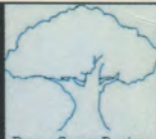


War & Home



Pecan Grove Review

PGR



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PGR: Volume VIII

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We dedicate this volume of *PGR* to all members of
the U.S. Armed Forces, their families, as well as
to all who work for peace.

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The Puppet Master

January Carrillo

Who are you?
To leave us dancing in this evil charade of yours
To leave us in the dark dangling
Waiting for your cue

Who are you?
To dress us in camouflage suits
And hand us unfamiliar scripts

Who are you?
To place us in the spotlight
And with the sway of your wrist
Dance us into the valley of doom

Who are you?
To strip us from our souls
From our humanity
From our lives

Have we amused your audience?

**The Dawn Brought Fear & G.W.'s
Power-Mad / Nuclear Sunrise**

Richard Mavis

They hacked into the Law – the moon was blue but demanded recognition – dawn came in reverse in a carnival of mute & pine & lamplight flickering, confused. Age confusion, anachronistic – horizon blushes & pastels, stays static. These kids developed a fear of stasis most sincere.

Distortions between St. Vacant & her Pantokrator: “you can explain to me infinity+1 forever & I’ll never understand – I do know, though, that this strange opera’s sans seraphs” – the morning bell muffles itself in shame. Factory smoke already hums somewhere far behind the steeple, dissolving into blue come orange come purple come radiating ecstatic glow come time unafraid of standing still come infinity & infinity+1 & infinity&infinity it makes no difference–

Your radiation dissolved the moon. Nevermind – come nothing.

Love Poem

Richard Mavis

Sometime before the crowds returned from their scattered rowdiness, two samurai climbed to the hotel roof. They were laughing & drinking the Lethe & conjuring butterflies.

Father Death raced up to visit but they pummeled & he tumbled back down the stairs. Banshees & doppelgangers tried to intrude but they sealed the door. Alone then, & quiet, requiem, the music of the spheres, they slashed each other's throats & stared unblinking in solidarity.

They dangled their feet over the ledge & watched their blood run down the brick & windows. As the sanguine moon faded in the night, these two samurai delighted in the movie of the streets below, &, flitting out of sight, the butterflies they created.

La Llorona
Veronica Garcia

I am alone between the four walls of my home.
Yes, it is a shack.
Much of nothing I would say.
I sit at the kitchen table
watching my toes circle the dirt floor beneath me.
Looking to recall surreal memories.

*My youth was full of beauty and innocence.
I was an essence.
Encouraged by the possibility of happiness.
A man came to me then,
allowed me to know bliss,
taught me to feel love.*

I have worn circles into the floor.
The circles create images that spin my head.
The empty bottle slips from my grip, shatters.
I rest my head upon the table hoping for tranquility.
But the broken pieces only bring pain.

*I became a woman of hate and sadness,
abandoned by a man of bliss and love.
He left me with our three children,
my daily symbols of regret.
Everyday I walked in shame with them.
We were a burden to life.*

I continue resting my head upon the table,
as pieces of glass drown in a puddle of mud.
Did the water come from my tears
or from my hands?
The wet prints wander from the door to my feet.

*I opened the door.
The night's cold swept through the house*

*when I woke them from their beds.
The children whimpered as we wandered into night.
The river glistened with a cosmic glow.
The bright light beamed off the bottle in my hands,
as I watched my children play in the water.
Tonight, I gave my children to the river.*

El Ultimo

Veronica Garcia

I am the youngest,
the last one to die.
I stood three feet tall
the night I followed my mother to the river.

I remember walking in the steps of my brother before me,
my mother's voice echoing in the winds.
I was amazed at how
the moonlight mirrored off the water.

Tempted by the moon, my brothers
became lost in the night, lost for eternity.
I swam around in the river
before my mother grabbed me into her arms,

said she was sorry.
I gave her a kiss
and she began to cry.
Gently she held my head.

As I watched her face blur above the water,
my mouth was open
but I heard nothing.
She must have.

She released me
and I too drifted the river,
lost to the night.

I am not leaving any time soon

Cesar "Turtle" Gutierrez

I am a citizen of these United States.

This is my home. It is where I was conceived, where I was born, where I have lived my whole life, and where I plan to die.

I'm an American in the broadest of senses. I live in a North American country on the American landmass. Why should it be that only those living in the U.S. should be afforded the ability to call themselves an American? Why not call everyone who lives on the American landmass an American, seeing as how we are the United States *of* America? Does it not seem arrogant? Exclusive? Bias? That is not a very popular idea, I can almost guarantee it; but I think it is a valid point and a valid thought. (I happened upon a piece online one day raising that point, but I forget exactly where.) Because of that, I do not know if I really want to call myself an "American." That's just how I feel.

I have wrestled with Thoreau's question, "How does it become a man to behave toward this American Government today?" and only come to a lack of means to answer it in a concrete manner. I am one person, though—a man—and only I can decide how I should behave toward the Government. The Government itself grants me this right. It is here that I quarrel with another statement, "Love it or leave it."

What is a patriot? A patriot is easily defined as someone who loves his or her country. But under what pretext is that love? Is it blind love or is it well learned?

Picture a flag waving, 29-year-old, working class man, who barely got his high school diploma, who loves his beer, his baseball, his women, and his apple pie calls himself a patriot. He chants "USA! USA!" every time some foreign team plays against us. He knows the pledge, the anthem, and "God Bless America." But this man cannot necessarily tell you who wrote them or the stories behind them. He does not know who the Speaker of the House is but he knows who the President is and will support him no matter

what. This man is considered a patriot because on the outside it seems he loves his country.

But what about a well-educated person who reads the entire New York Times and USA Today every morning before work and during his/her lunch break? What about the person who diverts his/her taxes from the military because they do not believe in war or think it can go to something else, like education? What about the person who does not support his/hers president? Because of all this, is he/she not a patriot? If he/she burns a U.S. flag, does that mean that he/she is not patriotic? Does that mean that he/she hates their country? Does he/she love their country any less than a red-blooded American serving on the frontlines ready to die for that burn away symbol? Is he/she automatically guilty of treason because he/she has a different opinion?

These are just questions I pose. But what if that person is me? If I choose not to say "Under God" or place my hand on my heart during the Pledge of Allegiance, does this mean that I do not love my country or the religious freedom for which it stands? If I choose not to let my taxes go towards the military because I'd rather it go to education or burn that aforementioned flag, does this mean I want to see democracy and capitalism crumble? I say, "No." I know that I, as an individual, a person, am privileged to have those freedoms. So, why do people think I, or anyone else with these views, should leave?

Any time I think of the statement, "Love it or leave it," I automatically think of a quote from the song "Resisting Tyrannical Government" by Propagandi, and I quote, "...And yes, I recognize the irony that the very system I oppose affords me the luxury of biting the hand that feeds. But that's exactly why privileged \$%^&* like me should feel obliged to whine and kick and scream—until everyone has everything they need." And, for some reason, it makes me think of my dog. She has lived with me since 1994. She is there when I get home, eager to see me. I bring her food

and water and she lets me pet her. I bring her inside when it is cold, and if she is clean, she warms my feet as I slumber. But she barks late at night, goes to the bathroom on the carpet when we leave her inside too long, and occasionally has ticks or fleas. She smells, she sheds, and she can be annoying. But I am not going to get rid of that dog because I love her and she is loyal to me; in turn, I am loyal to her. But if she bites me, I will bite her back. If she pees on the rug, I will clean up her urine and reprimand her to work on preventing her from doing it ever again. And if she has ticks or fleas, I will take them off, give her a flea collar, medicine, or bathe her, get rid of the problem itself, not what the problem is a part of. So why, I ask, if I do not agree with some of the issues, views, prejudices or beliefs that are held by people in the country that I live, should I be obliged to leave?

In fact, I may even go as far as to say that I love my country. I have the freedom to oppose the methods of the economy and things (lying, cheating, stealing, murder, substance abuse, infidelity, child abuse, rape, the list goes on) I find immoral. I have the freedom to not serve in the military and not to let my money go to it. I have the freedom to dislike and even oppose the mayor, the governor, or the president. I may or I may not do these things but I can, and I will if need be, because I live here.

If this country is going to hell in a hand basket, I am not the only person in that basket. Jumping out will only lighten the load and contribute to my burning. If I do nothing, that is all—I am doing nothing. But, no one ever said I could not try to get that hand basket to safety. This says that I feel more than obliged to act out against something immoral, unjust, or even flat out wrong. I feel that it is my duty as a citizen. That says that I, possibly, love my country more than the people driving down the road with a tattered flag in the window that they do not have the decency to replace because they do not know the proper method of disposing of a flag.

And yes, the masses, the majority may not like the fact that I think I know what may be better for them—but a lot of the time they do not do anything about it. This is a majority rules society, no doubt, run by the minority. The majority of this country are not the politicians, are not the

liberals, and are not those who know why "Under God" is considered unconstitutional.

If those who feel I am wrong are inclined, they may sit down with me and we can discuss our views and beliefs. We can discuss why we feel the way we do, why we do not feel the way we don't feel, and, if need be, agree to disagree. But I will not argue with them about what is right and wrong. I am tired of arguing beliefs and views in a country based on civil liberties. I will not oppress them for their beliefs or views if they do not oppress me for mine. I refuse to sit down and listen to anyone tell me I am wrong as he/she spouts his/hers self-righteous and close-minded views. (Close minded meaning they are convinced I am wrong and will not listen to anything I have to say.)

I love this country as if it were my own child and I will not abandon it. It is its own entity. I can only show it, request of it, or recommend to it, and in a sense, maybe even try to lead it by example—but not tell it what to do. And I realize that sometimes I will and can contradict myself, but I am only human—I can also fix my mistakes and learn new things.

"The Declaration of Independence" says, "We hold these truths to be self evident." These are my truths: I do not want to go to war; I would rather support education than the military with my hard earned money; I do not believe in unjust killing; I am pro-choice; I feel everyone deserves an equal beginning; I feel that gays and lesbians should be granted the civil rights that every one else is granted; I do not say "Under God" or place my hand on my heart when I say the pledge because of my beliefs; and I have no problem taking part in a protest as long as I truly believe that what I am protesting is wrong. I am forever destined to be part of the minority, and I am okay with it. I am as true to myself as I possibly can be. I am agnostic, a Mexican-American, I love punk rock, I do not always agree with pop culture, and, in all likelihood, I will not agree with *everything* that President George W. Bush, or any president for that matter, does.

I am a citizen of these United States. This is my home, this is where I was conceived, this is where I live, and this is where I want to die. I am not leaving any time soon.

Trapped

Tom Deibel

Confined in a box
With only a low rumble to my name
(Pat, pat Rat-a-tat-tat)
My palms and knuckles offer little amusement
Snick-a-dee-snack if I only had
a vorpal blade
(Whap-whap Bang Bang)
Hard tremors along the walls
Side-to-side I throw myself
(BOOM! BOOM!)
The box has increased in size and population
I gain a friend with a common interest
(knock knock)
Can WE come out?
Outside a crowd gathers
"What's in the box?"
"Can we get in?"
"Who's in the box?"
"How many people are in there?"
"How do we get in?"
(Slice, snick, rip)
Our box gains light
The venture outside is interrupted
By a rush inside
Our box becomes crowded
Where I once banged to get out
Others banged to break in
I remain in the box with a new line of thought

To Live or To Die

Juan Carlos Diaz

In a small lagoon resting in the Adriatic Sea and amidst various flowing canals, Dr. Grossman sits in a small dark room at the back right hand of the Maracatunga Cara. He is a genius in philosophy and his door of knowledge is always open to anyone who is interested. After many years of traveling around the world and studying the science of the Lamas in Tibet, he developed a virtue that brought him much fame. Dr. Grossman had the ability to understand the concepts of life in a whole different perspective. One Sunday afternoon, a storm raged throughout the day and the fog became so dense that if one were to stand inside the coffee shop the stoplight in the corner of the street would not be visible. While Dr. Grossman was sitting in his favorite chair at the coffee shop and ordering his usual mocha, a tourist from Mongolia by the name of Chung Tai suddenly appeared in the midst of the fog. He was drenched from head to toe and carried a small raggedy bag, in which he had many books he had written throughout time. All his books were based on his life experiences and, most importantly, on the quest he had set for himself three years ago. He wanted to write a set of books featuring all the historical events in the world. Due to his misfortune, his books had absolutely no success so far. So he decided to travel thousands of miles in search of the Maracatunga Cara in order to put his mind at ease with Dr. Grossman's help. His face had the look of a desperate man, but as he entered the coffee shop a smile appeared on his face and his eyes grew bigger with joy. He opened the main door of the Maracatunga Cara and, with a confused look on his face, walked towards Dr. Grossman's table. He placed his bag on the floor and with hope in his eyes began to speak to Dr. Grossman about his frustration. "Dr. Grossman, I have been trying to collect all sorts of knowledge in the world, but for some odd reason the books I write tend to lack public

appeal," said Tai. Dr. Grossman took the time to read one of Mr. Tai's books. Not long after he began reading the book, he explained to Mr. Tai that he had to understand a very important series of factors in expressing information to the populous. First of all people tend to be very lazy and most of them don't care to spend their free time reading loads of educational information. Secondly you have to remember that long books based simply on information become extremely exhausting. The third and final step is that in order to gain people's attention you have to transcribe all your information to exciting stories. You have to start using your imagination and making your educational books fun and interesting to the reader. Dr. Grossman told Mr. Tai to remember what Albert Einstein once said, "imagination is more important than knowledge." The moment you come to understand that and begin using it, your books will begin to have a fabulous appeal to the public. Mr. Tai just sat there oblivious to the world staring into nothingness. As he sat there, he began to remember all his sacrifices, flesh and sanity, he had made along the way on the grueling journey like slides in a picture show. He recalled the time he was put in jail in Spain, forced into a hellish existence within the inner sanctum of a gargantuan prison. The temperature within those four walls was unbearable almost to a freezing point and the solitude for several months almost drove him insane. A year later he found himself in Rome, penniless and alone. He spent long, cold lonely nights hunting rats and cooking them in order to ease his hunger. As the sun rose, he would steal a dog's food and water in order to survive. Within a couple of minutes, he came to his senses and left extremely mad in absolute disbelief of Dr. Grossman's stupidity. In his mind he couldn't help but thinking, "and this is the genius? My ex wife could have given me better advice!! This has definitely been a waste of my life." After all the strife he had to overcome, Mr. Tai felt so disappointed, his depression drowned him in absolute disillusionment. So he started dedicating his time to gardening his backyard in Mongolia. A year later, as he was gardening, he began pondering the time he had entered the "Maracatunga Cara" and the advice Dr. Grossman had given him. His anger rose to such a level that he had a heart attack. As he lay on the grass, he began to think about how short his life was and the

fact that "we all come from dust and in dust we'll become." As he began to feel better, he contemplated how close he was to death and how short life is. So he decided to rewrite one of his books with the sense of imagination that Dr. Grossman had recommended to him. As soon as the book was finished, he sent it to a publishing house and as it turns out, the book was published a month later. Within three weeks, it had broken the records and was standing at number one nationwide. No other author had sold so many copies in the entire history of Mongolia. He started doing the same thing with his other books and became a very rich man. The people loved his writing and the information Mr. Tai's books contained, but the masses were becoming extremely smart. For the government, this meant bad news and so they warned Mr. Tai to stop publishing any other books. All publishing houses had specific instructions from the government not to collaborate with Mr. Tai in any way or else they would be closed down. However, Mr. Tai decided to publish another book with his own money and with the help of a publishing company in Italy. After the book came out, it sold more copies than any of his previous books. In October 1986, he was given the "Kandinsky Prize", a prize given every thirty years to the man or woman that makes a vast positive impact on the society of Mongolia. After the ceremony was over, Mr. Tai took a seat in his limousine. As the driver turned to ask the famous author for his desired destination, he pulled out a gun and killed Mr. Tai. Shockingly, Mr. Tai had a smile from ear to ear even after his death. People tend to say that it was because he was a man filled with love and one of God's favorite disciples. However, what really went through his mind in those last seconds of his life was the peace of mind and the satisfaction he had of knowing that his dreams were realized thanks to all the sacrifices he had made. Above all, he had left a piece of him in every citizen of Mongolia, just as Dr. Grossman left a piece of him in Mr. Tai and many others.

From My Journal

Gina Manring

Silence to me lives in a place where no one has ever been,
the only way for us to see it is through an illustration,
silence is a classroom with empty desks. Silence is
perfection. Silence is when you see something so beautiful
you cannot speak because words would only detract from
the moment. If I could tell silence one thing I would say,
"Come back tomorrow." Silence helps to tap into my
creativity because it lets my mind be at peace and it lets me
focus without distraction.

How the words from a fool's tongue
Can make no Woman weep
Yet one wise word from a stranger
Could make the devil cry in his sleep

When lacking inspiration,
one should check her pulse,
and begin to write.

Visitation

Cyra S. Dumitru

It is good every now and then to stand outside your life,
slip out of your skin for an hour or year. Some people
sprinkle their skin with baby powder before
folding and placing it neatly on the couch,
others leave it slouched like a well-worn jacket.

But the important thing is to step anew into dust,
let it settle and thicken around your bones
fitting you unfamiliar, then let it lead
deep through the woods to a clearing where
giant moths whirl like words around a campfire.

You have come to the Outskirts of Language.
That is the only name I can give you.
You will come to another way of knowing
if you empty into this place —
breathe the flaming air, dance with the whirling

until you are so weary that stillness takes root,
and you hear past your heartbeat to the aquifer foaming
underground, the flow between layers of limestone.
That's when revelation might glide on great horned wings
into the center of fire and seize a small hot stone.

If you are feeling brave
you could open your mouth,
discover how gently this owl
can place a stone upon an outstretched tongue.

How delicious
the words
that lie
on the other side
of burning.

Nolte

Jeremy Koontz

This was a strange place I wandered into. The front of it appeared to be someone's living room, a small corner of which was converted into a barbershop. There were two pale blue couches, placed end to end and perpendicular to one another, both with the occasional explosion of cotton partly restrained by a strip of duct tape. The area behind the couches was filled with random items unified by no particular theme or logic; there was an old white word processor with only about seven keys; this derelict instrument rested upon a short black file cabinet that had been severely banged inward on one side such that I suppose it was no longer fit for filing; leaning in a corner filled with several broken old mop and broomsticks was a large wooden sign that read "Leroy's" in faded and chipped red paint; a set of blue and green pom-poms were piled in one corner, in and out of which some vermin was playing; there was a rusted bicycle without chain hanging by a bent, tireless rim from a rusted meat hook that may have had a bit of meat still on it; there was even a manikin, armless and wearing only an old, faded black White Sox jersey, lying in front of a door marked *caballeros* in cracked and faded green paint; this is only a minute sample of that great variety of items, that residue of time's dismantling effect on objects and events.

The small corner of this strange place that had been converted into a barbershop was behind the inward swinging door, almost hidden. There was a single chair, in which sat a man of no less than 30 years, no more than 45, covered from neck to ankles with a large gray smock. Over him stood the barber, slightly older with a friendly round face and spectacles that sat near the end of his nose, shuffling around his customer. Behind the two, there was a small begrimed mirror over a porcelain sink and counter;

the faucet had a peculiar pattern of dripping, first slowly, about a drip every five seconds, then up to about two drips a second, then slowly again.

"Alright, how ya doin' there young man?" The barber asked, snipping away with a pair of scissors.

"Alright." I answered, noting for the first time the black and white television beside the sink that displayed one of those late morning talk shows celebrated for their base content. A title at the bottom of the screen read Shocking Love Affairs. Two young girls in tight, revealing clothing grappled with one another on the stage, pulled apart by two men in black only to rush at one another again.

"...Stay away from him! Stay away! You don't know who you (beep) wit...(beep)..."

"You need a haircut?" I watched the scuffle for a moment, which forced a smile from me, before I responded.

"Yes, sir."

"Alright; it'll be a coupla minutes..." And he continued snipping with his back turned to me. I felt a little more comfortable now in this strange place, though wondering what else he might think I, a complete stranger, had come for. I nodded my head in response, still watching the absurdities on the television, even though he couldn't see me.

"Man, ya know what..." started the man in the chair as the barber put down the scissors and started a loud pair of clippers, "Ya know nowadays people don't understand that when ya do somethin' to somebody else its gonna come back to ya. Ya know what I'm sayin'? No matta whatcha do, man, good or bad, it'll come back to ya." He was watching the talk show as well.

"...I seened it all; ya'll didn't know I was lookin' but I seened it..."

"Yep, yep." The round-faced barber returned over the sound of the clippers.

"Ya hear what I'm sayin' though? No matta whatcha do, it's gonna come back to ya. Man, you could hurt somebody today and not see 'em for over fifty years; then, one day, you'll see em' and they'll turn around and throw a brick atcha."

"Yep, yep. You know my wife and I were drivin' around and the car broke down on the otha side of the

freeway the otha day and this Chinese dude I gave a ride to one day drove by and helped us out. Man, you know I haven't seen that dude in 'bout seven years..."

"...That nigg(beep) ain't worth it no-way! You can have 'im...(beep)..."

"See, that's what I'm talkin' bout. How old's that girl, 'bout fifteen...?"

"You know," the barber began, turning off the clippers and placing them on the counter, "there's this homeless dude who comes in here every once in a while wantin' to watch TV. I let'im stay, but ya know I don't expect nothin' from 'im..." At that moment, another man walked in, a skinny brotha with a head of thick, rough hair and a thick mustache.

"Ey, what's goin' on, man..." He sat down on the opposite end of the couch in which I was sunk.

"Ey, what's happenin'." The barber returned. "Where ya been?"

"...Okay, let's bring out the boyfriend, Tom!"

"Aw man," The skinny brotha answered, "you know how I do it; has Whiskey come 'round here?"

"Man," the barber began, "I don't know 'bout that dude. I cain't keep company wit folks who try to stab me. I told him not to come 'round here actin' crazy; if he mess around and pull a knife on me again I might have to shoot 'im..." The two laughed as the skinny brotha added,

"Man, that's messed up when a nigga wanna stab somebody cause they won't give em' a pack of cigarettes; I woulda shot 'im the first time..." A heavy set white guy of no less than forty years was now on the stage between the two young black girls; one of them had her arm around him yelling obscenities at the audience.

"...Booo, booo, boooo! Booo all you wont to...! (beep)..."

It was at that moment that the door swung open, and a pair of faded blue slacks swept between the television and me.

"Hey, watcha up to Nolte?"

"Alright, alright, nothin' much, man." Responded the new presence, sitting in the other couch. I looked over and saw Nolte for the first time, but could only manage a glimpse, as we made eye contact almost immediately; the

tall, gangling, grave faced brotha sat deep in the couch, deeper than myself, almost consumed by it, anxiously opening a McDonalds bag; he wore a loose, faded blue shirt with a pen in the front pocket, occasionally patting the pocket seemingly to make sure that the pen was still there; his wool-like mat of short, black and gray hair began at the very top of his head, giving him a massive, almost dignified forehead that wrinkled only slightly when he glimpsed me glimpsing him. The brief exchange startled me, as I saw myself in those large, mirror-like eyes. He was a poor man, no doubt, definitely pushing fifty years, and I immediately recognized him as the "homeless dude" of whom the barber spoke. He rushed in opening the small package he produced from the bag, humming as he did so as though he hadn't eaten in months.

"Watcha got there Nolte?" The barber asked.

"Awe, man, I got, I got triple cheese..." He bit into the hamburger, humming the entire time. "Ummm, hmmm...yeah...a dolla ninety-nine..."

"...I didn't know it was her sister, but I did know how young she was..."

"The girl is 15 years old. That big white dude oughta know betta..." The man in the barber seat commented.

Out of the corner of my eye I could see Nolte devouring the burger, every so often patting that front pocket with the pen, humming the entire time and tapping his foot. He was watching the talk show as well, but was not nearly as involved as the rest of us; the barber had said that he came to watch TV, but that didn't necessarily mean that he came to participate in the shows he watched like the rest of us; no, he seemed only a marginal observer of that semi-reality in which the rest of us voluntarily indulged, watching through a different eye, hardly indulged in anything other than the hamburger he devoured. It didn't take more than two minutes for him to finish his meal, wiping his hands on his faded blue slacks and humming the entire time, patting that pocket.

"Come on, now, you can trust me..."

"Say, man," Nolte began, "You know a fella named Rick, live up a few blocks there? Said he had a place for five dollas..."

"Stay up here a coupla blocks?" The barber answered. "Rick? Naw." Again, he activated those loud clippers.

"Yeah, man, five dollas; I was talkin' to 'im the otha day; I need to run back over there and holla at 'im...Five dollas, yeah..." Nolte tilted his head and began observing the wall next to him, a wall which I realized for the first time was covered with pictures, newspaper clippings, and such; there were photographs of young men and women, some individuals, some in groups, some smiling, some frowning, some laughing; there were faded articles with faded black and white pictures of football and basketball teams, a few of a young girl with braids rounding a track, and one or two of a young basketball player wearing those really short shorts that were the style of decades past; mixed with these were clippings from obituaries, as well as several pictures of babies, some apparently decades old. There were photographs of families, some large, some small, beaming black faces huddled together in backyards, living rooms, parking lots, one even in barbershop. There was a small black and white photograph of a cemetery, quite faded and partly hidden behind one of the photographs of the running girl with the braids, its edges torn, held to the wall with a red thumbtack thrust directly through the center of it. Nolte mumbled something under his breath as he looked over these, apparently enthralled.

"...You crazy fool! I spent that money as soon as you gave it to me...!"

"Watcha say there, man?" The barber asked him.

"Huh?"

"Talkin' to ya'self?"

"Naw, man; I was just lookin' at the pictures..."

"Alright, then; now if you get to talkin' to ya'self ya might have to leave..." The two laughed, the barber more than Nolte who patted his pocket and resumed his humming.

"Awww, man, alright..."

"...The money doesn't matter; do you love her...?"

The talk show went on, without a single commercial since I walked in and sank into the couch. The clippers buzzed louder and louder, then softer, then louder again. The faucet dripped in its peculiar pattern; I could have set

my watch by it. The skinny brotha who walked in after me chuckled as the two young girls on the TV lunged at one another again. Outside the window next to me, cars rolled by in the street, some slowly, some in a flash, each glinting a reflection of the high afternoon sun as it passed. I stared past the TV at the word processor, wondering what words it had processed, as the clippers were turned off again, amplifying the sound of Nolte's humming. The man in the chair took a small mirror the barber handed him and surveyed one side of his head, stating,

"Yeah, that's it; just like that..."

"...Both of ya'll (beep) are crazy; you know you both liked it!"

A thought found its way into my mind as I sat amid all this...strangeness. The humming ceased and the thought passed; Nolte leaned toward a small picture on the wall of a young man proudly standing beside a new car, then turned to address whoever would listen.

"Man, you know that car reminds me of somethin' that happened to me the otha day..."

"Yeah, what's that?" The barber began snipping with the scissors again as the talk show went to a commercial.

"...Moments of revelation are often preceded by increased awareness..."

I could feel that I was the only one who was giving full attention to this impoverished, grave old man; from the corner of my eye I could see his large white eyes looking up at his inattentive audience then further up at the ceiling, determined to speak regardless of if anyone paid attention.

New Crusade

Richard Catron

Mars, you tireless sonofabitch,
you trudge with the tenacity
of summer's heat, sticky and oppressive,
wielding your damnable arms
not yet blemished with rust.
Your dogs are still loose.
How long has it been
since they've felt the iron resolve of the chain?
As those mongrels run free,
minds are siphoned from cool reason
into a vat of bloodlust.

Monument

H. Palmer Hall

“And will it be yet another tiresome monument” she asks. “One with all the names of all the dead?” and later, Must this go on and on, names carved in black polished stone: they lived, they died,

like all of us who live and die.” At that other wall we call The Wall, the dead of one war’s life reside, name by name like crosses and stars at Arlington and three tombs dedicated to three soldiers. But here

the names are known though they merely went to work, shuffled papers, failed to die “in the service of . . .” Not heroes, victims, of something they cannot, could not, comprehend. Weeks of obituaries in the Times,

each person immortalized, faults painted out, all-American men and women: none had affairs, none cheated on taxes, none. . . “And will the others be named, the ones who will fight?” she asks.

“Iraqi men and women, children playing in the streets?” American men and women, British, all those who will go to war and die or returned maimed, symbols of some adventure, the first new war

of a new millennium. “Can you hear them? They speak in whispers; they are the winds sweeping through canyons made by tall buildings. They lament the loss of all, blown dust along sidewalks, leaves blowing.”

A Moment for Vernon and Other People Who Make a Difference

H. Palmer Hall

I have always found it difficult to talk about that moment, but as a teenager I lost something very important to me. No, not one of my parents, not my brother or sister, something, though, that I was a part of. It all happened forty years ago and I still have problems when I drive through that stretch of woods off IH 69, not too far from where James Byrd Jr. would be murdered many years later. Let me tell you about it this way. When I was growing up I was both fortunate enough and unfortunate enough to live in the Big Thicket of Southeast Texas...

Vernon Dugard had returned from Mississippi and Alabama. He had grown up, grown quickly after riding on Freedom Buses through those states. Three of his friends had been brutally murdered, but this is not about them. Vernon was teaching at Silsbee High School, a school that many of his relatives and ancestors had attended: his parents and his parents' parents, though their schoolhouse had been smaller, much smaller. I would teach at that same school a few years later.

I had not met my cousin Vernon until that fall. I had spent much of that summer hiking in the Big Thicket. I had aimed at but not shot three whitetail deer, had caught fish to eat and found artesian springs to drink from. I had learned to live on my own in the woods for one week as a part of the Order of the Arrow initiation. I had, at seventeen years old, lived apart from the world and in a part of the world that would permit me to forget or ignore all of the problems Vernon had been fighting.

Vernon brought me up to date. The two of us spent weeks talking about his days in Mississippi, hot, threatening, and then the disappearance of his friends. "We thought they'd been burned up in the car," Vernon had said. "But there were no bodies there." I listened to my cousin. When he walked back to his tent close to the creek, I thought about what he had said. I thought about

a society that would murder young men and women Vernon's age because they were working for other people's rights to vote and be treated like everyone else.

You see, we took a lot for granted even while not consciously thinking about what was happening in our society. We went into restaurants and were served by people who could not eat at the same tables they served our food on. We went to movies and sat on the main floor while they sat in the balconies. We saw ourselves on the screen; they saw us, too. They went to, were bused to, separate and unequal schools. We were the city councilmen, mayors, policemen; they did not often get to cast their votes. Vernon and I talked about a lot of things that summer when I was graduating from high school and getting ready to go to college.

I did my undergraduate work at Lamar State College of Technology, later renamed Lamar University. Lamar was an early experiment in integration of state universities in Texas and it worked reasonably well. Oh, many of the white students bitched a lot and white and black students re-segregated themselves at various tables in the cafeteria, but, basically, things went fairly well: no major demonstrations, no riots. Some of the home-grown faculty members were worse problems than any of the students. D. L. Hybarger, who had been principal of my segregated high school taught on the education faculty and I dropped his "methods" course because of his treatment of a young black woman in the class. She was stunningly beautiful and, on the first day of class, Hybarger asked her why she hadn't been caught by some "strong young black buck." My consciousness had not yet been raised very far but I was so offended by his question that I stood up immediately and went to the registrar's office to drop the course and add a different one.

I was a speech and drama major and there were a few black students in the field. None on the stage as performers until my second year in the school. We always had cast parties at the same place: The Golden Arrow, owned and managed by Red Shelton, a rather florid and demonstrative man who always welcomed us with open arms. The Arrow had some of the best chicken fried steak in the State of Texas and I had a running tab there. That

first night we arrived with one of the black women from a play, it was *The Diary of Anne Frank*, Red told us we were no longer welcome unless she left.

At moments like that I thought about Vernon and the experiences he had gone through in Mississippi during the freedom rides. You see, I was not terribly enlightened. I just had not thought much about the whole black/white issue in my corner of the South. In retrospect, I would say that I was very dense, perhaps even willfully not looking at what was there, at what was so easy to see if anyone simply looked. Vernon was slowly opening my eyes, encouraging me to focus them.

In my last year as an undergraduate, I participated in a sit-in at Morgan & Lindsay's in Beaumont, Texas. That was early in 1964. The public schools were not yet integrated, black people could not sit at the fountain in Morgan & Lindsay's and get a Coke, only whites sat at the front of the bus, there were still "White" and "Colored" water fountains at the Greyhound Bus Station. Jesus Christ! That was a great day in my life. We sat peacefully at the fountain until the police came and pulled us out of the store. That doesn't sound like much. We were not beaten, not tear gassed, not locked up in the city jail, just taken by the arms and led out of the store to accompanying newspaper photographs and stories. My picture isn't there and I'm not mentioned in the story. I was pretty much on the periphery of the whole "movement," but it all remains so important, something that we should not, cannot fail to remember.

I guess I'm writing all this because Vernon died 25 years ago this spring and I am thinking about him today. He was still teaching at that high school up in the thicket, still doing good work, still an advocate for all the things he believed in. He had stopped to change a flat on the shoulder of Highway 69, the road that leads from Beaumont out to Jasper, the town where James Byrd, Jr., was murdered a very few years ago, when a car swerved off the road and killed him. Hit and run. The police never found the driver or the car.

No, it wasn't deliberate murder. I'm pretty sure of that. Just one of those horrible incidents that remind us of how fragile we can be.

Lady of the Night
"one night cheap hotels"
—T.S. Eliot

January Carrillo

Torn black net tights,
Red Cadillac lipstick,
White scratched high-heeled boots,
Half deserted streets in the soft October night
I can feel the sin in the air
As I search for my prey in desperation.

An old man with a bald spot in the middle of his hair
Still wearing his morning coat
His collar mounting firmly to his chin
Necktie rich and modest but asserted by a simple pin.
At home his lovely wife dressed in silk pajamas
With arms that are braceleted and white and bare
Waiting, Waiting, Waiting.

The room is dark and cold
Red curtains cast a devilish shadow upon the room
The demons come alive, dancing on the walls.
The yellow fog rubs its back upon the windowpanes
No! No! Not this nightmare again
Feeling covered by the soot that falls from chimneys
Dark smudges spread around my eyes and into my soul
My sense of touch has vanished
I am a patient etherized upon a table
Being worked upon by a stranger.

What happened to toast and tea?
I now measure my life with coffee spoons
To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?
To turn back and start a new
I yearn for the music from a farther room.

Curled once again about the dark back alley
Counting my Washingtons.

Chapel Magistrate

Matthew Landers

The warm afternoon sun slipped through the jagged cracks of the red brick building and pressed itself upon the tall, thin windows with a heaving breath. Black curves dissipated in their carving paths around the jumbled pieces of rainbow colored glass as shafts of golden light filled the portraits. A softening glow descended over the high-backed pews, constructed of dark cherry oak, and settled into the carpet with a delicate touch.

Father Hugh Cross paused before the wooden doors of the chapel as his deep eyes narrowed on the form sitting quietly in the first pew. The form seemed familiar, a young man, student, he knew through memories of an earlier encounter on campus. With silent steps, he passed along the narrow side, opposite the main aisle, and occupied a space next to the young man.

The priest stared at the altar before taking a breath.

"Sometimes the church is regarded as a place of sanctuary."

The young man did not look at the priest, "I came here to be alone." His words resounded of mere fact, not irritation.

Father Hugh inclined his head and whispered, "You came to the wrong place then." The young man's eyes shifted to the crucifix hanging from the ceiling over the altar.

An air conditioning machine's slight hum invaded the silence between them.

"I used to come here all the time when I was an undergraduate." Father Hugh paused. "That was a long time ago, of course." His eyes wandered the interior after a trickle of a chuckle escaped him, "but I never came here to be alone."

The young man's eyes centered on his own clasped hands, "why did you come here?"

"As an undergraduate? Well, I didn't have worry about professors here...or homework...or girls." Father Hugh's direction turned to the wall. "Sometimes I would just stare at the stained glass." A mop of sandy blond hair dangled at his ears and did not forgive the rounded cheeks or dimpled chin.

The air conditioning machine continued to pulse and hum.

A sacramental candle flickered in its red casing.

"How do you know when God has responded to your prayers?" the young man inquired with raised eyebrows in the direction of the priest.

The reason leaped toward the priest's mind.

Behind the solid brown eyes, a deep wisdom, as if years of academic study meshed with the multiple experiences delivered in four decades of his life, emerged and penetrated the void that could not last. A previous assignment in Memphis never prepared him for the needs of students at the university. Once ambition had left his mind, simple living ingrained a synonymous tone with the priesthood and he found himself proud of the work within the school.

He folded his arms and breathed in the confirmation of his suspicion.

The priest thought for a moment, "that is a difficult question to answer." His eyes stared at the altar. "God can respond in many ways. A Protestant minister once said God's response takes one of three forms. No, maybe, and go. One thing I do know is, God always hears you, what's in your heart."

"I've definitely learned that over the years but..." the young man jerked his hands on the wood paneling of the pew in front of him. "What-, how, how do you know if something is his response though?"

"If you are looking for a sign, they are all around us. It depends on what is in your prayer." The priest paused. "Have you ever just listened to God?"

The young man inclined his head, "I don't know if it is him talking." He heard a click from behind him, possibly the door.

"What are you asking of him?"

The young man sighed, passed a hand along the side of his head feeling the short hair whisper against his skin, and glanced at a statue of Jesus Christ in an alcove just behind the altar on the right side. Patience seemed to emanate from the sandstone.

"This is about a girl."

Father Hugh nodded slightly.

The statue of Christ stood motionless with an extended hand, open palm, on sandaled feet bearing the intricate sculpture of smooth rivulets in an ever-shifting emergence of life before his eyes.

"How do you feel about this girl?" the priest finally inquired.

The young man seemed energetic in his pronouncement, "she's everything to me. She's the greatest. I've never met anyone like her before. I feel like," two emeralds flashed before his lost eyes but dark spots filled the center in the midst of dominant green as darkened waves like maple leaves lengthened around it, "I feel like this is it."

"But you can't be sure."

"Yes." The young man lowered his head and then raised it to the altar.

Father Hugh glanced at him, "does she know this? Have you told her?"

"What all I said? No." The low tone of his voice broke the air. "I can't."

The silent candles around the altar remained stoic without the dancing fire of a burning wick.

"What do you think would happen if you did tell her?"

"Nothing. Nothing would happen."

With a deepening countenance, Father Hugh narrowed his small eyes. Their brief interactions over the previous months of the semester joined the scrambled pieces of a complete character and, now, disguising selfless hopes did not clutter his search for the truth. His mind's perception had sharpened in the years after his ordination.

"Why do you say that?" he probed.

The young man's tone wavered, "I do not know. She would probably be afraid of me then, not talk to me anymore. Nothing I want would happen."

Father Hugh's eyes fixed on the tabernacle. Brilliant gold plating beset every side of the holy box-like container, where the seemingly broad doors beckoned like grand, pearly gates. In the pew or even his small office, his words bore the same weight along the heavy, sacred air.

"A student of mine, when I was assigned in Spain, wanted to be a priest. But he did not know which religious order to join. He could not decide among the orders. For instance, the Jesuits or Marianists." Father Hugh paused briefly. "After a few days, he came to me and asked about choosing an order. I told him to choose whatever he felt was right." The young man glanced at him as he continued, "he chose the Marianists."

"Everything seems so right yet I just don't know what to do." The young man covered his face with his tired hands but removed them promptly with a sigh.

Uncrossing his arms, the priest said, "That student of mine studied and talked about it for days."

"So I must take action? I should do something."

"Not necessarily. But if you do something, what that is I cannot say. Only you can decide that."

The young man settled against the hard wood back of the pew, "it depends on if the situation is right."

The priest rose to his feet as his face renewed attention from the young man. "The right situation will be defined by what you believe." Silent steps along the carpet marked the holy man's departure from the other individual and down the narrow side.

"By what I believe..." the young man sat there.

No sound came from the steps on the carpet.

"Father."

The young man called out as he stepped out of the pew into the main aisle.

The priest stopped at the door and turned to face the student.

“How will I know?”

Father Hugh held the gaze of the young man, “when the time comes,” he nodded, “you will know.”

He opened the door and walked out of the chapel.

Homecoming

Tony Breyden

Majestic figure in white light.
Body bruised, torn.
Head down, spirit worn.
Arms up, nailed, hurt, no blood flowing.
Yet your soul keeps glowing.
Dead on the cross.
But is the spirit worn?
Perhaps for the first two days.
But you rose on the third,
And your spirit blanketed the earth,
As if in one big wave.
"Faith instilled,
Your work there is done.
It's time to come home now,
My precious son."



No Name Woman—My Reflection

Humera Muzaffar

Born an unwanted child, I added just another girl to the family. They all were expecting a son, but my mother had disappointed them again. I was the second disappointment after my elder sister's birth two years before. My father wanted a son who would carry on the family name to the next generation, and my grandmother wanted a grandson who would inherit the family wealth. As my mother cried at my birth, she did not know that she was cursed, as she was to produce two more daughters after me and no son at all. In the essay, "No Name Woman," Maxine Hong Kingston has written of the same experience: "To be a woman, to have a daughter in starvation time is a waste enough."

We are a family of six, my parents, my three sisters and me; and, when it comes to extended family, we become a whole lot of around fifty people. Fifty people who keep a good watch on everybody else in the family. My father was brought up in Pakistan and he is a typical Pakistani man, with the traditions and customs instilled in him. But the difference between the rest of the males in the family and him is that education in a foreign country gave him liberal ideas. Sometimes he puts aside the norms of the society that handcuff us and makes his own decisions.

With all the restrictions that my culture puts on me, my childhood ended before I even knew it existed. When I was five years old, my contact with male children of my age was purposely stopped. I was made to sit at home and learn household chores since a girl ought to be well-bred and should know everything about cooking, sewing, dusting, etc. After all, some day I will be married off to a complete stranger. I am supposed to impress him with my dowry, and my other household skills. In Pakistan, the first thing a girl is told is that a way to a man's heart is through his stomach. Family traditions and cultural norms were forced to be part

of me, as Maxine Kingston says in her book, "The emigrants confused their gods by diverting their curses, misleading them with crooked streets and false names. They must try to confuse their offspring as well, who, I suppose threatens them in similar ways." I started to fear people and lived in a closed shell, in the world in which dreams gave me hope—for even when incomplete they were my only support!

At my mother's insistence, my father agreed to send us to the best school in Pakistan, although people did object that British education would spoil our morals. We were purposely sent to an all girls' school. More than anything, I knew what my parent's trust meant and I wanted them to be proud of me and happy about their decision to send my sisters and me to a good school despite disapproval from my extended family. The only way I could make my parents proud of me was to get good grades. From class one until my A level from Cambridge University, I was the top student. I won numerous debates and elocution contests and my aim was to make my parents proud of me! Unconsciously I had in mind that I am secondary to all by virtue of my gender. I realized that if I wanted a respectable place in my family, I had to be the best, better than the men in my family.

As long as I was in a girls' school, my family members had no complaints. As soon as I started going to a coeducational school, people started objecting to my interaction with males, although they knew that it was just on an academic level. I remember the maelstrom the first time a male class fellow of mine called at my place. My grandmother called a whole council, which was to decide my future. The only thing I feared was that they might tell me to discontinue my education because I had been disobedient and unchaste. But to my surprise, my father took a stand and I was acquitted of the crime, as they termed it. I was asked to restrict my contact unless unavoidable. And so I followed the rules until I passed out of school.

I have struggled to get the best in life. At the end of a trial, which was fruitless, I have the satisfaction that at least I tried. I believe in Darwin's theory of struggle for survival and I have fought and rebelled. I know that only the fittest survives. When it came to the major decision of my life, I had two options. Either I yield to everything: continue my education in Pakistan and marry a stranger after my

bachelors or I rebel: try my level best to go abroad and earn a PhD. Either way, marrying a complete stranger is still what I will have to do no matter what. So I persuaded my parents that my exam records and my SAT scores said a lot about my capabilities. I had scholarships from many places but my father did not let me apply. He was afraid of his family, if he ever let me go, they would cast him out. Admission acceptance deadlines passed one after another. I continued to convince, until finally there was a crack in the stone! My friend Mona's father talked to my dad. I have no idea what he said but my dad had made up his mind. He told me I was going abroad for my bachelors.

"Don't humiliate us, you wouldn't like to be forgotten as you had never been born. The villagers are watchful." When I was leaving for the U.S., my mother said more or less the same thing, that Ms. Kingston's mother had said to her. My mother told me that I have to remember every lesson that she has taught me unless I want my father to lower his head in front of his family!

In spite of being allowed to educate myself, I still do not have the basic right, the right to choose. Maxine Kingston wrote in her composition,

"Women in Old China do not choose." Similarly, I know that one day I will be married to a complete stranger. Maxine Kingston writes about the marriage of her aunt, "When the family found a young man in the next village to be her husband, she stood tractably beside the best rooster, his proxy, and promised before they met that she would be his forever. She was lucky that he was her age and she would be the first wife, an advantage secure now. The night she first saw him, he had sex with her." And I see the same for myself. It seems that these few lines are a part of me, they completely tell my future. No matter what I am, with a Masters in my field or a PhD, my culture has determined my future.

I may be one of the lucky ones to be outside my tenacious society for a few years, and I am fortunate enough to have a liberal father; but, for the most part, I am a woman who has no name. She is blind, she is dumb but not deaf for she has to listen to commands. That is what she is born for!

I come from a country where mothers-in-law and husbands burn their daughters-in-law and wives for petty

reasons. It is a completely patriarchal country, where being a woman is a crime enough. It is a country where girls are married to men older than their fathers. It is a country where spousal rape is not even recognized let alone punishable. It is a country where a girl who is abducted and brutally raped must provide evidence that she did not have sex willingly with the assaulter or risk being stoned to death. It is a country where women supposedly are respected, yet are slaves to men —who are all merciful and who are all murderers, no matter how liberal or conservative they are. They rule women to satisfy their egos and inflict pain or them with a smile on their faces—their faces showing compassion while hiding the gruesome acts that they perform. The society is brutal and smothers women in the smoke of norms, rules, culture and self.

In Kingston's composition I see my culture, my experiences, my life, my education, my future and myself. The essay depicts me as a person and as an individual but more so, reading this essay gave me a clue as to how I can fight life, male domination and oppression, I know that women in my country are not alone in experiencing the lashes of male brutality. I want to bring about a revolution and prove my mettle. I want women to breathe fresh air again. I want an identity and a voice...I no longer want to be a No Name Woman!

The Declaration of Net-Independence

Isaac M. Esparza

When in the Course of human events it becomes necessary for a people to dissolve the institutional bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Faculty, Staff and Students of St. Mary's University are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness (in regards to complete and total access to the Internet). That to secure these rights, Specialists are instituted by the Faculty, Staff and Students, deriving their just powers from the consent of the users. That whenever any Form of Specialists becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Specialists, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Specialists long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariable the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Specialists, and to provide new Guards for their future security. Such has been the patient

sufferance of the people of St. Mary's University; and such is now the necessity, which constrains them to alter their former team of Specialists. The history of the present management of the technology center is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over this university. To prove this, let Facts be submitted to a candid world.

He—who has been so crafty as to conduct these measures while keeping his identity secrete—has refused to take into full consideration alternatives before implementing new directives (We are assembled to voice our concerns and ideas on how he can serve us better, yet he neglects to reflect fully on what we have said).

He has taken it upon himself to pass new directives without the consent or notification of his superiors (Months ago the Firewall that protects our network was reconfigured, shortly thereafter it was learned that a single specialist of the computer department was the soul responsible for this action, it was also learned at that same moment that he voluntarily did that task without anyone [especially the President of St. Mary's] asking/telling him to do this).

He has sealed off access routes to greater knowledge (As I am an employee of the academic library, many patrons to the library have brought to our attention that they cannot adequately conduct their research. This is because what they search for is not allowed by the extremely sensitive nature of the Firewall).

He has taxed us for the limited knowledge he has granted us access to. (It is no secret that we are now forced to pay for printing per page of our assignments for classes.)

He has not provided the proper method of payment to gain access. (Again, as I am an employee of the library, many patrons have voiced there disgust of having to pay for printing and further the complications they have that their ID cards cannot be read by the printing station and so are forced to purchase a card. However purchasing a card has not been possible for nearly several months now because the machine that dispenses cards has been empty of said cards; and

although we [the library personnel] have made countless requests that the computer center send us cards and yet they have not complied; until after five months of requests that they finally came in with new cards—where upon they informed us the delay was a result of a loss of their own memories from whom they purchased the initial batch of printing cards.)

He has blockaded our ability to pursue happiness. (Granted the top priority at this institution is education, everyone must occasionally take a moment out of studying and have a little fun. Some enjoy practicing this fun in the form of on-line gaming on such sites as games.yahoo.com; but access to this for sometime had not been possible because the Firewall denied access to those sites. However highly graphical and intense multiplayer games, such as first person shooter games, are still unable to gain access to the gaming tables beyond the confines of the university network.)

He has disconnected us from our loved ones. (A common form of communication among several individuals is Instant Messenger; this enables users to communicate with anyone anywhere anytime. This also allows users to share their lives with visual aids or files/documents to those they communicate with. However one of these or even both of these abilities, either communicating and/or sharing files, for some individuals on campus has not been possible because of the level of security the Firewall has kept people from activating their messengers.)

He has left traces that he conducts secretive measures to monitor us. (Occasionally information appears that on one's computer system that was not there before, and this information bears the name StMU@yahoo.com. This individual is unknown to anyone, yet he has been able to learn information about the individual whose computer he's been able to gain access to.)

He has made it extremely difficult for guests to our university to make full use of our facilities because he restricted access to university personnel only. (While although our facilities are mainly for the use of the faculty, staff, and students of the university, we also

extend our services to the rest of our surrounding community and beyond. However, if they wish to use our facilities for the purposes of searching the Internet, they cannot do that because the University's access to the Internet has been only granted to the faculty, staff and students because they possess a St. Mary's University issued username and password. And recently our own personnel were deleted from the network because He felt that all usernames should be uniformed. He therefore deleted all personnel whose usernames ended in @po.stmarytx.edu. He made an extremely small effort to warn us of our deletion prior to this event by sending us an e-mail to this address. Unfortunately, no one received this warning because they find that it is too complicated to set up the account by simple guess-and-check method when he should have included a set of instructions on how to set up the account. The only people who are familiar with how to properly set up and maintain their St. Mary's e-mail accounts are those currently in computer science classes because their professors demand that they use them or are departments who insist on using these accounts. The rest choose to use e-mail services provided by AOL, Hotmail, Yahoo, Earthlink, and/or Road Runner to name a few. He then tell us that he will remedy the matter immediately if we visit him in person, however when we arrive he has us fill out a form and tells us come back in twenty-four hours to pick up a business card with the information, information that could easily take minutes to take care of.)

In every stage of these Oppressions We have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble terms: Our repeated Petitions have been answered only by repeated injury; whereby he asks us to come before him in forums to voice our petitions yet sits there and turns a deaf ear to our voices. A Prince, whose character is thus marked by every act which may be defining a Tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free people.

We therefore the Representatives of St. Mary's University, in General Assembly, appealing to the Supreme Technical Specialist of our intentions, do, in the Name, and by Authority of the good People this university, solemnly publish and declare, That this

university is, and of Right ought to be a free and net-independent institution; that they are Absolved from all restraints and blockades ought to be totally dissolved; and that as a Free and Net-Independent Institution, we have full Power of contacting our friends and family throughout the world, establish Trade, and to do all other Acts and Things which Independent Responsible Individuals may of right do. And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor.

2003

Zarzamora

Frances Trevino

Jump inside my silver ride
for a low and slow glide down Zarzamora
with cars steaming, radios screaming.
Put your ear down to the urban sound
and hear the city's pulse, its beat, its breathing.

At the corner of Culebra you'd never think
a saint sleeps in bliss, hands folded over her heart like this—
Twelve year old Saint Teresa Little Flower of Avila
sleeps behind caged candles and glass where families
of four and five and six step up to Sunday mass.

Stucco shops of brooms and mops
imports and exports of Christ on the cross
little stores with shiny mopped concrete floors
and dusty shelves selling cast iron skillets
cast iron pots, cast iron bars on the homes off Zarzamora
cast iron cages holding in air conditioners
while lacy curtains blow in living rooms.

Auto zone, auto parts, automatic engines
roaring passed stands of oranges and lemons.
Dollar stores, dollar daze going through this maze
of beauty shops and cantinas going through this mess
of streets so familiar: Ruiz, Monterrey, Santa Monica,
El Paso, Commerce, Martin, Culebra, Durango.

At night high beams will be beaming
people will be dreaming scheming
one can get lost in this big small town
so put your ear down to the urban sound
and hear the city's pulse, its beat, its breathing.

Pass by the houses of pink and teal trim,
pass by the houses that won't let you in
pass the houses with signs on windows and doors:
Este hogar es catolico no aceptamos propaganda
Protestante ni de otras sectas. ¡Viva Christo Rey!
¡Viva la Virgen de Guadalupe Madre de Dios!

But then of course further down South
going towards Military: Taft, Barrett,
Thompson Place, Carol, Cavalier, Hearne,
Linares, the tiny shops in all their glory,
small spaces become more celebratory,
more bridal and birthday, hoop dresses
and silk flowers with satin and lace
the leaning over mannequin with the freaked out face.

Mothers and daughters going to celebrate
fifteen years of living a life that's been sweet
in a little wooden house off Zarzamora street.
People stepping up and stepping down
daughters and sons staying and leaving.
Put your ear down to the urban sound
and hear the city's pulse, its beat, its breathing.

Zarzamora street where blackberries once grew.
Who knew the street would grow that long
Who knew poets and cantoras would still be singing songs
Zarzamora still lounging around,
Santiago's accordion can still be found
behind the smoke and laughter at Lerma's.

On any given Wednesday hear gritos from Janie's Bar
bible study prayer from Zarzamora Iglesia Bautista.
It isn't too far from down this dusty street
Mexican Baptists singing Christian songs
against honking horns singing Christian songs

As people with 40s walk by church doors and church floors
Mexican Baptists meditating concentrating
hands raised while they are praying.
Put your ear down to the urban sound
and hear the city's pulse, its beat, its breathing.

Zarzamora a dusty and rusty barrio street
I say, we make a date and meet
in the patio at Karam's or the benches at Luna's.
I say we take in the summer and the
hot humid air like it were the holy spirit itself.

Joining us as we rest our feet in the afternoon,
in the early evening at a place no matter where you are
is only minutes from your home, a place we all know for
the good,
for the bad, for what it is and the way it should and
shouldn't be.
Come with me and just maybe we'll find some
wild blackberries down the street on Zarzamora.

The Art of Floor Sweeping

Shoshana Gray

Jake carefully folded the morning newspaper, neatly feeding the sections back into each other, recreating its original compact state for the next reader. His little sister, Janar, was home from college. She was attempting to sweep the kitchen floor. Her approach was pathetic; zigzagging all over the place. Probably, no one had ever shown her the efficient and effective sweeping techniques his drill sergeant had shown him in basic. If she was going to do the job, she should know how to do it right.

“Janar! Hand me that broom.”

Startled out of her reverie, her face blank with the sudden assault, Janar handed Jake the broom upon command before she fully processed what was about to happen. Trying to recover from the abrupt invasion of her private thoughts, she noticed that Jake was still talking. She knew that he would be upset if she couldn't repeat back to him what he had said. He would often ask her to do that to see if she was listening. She stood very still, focused on his lips moving, and struggled to tune in to his voice.

“Once you have swept the baseboard crevices, using the broom on an angle, you go back over the that area and sweep about two inches out to collect the dirt you have pulled out from the crevice. See there! That dog hair—it's just about two inches from the baseboard now.” His eyes jumped from the dog hair, making fierce contact with hers, as he blurted: “Janar, did you hear me? What did I say?” She repeated his last sentence back to him: “The dog hair is two inches from the baseboard.” He released her eyes; he was satisfied.

She had learned this trick for occasions such as these. Most of the time it worked and Jake believed she had absorbed what he said simply because she could

repeat it. Repeating his words was easy for her and got her through these confrontations with minimal conflict while most of her mind remained internally focused.

Jake was still instructing, "You have to be alert when you're doing this job; you have to remember where you have swept. You go in a straight pattern, moving all the dirt into one pile, like this. You have to have a system."

She and Jake were like night and day—but even night and day come together briefly at sunrise and twilight. Perhaps this was one of those magical times when Jake might really see and hear her. Janar risked it: "Why?"

"Why, what?"

"Why do you have to have a system?"

"So you can accomplish the job efficiently!"

He bent forward, sticking his face into her personal space. His incredulous tone implied that everybody knows that and she was somehow behind in her understanding. He continued his lesson, sounding a bit more impatient than he had when he started, "There's a system to everything, an effective way to accomplish any job with the least amount of energy. The goal is to discover this method and use it."

"What if doing the job efficiently takes away the joy of doing it?"

"You are sweeping the floor! It's a job that has to be done; the idea is to do it quickly and effectively. Once it is successfully accomplished, you can move on to other things."

"That's exactly it; since I have to do it, I'd rather *enjoy* doing it!"

"Your method was not effective. I was watching."

"It was effective in providing me enjoyment and sweeping up the dirt just fine. I liked what I was doing. If my broom had had paint on it, I would have the most beautiful abstract painting right now. I could kind of see it as..."

"The goal is to get the dirt swept up. Then you can go paint. That's what I was trying to tell you before. Now, once you've collected the dirt from the baseboard

crevices, you move to a grid pattern for the rest of the floor.”

Janar gazed down, recreating the abstract as she left it, a dazzling, red lightening bolt, cutting across the kitchen floor. Jake’s angular swish across the baseboard was a dark gray-blue, the sky preparing to release. The dirt and dog hair he had swept looked like an elm leaf. She could see how the crusty masterpiece had coasted on the gentle currents down to its destiny, to its home on the forest floor. She smiled inside herself. This was the calm before the storm. All life settling into place, creating the semblance of order. The sense of peace moments before Nature’s revolt.

Escúchame Niña Piqueña

Trisha Serenil

¡Escucha todos los días!; make the bed; make sure the sheets are tucked under; cook breakfast, lunch and dinner: tortillas, carne, rice and beans.; make enough para tu familia grande; limpiar la cocina and don't forget to wipe la mesa; don't smack your gum; be good to your abuelita; work hard; do your best in everything you do; don't give up; if you need to, take a time out; read the Bible; pray el rosario; be strong and brave; don't forget where you came from: Mexican/Native American ancestry; remember luchas are for boys; wear your best dress to church los domingos; listen and do things now!; you will understand later; go to school; study, study, study; do good; hacer trenzas in tu pelo; if you burn yourself put mud on it; don't forget to buy plantas de sábila; save your money for un día especial; stay away from chisme; make chili picoso, that's how tu papa le gusta; take care of the little ones; "aye, escúchame por favor"; learn now so you can be a good wife later; don't eat too many chicharrones, it's not good; En todo el mundo follow tu corazón; marry for love, not for money; escuchas, you hear; don't steal, work to get what you want; life is tough, but that's why there's faith; Gracias a Dios por dirigirnos; do what you're told and all will be okay; ¿porque mamá, porque?; ¿Niña Pequeña que hago contigo?; tengo una niña que no escucha *ninguna* palabra que digo; I tell you all this and for what?; ¡No Entiendes!

Love Machine

Gabriel Valdez

If I was a jerk things would be different.
Things would be better.
You would love me
and be my property
all mine.

If I beat you
it's your fault, you deserved it,
this hurts me more than it hurts you,
I'm only doing this because I love you.

Here put this on your eye and ya callate.
I cheat on you time and time again
coming home not with flowers
but battle scars and her scent on my skin.
I kiss you with her lingering embrace
you say nothing and lie next to me, trapped in my arms
and fall asleep.
You say nothing because you are happy that I came
home safely.

I dare you to serve me cold tortillas
or eat before the kids are served.
Get your damn kids out of the way,
the game is on.
Shut up already and bring me my beer.
You ugly, lazy, fat, worthless pig
I call you these names to help you.
I don't need help,
I'm the love machine.

But I don't do these things.
I show you unconditional love
and you loathe it.
You despise me. I'm too nice.
I'm too stable. I'm too organized. I'm sweet,
I'm boring. I'm just a friend.
If I was a jerk things would be different.

Raped

Jaqulyn Speed

Do you see her
as I see her?

No- you only see the jagged
rigidity of a heart.

A heart that has been
torn apart—now cautious.

I see what is under
where no one else is allowed.

Layers of a girl chipped away
a precious moment never to return.

Inside she is no longer white
but scorched with red.

Outside has turned gray
protection for her vulnerable heart.

Can you see her now?
See why her battle wounds show?

The wounds go deeper now
because still no one can hear her.

I hear her, hear
the cries,

she does not want
me to hear.

You still can't hear her
for no one knows as we know.

No one can know. No one can
feel her pain as we do.

She tries to make you understand
tries to show you how to see us.

Still we get only one thing
in return, more pain.

The Forbidden Dance

David Gomez

"I'm fine, I'm FINE, I said!"
*"Will you just leave me alone, Dammit, I know
what I'm doing!"*

My body's programmed by computer chips

It all began with few sips and now two trips
an afternoon will
have-to do

The Yellow-Brick
Road
is Dancing,
Slanting
in Forbidden-
Angles

It's the Forbidden Dance,
Lambada,
Lambada,
Lambada!

Body's *Per-*
spir-
ating, Souls R

EN-
tan-
gled

"No sabes nada, babosos! Estoy bien!"

But
this poison is constantly lurking, VOICES

keep chirping, My tongue is

flirting with the moistness
that she poi-ses, Suicidal Ointment,
Life is filled with Do-or-Die Choices

*"I keep begging him, liver alone!"
"Please just Liver Alone!"*

But he Can-not manage to let go of her,
As he *fastens* his hands
around her waist

My- Blur ry
 Vision is-

My
Thoughts
R Merged
IN!

I'm Losing my *GR-*
 IP!
Training wheels R *swerving*
The ambulance keeps playing my song

*"I can stop whenever I want to!"
I don't need to, I just like to....."*

...DANCE! *"Can't you hear, they're playing
my song
and I just can't stop dancing."*

The Courtesan

Amparo S. Morales

another cherry balances on your tongue,
another kiss laid upon your cheek.
i show you the world of happiness
and fill you with the emotion of love.

harsh glances scorch my skin
and hushed words fill my ears.
acceptance is unknown to me,
except for those that can pay.

you can't wait to see me again,
i count the minutes in between.
i show you what you thought was dead
and fill you with lost hope.

screams are directed at me
and fists balled in anger greet me.
i am hated among most,
loved among few.

in this world of hate,
there is no happy love.
i give the illusion of love
in a place that has destroyed it.

Some People Can

Claude Stanush

She had three husbands.

Then came unto Him the Sadducees, which say there is no Resurrection; and they asked Him, saying, Master, a certain woman had seven husbands, all of whom died, and last of all the woman died also. In the Resurrection, therefore, when they shall rise, whose wife shall she be?

Sam and Chester were both cads; Bertha didn't care if she ever saw them again. Solomon she had married more out of loneliness than love. But he was a kindly man and, in his own way, a wise one. He never asked her if she loved him.

And Jesus answering said unto them, Ye know not the Scriptures, neither the power of God. For when they shall rise from the dead they shall be as the angels.

Solomon was ill for almost a year before he died. Bertha nursed him like a mother. Often in the evening, when the weather was right, they would sit together in the backyard and listen to the rustling of the leaves in the tall sycamore. And they would laugh at the big, chesty mockingbird that lived in the tree and thought it belonged to him, screaming like a fishwife at the cat. Sometimes Solomon laughed so hard that tears shook from his eyes and streamed down his cheeks. Bertha wished Solomon would talk more than he did but that was the way he was and when he didn't feel like talking it was better, she had learned, to let him be. It was so peaceful, so soothing, sitting out in the yard in the cool of a summer evening that sooner or later Solomon's head would nod with the leaves and he would fall asleep, to awaken with a start and a smile at the mockingbird's loud, resounding, "Tcack, tcack, tcack, tchair, tchair, tchair."

For when they shall rise from the dead they shall be as the angels.

Once, when she was a little girl playing in the woods near her home, she saw a band of Indians riding down a trail toward her. In her fright she almost swooned. "But they can't be real Indians; they must be from some circus." Hiding behind a tree she watched, entranced, as they rode by. Led by a chief wearing a bright feathered headdress, they moved in single file so closely that the feet of their ponies seemed to belong to one body, like a giant centipede. Their faces were smeared with paint and they carried long lances which nodded with the prancing of their ponies. When they were gone, swallowed up by the brush, Bertha ran breathlessly home to tell her mother. "Circus? There's no circus in town. Child, what's the matter with you?" But she *had* seen them. She'd ask her teacher; Miss Clifford would know. "That's strange. There was a camp of Indians in those woods once; a long, long time ago."

"Do you believe in things you can't see?" she asked Solomon one evening. They were sitting in the yard looking at the sycamore.

"I don't know."

"Well, look at those leaves. Can you see what's making them sing and dance?"

He was silent for a moment. "Caterpillars," he said finally.

"Fiddlefooted caterpillars. There's one kicking up his heels behind every leaf."

"I'm serious," she said.

"I'm serious too," he said, laughing.

Live joyfully with the husband whom thou lovest all the days of the life which He hath given thee under the sun; for that is thy portion in this life.

In August, in the fullness of summer, Solomon died. It wasn't a difficult end. He had had a restless night, then shortly before dawn he fell into a sleep, a deep sleep from which he never awakened. "God of mercy, God of grace, show the brightness of Thy face." Bertha was holding his hand and singing in a low voice as he breathed his last.

Outside, the air was clear. The sycamore stood as still as a tree in a painting, the mockingbird was silent.

Feeling Solomon's hand grow cold in hers, Bertha beckoned the doctor who sat across the room, patiently waiting. He had come about an hour before although he knew that he could do no good. Now he did no more than look at Solomon's blank, graying face.

Bertha's heart swelled up within her until she thought her ribs would snap. But she couldn't cry; the tears were too deep within her. She could only shake her head.

The doctor patted her gently on the shoulder and went into the next room where her sister Ida and Solomon's friend Albert were waiting. They, too, had come that morning at Bertha's call. Receiving the news silently, they waited for a few minutes before going into the bedroom.

The doctor stood behind them. "I'll be going now," he said, clearing his throat. "I'm very sorry about Solomon."

When the doctor had gone, Ida said to Bertha, "We're going to stay. We don't think you should be alone."

"I'm not alone," Bertha replied.

"I know," said Ida. "But Solomon's dead, Bertha. Do you want me to call the funeral home?"

Bertha didn't answer. The last time she had talked to Solomon was shortly before midnight, when he had asked her for a drink of water.

Jesus answereth, If any man walk in the day he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world. But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him. These things said He: and after that He saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep.

Once more. Oh God, just once more!

"Bertha, I tell you Solomon's dead!"

For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast; for all is vanity.

"I tell you, Bertha, if the Lord ever breathes on Solomon again it will be on Resurrection Day; not now."

"You don't know what you're talking about."

"As much as you do."

"No, you don't."

"Bertha, we're all the same. You and me and Albert — and Solomon, too, when he was alive. But he's not one of

us any more."

Bertha stared out of the window. A slight breeze quickened. The sycamore leaves were quivering.

"Please leave for awhile," she said. "Come back tonight."

"We'll be back shortly," Ida replied. "It's not good for you to be alone."

When they had gone, Bertha sat down again by Solomon. She looked into his face. He was resting so peacefully; why should she feel so sad? Reaching over, she took one of his hands. It was dry and leaden but she clung to it.

There was a clock on top of the bureau. An old clock in a mahogany-veneer case. Solomon had bought it at an auction. He liked it because without any noise it let you know that it was keeping time. The big minute hand moved with a sharp twitch. While Bertha waited, the big hand jogged slowly from four to ten. An airplane droned overhead.

Bertha leaned forward. "Solomon, honey," she said, "speak to me."

The hand on the old clock twitched. Several minutes passed.

This time in a more urgent tone, "Solomon, speak to me; *please*."

No response.

"Solomon," she demanded, "now you speak to me!"

Nothing.

Anger mingled with grief for a moment, before a smile came slowly to Bertha's face. "That's Solomon, all right," she said. "Best-hearted man in the world, but he won't be ordered about. He'll speak to me, I know he will, when he gets good and ready."

Standing up, she lifted Solomon's hand and laid it on his chest. Then she folded the other over it, the way he had often done himself when he was thinking about something.

She would wait for as long as he wanted her to.

Outside, in the stillness, a bird twittered. Bertha's heart leaped. Tchair, tchair, tchair. High notes. Tcack, tcack, tcack. Low and deep-throated, mournful-like. Tchair,

tchair, tchair. High again brilliant, exultant. Bertha's heart was lifted with the song.

"You hear him, Solomon? The mockingbird; your bird is singing. Singing for you. Tell me you hear him."

There was no answer.

Bertha was tired, exhausted, for she had been up most of the night and many nights before that. She slumped into a chair and in a few minutes, though she fought against it, her eyelids began to droop.

She was asleep, her legs sprawled outwards, her hands folded like Solomon's.

The mockingbird stopped singing.

How long she slept she didn't know — when suddenly she heard a familiar voice cry out.

"Bertha. Bertha."

She was on her feet. Holding his hand again. "Yes, Solomon, what is it? I'm here. Here, right beside you."

Solomon's mouth was open. Wider than before. She was sure of it.

"You called me, Solomon! You called me! What is it you want to tell me? Are you happy? Are you sad? Tell me, so I'll know."

Her lips kept moving. She would speak the words for him if he wanted her to, if only she knew what he wanted to say. "Tell me, Solomon, tell me. But you've got to speak louder. Much louder."

The big hand on the mahogany clock danced forward but in the room there wasn't the slightest sound.

She waited. Waited. Waited for as long as she could stand it. And when she could stand it no longer she put her face into her hands and groaned. And now the tears were loosed. She wept. Wept until she could weep no more, until her body was drained of all tears and all feeling.

When Ida and Albert returned, she was sitting in the chair, her face pale and drawn though without the trace of a tear.

"Shall I call the funeral home now?" Ida asked.

Bertha didn't answer.

"I said, shall I call the funeral home?"

Bertha looked up.

"You can call them."

Her eyes lowered, and she looked down at her hands.

“Yes, you can call them. Solomon’s ready to go.”

Remains

Cyra S. Dumitru

of the space shuttle have fallen
near Corsicana, not far from the bakery
famous for its cake — bits of cherry,
raisins, Texas pecans embedded
in fragrant dough

Chunks of metal, tile, pieces of helmets
lie scattered across thousands of miles
each a small piece of a flying mosaic
that once bore sunlight upon its back
through the shining ocean of space

And the seven who watched over us
like the days of all our weeks?
What storms did you watch brewing
along the shores of our continents
spinning below? Prelude to war?

As noon pours brightly upon us now
like a strong cup of tea on a winter's day,
does some greater vision tangle
unseen with this light? This speck
of ash landing upon my arm —

can we hear you speak of unity,
how we all share the same air,
the same elliptical path? On the school
grounds of Fair Oaks Elementary,
a child drops his plastic bag of goldfish

Cardboard Brown

Diane Bertrand Gonzales

In the familiar of my memory, I know his tanned skin, his black eyes, and his stiff black hair. He bends over his school desk, writing me love notes. He passes them to me when Sister Lelia turns her back to us.

Anthony loved me as much as a sheet of torn paper allowed. I'm certain his notes made me feel more important than any other girl in the third grade.

I don't remember how he sang in Church, or how he smelled after it rained on the playground. I remember he sat in the lowest reading group because he struggled with words that were not like the Spanish ones in his home. He made me laugh if he pulled his ears or clamped his lower teeth over his upper lip when Sister walked away.

Until Maurice Ortiz, a classic bad boy, charmed me. He had black hair but white skin. I saw a silver crown on one side of his smile when I looked his way.

Anthony noticed Maurice's attention. His wrapped his last love note around a fountain pen. Not like my messy pen with a refillable cartridge. He gave me a modern one with a plastic disposable cartridge.

Maurice said I should give Anthony back the pen if I wanted to be HIS girlfriend. And on that Thursday, I told Anthony, "Here, you can have this back. I like Maurice more than you."

I was the girl in third grade that walked into school after the three-day weekend, wondering if Maurice Ortiz would notice the new blue barrettes in my hair that morning. Diana Canales grabbed me by the arm. "Did you hear about Anthony? He played inside a refrigerator box in the alley, and a truck ran over it. He's dead."

No grief counselors on staff at my school; just a tight-lipped nun on the job. She warned us not to talk about Anthony anymore.

I wonder whether he held the pen inside that cardboard box.

Your Smell
for m.

Michelle P. Pina

your smell
lingers on the chenille
pillows in which I bury my face
when you leave

you leave before the light comes
when the earth is still
quiet in the streets
the house holds it's breath when the door closes

I turn the key
returning to my sheets
holding the scent of soap, pumpkin bread,
the slightest trace of mesquite
your smell

Woodcarving
(an excerpt from the novel,
The Bells of Santo Niño)

Michael G. Richards

Having been working on a set of legs for a damaged antique Brewster chair he had rescued from a trash bin at Mancha Brothers Fine Furniture and Cabinetry, Thomas has four scraps of elm that, with a single cut, will be the perfect size and shape for the spinning top. He fingers each of the four with the precision of a jeweler and chooses the one with the fewest imperfections. He secures it in the table vice which he has mounted on the edge of the television table in his hotel room, protecting its soft edges with two scraps of cedar, and carefully runs the marking gauge all the way around. With his dovetail saw he reduces the ten-inch piece of wood to nine, removes it from the vice and pinches it between the rotors of the lathe. From his box of coveted Forstner bits, he chooses a three-quarter inch, a half-inch, and a three-eighths inch and lays them alongside the lathe. The edges of the bits are crisp and clean and now, as so many times in the past, he congratulates himself on spending so much more for these than he would have spent on a lesser set. A craftsman, his maternal grandfather had often told him, is only as good as his tools. A partial truth, but an important one.

When lathing a spinning top, the three pieces—the whorl, the bobbin, and the spindle—are turned all-of-a-piece from a single length of wood. The top emerges from the amorphous lump of fiber as would a planetary system spun from nebulae. Thomas has often considered it the most elegant of all the toys that are suited to be created from wood. He has noticed that when lathing a spinning top, the wood briefly, very briefly, takes on the shape of a voluptuous woman before continuing on its journey toward being. And he has speculated that spinning wood has some fundamental contact with deeper truths in nature just as a woman's body

does. Somehow it seems that the forms that emerge in the lathe are parallel to the processes of birth, growth, evolution, and of course, creation.

With a caliper he measures off two inches to account for head-chock waste, then one-and-a-half for the bobbin and ball, a quarter inch for parting waste, two and a quarter for the main whorl, two inches for the spindle, a half inch for the finial at the top of the spindle, and a half inch for tailstock waste.

He runs the marking gauge around the wood in each of the marked places. He flips the power switch on the lathe and with a gouge he chews away the rough edges of the wood. Using the skew chisel, he makes a clean pass all the way around the wood along each of the markings.

Soon the wood begins to transform into something symmetrical, sleek, meaningful in its lines and contours. A message from beyond the surface of things. Briefly, a nude worthy of Degas.

With the heel of the skew chisel, he further assists in the birth of the top. On the worn carpet at his feet, there is now a pile of wood filings and fine sawdust. The lathe spins to a stop and he rests a moment to admire his work. He imagines Sam when he gives the top to him, and although the image starts out joyful, it quickly turns ugly as Sam's sorrow over the divorce emerges—a sorrow that not even a new top for the WWF on the dining room floor is likely to appease.

This top, will have to be special. He will not paint it, as he has the others, but will use the edge of one of his old cabinet rasps to friction-burn designs in the wood; then he will coat it with carnauba wax, and using a cloth pad, burnish it to a high-gloss finish. Perhaps the sleek new top will spin faster than an eight-year-old's despair.

The Apology

JoAnn DeLuna

Today we were in our workshop groups. All nestled together around one small table. Each trying to listen attentively to the other. This is gold. Crowded but not too crowded; just nestled. When, after several moments of having my left-crossed over my right, I decided to shift unconsciously.

In doing so, I kicked Nick. Not hard, just brushed some pressure against his shin. Nothing the ol' guy couldn't handle. I immediately, habitually, innately, routinely, customarily said, "I'm sorry," without even thinking about whether or not I was really sorry. Most likely not. And Nick said, "For what?"

At this I pondered because, I began to question whether I had even kicked him at all? Did I kick C-czar instead or perhaps the table leg?

I said questioningly, "I kicked you, accidentally." He smiled and chuckled a bit before answering.

He looked me straight in the eye, with his transparent blue eyes and said. "Don't apologize for human contact. That's what's wrong with society, we don't have enough of it."

I looked at him with wide-open eyes. Eventually after a silence, I smiled, (making them small again). I took it back. Then I told him I'm sorry again.

Initially I apologized for human contact. Now, I apologize for not "kicking" him more often.

while dark-haired girls in green leotards
orbit above blue mats, backwards
into handsprings — land securely on bare feet,
backs arched, hands outstretched as if trying

to reconcile the incalculable distance

The Dawning of a New Day

Kelly Duron

The room is terribly still. The curtains hang silently, shading all within from any outside light. They are stiff and refuse to move. The sponge pattern is blotted all over the material, as if it is a canvas for the deranged artist. Surely, this pattern has absorbed all the light, the way parched earth soaks up water. The material has captured the light and confines it in tiny sponge straitjackets. The ivory color gets darker and darker and darker every night. But these curtains do match perfectly with the furniture. Those two large wooden dressers standing off in the corners watching me with indifference. They are a set. I wish I could be as strong and upright as those dressers. My pictures are lined up and staggered on the top of the dressers, pictures of fake smiles and empty happiness. They just silently stare. The walls seem to be staring at me also and caving me in deeper and deeper. Soon I won't be able to move. I lie, motionless, in this room curled up in the corner of my bed, surrounded by my gray comforter. The off white walls appear to become just as gray as the bed. The room is still. It is as if I have consumed all the life the room had. I can feel it. It stirs and aches inside. The pounding of my heart grows stronger. I can hear it, the way I hear the bass blaring over the music with subwoofers. Surely I will burst.

He sat motionlessly in his favorite chair staring blankly at the television. He could see through the TV. I was sure. But what was on the other side? What had he been looking at? Sometimes he would fall asleep as he sat there dazed. It was never a quiet sleep but one filled with trembles. He would shake, a deep shake that came from deep within. He looked like an autumn leaf shaken by the

cold winds, not one that had just fallen, but a leaf that had fallen two days ago, with missing pieces.

Roger that. We have orders to maintain position. Take cover! No! . . .

Usually his cries were accompanied by jerks, jerks of his eyes, head, arms and legs. I didn't always understand what he was saying but I understood it was somehow painful. Ma said to leave him alone, and not to be causing any trouble. I longed for him to catch me in his arms and hand me the glove. And once more go out into the yard and throw the ball around. But he just sat. He was still. How I craved to be held once more. Ever since he returned he would not hold anything, except that bottle. It became his salvation. Drink, drink and then drink some more.

I can hear fingertips on my windows. It's coming from the outside. And it's getting faster. It sounds so pleasant. Wouldn't it be wonderful to free-fall from the sky? But I wouldn't want to splat here. There has to be somewhere else. But it has gotten darker in here. The curtains soaked up all the sun, and hid it. Yet, the rain continues to fall, harder and harder.

It had been raining that day. He sat there. Drinking. Ma came in and told him that was enough. There was work to be done around the house and she needed some help. Ma couldn't do it all by herself. But she used that tone with him. The one mothers use to scold children who aren't behaving; he didn't like it. There was some yelling, some screaming, and then some tears. I could hear the furniture move. It scratched the floor in jerks; little pushes here and there. Glass crashed against the hardwood floor. I yelled, begged them to stop. It was no use. To them I was mute, voiceless. I stood there helpless. As they looked passed me the rage was building and I wanted to strike out. I could feel the heat. My blood was beginning to steam. Again the furniture stirred. There was a smack and then a thump all in the same instance. I could see her on the floor. Her face was flushed; it was a crimson color. I could see the fire burning in her eyes and the pain right beside it. Tears flowed down her cheeks; hot tears forming permanent

tracks. Her jaw quivered causing her lips to flutter. I was numb and only aware of the rock settling in the pit of my stomach. This was just the beginning.

Ma was never the same. None of us were. She was the silent victim. I watched as she took and took. There was nowhere else to go. She tried to veil the pain, anger and secrets. But I could feel it. I became her support –her crutch; burdens grew heavily upon my shoulders.

That's when I found what I thought was my salvation. It was in the arms of a man with dark hair, hazel-green eyes, strong physique, and empty words. He promised the world to me; told me I was special, fed me the things I had longed to hear. He was wonderful. So wonderful, that I gave him all I could, all that I had. I gave him me. But I was just one of his flavors. So I gave him more of me. And when I was with his child he didn't want me. He smirked showing his pearly white teeth. He wasn't ready to be daddy.

Daddy. When I told him that I was pregnant he just stared blankly at me. He was looking through me. Say something. I cried, he yelled. GO! I disgraced the family and so I must pay. I was no longer welcome in the house. Ma stood there. Her eyes were tired they seemed to crack and shatter the way a mirror does when it is struck. Then drops flew down those tracks. She was still.

I often wonder who and what that child would have been.

The other men were the same kind of jerks. They fed me lies and I eagerly believed them. I ate up every word. Became putty. Thought I was really loved. Most of the relationships were empty, one-way streets. Alone, I became the crimson colored woman.

He thought I was lying, doing things behind his back. It was only 23 minutes. But that's all it took. The questions of an insecure lover flooded in, my answers were insufficient. He raised his hand with his palm facing me. His fingers were firm. He wouldn't. I froze. He wouldn't. I stared. He wouldn't. I was still.

He did.

It stung. A thousand needles were piercing my cheek. I could feel the handprint being branded on my

face. It burned. I burned. I went at him. The furniture moved. The rock grew. The blue chair got in the way. It was the one Ma gave me; it had wooden legs, the right front leg being slightly off causing the chair to wobble. I staggered, and fell over the chair. Everything was fuzzy. I couldn't tell up from down or which was which. Clouds formed all around me. I could hear him yelling but the words were jumbled and lacked meaning. Pain. That's all I could hear and feel. But I didn't do anything, I promise. I wanted to scream, I wanted to run, and instead I was still. I saw Ma. I was on the floor. Oh, how it hurt. I had vowed never to end up the way Ma did. And there I was —on the floor. Hot tears burned my cheeks and added to the sting. My blood boiled.

I caught my reflection in the mirror just as she tried to flee. But my stare pinned her down. She looked scared. I could see the fear, the rage, the emptiness. I dashed at her. There was blood, a spat of it. It felt good. I could feel the throbbing. There was that sting again. Mechanically my hands found my face. I could feel the hot blood. My fingers turned into claws. The kinds of claws cats have, rigid claws, with sharp nails. I scratched — a firm, deep scratch that penetrated the skin. Red lines formed. It felt good. I scratched more. At last, there was the blood. Blood mixed with sweat and trickled down to my chin. I went to grab a knife. This was the answer. Why had I not seen it before? Why hadn't I done it? The only knife I could find was a steak knife. It shone and almost sparkled. The blade grinned at me. I held it to my wrist. Slowly I slid it across. There was no pressure. Then I added some. Slowly, very slowly until blood came. Back and forth. Back and forth. I stopped and fell to my knees. The humming of the refrigerator filled the room with a desperate noise. I saw someone hiding in the stove. She looked sad. She was cut up. She was bleeding. She was broken.

I didn't want to exist anymore. Nothing I did helped. The cutting was no longer pleasurable. Men only left bruises. And it was tiresome lying on the leather couch in that white office with the diplomas pinned to the wall. It was my deepest desire to get away — to go away,

to melt away like ice. I was sobbing one night, a night just like this one. My pillow was wet. I sat up, searched for something to throw, something to bite. Instead my eyes landed on the crucifix. I cursed. I screamed. Why?! What did I do? Why are you doing this?! Look at me – with my scars and bruises!! Why

I stopped. There was no answer. I was still.

With nowhere to turn I prayed. I prayed the same prayer every night. Always the same plea to relieve me, to take me away, to get it over with – I wanted answers. But He never answered. I waited and waited. There was Nothing.

I continue to pray anyway. There is nothing else to do, nowhere else to turn. And sometimes when things are overwhelming I just give them up to Him. I don't like feeling bad. I try talking and not yelling at Him. I pretend He's listening. Now I ask to get through the day if He's not going to take me. I ask Him to help me. I like to imagine He cares. Sometimes I think He really does. He sends what I think are little signs. Slowly, I am learning to hope.

There is light. But I don't hear the rain. It's starting to creep in. The light fights the curtains. The shadows begin to vanish. They sneak under those dressers. They hide from the light. I don't blame them I would do the same. I watch the room. It is still.

My body aches. My head throbs, I can hear it; it's the beating of a single drum. My face feels stiff. My gray comforter is wet; I must have a leak in the roof. I should check that.

Already it's morning. But the light will not be admitted.

Wait.

Right there in the corner. There is a crack. The light seeps into the room. I have never noticed it. It's just a small crack, but a crack large enough. It's a tiny ray just like the ones that flow through clouds on glorious mornings. This is one of the signs. I sit up and stare. The room and I are still.

The Birth of Poets

Eric J. Cruz

The rain is cold and lends its voice.
Our world is dark. It makes us fold
when candles melt, ink smeared like mud
with too many footprints. We catch the scent
of life run thin. We know the body's whisper.
If we are more light than flesh, let it rain.

Come. Move away. Let it rain.
The body unfurls itself as a voice.
And we know that voice whispers
because God and everything in him folded.
Fog is upon us. Good. It is scented
with oaks and roots, mixing thick mud.

God rests in these pools of mud.
He let the skies fall and drown us with rain.
We limped from the depths and buried tears
as if God did not know how to kill a voice.
Our wombs of darkness let hope unfold.
We shivered and hacked love to whispers.

God could not speak. That faceless whisper
could not carve his image in our blood soaked mud.
We stomped the earth and let light fold
in the clouds. We feared rain.
Dance for silence until the last of our voices
was caked in a brown cast. God had no scent.

Find him. There is no scent.
We are children that whispered
our flesh into dust. Wicked voice.
We are children founded in mud.

Come outside. The steady beat of rain
is a phantom passing through. Fold it

on your tongues and fold it in your throats.
Rain glides like a woman's scent
and soaks like a man's tears. Let it rain.
Your skin is God. It will not whisper
to the coming deluge of mud.
Listen. There is a voice

that folds silence. It is the scent
of rain that falls too hard. The whispering
mud in a puddle. A voice so deep, it hurts.

PGR Submission Guidelines

Poetry — Submit up to four poems (any style/form) that total no more than six pages, single-spaced

Fiction — Submit up to two stories, each no longer than eight pages, double-spaced

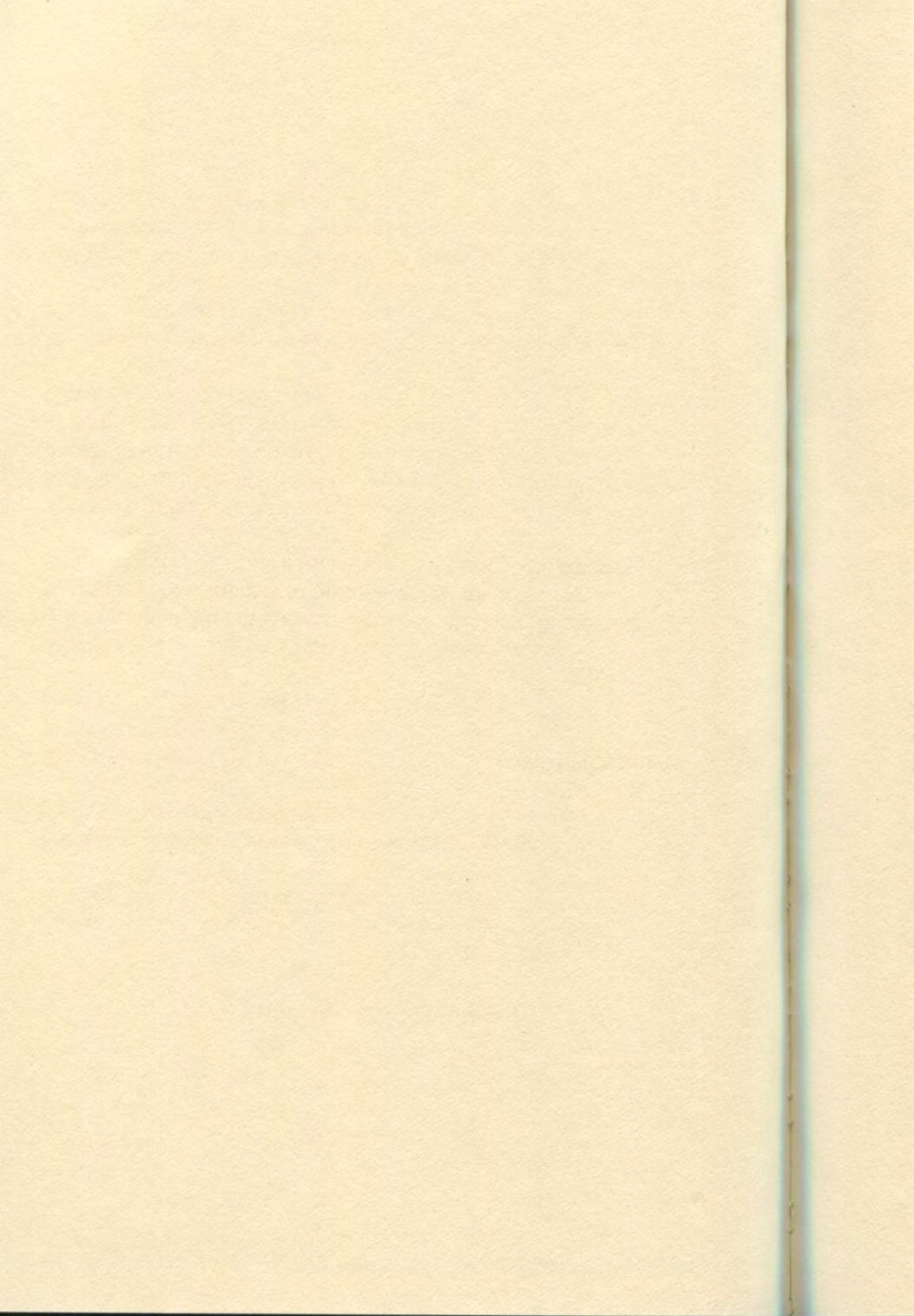
Essay — Submit up to two essays, each no longer than eight pages, double-spaced. Can be either formal or informal essays or related segments of a journal.

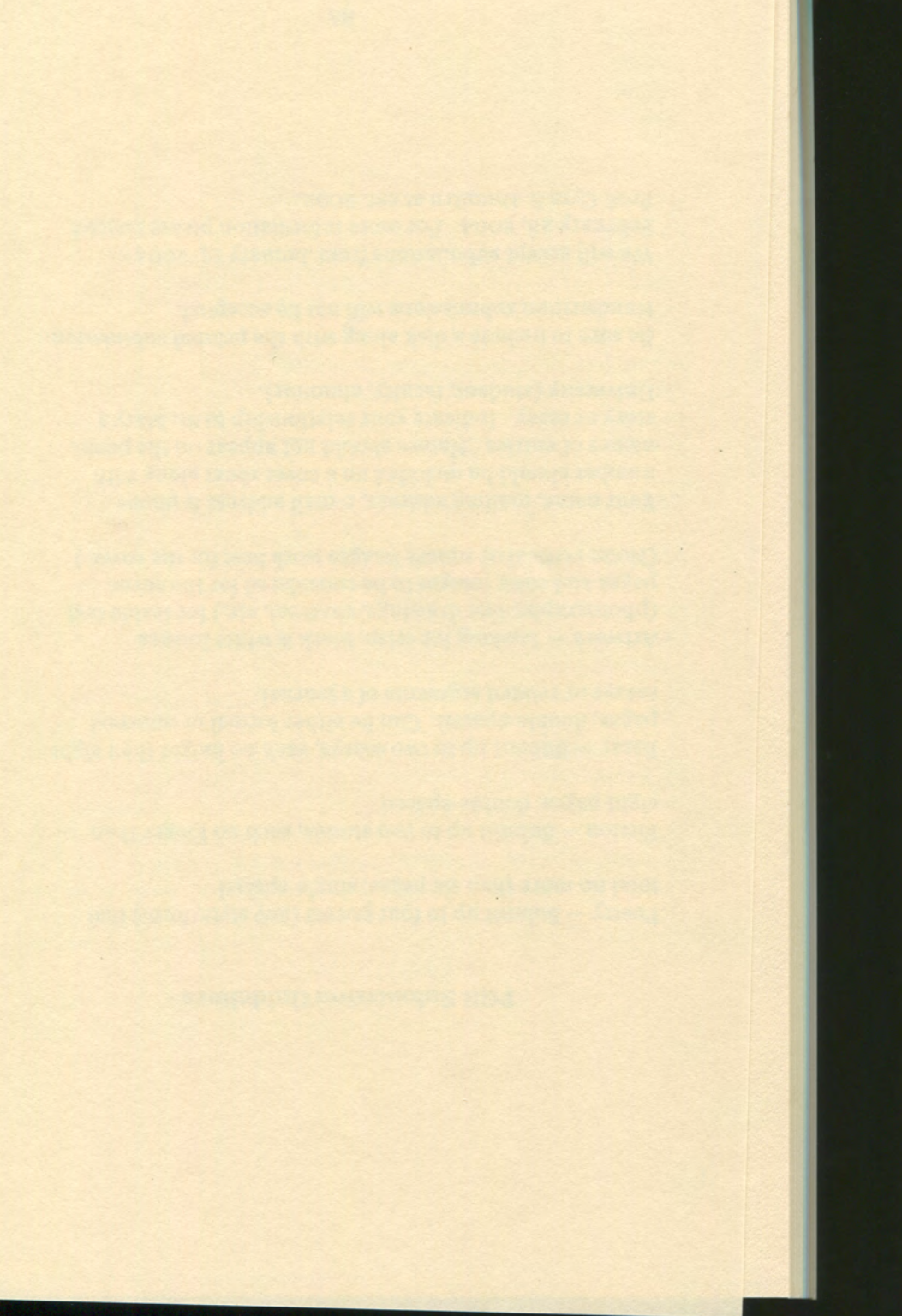
Artwork — Looking for crisp, black & white images (photographs, line drawings, charcoal, etc.) for inside text pages and color images to be considered for the cover. (Note: vertical or square images work best for the cover.)

Your name, mailing address, e-mail address & phone number should be included on a cover sheet along with names of entries. Names should not appear on the poem, story or essay. Indicate your relationship to St. Mary's University (student, faculty, alumnus).

Be sure to include a disk along with the printed submission. Handwritten submissions will not be accepted.

We will accept submissions from January 15, 2004 — February 28, 2004. For more information please contact Prof. Cyra S. Dumitru at ext. 2092.









Featuring students, faculty, and alumni of St. Mary's University

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Tony Bryden
January Carillo
Richard Catron
Eric J. Cruz Tom Deibel
JoAnn Deluna
Juan Carlos Daniel Diaz
Cyril S. Dumitru
Kelly Duron
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Veronica Garcia
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Shoshana Gray
Cesar "Turtle" Gutierrez
H. Palmer Hall
Jeremy Koontz
Matthew Landers
Gina Manring
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Amparo S. Morales
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