Memory’s version captures a truth about the place, not merely as it appears, but as it was felt, played in, dreamed of [. . .] Memory can offer up the richness of imagining where a photograph would only dole out the thin gruel of the visually literal.

—Chris Anthem, “(Entrance)”
Chris Arthur was born in Belfast and lived for many years in County Antrim. He is author of a trilogy of creative nonfiction, Irish Nocturnes (1999), Irish Willow (2002), and Irish Haiku (2005). Widely published as an essayist and poet on both sides of the Atlantic, his work has appeared in The American Scholar, Dalhousie Review, Descant, the Honest Ulsterman, Irish Pages, North American Review, Northwest Review, Orion, Poetry Ireland Review, Southern Humanities Review, Southern Review, Threepenny Review and others. He was winner of a Theodore Christian Hoepfner Award in 2004. Other awards include the Akegarasu Haya International Essay Prize and the Gandhi Foundation’s Aitchtey Memorial Essay Prize.

The Times Literary Supplement says he writes with “unimpeachable precision”, producing books that are “civilized, idiosyncratic and rare”. He’s been described as “the Irish writer who has been quietly rescuing the meditative essay for the twenty-first century.” Critics have compared his writing with that of, among others, Seamus Heaney, V.S. Naipaul, Loren Eiseley, and W.G. Sebald. His work has been included three times in the list of “Notable Essays” included in the annual Best American Essays series, alongside work by Salman Rushdie, Nadine Gordimer, E.L. Doctorow, Sven Birkerts and others.

He teaches at the University of Wales, Lampeter, the smallest university in Europe and the oldest in England and Wales outside Oxford and Cambridge.

Before coming to Lampeter, Chris held fellowships at the Universities of St Andrews and Edinburgh. He has also worked as a TV researcher, a schoolteacher and as a nature reserve warden on the shores of Lough Neagh.

Details of his three thoughtful, lyrical and moving essay collections can be found on his publisher’s website: www.thedaviesgrouppublishers.

Our discussion of his approach to the essay form took place by email in March 2005, a few months before Irish Haiku was published. Since we spoke, extracts from each book in his essay trilogy have been included in Patricia Craig’s landmark publication, The Ulster Anthology (Blackstaff Press, Belfast: 2006). Chris is currently working on a fourth collection, Irish Elegies.

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Saint Thomas: In a photograph of you posted on the Internet, you look pretty dapper for an introspective fellow with a liking for nocturnes and willows.

Arthur: I’d rather focus on words than photographs, though how the two relate can be interesting. Sometimes I think books should appear under pen names and without author photos (or with photos of different / random people), so as attention is kept firmly on what’s written. I mean, does it really matter who wrote something? What’s important is the quality of the writing, whether it’s interesting / beautiful, whether it sparks insight / pleasure. Maybe this is just a reaction against some of the daster tendencies of academic authorship, where people lay claim to every tedious footnote and seem to be very possessive of —and frequently tiresomely boastful about— every damn thing they’ve published, even if it belongs with what’s been nicely dubbed “the pornography of insignificance.”

Saint Thomas: Your essays read like maps, each with a significance of place. I happen to be a descendent of the Isle of Man, then later, Liverpool. Something about your essays caused me to consider going to those places to write for a bit. Can you speak to those places at all?

Arthur: Interesting! People tell me the Isle of Man is like a cross between Ireland and Scotland. But then people say that about Wales too and it isn’t true (well, not to me). Every place is its own place, however
many echoes it has of somewhere else. Haven’t been to Isle of Man, though it has provided welcome shelter in stormy sea crossings (things get calmer in its lee) and I’ve sometimes seen its landmass—distant/in-distinguish—on flights/ferry trips to/from Ireland. I’d wager there are no copies of Irish Nocturnes on that Island. The nocturnes may be Irish in provenance, but I hope I manage to hit notes in them that will resonate with all sorts of readers in all sorts of places. I like the Isle of Man’s symbol of independence. The motto of those three legs “Quocunque Jeceris Stabit” - “Whichever way you throw me I stand” - has a certain air of Ulster defiance to it.

Liverpool has a quality all of its own. Sounds like you’ve been able to trace some of the maze-way of your family’s peregrinations. I’d like to hire a team of researchers to follow up some of the leads I’ve discovered about family in doing the background for an essay in Irish Haiku entitled “Obelisk.” Seems like some of my mother’s ancestors, who are buried at a place called Umgall in County Antrim (from the Irish Uimgaill, meaning “Land of the Strangers”), were refugees from Northumberland, fleeing either plague or religious persecution sometime between 664 and 674. If even some of their story could be retrieved, some of this obscure familial nerve teased out from all the forgetfulness that obscures it, that would provide raw material for a score of essays.

**Saint Thomas:** In “Facing the Family” you write: “To have effectively mislaid the last earthly remains of one’s progenitors....” In thinking about where my own grandmother might be buried, this retrieving, this teasing out of obscure familial nerve from forgetfulness for raw material intrigues me. Is that not true with most things? I mean, should writers not dig deeper then?

**Arthur:** This is definitely true of most things. I suspect that the essayist equivalent of a Zen Master (and I can think of no one who would quite qualify) would be able to start an essay from anything. If we dig deeper, learn to see more clearly, listen more sharply, the camouflage of the mundane starts to slip off, and that’s when, at least for me, writing starts.

**Saint Thomas:** I'm quite interested in landscape as technique in essay form. Do you say that what you see in landscape is influenced by your interior state or does landscape affect your interior state? Say I experience a great loss of some kind or another, I may have great difficulty seeing beauty, sunshine, or what have you. Do you see what I mean?
Arthur: Landscape and mindscape / heartscape / soulscape strike me as intricately linked. If I’d been born and raised with Welsh contours running through me, or Isle of Man ones, I’m sure I’d write / think differently. But that’s probably just another way of saying that I’d be someone else. Not sure how long it takes living in a place before you take the landscape with you when you move away. I know I’ve brought loads of County Antrim memories / images / imaginings with me to Wales.

Saint Thomas: Earlier you said, “What’s important is the quality of the writing, whether it’s interesting / beautiful, whether it sparks insight / pleasure,” you seem to be saying then, that when you write, you have the reader’s pleasure and process in mind as well as your own. Some authors have said they don’t write for the reader at all. And that seems odd to me, given that language is a form of communication, whether spoken or in text.

Arthur: If someone is prepared to pay an author the compliment of giving up time (the most precious of our non-renewable resources!) to read his/her book, it strikes me that there are obligations, of courtesy if nothing else, to try to ensure that the time isn’t wasted. Georgia O’Keefe’s idea about filling space beautifully is an aesthetic hurdle that text too often fails to get over (and I’m not exempting my own). Some writing doesn’t even manage, so at least it seems to me, to get over much lower hurdles, sometimes to the extent that it comes across as a waste of time/space/energy (again, I’m not claiming innocence here). I’m very keen to avoid a particular type of academic writing of which I’ve had a bellyful. The sort of articles this results in is nicely pilloried by Kingsley Amis in Lucky Jim for their “niggling mindlessness”, their “funereal parade of yawn-enforcing facts”, the way they throw “pseudo-light upon non-problems”.

That said, it’s not as if I sit down and think: “How am I going to write this essay so that readers will like it.” My primary audience is, I guess, myself, and I’d still be prompted to write even if I thought no one was ever going to read it (realistically, very few people are ever likely to read these essay collections). In part, writing is a way of getting my thinking straight, but also, as per the image at the start of Irish Nocturnes, “I write because I have no tail to wag.” I like to hear words cast in particular ways and try to write according to that (often damned elusive) voice - but in the hope that my likes/dislikes/standards/style will be something that others - though not necessarily that many others - will share.
Saint Thomas: Would you elaborate on your wish to hear words cast in particular ways?

Arthur: Perhaps. It’s when they sound right and look well together, fit flush with what you’re trying to catch with them. In fact, one of the essays in Irish Haiku is about and entitled, “getting fit” - not in the sense of weight training and running, but in terms of getting utterance/writing to fit experience/ideas. I keep going back to Basho’s advice: “Let there not be a hair’s breadth separating your mind from what you write.” Impossible of course, you can always see lots of daylight between them, but when you get the best fit it’s momentously satisfying. Why that should be I don’t know. The level of pleasure-fulfillment that writing provides, when it’s going well, is astonishing. So, I guess the depth of angst that comes when it’s not going well shouldn’t be surprising.

Saint Thomas: You speak of this “often damned elusive voice.” Is it a common thing for a writer to fear losing a voice that he has grown comfortable with, or should he just go with it to see where it leads?

Arthur: If a voice spoke to me in this kind of tone/tempo I’d sit up and listen, transcribe it, tease it out, ask it to continue - and not complain! I very definitely live in fear of losing the voice that I’m looking for, and occasionally find, in my essays. In the midst of writing, when it’s going well, it seems strong, fluent, something you can depend on just to keep on coming. Then the piece is done and, knowing that I don’t really understand where the impetus for it came from, or perhaps knowing it’s more something given than something manufactured, I’m concerned about where the next one will come from - or if it will come.

My writing is interspersed with long silences which I don’t welcome and sometimes find really depressing, but which I suspect are a kind of necessary gestation period. It would be wonderful just to be able to have that elusive voice speak to me all the time and so have the kind of writing life that can fill every day with well-wrought words. I’ve only been able to manage that kind of approach on a couple of relatively brief occasions, when I’ve taken time out from work, based myself somewhere else and got into a whole different set of routines. I dream of doing so again, but the realities of job-family-money make it difficult.
Saint Thomas: I have noticed that, in your essays, you find a way, a burrowing if you will, into the mysteries of life through the commonplace. This process is summed up in the title of your essay, "Meditations on the Pelvis of an Unknown Animal." I remembered finding the complete bone structure of a cow at the top of the Appalachian Trail in PA. As you say, "...cleaned of their flesh, bleached white and naked, they have always struck me as objects of extraordinary beauty." I wanted to hook them back together somehow and hang them up as art. As I was reading your essay, I imagined you coming upon that large pelvis, stooped there in a pair of shorts on the stony shore near Fifeness, eyes perhaps bugging out of your head. So, would you say that it is the process itself of examining mystery or the writing of it that intrigues you the most? Put another way, is it the adventure or the linguistic expression of that adventure?

Arthur: This is an interesting point. I think certain types of experience come freighted with such a load of meaning - that they carry significance/prompt reflection by the very torque of their occurrence, the camber at which they intersect with the mind - that, in a sense, I've no choice but to write about them, even if I may not do so immediately (sometimes not for years). In particular, some natural objects seem to cry out to be touched, held, kept. It's almost like they're talismans, relics or totems which carry an enormous density of mystery-meaning. Essay writing is at once a way of seeing further into, and expressing, their mystery and meaning. The pelvis was one such object.

One of the essays in Irish Haiku ("Miracles") takes as its point of departure a fossilized whale's otolith (ear bone). When I came across it in Stan Woods' famous fossil shop in Edinburgh it exerted an almost magnetic force on me. Obviously the writing depends on the experience/object - but at the same time the experience/object is deepened/developed/changed by the writing. I look at the otolith differently after going through the experience of writing an essay about it (and doing the research/reflection the essay entailed). I find natural objects are the most potent in this respect, but much the same thing can also apply to things we manufacture - the ferrule from my father's walking stick, a book held by a terrorist (this latter from "Witness" in Irish Haiku).

Saint Thomas: I believe it was Michel de Montaigne who called himself an "accidental philosopher." And here's what I'm wondering: for you, do you see the results of examining as accidental? Do you simply happen onto truths? Or, as Socrates, do you have a mystery, or say, an abstract question in mind to pursue when an essay starts up in your thoughts?
Arthur: That’s difficult. It’s often a bit of both. In “Under Siege” in Irish Nocturnes, for example, the essay was in part sparked by an object I stumbled on - Walker’s Diary - a book that had been in the house for years. But in part the essay is also a meditation on what theologians call “the problem of suffering”, something that I’ve thought about on and off for years. “A Tinchel Round My Father”, in Irish Willow, was born largely as a result of a particular photograph, but it also came about because I was thinking about photography and time, and - largely through the notion of “Indra’s Net” - about how things are connected. In Irish Haiku, “Water-Glass” is another attempt to “burrow into the mystery of history through one common place” (to adapt your words).

If that common place, a street in my hometown of Lisburn, Country Antrim, hadn’t existed and meant something to me, though, I’m not sure if abstract reflection alone would have been enough to make me embark on a written exploration of what lies beneath the ordinary surfaces we walk on. Despite my professional background in philosophy and religious studies, I’m not engaged, at least not in these essays, in systematic logical analysis, following an idea through point by point. There is certainly an element of accident, but lots of deliberation too. How essays start up in my thoughts I don’t know. I just wish they did more often!

Saint Thomas: In your essays, human existence is mostly comprised of a complicated array of activities beyond the mundane. You certainly have a wonderful skill in going beyond the immediate, say, a piece of linen, or a common shy bird. But have you ever encountered a thing, a feeling, or otherwise, that you could not put to text?

Arthur: Thanks for this generous/positive assessment of my writing. Your question here immediately brought to mind a section from “Malcolm Unraveled,” one of the essays in Irish Haiku. I hope you won’t consider it poor taste/bad form to quote myself at some length, but I think this very much addresses your question. Malcolm was a neighbor awoken when my cousin and I shouted out in glee at having caught a poplar hawk moth late one night on the street outside our house. The essay tries to dissect the moment when he stood in his pajamas under a street lamp and stared at us disapprovingly.

Thinking about our experience of interrupted stories, the way we are
surrounded by fragments of lives, fractions of things, the fact that we will never know “how things turned out” or what the whole looks like, makes me remember a foolish abstraction I once believed in. I’m in my twenties, butterfly and moth collecting forgotten, sitting in some university library thinking about the logical problems raised by claims that religious experience is ineffable. That is, that God, Brahman, Nirvana, the Tao, and suchlike cannot be adequately described and that they are beyond the reach of words. With the arrogance of youthful and unsubtle thinkers, I conclude that it is logically impossible for anything to be ineffable on the flimsy grounds that it is always possible to say what something is like, or at least that it is possible to indicate that it is more like one thing than another.

Taking another clumsy leap in the dark of specious logic, I further conclude that it would not even be possible to experience something that was completely unlike everything else, so that to claim to have had an ineffable experience would be incoherent. How, I reasoned, could we ever be aware of something that was completely beyond our power to describe it? I’ve long deserted such heroic naiveté no doubt replacing it with other stupidity.

Now, far from defending the position that we could never experience the ineffable, I incline more to the view that everything we experience is ineffable. For how can you really say anything about Malcolm, who can stand emblematically for any moment, unless you decide not to unravel him at all and stay only at the safe surface layer of radical abbreviation that everyday discourse affords? Yes, we can say something (this essay bears testament to that), but the words keep slipping off, there is a sense of the essential nature of the moment escaping. And yet, perversely, it is just this sense that acts like a spur, making me search for the unreachable, impossible grail of a description that might somehow capture the uncatchable.

**Saint Thomas:** So then, in this adventure of catching the grail, what writing techniques do you find helpful in crafting and perhaps embracing the unknowns?

**Arthur:** Well, I guess it’s a case of looking for metaphors, images, stories, and symbols - coupled with periodic reminders to myself and readers that words don’t work beyond a certain extent. Joseph Brodsky once said (in his wonderful essay collection, Less than One) that “As failures go, attempting to recall the past is like trying to grasp the meaning of
existence. Both make one feel like a baby clutching at a basketball: one’s palms keep sliding off.” But of course, in that image of failure, Brodsky has, in fact, succeeded in saying something about this failure. In that same collection, incidentally, Brodsky talks about trying “to make the monotone of the infinite more audible.”

Many of my essays might be seen as attempting this. I mention this comment in the Foreword to Irish Willow, suggesting that “It’s one of the most perplexing characteristics of our species that we often don’t hear the deafening hum that Brodsky identifies (astutely recognizing the need to amplify it yet further).” In one sense the ineffable/unknown/mysterious is commonplace, encountered everywhere you turn. In another sense it’s camouflaged by the mundane and very hard/rare to see. Without wishing to endorse her theistic assumptions, I think Elizabeth Barrett Browning makes the point nicely in Aurora Leigh:

    Earth’s crammed with heaven,
    And every common bush afire with God:
    But only he who sees takes off his shoes
    The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries.

One of the review comments on Irish Willow that pleased me most said that the book “manages to catch quite a bit of the uncatchable mystery of being.” It doesn’t really, but that’s what it’s attempting. The fact that this mystery is staring us in the face the whole time, but that for the most part we operate at a mundane level and ignore it, is maybe not so strange. Would we stay sane if we stayed mindful of the realities of our situation the whole time?

**Saint Thomas:** Earlier you said, “We often don’t hear the deafening hum that Brodsky identifies.” Do you think it’s because we don’t have the ability to “sit”? What would you suggest a writer do to be in a place to hear? Given that writers by default are not economically placed such that they can ferry off to crashing coasts for retreat.

**Arthur:** Writers surely need some parallel to the ability to sit well/attentively. What works for one person, though, may not work for someone else. The kind of practical advice I give myself (and I often ignore my own advice) is to remember to engage with the elements. Very easy in the strange society we live in to insulate yourself from the dark, from stars, from dawn, from trees coming into leaf, from birdsong, from the
seasons. I try to sit at first light most mornings in my garden just drinking coffee and noticing small sights-sounds-smells.

Someone I know does all kinds of obviously adventurous things, and travels widely, and then tells friends about what he’s done/where he’s been. But it just comes out like a rather tedious list and I’m left with a strong sense that nothing’s really touched him, that it’s all so much superficial distraction/activity. I contrast him with a recently deceased neighbor in Ireland (mentioned in “Takabuti’s Tears” in Willow) who, for most of the time I knew him, had an outwardly very quiet existence but was electrifyingly engaged with life. It’s that kind of engagement I envy.

**Saint Thomas:** I was wondering about your choice of language, the density, the thoughtful thickness so to speak. When I picked up “Irish Nocturnes” I noticed an immediate slowing of my thoughts, even the rest of me. I was invited to enjoy, meditate, think, ponder, and even posit with you at your speed. Do you set out to pace your essays as such? Or does this pace in your work reflect your person?

**Arthur:** The pace isn’t premeditated. It just happens. Good to know it’s an infectious tempo and makes you fall into mental step beside it. That’s wished for, certainly, but not planned. And it definitely doesn’t work for everyone. One friend’s response, having read Irish Nocturnes and Irish Willow, was, “There just aren’t enough wizards in them, Chris” - meaning he found them slow and tedious when set beside the likes of Harry Potter. Not sure if the pace reflects the person or not. Certainly it reflects part of the person. But I’m other things besides being an essayist.

**Saint Thomas:** In your essay, “A Paper Star for Brookfield,” you mention the Trappist monk, Thomas Merton. I’ve read much of his work, and enjoy it greatly; and I sense something kindred in your work. Could it be that Merton influences you?

**Arthur:** I’ve not read much Merton, but the little I’ve looked at has impressed me with the authority of its wisdom/courage/insight. A short book, Raids on the Unspeakable, contains an idea that has stuck in mind over the years and sparked off various thoughts. Merton’s view that the very concept of sanity, as it’s held to in modern society, contains a fundamentally non-Christian element in its exclusion of love. Meaning, I think, if you interpret it more widely, that many religiously-spiritually
based notions of identity and purpose view social-psychological norms as so fundamentally misguided as to be evil/sinful/insane.

**Saint Thomas:** Is there anyone whose book covers you've worn away?

**Arthur:** Not always easy to know which books/authors end up being an influence. Sometimes I guess it’s evident from what’s specifically mentioned in the essays. The forewords to all three books refer to haiku, and that mode of writing has had a very definite impact - not least because there are some very “felicitous pairings” that can be made between essays and haiku. I’m stealing that phrase from a book review of Willow that said such pairings could be made between my essays and Seamus Heaney’s poems. Don’t know if that’s true, but there are certainly lots of Heaney’s books on my shelves. I prefer his early collections - and I think some of his prose - in Preoccupations, for example - is excellent.

I’m a big fan of the Best American Essays - though I think this year's volume is a bit disappointing. I like the way the series provides an annual harvest of what’s been appearing across a whole range of interesting publications. It was via Best American Essays that I discovered Reg Saner’s work. I’d put Saner in the same kind of category as the likes of Annie Dillard, Edward Hoagland, and Barry Lopez. This kind of lyrical celebration of nature really strikes a chord. My first encounter with writing of this kind came with the English writer J.A. Baker’s, The Peregrine, a book that deserves to be better known.

In terms of Irish practitioners of this sort of thing, Michael Viney’s A Year’s Turning is notable. Flann O’Brien made a big impression on me. In the days when people thought you’d attained adulthood at age 21 an uncle gave me £21 - back then a very generous gift. I used it to buy all of the great Flann’s work in hardback, though I’d read most of them by then already in paperback. The uncle in question - very bigoted against things Catholic and Southern Irish - was horrified when I told him what I’d spent his money on! Currently, my reading is what you’d describe as catholic - or maybe just chaotic. Of recent things that really stick in mind, Phillipe Descola’s The Spears of Twilight would probably come first out of a very mixed bunch.

**Saint Thomas:** When I run into the Irish here or in the homeland, they tend to launch into proud chat of their heritage. Likewise, It seems that history smartly informs the language and backbone of your essays. How important is history to
your own writing adventures or for essayists in general, no matter the culture?

Arthur: I’d be very wary about making any kind of claim for “essayists in general,” given that the essay is such a varied, diverse, unfettered sort of genre (or anti-genre). So far as I’m concerned, though, yes, history is important, both in the sense of times past, but also (I think more importantly) in terms of giving texture/depth to the present. I mean, every moment trails tendrils back and forward, connects with time/space on a scale that’s stunning. Every microsecond is a kind of portal into time. I’m more interested in local history, personal history, the particular histories of objects, than in any abstract “history of Ireland.”

I guess you might say my focus is on lower case histories, rather than in any upper case, capital HISTORY (though of course the two are interconnected). Nocturnes and Willow both, I think, suggest this interest, but I was surprised how much more pronounced it became in Irish Haiku. One long essay in Haiku, “Obelisk”, started off life with a different title, and with the sub-heading: “Some Reflections on History and Other Matters.” Its ten sections are each prefaced with a quote from some eminent historian (sorry, I guess that should be Historian) which I then proceed either to illustrate or mock. For instance, Part I is headed with M.C. Lemon’s: “The historian should not people his narratives with pseudo-human agents such an animals, angels, ghosts or gods” - and I then focus on my mother’s memory of a snake preserved in a jar of formaldehyde as a way into the particular nugget of local/family history on which this essay dwells.

Saint Thomas: If you were to stand up from your writing chair and look around, what do you see? Feel? I mean, what are your empirical surroundings like in terms of place?

Arthur: Most of my writing at the moment happens first thing in the morning, before anyone else is up and before my working day begins, sitting at a plain pine kitchen table. This is often before light. The room has no view. When things are at the stage of moving from notebooks into electronic form, I work in my study. Book lined, paper-strewn, littered with some of the “found” talismans I mentioned (including the pelvis, the otolith, the willow pattern plate etc). I sit at a desk that looks out of a bay window offering a good view across some of the slate roofs of a small Welsh farming town to the green hills beyond it. It’s not my ideal place to write, it’s not my ideal place to be, it doesn’t speak to me in the way some other places do. But it’s where I am just now and it
works well enough. The university here is the smallest in Europe, and the one with the oldest degree awarding powers in England and Wales after Oxford and Cambridge. It has a long tradition of strength in my disciplinary area of Theology and Religious Studies. When a lectureship came up here it seemed like a smart move to go for it.

My most intensive period of writing happened in St Andrews, when we borrowed someone’s house there for half a year. That’s where Willow was written. There’s something about the quality of the light in that part of Scotland - coastal Fife - that seems to feed my spirit a richer mix than anything I’ve encountered elsewhere. The sky there is quite different from the sky here. Writing seems to take off in Fife much more easily. I dream of being able to get back there on a permanent footing, but it’s hard to see how the practicalities of such a move could be sorted at the moment. As things are, we try to spend a couple of weeks there each year. Not enough time to write much, but I invariably come away with scribbles/fragments/ideas that sustain my writing when we get back home.

Saint Thomas: What is on your plate now?

Arthur: Well, Irish Haiku is imminent. Publication was initially scheduled for two days from now, but a glitch with the CIP data means a delay. Having not so long ago dealt with the proofs, and having recently seen the illustrations for the first time, all sorts of echoes from the book are very much to the front of my mind.

In terms of future writing, I’m in a kind of limbo just now, weighing up whether to work towards a fourth book of essays, or just concentrate on individual essays without any thought of where they may lead beyond themselves. I have a couple of new essays out seeking journal publication at the moment and a couple more nagging to get from the back to the front of the mind. Sometimes, though, with work on the Lagan Press selection completed not so long ago, I wonder if I might not be better to turn again to poetry, particularly haiku. Or perhaps do something completely different. Occasionally I speculate about marrying essay-style and academic-style.

Saint Thomas: And any plans for a voyage to this side?

Arthur: I’ve no immediate plans for a transatlantic trip. Littler jour-
neys planned are one to Ireland in a couple of weeks, and one to Scotland in the summer. In the last few months I’ve also found images coming back from a trip made to Norway over twenty years ago. I find I’ve a hankering to go back there at some point.

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**Samuel Saint Thomas** was born in a gritty Pennsylvania steel town to Jazz musicians who both became Pentecostal preachers. A former founding member of a religious order, Samuel has since earned his BA in both Philosophy and English from East Stroudsburg University and an MFA in Creative Writing from Fairleigh Dickinson University. Besides his various creative interests, he teaches composition at a small suburban university and is restoring a Chinese Tea House in the mountains outside New York City.

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