

SUMMER 2017

TANGENTS

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

IN THIS ISSUE...

Essays by Martha McDaniel, Gene Slater

Fiction by Andy Grose, You Jia Zhu

Poems by Katherine Orloff, Prabhu Palani

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

Jayne Pearce, Marketing,
Master of Liberal Arts Program
Stanford

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."

Rights and Permissions

Copyrights for material included in this publication belong to their creators or are sourced from iStock.

TANGENTS

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

VOLUME 16

IN THIS ISSUE...

- 2 Letter from the Editors
Oscar Firschein
Roxanne Enman
- 3 *Story: Iggy*
Andy Grose
- 7 *Poem: Rise Like a Phoenix*
Prabhu Palani
- 8 *Thirteen Ways to Be: A Visual Interpretation*
Martha McDaniel
- 18 *Poem: But a pulse we are*
Katherine Orloff
- 19 *Poem: You are the quiet*
Katherine Orloff
- 20 *Dividing America: Using Freedom to Oppose Equal Rights*
Gene Slater
- 27 *Story: Apartment*
You Jia Zhu
- 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 sixteenth volume, we have chosen a diverse group of works by students and alumni, including:

- ✦ two stories, one about three boys whose questions lead to an interesting turn of events and the other about an elderly woman coping with life in modern-day China;
- ✦ an essay that describes how to convert a poem into a painting;
- ✦ two opposing views of “freedom” when considering housing discrimination; and
- ✦ three poems (*Rise Like a Phoenix, But a pulse we are* and *You are the quiet*).



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 or enman@alumni.stanford.edu.

IGGY

by Andy Grose



Iggy, Pete and Toad's new friend, was waiting patiently in their front yard while they finished breakfast.

"That Iggy is one skinny little bastard," their father said, to no one in particular.

Their mother sighed, "Joe, don't talk like that," adding, in a more off-handed tone, "There's nothing wrong with being thin. Iggy's still growing, that's all."

Their father teased her in a sing-song voice, "It's not a sin to be too thin..." She silenced him with a hard stare. He kept humming in self-amusement as he washed his hands at the kitchen sink, moving them in time with his song.

"Hey, Dad, what exactly is a bastard?" Pete asked.

Their mother gave their father her best see-you-later smile, and disappeared into the other room.

"Oh, you know. Well, it's...well..." He glanced out the window at Iggy, "...it's someone with no father."

"I thought everybody had a father, like when you told us. You know, the birds and bees."

"Remember, Dad?" Toad chimed in. "Takes two to tango?"

"Well, I mean, it's when the father doesn't stick around."

"Oh, like killed in a car wreck," Toad said, satisfied, as he began looking for his shoes under the kitchen table, anxious to get out to play with Iggy.

"Sort of," he said. "Ask your mother."

Their dad quickly dried his hands on the dish towel, grabbed his lunch bucket and stepped out onto the porch, only to return moments later.

"It's a bad word, and I don't want you boys saying it. Okay?"

"Bastard, you mean?"

"But everybody's saying it."

"Well, don't you two say it."

"Okay, Dad. No more bastard."

•••

Pete and Toad had met their new friend several weeks before.

"My name's Iggy," the lanky third grader said that day, in front of church. "Short for Ignatius. You know. The saint. Saint Ignatius Loyola. But my friends all call me Iggy."

The brothers studied him for a minute. They already knew his name, knew that he was visiting his uncle. That he was the priest's nephew. The ladies were all whispering about him in the stores, even in church.

"I'm ten," Iggy said, "I missed a grade."

"Nine and a half," Toad said. "Almost ten."

"Eleven," Pete said.

Iggy was tall for his age, thin, with large blue eyes and an easy smile.

"Do you play baseball, Iggy?" Toad asked.

Most days since then Iggy joined in their baseball games, but some days he climbed up into a tree with a book and kept to himself. Not sulky, like some of the girls, but alone.

"I'm reading," he'd say if they called him to play.

Or he might not answer at all. Some of the boys whispered that there must be something wrong with Iggy's hearing. But his hearing was fine, and he heard all their whispers. Even when Iggy didn't have a book, they might find him sitting alone quietly, looking off.

"Just thinking," he'd say.

HEY, DAD, WHAT EXACTLY IS A BASTARD?" PETE ASKED.

"City boys can be like that," their mother assured them. "There's nothing wrong with Iggy."

"Unless he has bookworms," their father teased. "I hear they're contagious."

• • •

Today, like every morning lately, Iggy was in their front yard, waiting for Pete and Toad to finish breakfast. He knew they'd have to eat every bite. And he was good at waiting.

Buttering a slice of toast, Pete asked, "Mom, what's a bastard?"

Their mother explained in her calm, soft voice that sometimes unmarried people want to have a baby. That sometimes God sends children to women who aren't married. Women who would be good parents.

"So," Toad reasoned, "Baby Jesus was a bastard."

"Well, I never thought of it that way," she laughed.

"If God sends them, why are they called accidents?" Pete asked.

"Jesus wasn't an accident!" Toad complained.

**"JESUS WASN'T AN
ACCIDENT!"
TOAD COMPLAINED.**

"You boys go on now. Go play," she said, "Poor Iggy must be worried, out there alone."

• • •

The parish priest, Father Merrill, knew there were whispered rumors. He knew that he had caused them himself. The way he introduced Iggy. He told the parish at the end of his sermon, right after the announcement about Bingo Night, that his nephew would be spending the summer with him.

Iggy was already sitting in church. He stood up and smiled.

"Hello, everybody."

No one even knew the priest had family, much less a young nephew. Until that Sunday morning, the only family he talked about was the Holy Family. Even now, weeks later, he hadn't said anything more about having a brother, or sister.

The parishioners shared their suspicions quietly among themselves. It was only natural to wonder. It would be rude to ask. Several of the ladies allowed that he was handsome to be a priest. A few claimed they always knew he had a secret. Their juicy gossip was disguised as pure Christian concern. But shared

in the whispers they usually saved for confessing their own sins.

• • •

Iggy was interested in everything. Pete and Toad found his curiosity infectious. There were fresh adventures in showing him things that were old-hat to them. The hills behind their house were exotic Africa, when seen through Iggy's eyes. The neighbor's horse was a wild west wonder. Forgotten toys were reclaimed. Their father resurrected last year's Easter kite, splicing the cross beams with black electrician's tape.

Iggy was dumbfounded that a kite could stay up overnight, all by itself.

It all made Pete and Toad feel like heroes.

One afternoon the three boys were becalmed by the breezeless, summer heat. The air was languid, and laced with the rich smell of weeds. And of gardens overflowing with swollen squash and splitting-ripe tomatoes. Even the birds were too hot to move.

From their usual spot in the apple tree they could see in all directions, peering between branches so heavy with fruit that their father had propped them up. To keep them away from Rex McAdams' roaming goat. The goat had danced on two hind legs to eat the lowest branches anyway. Fruit, leaves, bark, and all. Now from the street, the tree looked like a colorful, flat-bottomed cloud.

They had spent the morning making tattoos with the sticky sap of soft, green cockle-burrs. Cockle-burrs that by autumn would punch holes in their fingers, if they tried to pick at the sharp brown thistles tangled in the cat's fur. The burrs were fuzzy still and their tacky golden sap made feathery patterns when they were pressed on their arms. The sap caught the ashy dust they rubbed on. Better tattoos than the smudgy ones made with strawberry juice.

Pete folded his arms across his suntanned chest, admiring his war paint. He had eleven of the dusty stars, one for each year, more or less in a row. The one in his elbow crease was already smearing in his mid-day sweat.

"Yours itch?" Pete asked.

"A little," Iggy allowed, working on a dandelion ring that kept coming apart.

"Nope," Toad answered, not wanting to be a complainer.

"Don't ever eat one," Iggy said. "They're bad poison."

"Says who?" Pete challenged.

"Poison?" Toad looked at his itchy arm.

"A book I read. Pigs are the worst. They'll eat themselves to death on little cockle-burrs."

Iggy was always finding things like that in books. "Just a fact. Not good or bad," was how he put it.

"Don't lick your tattoos."

Pete shimmied out of the tree and across the yard. The others followed, swinging their dusty arms in unconscious unison. They trailed over the thick grass past the lush purple lilac that was entertaining a swarm of bees, drawn there by the waves of soft perfume.

The bees' steady drone made the day seem even hotter.

Inside, they headed down the stairs and to the corner of the basement where the brothers slept. The thick concrete walls stayed a welcome cool all day. They stretched out in the dim light, and soon the sweat on their faces and in their clothes began to dry, reviving them.

"Want a soda?" Pete said. "I hid some under the bed."

While they sipped the lukewarm sodas, Iggy looked through the few books on the shelf. Most were old school texts. Several battered comic books. A *Popular Mechanics* magazine. Mixed in among the others, he found a library book, long overdue.

"Don't you know it's a sin to steal a library book?" Iggy said, holding it up, waiting for a response. "Did you confess it?"

The brothers couldn't admit that the money their mother gave them to pay the fine had gone for bubble gum. That they'd since forgotten all about the book.

"Let's catch us a horny-toad!" Pete proclaimed, hoping to change the subject.

"A what?" Iggy asked, nibbling at the bait.

"Oh, just a devil lizard," Pete answered in an even tone.

"Devil lizards?" Iggy asked. "Where from?"

Pete, keeping a poker face, continued. "Well, some say they crawled up from hell. I don't know exactly. They made it onto Noah's Ark, that's for sure." He waited a minute measuring Iggy's reaction.

"I heard that the big ones eat birds," Pete added, just in case.

"But mostly just ants and grasshoppers," Toad reassured Iggy.

"They're safe to catch. If you know how."

"Where can we find one?"

"Up on the hill," Pete stomped his empty soda can flat.

"At the hot-as-hellest time of the day," Toad added.

"That's right now!" Iggy dropped the book. He was hooked.

•••

Forgetting the tattoos, they headed off on their new adventure.

It was hotter than ever. The sun was shimmering on the rocks, and they stopped often to catch their breath. There was no shade, only dry grass, tumbleweeds, and scattered sage brush.

They had to push their battered bicycles where the hill became too steep to pedal.

This time of day the horny-toads would be resting atop rocks, sleeping in the heat, easy to catch. The turtle-shaped lizards were ferocious-looking, with rows of spikes on their backs and legs. Prehistoric-looking. Their bulging black eyes and jagged, horned heads belied their gentle nature.

They were perfect for boyhood bravery.

Half-way up the hill, they stopped to look back at the ragged town. A half mile away, the houses looked like blocks of carved wood. The tin roofs shimmered and the trees could have been tufts of cotton. Iggy pointed out McAdams' goat, staked behind his house.

They could just make out the apple tree.

The fields beyond the town were a jigsaw of yellows, greens, and browns. Covered with sunflowers full of seeds, corn, and alfalfa lush from faithful irrigation. Even further off, beyond the canal, the land had already been plowed for dry-farmed winter wheat.

A question that had slowly formed in Toad's mind weeks before suddenly popped from his mouth.

"Iggy, are you a bastard?"

"Who says I am?" Iggy's face flamed red.

"Nobody," Toad mumbled, turning his eyes back toward town.

"Well, your uncle, Father Merrill," Pete persisted.

"Which side is he on?"

"What do you mean?" Iggy stammered, stepping back. His skinny arms hung limp above his clenched fists. He didn't answer. Or turn away.

"Your mom's side. Or your dad's," Pete offered, startled by Iggy's reaction.

After an awkward silence, the three pushed on. Panting and hauling their bicycles up the hill, now steeper than ever. When Pete and Toad had to stop again, Iggy kept struggling on ahead of them for a few dozen yards. Then he swung his bicycle around and climbed onto it. He was too tall for the bike. A

jumble of loose legs and sharp elbows as he flashed past the brothers, forcing them to jump aside.

Iggy jolted down the rocky path back into town. His outspread feet kicked up swarms of grasshoppers that swirled in his wake.

"Maybe a big lizard scared him," Toad said, knowing better.

•••

The next morning, Iggy wasn't waiting for them. They found him in the front yard of the rectory playing catch with Father Merrill. Iggy and the priest went on playing for several minutes, laughing and joking together, ignoring the brothers. When the priest took off his glove, his eyes still seemed focused on something far away. He threw his ball cap onto the stairs and combed his hair carefully. When he finally came over to the two boys, Iggy kept pace with him, walking side by side, matching him step for step.

The priest knew both brothers well. They were sometimes his altar boys.

"Hello, Pete. Toad," Not in the stern voice they knew from his sermons. In his friendly after-mass voice.

"Iggy doesn't need questions. He needs friends."

A flock of sparrows swarmed into the cherry tree by the rectory door, all a-chatter, squabbling for perches. They'd eaten the cherries long ago, before they were ripe. Pete and Toad stared at the lawn until the birds settled. Father Merrill's hands rested on Iggy's shoulders.

"I'll answer any questions. Okay?" They both nodded.

"I am his father's side of the family."

The sparrows swirled in and out of the cherry tree fighting for better positions.

"Iggy's named after me," he said as Iggy beamed. "Ignatius Loyola Merrill. But he's the only Iggy. My friends all call me Nat."

Neither brother spoke, keeping their eyes down, not sure what to say.

"So, no more questions for Iggy. Okay?" The four of them stood together listening to the sparrow chatter, until finally Pete looked up, relieved that the discussion seemed to be over.

"Okay, Father."

"Father Nat," Iggy corrected, as he skipped off to look for the baseball.

All three boys were soon on their bikes and off.

Nat Merrill clapped his hands to shoo away the curious sparrows. He watched them disappear into

the morning sky, knowing full-well the pests would come right back. Once inside, he closed the blinds and sat for a while in the dark, asking himself for the thousandth time how it had all happened.

What was a man supposed to do?

He called the Bishop.

•••

That night, a very tired Pete and Toad tried to make sense of it all. The business about bastards. All the whispers. Iggy being so upset. The way Father Nat played catch with him. Right on the church lawn. And having the same name. As Toad pulled the warm quilt up around his neck, he whispered to Pete that he had an idea. But Pete was already dreaming about pigs and poison cockle-burrs.

Toad shared his idea at breakfast.

"Father Merrill adopts Iggy. He can't be a bastard! It's so simple."

Pete nodded a little, with his mouth full.

His parents didn't say a word.

A few days later, Toad whispered his idea to the priest when he went to confession. Father Ignatius Loyola Merrill laughed so loud the altar ladies spilled the flower water. Then he whispered a secret to Toad, and made him promise not to tell.

A FEW DAYS LATER,
TOAD WHISPERED
HIS IDEA TO THE
PRIEST WHEN
HE WENT TO
CONFESSION.

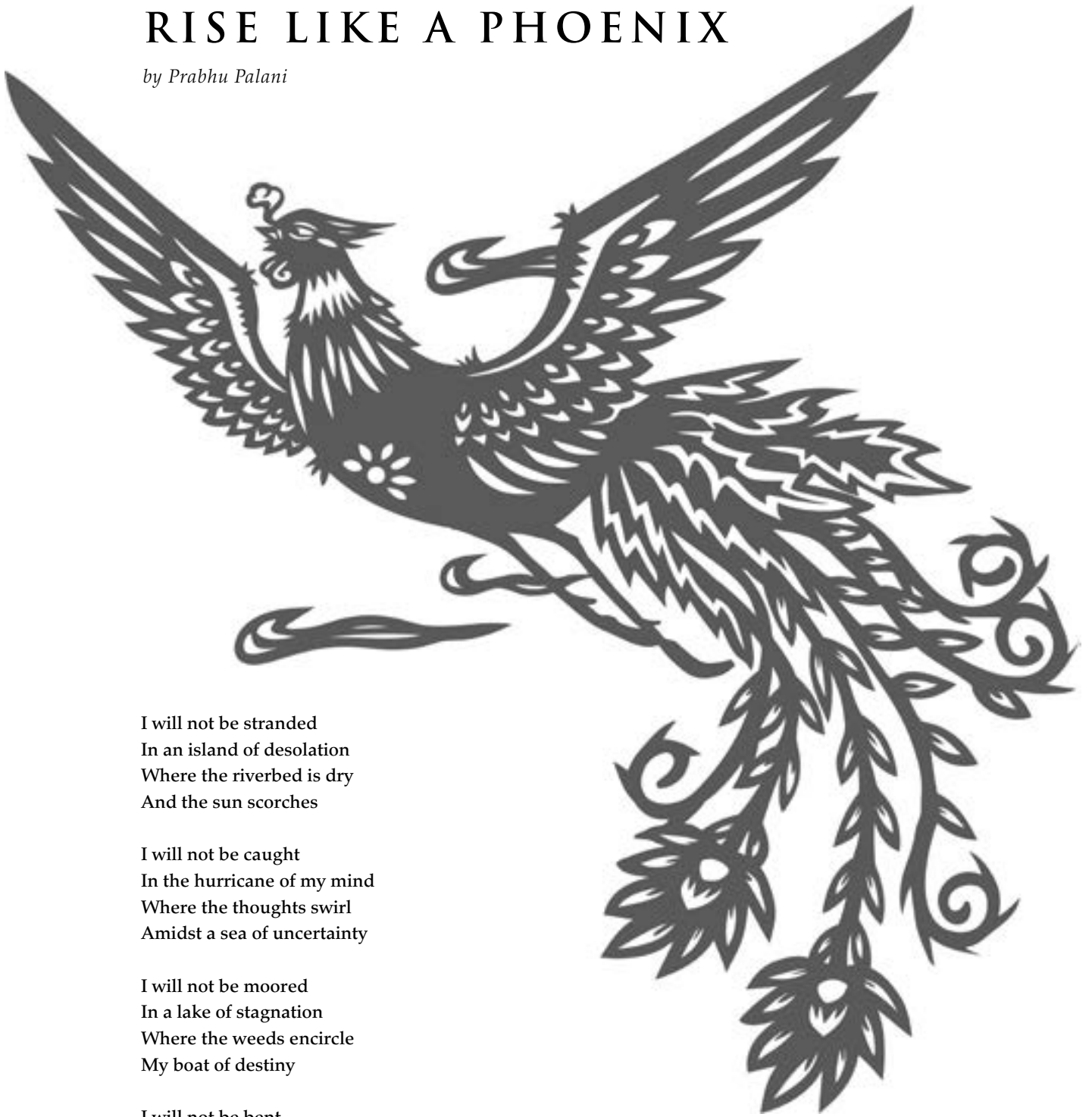
The very next morning, Iggy announced he was staying for the school year.

At Thanksgiving, Iggy's mother joined them. True to form, Father Merrill introduced her from the altar after she arrived. He needed a cook. Toad wasn't surprised.

Everyone whispered that Iggy was too skinny.

RISE LIKE A PHOENIX

by Prabhu Palani



I will not be stranded
In an island of desolation
Where the riverbed is dry
And the sun scorches

I will not be caught
In the hurricane of my mind
Where the thoughts swirl
Amidst a sea of uncertainty

I will not be moored
In a lake of stagnation
Where the weeds encircle
My boat of destiny

I will not be bent
Like the slim stalks of a fair creeper
Whose only direction is that
Of the wind's might

I shall stand tall among the ruins
Convert the poisonous feed
Into a force so potent
And emerge from the ashes a hero.

THIRTEEN WAYS TO BE: A VISUAL INTERPRETATION

by Martha McDaniel



FIG. 1. Martha McDaniel, "Thirteen Perspectives on a Blackbird," December 2016, Wood, collage, acrylic paint.

"The point is that the poet does his job by virtue of an effort of the mind. In doing so, he is in rapport with the painter, who does his job with respect to the problems of form and color, which confront him incessantly, not by inspiration, but by imagination or by the miraculous kind of reason that the imagination sometimes promotes. In short, these two arts, poetry and painting, have in common a laborious element, which, when exercised, is not only a labor but a consummation as well."

Wallace Stevens¹

The consummation of a work of art is a bringing together of all of the learning, thinking, planning, feeling, and living that the artist, and history, has experienced up to the point of completion. In the creative process, the artist examines a realm of possible realities and ways of knowing oneself, consciously and unconsciously, through the efforts of the mind. These efforts are the subject of the writings of American modernist poet, Wallace Stevens, as he seeks to convey the many ways the mind sees itself and constructs reality. Stevens looks at the self and the mind's various perspectives on reality through the thirteen stanzas of "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird"ⁱⁱ (the poem is reprinted in its entirety below). While each stanza could stand on its own, as a set they are inextricably interrelated. Within this structure, Stevens paints a verbal picture of how we ultimately exist within a multiplicity of realities through time and space. Stevens scholar Michel Benamou summarized Stevens' view that "a poet can learn his trade by reading what painters reveal about theirs, and by looking at their pictures."ⁱⁱⁱ As a visual artist, I can likewise say that artists can gain insights into their creative process by reading and interpreting poetry and other creative writings. Reading "Thirteen Ways..." spoke to my imagination and prompted me to create a visual art piece that interprets Stevens' poem and its sensual, vivid imagery. This essay documents both my process and end product (see Figure 1).

THIRTEEN WAYS OF LOOKING AT A BLACKBIRD
by Wallace Stevens, 1917

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>I Among twenty snowy mountains, The only moving thing Was the eye of the blackbird.</p> | <p>VIII I know noble accents And lucid, inescapable rhythms; But I know, too, That the blackbird is involved In what I know.</p> |
| <p>II I was of three minds, Like a tree In which there are three blackbirds.</p> | <p>IX When the blackbird flew out of sight, It marked the edge Of one of many circles.</p> |
| <p>III The blackbird whirled in the autumn winds, It was a small part of the pantomime.</p> | <p>X At the sight of blackbirds Flying in a green light, Even the bawds of euphony Would cry out sharply.</p> |
| <p>IV A man and a woman Are one. A man and a woman and a blackbird Are one.</p> | <p>XI He rode over Connecticut In a glass coach. Once, a fear pierced him, In that he mistook The shadow of his equipage For blackbirds.</p> |
| <p>V I do not know which to prefer— The beauty of inflections Or the beauty of innuendoes, The blackbird whistling Or just after.</p> | <p>XII The river is moving. The blackbird must be flying.</p> |
| <p>VI Icicles filled the long window With barbaric glass. The shadow of the blackbird Crossed it, to and fro. The mood Traced in the shadow An indecipherable cause.</p> | <p>XIII It was evening all afternoon. It was snowing And it was going to snow. The blackbird sat In the cedar-limbs.</p> |
| <p>VII O thin men of Haddam, Why do you imagine golden birds? Do you not see how the blackbird Walks around the feet Of the women about you?</p> | |

Through her poetic imagination, the artist presents a summation of ideas, experiences, histories, and impressions that are her self. Stevens tells us, "The subject-matter of poetry is not that 'collection of solid, static objects extended in space' but the life that is lived in the scene that it composes; and so reality is not that external scene but the life that is lived in it."^{iv} The self comes to experience the known through the interplay between the imagination and reality. Stevens saw the self as fluid. It moves through life, time, and external reality as a series of perceptions, thoughts, and events that define an individual's reality moment by moment.

The striking imagery in "Thirteen Ways..." suggested to me that a visual interpretation of its framework, details, and relationships might provide another perspective from which to consider the poem. Wallace Stevens said that both "Poetry and painting alike create through composition"^v to materialize an idea. To create my interpretation, my task was to conceptualize the visual forms and composition of the ideas within the poem (and in the context of my own confluence of self). This involved consideration of the forms in the poem and how they relate, or speak, to each other, both between and within stanzas.

THE STRIKING IMAGERY IN "THIRTEEN WAYS..." SUGGESTED TO ME THAT A VISUAL INTERPRETATION OF ITS FRAMEWORK, DETAILS, AND RELATIONSHIPS MIGHT PROVIDE ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE FROM WHICH TO CONSIDER THE POEM.

As Beverly Maeder, author of *Wallace Stevens' Experimental Poetry: The Lion in the Lute*, observes, "Each of the thirteen sections demonstrates a fragmentary instantaneousness that relates it to Imagist poetry of the period and may distract us from the fact that the framework itself creates a very strong sense of location or setting; that is, it posits a spatial context and indicates the extent of this context for the sequence it embraces."^{vi} I wanted to find a framework that would provide an equivalent kind of context within which the individual images could co-exist. I accomplished this by creating a single twenty-four-inch square composition—a frame, to provide a sense of setting and spatial context for the sequence of stanzas. Within that frame, I designed a series of image clusters and arranged them to read the way a text might: left to right, top to bottom.

The physical framework of my piece is constructive, built in three dimensions, to enhance Stevens' overall sense of setting with its varying distances, angles, and degrees of motion. The poem brings together distant snow-filled mountains, nearby trees, the stillness of a bird in a tree and the actions of a shadow crossing, wind whirling, and river moving. These diverse perspectives illustrate how "Stevens blends Cubism's multiperspectivism with haikulike concision."^{vii} I wanted to highlight the sequence of stanzas while referencing Stevens' cubist influence, the multi-perspective, faceted aspects of the poem, along with the repose of his more haiku-like stanzas.

While we can see the faceted qualities of "Thirteen Ways..." in its structure of stanzas, perhaps more to the point is Stevens' shared philosophy with Cubism.^{viii} Pablo Picasso explains, "Cubism is not either a seed or a foetus, but an art dealing primarily with forms and when a form is realized it is there to live its own life... We have kept our eyes open to our surroundings, and also our brains."^{ix} Cubism is a way of seeing and thinking about the self and world that paralleled Stevens' environment in the 1910s. Stevens believed, "the real subject of poetry and the real subject of cubist painting is not immediately perceptible: it is poetic imagination. The merit of the poem, or picture, arises from the degree of concentration with which the imagination refracts the object."^x For Stevens, poetic imagination, like visual imagination, is an inseparable part of the mind. The artist or poet's imagination, the internal activity of the mind, refracts whatever it gazes on and interprets it through an artistic medium. "Thirteen Ways..." gives us a collection of views to reflect upon in a structured, deliberate format.

The stanzas are presently in a linear sequence, yet they relate to each other both adjacently and in their relationship to the whole poem. They include repetitions and contrasts from one stanza to another, such as the snow in the beginning and the snow at the end, in word choices, forms of being such as "is" and "was," and references to what is known or imagined. As construction evolved during the compositional phase of my visual interpretation, I began to consider the details of my piece.

In the creative process, there are periods when the artist becomes immersed in the doing, in the execution of a piece and in the details. As Stevens asserts, "Imagination applied to the whole world is vapid in comparison to imagination applied to a detail."^{xi} All of one's prior thoughts and reflections about the piece influence the decisions about each detail, though not always consciously, as the artist becomes absorbed in producing the piece. Memories and related experiences surface then submerge again to join with those in the poem, forming a dark, deep subterranean river of influences that infiltrate the visual output. Choices are thus made from primal and historical impulses that blend with conscious decisions.

For poetry, these decisions may concern semantics, rhythm, rhyme, tense, and sound, for example, but may also involve how one "sees" the images created by the tools of language. In the visual arts, decisions on details relate to the very imagistic elements of color, form, light, contrasts, and images, but may also incorporate rhythm, meaning, other elements of language, and even music. I ask myself questions along the way. How do adjacent contrasting colors impact the mood to elicit reflection, excitement, or fear? How does a contrast create a rhythm or vibration? How does the curved edge of a shape move the eye to the next image or to a related image across the plane? Can this repeated shape set up a narrative for the viewer?

As I worked, forms, images, and relationships continued to suggest themselves to me. They came from re-reading the poem, reading his other works, and reviewing critical analysis of Stevens' writings. They also came from the toolbox of collected objects, images, and color mediums that I draw from as I work.

The color palette began with an initial idea around white and black contrasts and then evolved into a subdued forest palette. As my piece progressed, I grew to feel the influence of the deep quiet of the woods that framed, and acted as, a substratum of the poem. The greens and grey-browns of trees, deep river currents, and the darkening afternoon light among the cedars started to envelop me. The white of the snow in the poem began to feel like part of the blanket of the living, earthy, early evening color palette that I ultimately chose.

In this dusk-like setting certain features and representations begged to become more recognizable, more

visually heightened, than others. For instance, it seemed that the blackbirds should be seen as such in stanzas I and XIII, to act as bookends of the poem and artwork. In the other stanzas, the blackbirds' presence is shadowy, elusive, mysterious; I utilize a symbolic black crescent for those.

The poem contains several repeated elements, in addition to the ever-present blackbird, that I include in the artwork. The eye of the blackbird as an equivalent for the "I" of the self, is represented by numerous circles and in a large letter "I." One example of this appears in lines two to four in stanzas I and II: "The only moving thing / Was the eye of the blackbird. / I was of three minds." Birds' eyes do not move; thus I took the moving thing to be the "I," the self, with three minds that is introduced directly after. Also repeated are the arcs and circles that are both explicitly represented and implied. The most overt example is in stanza IX, when the blackbird "marked the edge / Of one of many circles." Other arcs are implied, such as in the whirling blackbird in stanza III. Additionally, I used arcs and circles to interpret several elements, including the "inflections" and "innuendos" in stanza V. As a final example of repeated elements, threes appear several times—as three minds and three blackbirds in stanza II, three as one (man, woman, and blackbird) in stanza IV, and three "I's" in stanza XIII (13).

As you can see, art can be both objective and subjective. It can convey many meanings depending on the maker and the viewer, the context of their physical, emotional, and historical circumstances, and the various interpretations that it might evoke. My comments on the overall tone, color palette, connections between stanzas, and repeated elements only partially explain my visual interpretation of "Thirteen Ways..." Each of the thirteen stanzas has its own set of very specific details and in some places these details interact with other stanzas. To fully understand the visual elements and relationships therein, Figure 2 offers a map of my final composition; it is followed by a discussion on each stanza.



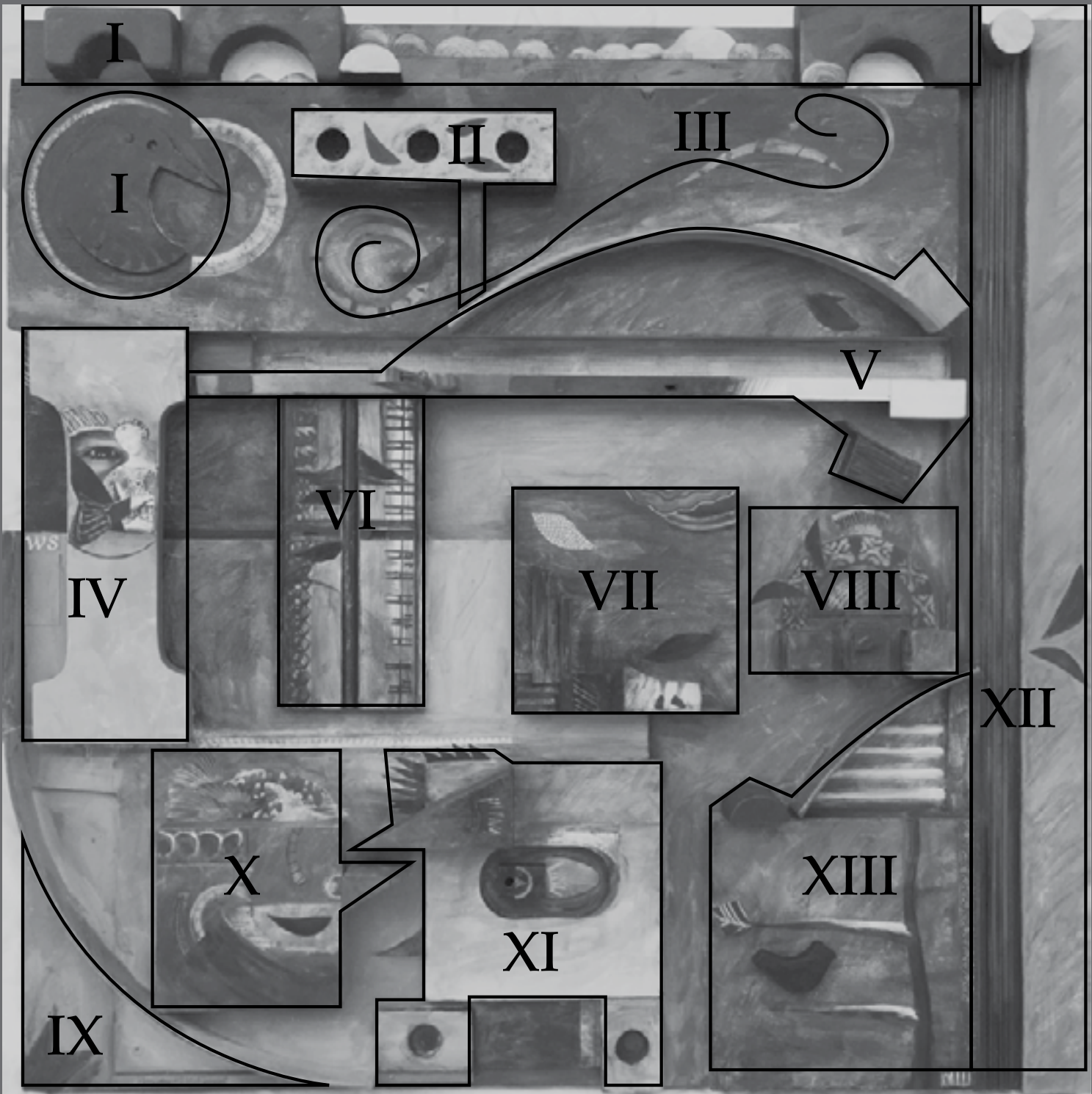


FIG. 2. Map of Visual Response* by author to "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird"

*"Thirteen Perspectives on a Blackbird" by Martha McDaniel, December 2016.

DISCUSSION BY STANZA

*I. Among twenty snowy mountains,
The only moving thing
Was the eye of the blackbird.^{xii}*

The twenty snowy mountains across the top of the piece give a sense of the shared space that the stanzas occupy in the poem. The mountains are rounded, Connecticut^{xiii}-style, rather than peaked or jagged. The eye of the blackbird is significant as “The only moving thing.” As mentioned earlier, birds’ eyes do not move, so I interpreted the “eye” as a window into being, into the self, and thus show the bird within the eye (a blackbird’s eye is ringed by yellow). The large eye is directly above stanza IV’s imagery that is contained in a large capital “I.” To the right of the eye, I mirror the initial arc of the eye with the beige timepiece arc of Roman numerals I through XIII.

*II. I was of three minds,
Like a tree
In which there are three blackbirds.*

The three minds are treated as three dark holes in a green rectangle, a representational branch-like form. The tree is further abstracted to include a small vertical trunk. The branch also holds three crescent-shaped blackbirds. The three minds and the three blackbirds are separate, only connected by occupying the same space. In the poem, minds are likened to blackbirds; to create this visually I wanted to establish a rhythm between them.

*III. The blackbird whirled in the autumn winds,
It was a small part of the pantomime.*

The red-orange whirl of the autumn wind sweeps up a crescent blackbird. The wind swirls through the upper panel, forming arcs and movement, and twirls the blackbird along. I was struck by Beverly Maeder’s analysis of Stevens’ use of circles in his text and imagery; she notes that the source of the word “whirl” is “related to Old Norse hvirfill... [meaning] ‘circle, ring, summit’^{xiv}” This definition suggested the arc and circle theme as well as the sense of a cold darkening Northern day with low mountains in the distance. Ironically, Stevens uses words to describe a wordless pantomime.

*IV. A man and a woman
Are one.
A man and a woman and a blackbird
Are one.*

The central, repeated word in stanza IV is “one.” I represented the “one” with the Roman number “I,” since as mentioned earlier, the letter “I” or the Roman numeral “one” can also be related to the “eye” or “I” of self. We also have a trinity (man, woman, blackbird) as one. I have included a small collage of a man’s eye, a woman, and crescent blackbird pieced within the large “I” to convey these ideas. To the left of this image are the initials of Wallace Stevens. I chose to place them next to this stanza to suggest that the poem reveals Wallace Stevens’ ideas about the centrality of self.

*V. I do not know which to prefer—
The beauty of inflections
Or the beauty of innuendoes,
The blackbird whistling
Or just after.*

To capture the many meanings of this stanza, and indeed the many ways of conveying meaning that this stanza suggests, I used an old piano key to connote both sound and the absence of sound. The red arc above the key represents an inflection of the key; it is bold, definite, purposeful. The small brown key-shape with a short arc represents an innuendo, which is subtler, more suggestive and elusive than an inflection. Both embrace the original key, but diverge from it as separate forces. The raised mechanism towards the back of the key acts to further this idea within the next stanza, where a mood traces "An indecipherable cause."^{xv}

*VI. Icicles filled the long window
With barbaric glass.
The shadow of the blackbird
Crossed it, to and fro.
The mood
Traced in the shadow
An indecipherable cause.*

The mood feels ominous and threatening. Something sinister is lurking, perhaps in our imagination? How are icicles barbaric? Is the blackbird something other than the projection of the mood itself, of the darkness of the mood, of its constant nervous movement barely contained within the frame as it crosses to and fro? I initially saw the window as a long horizontal shape. After reflecting on the barbaric glass, I now see it more as a religious or anti-religious window, perhaps a broken church window, where the shadow (or shades) of dead gods loom in the past; where our souls are no longer a part of ourselves.

*VII. O thin men of Haddam,
Why do you imagine golden birds?
Do you not see how the blackbird
Walks around the feet
Of the women about you?*

Set into a five-inch-square block, the scene includes two thin men of small vertical sticks on the left side, reaching up towards an elusive, crescent-shaped golden bird. They are detached from, and avoid looking at, the blackbird engaging with the woman's feet. There is a rigid willfulness about the men and their blind quest for an idol or otherworldly meaning to their lives that ignores the earthly realities of their existence. The woman in this scene engages in the dance of life.

*VIII. I know noble accents
And lucid, inescapable rhythms;
But I know, too,
That the blackbird is involved
In what I know.*

I used three wooden blocks to convey the noble accents. The middle block has a raised accent mark on it. They are placed equidistant from each other in a sort of rhythm. Their crown of an arc, a dome and a peaked structure hints at a crown of nobility. The crown includes two blackbird crescents emerging from its arc—they are there, as part of the known.

*IX. When the blackbird flew out of sight,
It marked the edge
Of one of many circles.*

A jagged blackbird form flies away from the lower left corner; an arc marks its exit. A thin red rim on the arc denotes the last light of a disappearing era. Several other arcs and circles within the piece repeat the idea of “many circles.” They are the many layers of moments and self that occur as we traverse through time, history, and perpetuity.

*X. At the sight of blackbirds
Flying in a green light,
Even the bawds of euphony
Would cry out sharply.*

This stanza is set in and around the four-inch-square green and red block. It presents a crescent blackbird flying in a green light. The green is luminescent as it glows upward. It, too, influenced my color palette. The bawds, or madams, are represented by the red arcs to implicate a red-light district; they are designed to contrast visually with the green light and to stimulate the viewer’s eyes. I show their sharp cry as the raised red triangular block to the right—a sharp shape that extends beyond their scene. They cry out at the sight of the blackbirds that are the true self—the center that is each of us—but that gets lost in so many ways.

*XI. He rode over Connecticut
In a glass coach.
Once, a fear pierced him,
In that he mistook
The shadow of his equipage
For blackbirds.*

The glass coach reveals the interior of a man who would be pierced by fear whether he mistook the shadow of his equipage for blackbirds or any other form. A glass coach is both transparent and fragile. It allows us to see his inner self, and it represents the fragility of that self. “He,” like the bawds, is afraid of self, of reality. Made of glass, the coach also provides a mirror in which he can see the fear that is within him. His fear is represented by the jagged forms at the top and within the window of his coach, and by the large triangular block that acts in tension to the bawds’ red block. I imagined that “The shadow of his equipage” was a view into stanza X, into an unseemly image of himself, an image that reveals the same seedy core, whether nobility or society’s fringe. The eye, or self, sees and reflects the world as any number of realities.

*XII. The river is moving.
The blackbird must be flying.*

This simple stanza is haiku-like, a meditative mantra. It brings us back to the simplicity of what is at the core of our existence, without the dramas of stanzas VI, VII, X and XI, for example. To visualize this idea, the river in my piece is simply two vertical blue bands that run along the whole right side of the piece. A single circle (eye, I) at the top serves as a source for both the river and the self. Two black crescents embody the blackbird flying. River and blackbird are equivalent; they both just are; both are part of movement and life, a statement of existence.

*XIII. It was evening all afternoon.
It was snowing
And it was going to snow.
The blackbird sat
In the cedar-limbs.*

The snow in this stanza recalls the imagery of Stevens' first verse, returning the poem to the quietude of nature. Likewise, I anchor this image in the lower right corner, as a kind of conclusion, as a resting place from the dramas within the poem. Despite the chaos of activities, fears, and conflicts in the world, or perhaps to reflect this turmoil, there is a certainty about the cold dark light of a winter afternoon. Within the scene remains the self, the one capable of perceiving the true simplicity of reality.

CONCLUSION

At the consummation of this visual piece I came to a conclusion of thought—a resting place of being, a union of imagination and reality—much as the poem does. For Stevens, imagination and reality are one. His poetry “affirm[s] the equivalence of the multiple in the one. All entities come together in the realm of things as they are, the realm of the “is” which yokes them together in the unity of being.” As humans, we struggle with our ideas of self, of knowing, and of reality. By grappling with how to interpret the poem, I ultimately had to rely on my imagination and its relationship with the imagination and reality of “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird,” and then place that imaginative process into a moment-by-moment relationship with creativity. In so doing, I was able to experience a reality of being, even if just in those moments in the present, “between is and was.” As Stevens writes:

*The mobile and immobile flickering
In the area between is and was are leaves,
Leaves burnished in autumnal burnished trees*

*And leaves in whirlings in the gutters, whirlings
Around and away, resembling the presence of thought,
Resembling the presences of thoughts, as if,*

*In the end, in the whole psychology, the self,
the town, the weather, in a casual litter,
Together, said words of the world are the life of the world.^{xvii}*

In expressing his complex and thoughtful ideas through poetry and other writings, in laboring on the details of words, composition, meaning, and in consummating so many creative moments of being, Stevens lived his life. Through his poetry, he shared his life and his thoughts in a way that piqued my imagination and roused an urge to respond visually. The poem spoke to something in my core, a question common with all humanity—an interest in how we, as beings, exist in this world. As I reflected on “Thirteen Ways...,” my visual piece became a part of my self, my life, and the “life of the world.”

WORKS CONSULTED

Benamou, Michel. “Wallace Stevens: Some Relations between Poetry and Painting.” *Comparative Literature* 11.1 (1959): 47-60. Web. 29 November 2016.

Buchsbaum, Betty. “Contours of Desire: The Place of Cézanne in Wallace Stevens’ Poetics and Late Practice.” *Criticism* 30.3 (1988): 303-24. Web. 17 October 2016.

Costello, Bonnie. *Planets on Tables: Poetry, Still Life, and the Turning World*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008. Print.

Feinstein, Sascha. “Stanzas of Color: Wallace Stevens and Paul Klee.” *The Wallace Stevens Journal*, vol. 16, no. 1, 1992. <64http://search.proquest.com/docview/1348847477?accountid=14026>.

Web. 17 October 2016.

Harrison, Robert. “A Monologue on Wallace Stevens.” *Entitled Opinions (about Life and Literature)*: Stanford University podbay. fm, 16 October 2009. <http://podbay.fm/show/81415836/e/1260360001?autostart=1>. Web audio. 3 December 2016.

Hockney, David, Ed Colker, and Wallace Stevens. *The Blue Guitar*. London: Petersburg Press, 1977. Print.

Honour, Hugh, and John Fleming. *The Visual Arts: A History*, Revised Seventh Edition. London: Laurence King Publishing, Ltd, 2009. Print.

Kaelin, Eugene F. “The Fourteenth Way of Looking at a Blackbird.” *New Literary History*, vol. 14, no. 1, 1982, pp. 191-203. <www.jstor.org/stable/468968>.

Lawlor, Leonard and Moulard Leonard, Valentine, "Henri Bergson," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2016/entries/bergson/>>. Web. 30 October 2016.

Maeder, Beverly. *Wallace Stevens' Experimental Language: The Lion in the Lute*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999. Print.

McLeod, Glen. "'Notes Towards a Supreme Fiction' and Abstract Art." *Journal of Modern Literature* 16.1 (1989): 31-48. Web. 17 October 2016.

---. "Stevens and Surrealism: The Genesis of 'The Man with the Blue Guitar'" *American Literature* 59.3 (1987): 359-77. Web. 17 October 2016.

"On 'Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird'." *Modern American Poetry*. Department of English, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. <http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/s_z/stevens/blackbird.htm>. Web. 27 October 2016.

---. Helen Vendler excerpt from: *On Extended Wings: Wallace Stevens; Longer Poems* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1969), 75-77.

---. Beverly Maeder excerpt from: *Wallace Stevens' Experimental Language: The Lion in the Lute*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999. Copyright © 1999 by Beverly Maeder.

---. B. J. Leggett excerpt from: a longer analysis in *Early Stevens: The Nietzschean Intertext*. Copyright © 1992 by Duke UP.

---. Kenneth Lincoln excerpt from: *Sing with the Heart of a Bear: Fusions of Native and American Poetry, 1890-1999*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000. Copyright © 2000 by the Regents of the University of California.

Miller, J. H. *Poets of Reality: Six Twentieth-Century Writers*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1965. Print.

Ramazani, Jahan, Richard Ellmann, and Robert O'Clair. *The Norton Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry*. 3rd ed. Vol 1. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2003. Print.

Schwarz, Daniel R. "Searching for Modernism's Genetic Code: Picasso, Joyce, and Stevens as a Cultural Configuration." *Weber Studies: An Interdisciplinary Humanities Journal* 10.1 (1993): 67-86.

---. "'The Serenade of a Man Who Plays a Blue Guitar': The Presence of Modern Painting in Stevens's Poetry." *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, vol. 22, no. 2, 1992, pp. 65-83. <www.jstor.org/stable/30225352>.

Serio, John N. *The Cambridge Companion to Wallace Stevens*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Print.

Stevens, Wallace. *The Necessary Angel: Essays on Reality and the Imagination*. New York: Knopf, 1951. Print.

John N. Serio, and Chris Beyers. *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens*. , 2015. Print.

Turco, Lewis. "Wallace Stevens in His Role as Imagist." *Poetics and Ruminations*. 25 May 2009. <<http://lewisturco.typepad.com/poetics/2009/05/wallace-stevens-in-his-role-as-imagist.html>>. Web. 3 November 2016.

Vendler, Helen. *Wallace Stevens: Words Chosen Out of Desire*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984. Print.

Yeats, W B. *Ideas of Good and Evil*. New York: Macmillan, 1903. Print.

ENDNOTES

ⁱ Wallace Stevens, "The Relations between Poetry and Painting," *The Necessary Angel*, 165. This essay was read at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1951.

ⁱⁱ Wallace Stevens, "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird." The poem was originally published in 1917. It is reprinted in *The Norton Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry*, Jahan Ramazani, et al, 244-6. The poem is presented here, beginning on page 9.

ⁱⁱⁱ Michel Benamou, "Wallace Stevens: Some Relations Between Poetry and Painting," 47-8.

^{iv} Wallace Stevens, "The Noble Rider and the Sound of Words," *The Necessary Angel*, 25.

^v Wallace Stevens, "The Relations between Poetry and Painting," *The Necessary Angel*, 163.

^{vi} Beverly Maeder, *Wallace Stevens: Experimental Language: The Lion in the Lute*, 112.

^{vii} Jahan Ramazani, et al, *The Norton Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry*, liv.

^{viii} Cubism's history is rich and complex. It grew out of dramatic developments in Western art where "Artists found themselves confronted by an insoluble dilemma as they oscillated frantically between the cult of pure form and the cult of inner truth." Quotation from Honour and Fleming's *The Visual Arts: A History*, 768.

^{ix} Reprinted from "Picasso Speaks" published in *The Arts*, May 1923, in Honour and Fleming's *The Visual Arts: A History*, 785.

^x Michel Benamou, "Wallace Stevens: Some Relations Between Poetry and Painting," 50-1.

^{xi} Wallace Stevens, from "Adagia, II". Jahan Ramazani, et al, *The Norton Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Poetry*, 974.

^{xii} See endnote ii for citation on "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird" for all stanzas, I through XIII.

^{xiii} Connecticut is referenced in stanzas VII and XI. Stevens lived most of his adult life in Hartford, CT.

^{xiv} Beverly Maeder, *Wallace Stevens' Experimental Language: The Lion in the Lute*, 119.

^{xv} Wallace Stevens, "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird," stanza VI, last line.

^{xvi} Hillis Miller, *The Poets of Reality*, 275.

^{xvii} Wallace Stevens, from "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven," *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens*, 500.

YOU ARE THE QUIET

by Katherine Orloff

You are the quiet -
spreading through the night out from me
over the earth across hillsides my room thickens
until there is only my flesh
and an everywhere-you that wakens me

I saw the other side of her face loving you
and the bit of skin
behind her shoulder
from the pain
of not.

BUT A PULSE WE ARE

by Katherine Orloff

But a pulse we are
All swells and fades alike into end's good perfection
To feel my heart beat once is to know you
Wholly and in all directions.

What life in such a pulse
And, too, what death
An end to each beginning is bestowed
All breath has learned your name knowing well when to unsay it
Breathing in I likewise learn
But out -
I let you go



DIVIDING AMERICA: USING FREEDOM TO OPPOSE EQUAL RIGHTS

by Gene Slater

A STRANGE PARADOX lies at the heart of American political debates, yet is rarely put into words. Conservatives and liberals who disagree about almost everything, agree that freedom is the country's most important value (Foner xiii, Lakoff 3). Americans invoke freedom, dedicate campaigns and invasions to it, and proclaim it on talk radio and at protest marches, as though we mean the same thing. When Ronald Reagan spoke of freedom, we assume that he was referring at least to the same general idea as Jimmy Carter. But what if this assumption is radically wrong? What if American politics is driven by two profoundly different visions of freedom, one which fundamentally rejects the concept of freedom in the Declaration of Independence while the other embraces it? By recognizing this, much that seems perplexing about the politics of human rights in America becomes clear. We can understand why 'freedom' is used both to support and to oppose expanding civil rights. On issue after issue—fair housing, immigration, voting rights, policing, discrimination—what liberals see as essential freedoms, natural rights any government should guarantee, are condemned by

conservatives as attacks on freedom itself. Because liberals and conservatives use the same hallowed term to justify their positions, we rarely recognize how fundamentally opposed their visions of freedom truly are. By analyzing the bitterly-fought 1964 California campaign over fair housing—where the conflict between these visions first came to dominate and polarize modern American politics—we can see that liberals and conservatives believe in two opposite types of freedom, each deeply rooted in our country’s history.

WE CAN SEE THAT LIBERALS AND CONSERVATIVES BELIEVE IN TWO OPPOSITE TYPES OF FREEDOM, EACH DEEPLY ROOTED IN OUR COUNTRY’S HISTORY.

The liberal vision of inclusive freedom, that all individuals should have the same rights, inspired California’s first fair housing law in 1963. Adopted in the midst of the Civil Rights movement, the law addressed overwhelming residential segregation in California and was hailed by its supporters as a major step in expanding freedom. In response, the California Realtors’ Association and their chief spokesman, Ronald Reagan, in the first major step of his political career, campaigned for a state constitutional amendment, Proposition 14, that would permanently ban fair housing in California. No complaint of housing discrimination could ever be investigated or acted on by any State or local agency. What made their campaign extraordinary was its presentation as a race-neutral effort to protect American freedom: the freedom of choice of homeowners to sell and landlords to rent to whomever they chose. Structured as an argument to preserve freedom against government intrusion, their ballot campaign had a lasting effect on American politics and on conservative arguments for freedom today.

By examining this campaign now, we can see what liberals and, indeed, almost all elected politicians, did not recognize then. They had assumed there was only one type of freedom, one synonymous with human rights. At the very moment when post-war liberalism seemed most dominant, on the same ballot where almost 60% of Californians chose Johnson over Goldwater, two-thirds of California voters were persuaded that another type of freedom mattered more (HoSang 83).

The Proposition 14 campaign allows us to see the difference between the liberal and conservative ideas of freedom when the stakes were extremely high. Both sides felt intensely that freedom, as they understood it, hung in the balance. But each was concerned about a very different type of freedom. For liberals, then and now, freedom is universal and inclusive. It depends on and requires equal rights for all. Government is needed to protect and assure those rights. For conservatives, by contrast, freedom belongs more naturally to some Americans than others. The pro campaign revealed this most powerfully in its silences. It repeatedly stressed that the freedom of choice of white homeowners and their neighbors constitutes freedom. The only freedom of choice that matters, the only one that the campaign even considers, is that of whites. The inability of other races to choose where to live doesn’t seem to exist. The American freedom that needs to be protected and restored is exclusive freedom, for those who deserve and are entitled to it. This is an argument we hear today in efforts to prevent former felons from voting, to prevent undocumented immigrants from applying for citizenship, to build walls along our borders and to limit refugees from certain countries.

SOURCES OF THE PARADOX: ORIGINS OF COMPETING VISIONS OF FREEDOM

The Proposition 14 campaign revived a conservative vision of exclusive freedom articulated by John C. Calhoun in his *Disquisition on Government*, completed in 1849. The liberal vision of inclusive freedom, and specifically the right to choose where to live, was set forth by Frederick Douglass in his remarkable 1869 speech, “Our Composite Nationality.” The difference between these two types of freedom turns on a single question: is freedom indivisible, as liberals argued against Proposition 14 and discrimination, or is it zero-sum, as the Realtors maintained, “[g]ranting one group of citizens rights... necessarily take[s] away from the rest

of the citizenry” (Slater 37)? That is, does your freedom depend on others being free, or are your own rights diminished if others have them, too?

The answer affects not only who is free, but the nature of freedom itself. Exclusive freedom creates an additional, usually unstated right: the right to dominate or exclude those you subordinate. Reagan described this right: “If an individual wants to discriminate against Negroes or others in selling or renting his house, it is his right to do so” (Longley 76). The Realtors’ equation of the rights being taken away from whites and those being granted to minorities is misleading. What is taken away is your ability to discriminate; what others are given is the right to be treated no differently than yourself. Put more simply, what’s taken away is the inequality of rights. Exclusive freedom includes a vast, silent right, to benefit from inequality.ⁱ Equally important, exclusive freedom makes freedom into a possession, one that belongs to you and your group as a natural entitlement. Liberal efforts to make freedom more inclusive threaten this sense of specialness, of being more American.

The Realtors and Reagan, making their campaign mostly race-neutral in light of the recent passage of the federal civil rights law, argued that California’s Fair Housing law (that they referred to as the “Forced Housing” Act) removed freedom of choice. It therefore threatened all freedom in the name of civil rights. “Drop the cloak of minority rights... and there stands the police state in the name of social justice with a dagger poised directly at the heart of freedom” (Reft). They made a vote against Proposition 14 a vote against freedom.

Conservative thinkers in the 1950s and 1960s explicitly drew on Calhoun’s idea of freedom. Russell Kirk, a founder of the *National Review* whom Reagan called “the prophet of American conservatism,” hoped that “the politics of ... Calhoun might fructify” (Calhoun xi). Ignoring Calhoun’s support for slavery, modern conservatives focused on his vision of freedom and the limited role of government, and used it as the basis for the Proposition 14 campaign. Calhoun rejected any idea of freedom based on three “great and dangerous errors”: that all men are created equal, that all groups are equally worthy of freedom, and that freedom depends on (and is compatible with) equality (Calhoun 34-36). Instead, Calhoun argued that freedom, far from being a universal right, is “a reward... for the patriotic, the virtuous and deserving,” not “a blessing to be gratuitously lavished on all alike” (Read 36). Calhoun’s ideas were thus central to the Proposition 14 campaign.ⁱⁱ

Douglass had made equally clear that each individual’s right to choose where to live is fundamental to all other rights.

Human rights... rest upon no conventional foundation, but are external, universal and indestructible. Among these is the right of locomotion..., which belongs to no particular race, but ...to all alike... It is this great right that I assert... for ...all varieties of men equally with yourselves, now and forever. (Douglass 225)

Douglass, as he often did, went straight to the heart of the issue. To deny whole groups of individuals the choice of where to live would be to accept the “arrogant and scornful theory” by which white men limit that or “any other essential human right to themselves.” This theory “would make them the owners of this great continent to the exclusion of all other races of men” (Douglass 225). Douglass’s image startles because it lays the theory bare. In 1964, liberals and minorities understood that this precise theory lay behind Proposition 14: that whites have the right to decide where anyone else can live. Any and all areas in California in which whites want to exclude others would always remain white; the State can never interfere. African-Americans understood this clearly. They called Proposition 14 the Jim Crow Amendment (Theoharis).

Fear drove both sides of the 1964 contest, just as Douglass’ and Calhoun’s opposing visions of freedom were each rooted in specific and, in some ways, parallel fears. Freedom, for both Douglass and Calhoun, consists of the rights needed to protect against political, social and economic submergence. Douglass’ 1869 speech for universal freedom was based on his great, prescient fear that blacks would be trapped in a permanent lower caste, more insidious and harder to eliminate than slavery. For Calhoun, the threat to freedom is governmental tyranny. Unless resisted, government, by its very nature, seeks to expand its powers to serve government officials and those they represent, by raising taxes to expropriate the fruits of liberty and, even more, by forcing citizens to share their exclusive freedom. Calhoun’s warning about government “passing beyond its proper limits and ... [not being restricted] to its primary end—the protection of the community” (Calhoun 32) became the central message of the campaign for Proposition 14. Reagan and the Realtors fought a crucial, last-ditch battle to limit the power of government before it was too late.

PROPERTY RIGHTS AND FREEDOM IN PROPOSITION 14

The Realtors and Reagan argued that fair housing was a major threat to the sanctity of individual property rights, which they asserted is the basis of all freedom. This argument brought together many types of conservatives in a far broader coalition than Goldwater's (attracting an additional 24% of the electorate). It helped unite libertarian conservatives for whom government encroachment on private property was socialist if not communist, together with social conservatives, including ethnic Democrats, who generally supported government programs and were concerned about threats to traditional social order (McGirr 158). What made the Realtors and Reagan's argument so electrifying was that individual freedom of choice and the community's settled way of life are often opposites, as in civil rights struggles in the South. Here, they could argue that, by threatening the freedom of choice of individual owners, government was thereby attacking the community's way of life. Property rights thus did double duty in the Proposition 14 campaign. Moreover, in stressing private property rights as central to American freedom, proponents drew on the powerful arguments of Calhoun and John Locke.

But was the Proposition 14 campaign primarily about freedom of choice of individual property owners? After all, the Realtors had insisted for decades on coercive racial covenants, which were precisely designed to restrict owners' rights regarding to whom they could sell. What proponents wanted voters to focus on wasn't, in fact, the freedom of the seller moving away from the neighborhood, but the exclusive freedom of those who remained: to live in an area that kept other races out. Moreover, if property rights are the basis of freedom, the Proposition 14 campaign ignored entirely the right to *acquire* property, which Calhoun saw as the very purpose of freedom, and which Locke and American Revolutionaries saw as the key to broad democracy in the first place. Indeed, the very purpose of fair housing is to assure the freedom to acquire property. The key "property right" for those in favor of Proposition 14 was not choosing to whom you could sell your home, but what a suburban home and lot represents, what it entitles you to: your right to be separate from the dense, socially mixed city left behind and your right to be included in the broad category of whites that, with World War II and suburbanization, transcended ethnicity and religion (Self 131). Such broader property rights required the ability to exclude non-whites.

RACIAL PREJUDICE AND SELF-INTEREST

Not surprisingly, opponents of Proposition 14 saw the conservative revival of exclusive freedom as simply an excuse for racial prejudice, albeit cleverly-coded prejudice. Such prejudice was explicit in Calhoun and implicitly fueled the Proposition 14 campaign. But to reduce exclusive freedom purely to racial prejudice fails to explain how compelling exclusive freedom is, nor why and how an appeal to it could dramatically transform American politics. Nor does exclusive freedom need to be based simply on race. As Douglass made clear, sex, religion, language, ethnicity and date of arrival in the country can all be used to distinguish who is worthy and who is not. Only by understanding exclusive freedom as its own fundamental idea can we understand how freedom can oppose human rights. California liberals, who could only respond to proponents of Proposition 14 as racially bigoted, found themselves at a loss.

As Douglass recognized, exclusive freedom requires and utilizes prejudice to justify and sustain itself. An advocate of Proposition 14 blamed those discriminated against: "Negroes are not accepted [in white neighborhoods] because they have not made themselves acceptable" (Theoharis 47). But rather than accept the premise that freedom depends on proving you are worthy, and then endlessly defending or arguing against every alleged flaw, Douglass cut through all claims of unworthiness. The way for people to become worthy was to have freedom. Since the value of freedom, for Calhoun as well as Douglass, is precisely to allow people to improve themselves, the only justification for limiting freedom is to believe there is some group of human beings who can never change (Douglass 227-228). This presumption, this prejudice, that sustains exclusive freedom derives from self-interest, from the advantages that beneficiaries receive from exclusive freedom.

Indeed, Calhoun and the advocates of Proposition 14 celebrated self-interest as the basis for society and all freedom. "Self-preservation is the supreme law, as well with communities as individuals" (Calhoun 7). Calhoun,

writing in the 1840s, felt no more need to be ashamed of self-interest than Donald Trump in his campaign. Any idea of freedom that claims to be based on selfless, abstract principles is false and misleading. Those who say you should limit your self-interest so that freedom can be inclusive are self-serving and would destroy your freedom. Furthermore, prejudice is natural. It's normal to see those like you as being more worthy of, and compatible with, your liberty. To claim otherwise, Calhoun asserted, is false and misleading, just as such claims are derided by conservatives today as 'political correctness.' Moreover, self-interest is national. Democracy can only be secure, Calhoun argued, if some people have fewer rights than others. Political unity is greater if there is a subordinate caste or class. "White racial solidarity—the common bond... generated by feeling superior to blacks—was essential... to... American democracy" (Read 131).

Liberals opposed to Proposition 14 did little to combat the fears of white voters that their self-interest was under attack. In fact, liberal efforts to prevent the Proposition from being put on the ballot only confirmed such fears. By contrast, Douglass took a more direct approach. He boldly asked and answered: "Is there not such a law or principle as self-preservation? Does not every race owe something to itself? ...Is there such a thing as being more generous than wise?" (Douglass 224). It's easy to imagine Reagan asking this. Douglass' answer is as direct as the question. A country that denies rights to some is always setting itself up for civil strife and repression. We have only to look to our past. Moreover, enlisting everyone's talents and energies strengthens "the foundation of the future Republic" (Douglas 228). Douglass thus appeals to national self-interest as the most powerful reason to make freedom inclusive. From the beginning, from Jamestown, we have been a composite nation. This is the reality. The question is whether we make this our strength or our weakness.

COLOR BLINDNESS

Perhaps the most insightful analysis of the entire Proposition 14 campaign is offered by Daniel HoSang, who argued that racial prejudice of individuals was not the real or driving issue in the campaign. What was at stake were the structural benefits of 'political whiteness,' the advantages of exclusive freedom taken for granted by most whites. Indeed Realtors' claims to 'restore our freedom,' 'our rights,' 'our neighborhoods,' 'our state,' never mention race (HoSang 21). They assume that segregated neighborhoods naturally exist, rather than reflect specific efforts by Federal mortgage insurers, Realtors, homeowners associations, etc. over decades. Because of the implicit assumption that whites face no undue obstacles in benefitting from American freedom, minorities are asserting special interests in seeking to lower obstacles. To oppose such special interests, Reagan and the Realtors made clear, means you are color-blind. Being against fair housing didn't mean you were prejudiced, but rather that you believed in freedom. Nor did the vast majority of white California voters see in themselves or their friendly local realtor the image of racial prejudice of Southern bigots and sheriffs on the evening news (HoSang 86). The great political implication of the Proposition 14 campaign was that color-blindness made a far more effective, broad-based case for exclusive freedom than an appeal to prejudice or racial superiority. It offered white voters a powerful way to maintain what James Baldwin, the leading African-American writer of the time, calls their image of innocence—and, for Baldwin, it is their "innocence that constitutes the crime" (Baldwin 174, HoSang 269).

Indeed, by deliberately making the campaign seem color-blind, by not talking explicitly about race but about embattled freedom, proponents inevitably made government and government officials the danger. This provided an attractive and easy target. Compared to overreaching government, ordinary (white) citizens and individual homeowners became the underdogs and victims. The choice was between freedom for the hard-working homeowner or an ever-bigger government. The President of the Realtors called fair housing "a dangerous step toward a police state" (Slater 38). If government succeeds in limiting this one right, he claimed, it will soon go after all your personal freedoms. Proposition 14 is the only way to stop government's relentless encroachment on personal liberty (Slater 38-39). The threat they were most concerned about was the threat to exclusive freedom.


Although we think of Calhoun and his modern supporters as the great defenders of private rights against government, they, in fact, believe in and require strong governmental authority to protect those rights. The argument between conservatives and liberals over whether government is a threat to freedom is really an argument over *which type of freedom* government supports. Beneficiaries of past government protection of their

exclusive freedom feel betrayed, threatened and angry when government seeks to expand such freedom. This was as evident during the Proposition 14 campaign as it is today.

IMPACT OF THE PROPOSITION 14 CAMPAIGN

While Proposition 14 itself was ultimately overturned by the California and U.S. Supreme Courts, its effects were lasting. Martin Luther King Jr. called its passage “a tragic setback for integration throughout the country” (Slater 46) and few analysts doubt it was a key cause of the Watts riots nine months later. At a Congressional hearing after the riots, a resident was asked, if unemployment in Watts was 40%, why don’t people just move. He was incredulous. Haven’t you heard about Proposition 14? (Perlstein 104). The vote results on Proposition 14 led Congress to strip all government enforcement from the eventual Federal Fair Housing Act four years later. This remains the case today, even with four million discrimination complaints each year (Lipsitz 261). In a sign of things to come, white union voters supported Proposition 14 by more than four to one (Casstevens 75). The campaign contributed directly to the rise of Ronald Reagan and his policies in California and nationally, while the argument that civil rights threatens personal freedom became a mainstay of conservative politics.

TIME’s description of Proposition 14 as “the most bitterly fought issue in the nation’s most populous state” overshadowing “such relatively piddling contests as the one between Johnson and Goldwater,” intended to be ironic, proved prophetic (HoSang 53). The implications of Proposition 14 and Calhoun’s and Douglass’ visions of exclusive and inclusive freedom can be seen in today’s voting rights battles, where conservatives and liberals each argue that they are the true defender of American freedom. Calhoun and modern conservatives emphasize that they are the ones truly committed to freedom, while liberals, in their support for fair housing, for instance, sacrifice freedom for equality. A more precise statement may be that liberals believe in the *inextricability* of freedom, while conservatives do not. Conservatives and liberals thus mean two very different things when they lay claim to this almost sacred term in our political history. Proposition 14—and this was its argument’s great and lasting appeal—allowed millions of Americans to see themselves as defending freedom while rejecting what Calhoun called the “great errors” of the Declaration of Independence. Battles over political freedom in America become battles over who freedom is for, and therefore, what it entails.



THE ARGUMENT BETWEEN
CONSERVATIVES AND
LIBERALS OVER WHETHER
GOVERNMENT IS A THREAT
TO FREEDOM IS REALLY AN
ARGUMENT OVER *WHICH TYPE OF*
FREEDOM GOVERNMENT SUPPORTS.

WORKS CONSULTED

Buccola, Nicholas. *The Political Thought of Frederick Douglass*. New York: NYU Press, 2012. Print.

Calhoun, John. *The Essential Calhoun*. Ed. Clyde N. Wilson. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1992. Print.

Casstevens, Thomas. *Politics, Housing and Race Relations: California's Rumsford Act and Proposition 14*. Berkeley: Institute of Governmental Studies, UC Press, 1967.

Douglass, Frederick. *The Essential Douglass: Selected Writings and Speeches*. Ed. Nicholas Buccola. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2016.

Foner, Eric. *The Story of American Freedom*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998. Print.

HoSang, Daniel Martinez. *Racial Propositions: Ballot Initiatives and the Making of Postwar California*. Berkeley: UC Press, 2010. Print.

Kirk, Russell. *The Conservative Mind: from Burke to Eliot. Seventh Revised Edition*. Washington D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2001. Print.

---. "John C. Calhoun Vindicated." *Southern Partisan Magazine*. Vol. III, No. 1, 1983. Web. July 7, 2016.

Lakoff, George. *Whose Freedom: The Battle Over America's Most Important Idea*. New York: Picador, 2006. Print.

Lipsitz, George. *How Racism Takes Place*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2011.

Longley, Kyle and Jeremy D. Mayer, Michael Schaller and John W. Sloan. *Deconstructing Reagan: Conservative Mythology and America's Fortieth President*. Armonk: M.E. Sharpe: 2007. Google Book Search. Web. 5 June 2016.

McGirr, Lisa. *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right*. Princeton: UP, 2001. Print.

Meyer, Stephen Grant. *As Long as They Don't Move Next Door: Segregation and Racial Conflict in American Neighborhoods*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001. Google Book Search. Web. 4 June 2016.

Perlstein, Rick. *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America*. New York: Scribner, 2008.

Read, James H. *Minority Rule versus Consensus: The Political Thought of John C. Calhoun*. Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2009. Print.

Reft, Ryan. "Structured Unrest: The Rumsford Act, Proposition 14, and the Systematic Inequality that Created the Watts Riots." *Tropics of Meta*, historiography for the masses. <https://tropicsofmeta.wordpress.com/2014/09/02/structured-unrest-the-rumford-act-proposition-14-and-the-systematic-inequality-that-created-the-watts-riots/> Web. 4 June 2016.

Self, Robert O. *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland*. Princeton: UP, 2003. Print.

Skelton, George. "Thank you, Donald Sterling, for reminding us how far we've come." *Los Angeles Times*. May 7, 2014. <http://www.latimes.com/local/la-me-cap-sterling-20140508-column.html> Web. 5 June 2016.

Slater, Andrew. *Race, Real Estate and the Forgotten Man: The Rise of Conservatism in California*. B.A. Honors History Thesis. University of California Berkeley, 2008.

Tanenhaus, Sam. "Original Sin: Why the GOP is and will

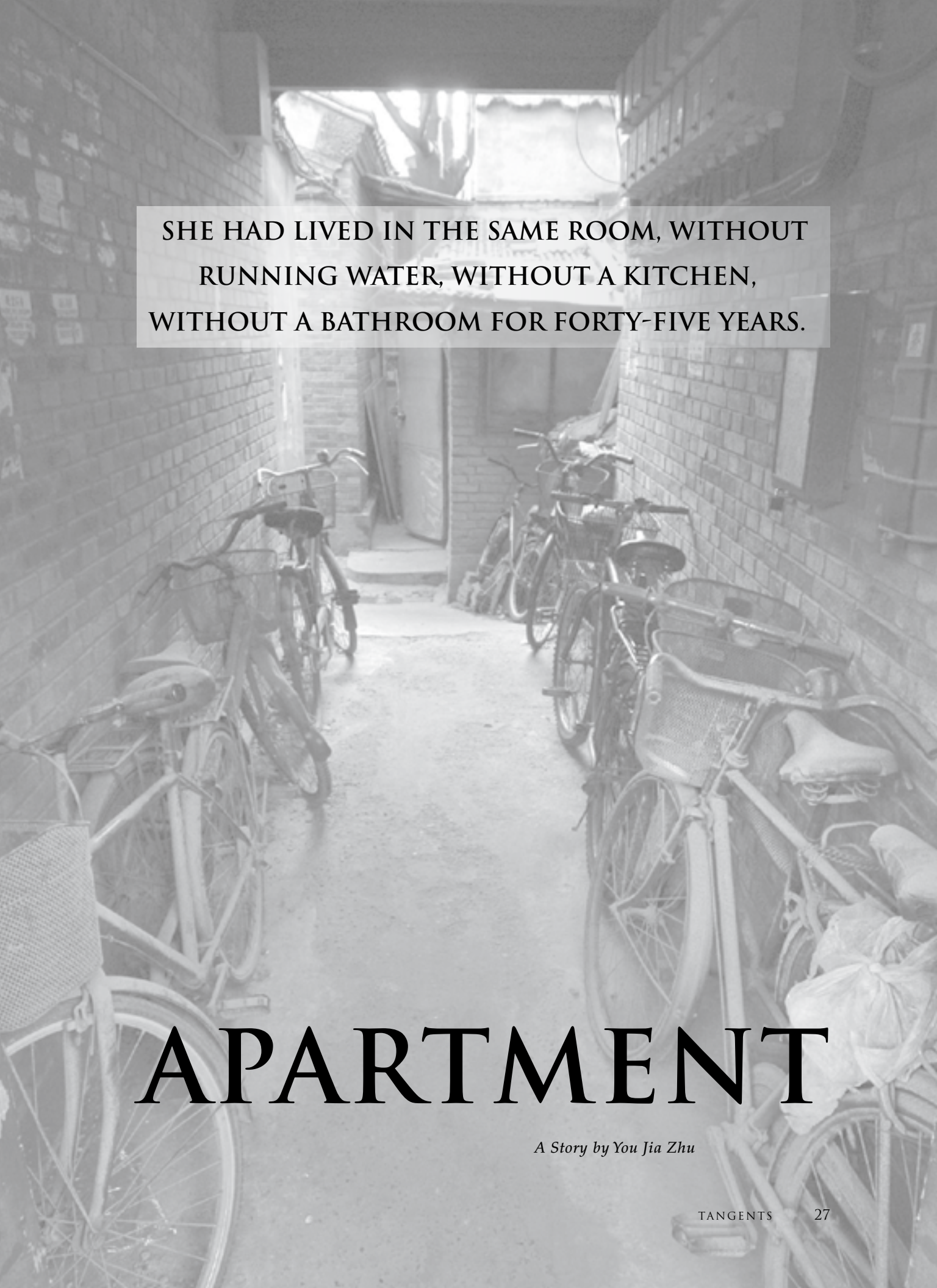
continue to be the party of white people." *The New Republic*. Feb. 9, 2013. Web. 19 May 2016.

Theoharis, Jeanne. "'Alabama on Avalon': Rethinking the Watts Uprising and the Character of Black Protest in Los Angeles" 27-54 in Peniel E. Joseph. *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights – Black Power Era*. New York: Routledge, 2013. Google Book Search. Web. 7 June 2016.

ENDNOTES

ⁱ This right was very much on the minds of Proposition 14 supporters. The President of the volunteer California Republican Assembly made clear that the right to benefit from inequality is the very purpose of freedom itself. "Freedom to be unequal is really our national purpose. People have a right to discriminate in a free society" (Skelton).

ⁱⁱ This connection to Calhoun was not accidental. The impact of Calhoun's ideas on modern conservative thought is something many conservatives are proud of. They admire him as one of America's greatest political statesmen (Calhoun, ix and xv). Minimizing the role of his ideas in justifying and expanding slavery, they focus instead on Calhoun's vision of freedom and limited role of government. This philosophy is color-blind, they argue, and more relevant than ever in resisting government today (Wilson xv). The interconnected ideas of the Proposition 14 campaign—exclusive freedom as the only type of freedom, the right to discriminate as essential to such freedom, the danger from the government seeking to impose equal rights, the need for resistance against such tyranny and the need to protect and restore freedom—are at the heart of Calhoun's vision and help explain why "when the intellectual authors of the modern right created its doctrines...they [borrowed]...explicitly from...the intellectually fierce John C. Calhoun" (Tanenhaus). The Proposition 14 campaign helped turn Calhoun's philosophy into a force in contemporary politics.



SHE HAD LIVED IN THE SAME ROOM, WITHOUT
RUNNING WATER, WITHOUT A KITCHEN,
WITHOUT A BATHROOM FOR FORTY-FIVE YEARS.

APARTMENT

A Story by You Jia Zhu

APARTMENT

by You Jia Zhu

Ever since her son, who now made movies, had moved out, Li An had lived alone in a large room facing west in the east wing of a *si he yuan*, a traditional courtyard dwelling in Beijing. She had lived in the same room, without running water, without a kitchen, without a bathroom for forty-five years. In the afternoons, the intense rays of the setting sun used to peel the colors off her walls, but now she rarely felt the heat of it. Late autumn had just passed. She was bracing for the cold winter.

The courtyard, hidden deep in a maze of winding old *hu tong*s near the Rear Lake behind the Forbidden City, had once belonged to a minor mandarin of the court. It was one of the rare courtyards with front, back, and middle enclosures. Li An's room was in the front enclosure. The middle and back rooms were recently flattened to make way for an office building.

Li An stood in front of her window looking at a door to the pathways that ran along the north wing, waiting for it to open. The noises of the metropolis were safely shielded away by the enclosing gray brick walls. A row of glass jars, all filled with loose change, lined her windowsill; surgical tape labeled each in traditional calligraphy with the names of old neighbors. There was space left for one more jar. Li An remembered the mornings when the courtyard was full of children playing hide-and-seek, the evenings when elders sat fanning themselves and gossiping, telling ghost stories to unnerve the young. This was almost the time of the year to bring in the goldfish.

The rising sun, looking meager and vague behind a veil of fog, resembled a pancake. A lone persimmon tree stood in the center of the courtyard, a pile of junk at its base. Ripening fruits dotted the nearly bare branches, giving the courtyard the color of life. A whisper of wind blew from the northeast; a persimmon fell onto the junk heap, disappearing into legs and arms of old chairs, upturned table tops, broken electrical fans, splintered wooden planks, dirt mixed with split stones and shattered bricks.

The door opened from the north wing. Old Wang sauntered out. Li An quickly stepped outside.

"Have you had breakfast yet?" Li An greeted him.

"Yes, yes. Is your son coming tonight?" Old Wang asked. "I like chatting with him."

"Come over for dinner," Li An said.

"What're you cooking tonight?"

"Dumplings, of course. Where are you off to now?"

"I must go to my daughter's now. My grandchild is almost due."

"I'll wait for you for dinner." Li An watched Old Wang walk slowly out of the courtyard gate before returning to her room.

•••••

The room had hardly changed since the death of her husband. Their bed, pushed against the wall, was stacked with their wedding comforters. Two big cedar trunks tucked neatly beneath the bed were covered with crocheted white lace. An old drafting table with shortened legs occupied the entire length of another wall. Clear glass over the tabletop covered pictures of neighbors and friends, mixed with random notes, postcards, letters, business cards, newspaper clippings, and magazine articles. On the wall above the table was a *Huang Li*, the Chinese daily calendar, displaying Sunday in ferocious, big red characters. Next to it a Gregorian calendar showed a traditional Chinese brush painting of chrysanthemums for the month of September. Each day past was crossed out with a big X. The last row remained uncrossed. A dressing table, salvaged from a parting neighbor, was the only new addition after her son had moved out; it sat where his cot once was.

Opening the bottom drawer of the dresser, Li An paused, then selected an aubergine-colored western-style jacket to put on over her gray sweater. From under layers of neatly folded clothes, her hands found the wooden *zi tan*ⁱ jewelry box. Carefully, she placed it on top of the dresser and examined her face in the mirror, her index finger tracing her eyebrows. She smoothed a few strands of her newly-waved hair behind her ears. Opening the *zi tan* box, she picked out a pair of small golden earrings and threaded them carefully into each of her earlobes, avoiding looking at the black-and-white wedding photo glued to the inside of the box. She closed the box and put it back underneath all the clothes. Finally, she changed into freshly polished leather shoes. The young man who had been on the phone had insisted that she should not be late, and gave her detailed directions. Before leaving her room, Li An took off the golden earrings

and returned them to the *zi tan* box. The apartment buildings, the young man had said, were outside the Sixth Ring Road.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■

Li An sat high up by the window on a crowded bus leaving the city. She watched young men and women in pairs, quietly murmuring to each other.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■

The day her husband did not come home had been a fine spring day. As usual, he had gotten on his bicycle in the morning and waved good-bye to go to work. Their son was barely a year old. It was *Qing Ming*, time for the annual switching of the cedar trunks, when the winter clothes were stored and the spring ones shaken out. Li An had waited for him to come home till the moon was high.

"He had passed *Tian An Men Square* at the wrong time of day by mistake," said the head of the neighborhood association. It was a shame. He was such a fine person, young with a beautiful wife and a newborn, caught up in the spring protest of the Gang of Four.

Li An was stunned, silent at the news.

Old Wang's wife and others from the courtyard took turns staying with her. They looked after her son until it was winter time, until she regained the ability to cry, until everyone had exhausted stories of relatives and friends going to the countryside and not coming back, of years spent in prison not knowing one's best friend was in the next cell, of missed losses one didn't even know about, like the man who came out of prison to learn he had shrunk five centimeters. "Life is such," Old Wang then comforted her. "Don't kill it with your pain." But Li An felt irritated and angry at her infant son's cry, his neediness for her bosoms, and his face with his father's eyes, nose, and that high forehead. She began marking an X on the calendar for each day that passed.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■

She gazed out the bus window. An old man in a drab winter jacket and skewed baseball hat pulled a three-wheeled cart piled high with cardboard boxes, grinning for no apparent reason. A kiosk girl stood re-arranging magazines and newspapers. A young man on a moped zipped alongside the bus, cigarette dangling from his mouth. He shouted into his cell phone while spitting into the street. A colorful spandex-clad racing bicyclist with a red helmet came close to the moped, stopping a hairspace behind its rear wheel. The light changed. With a scream, the moped sped up, leaving a thin tube of black smoke

in the air. Li An watched the bicyclist raising himself above the seat, pedaling rapidly, quickly overtaking the moped. His red helmet threaded through traffic like the head of a colorful snake. The bus headed north towards the mountain, moving farther away from the city center. The fog thinned.

As the slim, clean-shaven city youths left the bus, a crowd of sturdy country folks boarded, carrying on their backs dull blue cloth bags bursting at seams. They shouted at each other as they stacked their bags together, and laughed when the bus jerked forward and one man fell on top of the bags. A laugh escaped from Li An, but she quickly turned away, ashamed of her gleefulness. At the next stop, a group of young women in tight jeans came on, followed by a few young men with apple-red cheeks, bright eyes, and thick black hair. There was hardly any standing room left on the bus. A young woman situated herself next to Li An, hooking her hand on the handlebar overhead. Her elbow swung near Li An's head. As the bus swirled, that elbow threatened to smash into Li An's forehead.

The road had widened. There were fewer pedestrians, bicyclists, and vehicles, but more trucks. The sun climbed up in the sky, slanting into Li An's eyes. By the roadside, large patches of empty land alternated with vacant, newly constructed apartment blocks, waiting for someone like herself to come and buy. She remembered the orchards and vegetable fields that once extended to the mountain's base. Her family, unlike her husband's, was an old Beijing family. Her grandmother, who had bound feet, told stories of ghosts, and lamented the fall of the city wall and the burial of the imperial moat.

The bus followed the Grand Canal north, diverting occasionally to circle small towns at its edge. Finally it stopped and emptied all its passengers onto a street without sidewalks. She remembered the telephone instructions: take the bus to the end of the line, go north for 500 meters, then walk eastward for another 200 meters to the new buildings with the blue glass façades.

■ ■ ■ ■ ■

A young man in a bright red jacket stood at the to-be-constructed sidewalk. "Ms. Li, welcome!" he said. "Please come with me." When he raised one hand to wave at her, his jacket fluffed like a flapping red flag in the wind. His other hand held a phone into which he shouted, "Ms. Li has just arrived."

Another young man rushed out of the blue glass building waving a yellow hardhat, which he handed

to Li An. Li An stared at the hat, puzzled, until she saw him gesturing, "Put it on please." He led her through a lobby, also under construction, into a mirrored elevator that ascended slowly all the way to the top floor. Three more smiling young men in red suits greeted her in unison when the elevator door opened, "Ms. Li, welcome!"

"Please sign in, Ms. Li," one said, thrusting a clipboard and pen into Li An's hand and helping her take off the hardhat.

"Did you have a good trip?" another asked.

He led her down the carpeted hallway and opened the door to an apartment. A rush of deafening noise poured out to greet them. The room gleamed in blinding brightness. It was filled with small round tables, each manned by a young man in a red suit. She was led to one.

"Ms. Li, how are you today?" Her young man was very tall and thin, like a sapling. His face was full of pimples, one so prominent it sat right on the tip of his nose. Li An couldn't take her eyes off it. She thought it might explode anytime.

"I'm good ..."

"Sit down, sit down. Thank you for taking the time to come out here, Auntie Li. A yi, do you take vacations?"

"Vacations ..."

"Do you dream of the American West?"

"Where ..."

Her young man shouted above the clamor inside the apartment, "The stress of modern life – the noise, the overcrowding, the traffic, the pollution, the fast pace ..."

bonfire at night, to"

"Inner Mongolia? I only want to buy an apartment big enough for my son, so we can live together, closer to each ..."

"Please, *a yi*, let me finish ..." the young man leaned forward. Li An looked away, ashamed at her interruption. The young man raised his arm again, and quickly found his way back to his perfectly pitched rhythm.

"... our big boss will give you, Ms. Li, a free ticket to fly to Inner Mongolia to spend a weekend there. For free!" His hand now rested on his thigh.

Li An's eyes wandered to a young woman at the next table. She wore a white scarf covering her head and had a heart-shaped mouth. Li An felt thirsty.

"I'm so sorry, but can I have some water?" she requested.

Her young man sighed, waved his arm high into the air as if to call an army into action. Another young woman in a blue jacket rushed over.

"Xiao Liu, get auntie some water." He turned back to Li An and began once more without a pause, "Ms. Li, would you be interested in purchasing a house?"

"Where is the house?"

"Let me show you a map." He raised his arm once more, waved, called out, "Xiao Liu, get me the map!"

The same woman rushed back to them with a binder, opening it to reveal a well-thumbed map.

"Water," Li An said.

"Xiao Liu, quickly! Where is the water? A yi is thirsty." Her young man looked as if he also needed a drink of water. "If you make a small deposit today, Ms. Li, we can guarantee a discount of twenty percent

"THE STRESS OF MODERN LIFE – THE NOISE, THE OVERCROWDING, THE TRAFFIC, THE POLLUTION, THE FAST PACE ..."

With each phrase, he raised his right arm high above his head, before letting gravity pull it down to his thigh, making a soft slapping sound that was lost to all except Li An.

"... vacation is great. Take family and friends to a remote part of Inner Mongolia to ride horses on the vast empty grassland, to experience nature, to BBQ by

off the advertised price."

"But I don't want a house in Inner Mongolia. I just want an inexpensive apartment in Beijing," Li An said. "I should leave."

"Please, *a yi*, please let me finish," her young man begged, raising his arm above his head again as if to draw an exclamation mark.

Li An looked away toward the nearby young woman with the scarf and focused her eyes on her heart-shaped mouth. "They are all so young," she thought, and she desperately needed a drink of water. She inhaled deeply and fell back into her chair as it tipped under her weight: light and life appeared to her as on layers of a wedding cake, as if in a movie. She saw the Double Happiness signs on the windowpanes, and her husband with a big red paper flower on his left breast against the deep blue worker's jacket. She saw parades of cheering crowds marching through their hu tong in front of their courtyard gate. She saw broken glass, fallen tree branches, and smashed bricks scattered in the courtyard. She saw the mouth of a bawling little boy, heard the piercing screams that broke the eardrums, a face of tiny red dots, and a pale hand fanning above her face. A heart-shaped mouth, and a soft voice called out, "A yi, a yi, wake up, wake up." She felt hot and thirsty.

"Oh I'm all right, I'm all right." Li An tried to sit up. The young woman with the scarf held her gently and stroked her arm as Li An drank greedily from a cup of water handed to her by the pimply young man. Quietly he sat with both hands resting on his thighs, and watched Li An until she got up and left alone.

♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦

Outside the building, Li An stood a little lost, by the wide boulevard without sidewalks, waiting for a break in the ceaseless parade of vehicles so she could cross the street. She leaned on a newly planted sapling, watching a farmer spreading grain on the boulevard to dry, as a swarm of bicyclists passed by. Seizing a break in the traffic, she ran across, and headed toward the bus stop. The young woman with heart-shaped mouth was there, too. Li An bowed slightly, feeling embarrassed. Together, they waited for the bus in silence. The spandex-clad bicyclist again flew by. The air stirred, then swirled. Both women looked and smiled at each other.

"A yi, let me accompany you home," the young woman with the heart-shaped mouth said shyly.

"It's cold," Li An said, stamping her feet on the ground, stirring up dust that settled on her once-polished shoes. She fingered a movie ticket in her pocket and remembered the last time she had worn the jacket, when she had gone to watch a movie made by her son.

"It will be too much trouble for you."

"Oh, no, not at all. I live near *Niu Jie*. Where do

you live, a yi?"

"I live near *Gu Lou*."

"We are heading in the same direction."

During the long bus ride back to the city center, both women fell silent. The movie her son had made played in Li An's mind. There was so much violence, blood, and discontent. She doubted his father would have liked it.

♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦

Arriving at her bus stop, Li An asked the young woman, "Please come and stay for dinner. I'm making fennel and pork dumplings tonight."

"A yi, that's so nice of you, but I'm a *Hui Min*." The young woman smiled.

"You are a Muslim. I can make other fillings, too. Please come."

"I should go home. My parents and others are waiting for me." The young woman left her name and phone number with Li An and promised she would come to visit her soon.

♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦

Walking home from the bus stop, Li An was stopped by the American woman who had bought the adjacent courtyard. She waved to Li An, "Auntie, a yi, please visit. Come inside." Li An laughed at the American's stilted Mandarin, and felt curiously pulled by this foreigner's desire for companionship. Stepping into the American's courtyard, she was transported. But the colors were all wrong: the eaves were painted steel blue, the columns brown, and the doors light beige. She was impressed with the brick-paved garden, the shrubs and trees, and the brightly painted red corridor ceilings along the east and west wings with stenciled scenes from *A Dream of Red Mansions*. There was no clutter and no junk, nothing astray. The doors of the north main receiving hall were open. Li An peeked inside at the stately Ming and Qing antiques, the solemn wall with the ancestry scroll painting, and felt she was in a museum: distant, untouchable, pristine, reticent. She turned quickly and said she needed to go home to cook.

♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦

Back in her room, Li An waited for Old Wang as she sat on a stool, hunched over the little round chopping board, mixing the flour, chopping the meat. Outside the courtyard came the cry of the junk collector accompanied by the faint, crisp jingle of his bell. Li An stopped to put on a pair of tattered gloves and walked to the foot of the persimmon tree, studying the junk pile at its base. Carefully she tugged on a protruding leg of a chair. It wouldn't

budge. Li An stood back. The cry of the junk collector was approaching. She repositioned her legs in a *tai chi* pose and, with a sudden pull, a sun-faded chair seat emerged from the debris. Just then, another pair of hands slid in beside hers, grabbing the other leg. Shoulder to shoulder they pulled—one, two, three—and a two-legged chair surfaced. Li An turned to thank her helper, a well-dressed but disheveled young man with a big grin, who smelled of alcohol. Together they pulled out a tabletop, an old hair dryer, a broken mirror, small planks of wood, another broken chair, a bottomless pot. They carried all into the *hu tong*, and piled them onto the junk cart.

“Have you eaten?” Li An turned to him, smiling. “Stay for some dumplings. I make the best in this entire *hu tong*.”

“Next time, *a yi*, next time.” The man turned to assist others who had come out of their homes with pieces of broken furniture and appliances. The junk collector pressed a fistful of loose change into Li An’s hand. Laughter and chatter filled the usually quiet alley, the *hu tong* became congested, an obstacle course for the spandex-clad racing bicyclist who entered from the far end, coming toward them. Li An held her breath as she watched the cyclist maneuvering around people, junk, and cart, disappearing around a bend in the *hu tong*. She waved as the junk collector left with that well-dressed but disheveled young man trailing behind. She then went back to her room and apportioned the loose change into the jars that lined her windowsill.

That evening, Li An’s son did not come for dinner. Old Wang and Li An finished all the dumplings.

“We two are the only ones left from this courtyard,” Old Wang said. “Not many old houses are left on the street. Most are gone.”

“Are you thinking ... wondering if your grandchild is a boy or girl?”

“I hope it’s a granddaughter.”

“Yes. A daughter is much better to have, closer to home. It’s been five years since your wife passed away.”

“I’m old now, full of fears, especially this fear of losses. No beginnings without endings. What should I embrace, fear or loss? What do you think? *Xiao Li*?”

Li An thought about her husband, her son. She quietly listened as Old Wang continued. “Since my wife died, I have not lived. Thinking of my future grandchild, I decided to try facing losses for a change.” With that, Old Wang went on to talk more about his daughter and son-in-law. Her *lao wai*ⁱⁱ

husband was from France.

Old Wang said he would begin taking French lessons.

That night a rare autumn rain fell in Beijing. Li An lay awake, listening to the pitter-patter of the raindrops, and thought about her own fears and losses. She suddenly remembered she would be sixty this year, Old Wang was almost seventy, her husband—who had died thirty-three years earlier—would have been sixty-five, and she had forgotten to cross the day that had just passed with an X.

In the morning, she got up early and boiled water for tea. Standing at her windowsill, she watched the door of the north wing, waiting for it to open. Suddenly she turned and took out the little *zi tan* jewelry box from the dresser. She studied the wedding photo glued inside and picked out the golden earrings, threading each stud into her earlobes. She would tell Old Wang she, too, could learn French.

ENDNOTES

ⁱ prized tropical hardwood

ⁱⁱ foreigner

CONTRIBUTORS

ANDY GROSE (*Iggy*) is a 2001 graduate of the MLA program and a retired emergency medicine physician. *Iggy* is one in a series of short stories drawing on his youth in rural Magna, Utah. Several of his short stories and poems have appeared in *Tangents* over the past sixteen years. He can be reached at: andrew.john.grose@gmail.com.

MARTHA MCDANIEL (*Thirteen Ways to Be ...*) is a third-year MLA student at Stanford University and holds a MFA in pictorial arts from San Jose State University. She is a practicing artist, a volunteer art teacher for middle-school children, and a lifelong learner. Her art springs from her passions for nature, family, and motherhood. She taps imagery from visual, sensual, and life memories that are interwoven with the complex fabric of history, place, and dreams. Her creative process stems from primal and historical impulses that blend with conscious decisions. In Martha's career journey, she co-founded and managed a company specializing in cancer pharmaceutical business consulting. She co-founded another that designed, produced, and marketed a wearable travel-bag. She lives in San Carlos, California with her husband and daughter and enjoys sharing this precious earth with them and a much-appreciated network of friends.

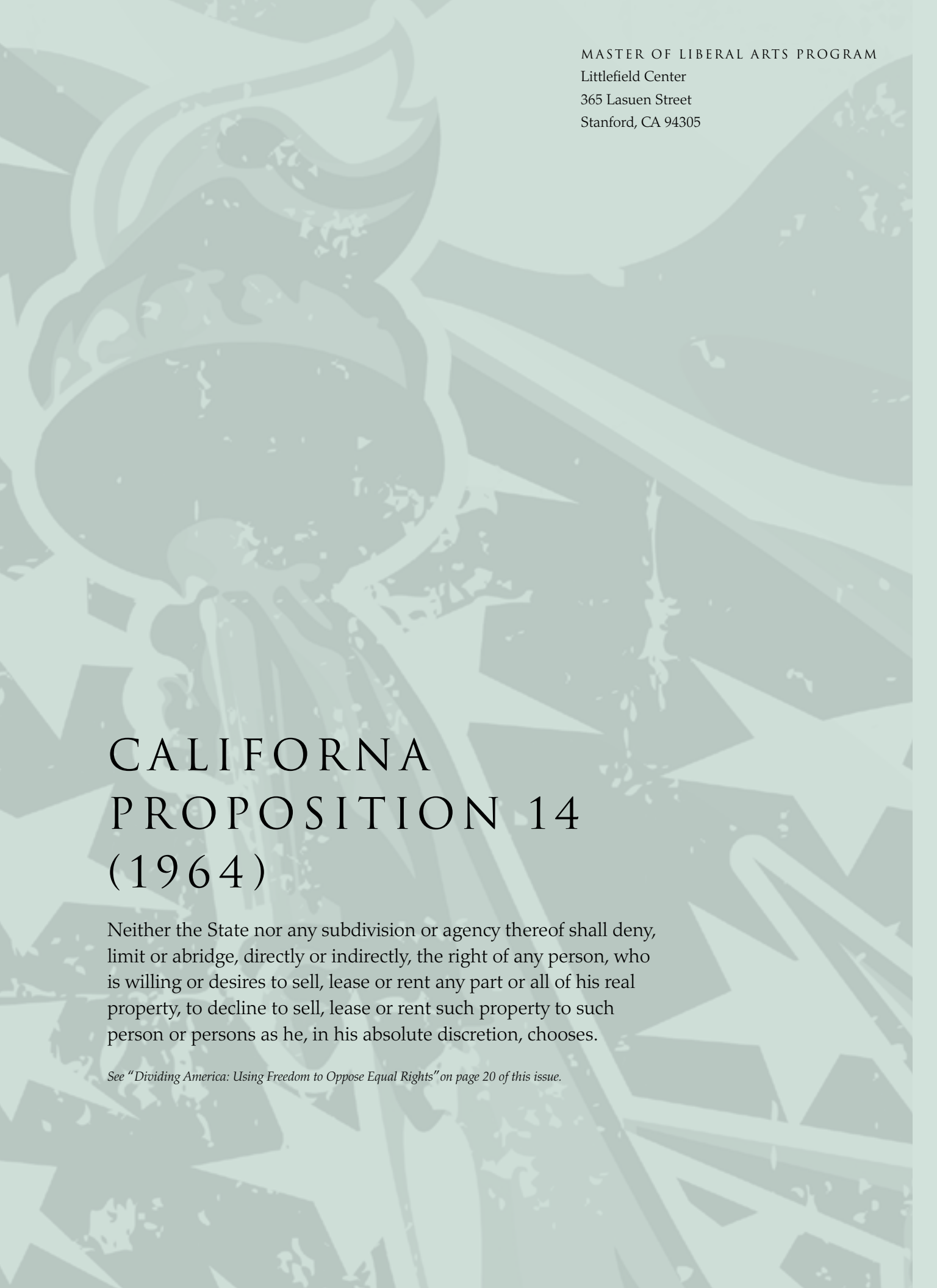
KATHERINE ORLOFF (Poems: *But a pulse we are, You are the quiet*) graduated from Stanford's MLA program in 2014. A former professional dancer, Katherine currently directs the dance program for the Contra Costa School of Performing Arts. Having always found that her artistic and academic interests greatly complement one another, she continues to write, dance, teach, and research subjects that help her better understand the human experience.

PRABHU PALANI (Poem: *Rise Like a Phoenix*) has had a career in investment management spanning over 20 years, including senior portfolio management positions at Franklin Templeton Investments and Mellon Capital Management. In 2004, he returned to school and his first love of liberal arts and graduated with an MLA from Stanford in 2009. The pain of separation from Stanford was too great and he now lives vicariously through his son who is a freshman there, often shuttling between his hometown of

Fremont and Palo Alto. This poem was written as an anthem for all victims.

GENE SLATER (*Dividing America*) is a current MLA student. He received his BA in Government from Columbia, Masters in City Planning from MIT, fellowship to the London School of Economics and mid-career Loeb Fellowship from Harvard. He helped found, and chairs, CSG Advisors, the leading financial advisor in the country for financing affordable housing and major public-private projects.

YOU JIA ZHU (Story: *Apartment*) is a second year student of the MLA program. She was born and raised in Beijing, China, and now lives and works in San Francisco.



MASTER OF LIBERAL ARTS PROGRAM
Littlefield Center
365 Lasuen Street
Stanford, CA 94305

CALIFORNIA PROPOSITION 14 (1964)

Neither the State nor any subdivision or agency thereof shall deny, limit or abridge, directly or indirectly, the right of any person, who is willing or desires to sell, lease or rent any part or all of his real property, to decline to sell, lease or rent such property to such person or persons as he, in his absolute discretion, chooses.

See "Dividing America: Using Freedom to Oppose Equal Rights" on page 20 of this issue.