

The Bayou Review

Fall 2002



*The University of Houston Downtown
Visual and Literary Arts Journal*

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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

*"Whether you think that you can or that
you can't, you are usually right"*

-Henry Ford

Indulgences

I am indulged at all times:
with chocolate liqueur,
infants, babysitters,
lovers, long rests,
therapy, hospitals
and a total freedom
from expectations.
It is no more
than my prerogative.

My husband's hands pay silently
for all his rivals.
His still smile makes
the coffee and the eggs.
Then the back of his head
leaves for work
with enough relief
for an armistice.

My child learned to count
early, on short fingers
to prove that I was here.
Her reachless arms
learned a benediction
and were raised toward me;
now whatever I may become
she christens "normal."

My family has made me
a present of a golden egg,
all yolk sac,
without albumin or shell,
and in return
I indulge them all
by remaining alive.

Creativity

It is too bad I never wrote;
I am nothing
but interesting material.

Anytime you ask,
I will tell
a consuming story.

Blood rusted metal reaches up
towards great torrents
of pale hair.

Souls like gingerbread
take fingers
from children for dessert.

Deep voices call down curses
of animal transformation
and forgetfulness,

but I can not say
if a word of it
is true.

I will just pass the myth
across the desk
for you to edit.

I suggest you follow
this rule of severed thumb:

distrust all
that is dramatic.

Sustenance

This fish you are turning
from silver to white,

did you take it?
did you get your paw wet?
or did you cheat,
using explosives
or just plastic wrap?

This mammal you transmute
from red to gray,

had it just slopped out
out some new life?
was anything eating
at its breasts?
did it ever provide?

or did it just hang uselessly
around the kitchen,

taunting its mate.

River-Ghost

Little Chihuahuita shadowed beside *Segundo barrio*.
A dead German Shepard with a broken neck lies
on the side of the street for days. The stench
of El Paso's sewage is in the air, a Mexican flag hugely
flaps itself above the chain-linked fence
topped with chicken wire. In the morning, blue mountains
smog. South side of the border, a man jogs.
The river's bank is green with grass, small trees
bob in the wind like green truffles.

Each day thousands cross the open bridge, both ways;
each night they go home to sleep silence. Cars hum
and wait for hours like sleeping cats. The cemented river
is half-dried, even the canal drains away. Some say droves
of shadows at night move ghost-like through the dying river.
These people grow invisible, as if air, irrelevant and holy.
At night I can hear the whisper of my grandfather,
"all the angels live in Juarez."

There is an old language broken in my throat.
Some eyes mistake me for shadow. When I speak my voice
is a fearful phantom. In Spring, dust storms come, the sky
browns, my visage half-forms beneath the Italian cypress,
and when the day's moon is full in its silence,
I am afraid of my own darkness.

Small Change

She sits outside the cafe crouched
like an animal. The woman's bony
cheekbones and citrine eyes like the last
sparks of a snuffed flame watch
men and women wander through glass
doors wearing coats and scarves.
Her Song's became a broken cackle,
and the last coyote
runs hard away into the blue hills.

Drop me a quarter or a dime.

The asphalt-smudged woman grovels.
Her Eyes like sleep; her sleep has eyes.
The fog rolls in like ice over the desert.
Lizards lick the gray night. Feral
cats, all ribs and bone, fear her caress
among the overflowing garbage cans.

Her Eyes of silver and night are red
with hell and desire. Sleepless need--
I Drop her a penny.
Drop her a lie.

I dye my hair fire red. Paint my desert lips,
red-blooded and caked with desire.
I dye my hair dead.

I Drop a Penny. Then a dime
into her calloused palm.
Her face smudged and dark.
I Watch the sky blue, cold, and black
roll over the city like a forgotten god's
fog.

The Bullfight

Beer bottles hang in the bare brown tumbleweeds,
and the rock-cement fences crumble. Maquilladora
workers are buried in shallow graves along the border,
Indian mothers smudged with asphalt beg for dimes
near the Tigua reservation where drums rumble.
There is a statue of a Spaniard long dead, and the voices
of rage and history cannot be redone like a poem.
It is something we carry, something we can never carry.
I am so far gone from the memory of myself, even Chicanas
ask me who I am. What is your name they say.
What is in a name? Names are like languages; they come,
they go. I am counting sea-shells from a trip to the Bayou.

My thigh was on an oyster shell there, green trees sung
with crickets all night as this flesh bled and bled into water.
Salty sea meets fresh water marshes, and animals slither
silently through grass. Alligators thinning in their numbers,
hidden within themselves. Creole women singing.

The Rio Bravo is slow with a muddy past. The River
that divides me crosses me daily like the forgotten
history of my grandmother. The way her abuelita snuck
pennies beneath her pillowcase. "She was the only one
who cared," she sighs. The way children fight
among themselves. How an egg is divided
among eight crying mouths.

My legs went limp in the cold Mississippi. Lifting
my chin up to the boat again and again, I sunk.
I was all desert, brown sand, cacti blooming
small red flowers. Want grew through my veins
like weeds. The Spanish I half-knew fell from lips
as water onto sand. Even the people I longed for,
la raza, forgot my face. The same one I tried to forget
always reflected in endless mirrors, the doughy hosts
of an endless penitence for the shame at my border birth.

Never Mestiza enough, never English enough.
A face always following me, demanding homage
for its vast desert. I left the barren place where men flee
shanties and maquilas and the darting smoggy traffic.
Ran from my step-father's fear of my mother's language,
from my mother's half-Jewish history. Her own lost
heritage buried in a desert cemetery plot. I ran so hard,
so fast, for so long, that when I returned, I was exiled,
yet forever needing the place.

Perhaps, I'm fighting an imaginary bull--It's single eye
blinking against the sun as it slowly dies
and its dark blood seeps into the desert sand.
My blood, of necessity, will eventually seep
into the desert; it is the way of my people;
it is the way of all people: Crossing borders,
learning of caliche and wind,
building monuments from wind,
building monuments from mud,
finding something of themselves,
losing something of themselves.

Vanessa Raney

Thinking of the Late Mrs. Ung Trinh *dedicated to Tony*

For the trumpet sounds the golden moon,
So mocking-sweet this hollow plain
As upward-bound these turrets fly

Their wings forward-fanned, bodies proud
To the sky they try
And down to earth they fall,
Shimmers of an age long past

Here her spirit sits
Whistlers and fannie whisps
There the golden moon may rise
Her smile now sunk and hollow
These are the memories best forgot

But yours, to tender sweet.

Hearts of Stone

I saw a man crying in the street today
His arms outstretched, gazing toward the sky
He stood there, in the middle of the road
Tears streaming from his eyes
His mouth was open in a frozen sob
His pain spilled out into the world

I saw a man crying in the street today
Countless faces passed, but no one ever saw
That his heart was broken open
Spilling sorrow from his eyes
They turned their hearts to stone
And kept on driving by
I kept on driving by

Willie T. Huggins

Transcended We Stand Supplanted

I walk supplanted
From our collective reality
Indeed there was one
And she chose to walk with me
Inside space we conjured meaning
We stood, we talked,
Conversed with implication
Back and forth we spoke
Our lips seemingly fixed
For we spoke with a thought
And with a thought was our word
Our word, it was interwoven
As fine verbal tapestry
And though not discernable from the outside
It was written in our heart
For we had become one
Fused, and from each other, never to depart
You see, she stole my heart
And in turn I stole her own
We each crossed the other
For our individual gain
Instead, we connected
Becoming one and the same
Our fears were no longer
And our tears became one
They were tears of joy
for sorrow had left, and in its stead

Happiness Sojourns

It was and is experience beyond edible word
So I shan't scribe what could never be told
Our cup, it overflows, for our love is lifted
Oft times I wondered, what if first we had met,
Before the curtain of our dreams had been lifted?
Would we then have known
The beauty within, that existed forever?
But I fret over the frivolous no longer
For we are one, and we are the same
There is as there was, only one creation
For we were written of from the before
And now we stand as I, destined within the other to be
The Lord has truly blessed we

Andrew Garcia

Illumination

I saw one night a child alone
A child alone and frightened
Frightened by the world around
Which suddenly had brightened
Only for an instant though
There flashed that brilliant light
Which let me see that child
In that darkest time of night.
In just that instant I could tell
The boy was recent-born
How is it that he came to lie alone
Within this storm?
Could he be a child of Nature
Whom the earth herself had formed
Mixed in place, loam of the forest
And the water of the storm?
Nature-born or cruel abandoned
Now counts little in my eyes
For here, alone, a child deep
In mud, and fear, and water lies
So I will take him in my arms
and to my home
Both safe and dry
And as I do, he seems to know
that he no longer needs to cry.
Here surrounded by the forest

As we amble toward my home
I think about his fear,
and then I think about my own
I ponder on the future,
and I puzzle on the past
And then I wonder-on this stage-
how long this actor's act will last.
But then I look into his eyes
And they are pleasant
As is he
And I am moved to hope
That someday some kind stranger
Rescues me.

Gracie Ochoa-Alvarado

Days Pass Me By

A day occurred without me in its plan.
I traveled among loose ends of red, blue,
and green streamers that into the past ran
searching for those safe and sound days of you.

Lost in confetti dreams that only hide
the sadder years and the despairing tears
of today, I hold on tight as I ride
away with abandon and disappear

steadfastly toward your light and away
from gray skies, unkind eyes, surrendered sighs.
I drift on white clouds, through timeless forays
to meet you and once again say goodbye.

I awake on a canvass bleak and bare
needing again to paint your presence there.

Ode to a Pocket

Container of treasures

Minute, yet great

stories revealed.

Chubby fingers digging for

lint-covered gumballs

rolling in spoonfuls of crumbs.

Forgotten notes,

adolescence hidden

in tear drenched caves.

Safety pins, paper clips

keeping life's chapters intact.

Yesterday's hopes, tomorrow's dreams;

time's gnarled hands

slipping quietly into familiar homes.

Clarity

Past my visual impairments
With your direction blinded
Blockades, concrete walls
My turn signals guide nothing at all

Skin deep is only so never deep enough
Blood red, purplish blue – cold
Hold all your colours to the light
Rip the cornea, the iris from my sight

If green was blue to you
What would it be to us, to me
Black was our understanding
Leaving the gleam in my eye so demanding

Like windowpanes filtering your truth
The effulgent saliva on a front tooth
Glistening, injecting, pretending, rejecting
My senses with nothing quietly reflecting

The colour that missed the mark, the scale
So subtle, so invisible so relatively pale
How would we notice what is so beautiful, so dear
Without the window of blankness, this colour clear

Pissing Egg White Omelets Down Manhole Covers in the River Oaks Cemetery

Run free from the cellulite young idolater
It won't be long before we end this roman feast
Cradling candles on the edge of the queen's bed
Kissing her freckles while you count back from a hundred

How now young calf you may have the first laugh
But mine shall surely be the definitive in a series
That carries into the looming wheelbarrow
We call self-improvement in this formal statement I'm faxing

Gently howl at the moon on Main Street
Running through courtyards in front of the fine arts museum
Stark raving nude ass cheeks chafing
Until the sprinklers self-destruct and the Cullen fountains
burst with semen

And then I'll laugh at Halloween in September
And let burning bricks fly from hospital windows
At nearby tenement and cough up my esophagus
Pissing on the front steps of city hall with Boxcar Willy and
his gang of ghouls

Ursa Demise

I walked the mile in her shoes
My toes never felt better as
Riding on the clouds in them faithfully
Stomping on angel's wings – gracefully

Her heart digesting me evenly
All the while taking what it longed for
My smooth parts, her nutrients
Chewed up and made fine supplements

She hummed a tune she learned from me
On a warm midsummer eve
A piece of cake rotting under be frame
The pillows carried both our weights

She laughed heartily at a joke
A fine one at my expense
Stooping – starting – then recalling
My Ursa Minors in Libra came falling

She scribbled in notebooks pensively
Signing my name to hers unofficially
Scheming on the tones – their unison
Knowing how t'was to end before we begun

Her eyes could never pick a color for long
They evoked more words than a verse
Those I's eye failed upon were my curse
Eating me alive for all of my worth

I ran the six minute mile in her shoes
So delicate – demanding always – sandbagging
Hastily they took me over those angel's wings
Over my verse, my heart - not important things



“In My Birthday Suit”



“Midnight At The Goodwill”



“Little Logic and Freeda Imagination”

From War

From force come star spangled spin doctors,
dizzy with power,
whimsically operating under cultural anesthetic.

From fear come attacks of faith,
condensing galaxies into brilliant glowing grains,
slowly sinking beneath our tired feet.

From honor come bitter, brave idiots,
with their youth seeping from huddles,
soaked in the fleeting fire of high school heroes,
delivering dirty bombs with perfect, smoking spirals.

From death come armored children humming broken ballads,
patriotic princes left to wallow in their cardboard castles,
with memories, like fingernails, they can't scrape clean.

An Ode To Ecstasy

Tiny perfect pill of ephiphanies,
recipe for instant innocence,
I yearn for your sudden intensity,
Your enthusiastic grasp of the unreal,
The quiet groove of an elevator rising to the top floor.

Your strength is my weakness,
Your transient cure is my disease.
Your black magic mixes oil into chemical rainbows,
and melts monotonous years into mythical minutes.
You teach pupils to dialate,
and jaws to clench.

You instill me with a beggar's hope,
that I could forever float inside this fantasy of frozen moments.
But your hand coldly slips from mine,
and time latches the door between us,
locking me inside myself,
swallowing pink and yellow keys.

The World is a Stage

The bell rings,
and sings,
that same thick, strict sound,
binding us to another hour of gravitational pull
dragging drifters down from the clouds,
and into the business of breathing.

A clock ticks,
and kicks,
another victim out of bed,
and deadens him with its daily disease,
spreading subtle sickness in wireless waves.

His trail bends,
and ends,
without a trace,
without a face,
but shoes tied,
and shirt tucked.

An American Atheist

Fueled by hype and haste your fury seeks,
a hallowed target to bleed and bear your pain,
but your breath lays waste when mercury speaks,
where your faith was conceived, now retrieved with flames

Some doubt seems noble, or novel, or both,
daring a dream to succeed where senses failed,
but some can swallow what others choke,
and aren't forced to explore before the lifted veil,

But these cafe and coffee shop crimes persist,
where rhetoric without consequence is just,
this ignorant idle hunch that minds commit,
when 'real worlds' split and heavy metal rusts,

the search for T R U T H should refute any alphabet it knows,
beyond the confines of brash dispute, it waits for nuclear glows.

Valerie Kinloch

Mi Amor Miguel

It's not always so easy to see the deepness of a person,
To reach the power of a person's soul
And feel the kindness and charm that is called Life
Mapped across the face and in the crevices
Of a palm's lines,
Inside and underneath the eyes that glance at first
Then stare before turning away.

It's not always so easy to feel the gentle sincerity of a person
Even when such sincerity is outlined in a person's smile
Or in a person's slow, but gracious steps.
For when the veil of secrecy is removed
From what we see and how we feel when we first meet a person,
The soul is exposed – the sincerity shines forth
and the language is made understandable,
Even when the languages are different and serenity takes the place of fear..

Mi Amor Miguel exudes a form understood by
the daily nuances of indifferences,
Making Life a little less difficult and a lot more enjoyable.
He outshines and outsmarts the next person in order to please his travelers.
More than the average person,
Mi amor Miguel epitomizes what most others pray for
– patience, strength, charm, and a beauty that becomes his intelligence.

I've seen his sincerity,
I've witnessed his deepness,
I've seen the workings of his soul, and now I can go back home.
Adios Mi Amor Miguel.

America the Babe

The barrio took on confusion
When many of the men got
Drafted into the war.
No one actually knew what
The war was about.
We just knew that we each
Had to give up one of our sons.
A rendition of Moses and the
Pharaoh's curse where the entire city's first
Born were murdered.
Should I have rubbed lamb's blood
On my doorway too?
The blood wouldn't have scared the
Angel of Death away but scared away
The unwanted American flag.
The ritual was when a soldier died
The flag was put on their
Family's front porch.
Soon the barrio became a theme
Park for the red, white, and blue.

Victoriano, my brother never
Would reply to our letters.
We would mail him
Letters filled with questions.
How are you?
Is it going to be over soon?
Because of my age I

Was incapable of writing to him.
Just a few years back I had
Learned to speak in English.
Cotton picking doesn't call
For much of a vocabulary.
At times I wondered if Victor
Missed the fields of bronze.
He was always the quiet one
While the girls would always
Bitch about having to work
So hard, constantly bending over.

Months passed and finally
Our house had been blessed with
A letter from my brother.
We all crowded around
My mother as she opened
Up the white envelope.
It was addressed to me and
With amazement none of our
Questions had been answered.
He didn't write anything
About the war or his condition.
He simply wrote about music
And the lyrics to certain songs.
He wrote about Bob Dylan's song
"It Ain't Me Babe."
We discovered the true meaning
To the song and how it wasn't about
A man and a woman.
No, it was about a person not putting

Up with the government.
"Go away from my window" Bob
Would sing, "And leave at your
Own Chosen speed. I'm not the
One you want, I'm not the one you need."

When Victor finally came home to us,
He came home to a changed America.
There were no parades, or bands
Awaiting his arrival.
He can home to fight a different battle.
He was now considered a coward in the eyes
Of the American citizen.
People hated the Vietnam
Soldiers for fighting.

Confusion still lingered around
But it didn't matter any more.
My brother was home and
The world rolled off my shoulders.
I could see the hatred and turmoil descend
As the barrio's flags began to slowly
Come down one by one.
It was then that I had found my brother's
Welcome home parade.
I then found my brother's
Welcome home band.
It spins round and round
In circles.
It goes by the name Bob Dylan.

Division of Music

It turns out Frito had tunes in his head.
At his mother's there was a turntable
Where music was spoon-fed.
He had plans to start a band.
He didn't want to play Mariachi,
He wasn't the typical Mexican.

Being neither white nor black
He was in the middle.
The division of races among
Music to him was a riddle.
Why should I sing in a song
And make the beat trash?
Words are what divide us
In life, so I'll play jazz.

(Frito had a mind full of dream-
His heart would soon rip at the seam!)

The band teacher handed him
A big brown guitar.
He thought this a limitation
That could only take him so far.
He told the teacher not to
Consider where he was born.
He hoped to be transparent
And be passed the horn.

(Frito was raised on Spanish song
And was forced to sing along!)

He promised himself if
He ever had a baby girl
He'd buy her a jukebox with
Music from around the world.

Spanglish Love

My love~
Mi amor~
Cannot be expressed
With English vocabulary.

Heart only has
One syllable.
Corazon
Holds three.

Mi corazon gushes blood
Through my body
To the brain.
Rivers submerge
To my eyes~
To my ojos~

If my corazon
Over flows
With love~
Con amor~
My eyes~
Mis ojos~
Shed tears.

If my rivers lie
My eyes~
Mis ojos~
Look away
And close.

My love~
Mi amor~
Runs deeper
And Further
Than any
English word.

Sponge

He stands mute, defiant
absorbing evil from a union gone bad
hateful words ricochet off walls
he soaks them in, storing them

Smack-slap-hit bounces off mamma
catches them with his frail body
holding them inside 'til the storm subsides

Sneaks through the familiar fence
desolate field of sponge grass
lets a mad-scared scream
wring the badness out, vomiting
dad's force-fed meal

He slumps to the ground, weakened
But ready to return to his post

Slow Drain

He stumbles in for a year or two
I gently guide him to bed

He tumbles in for a while or more
I show him to the couch

He is consistent for another decade
I unlock the door and fade quickly

Time passes, peaceful time
But headlights sweep, the same old
knock

I sigh, stretch, steel my will,
Walk With heavy feet,
And forever lock the door

Wells

It doesn't have to sparkle to pull
But you know that
You
In your autumn way
So glib about cannibals
Galactic and otherwise
Pull as hard
Are as insensate
As insouciant
Fail as completely
As gravity

Thusly do I lay blame elsewhere
In this blameless trend
Of falling from orbits
Watching these brief, fierce foci shrink
Cool
All the while feeling
The gentle tug
Of a thousand galaxies
In random flight around me

Random Thoughts on Endometriosis and Being in Love with a Popular Icon named Maynard

My renegade uterus
wouldn't let me see you
in May

My daughter is so much like me
but so much smarter
she refuses to be

She punishes me for even considering
forcing such a thing
on her

So I lay on the floor in my room
knowing so much more about my ceiling
because of you

Listening to your voice and thinking
this is absolute purity
restrained

Pushing the inside of a nylon stocking
with perfectly spherical
jellied force

Counting out eleven revolutions
of the ceiling fan
over and over

GOD DAMNIT I'LL GET A FUCKING HYSTERECTOMY
IF YOU'LL QUIT THIS HORROR
WHAT KIND OF AN ASSHOLE HAS A CONCERT ON A
MONDAY ANYWAY

I call my friend John I lost to a needle
years ago and buy a
morphine pill

John breathes long after we all lost Dave to a bridge
over a soft bottomed lake that was much more shallow
than it looked

John would kill me if he knew I just swallowed
that pill
He'd say:

You just don't know what you're missing, Gwen

Untitled

I can wonder
My stomach rises to greet your smile
I can dream
In foggy sighs and whispered miles
How sweet the hips that pull belly taught
How dear the tender, low lidded thought
Of your eyes

I know you
I can taste your imperfection
It throws back my head as I rise to meet you
In this impossible warmth
And softness of moment
Our bodies pressed together
like a child's hands in prayer

after all
sin is just another idea
it's my reverence that betrays me

Wingspan

A long-lost short story by Henry Flower

So, I.B. Cyrus sighs in a Scullionspeak from his slightly parted lips, it is to the birds I must heed. Cranes, Starlings; Seagulls; the foes of his dearest feline. The caller, distant, hisses hastily from the telephone receiver as if hummingbirds haunting succor.

—You cannot serve me. I must go to water's wide edge, to the verdant end of the virile forest in congress with those aerial winged wonders to seek guidance on Mimi, missing more than a night's rest now. I must go.

Mr. Cyrus lowers the telephone back to its cradle, gathers his latchkey and exits his tower. On the lawn he lights a cigarette, pulls his fedora down closer to his eyes to guard against the sun. In the pocket of his coat, a tuna fish sandwich—a favorite of Mimi's. He scans the sky, thinking of places where things are lost. *Dia duit*, sonny. Ah, Papa, good morning, the sky says to Mr. Cyrus lost in cirrus. His grandfather's aplomb, appears apparition, singing a'capella, *Dia duit*. The slow murmur, of his milting, his marrow, his no more.

—Ibby! Mr. Cyrus deafened by divinity, crosses himself, and kisses the tips of his fingers, which taste of ash. Wednesday. It is? The sun; he covers his eyes to witness Buck Milligan emerge from an oblivion amidst the sun shards slicing the street. Polenshadows float silently by through the morning solace from the parapet of his manicured lawn with each Milligan step; the light a mirror of the sky at once dark and light: blue: the color of change. Mimi is? Mr. Cyrus fills the bowl near the sink, an earlier time, with first knowledge of Mimi's missing furry form. Nine lives. Fall down seven, get up eight? Nine years in human years is one.

—What's with the moping? Milligan, stately and plump clamored as he came to the side of his companion who greeted him with initial silence, enough of an interval for a volley: What cat got your tongue?

—My Mimi is missing. What do you care, lover of dogs, you *madra* yourself. You flea-bitten lick of balls.

His head halts for a brief moment, hikes towards the sky. Birdsong?

—Squawks? Mr. Milligan barks as if bitten by fleas or festered by feathery foes fallen from nearby fronds. He takes off his

hat and stares at the sky.

—Birds. Their songs have been our family's salvation. Did I ever tell you the tale of my uncle the poet? Only a few of his poems exist still today. But for a brief time, he was famous. Back then, famous. Not now, famous. All that is really known of him is the dramatic story of his death.

—O, an impossibly Greek story no doubt! Milligan slaps Ibbey on the shoulder. They walk down the lawn to the pathways. Ibbey weaves an arm through Milligan's.

—He was attacked on a pathway and robbed; he was mortally wounded. A flock of birds, seagulls, flew by overhead, and he called on them to avenge him.

Milligan withdraws as if wounded.—Such blarney from the Irish!

—This is Greek, remember. And I am not Irish.

—You are madra.

—Perhaps if I bear my fangs: yellow: enticing. Soon after the seagulls flew over the coast to a line of fishermen coming in from the sea. It was noisy.

The sea sings sirens seeking to wash world-weary welts from the body of beaten beasts. The sea sings sirens seeking to wash world-weary worry from the brain of the begotten beasts.

—And?

—A man's voice: The seagulls of Skellig, the saviors! The fishermen turned, their nets swollen with the sea, to see. The men stood and understood; they shouted: The murderers! The murderers! The seagulls took the men to the robbers who got them drunk, boarded them on boats and buried them beneath the sea.

The sea sings sirens seeking to wash world-weary worms from the bone of bargained beasts. The sea sings sirens seeking to wash world-weary words from the beak of the seafaring beasts. The murderers!

Mr. Cyrus walks quickly to the end of the street; Mr. Milligan follows, his arms pumping at his sides. He noshes on chocolate, a bar he had withdrawn from his pocket. At the end of the street, he offers his companion a bite, to which Mr. Cyrus raises a palm, closes his pious pupils, and silently shakes his head.

—Forty days. (Heathen)

Throughout the forest, he fumbles, festooned with frustration; he is alone, aloof to chattering cicadas, eager for egrets and seeking seagulls. Birds. The dove, the olive branch; the responsibility of bringing peace. Mimi is chasing birds? Something purple in the woods; a finch? The color of mourning, memo-

ries. He might be lost in this unfamiliar untamed unction. His parents? It is hard to pinpoint one memory of his parents; the woods twist into confusion, a worry of will 'o wisps and thorny bush; roots make one stumble. The burning bush: They were cremated. They are everything to this young man. But now gone. They feed him still (is he a worm?), clothed him, protected him; never lost him. In God We Trust! Indeed. Mimi? The tuna fish sandwich! Mr. Cyrus takes it from his pocket and unwraps it, waves it about. The smell, the aroma of home. Tea. It was dark, the town lights on and he sits quietly just watching the parade of shoppers go. He cannot recall exactly what was said. Just cups of tea. Sustenance, succor, safety. She says you are from here. He doesn't know where they are. At that moment there is truth. And the word is: Hope. Miasmatic and ungainly; twisted and untethered, truth unravels when it leaves the hands and enters the abyss of larger things. But then. Then. From here, he can stare at them swimming in the pool in the yard, in the place where they cannot see him. He lowers his hands, he unzips his pants, and for a moment; meme meme meme meme, murmuring, meme meme meme. He is meme of masculine motion.

Lig se beic as.

—Excuse me, do you know the way to Timberland, eh?

Mr. Cyrus turns to see the short man standing in the lane near the water's edge. For a moment, he wants to see a cat face above the man's shirt collar. He wants so badly to be home. There are no birds, no song, but confusion and roots and brambles and wind in the leaves. Fucking cicadas; the humidity.

—Are you Canadian?

—The 'eh' gets them every time. Yes. Timberland?

—I'm Canadian, from the west. (I think?)

—Timberland?

The finger points north, just west of the northern ridge of green so dark it is the color of a dead cat's tongue. Mimi.

—Have you seen a black cat. A skinny black cat, little guy got away, eh.

Guy shakes his head, turns and trundles off his body slowly eaten molecule by molecule by the day's gloaming fast approaching. Day's ending, Mimi must find before home is dark.

Where now?

His secrets: Old stories are lies, the tattered photos of drinkers in Scottish pubs; old photos of relatives no longer known to him are given names of uncles and aunts; his family tree weak with lead smudges and dusted with eraser grit. A birdcage with the gate open. Song awaited.

O, won't we have a merry time
Drinking uisce beatha and wine
on family,
Family Day?
O, won't we have a jolly time
at the reunion drinking?

He takes his Irish-English dictionary from his hip pocket. He looks up lost, he looks up found. He looks up family, up cat.

—We are...

Mewing. He hears mewing. There at the water's edge, with feathers on its whiskers. Mimi, mewing, Mimi. Memories.

He watches his furry charge warm up to his presence in her killing field. There were no birds for she had eaten them. Birdbone, craw, featherduser. Nearby a bloated black cat is plucked by a murder of ghost crows (the gloaming) as if a musical instrument. A battleground. It is the sound of freedom; the sea singing sirens: Seagulls: Skellig: Savior. The sun sits hard against the horizon. The gloaming flies in full and foreboding as if on winged carrier.

—Where have you been?

Mr. Cyrus does not expect an answer as he stoops to scoop the skinny sly sinister cat from its hunting haunches and sits near the water. But: Song comes from birds. Birdblood rhapsody.

—Don't you know the history of cats? The history of history?

He sits Mimi in his lap. He takes his hand and steadily strokes her head. Moreover, he shakes his noggin; in this unfamiliar place he calls his home. Now, here, he can be whomever he wants.

—We hide best when sought for.

The sun nearly nimbus numb against his need, slides, then sinks: blue: the color of change.

—I am...Mr. Cyrus begins. The ash of Wednesday; the giving up for Lent. Suddenly he is arisen!

He tosses the cat in the lake. A good pitch, a strong throw; the arc of triumph. Watery grave; bubbles of purloined profanity. Mewing, murmuring, murder.

A seagull lands as if epaulette at his ear. Mr. Cyrus smirks serenely and sings a Scullionspeak sonata in praise of birds.

Turning the curve for wherever, he waves a dismissive limb. It calls again: Tempting: Untempted. He did not turn, didn't need to; a sleek black head, Mimi, far out in the water, bobs, sinks.

Forgotten.

—I am a descendant of dinosaurs.

He stretches his arms as far as his marrow will mightily muster.

Wingspan.

This story was discovered by Pdraig Connolly beneath the floorboards of the union steward's office at St. James' Brewery in Dublin, 1916. It has been authenticated by the Irish Gael Accord.

The Woods

The woods began just on the other side of the road from the neighborhood. Everyday the boy would play on the other side of the road in the woods. He had many adventures there, but one particular day stood out in the boys mind from its advent forth. On that day, the sky was the sort of even gray that darkens but at the same time lightens from all directions. The air was cool, but did not make the boy shiver. Everything seemed still except the subtle rustling of leaves that, but for their sound, would otherwise go unnoticed. He ran through the woods, surrounded by the silver-gray trees. Most of the smaller ones were already bare; their leaves a carpet of brown on the forest floor. He ran and played. Sometimes he could see the road through the trees. It was at one such spot that it happened. He climbed a small gray tree up to the fork where the branches began, about the height of two full-grown adults. The woods already seemed a different world, but in the tree no person's rules were present. Tall trees provide a canopy for the relatively smaller trees that grew amongst them and even in his small tree the rules were different. At that height nothing could walk. So there amongst the air he sat looking down on the speckled brown floor, listening to the sound of dancing leaves, when it stopped. The sounds stopped. All movement stopped, even stillness itself seemed to hold its breath. At that very moment when all had stopped something slid through the corner of his sight. He looked around and scanned the branches of the trees level with him. They displayed nothing but the silvery mesh of their arms. Then two arms length away he saw it.

A small owl, the same silvery gray as the trees, striped with a walnut brown, who at that exact second seemed to feel the boy's stare and turned his head around replacing the back with the front. The boy, unblinking, looked directly into the large round eyes. The unearthly smoothness of those yellow eyes looked back into the boy. The boy blinked and the owl let go of the branch and slid through the silence. The leaves began to rustle again. The street reappeared through the branches.

Whiskey Pantoum

Empty bars are the loneliest places in the world.
Cigarette butts smolder in empty mugs.
He scratches another eight-ball.
Labels. Labels. Labels.

Cigarette butts smolder in empty mugs.
He has bourbon while she sips chardonnay.
Labels. Labels. Labels.
There's a ring on my finger.

He has bourbon while she sips chardonnay.
But the jukebox never sleeps.
There's a ring on my finger.
Wolves and witches prowl around me.

And the jukebox never sleeps.
Can I get some coffee over here?
Wolves and witches prowl around me.
No one knows me in this place.

I need some coffee over here.
He scratches another eight-ball.
No one knows me in this place.
Empty bars are the lonliest places in the world.

Medal of Honor

Ideally, people are supposed to die in the order they were born. However, for some reason things didn't work out that way for my Uncle Jake—who was the youngest of three brothers. Growing up in the deer blinds of East Texas, Uncle Jake had always been an exceptional marksman. Who would have ever thought he'd accidentally shoot himself with his own .45 while he was cleaning out his pick-up?

It was my father's job to prepare the funeral arrangements as he was the eldest. I remember being at his house while he was searching for the item that marked the most productive time of Uncle Jake's life—his Eagle Scout medal.

My dad had gotten the call two days before. His demeanor was tired and resigned, much the opposite of the usual. His heart was hurting. All I could do was listen to him as he reminisced and searched through box after box, drawer after drawer.

"Your uncle was by no means a saint, you know. He was a tough one Ole' Jake. And a tragic alcoholic. It's only been in the last year that he's been able to stay sober and lead a somewhat normal life. He'd fought against invisible demons for years. But he was a good person. I suppose the Warden figured it was time he got a break." I nodded as he paused. In his hands were old photographs of three golden-haired boys sitting on a rusty tailgate.

When my dad and uncles were younger, they were inseparable. Their ages stairstepped, so they shared everything from t-shirts to best friends. They also shared a love for the outdoors. There have never been three boys as passionate about camping, hunting, fishing, and just being

outside, Uncle Jake, Uncle Jim, and my dad.

"Jake was the youngest Boy Scout to receive his Eagle in our troop's history. He was only 13." His voice cracked and he closed his eyes. "It was the biggest thing he ever did." All three of them achieved Eagle status-and it was the one thing they had in common in their later years of life.

"Now, all I've got left of him is that damned medal." He wiped away a tear that had escaped his left eye. His face reddened and his heavy hands pushed frantically through papers, opening and closing any containers in their wake. "I've got to find that medal. He should wear it one more time. He earned it." Dad tossed me an old wine box with yellowed masking tape hanging from the sides where the adhesive had long ago lost its stick.

"Look in there for me. I'm going to start looking in the drawers. I should have put it in a place I'd know right where it was. He should've given it to Jim." I opened the box, but kept my eyes on my father. His hands had begun to shake as he opened drawer after drawer in his nightstand. Memorabilia from his childhood was stashed in every corner of his side of my parents' room. Oversized 'steelies' from his marble-playing days sat in a worn plastic baggy. Pieces of braided sinew that he took on campouts had been collected and thrown in randomly. Loose bullets of various sizes made that hard, rolling sound as he opened and closed the drawers. He slammed the last one shut, and in three strides, crossed the bedroom to throw open a cabinet door in the antique chifferobe.

"He trusted me with it! He didn't trust himself not to pawn it and now I've lost it! What kind of brother am I that I can't even keep one simple promise?!" Tears began to run down his red, whiskered cheeks. I quickly looked down into the box, so as not to embarrass him further. My own eyes got misty as I ruffled through

old black and white photographs. The boys got younger and younger as I made my way towards the bottom of the box. No medal presented itself, but I continued to keep myself busy with the pictures. I didn't want to find the medal. I wanted the victory of its discovery to be my father's.

He moved to the cedar chest. With one swipe, he cleared the silver trinkets and picture frames to the floor and threw the top open, banging it against the wall. He had quit talking now. The words weren't helping him anymore. His knuckles were white and his thick fingers moved with uncanny speed as he shuffled through clippings, certificates, and folders. Sweat trickled down his temples in a mad determination that I didn't dare interrupt. I kept myself busy with the box of photographs.

He began throwing things across the room. His melancholy had turned to rage. His dead brother's face kept smiling back at him picture after picture. In his moment of frenzy, he lifted a wooden trinket box and stood holding it over his head, about to throw it hard to the floor when something made him hesitate. Slowly, he lowered the small container and softly fingered the slight scrap of blue-colored fabric that was hanging from the inside. Once again, he wiped a stray tear away and his breath slowed.

His heavy hands lifted the lid to reveal a badly tarnished, but easily recognizable silver eagle medal. The eagle's wings were proudly spread and the letters "B.S.A." were embossed across its chest. It hung from a tattered piece of red, white, and blue fabric that had a fastener at the top for a lapel. At the top of the fabric was a strip of metal that read "Be Prepared." It dangled delicately from between his thumb and finger. His shoulders dropped and his breath slowed. A slight smile emerged and he showed me the relic from his favorite childhood memory. He was calm and peaceful and his eyes sparkled as he allowed the last tear to fall. This time, he didn't wipe it away.

“Let’s Recap”

There is something that has taken shelter inside me that is tearing open the life I seldom appreciated. I have come to grips with the fact that I contracted HIV/AIDS from my undesirable need to have sex. I lost my direction in life, not from God, but from what I have left to accomplish in life. I can remember vividly the morning I was called in to receive my HIV test results at the Montrose Clinic. The day held my life in its hand and numbness was spreading from my brain to the rest of my body. My heart turned into a muscle cramp that held the tears of my reality. I did not need a test to tell me I was infected. I knew deep inside that my actions would hold me liable to this type of fate. I always pictured myself the type of person to be infected with the HIV virus. Out of all my friends, homosexual or not, the one most at risk would be me. I am the most promiscuous, or slutty if you prefer. Sex was a necessity and I would have sex with anything with a pulse, men preferred. It just shows how much self-esteem I had as a young adult. I was sexually active at a very young age and it escalated till the day of my prognosis.

When the doctor came in to give me the results, I was already sweating bullets and on the verge of a nervous breakdown. I needed a cigarette or a double shot of anything that would make me feel at ease with what the doctor had to say. Yeah, I was ignorantly prepared for the best and worst, but in reality I wished I were one of the lucky ones to be given a second chance at life. Oh how I prayed to God, in those few seconds that seemed to take forever.

God? Does He really have a place here or does He only have a place when I die?

1a

I mean this with no disrespect
The matter with my life prevails
But I feel I do not sin under GOD's veil
I sin under my own

I remember the thoughts that clouded my mind before I received my results. I promised that I would be a better person. I would stop having sex if not in a committed relationship or would be less of a slut, be the best possible son to my mother who has put up with a lot of my shit, and I would try to make positive changes in my personal life. Of course this was a lame attempt to erase all the bad karma I knowingly put out; but of course it is too late to erase the past. The doctor was so ethereal in his attempts to explain why HIV is a highly transmitted disease that I broke down and told him to get to the point. I am not one for many words even though this slight detailed event on paper is very elaborate. So he proceeded to tell me that I was HIV +. Suddenly...I felt a stand still where my world began. Where my world is? Where the fuck my world ends! But no one could hear me on that beautiful day. Nothing is normal anymore.

The doctor did not leave me clueless nor did he attempt to school me. Instead, he asked me how I felt and told me that the clinic had simple procedures for patients with HIV that he would like me to hear. I asked if I could be alone and he complied. All I did was cry and remember my childhood. I was so happy then, and now I am filled with anger, pain, and regret. I spent most of my time having sex with strangers. Morbid thoughts flooded my inner self and thoughts of suicide came to mind; I wanted to die rather

than live in shame; I wanted to die rather than be alone the rest of my life. Who would love someone like me? I wanted to die in order to stop feeling. I hated myself at the time, and as you can see I am still alive; so something must have changed.

I let go of the plague that was growing inside me. I am not talking about the HIV, but of the rabid sickness of feeling pity for myself. I was never the type of person to feel pity for someone or thing, so why begin now?

1b

Pity is for no one
Sorrow is for many
I live alone with someone
And, I live alone with myself.

Once the doctor came back and began to explain what HIV/AIDS is and how it will effect my life, I started to see a way out of my self-pity. I had my good cry. Then I was ready to listen, and listen I did. The doctor said that the worst is not over and that the beginning of my new life challenges began that day. I was not reborn but was given the circumstances I felt had taken on a different form.

When I had my first test with HIV, I had no symptoms; I had more than 1000 T-cells and a viral load way below 55,000, which meant that no real treatment would start. The Doctor did recommend that I start some type of therapy to keep the viral load down and preserve my immune system as long as possible. The treatment possibilities seemed risky no matter which road I would take. The thought of being sick terrified me. I explained to the

Doctor my novice approach to HIV and I wanted to attend meetings that educate in HIV treatment. If life has taught me anything it is that being well informed can be useful. The unconscious self will no longer keep me oblivious to that fact. I had lived my life up to that point relying on its companionship and look where I have landed.

I started with Montrose Clinic attending informal meetings with other HIV + patients. The thought of being with others with HIV was giving me a sense of denial. I was giving in to denial of my sickness and the possible threat of ignoring my status. I was doing this on my own but my family and friends keep me alive with their active support. I wanted to cry so that the ball in my throat would diminish and the fear carrying me would feel less intense. The moment of flash came two weeks later after I attended about three classes and built strong connections with people that were equal to me, not in status, but with the sense of belonging and not feeling alone in the shadows. The goals of my therapy are easy to understand, but the sacrifices one makes are the biggest challenge.

After getting over the stigma that shrouds HIV/AIDS, I have to wonder what type of treatment can I handle? The list to choose from is an endless list of do's & don'ts that do not offer any type of solace or well being. The word medicine (a science & art of dealing with the prevention and cure of disease) is stripped down to its fundamental level when explained by the doctor. He explains each drug and their possible side effects as if I were buying a used car. For example, I may experience loss in energy, diarrhea, nausea, muscle inflammation, oral ulcers, neuropathy, anemia, vomiting, central nervous system effects (confusion, abnormal thinking, impaired concentration, depersonalization,

etc..). All of these risks come from taking drugs that are supposed to protect me from the virus that rapidly mutates to withstand the medications. I need a moment to relieve myself from all this. I am in the middle area with HIV and a thought has risen. Have I not thought about my death yet?

1c

Some are alive, but dead
I am alive, but dying
You're alive, so live
Take from death zilch

I know the ending to my sadness, but how do I change my sentiments with the life I have lived? To live life on a risky roller coaster ride of drugs that cause severe damage in the name of science is preposterous! Because in the end HIV/AIDS does not have a solution in the times of war I am living in! The constant attacks between countries; the unyielding issue of death makes my own fate seem less complicated.

1d

I'm at war
You're at war
We fight with ourselves
ALL THE TIME

My sanity runs wild while my spiritual need to get well slowly escapes from within me. The medicine will eat my sanity and leave me vulnerable to the dark shadow that is El Arte de Morir (the art of dying) these days. What about the science of living? Is there a 10-step program for that? When I told Andres about my choice I can remember him saying, "So, you're going to

start to smoke marijuana?" My response was "Girl, I can still eat. Nothing is wrong in that area yet. If I do decide to take medication because of complications with my food intake, then yes, light me up a joint!"(spoken with attitude) I want to be capable of enjoying life to the fullest considering the situation I am in.

Communication. I recently began to express myself in a different way since my knowledge of my HIV status. My soul had taken a journey and my spirit was flying solo. It sounds so corny, but the truth is that I beat my inner self down repeatedly. For my spirit to live, I had to reinvent myself to be strong. Because my spirit will be my backbone until I get sick and die.

Medication would have kept me mindless, but I was able to find lots of alternative methods that have transformed my whole life. I can't believe that I can put one leg behind my back now and that my health is improving rather than becoming worse with time. I can only imagine all of the sexual positions I can get into now that I have mastered Yoga (just kidding). My family and I are from Mexico and food is very important, so eating right sometimes takes a backseat. But I would be a hypocrite if I did Yoga in vain. For example, I don't go to MacDonald's and order a #5 super sized with a large Diet Coke. It's one of those moments one says to oneself, "Girl, what is wrong with you? Crazy Bitch!" I have been able to structure my eating habits to moderate and healthy intakes. I still eat well, but I am careful yet realistic. I refuse to fight with my body anymore than it is already fighting itself. I drink, but never to get drunk, and I smoke a cigarette every blue moon. Communication with myself has been my greatest companion, because in the end I am the one left with the decision to live or die the way I want.

Thank you Mrs. Macgregor for helping me deal with an

issue that I have been avoiding for a long time. I am gay, 23yrs old, Hispanic, and at risk just like everybody else. I received a great deal of support from family, friends, and the Internet. I have always been a slut, but I have not always been careful when it came to sex. I have not had any sexual encounters since I began to look at my life introspectively through the writing of this paper. The unknown is scary, and the stigma placed on AIDS needs a different outlook. I learned that HIV is not a death sentence but a challenge. Yet, most gay males and people in general believe in the same idea but do not take their illness seriously.

Thank you again.

Like a Horse to Water

The sun shone brightly. Low on the horizon, it hovered out of reach of the dense clouds, telling him rain was imminent. Each gray stone rose from the Earth whining, "Rememer me, remember me."

Jack wondered what it was like. He stood, thinking, while the wind's bluster whipped his baggy jeans and loose sweater. He brushed his straight, brown hair from his eye and it occurred to him that Bernie had been gone only one week. It seemed like years.

The preacher spoke in long arduous tones. How else would you speak of what happened to Bernie. Thank God the service was over. All that was left was the burial. He wanted that to be over as well. He was sure someone else knew what he had done. Bernie must have told. Jack scanned the crowd looking for some friend or family member who knew.

Jack tried to evaluate the crowd, but the eastern sun blinded him. The clouds gave partial cover but could not hold back the light.

Like a marriage, he thought, the sun and clouds, a wedding of good and gloom. It was almost three years ago when Bernie first got sick. It was fall and they were sitting on the back of Bernie's Ford. Not the good Ford used for their formal dates, but the older one used for construction and their quick "lunch break" rendezvous. The clouds and sun fought in just the way they did today.

"That's my favorite sky," Bernie said.

Jack had argued briefly. He'd pointed out how the clouds were fighting the sun for the last dreary impression of the fall

evening. Like any good marriage, they were each fighting for the last word, but something seemed final.

"Exactly," he said. "We're like the sun. The way it is now. Always shaded by the clouds. Never really shining. So tonight, it will go away. Next time it comes up, maybe there won't be any clouds. Maybe the next time it comes around, things will have changed."

The preacher droned on, but he knew nothing about Bernie. Most of the eople there didn't know Bernie, which was amazing considering the small size of the town. No one had seen their escapades and jaunts to the park. Or had they?

Jack again tried to focus on the sobbing faces, drawn tight with grief. Nope. They knew nothing of the pact. He was sure.

His mind began wondering through his maze of doubts. He could act. he could pretend. He could move away. Leave his parents.

But as the sun grew weary of its struggle and settled with the clouds on the horizon, Jack grew stronger. The cool spring air felt almost icy. He realized Bernie was right. It was time for a change. The clouds only obstructed the truth. A truth he, like Bernie, would no longer be burdened with. Bernie was shining through loud and clear now. Jack no longer cared whether they knew what he had done. Bernie had suffered so long. The "cancer" had eaten at him as slowly as this damned service. He and Bernie had known each other for three years. Three years of separate cars. Three years of separate apartments. Three years of sleeping alone. Jack had done right by his friend. He realized that now.

As the last bit of dirt was poured over the casket, people began wandering home. Jack waited for a moment before turning to leave. Walking through the maze of history, he molested the

handful of 'greens' and 'whites' in his pocket. He needed to get to his parents house quickly, while the sun, still casting a bright glow through an otherwise blackening sky, gave him courage. He walked briskly. While passing through the manicured plots, he jingled the ones he had saved for himself. So tired of hiding. So much wasted energy on the subjugation of pronouns. It was no wonder Bernie got sick. It was no mystery why he wanted what he wanted. It was like leading a horse to water. "Not me." Jack reminded himself. He was in control of his life. "Not anymore. From now on, I'll get my own glass, thank you."