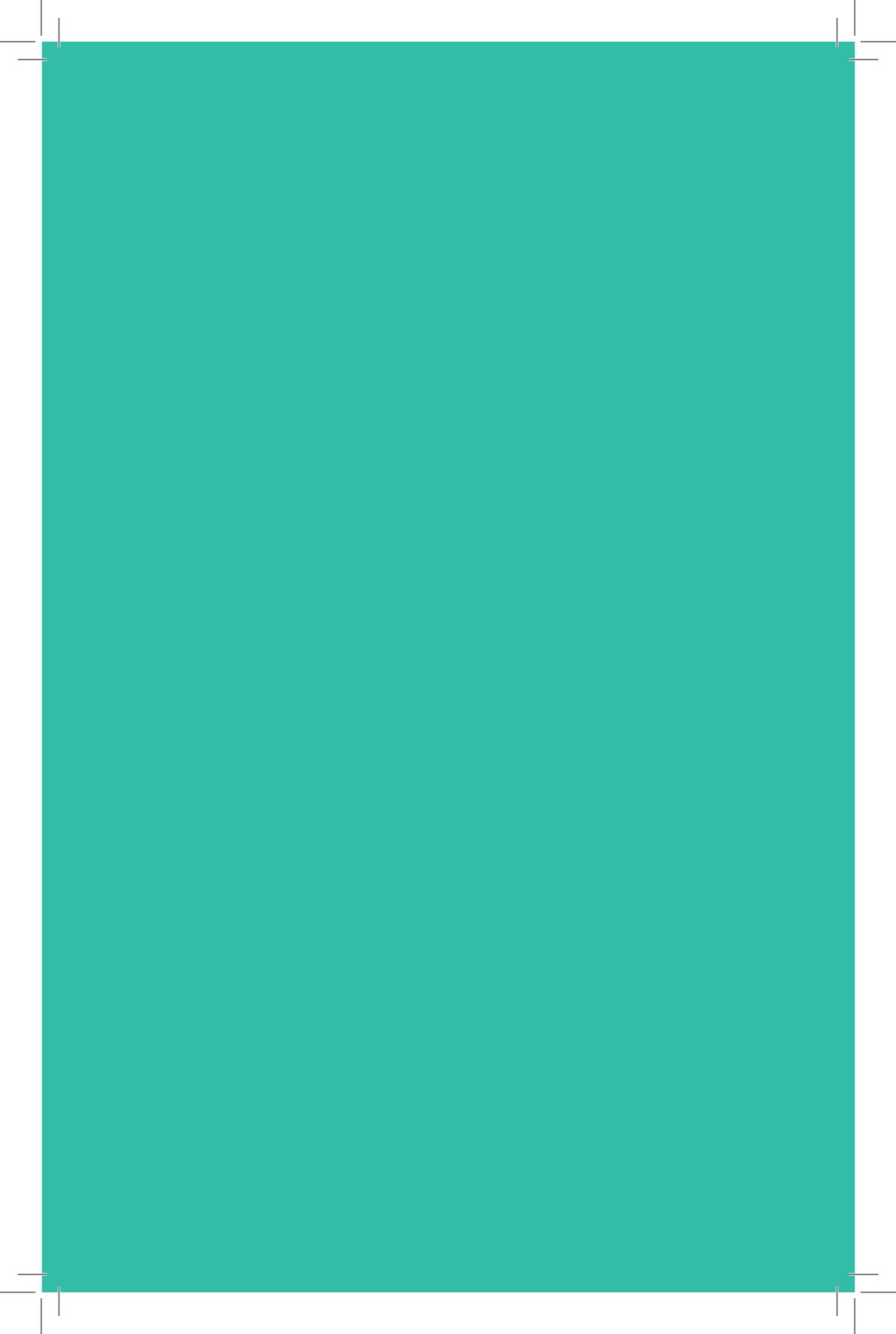


# EN JA MB ED

SPRING 2017



# VOICES OF DESCENT

“Never be afraid to raise your voice for honesty and truth and compassion against injustice and lying and greed. If people all over the world...would do this, it would change the earth.”

*William Faulkner*

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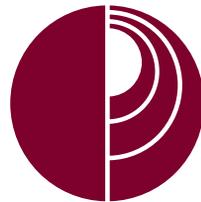
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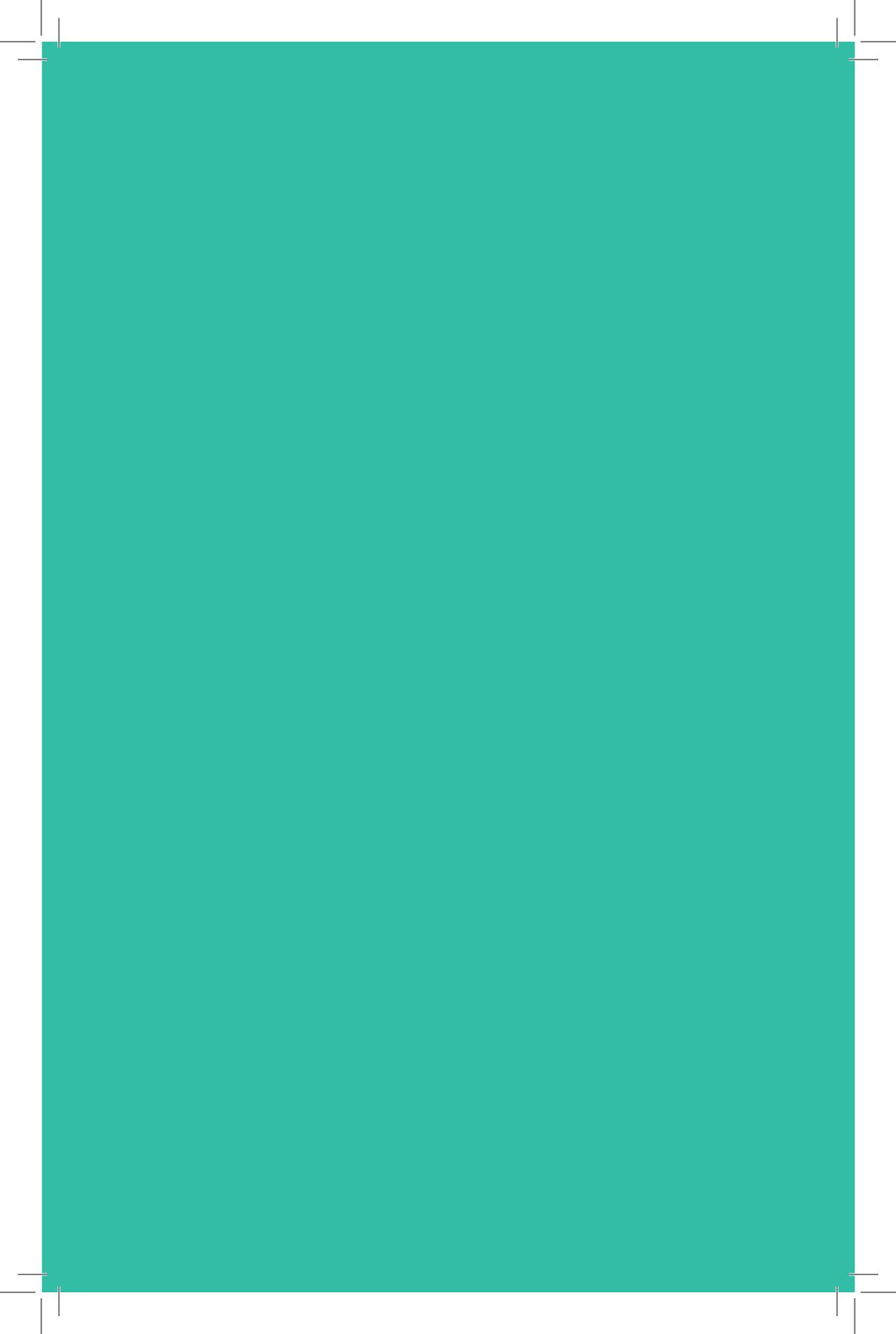
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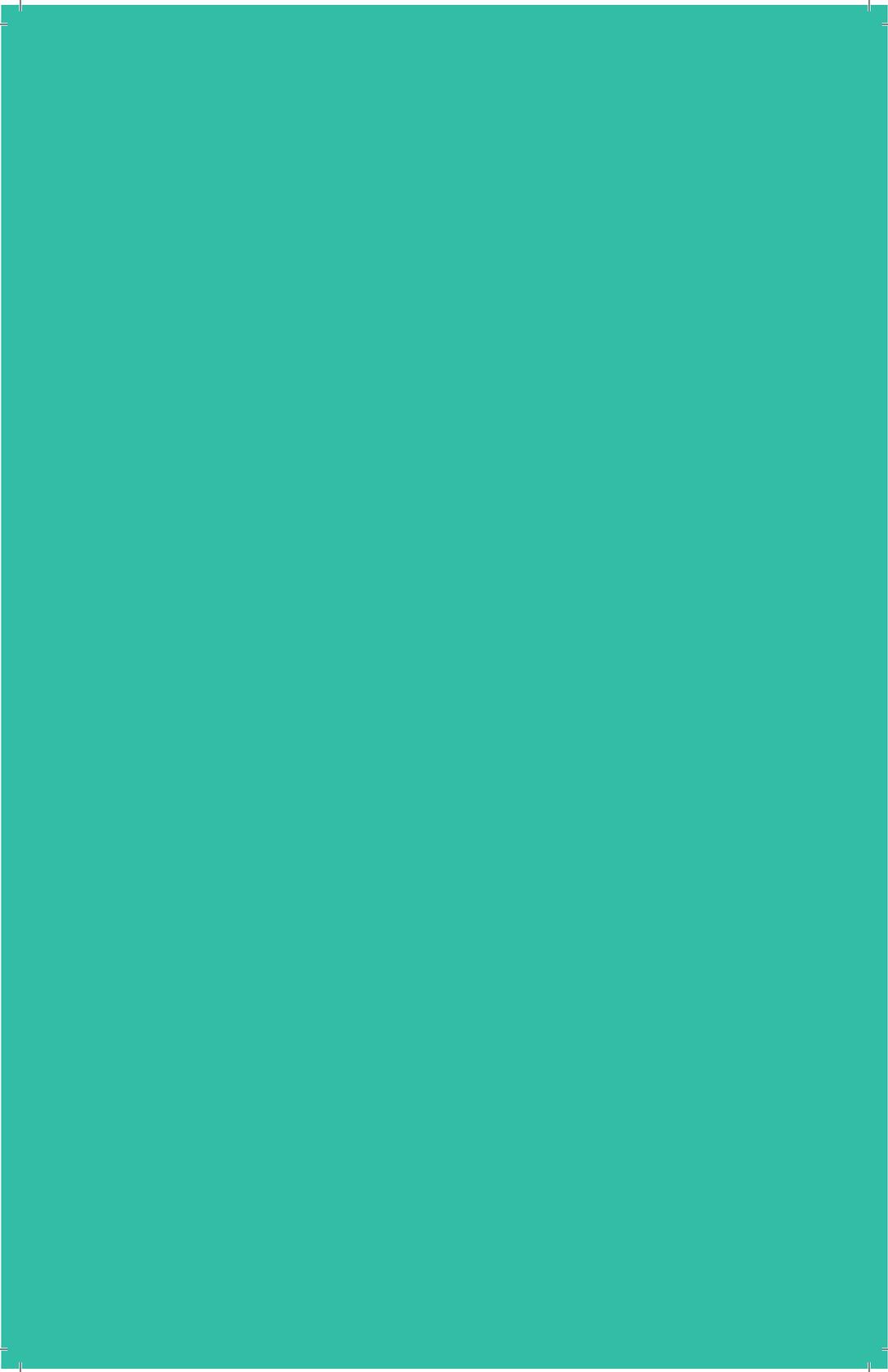
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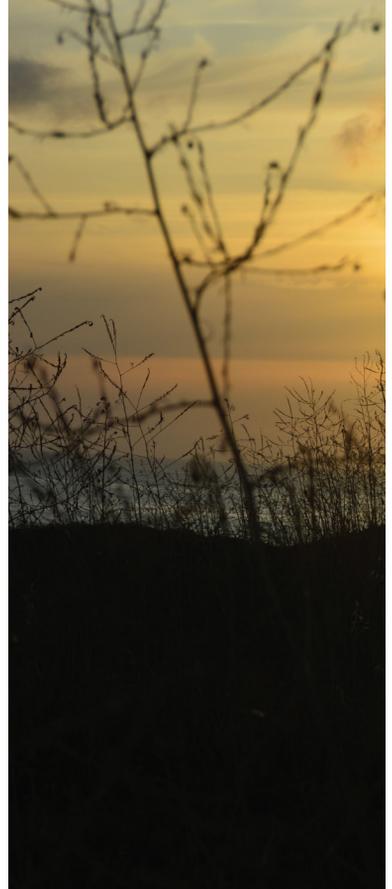


# DRUGS ARE SWALLOWING OUR YOUTH

*Joel Avalos*

There is an alley by my house. I always pass through there. I see graffiti on the walls, trash on the ground, dust everywhere, and I smell the scent of marijuana in the air. There are many corners in this alley. I always see young people, I am guessing of ages fourteen through twenty-four, in these corners. They are constantly puffing smoke into their lungs. Then, they begin to cough vehemently, and the sound of their coughs echoes down the alley and into the windows of many apartments and houses. The entire neighborhood knows about them, probably complains about them, but never confronts them. I usually see them before 8:00am, after 3:00pm, and sometimes in between when they are ditching class to get a smoke. When I pass by these youngsters while driving my Honda Civic through the alley, they

seem to stop what they are doing and stare at my car. Perhaps, they are afraid it could be the police even though they move, remarkably, at a slow pace similar to the pace of a snail every time they hear a car coming their way. Their eyes are red like red raspberries, and they do not say a word. They merely stare at me with a face that looks tremendously tired, but I am sure they only appear this way because the effects of the marijuana they inhaled kicked in. I noticed it is a different group of young people every time I pass through the alley. Sometimes, it is big, and sometimes, it is small. They are of all races, ethnicities, cultures, and beliefs. I think to myself, "They are so young and intelligent, but they are already damaging their health. Someone around here is selling drugs to the youth and stealing their future and dreams."





# LOVELY THOUGHTS

*Dejour Stricklen*



# LAYC

*David Williams*

With a couple of hours between connecting flights, I decided to grab a quick dinner in a bustling bar and grill not far from my gate of departure in the Atlanta International Airport. Alone at a table and surrounded by noisy patrons, I ate a club sandwich and sipped a glass of raspberry iced tea, engrossed in the paperback I had been reading on the plane. For a time, the world of the novel insulated me from other diners and passersby in the terminal. Suddenly I noticed everyone stop mid-sentence and pay attention to the giant TV screens nearby. Some rose from their seats and stood closer to the monitors, while others craned their necks to see around and between people positioning themselves for a better view.

We were a diverse group thrust together at a break in our journey, waiting for a connection. Crowded around the television screens were folks from all over the country and beyond – old and young, male and female, white and blue collar. Most of us were travelers from somewhere else waiting to depart to separate

destinations, but some were airport workers on break, and to my right stood three uniformed policemen. As we bunched together to view live footage of breaking news, we couldn't help but say what was on our minds. Maybe it was the safety of anonymity – the fact that we were randomly gathered and would never see each other again after this moment – that emboldened us to say aloud what we may never have said in mixed company at home.

CNN host: "You're looking at pictures of the protests. I know it's dark to see. It's hard to see because it's dark there, but those are protesters on the scene and police officers there all lined up, and they're trying to regain some control."

"Oh no, here we go again. Entire country goin' nuts."

CNN host: "But, again, you have another incident that, you know, resulted in an African American male who was killed and so people are really anxious, people are worried, people are scared and it's another tragic incident in our country and now



# DIVER

we have, you know, the escalation of force going on right now, and riot gear, and teargas and all of those things so – I mean, you just pray for peoples' safety and hope we can figure out what's going on and make sure that this doesn't happen again."

"This time they caught it on tape. Have you guys seen the video? It's all right there, clear as day. There's no getting around it this time."

Black attorney representing the family of the deceased (on CNN): "There's nothing that I can see in the video footage that indicates imminent threat. What we're finding more and more is that when an African American male is shot, unarmed, we get these tag words. We get these automatic responses either from the attorney for a particular police officer or from the police department, saying that there was some sort of imminent threat."

"Yeah, I wonder how they're gonna wiggle outta this one."

Mayor (on CNN): "Please, let's wait for all the information before we reach some judgment. You know, you can

see things different ways. Someone can look at a video and see something different from someone else. But we have to pause, take a breath, and let the system play itself out here."

"If it's all a matter of perception, can we ever get at the truth?"

"You're right; you've got a point. I feel like we're grasping at shadows, like we're prisoners in Plato's allegory of the cave or something."

Police Commissioner (on CNN): "The first story is one that usually does not have everything down in terms of accuracy. We're caught in the middle. The media's asking, 'What happened, what happened? The people want to know.' We can only give you what we have at that moment."

"C'mon, can we get a straight answer here? It's like Who's on first, What's on second, and I Don't Know's on third, you know what I mean?"

"WHAT?"

"Hey – it's easy for you guys to play Monday morning quarterback and criticize decisions that police have to make in a split second regarding

whether to use deadly force. Hindsight is always 20/20. The problem is you guys ignore what actually happened, and we all become slaves to the narrative that emerges from pure myth.”

“That’s right, officer. The narrative almost always involves an innocent black man, doing nothing wrong, who got himself gunned down by a racist white cop. But you all should take a closer look at the person before blaming cops. Too often he’s a criminal who took a wrong turn in life and has no one to blame but himself for what happened.”

Police Association Director (on CNN): “False narratives and irresponsible anti-police rhetoric have put our officers in greater danger than ever before.”

Republican radio talk-show host (on CNN): “Building hysterias based on falsehoods is the primary modus operandi of the Left. First, a lie or exaggeration is manufactured. Then it is repeated over and over by the mainstream media and myriad left-wing groups. The latest left-wing hysteria is Black Lives Matter – based on the lie that black lives don’t matter because white police kill blacks wantonly.”

[Image on TV screen: a black woman carrying a large sign at protest – “IS MY SON NEXT?”]

“You know, black people see racism everywhere; they blame everything on racism. Whenever white policemen interact with blacks, you can bet they’ll be charged with racism.”

“Yep. Sorta reminds me of my

grandfather, bless his memory. He believed that everyone who cut him off on the interstate was an anti-Semite.”

“Wait a minute! You whites live in a dream world where white racism has been conquered and our high arrest and conviction rates are solely the result of black behavior. Gimme a break!”

“I’ve always wondered... Why are black people so hypersensitive?”

“Some are and some aren’t. But I find it kinda funny that you can sit back and judge, with that smug attitude, having the luxury of knowing full well that what happens to us out there in the streets will never happen to you!”

“Okay, riddle me this: What kind of sense does it make to riot and loot and destroy the community where you live and work? Think of the long-term damage – and all for nothing.”

“You guys have all of this outrage when a window gets broken. Do you have the same level of outrage when a young black man is killed in our community?”

“Why all of this hatred toward cops? Police are only there because of your criminality.”

“Most of the gun violence in the black community is directly connected to the narcotics trade. They join gangs and deal drugs because they have been systematically engineered into the lowest level of a real-life monopoly game, rendering them as permanent underclass. It’s a crabs-in-the-barrel mentality.”

“Us Latinos are in the same barrel,



dude. We all keep climbing up on top of one another and just when we think we're almost out, something tugs on us and we fall back in."

"The real point is this: crabs aren't supposed to be in barrels."

"Now that's real talk. If you're poor the only way to escape poverty is through crime."

"Hey – not so fast! My family and friends were poor growing up, but we did not rob or murder anyone. It's not poverty that causes crime; it's poor character. We are all responsible for the choices we make."

"Now we're getting to the heart of the matter. The real problem isn't police shootings; it's black-on-black crime."

"Get outta here, man! Your focus on black-on-black crime is just a diversionary tactic, suggesting that black people don't have the right to be outraged about police violence in black communities, just because those communities have a crime problem."

"I'm from Chi-Raq, so I know what I'm talking about. Where are you from?"

"Killadelphia."

"Face it: police stop and arrest more black people than others because they commit a disproportionate percentage of crime. Case closed."

"Does that give law enforcement the right to profile and oppress the even larger percentage of law-abiding black people?"

"What about us? We're the ones out there patrolling and stopping suspects that may have guns under

the front seat. We're the ones out there risking our lives trying to clean things up. Good cops should not have to feel like they are under siege by the communities they serve."

Black Lives Matter spokesperson (on CNN): "All Lives Matter' points to a Utopian reality that we don't live in right now... Of course all lives matter, but we live in a society where black lives are devalued and in fact targeted for destruction and demise. So if we really want to build a world where all lives matter, then it means that we will fight like hell today for black lives."

Black actor and activist (on CNN): "Now, what we've been doing is looking at the data and we know that police somehow manage to de-escalate, disarm, and not kill white people every day."

Fox News host (from the TV across the room and above the bar): "The reason there is so much violence and chaos in the black precincts is the disintegration of the African-American family. Raised without much structure, young black men often reject education and gravitate toward the street culture, drugs, hustling, and gangs. Nobody forced them to do that. Again, it's a personal decision."

Black journalist (from the TV mounted on the side wall): I feel compelled to give out some good things about African-Americans. Nine out of ten black people, age twelve or older, currently don't use illicit drugs. 93% don't suffer from substance abuse.

## 7

Seven out of ten black fathers ages 15 to 44 do live with their children and bathe, dress, diaper and help their children every day and spend time with their families...”

Our heads swiveled back and forth from screen to screen and from one of us to another. Amid animated sidebars and wild gesticulations throughout the packed bar and grill, amid point and counterpoint and over the din of the crowd, the TV pundits loudly opined while in the background another big city burned. In time, one by one, we glanced at our watches, took a last look at the dueling giant flat screens and wandered toward our respective gates. One by one we left, each abandoning what we had started to build together, and like the ancient workers on the Tower of Babel, scattered to our respective corners of the earth – each speaking a language that the other could not possibly comprehend.

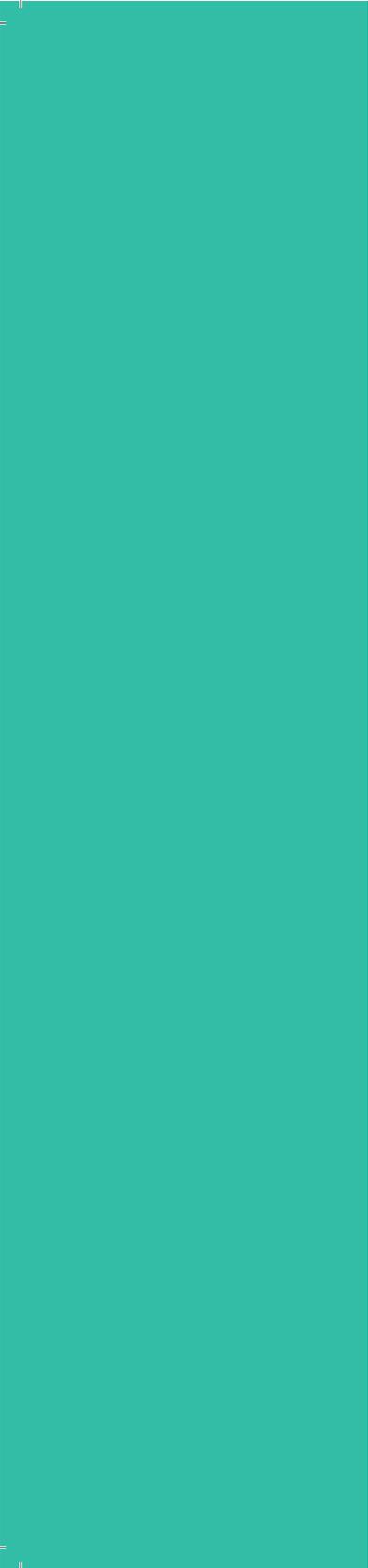




**FR  
AG  
ILE  
?**

*Jesus Rocha*

Counting the seconds between the beats  
 As if the moments therein are life.  
 Time to listen and tell, diagnose the heart with the eye of the mind.  
 Box it, seal it, sell it, brand it proudly for all to see:  
 "Fragile"  
 Cogs, wheels, springs and boards.  
 Fragile? Frailty in the purpose you impose on the parts,  
 Sliding towards the thrumming machine.  
 Fragile? Yes, if perception as far as the plans can go is all you have.  
 "Fragile", so bold a statement in its simplicity  
 If all you see is the end goal, rigidity in thought incarnate,  
 Then being fragile is truly its reality.  
 And still the beats continue,  
 Rhythmic cultures bound by the turning of the clock.  
 The seconds between the beats are not life,  
 They hold life within the fragile frame we create.  
 Time, the river constant, within it, floating,  
 We build the thrumming war.  
 We build the culture to consume and refuse to conceal.  
 Fragile? Yes, the strongest pieces peel and pile if left to weather alone.  
 Fragile? Yes, the counting of the cogs, breaking the wheel, burning the wood,  
 And still we float towards the thrumming mouth, onward to the war.  
 Consumption of our mother,  
 Burning of the wood.  
 Consume, count, consume, count.  
 The seconds in between the beats  
 Are all we know of life.



*ENJAMBED*

## LOVE BY JERKS

*Danely Segoriano*

Maybe it's the patience,  
the everlasting conversations?  
Teasing and timid smiles,  
the loss of reason,  
and all senses?

Maybe it's a void,  
a heartache and a storm?  
A wispy Spring wind,  
love by jerks,  
just moving along.

# DRUGS

*Jourdan Thibodeaux*

*Hello Friend.*

*I know. I know what you're thinking. We're not friends; you don't even know who's writing this. But I don't have any friends. And since you took time out of your day to read this, I'm guessing you have nothing better to do. So please, let's just pretend we're friends. Just for a little while.*

*I've never been good at making friends but from what I've noticed friendship requires a certain give and take. So if you'll listen to me, I can tell you a secret. I can tell you, show you, how to be normal. How to act normal.*

*I know. You're probably thinking this is bull shit. You have friends, you have a job, you pass your classes. You're probably the walking definition of normal but what I'm going to tell you is a new kind of normal. So before you flip this page, just listen for a while. Stay with me.*

*Who knows? After you're done reading this, you may consider us to be real friends...*



I have to remember to take my Zoloft, first thing in the morning. Every morning.

My doctor keeps raising the dosage each month. I've been on it for three months and have yet to see a change but this is, in her words, just the tipping point.

I keep a bottle of water right next to my bed, next to the orange prescription bottle, next to my glasses. I keep it this way, every night. A way to reprogram my brain. Pills come before my glasses. I cannot put on the glasses if I did not take the pill.

So if I ever get up and go to the bathroom, blind as a bat, looking for toilet paper under the sink, I'll know I've forgotten my glasses. In this fucked up way, it's almost like I can't see without taking my pill.

I stand in the bathroom and avoid my gaze as I brush my teeth. It's not some poetic "I can't look myself in the eyes anymore" bull shit... It's more like. "I know how I look. I know the look in my eyes. There's nothing new to see here."

I make myself a cup of coffee before school. It's a new Keurig. My mother bought it a few months ago. As much

as I hate change, I have to say, the Keurig is a faster way to make coffee. It only takes a minute or so. It leaves me alone with my thoughts.

*Friend? Are you still there? Are you watching me? Well if you are, pay close attention. Coffee is key. Repeat that to yourself every morning if you have to. Coffee is key.*

*I take sleeping pills every night. Do you see how I make myself two cups of coffee? Well that's because I took 4... no, 5.... Wait... maybe 4?... Doesn't matter. Whatever handful I took results to how many cups of coffee I have in the morning.*

*Do you see me, leaning against the bar, holding the cup in both hands? Do you see me close my eyes as I drink?*

*Copy this movement. This is the one part of the morning where you get to be yourself. Coffee, energy drink, protein smoothie. Whatever you need. Hold onto it.*

*Pay close attention. This is where it gets normal.*

I'm a student worker.

This is what normal looks like. Me, in an office chair, writing down names and scheduling appointments. Giving

# SUCH

students the right files, telling them where to go to fill in these files. I help people and I get paid for it. I tell people when my boss is in a meeting. I ask them if I can do anything to help them.

There are words people use every day until it starts to become a habit. If someone sneezes, it is almost an automatic reply to say "Bless you." If I leave a class or study group, I should say "Goodbye."

Office talk is the same thing, but worse. If someone comes in, no matter who it is, you say "good morning". On the phone you will say. "Please hold, while I direct your call." or "I'm sorry, he's at a meeting. Would you like me to take a message?"

Not only will these phrases be automatic, you need a practiced laugh. Not a real laugh but the kind of laugh that says "I am listening. I do not think you're funny. But please keep paying me."

Along with this laugh, you'll need to practice body language. You'll need to adjust the volume of your words, the tone of your voice. You'll need to sound like an asshole but an asshole who's only doing their job.

Take it from me, office talk is the most irritating kind of talk in the world.

Occasionally, one of the head supervisors will come in and he will ask me how my weekend was. I will give him a professional smile and nod, say something about the weather. Maybe, if he does not leave immediately, I will

ask him about his grandchildren. Timmy Who The Fuck Cares Jr. and little Sally Douche Bag.

I don't really hate his grandkids. I just hate talking about them. I have never met them, will never meet them, and they probably don't give a shit about their grandfather. I mean, what kid really does?

*Look! Look at my desk. Do you see the papers neatly piled together? Notice how I just sprayed and dusted the keyboard? My hands are folded out in front of me, but not tucked under my arms. I give off a professional, but easy going posture. My smile says come in, talk to me, I'm here to help you.*

*Do you see how easy it is to be normal? Look how normal I look. Isn't it easy?*

"You have a really beautiful family." I say, smiling and nodding as my supervisor shows me family photos on his phone that I did not ask to see.

"Did your grandson every get into that science program at school?"

"No, no!" My supervisor says, exasperated. "We spent all this money on supplies and tutors to help him and now he doesn't care for science. He wants a guitar now! Can you believe that?"

"Well," I laugh, shaking my head. "What are you gonna do? Kids will be kids. He just has to find his calling in the world! Music and science are both really good hobbies for kids." He points at me, as if I had said the



perfect thing in the world. The words he's been looking for all day.

"You know what? You're right. When you're right, you're right!"

I reach behind me and gather the files that my supervisor came in for. I also grab my reusable coffee cup and take a big, thirst quenching drink. My supervisor takes the files from my hands and nods graciously.

I keep drinking from the cup. I hold up one finger so he will wait for me to speak. "A Mr. Bridges called you at 8 O'clock. He didn't want to leave a message but he asked for you to call him back when you came in."

I hand him a sticky note with Mr. Bridges name and phone number. My supervisor smiles at me as if I am the daughter he wishes he had. I smile back as if I am not high as a kite.

Crushing up a Norco into fine dust and sprinkling it in my water was one of the greatest ideas I have ever had.

*I don't like to leave my friends out in the dark so let me explain.*

*Norco's are pain killers but not just any pain killer. It's more than Tylenol, less than Morphine. I used to only take it on rainy days but I've learned something about painkillers. Something important.*

Before he leaves, he points at my coffee cup. "Any place you know that serves a good cup of coffee?"

I'm so high right now that I feel like I love my supervisor. Not only do I love him, I want him to feel as good as I do. I don't just want him to have coffee, I

want to run down the street and buy him coffee. I want to bring it to him in his office while he tells me about his nephew's little league game.

He could talk all he wants about his grandchildren now. Not only am I happy to listen, I'm so euphoric that I may even give him parenting tips. I could tell him the video game to buy for his grandson's birthday.

I could tell him he's the greatest boss ever. It's not true. But I could tell him.

"Oh, I'm drinking water right now." I chuckle my practiced laugh. "But I know 7-11 has a lot of good coffee. Less expensive than Starbucks and right down the street."

He laughs before he closes the door. "Water?!" He shakes his head incredulously "I need my coffee to start off the morning, don't you?!"

I laugh. Not the rehearsed office laugh, but a real laugh. "No. I think I'll just stick to water."

I watch him walk down to his office. I then stare at the computer in front of me as I finish off the last of my drug infused water. My hands are starting to lose feeling. I run them up and down the keyboard, like I need to touch something. I need to feel something.

*Here's what I've learned: No matter what the day is, pain killers will always be unhealthy. But with that being said, there will always be people who make it feel like a rainy day.*

*So take the Norco. Life is short. And so is the high.*

I look at my empty cup and run my fingertips over it lightly. I'm smiling like an idiot but I can't seem to stop myself.

"It's good to stay hydrated." I whisper to no one.

After work, I have class. I sit with a girl who is like a friend, but who really isn't a friend. She will joke with me, she will copy my notes (as well as me copying hers, occasionally), and she will tell me about some petty problem. Maybe her boyfriend is being a dick. Maybe her parents did not pay back the money she loaned them. Maybe her grandmother died; nothing too big that she can't tell me about.

She is just like me. She is pretending to be something. Pretending to be a friend. Which is why she is the perfect friend for me. We're both just acting; adding lib and improvising.

She tells me every Thursday she will text me the following weekend. And every weekend I wait, but there is no text.

This used to hurt me until I realized that if she did come over, I would have to share my weed with her. So I'm glad she is just pretending.

*Do you see me and my pretend friend? We're at the back of the class. My desk is right next to the back door. I don't sit here for convenience or to sleep in class. I sit here because it's my own bubble. I can sit here unbothered.*

*I've figured out the secret of class and you should too. Take my advice: If you sit in the back, ask one question. Once*

*a week, at least. That way, even if you're sitting next to the bad students, you can be labeled as a good student.*

*Maybe even ask a question at the end of class. A good question. And remember the answer. Make sure the professor knows your name.*

*Oh and here's another tip... Do you see me, looking at my pretend friend but reaching in my backpack? Does it look like I've lost a pencil? Maybe I put my best pen in the wrong pocket?*

*Here's the best piece of advice:*

*When you open your bottle of Xanax in class, make sure no one ever sees the prescription bottle come out of your backpack. Make sure you're looking at something else when you swallow them. Look as normal as possible. Only take two. No more or less. Because if you take less, it will not work, but if you take more, it will work too well.*

Maybe you should be writing these notes down...

The professor comes in another high comes crashing over me. Not only am I completely calm, I'm completely in control. If this building burst into flames at this second, I would not only remain calm but would somehow retain the confidence to put the fire out.

I nudge my pretend friend. I smile at her and she rolls her eyes. She knows how excited I am for history. The professor's lectures make history come alive. That's not just the Xanax talking. The first day I came to this class I was sober and I still enjoyed it.



This means something to me. It means I'm not just an addict, but a student as well. I come prepared every day. I bring my homework, I bring my pencils, my clothes are neat and clean.

*If you don't want to look like an addict, come to school prepared. Pack your pills the night before so you do not suffer withdrawal headaches.*

The last class of the day is the hardest. That's when the highs will start wearing off. If you've followed my advice so far, you may feel spacey and distant. If this is your first time taking all these drugs, then you may be drowsy. Not just drowsy, but downright exhausted.

So that's why you need to find a drug dealer who sells Adderall.

I can focus on anything with Adderall. Not only can I focus, but I'm the most helpful person in the world in my last class. I make sure if no one else is listening, I make eye contact with my professor so he can feel like he taught one student, at least. If the girl who sits next to me is absent, I will have a copy of my notes and I will give them to her. I do not even know her name; I do not know if she ever reads or appreciates the notes. In fact, I don't know why I make copies of math notes. I'm not even reading them over and over again.

My professor calls on me. Sometimes I forget I have my hand raised. So I have to improvise a question.

"Yeah, I'm sorry but can you do

another problem like question 16? I don't really understand it yet..."

He'll look at me with hope in his eyes. The kind of hope that teachers and professors are drained of in the middle of the semester. His excited smile is enough to know why he chose this profession.

"Of course!" He'll say, over excited. "Of course. Well you see, for the first part of the linear equation you have to..."

I usually stop listening at this point.

My brain can't seem to focus on anything. His words are literally blending together.

"We can see here, from the fraction, that humsblk nduclu, skwyaq nsycie."

My eyes widen but not with euphoria, with nothing but concern. I look at my classmates. They've noticed nothing. I grip onto my desk because it would look crazy to hold my hair and pull it out.

My professor keeps speaking. "Mhyskre kyeslir wubnert starlynt... Do you understand now? Does that make it easier?"

*You heard him too, right?...*

*Don't tell me it was just me?...*

My classmates have turned to look at me now. I've been quiet for too long. I try to wipe the confused look off my face as I nod my head vigorously.

"Yes. That makes it much clearer. Thank you."

The professor squints his eyes at me

and then at the white board. I know he thinks he's made a mistake but it's just me. Still high as a kite.

But I know the answer to this problem. So I call my sister. She gives me a ride home. I hid a blunt in her car and she overreacts when I pull it out of her glove box. She yells at me and I tune her out until eventually, I arrive home. Before I leave the car, I give the rest of the blunt to my sister. I remind her, warn her, not to drive high. To wait until she gets home.

*Don't let your loved one's drive high  
Invite them over, get high with them.*

*Don't kill anyone else while high.  
Just focus on killing yourself.*

*I think we've made a great stride  
today, friend.*

When I close my room door, I unlock and open my drawer of pills. I have endless bottles of sleeping pills. There are a dozen different kinds to choose from. Advil PM, Nighttime Cold and Flu, Zzzquil, Melatonin, Benadryl; you name it, and I have it.

*Maybe you've learned a lot from  
me. I'd really like for us to stay friends.  
There's so much I can show you. I have  
so much more to tell you.*

Tonight I choose Advil PM. They're liquid tablets. Fat and blue pills that look like marbles if I hold them up to my bedside lamp. I take them with soda while I watch TV.

I have to watch something simple and mind numbing while I fall asleep.

No horror movies, no law and order. Something like Friends or The Big Bang Theory.

I take the pills out of the bottle one by one. I only have one class tomorrow so I can take more than 3. I can take up to 6 but 6 makes you sick.

That's a rhyme I practice when I take pills. I figured it out when I woke up in the middle of the night, too numb to move, throwing up on the side of my bed.

*You'll need to find a good drug  
dealer. Remember to tip him. If you tip  
your drug dealers, they'll usually text  
you first with their best deals. That's how  
I started taking Adderall. It was a two for  
one sale.*

*Yes. Drug dealers, the good ones,  
really do give two for one sales.*

I have to take off my pants and shoes quickly. It's very important that I find a comfortable position in bed because once the pills kick in, it will hit my body first. I will not be able to move. I usually sleep on my stomach. So if I ever throw up again, I will not drown in it. I lay down cautiously, listening to the sounds of Friends. I've watched this episode so many times, I only need to hear it to know which episode it is.

*Are we friends now?*

I start to lose feeling in my legs first. It's not like I'm paralyzed but it's as if I'm moving in slow motion. My body feels heavy. I turn my head and face the wall.



The clock on my bookshelf reads 6pm. I  
can't remember if I packed my Xanax.

*I'd really like for us to stay in touch.*

*Like I said, I can be normal.*

There's this dull hot pain in my  
stomach. It's been there for the past few  
weeks. I know it's because I eat more  
pills than I do food but I'm not ready to  
face it. I'm not ready to deal with it.

*I can share my blunts with you. I can  
share my pills with you. I'll even hold  
your hair back when you throw up.*

*But like I said, friendship requires a  
certain give and take.*

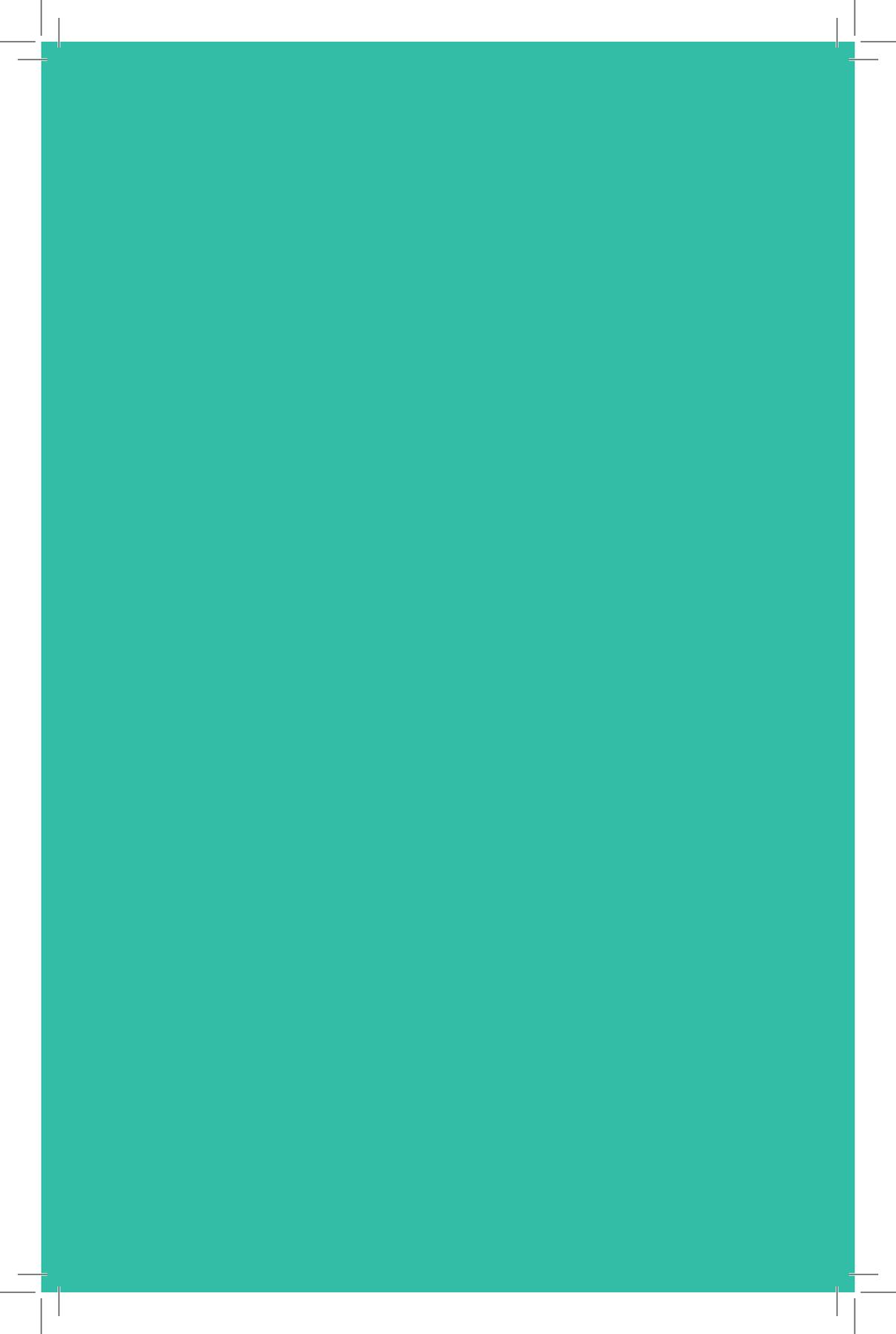
*So I'm only going to ask one thing in  
return.*

I used to panic when my eyes close.  
I used to think I would never wake up.  
But I do. I keep waking up every day. So  
there's no need to panic anymore.

It's been a long day. I deserve this  
soundless sleep.

*You have to tell me if you think I'm  
becoming an addict.*

*Deal?*



## A GRAVE SITUATION

*Adam Applebaum*

A cold moonlit night,  
We see a sight.  
A child kneels in front of a  
tombstone,  
He cannot go home.  
As a cold wind blows,  
Where it never snows,  
Etched in the slab,  
In a color most drab,  
The name of the  
deceased,  
Cause of death by a beast.  
The child cannot sleep,  
He can only weep.  
People visit and  
cannot see,  
The name on the  
stone is...me.

# SEGREGATION

*Jonathan Rodriguez*

Fuck all these  
identity politics.  
But let me explain.  
I'm not against who you are or what you  
want to be.  
What I am against is the segregation that you  
are creating.  
You speak of inclusion, yet you broke my brother's  
nose for being a descendant of Rosarito.  
You speak of ending racism, yet you pepper sprayed my  
sister for being a descendant of London.  
You speak of preserving unity, yet you put my brother in a  
coma for being a descendant of Egypt.  
You speak of self-preservation, yet you choked my sister for  
being a descendant of the Sioux.  
You speak of community, yet you banished my brother for  
being a descendant of Afghanistan.  
You speak of compassion, yet you spit on my sister's face for  
being a descendant of Chile.  
You speak of understating, yet you laugh at my brother for  
being a descendant of Russia.  
You speak of silencing the polyarchy, yet you attack  
dissenting opinion.  
You speak of love, yet you love with your fist.  
You speak of none, yet you are one.  
You speak of equality, yet you  
embrace segregation.



# REQUIEM

*Anthony Maese*

Crimson waves and black skies  
Engulf the sea, shroud the sky.  
Memories of death and happiness  
Remain as glimpses of what was  
and what is to come,  
Yet only one will determine your life  
Based on the decisions you make  
and how you let your choices effect you.  
Relinquish your troubled pasts,  
accept the future and let go of the past,  
less you wish the reaper to come  
and wreak havoc on your soul,  
Until your damnation is nigh  
And you fall hard from the sky.”



# MAY THE FORCE BE WITH US

*Lily Rodriguez*



# THAT HOUSE ON EVERY STREET

*Tony M. Smith*



ENJAMBED

I just got off the bus. My fourth bus of the day. And that was the last one. I smiled at the overcast sky. Tired. People tired. People scattered all over the place like a handful of diamonds after being dropped on the floor.

Everyone walking toward me or past me or standing still. Or, all three at the same time.

It was anarchy to my senses.

And I tried to remember it all just so I would have something to write for my submission and relay to the reader the voices I heard that whispered dissent.

When I look straight ahead toward the beach or to my right towards Downtown, I can see colors warring in the sky as if they are all fighting for space.

Earphones in. Music blasting. I can't remember what song was playing but it was loud enough to drown the sound of the sirens trying to lure me into the street. They sounded so beautiful but a blind guy from Greece taught me well.

I wondered how the heat got trapped under those big dark clouds. A rebellious cold breeze waiting in the alley for me to walk past so it can show me love that will, no doubt, kiss me and then slip away. Leaving me to be impatiently warm. My shirt hugging me as if it's lonely but I don't want it hugging me. We are in a one-sided relationship.

I walk as fast as I can without giving the impression that my pace has purpose: somewhere between speed walking and a slow bop.

I made it past another street. Now I'm standing at the very top of the hill. From this point of view, I'd be looking south. Down the hill. My grandmother's street.

It is by the smell that reminds me I'm almost home. It's heavy, the scent I mean. Strong enough to cause me to feel the effects without having to put five on it though.

I see them in the corner of my eye so I cross to the other side before they see me. It would be just my luck that SWAT decides to raid the place when I'm there. For sure they would think I'm involved too. Why? Because I'd be in front of that house located on every street.

I can see a piece of the rooftop of my home. Almost there. I look west into the alley behind the apartments. A tough little kitten stopped and stared at me. She was perfectly black.

With her two front legs extended, I swear she was trying to push her chest out to give the impression of dominance. Underneath the dumpster were more little eyes. Her brothers, and they looked scared. I smiled, admiring her braveness and I should have asked to borrow some.

A sheriff's car is advancing north up the hill. Shit, coming straight my way. I take a forced sip from my warm water bottle to appear to be as much as a civilian as possible. Because in my mind, criminals and gangsters don't drink water.

Heart beating. Faster and faster. Faster and faster.

Here they come.

Heart beating even louder. Faster and faster. Faster and...

Sigh of relief: Those cops weren't even focused on me.

Both sheriffs staring directly into the eyes of the guys in front of that house.

It was like a standoff. The middle-aged police officers staring at the guys twenty years their junior who were staring right back. It was the tension one feels before the commencement of war. I'd be collateral damage. And when the smoke cleared, it would still take every bit of both side's strength not to flash the third finger from the left in an attempt to rekindle the fire. They were fresh though. Those guys in front of that house, I mean. I'll admit to that. Who could deny it? No jobs or formal secondary education but defiant enough for the universe to notice them. And because of this, they were rewarded with brand new \$200 Retro Jordan's. New jeans. New shirts. New hats. New everything except an acceptance of federal law and what it refers to as "illegal."

One of them said to me once, "See, you're doing good. School and all. But, you could be doing better. I'm not saying you're not doing good or anything. You just could be, you know, doing better." "I know," was my only reply as the gorgeous girl in the passenger seat grinned while staring into her phone. I didn't heed his message quick enough so he rolled up the tinted window of his brand new M6 Gran Coupe and left the scent of burnt rubber in his wake.

I silently wondered why I spent all day in classrooms. Eyes glued to a book inside the library while my pockets resembled dark caves. They were free and getting paid. If I had a car, Sallie Mae would be the only girl next to



me and the only reason she'd be looking at her phone would be to see who else she could loan an education to.

Those guys, like me, had been told that school was the ticket out of poverty. But, their non-belief in that maxim had them more financially comfortable than the retired people on the same street whose backs have yet to stop aching from years of toil.

I remember walking past and some of the prettiest girls would be standing in that yard. I, with my backpack full of used textbooks and toothbrush-cleaned sneakers, was of no mind to them. I made my reality fit me and changed my perception: there were many routes leading to the valley of Instagram models, I just happened to choose the slowest. So, on Friday and Saturday nights, their cute giggles found me writing fictional stories in the den inside of my grandmother's house.

Occasionally, a few of those guys would go to jail for a day or a month or a year. It would keep the old ladies in the neighborhood occupied with new gossip for a week. They told their granddaughters to stay away from those boys. But, that only drove them to seek forbidden fruit. Those apples were easier to pick than the rest and in this sense, they all become Eve again. After a quick jail trip (the cost of doing business), they would always come back with a brand-new car and the next girl who will eventually have them in a courthouse for the monetary support of a child. Wait, her child. Major emphasis on the "her," because minutes of pleasure will only equal 18 years of money if the State says so. And if it is found that they must pay to support the child, they just refuse. What could the court really do to them anyway?

Jail? Been there.

Take the license? Never had one.

Take the passport? Ha!

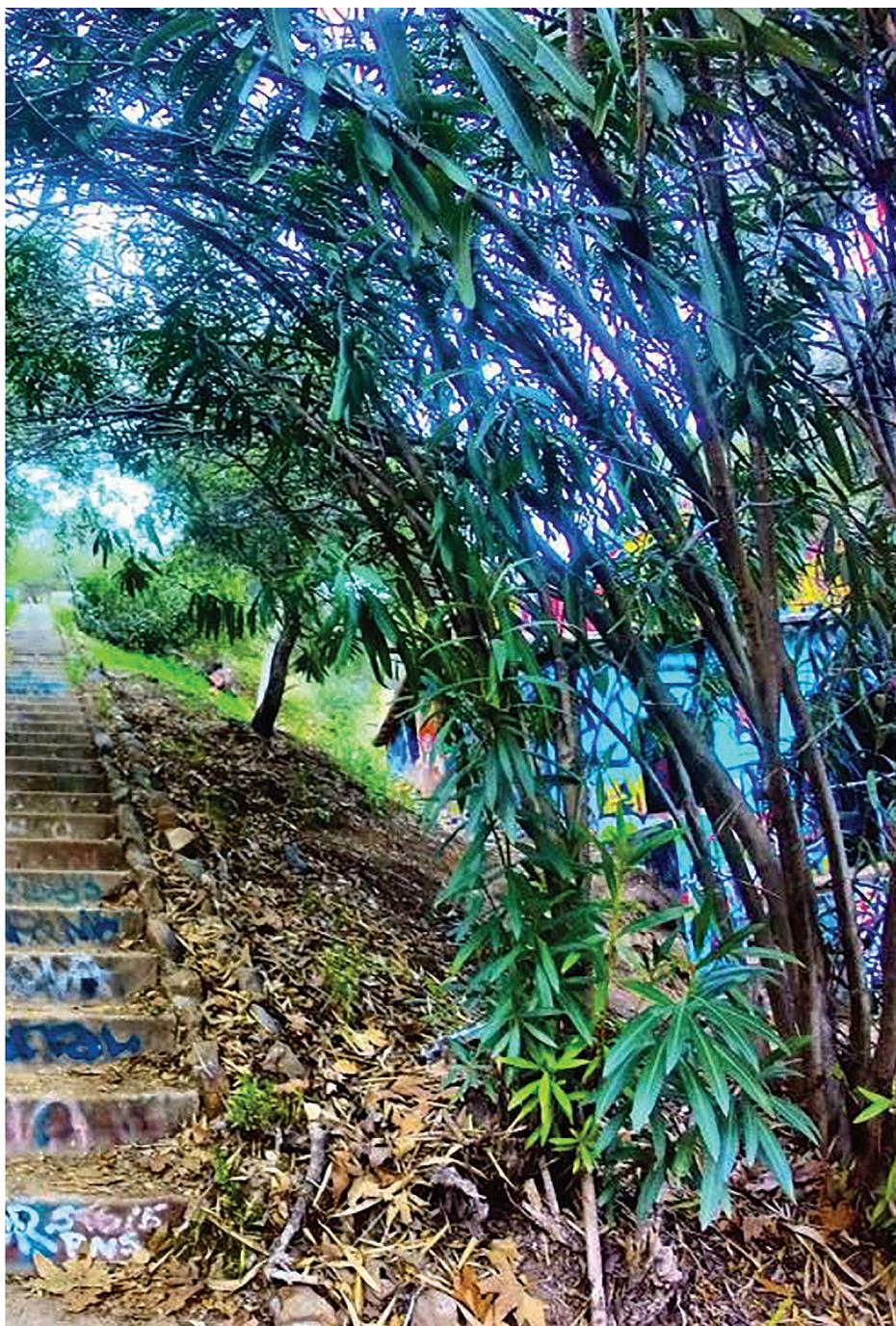
Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, Hamilton, Jackson, Grant, and Franklin seem to think that those guys' dissent is just adorable because they are attracted to each other like true opposites. The DNA belonging to criminals from Western Europe pumping through the veins of drug dealers in America.

I looked back up the hill from where I came and shrugged my shoulders. I pushed my key into the front door with a big smile on my face. That was my last bus of the day.

# STAINED STEPS



Jackie Connet



2017

*ENJAMBED*

# THE SINGING BIRD

*Carlos Alvarado*

It is for me that the singing bird sings  
It wakes me up at night with torment  
It wakes me up at night with anger  
It wakes me up at night with joy  
It waits for me when I awake from dreams  
As annoying as it sounds, I don't want it to leave  
For I fear it will take everything with it

It was then after these thoughts that my younger self manifested before me  
So I stared into his tired brown eyes and told him,  
"There are some things in this world we have no control over"  
But he sniveled, angrily  
As if we did have some type of power  
As if we all had some type of control  
Over things that were out of our hands

I looked at my younger self, vulnerable  
And he looked at me, vulnerable  
It was a path we hadn't been on for a while  
Living in fear and faith.

# INHOSPIT

*Andy Lara*

into the void je send  
 my sentences  
 j'ai envoyer  
 my pleas into a hole  
 todo unread all  
 unheard tous unseen  
 against your total wall.  
 un-dear non-reader non-  
 dear disbeliever, u hold  
 your high ground  
 laughing  
 at my sea level view  
 i push my precious  
 boulders up  
 to your vanilla tower  
 ur isolated office hour  
 to disturb yer  
 thoughtless slumber  
 to detonate your  
 calm security  
 in contrast to yr icy tone  
 youre jaded baritone

for your displeasure,  
 i'll rehearse my  
 deep blue dance  
 no argument,  
 just dancers  
 and the moves that take  
 your pleasure, hoping u  
 slither and squirm  
 red rejected  
 disheveled worm  
 what is the problem  
 red in the face like the  
 black in your veins  
 quelle est tu probleme  
 que pinche pedo tienes?  
 could it be u who  
 doesn't belong  
 u should try to find  
 another job  
 and as reminder, i  
 send this song

# EX

# FL

# TALITY

*Anthony Maese*

“Horrid thoughts and a tragic life.  
 You always knew how to go with strife.  
 We live to please and die with ease,  
 Yet no one ever looked so eager,  
 to help someone in need of help  
 and though we may try and try again,  
 It'll never be enough for you.  
 You eat, drink and sleep without  
 thought,  
 but cast us aside when we beg.  
 You chew the fat and burn your bridges  
 of the destruction you cause us, of the  
 death you bring.  
 You stab, shoot and mock us  
 As we lay on the floor,

and you laugh, spit and tarnish our  
 remains  
 even in death, even when we're gone.  
 We are the sheep to your herd,  
 yet you guide us with malice and  
 distaste  
 As we look unto you for guidance.  
 You'll be nowhere to be seen.  
 You're filled with greed,  
 Stricken with overzealous need.  
 But when you're on the brink  
 of your flame going out,  
 We'll be ashes and be reborn,  
 And you,  
 Will be extinguished.”

# XTINGUISHED \_AME

# AMERICAN BORN

*Jennifer Henriquez*

A bland Sunday afternoon. Chinese music plays in my dad's car stereo. It's the same cd that he plays whenever I'm in the car with him. I think it's some mix cd of sorts with different female Chinese singers. Well I wouldn't be able to tell the difference anyways. I am not musically inclined, nor do I understand the language. So, I sit quietly as it plays in the background.

But then, I hear him. I hear him singing along with one of the songs. It startles me. But I hear him. He doesn't sing the whole song. From what I can tell, he only picks up the chorus. But I hear him.

I'm pleasantly surprised that he wants to sing and can sing along to the tune. I don't know Chinese, and in a way, now that he is older he is his Chinese language.

"She's American, she should speak English"

That's what my mom said my dad used to tell her when I asked her why I never learned Chinese.

I guess this makes sense? I mean, I am American, and I do use English to talk with people every day. Still. I still don't get why he never had a huge urge to speak Chinese with me. Admittedly, I suck at learning



languages. I learned Spanish (albeit a broken form of it), but I still learned to understand it.

My mom speaks Spanish at me. “Jennifer!!! Me lo termino todo?” she hollers at me from the living room as I type away on my laptop.

“Yeah!!! Si tu quieres” I answer back loudly from my bedroom. I speak at her in English and broken informal Spanish.

I thought I spoke Spanish well until high school where I was surrounded by a predominantly Hispanic population. In both culture and in speech, I became aware of how deficient I was at being Hispanic. I have the last name, but not much else of my Salvadoran heritage. Hell—I didn’t have a pupusa until 10th grade. Now I have them too often.

Still—I heard well. Whenever, my mom spoke to me in Spanish I understood her. She didn’t have the English vocabulary to express her feelings, so she told me in Spanish.

“No entiendo que esta pensando. Esta loco o que?” She laments in response to what I tell her regarding when my dad plans to tell his sons about my existence. It turns out that a year wasn’t enough time to let them know. I’m twenty-six, and they’re in their mid-forties. They speak Chinese, and I don’t. She’s upset, and I’m contemplative.

I don’t think in Spanish and my “R’s” don’t always roll the way I need

them to when I speak. I have English words. So, when it comes to sharing the profound depths of my emotions in Spanish, I always come up short.

When people speak in Spanish I understand them well. I can understand the nuances in their speech, but it takes me a minute (well, more than a minute) to craft my response in Spanish.

Yet, I understand Spanish. Unlike with Chinese, I haven’t been barred from a culture.

So, why was he so against me learning his native tongue?

As a child, I used to think he didn’t want to teach me Chinese because then I wouldn’t understand the conversations around us when we went to Chinese restaurants and markets.

*Is that the maid, or his wife?  
How dare he trot around his mistress  
in public? Does he have no shame?  
Are they married?*

Whenever we went out for Dim Sum, I was always acutely aware of how strange we looked as a family—a Chinese man, a Hispanic woman, and an Asian-looking daughter.

I felt my difference in contrast to the other Chinese children and families as older Chinese-speaking women with masks about their mouths circled around us pushing their carts of small Chinese breakfast foods.

Chinese conversations would

abound all around us as I quietly waited for the food carts to pass by our table, so we could order. I felt deaf. Even though I could hear their conversations, I couldn't understand them. Their voices blurred and buzzed. A series of Asian-sounding sounds that my English vocabulary couldn't translate into any discernable speech.

I wanted to understand and to take part in their culture because wasn't it mine too?

Of course, my mom made it worse, when inevitably, she'd push me to ask for a fork. Ugh.

Didn't she know that I just wanted to fit in? Didn't she know that I wanted to hide the fact that even though I look Asian in face, I lack the language?

"O quería preguntar por qué te gusta tanto Batman?"

I tell her that he was my favorite superhero character when I was a child. She seems surprised, but I tell her that I learned English from television. Specifically, I learned how to speak como los gringos. She seems surprised, but I ask her if she has never noticed that the way I speak English is with a strong American intonation. Even though I grew up with two immigrants for parents, I don't have a Spanish accent, let alone, a Chinese one.

Actually, I don't sound like either of my parents. I watched a lot of television growing up. A lot. At first, I used to watch novellas with my

mom, but at some point, Spanish news became too boring to watch, so I began to channel surf. I Love Lucy, Batman the Animated Series, Superman the Animated series, Sabrina the Teenage Witch, Xena Warrior Princess, Hercules and the Simpsons became some of the many shows I watched religiously on the weekends. The actors and actresses on these shows became the voices I heard on a daily basis. Voices like, Lucille Ball, Kevin Conroy, Tim Daly, Melissa Joan Hart, Lucy Lawless, Kevin Sorbro and Dan Castellaneta became the disembodied professors that taught me American colloquialisms, history, and sarcasm. Like a sponge, I soaked up and perpetuated the quirks of their English speaking into my own.

As immigrants, my parents carry the intonations of their native language into their English. Both will make mistakes with their subject-verb agreements. Although neither is an English native speaker, somehow my parents found a way to communicate with each other. In fact, whenever they did speak to one another, they always used the simplest and most clichéd forms of English.

*"You..." he greets jokingly.*

*"You..." she copies in response.*

*"How are you?" shifting into tones used in formal pleasantries*

*"I good. You?" she answers shyly, yet confidently.*



*"Yeah? Yeah, same. Tired" he sheepishly answers.*

*"Yeah? You work to much man...."*  
*She chides.*

*"Aye, dale..." he humorously responds in Spanish.*

When they speak to each other, it sounds crude and loud, but strangely, there's a sense of comfort that radiates from their conversation. My dad speaks palabras. He picked up a few Spanish words here and there that he uses them to lighten or divert conversations. Like me, my mom never picked up any Chinese.

In fact, my half-brothers wouldn't have picked up Chinese if it weren't for their grandmother. According to my mom, my grandmother used to care for my dad's sons when they were younger. As a result, his sons are a bit estranged from him and his wife.

I met my grandmother once. She seemed nice, but she didn't speak a lick of English, and I didn't speak lick of Chinese. I sat there looking dumbly

at her as she and my dad shared a conversation. I knew who she was, and I like to think she put it together when she met me that I was her son's daughter, but I guess, I'll never know. We smiled at each other like two strangers in an awkward situation.

I'm 26 years old. Way too late to pick up a language and be proficient. I still feel ostracized at Dim Sum restaurants and other Chinese establishments. The buzzing is still there, but I don't wonder if my Asian brethren notice my illegitimate status.

What I notice now are people my age or younger that are able to order and converse with the staff as the carts make their way through the rows. I notice my dependence on my dad whenever I want to order a specific food item.

I'm jealous. I want to be able to use and speak in my language too.

I have English.

I have some Spanish.

I have nothing from Chinese.

## INTERSTATE OF BEING

*Rachelle Delle*

The cars weave in and out of traffic  
like a needle drawn through leather  
We sit here as far apart as we  
are together  
White lines pass underneath us  
rhythmically  
Spinning our wheels so mechanically  
The intervals lull the conscience into  
submission  
We began this venture together with  
such ambition

I roll down the window looking back  
Shuttering past a black Cadillac  
My hair pulled wildly by the cold air  
The world passing in a stinging glare  
Turning with invisible means  
These streets are the stitching at  
its seams

Strange eyes lock in the night; a brief  
exchange of humanity  
leaving both players alone in  
uncomfortable insanity  
The illegible unfamiliarity of  
human expressions  
Flicker and swim away instantly  
leaving only phantom impressions  
The sentinel of glass severs more  
than it saves

As we continue past in our sepulcher  
like death's slaves

The reflected lights splash our stoic  
faces in fluoresce  
The speed-streaked signs become  
nonsense  
When we talk, we can't escape the  
daemons within  
Neither one of us knows where  
to begin  
We try never to let them show  
There is nothing to face if we  
never slow

This lifestyle has grown so stale  
We teeter-tooter on a tortured scale  
The downpour disguises the disease  
underneath  
I bite down hard on the words with  
gritted teeth  
They bleed black ink, staining the  
gums, painting the lower lip  
The lip with the power to cuss and to  
kiss like a whip

I sit here, as we punch through sheets  
of shouting silence,  
Looking out there at the  
nocturnal violence

We thought we could heal each  
other's scars  
We thought we could conceal the  
pain in a rush of cars  
Our jagged edges become weapons  
of self-harm  
Neither one of us willing to disarm

It's taking too long to come around  
Make-up runs down without a sound  
Drowning out all the colors  
Washed away like all the others  
This city throbs with exposed veins  
Cut too closely and everyone's  
life drains

Driving forever forward going  
nowhere  
We advance head on into a dead  
stare  
Foot pressing down hard  
Flashing by life with icy disregard  
Keys jingle lightly in the ignition  
Bringing me back to my cognition

Your fixed eyes grow big  
with intensity  
Please stop you're scaring me.

# THE RUG

*Leonard Murray*

The last minute appeals had fallen on what appeared to be his normal muted tone. The typical ploys, “you know Glenn wanna know if you’re going...the first thing he asked Mary, ‘is Big C going?’”

I told her, “Girl, you know Coursey... And, I ain’t wasting no more of my money for him to flake on us anyway...”

“So, you better tell Glenn, straight up, that Coursey ain’t going nowhere no more, it’s like there are prison gates across our front door or something!”

Mary’s empathetic chuckle and laughter echoed in Phoeby’s ear. But, the humorous cajoling marched out the status quo of her marriage to Coursey: Invitations returned with “regrets” or even worse the obligatory “one person no guest,” as she went alone when she had to.

The Northern Shore chimed and sang out “all aboard,” and she climbed the steps to the second floor seats hoping for a new perspective or at least the peace and quiet of clattering tracks. That thought was threatened as the chirping of the usual suspects followed her up the stairs. They would be searching her face and her responses for something they could chew. Surely, upon this train, on this First Sunday of faith and football, they would gnaw upon her like the snacks packed away in their purses. All three sistas would serve as hammer and nail while they spit speculations about how she ended up being alone while all of their men slithered to the lower rear seats.

"Girl...you better come on down here with the rest of us...We're going to sit up here with you for a minute. But, you know the football fantasy owners didn't wanna come in the first place. And, we are trying to get them to spend some money on us... So, when this train gets to rolling, we're going downstairs and start to whistling..."

You mean begging...

"Okay, whatever... But, what you buy today is coming out of yo pocket. Because, I swear I picked the tightest jeans I could find just so I can complain to Glenn about not being able to get my money out."

Defenseless, Pheoby acquiescently smiled and chuckled with her sistas as they pounded upon this old wound. They didn't hurt her. He did. And, Coursey had become quite skilled at opening her up for the microscopic pinch of needling friends, who might drown in despair if it were not for the life giving breath of inhaling judgement and exhaling gossip.

The slow roll and rattle of the train in the city became the rhythm of fast track on an open horizon. Pheoby hardly noticed them as they clattered down the stairs out of sight and sound. But now, the pinch of their sticks left her bleeding a flood of fears about what had been her entire life, those boys and that man. She, unable to recall anything that didn't involve them, almost panicked in a nightmare that involved stories about her in the absence of them.

"Ticket please..."

The voice startled her but it allowed her to take a breath as she looked over and reached into her purse for that single ticket on a roundtrip journey. Somehow, the breath and the glimpse of the fading city gave her a sense of calm and even a purpose for no one but herself. At that moment, she decided that she would shop instead of gambling because she could no longer afford to bet on others and end up empty handed and lonely. As the double tap of the conductor's puncher pierced her ticket, Pheoby smiled. On that day, she shopped the outlet and discovered something within that she longed for.

Today, she was bursting with energy as she prepared for the first ring of the bell. Sweeping around the house, she noticed all the new things she had found to decorate her space and her new life. She was clear about which things were just mere embellishments of stories not to be told and which things possessed the meaning of symbols that only a wise and patient few might understand.

Months had passed for sure as she mastered a few new skills unbeknownst to her near acquaintances. She now routinely checked "one person only" while dodging any thoughts of inadequacy. Moreover, on this day, she was hosting a story telling "sip and see" completely of her own volition.

As she penciled the final outline upon the lips her guests were sure to envy, she recalled the journey alone that brought her around to herself. That trip ignited a new vision and she went into a frenzy of redesign. She removed all things that didn't matter and moved the things that did. All the while refusing to call it remodeling, because, "Remolding means that you are getting rid of major parts of your life forever...And, I'm not doing that."

Now, as everything, old and new, is in its place. "I must leave space available for the most important things in my life. They are ever-present in my heart. But, my place is full of me."

With that intimate conversation between her and the mirror complete, Phoeby descended the stairs as if bounding upon them. Looking into the closet, she gazed at it and reminisced ever so briefly knowing that today was to be its fulfillment. There, with its muted brilliance of browns, blacks, reds and beige, was the first and only item she bought in the absence of Coursey on her lone crusade upon the Northern Shore. Ripping the tags away and placing it just as the bell rang, Phoeby stood upon her new passion with confidence.

"Hey Girl!...Look at you! You're going to make me go home tonight and do some house cleaning myself!"

Mary you need to stop it.

"For real you and your house look good from the polish on the door handle to the color on your toes! And, look and the damn rug! It's just too fly! Where did you find that?"

"Girl..., I found that rug on the trip up north... Come on in and be the first to wipe your feet upon it."





# THIS ISN'T 1920... OUR FIGHT CONTINUES

*Lily Rodriguez*





# THE PRANCING SKILTAIRE

*Adam Applebaum*

House of Avant-Garde activities,  
And no work-related responsibilities.  
A mix of culture and couture,  
Snacks are laid,  
and beds are made.  
Who lies behind the veiled mask?  
What are they outside the mask?  
You might ask.  
People in touch with their childhood yet,  
You give what you get.  
They hate being without their hobby,  
in a Convention Lobby.  
People who are normal,  
think it informal,  
To bring a show on the go.  
Artists, poets, writers, actors galore,  
Who could ask for anything more?



# 51 ON THE

*Jade Harvey*

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Hi, I am Jyn the babe at the crossroads.                    | 10 |
| I live between babies and teddies.                          | 9  |
| It's Jyn, brownest baby doll in the crossroads;             | 10 |
| Jyn and her foul Teddy friend Freddie.                      | 9  |
|   |    |
| If I weren't made of plastic, I'd jump up and down.         | 11 |
| I love that I live between This and There Town.             | 11 |
| It's Six in the morning; I've just been re-shelved          | 11 |
| With the trucks, the teapots, and girls like myself.        | 11 |
| My smile is frigid, and my eyes much too bright             | 11 |
| But to There haggard mother, I look all right.              | 11 |
|   |    |
| My Freddy the Teddy is out of his box                       | 11 |
|   |    |
| That's Freddy the Teddy not Roxy the fox                    | 11 |
| Roxy the Fox was quickly bought off the shelf               | 11 |
| 'Cause Roxy the Fox only plays with herself                 | 11 |
| Her fur, it's so bright, her button eyes glisten            | 11 |
| But when kids whisper it's Freddie who'll listen            | 11 |
|   |    |
| Freddy is enveloped, with Crumbs, and with Clay             | 11 |
| He's stiff, sticky, and been drooled on all day.            | 11 |
| "Ahhh... that my fur weren't so dingy and dull.             | 11 |
| But these mams today, wipe there young with my skull!"      | 11 |
| "No wonder you're dirty, all gritty and grey;               | 11 |
| It's all of these sneezy snotties, with whom you play"      | 11 |
|   |    |
| Freddy stops, steeped in thoughts with a pop button frown.  | 11 |
| Then tells me quite clearly about life and This town        | 11 |
| "I'd say There mothers get the best of the deal.            | 11 |
| They yak on their phones; as their kids screech and squeal. | 11 |
| They think it a gift, or a new game to play.                | 11 |
| Soon they will grow...not blooms, but weeds all gone grey   | 11 |
|   |    |
| "I hug the children, knowing they'll grow up tough.         | 11 |
| I hug the children, because they won't get enough."         | 11 |



# E SHELF

|   |    |
|---|----|
| They'll fight, and then wonder, what was the purpose                  | 11 |
| Of keeping a child, that Pa thinks is worthless?                      | 11 |
| With babies and Makeup, With food and with knives...                  | 11 |
| They'll try to bring meaning, to their clueless lives"                | 11 |
| "Dear Freddie your heart is of gold and of steel.                     | 11 |
| It's sad that these children get such a raw deal.                     | 11 |
| So quickly they grow up grow hard and grow cold                       | 11 |
| And no good news Here... but, that we're, getting old."               | 11 |
| I smirk with a look to The Ben and my Freddy                          | 12 |
| "A gapped toothed young terror will laugh and will hug me."           | 11 |
| It does take a while...   | 5  |
| But he gives a smile!   | 5  |
| He takes up the call,   | 5  |
| And gives it his all.   | 5  |
| A Boy born in India, Zambia perhaps Brazil!                           | 14 |
| Whose parents have nothing to give him...save the love that they feel | 14 |
| They'll wash and they'll clothe Him, patch him up when he breaks.     | 12 |
| They'll work hard and steady for the little boys' sakes.              | 12 |
| No glamor to their life,  | 6  |
| No pretty prancing princes  | 7  |
| or Cougars called 'Sprite,'   | 5  |
| Street girls claim the corners,                                       | 5  |
| Forced smiles all the night   |    |
| I have dirt in my fur, fetid milk on my toes.                         | 9  |
| But I bet where I go they'll be worse for the nose."                  | 9  |
| "Ha! that's the spirit my friend,                                     | 6  |
| a sweet lovely thought.   | 5  |
| One day you'll be covered   | 6  |
| in your own child's snot!"  | 5  |



## 25

*Adam Applebaum*

The cents of a quarter,  
Dollars to fulfill an order.  
Years I've been alive,  
The square root is 5.  
\$24.99? Keep the penny!  
I'm not here to  
win an Emmy!  
A Nobel Prize takes 50,  
I'm not that nifty.  
Minimum of a chapbook,  
Not sporting a rap look.  
Though making a  
dope rhyme,  
Is not a crime.  
I take my time,  
And earn a dime.  
If I didn't submit,  
You must acquit,  
The copyright claim,  
Made for fame.  
Titled this poem,  
And 25 is the name!

# RENAISSANCE

## *The Passionate Player to His Love*

Come live with me and be my love,  
We'll sample all the pleasures of  
Sweet gin and juice, the best of weed  
A sidepiece I will never need

In penthouse suite we'll lounge all day  
I'll lavish you with Cartier  
Louis Vuitton and Jimmy Choo  
If you'll consent to be my boo

And travel all the world we'll go  
From Mazatlan to Monaco  
If yes to my invite you say  
We'll outdo "Fifty Shades of Grey"

To prove this ain't no catfish scam  
I'll post our meme on Instagram  
If you give me your heart today  
Fo' sho' we'll be the next Kimye

If you would only holla back  
This dating app won't be so whack  
If I'm just what you're dreaming of  
Then "like" my profile – be my love

# REDUX

## *(THE REMIX)*

*David Williams*

### ***The Nymph's Reply to the Player***

If dating didn't cause such stress  
And you were not such a hot mess  
Your lines might fit like hand and glove  
I'd live with thee and be thy love

Your true ID I sense you hide  
In parents' basement you reside  
To woo me it takes more to please  
Than taking me to Applebee's

You claim pure love but know I yet  
My body broke the internet  
Your passions wild with lust just so  
Because my cuppeths overflow

Don't you get all touchy feely  
Dude, pump your brakes – I mean, *really?*  
I crave romance free of drama  
Cannot be mere baby-mama

You do not have the wherewithal  
To love beyond a booty call  
Until your morals rise above  
The gutter – I'll ne'er be thy love

## IS THE SUN SHINING FOR SOME THING?

*Guillermo Lopez*

Is the sun shining for something,  
Someone else?  
Do they wish upon it?  
We forget there's a star. Right,  
There.  
When it explodes, it'll take  
Us with it. Swallow us like the ocean upon  
A grain of sand.  
For Them, the sky will fill with  
Light, an amazing Super Nova.  
The Moon  
Lingers like a quarter  
In a drawer. Waits to  
Be noticed during the day.  
At night, it shines; look how  
Happy it is. It's when dreamers  
Dream. A time when it is clear  
And I can see you right  
In front of Me, underneath  
The moonlight.  
Look at the stars  
A billion glistening back  
One for each of us  
To keep. Forever. And, yet  
We stagger on other Things:  
Sex. God. Skin. Tongue.  
When we turn around, we will  
Hold hands and walk into the  
Sun.

# OFF SIDE READING

*Brenda Bran*

“Papi, podemos ir a—”

“Daddy, can we go t—”

The sound of the television drowned out my voice, but I hoped my dad heard me. Almost immediately, he stood up and yelled rapidly at the TV.

“Mira, mira, mira, mira!”

“Look, look, look, look”

Like many children around the world, I grew up watching my dad watch futbol—yes I mean soccer, not that ball-carrying-armor-wearing-hardly-ever-kicking tackle ball that most people in the States call football. Many of my Sunday evenings were spent watching a blurry green field with little dots running from one side of the field to the other. Sometimes a pass would make my dad jump out of the couch in anticipation. If the next sound was Andres Cántor’s voice bellowing “Gooooool!” then my dad would pump the volume on the TV as he jumped up and down in celebration. Most of the time, I didn’t know what was going on, but I wanted to join in on the jumping, so I too yelled and jumped up and down like I understood what the sports ball was all about.

But pretending could only get me so far, especially when the commentators would yell out soccer terminology that I didn’t understand like “ahora va Guerra con la pelota! Se la va passar a Cienfuegos—no esta adelantado.”

\*\*Edited translation for the Spanish deficient\*\*

"Here comes Guerra with the ball!  
He's going to pass it to Cienfuegos—no  
he's offside"

Adelantado means he's ahead, which  
is what you want when you're trying to  
score a goal right?

I asked my dad what they meant  
by "adelantado," so he explained.  
What he said, I don't know—so I  
just responded with a pensive—but  
ultimately feigned—"Ohh, okay!, that  
makes sense" and let him return to his  
game.

What the heck did adelantado  
mean?

Then Cienfuegos made a pass, and  
the receiving player was standing  
so close to the goal that I was sure  
that the ball would go in, but the  
ref whistled and Cántor's deep  
resounding voice reverberated  
through our living room, "Esta furea  
de lugar"!

Huh? He's exactly in the lugar he  
needs to be to score! What you mean  
he's not in the right place?!?

I was confused, but I didn't want  
my dad to notice, so I sat quietly  
till it ended. After the game, the  
broadcasters went onto the pitch and  
interviewed a few players. I didn't  
know any of them, well except for the  
guy who came out on all the Toyota  
commercials, Mauricio Cienfuegos—  
the biggest deal to hit El Salvador  
since...okay the biggest positive  
thing to hit El Salvador in a long  
time—we got pupusas, enpanadas,

and a severely crippled economy  
that has led to a rise in violence and  
a massive exodus of children—but I  
digress. Cienfuegos walked by the  
broadcasters, but they did not stop  
him for an interview. I noticed my  
dad rolled his eyes and muttered  
something under his breath.

"Que paso? Why don't they ask him  
questions?" I asked

What happened

"Es Savaldoreno," he responded

He's Salvadoran

"So?"

A stillness overcame the room that  
made me uneasy. I didn't think my  
question was a big deal, but the look  
on my dad's face told me otherwise.  
I don't remember the details, but I  
remember feeling angry, frustrated,  
but most of all disappointed. My  
dad explained some of the tensions  
between people from Mexico and  
individuals from Central America. He  
explained that in order for anyone  
in Latin America to make "it" in the  
Spanish-speaking world, they had to  
go through Mexico, but for irrelevant  
and obviously ridiculous reasons, that  
was more difficult for people from  
Central America to do. His suggestion  
that Cienfuegos wouldn't be  
interviewed because he wasn't from  
Mexico angered me. Here was this  
wonderful guy who was just selling  
Toyotas to the entire L.A area, and  
they couldn't interview him for three  
lousy minutes? Like seriously?



So I looked him up. If Univision and Telemundo wouldn't give me the information I wanted, I would find out for myself. I stated reading my dad's Sunday edition of *La Opinion*, the Los Angeles Spanish newspaper, but it took me twice as long to read things in Spanish than it did in English. One Sunday, while my dad and I were at the corner market, I asked my dad to get me the *L.A Times*, it was the only other newspaper I knew about. He agreed and when I got home I dumped pounds of the Sunday edition into the trash and dove into the sports section. Unfortunately, I was a bit ahead of my time in the mid to late 90s. The MLS, Major League Soccer, was just beginning, so media coverage of it was minimal. My plan to learn about Cienfuegos backfired, and I hit a dead end, which only intensified my anger toward Univision.

The day my family finally got an Internet connection was glorious. I was able to translate a lot of the terms my dad and the commentators on tv used during matches. Terms like "fuera de lugar" became "offsides," "tiro libre" became "a set piece," and "falta" became "foul"—I know that last one should have been obvious, but I didn't speak "sports" in English, so as obvious as it may seem...it wasn't.

I could finally look up Cienfuegos and Cobi Jones, an American soccer player who was also ignored by the

Mexican media. In interviews, they mentioned their dreams of playing European futbol, specifically the teams that they would play for should they ever have the opportunity. Real Madrid, Manchester United, Barcelona, and Chelsea (for some reason my dad really likes them? I'm more of an Arsenal girl myself) became the focus of my research. I started reading up on these teams and their players. For some reason, it was a huge thing for me to discover that the biggest stars on these teams weren't European but South American, oh yeah and that one Mexican player I didn't like, Hugo Sanchez, but he's not important. I read up on the South American players: Romario, Cafu, Dunga, Maradona (dude is crazy, but man could he control a ball—I still like Pele better though), and Ronaldo (no! Not CR7, the real one. The Brazilian one). I also looked up a few European players like Van Basten, Klinsmann (he now coaches the USMNT—United States Men's National Soccer Team), Zidane, Figo, Maldini, and Ballack (I only learned about him in 2002, but he's my favorite player of all time so he needs to be in here for obvious and arbitrary reasons). I read about their camaraderie, their technical styles, and the different experiences these players were having off the pitch.

Although I don't remember racism ever being the main focus of the

articles I read, it was like a dark looming presence that people didn't talk about, but they knew it was there. I read stuff, but I also listened to my dad and his friends about Pele and his impact on Brazil. Pele is a legend. Most soccer fans agree that Pele's name is synonymous with the "the greatest that ever lived"—unless one is in a room with Maradona fans, the discussion then quickly escalates and random acts of hooliganism might break down, but of course I exaggerate.

Anyway, the consensus among my dad's friends was that Pele's impact wasn't just on the pitch, but he had a dramatic social impact on Brazilian culture. They claimed that Pele's unique ability with a soccer ball began a national dialogue on race relations and that because of Pele, the government and society slowly became more tolerant of dark-skinned Brazilians. I wasn't sure of their claims.

I kept reading up on other players and listening to occasional interviews on TV. We didn't have cable—nor was Sports Center the massive enterprise that it is now—but I remember listening to a player discuss his experience walking out of a stadium. He told the reporter that someone was yelling racial slurs at him and demanding that he go back to Africa. I don't remember his name, and I feel horrible about it...

he wasn't even from Africa. He was Jamaican. He was accomplished. He was great on the pitch. But more importantly, he was human. That was the first time I really thought about my own prejudices and my anger. When my dad told me about the tensions between Mexicans and Central Americans, I blamed Hugo Sanchez. As the Mexican Golden Boy playing for Real Madrid, he became an easy target for me. He was the face of an institution that marginalized my culture. And yet, I was dismissing him because he was from Mexico. It was a complicated and really comfortable realization. I felt ashamed, confused, and lost. So I read. But I was no longer reading about soccer, I was reading to understand why. What makes it okay to have racial or national prejudices? Why did I focus on differences? Why did I take so much pride in learning that South American players could be stars? Of course, these questions are ones I'm asking myself now—with my years of wisdom, maturity, and a B. A in English Literature that helped me think about racial constructs and stuff—but back then all I really wanted to know was why do Mexicans and Salvadorans hate each other. My research led me through really dark places online, a few historic events, but ultimately didn't answer my questions. I didn't understand the root of these tensions, so I decided they didn't exist. If they did, they



were stupid. If I was going to dislike Hugo Sanchez, I needed a better reason than his nationality. Lucky for me, he had a slew of character flaws that I could easily pick from, but his nationality would not be the reason I did not cheer for him. He also played for Real Madrid, my favorite Spanish club, so my acceptance of him became a little easier too.

But where did these feelings of resentment come from? Why were cultural and racial divides so embedded in our culture? These questions continued to bug me. One tired afternoon, I walked into my boss' office, Amelia, and she gave me a term for them: dominant narratives—stories that become so pervasive that we internalize them and begin to project them out onto the real world. She explained that she framed her classes around these stories in an attempt to have her students think critically about their own perspectives and question the root of their own prejudices. I didn't say much as she talked about it—I hardly ever do. But I thought about it on my way home, especially as I drove past the StubHub Center, formerly the Home Depot Center—the place where I cheered for every country that wasn't Mexico.

Soccer had given me a start. At the time, there were numerous stories about Dani Alves, Jozy Altidore, and a number of other players facing racism abroad, so I researched.

Reading once again became the tool through which I could disarm these prejudices. I thought that if I understood why, then these racist preconceptions would no longer exist—temporarily forgetting that the rest of the world wasn't partaking in my own studies—self centered I know. I complimented my research on players with social justice articles and a number of scholarly works that explained dominant narratives. I saw Amelia frame her classroom around issues like this, so it is possible. I'm not quite certain how I'm going to do it, but I want my students to have similar uncomfortable moments where they question everything they think they know and actively choose to find out more for themselves.

# DRIVE

*Rachelle Delle*

The cars weave in and out of traffic like a needle drawn  
through leather  
We sit here as far apart as we are together  
White lines pass underneath us rhythmically  
Spinning our wheels so mechanically  
The intervals lull the conscience into submission  
We began this venture together with such ambition

I roll down the window looking back  
Shuttering past a black Cadillac  
My hair pulled wildly by the cold air  
The world passing in a stinging glare  
Turning with invisible means  
These streets are the stitching at its seems

Strange eyes lock in the night; a brief exchange of  
humanity  
leaving both players alone in uncomfortable insanity  
The illegible unfamiliarity of human expressions  
Flicker and swim away instantly leaving only phantom  
impressions  
The sentinel of glass severs more than it saves  
As we continue past in our sepulcher like death's slaves

The reflected lights splash our stoic faces in fluoresce  
The speed-streaked signs become nonsense  
When we talk, we can't escape the daemons within  
Neither one of us knows where to begin  
We try never to let them show  
There is nothing to face if we never slow

This lifestyle has grown so stale  
We teeter-tooter on a tortured scale  
The downpour disguises the disease underneath  
I bite down hard on the words with gritted teeth  
They bleed black ink, staining the gums, painting the lower lip  
The lip with the power to cuss and to kiss like a whip

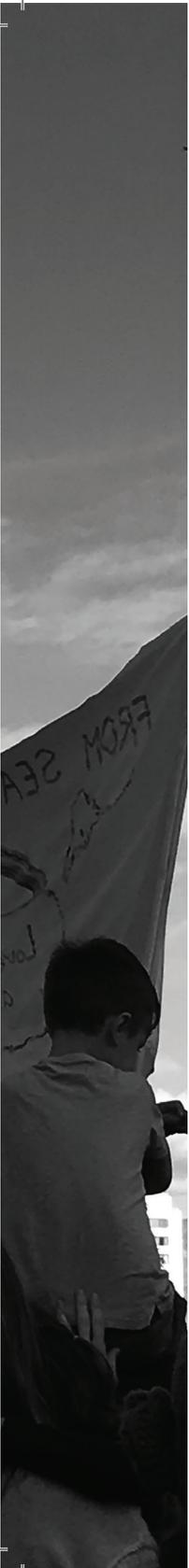
I sit here, as we punch through sheets of shouting silence,  
Looking out there at the nocturnal violence  
We thought we could heal each other's scars  
We thought we could conceal the pain in a rush of cars  
Our jagged edges become weapons of self-harm  
Neither one of us willing to disarm

It's taking too long to come round  
Make-up runs down without a sound  
Drowning out all the colors  
Washed away like all the others  
This city pulses with exposed veins



# TOGETHER WE *STAND*, TOGETHER WE *FIGHT*

*Lily Rodriguez*





## **TEARS TURNED INTO STONE**

*Tanisha Bell*

Being numb does not explain my feeling of pain. Over the years, I have run, hopped, and stumbled through the ditches and trenches to escapism, away from this place called life.



ENJAMBED

The lies that's been told, the back's that's been turned, the word's mumbled through broken smiles, while sitting across from me, as if I had no sense of recollection of the night before. You threw your fist to my face and your palm to my ass, as I slid across the thin glass, that surfaced the dining room table.

My mental strength has surpassed my physical weakness. No longer will I be abused and no longer will I accept the misuse. The misuse of my body, the manipulating of my mind, the pretending to love me but constantly bruising my heart. I refuse to be dragged by such ruthless dude then picked up when it's beneficial for you. Beneficial for you, like, when you want my body or when you want my lips, not just on yours, but around the tip.

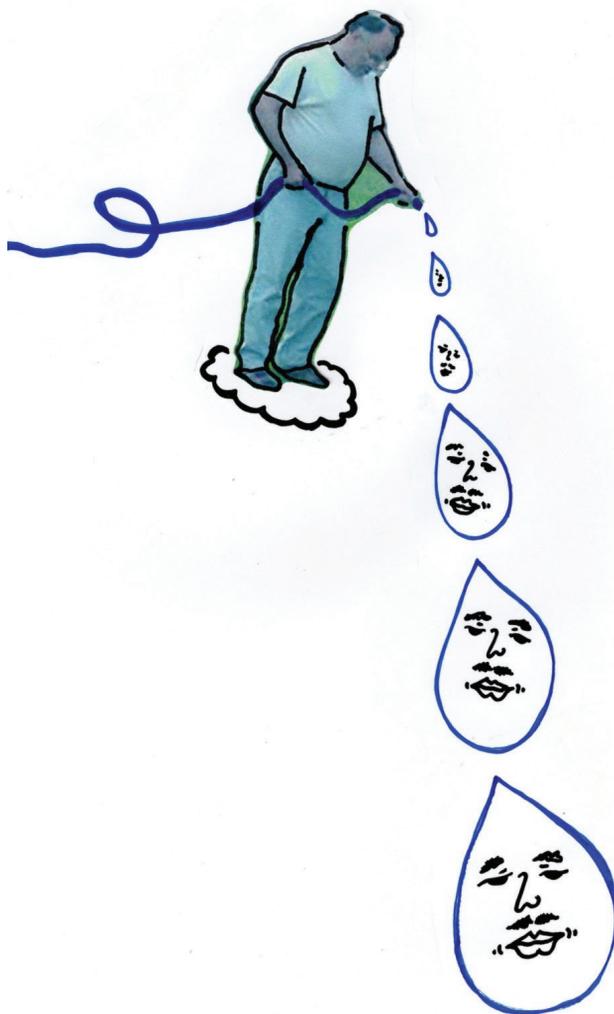
I cried ferociously as I crawled into bed, now comatose. I am dissatisfied and resentful after you thrust in and out with my knees to the floor, on all four, suffering from a rug burn minutes before, my mind wandered. My mind played tricks on me, as I imagined you finally down on one knee. As I snapped my fingers to the rhythm of your stroke, the flow being so predictable, I groaned, silently, because the pain I felt in my bones.

You've fucked me so many years, while I laid here in fear. Tonight, as I snap my fingers to the rhythm of your

stroke, I stare, not into space, but darkness, as I close my eyes. No longer do I cry because my tears have turned into stone. The tip of my toes carry me through the wooden cabin, lightly. My bones squeak like the aged wooden floor, loudly. I try to escape but the still silence gives me away. My back is against the wall, chin sitting on my knees as they're tucked in my chest, he calls my name, angrily. My hands search for an object of some kind, maybe a nail, a screw, anything that can bring this 7-foot giant to his knees.

I have dreamed, I have screamed, I have cried and almost died. But now what? No way can I stay and allow my strength to sway. No way can I be such a fool, so naïve, hoping he will change and see a brighter side, like the sun after the rain. I'm all dried out like a raisin from a grape. What more can I say? No need to contemplate. I gotta find a way to see a brighter day.

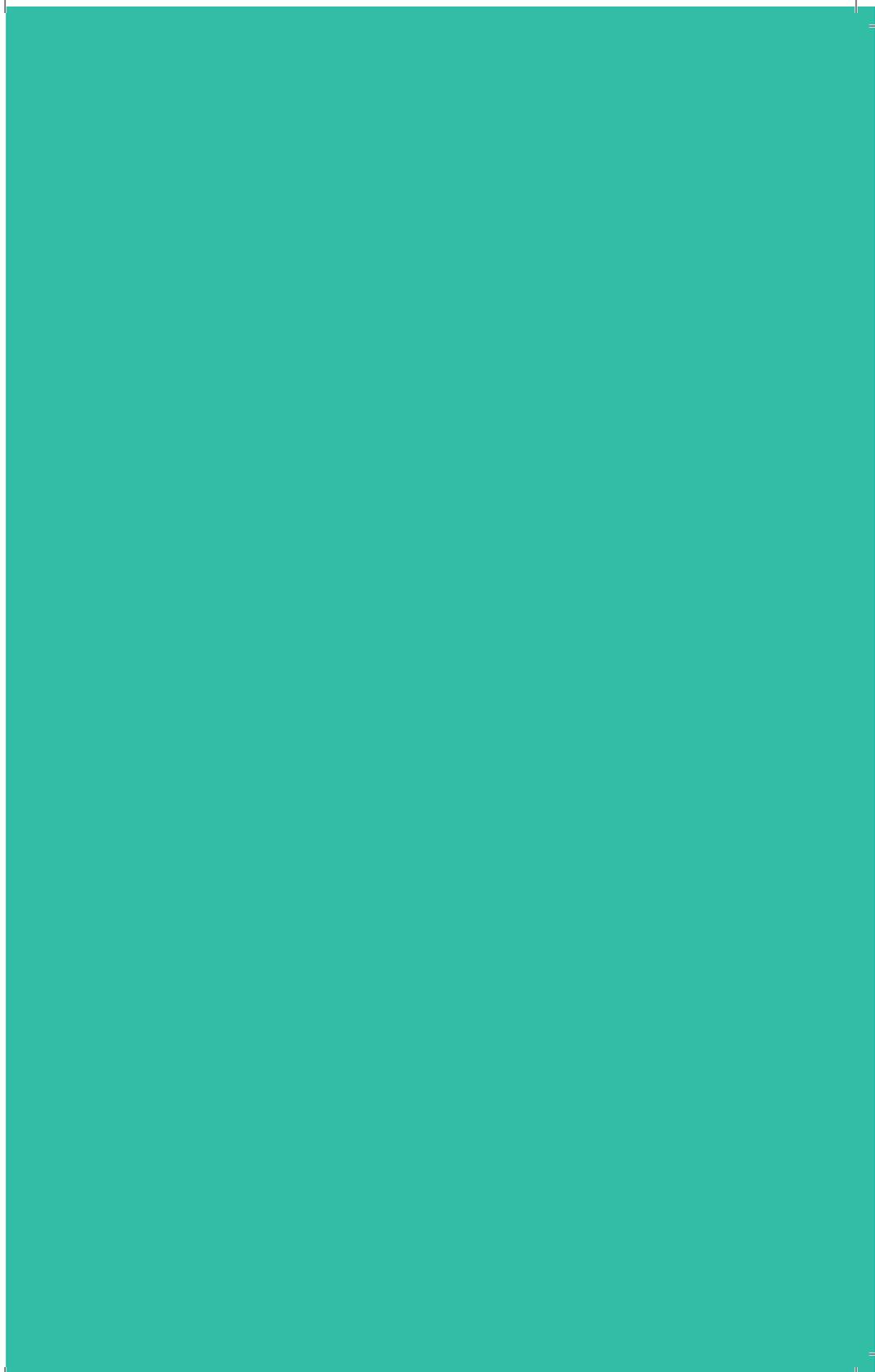
Here on the porch, we stand face to face. My eyes meet his when he grabs me by the wrist. My left hand is free, holding the nail that I found between my feet. He comes in for a kiss. My hand meets his neck as I dig and I twist. The nail is deep into his throat and tears fall from his eyes. Here, I smile because my face is finally dry. I cry no more because my tears have turned into stone.



# PICHUQUITO

*Julian Catania*





# THE BREATH C

*James Page*

Face covered in sweat, he was a man in great distress, having lost his job due to his own incompetence of meeting their standards. Anxiety was his enemy and the impatience of others only were a detriment to his performance. Walking along the streets of LA in route to his safe haven called home, he relaxes himself and calms his senses. He heard the ruffling of trash in an alleyway but denounces it as a stray cat or dog. Quicker than lightning he is pushed back to the wall in front of the alleyway with great force, being held up by a man in similar height to his, but much darker than him and utmost stronger than him. "You have what I need" in a deep dark voice. "Oh you want money? Is that it? Well, I only have about twenty dollars, would that be enough? I'm not a rich guy, please don't kill me" he says. "No Dante, money isn't what I need from you, as I could easily get it from anyone. I need your soul." He unveils himself into a monstrosity taking off his hat that is covering his face while simultaneously letting his body envelope his clothes as becoming pure black with no light in sight. "I am shadow and

your life belongs to me now." Blades protrude from his hands that puts Dante into meer shock, he froze only bringing him to let his life flash before his eyes. Emitting a dark bloody glow to Shadow's blades, he grins as he forcefully enters them inside of Dante's stomach. "You are mine now" he whispers softly. Dante's body surges with energy of darkness branching out from within his body. He convulses from the immense power that flows through him. His pupils turn black covering the color it once had. With a sense in being at peace with oneself, he attempts to remember the greatness he will be leaving behind, as being a star athlete in high school came first to his mind, to obtaining his Doctorates in college, to meeting his true love Suki and getting married in Thailand. They slowly became blurry and darkness had consumed every memory. He falls like a rag doll with two open wounds in his stomach and releases steam from his body. Shadow is nowhere in sight as he has found the perfect home. "Let us get down to business shall we?" Shadow says with an evil tone. Dante's eyes open up with a dark glow as an evil grin grows across his face.



# OF DARKNESS

It was a bright sunny day composed of clear blue skies, birds singing, and the sun shining through Dante's curtains. Beaming upon his face, he woke up to a note on his face. Gradually getting up, he picks it off the top of his forehead and gains the strength to read it.

Hi honey,  
I had work kind of early today, but I will see you later tonight, love you.  
-XOXO Suki

The blissful love of his wife grasping at his heart was a sign of relief from his horrific nightmare. "Nice little note she did for you Dante, so ravishing I would say." Heart stricken, as the pace of his heart reaches an unhuman like extent, Dante looks toward his left and right in hopes of finding that familiar voice. He leaps off his king sized bed and searches under it, but...nothing. He moves with quickness in checking his rectangular closet as he expresses with caution as he also checks his hallway. "I'm not there silly, I am within you and kind of not. Check your shirt". Dante observes his white t-shirt as it fluctuates with darkness and consumes the color of the shirt. "Now let me be very

straightforward with you, you are mine Dante, you are dead without me. If you step out of line you die, so do not disobey me and both of our lives will be spared. Time is of the essence and I give you my power to become a Soul Taker. Reality danced on Dante's mind as if all of this was a dream, but with realization everything was not what it seemed to him anymore. Science was his flavor and with the little hint of paranormal into his drink, tainted it and engulfed the flavor. "So are you done contemplating your human life? Come on, let us get this ball rolling shall we?" "So, where do I start?" "Well if you have not noticed already your taste buds are no longer craving food, but rather something extraordinary and that is the human soul. So I would recommend we get to killing as soon as possible and let us make this world a bloodfest, a world of our control, with my powers and your brains going hand in hand it is not a force to reckon with. So get dressed and let's go hunting." Dante's face grows sadder, as Shadow's desires conflict morally with his own and he would rather want to opt out of it, but it is his survival and his growing love for his wife that only keeps him going. Getting

ready to kill people was a continuous knock on his door that he could not answer and it was comparably as painful as an itch he could not scratch. "Do not belittle yourself, you are good guy forced to do bad things for your own survival, you are not bad, but life has done you wrong. "You are calling yourself life? I did not ask for this?" "Come on cheer up, it will all be over soon, trust me." "Yeah...hopefully" Dante feels Shadows darkness hindering his thought process the more Shadow interacts with him. He gets undressed and puts on dark blue jeans and a black leather hooded jacket to compliment his black shirt. He proceeds to his bathroom to brush his hair and brush his teeth, while checking himself out. He puts on lotion among his brown skin along his arms and face, he is ready to go. Opening up the door as the breeze carried with multiple kisses meets his face. He is greeted by his neighbor from outside his white gated lawn with a warm good morning, Dante walks towards him with hesitation. "Are you ok Dante?" "I am ok Mike, I have a minor migraine." Dante suddenly falls to the ground and is met with Mike's comfort as he rushes to help him up. His blonde straight hair and blue eyes meet Dante's eyes. Dante's eyes blackened, "You are mine now " Dante roars from the darkness Shadow empowered him with. He stabs Mike with his bare

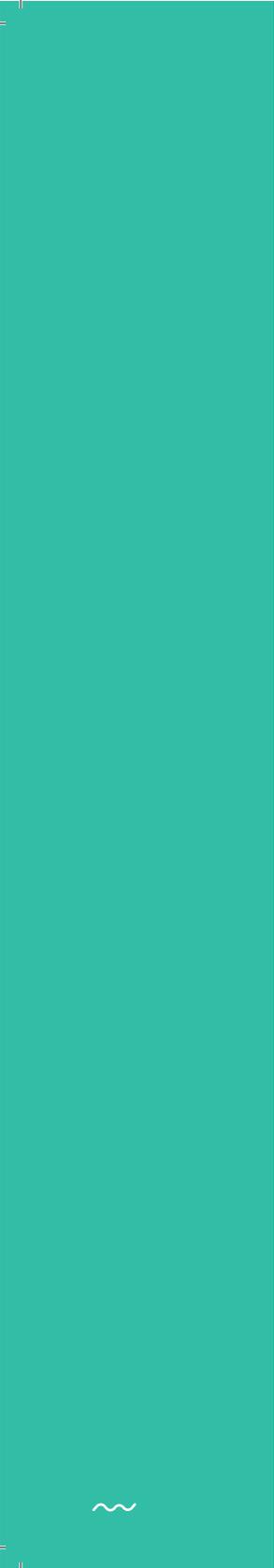
hands into his chest, Mike paralyzed from the power conjured by Dante. Dante's hands slowly go from brown to black and with them inside his body, Dante's hands start sucking the life out of him. With every second his hands were in him, Dante was able to see the light in his aqua blue eyes darken. The last drop of light in his eyes fell out to fall in his mouth and he felt the taste expand within inside himself, it was unexplainable, it was the best thing he had ever had, as if it was the taste of heaven. He threw the body from on top of him and felt the flow energy electrify within him only craving more. Shadow came from his shirt to take care of the body and drag him into a dark portal that Mike was sucked in without a trace, no witnesses in sight, it was a job well done. " How did that feel Dante?" "It felt great! I feel so good." It was the darkness talking from within him. "How about we go for a walk and look for another meal?" Dante says excitedly. "That is what I like to hear". Walking like a robot as he makes his way down towards the Redondo Beach hub, he is met by many friendly faces, which sets off his inner self to fight the parasite that is controlling him to become a monster. He gets caught up within himself as he walks into oncoming traffic and is hit by a silver Honda Civic. Before bracing impact Shadow summoned a dark ball to circum Dante and absorb



absorb the impact. The Honda was obliterated from the strength of the ball. Cars came colliding from behind it and it was a unanimous pile up. Dante's eyes darkened yet again, it was like instinct looking for another soul to take. He became hesitant as he saw the girl in front of the car lying near death with half of her body on the hood of the car while penetrated by the shattering glass. "Please kill me" uttering under her dying breath, while blood profusely came crashing down from her forehead onto the car. It was surreal, blood everywhere from all cars behind her, bodies piled up on each other moans and cries in every direction and all trying to survive. Dante was broken, but the darkness within him was not, he took a couple of steps back reaching the sidewalk. His eyes became even darker, lifting up his sleeves among his leather jacket while also focusing on the darkness from within, he made the darkness slither its way down his arms and created dark thin tentacles that were capable to suck souls from a distance. With the tentacles unraveling from his fingertips, the bodies from the cars all began to slowly die and the white little pieces of their souls found their way within him. It came to him like a passionate kiss among his lips. "Get me out of here now!!" Dante said with sadness and the conflicting taste of anger. Black wings appeared from his back and he took off seeking

refuge from his dark tendencies. Finding a mountain top away from human life he was at rest focusing himself to find peace, looking at the overview of the city thinking about all the families he ruined and through those painful hours, he found relaxation. "Stop this Dante, you will die with your stupidity acting like this." Dante let go and he had jumped from the mountain top and had no remorse for his decision and accepted it.

Among Suki's break, she interacted with her coworkers at the hospital she worked at and had her time to relax after back to back surgeries in the ER. She sat among the couch drinking black coffee watching the news and to her attention she saw reports of her husband doing the unexplainable that boggled her mind. The news showed a censored playback from the traffic cameras of the incident that only made things worse. It was the mass killing of over 20 people in a car crash pile up. She was stunned as the images were on repeat in her head of how her husband could have done something like this. Her breath tightened up and she went into intense panic, she left rushing home to contemplate. Driving home in her red Mustang GT at night she went straight to her room to cry her eyes out and to figure what in the right mind is going on. What is real? What is fake?



# WHO AM I TO ARGUE WITH ANZALDÚA?

*Brenda Bran*



ENJAMBED

I don't like Anzaldúa. I should. I guess. But I don't. She angers—no. She unnerves me. She has a wild tongue while I have a restrained one. While she ignored her mother's "en bocca cerrada no entran moscas," I listened, I learned, and I obeyed my mother.

De mi bocca cerrada no salen moscas

The culture she describes sounds eerily familiar. In my family, women lead, but they pretend not to. My dad tells me that when he first moved in with my mom, she tried to give him her paycheck. My dad didn't understand what was going on, so he asked her:

"Por que me lo das a mi?"

"Todo el dinero de la casa va al hombre" she responded

Arbitrary-patriarchal bullshit.

He told her to keep her money and that they'd divide the household expenses. Whatever was left, she should keep. My mother sent the remainder of her paycheck to her mom back in El Salvador, who then used the money to pay off my grandfather's debts and a few of the household expenses. See what I mean? They pretend not to be the backbone of the family, but they are. The pretense is so embedded into my family's structure that I doubt we know how to live without it.

My dad is weird though. He raised me like...a boy? I guess? He never expected me to be a boy, but he never told me that I should get married and have kids like my aunts and uncles. He repeated my family's gendered bullshit about women cleaning the house and doing all the household with a smirk and wink because he didn't genuinely believe any of it. When my aunt told me that I had to learn how to cook because that was a woman's job, my dad joined me in the kitchen and taught me how to make spaghetti. When my mom said that I should wear dresses, he said that I should wear them only if I wanted to. When my grandfather said that I should let my hair grow out, my dad took me to the beauty salon so that I could get my bowl cut. When I told him that I wanted to be a mechanic, he laughed. Not because it was a profession for boys but because there's no money in it (sorry dad, no money in teaching either). Like I said my dad is weird in the context of my mom's family.

Anzaldúa's family was a lot like my mom's. I grew up with the same crappy traditions of silence that marginalize women. I heard the same things about being an "hocicona." When guests came to the house, my aunt and I greeted them, but then we had to retreat into our room.

I didn't complain about it. I didn't question it. It just was. So when I first read "How to Tame a Wild Tongue," I was angry. How dare you, Gloria Evangelica Anzaldúa, question the culture that gave you a voice? How dare you question the

way I've lived my life. You are an hocicona.

You're complaining about people telling you to shut up? Really? Screw you, lady. That silence is my cover.

It protects me when people ask me, "you're not white?" It protects me when the dude in class repeats over and over again that he's not racist or sexist. It protects me when the white guy—yes, you Mr. Loeffler, Mr. Donahue, Mr. Carr, Mr. Gregory, Mr. Harlander—who grades my work condescendingly says, "I understand it's difficult for you to write about because you're--" That silence was my armor. They couldn't hear my thoughts. They couldn't question me. They couldn't see me bleed when they carved their criticisms of my English into my skin.

I didn't understand Anzaldúa. I didn't want to.

The first time I read Anzaldúa's work was for a Latin@ literature class—wait, is it Latinx? Is that right? Language changes so swiftly that it forgets to tell its speakers. I zoomed through the Spanish in her work like an energized child at Disneyland, so overwhelmed with excitement that I didn't know where to start. Then I read the word "Chicano." A word that celebrates a cultural identity—a specific culture, though. Not mine.

"If a person, Chicana or Latina, has a low estimation of my native tongue,  
she also has a low estimation of me"

-Anzaldúa

I grew up in South L.A where the low estimation of me laid in the fact that I wasn't Chicana. On the school yard, I was often made fun of because I wasn't Mexican. I didn't understand it, but because I was Salvadoran, I wasn't the right kind of Hispanic. This obviously has nothing to do with Anzaldúa, but it colored my vision of chicano culture so that I began to associate it with the Mexican-American girls who mocked my Salvadoran accent when I spoke Spanish. My Spanish has never been perfect, I don't always pronounce the "s" in words and I often use eight words to say something instead of the necessary four to say something and these imperfections signaled my parents' national identity. It meant that I was not part of the Chicano culture—not part of Anzaldúa's world, so I stopped paying attention. I read but with anger.

When she elevated Chicano Spanish as her tongue, I winced. Chicano Spanish doesn't have rules—it's not, in the words of Jamilia Lyiscott, "articulate." It's also not mine. As she elevated her cultural identity with pride because it resisted



assimilation, I looked at my Central American roots and cried. The Chicano identity—your Spanglish, Ms. Anzaldúa—is accepting and beautiful, if you’re a part of it. I’m not. We’re not all Chicanos, so what’s my language supposed to sound like? What am I allowed to say? Why am I looking to you for those answers?

En oídos cerrados no entra sabiduría

One word and the close minded brat stopped listening.

It took me two years to pick up her work again. It was too close to home. I listened to my instructor’s lecture, but I couldn’t see past my own life experience to understand what she wrote. I had options, so I wrote on someone else—don’t even remember who. It was selfish. It took me a long time to understand why a liberal education and her work are important. I may not agree with Anzaldúa, but I’ve come to recognize that her work was an important stepping stone in academia. Because of her, a lot of us can find our own voice and disagree with her. We can use language in whatever way we see fit. Anzaldúa helped me see that...eventually. But it still bugs me that I couldn’t see past...me and my own life experience. So I ignored what she had to say. I pretended she didn’t exist. I didn’t listen. Why? Why the hell was I in school if not to understand others? I was so self-absorbed that I couldn’t even make the effort to see what she was saying about language. Literally the thing I was studying—language.

“Until I am free to write bilingually and to switch codes without having always to translate, while I still have to speak English or Spanish when I would rather speak Spanglish, and as long as I have to accommodate to the English speakers rather than having them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate”

-Anzaldúa,

Girl has a way with language. I don’t agree with her though. Language isn’t a zero-sum political ploy—it can be, but I don’t want it to be. It’s for communication. It’s a vehicle for us meet each other half way. I don’t need you to accommodate me to feel legitimized. I don’t need you to validate my culture for me. I don’t need you to recognize my identity to feel whole. That’s bullshit. I need you to try a little, and I promise to try a little too. I want to understand. If the only way that you’re going to try is by recognizing a little bit of my identity, then please do so, but understand that your opinion of me in no way diminishes or improves my sense of identity. We can respect differences and embrace them through language, but I don’t need you to give up any part of yourself for me to feel whole—that’s not the point of language

Con ojos abiertos se puede ver a otros

My students hate Anzaldúa. When I ask them what they think about her, I get a mixture of “yeah she’s cool” and “I get what she’s saying, but like I can’t relate to her.” I think back to my experience with her, and I wonder if they feel the same way that I felt. Perhaps we’ve come a long way from her struggle. Academia has gotten a lot better about recognizing that diversity is important, so perhaps my students do not feel like her struggle is their own.

“Do any of you wish you could write in Spanish in school?” I ask. Some of them respond that they feel more comfortable with English. Others simply shrug and say that it would be harder. A lot of these students are Spanish speakers, and as I ask that question I can’t help but feel like I’m alienating anyone who isn’t also a Spanish speaker.

“What about those of you who do not speak Spanish? Would you like to use a different language in school when you’re expressing yourself? How about a different dialect?” Or how about the slang that you use with your friends? I think as I listen to their responses

A few of them say that they would, but the consensus seems to be that they prefer English. Perhaps because they buy into the fact that English proficiency means economic growth. Perhaps because that’s the only way they’ve written in school. Perhaps it’s just easier. Perhaps it’s all of the above?

But my job is to help them with comprehension strategies so that they can pass the Exit Exam for the class. I can’t tell them that Anzaldúa makes me want to scream, or that her work is like looking into a mirror and seeing a polarizing ideology that simultaneously breaks my heart and gives me hope. They’re writing about code-switching, so we focus our discussions on that.

“How do you all speak to your parents?” I ask the sleepy teenagers in the room.

Low murmurs agreeing that they are all very respectful around mom and dad fill the classroom.

“How do you talk to your best friend?”

A cacophony of profanity erupts and students suddenly come back to reality.

I laugh as they all start listing the phrases that they use with their friends. I sloppily write them on the board to help them see the different identities that they project through language alone. Some of them find it cool, others are itching to mess around on their phones.

Code-switching. Identity switching? Or is it all part of who we are? Identity is



supposed to be a lot of things right? Anzaldúa calls it a dual identity, but if we all use different masks with different groups of people, aren't we navigating different identities too? Which one of my identities do I use to read Anzaldúa?

I've read her as a student. I've read her as a casual reader. I've read her as an instructor. Yes, in that order. She's always frustrated me though. Perhaps because she makes me confront things in myself that I'm not ready to face? Too deep.

Como leo algo que me hace ver cosas de mi misma que no quiero ver?

Don't get me wrong Señora. La respeto. I respect you. La admiro. I admire you. Quiero ser como usted—menos terca, claro—pero quiero poder imponerme como usted. Hell, I'm even trying to steal your style of writing. Estoy cansada de esperar que me escuchen. Quiero que me oigan sin tener que gritar. Pero cuando hablo, mi voz no tiene volumen.

Thank you. Because of you, a lot of us have liberties in academia that you didn't have. We can look at you and scoff at the fact that you go too far. Yet, we weren't there. So maybe you had to yell like this. Perhaps you had to demand legitimization because no one would listen. If you're silenced for so long, outrage makes sense. I wasn't silenced in academia like that. I was at home, so I get where you're coming from. But I can argue with you, with Derrida, with Plato, with whoever the fuck I want because you, and others like you, made it okay to do it however the hell I want.

Tengo este lujo gracias a usted.

Yet in the classroom, I adhere to our traditions of silence. My tamed tongue is afraid to challenge anyone in classroom discussions. I am too shy to tell the gentleman in class to let the instructor explain rhetoric theory to us cause some of it is like reading a foreign tongue. I am afraid to tell the other gentleman in class that discussions on bullying are important.

I wish I were more like you Ms. Anzaldúa. I guess I do like you. I obviously have a complicated relationship with you. You yell while I lower my head. You fight while I try to find another recourse. You write and publish while I draft manuscripts I know I'm never going to send out to anyone. Language, though, is our common thread. Silence may be my armor, but really it's just a really shitty metaphor to explain my fear of pissing anyone off. You don't seem to have that fear. You seem to relish in making your reader feel uncomfortable. I envy your ability to articulate your frustrations while I sit here seething in mine.

# MURDER

*Jonathan Rodriguez*

Now I speak to you from afar.  
No one knows the future that I have seen.  
Swallowed by pain, I have fallen to pieces.  
I'm soaking my sorrows in a selfish way.

When I held you tight, I had the world.  
I was staring into the eyes of my past.  
The poison which I swore to drown.  
No real reason to accept the way.

I am staring down the sights of my regret.  
Sitting here writing my apologies.  
Life is no more than a lie to me.  
So I must accept the truth I cannot understand.

Standing above the ashes of another life –  
As your purity stained the cement –  
Crying for me to save you –  
But little did you know of my own disguise.



My faith in humanity had been lost.  
Purity slipping through my hands.  
Realization infecting my heart.  
Lost for words, I fell to me knees.

Holding your cold, lifeless hands—  
The warmth from my soul faded—  
Like the light from a distant star—  
No more but a big bang.

I dropped my disgust.  
My hands in the air.  
A silent blow to the back.  
My hands behind me.

Head down.  
It finally hit me.  
I'm never getting out—  
Of the life I chose to end.

# TO MY SA SWEETHE,

*Andy Lara*

uncolored and lifeless,  
untouched by  
any hairbrush,  
the wires upon your head  
are not as homely  
as the nights you  
spend hopeless in  
your bed and lonely  
and that blood dripping  
from your fangs and  
those flames crackling  
in your eyes are  
yours to treasure. I've

closed my gates to you  
and your medieval  
pleasures.  
I'm only returning a favor  
a resentment that's  
ours to savor  
so let's indulge our  
indifference  
let's coddle it and  
make it overweight  
I could have liked you,  
yet now it's much too late

# INDUSTRIAL ART

*Anthony Maese*

"You grant us sight, yet you blind us with your commercialization, false advertisements and subliminal messages. You grant us the ability to smell, but only cause us to smell death and the crude smells caused by your actions. You grant us hearing, yet you make us hear nothing but lies and garble. You grant us taste, yet we can only taste the poison in our food supplies. You grant us speech, yet you silence us. You need vacations to escape the burden of your daily lives and from having to deal with those you bound and censor. You start wars online,

in public, over media and overseas because people don't believe and follow your ideologies. You commit suicide when you're too cowardly to accept the results of your actions, against those you hurt or kill. You lie about yourself, about your goals and accomplishments in order to feel good about yourself in front of us. You cheat on your life, spouse and your taxes because common life values bore you. You are weak, unable to accept your own punishment, unable to live like those you step on. You cannot survive."

# YOU

# PUPUSA

*Brenda Bran*

## Summer 2016–Watts

The steam from the griddle enveloped my face as I struggled to flatten the dough into a circular stuffed pancake. I forgot to wet my hand before I started tortiando, so some of the masa stuck to my palm.

“No se mojo la mano verdad?” she asks

If you know I didn’t wet my hand, why are you asking? I thought to myself. Mi tia Nena smiled and continued palming the pupusa in her hand. She picked up the turner and flipped a couple of the pupusas. It’s been 25 years, and I still can’t make a pupusa like hers. Where mine are small, hers are big. Where mine are sad circle-wanabes, hers are geometric masterpieces. Where mine are gringa-fied stuffing-less tortillas, hers are genuine-Salvi pupusas.

Ever since I was old enough to stand still for more than thirty seconds, my

aunt and mom have attempted to coerce me into learning how to make traditional Salvadoran foods: tamales, pastelitos, horchata de morro, and of course the staple of a lot of Salvi homes, the pupusa. I’ve never been too keen on the idea—I love cooking, but I don’t particularly enjoy Salvadoran food. My dad and I often joke that we may have Salvi blood, but our hearts are Mexican—not in soccer though. Never in soccer. A lot of Central Americans love Mexican culture, but when it comes to soccer, there’s a fierce rivalry. Mexico’s national team has a tendency to crush Central American teams—not always, but enough to stir feelings of resentment or fiery hatred towards their soccer team—but it depends on the day. We do love Mexican food and music though. Vincente Fernandez and Jose Alfredo Jimenez sing anthems and homages to their beloved country, and it makes us feel like we too share in that



# CHATS

culture. And to my dad and I, Pupusas simply can't hold a candle to enchiladas and tacos. Salvi food just seems needlessly complicated to make. The work and effort to make this dish doesn't match the taste and honestly, why make it myself when my aunt is better at it than I am.

Before making pupusas, my aunt seasons and cooks the pork loin. She stands over the stove turning the meat over so that it doesn't burn. She stares intently at the pan.

"Ponte hacer el curtido" my aunt's voice echoed from the kitchen

"Ay voy" my mom replied as she pulled herself away from her novella.

Out of learned guilt and a desire to avoid the "you're-old-enough-to-help" speech, I follow my mom into the kitchen.

This is our routine. When my aunt starts making pupusas, my mom makes the curtido, my aunt does the heavy lifting,

and I become her unwilling apprentice.

## Summer 1995—West 66th Street

"Mientras ago esto, ven para aca a practicar a tortiar?" my aunt asked me "What's that? Tortiar?" I was confused by the word

"La manera que hacemos las tortillas"

"But we have tortillas in the fridge? Why do I need to make more?"

"Para usar la masa"

Why not use the masa for more pupusas? I didn't understand that we would inevitably have more masa than stuffing for the tortillas, and I wanted to go back to my room to watch the Power Rangers. But my aunt's patient tone made quick work of my hesitance, and she took the opportunity to quickly model the process for me.

She took a bit of the masa and rounded into a ball. She then wet her palm a bit and began to pound the masa into a circular shape. I followed in suit,

but I was an unmitigated disaster. As I pounded the dough into a flat shape that defied geometry, my aunt chuckled and whispered,

“Tienes que aprender a hacer las”

“Why do I have to learn to make them? We can just buy them. Besides I don’t like these kinds of tortillas” I responded. It’s true. Salvadoran tortillas look like pupusas but without a happy ending. They are literally flavorless pitabread that you can’t fold! It’s annoying, but my aunt likes her traditions. She smiled, and calmly responded,

“A mi me gustan. Mi madre tortiaba todas las tardes. We would eat fresh tortillas con queso y frijoles. Seven of us and she would make enough so that none of us were hungry”

I looked away for a split second avoiding her gaze in shame. Whenever she or my mom brought up their childhood in El Salvador, I was guilted into realizing my privilege. I silently took another bit of masa and began palming it slowly.

My aunt looked down at me and once again smiled. She offered a few words of encouragement as she watched me struggle with the masa. She took the doughy mound from me when I deemed it ready for the fire and placed it gently on the griddle.

“You know all the women in our family know how to make tortillas” she commented as she flipped one of her pupusas.

“Why?”

“Tradition and money” she answered calmly as she flipped another pupusa on the griddle. Her pupusas were perfectly round while my mini tortillas had edges and sides. Because of their small size though, my tortillas fit in the small crevices between the pupusas that my aunt made.

“But we can buy them now. Why bother now?”

“Para que no se nos olvide” So that we don’t forget? I thought Forget what?

### May 2000–West 66th Street

My aunt stood in front of the stove carefully placing each pupusa on the same old griddle. She looked over at my hands as I was slowly learning how to palm a pupusa without causing a tear in the masa.

“Remember when I couldn’t see over the stove?”

“Si me acuerdo. Has mejorado mucho” “Yeah right. My pupusas still don’t look round” I responded as an eerie silence overtook the room.

This was one of the last times that we got to make pupusas in this house. I thought about the lives that were waiting for us in El Salvador. I was both excited and scared. I loved El Salvador, but I couldn’t write in Spanish. My entire education had been in English, so I knew I would be behind all the other kids. Then there was the issue of my aunt. My aunt would live wither sister and my grandfather. I would live



in another colonia with my parents. We wouldn't make pupusas together anymore. I wouldn't share a room with her. My aunt often said that this would be a good thing—that I could finally enjoy having my own room, but I didn't want to. I liked sharing a room with her. I don't have siblings, so my aunt became my sister, my friend, and my most ardent defender. I was going to miss her. But I never told her this. Whenever the issue of the move came up, I distracted her with plans of going to my grandfather's pool, of trips to the mercados, how I was going to impress my classmates with my English. None of this happened when we actually moved, but I didn't want my aunt to know I was secretly sad. I remember feeling frustrated with one of my pupusas as I was trying to palm it into a circular shape,

"I suck at this" I bemoaned

"Con mas paciencia y mas espacio" my aunt advised.

"I'm doing it slowly. My hands are just too small for this"

"No uses tanta masa"

"I didn't get a lot of masa. I only got a little bit"

"Paciencia"

"How can I be patient? You only worked at that restaurant two weeks and you learned how to make these" I whined

"Si pero yo ya podia tortiar"

I scoffed and got some more masa. My aunt said I was getting better, but I didn't see it. My aunt just smiled at me and corrected my mistakes as often as she could.

We didn't talk about our impending move, but I've asked her how she felt about it. She says that she was sad, but hopeful. Hopeful that everything would work out. That she'd be able to care for her father and that I would have gotten the chance to grow up around my cousins. Neither happened of course. But back then, we both felt like our days together were numbered.

### September 2002—East 55th Street

"Why are you making pupusas?" I asked my aunt

"Tu mama quiere pupusas. Vamos a comer pupusas" my aunt's curt tone stuck me, but I didn't want to argue.

"I'll make the curti--"

"Ya lo hiece" she cut me off

"Fine." I replied flatly

Neither of us wanted to talk. We knew we shouldn't be making pupusas. We knew we had to finish making them. We knew we did not want to look into the living room. While my aunt continued flipping the stuffed tortillas on the griddle, I preoccupied myself arranging the condiments on the table.

"Her doctor said she should avoid foods like this"

"Cállate. Te va oír" she angrily whispered

A long silence took hold of our narrow kitchen. The only sound in the room was the sizzling of the griddle.

"No has practicado en mucho tiempo. Ven ayudarme" she called me over to the stove.

My aunt knew that I didn't want to make pupusas, but she also knew that I sure as hell didn't want to leave the kitchen only to go into the living room. My mom had gotten her third round of chemo that morning, and she looked exhausted. As much as I love my mom, I had gotten sick of telling her that everything would be alright. That she would beat this, and everything would return to normal. I felt like a liar. How could I keep encouraging her to have strength when she would wake up in the middle of the night in a cold sweat. How could I encourage her to keep at her treatments when the smell of bacon turned her stomach and made her dash for the nearest restroom. I didn't want to fill the air with empty phrases of encouragement, so I crossed the room in a few steps, washed my hands, and picked up a small ball of masa.

"She's not getting better. This is only going to make things worse" I stated flatly.

I was angry. I was angry at my aunt. I was angry at my mom's cancer. I was angry at her doctor. I was angry at my mom. I was angry at me. I couldn't do anything to make things better. I knew my anger confused and disappointed my aunt, but I didn't know what else to feel. I understood my aunt's inclination to say, Screw the doctor. If pupusas would make my mom feel better, then we'd both palm away till our hands bled. But we both knew that any momentary happiness would quickly dissipate. She'd still need her treatments.

She'd still wake up in the middle of the night. She'd still throw up the majority of her food. She'd still have cancer.

"Se le va subir el animo" my aunt stood in front of the stove as tears welled up in her eyes. She would not look at me.

Las mujeres en esta familia no lloran I bit my lip and resisted the urge to be an obnoxious ass. I wanted to pick a fight, but I realized it was futile. I could sense the tension rising and my aunt's need to cry. She wouldn't though. Growing up, I heard the family credo: women in this family don't cry. A phrase repeated with such masculine pride that I always rolled my eyes. But now. Now, we used it like a rock to lean on. A phrase I repeated over and over in my head, and I imagine that my aunt did too, to keep ourselves from crying. I can't cry. I can't cry. She's fine right now. I tried to convince myself of this, but I knew she couldn't even stand that afternoon. But I still tried to avoid the tears. For a few seconds—they felt like minutes though—I pretended not to see my aunt's tears. But my own eyes began to betray me. I didn't look at her though.

"Don't let her see you. She needs us to be strong" I said quietly

"I'm scared, mami. But she can't know we're scared. No lloranmos remember?" I continued.

My aunt set the flipper on the stove and embraced me.

"Ahora si."

**Spring 2004—East 55th Street**



"Ay que celebrar" my dad announced as I walked into the house. It was another late day at school, and all I wanted was to get into my pjs and watch Buffy the Vampire Slayer.

"What are we celebrating?" I asked tired.

"Ya llegaron los ultimos análisis y tu mamá ya no tiene cancer"

"What!?" shoot a look of shock and hope towards my mom who is standing at the kitchen door. "En serio?" I ask

My mom nods with a smile, and I hugged her. I don't remember crossing the living room or walking past my dad, I just remember hugging my mom and crying.

"Ya sabe mi tia?" I ask knowing that my aunt needs to hear this news.

"Not yet" my dad responds "We just got home from the doctor"

This was post 9/11, but my family was slow to get cellphones. They figured that the only people who needed cellphones were the two people in the family who used public transportation, so my aunt and I had phones. I spent some time with my mom but as soon as I went into my room to change out of my school uniform, I called my aunt.

"Ay que celebrar. Vayan a la superior y voy hacer pupusas cuando llege" she says

I laughed at her response.

"I'll tell my dad right now, and I'll prepare the masa" I respond her.

My parents ended up going to

the super market without me. I turned on the tv and switched the channel from Univision to Digimon. I prepared the masa and waited for my aunt. It felt surreal. When my aunt arrived, we hugged and prepared the curtido for the pupusas.

### June 2008—East 100th Street

"Como quiere celebrar su graduación?" my aunt asks me

I'm kneading the cheese for las pupusas revueltas. Revueltas means we're going to knead cheese into the pork stuffing to make "mixed" pupusas.

These are my favorite.

"I don't know. Are you coming to my graduation this time?"

"No. Tengo que trabajar" she says as she turns on the fire on the stove.

"We'll go out to dinner in the weekend then"

"Pero los voy a ver después"

"Okay then, we can go to dinner afterwards"

I knew we wouldn't be going out to dinner after my high school commencement ceremony. My mom and aunt hate eating in public. They hate restaurants because they say that it feels like everyone is watching you. I felt a similar sense of anxiety sometimes, but mostly I hated hearing the "I-cook-better-than-this" lectures that my mom would give whenever we went to restaurants. I also knew that something would go wrong that day. My aunt has always been a mediator between

my mom and I. When my aunt isn't around, my mom and I typically end up in some sort of heated argument over the slightest thing.

It bothered me that my aunt wouldn't be at my graduation. She's been my biggest cheerleader throughout my high school experience and now she wasn't going to be there to watch me get my diploma.

"Va estar ahí cuando me gradué de la Universidad verdad?" I asked tepidly

"Of course" she responds with a smile as she starts making the first pupusa.

She was there for my college commencement ceremony like she promised.

### **August 2015—East 100th Street**

"When we're dead, you're going to have to carry out our traditions"

"But like, I don't like tamales or pupusas"

"Since when do you not like pupusas"

"Fine. I like them, but not enough to make them myself"

"Y quien te las va hacer?"

"Mami, we live in L.A. Like you know Pico and Union has a lot of pupuserias as does Huntington Park. There's a place near where we groom Cosmo!"

Ana walked into the kitchen and shook her head, "Your aunt is right. It's not the same"

"You're right mom, they're better. My pupusas are just as much a disaster as the Green Lantern movie" Both women

stared at Lee with perplexed looks on their respective faces.

"Nada? Seriously? I'm being incredibly clever here and no one appreciates it" Lee shook her head as her Doctor Who reference went unnoticed. She begrudgingly continued acting as her aunt's apprentice.

"You know Lee, when you have kids--" "Nope."

"You're going to want to teach them our traditions"

Lee pointed at the two fluffballs laying at the kitchen entrance.

"Look at Cosmo. Look at Luna. That's as close to grandkids as you're going to get" Lee said flatly as she set her final pupusa on the griddle.

Nena did not understand her niece. She feared that Lee's attitude about children and marriage were a consequence of Nena's influence. Nena never had a family of her own. Lee was the closest thing she had to a daughter, and now Lee was adamantly against having kids. Hopefully it was a just a phase.





# ANESTHETIZED BY HOPE

*Leonard Murray*

In the aspirations of America I carelessly  
sold myself into the slavery of creditors and  
debts.

How did I buy so deeply into the illusions of  
grandeur, materialism, and glory only to have  
them snatched away just when I imagined  
they mattered?

“Repossession” is what they call it.

I must recall the Nigger Jim saying, “I’s rich  
cause I owns myself...”

I must fortify my mind and stir the courage  
to traverse the labyrinth of false ideals and  
values that have corrupted and corroded this  
mechanism leaving me unable to discover  
self-worth.

In this epic battle upon the soil of my mind,  
blood is shed.

The struggle for freedom demands that  
pride bleed out until hubris clears the system  
and humility forces me to stand erect.



I must resupply my armory with powerful thoughts setting off explosions like kegs of dynamite because this is a revolution!

My mind fires bullets, sometimes with the precision of a sniper, "one shot, one kill!"

But, in intense conflict, it fires with the desperation of the turret gunner who holds the trigger down on a weapon with endless ammo knowing, if he were to stop firing, his entire crew would be lost.

In this battle, I must forget the past because, like fired gun powder, it dissipates and cannot be recycled,

As I seize the day, the words I mastered are the language that paints landscapes and portraits of my experience.

Then, inspired with a new pulse of morning, I risk everything to express myself because in exposing myself I may deliver many, starting with my own children.

*ENJAMBED*

# A MODERN DAY FEMINIST'S "CANTERBURY TALE"

*Lily Rodriguez*

Friday morning, workers meet the beggar  
 Counselor for the beggar, she fed her.  
 Woman of strength, Althea Avila  
 She's as strong as the scent of vanilla.  
 5 She joins in protests, fighting for women  
 Yells for equal laws hoping she'll win them.  
 Such a young woman, of age twenty three  
 Struggles with finances, nothing is free.  
 Stress is present like rust on an old rod,  
 10 Some don't see it could all be a facade.  
 She masks her youth since she can't be a child,  
 Takes care of her brother all the while.  
 There's one place maturity doesn't reach,  
 The soft orbs dancing in fire wanting speech.  
 15 Her eyes are as lively as her short curls  
 Spiraling messily like ocean whirls  
 Ink is drawn into her dark as dirt skin,  
 Chinese characters with lines that are thin  
 A Venus symbol, located on her wrist  
 20 In between her veins when she makes a fist  
 Many more things hidden in Althea Avila  
 Saving her story is an idea  
 However, briefly this is what I say  
 Her purpose is to be a healer by day  
 25 Also to show female independence  
 Spread self reliance, she's a transcendence.

# BORN OF ASH

*Jade Harvey*

Fire and the Fox

Do you see her... In the music?

She is here

She is me.

I am here.

Until I wasn't.

The day I came into being was beyond words. It was the start of something new after an eternity of repetition, and not understanding what was missing. My birth was a unlike yours... Unlike your father's, your sisters, your pet, and all other creatures. I have always been as I was, and I never wished for myself to be anything else. I have never known anything else. Then, I became... something. I became more.

A creature, hated and avoided by man, considered the fire. The fire, taken for granted... by man... And by all that came before, was for the first time called beautiful. The creature looked. It watched the flickering for so long that, all at once; it was noticed.

Dog and Lion, would not eat for fear of taking in the change. Elk and Horse, would not stomp for fear of joining with the creature. They would not touch it for fear of fire. But they were aware.

It was left entirely alone.

It was not alone.

For days rising and stars following, it peered into the flickering light.

Desperate

Fearful

Elated

Trying to see.

It grew thin for wanting.

Even standing at death's dais it refused to look away. Its last breath did the great friend of fond and sorrowful adieu. Although the spirit of the creature had started on the final path, it's innate self was not quite finished. It looked back at the fire, grieving, not for its own life, but for the loss of such a fine companion.

This time, the fire looked back.



It grabbed on to a creature it did not know, and could not completely understand... and the creature allowed it to do so. The fire took the creature's spirit into its depths; and they were one.

In a world where each one strives for his own.

Each one strives for her own.

Where each one stands individual.

Where each one remains alone.

No more.

As one, their spirits cavorted. Free... and bound, they relish the warmth of each other's strengths and weaknesses and are willingly blinded by love.

And so, they found themselves burnt,  
Wonderfully, willfully burnt;  
Purified and perfected.

But, this world that we live in abhors perfection. The two unknowns were made to calm; and then, they were made to part.

A woman is born.

Burned by the light of the fire bright,  
and cooled by its loving gaze.

Women.

She is;

A cool lacquered black, with skin hairless and smooth in remembrance of pain, hair curled close to the skull in fear of the blazing lights, lips stung from heat; heat dancing through and around. The heat that was everywhere while never quite touching.

And she is;

Alive, breathing in the air of this... a world she had never before seen... through a cold wet nose, kneading grass with four ashen paws, and taking in the whistle a brother wind as he dances between trees made freshly bald in preparation, knowing winters breath, and her stinging soldiers, swiftly come though not a speck of ice is found.

And they spoke; of new things and of old.

A nod combines with a sneeze,

They laugh with one another...

There would be hate late

Now there is only love

These new things, born laughing.

**TO  
MY  
FAMILY**

*Aaron Silas*

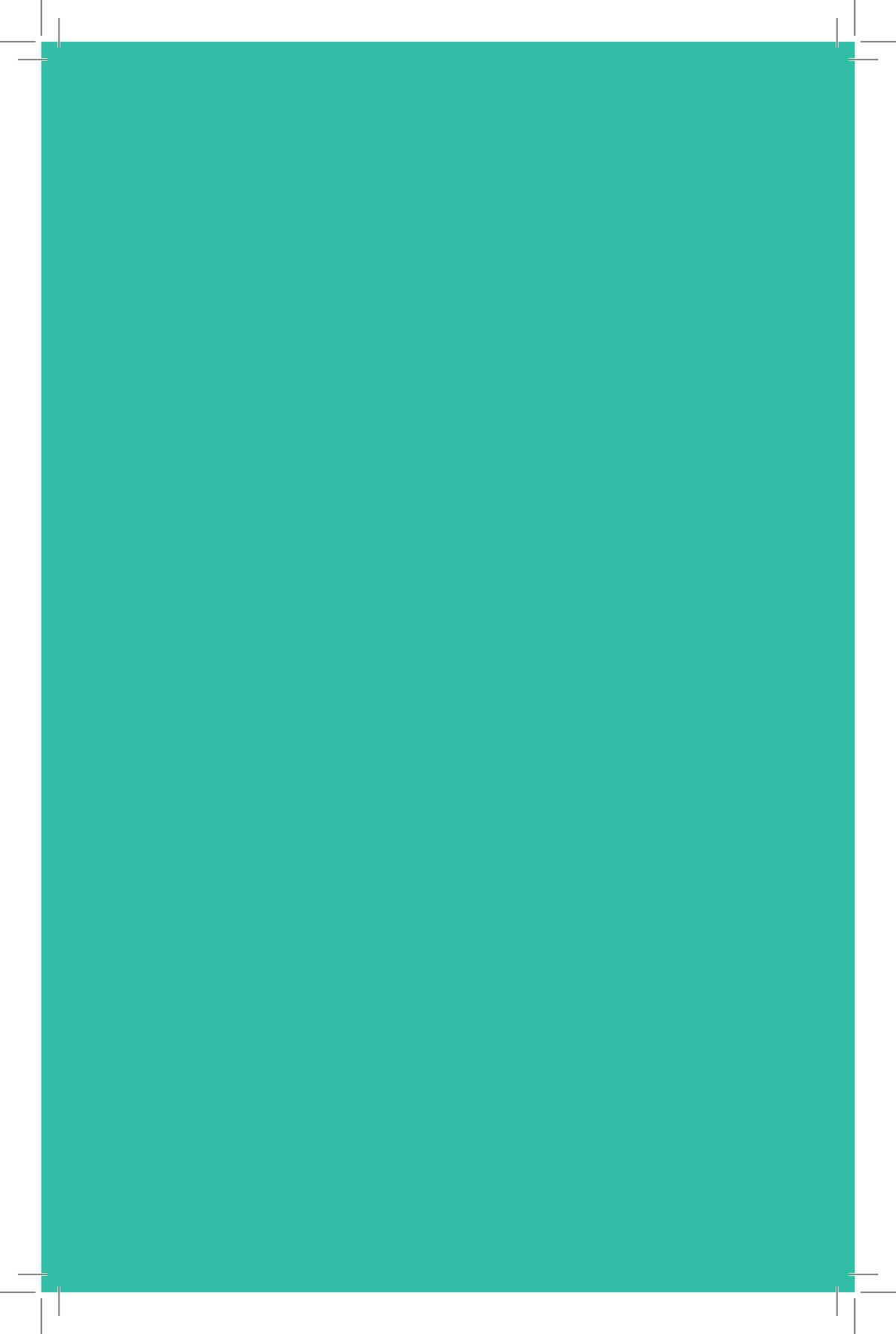
I'm sorry Mom  
for washing my  
bunched boxers  
mottled with  
crisp clutters of  
Elmers Glue.

I'm sorry Dad  
for finding your  
double  
penetration  
 pornos  
palled  
under socks.

I'm sorry brother  
for sneaking snugs  
at my snout while  
you slept in the bed  
next to me.

Im sorry sister for  
designating your room  
as the "Swack Shack"

I'm sorry  
for believing  
I was discreet.

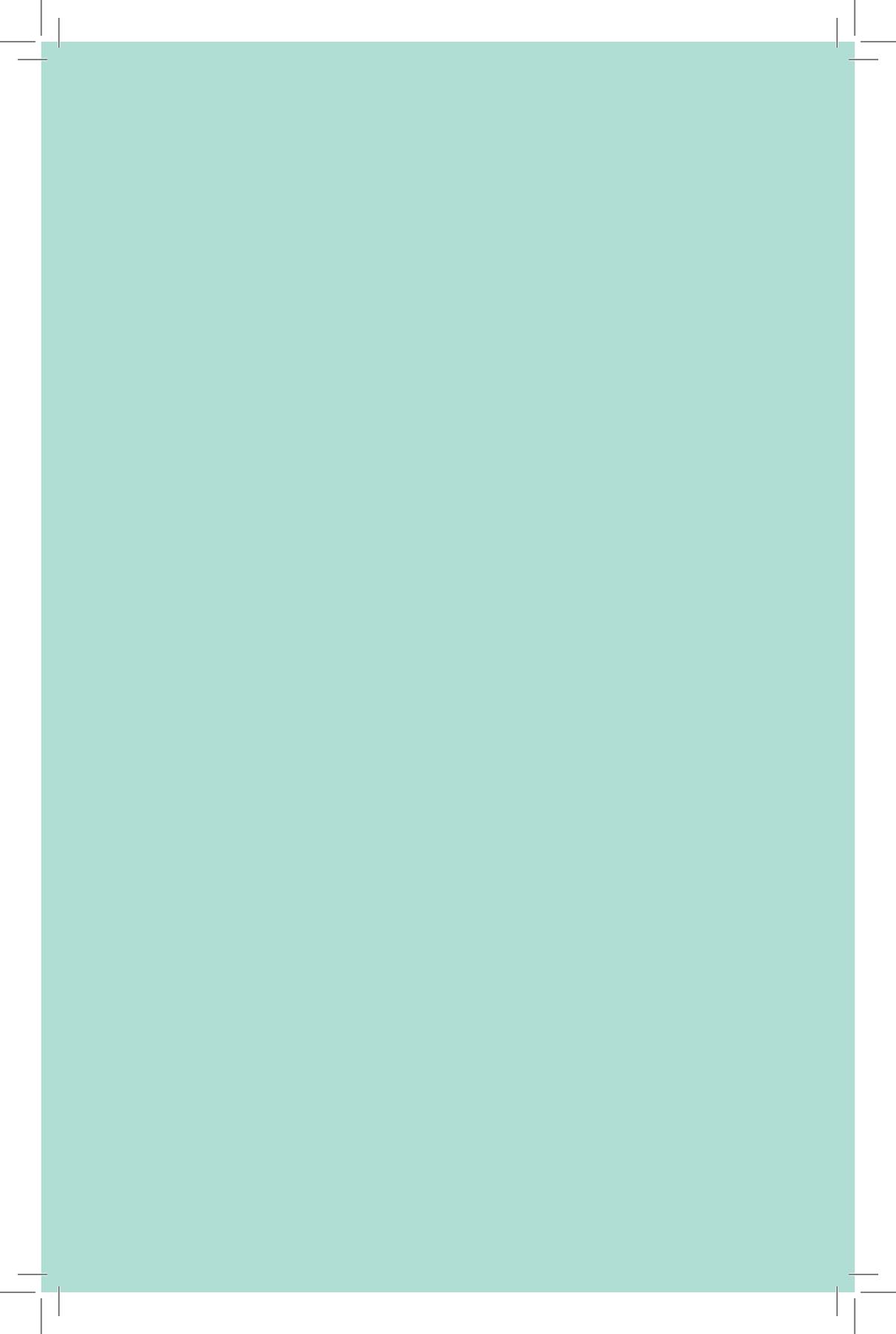


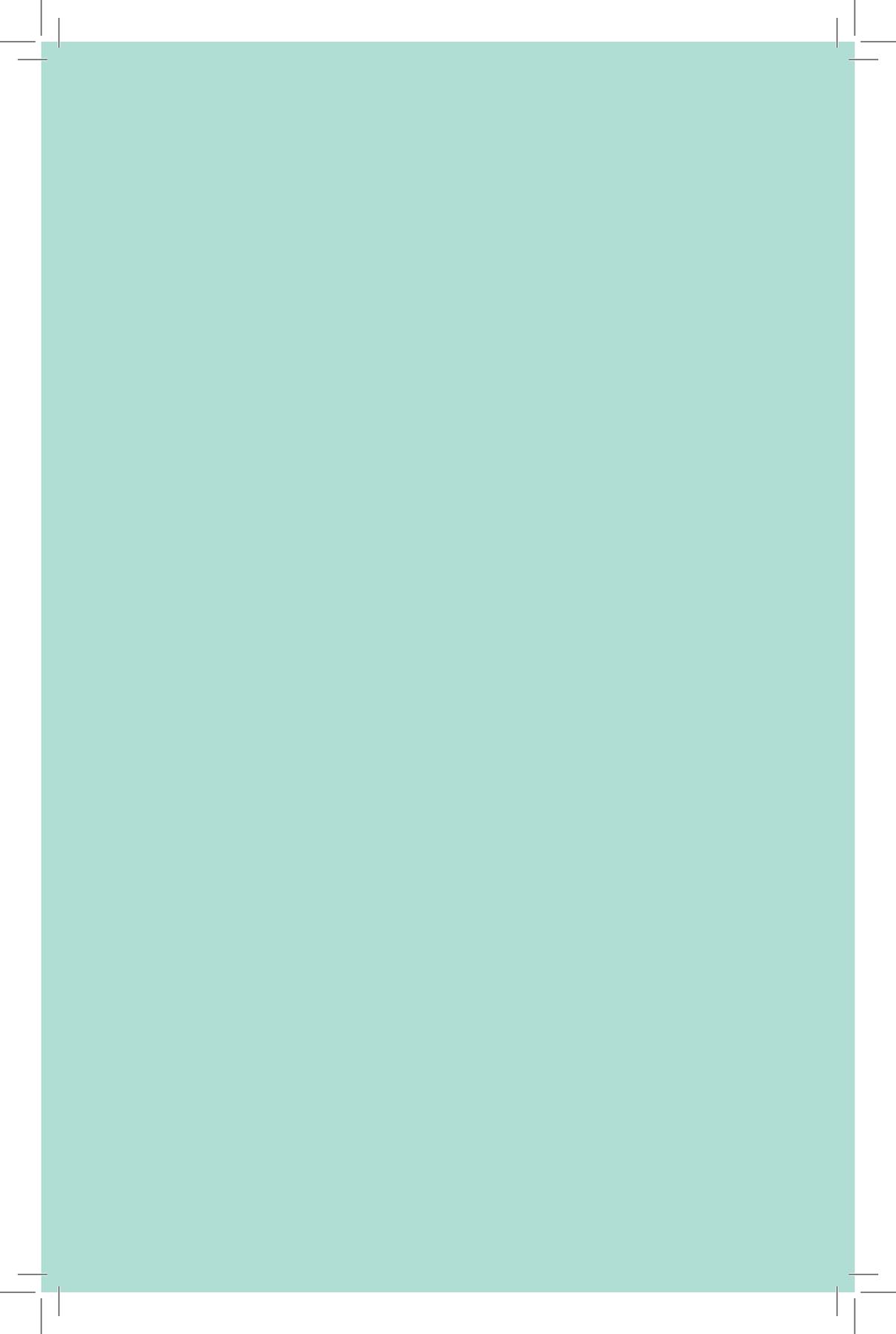
## [UNTITLED]

*Kyle Moreno*

The little wooden bungalow came down overnight -  
reduced to a stack of cabinets, stained glass, the elegant  
wreckage of crown molding and mahogany banisters.

The swarming scaffold is my new neighbor, and a century  
old American dream  
is in the pile driver. As the day laborers quickly haul away  
the last splintered beam,  
the scaffold crew constructs a monolith.







California State University  
**DOMINGUEZ HILLS**