

# The Lighter

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## The Lighter Fall 2008

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the **Lighter**

fall 2008

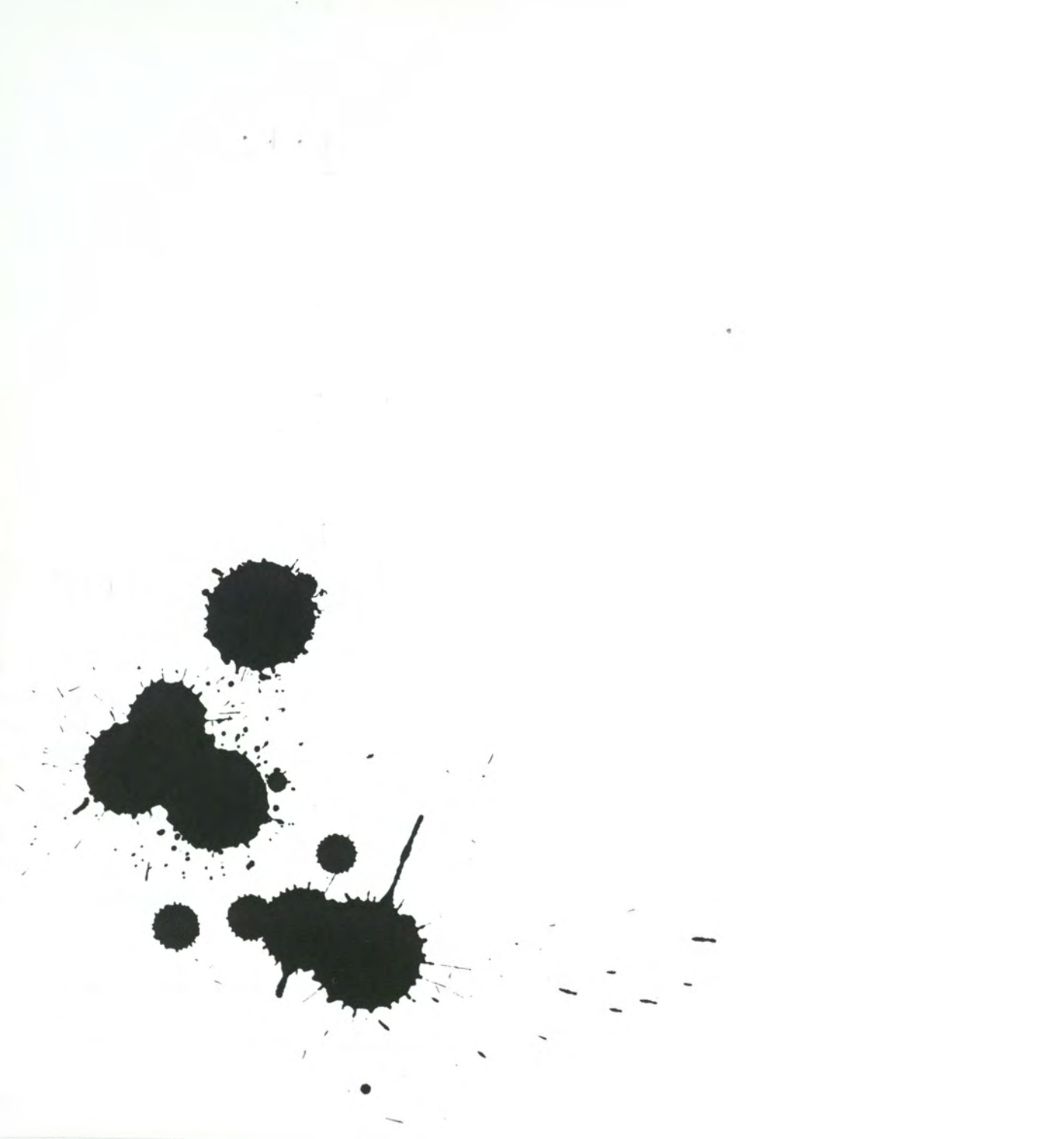


# the Lighter

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# Interview with Susanna Childress

Jon Krause

I had never conducted an interview before, so needless to say I was a little nervous going into my sit down with Susanna Childress. I mean, this woman not only has a PhD in English/Creative Writing, but she'd also published an award winning book of poetry, *Jagged With Love*, before the age of thirty. A little intimidating, if you ask me.

So, I sought help. Several of my friends write for *The Torch*, so I figured they'd know a thing or two about interviews. I asked for a few pointers.

"You just ask them questions," was really the best advice I could coax out of them. "It's really not that hard."

Could an interview really be as easy as, say, having a conversation? Surely not. But what question to ask? What do you, the humble readers of *The Lighter*, want to hear from an accomplished author?

As I was getting ready for the interview, I was struggling with some questions of my own – questions that I'm sure many college-aged aspiring writers are struggling with as they search for employment, acceptance to graduate school, even personal fulfillment. Maybe all three. Eventually, we'll all leave the comfortable confines of this university and have to face the real world. The big, scary, real world. What does being a writer in this day and age mean?

What is our place in this world? It was with these questions in mind that I prepared for this interview.

The interview took place on a Thursday evening in Professor Childress' basement office in the Linwood House. I've seen a few basement offices before, so I almost did a double take when I entered hers – the ambiance of the soft, low light made it feel as if we were talking in an unusually quiet coffeehouse rather than an office.

I started out with a warm up question to "break the ice." Try to see the person behind the poet, if you will. I asked her to list her favorite song, her favorite book, and her favorite movie. It's not a question I could have easily answered, or even answered truthfully at all, so I should have known better. After some consideration she conceded to provide her favorite musical artist, her favorite author, and her favorite film director, though she warned me that her tastes were constantly evolving and she tended to favor independent artists, especially with music and film. Her answers? Sufjan Stevens, who recorded his first album at Hope College, where she has worked for the past two years; Marilynne Robinson, even though she is a novelist, not a poet; and Majid Majidi, an Iranian director best known for his films *Children of Heaven*, *Color of Paradise*, and *Baran*.

We're about five minutes into the interview when I get to my "real" questions:

Jon Krause: I guess the real purpose of [this interview] is talking to authors, because our main readership is young writers hoping to become authors someday, and the world can kind of be a scary place for writers. And I think a lot of people have the impression that others don't see

artists as, maybe, necessary. And so how would you see the artist's, or even just specifically the writer's, role in the society at large?

Susanna Childress: Funny you should ask that, because we were just talking about this in my Twentieth Century Poetry course today. W. H. Auden has this fantastic essay, it's called "Writing." And he says here that –

All those whose success in life depends neither upon a job which satisfies some specific and unchanging social need, like a farmer's, nor, like a surgeon's, upon some craft which he can be taught by others and improve by practice, but upon 'inspiration,' the lucky hazard of ideas, live by their wits, a phrase which carries a slightly pejorative meaning. Every "original" genius, be he an artist or a scientist, has something a bit shady about him, like a gambler or a medium.

Literary gatherings, cocktail parties and the like, are a social nightmare because writers have no 'shop' to talk. Lawyers and doctors can entertain each other with stories about interesting cases, about experiences, that is to say, related to their professional interests but yet impersonal and outside themselves. Writers have no impersonal professional interests. The literary equivalent of talking shop would be writers reciting their own work at each other, an unpopular procedure for which only very young writers have the nerve."

So we talked about one of Auden's main goals, which was, I think, to write a poetics of affirmation. One of the lines he's most famous for writing is that "poetry makes nothing happen."

And that line is often pulled out and misused. But later in the same stanza, he says "poetry is a way of happening, a mouth." And the very end of the poem, which is "In Memory of W. B. Yeats" – he says that the poet's job, and here I'm paraphrasing, is within the deserts of the heart to teach the free man how to praise. I do think that that's something writers are called to do— not necessarily to paint a jovial picture or, as my mother really wishes I would do, to write rather Sunday School-like material, have that content be full of joy and the abundance of life, but to be honest within that. The lines from Auden are "In the deserts of the heart / Let the healing fountains start, / In the prison of his days / Teach the free man how to praise." Some of that may feel a little cliché, may feel a little jovial – "the healing fountain" – but basically he's saying that human experience is imprisoning, and so within this imprisoning experience, poets teach us how to praise. So for the writer, I believe the challenge, in terms of relevancy or utilitarianism, whatever practical way you might be seen or assigned a place within society, your writing serves to be honest and to affirm life, even if that means writing dark stories, dark poetry, dark nonfiction. And by dark, we could mean almost anything. I have to go again to another poet, to Marianne Moore. She has a poem called "Poetry," which is her most well known. I think she says it so well in this poem –

"I, too, dislike it: there are things that are important beyond  
all this fiddle.

Reading it, however, with a perfect contempt  
for it, one  
discovers in  
it after all, a place for the genuine."

And then she comes back to the idea of the genuine at the very end –

“if you demand on the one hand,  
the raw material of poetry in  
all its rawness and  
that which is on the other hand  
genuine, you are interested in poetry.”

In fact, I think this could be applied to writing more generally. I also write fiction and I'm trying my hand at nonfiction, and I'm constantly trying to keep this in mind. Rawness, “the raw material...in all of its rawness,” and the genuine. So the jagged, the hard pieces of life, the confrontations and the suffering and the injustices, and working in whatever way we can to expose those and balance them with the simple and beautiful, elemental parts of human experience. That's something that I don't think most people are walking around thinking about. That's our utility. That's what we can offer.

[several moments of silence]

SC: Did I answer the question?

[both laugh]

JK: You did great.

SC: I can't quite even remember what you asked me...

JK: No, it actually ties quite well into my next question. You talked about reporting the truth, not sugarcoating what your experiences are. I read your book, which was very good.

SC: Thank you.

JK: I don't normally go out of my way to read poetry...

SC: [laughter]

JK: ...I'm not a poet, per se...

SC: That's a big compliment!

JK: ...but it was a page turner.

SC: Well thanks!

JK: But it did feel very personal. There were a lot of themes that were consistent within each section – the human body, fathers came up a lot, hospitals. Would you consider any of your poetry based on your life, or even autobiographical?

SC: That's a good question. And the answer is a hard one because I can't say yes or no, not because I want to be discreet about my personal life or withholding from you some truth, but because I honestly don't know exactly where my life, my personal experiences, stop and start within the poems. I could go through line by line and tell you, but that wouldn't be very helpful. Here's what happens – I start with an experience, and then the poem often takes on a truth of its own. And that sounds sort of mystical or bombastic, but if I'm writing about something that happened to me, and I find that as I'm writing about it the truth of the poem really is something else, then I end up changing the truth of the experience. I'm going to make up an example because I don't know if I can think of one specifically from the book. Say that I've had a fight with my husband. I might take a really hurtful line from that fight and begin writing about it. It might not begin the poem – you never know where it will end up. I start out writing about that, but in that, I imaginatively am able to move in different directions, and I make it a line that my grandmother said to my father. Because the truth of the poem may be about the way we hurt each other.

JK: Make it broader, about general human experience.

SC: Yeah. And so, no, my grandmother never

said that to my father, but yes, I think my father was hurt in some specific way by his upbringing and that that scar may be something that then I experience in him. Does that make sense?

JK: Yeah.

SC: The subject matter, the truth of the poem itself, then determines how I change the factual truth of the experience.

JK: Yeah, I think there was a balance in your poetry between this personal-ness and this kind of common human experience that really made it relatable and very touching and meaningful to a broader audience.

SC: Oh, thanks.

JK: I think a lot of poets just kind of write for themselves without the intention of other people reading it.

SC: Well, a lot of it for me, I think, has to do with an overweight imagination. I just have this imagination that is...really hefty. Before I was married, I was writing poems about being married and what it might look like. I don't have children, but I have for some time been writing poems about... my son planting a tree, or... you know, whatever it might be. I don't actually know anybody who has had a breast removed. What was important for me, especially in that first book, was to take on different voices, different personas. I wanted to get out of my own experience, because I was young when I wrote that – I just turned 30 – so I can say, "I was young when I wrote that book!" I wrote some of those poems when I was a senior in college. So, 22 to 25-years old. And what are you writing about then? You're writing about boys and you're writing about your dad. And pretty much, that's what I was writing about. So, I really did want to go beyond my own experiences to try

and recognize how another's experience might be affecting him or her. The good thing is that with a large imagination, I also have a pretty large sympathy [for others]. So as I imagine it, I can feel it. There's a poem in *Jagged with Love* called "Daughter in the Waiting Room," and that actually didn't happen to me at all. It was my college roommate's best friend's mom who was going into the hospital to have her skull examined because there was a hole in it, so they had to cut from one ear to the other and peel the skin back to examine her skull. I just remember one evening, when my roommate told me that this was happening, trying to imagine and then immediately being able to sympathize, and crying as I was writing this, what it would feel like if that were my mom. And later on, I read that Shelley says that poetry – and I think it might be true about literature in general – allows you to stand in another's place. This was long before the cliché of walking a mile in someone else's shoes. But it allows you stand in someone else's shoes because as a reader, you are experiencing what the writer experienced. And I think then if the writer is trying to experience what someone else has experienced, there's sort of a "double love," you know – there's an ability, twice removed, for that many people to experience something singular or particular. So, in that way, many of my poems have autobiographical elements, but to be honest, I wouldn't say any of them are sheerly autobiographical. That's actually why I've stayed away from nonfiction, because it's hard not to lie.

JK: [laughter]

SC: It really is hard not to, you know... I want this person to say this at this time, or I want...

JK: It's more convenient that way.

SC: With poetry and with fiction, I can maneuver all of those elements so that the truth of the piece is foregrounded instead of my experience or what actually happened.

JK: Going back specifically to that crazy time between 22 and 25...

SC: [laughter]

JK: ...you're amassing all of these poems – at what point did you say “I’ve got a bunch of poems here; maybe I should make a book,” or was there a guiding theme at the beginning that made you say “I want to write about this”? What really made the book happen?

SC: Two things – fantastical naiveté, and an assignment, a school assignment. You bring those things together, and viola!

JK: ...and you get published...

SC: [laughter] No, I’m just kidding. I had been writing through college, but most of the poems were no good. I would say 95 percent of them were no good. The only thing that was good were those poems that granted me entrance into a masters program. And from there, I revised some of the poems that I had written in college, and two of those made it into *Jagged With Love*. I was in a two-year masters program. I did not think about publishing a book; in fact, the closest I came to thinking about publishing was individual literary journals, which I’m sure you’re thinking about and everyone here is thinking about. But those are sort of...they seem sort of ephemeral, in a way, you know? That there are these journals that exist, and you get a poem in one, and then you get a poem in another, and you may get a poem in another. But that’s not why you’re writing. That ends up being a headache and a happy consequence of your diligence, that you end up writing quite a bit, and sending out.

But I had not really thought about a book. It was only when I had to create a thesis, a master’s thesis, that I put together these poems. Because I had to. I had to turn them in. And in fact I had an entire semester to work on the thesis. I still didn’t have a very...I really didn’t have a sense that they would be published as a book, in part because I didn’t believe in myself that way. I thought they were decent poems. I thought a few of them were probably pretty good and would get published in journals, but I didn’t really think about the book being published. And it was after I had finished the thesis, and had help from a professor at Florida State, in terms of reordering them and doing some serious revising, re-titling. Then I began sending out in earnest, with great hope, but to be honest, no real expectations. So I was unbelievably thrilled when it actually got published.

JK: Looking even further back, what was the spark, the drive, to even get into this field – is it something you kind of fell into, or is it something even when you were very, very little, that you wanted to be a great author when you grew up, or something you found later?

SC: I think, relatively, I was a late bloomer. When I say that to my colleagues now, they laugh, because I’m just now thirty and have a Ph. D. and have a book. But I feel behind. I did not read very thoroughly in high school, and by that I mean I read every book thoroughly, but I did not have a wide base. I got to college and hadn’t read many of the books that my peers had read. I got to grad school, and I was then further behind in the books that I had read.

JK: You can only read the books that you’re assigned – there’s no time for free time reading.

SC: That’s true, that’s true!

JK: I can resonate with that as well.

SC: [laughter] Well, and too, sometimes it's an issue of exposure. My parents are very well-educated and very loving, had very high demands for me in terms of my performance in school, but were not, maybe, attuned to fine literature. So I wrote a little bit. I would write silly poems. The first poem I think I actually wrote was about why I do not like vegetables, something like that. And I'm actually vegetarian now, so there's this huge irony! But I really hated vegetables, so it was this very angsty poem in sixth grade, or whatever. But I was editor of my school newspaper in high school, and I wrote one of those columns, those editorial columns, that only appear in high school newspapers, where I just sort of creatively twirled and did some lyrical ballet here and there, and found myself enjoying it quite a bit. And I thought I wanted to be a columnist, which shows I had no idea that that's not what being a columnist entails. So I wrote a lot of what I now see are very saccharine columns for this school newspaper. They're sort of the Sunday school material my mom has been hoping for since. But that began in me a desire to write, and so I went into college as a communications and English major, and very soon realized that communications was not for me. Those "w's" – who, what, where, when, why – left no room for beautiful adjectives and very little room for creative reflection. So, my first semester, I took an Intro to Creative Writing course, in which I was introduced to poetry, fiction, nonfiction and drama, and I was hooked. I was done. And at that point, I really thought I wanted to be a college professor. So, after my first semester, when I changed my major to writing and English literature, because those were two

separate majors where I went to school, I knew that I wanted to teach college, and therefore I knew that it would take graduate degrees.

JK: A lot of the writers that come to campus, they'll sometimes have a little quirk or something in their creative process. Could you talk a little about your creative process, about what you may do differently, or if you have a schedule or routine when you write?

SC: Jon, I think I'm going to disappoint you on this one. I'm a very boring writer. I do keep a journal with phrases or images. But I rue to admit that I can only compose on my...[whispers] laptop computer. So, no legal pads out in the meadows at 4:00 a.m. What I would say about my process is that when it comes upon me...and I'm not someone who really appreciates the metaphor of the muse, since it's a pretty sexist metaphor. You know, this woman comes and sort of eroticizes your imagination...that doesn't really work for me. It's not so much the muse as what might lightly be called a compulsion to sit down and take the phrase or the image I had written down and have been thinking about for a day or so and try and get it out. And then what happens, which is maybe more heavily compulsive, is that I attend to that piece, whether it's a poem or a short story, for hours and hours upon end. So besides sleeping, it's pretty much all that I think about for a good 48 hours at a stretch. And then maybe I can have something that diverts my attention, but then I'm right back to it. So, it feels a tad religious – if I am working on a poem, I print it out before I go to bed or, now that I'm trying to save paper, I have my laptop right next to me. I read it right before I go to sleep, I sort of fall asleep thinking about the piece, and as soon as I wake up in the morning, I read it again

and begin working on it again. It's consuming. If I have to teach class or I have to walk the dog, I'll do it, but I'm not thinking about anything but that poem. Don't be fooled! I've told Josh, my husband, not to talk to me about anything important in those long periods. Which is kind of hard, because sometimes they're very, very long periods. But I sort of obsess about the piece until I feel okay about it. And then I put it away. And then a month later I'll pull it out and do the same thing all over again until it's finished. Whatever that might mean. So it involves long periods of isolation and a good deal of healthy compulsion.

JK: Do you have one poem from your book that's maybe your favorite? Or one that you're maybe personally closer to than the rest? I know it's hard to pick just one...

SC: I suppose I am more emotionally connected to certain poems. I think there are poems that perhaps I take more aesthetic pride in, in terms of the craftsmanship, but then there are other poems that bear such psychological weight that I appreciate them more than the ones that I think are really well crafted. Thankfully, the title poem for the book, *Jagged with Love*, is one that I am decently proud of aesthetically. If one can say this about her own work, I think it's a pretty good poem. And it's also one that was incredibly hard to write, and is, at every reading, incredibly hard to read because there are larger pieces of it that are autobiographical and are onrunning in their relevance. But ultimately, it's a poem about forgiveness and coming to peace with the reckoning one might need with someone she's tussled with. It was a poem that really was enacting what I was experiencing, trying to forgive and love my father. So, it's a poem that still frightens me because I know my dad has

read it, and we've never talked about it. And every time I read it, I can't help but wonder what he thinks when he's reading it—if he read it at one point, what he thought while he was reading it. And I think that the kind of forgiveness that we work through on any sort of regular basis is the most important work that we do in our lives. Existentially, at least. So that's an important poem for me.

By this time, I had run out of my "real" interview questions. During my preparation phase, I had planned to end the interview with a more lighthearted question, but the transition from the previous response seemed irreverent. Luckily, Professor Childress made up for my lack of improvisational skills and broke the silence with her contagious laughter, warning me with a smile that I'd better change the subject before tears starting flowing. Being as the interview took place on the day before Halloween, my last question was if she was going to dressing up for the occasion. She wasn't, though she wished she would have gone as Sarah Palin. She asked me in turn if I was planning on dressing up, to which I replied that I would be going as a Jedi. This sparked a small conversation about the Star Wars franchise, which led to us swapping stories about attending movies with our parents as children (she insisted on leaving *The Empire Strikes Back* after the wompa attack; I had a similar experience at the live-action *Ninja Turtles* movie, though I don't think my parents were too disappointed to leave that one).

Thus concluded the interview.

Instead of trying to say something smart, I'll let Susanna Childress finish for me with her poem "*Jagged with Love*."

The year my father stopped yelling. I began  
to see a counselor. I cried to her, all the buds  
of forgiveness stubborn as flax, the color  
of a forgotten wall, having burrowed

for years, and now with the coaxing  
of this woman, psalmist's verse, dry-erase board,  
I wept stupidly, like a girl  
who's torn the head from her doll, meaning to.

My nightmares recurred. I stopped sleeping,  
stopped eating meals, only the forkfuls I could muster  
while my roommates gawked. I stayed days in my room  
and found music that cried with me, for pity's sake,

the blue stomachache of life, life shorn up as a skull.  
My counselor kept mentioning  
the mortal coil, and here I was, she said, somewhere  
between Eeyore and catatonia. How's your sex drive, she'd ask, and,  
The centipede in your dreams still speaks?

One day a sign outside her office building says, Watch  
for falling tar. We start on the fainting spells,  
the one and only slap, the first time he called me a whore. Men  
on the roof keep throwing over bags of powder, their tools,

their helmets flag past the window and hit the ground  
like a knee-jerk memory: his breth  
blowing out Shit For Brains. His soldier's stance,  
close enough to my face for a kiss, or a small,

calculated bite. Last night, I start, I finally dreamed of Vietnam.  
Good, she says, and marks it down, Good. No, I say, it was me,  
giving birth in the jungle. My father was nowhere, not with a gun,  
not hunting Charlie. My father, I say, was not even dead.

And then, as sometimes happens, my hour is up, and I am  
standing outside. It smells burnt. I look up, watching for tar to fall,  
but even that, I don't know what it means: how do you  
watch for something to fall? Just walk, I guess, and this

is what I do, chin tipped to the sky, thrumming with the urge  
to love complexity, as I know it, jagged with love.







poetry

# Eden

Thomas Heet

It was a garden on fire  
at the moment of my birth.

I nursed on the boiling sap of maples,  
chewed the burning bark of aspens and oaks and pines,  
and breathed the ashes of leaves.

My tongue withstood the assaults of every flame and ember  
and my teeth grew under the pulp of timber  
that could fill entire mountains.

The ceaseless smoke caused tears,  
tears that kept my naked skin  
pink and soft and cool.  
Tears that ran with rivers of sweat that gave to the seas.

Fruits were turned to tar and the clay earth a dried cake.  
Burned vultures and owls crumbled as their carcasses fell to the forest floor.

It was a lifeless world except for a solitary songbird  
with a bright yellow breast and wet black eyes.  
The red of its face was the fruit of knowledge  
and its song the only hint of God.

When at last I had consumed the burning forest  
-- every needle, leaf, branch, trunk, fruit, cone and root--  
I became Man.  
I exhaled a giant orb of fire and threw it to the horizons.  
I rested on the naked earth and, realizing its absence, longed for the bird.

When it appeared, I knew  
that the brightness of its colors had faded under the new sun.  
Its feathers retreated into its skin, which had become like a gray paper.

In its sudden frailty, the bird cracked and collapsed,  
releasing a million tiny spores in an extinguishing puff.  
As they spread, the spores returned the browns and reds to the soil and clay  
and the even blue to the sky.  
I had no other companion there.

The bird's feet became worms which moved in the dirt  
and hundreds of tiny green threads were crawling upwards from the soil's  
depths.  
Some of them grew pods that fattened like bellies  
in the new light of day.

They swelled until they popped open  
and each plant birthed its own new bird,  
smaller than an egg, hummingbirds.

Some of them flew forth and filled the sky  
and others became flowers,  
their wings turning to petals and their beaks to pistils.

And from these flowers more birds were crawling forth.  
The pollen colored their wings during their struggle to spring.  
I called them orioles that crawled from orange flowers  
buntings and jays from blue flowers  
cardinals from red flowers

Soon, entire trees were growing  
and the bones of owls and egrets grew flesh and feathers  
within the hearts of the trunks  
and their giant wings pushed through cracks in the bark until they emerged,  
beating the air like hammers.

The roots of some of the trees became serpents  
and tails of beasts.  
Rocks in the sea grew soft  
and formed all manner of fish and reef.

The world was finally beautiful  
but without purpose.

So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon me  
and I slept;  
then he took one of my ribs  
and closed up its place with flesh.

# Our Tree on Chute Street

Emme Davis

Cradling thought and sleep and play,  
we tattooed your arms with the fervor  
of youthful subjects  
and the blunted edges  
of kitchen-swiped steak knives.

Standing alone at the edge  
of an odd oasis – stretching prairie bespeckled  
with cement slabs and weeds, bordered  
by crumbling asphalt – we thought you  
swayed hello  
whenever we drove by, so we waved.

A sprinkling of blossoms  
lies bruised  
where they fell crushed  
by our eager feet, dirty  
feet, bare feet which scabbled  
against the rough trunk.

Ants go marching one by two  
up our arms until we shoo them

back into the crevice  
from whence they crawled, always  
to creep out again.

We dare each other to gnaw  
the green fruit that only looks  
like cherries, and the juice bites  
our tongues when intrepid teeth nibble  
the nose-scrunching sourness.

Peeking at passersby from behind  
our veil of crisp leaves, we laugh  
when they miss us straddling  
the gnarled and twisted rheumatic  
limbs, wrinkled but never withered.

Our backs ache  
and our legs grow  
stiff, but still we stay  
as the camouflage  
of chlorophyll shadows  
erases all below.

# Bare Summer Soles

Emme Davis

Barefoot traipsing  
through vacant lots  
and backyard byways,

no amount of scrubbing  
can pry mulberry-stain  
from our stubborn skin.

Cool blackness  
from freshly-tilled  
garden soil seeps  
into the ingrains  
of hardened heels,  
wedges between wiggling toes.

The dirt dries  
and cracks  
and crunches  
and falls off in clods

until hose water squirts  
through the crusty top layer  
making oozy mud-slime.

We don't give in to cleanliness,

not while the freshly mown lawn  
lolls in bleeding clumps. We scuttle  
through the mower-thrown remnants,

trample and mash down the grass  
with the staccato  
pounding  
of feet


soaking up the vigorous greenness  
with our bare summer soles.



# A Tad Sandy

John Linstrom

I know your sandy feet are dry,  
but if your toes could gellify  
I'd take that cup,  
and from it, sup  
on jellied toes, and cry.





# Lost

Michaelene Jewett

We used to capture  
glitter bugs in jars  
bolting the lid down  
tight so a light stayed

with us, a hushed glow  
to protect our souls  
from the devil lurking  
in the black gray mist


of bushes or oaks  
while we raised our gold  
cross necklaces to the sky,  
hands clasped, heads

bowed as yours is now,  
alone, burying your nose  
into a few soft cotton  
sheets, inhaling deeply

before you wail and beat  
your fists on the bed, wishing  
you could preserve the odor  
of powdered milk, while

the faded pink material stains  
with splotches, chalky streaks  
of black shredding  
lightly stitched seams.

-----



Your brown hair hangs  
in webs of tangles, nails  
short, bitten to the red raw  
skin of fingertips as splinters

run up your tights,  
stretching and clawing,  
attacking your leg  
like the wooden edges

of pews would as you passed  
Sunday after Sunday  
until you stopped going.  
The day you heard the crack

of a whip and felt the weight  
of concrete stone, her name  
engraved, which reminds me  
of the precise tick of the clock

when that jar full of light slipped  
from my fingers, crystal glass  
glittering off the full moon before  
it vanished, and you screamed.

# Information Overload

Michaelene Jewett

Letters travel from one side  
of the screen to the next  
as we scramble words together  
until lines of black and white static  
noise greet us—We've lost signal.  
A red switch blinks frantically,  
a warning siren splits the cabin.  
"Overload! Overload!"  
it screams. Our vessel sinks  
With the traffic of the sickly green  
Tides and steep rifts as schools  
of minnows swim past eager  
to fin their way to safety. "Come  
With us," they yell, as waves swallow  
our craft and our lungs fill with water,  
Its salty substance seeping between our  
Parted lips, creeping into the slits  
of our eyes as we go blind  
before we reach the surface.

# Raw Nature

R. James Onofrey

---

Cancerous courtesy  
drowns in a flowing  
river of gasoline,  
preparing nature's vengeance.

The leaves are paranoid,  
changing color to  
camouflage their  
peccant veins.  
Leaping from the branches  
when they become aware  
of themselves.

The trees begin to rid of their skin,  
revealing their fading scars.



# Schizophrenic Beard

R. James Onofrey

The sun's illumination  
is persistent, unchanging.  
It's core is as cold as the arctic,  
a reflection of all.

The center of the earth  
is in our backyards;  
dying in its deterioration  
while blades of grass  
quiver in the wake  
of a suicidal moonlight.

Flickers of independence  
hide between the pillars  
of an underpass, spewing  
schizophrenic tendencies  
onto the beaten cement,  
absorbing into the mind  
of a homeless man  
with a master's degree  
in skepticism. He begs  
for spare change from a  
mountain of deformed  
typewriter ribbons.

He bellows tales of  
disturbed serenity  
and  
tranquil chaos,  
attempting to remunerate  
his debts to the Pope with  
barrels of obsequious insects.

His beard begins  
to grow rapidly.  
Pouring out of his face  
like a wooden waterfall,  
slowly constricting,  
exterminating his breath  
melting his thoughts.  
Extinguishing the illumination  
of the sun and moon.

# Global Warning

Ryan Bourgart

A solitary wolf howls mournfully  
for his slain pack.

Blood red, setting sun reveals a stony face  
with falling tumbling tears  
once secured by icy glass.

Slowly splashing paws break the still surface  
the once thick soft fur becomes slick and moist  
weighing down an ursine family.  
The restless sea sends storms to the coast  
to confound the intelligent.

Clouds of fumes blanket the sky.  
Glistening eyes,  
full of the fire  
of celestial dreams  
blink out

Ruling fists of metal  
and mechanical mind  
cannot hear her desperate cry  
drowned out by the torrent of egocentric voices.  
The reverent reflection of her regal rain  
offers stable salvation.

# The Essence of Ageing

Carolyn Simpson

Whispering wet winds,  
littering, lonely leaves  
the death of Summer welcomes  
the birth of Autumn

Deciduous trees lose their leaves;  
the pines smirk  
at the baldness of their friends

Colorful flowers fold,  
wither, bend into knotted  
gnarled arthritic fists

Creaking, cracking limbs screech  
protests to the tossing wind  
tormented with confined flexibility

Scaly bark splits  
with another year's wrinkled  
circle, expanding with the growing  
girth of bulging trunks

Soon we'll see the sun



# apart

Megan Telligman

our bodies pressed together  
like a finger into sticky paint  
pulling away slowly, savoring  
slight resistance and a quiet noise.  
like the chemical smell  
that hangs on your hands for days,  
and the imprint of your index,  
staying in that paint forever.

---

our words - like magnets.  
when forced together, we felt  
tension pushing out, a small space to close  
but somehow they always just missed.  
when flipped, our words would click  
together. and trying to pull apart,  
they would grate against each other  
until our fingers hurt from prying.

---

eventually, our words did the same to our bodies.  
eventually, we would be here,  
pulling our bodies away-  
wallpaper from a wall-  
ripping tearing destroying-  
beautiful patterns. and your sweet  
scent stayed with me forever  
like a fingerprint in red paint.



# Braided

Kayla Robertson

The hair yanked into my braid  
this morning knows taut and twisted  
so well it has permanently kinked  
into the bind. My mother's fingers  
pull my hair as tightly as the bungee cords  
that hold down the bright green tarp  
atop the compactly packed black car.

“Josephine,” my father sighs  
against the fierce wind blowing  
the murky grey wall so far  
over the house that I have to lean  
my head back until my chin points  
to the sky. The first drop falls  
down my neck and slides icily  
across my beating heart.

Reaching up, I snap the ties that hold  
my braids, wrenching my fingers down  
through the twists and turns. The water  
will ease the creases and bent edges  
of my tresses tossed wildly by the wind.  
An ant carries a leaf through the storm  
far below my small world of damp curls.

# Bruised

Diana Stutzman

My smudged skyline  
bruises after sunset;  
but blackness kisses  
sleep just before waking,  
and this is blue  
of dreams and dark chocolate.  
Stars are sharp sutures  
threaded by blind men;  
haphazard, still  
they form a pattern  
and let in light.

# Naturally

Elspeth Taylor

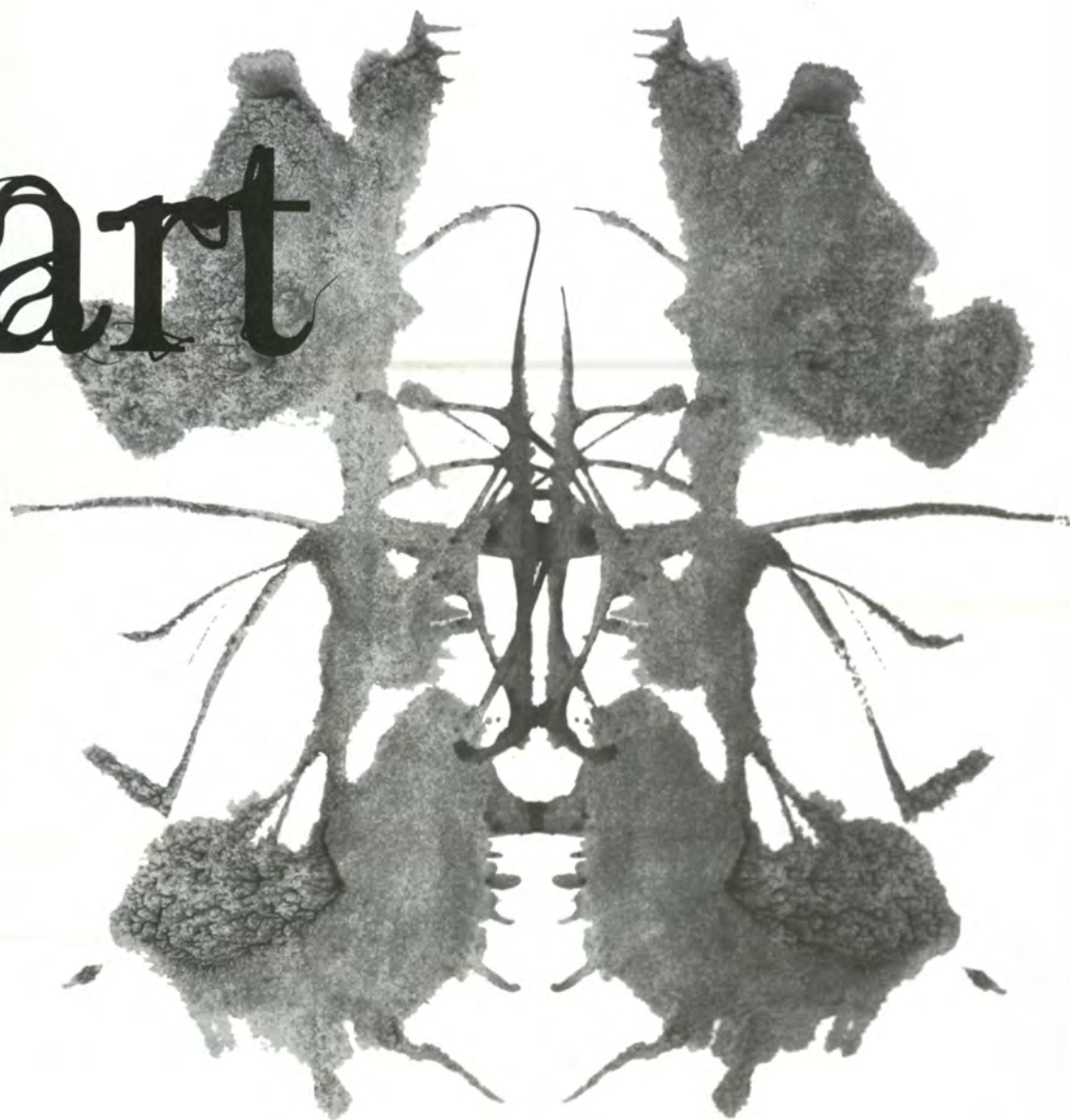
Every night, I flit into your room,  
settle myself onto the bed with its forest  
colored blanket, lay out feelers

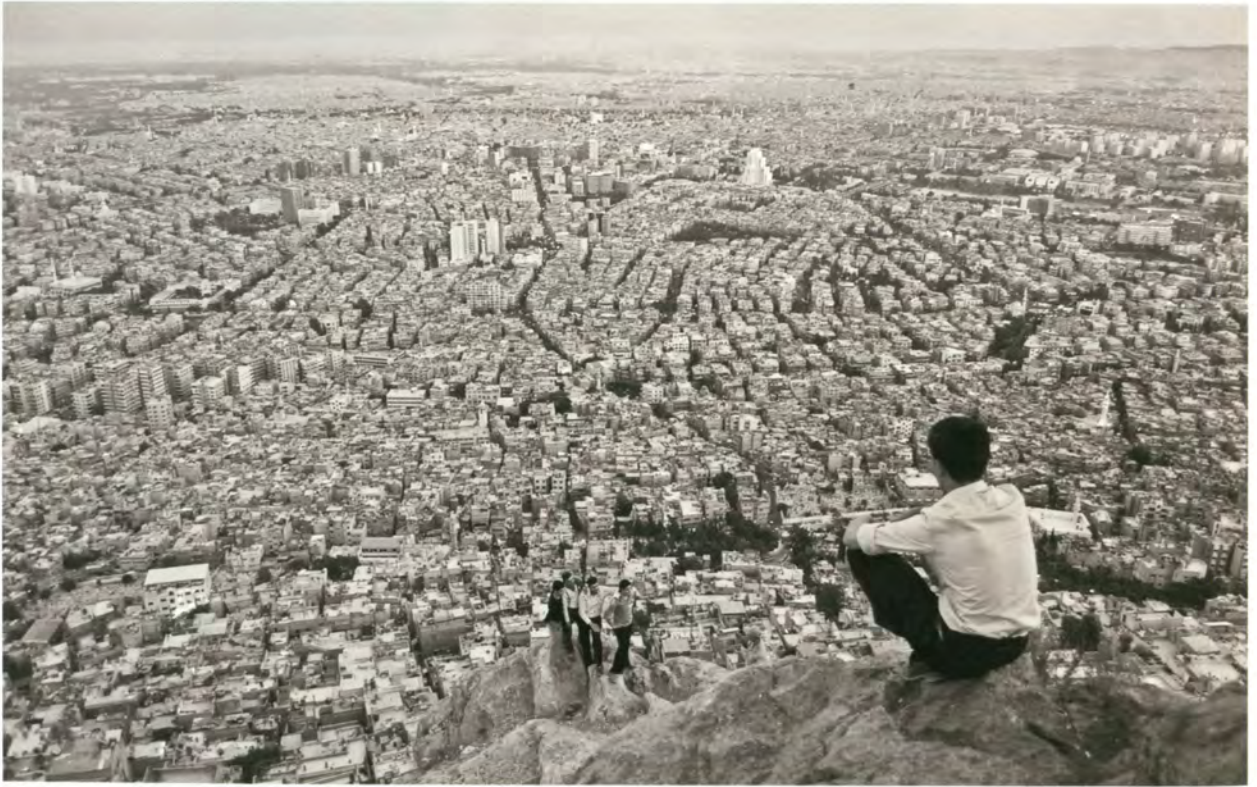
as if it is my leaf-covered home.  
The moon's twinned sphere  
folds my winged body deep into the night

sky, where its luminous glow  
draws me into itself like a strong-armed  
embrace. I glimpse my shadow, wonder

whether the light will kill or illuminate.

art





Road to Damascus - Hashem Rifai



Afternoon Shadows - Dan Lund

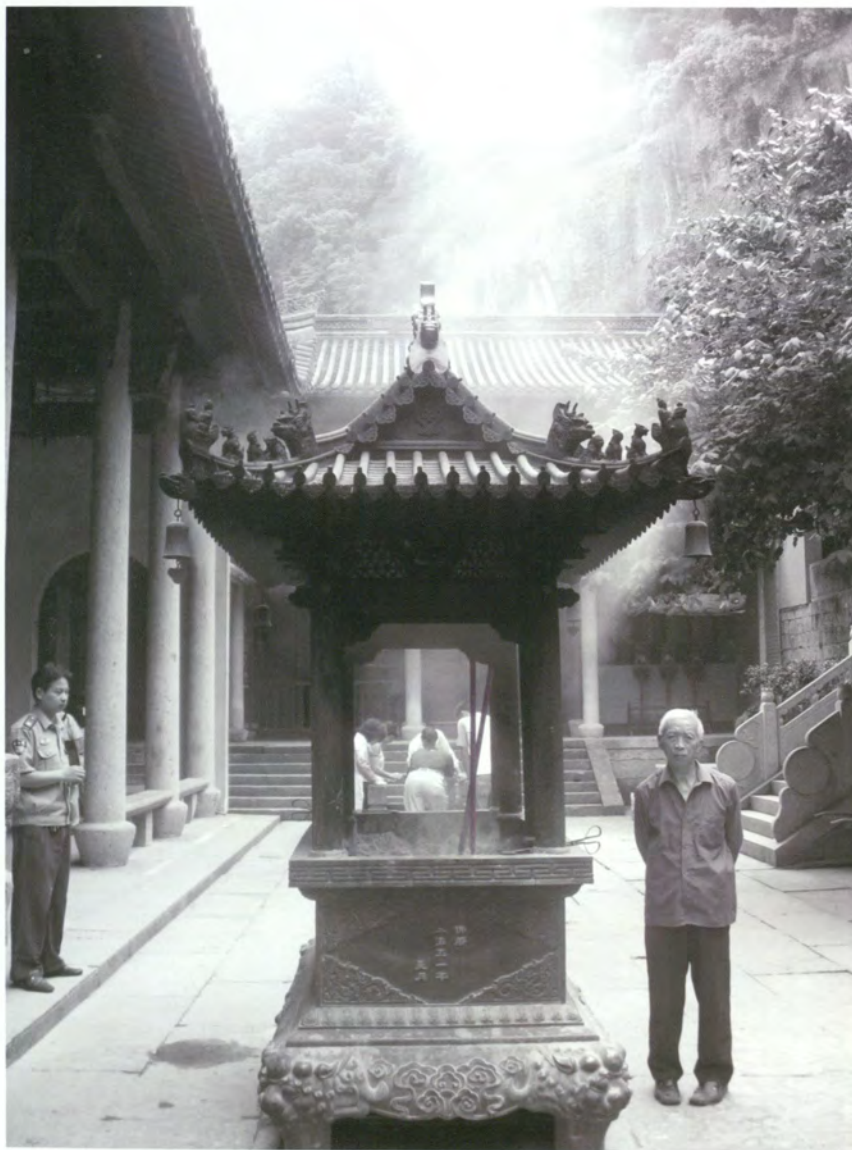


Mirror's Revenge - Eric Prusinski

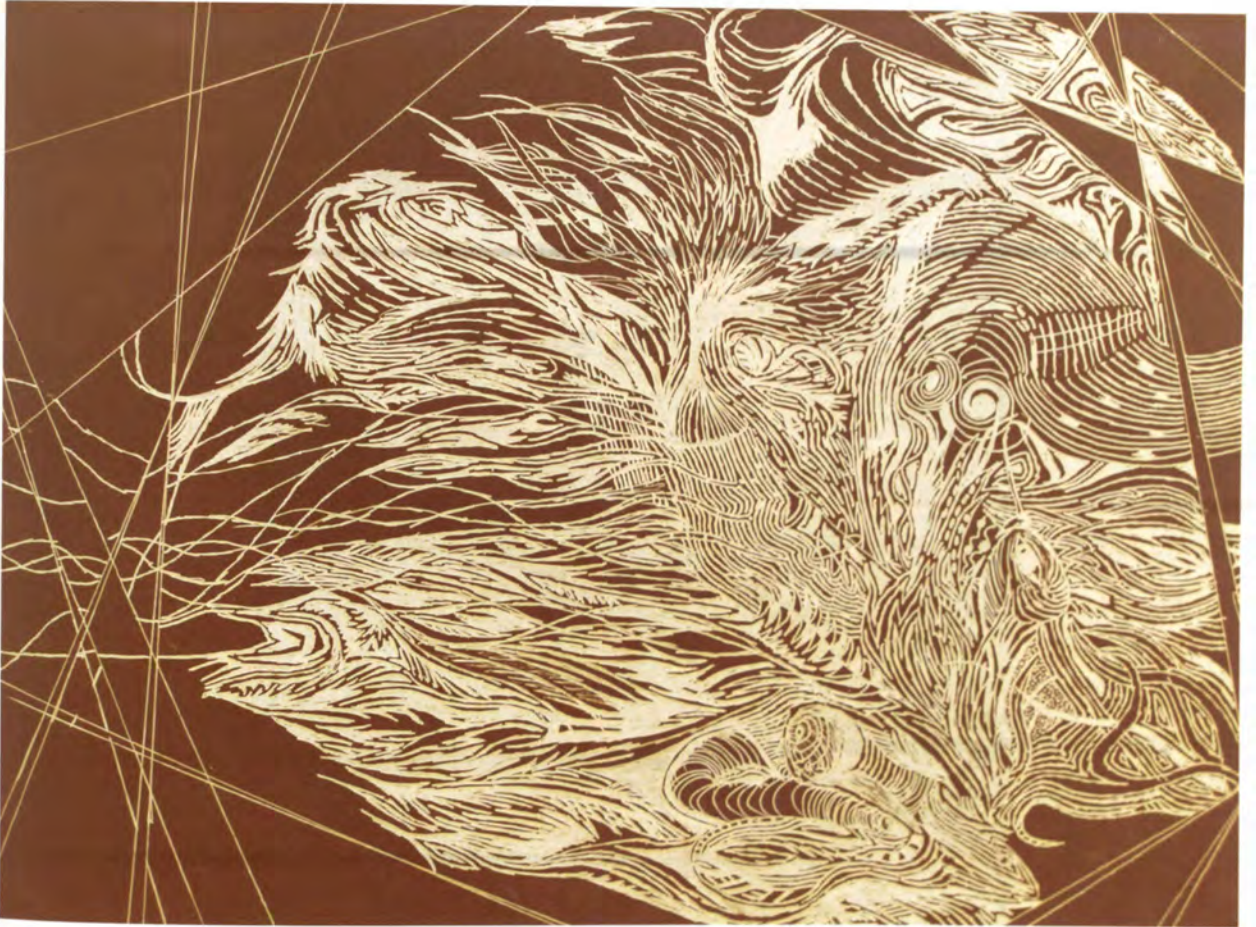


Bridging the Gap - Eric Prusinski





Incense and Peppermints - Jennifer Halbert



Abstractions and Intricacies · Dan Lund



Untitled - Thomas Heet



Fall Fashion: A Magenta Shade - Amanda Gartman



f/2.8 - Dan Lund



The Cleansing of Life - Rachel Rodriguez



Grace - Rebecca Barnes

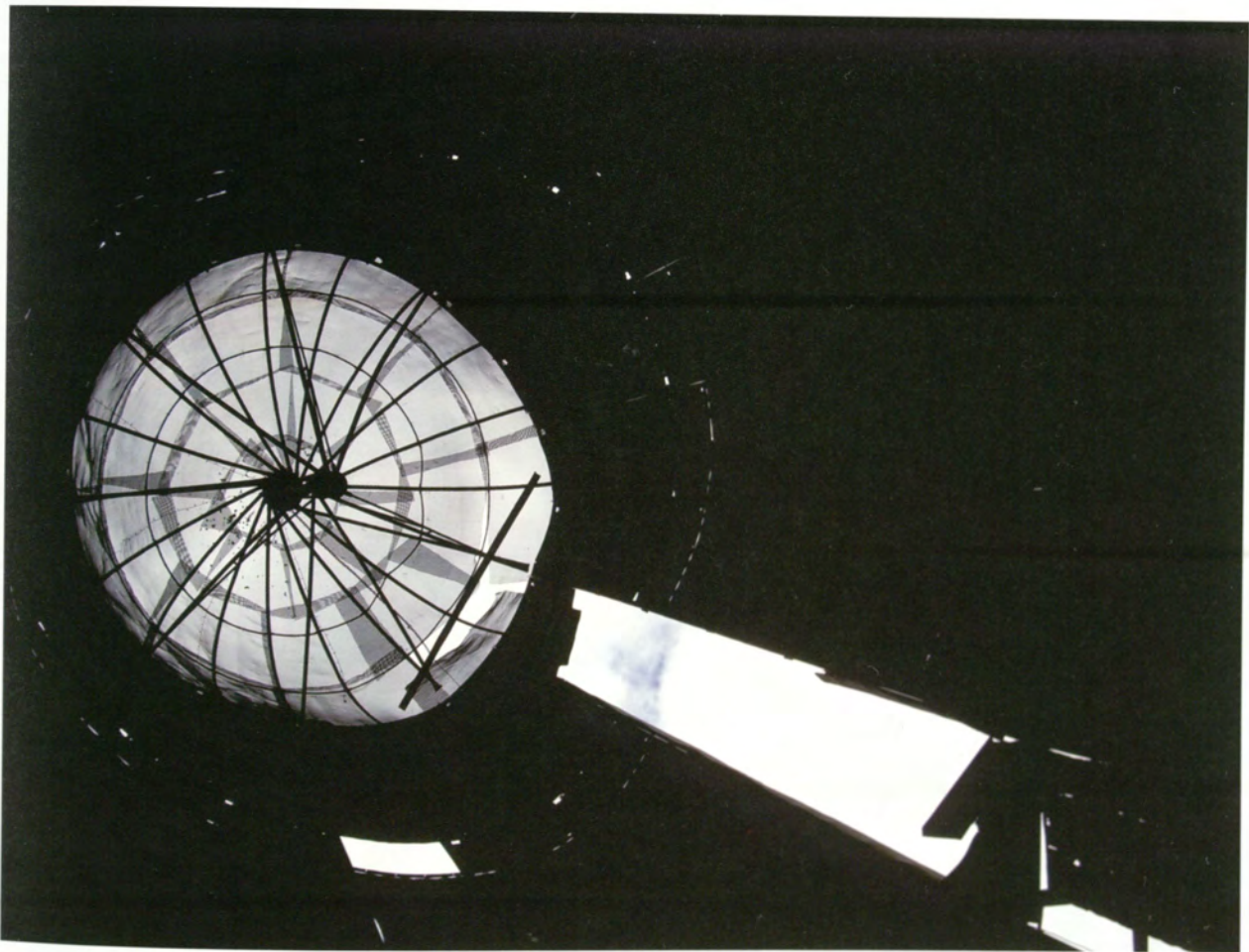


Robyn - Kimberly Sienkiewicz





Sweet... - Eric Prusinski



Tractor Beam · John Linstrom



A Shot in the Dark - Dan Lund



Two Seconds on Michigan Ave. - Kimberly Sienkiewicz



Ceci n'est pas un oignon - Amanda Gartman



tea traditions - Hashem Rifai



Liberty - Rebecca Barnes



Mountain Lake (Subtle Self Promotion) - Dan Lund





mia bici - Hashem Rifai



Ice - Rebecca Barnes



Reaching - Megan Lee



Aegean Sunrise - Dan Lund



Bathroom - Jon Krause



Bedroom - Jon Krause



Kitchen - Jon Krause



prose



# Practice

Kris Lohn

-For my best bro in the music theory gang.  
Lets play until we die. V7

It makes you want to run down the hallway shouting; you want to kick and scream and jump and let it out. You feel the burning and the fullness and the emptiness and the isolation. You want it out. You want to let it out and let everyone everywhere know exactly what you're feeling because they've been there and you're there now. You are speaking without words. You feel the space between you and everyone else and the weight of every conflict caused by that unfathomable distance. You play more. You connect. You know they feel it with you, but all you can share in is the silent feeling. All you feel is a deafening noise, an eternal rumbling, a

universal melody, but the best way to express it is through silence. You try to put it into words, but all you hear is choking sounds and screeches. An overwhelming energy- humanity and history are around and inside you, shrieking that melody so loud your conscience bleeds. It bleeds with the mistakes of the past and the failings of the future. It is patched back together by the music only to be torn apart again. It will bleed until we are dead, and then it will rest. It bleeds with the futility of the now and our inability to connect with life. Life, which sings in everything, and is ephemeral and false and very, very real.

I cannot make anyone else know what I am. I cannot let anyone else experience what I experience in that moment- when the music and the feeling and the weight of everything hangs together tangibly in the room. Several people become one living, singing organism, mirroring the connectedness of all life. That is why we play music- to address the feelings of yearning and loneliness and isolation, to tackle mortality and brevity and separation. Because for a short time, we can come close to a unified experience, where the music we make is almost replaced by the melody that sings inside us all. You feel the life of the person who wrote the song melding with your life. The tree that was used to make your guitar is alive and singing the same song that you will sing when you are returned to molecules and dust and are part of something bigger.

Even in the tiny practice space, you feel the vastness of the world and the universe and yourself. You see your best friend and yourself at every level: in the now, separated by three

feet. In the music, you are separated by nothing. On the metaphysical, you are separated by an incomprehensible vastness that can only be bridged by death. At the end- separated by nothing, part of the song. You want to sing the song together while still drinking from the bittersweet river of life. You want to feel alive. Your eyes go wide and you writhe in perfectly inexpressible agony. Caught up in the melody and the life and the inability to express it all, your body moves with the music. The melody tries to escape your skin, its material and mortal prison, and to be one with everyone else's.

You and your best friend of eight years have been working on some permutation of this song since you were freshmen. The history is there. The passion is there. Now finally the knowledge and ability are there. Staccato eight-note toms set it up- you're all holding as the guitar ostinato rings freely over the room. The bass and toms slam into you from all sides. Most of the major themes are introduced; the intro rocks hard. You bring it down for the verse while the bass and drums work in perfect rhythmic unison, choppy but in time. You feel the tightness and the connection. The vocals are the melody floating over a steady reminder of the continuity of everything by the guitar. A pause, dramatic, the guitar rings out again. You hold your breath, knowing you're jumping off, free-falling into the chorus. The words express the longing of someone far away, forced by circumstance to leave a place he though he was always going to be. He was happy. Verse again- same storytelling theme as the first over different music. Steadier and more influential to the feel, the drums support more active guitar

lines. The drums pound into another chorus. Guitars rip and run and ring truer and truer to that ineffable melody. You play steady and repetitive on the bass and you let it envelop you and carry you away. You are floating over cymbals and colors and sounds.

Long and complex and building toward an explosion, the bridge starts with a 5/4 finger-tapping bass section. You and the drummer and both your hands simultaneously working under sparse guitars. People will be impressed, but you want them to know that things are easy and things are hard and things are complex and so you let yourself play out all of these. The next sections wander and drift around the feel and the key. The loneliness and the confusion and the separation are tangible between the coinciding yet contradicting guitar lines. The drums are barely playing, and you sound lost on the bass. Like in life you are together. You are all hopelessly lost together.

Parts start coming together. The guitars, more active, blend into one wall of thin, twangy sound. You repeat notes on the bass and string them together more actively. By switching to the hi-hat, the drums return everything to earth. A giant cymbal crash and an octave leap down- you are building to the end of the bridge. Quiet, slowly increasing eight-note pulsing in the bass and drums. The guitars are up high, playing their same melodies over and over and over. The volume and the movement build. You explode into the tail section of the bridge, the fullness of the bass and the roundness of the cymbal pushing back the walls. The guitar melody is mournful and ecstatic and longing and leaves you feeling

satisfied. The words are the speaker speaking to his home and his loved ones. The words are you to your best friend. They are life to everything it has created- everything you are using to tell your friends exactly how you feel about them. "I have always loved you, and I always will."

The final chorus, exalted and ephemeral and unified, brings lines from the rest of the song. One guitar is the chorus and the longing. The other guitar plays the bridge and recognition of the unity of life. As everything that holds them up, the bass and drums work together in perfect unison. You best friend sings the words of the chorus and of loneliness. You sing the bridge and the words of happiness. All of them effortlessly swirl together and rise up and up. You ride with them and the energy through the outro. The ending moves up, hanging in the air, suspended in uncertainty. As you let the notes die, you feel the uncertainty together. You know that you are all moving towards a very finite, very certain unknown. And now you know that you are moving there together.

"Call it a curse or call it a blessing. Call it a gift that I got away.

It's been six months since I've seen the Atlantic

And it's getting harder to live with each day."

-DJ Crenson, Morningside Drive



# Sharing

Mark Shoeck

“Hell, I was only five years old. You know? What am I supposed to do at five? Am I supposed to make things better? Am I supposed to make a change? I mean, hell, mom told me I was getting changed until I was damn near five years old.”

Trevor and Johnny laughed at this. It was funny, I guess. I was a real asshole as a kid.

Trevor tapped my shoulder. He held up his index and middle fingers for me put the cigarette there. We only had two squares left, so the three of us shared them one at a time, passing the cigarette around, and the smoker talked while the other two listened and sipped on a forty. We all sat on the hood of my car, side by side, six feet propped up on the bumper, working a big dent into the hood of my Ford. Trev inhaled deep on the Marlboro. He liked to close his eyes

when he smoked. I don't know why. He held in the smoke for a while, then let it all out.

“Dylan's only seven right now,” Trevor said. “He's reminding me of the way you were when you were that young.”

“He's that dumb?” Johnny chimed in.

“Yeah,” Trevor said. “I worry. Like he comes home from school, three o'clock, three thirty, and he always wants food. Macaroni and cheese or whatever. He's got this routine of turning on the burner while he fills up a pot of water. He'll set the pot on the counter and, you know how the burner turns red when it gets hot? The dumbass just doesn't get it, he'll always stick his hand right on the burner to see if it's really hot, and he screams when it burns him. I don't know what to tell the kid. I tell him no. Is that enough? It's always the same, I have him run his hand under cold water and end up making the mac for him. Probably it's happened a dozen times now. Maybe he's too young to get it.”

Trevor took another puff. On a cold night like this, we could see our breath. You couldn't really tell who was blowing out smoke and who was blowing out air. We all bundled up, trying to stay warm, but it didn't really work. Johnny was wearing the hooded sweatshirt that he always wears. It's his girlfriend's and it doesn't fit him at all. Way too small on him. But they wear each other's clothes like that all the time. Trev was wearing this old army jacket, a big heavy one that his dad used to wear. I always kept this big black blanket in my car for when we'd come out here and do our thing, so I covered up in it.

“Easy, Patty,” I shouted over to the light

pole where my mutt was tied up. The light up top was buzzing, glowing gold and he was barking at it. I threw him a treat and he ate it up and calmed down. He's a great dog, a big brown mutt. I take him everywhere with me.

Johnny snagged the Marlboro from Trevor. He started talking and me and Trev took turns with the forty of Miller.

"You know, I think I caught Angie touching the stove like that a couple weeks ago," Johnny said.

"What a box of rocks," Trev said.

"Should I be worried about her?" Johnny asked. "Really? Seems like she does this stuff all the time. And even last night when we went out to eat I let her drive, and she kept revving the engine, not on purpose or anything, until the damn car overheated. I love her to death but that whole intelligence factor is a real issue with her."

"I'd worry if I were you," I told Johnny. "But that's what you get for dating a girl three years younger than you."

"Jailbait," Trev and I said at the same time. It wasn't the first time we gave Johnny shit for it.

"Whatever," Johnny laughed. "Pass the forty. Quit hoggin'."

I passed him the Miller and he took a swig.

"This brew's about to freeze," Johnny said, taking a bigger gulp. Trev finished the cig, so I pulled out the last one. Trev pulled out the lighter for me. He clicked it a few times and it just sparked.

"Too cold out here," he said. He clicked it

a few more times and it finally lit. I got up and went over to the pole and untied Patty. You could see his breath too, just like ours, but he had a big brown coat of fur that let him deal with the cold a little better than we could.

"You need a bath, don't ya?" I said, scratching Patty's thick coat. I inhaled deep on the last Marlboro, let it sit a couple seconds, and let it all out.

"Mom says I come here too often," I said. "She says we all sit out here too often. 'Gonna wreck the hood of your car just like your brother did years ago.' I tell her it's okay, ya know? He always came out here like this with his friends and look how he turned out. Before the accident he was really something."

"He had that girlfriend," Johnny said. "Remember her? I think you had a crush on her back then."

"Yeah," I replied. "But that was me back then. I didn't know any better. I know I talk about him a lot even though I was so young, I just remember doing everything because he did it. I come out here now with you guys like he did with his buddies. I wanted to let my hair get real long like his was because I thought it looked so good on him, that big brown mop on his head."

I took off the blanket I'd been wrapped up in and decided it was the dog's turn with it. He was probably warm enough. I just like taking care of him. I crossed my legs and leaned forward a bit, just trying to get comfortable on the hood. I took another deep puff on the cigarette.

"I remember we'd share a bathroom upstairs and I'd have to wait until I was practically late for school for him to get out of

there. He'd be in there forever scrubbing that big mop of his with our shampoo. Forgotten Springs shampoo, I still use it. I was late because of him about a dozen times."

"I remember that still," Trevor interrupted me. "It was kindergarten I think. You'd show up late and they'd ask why, and you'd tell them the bathroom was taken like that got you a free pass." We shared a laugh.

"My hair would be wet until recess everyday. I always felt dumb. But it was funny, he always used the cold water in there to make sure I had a warm shower, and he always made sure there was a fresh bottle of shampoo in there since we shared the bottle. He'd walk out of the bathroom smelling like that stuff and I'd make sure I smelled like it too. Sure, I didn't know him like mom and dad did, or like his friends. But he always took care of me, I remember that. I mean, we had all our meals together, played catch in the back yard together, all that stuff. Hell, I was only five years old. But we shared enough together that it was okay for me to get upset when it all happened. I was such a dumbass about it all though. Funnier looking back than it actually was, I'm sure. Mom told me I'd always point at the big picture we have of him and say, 'That's Patrick. He died.' Or I'd point at his hair and tell her about how I wanted mine to look like that."

I stopped talking. Silence fell over us like the cold, and the night clouds hovered over us, blocking out the stars. I puffed on the cigarette one more time before I realized I'd smoked the whole damn thing while I was talking. I stood up and tossed it on the ground, put it out with my

shoe. Trevor and Johnny don't mind me talking like this, I don't think. Seems like they're used to it.

"Your hair kind of looks like his," Trev said. "Like the way his hair is in that picture. Can't say it looks too good on you though," Trevor laughed.

"Looked better on him," I said, laughing too.

"It's freezing on this damn car," Johnny said. "And since you killed that last Marlboro I guess we're just stuck here with a near frozen forty."

I said sorry.

"Ah, I'm just givin' you shit. I was all smoked out anyway," Johnny said.

We sat there a couple more minutes, passing the brew down and back. Didn't really say anything. We just sat there looking like we were still breathing out smoke. Patty started to fuss a little bit and knocked off the blanket I'd tossed on him.

"Looks like this mutt's ready for his bath," I told the boys. "I'm gonna see to it."

"Always putting the dog in front of us," Trev joked. "It's like you married the thing."

"Well," I replied, "he is family."

I loaded Patty up in the car and said bye to the boys. They said they were about to finish up the forty and head home themselves. My engine was so cold I could hardly get the Ford started, and when I did, the heater didn't even work. We made it home like two blocks of ice and went inside to melt.

I ran the water for his bath. When the

water was still cold, I rinsed my hands off. The water warmed up enough and dropped him in the tub. I took off my shirt to keep from getting a mess on it. I grabbed the bottle of shampoo I share with him and covered him in it. I scratched my soapy fingers deep into his brown coat, and he just sat there loving it. I scrubbed him all the way down, starting with his head, behind his ears, his big back, his pale stomach, all four legs, and I even gave his tail a good scrub. We'd both come out smelling clean. I rinsed him off and drained the water out of the tub. I was still a bit frozen and he was all warm, so I jumped in the empty tub and just laid there with him. I just held on to him.

# Carpet

Megan Telligman

The day I found out the house was mine I ripped out all the carpet. I left the stuffy lawyer's office with a smile and a purposeful walk, and immediately drove to my grandma's house. My key slid into the lock like a knife through warm butter, easier than ever before. I pulled off my shoes as I entered and headed straight for the carpeted living room. I felt the thick, red thread push up between my toes as I shuffled through the room. I lay down.

I lifted my wrists and dug my finger tips into the carpet, like sinking into hot sand. As my head sunk into the deep red and the tips of my fingers met the rough base, I thought about all the times I had spent there against that carpet in Easter dresses, pink, itchy, uncomfortable and making carpet-angels. Vacuum lines made

blank slates for me to draw houses, practice my alphabet. How many times had I etched my name against that plush red? Jumping up, my body moved freely away from the carpet, but my hair? No. It wanted to stay. My hair, long brown strands radiating away from my head. Reaching, reaching for that carpet. I didn't know the phenomenon of electricity yet. Science. How was I to know that the switch that scared the monsters from the dark corners of my room also caused my hair to long for that carpet?

I lay there that day, the day I claimed ownership over that carpet. I moved my legs apart and my arms away from my sides simultaneously. An angel. Back and forth. I sat up as carefully as a child in a snow bank, calculating the best way to stand and not destroy my creation. I placed a hand behind me, awkwardly standing after a precarious maneuver. I stepped carefully away and looked at my angel, and I couldn't help but smile. At my naiveté. I could still see the lines from where my grandma had last vacuumed, just days ago.

I walked to the kitchen. I felt my feet stick to the warm wood floor as I stepped, dripping, out of that sea of red. I received a gentle shock as my fingers curled their way around the cool brass handle. I pulled out the drawer and felt the rough, cold metal of the worn shears as I lifted them out of the cluttered drawer. I felt their weight in my hand as I headed back to the living room, stopping with my toes on the edge of the carpet. When I could barely feel the fibers of the carpet against my bare toes, I stopped and crouched down. I felt the carpet one last time, running my hand over it, like smoothing



newly planted soil. Back and forth. I grabbed a fistful of the carpet, pulled up, and shoved the scissors deep between my other fistful hand and the carpet.

When I finished ripping up the red carpet, I stopped and surveyed the effects of my efforts. Red fibers floated like snow through the air. The floors looked like a wavy red sea, with oddly shaped pieces of carpet sticking up in different directions. Flashes of a worn, black oak floor peeked from between the red sections. Bits of red carpet and foam clung to the furniture. I had pulled as much as I had cut, breaking all of my nails and rubbing my fingertips raw in the process. A thin layer of sweat covered my forehead, causing my bangs to spilt and stick there. My arms were coated with a thin red fur, and my vision seemed red and cloudy, like staring at the world through a glass of red wine. I could feel a red fiber in my mouth and I wound it around my tongue a few times before I drew it to my teeth and spit it distastefully across the room. I dropped the shears on the kitchen table, and grabbed six black garbage bags from under the sink. I vacuumed and dusted, scrubbed and swept all the remnants of that red carpet away. I stuffed the chunks of carpet into bags, tied them off with several knots, and dragged them outside. As I drove off that night, I saw the bags, rising like the gray silhouettes of a mountain against the red brick of my grandma's house.

I showered when I got home, watching the red fuzz flow off me before swirling around the drain and disappearing into the black.

A week later I did my laundry. I opened my dryer, the warm, clean dryer smell flowing over

my face. I pulled all my clothes out and into the laundry basket, searching as I went for the dryer sheets. Like needles in a haystack. Finally I pulled out the lint trap. Lint, red lint, covered the thin screen like deep red carpet. I stared at the lint trap, wide eyed, before I placed two fingers on the corner of the screen. My fingers sunk into the deep red, and my finger tips, still tender, rubbed against the rough base. Back and forth. I dropped the ball of red fibers into the trash, looking curiously after it. I gathered up my things and left the Laundromat, the bell above the door twinkling softly behind me.

The next day I found red fibers in my hair brush.

Later that day I blew my nose. Shiny red fibers glinted at me from the tissue.

A day after that, I took off my dingy, white socks and found red pieces of lint between my toes.

I found red fibers everywhere in my house. In dust bunnies under the couch when I frantically vacuumed. Again when I vacuumed the next day. And the next. Stuck to the ends of forks, and in between plates in the cabinets. Floating in the toilet bowl and stuck in the sponge. In between the pages of my books, and in clumps in the bottoms of my purses. I found red fibers itching the corners of my eyes and burrowing under my nails. I found them wrapped around the q-tip when I pulled it out of my ear.

Three days later after I got off work I went back to my grandma's house. I breathed a sigh of relief when I saw that the bulging black garbage bags had been taken away. I fumbled as I slid my key gingerly into the lock. I flipped on the

light and scanned the kitchen. Nothing. I walked to the living room, holding my breath. I flipped on the light. Nothing. I scanned the length of the room several times. Back and forth. No sign of anything red. Not a speck. Just like I left it. Puzzled, but somehow relieved I flipped off the light and walked back through the kitchen. As I flipped off the kitchen light and pulled the door closed behind me, I was sure I heard rustling from inside the empty house. Like monsters from the corners of a dark bedroom.

The next morning I woke up with a stuffy nose, only to find it plugged with balls of red fibers.

That day at work I reached for a piece of tape, and as I attempted to stick a note to my desk, I found that the tape was not sticky at all, but instead coated in red fur.

After lunch that day, Angela told me to "hang on a second" as she walked behind me into the conference room. I stopped and she lifted a piece of red lint from my shoulder. I glared at her and walked away.

I didn't go home after work that night. I went straight to my grandma's house. I didn't open the door or look inside. I went straight to the garage and grabbed a large, light rake. I raked and raked. I combed the yard. Back and forth. I pulled every piece of dry brush I could away from the yard and up to the house. My back and shoulders burned. Around two in the morning, I had gathered all the leaves, sticks, and pine needles that I could into large piles surrounding the house. I walked to my car and rummaged in my bag to find a book of matches. I carefully pulled out the pieces of red lint that were woven

between the matches and then lit them one by one, throwing them in the brush as I walked around the house one last time. I drove home, climbed into bed, fell asleep.

During my lunch break the next day I received a call for the police, and I drove to my grandma's house. The street was blocked off so I parked and walked closer. Many neighbors I vaguely recognized milled around outside, already bored. Bright lights and sirens flashed in my eyes and ears. Arcs of blue water futilely streamed toward the house. As I approached, I frowned. I saw the flames rising around the house like towering red fibers, engulfing the house and destroying everything inside.

# Traffic

Megan Telligman

The girl felt the hot sun on her forearms; saw the light that cut bright lines across her pale skin. Her dry hands gripped the worn, sticky steering wheel, and she stared straight ahead. She was a small, skinny, unhealthy looking girl. She had long hair, dyed a light brown, which usually hung limp on the sides of her face. Today it was up in a messy ponytail, a failed attempt to combat the somthing heat. She looked at the car in front of her, trying to make sense out of the letters and numbers of the license plate. She peered through large, fashionable sunglasses at the arrangement of letters and numbers, her pale lips moving silently.

She was always looking for the hidden meaning in license plates, thinking that everyone was infinitely cleverer than they were in reality. License plates were constant puzzles that

strangers made for her to solve. And when she couldn't solve them? Well, that was her failure, like leaving a crossword puzzle unfinished. That was life, she thought, never finding the answer, leaving everything unfinished. A giant puzzle had beat her again.

When she had exhausted her current puzzle, assuming herself to be too stupid, she began to look around. She glanced at the shiny cars around her. She was part of an impatient, humming mass, ready to speed away as soon as the traffic dispersed, shuddering in frustration and the smell of exhaust. At night, she could fly through that city in five minutes, but now she could sit for an hour and only get three miles. Stop. Go. Stop. Go. Stop. Her neck ached with the constant movement, but she sped up to the bumper of the car in front of her and abruptly braked over and over again. She felt the boredom spread throughout her body, beginning in her legs and moving up and up until she twitched with frustration and pent up energy. She looked and looked – at the towering skyscrapers, at the billboards, at graffiti, at the people who crossed above her on bridges. Once when she stopped she looked over next to her and saw a man staring back. A man. A young man with dark eyes and a bored expression. Her eyes cut away to the green flashing numbers on the clock. Her face flashed red. She never knew how to set that clock. She never had anywhere to be.

So when she was stuck in traffic for the next hour it didn't matter. What did matter was that she kept him next to her - that man in the Camry who had looked at her. She stole glances at him. She stole them because they were not hers to have, because she had no right. She had

no right to his light brown hair and five o'clock shadow, or his wrinkled blue collar and his skinny black tie. She had no right to watch him light his cigarette, chew a piece of gum, or answer his phone, but when he did, she imagined the call was from her.

"Hey, honey." His words made her smile. She felt the happiness in his voice when he spoke to her, as if his care for her was contained in every word, like his words were encased in shells that shattered when they hit her, their warm centers spilling over her.

"Hey! How's it going?"

"On my way now, stuck in traffic at about Monroe. What about you?"

"Nothing. Just making dinner."

"Oh, good. What are you making?"

"Your favorite."

"Great. I can't wait. I should be home in about a half hour. Love you."

"I love you, too."

The last words she said aloud as she looked over at him, her care for him hitting the glass window and spilling back on herself, a mess. Maybe if she rolled her window down her thoughts could reach him.

She imagined the little things. She imagined him opening the jars she couldn't get open. He lifted the things she couldn't lift and reached the things she couldn't reach, all the while he showing his subtle smile and using his kind words. He had a smile so bright, full of teeth and happiness.

And the big things. She imagined him whispering in her ear on their wedding day, his care pouring in her ear and through her body. She

imagined him playing in the green front yard with their kids. He cried and kissed her when he found out she was pregnant, and held her dry hand as their daughter graduated. She thought of the breakfasts in bed, and the surprise homemade dinners. She thought of the simple notes hidden deep in her purse and postcards she received from his faraway vacations. She remembered of the clever homemade cards and the strategically chosen songs from his mix tapes. She thought of the first date and the last date, the first kiss and the last hug. She remembered the trips they went on and the arguments they had. She thought of how much she loved him. That man, no, this man in the car next to hers.

She had kept him next to her, carefully speeding and slowing to stay with him. The two cars travelled over bridges, through tunnels, past the city, always together. Whenever she thought she was losing him, she felt a dull panic drum in her chest. Her muscles would tighten and she would begin to strategize ways to stay next to him. She weighed each move she made, calculating if it would move her closer or farther from him. Her movements were nothing more than another puzzle for her to work out. She breathed light and fast. She would squint to keep him in her sight and crane her neck until it hurt to see past cars, to see his tan, rusty bumper. By the end of their trip together, she knew his car by heart, from the shape of his headlights to the small scrapes on his door and bumper.

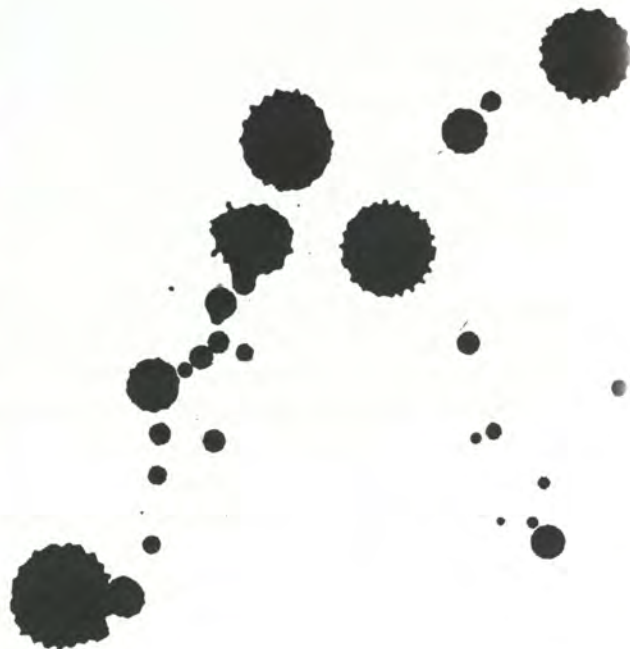
But then she came to Division Street, her exit. She sat there for a second, completely stopped, knowing and accepting what she needed to do. Her arm lifted up to flip on the turn signal.

Her sweaty arm stuck to her body, the result of the mess she had made with her misplaced care. She slowly turned the steering wheel, which resisted her efforts, and merged into the small space between his car and the car in front of him. She heard a ripping noise, like the tearing of a sheet. She heard the noises all around her, the honks, his honks. His windows were up and he was shouting angrily, but she could hear every word. The words rushed at her, making mean, jagged paths in the gray clouds of exhaust and heat. He waved his arms at her and she began to cry. He was so angry at her. He loved her and she was leaving. He called her a bitch and an idiot as she forced her car to move in front of his, and she sobbed that much harder. Her tears cut bright paths down her blushing cheeks, paths that shone in the fading light. His words were nothing but metal, flying at her, through her, leaving giant black holes in her and lodging in the hot leather of the car seat.

She shouted back to him, those words she had shouted before.

“We’re not right for each other. We never were.”

She sped down the off ramp, her vision blurred with tears, the hot steering wheel shaking in her hands. She sped away from the man in the Camry, the man she had never known but only thought she did. She sped away from the puzzles she couldn’t solve and the questions she left unanswered. And finally, she knew she could never forgive herself for what she had done to him.



# Ways of Looking at a Blackbird

Elspeth Taylor

## I. Incarnation

I fell in love with Chris the first time he spoke to me in German. It should have been French, really. No one thinks of German as a romantic language, except possibly the Germans themselves. But there was something about Chris that made it seem like a secret language that only the two of us could understand.

I had a boyfriend, too. He was 6'4", ate three stalks of celery at every meal, and read biographies of obscure mathematicians from the 1800s. He didn't speak German.

I first met Chris during an apartment meeting. He lived one building over, on the first floor. My boyfriend didn't come because he had an emergency root canal appointment the next morning. Chris mentioned something about his

upcoming vacation to Vienna, and I asked if he knew German.

After that, whenever I saw him, he would ask how my evening language classes were going. Gut, I replied with a smile, and allowed myself the luxury of imagining what it would be like to leave my dull life behind and run away to Austria with him.

## II. Cognizance

You meet someone at school. It's a chance encounter, but you've seen him around the drama wing a few times. His soft blond hair is the envy of all the girls in your Geography class. Your attraction to him is based on the assumption that the two of you will never meet. Yet here you are, and here he is.

It's a Tuesday afternoon, and you're at the first rehearsal for the spring musical. You've been cast as Mayor Shinn's wife in "The Music Man." Your daydream person—his name is Matt—is a year older than you, and sings tenor in the barbershop quartet. During the opening warm-ups, you're partnered with him for a cast bonding exercise and have your first real conversation with one another. In the brief seconds before you walked over and introduced yourself, you've imagined that it would be horribly awkward. You're surprised to discover that you both like peanut butter, hate Breakfast at Tiffany's, and broke your right arms in middle school.

Whenever you both have free time during rehearsals, you sit backstage and talk to him. The conversations are never more than five minutes, since you both have other friends

in the show who demand your attention. But you start to feel like maybe there's a connection between the two of you, even though neither of you have said anything to that effect.

After the show closes, you don't get a chance to talk to him at school. Two months later, just after your graduation ceremonies end, you finally run into Matt again. You hope he'll be staying nearby, since you plan to attend the local liberal arts university. You ask him what he'll do after graduation as his family approaches. Matt barely gets a chance to tell you he's moving to Boston as he and his family walk to the car and drive away.

### III. Growth / Regeneration

"Lanky boys are nothing but trouble," her mother says. Sylvie hasn't thought about it much until now, but there's truth to the claim. Something inside them has been squeezed like an empty tube of toothpaste, pushed and prodded until it cracks.

In some ways, Sylvie and her mother have had a lanky life. They moved to a rural town in Vermont when Sylvie was four, and she can't remember anything else. Her mother has cultivated her daughter's selective memory by refusing to answer any questions about anything that happened before her fifth birthday. Now that Sylvie's in high school, her mother has warned her to stay away from boys with buzz cuts, boys who wear shirts that advertise rock bands, and boys whose names begin with a "J."

Sylvie's mother has made rules for herself, too, and follows them religiously. No

ice cream except on Sundays. No low-cut tops. Always keep scented lavender candles in the bathroom and be home by 9:30 on weekends.

They have another unspoken rule that they rarely even think about: don't discuss him. They both know that the discussion will lead nowhere.

Since Sylvie is no longer in junior high, she feels wise and independent. She gets the house to herself after school, and sometimes brings her friends over without telling her mother. They buy pints of ice cream at the corner store and eat it on the front porch until it starts to run all over their hands. When they finish, they go inside and watch reruns of "Gilmore Girls" and "I Love Lucy."

One day, an hour and a half after her friends leave, a silver sedan pulls up in front of the house. Sylvie watches from the behind the curtains as a tall man swings the driver's side door open and steps out. He wears dark sunglasses, tight jeans, a white pinstriped blazer, and a tie. He steps up to the door, looks around, and rings the doorbell.

"Who is it?" she calls from behind the door.

The man hesitates. "Is this Sylvie?" he asks. "My name's Leonard. I'm your father."

### IV. Death

When you rely on another person to define or delineate who you are, their loss is as devastating as if you'd taken a sharp carving knife and sawn off your own hand at the wrist. Maybe your palm is rotting away from gangrene, and it's a necessary removal. Perhaps you were missing

several fingers even before the amputation. It could even be a temporary act of insanity, if you're in the right—or wrong—mood. But after the blade leaves the stump raw and exposed, you have to decide whether to cauterize the wound, or simply let it bleed.

## V. Birth

Nine months, three weeks, and five days later, Jessica arrived. Her absence had left a pit in his stomach the weight of an overripe melon. Jason had known her return date for two weeks, but it had been pushed back so often in the past that he still sensed that the situation was an elaborate charade.

He had been living alone in an apartment, although there were other people around him constantly, marching in and out of his doorways and using their portable lanterns to write letters as he slept in his room.

He stood with fifty other people in the waiting room. Some of them paced with backpacks slung over their shoulders; others slumped against the wall for support, anxiously cradling their cell phones. Jason avoided their eyes.

A little after seven o'clock, a man came in to tell the waiting room that the people they'd been expecting had arrived. Jason traced his face with his left hand. He was no longer sure that she really existed, or that she ever had in the first place. The first members of Jessica's battalion began to emerge from the doorway. He wondered how he would meet her.



# Semester Abroad: Journal Excerpts

Ellen Orner

9/24/08

down trinity street in a misting rain. "well helLO," i hear, and a woman in short black hair lets go with one hand and bends around the stroller she's pushing to admire her baby. the stroller veers to the left and skips into a man's heavy boot. he is tightly hooded against the wet and i can't see his face, only his beard. "sorry, Daddy," the woman grins and rights the stroller. Daddy doesn't answer, but he drives the stroller from then on.

9/25

instructions for relieving the stress of leaving your ipod on the train from Cambridge to London

Liverpool St., botching the security check for the Dublin flight on RyanAir, losing your makeup remover to burly security guard, and getting cleaned out by a pay phone (3 pounds) trying to report the lost ipod: find the duty free store giving out free sample of coffee flavored Bailey's Irish Cream, and buy a 300 g. chocolate bar. eat half. upon hearing that all RyanAir flights have been cancelled due to radar failure, eat the other half. Refrain from thinking about Andrew Bird to whom you can't listen while camped in the airport. graffiti your hand and take pictures of it.

9/26

on the train from Stanstead back to Cambridge. there's a French family in the seats to my right, eating big bonbons from a huge bag. each candy is different. colored toffee, maybe. or that boiled sugar stuff, yellow, pink, and blue. variety of shapes. they reach in the bag and pop them in their mouths w/out looking. they're laughing and talking...dormir is mentioned frequently. the father is very large and fat, the boy is slight, blonde, and wholesome, and the other 2 are grandparents, i think. grandpapa has wiry gray hair, grandmamma looks just like the boy. ooh, i think these might be 2 more. dark-skinned man, shorts and blue cashmere sweater—baby blue. and a straw hat with navy, red, and cream ribbon. this old lady with him must be his mother, maybe she dressed him. Deux mille heures, i think she said. 2000 hours. i feel like that too. she smells like Vaseline. he reached out of the door and plucked her off the platform into the train, just in time.

Sunday evening—my night out by myself. we hopped off the train home from Scotland—the last hour of which I spend sprawled on the floor, snoozing on Kelsey’s lap, while she sang. who needs an ipod? everyone else is walking back to the house, they’re worn out. it’s 6:30 pm and i’m going to stay out for modern jazz from 9 to midnight at a pub in a section of town none of us has been to before. i’m possibly delirious from the trip and am making ‘interesting’ choices. not a terrible way to conduct an experiment. my current location: a sushi restaurant on huntingdon rd. when i first walked in the waitress said, “table for one?” and i said “no, takeaway,” because the sound of it scared me, but then i bucked up and decided to stay. the walls are bright white, there are no oriental portraits hanging, just muted maroon tapestries and a few pottery vases with fake autumnal maple leaf sprays. i like them, they remind me of Brown County, Indiana. lots of wood, rich, thick, dark oak tables. big front windows, a couple young men have stopped outside them in front of my table and are smoking. the waitress is cute and diminutive and a little ditzy, as sushi waitresses tend to be. and of course the chefs are all strong silent types. i’m probably making them nervous, writing in this journal. either they think i’m a restaurant critic or they think i’m crazy. the walls glow pink from the Chinese lanterns and the waitress, never blinking, watches one of the chefs fix my salmon roll. she has nothing else to do. or she loves him.

7:45 now i’m in a pub called the Elm Tree and feeling just about as weird as possible. there’s this damp, woody smell, like i’m sitting in a beer cask. the light is too low, the air is too warm. the barmaid is lounged in a bench seat, reading a book. she’s wearing a pointy blue knit cap. torn up green khakis and squishy black boots. she reminds me of a smurf. there’s a couple in the corner across from me, 2 of 5 patrons, including me. a large—by which i mean fat—foreign woman with unidentified accent...Greek maybe? and very short hair and very loud voice. she’s telling a story about Scotsmen in kilts without knickers and all that bouncing around up there. and another story about what she said to a man who asked her age. her lover is a young boy with a pretentious English accent—a Cambridge student, i’m sure. he’s wearing dark-framed glasses and a wooly jacket and he’s absolutely smitten with this woman. she talks, he gazes in her eyes and murmurs. oh, they’re engaged. she met his family recently. “are you tired?” he says. “shall we just go home and have a shower?” “yes, let’s do that,” she says. but first she comes over to my table. “were you at Stanstead Airport today?” she asks. “did you ask me for directions?” i shake my head no, and then, reciprocating, i say, “where are you from?” “Brazil,” she answers, and then she leaves, telling her lover a story about how this girl had asked where she was from. the old man in the other corner—he’s reading...what is he reading? something requiring a lexicon—he mutters, “I’m rather glad you asked that, I had narrowed it down to somewhere in South America.” he

doesn't look up, he's still peering through his pink and yellow plastic reading glasses. across the room, the other old man is reading the paper and counting change for a 3 pint. the smurfy barmaid unfolds herself to serve him. i don't seem to exist here, quite, but i feel accepted by their silence. i have to get out before i start growing elm roots.

10/8

Ely Cathedral. Octagon Tower. 200 tons of oak, 200 tons of lead. 190-some tiny spiral steps up the Octagon Tower.

I was highly entertained by the gulls perching in the crannies of 700 year old piece of carved stone, and the old people climbing about on the roof with me. One of them was a tiny man with a huge camera, from Devon. He was so old he'd almost lost his little English spring but he still tried. Walking beside him, I felt uncomfortably tall, at 5'2". And then there was the retired vicar who "gets sent over to the cathedral once a month to tell people about Jesus"—and to help them admire the rather modern (blatantly erotic) figure of the Virgin Mary, in a flowing blue robe (matching the vicar's) and metallic blonde hair. Her arms are raised straight above her head, as if in the midst of a self-defense maneuver. The most bizarre perhaps was the ranting old man on the street—he was with an old lady, but she went to the post office and left him outside, yelling at me about the current dreadful state of interpersonal relationship skills, "terminals" (computers), the 280 jobs he applied for in 1992, without getting one interview, and the deplorable decline in

industry, most notably the design of smart car seats, on which he tried to cut a sandwich and ended up tearing the fabric and getting tea spilled all over his pants, right down to his knickers, which he had to dry by walking in the breeze, and all because of the failure of interpersonal relationship skills! He wasn't finished, but at this point I said goodbye and went on a tea room search. This one has a backgarden with a view of Ely Cathedral's backside, and is chockfull of 2 year olds, all of them exactly the same height. It also has a generous portion of middle class women, pushing 60. This group nearest me is laughing uproariously over their divorces while one of them, the queen bee, I suppose, is trying to switch the subject to the proper way to clean an opal in a way that causes the most possible embarrassment to the offending members of the court. These progressive young mothers behind me had better quit planning trip to the zoo for a minute and watch their toddlers—three little boys are plotting to stick a feather up the little girl's nose. Ah, too late, she's taken matters into her own hands, and now three little boys are in tears.

# The Conversation

Kati Schmidt

(The scene opens mid-conversation. It does not matter where they are. The characters face each other, but stand a comfortable distance apart. Secretly, one is in love with the other. MARGOT holds a small book and pencil; she draws as they converse. MITCHELL toys with a pen.)

MITCHELL: What else is there?

MARGOT: Nothing.

MITCHELL: So it's just you and me?

MARGOT: And a big black rectangle. I'm experimenting with some words.

MITCHELL: What kind of words?

MARGOT: Well, right now it says, "you're the yellow bird I've been waiting for," but it's very light. I just wanted to see how some words would look.

MITCHELL: Does that go in between you and me, or what?

MARGOT: In between. (Holds the book at arm's length to show MITCHELL.)

MITCHELL: Wow.

MARGOT: Doesn't it look great all together?

MITCHELL: Yeah... Definitely. Really great. (Takes a step closer.) MARGOT: I don't know what else to do. I can't decide on the words.

MITCHELL: There's nothing wrong with it. If only we were in love, this would be romantic.

MARGOT: Yeah. It would be. (Their eyes meet for a moment. Pause. MARGOT begins to erase.)

MITCHELL: Are there other words you're experimenting with?

MARGOT: That was the first thing that came to mind.

MITCHELL: It would have to be.

MARGOT: Hm? (Stops erasing and looks up.)

MITCHELL: It would have to be the first thing that came to mind. It would be mine, too.

MARGOT: Maybe we are in love.

(MARGOT drops her pencil. As she reaches for it, MITCHELL stops her, handing her his pen. MARGOT continues drawing. MITCHELL picks up the pencil. Lights flicker, then down. MITCHELL and MARGOT are left in the dark.)

# Contributors' Notes

Ryan Bourgart is a junior environmental science major. He is interested in protecting the environment, reading, meditation, and running to name a few. Global warming is an important problem that concerns everyone. He's very concerned about the well-being of the environment and in this poem he wanted to convey some of the effects of global warming. We are partly responsible for the changing climate, and the effects that are being observed serve as warning signals that we need to start changing our behaviors to help our beautiful planet.

Emme Davis is a junior English and Greek major. She has always loved playing outside during long and lazy summer days, and both of her poems included in this semester's edition of the Lighter were inspired those magical, carefree days spent as much out of doors as possible. "Bare Summer Soles" is a celebration of the wonderful feeling of green between your toes, and "Our Tree on Chute Street" is an attempt to memorialize the kind of childhood stronghold that she hopes everyone had in their life at one point or another.

Amanda Gartman is a junior art major with a penchant for viciously color balancing every photo that comes her way. She has become accustomed to never having clean hands, and she can probably tell you what shoes you were wearing last Wednesday.

Jennifer Halbert is a junior Public and International Relations major. Her inspiration has come through international travel. "Incense and Peppermints" was taken at a Buddhist temple in China, which was an experience she will never forget.

Jon Krause thinks video games are pretty cool. He really doesn't see what the big deal is. He also prays that God make some more decision for him in the coming months.

Megan Lee can't truly take credit for this photo. The landscape was so beautiful; she simply captured it. So here's to the Namibian sun, the splinters in our skin from climbing those trees, and the cold drinks afterward.

John Linstrom is a third-year coffee drinker majoring in the important stuff (because everyone going into the real world should know how to starve). He enjoys pesto, lying on his back with his hair in the dirt, feet, and the Oxford comma, which he implements relentlessly. Primary credit for his submissions included here should be given to lumberjacks and to some girl, and although he unfortunately can't really thank any of them he appreciates their help. I am because of you! Ubuntu!

Kristofer Lohn is a sophomore meteorology major from Baltimore, MD. He is an avid musician, performing out several times a month. He also enjoys skiing, running and football. When he feels like not being as active, he enjoys playing Halo or watching South Park. His piece is a kind of philosophical exploration of running through a song during band practice. It was inspired by experiences playing music with his best friend, and by playing music in general.

Dan Lund is a sophomore art and history major. He loves photography and the Cubs. And he submitted this note via text message.

Robbie Onofrey is a freshman Creative Writing major and was born and raised in Valparaiso. He finds that the best inspiration lies within nature, and the writers that influence his prose and poetry [Ernest Hemingway, Jackson Tippet McCrae, Jack Kerouac, T.C. Boyle, E.E. Cummings, and Joey Comeau]. Also, one of the biggest influences on his poetry is painter Jackson Pollack; he tries to write poetry like Pollack painted.

Ellen Orner is a junior creative writing major and piano minor and maybe French minor who might like to drop all that and take a bunch of art classes. She aspires to being homeless on the Boston subway but only for long enough to write a book about it and hopes nobody takes her idea before she graduates a year late. She wishes she was a magnet for good music like the Jonathans in her life. It is her dream to have dreadlocks before you see her again.

Carolyn Simpson is a graduate student getting an A.MALS.ENGL (masters in English). Her interests include Thomas Kinkade, historical fiction, Snow White and Grumpy, Elvis Presley, and of course, creative writing. When thinking about how God's creation changes with each season, it reminded her of how humans, too, have defining seasons. "The Essence of Ageing" attempts to show a relation between human and plant life, with, she hopes, not only nostalgia, but also with a hint of humor.

Eric Prusinski is a sophomore Environmental Science major. He strives to show people beauty. Using his own perspective and a little help from his camera, he tries to prove the

uniqueness of the mundane, force people to look at the overlooked, or maybe just provide a different angle on an otherwise boring subject. Eric enjoys long walks through the Valparaiso snow with the love of his life, Sarah. In his spare time, Eric sits in a room by himself, thinking of funny things to say.

Hashem Rifai is a junior biology major. The world is his playground.

Rachel Rodriguez is a sophomore Criminology major with a minor in Spanish. Photography and music play very big parts in her life. For "The Cleansing of Life", she was thinking about how peaceful and calm a rainfall was and how she could capture those emotions. After the rainfall, all the nature on campus seemed rejuvenated and seemed to have a new brightness to it. She thanks her family and friends for all the support!

Kati Schmidt is a junior graphic design major, but she wanted to try something new. "The Conversation" was just that: an actual conversation between two people (stage directions not included). She is grateful to Mitchell, Margot, and Conor for the inspiration, but all she really wants is to know who's in love with whom.

Diana Stutzman is a sophomore Nursing major, Creative Writing minor. She loves to write in whatever spare time she can invent between Acabellas, Kantorei, and Lux. Her piece "Bruised" was written, as many of her poems are, while driving in her car around sunset, watching the play of colors in the sky.

Elspeth Taylor is an English major and German minor who enjoys good food, bad jokes, and reading any fiction she has to dig in library stacks to find. In her free time, she plays the tuba and thinks about how she can better manage her time.

Megan Telligman is a junior Biology/Creative writing major whose interests include being consistently frustrated. She enjoys romantic dinners and walks on the beach, except not walks on the beach, because she can't stand the feel of sand, and not romantic dinners either, because she doesn't understand what part of eating in front of another person is supposed to be romantic. Megan is inspired by long car rides and the feel of paint. She parts her hair carefully to one side to negate the perfect symmetry that would allow her to be chopped exactly in half.

The Lighter is currently accepting submissions for the Spring 2009 edition at  
[the.lighter@valpo.edu](mailto:the.lighter@valpo.edu)



