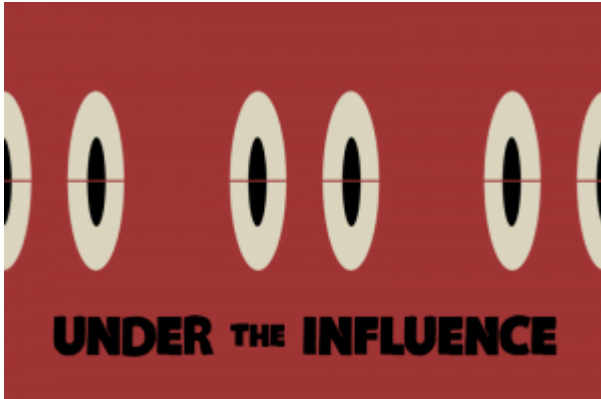


Under the Influence #8, Perspective

written by Kurt Baumeister | March 5, 2019



Intro

Wherein Michael J. Wilson pens a brief, brilliant love letter to Hart Crane; Joseph Salvatore praises the perspective gained from ancestors both biological (his father, and his cousin Rocky Marciano) and literary (Don DeLillo), Christine Sneed muses on Joan Silber's singular achievements in first person storytelling, and Sequoia Nagamatsu shares his thoughts on the ways Kobo Abe's characters navigate their semi-allegorical existences. I'll be back at the end with a few words on perspective. Please read and enjoy...

Kobo Abe

by Sequoia Nagamatsu

I came across Abe's *Woman in the Dunes* in a Tokyo used bookstore and found myself immersed in a man's Sisyphean task of shoveling sand in a deep pit, the home of a widower, which had become either his prison or an escape from the hustle of post-war urban life. Unpacking humanity through one outcast is common with Abe. His characters read like shadow puppets—more symbol than person, and as someone fascinated with using myth as a vehicle for illuminating who we are, I was drawn to his allegorical misfits and how they navigate his horrific (*Face of Another*) or scientific mazes (*Inter Ice Age 4*). How would they escape? Do they want to escape?



Sequoia Nagamatsu is the author of the Japanese folklore and pop-culture inspired story collection, *Where We Go When All We Were Is Gone*. His fiction has appeared in *Conjunctions*, *Zyzyva*, *Black Warrior Review*, and *The Fairy Tale Review*, among others. He is the managing editor of *Psychopomp Magazine* and teaches creative writing at St. Olaf College

in Minnesota. He is currently working on a collection, *How High We Go in the Dark*, and a novel, *Girl Zero*. You can find him at <http://SequoiaNagamatsu.com> and @SequoiaN on Twitter.

Joan Silber

by Christine Sneed

Over the last ten years or so, I've encountered some of Joan Silber's short stories but only recently and at long last did I read one of her books. She writes primarily in the first person—although I haven't yet read her two earliest books, so perhaps these two have third-person narrators, but of the other six I've read, most feature first-person narrators, and she writes in this point of view as convincingly and as engagingly as anyone I've read. Her stories remind me of Alice Munro's and William Trevor's (whom I've since seen other fans of hers also compare her work to)—Munro's perhaps most notably because of her tone—a perfect balance between wryness and earnestness, and Trevor's because he and Silber both write with what seems effortless control and ultimately, a deceptive simplicity.

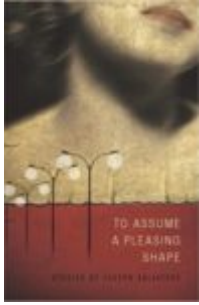


Christine Sneed is the author of the novels *Paris, He Said* and *Little Known Facts*, and the story collections *Portraits of a Few of the People I've Made Cry* and *The Virginity of Famous Men*. Her work has been included in *The Best American Short Stories*, *O. Henry Prize Stories*, *The Southern Review*, *Ploughshares*, and *The New York Times*. She's been a finalist for the Los Angeles Times Book Prize, and has received the Grace Paley Prize, Chicago Writers Association Book of the Year Award, Society of Midland Authors Award, and others.

Don DeLillo

by Joseph Salvatore

Born in Brockton, MA, before the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti, my father grew up experiencing severe prejudice against Italian-Americans. The sport of boxing, for my father—and his cousin Rocky Marciano—permitted ethnic men of their class access to a profession without the same hostility they faced in the city's shoe and leather factories. As I work on my own novel about those men, I return often to *Underworld*, and its rich representations of such characters. Don DeLillo's mix of celebrities and private citizens, set within the 20th Century, has taught me how better to write and to see.

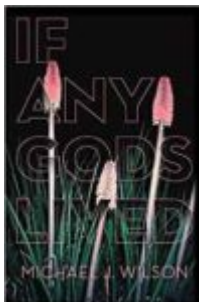


Joseph Salvatore is the author of the story collection *To Assume a Pleasing Shape*, and co-author of the college textbook *Understanding English Grammar*. He is Books Editor at *The Brooklyn Rail* and a frequent contributor to *The New York Times Book Review*. His work has appeared in *The Collagist*, *Epiphany*, *New York Tyrant*, *Open City*, *Post Road*, *Salt Hill*, *Sleeping Fish*, *Willow Springs*, *Rain Taxi*, *Routledge's International Encyclopedia of Queer Culture*, *Angels of the Americlypse: An Anthology of New Latin@ Writing*, and *The Believer Logger*. He's an associate professor at The New School, and founding editor of the literary journal *LIT*.

Hart Crane

by **Michael J. Wilson**

You imperfect, maddening, beautiful Crane. Frozen, one hand on the railing of a ship bound for New York. Crane, bound to death like Plath. The matrix of the heart bare and visionary. Queer avatar of the closet. Son of the inventor of Life Savers. Crane refusing Eliot's dark Waste Land, rose towards the moon, attempted to carry us all on his back across The Bridge and failed. Gleaning some kind of light from the horrors of the 20th century. Oracle, priest, cruising fiend, who saw the void, dared it, was lost at sea. *Only in darkness is thy shadow clear.*



Michael J. Wilson lives in Santa Fe, where he writes about aliens and portals into infinity for Meow Wolf. His second book of poems, *If Any Gods Lived*, is available from Stalking Horse Press.

Outro

Is history stable or is it a work of imagination, a dynamic fiction dependent more on perspective than facts? Is history, in the vernacular of Graham Swift's classic novel, *Waterland*, water, land, or the confluence of the two? *Waterland's* answer, though it's more an admission, is that history is an ever-changing fiction, a shoreline in flux, just as reality and truth are.

Each of these perceived foundational truths is a semi-truth dependent on perspective, itself an entirely subjective assessment. As the subject changes, so does perspective and, in turn, understandings the subject holds of concepts like history, truth, reality, and even perspective.

In spite of "perspective's" mutable nature the understanding of it remains central to writing or any other creative endeavor, as important in understanding what's being seen as the thing itself, "the vivid thing," as John Banville notes semi-Platonically in *Doctor Copernicus*. The case could be made, in fact, that understanding the perspective under which a piece of fiction is narrated (or written) matters not so much because meaning falls apart without perspective but because comprehension of perspective offers a fuller understanding of the dependent writing. Meaning, "the vivid thing" is not the same "vivid thing" for each person and that Plato's forms can only exist in an invented philosophical zone outside time and space.

Perspective is central to creative writing not because of what it is but what it isn't. Whether we mean the perspective of author, narrator, character, reader, or critic perspective is a lens through which to see a set grouping of signifiers: a book, the facts underlying a book, the writer who created the book, the critic who dissects the book. But understanding a piece of art's perspective is an exercise in never quite getting it right. Even a piece of art's maker will forget, quite quickly, the precise perspective under which she was working an hour, day, or year earlier. Perspective must be continually re-assessed, torn apart and picked at, just as the text must; the goal, through the understanding of perspective, to know what to subtract to arrive at "the vivid thing," though we understand that sought after, imagined, "vivid thing" can never *really* exist.