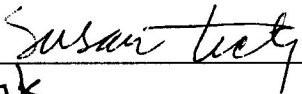
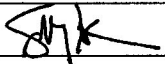
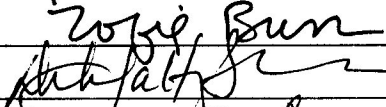
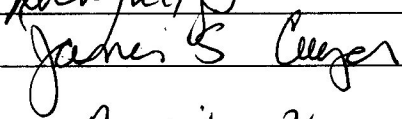


LOW

by

Sean Pears
A Thesis
Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty
of
George Mason University
in Partial Fulfillment of
The Requirements for the Degree
of
Master of Fine Arts
Creative Writing

Committee:

	Director
	
	Department Chairperson
	Dean, College of Humanities and Social Sciences
Date: <u>April 21, 2015</u>	Spring Semester 2015 George Mason University Fairfax, VA

LOW

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of
Fine Arts at George Mason University

by

Sean Pears
Bachelor of Arts
University of Chicago, 2010

Director: Susan Tichy, Professor
Department of Creative Writing

Spring Semester 2015
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA



This work is licensed under a [creative commons attribution-noncommercial 3.0 unported license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/).

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	vi
North & South.....	7
NORTH & SOUTH.....	7
LOW	8
AFRICAN AMERICAN	8
GENTRIFICATION.....	10
LOW	11
HARLEM IS DYING.....	11
HANDCRAFT	13
THE LAP OF	15
SKELETON GORGE	18
MALAWIAN TABLEAUX	20
AT THE FISHHOUSE.....	20
LOW	22
PRESIDENT FOR LIFE	22
WITWATERSRAND.....	24
WITCHDOCTOR	27
LOW	29
WITCHDOCTOR	29
WITCHDOCTOR	31
LOW	32
THIRD WORLD ELVIS.....	32
EXCERPT FROM A LETTER FROM JP TO TD, 1981	35
LOW	35
SKELETON GORGE	36
FUNDAMENTALS OF FANAGALO	39
DI(SA)SSEMBLE.....	43
LOW	43
EGYPT ROAD.....	43

LOW	46
THE MISSION; OR, SCENES IN AFRICA	46
LOW	48
THE MISSION; OR, SCENES IN AFRICA	49
ONE THING LEADS TO ANOTHER.....	50
THE MISSIONARY	53
LOW	55
SCRAMBLE FOR AFRICA.....	55
AN EXCERPT FROM THE LIFE STORY OF JACOB DIEHL.....	57
SKELETON GORGE	58
KOLMANSKOP	61
LOW	63
References.....	64

ABSTRACT

LOW

Sean Pears, MFA

George Mason University, 2015

Thesis Director: Dr. Susan Tichy

This thesis is an exploration of my parents' decision to emigrate from apartheid South Africa in the early 1980s for political/ideological reasons, and within that context, the role and function of "apologist" stories. To that point, the thesis meditates on the limits of and what it means to tell "true" stories, in ways that will hopefully reflect on the guiding principles of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). These themes are developed across short essays, poems that privilege sound and linguistic play, and longer poems that work within both abstract representational and epic narrative modes. I plan to develop this thesis into a longer manuscript that more explicitly draws connections to the TRC, continues my parents' narrative into the present day, and also reflects more directly on the racial politics of contemporary America after the death of Michael Brown.

NORTH & SOUTH

In the kitchen we dream together
how the meek shall inherit the earth—
or several acres of mine.

Elizabeth Bishop

NORTH & SOUTH

The address where I write now – 1204 East Capitol Street NE – faces south, into Lincoln Park. It sits on the dividing line; the address has “north” in it, but if I look out my window, I’m seeing the city’s Southeast. Coming down here from Boston was my first truly southern move. And everyday I venture further south to campus, to the “real” south, to Virginia, even though I know it’s just sweet suburban Fairfax, an extension of this strange and uninflected metropole. When Telemachus—who was researching family history long before it was in style—goes to Pylos, Nestor is amazed at how much the boy’s voice sounds like his father’s. Who would’ve thought a young man could sound so much like Odysseus? The summer after I graduated from college I worked a demoralizing and often hugely clarifying job as a door-to-door canvasser for a sham environmental lobby. The primary clarification was my own insignificance. I pounded pavement and knocked on doors all up and down that coast: Gloucester (where we cashed in); Providence (where we didn’t); Dedham; Sharon; Newton; Ashland; Bedford. Out we

went daily, to the white peripheries of Boston. Most people weren't home. After that, most weren't interested. Otherwise, generally, the rare person who was going to give money gave it up pretty quickly. But every now and then someone would just want to talk (and then they would give or they wouldn't, there was no way for you to tell). I remember with one woman—I remember this as being somewhere south, maybe Providence—I somehow got to talking about accents, about inflection. Where does it sound like I'm from? I asked her. Her response ruined me. She told me I sounded like I had gone to college. What I didn't tell her then is that this has always been one of my biggest fears - the fear of uninflected speech. As a first generation American, you'll never find a Nestor to recognize your father's voice. I don't think she wound up giving me any money. Very recently, out of the blue, someone told me that I sound like I'm from the south, to which I responded, totally chuffed, No way.

LOW

Wind whittle me to location's end. When things "go south."
Miles of endless sea foam skidding past sharks set on their sides.
Small resort town north of Shark Island. Gulls: Shaughan. Schoon. Shorn.

AFRICAN AMERICAN

I've referred to my street as the "bleeding edge," though recently I tried to puzzle out the metaphor and realized that I'm not sure I know which side is bleeding, or which side is being cut, which has the body, etc. My teaching schedule usually leaves me a day or two working from home, and when there isn't a talk at the Library of Congress or a meeting somewhere in the city, I like to break up my day with a long walk. Usually I walk south

and west along East Capitol Street, where there is a little used bookstore I like to poke around in, either avoiding the guy at the desk who once sold me a Chuck Klosterman book slightly against my will, or attempting furtive talk with the girl at the desk about to leave for a Fulbright in melittology. Over East Capitol, the twisting arms of white elms form a canopy “like a cathedral nave.” Solid rows of three and four story townhouses, mostly built around the turn of the century, are set back from the sidewalk; between the black wrought iron fences and the front doors retired Congressmen putz around in their gardens, adjusting geometric stone pavers amid gurgling fountains and, in at least one case, bizarre plastic animals poking out from behind the ferns. The spectacle is hard to resist. But some days I walk east. Out towards the lonely stadium and the mighty Anacostia, the city’s “forgotten river,” also the neighborhood, the intersection of Good Hope Road and Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue, where Frederick Douglas lived out his retirement, though I never make it that far or even close. East of 14th street the architecture mutates. The rowhouses are lower, mostly two stories, with smaller windows and long strips of vinyl siding. On some blocks there are larger brick apartment buildings in the rectilinear and slightly fortress-like style I associate with the G.I. Bill. And these are the blocks on which I’m noticed. On this day when I walk out I’m carrying Teju Cole, a fellow perambulator. In the heavy rain as he is walking across Central Park Cole’s protagonist imagines that he is seeing New York City as he would have seen it in the 1920s, “a phenomenon I had noticed before only with snowstorms, when a blizzard erased the most obvious signs of the times, leaving one unable to guess which century it was.” A whiteout, they sometimes call it. Cole remains in love with history. In this fair

city in the 1920s, 50,000 Ku Klux Klan members marched down the National Mall. To get out of the rain, the protagonist slips into a taxi driven by a man from Barbuda. He is annoyed by the man's familiar tone, the way that he tries to identify with him as a fellow "African," calling him his "brother." At a party up in NW I meet a young man from Liberia. The First Liberian Civil War started when he was two. It broke out while his mom was visiting his dad, who was working at the time in D.C. They were stuck in the States, not knowing if they would ever see their children again. So he spent the first years of his life separated from his parents, living in refugee camps, eventually making his way to Guinea, and then across the Atlantic to the U.S. But he laughs about it. Now it's just a story I tell. He tells me about the clinical study he's doing at Howard. His ambition is to get a medical degree and take his skills back to Liberia. I'm not sure about it but then I decide to, and I tell him my parents' story. Just the short version: they left South Africa, here they are. But as soon as I do I wish I hadn't. We high-five. I laugh uncomfortably. You're an African American, he says to me. Don't forget that, you're an African American.

GENTRIFICATION

On the radio—I'll just say it, on NPR—I listen to a segment on The G Word, the smug humor of the segment's title already nagging at me. A woman is talking about opening a theater on H Street in the 90s and how when it first opened people kept calling her an "evil white woman." But she resolves the story nicely. Because she tells us—proudly—that she probably did have something to do with gentrification in the area because she

was bringing “bodies to a place where no bodies had been in a long time.” I could feel my chest jump in that small anxious feeling like a panic. That summer I visit my friend in Bed-Stuy and he plays me Bobby Shmurda, the song you can hear playing on every block in his neighborhood. The kids at his elementary school love doing the Shmoney dance. “Mitch caught a body bought a week ago,” Shmurda sings. That December the entertainer is arrested by NYPD for conspiracy, reckless endangerment, and gun possession. We’ve all heard this one. “A cavalier disregard for human life,” the prosecutor proclaims.

LOW

after Wolfgang Voight

Small moving into looking. Henry Selwyn’s garden. The statistics of rage, a mini-series. Remixing the Romantics with a 4/4 backbeat. The weird creaturely shit I do when I’m alone.

Though it was unfair of me, I told the writer I felt that we had no authority in the face of course of surrounding urban superstructures.

Here and there the strings emerge but with no melody, a smear of melody material, stretched or smudged, allowed to be absent of possession.

HARLEM IS DYING

As I imagine is true for many, my first foray into real estate was naïve and a bit embarrassing. We hear about an estate sale just a few blocks north (a perfect location, close to Union Station, closer to the burgeoning H Street, burgeoning as long as you discount the closure of the HR-57 Center for the Preservation of Jazz and Blues...where were all the bodies for that?). We’re dreaming of the investment that will carry us into

maturity: a fixer-upper that's still live-able, a weekend project for the next 10 years that one day we flip and make a mint. It doesn't take long for the cold reality of real estate to set in. A gruffly apathetic real estate agent sitting on a lawn chair on the porch keeps repeating "as is" to people's questions, shaking her head cryptically (we find out later she had her own bid on the house). The house is in horrible condition: air heavy with must and swamp; windowsills rotted and falling away; living room walls covered—shockingly—in a plastic imitation brick paneling, something I've never seen before and have to run my fingers across to believe. I keep trying and failing to imagine someone actually living in the home, leading me down the morbid path of those final years, that letting go (what kind of an "estate" will I have when that day comes?). In spite of its sepulchral aura, buyers stream in endlessly behind us, at least 15 different groups in the short time we spend in the house. I can't resist thinking that we're scavengers, insects on a dead thing. At least in D.C., the way that "gentrification" seems to work is that there is a long list of young white couples waiting for an old black woman or an old black man to die. It's hard not to think of it when I walk around and see women sitting out in the evenings, resting their canes against their plastic porch furniture, or teetering down the steps to grab the paper. I try to say Hi to them but I think they see what's in my eyes, or what's on my face. The story I never hear told is of all the grandchildren somewhere cashing out. That little townhouse sold for over \$500,000. On the phone my friend tells me how mad he got when a friend had remarked, "Harlem is dying," that wistful nostalgia of course sounding like gross pretention in the mouth of a wealthy Jewish kid from Newton, MA who'd moved to New York straight from Wesleyan. Harlem is dying.

HANDCRAFT

L. brings back from Tanzania a set of small, round coasters that fit into a cylindrical caddy, all carved out of stone. We joke that you can tell it's from Africa because only Africans have time to hand carve something out of stone. Though it's not really a joke. Subtle variations in the carving mean the coasters have to slide into the caddy in a certain order. Otherwise they don't fit. On a bright October day my parents come to town and we drive out to the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum, from which I'm expecting an exhibit on the neighborhood, or D.C. history, but instead: South Africa. Ubuhle beadwork from KwaZulu-Natal, on the eastern coast, where we visited my uncle back in 2009. The Ubuhle tradition began in the late 1990s in a rural community as an attempt at financial independence by women whose husbands worked on the surrounding sugar plantations. The artists stretch black cloth as though it was canvas, into which they sew colored glass beads. The differing lusters and colors allow deft play with layering and perspective; some of the abstract work by Ntombephi Ntobela blossoms with vanishing points in a way I'd previously only associated with abstract expressionists like Roberto Matta. Your eyes move deep into these pieces. Ntobela's sister Bongiswa uses the same abstract technique, but then punctuates her landscape with a rectangle of brightly colored bands: a tacky button on a thousand dollar suit. Before she died of HIV/AIDS in 2009, Bongiswa had been a sangoma, a traditional healer. After the Ubuhle exhibit, we poke into a house just up the street covered with plastic banners advertising "African Art." It turns out they are closing down, this is their last weekend, everything must go: the Zimbabwean bronze

throne has been marked down to only \$8,000. The house is painted bright yellows, greens, and reds. A mural of the owner's face adorns the wall of the main room. But the once-vibrant space is now scant and disorganized, clearly in the process of being dismantled. In the backyard there are crates overflowing with books, hangers, handbags, Richard Pryor VHS tapes. Further down the lawn an outdoor stage built of painted plywood looks rain-washed and vacant in the sun. The incredibly ebullient proprietor tells us that the empty lots next door have been bought by the city for the construction of a charter school, that that is why they're shutting down. I can't remember exactly what he says about it but I get the impression that he has mixed feelings about the charter, is maybe even politely hiding stronger feelings. Though it's early afternoon, he starts opening bottles of wine, effusively. A couple walks into the store behind us. I noticed them before at the Ubuhle exhibit: a white man with a grey beard and ponytail and American-flag print leather jacket and a young woman with very dark skin. In the gallery, I'd noted their difference in age: he looked to be in his sixties; she could have been my age. He strolled through the gallery with familiarity, chatting with guards and docents. Then L. and I run into her upstairs and the room becomes small. As the afternoon sun streams through the single window of the now mostly empty room, the house-turned-art-store seems suddenly much more house than art store. I say hello but she is very shy, and slinks out and down the stairs. On the lower level, the pony-tailed man is talking to the proprietor. My dad is waiting patiently to purchase some funky plates. The room seems tense. I'm afraid of what I'm inventing. I want to leave. When I get home I notice that someone has stacked the coasters incorrectly, and I have to kind of wrench them out.

THE LAP OF

No one likes being called sheltered.
The most human thing we can say
Is, you are going to be okay. It meant
Something, she said. At least
In that moment, she said, it meant something.
A shelter is always a surprise

When you come to it
In the forest. I could've sworn
I'd passed this way before
But there it was: horrifying,
A random array, or no,
A pattern, a kind of carnation

Of weathered wood, warped
Poles, ecclesiastical grasses
Resting sadly at its base.
What makes a built thing so
Obviously built? At the time,
I thought of clambering up

The jangly structure, but
Looking back, I should've
Gotten under, the idea of
Its weight collapsing onto me.
In every fairy tale I know
She rolls the company

Maserati and walks away.
Steel cage. She takes the opportunity
To catch up with 50 Cent
At the New York City Ballet.
The event is pre-paid and absolutely
Unthinkable. The wolf in wolf's

Clothing balances a tumbler
Full of ice. I have no skin
In the game, no shining armor,
Just a sense of something
Hiding. But I know you need

The grit to grind the glass.

The get rich or die trying.
On stage, the dancer rises
And falls and then
The muscles tense
In one moment. I knew
A guy who thought the whole

World could be whelmed
In such a thrust, bracing,
Bracing, the leg extending,
The fist closing. But I can't shake
The feeling that in fact
the dancer's held, even coddled

In her movement downwards, downwards
To the strange springy-ness
Of the stage. But who am I
To say, to talk? This is all
Meant for my friend
As an apology. The forest's architecture

Is premised on sunlight
Being lost, being stolen.
To call it shelter
Is to get it backwards.
We railed all day
Against the sun, until the night

Swiftly took it away so we fell
Asleep under the stain-smeared covers
Of darkness. What if that night
A demon stole after you
Into your loneliest
Loneliness and said, This life,

As you have lived it, every pain
And every thought and sigh,
You will have to live once
More and innumerable times more
With nothing new, except
This next time it will be

Rough. Would you rejoice?
For the past few days, it's been raining
And there's this way when it rains
In the city that everything
Disappears. Streetlamps fall
Orangely onto the leaves and nothing's

Really dark or dry. I'm out
To buy a bottle of very expensive
Milk for all of us, which I'll decant
Into a crystal chalice. My dear,
I am that demon.
Around me, there are homes

That look like the homes
In the middle of the model train
Set we used to visit at the mall,
Their wrought iron steps
Spilling forth from their front
Doors like cages. We lived at the end

Of a dead end so winters
The plows would make
A massive pile where we'd build
Tunnels. That Mom
Told me that a child was crushed
To death when a pile

Collapsed, that he suffocated
In the snow and no one
Could hear his cries and so
That I should stay away
From those snow piles made them
Almost unbearably attractive.

All wrapped up in hat
And gloves and sweat, the tunnel
Just the size of my body, almost
Crushing, inside, no one
Could hear me if I cried,
No one knew I was there.

SKELETON GORGE

I'm never sure whether to use the word "exile" to describe my parents' leaving, or maybe there are more and less difficult forms of exile, and that fact need not necessarily cheapen the word. "I've always told myself that I've got to stop using the word exile," Derek Walcott told Edward Hirsch in 1985, a few years after my parents left, "Real exile means a complete loss of the home. Joseph Brodsky is an exile; I'm not really an exile. I have access to my home."

My dad had left to evade conscription, and if he had returned the government may have sent him to the front lines of the Angolan War, or to prison (the sentence for refusing to join the military was seven years). But the loss of home wasn't really complete. My parents were white, they hadn't been very politically active (though my mom had attended rallies and meetings), and the technological infrastructure for control was looser in those days, even in a totalitarian security state. When they left, they just left, walked onto the plane, bon voyage. Such freedom was possible before the internet.

They stayed in London for a few weeks, trying to figure out the next step. My mom's friend from high school, Nana, and her husband, Allan, put them up. When they decided to get married to make immigrating to the United States easier, Allan and Nana were the witnesses at their wedding. They borrowed Nana's ring for the ceremony. Other than on that day, neither of my parents has ever worn one. They're like that.

At the time Allan was working with The Committee on South African War Resistance (COSAWR), an offshoot of the ANC he had founded with a few other white South African exiles shortly after arriving in London. Their goal was to convince the UK

government to automatically grant political asylum to any white South African who had left the country to avoid conscription. For more than 10 years, they sent political propaganda to white South Africans and channeled young men out of S.A. at a rate of about 1,000 a year.

Compared to my parents', Allan's escape from S.A. had been more of an escape proper, though not quite cinematic. He had been politically active from a young age, working with the anti-conscription campaign while hiding out in multiple degree programs to avoid his own conscription. When he graduated (his second degree), the police showed up at his apartment and put him on a military train to a base at Oudtshoorn. That night he walked off the base, caught the train to Johannesburg, and bought the cheapest flight out of the country with the cash he had in his pocket, which took him to Luxemburg.

He hitchhiked across Europe, and found his way to Victoria Station in London, where he slept for a week. When he ran out of the little money he had, he went to the police station and told his story to the young officer sitting at the front desk. The man listened politely, and at the end of the story, said, "Look, I don't know much about the political situation in South Africa...but, isn't it the blacks who are being persecuted?"

Yes, that's true. But this is my story. And it worked out. Another officer at the station suggested he apply for political asylum. After a year it was granted. He started COSAWR. He played his part.

MALAWIAN TABLEAUX

Significantly, when these ex-slaves dance in the possession rites they carry as insignia whips which, though they are of course no longer used today, enable them to present themselves not as slaves, but as masters of slaves.

I.M. Lewis

AT THE FISHHOUSE

Vaughan's joke about the job with the Blantyre office of Montgomery, Oldfield & Denn was that he and my dad were the only people who had actually applied for it. The two friends' joint "interview" was at one of the partner's homes, on the crest of an escarpment north of Cape Town, overlooking Clifton's paradisaal beaches. In photographs, Clifton has the kind of furthest-reach-of-land spectacle I associate with Robinson Jeffers' northern California: mountains into endless ocean. And, in this case, also the beach and its very white sand. When they arrive, they are led to the deck, where the partner is lounging along with a few topless women. The partner asks one of them to mix some drinks for the guests. The interview has begun. They both get the job.

The company put them up in a multi-bedroom stucco home on a five-acre plot near Blantyre, but my dad tired of the suburban feel. After only a few months living there, he managed to convince the company to pay him the cost of the home rental directly, and he and Vaughan found an abandoned fish warehouse a few miles south, off the M1 highway. The space was divided into two halves raised on a concrete foundation set about three feet off the ground; through the middle ran a track at ground level through which the

trucks would have driven to unload their wares. When they moved in, in the far corner of the warehouse, there was a huge mound of dried fish. They hired laborers to help them convert the warehouse space into a set of apartments spread across its expanse, including a bathroom with wood-fire water heater and shower system jerry-rigged out of a repurposed 44-gallon drum.

Most of the men they hired spoke little or no English, so communication throughout the project was gestural. Vaughan told me that when the job was finished they held a huge party for everyone involved. They all sat around the fire, laughing and drinking and even crying, generally conveying that it had been the most exciting project any of them had ever worked on. All without a shared language.

He and Vaughan had only been living there a few weeks when a short, stocky man in his early thirties with close-cropped hair and a rounded, shaven intelligent face showed up at their door, telling my dad that he was there to work for him, to be his servant. No, thank you, but I don't need anyone. But you don't have anyone working for you; everyone needs someone to work for them. This was exactly what my dad had left South Africa to escape. He could hardly flee conscription in the apartheid army only to hire a man-servant. He tried to explain this to the man. But everyone needs someone to help them. The story goes that my dad eventually managed to convince the man to leave. But he came back the next day. And the next day. Until my dad hired him. His name was Marco. He lived in the Fishhouse, eventually with his wife and kids, and my dad, and Vaughan until Vaughan left, and later also with Marco's uncle, until my dad left Malawi.

LOW

after Roger Ballen's "Sergeant F. de Bruin, Department of Prisons Employee" (Orange Free State, 1992)

A thin wire, or piece of string, runs behind from ear to ear, and his face hangs in between, like a strung up small intestine.

Imagine his spine as it lists in a subtle path to the right, to his face, and the impossibly long line of his lips. His cap crests with the robust heft his face is not.

When my father was a child, all he wanted was a Sam Browne to sling across his chest, a clip to tether to his belt, a holster just above his hip.

In the photograph his chubby face stands at attention, working to explain my father's stunned emotion when he turns to this page. Clothes never quite fit children right.

The crease of his right sleeve is slightly doubled, the imprecision no doubt not his own. 1992. He'll never make it out intact.

PRESIDENT FOR LIFE

The first post-independence president, Hasting Kamuzu Banda's name itself seems to live between cultures. His Wikipedia page and obituary in *The Independent* don't fail to mention that "Kamuzu" means "little root" because he was conceived after his mother had received a root from "the medicine man" to enhance fertility. "Banda means a small hut." "Hastings," though, he took from a Scottish missionary. Kamuzu left Malawi for South Africa as a young man in pursuit of education but instead wound up working for years in the Witwatersrand mines. In 1925, he finally received funding to pursue a degree in the United States. We share our alma mater: University of Chicago, where he studied history. He then received his medical degree in Tennessee, and after a few more degrees in Scotland, set up a successful medical practice in London. When he was convinced in 1958 to return to what was then called Nyasaland (which he would soon rename Malawi),

Kamuzu had lived a whole life on three continents. But Africa was shifting. In 1960 alone seventeen countries gained political independence. When Kamuzu was elected the first president of the newly independent Malawi, and then soon became President for Life, it seems that his heart was split, at least as I'm used to thinking about hearts. His economic reforms focused on self-sufficiency, independence from European economies, and the increase of agricultural exports. He was also one of the only sub-Saharan leaders to maintain friendly diplomatic relations with Britain and apartheid South Africa. This, of course, was why my dad could apply to work there in the first place; white South Africans weren't generally welcome in sub-Saharan countries at that time. Kamuzu also actively encouraged women's participation in government and business, which gave the Malawi the reputation of a progressive feminist culture. He also banned them from wearing mini-skirts and trousers. "One of the most spectacular and surreal sights I have ever seen in Africa," recalls British journalist Richard Dowden in Kamuzu's obituary, "was Hastings Banda in Homburg hat and dark three-piece suit, riding high in the raised back of his open Rolls-Royce. Around the car a vast heaving throng of women danced and sang and jogged along, all wearing the same cloth emblazoned on breast and bottom with the Ngwazi's smiling image. Beside him, waving majestically like a consort dressed in a broad blue hat and pink frock, was Margaret Thatcher." Vaughan recalls that after he left his job at Montgomery, Oldfield & Denn only a few months in, he had befriended Malawi's Minister of Education, who helped extend his visa. One day he was with the Minister when he received a phone call about a labor dispute at a brick factory. At that time Kamuzu had decreed that all brick-making businesses must be women owned;

nonetheless, the Minister had a stake in this factory and was being called in to help negotiate. They drove out of Blantyre to a dusty, barren stretch of land, punctuated by a few low trees. They saw the massive brick kiln first, rising above the landscape like a temple. The owner of the factory sat on a wicker chair—like a throne, as Vaughan recalls—with her books and ledgers, on the top of the kiln, surveying the landscape. Next to the kiln there was a hole, in which, it seemed, was a whole village of people: men, women, children, squelching around in the muddy clay and scooping it up with their hands into buckets that were then lifted out and poured into molds. When the Minister arrived the owner stood up and called out to the workers. They stopped scooping and clambered out of the hole. In the sun the mud dried into cakes over their bodies (like they were chocolate-covered, as Vaughan recalls). Their spokesman stepped forward and began negotiating with the owner and the Minister. Vaughan, not understanding a word, watched the children pick cakes of clay from their chests and arms and toss them at each other. Eventually, their terms having been summarily rejected, the spokesman and about half of the workers turned and walked away from the factory. The other half clambered back into the hole.

WITWATERSRAND

My hole is warm and full of light.

Ralph Ellison

And then reach 'face,'
Arms of rock dust
And unbelievable noise,
Unpierced ever with glitter

Of sun-rays, stretched over
All with swartest night.

Now tilt the picture sideways.
Then iron-grip held my wrist
But I saw no fore-arm.
'Listen,' the voice spoke,
'I've seen many in my time
'Made of dirt.' In the shadows

Muddy shapes of undefined
Bodies. 'Who are you?'
My thin voice over
The top of the infernal tamping
But in rage he continued,
'The hospital is clean

'But the mortuary
'Is too small, packed
'Like chicken in the fridge.'
Thunder shaking rain,
A frantic pounding shook
My wrist near beyond

The joint, then ceased,
Leaving echoes through
My groin and chest, quivering.
'With all that noise—
'Now that's what they like,'
My guide, grinning, grabbed

My arm and hoisted me up.
"The tunnels of the major
Mines would stretch
From New York to Chicago,
Two and a half miles below
The shopping centers."

Named for the water
Rushed down its face
In sections, it runs
For thirty-five miles, broken
Only once—an escarpment
But also the miles underneath,

Leaning groups of layers
Set like old volumes.
Scientia et Labore.
Through knowledge and work.
Hewn joists and spoil tips,
Dashing unclothed bodies.

'Wits.' A short sound
I heard from early on
Delivered with ambivalent
Smiles I understood
Somehow, even if I could
Have never put it into words.

One syllable, fricative into
Dental sibilant, but within,
The vowel is kind of sung,
More a u than i. I would have
To be there to say it for you.
Maybe that's why he insisted

We descend. A rickety
Diesel train, about four feet high,
Took us laterally a mile,
Then down another shaft,
"Ultra-deep," where rock-shatter
Taunts the thin veins

And all there is is heat,
Incredible heat, and noise,
And this unknowing eye.
Let me tell you a story.
On a certain day white women
Enter the mine in a group.

At some point one will slip
Away to an abandoned
Section, and in this quiet
Corner of the earth she
Will have discourse
With a ghost and leave behind

A fortune. The following day

The ghost will choose a worker.
Alone in the dark with
The ghost, and the quiet,
He will feel the miles
Of earth in all directions

Shifting imperceptibly.
He will find the money
And leave this place forever
And never speak to anyone,
Not even his wife, about what
Happened. “Wits.”

“Whites.” The one note
Tossed across. I looked up
And couldn’t see any face.
Only the combination of words,
Or their tones. Not a song,
Again, but sung.

I said I wouldn’t
Be surprised by what
I found then, no matter what.
There were only objects,
Running from my knowing,
Fixed in only pieces by the light.

WITCHDOCTOR

This is a story my father always told me. After his visa eventually ran out and Vaughan moved back to South Africa, and after Marco’s uncle moved in with Marco and his wife and children to their half of the Fishhouse, my dad is awoken “in the middle of the night.”

It is a clear night and the moon would be filtering in between the sparse sub-Saharan foliage. From his bed my dad can hear shouts, strange, incoherent. He has either just gotten out of bed or just gotten out of the house, is either crossing the house or just walking out of the front door—though the front door seems the more likely, the more

colonial threshold—when Marco’s uncle comes running up to him, saying “Master John, you need to help. There is something wrong with Marco.” Marco is in the yard, running around in circles, screaming wildly, incomprehensibly. My dad rushes up to him and grabs him by his shoulders to try to see what is wrong with him. He looks into Marco’s face. There is no recognition in his eyes, “wide and white...like saucers in the dark.” He struggles to wrench himself free, “foaming at the mouth,” screaming, writhing. My dad and Marco’s uncle wrestle him to the ground, which seems to calm him, but his face is still stricken, his eyes still wide. Marco’s uncle’s request then comes unambiguously: “Witch-doctor.”

The term “witchdoctor” in fact comes from my neck of the woods, from New England. The use of the term can be traced at least as far back as 1718, when Francis Hutchinson, Bishop of Down and Connor, in his book condemning the Salem witch trials in the New World, states that Dorothy Durent had been with a Witchdoctor. It’s not until a hundred years later, after the Salem persecutions, after the Reverend John Pears, the original colonial, has moved to the Eastern Cape, that Dublin-born adventurer Robert Montgomery Martin remarks on how “infatuated [are the Kaffirs] in a belief of the infallibility of the wizard or witch doctor.” From their corner of the Atlantic and for centuries, the Brits have been appalled. Brian Morris, an anthropologist who studied spiritualism in southern Malawi the same years my dad was living in the Fishhouse, notes that “ ‘Witch-doctor’ is in fact not an inappropriate term, but as the witch (mfiti) and doctor (sing’anga) are so often misleadingly confused in popular thought and literature, and as the term now carries such negative connotations, it is one that is best forgotten.”

Morris is right; it's almost impossible to separate the word from something essentially hokey and magical, something patronizing. It's harder still for me to imagine Marco's uncle—distraught over his nephew's hysterical condition—asking for my dad's help in exactly that term. But on this point my dad is adamant. He had asked for the “witch doctor.” He had kept repeating it. When I talk on the phone to the now-retired Brian Morris, who was about to leave for a bird-watching trip in Wales, he tells me that the most famous witch-doctor of all time was Jesus.

LOW

nihil huminam alienum

Ezra Pound, Canto LXIV

harbor teeth
msebenzi
eem sr)under

ketsh
kinch
kak

held it lengthqer
over omunye ocker
krr)ektor kekela

& mpendulo
asymbolition
sing)e)doption

WITCHDOCTOR

Somehow my dad and Marco's uncle manage to hoist him into the back of my dad's car and they start driving south on the M1, away from Blantyre. The moon casts white light

over the rolling green hills, and the headlights throw their wavering beam just past where the paved road dips into orange dust on either side. It's not until Marco's uncle asks my dad to pull off the highway and drive down a dirt road "into the bush" that he starts to get nervous. On the highway he can always turn around and gun it back north. But now he is being directed down roads that fork randomly, like a warren through the darkness.

Eventually the road they're on comes to an abrupt end, the headlights stark against a swath of low, dry grass. My dad and Marco's uncle get Marco—still jabbering and writhing—out of the back of the car and start walking him down a footpath. Through the trees ahead my dad can see the light of a fire and some small buildings.

In the 1960s, when my dad was still a schoolboy down in South Africa, Mai Menala, an Nsanje woman from southern Malawi, held performances of her spiritual possessions that drew significant crowds. As was not uncommon for Malawian mediums, Menala was the medium for a wide range of different spirits, in her case, more than a dozen madzoka (benevolent spirits). Matthew Schoffeleers, a British anthropologist who studied religion and spiritual practices in southern and central Malawi, witnessed a number of Menala's performances. He reports that the arrival of the spirit of Menala's maternal grandmother used to announce itself "with a perfect imitation of a steam-train." Her performances would usually reach their climax with the possession by a British colonial soldier, a sergeant-major who had lived in Malawi:

He was announced by an ear-splitting rattling of a drum. Menala then marched in with an imitation rifle on her shoulder. Next she installed herself at a small table, and in a gruff voice shouted 'Booooooy!', the way many Whites in colonial times used to call their

personnel. The call was answered by a little girl who handed her a varicoloured apron which she helped Menala get into. Next, Menala ordered bread and tea, which were promptly brought in, together with an outsized carving knife. Menala cut a piece off the hard and stale bread, and chewed it with the help of a cup of tea. While occupied with this, she kept shouting commands to her ‘boy.’ Thus duly fortified, she got up, shouldered her rifle once again and started striding amidst absolutely silence towards the middle of the bwalo. There was a feeling that something extraordinary was about to happen. And the audience got what it came for. The drummer suddenly burst into a blood-curdling imitation of a machine gun. Menala aimed her rifle, shouted commands at an invisible platoon, and started a military drill that brought her audience to shrieks of delight. It was nothing less than first-rate theatre. When it was over, Menala was visibly tired and took a rest.”

WITCHDOCTOR

“You must wait here,” Marco’s uncle says, and he leads Marco down the path that veers off into the tall grass surrounding the road. My dad waits for a very long time. Whether this is an hour, or how many hours, he doesn’t know. At some point he walks back to the car and waits there, at the end of the road, the border between path and road, a kind of junction. He considers leaving, but he would never figure out the way back. The headlights, which eventually he turns off, illuminate the patch of grass. Beyond that, black. A very long time. My dad is out in the middle of nowhere, “a white speck in the middle of all of that nothing.” Schoffeleers explains that the exorcism of an evil spirit is

often performed at a cross-roads or a junction, the hope being that the spirit will become confused about which was to go, and that he will lose his way.

Marco's uncle eventually comes back and tells my dad that Marco needs to stay at the witchdoctor overnight. Together the two men drive back to the Fishhouse in silence.

When Marco returns the next day, he is visibly embarrassed. Staring down at the ground, he keeps shaking his head back and forth and apologizing for inconveniencing my dad.

My dad just wants to know what happened. Marco explains that he had been cursed. He doesn't know who put the curse on him or why they did it. He keeps apologizing for inconveniencing him, for waking him up, and making him drive many miles away from Blantyre and wait at a crossroad.

LOW

...she resorts to mimicking gestures with the mouth

Theresa Hak Kyung Cha

Check myself under an awning
Bright day Still all assertive
In the continual collapse
I go by many names
Citizen
Devourer
Archie Bunker
Woman of color
"My inability to cry has been structure determined"
Just recently I've been getting better

THIRD WORLD ELVIS

Caught between colonial ease and its ideological rejection, college years and adult life, South Africa and the United States (even if they didn't know it yet), those years in Malawi were an adventure. Malawi Gold is still today renowned as one of the most potent sativa strains of marijuana grown in the world. When they came home from work each night a good serving of it would have been cleaned, rolled into joints, and placed for them on their coffee table, one of the products of Marco's housekeeping. They would sit up drawing, writing, talking philosophy. Vaughan took to sketching the mosquitoes he swatted in their fatal contortions.

It didn't take long for the Fishhouse to become known among the community of wayward tourists and wanderers who had found their way to the Shire River basin; every few weeks, a dusty European would amble up with rucksack full of dirty laundry, hoping for a place to crash. You still meet these types roaming the continent. One had been riding across Africa on horseback. Another came with a strange rash covering her entire body that she had contracted while crossing a river. Another was described to me as a "jock," a brawny South African male—strong stock, as they say—wont to spend time out "in the bush." One night the three of them—the "jock," my dad and Vaughan—sat around smoking joints and flipping through a set of slides that he had taken on a recent trip across the Karoo. Vaughan and my dad agreed that they were the most exciting images any of them had ever seen, bizarre, abstract, alien compositions that somehow got at something very deep and essential about this unforgiving landscape. They were stunned at the aesthetic subtlety of this seemingly oafish young man. In the sober morning, when

Vaughan happened to look again through a few of the slides, he realized that, in fact, they were just horribly overexposed. Washed out.

As the roving Europeans came and went, one Fishhouse constant was a young man named George, the drummer in the band at the Mount Soche Hotel, the center of Blantyre's nightlife scene mostly by virtue of its being one of the only places open at night. George was very thin, very tall and very dark, and sported tight-fitting bell-bottom pants, a variety of boots, and a silver faux-leather jacket. Vaughan recalls him as a kind of "third world Elvis." My dad remembers George took to showing up at the Fishhouse after he had played his set, sometimes with a whole crowd of other people, sometimes once my dad had already gone to sleep. Bearing a small gift (a joint or a few beers), George et al would precede to clean out my dad's refrigerator in sessions of late-night, early morning carousing.

The only remaining image I know of that gives a complete view of the Fishhouse's interior must have at one point sat for too long in the slide projector, because it is cracked and burnt. But it's all there: the central living space with brick faux columns that twist near their top. The chimney built through the center of their half, with the red drum of the rigged-out water heater.

It was into this pre-post-colonial adventure that my mom stepped, not without, as far as I can tell, a reasonable dose of skepticism. She was pursuing a degree in biochemistry at the University of Cape Town, was involved in anti-apartheid activist groups, housed for a while—illegally—a black South African friend of hers in her apartment. She had wanted to visit Malawi to see first-hand the gender reform that had been happening under

President Kamuzu and his close advisor Cecilia Tamanda Kadzamira. My dad picked her up at the airport, wearing, in true colonial fashion—as the joke always goes—all white.

The rest is history.

EXCERPT FROM A LETTER FROM JP TO TD, 1981

Blantyre

Mid-August

Dear Pippa,

No, I haven't changed my mind - in fact went to see the travel agent today about my airticket. Will be leaving here on the last day of the month and spend a week or two in JHB. on the way down. My little sister has recently moved up there and I'd like to spend awhile with her.

...later (11:45pm) It's nearly midnight and I've just returned from the restaurant which followed the squash. French Onion Gratinee followed by garlic and butter prawns, rum cassata ice cream and strong black coffee. Lekker! An afrikaans girl stayed here soon after you left so I've re-learnt my favorite southafricanisms for use on my return. I've moved into a new bracket style-wise since I employed a chauffeur. I still haven't gotten it together to sit in the back and it's too close to leaving time to warrant buying a uniform and cap (peaked, black) but nevertheless it does something for my image. It all started 8 months ago when I had an accident in my then Renault 16TS. I ran into the back of a City of Blantyre vehicle and when the cops came they noticed that my car license was 11 months out of date and unfortunately so was my 3rd party insurance plus I didn't have a driver's license for Malawi. It took all this time since January for the case to come up and I went along to court armed with K300.00 expecting a big fine. I was delighted when it turned out to be only K30.00 but they also took away my license (I got one soon after the accident) so I can't drive in this country for the next 6 months. Hence the chauffeur who is on 24 hour call. Disgusting really, but an appropriate way to say farewell to one of the last bastions of High Colonialism.

...anyway you're not going to get rid of me so easily - in fact how about coming out to dinner or something with me the first week I get down i.e. the 3rd week in September? With that amount of advance warning I'm sure you can fit it in between classes and volleyball...this is the first time I've asked for a "date" in writing.

See you soon

Love to Linda & Vaughan

Love JP

LOW

Release affirms the boundless inner light of things and to thee bringeth thus streaming.
The ‘-ness’ of it.

Devil’s claw hanging from string in the kitchen, a garden of succulents, and a spirit of indefatigability about the portraits.

These I pass on to you along with the ceaseless re-essentializing machine. Use them well.
Their weight becomes you.

SKELETON GORGE

My dad’s story of Marco has an uncanny parallel to the climax of the play, *Skeleton Gorge*, which chronicles three white former anti-apartheid activists on their first trip back to South Africa after leaving the country for exile in the early 90s. The play was written by Allan Leas, founder of COSAWR and witness to the fateful union of John and “Pippa.” He emails the working text of the play to me after we chat about the anti-conscription campaign and my parents’ brief sojourn in London.

The exiles in *Skeleton Gorge* never actually appear on stage (they are out climbing the gorge of the play’s title). Their stories are told through their partners, all three of whom are British and confronting directly the history and politics of South Africa for the first time. Each is anxious to fill in the blanks and check the facts of the yarns of anti-apartheid derring-do they’ve been told by the men. What they find is that the stories all contradict. Even the men’s pact to return from exile on the eve of Mandela’s death, we learn, is fabricated, motivated. When they left in 1990, they could have never predicted the political transition, or Mandela becoming President. As it turns out, the timing is awfully convenient for one of the men, who has to come back to deal with an estate he just inherited.

In the second act of Skeleton Gorge, Steve arrives to set the record straight. He is the mysterious fourth member of the men's old gang, the one who stayed behind in South Africa when they all left in exile. Listen to the story he tells:

In their first year at university the four young men all moved into an old run-down mansion on the top of a hill (soon dubbed the White House). They hadn't been living there long before a small, nervous woman in her sixties, named Katie, knocked on their door. As it turned out, for the past ten years she had been the maid for the previous tenants, who had abandoned her when they left; she was still living in the servant's quarters at the bottom of the long garden. Now she wanted to begin her work. Now their young activist ideologies were now confronted with a real living problem: Katie. After long deliberation, they decided to offer her retirement: let her stay in the room, double her salary, but refuse her work. But it doesn't work like that.

"Although the situation had confused her," Steve tells us, "we had at least assured her that she could stay, that her room was safe. The next day she knocked on the door, and offered to clean the house, and we tried again to explain that this was not necessary. The day after she tried again, offering to make our beds and to wash our clothes. By the third day she was begging us to let her do the cooking. By the end of the week she was trying to cut half an acre of lawn with a pair of rusty garden shears. It would have taken her a month at that rate, and every time one of us went out to try and stop her she screamed at us in a language that none of us understood. After a few days of this we couldn't stand it any longer, and we took the shears away from her."

Katie left that day, Steve tells them, and they didn't see her again until months later, when they run into her on the street. She is sick and addicted to methylated spirits. They try to give her money but she screams at them. Soon after, they leave the White House.

FUNDAMENTALS OF FANAGALO

The entire language can be learned in sessions totaling only 15 hours.

In the most effective mode of instruction, each student sits in a sound-proof cage made of glass.

No attempt has been made to distort the simple character of the language by inventing translations for scientific, political or philosophical terms. Bantu languages are deficient in abstraction.

While the language of the Bushmen comprises a strange—one could say inscrutable—combination of clicks and other sounds, the three in Fanagalo—the c, the q, and the x—are easily learned. The x click is made by pressing the tongue against the teeth, and then withdrawing it on one side only, with a sucking-in of air. This is the sound that White children make when they imagine they are urging a horse to get moving.

Fanagalo is the lingua franca of Southern Africa. This is to say that you can visit Mozambique without a word of Portuguese. It is also used for black-on-black communication.

The students in the cages are given tape recorders, into which they repeat the phrases they have heard. They are corrected by the teacher from a console.

Imisa.

Yabolisa. Imisa.

-

Unlike Esperanto, subject of a poem
by Srikanth Reddy, whose form I've stolen for my
own poem about language,

“no learned professor
sat down & invented it in a moment of
inspiration,” according
to Phrasebook, Grammar, & Dictionary of Fa-
nagalo, a book from which I have been quoting
above liberally with no attributions
but which I feel compelled now
to bring out into daylight.

I first met Srikanth, whom his students call Chicu,
when I was twenty, naïve,
wondering if I could become a writer too.

Like all winters on the third coast, it was freezing.
The wind “rattled the tops of garbage cans, sucked wind-
ow shades out through the top of
opened windows & set
them flapping back against the windows.” I was
re-learning, that semester,
self-appreciation & wanted to channel

that new sense of purpose. Among my scattered drafts,
bad imitations of Ashbery, Chicu picked
out an honest poem on
putting together my
grandparent's table, which had been shipped from S.A.,
"in a box with the scent of
red wine...two months after we had watched dad cry."

-

I want to get to the bottom of Fanagalo but I'm afraid I won't find a bottom. Adam Hochschild, writing in 1988, the year I was born & the year that *A World Apart* was released in the U.S., the year before a shlumpy Marlon Brando would play that insufferable, righteously indignant human rights attorney in *A Dry White Season*, states that "Fanakalo is a tongue invented solely for giving orders." The 1961 *Encyclopedia for Southern Africa* works more by suggestion: "Its use is officially encouraged by the Transvaal & O.F.S. Chamber of Mines & other authorities." It's true you can't exactly shove a language down someone's throat. You can give a man a grammar, but what comes out is all his own, & as Malice puts it, "that's exactly why the caged bird sings." At the end of Ann Petry's *The Narrows*, Link's final, hopeless defense is to use that funny talk he does: I have, on occasion, looked at wine when it was too red, looked too long, & with too tender & yearning an eye. I have been guilty, also on occasion, of running swiftly with the hares, gamboling with the hares, & at the same time running swiftly with the hounds, baying the moon at midnight, with the hounds.

-

Gamina wetu hayikona lapa.
Hindsight is 20-20. I wish I'd known
when I was still in Chicago the full extent
of the privilege of having Chicu as a mentor
though that kind of reflection
is deceptive: you need sharp teeth
to run with the hounds, & I was still a hare,
or the other way around. As I walked home
through the university's neatly
manicured Victorian Gothic quad
I looked at the string of lights
they would hang after break
when winter would really set in.
"Suicide lights," we called them,
beacons against the seasonal depression
that at times seemed inescapable
living among a couple thousand neurotic
and competitive aspiring intellectuals.
But I was happy. I felt that I was
making art, and I had met a girl
who loved the idea of me as an artist

almost as much as I did myself,
and then I didn't predict the disaster
that would entail. I also didn't think to know
that if one pulled back—in the way
of a college brochure aerial—
that night you would see
another string of lights, the blue emergency
lights, 380 of them, in a dense pattern,
with me in the center, fanning out to the lake,
and going suddenly dead
at the edge of Washington Park,
that if you pulled back further still
you could see the cover of Chicú's first
book, Facts for Visitors, the world's own string.
But enough about lights.

-

The literal translation of "fanagalo" is
Do it like this—one can see why Hochschild
would claim it was invented for mining.
Mina tshelile lomuntu hayikona yena
hamba pantsi, ndaba yena dagiwe—
I told this boy he must not go underground,
as he is drunk. But Fanagalo is rare
among pidgin languages; it has a Bantu
grammar. It is closer to the native
languages than to the colonizing
Dutch or British. Loskati mina hambile,
lalela lo basboy gawena. When I am away,
listen to your bossboy. Though it is associated
with the mines, Fanagalo's use extended
to the domestic space, to the suburban.
Wena azi lo golof? Mina hayifuna lo
mampara mfan. Have you caddied before?
I don't want a useless boy. The tiny, pocket
phrasebook was published in 1974.
Chicú was one year old. Sanford and Son
was in its third season. The Dolphins
had defeated the Vikings. My parents were
at the University of Cape Town. When I
mention Fanagalo, they both laugh. In their day,
it had become a popular term for "bullshit,"
a story that makes no sense. In his poem, Chicú
tells me that we need to write the Esperanto epic.
Is he serious? At least in part. But I'm tired.

Maybe what I want to do is draw a bold black line across an otherwise white field and keep discussion of its meaning to a minimum.

DI(SA)SSEMBLE

First we must study how colonization works to decivilize the colonizer, to brutalize him in the true sense of the word, to degrade him, to awaken him to buried instincts, to covetousness, violence, race hatred, and moral relativism; and we must show that each time a head is cut off or an eye put out in Vietnam and in France they accept the fact, each time a little girl is raped and in France they accept the fact, each time a Madagascan is tortured and in France they accept the fact, civilization acquires another dead weight, a universal regression takes place, a gangrene sets in, a center of infection begins to spread; and that at the end of all these treaties that have been violated, all these lies that have been propagated, all these punitive expeditions that have been tolerated, all these patriots who have been tortured, at the end of the all the racial pride that has been encouraged, all the boastfulness that has been displayed, a poison has been distilled into the veins of Europe and, slowly but surely, the continent proceeds toward savagery.

Aime Cesaire

LOW

after Roger Ballen's "Early Morning" (Napier, 1985)

Nothing could intrude on
the drama of this vacancy.
Nothing rings out.
The long windows
peak
crisply in the light,
and the cross,
small
and indelible
against the air.

EGYPT ROAD

For L.'s birthday I surprise her with a biking trip around the Blackwater Wildlife Refuge on the Delmarva Peninsula—Delmarva being a euphonious if somewhat crude portmanteau of Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia, the three states that all claim different sections of this ungainly rabbit's foot of land that juts out into mid-Atlantic. For some

reason the Visitor's Center at the refuge doesn't show up on Google Maps so we have to just go for it, following our own sense of where it is that we are at each moment rather than relying on representation of ourselves as little arrow following blue line to its end. The road I think will lead us there is Egypt Road, which runs in an almost straight line north-south into the center of the refuge. The incredibly kind-hearted woman at the Visitor's Center points with gnarled, papery fingers at renderings of eagles, harriers, owls, telling us very slowly and very precisely which ones she had seen where. We do manage to see two bald eagles on the ride, but only for moment: I call out, "Bald eagles" and thrust an arm up as I ride, and they fly with us as we try to go after them, but they peel away to the right away from the road and over the top of the trees. Our most striking sighting we decide is an egret, wading alone through the marsh, then taking off and cutting a dramatic line across the horizon of the observation deck. What is striking is that the bird is very white, and when L. suggests that it's an egret, I think of Walcott's book and how my mind is always adding the "r" to make it White (R)Egrets. After finishing the ride, stretching, and sharing a candy bar, we poke around the Visitor Center to see what else Dorchester County has to offer. Our room is in Cambridge, the county seat of Dorchester, both names coincidentally speaking Boston: Cambridge, the hip second half of Boston, full of artists and rich professionals, where Henry Louis Gates was arrested outside of his house and where my newly immigrated dad went in the 80s to score weed; Dorchester, simply put, a place where white boys from the suburbs just never went. Stretching my legs beneath the table at dinner I think of C.S. Giscombe; he's a monster, covering sixty, seventy miles a day, day after day, on his trips. We do less than thirty and

still feel like we earned our beers and crab dip. Even though everything is closed the next day and a fierce, cold wind whips up and drives us back to D.C., we still learn that Dorchester County, “which is physically shaped like a heart,” is the birthplace of Harriet Tubman, and hosts her museum, and the Underground Railroad Driving Tour. Site #14 is Blackwater, “a place to see birds, wildlife, and environs that were a part of Harriet’s life.” Nature, in its permanence, offers us her life, insofar as we might project that narrative of escape onto stage of this landscape. Did she ever look up to see a pair of eagles flying in line with her path? Did they stay with her or did they bank away? And how much longer, anyway, will we be able to boast that this land bears resemblance to that of the mid-19th century? In t-shirts in October, we sweated through the day’s heat. What will endure? On our drive back, L. wants to stop in at an antique store, and we pull off at a bland beige rectangle next to a Tex-Mex restaurant and a vacant lot. The store, the inside of which is surprisingly expansive, is divided into dozens of small booths, each individually curated. I wander to the back, into a room painted entirely in an aristocratic red. Against the far wall there is a sideboard and hutch with an inset mirror, on top of which is a shining and intricately engraved five-piece silver tea set. Opposite, a crystal brandy set adorns a writing table; lifting the top of the beveled tumbler, I confirm that it is in fact full of brandy. While I’m checking out my purchase, *The Mission; Or, Scenes in Africa* by Captain Frederick Marryat (1792-1848), which I find on the desk in that back room, the shop’s owner, hefting the small book, turning it over and casually inspecting its faded blue cover, tells me—somewhat pointedly, though I can’t tell in exactly what direction—that the books are really just there for decoration.

LOW

English is a foreign anguish.

M. NourbeSe Philip

Lien. Line. Land. Linga. Langa. Lung. Lunge. Lunga.
Lorn. Loral. Loeson. Line. Lingana. Langue. Land. Lung. Linen.
Lunga. Lingua. Lien. Land. Langanisa. Lorn. Linga. Line.

THE MISSION; OR, SCENES IN AFRICA

My parents had wanted to name me Alexander, but they didn't like the abbreviation, all abbreviation containing ambiguous inflection. On the other hand, my brother Robert wasn't Robert long before my relentlessly calling him Bob stuck and he was Bob, and I think his friends call him Robb. For me, Alexander is my middle name, though that's not something many people know. That early imperialist. Alexo aner—"to defend" "man." Against the barbarians, as the case may be. In Marryatt's 1845 *The Mission; or, Scenes in Africa*, Alexander is the protagonist: "a tall, handsome young man, very powerful in frame...generous and amiable, frank in his manner, and obliging to his inferiors...[whose] most prominent fault was obstinacy; but this was more shown in an obstinate courage and perseverance to conquer what appeared almost impossible, and at the greatest risk to himself." He sounds insufferable. No surprise that the story goes Alexander's granduncle, the wise old Sir Charles Wilmot, lost his daughter years ago in a shipwreck off the coast of "Caffraria." Shipwrecks punctuate any good 19th century "rounding Africa" story. But then, out of the dark depths of history, reports travel overseas that the ship may have blown ashore on the eastern coast, near Port Natal, and

that the surviving passengers may have attempted a trek across the continent to Cape Town. Imagine Sir Charles's hope. Imagine his fear. That his one remaining child might be "living with the savages...may have returned to a state of barbarism,—the seeds of faith long dead in her bosom,—now changed to a wild untutored savage, knowing no God." So Alexander convinces his granduncle to allow him to go in search of the girl, now woman, his aunt, Charles' daughter. So that his granduncle can die happy. He goes to the library and finds all the books he can on Southern Africa and pretty soon "the narratives of combats with wild beasts, the quantity and variety of game to be found, and the continual excitement which would be kept up, inflamed his imagination and his love of field sports."

Alexander sails in 1829. It is the same year my great-great-great-grandfather, the Reverend John Pears, my father's namesake, arrived in Cape Town. Before he left for his own adventure, he received a degree in Classics from the University of Edinburgh and went on a few hiking trips with historian Thomas Carlyle, who said of him, "he was a cheerful, scatter-brained creature who went out ultimately as preacher or professor of something to the Cape of Good Hope." When he arrived in Cape Town he was hired briefly as a professor at the fledgling South African College, but was soon more or less fired. Though he had been trained as a Presbyterian minister, his option was to start a mission for the Dutch Reformed Church out at the borders of "Kaffirland," or, in other words, out at the front lines of the colonial war that Britain waged somewhat haphazardly throughout the 19th century until significant gold and diamonds deposits discovered in the 1880s meant that things got serious (see: Boer Wars). In Captain Marryat's view,

someone like the Reverend John Pears may have been ill equipped for the mission work he found himself set to. “I much question whether men of higher attainments and more cultivated minds would be better adapted to meet the capacities of unintellectual barbarians,” Alexander’s friend remarks during one of endless such “soliloquys” throughout the novel, “a highly-educated man may be appreciated among those who are educated themselves; but how can he be appreciated by the savage? On the contrary, the savage looks with much more respect upon a man who can forge iron, repair his weapons, and excite his astonishment by his cunning workmanship; for then the savage perceives and acknowledges his superiority, which in the man of intellect he would never discover.” Caught between the dismissive snide remarks of Thomas Carlyle, and these hordes of savages, who could never appreciate his great learning, it seems there was no place for John Pears.

LOW

To sound off
Loeien
To access sound
Put your hands in the air
Doeth loweth the oxe when he hathe foddre?
To receive sound
As though from far off or across a great distance
Taught the Elephants how to low like Cows
Or in an isolated attestation
Put your hands up
Throw it up
Loeien

THE MISSION; OR, SCENES IN AFRICA

Part of what is so odd about the insufferable Alexander's journey across the Eastern Cape is that it's a kind of Anglicized Great Trek, following the path of the Voortrekkers along the southern coast to Graham's Town, on to the mission at Butterworth, and then north into the land of the "Caffres." The Boers (or "boors," as Marryat has it), the descendants of the Dutch settlers who came as early as the late 17th century, "became an athletic, powerful, and bulky race," another soliloquy opines, "courageous and skilled in the use of firearms, but at the same time cruel and avaricious to the highest degree. The absolute power they possessed over the slaves and Hottentots demoralized them, and made them tyrannical and bloodthirsty... The origin was in that greatest of all curses, slavery; nothing demoralizes so much." Who would've thought? The Captain has written a liberal apology. Even while pathologizing the Boers, the novel doesn't hold back from indulging all of the sexiness of that frontier myth. The rigged-out wagons. The cries in the wild night. The thrill of the hunt. The little naked Bushman boy they find in tall grass (who can imitate the sound of any animal! and lampoons the surly Hottentots!). The plot's central problem—Sir Charles's missing daughter—is resolved before the story is even halfway through. In fact, we discover that the journey was never about finding the girl, not really, but about erasing the leering specter of miscegenation. Alexander goes to interview the Caffre chief Daaka, the man with "strikingly European" features, but realizes that the dates don't line up. Once it is determined that these mixed-race men are no kin of mine, all the tension is released. "I dare say...that you will make old Daaka a more handsome present, for proving himself no relation to you, than if he had

satisfactorily established himself as your own first cousin.” The happiest news, the only news, is that Daaka is someone else’s problem.

The second half of the book is formulaic hunting scene after formulaic hunting scene.

This, presumably, is all the male bullshit that Hemingway, a huge fan of Captain Marryat, loved. Seven or eight lions are killed, as well as giraffe, elephant, hippopotamus, eland, gemsbok, springbok, on and on. The “field sports” of note above. And, unlike miscegenation, this is an imaginary construction no one even gets all defensive about today (see 2014 *Blended*: Adam Sandler and Drew Barrymore team up to show their kids the “real Africa”). When L. gets a scholarship to study in Tanzania, friends’ parents earnestly ask her if she is worried about getting eaten by a lion. It’s unclear whether the Reverend John Pears had much of a penchant for this side of the African adventure, though there is one story of grit that involves him falling from his horse and breaking a number of ribs, but deciding to continue his journey, complete his mission, and only then ride home to have his injury attended to. Those long journeys across the central Cape to minister to his “widely spread flock” no doubt had their moments. Late in the novel Alexander gets lost in the desert and almost dies of thirst. Bizarrely, to seek shelter from the sun, he buries his head in ant-hills: “...as they lay at some yards’ distance, with their heads buried in the ant-hills, they could not communicate with each other even by signs. At last they fell into a state of stupor and lost all recollection.”

ONE THING LEADS TO ANOTHER

There would be a hole in the earth where a town should be.
And we would be dead or low to the ground.

TJ Jarrett

The work is beautiful
And is done insanely.
The structure of
The mound bespeaks
The termites' turn.
They reach a point

And then they move,
Instinctively.
As we drive, the phallic
Silent statues dot
The landscape, standing,
As in witness, as tall

Or taller than a man.
They are the 'lungs'
For what's below, 'Chinese
Puzzles boxes' that grab
The wind and whirl
It down the cellar

Where the Queen lives.
'Suddenly the field
Is full of ancestors.'
Suddenly the sound.
In the darkness
And confusion, the manic

Yelps of the baboons.
The spider was so white
Against his hand I
Wondered how it lived.
He's sleeping, he said,
Then showing me his teeth.

I went to touch it.
The cries of the hyenas,
So boyish and human.
We were there to celebrate
A birthday. We were there.
'The mounds don't sing

So much as they hiss,'
Like twisting organ
Tendrils, leaning crazily
North toward the sun.
Wind corner. The place of
Steam. Windhoek.

The dazzling scaffolding
They reveal when they pour
The plaster down
The tunnels and excavate
The white tangle it creates.
'It took our breath away.'

Our rough and shabby
Sense of self could never
Match this cast,
Rack of an Irish elk,
Or bayonets. We don't
Know things like this.

I was there, sweating slightly
Into the car's cloth seat.
The termite's tender skin
Needs humid air. This is
What the mounds do.
Not castles, not cathedrals,

A trap to trick the wind
Down. We sent my brother
Out to stand beside one.
His voice pealed out.
It was a different sound.
No one could mistake it.

Hollow. Nowhere
To go in all that space.
They were all over him.
Not that they know
How to move in anger.
Moving only as the wind.

Then back across that horrible

Breathtaking Atlantic,
Depths completely purpled
With sea beasts and white
Crests of mid-sea waves,
'Loath to descend

From this high tranquility,'
This place of only things
(The work of hands but
Absent hands), reluctantly
We tilted, dropped
And skidded to a rest

Astride a carousel,
Holding unwieldy curios
And looking through
The floor to ceiling
Sheets of glass out into
The layers of the street.

THE MISSIONARY

"The Karoo breeds few atheists," notes the municipal website for Pearston, a small town in the Eastern Cape that was named for the Reverend John Pears in 1859. "Perhaps this is an accident," it continues, "and its plant and animal world, so bizarre yet so methodical, plays no part in this at all. Or, perhaps, unguessed by its people the pressure of a great plan is about them." One does suspect some such plan. One biography of the Reverend John Pears, researched in the 1970s and subsequently posted online by distant relatives, punctuates the brief tale of his life with notes on the "Kaffir Wars:" "there was the War of the Axe (1846 - 1848) the 7th Kaffir War (1850 - 1853) the 8th Kaffir War in 1858 - all in John Pears's time." This sprawl of colonial conflicts, sometimes known as Africa's 100 Years War, was neither swift nor one-sided, and the missions were a kind of vanguard in this slow possession. One can imagine the missionaries playing an

ambiguous role. Mediator. Cultural interpreter. Informant. Propagandist. Murderer.

“Pears was not an eloquent preacher,” his Wikipedia page (translated from Afrikaans) reads, “but he was a good and faithful shepherd.” In October of 1862, a month after the Battle of Antietam, just four years before his death, the Reverend boarded the Waldensian steam ship, sailing west with plans to attend the Dutch Reformed Synod in Cape Town. A few days into the voyage, on the night after leaving Plettenberg Bay, around 10 o’clock, once most of the passengers had retired to their cabins, they were “startled by a sudden and violent shock, which was succeeded by a grinding, crashing noise.” Dr. Dyer, one of the passengers, tells it like this, “I went on deck, and then found she was fast on a reef — with breakers close to us — and land scarcely discernible in the distance. My first thought was the safety of the ladies.” The passengers rushed to secure their belongings. A boat was sent to the shore in search of a safe landing. “Much to our satisfaction, the moon rose and threw its light around us.” When the boat returned with good news, the ship’s Captain organized passengers into three life boats “as coolly and carefully as if he were landing his passengers in Table Bay.” Dr. Dyer, who was in the third boat, tried to keep the second boat in his sights, but “by this time the moon was obscured, and a thick driving mist coming up” their boat drifted past the landing place. Luckily, they were hailed astern, and turned, and got the ladies safely to the shore. All through the night, until the early morning began to cast blue shadows over the landscape, they worked to retrieve the passengers from the sinking Waldensian. But for the grace of god. The newspaper article also includes the account of an unnamed “clergyman of the Dutch Reformed Church,” who was one of the last to be rescued from the sinking ship.

“In painful anxiety we waited, all uncertain of the fate of our friends who had disappeared amid the darkness and the breakers.” The clergyman, John Pears maybe, feeling the pitch and grind of the ship’s ruined hull beneath him, the smell of the cold water and the vast night, the waves sweeping away snatches of prayers murmured at his back, stood searching in the endless black for that faint glimmer of the boat’s return. They made it ashore. He made it to the Synod.

LOW

after Roger Ballen’s “Classroom scene” (1999)

The female form,
perfect wire spiral
breasts, head a mess
of tangled curls.
The instructor
handles the white
cord, one eye
veering into her face,
while the pupil
scrunches up
the black sheet beneath
her with her knee.

SCRAMBLE FOR AFRICA

The Herero are a pastoral people who most likely migrated to what is now Namibia from the great lakes region of East Africa throughout the 17th and 18th centuries. “Herero”—shortened from Ovaherero—means “people of yesterday.” The most immediately striking feature of the present-day Herero people is their women’s “Victorian dress of carefully studied fashion detail,” as Ruth First describes in 1963 South West Africa, “sweeping,

ankle-length skirts, with many underskirts, short bodiced waistcoat, mutton-chop sleeves, long strings of necklaces, braid, pearly buttons and draped shawls.” Herero women appropriating and reimagining the clothing of the wives of Rhenish missionaries. The result is vibrant, playful, disarming. Between 1904 and 1908, German soldiers systemically exterminated between 60,000 and 100,000 Herero people in what is now considered to be one of the first genocides of the 20th century. The extermination, carried out under the orders of Kaiser Wilhelm II, was most immediately precipitated by a revolt led by Herero leader Samuel Maharero beginning on January 11, 1904. The revolt, in which around 100 Germans were killed, involved land disputes (i.e. the Herero were tired of the Germans stealing their land). In response, the Kaiser sent General Lothar Von Trotha, whose ruthless tactics would become a haunting augur of the horrors of that then nascent century: “the use of ethnic identification labeling, ethnic branding, slave labour, concentration camps and exterminations” were all inflicted. Scholar Jeremy Sarkin argues that the brutality of the Germans can in part be attributed to their desire to rapidly enter into the so-called “Scramble for Africa,” the European nations’ dash at the end of the 19th century to formalize their colonization of Africa. Until that period, Germany had had relatively little involvement in colonial endeavors; they really had to scramble. It was this rush to formalize European holdings, Hannah Arendt argues, that first introduced racial ideology as a foundation for totalitarianism. “Race was the emergency explanation of human beings whom no European or civilized man could understand and whose humanity so frightened and humiliated the immigrants that they no longer cared to belong to the same human species,” Arendt writes of the Dutch settlers in neighboring South

Africa. “Race was the Boers’ answer to the overwhelming monstrosity of Africa — a whole continent populated and overpopulated by savages — an explanation of the madness which grasped and illuminated them like ‘a flash of lightning in a serene sky: ‘Exterminate all the brutes.’” In the Scramble for Africa, there was a sudden and carefully deliberated codification of race, with the Dutch Boers inhabiting an ambiguous middle space between white and black. The Herero, despite their hybridized clothing, weren’t so lucky. In 2004, on the 100th anniversary of the Herero genocide, the German government issued a formal apology. In the speech, Minister Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul makes a point to observe that, “even at the time, back in 1904, there were also Germans who opposed and spoke out against this war of oppression. One of them was August Bebel, the chairman of the same political party of which I am a member.” Why does Wieczorek-Zeul spend almost as much time highlighting an obscure voice of opposition as she does recounting the violence endured by the Herero people? Whom exactly is this apology for? The German government made it clear that reparations were not to be discussed that day. In the huge trunk of photographs, journals, letters, and certificates that my mom took back the U.S. when her family’s farm was sold is an odd, typewritten biography of my great-grandfather’s life. We’re not sure whether he typed it himself. Only three specific dates appear in the document: that of his own birth; that of his wife’s (my great-grandmother’s) death, and; January 12, 1904. Listen to what he is saying. I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry.

AN EXCERPT FROM THE LIFE STORY OF JACOB DIEHL

I was born August 8th, 1878 as the forth child to a small farm in Schwalbach, Wetzlar. The same year I was born my father borrowed a lot of money to build the house and the farm. His father was one of ten children and since his inheritance was small it was difficult to provide for four children. There were no wealthy farmers in that area at that time, everyone had to work hard as long as his legs were able to carry him.

My ambition since a small boy was to do better than my father. The school I attended had 150 students and only one teacher so it was difficult to learn. My writing was always bad especially spelling and I was ashamed of that. After school I was employed as a builder and earned 1 DM a day. My parents gave me 50 pennies as pocket money. While other young men spent their money on drinking and dancing I went other ways.

When I completed school I wanted to go to a school to learn construction but I could not afford it, but kind people loaned money to me—a bank and a priest. I repaid them later when I was in Namibia.

In 1901 I applied to a job at the Rhenish Missionary as a builder and they chose me out of 20 candidates. I had a five-year contract. Then I sailed to South West Africa. I got paid 200 DM of which 100 DM was paid in board. I built a mission home and a school in Windhoek and then the church in Hoachanas. Then in 1902 I built the church for the natives. The brick for the church in Windhoek I made in the river, since there were hot springs then. Schoolchildren helped with carrying the water from the river to the building site, they used cans and beer bottles to carry the water. The church was done in 1903.

The building of a church for the Hereros was started in Okahandja. Mostly the workers were sons from the chiefs and elders. The captain of the chiefs, Samuel Maharero, had given permission for the boys to work there, since it was a church for their own people. One morning after drinking coffee I went to the building site and there was nobody there. So I went to the captain's home and I found that under a larger tree there were 50 chiefs, the elders and the captain gathered and everyone had a gun. I tried to negotiate with them that if the workers don't arrive then the church would not be finished. Then they sent the boys back to work. But after a little while they were called back again. Then I went to the missionary and told him about that, but he said that this was not true. But within minutes the shooting began. Some lives were lost, but at the end of the day on January 12th 1904, that evening I went with a colleague who had learned to speak Herero to the captain to negotiate terms. I was very nervous and did not know what the outcome would be.

A thousand Hereros were gathered. One of the builders who worked with me held my hand and assured me that nothing would happen to me. Meyer negotiated with the chiefs and elders but the captain was not there. They told them that it was decided that all white men had to be killed, but women and children, and the missionary and me, since I built their church, would be spared.

In 1909 and 1910 I built the missionary home and the church in Rêhoboth. These were my last projects. Then I bought the farm, Girib, next to the Schaf River, about 14000 hectare.

SKELETON GORGE

Perhaps the contradictory, confusing, unlikely stories that the former activists have told their partners reveal their duplicity. At least one of the women, Laura, is very happy to tell us as much. But the truth might be harder than that. The apartheid government (much like the C.I.A., which assisted them for decades) had an elaborate network of covert intelligence and double agents who had infiltrated anti-apartheid groups. These agents had a profound psychological effect on anti-apartheid activists. Simply put, you didn't know whom to trust. You lied. You deflected. You misrepresented. It was part of fighting apartheid. Where do you locate truth in this narrative? Which thread do you weave?

I sit in my apartment and watch interviews with Craig Williamson, an infamous former apartheid security agent. In a lawn chair under the shade of a tree, his straining belt divides his stomach into separate upper and lower sections of billowing safari button-down. He waddles around his resort, calling to a baby elephant and then patting him on his wide, leathery rump. This is the country he fought for. And as he answers the interviewers' questions, what strikes me is that I very genuinely have no idea what he believes.

Anti-apartheid activist Marius Schoon had the same impression when he met Williamson in the 1970s. Williamson stayed with Schoon and his wife, Jeannette, at their house in Botswana while they were teaching in Molepolole and organizing against apartheid. "He's got a very good mind. He's quite convivial company," Schoon recalls, "But I was never able to find out what was going on, either in his head or in his heart."

Based on their interactions, Schoon suggested to leaders of the ANC that the rumors that Williamson had been working for the South African Police may be true and that he

shouldn't be trusted. At this point in his life Schoon had already sacrificed much for the anti-apartheid cause, having spent twelve years in prison for his foiled plans to bomb a police station in Johannesburg in the early 60s. While he was in jail, his first wife committed suicide. You can imagine how careful he was.

Schoon and his family moved to Angola after the UK Ambassador to Botswana warned that they were potential targets for assassination. While Schoon was on a trip out of the country, he received a package in the mail. Jeanette took it inside the house and opened it, and it exploded and killed both her and their daughter. Their toddler son was found later, wandering around the house. The package had been sent by Craig Williamson. Marius Schoon didn't want to see Craig Williamson in the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. He said that one way he would be happy to see him is through the sites of an AK47. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was such a challenging notion because it was premised on an almost unimaginable faith in the power of true stories. If you told a true story about your crimes there was the opportunity to be granted amnesty. Telling the truth about its past would allow the country to begin to heal. And for the people whose lives you had ruined, for people like Schoon, you could see why they would question the premise.

Williamson says that he doesn't want to be forgiven. He says that he never knew. That he never questioned the apartheid system. He says, "we thought the moral high ground was ours." Let's take him at his word. Let's assume that the firsthand account that when he found out that the letter bomb had killed Marius Schoon's wife and child and missed Marius, he expressed no remorse, that he had said, "it serves them right," let's assume

that isn't true. Let's take Williamson at his word. When you wake up one day and realize that everything that you did was wrong, that the whole system you had committed your life to supporting was premised on the violent exploitation of people based on their skin color, what story do you tell?

KOLMANSKOP

South Africa's history of racial violence has been carefully and painfully preserved over the years that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission spent traveling the country and collecting the stories and testimony from witnesses, victims, and perpetrators. The history of the German colonization of South West Africa (today Namibia), smaller, briefer, and more politically muddy, will never see that treatment. At the end of World War I, South West Africa fell under the administration of the British Empire, via the South African government, under which it was slowly pillaged of its ample mineral reserves until 1990, when it gained political independence. The German presence in the country continued, but in a diminished way, constantly threatened.

Among my mother's photographs I find a few that were taken during a trip to Kolmanskop. The town is about ten miles inland from Luderitz, a port on the southern stretch of Namibia's coast. In the years prior to War World I, Luderitz rapidly blossomed into the Las Vegas of South West Africa, as German prospectors flocked to the newly discovered diamond deposits. Almost overnight, towns sprung up in the surrounding area, serviced by a network of railroads largely built by men taken from the Herero concentration camps. Even decades later, during my mom's childhood in the 1960s,

Luderitz was still renowned as the entertainment capital of the country, one which her adventurous Aunt Lisa would frequent every year to enjoy the theaters, movie complexes, casinos, bars, and the surrounding desert wilderness. When I met Lisa, in her late eighties, she seemed to have lost little of her vivacious spirit, as she enthusiastically displayed her collection of rare succulents and other various treasures from her days in the desert. But after World War I, many German citizens were deported, the mining plays shifted further south, and most of the small towns around Luderitz went into a slow decline. Founded in 1908, Kolmanskop had been one of those towns that had sprouted mushroom-like from the desert sand. The town's hospital had boasted the first x-ray machine in Southern Africa. "Fashionably attired in well-cut outfits, the better halves of the diamond kings walked through the deep sand, their left hands, mostly in cotton gloves, holding their long trains very stiffly, while their right hands held their feathered and flowered hats in place against the pressure of the wind." But in 1956, Kolmanskop's last remaining residents moved along. Since then, the sands of the Namib Desert have reclaimed the colonial mansions, slowly breaking in doors and windows and flooding the spaces. Haunting them. As a young woman, my mom went to this vacant space in search of something, the spectacular thought of the world after the last humans are gone, or maybe something closer to home. She moved around the crumbling structures, taking photographs and peering into the shaded rooms. Each step she took in the dunes that moved among the homes displaced the sand. But the wind would put them back. To the sound of the shutter capturing, she moved with a sure sense, maybe, of where this led.

LOW

The sea uses everything.

Dionne Brand

Rememory. The angriest part of its movement.
The whole two weeks it reared up
with deck fallen towards us like its face
a face to be kicked in
but most days barely seen through wild shore mists.
Not discussed.
Sea or sand synchronic.
One turns to look and turns to look.

REFERENCES

- Arendt, Hannah (1968). *Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York, New York: Harcourt, Brace & World.
- Baldwin, James (1998). *Early Novels and Stories*. New York, New York: Library of America.
- Bishop, Elizabeth (1979). *The Complete Poems: 1927-1979*. New York, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Bold, J.D. (1974). *Phrase, Grammar and Dictionary of Fanagalo*. Johannesburg, South Africa: Hugh Kewartland Publishers.
- Brand, Dionne (2001). *A Map to the Door of No Return*. Canada, Doubleday Canada.
- Cesaire, Aime (1950). *Discourse on Colonialism*. New York, New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Cha, Theresa Hak Kyung (1982). *Dictee*. New York, New York: Tanam Press.
- Cole, Teju (2011). *Open City*. New York, New York: Random House.
- Ellison, Ralph (1952). *Invisible Man*. New York, New York: Vintage International.
- First, Ruth (1963). *South West Africa*. Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books.
- Hochschild, Adam (1990). *The Mirror at Midnight*. New York, New York: Viking.
- Jarrett,TJ (2014). *Zion*. Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Leas, Allan (2013). *Skeleton Gorge*. Unpublished.
- Lerner, Ben (2006). *Angle of Yaw*. Port Townsend, Washington: Copper Canyon Press.
- Lewis, I.M. (2003). *Ecstatic Religion: a study of shamanism and spiritualism*. New York, New York: Routledge.
- Marryat, Frederick (1845). *The Mission: Or, Scenes in Africa*. London, England: Longman, Brown, Green & Longmans.

- Nietzsche, Friedrich (1891). *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. New York, New York: Penguin Classics.
- Petry, Ann (1953). *The Narrows*. Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press.
- Petry, Ann (1946). *The Street*. Boston, Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin Co.
- Philip, M. Norbese (1989). *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*. Nova Scotia, Canada: Gynergy Books.
- Pound, Ezra (1989). *The Cantos*. New York, New York: New Directions.
- Reddy, Srikanth (2004). *Facts for Visitors*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press.
- Rosenthal, Eric (1965). *Encyclopedia of Southern Africa*. London, English: Warne.
- Sarkin-Hughes, Jeremy (2011). *Germany's Genocide of the Herero*. Cape Town, South Africa: University of Cape Town Press.
- Schoffeleers, Matthew. *Religion and the Dramatization of Life*. Zomba, Malawi: University of Malawi Press.
- Sebald, Winfried Georg (1996). *The Emigrants*. New York, New York: New Directions.
- Seidel, Frederick (2009). *Poems 1959-2009*. New York, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

BIOGRAPHY

Sean Pears has lived in Boston, Chicago, and Washington, D.C. He received his Bachelors of Arts in English from the University of Chicago in 2010 and his Master of Fine Arts in English from George Mason University in 2015. He is going on to pursue a doctoral degree in English from the University of Buffalo.