



Bayou Review

Spring 1989

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EMPTY MINDS
Crystal Clay-Ardoin

Mind so empty,
like cobwebs of ancient
homes for sale

Lost ideas
No creativity
like country wells
gone dry

Rollercoasting
endlessly through
tunnels of darkness
unable to feel the tears you cry
or
imagine the mind so empty.

DOOR
Crystal Clay-Ardoin

Many have abused me,
hit and slammed with
a force uncontrolled

Pulp inside throbs immensely
and my spine rattles
with each angered movement

When days are bad you
force the key with
violent insertion and
grab me without any sensitivity
then close me again
left exposed to
nature's beatings.

JUST A BUM
Richard Davidson

human waste lies on the pavement
lives beneath a bridge
screams at unseen demons
& feeds & bleeds like you & me
while passersby don't break their stride
 (no cause to pause . . .
 it's academic anyway--
 this epidemic's here to stay)

like a withered snakeskin
slithering in the wind
 he could be
 tossed from the park
 lost in the darkness
 what's it matter
 what's the matter

just so much flotsam & jetsam choking the river
it's not my brother but another broken mirror



Untitled (oil on canvas)
Linda Ramirez

It's known as the Eighth Wonder of the World. Sometimes I take the place for granted; after all, it's just a building on the Loop, and there are plenty of buildings on the Loop, just as there are now plenty of domed stadiums all over the country. But the Astrodome was the first. The original. The forerunner. It helped introduce indoor baseball and AstroTurf and lots of other technological breakthroughs to the game. You may argue that outdoor baseball on natural grass is the only pure form of the game, until you try to watch a ballgame in summer in Houston; thank God for air conditioning. Yep, the Dome has withstood the test of time. It's as much a part of Houston as oil and humidity.

It's also the home park of the Houston Astros. My team.

To this very day, I still feel a certain thrill when I walk up the ramp leading from the parking lot to the stadium, the shrill sound of scorecard-sellers exhorting me to purchase their publication because I "can't tell the players without a program." Of course, even though I *can* tell the players without a program, I buy one, usually for the statistics it relays or the photos it contains. Tonight, a picture of Astros first baseman Glenn Davis mashing a high fastball into the ionosphere graces the cover. Three flags—American, Texas, and Astros—are flying outside the entrance to the stadium, whipped into a frenzy by the late afternoon breeze. By now, I've forgotten where I parked the car, forgotten which entrance I used, forgotten about my problems, forgotten about everything but baseball. Ask me who's pitching. Ask me who's in a slump. Ask me how many homers Jimmy Wynn hit in 1969. Ask me anything about baseball right now. I'm in tune with the game. The mere sight of the Dome has that effect on me.

A rush of cold air greets me as I enter the stadium. The curious blend of crowd buzz and organ music fills the corridors, as does the smell of hot dogs and popcorn from the crowded concession stands. The mesmerizing drone is punctured by an occasional "Peanuts—get your peanuts!" and the "crack!" of wood against horsehide as the players take batting practice. I find my seat in the mezzanine and arrange my feast in an orderly

fashion: hot dog in one hand, drink in the other, chips in my lap, peanuts on the floor, mustard on my chin. Popcorn all over the place. It's one hour before the game starts, and my attention is focused on Astros second baseman Billy Doran as he fields a few grounders and turns a few double plays.

Second base was my position when I played Little League ball back in the early '70s, at a complex known as Dow Park in North Houston. I was raised at Dow Park as surely as some people are raised on a farm or in the city. We lived there about six nights a week. Well, we never actually *slept* there, but we did just about everything else there: ate, argued, hugged, cried, laughed, lost friends, made friends. *Lived*. I wonder how we ever found time to play ball. As the game starts, and I finish off the last peanut in the bag, I think about those days, when baseball was something I played as well as watched . . .

"It's a beautiful day here at Dow Park, sports fans, as the championship game between the Phillies and the Pirates is about to get underway. Both teams finished the season at 12-2, each beating the other once. The Pirates have a formidable team, while the Phillies rely on a scrappy offense and the pitching of Steve Mikolajcek. The stands are jammed with fans, and this should be an exciting contest."

Hmmmmph, he didn't mention me. Second baseman, leadoff hitter, 4-foot-7-inch, 74-pound Billy Shaw. Billy the Phillie. Terror of the league. My method was simple: get close to the plate, crouch low, make a menacing face at the pitcher, and draw a walk. I had walked about a million times in those fourteen games, and Steve would drive me home practically every time. What a team.

Actually, we *were* pretty good. We all liked each other, got along really well. Mr. Goodwin was our coach, and my father was his assistant. They were great to play for, until we struck out or made an error. At those times, they would put their hands on our shoulders and quietly, compassionately, tell us that they had daughters at home who could do better. My sisters were legendary ball players without ever having stepped on a baseball field.

Anyway, the announcer is right. It *is* a beautiful day. It's almost dusk, and three flags—American, Texas, and Dow Park—are being whipped into a frenzy by the afternoon breeze. We are

playing on the middle field of a three-field complex, a beautifully manicured playing surface. They've brought in some extra stands to hold the crowd that's expected to arrive, and arrive it does. The place is packed. Some kids are hanging out behind the green outfield wall, and the announcer, sitting high above the field in a white tower, warns them not to sit on the fence during the game. They make some rude comments and head for the concession stand to buy Frito pies and bother the counter girl. I laugh, not without some nervousness, and grab a bat to warm up.

The park looks clean and fresh today . . . no, make that tonight. Darkness has sneaked in, and the huge, harsh-white lights are turned on. I look for Mom in the ever-swelling crowd. She is in her usual position—head in hands, eyes covered, shaking like a leaf. She gets so nervous for me when I play, but tonight . . . heck, the game hasn't even *started* yet. She'll be a basket case by the third inning.

Anyway, as I was saying, the park looks great, exactly like I imagined it would look for a championship game—the chain-linked fence lined with people, the smell of lime baselines and freshly-cut grass hanging in the air, and the league president throwing out the first ball. Wonderful. I would treasure this moment forever. The Big Game. Coach said that this is what we play for (actually, some of the guys play for the free sno-cones the players get after games, but that's another story). As for me, well, I like a good sno-cone, but this is for a *trophy*, man. I picture myself at the awards ceremony, running up to get mine, hearing my name called out, standing with my teammates, league champions, *league champions* . . .

Suddenly, the surreal, dreamy quality of the moment is interrupted by the umpire's shout of "Batter up!"

He means me.

I run from the dugout, small bat in smaller hands, and dig in, peering at the pitcher through my thick horn-rimmed glasses, giving him my best menacing look, trying not to appear too nervous. I don't look in the stands, but I'm sure that my mom is covering her face, rocking back and forth and asking my sister if I'm wearing mismatched socks. This is it. The pitcher winds and

delivers, the ball comes hurtling towards me, up and out over the plate, just where I like it. I'm not walking this time. I close my eyes and swing.

CRACK!

I open my eyes. The crowd rises. The ball arches higher, higher, reaching its apex before beginning its long, gradual fall. I look at the fence; I think it's going to make it over. The left fielder goes back, back, back and looks up. It's gone. The crowd goes wild. I just smile.

Glenn Davis has just mashed a high fastball into the ionosphere.

Astros lead, 1-0.

Back to reality.

HER

Damn, another stupid fight. Can I pick them or what?, I thought as I slammed the car door. Stupid men? After I had yelled to Jack that I could find my own way home, he had screeched off without another word, leaving me to indeed fend for myself. It started to drizzle rain, which led to another outburst of "damn" from me, and I ran to the nearest shelter. Jack and I had just had dinner on a street populated with restaurants and clubs, and I found myself huddled just outside the "Blue Ice," a well-known singles club.

As the dampness started to penetrate my blouse, I decided to go in and call a cab. I stepped into the club and the smell of liquor, smoke, and an overabundance of Giorgio perfume immediately met me. After the fight I just had, the rain, and the overall bad day, this attack on my senses made me livid. *Just find a phone and get the hell out of this hellhole*, I fumed.

I was uncertain about which way to turn to look for the pay phone, and stood, surveying the room, searching. From every angle all I could see were men putting the make on the women, and the women pretending sophistication. I suddenly felt eyes on me and turned to the sardonic smile of a stranger. He was sitting on a stool at the bar and just stared at me. The more he stared, the more ill at ease I became until I decided to just walk around until I found that blasted phone. I would ask no one. I was just too mad.

HIM

William was bored. Each time he went to a singles bar, he swore it would be his last. Too many Friday and Saturday nights wasted. Nothing but pointless chitchat, liquor, smoke, cheap perfume, and phonies. He had seen them all—from men driving up in rented Porsches and passing themselves off as successful businessmen, to file clerks who had spent a week's salary to buy an "L.A. Law" business suit to imitate prominent career women. He had seen each of them meet and lie to each other about how they wanted to meet an honest man or woman and have a meaningful relationship. As he was laughing to himself about the absurdity of it, he saw her enter.

Another one, he thought. She was dressed very well. Probably on welfare, with three children at home. He visualized that she would return home and tell the three expectant children that she had failed again. "No daddy material out there again, kids, have to look again next week."

There she was, surveying the room, with a cold calculated look. A man could just as well have been at a check-out counter, the way she took inventory. "Gucci shoes, \$300, Armani suit, \$600, bikini briefs, \$12..." He could just read her mind. Oh, this club had them all. She caught him staring at her and frowned at his mocking smile. She turned her head and started working the room.

THE RIDE HOME: GULF FREEWAY

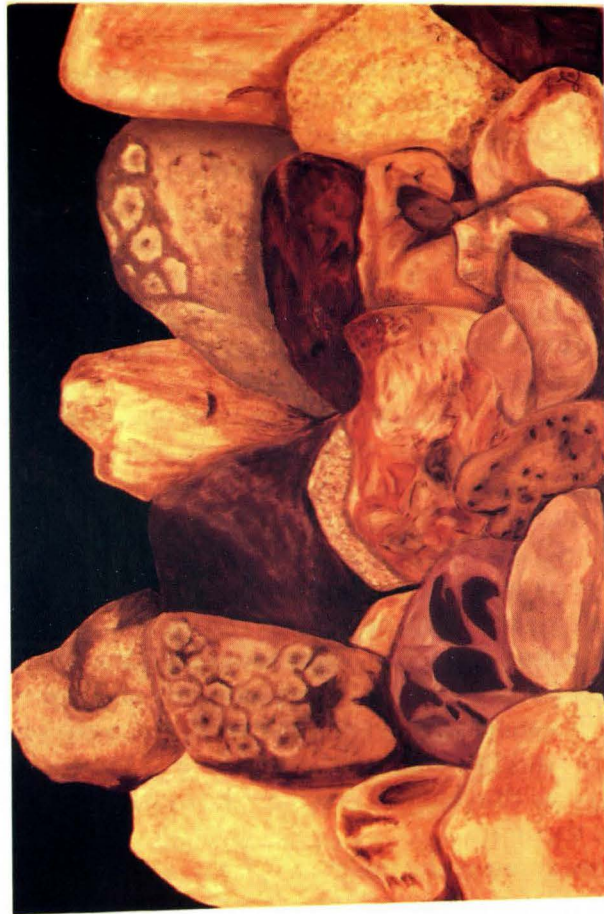
Fabian Worsham

Nineteen miles down I-45,
nearly halfway to Galveston,
the sharp-edged outlines
of Houston's skyscrapers
framed in the rearview
still dazzle the eyes, incised
like a cameo against the horizon,

a profile as direct as this
highway to the suburbs—
end-to-end concrete slabs
bumping in syncopation—
a concrete beeline on a scale
a Georgian has to get used to.

Alien here,
attuned to the foothills'
undulant folds, baroque
convolutions of roads
and vines, for a long time
I saw nothing.

But today prairie stretches to the arced edge of the world,
its grasses burnished russet, rippling in wind, a face
turned to the sun, open and undisguised. And above—
field on field, infinite, miraculous—the sky.



Rocks (oil on canvas)
Betty Lehnert

A loud metallic clank shook the walls of the cell and the cobwebs in Velma Faye's head. Cautiously, she opened one eye and looked around. God her head hurt. Where the hell was she? She attempted to focus through the Jack Daniels fog that enveloped her brain. There was a scratchy old gray blanket that smelled like dirty feet wrapped tightly around her. Pulling it closer around her shoulders she muttered softly, "Lord, I wonder how many of them there brain cells I killt last night." Suddenly the all-too-familiar urine and puke stench of the drunk tank caught her attention. "Son of a bitch, I'm in jail." Somehow she didn't care. It was warm, safe, and she was so tired. She didn't need anybody or anything. She'd lived forty-five years and never asked a person for help, and she wasn't about to change now.

A wispy voice invaded her clouded thoughts. "Is there room at the inn?"

Quickly Velma Faye rolled over to see who was talking to her. She opened her mouth and made a sucking noise with her overly large, bucked teeth, "I knew I killt too many brain cells." Standing at the door looking down at her was the strangest looking person she'd ever seen. It was a young girl probably in her early twenties with purple and orange spiked hair that was shaved in a little checkerboard pattern on the right side of her head. She was dressed in all black—in something that Velma Faye thought was for exercising—"them leopards and tights," she called them. The most significant features were the girl's big eyes. Velma Faye couldn't tell the color of them. They looked black, but there was a thin haze of green on the outside perimeter. Strange, she thought.

"I said, is there room at the inn?"

"Who the hell do you think you are, Mary?" She snorted and then laughed in self-satisfaction at the joke she had made.

"How did you know?"

Velma put one of her Maybelline Red Rendezvous lacquered nails in her mouth and flipped it, making a loud noise, "sit your ass down, girl. I'm too tired to play games." She pulled her feet

up to make room for the strange girl.

The girl's movements were fluid and exaggerated. She reminded Velma of one of those marionettes she had seen at the county fair when she was a kid of about thirteen. That was the year she let Billy Joe Bradshaw get to second base in the tunnel of love. He'd scored a home run, but one of the carnival fellas came through shining a flashlight on the cars. No bother, she and Billy Joe went all the way the next week in the back of her daddy's bass boat heaped up on old mildewy-smelling, orange life preservers in the garage. The thought made her smile—something she didn't do much anymore.

Mary sat down on the cold metal bench and pulled her knees up around her chest. "They brought me here in a spaceship, you know."

Velma's Red Rendezvous mouth turned down at the ends, "Sure honey, whatever you say."

Mary's eyes widened, and she leaned over and got so close to Velma that Velma thought their noses would touch. "They did. I was driving down Memorial and they stopped me and put me in their helicopter, and then brought me to this bunker."

"Sweet Jesus," Velma spouted.

"Yes, Jesus is sweet, the Bible tells me so."

Velma Faye pushed a strand of Clairol Copper Penny hair out of her eyes, and shook her head. "What's the matter with you, honey? Was you born too early or somethin'?"

Again the wide eyes stared back, they never blinked, which Velma thought was creepy. Suddenly the girl screamed and pointed to the floor, "Crawling shit, crawling shit, get rid of it!"

Velma Faye looked at the dirty gray painted cement floor and sure as hell didn't see any crawling shit. "Honey, that is brown paint from these cold-ass benches we're sitting on, and there sure as hell ain't nothin' crawlin' down there."

The young girl nervously ran her finger over one of the shaved portions of her scalp. "Thank you, I don't like crawling shit, it frightens me. You know I am very sensitive, in fact I am probably the most sensitive person you will ever meet. No one understands me, and I don't know why." A tear formed at the corner of her eye and began making its path down her pale cheek.

If they do understand you then they're ready for the looney bin, thought Velma Faye. "Come on now, hon, don't cry. There ain't nothin' in this world bad enough to make a person cry. As my daddy used to tell me, the lousy son of a bitch, you gotta be tough in order to make it. Live on your own, and don't ask nobody for nothin', and don't let nobody get to you. There ain't no one worth cryin' for."

"Not even for yourself?"

Velma shook her head and her dyed, orange curls bounced as she laughed. "If you cry for yourself, you make sure no one can see you do it. People don't care nothin' about what makes you feel good or bad. They're all too wrapped up in their own life to give a shit about yours."

The girl appeared to completely ignore her cellmate as she reached over and jerked off several sheets of toilet paper. Tearing them in small pieces, she threw them in the air and laughed with childlike delight, "It's snowing. Look, it's snowing. Whee."

"Hush now, you're making too much noise. You don't want that butch matron to come down and bitch at us do you?"

"My brother uses butch wax on his hair, but I don't think he is a matron. Have you ever wondered if you are really experiencing something or if you are dreaming? How do you know that this isn't all a dream?"

The Jack Daniels fog was lifting and sobering reality was beginning to take effect. Velva Faye was pensive, which was unusual for her, and spoke softly and slowly. "I know this ain't a dream because I wouldn't dream about bein' someplace like this. Now maybe in a nightmare I'd be here. No, this ain't no dream."

Mary opened and closed her lids as she tried to focus on Velma Faye. "Where would you be if this was a dream?"

"I'd be in a big fancy house with two stories and lots of bathrooms. I'd have me some servants and people to take care of me. People from all over would come and visit me because they liked me. I would be important—I'd be somebody..." The girl's pupils were dilated. That was what made them look so strange, and that's why she was talking so crazy. Velma Faye was relieved because the girl wasn't a retard or something. "What did you take?"

"I didn't steal anything. I do not steal. To steal is to break one of the ten commandments."

"I mean... what kind of drug did you take to do this to you?"

"Life's elixir. A little bit of reality mixed with a little bit of fantasy, and seasoned with the salty tears of our nothings. Would you like some? It's better than that you've been doing. I never get sick, I don't smell like alcohol, it's not fattening, and I can fit it in my pocket. I'll bet your high doesn't fit in your pocket." She leaned her head back and began laughing hysterically. "No, you can't fit your high in your pocket, and you can't pocket your high anymore. You're at the end of the road. Dead end, wrong way, closed for construction."

Heavy footsteps, getting heavier, approached the cell, and a gruff voice growled, "Shut up in there. You're disturbing the other prisoners. The lady from AA is here. You wanna see her?"

Velma Faye snorted and belligerently held her chin in the air, "I don't need to see the lady and listen to her twelve-step bullshit. I think my cellmate needs somebody though. She's out in la-la land."

The matron rapped her nightstick against her palm, "Don't give me any trouble, Velma Faye. If you think you have a cellmate then you're in la-la land."

In a jerky movement Velma Faye turned and looked at the empty bench next to her. "She was here. She was here. Mary who saw the crawling shit and the falling snow. I swear. She had orange and purple hair. You know, you brought her in here."

The matron shouted over her shoulder to a faceless image, "Call the doctor. We've got another one beginning DTs."

"No. No. I seen her. I seen her. A long purple thread lay on the blanket in front of her. Velma Faye wasn't sure if it was from the purple angora she wore or from Mary's hair. Words echoed in her ears. 'Have you ever wondered if you are really experiencing something or if you are dreaming?'"

Tears formed in her eyes and she tried to fight them back. With difficulty she whispered, "Help me, please."

SHE'S NOT AFRAID TO WALK AT NIGHT

Carmen Anderson

Under cold star light,
arrogant, alone she walks,
knowing others sleep.

They glow in the dark—
a pair of eyes, quickly gone;
she feels a shiver.

Now, dark illusion,
like roots pushing through concrete,
penetrates the night.

ABSOLUTE COLOR

Scott Ward

Black is never really black
And white is never white
Everything's a shade of gray
And who's to say what's right.
This world has no absolutes
In form or shape or color
Without our many differences
Our lives would be much duller.

ANGEL OF MERCY

Kevin Fricke

Stopping her battered car,
She hurries toward me with
A thermos and warm blanket.
She calls me an image of
Silent, walking poetry as
I shuffle to my frozen,
Cardboard box, to huddle
Beneath an I-59 overpass.
Shivering, I take the
Steaming paper cup she
Holds in her shaking hand.
I see her type so often,
Afraid to touch me but
Still with that hand,
out-stretched and unempty
Until she pulls it back
To be examined later.
But I am not so different.
I could have been her
Son or husband, but I
Got caught—and gave up—
Afraid to try or end up
Caught in a hypocrisy
I couldn't understand
And I have suffered for
My indecision and can
Understand only too well
As she hurries back to
Her warm and waiting car
Leaving a puff of warm poison
In the air behind her and a
Momentary warmth in my
Belly. Silently, I thank
Her and turn up my collar.

SHE'S NOT AFRAID TO WALK AT NIGHT
Carmen Anderson

Under cold star light,
straggled, alone she walks,
knowing others sleep

They glow in the dark—
a pair of eyes, quickly gone
she feels a shiver.



(acrylic on canvas)
Tim Litzmann

IT WAS DARK AND SILENT
around them
rows and the warm
blue light of the
stars and planets
filled the sky
and the stars
were so bright
that they seemed
to be alive
and breathing
and the stars
were so close
that they seemed
to be just
out of reach
and the stars
were so beautiful
that they seemed
to be just
what they needed
and the stars
were so bright
that they seemed
to be just
what they needed



(acrylic on canvas)
Tim Litzmann

OF PLACE AND TIME

Mary Harms

The chair set, firmly anchored in cement, at the base of a maple tree in our backyard. Iron and wood painted forest green, with the exception of the numbers 196 in white on the middle slat, the chair had been one of hundreds in Sportsman's Park in St. Louis. My father had taken the chair when the park was being torn down. He, as well as many other local fans, had gone to salvage a memento from the old park.

He'd placed the chair under the tree near the rear of the yard, but in full view from the patio door. Each spring he checked to see how the chair had held up under the winter's snow. He then made any needed repairs. Each summer he repainted the chair, always the original color, and he carefully touched up the numbers.

I'd always wondered why that little chair meant so much to him. Sportsman's Park was one of only a few landmarks that had vanished since his childhood. Most of the places he frequented in his growing years were still standing throughout the city and even played a large part in my own childhood.

Often, he would spend Saturday afternoons taking me through his old neighborhood. He'd show me his home, the little house with the iron fence surrounding the front yard, where his grandmother had raised him. He'd point across the street to Fairgrounds Park, the place where he'd first played stickball and later, when he could afford a glove, played baseball and dreamed of the day when he'd make the big leagues. He'd also point out the houses that were especially good for collecting milk bottles which, if he collected enough, earned him a nickel to go to a movie.

We'd go past the schools he attended, and sometimes on Sunday mornings we'd even attend mass at Holy Name where he had been an altar boy. The places and moods were many, but I suppose my favorite spot was Crown Candy, the malt shop where we'd stop for a sundae, just as he had done forty years earlier.

Our trips also included visits with relatives and the many friends he'd known through the years. Though removed from the small neighborhoods where they'd once lived together, they

Mary Harms 21

remained near the city, near home.

Yet, through the sentimental recollections and the warm visits, I heard a certain sadness in his voice. His city had grown beneath his feet, expanded beyond his ken. The comfortable and familiar were now surrounded by the new and different. Those places he once knew so well now belonged to a city that had outgrown his memory. We had to drive a good distance from the suburbs in which we lived in order to visit. Often the trip home was filled not with reminiscences but with silence.

Still, I grew up to believe that, as it had been for my father's generation, the city I knew would not disappear; those special places and family members would remain. Even as I left home to make what I believed would be a temporary stay in another state, I thought that the special places and people of my own childhood would remain. They would greet me when I returned, welcoming me back to my home.

Yet, with each return my home seemed newer, less familiar. I did not share my father's good fortune that family and places remained somewhat the same. Many in the family, my generation, have moved across the state or across the country. Many neighbors and friends have done the same. And those special little places of my youth have changed quickly and drastically.

The serene little farm where I'd gotten my only glimpse of horses has become a condominium complex. The drive-in where hours of teenage mischief were passed has been torn down and replaced by a shopping mall. The church I'd grown up in has been thoroughly remodeled and modernized to attract new parishioners. Even the quiet park behind our house now has lighted baseball diamonds and a track surrounding it. The park is always filled when I visit, but I've yet to find a familiar face.

Over the course of my trips home, I have come to understand the significance of the old chair for my father. For him it stood as a small reminder of another place and time, a small memorial to the city he called home.

On my last visit home, I spent an afternoon helping my mother with the yard work. While raking away leaves, I came upon what remained of the old chair. I paused to stare at the splintered slats of wood and the rusted scraps of metal that once held them together. I found a piece that still had a dull hint of the once deep green finish. I slipped it into my pocket and went on with my raking.

QUESTION TAG

Khatija Khwaja

As a child I believed
God is Mercy
Watching me, loving me, every minute
But growth was accompanied by awareness,
Wisdom, and experience
Which stated otherwise.

My soul longed for him
My head for logic
Would there be wars and hatred,
Would there be famines and floods,
If god did not wish it.
For not a leaf, not a hair
Can stir without his leave.

My soul defending god
Excuses it brought
I long for the truth . . .

IS GOD MERCY?
IS GOD LOVING?

THE LIFE OF A MODERN DAY TRAGIC HERO

Paul Dertien

One morning I woke up crying
and sucked from my mother's breast
then ate from a spoon
and began to walk
and talk
and go to school
and read
and write
and play sports
and kiss girls
and I went to college
and read some more
and wrote a little
then graduated
and got married
and worked for a company
and moved to the suburbs
and had a child
then had another
and then retired
and moved to Florida
and played golf
and drank beer
and watched T.V.
and played golf
and drank beer
and watched T.V.
and then I died.

The day is an unclean grey-blue with an intermittent breeze. It is early March. The trees in my back yard struggle to emerge from their winter-imposed dormancy; there are new green buds in evidence. Yet leaves that should have been raked and gathered weeks ago are strewn across the yard, and a great brown heap of them—mixed with lifeless branches of holly that I trimmed from the north side of the house—squats next to the wooden fence. They are expectant of me coming soon to bag and discard them.

I know that winter has not yet completely passed here on the coastal plain of Texas, but I also know that spring is coming. Soon flocks of robins will pass through the countryside. Cedar waxwing, profuse in number, will gather to drink themselves drunk on the intoxicant of a particular berry. Already the weird calls of non-migrating blue-jay and the grackle have become even more prevalent.

During an especially temperate day this past February, I climbed the naked branches of a birch to retrieve some bird's nest left from last season. Twigs and debris that composed it were now loose and the entire construction was falling apart. But there were remnants of the down and feathers that lined it—vestigial signs of life in a now lifeless home.

Such paradoxes—the increased activity of birds, the litter of brown across the yard, a budding green, and all overseen by an unpleasant loom of sky! This is analogous to the happiness I at times experience that is co-habitant with melancholy in my innermost self, like the faint loveliness of a funeral dirge.

II

The evening twilight comes. Fast after follows darkness, which, in the moonless sky and sudden hush, is worthy of its association with death. I go out back and tip a rotting tree stump that sits among the new shoots of grass just off the patio. With the aid of the overhead light, many of the living creatures there

are evident. There are millipedes, earthworms, and a species of spider whose bloated abdomen appears many times the size of its thorax and head. Here again the death/life paradox is exhibited. These exist in an ever-present night, in a near-death existence. Motion is usually sluggish, yet they are no less alive. I unearth a grub. Its stumpy legs stir; it unfurls a stub of a body, revealing the lower tract gorged with the fertile earth in which it languishes. To the human, light and the society of others speaks of life; our moods frequently reflect this. The creatures here are, from all outward signs, not in need of such stimuli.

I release the stump; it falls with a cryptic "thud."

The night will increase. But I know that before the dawn the cloud-cover will abate and admit to the earth below rays of the waxing moon. The diurnal cycle will continue and the life/death intertwinement will endure.

LANDSCAPE OF CONFLICT

Dorothy Campbell

A spotless sky.
The scavengers
Of the air
Land on a
Leafless tree,
Contemplating the
Bloody carcasses
On the ground
Below.

A gutted house.
The children
Of the dead
Hide behind
Doorless homes
Contemplating the
Priceless amenities—
clothes, boots, lying
dangerously in their yards.

Yes. This age
Of war
Has left us
Blood baths,
Lands thickly carpeted
With the corpses
Of frustrated patriotism.

Iran and Iraq,
England and Ireland,
Namibia, Angola, South
Africa—
Israel, Egypt, Korea, Libya
Are like a mirage.
These lands
Are torn away
From us
Aborting our
Yearning to
Experience newness
In their antiquity.

I stare
At the spotless sky
And inhale
The essence of my dilemma.
The world is dying,
And I have not yet
Begun to live.

ANYTHING

Mike Jungman

Two lone riders passing through this time.
Running from right side of the lie and the white line.

On the road, the pavement winds to the sun.
No one knows what we'll find or when we'll have to run.

I'll give anything you want or
Anything you need.
Anything you want—
Give you all you need.

On the road is never the right time,
Giving our souls on the run and leave ourselves behind.

Now when I pass her, I just have to turn away.
I'm always trying so hard—hard to hear her say

I'll give you anything you want or
Anything you need.
Anything you want—
Give you all you need.

Oh, Anything . . .

WHITE NOVEMBER

Luck Smith Jr.

Momma is silent. I can't remember why I love her; the moment of occurrence has faded, unimportant or hidden from sight by the obstruction of the many memories accumulated over it. I watch her, disturbed by her power over me to stir my emotions. It is cold outside, but there exists here an atmosphere of coldness and foreignness.

Yet, lying there in white, she effortlessly makes the room feel like home. Looking at her, I feel the warmth of home in cold November, smell the familiar smells in the familiar white house on Burning Tree Street, expect her to awaken and let escape from her unpainted lips the familiar witty remarks that confirm she is who I have suddenly suspected she is not, who I have suddenly suspected I have lost. Although her breathing is soft and nearly undetectable in this white, hollow cubicle, it is loud as a chorus of rushing air on a windy day.

My hands are clutched, the fingers intertwined, as if in prayer, lying as both strength and control on my lap, longing to touch her now alien body. My throat is clogged and with questions and revelations and hurt, tremulous words—words that need escape, and embracement from her. But the moment, I feel, is inappropriate, and like the days previous, there is always tomorrow to count on. She is there in the white bed everyday, surrounded, imprisoned, isolated, marked by the white hospital walls, eyes closed, softly breathing as loud as the cold wind in November.

SESTINA FOR MY HUSBAND'S EX-WIFE

Marty Manegold

"Can somebody, anybody please tell me what a blue norther is?" you asked, his past participle ex-wife from Georgia. Clues are the stalled streams of water, now ice hanging from the eaves of the house, glacially cold even to observe or admire. It is the shivering plants in the front yards covered with old pastel bed sheets

or 2 mil green plastic. It is sleet cutting the air like sheets from a ream of dropped paper jolting a jogger out of her blue mood. She dashes inside and quickly and firmly plants her sweat pants in front of the red-cheeked fire, safe from the hazards of exercising madly in the blue norther cold. The chill doesn't prevent her from noisily drinking her ice

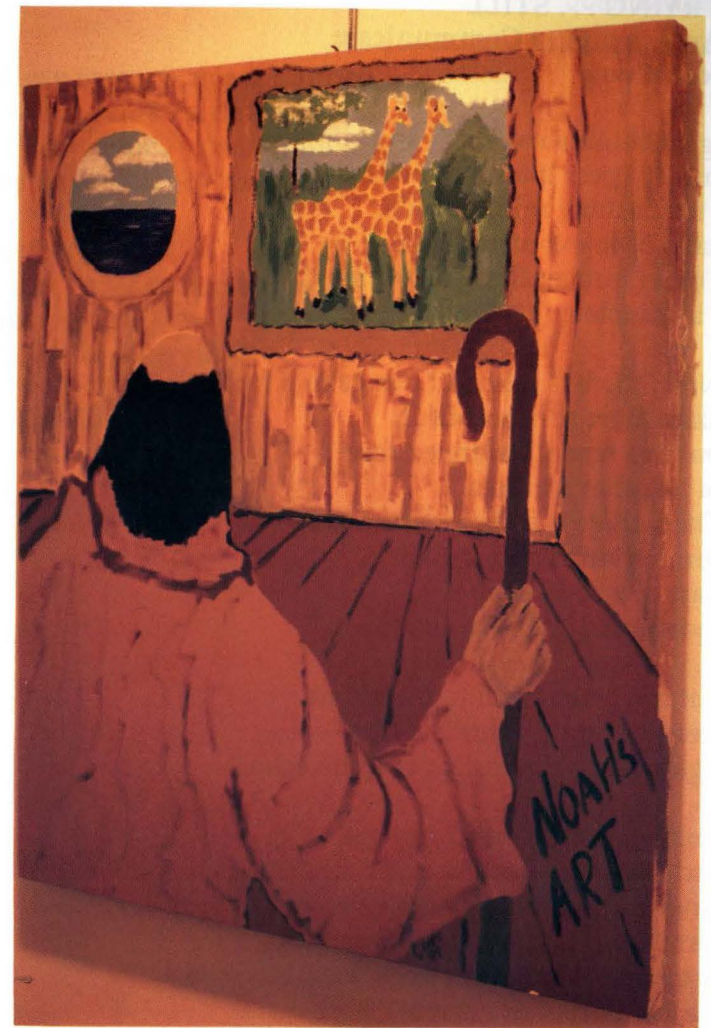
cold ice water with lemon, delighted that all of the ice cubes inside are inside her glass. The corrugated sheets of metal are the roof of the shed in the yard, metal as cold and uninviting as you, the ex-wife. Obscuring the pale blue winter sky, the bleak clouds are ominous, as if left over from a Georgia marriage as icy as the storm. A blue norther is plants,

especially the ones not hidden, which soon become plants *in extremis*, the victims, like strays, of neglect and ice. If their roots stay dirt-protected and don't shrink much from not being covered by the warmth-giving threadbare sheets, they may survive until spring evolving into velvet blue pansies glad to be planted in Texas, away from the Georgia cold.

A Texan's analogy for the Georgia inquiry about this cold is an alley cat staying inside and nibbling on plants, like dracenas and palms, neglecting his harem. A blue norther is the house's faucets steadily dripping ice water from all of its spigots and slush falling in sheets, sneaking in to trespass on the rug. And so, you are from

Georgia. Of course I recall that you said you come from that wonderful peach state. The winter's worse cold there is quite different from ours. Your designer sheets delicately cover your drawling deep south Georgia plants and always coordinate their colors. It seems that the ice that crystalizes in your small frozen mind is gangrened blue

from your frigid battles over girl children, dogs, and plants. The cold you spewed at your daughter's wedding was the ice off your last marriage's sheets. You left him. Why are you blue?



Noah's Art (acrylic on canvas)
Robert Davis

TRYING . . . STILL
An Attempt to Communicate
Josh Crane

A fog surrounds me, thick and cling wet.
Straining, I peer intently into the dark
and, for flashing milliseconds,
in shafts of unexpected light,
I see other human forms—like me,
only incomplete:

Now, there is a perfect eye gazing forth,
azure blue and beautiful,
but in a smooth-skinned face
of no other features.
Then, there is a shoulder moving by,
proportioned and strong,
part of a body shape
indistinguishable in shadows.

I shout my greetings into the gloom
and reverberating sounds return—
strange ancient chanting, not quite echo.

I stumble forward stretching out
toward the shapes and sounds:
my fingers slip over the elusive forms;
my hands tingle, touching wispy hair;
my arms quiver against silken skin . . .
then, all at once, I'm grasping air!

Frustration and loneliness
overcome me and I collapse,
again, in failure's despair.

I do not know that it is I who's incomplete;
it is my eyes which are fogged
by selective glaucoma;

is my ears which are muffled
by self-centered deafness;
it is my touch which is numbed
by inconsistency's paralysis.

Imperfect as I am,
how can I ever communicate?
Human as I am,
can I ever cease trying?

SHE

Richard Davidson

She stands and sings aloud and all alone
Or paints a portrait of a passing plane
And faces forfeit of the label sane
While dancing rings around the telephone
She laughs and leans way down to feel a stone
To touch the texture rounded by the rain
"So much is measured, bounded by our pain"
She passes dreams around for all to own
Yet sleeps in silent solitude tonight
In bed between her animals and toys
And what she sees is what she wants to live
In fields still free from all forms of fright
All dread, disease, and death have turned to joys
And what she'll seize is what she wants to give

WITHOUT WARNING

Paul Dertien

He stood small and safe
under the christmas tree,
and smiled
up at the branches
that strained and bore
clumps of silver shining string
and balls of white red and green
some peeling in the smokey haze
of flashing flourescence.
When without warning,
the horror began,
and the tree shrank
into an evergreen
and the silver foilage
was a metamorphosis
of tacky tinsel
and the brilliant bulbs hatched
gaudy styrofome balls
wrapped in tangled thread.
Slowly the tree withered,
collapsing smaller
and smaller.
He cried

with all his might
prying with desparate
arms
so that he might
hang upon the tree
himself, a smiling rosy
smile forever in a forest
of warm green brilliance,
so that the tree
might sing again
in those mesmeric colors
of youth.
But it folded and shrank
and spit him into
the uncertain light of
today
and blipped occasionally
in a memory
leaving him bald,
scratching his beard.

MOUNT EDO
Joseph Hall

In the winter of 1973, I was eight years old. The war was ending, and back in the United States, President Nixon was protesting that he was an innocent man.

I was with my mother in the city of Edo. I don't know what reason she had for bringing me with her to Japan. Maybe we were closer then.

One morning, I wandered off, as young boys are apt to do, to a park near our hotel. I don't recall being frightened though maybe I should have been.

I was sitting under a tree watching the sun glisten on the wet snow, when I heard the voices of people talking in Japanese. The voices were rather gruff and the sentences seemed rather short, almost as if the two men were barking at each other.

They were dressed in white traditional dress. I would have thought they were Cistercian priests, except that I could see that one carried a long sword. I may have become afraid at this point, because I knew that I could not leave my spot until the old men had passed.

But the old men did not pass. One spread out a white cloth and laid a knife on it, while his friend knelt down in the snow, with his back to me. The two men sat facing each other with the sword and the knife between them on the cloth.

The man with his back to me looked up at the grey sky and spoke a word to his friend. His friend stood, picked up the sword, and moved to the kneeling man's side. The kneeling man took up the dagger while his friend raised the sword over his head.

The sword came down quickly and the kneeling one fell forward. The old man touched his friend's body, picked up the knife, and walked back the way they had come.

I sat watching the dead man's blood melt the snow for a long time. I had never been lonely before that minute. I was only eight, but I had never had a friend and I became aware that I never would.

And I've always wanted a friend like that.

I walk through the orchards
After the cherry blossoms fall and the wind blows
And think of you
As pure as the snows of Mount Edo.

The flowers blossom and fall
Around the Gaijin who does not know
Of the curious old samurai
Kneeling in the snows of Mount Edo.

The samurai prays for mercy
But never wishes there was another way to show
How much he loves the flowers
Watered by the snows of Mount Edo.

The blossoms turn my thoughts to you,
A spot of red in a soft white glow
That stirs the poet's soul
Like the blood in the snows of Mount Edo.

WHO IS THIS MAN?

(The question of a South African child)

Dorothy Campbell

I watch the roundness
Of her belly inflate
Each time the man
They say is my father
Leaves.

I watch her eyes
Swell with tears
Each year he returns
And makes us rich
With his presents/presence.

His sparkling ivory smile,
His commanding voice,
His firm conviction
In a God . . .

. . . a God that takes
Him away from us
And buries him
In a coal/diamond/gold-mine,
Where he sweats
And bleeds for
Enough change for

. . . the bus ride back home, to see us.

To see us laugh
At his unfamiliar face
And cry at the death
Of yet another malnourished
Child.

Yet, when he leaves,
Again Mama's belly swells
In the absence of
The man they say
Is my father

WADING IN THE YEARS

Joseph R. Williams

We may go out 'morrow
making merry
And we may marry
(We did)

At that time we had too much to think
So you sing-songed it to death
While I raised my voice in our living room

Too much of my energy
And I slumped slacking
And blurred eyeing the time
I'd used up all my words

"I will, and do," as was said then,
but 'morrow came and plundered my mind
Now you're hating at the speed of anger
As I grit ink into a paper

HILL, GREEN HILL

Page Ann McIncrow

Hill, green hill where are ye?
I've spent half this day aft ye,
yet all I've found is a factory.
Hill, green hill where are ye?

How oft as a lad I'd run up ye slopes
to catch a butterfly,
stumble, fall and roll down ye slopes
laughing all the way.

Ah, is this the old fence post?
Yea me name's still carved deep.

Aw, hill, green hill
the factory has now ye place
as the man replaced the boy.
Hill, green hill
I'll ne'er forget ye.

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