

ENJAMBED



CSUDH LITERARY JOURNAL 2013

ENJAMBED

California State University Dominguez Hills
Student Literary Journal
Spring 2013

Editors

Raul Martinez
Amanda Reyes

Editorial Board

Joni Johnson
Steven Parada
Abel Santibanez
Benjamin Reveles

Faculty Advisors

Dr. Randolph Cauthen
Rhea Lewitzki

Layout

Amanda Reyes
Montserrat Varela

Front Cover Photographs:

CSUDH, Carson, CA
Photographer: Amanda Reyes

Special thanks to advisor Rhea Lewitzki, advisor
Dr. Randy Cauthen, the CSUDH English Department,
The College of Arts and Humanities, Associated Students,
Inc., Evyn Blair, the CSUDH Bulletin, El Pescador of Carson,
and all the brave souls who submitted their work.

All contents are copyright 2013 by Enjambed Literary Journal.
Authors and artists retain all rights.

TEXTual Poetics: Image taken from Backgrounds HD Images, doyle and gods of will

Pocha

Cristina Gutierrez

The Joy of Cooking

Stephanie Deal

Spring

Evening Primrose

An Old Song

Britney Golden

Consciousness?

Benjamin Reveles

Clueless

Vanessa Medrano

Sweet & Twenty

B.T.S Agnomen

16 Hours

Sakara El

This One Song

Jennifer Tejada

Fashion Sketches

Leslie Sanchez

TEXTual Poetics:

An Unintended Cypher

Danielle Cruz

Amanda Reyes

An In-Voice For my Mother

Amanda Reyes

UNTITLED

Sarah Holland

Mother's Titty Bleeding

Eduardo Hernandez

**Portrait Of My Father, Wife
Beside Him**

Obituaries

Kyle Moreno

But Time Is God

Abel Santibanez

Don't Come Round

Mary Copeland

Abeer Qassim al-Janabi

C.Rios. V

Mrs. Longfellow

**Dreaming Of An Age Un-
dreamed Of**

Raul Martinez

Pocha

Gringa Spanish
Private schools
Mini vans
White suburban neighborhoods
exiled her from ever being a “true” Mexican

- Cristina Gutierrez

The Joy of Cooking



-Stephanie Deal

Spring

I sketch spring on a scroll.
The soft colors of daybreak
Push off the rising sun,
And are laid across the land
As I am laid across your bed.
The skyline sings to the horizon,
The sound slides along the expanse
Like a mouth along a harmonica
An open window brings the promise
Of a summer wind,
Curled up under the wings of a bird
Who dips a glossy feather into the sea,
Where the ripples of a million rivulets
Kiss the belly of a thousand ships.
I capture spring on a scroll--
I hold it in my hands

Evening Primrose

I dreamt of you again last night,
I sat alone in a big, airy house
With wood floors and open windows,
Watching an old home video of you in a school
play.
You're the lead, opposite a pretty girl
The kind of girl I picture as your type
Short hair, big eyes, no makeup,
Your young faces radiate sweet and serious.
You watch her with an intensity which con-
firms my feeling
That she is yours, on and off the stage
I hold my breath through the bloom of longing
Opening up in my chest like a moon flower,
An evening primrose.

I'm in mismatched flannel making tea
in the kitchen,
When I feel you behind me
I'm afraid to turn around,
You'll know I've been thinking of
you.
My secrets are written on the tips of
my eyelashes,
Behind the twitch of my mouth,
Between the shake of my hands as I
grip my tea cup.
But this is a dream
So the look I find in your eyes is curi-
ous and calm,
You move toward me with purpose
Wearing a half-amused smile,
Which says of course you've been
waiting to get to me,

An Old Song

I discovered your secret alongside
The harmonica in Dylan's shirt pocket.
It clung to the memory of the last note
Of a beautiful song.
So it's true, you were destined:
The women you'd love,
The cities you'd court,
The films that would change you,
The game that would shape you,
The scenes of people, songs, and stories
That would inspire you.
Foretold in Dylan's late-night scratching's
One hand tangled in his curly hair,
In his boxers, with a cigarette in his mouth,

And a beautiful girl in his bed
He penned reflections of you.
Every blow and strum, sounds and words
Of a language I could hope to learn
Between chords I closed my eyes,
And saw a movie
About a boy who grows up
To whisper "thank you" to the darkness
Of his room, while
listening to an old song.
A song Dylan often sung to himself,
Which followed the years up the road,
And made its way to you.

Poems by: Britany Golden

Consciousness?

We sat in the hotel room around the circular table, with two massive bottles of vodka and rum staring back at us. I was surprised at how normal this felt; back home, I would have over-analyzed everything. If there was a string of circumstances that would lead to my discovery, I would have known about it and taken steps to prevent it. There was no way in hell that I was going to get caught up again, especially not now when I have too much at stake. There is always a paranoia that shows its face, even after I've chewed gum and concentrated really hard on acting normal around mom and dad despite the fact that my head is spinning. Not here though, I felt relaxed.

I like to believe that it felt normal because it probably meant that I've grown numb to lying to my family (although I still can't decide if this is a good or bad thing). But it was probably the fact that I was on the other side of California. It's not like they could have threatened me with the usual "Hey asshole, you better find a nice street corner to sleep on, because it's past midnight and we're not going to stay up to open the door until you feel like coming home!" If they did, I would respond by saying "Ok, I'll be there in eight hours" How absurd would that be?

So we began. We each took shots out of the bottle caps for pragmatic reasons. I went for the vodka first: The acrid sensation burned my mouth and nose. I really saw no difference between the taste of vodka and the smell of rubbing alcohol. The words of Elmer from high school replayed in my mind: "Whatever gets you high foo!" Indeed.

I went for the rum next. By this time, my taste buds cringed in agony at the torture I was forcing them to endure. My throat was burning in rejection of the foul substance, and my eyes watered. Sure, the vodka burned about the same, but at least it didn't have the pungent aftertaste that the rum had. I guess this is where the aesthetic of hard drinking lies. It's all very macho. It's about enduring just to prove to yourself and your friends how tough you are.

After swallowing my first mini-shot of rum, I let out a yell and slammed the cap on the table. I had learned from movies that this was proper hard-liquor-drinking etiquette. Stein stopped us and said "Let's play a drinking game!" We looked at our surroundings for ideas. We didn't have a deck of cards, so King's Cup was out. The hotel only stocked the rooms with about four cups, so Vodka/Rum Pong and Flip Cup were out. Our lack of imagination and materials forced me to say this: "Let's just play rock-paper-scissors and whoever loses has to take a shot of whatever the winner tells him to!"

Rock-paper-scissors was perfect for our situation. "Punk as Fuck" was starting in thirty minutes. Now, we had a knack for arriving at places fashionably late, but complex drinking games like King's Cup and Vodka/Rum Pong would be too time consuming, which would increase the chance that we would simply get too inebriated and not show up to the show at all. Rock-Paper-Scissors was a quick and easy way to get real shit-faced real quick.

We decided that our opponents would be the person to our clockwise-left. This pitted me against Moral and Stein against John. Our sadistic strategy was that we would make the loser drink the liquor that he hated most. I kept losing to Moral, and I was forced to drink multiple shots of rum. Then out of the blue, Moral came up with a rule: "If you spill any booze, you have to take another shot!" I took this as a personal attack because he said this after I over-filled the cap with vodka and spilled it on my jeans while I was transporting it to my lips. They all started laughing at me and I gave Moral a hateful look as I took another shot of rum.

After too many mini-shots or liquor, our stomachs felt warm and our heads were beginning to spin. We spent thirty more minutes in the hotel just dancing and dropping freestyles to a trip-hop instrumental playing from John's phone. It's amazing how chemicals improve your improvisational abilities.

We stumbled out of the hotel room and locked the door. As I slowly-but-surely felt my consciousness begin to abandon me, I put my wallet in the interior pocket of my windbreaker as a way to protect it from myself. It was 10:30 and it began to rain, reminding us of the dreaded Frisco chill. A bunch of Angelinos weren't used to this kind of weather. Luckily, our multiple jackets and inebriation provided much warmth.

As we trekked through the city in search of “Punk as Fuck”, my consciousness was further leaving me. My body was completely numb and I had to focus just to keep my head upright. My vision was getting more and more blurred. I was surprised that I still had control of my basic motor functions. It seemed that my body was being possessed by an unknown force, and I was just a prisoner being forced to watch myself.

At an intersection, Stein pointed at a man standing across the street and said “I’m gonna ask that guy to buy us beer!” I crossed the street to wait for them while Stein put his silver tongue to use. They walked over to me with smiles, signaling to me the success of Stein’s persuasion. Our new friend’s name was Mark and he led us to the closest liquor store. He inquired as to why we were in Frisco all the way from LA, and John told him a completely made-up anecdote that we reinforced: “Some foo who lives in Lennox stole our money, so we stabbed him! We’re out here hiding from the feds!” I laughed at Mark’s gullibility. We reached the liquor store and Mark came out with nine tall cans: two for each of us and one for himself. I was going to be forty-eight ounces drunker. We allowed Mark to keep the change as an act of gratitude for his philanthropy and departed from him.

As we further trekked through the city, John cursed at people driving by, Stein caught a few spots, and I got pummeled by the fists of my friends, the latter being the result of a previous drinking game that involved punching out whoever would stop to urinate.

When we finally arrived at “Punk as Fuck”, the bouncers forbade us from entering with the tall cans in our hands. He suggested that we go around the corner to finish our beverages, because the venue’s outdoor cameras had a blind spot that could be exploited there. We followed suit and returned to the door, where the bouncer asked for ID. He denied us entry, being that we were all under 21. He then began to direct us to a party that was happening several blocks away (Frisco was obviously full of philanthropists). Suddenly, John’s anti-authority attitudes became more pronounced as he continued to curse at the bouncer. “What the fuck man, what kind of bar denies entry to underage people?” “Every fuckin bar in America!” John was unable to accept this basic logic and yelled “You know what man? You’re just a little BITCH!”

This must have hit a soft spot, as the bouncer began to violently push us. “Getthefuckouttahere!”

After facing complete rejection, we ...

“...stop fuckin touching me man ...”

... I was hunched over gagging, looking at my shoes ...

... at the stained glass windows, which looked very beautiful under the midnight sky ...

... and it felt so therapeutic. He stared at the combination of stomach acids and food that was splattered on the concrete. ...

... “hahahahaha!” ...

... my phone read 2:00 AM, and we kept walking the freezing streets. I was cold, drunk, and miserable. And John was nowhere to be found. Moral and I followed Stein who was leading us with his phone navigation app. His navigation was a bit flawed, as we often had to walk the opposite way. ...

... “Whaddup” he said. “John! Where are you?” “I’m in the hotel bro!” “Ok, we’ll be there in a bit.” ...

... Moral said. “Man we’re never gonna find the hotel!” ...

... by this time I was feeling rather depressed, and thought that we would have to find an alley somewhere to sleep in the twenty-degree weather ...

... we asked a young man “Do you know where the Knob Hill Inn is?” “Oh yeah, it’s just over there.” We walked through the parking lot and ...

... Stein opened the door, and I saw John comfortably sprawled on the bed. I walked over to the cabinet and got my blanket. I took off my shoes and ...

I awoke the next morning to loud music. I quickly sat up and realized that I had fallen asleep on the floor of the room with the blanket wrapped around me. The grey sunlight poured through the windows and I surveyed the room. I was the last to wake up and Moral, John and Stein all began to laugh at me. My head and stomach felt horrible. I went to the bathroom to look at my reflection. “So this is a hangover huh?” I said to myself. “Never again...”

-Benjamin Reveles

Clueless

The psychiatrist said while he chuckled
And his strangled belly moved
Like an old school funk bass line.
You have too many passions
Bebey,
You gotta learn ta controlum.

The psychologist said,
Maybee that's what your problem iz
Yuwuu theenk towoo much,
Stop fixateeng on the truth.

Her Mother said,
Tha's wat jord problem ees!
..ju think abou emoshions too mush
And ju nevr forget anyting mija.

Her mother in law said, in her mixed-
greens-westcoast-bama-twang,
"Senile chile thas what cha problem is!
You always wanna look at the bigga picsha.
Sometimes ya gotta look at the smawlla
picsha!

Her teacher said,
oh yeah, you're the writer right?
She sat still.

- Vanessa Medrano

Sweet & Twenty

"Then come kiss me, sweet-and-twenty!
Youth 's a stuff will not endure."
~William Shakespeare (Twelfth Night, 2.3.51-52).

Sweet and twenty years ago
Hope and happ'y did I know.
Twenty times this now's my woe,
For my folly, I did f'llow
Something wicked. This way go
I, and pricked my thumb like so.
What's done is done. And done, but oh!
Knowing then what I now know,
I'd all my pretties in a row:
Sweet and twenty years ago.

- B. T. S. Agnomen

16 Hours

Our first date lasted sixteen hours
Just a few hours and tick past the moment we met
It was a warm summer 2a.m.
No breeze
A hand held walk down Long Street
Neon lights, Local and foreign languages tangled in the sound of traffic
And
Music
We found comfort in our commonalities in spite of our hemispheric differences
Interrelating on levels beyond my past experiences
We spent the whole night discussing
South African politics vs. American Democracy
Our love for The Roots and Talib Kweli
Philosophies of Confucius and Noble Drew Ali
God and his or her many names
Rituals and religion
Adding in
Sly remarks and flirtatious banter
And this is just my luck
But I won't complain
I'll just enjoy looking at your face, listening to your accent
Paying close attention to the way your tongue hits the roof of your mouth
And makes a clicking sound when u speak
I am listening
Not nervous, uncertain or shaken
Just In
Your space, your scent, your smiles, our moment
And just as we were about to
It was painfully interrupted by
The popping of my ears caused by the pressure at high elevations
A noisy seatbelt sign and the pilot
Reminding all passengers that our 16 hour flight was at its end and
to return to our seats
As the plane was starting to descend
My fear of flying kicks in
I immediately clench your hand I mean
The armrest

-Sakara El

This One Song

I've been stuck in this bubble
I've been hiding
my face waiting
I keep thinking that I hear it,
That little bit of humming turning into drumming.

As I walk through my shadow
As I fear my path to be narrow
I lift my head up,
"Do you hear my cry?"

The loud thunder has taken over
Unable to speak,
As if my choice.

waiting for so long,
nothing has come.
My faith dissolving,
But not gone.

nothing in mind,
Yet a heart quite strong.
Little voices telling me, "You won't get through,"
not true.

Hope through my veins,
Little by little, breaking pieces of chains.
Inside no one could break me,
my life wasn't as simple as the "A, B, and C."

For my strength
Something not every person
is quite aware of.
many people in this world carry selfish mindsets –
bring others down as they sink themselves,
give up on you

Moments where my strength takes control.
Moments where I realize
that it's time to change that light bulb.

Changing a light bulb can be quite dangerous.
There are moments where you switch one
and it gives up on you right away.
It burns as quick as placing a lighted match next to a piece of cloth.
let the cloth fade away

how beautiful when you come across
a new light bulb that remains
wonderful to see its brightness sustain
My dream has come.
My world is finally a musicality.

I have let go
I have set myself free.
I have moved on
I have found love with pure simplicity.

A love that has created
given my song direction.
given me a sense of protection.

No longer in a bubble,
No longer hiding my face.
I can speak.
I can even dance my ballet.

My heart has remained
holding on all along.
I knew I could pull
this one song.

-Jennifer Tejada

Beautiful Fashion Sketches



-Leslie Sanchez

TEXTual Poetics: An Unintended Cypher

9:52PM, Mar 26

*Sometimes the words don't
Come out right
And I choke
On silence
When did words cripple me?
What can I do
To express meaning?
If only you could feel
What I know
Then what?*

9:57PM, Mar 26

Then what...
Then maybe the tears that secretly overflow my face
Might be shown
And the words I wrestle down everyday to stay tucked away
Might slip through a crack
And then...
Then suddenly I might be alive again.
If only...

10:03PM, Mar 26

*If only...
A crack would appear
To tempt me into slipping..
Let me live
Like I once did
Did I ever, live?
Can the deaf, the blind, the mute
After hearing, seeing, voice
Be the same?*

10:29PM, March 26

Be the same?
If I never once lived...
Although in time I may have thought I did
Being the same might mean conforming
Conforming to the norms,
To the already known,
And to societies expectations
I want to live...live freely
However I am so unsure..
What is free?

10:35PM, Mar 26

*What is free...
Free is free!
Conform, confront, concede
Choices
Let freedom Reign
Rain down
Showering my vision with clarity
We were born free
Only to live as slaves
What is bondage now?*

11:02PM, Mar 26

What is bondage now...
Bondage is the untold story of the caged bird
A story which I can tell not without he
For I have never been nor will I ever be..
Not free
I shant sing his song or even pretend to comprehend
For the thought of subjecting to influence perplexes me
And yet still I ask have I begun living
Under the influence?!

11:21PM, Mar 26

*Influence!
By other names it goes by...
You.
Him.
She.
Them.
It.
Us.
Do I not sing?
In my silence.
Fragments-
Utterance is now speech
Pieces paint vivid
What if the bird must follow as well as lead?*

-Danielle Cruz

-Amanda Reyes

An In-Voice for My Mother

For Lisa

Ironic. That's what this photo is. You, looking at the camera- She looking at you. I don't know either of you, but I know Her. Who? Her, you know... Your daughter. My mother...



Smiles-

He smiling, Ironic. How?

I wonder how many screwdrivers it took to tease that out, that smile.

I sound negative... You look genuinely happy... Let me reflect...

Her... Who?... Her! not my mom, her Mom.

She's smiling. Ironic. How?

I wonder if this was before or after the divorce. Could be either because you still lived together after it happened... mom said the car ride to Connecticut was rough...

Did she stay for him? Or them? Both?

My feelings about you two are biased-

I know I like him a little better because mom softened you up in

her stories- why?

Because she admired you and although you made mistakes-
I think she was still sure of your love.

Masculine. Masculine love can be expressed
through fragmentation

and that's okay- because you're a man.

But Her!

...She hurt her. Who? My grandmother.

Mom youngest of seven. She barely paid attention- except the little
things stuck-

Those damned peanut butter cups...10 cents in Connecticut.

Mom and Lori would love em, so She would sneak a dime or two
when they went to the Cumberland Farms Corner Market... "we don't
have many out here, but back east..."

Mom's favorite candy is reeses peanut butter cups.

But I wish You could have been less sneaky with your love. It hurt
her...Ironic...

She smiling at him...maybe Mom was somewhere near and really She
was looking past him at her... smiling...speaking love with words
unsaid...

Mom wanted, needed, that feminine love. That ... Expression of affec-
tion in words of blunt. ... I love... you...

I love you Lisa. I love you hunny. I love you sweetie.

The first 10 years of my life

Every night before bed. Mom came
in- tucked us in- said our prayers.

In. Jesus. Name. I. Pray.

And our goodnights and Always

ALWAYS- I Love You.

Tough love from both of you- for the youngest...was more than dif-
ficult...

Smiling, both smiling. Laughing?...Ironic.

He smiling at me, while she...fades in the back...

Just like Mom tells it...I told her. Who?

Mom. I said, "you're still angry at Her you know. You rarely
talk about Her, always about Him"...Even though he yelled! How
LOUD?!

LOUD!!! He was partially deaf. That alcoholic bastard. Orange car-
ton in the fridge with the

tape that READS: "Don't Drink-Dad's OJ"

Have you ever had black walnut ice cream?

I love it. It is one of my favorites. Because it was His...She told me.

Who?

Mom....I don't know Her favorite ice cream though...No, wait.

It is Rocky Road...same as my moms...hmm...

Ironic. Two smiles- happiness.

I wonder...how many years before your deaths this was taken...couldn't of been long.

He- heart attack- Mom didn't know, she got to the hospital and he was...

And she became...

She said...Who? Mom! She said, she didn't believe it when they told her-

So she ran-and ran- and ran- and... she might still be running... And She-

Who? Her mom...she had a stroke, barely six months after he died. Mom was 16.

Mom took care of her. I wonder where all her siblings were... Oh...that's right.

Jail. Drugs. Alcohol. Theft. Lies. Cheats. Grand theft auto. Robbery. Rape.

Too busy trying to live like their father. No! Not like Dad!

Because he was a "functional alcoholic" she'd say. Who? My mom.

She died. Who? My Mom's mom!

Not even two and half years after He did. Mom was 19.

Ironic...you two, smiling. Genuine seeming...

I can almost see her in your faces. Who?

Mom...not quite, though...

I don't know you, either of you. And yet...It is ironic-

That I should feel...hurt by your happiness-
Smiling...

I'll pretend your smiling at her. Who?

Her! She is smiling, happy, because she knows Mom found love and pursued her dreams and succeeded and became a mother and a wife and an inspiration and found...happiness.

And didn't turn out like them. Who? Them!

All the others the two of you parented...or should I say didn't parent. Fuck them! Fuck...you? Who?...

Ahh...

I'm angry for her.

Let me reflect...I see me in her and her and I in you two.

Smiling.

We are all smiling...

But inside...

We are all

Lying.



From Amanda

Untitled

The flight from America to Belfast, Northern Ireland took off on September 11, 2001. Cocktails flowed and gaiety filtered through the plane. As I disembarked in London all of the televisions were replaying the scenes in New York. It was as though the world had changed while I transversed the globe.

Roughly two years later, I sit at a bus stop on the Ormeau Road in Belfast between a bakery and a Presbyterian church. I am staring in admiration at my new boots from Primark and reflecting on my September 11th experience. The BBC reported over tea this morning that my country, the United States, had decided to invade Iraq. I had spent my time since 2001 as a PhD student at Queen's University studying international conflict and it appears that my country is now going to be right in the middle of much of it. It was a bad move. Iraq was an ethnic conflict held at bay by madman with little real interest in Al Qaeda. I knew it would just inflame jihad across the region.

Two ladies of a certain age dander up to the bus stop and begin to whisper in their Irish lilt. Evidently, one of their nieces had been in New York at the time and God bless 'em they had made it out. The ladies also believed the world apparently had taken leave of all its senses. 'Cause according to them the war in Iraq was over oil, much like the war in Ireland was over drugs, be it paramilitaries or heads of state. The bus pulls up and the bus driver opens the door and helps the ladies with their trollies.

Two twenty-something girls take the seats the older ladies had vacated. They have sat for less than a minute when the invasion of Iraq comes up. One of the girls leans over and says, "Sure what makes America so special we've had terrorism in this country for years." A lady appears from the charity shop across the road and yells over to the girls that the shop just got some new stuff in from TopShop. If they help her

Two twenty-something girls take the seats the older ladies had vacated. They have sat for less than a minute when the invasion of Iraq comes up. One of the girls leans over and says, "Sure what makes America so special we've had terrorism in this country for years." A lady appears from the charity shop across the road and yells over to the girls that the shop just got some new stuff in from TopShop. If they help her she'll let them keep a piece of clothing. They both disappear into the charity shop.

I lean down confused, angered, and grateful that my new boots are protecting my legs from the Baltic winds that sweep through Belfast. The focus on my boots shift as eight school children in their black, grey and white uniforms join me at the bus stop. I am jolted from my thoughts by a fourteen year-old boy, "Swear to God like, next thing ya know you'll see the Americans rolling down the streets here in tanks."

"Aye we can change our names to Snoop Dogg and pledge allegiance to rap," giggles another kid.

"Aye, yer right and we can get us a couple of those pimped out rides, they're as big as me ma's caravan in Millisle."

A ginger haired girl passes around a packet of pickled onion crisps. My bus into town is headed towards me as I lean into the crowd of kids.

In my loudest and most stereotypically Texan voice I say, "Do you have the TIIME, ya all?"

The crowd of students freeze.

One of the kids stutters, "Uuuh, half past eight."

"Why thanks!" I grin.

I stand on my boots and walk to the bus. I only turn around when I am onboard and see the rest of the kids poking fun and laughing at the two kids that were talking about America.

My cellphone rings and written across the screen is my brother's name, with an Iraqi country code.

- Sara Holland

“Mother’s Titty Bleeding”

Mother’s titty bleeding
As She tries to produce a feeding
For Her 10 year ol’ boy

You see, as broke as She is
She hasn’t given Her child what it needs
Since She was making milk from Her mummeries

The story goes
Father strung out
Crack rock
Knocked up
A two bit hussy
Too young to see
The daftness of shinny rims
And gold teeth
But old enough
To be seen as fresh meat
Cause at 14
She was turning
Two tricks at a time

Uterus bruised and bloody
Form staying on the grind
Her moment of damnation
Or better said
Her moment of salvation
Came with bloated feet
Morning sickness
Waking up before dawn
Throwing up with each yawn
Yells from hell

And diaper streaks
Nestled in a four corner shack
Walls crumbling from
An infestation of rats
Mother huddles
Over a spoon
In Her eyes
Fire lit light
Brightens the room

She waits for
Substance bubbling
Time to be right
Inject shot
To close her night

Numb to baby cries
Her kid is now
Two times five
With a rap sheet
Twice his size
Hand pressed against clear glass fence
She notices scar split wrist form suicide attempts
She sees, Fathers eyes searching for Mother ass
She sees, everything He and She used to be,
And She weeps...

Portrait of my Father, 22, Wife Beside Him

In the background, just behind him and his new wife, stands the place where they made love or sex for the first time, grappling each other nervously, as if fighting some fresh beast they'd never seen or heard about.

The Plaza Hotel: where she took a long hot bath and scrubbed herself red because her mother said men like a woman who smells clean, where she dried and brushed her dark brown hair until it fell just right below her back all neatly for him, for he who would take what she'd been guarding ever since she knew she had it.

It is morning and both of them are smiling, looking at the camera as though it were a funny aunt or a giggling baby.

With his mustache and his hair combed back, my father stands in his new shoes, light pants and creased up shirt knowing that he'd want to put this picture in a giant frame or at least beside his bed to see each dawn, work on the horizon.

He is twenty two, likes the way his wife's name, Elizabeth, rolls off the tongue and onto his lips. Likes that she is already trying to speak English and the way her words come out half pretty and half ugly like moths rushing out of her throat. I want to leave them there like that, as steady as they look inside that faded picture. I want to see what lives can have before the roots get dry or quitted from them. There, behind frame and glass, they are happy and in a few months they'll be down in Baja on some beach, me in her belly and he singing to her about food or family or love – that thing that passes by in such a hurry, like an inattentive tourist looking for a better place to see, as if there were such a place to go.

Obituaries

I read them to discover who had three wives, a lover,
never married, lived alone. Who knitted, safaried,

raced cars, bred peonies—then spent a summer topless,
with other women, building cabins in Alaska.

Who served in the war, the Peace Corps, the merchant marine.
Or studied Meister Eckhart, flew to Khartoum, walked to Machu
Picchu.

An entire life distilled in a few column inches—
listing kinfolk, in-laws, the preceded, the survived.

Just a teen, an only child, a newborn, a newlywed.
From complications, too soon, unexpectedly, in an accident.

Interred, cremated, buried at sea, released to the sky.
In lieu of flowers, remembrances to, memorial reception at.

And always the photograph in a floppy hat or sombrero,
black cocktail dress or business suit, uniform or short sleeves—

In that last shot, never a thought of death, your face
radiant as you gaze into our eyes.

Poems By: Kyle Moreno

But Time is God

The ride home made the night travel faster as Sofia looked out the window of her father's car. The trees seemed to her strange creatures with their many limbs poking the dark sky, and the houses as faces staring directly towards her and following her as her father drove past them. Her mother still kept close to her—from the moment she was taken to the hospital and after the police had finished questioning her. The mother grabbed her cold hands, looked at her, but she was only able to see the back of her head. She tried not to wonder what her daughter was thinking. The thought of it just seems too unworldly, but then she realized that it's inevitable not to think about it. Still Sofia's eyes continued to look out the window while her mind remained locked in that moment of moaning and movement that resembles not the act of starting life but rather the end of it.

It was some minutes past midnight when they pulled up the driveway, but in Sofia's eyes, the night seemed darker and colder. The dad shut off the ignition, but neither he nor the mother did any attempt to get out the car. They both looked at the girl, and when the mother saw that she also didn't made any attempt to step out of the car, she finally spoke to her for the first time in the thirty-minute drive home.

"You ready, honey?"

Without any sound, Sofia slowly took a step out the car and started walking towards the front door. The mother immediately followed and spoke to her husband for the first time as well.

"Open the door."

He rushed to open the front door and moved aside so that Sofia would be the first one in. She walked in slowly, looked around, but couldn't see any familiarity in the house. The walls seemed to be of different color, not dark like the night outside but rather colorless. The walls have always been white, and even white, she remembered, had been a color. But at that moment, the walls seemed blank, idle, as if they knew they were being watched and thus pretended to be blank and idle, just waiting to spurt out at any moment. Sofia sat down on the couch, and immediately felt the weight of her mother and father next to her. No one spoke for a while, and to the surprise of the parents, Sofia said the first words in a soft, trembling voice.

"I don't know what I'm going to do."

"You don't have to do anything right now." She looked at her husband for reaffirmation: "right?"

"Yes, you don't have to do anything."

He had spoken very little since he heard the news. There is nothing that he could say to make his daughter feel better. He couldn't think of anything. His mind felt heavy from thoughts that kept coming and never leaving. He simply couldn't understand why, and didn't seem to understand that it is human nature to ask and sometimes never receive an answer, but he kept trying anyway. He kept filling his mind with those same thoughts—all the quieter more and more. His wife waited for a little while to see if he was going to say something else, and when he didn't, she turned her attention to Sofia once again.

“Don't think of anything right now. Don't worry about school. I'll send somebody to pick up your stuff.”

“I don't care about my stuff. I—I just don't know what to do.”

“It's alright. You can tell us anything.”

“I don't know what's— . What if—”

Sofia begins to sob, and for the first time in front of her, her mother too. Sofia's father walked into the kitchen and came back with a box of tissue paper. He knew exactly what was on her mind. He had been thinking of the same thing.

“Why me?”

“I don't know,” He said almost whispering, as if answering that question for himself.

Truly he did not know, and wished he knew so that he had a way to help her only daughter. That realization of impotence made his head less heavy, perhaps because he had accepted that the situation was outside his power, and for that same reason he began to cry as well.

“I don't know,” he repeated in a louder voice.

“Oh Sofia, please don't think about that,” the mother finally said.

“How can we all not think about that,” the father retorted.

“It's true, but remember what the doctor told us.”

“No matter how hard I try, I—”

“Please tell me. Talk to me.”

“I cannot be like you.”

“Like what?”

“There is no other way how to take this.”

He looked at his wife's tired face. The bags under her eyes and her blood-shot eyes caused him to turn away. In that brief moment she knew what he was talking about.

“I'm scared too. We are all scared.”

Sofia had stopped crying and kept staring at the wall in front of her. Her mind kept recapitulating the scene over and over again—unwillingly, like a reflex.

“When is this going to stop?” she said.

“Please honey, try your hardest not to think about it too much.”

“I don’t know how to do that. It hurts. Everything hurts.”

“We’re going to seek all the help we can get and—”

There was a long pause before the mother could finish.

“—and whatever happens we will be there for you. You’re never going to be alone.”

The night maintained its darkness as they sat together. The hours went by and no one seemed to want to go and sleep. Every now and then someone would speak, but it was only to make sure they were still in this world. Sofia’s eyes got heavier and heavier, and it would have been an impossibility to go to sleep with what have happened, but the physical and mental strain had just been too much that the body on its own decided to shut down. The night had been a blur to everyone, but nevertheless Sofia had understood one thing: nothing seemed to make sense.

Sofia woke up in that same place she had sat when they got home. Her mother and Father were still sitting next to her, sleeping. She looked around the house and saw that it wasn’t so dark anymore. The wall in front of her was now decorated by shadows. She recognized the vertical lines that began in the middle of the wall and dropped to the floor. There was no need to turn around to know that a window was behind her and that the vertical lines on the wall were being emitted by the vertical blinds. She observed the familiarity of the shadows on the wall. She had sat there looking at the same thing many times before without realizing that even shadows had a purpose. The house was less strange. She knew she had been there before.

- Abel Santibanez

Don't come Round...

Don't come round...

but if you do...

and see me dancing, through lace curtains, to rock 'n' roll
singing Meat Loaf or Springsteen at the top of my lungs
as the energy builds in the room,
please go away.

If I know you're there, I'll have to be quiet and sit still,
and be a lady.

It's really better if you don't.

I might be screwing your best friend
or my best friend
or someone whose name you know
or someone whose name you don't.

If all you hear is the television,
no, don't come in.

I'll be lying on the couch, lost in potato land
and I won't be the one you think I am, the one you know, the one you
love.

I'll be a piece of earth, lying fallow, waiting for spring, and new seeds.

If it's dark, I could be doing anything,
and you take your life in your hands just standing in front of the door.
I could be calling down the winds and the gods, and the light from the
dark side of the moon,
and you wouldn't want to know.

I might be asleep,
with the bedside lamp shining on my closed face,
eyeglasses on to see clearly in my dreams
and the book somewhere in the bed, turned to the wrong page.

I could be dreaming, where you would never find me.
I could be dead, or flying, or elsewhere, and if you moved my body
I might never find my way home.

Or I might know you were coming,
and be waiting for you at the door,
while you were still walking down my street,

-Mary Copeland

Abeer Qassim al-Janabi

(slam this one, my love)

I am not a woman yet sir
Not a woman just yet

You, who are dressed in colors of forest,
And a grin of steel upon your lips

You are shaking my body sir
You are breaking the bones between my tights
You are making it impossible to breathe

I am alive
I am not dead, yet.

I am not suppose to bleed like this
These clothes upon my body are drenched
With your sweat
With your forest
With your grin
With your screams
With your spit
With your insults
With my blood

With my blood

I was looking at you through the hole in the wall
I was running outside through the back door
I was unlocking the gate
When your fist clinched me
I was on my way out
When you pulled me back in
I was almost gone
I was so close to alive

And now
You are on top of my world
This green that struggles with dust and moist
And I become waste and blood
Like a road-kill but still alive
Like a fetus hoping to die

This is such a terrible fairytale at bedtime tonight

I wish to see a picture of me before this, sir.

Before your body of water drowned me
Before your spermatozoon invaded me
Before I was under your forest green

I was sand
I was a fugitive of lost bullets
And a war that killed us all
And a war that impoverished us all
And a mess of ideologies that murdered all us
I was inevitably cursed and oppressed
I was unaccountable property to none in certainty
I was injected with fury and determined to die
I had neither expression nor opinion on life

But I had dignity

Even beasts have it
Even angels have it
Even you had it

I had dignity

I was reaching for the lock
I had opened the door and I was out
I was swimming through silt and gravel
I was building walls in an unfounded desert

Three,
One after the other
My body is cracking open
Sand dune under three massive forests

Like nails on a board
There they go pounding my body

Where!?

Father.
Mother.
Brother.

Where!?

Look, my breast
A swollen hill full of bites and spit

Look, my hands
Broken wrists and clenched fists

Look, my legs
Bended unwillingly

Look, my eyes
Purple haze, shutting down and tearless

Look, my belly
Ground and seed, but wishes dead

Look, my feet
Bound to ropes and pulled

You are making it impossible to breathe

I am alive
I am not dead, yet.

Like nails on a board
There they go pounding my body

Where!?

Father.
Mother.
Brother.

Where!?

And a mess of ideologies that murdered all us

Abeer Qassim al-Janabi,
Strength of fertility in the dunes

Lay me to rest...
Rest.

-- C. Rios V.

Mrs. Longfellow

In kindergarten the boy learns to read and write.

He paints in red, blue, and green
onto butcher paper

and when he is finished
his hands are thick with paint
and smell sweet.

There are many firsts:

first fight,

first going to the bathroom alone,
and first crush.

Mrs. Longfellow has a terrarium with two ball pythons,

Which lay coiled like tawny industrial hoses

Upon the straw.

Within the classroom is a whole other room

with wooden blocks, costumes,

a play kitchen, truck, and passenger jet.

High on the wall is a mounted swordfish
brilliant in blue and white.


The boy loves to stare at it,

noting the iridescent scales,

the bulbous eye,

and the rapier nose that pierces space.

He loves kindergarten.



Mrs. Longfellow looks like a silver-haired pixie
and wears white cotton blouses with baby blue slacks.
Before the boy cleans up the blocks
in order to line up for lunch,
she grabs her guitar and sings,
“Clean up, clean up, everybody clean up,”
her fingers strumming as dexterous as orb weavers.

Mrs. Longfellow smiles when she talks to him
and she smiles when she listens to him.
And on the boy’s birthday
she takes him to the kitchen
and they bake a chocolate cake together
in a thick aluminum cake pan.

When she reads a story aloud to the class,
the boy stands behind her
and places his ear on her warm back
and listens to her voice.
It is so deep and beautiful,
with the words of The Three Billy Goats Gruff
resonating
through Mrs. Longfellow into his warm ear.

-Raul Martinez

Dreaming of an Age Undreamed of

Even Conan's lightning quickness failed to avoid the monstrous white form that suddenly hurtled upon him from above. He had a glimpse of shapeless limbs and a horribly featureless head. Then he was flung to the ground with such violence that his breath was knocked out of his lungs.

-from Conan the Avenger by Robert E. Howard

Conan. It was Conan the Barbarian saving a buxom princess that put me on the high, adventurous road of reading and writing. I was six-years old, in the first grade, and on a daily, after-school visit to the Los Nietos Public Library with my mother and four brothers. I had wandered away from the red, squat tables of the children's section, paused before entering the dim-lit and tall aisles of the non-fiction bookshelves, and found myself before a wire-framed, spinning bookrack of paperbacks. I spun it of course like a wheel of fortune, and as the squeaks ticked away, and lessened, then stopped, there it was:

Conan the Avenger. The title was written in bold, purple letters on the white cover of the paperback. And in the center, a Frank Frazetta painting of the wild warrior in mid-leap: Conan enraged, his teeth bared, his necklace trailing behind him like a tiger's tail, about to tackle a black-robed wizard who was seconds away from plunging his evil-looking dagger straight into the full breasts of the damsel splayed out, bound upon a black altar.

But in a way, it wasn't any of this, or the shadowy figures of crocodiles, tentacles, and demons surrounding Conan. It was Ms. Casares the librarian spotting me, then standing next to me, right as I was about to spin the bookrack again, right back on Conan the Avenger by Robert E. Howard. She pointed to a yellow sticker on the book, and told me gently, in a librarian's whisper, "Sorry, mijo, you're too young to read that. Do you see, it says, 'Young-Adult?'"

I was six-years old, in first grade, and Young-Adult, for all intents and purposes was a nonsense word and destination. It was like telling me, a poor, Mexican kid—whose world-radius in unincorporated Los Angeles was less than a medieval peasant's traveling experience—you can't read it till you get to Timbuktu. Ms. Casares smiled regretfully before she walked back to sit at her desk. Her green dress, which hung by the bony knobs of her shoulders, ruffled

and then was still like a curtain not long in the wind. The yellow Young-Adult sticker glared at me from the safety of the crinkled spine of its book.

Days went by and seemed to go on as before. My older brothers, Jorge, Jaime, and Hector sat at the wooden desks in the main reading room, while Juan and I, the two youngest, continued to sit in the children's section with the plastic desks and plastic chairs and read books like *Where the Wild Things Are*, or the *Curious George* series—one of which, I remember, taught me how to fold together a paper boat—and of course, books on dinosaurs. I'd pore over the illustration of a Stegosaurus swinging its spiked tail at an Allosaurus, or a cut-away diagram of an Ankylosaurus's internal organs, or put my hand against the life-size, foot long drawing of a T. rex tooth. But every now and then I'd glance over to the bookrack.

There would be other days when Ms. Casares would lay out paper and crayons for us and we'd spend the whole afternoon drawing trees and silver spaceships, suns with happy faces, and Superman, or green dinosaurs. However, once in a while my stick men would begin to sport long, black manes and carry broadswords. And when I wanted a drink of water I wouldn't go to the closest water fountain near the entrance, but would walk farther instead towards the one in the back near the reference books. Or, I'd find excuses to go bother my older brothers for something at the far end of the library. Both walks, curiously enough, that would pass directly by the Conan bookrack.

Sometimes I would stop in front of it, and I remember that I would notice other books, like Ray Bradbury's, *The Illustrated Man*, whose cover of the tattooed figure sitting cross-legged in the middle of nowhere always intrigued me. Or I'd look at Poul Anderson's, *High Crusade*, with its cover of knights on horseback charging towards a rocket ship. But always, ever always, there was Conan. Conan the Wanderer, Conan the Adventurer, Conan the Buccaneer. Conan the Warrior, Conan the Usurper, Conan the Conqueror. All of them with that damnable yellow sticker. So near, so far away.

Months passed, summer passed, and then came fall and I was now in the second grade, and a few weeks from turning seven. One day, I walked over to the wooden tables to ask my oldest brother, Jorge, about an arithmetic problem--something to do with adding apple baskets. He took my pencil and worksheet and started to explain things when I saw that the book he had just been reading had a yellow sticker on it.

“You can read those now?” I asked.

“Oh yeah, remember?” he said. He had just turned twelve in October.

I stared at the sticker, looked over for Ms. Casares who was nowhere in sight. I got sweaty, my hands started to leave prints on the smooth desktop. Conan.

“Anyways, you just count the baskets—“

“Do you think you can get me a book?” I said.

“Why,” he asked, doodling on his pee-chee folder, “did you go over your limit?”

“No, it’s because, it’s because it has a yellow sticker.”

“Oh yeah, sure, what do you want?” he said.

She was still nowhere in sight.

“Conan, Conan the Avenger. It’s over there,” I pointed at the bookrack, “It’s the one with Conan jumping at the wizard.”

Jorge got up, ambled over to the bookrack, gave it a half-spin, and took the book. He came back, placed it on the tabletop next to his book, and then continued to help me with adding groups of apple baskets which I could color after finishing the problems.

When my mother came to pick us up, I ran up to her and then ran outside, pretending to chase butterflies or grasshoppers or something. I didn’t want to look back inside, but I would, every now and then, steal glances.

My brothers lined up to check out their books. Finally, Jorge went up to Ms. Casares, placed his books on the counter and signed for his books. Ms. Casares then peered over the circulation desk, out towards me. She said something to my mother. My mother opened the glass door, yelled out, “Raul, no quieres un libro?”

“No, Mama. No gracias.” I said

“Estas seguro?” she asked.

“Si, no gracias Mama,” I said as I ran behind the bushes which hugged the library walls, looking for something, anything; spiders, roly-polys, marbles, anything, to get away from Ms. Casares’s gaze.

That moment—between waiting outside of the library and finally grabbing the book from Jorge as soon as we got into my mother’s car—was the one that riveted together my literacy. It was about acquiring hidden knowledge from the guardians of the gate. I had been reading prior to this, I had been excited about books prior to this, but this time I was doing something, learning something, which was outside of my boundaries, which was not intended for me,

and yet I wanted it and had now gained it.

And no one could take that away from me. Not even Ms. Casares. Who, in all fairness, was a sweet and good woman. I remember that everyday she wouldn't only ask my mother to attend ESL or literacy classes, but the other mothers as well. She also took it upon herself to drive around the neighborhood in her blue, Datsun 280Z and invite everybody into the library. She was a woman who took great pleasure, smiling, every time we signed our name on those blue cards and then she'd stamp our books with a pleasant roll of her wrist. I don't think anyone of us was ever overdue on a library book—not from fear, but from great respect that we might offend her in some way. She gave us bookmarks, stickers, and sometimes comic-books. Every now and then, when the library offered baking classes, she'd make sure to hand us chocolate chip cookies on the way out. We loved her. But for that moment, in the child's mind, she was a guardian at the gate.

Once we were seated inside my mother's blue Cadillac, Jorge didn't give me any of that big brother take-away crap before handing me the book.

"Here you go," he said.

I grabbed it and the sunlight glittered off the cover. My fingers and thumbs rubbed its smooth surface. I breathed in the musty smell of its yellowed paper, and listened to the tattering sound as I flipped its pages like a deck of magic cards. The car started, bucked, and the ride commenced. I was happy, fulfilled, and chuckling as the winds came in, and the oceans drank Atlantis, and dreaming of an age undreamed of.

His shirt was burnt and torn away, his back was furrowed with scratches, and his eyebrows were singed. But he went up to the altar and exerted his strength in one more gigantic effort. The chains holding the woman tinkled broken to the floor.

As the victorious host came shouting and cheering through the door, they found him embracing his lovely queen with all the ardor of a man in love for the first time.

-Conan the Avenger, R.E.H.

- Raul Martinez

