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Meat for Tea: The Valley Review

Meat for Tea: The Valley Review was founded by Elizabeth MacDuffie and Alexandra Wagman. We are a non-academic affiliated magazine committed to recognizing and featuring the work of the artists, writers, and musicians living in western Massachusetts and beyond.

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Guest Salutation with Peter Tacy

A Salutation for Jane Yolen

The first words spoken by Jane Yolen on the occasion of running into any of her many, very many literary friends and acquaintances (myself included) were always the same: “what are you writing?”

The weather, our health, our love lives, and all the other ups and downs of everyone’s days got no similar priority — because, for Jane, the act of writing was utterly central to the joy of living, and she naturally assumed that it had to be the same for all of us.

Those of us who shared with Jane a passion for messing about with words — and for story-telling — understood what was happening. She had asked us because she cared for us in a way that went well beyond ordinary friendship and mentorship, and verged into a sort of collegiality — and something more. And, of course, we cared right back, deeply.

Jane’s departure has left a big hole in a climate of interconnection that she created, a climate that flourished around her, especially here in the Valley, for seven decades. For some of us, that “climate” was at least as important an achievement of Jane’s as her several hundred published books and heaps of awards could ever be. It helped us to believe in ourselves and enjoy and achieve. Whether it can persist without her is going to be a big question. Our lives will be poorer if the answer is negative.

One difference for me was that this routine began so long ago — in 1958, when we were both undergraduates and each longed to find just one friend who loved writing as much as we did. Her questioning of me never stopped, though, even when my answer was evasive (or worse) as was too often the case for decades. The question just kept being asked — even later on, when Jane became too ill to write herself.

So, dear reader, here again is Jane’s question: what are you writing? Answer, please! ...Your reply is “nothing, yet”? Well, there’s more of this day left, isn’t there? Put your butt in your chair and a song in your heart and get going! We’re all waiting.

Peter



the song of telemakhos

Peter Tacy

When I was younger
I thought it was *my* story, of
how my days of longing
ended. How I'd stood
aft, where I'd seen my father
standing, as he sailed away...

Or how I found him
and how my powerlessness
to defend home, kin,
and mother from debauchery
ended – as we two, now one,
father and reclaimed son,
slew them! We killed them all...we
cleansed our home with blood –
washed the floors, tables,
long dining benches, and
even the limestone walls
with blood. Their blood.

But that is his story.

The years passed.
I learned to rule. I learned
how unforgiving grief can be,
even if grief is for the unforgivable.
I found that lives protected
and love requited matter more
than any man's adventure. I learned
the hardness of hatred
and the legacy of vengeance. And
I learned about the cost of justice.
You see, having grown up fatherless,
without a ruler to emulate,
I learned the truth about ruling
on the job.

Those lessons saved me. They saved
my sons, my daughters, my wife,
and my people. But they were
bitter lessons. They led me to a
bitter fate...to forever lie
outside *the story*; to be son
of a canny voyager who wrecked
monsters and shipmates equally;
a mere footnote to his epic.

But now – now I know the truth
is indeed mine, and not my father's.
Yet how can my truth be the story?

Within these walls
my grandsons read of him, not me.
They live in peace, but study war;
learn that leaving home on a fool's errand,
summoned by another man's vengeance
is grand, virtuous, even sane; that
abandoning the beloved to survive or perish
as heartlessly as capricious gods
abandoned blameless Andromache –
heiress to a throne, then slave and concubine –
either – at a toss – as mere token
in a game of men and gods –
is the mark of a man we call hero.
Chancing us to such a fate, my father set forth.
And long afterward, a great singer set
his story, not mine.

My lesson is here...
but who will teach it? Who will sing it?

A quiet heroism begets a small poetry.



moving to senior housing

Peter Tacy

It's time.

I look at furniture, cookware,
books, clothing
to be left, as if the seasons
were summoning them to be shed
from a life made solitary;
they're now disposable.
These empty rooms will
only hold memories.

It's time.

The boxes have been packed.
Each holds objects
with remembered
connotations, now ties
from me to...no one.
No value resides there now.
The boxes will be given away
before the movers come.

It's time.

A few things will be taken,
like grave furnishings
for the as-yet living, chosen
to make the good-byes
feel final and significant.
Each has a tag affixed, a
sort of benediction
signaling "not yet".

It's time.

Crushed by the weight of air
atop me, laboring
to go on breathing, I want
to say "it's a reculer
pour mieux sauter moment";
a pause before a new beginning.
Doubting it is, but still alive,
I take the needed step.

It's time.



150 Pleasant St., Easthampton, MA
between Abandoned Building and New City breweries

the meaty interview with Steven Seidenberg

What's your favorite color?

I don't have a favorite color, not an inclination or disinclination of any kind, neither in my wardrobe nor in the perceptual field. Color is relational, after all—coupled with its complement, any color yields a sense of clarity and distinction that can alternate between repulsive intensity and beguiling radiance. As a visual artist, and a photographer in particular, I approach color as a tool, a means to manipulate the viewer.

What's your favorite animal?

I am most interested in other primates, in particular homo sapiens.

If you could choose to fly or to be invisible, which would it be and why?

My sole criterion for choosing is how well such an ability would help me escape annoying interactions with the aforementioned primates, both those in which I'm a participant and those merely overheard. For this purpose, flight seems a more expedient means of decampment, where invisibility would only serve to elude direct address.

Are you happy and, if not, why?

Situationally on and off, but happy is not the goal. I'm driven, and that seems enough.

What book/s are you reading at the moment?

I'm always reading many books at once. Books I've picked up in the past week: the poems of Andrea Zanzotto, John Wieners, and Edouard Glissant; Glissant's *Faulkner Mississippi*; a couple of books by Catherine Malabou—*Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing* and *The Future of Hegel*; Boris Groys' *Alexandre Kojève: An Intellectual Biography*, and Kojève's *Atheism*; Hegel's *Theory of Intelligibility* by Rocco Zambrano; *The Ghost of Memory* by William Harris.

What are you currently listening to?

Sarah Davachi, *The Head as Form'd in the Crier's Choir*; Akira Kosemura, *In the Dark Woods*

How old were you when it became clear you were a writer? a photographer? a philosopher?

Has it become clear? I do those things, but I exceed them, and insofar as I think my efforts as a maker successful, the artifacts thereby produced exceed me in turn.

If you could invite six people, living or dead, to your ideal dinner party, whom would you invite?

I just don't think this way, being without interest in the personhood, as it were, of those whose work I admire, and I have neither knowledge of nor curiosity about celebrity. But I have a couple of friends who died when I was young, a few other friends who died the past decade, and my parents, also deceased. I miss them all, but it would be a terrible dinner party. I'd be in tears, and they'd be at odds.

Tell us about some of your upcoming projects (here engage in shameless self-promotion)

I continue to promote my most recent book *Coda* (Omni Dawn, 2025), which was also published in Portuguese translation by Quiasmo in the Spring. My 2018 book *Plain Sight* will be published in Italian translation by Il Verri this fall, as will a new collection of photographs, *Kanazawa Vacancy*, by Chin Music Press. Working out details for a couple of shows in the next year, in Lisbon, LA, and a few other places.

charism

Sean Coon

With smile plastered,
the priest finishes reading the
prescribed daily pericope,
puts away the lectionary,
and commands his eromenos, errr, altarboy
with gesture and mere glance.
(This scene: played out a thousand times each Lord's Day
across the commonwealth of Massachusetts)
Incense, begotten by three swings of the thurible,
floats lofty, lazily, in the air,
descending, will sting the lucky eyes of the first pews of the most faithful.
each tiny mote, each speck,
reminding the truly devout of their unworthiness.

Before he turned his back on these, his children,
prior to intoning the offertorium chant over the monstrance,
he stepped through automatic anaphora and epiclesis
and gazed out upon this foster flock of mostly Italians and Irish,
his mien construable from afar as solemnity.
Closer, it clearly presents as imprecation. For their depredations.
For their spiritual impecunity. Only he could make for them the oblation.

Before he turned away for the intoning, he
was struck in the eye by a beam of sunlight streaming through the stained glass
He'd been able to put aside his needs for the entirety of the hour of mass.

There but for the grace went I,
but for the grace of my family attending different churches weekly.



in memory of bruce tull

Ed O'Connell

I'm not sure how to write about Bruce.

By the time I moved to Northampton in the early 1990s, Bruce's kitchen table was already modestly famous, part of the lore of the legendary Scud Mountain Boys, then at their incendiary peak. That table has been justly celebrated and written into history by none other than David Berman, who referred to Bruce as "the guitarist's guitarist" in the liner notes to the band's Pine Box album. I am aware as I write this that this is hallowed ground, and I want to tread lightly, because the chronology of my own involvement is necessarily blurry, and I will not be able to speak to the level of musicianship Bruce carried so effortlessly with anything like the proper precision, but I was honored to have a seat at that table for many post-last-call, small-hour sessions as guitars were passed around, whiskey was poured, and stories, jokes, and songs all swirled together with the smoke, laughter, and occasional tears that bound together the close-knit loosely affiliated band of outlaws that comprised the pre-dawn shift on Woodmont Rd.

He and I were both alumni of Green Street Cafe. Shortly after he moved to Oklahoma, he wrote me a message with what appeared to be a question about one of the dishes on the menu. He was looking for the recipe for the chicken breast with apples and hazelnuts we used to serve in the fall. We served it over Yolanda pasta in a marsala sauce. As flattered as I was that he would ask me, I realized about halfway through reading it that the question itself had already become so specific I was going to have to update the apparently vague approximation I'd been carrying around in my head and calling a recipe. Did you know there's a controversy over how airline chicken breast got its name? Bruce did. The level of detail with which he catalogued the world was astonishing. It was impossible to hang out with him for any length of time and not learn something.

Now that he's gone I realize I always thought I was going to see him again. Yes, just like in the song.

Bruce was a man of odd postures. He could stand or sit for great lengths of time in positions that were troubling even to behold. One of the many photos that have circulated since he passed is a shot of him taken from an angle that captures him working behind the bar. He is bent over with his chin resting on the palm of one hand, his elbow supporting the full weight of his head and upper torso, leaned forward in rapt attention with his legs crossed behind him in a manner that would unnerve any honest chiropractor. I think he was capable of this because of the intensity of his brain.

It is for other people, the real world-class musicians with whom Bruce regularly played, and for those who were around when the Scud Mountain Boys were simply called the Scuds, to testify to the depth of his musicianship. I can only tell the part that is mine to tell, but I loved Bruce, and I miss him.



in memory of bruce tull

José Ayerve

Standing by the booth closest to the window-framed stage of the Baystate Hotel, smoking a cigarette and gently fidgeting with the mixing board, Bruce Tull would shake his head up and down, like a bob, but sometimes only slightly. In between sets, he would sprinkle a conversation with several *yuh's* before chiming in with an observation or a fact —something worth knowing. He might even pay you a well-timed complement, pulling you out of your own head and grounding you in the present. When Bruce first heard me sing, he generously compared my voice to Paul Westerberg's and not to that of some famous Irish guy with a rasp. I think it's one of my favorite complements that I have ever received, and I thank him for it.

I also thank him for my amp, a VOX AC-15 with two-10" speakers (instead of the far more common one-12" speaker). Mine is a British model adapted to a 120V current. Bruce picked it out and presented me with it in Northampton circa 2000; it was a gift from the music community, one that I cherish with all my heart.

I don't mean to make these words about me; to inject myself into the memories of this man that some of us got to know and love during our tenure in the Pioneer Valley. It's just a reflection of how I experienced my time with Bruce. I loved the guy, everyone who knew him loved him. The Northampton Music Scene lost a real gem when Bruce died, even though Bruce had moved back to his home state of Oklahoma many years before his very recent passing. I regret not having done more to keep in touch with him.

If you didn't know Bruce, I can try to describe him. He was nimble, flexible, a bit thin, and average in stature —maybe even slight. Charming, awkward, friendly, and welcoming, his brilliant mind was replete with information, especially when it came to gear and music. His knowledge, like his talent, was simply advanced. I tell you: it is an awesome thing to have made music with Bruce Tull, whether recording tracks for Lo Fine and Dennis Crommett, or trading tunes around his kitchen table with almost every musician in the Valley, in the wee hours of the morning after an eventful show. It is equally awesome to have been his friend, and an honor to have been his contemporary.

He and we are no longer inhabiting the same physical plane, but that doesn't mean he ceased to exist. I'll have conversations with him in my head from time to time, from now on. This is how I keep my loved ones alive well after they've transcended. In Bruce's case, I also get to listen to the glorious sounds he helped create. That's a very special thing.

Bruce was particularly good at using his pedal steel or Tele to exploit or punctuate the tension of a vocal melody or lyric. He could wield his instrument at once like a highlighter *and* a picture frame to underscore the context and set the scene. He was as gentle and as impactful as he needed to be, both in life and in music.



in memory of bruce tull

Thane Thomsen

I first met Bruce when my band, The Figments, was playing at the World War II Club in 1997. At the time I was playing my guitar through a small Park tube amp, which I miked and then ran through a big Heathkit amp. It was a ridiculous rig, and it made Bruce's head spin. I remember him standing, in this way he had with his legs splayed out at odd angles, watching the band, and it seemed his head was literally spinning, such was the intensity of his mannerisms. Talking to Bruce after the show, I was thrilled to be talking to the guitarist of the Scud Mountain Boys, who I loved but had yet to see perform. He would soon help to convince me that I should get a real amp.

Over the following years I would have the remarkable experience of becoming good friends with Bruce and playing music with him in the bands Lo Fine and Rehab Massachusetts and at late night sessions at his house on Woodmont Road, where the Scud Mountain Boys had rehearsed around his dining room table. Through that time he continued to influence my choices regarding musical equipment. He introduced me to the Nobels overdrive pedal a little over 25 years ago, and since then I've played few notes on the electric guitar without it. Not only was he always willing to help, but he carried with him a formidable depth and breadth of knowledge. He once said to me, not in regard to music but rather about mixing tobacco flavors, "I'm nothing if not thorough." I would ask about a specific guitar, and Bruce would include serial numbers in his answer, no cell phone necessary.

It would be hard to overstate how central Bruce was to the Northampton music scene through the 90s and until he moved back to Oklahoma to help take care of his dad around 2008. Besides playing in bands, he worked running sound and bartending at both the Baystate and Harry's. He was also regularly hosting late night music sessions at the Woodmont, where I was fortunate to see some of the area's best songwriters develop their songs sitting around the famed table, usually with Bruce playing along on pedal steel. I wasn't there the times that nationally known songwriters like Richard Buckner and Jason Molina stopped by, but I heard about the good times that ensued.

Bruce also recorded a bunch at the Woodmont. Certainly he was very fond of classic tube amps and analog recording, and I know that the Scud Mountain Boys recorded to tape at the Woodmont. But Bruce was also very pragmatic when recording. He told me that for some of the Scud Mountain Boy recordings he plugged his telecaster straight into the tape deck, which is unconventional for a tube amp guy. I was lucky to have Bruce play on an album I had written called Rehab Massachusetts. I was extra fortunate to have Bruce record a lot of the album at the Woodmont, which he did on a digital recorder. Bruce totally adjusted to the new technology and recorded an album, along with Mark Alan Miller, that sounds warm and intimate, like an analog recording.

Bruce pursued other interests besides music. Around the turn of the century, he completed his doctorate in economics at UMASS. His focus was the Springfield Armory, and to some extent, its role in the Union's victory in the Civil War. He seemed to know all there was to know about 19th century munitions. I felt fortunate to be able to learn about his dissertation and discuss other topics in economics with him. Bruce introduced me to the works of Thorstein Veblen, and we had a shared regard for the works of Karl Marx.

Toward the end of his tenure in the Valley, I wrote a song with Bruce. He was living in an apartment on Paquette Avenue, and I was living nearby on West Street. We started working on the song pretty late at night and finished most of it just before the sun was coming up. It was a genuine collaboration, and we split the writing of the lyrics, melody, and chord progressions equally across the board. Although it's hard for me to remember who wrote which parts, I do know that it was Dr. Bruce Tull who came up with some relatively academic, yet entirely appropriate, lyrics. The song, called Drunken Birds, was recorded for the album Goldwater the Second, and features Bruce playing lead acoustic guitar and bass. Although Bruce loved celebratory music, and he loved to two-step, his real passion was for mellow and heartbreakingly sad music. Drunken Birds is certainly a sad song, and in the wake of Bruce's death, it seems fitting to end this with some of the song's lyrics.

Damn the crooked wind
We all need our animus
The rest can be left behind
The letter is sealed and signed
But the address is spurious
You've always been so hard to find

What you want to see might not be your window
The birds have all flown away
What you want to say might not be that easy
The words get blown away



in memory of bruce tull

Jim Armenti

Bruce first came to a Yankee Rhythm Band show at the Hollywood in Bernardston MA sometime in the late 1980s to dance the two step. Being from OK, and a man of the people, he loved the whole scene and was soon coming to other venerated valley roadhouses, to dance, but eventually to bring along the Scuds who we invited on to the stage to perform 'Helen' and 'Photograph' to the surprise of the usual Saturday night crowd. Fun Times. Bruce came to DTS for guitar lessons for a few years in the early Scud days and mostly wanted to know guitar theory and the ways of the Texas Playboys. He was a fine interesting guy with a quick sense of humor and a bottomless curiosity. His quick laugh ended with a snorting intake on a regular basis, and if I picture him now, it's with a glass of bourbon, a cigarette, a guitar and a snort.

