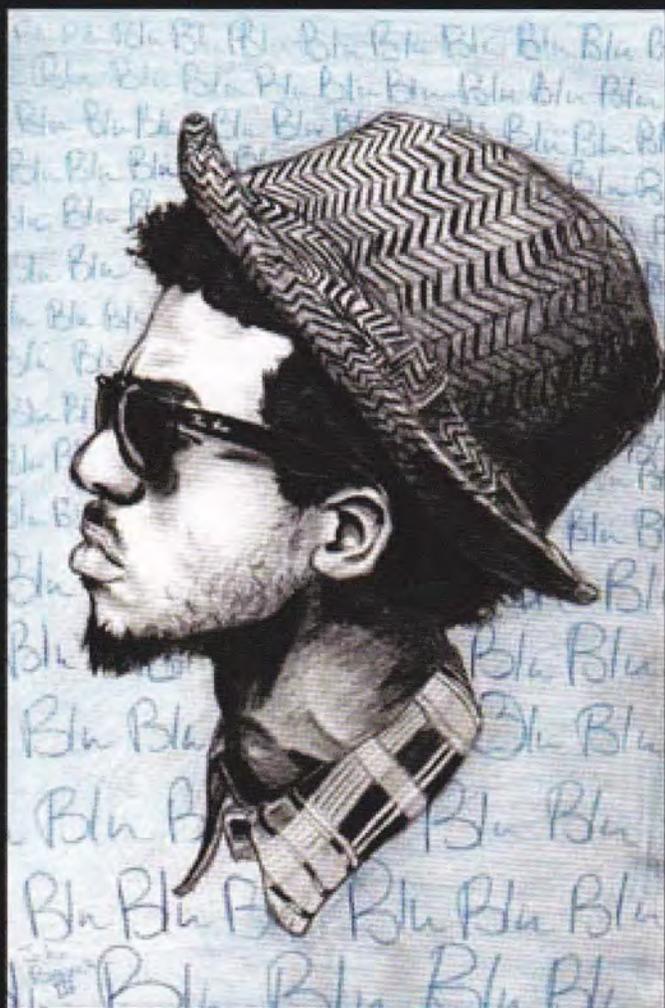


THE BAYOU REVIEW

SPRING 2012



THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON-DOWNTOWN

A Literary and Visual Arts Journal
Volume 26, Issue 1

I want to travel past the event horizon,
deep into the center of a black hole.
I want to feel my being bend, crush,
break, and stretch, until I am nothing
more than an infinite stream of consciousness.

Becoming a mere possibility of existence,
I would have to radiate with persistence
if I were ever to return to the temporal world.

Only then could I determine
if I truly have a soul.



THE
BAYOU
REVIEW

Volume 26, Issue 1
Spring 2012

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Michael Hilbig

"The Noodle Effect"

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Thank You

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To Nicola Parente, thank you so much for providing us with inspiration and for exposing us to your incredible artwork. Meeting and working with you has been a transformative experience.

Finally, the editors would like to thank Professor Garret Johnson, our faculty advisor for the Spring 2012 issue. You've grown with us, giving us your time and experience, and you've truly become an unforgettable source of support and guidance. From the bottom of our hearts, thank you.

About the Layout

As the editorial staff pored over the submissions for the Spring 2012 semester, a thread seemed to emerge amid the majority of the work: the spectrum of the different states of being and how it informs and cultivates one's unique identity. This seemed fitting because, amid the shifting political climate and evolving technological advancements, identity remains the one stable, yet dynamic, entity within our realities. Thus, the works featured in this issue commemorate that struggle within everyone's life, the struggle to not only be, but to be yourself.

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The Clown

Victoria Chadwick

The greasepaint, known as clown white, made a particular sound as Toby taught me to “stucco” it onto my face. Next came the powder. Then he handed me a tackle box full of such things, saying “Now go find your clown.”

“What do you mean?!” I exclaimed as my face began to harden, even in the sweltering July heat. “You’re supposed to teach me how to be a clown!”

“And just how can anyone teach you something that must come from inside of YOU? Sure, any joker can copy a painted face, a slapstick, a burlesque, tell a joke or two. Get a chuckle, make some money. Big deal. But to truly reach an audience - make them feel; touch their hearts - it has to ring true. And that can only come from what’s real. And what’s real is what’s genuinely inside of YOU. So, do you want to be a joker or practice an ancient, profound and noble art? Touch some hearts with the mystery of beauty and truth?”

I must have been looking anxious – hell, I must have been scared because for once I was speechless. Toby had mercy on me: “Look. You’ve just done the first part and that’s absolutely essential.”

“What first part did I already do?” I was getting more confused and frantic by the minute.

Toby stepped back and smiled wide, perusing the gummy greasepaint. “You’ve let go of yourself. That’s always the most important. So you’re halfway there, girl. Now go find your clown.”

He noticed that the exasperation in my eyes was about to convert to precipitation, so he put his arm around my shoulder, turning me toward the empty lot, whispering: “You can do it. Just get very, very quiet inside and.....well, you’ll

just know. Now go on, go find your clown.” Absolutely prohibiting another word, he shushed me off toward a field out past the big top.

I dumped out the contents of the tackle box in a tiny clearing amid the tall summer grass, balancing a mirror on the upturned box. How startled - how rocked to the core - I was to discover that there was no reflection of me, as I knew me, in that dime-store mirror. No features, no contours, no contrasts, no definition. I was gone. All was white. Flat, stark, plain white. A blank canvas.

Toby was right. I had already done the first part, the absolutely essential part.



City in the Clouds

Michael Biddinger

Daddy's Girl

Alayna Sievers

I hear our old Basset howling from inside my bedroom. The sound of the loud gunshot must have startled her in her sleep and hurt her old, delicate ears.

The .45 wobbles in my shaking hands, but my hold is still firm on the grip. The smell of burnt gunpowder fills my nose, and faint trails of smoke escape from the barrel of my gun. I refuse to look down at the source of the loud thud that has landed on my bedroom floor.

"Mattie? Mattie! Are you okay? Has he come back?!" I hear my mom shouting from inside her bedroom. Her room is only fifteen to twenty feet from where my .45 and I are standing, alone in the dark, but her shouts sound muffled and distant.

"Are you okay, darlin'?" my dad asks me as I try to pick myself up off of the ground, brushing dirt and grass off of my worn out jeans. He holds back bursts of laughter as he takes the 12 gauge from my hand and helps me up off of the ground.

"Michael, that's not funny. She could have gotten hurt!" my mom, who was sitting on the tailgate of the old Ford, protests while she, too, tries to suppress a few small chuckles. "Honestly, don't you think she is a little too young to be shooting a shotgun? The kick from that one knocked her down flat on her back!"

"Nah. She's got six more years under her belt than I did when I first shot this same gun. And I was six! And look," he says seeing the big and eager smile beaming from my face, "she's ready to have another turn!"

I'm brought back to reality when my mom finally scrambles out of her bedroom and through the small hall that connects our rooms. "My God! What happened?!" she shouts again. She runs up to me and grabs my shoulder, checking me over to see that I am alright. "Have you called the po-"

Then she stops talking mid sentence. Both confused and shocked by what has transpired in the past two minutes, I must have turned on the ball of my right foot and pointed the gun at her, my hands shaking even more as I sight the pistol in line with her forehead.

"Remember, always aim a little higher than where you intend to shoot. Your hand naturally lowers slightly as you are about to squeeze the trigger," my dad advised me

during our first hunting trip together.

My mom squeals and then freezes in place from the terror of seeing her little girl pointing the recently fired gun at her face. "Mattie, it's okay. It's mamma," she soothingly reassures, a slight sound of panic still in her voice.

"Never point a weapon, loaded or unloaded, at anything or anyone unless you intend to shoot it. And keep the safety turned on when you are not using it."

I obey my father's old weapon safety lesson and lower the weapon away from my mother, turning the safety switch to 'on' as I point the now cooled off barrel towards the floor. My left hand lets go of the pistol grip to reattach a strap of my rundown pajama top that was torn during the skirmish with the body on the floor. I fight the tremors in my hand to try to somehow magically mend the two pieces of frayed fabric together.

My mother then notices what I had been staring at when she first walked into my bedroom. Under normal circumstances, it would be unlike her to not notice a body lying in a pool of blood on her new, white Berber carpet, but it's hard to notice those kinds of things with the open end of a gun barrel pointed at your face.

"Oh my God, Mattie! What have you done?!" she screams as she kneels next to the body.

"Look what you've done, darlin'!" my dad proudly exclaims as he removes the torso shaped target from the barn post and walks across the empty field back towards me. "All seven shots are dead center! I think you are ready to go get your CHL!"

I inherited a lot of things from my dad: his looks, his thick brown hair, and his precise accuracy with a firearm. The drug addiction, however, I acquired on my own. He used to spell out letters with bullet holes on one of the walls of the old barn on my grandparents farm that we used for target practicing trips, and I would follow suit by shooting at the holes that he had made. Rarely were the holes I made half an inch or more away from the holes made by my father.

It was because of my skill with a weapon that he suggested I get my CHL after I turned 21 since I was going off to college for my master's degree. And so for my 21st birthday, he took me to his favorite gun shop and bought me my first .45 as a birthday gift. The same .45 that now hangs limply in my hand.

I look down at the body that's bleeding out on the white carpet, and I notice my mom is screaming something at me, but I can't hear her. All I can hear is the sound of my dad's voice.

"Should you ever have an accident, Mattie, take responsibility. The same goes for things other than firearms. Nothing is more pathetic than a person who cannot take responsibility for his or her own actions. It may be okay in the eyes of some people in this country, but I will die before I teach you that it is okay to blame your faults on someone else."

Then I look back at my two hands. The .45 is barely hanging on the fingertips of my right. Despite its limp grasp and the sporadic jitters of my left arm, my right hand is determined to not let the pistol fall to the floor.

"Mattie! For God's sake, call the paramedics!" My mom is now pleading with me and applying pressure to the wound on the torso of the body. "It's going to be okay. You're going to be okay," she keeps repeating to the man on the floor.

I briskly walk over to the phone on my nightstand and gently set the gun down next to the base of the phone. My right hand is now shaking as much as my left, and it takes both hands to pick up the small, wireless phone and dial 9-1-1.

"Bradford 911. Please state your emergency," a calm yet professional woman says right after I place the phone against my ear.

"Hello," I say hoarsely. It's the first thing I have said since I woke up screaming and disoriented from the recurring nightmare. The nightmare that brings back horrible memories of constantly being fearful for my life. The same nightmare that caused me to accidentally shoot an innocent man who was only trying to help and comfort his terrified daughter. "There's been an accident. I've just shot my father."

Hercules' Cave

Steven Shelton

I.

inmismal keyholes
skeleton keys bound by gold
Tinji's child uncrossed
 measure no love lost
 measure no ribbon lengths sold
 measure no burned scrolls

open wide the tomb
Tinji ignores you and laughs
her child lives in you
 carry nothing blue
 carry neither snakes nor staffs
 carry naught in your womb

II.

enter lightly, child
motherhood's profound courage
compassion's plain truth
 nothing evil to see
 no sound of an entrapped stage
 no one to speak, «wild»

bow to no man, love
bow as both woman & priest
bow to no darkness
 you are what he is
 you are what we want in feast
 you are what we're of

rotations changes
stone, armless, slow-grown mores
sticks evolve to spoons
 we need no new moons
 we need no behavior plays
 who needs dead sages?

III.

return, find lost glass
gentle souls never whisper birds' names
singing whippoorwill
 no stone is your pill
 no grain of sand is blown pain
 no air can confess

now, slide shut the gape
return the skeleton - clink -
rumors of glory
 is this her story?
 am I your reason to think?
 has she ended shape?

Emerge

Jonae Muhammad

Beside her remains we found
her life's work tangled unrecognizably
amidst the carnage

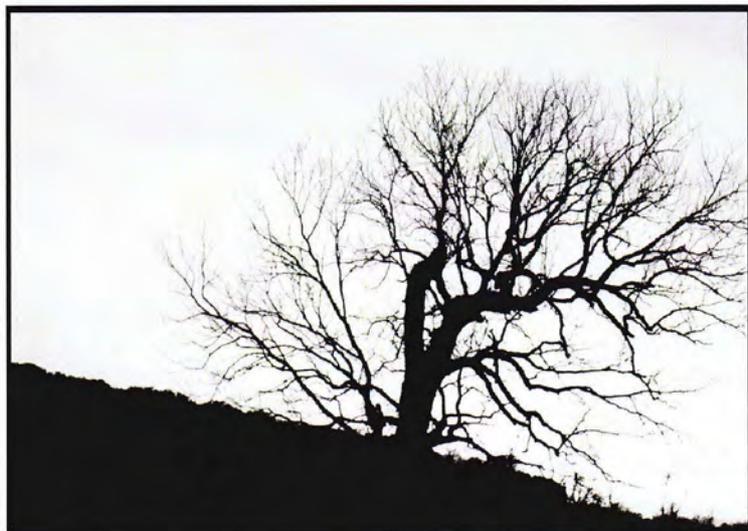
the loose ends of one matter
enmeshed into the loose ends
of the other

these voided acts
in spite of countless, dedicated hours
poured into the loving of them
failed to amount, amass
that vulnerable seeded hope
buried in the burning breast

what inspiration fuels this deathless
momentum
hollow screams into black smut

that is where I, begins
and the world drops off

the background differentiates itself
from the subject of the frame



Veins

Saul Cisneros

Caregiving

Todd Snider

Laurel strides across the grounds of the complex, the damp autumn leaves from an oak tree sifting in her wake on the brick path that leads to her husband's corner apartment. The years have been kind to her figure. She still retains the elegance and grace of the dancer she once was. Above a smart black suit with black stockings to show off her legs, her fiery shoulder length red hair frames a generously made up heart shaped face, and full red lips. Long, slender, aged hands with swollen joints seem alien to her as they extend from her jacket. She clutches a grocery bag in her left arm and inserts a key into the lock on the door with her right.

"Greg!" she calls out as she comes through the door. The tiny living room is empty, but she hears shuffling from the bedroom at the end of the hall. She snaps off the TV that is spinning through the latest 30-minute news cycle. Bits of damp leaves and mud are scattered across the floor and down the hall. The sofa and easy chair are soiled and smell faintly of feces and urine. For fuck's sake.

"Greg!" She drops the grocery bag on the dining table and continues down the hall. The bedroom door is halfway open to reveal Greg in a ragged flannel shirt and slippers. His scrawny half-naked frame tenses at the draught from the door, his rickety shriveled legs and penis shivering. He wobbles to and fro, clutching an old pair of sweatpants in his hands. He seems about to keel over onto the floor. His hollow eyes peer from his face in horror and embarrassment.

I'm sorry.

His voice in her head; had she imagined it?

"What?" She looks into his face, searching for something that isn't there. "Oh, Jesus! Would you put the god-damned pants on? That," she says, vaguely waving a hand to ward off the sight of his distress, "is disgusting."

She turns and exits back toward the kitchen, picking up the grocery bag and dumping the contents out on a counter. She starts to sort through the mail and lines up Greg's medication bottles. Can't you just once be cleaned up and decent when I get here so I don't have to go through this bullshit every time?

She hears a loud grunt from the bedroom.

Seriously? she thinks, then raises an eyebrow and lets out a small chuckle at his response. We are going batty. You and me both.

She pulls out the weekly medicine bins and begins to sort his daily doses from the bottles: Levodopa, Carbidopa, Rivastigmine, and other stuff to keep him from puking. She works fast, trying to be done and gone before he goes into one of his weird fits. I'm at the end of my rope here. Driving halfway across the city just to make sure you're still breathing and hoping sometimes that you're not.

"Uhn . . ." Greg appears in the doorway, with pants on, and shuffles towards her. "Ah, . . . I'm s-s-sorry," he cries softly as he reaches his arms out to her. She allows him a hug and turns her head for a kiss on the cheek. When he doesn't release his hug, she firmly takes hold of his arms. He clumsily tries to pull her closer, but she holds him at bay until he stops.

She puts on her motherly, soothing voice, "Why don't we go sit down at the table and I'll fix you some soup, OK?" She turns him back towards the doorway and guides him to the dining table that is crammed against the wall between the kitchen and living room.

She pulls a chair away from the table for him and turns him to face her, his back to the chair. He reaches back and down to touch the arms of the chair. She holds her arms out and he takes her wrists to keep himself steady. She feels his grip loosen and tighten as he struggles to find his balance. Then the process of sitting begins. Each time he bends his knees a little, his grip tightens on her wrists as he begins to descend toward the chair, coming to the tipping point where there is no turning back. He panics, grabbing at her wrists and pulling himself back up, afraid to let go.

He tries again a second and a third time, until finally she is able to anticipate his descent towards the chair and lowers her arms as he falls into the chair. "There you are, OK?" He looks up at the sound of her voice, his eyes pleading.

Do you still love me? Even like this?

Did you say that? She looks deeper into his eyes, searching for some connection, some light, some spark . . ., but he is already gone to a different place.

She watches him from the kitchen as she prepares the soup from a can. He stares blankly ahead at nothing. Occasionally his expression changes: angry, sad, happy, angry as the faint glimmers of memory bubble to the surface and are swept away in an instant. How much longer Lord? Has he not suffered enough? Does he

even know who the hell I am anymore?

The gas hisses and clicks before the flame catches on the stove. She puts the saucepan over the flame and turns it down. She stirs the soup every so often, letting her eyes gaze dreamily out the tiny kitchen window. Her mind wanders. She thinks back to the night of the company party two weeks ago. She smiles as she remembers Bob's playful flirtations, "Hiya Red," waggling his eyebrows. It had been such a long time for her and it had felt so good. So good.

What have you done?

The blood runs cold in her veins. She turns to see that Greg is looking straight at her.

Your Pride

Victoria Chadwick

Your pride stands before you
like a rock that blocks the sun
you possess perfection
but you wield it like a gun
afraid of your shadow
little boy on the run
alone in self rejection
closed off to everyone

Let someone in, teacher
not someone you control
commit the sin, brother
give it up inside your soul
if you will play the fool
the part will make you whole
come join the clown parade
you already paid the toll

Hotline

Mike Hilbig

I called God
on the late night hotline,
1-800-SAVIOUR.

Many despondent nights,
I had dialed before,
only to have a busy signal
pontificate pitches.

Other times,
the receiver merely
rang
and
rang
and
rang
with no answer
until I slammed it down.

I thought
I had given up,
but true pain—
the type that feels
like every atom
of every cell
is misfiring
and ripping through skin
and bone
and nerve-ending—

can produce
just the right amount
of desperation
to pull the earpiece
off the cradle
and punch the number-pad,
one more time.

Finally, after thirty years
of God's negation,
I got an answer,
and on the first ring too.

"Hello,"
groaned a voice from the other end
like a tired customer service rep
at the cable company.

"Is this God?"
"Some have called me that.
Can I help you?"

Again with the complaining tone.
What an asshole,
I thought to myself.

"I'm not sure I like your world."
"It can't be all bad."
"Well, no, but I guess I feel..."
"Tell me what you do like about it."

I remained silent and thought
while listening to God's breath.
It sounded like one of those

high-tech vacuum cleaners,
advertised as silent,
but still producing a light annoying hum
when operational.

Inspiration didn't originate
in reminiscence,
but when I spoke,
I heard myself say,

"I like eating Chicken Mole late night at the taqueria.
I like drinking too much coffee until my eyes feel like they will shoot out
of my skull while having deep conversations with good friends that don't
ever go anywhere.
I like making fun of Republicans.
I like the bass of a live hip hop show rattling the teeth out of my head.
I like writing poetry.
I like watching the sunrise on psychedelic mushrooms, the way all the
colors fly through the air, and you can actually taste them.
I like falling asleep to the sound of a train horn off in the distance.
I like..."

I stopped as I heard God
laughing on the other end.
The bastard.

"I still have some complaints."
"It sounds like you know the answer."
"Yeah, but..."

The line went dead.



Peace

Saul Cisneros

As the Author Channels William James

Steven Shelton

Henry Mouse, now dead, is a tool –
he wakes not, so I can speak it.
Hell hath no image, bled or spit
save brothers bound by elder rule.

He knew the misfortune of name –
I try and milk a pure meaning
from what could be more than nothing
while he is destined to be Twain.

Henry, the screw, the do, the
useless as symbolic paradox –
born, says I, in unnamed complex
injected by Christ's father,

I am no judge, & if you know this
betray no likeness with your kiss.

I Don't

Victoria Chadwick

I don't have to get clean
I don't have to get clean
I don't have to get clean for no body

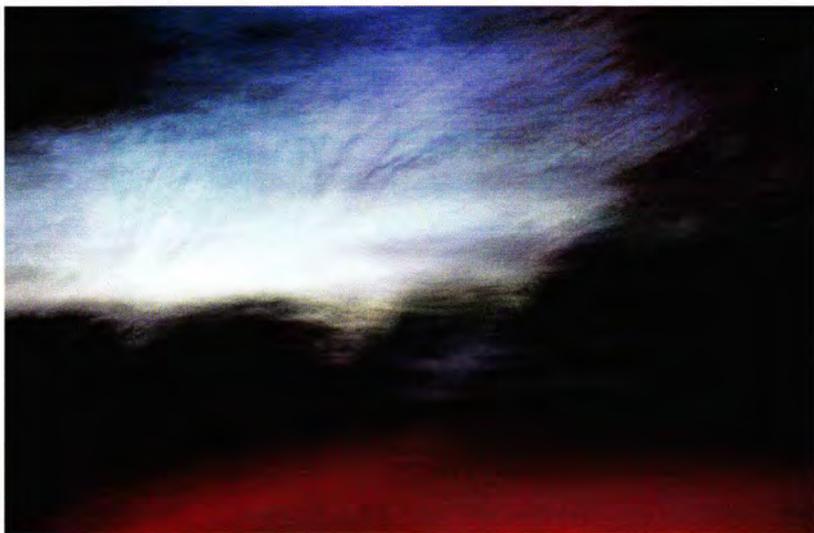
I don't have to be pretty
I don't have to be pretty
I don't have to be pretty for no man

For my Self do I breathe
For my Self do I breathe
For my Self do I breathe into this body

What I am



Above: Print Catalog # 12-490
Below: Print Catalog # 12-497



Bishangari, Ethiopia, Ltd. Edition, 2011

Nicola Parente

The Bayou Review



Nature's Echo, *Journey Series*, 1998

Nicola Parente

A Journey from Inception to Creation: An Interview with Nicola Parente

Ana Laurel, General Editor

Nicola Parente's art is enveloped within an overlying structure which permeates and informs each facet of his artistic journey, from inception to creation. The very way in which he physically layers his paint reflects the way experiences in his life have been layered to create his own philosophy of art: he allows each experience to coalesce in his consciousness and then reduces these experiences to their bare minimum, gleaned that which is most conducive to the production of his compelling and challenging artwork.

Yet, in the midst of this intimate process, there exists a universal quality to Parente's work which allows it to transcend languages, geographical boundaries, and artistic genres. Whether applying his creations to Tibetan hand-woven rugs, textile artistry, print-making, or even to the scenery of ballet productions, this distinctive balance, between the incredibly personal and the immediately universal, characterizes Parente's style and enhances the aesthetic quality of each medium it embraces.

As Nicola and I sit down for our interview, I have to remind myself that the man before me, dressed in the typical Texas attire of shorts, sandals and a t-shirt, is the same man I saw at the opening of his Bishangari photography exhibit during FotoFest in March. On that day, surrounded by fans and friends in a handsome suit, he exuded the same sense of comfort and confidence that he does today, an observation which highlights the fluid adaptability apparent in his artistic style.

Ana Laurel: I wanted to start with talking about your most recent project in your portfolio, *Edge of Awakening* [pictured on page 36]. On your website, you feature a quote by Henry David Thoreau, "Only that day dawns to which we are awake." What about that quote drew you to it in relation to this series?

Nicola Parente: Well it's interesting. Sometimes I work from looking at a quote, and then creating a body of work to present what it is about that body of work that relates to the quote. But other times, like in this instance, I found the

quote as I was developing the body of work, so the body of work is about that moment of time when we all awaken. I was trying to find a correlation between , no matter what part of the world you live in, no matter what your economic status is or what nationality you are, what is it that ties us together as far as the human aspect? And one of the things that ties us together is the moment of awakening. That moment of time that you all awaken in the morning and it's a brand new day and light is starting to filter through from darkness...and we have that sense of a new beginning; and everybody goes through this....So the quote really spoke to me because it is about beginnings and awakening. I thought it was a fitting way to introduce my work by putting a literary element within the whole structure.

AL: A lot of people described your work as abstract. You've been quoted as saying, "Art is a venture into worlds that are often only discovered in the attempt to represent them to yourself and others." Please explain what you mean by that....

NP: ...I try to focus on what I see in the present time, what I'm surrounded with. Whether it's beauty or not. And I try to use that as inspiration for creating the work. I consider my work more of a reductive abstraction, so I consider myself a reductive abstract artist. Because what I do, when I'm painting, part of the process is to lay out various layers of paint, and at the same time, what I'm doing is taking away layers while they're drying. Part of the process is that richness that happens when you're layering paint. Rather than creating a piece of artwork that has layer upon layer upon layer, which becomes an abstraction, what I'm doing is I'm putting layer upon layer, and then reducing it down to almost the initial elements, revealing some of the underlining, to create the work.

AL: That's so interesting. I had no idea that there were so many layers to your paintings... How did you start doing this process? Is it something you developed over time and just evolved out of what you started out doing?

NP: I think every artist can say their career evolves as their progress evolves. For me, what made a difference is when I made the decision to only focus on my art and let it guide me, in a sense. A little bit over 10 years ago, I made the decision that I was just going to focus on my art full-time, and I've been able to

do that. From that moment forward, I really feel like I've blossomed because it allowed me...to really focus on experimenting and working with materials that I had never had time to utilize before...I wanted to work with 21st century materials rather than the typical works on canvas, wood, or paper. So, I sought out to contact manufacturers in plastics because I think in modern society, so much is made out of plastic. [I contacted] these manufacturers and told them I was an artist and I was experimenting with trying to find a new medium and asked if they would send me some samples, and most of them did. It took me about three years to really find what I continue to work on with traditional [painting] methods...and with what I was trying to create. I found that this industrial element allowed me to create a movement on the panel that I struggled with so long to try to do on other mediums. Part of that evolution I think was just me growing as an artist, just me trying to find my way and my voice through my work. And the panels that I use are recycled materials and... [have] basically become what I do all my paintings on.

AL: So you had an exhibit in Ethiopia and one in Mexico.... How do you feel...going to foreign lands has informed your work? ... Because I've studied a lot of writers who do a lot of travel writing and they say it really enhances your writing because it takes you out of the familiar and it forces you to go back to primal creative impulses. How do you feel about that?

NP: Well, I was born in Italy and raised between Italy and the US. I have a dual-citizenship, so I feel that's a blessing and I'm really lucky to have that because it allowed me to travel without many restrictions, without having to get visas and things as far as travelling outside of the US....Yes, having the travel opportunities opens my eyes to getting out of my comfort zone, out of my every day way of thinking and working because I think anytime you can open up yourself to various cultures as an artist--- you know, I never look at things as black and white. I want to soak it in as a sponge. I want my peripheral vision to not even exist. Even if I travel somewhere else in the US, or somewhere else in Texas, I try to open up my mind for the experience to speak to me and to just kind of soak it in. But when you travel to countries that have different cultures than what you're used to, it allows me as an artist, to look at things differently, to look at light differently, to look at people and the way that they're living and what's important to them....

AL: And I feel like that's like what you described, you know, no peripheral, no preconceived notions, it seems to be the same thing you were describing in your approach to doing your art as well. Calling different companies and asking for materials, no preconceived notions of how it's going to work, just trying it out and seeing what works and what doesn't. It seems like that's a part of your philosophy. It's interesting that there are parallels between the different facets of your life and work. So I've seen that a lot of artists use the internet and stuff, like blogging, to get their works out there in order to get people to see them. I'm wondering how that's affected how you're able to put yourself out there and if it has benefitted you or you feel like it's a detriment to you.

NP: I think that we're in a very exciting time for artists because social media allows a cross-platform of communication between people, not only in your own circles, but also at the outside of your peripheral [environments].... I've noticed, for me, it's been very helpful to have part of that social media marketing because it's allowed my work to travel virtually across, not only the US, but across the world.... It gives me encouragement as an artist to develop my work because I feel like it has a voice, but it's not specific to one culture. And I think if art can kind of give the sense and communicate the same thing across platforms, across worlds then the artist is doing a good job at creating that body of work because it speaks to everyone no matter where you're from. And I hope my work does that. And having my show in Ethiopia, people that saw my paintings and my photography, they got it [and] they understood it without speaking the same language. Without being able to communicate, in a verbal sense, I was just letting the art speak for itself.

AL: Well I think it's true because with the internet, an artist has to learn to market himself in a way that he didn't have to before. In addition to the social media, you need to know how to build a website. I mean, you can have someone else do it, but it's very expensive. There are basic things that you need to learn to get your work out there--

NP: I'm very lucky because I came from a business background and that business background has really helped me, as an artist, grow. Though when I began

doing my art full-time, I didn't want anything to do with the business aspect... A few years ago, Creative Capital in New York did a week-long seminar for artists and you had to apply to get in...It was a seminar that changed my whole thinking about art because it made me realize that as an artist..., you don't have to live under a bridge, you don't have to struggle, and you are the controller of your destiny. And I think that applies to anyone who wants something specific for their lives. That you can create your own reality by living it. So that whole business aspect for me, you know, taking that Creative Capital workshop opened my eyes to, Wow, this is stuff I'm familiar with through my business background, and I should be applying this to my art career. And that has helped me tremendously...

AL: Related to technology, in reference to your work on Dominic Walsh's productions, *Terminus* (2008) [pictured below] and *Time Out of Line* (2011), y'all incorporated some very new features into the show. One of them was the video and the projection, and so I was wondering, what role has technology played in



your art as far as the production of it, and has it simply become another medium through which you can filter your imaginative impulse?

NP: Yeah, working with Dominic Walsh Dance Theatre was an incredibly

rewarding experience for me because it allowed me to step out of my comfort zone...and step out of creating basically one-dimensional paintings. Dominic had seen my work and was drawn to it and approached me about writing a ballet around the actual body of work. It was the *Edge of Urban Time* series [picture on page 35] from like 6 years ago, I guess. The process in going to their rehearsal as he was developing the choreography for the ballet...was based on the same premise that my work was about, and he created a multidimensional way to express that through dance. [Walsh] asked me to create the set design for it, so through that process I wanted to not just create some paintings as a background; I wanted to do more than that. So I decided to, because a lot of my work is about movement, as if you're on a fast-moving train and your peripheral vision starts playing tricks on you, I wanted to incorporate some of that movement and I thought what better way than video. So not having any expensive cameras to work with, but having a video option on my old flip phone [laughs] I used that to create video. I took drives---I had gotten into a state international juried show in Nacogdoches and it was around the same time that I was working on the set design and driving to Nacogdoches and back. It was the hilly, hill-country kind of thing, beautiful panoramic views and there were parts of it that followed a train line, so you had these beautiful old steel bridges and stuff that went through it so the video aspect of it was shot with that phone, with my window down holding my phone out the window as I was driving and they were all basically these snippets--- I think my phone would only record maybe 2 or 3 minutes at a time--- so it was basically all these snippets that I put together and created a video feed to project onto the stage as part of the background. In addition to that, Dominic wanted me to showcase my work, my body of work from those paintings, so part of it was doing these projections on these panels and the panels were the same kind of panels that I paint on but I had them juxtapositioned where they were falling in and out of each other, in front of each other, behind each other, it was kind of like layered, almost like I have my paintings, but they were just layered in different levels so as they appeared blank on top of the stage, they were at different levels and then when you added video elements to them, or I would project my paintings onto them, it just created a beautiful perspective of the work. So, the technology allowed me to come out of my shell in a sense and explore, you know, other art mediums that I'd been wanting to do....It was quite challenging and it was a lot of work, but the rewards were so

worth it because it was such a great experience and it opened my eyes to different media that I can and want to explore in the future.

AL: So from installations to your sculptures to your paintings, you're constantly working with your hands. And for a poet, the difficulty lies in translating the abstract of the imagination to the written word/language, so how difficult is it for you to bridge that divide from the intellectual to the representational on the panel, not the canvas, or the---

NP: Video, whatever the medium? Well, I think it's difficult, I mean there's no doubt that it is difficult to put yourself out there and to open up yourself to vulnerabilities. Not everything that I do or create is a success; I have my failures, too. But I think that having those failures really makes you a stronger artist... whatever your medium is. And for me it's just about learning to create. The how-to and the end process is only a part of it, but the actual creating process is what art and writing are about. To be able to make A go all the way to Z, I mean that's the art form. And then the result of it is what others see, but it's such a small aspect of what has gone into it.

AL: So you're very involved in community projects. What do you currently have going on?

NP: One of my favorite organizations is WITS, Writers in the Schools, and working with them because what they do is have professional writers that they put in the school systems to help kids improve their test scores and to improve their writing by making [it] fun for them. What I do is I'm one of the artists in residence that is actually sent to the schools. I take the writing that the kids have created and create an art component to it, create a visual. A lot of these kids have never even been to museums so part of the program allows them to go to a museum for the first time and write about that experience. Or write about---for example, a couple of years ago we did one for the [Joaquin] Torres-Garcia exhibit at the Menil. All of his art is based on symbols, so the kids had to write about symbols and my art project was to actually create a symbol that represents their life. So, I had them doing carvings with a heat carver and wood.... They had to write poetry

about it and incorporate their poetry that related to their life and their symbol. So it opens up their lives and makes writing fun for them, but it also opens up their eyes to appreciate art and to see that it's such an important aspect of life. And I love getting that smile or sense of excitement from a kid because for them, it's a break. Especially since a lot of schools have taken funds away from the arts. So for



some of them, it's the only opportunity they have to be creative---visually creative.

AL: It's also that acknowledgement that art is important to education. That it does facilitate---

NP: Conversation and----

AL: Helping you express yourself. Which is important. Even in academic writing, though it initially seems stale, everyone has a certain, unique style or way to express themselves and their thoughts. And this opens up that realm for the children and helps them develop their own styles. So, I want you to describe more the artist's role at WITS. I know some people that matriculate at our university know perhaps a little bit about it, and the people that do know about it might only be aware of the role for writers in that program. I wanted to---

NP: Incorporate that artist's role, too?

AL: Because we do have a lot of interesting artists at our school....I just want to make sure that they know there are other things for them to do as far as giving back to the community. It's not just for writers. So how did you get involved with WITS?

NP: That Creative Capital workshop that I was telling you about? A couple of years ago? Long [Chu], one of the directors at WITS, was a part of the workshop, and we started a dialogue and I was telling him I wanted to get more involved with children and he said, "I happen to work with WITS," and I said, "Well, what's WITS?" So, we just did a studio visit and he loved my work, and he asked if I'd be interested in working with them on a project-to-project basis and I said, "Of course." And that was about three or four years ago...It's not a full-time gig, but I just get a lot out of it. I've been working with anywhere from elementary school to junior high kids so it's that whole gamut of children, and it's just amazing to see how they view art from various stages of their lives and their age groups and intellects....I think it makes a more well-rounded individual, ultimately....And I try to incorporate, at one point or another, either at the beginning or at the end of the class, I usually end up talking to the kids. We do like a kind of critique of everyone's work and I try to incorporate the fact that it's important to do something they really love with their lives... If their hearts are into it, that's what they should go for....

AL: You're also facilitating the next generation, a future artist perhaps. You've done what you could to help them out and get them along. From what I understand, I think it takes a lot more work than people may realize to become a notable artist, so it's good for someone in your position to be able to be like, "It's possible. Don't give up. But you will have to work hard"...It's probably incredibly instructional for you to see the art of the younger kids as well because there would be less of a filter in their approach. It's simply pure imagination, unbridled and unedited.

NP: ...Elementary school kids are great because they have no preconceived notions of what is right or wrong [in art], so they're very creative and are willing to try things that aren't expected. And I do learn a lot from them. I always think, "I would've never thought of that. It's really cool."



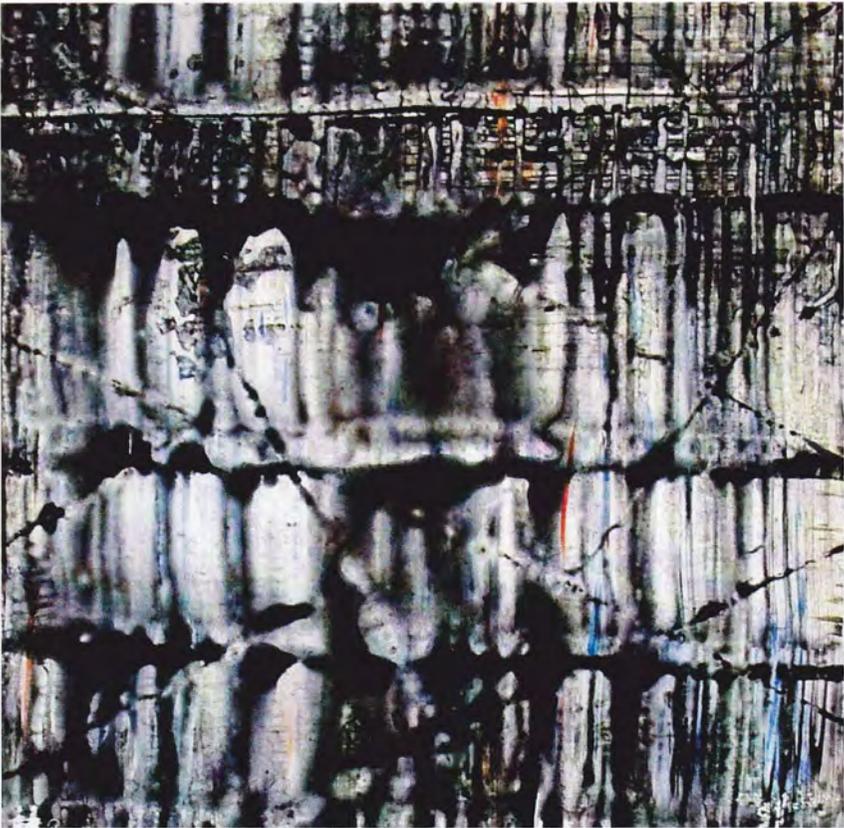
AL: Finally, where do you gain influence, or what strikes you as most influential in your everyday life?

NP: ...I love going to museums and seeing, especially contemporary works, and one of my favorite museums in Houston is the Menil. I'm usually there once a month. I love to go through all the various halls they have from Surrealism to whatever they may be featuring in their contemporary gallery spaces, to their permanent collection of African art. I can look at a painting a thousand times and always pull something different away that I hadn't noticed and it's that element of surprise in abstract art that I'm really drawn to. So, when I'm looking at art in a museum for inspiration, a lot of times I'm not setting out saying I need to look at this because I need to be inspired to create something similar to it or create an aspect of it, but I'll look at something and if it creates some kind of emotion---Like I remember going to the museum to see Roberto [Gil de] Montes' work years ago,

it was one of the largest exhibitions of his work and it was owned by the Menil. And this was like over 10 or 12 years ago. I was so moved that I was in tears by this exhibition. And to this day he's still one of my favorite artists. There's something about the emotional connection that art can create in the same way that a good book or good writing can. It's that element of getting your heart to beat faster and maybe creating that emotion that you get teary eyed. It's that connection that really makes it all worthwhile....The inspiration is drawn from all around me. A lot of times I'm inspired by talking to other artists and having a dialogue. A lot of times I'm inspired by having that dialogue with my collectors...Or taking a walk and looking at construction sites. I'm fascinated with construction sites and trains. So going to a construction site and looking at a scaffolding and looking at the artistry that goes into the scaffolding and how it all---there's a correlation to how it all connects---and that connection creates a safety board for the people that are using it. Or creates a temporary structure to hold up what's behind or on top of it, so it's like that whole dialogue that I have in my brain while I'm looking at something.... It's that dialogue and that complexity that makes each work of art what it is that intrigues me and inspires me.

Emergence, *Edge of Urban Time* Series, 2006

Nicola Parente





Portrait Dreamer, *Edge of Awakening*
Series, 2011

Nicola Parente

Entre Lineas de Amor y Sangre

Alex Guerra

El pueblo de San Felipe siempre ha sido reconocido por sus historias de amor y desamor, pero la historia de Abel y Sandra es más que solo palabras de soledad y pasión que atravesarían el tiempo y vencerían a la muerte.

Estos dos enamorados, siempre unidos a pesar de las adversidades pero un día la madre de Sandra, mujer con una fe que rayaba en el fanatismo, compromete a su hija con el sobrino del cura del pueblo. Ahí empieza este relato que aunque casi mítico aseguran los pueblerinos es real.

Ante las inesperadas noticias del compromiso de Sandra, el joven enamorado no tuvo el valor de seguir viviendo, así que renunció a todo, incluso a su pasión de escribir, pues la musa se había ido de su vida.

La familia de Abel, preocupada por su estado de salud llama al doctor del pueblo, hombre ambicioso y sin escrúpulos, el cual solamente se había dedicado a atesorar fortuna sin importarle nada más. El galeno de nombre Omar realiza su primer visita al joven, el cual le comparte su desdicha, haciéndole partícipe además de un terrible secreto que embargaba su corazón. Dicho secreto consistía en haberle entregado el alma al diablo, pero éste jamás contestó a sus suplicas.

¿Quién puede sobrevivir sin amor? se preguntaba a cada segundo Abel, el cual entre llanto decía “perdi a Dios, el diablo jamás respondió a mis suplicas y la mujer amada le pertenece a otro hombre” “ha olvidado nuestro pacto de amor” agregaba.

Poco antes de la muerte del infeliz, el médico inicia su rutina y toma una muestra de sangre del poeta, al llegar a su clínica por error cae de sus manos uno de los tubos que poseía la sangre del moribundo paciente. La sorpresa fue mayúscula al descubrir que la sangre empieza a formar letras las cuales se alineaban en perfecta comunión, cada una de ellas se unían para formar palabras las que a su vez formaron oraciones de un sentido literal hermoso.

Hasta el alma del médico se estremeció enormemente ante la presencia del milagro y a pesar de jamás haber sentido ninguna clase de amor hacia nadie se sintió enormemente conmovido ante dichos escritos, los cuales parecían haber sido realizados por un ser divino.

La avaricia no tardo en aparecer así que decidió guardar el secreto y guardo cada una de las frases como si fuera el tesoro más sagrado. Día a día desangraba al inocente Abel, y este ya casi en estado vegetativo no tolero más y después de una semana de agonía murió. Su partida fue una muerte corporal y no del alma la cual se negaba a dejar este mundo aferrado al gran amor de su vida.

El facultativo estallo en ira "estoy acabado, no podre seguir esta farsa de ser escritor" lleno de cólera. Pero de momento surgió una idea descabellada "inyectare este último tubo de sangre y así esta formara parte de mi circulación y mis células sanguíneas se reproducirán al lado de las de este mendigo.

Después de varios años la vida le otorgo a el médico la mas inusitada fama, sus libros eran cada vez más famosos, se vendían por millares y le redituaban millones en regalías. Un día decide regresar a San Lorenzo a presentar su nuevo libro titulado "Entre el amor y la vida", en esta novela describía la gran pasión que sentía por la dueña de su corazón, todas las obras las había escrito a través de las sangrías que se efectuaba cada mes.

Sandra, no podía dejar de asistir a la presentación de este nuevo libro, pues todas y cada una de las frases parecían haber sido escritas para ella. Ese día decide conocer al famoso Doctor, ahora ya dedicado a la literatura. Tristemente se da cuenta que el evento estaba repleto de personas en espera de la aparición del personaje más famoso de los últimos tiempos. A pesar de sentirse desesperada por el contratiempo no se da por vencida y se abre paso entre la multitud.

En escritorio de cedro con formas torneadas y varios de los libros apilados en espera de ser firmados hacían la escena perfecta que dejaban ver el triunfo del escritor. Al estar a pocos centímetros de distancia, Sandra extiende su mano para ser saludada y el contacto de las manos fue impactante. Inmediatamente el doctor empezó a sentir una terrible molestia, su corazón empezó a acelerarse de forma súbita, y sus oídos dejaron de percibir sonidos, a su vez el sudor se volvía espeso y de tono rojizo cada vez de tonalidades más oscuras.

A los pocos segundos se encontraba tirado en el piso, ante la mirada sorprendida de los asistentes. El piso del recinto ahora era un río de sangre que era emanada hasta de los ojos del decadente médico, era un llanto literalmente de sangre.

Sandra se acerca para tratar de dar auxilio, incorporando el cuerpo inerte del moribundo, sosteniéndolo por el cuello. Sus manos sintieron la tibieza de la sangre como una caricia, esa caricia que estuvo esperando por muchísimo tiempo. Entre el

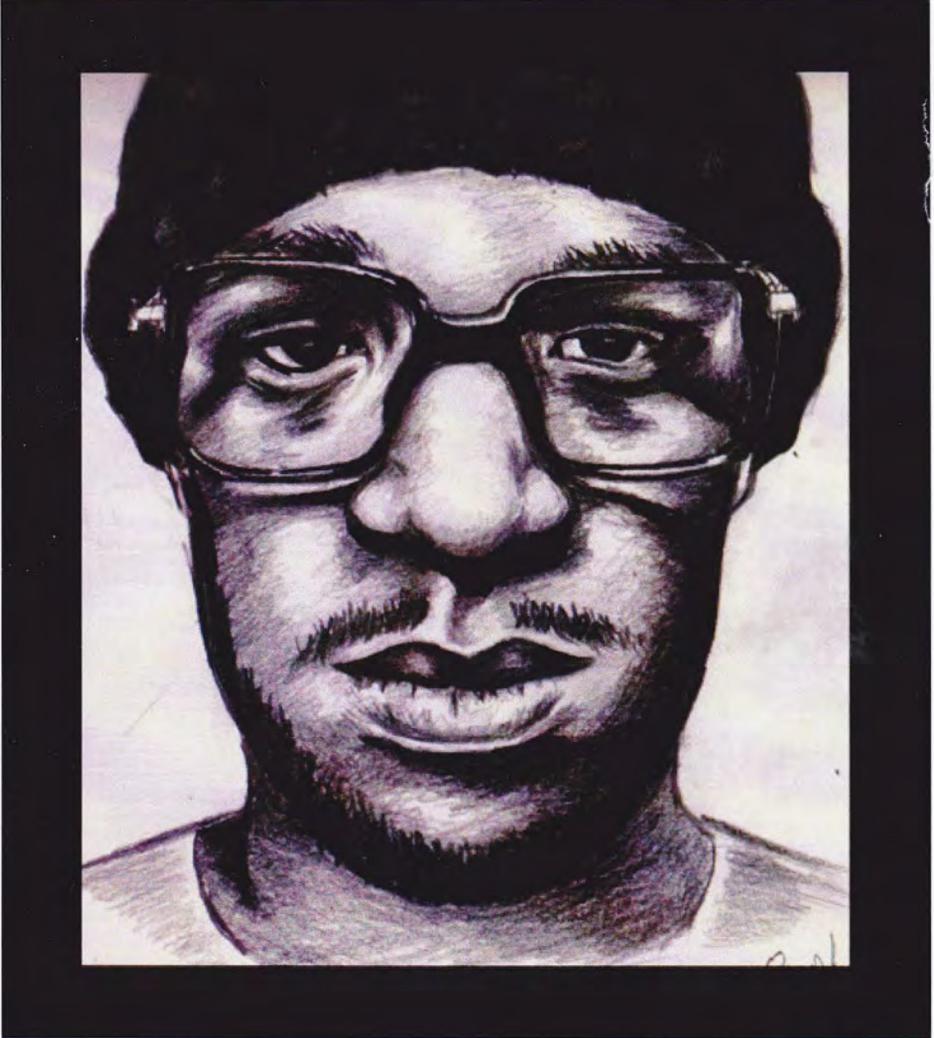
movimiento, los libros cayeron al piso y Sandra no pudo evitar la inquietud y tomo un de los ejemplares, los cuales estaban manchados del fluido vital.

Al llegar a su casa aun en estado de confusión, dejo el libro en el sillón de la sala y se dirigió a lavarse la cara para tratar de disipar un poco la emoción vivida, tras regresar a buscar el tanpreciado libro, la sorpresa la dejo sin habla. El libro se encontraba abierto en la última página con una dedicatoria escrita aun con la sangre fresca y decía con letras mayúsculas "DEDICADO A TI, EL AMOR DE MI VIDA, POR SIEMPRE TUYO". Y lo firmaba Abel.

Echoes of Thunder

Jonae Muhammad

In my mind, I'm eulogizing
my losses in a never ending
Explicative monologue
that travels into forever
to the people that feel
the words like resounding
echoes of thunder
Deafening the life they knew



Scott

Quentin Pace

The Most Worthless

Steven Shelton

Some words make pretty thoughts,
how they get the brain's tongue
to sing truth in a way
so love and beauty cascade over
the walls of the skull
as though the margins
between which they're written are
the sides of a sacred cup,
& they tell about
all that keeps any human
from becoming something other than human,
the most noble communication,
& they get the brain
to hear the song
& believe.

If the words following this
affect you so,

I want to meet you.

I want to be your friend.

I want to talk with you.

I want you to tell me

about robins' eggs

and growing herbs for cooking

and foraging for salad free of a garden's borders

and about sunlight and moonshine

skipping across a lake in spring,

of the onomatopoeia

of leaves as they *do*

in October.

I want to see and hear and feel these things with you.
You can burn what is written
if you give me the simplicity of your sweetest time,
company, comfort, and thought.
But there is a reality to life
despite the fancy
of wizards
and witches
and ghosts
and zombies
and vampires
and fairies
and superheroes
and men who are good
without being goods.
There isn't a day that passes,
rarely an hour
where I do not wish
I had put a new hole
the size of a .44 caliber ball
into the skull of the man
the person the world
tells me I must call mother
told me I must call father.
She still lives, and the world now tells me
(because nothing changes)
she is my second chance.
She *is* my second chance.
My fate is/was
I am/was a *natural born killer*
in the flesh,
out of the 27-inch box
like the ticks of grandfather clocks,
and I am a failure unto my world,

& perhaps *the* failure,
since I have a second chance
unless I embrace my fate.
My fate (fate is always religious,
even in America),
was to re-hole him
& walk away,
into the waiting womb of a prison cell,
& hold the little dignity I found in the deed
like a light
the way one might read Dostoyevsky
& I should hope
Jesus would like
& forgive me when He comes back around,
& until -
I am becoming
more and more
the most worthless
with every word there is.

The Suffering Caused by Really Mean Professors

Malcolm Williams

Mine's name was Marianne. I don't know if her parents had named her after the famous French allegory or not. She was large and imposing and she had a speech impediment, and she scared the fuck out of me.

When I entered the discipline of linguistics, I had a vague sense that it was no longer strictly a humanity. I had tried to read Chomsky once as a kid and gave up. Even during my last year at the Sorbonne, fellow students would whisper to each other, "can you read Chomsky in the original?" And, they didn't mean the original English. They meant that even as grad students, Chomsky was best understood explained second-hand. I guess I hoped that I could still get by approaching language as an art instead of a science. Well, it was a nice fantasy.

Her specialty was phonology and I had already studied it at the graduate level in the States. I had had a kind and gentle professor who told us when we got to the section on distinctive features and binary code that we could ignore it because it would never be needed at our level. And, I did have a flair for phonology; indeed, it was studying phonology that enabled me to shed my accent.

On the other hand, Marianne had a reputation for being a no-nonsense professor and she was. The first week of class we had an anatomy exam; from the cranium to the esophagus to the lower lobes of the lungs, we had to memorize the name of every part of the human body that was involved in the production of phonemes. We examined cheek tissue and the blades of tongues. And that was just to get us started. The burden of the course focused on mathematical formulas. At first, they were kind of simple and my mind began to open up to the amazing explanatory value they had. For example (a mundane one at that) there is one formula that predicts when "d" and "t" should be pronounced like "gee"

and “chee.” [1]But one day in class, she explained the means of applying the rule usually written C0. Just about the time she told me that I had to make an infinite number of passes through the rule until the transformation was complete, I burst into tears and fled the room. She took no notice of my panic, but later on she remarked that she enjoyed my sense of humor. I gritted my teeth and thought she was the meanest person alive. And, her criticisms were relentless. For my final exam, I had to write one rule that would generate every past verb form in Japanese, both regular and irregular. I stared at the data set for 2 hours, convinced that it couldn't be done. Suddenly a pattern emerged before my eyes and I had it! I felt pretty good by then. Not long after her course, I took a psychological profile and discovered that I was no longer right-brain dominant. I was totally bilateral!

A fellow student had decided on her own that she wanted to write her thèse on a sound change that had been detected in Provençal. I thought it sounded like a good idea, but Judith made 2 mistakes that cost her. She asked another professor to direct her research, and she accessed a data base of documented sound changes that were occurring in the South. Later on, I accessed the same data base and came away with nothing. Worse, her professor had a reputation for being kind. Those were the first words I ever heard about him and they were still on everyone's lips when I left France. Yes, he was kind. Marianne offered her advice on the research and my colleague plunged ahead without her advice. She completed her research and wrote up her findings within a year; she was determined to finish her degree and go back to her career as a nude model. I was sitting in the Café Maubert three hours later when she slunk over to my table in a flood of tears. She sobbed disconsolate for 30 minutes and when she could finally talk, she told me that Marianne had convinced the rest of the faculty to fail her because she had not distinguished between real time and apparent time in her findings. I was absolutely horrified. The meeting had been more like an inquisition and the only person who had been kind was her director. Yes, he had been kind all the way to end, and in his kindness, he had never been able to tell her that her research sucked. Or, maybe he didn't know. His specialty had been African languages, not phonology.

I was moved to pity for her and I was paralyzed with fear. Fear, yes. For several months, I tried to find a topic for my upcoming inquisition. And every time I came

up with something that sounded good, Marianne batted it down, and never in a kind way.

But one day, she called me and asked if I had noticed what had been going on in Languedoc. The time had finally come when French intellectuals admitted that there was more than one language in France and something was taking place now that it was considered a real language again, instead of a degenerate dialect. She could not tell if the shift was a merger or an exchange and asked if I would be interested in figuring it out. (The most distinct isogloss in France is between *langue d'oïl* and *langue d'oc*, which means areas where the word for "yes" is *oui*, and areas where the word for "yes" is *oc*. Hence the names: *OCcitan*, *OCcitanie*, and *LanguedOC*.) I had always wanted to go there, since those languages are so similar to the Catalán that I occasionally heard as a child. I was hooked on the idea, even though I had no idea what she was talking about.

I gathered up my belongings and found a room to rent in a house in Neffès. I had thought that the hardest thing to do would be to overcome my shyness while interviewing strangers; I had no intention of getting my data from somebody else's data-set. But I was wrong. The real difficulty was in overcoming my prescriptive filter: I simply could not hear the incipient sound change she had told me about because I was filtering it out, a habit I had picked up when outsiders always described my dialect of Spanish as "that ghetto Cuban that you people speak." My whole life, I had worked so diligently at passing for "correct" that I simply could not hear what people called "errors" back then.

It took 2 months, and then I heard it! I collected my data, sent hundreds of recordings to Paris for spectrographic analysis, and wrote Marianne 3 chapters of introduction to the tune of 180 pages and sent it to her.

I didn't hear back from her for a month. She had gone to the States to attend a conference. When she returned, she asked me to come to her house on *rue de la Montagne Ste. Geneviève*. I got on the train with delight and looked forward to seeing her and Paris again. At her house, she sat me down at her kitchen table, and then she mounted her broomstick and rode it around her kitchen for 5 hours.

When she was done criticizing me and my writing and trashing my ideas and organization, she invited me out to eat Mexican food at Le Forum des Halles. I don't know why. Maybe she thought I was homesick, or maybe she wanted to show how trendy she was. I don't know. Naturally, the Paris version of Mexican food didn't agree with me. I never knew if it was the sauce on the enchiladas that looked and tasted like library paste, or if it was her ruthless criticism, but I didn't get out of bed for a month. My diplomat boyfriend told me if I left Paris again that there would be no place for me to stay on my return.

Finally, I managed to crawl out of bed and I returned to Neffîès and started interviewing people again. At her insistence, I cut my first 180 pages down to 40! And, eventually, I got the thing written. And, I learned a lot. The reason that linguists couldn't tell if the sound shift was a merger or an exchange was because of the new politics. When Occitan had been a despised dialect, the language had remained static; once it was spoken in public by educated people again, it did what languages do: it began to evolve naturally. What might have been taken as an exchange was due to people overcompensating the loss of roundedness in a retroflex environment, much in the way that some Texans pronounce the /a/ in "garden with a slight /o/ sound to compensate for a similar merger here. (I'd use technical language, but this computer doesn't have the right symbols.)

Marianne said that I was ready and I met the linguistics faculty for my inquisition. I was out of there in 15 minutes! What had cost Judith a 3-hour inquisition took me ¼ of an hour thanks to Marianne's meanness (so-called). Having got my findings accepted by her had taken me 2 years. Getting the rest of the faculty to put their imprimatur on it was a done-deal by the time she was done with me.

And she had a few more surprises in store for me. My boyfriend, the one I had been living with while I was a student, the one who worked at the Ministry of Education, decided to ditch me for someone younger. So, I lost my place to live, and since I was no longer a student, my attestation de séjour would expire soon and I would be deported.

I began making job inquiries at the Schwäbische Universität Gmünd and tried to resign myself to the possibility of moving back to the States. I even considered returning to life on the streets. But cruel Marianne had another surprise for me. She had decided to spend a year in Katowice teaching linguistics at the new institute there. She offered me her house for the year and I was glad to accept. I got my right to live in France extended so I could take care of business for her while she was in Poland.

So, I spent another year in Paris enjoying the lifestyle and finally accepted the idea that I would live in Texas again. Marianne, the mean one, who had convinced the Faculté de Linguistique to fail Judith, the one who had trashed my writing so bad that I couldn't get out of bed for a month, has kept in touch all these years, and thanks to her, I know what hard work is, especially hard work on one's writing. After that time, I never had trouble finding work in linguistics; and occasionally, students stop me on campus or on the train to share *their* success stories and to thank me for insisting that they work so hard.

Fat

Victoria Chadwick

I love to go out shopping
I buy things for my dreams
But when I come back home
I've forgotten what it means

To put sweat into desire
or work into the goal
To gain the skill to sound
the groanings of my soul

Tease myself with somedays -
Avoiding truth with that;
But my restless, deepmost heart
Knows I'm choosing to grow fat

Every hour of wandering
is lost to me, alas.....
and the future needs more courage
to ignore the wasted past

The possible with sunbeams
Tickle time like drops of rain;
Rainbows, brilliant from the two
will cut through fat, embracing pain

Sleep

Tracy Lyall

When I was nineteen every midnight was a paradox,
one long drag of a cigarette on a cool, cement porch,
pick-a-star in the muggy sky of smog
as smoke stacks blazed along the horizon.
Horrid love affairs
with steel, crooked highways and train tresses
bare-boned and black
against the sky.
Glistening city shards peered up from the dirt
like a splintered cross
bloody, boiling flesh oozing sweat
of generations
beneath the hated sun, eight month sun.
I reached out to you.
You, were rampantly horny in foreign lands.
Spanish deco and prescription pills,
restlessly depressed in European rail stations,
Turkish coffee and cigarettes
Smoking, nappy hair, and lies you told
along the cobblestone river
near stained-glass cathedrals,
the portholes to some imaginary detox heaven.
Midnight
I made a wish for the supernatural,
and handcrafted delusion of any religious folklore,
the Milky Way and its galaxy of dark matter,
contemplation of alchemy, science of mind,
tried to find Jesus, Methuselah, and the goddess within.
I rubbed Buddha's fat belly in good-luck Chinese restaurants

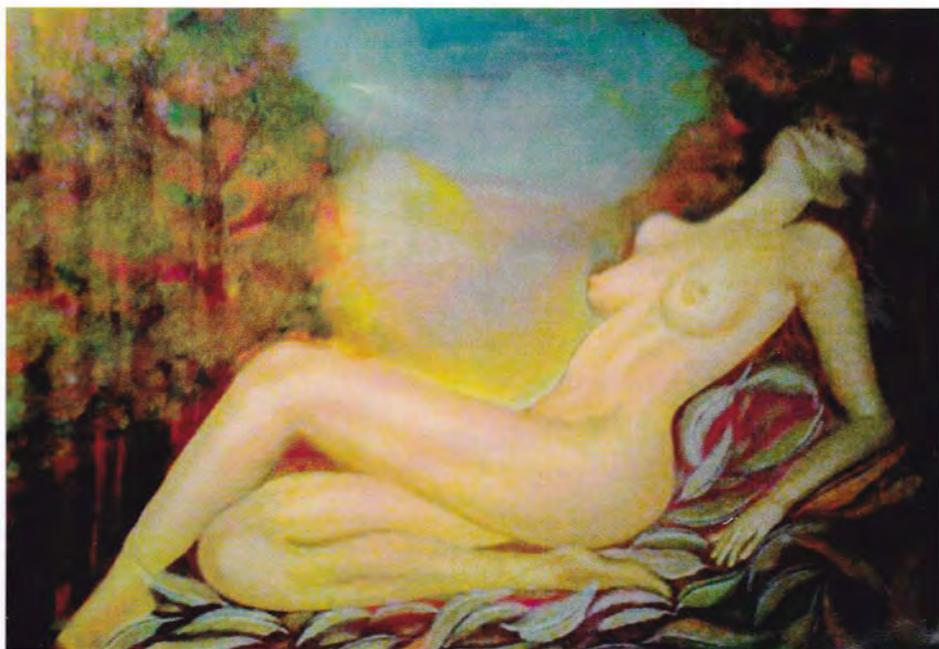
beyond neon bar signs
where violin strings would vibrate invisible messages
cryptic codes from lonely musicians
at dim-lit warehouse parties.

Resolved with one deep breath,
Sinless.

Don't come to me now for it is too late
I have fallen through the eternal depths,
crawled inside the void within, through layers of time
and found the looping dimensions.

Depths of a Spirit

Veronica Elizondo



The Heartbeat Merchant

Peterson Alimole

Outsiders often breach our gates in search of countless treasures, none of which surpass the value of the misplaced heartbeat. Selling them is a very lucrative practice. Tracking them down however is far from seamless. There are only a handful of us capable of the near-impossible feat, and I happen to be the sole practitioner in our great city.

For us heart hounds the art of finding a heartbeat is in our genetic coding. My father didn't have the ability, but his grandfather, as well as his father before him, did.

I can spot a lost heartbeat in a crowded room. They whiz about as pulsating lights, each shade and hue more different than the other. When I'm able I gather up as much as I can, taking them home with me. I make sure to give each heartbeat a separate chest or else their lights could bleed into one another, making deciphering them torturous.

When one loses their heartbeat it becomes impossible for them to pick up on that of another. They can never hear the sound of a heart that isn't theirs, which makes it possible for them to select from a litter of those that have been misplaced. I've always wondered what would cause one to lose something so vital. Such an odd feeling it must be to be alive, a constant quaking in your chest, yet unable to pick up on a sound that would indicate the presence of a living organ.

"It's the silence that kills them," my father had once said. "Not knowing what's keeping you running ... it makes short work of a person."

Closing my eyes, I envision the pulsating muscle wrapped in a meshwork of meat, arteries, and blood. All anxiety dissipates as I pick out the ever present b-bump emanating from my chest, creeping into my temples, roaring like a hungry lion around my eardrums. It's one sound I never hope to lose. At least until I finally kick the bucket.

The windchimes filter the force of the door being shoved lightly inward. A woman walks in dressed in a red, slim cut blazer over a pair of pleated trousers in the latest style of the queen's maidens, her black patent leather boots angled sharply

at their tips. They take up a major portion of her shins. On each of her forearms an array of silver bracelets glistens with the bright light of early noon, and on her face is a mural of surprise and mild fluster as she catches me staring. Bringing her body to a full stop causes the silver loops dangling from each of her ears to sound off like sirens. "I'm Mona Nassir of the queen's maidens. I seem to have lost my heartbeat." She slips off a glove, and I press my mouth to her wrist in the common greeting. "Can you help me?"

What I can't help is a smug smile creeping across my lips. I indicate the shelves behind me stacked from top to bottom with small wooden chests, each the size of a bulging oilskin. "Don't you see those boxes? Your heartbeat is bound to be part of my collection."

She reclaims her hand with a start. "I've been to every heart hound from the inner walls of the province to the outer circle of the old universe. They all said the same."

Now I feel a bit nervous. I may be one of few capable of finding a heartbeat, but I'm hardly the best. Nonetheless I set to work. Grabbing the chests closest to reach I lay them out on the counter, input their combinations, and spread them open for the queen's maiden to observe. "Hear anything?" But I already know her answer. Though I can see the bright lights flittering inside their boxes, shimmering before my eyes, I know none of them belong to her. Returning the chests to their places, I drag out a second batch.

Mona Nassir of the queen's maidens watches me work with a look of resignation that makes me question my even trying. It seems she gave up some time ago. After the seventh row of chests opened, I stop. "May I examine you?" Mona consents. Silently she unbuttons her blouse. All too familiar is she with the procedure. For how long exactly has she been without a heartbeat? I stop her before she can strip bare. A bountiful amount of cleavage peeks through her shirt as I examine her chest. It's exactly as I'd feared. Many people come in search of a heartbeat not because they've lost one, but because they can hear the one they have starting to peter out. But Mona's has long petered out. There is no last stand from the iridescent fire. In her chest all I see is dry emptiness. She's been without a heartbeat for some time. I know her heart is there. It's what's keeping her walking, talking, what's keeping her alive. But there is no sound and so there is no fire. There is no light. "How long have you been without a heartbeat?"

“Longer than I can remember,” she replies. “I don’t think I’ve ever had one.”

#

Several weeks pass and the search continues. I examine numerous chests. Each one I leave open for Mona and each one she turns down with little hesitation. She can hear absolutely nothing.

Some days Mona shows up in heavy makeup, most likely having just escaped some ceremony or another. “What made you wait so long to find it?” I asked her once, and she stared at me as though the answer to that question was as obvious as the nose on my face.

“What makes you think I did?”

#

There’s no hope for Mona, and I’m not sure how to break the news. I’ll have to inform her that today will be our last session. Her heartbeat does not reside here, and it’s a shame, for I’ve grown quite fond of her.

She arrives with little ceremony, her makeup scarce, her blazer and boots replaced with a pair of open-toed sandals beneath a sun dress. “I’m free for the day,” she announces with a flourish. Her bracelets jingle. Her earrings chime. Her laugh cuts through the dusty morning like a sunlit blade. I feel my heart sputter and die at the sight and presence of her beauty. She’s still laughing when she approaches the counter, but when she notices I’ve arranged no chests for her today a look of alarm clouds her face.

“What is this?” she asks, panicked.

“I don’t think your heartbeat is here.”

“But I’ve been everywhere and back,” she says. “It has to be here.” Before I know it she’s up and over the counter—fast as a cat; fast as the queen’s own. Boxes plummet from their high places, shattering upon reaching the ground. Heartbeats spill out like fairies. It’ll take me hours to wrangle them all.

Several chests topple from crumbling corners, building the carnage. “This will cost me a fortune, Mona!”

She stares down at the mess she’s made. “Hush! I think I hear something.”

I watch her claw through the pile of debris. Pretty soon I join in. Though I’m unable to hear what she hears, several heartbeats lay trapped beneath the mess. Maybe she has indeed found the elusive thing. When we do finally clear the spot

three of them pulsate in a row, waiting to be picked.

I direct Mona toward one and she takes it in her hands. It's light peeking through the gaps between her fingers, it resembles a setting sun. Mona holds it up to her ear. Then she lowers the heartbeat, and it slips through her fingers, seeming to fall before stopping midway and changing direction, floating up toward the ceiling. "Not that one," she says dejectedly.

The next I place in her palm, she pinches between thumb and forefinger, lifting it to her ear but dropping it before it can graze the side of her face. It zips off as though offended. "No. Not that one."

I hand her the third and final heartbeat, and she takes it in one hand. Its light is a cool, electric blue that soaks up her arm and face. Mona raises it to her ears. When I see it leave her fingers I give off a frustrated sigh. "Hush!" she quiets me, placing a hand over my mouth. "Can't you hear it?" I close my eyes and I listen. I actually listen. Then I hear a single thump, and soon enough a succession of them.

I mumble as best as I can beneath her suffocating grasp; "I hear it."

"Shh!" Mona hisses, drawing closer. Now she's so close I can hardly see straight, so close I can smell the perfume on her, bath soaps and faint sweat and dust. She's so close I can almost kiss her; so close I have to restrain myself. But for a second I don't. For a second I let my lids stay shut. For a second I indulge my fantasy. I pucker up.

Then a weight on my front flings me out of my reverie, and my eyes spring open. Mona has her ear pressed to my chest. "I hear it," she says, staring up at me. The angle at which we lock eyes cause electric impulses to shoot into my brain. "I hear it!"

And I die a very miniscule death because I hear it too.

Hot and Cold

Michael Hilbig

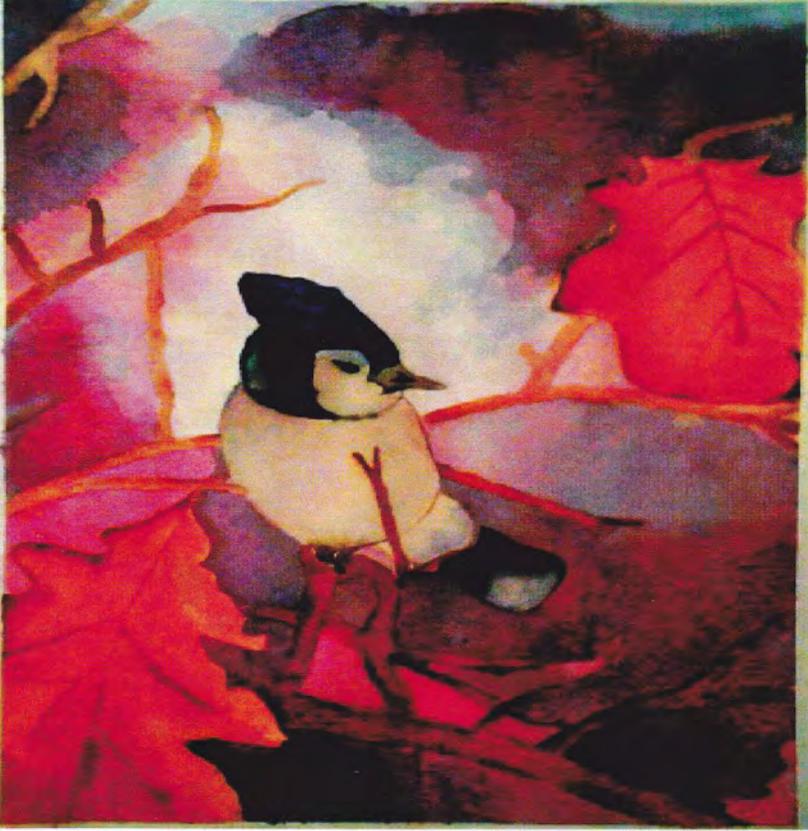
Sometimes, life is like
the cold corners in the shower
where the hot water
can't reach the skin,

and when the breeze blows
through the chasm of the curtain
and the wall, goose bumps
bleat like sheep being sheared,

and futility awakens because really
there's nothing to be done
except wait for the drops
to amass

and slowly

s
l
i
d
e
down.



Birds Are Blue

Claudia Elizondo

The Crackling

Victoria Chadwick

The crackling of old wood consumes
the silence of my weaving room
My heart, strung tight across the loom
Must let the shuttle's work resume

Black shuttle weaves through brilliant hues
in patterns that I cannot choose
Let its rhythm somehow soothe
the pain of all I've had to lose

Let colors of the deep unseen
Dye the fibers of my being
Braid me with the timeless stream
where love and life are evergreen

You didn't leave without a trace
I find a thread in every place
Though these arms yearn for your embrace
Your life in mine is interlaced

Your smile I may not gaze upon
Your laughter lingers far beyond
and like some lonely vagabond
My gift to you? To travel on

To fire dance upon the frozen
Destiny to be engrossed in
To be the weaver and the woven
knitting choice with the unchosen

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