



RICHARD BERNSTEIN

NO SERMONS IN STONE

This time it's not the statue of Goya surrounded by demons
outside the Prado, nor the blue note of the Hungarian guitarist
and his daughter with her paper flowers in the Plaza del Sol,
but a stretch of evening along the back road from Syracuse—
the crippled birch, the bent guardrail, a teaspoon of old moonlight
for the skunk's ruined carcass—after yet another all-day
State-Ed luncheon on *Jargon and Acronyms for a Brighter World*.
This time it's the lengthened shadow burrowing the underbrush
along the shoulder where the local committee on literacy
sniffs the air for outcomes, blueprints with performance indicator columns,
the latest thises and thats blown all the way from Albany.
It's the boney syntax, the data-driven shagbark hickory breath,
beyond which sounds only the unsolicited nostalgia
of some animal cry confined to its wonder.

What is it, after all, that the future would have us believe?
That with enough bad coffee and a little training,
high-stakes testing will be our bar graph to the stars?
That it's true what they say: We enter and leave
alone, like lovers, but our fifteen year-olds
have fallen behind Iceland and Estonia?

What if in the end there's only a little pity for strangers,
a little more Yeats from the stone, more gods from the river,
more gods for the dead?
Will we still presume love is a knife we're born with,
a machete in the wilderness, a hungry thing rustling the leaves—
and then leash it in the backyard, all shiver and howl,
to study it as it peels its own belly?

And if there are no sermons in stone, not enough conferences
or reform initiatives in the universe to keep us from our wonder,
will we think it enough to pitch our tents among the demons and dreamers
and, like Goya with his bats and owls, question which is which?
Will we hold our rallies in central parks? Will there be horses?
When the occupation is complete, will we still be asking
who among us will be the last arrested, and who'll be left
to conduct a miscue analysis of responses to question 26?

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© 2016 Richard Bernstein is an 11-time recipient of the Bright Hill Press New York High-School Poetry Teacher of the Year Award and is in his 30th year as a high school English teacher in Norwich, New York. This poem was first published in *The Georgia Review*, Winter 2012, and is reprinted here with permission from the author.

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left behind

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chairs



chairs



chairs



chairs



empty rooms



NO NO DRINK
FROM HERE

empty rooms



empty rooms



empty rooms



Turn Light
ON
a new
style of
Toner

ENTREPRENEUR
BUSINESS

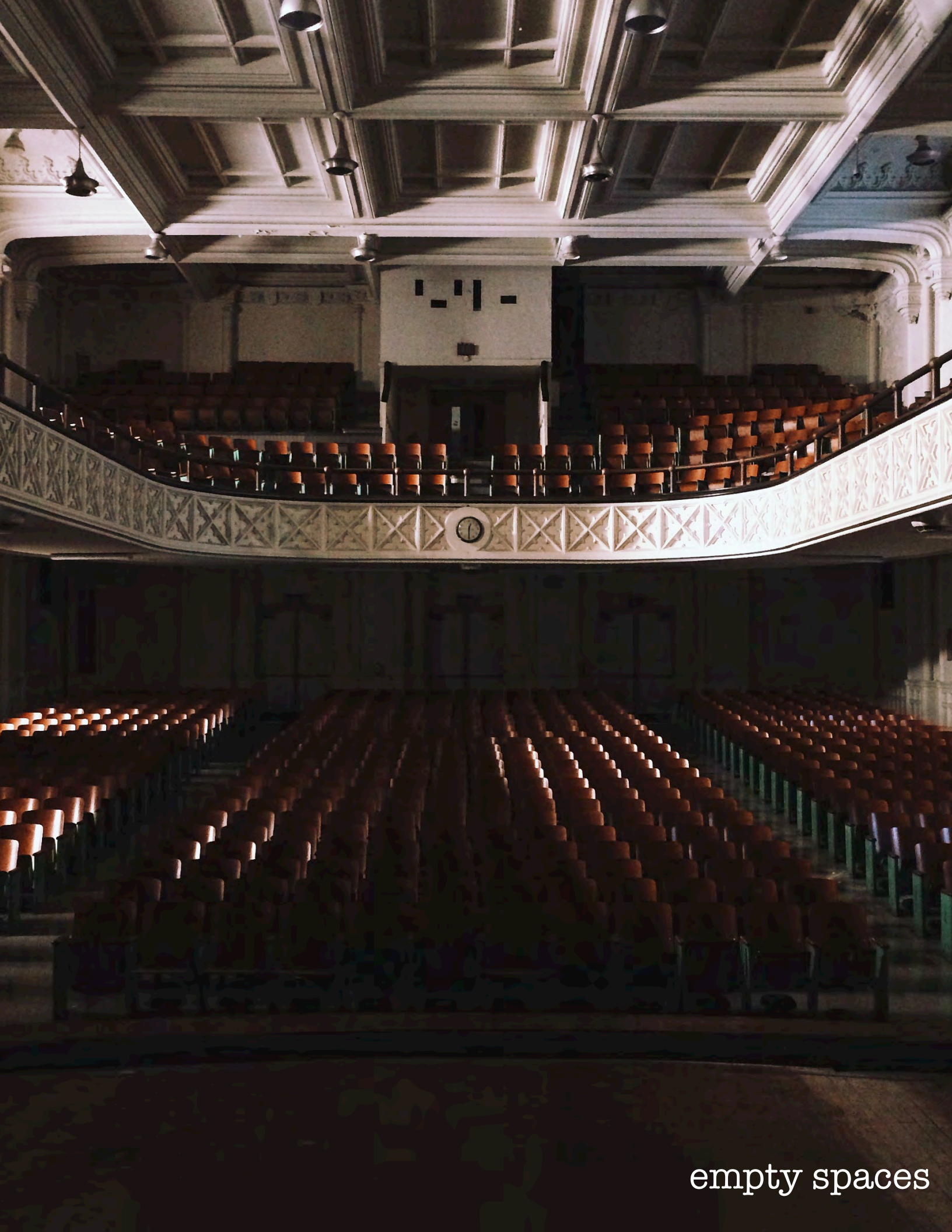
lots left behind



lots left behind



empty spaces



empty spaces

