

# THE BAYOU REVIEW

A Literary and Visual Arts Journal  
Volume 25, Issue 1

THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON-DOWNTOWN



SPRING 2011

There is no question about it, I am more than what you see: I am not merely the product of sinew and protoplasm, mitosis and evolution; I am more than what you see, I am the composite of eternity and time; the embodiment of divinity and mortality. I am the incorporation of infinite wisdom and divine genius; the splendor of true ingenuity and purpose. I am no accidental birth; a happenstance of humanity in motion—I am more than what you see:



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Spring 2011

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*The Bayou Review*

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“Dear Philly”

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## About the Layout

2011 marks the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *The Bayou Review*. To commemorate this accomplishment, the editors have selected works from the first twelve volumes and reprinted each in chronological order. At the same time, the selected works for the Spring issue were organically incorporated to convey a threaded theme — juxtaposing natural life and city life. We hope you enjoy the 2011 Spring issue of *The Bayou Review*.

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## 1

# Cryin' for Stinky-Feet Jessie

Tomás Vallejos

*Reprinted from Volume 1, Issue 1*

Esky! *Esquirosa!* That's what everybody at school calls her. Esky Jesky. Her real name is Jessica Montoya. Her family calls her Jessie. But everybody else calls her Esky Jesky. That and Stinky-Feet Jessie. And, you know what? She never even cries. It's like she don't even care.

I remember when we were little kids, a couple years ago. We used to go play on the swings at school. First, we'd pump our legs and get goin' fast, and high, 'til the chains would jump. Then, when we were goin' nice and high, we'd start in. Sorta singin', sorta just talkin'. You know? Like when boys are playin' baseball and go, "Hey, batta, batta. Strike one, strike two, strike three, yer out. Hey, batta, batta. Hey batta, batta." Or like when girls are jumpin' rope and they make up those rhymes? Like that. Well, we always used to go like this when we were swingin': "I'm cryin' for Stinky-Feet Jessie. I'm cryin' for Stinky-Feet Jessie." Over and over and over. I don't know why. It don't even make sense, no? And she wasn't even there to hear us. But it made us laugh, anyway.

One day mama hears me and Rosie—that's my little sister—makin' fun of Esky Jesky. She tells us we shouldn't call her that. "Why not?" we ask. "She is Esky." And me and Rosie laugh. Mama says we shouldn't use words we don't even understand and call people such names when we don't really know 'em.

So I ask mama, "What does *esquirosa* mean, anyway?" And she says, "Well, it means sickening. Like something that turns your stomach." And we laugh some more and I say, "Well then, that is the right name for her. She makes everybody sick. Huh, Rosie?" Rosie says yes and both of us wrinkle up our noses like if we smelled spoiled milk or somethin'. And then we laugh.

Mama don't like that and she sends me to the boys' bedroom and Rosie to the girls' bedroom. She tells us not to come out 'til she comes and gets us. "You sit there and think about it," she says. So I sit on the bed 'til I get bored. Then I look out the window awhile 'til that gets boring, too.

Then I see the Spanish Dictionary on top of the chest. My big brother Gilbert uses it for his Spanish Class. He's in high school, you know. I turn to 'E' for *esquiroso*, just to see if it's a bad word. Why else would mama be so mad at us? But you know what? There's no such word in the dictionary. I figure it must be a bad word. But then I change my mind 'cause Mama never said nothin' about it bein' dirty or nothin'. And everybody says that word and nobody says nothin' about it bein' a bad word.

But I'm a perty smart kid. That's what my teachers tell me. So I look in the English part under 'S' for sickening and there is a list. Right after *nauseabundo*—I guess that's how you pronounce it—and right before *repugnante*. Is that right? *Repugnante*? But guess what? It isn't *esquiroso*. It's *asqueroso*.

So, I flip back to the Spanish part and look up *asqueroso*. And boy! What a list of words! Nasty! Filthy! Nau-se-ous—I'm gonna have to look that one up to see how you pronounce it. And there's more. Loathsome and disgusting! Jeez! Poor Jessie! Who started calling her *esquirosa*, anyway?

Then I close the Spanish Dictionary and get the English one. I gotta see how you pronounce that word: nau-se-ous. Then when I find it, I see that it's nau-seous. Two sounds, not three. And then I see the word "nausea." Hmm. I wonder how you say that in Spanish. So I get the Spanish dictionary and flip to the English part and look up "nausea."

And there it is: "asco, n.m. nausea; loathsomeness." Boy, somebody must've really hated Jessie to start calling her Esky Jesky. And then I notice somethin' else about the word *asco*. Inside of two curved marks that look like sideways smiles it says "coll."—Whatever that means—and then the word "fear." Fear? What does that have to do with nausea?

I wish Mama would come and get me so I could ask her about this. But she takes forever to come back. And all I can think of is Esky Jesky. "I'm cryin' for Stinky-Feet Jessie." And I ask myself, "How come we call her Stinky-Feet Jessie,

anyway?" I never noticed no smell on her. Not her feet. Not her armpits. Nothin'.

And then I start to think some more about Jessie. She lives about three blocks from us in a big ol' run-down apartment house. It's the only four-story building in the whole neighborhood—maybe the whole town—and it's right next to the *arroyo*. And right next to it is an old run-down barn or somethin'. I'm not sure what it is, but nobody's lived in it for years 'cept the pigeons and some filthy old man everybody calls Miser. He walks around town carryin' a bag full of trash and he sleeps in that old barn, or whatever it is. Everyone says he's really rich, but he's just too cheap to spend his money, so he collects trash and sleeps there. All I know is the whole place smells like birdshit and so does Miser. Now, he's *esquiros*!

But Jessie and her family, they ain't that bad. You wanna hear somethin' funny? You know what everybody calls the place where Jessie lives? The Castle. I guess just 'cause it's so big and it's made outta big grayish brown stones that are all rough and crumbly when you touch 'em. But that's about the only reason I can think of. 'Cause it's a dump. A plain ol' rundown dump. And just about everybody who ever lives there is dirty. I mean kids with *piojos* in their hair and shit slidin' outta their diapers down their legs. Yecch! And you know what's even worse? I hate to say it, but I don't think nobody's ever lived there 'cept Mexicans.

We don't have no black people in our town. So I guess the Mexicans are kinda like the niggers around here. 'Cept there's so many of us they can't treat us all like niggers. So I guess there's the Spanish people—like us—the ones that live in halfway-decent houses, and then there's the Mexicans. The dirty Mexicans. I guess Jessie and her family are the Mexicans. The dirty Mexicans. I've never been inside of their place—I wouldn't even think of it! But, you know, now that I think about it, Jessie really ain't that dirty. I mean, she don't stink or nothin' and her face is always clean. It's just that place she lives in. And her clothes. It looks like she gets 'em at the Salvation Army. I guess that's why we call her Esky Jesky. But jeez! *Esquirosa*?

It seems like a whole day before Mama comes to the door. "Come an' eat," she says. She's still mad, I can tell. "An' don't forget to wash your hands."

"Mama? How come you got so mad at us? I looked up the word *esquiros* in Gilbert's dictionary. It ain't no bad word or nothin'. Did you know there's no such word? It's really *asqueroso*. Did you know that?"

"Is that all you learned?" she says. She's still kinda mad.

So I tell her, "Well, no. I been thinkin'. I guess yer right, Ma. I was thinkin' about Miser. Would you say he's *esquirosó*?"

"Miser? Well, I don't know. I guess so. But you shouldn't tease him, either. He's prob'ly crazy. He can't help it if he's crazy."

"I guess not. But he's *esquirosó*, no? And some of those people that live in the Castle? With *piojos* an' all that?"

Mama turns red an' grabs my shoulder. Not hard, but kinda firm. Like she's got somethin' important to tell me.

"I know you're too young to remember, but you talk to Gilbert sometime. Or any of the older kids. They'll tell you what it's like to live in the Castle."

I'm so su'prised I don't know what to say! Then she looks at me kinda sad and kinda scared at the same time. "You just thank God you don't live there and pray that we never have to live there again!" I just know I'll never forget that.



# Child of Dust Storms

*Lillian Susan Thomas*

Growing up in Lubbock,  
Child of dust storms,  
There were years when all of my memories  
Were shaped by wind.  
Nightmares were tumble-weeded and dust-deviled,  
Hounded by prairie dogs  
Into their safe haven underground  
Dark and deeply labyrinthed.

We had weeks when the sun  
Was weakened to a pallid moon.  
Even at midday I could stare into it  
Without tears, without sneezing,  
If I could open my eyes.  
When I had to walk into the wind  
I invented a way of walking—backwards,  
Glancing over my shoulders.

For years soon after cotton fields were plowed,  
Maize and sorghum were seeded,  
The wind would rise, lifting topsoil  
And some of the tiny kernels of hope  
In the dark skirts of sand storms,  
Destroying farmers' fantasies of tall green stalks.  
The winds would start in spring,  
Blow through August,

Until finally in October,  
They would die, and rain would wash the air clean.

On quieter days during those dirty months  
The sky would fade from blue to dun to tan to brown,  
Smudging with the horizon, inseparable,  
Woven together, sharing strands of warp and weft.  
But for all of the ugliness,  
With so much silt in the atmosphere,  
I remember even 50 years later  
The sunsets so brilliant with colors,  
Hues we have no names for—  
Mottled grayish purple, coral-pink,  
Cinnabar-salmon, rose-vermillion—  
The variegated clouds still ribbon through my dreams.



## Hair

*Ana Luisa Morales*

*The Bayou Review*

# An Easter Story

Malcolm Williams

I agree with T. S. Eliot when he says that "April is the cruellest month." I hate it and I find Easter so disturbing that it would have been necessary to invent it if it didn't exist already.

That corpse you planted last year in your garden,  
Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?

But I think that the cruelty of spring is best hidden in the lines of e. e. cummings:

*in Just-*  
*spring when the world is mud-*  
*luscious the little*  
*lame balloonman*  
*whistles far and wee*  
*and eddieandbill come*  
*running from marbles and*  
*piracies and it's*  
*spring*  
*when the world is puddle-wonderful*

*the queer  
old balloonman whistles  
far and wee  
and bettyandisbel come dancing  
from hop-scotch and jump-rope and  
its  
spring  
and  
the  
goat-footed  
balloonMan whistles  
far  
and  
wee*

cummings uses capital letters only for a reason, and my students go into shock when I point out to them that the lame, queer, goat-footed balloon man's M gets bigger once he's inside the circle with the children. The usual explication for this poem is that the balloon man is the god Pan whose pan-pipe announces the rising of Persephonê from the Underworld. Spring! So it is, but we ignore the fact that she was an innocent child when she was taken down by the use of magical lures.

Magical lures come in myriads of shapes and styles, but of course, ice cream, candy and bright, shiny objects come to mind if the abductee is to be a child.

When my family moved to Houston from the Cuban ghetto we were born into, I-45 began at Dowling Street (south of downtown) and ended at Griggs Road, 3 miles farther south. The bright, shiny lights on I-45 are my first memory

of this place. I had never seen street lights before.

We moved in a development of duplexes between Telephone Road and Griggs Road and began the process of urbanizing ourselves. My next surprises were running water and telephones.

My brother grew fond of Paul, the ice cream man, who arrived every afternoon to sell his products to us. All the children were crazy about him, and we were all sympathetic when he arrived with a broken leg one day. We didn't know how his leg got broken. He had a walking cast and continued his work and we admired him for managing so well even though he was limping pretty badly.

One summer day, my brother announced that Paul was inviting us to go along on his route, so I climbed aboard at my brother's insistence. I don't remember much of the route after the initial thrill of being in such an important place. As I said, Houston really did end at Telephone Road back then, so I was not curious when I noticed that the houses began thinning out. And, I was not curious when there were no more houses. And then, I wasn't really curious when I had no idea where we were. What did surprise me (I was 4 at the time) was that my mother suddenly arrived behind the ice cream truck and heatedly demanded that we get in her car.

When I tell this story to my students in order to convince them that cumming's poem has undertones of child-molestation in it, their eyes get enormous; then, they shudder and ask me what happened next. The answer is, nothing happened next. I remember nothing else about that day. Years later, when the word *child-molesting* became common, I understood for the first time why my mother was so agitated.

But she needn't have worried. I had already been lured upstairs by two teenage güeras who promised me candy. While they were having their way with me, I feared that their bathroom would cave in and I would be found in a very strange position, still pinned to the floor, in my mother's kitchen which was directly below their bathroom. They never gave me the candy. They ate it in front of me with their blonde pubes showing before they put their clothes back on.

I descended the staircase back home, but this time, the Underworld had been up, and not down. I felt alone and scared and betrayed.

And I Tiresias have foresuffered all  
Enacted on this same divan or bed...  
grope [... my] way, finding the stairs unlit...

The only person I could trust was my sister. But, my mother was adamant about us fitting in; we were forbidden to speak Spanish. At the time, I didn't have the skills to express what had happened in English, so I waited until my sister and I were alone to divulge my terrible secret. As I was pouring my heart out, mother flamed into our bedroom and caught us using the forbidden tongue. A week later, my sister disappeared, and no amount of questioning yielded anything that made any sense to me.

My mother never noticed that I began to fetishize sweets after that. And when Dean Corll had his candy store in the Heights, I was not surprised by what the police found in his boat shed.

Like Richard Rodríguez, I never spoke Spanish in public again and spent the rest of my formative years pondering the dreadful power of language to make people behave as they did. Nobody would tell me why my sister evaporated, and at that age, I assumed that she had been punished for what I had done. The only truth that I acquired in time is that she was found dead in Mexico. The other truth I learned is never to open a box of "ashes" during a windy boat ride halfway between Key West and Cuba. The word "ashes" is a misnomer and a euphemism for what you really see.

Tiresias had been stricken blind for telling the truth, but he could see in the other world. My experience robbed me of trust, and of fluency in my first language. But, having been dragged down into the Underworld, I now had another kind of sight: to see through people's intentions, to name one example. Classical literature is full of stories about people returning from the other side, and in our modern era, we seldom notice that they were never much fun when they came back. Jesus refused to let Mary touch him on the day of his *αναστασις* (the Greek term used in Mark 12: 18) literally means "erection," by the way.

The Egyptian myth is more direct about the implications of this. Depictions of Osiris leave no doubt about what he is holding on to when he is resurrected and

show him as ithyphallic (as the Greeks politely put it). And, it is clear that Isis has resurrected him just so she can have her way with him one more time before he gets mummified. In this day and age the underlying significance of all that is hidden in stories about enchanted rabbits and magical eggs hidden in the ground. I still dislike Easter and those rituals about digging for dead bodies in the ground and finding nothing but candy instead.

After an experience like that, stepping out one's door is an adventure, to put it mildly. The term "derealization" has been coined to describe this. You open the door, the ground cracks open beneath your feet, you feel yourself being sucked downward. Some people have told me that they're afraid of me because I can see straight through them when that happens. It can be called "psychism" if one likes but what really happens is that when the gods of the Underworld come, you lose touch with that part of your mind that manages the time/space continuum; past/present/future all melt together. That is why hell (and heaven, for that matter) are described as lasting forever. That most famous of agoraphobes, Emily Dickinson, describes it in "It Was not Death": going out her door and feeling dead/alive and all the bells sticking their tongues out at and taunting her.

It was not Death, for I stood up,

And all the Dead, lie down—

It was not Night, for all the Bells

Put out their Tongues.....

T. S. Eliot begins his "Love of Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" with his character ascending from hell.

Senza temia d'infamia ti rispondo,

Let us go then.....

His more famous poem begins in the Underworld and stays there. I would like to end this meditation on the way down as well. I begin my lectures on "The Waste Land" by showing my students Fellini's racy *Satyricon*. Eliot also lifts a scene from Petronius where the two wanderers meet the pythoness at Cumæ. Because she can see in the other world, like Tiresias, she is immortal in this one, having lost



access to the time/space continuum. While she is swinging over the crevasse in her ampulla, they ask her what she really wants. Like Tiresias and like me, who have seen too much and wish we hadn't,

(I Tiresias, blind and throbbing between two lives...

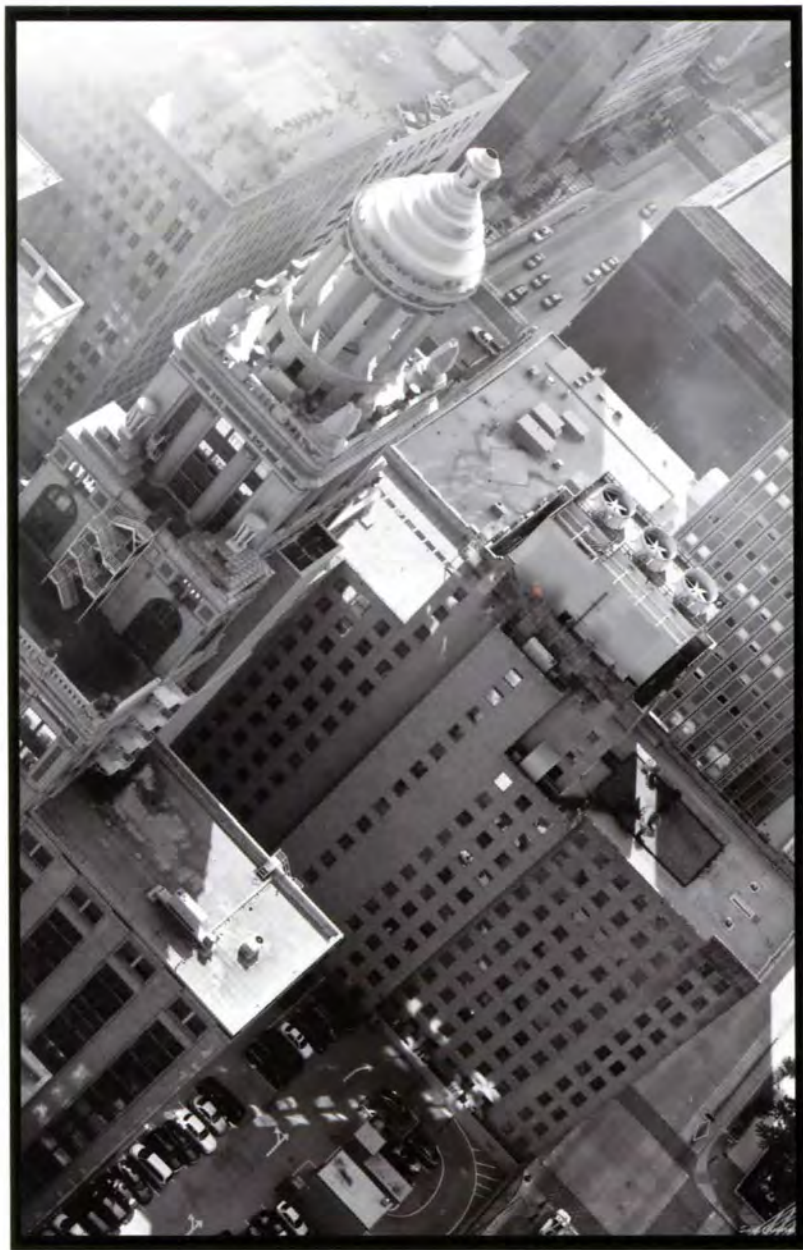
I who have sat by the Theban wall

...grope his way, finding the stairs unlit...)

her answer is simple:

αποθανείν θέλω.

I just want to die.



# Untitled 1

*Saul Cisneros*

*Volume 25 - Issue 1*

## 2

## Suburban Saturdays

*Lorenzo Thomas**Reprinted from Volume 2, Issue 1*

Given choices, standing in the street  
And shouting  
Even for a worthy cause  
The way we used to do  
When we were young  
Even for nothing  
Is not choice.

The world has changed.

Homely estrangements  
In the presence of one's children  
Is more fun  
Less public and, embarrassing to say, less private  
Even.

    You're weeping through  
"The Way We Were" on cable  
They are saying "Huh?"  
I don't like Barbara Streisand anyway  
Her nose is funny"

They have no time for you  
No words and infinitely less concern.  
They vanish after dark  
Just like you taught them at 3  
But now it hurts.  
All parents reach this point, a cliff. \*\*  
Maturity is what we like to call it

The world has changed  
Manners your elders strapped you into  
Somehow have come unraveled in your hands  
You watch the loose ends  
Flap away like thoughtless tongues  
Dances, movies, parties  
Impudent and bold, and beautiful  
And realize, that given choices  
Had you known,  
It really wouldn't have turned out this way

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# 3

## The Ride Home: Gulf Freeway

Fabian Worsham

*Reprinted from Volume 3, Issue 1*

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 arched 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.

# Ruby

*Jere Pfister*

“Hand me the salt, girl.”

I hugged the bag of rock salt to my chest, “No, Ruby, let me put it in. I won’t let any get in the ice cream. I can do it!”

Without even breaking a beat with her cranking hand, Ruby reached through my tight little arms and dragged the bag away from me. “Girl, why do you bother me? Go play.”

“Give me the paddle and I’ll go play,” I tried bribery.

“Miss Jere, you know your brother’s turn to get the paddle today! You just want to stir up a fine mess of yelling and crying and your mama’s gonna take your Daddy’s old belt to your skinny ol’ legs. Now you just sit quiet and I’ll slip you something extra.” Thick, black, slimy spit began to run down Ruby’s face. She used snuff. She took the old empty snuff can she always carried in her breast pocket and spat in it.

“Ruby, you ever spit in our ice cream when I’m not looking?”

She swatted at my exposed flesh with her old fly swatter, “You get girl, til’ I call you. Let my ice cream set. And don’t you be giving me any of your ideas. I spit lots of places.” As I ran off Ruby was laughing and talking to herself.

I ran down toward the river. Down the steps, past the compost heap, then the chicken coop that hadn’t seen a chicken since we lived there, past the old rotting rose arbor that still supported tangles of colorful roses and bees to sting, down still further to the Tung oil trees that marked the edges of the cliff that looked down on to the river. The cliff was grey clay. I ran down the steps that were cut into the clay

and held secure with heavy planks of cypress wood. Down further to the scooped out area next to our river bank where the water moccasin liked to sun itself. I could sit and just watch that snake for a long afternoon, all the while wondering if he would hurt me if I reached down into the amber water to stroke his pretty, long body all curled into a spiral like the Slinkies that we found under the Christmas tree every year. We weren't allowed to enter the water if he was there. I wasn't even allowed to get in the water unless Brother was with me, even though I could swim almost as good as him.

"Jere! Jereee! Come home!" Mama called me back to the house. Everybody was gathered on the back steps already, except Daddy. It was the summer after he went crazy. It was 1948.



Easter, 1948. Brother and I awake to find the dining room table covered with the green cellophane grass that usually lines baskets. Hidden in the expanse of grass are small yellow chicks. *Do I remember my real chick? Does my Mama?* Is that why she always decorates our Easter with artificial chicks that last all year? Spread out in the expanse of green are candy corn and jelly beans, gold brick candy bars and the large gold brick eggs covered in foil and stuffed with small wrapped nuggets of the candy. Bowls of homemade fudge and the hard-boiled eggs we dyed and decorated the night before sit on the buffet.

We can't eat any of it before we go to church. We have to fast until after communion. At church Daddy, all dressed up in his suit and bow tie, is holding court at the table where people pay their ten cent pew rental fee. In the afternoon, there is a big party and the children all go to the Star Theater and see the new Walt Disney movie, *Song of the South*. I have anticipated this movie more than Easter candy. It has real people in it.

After the movie, I am in the kitchen sitting on the stepstool between the stove and the icebox when Daddy comes in drunk. He reaches into the icebox to get out a bottle of milk. Before I can stop him, he tilts a full bottle of cooked starch into his mouth. He spits it out all over my pretty new Easter dress. The bodice is covered in great globs of cold congealed starch and spittle. I don't remember the color of the dress, only that it was new and pretty and now is ruined. He grabs me and begins



trying to clean the dress, screaming at my mother who is standing next to the stove.

"Why do you have to put the starch in milk bottles? Look what you made me do!"

I push him away, hating the smell of his breath and the feel of his scratchy beard against my face. *Now, I remember pushing my young husband away when his beard scratches my face. I feel repugnance all out of context. Did my face remember my Daddy? Was I suddenly a little girl lying beneath my husband?*

"You're drunk, Daddy."

The sound of the slap is like a gun shot, as I fly in the air. Then Mama is screaming and I don't know where Brother is. Aunt Laura, my godmother, is there fussing at me. Her mouth is moving and she's yelling.

"Stop your screaming, Jere. You're only making it worse. You're just being dramatic."

I stuff my dress into my mouth. But the sounds keep escaping. Daddy is choking my mama and shouting he is going to kill baby Clay, who is asleep in his bassinet in the bedroom. I am pushing on Daddy and he lets loose of mama long enough to hit me again and now I'm flying toward the gun closet and Daddy has a gun and then I'm in the bedroom with baby Clay, picking him up and carrying him outside, past Brother who is sitting on a chest rocking back and forth, and I know he can't help and I'm afraid of the dark and the night but it doesn't make any difference and I sit under a tree till Mama's daddy arrives and they send me off to stay with friends where I turn down ice cream and cry those shuddering tears of a child who can't stop crying and when she does her body begins to drown.



Mama was serving the ice cream into the china bowls. Brother was licking the paddle, getting chocolate ice cream all over his ugly freckled face. *Mama says don't call your brother ugly, it hurts his feelings. People can't help the way they look.* Ruby was already eating her ice cream out of her old tin pie plate. I could see an old wad of newspaper sticking up out of the ice in the wood bucket. She'd saved me a kitchen spoon of ice cream. It was all packed down in the ice and would be super hard

when she snuck it to me later when Mama took her nap.

While Ruby cleaned the kitchen, I sat on the ladder stool and quietly watched her. Everything about her was slow and sad. Curiosity about her made me stare at her. I must have asked questions about her. I can see my Mama as she took a long drag on her cigarette and sipped her coffee. She told me for the umpteenth time that there were two kinds of colored people, good ones and bad ones. And the worst of bad was uppity. Ruby married an uppity man. He took her to Chicago, and they had a baby and there was a race riot. I could not wrap my mind around the meaning of race riot.

“Like horses going round in circles?”

“No, Hon, like white people tired of uppity Negroes and being white trash. Anyway, they beat and killed the colored people. The Negroes just ask for it, honey. You can't ever move out of your own kind, Jere. It doesn't work. Ruby's husband was uppity. She got all cut up and beaten and he got killed and so did their baby. And seeing that is how Ruby went crazy. Now don't you go asking her about it or talking about it. You'll make her feel worse and it's not proper anyway to go into other peoples' lives. Do you understand me?”

I wanted to know about that baby and Ruby's uppity husband. Mama saying not to ask it was like God putting a tree loaded with beautiful, ripe figs or peaches or apples, or even poisonous Tung oil pears in the middle of the garden and telling me I couldn't eat its fruit. The story of how Ruby got crazy was all I could think of. It burned in my brain. It stuck like a fish bone in my heart. But I was obedient about important things and I knew this was important.

On Tuesdays, Ruby emerged from the woods and ironed all the clothes that had been washed and starched on Monday. Ruby had a special way of sprinkling. Mother said it was the mark of a good ironing woman. She had the art of getting the cloth evenly damp. On the way to our house Ruby would pick up or cut a fresh small branch of pine needles. When she got to our house, she'd fill the old pot with water and using the branch as shaker she would sprinkle each piece of ironing.

She ironed in the room next to the garage. It was supposed to be my playroom, but it was just an extra place and good for ironing, although hot in the summer and

cold in the winter. In the summer I would stand next to Ruby and listen to the sizzle of the iron hitting the damp clothes and smell the strong pine scent released whenever Ruby cleaned the iron of excess starch by running it over the wet pine needles. I would beg.

“Ruby, let me iron!”

“Get away girl before you get burned!”

“Ruby, I wish my Daddy would stop getting drunk at Mr. Tugy’s and be nice and come home and eat supper with us.”

I got careless. I rested my arm on the ironing board as I looked up at her face. It turned hard and ugly and she ran the iron over my bare arm. The pain and shock of the scalding iron made me scream. There was a long ugly red streak across the outside of my right lower arm. The look on Ruby’s face made me afraid of her and of what I had done. I had told something private. Then the shame hit me like another burn, this one from within my body.

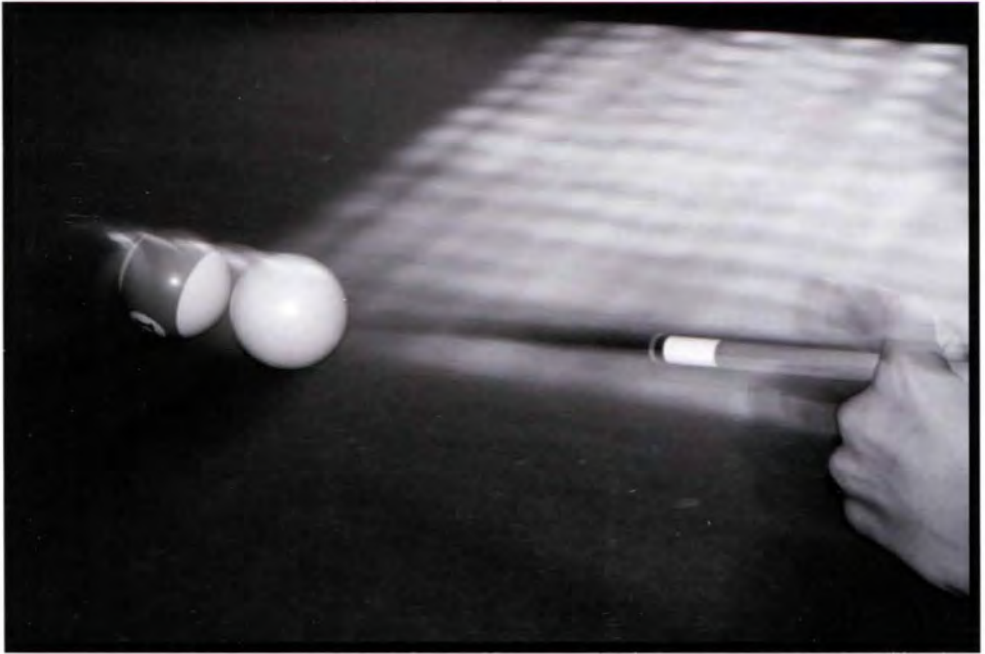
“Don’t you go bothering me with no talk about white men’s drinking and your wishing. Wishing don’t count.” She put the wet pine branch on my arm. “Now go get your own ice and cool that burn. And don’t you be worrying your Mama.” Running to my bed I cried that whole afternoon. I never did tell my Mother.

I never told Ruby about the bad Sunday night either, but she knew. I know she knew. Ruby was a spy. Sometimes I could tell she was out in those dark trees, at night. I never told about the Easter night my Daddy went crazy. Or that it was the starch that did it. I didn’t tell her about the other time I woke up to find my Daddy laying on top of my body, shushing me, saying, “Shhhhh, little girl, don’t make a sound. We don’t need her.”

I didn’t tell her that Mama came yelling and pounding on the front door and broke the glass on the side window so she could unlock the door, and how Daddy cut his feet and ran for his gun closet as Mama took Brother and me and baby Clay up stairs and locked the door. I didn’t tell her about Daddy shooting out some of the windows and yelling at us and the sound of the rifle and the clips being added.

I didn’t tell her about the Sheriff and the hound dogs. I didn’t tell her about

Mama lying about seeing the strange colored man. *The intruder*. I never told Ruby. I suspected she saw it all, that she was out there watching out for us with her knife strapped to her thigh, waiting to see how it went.



## Click

*Celeste Cortez*

*The Bayou Review*

## My Apology

Martha Ideal Gonzalez

*Reprinted from Volume 4, Issue 2*

I was so selfish back then.  
When I was made to feel like an outcast,  
I blamed you both for it.  
Each of my inadequacies was highlighted in class  
In front of all my peers.  
I remember so vividly  
My language seemed to be the root  
Of my problems, so I blamed you.

Please forgive me, *Padresitos mios*.  
I did not understand  
The monumental sacrifices  
You were making for us, your children.  
To offer us the Land of Opportunity,  
You left behind all that was familiar:  
Your Motherland, your relatives, your knowledge of  
The system, your place in society.  
You ventured into unknown territory  
To find a place in America  
For the Mexican Dream.

# Stretch

*Gustavo Jacobo*

inside a ghost bus,

the back seats are known  
by a rosa.

that is where i sit when we cross into sarnia,  
when we enter buffalo.

(midnight  
crossing)

i pretend to sleep  
soundly.

in the darkness  
of dusk —

flash lights move toward me.

They prompt me and

i  
sleepily reply *Texas—i'm from Texas.*

and i pretend  
to sleep

(ghostlike  
crossing)

## On the Way to War in Kuwait

Koga's Zero

*Reprinted from Volume 5, Issue 1*

Jula Tulip climbed into the shuttle bus and made her way to the only available seat, towards the rear, behind the wheelwell where some other, nameless, University of Houston-Downtown student sat, staring out the smeary window onto the parking lot. The doors closed just as the creaky bus jumped to a start. Jula found herself suddenly, but not neatly, deposited in the hot vinyl seat, her books sliding in her lap. The August heat made her doubt the efficiency of the bus air conditioner, but the radio was tuned to a rock station, so she made the best of the situation, tapping the seat to the beat, and bouncing with the rhythm of the bus as it jostled up the hill. The drive kept her mind from worrying about the coming exam in Crime and Delinquency. Exams made her nervous. A news broadcast interrupted the music just as the driver applied the brakes at the top of the hill. The announcement was as follows, "A large assembly of Iraqi troops has invaded Kuwait this morning, and there is reported bombing and shelling, together with military occupation of most major Kuwaiti installations. Sources indicate that about 60 percent of the Kuwaiti army is now on summer leave, making any resistance the responsibility of a small residual force, and Palestinian and Kuwaiti civilians."

At six a.m. on August 2, from the living area of their 11<sup>th</sup> floor apartment in Kuwait University's Shuwaykh housing, Jula's sister, Mala, screamed at her sleeping husband, Shafeeq Jhabra, "There's machine-gun fire and shelling!" He found his way to the elevator and then to the ground floor to investigate. A cry from a crowd



of colleagues informed him of the trouble, "The Iraqis have taken over the campus!"

Shafeeq Jhabra could see the university's main gate from the elevator, and indeed, there were tanks, trucks, and hundreds of soldiers. Crowds of university employees on their way to work were being stopped, taken out of their cars, and made to put their hands on their heads or to lie on the ground. For hours the entire country was in shock. Confusion was rampant. Everyone was on the phone: asking, checking, or getting information. No one thought they would wake up in the world of Saddam Hussein and his army.

Jula plugged a quarter into one of the corridor phones and waited anxiously for her mother's reply from the other end.

"Mom? Mom? This is Jula. Did you hear?"

"Yes, Jula. Mala just phoned. It's true. Kuwait's been invaded. They don't know what will happen next. They've taken over the university where Shafeeq is. They were all right when she called, but she's very frightened."

After Jula's mother calmed her down, she coaxed her to go ahead and take her exam. Jula explained that she would not be home at the usual time after the class.

"After class, come to the Sheraton, Jula. I'm meeting relatives again before the wedding tonight. OK?"

"Yes, Mom."

"Do well on your exam. And don't worry."

In downtown Kuwait City, soldiers burst into a hotel where Shafeeq Jhabra's cousin was working as a busboy. They seized the safe deposit boxes and hotel cash, and transferred all the hotel employees to an assembly area where thousands of civilians were detained for several hours. Those who questioned Iraqi orders were beaten with clubs.

At the university, Shafeeq Jhabra and Mala lingered in a state of disbelief. The air conditioning had stopped working on campus, and no one could sleep from the heat. The campus supermarket had closed because of the mad rush there to buy necessities. A terrified Sudanese informed Shafeeq's brother that the adjacent Port of Kuwait had been taken over, and that the army was asking for Kuwaiti employees.

Late in the afternoon of August 3, Shafeeq Jhabra, Mala and their two children passed through the campus checkpoint (after being searched) and into the deserted streets of Kuwait. The city had changed overnight. Heavy tanks had destroyed the roads and highways, and the Iraqi army was everywhere. As the family drove slowly through the empty streets, they encountered hundreds of abandoned cars, some stripped of their wheels and parts, and others burning. They drove past burning stores that billowed smoke into the blackening Kuwait sky, and the smell of gunpowder hung heavy in the air.

At the hotel with her mother, Jula expressed relief that her exam was over. She was sure she had made an A. Preparations were well under way for her older sister's wedding, and dozens of guests had gathered in one of the ground floor lounges to chat and celebrate. The guests all tried to be gay, but thoughts of Mala in Kuwait subdued the hopeful group. Jula's mother had the added worry over accommodations. So many guests had arrived; it appeared there wouldn't be enough room at the Sheraton.

Shafeeq Jhabra and his family did what many Kuwaitis were doing. They left the campus, which was no longer safe now that it had become a stronghold for the Iraqi army, and sought security at his parent's house in the Kuwait City suburbs. Thirty-two people sought refuge in his parent's house. With rumors of fighting about to break out, they all slept in the basement. The days following the invasion, as a result of transportation problems and the rapidly growing scarcity of goods, new sidewalk markets suddenly began mushrooming all over the city. These open bazaars drew large crowds of people looking for a box of oranges, bananas, or other items that were fast becoming rare and expensive.

Kalua Tulip argued with the French caterer over the quote for the food for her wedding. "It's too much! We have to keep it under this price. You're too expensive. You'll have to cut it, or we'll go to another. We can still cancel."

"Is it not the budget quote you gave?" asked the manager, perturbed.

"Not at all. It's up \$2000. I never quoted you this. My mother will be hysterical!"

"I will go to work on it right away, miss. Sorry for this inconvenience."

On August 22, Jula found herself standing in "the longest line she had ever seen" at registration for fall classes. After two hours in the long line, sweaty and

impatient with “the whole silly business,” Julia smiled gratefully when a classmate from her summer group pushed her way through the mass with a Pepsi and some chips.

“I saw you in the line an hour ago!” laughed her friend.

“More like two,” was Julia’s reply.

“How’s it going? I mean, with your sister in Kuwait.”

“They’re trying to find a way out of there now, at least for Mala and the kids, but it’s tough and very dangerous. They’re still at the house of Shafeeq Jhabra’s parents, along with about 40 other people.”

Julia’s friend looked up at the ceiling and laughed. “It’s hot! Why don’t they turn on the fans?”

Julia laughed, too.

“Yea. What are fans for anyway?”

During the third week of the occupation in Kuwait, the Iraqis began a brutal offensive against Kuwaiti society. The policy of mass arrests and seizures of young Kuwaitis at checkpoints was intensified, and torture was practiced on a wide scale. One of Shafeeq Jhabra’s cousins came home one night to the crowded safety of Shafeeq’s parent’s basement with a gruesome tale to tell. With tears in his eyes, shivering in shock, he related his story to his concerned cousin.

“My friend at the ministry was found with an anti-occupation newsletter in his desk. He told the lieutenant it was not his, but he would not believe. They questioned him about the resistance for maybe an hour, holding all the members at gunpoint. They beat him and still he told them he was innocent, but they would not believe. Then they tied him by one hand to the revolving ceiling fan and he swung there, around in circles, screaming for hours while we listened and watched. Then the screaming stopped. When they finally cut him down, it was too late. The women were crying.”

Beginning in September, anywhere from one to five Kuwaitis were executed in front of their homes every day, most with their families watching. The owner of a travel agency was executed for possession of a Kuwaiti flag and a few family

photographs. Six Kuwaiti doctors were executed on charges of hiding valuable equipment and providing medical care to Kuwaiti resistance members.

Shafeeq Jhabra and Mala approached an unarmed checkpoint on Damascus road and decided to proceed until they heard shouts from behind. As soon as the soldier who stopped them saw that Shafeeq was a university professor, he yanked open the back door of the car and began searching. When he found an old pamphlet that had been in the car for months, containing photos of the Emir and the Prime minister, he flew into a rage and took aim at the car with his machine gun. Mala screamed out that the pamphlets were only children's programs. He stopped and stood in front of the car with the machine gun aimed while he read the pamphlet. He handed Shafeeq the pamphlet and ordered him to tear it up. Impatient with Shafeeq, he grabbed the pictures back, and threw them on the ground. Then he shouted, "Leave! Now! Next time I'll shoot!"

"Jula, did you hear the news about the Downtown Center last night?" asked one of her classmates in the 8<sup>th</sup> floor hallway lounge, Jula's favorite place to "hang out" between classes.

"No. What?" She replied.

"There was a robbery and vandalism. They did a lot of damage. A couple of students were arrested. Guess they were fighting over some stolen books or something. Everybody's talking about it."

"It's the first I've heard of it. I'm glad they were arrested if they caused damage. This campus is normally so clean."

"Yea, and the computers and all the equipment here work most of the time. Even when they break, they're repaired quickly."

"Not like some places!"

They both laughed, remembering another campus they had attended together.

When Shafeeq Jhabra and his wife went to retrieve his furniture and personal library from the university faculty housing, they had to answer questions at gunpoint to the new Iraqi university rector. After they were allowed entrance, they found scenes of chaos in student housing. Furniture was overturned, mattresses

were slashed, closets and cupboards broken with clubs, photos ripped and books torn. Computers, cars, and the law library were looted. Department files had been destroyed and most English books were torn. Ink was splattered on books everywhere.

Early in December Jula sat in one of her classes waiting for the professor to arrive. A few of her classmates were joking about graduation being a long way off. When one of the groups asked Jula jokingly if she thought they'd ever get out of there, she smiled and left the room in a hurry.

Later that evening Jula held Mala tight in her arms, and they cried together along with their mother and Mala's two children. Shafeeq Jhabra had just crossed safely into Jordan and would follow his wife to Houston as soon as he could get on a plane.

*(This is a fictional story based on factual events.)*

# The Creature

Thien Le

There once was a creature that lived in a forest. The forest was small, the forest was free, and most of all very wild. People did not go into that forest, nor did they even go near it. With walls of fir and curtains of vine, it was alive with shadows and places to hide. In this forest lived our creature, surrounded by trees of green and pools of shade, never knowing the world beyond this forest.

The creature lived in that small, free, and wild forest all by himself. In that forest he ate by himself, played by himself, and talked to himself. For as long as he remembered, there was no other like him. Each day the creature would do all kinds of things to occupy his time, but there was only one game that he liked the most. His favorite game was to pretend. He pretended to be a tree, and stood on a stump very still for as long as he could. He pretended to be a deer and ran through the forest chasing birds and squirrels. He pretended to be a fish, and swam in the lake until the sun went down. He loved this game and was great at it, but it was a lonely game to play. Day after day, he would stand on the same stump, run the same trail, and swim the same lake over and over until there was nothing left to enjoy. Eventually, having thought and thought, the creature cried out what was bothering him, "I have no friends!"

The animals would not talk to him. The trees would not walk with him. The lake would not comfort him. No matter how well he pretended to be one of them, none of the animals would be his friend. One day when the creature had had enough, he got up and went for a walk. He walked and walked for hours and hours until the greens and shadows no longer surrounded him. He walked and walked for miles and miles, until the forest he once knew was far far behind. He did not know why he walked; only that he did not want to stay in that place without friends and without fun.

Eventually, he became hungrier and hungrier. Life outside the forest was very different and not as easy as it was in the forest. Though still sad and without friends, the creature now had to worry about his meal, because that is what happens when you walk and walk without plans or friends. Hungrier and hungrier, weaker and weaker, sadder and sadder the creature became. After days of walking the creature stumbled upon a village. A nice pretty village in a shiny and welcoming valley full of people and houses. The people were all dressed brightly and the houses were all painted nicely. Each housed a garden of food and a door of different color.

“Hurray!” Cheered the creature. “These people will play with me!”

“Yippy!” Screamed the creature. “These people will also feed me!”

And with hope renewed he trotted his way into that village of gardens and doors. But life outside the forest was very different. When the villagers saw him, they all ran away to hide and stare. No one would come out to greet him, no one would come to play with him, and no one would ask to be his friend. The creature tried to find these people, who were all in their houses with their painted doors. Approaching a bright orange door, the creature would knock and plead,

“Would you come out and play with me?”

“Would you come out and eat with me?”

“Would you come out and be my friend?”

Having heard him, the orange door replied,

“Who are you?”

“What is your name?”

“What do you do?”

The creature, having grown up in the forest where he ate by himself, played by himself, and talked to himself, did not have the answers. He was who he was, no one gave him a name, and no one told him what he did.

So the creature replied, “I am myself, I do not have a name, and I do what I do.”

The orange door did not open for him and would talk no more. The creature

stood and waited, but after some time his hunger renewed and he walked away to try his luck at the next door. But no matter the color, be they blue, green, red, or yellow, none would open for him. It dawned on the creature that his answers were wrong and if only he knew what to say then those painted doors would finally open. So still without friends, still very sad, and now even hungrier, he continued walking—leaving that village with its gardens and doors.

For miles and miles he walked and walked. He would have kept walking still except he met a man. The man was carrying a large sack upon his back. He looked friendly and waved to the creature. Seeing his chance the creature came up and asked,

“Who are you?”

“What is your name?”

“What do you do?”

The man, being friendly and jolly, stopped in his tracks to answer the creature,

“My name is Frederick, I am a baker, and I am carrying bread back to my village.”

“Finally!” Thought the creature. “Someone who will play with me.”

Then he asked the man, “Would you be my friend? Would you play my game? I am so very sad and especially hungry.”

Having looked at the pitiful creature, Frederick, the baker who was carrying bread back to his village, felt sorry for him.

“Yes, let us be friends. What games do you play? And please have some of my bread.”

“Let’s play pretend!” Cheered the creature, and then he ate Frederick.

CHOMP CHOMP, CRUNCH CRUNCH, GNASH GNASH

The creature played this game the way he had always played this game. He wore Frederick’s skin and put on his clothes. He picked up Frederick’s sack and walked to the village, feeling full and happy at pretending to be the baker. At



the village of gardens and the doors, the villagers all greeted him. Everyone was friendly and waved when he came up, which was very different from how they treated the creature.

“Hello Frederick, how are you, my friend?”

“Hello Frederick, can I have some bread?”

“Hello Frederick, will you play with us?”

Everyone in the village was now his friend, everyone wanted to play with him and talk to him. So the creature went about the village telling people,

“Hello! My name is Frederick, and I am a baker. Here, have some of my bread.”

All was well and the creature was so very happy. He had friends, he was full, and he had a name. Frederick, the baker, a name everyone liked. He played all day and into the night, laughing and dancing with all his new friends. Being the baker was so much fun! Then, after much playing, he went off to bed, dreaming of his name and what a wonderful name it was too.

The next morning came and the creature was hungry again. But, most importantly, he was bored, bored with pretending to be Frederick. It was a wonderful name, but now it was a boring one. He did not want to be Frederick anymore and started to feel sad again, that is, until he bumped into the mayor,

“Hello, Frederick, my name is Dallion and I am the Mayor.”

“Hello, Dallion, would you like to play a game?”

“Why sure, what kind of ga-...”

And the creature ate Dallion.

CHOMP CHOMP, CRUNCH CRUNCH, GNASH GNASH

The creature then did what he did when he was in his forest; he wore Dallion's skin and put on his clothes. Once again, the villagers greeted him and played with him because he was now Dallion, the Mayor. Oh, the creature had so much fun with his new friends while pretending to be Dallion. Being the mayor was so much fun! But, just like before, when the next morning came, the creature was hungry and bored. So he kept on playing with different people.

CHOMP CHOMP, CRUNCH CRUNCH, GNASH GNASH

He would wear their skin and don their clothes, introducing himself with his new name,

“My name is Otto, and I am the cooper.”

CHOMP CHOMP, CRUNCH CRUNCH, GNASH GNASH

“My name is Allan, and I am the sheriff.”

CHOMP CHOMP, CRUNCH CRUNCH, GNASH GNASH

“My name is Lily, and I am the herbalist.”

CHOMP CHOMP, CRUNCH CRUNCH, GNASH GNASH

“My name is David, and I am the barkeep.”

CHOMP CHOMP, CRUNCH CRUNCH, GNASH GNASH

“My name is Ivan, and I am the shepherd.”

Everyday the villagers would play with him, but everyday he would still be hungry and bored. Sure, it was fun to pretend to be someone else, but he felt that none of those names were really his name. None of those jobs were really his job, and none of those people were truly his friend. He kept playing until, one day, when people noticed that there were much less villagers walking around, they began asking,

“Where is Frederick, the baker?”

“Where is Dallion, the Mayor?”

“Or the cooper, the sheriff, the herbalist, the barkeep, the shepherd?”

Soon the villagers were not friendly anymore, no one wanted to play. They all hid behind their painted doors, and stopped going outside to play. They had

suspected that something had happened to all of their friends. The creature became even unhappier because he did not know who he had to pretend to be to have friends again. Despite playing his favorite game day after day, he was just as sad as when he had left his forest. The creature was still the creature, he had not found a name for himself, and no one told him what he did.

One day, the villagers hired a famous hunter. His name was Samuel. Samuel also had a favorite game that he liked to play. His game was finding things that were missing, and he was great at his game. With so many of the villagers missing, Samuel began to play his game. He would go around to each of the painted doors and ask everyone questions. Questions about who they were and questions about their missing friends. Questions became clues, and clues would lead to finding things that were missing. That is, until Samuel knocked on the orange door and met the creature. Well, the creature was not really the creature because he was pretending to be Isaac, the student. He had stopped having fun as Isaac and was getting bored with studying and taking tests. And so when Samuel the hunter knocked on his orange door the creature was eager to see who it was.

Samuel, the hunter, spoke to the creature as he had spoken with the other villagers.

"Hello, my name is Samuel and I am t-"

"Yes, yes I know who you are," said the creature.

### CHOMP CHOMP, CRUNCH CRUNCH, GNASH GNASH

And so the creature ate Samuel, the hunter who was good at finding things that were missing, and who, in the end, found what he was looking for, just not in the places he thought. But just as the creature was finishing up Samuel, he noticed a little girl who was staring at him. She saw the creature in his own skin when he was no longer pretending. She saw the creature eating Samuel and putting on Samuel's skin. She saw the creature and knew exactly what he was. A face of teeth and blood, the hands of claws and gore, and the body of death and terror. She screamed at the top of her lungs to all who could hear,

"Monster !!!! It's eating him !!!!"

And then the creature smiled. A monstrous smile of tooth and blood, but a smile nonetheless. He smiled because, just like Samuel, he found his answer, just not in the places he had thought. It dawned on him that he had found what he was looking for the whole time. A name, a purpose, and people to play with as his real self.

Extremely happy now and ever so grateful, the creature looked at the girl and said,

“I am Monster, I will eat you. Would you like to play a game?”

CHOMP CHOMP, CRUNCH CRUNCH, GNASH GNASH



## Exitus

*Wilson Marinero*

*The Bayou Review*

I ate the  
M/M in my eye  
I want ~~to~~ black, sell me to the ~~state~~  
I'll think I'll spot me





on  
back.



# Gabriel Orozco at the Tate Modern

Paul Murphy

Tate Modern, London  
February, 2011

The artist Gabriel Orozco was born in Mexico in 1962, began to rise to prominence in the 1990's and now lives internationally, strung out, you might say, somewhere between New York, London and Mexico City. That sounds depressingly rootless; many of the works offer testimony to his constant shifts and possible escape acts.



Gabriel Orozco

La DS 1993.

Fonds national d'art contemporain, Puteaux, France

© Courtesy of the artist.

Photo: Florian Kleinfenn



Some of Orozco's works imply possible new horizons but many are rooted in art college banality. An enormous chess set with hundreds of squares, fifty or so knight pieces. The knight is the only chess piece that has two simultaneous moves within its single board move. In psychology a knight's move is an attempt to connect two disparate concepts or implies the disconnected or fragmented thought process of the psychotic. Modern art, Orozco is saying, resembles psychosis in its attempt to describe chaos or fragmentariness and the connections in between without collapsing into total chaos itself.

Orozco's sports car for a very fat man or two very thin ones, for instance (*La DS*, 1993), is another sideways portrayal of the urge towards everything shiny and new, fast, modern gadgets that do more than move you between A and B. His game of carambole, a French form of billiards with a pocketless rectangular table (*Carambole with Pendulum*, 1996), is transformed into a pocketless oval table and is played out interactively as visitors are also allowed to play the cannon off the white ball into the red ball swinging from a pendulum, a feat that this reviewer accomplished once anyway. It's as if the table itself bent *perspectively* in a distorting invisible mirror.

Orozco's work has undoubted connections to surrealism obviously, where the everyday is imagined new, yet Orozco casts his decaying laundry hung out on invisible lines or empty cardboard box in a way that allows you to smash into it or even ask: is this laundry or a cardboard box? Indeed they are, is the answer. However Orozco's work seems connected more intrinsically to the games of perspective and infinite regression configured by the Dutch artist M.C. Escher. Escher was hardly original as Rembrandt, Turner or Picasso were, but he was more than a gimmick or one hit wonder, managing to re-interrogate ways of seeing in a perplexingly original sense.

Sometimes Orozco depicts the repetitive symbol of two yellow mopeds in some presumably Latin American city, images like atoms or atomic symbols, machine code computing binaries like the infinite regression of perspective found in the work of Escher, for instance, that turns out instead to be pages from a telephone directory, jaw-droppingly repetitive yet intrinsically comfortingly so. There are symmetries as well as asymmetries, decaying truck tires salvaged from an elephant's graveyard of trucks it seems, the kind of pure waste that we are accustomed to in

the west being transformed into art but which might indeed seem gob-smackingly original in contemporary Mexico. Orozco salvages waste, yet it remains detritus until re-forged or re-imagined in the artist's imagination. In short, it's not clear if Orozco is this artist but his work is tending in the right direction. Perhaps *Black Kites* (1997) is his most quintessentially Aztec work, a human skull decorated with black and white squares, with its intimation of human sacrifice and tribal decoration, it yokes together the violence of contemporary Mexico with its Aztec antecedents.

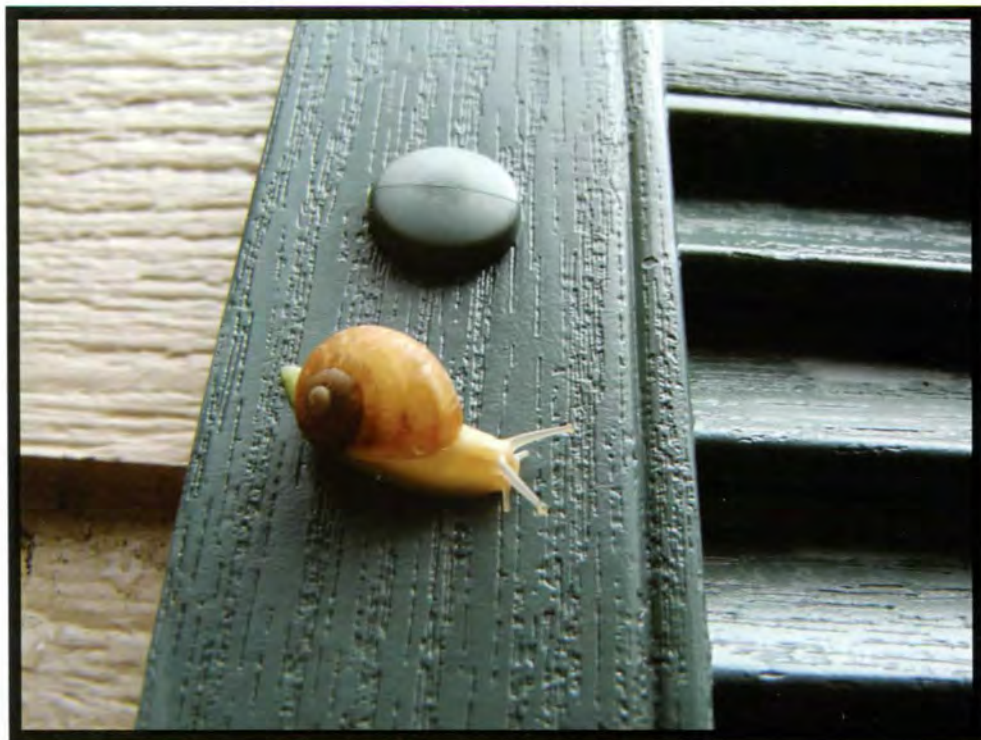
There was very little text accompanying this exhibition, possibly because little has been written about Orozco in Europe generally and in Britain particularly.



## Bad Dog

*Tracy Lyall*

*The Bayou Review*



## Snail on the Shutter

*Becky Van Meter*

*Volume 25 - Issue 1*

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## Out of the Ordinary

*Bryan Nguyen*

*The Bayou Review*

## Ekushey to International Mother Language Day

*Dr. Anisul M. Islam*

Bangladesh achieved its independence from the colonial clutches of Pakistan in 1971 through a bloody war of independence. The history of independence of this nation was not an isolated incident. It was a long history of struggle against oppression and subjugation of all kinds by Pakistan and other external and colonial powers at different times in its long history.

In this checkered history, Ekushey February (Twenty First February) occupies a special place in the hearts and minds of the people and in the sociopolitical and cultural map of the people of Bangladesh. On this historic day in 1952, the valiant people of Bangladesh came out on the street voluntarily and spontaneously to protest against the sinister designs of the then Central Government of Pakistan to impose Urdu (an external language not spoken in Bangladesh) as the only state language of Pakistan. The police opened fire on the unarmed civilian demonstrators and took away a number of young lives. Some brave young lives were thus sacrificed on the streets of Dhaka; the names such as Salam, Barkat, Rafiq, Jabbar, and others became the first martyrs of the language movement on this day.

Since then, the Ekushey February is celebrated in Bangladesh each and every year as a very solemn and most auspicious day in its checkered history. This day became recognized as the "Bangla Language Martyrs Day" (Shaheed Dibosh). It is indeed unprecedented in the history of mankind for any people to sacrifice their lives for the preservation of their language (their mother tongue) and culture.

The significance of this day goes far beyond the struggle for the preservation of Bangla language. In a broader sense, it also represented a struggle for the preservation of Bangla culture and heritage. The struggle subsequently manifested itself into a

broader movement against the political oppression and economic subjugation by the then West Pakistan-based military-industrial-bureaucratic ruling class over the Bangla-speaking majority people in the then East Pakistan (today's Bangladesh). In essence, this monumental and emotion-filled twenty-first February (Ekushey February) day sowed the seeds of Bangladeshi nationalism that ultimately led to a ten-month long bloody liberation movement that finally led to the emergence of a free and independent nation on earth, the People's Republic of Bangladesh, in 1971.

As a matter of fact, the significance of this day has gone beyond the national boundary of Bangladesh. As many Bangladeshi people now live in foreign lands, these expatriate Bangladeshis also solemnly observe this day with as much dedication, devotion, and commitment as their counterparts at home. More importantly, the twenty-first February has now been proclaimed as the International Mother Language Day (IMLD) by the UNESCO (United Nation's Educational, Social, and Cultural Organization), which is an agency of the UN (United Nations) , during its November 17, 1999 General Assembly Conference.

Since the year 2000, i.e. the beginning of the new millennium, this day has been recognized and celebrated by the UNESCO and all UN member nations as a symbol of struggle for the preservation of indigenous language and unique cultures of their own nations and as a symbol to embrace and promote multiculturalism in and around the globe. Given that this declaration represents an international recognition of the unique event that happened in Bangladesh in 1952, the people of Bangladesh living at home and abroad can take great pride in the fact that our unique history has achieved such a global recognition and honor.

As a free and independent nation, we can now feel vindicated that the lives laid down by our fellow citizens in 1952 did not go in vain. Their sacrifice not only cemented the bond of Bangladeshi nationalism and the subsequent independence of the country, but it also brought pride, prestige, honor, and recognition at the global stage for our beloved and cherished motherland we call Bangladesh. Let's not forget the supreme sacrifices of the martyrs of the 1952 language movement from our heart and use this occasion each year to renew our pledge of allegiance to a free and independent Bangladesh and to preserve our unique and rich language, heritage, and culture.

# Understanding Buddha

*Bradley Earle Hoge*

understanding Buddha  
in a modern context  
is not about string theory  
cosmic dance of quantum  
particles somehow connecting  
all of us nor about multiple  
universe interpretations  
of reality that allow everyone's  
truth to be real it's not about particle/  
wave duality that places us  
in the center of our own  
creation no anthropic  
cosmological principle  
it does not stem from mitochondrial  
Eve or emanate from black  
hole event horizon in fact  
it is the exact opposite  
it is simply that no matter  
how hard we look  
at this universe there is nothing  
that is not cold and empty  
no spark of life except red  
in tooth and claw no redemption  
in art and poetry science  
or philosophy we cannot paint  
warmth onto cruelty  
we cannot argue light  
into existence we can only  
live as if life is meaningful  
knowing the only path  
to making our lives meaningful  
is through compassion  
and tolerance





## Butterflies

*Bryan Nguyen*

*The Bayou Review*



# Blur

*Laura Lipschutz*

*Volume 25 - Issue 1*

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## Garden Palette

*Laura Lipschutz*

*The Bayou Review*



# Botanica

*Angela Rosales*

*Volume 25 - Issue 1*

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# Love Wave

*Rachael Walston*

Gentle spark,  
now an inferno, that sweeps  
across the fields of desire  
threatening my core

upon pleasure, my skin  
becomes a subtle river  
that with your touch  
swells beyond its banks

Firestorms quenched  
my body  
a soft marsh  
where our waters meet.

## A Poem by Sunlight

*Steven Shelton*

Temporary sunlight  
gallops helter skelter and  
ghostly through the window pane,  
frightening the reading lamp's shadow  
into hiding in a rigid stance along the wall.  
Peek-a-boo, dark shadow.  
I see you.

# Nafta

*Benjamin M. Reyna*

*Reprinted from Volume 6, Issue 2*

Screaming forklifts rape the valley,  
as fortune's fat five-hundred  
market the last frontier.  
Hydraulic hook and chain,  
cargo nets, leather straps  
the wetbacks to a new yoke:

The white folks are coming,  
The white folks are comin'.

## Generations of Pain

Cassandra Harris

*Reprinted from Volume 7, Issue 1*

Men in our family don't seem to last long. Smothered by obsessive women they die young, either physically, mentally, and/or financially.

I used to think some genetic monster rested in our bosoms that made us attracted to weak men. As I grew, I came to know the only thing that made most of them weak was the fact that they loved us enough to hang around overbearing, domineering, abrasive women.

It has to be excruciating to live with such an aberration. You also have to wonder how great a capacity for love some of these men must have possessed.

Take my father; an average man, with the flaws and faults of many a human being. He brought laughter and joy to my brothers and me many times. Strong shoulders, broad smile, resounding bass voice—he stood ten feet tall in my eyes. Every chance mother got she took him down an inch, publicly and privately. I remember thinking, why did she stay with him if she felt he was such a no good, alcoholic, womanizing derelict. I know he must have hurt her deeply from time to time; but it was apparent on more than one occasion that they loved each other deeply.

I recall stories about how more than once she had left him. Once he walked thirty miles to plead with her to stay with him. I also remember the genuine pain in her face as tears rolled down her cheeks whenever he said he was going to leave.

Now, looking back I wonder if obligations should be damned and everyone go their separate way when you start to dislike each other so much that the only



look between you is one of disdain. My father was far from perfect but I realize now no man could have lived up to my mother's expectations. She often spoke of being punished because they were "unequally yoked." She constantly remarked how, without her, he would be nothing. If there is such a personality that can be described as shrewish, it might be ascribed to her.

Thinking back, I realize I've committed murder myself. I've assassinated two husbands mentally, perhaps a little financially.

Yes...several men have suffered under my hand; brothers, cousins, lovers, acquaintances, friends...and now my sons.

The destruction was never intentional. It began lovingly with a passionate determination to always make better the individual I tortured.

No. I won't kill anymore. I love my sons and they deserve a chance. I pray any damage done is not irreparable. I know I can change. God help me, I must.

So, every day I embrace myself, look at me and say "Today you will enjoy you and everything and everyone around you." I hug my sons and tell them, "I love you. You are the best part of my life. Should I for any brief moment make you feel otherwise say so." They do.

Maybe there must be pain; but the destruction has been minimized.

# Rasket

*Merrill Jones*

"Ain't like she ain't deserved it." That's what I told him. "Always whoring like she do. Whoring on John and whoring on Cecil. But I ain't done no stabbing. She fall on that knife. Think maybe God done the stabbing cause it ain't right a woman whoring against her man on them two brothers. I mean, if Cecil ain't done it, she fall on that knife."

"So you think she was having sexual relations with John and Cecil?"

"I know she be on em," I said. "Whoring right up on em both."

"Okay," he said. "By whoring on them, you mean—" Him saying whoring slow and careful like it's a bad word. "You mean she was whoring on *you*?"

"You ain't getting it," I told him. "She ain't whored on me in a long time. That's how I known to watch and see she whoring against me on them two brothers. But I ain't stabbed her, though maybe I should'a. Less it was Cecil done it, she fall on that knife. And if that's it, it's God to thank. All I'm saying."

"Rasket," he said. "If I'm going to be able to help you, I need to get all the facts straight. When you say she was whoring on Cecil and John, do you mean she was cheating on you?"

"What else?" I asked him. "You married?"

"Well that's not really important."

"You be happy your woman whore down on another man?" I said.

"No, but—"

"Your woman whoring on somebody right now," I told him. "I bet you."

"This is not about me," he said.

"But you see what I mean," I told him. "Can't be too sure. Ain't that right?"

"No," he said. "I'm sure. But this isn't about—"

"You ain't there. You don't know."

"Let's get back to—"

"You can't know," I said. "Can you? Tell me how you can know?"

"Know what, Rasket?"

"Where she at," I said. "Where your woman at? You here. You can't know. I'm right," I said. Cause I knew I was right. You can't always know.

"Well, Rasket," he said. "It sounds like there may have been some animosity, a motivation—"

"I don't know nothing bout her motivations for whoring against me," I told him. "She ain't had none far as I can tell. And really that makes it even more against God, her being married and all, without no motivations." He tried to interrupt me the whole time I was talking. "You know it's rude to try and talk in the middle of a man talking. You ain't learnt that in all your schooling?"

"Rasket," he said, getting this look on him like as to school *me*. And I started thinking, should'a been him fall on that knife. "What I'm trying to say is there was a reason. Now it appears you had a reason to want to hurt her. You understand?"

"Hell," I said. "I got more'n one reason." And I put my fingers up one at a time, thumb first. "Cecil. John. Whore. But that don't mean she ain't fall on that knife. Less Cecil done it."

Then he asked me to tell the story and why that knife she apparently fall on, that's what he said too, *apparently* fall on—like he ain't listened to a damn thing I told him. Wanting to know why that knife was nowhere to be found and why it was John dialed 911.

"Cause I wasn't there yet," I said. "Maybe she ain't really fall on it. Hell. Maybe Cecil put it in her. Maybe he find out she whoring on his brother, John. Ever think of that?"

"Rasket?" he said. "Rasket? Is that you?"

"What you mean?" I asked him. "Who you think you been talking to this whole damn time."

"Cecil said when he came around the corner of the hall, he saw you pull up and away from her and then run out of the kitchen into the backyard."

"That's what them cops said too," I told him. "But I come to find Cecil just saw a flash. He ain't seen me. Ain't that right? Ain't he just seen a flash?"

"He did say he couldn't tell for sure," he said. "But when she comes out of—"

"Comes out?" I asked him. "You really think God gonna let a wanton woman come out of nothing? And it don't matter," I said. "Cause I ain't done nothing. And if she says I had, well who's gonna trust a whore?" That's what I told him.

But he said it ain't added up. Like it was all math that makes the difference. And I started thinking bout her waking up from that coma. Popping back her lids and seeing them white-painted cardboard tiles in the ceiling. Hearing that machine beeping like it does, choking on that tube that keeps her breathing. Then I wondered, what if she thinks I gave her that push? What if she thinks she ain't really stumbled on that knife? Or if it was Cecil, what if she thinks I done it?

"You know where John is?" he asked me.

"Think he done run off," I said. "Soon as he find out. That's John. Always up and gone when it gets something hot."

"Maybe you can help me find him," he told me.

"Why I wanna find that s'om bitch," I said. And he kept saying he needs to talk to John, how he ain't talked to John yet, like I could just think John up or some shit. Hell, if I could think John anything, I'd think him gone, and that's what I told him. "You try and find a man your woman been up on?" I said. "Not less it was to kill him!"

"When am I getting out of here?" I said.

"Cecil?"

"What else you wanna know bout Cecil?"

"Rasket?" he said, and then he took his clipboard and wrote something on it.

"Don't wear it out," I told him.

"Wear what out?"

"The name," I said. "Rasket's the name. Don't wear it out. You ain't never heard that?"

"Okay," he said. "I was just talking to Cecil."

"What?" I said, and then I knew he was crazy. "Just now? You gonna tell me you a god damned genie? Don't tell me you one of them tellpathics. They don't teach that shit even to doctors."

"Cecil said that maybe it was John he saw running off with the knife. Could that be true?"

"You said you ain't seen John," I said. "Ain't that right?"

"Rasket," he said. "I need to know what happened to John."

"I tell you and I'm off the hook?" I asked him.

"It could definitely help your case," he said.

But I didn't know where John was. Hell, like I keep tabs on some shit getting on my wife. He probably got his ass straight out of the country. I know I stab some whore I sure wouldn't stick around, no way.

"Wish I could help," I said. "But you can't find him, right? That ought'a tell you something. You ain't talked to him?"

"Not yet," he said.

"You don't know where he might be?"

"We were hoping you would."

"Why don't you ask his brother?" I said. "Bet he knows where he gone to."

"He says he doesn't know."

"Course not," I said. "Gotta protect your own."



## Untitled 2

*Saul Cisneros*

*Volume 25 - Issue 1*

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# Nobody and Nothing

*Carl Vinson Neyland*

“You ain’t nothing! And you never will be nothing!”

I’m pretty sure at some point in time you’ve heard this before. A herald of lost cause perception. Remember the adjacent sequel of doom, “You ain’t nobody! And you ain’t going to ever be nobody!”

But, tell me this, what is Nothing. And what on earth is Nobody. I mean, if nothing from nothing leaves nothing, then nobody is perhaps the summation of void, vacancy and absenteeism. Yet, the most essential question remains; Does being or emulating Nothing in essence make me Nobody? Or am I nevertheless, Somebody even though I am Nothing?

Nobody and nothing.

What in hell did you say?

## Yet Another Meta-Writing Poem

*Steven Shelton*

If writing were not a battle,  
then it would not be worth your time  
to sort through these bloody symbols  
and swear to crucify all rhyme.

Unless you read between the lines,  
you're sure to find a lying man.  
You may think I'm hung up on this.  
Frankly, love, I don't give a damn.

In two verses now, I've begun  
to scrawl truth—hypothetically.  
I may have followed through, or not.  
Neither shall prove that you can see.

Now, full circle, as art must come,  
when nothing's wicked, nothing's won.



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# Mathematics of Eternity

Bradley Earle Hoge

We learn by experience  
that mathematics  
helps simplify the problems  
in our lives, that formulas  
are easier to deal  
with than unruly  
data, that if we must  
pay attention to every  
detail the world becomes  
too confusing and frightening  
like trying to balance  
all the grains of sand  
on the earth, each  
containing eternity  
each moment the universe

## Empty Rafts

Tommy N. Thomason

*Reprinted from Volume 8, Issue 2*

Send 'em back to Cuba.  
Real Americans, we say  
send 'em back where they came from.  
Send 'em back,  
they'll take our jobs, our money  
(our women)  
and undermine our Good American Freedom.  
Send 'em back.

Our Coast Guard's out there now  
wasting our Solid American Tax Dollars  
with our Brave American Boys  
(God bless 'em)  
risking life and limb to save those  
(communists)  
Cubans.  
Send 'em back  
(let 'em drown)

The Radioman said a storm came through  
(they shoulda stayed in Cuba)  
Said the Coast Guard found some empty rafts  
(so what?)  
after the storm.  
Warm and dry Americans, we close our eyes,  
(serves 'em right)  
change the channel and believe  
nobody drowned.

No desperate men and women tried to hold on  
to the raft  
to the idea  
to the (phantom) freedom  
that lured them from their homes.

Full and Sleepy Americans, we loosen our belts,  
turn off the news, and dismiss the idea  
that fathers and mothers, families and children  
tried to stay above the waves  
until the waves said ENOUGH!  
and pushed them under the sea.

Safe and Secure Americans, we change the subject  
unwilling to think too long about  
empty rafts.

## Brewster's Box

Aaron Neathery

*Reprinted from Volume 9, Issue 1*

There aren't many alive today who remember Robert Brewster or the circumstances surrounding his mysterious demise (and I use the term "demise" for want of something more accurate). Those who do actually remember Bob Brewster recall a grave man who always behaved as if a close relative had just passed away. No one living remembers Bob ever laughing or even smiling. In brief, Bob was a gloomy man, practically a hermit, all of which made his final days doubly ironic.

Mid-1933 found America in the depths of the Great Depression and Bob Brewster up to his neck in debt. Bob had managed to acquire a position on the assembly line at the local Krupp motor car factory, but the meager three-fifty a week this back-breaking labor fetched Bob was scarcely enough to allow him to pay his rent and survive at the same time. Every evening aching and tired, Bob would catch a streetcar back to his apartment and thumb through the employment pages. This had been his routine since July of the previous year and he was ready to accept his fate when the package arrived.

It was a very large box securely wrapped in brown paper and string. That the postman had to wheel the box into his apartment on a dolly betrayed its excessive weight. Bob ardently signed for the package and the postman departed. But Bob's joy proved premature when he discovered that the package wasn't for him. It was, in fact, addressed to a Mr. Robert Brewer who, according to the shipping label, lived in an apartment-block further down the street. It was a curious mistake for the postman to make. Bob was surprised to note that the sender of this package was a government agency; the Federal Entertainment Bureau situated in Washington,

D.C.

Angry at the people and various governmental agencies who were busy not sending him large, heavy boxes in the post, he decided to keep the parcel out of spite. He deserved a gift and this might as well be it ... whatever it might be.

With a grunt, Bob hefted the box onto his kitchen table. Indeed, the box felt as if it might contain a solid block of lead! Growing ever more curious, Bob eagerly opened the parcel with a kitchen knife. Beneath an abundance of shredded newspaper was something metallic. He tilted the box and carelessly rattled the object from its confines. Bob had never seen anything quite like what was now resting on his table. It was a machine that appeared as if it might have been the illegitimate offspring of a motion picture projector and a radio. The device seemed to have been designed in a wind tunnel, but its sleek, aerodynamic surface was marred by many unstreamlined, cryptically labeled knobs, switches, and buttons. The machine's most striking features were its large lens, its radio-like aerial, and a counter reading five thousand-ten, marked "circulation."

So alien was the piece of machinery, that it seemed a shock that it would be plugged into an ordinary electrical outlet. Tied to its cord was a small paperboard card. Bob pulled it off and plugged the machine into the wall. It lit up like a Christmas tree. Bob forced his attention away from the wildly blinking and flashing machine and began to read.

Dear Mr. Brewer,

Here is the camera. Broadcasting begins at 6:00 CST and will continue, daily, at six until we contact you again. Good luck

Sylvan Foster

FEB coordinator

Bob glanced over at his clock. It was nearly six now. As the second hand passed twelve, Bob noticed that the camera had begun to emit a low humming. This humming rapidly rose in pitch till it was a piercing shriek. He was about to pick

the machine up and toss it out the nearest window (lest it be a bomb of some kind) when, suddenly, there was a loud pop and blinding flash. Startled, Bob threw his arm across his face to protect himself from flying shrapnel. When he realized that he was in no pain, he took a close look at the machine. It popped and flashed again and Bob got it full in the eyes. Twice more it flashed with a short duration between each and, finally, the machine made a small chirp and fell completely silent.

Still suffering the effects of the glare, Bob rubbed his eyes and squinted at the device on his table. It was no longer lit and was apparently off. To make doubly sure, he yanked the cord from the wall. Bob was fatigued from a hard day's work and decided to postpone a thorough examination of the machine until the next day.

Bob awoke, as usual, to the sound of newsboys hawking their papers in the streets below his window. After his usual cup of hot coffee, he stepped outside and bought his usual copy of *The Sun*. As he was flipping through all of the usual news, something caught his eye on the funny page. Among the standards like "Thimble Theater" and "Wash Tubbs" was a new strip titled "Stan's Tavern." The funny thing about the strip, though, was that there was no joke told nor any tavern depicted. There was just a cartoon character alternately shielding his eyes or staring straight out at the reader with a vacant expression. It didn't take Bob long to realize that the character was him!

By the time Bob was hit by this bewildering revelation, it was time for work. He reluctantly left his apartment and the machine for a troubled day on the Krupp assembly line.

When he returned that evening, Bob once again plugged in the machine and, as before, it immediately sprang to life. Anxious to test out his theory, he put the machine on the coffee table facing the couch. At six, the machine flashed. Bob sat on his couch holding up a sign reading "Hi."

The next day, bob bought his paper and opened it to "Stan's Tavern." There he was again, holding his sign. Bob didn't really know what to think. In the right hands, this fantastic camera might prove a powerful tool but Bob simply had no idea what to do with it. Rather than give the camera to its rightful owner, however,

Bob decided to put it in his closet and forget about it.

For the next week, *The Sun* continued to run "Stan's Tavern" with each panel a solid black. On Sunday, "Stan's Tavern" was a full page of solid black panels in the color comic supplement. Initially, Bob felt a little guilty whenever he came across it but, after a while, these feelings subsided. On Monday, he noticed that the strip was missing from the paper and he was relieved.

Then, two weeks to the day the camera was first delivered to him, Bob received a phone call.

He barely had a second before the receiver was placed to his ear when a man yelled, "Do you have the camera?!"

By now, Bob had practically forgotten about the machine collecting dust in the back of his close. Embarrassed, he was about to slam down the phone when the man on the other end began to yell hysterically.

"Don't hang up, Mr. Brewster! You're in terrible danger!"

"What?" asked Bob, nonplussed.

"Mr. Brewster, this is Sylvan Foster of the Federal Entertainment Bureau. Listen, Brewster, you've got to plug it in immediately!"

"The camera? Why?"

"Do it! Now!"

The command sounded so urgent that Bob felt he had no other option but to obey it. He pulled the machine from the closet and plugged it in.

"Brewster, on the camera there's a panel labeled 'circulation.' What does it read?"

Bob noticed that the counter no longer read five thousand-ten. Now it only read "one." Bob relayed this information to the agent on the phone.

"That means there is only one paper running the strip! Listen, Brewster, you can't let it drop below one! You've got to do something to keep that last paper from dropping you!"

"Like what?"

"Something funny! Anything! It's almost six! Hurry!"

Bob was baffled. He sat on his couch facing the camera which had just now begun to hum. It was like facing a firing squad without a blindfold. He tried desperately to think of a joke but none were surfacing. He was beginning to regret being such a solemn man.

But just before the first flash, Bob remembered a joke he had heard when he was a kid, the old 'banana-in-the-ear' gag. . .

The camera began to flash and Bob told his joke.

When it was over, he picked up the phone receiver again.

"Brewster? Are you still there?"

"Yes."

"Thank God for that! Look, Brewster, I'm going to have some of our men come around tomorrow morning and take that machine, okay?"

"Fine by me," said Bob.

Early Wednesday morning, two men from the FEB arrived at Bob Brewster's apartment. It was locked and, after several minutes of calling to him through the door, the agents kicked it in.

Bob Brewster was nowhere to be found. His bed was still made and a cold, half-eaten plate of beans sat on the kitchen table. In the chair at the table was an unusual pile of empty clothes. A pair of shoes lay on the floor.

And on the coffee table before the couch was the camera, its circulation counter displaying six zeros in a row.



# In the Deafening Silence of No Central Air

*Natasha Bardwell*

All she could hear was the bedlam of racing thoughts assailing her skull;  
Fire ants pouring out of an undone lair, fighting and biting their way up  
bare feet.

# Window

*Nain Martinez*

My home has  
Many windows

Windows enclose my view

Blue Sky, white clouds Tree tops, two pines Neighbor's house Chain-link fence Rose bushes Tall grass, two months old
---

Wind moves my plants  
Plants grow    grow    grow  
So slow

Brown feathers, black eyes  
Color not blending with sky  
A bird  
Brings action to my still world

I watch the bird  
Does it see into my home  
When I'm not looking  
Does it see action or nothingness

I look at my neighbor's house  
For the first time  
I do not venture to stare when he is there

Outside my window

## Getting Hired

Lupe Méndez

Wear black,  
its appropriate  
for today.

Lace up the Filas.

You'll run the  
next four blocks

past two gangs,

Juan Sexto,  
who will want to  
sell you dime  
bags of bad shit,

and Carmona  
who offers ass  
on the corner.

Don't stand

on the seawall  
you will stink  
like old fish and  
sun burnt sand.

Walk in quietly.

Don't bother  
smiling a lot;  
she will see your  
soul stick out.

Be semi- confident,  
you might just  
wash dishes today.

When she asks you  
why you came in  
to the San Luis Hotel  
to get a job, mention  
great opportunities;  
say

you have a few friends  
whose older siblings work  
and are well off there.

But never mention

you want this job  
because you are  
scared of the way

Wilmar got beat down last night

and you figured out  
this job might be the

only way to keep you sane  
and be the step to lead you

out of town.

# From Word Choice to World Class: An Interview with Poet Lupe Méndez

*Gustavo Jacobo, General Editor*

Poet Lupe Méndez invokes images that juxtapose Mexican experience with American reality, resulting in a unique voice that reimagines a world perspective. Galveston Island witnessed Méndez's struggles, like the time when teachers at Live Oaks Baptist Church labeled objects to help him acquire the English language. Méndez surpassed that childhood experience to inspire the rest of us through his poetry. Recently, Méndez was published in *Sudden Fiction Latino: Short-Short Stories from the United States and Latin America*. And, although his work proves to be world class, Méndez remains humble and true to his roots. Through his actions, Méndez does more than express experience through writing. The living poet puts words into action.

I caught up with Méndez a few days after one of his readings for a Mexican-American literature class. It is not coincidence that Méndez plays a key role in the organization that inspires many Latinos to write — *Nuestra Palabra: Latino Writers Having Their Say*. As a volunteer coordinator for the “Edward James Olmos Latino Book Festival” hosted by *Nuestra Palabra*, Méndez says that “[he] always got stuck with the dirty work.” Of course, you have to know Méndez to know that he followed his comment with a vibrant smile accompanied by a generous laugh. “A literary movement,” he adds, “is about getting the books in the kids’ hands.” And that Méndez continues to do through advocating for the written and spoken word.



There is more to Méndez than mere words. This poet knows the network of spoken poetry performers in Houston and is involved with the Word Around Town project. Through action, Méndez seeks to share the act of poetry writing through workshops and advocating projects that share similar values. Méndez knows the value and power of literature and, as he did with the staff of *The Bayou Review* over dinner, the poet selflessly shares his knowledge and experience to instill the value of literature in today's culture. In a recent interview, Méndez shares his modus operandi, writer's perspective, and passion with *The Bayou Review*.

Gustavo Jacobo: Your recent chapbook entitled "In Honor" meditates on themes of passion, remembrance, and nature. Your poetry records experience, revealing the intimate moments which transform the individual — such as the poem "A Timeline in Women" gracefully achieves. On the other hand, poems like "I'm Sorry" record historical moments of social disparity brought about by nature as in the case of Hurricane Katrina.

Can you describe the process in the creation of your poetry? Do you have a specific goal when you write?

Lupe Méndez: O.K. let me think . . . hmmm, I guess the process for me is like combing over a lot of emotion(s) to get to the heart of what's really going on. I am always looking for the right combination of feeling, sensation, word and image that best brings a sort of story to the reader and the listener — this is the goal.

At best, I feel like sometimes some poems come about easier than others. Poems about events, particularly, big bold events, i.e. Katrina, Ike, etc., they are formed once I have had an unconscious chance to look at the news, read a few blogs, listen to someone else describe the event, then in those instances, I can come up with my own imagery. Some poems, that are more personal in nature, they come about when a memory or another event stirs them up. I remember writing an intense piece about a former fiancée and how [the relationship] ended badly, solely because I was listening to a jazz band at a small venue here in Houston. The memory led me back to that instance and it's the picture and the feeling I had to write about right then. I wrote the piece on a napkin and edited it later.

I edit a lot of my work; I look at word choice, word placement in a line. Sometimes, I take out whole stanzas if I feel it takes away from the piece. Sometimes,

I put away a poem for a while and come back to it later, and totally change the damn thing until it looks like something new and then see if I can add older ideas with the newer ones. It's a process that is always in motion. It takes me over until I see nothing else but the poem and the people reading it.

G.J.: You mention the media and blogs as sources of information that shape the way you digest human experience. How do you see technology influencing future generations of poets, especially when one considers the influence of social media, which are literally instantaneously recording human experience and reshaping language?

L.M.: Ok. So as far as technology goes, I think it has an additive AND subtractive quality when it comes to how it influences poets. On the one hand, man, you have a whole new wealth of readable resources from every corner of the world. Gone are the days when a working poet, an upcoming poet was only able to be as well read as what they could afford. Free access to the internet, blogs, e-zines over poetry and fiction, are the fuel to the fire for a poet. He or she can totally immerse themselves into any style, any technique of poetry they wish to without spending a fortune on a certain literary magazine. Poets can be more worldly about the topics they choose to write about because the fact finding, the research can be managed a lot easier.

Technology even allows poems to evolve. Hell, I could find it, but I remember hitting on a website that had several pieces of poetry [with] a physical manipulative aspect to it — you had to turn the dial on the radio to hear the music play and the words light up as music notes to read the poem. Another poem I read had a tree and each time you clicked a few more lines of a poem would appear. The possibilities are endless.

NOW comes the downside, BECAUSE there are sooooo many new ways to see poetry, to experience its ideas, it also opens up the field for people to read more crap. Any and everybody who wants to publish their own work of poetry, well, now they can. What happens when you get someone who doesn't pay that much attention to detail? What happens to the validity of the true art of poetry? And for the guy or gal who wants to just research and find something to write about, now instead just one topic or idea, they get the whole world. It can be overwhelming. As an artist or a fan, you have more to pay attention to. I suppose though in the end,



it makes you a better judge of work, or just totally lost. Damn.

G.J.: The internet has made it possible for practically anyone to publish their own work on blogs and similar platforms. However, the real challenge is subjecting your work to an editor who, more than likely, doesn't know you on a personal level and selects literary works for their cultural value. Can you talk about the experience of submitting your work to a publisher? Is there a reward in the end? If so, what is it?

L.M.: Any writer who has submitted their work — poetry, fiction, non-fiction, novels, children's stories, any of these, probably has a collection of rejection letters. I know a poet who frames the collection letters on a wall as artwork, another who places them in sheet protectors in a binder, and still another who just shreds them!! It is a rite of passage a writer goes through. It is a hard, dubious task — putting your heart and soul into a project and then sending it off to some group of people somewhere else and waiting for them to tell you “yes, we want you!” or “thanks, but no thanks.” I have learned one thing over the last few years as I submit my work: any writer who submits must understand that their work has merit. Just because a publisher or an editor doesn't choose it means nothing. Keep writing. Do your research. Find a journal or a magazine that fits your work or whose chosen work you feel comfortable with.

I have experienced some journals that say my work is “too ethnic” or that it “misses the mark of this publication.” So you chuckle and move on. Try them again later. They actually might remember you later. The rewards? Heh. As I write this, I have had the best time of my life with this. I most recently was let go [from] my previous teaching position, and at the same time, I am getting published in the UK, here in Houston, and was just interviewed by Paula Beltran for an article she wrote for *Semana News*. Yet so far, I can't get a job. The rewards are internal. You get the credit and an addition to your vitae, maybe some writing gigs (which actually for me are opening new writing opportunities.) You have to learn to take it all [in] stride. Some years are good, some are plain, and some are dry. This year, for this writer, it is amazing. You can enjoy the recognition and the approval, the best part though, is the fact that somewhere, someone is nodding their head, understanding your work and reading your lines.

G.J.: Your poetry, as is the case with many Latino/a writers, uses Spanish

sporadically to enhance the aesthetic of a written piece. At times, the utterance of Spanish calls upon a certain meaning that only that word can describe. For example, in the poem "I Don't Know" you use the word *greñas*, but its English translation would invoke a different meaning, a different emotion. Gloria Anzaldúa describes such utterances as bordercrossings, a challenge to cultural norms. Do you consider yourself a bordercrosser? If so, in what ways?

L.M.: Hmmmm. Yes, I guess I am a bordercrosser. I feel like the fact that I am a fluent bilingual allows me to understand two different cultures, two different worlds, so my understanding of events, feelings and ideas can be explained in more than one language.

Sometimes, I don't feel that I can express certain ideas, certain images well enough in English, so I make sure to include phrases and words that make sense to me (and a certain population of readers, who understand it the way I would). There are ancient poems that include French and Latin, so I figure, why should they have all the fun?

B.R.: Inspiration is important to the artist, the poet, and the fiction writer. Who or what inspires you? What other artists or poets do you draw from for inspiration? If we could go back in time, is there a poet you'd like to meet?

L.M.: Ok. So who inspires me: I am going to have to list this out, cause you just have to know these people and their work.

Dee Brown. Wrote *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, it's an account of the U.S.'s western expansion through the eyes of Native Americans, brilliant.

Mary Shelly. I love *Frankenstein*.

Edgar Allen Poe. The macabre and the romantic in me needs his work.

Guillermo Arriaga. Author of *Amorres perros*, *El búfalo de la noche* and *Un dulce olor a muerte*, guy is detailed and gritty.

Michael Ondaatje. Poet, wrote *The Cinnamon Peeler* and *Running in the Family*, just great, great witty writing.

Gloria Anzaldúa. Love her poetry, clear and colorful.

Carlos Fuentes. Wrote *El naranjo*, his ability to stuff sentences with so many tid-bits makes me just want to keep on going.

Ernesto Quinonez. Wrote *Bodega Dreams* and *Chango's Fire*, brilliant guy, brilliant work.

Alice Walker. Wrote *The Color Purple*. Amazing.

Esmeralda Santiago. Beautiful poetry

Langston Hughes. Need I say more

Sylvia Plath. Wrote very strong, very dark poetry and the book *The Bell Jar*.

(last one) Juno Diaz. His collection of short stories *Drown* is an amazing read, and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* is even better.

(I lied) Rudolfo Anaya. *Tortuga*. Read it.

(still lying) Raul Salinas. Poet, (que en paz descanse) he is an amazing writer and a gem.

House music and anything by Jeff Buckley, Etta James and Cornelio Reyna.

Who would I like to meet? Langston Hughes and Jeff Buckley. Both of them for me would have interesting conversations about the art world today. I would love to hear what they have to say about the way writing and books and music has progressed today.

# In Honor of Palm Terrace

*Lupe Méndez*

In Honor of Mr. Michelletti, with his lazy eye; he could never point to the right price on the back wall of the meat market and ring you up for the ham you desperately needed to make a sandwich on a brazen sandy Sunday,

In Honor of Doña Maria, with her arthritic knuckles that were cold to the touch and she would actually say she loved the green make-up on the wicked witch of the west—both *cabronas* scared the hell out of my 7 year old ass,

In Honor of *El Novio*, the self proclaimed ladies man, who would take me by the hand and walk up and down the beach yelling out that “we should play, Frisbee, *mijito*” in front of the young girls he wanted to talk to,

In Honor of Dominic Streater and his bigoted voice as he constantly yelled from his window for us to turn down the *Vicente Fernandez*, because he can't drink his Shlitz in peace,

In Honor of all the neighborhood public schools that thought I was mentally retarded and didn't click to the idea that I only spoke a bold

Spanish and lost me to an all *negrito* Southern Baptist school that labeled everything in the building so I could finally learn to say “tank jews” out of gratitude,

In Honor of my mother who worked too hard and still had time to tell me a story, and yet I could never tell her mine,

In Honor of Marcus, with his sling shots and bruising rocks that managed to get us a slick switch to our *nalgitas* from everyone in the neighborhood, until someone hit him with a bullet in his lung then he and it collapsed,

In Honor of Gladys the bus driver who always gave me a free lift to the library, because she could see how much a bloody nose or a knot on my head never took my determination to hide in a book or ten,

In Honor of Fr. Frank and his funny accent in Spanish, it just provided him with a new congregation that didn't care about the rumors of him and little white girls, *acabo, no era nada nuevo en este barrio*,

In Honor of Carmona, who used to buy me and Marcus orange, sticky, push-up pops with money from her push-up bra that she wore like a badge as she patrolled the corners from 6pm to mid-night,

In Honor of Ira, our neighbor in 3B, who taught me how to pack her Winston cigarettes with a 1,2,3, taps on the meaty flesh of my palm, because I would steal about three packs in my underwear and only have to pay for 1, and she liked that trick and needed her smokes. A lot,

In Honor of my Tio Reymundo who showed me how to treat a lady — like the dog that she is, you can beat her, you can rub her face in shit, *mijo* and she'll still come back to you — it didn't get him very far

In Honor of my Father, and his abundance of Miller Lite, Old Milwaukee, Blue Ribbon, Ramon Ayala, gold chains, *fútbol*, and his lack of memory, direction, determination and the ability to teach me that even adults lie and that independence is getting left outside when he's had too much to drink,

In Honor of Streater's Tavern with its funny fights and clumsy nights that always brought a few holes to my wall and got me interested in collecting revolver shells and new cuss words,

In Honor of that old barrio always defined by old orange brick; speckled by bickering *blanquitos* and blacks that finally made me want to come back to the spot I remember Marcus' last words — *get my mom, she'll know what to do*

## Refuse

Vittorio Bonomi

*Reprinted from Volume 10, Issue 1*

Life is a stage  
so I've been told  
I then choose to be the potted plant.

## Haiku

Natalie Martinez

*Reprinted from Volume 11, Issue 2*

Schizophrenia

I think therefore I am not

Who I am today.



## Chapter One

Mark Meitzler

We sat like mountains by the river watching the Texas sun that you always hated get higher and higher as the morning melted away and broke into pieces, sweat pouring down our faces like rain knowing this moment was everlasting.

"I dance like lightning and you talk like rain," You said, "That's a match made in Heaven." I nodded, grabbed another mushroom from the baggie and said "We'll see."

Suddenly I heard you panting and talking nervously about how we needed to get to dry land or we'd drown. "We're not in the water. We are just near it," I said, but I had to question this myself. *Am I so out of my mind on drugs that I cannot tell dry land from water?* I looked at my watch and it was still ticking, so I assumed we were safe. "We are fine. We just need to get out of this goddamn heat and find a drink," I said confidently. "We just weren't built for this climate."

We walked to the nearest town and found a bar. I sat watching you smoke all my cigarettes, bitching about your life. You talked until your words slurred and blended together like the hum of an old fan. After a while the hum became a pleasant, almost melodic sound. I felt an overwhelming sense of Zen-like euphoria. They played old bluegrass and country 45s on the jukebox. I wondered what it must've been like coming to this bar 50 years ago. This could be the best place in the world, I thought. You sat running your goddamn trap like an enlightened anarchist in an old one-person prison cell.

*I once saw a Quaker wedding in Houston. No one was to speak unless they felt moved to by God. We all just sat in silence and the bride and groom just stared at each other calmly, and after an hour or so, they were wed. It was one of the most peaceful and beautiful experiences of my existence and I imagine there was a lesson to be learned.*

"This town is death. We will just keep dying 'till we're dead and then we will be buried side by side and rest together infinitely with God." You said with a smile and leaned closer.

The way that you smiled made me feel like water drowning. I looked deep into your eyes. I could tell you were as empty as a prison guard in Huntsville. You were just a lost little girl like that song by the Doors. I didn't want to talk at all.

I looked out the window counting clouds, noticing their shapes and colors. They were bright and white and beautiful and I thought to myself that I'd rather just sit in silence looking at clouds than just about anything else in this whole goddamn world.

"I have to go pee. Meet me in the restroom in five minutes and we can fuck." You said suddenly. I wanted to strangle all the life out of you and throw your body into the woods.

"Let's just sit here and look at clouds and savor this moment." I said.

"They are pretty fucking beautiful, aren't they?" You replied.

"Yeah, they're perfect."

"They only play country music at this bar, huh?"

"Yeah, I like it though."

"I'm gonna go pee now."

*People, as a whole, are too sentimental about things. There are no emotions in nature. The sun and the moon don't give a damn. If there are not emotions in nature, doesn't that make emotions unnatural? YOU are now one step closer to becoming an enlightened being. Enlightenment is reached when one realizes how completely and utterly full of shit everyone is.*

You came back with this scribbled on a paper towel in blue ink. You had copied it word for word off of the bathroom mirror. I felt perplexed. Where the hell were we? *I can remember dreams from elementary school more vividly than conversations I had yesterday.*

Two days later we hitchhiked to Nashville. We sat in the tall grass getting tans and picking flowers just to watch them die. We were drinking lots of whiskey at

night to numb our thoughts and slow dancing to whatever station we could pick up on our old radio. The blazing hot sun intensified our hangovers. Alcohol poured out of our pores like syrup. It felt awful. It felt alright.

You loudly read passages from a book called *The Unknown Poets*:

*"We embraced impermanence, regurgitated the apple of logic, and walked hand in hand with Christ upon the water, and then there was nothing left to do but die."*

I laid my head down in the cool, wet grass and closed my eyes. Your voice shook the world and became more and more distant until it bounced around inside my brain like waves. Then I went to sleep.



## Pine in Huangshan Mountain

*Hong Lin*

*Volume 25 - Issue 1*

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# Everything

*Mark Meitzler*

Too much thought  
Emotions run  
Like wild horses  
I finish  
My beer and  
Take  
My spaniel for  
A walk  
Around the neighborhood  
Tall skyscrapers rest high above  
The hills  
A few stars scattered  
And the moon  
Is a perfect crescent  
Everything  
Will  
Be  
Okay

## Self-Portrait of Pluto as a Ceiling Fan Pull

*Robert Wynne*

Dangling is my specialty, hanging  
below the whirlwind to swing

in this tiny circular orbit  
and swaying on the frail chain

that tethers me to the only reality  
I've ever known. The length of my days

varies, but the great hand of gravity  
always jolts me downward

to signify each sudden dawn  
or dusk. I think of myself

as a planet, mostly because  
my reflection in the windowpane

looks so different than those stars  
which populate the night sky

on the other side of that glass.  
Still, I've learned words

can't be trusted, harboring  
some unknown agenda

honed over thousands of years.  
I have grown so lonely

and though the blades above slice air  
into a blur that makes it visible

I wouldn't know  
how to ask them for anything –

I don't even know their names.

## Keepsakes

Stephanie Konvicka

*Reprinted from Volume 12, Issue 1*

Uncle Willy died yesterday. For some reason, thinking about him reminds me of Grandpa's glass eye. It had an unnerving way of looking over your shoulder when he was talking to you, that made you want to turn around and see what it was looking at. But the really creepy thing about the eye was the way it would watch you lying on the blue braided rug in front of the television without Grandpa ever taking his attention away from Ed Sullivan.

I never made a face when Grandpa told me to fetch him a beer, because I just knew the day I did, that big gray eye would swivel around, blink, and say, "Caught you, you little shit." And Grandpa would spank the fire out of me. So, I would just sigh loudly and take my time retrieving his beer from the fridge, careful not to argue in my head, just in case the eye could read minds as well.

I honestly didn't know they could do this, but the day Grandpa died, the mortician asked Gram if she wanted the eye. Sitting on the powder blue chintz sofa in the funeral home parlor, she said, ending any chances of me ever sleeping soundly in our house again, "If it isn't too much trouble, dear." And then, to my complete horror, the man produced out of his pocket and held in the palm of his big, rubbery looking hand a small black box. Gram cradled the box in her hands as if it held Grandpa folded up all tiny inside. In a way, I guess it did, because other than that eye, my memories of Grandpa have become pretty fuzzy. Maybe holding on to the eye, as morbid as it may seem, was Gram's way of holding on to Grandpa.

But if that were the case, you'd think she would put it somewhere more sacred



than her pantyhose drawer. I never actually saw what she did with the eye, but when Mom was helping her into the car at the cemetery, I heard her say something about "Joe" and "drawer" and "safe place." Knowing how fond Gram was of her pantyhose, I assumed that was where she put it. I imagined it staring out of those little plastic bubbles you get out of gum machines, nestled in the cozy comfort of her suntan pantyhose which made her look like she had wooden legs instead of a real suntan. There could have been a million dollars and no glass hidden in that dresser drawer, but I wasn't taking any chances; you'd never catch me snooping.

I guess you could say our family reacts rather oddly to death. We cry loudly which I'm sure is a completely normal reaction to grief, even though I've never heard anyone cry as loud as Gram could when she got wound up really good. But something we also do, and I'm not sure is normal at all, is laugh, as loudly as we cry, usually during the quiet parts of a funeral, like when the priest says, "Let us silently offer our own petitions." I had never thought about it until Mother did just that at Gram's funeral. She practically fell out of her seat, doubled over with big belly laughs that shook her shoulders and made her face turn beet red. Then she cried big wracking sobs with her mouth wide open so that precariously thin drool strings hung from her bottom lip and swayed, amazingly, without breaking in the unusually brisk April wind.

I guess the rest of the family had gotten pretty used to this kind of scene, because no one made any mention of it at dinner after the funeral, at least as far as I could tell. What I didn't know was that the conversation I saw Mother having with the funeral director after the service had nothing to do with how natural Gram looked or how at peace she was now that she had passed, but had everything to do with the fifty she slipped him to open up the casket and remove Gram's dentures after everyone left. I found this out when Mother followed me in to the restroom at the parish hall and said with the most sentimental look on her face as she pulled a hanky wrapped lump out of her black vinyl pocketbook, "She would have wanted me to have these, at least for a keepsake."

I wonder if they plan to bury Uncle Willy with his wooden hand. I'm just curious, of course. But we were pretty close.



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