

Casiano R. Hamer

Justin Torres Response:

Introduction:

Justin Torres illustrates the animalistic quality of being powerless. The turmoil and chaos that brews internally as one turns the other cheek. In his short stories, “Dog Walking for a Wealthy Narcissist” and “Reverting to a Wild Side”, Torres explores the perspective of one who is pulled by the forces around him. In my life experience, this purgatory begs for a reaction, a bite back, which requires one to play by the rules created by the world they are surrounded by and to usurp it in very small doses. “There ain’t no shame in being a bitch, but, Lord, be a bitch that barks..” as Torres puts it.

In my response, I am exploring themes of sexual awakening, trauma, and contemplating the past. Themes that find traces in Torres’s work and in his life as I do in mine.

## *Chest*

I once told a girl that I wanted to try eyeliner. I never saw her again. I was there one night for the ambiance in her apartment and she had me over for the same reason. At age twelve, sometime after hardening my torso for an admirer, the Southern drawl of Ludacris echoed in my earbuds, “*want a lady in the street but a freak in the bed.*” I felt a warmth in my face, almost embarrassed that someone took the words out of my mouth.

I once told a girl that she had even bangs. By dawn, I headed back alone with my hand cupped against the chafe in my crotch, and the juice around my lips hardened against the East River gusts. At age ten, in the unfinished living room, my father forced my mother down to her seat. “It must have been the baby,” I thought. She knew not to provoke him.

I once told a girl that she could have me if she wanted to. I had said the same to others but I had never referred to the entirety of me. She replied to another request at a basement party. The butt of my can of beer met the wall and puke spread across the floor of the room I was squatting in. On the bus back to my grandfather’s guest room, I noticed how the fluorescent bulbs of the Lincoln Tunnel fluttered like a pearl necklace being pulled against the ceiling. They followed me from their place on the half bathroom mirror where my father told me that women want an even fight. “That is what they dream of in a relationship, only after the fact,” he said.

I have made efforts not to play his game. At nineteen I look for equilibrium at a boy's bar. I leave half hard from a phallic choke before I make a phone call. Again I am in someone's ambiance. Blonde hair, gold skin. Her place is organized in pastels like a Miami suburb. Again, I am chained in a room of my fantasy. She looks at me with short-sighted hunger. Her hair tickles my forehead as she climbs on top and a black river of sex runs through me. I devour it. This is my fair fight.