



etruscan press



Interview with Kevin Oderman

Kevin Oderman's *Cannot Stay: Essays on Travel* has beguiled readers since its release in July. Editorial associate Sam Chiarelli interviewed Kevin about how he brought this collection of essays to life.

Q: What attracted you to travel writing?

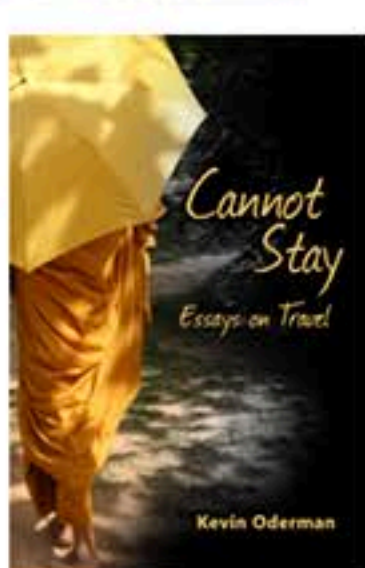
Travel appealed to me. And in this I am nothing if not common. Then, traveling, suffering the many difficulties, I began to wonder what was calling me to travel. That wondering is the source of my desire to write about travel.

Perhaps at the core, traveling disrupts our sense of time. Our lives fall into routines, and although routines slow time in the moment, when we look back at all that sameness, memory finds little to hold to. So, in memory, routine shortens our lives. The years can just slip away, and when they do, encroaching darkness does seem to "hurry near." Out traveling, a few days or a week, a month, seems to pass disconcertingly quickly, but in memory the parade of new experiences makes our time away seem long. So, in this very limited sense, travel cheats time, gives us more life. At least I think so.

In *Cannot Stay* I have tried to register this disruption of time, but also the ways in which the new of travel disrupts what we take as given, what our culture says is just so. Travel even a little and our cultural certainties begin to feel smug. And I think this is a good thing. I want that. I want such certainties unraveled.

Q: How do you develop a sense of journey for your reader?

I tried to evoke the experience of the long flight overseas in the introduction to *Cannot Stay*. Most of my essays are written in vignettes, sometimes narrative, often not, but the links between the vignettes generally are not narrative. I hope the sense of being there is stronger than the sense of getting there.



Q: What is the writing process like for you, turning experiences into essays?

Experience is so chaotic, and traveling—the strangeness of the new place—makes it more so. So I try not to write too soon after a trip. I count on memory (or is it forgetting?) to sift through my experiences. I let memory be my first editor. I'm not at all confident that I can recognize what will stick with me in the flux of lived experience. Often images will rise out of memory with the force of dream, or myth, sometimes things I hardly noticed at the time. I like to work with these memories, the ones that stick and are perhaps burnished by being lifted out of their original context.

Then I'm finding patterns, making meaning. During the actual composition, this is most like listening. The material comes to me, accretes around a few images or relations or ideas. It grows. Then it's all about shaping, structure, getting the language right.

Q: You said memory is like an editor for you. Can you expand a little more on how memory affects your work?

Often memory works by association, one memory calling up another, related memory. And it feels like there is already a pattern there to discover. Of course, the mind is busy and much of memory is random; it's like listening to a song on the radio through a lot of static. Sometimes the song comes clear and possesses you. Sometimes it doesn't.

For instance, I have been haunted for years—almost twenty years—by a memory that has never found a place in a pattern of memories. Here it is: I was living in Pakistan, in Lahore. I was on the way home from a party. I had a car and a driver and I had dropped a friend off at home and headed out into surprisingly heavy traffic. It was around midnight. Stop and go. Six lanes. We came up alongside a trailer loaded with I-beams, which was being pulled by another trailer loaded the same. Light glaring on all that steel piled high up over our little yellow car. Then our lane opened up and we slipped forward. I was almost asleep and then astonished to see that the trailers were hitched to a wooden cart. A man in a white shalwar kamis stood in the cart sending his whip—I think he had a whip—over the six camels in harness that were pulling all that steel. Something about how the camels leaned into the weight of it, the traffic, the glaring light. Bright as hallucination, indelible. I've revisited that moment, or, better, it has visited me, untold times since that night. Far more often than anything else that happened to me during the many months I lived in Lahore. But it never wanted to connect to anything else and I never found a use for it. Well, not until now.

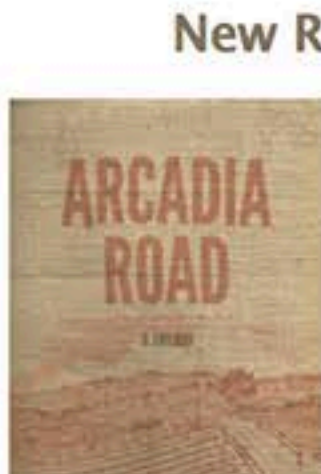
Q: I know you don't consciously travel so you can write about it, so how do you decide where you want to go?

Many kinds of things have sent me traveling. Sometimes it's no more than a photograph, of a landscape or cityscape, and I find myself already going. I've traveled for art, for architecture, for archaeology, for dance. I've traveled to honor writers who shaped me, Karnak for H.D. [Hilda Doolittle], Alexandria for Cavafy and Durrell, and that's just Egypt. I require little in the way of instigation. I travel to be shaken from my certainties, including certainties about who I am. And I've found that travel delivers. I don't ever remember wishing I'd stayed at home.

Cannot Stay: Essays on Travel is available now in paperback and as an ebook. Oderman has also been interviewed about his latest title by [Hippocampus Magazine](#), [Brevity](#), and [WVIA-FM](#).

Sam Chiarelli is completing an MFA in Creative Nonfiction at Wilkes University. He is working on his first full-length manuscript—an exploration of humanity's fascination with dinosaurs.

New Releases from Etruscan



Arcadia Road: A Trilogy by Thorpe Moeckel

Arcadia Road is three long poems – narrative, lyrical, meditative – each as audacious as down-to-earth, each as strange as intimate. Moeckel's trilogy is as rich, lush and organic as the soil of his Virginia Blue Ridge homestead. In a mode both contemporary and as old as Hesiod, Moeckel sustains a cosmic and earthbound incursion into essential techniques and textures of life. Moeckel's poems are organic and intimate, revolving around the time, work, grace and struggle of bringing food from field to table.

Crave: Sojourn of a Hungry Soul by Laurie Jean Cannady

Crave is a coming-of-age memoir that chronicles a young girl's journey through abuse and impoverishment. The effusive narration descends into the depths of personal and sexual degradation, perpetual hunger for food, safety and survival. While moving through gritty exposés of poverty, abuse, and starvation, *Crave* renders a continuing search for sustenance that simply will not die.



Brady Wins Ohio Governor's Award for the Arts



Senate President Keith Faber presenting the Ohio Governor's Award for Arts Education to Dr. Philip Brady, along with House Speaker Clifford A. Rosenberger • Photo Credit: Terry Gilliam

This year has been an important one for Etruscan Press. We've welcomed breathtaking new voices to our booklist and we've been recognized by AWP for our contributions as a leading small press. One of our proudest moments has been celebrating our Executive Director, Phil Brady, receiving the Ohio Governor's Award for the Arts.

Brady was selected for the Governor's Award because of his work in art education and outreach programs. By not only producing acclaimed works of literature, but encouraging others to produce their own, Brady has exemplified the values he's instilled at Etruscan Press—to bear imagination and share it with the world.

Through a variety of outreach activities, Brady has helped to promote literacy across cultural spectrums. He's been critical in encouraging reading among teenaged students in inner-city schools, octogenarians in retirement homes, and inmates in prison. He's also pioneered Little Free Library stations in Youngstown, Ohio.

Etruscan Press is proud to continue Brady's vision of promoting a dialogue among genres, cultures, and voices.

About Etruscan Press:

Housed at Wilkes University and partnering with Youngstown State University, Etruscan is a non-profit literary press working to produce and promote books that nurture the dialogue among genres, cultures, and voices.

For the latest Etruscan events, please visit [our website](#).

