

and two or three others sat on the sofas and explained that we had no real idea what we were writing; they, however, did. They interpreted our hidden signs, explained meaning was relative or nonexistent, and congratulated themselves on speaking in the same hermeneutic codes. At least that is my memory of the first half of the workshop. After the break, Gary Soto, Jon Veinberg, and I did not return for more.

I wrote, published; avoided theory, its disregard for “primary texts,” its disdain for writers—and kept trying to work out what I could in some coherent ontological fashion. To me, we wrote to try to make sense of our lives, if only in bits and pieces. I taught at a fourth-rate college in Pennsylvania for a number of years, and at a year-end gathering of faculty and students, a colleague from England—hired to teach American literature, though he’d only published one book describing the tenets of deconstruction—asked about my most recent book: “You don’t really think you know what you’re doing when writing your poems, do you?” It wasn’t personal, as he had not spent any real time with my books. He was just promoting his view of literature, which he was sure—though he had never written or published any literature—was correct. I was leaving to chair a creative writing department at the University of California; I’d had a glass or two of wine, which, in my experience, promotes candor—and what was more, I could see no reason to suffer his academic arrogance. “I damn well do,” I said, and added a few sentences further to that effect. . . . I think he took my meaning.

I returned to California, to Santa Barbara, a place that still holds an Edenic thread for me and my writing. I’m still trying to answer some of the questions implanted in my brain when I was six at Our Lady of Mount Carmel School about why I am here, what it all leads to. . . if anything. I have, over the last several years, taken up reading popular books on cosmology. I am interested in the “theory of everything,” M-theory, the eleven dimensions of string theory, parallel universes, dark matter and energy, what exactly every bright thing in the universe is redshifted toward as we pick up speed, apparently hell-bent for darkness. How might this all undercut intelligent design? Looking out at the sky, I keep wondering what all the metaphors might ever add up to. And I have to wonder how much time there is left to wonder, to write. The in-

formation coming in, the cold hard scientific facts, do not offer much hope. It appears we are alone among scattered billions of stars, a lucky spot where some mitochondrial DNA dropped down off a comet and gave rise to some self-conscious constructions such as ourselves. We want more, something beyond the stars, but this may well be it. All I can hope for is that I might live long enough to believe in something else.

In 2014, **Christopher Buckley** published his twentieth book of poetry, *Back Room at the Philosophers’ Club* (Stephen F. Austin State University Press), and his third book of nonfiction, *Holy Days of Obligation* (Lynx House Press). He is editor of the poetry journal *MIRAMAR*.

GARY HUGHES

Common Objects Enjoy the Beach, 2014

Oil on panel, 36 x 48



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