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## The Third Side of the Coin

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# THE THIRD SIDE OF THE COIN

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
University of New Orleans  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts  
in  
The Department of Drama & Communication,  
Creative Writing Program

by

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•  
December, 2002

# The Third Side of the Coin

Poetry Manuscript By  
Tamara Wells



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

If Marvin Bell is right and “good poets borrow, but great poets steal,” then I certainly have had every opportunity in the last two years to embark on a life of crime. With thanks to my committee members, Richard Katrovas, Bill Lavender and Anne Marie Macari, for their guidance throughout the manuscript process; to my fellow hyphenated students in the MFA program, Sonja Hansard-Weiner and Dana Harrison-Tidwell, for their support and encouragement; to the many talented poets and instructors with whom I’ve come into contact over the course of the program—Marvin Bell, Gerald Costanzo, Nancy Eimers, Ed Hirsch, Bill Olsen, Greg Orr, Stan Plumley, and Judith Root—they’ve led the horse to water (or the thief to the illicit goods); and finally to my husband and friends without whom I would never have embarked on this journey.

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## **ABSTRACT**

*The Third Side of the Coin* is a manuscript of poetry exploring ironic distances, both physical and metaphysical, both slight and significant. It opens with a quote from Agha Shahid Ali who asked, “What then is separation’s geography?” The poems in this collection describe the geography of separation between individuals, cultures, ideas, man and nature and the physical and metaphysical realms. As the author travels deserts, oceans, and outer space, she seeks proofs of existence and questions natural laws deemed irrefutable. This questioning is reflected in the book’s title, which, on one hand, represents a state of geometric impossibility. And yet, the author contends that every coin has a third side, however narrow, marginal or fleeting it may be. It is the third side that unites diametrical opposites, that permits the coexistence of dark and the light, and that bridges the gravity and weightlessness of our existence.

## **INTRODUCTION: The Artist's Statement**

The Venus of Willendorf and the cave paintings of Lascaux are proofs that we as a species have long been compelled to make sense of our existence. From our earliest etchings, we have been obsessed with bringing order and meaning to the seeming disorder and complexity of our universe. Thus, our works of art attempt to clarify, magnify and preserve our experience of life. In this sense, they often have become the truest and most reliable witnesses to the times we have lived.

Though H.G. Wells might argue that artistic pursuits are mere diversions, outlets for surplus energy undevoted to commerce or warfare, I'd contend that art engenders both its creators and its audiences with a sense of belonging to a group or culture. This results from the recognition that certain works of art accurately capture (through observation, intuition, metaphor and creative impulse) some aspect of our common human story. Art affirms that human goals can be imagined and achieved and that ugliness, horror and fear can be vanquished. Unlike other modes of reacting to human experience (i.e., religion, science, politics), art results in a tangible, external product that has the capacity to "speak to" and inspire future generations. While art may be produced to fulfill practical needs, it is unavoidably an expression of an ideal that withstands the ravages of time.

*So what is separation's geography?*  
—Agha Shahid Ali

1

## Proofs of Existence

the shattering of a dancer's leg

the gravitational pull of Mercury

naked arms of a stillborn's mother

blue kisses on the inside of a woman's thigh

hawthorne scars on a penitance's back

\*

the hammering of a hummingbird's heart

protest of a board at the tread of a foot

unwitnessed space between a frame and its canvas

Christmas trees unsold on a deserted lot

arachnid skeleton of an abandoned umbrella

\*

names never called in a phonebook

a razor blade glinting on a bathroom sink

afterthoughts pencilled in a prayer book:

*if not this, then what?*

the distance in meters from my house to yours

## The Priest Says

There is no light in darkness  
nor darkness in light,  
the priest says as he tears up  
my paper. This is his proof  
that the yin-yang is an instrument  
of the devil. His proof  
that there is no evil in heaven,  
nor goodness in hell.

Thirteen, I look to the night sky,  
the visible blue mapped millions  
of years before my birth,  
I know he is wrong.  
I know there is a third side  
to the coin.

## Daylight Savings

I was three and we were going to the circus.  
 I'd only ever seen one on TV—  
 clowns with billiard ball noses,  
 flossed candy whipped into high bouffants,  
 tightropes stretched high as telephone wires,  
 striped tents billowing like laundry freshly washed.

Persistent as a seatbelt alarm I badgered:  
*Is it time to go yet? Is it time to go?*  
 Fed up, my father led me to the kitchen.  
 Pointed at the clock above the fridge:  
*When the big hand's on the twelve  
 and the little's on the six, we'll go.*

Then he returned to mixing martinis on the patio.  
 I stood staring a long while at the winking orb  
 It would be another year before man rocketed  
 to the moon and the eagle would land.  
 But in the spirit of that endeavor I launched myself  
 atop the table and moonwalked my way to the fridge.

Standing tiptoe, I adjusted the hands and then gingerly  
 made my way back to earth. With a sleight of hand,  
 I had altered time! Swelled with accomplishment,  
 I skipped outside. It was time to be on our way.  
 But, alas, when my subterfuge was discovered  
 I never made it to the circus. Clowns tumbled

from their midget cars and the Wallendas walked  
 their ropes without me. Even at three,  
 I knew this tale would have ended differently if I had  
 turned back the hands of time instead of advancing them.  
 Even then I knew I had been betrayed by time.  
 Ever since, it's been my mission to save the daylight.

## Blessings/Curses

My mother once told me that her father chased her  
 through their house in Havana with a machete.  
 And I hated him, hated him right up till seconds  
 before he died, when he sat crooked and bent  
 as all the weapons he'd carried.

Defiant as a pope.

Shrunken in velour robes, his skin was vellum  
 stretched across cheekbones. His voice rattled  
 in his trachea; his head hung awkwardly like  
 a marionette dangling from a toymaker's wall.

At ten, I invented a war wound for him—  
 shrapnel in the knee— to explain what tormented  
 and chased him across 10,000 nights. Up and down  
 the cobblestones of Havana, Abidjan, Rabat,  
 Montreal, Bogota, Buenos Aires, Shanghai, Bangkok.  
 Places where he'd lose himself in bourbon and gin  
 and in tales of his Spanish forebears'

glorious debauches.

Late some nights, I fear, what tormented him,  
 torments me.

For after years of counting stitches  
 & packing suitcases, my mother was dead too,  
 and with her all of the things she dared not whisper  
 into the night. Three days later as my grandfather  
 prepared to bestow his final blessings,

all I cared to know

was how long must we carry  
 our mothers and fathers?

## **Dígame (Tell Me)**

Tell me, you who've left this world on *condorito* wings...

Do you hit your head upon the sky?  
Must you look away from Jupiter's one mad eye?  
Have you ever heard a *tortuga* cry, as she heaves  
her body, heavy with eggs, to the shore?

How do you spend your days, *mi abuelito*?

Do you train clouds to herd horses?  
Do you provide refuge for storm-battered birds?  
Do you whisper in the ears of sleeping priests,  
forgiving them their sins?

Must you really pluck the harp all day, *mi abuelito*?

Or can you climb Mons Olympus to trumpet  
the births of new suns? Can you awaken a field  
of dandelions, or tell *dichos* to astonished forests.

*Dígame, por favor.*

## Miles from Anywhere Else

### 1 Bluff, Utah

Your choice: Blanding or Bluff.  
What's the difference.  
Only the miles from anywhere else.

At the diner where the girl  
storing starch for winter  
keeps mixing up orders,  
I ask for a shrimp salad  
and overhear from the kitchen:  
"It's just like a Chef Salad,  
except you put shrimp in it  
instead of ham."

The fifty-ish proprietress  
with a requisite bouffant  
sits puffing under  
the NO SMOKING sign.  
She watches three J Crew types  
fresh off the river  
order their carbo-loads  
and complain about prices.

A man chewing a toothpick joins her.  
Neither smiles. Whenever someone  
they know walks in, they raise a hand.  
But not too high. They must conserve  
their energy for late night TV.

Here they never lock the doors;  
you can see right through the windows  
cast in greenish afterglow  
by the insect-repelling nightlights  
of some otherworldly brothel.

## 2 Chinle

In the land of the one-eyed pickup,  
we stop to ask a Navajo cop,  
Where's a good place to eat?

He sends us down the road  
to the lodge cafeteria we'd just left  
because it had too many tourists.

## 3 Spider Woman's Rock

The sign at the edge of the cliff  
with a thousand-foot drop reads:  
"Caution: Fall May Prove Fatal."

A man in a Broncos cap laughs  
and dangles his two-year old  
over the chasm. Turkey vultures  
jockey currents overhead.

## 4 The Spanish Mission

The shop sells Jesus on bookmarks,  
drinking glasses and playing cards.  
The clerk who volunteers  
every third Tuesday  
from one to three  
points out  
the NO SHORTS sign  
to a young guy in cut-offs  
and asks where he's from.

"Catholic?" she asks. He nods.  
She pats his hand and tells him,  
"The thing I like best  
about our religion  
is that you don't  
have to make any decisions;  
they've already been made for you."

## 5      **The Petrified Forest**

To whom it may concern:

You probably get hundreds of letters like this  
 But none with a tale like mine.  
 I know signs throughout the park warn  
 to leave the wood undisturbed, but I thought  
 no one would miss a tiny piece,  
 no bigger than my thumbnail,  
 and then one more to keep it company.  
 I carried it out in my shirt pocket,  
 past rangers,  
 past even my wife.

I'd had the wood less than a week when

my tire went flat in the Texas panhandle  
 the IRS ordered me to pay six years in back taxes  
 they repossessed my Audi, my Volvo and my jacuzzi  
 my son changed his name to Mohammed  
 my daughter called me "Jesse" and pierced her nose  
                   with diamond studs I'd given her for Sweet Sixteen  
 then my mama died and left my share  
                   to the Humane Society of Abilene

Herewith enclosed please find  
 two pieces of petrified wood.  
 Forgive me for taking them.  
 They have been my ebony sorrows,  
 my Apache tears.

## 6      **Saguaro in Snow**

Photographers outnumbered the cacti.  
 Snowbirds who swim at Christmas  
 refused to believe that the powder  
 dusting the ground was the genuine article.

But high speed films documented  
 this once in a lifetime occurrence  
 for covers of *Sunset*  
 and *Arizona Highways*.

## 7 Gallup, NM

Welcome to New Mexico. Bring your camera.  
 See Indian City with the world's largest teepee.  
 Six stories high!  
 See the world's largest wholesaler  
 of authentic Navajo jewelry.

The world's largest truckstop.  
 57 restaurants. 24 motels.  
 2 campgrounds.  
 1 dog decomposing.  
 Free coffee. Gas only \$1.03.  
 Clean restrooms. Half a mile.  
 Exit now.

## 8 Through Thoreau

A cluster of hogans herd together like elephants  
 protecting their young from attack.  
 Barricaded with tumbleweeds and used car parts,  
 a mobile home stands: a lunar space station,  
 its satellite dish picking up weather reports  
 from Barrow, Alaska.

A weathered woman in velveteen waits  
 in an arroyo. We pull over, ask if she needs a ride.  
 In English as broken as her two front teeth, she tells us  
 she has "three womens" and "three mens"  
 she must pray for at the revival up State Route 666.  
 It is only later when we pull away, I realize  
 she was referring to six of her own children,  
 each long dead.

## 9 Chaco Canyon

Where we walk, water settled  
 into primordial seas, out of which  
 fish crawled so we could be here.  
 Where we walk, lava oozed  
 and pumice burst forth—  
 popcorn from a hot air popper;  
 the aroma faintly burnt.

Only stone ziggurats  
 recall these geologic birth pangs.  
 Only they know the splendor  
 of sun at the center of the earth.

## 10 The Politics in Rio Arriba County

Mino Abeyta, Seferino Archuleta,  
 Eppie Martinez and Sammy Sandoval  
 are such good citizens. Together  
 they've been dead going on thirty years,  
 but they still come back to the *vecindario*  
 every year to vote.

## 11 Phone Conversation in an Española Drugstore

“ ‘Allo. Linda? God, I'm glad I got you. You know the police got your  
 cousin in jail... Yes! And they got my number and called me here  
 at the store and asked me if I knew you—Linda Chavez—and I said, yeah,  
 I knew you; you're my sister-in-law, but I didn't know where you were.  
 I hope that's okay I said I knew you 'cause I didn't know what name  
 you're using now. Hey, Linda, I gotta' go. I got a customer.”

## 12 Salsa Sabrosa

Argentina: *tango*.  
 Brazil: *samba*.  
 Haiti: *mambo*.

But Friday night at Club Alegria,  
 when Father Pretto plays,  
 all steps are *cumbias*.

In this city of faith,  
 only hips move.  
 Anything else  
 is an illusionist's act.

## 13 Sunset at Canjilon

Fingerlength trout gum at Velveeta  
 on the end of your line. You, a war baby,  
 insist that Velveeta in its foil,

(along with Wonder Bread and Spam),  
is one of the greatest creations  
of the twentieth century.

But the fish don't bite.  
I tug on my baitless line and marvel  
at the fly fisherwoman,  
plunged knee deep in muck,  
herding in fish like an old time *vaquero*.

A chipmunk with Betty Boop cheeks  
honks for more luncheon smoked cheddar  
she carries away to rot in storage till winter.

Then sun fractures the light  
setting wild poppies ablaze, and  
we too are carried away.

## Myths of the Flat World

### 1

This is how it starts.  
Sky bares its back.  
Fireflies tattoo  
its expanse,  
diatoms  
adrift on sea.

Nightshades in their  
kabalas whisper wild  
incantations. Musks of olives  
awaken owls, and cicadas  
flood the dark  
with their voices.

We are lulled into thinking  
that this is all there is—  
waves of grass,  
thickened air,  
a capricious breeze,  
our gossamer hearts beating.

But tonight, tonight,  
we fall off the world.

## 2

If you had listened to your mother,  
you would have stayed at home in Genoa.  
Instead you wander bow to stern in search  
of *terra infirma* and *terra incognita*,  
indigo-inked gaps where four-headed  
monsters skulk and narwhales and sea cows  
nurse their young.

Candles wick down as you sit in the Vatican library  
perusing parchments, deciphering runes,  
running your fingers along gilded perimeters,  
returning again and again to borders  
to confirm: this world is rimless;  
its edges are singing.

## Age of Exploration

The blouse comes off first.  
This is how it's done.

Bra and blue jeans next,  
zip tonguing  
    smooth flesh of belly.  
    Soon replaced by fingers  
        exploring edges:  
        navel, aureoli, lips.

Revulsion. Fascination.  
    Equinox night.

    Sea overhead,  
    or below?

There are fourteen words for snow  
yet none I can think of  
    for my "sky sea,"  
    *mi cielo mare.*

There isn't enough blue overhead  
to rinse the world and make it fresh,  
    to greet this new-eyed day  
  
    and all the glorious creatures in it.

## For the Man at the Next Table

Has your date stood you up again? Let me entertain you.  
Let me be your Scheherazade and tell you stories all night long.

See, the moon still stuck in its shell. It will be a long time escaping,  
but night's awakening. Shall I tell you a tale?

\*

*There once was a fisherman who feared his wife planned to leave him  
for another. He went out in his dinghy and vowed he would cast his net  
four times, and if he caught nothing, he would throw himself to the sharks.  
He tossed his net once, twice, three times—nothing, not even a tiny porkfish.*

*On the fourth throw, he heaved the net and waited. Near sundown, he'd  
resolved to be done with it. But ensnagged in filament was a slender sailfin,  
Alive, but very still, making no movement to save itself. The fish called out,  
"Open me up. Hurry, you must open me up!"*

\*

Would you care for another glass of wine? Perhaps a beaujolais? No?  
Still worried about your date? I'll bet she collects men like matchbook covers.

When her plants perish, she just buys new ones. She's a riptide,  
forever tearing you away from shore. But I digress from my tale.

\*

*The fisherman pulled out a rusted knife and slit the sailfin's gullet.  
In the belly, he found a human finger, and on it a signet ring.  
He wrested the ring from the finger and slipped it onto his own,  
rubbing it once, twice, three times, four.*

*A jinn appeared before him. The fisherman knew that the jinn  
must grant him one wish. He was quick to make it:  
"I wish this ring were mine!" The jinn grinned,  
then vanished into ether.*

\*

Do you tire of my story? Shall we dance?  
Let's dance dangerously, Argentinian Tango...no false steps.

Look at the stars—flakes of mica in an azure pool— some nights it seems  
possible to count them but I always lose my place. Ah, yes, the jinn..

\*

*The man stared at his left hand and saw a blue gap  
where his finger had once been. From the corner of his eye,  
off the bow of the dinghy, he saw the sailfin—  
in its mouth, his finger, and on it, his ring.*

*No one ever saw that fisherman again. But nine months  
to the day, his wife gave birth to a girl she named  
“Faith, Hope and Charity,” figuring  
one could never be too hopeful in this life.*

\*

Do you know, I think I dreamed of you once. It was St. Agnes’ Eve.  
Of course, this was long ago, but your cologne is unmistakable:

dry rot and wood smoke. Don’t mistake me, I like it.  
Can I tempt you with dessert? They serve a heavenly gateau here,

silky as the arms of a Nubian girl. Perhaps I’ll even sing for you.  
It’s your night; I’m performing for you.

## **A Mon Seul Desir (My Sole Desire)**

*After the Unicorn Tapestries at the Musee de Cluny, Paris*

Reveries of my desire blurted out in a crowded room  
or shouted from atop the Eiffel Tower.

I shall surely scream if I hear one more harpsichord refrain,  
must embroider one more mantelpiece or train.

If forced to endure one more ode to my lotus petal lips,  
my tea-stained skin or the cloves in my perfume

I'll set my unicorn on you, truly I will. Tired of all this  
splendor, I yearn to be an idiot savant.

People will veer to avoid me as I walk down breezeways,  
muttering about waves on the moon and starships

propelled by sunveils. I'll lock myself in my chamber  
and plot my journey to far Antipodes.

And in the dark quiet, I'll profess all manners of heresies  
that will awake the fury of the sun.

## Field Notes

Slow dancing on Birth Control Night  
at the Danceteria, all the while wondering  
whether the Tina Turner look-alike

was male or female  
and whether we looked an odd pair  
among dozens of single-sex couples.

Standing in line under an orange sky  
for long candles, milk and batteries,  
laughing at baskets filled with videos

and microwave popcorn,  
forgetting what it was we came for.  
Slamming an old four-poster into the wall

once too often. Afraid we'd wake  
the neighbors. Resolving to buy a new bed,  
a futon this time. Hauling to shore

the untippable kayak we'd twice rolled  
in the lake. Then watching for hours as red ants  
rebuilt the nest we'd trampled. Turning in time

to catch our aging shepherd rolling neck first  
in fresh scat, trotting back expecting  
congratulatory pats. Surveying the silence,

marveling at what we find to spend our time at.

## Night Floods Canyonlands

We descend into the canyon  
 where I-70 dips down to the Green.  
     Acceleration blurs the scene  
         like snowfall in a paperweight.

Light is lost, as science predicts it will be:  
 first red, then orange, yellow and green.  
     Blue is last to be swallowed  
         by dusk's octopus ink.

Bubbles halo our heads as we venture into  
 this dual world of atmosphere and brine.  
     Transfixed by the headlights  
         of a long haul trucker,

a jellyfish, suspended below the surf,  
 is dumb to its final impact against our window pane.  
     Ahead, a transient whale  
         scrapes its belly along marl,

tracing coastline as an old Labrador  
 navigates a fence, butting its weary body  
     up against each familiar knot  
         and indent of wood.

A Moray bears its teeth for want of a rattle.  
 Assured that danger has passed, it slithers back  
     to its crag, as a reef crab scuttles to sanctuary.  
         We check our tanks;

they are running on empty. We begin our ascent.  
 Halfway there, the dividing line re-emerges.  
     Tires crunch against gravel, and  
         the radio beckons.

## Western Serigraphs

*For my husband*

*“The devil whispered behind the leaves:  
‘It’s pretty, but is it art?’  
—Rudyard Kipling*

### 1 “The Faraway”

Morning is a Martian landscape,  
red, red with the blood of sand. You argue  
there is less oxygen before daybreak  
and light a cigarette to prolong the night.

Indigo traces sky with mares’ tails,  
masking the split of heavens and earth.  
Brushed in are osage, autumn aster,  
Indian paintbrush and monk grass.

Stretched out they form muted layers  
against sky. Too stark. Too perfect.  
Some element is needed to break  
the monotony. You light another cigarette.

## 2 Oracle Bones: O'Keeffe in Abiquiu

Earliest script known to man  
scored on vertebrae, skull and rib.  
Bones from deserts sea-stripped of gypsum.

Our ancestors came to know animals  
by skinning them.  
Simplifying forms.

But is it the form or the function  
that causes her to place these bleached bones  
on her windowsill,

to stare at them  
till dawn breaks over the Rio Chama  
and snow blues the horizon?

What is she waiting for?  
What might she divine  
with these bones?

### 3      **The Diné Art of Weaving**

Lorenzo Hubbell shows Minnie Two Goats the Oriental rugs from the Sears Roebuck catalog. It's 1897, and *this*, he tells her, is what she should be weaving. *This* is what people in Topeka and Cincinnati will buy.

She looks at the patterns and in an instant has them memorized. She has been carrying pictures in her head so long, this is easy. What really dazzles her are skeins and skeins of yarn on shelves next to tins of Crisco and boxes of Arm & Hammer.

Skeins made from sheep jewel-dipped in lapis lazuli, carnelian, amethyst, jet—hues she has never imagined possible. Her fingers tremble as she sets up her loom.

#### 4      **At the Break of Dawn**

Reality isn't dramatic enough for you.  
I have brushes. I have ink. But no color  
to convey the uncertainty with which mountains  
and arroyos shapeshift in thin, dry air.

This frustrates you, my indecision before  
my box of hues. *Just choose one, any one,*  
I can see you want to say. My brush is dipped  
in cinnebar, mauve, violet, ochre. I'm watching

the sun as it inches up the canvas.  
Clouds surge in  
and there it is—  
the brush lets go.

## **Somnium del Sol (Dreaming of Sun)**

My father has another wild-eyed idea  
he trots out like a new toy.  
Light, he speculates,  
might carry recordings of the past.

But how much light, I insist,  
would we have to collect  
to replay one instant  
from 1489 or 1653?

And how would we know  
which rays to gather?  
Let alone how would we capture them  
And secure them in our workshops?

Would it matter their intensity?  
Could the light that collided with my face  
and forced my eyes open this morning  
have the same effect as light plunging

through layers of ocean thermoclines,  
until it is stripped of all but its longest,  
bravest waves? My father who collects  
unicycles, waxes on and on

about the miracles of Vitamin C  
and is convinced all firefighters are  
pyromaniacs at heart, my father sighs,  
sips his glass of wine, changes the subject.

## Departure

*For my mother*

Each night, the pumpkin-faced moon  
hung lower and lower in the sky.  
Its faint heat forewarned the foothills,  
prepared them for hibernation  
ahead. Each night you looked from  
the waves of your bed to horizon  
beyond plotting your course.

On hale nights, you would recite  
the ABC's of the universe: Andromeda,  
Betelgeuse, Ceres, Denub... Other nights,  
you'd grow tired of all this beauty and sink  
deeper into the folds of your sheets,  
then disappear.

2

## Dog-Eared Memories

The album on my mother's bed  
is dog-eared with memories  
she returns to

again and again,  
where she left them,  
pressed between the sheets.

The clover,  
its fourth leaf  
glued on.

A crossword puzzle  
she started & he finished  
in red ink.

Fortunes  
from Chinese restaurants.  
One promised she'd have

two great passions in her life.  
The other that she'd have  
constant aches in her back & neck.

Jokes she copied from magazines.  
She laughed loudest  
when he told them

a third time,  
getting the punchline  
wrong.

Warrantees never sent in.  
The Christmas he gave her  
an electric fondue pot.

She couldn't cook  
but she gave him  
*A Complete Guide  
to the Repair  
of Your Fiat-124.*

He'd sold their car last April.

Wrinkled photos  
of a bullfrog  
in a drainage ditch.

She said it looked like him;  
he said like her.  
They named it Amabel.

The blanket grows heavy  
upon her chest. The bookmark  
has fallen out.

She forgets where she is.

## Dwelling Among the Living

### 1 Queens of Moravia

It's noon; the town square's empty.

But the cemetery's combed with matrons,  
babushkas in umbrella skirts,  
sturdy knees dimpled like potatoes.

The dowagers don cardigans;

then kerchiefs knotted against wind,  
they babble to chap-cheeked babes in prams,  
singing them folk tunes,

feeding them crusts of bread,

telling them honeyed lies. What secrets,  
I wonder, will they bear to their graves?  
The third child annulled by a knitting needle...

The fourth with a cleft lip. Never baptized.

Instead they wrapped her in a cloth  
and abandoned her to the elements.  
The demented uncle who stopped eating,

and—*please forgive them*—they let him.

Sunflowers balk on the perimeter,  
obscuring muddied paths where peasant women  
staggered from harvests to give birth.

Only the scent of pollen

and sound of buzzing bees  
comforted them  
as they tore umbilical cords with their teeth.

Then, licking sweat from their upper lips,

they prayed yet again for sterility.  
Cursing, *Jesus Maria*,  
they shucked the beads of their rosaries.

## 2 Finding Roots

Late summer flocks of geese veed above her,  
 as grandmother carried her newborn  
 to the cool dark of the root cellar  
 where she suckled him for the first time.

The same cellar where your father at 6  
 was locked seven days straight—without food—  
 for refusing to enter the priesthood,  
 rejecting the honor of firstborn sons.

Your grandmother feigned anger  
 but surely she was relieved  
 when Josef ran away at 10,  
 making his way with a pocketknife,

a felt hat and two good hands  
 to Dusseldorf, then Hamburg.  
 He lied about his weight and age  
 and claimed to be Bohemian.

He would never pour sacrificial wine,  
 uproot beets  
 or see his mother again.  
 She bore other children,

and they, grandchildren.  
 I'm sure she walked them along these same paths,  
 tickling their chins with dandelions  
 that she'd place in jelly jars on the graves

of her own kin. For she distrusted the living  
 and unkept promises  
 but found her ease, as we do,  
 among the dead.

## The Salem of Growing Up

Memories round as blueberries grow up to the water's edge,  
 where their roots dip in. The berries, a stain  
 under our fingernails. A stain that deepens with time  
 and distance from Salem, and from you, Carolyn.

At four, you talked me into taking our Monopoly money to the 7-11.  
 We stuffed candy in our waistbands, then ran like crabs,  
 leaving teenage clerks staring at wrinkled bits of pale green,  
 blush and canary littering the counter like confetti.

Kindergarten. We crushed rose, gardenia and freesia petals into  
 a witch's brew, mixing essences in black film canisters, selling them  
 for a nickel on Washington Square. Offering the brew up like holy water  
 at Sunday mass. Certain that one drop would ensure life everlasting. Amen.

Summers— we picked blueberries with your little brother, Dylan,  
 tagging behind and stealing all the berries. The one time I remember  
 your father and mother together singing *Hey, Jude* and trying  
 to make it better.

In second grade, we dressed up in your mother's black lace slips,  
 ones she wore to answer the door at noon, mascara caking  
 the corners of her eyes, runs in her stockings visible  
 below the lace of her slip.

We smoked swizzle sticks like cigarettes and munched  
 cocktail onions, pimiento olives and Baker's chocolate chips  
 in your foyer. Sometimes we locked Dylan out; sometimes  
 we let him in, as we whispered secrets to one another—

who we loved, who we'd marry. We played *Rock, Paper, Scissors*  
 and pretended to read palms by the gutter you called a creek,  
 far from your father's *goddamns* and *sons-of-bitches*  
 and doors slamming in reply.

Before you moved away, I came by one last time and found you  
 huddled in your closet with outgrown snowsuits, mismatched  
 patent leather shoes, headless Barbies and Dylan—fugitives all.  
 My life must have seemed so carefree. But yours, again and again,

was flipped over like a carnival ride at the Midway. Freshman year, your parents divorced. A year later, someone told me, you found Dylan hanged in your bathroom. I can picture you finding him, nude, helpless, stripped even of shadow. I can see you lowering him to the floor.

But then my vision always fails me. Here the story becomes a tale not of your life or my own, but of the moment we as children inherit our impotence, the moment we come to realize that no one of us can sustain our world.

## Psychology of Drowning

*For Jim Sagel*

Every year at Cochiti,  
it's the same.  
Some machinist  
or maybe a trucker  
from Chimayo  
or Velarde or Santa Cruz,  
after a couple of Dos Equis  
and a load of shit  
from his friends  
about how he needs  
to prove himself a man  
tries to swim to the farthest shore  
of the lake where the beaches  
are as distant as Antares  
and light years  
from the barrio.

Halfway there all he can think about  
is what they'll say when he's gone.  
That he was never any good.  
Always dumb and in trouble.  
Failed Health and P.E.  
Never finished school.  
Couldn't keep a job at  
Albertson's,  
or convince his girl  
to marry him. Missed  
his daughter's christening  
and his grandpa's funeral.

*Much better to just  
give myself up  
to algae-dark waters.  
Much better that  
mandolins play  
as I go under.*

## **All For You, Mary**

*Medjugorje, Yugoslavia, 1981*

Every morning, 6 a.m., she blesses herself  
with holy water and kneels before the Virgin.

When she passes, hands pressed palm to palm,  
the girls snigger at stigmata she cannot hide,

whisper that she carved them herself  
in the girls' bathroom with a paperclip.

Yet her smile is luminous as a baby mouthing  
new vowels. And in her patient black shoes

and tiny pearl earrings, she waits for mass to begin.  
The boys whisper that she hears Santa Teresa

weeping in the sacristy. Sees roses erupting  
from the foreheads of priests. Smells

frankincense burning beneath the altar.  
Tastes the wine of the Eucharist turning

to bitter blood. We are here today to watch  
her eyes roll back and see her flail to the floor.

Perhaps she'll speak in tongues this time  
and news crews will come again

to try to flake off a bit of her:  
glitter on their palms.

## Central Station, Antwerp

Trains conga into the station,  
 rays high stepping to a geometric point.  
 Art Nouveau splendor contrasts  
 with tenement squalor—  
 balconies with decaying Sukkot huts  
 and ropes of bruised waistcoats  
 hanging sill to sill.

Wurst and rancid cabbage  
 mingle with diesel fumes.  
 Russian mafiosos draped with 24-carat chains  
 and baby seal furs brush up against  
 Bruxelles schoolgirls in miniskirts  
 and platform shoes. Patent leather packs  
 crisscross their backs like Amazonian armor.

They sashay by middle-aged men  
 headed for red lights behind the cathedral,  
 where naked women knit in windows,  
 biding their time between dockings.  
 Pimps beckon passersby: *You'll like this one;*  
*she's a Dutch treat.* The pimps laugh and pick  
 flecks of tobacco from their golden teeth.

*Every mafia in the world is here,* a tobacconist  
 tells me. But what draws me here time and again?

## The Wombat

Its very name conjured a whimsical marsupial,  
out of Lewis Carroll or Dr. Seuss, not  
an overgrown guinea pig with rabbit's coat and  
woodchuck's teeth waddling along the wall  
of the city's ancient zoo.

Nocturnal, this corpulent creature teetered  
in the noonday sun. While trains lumbered  
into the adjoining station, it hefted its weight,  
back and forth like a pendulum. Treading the boards,  
an actor desperate to forestall his creditors,

it ignored the shouts and jeers of schoolchildren  
who clambered to offer it kernels of popcorn,  
morsels of candied apple, peanuts in shells.  
Their minders all too happy to abandon them,

the children reverted to their tribal beginnings.  
Their pencils became spears, their coin purse rattles,  
their gumballs missiles, as they ritually tortured  
one another and the helpless beast. They were relentless.

Hours passed. Finally in late afternoon, the last  
of the errant schoolchildren were rounded up.  
The city's din and shriek subsided—save for  
the occasional whistle of an incoming train.

At last, the wombat collapsed in a heap in its pen,  
one wary eye trained on blue shadows  
    dancing in the windows  
    of high rises above him.

## When

When did Franziska Schazkowska stop believing  
herself Polish and when did she tell each anemic cell—  
unite boys—*we are Anastasia, Imperial Grand Duchess!*  
When did she decide it preferable to be a willful brat  
of privilege who pulled her sisters' hair and tripped  
hapless serving girls, rather than a daring adventuress  
who survived dragging from a Berlin canal and weeks  
of tubercular hospital wards?

After all those years of potatoes and hoeing wouldn't we  
become Anastasia too? Wouldn't we rather walk in gardens  
their leaves draped like the tiny jackets of cobblers' elves  
rather than forests where gnarled roots reach out with the knuckles  
of toothless crones who sputter curses and always demand more.  
More porridge, more crusts of bread.

Wouldn't we rather ride in droshky drawn by Arctic wolves  
whipped to a frenzy by crimsoned Cossacks? Gather rose petals.  
Not smell of pigs' feet and fennel. Fold newspapers into paper hats  
& charge down hallways with tin foil swords, brandishing them  
against our invisible foes. Die applauded for our audacity  
rather than the extraordinary ordinariness of our lives.

## Pieces of Eight

This city deals in splintered coins,  
fractured shards traded sunup to sundown  
and well into the night.

### 1 Near Midnight

Near midnight, we stroll the swelter of  
Albuquerque's South Valley.  
A skinny-boned girl in tube top and shorts  
plays hopscotch in lamplight.

"Hurry up, Mama," she singsongs,  
her sneakers softshoeing sidewalk,  
her braids bobbing up and down in unison.

"Hurry up, Mama, you gotta' make the rent."

### 2 Brown Sugar

Mama sits in a strapless dress at a café table  
and trills into a cordless phone: "Well sugar,  
you might say I'm mocha-chocolatta,  
with an emphasis on the latta. But tonight,  
honey, I'll be any flavor you want—  
straight from Baskin Robbins. Any flavor."

### 3 Streetwalkin'

Coeds tramp from bar to bar in small packs.  
On a corner, a bottle blond in fishnets and feather boa  
studies them and calls out: "Four guys and one girl?  
And they call me a hooker??"

### 4 Taking Turns

On a stoop, five guys trace  
Nazca lines in powder.  
One tilts back his head,  
pinches together his nostrils  
and holds out his razorblade:

“We’re taking turns, son,  
and it’s your turn.”

## **5 Southern Comfort**

A woman in stained calico  
is framed in a doorway,  
A bottle of Southern Comfort  
clutched in one hand as if  
she’s the night watchman,

calling out the hour, and  
assuring us all is well.  
But instead she yells  
to the man who is leaving her:

“I hope they bring you back in a coffin!  
You hear me? In a coffin.”

## **6 Spare Change**

At the all-night Walgreen’s,  
a college kid  
whips out a crisp \$50  
to buy a can of Mountain Dew.

The clerk looks at him.  
“You have too much money,”  
she says. “I’m an old woman.”  
She opens her change purse,

her pieces of eight—  
disks of copper and nickel  
ablaze inside.  
“You see all I have.”

## **7 Evening Prayer**

Robbers, rape, raucous cries.  
Birth, and always, someone dies.

Keep me safe from any harm  
on my wicked, woeful street.

## 8      **The Writing on the Walls**

Two a.m. Reyes the King sits bent over his notebook.  
Vatos surround him as if he's the Buddha.

He's got every shade of Prismacolor but hasn't eaten  
since Tuesday. He's stopped coming to night school.

I ask him why.

He says he got caught tagging at the railyard.  
One more time, his stepmom said, and he's out.

She's got other kids to worry about.

Since then he's been living above the Lock & Key.  
Why the railyard? I want to know.

*Because stock cars go everywhere; they'll know my name  
from New York City to San Francisco.*

## **Goin' Somewhere**

*I'm gonna' take off  
without no aeroplanes  
without no baggage claims  
without no restraining reins*

*I'm gonna' get off  
where there ain't no freight trains  
where there ain't no flood plains  
where there ain't no blood stains*

*I'm gonna' live long  
eatin' whole grains  
drinkin' champagne  
dancin' with top hat and cane*

*'Cause I'm gonna'  
roar down life's gold brick lanes  
rid small kids of pains  
soar with free-flying cranes*

*Hear my loud refrain:  
I'm goin' somewhere*

## if the angels

on the day Katrina's father died  
 she heard bagpipes wailing  
 above her father's bed  
 where he'd left his tired bones  
 behind  
 bereft as a picture book  
 with a broken spine

now whenever she walks through the house  
 and touches things that he had loved  
 that they had loved together

the ivory pocket knife  
 the lump of fool's gold they hid  
 from the greedy leprechauns  
 the cereal box kazoo

she croons  
 and remembers

his Methuselah beard  
 that reached the bottom  
 of his belt buckle and the top  
 of her tawny head

skipping stones  
 smooth as the nesting  
 of his palm and true  
 as the North Star

pennies  
 he'd offer to the moon  
 to shine bright  
 and light Katrina's night

the kilt and sporran he'd wear  
*when the broom was in bloom  
 and all the bairnies should be there  
 to gather a sprig*

songs he'd make up  
about tapdancing pancakes  
and warbling waffles  
that made her beg: *No more!*

but at twilight under her covers  
in the hollow of echoes and voices  
she worries—

what if the angels have no ears  
who will hear  
her father singing



like elephants buffeting their trunks...Each retreating wave reverberating: *we shall not forget...we shall not forget...*

#### **4 Tomb of the Unknown, Shanidar Cave, Iraq**

The Neanderthals willed their dead awake with flowers—goldenrod, gloriosia and heliotrope. Scents to rouse them from shallow graves, where they would brush away rubble and thrust back boulders sealing them in their caveate tombs.

#### **5 Old Jewish Cemetery, Prague**

Petr sashays along the prescribed path  
in his black leather pants, lamenting  
that he used to be able to walk  
among the headstones,  
now staggered  
against one another,  
stones wetting their tongues  
on slivered sun above.

Every crow in Prague must be here.  
They wrap the sky in veils,  
carrying hundreds of tiny messages  
rolled like cigarettes.  
They swallow tiny pebbles,  
weighty sentiments for ballast,  
as they ribbon their way  
to New Jerusalem.

#### **6 Lafayette Cemetery, New Orleans**

*We loved our slaves*, the blue-hair tells us,  
as we trip from crypt to crypt. Surely so did  
Duke Wu and Duke Mu who buried their concubines  
alive with them in the days of the Shangs.

But they bury their dead  
above ground here, lest corpses pop up after a storm  
and drift their way down Bourbon or LaSalle.



*Kouman ou ye? Kouman ou ye?*  
 the faithful call out to the seas.  
 A mulatta swings a duster  
     (the whole chicken  
         or just the feathers?)  
 as drums beat out the rhythm  
 for the final ferry crossing.

## 10 Her Resting Place

The cemetery stretches out before us,  
 freshly mowed, redolent with clover,  
 and the tinny scent of the Intel plant  
 looming on the bluff.

We watch as seams of earth  
 are resown; the sealing  
 of a mother's womb.  
 We are *matrushka*,

Ukrainian stacking dolls.  
 My mother inside hers  
 inside hers. Inside me?  
 What seed?

My mother realizes too late,  
 as one guilty of sin,  
 that *mi abuelita's* false teeth  
 are still soaking by the sink

in the bathroom.  
 Always in bathrooms we cry  
 together. Mama hands me  
 a yellow topaz I'd last seen

on *mi abuelita's* gnarled finger.  
 Tells me she wants me to have it.  
 She'd want me to have it.  
 She tells me all of the things

people say to one another  
in movies and a school child  
saying catechism I repeat them  
back to her.

But I can't bring myself to say  
I'm sorry that she's gone.  
The tyrannies of the elderly  
are still too fresh.

3

## Contrails

*Challenger Mission, January 28, 1986*

The plumes reminded me of sandhill cranes  
we'd seen winging together over the bosque  
near Bernalillo. Cranes stroke together for life.

Dawn widens with their litanies each January,

as they whoosh down, migrating for Alaska,  
their wings brushing air in cuneiform strokes,  
imprinting the season. With elaborate courtship rituals,  
they pledge themselves to each other.

Their long black legs stained by peat and toes  
too short for gripping, they were ungainly on the ground  
but majestic in lift-off. We watched them arc again and again  
into clouds. It was hunting season, so it was inevitable—

there would be a crack. Above, one crane veered quickly,  
as if to intercept, extending its crown and neck in a perfect dive.  
To this day, I am convinced that the crane sacrificed itself  
for its mate. And as it fell back to earth

we watched its grey-white feathers cascade down  
until all that remained were contrails—  
wingbeats preserved in air—vestiges, ghosts—  
then gone.

## Gravity

A silvered rim of moon hangs in the sky,  
 an architecture of clouds around it.  
 The skies are silent but the earth resounds,  
 panting with grave breaths  
 of long distance running.

Seen from above, streets are tied  
 in hopeless children's knots  
 by neon coils of traffic. Businessmen behind  
 their wheels disappear. From great heights,  
 skyscrapers emerge dazzling—

graphic equalizers, lighting up  
 in a new wave classical funk,  
 each note stirring the spleen.  
 Higher and higher still  
 whole metropolises are no more than

clots on the terrain, halting the ebb and flow  
 of rivers. Vapors writhe around the planet,  
 marshalling storms from Baffin Bay  
 to the Amundsen Sea.  
 Away from earth's moist embrace,

we are surely colder, thinner.  
 Oddly pockmarked and sterile,  
 the beacon moon comes into closer view.  
 Sirius, the Dog Star, burns far brighter;  
 the Nile will flood its delta soon.

We forge onward until the stratosphere  
 bulges along its invisible seam.  
 We puncture it, releasing air  
 from the balloon. First, in spurts,  
 and then with a steady hiss,

reminding us that entropy  
 will wear us down yet.  
 Take a breath beat;  
 hold it in.  
 Gravity will bring us back.

## Time Magazine Reports

*The verdict is in—T.S. Eliot was right.  
The world will end not with a bang  
but with a whimper.*

Indulge me a moment. What if we stepped  
into the world after the opening credits  
of some endless movie. We might never know  
where it was filmed or the actors in leading roles,  
but would we appreciate the drama any less?

Wouldn't we somewhere in the middle  
of the flickering frames pick up the storyline  
and continue passing it sprocket by sprocket,  
day after day, through our lives? When we grew  
old and tired and wore half-frame spectacles

and sensible shoes, would it really matter  
if we fell asleep in one scene and awoke  
with a start in the next, dwarf stars  
blinking off, then on, but spinning  
always spinning. Waves would still break,

and ships would unload their sorrows.  
But the sun would rise again; the oceans too.  
So until the humpback whales stop singing,  
beaching their defeated grey hulks on sands,  
for the last time, please indulge me

## **Flowering Woods**

Every year the dogwoods long to tell us,  
the azaleas too, their blossoms unfurling  
like synchronized swimmers  
in a Busby Berkeley musicale,  
that it is possible to be content,  
to be blissful in this world.

## Destroyer God

Lilacs stroke the fenceline, their purple florets  
 embedded with staurolites, tiny crosses held up  
 like candles in the night. For prayer, for hope.

\*

April. I step into my garden, expecting  
 everything's unchanged, that buds  
 will flower and harden to fruit because  
 they've always done so. But where  
 last spring there were emperor tulips and  
 wind anemones, now there are burrows  
 riddling the earth like paper accordion snakes  
 that slither on tables in diners.

My plans ruined, and like an avenging  
 angel, I contemplate the form of my wrath.  
 Flood, pestilence, plague or famine?  
 A thousand gallons of water through  
 a coiled hose? Smoke bombs?  
 Cyanide pellets? Baited traps?

My green-kneed neighbor endorses  
 raw potato at the entrances to their warrens.  
 The starch, he declares, is indigestible.  
 It will ferment in their intestines causing them  
 to burst. No muss, no fuss, he promises.

But I see myself as a Gestapo agent  
 rationing my bullets, an officer planning  
 a botanical blitzkrieg.

I resolve then to abandon my garden  
 to the elements—the sun, wind, ravens  
 and rodents, and other aches  
 that only the earth knows.

## Exercise in Faith

Does one wreck havoc  
or reek havoc, asks the tree,  
as I chop its limbs.

•

You've got to have faith,  
I tell the tree, that you'll be  
beautiful come spring.

•

The tree stares up at  
the dwarf stars, challenging them  
to offer it proof.

•

Grey tulle wraps above  
and the insects sleep, as I  
pretend to read palms.

•

Why do the stars lie  
with their million-year old light?  
What are they hiding?

•

What are the outposts  
of the stars' last missions?  
The tree grows restless.

•

The blue remains long  
after the birds have flocked on,  
testament to faith

## Bridges Fall Down

*How much will the bridge cost?  
Seven million dollars.  
How long will it take to build?  
Seven million years.*

It was a steel night in Boston on a dimlit bridge  
when a man came at me speaking tongues,  
brandishing steel. He grabbed my arm,  
pulled me to the water's edge and pressed a blade

against my cheek. That night I saw stars  
in the molars of his teeth. Another time,  
I might have feared bone gnashing against bone.  
Steel grinding against steel.

But some odd calm came over me and I whispered,  
*We still have work to do.* He looked hard at me  
and let me go. Perhaps it was no night for sacrifice,  
no night to plunge into the dark void of the Charles.

It's not borders, oceans nor even darkness  
that divides us. We both shall die wanting more  
velvet nights, more sterling coasts, more nitrate ceilings  
lit up like disco halls with celestial bodies pulsating

to grunge rock beats. A wide stage to spotlight us,  
Wanting. Longing.



## Lighthouse

*For my father*

Your glasses rest on the end of your nose:  
twin telescopes pointed out to sea. Fresh fall

of dandruff sprinkling your collar.  
Your shoulders gently humpbacked in sleep.

Even at rest—your hands are constant motion.  
Treads of your fingertips sanded down,

whorls of pewter, from sculpting antler tusk  
and sea mist. On winter's shortest days,

your voice wraps the dinner table  
like a Tlingit blanket, striped red and black.

Your breath: cracked wheat and Athabaskan  
lullabies. Your words drum the waves,

navigate tides.

## Math Lessons

Didn't every child at St. Mary's  
long to be the one called upon  
to connect the constellations

of  $a^2$  plus  $b^2$  to  $c$ , and to traverse  
the long strides of distance  
from proofs to their theorems?

When Mr. D called for our hands  
to palm the skies, we spanned  
millisecond voyages between

earth and moon and back again.  
Each time claiming the stardust,  
leaving trails of it across the board.

Yes, it's true, each time we backed away  
to admire our handiwork,  
we fell to earth.

But each time we dusted ourselves off  
and pulled away again  
to the stars.

## Walking the Bridge

Each day I walk across the Mass Ave bridge  
past faces that register as pricks of light  
on the retina, their features a jigsaw  
as yet unassembled. I am quick to condemn  
a balding driver who halts his cab to berate  
an old man in a wine-stained overcoat stumbling  
the sidewalk. I shoulder by a bottle blonde retracing  
her stiletto steps to recover a set of keys.

But what if  
the cabbie was up all night with his inconsolable  
newborn or caring for a wife with a disease  
slowly swindling her of sight? What if the old man  
lost his eldest son in a mineshaft cave-in, his youngest  
in the Gulf, and the woman rehearses a murder or  
her suicide? It's always with us: what we don't know,  
will never know. It plagues us, gives us circles  
under our eyes, cricks in our necks. Pays us

in our own coin, with a third side. Not head,  
not tail...This coin is from the middle ground.  
It's the middle son born in haying season.  
The one that endures.

## Manuscript Notes

The quote from Agha Shahid Ali is taken from his final book, *Rooms Are Never Finished* (Norton, 2002).

*Dichos* are Spanish proverbs or folk wisdom. For example, “*Buenas son mis vecinas pero me faltan tres gallinas*” is a popular dicho which translates, “My neighbors are nice, but I’m missing three chickens.”

*Thoreau* is a town east of Gallup, NM, on Route 66. Originally named Mitchell, it was renamed in honor of Henry David Thoreau, but the locals pronounce the town’s name as “through.”

*Vecindario* is Spanish for “neighborhood.”

*Cumbias* are Latin American dances descended from 19th century slave dances.

*Serigraphs* are silkscreens produced by a printing process in which one layer of color is applied at a time. The process can result in any number of copies until the printer’s template is destroyed.

Georgia O’Keeffe referred to the landscape of northern New Mexico as “*The Faraway*,” reflecting her awe at being able to see for miles and miles in all directions.

*Oracle bones* are records of divination incised on bones and turtle shells. They are the earliest known form of Chinese writing.

*Diné* is the Navajo name for themselves; literally “The People.”

*All For You, Mary* (“Totus Tues, Maria”) is the personal motto of Pope John Paul II.

In June, 1981, six teens in *Medjugorje, Yugoslavia*, reportedly encountered the Virgin Mary near the top of Mount Podbrdo. After six years of professing daily contact with the Virgin, the teens admitted that they made it all up.

*Vatos* is Spanish slang for “friends” or “homeboys.”

*Descansos*, in the Latino world, are spots for pallbearers in funeral processions to rest. A descanso may also mark the spot where someone has died.

*Camposantos* are country graveyards.

*Kouman ou ye* is Haitian Creole for “how are you?”

And, yes, *hunting sandhill cranes* is legal in the southwestern United States.

## Vita

Tamara Wells-Banar was born in Tucson, Arizona, but spent her youth traveling the world as a military brat. She received her B.S. in 1988 in Communications & Public Relations from Boston University, where she was a Boston University Trustee Scholar, and her M.A. in Training & Computing Technologies in 1991 from the University of New Mexico. She has worked in a variety of fields and settings ranging from art museums to robotics labs.

She currently teaches history in northern New Mexico, where she has lived on and off for nearly 30 years, though her mother's family hails from Cuba and her father's from Alaska. She grew up speaking both Spanish and English and is an avid painter and scuba diver.

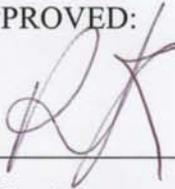
# THESIS EXAMINATION REPORT

CANDIDATE: Tamara Wells Banar

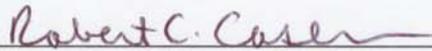
MAJOR FIELD: Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing,  
Low Residency Option

TITLE OF THESIS: *The Third Side of the Coin*

APPROVED:

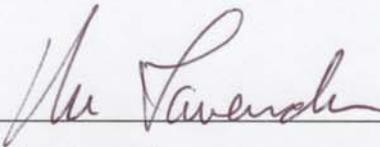


Richard Katrovas, Major Professor & Chair

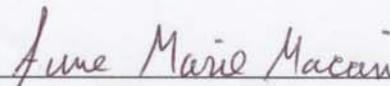


Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:



William Lavender



Anne-Marie Macari

DATE OF EXAMINATION: 11/19/2002