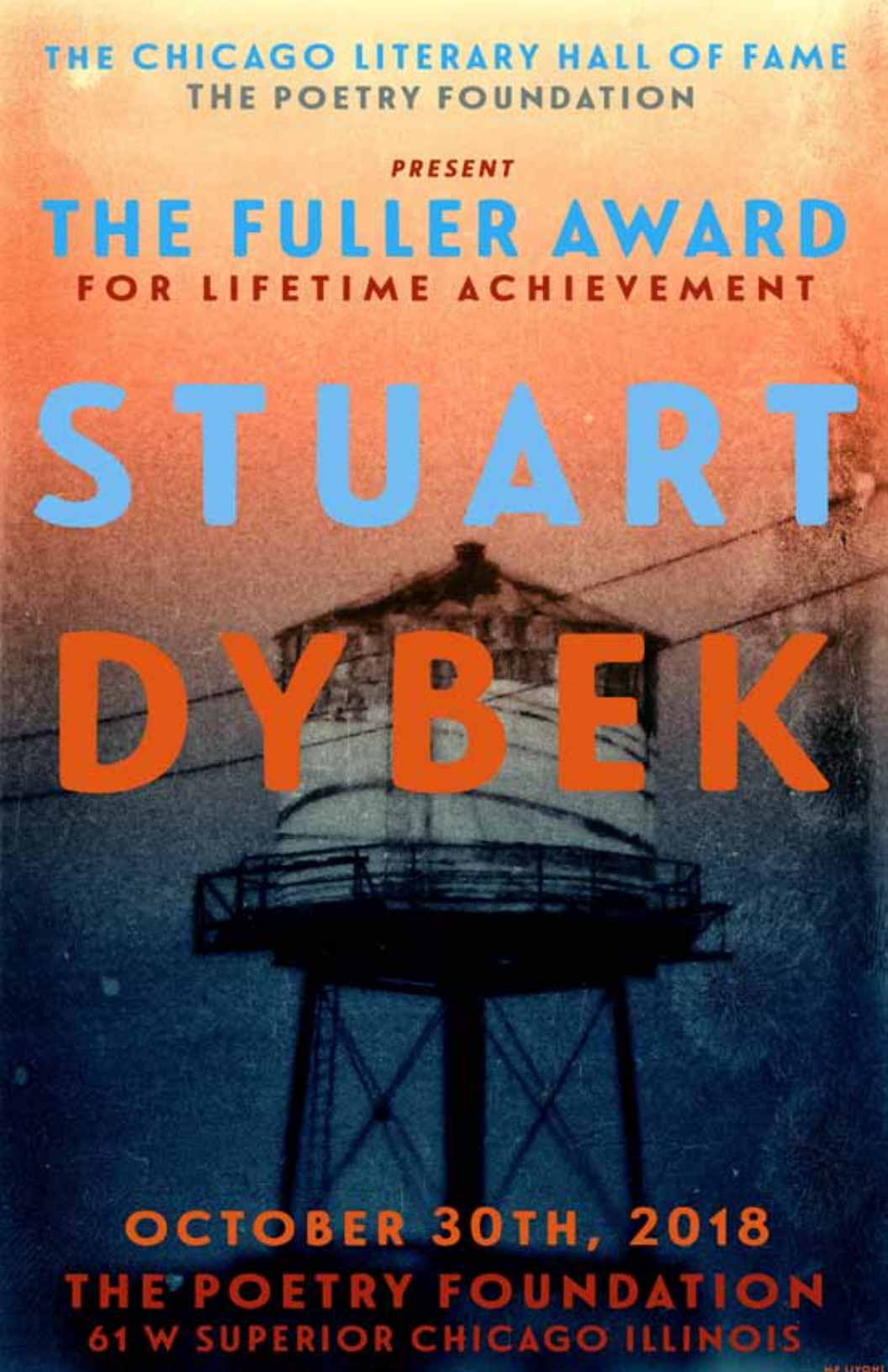
THE CHICAGO LITERARY HALL OF FAME
THE POETRY FOUNDATION
PRESENT
THE FULLER AWARD
FOR LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT
STUART
DYBEK
OCTOBER 30TH, 2018
THE POETRY FOUNDATION
61 W SUPERIOR CHICAGO ILLINOIS

GROWING IN PLACE

BY DONALD G. EVANS

Genius did not announce itself readily, or convincingly, in the Little Village of the early 1950s, when the first vaguely artistic churnings were taking place in the mind of a young Stuart Dybek. As the young Stu's pencil plopped through the surface scum into what local kids called the Insanitary Canal, he would have no idea he would someday draw comparisons to Ernest Hemingway, Sherwood Anderson, Theodore Dreiser, Nelson Algren, James T. Farrell, Saul Bellow, and just about every other master of the blue-collar, neighborhood-driven story. Nor would the young Stu have even an inkling that his genius, as it were, was wrapped up right there, in that mucky water, in the prison just beyond, in the side streets and corner taverns and parish churches, in all he was and was surrounded by.

But as early as grade school, Stuart found something in words. One fourth grade morning, with his mom wasted out in bed from an all-night bout with the flu, Stuart rejected a stinking bowl of Ralston cereal in favor of work on a geography paper about Africa. He had to describe a tree, a tall tree, and eventually came up with, "the tree scraped skies." Stuart was *thrilled*. He rushed into his mother's bedroom, and as he tried to read his creation she…vomited in a sick pail. Later, Sister Regina, who'd been his enemy, read the paper aloud to the class.

"From that moment on," Stuart says, "writing wasn't a school subject. It wasn't in that category for me anymore."

Two years later, Stuart wrote a Christmas story called *The Enormous Gift*, in which he penned an ant instead of the expected angels and shepherds to star in his story. The ant had to cross the stable to the manger carrying a bread crumb and along the way dodge all kinds of dangers, like a chicken. This time Stuart beamed as Sister Edmund read the story aloud to the class. He had reinforcement, but more than that, a sense of accomplishment, accomplishment borne of words, of stories. "That really sealed the deal for me," Stuart says. "I knew it wasn't just spelling. It wasn't diagramming sentences."

Stuart's family lived on 18th Street, right off Blue Island, before moving to 25th and Washtenaw. Little Village had factories, like McCormick Works, where his dad began work at the age of 16. Back lots of factories in the process of closing. It had the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal. The Cook County Department of Corrections. Breweries, including Monarch Brewing Co., from which the smell of mash pierced the neighborhood. All kinds of industrial shops, like the one on Rockwell at which his mom worked as a freight dispatcher. "Just nonstop stimulation," Stuart says. His family six-flat stared at a one-square-block housing project, Lawndale Gardens. "It was free range," Stuart says. "I met every kind of person I was going to meet by the time I was 12."

Stuart's family lived on the first floor of the six-flat, which his father endlessly repaired and upgraded, often with Stuart at his side. Stuart's bedroom was decorated with the Picasso wallpaper he had requested, and from there he peeked out at Kashka Mariska's wreck of a house, replete with chickens and dogs running all over the place.

"That kind of immersion early on kind of makes everything in later life boring," he says. "If you could survive it, it was kind of a gift that you didn't even know you were getting."

Stuart, consciously or not, was being drawn into the world of stories. He recognizes that his Little Village had what Southern writers often refer to as a storytelling culture. Nobody had air conditioning, and as the neighborhood heated up people took to their porches and stoops, to their garages. Radios played. Beer cans popped. "They're drinking beers and talking," he says. "They're just talking, talking, and when you say they're talking it's really being imprecise: what they're doing is telling stories."

He started scribbling satires about school, dirty limericks, and a piece called "Opus Turd" that would now be called flash fiction. Stuart read his offerings aloud to the guys, or sometimes they got passed around class. There was a part of Stuart outside of himself that dictated how he saw the world. "What I wanted to do was play saxophone," Stuart says. "I just wasn't as good at it as writing. Writing was like my secret friend."

Stuart had picked up money doing odd jobs as a boy: helping the truckers load their hauls, shining shoes, hunting deposit bottles, Turtle waxing cars, mowing lawns. He also worked for his father painting porches, tuckpointing, retrieving bricks from razed buildings, helping him tear out this or install that. At 16, though, he was legally eligible to get a real job, and he set his mind to finding something like what his grandmother did, scrubbing floors in a downtown skyscraper. Wandering around, Stuart spotted Seymour's Jazz Record Mart sitting there beneath the Wabash el at 439 S. Wabash.

It was an emporium of 78 jazz records, vintage piano player rolls, memorabilia: an almost complete catalogue of jazz music, all in this retail outlet set amid a stretch of mob-owned strip joints. Seymour Schwartz, a handsome

trumpet player in his prime, was away on a gig then, and instead Stuart met Harry Rose, who was working the counter and answering, best he could, customer questions. Stuart, the fledgling saxophonist dressed in his best sports coat, chimed in his thoughts until finally he approached Harry about a job.

The drawings found throughout this program are from the illustrated version of Dybek's story "Vigil," created by Dmitry Samarov for the 2015 Chicago Independent Bookstore Day. Used with kind permission.

Soon, Stuart essentially ran the store. He spent a whole summer organizing every record, which heretofore had been crammed and shelved and boxed and laid aside in no particular order. He worked six days a week, his mind exploding with jazz, and "listened my way through the entire history of jazz." As Stuart listened and worked, worked and listened, he heard the blue light in the notes and wondered how to write a piece that had that. He would go upstairs to stare in amazement at the vibes Seymour owned. Stuart proved so efficient and valuable an employee that Seymour tried to talk him into managing the store rather than returning to high school.

"That had this absolutely profound effect on me," Stuart says. "No educational experience, even the Writers Workshop, came remotely close to what that summer job did. At that point, something that would always be there for me was the relationship between music and writing. Somehow the line between them got blurred, one was the other."

It was there, too, that Stuart gave up his musical ambitions. He'd loaned his alto saxophone to a friend he'd met at the store, and two months later Jesse returned it, saying he had a part-time job and planned to buy his own. The two went upstairs to the studio, where Jesse, two months into his training, displayed a proficiency far surpassing what Stuart had accomplished in eight years. "I realized then that I didn't have what I wanted to have," Stuart says. "The reverence I had for music would not permit me to think that I would play saxophone in any more than the shitty little places I already played. It was at this point, I started to move to writing."

Chicago and literature, for Stuart, were already a perfect marriage. At 17, his father's job transfer forced the family to relocate to Memphis, but he remained in Chicago to start a short-lived pre-med program at Loyola University. This city was already his.

"The city became my family," he says. "I would come back from Memphis on the train, and when we entered Chicago I would just feel I was home, even though my family had left. The city had so worked its way into me. I would feel myself relaxing. I would know where I was. That sense, I remember it vividly. That belonging is supposed to be between you and human beings, but I had somehow personified the city into something. It was just buildings and concrete and shit, it was nothing. But through some mental gymnastics, I had made it into a self. For all its dangers, I had made it benevolent."

The story doesn't stop there, of course. There were more dead-end jobs, lots of academic pursuits, an apprenticeship under and with the best writers in American literature. There was the publication of his first poetry collection, and then his first story collection. Praise, such as gushing commentary from people like Studs Terkel, who said Stuart was "the bard of the blue collar." More story collections, more poetry collections. All kinds of prizes, including a good number of the big ones. Routine story placements in the finest publications. An illustrious teaching career with hundreds and hundreds of disciples, many of whom went on to their own greatness. Travels far and wide. Even, when Stuart was 65 years old, the MacArthur Foundation's so-called Genius Grant, making it, in a way, official.

No, time moved on from those days in which an alcoholic populated every street corner, hopping freight trains constituted entertainment, and everybody around him balanced on the edge of personal destruction. But Stuart had already collected the material, conjured the muse, that would sustain a body of work that will outlive countless gentrifications of his old neighborhood. It would not be, decades hence, a man merely *remembering*, but an artist *internalizing*—his surroundings, the irreplaceable grandeur of childhood, the long tentacles of friends and family, the profundity scrawled in crimson spray paint on rusty steel girders, even the merging of dreams and reality. ■

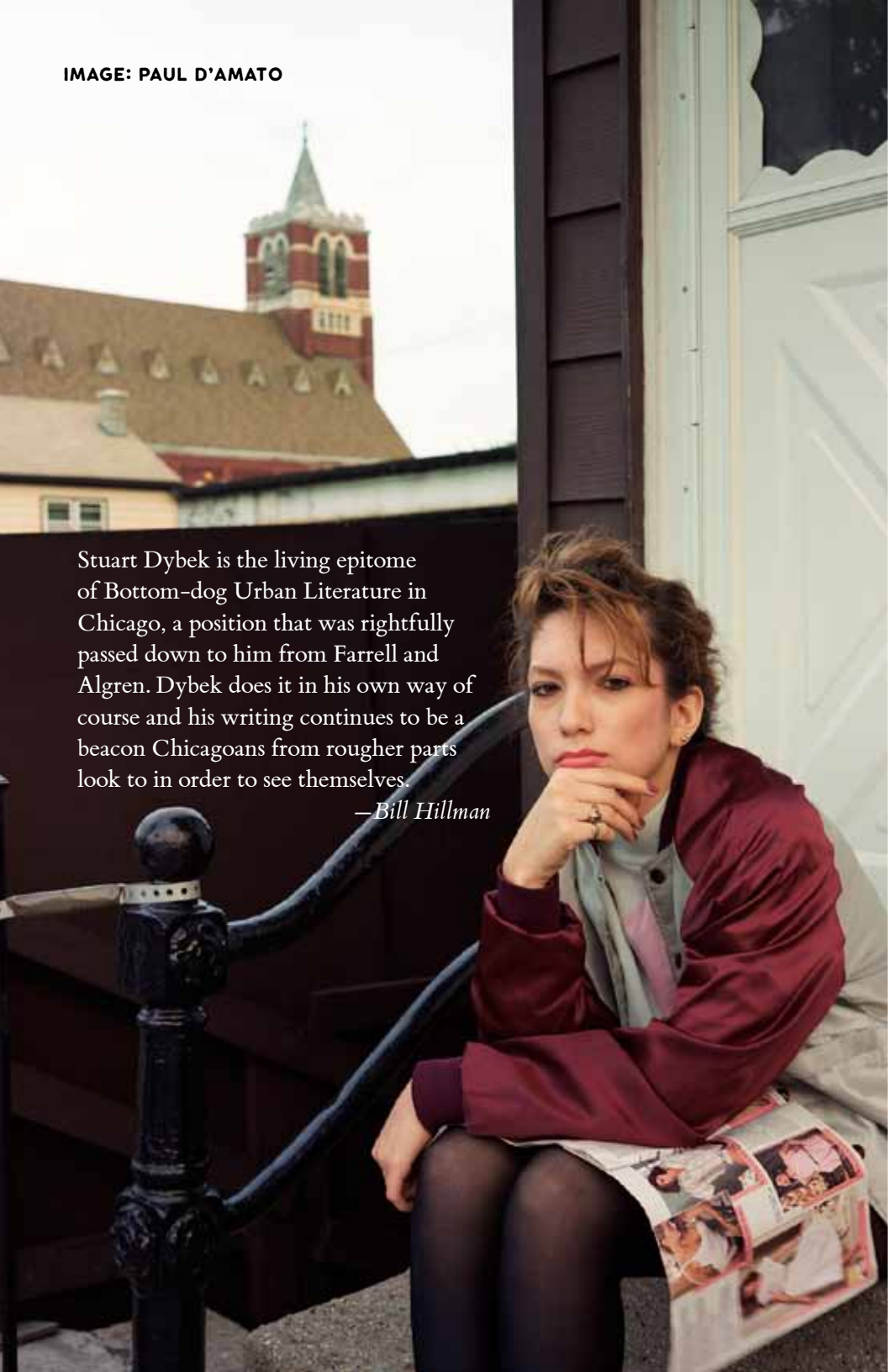

IMAGE: PAUL D'AMATO

Stuart Dybek is the living epitome of Bottom-dog Urban Literature in Chicago, a position that was rightfully passed down to him from Farrell and Algren. Dybek does it in his own way of course and his writing continues to be a beacon Chicagoans from rougher parts look to in order to see themselves.

—Bill Hillman

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- *Ecstatic Cahoots: Fifty Short Stories*, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2014
- *Paper Lantern: Love Stories*, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2014
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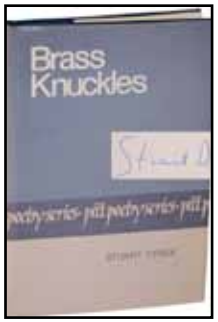
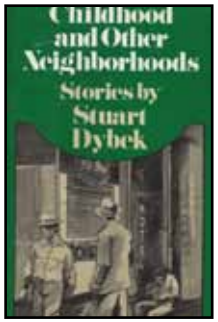
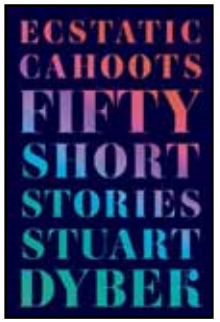
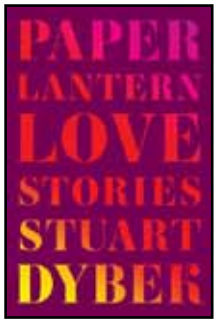
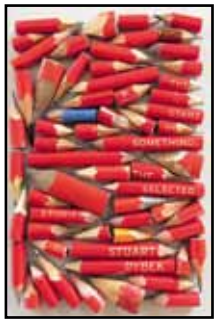










AWARDS

- 1978, 1982: National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship
- 1981: Guggenheim Fellowship
- 1985: Whiting Writers Award
- 1985: Nelson Algren Award
- 1985, 1986, 1987, 1994: O. Henry Award
- 1994: The American Academy of Arts and Letters Award in Literature
- 1995: PEN/Bernard Malamud Prize
- 1998: Lannan Literary Award for Fiction
- 1999: The Pushcart Prize
- 2007: MacArthur Foundation Fellowship
- 2007: Rea Award for the Short Story
- 2014: Harold Washington Literary Award

IMAGE: DMITRY SAMAROV

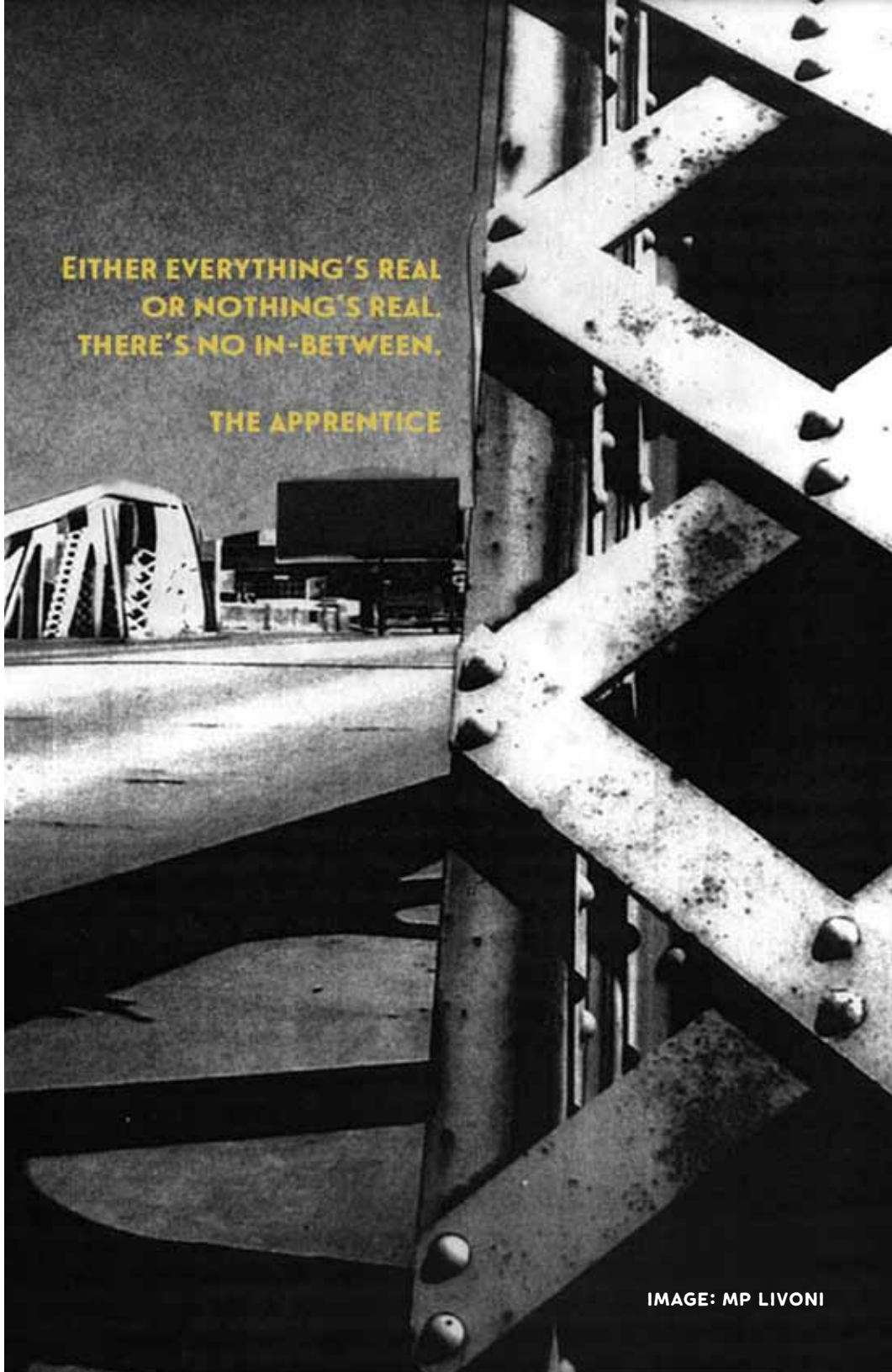


IMAGE: MP LIVONI

THE FULLER AWARD

BY VALYA DUDYCZ LUPESCU

"The Fuller" is awarded by the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame to a Chicago author who has made an outstanding lifetime contribution to literature. The Fuller Awards so far presented include Gene Wolfe (2012), Harry Mark Petrakis (2014), Haki Madhubuti (2015), Rosellen Brown (2016), and Angela Jackson (Spring 2018).

The award was inspired by the literary contribution of Henry Blake Fuller, one of Chicago's earliest novelists and author of *The Cliff-Dwellers* and *With the Procession*. Both novels use the rapidly developing city of Chicago as their setting and are considered by many to be the earliest examples of American realism. Theodore Dreiser called *With the Procession* the first piece of American realism that he had encountered and considered it the best of the school, even during the days of his own prominence. There are additional layers of meaning to the word "fuller." A fuller is also a tool used to form metal when it's hot, an important part of building, and a nice metaphor for Chicago, home to the "First Chicago School" of architecture that rose up from the ashes of the Chicago Fire of 1871. Between 1872 and 1879 more than ten thousand construction permits were issued. Chicago emerged as a resilient city that took risks and made bold decisions—using iron and steel to frame its buildings, giving rise to the world's first skyscraper. The fuller was one such tool that made it happen, a symbol of possibility and perseverance.

Inspired by the sleek lines and art deco style of Chicago sculptor John Bradley Storrs, whose sculpture *Ceres* is on top of the Board of Trade Building, the award statue for the Fuller was based on Hephaestus, the Greek god of the blacksmith's fire and patron of all craftsmen. According to legend, Hephaestus was the only god who worked, and he was honored for having taught mankind that work is noble and one should excel at their craft. The patron of artists and craftsmen, he seemed a fitting symbol to capture the spirit of excellence embodied by the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame's Fuller Award.

Ron Swanson, Jr., who created the Fuller Award statue, is the founder and owner of R.E. Sculpture, Inc. [**resculpture.net**]. Over the course of his career, Ron has worked on large sculptures, including public figures as part of an artist group at Friends of Community Public Art in Joliet. He has also worked on many original toy prototypes and various licensed character sculpts.

THE CHICAGO LITERARY HALL OF FAME (CLHOF) honors, celebrates, preserves, and promotes the development of Chicago's great literary heritage—past, present, and future. CLHOF seeks to realize this purpose by annual inductions of selected great writers from the past, ceremonies honoring living writers whose lifetime contributions to the literary arts warrant the highest recognition, literary awards to youth, classes, panels, and other literary endeavors designed to encourage the development of writers at all ages. CLHOF also creates written materials that record the lives and works of Chicago's most important literary figures and presents these and other materials on its website, in exhibits, author events, public art installations, literary tours, and programming relevant to the organization's goal of promoting Chicago's vibrant literary tradition and culture. Visit us at **chicagoliteraryhof.org**.

THE POETRY FOUNDATION

The Poetry Foundation works to create and encourage a vigorous presence for poetry through *Poetry*, free public programming offered in our building in Chicago, programs created with partners throughout the United States and abroad, and a website that hosts more than 3 million visits each month. The Foundation increasingly supports programs that intertwine poetry and other art forms: music, dance, theater, and visual arts.

Founded in Chicago by Harriet Monroe in 1912, *Poetry* is the oldest monthly devoted to verse in the English-speaking world. The work of Chicago poets such as Margaret Burroughs, Carl Sandburg, Sandra Cisneros, Ed Roberson, Nate Marshall, Eve L. Ewing, Kevin Coval, and Fatimah Asghar has been published in *Poetry*. Harriet Monroe's "Open Door" policy, set forth in volume 1 of the magazine, lives on in the Foundation's mission and programming.

From 2017's year-long celebration of Gwendolyn Brooks' centennial to this year's third annual Poetry Block Party, the Foundation is committed to the poetry of Chicago and communities that make that poetry possible. Learn more about our programming at **PoetryFoundation.org**.

As a teenager in the 1980s, I wandered into a room at The College of Lake County where Stuart Dybek was reading about public oyster eaters, a doomed right fielder, and more. It left me determined to move back to Chicago and become a writer. Decades later, I mentioned that night to Stuart, and he remembered it well—how, in his haste to get back to the city to catch a jazz show, he drove for 20 minutes the wrong way down dark rural roads and ended up in Wisconsin. Though off-the-cuff, it possessed that Dybek storytelling genius—the subtle humor, the strange pathos, the Chicago-guy-as-universal-Everyman—that makes Stuart our city's greatest living writer of literary fiction.

—Don De Grazia

IMAGE: PAUL D'AMATO

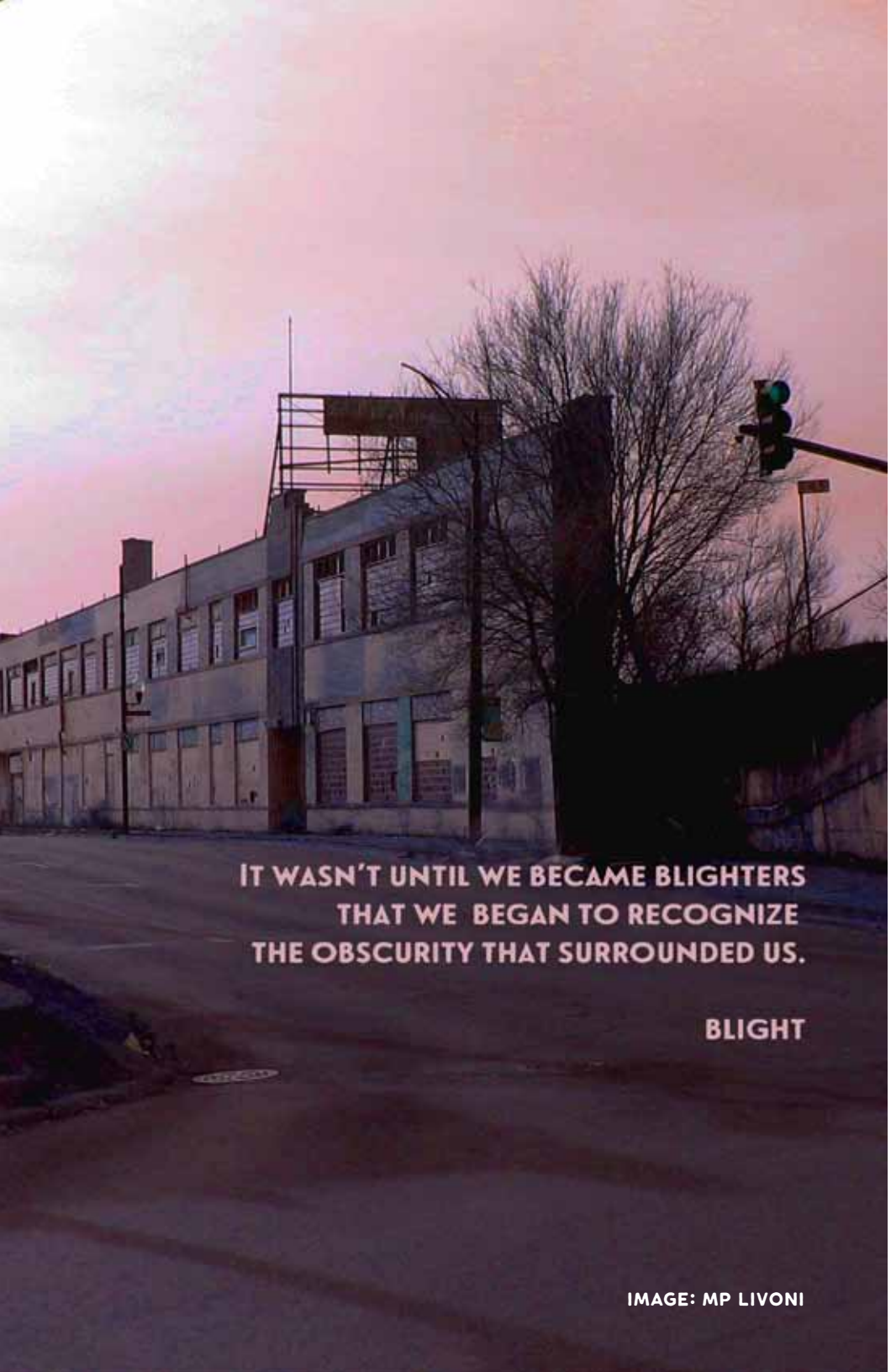


IMAGE: MP LIVONI

TONIGHT'S PROGRAM

Bill Savage ..... Emcee

Henry Bienen ..... *Stuart Dybek, Northwestern, and the Poetry Foundation*

Donna Seaman ..... *Chicago Dreaming*

Mark Turcotte ..... A Reading of "Ravenswood" and "Autobiography"

Alex Kotlowitz ..... *Chicago's Greatest Spear Fisherman—and, lest I forget—Our Greatest Short Story Writer, Too*

Malcolm O'Hagan ..... *An American Writer*

Rachel Jamison Webster ..... *Stuart Dybek as Poet*

Reginald Gibbons ..... *A Friendship in Books*

Mary Dempsey ..... *One Book, One Coast of Chicago*

Dennis Zacek ..... A Reading of "Mowing"

Scott Turow ..... *Working-Class Hero*

Donald G. Evans ..... Presenting the Fuller Award on behalf of the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame

Stuart Dybek ..... Acceptance Speech

PARTICIPANTS

Bill Savage is Professor of Instruction in the English Department at Northwestern University, where he teaches the course "The Chicago Way": Urban Spaces and American Values. His last book was an edited and annotated edition of George Ade's 1931 anti-Prohibition screed, *The Old-Time Saloon* (University of Chicago Press, 2016). Savage co-edited two critical editions of books by Nelson Algren, The 50th anniversary critical edition of *The Man with the Golden Arm* and the *Annotated Chicago: City on the Make*. He has taught Dybek's poetry and prose since the mid-1990s.

Henry Bienen served as Northwestern University's president from 1995 through 2009 and currently serves as president emeritus of Northwestern University. He was the James S. McDonnell Distinguished University Professor and dean of the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University prior to his appointment at Northwestern. In July 2015 Mr. Bienen was appointed interim president of the Poetry Foundation. December 2015 he was made president of the Poetry Foundation and serves on its Board of Directors.

Donna Seaman is the Editor for Adult Books at *Booklist*, a member of the Content Leadership Team for the American Writers Museum, and a recipient of the James Friend Memorial Award for Literary Criticism and the Studs Terkel Humanities Service Award. Seaman's author interviews are collected in *Writers on the Air: Conversations about Books*; she is the author of *Identity Unknown: Rediscovering Seven American Women Artists*, cited as "A decidedly important and long-overdue showcase" by Kirkus Reviews and "An inspiring and beautifully written book" by The Guardian. Seaman lives in Chicago.

Mark Turcotte (Turtle Mountain Ojibwe) is author of four poetry collections, including *The Feathered Heart* and *Exploding Chippewas*. He has been the recipient of a Lannan Foundation Grant, two Literary Fellowships from the Wisconsin Arts Board, and a Josephine Gates Kelly Memorial Fellowship from Wordcraft Circle. Since 2009 he has been a Senior Lecturer in English and Creative Writing at DePaul University.

Alex Kotlowitz is the award-winning author of four books, including the forthcoming *An American Summer*. His work has appeared in numerous anthologies and publications, including *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times Magazine* and on public radio's *This American Life*. His documentary film work includes *The Interrupters*, for which he was awarded an Emmy, and an Independent Film Spirit Award. His journalism has been honored across three mediums, including two Peabody Awards, two Alfred I. duPont-Columbia University Awards, a Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Award, and the George Polk Award. He teaches nonfiction writing at Northwestern University.

Malcolm O'Hagan is the founder of the American Writers Museum that opened in May 2017 on Michigan Ave in Chicago. He is actively engaged with literary organizations in Ireland and the US. He is a lover of the written word and a champion of literature in all of its genres. Dr. O'Hagan, a naturalized US citizen, was born and raised in Ireland, and holds a B.S. and M.S. in Mechanical Engineering from The National University of Ireland. He obtained his D.Sc. from The George Washington University in Washington D.C.

Rachel Jamison Webster is the author of *Mary is a River* (Kelsey Books 2018), a book length poem that was a finalist for the National Poetry Series in 2014; the collection of poetry, *September* (Northwestern University Press 2013) and the cross-genre book, *The Endless Unbegun* (Twelve Winters 2015). Rachel's poems and essays appear regularly in journals and anthologies, including *Tin House*, *The Southern Review*, *The Paris Review* and *Narrative*. Rachel is an Associate Professor of Creative Writing at Northwestern University.

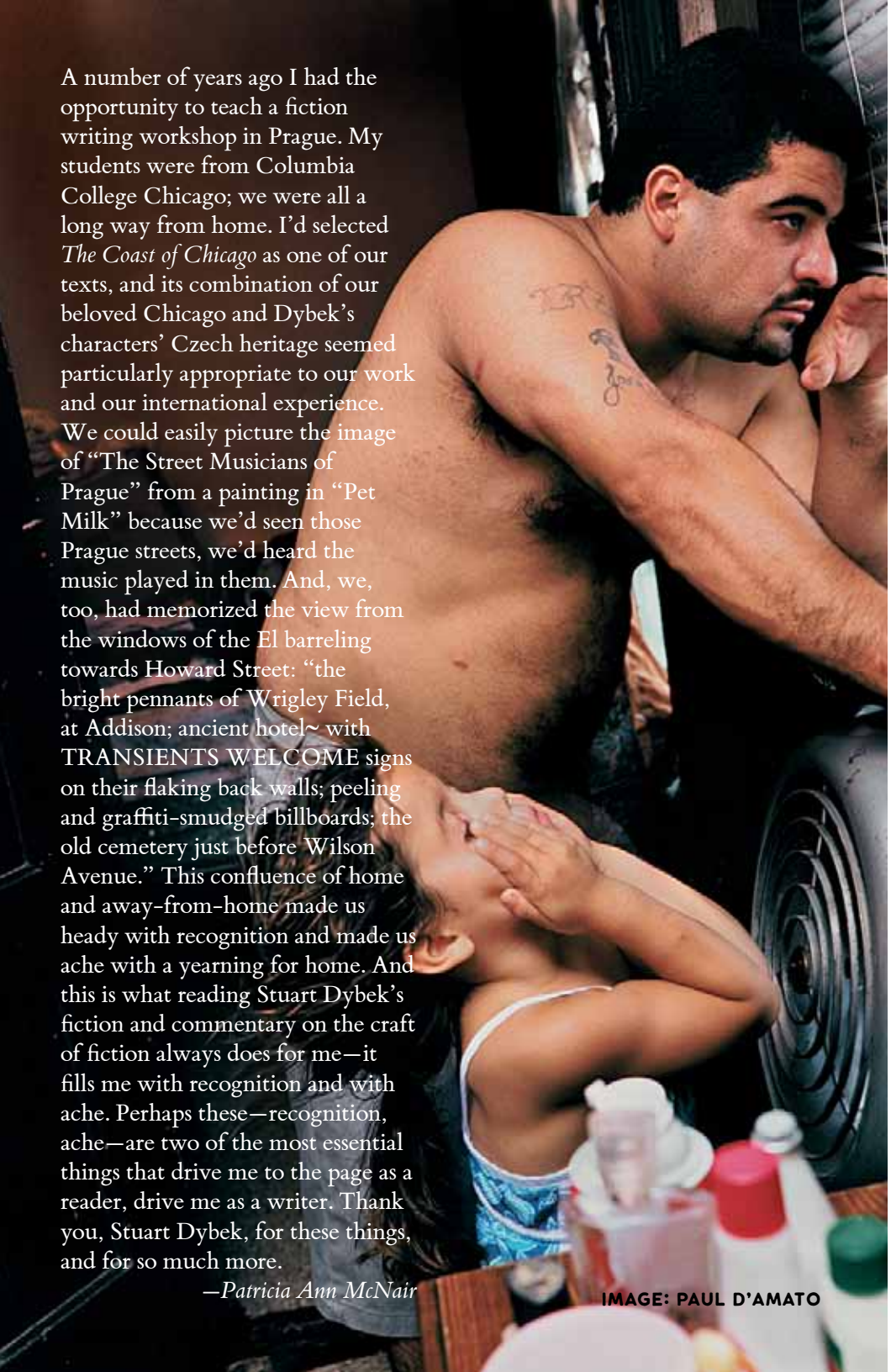
Reginald Gibbons' tenth book of poems, *Last Lake* (U of Chicago 2016), and his most recent book of fiction, *An Orchard in the Street* (BOA Editions 2017), reflect his continuing work in both genres. His *How Poems Think* (U of Chicago 2015) is a book for readers and poets. He is the director of the new MFA+MA program at Northwestern University, where he is a Frances Hooper Professor of Arts and Humanities. He is currently at work on a novel and translations, and has recently completed a project with Russian poet Ilya Kutik—a volume of translations of selected poems by Boris Pasternak.

Mary Dempsey is President of DePaul College Prep, a co-ed Catholic high school serving Chicago and surrounding suburbs. She is responsible for the administration of DePaul College Prep and for the implementation of the school's strategic plan, *Faith in our Future:Vision 2020*. From 1994 to 2012, Mary served as Commissioner of the Chicago Public Library. Under her direction, 44 new libraries were constructed; all 79 libraries were equipped with state of technology, and rich book collections; and innovative reading and digital learning initiatives such as **One Book, One Chicago** and **YOUmedia** were implemented.

Dennis Zacek has performed at American Blues Theater, Northwestern University as a Guest Artist, Victory Gardens Theater and Steppenwolf Theatre Company. He won the Best Supporting Actor Award from the Academy of Theatre Artists and Friends for his portrayal of Clarence Darrow in John Logan's *Never the Sinner*. He is Artistic Director Emeritus at Victory Gardens Theater and Full Professor Emeritus in Theatre at Loyola University, and recently the Resident Director of the Fringe Theatre in Key West for four years. He was recognized by the *Utne Reader* as an "Artist Who Will Shake the World—An International Round-Up of the 40 Most Exciting Soulful Artists."

Scott Turow is the author of 11 best-selling novels, including *Presumed Innocent* (1987) and *The Burden of Proof* (1990). He has also written two non-fiction books—*One L* (1977) about his experience as a law student, and *Ultimate Punishment* (2003), a reflection on the death penalty. He has frequently contributed essays and op-ed pieces to publications such as *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Vanity Fair*, *The New Yorker*, *Playboy* and *The Atlantic*. Turow's books have won a number of literary awards, including the Heartland Prize in 2003 for *Reversible Errors*, the Robert F. Kennedy Book Award in 2004 for *Ultimate Punishment*, and the Carl Sandburg Award in 2016. His books have been translated into more than 25 languages and have sold more than 30 million copies world-wide.

Donald G. Evans is the Founding Executive Director of the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame, author of the novel *Good Money After Bad*, and editor of a Chicago Cubs anthology *Cubbie Blues: 100 Years of Waiting Till Next Year*. His most recent book, the short story collection, *An Off-White Christmas*, came out in October, 2018. He's been listed four times in the **Newcity Lit 50**: **Who Really Books in Chicago** feature, and received the Chicago Writers Association's Spirit Award for lifetime achievement.



A number of years ago I had the opportunity to teach a fiction writing workshop in Prague. My students were from Columbia College Chicago; we were all a long way from home. I'd selected *The Coast of Chicago* as one of our texts, and its combination of our beloved Chicago and Dybek's characters' Czech heritage seemed particularly appropriate to our work and our international experience. We could easily picture the image of "The Street Musicians of Prague" from a painting in "Pet Milk" because we'd seen those Prague streets, we'd heard the music played in them. And, we, too, had memorized the view from the windows of the El barreling towards Howard Street: "the bright pennants of Wrigley Field, at Addison; ancient hotel~ with TRANSIENTS WELCOME signs on their flaking back walls; peeling and graffiti-smudged billboards; the old cemetery just before Wilson Avenue." This confluence of home and away-from-home made us heady with recognition and made us ache with a yearning for home. And this is what reading Stuart Dybek's fiction and commentary on the craft of fiction always does for me—it fills me with recognition and with ache. Perhaps these—recognition, ache—are two of the most essential things that drive me to the page as a reader, drive me as a writer. Thank you, Stuart Dybek, for these things, and for so much more.

—Patricia Ann McNair

IMAGE: PAUL D'AMATO

THE GIFT OF INFLUENCE

BY GEORGE SAUNDERS

Stuart Dybek saved my artistic life back around 1984. I had an aversion to reading contemporary fiction, mostly because I was afraid of what I would find. It was one thing to have your mind blown by someone already dead—that, my fragile ego could take—but I had no desire to find out that there were people still living who were great. But, circling the drain, roofing on the South Side while living in my aunt's basement, cranking out endless Hemingway imitations, I decided to do a binge-read of contemporary stories, just so I could, once and for all, stop worrying and go back to copying out "Hills Like White Elephants" by hand. So I loaded up a table at the old Chicago Public Library on Michigan Ave with literary journals and spent a day reading. One story after the other fell away, leaving me unimpressed, and I was about to pack it in and get back to trying to figure out what I knew as well as Hem knew bullfighting, when I stumbled upon "Hot Ice" in Antaeus. I can recall, to this day, my face getting hotter and hotter as I sat there reading. Line-by-line the story drew me in, and the more I tried to resist, the more some sane, intelligent part of myself muttered under its breath a counter-message: "Keep going, idiot, this is proof that greatness is real and walking around in this world, right now."

For the first time, I saw how it read when a world I knew (Chicago in the 1970s) was seen through a fictive lens. I felt the truths in the story (the description of the young hero collecting shop windows felt like it had come directly from my own mind and most cherished experiences) but I also felt the beautiful distortions being enacted, which, strangely, were making the story even truer. (I felt something like this: "Aha, so this is the transform between reality and reality-on-the-page!") The prose felt like Chicago itself: tough but lyrical; hopeful but death-obsessed; nostalgic yet utterly unsentimental. Finally, and more than anything else, I felt that this Dybek guy (whoever he was), like my long-dead heroes (Hemingway, Faulkner, Kerouac) had managed, first, to attain a wild, grand, unique spirit, and then to get it into every line of his prose. There was a great human being here, who believed in the world and found it sublime. There was a wry Chicago wisdom, a touch of an Eastern European poet, some George Carlin, maybe? There were qualities in the prose that I had never seen in a book before and had just begun to discover were necessary for survival. I had never seen my real struggles in a book before, especially my dawning confusion about class. I had never seen, in a book, a certain flavor of downtrodden comic tenderness that I had seen in people in my own neighborhood and was starting to feel as a necessary form of resistance.

But here it was. Tenderness suffused "Hot Ice," and, as I would soon find out, all of Dybek's work. In other words, he was a complete original who had tapped into something universal and healing. And even I, lunkhead that I was, could feel it.

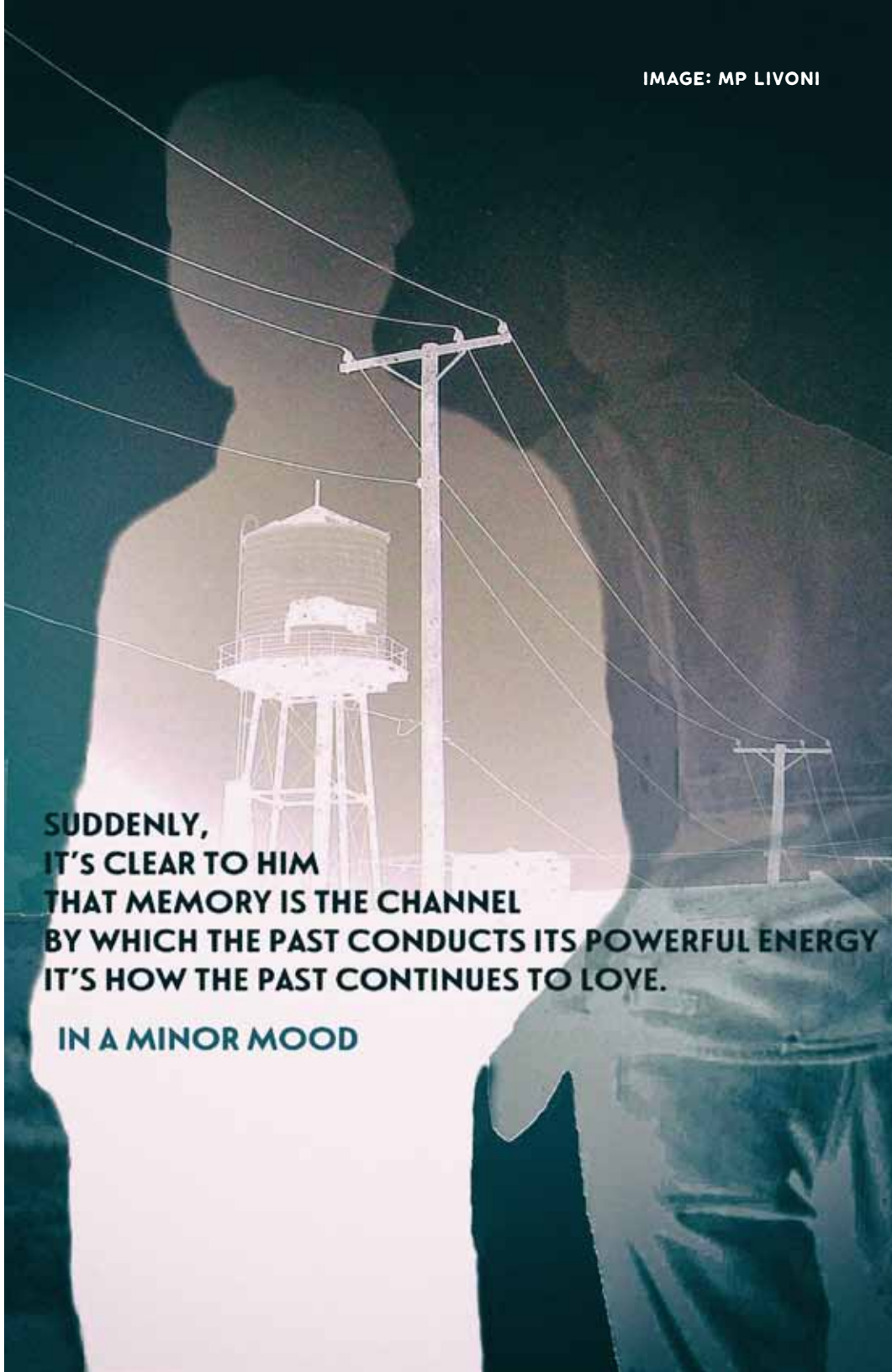
So I sat there, face burning, chiding myself for not getting to this moment sooner, strangely ecstatic. Dybek, in one story, had suddenly, if I could put it this way, (and as I have seen him do with countless of the students to whom I've assigned his stories since), validated the mangy America I knew as being part of the vast human comedy. (If it is in the world, it can be made literary, he seemed to be saying.) He had run a conduit that connected the world of prose with the actual world. And he had done it with so much joy and honesty that everything suddenly felt new. I mean, literally: it was a bigger, fresher world when I walked outside, filled with despair (there was so much to do!) and hope (it could be done—the story I had just read proved it!). This is what a great artist like Stuart Dybek can do: he can polish up the world and give it back to us and make us love it again.

I was filled with gratitude that such a writer could exist and I still am. The phrase "national treasure" is overused but it surely applies here. Dybek represents a suite of American virtues that could save us, if we could learn as a nation from his stories that to be human is to be open, down-to-earth, lyrical (alive with the notion that the world and language are not separate things), nostalgic (capable of feeling the terror and wonder of: time, passing), and charitable to one another (aware that our neighbors are just us on a different day).

In the years since, I've continued to be nourished, dazzled, and inspired by Dybek (the writer, the person, and the teacher) and to learn from him and his work. I want to offer my sincere congratulations to this great American master. There is, for me, no more important writer in the world.

The fact that he is a White Sox fan is, of course, a plus. ■

George Saunders' newest book, the novel Lincoln in the Bardo*, was the winner of the 2017 Man Booker Prize.*



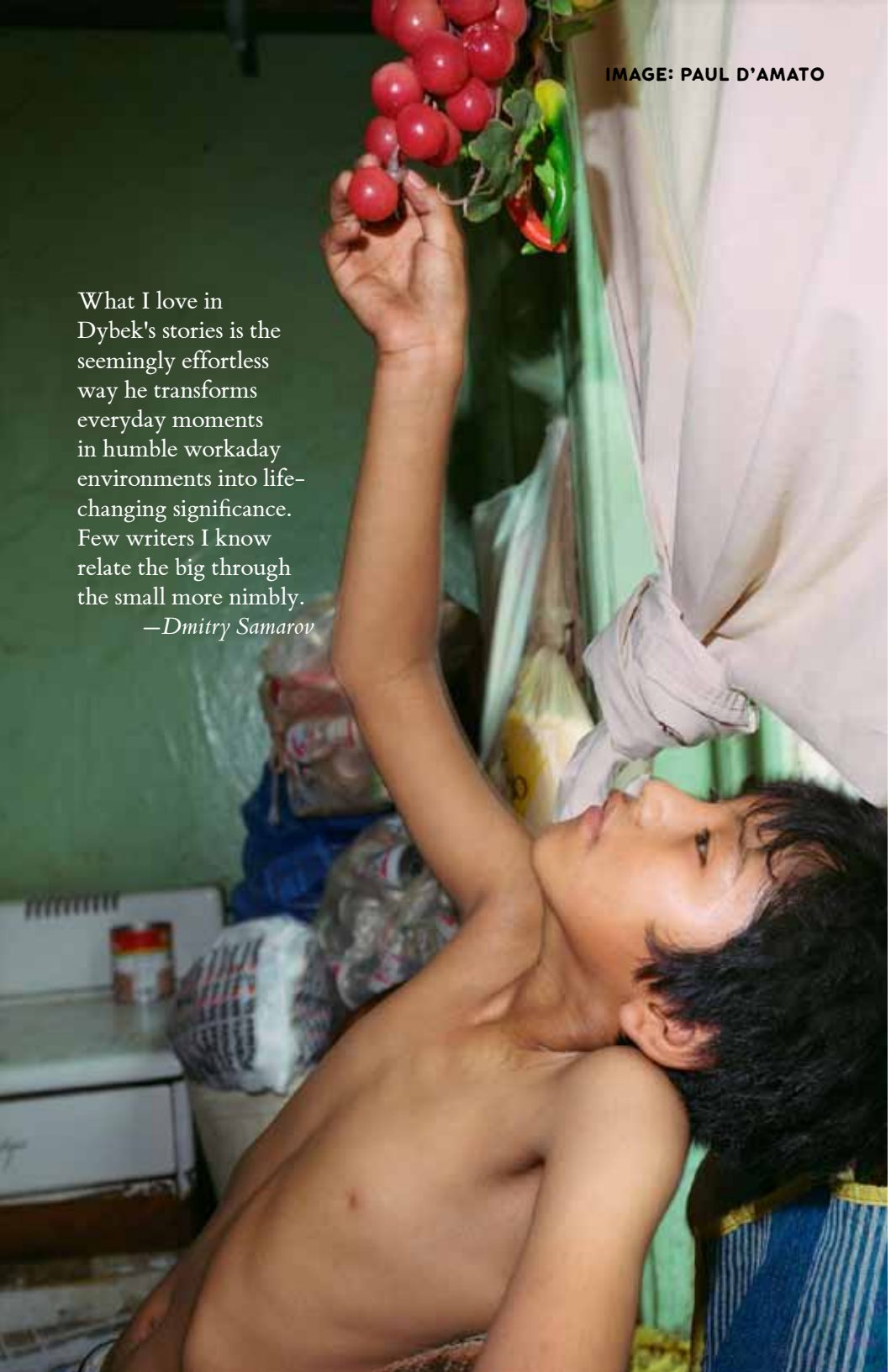


IMAGE: PAUL D'AMATO

What I love in Dybek's stories is the seemingly effortless way he transforms everyday moments in humble workaday environments into life-changing significance. Few writers I know relate the big through the small more nimbly.

—*Dmitry Samarov*

THE MAGIC OF THE PAST

BY EDWARD HIRSCH

Stuart Dybek is a cosmopolitan writer with strong roots in his native territory. He begins with a ferocious loyalty to his neighborhood, to his Polish, Catholic, working-class boyhood in Chicago, which he has evoked in some of the best short fiction published in the past fifty years. I would especially bet on the permanence of his two collections, *The Coast of Chicago* and *I Sailed with Magellan*. He has also published two touching books of poems, *Brass Knuckles*, a gritty streetwise collection, and *Streets in Their Own Ink*, which is filled with moody nocturnes, with long, rhythmic, solitary walks through the city streets at night.

Dybek is the most careful and scrupulous of writers. He is a true artist and doesn't publish anything until it is virtually perfect. I think of him as a splendid urban writer with a deep feeling for music and an equally deep allegiance to dreams. In both poetry and prose, he sees the extraordinary in ordinary lives and blends the quotidian with the fantastic. He treats the past as both familiar and strange country. He suggests that the past is always inside, yet it can't be simply recalled at will with deep accuracy. It has to be nourished back into being. "Suppose the past could not be recalled / any more than we can foretell / the future, that in order to remember / you'd have to visit an oracle."

> At such moments, the past
> would suddenly bloom into consciousness
> with a shock like clairvoyance.
> What had happened would seem to loom
> with the mystery of what will happen,
> and stunned by this unwanted gift, we'd pray
> for the revelation to be lifted.

The oracle, for Dybek, is writing itself, and the magic of the past blooms into consciousness in his work. He is often known as a realist in the tradition of Chicago literature, but he also recognizes the fantastic elements in that tradition. His greatest loyalty has always been to an inner city of dreams, the geography of the interior, our secret lives. For him, this inner life is inextricably intertwined with the outer one, which we cannot forget, which seems never to forget us.

I am completely thrilled that my old friend Stuart Dybek is receiving the Fuller Award, which he so richly deserves. He has scaled the heights. ■

Edward Hirsch is the author of nine books of poetry, and a winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award.

A TRIBUTE FROM A FORMER STUDENT

BY KELLY LUCE

Back in 2002, when I was a senior at Northwestern, a visiting writer named Stuart Dybek led a workshop on image. I was a cognitive science major who hated English Lit courses but loved making up stories, so I enrolled. The way Stuart talked about fiction—about phrases and sentences—lit me up. It wasn't analytical. It was about feeling, about observing, about instincts. And even in the worst of drafts, he had a knack for finding and praising the one or two decent moments, so you felt like you had lightning in your fingertips.

We kept in touch. Partly due to his encouragement, I moved to Japan after graduation. It turns out Stuart's work is huge there. They can't print his books fast enough. When he told me this, I immediately knew why the Japanese were drawn to his work. It's the sense of *natsukashii*, which might be loosely translated as "nostalgia," or more literally, "the sweet sadness of memory." After Stuart returned from his first trip there in 2008, he confirmed my theory. He told me, "Moto, the translator who is responsible for making a name for me there, said he wanted to translate me because my work gave him a big *natuskashii* about growing up in an industrial area of Tokyo. He said reading my stuff was like experiencing a dream of his past life."

Stuart's work transcends Chicago the way a good Italian beef sandwich is more than the sum of its jus and meat. He uses place as a jumping-off point to the universal, to the internal landscape each of us inhabits. I feel beyond lucky to have met him when I did, and to count him as an influence I'll never outgrow. ■

Kelly Luce is the author of the story collection Three Scenarios in Which Hana Sasaki Grows a Tail *and the novel* Pull Me Under*, one of* Elle *magazine's Best Books of 2016.*

IMAGE: MP LIVONI

THE FIRE, AS I RECALL IT, IS MERELY A BACKDROP COMPRESSED WITHIN THE BOUNDARIES OF THE PHOTOGRAPH I TOOK OF HER.

PAPER LANTERN

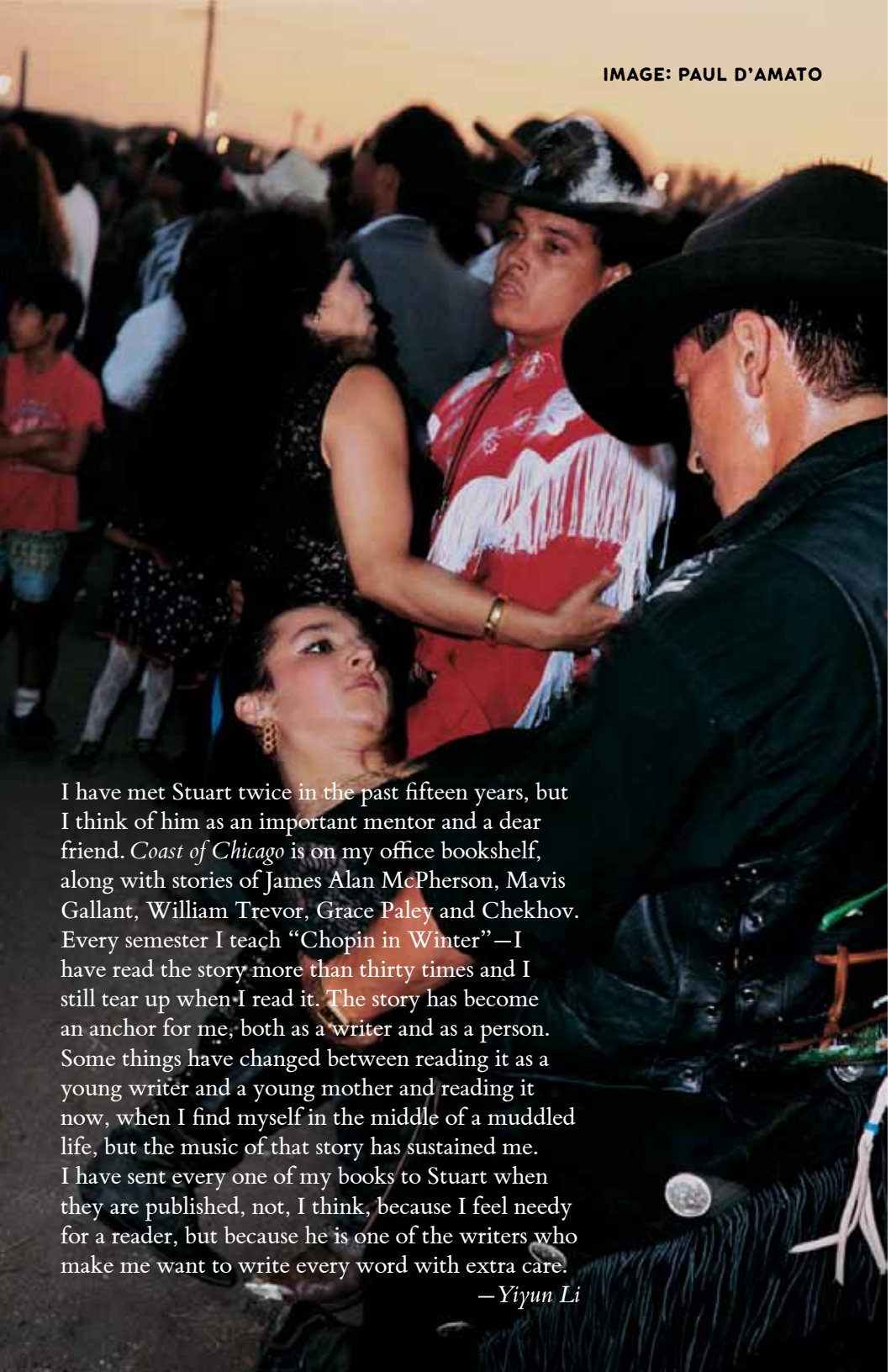


IMAGE: PAUL D'AMATO

I have met Stuart twice in the past fifteen years, but I think of him as an important mentor and a dear friend. *Coast of Chicago* is on my office bookshelf, along with stories of James Alan McPherson, Mavis Gallant, William Trevor, Grace Paley and Chekhov. Every semester I teach "Chopin in Winter"—I have read the story more than thirty times and I still tear up when I read it. The story has become an anchor for me, both as a writer and as a person. Some things have changed between reading it as a young writer and a young mother and reading it now, when I find myself in the middle of a muddled life, but the music of that story has sustained me. I have sent every one of my books to Stuart when they are published, not, I think, because I feel needy for a reader, but because he is one of the writers who make me want to write every word with extra care.

—*Yiyun Li*

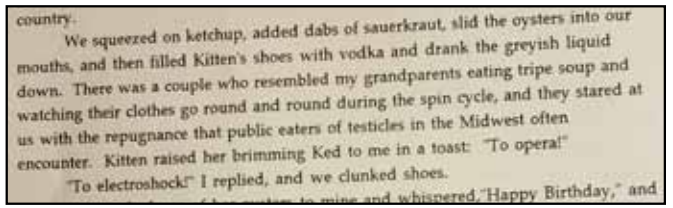
PET ROCK

BY BONNIE JO CAMPBELL

When I was a PhD student in mathematics at Western Michigan University, I was writing fiction on the side. As I went along, taking preliminary exams and getting my master's degree, I became progressively unhappier communicating in the language of pure logic. When I confessed to my advisor that writing proofs was making me cry every night, he suggested I take a class with a guy he sometimes played tennis with, Stu Dybek.

Stuart Dybek turned out to be not just a great and famous writer, but also an inspiring professor and workshop leader, who gave his students a glimpse into his world. Every class period he peppered the conversation with the names of other famous writers he knew personally, and he gave the impression that writing was a fun business, that one minute you were writing a brilliant story for the *New Yorker* and the next minute you'd be kayaking in the Florida Keys with "Toby" Wolff and Tracy Kidder. He also told the funniest stories—one I recall was that on his way to a reading he stopped to pick mushrooms in the woods and got very very lost and missed the reading. The tales of his personal adventures were as engaging and well-crafted as his literary stories. I know that excellent writing does not come easily to anyone, but he gave that impression, that because he was a writer, creating stories was the most natural thing.

Others are better qualified to express how in the pages of his stories he turns anecdotes into poetry and then uses that poetry to create something we might call the landscape of male desire. As a student, he opened my eyes again and again, usually about some simple thing, a reminder of what was interesting (e.g. jobs and work) or a reminder of how a reader expects a story to move. I remember marveling at how his story "Pet Milk" moved forward by images instead of cause and effect. My friend Heidi Bell and I were in his class and wrote for him a parody of "Pet Milk." We called it "Pet Rock." ■



country.

We squeezed on ketchup, added dabs of sauerkraut, slid the oysters into our mouths, and then filled Kitten's shoes with vodka and drank the greyish liquid down. There was a couple who resembled my grandparents eating tripe soup and watching their clothes go round and round during the spin cycle, and they stared at us with the repugnance that public eaters of testicles in the Midwest often encounter. Kitten raised her brimming Ked to me in a toast: "To opera!"

"To electroshock!" I replied, and we clunked shoes.

Bonnie Jo Campbell is the author of five books, and a past finalist of the National Book Award and National Book Critics Circle Award.

KALAMAZOO: FALL, 1979

BY JEFF HUEBNER

In the late 1970s, when I was his student for a couple classes, Stu would sometimes convene his Fiction Workshop courses in the leafy, cozy confines of his house on top the hill on Monroe Street in Kalamazoo rather than in the spiritless classrooms of Brown Hall. (This was a time when he was publishing stories in literary magazines that would soon be collected in *Childhood and Other Neighborhoods*, his fiction debut). As I recall, we'd be invited to his home later in the term, after we'd gotten to know our fellow students better and were more comfortable with each others' critical chops, if any. Stu helped foster a camaraderie amongst us, a not insignificant task for a writing "coach"; now we were more or less a collegial though still motley crew, confident in our points of view. I still remember some of their names. (Where have you gone, Ted Young?)

For aspiring writers, this was not like a university class at all. It was an extension of our lives.

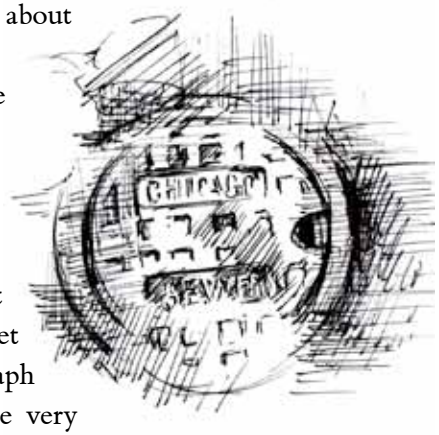
Stu had urged us, in our latest fiction assignment, to try to defy time and space, to play with narrative, to subvert the episodic. (Think of his earlier stories like "Hot Ice" and "Pet Milk," and later stories like "Tosca" and "Paper Lantern," which involves an actual time machine.) Our modest professor—who hardly seemed older than us—never used his own stories as examples. But he'd assign us to read other writers.' Tonight, though, instead of reading at home, we'd be doing it in class. He had us—there were about a dozen of us—take turns reading aloud the 108 paragraph-long fragments of Robert Coover's technically brilliant if impolitically ribald meta-fiction "The Babysitter." (What would you expect from a book titled *Pricksongs & Descants*?)

It wasn't hard to see why Stu chose it as a lesson: The 1969 story is a trick bag of multiple narratives, overlapping perspectives, and parallel realities, in which events (perhaps "actual," perhaps "imagined") move backwards and forwards in time, slip back and forth across planes of space; in which things happen, or then again maybe they don't; a tale of sex, lies, and truth, in which we never know what's real or who's fantasizing—but then again, this is a *fiction*, right? You will never meet a more unstable narrator—if we even know who's doing the telling.

Stu and then-wife Caren used to serve us crackers and cheese and chips

on these special occasions, and there always seemed to be beer and wine in the refrigerator, or people seemed to bring it. Tonight, as we all sat on a circle on the living room carpet reading "The Babysitter," recounting the doings (or not doings) of the unnamed teenaged babysitter; the parents Harry and Dolly Tucker; their kids Jimmy, Bitsy, and the baby; suitors Jack and Mark; as well as a bathtub and various TV shows, over a couple hours, we got progressively tipsier, our tongues tripping and words stumbling, regressing from snickers to chuckles to outright hilarity, then mock-horror, and finally near-incoherence.

I don't know what the class discussed afterwards. Maybe we didn't discuss anything. Maybe our teacher cut the whole thing off when things got too out of hand. I can't quite remember—it has been a while. Rollicking fun and salaciousness aside, we got the point about disrupting narrative flow.



Decades later, I still think about the "Babysitter" class in light of Stu's own fiction—not that it's anything like Coover's. I've seen how his work has evolved from remembrance—embellished, of course—"the great gift of calling back dreams," as he quoted poet Antonio Machado in part of the epigraph to *The Coast of Chicago*—to mining the very act, the arc, the art of remembering, the associative workings "of the whole of memory," to quote another part of the epigraph. You could liken Stu's project—too grounded in *real life* to be "post-modern"—to the time machine in "Paper Lantern." Even as it apparently is consumed by fire, its "red-hot skeleton" will continue to radiate from inside out, still collapsing time and space, always illuminating his and our pasts. ■

Jeff Huebner is a Chicago art writer, journalist, and author. He's been a longtime contributor to the Chicago Reader*, dozens of other local, national, and art publications, as well as the author or co-author of several books on Chicago-area public art and community murals. He was a 2017 recipient of the inaugural Rabkin Foundation Award for Visual Arts Journalism. His long-form story about Stu Dybek, "Coming Home," appeared in the Nov. 13, 2003* Reader.

I met Stu in the early 1970s at the Iowa Writers Workshop, where I learned that he was a real writer of fiction, and that I wasn't. We've stayed in touch ever since, mostly via fishing and writing, mostly down in the Florida Keys, where as a rule we write in the mornings and fish in the afternoons. From time to time we've asked each other to look over manuscripts. I'm sure he's helped me more than I have him. Mostly, I've just fixed his spelling and his Pilsen grammar—and, sorry to say, it's now clear that those will always need fixing. He is an able spearfisherman, but in spite of my efforts, he still doesn't know much about handling a boat or reading a nautical chart. He's a good cook but has a tendency to get carried away. I remember an evening after a good day's catch when he had used every piece of cookware in our rented house and every conceivable herb and spice and then said to my wife, who was acting as sous chef, "Oh, I wish I had some cilantro!" She was amused, and he seemed puzzled by her amusement. His sense of humor is, to put it charitably, childlike.

What else can I complain about? He hasn't written nearly as much as he should have. On the other hand, everything that he *has* written is well worth reading. Most of his stories strike me as wholly original. Many travel with me. Or rather they still take me with them. They give us the gift of what Emily Dickinson calls *transport*. I think they'll be around long after he's gone fishing for good.

—John Tracy Kidder

IMAGE: MP LIVONI

STUART DYBEK: A CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

BY JASON PETTUS

It's been a fascinating thing this month to read through the entire prose oeuvre of Stuart Dybek in chronological order for the first time, as we here at the Chicago Literary Hall of Fame have been making plans for tonight's ceremony, and have been gathering in the effusive praise from his friends and colleagues you're reading in this program. Like many, I had read his most famous book, 1990's *The Coast of Chicago*, in my twenties soon after it had come out; like many, it was at the urging of a woman I was trying to make into my latest romantic partner, a slam poet and former student of his who told me that "everything I needed to know about her" could be gleaned from the book; and like many, once I did read the book, Dybek's unforgettable prose took on a life of its own with me, apart from the six bittersweet weeks said woman and I ended up together. (And strangely, like Dybek's story "Córdoba," said woman just happened to live at the corner of Buena Avenue and Marine Drive, which made me feel like one of the sweet but hapless male heroes of his pieces when coming across this fact last week.)

But still, I had never explored the rest of his fictional work before this month, so I decided to start with his first, 1980's *Childhood and Other Neighborhoods*. Even 38 years later, it's easy to see with this book why Dybek started gaining a feverish cult following from his very start, because the writing on display is startlingly unique; the magical realism of Gabriel García Márquez, the gritty urbanism of Nelson Algren, the sweet nostalgia of the *Saturday Evening Post*, but with the naughty subversion of the Countercultural era. (Also, what an astounding historical record of a Chicago that no longer exists, as best typified by the very first story of the book, "The Palatski Man," in which alley-going knife sharpeners on horse-drawn carriages still live in a wild rural wonderland, right in the middle of the city.)

Next came *The Coast of Chicago*, deservedly now known as a modern classic, one of those magical moments in literary history when everything came together perfectly. An expansion of Dybek's look back at his childhood as a Polish-American in the Little Village neighborhood (in a post-war time when the area was undergoing a transition into a mostly Mexican neighborhood), it's also a thoroughly contemporary collection of pieces about masculinity, sexuality, and experience-hungry youth, containing many of the most indelible and heartbreaking stories of his career, such as the aching "Chopin in Winter" where we watch the twin fates of a dying immigrant grandfather and an

illegitimately pregnant teenage neighbor. (Also, for those keeping score, this is the book that contains the famous "Pet Milk," mentioned over and over by his admirers in this program.)

A decade later saw Dybek's so-far only novel, 2003's *I Sailed with Magellan*, although this comes with an asterisk for being a "novel in stories," the literary length for which he's destined to be mostly remembered. A non-linear look at the life of the sometimes infuriating, always engaging Perry Katzek, this is Dybek doing a deep dive into his checkered youth within a rough-and-tumble, pre-gentrification Chicago—a world of mobsters and viaducts, dead disabled boys turned into Catholic martyrs, broke but striving social workers living in rundown northside SROs, and as always the women beside them who propel them along, messy mistakes and all. To me, it was my favorite of all his books, and one I know I'll be coming back to again and again for the rest of my life.

And finally, a decade after that, Dybek gave the world the remarkable gift of 59 new stories in a single year, with the twinned 2014 publications of *Ecstatic Cahoots* and *Paper Lantern*. A reflection of Dybek's years of honing his craft in the academic world, as both a beloved professor and working artist, these pieces are mostly tiny little diamonds from a now master of his craft, pieces that often approach flash-fiction but that packs all the wallop of stories ten times the size. Split between general stories (*Cahoots*) and specific love stories (*Lantern*), these books see Dybek at the absolute top of his game, a crowning achievement to a busy and award-packed career that is about to celebrate its half-century anniversary.

With all the wonderful anecdotes in this program from long-time friends who are intimately acquainted with his work, I'm proud to be one of the few to say that it's perfectly all right if you're not familiar yet with all of Stuart Dybek's books. It is in fact a perfect time to become so, with all of his titles still in print and with a brand-new greatest-hits collection that was just recently published by Jonathan Cape/Vintage. Still as relevant as ever, still as powerful as ever, he is truly one of America's greatest living authors, and a bright star in the annals of Chicago's literary history. ■

Jason Pettus is the founder and executive director of the Chicago Center for Literature and Photography.

When I moved to Chicago from New York City in the early 1990s I had yet to write a word, but I wanted to. I also didn't know Chicago writers. Well, I did, but not many. There was Mike Royko whose columns I loved as a child, Saul Bellow who my father idolized, Studs Terkel, a hero in my home growing up, and Richard Wright, who I read in high school, but things were sketchy after that. Does David Mamet count? And then I was here and I discovered Gwendolyn Brooks and Alex Kotlowitz and Joe Meno and all I wanted to do was write, had to write, and was soon consuming any and all words I could, searching for whatever mojo makes for a story. I talked and thought about writing all of the time and one day a co-worker said he couldn't believe I had yet to read Stuart Dybek. Hadn't read Dybek? I didn't even know who he was. And then I discovered "Pet Milk" and I read "The train rocked and jounced, clattering north. We were kissing, trying to catch the rhythm of the ride with our bodies. The sun bronzed the windows on our side of the train. I lifted her skirt over her knees, hiked it higher so the sun shone off her thighs, and bunched it around her waist. She wouldn't stop kissing. She was moving her hips to pin us to each jolt of the train," and that's when I knew what a short story could be.

—Ben Tanzer

IMAGE: MP LIVONI

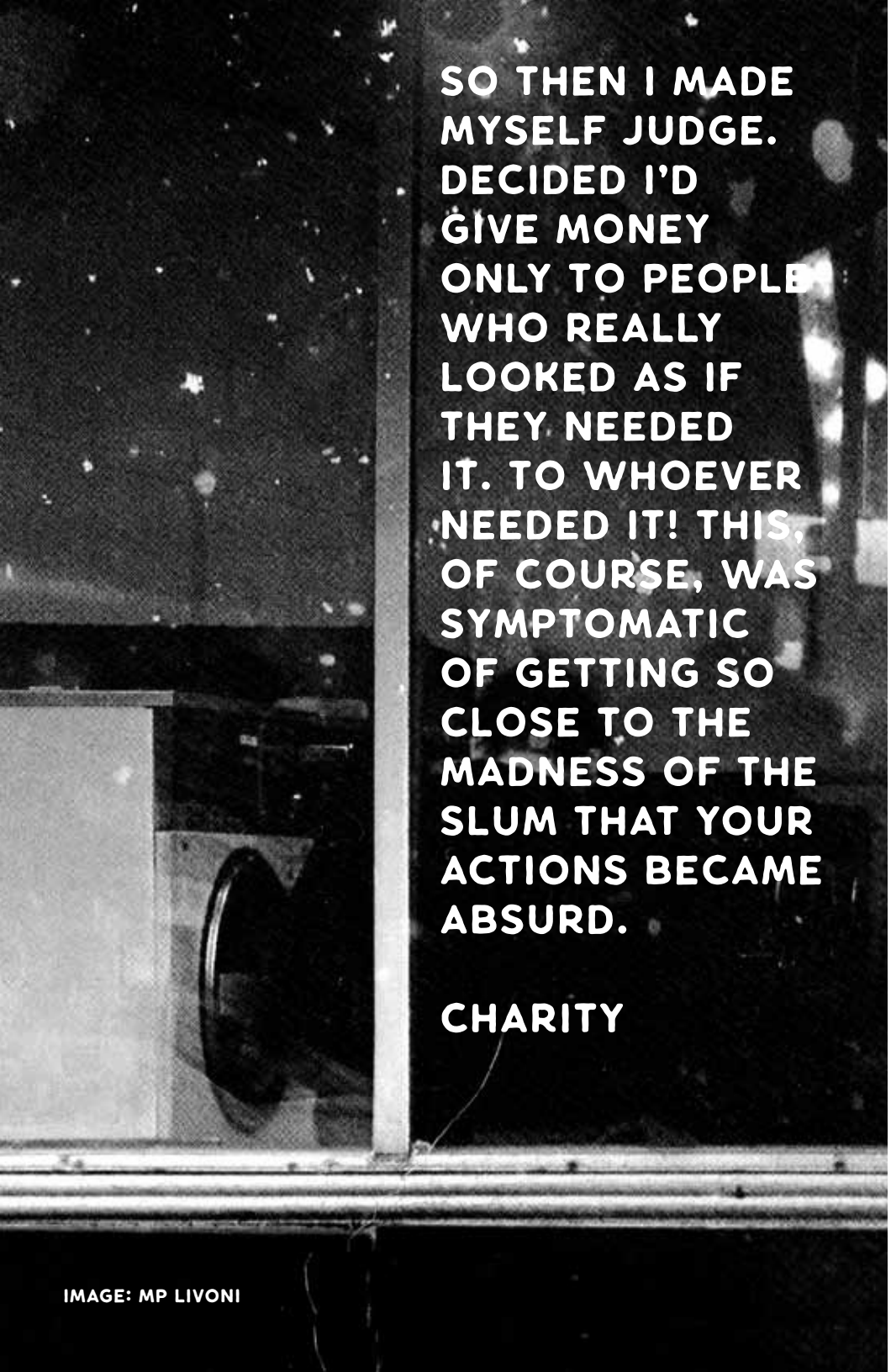


IMAGE: MP LIVONI

BRIEF NOTE ON DYBEK

BY PETER ORNER

There are so many of us out here plugging away in his long, benevolent shadow. I wouldn't write at all if not for the work of Stuart Dybek. I can tell you exactly where I was when I first read "Chopin in Winter." I was alone in a booth at the Brown Jug in Ann Arbor, Michigan pining over—it doesn't matter now. (It doesn't?) I had to leave Chicago to find my way back to Chicago. Like the ancient mariner, Dybek detained me with his first lines. *The winter Dzia-Dzia came to live with us in Mrs. Kubiac's building on Eighteenth Street was the winter that Mrs. Kubiac's daughter, Marcy, came home pregnant from college in New York*. Somehow, he made my own goofball loneliness, how to put it, a little bit worthy? Better or worse, I'd found what it was I wanted to do. But what was it exactly? I guess what I'm saying is that Dybek made it all right to speak up as myself. Whoever this was. I stopped going to classes almost completely. I began to write stories. I drove the bus for the Ann Arbor YMCA and wrote stories. That they were pretty bad stories isn't the point.

Back then, much as I revered another fellow Chicagoan, this wasn't the feeling I got when I read Saul Bellow. He didn't make me feel that I too might have something to say. Dybek has this way of shaking you into seeing what should have known all along, that your own life, inconsequential as it may feel, *is* your life. And it damn well has beauty in it—if you look close enough. To this day I can't read Dybek without a notebook to take notes on all the things he reminds me to remember.

In the middle 1990's, I remember sitting in a workshop in the home of Andre Dubus and Dubus reciting, from memory, "The Knife Sharpener's Daughter":

A drain spout splashing
rusty stains on concrete,

the taste of doorknobs
you kiss before squinting

through the musty keyhole
at the knife-sharpener's daughter,

while across the city
the knife-sharpener

limps his pushcart
with its dinging axles,
with its screeching whetstone

up wet alleys
crying: scissors! knives! axes!

Dubus was silent after. Finally, he said, "How the hell about that?"

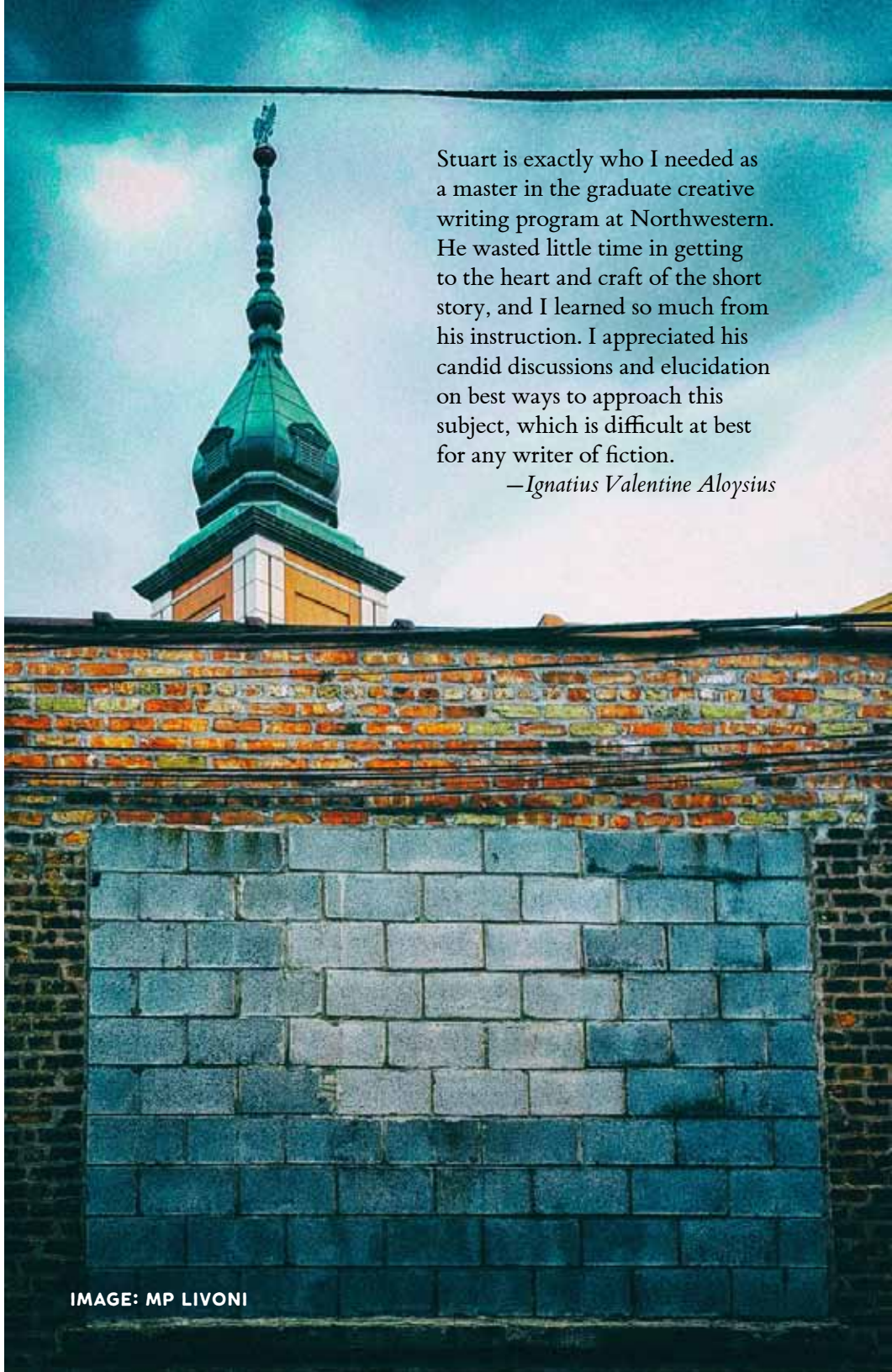
So many things I'd like to say: *I Sailed with Magellan* is an unsung masterpiece of unusually intricate construction. Ragged and beautiful and funny and devastating—the way the stories speak to each other in slant ways calls to mind Eudora Welty's *The Golden Apples*. And Dybek, like Welty, knows that if you stare at what you know long enough it becomes strange and wonderful and completely *un*known. Another opening line, this one from "Orchids": *I could begin with sitting at the kitchen table on the way to Mexico, speeding on uppers, and typing to the sound of Stosh's Merc circling the block*. Again, how would it be possible not to keep reading this story?

And then: how long has it been now, three, four years? That double-barreled blast of Dybek. *Paper Lantern* and *Ecstatic Cahoots* together in the same year. And the familiar became uncannier than ever. To this moment, I can't look at Lake Michigan without thinking of the priest in "Seiche" who, daily, swims off the little beach by Loyola's Madonna della Strada. Was the priest's swimming—and the man continued to swim until well after Labor Day—a form of prayer? Or penitence for a secret sin? Dybek never tells us. Another thing I'd like to thank him for. This mysterious priest swimming, still, way out past the breakwaters. ■

Peter Orner's six books have been past winners of the Goldberg Prize for Jewish Fiction, the New York Public Library's Young Lion's Award, and the National Book Critics Circle Award, among many other accolades.

My introduction to Stuart Dybek was the short story "We Didn't," which we read in my first creative writing workshop. I had never read anything like it. I was awestruck by his lyrical style and inspired to continue writing. Years later, I was lucky enough to study with Stuart in my MFA program. He is a gracious and generous teacher, and he is as inspiring in real life as his writing is on the page.

—Betsy Ann Haberl



Stuart is exactly who I needed as a master in the graduate creative writing program at Northwestern. He wasted little time in getting to the heart and craft of the short story, and I learned so much from his instruction. I appreciated his candid discussions and elucidation on best ways to approach this subject, which is difficult at best for any writer of fiction.

—Ignatius Valentine Aloysius

IMAGE: MP LIVONI

MY LITERARY HERO

BY GARNETT KILBERG COHEN

Stuart Dybek is my literary hero. And my guess is he is a hero to lots of other writers as well. Above all else, he is a hero because of the way he writes. When I first read *Childhood and Other Neighborhoods*, I remember wondering if I could learn to do that magic. He puts us in the skin of a wide cast of characters from little boys roaming the streets of Chicago to social workers in shiny new suits, factory workers and scientists. He allows us to experience their fears and fascinations through our senses. He can reveal a hidden world or a complicated relationship with a single image or object—a bruise, a telephone, a tube ("bullet") of lip gloss—within lush prose or in just a few sentences. Take for example, all that is suggested about the two characters and their situation in "Misterioso," a story complete in just two sentences:

> "You're going to leave your watch on?"
> "You're leaving on your cross?"

Stuart Dybek is a hero of the short story. Despite exhortations for him to write a novel, Stuart has—like Alice Munro—remained faithful to the short story, reinventing it time and time again in myriad shapes and strange incantations, to show us both the power of the moment and how a "mere" story can reveal the unexpected layers of a long life.

Stuart Dybek is a hero in his legendary support and championship of other writers. His work moves all serious readers of fiction but it particularly inspires other authors who, like him, excavate their secrets, their obsessions and their most haunting memories for material. Yet his gift to other writers goes beyond inspiration and takes on more tangible forms. Any writer who has had contact with Stu—as his student, as a colleague or just crossing paths in the literary landscape—is aware of his kindness and generosity. In my own case, it spans decades.

Long ago—when I was a young single mother—Stuart was my teacher at a college where I didn't stay long. I think I took two workshops with him and an independent study. But during that brief time, he looked at my writing with a seriousness that made me take it seriously; he helped eliminate any doubts I had at a time when I had every reason to think such a path was impractical. But what really amazes me—now that I have been a teacher for many years and have experienced the Lucy & Ethel-like assembly line of student stories coming at me—is that long after I left that school, graduated from another university and went on to get my MFA, Stuart was there for me. Even though I had other wonderful teachers, I regularly sent him stories and he regularly responded. I am talking actual envelopes with licked stamps on them, containing handwritten letters with both comments on my work and funny anecdotes from his life. I can't imagine how busy he must have been, and how blithely inconsiderate some of my requests must have seemed. There were long periods of time when we didn't see each other. Yet, the critiques—along with recommendations and, later, blurbs—kept coming. I still have a large box of those letters with my name and various addresses scrawled across the front in his cheerful script. Letters became e-mails. I never waited more than a few days. No mention of an expiration date on all this good will. Clearly others have had this experience. Over the years, I have noticed how many of my favorite books—especially by beginning writers—carry his distinctive blurbs.

Stuart Dybek is the epitome of what it means to be both a great writer and great citizen of the literary world. Stuart Dybek is a hero in the world of words and the world of kindnesses. ■

Garnett Kilberg Cohen is the author of three collections of short stories. She is a past winner of the Crazyhorse Fiction Prize and a four-time honoree of the Illinois Council of the Arts.

It's been wonderful to have Stuart Dybek teach for our MA/MFA in Creative Writing programs at NU's School of Professional Studies. The attention to craft he emphasizes in his fiction writing classes has produced award-winning graduates of the program. His syllabi are things of beauty. His feedback to students is always generous, candid, and thoughtful. And despite his fame and endless commitments, he's one of the most down to earth writing faculty I know, dedicated to working with students from diverse and varied backgrounds. He is genuinely interested in his students' development and success as writers.

Stuart's writing workshops fill in the first ten minutes registration opens each term. Writers regularly apply to NU solely in hopes of getting the chance to work with him—many of them from out of state, leaving behind family, friends, and jobs to do so. He does not disappoint. I often hear students say their experience with him exceeded their expectations. And any time I ask a student how their class with Stuart is going, there's always a glow of joy that washes over their face; they're so clearly impacted by his interest in and support of their work.

—Amy Danzer

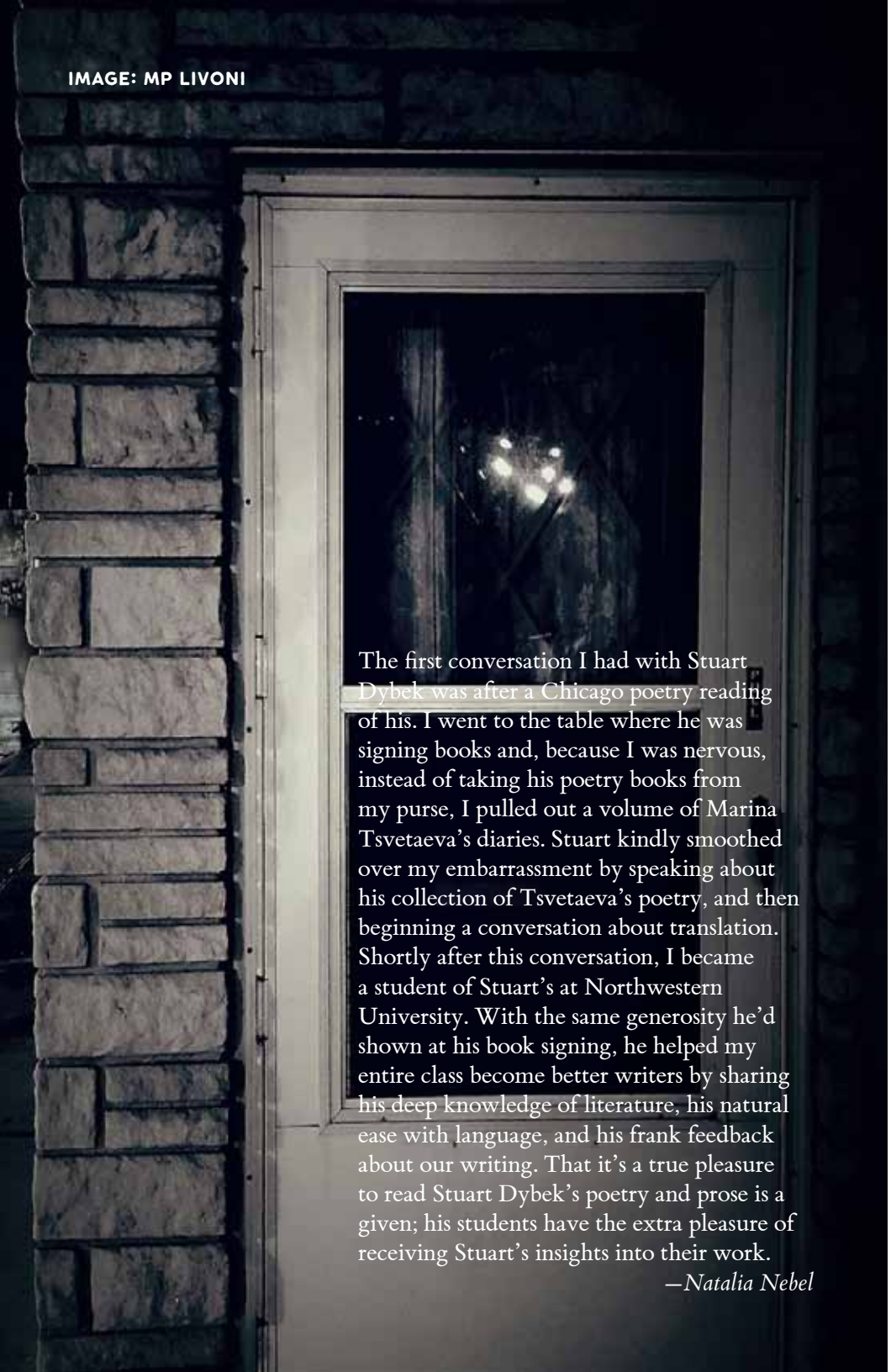


IMAGE: MP LIVONI

The first conversation I had with Stuart Dybek was after a Chicago poetry reading of his. I went to the table where he was signing books and, because I was nervous, instead of taking his poetry books from my purse, I pulled out a volume of Marina Tsvetaeva's diaries. Stuart kindly smoothed over my embarrassment by speaking about his collection of Tsvetaeva's poetry, and then beginning a conversation about translation. Shortly after this conversation, I became a student of Stuart's at Northwestern University. With the same generosity he'd shown at his book signing, he helped my entire class become better writers by sharing his deep knowledge of literature, his natural ease with language, and his frank feedback about our writing. That it's a true pleasure to read Stuart Dybek's poetry and prose is a given; his students have the extra pleasure of receiving Stuart's insights into their work.

—Natalia Nebel

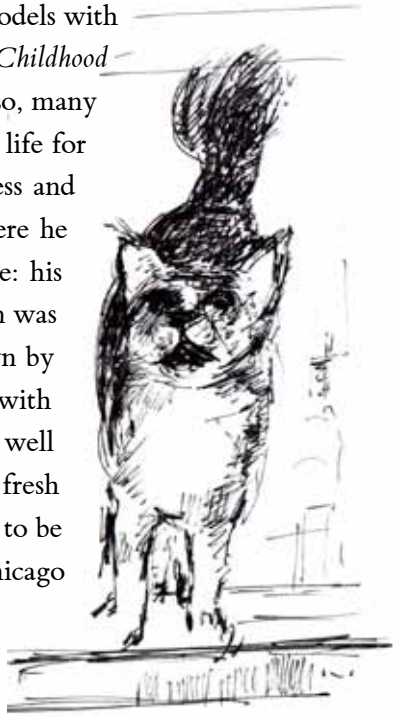
BEAUTY-DIGGER

BY CARLO ROTELLA

"'**This is Deejo. He digs beauty.**'" I've always loved that line from "Blight," not just because it's funny but because it carries its payload of wisdom with such deceptive lightness.

In some ways it's faint praise to describe Stuart as the great Chicago writer of our time, but this distinction means something extra to me, as a Chicagoan who wanted to write. To explain that something extra, I have to talk about Stuart as mentor and example, which would appear to be a sideshow. His writing is the main event, and it deserves every one of the many honors that have been heaped upon it and will be heaped on it for years to come. But the apparent distinction between main event and sideshow breaks down if you bear in mind that Stuart's generosity to his characters and to the world extends far beyond the page.

Choosing to write means choosing what kind of writing life you want to make for yourself. You have to pick your models with care. Even when I first came across a copy of *Childhood and Other Neighborhoods* at the age of 18 or so, many years before I could even imagine a writing life for myself, I was instantly drawn to the richness and the depth of Stuart's engagement with where he was from, in the fullest sense of that phrase: his neighborhood, his upbringing, his life. Pilsen was far away from South Shore, but I was drawn by the combination of craft, discipline, and joy with which he went back again and again to the well of experience and imagination to discover fresh meaning and, yes, beauty. I wanted this guy to be my rabbi, to borrow a useful term from Chicago politics, my guy downtown in the Republic of Letters.



When I met Stuart and we struck up a friendship, he became the most low-key and least self-important of mentors, offering guidance with a seemingly casual remark: "you might like teaching some creative writing courses . . . ,"

or "you should apply for this fellowship . . . ," or just "what are you working on now?"—a question that, coming from Stuart, always makes me feel as if the answer might actually matter. When we talked, it seemed as if we were shooting the breeze, just catching up every few months or years, but I look back and see that he was helping me to recognize and make the life I wanted for myself.

What I'm talking about goes far beyond writing. Even if I'd followed another path and never written a word, Stuart would still be one of my models for how to be a human being: how to pay the kind of attention to your world and your fellow human beings that sustains you over the long haul of a life. I pick up a book by Stuart, and I can hear his voice saying, "'Hey, man, let's go dig some beauty,'" and I can hear that he's putting on an old neighborhood voice to kid around a little but he's also not kidding at all, and I feel that I'm back in the neighborhood in which I want to live. ■

Carlo Rotella's next book, due out in April 2019, is The World Is Always Coming to an End: Pulling Together and Apart in a Chicago Neighborhood.

I love nearly all of Stu's stories and poems, but I think "Pet Milk" is my favorite. It's syllable-perfect, even if *The New Yorker* made him delete an R-rated phrase or two from the make-out session inside the El conductor's cubicle. I've been teaching it since 1984, but I or my students keep finding new facets to marvel at and maybe try to steal: the way, for example, Stu controls the tense, and the tension, so exquisitely, making the final miracle of a sentence pay off from the perspective of Perry's teenage self, standing on the platform watching the lovers blast through the station, looking forward to when he'll finally get to do what they're doing; his 22-year-old self, actually having sex with Kate on that warm Chicago evening; and his middle-aged self, remembering it, forced to realize he's never had, never will have, a better erotic experience. Stu had stayed in my apartment the summer (or maybe two summers) before the story came out, and I like to think he wrote at least part of it there. Wherever he wrote it, "Pet Milk" stands as one of the peaks of his great range of lust stories—"Lunch at the Loyola Arms," "Paper Lantern," "We Didn't," a dozen others—establishing him as our most vivid poet and chronicler of that undeadly sin. Undeadly, that is, unless you're caught squinting through a keyhole at the knife-sharpener's daughter.

—James McManus

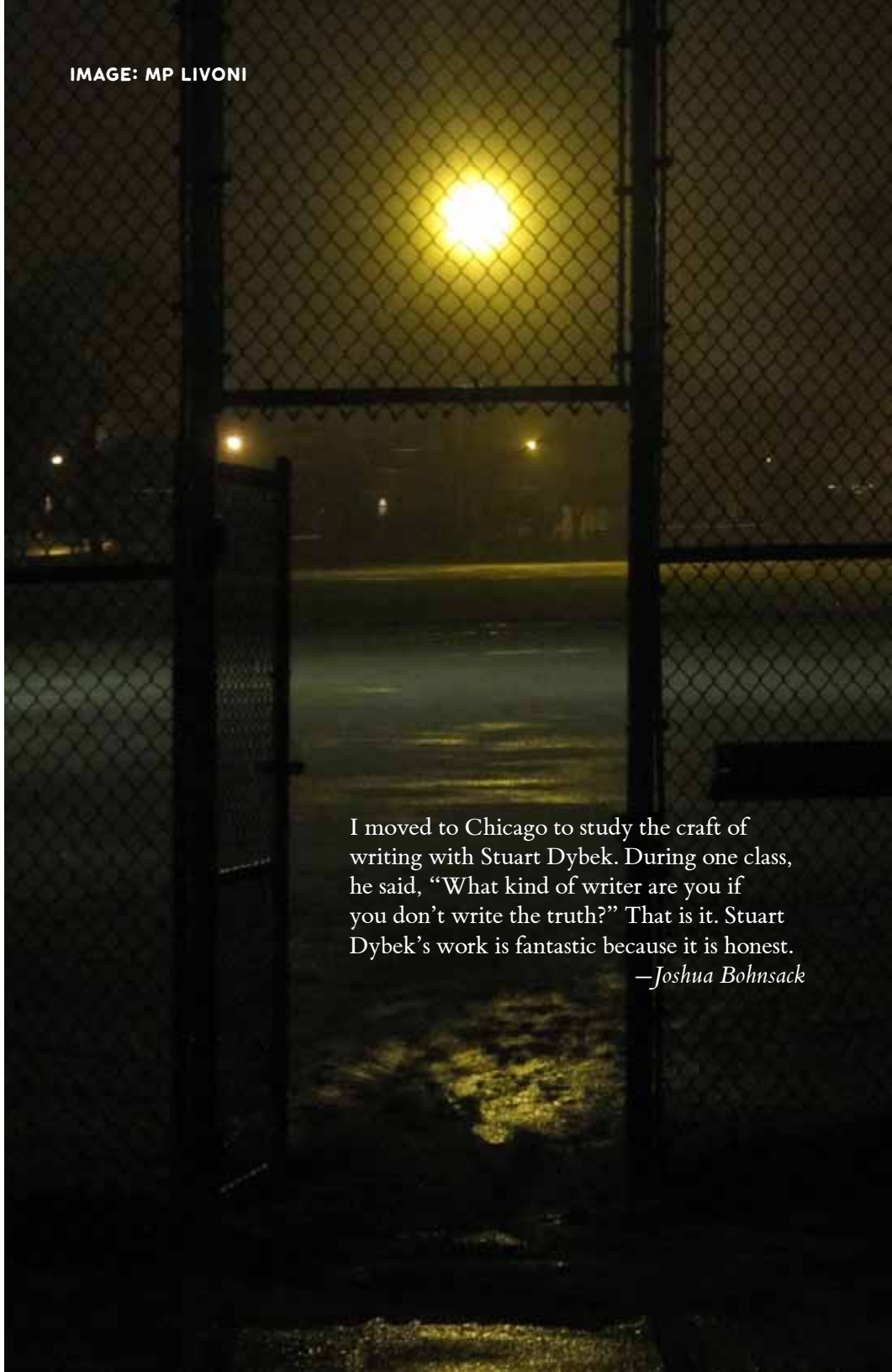


IMAGE: MP LIVONI

I moved to Chicago to study the craft of writing with Stuart Dybek. During one class, he said, "What kind of writer are you if you don't write the truth?" That is it. Stuart Dybek's work is fantastic because it is honest.

—Joshua Bohnsack

The train was braking a little from express speed, as it did each time it passed a local station. I could see blurred faces on the long wooden platform watching us pass—businessmen glancing up from folded newspapers, women clutching purses and shopping bags. I could see the expression on each face, momentarily arrested, as we flashed by. A high school kid in shirt sleeves, maybe sixteen, with books tucked under one arm and a cigarette in his mouth, caught sight of us, and in the instant before he disappeared he grinned and started to wave. Then he was gone, and I turned from the window, back to Kate, forgetting everything—the passing stations, the glowing late sky, even the sense of missing her—but that arrested wave stayed with me. It was as if I were standing on the platform, with my schoolbooks and a smoke, on one of those endlessly accumulated afternoons after school when I stood almost outside of time simply waiting for a train, and I thought how much I'd have loved seeing someone like us streaming by.

So many narrow escapes mark my life. What if I hadn't read "Pet Milk?" What if I hadn't read, and been arrested, by that final scene—the sixteen-year-old boy on the platform, smoking a square and seeing Kate and the narrator streaming by making love in the conductor's compartment? Like a former, maybe perfect girlfriend who has ruined all other girls for you, that arrested wave may have ruined endings for me.

ALMOST ALL OF US

BY BILLY LOMBARDO

But I grew up in a house with no books and I could easily have not picked up *The Coast of Chicago*. And if hadn't read that, I would never have known that Bridgeport, the terribly beautiful place I grew up made it into a book. And what brought me to St. Ignatius's literary festival to hear him speak on May 21, 1999? And what if I hadn't introduced myself to Stuart then? Told him I lived above a bakery in Bridgeport? And what if he hadn't looked at me with pastries in his eyes and the smell of lemon and that flour-powdered wooden floor, too, and said, *Oh, Dressel's Bakery*?

I'm not sure I would ever have felt a kind of permission to write stories if I hadn't learned from Stuart that Bridgeport was a place, and that its people—its scared and brave, its racist and beautiful, its priests and punks, its bakeries and bastards—that they had a place in story, too.

A few years after I met Stuart, I asked him to visit the school where I taught.

I had a coffee with him across the street and told him I had just started writing the stories that would comprise my first book. I was in that space young writers are when they can't quite muster the word, *writer*, to describe themselves, and I mentioned that to him. He looked at me slowly, then, and told the only lie he'd ever tell me.

"We're all imposters," he said. ■

Billy Lombardo is a past winner of the G.S. Sharat Chandra Prize for Short Fiction and an Illinois Arts Council Literary Award, among other accoloades.

I first met Stuart Dybek nearly twenty years ago, when I entered the Ph.D. program at Western Michigan University as an emerging poet. I'd heard a lot of good things about Stu and his work before I'd arrived in Kalamazoo, so even though I'd never written any fiction, I decided I'd try to get into one of his classes. What I'm about to say next is not an exaggeration. One workshop with Stuart Dybek changed the course of my life. I turned in a story about a young girl who digs up her long-dead cat in hopes of assembling its bones back together and entering her glued-back-together-cat in her elementary school science fair. I remember vividly a moment, after I'd turned the piece in and before I got feedback, when I felt so vulnerable that I almost couldn't bring myself to go to class. *What were my classmates going to think of me? Who writes a story like that?* It was actually based on an unfortunate event in my own life, where as a young child I'd dug up my long-dead cat in hopes of assembling its bones back together and turning in my glued-back-together-cat to my third-grade teacher for extra credit (my rural Idaho school didn't have the money or parent volunteers to pull off a science fair). So I went to Stu's workshop braced for disaster, but the feedback turned out to be mostly positive. Stu handed me back my story and I read his notes before I left the room. His first comment was, "It made me happy to read this. Could you write more of these?" Well, I did. And those short stories became a book, *Camille McPhee Fell Under the Bus*, which was published by Random House in 2009 and chosen by School Library Journal as a Best Children's Book of the Year. I've published twelve novels for young readers with more on the way, and have had a tremendously happy and rewarding career. For better or worse, I've always been too easily influenced by compliments. Essentially, I feel like Stu complimented me into becoming a fiction writer. The entire trajectory of my life changed after that workshop. And I've always felt so grateful. I've saved every story I submitted to Stu along with his invaluable comments. I adore Stuart Dybek's writing. And I feel so lucky to have studied with him.

—Kristen Tracy

I was very happy to hear that Stuart Dybek was to receive this honor. I have loved his work, and taught his work, for many years—decades, in fact, though it pains me to use that white-haired word in relation to either of us. Robert Frost said that his hope as a poet was to get a few poems stuck so deep that they couldn't be gotten out again, and Stuart Dybek has done that again and again. The titles of his stories circulate among us like golden coins—"Pet Milk," "Hot Ice," "Chopin in Winter," "We Didn't," "Paper Lantern," "Orchids," "Live from Dreamsville," on and on and on. He follows no school; every story seems to create its own form, its own tone. He is deadly serious even when jolting us with hilarity, as when two determined, would-be lovers are interrupted yet again by the discovery of a corpse near their trysting place; earthily authentic even when entering the realm of the surreal, as when a drowned girl is preserved in a block of ice, and becomes a local saint. The local is not incidental to Stuart Dybek's work. He has made his own place, his own Chicago, from the materials of his memory and imagination, and we continue to live there long after we close his books, as we continue to live on in Garcia Marquez's Macondo, or Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County. He is a wonderful writer, in the most literal sense: full of wonders.

—Tobias Wolff

IMAGE: MP LIVONI

Chicago literature can sometimes feel like a grim death march. The city's history has been a saga of racial and ethnic conflict, political corruption, economic exploitation, and mostly bad baseball teams. From Carl Sandburg's "Chicago" forward, our writers depict the tension in the city between its wicked, crooked, brutal side, and its energetic dynamism and beauty, both man-made and natural. Chicago traditions of plain-language poetry and Realism/Naturalism skew towards tragic figures crushed by larger forces and their own weaknesses: Studs Lonigan, Bigger Thomas, Frankie Machine. In over twenty-five years of teaching such classes at the Newberry Library and Northwestern University, though, I have learned that concluding a course with Stuart Dybek's short fiction is the best way to wrap up a conversation about American identity and Chicago. Dybek always brings a burst of positive, yet utterly honest, self-critical, and humorous energy, and a vision of the city that makes clear how art (especially perhaps music) can bridge gaps between individuals and groups.

DIGGING BEAUTY: TEACHING STUART DYBEK

BY BILL SAVAGE

The two dominant tropes of Chicago literature are the depiction of either a particular place in time, or a journey through the wider cityscape. In two vital stories from *The Coast of Chicago*, Dybek shows how art connects people despite the city's myriad divides. In "Chopin in Winter," he suggests that music is as essential to making a building livable as air, water, or heat. In his home on on 18th Street, the narrator recalls hearing his neighbor's music travel through the apartment building's internal circulatory systems: "the air shaft, behind walls and ceilings, under bathwater. Echoes traveled through the pipes and wallpapered chutes, the bricked-up flues, and dark hallways." The point: you can only live in a place if air, water, and heat circulate through it—and "Chopin in Winter" asserts that art is as essential to life as air, water, and heat.

The trope of the journey structures "Blight," a coming-of-age tale that depicts the importance of making and consuming art in the broader urban landscape, and the city itself functions as an object of aesthetic regard which inspires one character to proclaim "I dig beauty!" The key image in the story (and, I would argue, perhaps in Chicago literature as a whole) is a moment in viaduct beneath a broad railyard in a near Southwest Side neighborhood, which has been "proclaimed an Official Blight Area." There, the narrator and his pals transform the detritus of the city into art, playing the stone and girders of the viaduct with detritus from the street, to make music like the Blues singers they admire. Then, ". . . a gang of black kids appeared on the Douglas Park end of the viaduct and stood harmonizing from bass through falsetto just like the Coasters, so sweetly that though at first we tried outshouting them, we finally shut up and listened except for Pepper keeping the beat." Railroad yards and other aspects of the built environment help create and maintain divisions between races and other categories of American identity. But every physical barrier in Chicago has built into it some means of connection—if you choose to pass through it, or even just listen to art made on the other side.

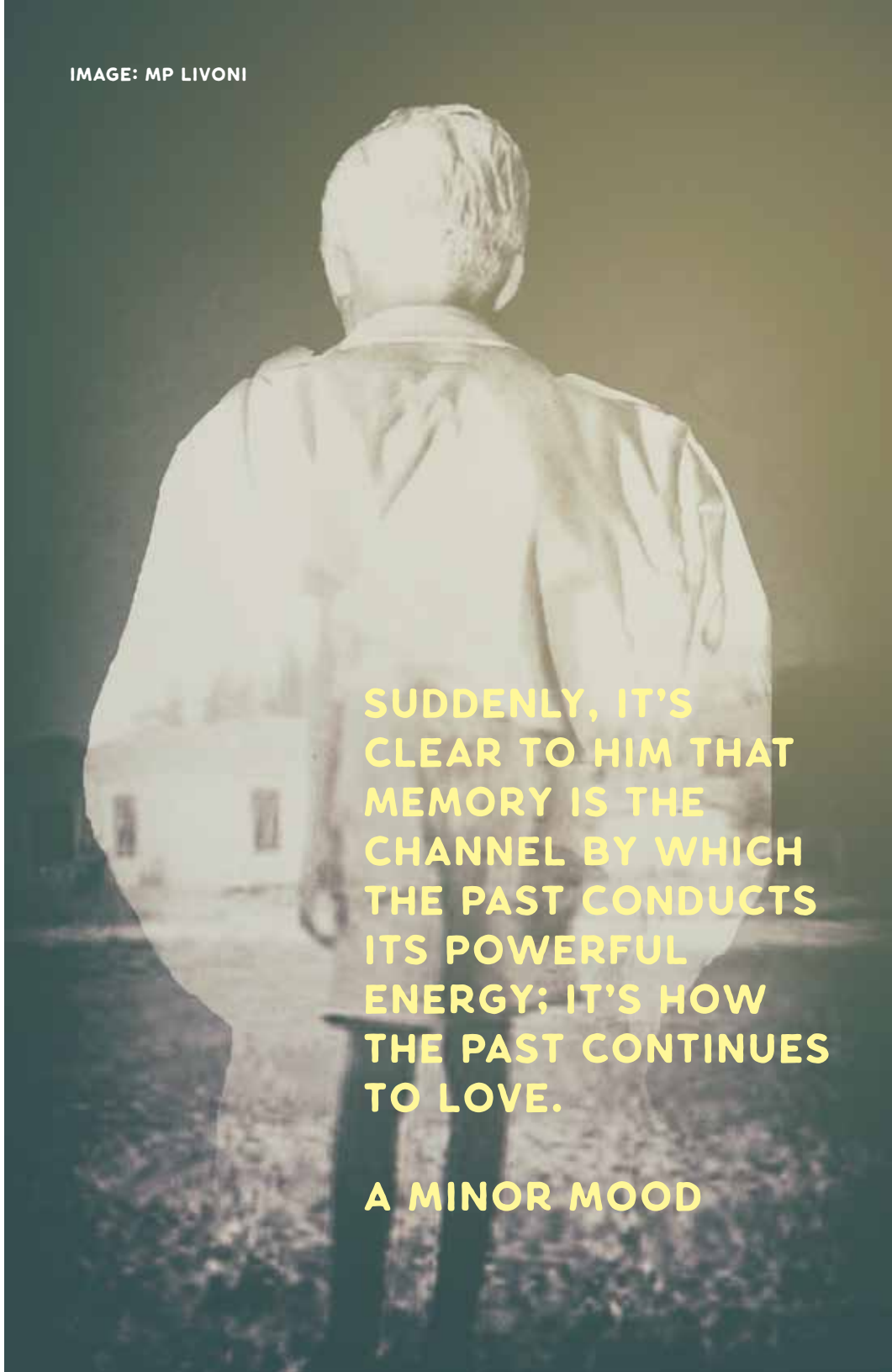
Stuart Dybek's stories connect anyone who is lucky enough to read them through the vital viaducts, literal and metaphorical, of Chicago. ■

Bill Savage is Professor of Instruction in the English Department at Northwestern University, where he has taught Dybek's poetry and prose since the mid-1990s.

Chicago can be a hard place to love. But as I read Stuart Dybek's stories and poems, my perception of the city is transformed, its camouflaged, poignant, fleeting beauty revealed. In Stuart's rhapsodically rendered tales of his city, of Chicago dreamers who struggle just to get by, the revelations of unexpected magic, of piquant humor, and endless longing achieve that mysterious literary alchemy that makes the specific universal and transcendent. Stuart's sensuously, imaginatively, and compassionately realized Chicago becomes Everycity, its pain and passion and wonder everyone's.

—Donna Seaman

IMAGE: MP LIVONI



MOMENTS OF ECSTASY AND GENEROSITY

BY JOHN LILLIG

In Stuart Dybek's story "Pet Milk," the past and the present, memory and emotion, all intermingle and coexist. As the story begins, the narrator reflects on the condensed milk he is pouring in his coffee, which reminds him of first his grandmother's kitchen, and then of a former romance. Like the condensed milk itself, the narrator's emotions and feelings, his past and his present, are intensely concentrated in the image of the coffee. But the narrative moves seamlessly, like our memories actually do, instantaneously linking the scenes and feelings so the reader doesn't know what is "past" and what is "present," what is "memory" and what is "now"—or whether we can even make such distinctions.

I first read Stuart in 1986 as a high school student, when a great and inspirational English teacher, Mr. Thomas McKenna, gave us Stuart's short story, "The Long Thoughts" from *Childhood and Other Neighborhoods*. The first thing that struck me about Stuart's work, and it is just as true when I read him today, is his ability to precisely capture emotion and feeling. In that story, it was the emotions and feelings of high school boys in the urban landscape of post-war Chicago, which particularly resonated with me at the time. I was so blown away by reading Stuart's story in high school that twenty years later a classmate commented that my love of that story was his most enduring memory of me.

When I became an English teacher myself years later I read Stuart's poems and stories with my own students, brought students to his readings, and hosted him in my classroom. His friendship to me and his generosity to my students over the years has been enormous.

Stuart often speaks of exploring "ecstatic" states, in which one may experience moments of insight or awakening. In his stories, experiences of art or music often provide opportunities for the ecstatic, as do physical, cultural, or emotional borders, encountered or crossed. I believe that when I first read Stuart's work, what I experienced was a kind of ecstasy. I have been fortunate to have been thrilled by many other such moments with Stuart and his work since then. ■

John Lillig is an attorney and teacher who has taught Chicago Literature courses to high school and university students.

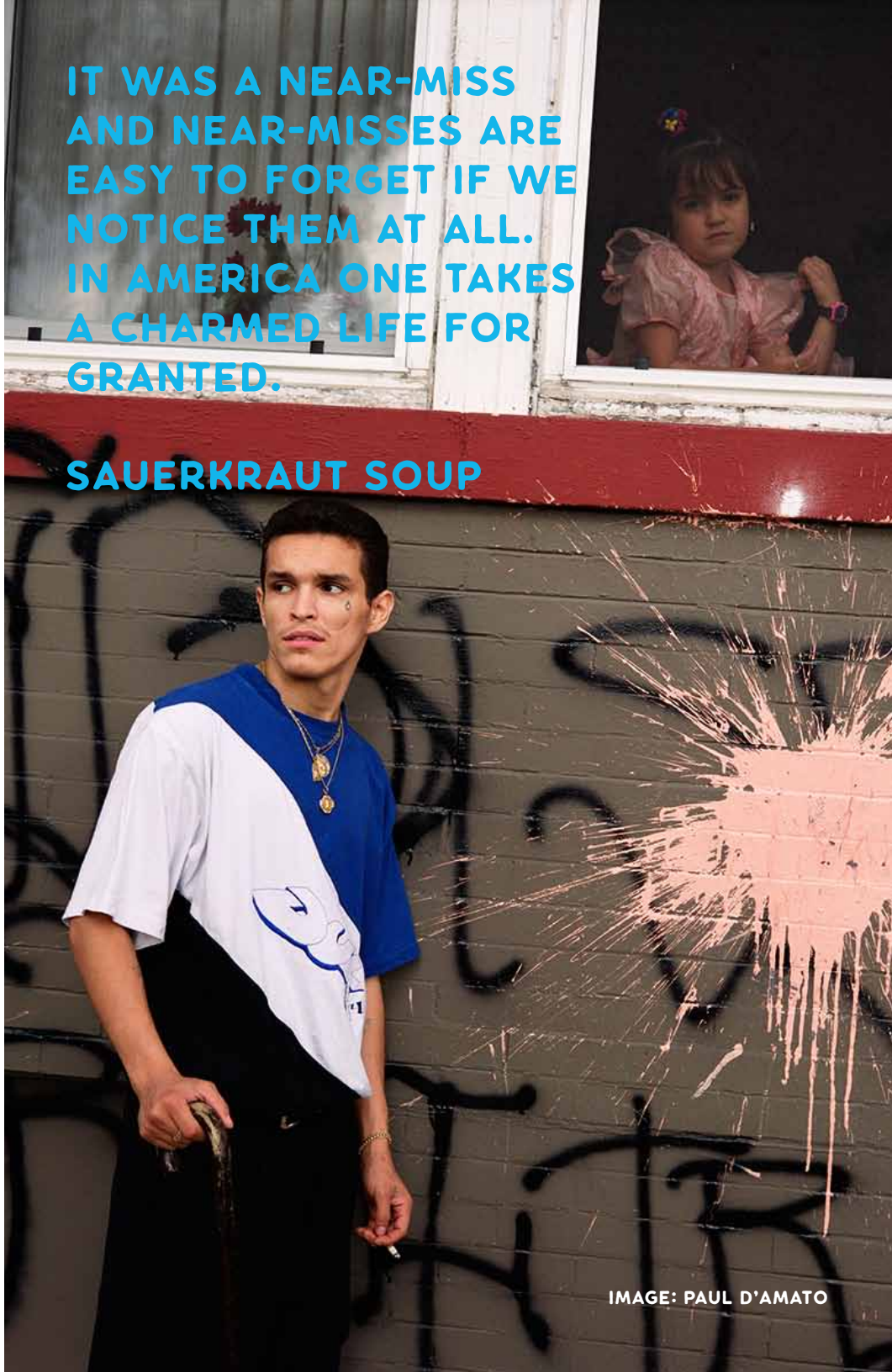


IMAGE: PAUL D'AMATO

UNTITLED

BY ALEKSANDAR HEMON

I came to Chicago in March 1992, after a weeks-long trip around the US and Canada, mainly under the auspices of a US government agency that used to facilitate cultural exchanges. I was supposed to leave Chicago on May 1 the same year, but I didn't, because the war in Bosnia started and Sarajevo, my hometown, came under siege. In addition to figuring out how to get the papers and find a job, I had to decide what to do with my writing life. I'd been a young writer/journalist in Sarajevo, young and published, but now the people who spoke and wrote in my native language lived in a fundamentally different reality, to which I had no access whatsoever. I realized that I would likely live in America for a very long time, and that I'd have to write in a language that was heretofore foreign to me, and in which I was now a refugee.

It took me three years to write my first story exclusively in English. "The Sorge Spy Ring" was published in 1997, in *TriQuarterly*, whose editor at the time was Reg Gibbons. The following years, the story won an Illinois Literary Award. I was particularly proud of that prize because Stuart Dybek was on the jury. I'd bought *Childhood and Other Neighborhoods*, for 25c at a library sale, and I quickly fell in love with it, because Stuart turned a physical city into a domain of poetry with such gorgeous ease. Moreover, to have been selected by someone like Stuart implied that I, displaced in English, might find a place for me here—the here being Chicago and its literature.

And then, some time in 1998, Stuart called me, out of the blue: he was going to be a guest editor of *Ploughshares*, a literary journal published out of Emerson College, and he asked me if I had a story I could submit for the issue. This was the first time ever I talked to Stuart, and I did it in a high-pitched voice, as my vocal cords tend to tighten whenever I'm overwhelmed, which I was because he told me, in his nasal Chicago accent, that he liked my work and wanted to publish it. Who was I not to have a story when Stu Dybek asks for it? I submitted one called "Islands" and it came out. A few months later, in the far off city of New York, a young man named Aaron, who was an assistant to a literary agent, was waiting for his friend at a bookstore. His friend was late, so he picked up the *Ploughshares* issue where "Islands" was the first story, so he read it, and then his friend came. He took the issue to his boss, told her: "You have to read this!", and she is now my agent.

At my readings I am often asked by ambitious young writers for advice about living a life of a writer, getting an agent, all that. I usually waffle and obfuscate, mainly because I don't want to tell them that there is no method in that madness, that it's mainly luck, and I have been lucky enough to have been peppered with angel dust by Stuart Dybek.

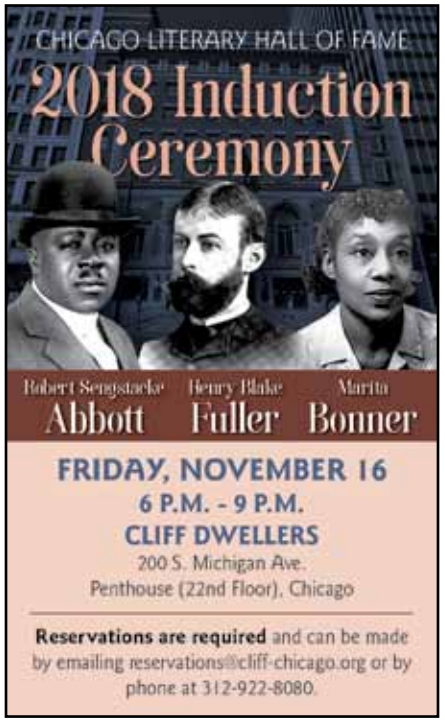
Everyone knows what a great writer Stuart is: his genius is self-evident in each of his sentences. Just take the opening of "The Palatski Man:" "He reappeared in spring, some Sunday morning, perhaps Easter, when the twigs of catalpa trees budded and lawns smelled of mud and breaking seeds." But a few of us also know what a beautiful human being he is. I've been exposed, for some twenty years now, to his kindness and generosity, to his wisdom and storytelling, and I always remember the way he invited a refugee into his city and language. Lucky is a person who can claim Stuart Dybek as a friend. Blessed is a city that can claim him as its writer. ■

Aleksandar Hemon has been a winner or finalist for the National Book Award, National Book Critics Circle Award, and National Magazine Award, among many other accolades.

Mr. Dybek holds his students and readers by their hearts, for when he speaks and writes his words ring vivid and true. When you read him, you are present in the setting and the emotion of his work, and when he speaks you dwell under the same busy light of his literary unconscious. He has the gift of recognizing realized, and unrealized, potential—two imperatives for brilliant writers, and teachers. I was, and am still, lucky to have had him read my work, and we're all lucky to be able to read his.

—Ross Ritchell

IMAGE: MP LIVONI



The drinks are on us, Stuart!

Knowing that Stuart Dybek is alive and well and writing—whether the writing is poems, or stories, or the rough draft, teaching—is reason to hope that the light offered by serious discourse on worthy topics, moderated by humor and wisdom, has not been extinguished, and will survive and continue to warm us and our descendants.

—Leigh and Henry Bienen

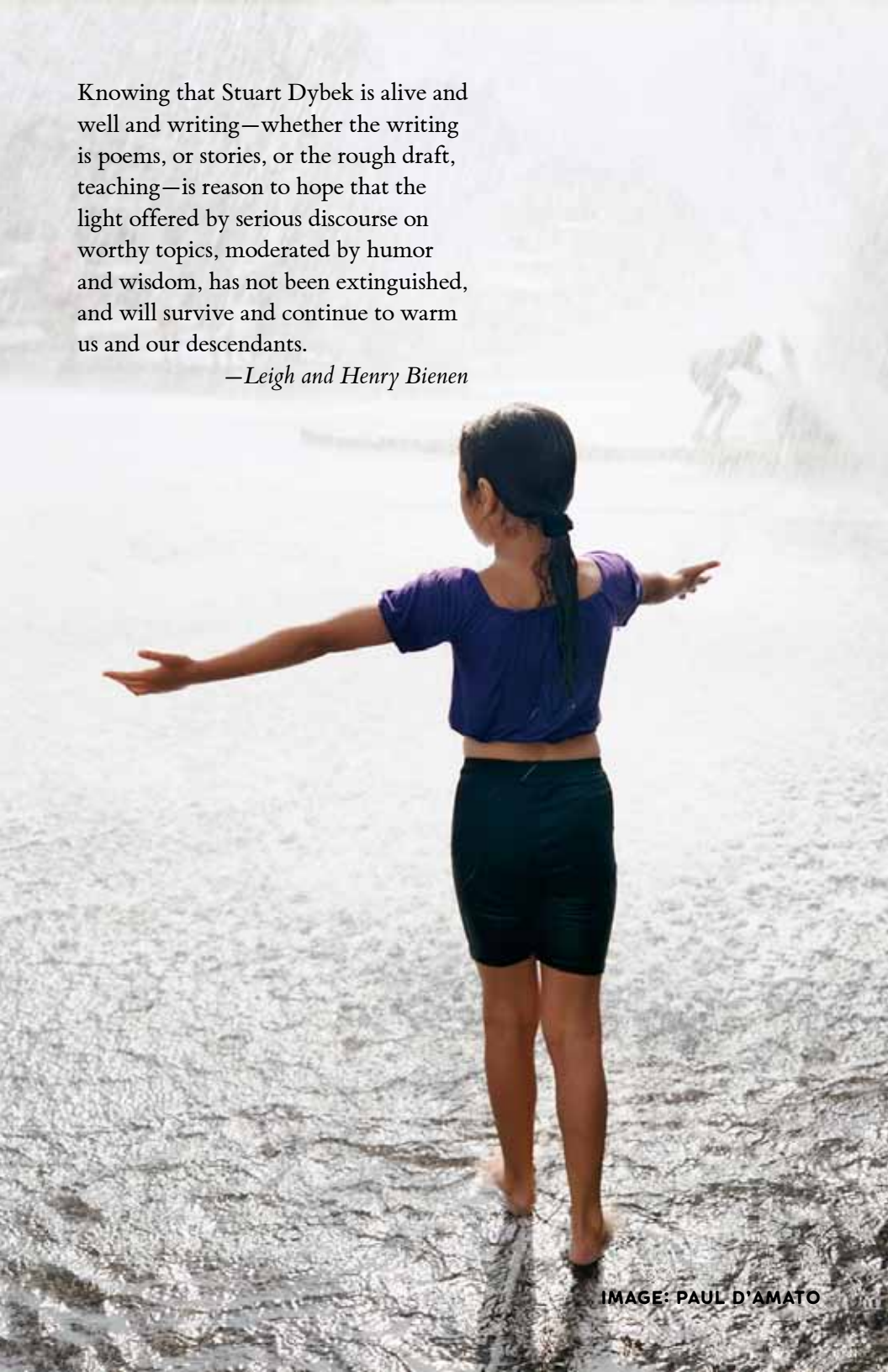


IMAGE: PAUL D'AMATO