.
- <sup>9</sup> David Corcos, "Jewish Quarter," Jewish Virtual Library, 2008, [http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud\\_0002\\_0011\\_0\\_10147.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud_0002_0011_0_10147.html).
- <sup>10</sup> José Antônio Gonsalves de Mello, "A Sinagoga do Recife Holandês." *Revista do Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro* 149, No. 358 (1988): 72-82.
- <sup>11</sup> Jews often changed their names to conceal identity. It was common practice for converses to adopt a Christian name. Equally common, from European custom, was to adopt a "cover name" to avoid persecution and facilitate the temporary or permanent incorporation into local communities, circumventing the dual stigma of being Jewish and a foreigner.
- <sup>12</sup> The name "Kahal Zur Israel" was likely a reference to the synagogue's host city: Recife – a designation that is derived from the natural reef of stones that secure the harbor.
- <sup>13</sup> Leonardo Dantas Silva, *Holandeses em Pernambuco 1630-1654* (Recife: Caleidoscópio, 2011), pp. 98-99.
- <sup>14</sup> de Mello, *Gente da Nação*, p. 136. The Dutch administration worked through a council of nineteen persons, commonly called the *Heeren XIX* (The Lords Nineteen), eighteen of whom were chosen from five offices spread throughout The Netherlands, the *kamers*, "chambers", while one was the appointed governor at the Colony.
- <sup>15</sup> Arnold Wiznitzer, "The Number of Jews in Dutch Brazil (1630-1654)," *Jewish Social Studies* 16, no. 2 (1954): 107-114.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>17</sup> Herbert Bloom, *The Economic Activities of the Jews in Amsterdam in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*. (Williamsport, Pennsylvania: Bayard, 1937), p. 31.

## CONTRIBUTORS

CANDY CARTER (*What Happened when Anna Jumped from the Window...*) Candy Carter is a fourth generation Californian, a sixth generation teacher, and a 2014 MLA graduate. She received her BA at Stanford (English/Psych) as part of the (in)famous Class of 1969, so she now gets two reunion invitations every five years. She and her husband of 45 years (and counting) live in an old fruit packing plant in beautiful downtown San José. Having finished the MLA program, she has returned to reading books for pure pleasure. She also enjoys Stanford football and playgoing. She loves going to London and tries to get there every year...somehow.

LAILA CRAVEIRO (*The Seventeenth-Century Sephardic Jewish Diaspora in Brazil*) For over 10 years, Laila has proudly called Stanford home, as both a manager in clinical research in the School of Medicine and as a 2015 graduate from the Master of Liberal Arts program. She used to be a Journalist in her native Brazil. She moved to the United States in 1991, after backpacking through Europe, Asia and northern Africa for one year. She currently lives in Palo Alto, with her husband, two sons, dogs and chickens.

LAURA DAMONE (*Poem: The Last Blackberries*) is an LSAT instructor, curriculum developer, and first-year MLA student. She lives on a farm with her husband and her four-year-old son, about whom the poem was written. She holds an Honors Baccalaureate from Virginia Tech in the field of Interdisciplinary Studies, with foci in Women's Studies, Africana Studies, Theatre and Political Science.

ANDY GROSE (*Story: The Memory of Ditches*) is a retired emergency physician and a 2001 graduate of the MLA program. The story presented in this edition arises from his experience growing up in Utah in the 1950s, before he left for Notre Dame and the life that followed. His previous contributions to *Tangents* have included several poems and short stories. Often, those stories were about the young brothers, "Pete and Toad." They both appear again, unnamed, in this story, which is told from the perspective of Pete.

KEN NEFF (*H.G. Wells*) is a second-year MLA student. Originally from southern Indiana, he received BS degrees in computer science and mathematics from Purdue University and an MS in mathematics

from the University of Illinois before setting off on a clockwise lap of the US (Boston, Austin, San Jose) in pursuit of compelling software start-ups. Ken now divides his time between a cloud application consulting business and his MLA studies, deeply grateful that his family supports (permits) his crazy schedule. This is Ken's first non-technical publication in a very, very long time.

YOU JIA ZHU (*Story: Lift*) is a first-year MLA student. Born and raised in Beijing, she now lives in San Francisco and divides her time between consulting and reading. "Lift" is from a collection of short stories taking place in Beijing.

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