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# The Black Manifest Destiny

by Leland Brown III

Imagine, if you will, walking in a place of total isolation feeling as though no one in the world can see you and you in your natural habitat asking, what makes this natural?

Latin word "Naturalis," meaning "by birth, according to nature" Therefore, I am from "nature" — black as the ground you walk on Shaka Zulu bit by the germs of earth's wrath itself

You walk on the living contradiction of my melanin treading the enflamed paved way of the "natural" habitat counting the painful steps into the oblivion, as nature calls to me in its most basic form.

My senses relax as the wind blows, as the sun sets the wind slows as I tug deeper into your stories.

I heard your lies, said *you objectified our lives*breathed in gentrification's lust for our souls
paid reparations for your tolls
breathed in the riddled muse.

The noose is here, top of Nicodemus and thousands of years recollect the pain that has influenced me — smell of broken bones burning homes stolen ingenuity still ruins me

Tried to believe that someone is looking down I looked around, my knocks still unfound My people can't help – Willie Lynch set this system up himself.

I can't breathe —



The phone rang and I heard dial tone, spoke to Jim Crow and he said, *call the other line*I called Willie Lynch and he told me, *take your brothers to the other side*I ran into Reagan – he forgot to tell me about the war on lies

I can't see I can't speak I can't I'm weak.

I've been the strange fruit far too long hanging from a rope pulled far too strong I smell the poplar trees, I smell the burning bodies east of the Mississippi, blood curdling screams

so I jump, leave my feet the flow of air takes me & I leave my natural form, bound to your depth I lose my breath

I'm here, arrived & steer inside the pride of the isolated, emancipated standing on Plymouth Rock shrewdly asking, *did you land on me?* 

## Chorus

by Will Shook-Shoup

In Bethel space, Bradford Pears blossom under half-dollar-sized spring snowflakes. Not enough time to not

worry. Souring coffee made right by laughter. The slow piecemeal work of picking banjo strings

or picture-making in harmony and rhythm, immersion exercises, incarnations of common

and rare and the quicksilver sap of soprano alto tenor bass and mixed.

Between prayers, between dreams, research the common housefly, house finch, sparrows' wings. You are

meaning-making machines, you are tinkerers and demon-makers, movers of old wool, seeing bones,

shaman skin and paint. Good energy in this place, good guts. Our kidneys scrub clean enough blood each concert to fill a pool.

There are spiting spells, too, but you don't have to believe in them. Fill up, pomp up, reflect on old altar calls,

songbirds' calls. Call Glass a minimalist and laugh, and call ya'll a pack of pacifists, cynics, and skeletons

with bright teeth, weak knees, and bad or absent dance moves. All your toes go black and brittle with frostbite.

Now, go to the hill and bury memory in good black soil, plant winter wheat on it, and hope for green growth—



for couplings, tribes, and sprouting genealogies of voices. Ancestor speech. And hope that the cycles of sunlight and night's black absence

will fruit it whole again each year. Know it. All this was and I hear you. No memorial, more memory, memory's hall

and wall of sound. And I was and am moved by your singing and I am moved to sing with you and so I sing with you now.



Untitled 1. Photography. Heath Goertzen.



Lonely Blue Spirit Wolf. Acrylic. Bethany Hamill.

## Wild

by Sutton Welsh

I don't belong in my pack. They earned their stripes. I was born without a cry and with magenta polka dots embedded into my fur. When I speak, they flick their tails into my face. When I suggest a game, they become hyenas; I hear their cackles throughout many sleepless nights. I could trot away to another land, but they're home. We're sisters. We're primitive. We're forgetful. We push each other aside to drink from the watering hole. Survival is obsession. We never share our killings. They know I prefer grapes to gazelles anyway.

The desert is in my lungs, and my body all warmth like my mother's. O family, all gone without moving a hoof. When the sun sets, I gallop amongst fireflies, seek new sisters. I sprint away from the pack. I leave my internal beasts.



# The Seed of Reflection: Steven Wingate on the Art of Fiction

Interview by Elizabeth Schrag

On October 27th, 2016, the Bethel College Literary Studies Department hosted Steven Wingate, fiction writer and author of the acclaimed short story collection Wifeshopping (Houghton Mifflin, 2008). Wingate is an Assistant Professor at South Dakota State University, where he also serves as faculty mentor for Oakwood, SDSU's undergraduate literary magazine. During his visit to the Bethel campus, Wingate gave a guest workshop in Dr. Siobhan Scarry's Fiction Workshop (Lit Studies 251), met with our editorial staff about the power of literary magazines to cultivate a creative campus, and he read a new work of fiction at an evening reading in Memorial Grove — a gorgeous fall night under the stars with stories & s'mores. Wingate made time during his busy day to sit down at Mojo's and answer a few questions from fall term editorial staff member Elizabeth Schrag.

Elizabeth Schrag: What authors would you recommend for young people who aspire to make things with language?

Steven Wingate: This is an enormous question because there are so many. For me, the most interesting people in my life have always been experimental writers and artists because they're really working with the building blocks of language itself as opposed to working with the building blocks of something like story. So I like to look at people who are doing very intimate, small experimental things. Some of my favorite writers, my real go-to writers — whenever I'm blocked or don't have any ideas — are Gertrude Stein, William S. Burroughs, and Antonin Artaud ... because they really kind of break language down to really small elements and then see how they recombine together. That is where I've found most of the original energy in my work.

LS: I noticed that you really work at blurring the lines between types of literature. As a college student, I often feel that I am given a specific set of criteria and am expected to spit out facts. I then become disconnected from what I am writing. As a professor, what is your purpose in having students write?



SW: I'm teaching creative writing almost exclusively. I think the main thing going on is self-expression. I think that on the page, we work out all sorts of questions about our identity and our place in the world. I don't think we ever

figure out our identity or our place in the world on the page, but we define the contours of the questions that will define our own lives. Whether we're writing fiction, poetry, or non-fiction, it's an act of looking in the mirror and an act of looking in the world at the same time, and in that reflection is the seed of what I hope will be a lifelong contemplation of what it means to be human. So I think that learning creative writing at the undergraduate level is a wonderful way to start thinking about that gigantic question of who you are and how we live in the world.

ES: As you experience it now, what would you say is literature's most important function in our society today?

SW: It's the same as it has always been: we use literature to ask ourselves who we are and how we might live in the world. It's a way of recording who we are and simultaneously a way for individuals, cultures, and even our species to ask itself, "what if?" And for individuals, it's a form of communion with one another, a way for us to understand that we're not alone.



ES: In regards to your book *Wifeshopping*, from where did the inspiration for the stories and the book come?

SW: I never set out to write a book called *Wifeshopping*. I simply had a bunch of stories from a dark time in my life, after I had come out of an unsuccessful



first marriage and before I met the woman I'll be married to until the end. My fictional characters went through the same journey as I did: trying to figure out what it meant to love another person and to understand what it means to give something of yourself up to allow love to happen. The best of these stories kept on "talking" to me; I kept on working them, trying to understand their characters. Eventually I ran into an old friend and asked if he was dating, and he said, "Actually, I'm wife shopping." And I instantly knew that I had a title for a book that would bring together all of the stories I'd been working on. That's when it kicked into the next gear and started to become a real book.



ES: What is the best advice you have for anyone struggling with writer's block?

SW: Writer's block comes when you're pressuring yourself or trying to write something that isn't really you. When that happens to me, I just shift to another project — that's part of the advantage of working in several different forms. I can shift easily from a point of struggle to something else that I'm not pressuring myself over, something that's really grabbing my curiosity at the moment. For younger writers, I see a lot of people struggling with the pressures of plot or even careerism. They want to write gigantic novel series when they haven't figured out the basics of language and character. This can make the weight of every word immense. Who can write under that kind of imagined pressure? Writing needs to be free, especially in first



drafts, and you can't worry about making mistakes. Ultimately, I think writer's block is all about perfectionism and the lack of freedom it creates.

ES: Did you always know you were going to be a writer?

SW: For the longest time, I thought I'd be a scientist — a primatologist. I adored Jane Goodall as a teenager and wanted to follow in her footsteps, studying primates. But late in my teens I realized that as a writer, I could study the human primate and find significantly more variety. So I knew it since my late teens. I wasted a lot of time wondering what kind of writer I was going to be, and wish I'd come sooner to the realization that I've had in the past few years: that "kind" is just a label and has nothing to do with the literature you actually create.

ES: Is there anything else you would like to share with the Bethel community?

SW: You have a wonderful thing going at your school. There are as many people involved in *YAWP!* as there are at South Dakota State's literary magazine, and our school is twenty times larger. Keep building that community and you'll grow a terrific writing culture.



Photo Credits: Jackie Moore

## **Kiss**

by Kendra Scott

She did the same thing every Sunday around 2 P.M. I could see her walking down Fourth Street, my street, and crossing the busy road before my block. I would watch her walk down my street's crooked sidewalk past the overgrown bushes with her black book bag sitting high on her back. She usually wore her long, blonde hair down and curly so that it covered most of her face. I liked to guess what color her eyes were. Blue, probably. She walked with purpose and poise. I never once saw her trip over the broken sidewalk as she made her way to the cemetery at the end of my street. Every Sunday she paused at the entrance to Holy Cross. She tied her left shoe and then would look up at the sky. Then she went in and would come back out about an hour later. I would watch her make her way back up Fourth Street, cross the busy road, disappear into the distance, and wait until the next Sunday when I could see her again. My house was three houses down from the entrance to Holy Cross Cemetery. As kids, some neighborhood friends and I used to play hide and seek in the dark in there. I wouldn't dare do that now, not knowing what I know, even after years of college and new memories to try to erase the old ones.

I watched her walk up and down Fourth Street with that black book bag on throughout the seasons. She marched on in the hot and humid summer months, continued into the windy fall days, and stomped through the snow in the winter. It wasn't until a cool spring day that I didn't see her show up. It was well past her usual time and I was outside shooting some hoops in my driveway. I never had been much of an athlete, but I enjoyed the activity nonetheless. I shot a 3-pointer and missed, causing the ball to ricochet off the rim and bounce to the sidewalk. She picked the ball up and tossed it to me. Her eyes were in fact bright and blue, and they locked with mine for a split second before she looked away. Sweat glistened on her forehead and her bounty of hair was pulled back with the exception of a couple of stray strands.

"Thank you," I said, more shyly than expected. She nodded her head at me and briskly walked toward Holy Cross. Her book bag was slightly unzipped and I saw one blue flower peeking out the side. I jogged up beside her, gaining courage with every stride.

"Excuse me," I said, startling her. "Sorry, uh, but your backpack isn't zipped and I thought you would like to know that?" She flipped her

backpack around and finished zipping it, hiding the blue flower once again.

"I'm Caleb," I said while extending my hand. She hesitated, and then lightly shook my hand. Her skin was cold and soft against mine.

"Erin," she responded. She turned and continued to walk up the crooked sidewalk. From 20 yards away I watched her bend down at the entrance to the cemetery and tie her left shoe. And from 20 yards away I could see that it wasn't loose. Erin glanced over her shoulder as she stood back up and once again locked eyes with mine. She finished her routine by looking up at the sky and entering Holy Cross.

I went to Central High School. It was a plain building with rooms divided by walls essentially made from cardboard. There were girls, cute girls, who I saw in some of my classes and in the hallways. But I didn't care about them. I saw those blue eyes and blonde curls every time I closed my eyes in the week that followed our first official meeting. I never saw her in the halls or in the cafeteria, though. I asked my friend Mac during study hall on Friday if he knew of anyone named Erin.

"Well, there's Erin Burnet, Erin Olsen, Erin Reed, and Aaron Waters, but the last one is a guy. You're not into that, right? I mean I've always kinda wondered and I wanted to let you know it's cool with me, bro," Mac snickered.

"I'm not gay, asshole. It's none of those Erins. I told you she has blonde hair with the most curls I've ever seen. And she's kinda tall, rather skinny, with blue eyes. She's beautiful, man."

"Maybe she goes to North High? Maybe she's homeschooled? Or, maybe she's a dropout! You've found a winner, bro." Mac put his headphones in and began doing his Calculus homework. North. That's gotta be it. I couldn't wait until Sunday when I could see her again.

I woke up late on Sunday and rushed to get ready. I put on my favorite pair of jeans and a V-neck. I took the time to lather in gel and combed my straight, brown hair back and over, attempting to look like the model I saw in a Hugo Boss advertisement. When 2 P.M. rolled around, I was conveniently on the front porch enjoying the beautiful spring day while reading *The Great Gatshy* for my advanced English class. I became interested in the book and didn't notice Erin walking down the sidewalk.

"What are you reading?" she asked me from the sidewalk. I quickly closed my book and sat up straight at the sound of her voice. She slowly walked up the driveway to my house and paused at the bottom of the steps leading up to the porch. Her hair was down today and wild, shining in the sun.

"The Great Gatsby," I replied. "It's for class." My heart was racing and I felt

my face get hot. Keep it together, man.

"You could just watch the movie, you know," she responded with a laugh. "That's what I did, at least."

"Do you go to North?" I asked her.

"I used to. I graduated last year. I am currently taking a year off to 'find myself and find my passions.' At least that's what my mom tells everyone." She rolled her bright blue eyes and flipped her hair as she spoke. I nodded along, curious to hear more about her. I racked my brain for something clever to say without admitting that I was still in high school. She filled the silence by walking backwards slowly the same way she came.

"Well, Caleb, I'll see you next week then?" I once again nodded my head. I once again watched her walk to the entrance of Holy Cross, perform her routine, and disappear inside. I had about an hour until she would emerge from the cemetery for her walk home. I hopped into my Ford Ranger and sped to the nearest Redbox. I returned home within about ten minutes with the newest *The Great Gatsby* movie in tow. My parents were at my grandma's for the day so I had the house to myself. I popped a bag of popcorn and then tossed some pizza rolls in the microwave, all the while keeping my eye on the window so I didn't miss Erin. My phone vibrated in my pocket. Mac.

"What's up, dude?" I asked while peering out the window. It was almost 3 P.M. and she would be walking past at any time. "I'm kinda busy. Well, almost busy. I'm waiting on Erin."

"Ahh shit, bro! You two are hanging out? Almost busy? What does that mean, bro? Nah, I know what that means. I'll let you go, man. Put a picture on your snap story so I know it's real!" Mac hung up the phone. He was speaking so fast I didn't get a chance to correct him. I spotted Erin exiting the cemetery and jogged outside.

"Want to help me with my homework?" I asked her as I held up the rented movie. She threw her head back and laughed, then nodded "yes," smiling. I ushered Erin into my house, grabbed the popcorn and pizza rolls, and led her down to the basement. She sat on the couch at one end while I put the DVD in and shut off the lights. I awkwardly sat at the other end of the couch, leaving a whole cushion in between us. I could hear Mac's voice in my head: *quit being a little bitch and get closer*. I looked at Erin through the corner of my eye. She stuffed her face with a handful of popcorn and spit a couple of pieces out when she laughed at something Jay Gatsby said. I scooted closer to her without her noticing.

\*

"The first time I saw this I couldn't believe Myrtle got ran over," Erin began. She took a bite of pizza roll and continued, "But then I thought,

that cheater deserved it for doing that to Daisy. And if I were Daisy, I would just kill Tom too so I could be with Gatsby." She nonchalantly grabbed another pizza roll and popped it in her mouth. I laughed and scooted a little closer to her. [continued on page 28]



P as in Pterodactyl. Acrylic, India Ink Wash, and Gel Ink. Kaylie Penner.

"Violent, are we?" I raised my eyebrows and asked with a smirk.

"Maybe," she responded. We both reached for the last pizza roll and our hands touched. She quickly pulled back and giggled. Once the movie was over and the snacks were finished, she stood up to leave.

"It's getting dark and I have to walk home," she said as she grabbed her book bag and put her shoes back on. "Thank you for inviting me over, though. And thanks for like, not making a move on me during the movie or anything. Most guys don't want to just be my friend, you know? And I need a friend right now." Friend. She needed a friend right now. Friend-zoned. Shit.

"No problem...dude." I gave her a pat on the back and she laughed as she walked out the front door.

"You called her 'dude'? What the hell, bro. You like her, right?" I nodded my head at Mac's question. "Then tell her. She's an *older* woman. You aren't dealing with high school bullshit with her." He shook his head in disgust. "Who watches a whole movie with a girl — home alone — and doesn't at least make out by the end of it? Bro, you're still a KV. She's the one who can change that!" I looked up at the ceiling. I was aware of my KV-ness. Short for Kissing-Virgin. I told Mac to shut up and pulled out my homework. I had to get Erin to like me, to kiss me. I spent the rest of study hall thinking how I could make those things happen instead of thinking about my Anatomy assignment. I decided that I would have to suck it up and be her friend first. That would be my ticket in. My ticket to Erin.

The next month or so consisted of me waiting on the porch for Erin every Sunday. When she arrived I would join her and ask her about her week while walking with her the rest of the way to Holy Cross. I avoided asking her the reason for why she visited so frequently, although she did mention that she was currently seeing a therapist to "talk about her issues," as she put it. After she was done inside she would come back over. We would talk, shoot some hoops, pick weeds from the flower bed or watch TV. I was the best friend I could be. On a warm Sunday in early May, she invited me to go inside the cemetery with her.

"Are you sure?" I asked. "I don't want to, like, step over any boundaries or anything."

"I want you to. I kinda need some company for this today," she responded while tying her left shoe. She glanced at the sky before we walked in. I wanted to ask her why she did that. The words were forming on my lips and she noticed.

"I'll tell you later, maybe." She told me. She grabbed my hand and

led me to a corner of the cemetery that was mainly trees. We stopped in front of a sparkling tombstone that read "Quinn Thurman." I recognized that name from somewhere. Erin took her black book bag off and pulled out a single blue flower. She set it beside the stone next to about ten other blue flowers that she must have brought previously. She sat down on the ground in front of it and motioned for me to sit beside her. The trees were all full and green, and the bright green grass was soft and thick.

"She was my best friend." Erin spoke softly after a long silence. A single tear ran down her cheek and she quickly wiped it off. "Today marks one year since she ... well, you know," she said as she motioned to the tombstone. I couldn't find the words to say to her, so I didn't say anything at all. We sat in silence once again.

"What happened to her?" I asked, finally.

"Car accident. You probably remember it being in the papers last year," she answered. That's how I knew her name. I remembered reading that a couple of kids got in a crash driving home from a party after prom and two of them died. I stretched out my arm and put it around her shoulder and brought her closer to me.

"I was with her. Her and Reed," she continued. Her eyes were focused on a memory. "We went to some stupid party at this kid's field and Quinn got trashed. I was a little tipsy but not bad. Reed was her date and he told us he was good to drive, so we let him. He ended up not being good and he veered off the road and hit a tree and we flipped. I was in the backseat and had my seatbelt on. Reed and Quinn didn't. They both got thrown from the car." Erin's voice was low and mixed with sadness and anger. I imagined how scared Erin must have been. "So I got out of the smashed-up car and saw Quinn laying there on the ground, covered in blood, surrounded by a patch of blue flowers, well weeds probably. Anyway, I ran to her but she was gone, I could tell. And then I saw Reed. He was also covered in blood and laying on his back. I thought they were both dead. He was the reason Quinn died." Her voice was still low but surprisingly calm. "Then he started to sit up. He had this huge gash on his forehead and it was bleeding pretty bad but he was sitting up, he wasn't dead. He killed Quinn! I stumbled over to him and kicked him in the head as hard as I could, so hard that my shoe came off." She looked down to her left shoe and absentmindedly untied and retied it, then looked back into the distance. "He fell back down to his back and stopped breathing after a while.... The police decided they both died on impact." Tears were streaming down her cheeks from her now stormy eyes. I looked at her in horror. She gave a small smile, wiped away her tears and said,



"He deserved to die. He killed Quinn. He deserved to die." She laughed and slowly rolled her head to face me. She was a monster. A beautiful monster. Her beauty sickened me. Then she leaned in and gave me a soft, long kiss on the lips.



Sunset 2. Acrylic. Natalie Unruh.

## Ode to Cello

by Allie Chesbrough

How I dare to touch, embrace your curves. Sweet resinous varnish tingles my nerves.

My neck on yours, like naked waltz. Our vulnerability knows no faults.

As dancing fingers turn callous by steel, my wounds of past, you slowly heal.

Your auburn tone, like autumn's abscission, grants me only one decision.

Take me prisoner, never to flee. Entrapped and entranced, I am finally free.

Strings worn smooth by sweat and friction, bare scars from years of this addiction.

Blind hands in the dark, my legs search your waist, slip into grooves, a familiar place.

Your scroll unfurls secrets, whispering in my ear. Tickling more than my fancy, assurance you are near.

Tuners wind string like spools wind twine. Strings crawl along fingerboard in envy of vine.

Your rounded bouts silhouette my frame. Instrument and human become the same.

Where wood meets skin, barriers soon fade. Melting into the other, a fleshly, oaken braid.



Sunset 1. Acrylic. Natalie Unruh.

# **Potluck**

by Will Shook-Shoup

He thinks all men are the same man and that that means sex, yes, and gender but also post-hole diggers, sand burrs, goat-head memories, and dreams of water boatman.

And daddy-long-leg self defense, skittering ends on glass, and insecurity, especially about not knowing how to change the oil.

The table is wide. The table is open to all who are.

The three are one and the grape drink is grape drink and the beer is beer. Everyone eats—
the atheist, the agnostic, and the faithful—
over bowls of macaroni, watermelon, and baby spring greens.

# Recitations

by Miner Seymour

My father rides above and behind me in a hand-tooled leather satchel. We are headed north and home.

I am taking him to the big lake to swim with coho, cutthroat, and browns to keep a pledge known, but never spoken.

It is New Year's Day and a Michigan day, bitter cold and clear as a bell. The wind is blowing hard northwest, waves pounding at the shore.

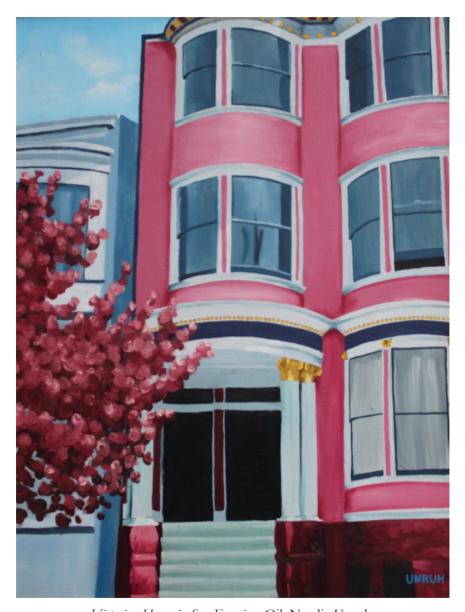
The icy spray drives me back, I turn from eternity's door.

Up the beach, at the steel I can reach the river kneeling. Here with my hands, I commit him to wind and sand and water.

Ashes blew onto my hands, my skin turned grey from white. I washed my hands, I washed my hands as long as I could bear.



Untitled 5. Photography. Heath Goertzen.



Victorian House in San Francisco. Oil. Natalie Unruh.



## Color Blind

by Roderick Williams Jr.

You look outside of the house window to view the scenery in the neighborhood and find two officers flanking your father sitting on the bench in front of the house. Nosily you go outside to get a better status. There he goes. There who goes? Let's get him. Then the sound of the handcuffs on your wrists and a slam of a door. Immediately a voice on the walkie talkie thunders, "We have captured the African-American teen who caused domestic violence on Barbarosa Drive."

Everyone heard it. We were on Joaquin Road five blocks away.

You are staring out of the back driver-side window, seeing hand gestures from the officers trying to calm your father's rage. You are trying to make out the words that are being exchanged between the two parties as if you are waiting for the final verdict from the jury. Then the officers open up the door and with guilt-ridden voices ask you to get out of the car. They release the sturdy grip of the handcuffs from your wrists before they get in the car and drive off with no more words to say. You are left there with a puzzled look upon your face.