The Streetcar

Creative Arts Journal
Mississippi State University

Cover art: “Anchored Bay” by Lily Schiebelhut
(first place art submission)

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The Streetcar

Mississippi State's Creative Arts Journal

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"It is not expected of the picture that it will make itself humble in order to be forgiven; and the analogy between the art of the painter and the art of the novelist is, so far as I am able to see, complete. Their inspiration is the same, their process (allowing for the different quality of the vehicle) is the same, their success is the same. They may learn from each other, they may explain and sustain each other. Their cause is the same, and the honour of one is the honour of another."

Henry James, *The Art of Fiction*

Letter from the Editors:

Plans for what would eventually become *The Streetcar* first began in the spring of 2012. What began with a small group of four students would eventually grow into a staff of fourteen all working towards publishing the first-ever creative arts journal at Mississippi State University comprised fully of student work. Envisioning a work of collaboration between all forms of creative expression, both written and artistic, the staff worked to shape the vision planted in May of 2012 into a physical journal. We had hoped the idea would catch like wildfire among students; what actually happened was far beyond our wildest imagination.

With over two-hundred and fifty submissions from over one-hundred submitters, *The Streetcar* staff was overwhelmed with works from students spanning the disciplines. Shortly after we began the review process, it was clear that several recurring themes began to appear in the pieces we accepted. The most significant of which is the complexity of emotions that we, as young adults, feel towards life in the South. Pieces such as "Because we lived in a small town" and "Southern Fried Words" exhibit affection and nostalgia towards daily Southern life; it was a feeling with which each staff member could relate. However, other pieces deal with deeper elements of Southern society. Whether it is the questioning of gender roles, "Submerged" and "Spotted, Scarlett O'Hara Mourning Mammy," the examining of childhood traditions, "Pink Snow" and "Staying Afloat," or discovering a place for artists in our culture, "The Girl with the Viking Helmet" and "Why I Can't Major in Accounting," it was obvious that students were more than a little interested in challenging the accepted perception of Southern ideals. Much of the published artwork also exhibits similar concerns, such as the featured photography collection of Whitten Sabbatini. This direction of the first issue of *The Streetcar* was not accidental, but rather shaped by students in the submissions we received.

While founding a journal and completing its first issue is no easy task, we are more than happy with the finished product. What sits in your hands is a collection of work which we feel embodies the spirit of our student body, our campus, and our university as a whole. It is with great admiration of our student artists, unmatchable joy in seeing the journal in whole, and continuous thanks to our supporters that we present you with the first issue of *The Streetcar*.

Hannah Humphrey and Donald Brown, Editors-in-Chief

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Because We Lived in a Small Town

Catie Marie Martin

Because we lived in a small town

Because we lived in a small town
We knew too many nobodies
We danced with too few somebodies
We kissed too many passing-throughs

Because we lived in a small town
We snuck away to the same hollow trees
We slept in the same blades of grass
We woke to the same mellow illumination

Because we lived in a small town
I loved him
You loved him
She loved him
(He loved her)

Because we lived in a small town
We retreated to the same desperate
Places, and we
Congregated in our wallowing sorrows –
(Misery loves company)

Because we lived in a small town
We suckled on words
We made our diet of chewy fat
We became heavy with trivialities

And bumped our heads on the familiarity of the cabinets
And rubbed our knotty skulls raw with
Bubbly dreams.

Because we lived in a small town
We talked big
We thought small
We traveled little

Some of us left, but
Our bitterness will always remain in
    This
        small
            Town.

What of this Winter

Kenneth Jack Faught

What of this winter,
Where icy sheets of rain
& icicles splinter;
A numbing disdain.

A chilling wind blows,
Sweeping the cold along
& drifting ‘er it goes:
Whistling a wintry song.

The sky, a uniform gray,
Hides the sun’s delight
Behind the vast array
Of clouds, bound tight.

Days long become short,
Much like the breath
Of a fading, fighting effort;
Then settles death.

But rain feeds the current,
& God is yet in power.
For death is no accident
As winter’s but an hour.

So what of this Winter,
Our one relentless season:
Trying times at the center,
& repentance is the reason.

Love Poem to Failure

Katie Graham

After Sandra Beasley

You are a roller coaster.
The adrenaline rush when you begin
Does not erase the dead stillness that follows.

You are the cold chill that curls around my spine
As I utter the words “time of death.”
You are the tears that run down my pale cheeks
When they tell me the other driver did not make it.

You are the vodka that burns my throat.
The flame that licks my fingers.
When I wake from my dreams,
You are the cold sweat that nips my flushed face.

You are the noisy neighbors that I let keep me up all night.
And the headache I nurse the next day.
You are candy to a diabetic,
Sunlight to a mole.

And you will continue to wrap your arms around me
Even when I turn you out in the cold,
Without a kiss to keep you warm.

<3 Ache

Myke Rich

watch her fall deeper with each strum of the strings
scared to show true emotion for fear of the consequences that it may bring
Thinking to herself I see through these bulls*** guys selling dreams
but she holds onto every word as she rocks to the melody
Took a vow of celibacy to combat emotional irrelevancy
but now her backs against the wall as she fights urges to create memories she'll hate being able to recall
drawing closer to withdrawal creating a masterpiece of destruction
knowing if she lets her guard down then her hearts up for abduction
and it always ends up broken
How's that for consistency
Now every male she meets is secretly faced with this plan of contingency
So she retreats
because even the possibility of facing another emotional defeat just strengthens the parasitic bond between her heart and misery
and now the things that used to make her happy don't even pull a dimple
always buried under work trying to manipulate her mental
so aim to stimulate her temporal without being sinful so
when the conversation gets sensual all moves will be consensual
never needed to be provisional so ya pockets keep some residual
income but the outcome still remains the same
You'll get pushed further away the more her mind starts to stray
in class as she scribbles your name in her notebook

seeing herself fall and she gets a little shook
It's happening again
and there's not much that she can do
to keep from uttering those three words to the current dude
filling the void left by her daddy issues.

Finger Wigglers

Ethan Todd

Fingers dance over keys,
As leaves dance across the air
On a windy night in autumn.

Like the human body,
Legs support the body's foundation,
The beat, the feel, the rhythm.
Arms move the body's expression,
Their independence.
Give them the go. Light the fuse,
And they're off to work.

These cats addicted, like junkies,
To their instruments, their needles.
Mixolydian, dorian, pentatonic—
Drugs for their hands shaking in withdrawal,
Fingers hitting keys of air.

Bending, wailing, slapping, shredding—
They work their old instruments
Till they're rusted, bent, and worn
Their most valued possessions:

The saxophone, running at full speed,
Hums and revs, showing off his power
As it floors before the down beat.

The keys create a thunderstorm,
Referencing through its complicated arrangements.
Yet, beautiful patterns are at its disposal.

These pieces, with no value on the market,
Of bended metal and carved wood are
Not treated with concern or care,
Like a pair of old work boots,
Tapping a beat down an alley.

Mud

Duncan Dent

I walk outside,
After a heavy rain,
Thick like cheese.
Kneeling I grab some mud.
Run it through my fingers,
Gritty smooth.

This mud that forms the land.
You got to slog everywhere.
Trudging through the milkshake that is Mississippi.
Smelling the mud on the wind.
Hearing the mud in the music.

Mckinley Morganfield was born in this Mississippi,
But his legend sprang from the muddy waters,
Of the namesake river.
He was born in the Issaquena county mud
Or was it the slush of Rolling Fork town.
The original rolling stone.

On a dusty porch The blues man rocks his chair,
Rocks his chords
Through the thick night air.
He wails of sex and moans of bondage.
The sweet sweat flows freely from his brow.
His continuous song bellows and blisters.
His soul is on his face and fingers.

Saying as the poet says
“don’t move your head, don’t move your lips,
Don’t move nothing baby just shake your hips.”
What moves the masses, moves the soul.

Wailing on in his gravely voice
“I don’t want you to wash my clothes,
I don’t want you to keep our home,
I don’t want your money too,
I just want to make love to you!”

The same mud clings to different shoes.
Haunts the winds.
“I just want to make love to you!”

Unwoven

Ana V. West

I sit down on my bed,
suddenly weighted down with all the cells in my body.
My fingers, curled around the edge of the sheets,
tighten and relax slowly,
as if they're frightened of my falling
into the canyon below.
I swing my legs up onto the mattress
and slowly lay my head down,
creating a woven crater in my unsuspecting pillow.
I lift up my shirt and expose my chest,
running my fingers over the tiny, soft hairs
that cover my body.
I deftly undo the knots of thread
beneath my breast
that hold my skin together,
and open myself up like a secret compartment.
I carefully remove my ribs one by one,
and place them on my shelf.
I scoop out my heart
and place it next to my ear,
so that its rhythmic thuds might help me sleep.
I thread my skin back up and deflate into the sheets.
I reach down and detach my legs from my pelvis.
with swift unlocking twists.
I turn the latches on my eyelids,
protectively encasing my eyes.
I cross my arms over my chest
and drift off into places
where I might not need
such a cumbersome form.

Planting Paradise

Kylie Dennis

When I sleep I dream of us entwined
In the place where no love has been
And our hearts are engulfed by the grisly sea
And the envious eyes of men

At our backs lies the hatred of ages
And before us a desert of sand
But I'll empty the rain from my scars
If you scatter the seeds from your hand

Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence

Cameron Clarke

Mankind has always been concerned with extraterrestrial life, ranging from ancient times where myths have immortalized the idea of supernatural beings descending to Earth to mix among mortals all the way to our modern fears expressed in science fiction films like District 9 and Battle LA. Are these fears founded? Are we alone in the Universe? Which would be worse, to be all alone in the infinitude of stars or to be surrounded by potentially dangerous forces beyond our control? Luckily I am not the first person to consider this question and I will make sure to refer to the many authorities before me to discuss these questions.

First I would like to consider the ongoing search for extraterrestrial life in our galaxy, actively performed by many professional and amateur astronomers around the world. The Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence, better known as SETI, is run by a private, nonprofit organization called the SETI Institute, which is dedicated to scientific research, education and public outreach, according to www.seti.org. According to their website, "the mission of the SETI Institute is to explore, understand and explain the origin, nature and prevalence of life in the universe."

Now, many people immediately discredit anyone who takes the idea of intelligent aliens seriously. Admittedly, pretty much every claim of alien abductions and unidentified flying objects (UFOs) has been completely ungrounded and lacked even the beginnings of credible evidence. Rather, the argument for intelligent life existing in the universe is grounded in statistics and logical reasoning, instead of wild tales of abduction, vivisection and impregnation.

Frank Drake, a famous astronomer at Cornell, developed an equation to model the probable number of advanced, communicating extraterrestrial civilizations within the Milky Way Galaxy. Although there are several ways to calculate this, according to Carl Sagan's book Cosmos, the

Drake Equation is: N = N* * Fp * Ne * Fl * Fi * Fc * FL where N is the probable final number of communicable civilizations within the Milky Way, N* is the best estimate of the number of stars in the Milky Way, Fp is the fraction of these stars that have planetary systems, Ne is the average number of planets per planetary system suitable for life in some way, Fl is the fraction of those suitable planets where life actually arises, Fi is the fraction of life bearing planets which give rise to intelligent life, Fc is the fraction of intelligent civilizations that are able to communicate with each other, and lastly FL is the fraction of the planet's lifetime that a communicable civilization is alive.

According to an email interview with Mississippi State Assistant Professor of Astronomy, Dr. Angelle Tanner, some acceptable educated estimates are an Fp of .5, and an Ne of about 3 planets per solar system. Dr. Tanner warns that the variables get complicated and that the Kepler Space Telescope program that she is working with is currently trying to determine these very numbers.

We should consider that many earthlike planets may be outside of the habitable zone judging from our own solar system, and they could still harbor life due to other sources of energy or different chemical interactions. Therefore, a group of probable values, which are under research and debate, are N* = Three Hundred Billion stars, Fp = 1/2, Ne = 3 planets, Fl = 1/100, Fi = 1/100, Fc = 1/100, and FL = 1/1,000 (assuming that one out of a thousand civilizations are either new or have never destroyed themselves violently).

Multiplying these particular numbers together yields a possible number of civilizations in the galaxy of about 450. Obviously the lower boundary for this number is one, because we exist, but it could also be the case that the probability for all the correct factors to come into play for the development of life is much harder than we think, such that life only appears once in in every few galaxies. Regardless of the range of numbers, from thousands per galaxy to one in every thousand galaxies, it should be apparent that due

to the sheer size of the universe (which contains billions of galaxies, each with billions of stars etc.) it is not unlikely that there are aliens somewhere out there. With such immense scale it seems more remarkable that we would be alone than if we were completely surrounded by alien life.

The Drake Equation is not meant to be taken as an empirical statement about the exact number of aliens in the galaxy, it is really just useful to get into the ballpark and help us understand the scale of our galaxy and what we should expect to be out there. Regardless of the improbability of advanced communicating civilizations existing, if even one besides us exists anywhere in the entire universe there are immediate philosophical and religious implications. These implications matter from the perspective that we are not alone as sentient beings on just one lone planet. We can decide that we are not alone either from the assumption of the development of life elsewhere from the Drake Equation, or because of a future empirical discovery of life somewhere else.

From a philosophical perspective, if you hold to any theory of materialism or physicalism then it will not really matter if there is life somewhere else, but what I want to talk about are the implications from dualism, the idea which, according to Robert Solomon's Introducing Philosophy Tenth Edition textbook, says there are two fundamental essences in the world. In Dualism there is the physical realm, ruled by physics and dealing with objects which can be fully understood by empirical methodology, and there is the realm of the soul or mind which is independent to some degree from the physical world.

There are varying degrees of dualism, some of which will not care if aliens have souls. One variety of dualism states that the realm of the mind (what we might call conscious perception or even the soul) is a product of the two aspects of every object in the universe, the physical and the mental. This dual aspect theory could either claim the whole universe is composed of both a physical and a mental part

which both interact causally somehow, or it could say the mental world is subordinated to the physical and is not able to act as independently as we would like to imagine but is the product of physical interactions and brain chemistry. In either case there could be some conflict over extraterrestrial intelligence or non-human conscious activity, but only to the same degree that our human souls are not fully understood.

There is also the idea of mental phenomenon being a result of complexity in a physical system. A good example for this is from Isaac Asimov in his book Foundation's Edge where he proposes the theory that all physical objects having some amount of mental existence governed by new laws of physics. Asimov's mentalic existence is determined by the complexity of a system, where doors and walls are capable of the minutest thoughts of linearity and sturdiness, while complex humans and robots are capable of monumental feats of telepathy and mind control.

The type of dualism which is probably most touchy on this subject is the variety ascribed to by Christianity, which approximates a theory called causal-interactive dualism. This says that the mental and physical worlds are very different, not even two aspects of the same substance necessarily, but yet they are able to interact so the soul is in control of the body. Therefore, in the case of religion, any sinful action performed by the soul-body system is as eternal as the soul is. Philosophically there is not too much at stake by saying aliens could be equal to humans; ideally any issues we would have with them are just the same as we currently have regarding our own souls or non-physical minds. Religion though is another important factor, as the details move past philosophy and into the realm of faith, sin, and redemptive divine intervention on our planet. Having covered the cosmological argument for extraterrestrial life and having addressed at face value some philosophical concerns, I would like to undertake an examination of the implications for Christianity. I am sorry if you really do not care, but this is where religion gets interesting.

From a Christian perspective I think that it is fine to simply say God only created mankind with souls, or even He only created life on Earth out of all places, but the moment we find real alien life or intelligences any argument for the uniqueness of man falls away. How would you like it if some Vogons or Twi'leks landed here and started to tell us they alone possess any sort of metaphysical soul? If and when we make contact this is sort of what we would be doing if we totally ruled out any spiritual or religious existence for aliens and yet they existed.

One could just say that we are alone in the universe, meaning your religion does not need to change to fit a universal perspective, but I would be sure you have a backup plan in case some intergalactic monks come knocking on Earth's door to inform us about our infidelity and their religion's superiority to ours.

In The Bible, Adam is placed on Earth in very recent history, with no mention of any other life forms elsewhere. In addition to the locality of humanity's fallenness on Earth there is the claim of the fallenness of the entire universe as a result of Adam's sin. This is a point of contention, and one view says the universe itself is not inherently fallen but it is only the humans who interact with it that are fallen, and another view says the entire universe has been cursed and altered drastically from its original form as a result of the fall. Now this theological question becomes central when aliens show up. If those aliens are also souled beings like we are, then how could they have been cursed as a result of Adam's sin? Hopefully Adam only represented humans, but at the same time how could the whole universe not be fallen if even one of all the civilizations were fallen? Would not interaction between sinful and sinless races be just about impossible without something terrible happening?

This is what C. S. Lewis addresses in his essay "Religion and Rocketry" where he considers several perspectives. He suggests that aliens could be completely unblemished, and so we should avoid contact lest we pervert them. In an

other book, Out of the Silent Planet, he covers the potentiality for other races to have their own salvation system, as the Martians are ok with naturally occurring death, seeing it as natural rather than some terrible experience to be avoided. Lewis's sequel, Perelandra, examines closely the ability for a new race to not fall in the first place as well as the precarious danger of our meddling with such a race.

So, assuming that every race gets its own chance to fall or to pass the test, if they are fallen then does the atonement of Christ on the cross count for them too, is it even possible to not fall, and did He die for them on their world as he did here, or is it our unique responsibility to tell the universe about Christ? As I said before, a reasonable sounding option to me is this: the universe itself is not fallen; the only attribute of man which really changed after the fall of Adam was the initiation of the death of the soul as a consequence of rebellion, be this due to some earlier cosmic fall or not I do not know. In this setting it would make sense for each souled race to have its own Adam figure and if they fell then later to receive a functionally identical embodiment of God the Son to bring knowledge of his singular act of redemption of all souls.

Now it could also be the case that there was some sort of proto-Adam, before the universe as we know it either developed or was caused to exist and this proto-Adam represented all sentient beings and when he fell caused all to fall and did cause the entire universe to fall, initiating death, pain, etc. If this were the case Jesus would probably come to every single civilization incarnate into its flesh to bring the news of his intercession for the punishment of the soul in his own spiritual death. I find it hard to believe that we alone of all civilizations would be charged with spreading the good news to all worlds.

What really matters in the end is not what strange idea you have about the way salvation works for aliens, but rather what is most important is God's sovereignty over everything, regardless of how strange it may seem. The uni-

verse is a large place and could hold many independent races of aliens at the same time, and God can handle situation that just as well as just handling us all by ourselves.

Finally, I would like to quote Astrophysicist Neil DeGrasse Tyson: “The discovery of extraterrestrial intelligence, if and when it happens, will impart a change in human self-perception that may be impossible to anticipate.” My hope is for us to gain a cosmic perspective which shifts humanity’s focus away from our current petty arguments and towards survival as a whole in the vast and likely dangerous universe. Until we make first contact we must wait, but while we wait we can invest in astronomy and astrobiology, actively pursue philosophy, and continue sending out probes and rovers into our own solar system to discern the possibility and probability of alien life so that we will not be taken by surprise if and when aliens show up on our doorstep, or even better, when we show up on theirs.

The Red Confetti Envies

Jessica Ferrebee

"Now the media are gearing up for election night, the finale of the year's biggest story."
-Brian Stelter, The New York Times

Metallic blue confetti fall
and glide around the room.
The tiny spectacles
catch lights and project
rainbows. Colors fly.
Each reaches to another,
flashing partners-in-crime.

The red confetti is jealous.
They're held in bags, in nets.
You poor red ribbons,
the blue taunt, watch us soar.

The blue confetti jive and swing.
They smile brightly for cameras while
the red ribbons are motionless.

A cry of "Red" begins
their drop,
set free by an outraged fan.
The red confetti boogie
downward.
Workers panic,
throwing sacks full of white ribbons by hand.
It was all planned, they lie,
wiping their sweaty faces.

The white paper strips
don't know nor care
why they fall, but they
work the runway
like it's 1989.

When the room is empty,
the floor is littered with
red, white, and blue confetti.
They are immobile together,
washed up and elderly.
Now they all will be forgotten.

RILEY REID
From The Outside

My curiosity into the lives of others has been one that has continued on from my childhood. This transcending question about identity gave roots to this series, which investigates the interactions of others specifically in domestic environments. Capturing the lives of others through a photograph allows me to study, uninterrupted, the details of others that for so long have fascinated me. The photograph becomes an intimate record, an "instant history," an artifact, of the lives lived; the moment made eternal.

The home is the expression of who we are as individuals, and in the home we are allowed to struggle, to fight, to love and to rest. The home is an extension of the self and when revealed to the eye of a camera can invite viewers to glimpse into the way that others exist. Yet, for this body of work, exploring the home has given way to a new understanding of an overall lack of privacy that we have, even within the place we believe is the most concealed. The moments captured in the daily lives of others from the exterior reveal vulnerability and openness; qualities that the home naturally allows.

The sanctuary of the home finds within it the paraphernalia of the domestic, including lamps, chairs, books, flora, and pets. I was frequently caught off guard by the similarities of the scenes that I was photographing. While home gives reference to a private identity, it becomes the public stage in which we live out our lives.

"Swiss Guard," Ben Bailey

"Surprise! Sprinkles," Lilly Scheilbelhut

"Untitled," Sloan Chesney

“Barn and wheat field,” Sloan Chesney

"Reductive Still Life in Charcoal," Eleanor Bailey

Whitten Sabbatini
Something Southern

This series of photographs, Something Southern, is deeply rooted in the themes of identity and place. As an outsider, a privileged, middle class Caucasian, I'm examining the lives of African Americans inhabiting a similar, but completely different world other than my own in the rural South. The rural South is a place still haunted by, and oppressed with segregation. A place where, often times, African Americans are viewed as dangerous or pitiful. This body of work is my acknowledgment and appreciation for the other race.

In Susan Sontag's book, "On Photography," she says about Diane Arbus's work about freaks, "There was a thrill of having won their confidence, of not being afraid of them, of having mastered one's aversion." I, too, feel this when searching for, and photographing these African American subjects. This search for, and interest in these people, is my attempt at denying my on naivety, undermining my sense of being privileged, and is my way of escaping what is "safe."

This work is not about me, but rather, the relationships formed between myself and my unexpected subjects. Within these photographs, I want the viewer to consider my subject's vulnerability to lending themselves to the photographer. By acknowledging the camera and posing for the photographer, my subjects actively participate in this act of being photographed, revealing the relationship between photographer and subject.

CHAPS

DINOSAURS
RESCUE

“Lydia in Loge Wearing a Pearl Necklace by Mary Cassatt,” Eleanor Bailey

"It's Only Life," Eleanor Bailey

"Vertical Field," Sloan Chesney

"Harold from New York City," Paul Prudhomme

"The Reader," Eleanor Bailey

Wild Life Prints

Photography by Jackson Donald

Whoever knew that the classroom doodles of Mississippi State students Paul Prudhomme and Mark Slawson could build the foundations of a business endeavor? Sheltered by a backyard shop, Paul and Mark created Wild Life Prints, a screen printing press and creative outlet allowing them to put their designs on the clothing of their friends. The Streetcar visited their shop to ask them a few questions.

Streetcar: The name, Wild Life Prints--where did that come from? And is Wild Life Prints just the two of you?

Paul: Yeah it's just us.
Mark: I really don't know, I just was sitting in bed one day and thought of it. We want a childhood nostalgia kind of feel. You know, going outdoors. Wildlife. And then we made it two separate words.
Paul: There's really no sentimental story behind it. I wish there were.
Mark: I said, "Hey Paul, what do you think about the name Wild Life?" And he was like, "Aww hell yeah."

SC: So, how did y'all first get the idea of screen-printing? Were you inspired by someone you know?

Paul: So, I was home for a year from school, and my brother was home, and he just cannot stay still. He has to be doing a project, working on something. So he said, "All right, we're going to get all this stuff and I'm going to teach you how to screen-print." We never did it. My dad shut it down. The summer that me and Mark started to decide on doing this, my brother was a big cheerleader. And he showed us how the process worked and made us understand for real. And I always liked Hatch Show Print, a print shop in Nashville. They're really interesting and committed to the old way of doing things. Like, nobody knows how to do this anymore. Everybody relies on this big computer thing to shoot ink onto a shirt.

Mark: I think me and Paul both care more about the process rather than the end result. Every shirt is different because the process is so inconsistent. I like that and I think Paul does too. It's more about getting there than actually being there.

SC: Do y'all both do the designs?

Paul: Yeah, it's pretty much half and half.

SC: So it's like a team?

Mark: I mean it's all personal designs. Like that's not like a collaborated work, that's Paul's. The only thing we've collaborated on is our logo.
Paul: Yeah. And it's not like, "Aw I sold some slingshots" [one of the designs]. When it's out there, it's Wild Life's. We don't care who sells the most. But I think coming up with them is the funnest thing.
Mark: Because the first time you print your designs is definitely the best feeling.
Paul: Yeah, I get excited about seeing things transfer onto something.

SC: So where did the idea to start screen-printing on clothes come from?

Mark: I think at first we both wanted to do prints more than t-shirts, but we realized that you have to do multiple colors to make a print look cool and it's harder to do that. This just fell into our lap because people would buy shirts and it was easier actually to do the shirts than to do the prints.
Paul: We would have a lot of line drawings and stuff from our notebooks, and we just thought, "I would like to wear this."

SC: When did y'all begin to get the gears rolling? How long has it taken to perfect the process?

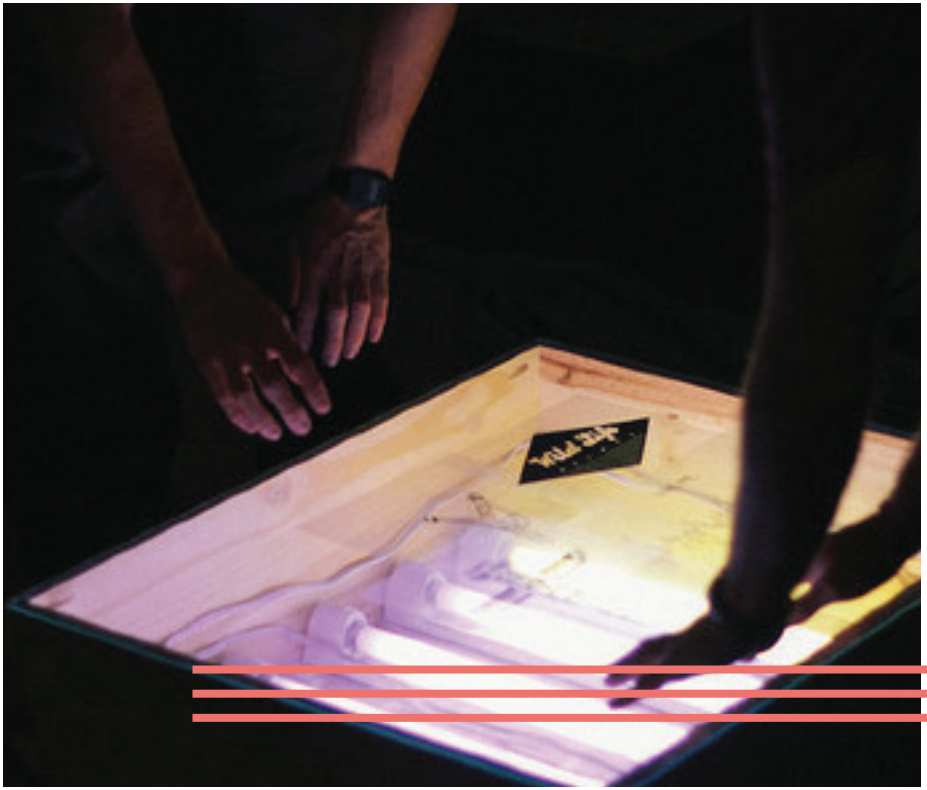
Mark: Last summer is whenever we started making designs and trying to print.
Paul: But the first successful t-shirt print was probably the middle of last semester. It was just a Hanes t-shirt, and when it turned out nice, we said, "Yeah we've got to figure out how to do that again." And then we would make fifty shirts at a time and they would all sell. Now we've got a website: wlprints.com

SC: Looking at your designs, it's clear that y'all have developed a style.

Mark: We try to still make it look pretty wonky.
Paul: It's all about nostalgia, and boy scout camp, and things like that.
Mark: As manly as a little boy can be.
Paul: Yeah. Just things that you can remember. Like totem poles and a Cherokee… burial ground place… but yeah, stuff like that. Just manly kid stuff.

SC: Ok. Manly kid stuff.

Mark: Let's say that's off the record.
Paul: No, that's definitely on the record.



"Tiara with the cool hair," Paul Prudhomme

"Boy," Lingling Hu

“Flowers,” Sloan Chesney

"Fusion," Claire Mosley

THE DREAM OF THE 90'S IS ALIVE IN 2013 (AND IT'S BAGGY)

JAMES LOGAN

If someone told me a year ago that music from the early 90s would not only be relevant in 2013, but that it would also be poised to make a comeback, I would call them mad. After all, the 90s are not remembered particularly as being an influential decade with a unique identity like the 70s and 80s. Yet, here we are, 23 years after 1990, and the influence of 90s music is resurfacing in indie rock.

I'm not talking about the grunge and alternative rock that was popular in America. I'm talking about the acid house, psychedelia fusion that came to be known as the genre, Baggy. Bands like the Stone Roses and Happy Mondays were the life of dance floors across Europe. Clubs were filled with a pulsing bass which served as the thread that weaved individuals together into one giant crowd of perpetual motion. The scene was known as Madchester.

Madchester is a play on the name Manchester, the home of the movement. Much in the same way that hip-hop is now considered an entire culture with its own fashion, art, language and music, so was the same for Madchester. The culture evolved out of the

restrictive, anxious punk rock era of the early 80s. Instead of wearing tight clothes, people started wearing clothes that were comfortable to dance in; the baggier the better. Flared jeans and baggy shirts become very popular. The fashion represented the more relaxed sound of the music. Hence why the popular genre that emerged from this culture is called Baggy.

The genre never reached the heights in the United States that it did in Europe, and even in Europe its success was short lived. A handful of bands created Baggy, then several bands tried to capitalize on the success of the genre. What followed were sloppy attempts to emulate the unique sound that was made popular by band like the Stone Roses and Happy Mondays. Unfortunately, the genre, when remembered, is remembered for the pitiful attempts of the bands that stumbled in the footsteps of the creators of Baggy. The genre was left to die as the forgotten cheesy mock-up of varied musical influences. However, Baggy is finding new life in 2013.

Many, including me, have never heard of the genre or the bands associated with it. Not surprising that when Coachella, a premiere U.S music festival, announced that Stone Roses, who have not toured since 1996, would be headlining the event this year, people had no idea who they were talking about. The announcement met backlash from fans of the festival. Keep in mind that Coachella is famous for having the best performers. It is, after all, the festival that resurrected Tupac with a hologram performance just last year.

Possibly as a response to the backlash, The Flaming Lips, frequent Coachella line-up veterans, revealed that they would be recording a cover of Stone Roses' entire first album. The Flaming Lips have recorded covers of entire albums before, but the timing of this cover album seems more than coincidental, if not outright tactful. Maybe it is an attempt to get younger generations familiar with Stone Roses and Baggy music. Or, maybe they realize what I have since started to believe, that the conditions for Baggy to make a comeback are perfect.

All it took for me was to hear Australian duo Jagwar Ma's first single of 2013, "The Throw." I had never heard of Jagwar Ma before, but I was so blown away by "The Throw" that I had to learn more. The track sounded so progressive to me, mixing several genres that I listen to into one incredibly danceable rock song. After some research, I learned that the song was not technically progressive at all. In fact, it was a throw back to a much older sound that I now know as Baggy. From the thumping house-y bass, to lead singer Ga-

briel Winterfield's voice that is reminecent of 70s funk, "The Throw" captures the aesthetic of Baggy perfectly. For an idea of the sound, imagine a dance remix of a Blind Melon song. It sounds crazy but the result is fantastic.

Currently, "The Throw" is Jagwar Ma's most popular song. In the two months that the song has been on the band's SoundCloud page it has been listened to over 160,000 times. The next most listened to song, "What Love," on Jagwar Ma's page has been listed on the site for a year and has just over 26,000 listens. The baggy-ness of "The Throw" is obviously more appealing to listeners than Jagwar Ma's previous songs that never achieve the same level of energy. It is a sound that fits perfectly into the current make-up of popular music.

College radio is currently split between two general sounds: indie rock and dance music. Baggy is the perfect blend of the two, which is what makes 2013 perfect for Baggy to make a comeback. Even the major festival line-ups of 2013 are mostly guitar rock and electronic dance music with band such as Major Lazer, Calvin Harris, Skrillex, Mumford and Sons, Gary Clark Jr., and Wilco all playing to the same audiences. Baggy is the middle ground that can appeal to both sides of the spectrum and transcend genre barriers.

Baggy music is the perfect fit for night clubs and concert fields alike. The genre bending sound should appeal to fans of, arguably, the two most popular forms of music at the moment. Baggy has all the elements of a pop or rock song, mixed with the energy and rhythm of a hip-hop or electronic dance song. These elements come together into one endlessly enjoyable sound that should not be ignored.

"Identity," Eleanor Bailey

"Black and White arches," Sarah Wiley

My Brother's Dopplegangers

Jessica Ferrebee

My kid brother's doubles are everywhere,
in streets, drab diners, and cafes in town.
High German noses and dirty blonde hair
pull interest to surface, then back to drown.
They chomp on crackers and sip English tea.
He grins, a baboon, excessive clowning.
Snotty retorts versus ignorant glee,
Doppelgangers nod, serious frowning.
I stop and stare, wishing that those doubles
brush bangs back, compulsively avoid dread.
Lift their pretty heads as laughter bubbles
like foam. Confidence, mother always said.
But odd twins are like faded tea leaves, gloom
and omen at the bottom of the fume.

The Undying Heart

Benjamin Tillman

As daylight fades into night
So does his heart become overrun by dark
The dark that tries to take away his will to fight
But he must keep searching for that tiny little spark

Light begins to mix with the dark now
Lack of sleep fogging his mind's eye
Trying to keep his steady vow
Not knowing if her heart will be nearby

Every corner turned takes him one step closer
Now no stone can be left unturned
Hoping each one may hold that four-leaf clover
To create one heart from two, forever conjoined

With this my heart may become brand new
As these two once dying hearts join together
To be the one I never knew
Now I know this love will last forever

Spotted, Scarlett O'Hara Mourning Mammy

Jessica Ferrebee

In Henry's
Laundromat, dingy machines
are bursting and whirling.
Suds fight,
clamping their pearly whites
into deep orange stains like
skinks pinching fingertips.

That's when I see her.
Scarlett O'Hara,
poised on top of a dryer,
feet dangling above
the checkered floorboard.
She's folding tailcoats.
Instructions are softly whispered
in a slight southern drawl.
Fold in half.
Press.
Fold over.
Press.

Slanted eyes and
hushed murmurs
accompany the
wish-wash-wish-wash
of the cycles.

for the next load.

Her curls bounce and her
frock sways as she catapults
balls of disintegrating
Antebellum mementos.

The Apple Orchard

Amy Kraft

It is considered bad luck to leave one apple on the tree after the rest have been picked. They say if you leave just a single apple on the tree, a death will occur the following spring.

The canopy of leaves rustles
as the old man plods along beneath the apples,
drinking in the shade's coolness.
The man's stooped back
reflects the curve of the boughs,
his hands as gnarled as the knotted tree bark.

The cleansing, anchoring scent of the fresh, strapping apples
bowing from the branches
mixes oddly with the pungency of the fruit
lying in the grass.
The farther the man walks among the trees,
the more he remembers.

He can see them, young and crisp,
between the arching rows,
the aisle of spring's cathedral.
He can see the apples, the only audience,
peeking from behind veined green leaves
like nosy neighbors peering over a fence.
He can see himself plucking two,
offering one to her, tossing the other in the air,
catching it and relishing
the hollow slap of the fruit against his sturdy hand.

He finally stops at the tree.
He leans the worn wooden ladder
he has been carrying beneath his arm
among the limbs.
Then he climbs, and when he finishes climbing,
he picks apple after apple.
He has no basket, and instead
lets the fruit hit the ground,
taking grim compensation in the knowledge
that it will perish like everything else.

KARDOS

Dr. Michael Kardos is assistant professor of English and co-director of the creative writing program at Mississippi State University and author of *The Three-Day Affair*, published in September 2012. In the book, three friends and Princeton alums on their annual reunion are at a convenience store when one of them attempts to rob the store, throws a woman into their car, and barks, "Drive!" The book was reviewed in *The Sunday New York Times Book Review* and was named one of the best books of 2012 by *Esquire* magazine. Kardos is also the author of the award-winning collection of short stories *One Last Good Time*. He sat down for a Q &A session in his office-in-exile at Howell Hall on Wednesday, March 27.

Streetcar: What was your inspiration for The Three-Day Affair? I've heard you mention a newspaper article before.

Kardos: There was a newspaper article about a bus driver in Washington D.C. driving a bus full of kids. There were problems in his own life that he was caught up thinking about, and he missed a stop and left the kid on the bus. He was so worried about having missed that stop that he missed the next stop, and then he was worried about that and after a while he realized he could get in a lot of trouble for missing these stops, so he just kept going. So without exactly intending to, he had hijacked his own school bus.

That was in the first couple paragraphs of this newspaper article, and as soon as I read that, I stopped. I didn't want to read anymore, because I wanted to invent the rest.

The short story I wrote was just that, a guy driving a school bus who gets himself into lots of trouble because he doesn't stop the bus.

After I was done working on the story, I realized I wasn't done thinking about that idea: a guy who is not a bad guy, exactly—who if he had time to think through his actions would probably do the right thing, but because he's driving and every minute he delays making a decision, he gets him into deeper and deeper trouble. The guy doesn't have the time to make the right decision, and the act of thinking about it just gets him into deeper trouble.

SC: So there was a story that proceeded with the idea?

Kardos: The story became the title story of the collection [One Last Good Time] but the idea kept coming back.

SC: There's the idea that stemmed from the newspaper article, then the idea of the college friends getting together each year; did those two ideas start out separately and come together for the book?

Kardos: I think so. You know, I was out of college for a long time when I started working on the book, and for several years some friends had gotten together annually; then you start playing games with yourself—"What if this? What if that? What if that?" You knew each other very well for a specific period of time in college and then you all go off and do your own thing. You don't know each other as well as you did. You don't know if anyone has this whole other thing going on.

SC: How long did it take you to write the book?

Kardos: It took about 2 years of full time work over a 3-year period, because I was also teaching and writing short stories.

It took 2 years, and yet the idea for the novel began with the short story. In a way, I don't know how long it took, because the story got written and then a couple years later the central question was still floating around in my mind, and it became the novel.

SC: Was there a time when you were writing and you weren't a teacher?

Kardos: Yes, before I went back to grad school, and it didn't go very well. I didn't know any other writers, I had never taken any [creative writing] classes, and I was bumping up against the limits of what I could do myself.
SC: When you're writing a novel and short story, is there a difference in the way you write them or is it simply the mental designation that this is a novel and this is a short story?

Kardos: The stakes are higher in a novel, because with a short story the worst thing that happens is it doesn't work and you can chalk it up to having learned something. But with a novel you've spent a few years on it. It's harder to chalk up a failed novel. Along with that, I don't know exactly how I write novels because I've published only one and I'm working on a second one. But I do think a bit more planning has gone into this one ahead of time, because I want to know that I'm building on something firm. So it's not like I'm outlining everything, but I do have a few page outline and am continually tweaking it and looking back on it, making sure there's a solid foundation.

With a short story, I don't need a foundation. I can start wherever and hope to luck my way into the story even if it means deleting some pages, getting rid of lines; I feel more comfortable not knowing where I'm going in a story. But with a novel I'd be afraid to do that, spending years and writing thousands of pages when there's nothing there. So I do more planning ahead of time.

SC: Do you have a specific process you follow when you write?

Kardos: My ideal is to work in the morning for three or four hours. I've got my cup of coffee and everything is wonderful and silent. But in reality I have a two-year-old at home. My ideal is to spend a big chunk of time on whatever it is I'm writing as often as I can, because it's hard to come back to something once you stop; if you run every day and you skip a couple days it's a lot harder to resume than it is to keep doing it every day.

SC: When you write, do you have a specific intention when you sit down to work or do you just sit down and begin writing?

Kardos: For me it works best if I know what I'm doing when I'm going in. Hemingway said that he always stopped for the day when he knew exactly what he was going to write next. So when he came back to work the next day, he could just start—he didn't have to think about what to do. I definitely work better when even away from the computer I have thought about something I could be working on that day so I can sit down and start working on it rather than turning the monitor on and saying to myself, what should I do? But sometimes that happens, too.

SC: Is it difficult teaching and writing?

Kardos: It is difficult only in that they both take time and they both have to get done. That said, they complement each other really well. Other than the fact that it's busy, neither one of them is as busy as having a two year old. That's the hardest balancing act.

SC: I've heard some writers write in particular places, like their kitchen; do you write in a specific place?

Kardos: Wherever I happen to be. I can't write to music, so that's one thing. I do best in silence, whether that's here in an office or at home or anywhere, as long as it's kind of quiet.

SC: Are you constantly reading fiction while you are writing?

Kardos: I go through spurts of it. I'll go through big reading phases and then take a break, not consciously [though]; it's just finding time.

This past weekend, I got so much reading done on the plane and in the airport, then I probably won't read as much the next few days because I have classes and things like that. I'm usually reading something.

SC: Do you feel like what you're writing is colored by what your read?

Kardos: It's usually the other way around; if I'm writing I'll choose what I read based on that. Sometimes I'll read something kind of similar to what I'm writing to see how other people do it, and other times I won't want to be overly influenced. But there's not really any negative side to reading something as far as that's concerned.

SC: The Three-Day Affair could be called a thriller though you never intended to write in a particular genre, right?

Kardos: I wrote the novel I wanted to write, which was the novel I wanted to read. The designation of it being a thriller, that happened at the publishing stage where the publisher that bought the novel is the crime imprint of a larger literary publishing company.

It doesn't really affect anything as far as the writing or editing, but it does affect things like the cover. And its being called a thriller gives us more opportunities to get it reviewed—crime magazines and blogs as well as traditional newspapers.

SC: You said you read the first few paragraphs of the article and then stopped, because you didn't want to know what happened next. Was it difficult for you as a writer to fill in those blanks of what happens when you wrote the story?

Kardos: That's hard work, actually. That story was really weird in that I wrote the first paragraph, and in that paragraph a body is found. I really liked the paragraph, and I spent the next year and a half trying to figure out how the heck did the body get there? It was a body found on the beach, and I literally got stuck one paragraph in for over a year. I was writing other things at the time, but every so often I would open up that file and read the paragraph and say, "Yep, still like it. Nope, still have no idea how the body got there." And then one day I figured out how the body got there. So it was hard to figure that out; the first paragraph developed for years, the writing went a lot quicker at the end, but it took a long time.

SC: Are there any writers in particular that you cite as influences?

Kardos: There are so many. The ones who come to mind immediately are Tim O'Brien; Tobias Wolff; Diana Abu-Jaber, her novel Origin is terrific. Toni Morrison…can I trace her influence in my work? I don't know—but it's in there somewhere.

This book I'm reading right now by Jess Walters, Beautiful Ruins—it's so good. I'll cite it as an influence on the next book I write.

SC: When you are working on a novel, do you also work deliberately on short stories?

Definitely. Sometimes I need a break, sometimes I'm stuck, sometimes I get asked to write a story for a particular magazine. I will definitely be working [on other things] while writing a novel.

Submerged

Amy Kraft

Again and again and again
dipping into the callous water,
the small square sink in the box-like kitchen,
hands still young, still smooth, still unblemished,
but for the lacing of wrinkles
on her pallid palms.
Her reaching fingertips are slippery
on the plates, the bowls, the tiny spoons, losing grip.
The dishes are reborn, purified on a formica altar
by a disillusioned priestess.
There is a window, though its glass is clear and not stained,
that looks into the yard, but but she rarely looks up.
What's the point, when all there is to see
is a white fence spiking up from the dirt
like monstrous teeth rising from green gums.
Instead, she stares at the sink, her hands
disappearing in the suds that are like foam
washed onto beaches,
at first fluffy and white, but
then sullied by the silt,
the children, and tourists.
She can see herself there and she wonders:
Why the allure of islands?
Each is roughly the same,
all sand and salt and sun
that shines until it burns,
coarsening the skin to inoculation.
Islands are ubiquitous and secluded
by waves, sinking slowly,
no cathedrals or monuments
to distinguish their surfaces. Just
shore after shore after shore.

caymans bahamas keys
women mothers wives
Now she can see her daughter there too,
slathered in sunscreen and building
a castle from crumbling sand.
It is sure to fall, the mother thinks,
what with the baking sun
and the too-high turrets, but the
child is confident
while the mother lies still and burns.
But back at her altar, where the dishes
have long been baptized, is where she stands.
The daughter is there too, and mother wonders
how long she will remain
the way she has long forgotten.
The child looks towards the mother,
smiling, her face brightened by the
sun in an endless blue sky.
The mother looks towards the child,
blinking, her face shadowed by the
too-bright sun.

Stalkers Prefer Sestinas

Mary Chase Breedlove

Memphis, Nashville, Birmingham, and Atlanta
have each held my heart in their hands.
I locked eyes with him in the Nashville Airport; now I live
on the interstate. I begin in Memphis, where my heart started to beat —
then meet Birmingham for the sake of I-459 and relief
from the state of Alabama. Two hours in, I've made good time.

My chest thumps and echoes in my throat when I meet the time
change. Only 61 miles to Atlanta.
The excitement peaks when I see the skyline, but relief
fades to terror. Knuckles white, neck tense, hands
sweating. I always think I'll finally beat
the sea of angry drivers on Ponce, and don't. Mercifully, I live.

John Mayer asks the right questions on the radio: Am I living
it right? Why, Georgia indeed. But this time
I think I am doing it right. He's perfect. He certainly beats
the last one. Or three. Tracking him all the way to Atlanta
has been exhausting. I watched him in the airport that day — I watched his hands
holding the boarding pass and lungs rise and fall with relief

that Flight 353 to Hartsfield-Jackson was on time. The relief
for me was I remained unseen. That look was all I needed. We will marry and live
happily ever after, I'm sure of it. He'll put a ring on my hand,
he just doesn't know yet. He can't know yet, it's not the right time.
Now that I've mused about our first date, I park my car and
greet Atlanta,

I'll walk down Tenth Street until I find him. Maybe I'll beat
the crowd of Techies swarming the street. You can't beat
a spring day in Atlanta — they're all out to play. I'm filled with relief
when my eyes find his car. Yes, that must be his. It's suitable for Atlanta
traffic. Red body, strong tires, seatbelts. It keeps him safe so we can live
together forever. That's all that really matters. I remember the time
I watched him lift his suitcase. He was so careful and deliberate with his hands

and I knew then — he is the man of my dreams. Now I watch his hands
open the car door and climb in. The sun beats
down on my back. It's time to meet your future wife, darling. It's time.
He tries to start his car. Tries again. And again. What relief
to see he needs my assistance. It's meant to be. I'll live
as the hero in our love story that blossomed in Atlanta.

I walk towards him — happy, eager, and ready to start our lives in Atlanta.
We make eye contact for the second time, and he sees how I live
for him now. He looks shy, but soon he'll feel relief.

Staying Afloat

Donald Brown

Down in the South, there are certain things you have to like. One of them is fried fish. I remember the first time I took a trip with my mother to Buddy's Fish Market. I couldn't have been more than five, but I'll never forget it. It was a little run down wooden shack. The parking lot was gravel, and much too small for all of the customers it attracted on the weekends. Many people just parked in the grass. It was raining the Saturday I first went, and everything was a mess. The gravel had mixed with the rain. It was all rocky red slop. Cars were stuck in the mud trying to back out, and the rain was coming down so hard you could barely see where you were going. People were walking with their heads down in their raincoats and umbrellas running into the other people in the same predicament. We finally got a parking spot. The fish market was packed full. That was the first funny feeling I got about the place—too crowded. I heard flapping sounds and metal bats hitting the concrete floor ferociously. Bang! Flap-a-flap-flap! Bang!

"Oooh, Mama!" I hollered as I squeezed her right leg.

"Child, what you grabbing me for?" Mama said.

"What's that noise?"

"Honey, don't worry. Aint nothing gone happen to you."

The floor was slippery. A thick mix of liquids created another solid layer on top of the dirty concrete and you had to be careful with every step. Come to find out, the workers were beating the fish to death by smashing them with metal baseball bats. As we moved up in the line I saw the whole process. There were live fish packed inside of tubs filled with water. You got to pick which fish you wanted, and when it got your turn, the workers got a net and caught your desired fish. They lay the fish on the concrete floor. The fish go to flapping like crazy. One by one, they beat those suckers to death. That layer of liquid was a mixture of fish blood, water from the net, and rainwater and mud from the bottom of

people's shoes. That was the second funny feeling I got about the place. It was too slippery. If not for Mama's support, I would have fell down on the concrete. It was a sight to see. I swear to God, they beat those little creatures like they were Emmett Till. And that was the third funny feeling I got about the place—too much violence. Once the fish were killed by the workers, they hung them on a pole and skinned them, and put them in a bag for us to take home to eat. Nobody else thought it was a big deal, as if it was just like any other business, like McDonald's or Wal-Mart, but I was enthralled.

The big fat white man that skinned the fish was Buddy, Jr. His daddy started the business, and he was the boss now. All his brothers and cousins were big burly white men, too. They were a rugged bunch of folks, but real nice though. Always wore old tee shirts or camouflage with some jeans and boots. The women and the children worked the cashier normally. They were the first and only white business to ever set up shop down at The Bottom, and that's where Mama, my brother Jacob, and I stayed. We had a little apartment down there: Riverview Apartments. The river was not really "in view," but I suppose it was close enough.

I never asked why it's called The Bottom. I guess because it's located in a valley. Vicksburg, Mississippi is a city full of hills, and the Bottom separated the city into its two distinct parts. All the modern businesses, like our mall and movie theater and restaurants were located on top of the hill to the east side of the Bottom. Everything on top of the hill to its west was mostly tourist attractions—antebellum homes, antique shops, old churches, and the famous National Military Park: acres upon acres of green where thousands of young men died to protect a system of life that enslaved people in the Bottom.

Buddy's Fish Market got most of its fish from the Yazoo River. The Mississippi River used to flow there, but the river changed its course a good while ago. Didn't want to be associated with this city anymore. First two places you see in the Bottom are Buddy's Fish Market and The Corner Liquor

Store right across from each other. Next is Gus's Grub. A real good restaurant where you can get a home-cooked meal for five bucks: one meat—fried chicken, pork chops, catfish; two sides—rice and gravy, macaroni and cheese, collard greens, green beans; and a piece of bread—corn bread or a roll. Add a desert for a dollar—peach, apple, or blackberry cobbler. Just depended on the day. Then there is the corner store for your goodies, drinks, and some really good fresh sliced sandwich meat—Jimmy Chu's. An old Chinese man and his wife have been running the business for about forty years. Then you have Holsum's Bread Store, a little old car wash, a barbershop, a few small houses, Bethel Baptist Church, and the most recent addition—The Vicksburg Warren County Police Station. But like I say, I never liked the idea of eating those fried catfish we got from Buddy. When I told Mama that though, she said she was not cooking anything else and that she better not see nothing but bones on my plate when I was through. She didn't cook much anyway because most of the times she was working so, of course, I ended up eating the fried catfish just like everybody else. I didn't like the taste of it though. Nope. Not one bit.

Jacob, on the other hand, didn't mind eating fish. He was about 6'3" and lanky. He could dunk at thirteen. He had charisma. The girls ate it up. He always had kept his hands in his pocket while he was walking, unless he was rubbing his goatee. He wore those big colorful shirts, too, and it just made him look longer and lankier. It always pointed him out in a crowd. Not like he needed it, but it sure did help. Not many other guys were bold enough to rock orange and pink like him back then, but as he said, "Man, I'm just doing me!" Everybody noticed him. He had a naturally lazy loose loud voice. If you didn't know him it could be hard to understand him if you caught him in his element. Now he could talk properly when he wanted to, of course, but when he was in his element, nobody could tell him anything. I suppose he, like the rest of us, just wanted to be liked, wanted to be noticed. He just happened to be better at it than most oth-

er people. And he loved going to aquariums. Every time we would go on a vacation which wasn't often he wanted to go to the aquarium. He said he liked watching animals swim around without a care in the world. He would say, "Imagine the life of this here fish," as he boisterously pointed at one of them. "No predators, no worries, no nothing! To live in a place where you just float and swim around and do what you were made to do. No questions asked. Just float! Swim! Be free!"

One time I joked and said he liked going to aquariums because he could not swim and he appreciated some creatures that could. He snapped back by saying, "You know you can't talk much cause you can't swim either!" Hardly any of us in The Bottom could swim. A Negro that could swim was magical. I remember one summer we went to the YMCA and took swimming lessons. Me and my boys were all hoping to get the finest and fullest-figured white girl as our teacher. I got me a real fine one, too. She had blonde-hair and you could stare into those deep blue eyes for days. She would grab me and hold me up as I lay flat on top of the water. She would tell me to relax and float. She'd say, "I'm going to let go any second but don't worry! Don't move! Just relax. The water will hold you up. You won't go under if you trust me."

Well, as sure as the sun rose the next morning I sunk as soon as she let go of me. My mind was going in so many directions. My body was pressed up against hers so I was naturally fidgety. I could not just relax. I wanted to date her. I could not have been more than ten. It is the closest I have been, or ever will be, to a white girl with that little amount of clothes on. I felt good but wrong at the same time. I wanted more of her or nothing at all. My boys and I all got the same results with our swimming classes: failure. It made no sense. There were little white kids that were only three or four years old swimming after one lesson, and me and my boys were still sinking at the end of summer. I started thinking water did not like us. White folks had a natural tendency to just float. Still to this day I aint never met a white person

that couldn't swim. Can count on one hand the amount of blacks I know that can. I remember the last day of swimming lessons my instructor, Bonnie was her name and she let me jump off the diving board. She promised she would catch me. I jumped off of that board and landed right into her body and held on real tight. I was scared because I could not swim and we were in the deep end so I had to hold on tight. I had always wanted to hold on tight to a white girl anyway, just to see how it would feel. She carried me all the way to the edge of pool and helped me get out, and that was the end of it. Bonnie said, "Well, it's been fun working with you. I hope you had fun, too! Have a good school year and come back next year! You still have a ways to go before you can swim, but you're getting there! You gotta trust me more next year. Just loosen your body and let go. The water is on your side! Anyways, good-bye, buddy."

I responded by saying, "Ok thank ya, Ms. Bonnie. Maybe I'll see you again next year, mam."

Bonnie then said, "I'm only in a junior in High School! I told you about that Ms. Bonnie and yes mamming no mamming me. Making me feel old!"

"Yes mam, no! I mean, ok. Yeah. Bye-bye." I said, and then I went into the boys' bathroom to change.

It goes without saying, but me and Jacob did not go back next year to the YMCA. None of my other boys did either. Do not know what it is about that water but it is hard for a black man to trust it. It is just too big and wide for me to believe it is on my side. Mama was upset with me and Jacob when she read the YMCA report card. She said, "I'm trying to prepare youall for life. I wasted money on these damn lessons and youall still can't even float! One day youall gone wish youall took those lessons more serious because everybody needs to know how to swim cause you never know when you gone need to use it." I never asked Mama if she could swim. It was never the right time. I doubted it though.

The Closed Casket

Ethan Todd

Day is done
Gone the sun

He lies in peace in the bedroom:
No more running, no more fighting.
Never got a check? Drinks are on me,
What good is his body now anyway?
Just a pair of boots, used until useless.
Good bodies are wasted every day.
They are like retired rifles never fired,
Retired jeeps that never ran went through the sand.
Not here, not in this bedroom.
Heroes are found in junkyards.
We can drink our liquor to the past.

From the lakes
From the hills
From the sky

The armored truck sang, moving into battle.
He rode atop, his cigarette blazed
From his lips above a scraggly mustache.
He held his MaDeuce on top of a beat up Humvee.
His newly returned single chevron displayed
With pride on his dirty, crooked cap,
The sun's red tears soaked the ground.
His body became gaggled pile,
Scattered blocks for us to pick up.

All is well
Safely rest
God is nigh

“Thank you for your service.” That act of praise
Seems cheap during a moment like this.
The casket is shut, as if to hide
What remains of reality;
Just another one of Conrad’s whited sepulchers.
Chaplain, please make a deal with God
Color guard, give him his exit.
Make his father proud, as if we knew who he was.
Like a puzzle, we arranged him as best we could.
We never could find his shooting hand.

How the West Was Won

Duncan Dent

The scalp of an injun will get you ten dollars in some parts,
Some parts less.
Easy money.
When the injuns run dry you just dip south
And Claim Mexican scalps.
They look the same. Same mocha skin and onyx hair.
Same death throws.
All in a days work.

The mescal slithers down my throat.
The cantina is packed with outlaws drinking their scalp money.
A string of scalps outside signals the grisly assemblage within.

A bottle crashes against a man's skull'
"You sumbitch," is slurred in retort and a shot rings out.
The bar explodes in rage around me.
I broke three knuckles to get to the door.
There stood the law.
He leveled a revolver and fired a ball through my skull.
Dead in an instant

We lay there the next morning in the middle of the street,
Relieved of our boots and scalps,
As a carpenter hammers the final nails in four boxes.
The priest blesses the vagrant dead
Under circling vultures.
All in a days work.

The Girl in the Viking Helmet

Jana V. West

Loud noises startle the rabbits in my backbone,
while the quiet that simmers in the deadpan
stirs the demons in my chest.
The heat dries out the ink in my fingertips,
while the frozen wind pulls the trigger pointed at my eyes.
I draw prime numbers with the stale water
that gathers on the curb
and try on other peoples' clothes.
I wear armor to tea,
but no one likes the girl in the viking helmet.

Meeting Doubt and Fear Upon My Death

Matthew Chandler

In an evening field, in quiet repose,
So low and calm my body finds sleep.
Under stone carved and named so familiar,
And after the elegy by voices so meek.

Soon in my sleep, ‘til then deferred,
I met two foes held long at bay.
They were no threat when I drew breath
And stood alert midst my waking day.

In life, my fire would make them flee,
But now I lay in helpless rest.
One proclaims my faults. The other, his strength.
And both weigh burden upon my chest.

And soon I began to doubt myself,
Which opened wide a long sealed door.
That ancient and keen monstrosity
Was upon me, lest I brood no more.

I saw myself as he wished me to,
A failure in most brazen robes.
And I desired to wash clean of myself,
To escape this mind he freely probes.

He exposed my true and deepest thoughts.
At my guile, he laughed and did decry,
And proved to me it’s shallow worth,
And I knew the fool exposed was I.

Fear then clutched me, held me close,
And made sure I did see his eye.
He showed me what I won't convey,
Which nearly stirred me where I lie.

He showed me things that have no name,
That grew before the light and dark,
That do not know of time or age.
Now to spare my mind, I hold remark.

His horrors struck my helpless soul.
He spoke in floods against my heart.
With no allies near I lost my hope,
And drowned amidst his blackened art.

I paid for my life's arrogance,
I reaped what I had sown.
These fiends have taught me quick and well
With the terrors they have shown.

My humbled shell could not withstand
Their coupled strike against my soul,
But sermon taught, they left my grave,
And rest returned to wash me whole.

So under stone and dirt I lie.
My soul at rest, though now deposed.
I won't forget what I have learned
In this evening field, in quiet repose.

The Hospital and the Deaf Boy

Matthew Chandler

I relaxed in the fluorescent sanctity of Saint Vincent's white walled serenity,
And listened to nurses drone about their wondrous weekend plottings.
I was waiting for my father to stride in, lab coat and briefcase in hand,
Ready to escort me home from this unapologetically boring place.
I didn't know this antiseptically sterile world was about to collapse

As an older looking black man came crashing through the double doors
Being rushed along by men in white with worryingly distressed faces.
The fury of motion and sound exploded across the once serene room as
A trail of blood dripped behind the gurney like fate's footsteps
That fell down just a heartbeat faster than the boy's feet chasing behind them.

I wonder if the kid saw his own face mirrored in that colossal glass shard
That jutted from his father's neck like a great, clear monolith.
I wonder if the nurses that held him back noticed his eyes that poured
Rivers of confusion and despair, or if they had been trained

not to look.
Silence returned as his chest heaved in agonies that his voice couldn't convey.

A young woman sat him down, golden hair framing her doleful eyes.
As her hands traced symbols in the air for him, her lips betrayed no sound.
Soon his eyes matched hers as her silent elegy screamed through his mind.
Until finally, one hand disappeared into the air behind the other's open palm,
And I recognized that last fleeting sign before her hands died at her side—

Gone.

Ether's Clarion

Matthew Dunaway

In a moon lit grove quiet and ever stretching,
Evident and yet blanketed
By that serene darkness
So enchanting in likeness to a veil,

The broad Oak shook in magnificent bout,
Consecrating the shadowy floor
From whence all
And now He does sleep,

By Autumnal reign this force rushed about,
Enshrining its victim and fellow,
Prophesying war and peace,
The stir of the wood then awoke him – meditative as he,

Against wise bark he had reposed
Until embraced by ease of slumber,
Toward yon and torn asunder
He had fallen into the whole,

But above a startling wind
Had too roused the trees,
And dispelled a plague of leaves about the lad,
Inciting a restlessness its passing returned him to conquest,

Appetite first had driven him across the glade,
Yet scant resource beckoned fatigue,
Now with renewed vigor he found his bow
And pains of mortality,

For his was a hunger, though true and of younger,
To beseech and hope to redeem,

Then with eager eye fixed and aimed bow drawn
He so mixed tension and relief,
As a final burst of sense conviction
Loosed violence unto the scene,

Yet with this shot he struck a chord
And the reverberating string sung a dirge,
Now induced in he was thought
But unlike that which is heard,

This note did call from the sinew,
That binds the mighty bow,
And by it and the wood
Told the truth of the soul,

The arrow flit and pierced the doe,
As the Oak wept in reproach,
Soon too was its legacy
Found beneath our pensive host,

For as the deer collapsed,
And as the lad took step,
The leaves below they did compress
Henceforth to his awareness,

By and by the moon sank,
Dim to the radiance of twilight,
Haze for haze but with the promise of day,
In awe he encountered such beauty,

Never without hope for more
Does he now endeavor with the ephemeral,
Whether by avarice or piety unsure,
He has undertaken this conviction,

Though remain he a mortal, brilliance invokes a question:
Be he lust or divinity?

Out of necessity he claims prey
But is bound to higher faculty,

Alas this is Man's fate,
For all who come ensue,
Upon his own awakening,
Uriel shook before he knew.

Pink Snow

Dave Storment

John Ryland made his first kill at the age of eleven in the hilly woods of Illinois, the day after Christmas. His grandfather had gotten him a new Remington .22 caliber rifle with a wooden stock and grip. They were wearing their white camouflage to blend in with the snow that lay on the ground and in the trees. As they stalked quietly from one tree to the next, John turned his head with each crunch of their feet, and the surface of the rifle was cold on his bare hands. His grandfather had made him leave his thick gloves at home so he could feel the safety button and trigger better. The glare of the sun hurt his eyes and made it hard to see, but his grandfather Samuel had sharp vision- a result of years on the hunt and his experience in World War II. They reached the peak of a small hill when John bumped into his grandfather's back.

"Shh," Samuel said. "Get low to the ground." John was hesitant to get on his knees because he knew the snow would seep through the material of his pants, making them damp and cold. His teeth were already clenched to avoid chattering.

"What is it?" John whispered, his youthful voice sounding more feminine than he would've liked.

"Look," Samuel said, "just to the right of that small pine."

"What? I don't see anything." He compensated this time for his prepubescent voice by growling his throat a little. He squinted his eyes against the sun and scanned the ground.

"Look for movement, son," his grandfather said. John was about to question Samuel when he saw it. A snow-white rabbit hopped gently in the powder, just close enough that John could make out the pink of its ears. They laid down and watched the rabbit as it unsuspectingly sniffed the ground.

"Can I shoot it?" John asked anxiously.

"Not yet." Samuel said. John watched his grandfather

while he stared intently at their prey. He had hunted with Samuel plenty of times before this, and he recognized the look in his grandfather's eyes. It was a powerful look of passion and determination.

His eyes were squinted a little and focused sharply like the scope on John's new rifle. He wondered what his grandfather was thinking. Maybe he was thinking about the war. About the gun. He was studying the movements of the rabbit. He was calculating the wind. He was remembering the look on John's face when he opened the box to reveal the new rifle. He was thinking about the coffee he would drink once they got home. John was reviewing the possibilities of his grandfather's mind when Samuel whispered without taking his eyes off the target.

"Now remember, John. You have to contemplate a kill before you make it. You'll only have time for one shot, so you want to make sure you'll hit it on the first try. But there's more to it than that. You have to get to know the prey, see? You have to appreciate the animal. Or whatever it is. You thank God for giving it to you. You promise him that you'll do the right thing when it's time to make the decision. Remember that, son."

"Yes, Grampa," John whispered. He wasn't sure what all that meant, but it was clear that Samuel took hunting seriously.

"Now, slowly raise the butt of the gun up to your shoulder. Support the front grip with your left hand, elbow on the ground. You've seen me do this before. Now look through the scope and find your target in the cross-hairs."

"Got it," he said after a few seconds of searching. The rabbit looked different now. Through the scope John could see the rabbit's eyes. Its nose wrinkled and unwrinkled as it sniffed at the ground for something to eat. It scratched its side with its hind leg. John thought of his Boston Terrier, George. Maybe the rabbit likes to be scratched behind his ears too. He looked at the slightly ruffled fur on the its back. He didn't hear his grandfather telling him to take his

time. He didn't hear him telling John to aim in the middle of the chest. The rabbit scratched through a thin layer of snow under the limbs of a tree and found a root. John liked the way it ate. It made a funny face when it chewed with its little jaws. John chuckled to himself.

A soft wind blew by and raised the hair on the back of John's half exposed neck. His back shivered. The rabbit stopped chewing and looked up at them.

"Shit, he sees us," Samuel said. "Make the shot quick, or he's gonna run off."

John wished he could watch the rabbit longer. He wasn't ready to stop watching just yet. He wanted to touch the rabbit, to feed it.

"Safety off," Samuel said. "When you're ready, pull the trigger back slowly with the very tip of your finger. Make sure you keep'em right in the cross-hairs."

Click. Safety off. John felt the cold, hard trigger with the soft, half numb pad of his index finger. It was hard to breathe. His peripheral vision went black, and his grandfather disappeared. Looking through the scope, John could stare into the rabbit's eyes. Black, beady eyes. He drew in a long breath and held it in. The wind, the rabbit, Samuel, time itself seemed to stop for half a second. John knew this was his chance. Still as a rock, he slowly and fluidly pulled backwards with his finger, until what seemed like a crack of lightning to his frozen pink ears brought the rest of the world spinning in time again. A flash of red, and his hands were shaking.

"You got'em!" Samuel yelled. "Come on!" John, clumsy in his oversized hand-me-downs, could barely keep up with his grandfather and nearly tumbled down the hill with the rifle slung over his shoulder. When John finally arrived at the small splash of red on the white ground, Samuel clapped his hand on his grandson's back and beamed at him with the distinctive pale gray sheen of old teeth. John didn't smile back. He stared at the mass of fur and muscles lying in a puddle of blood, which was quickly turning pink as it dissolved

into the snow. “He didn’t even stand a chance. What’d I tell you, you’re a natural, just like all the Ryland men.” Samuel snatched the corpse off the ground by its hind legs and tucked them into his belt loop. “Yes sir, we’re having rabbit stew tonight. And I’ll make you a lucky rabbit’s foot, just like the one I got on my keys,” he said before trotting back up the hill.

John’s feet were still planted in the ground. The rabbit’s red and white body was still in his head, tumbling backwards. He remembered how he felt right before shooting it, calm and proud. But not now. He thought again of George, and his short black and white fur and wagging tail. A tear escaped from John’s eye and dripped off his chin, pressing a dimple into the soft pink snow. He heard his grandfather call his name, and still looking at the ground, turned to follow him home.

Paterfamilias

Mary Chase Breedlove

He was fifteen, but one day he became fifty
when the Watkins salesman who raised him
to work hard and play the guitar
put a pistol in his mouth in 1931.
My grandfather became the man of the house.

Dad made a surprise debut in ‘53.
Granddaddy taught him to love and live
and laughed hard when he spent the night
vomiting that Brown Mule chewing tobacco.
Eight-year-old curiosity cannot be quenched.

When he was ten,
dad watched the men in white robes
come to their Mississippi home,
asking my grandfather to “join the great cause.”
He kindly told them to get the hell off his porch.

“Son,” he’d say, “always do the right thing.
Remember money is just a tool, and
those damned Republicans will starve you to death.”
He rarely spoke of the Depression.

I wish the strongest memory I have of him wasn’t
was when they put a sheet over his head in his home.
I was four, eating ice cream on the porch, and our whole family
cried when the long black car pulled in the dirt driveway.
Disease stole his mind after 80 years of life.

I do remember his hugs and flannel shirts, and sweets
from every visit.
“Come over here and give me some sugar,” my grandmother echoed.
He raised Dad to be a superhero.
Mom says I’m as stubborn as both of them combined.
I don’t mind.

Boy with a Kite

Catie Marie Martin

Today I watched a boy flying
A kite. It was a rudimentary creation
Shaped like a shark, its mouth
Opened wide to swallow
The sky, its eyes
Bulging open to survey
The clouds.

With my notebook
My eyes
My heart
Open,
I thought of you, you with your
Songs, your stories,
Your pictures of the demolished.
Your affinity for sea creatures
So much in sync with this
Miniature you.

I write you a note
On my college-ruled
Blue-lined paper
And I close my eyes and wish it was
Attached to that paper kite
Because to ride on that flying shark
Is the only way
For us to touch the sky
That I can fathom.

The Invitation

S. Kate Thompson

Greet death
In your favorite shirt
In your Sunday shoes
With gel in your hair
And a single red Gerber.
Say I've been waiting for you
The car is running
My father will be happy
You came to the door.

Greet death
With your palm face up
Inching towards the middle of the armrest
By clearing your throat
And stretching your arm
Around the back of the passenger seat.
Say You look good tonight,
And pull the car top down.

Greet death
with one last drive
where you don't run out of gas
or hit the neighbor's dog
and the wind around the car
doesn't even muss
your hair.

Lara Turner

S. Kate Thompson

Lara, Lara
the oldest girl
in the whole first grade
your knees are stained green
and your hair is shaved clean off
you call it “low maintenance”
your “friends” call it stupid
you read your books
upside down
and devour every color
in my crayon box
your house has four wheels
and seventeen nameless dogs
your pockets are filled
with dirt and leaves
your arms are filled
with bruises
I hear the explanations
That you tell Mrs. Douglas
But not even you, Lara,
Could run into a doorknob
That many times.

Southern Fried Words

S. Kate Thompson

"Words and blood are the double helix that connect us to our past."
-Tony Earley

Sunflower Grocery in Picayune, Mississippi is shelved with string beans, spaghetti sauce, and Southern speech. When I was a young girl, my mama took me shopping after Sunday service. I clung to the fold of her skirt as she reached for "dah-sd ter-may-tahs" and "grain bains." Our buggy squeaked through yellow linoleum aisles, past uncooked "paw-stuh" and bags of "fuhl-ow-er." I absorbed her words, the pulling of vowels and stretching of syllables. She made groceries sound beautiful. My mother throws sand in her words when she speaks to strangers, clogging and roughing up the oily smoothness of her voice. She keeps her childhood stories in our family: squirrel hunting, rotten orange fights, and sugarcane desserts. "I'm sorry your mother sounds so stupid," she says after explaining her order to the waitress at Olive Garden three times. Her fingers fidget with a cloth napkin, afraid she embarrassed her daughters with her slow tongue.

My daddy's tongue is more trained; he tries to tighten his words and corrects my mother every Halloween when she is "carvin' punk'ns." Still, you can hear a slow slip at Thanksgiving when he asks me to pass him "su'more cran-bay-ree sawce" or offers me a swig of his "eye-sed tay." He pulls me onto his lap in the living room, shuffles a deck of cards with one hand, says "A'right, baby girl, lemme show you sum-en right quick." He thickens his accent when he's around other men. I hear it in the bait shop, the football stadium, and at family reunions. His chest swells up like a bad bee sting, and he drags his "y'all"s out for miles. My grandmother shows me photos of my father barefoot with a bigmouth bass in hand. His shirtless shoulders are freckled and browned by the August sun, his toes dig into a mud bank, and Mississippi dirt runs up through his veins. I like his smile best. It is crooked

and young and tells me happiness is a fat fish and a dirt road. I hear his smile in his voice.

I savor the comfort of my family's voices. They remind me of home, a place where everyone is either "ma'am" or "sir," every soda is a "Coke," and we call our parents "Daddy" and "Mama" regardless of our age. I envy my mother's voice; I want that Mississippi stamp on my throat, the smooth, exaggerated speech way of "a right, Southern lady," as my grandmama puts it. I want to sound as Southern as fried okra, wear my words as proud as my daddy, and carry my family's language to every corner of the earth.

Little Lucy LaGrinn

Kylie Dennis

Little Lucy LaGrinn sat entombed in the den
Where her father had asked her to stay
As he went for a chat with the man in a hat
And had promised return by midday

Always eager to please, little Lucy with ease
Promised wholly to not move an inch
And her father, so proud, gave an elegant bow
And he bade her goodbye with a pinch

As he left from the den, the sweet little LaGrinn
Took a seat in the chair by the glass
And looked out at the sun as the morning begun
And awaited her father to pass

But as Lucy LaGrinn watched the two handsome men
As they passed, out the window she peered
And she witnessed that rat of a man in a hat
Kill the father she cradled most dear

But poor Lucy LaGrinn with a tear on her chin
Who at last took a breath to survive
Only gripped to her chair with a paralyzed stare
On the man who lie dead in the drive

So the hour of midday and the sun and its rays
Came and went as a jovial pair
But for Lucy LaGrinn who was one less in kin
She stayed glued by the glass in the chair

Now the moon soon it went as its time there was spent
And it withered and bloomed as before
But for Lucy LaGrinn with the tear on her chin
There came never a knock on the door

So good Lucy she stayed as her fathered decayed
And sat poised in her shell as a pearl
But the more time she spent and grew covered with lent
She seemed more of a chair than a girl

For the arms of the chair became battered and bare
And her own arms grew limp on the wood
And the legs of the chair fell into disrepair
As her own upon which she once stood

Her stomach grew thin, the poor Lucy LaGrinn
And her eyes rolled back deep in her head
And the lace on the chair became threaded with hair
And her spine became anchored with led

So it was by the day Lucy wasted away
Till the pieces remaining were rare
And the tear on the chin of poor Lucy LaGrinn
Vanished lastly into the old chair

Little Lucy LaGrinn sat entombed in the den
Where her father had asked her to stay
Now he lay just outside where his little girl died
And the two of them wasted away

Why I can't Major in Accounting

Katylynn Thomas-Walls Wright

Because to me it is fraud -
the value of my life depreciated
in its prime. We must
consider the opportunity cost.

In lieu of the ledger
filled with murderous red ink,
we must explore our dreams.

I can't sit hunched over
a desk staring at the blinding
pixels of a spreadsheet as the clock adds
up from daylight to midnight.

Instead, let's major in theatre
and start a flash mob
in the center-stage of Times Square.

I can't stalk a cold calculator six days out of seven,
allowing its figures to subtract
from my creativity until my imagination is so small
it falls through the cracks of my brain.

I'd rather major in English,
travel to Timbuktu and back
to share what we've seen.

I can't function on coffee from January
to April while the grays of deadlines
multiply through my hair and the wrinkles
of taxation divide into my face.

So let's major in philosophy
or general liberal arts and do
what we damn well please.

Final Descent into JFK

Isabelle Lang

There are the streets.
And look, there's a bridge!
Overpasses, underpasses, skyscrapers.
The rounded, dome-y shape of the terminal
A ways off in the distance.
And thousands upon thousands of lights.

Just like I imagined.

But—what's this?
These big, dark patches of inky blackness,
Sporadically placed here and there?
"Parks," someone told me later.
"Grass and trees," they said.
Funny.

I never thought there would be trees.

Mama's Hands

S. Kate Thompson

The single pane of the kitchen window
Frames my mother outside, kneeling into
Her vegetable garden.
Worms turn under the practiced calloused fingers
Of her hands drilling holes in the earth,
Burying tomato seeds, mashing in fertilizer
With stiff, dirt-streaked knuckles.
The skin of her hands dips and cracks
In dry rivers across her palms,
Toughened from work digging up our meals,
Beating laundry, and pressing against
The fevers on our heads.
She hides her hands when signing checks
at Hancock Bank, eyes the teller's
fresh, white fingers, scrubs dirt from her
own nails with the inside of her jeans pocket.
I tuck my hand in hers, tracing
The tan labor lines with my fingertips,
Outlining the hands that pack my sack lunches,
That braid ribbons into the tangled strands of my hair,
That will wrap me in my sheets tonight
As I sleep.

The Last Angel

Antoinette Hayden

She didn't want to say good bye to him. Looking down on the grave, she traced the letters engraved in the headstone. In order to get through the funeral, she'd turned off all of her emotions. It was the only way she could deal with the constant barrage of forceful smiles, dead eyes and aggressive perfumes and colognes. She didn't know how much longer she could deal with the polite hugs and all of the "I'm Sorries" from people she only saw during tragedy. Relatives swarmed her everywhere she went, the funeral home, the parking lot, and finally, the graveyard.

It was supposed to be a beautiful service, and maybe it was. She couldn't remember. Somewhere between sitting down in the church and one of her sisters fainting at the casket, she had escaped into herself. "Julianna, are you okay?" She turned to see her father behind her. He stood awkwardly next to her, his hand hanging on her shoulder like a deadweight. She just nodded and turned back to the headstone. A while later, she didn't know how long, she felt another hand on her shoulder, this grip surer, more aggressive. Turning, she saw her grandmother holding her daughter in her arms. She stepped back away from their presence, her heart rebelling at their intrusion, at their audacity.

Her grandmother had been keeping her daughter since the accident. She couldn't stand to be around her other child. Looking at her just reminded her of what she had lost. When she had to go to the funeral home to make the arrangements for the funeral, she dropped her daughter off at her grandmother's, her body moving automatically as she prepared to arrange the second funeral in her life. She hadn't said good bye to her. She just handed her off to her grandmother and turned and walked away.

Staring her granddaughter in the face, Mae put the child down and gently nudged her towards her mother.
"She needs you, too. She's still here Julianna," her Grand-

mother said. Then she walked away. Looking around, she realized that everyone else was gone also.

Looking back at her daughter, she saw her curled on top of the grave, her mouth was moving, but she couldn't hear what she was saying. She kneeled down next to her and heard her daughter singing the song she sang to her son in the hospital after the doctor told her he was dying. In order to keep him from being scared, she had sang a small song she made up for him,

Sweet little angel,
Why do you cry?
It's time to fly,
To God,
In the sky.
Don't be scared,
Dad's there too,
Arms spread wide,
Waiting on you.

Her daughter repeated the song over and over, tears sliding down her face into the dirt. Laying down next to her, she held her daughter's hand and listened to her beautiful voice sing.

When she stopped, she just looked at her mother, her dirt smudged, coco brown face displaying the world's pain. "Mommy," She started, her eyes knowing more than a five year olds eyes should. "Yes, baby?" the mother asked, her voice wavering. "I'll trade places with Dominic and Daddy. Take them out the ground and put me in. Will that make you feel better?" She said it bravely, the only thing that betrayed her was the tremble of her bottom lip. Julianna felt all of the buried emotion began to rise at her child words. The bravery of her statement, the pleading in the request, and her willingness to trade herself clawed at her heart until she felt tears falling down her own face.

Gathering her daughter close, she held her tight and sang a new song,

Angelic little girl
With a heart of Gold
A healing balm,
To her mother soul.
Sweet little face,
Fearless words,
The sweetest gift,
In the world.

Kissing her forehead, Julianna picked up her daughter, Olivia, her heart whispering a “see you later” to the old grave holding her husband, and an “I love you” to the new grave holding her son.

Carrying Olivia to the car, she made sure she was strapped in tight, and sent up a silent prayer that she could remain strong for her last remaining angel.

The Greatest Gift

Catie Marie Martin

I want to write something for you. I want for the words to sound nice when they are read aloud. I want for them to look nice when they rest on the page in front of you. I want for you to notice the precision that I took while scribing the capital J of your name, I want you to know that I choose only the prettiest words when I am around you, aesthetically and audibly pleasing to you.

I want for you to enjoy the sound of my voice when I read to you. I've been told I have a lovely speaking voice, could you please affirm that? I want you to read the words to yourself, taste them on your tongue. I hope that the rolling r's and the hard t's feel good between your teeth. Bite down on the words, turn the sentences into fragments. I hope they satiate your hunger for meaning.

I want to give you grammar. In a crumbling world, I want to give you structure. I don't want to give you any unnecessary confusion. We don't need run-on sentences or comma splices; we need semi-colons and periods and conjunctions and subject-verb agreement. I don't want there to be any doubt. I want for us to be as black and white as the ink on this page.

I want to give you language. It isn't much, but it is all I have to give.

Student staff:
Hannah Humphrey
Donald Brown
Magen Nelson
Anna Ballard
Megan Crutchfield
Daniel Hart
Sarah Shields
Ann Elizabeth Allison
Rebekah Boden
Kylie Dennis
Sloan Chesney
Mallory Self
James Logan