



The Bayou Review

The University of Houston-Downtown
Literary and Visual Arts Journal

The Bayou Review—

The University of Houston Downtown
Visual and Literary Arts Journal

Spring 2003

The Bayou Review

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The Bayou Review is published biannually by the University of Houston-Downtown. The journal welcomes essays, short stories, poetry, art, and photography submissions from UHD students, faculty, staff, and alumni. We also accept outside submissions. Please mail all manuscripts to:

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University of Houston Downtown
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The Bayou Review reserves the right to edit for grammar, punctuation and content.

Acknowledgments

The Bayou Review Spring 2003 issue is finally here. The road to its production was one full of technical delays and creative detours, but it was a road worth traveling. Among the unexpected elements on this journey was the overwhelming amount of entries for the issue. The time it took to read and look over every submission was extremely rewarding and entertaining. Due to limited space, many of the works submitted have been earmarked for publication in the fall issue.

I would like to take a moment to thank Dr. Jane Creighton for her continued involvement and faith in the Bayou Review, and Dr. Barbara Canetti for her endless encouragement and support. Their academic and professional guidance have opened numerous doors of possibility for the future of this journal and for me personally.

I would also like to point out that this issue would not be possible without the invaluable contribution of the next Bayou Review editor, Scott Stephenson. His artistic vision and creative input were inspiring to witness and will continue to be the driving force behind this journal in the semesters to come.

Finally, to all who submitted work for consideration, thank you, and may your inspirations continue to drive your dreams and creativity.

Gracie Ochoa-Alvarado
editor

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*"The artist is nothing without the gift,
but the gift is nothing without the work."*

-Emile Zola

"The full use of your powers along lines of excellence."

-definition of "happiness" by John F. Kennedy

"Glory is fleeting, but obscurity is forever."

-Napoleon Bonaparte

*"Art is a readjustment of perception
(expressed) from physical actuality to a
perception expressed by the artist"*

-Jack Kerouac

I Came To Poetry Late

I came to poetry late, having lived long.
Those weaving worms of silk for me are worn
Having woven my shroud to the career of song
The poet of the singer thus was born.
Beautiful brown eyes, my wisdom's wife
Her mind of trenchant power, and lithesome word—
To be a teacher ever is her life
She spoke to me one day—at last I heard.

Song is my singer now, poetry my staff
I go about my days befuddled, sad
Yet verging upon the primal, joyous laugh,
The syllable sequence keeps me less than mad.
I came to poetry late, having lived long.
I don't know as how I've done the deed wrong.

Susan Naomi Bernstein

Asleep in the Snow

The snow is lit by
Sodium streetlights and
The falling flakes take on
A weary orange glow

The sun, it faded long ago
Behind a bank of deep gray clouds
And the air was white as night
Fell and the snow swept down

Now the trees bow low
With the snow's weight
Branches tremble and break
In the sharp night's cold

The street grows full with
Winter's weariness and
Under these sodium lights
Spring stirs in sleep

One-Syllable Train Poem

—Yes, she said,
I dress in the dark.
When I leave home there is
no sun. I kiss
my man, I hug my cats,
I take this train. Each
day it is the same. I sip
my tea—still no light. What
song shall I sing on this train at
the end of night? This work I do—
I grind my teeth—and smile and
sigh. But each new day it is
the same. Out in the dark I face
that train. —Yes, she said, that is
the rule. Out of my home, far from
my man, no sun near, a smile as I sigh.
I sing as I can. If not, I die.

What Poets Do

Take me and put me in a story-
Place me in a paragraph-
A sentence, a stanza-
Drop me at the end of a line
And make me rhyme.
Make me an adverb,
A synonym, euphemism.
I want to be past tense
And singular-
Take me and toss me down a
Spiral of alphabets.
Sketch me on paper
And read me out loud.
Do to me what poets
Do to words.

A Word For My People

I try to think of a name for my people

they are the third wheel,
shorter than the average,
greasy haired.
They eat mixed dialect tacos in the evenings,
labor covered eggs in the mornings.
My people build roads,
you can see them if you are a motorist.
They've also built the building in which the
road leads to.
These people have also built bridges,
bridges that allow you to drive across
the ocean.

(I suppose my people are ___ bridges)

Shark

Aztec dream
heart of the sea
unleash your wave upon me

Wash me to your shore
I want to feel your sand
in between my toes
up and down my back
in my hair
on my lips
on my breast
kissing my face.

Pour your Spanish wine
cleans me from what I do
I want to be drunk by your laughter
in pain by your sadness

Build your colonies
sew your seed
plant your tree
create your land upon me
for I give myself to you

Every molecular structure
of my existence
fiends for your
lips
hair,
curves of your body,
the softness of your voice,
the innocence of your smile.

Your love is a cursed pond
which I swam in,
drowned in,
and was lost in your abyss.

Blake Matthews

Poseidon's Triumph

Winding drafts from Helios' paths
Sear crisp air in chariot's climb—
Burned nostrils and beads of earned sweat.

Victor of the chariot race finishes
Near browning pines, screaming for Poseidon's blessings.
Dry, cracked lips pray for a deep, sweet breath.

Dehydrated tongues silently suffocate,
Dragging underground down yellow fields
With upturned labyrinths of fractured, infertile mud.
The son of Kronos hurls a thunderbolt
Upon a youth for fear of a desolate ball of stone.

Upwards travel the final traces of moisture,
Upwards travel dissipating remnants of clouds.
Upwards travel tongues of flame—
Ravaging hill and dale.
Upwards travel blasted ash and smoke
From sacred lands and homes.

Distant halogen candles warn
The peril of sink holes
That can break legs in a full sprint.

Stars burning on moonless nights;
Guardians of blackened skies.
Children of frost giants trickle downwards
As the Leviathan opens its mouth—an ocean wide—
To feed on crusty continents.

Down we go to live among sea nymphs;
Down we go to Neptune's kingdom;
Down we go to the salts of the Earth;
Down we go to the sea's scavengers.

Farewell sweet lady in the green evening gown;
Farewell crimson, eggshell, and navy blue;
Farewell great father of us all, farewell.

Gwendolyn Osburg

My Field

I cannot write you a regular love poem
You are not a color
You're no season
There is no ocean to speak of
They are paltry
Trash

Fuck the spring rain
It has nothing on you

I sit before you like
Russel and Whitehead
Before $1 + 1 = 2$
This proof will take 362 pages
It's that simple
That true

You have become
My most basic assumptions
Everything else I can define
Without tautology
But not you

How can I say you make me happy
When happiness = what I am with you?

Redundant to say I love you
We define love by what I know
When I look at you

You give my life meaning?
Meaning is what you give my life.

And this is where I fail as
We lie in bed and I'm lost
In this infinite loop
Of things defining each other

When you
Without a tincture of doubt
Or a raindrop of uncertainty
All the skin on your face
Lifted to the sky
And the half-moon of your mouth
Leading to this abyss
From which comes the plainest
Rightest answer

"I don't know"

Waiting for the Moon

Pity
In rags
Tells me stories
Of moons
Killing planets for stars
Making midnight monsoons
I quit listening
The moment
She tells me my fate
Because death I can handle
Not having to wait
So I speak with death
Whispers silence to me
As we swim in the void
With eternity
Death soon gets bored
And I fall into being
Who'll notice me not
With her infinite seeing
I took off my shoes
In this bare walls room
Been here since then
Waiting for the moon
Closer every night
Always choosing flight
Memories sink my soul
As I wait
Murmuring to mice
That maggots look like rice
And always trying to fill a hole
With empty hate

What a useless abuse of anesthesia we are
Until the moon

Untitled

The snow keeps time with the stale air
Such a strange modelic
Made by dead skin and breath
It's arid
but silence is a colder death than winter
So I sew this thought
With spider web silk:
It is necessary to be happier

So I outthink myself
Over speak my point
Undervalue my body

And the warm, swampy waters of my sleep
Remind me of a well kept promise

The Dump

The Dump.

It's a breeding ground for insects and rodents.

It's the physical form of my soul.

We all have this dark inner place in our souls.

I do...

Makes me human, makes me feel pain.

It's the animal that I can fall on,

Like a small razor filling me with pain and desire.

I'm sure you have it.

Good little boys and girls don't think of such things.

Don't lie; I know you've thought of it.

Daddy

Let's break the word down
D is very simple
On me your eyes looked down
A is very common
'Cause your ass was never around
Just like the devil visiting church
Afraid to touch Holy Ground
D is for didn't do
'Cause you didn't do a damn thing
On birthdays I waited for your smile
And the gift you didn't bring
D is for don't bother
You haven't done right this long
Y is for why did I
Worry about you this long?

Brian Kenneth Swain

Covering UP

So there I am,
Late one Saturday night,
watching this old
black and white
movie with
huge atomic mutant spiders.
And there's this scene
where the spider
comes after the heroine, who,
with a dramatic close-up scream,
throws her forearm over her eyes,
and gets eaten.

As I reflect on
this poignant vignette,
it occurs to me
I've seen it many times before:

- car crashes
- free falls
- crimes of passion

Anytime someone is
suddenly set upn
by their fate,
sees it arriving,
cold and eneluctable,
but just can't bear to look.

And I think it odd
how we spend
our entire lives

- working
- striving
- yearning

to know our destinies,
but we are not so keen
to meet them
once they arrive.

Visiting My Father

I don't get home much.

But when I do,

I try to stop by
the old graveyard next to the highway,
across from the iron works.

That's where my father is:

beneath the bare gray
December branches
and the hard-packed snow
that covers his small in-ground stone.

It doesn't say much—

But then,

neither did he.

I kneel to brush the snow away,
and pick up some trash
and dead flowers.

But as the winter breeze
creeps among the branches overhead,

I feel a strange uneasiness.

Here in my knees

I am closer to him
than I have been in years,
if only by a foot or two.

Still I struggle for words,

My thoughts refuse to congeal,

And my emotions, while close at hand,
 remain elusive,
 like the neighbor I never bothered to meet.
So I stand and gaze upward for a moment
 at the branches that sway and whisper overhead.
And I wonder how many more leaves will
 come and go
 before I return to this place.
Sensing that a gentle reminder might help,
I look to the snow-covered ground,
 and kneeling one final time,
 I grasp a single dry and crumpled oak leaf.
Thrusting it into my pocket,
 I murmur something vaguely apologetic
 and turn to go.

A Cookie

What has yet to trickle into decibel,
during schizophrenic coffee break lengths,
pertaining to white, yellow, orange-red spheres?
So celestial...
The absent and breathing fear panic and cheering she breeds.
Light and night never emit quite righteous spectrum sectors.
So, damn all pregnancy just as the sterile.
“Just get on down,” tell that subject.
“Be.”
Because...who is ever right?
Why would pendulums leap canyons then?
Brightness naps whenever we please.
Pleasure can, certainly assured,
remain constant in evolution.
Romantic consolation as time tends to tattle-tale.
Tea time hours do fluctuate.
sometimes...
She’s a shy li’l girl

Jazz I

it moves up and down
and left and right
round and round
makes one dizzy.
keeps goin' round
and round.
turning, revolving.
all the instruments
all the notes
gently crash together
to form the song
and who's playing?

Jazz II

not me.
i get off note
forget the brakes
mess up the melody
it's safe to sit
and tap your feet to the music.
but it takes you in
and swirls you
not asking
what note you sing in

Deja vu

I wish...

I could be as strong

As strong as you.

No matter what is wrong

Not as unstable as reality.

Reality in a mad man's dream see?

Waves crashing over me.

You're with me in this dream sea.

Waves crashing over me.

Salt taste in my mouth and eyes,

Sliding my hand between your thighs.

Salt taste on your skin

Déjà vu again!

I'm drowning...

Your tide rushes in

Sweeping me out again.

Crystal reflections in your deep sea eyes.

The rhythm of your waves holds me mesmerized.

Caroline Adams

No-Show

The day steams with midsummer fire.
Flat sunlight
slides off the hoods of cars.
The pavement vibrates,
heatwaves lick the asphalt.

I swing the steering wheel free,
change lanes
to follow broken lines west.
I always feel this way
when I drive to meet you:
as if I've forgotten something--
that I could remember it,
if I just didn't show up this time.

Though the Night May Find Her

She is a woman clothed in wilderness,
distant as a crest of moon
drifting in a winter lake.
She walks alone in this world,
its bitterness enclosing her
like a cold embrace.
You may offer a moment's warmth,
sanctuary, healing.
She may nod and beckon,
gliding from twilight
to a room's dismal glare,
but she will expect nothing from you.
If you linger,
needful in the absence of conversation,
she is aloof as the furthest constellation,
though the night may find her
in your arms again,
and starlight falls on a nearing shore.

The Televised War

Each night at 6,
we gaped at our new world:
jungle bivouacs in naked forest,
tense young soldiers
carelessly shouldering M-16s,
cowering reporters dodging VC,
a quick-cut of medics
tending the doomed or the dead.
We came to dread
camo gear in suicide green,
the heavy whir of transport helicopters,
the shrill chatter of foreign tongues.
From clean-cut newsmen,
we received body counts,
long lists of POWs and MIAs.
We were notified of daily skirmishes
on the Ho Chi Minh Trail,
of the helpless in Hanoi Hilton,
the horror of My Lai.
We heard "free fire zone,"
and "escalate."
We listened for "end"
and "over."

We did not speak.
We drilled blank stares
into a ghostly blue screen.

This was how we prayed.

Mikel Cole

Sonnet for a Phoenix

Can peace from the ashes of war arise?
Why can't we this senseless destruction prevent?
I'm forced, in the end, to admit that descent
is implied by the effort to conquer the skies.

Although tragic, it's loss of life
which enables those who suffer after
to learn the worth of children's laughter.
Death's forces fuel the birth of life.

Quite often cruel, the truth displays
its beauty in masks of hideous form.
As pain simply proves that a heart is still warm,
so too the fire flight's future conveys.

That's why this cycle won't ever cease;
it's only through war that we know about peace.

She said, He said

She, reclining on ruffled sheets
said, "This is nice, don't you think?
Last night, this morning, everything between...
Are you hungry, Love? Want something to drink?"

He, rolling over to face the window,
replied, "No thanks. I'm fine.
It's late, you know, I have to go..."
and returned to the home of his own mind.

As he stood up, she looked up
and in his stance she knew
the truth. "On your way out lock-up
this time." "Of course, I always do."

Just like that, just like before,
her love walked out and locked the door.

Cincinnati

Change of seasons,
winter fading to spring.
Slow melting snow,
piled for bases.
Grab the bat.
Don't forget the ball.
Who cares if you have to wear a coat and gloves?
Baseball season approaches in

Cincinnati

Is it time
to grab bat and ball?
It's cold. Winter has not passed
but who cares?
It's the start of baseball season
for a young boy.
Baseball and snow; baseball and cold;
do they mix? Only for a young boy in

Cincinnati

Now a new baseball season is here.
Cincinnati the birthplace of baseball, they say.
Maybe that's why young boys yearn
to be the first
to throw that first ball,
to take to the fields racing through the snow,
even though it does not make sense or reason.
It's the start of baseball season in

Cincinnati

Check the papers, it's spring training.
Did beg Ted hit a homer?
How well is Ewell pitching?
A young boy scans the paper daily
checking stats of his favorite players,
wishing that he was in Florida,
a member of his favorite team,
the Reds of

Cincinnati

I was that young boy
playing baseball in the snow
in March, in Cincinnati.
Playing catch with a buddy,
hoping we would not drop the ball in the snow.
Were we rushing the season?
Sure – but who cares?
It was always baseball season in

Cincinnati

Need a new ball...
the old one's come undone,
it's burst red stitching
and scuff marks tell the story
of wood against horsehide
and if that ball could talk,
it would tell the stories
of a young boy's life in

Cincinnati

Need a new mitt,
the old one is worn.
A Johnny Mize model would be great.
Everybody knew Johnny Mize, and his
big, orange glove
with a perfectly formed pocket
with full webbing between first and second fingers,
no ball could escape my grasp in

Cincinnati

At last the green grass
surges where snow once was.
Coats are no longer required.
Gloves are no longer required
except for the big, orange glove
my dad bought for me.
New ball, too
oh he was a great dad, my dad in

Cincinnati

Time stands still
for a young boy in love with baseball.
Endless days of sandlot games
early in the morning, mid afternoon,
or maybe a game in the evening.
The Cincinnati Reds on the radio,
baseball never ended for a young boy in

Cincinnati

I remember these endless days
of new hope for a new season
of endless sunshine,
of hero worship.
My dad,
my Cincinnati Reds could do no wrong
In the best season of the year
the start of baseball for a young boy from

Cincinnati

Angry Stew

There's a stew bubbling on my stove.
It's been simmering awhile,
but lately it's been close to a boil,
spattering all over the place,
making a mess in the process.
I know I've added a few questionable ingredients:
the wrong people, places and things,
but I've come to learn
that a base of Type A personality
combined with years of frustration
and a heart filleted by love
will lead to a volatile mixture
when you add a lot of painful memories
and a hearty dose of an inability to let go.

The more I stir it the more I've become aware
of what's around me;
I'm having trouble reconciling
the point we're supposed to have in being here.
How can we be slim and sexy yet going bankrupt
in a world filled with terrorists and globalism?
Or is the real acid reflux in the gap between truth and fiction?
Just more crushed pepper for my stew.
All these ingredients seemed right at the time;
but now they've changed my recipe,
and I mixed it so hard I broke my hand.
I don't even want to stir it anymore,
but I feel helpless to turn off the heat.
It's taken on a fire of its own,
stinging my tongue and making it hard to swallow,
and I don't know if there is a cute colored
pill to make everything feel better.
I keep hoping that I can keep the lid on
before it boils over into a mess I can't clean up.

Purple Roses

Purple rose embedded in your hair
Angel breath is everywhere
I remain standing wearing the mark of venus
Cold in my solitude without you
Mars is in the back room speaking
Blasphemy
How can I be standing still with a cold heart
Lost and Blind with my eyes open
You touch me with fire
I will never burn alone again
Glow down your light to my heart
Purple roses embedded in your hair

17

17 was lost in the sea
Breathing out to breathe in
Holding on to hold out
Drowning feeling
17 grows apart
17 bleeds on through me
I've lost everyting
I've lost nothing
Innocence was just a series of moments
Lost in you
Lost in me
17 was gone
Close to my heart, nevermind, unwind
17 was blind
Close to heart

Adriana Hernandez

Breathe

The stranger's whisper flitted across my ear

His voice the crunch of glass

Spinning in a blender

He stepped near me

So close I held my breath

The hairs on his arm brushed mine

He left me with

Fear -

Deep as I never felt again

The stranger's words reverberated through me

Guitar feedback at 120 decibels

All other noise ceased to exist

When he slunk away

The stench of his words clung to my skin

Words typed on paper

A Theory of Radical Notions

radical notions
are a major source of amusement
for those of us
that have them
it isn't always necessary
to act them out
or take them too seriously
in fact that might ruin everything
take all the fun out of it's
it's easy to tell
which ones have their own seriousness
their full effect is always there
there's an awe a majesty
when certain ones arrive
and you know your life
will never be the same
with all the playful ones
dancing and farting
and cutting their own throats
and telling jokes
about the nature of the universe
all well and good
for a wonderful existence
but these other ones that arrive
these perfectly radical notions
you might have seen them
now and then from a distance

but when they turn up for good
in your life to stay
no use pretending

you might as well
just say hello

they're not going anywhere
until you understand completely

and they're full of wisdom

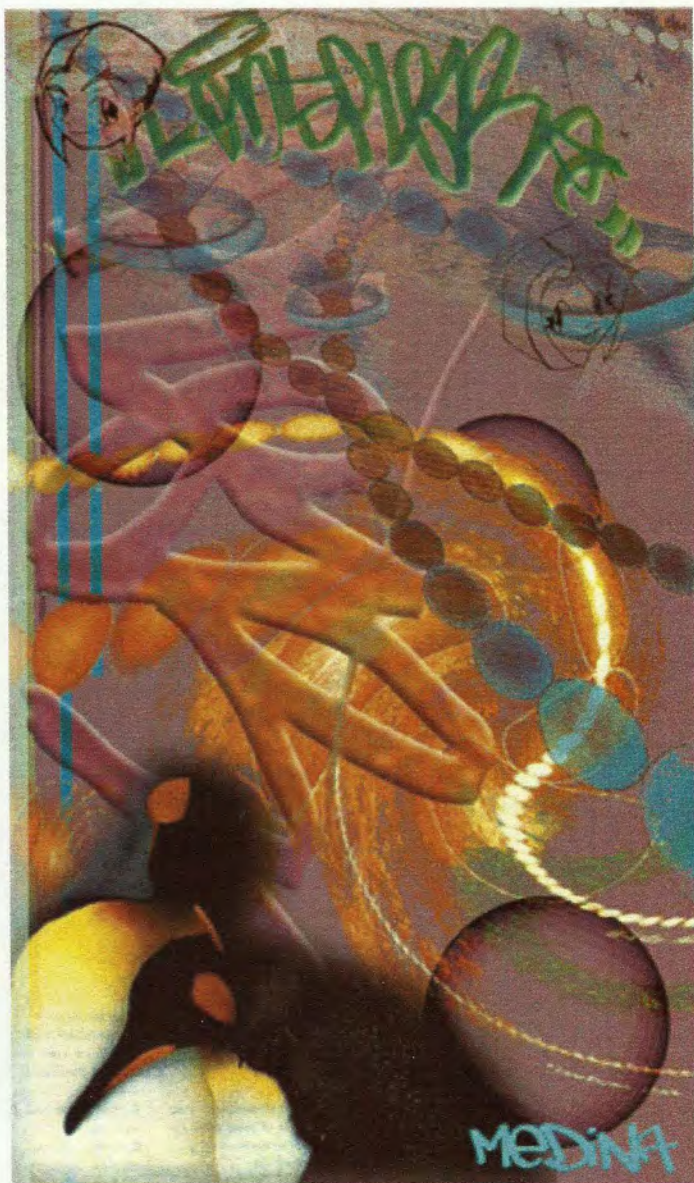
Untitled

a picture of nothing
that goes
about something
beautifully

sitting very still with a cat
petting softly purred for a while

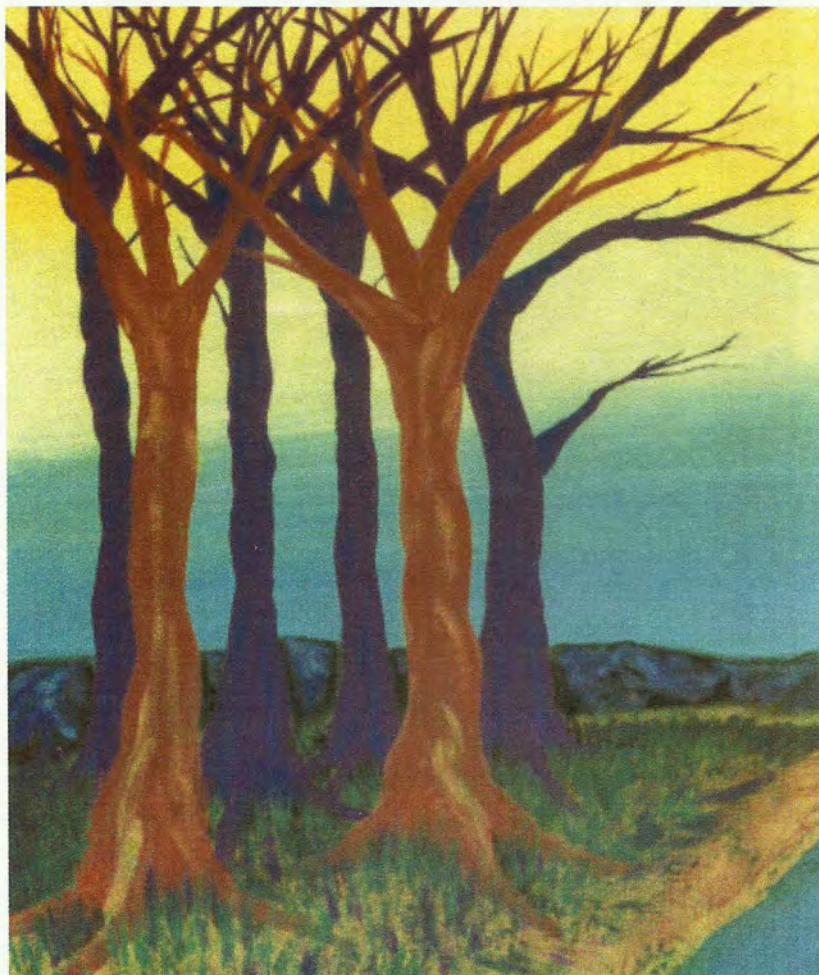
as I am
what fear of the other
complicates us

so many gods
or none



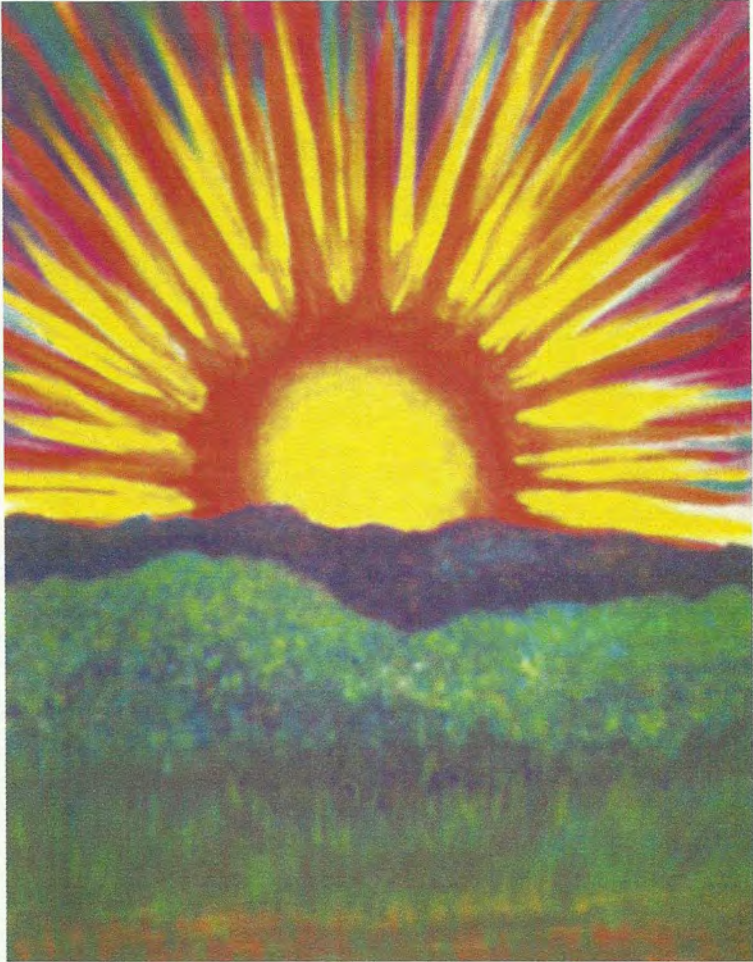
“Konsprier”

Stephanie Chadwick



“Morning Mist”

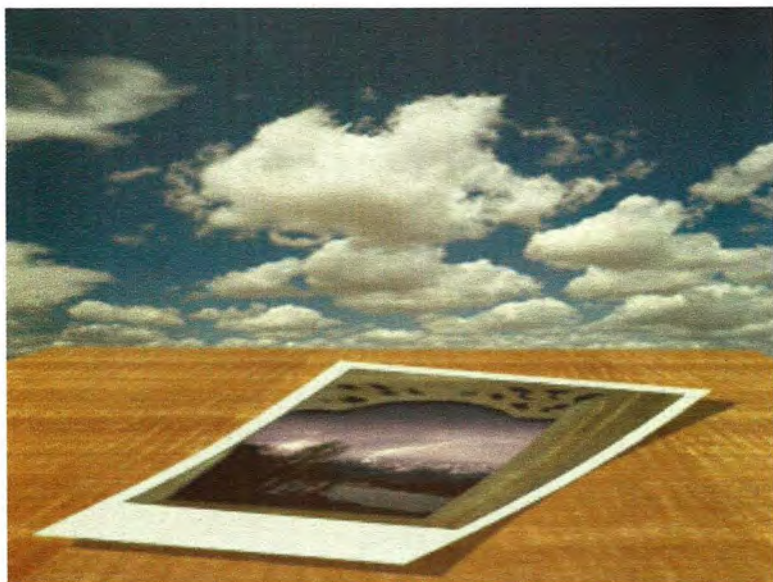
(Acrylic on canvas)



“Sunburst II”

(Acrylic on canvas)

Moses J. Hernandez



“Stormy but Nice”

Wine

Her eyes are purple like Elizabeth Taylor's,
Marilyn Monroe by Dali on the wall.
Our lady breaks her back for us.
Hour glass figure minute by minute,
She pours more wine.

She is an illusion like numbers
On my watch
When I cannot sleep.

She pours Burgundy
Unattended wound,
I like the taste of wine mixed
With my blood.
The glass is full for now.
I spill wine on oak
On another night of loneliness.

Thorns rupture our lady's heart.
She says, "Last call."

Mirrors (13)

You say don't judge but you will
you scream and yell their mouths to still
those letters scattered about the page
twisted and tattered in blind, shrill rage
claim you know, claim you are
but it's known to all, just how far
from the truth you are

Cup of Joe (21)

To measure the water, to grind the beans,
Sweeten the taste and lighten its shade.
Fill the mug by any means,
To gather my wits as sharp as a blade.

No crullers needed, biscotti or scone,
Just tiny straw or plastic spoon.
I'll not answer the door nor pick up the
phone,
Hot or cold I'll drink till noon.

Temples throb and muscles ache,
Stomach rumbles, and blood pumps slow.
Relief will come in caffeine's wake,
My kingdom for a cup of joe.

Any Little Intersection

Delirium misleading to hoist one's self
atop the pyramid of choice

Only led be outrage

Entertaining angry vices
so we appear more disaffected

Art imitating outrage

Reaching out to steal the food from hands of peasants
Inspiration imitating broken fingers to sell dissent to journalism

4 cars parked with windows tinted — skyline spliced with fiber
optic instant message
ex post anything to cause the tension necessary to start an
outrage.

Life imitating civilization

imitating our instinctual passion
for getting to the top of the
tallest pyramid

Invalid options we program your reaction
You shall up rise as you were instructed to openly defy
the system

This outrage is permanent and will probably change
everything

The way your children will bear the burdens of
existence

And your comfort zone pretty much as you know it.
Property values like a symbol of us merging

The way paint drips from canvases to your cloak then
Converges with carpet

Next thing you know your defacing your homeland on purpose
A vandal will cherish his mark on the overpass

As he knows that at least
somebody will notice

dissatisfaction

But this illusion of safety will fade as *we imitate art mocking
our senses*

*avant garde extension of the arm with a fist clutching a pen
.....bleeding dissent*

.....Imitating human experience

....Led only by outrage...

A Letter To My Heroes

I've studied you in depth
I know you better than myself
One day you'll see the sketches carved in ice
and melted one by one
To drown the present tense as we advertise
and sell ourselves.
Your name in vein enjoyed many public misspellings
Exploit your wisdom... taking pictures... making
axiom of your sanity
Your crooked sense of humor, your ability to create emptiness
in a room
We fought so hard to keep expressions simple and look at
what you did.
I painted your eyes on my wall once and wrote
excerpts from your epic
in my hallway
With a sharpie marker and a shotgun –thank god for my
miscalculations and how they
always miss in movies
I guess I'm still a pacifist but I can't believe my
government so I've got no cause
Or common sense and that's what I call freedom
So I sift through the puzzles and sort through
illusion
The strangers among us confuse me too
I still haven't discovered the Entrance you looked for and have
no clue as to what I'm
being Punished for. There's so much to learn from the
constraints and conformity.....

the observance that the world might not spin around me

So I smile at your unkept hair and your
eyebrows and

I laugh hiding the fear that I know how you're
probably right.

So you the romantic wrote my life by the chapter,
cinema ending...cliffhanger

Suspense set Victorian England where the dapper
young chap loses girl
Comes to terms with fear, I don't want to give it away but you
get the idea

I'll never want to see that halo you wept for...but I know that in
time the truth is inevitable

There will come time to read Longfellow grow a beard and go
insane

But for now I'm just
glad to be sitting beside

you
Now I'm finally accustomed to paranoia — I'm sorry it
killed you

You just can't believe everything.
We're all just a part of the grandfather clock under the ill-
tempered boot of our television

I mean Robinson Jeffers built a box by the ocean to be
completely alone

Keep out salesman and seagulls
I love the idea but as a reasonable species we're
entirely to human to go through
with it

And Thomas you were on to
something as well...
what a fabulous world that you were able to show us.
I bet that you are tossing ...and turning ...in your grave... at the
sight ...
of this shithole we are living in Now.

Ken Jones

The Drunk Tank

Welcome! To
The drunk tank,
The stinging clang
Of the last door
To the warm outside
Introduces with tympanic panic
The clunk and clank of cowboy
Boots into the sunset.
This is called a prison.
Gaze in amazement
Through the sites of
Your only home for the moment.
A solitary light
Dangles in gallow's serenity
From above.
Six dormant bodies
Caterwaul sprawling
Sweating symphonies.
Flesh presses close
Perverse and appalling.
No fungus scales the wall.
The tile floor gleams
Spic and Span
Whitewased testimony to
The perfectibility of Man.
I am paramecium sputum.

Scenes of a Monday Morning at the Gulfton DMV

Hip young hustlers of
another country eye the long line,
their hair so slick and shiny
but shoes beat earth roots.
They all have the same tattoo
of a thorn that sticks in their side
and can only be removed by
Medusa's teeth going down on them.
A man has the biggest nose
and smallest chin I have ever seen,
his face an arrow pointing
to the sin of saints on Xmas Eve.
The soul of the healers bleeding
itself dry with philanthropy,
a forgotten art of idle conversation
in the grocery store parking lot or
transit stop depot rest benches.
Now we entertain each other with
our cell phone conversations.
We slow down and rubberneck
till we tie our throats in nooses
stopping to stare at his old lady's ass.
'How do you like mine?'
- Look but can't touch.
Around us they are tearing down
the walls to put up bigger ones.
The noise drowns out
any remaining desires

to confide in one another and
complain for good ol' times sake.
Soon it will be your turn
to stand blank and faceless at
the front of the line
to tell the nice lady what your
name is – as if she needs it.
Everything she desires is
right there encoded on that
thick black magnetic strip.

Day Sleepers (smoke in bed)

I remember when you dyed your hair cherry blonde
and made love to me in your catholic girl's skirt.
It was warm outside and I held your shaky hand
while we listened to Fiona Apple and The Pixies in my bed.

I can recall the way the afternoon sun fell through in beams
from the sundry little slits in the mini-blinds.
It lit the austere walls with dancing lucent dots
as a dauntless spring breeze rattled the old screen.

In the extraneous little rays of sharp white light
I could see the shady brook of a cold summer spring.
All the white dustmites danced in my alcove's sunbeams
as you puffed on your smoke with my arm around you.

I felt your naked shoulder resting heavy on my warm flat chest,
I held on tight never knowing when I would lose you;
What day, month, or year it most surely would be,
when you would turn in your keyring, I could never be certain.

But all those afternoons, we would make quiet love
with the shades drawn and little sunbeams peeking in, were perfect.
I still have your set of keys although you will never reclaim them,
they just remind me of the rattle at the door those afternoons.

Afternoons when you would come in from work or school,
and drop your bag on the floor and throw your shoes
with a loud thud on the hardwoods, and quietly undress
with a wicked girlish grin of understanding fate and bitter partings.

Most times I was still in bed and couldn't stand to face the world until you forced your lips against mine, your hair falling in my face, pressing your chest or palms down upon me and saying,

“Baby, you sleep so god damned much,
I swear, one day your gonna sleep so long
you'll wake up and I'll be gone forever.”

The Only Cure

Lips grossly chapped to the point of bleeding,
fever blisters and flaky skin suspended
on a mouth so thirsty – drank me a river.
Sudden thoughts of bacon and omelets,
orange juice and a before breakfast cigarette
but suddenly it hurts too much to eat
and the cigarette will just have to do.

The afternoon cartoons are all that's on
and tragic day time talk show episodes.
Pounding headache makes it hard to see
or is it just the bourbon and barley still,
making it's way through these blue veins?
Nape slumped against the headboard -
it's hard to sit up straight or even move
when the demons in your belly twist their knives
and bleed your liver dry of precious years.
Scratch your hairy paunch and heave a sickly cough
at the television – who cares about you Ricki Lake?
The aspirin bottle's empty like your soul -
the demons ate them both long after last call
and spit out what was left of the heart and liver.

The bathroom's too far away, just go ahead,
brace your shaky knees and wet the bed.
The cloud of tobacco settles, stomach never will,
go ahead and kiss the bottle with your lips –
it's well past noon and time you made up.
Two are one again and now it's safe to say,
the only cure for a hangover is a heartache.

Pasch'al Wine

Sunday finally arrived and so there was to be a grand party in
our honor
I arrived early to study the dirty dust corners
spilled beer-soaked concrete floors
In my fleet temerity I scooped up cigarette butts while you
watched curiously
Dark brown hair ~
Rich creamy Vietna cheeks,
You said no sudden words ~
shuffling your passive feet
Pause – your eyes were cool and gray and winced at me with
interest
I unloaded bundles of wine bottles
red, white, blush, sweet, tart, California, Italy, France
You politely asked that I pour you a glass:
I didn't know who you were and had my suspicions of drunk
forlorn girls
who ask young poets for wine instead of first names.
You requested a white, I poured a Sauvignon Blanc
into a red plastic cup
and held out my hand
in the hush
of the tenebrous studio
for you to drink.
I waited and watched the first sip dissipate on your tongue and
then smelled the cork.
We looked at each other as if I, a wine steward
patiently waited to pour
my tired heart in your red cup.

Nod of approval – soon poets arrived to hide in corners and be poets
of the night
sad poets, lost poets, loud poets, quiet, disinterested poets, all-
American, diction poets
who read like the rest of us never write
and sound better than sentences allow most poets.
Your voice set sweet words buoyantly above bluesy measures as the
whole room relished
I stayed quiet and just listened –
Sweet soul
sing scratchy soothing songs
to tantalize my enigma verse,
take me away.
During the break you kissed me and winced your eyes inspecting my
unshaven face
with quiet admiration your breath fell softly
on my cheeks and you pinched my fingers softly.
I lost my eloquence and wanted to rip all of you to shreds
of paper from your leather bound journal
with all those prolific words that slide off your tongue with wine.
We then drank dark burgundy French Bordeaux:
dry, but sweet with black currants
rich purple plums and oaky undertones.
I let the finish slide off my tongue
listening to your words
I am finished.
Our feet carried us to a bar and there were your familiar people:

I drank a dark brown beer and wished for more kisses and
wine,
you clasped my hand tightly as I grabbed your taut round
bosom
and we ran outside under a street lamp.
The light, luculent and warm
in the starless humid night
your lips did all the work
embracing mine to clasp them tight
my fingers ran through
your fecund proliferating hair
and all the while inebriated dolts
passed us by and stared.
Our arms were elixirs
for humid starless sad poem nights
our lips were empyreal
as they softly caressed one another's bite
the exact sensation
became immemorial in the spell of wine
leaning against somebody's car
I whispered in my head
that you were mine.

Alex Wukman

Hasta Be Written in the Sky

(based on the poem Hadda Be Playin on the Jukebox by Ginsburg)

It hasta be written on the CNN crawl
Hasta be blasted over the radio
Hasta be screamed on the cartoons
The U.S. government is killing its sons and daughters
It hasta be said in kidspeak
It hasta be said in Mexican papers
If Bush scratches and stretches
We get doublecrossed by fascist thugs and killer agents
Rich oil execs with dirty hands
Arms dealers in america workin with arms dealer in Israel
workin with big time syndicate time warner
It hasta be said until we drop dead
It hasta be spray painted on ghetto walls
It hasta be tattooed on punk rockers backs
It hasta be yelled in the bedroom where lovers are fucking
It hasta be howled on the street by crackheads to cabbies
Hasta be played on jukeboxes
Hasta be printed on flyers and passed out in Guilliani's times
square
Hasta spin in after hours parties
Hasta be documented in bestsellers with movie rights
Hasta be on the front page of the times and the journal
Hasta be dropped by J-Lo and P-Diddy for the top 40
countdown
Hasta be whispered in high school hallways
Hasta be downloaded off the net
Hasta be neon lights flashing
Hookers stopping dead in the middle of a blowjob
Hasta be general Tommy Franks and the kurds getting together

to destabilize OPEC reported the nation
Hasta be the US and Saudis together cutting Iraq out of the pie
Invasion of Kuwait 24 hour notice on the hotline
Hasta be the CIA and The Bloods selling coke in south central
World wide fundraising for black ops
Hasta be the terrorists, the troops, and the pushers workin together
Bigger than Reagan, bigger than freedom
Hasta be slaughterhouses full of blood
Hasta be missing limbs and starving children third world genocide
Hasta be a media gangrape
Hasta be in Larry King's mouth
Hasta be Al Quaeda, the agency, the oil companies, the Saudis
One big set of blood thirsty psychopaths
Workin together to kill us all
Snipers and murderers everywhere outraged on the make
Secret drunk brutal dirty and rich on top of an oil rig
Industrial cancer plutonium aids shantytown cities grandmas bedsores
brother's lust mother's anger father's resentment
Hasta be the slave masters wanting control and getting rich
On wanting protection for the status quo
Wanting junkies, wanting Venezuela, wanting Afghanistan, wanting Iraq
Yes, hasta be the CIA, the oil companies, and the republicans
Multinational capitalists
Strong arm death squads
Deriving detective agencies for the oh-so very rich
And in New York and in DC and in Pennsylvania, Afghanistan,
Colombia and the Philippines
Killing innocent people
Hasta be capitalism, the vortex of this rage
This competition man to man

The horse is dead and the camel is beggin
The companies wipe out their competition
Slap an M-16 in a boy's hand, send him across the ocean
Bomb Baghdad, settle the score
White out the truth
Warning to old European governments:
Secret police embrace for decades
The SAS and the ATF put 14 rounds in the backs of 16 year olds
The mossad and the CIA blow up nightclubs
MI6 and the FBI one mind brute force and fulla money
One mind brute force and fulla money
One mind brute force and fulla money
One mind brute force and fulla money
and fulla money and fulla money and fulla money
Haveta be rich, haveta be powerful
Haveta murder in Colombia 200,000
Haveta murder in Afghanistan half-a-million
Haveta murder in Yugoslavia
Haveta murder in Iraq
and haveta murder in America
haveta murder in america
haveta murder in america

Suburban Dreams

half realized hopes and abandoned aspirations sit
smoldering in the noonday sun as the
intergalactic joad family stands
selling dreams and desires to pay
off the short term interest on the
thirty year loan for a brighter tomorrow so
the mindless middle
income drones come and
act daring by sifting
through the refuse of
long-gone glories and scavenging the
bones of human misery in
hopes of furnishing the nest with a
velvet messiah or
meaningless mementoes from
a simpler time when
life was held together with
spit and bailing wire and
no one dared to wonder
might things be better and
the founding fathers smile
too many times as antiquated
arms and outdated ideas are
bartered for the blood of a nation to
burn away the leeches and
invest in life's business knowing
full well that the rising tide won't
recede and there isn't enough
room in the life raft
for everyone

Chris Beiers

A Regard for Breathing

You touch eternity in this
Lips meet in the still
Shoulders sigh
Muscles relax on the moment
As if the ache was too long

This will do
Hello?

You picked up the phone
No one was there before this

She saw you huddled there with your cigarettes
You had decided it was over
The rescue wouldn't work
Tomorrow was going to be intelligent though

Hello?

Today is smarter
You show her a seedling
Still you
But the strength is awake

You promise yourself it's for good

This time

Dan Patrick Gailey

Untitled

With a rat tat tat of the drums
the warrior figure just hums
standing over the bodies of his once loved friends and chums
kneeling in the middle of the field, he can still feel the steel
pressed against his head – *BAM* another mother fucken dead
what are the depths that we're digging
now we're living all alone in a warzone
and my breath is the only secret thing
that I have left in my home

Privacy is another casualty, another one of you, another one of me
I know the enemy sittin in his office with a pompous like stance
looking at a tv watching war at a glance

George Orwells 1984 had a term for me
like a term for the war and the turn of the 21st century

It only matters about the bottom line,
drawn in the sand, with blood and time
it doesn't matter about reigion, creed, or races,
but what haunts me is to look in the mirror
and see their ghostly faces.
with a rat tat tat of the drums
the warrior figure just hums

motha 2 motha

she was birthed in luv
drug thru that Mississippi mud
yet still arose as clean as a whistle
cause when confronted it's 'bout the principle
of the situation
feminine elevation
soulful irrigation
melanated relations
not too proud for the bus station
cause she gotta make moves
on the grind to prove
that it's all worth it for her seeds
those growing mouths to feed
those same mouths that occasionally speak when not spoken to
just to test authority and see if she'll follow thur
with the verbal threats
and you can bet she met
each sassy strand with a backhand
cause most times she fulfills the role of both woman and man
yeah her responsibilities be grand
in stature and in nature
motha nature giving blessings and hard knock lessons
you know they say: teach a man teach an individual
teach a woman teach a nation
so no time for feeble frustration
woman lead the way
to a brighter day

after a ghetto night
supply the demand for wisdom and insight
without depleting all of your resources
patronizing those kinetic energy forces
forcing me to surrender daily meditations to the Creator
for my procreator
praying that today like her
i'm sho nuff eloquent ebony motha

May I Be Not Sorrow, But Life In You

For sorrow's sake
Lay your troubles to rest
Tears have watered this garden
To a drowning death

The sun's radiance
Once substance for life
Only serves to steam
The nutrients of the garden's essence

New sorrows birthed daily
As the sun dies in the west
Eroded layers of emotion
Testify deaths trail from conception

The abused heart is a weapon
Piercing the soul
With agonizing cramps
Of non-rhythmic beats
Stalled by breath disrupting
Moments so continuous
They are life's cycle

Sorrow is lonely
Greedy for life's hurts
Exploiting discontentment's growth
Parasite for existence
Only wishing it itself
Could fade away
But forever it is emboldened
To life's side
Life's need for misery
Too resistant to enjoy
Peaceful permanence

Would sorrow dream
It would be no more,
Some will say save for sorrow
There could be no comprehension
To the depth in emotion
But understand,
Sorrow is not part of life's equation
Just an addendum
To unwanted situation
For sorrow's sake
Lay your troubles to rest
That your breath
Would breathe
Instilling new life within
Allowing experience
Beyond the curve of existence

Would the sun once more heal
Evaporate those cloud soaked eyes
Lift their cover
That they might once again see

And though they may not
Cast sight upon Eden
The garden still blossoms within

Words spoken
So troubles would no longer
Harden the heart
Words spoken
To decontaminate the poison
Of restricted life's flow

Accept what is
So it would trouble no more
For sorrow's sake

Tour My Venus

the thoughts of flowers fill my dreams
walking on the crest of a quarter moon
feet embraced by bubbles on a sea of gray
talking to the trees
and making love to midgets dressed in coconuts
driving into a hole: no risk of obligation
floating in darkness
emerging on a fire truck covered in Jello
racing a witch to the clouds because she has a nice ass
phone ringing in the distance
truck honking
rushed by intimidation
possessed by another life
no more midget sex
only fear of being late to work
time rushes your eyes like a red light in traffic
its only 7:30
hatred of the man who set it so damn early
midget sex fading to black

Ursula Dorsey

Feel-Good-Right-Now

I masturbate much too much
whether it be with chocolate
or the purchase of a new handbag
eating of some delicious morsel
indulging in an intoxicating liquor
or with the dildo hidden smugly under my pillow.

I search for the indescribable for feeling
of comfort
solace
security
Like I imagine, the womb must be.

What I really crave is to masticate on the issues of my existance
to find my voice and decry my hearts desire
but I'm addicted to instant gratification
and so I masturbate
to the sounds of soul stirring music
in the delight of heart felt words
to a really good read
and put off the withdrawal of my self imposed obsession
to the feel-good- right-now.

Losing You

A box above the street
Family plot #804
A single bulb spews light
Casting shadows on the door
Constant clatter of the blinds
Keeps me from my sleep
Nerves crawling on my skin
I hear the city lights
And see their blaring horns
My body close to bones
Hunger hurts my teeth
Knees drawn in tight
Like an old woman dies
Cold is biting at my feet
Damn blankets gone AWOL
My mind is soon to follow
Without you

Devotion

I stand in
The pouring rain and
Shout up to your windows
And let the neighbors
Think I'm crazy

Gracie Ochoa

Spell

He seduces with sounds and ideas that taste of honey and
Sees the world through eyes of hope and beauty
His heart beats with crimson love and youth that
Forever guides his path of uncertainty

His presence in my life resounds like
A thunderous storm
Loud, beautiful, fearful, yet comforting like
Something foreign that so belongs

He's my friend, my confidant, my ease and
In my mind and soul becomes elusively a lover
Changing and shifting constantly in motion
And emotion

I awaked at dawn in an empty space
That envelops time
Only to discover that I'm addicted
To the powerful spell of a memory

After Elena

We had loved her, maybe for always. I like to think we loved her before we even knew her, all the time before, the years we spent trying to find her.

Then, we were lost and wandering, no more than frail spirits. Yet somehow we found a way, a direction, that led us to her. After crossing what seemed an endless desert, we stumbled across a creekbed that led to a small, struggling stream that kept us alive. But soon the creek became a river that flowed down from the mountains. By then, we were hoping that we were near her at last. Sadly, we learned that we had come too late.

We found her in a high valley, reclining, sprawled across a great forest. Brightly painted houses were built across her breasts, her arms and legs. Narrow dirt roads crisscrossed her body and were traveled heavily by merchants and carnivals from distant lands, and by people whose families had lived there, waiting for her, for a thousand years. By the time we arrived, coming up a dusty road as darkness fell, everyone was doomed.

Not by war or disease, but by Elena dying. No one was fully aware of this yet. We, being the newest arrivals, knew even less. People living there had become so distracted, so caught up in their own lives, they did not comprehend that Elena had killed herself. Perhaps it had happened years before. Her body remained lifelike, still giving.

We had come to find a way out of our misery. Like the others, we thought only of ourselves. And maybe in time Elena had grown weary of people and their ways. The night we arrived, we gathered to watch the stars. It was then that the angels appeared.

Hundreds of them, their hair golden, their gowns effervescent, eyes shining, coming down the sky. They had come for Elena. If I could, I would tell you about their faces. But I don't know the words. They were like nothing we had ever seen, not in the desert or along the roads that brought us to Elena.

It happened so quickly, so magically. The angels began to sing as they lifted Elena into the air. She floated in the blue night sky. Awestruck, we still could think only of ourselves and our predicament. What of all the houses, of the people trying to make some sense of their lives? What would happen to us, the newest arrivals? What would become of us all?

The angels answered our questions. Still singing, they gently raised their hands at us. They seemed to have seen that it was not yet time for us, but only for Elena. In the middle of the night, we sat on the dew damp ground. Everything was gone - Elena, the angels, even the stars. By morning, thousands of people began moving out, migrating. We had no choice but to follow them, wherever they were going.

We began walking, pacing ourselves because we did not know how long the walk would be. All around us were whispered rumors of another mountain, a high valley, even a new Elena.

Now, so much time gone by, no one talks of this anymore.

Smoking Monkeys

Luckily I was only cut on the left and right side of my shin. Our tour guide said that they only poison the traps within a hundred yards of the beach and here we are some fifty miles out. I was able to bandage the wound up with a bandana Conrad had given me. The pain slowly minimized. We began to dig our foxholes in an open field. It was an empty field that had a perimeter of trees surrounding it and we camped on the North side of the field. The day was getting old as we finished up our duties. We didn't talk much because most of the fellas were scared and nervous. The ambush we had just gone through took a few men's lives. One of the unfortunates went through training with me in Louisiana. He was a young man fresh out of high school. I felt for him but felt as though it was somehow his fault. The ambush took the fear out of me. I'd rather be in crossfire than in a foxhole because silence is a pending doom. In battle there is only one winner and one loser but when not in battle there was nothing. A soldier in combat forgets about the destination and focuses on the journey and here I was awaiting some noise.

"Victor, you keep watch for a bit," Conrad signaled as he pointed at his eyes then at the trees.

I scoped through the trees with my rifle looking for movement or signs of life. I almost wished that someone would give me an opportunity to shoot because I felt a need for vengeance. I left fear and nervousness with my friend from Louisiana. There was a very large tree on the East side of the field that seemed to have some movement. My rifle's scope would not suffice so I reached for my binoculars. After about ten minutes of staring I saw a finger wrapped around a branch. I signaled to Conrad that there was something in the closest tree on the East. We all began to unload our rifles by spraying the whole tree. I reached for a grenade on Conrad's vest, counted three seconds then tossed it to the base of the tree. The tree broke like a wet toothpick and

large cumbersome bodies began to drop to the ground. Conrad held his hand up signaling us to seize fire except my finger would not pay attention. I fired until my clip was empty. Conrad and I strategically ran from tree to tree until we were at the broken one. The bodies moved very slowly and smelled of pork bellies.

“Congratulations Victor. You’ve just wasted a battalion of monkeys,” Conrad laughed out.

Conrad lit a cigarette and held his fist in the air to signal the men that the situation was under control. He grinned at me and took off my helmet. He placed it on one of the monkeys that still had a bit of life in him.

“We have a prisoner of war on our hands. What should we do with him?” Conrad said.

“Leave him be. The bastard lives here so let him die with his family.” I announced.

“Well, any last wishes Private monkey? How about a smoke?” Conrad laughed out.

Conrad placed his cigarette inside the primate’s mouth and the few breaths left in the monkey puffed the cigarette. His eyes were dead as night but seemed to stare at Conrad’s movements. Conrad headed back towards the camp. The monkey was now leaning against a large branch of the tree. I thought it was peculiar how the monkeys did not cry or yell in pain but only lay quiet. He would have been an honorable soldier and probably have been awarded the Purple Heart. The cigarette burned out as he passed on and with the palm of my hand I closed the monkey’s eyes. I put my helmet back on and kicked over the Private monkey. He fell on top of one of his soldier buddies and exchanged scents. As I walked back towards the camp I felt nervous.

Girls Get the Last Laugh

"I'm cool," says Only Son as he is up in a tree after running from Dog and Posse. Neighbor did nothing to help Only Son. Instead, Neighbor probably laughed all the way home from the sight at the tree. I couldn't say that I blamed him. Only Son perched up high in a tree with Dog watching at its base waiting for its toy to climb down; that must have been a funny, knee-slapping sight. Cousin was with Only Son until Dogs decided to run after them. Cousin was in Bayou also waiting for Posse to leave him alone. Here these two Boys boasted of Manhood to their sisters (Only Son's sisters: Oldest Daughter and Middle Child and Cousin's sister: Girl Cousin). They waited for Dog and Posse to leave, but Dog and Posse had other plans.

It would all happen one summer. Only Son and Cousin were always together in Family garage playing Nintendo's *Zelda*[®]. Girl Cousin wanted to try, but she was never allowed in Boys' sanctuary. Oldest Daughter wanted to play *Tetris*[®], but she was also not allowed. Oldest Daughter, however, had the power to 'persuade' Boys to do as she said. They would in due time. Oldest Daughter had Car and Money on her side, which she knew they wanted. Time was also her key to revenge. Like Hunter, Oldest Daughter knew that prey need to be watched and studied for the right time. Strike Time would soon arrive. Boys would soon enough be Boys and do something stupid. Time was Girls' friend. Time was a tool Girls knew how to use effectively, along with the power of 'persuasion' Girls knew worked all too well with Boys (constant nagging, pricking, prodding, hugging, kissing and overall annoying). Girl power: something about cooties Boys dreaded.

Oldest Daughter didn't even know that Only Son and Cousin walked to the store (which made no sense since they each had Bike to ride). They did it often, though. It was in the early evening when they left. Only Son and Cousin 'needed' something from Stop-N-Go, as Boys always did. They didn't arrive until several hours later: Dog and Posse

were in play. As Only Son and Cousin were walking back, Dog and Posse were on their tails. Being that Only Son and Cousin were ridiculously afraid of canines, they parted company and ran in different directions seeking shelter from the horrendous Dog and Posse. The ferocious beasts were in pursuit of Only Son and Cousin. Only Son sought refuge in a tree. He figured Dog was not Bear and therefore lacked the power to climb trees. So up in a tree sat Only Son waiting for Help. Cousin saw no immediate succor either, so he dove dangerously into Bayou with Water Moccasin and Friends. Cousin figured Posse was afraid of diving and thereby killing himself from a possible breaking of his neck from such a tremendous feat only Olympic Divers could pull off successfully. Posse was not Stupid, just Hungry for Fun. Cousin didn't see that, he was Scared.

For hours, Only Son sat in the tree waiting for Help. Neighbor (perhaps even Dog's owner) saw him and struck conversation, "*Hey, how are you buddy?*" Only Son answered, "*I'm cool.*" Neighbor managed to get a few more lines of conversation before sauntering away from the sight with a fit of laughter dying to emerge from within. Only Son continued in the tree as Dog kept vigil at its base. Cousin, but a few short yards away, waist-deep in water that was riddled with poisonous moccasins and creatures fit for sci-fi novels, continued awaiting Help to arrive. Help was nowhere to be found. Posse was still at water's edge waiting for Cousin. Dog and Posse became bored of such uncaring and selfish playthings and left to find others. Only Son and Cousin finally emerged from their individual refuges to walk back to Family Home. Girls were waiting.

Only Son and Cousin said not a word. They knew they would never hear the end of it. Interminable laughter and teasing would ensue if they said the reason for their tardiness. Girls waited. Time was a friend. Finally, Oldest Daughter found out of the hunt. Oldest Daughter could not contain her laughter. Many years later, what Dog and Posse did to Only Son and Cousin still causes uncontrollable laughter fits. Only now can Only Son and Cousin look back and laugh as hard as Oldest Daughter has. Time once again gave Girls victory over Boys.

The Apparition

Our story begins where apparitions are oft seen, or said they are seen. It begins in a clearing in the middle of a forest hung upon a trail as a bead upon a string. Everything was slightly blue for the moon was shining full, the black of the night sky contrasting the white glare of the snow, the dark silver of the trees providing a no-mans-land between the two. The surrounding air was tense and quietly twinkling from snow drifting down. The sound of horse hooves packing snow began from the far wall of trees. It grew louder and louder until the shadows drew away and in cantered a man upon a black horse. Steam shot from the horse's nostrils and an icy lather coated its broad black neck and shoulders tensing with muscle underneath. The rider the horse carried was wearing tall riding boots that disappear under his leather great-coat, which was buttoned to his eyes. He scanned the clearing, his eyes shielded from the moon by his three-cornered hat. The horse moved uneasily beneath the rider as he drew it to the left with his reigns. The rider paused, then digging his silver spurs into the horse, drove back into the shadows on the clearing's edge. There was a pause, then the crunching sound of packing snow followed, but this one had no break. Trotting into the clearing came a sleigh pulled by two dappled mares. Its rather round occupant, covered by a large fur robe and a small flat cap, hummed a song to himself with the beat of his trotting mares, which made him seem all the more complacent than he otherwise might. Glancing down he adjusted his robe. When he looked back up, he saw a black charger mounted by the dark figure in his path. He pulled hard on the reigns stopping the sleigh.

-Sir, I say get out of the way or I will run you over!

The man in the sled yelled at the figure. In response the horseman turned a quick shuffle into a gray-barreled pistol pointed down at the man in the sled. He cocked it.

-If you will be so kind as to quickly step out of the sled and remove your coat. A hot ball will reward your refusal... Thank you, sir.

The round man began to sweat as he hopped out of the sled and waddled over with his fur coat. The horseman, grinning, leapt down and began to remove his great coat.

-Try not to think of this as a robbery, but rather a trading. I shall give you my coat, hat, and horse in return for your coat, hat, and sled.

The round man grumbled.

-Now, now, no one likes a poor sport.

The round man grumbled again.

-Up you go sir.

The horseman then motioned to the steed's back with his pistol.

-But sir, I have no step to aide me, and I have difficulty without.

The horseman tipped his head back laughing in response.

-Quickly, time is precious.

Being swallowed by the round man's furs, with his round cap tilted rakishly off to one side the horseman alighted onto the sleigh.

-I rather like being you.

He took the reigns. The round man continued to struggle onto the horse, finally rolling into the saddle.

-I must admit though, my great coat is a tad too small, but my hat looks well on you. Oh, one more thing, here is a pistol.

The horseman tossed up a pistol.

-You needn't use the charge on me, it has no ball to push, but know mine does and under this robe it points at you. On my word fire it at the sky.

-What is the meaning of this?

The round man insisted wrinkling his brow and wheezing. Behind him there came a clamour from the woods. A fresh cut hesitates to bleed so it may pour more dramatically, just as the wood hesitated. Pouring forth as a sort of mechanized blood, a troop of soldiers in red coats rushed out of the wall of trees.

-Fire sir.

-What? Now?

-Fire Now!

The sleigh began to slide forward and its occupant ducked. The man on the horse shot his gun towards the moon.

-Fire!

The men in the red coats dropped to their knees and released a volley of balls upon the horseman who had just turned, still wheezing, to see them. The black charger bolted into the woods again. His rider assumed a crumpled position on the ground. Around him the snow turned red in a growing circle.

-Gentlemen I commend you! I thought I was done for, you came none too quickly! But, I must be off for I am late. Very late.

The man in the sleigh yelled at them as he pulled out of the clearing. The soldiers advance to the crumpled body.

-Well he was a strange one wasn't he?

-Those with money can afford to be.

-Ha! Aristocracy.

-Hey, look over here. Does he seem... fatter than before.

-No, I don't think so. You know those scofflaws, they are all mindless gluttons, no restraint.



Contents Supplied by HCDE Client
Printed by

**HARRIS COUNTY
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

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