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*an art and non-fiction literary
magazine of Loyola College in
Maryland*

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This year's *Forum* is somewhat a break from tradition. The color cover and color inserts are something new which we hope our readers will enjoy. We have some fresh staff members who have helped us tremendously. I would like to thank my co-editor, Camille, and Tom Panarese, who helped this issue become a reality. I would also like to thank Dr. Dan McGuiness--thanks for the yummy dinner and conversation.

Though the age of technology is upon us, and the *Forum* will likely be keeping up with the times, we must remember why we have a literary magazine. The *Forum* not only showcases the artwork and writing of Loyola College students, but makes us aware that there are artists and writers among us. It convinces us that self-expression and creativity are still alive within us.

So turn off your televisions and computers and open your mind to explore human nature, the macabre, serious political and emotional issues, and real life. To begin your quest, click [HERE](#).

Jaime Fischbach

For all of you bookworms out there or just those who like to keep up with the art and literary who's who at Loyola, here you go -- *Forum* 1998. Who can say how many hours, emotions, strained nerves and tears have gone into the writing, editing and layout of this little number, but I can say in the end it's definitely worth it. Oh yes, *Forum* is catching up with the space age, so look for it on Loyola's Writing and Media website.

V.I.P.'s this year: Dr. McGuiness (as always), Jaime "Gafilte" Fischbach, Tom Panarese (and his continuing battle with Loyola's print publication software programs), and ESPECIALLY Janet Maher and Mary Beth Akre of the art department, who really went the extra mile. Thanks.

Camille Whelan

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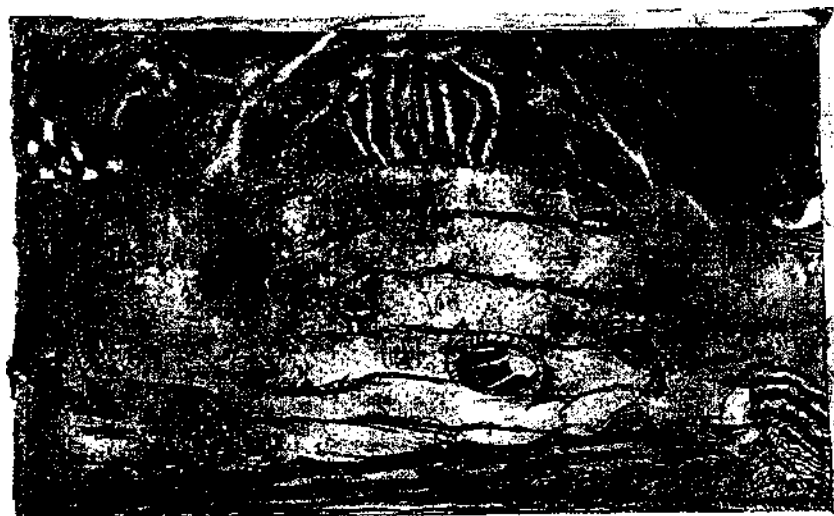
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The Evolution of Darkness

Josh Warner-Burke

"This house is as dark as ignorance, though ignorance were as dark as hell," Shakespeare wrote in *Twelfth Night*. The word "dark" has traditionally been used to describe obscurity, ignorance, and evil. The connotation of darkness as obscurity is even present in the Bible: "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?" (Job 38:2).¹ The tendency to use "dark" to describe obscurity is natural, as physical sight becomes limited in darkness, and the usage as ignorance seems to come from the age-old metaphor of knowledge as light. But how did dark come to mean evil?

Perhaps the connotation as evil comes from the human tendency to fear the unknown. Perhaps we fear what we cannot understand because we cannot control it. Certainly, wars have been undertaken because of a lack of understanding of another race, because of a desire to control it, and out of fear.

The fear of evil which darkness causes leads parents to demand their children be in by dark, and those children to cry at night for their parents to leave the light on. In general, we fear darkness, dark things, and the evil which lurks at night.

But in recent times, a subculture has slowly emerged which treats the word "dark" in a different way. It has in popular culture become an en vogue way to describe a new film or book or album; the word has evolved over time from meaning simply evil to meaning something much more complex, something good.

It is difficult to determine when the change began to occur, but the roots of the change can perhaps be traced to the Gothic novels and short stories of the 18th and 19th centuries. The Gothic tale presented darkness as a means of inspiring fear in its audience, and this was its primary appeal. As Chris Baldick explains in the introduction to *The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales*, "It is customary to account for the appeal of Gothic

fiction by reference to a set of universal and timeless dreads usually referred to as 'our deepest fears'.² The dark aspect, although meant to be frightening, was the key element of the fiction of the time and likely what made the readers keep coming back.

That Gothic tales were inherently dark and dreary can be seen even in the first sentence of Edgar Allen Poe's classic "The Fall of the House of Usher":

During the whole of a dull, dark, and soundless day in the autumn of the year, when the clouds hung oppressively low in the heavens, I had been passing alone, on horseback, through a singularly dreary tract of the country; and at length found myself, as the shades of the evening drew on, within view of the melancholy House of Usher.

That people kept coming back to this dark world is significant. They must have been drawn to it. As Rudolph Otto described the fascination he described the device which made Poe and other Gothic writers so popular:

The daemonic-divine object may appear to the mind an object of horror and dread, but at the same time it is no less something that allures with a potent charm, and the creature, who trembles before it . . . has always the impulse to turn to it, nay even to make it somehow his own. The 'mystery' is for him not merely something to be wondered at but something that entrances him . . . he feels a something that captivates and transports him with a strange ravishment, rising often enough to the pitch of dizzy intoxication; it is the Dionysiac element in the numen.³

Then in the 19th century darkness was used by the Symbolist movement in art. As Robert Goldwater writes, "Symbolists and thought-painters alike wanted to give pictorial form to the invisible world of the psyche."⁴ The paintings, such as Franz Von Stuck's *Sin*, use darkness strategically to engage the imagination, and they also portray "dark"

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desires. Freudian psychologists would suggest that they satisfy the "id" which lurks in the darkness of the unconscious and helps to propel the conscious mind.

Silence by Odilon Redon is often cited as the epitome of Symbolist style and intent. Goldwater explains the essence of dark art in that *Silence* "contains that suggestion of the mysterious reality beyond appearance ... both in its subject, which stresses a concentration upon the usually unseen and unheard, and in its handling, which suggests more than it depicts."⁵ In essence, dark art stimulates the unconscious mind to fill in the shadows.

Redon wrote to his Dutch patron Andre Borger, "My sole aim is to instill in the spectator, by means of unexpected allurements, all of the evocations and fascination of the unknown on the boundaries of thought."⁶ When one looks at a painting such as *My Irony Exceeds All Others* there is not much to see at first; the painting is difficult to grasp as it is mostly black, but there is much more to the painting than what one can first see. One must let one's unconscious mind fill in the black space for it to become a whole painting.

Darkness, the absence of light, is similar to silence, the absence of sound. Silence, Goldwater writes, "was of course not merely the simple absence of sound, nor was it an end in itself: one cultivated silence as a means of shutting out appearances in order to concentrate upon essence, and so isolation became the condition through which the artist could ignore the material and thus be able to penetrate the spiritual."⁷ Perhaps darkness was appealing to the Symbolists for the same reason-the concentration upon the spiritual.

Joseph Conrad is said to have drawn upon both the Symbolist ideas and the Gothic form in his dark novels, especially *Heart of Darkness*. There have been countless interpretations of *Heart of Darkness* because Conrad meant to obscure its meaning. Allen White, in *The Uses of Obscurity*, says that Conrad's fiction "deploys a variety of figures which combine to imply that the narrative is only a hint or a clue to some immense secret enclosed within it. The tragic gloom which hangs listlessly over so many of the stories can be related both to the threatening proximity of this transcendent symbolic realm, and to the lack of any possibility of locating it." The entire novel is about Marlow's journey up river into the "heart of darkness"-that is, obscurity. There is almost nothing in the novel which is described concretely; everything is

"impenetrable" or "inscrutable"; Conrad doesn't want us to grasp hold of anything in his story tightly, and he means to tell us nothing concretely except perhaps that life is, for the most part, unknowable.

White goes on to explain that the inscrutable nature of Conrad's fiction also serves as a mirror of the reader. "Proust has remarked that 'Some people who are fond of secrets flatter themselves that objects retain something of the gaze that has rested upon them.' This enigmatic flattery operates like Borges' story 'The Mirror of Enigmas' in that it makes the enigmatic endlessly reflective (in both senses of the word). The transference from subject to object, inverting the relation of questioned and questioner ... is an essential part of the structure of *Heart of Darkness*"⁸ and this reflectiveness echoes the aim of the Symbolist painters.

Darkness became important again in the 1930's and 40's in comic books and the pulp fiction of crime novels. The dark aspect had at that time become the violence with which heroes and villains alike battled each other. Freud's theory stated that most of human motivation involves sex and violence, and the crime novels and comic strips beginning in the 30's had much to do with both. For example, the Dick Tracy comic strip by Harold Gould was violent and what would be described as dark. In comics like Dick Tracy the villains were perhaps more notable than the detectives. Wiley Lee Umphlett, in *Mythmakers of the American Dream*, suggests that the reason why such crime drama was so popular is that we feel a nostalgia for violence — "a recognition of some forgotten emotional experience from our distant past through reexperiencing a graphically visualized portrayal of man's inhumanity to man."⁹ That sex was a large part of these crime novels can be easily seen on any *Mystery Adventure* cover.

The most influential example of deliberately dark art is the film noir of the 40's. As *The Oxford Companion to Film* explains, "German filmmakers pioneered a form of horror film (such as *Nosferatu*, 1922) using oblique lighting and compositional tension rather than physical action to create a nightmare world of violence . . . and these elements were fed into the Hollywood gangster tradition by the German directors and cameramen who went to the U.S."¹⁰

The *Maltese Falcon* with Humphrey Bogart is a prime example of film noir, and much can be learned from its technique as to why such a dark movie would have such appeal to a large audience. A central

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characteristic of such film noir is the incompleteness of perception. In an early scene Sam Spade (Bogart) gets a call, and during the call Spade is off screen, and the voice on the other end is not heard. The viewer is not told what is going on but has to guess, much as one has to feel one's way around and draw conclusions when walking in the dark.

The oblique lighting derived from German films causes every man to have a shadow, which acts as a symbol of the dark side of his personality. These shadows, these dark sides, are noticeable throughout the movie. The characters, then, are acting on their dark desires. And the viewer wants that-the viewer wants to see the "corrupt"-perhaps to look down upon it but more likely to live vicariously through it.

Before Sam Spade gets to know Bridget O'Shaughnessy (played by Mary Astor), the following dialogue takes place:

Sam: You aren't exactly the sort of person you tend to be, are you?

...

Bridget: I haven't lived a good life; I've been bad. Worse than you would know.

Sam: Well, that's good, because if you actually were as innocent as you pretend to be, we'd never get anywhere.

Bridget: I won't be innocent.

Sam: Good.

And in that, he describes the dark aspect of film noir: we want the characters to break the rules and be "bad". But there's more which film noir added to the concept of darkness.

At the end of the movie Sam is not persuaded by Bridget to go with her. He says he might love her, but he turns her in to the police because he knows he could never trust her because she killed his partner, "and it's not good for business if you know who killed your partner but they don't get it in the end." Essentially, he rejects sentimentality and caring, and he champions honor, machismo, and autonomy. With film noir darkness in art became also the rejection of altruism and the embrace of an "every man for himself philosophy. Viewers could, for the two hours of a film noir, be selfish, and live out another dark desire.

In the 1960's even music began to become dark. Jim Morrison and The Doors reached immense popularity singing and talking about

dark desires. In Jim Morrison's *An American Prayer*, an album consisting of music and poetry intertwined, he talks about places where the human spirit is left on its own to do as it pleases:

My gang will get you.
Scenes of rape in the arroyo.
Seductions in cars, abandoned buildings.
Fights at the food stand.
The dust.
The shoes.
Open shirts and raised collars.
Bright sculptured hair.¹¹

Also to be noted is the music which accompanies the preceding lyrics; the music is playful and rhythmic. The words and music describe a free, happy place. In short, the song indulges a fantasy of anarchy, indulges dark desires.

He also liked to sing and talk about despair and searching in darkness for something essentially human. The night and the moon show up frequently in his poetry and music. An example can be seen again in *An American Prayer*:

Let me tell you about heartache and the loss of god,
Wandering, wandering in hopeless night.
Out here in the perimeter there are no stars,
Out here we is stoned
Immaculate.¹²

The "wandering in hopeless night" reminds one of the incompleteness of perception involved in film noir. Morrison sang the poetry of confusion. He sang about basic human feelings and desires, such as sex, violence, sadness, and the search (in darkness) for a higher purpose. In Morrison's music darkness and night are used in much the same way as Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*-to emphasize the final impenetrability of things.

Today in the 90's dark art has reached a high point and has achieved mainstream popularity. One can hear it in popular music and see it in the theaters; there is a huge market for dark art. Take, for



instance, some lyrics from Metallica, a heavy metal band whose "Black" Album (it is a self-titled album whose case is all black) has sold 15 million copies:

Something's wrong, shut the light
Heavy thoughts tonight
And they aren't of Snow White

Dreams of war, dreams of liars
Dreams of dragon's fire
and of things that will bite

Sleep with one eye open
Gripping your pillow tight¹³

In movies especially the dark has become a symbol much striven for. Could Quentin Tarantino have sold a movie ten or twenty years ago? *Reservoir Dogs*, *Pulp Fiction*, and *From Dusk Till Dawn* have all achieved a great deal of success in spite of the fact that they are graphically violent and focus on the adventures of violent criminals; once again one could easily conclude that they have been successful because of their violent nature. In the Nineties we have embraced the antihero: The Joker in *Batman*, Brandon Lee in *The Crow*, and Vincent Vega in *Pulp Fiction* are only a few examples.

Escape From L.A. by John Carpenter, a sequel to *Escape From New York*, is the epitome of dark art as it has come to be defined. Snake Plissken, played by Kurt Russell, is essentially a cowboy stuck in a society which has exiled everyone who does not conform to the lofty morals set forth by its dictatorial ruler. He is a misfit, and we love him for it. He dresses in black leather and packs more than one gun. He smokes in a society which does not tolerate it. He lives out the secret desires of a large part of a generation; he gets the women, cares only about himself, and does anything to get ahead. We love his immorality, just as Sam loved Bridget's in *The Maltese Falcon*.

The movie comes to a climax when Snake gets hold of the remote controlling an Electromagnetic Pulse weapon in outer space with the power to destroy every electric circuit in the world. He holds the remote, and the president of the United States begs him not to use it; "You'll destroy everything we've worked so hard for," he urges.

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Snake looks around and we know he sees nothing worth keeping. He punches in the code, 666, and the satellite shuts everything down. The world goes black. Symbolic night has been achieved. He walks away from his captors, their weapons useless. He finds a pack of cigarettes and coolly lights one up. He takes a drag, looks at the camera, and says, "Welcome to civilization." Fade to black.

I feel a change
Back to a better day
Hair stands on the back of my neck
In wildness is the preservation of the world,¹⁴

Metallica wrote in "Of Wolf and Man". Dark art has become a release for our deepest desires for violence, sex, and anarchy. It is a way for us to live out those desires vicariously and nondestructively. It is a way for us to get in touch with our primal selves, and experience the nostalgia for a forgotten emotional experience in our distant past that Umphlett describes. Darkness is something we no longer fear.

Notes

¹ *The Oxford Annotated Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

² *The Oxford Book of Gothic Tales*, Chris Baldick, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 11.

³ Rudolph Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational*, trans. John W. Harvey (New York: Oxford University Press, 1924), p. 31, as quoted by David R. Saliba, *A Psychology of Fear* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1980), 3.

⁴ Robert Goldwater, *Symbolism* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), 9.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁶ Ibid., 116.

⁷ Ibid., 120.

⁸ Allen White, *The Uses of Obscurity* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1981).

⁹ Wiley Lee Umphlett, *Mythmakers of the American Dream* (Cranbury, NJ: Cornwall Books), 92.

¹⁰ *The Oxford Companion to Film*, Liz-Anne Bawden, ed. (New York: Oxford University Books), 249.

¹¹ Jim Morrison, "Black Polished Chrome" from *An American Prayer* (Elektra Entertainment Group, 1995).

¹² Jim Morrison, "Stoned Immaculate" from *An American Prayer*.

¹³ Metallica, "Enter Sandman" from *Metallica* (Creeping Death Music, 1991).

¹⁴ Metallica, "Of Wolf and Man" from *Metallica*.



Homicide: Life on the TV?
Anthony Peduto

On a Friday evening in March, I was enjoying a much-needed spring break at my home near Annapolis, MD. I spent most of my vacation either sleeping or taking part in the "great American pastime" — watching television. At 9:55 p.m., I was resting comfortably on the couch in our family room, fairly disappointed with a day of soap operas and outrageous talk shows. As Billy Idol sings, "57 channels and nothin' on." As I watched the closing credits of another show, I eagerly awaited the coarsely edited montage that comprises the opening credits of *Homicide: Life on the Street*. To my horror, I saw not the imposing images of Yaphet Kotto, Andre Braugher, and Richard Belzer, but an overly fervent and artificial Kelly Martin, who was darting around Los Angeles on a pretentious mission to solve everyone's problems so that they could live happily ever after. *Homicide* had been temporarily taken off the air by NBC so that they could test-market a new one-hour "shockudrama" called *Crisis Center*. I didn't even bother to watch the show.

I know that it may seem trivial to spend so much time fretting over NBC's "Must See TV," but NBC's treatment of *Homicide* raises a disturbing point about the mass media in general. Television is a very powerful medium with the capability to inform, persuade, entertain, and educate millions. Unfortunately, television is also a "big business" in our capitalist economy. Most of the major networks are now owned by huge corporations: NBC by General Electric; CBS by Westinghouse; ABC by Disney. Ted Turner has built an empire comprising multiple cable networks.

Because of the corporate nature of American television, its content is controlled by a singular force: ratings. High ratings represent a large audience; a large audience translates into tremendous profits for the network. Thus only those shows that garner high ratings will be aired, regardless of their merit. In American television programming, substance is often sacrificed for profit, hence the fate of *Homicide*.

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Despite its treatment by NBC, *Homicide* is, hands down, the best drama on network television. Among its distinguishing characteristics are exceptional, original writing; striking visual impact; a realistic setting; an unusual cast; and consummate acting. All of these elements intertwine to produce an experience that is much more than the sum of its parts.

The caliber of *Homicide*'s writing is unmatched by any other network drama. While other shows rely on hackneyed gimmicks to support their otherwise limp plots, *Homicide* remains original. *Beverly Hills, 90210* would never make it past the credits without gimmicks; its viewers are forced to endure the ridiculous antics of Shannen Doherty and Jason Priestley as these two try to raise enough money to save their beloved hangout, the "Peach Pit." *Homicide* relies on original writing. While the storylines of most network dramas can be pigeonholed into hackneyed categories, *Homicide* remains completely original. You will never find a typical "chase scene" or "boy meets girl; boy gets girl" structured plotline on *Homicide*. When the show addresses dating, it presents romance in an original way. A major plotline in recent episodes has followed the intermittent romance between Dr. Cox (Michelle Forbes) and Detective Kellerman (Reed Diamond)—a relationship which challenges the "boy meets girl; boy gets girl" stereotype. Like many real-life couples, the pair suffers from bad timing; one is ready for a serious relationship while the other needs space. *Homicide* is credible.

Implausible plotlines typify most network dramas. *ER* is currently the highest-rated drama on network television, yet it is also one of the most unrealistic. As an employee at Shock Trauma (Baltimore's trauma center), I know the realities of emergency medicine. Though much of *ER*'s writing is based upon fact, its plot is overblown with ridiculous elements that over-dramatize the show and feed the audience what it wants to see. A recent episode featured Nurse Hathaway (Julianna Margulies) performing medical procedures in a convenience store using plastic utensils and drinking straws! Though the deep personal relationships that develop between *ER*'s doctors and patients create high drama, real doctors would never act so unprofessionally. *Homicide*'s plot is realistic. It shows the Baltimore Homicide Department for what it is; it does not invent circumstances that the audience wants to see. In a recent episode, Detective Bayliss (Kyle Secor) wept as he sat on the bank of the Patapsco River in Fells Point; the rape and murder of a young girl had forced him to face his own childhood abuse. Realistic plotlines add to

Homicide's authenticity.

Most shows immediately seem phony because of their artificial dialogue; soap operas are the most flagrant culprits. Anyone who has seen *Days of Our Lives* or *All My Children* knows that the characters often speak as if they are reading from a script. Excessive inflection or emphasis is given to certain words to increase the intensity of the drama; if a powerful word such as "kill" or "hate" or "sex" is part of that dialogue, it will be emphasized regardless of its context. Ironically, this only makes the acting more unrealistic; soap opera acting is often reminiscent of the immature melodramatics of high school plays. Artificial dialogue is also present in network dramas such as *Beverly Hills, 90210*. *Saturday Night Live* once devoted an entire skit to satirizing Donna's (Tori Spelling's) bizarre "dramatic" dialect. The skit was obviously an exaggeration, but it was very funny (because it was true!); by the end of the skit you could not understand a word of what Donna was saying. In *Homicide*, dialogue is natural. *Homicide's* creators have even managed to capture the flavor of the Baltimorian accent; *Homicide* is perhaps the only show that has a place for the uniquely Baltimorian word "hon." When watching *Homicide*, you get the impression that you are a fly on the wall, hearing conversation as it would occur in real life. In fact, much of *Homicide* is improvisation; the intense and often violent interrogations performed by Detective Pembleton (Andre Braugher) and Detective Bayliss (Kyle Secor) can obviously not be precisely scripted. Because the show sounds so real, it seems real.

Homicide's writing focuses on the human condition. Does it really matter in the scheme of things whether or not Brandon and Brenda are successful in saving the "Peach Pit"? Real people deal with much more serious issues, such as the threat of losing a job due to illness. Recently, a major plot line has focused on Pembleton's struggle to recover from a stroke and retain his position as a detective. The show has followed Pembleton in his struggles to control both his mind and body. *Homicide* gains strength through humanitarian themes to which real people can relate.

Homicide's writing is strengthened by the fact that plot lines are not episodic; the series itself is a linear stream of events comprising one continuous plot. The only device that separates the series into distinct episodes is the show's one-hour time slot. Specific homicide cases and events in characters' lives transcend episodic boundaries. During one of

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the first episodes, a young girl named Edina Watson was brutally murdered; four seasons later this case continues to haunt Detective Bayliss. Pembleton's recovery from a recent stroke has spanned an entire season. Though this format has been attempted by other shows such as *ER*, none have achieved the natural flow of *Homicide*'s plot.

Homicide's visual impact is just as powerful as its writing; the visuals complement the already powerful plot. While *Beverly Hills, 90210* and *Melrose Place* exhibit classic soap opera lighting (the artificially perfect lighting exhibited by most TV dramas), *Homicide* is filmed under realistic lighting conditions. The earlier episodes look like they were filmed with a home movie camera; scenes appear very rough and grainy. As Detective Munch picked his way through the scene of an arson in a recent episode, he was often hidden in shadow or obscured by parts of the scenery.

Camera angles in *Homicide* are rarely the conventional, straight-on establishing shots used in most sitcoms and dramas. When shots are straight on, they are usually extreme close-ups that emphasize dramatic scenes. These close-ups often appear during an intense interrogation in "the box" (the interrogation room). Few can forget a scene in which the furious face of Detective Pembleton fills their television screen.

The camera of *Homicide* is in constant motion—a feature reminiscent of such reality shows as *Cops*. This gives scenes a chaotic appearance, which almost makes you forget that you are watching fiction. As the camera followed Detective Lewis (Clark Johnson) through the woods to the scene of a murder in a recent episode, it weaved between the trees and over obstacles just as adeptly as its subject.

Homicide's editing is very choppy. The show often contains jarring jump cuts, in which short parts of a scene are repeated in quick succession. When I first noticed this choppiness, I thought that it was a mistake; I could not understand why an NBC drama could not afford proper editing. I soon realized, however, that the jump cuts are used to emphasize dramatic dialogue. Instead of hearing an important line just once, the audience hears it three or four times. The jump cut was used in a recent episode, in which Pembleton was extremely frustrated during an interrogation. He stood up and screamed, "Son of a bitch!" This short outburst was immediately re-played two more times, revealing Pembleton's rage in an intense outburst: "Son of a bitch! Son of a bitch! Son of a bitch!"

Homicide's cinematography is unusual in that it highlights not

Kristin Murray



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the clichéd traffic shots and skyscrapers usually present in urban themes, but instead focuses on everyday scenes such as the row homes of Highlandtown, an old neighborhood in downtown Baltimore. The cinematography does not glorify Baltimore by only showing its polished downtown district. Instead the camera focuses on less attractive but more realistic settings such as the public housing projects surrounding Fell's Point. The visual impact created by this unique cinematography makes *Homicide's* scenes very realistic.

Using Baltimore as *Homicide's* setting is central to the show's originality; Baltimore is perhaps the perfect setting for such a show. Most other police dramas such as *NYPD Blue* and *Charlie's Angels* are set in either New York or Los Angeles—high profile cities that do not reflect the rest of urban America. Baltimore, however, is a working-class city that does not perpetuate the New York/L.A. urban cliché. *Homicide* is filmed on location in Baltimore. One has only to make a short drive to Fell's Point to see the actual police station seen in the show. In the earlier seasons the morgue scenes were filmed on location in the Medical Examiner's Office.

Many television dramas gain much of their success by riding on the coattails of their star actors and actresses. *ER* would surely not be as successful without the likes of George Clooney and Anthony Edwards. Edwards is famous for his role in the blockbuster movie *Top Gun*; Clooney's draw is his sexual appeal to *ER's* female audience. None of *Homicide's* actors are overly famous or high-profile. The most famous of *Homicide's* cast is Richard Belzer, who is himself an obscure stand-up comic. You won't find any of *Homicide's* cast members giving rise to new fad hairstyles (e.g. George Clooney) or appearing in credit card commercials (e.g. Anthony Edwards). No particular actor has a disproportionately large role in *Homicide*. Although Detective Kellerman may monopolize most of the plot during the episode in which he is on trial for arson, he may have only a token appearance (e.g. walking across the squad room) in the next episode.

Homicide's characters look like real people; few of the characters could be considered "attractive" by conventional standards. Detective Howard (Melissa Leo) looks constantly frazzled and stressed out by her job. Detective Munch (Richard Belzer) is very eccentric looking; he has a tall, thin frame and always wears large dark glasses that obscure much of his gaunt face. The ordinary appearance of the cast is refreshing when

compared to the artificially polished, beautiful actors and actresses on most dramas (who would have thought there were actually normal-looking people in Beverly Hills?!?).

Homicide's quality of acting is unmatched by any other network drama. Most other dramas offer mediocre acting at best, while the rest present just plain bad acting. When watching *Beverly Hills, 90210*, I often get the impression that the actors are reading from a TelePrompter; the acting is dispassionate and completely without emotion. When a scene is acted with feeling, it is done so badly that I often find myself laughing at a scene that was obviously meant to be serious. Donna is the most glaring example of such acting; her speech and facial expressions during dramatic scenes are truly bizarre. One wonders how she landed such a substantial role on such a successful show (that is until the credits identify Aaron Spelling—her father—as the executive producer). The cast of *Homicide* does the viewer no such injustice. It is made up of skilled actors who are convincing. Andre Braugher is the most powerful actor of the cast; his intensity is unmatched by any other television actor. Few *Homicide* fans can forget fierce interrogations performed by Braugher's character. He throws himself into his character and makes one forget he is acting; as he screams at a suspect his eyes bulge, his hands clench, and the blood vessels of his head pulse as if he were truly enraged. Originally trained in the theater, Braugher knows how to make his character come alive.

Plato was the first of many to observe that art imitates life. *Homicide's* imitation of life is its driving force as an art form. Without this force, *Homicide* would just be another *ER*—another banal entry in a lifeless mass of television programming. The realism of *Homicide* allows it to transcend all other television dramas. To experience *Homicide* is to experience the complexity of reality set forth in an authentic way. A lone cello playing Beethoven's Ninth Symphony creates a detached harmony that alone means nothing; when placed in a full orchestra, however, the cello plays a vital role in producing a work of art. Like a symphony, *Homicide* is the culmination of many simultaneous creative efforts which create an overall effect that is beautiful, even when violent and disjointed.

Despite *Homicide's* excellence, the show has had a rocky history. The concept for the show originated as a book called *Homicide: A Year on the Killing Streets*, by David Simon. It first appeared on televi-

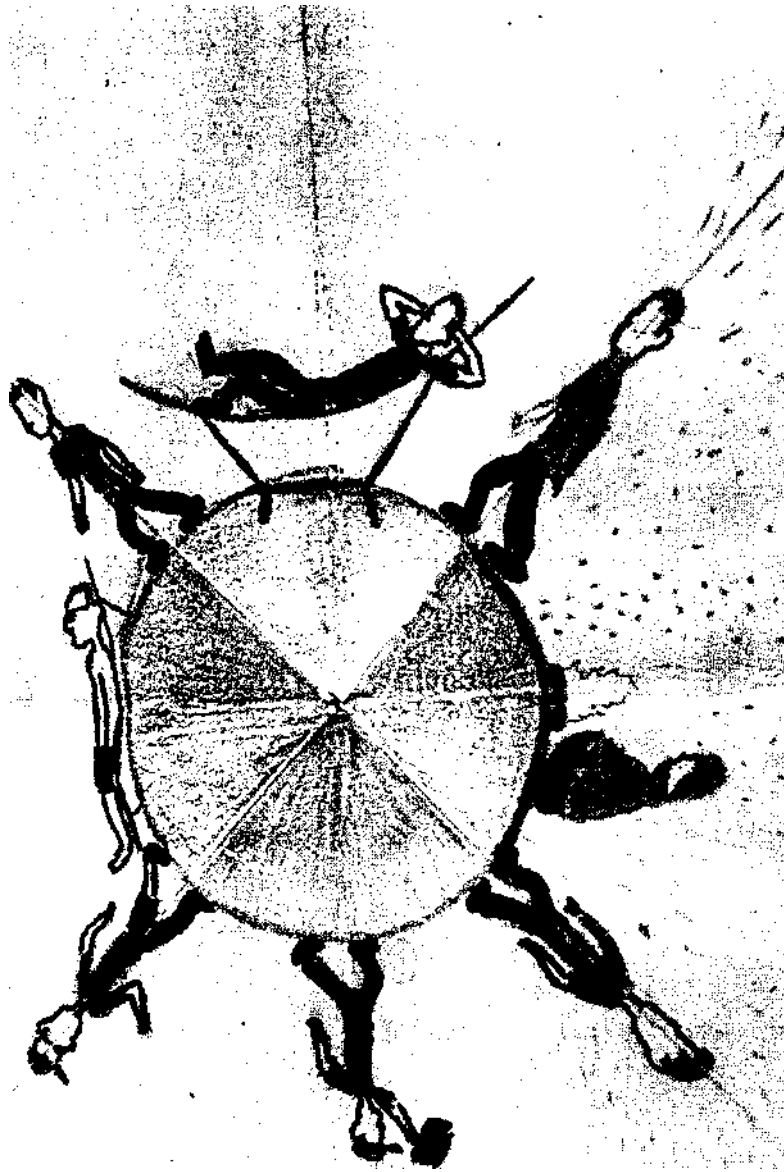
Homicide: Life on the TV?

sion as a feature-length movie, which received critical acclaim. The show was then picked up as a series, but was canceled after a few episodes. Fortunately, it was again picked up by NBC, where it airs on Fridays at 10:00 p.m., though this time slot is currently under debate.

Why does such an excellent show stand upon such shaky footing? The answer is surprising. The show simply does not get the high ratings of *ER* and *Melrose Place*. One may wonder why such a great show is not number one in the ratings every week. Why? Most Americans are simply not used to watching shows of *Homicide's* caliber. When we discover something different—something new—our first reaction is often to find fault with it. We often fear that which we don't understand, and thus alienate it from ourselves. When Europeans began to colonize North America in the seventeenth century, they knew nothing about the Native Americans. Europeans could have learned much from the Native Americans, but instead of exploring friendship, they took a defensive stance. The Europeans chose to exploit the Native Americans instead of embracing them, and in doing so, forfeited what could have been a beautiful exchange of ideas.

In much the same way the American television audience has chosen to reject *Homicide*. Viewers find the uniqueness of the show strange, so they choose not to watch it. For the past few weeks I have been trying to introduce three of my roommates to *Homicide*; so far I have been unsuccessful at getting any of them to appreciate it. They often make comments like "Why don't they keep the camera still" or "Why can't NBC afford decent editing?" Because they do not understand *Homicide*, they refuse to watch it. *Homicide* demands something of its audience that few viewers are willing to provide: an open mind.

Despite *Homicide's* mediocre ratings, the show does have a chance to gain the airtime it deserves. Hundreds of cable and satellite channels obtain their programming through syndication. Syndication allows TV shows to survive well beyond their cancellation—a sanctuary for shows that have otherwise questionable futures. The cable network Comedy Central has become the sanctuary for the 70's comedy *Soap*—a controversial but critically-acclaimed show that did not find its niche on network television. *Homicide* has likewise found a sanctuary. On April 14, 1997, the Lifetime network began airing the drama in the 11:00 p.m. time slot. There is hope for this extraordinary crime drama, so long as we continue to appreciate its achievement.



Easter 1996

Alison Esposito

I am not traditionally religious, but I know the stories. Christ was crucified on Good Friday, and three days later, on what we now call Easter Sunday, Christ rose from the dead and appeared as a sign of hope for all the peoples of the world. It is with searing irony that on the exact day of Christ's resurrection, one thousand, nine hundred and ninety-six years later, one believer was robbed of all the hope she had ever known.

I was born the fifth day of January in the Year of Our Lord 1978. On this day, the chill outdoors was comparable only to the freeze of the ninth circle of Dante's *Inferno*.¹ This state of weather is related to me each year at my birthday dinner by two of my uncles who are in attendance, after which my mother annually remarks that it was the best day of her life, and my father remembers being overjoyed simply because I was "normal." These dinners proceeded in exactly the same fashion every year: routine, but happy—one big happy family of which my mother and father were the pillars upon which everyone else, myself included, leaned. We were a strong family, and since I was their only child I received all of my parents' attention. Actually, all of my mother's attention, for my father's thoughts were always devoted to work—a survival mechanism for him which I could not understand. My father rose every day at four or five o'clock in the morning, and I rarely got to see him, save those infrequent occasions when he wouldn't leave until six. On those days I would wave to him through the cold glass of the front door as he honked the horn of his immense, steely truck and made the sign language sign for "I love you" with his hand. These deaf moments were the closest we ever came to communication.

When I was very young, I often refused to speak to my father when he came home; I would not give him a hug when he returned from the darkness outside at eight or nine at night, because he never really returned from the dark space in my mind. I saw him as a distant identi-

ty—far-removed from my world, but not really having one of his own; the sad part was that I knew he wanted to be a part of my life, but I could not let him. Every night that he was home for dinner he would ask me what I had done that day, and each evening I would reply "nothing," unable to relate to him any of the day's events which fifteen or twenty minutes ago I had just told my mother with such enthusiasm. The "A" on the paper seemed unimportant, my running time was not so special after all, and the gossip—well, he could never remember the names of my friends anyway—it would be a waste of time to try to explain it to him. So each night my father was home for dinner, when he asked me what I had done that day, my mother would reply enthusiastically, informing him of my "wonderful" grades, my fast times, my life. It was through her that he knew me, and that I gained my limited knowledge of him. My mother not only supported but built the relationship that I had with my father. The issue was not that I hated him, it was that I never knew him, and the rift between us only grew greater as the years went on.

My mother and I, on the other hand, grew closer with the passage of time. She, always home and ever-ready to help me whenever I needed it, became my closest friend. She was reliable, always wanting to hear my problems and always having an answer. When I was small, my mother stayed home with me. In elementary school, she took me to the school bus, and in middle and high school, she drove me to and from school until I was old enough to drive. She packed my lunches through the twelfth grade. Ironically, as I grew older and more independent, she became a bigger part of my life, but not so much as a mother anymore—as a friend. This is not to imply that we got along all the time, because we definitely did not, but we never really had fights—the screaming sort that we both had with my father.

My father often proved to be a source of anger for both my mother and me, but while she could deal with him on an adult level, I was powerless against his fits of irrationality. So my mother would work things out between us when we would argue, and she would try to explain to me that my father loved me and would do absolutely anything for me, if only I asked him. I never asked him. I guess I could not believe her, and I knew I could not talk to him. I was sure, though, that my mother loved me and would do anything I asked of her. She knew everything about me, and I thought that I knew everything about her. Trusting one person so much was the most costly mistake that I have ever made in my life.

Judith Fitzpatrick



Trust, you see, is a false friend. It blinds you to reality, makes you feel emotions unconditionally, and it is like a pillar, for if you lean on it too hard and too long it is bound to give way. And when it does, it is as though the Coliseum has crumbled down upon you. I trusted my mother infinitely, so I never saw it coming until one day, all of a sudden, the Coliseum fell down on me and crushed my soul. So it happened that on the day upon which Christ rose from the dead, one thousand, nine hundred, and ninety-six years later, my mother delivered to me the news of her own resurrection, leaving me to take her place hanging on the cross.

"No I will not come and live with you, are you crazy?" My mother actually expected me to move out of the house in which I had lived for eighteen years and into a townhouse with her and her new boyfriend. In doing this, I would be leaving my father to fend for himself, completely alone in the country just six months before I was to leave for college. "You don't understand." "It's not your fault." "It's not you I'm leaving, it's your father." I had made an attempt to keep the anger from oozing through the pores of my skin, but it was not working, for my mother continued to backpedal. I was also trying to keep my sarcasm in check, but it was getting harder with every word that came out of my mouth attempting to explain why she was leaving my father after twenty-one years of marriage, and for a man that she had been having an affair with for just months. Funny, I thought adultery was a sin—so why was I the one with a stake through my heel, being hauled up to hang from my outstretched arms? Completely defenseless. I began to see everything in a new light, through eyes rolled back and tinted red with blood.

My vision impaired, I almost did not see that she had left two weeks later. The day she moved her things out of the house I was not at home, so nearly everything was the same as usual when I returned from school that evening. There were a few books missing from the bookshelves, some paintings were gone, and one closet was now empty in my parents' bedroom, but other than that nothing had changed. It was hard to believe that all my mother amounted to was some books and clothes, but that was how it seemed, and it wasn't as if anything was really gone.

Not gone for very long at least, for, you see, my mother was coming back. She had a momentary lapse of reason, but she would soon return to her senses and to our house and make it whole again. Every day I heard this reassurance from the voice in my mind, but every day this voice became a little more hoarse, a little more tired, until finally it fell

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silent, unable to utter another word.

The silence at the dinner table was, at first, stifling. Because my father and I had never had to directly communicate with each other, it was an awkward endeavor. Neither wanted to talk about what had happened, but we really didn't know much about each other's lives, so the topic of conversation each night rested on what we had done that day. I could understand little of (and cared less about) what my father had done with his truck's transmission, and preferred to reside in my mind's silence rather than make the Herculean effort of explaining to him what was going on in my life.

As I had done as a child, I kept him and his world far removed from me and mine. He tried to break through the icy wall that I had built up against him over the years, but he had little success, for no matter how hard he tried, this wall could not be broken. It had to melt, and in order to do that my heart had to be warmed. Three months, five months, seven—and my heart was as cold and stony as ever, for I thought that I needed no one's help, no one's friendship, no one's love. After all, if my mother had stopped loving me and I had not died in the process, surely love was not something that I needed in order to live. I would simply live without it, then; the issue was decided—but things just kept getting more and more confusing, more and more difficult, more and more frustrating, and every day I got more and more angry until one day the ice around me cracked under the pressure. The split slit through the hard ice, through my thick skin, and I bled. The shocking sight of the red stream flowing from my body frightened my heart back to life and back to warmth, just enough to begin to melt the wall around me. Although I slid, and sometimes fell, climbing over the slippery, watery red mess melting around me, I grabbed hold of my father's hand and came to stand on solid ground. And I began to see my father in a different light.

Since then I have come to realize that my father and I are not so different at all, our worlds are not so separate as I once thought them to be. In fact, I see a lot of him—his actions, his thoughts, his mannerisms—in me, and I have begun to trust him, to tell him my problems, and to learn from his advice rather than tune it out. He knows much, much more about life than I ever realized. He is one of the kindest men I know. He is a great friend. He has become what I always thought a father should be. Most of all, though, my father succeeds (and this is no easy task) in giving me hope for the future, in making me see that I can trust again, and

Alison Esposito

in letting me know that love is not always as fickle as it seemed to me almost a year ago. And he is managing, slowly, to pry free from my blood-stained hands and feet the nails of disillusionment with which my mother crucified me, so that I may move on to a better world.

Notes

¹ The ninth circle of Dante's *Inferno* is the level of Hell where those whose sin is betrayal of family are punished: it is a frozen-over lake which holds the unmoving bodies of the sinners.

The Afterglow in Bayonne

Lee Abbey

We walked along the city streets. It was nighttime and it was winter and we could see our breath in front of us. Main Street was deserted. The sidewalks were cold, or warm from neon lights that hung gently buzzing blue and red in the windows of closed-up stores and second-rate bars. We floated by these lights, bathed in fluorescent glowing shadows, and we talked about how good it was to be dead. We walked alone, in no particular direction, ignoring the crosswalk signals that flickered orders at people who were already tucked away in their apartments and at cars turning cold in their garages. It was a wonderful time to be a ghost in Bayonne.

"If you had to choose between being rich and unhappy or poor and completely happy with your life, which would you choose?" I asked.

He said, "I'd much rather have the money. In my experience I've found that money can equal happiness."

"You capitalist pig."

"And you, my friend, are a communist who'll never know how it feels to climb the social ladder all the way to, to, to --"

"To what?"

"I don't know. But I'll make sure I write you a postcard from wherever it is."

Life was very simple when we were dead and talking in Bayonne. Neither of us ever heard an argument from a street light or a sewer, only friendly echoes from the alleys between sets of brownstone buildings and bakery shops with unsold bread going stale on deserted shelves. I thought of businesses like that: not a way of satisfying a basic human need, but an empty stomach, a stomach that starved for the hunger of others. I looked at my friend, my only friend at the time, and then I looked at the

sleeping shops with their doors locked tight and their dreamy reflections in the windows. And I decided to keep my mouth closed — I didn't want to let anything go stale.

In Bayonne there is a park where you can sit on benches and look out at the Bayonne Bridge. The view would be unbearable during the day, with the sun and its detecting rays seeking out the dealers, the decadence and garbage tossed from car windows and frozen on the grass. But the night was kinder to ghosts in Bayonne. All signs of life would sleep under its blanket and our eyes could relax enough to see that what is bearable becomes beautiful when you're a ghost in Bayonne.

"Did you know Ginsberg mentioned this bridge in one of his poems? Here, take one of these."

"What is it?" I asked.

"I don't know, some kind of painkiller. I stole it from my mom's purse."

"Well, what does it do?"

"It kills pain, you idiot."

"I'm just afraid it might kill me, you know?"

"Take a look around, Chief. We're already dead."

On the park bench we found ourselves surrounded by the numbing chill of winter, broken from time to time by the sounds of the river water splashing against artificial banks. We felt privileged to sit in this temporary half-heaven with nothing around that could possibly haunt a ghost. Except, maybe, the promise of day.

"Do you remember a movie called *Heaven is a Playground!*" I asked him.

"Yeah, we'd pick it up and read the cover but never rented it. God, what a concept — 'heaven is a playground.' What do you think that makes hell?"

"Hell, I guess, is where all those children stand, outside the fence, looking in and watching the others play."

I looked around. "Do you think anyone is watching us?"

"I doubt it. Everyone's asleep."

The Afterglow in Bayonne

We got up from the bench and began walking again, this time towards his house so we could escape the rising sun. We walked along the sidewalks. It was still cold but the darkness was starting to fade. Step on the cracks, break your mother's back, step on the cracks. . .

I don't think we missed a single one.

He said, "It's not that I don't like her. I just seem to feel better when she's not around."

"I once wrote a story about a kid who just couldn't bear to say goodbye to his mom in the morning, so what he did was stuff her into an oversized book bag and carry her wherever he went. All was going well. He learned to just ignore his mother's muffled cries for help until, one day, he began to feel hungry because he didn't know how to cook. He tried asking his mother for instructions but he couldn't make out her exact words. So he had to choose between starvation and the chance that his mother might get away from him."

"So what happened?" my friend asked.

"So he finally decided to open the bag. But, you see, his mother was stuffed in so tightly that when the zipper opened it snipped her jugular vein and she bled to death. The kid died, too, from the shock of seeing his precious mother lying there, and fell on top of her, a lifeless heap of unconditional love. It was all very tragic."

My friend paused. "What the hell is the point of that?"

I answered, "I have no idea."

After a while, my friend said, "That could never happen with my mother. I think our relationship is too open for that sort of extreme affection."

This was true. There on the sidewalks we found ourselves laughing as the dawn crept up behind us — it was getting lighter with every step. Soon we would be required to live, to share thoughts with the thoughtless, to fight with strangers for the back seats of cabs, and to read the news in black and white with tired eyes. . .

It was all very tragic.



Shoot for the One in the Middle

Katherine Repetti

Only twenty-five seconds remaining, and we were still down by two points. The high-pitched squeal of the whistle echoed through the enormous gymnasium. "Time out, " my coach yelled. We all hustled to the sidelines, and smacked our butts down upon the splintered, wooden bleachers. "All right," he said, rather frazzled. "Megan, you bring the ball down, and pass it out wide to Katherine. Katherine, you just be sure to get the ball in to Debs." He turned toward Debbie and simply said, "Do your stuff, kid." The buzzer called us out to the court once again. This play was nothing special, but it would work. As long as we got the ball to Debs, our fate would be sealed. Debs, who was often referred to as "Diesel," could break through anyone to get the ball into the bright orange rim.

The whistle blew and it all began. Megan quickly got the ball down the court, and into my hands. As Debs flashed across the court, I chucked the ball her way. She caught it, and, with three players guarding her, went up strong and shot the ball. It bounced off the backboard and through the net. While our eyes watched, our ears were disturbed by the sound of one final whistle. "Foul!" the ref exclaimed. We all danced with joy! Debs would get to shoot one foul shot. If she made it, the victory would be ours.

She positioned herself at the line. I made my way over and slapped her hand. "Repets," she whispered, "What do you think, shoot for the one in the middle?" I just laughed. Throughout the season, Debs had had this triple vision problem. Between school and practice, she hadn't found the time to get a new and improved set of contacts. It was a common joke among us. Always shoot for the middle we had both agreed at the beginning of the season.

Finally, the ref tossed her the ball. "One," he said firmly. She bounced the ball twice, positioned it comfortably in her hands, and

released it. Floating freely through the air, it successfully reached its destination. We had won! I ran and jumped on Debs, followed by the rest of the team.

Just a few weeks later our season ended, and we returned to the regular school routine. I walked into study hall and looked for Debs. Suddenly, I remembered that she was absent because she was finally making the trek to the eye doctor. That evening I heard my phone ring and raced upstairs to get it. I answered, breathing heavily from my strenuous dash, and heard nothing but complete silence. I was going to hang up when I heard a mumbled, "Hey Repets." "Hey," I replied. This was not the usual "Hey Repets," that I received around nine o'clock every night. Something was wrong. She didn't call to talk about school, guys, or to just joke around; no, it was nothing like that. She had called to tell me something terrible, to ramble off a line that I would remember for the rest of my life. "Repets," she managed to squeak, "I'm at New York University Medical Center. I have a brain tumor." Shocked, I said nothing. I didn't know what to say. Even if I did, my throat would never have softened enough to allow me to reply. Then all I heard was a click; she had hung up.

I just sat paralyzed. I was devastated. What did this mean? So many thoughts raced through my head. Was she going to die? What if this tumor was cancerous? Was this mass the cause of her triple vision that we had joked about so frequently? Emotions overwhelmed me. I was angry, confused, and upset all at once. I could not imagine my life without my best friend by my side playing basketball, discussing everyday gossip, sharing our wild and magical dreams, and just being best friends. What would life be like?

Further tests proved the worst. The doctors claimed that the tumor growing behind her right eye was malignant. My best friend, only seventeen years old, was suffering from cancer. This had to be a mistake.

The entire summer, Debs underwent chemotherapy and radiation treatment with the hope that she would conquer her disease. Many times these treatments made her incredibly ill, but other times she was healthy enough to continue a slightly altered version of her normal, teenage life.

Each time I visited her, I could see her decaying physically. She lost a lot of weight, she lost all of her hair, and the skin on her head, neck and chest was charred a dark, brownish-black from the radiation. Debs always thought that she would recover, and never let anyone tell her dif-

Shoot for the One in the Middle

ferently. She was determined to use all her strength to pull through and defeat her disease, just as she used her strength to score the winning basket, and defeat our rivals. It was this positive attitude, and her love for life that kept her going strong.

Out of nowhere, toward the end of the summer, her regular MRI's showed that the tumor was shrinking! She started to get better! The treatments were working! A miracle! She would be okay; things would return to normal! Debs continued her treatment faithfully, even though the cure was making her very weak and at times violently ill. She was going to beat the disease that she was contending for her life.

The doctors were amazed at how well she was responding. But, the rigorous treatments soon became too much for her rundown body to handle. She could no longer remain healthy through the treatments; she contracted pneumonia. The treatments had to stop. Each test verified that the tumor was once again growing.

From this point on, Deb's health declined rapidly. Her once strong, and shapely body was now bony and pale. She could no longer walk, or even sit up on her own. Her triple vision turned into a single, dark, blurry picture. She was completely helpless, and had to rely on everyone else to help her live what life she had left in her. I'll never forget the day that I went to visit and she did not know who I was. I tried so hard to understand, but it hurt so much. For the first time, I was forced to face the fact that my best friend was going to die. I did not want to scar my memory of her any further. This was not the Debbie that I wanted to remember. This was not my Debbie.

A week went by. I had not even called to see how she was, even though I longed to find out her status. I knew that she was dying, and all that I could do was wait for that one phone call- the call that would be the most devastating, yet the most relieving. Each time the phone rang, I could not help but think that maybe this was the call that would inform me that she was gone.

Suddenly, I changed my mind. I was in school and I decided that I must see her. I don't know where the sudden impulse came from. It was like a little voice was telling me that her time was almost up. I left school and drove in a frenzy to her house. I talked to her mom for over two hours. Together we sat and conversed, all about Debbie. She showed me numerous pictures of her, and we exchanged countless stories of our own experiences with her. I saw pictures of her as a precious ballerina, a

graceful side of Debs that I never knew, one of her sunning herself on the beach in a tiny bikini, and finally, one of her giving me a piggy back ride.

Eventually, I got enough courage to enter the room where my buddy lay, motionless. She was just lying there, in almost the same position as the last time I saw her. I sat in the seat next to her bed, and grabbed her cool, emaciated hand. I sat and stroked it while I talked to her. Of course she gave me no response, but then again, I didn't expect one. I still don't even know if she heard the words that I said. For a while, she opened her eyes: her pain, suffering, and her desire to escape it all, the way they sparkled blue made me forget, just for a brief moment, that my buddy was dying. I could not help but wonder if she could see me. The one in the middle, I thought to myself. Then she shut them. "I love you," I whispered. I got up, leaned over, and kissed her cheek. My tears rolling down my face, then hers.

When I turned and walked away, I knew that that would be the last time that I would see my friend with any remains of life left in her. The next morning, I was called out of class by the principal. Words were not necessary. I knew what had happened. The battle that Debs had been fighting for eight months had finally come to an end. Instantly, I began crying. I made my way to his office where my mom approached me with her own tears. "I'm sorry," was all that she said. I sat and cried until my tears ran dry.

At the wake, I caught one last glimpse of my buddy. She looked beautiful. A blond wig was placed upon her bald head, her nails were perfectly painted, and she had on her favorite Manasquan basketball sweat-shirt. In the gleaming gold coffin she lay still. Her promising blue eyes that were once able to reveal her world were resting shut, now hollow and lifeless. For the last time, I held her hand, which was cold and still. Swarms of people with tears and swollen eyes came to say their good-byes. Cancer had the power to take Debs away from me physically, but in my heart, my mind, and my actions she will always be present.

After watching my best friend wither away from such a terrible disease at only seventeen, I began to think a great deal about my life, and life in general. I now realized that living is a privilege. We always think that because we are so young, we will live to be old. Well, then again why would we have reason to believe that our life would be cut short? We always think of the future, yet never imagine that there is a possibility that we will not have the opportunity to live it.

Shoot for the One in the Middle

In our fast-paced society, where there is an enormous amount of pressure upon us to succeed, it is very easy to lose touch with the present. Almost everything that we do is for some type of future success. Often, we find ourselves stressing out over grades, money, and relationships, and fail to enjoy many parts of life. We watch life pass us by. The present becomes a blur. We definitely must plan for the future, but at the same time we must continue to celebrate each day.

We should make time to enjoy the simple pleasures of life that we tend to take for granted. Make a point of making yourself happy. Make a point of opening your eyes to see just how beautiful the gift of life is. Ask yourself, if your life were to end today, would you be content with how you have spent your time? If not, make a point of changing your life. Fill your days with smiles and laughter. With each breath you breathe, you should become drunk on your existence. Bring yourself to life! Love living, while you still have the opportunity to.

In a way, life in the present era is very similar to the basketball games that Debs and I once played together. We played them from beginning to end, each moment attempting to find the strategy that would put us on top. We were always looking for that one move that would make us victorious. Essentially, that is what the entire game is about, winning in the end. It doesn't matter what the score is at half-time or even in the last seconds of the game. But unlike a basketball game, in the sport of life, we are not guaranteed a full game. In life we must concentrate on the present, for at any time the whistle may blow.

The Shore

Eric Dechtiaruk

I am at the Shore. As I walk across the flat back yard my shoes are moistened with the morning dew, where the golden sun is refracting into a thousand tiny rainbows. The lawn seems to be more clover than grass. On both sides of the back yard are my grandfather's gardens. The rows of tomato plants held in form by cylindrical wire cages, the trellis of cucumber, rows of string beans, and skirts of sunflowers all give the air the sweet scent of new life. They seem to give off their own emerald radiance that floats solidly through the air and gives me a warm, cozy feeling inside.

The previous times I have come down to the Shore are awakened in my mind. But it is more a sense of having been part of this place than anything else. I remember the rides on our Bayliner Classic. I remember the excursions in our fiberglass boat. The pull of the current, power of the wind, and fear of the storm that chased me across the Bay are all engraved in my being. They are as much a part of me as I am a part of the human race.

"Aunt, do you want to go for a ride with me?" I ask as she sits in the lawn chair on top of the hill.

She puts down her cup of tea and *Newsweek* magazine. "Sure," she replies.

I endanger my own life in carrying the heavy, "one-armed man," the white Johnson outboard, down the steep hill. I run out back to get the fuel canister, inside to get the oars and the life preservers.

As I step onto the sun-bleached pier and gaze across Old Road Bay at Bethlehem Steel, fire inside of me flares up just a bit. But I avoid looking into it, avoid trying to think about what it is, and attach the motor to the hand-powered hoist used to lower it onto the yellow, fiberglass boat which rests sturdily atop the calm water. Each year the water is a little cleaner, thanks to pollution-control laws implemented at Bethlehem Steel. It is not your ordinary saltwater. It seems to be a living thing as it

The Shore

swells and sinks ever so subtly. The afternoon sun penetrates about two feet down, giving it the same internal radiance as my grandfather's garden, the front porch, and the lawn.

But I slow down my hurried pace when a weight seems to pull down on my heart. It is a kind of burning, like a fire deep down inside, that blazes up when I realize I've been taking the splendor of this place for granted. But it is somehow more than just this. It is as if just as I reach a kind of ecstasy of joy, I question myself as to whether I really should be happy or not. It feels as if something is inside me and has its claws compressed around my heart. I turn to glance up at the blazing sun, then I turn around and scan my surroundings as slight fear, or insecurity, trickles into me. But as I notice the way the sun filters through the green foliage and throws golden spots on the lawn; the way the light illuminates the front porch as a cool breeze drifts through the screens surrounding the porch; the look of love on my aunt's face all help to quench the fire inside me. It takes a lot of effort, but I keep it below the surface.

After working a few minutes to get the motor on the boat and make sure we are ready, I unharness the boat and jump in with my aunt. Now the fun begins. I connect the black rubber handle of the starter cord. The two-cylinder outboard springs to life with a warm, blue-white cloud of smoke. It smells heavenly, and brings to mind the exact same feeling of peace and purpose that I've had every other time I've started this outboard.

It takes fairly quick reflexes to respond to the sputtering in time. I release the starter cord from my left hand and quickly move it down the front of the motor and close the choke, reducing the amount of oxygen available for combustion. With my right hand, I rapidly turn the throttle counterclockwise before the engine starves from a lack of air. The outboard produces a furious roar accompanied by an even larger cloud of blue-white smoke. Just a little slower, I turn back the throttle and push the shift lever into forward. This all takes about fifteen to twenty seconds.

We're off. Gray rolls seamlessly into a brighter saltwater blue, and covers the surface of the earth for miles. As I look to the south, out across the water, I can make out the outline of the Bay Bridge. Old Road Bay opens into the Patapsco right at the river's mouth. The Patapsco pours into the Chesapeake Bay. At the end of the Patapsco is the Inner Harbor of Baltimore City. Across the river, the houses are merely white

spots along the shoreline. The shape of Old Road Bay is like a gigantic puzzle piece, with three dead end creeks offering sanctuary for a hundred or so seafaring crafts. Occasionally, usually on weekends, a dozen of these will dare to wander out of their ports and slip beyond the Bay into the adjoining Chesapeake or up into the Patapsco towards Baltimore City. With its gentle touch, the water brushes against the aging wood pilings and bulkheads which hold the land against erosion. A comforting arrangement of quaint households rests gently along the zigzag shore. Each has its won unique shape and age. I often wonder how many other great-grandfathers started with little wooden shacks. These houses are offered shade by thousands of oak and maple trees which seem to get lighter and lighter the farther away they are. And across from the remnants of a tiny, tattered, overgrown beach looms Bethlehem Steel on Sparrows Point.

Towering smoke stacks, vast mountains of tan sand and pitch-black coal by the docks on the mouth of the Patapsco, warehouses, and a maze of roadways all encompass one of the largest steel factories on the east coast. A long, deep roar, like that of a dragon waking from sleep, echoes across the Bay as the monstrous blast furnace spews out steels by some ancient, mystical process. I often pause for a moment and wonder which has been here longer, the land or Bethlehem Steel. I cannot ignore the awesome grandeur of this place. This place where steam bellows up and meets the banquet of fluffy white clouds as they gracefully glide across the deep blue sky that makes you wish the world would turn upside-down so you can fall into it. And the sun! the splendor of the sun gives a golden clarity to everything — from the lighthouse at Fort Howard on the edge of the Bay to Wagner Station across the Patapsco. Not your ordinary golden sun, but a crisp ball of fire that stretches its arms in between the clouds and touches the earth with its fingertips. I have returned to the cries of the osprey and the mysterious bellow of the heron.

I have, to date, found no way to describe the utter joy and peace that settles in me here. This is where the world dons its halo and combines distance and perspective, light and shadow, steel and earth, to show all that life is about. "The Shore" no longer seems to be simply the "perfect place." It seems to be alive, and how I long to be alive with it. I often feel like Cortez or Columbus must have when they first discovered the New World. I am always overwhelmed with a sense that I belong here. I

The Shore

feel like the Shore is holding something in store for me, and it fills me with both excitement and fear. Fear rising from the occasional thought that "it's just me," that I am getting a little carried away. My family and friends always told me I had an overactive imagination. But if I am not crazy, then why is my joy mingled with fear? Why is this fire inside me? After all, no one else seems to see this place the way I do. My friends back home thought it was "nice," or "peaceful," or "quiet," but they never seemed to enjoy it very much (they always expected a lot of bikini-clad women). When I would tell them that there is no phone, no movie theater, no cable T.V., the excitement would leak from their eyes and they would usually decline my invitation.

But as I gaze at Bethlehem Steel, I once again feel a tension increase inside me. The burning returns as I wonder whether I am really in awe of what I am seeing; if I am enjoying it, or if I even should be. As we near the plant, everything — the wind, the waves, the perspective — changes. I do not know whether to enjoy it more the way it appeared a minute ago, or whether to abandon that joy for the new one that lies ahead of me.

My ailment has been given a name: obsessive-compulsive disorder. Instead of wanting to wash my hands over and over again, though, I need to pray over and over again. It is very hard to describe, and even harder to understand. What makes it so peculiar is that I am convinced that mine is actually a struggle on a spiritual level, as if, for some reason, I can only look at what I can enjoy, or if something is keeping me from enjoying it. But even if this is true, it is the nature of OCD to have me doubting myself.

"Eric," comes my aunt's soft voice over the roar of the outboard. Part of me wishes she would just shut up and leave me alone to figure this out. But at the same time, I desperately need her support. "Eric, God knows you thank Him for this place."

I grit my teeth and holler back over the roar of the motor, "Then why do I feel this way?"

"God is NOT a feeling! You have to fight this!"

"I AM!"

I muster as much courage as I can as the Shore is torn of its appeal. I concentrate on the fire inside me and say to it, "There is nothing you can do to me that has not already been done." Just as the Shore

seems to be becoming as bland as a block in the inner city, colorless, filthy, polluted, I realized that this could not, would not have happened anywhere else, and I am reminded of the fabled phoenix.

Rapidly, the fire seems to rush out of me and releases its great store of anxiety and tension. I look out over Old Road Bay at Bethlehem Steel and I know that I am not crazy. I am no longer afraid that all of a sudden, for no apparent reason, the Shore will lose its special meaning to me. The Shore regains its "heavenly radiance," but it is not quite as mystical. It is just as breathtaking as a few moments ago, but its ability to inspire awe seems to be sure. I feel reassured that no matter what happens, the Shore will be able to give me at least some peace and relaxation. I am becoming a firm believer in the idea that "nothing is a coincidence." It is not a coincidence that the seed should land in the right spot and begin its growth. Or is it?

Mariaelena Raymond



My Father's Music

Bridget Farrand

I could never understand why I love country music so much. Anything he liked, I mean anything, I have made a conscious effort to despise. I suppose those feelings don't apply to musical tastes. At one point he was my idol, so of course I still have affections for things I learned under his influence. The first few notes of Kenny Roger's "The Gambler" would slowly tempt me awake. Kenny's deep voice began as a solo but before long another, more familiar voice chimed in to generate the noise created by a miserable duet. My heart will pound wildly against my chest in anticipation of what I might soon confirm. The second, deeper voice was always a step behind Kenny's tempo. He was home! The sound of the second voice acted as my cue to whip my covers off and run downstairs.

Before I jump onto the bottom stair, I notice the air feels warmer, almost softer at the middle level of the house. The room always looks the way I pictured it in bed moments earlier. A strong figure stands in the midst of a cozy room, waiting anxiously for my arrival. Winter, Spring, or Fall, a fire rages in the fireplace. Candlelight enhances the glow of warmth around the room. An orange and yellow haze settles over the room as delicate shadows line the furniture. I peek around the corner to ensure that he is alone, humming and singing to himself directly next to the speaker of our record player. Sometimes others would be with him, buddies joining in to carry on the festivities deep into the early morning hours.

After a minute I walk slowly into his view waiting for the response. It is always the same. Arms outstretched, his swaggering figure turns to see me at the edge of the room. The sound of my beating heart pulses in my ears to the point that I can barely keep myself from crossing the carpet line onto the wood of the living room. With mock sur-

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prise, he lifts his hands to his eyes and pretends not to see me. My excited squeal and fitful giggling breaks his act and with the usual line he beckons me to his side. "Look who it is! It's Puddlehead!" Without a word, I sprint into his strong embrace.

For the next hour, we dance. We dance with my feet off the floor, his strong arms circled around my legs so that I can almost sit on his arms. My own arms wrap around his bald head, occasionally grabbing the two greasy ears for balance due to a particularly long spin. The smell of alcohol mixed with cigarettes dominates my every breath. I love the smell. Not once do my feet touch the floor. We pause only long enough to replace the record. After Kenny comes Willie Nelson and, if we last long enough, my favorite performer, Waylon Jennings.

I memorized each one of my father's moves so that I was prepared for whatever maneuver awaited me. I especially prepared for the dip. It would always follow a trip across the room, my hand in his pointing us forward. My tiny hand hardly wrapped around his thumb. Upon the return, I held onto both thumbs as I watched my red hair sweep across the wooden floor. That swooping moment which held me directly above ground was the most exhilarating of each night.

I suppose the sound of Waylon's belting voice was the sign which prompted my mother to end the festivities. My father didn't make this task an easy one. If she turned down the volume, he'd simply turn it up louder. If she began to blow out candles, he would simply relight them as fast as she extinguished each. It was a frustrating battle, but was absolutely fascinating to watch. In many ways, her power over him was astonishing. Her presence could transform him. Of the two ladies in the family, she was the favorite.

When my mother entered the room, he always lowered me gently onto the floor, his eyes never leaving her face. Her gaze tried desperately to ignore his and with each gesture her anger made itself more clear. As she gripped the empty beer bottles lining the mantle, every vein in her hand popped to the surface. When she bent down to sweep away the ashes which covered the base of the mantle, her movements were meditated and deliberate. Every move made him more excited, more intrigued by the challenge. He followed her every action. Before long I would find myself cross-legged on the floor, mesmerized by the swift moving set of four legs in front of me. The high heels accentuated her slender and shapely legs. Her flowing skirt shifted up and down to reveal her mus-

cular stocking-covered calves. The white business shirt which twelve hours ago was pressed and wrinkle-free, is now pushed up past his elbows. Sweat trickled down his face as he became more determined to dip, spin, and lift my mother. At first she resisted, but eventually she succumbed to his charms. Quiet giggling replaced stern pleading.

The harsh sound of Waylon's voice seemed distant in these moments. The graceful movement of the two bodies before me monopolized my attention and diverted my concentration from music and rhythm to my parents' performance. They created their own rhythm, completely opposite of the country whine blaring from the record. Instead of slow, steady swaying, the two danced to a synchronized rhythm based on quick moves. Hot wax from the candles lining the "dance area" dripped one by one onto the wooden floor, creating soft designs of varying sized dots. One night, the small dots formed a picture I had seen of an ancient acacia tree in Africa. The delicate short trunk covered by an umbrella of branches appeared more and more distinct with each falling drip of wax. Each dot added a twig to the branches. It is said wisdom comes to one who sits peacefully under the acacia tree. I too sat cross-legged with my hands at my sides like the African who is granted knowledge and insight in such a stance.

Sometimes her heel slid to destroy these beautiful creations of wax which gave him another opportunity to lift her off the ground. Her head tilted to meet his, as hands swept hair away to make room for lips. Her head buried into his massive shoulder and his hand secured her position. The music is silenced by this point in the routine. My favorite memories of childhood revolve around these dancing nights.

Childhood memories can be deceiving. It is true my father loved to dance to country music, but only on certain nights. On others, he preferred creating noise of his own. It was always right before dinnertime that my mother and I determined how the night would unfold. The shriek of the telephone indicated immediately that his power would destroy our established peace. I would hear my mother's hushed voice over the line, thanking the person on the other end for calling. The muffled sounds of my mother's sobs were muted by tissues covering her face. "Bridget, Honey, it's dinnertime. Daddy will eat later." The two of us ate in silence, the sounds of clashing silverware resonating through the dark kitchen.

I lay listening as the car lurched in the driveway, the drone of

David Kilsheimer



country music reverberating from the steel walls of the car. With the opening of the car door, the volume of the music increased dramatically and I could lip the words to every tune. He was home. As I listened to the vicious crunching of rocks and pebbles as footsteps made their way to the kitchen door, my heart pounded violently. The pounding was not motivated by excitement, but fear. I often placed both hands on my chest in an effort to mute the uncontrollable noise.

On these nights, it wasn't the sound of Kenny Roger's voice which awakened me, but the sound of my mother's cries. His deep voice which sounded so familiar in sync with Kenny's was now sounding like the firing of cannons, ordering my mother what to do. Sometimes I ventured out of my room to see if my parents were putting on another performance. After all, it is possible that this was all a bad dream and that in fact my Mom had an audition the following day that he was helping her rehearse. But each night seemed too real to be an act. The anger in his tone was too sustained to be false. His loud, booming voice matched the frightening gestures which controlled each of my mother's movements. Most nights she sat crouched in the corner, head in her hands, between the dishwasher and the refrigerator. His flailing arms threatened to hit her with every move.

They seemed as strangers to me in these moments. His lips, which usually formed an enormous smile, were flattened in a straight, determined line. Maybe it was because they never knew I watched them. I watched as her usual powerful figure crumbled into a ball as he hovered over her. It was all too clear who possessed the power on these nights. The arms which sometimes loved to hold her and never let go now refused to loosen their grip on her. All I could hear was my own childish voice screaming out to let go, to stop, to turn around and want to dance. But my voice remained captive in my chest. Night after night. And to my great regret, when he asked to dance, I never declined.

At one time I associated the strong smell of alcohol and cigarettes with warmth, laughter, and dancing. I later learned the smell of alcohol and cigarettes could mean sadness, tears, and hiding. When I first catch a whiff of this mixed aroma, without knowing it I am instantly comforted. The warm feeling of wild abandon I experienced so many times surfaces and I am in Heaven. But it takes just a split second to transform these feelings into absolute disgust. After a moment the musty smell of cigarettes combined with the potent liquor causes me to break out into a

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sweat. His demanding yells ricochet in my head and her soft cries overtake his screams. The experience is altogether deafening.

When a country song comes on the radio, I seem to have the opposite reaction. The first few notes send a shiver up my spine, a shiver of disgust and fear. But by the second and third verses I lose myself in the music. At one time we danced together and we laughed. These are the only moments I allow myself to forgive my father and enjoy his music.

Lean Ort Leathmhile....
(Or: Keep Going Half a Mile)
Sarah Heneghan

My cousin, Maura, went walking in the rain. She was not wearing a hood or a rain slicker. Maura has that pale and slightly odd brand of Irish beauty, with broad hazel eyes, translucent skin, and reddish blond hair that falls down her back. She is long and thin, and when she walks, her feet turn slightly inwards. Maura was walking near Vassar College, where, for fun, people climb trees on the weekends. So you see: she had both the ethnicity and eccentricity necessary to justify a late night walk in the rain. Despite this, she was harassed by a police man who drove along beside her, leaning his blue-capped head out of the window, fondling the steering wheel absently as he spoke. "What are you doing?" he asked.

"I'm walking," my cousin replied, and continued walking.

"It's raining," he chided, sidling the car into her path.

"I know, " she replied, and kept walking.

The policeman was clearly unnerved — not so much by the rain, but Maura's apparent willingness to be wet. The concept of surrendering oneself to the natural consequence of rain has gone the way of other archaic superstitions — for example, animal sacrifice and burning witches at the stake. Rain has fallen into the vast American category of bad, or inconvenient — the two at this stage are somewhat interchangeable. It is the job of a policeman to enforce absolutes of right and wrong. In this case, those absolutes were: wet bad, dry good. As Susan Griffin writes, in *The Eros of Everyday Life*: "Yet the contours of the mind resemble nature." The policeman's behavior and discomfort expressed the contours of the triumphant American mind. We are a bold and assertive country. We value above all else our individuation and freedom. It has only been two-hundred years since we threw off the colonization of England. In this time, we have mastered our great and stretching coun-

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try, conquering both the land and its native people. We have also conquered rain — we will not be wet — we will use umbrellas, or go indoors when it rains.

Maura's willingness to walk unprotected in the rain was an expression of the distinctive contour of her own mind. Raised in a strong Irish-American setting, there is molded somewhere in her psyche a memory of Ireland, where it has been raining steadily now for the past two or three thousand years. Because nobody in the country actually owns their own umbrella, the Irish have developed a keen and graceful knowledge of how to be wet. Eternally surprised by the weather, they wake to yet another day of frigid rain, only to muse, "Hm...it's another fuck of a day!"¹

Interestingly enough, there are a vast number of lost or stolen umbrellas — let's say, ten thousand of them — which circulate throughout Ireland. I know this because mine is one of them, and someday, when I return, I may see it again: blown inside out by the wind, flapping uselessly above somebody's head as they make their way down Grafton Street, in Dublin, or along Queen's Quay.

Recent advances in the field of cognitive psychology support Susan Griffin's claim that the human mind has an ecology just as the earth has an ecology. Both are shaped by circumstance and history. Both exist in flux, their contours forming and reforming with the patterns of their existence. Connectionism is the technical name for such a theory. Replacing older schools of thought, which held that the mind processed the world semantically (i.e., matching words and people with stored definitions), connections maintain that the mind apprehends the world in patterns, and that the mind itself is a matrix of patterns. The mind is made up of "networks of constraints which 'weigh' on the connections, eliminating some while keeping others until one connection emerges as the most probable and therefore the most realistic." As in Griffin's mind, the behavior of the connectionist construct "depends on its architecture".²

Therefore, the answer to the burning question: Why do the Irish steal umbrellas? may lie in the experience of their endless colonization (I say endless because all of Ireland is not free). Perhaps stealing has been ingrained into the contour of their minds as an unfortunate aspect of their Anglicization, a plausible connection emerging from the pattern of their colonized minds. Or perhaps (and I believe this to be the more likely

answer) the Irish are as naturally accepting of the paradox of not owning an umbrella in a rain-drenched climate as they are of the many other (and there are many) paradoxes inherent to their natures.

Ireland's foundation myth contains the original paradox of the Irish nature. The island was dubbed Ireland by a group of Milesians who sailed from the Iberian Peninsula, guided by the mystical vision of their tribal bard. Amergin was this bard, the son of the great clan chief, Mil. He and his brother Eremon were caught in a bitter rivalry for their father's affection. As different as night and day, Eremon was an arrogant and carousing warrior; Amergin a withdrawn and brooding poet. Determined to impress his father, Eremon executed a massive cattle raid on a neighboring tribe. The effects of the raid were disastrous. As the cattle overgrazed the land, a terrible drought began. The land turned to dust. The harvest was ruined and the cattle were starving. Unless half of the tribe emigrated, the Milesians would die out altogether.

While praying to the Druid gods and goddesses for a solution to his tribe's problem, Amergin the bard was visited with vision of a green and sacred land. The land would not be found on any map, he knew, but if he allowed his intuition and vision to guide him, his tribe would live. The two brothers, along with half of the Milesian tribe, set sail for Amergin's mythical land. After a long and treacherous journey, green Ireland came into view. Frantic to claim the place for their own, both Eremon and Amergin dove from the boat and raced for shore. Reaching land, the two brothers raised their arms high and then plunged downwards, into the water-worn sand of Ireland's shore, the harp and the sword. And so it is said that Ireland is forever divided between poetry and violence, and her people the gentlest and the angriest race on Earth.

On a train crossing into Belfast, my brother Dennis and I struggled through a largely one-sided conversation with a Northern Irishman, a retired publican. The conversation was one-sided due to our inability to understand ninety-eight percent of what the man seated across from us was saying. What was clear, though, was that whatever he said was said in a great spirit of camaraderie and joy. He laughed and pounded the table, pouring six or seven sugars in his tea. Eventually I began to catch a phrase here and there. It became clear that what he was talking about so loudly and joyfully was the frequent bombing of his pub in Belfast sev-

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eral years ago, before the Cease Fire, when the agitation between the Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland was considerably worse than it is today. His laugh was a great, open-mouthed one, his yellow teeth chewing like those of a horse: "I used to be a publican — god-damned people bombed me all the time!" he sang.

Everyone in Ireland has a story of someone they have lost to the seemingly endless skirmishes between the I.R.A. and the Loyalists. Violence is an ongoing and pervasive element of Irish life. This is a difficult thing to apprehend when you are actually living there — the Irish are truly the gentlest and calmest race. Their voices are melodious and low, their manners soothing. It is almost impossible to envision them living daily with fighting or dying or killing, which they do and have done, for thousands of years.

The experience of colonization is a paradox, wherein the individual exists in opposition to the greater whole of which it is a part. England's refusal to assimilate into Irish culture in the colonizations of the seventeenth century bred a dynamic of oppression and agitation in Ireland. The English viewed the Irish as barbaric and primitive. They forced their ways on the Irish people, suppressing their language and customs. Consequently, the Irish individual exists schizophrenically within him or herself but also within an oppressive Other. The Other is English, the self, Irish. The two co-exist without resolution in the one individual.

"In the poem," says writer Susan Griffin, "one can have the direct experience of being in two places at once, feeling two opposite emotions, holding two contradictory experiences, at once. And of course, one can. This is the real nature of the mind. Poetry is closer to nature than prose."³ Ireland and its people are this paradox of poetry. Physically, the Irish are divided between pale, fair Norman influence and the striking Black Irish. It was the Normans who brought red hair to Ireland in the twelfth century, making an effort to assimilate into the culture they had conquered. Beginning in 1588, the Spanish Armada involved itself in Ireland's struggles against England. At the Battle of Kinsale, the Irish and Spanish fought side by side against the Crown (and were defeated). Nine months later, there was a new and darker breed of Irish, with olive skin and charcoal hair.

Geographically, Ireland is paradoxical, too. Good land mixes with bad, making farming and settlement difficult and often isolating peo-

Sarah Heneghan

ple in pockets of civilization. The eastern triangle of Ireland, its three points marked by what is now Dublin, Dundalk, and Athlone, commands "...the geographical nucleus from which men have seen their best chance of commanding the whole country...also one of the most vulnerable parts of Ireland." There is a break in the mountain ring on the eastern point of the triangle which lures the invader onwards. The physical dynamics of the Eastern Triangle leave the Irish military both fortified and ultimately vulnerable.

Ireland's original religion was Druidism. Druids are pantheists, perceiving God to exist in all creation. The Druid self is only a small part of a much greater whole. The interconnected construct of self expresses a "deep and continuing relationship with all other terms of existence" and is an "ancient aspect of human consciousness."⁴ This consciousness has not died out in the Irish psyche, but rather lingers comfortably alongside its Christianity, highlighting once again the Irish knack for "feeling two opposite emotions, holding two contradictory opinions, at once."⁵

As a child, I was privy to the startling and terrible myths and revelations of Christianity as well as the superstitions and tales of the Irish country-side. I remember being told the story of my father's magical recovery from juvenile arthritis. When my father was eleven, he developed such acute arthritis in his legs that he was unable to walk for close to a year. After numerous and unsuccessful stays in various hospitals, my great-aunt Delia came to my father with an incantation and a mysterious balm. The healing was something she had been taught by her mother, a knowledge (or spell) she had brought with her from the bogs of Galway when she left at nineteen. Whatever it was, it worked. My father walked.

Banshees, fairies, little people, curses and the ominous and prophetic cawing of magpies all lived for me through my aunts and uncles from Ireland. Older beliefs were not precluded by their devout Christianity but managed to live peaceably and paradoxically alongside. It is like this throughout Ireland today. In St. Finbarr's chapel in Cork City, the floor is tiled beautifully with the signs of the zodiac. Red scorpions and blue-clawed crabs, a golden lion — pagans all — swirl over the floor just below the arching body of Jesus Christ, nailed to the cross.

"Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" These were the last words Christ spoke. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" It was in the

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moment of Christ's dying that His followers were saved, redeemed by His blood and sacrifice. Also, in this moment, every Christian was bound to betrayal. Christ was crucified by those he saved — mocked, whipped and beaten, spit on and denied. To be Christian is to be bound both by redemption and betrayal: "In each individual, the spirit has become flesh, in each man the creation suffers, within each one a redeemer is nailed to the cross."⁶

Long before St. Patrick brought Christianity to Ireland in the fifth century, Ireland had already conceived of a race of beings like Christ, half-people graced both by divinity and mortality. They were the Sidhe, shapechangers who dwelled in the half-light of dawn and dusk. They were the Danaan, who inhabited Ireland before the Milesians, and from whom the Milesians stole Ireland. When the Milesians arrived they met with the leaders of the Danaan, who were peaceful and amenable, offering half of their land to the Milesian tribe. The Milesians were greedy, and demanded sovereignty over the whole land. The Danaan leaders refused, and asked the Milesians to retreat 'beyond the seventh wave' so that they might prepare for battle. The Danaan were a magical people who had access to a great sword of light that pulsed with a terrible, searing fire. They knew that if they used the sword against the Milesians, its power would be so great and irrepressible that it would destroy all of Ireland. The Danaan had no choice but to surrender the land that they loved. But they did not leave Ireland — instead, their spirits entered the rocks and trees and streams and bogs, lingering in the contours of the land. The Danaan can take any shape they desire, and the shape of their desire is more often than not revenge. A woman might appear in an ethereal dawn to lure off a young farm boy, just up for his day's work, taking him to Tir-na-nOg, the land of the young, from which he may never return. A hound might enter a house at twilight, slinking half-seen through the shadows to claim a baby in payment for the land that was stolen from his people. The face of the Sidhe is sexless and ageless, fickle as fading light, seductive and disconcerting and irresistible.

The final paradox of the Irish psyche is the one which proves most troubling to tourists. Ask an Irish person where a place is (any place) and they will look askance, become pensive, take a gander at the sky, and they tell you, "It's just about a half a mile, up this road...." Go up the road half a mile and ask again, you will receive the same meticu-

lous answer. Follow this advice to a Gaeltacht in Galway, they will tell you, again and eternally (and perhaps the advice is terribly, wonderfully sound): "Lean ort leathmhile — keep going, half a mile...."

Notes

¹ Roddy Doyle. *The Snapper*.

² Seidenberg, 1600.

³ Griffin, 189.

⁴ Ibid., 84.

⁵ Ibid., 189.

⁶ Hesse, 4.



Talking about Rape:
Rape is not a Political Issue
Michelle Moore

It happens. Rape happens. When my younger sister told me she was raped that is what I told her. "I'm sorry, it happens." I knew too much about rape to care about rape. I went to feminist meetings where we talked about rape. I wore a pin on my backpack that said "Stop Rape." I knew the horrifying statistics. Some said one in eight college students, some said I never really pay close attention to statistics. But even looking skeptically, I could see what these statistics meant. Rape was common, almost ordinary. I had heard numerous survivors tell their stories at the speakouts. So when my sixteen year old sister told me she was raped, I wasn't shocked.

As a liberated college female, I tried to educate myself on the issues. I went to meetings of the Young Feminist Club. I read articles and books by feminist authors. I listened to Riot Girl bands like Bikini Kill scream at the male patriarchy. I stood for women's rights and I was sensitive about women's issues. I knew what a widespread problem rape was, but I guess I forgot what an emotional problem it is.

The feminists have taken rape up as a political issue. The rape of a woman by a man physically embodies the aggression and discrimination that men have towards women. To be a feminist means to be anti-rape. This is, of course, a good thing. If the feminists aren't against rape, then who will be? The problem is that rape is not always a political issue. In fact, it almost never is. Rape is a personal, physical, emotional suffering. We must be careful never to forget that. While the politics behind the anti-rape movement are well intentioned, too often they can take away from the reality of the pain of the sufferer.

In John Irving's novel *The World According to Garp*, an eleven year old girl named Ellen James is raped and her tongue is cut off by her rapists. All around the nation, in an effort to display solidarity and bring

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the issue of rape to national attention, feminists cut off their own tongues. These women carry around notecards for communication. The first card they always show is a card that says "Hello I'm an Ellen Jamesian." The cynical Garp is criticized by his mother for his lack of sympathy for the drastic measure of these women. He tells her, "I have lots of sympathy—for Ellen James." His mother counters that rape is every woman's issue, but Garp does not see the logic in it. Years later, he meets a young woman on an airplane. As the mute girl hands him a card, he is disgusted and fed up. But her card says, "Hello I am Ellen James." The movement surrounding her rape prevented him from feeling sympathy for her tragedy. The real Ellen James hands Garp a card that says I hate the Ellen Jamesians. She is uncomfortable with her personal tragedy being made into a political and social statement. Ellen James' rape is not every woman's issue. She needs compassion, sympathy, and care.

Unlike the fictional Ellen James, Katie Koestner is a woman who does not mind being the figurehead of the anti-rape movement. She was raped in her freshman year at the College of William and Mary. Her experience was made into an HBO docudrama called "No Visible Bruises: The Katie Koestner Story." Her picture was on the cover of *Time* magazine's June 3, 1991 date rape issue. She travels around the country speaking at colleges and high schools. Her name has almost become synonymous with date rape.

I saw her speak at my college a few years ago. I was moved to tears. She spoke in front of hundreds of bratty college kids and told her story. She came to college innocent and naive. A popular older boy asked her out on a date and of course she was excited. Afterwards, he came back to her room. They danced and started to kiss. She got scared when he started to take her clothes off. She said no, and he kind of forced himself on her, but she still said no. Nothing happened that night. He slept on the floor. The next morning, he apologized, they made up and snuggled. Then silently, wordlessly, he raped her. Of course no one believed her. She dressed sexily and she invited him back to her room. Koestner fought to have him suspended. She became a women's studies major and devoted her life to the prevention of rape.

I went to visit Katie Koestner to help start up a camp for teenage girls. As I drove into the hills of suburban Pennsylvania, I was convinced I was driving to her parents' house. But the mansion on the hills was her mansion and the luxury car in the driveway was her luxury car.

That weekend I saw her world and it almost made me sick. As a twenty-four year old woman (we celebrated her birthday that weekend), she had made mountains of money in business. The interesting thing is her business is talking about her rape. I looked through her office and on a shelf next to the HBO special (Katie calls it "my movie") were pamphlets promoting her talks. Katie Koestner is a rape celebrity. Katie Koestner is a rape business woman.

At first I was just surprised. I knew Koestner had just recently graduated from college and I expected her to live the same hand-to-mouth lifestyles that my friends lived. As we watched her movie and *Jurassic Park* on her new gigantic TV with some sort of sophisticated sound system, I knew this wasn't the case. But this was just after I learned that Elizabeth Dole earned two hundred thousand dollars a year as head of the Red Cross. I had to accept that people can make a profit off charity organizations and social causes. Just because someone earns a living doing good does not diminish the good they are doing.

It cannot be argued that Katie Koestner is not doing good. She has turned her terrible experience into a positive way to educate about rape. Her talks force the average college student to see the sometimes sadly invisible problem of date rape. Perhaps the emotionality of her speech prevents a potential rapist from being able to dehumanize his victim and rationalize his crime. The power of Koestner's cause was her frankness as a speaker. The audience could not help listening to someone talk so candidly and extemporaneously. College students have acquired the skill of tuning out even the most adept lecturer, but it is a lot more difficult to tune out a clumsy speaker who is crying. As Koestner stumbled over words and paused to find the right words, the audience was rapt. Ever critical, I wondered if Koestner always cried when she spoke about the rape. It was not possible, I thought. This speech must be special.

Then I saw her about six months later. I didn't really want to go because I had already seen the real speech, the powerful accidental speech that she had shared with us the previous spring. I knew the canned, prepared speech she gave would suffer in comparison to the one I had seen. But since I had met her since then, I was newly interested. I was right. We got the canned, carefully rehearsed speech. But I was wrong, because it was not worse than the speech I had seen before. It was exactly the same. Exactly. Before the power of the speech lay in its spontaneity, its realness. She asked the audience for help with certain words,

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like one does when talking with friends. She would apologize because she could not recall a meaningless detail. Overcome, she would pause. Her voice shook and she started to cry. But as I saw her give the second speech, it all seemed a farce. Everything was the same. She paused in the exact same places. She asked the same seemingly spontaneous questions. She cried at the exact same moment. This speech, I found out, is the most requested. It is called the "No-Yes" speech.

What I had taken as genuine emotion was actually forced. It is forgivable to see an academic give the same speech twice. We expect someone to recite their thesis in a uniform way, but we do not expect emotion to be forced, rehearsed, and practiced. Does Katie Koestner plan her speech the same way Hollywood plans its tearjerkers? Did she ask herself, "Where can I cry to get the biggest emotional response?" Does she sit in front of the mirror pretending to be embarrassed that she couldn't control her tears as she recites her speech, like an actress reciting a monologue for an action? Where is the rape she is talking about? When her strategy was exposed, I simultaneously lost and gained respect for her. I was disappointed that what I had taken as real was rehearsed, but I was impressed that she had a strategy. Her lecture, even if it is contrived, is probably more convincing about the destructiveness of rape than any factual treatment of the topic. I am concerned about Koestner. Is it healthy to act out your life? Is there something wrong with replacing real pain with pain that communicates to an audience?

I saw Koestner speak for the first time a few weeks after I found out my little sister was raped. That was why I was so interested in her personal pain and the possibility that making it into an issue would have on it. After my sister told me she was raped, I said, "It happens." I had accepted rape as inevitable. I had heard so many rape narratives that I was immune to one more. When she told me, I felt simply "that's unfair," like she had been cheated by an auto mechanic. It is sad that it happens, but it is inevitable and we have to accept it. My sister told me over the phone. When I hung up was when it hit me. Someone was not raped. My sister was raped. My sixteen year old virgin sister was raped. It does not matter that she was a virgin and it does not matter that she was only sixteen. Rape is tragic without regard to your age or your situation. What mattered was that she was my sister.

Her story was not strikingly different than others I had heard at the Take Back the Night rallies. She was in a car towards the end of the

summer after she and her boyfriend had been drinking in the woods. She was not really serious with this boy Jimmy. I hardly knew him. He was her best friend's boyfriend's best friend. He was going away to college soon. It was merely a convenient fling. I never really liked him. When I asked her what attracted her to him, she told me he was good at sports. My sister is a remarkable athlete and she said it made her last boyfriend uncomfortable that she had more trophies. But that athletic prowess, the big basketball player body that she was attracted to, was what caused the rape. As Katie Koestner's rape had "no visible bruises," my sister's had "no audible screams." He covered her mouth and forced himself on her. She tried to fight but was so overwhelmed by his weight. She said she was hardly bruised the next day. He did not have to hit her. He did not have to use a knife. His weapon was his strength, his sheer, terrifying strength. I did not doubt my sister. I believed her. Rape happens. I knew that.

When I hung up the phone, I realized rape had happened. I started to cry. I called my sister back and I apologized for my insensitivity. I spent a restless night talking to my boyfriend on the phone. I had talked about rape so much, only now there was nothing to say. I had an anger and a sadness that words could not convey. I talked about rape before, but now I was unable to. For three days I walked around campus kicking the air. Not only was my sister raped, but the rapist had gotten away. No one knew he was a rapist. No one would. My sister says he still calls her. He is convinced that she wanted it. He thinks rape is something that bad men do to young girls who walk alone.

The statistics that had meant so much to me before meant nothing. Rape could not be expressed in numbers. It is not the per capita GNR Numbers, knowledge, and information are almost meaningless. I knew that forty percent of rapists were animal abusers and fire starters as children. But now I know that a rapist is a blonde-haired basketball player with squinty eyes.

Talking about rape is a difficult issue. Katie Roiphe, author of *The Morning After: Sex, Fear and Feminism on Campuses*, makes this point in her book. This feminist criticizes the feminists on her Princeton campus who went to the Take Back the Night rallies to speak about rape. She sheds light on the destructiveness of viewing rape as a political issue. She worries that women who embrace the issue, these anti-rape feminists, are actually causing problems for themselves. These women are becom-

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ing victims by espousing their victimhood. Everytime they say the statistic one in eight, one in four, I have even heard one in three, they are creating feelings of helplessness. They are espousing the myth that rape is inevitable. They talk about rape as if it is an unavoidable evil like death. Instead of celebrating feminine power, they are mourning their weakness.

So talking about rape can be as problematic as it is helpful. Talking about it as a political issue takes away from the emotional impact and importance of the incident. The staggering statistics can be overwhelming and can lead to a perception of rape as inevitable. Rape is, of course, an important issue. But it is more than issue. The rapes of Katie Koestner and Ellen James were turned into social and political issues to further the anti-rape cause, but by this the emotional hurt of their rape was denied. In the case of my sister, I was temporarily unable to see her rape as anything more than another social ill. Sometimes rape does not belong on banners and buttons and other propaganda. Sometimes the most appropriate way to talk about rape is not in a lecture hall or a feminist rally. It is in a bedroom. No one is shouting "Stop Rape" and no one is spouting statistics. Two sisters are smoking cigarettes and crying together. Together they are kicking the air. Even without the knowledge of the statistics, these sisters know the gravity of rape.

Swallowing the Past-ures

S.T. Daley

As morning breaks along the green fields of southern Pennsylvania, the pastures of one town lie blanketed with stone bodies. In the shadows still surviving at dawn, these tireless warriors cast perpetual glances at the landscapes. They watch the peaceful farmland as orange and gold rays flood the horizon, and the sun, for some their solitary companion, rises above their solid temples. All is still in the morning there, nothing besides a breeze bellowing through leaves of grass well-trimmed by local caretakers. With a gorgon's gaze they wait on that ground, serving as reminders to those who pass, to respect their comrades still as the field, those friends, the unfortunate fellows that died so long ago on the placid pastures of Gettysburg.

I vividly remember the first time I jogged alone at the battlefield. At 5:30 a.m. on July 1, 1994, my alarm sounded to remind me that it was time to run. I had recently adopted a new fitness program, and the serenity of the mornings at Gettysburg seemed to offer a perfect time to exercise. Lacing my shoes by the streaks of sunlight that straggled into the room from under the shade, I remembered that this trip would be solo. My partner until then, my high school history teacher, had told me the night before that hiking on the previous day would force him to sleep in. I was nervous about setting out alone, but I was also determined, and left my room as my watch flashed "5:42."

The first mile strengthened my determination, as my route was shielded by the brick structures of Gettysburg College. It was there I stayed as a student of history, a member of their Civil War Institute. As I ran along the campus trails, I was protected by wood and mortar, and I felt quite safe as I passed the fraternity houses and local professors who felt the urge to stroll in the early hours. I soon reached the end of the long row of buildings, and my feet were then beating down upon Mummasburg Road, which led to the battlefield. That was when my

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nerves caught up with me, and I slowly realized with each leap that my figure was the only human design in sight that was not made of stone.

I braced myself as I started toward the heights which once were home to the Confederate army. The climb was long and slow, rising as slowly as the sun behind me. Known as Seminary Ridge, the rolling hills were unoccupied on this morning. Silence reigned on that field, and at America's most popular National Military Park, not a single car or observer passed me. I was alone with the landmarks of war, monuments shaped like bullets or warriors or generals shot from their steeds. Even though they all seemed to watch me as I chugged up the ridge, I never turned to fully meet their gaze or pause to engage them in conversation. If I ever did, their faces, full of sorrow and remorse from an event 115 years before my conception, would remind me why they stood guard at Gettysburg. Such statues force us to acknowledge that although we stand in such a beautiful place, farmland sprinkled with dawn, on that same ground thousands of souls departed in three days of summertime slaughter.

Many who visit the field never really ponder what actually happened there. The town, itself leeching off the random chance that brought the Civil War to Pennsylvania, makes its livelihood on the tourists who want to see a part of history. They come in thousands, men, women and children, to this hallowed ground, and with cameras and cars they swarm like locusts along the fertile fields. As they visit landmarks, they stop and pretend to listen to their guides, high school students who know as much as the park pamphlet, while their children frolic among the memorials and drop strawberry ice cream cones near rock walls. When they leave in the evening, after they stop at stores like "General Pickett's Buffet" or "The Official Civil War Store," they feel as if they have a grasp on what really happened on those grounds. But they never do.

For them Gettysburg is grass, marble, and clumps of mud that easily attach to boots yet prove difficult to remove. When they sit upon the hills, or stand next to General Lee as he is looking at a copse of trees, they never understand what happened in 1863. Their eyes have been fooled, as nature, a mighty magician, has blinded them to a horror of human history.

Nature has her own way of absorbing mankind's countless atrocities. On a summer day in this town, visitors could never really comprehend how the situation was during the conflict. They look out upon the

fields and see strips of farmland, peach orchards in full bloom, or stunning rock formations jutting out of the earth, and they are amazed at the sheer beauty of the area. When they hear names like "Devil's Den" or "The Valley of Death," they smile and move on to the next number on the map, neglecting several monument situated on the calm hills.

This disguise masks most of the world, as at almost every battleground, nature has covered the tracks of human misery. In Normandy, France, where my grandfather's comrades died on a bleak June morning, there are calm beaches with pure white sand. One summer day those sands were red with blood, soaked with plasma instead of flooded with water from the Atlantic. Some day, few will know that those beaches were even a target for an invasion. It just will not seem real, because nature has made that area calm: the boom of cannons carefully replaced by the crash of salty waves, or the countless corpses exchanged for crab shells and seagull feathers.

Wandering at Gettysburg, I have witnessed nature in her full glory on a July afternoon. The sun beats down upon your back, and it shines so brightly on every inch of the field that it seems like darkness could never descend. When the wind blows, the hum can be heard from almost any part of the 28-square mile park. It was not always like that. One day there were over 150,000 men clad in wool and storming the hills, streams, trees, forges, and cliffs, in the hope of killing men wearing a different color uniform. They were vicious men; merciless toward their brothers, and, on days when they could have admired the placid Pennsylvania countryside, they died violently.

On my last trek to the battlefield, one Saturday with a college honors class, we sat down to eat our lunch, a catered feast, in a forested section of the field. Many of our group began to complain, as they ate, of the cold weather or the sandwiches. As they continued to bicker, I walked a couple of yards off on my own, just out of hearing range. Putting my hand upon a fallen oak tree resting nearby, I looked out on the landscape before me.

There were trees for a few feet, coming right before a drop down to the strips of farmland. The breeze whistled just loud enough to block all other sounds from my ears. Gazing straight ahead, I saw Confederate soldiers, shoeless southerners marching from Chambersburg, all in perfect cadence. On horseback next to them rode a captain, a man with a tough demeanor but sad, blue eyes. All of their faces were a sight of ter-

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ror, as noses twitched when patches of cannon smoke wandered from the town below to their nostrils. Without a sound they moved on, trampling the earth below their feet, straight into a cloud of gray. It was this smoke that shielded my sight from the horrors to my immediate right.

Horrors of charges and skirmishes that I do not want to imagine. Men with their weapons in hand, firing repeatedly because in panic it was all they knew. If they were hit, they slumped to the earth, moaning as a minnie ball shattered bone and blood vessel as it entered the body from yards away. On that hard earth they were forced to lie, until either someone had mercy and shot them or their side began to win the day and doctors could approach. If those did not happen, then as they died they could watch the blue skies of Gettysburg, a quiet contradiction passing over the chaos.

The soldiers did not leave me. I watched them again as they began their assaults on Union lines, attacks that would till the fertile soil with their blood. Instead of green valleys and bright orchards, my eyes stared at seas of gray and blue, their endless waves smashing into one another until they finally came together to make a large red ocean. Those rock formations, collectively called the "Devil's Den," and a natural wonder became the eternal home of sharpshooters and New York volunteers who died in their defense. Some men hid behind the giant slabs sticking out of the ground, loading and reloading their rifles, and then clutching them to their chests like mothers with children. Tears rolled down the cheeks of others as they penciled notes to their loved ones and jammed them into any crevice they could find.

Then I watched the chilling climax of the three-day event: the advance of General Pickett's men. In sheer terror, I stood as the Virginian called his regiments to formation before a one-mile clearing. With a smirk on his face, and no farms or trees to shield his men, the general turned and ordered them to advance. No sooner had he lowered his sword than the Union bombardment commenced. Clumps of dirt flew out of the ground, some shots narrowly missing the troops and their commanders. They moved forward anyway, until they were stopped by bullet and shell inches away from their goal. Along that ridge, known ironically as Cemetery Hill, they fell in rows of gray against the grass, victims of human folly. On that hill they again became the full property of nature.

Only a few see these images at Gettysburg, because nature knows that for so many it is beyond comprehension. She absorbs our disasters,

and rejuvenates herself, so that some may never have to experience that suffering. She had seen what we did to ourselves, and the world, and just did not want that terror to continue. Nature knew our destructive capabilities, and her desire was that we would forever fail to realize them.

In my trips to Gettysburg, I usually had the luxury of climbing the steps of a tour bus to head home when dusk descended upon the land. However, once or twice I have watched night fall on the town where over fifty thousand men fell. I stood beside some monuments, the ones where ancient soldiers were still perched on slabs of stone. I joined their vigils, staring upon the blackened fields and bleak night skies, at times when no one else ventured to visit them. We gazed upon the lush pastures that lay silent in the evening, and together we recalled the horrors on that hallowed ground.

Matt Harris



The Recipe for Garnaches

Janelle Chanona

The smells of thyme, bay leaves, cilantro, garlic and onion lingered amid the noisy din of the crowded grocery store. I was hot and irritated. I nearly fainted when besides the intense heat of the store, I got trapped under the arm of a huge hairy man with the worst body odor. Barely escaping the stench, I collapsed on the onion rack. As the color started coming back into my cheeks, I began to choose the purple and white onions carefully. I had specific instructions not to get any with bruises or dirt.

I closed my eyes and thought about what my mom had said earlier that day. "Since you won't have garnaches for a while, I'll make some for dinner, okay?" No, actually it wasn't "okay." Ever since that conversation, a block of ice settled in my belly.

It began melting slowly, sending trickles of ice water through my veins, but it never got less. Right then it felt like it was expanding and my gut was about to come spilling out or that I was going to choke or scream. The thought of eating garnaches for dinner became nauseating. My throat began to close as my mind conjured its image. I paid for the onions and proceeded to Nunez's Tortilla Factory. Outside was so much worse than the grocery-store. I had to look at my bare arms just to make sure that my skin wasn't dripping off my body.

The heat of the machine that was making the tortillas forced me to stand at the door and yell my order to the pale, sweaty Hispanic man behind the counter. As I picked up the two pounds of tortillas, he said, "Vaya con Dios, Senorita" (Go with God, Miss).

I left the factory with a perplexed expression. If he had flirted with me as usual I wouldn't have given him a second thought, but I wasn't sure how to feel about people I didn't know wishing me good luck, especially since I wasn't sure myself if I wanted to go.

I sat in the car enjoying the air conditioning. At least at Loyola I won't have to endure this ridiculous weather! The ride home was spent

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slowly etching my surroundings into my memory. A figure frantically waving his arms caught my attention and as I drew nearer, the figure shrank drastically into the focused image of my friend Chepo.

Chepo is about four feet tall with a deep brown tan that confines the best friend anyone could ask for. I pull over and we hug goodbye in the middle of the road. Tearing myself away from his loving embrace, I felt my eyes grow wet. Will I meet someone at school whom I will be as close with as I am with Chepo? The ride home was all a blur.

The mahogany door opened soundlessly as I entered my home. I set the bags on the rose colored tiles and removed the onions and tortillas. I worked in complete silence. Mom was probably doing laundry downstairs; everyone else was planting flowers in the backyard. I rinsed the onions in the chrome sink and put the tortillas in the microwave to keep warm.

The light from the tall windows faded as the sky consumed the sun. Mom came in then. The size of our kitchen dwarfed her. The fading light added a soft sheen to her short black hair. The shadows hid her wrinkles and standing there, hands on hips, watching the oil come to a boil, my mother was beautiful.

Small hands delicately placed the still warm tortillas into the hot oil. Only an expert can manage to make the tortillas get to the same color and 'crispiness' without burning them. My mother is an expert at this long and monotonous task. She does it with the kind of patience and precision that gets under one's skin. My mother had often complained about this part of the preparation for that very reason but here she was doing it. Since she is not a woman given to expressing emotions verbally, I understood that it was how she was showing her love.

I washed and dried the onions one by one. Then I took out the butcher knife and sharpened it until it became a shining silver line. For a second, I stood there holding silver to the white of my wrist. I knew that if I applied even the smallest amount of pressure, the skin would break and a red river would flow.

To live would mean leaving everything and everyone I had ever known to live in a strange, cold place. Worst of all, it would mean being separated from Jamie. My twin and I were alike in every way, too much so sometimes. She is my best friend, my sister and the love of my life. I couldn't fathom not sleeping in the same room as her.

I stood there, with my eyes swollen and overflowing, trying to

clear my head of these thoughts. Mom scolded me for standing directly over the fumes. But she didn't understand, I was not - those tears were mine, not the onions'. I had taken the opportunity to cry openly; otherwise I would seem weak. I continued to dice the onions and soaked them in vinegar, water and a little salt. Setting that aside, I held the can of beans firmly as I opened it to avoid scratching the marble countertop. The beans were so black as I emptied them into the frying pan. Looking down, while stirring, I saw the blackness of my grandmother's eyes.

They had filled with water as they watched Jamie and I receive our diplomas. I had confided my fears of loneliness and depression to her. Her wrinkled face with its wise eyes had creased into a smile. She said, "That's only natural. It is going to be your first time on your own and without Jamie but you'll be fine. You are strong. Your people came down from the mountains and braved the dangers of the valley. This is your valley and you will conquer it as did they."

The fact that I might disappoint my family made my stomach twist, cavort, rumble and roll like the beans in the pan below me. I turned off the burner and took out another pan from the cupboard near my knees.

The entrance of footsteps made me look at the doorway. My dad tried to be inconspicuous about stealing a crispy tortilla but the 'whack' he got on the knuckles from my mother's wooden spoon, told him he hadn't tried hard enough. I looked at him there, looking every bit the stereotypical farmer: baseball cap, worn and dirty; sunburnt face and arms; dirt-crusted shirt and jeans standing in mud-caked boots

My father - Daddy - it was because of him that I would seriously consider leaving my family for a new world. It tore my heart apart every time I came home to find him at the table doing paperwork even though he was exhausted. He tried telling me differently but the blood-shot eyes and the lifeless hands caressing the furrowed brow always gave him away.

With a bad price on the World Market for citrus and the cost of getting medical attention for my grandfather, it would not be easy sending twins to college. I remember when I received my scholarship. I had looked over at my parents, specifically my daddy. He was so thrilled, so overcome with emotion. All he could do was give me a thumbs-up sign. It was a far cry from the look he had given me when I had done poorly in primary school.

This new look made the silver edge of the butcher knife become

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the silver that lines every rain cloud. Since Jamie had taken over the task of grating the cheese, I left the tomato sauce on to boil, under her supervision. I went outside to gather the habanero peppers. The coolness of the dark sky hung in the air but the warmth of the earth under my bare feet made me close my eyes, reveling in the beauty of dusk. In the light of the rising moon, I looked over the valley before me.

I was on a winged horse then, flying over the citrus orchard, the rainforest, the freshwater river and the cascading waterfall. Suddenly the light changed and skyscrapers, taxicabs and thousands of people surrounded me. My heart grew cold; I saw nothing warm or welcoming. The horse wheeled to the right until we were heading home.

I understood something then. I would travel far away but my true valley would always be my home, always welcoming me with open arms, ready to shelter me from whatever lay outside. A fresh wind called me back and I gathered the peppers.

Inside, I held the peppers over the burner until they were black and crushed them with salt and vinegar. Making sure I was alone in the kitchen, I hurriedly put a spoon-full of beans on a tortilla, sprinkled it with cheese, onions, tomato sauce and gingerly added a little pepper. This is so good!

Later as my entire family sat around the table, it seemed like everyone I loved and everyone that loved me was there too. They were all there to witness my last taste of home before the iron bird carried me off to the new valley ahead. At least now, I felt prepared to take on whatever came along in stride. I had made my future with my family and it was as good as what my heart, and my taste buds, craved.

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