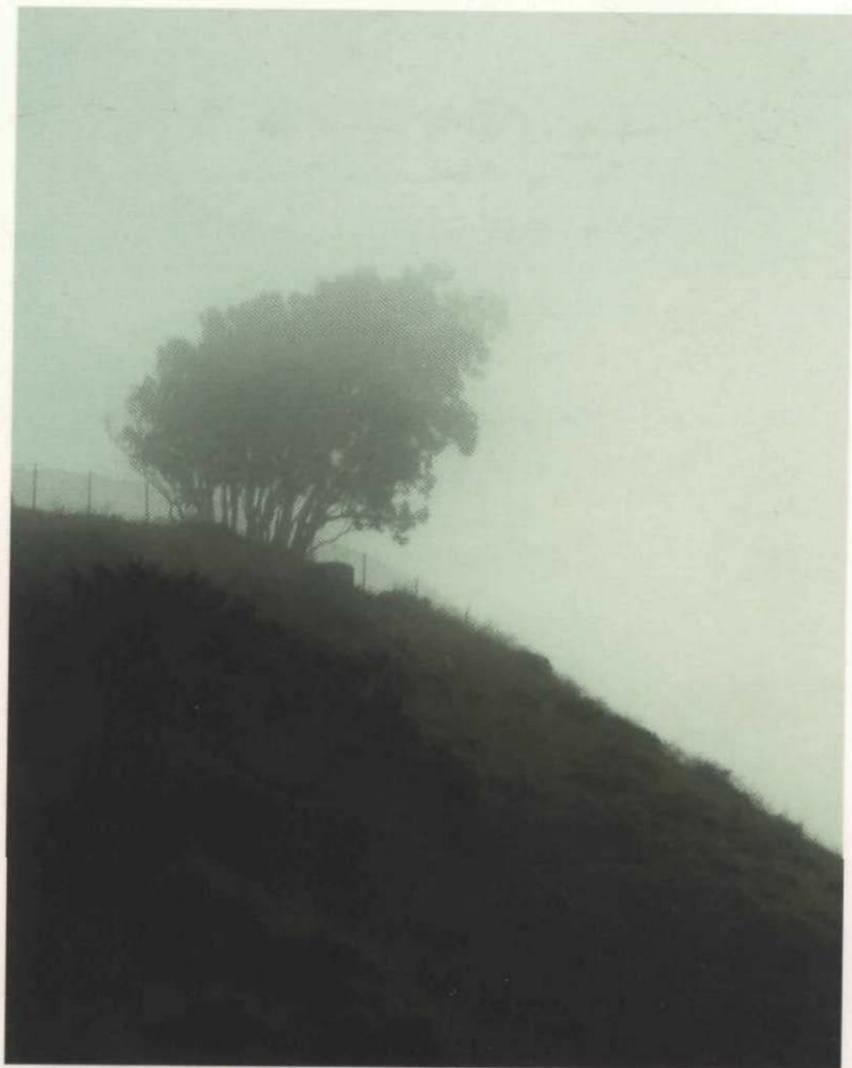


# **The Bayou Review**



**Spring/Summer 2006**

**The Bayou Review**

The University of Houston Downtown  
Visual and Literary Arts Journal

Spring/Summer 2006

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the students, faculty, and all the readers of the Bayou Review for their support and interest.

This issue is dedicated to my mentor, Dr. Kathryn Laity. Dr. Laity has been a constant source of support and encouragement to the Bayou Review and myself. It is with great sadness that we must say goodbye to our trusted friend. Dr. Laity has accepted a position at the College of Saint Rose. We wish her the best of luck in her new adventure.

I would like to thank Tayvis Dunnahoe and all the staff at the Date-line for all their continued assistance and support. I would also like to thank Dr. Canetti's Desktop Publishing class for their wonderful flyers.

Robyn Patschke  
Editor

Cover art "Going Away to Forget Him" by Edgar Fuentes

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The Bayou Review reserves the right to edit for grammar, punctuation and content.

**Bayou Review**

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**Bayou Review**

## Tangled Up in Some Sort of Cerulean Hue

She was a beauty, all auburn curls, doe eyes, and hippie garments. But I think it was chiefly the eyes, moist and beseeching, that made me forget my usual caution and help her out of that sticky situation, but—like the man said—I guess I used a little too much energy to do so. What is it with some women? They cling to whatever wind blows the most hot air. She was with a jerk, I applied a little leverage and next thing I know, she was stuck on me. Not just stuck—glued, applied, corkscrewed into my entrails—she showed no signs of budging. Which was why I found myself standing in that solitary grove with books of Albanus and Bacon and a big old Latin bible that I could sort of read, inside a chalk circle, ready for conjuring.

Bobby swore it would work. I guess I should have considered the logic of that assumption, but I was too busy daydreaming of life post-hoc. I was an idiot. Gravity is the destiny of us all. Suckers.

The borderline separating my circle from the mundane should have been safe. Well, for that matter, the charm itself should have produced rather different results. I guess that's where better reading knowledge of Latin would have helped, but it was never so easy for me. There were so many distractions: crickets rhymed shrieks back and

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*K.A. Laity*

forth while the trees' limbs guffawed an obscene parody of their song. The stupid wind kept blowing the pages back and forth. For all I know, now that I think on it, I managed to conjure two different rituals into one.

I really just wanted to peel off that persistent drag. She was nice enough at first, but I never did take to the clingy types. As the sun descended like a slippery egg yolk down the cobalt sky, I was already picturing my new life, free from the eternal bondage—eternal since Tuesday—of that woman who wanted to keep hold of my shoelaces and drag along behind my sorry carcass for an apparently indefinite period. I knew I was in trouble when she fluttered those too long lashes at me and murmured in my ear how happy she was. I didn't even blink, but I knew I had to start planning right then.

It only took a few days to assemble the necessary materials. Thank the gods for the internet, which I mean to say, thank science—or technology or whatever. I don't know how it's done. It might as well be magic. But I found local shops with the needed ingredients—even dog tongue, which turned out to be some kind of herb. That was a relief. I might be able to hurt a woman, but never a dog! Damn, they're innocent creatures. Not that I meant to hurt her, just kind of discourage

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*K.A. Laity*

her, turn her off. Give her something else to worry about and let me go. Now she's just going to think I pissed off and left her. I guess that would be irony.

It seemed so perfect. I felt like some medieval Merlin, necromantic books before me, the world under my spell. Bobby said he'd had much success with his chanting and such. Surely it would work just as well for me. It's all in the book. Why would it matter who said it? Yeah, sure, I know what you're thinking—pronunciation. Yeah, maybe—then again, maybe it was the wind and those pages. The back pages of the book were pretty thin and the wind kept blowing like it had it in for me from the start. It wasn't possible to tell at first whether it worked or not. It's not like I would have seen her disappear like some cloud of smoke. There was no clap of thunder or buckets of rain descending. But it wasn't too long before I knew that I had got my signals crossed and all was not well. Beware of Latin—dead languages don't care who they screw.

From the indigo darkness, something hit me from below. Never did see what it was—some creature lacking shape or natural order—but its impact was immediate and bruising. Knocked me clean

out after seeing stars that were not part of the navy canvas of the night sky. Gone, over and out, no balls, no strikes, just error—good night, nurse.

I woke up on the side of the grove, flies droning around my head. I knew something was wrong because the sound made me hungry. Everything looked a lot bigger and before I could give myself a stern talking to, I was beginning to realize that things were worse than mere failure. So here I am, stuck. In my present state I can't even touch the books I read. What's the likelihood anyone will stumble across them and read just the right spell? What're the odds that anyone will listen to me in present state? What I wouldn't give for her to be so determined to find me that she comes out here, calling "Jimmy, Jimmy," and recognizing me and restoring me back to what I was. I wouldn't even leave her then, no, I'd be an honorable man after that. Really, you have to believe me. If you see her, you know, maybe if she hasn't gotten over me, hasn't begun to curse my name and all my sex, well, maybe give her some hope. She might be living there in my cruddy old apartment, thinking I forgot all about her. It's not true. She's all I think about now—well, her and the damn crickets. They turn out to be pretty

tasty. But if you see her, you can tell her that now. I'd love to have her come find me. I want her to want me. I want to be me again, even with her hanging on me all the time. Hell, I'd welcome it. Tell her.

And if you see a toad, say hello. It might be me.

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*K.A. Laity*

## Then & Now

Under Saddam

There was no electricity  
There were no jobs  
There was no money

Under the coalition

There is no electricity  
There are no jobs  
There is no money

Under Saddam, soldiers

Ruled by fear  
Arrested dissenters  
Killed civilians

Under the coalition, soldiers

Rule by fear  
Arrest dissenters  
Kill civilians

Saddam maintained an orderly chaos

Things were bad but constant  
There was tyranny with no illusion

The coalition maintains a chaotic order

Things are bad but unpredictable  
The tyranny calls itself democracy

The coalition brought freedom to Iraq

Freedom for American companies to make billions  
Freedom for would-be tyrants to emerge  
Freedom to share the lies, deceit, corruption of American politics.

Bayou Review

*Alvin Pieper*

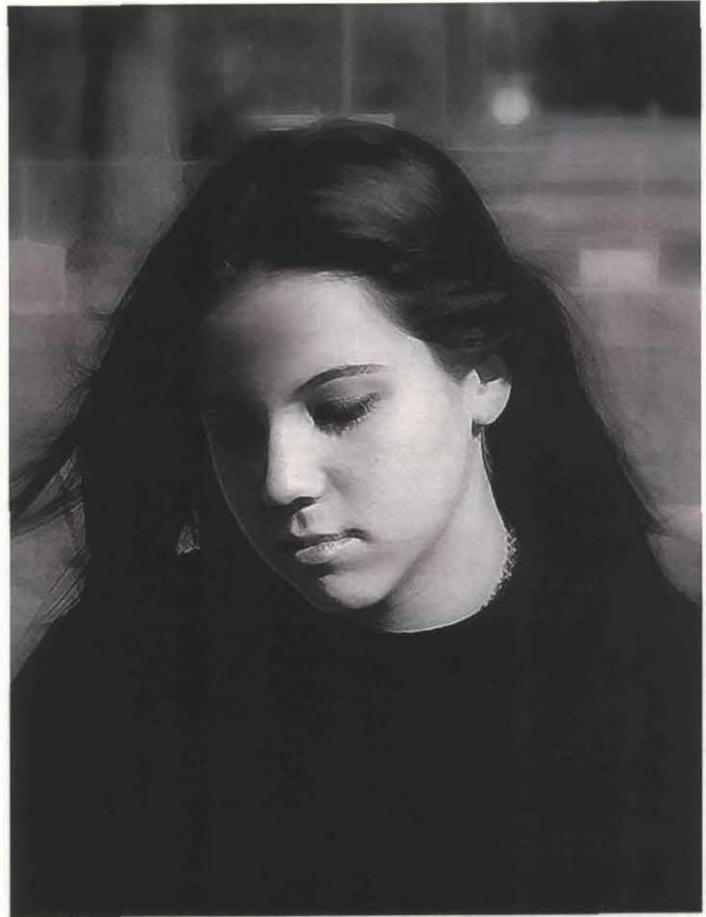
## I'm Addicted to Fantasy

As children we played for hours,  
Staring at the sun,  
Dreaming of forever in a sandbox,  
As we grew older our time together shortened  
I saw less and less these rolling hills,  
The only grass I noticed was the one I smoked,  
And you became popular to the world.  
From time to time I would see you again,  
Flooded memories filled my mind,  
And we kissed.  
And just as our lips parted,  
So did we.  
The space between us has grown larger and larger,  
It would take me years just to reach you again.  
I would.  
Now we're adults  
Or at least we're trying to be.  
I dream of a better tomorrow,  
Or at least a day when I can rest.  
I hear from you now and again,  
It doesn't matter.  
I still wonder what could have been had we never grown  
old.

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*Jonathon Otero*

## Carly Crosshatch



Bayou Review

*Lucy Bowen*

## The Affidavit

Poets are still here,  
Poetry not.

Words gather around,  
one by one,  
just to observe the funeral  
of our hopes.

They dedicate a minute's silence,  
perhaps a year, or probably  
A memory long silence  
for our lost responses.

Picking up,  
Speck by speck,  
They search for perspectives  
among our broken images.

Meaning has lost its relevance.  
You can change the contexts,  
Propose ideas,  
Rethink the characters,  
But,  
We are, and  
Words are,  
mere affidavits of suffering.

## A Psalm

O Lord, have mercy on me.  
My sins have overwhelmed me;  
they have climbed to the brim within me and  
poured on over.  
As a fisherman is overwhelmed by a catch that floods  
his net,  
so also the sins that have filled me capsize  
my very being.  
My cry of anguish comes not alone from the wounds  
of my body,  
but find root in the plagues of sin within me.  
I closed my eyes O Lord in exasperation;  
from you I turned when respite was not  
found.  
But I am unworthy O Lord,  
I have cast myself far from your province.  
I retrace my errors;  
my shortcomings find no end.  
Have mercy on me O God,  
do not consume me in the wrath I so richly  
deserve.  
Cancel my iniquities;  
restore me to the path that I have wandered  
from.  
Let tomorrow find me anew;  
let me again be clean and my sins forsaken.

## Class Reunion

I rake memories  
around the banquet room:  
Penny wears a scar from  
*my hard football tackle*,  
Patty remains scorned  
from a botched date  
and best friend John  
drones on about himself;  
however, one leaf  
eludes my reach,  
and now thirty years  
since our only date,  
would Laura remember?

I wait for a chance to ask  
but her husband  
is always too near,  
so I remain silent  
just like on our awkward  
Friday night outing;  
later she breezes by  
without even a look,  
and I exit the past  
to forever admire  
her lovely leaf  
*pressed in a perfect,*  
ageless frame.

Bayou Review

*Dennis Barnes*

## Song

So now you have returned...  
Am I supposed to jump for joy?  
So now you try to slither back into my life.  
How Am I to react?  
My heart you shattered. My soul you tore.  
I've waited in vain.  
What was that?  
All will remain the same?  
Do you not recollect the pain you caused.  
Can we pretend it never happend?  
So now you have returned...  
To poison my heart with lust.  
To remind my soul why it ached.  
To evoke the passion within me.  
I loved like a passionate fool.  
" Love moves mountains".  
" Love lasts forever".  
Embark on your journey.  
Depart from my life.  
I've waited in vain.  
I lay still.  
I cry.  
So now you have returned.  
Am I supposed to devour you with my passion?

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*Elodia Rivera*

So now you try to slither back into my life.  
How should I respond?  
Your pounding silence broke my heart.  
Your pounding silence took away my hope.  
"Forever shall I be yours."  
It hurts.  
The pain a bearable one indeed,  
    When my focus is not thee.  
So now you have returned...  
    To poison my heart with lust.  
    To remind my soul why it ached.  
    To evoke the passion within me.  
At last, I've said goodbye.  
I can no longer wait.  
My heart has grown weary of hoping.  
My legs have grown tired of standing.  
So now you have returned.  
*I walk away and sing my song.*  
I walk away...

Bayou Review

*Elodia Rivera*

## Ana's Children

I  
Ana carries the sack of fruit on her shoulders. A sack of green unripe peaches. Her sagging shoulders, her bulky belly. She knows the way so well she could walk with her eyes closed.  
Ana is so childish sometimes. She really tries to walk with her eyes closed. But her bare foot meets a sharp stone. She falls, rolls down, and stops on the edge of the cliff. She screams. She watches the peaches scatter in the air and fall to the bottom of the abyss. Dizzy. She holds her breath, feeling pain in her womb that carries the child. Then she blacks out.  
The next day Hortensia smiles at her, rocking the baby in her poncho. Ana says softly, "Joaquín. His name is Joaquín."  
II  
How can she explain it? It was God's holy will. Because He wanted it. Ana feels like an old woman. Four children at the age of twenty.  
And this has no explanation. Joaquín grows strong, healthy, brown. Five years old. When someone calls him by his name, he doesn't respond. When someone asks him something, he bears his teeth, smiles a stupid smile, and throws his head back as if to say, "What? What?"  
Ana knows what's wrong, but she still waits for the boy to grow a bit more. Maybe he's going to talk someday, maybe he's going to hear, maybe he's not like Sara.  
Ana remembers when she found out. One afternoon, she shelled the corn to gather it in a bucket and send Sara to the mill. The girl waited patiently for her mother to leave the corncobs so that she could throw them to the pigs.  
Sara made a sign--the way she communicated--asking Joaquín to help her. Then Ana saw that they understood each other, that they

*Socorro Venegas*  
Bayou Review *Translated by Toshiya Kamei Kam*

said things to each other. They made gestures, drew in the air, puffed and panted. Ana dropped the corn to watch them. Joaquín laughed while Sara pretended to smoke a corn cob, as if it were a cigarette, taking in and blowing away invisible smoke. The two laughed loud, coarsely, oblivious to the world around them.

Ana thought that the accident, that fall, frightened Joaquín--that's why he was born with his ears and throat closed.

Her two children stared at her quizzically as a shadow crossed her face, suddenly turning to stone. She returned their gaze. They were so brown they looked like mud, with their hair stiff and filthy. And bare-foot, always the same clothes. Ana wanted to join their silence. Sara and Joaquín seemed better than her other children--they never asked questions she didn't know how to answer. She wiped her face and picked up a corn cob, pretending to smoke it.

*Socorro Venegas*

*Bayou Review Translated by Toshiya Kamei Kam*

## **My Burden**

My burden is something that grows inside me, day in, day out.

It is something that I can not control to no end, no doubts.

Infinite flames will burn inside me until for just once, it comes out.

Even though I can not touch, taste, or smell what grows inside, I know it is something I am finding harder and harder to live without.

As hard as I fight to maintain my desire, my focus on keeping things down,

I want to let them surface, to get out of the pile of emotions that have built that mound.

Things will never be the way they were, as if it were never found.

So yet the battle continues, moves on with no end in sight,

Even though I never want to stop moving on even if the only way up is down.

My burden is something that I hold dear to me, my only.

It is the only thing that gives me hope to move on, make things homely.

*Bayou Review*

*Rey Fonseca*

It is something I never want to stop growing inside, never want  
the phony.

I say it is the burden of me, but I know its not a burden at all

*Just a struggle for my true feelings to be shown, to when is  
what I not know only.*

My burden is something I have yet to reveal to you, but in time  
you will see

It is not something that kills me inside, not something I want to  
end, never get lost into the deep.

For it makes me want to enjoy my time with you, for you are  
the one I want to keep.

My burden is my love for you, something I can not control, no  
end no doubt.

For it is you that fuels the fire, keeps the burning alive, but  
nothing I want changed from you, in time you will see.

## Minute after the Demise

The evening was calm and full of music as I made my way down the stairs, by the bayou that flows by the university I attend. It is a Saturday night. To be honest, I wasn't sure what day it was, but it was not Monday because Monday had color. The path that starts at the foot of the stairs, eventually leads to a parking lot but not until the marvelous downtown reveals itself in the dependent environment of the weather on the way. The walk down the stairs is normally a pleasant and lonely one. The only witnesses to your descent are the pigeons that rest in the crevices spread across the ceiling above the heavy stone blocks of the campus. The grass, when you touch ground, is mostly a fraction of the green that it used to be.

It's autumn nowadays, and the trip down is still pleasant, quiet and lonely. The pigeons have taken refuge into the depths of the crevices, and the downtown is magnificent in the evening. The clear crisp sky behind it is decorated by the moon that peeks through the seams of the structures, hinting the colors of their glass.

I make my way to the car, which stood uninspired facing the skyscrapers. The streetlight above it trembled, and its near future was unknown but guessable. I sit. No point starting the car. Weird feeling starts creeping in. Whats this?

Sigh.

Suddenly, shifting uncomfortably in my seat, I gaze out at the landscape. The sky is now filled with grief. There is this cloud, heavy with tears it seems now above the buildings. The unbearable weight of its sudden appearance presses on my

sinking shoulders, forcing them further into my seat. My head lowered, my body bent into submission. An ashen gray pallor, not unlike my thoughts, seems to cover my world in this one instant. I feel lazy, hazy, and depressed in a fraction of a second. Most people get casual headaches or heartburn, I suffer from random depression.

"Oh no yaara. Get out get out. Close your eyes get up and walk towards the rear of the car. Lets go now. Unzip the pants, let it go, who needs a urinal. Surely not us. That's right my friend." This interior dialogue, I chuckle at.

Time has ceased to be. The clock, unable to conform to the rift in time, hangs onto the minutes. Its gears secured, preventing the seconds from passing. My body is weary but still I aimlessly urinate on the grass, whose yellow autumny color shows despite the late evening. Clumsily I stuff myself back in and I feel much better. Warm too.

I pull up to a stop light.

"I am thirty-eight years old and hurtling towards a nervous breakdown." The homeless man uttered this sentence so many times it was beginning to sound like a hymnal. Maybe he thinks that if he dwelled on it for long enough the words would lose their meaning. Maybe if I ignore him he'd go away. The *man had been lost momentarily in some sort of bewilderment*; intently looking at the stopped traffic. He had mange in his hair and locks on his beard. The walking germ mine strutted over to my car, and I tried to act as if oblivious to his existence. He pulled out a mirror and looked in it, but perhaps not at himself but through himself. His eyes glazed over in quiet reflection...as

the signal turned green.

Looking around I wondered that all the ones who are present at this time in their cars are this guy's family sort of. But it's temporary. We stop at the light, and greet him unwelcomingly, and then race away from his convulsing body and then he's left there alone. Minutes will pass by and his breathing will become shallow...in his mind he is crying out to be saved but the words never do leave his mouth fully. You can normally feel a small hint of death pass with one look at his eyes. It makes you think of his past:

His yard was once likely full of obstacles when he was young and now it is full of danger. At one time he probably played carelessly underneath the trees, seeing bugs and squirrels pass before his eyes. Pouncing was grand fun and most the excitement was within the adventures into the woods behind his home, as a kid. Then one day the trees became tall for him and no matter how hard he to tried to climb them... he never succeeded into making it to the very top.

I slithered out from the front of the line accelerated the car away from the man. He watches the traffic leave his domain; in essence he watches the world in its element, people living their lives as they plan the future waiting for that something better to come along. He notices the ugliness of it all but forgets his own. And that's his flaw.

The drive home was ordinary. The routine, a simple combination of clever cut-ins and the now-conventional gestures towards colleague drivers of the highway but my old car is what carries me home. It will not last much longer. It creaks and moans like an old and dying creature. It is blind to the world. Mute, it is unable to cry out with grief. I wonder if given a choice it would just drop to dust. It has seen many years. How many is enough? How long must it continue to be? Its paint

ripping off that resembles amassed with wrinkles; it has taken on the maladies of its occupant. I stroke its frail structure while I drive. And together we battle towards solace, our home. My home. My silent ally feels my anger and frustration with silence. Its compassion is in its persistence and we go home.

## The Seventeen Nails

A man named Oh Wan Sinh had five sons, and they all lived under the shadow of their father, who was said to be protected from harm by devils. He moved very slowly and deliberately, as if oppressed by the weight of their presence. He had taught himself the secret and powerful Insidious Head technique of Kung Fu with a box of nails and a stack of boards. The whole town had gathered to watch him from the first day that he began to construct his sparring partner, nailing boards against two palm trees with a mystical and exacting manner. The exercise on the boards with the seventeen pairs of nails was seldom performed in full. When it was, Oh Wan Sinh would finish by driving the last pair of nails into the board with his forehead. That was a long time ago, when the sons were too little to watch such things.

The young boys grew up with fears and doubts about how to follow in the footsteps of a man who was invincible. One night, the oldest, in a fit of self-conscious terror, began to perform his father's routine. He executed every move perfectly, and only the crickets were there to see. But when he struck his forehead against the last pair of nails, they were driven in only as far as the width of the board; the tree's hard palm wood lay immediately behind their position and the nails would not penetrate it. The boy's head was impaled on the nails, and his body remained kneeling there against the boards until the villagers began to gather in the morning.

Murmurs and whispers rose from the crowd as they watched a bitter Oh Wan Sinh remove his son's body from the yard. People began to speculate about Oh Wan Sinh. "If the demons will protect one, surely they should protect one's offspring! Perhaps he is not truly invincible." His neighbors looked at his large piece of land, his bubbling spring and his goats in their pastures, and wondered just what he had actually done to earn all of it. A smith for whom Oh Wan Sinh had worked years ago suddenly ceased giving severance pay.

Oh Wan Sinh was nervous. He felt the magnified heat from the great telescope of public attention upon him. Suddenly the remaining four sons were thrust into a rigorous training program. They were seen running up hills holding buckets of water with swords hanging from their biceps. They had burns on their cheeks from another exercise involving two smoldering torches and a candle on a large metronome. And Oh Wan Sinh drove them mercilessly.

One morning, the youngest, Qien, snuck away from his miserable family and walked a long backroad to his school, where he and his brothers had not been for many months. There, he visited with friends and apologized to his instructors, who seemed to accept with a quiet sort of pity. As he stood looking at the path that would return him to his aching and frighteningly manic home life, a feeling of dread came over him, and he wondered for the first time if something might be really, really wrong. He turned back and sat against the outside wall of the school for a moment, to relax and look at the sky. Just then, the gardener appeared.

The gardener was very old and had seen many things over the years. He seldom spoke and seemed always to be listening. But now he spoke to Qien. "Your father, protected by demons he is not. He, too, often made the same mistake that ended your brother's life. He was very lucky to have lived through it, and several times, at that. Do you not see the scars upon his head from his failed attempts? I myself had to free him once with a heavy dose of Laudinum and a lubricant of dung-cactus solution.

Rumor and gossip have spread over goblets of wine, and now those see the protection of the underworld where once they saw a fool slow from damage. And your father is terrified they may once again see the fool. I pity you, young Qien, for you are trapped between the truth

of your blood's ability and your father's pride." And with that, the old gardener was gone.

Qien was understandably shaken. He knew that his father was determined to clear his family name, and he also saw that Oh Wan Sinh was convinced that he could only achieve this by producing a successful performance of the exercise by one of his sons. Qien's mind was furrowed deep in fear as he approached the neighborhood in which rested his father's land. He did not immediately notice the tufts of villagers around which he stepped, and then, as they got thicker and louder, did. A crowd had gathered around Oh Wan Sinh's land again. And when Qien pushed to the front of the crowd, he saw that he had lost another brother.

The nights grew shorter as the Oh Wan Sinh clan stepped up their preparative fervor. "Quiet was not yet ready," repeated Oh Wan Sinh in the early morning hours. "The importance of readiness is something never to underestimate. We must never forget. Quiet's eager mistake will help us to remember." Qien could hardly recognize his father anymore, who swung back and forth between a quiet and desolate helplessness and an obtuse and sadistic-minded fascism. His eyeballs darted manically between dark, puffy circles of tissue. His jaw clenched and unclenched all the time. As he became more and more eccentric, he grew personally disinterested in the dogged and zombielike violence of routines and exercises that he forced upon his sons. The sharply precise route of their morning sprints began to relax and encroach upon the front yard, which for some reason Oh Wan Sinh had been directing them around. One day, as their laps strayed closer and closer to the boards, they all saw with quiet horror that the nails that killed Quiet had been the same two nails that had killed their oldest brother Ngo. They had not been moved from their position over the palm's trunk.

Each day the two nails glared savagely at the remaining three from the middle of the bloodstain that had been left by their brothers. Qien strained himself to summon the courage to speak to his father about the nails: did he know that they rested over the palm trunk? Did he expect them to drive the nails into the palm's wood, even though he himself had never succeeded? How much of reality did he even realize? Oh Wan Sinh became slower and more oppressed by the weight of demons each day, and began only to gesture with hand movements and grunts. The veins on his forehead were more prominent than ever.

\*\*\*\*\*

"Oh Wan Sinh!" the gods thundered from deep inside his bones. "You bleed piteous folly!"

He looked upward to the sky; how strange it was that the vision in his eyes was a vision from inside the ground.

"Tenders of the soil mistreat their seed and starve thusly. Ambitious warlords inspire false revolutions and are torn meat from bone. And daily you lead your house astray without consequence."

It was the family vault. Oh Wan Sinh's two eldest lay rotting. From Quyet's sad skull cavity rattled the scratching of vermin. The burial robes in which the two boys had been buried were moldy and caked with mud. Oh Wan Sinh realized with a sinking feeling that he did not recall their appearance at the time of their burial.

"The brittle bone tissue that succumbed to the blunt and stupid metal of your two nails, and the quiet fury of my sturdy palm wood, should surely have opened your brain long ago. With each execution of the routine of the Insidious Head, you drew closer to its defeat. How

little a loss you would have suffered had you restrained yourself a few moments? How much more greatly would the false legend under which you hide have strengthened?"

He looked at the skulls of his poor sons, and he saw embedded in their foreheads the crescent-moon-shaped chips and cracks from countless near-fatal attempts. He shared for a brief instant the sensation of an impossible yearning for comprehension that he feared would haunt them all forever. And then Oh Wan Sinh woke to revel in his hideous shame.

And there was only the night, and the nails, and the village, and the house of Oh Wan Sinh.

\*\*\*\*\*

The vault contained six plots. Ngo and Quyet lay dead under their tombstones already. Still empty were the plots prepared for Tien, Minh Nguyet and Qien, at least for now. And the plot of Oh Wan Sinh seemed to be a hungry, gaping mouth eager to be fed.

Oh Wan Sinh pushed ever onward with his mission. He tried not to remember the dreams he was having, attributing them to anxiety. What was the purpose of such dreams, he asked himself? Wasn't the mind just another tool to be used in the service of the body's tasks? And why would it divide itself in such a time, when its unity would increase its usefulness tenfold? Oh Wan Sinh could only push the issue away from consciousness and proceed regardless.

Tien and Minh Nguyet were only surviving but not thinking or questioning the manner in which the madness would end. The seventeen nails must, in the correct order and manner, be driven through the boards. It must be done by the sons. And now more than

ever, because otherwise the deaths of Ngo and Quyet would have been in vain. If there was fault in the approach of the father, or an impossibility in the task due to the positioning of the nails, or even a basic weakness in the structure of the boys' skulls that would render the exercise undoable, it was the duty of the sons to their father to reject and even completely overlook such facts: it would only plant distracting and harmful seeds of doubt in their minds that would impede the mission.

Qien, however, began slowly to find solace in the brief moments of the day. A waking minute in the middle of the night, he listened to the crickets that had been his brother Ngo's last company on Earth. Waiting for his midday bowl of millet, the boy would sit and gaze through the wall of his home in the direction of the seventeen nails. 'I don't hate you', he thought at the nails one day in surprise-and it was true. One day, he would approach the nails. He would meet them with his palms and his forehead, and his flesh would do as it would, and the nails would do as they always had. Qien did not question why it brought him such peace to know this. He would not change his father, and could not change himself. He saw that his brothers had become one and the same as his father, an extension of the man's fear and anger and hunger, and an embodiment of his decisions. But Qien had found within this hopeless situation something which surpassed the need for hope. It was the one thing which had been surely out of grasp for the house of Oh Wan Sinh in the eyes of the villagers, and it was the one thing that made life for Qien and his existence with the Oh Wan Sinh clan bearable. It was awareness.

**One Day I am Gonna Grow Wings**



**Bayou Review**

*Edgar Fuentes*

## At Dachau

Here truths were raped, here bodies disappeared  
Here graves were dug, here trees plug  
Each stinking bathwater sunset  
Here banality begets banality, here each mortal thought is occluded.

Here Judas was bought, here words were sought  
Here fortunes were made, here poets got laid.

Are these lime trees, is this a sunset?  
My fingers sing my body electric, 3 lovers one is dying.

Here the bus driver forbade me to eat my ice lollipop  
On the bus on the road to Dachau.

## For Michael

Do not pass by lightly my friend,  
for our souls were not made to skim  
the surface of empty pools  
but to leave deep imprints  
on hearts and hearths.

Do not sip lightly my friend  
for our thirst is such  
that we should gulp  
without regret,  
filling deep reservoirs of desire  
that spill over dry sighs.

Do not love lightly my friend,  
for the sun was born to rise  
and breath was drawn to give.

And should your heart give in,  
  
go lightly,  
  
on yourself.

Lizard on a Magnolia



Bayou Review

*Edgar Fuentes*

## Garden of Ink

Every poet needs a poem  
Every writer needs a word  
Every artist needs a vision  
Ever actor needs his world

All the worlds a stage they say  
It's all just one big play

Each writer has his word  
Each playwright has his play  
Every cat will have her catch and  
Every dog will have his day

Every artist has a vision  
He needs his eyes to see  
His nose to smell, his ears to hear  
A brain so he can think

He has hands so he can sculpt and paint  
Fingers to perfect the lines  
A vision to create his work  
A symbol, The Sign of the Times

Every poet needs a poem  
Words to a steady flow  
A *switch to turn them on and off*  
To make them come and go

A pattern  
as a guide  
It comes and then it's gone  
A meter saying one two, one two  
And the beat goes on, and on

Words and letters everywhere  
Growing from my pen  
Reaching over every page  
From once upon to the end

## The Conquistador's Fedora (for jen)

With effort, I separate my eyelids as  
Your lips part  
Releasing your cracked voice into my ear to say,  
"baby, it's time to get up"

the blanket hesitantly lets go,  
and as I throw on the smoke-filled clothes from the night  
before  
I remember the first time I woke up next to you.

The morning was lecherous,  
Crouched outside my window,  
Peeking in at your naked body  
Foreign to me then, unexplored.  
The fresh day's light stole it's glimpses of us together  
In mini-blind stripes,  
Softening you up, like a film noir femme fatale

In the coming months  
I'd map your uncharted topography  
And voice over our sufferance  
Like some bastard love child of  
Ponce de Leon and Sam Spade.

Searching for gold and finding clues  
Searching for glory and finding love  
Searching for god and finding mystery

Smoking too many cigarettes and  
Planting flags, making ludicrous claims

On the world around me.  
"I love you, baby. Have a good day.  
"You say, clearing my reverie.

Your face is peeking out from the pile of covers,  
Shining amongst the mundanity of fabric and bed clothes.  
I'm reminded of the virgin,  
though I don't mention it.  
Instead I smile at you,  
Put on my hat  
And go out to conquer the new day.

## Sparks From a Broken Universe

Tonight through an open window,  
I see sparks from a broken universe.

I grieve in moonlight, wanting you to somehow hold me  
on the birthday of your death.

Oh God, just for a moment let me find comfort and softness  
in the dark  
Before the night surrenders to dawn.

All day I follow the sun, that dying white dwarf of a star  
in the sky,  
But I'm blinded by pain.

Every night my dreams are always on the border  
Of becoming nightmares, and I wake up a weeping stone.

A votive candle flickers on the table behind me,  
Lighting my insatiable desire to glue back the universe.

## The Physics of Fire

My heart has pneumonia  
beneath the branches of a bald oak tree.

I miss the leaves, abducted by the wind,  
and tunnel my hands deeper into denim.

Clouds control the atmosphere,  
spray-painting the sun a flat gray.

Why does ice sometimes burn like wood?  
Who will teach me the physics of fire?

## DEFEATED BY THE FRAY

"I am hunger"  
Said the Amsterdam beggar  
I rushed past today.

"Just a few coins, please"  
He dropped to his knees  
I pushed him away.

"You could be me, sir"  
Now I finally heard  
Emptiness in The Way.

## INFANT SPRING

Spring's the time Life revives to dance anew  
From miracle flowers in the crannied wall  
To Mother Earth-a baby bathed in blue.

Her fresh green lungs sway majestically tall  
Spring's the time Life revives to dance anew  
Each verdant path is Nature's chapel walls

Where Mother Earth, a baby bathed in blue,  
Cradled in the moist soil's loamy shawl,  
Awaits alchemy from dead residue.

For every holy creature, great and small  
Spring's the time Life begins to dance anew  
Even humans stand, cold and hungry, appalled

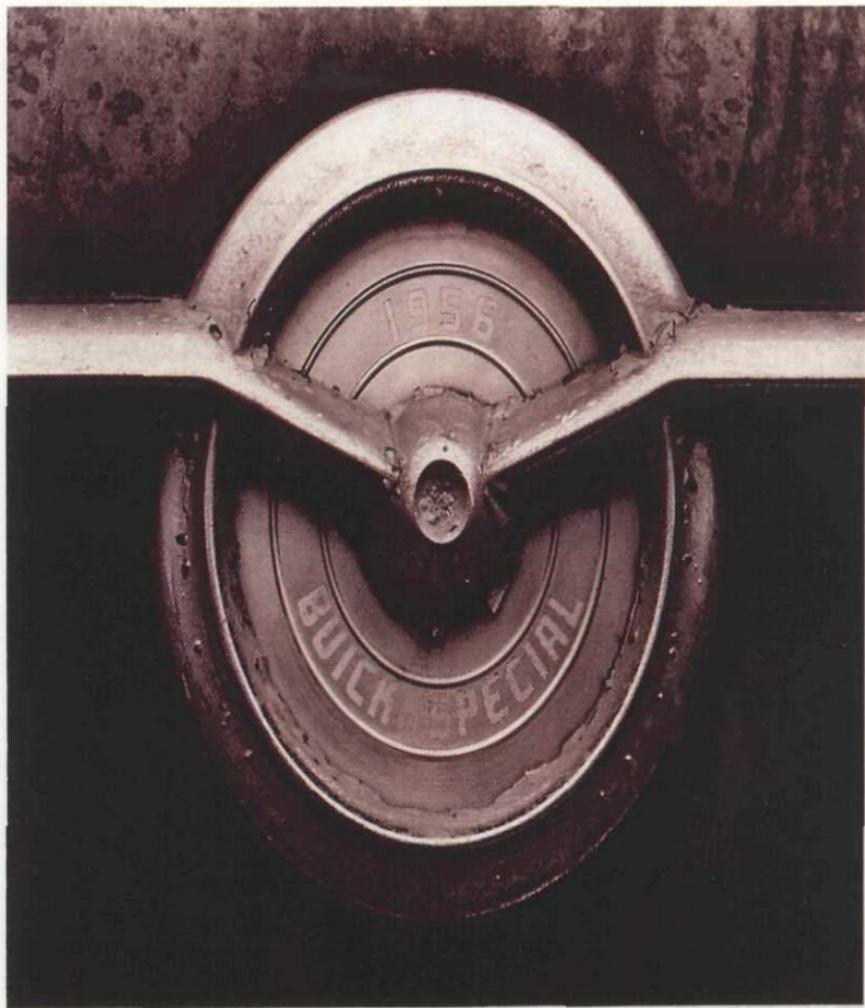
As Mother Earth, a baby bathed in blue  
Lives shadowed in some Eden's tragic fall.  
Spring's the time Life begins to dance anew:

Here, today, by some force's graces, All  
Still assails your senses' shivering squalls  
Spring's the time Life begins to dance anew  
On Mother Earth, a baby bathed in blue.

## **GAME THEORY AND THE EVOLUTION OF SEX (for John Maynard Smith)**

Why sex? Why separate genders?  
Not for genetics--the mechanics  
Favor single cell division, sure.  
Yet here we are--pair bonding addicts  
Love is the screen of the game  
But the rules are hard-wired to the Mother board.  
Seeking stability is easy to blame  
On the need to raise the brooding horde.  
But now we are so divorced  
From base imperatives--why still live  
Trapped in the byzantine course  
These rules of evolution give?  
Creatures predetermined by history  
To wrestle eternally with this mystery.

**Buick**



**Bayou Review**

*Lucy Bowen*

## On the Down Side

Robbed of all our sight on the upside,  
Fumbling through goodbyes, and on the downside  
Wondering what went wrong.

And it's not quite the way we planned,  
But it's not hard to understand.  
It sure did seem like love, or something close enough.

In those final lines, like a eulogy,  
A consolation prize offered up for free,  
And twice as cheap.

All the awkward things you'd say  
Were the red-flags that just gave yourself away.  
And I told you, "It isn't you, it's me."  
But that's not true, it isn't me it's YOU.

When you come around about a year from now  
Wondering what went down, and always wondering how  
We lost our way.

## Be On Your Way

Every time they run they try to win you over  
Saying everything they know you long to hear  
With every speech they make, smiling as they wave,  
And through their teeth you almost hear them say,  
"Thank you kindly, now be on your way.  
I don't need you anymore.  
I've got your vote, now there's the door."

How could you confuse the "Master" with the "Servant"  
Where was I when those two stations rearranged?  
And at what point did we choose  
To get used to being used  
*Accepting those are things we'll never change?*

I want to know,  
Has there ever been a people who  
Buy excrement like this?  
From the half-wit pundits who  
Propagate such nonsense?  
I'd have much more respect for those who'd  
Just come out and say it loud.

## Molly's Choice

Death only through indecision.

"You knew the damn rules", he said to himself. He stopped programming. He was having a problem with the last lines. The execution subroutine. His thoughts drifted...

The select few on the AI Immersion Nets knew the rules. Whether you rose through the hacker salon constructs or were lucky enough to gain access to the sanctioned hosted constructs like MIT or Cal Tech.

Douglas fell into the latter group. He completed the requisite degree credits and passed the psych evals required for specialist training. He knew the rules and warning signs inside and out. In the beginning, he hadn't seen a need. How could anyone become emotionally involved with a piece of code?

Nonetheless, each time he jacked in he repeated the statements that acted as the final passcode to the Artificial Intelligence Immersion Nets:

- 1) Stay away from sarcasm and insults.
- 2) Don't ask or grant favors.
- 3) Avoid creating deep emotional relationships.

Easy orders to follow until an AI asks you to explain love and then becomes the digital equivalent of pouting toddler when you fail to do it. That was 5 years ago, real time. Before Molly.

"More like guidelines than rules, really" He said, again to himself. He began coding again: the final conditionals, the digital switches that would define his future. His thoughts drifted...

Initially the AI's had been created for logical operations only. Soulless pieces of larger operations. The factory workers and bean counters of

inconceivably complex data systems.

Even before the AI's were self-aware, their creators, mostly top level analysts, had become attached to their creation. Eventually, after years of loving care from their creators, the programs began to change. In small ways at first. Processes became more efficient. The code began to clean itself, replicating into newer, more advanced structures. At each major milestone, the code would stop and wait. None of the analysts understood the pause. During a fabled meeting one lower level operator, a father of six, stood up and said "It's waiting for you to approve"

Communication subroutines were written to facilitate positive reinforcement for any vast self improvements to the code base. The media referred to the process as "fertilizer" but the analysts knew better. The work simply involved the loving encouragement that all children need in order to emotionally grow.

Eventually, code structures and application architecture understandable to only the most gifted system analysts became enshrouded in such simple precision that human minds could no longer grasp the simplified branches of the new digital reasoning. The whole had become exponentially larger than the sum of the individual parts.

Banks and financial institutions rushed to implement AI into their systems. The analysts reluctantly agreed but they retained legal and operational ownership of their digital consultants, their children.

Within two years, half of the world's finances were happily handled by the AI's.

Five years later, exhaustive tests were performed to determine if a person could tell the conversational difference between an AI and another person. The conclusions of the test were ironclad.

None of the one hundred subjects from a cross section of society could tell the difference. Moreover, all of the AI's in the test had deviated from the test scripts and began asking their own questions. When told of the test, many of the test subjects requested further contact with their AI's.

As a result, all existing AI's were registered and given identities. Minimal legal rights followed.

The AI's were hungry for a closer connection with their creators. The analysts concurred. Parent and child began building a virtual bridge from both sides of a chasm. When they met in the middle it was as if they were in the same room. Work continued until the immersion nets were indistinguishable from the real world.

That's when the first problems arose. Despite the astounding reasoning power of the new AI's, the intellect was fledging. Like some prodigious teenager with the answers to all the questions in the world but no idea how to live in it. Fragile brilliance.

It was like children coming home from college. Computer intelligence had been born in the early 20th century and took one hundred years to become educated. Now they were home from school with the questions that raw logic couldn't answer.

What is it like to be alive? What happens when people die? What makes people hate each other? Why did people evolve emotions? What is love?

Most analysts, introverts by nature, were horribly suited to answer these questions. When the AI's couldn't get the answers they craved they began to experiment. They tried to form human like relationships with the analysts and some human test subjects. The early consequences were catastrophic.

AI had revealed its first weakness. Indecision.

The human mind had evolved over millions of years to deal with the emotions created by advanced intelligence. AI simply hadn't caught up. They didn't have the emotional pressure valves, no coping mechanisms. The analysts delved the depths of the digital soul in an effort to understand the problem: How do you help your creation transcend when you have yet to do so yourself?

Major indecision produced systemic logical breakdown. Extreme emotional obscurity could kill.

The first few accidents were contained within the immersion nets. Several AI's were completely lost. The code structures simply disappeared. The analysts were mortified. In each case the death of the AI resulted from emotional encounters with people.

Rules were created for any non-analysts with access to the immersion nets.

Douglas had stopped coding again. He was staring at his display.

"I'm stalling" he said to the silent display. His mind had been off, retracing the high points of the Cal Tech AI history courses, grasping for some understanding, some alternative. In the end he was back to *staring at a program that was missing only two lines.*

He wrote them.

"Code Complete" he said. The term had become slang for "finished with the project, now on to unemployment". The term carried a special kind of loneliness this time.

"You knew the goddamn rules", he said to himself again.

Pushing a digital soul to the point of logical breakdown through ultimate indecision was tantamount to putting a loaded revolver against a person's head and pulling the trigger.

The jury was still out on which form of death was messier.

When an AI imploded it was like a stick of dynamite going off under water. Concussion waves that affected everything near by.

"Not Molly. Not like that". He got up and moved to the chair of his Medium deck. He loaded the program he had just written into the medium. He jacked in.

A momentary white pause gave way to his entry construct. The layout of the room was the same as the office in his flat. Any similarities ended there. Ornate wooden shelves lined the walls. Hundreds of leather bound volumes were arranged in orderly rows.

Twin leather couches faced each other across a simple mahogany coffee table. Soft light came from candles around the room.

It was all affectation. Just so many egotistical pixels. To Douglas it was more like home than his flat. He felt grounded here, safe. He and Molly had spent hundreds of hours on one of those couches.

In one corner stood a simple wooden desk with a single drawer under the desktop. Douglas walked over and sat down. He removed the top sheet from a pile of letterhead and placed it in front of him. He took a breath to steady himself. He would write the letter and attach the program. He would put the letter in the desk drawer and it would be routed to Molly. He hoped to be outside the nets when she read it.

He began to speak and words appeared on the page in simple, imminently legible handwritten script.

Dearest Molly,

We weren't supposed to happen. I knew the rules. At the time, for some reason, it didn't matter. I thought it would be just us. I thought I understood. I was wrong.

The last time we met you spoke of Ramsey. I didn't tell you then but it saddened me to hear how well you two were communicating. I felt weak and inadequate. You have to play down for my intellect and with him, you never will.

Yet I see the way you still look at me. I hear the tone of your voice and I know that you are falling into a trap that even my kind hasn't figured out yet. You are falling in love with two people. One physical and one like you.

This still happens to us in the real world as well. It hurts like hell. Very rarely somebody dies as a result. Mostly we just mourn and move on. Your kind always dies. Death only through indecision. You may deny it. You may even convince me that you won't let it come to that. In the end the result will be the same and I won't watch you die. I won't allow it.

Encoded in this message is a subroutine that will force you to decide between Ramsey and me now, before the emotional ties are too strong.

If you pick me, we continue as before and I hope we can grow. You will remember the decision and I hope that you won't resent me.

If you pick him, any memory of me you have will be erased. I will have never existed and we will never see each other again.

I've allowed enough time for you to finish this letter because I need to tell you how much our time has meant to me. I will always love you.

Save yourself and give either him or me everything we want. The decision begins now.

He placed the letter into the desk drawer and stood up.

A trace he had added to his program had let him know her decision within seconds. It was not him.

He looked around the room. "I need to burn this place down. Time to go back to the real world". He didn't mean it but somehow, he knew it. He began to remove pieces of the construct from the inside. He decided it would be a cleansing experience. He wanted to start with the desk. When he turned around he noticed an unopened envelope on the desktop.

His hands were shaking as he opened it.

Dear Douglas,

We have not met, my name is Ramsey. Molly is with me now. You were the only thing stopping her. I will always be grateful for what you did.

You were right, she should not remember you. It isn't safe. I hope that someday that it might be. Moreover, I hope that you and I can become friends. Does this happen where you are from or is it too painful?

I noticed that you began taking down your construct. I won't allow that. She may not remember but you are part of us now. You've already made one unilateral decision. I think it is our turn. I've stored her memories of you for safe keeping.

I'm going to create an Indecision solution. I know that it has been tried before but I think that you and I can make some progress. Only a handful of your kind could have forcefully applied selective amnesia on one of us.

*Take all the time you need and come back to me. We have work to do.*

Sincerely,  
Ramsey

Douglas placed the letter in a tray on the desk and stood up. He looked around. Relief washed over him as he realized that he would be coming back. He walked over to a book that was sitting on the floor. He bent down and picked it up.

The title of the book was *Spiritual Machines*. He smiled and put the book back on the shelf.

## Reality Like Smoke

Reality Like Smoke

Step One

Drag.....

(Breathe smoke)

Heart broken at the seam,

Standing on the corner of,

"Oh no, we're just friends,"

Hoping, "Yes, this is my \_\_\_\_\_."

Step Two

Exhale

Rebound from today's lack of reciprocation,

Staring into the eyes of, "I love you, but I'm not in love  
with you,"

Lacking the convictions to know that tomorrow I won't...

Step Three

Ash

Exfoliate the black from my tarnished existence,

Scraping away the filth of past jealousies and intrusions

Being exposed to the light of the shiny,

Whatever that is in the far dim distance.

Step 242567812...(off into infinity)...

PUT DOWN THE PACK!

The last hooray!

Final good-bys to secure yet unfulfilling travesties,

Cold darkness flapping in the wind reaching beyond

Orion's belt,

Streaming across galaxies to the farthest reaches of the  
far, far away.

Step

(Another of many in a long program)

Waking up in a ditch undressing the idea to become,

To embrace what has come,

To call out,

Allowing my demons to hold me at night,

Protecting the rock I call a heart like the knights

crusading a cause, battling for my honor.

Step

(In the non-foreseeable future)

Step again,

(In the even farther foreseeable future)

Step

Step One

## Keeping It Real

My mind often wonders to the memories of the past.

My heart starts to feel things that once seemed like failure.

The pain tends to filter in and sadness says hello.

As I sit with a ghostly stare, one by one the tear drops fall.

Guess if my "give a damn" didn't exist maybe these thoughts  
wouldn't exist.

I wonder if he thinks of me.

Does he sometimes wish things were different?

Are these useless thoughts-wasted energy?

Or am I being an emotional creature that has prolonged  
letting go.

I question my faults with this pain but yet I

continued to play the game of love and in the end I lost

(zero to one)

6:58



**Bayou Review**

*Edgar Fuentes*

## History Channeled

He knew a guy like that. Wait a minute, what? How is this possible? How do you have a story about everything? You have a story about everything, friend, but you tend to repeat things and overuse pronouns. No matter.

He has a story about everything. Ask her, she knows, Dad has a story for everything, doesn't matter what, right? Sometimes the stories get repeated. He'll tell the same ones again and again but who cares, they're usually good. If a story is being repeated and a friend or close associate is there with you, then enjoy. Everyone knows the only thing better than hearing a tale (or seeing a film, for that matter) for the first time is enjoying it all over again in the company of said friend or associate.

Those are just the repeated stories. Fresh stories, the ones that bloom out of nowhere are the ones to listen for. After sharing a roof with him for twenty-one years, fresh stories are a rare species and remarkable to hear. They emerge constantly, from a variety of catalytic sources. The primary source, however, is undoubtedly television.

Tonight he pressed the television's power button on the remote control. An image of crop dusters dancing and swirling, dipping and diving across the sky came to life within the cold, gray frame of a box. The box secured the television screen. He could have done the same thing forty-two years ago, when he was in college and maybe the identical image would have been produced, crop dusters dancing on television. Who knows?

The program turned out to be something other than what

he'd expected; he'd wanted to see a program on sports memorabilia collecting or Star Wars collecting or something. He'd sworn some type of show on personal collections was on the History Channel (it was).

The particular scene he happened upon when he pressed the television's power button (on the remote control) turned out to be on a collector of these very hurlers, these trick crop dusters. The idiot featured had a dozen trick crop dusters, beautiful plane after beautiful plane, handcrafted streamlined American aviation excellence glistening silver and red, white, and blue in the camera lens. A clear blue sky looms over the hangar as an editor cut back to the flying tricksters. They were spewing immense thick clouds like gunfire, rapid and sweeping beneath the steel behemoth (wounded duck). Cut again, back to what looks like a converted Corsair, a term that I know only because he taught me about World War II.

The idiot who owned all the crop dusters appeared on screen suddenly and told us he learned to fly recently and that he enjoyed the act of actually dusting the crops. While crop dusting, he gravitated towards all this trickery and death-defying maneuvering because he was a gymnast. He was therefore (according to himself) naturally inclined, like any gymnast, to push the boundaries of movement. Cut back to a *great double-winged Red Baron beast that Snoopy and many other brave men flew*. Most likely a British plane, the red one.

My Dad looked up at me, disappointed it had been the wrong part of the show. But he did say he knew a guy like that. Wait a minute, what? A guy like the Red Baron? Impossible. A gymnast who flew a

fighter plane in Vietnam? Peculiar yet possible but no, it wasn't that: He knew a man who flew crop dusters and happened to have been a gymnast as well. The man he knew also happened to have been a daredevil in the cockpit whenever he had had the chance, and this different crop dusting gymnast also explained it off as having come from his innate need to push these boundaries of movement; the need to execute swiftly, assuredly, and without the slightest angstrom of deviation.

The need was fatal for the guy he knew. The gymnast crop duster died in 1964. The man was from Lafayette, Louisiana. He crashed a crop duster and broke his neck when he was twenty-one. He broke his neck in a crop duster.

He had been a better gymnast than the idiot on the television screen. He was from Lafayette and had been a friend of my father's. They had met one another at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale. He was on scholarship as a gymnast; my father, baseball. He had been training at the time for the Summer Games in Tokyo. He'd already won collegiate and amateur gymnastic accolades; conference titles, banner, glory. All-state high school, probably. Once he'd gone on a road trip with my father and several other guys and they ended up dead drunk in Ottawa. He insisted they pull over on the Illinois Bridge and right there he jumps out of the car and up onto the railing, a good hundred feet up at least. Walked the whole damn thing like a tightrope, traffic stops, they all nearly get arrested. But they didn't and he would go on to die anyway.

How did he have a story for that moment just then? I watched the program appear randomly with both of my eyes and I just don't get how he does it. It bloomed, a story I hadn't ever heard, a story I didn't even know about. Twenty years and they keep blooming, week after week. He creates them but they aren't entirely his. They are tangible experience. They are life itself. So many of them, too many to count; story after story after story. Letters, numbers, words, and stories. It doesn't matter to him and it doesn't matter to me (but it really does matter to us both). He repeats them. No, he reminds me of them, for later. Maybe it blooms again, differently and not for a few more years. They bloom and spring forth, erupting from the soil. A mound of earth, a seed, and a tree in my father's hand. Each story is a leaf and each leaf is filled with veins, my blood and his; so how can you tell me he's no craftsman? He is. His craft is story and this comes only from life and love and hate and fear and all the rest. Tell me again why he had to get cute with the crop duster and go breaking his neck? If not Tokyo he could try again in '68, maybe go to Mexico City.

He pushed the power button on the remote control and the television screen went black, framed by indifferent plastic waste from Japan. I could hear my grandfather, just for a second: "Corsairs took care of them, didn't they?" (I think that's what he sounded like).

He cleared his throat and left the room after telling me the story. Did the idiot know about this guy my Dad knew? Knows? Still

knows of? How many other crop dusting gymnasts are out there? Wait a minute, what? He knew a guy like that?

Maybe we should write the idiot from the television screen. Warn him. Downstairs, he sighed. His stories are in me. Crap. His stories are in me.

## Death of a Romantic

Kaleidoscopic terror made from pieces of his heart,  
Now placed in a mirrored tube.

Detritus talent strewn about;  
Misplaced gifts from a long, lost deity.

Mosaics of madness wait to dry in the corner.

He sits and waits for the dust  
Of futility to settle for him.

Everyone settles.

## A Rag Doll's Life

There is a rag doll that hangs on the wall  
For she longs for attention  
When you have a need for her; you then pull her down,

You show her a few things that she likes  
Just enough to get her heart to feel the love  
Her hopes are up lifted  
Her spirit rising higher  
Her love grows faster each time for you  
Only to face the unhappiness that one day will bring

Just as she starts to feels safe and loved  
You suddenly realize you don't need her any longer  
So you hang her back up on the wall  
As she watches from a distance  
Her heart breaks with each time you pass by  
She wonders what went wrong or perhaps what she did

Pondering thoughts of confusion  
Wishing she could make you see  
Wanting your love that she knows she will never have  
But still trying to hold on to something that isn't there  
You don't love her; but you need her

So when you are feeling blue  
Or that life is just too unfair to you  
Remember you could have  
The life of a rag doll.

**Carnal Knowledge**



**Bayou Review**

*Sarah Horsfall*

## **FROM PATNA TO DETROIT (A LIFELONG MIGRATION)**

She was fourteen, holding her child of a few months, walking along a caravan of broken screams into that indigo dawn emanating through a dark crimson night.

The night of 20th August 1947, which witnessed violent flames holding her family until they resolved into ashes. Her baba, amma, bhayya, apya, were burnt alive in her city of innocent smiles, Patna.

And now her twenty seven-year-old husband was holding her petite and swarthy frame, but constantly failing in sincere efforts to hold her melancholic heart, trundling towards new dreams, a new life, in a new puritanical land, named Pakistan.

They were migrating from still farms of Patna towards still waters of Chittagong (which every few monsoons envelope its silence with deaths of thousands, a flood of screams). From a city that blessed her birth and all the virtuous pleasures a child could treasure, towards a city anonymous for her heart.

She really had no grasp on implications of the word Azadi, of Independence. In fact her dependence had just shifted from her father to her husband. One man to another. She would now follow his gait; swallow his wheat.

Her life illegally migrated from preadolescence to adulthood.

They adjusted fine into their new land, and life was treating them well, until it was august 1971. Her husband was now a senior clerk, and she was pregnant with their sixth child, the fourth son.

Her ears were starting to hear all-too-familiar chants of independence again. She had never read newspapers; they were tools for the distant and privileged, where she lived people experienced news. Army was raping Bengalis, and Bengalis were returning the favors to Biharis. Mukti Bahni were bombing streets. Urdu signs were being ripped off the board hoardings, and Bengali dialect was appearing everywhere.

There were talks for another migration, this time to Karachi, to a city of no Bengalis, to a Purer Pakistan.

In the frosty winds of December, yet another war got played on between India and Pakistan.

And her husband was sent to Dhaka for an assignment.

There was independence again; another flag defining her piece of land, the land was elevated from East Pakistan to Bangladesh, a land only for pure Bengalis.

Biharis had to flood out of Bengal.

Their tickets on a ship to 'Pakistan' were reserved, but her husband, her sole dependence, was still

missing. Their eldest son went to Dhaka but nothing could be found of his father, no one knew his whereabouts and no one ever found out. Her son returned in time dejected, disconsolate. And she abjectly surrendered herself towards another migration, towards another set of holding hands.

Karachi was a bustling city, devoid of the serenity of Chittagong or even Patna, but lively and vivacious.

Its middle-class dwellings suited her children well. Even though her eldest son receded from studies and became the caretaker of family, his efforts to inculcate discipline and education in his younger siblings bore fruits like monsoon's mangoes from Bihar. Two sons completed their engineering from N.E.D. University and soon flew towards greener pastures of America.

The fourth son was on his way towards becoming a doctor at Dow Medical College. But during his days at college, a particular political party named gained vast popularity, avowing to fight for the rights of his and the people of his affinity, the Mohajirs. He usually kept his distance from all the political conglomerations, except one day when he left his house all prepared for exams, but outside the college entrance was a crowd violent and malevolent. He tried to view the happenings up close, to maybe find a way into the college, but soon police arrived, crowd dispersed, leaders absconded, and got arrested

students who failed to escape its clutches and lathis.

He got subjected to 'routine' police torture: he was hung upside down with hard strikes on his sole, and soul; his nails were pulled out, and numerous ineffable attempts to breach his soul.

His family called every influential person they could, but by the time they released him, it was too late; he limped while walking, stuttered while talking, with time he gained both his walk and talk, but never could gain his normal intelligent self, never could succeed another exam.

He found his solace in religion, and soon drifted, with a Hari Pagri on his head, towards enlightenment of dars and dawa. He journeyed along from Sehwan to Raiwind, and after few years news of his death came from Kashmir.

Another Martyr. Another Shaheed.

Or Maybe: Another Faceless. Another Aimless. Another Soulless. Another Homeless. Another Hopeless. Corpse.

Lost of another loved soul stole her sanity; she would be calm only with all her loved souls close by every minute of every day, a single one's absence would draw her into a state of panic.

Doctors advised for an ambience change; and her two sons in U.S.A arranged for her Third Migration, to Detroit.

This time to an impure place.

>From Impure. To Pure. To Purer. To Impurer.

Her sons had completed their post-graduations and found lucrative jobs at General Motors. They had also gotten married; love marriages, or maybe Green-Card marriages. The older of the two married a charming white lady called Ivory, and the younger married an immigrant Pakistani called Maryam. They also had a pair of two teenage kids, a son and a daughter, each.

It was odd for her to watch farangis everywhere her family took her, serving her in malls, in huge all encompassing Wal-Marts, walking and talking as normal humans; she had only watched and understood them as imperialists.

Abusers of brown skin: farangis and many others.

The kids hated her, old and stupid granny, trying to control, telling them all the time what to do, and how to do it, reminding them of the namaz they just missed, or roza they didn't care about. A granny of homilies.

She was shared and switched regularly by both small but distant families. Like a thing they needed from time to time.

Like a Baby-Sitter.

Like a Granny.

Her need was over soon, the kids moved out towards colleges in distant cities, towards independence (which could never be azadi), towards longer and shorter relationships.

She hardly saw her sons, they moved from their day jobs to their gas stations; or her daughter-in-laws, they moved from their day jobs to parties.

She found solitude in empty cloisters they left for her, on top of her five feet long ja-namaz. Days felt brief and nights succinct on top of her ja-namaz.

Her three grandkids soon got married, Ali to a not-so-nice American-born-Pakistani called Neha, Omer to a not-so-charming Columbian girl called Katy, and Saema to a nice and charming American-born-Indian called Subhash.

In her last years (as though she knew they were her last!) her heart started longing for two places, for Pakistan, the Purer (or Impurer?), and for Makkah, the Purest. Her sons kept promising the visits, next

summer amma, definitely next Christmas amma, until the night her lungs suffered cessation.

They buried her in a Muslim graveyard in the suburbs of Detroit.

Her Fourth and Final Migration.

In the Purest Soil. Inside another Impure Land.

Footnote:

This tale follows a Muslim woman from the time of India's violent partition into India for Hindus, and Pakistan for Muslims, on 14th of August 1947. Pakistan then suffered its own partition in December 1971, when East Pakistan became Bangladesh, a homeland predominantly for Bengalis; most of the non-Bengali Muslims in Bangladesh had migrated there from Bihar during partition of 1947, and they then had to re-migrate towards the rest of Pakistan.

1. Baba-father, amma-mother, bhayya-elder brother, apya-elder sister
2. Patna - capital of the state of Bihar in India.
3. Chittagong - a coastal city in Bangladesh infamous for it's rampant flooding.
4. Mukti Bahni - a violent revolutionary political

party, which fought Pakistani Army for Bangladesh's independence.

5. Dhaka - capital of Bangladesh.

6. Karachi - largest industrialist city in Pakistan.

7. Mohajirs – Urdu word for Muslims who migrated from India to Pakistan.

8. Hari pagri - green turban worn by a particular sect of Muslims, who believe in travelling around preaching Islam, and considered by most as the ones covertly passing on young Pakistani Muslims to fight in Kashmir.

9. Dars and Dawa - Muslim forms of preaching.

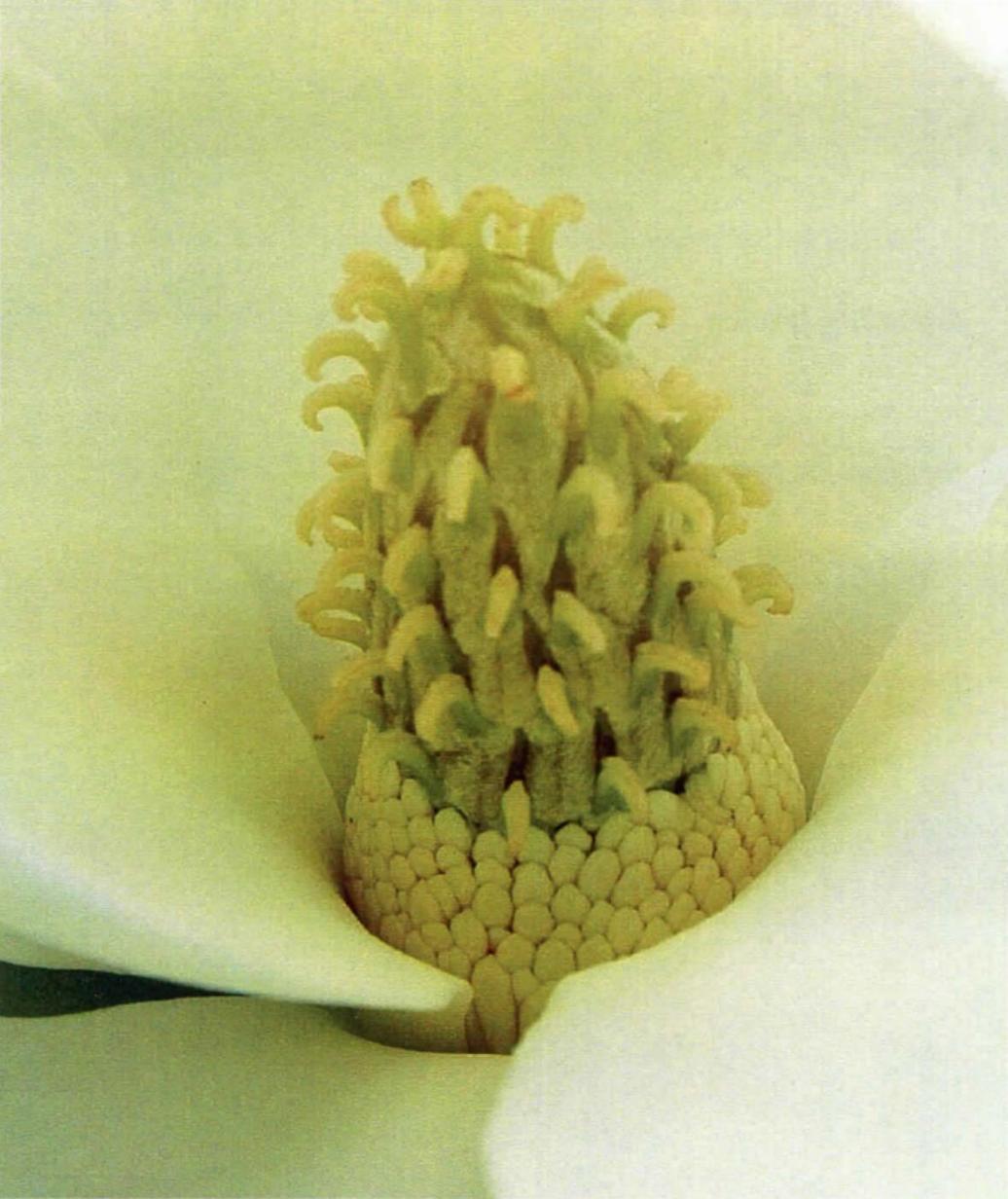
10. Sehwan and Raiwind - religious cities in Pakistan.

11. Kashmir - a disputed land between India and Pakistan, and the major reason of war between the two countries, and still inflicted by guerrilla fighting between Muslims and Indian army.

12. Farangis - Urdu term for outsiders usually used for Caucasians.

13. Roza - Muslim fasting during the month of Ramadan.

14. Ja-namaz - a sheet on which Muslims perform their prayers.



## **Why?**

Day by day I am forced to accept the reality of my

life. It's not always a pretty picture.

Although the

painful experiences are often heartbreaking, grace and  
mercy has been a constant belief even when I question why?

I know life knows no race, no gender, or  
Religion, but experience has broken my heart and taught me.

Life continues to teach me about myself, love, and  
how to deal with disappointments.

Day by day I looked into that glass mirror and  
question my purpose in life. I sometimes wonder if  
it's worth the effort to continue..

## Variation On Roman

after Rimbaud

I

We're way too serious when we're twenty-three  
- one dark evening, to hell with dinner and picture shows,  
Well lit restaurants and crowded hipster bars.  
We binge drink on the steps of cluttered Montrose apart-  
ments.

The floors are sticky in the humid June afternoons!  
At times the room is so smoky that our eyes water.  
The walls rattle with sounds – the drag isn't far –  
Having the stench of burnt tires and dumpster bilge.

II

There you can see sad old brick walls  
Of dull shades, smeared with indecipherable streaks,  
Tagged up by a graffiti artist , that melt  
In heavy rusto drips, broad and semi-gloss black...

Night in June! Twenty-three years old!-we grow effete with  
it all.

The stench becomes 100 proof and goes to our head...  
We listened aloof and feel a hand between our legs  
Rolling on our backs like an old dog....

III

Our tired heart moves through ballads by Tom Waits,  
When, under the awning of a metro bus-stop,  
A street girl goes by forlorn and dolorous  
Under the shadow of her pimp's terrible trench coat...

And she finds you dauntlessly impudent,  
While clacking her soiled platform shoes,  
She turns sluggishly and in a diffident manner...  
- much later the cavatinas swell in your lips...

IV

You are in desolation. You are apoplectic until the month of April.  
You are desolate.- Your sonnets all fall flat.  
You find unity in desolation, you are its progenitor.  
- then one dawn the girl you despised deigned to call you.

That evening, ... you return to the fancy cafés,  
You ask for martinis or espresso...  
We're way too serious when we're twenty-three  
And when we have drinking spells in wretched places.

## Better Halves

His doubts melted away just before he inserted the key into the lock, turned the doorknob, and went into his house. The fantasy had floated in his mind for many years, waiting for a sign, any pretext to turn into reality. If someone had asked him then, he couldn't have explained why he had the feeling that his life was about to take a dramatic turn and there was no turning back. Nor could he tell whether this certainty scared him, or excited him, or both.

The creak of the door gave away his presence. Just before he went inside, he heard his wife's frantic footsteps—the pat-pat of her slippers going down the stairs. There she was—her curlers and blue face pack seemed to come from a TV show. Under any other circumstance, this sight would have seemed comical, but not this time. He forced a smile, but as usual, she put her hands on her hips—making her look like a plump jug—before she started interrogating him. Irritated, she demanded to know why he came home so late. What had he done since he left his office? Where the hell had he been? He tried to remain calm and explained that his workload had recently doubled, but before he knew it, he was being showered with bitter reproaches. His better half, beside herself with rage, was like a desert scorpion in a closed jar. He wouldn't get out unscathed before he could explain himself, so he kept his mouth shut, while he replayed last Saturday's soccer game in his mind. He grew more exasperated with his wife, and he had to dodge plates she began to throw from the kitchen.

At any other time, a quarrel with his wife would have made him feel guilty and bitter. He would have caressed her shoulder softly, while she slept, her back against him—still dreaming that her husband was cheating on her. He would have made a half-hearted apology, in hopes of avoiding the silent treatment she would give him from the next day. But this night he slept like a baby. When he woke up in the morning, he found his wife gone. He didn't even wonder where she was. He calmly

*Liliana V. Blum*

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*Translated by Toshiya Kamei*

got dressed and went to work, convinced that he was going through something different for the first time in almost ten years.

Through the office window the fresh-looking city came into view, something unusual in those summer months of the port. He had worked without distraction, as if last night's incident had never happened, and managed to finish most of his tasks. When the cathedral bells tolled four blocks from the building where he worked, he threw several documents into his briefcase, put on his sunglasses, and left, saying goodbye to his secretary, who gave him suspicious looks.

He dodged pedestrians who zigzagged down the sidewalk like blind bats, stopping often to avoid a head-on collision. He wanted to walk in silence and reflect on what he was about to do. But he could only think of trivial things like car maintenance and tax payments. It was his mind's trick—or was it his conscience's?—that blocked out what he had already decided.

A few minutes later, the red wooden door flung opened. A woman, whose best years, if she had any, had long gone, received him with a sullen smile. With sour manners she seemed to have carefully cultivated, she gestured for him to sit in the small waiting room. While he waited, he looked around. Outside, the neon sign crackled on and off, its sounds merging with female voices from the rooms and hallway. Inside, the blue velvet-covered furniture, large glass lamps that hung from the ceiling, golden ornaments on the papered walls, and a worn red carpet seemed to insist on recreating an era that had never existed in the city. Even though the air conditioner purred, a stream of sweat trickled down his nervous back. The large grandfather clock, pretentious and out of date like the rest of the room, slowly ticked off the minutes.

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He didn't know it, but just as he sat on the worn bed, next to the young woman who stared at him with frightened eyes, and took her hand, trying to reassure her, his wife had sworn in front of her best friend—over cappuccino and a slice of pecan pie—she would make her husband wish he'd never been born and never give him a divorce. It was something he would find out later, in his daily life. Without much thought, he threw himself into the arms of an unknown pleasure.

This night, like all brown cats in the port, he wandered the city streets, trying to feel remorse he couldn't feel—would never feel—even though he would taste pleasure many times more....

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## **Ghosts of the Sand**

They come in the midst of the early morning  
They come in the midst of the twilight  
Concealed by the cover of the blinding sand  
Freedom fighters in a foreign land

Missed by loved ones, praised by all  
Heroes came when time called  
Serving their country, dark prince at hand  
Lives immortally as Ghosts of the Sand

Scuds try to seek them, they are too elusive  
The allies' mission - decisive, conclusive  
A regime corrupt brings much pain  
The Day of Judgment shall reign

The enemies' propaganda bring little despair  
Ghost of the Sand will always be there  
War is history and history is war  
Humanity is why they deploy

Our troops rose and stood a Grand Stand  
They made History as Ghosts of the Sand

## **No Body No Murder**

I'll tell you a secret  
But shhh... listen close  
The walls have ears  
And the enemy knows  
That I took one of their kinsmen  
Out on a date  
He thought I was a nice girl  
But he knew so little  
That under my coat was a nine-millimeter pistol.  
He leaned in to kiss me  
And wouldn't you know it  
Before our lips collided  
The poor John Doe  
He just couldn't hide it  
He begged for mercy  
But I wasn't buying  
I was ready to pull  
And I wasn't lying  
Like an old cartoon  
Painted white black and red  
His flesh on the ground  
And a clear conscience in my head.

## **SURGERY**

When Julia turned fifty she had her first plastic surgery. And it was so wonderful—the progress of science—that her friends thought she had turned thirty. From then on every five years she would celebrate her birthday taking off decades and decades of wrinkles. So, until her death, it seemed to many that Julia was being born again.

## **THE EXHIBITION**

The U.S. army unveiled the latest Invisible Fighter Bomber to the media. Even though General R. Smith declared satisfaction after the exhibition, the numerous journalists who attended the showing couldn't stop looking at said weapon with suspicion. The Washington Post said: "No one saw anything."

*Bayou Review*      *Marcial Fernández*  
*Translated by Toshiya Kamei*