- The prize is open to writers who have not yet published a book of fiction, either a novel or collection of stories.
- Submissions must be no longer than 8,000 words.
- A $25 reading fee must accompany each submission.
- Name and address should appear only on the cover letter. Submissions will not be returned. No simultaneous or previously published works. For notification of the winning submission, include a S.A.S.E.
- Postmarked deadline for receipt of the work is **May 1, 2012.** The winner will be announced in August.
- The winning story will appear in *Southwest Review*, vol. 97, #4 (autumn, 2012). All entries will be considered for publication.
- Mail entries to:
The David N. Meyerson Fiction Prize
Southwest Review
P.O. Box 750374
Dallas, TX 75275-0374
or enter online.

SOUTHWEST REVIEW

2012
David Nathan Meyerson Prize for Fiction

Named for the late David Nathan Meyerson (1967-1998), a therapist and talented writer who died before he was able to show to the greater world the full fruits of his literary potential, the Meyerson prize consists of $1,000 and publication in *Southwest Review*. With the generous support of Marlene, Marti, and Morton Meyerson, the award will continue to honor David Meyerson's memory by encouraging and taking notice of other writers of great promise.

— **www.smu.edu/southwestreview** —

SOUTHWEST REVIEW

• SINCE 1915 •

VOLUME 97, NUMBER 1

Essays

The Meanings of Forgery, PAULA MARANTZ COHEN / 12

Tasting Texas, IRINA ALEXANDRA DUMITRESCU / 54

The House on the Ledge, ANN PETERS / 89

Sudden Paradise: Another Consideration of Before, JESSICA GREENBAUM / 144

Fiction

The Geometry of Starting Over, CAROLINE PATTERSON / 31

Full of Days, DON WATERS / 63

Her Biographers, MICHAEL CARROLL / 113

The Ninth Step, ALEC SOLOMITA / 134

Poetry

Words, DANIEL CORRIE / 28
First Place Winner of the 2011 Morton Marr Poetry Prize

Vitis vinifera (European Grape), AMY GLYNN GREACEN / 29
Second Place Winner of the 2011 Morton Marr Poetry Prize

Two Poems, JOHN KOETHE / 82

Tasting Texas

When asked what Texas is like, I usually say it is the most exotic place I have ever lived. Before moving here, I spent some time in the northeastern United States, in Toronto, Berlin, and Bucharest, to say nothing of a few dimly remembered years wandering the desert in Israel. Texas is like none of these. The grandeur of its sky is unlike anything I've ever seen, a vast serene blue unblemished by a single cloud. Under this enormous canopy people rush, ensconced in metal carapaces, fast and fierce automotive cockroaches, scurrying away from the unforgiving sun and the occasional wonder of a perfect double rainbow. But, precisely because of its strangeness, this place also reminds me of my other homes in fleeting, warped, barely communicable moments of recognition. When I was little and directed my obsessive tendencies toward sticker collecting, some of the rarer specimens were holograms. From an oblique angle, I could see an image printed on the glossy foil, absurdly colored and bent along the curvature of the paper it decorated. This double reaction—momentary thrill at the glimpse of something hidden and familiar, and simultaneous recognition of its peculiarity—is constant in my new home. Especially when it comes to the food.

The early medieval monks whose scribbles I spend my days studying imagined reading to be like eating. Books were to be tasted, slowly savored in the mouth. Like bees, they roamed among fields of textual flowers, transforming pollen into sweetness in their little cells. Like cows they ruminated, digesting and regurgitating scripture, incorporating its poetry into their very being. But we live in base and literal times, and so I read new places by eating my way through their strip mall sushi, their street tacos and dumplings, their hole-in-the-wall falafel joints. An exile a few times over, I'm drawn to the edges and corners of a city's geography, those places where immigrants tuck small markets that sell smoked meats and jars of neon pickles or restaurants where oil-filmed curry is served on Styrofoam plates. I love

these places, love observing how their owners adapt their cuisines to local tastes, love making unnecessary trips to the bathroom when the staff takes its meal at the back of the restaurant so I can peek into their dishes and see what they really eat.

The cheap food of a city is a key to its soul, and the difficulty of getting to it is a good indicator of how much spiritual exercise is necessary to touch the essence of the place. Because there is little walking in Texas, you are unlikely to ramble by chance into Chinatown or by a three-table restaurant with no online presence. Even when driving aimlessly along main roads, something I did often in my first year in Dallas, it's hard to see the treasures hidden in strip malls along the road. Usually this is due to the big box, big chain stores stamped across the landscape obliterating anything small from view. Sometimes, though, it seems any signs of differentiated life have sought shade in dark corners, as though protecting themselves from the merciless Texas sun. Early on, Susan, a journalist friend who shares my love for out-of-the-way ethnic food, took me to a little place that produces and sells *injera*, the spongy bread that serves as both plate and fork in Ethiopian cuisine. Getting there involves driving down an industrial road named Jupiter, I assume due to its distance from human civilization. The store is in the corner of what looks like an abandoned strip mall, completely unmarked, and invisible from the road. For about three hours every Sunday afternoon, if you know how to get there, you have your choice of dark and light brown *injera* and gallon-sized bags of unroasted coffee beans. Peek beyond the counter and you catch a glimpse of long stainless steel tables on which bread is being prepared, for sale here and in select gas stations across the city. Chat with the saleslady a bit and she will tell you that, before 9 a.m. during the week, you can drive into the alley behind the store and knock on a particular door to get your fix of *injera*. Now, I think eating *injera* is like chewing on a moist dishrag, but knowing that I now possess the secret to buying freshly made floppy bread *any day of the week*, that, unlike my benighted friends and colleagues who have spent decades in Dallas without a reliable purveyor of the stuff, I could make a fluffy bed of *injera* and sleep in it should I so desire, gives me an incredible sense of empowerment. More practically, I can foresee a variety of apocalyptic scenarios in which ready access to five-kilo bags of coffee beans would come in pretty handy.

If the culinary soul of my Texas is concealed, hard to discern among the fast food joints, taquerías, and strip club lunches I see advertised along its highways, it is also profoundly mixed. This bare fact comes as no surprise in an immigrant nation, or in a state with an amusement park named after the six national flags that have fluttered in its winds. It is the quality of the mixing that stands out for me. Growing up in Canada, I learned that national identity could be expressed in a single food simile. The Canadian alternative to the American melting pot, that puréed soup in which immigrants lose their precious uniqueness and forget even how to pronounce their own last names, is a fresh, crisp, tartly seasoned tossed salad. Our ethnic diversity is raw, nutritious, and blends in your mouth, not your plate, so holds the Canadian political dream. And to a great extent, this was how I experienced it in Ontario. I could have Hong Kong-style high tea in Richmond Hill or visit an Izakaya in downtown Toronto, both without too many foreign ingredients interrupting the fantasy of realness. But Texas food betrays neither clear divisions nor complete assimilation. Chili is its ideal governing metaphor: a well-cooked stew that still needs chewing, with no clear consensus on what its ingredients are or should be but plenty of passion and bravado on all parts.

The fusion in Texas cuisine is rough and ready, even ungainly in a charming sort of way. This is not high concept international cooking, not the dusting of sencha green tea or smoky Spanish paprika an unwitting slab of tuna might suffer in a region with more refined pretensions. No, Texas cooking comes from years of Mexicans, Germans, Czechs, Native- and Anglo-Americans rubbing up against each other in this vast space, exchanging condiments, and generally making do with what was available. It is a process I once saw live during a cooking class at Kalachandji's, a Hare Krishna temple and restaurant in East Dallas. Manjuali Devi, the instructor, began the class with an hour-long explanation of the principles of Ayurvedic cooking and the properties of each authentic spice. She then named the precise breeds of chile pepper she would have used in India to flavor a dish and then nonchalantly added, "but here, I just use jalapeños." The fusion continues beyond ingredients, and into cooking methods and the rituals of eating. On the northern outskirts of Dallas, a little Indian restaurant specializing in Hyderabadi cuisine advertises as its signature dish a deep-fried spicy chicken appetizer that its owners invented in America. Bistro B, a Vietnamese joint that clearly hired its decorator in Las Vegas, offers customers two hundred dollars if they can finish a bowl of noodle soup large enough to bathe a baby in. This is not, by the way, an authentic Vietnamese practice. I asked.

The logic of Texas cooking goes like this: Can it be eaten? If yes, then surely it can be eaten more easily if a tortilla is folded around it. Has it been wrapped in a tortilla? If so, then add jalapeños to it, or chicken fry it, or douse it in *queso*. Or all of the above. If all of these steps have been taken, it is time to consider the application of bacon. Hence the existence of maple bacon rolls, which have joined kolaches, enchiladas, and good old American pies among the offerings at the Little Czech Bakery in the town of West, Texas, conveniently on the way from Dallas to Waco. Hence also that shining expression of the Texan genius, chicken-fried bacon. This delicious snack of unintuitively juicy bacon under a crisp coating of batter, demonstrates another lesson about local fusion. Any condiment, flavoring, or even beverage is, upon entering a deep fryer, transmogrified into a main dish. Thus the Texas State Fair has sold fried butter, fried beer, fried Coca Cola and, for visitors from the coasts, fried lattes. One of the most divine concoctions I ever had at the Fair was a large jalapeño stuffed with chilled guacamole, impaled on a stick, battered, deep-fried, and drenched liberally with cheese sauce. That little kebab could be sent into space to show passing aliens both the advancement of our civilization and the steeliness of our will. You just don't mess with people who will do that to a pepper.

When I look at Texas straight on I see the porous boundary region between Mexico and the Anglo-American South. The suburbs of Dallas, viewed slant, remind me of the grids around Toronto, orderly immigrant suburbias dotted with Chinese bubble tea shops and Russian groceries. A third perspective brings into relief the funhouse nostalgia that characterizes what has remained of German heritage in Texas, and probably in much of the United States. Now, let us be clear: I am fond of Germany. I am so fond of it that I married one of its citizens and have eaten salads made almost entirely of sausage. Such is my dedication. But what I love about Germany has more to do with excellent public transit, Turkish *döner*, and a predilection for putting philosophers on television, and precious little to do with the good old days of group singing and decorative beer steins. And so I

became fascinated by places like Hans Mueller Sausage, a beer hall on the grounds of the State Fair that encapsulates the half-camouflaged way German culture abides in Texas.

Sandwiched between the Cotton Bowl and a concert stage that actually has sport utility vehicles placed into its frame as decoration, Hans Mueller entices visitors with a fluorescent purple and teal awning, aimed no doubt at three-year-old girls thirsty for a lager. A step inside, and the scene changes completely. Over tables crowded with beer-drinking, wurst-gobbling fairgoers hang large banners in black, red, and gold. Accustomed to modern Germans' understandable reticence about sporting the national colors, I am taken aback to find them so brazenly displayed in Dallas. The hall's most prominent decorations, however, play on a different symbolic level. Flanking the main entrance are two man-sized sculptures of a sausage and a turkey leg respectively, both of which jut out of the wall at the angle of full tumescence and lour ominously over the crowd. Hans Mueller Sausage is a compact expression of German-American-Texan fusion: a manly temple to meat processed and meat *au naturel* under a hard pink candy shell. The riddle posed by Hans Mueller piqued my curiosity, so when I found out that Texas also had a Wurstfest every November, I knew I had to do some anthropological field work. As luck would have it, two girlfriends were set to visit me from Seattle and the Netherlands just around that time, and both are the kind of individuals who can sew or procure a dirndl given reasonable notice. So off we went.

The New Braunfels Wurstfest was first held in 1961, and it offers today's visitor a glimpse into the ethnic nostalgia of the Texas Hill Country. It manages to be at once tediously similar to every other event of its kind, outlandish in its amnesiac reach for the town's immigrant roots, and Germanic in quiet, uncanny ways that probably elude even the organizers' notice. The beer is Shiner Bock, and the people waiting in line for it look just like the folks at the Texas State Fair, only about a foot taller and naturally blond. Dirndls and lederhosen are everywhere, sartorial clichés that have somehow come to stand for all of Germany in the American imaginary, and which I can only imagine appearing in Hamburg or Stuttgart in the context of an *avant-garde* art performance gone horribly wrong. The concessions include all the corny dogs, nachos, blooming onions, turkey legs, and fried pickles you need to show your arteries who's boss, along with

food items whose hybridity recalls the twisted imaginary creatures of a medieval bestiary. Take the cheddar wurst, for example, or the jalapeño sausage. Or the reuben quesadillas. Or, most touchingly, the so-called "German taco," a sausage resting innocently on a bed of sauerkraut, wrapped gently in a tortilla, blissfully unaware of its unspeakable nature.

The great dark secret behind the yearly "Salute to Sausage" is that despite its enthusiastic dedication to all things wurst, the sausage itself is mediocre. A bland, boiled bit of encased pig parts was on offer, a sad piece of meat that no *Imbiss* in Germany would deign to serve. But because my girlfriends and I took a taxi to the fest and not the designated Wurst Wagen drunk van ("the best wurst ride in town"), we knew the unofficial story. Now, it is a particularly American talent, brought by Texans to an apogee of decadent sophistication, to put food on a stick. This is, I suspect, a veiled exegetical reference to the equally American practice of fashioning crucifixes out of unexpected materials, like matchsticks, or macrame. Our driver revealed to us what observation and experience confirmed: that the porkchop-on-a-stick, marinated in well-spiced dark vinegar, grilled to moist perfection, its juices caught by a bread roll impaled just below it like some gloriously edible Shroud of Turin, was the thing to eat at the festival. I did not try the shrimp-on-a-stick, or the sausage-on-a-stick or the sirloin-on-a-stick, not even the pickle sickles (invented, no doubt, to let the vegetable kingdom know it wasn't safe either). But the pork chop was indeed exquisite, like what would happen if a rostbraten took off its clothes and went tubing down the Comal River. On a stick.

The literalism I saw at Hans Mueller also characterizes some of the traditions of the New Braunfels Wurstfest. The event begins each year with the ceremonial Biting of the Sausage (actually one long string of sausages), and is given paternal authority by the Grosse Opa, the Big Granddaddy, as it were, who presides and also goes by the title "Spassmeister," or Fun Master. Fun is, in other words, commanded, and the order was, I confess, not hard to fulfill. When we entered one of the larger beer tents, the accordionist Alex Meixner and his band were playing a surprisingly convincing German-language, polka version of "I want to hold your hand." Some of the older women dancing near the stage pulled us into their frantic circle, and before I could disentangle myself, the sweat-drenched Alex was leading us in another

dubious import, the Ententanz—the "Duck Dance" (but to us it tastes like chicken). Together with these carnivalesque gestures towards a longed-for place of origin, there are glimpses of unexpected, even unintentional, authenticity. The Skat tournament is one, continuing the tradition of a Byzantine card game that enthralls and angers German men the way I have seen backgammon do to Romanians and Turks. Still, the most surprising bit of Germanity is to be found in the yard of the historic Saints Peter and Paul Catholic Church of New Braunfels. Not only was the church established in 1845, but it also boasts a famous tree, the church oak. The oak's marker vaguely associates it with a former Indian village and with the freeing of the first German in Texas, and adds, "Tradition says that under this tree Mass was offered by the Abbe Em Domenech in 1849." A perfect American tale of immigration and faith, unless we remember the eighth-century Anglo-Saxon missionary Boniface, who angered the Hessians he was trying to convert by miraculously felling the Oak of Donar, also known as Thor. Boniface tried to direct the heathens' perverse religious fervour away from tree-worship and entrail-divination by using the timber to build an oratory—dedicated to Saint Peter.

The day after visiting the Wurstfest, having missed the showing of "Batwurst: The Adventures of Bratman and Robin," we decided to explore a little more of New Braunfels' food offerings. In Gourmage, a little shop filled with specialty cheeses and chocolate, the owner confessed to being "a liberal." She did so with the kind of flustered trepidation one might use to say, "I prefer to eat children *en papillote*." Moreover, she had allowed her daughter to attend university in Seattle, to the consternation of family and neighbors, so the suspicion of child abuse was clearly not far off. We walked by the Wurst Craft Show & Sale in Texas, where remnants of the Oak of Donar were being turned into seashell-encrusted crucifixes, and passed the "Spass and Gemütlichkeit" mural, the fun and conviviality in this case referring mainly to sausage preparation. Our goal was the Friesenhaus Restaurant, founded by an émigré north German family in 2005, which advertised real German bread, along with schnitzel, marinated herring, polka bands, beer steins, Sachertorte, loose tea, leberkäse, dirndls, currywurst, weisswurst, Black Forest variations on any dessert, along with any other food, clothing, or practice that could possibly be associated with any region of Germany, past or present. To my surprise, the owner seemed unamused when I greeted him in German. Switching to English, I asked him if a lot of Germans came to the restaurant. His answer was curt: "I came here to get away from them."

I pondered whether this was utterly ridiculous or a strange sort of strategic brilliance on his part. In New Braunfels, Germans appear as semi-mythical Omas and Opas, running restaurants, leading festivals, pickling green beans, and generally keeping the freedom-loving, revolutionary spirit of 1848 alive, one supposes. Germany is all past here, and it is a comfortable past, if a somewhat fattening one. It reminds me of the 2003 German film "Schultze Gets the Blues," in which the retired miner and accordion player Schultze travels from his village in Sachsen-Anhalt to New Braunfels to participate in a folk music competition. Once there, he sits beside the Wurstfest stage, and after a few polkas, some yodeling, and the Deutschlandlied, quietly leaves. Schultze moves on to explore the bayous of Louisiana, in search of the zydeco that has captivated him. The old German is in the United States because he has fallen in love with America's savage places and strange rhythms, not to see a distorted reflection of his own home.

Why do I find an event like the Wurstfest uncanny while the Korean, Indian, Chinese, and Vietnamese restaurants around Dallas remind me of home? Is it that the first is the Disney version of a place I have lived in and even loved, while the others are simply the local analogies of other counterfeits I know from Toronto and New York? Or is it the relentless mythologizing in places like Hans Mueller and New Braunfels, the way they blow up a bit of stuffed intestine to epic proportions and then bow down to worship it? The truth is, behind almost every immigrant is a tragedy. The tragedy may be great and dramatic: war, genocide, famine, revolution. It may also be small, composed from the daily sorrows of waiting in lines, boiling water for baths, and knowing that the love letter you hold in your hands has already been read by a government censor. It always includes the knowledge of irrevocable separation from home, from the family and friends whose lives continued along their courses after you left, a distance unbridgeable by travel because it does not exist in geography. The proper response to these remembered heartbreaks is to grit your teeth, work hard, continue cooking that thing with the pig feet or cow intestines or sheep brains, that vaguely stomach-turning dish no one would eat if they had not grown up thinking it a delicacy, and remind

your children every day about the sacrifices you have made for them and the desirability of attending medical school. The immigrants I know continue their rituals and cuisines out of habit, not nostalgia, because they do not forget the reasons they left. The manic quality of the Wurstfest comes from the fact that it is, at its heart, a celebration of loss by people who have not lost anything themselves.

Or maybe I think that foods of place and memory taste best when we abandon the dream of an authentic past, and acknowledge that we'll improvise the spicing to suit the present. I have come to love some foods intimately bound up with the geography of Texas and the Southwest, like a spicy crawfish boil, which I first tasted in the midst of an epic winter storm that left roads strewn with broken tree limbs and large parts of Dallas without electricity. One of the tropes of Canadian émigré literature is the shock and delight immigrants from southern climes experience when seeing snow fall for the first time, but my own childhood in Romania was one of brutal winters and freezing temperatures indoors. Fifteen years in Toronto, where the first snow portends eight months of unceasing brown slush, did not increase the novelty or pleasure of seeing frozen water drop from the sky. But that February, the snow was new again, the Cajun seasoning burning my mouth and stinging under my fingernails a perfect complement to the unexpected cold outside. It was in Dallas, with a belly full of mudbugs, that I first felt the beauty of snow falling in the night, blanketing sidewalks and streets, forcing me to stay put for a bit.

DON WATERS

Full of Days

So Job died, being old and full of days.
—Book of Job 42:17

Life was mentioned in the King James Bible 450 times. Marc Maldonado subsisted off the word and thoroughly understood its opposite. He sensed the Kingdom of God within him on Sundays, driving sun-scorched trash-scattered freeways to his temple of worship, and he felt the emptiness of his own realm whenever he set the table for one, whenever he aligned his socks in the lonely dresser drawer. Amid this hot, high-voltage city, its pulsing neon, its armies of fingers slamming on video poker buttons, he felt the lovingkindness, the light ache of breath in his nostrils, and he knew he was necessary.

That day he drove the freeways, analyzing angles, the best possible exposure. The great desert opened to him as he cruised I-15 North-South, I-515 East-West, changing direction where the roads intersected and formed a concrete cross.

Summer's heat was a cruel spirit upon the city. 107 degrees. 111 degrees. Heat leaked through his car window and raked his cheek. On the hood of his Honda lay a pigeon's droppings, baked into the shape of an egg.

For weeks he'd been observing traffic patterns at different times of day. He was after the best coverage over the longest period of time. Vehicles moving at sixty miles-per-hour might only get a two-second glimpse of his billboard. He needed to capture his viewer in that brief flash. This was a twenty-four-hour city, and morning-afternoon congestion didn't always apply. Las Vegas had its eyes open at all hours.

He disliked dealing with the corporations. One in particular had a near-monopoly on the city. And it was the most difficult company to deal with: sign rates were astronomical, it had restrictive guidelines and, when Marc had emailed the saleswoman the image he intended to use, she never called him back. Then the woman refused to take Marc's calls at all.