

SHANKPAINTER 60



FINE ARTS WORK CENTER IN PROVINCETOWN

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QUARANTINE, QUAHOG



SPRING 2020

FINE ARTS WORK CENTER IN PROVINCETOWN
24 Pearl Street Provincetown, MA 02657 508.487.9960 **FAWC.ORG**

The Fine Arts Work Center is an equal opportunity provider and employer. The Work Center facilities are accessible to people with disabilities.

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GBOLAHAN ADEOLA still hasn’t learned the difference between a dock, a wharf, a pier, and a quay, even after months of living in a seaside town. But he *has* learned how to clam.

CALLIE COLLINS didn’t taste clam chowder until moving to Provincetown at age 31. Can you believe it? 31 whole years of unnecessary suffering.

NORA CORRIGAN would like to remind people that the word is quahog.

KEVIN FITCHETT would like to thank Shellfish Constable Stephen Wisbauer, Tom and his cat Valentino, my mom, dad and sister, Alicia; the Black Lives Matter van that swiftly reverses past Fishburn cottage at 11:24 every morning, my foreman, Raul; my dealer, Esther; my mentor, Rafe Wood; Youth Pastor Nikkie, Hanna Pylväinen, Kirsten Andersen and Lydia Hicks, Johannes, Stephanie, Coady, Akiko, Anina, Hannah, Rob, Pat, Antonius, Brandon, Jake, Jenna, Autumn, Adeola, Callie, Kristen, Nora, Colin, Francisco, Joy, J.W. “Feathers” Ptacek, and Alex. Without their financial support, tough love, and leadership, I wouldn’t have been able to write this poem about my pending WA state divorce.

ESTHER LIN’s family did not go hungry on the day she harvested 36 clams.

FRANCISCO MÁRQUEZ felt like a true provider when he sought his dinner out from the salt marshes. Although it only happened a couple times, he ultimately lived his butch fantasy.

JOY PRIEST is working on a statement of advocacy on behalf of the clam population here in Ptown and dedicated most of her fellowship to agitating for clams. Though, reports say that she loves Hanna’s artisanal quahog flatbread essenced with poached green crabs pregnant with eggs, and has been overheard proposing an inflated, neoliberal-inspired business model to sell the flatbreads for \$60 a clam.

J.W. PTACEK clams up at the mere mention of cheeky quahog-themed bios.

HANNA PYLVÄINEN suffers from thalassaphobia, but not enough ostroconaphobia to keep her from the (thank you, Nora) quahogs.

ALEX WALTON “appears here as ‘an immense collection of clams’ . . . as ‘a given clam’ exchangeable . . . for any other . . . on the basis . . . that ‘the value of a clam is determined by the quantity of labor expended to produce it’ and . . . congealed human labor time ‘one homogenous mass of clams’ ”

GBOLAHAN ADEOLA
BONES

It seemed simple enough. Saleh handed out latex gloves and Felix filled a large glass jar to the eight-liter mark. Doris and Nneka measured out the sodium hydroxide. Saleh lifted the disemboweled rabbit by its forelimbs and lowered it gingerly into the solution. In the next 24 hours, the creature's flesh would relinquish the bones—or was it the other way around? —and we would flense it off. We were to hand in the skeleton mounted. Intact.

For a while after Saleh lidded the jar, we stood around it and stared, silent and motionless. Then Nneka, who was catholic, clutched her rosary and intoned, We loved him, but our Heavenly Father loved him more. To which Doris responded by lifting her hands to her chest in an exaggerated show of bereavement. Felix—also catholic but clearly much less given to blasphemy—looked agonized.

When we left the lab, it was evening. The day's last lights had begun to fade. January, and it hadn't rained for several months, shouldn't rain for two more, although it seemed difficult to believe, seeing the compound, the grass, flaking despairingly into dust, that it would rain again in March. The younger boys made the best of the weather: they'd built makeshift football fields on the windswept lawns, with large rocks or stumps as goalposts.

I lingered in front of the science building, watching the wind rustle the locust bean trees—there were so many of them here—their ripened pods like gnarled black fingers, grasping through the dense green leaves at air. They snapped on the branches sometimes, the pods, brittle when the wind was especially cold and stiff, so that the two halves curled away from each other. But mostly they kept. Until they fell to the ground of their own volition. When I first arrived two weeks earlier, Peter, the SS3 boy with whom I shared a bunk, had gathered a bagful of the pods and offered me the yellow chalky pulp inside, between which the black seeds were lodged. You licked it until you got to the seeds, he told me. But when I tried one, it tasted as it looked—chalklike, with a vaguely-sweet-vaguely-cloying aftertaste—and I spat it out before I reached the core. Peter laughed and said maybe it was an acquired taste. A while ago I had never been this far north, did not know that locust beans grew on trees. A while ago, school was a place from which I returned every day; home, a discrete thing.

You don't *hab* to do anything, Saleh said. His hand on my shoulder startled me. The others had dispersed. *Ip* you can't handle it, just tell me. We are *haffy* to do all the work.

I did not say how much I had begun to resent this solicitude. Offerings of comfort and solace. Accommodations that presumed to understand the contours of anguish. Really, all of it insulted whatever grief I felt. I said okay, and Saleh patted me twice on the shoulder and leapt off the verandah.

When my mother called that evening, she sounded especially distracted, perfunctory. Your father cannot come to the phone, she said, but did not say why. I hope you're adjusting, she said, and then she began to speak of 'small victories': with their petitions and letter-writing campaigns, they'd finally succeeded in convincing the National Union of Road Transport Workers to make it mandatory for every long-distance public bus to keep a manifest of passengers. You'd think it would be obvious, she said. You'd think they wouldn't *have* to be convinced. We should be able to prove that your brother was *not* on that bus. And the police, of course they would cling to any excuse to stop searching for him.

Yes, I said. And I thought about things too easily traded for hope. Reason being the most prominent of them.

That night, I dreamt about him again, ablaze and thrashing. In the dream, I am watching from a pavilion on the shoulder as the bus somersaults and catches fire. In the dream I do nothing. I close my eyes instead, thinking that if I did not look at the exact moment when he finally succumbed to the flames, my brother, my twin, a charred and lifeless thing, I could pretend that this were not a body expiring but inchoate, flailing fervidly into being.

I kept my eyes closed even after I woke up.

CALLIE COLLINS
from “A WOMAN”

A DREAM

Margaret used to dream she wrote his speeches. The speeches she wrote in these dreams were more compact than Sam’s but also a bit less majestic, less outlandishly glorious, or less covetous of glory. These speeches observed strange, uncanny detail in keen, prickled ways; they got into the heart of things, rooted and burrowed down into the audience like wild animals do into dirt, observed the habits of men with alacrity and frankness. These speeches took into account God and his words and his plans, an allowance Sam still sometimes had trouble granting, and they acknowledged other places. They acknowledged other places existed, that is. They had both, she and Sam, come from other places, after all. He couldn’t have given her speeches in Alabama exactly—they wouldn’t have made sense—but had he tried to give her speeches in Alabama, his audience would’ve at least understood the words and the points they meant to make, would have intuited that the speeches were nuanced even if they couldn’t fully ride the wave of exactly how they were nuanced, or acutely described the nuance. Here in Texas, where the speeches were meant to be given, the lines she wrote could have—with their wit and summoning brilliance—lowered the rafters down to the ground, raked the clouds in wrinkles to the horizon, brought the men from their feet to their knees and hands. She could imagine a whole crowd of men on their knees pretty easily if she tried. She tried. It gave her stomach a little hiccup. It made her hot.

When Margaret dreamt she wrote his speeches, she imagined herself at his table in the library, but she imagined the shelves fuller than they were and the chair more supportive. She imagined her skirt hanging unobtrusively over the lip of the seat and not pooling up around her hips as it tended to do when she sat down. The children were quiet or weren’t even in the house but instead outside or with Eliza or Margaret’s own mother. Margaret’s wrist was strong and held up from her solid elbow above the paper like a tent pole. Her penmanship: inexorable.

She dreamt she wrote his speeches during the day and during the nighttime, under the net that protected their bodies from the mosquitos that rose up in gusts from the near-dry pond and descended to blanket the house and the land around it. But it was mostly the course of the long days over which she imagined writing like she wanted to write, thinking like she wanted to think. She could see the shape of each speech like a machine in her mind, like a topographical map; she knew the hills and valleys, and she knew the rhythms it would require to cross over them. The speeches accumulated and ballooned to occupy much of the unused part of her mind; she worked on them devotedly, and she had no doubt that having worked on them made her better, bigger.

She didn’t, though. Write. She didn’t write his speeches. She’d barely heard his speeches given, in fact; she was almost always at home when he gave them. The children were never out of the house, at least never all of them at once. Her skirts, no matter how light they purported to be, or how intentionally she put them on in the mornings, spun out around her waist and thighs like thick clouds until she took them off at night. Sam was east somewhere, or north. The feeling she felt most often was anger. She couldn’t understand why she sometimes became this sort of rageful, so angry she felt her whole body would char gray like a coal from it, even now, still, the thought of which made her reckless and angry again, because, already at thirty-one, she had all she’d thought would make her less angry: a home of her own; her Lord’s ear; the love and attention of an important man. Yet she didn’t do much but feel angry and stay angry, it seemed, and tell herself stories. And stories aren’t worth much at all in the voice of a woman. Even good stories, in the voice of a woman, are frivolous or insolvent or small. And even though Margaret hardly ever spoke her stories out loud, they unwound in her mind in her own voice, which was the voice of a woman. A woman with a title is still a woman.



NORA CORRIGAN
RACE POINT, 1998

April is cold and the beaches are deserted, which is why I'm out here sitting on a towel. I'm pretending it's the end of the world and I am alone in it. Then two people like the last survivors on Earth come walking up the beach, cocking their heads and squinting down at me. They are older, closer to my father's age than mine, and for a second I think he has sent them to find me. But no. The man, shirtless, has a bowie knife stuck under his belt, and the woman has a doll-size bottle of Tabasco poking out of her bathing suit top. The sun shining on them makes it hurt to look so I drop my gaze. Her toenails are unpainted ridged whorls, grotesque and elegant as mollusks.

They must know what I am, even at a distance: I am alone. But I am ready, too. I am waiting for someone to find me. When I stand, my bare feet sink in the cold doughy sand and the world tilts. They have a pail with them full of oysters and littlenecks. Probably the man says something to me, but I don't remember what, only that he takes the bowie knife from his belt, slips in the blade, and cracks open an oyster. He holds the meaty half out, and I understand this is a test. The meat is salty as it slips down my throat, like swallowing a piece of the ocean. They smile and tell me their names, and when they invite me back with them, I don't need to think about it. I fall in love right away.

I ride in the truck bed with their dogs, geriatric border collies, one blond and one dark. Up in the cabin they must be talking about me, wondering what to do with me, but all I know then is the wind in my face and the bead of a tick in the dog's fur under my fingers. That spring, the same awful pop song is playing everywhere, the whole world tuned to the same station. The song gets everywhere like sand, gets into my dreams so I wake up grinding my teeth on it. But riding in their truck that song and the rest of the world goes quiet, and this entirely new soundtrack starts up.

KEVIN FITCHETT
TRIAL SEPARATION VI, SUNSETS

This afternoon at my desk it starts
as a suspicious shift of atmosphere, as if I'd half-
heard a car door, half-felt tail lights dust
the room. Four months alone on the Cape
and I know when to pour the mezcal
and hurry out under the pinkening vault, the glass
ignited the two blocks to the harbor
where a lone cirrocumulus has paused
over the church steeples, the marina and widow's
walks as if second-guessing its break from
the end of its land, and it
goosepimples; it can't go
on and it does go on, that unbearable prickle
of restraint--I remember it reaching through my body
even the hair then just giving myself up and
scratching the fuchsia crust
down to the bruise of that rash that appeared
on my chest the morning after
our final long-distance call.
O once I wrote a stanza so purple
and void of perspective it closed a marriage.
It was that last week in the cabin;
if you heard my van door slide shut
a violet crumple lit the edge of your vision
before a migraine and because we couldn't say the sentence
that we'd needed to for seven years,
I wrote a villanelle about an immensely
happy moment when we fucked
on the glacier up the Sahale Arm. I read it to you
as you drove our Honda to therapy
I used the words vacuum, Carmex, doyen,
described staring across that horizon
of snow-capped volcano after volcano to Canada
and how I understood in a panic I'd miss
even your iciness, and you drove slower
and slower and pulled over on I-5
and whispered Get out of my Honda.
My Honda. Our line. What was it? How many eves
had it illumined our distance, a familiar
sense in the kitchen, unsaid, then set into flesh?

ESTHER LIN
THE MIND

So badly you want life to be of the mind.
The body is dull. It talks only of itself.

It is hungry. It is tired. It has been humiliated.
Every day a new humiliation.

You care for your father's body.
He hates himself for this. He hates you, as well.

You spend the summer reading Dante.
Not the traveler but the youth in bloom.

You imagine a wall, a fountain, nightfall.
And so on. But you are still young.

When your father begins to die
you can no longer read. You began to lose him

the moment you opened your eyes.
It was already over. Why should anyone grieve.

BEING WITH, BEING LIKE

In the last days
I wheeled him to the courtyard
for the fountain and the bench,
where he told me
stories of my birth
and of my childhood
and I told him
stories of his birth,
his childhood.
Because I had heard them
I was now their teller.
And he held my hand.

FRANCISCO MÁRQUEZ
PROVINCETOWN

Fixed at sunset, a wooden blue shack
as if with it a million scenes of shipwrecks,

not black rock or islands of fog rising individual
in a barrenness of salt. It is not that

it was not beautiful, but that I tried to conjure
its momentous light, eternal

that is inside the ordinary, and couldn't. If I look
backwards, the mysteries forming themselves

in darkness, I remember
the heaviness of heat.

A soporific wave lifting from concrete.
There was more a strangeness

in the dark square of water lifting
from a mallard having submerged,

like the sun into water, than there was
to that wooden place. But to think of it

in exile, in its solitude of water,
to see it turn significant

against what could destroy it,
it was then I saw myself becoming it.

A DESCRIPTION OF HAPPINESS IN HERRING COVE

All the windswept day sand fell
over the white quilted blanket,
which was like my life raft
in the shattering waves,
the dogs, leaping in and
out of the water, catching crabs
and cleaving their carapaces,
a harp on-loop playing the licks
of waves, built from the scrap
of a pallet and one wind-
twisted branch arcing toward
the sun, like a hand in the midst
of pleasure, and I was inside
its music, so I was inside
my birth, the sun bringing flies
over corpses disintegrated
into sand, which when burned
turns to glass, which magnifies
and lifted to the eye cleaves
to my water-gowned darling.

JOY PRIEST
PEARL STREET PICS FILM SERIES #1

Location: Stanley Kunitz Common Room
Date: Wednesday, October 23, 2019 @ 8PM
Free99 + skillet popped popcorn + BYOB

Alamar (2011), a languid, arthouse fishing drama set in Mexico from debut director Pedro Gonzalez-Rubio, 73 min.

During my first week here, I befriended my upstairs neighbor, another poetry fellow Kevin Fitchett and shortly after, a visual fellow, a word carver named Raul. We began to end up in short little adventures together, but mostly Kevin and Raul would fish and come back in the evenings with whatever they'd caught: mackerel, periwinkle sea snails, mussels. Maybe it was a combination of this seaside town, Kevin and Raul's impulse to eat what they fished, and Kevin's off-grid sensibilities that made me remember—like a forgotten song—this film *Alamar*, which I'd come across during an extremely lonely year of my life in Newark, NJ, my first year out of Kentucky (where we fish). I found the film to be strange, but mesmerizing, as I watched the film on my shitty laptop, day after day in my motel-room sized apartment. I wept over Blanquita—a special seabird in the film—against a background of perennially-pissed New Jersey drivers blowing their horns without ceasing outside my window.

I was mesmerized visually, which you'll soon understand, because the film takes place in Banco Chinchorro, a place off the coast of the Southeastern most point of Mexico. If there was no such thing as borders or nations, you might consider this place to be more akin to what you find in the Caribbean. It's very close to Belize and about as far from the Cayman Islands or Cuba and Jamaica as we are from NYC or DC. The water there looks like the water we see on destination cruise commercials, except it's remote and unmolested by the tourist.

I was also mesmerized by the way the film eludes traditional structure and genre. Maybe a true story, maybe not. Maybe a documentary, maybe a drama in which real people play themselves. We're never very sure about any of this, and this disorientation lends to a feeling of living "to the sea" (one translation of *alamar*), of living unattached to any Western systems of production that dictate the routine a person must follow each day or what a film must do. Here loitering is delightful,* and work is relaxing and fulfilling.

But this is not to say that the film is about living in "paradise" or that it is set in one, as the British film reviewer Peter Bradshaw mistakenly writes for the Guardian. The utopia that tourists seek is not here. The concept of paradise, which requires someone's invisibility and subjectification in exchange for another's unconditional pleasure, is not what the director is after. Here the camera

finds those who live in the periphery and highlights their relationship to the land—not as a backward savagery as dictated by Western enlightenment, but as a crucial epistemology and knowledge, that, if European settlers had been keen to learn, might have saved us from our current climate crises.

I dedicate tonight's opening film to all of the fellows and the next six months of our living "to the sea."

*"Loitering is Delightful" is an essay by the poet Ross Gay



Mackerel at Raul's, photo by JOY PRIEST

[...] here words failed the iconographer, who wished to express to the hegumen that he, the iconographer, was not the same man the hegumen had known when they were both young novices living together in the same cell, but also that he, the iconographer, was not the man the hegumen may have been led to believe him to be, because over the past ten years there had circulated among men a proliferation of fantastic fictions concerning the iconographer, and these fictions had grown only more fantastical with each passing year, making the fictions of previous years seem increasingly more plausible, until what was once considered an implausible fantasy was buried beneath new and greater fantastical implausibilities where it solidified into a bedrock of supposed truth, so that even the iconographer could not help but incorporate these fictions into his experience of himself and therefore his identity, if only by virtue of his being ever conscious of these fictions that were circulating out there in the world (much in the same way that, standing there in his surprisingly well-heated cell, he could not help but shiver and feel that he was cold, if only by virtue of his being conscious of the winds that were howling across the frozen field), because beneath even that bedrock of supposed truth, which was itself fictitious and which supported all fictions, there lay a certain lamentable fact that prevented any one of these fictions, even those fictions which ranked among the most fantastic and implausible, from being dismissed as a baseless lie, for they were all of them rooted in the same undeniable fact, which fact quite simply was this: the iconographer had renounced his vocation—this much alone was fact, and anything alleging to explain why the most promising iconographer in All Rus' had given up on iconography and to chronicle his doings thereafter was simply speculation, supposition, invention, in short, the stuff of fiction, but, be that as it may, should the notion arise that such stuff could not be of any possible concern to these pages, then such a notion must be corrected, because even as far-fetching a fiction as the one which relates how the iconographer killed a man in the city of Vladimir to save the life of a young woman, a so-called yurodivy or holy fool, and then as penance offered to God a vow of silence, even this could be of concern to these pages, providing it reveal some truth about the iconographer's relationship to his vocation, with a view to understanding his eventual writing of the icon of the Troitsa or Trinity, because insofar as a fiction revealed such a truth, then such a fiction would be of great concern to these pages, its deviation from historical and biographical fact notwithstanding [...] and the iconographer, alone now in his cell, was pained that he had been unable to speak to the hegumen,

but he felt that he could not have explained himself, that is, he could not have told the hegumen who he was, because truly he didn't know, he couldn't know, because even though he had returned to his vocation and understood what he was called to do, he no longer understood precisely who was calling—God, yes, but what that referred to was in constant flux—and he no longer understood precisely who was being called—himself, yes, but what that referred to was no less fluctuating—yet the reality of the call, the fact that a call existed, this much he understood, but anything beyond that was conjecture, hope and faith, all of which left him with no choice but to proceed in ignorance and curiosity, in wonder and humility, because whoever he was, that is, he who could be explained, who could make decisions upon such matters as the possibility or impossibility of explaining who he was, whose decisions were determined by fears and desires, who cultivated preferences as the contours of personality, whose thoughts were the thoughts begotten by that personality, whose reflections on those thoughts bore witness to that personality, and who was himself that personality, this was not the real and true him, this was someone who would pass away, who must pass away, in order for his real and true identity to emerge, and for him to become who he had been even before he was, namely that unique and unrepeatable utterance in the mouth of the One who called him to be [...]

HANNA PYLVÄINEN
from “THE END OF DRUM-TIME”

The sight of the sea brought the same relief it always had. There was the first relief of having arrived, and then the deep satisfaction of seeing the reindeer swim across the bay to the island, knowing how good it must have felt to them, to let the salt and cold kill off the flies and midges and pests crawling in their coats, to come out onto the shore and shake and see the greening rocks waiting for them, the snowed heights, the breeze stiff and sure to keep them cold. It made Anja feel good, to see them feel so good, and there was the same surprise as every year upon reaching their island that anything could be so beautiful. The low and snowed mountains hunkered over the bay, the porpoises turned over in the waves, revealing their rounded backs — the land could not stop showing off and she was reminded that seeing could be salvation. It was impossible, even with Willa around, to be unhappy, and for a few days, and even a week, she felt real delight in having arrived, in being on the island with the herd, and with Aslak, with whom she slept each night in their own lavvu, set apart from the others but not out of sight. He seemed different at the sea, relaxed, and his playfulness, even if it felt juvenile at times, still endeared him to her. He did stupid things, he put a crab in the ragas while she napped, he dangled sea-worms while she was trying to fix the net, he brought sacks of fish and dumped them at her feet as if to say, and I have provided for you, like they were playing at being together. But mostly she was happy because he didn’t take the Bible out, she didn’t hear a single word about Jesus or about Isak or about Mad Lasse, she only heard about the fishing and about the doe who refused to feed her calf and how many eagles he had had to scare away from the calves, and the only impingement on this was the sight of the path she had taken the year before, up and around the cape of the island, where Ivar had appeared, but there was no real need to go that way, no need to go where the small stones of the shore became boulders, green and mossy, soft and slippery, and she managed, most of the time, to not even look that way at all, and kept her gaze towards the unsinkable sun.

ALEX WALTON
UNCOOPERATIVE FRAMEWORK

Nothing left to wait for
the sun to rise on
but the world
and the morning held over it
nothing to hang on but the dead
branch between the living stuck there
moving when the wind *blows*
because the world’s warm in separate
places that have traffic
one with the other
in a way familiar
to us from ZIP codes
but without them.
Were we all to simply read
in the expanded sense this book
on the commune we could *read*
on the grass
the sequel with better pictures
than god took
before its past
This
is one among my many pranks
... – comparing
Mephistopheles’
comments upon juice
‘blood is a very
special juice’
to Samson antagonistically
acting out one’s
fantasies
of JOB. That is of having job
and nothing beats
the burning bush
to recommend the air
as something
doing.
Hope is a material
condition – only
kidding. But possibilities expressed
in matter plays
dough, resolute in
taking the impression of the mind’s
hand; rhetoric – open palm,
logic – closed fist – as if
to ask as vaguely as
could be what it is holding
nothing
in the other
spores of the grapefruit
passed into the sunlight
going off
a rider
better than their horse.
Where were you?
when the minor statements
PLAYED
upon the grand
moved the world
to their end
although
not its. As tagged
by them it only
resolutely found again
its economic spikes
and wore them to the mall
and out again
It feels good in the sun
not to think your way out of it
or on the surface
that is concrete
possibility, that being rubble
speaking gravel in grey mud
is making tangible
‘the role of good temptations’;
it disappointeth the devices
of the crafty
used to capture
SMART’s cat’s prank’s
quantity’s quality’s
creep. “Here the mouse’s
brick against the cat
pictures being thrown”; a HICcup
of the special juice where
leads the HOC road leaps.

2019-2020 WRITING FELLOWS



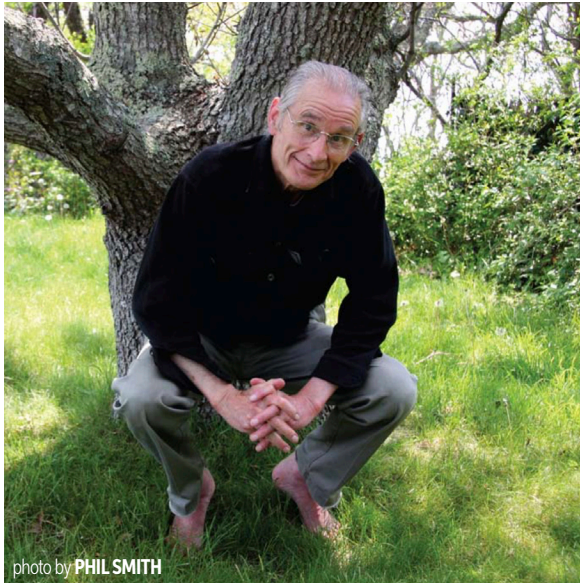
TOP FRANCISCO MÁRQUEZ J.W. PTACEK ALEX WALTON
 MIDDLE HANNA PYLVÄINEN ESTHER LIN GBOLAHAN ADEOLA
 BOTTOM NORA CORRIGAN CALLIE COLLINS KEVIN FITCHETT JOY PRIEST

WRITING COORDINATOR KIRSTEN ANDERSEN
 WRITING COMMITTEE CHAIR JOSHUA WEINER

DESIGN GARY RAYMOND



ROGER SKILLINGS



The Fine Arts Work Center is not just a community of artists and writers, it's a community of giving, a community of gifts. It not only gives without asking for anything in exchange, it relies on others to give to it so that it might continue its mission. Some of the gifting comes in the form of money, or other material support, some in the form of talent. No one gave more to the Work Center than Roger Skillings, who died two nights ago at the age of 82, after a long struggle. He gave, and he gave. It's practically not even an exaggeration to say he took the food out of his daughter's mouth to give to the Work Center. No one ever conveyed with greater force, by way of example, the core value of the Fellowship: that what the Work Center offered was never, in the end, a fellowship, but rather, fellowship. A way of imagining a life devoted to making art. Roger always said that the point was to live a sweet life; writing for him was the nectar at the flower's heart.

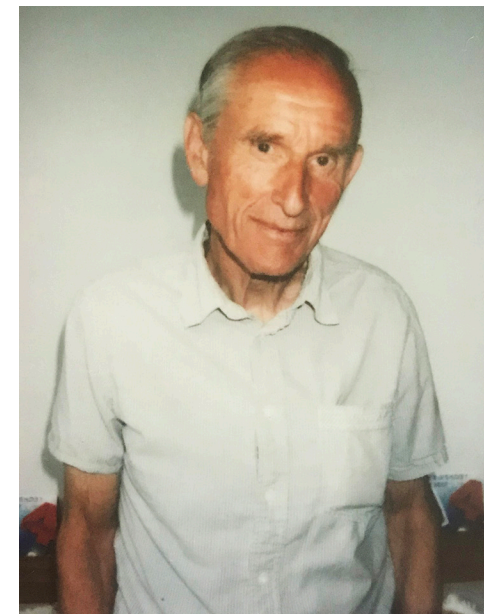
Roger was one of the first Fellows, in 1969. He came to Provincetown and he never left. It's fair to say he knew just about every inch of this place, every street, every dune, every drunk. Upon arrival in October, a Fellow's first outing to the dunes was often a walk led by Roger. He found in Provincetown a model of the world; everything was here to write about, every element in the social strata, every display of the human comedy. Staying put, paying attention, finding the story, and getting it down in signature sentences – taut, crisp, wickedly sharp sentences: that was the great long experiment of his life as a writer. His best stories are unparalleled in American fiction; even the ones that aren't quite as good as the best always have moments that are so good, so alive with some vivid descriptive detail or scrap of living speech, they would put other writers better known from shore to shore to shame.

Over the decades of his life here, his tireless work on the fiction jury, on the Board, and as chair of the Writing Committee, Roger never stood where I'm standing now, up here, at the podium, to read any of his work to an audience; he was shy to do it, but also, I think, he didn't really believe in it, even as he rarely missed a reading here of any kind. No; writers wrote, and then readers read them; the transmission was something that happened mysteriously in a quiet room between a reader and a work. That was the whole deal. He was a purist without being at all precious about it.

I got to know Roger during my fellowship year, 1993-94; and we worked closely together when I was the coordinator and he was chair, 1996-99, and for many years after that. I wouldn't be the chair of the Writing Committee myself now if it weren't for Roger; in this capacity, I'm pretty much just a weak imitation of him. And Roger, as a human being, was *sui generis*; he really was an American original. As Salvatore Scibona wrote in his obituary, "He cared as much about literature as about the younger people who were trying to make it and leaves behind generations of writers inspired by his example and his friendship." One of the great sadnesses expressed and shared by the writers on the committee is that the Fellows over the past several years, and including this one, never got a chance to know him. At some point there will be a memorial, and stories will be shared about this wonderful writer of stories, his grumpy opinions, his wit, and his unwavering devotions. For now and before we begin with tonight's reading, I ask for a moment of silence for Roger Skillings.

JOSHUA WEINER, Chair of the Writing Committee

Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, Stanley Kunitz Common Room – January 17, 2020

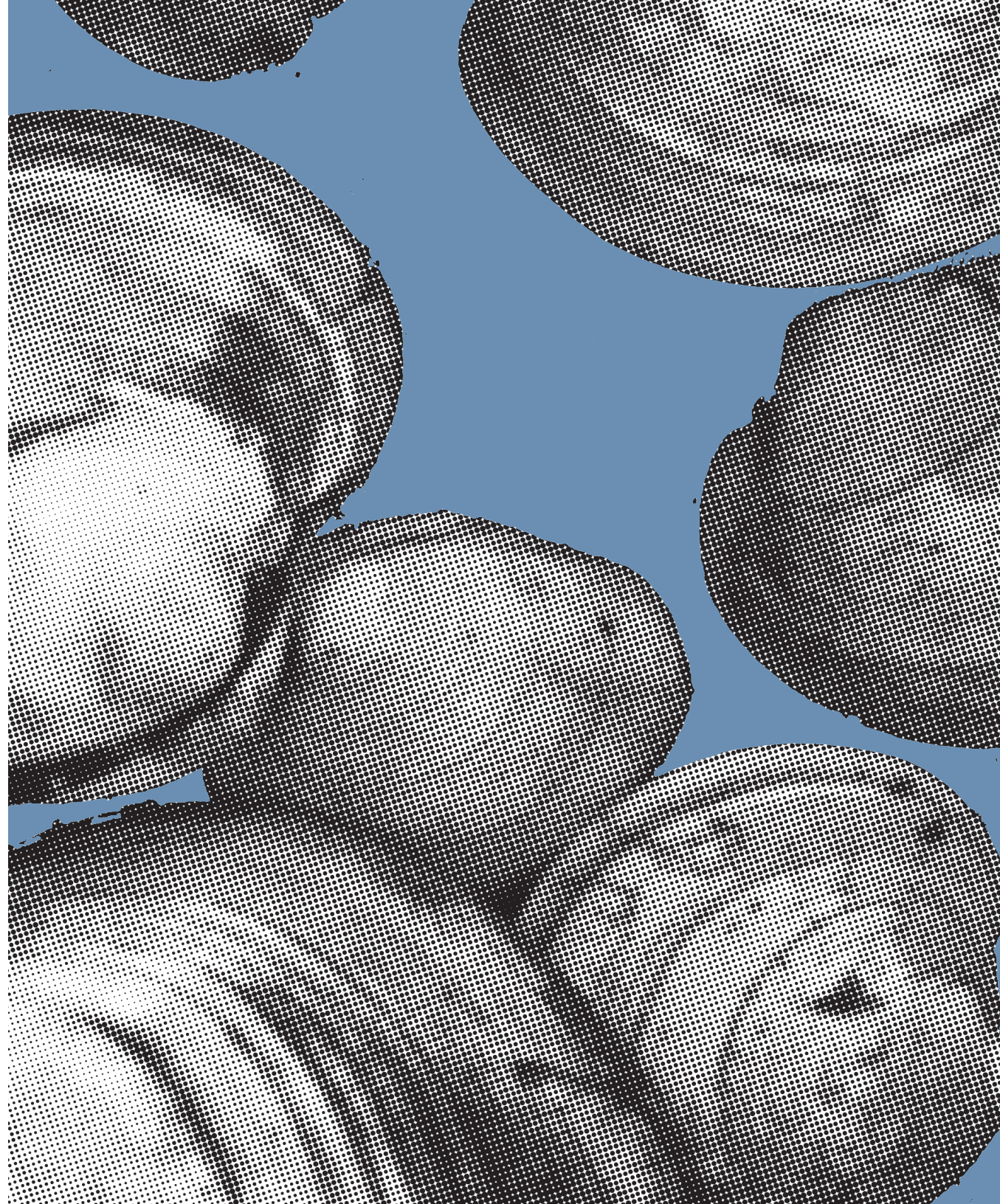


Roger, 2016 – photo by WINN ANDERSEN STANLEY, age 5 (daughter of Writing Coordinator Kirsten Andersen)

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