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## The Laureate, 3rd Edition (2004)

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THE LAUREATE

Literary Journal





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THE LAUREATE | Literary Journal



*The Laureate's* mission is to allow undergraduate students at Western Michigan University a place in which to publish their works of fiction, poetry, non-fiction, and other creative works. *The Laureate* strives to be a professional and engaging journal that appeals to all.

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## Table of Contents

Dan Frayer	Just Another Poem About Fall
Brooke Payment	Photo
	Spin Me
	Needle Tongue
Megan Drozan	Stylus
	To Learn is to Swim
Heather Good	My Roman Marriage
	Brooke
Julia Bozyk	Postcards
	Suddenly it's Autumn
Elizabeth Web	Thou Shall Not
Ayshhyah Eli Khazad	Crystal Revelation Blues
Lydia Anderson	Inside a Desk Drawer
Adam Mumy	Elizabeth, Who Calls Herself Mimi
Melissa Brummer	Untitled
Courtney Borchak	Libation
Rose Swartz	Shadow Boxing Unhappiness Under the Apartment Steps
	Mineral Spirits and Entropy
	Body Plays Dumb
Catherine Timco	Fusion for Spring
Ryan James Colliton	James Colliton
Michael Carroll	Untitled
Catherine Graham	Dear Bartender
Andrea Pellerito	A Conversation Before Saying Goodbye
Kevin Kinsella	Michigan Laughs at the Science of
Cryogenics	
Carey L. Fries	Dividing Two by Two What It Means to Count
	Orange Lifetime



Allison vonMaur  
Vietnam

Looking Out of a Bus Window,

---

Welcome to the third edition of *The Laureate*, Western Michigan University's only literary journal dedicated to publishing the creative work of undergraduate students. The journal was founded and first published in 2002 through the dedication and ingenuity of Jill Winkler and her editorial staff. Last year's managing editor, Melissa Matlowski, continued to expand *The Laureate* while I served on her editorial staff. I enjoyed working with Melissa last year and was delighted to be named editor-in-chief for *The Laureate's* 2003–2004 edition.

This issue is a compilation of wonderfully creative pieces that represent some of the very best writing by Western Michigan University's undergraduate students. The works of these twenty authors (twenty-eight pieces) were chosen for publication from nearly two hundred submissions. I believe they are truly outstanding, and I am extremely proud to have them included in *The Laureate*.

It was the dedication of the editorial board that allowed such fine pieces to be selected. Each of the members of my staff brought talents and color to our meetings that pulled together to form the journal as you see it. Special thanks go to them for this.

The editorial board and I are grateful for the financial support and advice received from the Lee Honors College and Assistant Dean Dr. John Martell. We also thank Margaret von Stenien, our graduate advisor, for her moral and technical support. She has been wonderful in helping me design a method of recruiting an editorial board and for judging staff submissions for inclusion without the bias of the editorial board. In addition, we thank the Design Center in the Department of Art for designing this year's layout and arranging for the printing of the book.

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The experience I have had as managing editor is one I will never forget. I was honored beyond belief to be chosen, and have appreciated every moment spent on compiling this journal. As I was working on *The Laureate*, I decided to adopt it as my Honors thesis project. I have learned and honed some of the major skills that are needed for leadership: organization, patience, devotion, and understanding. As you read, I hope you will love the journal as much as I have grown to, and I hope that *The Laureate* will continue to grow in the years to come.

Lydia Anderson  
Editor-in-chief

1



## **JUST ANOTHER POEM ABOUT FALL**

Dan Frayer

---

This story  
starts across town past two and everything is closed,  
sleeping curbside  
among strangers and innocent bi-standers,  
simple, quiet,

hesitate,

obstacles when everything looks different through the cross  
hairs.

With bread,  
butter knife,  
three dollars in quarters,  
the appropriate provision for our day ahead.

The screen doors slam shut with August  
and he took to the street  
against traffic  
and broken glass  
with dogs wal`king people  
who wish they could remember their dreams.

Now September is coming in with  
tragedies in the form  
of radio waves  
and wine vineyards  
over seas  
that smell like the grape jelly in our fridge.

## PHOTO

Brooke Payment

---

He rambles over the hum  
of the projector  
tongue clicking  
every time he changes slides.  
Everything is dark except for flashes  
at the front of the room,  
the screen glowing pink and orange  
on our faces.  
He hands back my slide and  
in monotone, technical terms  
tells me how my night with you went,  
scolding me about color.  
Lack of exposure.  
Too much exposure.

The light apparently was not in my favor  
that night  
we traipsed on top of the roof at dusk  
talking while grabbing handfuls of gravel  
and letting it fall through our fingers.

The brick wall kept you from falling  
to the city underneath us.

My lids flashed lightly  
over my lenses.  
My shutter speed complimented  
the movement of your breath perfectly.  
You were deep  
against a sky dusted with black and orange  
as the sun sank down to unearthly places.  
You . . . off center  
the horizon tilted and shook  
in my hands.  
My verticals off balance with yours  
and all I could save was your silhouette.

**SPIN ME**

Brooke Payment

Her feet, small shadows of my own  
 slid across thin blades of grass.

I promised her  
 I'd spin her at the park  
 where her legs wouldn't hit the furniture.

---

The trees could spin so fast  
 they'd become  
 not trees anymore,  
 the colors would bleed together and become  
 not colors anymore  
 but grey smears in between breaths.

She didn't know the world could slip  
 out from underneath her,  
 and that gravity could come alive  
 and bite us back,  
 nipping at her fingers,  
 until every one is lifted from their curl  
 around my hand,  
 tossing her into messy pieces on the grass.  
 She didn't know.

And in her light, airy six year old song, she said,  
 "spin me"

Without thinking, I took her hands in mine  
 and spun her  
 because the world isn't moving fast enough  
 already.  
 And before we can think,  
 it ties a rope around the neck of a peninsula,  
 restlessly pulling the earth  
 out of its socket,  
 skidding it into space  
 shattering us into messy pieces  
 on the sky's floor  
 to be vacuumed up  
 with the dust of the stars.



## NEEDLE TONGUE

Brooke Payment

---

You tell me about the stock market  
and how the digits are up  
two and  
a half percent  
and I'll tell you about  
the demon that holds  
black digits in the back  
of her throat  
and calls them out to me  
one by one.

Sixty . . . sixty-five . . . one forty-two  
two sixty seven . . .  
seventy-eight . . .  
two thousand and sixty two!  
Back down to  
shrink. sweat. sink. breathe.  
Stand  
on the white square  
on the bathroom floor  
and hear her tongue rise and  
fall.  
Flip. Flick. Spin  
the wheel  
before she changes her mind.  
Every day  
It's one twenty five . . . no, no . . . four  
one twenty four and three quarters.

Package the meat  
attached to bones  
call them separately  
ounce by ounce  
and listen to her  
auction them off with her long  
black, needle tongue.

**STYLUS**

Megan Drozan

I was young  
 full of purpose  
 created in mass  
 to avail the hoi polloi

After what seemed to be  
 eons and ages and ~~immeasurable spans of time~~  
 she picked me among the many.

I had longed for someone to  
 take me home  
 tear the plastic and  
 let me breathe.

But my anticipated gasp of air was  
 cut short.  
 Her grasp suffocating;  
 holding me tight won't make the words  
 come faster.

I am her tool.

She must hate me,  
 though my subservience to her  
 was inevitable.

Now I lie waiting in fear,  
 feeling cheap and used.  
 In the darkness I dread the moment she needs  
 me again,  
 and I cannot refuse her.

But sometimes  
 when the mood is just wrong,  
 she will rub my nose in the mess  
 pushing my face against the cement script  
 while my black blood bleeds  
 to fill an empty page.

## TO LEARN IS TO SWIM

Megan Drozan

---

That insistent roar of whispers  
that desperate war to be heard by some and not by  
others,  
it ends with a soft and simple decrescendo  
when he enters the room.  
Dry and empty, though filled with debris from those  
before,  
it is the bottom of an ocean, drained and aching for  
moisture.  
Their drums beat silent and their canals run dry,  
waiting to absorb what they can.  
The anticipation turns their minds anxious and paranoid,  
their self-assured fronts quietly dissolve inside.  
The silence has that power.  
And then comes a word, one soft beat on so many drums.  
The liquid language quenches the canals,  
and soon they are swimming.  
The dam has broken under the weight,  
and the sea swells with their fervor.  
Each hand raised in question  
is a stroke made in the voyage.  
Quietly, the flow is tamed and  
the torrid waters subside.  
The words have stopped and now the room is dry,  
but they are still dripping as they file out,  
drenched in the knowledge of the world.

## MY ROMAN MARRIAGE

Heather Good

---

I hope to marry a man  
with a Roman tongue, one who  
writes grocery lists on scrolls  
and reads Cicero at red lights.

He will wait until after dinner to have me,  
but only after he recites to me  
in his voice like a fat bee humming  
the epic poetry of Maro.

I will be reflective, a curved flute  
full of bitter, red-black wine  
becoming warm and still,  
waiting for him to abandon his study—  
flushing his cheeks upon the first mouthful,  
leaving a coat of drunkenness in his belly.

I will fall asleep  
with oil-painted images of Lavinium's shores  
and his slender, olive fingers.

Each morning he will tend carefully without complaint  
to the garden. I will eat grapes and laugh  
while I sew purple stripes  
onto his toga's extravagant folds.

We will live like this, pretending the Mediterranean is  
clean  
and that no Roman ever wanted war.

## **BROOKE**

Heather Good

---

I overhear someone saying  
in the dimness of a brewery  
they'd like to fuck her eyeballs.  
her face, when she hears this,  
will flush, brighten,  
then sink in with violated retreat.

I suspect those eyes want to be fucked  
because their color holds in them  
the lust of Marti Gras  
and the serenity of a Victorian novel. To have her  
is to witness her eyes dwindle and slit during inhalation,  
feel their quintessence envelop you  
as she exhales, filling space with smoke and talk.

Her name is like a spill of champagne,  
fanciful when you read it in Courier font  
on the header of a page of rejected poetry.

You will want to know her,  
create sticky labels to paste above  
those brown eyes, but will resign  
to know her as a paradox—a sorority girl  
who likes Joni Mitchell and calls herself  
a genre whore.

A prude, a lush, a freeloader. At first,  
this may be all you see: a girl  
who admits she smokes for oral fixation,  
gives good head, and should lose 20 lbs.

## POSTCARDS

Julia Bozyk

We are eating huge apples with both hands, juice running down our fingers. Still running, this tiny, tired car clunk-clunks up a dizzy mountain road. All windows open, wind runs into the backseat, licking our faces, drying the juice all the way down to our elbows. The wind pulls at my hair, twists the long strands over my lips and into my mouth. I push it away with sticky forearms. When you are done with your apple, you will hand me the core to eat right down to the seeds and then them, too.

We are driving home from Sleeping Bear Dunes, and I am sleepy from trying to find meaning in postcards when last night's sunset was amazing as well. It sinking, I snuck off to climb a big tree and think the big thoughts that would not come. Bark clawed at my back like fingernails and pushed me out of the branches.

Now, I stare out the window at forty miles per hour, holding back my hair with both hands, apple gone and hungry, again, for stimuli. We pass Zimmerman Tree Farm, and I think of Bob Dylan, him, as a farmer, I think all the same thoughts that I've thought before.

Wondering, *is your view better?* I twist in my seatbelt and there you are in my way. You startle me, seeing your shoulders are shaking in a belly-rolling laugh that I cannot hear. You have gone crazy, stuffing chunks of the entire apple into the soft folds of your cheeks. You are smiling a wide apple smile, only catching me looking when you hear happy gasping, my giggle rising over clunks and Johnny Cash. Your apple-smile turns to me, tilting, chunks shining through a glistening grin, gleaming drops dribbling down your trembling chin. Your eyes are crying, wild, on fire. You can barely breathe, but it's so fun!

I throw back my head and let go,

## **SUDDENLY IT'S AUTUMN**

Julia Bozyk

---

laughing, tornado-hair shutting my eyes. I cannot see windows, and metal frames leave me, the wind on my shoulders and lifting my arms.

---

I look up and, suddenly, it's autumn,  
and there is a bug,  
dead,  
on the knuckle of my thumb.

It seems things always go like this,  
dead before I know that they are dying.

You seemed, to me,  
beyond time zones, so I would say  
*call me*  
*when the sun begins to sink,*  
*come home*  
*whenever flakes*  
*first brush your face.*

You would arrive, always,  
just when my patience moved to melt,  
freezing me  
back,  
in place,  
like a baseball trophy  
in your mother's garage.

But now,

whole seasons  
too late, my patience  
puddles  
at my feet, leaves floating,  
bloated, to the surface, the bloom  
of which  
I witnessed,  
here,  
alone.



# **THOU SHALL NOT**

Elizabeth Webb

---

And the great-great grandson  
of a bug  
you should have crushed  
between our fingers  
is lying, dead,  
here

on my open hand.

## CRYSTAL REVELATION BLUES

Ayshhyah Eli Khazad

---

She pawned her father's gold watch  
and hid the twelve hundred dollars  
in the book of Exodus.  
The gold turned green was, in turn,  
exchanged for white  
rocks without commandments.  
The Holy Spirit gave her fire  
while Jesus turned stones into bread;  
and she took in God as a column of  
smoke.

## INSIDE A DESK DRAWER

Lydia Anderson

---

If dreams were crystal, like unto glass  
Perhaps the day would come to pass—  
When into shattered bits they'd fall  
At some prophet's lonely call—  
And the days of tired scorn  
Would pass before some breathless morn.

On that day of lost illusions,  
Picture all the strange confusions  
As we all give up despair  
To breathe again a purer air  
With longing for the way to come—  
Our strength restored to limbs once numb.

In a joyous throng we'd go  
With quiet reverence, just walking slow  
To see the new world with new eyes  
Under shadowless brilliant skies;  
Looking at glories mighty and proud  
That we had missed while heads were bowed.

At the last, new dreams would rise  
To give us wondering surprise;  
For with true sight we now behold  
Surrealistic visions of the old—  
Learning that it always was this way  
Only we had lost it in our play.

Perhaps, finally, we'd go to sleep—

Losing this dream too . . .  
The world is oh so deep.  
And mankind very new.

—dedicated, with respect, to Bill Wilson,  
co-founder of AA (Alcoholics Anonymous).

## ELIZABETH, WHO CALLS HERSELF MIMI

Adam Mummy

---

Inside a desk drawer  
tears wait under post-its  
and a box of crayons

Forgotten

Pieces of paper not yet yellowed with age

Ink and lead is absorbed  
spread across the pages like blood drained  
away

I

Love

You

A hand begins to tremble  
The letters laugh darkly  
Always

Ever

Yours

The notes are crawling  
and creeping up her arms  
her neck  
the final goal

achieved

Slowly tightening –  
her breath is gone  
She folds in tears  
as pieces of paper  
not yet yellowed with age  
flap  
innocently on the floor

---

Elizabeth, who lives across the street from us and who dances all the time, calls herself Mimi. She wears gypsy dresses and tells me stories: *shopping carts weren't popular when they were first invented. Mr. Heady wears high heels when no one is looking. My sister has one working eye.*

Sometimes, when my mom wakes up, her hair is like brown and yellow wires that stick up in the air. She always smells like charcoal and cologne and she always sends me outside to play. *Just go* she says and her voice is dry and cracked like her bottom lip and I go like a heavy mule. I go outside, down our front steps, cross Ormes road and up to Mimi's crooked front porch. It's like a silent movie until I knock.

Elizabeth, who calls me Tommy and who I call Mimi, is not a gypsy. She's part Dutch. "The Dutch part of me says my last name, *Oser*, but the French part of me says *Oh-zay*." She tells me this and we drink raspberry iced tea on her porch while enjoying the sun and the French part of her last name.

Mimi has never been to France, but she said that when she was in ninth grade, her teacher, M<sup>me</sup> Hackett, who wasn't French at all, let everyone in the class choose their own French name. Elizabeth chose Mimi because she loved the way the name made her think of the streets of Paris, sprinkled with women in mink jackets, kissing on both cheeks, *bonjour*. She never told anyone why she loved the name so much.

"Even the award that I won," she told me. "At the end of the school year for getting the highest grade in the class said, 'Ce certificat est présenté à M<sup>lle</sup> Mimi Oser.'"

Even the award called her Mimi.

Everyone calls Elizabeth by her French name except for Mrs. Hagadorn, who calls her Lizzy or sometimes Betty, but never Elizabeth and never Mimi. Mrs. Hagadorn sits in her kitchen and smokes cigarettes until the kitchen itself is filled up with smoke, just like her lungs. She smokes and smokes and calls Elizabeth Lizzy, not Mimi. Elizabeth doesn't mind though, Mrs. Hagadorn is

old and smokes too much and after all, Lizzy isn't that bad of a name.

Mimi did mind when Luke Peterson would call her Betty because he knew better. He knew that she loved the name Mimi, even though he didn't know why, and he still called her ~~Betty. We don't live in~~ *France, Betty. We live in Ohio*, Luke would say and then take her in his arms and smile, hoping she would accept this the way she accepted many things he did, like using all of the hot water before she could take a shower, and not putting that little metal cup with holes in its side and bottom back in the drain in the kitchen sink, and then letting wet noodles and cereal clog everything up. She would dig the noodles and cereal out of the drain with a dirty fork, and she would ask herself why the wet streets of France weren't kissing her window, why old men with white moustaches and big bellies weren't walking past her home.

She would tell our neighbor, Janice Crawly, who drinks tequila at night and cries, that Luke doesn't call her Mimi and Janice would say, *Mimi is not an easy name for a man to say*, and Mimi would shake her head and Janice would tell Mimi about her ex-husband's yellow toenails and how he snored too loudly. Mimi tells me that Janice isn't sad, but sometimes love can be heavy, like a sac of oats.

Mimi accepted many things about Luke but when he started coming home late, she couldn't accept this.

I could see from my house.

Two headlights that were crooked and yellow would slide over the chipped blue paint of Mimi's house. Sometimes a light from inside would come on and stay on, and sometimes Mimi would come outside on her front porch and cross her arms and stand like a pillar of salt. One night, when Luke came home late, Mimi used a wooden baseball bat that she stole from Brandon Decker when she was fourteen, /

Melissa Brummer

---

*loved him like a sack of oats*, to smash the headlights so they would never slide across the front of her tired house again.

My mother comes home late too.

I tell Mimi this, but no one else.

I tell her some nights, my mother's shoe is broken, or her breath smells like burning leaves. I tell Mimi that she touches me on my arm with dry fingers that have touched the shoulders of men who wet their mouths with beer and man laughter, and that she tells me to go to bed, and then laughs like she knows something I don't.

Mimi tells me all of the things that she knows and I don't, like how to get rid of a toothache, *drink hot water and rub silver over your cheek*, or how to cure sunburns, *peel an orange and throw the peelings over your left shoulder*. I open my mouth and laugh a soft laugh, soft like flower petals, and Mimi smiles.

A silence interrupts us. It's heavy, like summer flies that land on my hand, like the dust and stones from Mimi's driveway, and after the silence ends, Mimi sends me home, *it's getting late*, and she turns around, spins, like a gypsy, and goes into her tired house.

I stumble down the stairs of her porch, like the Dutch part of Mimi's last name, *Oh-zer*, the right side of me getting away with the left side of me. I feel the grass under my bare feet and see clouds in the sky, clouds that want to give me another name, that know that Tommy is not enough.

**LIBATION**

Courtney Borchak

---

This is loss;  
lightspots on my street  
from posts

with necks bent  
in shameful resignation.

Emptiness is not air.  
It is heavy,  
like mercury  
stored.  
It is cold  
and amplified  
like stifled laughter  
lost  
like bounces  
of balls  
down streets  
lined  
to confine  
what trees defy.

Gravity,  
is victim to entropy, too.  
We are



# **SHADOW BOXING UNHAPPINESS UNDER THE APARTMENT STEPS**

Rose Swartz

---

desperate like glue  
for the other  
to understand the angle  
at which our shadows  
attach our feet.

---

Elizabeth Bishop Influence  
After *Sunday at Key West*

She raises the cup  
From a dishwater ocean.  
Along the counter, clean plates,  
Napkins, half a butter Lamb.

She wipes the rim with a rag,  
A circle forms.  
Liquid coils around each wrinkled finger.  
Come all and drink.

## MINERAL SPIRITS AND ENTROPY

Rose Swartz

---

Today the bumper of a Toyota Camry told me that "happiness is  
being Finnish"  
and I'm thinking about my ethnicity and deciding I won't let it get  
me down  
until I'm walking behind the house under the balcony when  
unhappiness corners me between the tree and the fence and says  
"Hey, you're boyfriend doesn't hug you enough  
and you're bicycle isn't even the right size,  
I saw you crying on your way out of the dentist's today,  
why you gotta be talking shit, huh?"  
So I start off wincing "uhh, uhhh my parents love me," wringing  
my hands,  
"he would hug me more if i asked him,"  
and unhappiness glowers there with the sick neighborhood beer  
smells sneering at me sayin' "you timid bitch, you aint even Finnish,"  
So I get my fighting face on, say "hey-  
I may not be Finnish but I just saw the harvest moon  
up in the sky like an old tangerine  
or a Dutch man's weather beaten face (uppercut)  
and the guy in front of me at the cafe ordered  
a whole cup of milk it was lovely,"  
digging my toes in the dirt now thinking of the way kids in high  
school  
said 'scuffle,' and I go (jab-jab)  
"you should see me giggle at bedtime,  
hear my bicycle squeek and ka-chunk over the railroad  
tracks at night when I ride home from my love's house,  
my old Schwinn singing as we fly through neon ditches  
my hair exploding and so in love like a novel.  
Did you know that my great aunt worked in a button factory,  
just like that song? My grandma gave me a mason jar fulla buttons  
some of 'em big and bright and others that look like elephants."  
`Unhappiness is panting now, holding his bloody head,  
but I'm ruthless, I keep going:  
"I live in a dirty yellow house filled with typewriter noise  
and anarchistic basil plants, when I dance  
it's by accident, don't tell me I'm unhappy."  
"I got a sweater that covers my whole hands

**BODY PLAYS**  
**DUMB**

Rose Swartz

and a roommate that laughs like a movie  
star in training,  
we got a pet spider the size of a quarter,  
my brother's  
six foot four," "I'm going to see my  
favorite band next week."  
Unhappiness is on the ~~ground now rolling~~  
in pain, "last time  
I fell asleep in class I took notes on my  
dream.  
Last time I went to a party we were up till  
four am banging  
on pots and pans screaming 'we are not  
depressed.'"  
Unhappiness' face a proverbial  
catastrophe, "one more thing, yesterday  
I ollied down a set of stairs and a cute boy  
saw me land it,  
I work with the elderly and like it (kick to  
the groin!)  
Unhappiness is down for the count passed  
out in the gold  
light against bricks and my hips dance me  
all the way up  
the wooden steps to laugh for an hour  
before I sleep.

## FUSION FOR SPRING

Catherine Timco

---

You leave me like house paint leaves a house:  
slow, beautiful, so much peeling-  
The whole neighborhood getting in on the thing,  
coming over to help me forget:  
sticking their daggers and fingernails in my sides,  
putty knives and wet kisses in their picnic baskets—  
I could've gotten all of you off my-self,  
perhaps by sitting in a few lengthy rain showers,  
but I have accepted their gifts, drank  
their whiskey and am following them, bewildered,  
to the vegetable market- reuben sandwich- icecream shop-  
track meet-craft show-fast food-gambling capital backyard:  
the fingers of their mission statements are crawling up my  
legs, jauntily  
like cartoon spiders, me spinning around on hardwood  
floors,  
the castanets chattering in my hands, I'm screaming "yow  
yow yow,"  
like you are the fire  
and I am the witch.

---

In the afternoon morning that is only morning when you have been drinking, we sit on the sidewalk of the dirtiest drunken city. Outside the record store I ask body if it knows where it's been. Body plays dumb. Says no. I have to remind it how to feel. Feel like the baby bird bodies outside his house last night, the baby bird bodies we crushed under our feet, accidents that looked like Pollack paintings. Mottled and fucked up, body, that's how you should feel. I ask body why there are no tire treads on my back- why there is no sloppy seam running from brain to thigh where he slices me open. Body shrugs, says "look up at the lovers." Arm in arm, they smile too much so we heckle those lovers. We glare our ugliest glare. I scream at them "Hey look, we are in love too!" But body scrunches, knows this is a lie. I have to tell it to shut up, that this is just a joke. Now me and body yell together "We've never been happier!" I peel us off the concrete and accidentally leave some of body behind. We wail together " . . . so in love it hurts!" We chase the lovers but they are too in love to notice. Body gets tired, gets so jealous. Quits on the curb. I ask it again- where have you been? Body just cringes, says you don't even want to know.

## JAMES COLLITON

Ryan James Colliton

---

Last night I fastened my  
Thoughts to the rain  
Like a well sewn button on a  
Fitted coat.

Sprung the screen door open  
To see nothing less  
Than the elliptical moon  
Stretched out across a  
King size bed of dark blankets,  
Cornflower blue.

Now, I'm down here on the steaming streets  
Ankle deep in passing sticks and crumbles of black top  
Dodging deep perforated pothole puddles,  
Letting the swell unfold itself into  
Backyards, bird fountains,  
And well-tilled gardens.

The drops pulse my red rubber coat,  
The plastic sound amplified  
In my hood and down my sleeves,  
Rotating my body around,  
Arms stiff against my sides,  
Fingers hidden in pockets of Kleenex.

The currents parallel every street.  
Debris in the left gutter streams,  
Parading my yellow rubber soles  
Lifting and descending in an aisle of  
Golden leaves and acorn beads,  
Until at the edge of concrete curbs we diverge,  
Falling through metal sewer grids  
Tunnel ways and waterfalls.  
I had my fun too, then.

I remember when I didn't care,  
When I went swimming

Michael Carroll

---

In the neighbors' backyards  
Where the sewer drains couldn't handle the spill  
I came together with,  
Sticks, worms, dead animals, plus the neighbor boy,  
In the open field I launched my raft away,  
The water raised barely above my chin.  
Our feet brushing the just-mowed seaweed-grass.



## DEAR BARTENDER

Catherine Graham

---

Drunks die of their own accord,  
and exist thereafter like empty tortoise shells.

Leaving their beautiful wives to grow old,  
and their grandchildren to revere them as fables.

To sit up he had to build his momentum,  
Rocking back and forth, his arthritic spine  
Never allowing him to just simply stand upright.

"Just a snitch" he'd say through yellow hands,  
Puffing on his cigarette.

Moments later the glass of Corby's whiskey  
Would be brought to him by my father,  
Then an adolescent.  
The glass, still the deep tan of whiskey,  
The coloring of cola still mixing its way into the solution,  
Only to become a trace of its former self.

"How did you sleep last night?" he'd ask my father,  
Who the answer always escaped,

With your eyes closed.

I don't think my father slept a wink  
Waiting for his own to die,  
Always asking himself.  
Who was sleeping? What was awake?

I've been told stories. How the whiskey bubbled  
On your lips and the cigarette burned in your limp hand,  
The plume rising tight into the air,  
As you took your last shallow breathe.

For the first time, I hope there is a heaven  
Looming above.  
So you can see me as I ponder what I might become

---

(stirring the whiskey and ice in my glass)  
Looking for some sustenance to fill this shell.  
I am the arbiter of night;  
    Lord of vacant streets  
        where mailboxes and  
        fire hydrants stand

Silent-vigil  
against the pink murmur of the dawn.

Molasses dreams  
    pull words like fruit-  
        from trees  
    catching conspicuous notes           falling  
        from voices I thought I  
            would never hear again.

Voices  
    of back alley saints  
    with wings as smooth as  
        ravens' claws.

Fill my lungs  
    with the will of poets' pasts.

## A CONVERSATION BEFORE SAYING GOODBYE

Andrea Pellerito

---

And just like that it comes,  
full of sunlight.

Words  
caught halfway between confusions.

music?

tenderloin.

should taste.

rain.)

Sighs fall through me  
and I lay  
making angels in the grass.

(Have you ever eaten

slow chewed and  
swallowed-  
your own cotton candy

This is how grace

Jazz,  
bent cool over notes,  
distinct,  
organic cousins of

## **MICHIGAN LAUGHS AT THE SCIENCE OF CRYOGENICS**

Kevin Kinsella

---

Fill it up bartender, fill it up good  
and don't you dare stop until I can see  
the deep brown guts of Jack toppling  
from my glass and onto the bar.  
And even then don't you dare stop because I know you  
see  
me under the table, staring at the underside  
of a mahogany bar vulnerably sprawled  
on my back, belly up in anticipation for those frenzied,  
frenetic, fantastically over poured beads of liquor  
to run from the bottle and into my mouth  
overflowing my cheeks and drowning  
my teeth until my lips, my nose, my face  
my entire body is covered  
head to toe  
with a blanket of whiskey closer to my skin  
than a scar or a tattoo.  
And when your bottle is empty  
just open another and fill me a glass with your finest.  
Bourbon or Baileys? I'd prefer both  
but you could pour me a pitcher of roses and I'd still  
drink up.  
In fact fill my cup to the top with roses  
and don't you dare stop to pull off the thorns  
because they tickle my throat, do the two-step in my  
stomach  
and tear up my eyes. But just watch me keep on  
swallowing  
until my tears have watered a garden of roses  
that are growing and growing  
and in one sudden  
Blink  
they have climbed to the ceiling, consumed  
all the walls and enraptured me in a garden

**DIVIDING TWO BY TWO:  
WHAT IT MEANS TO COUNT**

Carey L. Fries

---

of golds and reds. I am spinning and spinning  
in a cyclone of color, dancing with daisies  
drinking from the cups of daffodils  
and finally diving into the dirt, naked and cold  
with my hand on my crotch and my face  
on a sweaty toilet seat.

---

The petals have fallen and covered my body  
like a blanket that covers your face  
but always leaves your feet cold.  
It's past my bedtime bartender, but you just keep right on pouring  
because I'm going to sleep with thorns in my hair  
and if you run out of Jack you can pour me whatever  
but don't you stop filling my glass  
don't you dare.

## ORANGE LIFETIME

Carey L. Fries

---

The charm of the necklace jumped between her twisting fingers as she looked up at him. *Don't lose that necklace*, he had said, *I don't know how much it cost.*

"Do you want it back?"

Dammit! she thought. Cost shouldn't be an issue, not when he had given her the necklace for their one month anniversary, not when he said he loved her, not when she was leaving today. Didn't he see the necklace hanging between her breasts each day? Didn't he notice it when, as she kissed him, it would sometimes tumble from its place beside her heart and gently strike his chin?

"No, I just don't want you to lose it."

But he was thinking about how he missed it. He was thinking, I used to like having it. If I had it still, I would wear it. I would wear it today. I would be wearing it right now, and that chain and that cross would be hanging around my neck, not hers.

Her fingers were no longer twisting the chain, no longer playing anxiously, but rather supporting her as she leaned back against her car. She tilted her head at him.

"If you want it back, you can have it."

He eyed it, hanging before him and thought, this is my apple. But I am Adam. It is Eve who must give in. He eyed the necklace, and then he peered at his Eve. Was *Eve* ever such an anal bitch? He felt the trap his girlfriend was building around him; if he said yes, I want it back, he would be in deep shit.

So he smiled and wrapped his arm around her, an embrace tight enough that she couldn't see his face as he grimaced.

"I love you," he whispered.

"I love you, too," she replied, her hands in the short hairs at the nape of his neck, the spot where she knew he wanted her necklace to be hanging.

---

As cars squeeze the fat, dirty snow along South Westnedge,  
Sea gulls squabble over grade-F meat behind the Taco Bell.  
They stamp webbed feet and the sound  
is the smack of a cheek on asphalt.

Sunflowers droop over the sidewalk.  
Their pale trunks struggle to support their big, empty faces.

Grass that poked the skin between my shirt and shorts  
Freezes to porcelain  
Shards now,  
slides into flesh without a fuss.

The Whitetail Museum is a pyre of antlers.

Outside my apartment, the crack heads dance  
To a song as taciturn as the Northern Lights.



## LOOKING OUT OF A BUS WINDOW, VIETNAM

Allison vonMaur

---

A kind of thick night moved over some man, his apartment.  
Through his kitchen window, a breeze wove in  
and out the lattice of gray screen. He was  
pensive, tugging air through a smoke.  
Haze exhales floated out to where  
the dark Indonesian- carved bamboo  
chimes spun in a circle, clattered  
then sucked in air, moved out a song.  
This reminded him of a certain night back home

in Michigan, spread him over the shores of Rosey Mound  
where his old lover and he laid in cool sand  
and counted as many stars, two hundred, as they might  
before a thundercloud rush could cover them  
spill them over, onto an already tumbling shore.  
He remembered the way her finger pointed out,  
up from their chins, the way its tip brought in a row  
down their arms about cluster recounts. His numbers

ending in and out a reality. The man decided  
to go to Phan's One-Stop Shop and unhook the gate in the back.  
He had been there before, knew Phan had no use for keys.  
And when the man did Phan was well asleep, was back in Shanghai.  
His hand skimmed over the smooth, sober steel of Phan's  
lattice chain links. It made a tink-drum by the tips of his fingers,  
no particular rhythm. In Phan's storage  
which served the same as an office, the man found  
blue crates neatly stacked. Six high in rows of four, corners and sides

married, one after the other. His hand latched. In unison,  
two fingers through two plastic, midnight holes.  
Then his left did likewise. The man could have taken more  
had he counted more the how. But no. It took him a few rounds.  
His room to Phan's. Back. Forth. There again.  
Each time he carried along two proud, blue stars  
suspended by two white and sweaty holds.

Each moment he sighed a stacked relief at the block corner;  
 the one turning his street away from Phan's. It was marked.  
 Tiger Lilies. Shut and resting the night in their berm. Their smell  
 made him feel invisible, the air less a labor  
 on his tensing lungs. It rolled in through  
 the man's senses, over and tumbled in waves. At five o'clock a.m.  
 in Michigan,

when he had re-latched the Phan's gate, began for home, the man noticed  
 on the clouds, how thickly, they packed over his deed, his mission, carrying,  
 in this unified shadow, the last two of its buried brilliance to his home.  
 And when he had, at last, the blue crates all lined up with corners  
 married, the man was surprised. He could not raise his chin  
 nor smile. No girl was present to point, disagree on their count, their worth.

Take the moments that stray ahead  
 and peel them back, dig your fingers  
 in ripe fruit of time.

*It could be sweet as when Persephone used to be.  
 She entwined Black-eyed Susan stems,  
 twirled them seven times  
 fair capello strands wound her airy toes.*

At times they have a sour bite,  
 a twinge  
 puckering lips.  
 We squint our eyes from spray juices, a sunny orange.  
 And we may shield their sight  
 our hearts, but they will come out anyway  
 with seeds from our mouths  
 to the ground.

*I tied your cravat as you had instructed,  
 looped it carelessly while staring into you your eyes...  
 when there was me in them, I was away staining my Hades blue.*

---

It was forgotten in a moment . . .  
 with that moment  
 This moment sliced in sections  
 rich with flavor.

*You string our tree and the fort becomes yellow. Dimentichi...this history  
 our decorations turn us red with shame and defeat? Look at the leaves  
 they mass down on us in \_\_\_\_\_ . . .  
 Catch them and they paint regret.*

It will be new for our memories, yet how much  
 would fill one moment? We recall the taste, curl our tongues  
 up against our palates, crave the zest  
 opaque as honey in our noses  
 that scent,  
 that sweat.

On a bicycle she  
 balances her day;  
 coconuts in one basket,  
 digital watches in the other.  
 Bamboo rod finds its groove  
 along her shoulders  
 as the baskets teeter,  
 shifting heights.

Round white faces gawk  
 through waffled windows,  
 nearly opaque  
 breath thickening my sight.

As though it were normal for the bus,  
 it jolts suddenly,  
 bouncing,  
 bobbing bodies,  
 nodding heads.

---

Then she,  
not pausing to brush  
the caked dirt from her face,  
instead shakes her head  
and climbs back on the bicycle.

Ragged edges  
of roads,  
of her clothing,  
of myself  
become clear  
as I lean back,  
sinking in  
against the straight line of the seat.

Today I made a promise.  
To live  
in the place between  
nurturing rocking  
and open-eyed shaking.



Lee Honors College, 2003



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