

...And the Earth Did Not Devour Him: Mystery Project X: Embrace Them All

I would like to see all of the people together. And then, if I had great big arms, I could embrace them all. I wish I could talk to them, but all of them together.

I love so many of Rivera's stories. Too many of them, in fact. Ask me which is my favorite, and I'll give you a different answer for each day of the week: *Vignette #1! A Prayer! It's That It Hurts! Vignette #8! When We Arrive! Self-titled awesomeness!*

But in terms of pure writing goodness, it just doesn't get much better than the main section of *Under the House*, which not only single-handedly justifies/redeems *The Lost Year's* presence at book's beginning, but accomplishes the near-impossible task of tying the disparate threads of the twenty-five stories that followed into something approaching a coherent whole. It's gripping, moving, morbidly funny – just ridiculous and awe-inspiring. And Evangelina Vigil-Piñón, whose translation I've long championed as masterful, is at her graceful, understated best in this section: never showy, hypersensitive to each speaker's voice, and with a knack for overcoming the pitfalls Rivera's more difficult shifts posed.

Each time I re-read the passage (and you know how often I've re-read it), I marvel at how seamlessly she and Rivera weave the speakers together, how subtly they make the nameless characters recognizable (a plot allusion here, a line of dialogue echoed there), and how fun their final creation ultimately is to read. It doesn't feel scattered, even though it obviously is: it feels like a perfectly-assembled puzzle, with the visible seams between the pieces doing nothing to damage the overall integrity of the picture.

In short, they make the insanely difficult appear insanely easy.

Which, of course, means I get to ask you to try your hand at doing the same.

From now on, all I have to do is to come here, in the dark, and think about them. And I have so much to think about and I'm missing so many years. I think today what I wanted to do was recall this past year. And that's just one year.

Some of you have spent more time on the various class blogs than others. (That's putting it mildly: returners finished thirteen to fourteen blogs last semester in addition to the eventual eight from this one.) But all of you have put in some time on it/them. Hopefully, the blog's been able to grow into what I wanted it to become: a seamless online extension of a thriving intellectual community, a place where bonds could be forged or deepened, a place where readers could discover the writers amongst their peers and marvel at the same insights that so often catch my eye. I wanted it to establish a challenging, thought-provoking, and friendly atmosphere: in my wildest dreams, I hoped the semi-weekly entries would provide the kinds of assignments students await with anticipation rather than with dread. (We're all allowed our dreams.)

With the semester coming to a close, I wanted to do the same thing with our community that Rivera does with his, albeit for different reasons (you are *not* oppressed, no matter how many assignments you imagine me passing out each week). I want you to take the pulse of the gathered commentariat, sift through the various entries from each week, and grab/capture the lines that made you smile, that moved you, that provoked thoughtful or complicated responses (even if you never expressed those responses in writing).

Steps

1. Head to the blog of your choice. Everyone is required to mine from the threads on *The Arch of the Sky 2012*, including:
 - a. *Making Islands Where No Island Should Go* (MIWNISG)
 - b. *Waiting to Panic, Vexed and Glorious as Ever* (WtP)
 - c. *All the Good With the Bad (I Think We Can Take It)* (AtGWtB)
 - d. *Our Heads Are Spinning Around* (OHASA)
 - e. *...But Not in This Lifetime* (BNiTL)
 - f. *Now You Lift Your Eyes to the Sun* (optional) (NYLYEttS)
 - g. *The Future Freaks Me Out (Our Last Days as Children)* (TFFMO)
 - h. *Picking Up Pieces (Somebody That I Used to Know)* (PUP)
 - i. *I Knew Prufrock Before He Got Famous* (IKPBHGF)

Interested students may also mine previous semesters' blogs, particularly if you posted on them last semester: you can find them at *The River 2011* and *Beneath the Stars 2011*.

2. As you mine the threads, copy/paste the lines or passages you like best from the comments you read. You are allowed to use material from the same entry multiple times; you may also use material from the same writer multiple times, even if you're pulling from different threads.
3. The shape your project takes will probably look something very similar to the italicized passage in *Under the House* (although you can skip the italics), with each quote separated by an ellipsis (...). One major change: as you go, cite each author using Chicago-style footnotes.
 - a. To leave a footnote in Word 2003, place your cursor immediately to the right of the comment's last character, click Insert → Reference → Footnote → Insert, then type the writer's first and last names (use a last initial if you don't know the last name) followed by the thread the comment appears in (use the abbreviations I listed above).
 - b. Provide a footnote for each comment, even if you're citing the same person again.
4. You do have some stylistic freedom with your formatting. If you don't feel like doing the Rivera-esque multi-page paragraph, you can organize the quotes differently. Surprise me.
5. Once you get to the end, please wrap things up with a thorough, reflective concluding section. Tell me why you selected the quotes (generally – "I tended to like writing that..."), highlight particular favorites (individually), and explain why you think your project "captures the pulse" of our classroom the way Rivera captured the pulse of his community. You may write this blog-style, of course – first-person perspective, contractions permitted, and so on.
6. Some odds and ends: You may quote yourself; you do **not** need quotation marks, unless you're quoting dialogue and the marks appear within the quote itself; you may write new material that hasn't appeared on the blog before and insert it into your project; and you should **not** quote me, famous people, songs, etc. The focus should be on the class community.
7. Once you finish, please submit your work to the appropriate Turnitin.com folder by **11:59pm** on **Friday, June 1st**. No hard copy will be necessary.

He immediately felt happy because, as he thought over what the woman had said, he realized that in reality he hadn't lost anything. He had made a discovery. To discover and rediscover and piece things together. This to this, that to that, all with all. That was it. That was everything. He was thrilled.