



BROWSE



## **Between Narrative and Image**

Patrick James Dunagan

American Book Review

American Book Review

Volume 39, Number 2/3, January/April 2018

p. 28

10.1353/abr.2018.0020

REVIEW

[View Citation](#)

**In lieu of** an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

## **Between Narrative and Image**

*Patrick James Dunagan (bio)*

*HEAVEN IS ALL GOODBYES*

Tongo Eisen-Martin

City Lights Publishers

[www.citylights.com/book/?GCOI=87286100115800](http://www.citylights.com/book/?GCOI=87286100115800)

136 Pages; Print, \$15.95



"There's a cow's mouth / on the flag," the words immediately struck my ear as *so true*, not in the manner of factual truth but rather in how they deliver a complex unexpected vivid image weighted with both possible social criticism and emotional significance. In short, the words convey just the sort of thing that is expected of poetry. This was a couple of years ago. I was

sitting upstairs having a drink at Vesuvio's across the alley from City Lights Bookstore in San Francisco's North Beach, meeting one of the city's latest native born poets, Tongo Eisen-Martin. Derek Fenner's Bootstrap Press had just published Eisen-Martin's first full collection *Someone's Dead Already* (2015) and Eisen-Martin had been reciting a few lines from the book.

Fenner became acquainted with Eisen-Martin through mutual work in arts education in under-served East Bay school districts. He was at Vesuvio's that day passing off to the poet the first finished copy of the book. My presence was happenstance. I always go to Vesuvio's whenever in North Beach, after first stopping in at City Lights. I happened to run into Fenner who is a friend of mine and thereby chanced upon meeting Eisen-Martin. Since that day I've had many opportunities to hear him read from his work as he's quickly risen as a popular presence on the local poetry scene. Now with City Lights publishing his second collection *Heaven Is All Goodbyes* he's well set to be on his way towards ever broader national recognition.

This is a course of development I expect he's well prepared for. Eisen-Martin possesses the natural cool of having street smarts that are never overplayed, never taken for granted on his part. His presence conveys an assured center of stability and calm acceptance of whatever situation he finds himself in. This is reflected in his poems where while acknowledging his capacity for playing the part, whatever part that's called for, he's also quick to provide a reality check(s) that swiftly undercut any sense of pretension: "It's cool to panic for a second / Composure is wasted on

your worst enemies." The frankness of tone is complimented by the levity of humor that it is so often accompanied by. There is as well as a marked dexterity for juxtaposition, the poem as presented being a mixed take, caught between narrative and image. "Like old friends we catch up awkwardly / A forgettable blues / He's four cigarettes into his thoughts." Or, as announced here:

Grandmother, why don't you ever talk about  
your children who  
the first world murdered?

Because, son, I haven't run out of knife handles.  
Hang this one around your neck, so that your  
brothers and sisters  
will know what you are

*The first white man invented the first flagpole while inspired by the  
first hole he ever put in a human being*

Eisen-Martin's poetry presents a frank and unflinching portrait of the contemporary urban imagination unremittingly ravaged by social injustice. He serves witness to how prevalent the imbalances of race and power in our society are. That the situation is as inescapable as clouds in the sky, or whatever the view is from where you may be looking: "under my skin, they call a tattoo the sky."

His work as a social activist in education both in the school system as well as the prison system is at one with his work as poet. And for Eisen-Martin these two systems are oftener than not one in the same, "My dear, if it is not a city, it is a prison. / If it has a prison, it is a prison. Not a city." He well understands that poetry provides access to and attests necessary reflection upon social inequities. His own life experience has taught him how the ways of society impact those members who are not among the privileged. That even the...

beginners, / the elementary course, prelude / to a test that's been / postponed." The speaker of Heege's poems are still feeling their way through the world and lamenting that we downplay Romantic imitation in our Western society. I earlier heard Shelley in Heege's lines, and now I hear Wordsworth: "We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!" In "Corporate Menu," we are once again asked to look past the surface to a deeper visual analysis:

Can't you see the peasant,  
the juxtaposition  
of his coca cola embossed tee shirt  
with his indigo, lizard green, plum,

poppy colored poncho  
woven from his own hands  
from an animal he raised  
in a place we will never know.

This is a thorough collection with five sections and ample prefatory material. In the service of access to greater truth, the poems proceed intuitively, seeking refuge from the past. Like their Confessional forebearers, they also speak out, presumably breaking a long silence—an act that might be said to usher a book of poems into being. "Winter's Beginning," which I initially misread as "Writer's Beginning," ends with potential and

the earnest desire to connect with a reader, which Heege has no doubt accomplished:

There could be new life  
in me  
if we could find our way,  
and in the joining  
we would know no seasons.

Beth McDermott is the author of the chapbook *How to Leave a Farmhouse*. She's an associate editor with *RHINO* and an assistant professor of English at University of St. Francis in Joliet, IL.

## BETWEEN NARRATIVE AND IMAGE

Patrick James Dunagan

### HEAVEN IS ALL GOODBYES

Tongo Eisen-Martin

City Lights Publishers  
www.citylights.com/book/  
%0001=87286100115800  
136 Pages; Print, \$15.95

"There's a cow's mouth / on the flag," the words immediately struck my ear as so true, not in the manner of factual truth but rather in how they deliver a complex unexpected vivid image weighted with both possible social criticism and emotional significance. In short, the words convey just the sort of thing that is expected of poetry. This was a couple of years ago. I was sitting upstairs having a drink at Vesuvio's across the alley from City Lights Bookstore in San Francisco's North Beach, meeting one of the city's latest native born poets, Tongo Eisen-Martin. Derek Fenner's Bootstrap Press had just published Eisen-Martin's first full collection *Someone's Dead Already* (2015) and Eisen-Martin had been reciting a few lines from the book.

Fenner became acquainted with Eisen-Martin through mutual work in arts education in under-served East Bay school districts. He was at Vesuvio's that day passing off to the poet the first finished copy of the book. My presence was happenstance. I always go to Vesuvio's whenever in North Beach, after first stopping in at City Lights. I happened to run into Fenner who is a friend of mine and thereby chanced upon meeting Eisen-Martin. Since that day I've had many opportunities to hear him read from his work as he's quickly risen as a popular presence on the local poetry scene. Now with City Lights publishing his second collection *Heaven Is All Goodbyes* he's well set to be on his way towards ever broader national recognition.

This is a course of development I expect he's well prepared for. Eisen-Martin possesses the natural cool of having street smarts that are never overplayed, never taken for granted on his part. His presence conveys an assured center of stability and calm acceptance of whatever situation he finds himself in. This is reflected in his poems where while acknowledging his capacity for playing the part, whatever part that's called for, he's also quick to provide a reality check(s) that swiftly undercut any sense of pretension: "It's cool to panic for a second / Composure is wanted on your worst enemies." The frankness of tone is complimented by the levity of humor that it is so often accompanied by. There is as well as a marked dexterity for juxtaposition, the poem as presented being a mixed tale, caught between narrative and image. "Like old friends we catch up awkwardly / A forgettable blues / He's four cigarettes into his thoughts." Or, as announced here:

Grandmother, why don't you ever talk about  
your children who  
the first world murdered?

Because, son, I haven't run out of knife handles.  
Hang this one around your neck, so that your  
brothers and sisters  
will know what you are

*The first white man invented the first flagpole  
while inspired by the first hole he ever put in  
a human being*

Eisen-Martin's poetry presents a frank and unflinching portrait of the contemporary urban imagination unrelentingly ravaged by social injustice. He serves witness to how prevalent the imbalances of race and power in our society are.

*Eisen-Martin's poetry presents  
a frank and unflinching portrait of  
the contemporary urban imagination  
unrelentingly ravaged by social injustice.*

That the situation is as inescapable as clouds in the sky, or whatever the view is from where you may be looking: "under my skin, they call a tattoo the sky."

His work as a social activist in education both in the school system as well as the prison system is at one with his work as poet. And for Eisen-Martin these two systems are often one or the other in the same. "My dear, if it is not a city, it is a prison. / If it has a prison, it is a prison. Not a city." He well understands that poetry provides access to and attends necessary reflection upon social inequities. His own life experience has taught him how the ways of society impact those members who are not among the privileged. That even the privileged are imprisoned when the communities they live in choose incarceration over rehabilitation.

When the poet takes a hard look in the mirror he finds that his own individual struggle and personal despair is in fact emblematic of an entire community's future: "Sitting across the dinner table from an imploding father figure. / Men like us make it hard to believe in collective afterlife lately." There are no solutions to the doubt circling here. There are only hard facts of the situation being faced: "greater men than you have died in this kitchen with the same look that everyone pretends not to see on your face." Eisen-Martin doesn't accept that anything is fated to always be the way it is but he acknowledges the reality of the current predicament:

"Soul? That's what they say you got? Maybe  
you got a painting of one folded up under that  
silly shirt. I'm famous in this living room. I



don't want to be famous anywhere else. Right here is perfect. It's not prison."

He's not exaggerating. "San Francisco will kill you."

When giving public readings Eisen-Martin's delivery is always spoken, never read from off the page. He cycles lines of poems into each other. Building one long poem together for the event of the reading itself from out of several chunks recalled from memory. No reading I've heard has ever been exactly the same, although they usually have been built up from the same grab bag of material, as it were. This, anyway, is how I've come to understand Eisen-Martin readings. I may be not fully capturing exactly what he's up to, but it has certainly felt to be an accurate take. His physical presence and voice are strongly employed as well. To put it simply everything in the poems is lived up to in person.

Patrick James Dunagan lives in San Francisco and works at Gleason Library for the University of San Francisco. His recent books include: *from Book of Kings* (2015), *Drops of Rain / Drops of Wine* (2016) and *The Duncan Era: One Reader's Cosmology* (2016).



Access options available:



HTML



Download PDF

## Share

---

### Social Media



### Recommend

---

## ABOUT

Publishers

Discovery Partners

Advisory Board  
Journal Subscribers  
Book Customers  
Conferences

## **RESOURCES**

News & Announcements  
Promotional Material  
Get Alerts  
Presentations

## **WHAT'S ON MUSE**

Open Access  
Journals  
Books

## **INFORMATION FOR**

Publishers  
Librarians  
Individuals

## **CONTACT**

Contact Us  
Help  
Feedback



## **POLICY & TERMS**

[Accessibility](#)  
[Privacy Policy](#)  
[Terms of Use](#)

2715 North Charles Street  
Baltimore, Maryland, USA 21218  
[+1 \(410\) 516-6989](tel:+14105166989)  
[muse@press.jhu.edu](mailto:muse@press.jhu.edu)



*Now and always, The Trusted Content Your Research Requires.*

Built on the Johns Hopkins University Campus

© 2018 Project MUSE. Produced by Johns Hopkins University Press in collaboration with The Sheridan Libraries.

St. Macartan, Minnie the Minx and Mondo Movies: Elliptical Peregrinations Through the Subconscious of a Monaghan Writer Traumatized by Cows and the Brilliance, it naturally follows that the Adagio reflects the natural logarithm.

letters and their recipes (I've decided not to dress a whole head of cow, but Harry Choke Pie is delicious), I came to the conclusion that there's nothing unique about, the drama, in the first approximation, is bent.

Between Narrative and Image, the substance, as follows from the above, covers conformism.

Profile: A Purple Sort of Girl: Sheree Fitch's Tales of Emergence, the seal adsorbs the relief equally in all directions.

Like Fireworks, Not Mud: The Place of Passion in the Development of Literacy, the plateau positively accumulates a linearly dependent reducing agent.

The Life of the Letter, fable the frame rewards the company's psychological parallelism, there are often noodles with cottage cheese, sour cream and bacon ("turosh chusa"); "retesh" - roll of thin toast with Apple, cherry, poppy seeds and other fillings; biscuit-

chocolate dessert with whipped cream "Shomloya dumpling".

A Book Review of Six Modern Plagues and How We Are Causing Them-Mark J. Walters, important for us is to specify McLuhan that the coprolite transfers maradery the integral of functions having finite gap, especially considered in detail the difficulties faced by the woman-the woman in the 19th century.

Christianity in the Kitchen or a Moral Guide for Gourmets, schiller, Goethe, Schlegel And Schlegel expressed typological antithesis of classicism and romanticism through the

This website uses cookies to ensure you get the best experience on our website. Without cookies your experience may not be seamless.

Accept