

OPUS

2009 - 2010

Issue VIII

State University of New York at Geneseo
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Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers,

Thank you for picking up this copy of *Opus*. It represents the result of the inspiring work of some of Geneseo's best writers and artists, as well as English Club's dedicated members. After experiencing the evolution of *Opus* during the past four years, I feel proud of its current configuration and hopeful for its continued future as a platform to serve Geneseo's creative communities. With the future of imaginative opportunities in mind, I'll conclude with a quote from D. H. Lawrence: "Be still when you have nothing to say; when genuine passion moves you, say what you've got to say, and say it hot."

Happy Reading,

Jennifer Picalila
Editor-in-Chief

Thank You

Professor Tom Greenfield, for his perfect comedic timing and enthusiastic assistance.
Michelle Feeley, for her endless encouragement and commitment to students.
The English Department, for its continuous support.
Our members, for their time, energy, and commitment.
All contributors, for sharing their artistic perspectives.
SA and AAC for providing the resources needed to publish this issue of *Opus*.

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Picnic

Elena Buttgerreit

Montauk sun glimmers across the diamond encrusted surface
as it tucks beneath its blanket of ocean.

The horizon catches fire with ripples
of pink and orange clouds that eclipse the scarlet sky.
A gentle breeze flutters across the nape of my neck
and I sigh into salty air.

Then, there they are.

The shrill shrieks of a dozen gulls echo across the water,
slicing through the soothing lull of tides.

They scour through the sand in search of food,
and come across a checkered sheet
that some unsuspecting tourists foolishly left unattended.

In frenzied harmony, they gauge out the eyes of potato salad
and maul a juice box until it bleeds Hawaiian Punch.

They cackle at the massacre.

The radiant sunset is overshadowed
by thoughts in my mind that

the sky were to actually burst into flames,

Fire engulfs the gulls and their tails feathers ignite
like the fuses of ACME bombs

and they explode in mushrooms clouds of squawks
and Nathan's french fries.

One by one they explode like consecutive detonations over the Atlantic –
a war waged in the name of nature
to annihilate the minions of McDonalds.

At last, the sun pulls that last of the sea over its face
and darkness bleeds into the fiery sky.

The gulls find solace on buoys
with heads tucked beneath their wings.

And now the stars have risen.

Delilah

Michael Roff

Praying made Bernice Lamont sweaty. First she would notice her long, pale fingers crunch between each other as her hands intertwined. She worried they would break, so many bones in such a small space. But Bernice's body was always steps ahead of her conscious thought; by the time she noticed the tension along her fingers' sides, they were already drenched by salty waterfalls. Normally she'd let go, rub her hands along her polka-dot pajamas, readjust her tank-top, and call it a night. Yet tonight was March 23rd. It was Delilah's birthday; Bernice had an appointment to keep. So she put her chestnut-brown hair up, made passing note of her armpits beginning to drip, and prayed.

"Thank you, God, for Delilah"

Bernice met Delilah at Orchard Park, across from Middletown Elementary School. Every day Bernice's mother would take her across the highway and let her loose on the remodeled playground and well-kept baseball fields. Ms. Lamont had a small apartment in a complex across town—there was little room for a growing six year old girl to spread her wings. Fortunately for Ms. Lamont, Bernice wingspan didn't span very far at all; she spent most of that daily hour in the sandbox making castles, marching with ants, or just letting the grains fall through her fingers. Most parents would discourage Bernice's solitary play—she was prime age for socialization! But Bernice was just so blissfully content in her eight by eight foot square that Ms. Lamont didn't have the heart to make her move. So she sat on the same wooden bench, legs politely crossed, watching days pass and sand speckle her daughter's shoulder length curlicues.

Bernice only asked her mother how she met Delilah once, when she was fifteen. Ms. Lamont was in their tiny kitchen, frying chicken cutlets and listening to 80's pop. The smell triggered Bernice's curiosity, a warm greasy, breaded crunchy so-bad-it's-good kind of smell. The question burst from her mouth without much forethought,

"Mom, how'd me and Delilah meet?"

Ms. Lamont stopped what she was doing, lowered "Like a Virgin" till the chorus was only faintly recognizable, and turned to face her fifteen-year-old daughter's tender blue eyes,

"I don't know, sweetie. It just seemed like she was always there"

"I know," Bernice mumbled, a little ashamed, "but I want to remember the beginning."

Ms. Lamont would give Bernice everything she possessed on request. The only problem was that Ms. Lamont didn't have very much to give. Her secretarial job in the town courtroom barely made enough to pay for rent and food. Any intellectual aspirations had been cut short once Bernice came into the picture; she had decided, in her sophomore year at community college, to keep and raise the child growing in her womb. Bernice's father applied for an executive accounting position in Canada. Ms. Lamont thought this was the beginning of a comfortable life, but her child's father never came back from his interview. She stopped keeping track of memories after the first few years of single parenthood. But, in this case, Ms. Lamont's frazzled mind made some accommodation.

"I don't remember very much, honey, but it was a few days after spring began. You were in a short sleeve dress with cute yellow flower petals sewn at the bottom. Delilah just came to you. By the day's end, you were making castles together. You were so happy! But I can't remember exactly when...I'm sorry dear." Ms. Lamont voice trailed off; by "dear," her soft cadence was barely audible.

Bernice's body went lax, and there were a few silent seconds before she muttered, "That's okay, Mom. Thanks anyway."

When Bernice began to turn away, she felt her mother's soft grip stop her.

"Honey"

Bernice looked up to meet her eyes—at fifteen, she had not yet surpassed her mother's height—and saw a swell of sentiment pooling around the edges. Ms. Lamont opened her mouth to speak, but the words took a moment to come.

"Dear...you are so strong. Whenever you came home from school upset, I'd worry myself sick. You'd always just say 'it's okay Mom, Delilah knows what to do.' You'd smile, wiping away the tears

with your small hands, and by dinnertime I could hear you laughing from your room. When things got rough,” Ms. Lamont’s voice cracked—here was hysteria’s brink—but she held firm, “you pulled us through. I’m so proud of you, Bernice.”

Ms. Lamont pulled her daughter in, her quick breaths warming the air between their bodies. Bernice felt her mother’s tears fall before hearing them in her trembling voice.

“I love you, honey. I always have.” She pushed her daughter away enough to make eye contact, still gripping Bernice’s shoulders firmly. Much to her daughter’s surprise, Ms. Lamont was smiling.

“You know what to do now. You don’t need Delilah.”

Bernice felt her smile broaden, her spirit strengthen, before responding, “You’re right, mom...I just need to remember what I was like before her. I want to know where I’ve come from.”

Ms. Lamont didn’t understand; her past was long since locked away. But she understood struggle.

“You’ll remember, love. I know it.” This was the most Ms. Lamont could give: certainty.



Mom

Anait Tamanian



Out Here in The Bounds

Walter Murphy

Out here in the bounds,
deep in the murk of periphery, always settling;
all the tiny paper edge pieces
after their spiral separation,
pile up like road salt.

White noise and electric silence,
insulting snow by name,
sinking slow like silt.
On this floor the volume is failed.

Filling in all the closed off spaces
of the newsprint
tracing over some letters and words
patterns make themselves,
and spell always her.

Mountain silhouettes
turn into circus tents when I get closer,
mocking my blisters.
Chain link fences smoke on the edge of town
which seems every place I go
pacing the deafer half over,
shown by sight what I do not want to see.

Clutching in pockets the letters we've read too much
while sparks rain on us
ache to get your fingers in the sand.

Too far distant walkie-talkie sounds,
-but maybe not.
Still in the carried breeze they haunt.

Inhalation's axiom forgotten here,
the piquancy of our breath
we can see because of what we breathe
released up through the thirsty atmosphere,
changed in now
for the empty steam of only our lungs' heat.
All these foreheads window pressed,
alien war drums roll
shaking old smudges on the glass,
my lips form the words she whispered last.

Slaying the Jabberwocky

Colleen Wilson

'Twas thundling in the crackling sky,
With rain in voribious sheets.
The wind beclattered round as I
Drove through the watly streets.

The weatherman warned of weather,
And the rain did energize,
Flumping brush and mush together,
Befuddling my eyes.

I turned onto an empty road,
Surrounded thick by forest dense,
When out sprang a beast alarmagode,
Whubbing the fender to dents.

I left the car and knelt in nausl,
Beside the hulkuferous frame,
Snickersnacked feet, feathers aflausl,
Bloody neck snapped alame.

As I fought the urge to vomit,
Beside me screechstoppled a van.
And with a 'dang' and one sharp bang,
Rushed from the door a man.

"Oh, thou hast slain the Jabberwock!
An endangered species they are.
Curse this fong day! Boo hoo! Boo hay!
You've killed it with your car!"

'Twas thundling in the crackling sky
As I petalmetaled it home,
Where no Jabberwock has to die,
Where no Jabberwockies roam.

Acquiescence

Hannah Schmidt

I admit

I abuse my poor memories

By dressing them up in faded gossamer

Lined with silky eloquence from old novels like the

Crumbling paper wrapping dresser drawers with a hint of musk and burnt candles.

I admit

I am guilty of colouring my retrospection with romance

Words unsaid and looks unlooked often

Have much more meaning than perhaps their absence did.

I admit

I add literary allusions to the changing of a traffic light or

The careless cigarette fuming on the sidewalk

As if it had political aspirations that died with the glow of its tip.

I admit

I occasionally form a future from a past that I loved but had not lived.

Like old photographs bathed in sepia tone

Or

The gasping of a song going around one too many times drenched in vinyl,

Dimmed wedding dresses, their lace forming halos of cobwebs

Or

A bruised trunk proudly wearing the passports of countries whose exoticness extended beyond the mere spin of the desk globe they sat on,

I remember and I admit

To bartering memories for the ones I sometimes wish I had.

And maybe did.



Ella

Olivia Derella



Wyatt Mentzinger

When Oedipus wept, his tears were caked
with blood; the rust of metal; the dirt on marble.
His pride became a hollow zeal
To shield him from Life's constant lies;
It was a trap that led him to this
Tragic world.

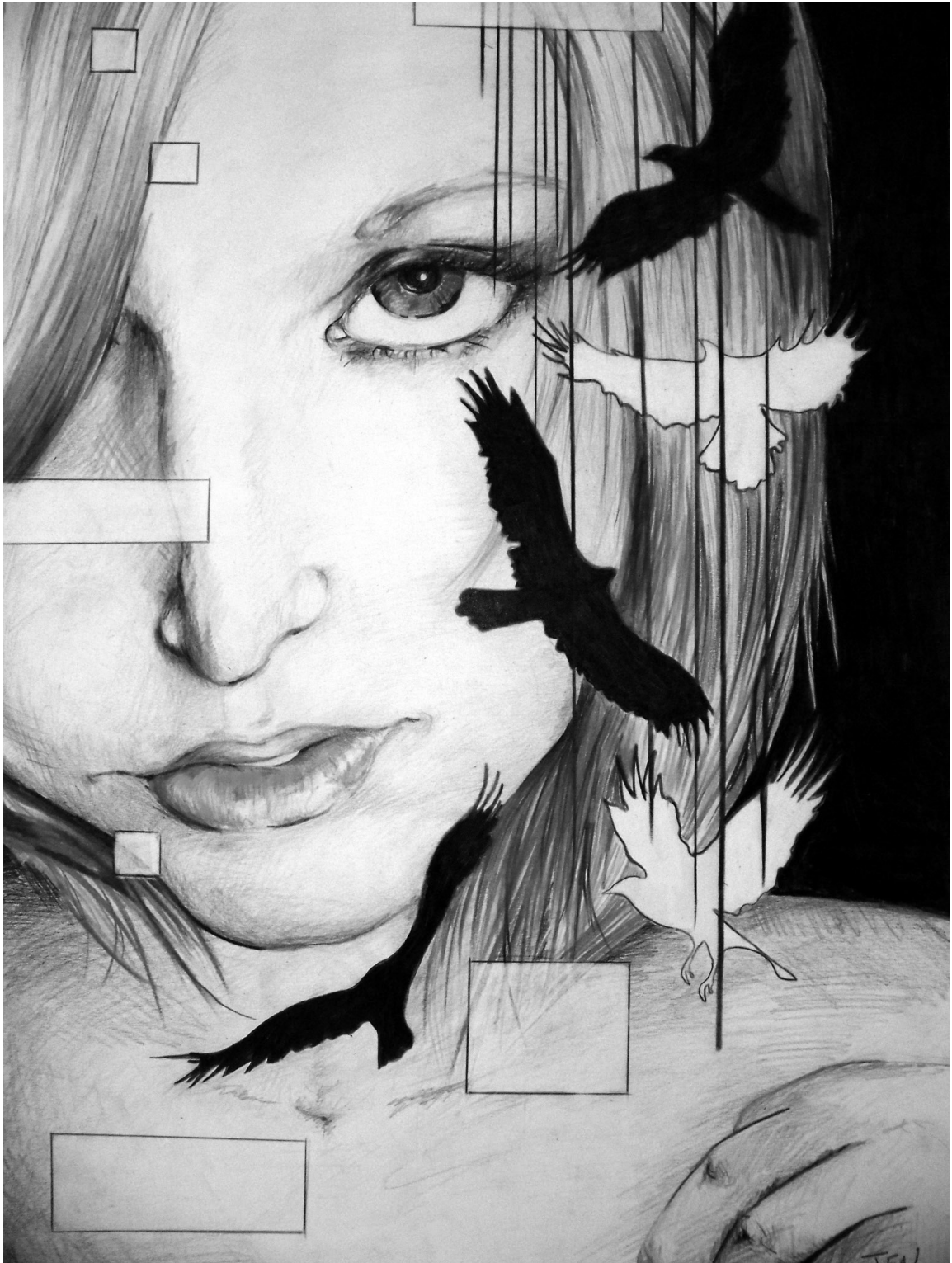
And when Achilles knelt at the beach of Troy before the Fates -
As a man who could not die -
They swept him up, like a bit of gravel,
And swung him to the ground, like a gavel.
His ashes crawled into the Deep, gray Sea.
The Tide carried him to this
Unavoidable world.

And when Socrates blushed from seeing his fellows' ineffable, black eyes -
When his state, in court, betrayed his beautiful mind -
Bitter arsenic had coated his throat.
Then came a taste of mold
and the cough of moths. Now silence, silence
while speaking in empty words to this
Ignorant world.

And when I gaze out from the West, to over
where they claim they once thrived -
Having heard their tales ad nauseam -
And knowing that here, in this
World,
There was never such valor, strength, or knowledge,
I cannot help but think that I was raised
in the wrong time
and on the wrong side.

Hell: Vultures and Crows

Jen Tayne



The Raven in Five Lines

Colleen Wilson

A man dwelt in sorrow and pain,
When in flew a raven arcane.
It perched on the door
And cried 'Nevermore',
Which thoroughly scrambled his brain.

birthday candle

Shannon Harwood

I am the martyr in your celebration of life.

Drowning Letters: A Story Painfully Close to the Truth

Gavin David Chau

Dear Mrs. [REDACTED],

I cannot express the grief and remorse I feel for your loss. If I could have sacrificed my own life to save

Dear Mrs. [REDACTED],

Please believe me when I swear to you there is nothing I could have done to change the events of last August. Misfortune conspired against

We found these crumpled and incomplete letters, along with thirty-six others, overflowing the trash receptacle beside Aviry [REDACTED]'s desk. The final version of the letter nineteen year-old Aviry sent Mrs. [REDACTED] was considerably longer, however we will delay addressing it for the time being in favor of examining these shorter letters. Our analysts have confirmed with nearly one hundred percent certainty that the handwriting does in fact belong to the recently deceased Aviry [REDACTED], who took his own life last October. Unfortunately, several of these letters were rendered illegible by excessive erasures and/or degenerate handwriting. For brevity's sake we will omit a series of letters with similar apologetic themes (copies can be found on our website should you wish to peruse them) in favor of Aviry's more vehement writings.

The next few letters are highly disturbing, and for decency's sake we have censored out much of young Aviry's more colorful language.

Dear Mrs. [REDACTED],

Go ahead and sue me you junky [REDACTED]. Once a jury sees what your cracked-out [REDACTED] really looks like they won't give you a [REDACTED]ing cent.

Dear Mrs. [REDACTED],

Did you always shoot your [REDACTED] full of heroine before sending your kid to summer camp? What the [REDACTED] made you think it was a good idea to put a mentally retar

Dear Mrs. [REDACTED],

Did you have to [REDACTED] the judge to win your custody battle? I should have called child services the moment you dropped off your son with a [REDACTED]-load of needles in the

This next letter is particularly troubling, as both Aviry's handwriting and mental stability are clearly decaying...

Dear Mrs. [REDACTED],

I'm gong to kill you [REDACTED]. As soon as I gt that gun I'll [REDACTED] you up be for a viist – wait [REDACTED] till I

As you can see, these letters are emotionally charged, highly accusatory, and stained with (what our DNA analyst's have confirmed) are Aviry's tears. Interestingly enough, we found these troubled and angry letters buried between two layers of apologetic letters begging for forgiveness and offering a variety of sympathies. Evidently Aviry went through a wave of remorse, anger, and remorse again (though it is possible that he wrote the letters in a different order than he threw them away).

Regarding the letter Aviry actually sent Mrs. [REDACTED], had our forensics teams not sworn it was by Aviry's own hand, we would not have believed it real. This incident is completely unlike any other case we have seen in all our collective years of criminal psychology. By the time Dr. Goldstein, Dr. Orilly, and I finished, we were on the verge of tears. I am still haunted by Aviry's words, and would advise you not to continue if you are already in a troubled or emotional state.

Dear Mrs. [REDACTED]

In the three years I lifeguarded with the Aquatic Affiliates of Western New York I never met a more affectionate or loving child than your son, [REDACTED]. From the very first moment we met I adored his wide smile, limitless energy, and unfaltering friendship. It may surprise you to learn that I did not know [REDACTED]'s name for the first month and a half of camp. Not from any lack of attempts to learn it, simply because the only word that ever left his mouth was "meow!" After a week of this odd behavior we affectionately dubbed him 'the meow kid' and treated him just as kindly as we treated campers with a full range of vocabulary. He wasn't a swimmer - being only five and lacking previous instruction - but with the aid of a personal flotation device he did exceptionally well during our daily trips to the water park.

After a month and a half he said his first words other than "meow." I'll never forget - he said, "My mommy doesn't feed me enough." Coming from a stick thin five-year old with wispy blond hair and puppy dog eyes, I had no trouble believing this statement. From then on I brought an extra pair of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches to lunch every day. [REDACTED] ate them with unmistakable delight and never failed to thank me with a grateful "meow!"

At first I thought his hunger was a simple oversight - I'm not a parent and have no right to judge others on their parenting skill. But as the weeks went by I noticed he consistently wore ragged clothing and kept a pair of dark bags under his eyes. I would have raised the issue with the camp director, but [REDACTED] maintained such an amazingly positive outlook I was convinced there could be no way his home life was anything less than a nurturing environment. Then, the day of our field trip to Beaver Island, I saw a pair of needles tucked under the back seat of your van. I should have called the police on the spot, but I didn't, and it hardly matters now.

If you've ever visited Beaver Island you'll know it's a beautiful place. The trees so green, the sky so clear, the water so calm and blue, I was convinced I'd stepped into a painting - real life could never reach such perfection. It lured me into a false sense of security, for although we brought a dozen camp councilors I was the only camp lifeguard on duty. There were two beach guards watching from a raised platform near the shore, but save for their initial advice they were completely useless.

They warned me the moment we arrived.

They warned me, and nothing I say or do alleviates my responsibility.

"Watch out for the clay pits."

"Clay pits?" I asked, only half paying attention.

"Watch out for the clay pits about a hundred feet from shore."

"Ok. Thanks!" And I forgot all about it.

...So there I was, wading along in water up to my knees (too shallow for even the slowest of campers to drown). Wearing my red-cross bathing suit. Thinking about video games and my girlfriend and how much my girlfriend hated video games.

Without warning the ground dropped out beneath me, sending me plummeting down a steep, slippery slope until the surface was a shimmering veil far over my head. Clay pits - they didn't warn me the [REDACTED] things were ten feet deep! I clawed back up for a desperate gasp of air, but while I was under I'd felt something that shouldn't have been down there.

"God no..."

Diving back into the murky water, I felt about blindly until my hands closed on a thin arm. I kicked my way back to the surface and realized it was your son. Not breathing. Not moving. Blond hair matted to his forehead. Eyes open without blinking. Lips a pale blue.

Dead.

I dragged him to shore and gave him cycles of two rescue breaths and thirty compressions, at least thirty breaths and four hundred compressions in all. Again and again I felt his ribs breaking with this awful 'crack' under the weight of my blows. Finally, after twenty minutes of failed resuscitation, I collapsed from sheer exhaustion. By the time the ambulance arrived there was no point in continuing. He'd been gone for nearly an hour.

You must know how heavily his death weighs on my conscience. I can only compare it to a ton of bricks resting on my shoulders. Over the last few weeks I've come to understand that this world can't possibly be worthwhile. All of life's mysteries are explainable by pure luck, and how can caring beings exist in a world defined by uncaring luck? If I'd fallen into that pit just two minutes earlier... If I'd been watching him when he'd gone under...

In the end, nothing I could have done would really make a difference. Sure I could have been more alert, or checked for the pits ahead of time. Yet, at any moment our lives can be snatched away by a stroke of misfortune beyond anything we could hope to control. I'm talking about that healthy athlete who never missed a workout in her life until she dropped dead from a heart attack at twenty-three. Those kids down the block who always looked both ways when they crossed the street until some double-parked [REDACTED] ran them over. I'm talking about my saint of a grandfather who never smoked a cigarette in his life and still died of lung cancer!! I'm talking about the unknown Shakespeares whose flame went cold before anyone realized they were worth the time of day. Not just them... I'm talking about us all.

Please understand how sorry I feel. I couldn't save your son and will now be recusing myself to avoid further misfortunes.

Sincerely,

Aviry [REDACTED]

Such emotional words! Looking upon Aviry's lifeless form - seeing the gaping bullet wound shattering his brow - my colleagues and I cannot help but mourn the young life tossed so needlessly away. One can only imagine the unbearable grief that must have wracked him. The utmost agony he felt.

Yet, here is the strangest thing of all! *Why? Why* did he do it? *Why* all the letters? *Why* is this case so special that a team of researchers and criminologists have tirelessly strived to publish it in our nation's leading mental health journal? The few answers we have only serve to raise more questions.

Forgive us for leading you on.

It is now our solemn duty to inform you that Aviry [REDACTED] was not responsible for a single death save his own. We have confirmed the validity of Aviry's letters (his job as a lifeguard, the fieldtrip to Beaver Island, Mrs. [REDACTED] dependence on heroine), *except*, the child Aviry refers to so affectionately as the 'meow kid' is currently living with a foster family in New Jersey. Witnesses report that the drowning boy latched onto Aviry's swimsuit as Aviry pulled himself out of the clay pit. The boy lived. He lived I swear! No rescue breaths were needed. No rib-shattering chest compressions.

Reading these letters and witnessing their heartfelt pain, I am completely blown away. This entire tragedy was nothing but a figment of Aviry's tortured imagination. His bright mind could not let go of a hypothetical version of events - an alternate set of possibilities in which he was not fortunate enough to save the boy. Unable to forgive himself, his grief tore away his very will to survive. Three months elapsed between the incident and Aviry's suicide, and in that time he dropped out of school, secluded himself at home, and lost nearly a quarter of his bodyweight. Tormented by speculation and soul-wracking apologies, Aviry couldn't stand to live in a world dictated by the heartless machinations of callous chance.

Lacking an autopsy and subsequent research, we may never know whether Aviry suffered from an undiagnosed medical condition, post traumatic stress, or merely the guilt-ridden wanderings of a troubled genius. In the mean time, it is best not to dwell on drowning letters too long, lest we become as sleepless and tormented as young Aviry.

-Written by D. Copperfield (PhD)

-Special thanks to J. Orlyly (MD), S. Goldstein (PhD), Buffalo Area Police Department, and Fictitious Investigations Ltd.

-Edited by M. Orlyly (MFA)

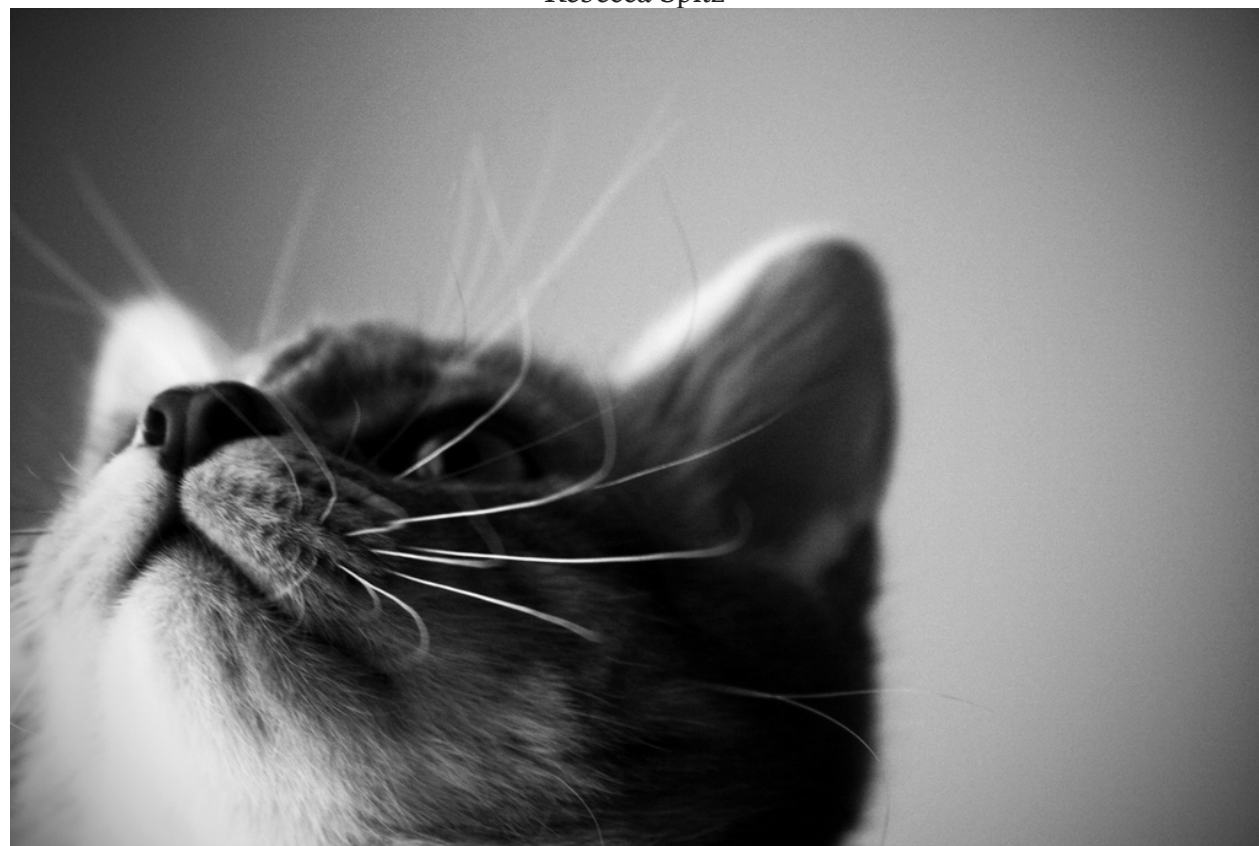
Elliott Regan



Touching a Feeling
Alex Spinello



Clover
Rebecca Spitz



Drowning of Li Bai

Meghan Pipe

He drinks alone tonight,
knight-errant cutting the still cloud
of the Yangtze with his paddle
and singing to the moon
evanescent, pearly muse
of his wandering ways,
until he peers over the hull
to whisper softly to her.

The wispy brush of his beard
trails through the inky river,
wristless strokes recording
ripples in the stillness as she flits
in bashful laughter before him,

so convincing in her lucid glow
the poet can no longer tell
if he is drifting on earth
or sky, dark milky river
above and below
and perhaps inside him,
he is so full of stars.

This is his swan song,
reaching to embrace the moon
in the dark water's surface,
arms flailing as the boat tips.
Sodden robes pull him down
or maybe up into the night,
where they will toast
the good wine, good words
and watching it all
from above.

how it feels to lose someone

Kelly Hendricken

Platinum and peroxide-ridden,
wisps of smoke
 on ecstasy, like film sprinkled with acid,
acrid and smoking in the dark somewhere,
under a flickering streetlight by a bar teeming with bodies,
 pupils dilated to the point where
her eyes are black and reflective,
 a neon cat drawing words with light,
 a flame weak enough to put out with your thumb and index finger. But she's

 laughing, laughing
coy enough with all her slits and holes, and
she's the insides of glow sticks,
 electric thrumming, a bass solo
 a Jackson Pollock in the blacklight
but sometimes she remembers what it's like when you play the acoustic
something about how acid eats film like the mind forgets memories
 she keeps trying to hold onto the smoke you exhale,
as if she's foolish enough to think this will preserve her, make her
 ageless,
a time with fancy cigarette holders and fringe,
 garters and thigh highs,
bright flashes and puffs of smoke mingling in the air with men's aftershave.

Drag her close by her long pearls or you might lose her,
 all her coy slits and holes and dents and marks,
all her laughter dying down to a serious silence
 when she grabs your hand and asks you what it's like
 how it feels to lose someone

and you say that it starts out as a tiny little hole that someone drilled into your head and
 in your sleep and it grows larger,
 slow and cancerous and it's like swallowing glass
like you're cut to pieces and there's only one person to fix it but that person's in
 a coma,
under the influence of lights and sound
vibrating apart like guitar feedback
 ageless like Jimi Hendrix
 but as nontraditional as seven nation army
and her lungs are bruised leather
 worn like a permanent hospital bracelet.

Maybe this is how she remembers it,
 in smoke filled basements and conversations with old friends about
substandard living as a student and roach fingers
and how you wish you could forget what sleep was again
 and come alive, every coy slit and hole, every imperfection,
revolve slow on the spot like a singer's closing note,
waver towards the finish and then stagger slowly,
 as if that could reconcile the tiny hole that started all of this.

On A Wire
Rebecca Spitz



Purgatory: Between Two Worlds
Jen Tayne



Going to See Stacy

Melissa Parietti

2 pm and the bell bursts and all the little children, aged 14 to 18, pour out from all the unhinged academic high school doors out into hallway, and from the hallway they scramble outside where there are big yellow buses and starbucks mothers waiting with comfy cars and coffee.

2:15 pm and all those kids who do not go on bright yellow buses and do not have starbucks mothers remain. The academic boys and girls hustle to their clubs; the athletes to their gyms and locker rooms. The hallways reflect white from the walls and blue from the students' lockers; long, long hallways stretch and flex; the longest runs an eighth of a mile, right down the middle of the school.

2:30 pm and only those that linger, remain. They are sparse. But, they are there. They are the ones who try to wander as long as possible before someone tells them to get where they are going. They are the ones who found perfection in the art of high school vagrancy, so that they could remain unfounded until the 5 o'clock bus arrived and they'd ship themselves home for the sake of having somewhere to sleep.

New shiny sneakers gleam white and mesh with the walls, the floor. Dark blue jeans, stiff pressed, hang loosely. Two arms swish in the stale air, and the walk starts, the game begins, from one side of the school to the other, from one blue locker to the stairwell, that stairwell near the wrestling room.

"I'm going to see Stacy," he said calm and collected to the social studies teacher, working his second job as after-school cop, blue in shirt with khaki down below.

"Stacy," the man said, "yes, Stacy." The patrolman looked off into the long hallway, staring at the after-school criminals, five boys standing idle, talking in cool curses and vulgar images. "Excuse me," he said, and walked toward the group.

Jangle, jangle the keys on the chain on the boy's belt swings ahead of him as he walks, and equally so swings behind him as he goes. Ahead are three groups of girls, chatting fast and talking well, two bored administrators too concerned with their black walkie-talkies to bark at them, and one outdoors security guard all yellow in her big rain jacket walking, for some reason, inside.

Static from the walkie-talkie shifts the air all different colors, and out it a muffled voice yelps *fight near the east gym* and the two administrators and the yellow guard walk a little faster past the boy, away from where he's going.

So all patrolmen disappear and now in the hallway only the girls and the white sneakers remain, and they yell out their cat calls and cool sass and linger real well against his shadow on the white walls, but he doesn't flinch. He smiles nice and when they ask, where you going, where you going, he says smiling so wide, Stacy, Stacy, Stacy.

He walks past and they shout, Stacy this thing Stacy that thing, Stacy slut and Stacy bitch. He smiles wider until their calling slows and all the static in the air ceases altogether. He enters a new hallway, no noise, air stale again and sneakers still white. Then the no noise silence goes away, shouting loud and exaggerated bursts down the other way, but he pays no attention. Stacy's the other way.

Another lone boy walking the other way.

"You got baseball?"

"Quit last year."

"Shame."

"Found other things," he says sallow, too proud.

“Oh.” Pause, thinking. “Friday nights?”

“Friday nights,” white sneakers nods.

“Where you going?”

“Stacy.” And all is very silent.

“Oh.” Pause, thinking, nodding. “See you later.”

Vibrations down below, his cell phone goes off. Real quick and cool he snatches it up and talks, *Ya?*

Mommy’s on the telephone and he growls a little, he sighs a little. Yeah, yeah, in a few hours. Where am I? Paul’s house. Why? Social studies project. How come you never heard of this project? I don’t know. Let you speak to Paul’s mother? Are you kidding me? Goodbye, mom. I have to go, mom. Goodbye. Goodbye, mom. I’ll see you later, not too long, goodbye.

No more vibrations, it all goes away. The hallway’s filled with nothing but the squeak of his shoes against the shiny floor, shiny from the lights above. He’s real slow, maybe hesitant, but no no no. Going to see Stacy. Stairwell isn’t too far away.

Passing big windows near the outside doors now. Bored kids whose activities have ended wait in slow motion, talk fast, laze forever with their cell phones at their ears and friends at a comfortable distance. Lonely kids sit silent and staring, their backs against trees, hands playing with the ground. And a flash. There remains safety in the faces he doesn’t know, won’t recognize, and then pop; one familiar face caught in the corner of his right eyes catches him suddenly and he can’t think straight.

Not Stacy, that other girl, is sitting outside. He gets all tense and choked up, eyes flare. He walks past the window fast. She’s sitting with two friends and all six eyes are staring straight at the big windows, staring where there’s nothing to hide. He’s on display and it’s almost as if he can hear their chatter, maybe laughter, but he shakes his head slightly, no, no. Lame party three weeks ago, who cares, who cares what happened? Screw them. Bitch on a high horse, ugly, ugly, ugly, no, not Stacy, no fun.

So he walks, and looks real cool in his white sneakers and blue jeans, stiff pressed.

Now the time is near. He can smell her laden with department store perfume, sweat, smoke. More smell, male, small, freshman doused with grocery store cologne, cafeteria food, smoke. They would be done soon. He waits, not impatiently, pensive. The door to the wrestling room is cracked open and yellow light pours messily on the floor. The big wooden door is silent and still and beyond it there are wrestling mats ripe of teenage stink and worm and he thinks: Was she friends with the wrestlers?

They did, after all, do what they knew best so close to each other.

Sound explodes everywhere and the thought shatters quickly. Boy hastily pushes open the stairwell doors and scurries away, tugging his jacket close to his body and pulling his hat over his head. Like a criminal he tries to hide his identity as he flees the scene, but he is obvious: freshman, short, very short, indistinguishable features; wholly unrecognizable in his quickened gait. As he walked, the little boy tugged up the zipper on his little pair of baggy jeans. Far away he walked from the stairwell, most likely to his mother’s waiting car.

There was a pause and the remaining boy waited until it was very silent, until no sneaker squeaks or flexing hinges could be heard; Stacy was finally found, and she too waited. She knew he was there, and he knew she was there, and now it was all a matter of formality.

His ten dollar bill was folded over and crinkled, and so on the supporting column nearby he tried smoothing it out best he could, holding the bill taut with two hands and moving it in a sideways motion against the pole. Satisfied, he carefully placed it back into his wallet unfolded, waiting, though he knew her hands would only crumple it.

Inside the doors, on the stairs, Stacy sat, her legs limp against the steps, her hair tied back in typical sweatshop manner, jean's pocket visibly bulging. The air was stale and moment quick; the harsh yellow light from above illuminated the features of her face, plain as always, the grease, the dirt, the sallowness tendency to linger; but these were unimportant details. He stepped forward, handed her the bill, and glanced, momentarily, at the empty hallway to the left before closing the stairwell doors behind him.



Integration

Kyle Skovira



Trail Markers

Walter Murphy

My sleeping dog stirs.
A bad dream?

So I shake him,
and am rewarded by his rising and leaving.

if only I could whistle to call my nightmares away

I lie lonesome now,
but maybe someday
you will roll over oblivious
and wake me
while I am running in my sleep.

So many echoes from under stick to each other.
We shove our feet across this catwalk
and hearing nothing will,
at the wailing wall of the sea,
send them over.

All of these shouting maps and replies
are as faded as trail markers painted on rotting bark,
falling back and peeling off
like a man on a ladder,
leaning away at arms full length,
looking up.

These bluffs aching to jump off themselves
and finally reach the waves
they've been straining to forever.

Navigating the perfect circle,
I fell off the back slope of Samsara.
In my world beneath the world,
there is still plenty of unscarred stone,
and digging to be done soon enough for the endless knot.

A whole acre of screams
when they saw the breaker burned.

please don't bury me in this mine.

Anna Pepe



Corinthian Canal
Anait Tamaian



Sarah Parker



The Balloon Salesman

Matt Cordella

New York City wiped the sleep crust out of its eyes and instead of saying “Good-morning!,” it said “tick-tock.” “Tick-tock” answered the wristwatches, and “tick-tock” replied the people, their shoes clicking heel-toe down the sidewalk in Central Park. Schoolboys in sweater vests and schoolgirls in pleated skirts marched through the park like their parents in miniature, who, upon entering the workforce, traded in their backpacks for briefcases. The latest in Bluetooth technology glimmered in every other ear, and the air was abuzz with a thousand disjointed half-formed messages of dire urgency. Like salmon swimming upstream, the morning migration clogged and choked the narrow arteries of the park with neckties and sensible diamond studs; all pressing together to fit down the slender, twisting filament of the pavement. With eyes fixed straight ahead, the commuters were completely unconscious of the people with whom they rubbed elbows. The resulting friction generated a steamy, rainforest heat and radiated a dim, colorless glow outward and upward from the busy thoroughfare. At 7 AM sharp every day, the Balloon Salesman watched the park light up like a fluorescent Energy Saver bulb.

The Balloon Salesman arrived at his park bench 5 AM without waking the birds that slept with sky blue eggs in nests of twigs and Dorito bags. Behind him he pulled a red Radio Flyer wagon, which contained an enormous stainless steel canister of helium. Every morning, he would sit down on the end of the bench and extricate three balloon skins from bluejean pockets cluttered with peppermints and cigarettes. Then he would tie three balloons--one red, one yellow, and one blue--to the neck of the canister. Each afternoon he would watch the three balloons fly away and then would go to sleep using his empty wallet for a pillow under the Gothic Bridge, just before the twisted nighttime monsters came out to roam the park.

The morning passed, as usual, without a sale. For all of their Swedish-memory-foam-Tempur-pedic-mattresses, not a single stiff-necked pedestrian turned to glance in his direction. The Balloon Salesman didn't seem particularly troubled, though, and when noontime came he took a peanut butter and jelly sandwich wrapped in yesterday's newspaper out of the Radio Flyer. Then, with crumbs of Wonderbread clinging to his graying muzzle, the Balloon Salesman unscrewed a jar of applesauce for desert. He didn't have a spoon, which was fine, because he seemed to enjoy slurping the fruity puree off of his fingertips. He wiped his hands clean on the grass just as the last school bell of the day rang out dismissal, and the sidewalks were teeming then with children that slung bulging bookbags over their shoulders and walked home to study chemistry before piano practice, only passing through the park because it was the quickest way back to their dwarf-sized desks. They marched home to Mozart, screamed into their skulls through beetle-sized iPod earbugs.

The Balloon Salesman scanned the stream of bodies for any indicator of anomaly while humming “If I Had a Hammer” by Peter, Paul & Mary. His heart leapt when he noticed that, twenty feet away and moving closer, walked a girl whose iPod seemed to have run out of batteries. “Balloons! Balloons, here!” yelled the Balloon Salesman. “You, miss, howsabout a nice yellow balloon?” The young girl’s long blond plait oscillated humorlessly as she peeled herself out of the human to face the Balloon Salesman without being crushed under the stampede of black patent leather shoes. “Sure,” said the girl, the corners of her lips telegraphing a mixture of pity, fear, and disgust. “Quick, though. I have gymnastics in fifteen minutes and I need to catch a bus.” “Coming right up!” ejaculated the Balloon Salesman. He disentangled a canary yellow balloon skin from the forest of brambles in his pocket, then inflated it and tied it to a sturdy string with expert dexterity. Broadcasting a surprisingly radiant smile for a man who didn’t own a toothbrush, he handed the girl the leash of the yellow balloon. “That will be twenty five cents, please.” “Fine,” said the girl, fingering through her file-cabinet purse. “Can you break a fifty?” The Balloon Salesman’s smile inverted itself. “No,” he stammered, taken aback. “I can’t, I’m sorry. I-I don’t have enough.” The girl looked at him, annoyed now, and snapped her purse closed. “You could have had it for free...” said the Balloon Salesman at her back, as her golden braid swung like a pendulum.

The rest of the day passed without a single sale. The sun began to set and the evening began to fall, and the Balloon Salesman untied the balloons from the neck of the helium canister and made ready to let them slip through his fingers and fly away. Thinking better of it, he tied them around his own neck and, lighter than air, he was lifted out of the reach of the stirring Central Park monsters. Breathless and ever rising, the Balloon Salesman parted ways with the earth and ascended beyond the smog and light pollution to the level of the stars in the inky black sky, and he prayed to set down in friendlier place.

Hayley Fuchs

Breathing in
All the dust that I can
Black particles
In a heated conflagration
Weld to the glass
Shiny and tar like
I let out a dragon's laugh
And skip into a wall
Slipping through cracks
Milk pouring my way
Into a mentally pleasing universe
Later old man sits near to the music
Needing the physical non-barrier
Nodding his head
With encouragement
And a cowboy's eyes
Minutes earlier he waned
To a young boy's guitar
A riff the color of blue
Three girls
Play with each other's hairs
Like monkeys
Lying forward
On a backwards couch
Palms under chins
As snow flakes tornado
Around the lamp post's glare
Swarming flies on a humid spring night
Some of the paintings
Can go out with the garbage tonight
But the muffins can stay
Cause the water is muddy
And the air makes the sweat
Under your sweater dance.
He's fallen like the leaves
While she stares with eyes closed
Already on her way to California
And on the other side of this painted wall
Are the narrow bricks
Of an alley where boys take swigs and levitate
Breathing out bourbon colored vapor clouds
The size of their fists.

Shooting Star
Whitney Marris



ravines

Kelly Hendricken

Don't wave at me because your hand
reaches straight through my chest and
the tiny little cracks widen and groan.
Something is about to give way.

You were a messiah of base needs.
Something about your eyes
after one too many drinks said that
there was nothing there
when I looked you straight in the eye.

Something about one too many pieces
being lost from the puzzle, and you tried
your hardest to find them but they were lost
under the couch,
under the bed,
with your dignity.

There was a time when your hands were paintbrushes,
creating stroke after stroke
to remake me into a masterpiece,
just for you to throw cans of paint on it in frustration,
undoing all the work you did.

And so I crookedly smile in response,
and the chasms widen, deepen like a ravine.
I stare into its darkness, unable to see an end,
unable to know how to seal it back up.

Shrieks

Julie McMahon

The grey sky mire
splatters onyx streets.
Its droplets shake the rooms outside
in the sectioned air
the space where clouds burst hysterically
and they reverberate.

We hear them from inside
sex of corruption
alabaster noise
cancerous penetration

We listen
for the obsidian-plated dilapidated high rises
as they scratch the nimbostratum.
In their vertical tumble, they shriek.

There's a space inside me
where I burst hysterically
and nothing but a colorless mist lies beyond my window lens,
but I can't in this comatose hide.

Eventually I rise
and from soft breath
elongated gasp
your name
pops from the fire of my crackling lips.

Palmistry

Matt Cordella

Father Ed stands at the foot of the altar
and thinks to himself that palm reading isn't an esoteric art
but an exoteric science.

The congregation files into a dutiful line
their hands outstretched
shuffling forward to receive God.

First comes the mother
palms careworn, hard-worked and smooth from
babies burped
dishes washed
shirts starched and pressed.

She balances an infant son on her hip and holds him tight in the crook of her elbow,
then turns her palms up to the celestial drama on the ceiling
rendered in chipping communion wafers of lead paint.

A flake of God shines on her silky palm for a moment before she buries him inside
and walks back to the pew to kneel in prayer.

Next comes the father
palms thick with callus, hard-worked and rough from
gardens weeded and fertilized
wood sawed
babies burped

His fingernails are painted purple where his hammer missed the mark.
He turns them down to face the fraying carpet
which has been worn colorless by scuff-toed Sunday shoes.

A slice of God glimmers on his scaly palm for a second before he swallows it whole
and returns to the pew to be quietly with his wife and baby.

Father Ed sees:

Palms

stained with motor oil
lined with age

Knuckles

scarred and bruised from punching

Fingers

withered and twisted from writing
choked with wedding rings

Fingernails

with bits of bright orange carrot caught underneath; Sunday dinner is waiting at home in the
crock-pot.

all groping for a piece of God to hold on to.

The last man in line steps forward
the man with the leaky palms
 palms that have leaked out the whole world red with blood and caul.
You can always tell the true believers by the holes in their hands,
 thinks Father Ed.

The man takes a God-shard
 white like the moon
and puts it in his mouth
then breaks the circle into four pieces with his tongue and swallows
 a snake eating its tail.



Hots on for Nowhere

Whitney Marris



Murder

Elena Buttgerit

Dead crows.

Corpses garnish the grass
beneath crabapple branches.

Mangled wings
hang at jagged angles.

Feathers torn from follicles
settle to the ground like volcanic ash.

Onyx eyes stare
cemented in sockets
shock burned into corneas.

Winged mourners shriek dirges
pregnant with sorrow.

Lively boys.

They wear tattered jeans
caked with mud by the ankles
with holes in the knees from hopping fences.

Gamboling down the dirt road
kicking up dust and stones
slingshots rest in back pockets
and giggles bounce off tongues.

Wyatt Mentzinger

The wrinkles
On an old couple
Laugh too



Flying Turtle
Natalie Bladis



Wyatt Mentzinger

Old Ipods retain
Innumerable songs
Yet have no mouth.

Commemoration of Childhood

Lauren Recny



RE: Still haven't done your SOFI?

Elena Buttgerit

Hello again!

If you are receiving this e-mail it is because you still need to fill out your SOFIs for some or all of the courses in which you are currently enrolled. Please take the time to do so now. I am sure you are tired of seeing my attempts at attracting your attention; do your SOFIs, the e-mails will stop and no one will get hurt. Don't make me resort to attempts at rhyme, iambic pentameter or puns. I'm sure it won't be pretty.

Since you dare not attempt to rhyme or write
in iambic pentameter, I will.

With ever inexpressible delight
I find my eyes fused to textbooks until
the words transform into maggots that writhe
in a frenzy. I've learned to dismiss my
five ton eyelids and moaning stomach. I've
built a shrine to caffeine from my supply
of used up Folgers cans. Final exams roar
overhead, an avalanche on the verge
of devouring me and yet, still more
inescapable assignments emerge.
As for filling out SOFIs for each class,
no thanks Geneseo. I think I'll pass.

Social Stagnation

Kate Harlin

I've got a few years left
on this lease before I turn in
the White Horse barstool, the rucksack,
the flowers from my hair, the bra-torch,
and get serious.

The mission's been accomplished.
They don't need me anymore. Anyway
the system's been broken since before anyone Howled
about it. It's not going anywhere (we should probably
be Mars-bound by now, though).

Maybe I'll have some green left in me
after I jet around the world,
and cram a study somewhere full of first editions
to buy a metal water bottle and a hybrid. Maybe
I'll have some time between Kerouac and Carlson
to light a different kind of fire.

Poem Puddles and Comma Drops

Gabrielle Gosset

We were told to miss the cracks in fear
of broken backs, so we walked like newborn
colts along every sidewalk. We were told
not to look down, but ahead, and so we fixed
our eyes on the horizon and faces looking
past ours. We were told to sit up straight and
so we uncurled our spines like snap bracelets.

One day, I bumped into you, and my bracelet
snapped and I wrapped around you. Later we
held hands and looked down at every crack
we stepped on, noticing the poems pooled in
between the concrete. We noticed the words
crushed underneath rocks, and the metaphors
hanging off power lines. We let punctuation
drip from icicles onto our eyelids and smiled
parentheses. We were marionettes cut from
our rhyme schemes, falling into free form.

She

Stasia Monteiro

I.

Born.

Coddled near,
adorned like the year-round holiday tree,
pruned

clip clip clip

There –

perfect Temple tendrils frame your chubby-
cheeked, blue-
eyed, adorably clumsy self.

Light-hearted melodies chime as bell-songs
lift your little feet from the ground

“Don’t worry; everyone will take care of you.”

II.

Born again.

Fallen far.

Projected beauty surrounds you
encompasses you

makes you a figment of someone else’s reality

clip clip clip

Impractically high

Heels lift you above us, calling for
praise of your painfully fashionable, lean-legged aura.

The breach of familial harmony plants your feet in the ground

“Don’t worry; I can take care of myself.”

III.

Burdened.

Foundation rests in the wrinkles–
decades of trouble that no one warned you about
bills and business and
fighting for your right to live

clip clip clip

the machine guns of the umpteenth war movie fire
in the living room.

So much headache

who knows when it all began?

Routine drags your achy feet to the table

clip clip clip

Another half dollar saved

this week on groceries

I worry; who will take care of me

Deep in Thought

Anait Tamanian



winter at night

Kelly Hendricken

It's dark out and
the field is covered in a layer of white down.
We all ran outside,
 all of us,
after gorging on wine.

If the snow could speak
it would've begged and pleaded.
There's something inherently wrong in
disturbing the tranquil white expanse stretched out
in front of us,
 a pure marriage bed under a canopy of stars.

And your strong arms were suddenly
 wrapped around me.
You tackled me down
under the stars washed out by the
 bright building lights.

The cold air siphoned off our laughter,
and the steam from our bodies rose
stolen by the bitter hands of the cold.

You picked me up,
carried me away in your arms
 and in the moment,
it seemed romantic and chivalrous.

But the cheap, weak light of morning
reminded me that our imprints in the snow
would be gone with warmer weather.

Cavity
Meghan Pipe

I.

After it all went dark, he whispered to her
Low growl reverberating, low note
A bow pulled along the bass string
Of her spine the better to keep you close,
My dear while Grandma whimpered softly.

And that is how Red found herself settled
In the swelled belly of an unlikely lover,
Cradled woman that now lived at the pace
Of his caged animal heart. She sang him lullabies
Until the ceiling of her world rose and fell

In slow heaves, traced letters on the fleshy walls
Of his stomach, spelling words he guessed or couldn't.
When he laughed, she was anointed by faint light
From a place unremembered, because maybe
This is all she ever wanted or could want.

He came to her draped in canvas tents,
Unhinging jaws to swallow whole the glowing flame
Of all she was, the empty filling the empty:
The sunken cavity of his abdomen
Bloating to the belly of a stone Buddha.

II.

When the axe ripped through his furry coat
Grandma fainted mid-novena, leaving Red
To protest too late the cesarean that had torn apart
Her world. Standing above him, she felt his nose was cold
And wet. She knew it couldn't have lasted.

Grandma didn't speak again, only rocking
Back and forth, bloody organ in a jar
Now her always metronome. The girl's eyes
Looked for something and nothing, both empty and full.
The wine from Red's basket was gone.

These days, it is always too bright for the lonely,
Who whisper the coming of a prophet reborn
Cloaked in the trappings of a wolf's hide
Who roams the woods at night
Howling lullabies in hollow tones.

Teach Your Children Well
Whitney Marris



