

# S P I R E S

*intercollegiate arts & literary magazine*

— f a l l 2 0 0 3 —

Columbia University § DePauw University § Tulane University  
Washington University § Yeshiva University

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Front Cover by Matthew Freel, Washington University  
Back Cover by Nathan Ratcliffe, Washington University

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*Kristin Hawly*  
*Washington University*

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# INTRODUCTION

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This is one of the first pages in a magazine that has almost certainly been thrust into your hands by an overzealous young woman or man of the pseudo-intellectual persuasion. For your own edification and general well-being, I will tell you now that said magazine has been entitled, Spires. I'm not lying when I say that I worked pretty hard on this Introduction, on this magazine, and that, in general, I work pretty hard on everything. Now I know that there are some of you out there, mainly those whose noses drip at the mention of robots, who are thinking, "Wow. This guy is pretty full of himself. He climbs his way to the top of a literary magazine of international importance, stepping on those who get in his way and knocking over those who are unfortunate enough to have fewer limbs than him, and in those opening pages of international importance does nothing but talk about his own work ethic, wit, good looks, and overall magnanimity." To you, pompous jerk, I say, "Shut up." The fact of the matter is that I am the king of all that is Spires and no one, not even robots, can bring me down from my mountain of yellow pride (my hair is always blowing in the wind to Barber's Adagio for strings).

But this, my friends, is a matter for another time and I can say with all my heart, "*Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa*" (literally, "Shuffle-step-slide-step, shuffle-step-slide-step, shuffle-step-jump). I promise that further perusal will prove enjoyable and interesting and that my proverbial voice will not be heard again. Once you turn this page, my reign will have ended and the undergraduate authors within will burst into your head filling it with rhyme, meter, brushstrokes, and other various scaffolds of artistic impression. I hope you will enjoy reading them as much as I have !

Your friend forever,

A decorative signature in a blackletter or gothic font. The first letter 'G' is large and ornate, followed by 'regory' in a smaller, similar font. The second letter 'L' is also large and ornate, followed by 'enhoff' in a smaller, similar font. The entire signature is written in black ink.

Gregory A. Lenhoff  
Co-President

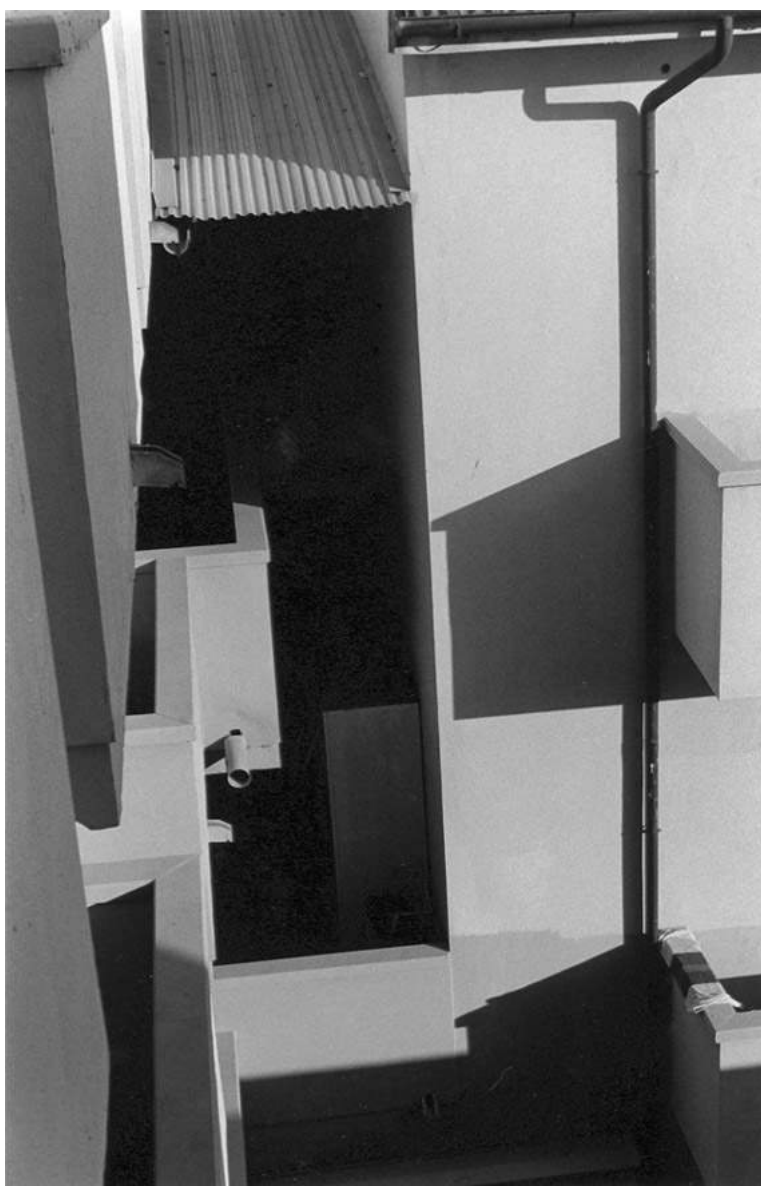




## SAD STORY

My dog died yesterday - could never control  
Her hunger for sullen toads on humid-stained  
Porches. You called tonight, and you listened  
For a while as I relayed the dismal tale:  
You see, toads emit a poison from their skin,  
Until the dog becomes sicker than she seems.  
The conversation drifted: sex, and poems,  
And the offhand old resistance to love. And then  
I am appalled: I see the ways we gather  
The ways to simulate that which we have;  
Are left inevitable and unslaked.  
The poison didn't kill her. It was my mother -  
Flushing the animal's foaming mouth with love  
And water that filled her lungs until she choked.

*Tiffany Richman*  
*Washington University*



*Daniel Marcus*  
*Washington University*

## MÃOS

I have worshipped the golden, honey-laced tongues of a thousand children, weeping behind their  
leather-tough shoulders and mouths  
Spitting phrases colder than blood and brighter than Selene as she sets them to sleep.  
I have seen their hearts, apple-red shells, chocolate-brown inside, and have proceeded still  
Warning them every minute of the wicked game of checkers we will play: always I am red, always they  
are black kings, always it is I who playfully tosses the board and never picks it up.  
I am a child, more youthful than they, less forgivable, and still as small.

I have worshipped Orpheus, whose lyre was plugged into the kitchen wall, where he sang as gods turned  
away.  
and Narcissus, bronze and brown, puddled blue: wagon-heavy and angry, spilling *sangre* on our  
aquamarine tile.  
Zeus, who came with rib stabbing his waist, hands of mercury and whimpering cry, stole me away.  
He was milk-white, with empty pockets, imperfectly perfect and daintily deceitful.  
I, his greatest task, am his mourner.  
He came to my side after hiding so softly in the long-lost recesses of my mind; he came and claimed I  
had dreamed.  
He did not bite my lip, now bee-stung and pink with the fervor of forbidden comforts,  
He did not pull my braids behind my head, making me blue  
But he paints me blue-green, earthbound as Leda, fire-red as her child.  
So we paddled away, 'cross the brook. I, blindfolded with secondhand bandanas, thought it was the sea.

I tear up at grass blades, at the soft hum of the black box all the world may worship, at the pounding  
murmur of your telephone.  
Waiting silently on the satin sheets each afternoon, I cried of anticipation unfulfilled, ignoring the  
monstrous clamor of all the gods I've loved before  
  
beating on my bedroom door.

*Jazzy Danziger*  
*Washington University*

FROM ASHES

I.

Cancer Aunt left me her entire collection  
Of thirty-seven pink shells  
That she saved while living  
In Hawaii.

Lifting a curvy sea  
Skeleton, I trace  
The spiral with my finger,  
Storms of sand falling gritty and salt-licked  
Into my lap.

I think of how we used to build  
Clay volcanoes on her coffee table  
And how she'd make gurgling noises  
In her throat, saying  
*I am the earth, getting ready.*

II.

My mother likes to watch me  
Clean them, placing each shell  
Gently into soapy water and  
Back into the pinewood box. She tells me:

Loss feels rubbery  
And bottomless,  
Like a whale that has swallowed  
The ocean.

III.

Holding a cracked shell  
Up to the light,  
The inner core glowing  
In the spots of yellow  
That lay jagged through the break

Loss is knowing another way out—  
Moments after the eruption  
Shatters the foundation,  
When every doorknob on every door  
Has melted away  
To dust

And you are the earth, ready for anything  
Except the stillness that follows.

*Faye Gleisser*  
*Washington University*

## THE WALNUT TREE

Memories of a childhood are these:  
a reedy girl, I hung by narrow knees  
and from within the arc of low trapeze  
would stretch hands deep into the walnut leaves  
against a summer sky.

There was a world of things that I,  
when I was young, could not imagine real.  
I read in Genesis but could not feel:  
the crush of serpent skull beneath Eve's heel,  
yet dreamed the snakeskin dry.

I feared no fall from any swing so high  
and felt no loss of things that do not last.  
I arched my back, threw shells into the grass.  
Among that fruit, rough bark within my grasp,  
I watched the small snake die.

*Rebecca Friedman*  
*Washington University*



*Jeff Stewart*  
*Washington University*

## NONAGON SONG

### I

The tower windows were lit in patterns,  
and we could see a single digit amid scattered  
flashes of light and people working.  
And we heard it said, "9 is the luckiest  
number in China."

Phone calls forced us to step outside  
(where the numbers we hear can be qualified  
and distinguished from the electrons on which they fly).  
We walked around the building's side  
before we blinked and realized  
that it was no coincidental pattern  
but an advertisement for something nonagonal.

### II

If there is anything to tell,  
it might be this:  
there is no motion of consequence.  
There is no such event  
as a spontaneous kiss.



Ethics of love do not exist.  
What is happy coincidence?

### III

Observation shows us that God is a scientist,  
locked in a room watching, making lists  
of what he observes, quantifying bliss  
and deciding which way we shall turn and twist.  
He's deciding that the sound of the drums he has missed  
is the sound of his blood rushing fast through his wrists  
and accelerating still when they ball into fists,  
rushing down drains into darkling pits.

There's a list of faces we make while engaged  
in invisible acts of sex and rage.  
He has them memorized, page by page,  
reciting by recall from a latticework cage.

*Phillip Rollins*  
*Tulane University*



*Nathan Ratcliffe*  
*Washington University*

ESCAPING

(POEM TO FORGET ABOUT BAY)

december was such a long month.  
you didn't call once,  
and i spent my time on airplanes,  
cocooned in sad music  
and flannel blankets,  
running in crooked

zigzags

from one ocean to another.  
i wrote letters just to feel closer  
to someone who was  
a continent away.  
you always said there was  
no such thing

as escape,

but i never believed you.  
and now that it is warmer,  
and i am back here,  
where you call all the time,  
i just write poems  
to get away  
from you.

*Natalie Cox*  
*Tulane University*

## IMPRESSIONS OF HARARE

When I try to tell you about the startling—even surreal—feeling upon seeing for the first time a bright, provincial landscape of tones that would be typically and perfectly European except that it contained bodies so dark, so out of place and our sense of time—established through history books that tell us of civilizations and development and the Third World—you will try to imagine it, try to convince yourself of this reality presented to you. But the truth we must first reconcile with, as writer and reader, is this: as much as the reader of literature or the viewer of art may wish it not so, it will remain that no art—nothing—escapes context, and nothing—even with the best intentions—will ever convey the identical sensations of a single experience. Nonetheless, I am compelled to share glimpses of a city, inadequate and all:

Zimbabwe can be spotted on any map—the region is usually shown in light pink—and some maps will tell you that Harare—a small star inside the pink—is elevated 8000 feet above sea level. For all I know, that information is not any less convincing than anything on this paper, trying to describe to you the mild but unmistakable claustrophobia from how low the sky seemed on some days, especially in the spring. Everybody feared that the sun's burn would be 8000 times worse here than anywhere else—under this sun, in lush but dry fields of yellow, green and yellowgreen, white houses glowed almost as brightly as the shiny foreheads of housemaids (named, say, Loveletter) who tended them; the

rich buttocks of chestnut horses shimmered almost as brightly as the glistening sweat of gardeners (named, say, Overseas) who tended them.

The whites riding the horses did not glow or shine—they burned pink, pink like the very country on a map—they kept their steaming black velvet helmets on and slapped sunscreen onto the wide tops of their pork pink arms. If I were to even come close to making you cringe at the lingering tensions between old colonial residue and the shy natives, there would be a part here that tells of how a white wife of a homeowner often pointed her fine filed fingernail at an arrangement of celery on a plate for the guests of a bridge game she was hosting—and how the dark maid stooped before Madam's finger and the celery, how you could not see the usually prominent whites of her eyes—for they were downturned now, as part of a much-practiced act of shame and submission—and how her thin body was always concealed beneath a starchy white apron and light yellow maid's uniform—sold at every supermarket, in the aisle with rubber gloves and gumboots, next to the canned corn. But no, I won't ever describe it well enough.

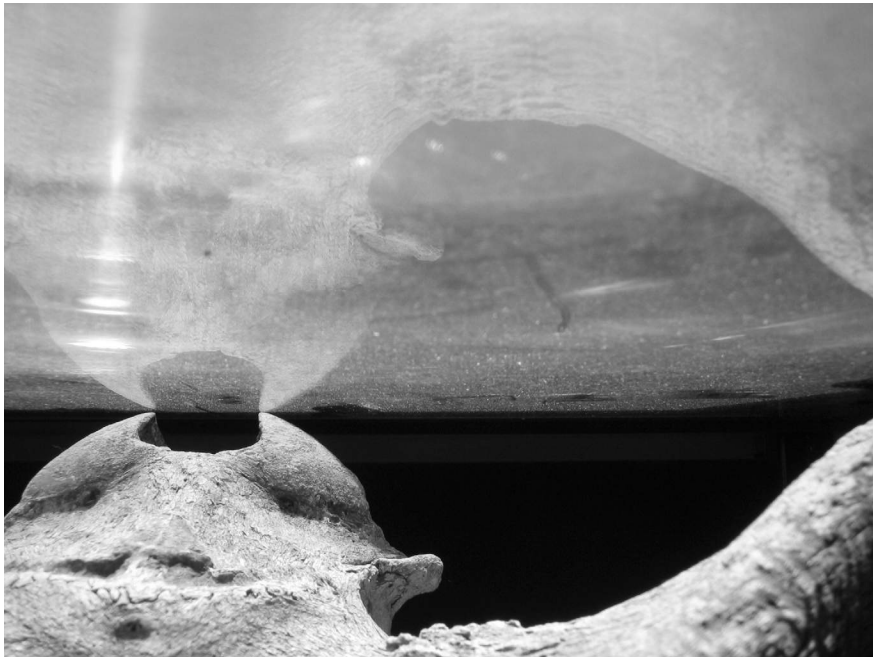
Nor will I ever be able to make you feel the creeping guilt I felt as a child in a privileged home in this land, standing in the garden watching the gardener wash our five puppies with a hose—the puppies I had just played with and enjoyed, no dirty work; the dirty work was all for

the gardener, who wore black gumboots and a dirtied blue uniform with holes at the elbows and knees. I might even help you see how he smiled to me from afar, looking up for a moment from the dirty wet dogs to reveal a genuine straight row of mild teeth—help you feel the strain in the lower right corner of my mouth when I returned him a smile, thinking, *Should I be washing the dogs? Yes. No. No.*

Of course there were pure pleasures too, elaborations of which may also leave you indifferent: steak devoured on countrysides that can be seen in, say, Cezanne's greener paintings—steak covered in thick gray sauces, steak that split open pink to match the guava juice next to the plate. Staring up at Eucalyptus trees that, for once, kept you from feeling the sky so oppressively low—staring up at the gum trees and pondering whether Africa was once joined with Australia when all the world was one Pangaea, times long before the British and the Zimbabweans, before any history books. One thing I believe you will understand is what all have sensed: breathing under the sun—the same sun that shone through a canopy of gum tree leaves onto horses, gardeners, the land elevated 8000 feet above the rest, and all the rest.

*Oh-Yoon Kim*  
*Brown University*

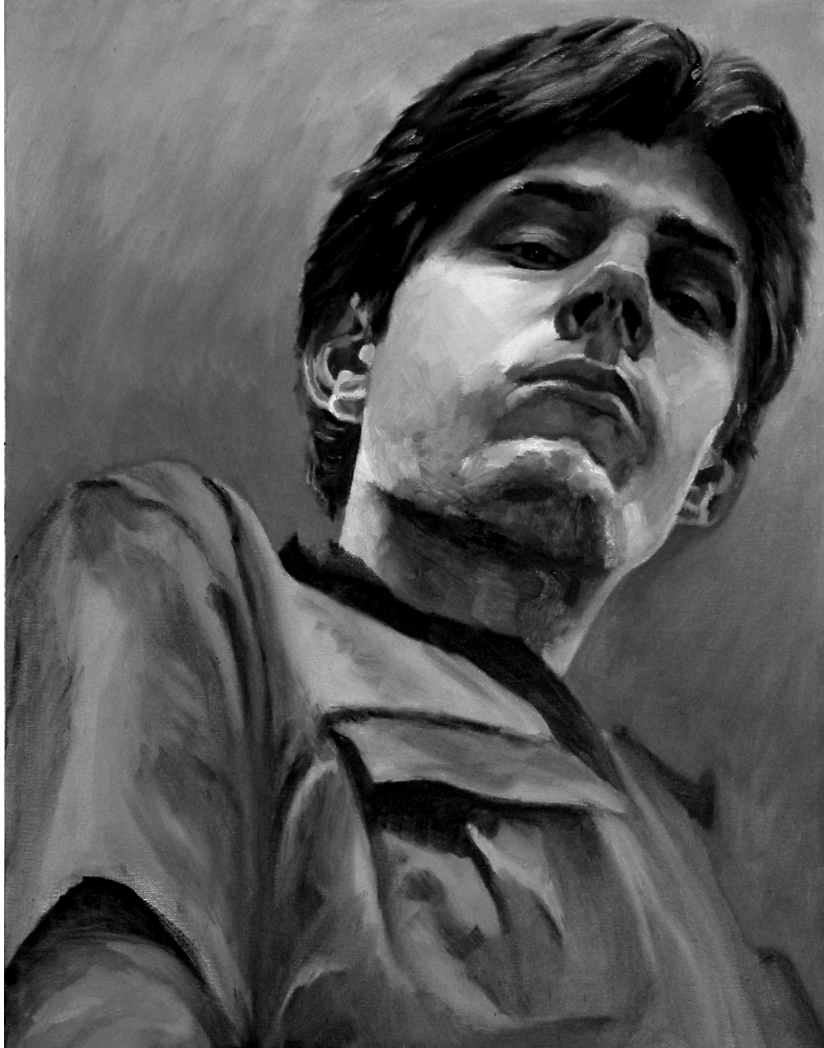
*Jill Larson*  
*Washington University*



## SOMETIMES EVEN THE BEST LAID PLANS

There's a black mark next to these twenty-four hours  
And the mirror reflects that up-all-night feeling  
But now it's the first glimpse of celestial glow  
And we loudly and artificially proclaim that the system works  
Our newfound cardboard companions quell our quaint ancient anxieties  
Because it's so deliciously simple to torch teasing effigies.  
I both delight and amuse myself with delusions of understanding  
Sometimes it seems like I'm psychic because I mistake strangers  
For friends, and then I see the people I thought I'd recognize.  
You can watch planes bisect and trisect balmy airspace,  
And I'll still wonder how fire can keep a monstrosity afloat.

*Meredith Reuter*  
*Washington University*



*Greg Bako*  
*Washington University*



*Taylor Marks*  
*Washington University*



## THE DEATH OF CLICHÈS

“I have angst,” she cried one day.  
“He doesn’t love me  
and I think I shall die.  
It’s simply too much,  
I’ve written all I can  
About single teardrops falling  
Into red wilting roses  
As darkness tears into  
The chasm of my heart.  
Oh painful world,  
I cannot escape you!  
Your materiality is death  
And thus the sunset  
Shall be my farewell.”

“That’s nice dear,” came the reply  
“Just please don’t leave a note.”

*Emily Norwood*  
*Washington University*

AL LADO DEL SENDERO LUMINOSO

The itch  
is no longer on your hands, but in them—  
your grandmother scratches her head, sees spots  
appear on shoulders like you  
see them when you press on your eyes.  
The sheets this morning—  
again—are stained with scratches.  
In sleep you wear mittens and manage, still  
to tear off flesh in search of bone;  
in search of fossil quietude.

Summer finds you thin, nothing grows,  
the cows have eaten sick grass  
and rot in their own teeth.  
You are used to these dead, feel them  
as tumors. As fungus  
on your field. Even so, you touch them.  
You put a hand in their eyes.

In time the cows are gone entire.  
Their bones found like scabs  
under your hair, replacing it,  
while Grandmother with a shovel  
tries to scratch the meat of surfaces.  
This itch is there  
under both of you, a bone in the throat,  
a policy. It comes clear—  
you chase one death with dust and livestock,  
find another with flags and white hands.

*Christine Whitney*  
*Washington University*



*Helen Pfeifer*  
*Washington University*



*Kathriel Brister  
Tulane University*

## ELEPHANT SEALS

I saw elephant seals for the first time in California,  
one cold December afternoon.

They pull and flop their massive bodies  
onto the sun-warm sands,  
out of the icy Pacific,  
shaking the ground with each thud,  
until they eventually find each other,  
and huddle together for warmth.

Their masses settle into one another,  
every sneeze and small movement  
domino-ing  
through their dog piles,  
rippling their velveteen fur,  
drying in the afternoon glow.

They are angry and easily annoyed,  
some can't stay still and others just want to sleep,  
so they push their bodies up,  
amazingly,  
with their tiny fins and bark loudly,  
thrusting and biting,  
until they are too tired and fall back together again,  
heaving and sighing into sleep.

If I had only seen them sooner,  
understood a few months earlier,  
then they could have kept me from saying goodbye to you;  
could have reasoned with me  
in the moment I decided I had sat still long enough,

waiting for you while you slept,  
and dragged myself out, alone,  
on clumsy, stumbling fins,  
into cold ocean waters.

They could have made me unslam the door,  
unpack my suitcases,  
magically put me back one year before,  
where you still were.

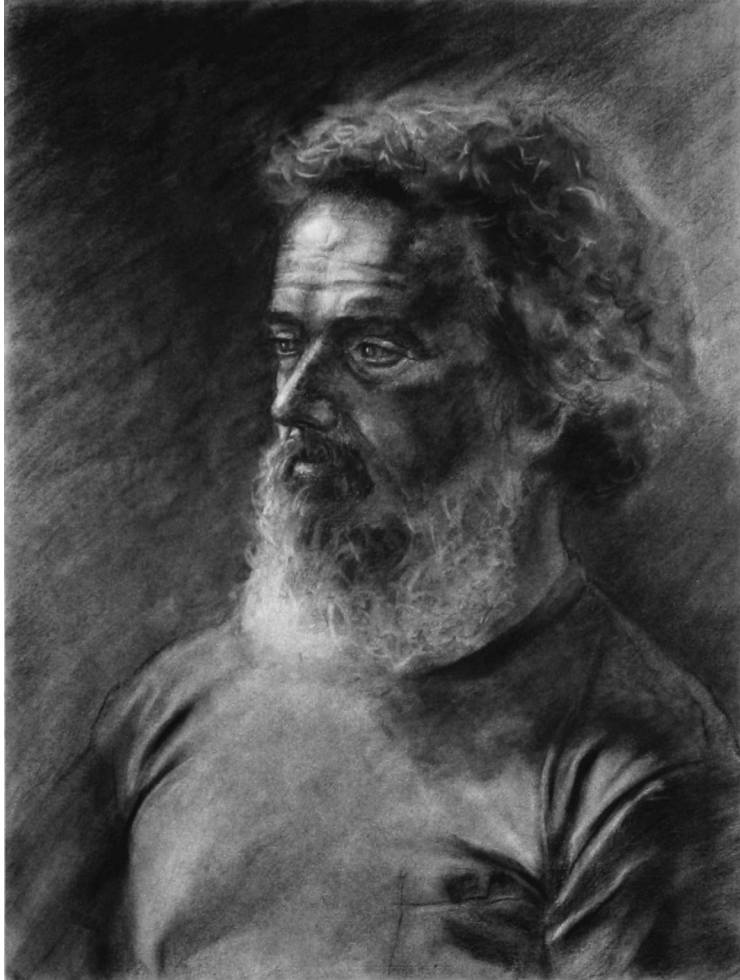
They could have told me that it was ok  
to bark and bite,  
and yell and slam doors  
as long as I came back at the end of the day  
for your body's warmth.

*Natalie Cox  
Washington University*

## BASIC BEAUTIFUL

Concerns dissolved into the  
basic beautiful of the only universal  
sleep only shallow beneath  
pulsing awake thinkness and seeness.  
Billowing sheets: nighttime  
furor rages beyond crackling support beams.  
Dial tones, as always, make mobile  
confessions in Morse code  
spilling the same letters across the empty wires  
that hover over empty desert streets.  
Immobile faces display stoic stiffness,  
an inability to act in accordance with the assumed,  
the Rational Actor Model, and thus charts  
flow bloodless drains down into (this dis-) place(d).  
The power of the human eye: weeping without weeping  
into weeping well weeping will weeping create. Sleeping  
without sleeping without slipping into sickness scars  
the bones and the growth plates and makes the  
miracle organ sing softly, pumped for songs that drone.  
Nothing moves the same notes twice  
and if it ventures along the same resonant strings  
then the strings themselves have moved.  
The music buries itself under mounds of flesh  
woven into tiny fabrics to keep off the sun and rain,  
basically beautiful they rub together in orchestral swells;  
muffling crescendos, baffling words.

*Phillip Rollins*  
*Tulane University*



*Greg Bako*  
*Washington University*

## FINAL PLANS

The day I read that the speed of light may not be constant is also the first time I was expelled from my body. Before the expulsion was the panic. I remember when things were simple—you ask someone about the universe, they say it's big. Now you ask someone about the universe and there goes your night, it takes that long to explain it. I don't know much about the speed of light and other high tech sciences, but I read that the concept threatens to unravel all our knowledge of the universe. I think someone should understand the universe, even if I don't. Ignorance has *implications*, you know?

The first time outside my body lasted only a few seconds. When expelled, I landed somewhere in the article I was reading, as the letter "s" in the word speed. Out-of-body experience is what some people call it—they die temporarily and whatever is left of them sees their body lying lifeless on a medical cot. It's the same for me, except I see myself *living*. I can operate my body, but from afar instead of inside. If I go to the grocery store and spot a value pack of canned soup, marked down, below cost, I get expelled from my body to the soup can, watch myself grab my new form, and throw me in the shopping cart. I imagine this concept is confusing for you. I don't understand it myself. How can a store mark down goods below cost and still pull a profit? There's a canyon carved in my consciousness and when I try to jump the distance I fall somewhere in between.

The doctors tell me I'm not sick, but that's their job—to make you believe it. I'm through with those we'll-save-your-life-if-you-let-us hospitals. I have a bed at The Pit now. I call it The Pit because the nameplate on the front of the building is so worn that all that's left is the "pit" in hospital. The doctors at the hospitals before this one told me that I would get better, in fact, that there was nothing better to get better from because I was not, as they put it, "physical sick". The doctors don't do that here. In other words, they're honest.

The Pit has boards for windows and doctors who became doctors by sending fifty dollars to Harvard's University, not the college, but the mail order professional degree company owned by a Russian Immigrant named Princeton Harvard. The staff here does one thing very well—they know how to let you die. That's all I'm looking for. A place to die.

When I'm not at the Pit I'm at Final Plans. I go there because this is where people like me are supposed to go. It's my second visit today and if I don't buy something now I don't think I'll make it back. The selection is the problem—aisles of death markers in different shapes and sizes and shades of gray. I'm in the Burial section searching for a tombstone that suits me—Am I the half-surfboard or two-dimensional rectangle type? Limestone or Granite? It's like trying to choose a prom dress to wear for the rest of your life, but you're not sure if you'll make it to the prom, if anyone will care, or if your dress will be out of fashion by



the time you get there.

Further down the aisle, in the condolence portion of Hallmark display, is a woman that looks two months into chemo, flipping through sympathy cards with the one finger that still bends halfway; she's missing enough hair to want to wear a wig, but has too much to actually need one. Over her pale blue medical gown, I can see a black crocodile skin purse next to her bulging hip-bone that would itself be visible were it not for a few centimeters of cloth and decaying flesh. If she didn't look so much like a corpse, I could almost giggle, but because I'm dying I force a laugh that comes out as a cough.

Final Plans is buried amidst distressed flower shops and flourishing strip clubs, in a housing district that was a great place to raise a family thirty years ago. Outside of the strip clubs, Final Plans is the only thing that flourishes here. Recently they added a full service funeral parlor in the empty lot next door, making the retail establishment nearly twice the size of the Costco by the interstate. Final Plans offers coffins that can be custom carved for dead people

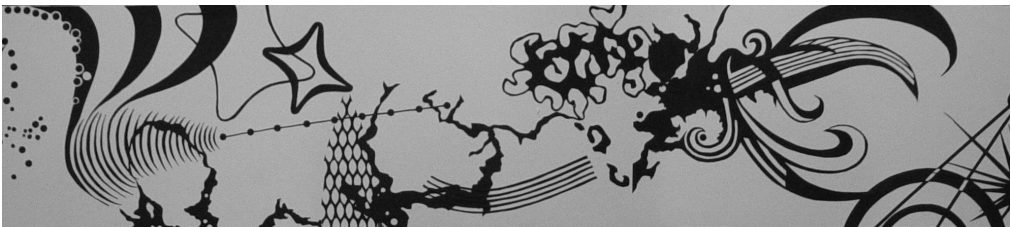
or their cats, and an in-house crematorium that has a partnership with the Russians, allowing customers to launch their ashes into outer space.

Most people come here when they are thinking about death but don't actually want to face it. Couples visit with their kids and make a day out of designing a tombstone or seeing a virtual representation of what their corpse would look like if mummified. The aisles are wide, the floor bleached a hospital white—the glare off the ground is so bad that the greeters at the entrance should hand out sunglasses.

Then there is the smaller, more serious clientele, like myself and the chemo woman from the Hallmark aisle. The visit for us is more a harsh look at a looming future than a casual glance from afar. The healthy families look at us the way wealthy people look at the homeless. They smile and stare, not because they are looking at you, but because they are looking past.

*Eric Wolff*  
*Washington University*

*Taylor Marks*  
*Washington University*





*Daniel Marcus*  
*Washington University*

'MILK RACES'  
(YORKSHIRE)

In that early morning benefit line they still remember  
the assorted free milk that bubbled from brined noses.  
The silver crested bottles which graphite scented hands grasped,  
The dewed kaleidoscope of sweat and pencilled debris  
Embedding softly in the canyons of eczema.  
They remember the milk races, that satisfied 10 am burp  
and the scratched roofs of their mouths from the sharpened straws.  
Their token meals taste ever as sweet today,  
Like the regurgitated Microchips in their child's mouths.  
The line closes in on the blue blazers,  
With a neglected scent of damp clothes and vacancy.  
Still chained now, still to the free school coats that marginalized  
Like a bitter lesson untaught.  
Think back to this playground,  
And its piggybacks.  
Think now of where their D.L.A car is parked,  
Near where Kipper Jackson pisses himself to sleep  
an hour later,  
Seen through pebble dashed eyes of  
The giro snatchers.  
The Ibiza cracked hands,  
Driving away.  
There will be no milk races again,  
until next Monday morning,  
In this retched stomach of a town,  
A hollow monument to a coal fire.

*Warren Lever  
Lancaster University, England*

## I AM MY FAVORITE BEAST

In our house, privacy is a crate  
of caterpillars, marked FRAGILE—

mail-ordered when the twin bed  
feels more like a strand of hair.

We use a wrench to pry the lid open, but  
by then it is too late.

The caterpillars spin cocoons  
big enough for only our thinnest secrets:

the stain on the carpet, the *misplaced* hammer,  
the broken heirloom.

Truth is when our front door rots.  
It has the smell of blackened lungs.

We keep denial fresh in the refrigerator,  
wrapped in tin foil; we eat the leftovers for days.

In our house, hurt is a puddle of paint—  
blonde and curly red competing

for the surface, swirls of testimony  
hardening beneath a glossy finish.

Compromise becomes the artist's signature  
that is too small to be seen.

In the morning, the imprints of pillow  
on your face are the promises I break;

the lies I twist through my fingers  
to keep my desires from shredding

another body. While you are gone  
I lay on my stomach in the grass and watch ants march.

They single-file into the earth carrying  
packages. I wonder if they quarrel beneath the ground

where there is no reachable bottom.  
I wonder if priority is still about reaching

the top. In the sky the clouds trade shoes  
and see how far they can walk.

Yet, when we lay beside one another  
and the evening sours to moonberry,

I would like to tell you,  
the loneliness we share is a coat

missing every button and every arm in the world—  
and I cannot wear you enough.

*Faye Gleisser*  
*Washington University*

## SECOND CAUSEWAY

I watch myself make the turn  
around a low curve of pavement,

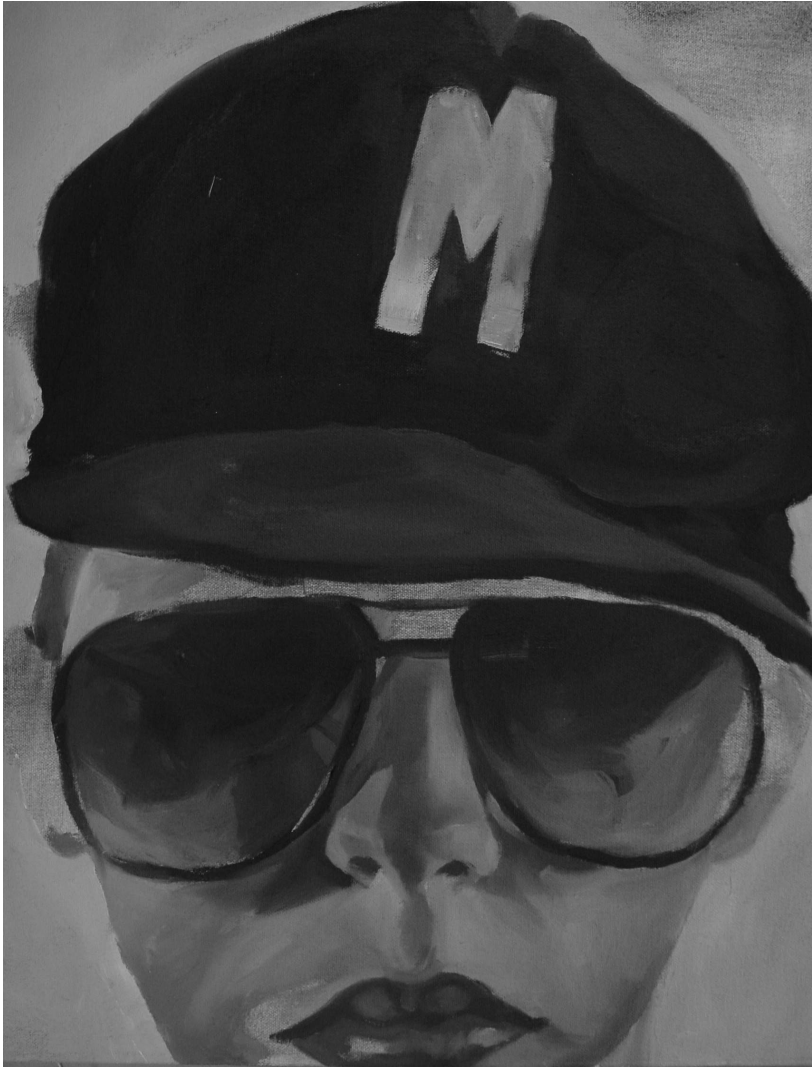
through the courtyard. Two dancers  
look up at a high window.  
A kestrel, talons at the glass, hovers,  
attacking and defending itself with the same set of gestures.  
I keep dreaming I've lost my memory in Florence.  
Each day I look more like a ditch-digger.

When the sun starts to turn oven-colored, I re-count my fetish objects.  
One blue plaid napkin. Corks.  
A drawing on newspaper—two figures, who,  
with teeth bared, lash at blank space with their long clean fingers.

The kestrel turns a wide wheel overhead.  
I picture its eyes turning, as it makes its pass,  
to keep me in its view—  
breath, exhalations,  
my laughter, which, directed at itself,  
is a kind of hate known to small predators.

Stones darken,  
the sky clears and sinks.  
I know this girl; she leaves, under the arch,  
then disappears down the stairs.  
I take a cork from my pocket, and, while turning,  
notch it with my fingernail, all around its sides.  
I'm actually surprised to see my bike  
propped where I'd left it. I ride west along the path.  
This night is hot, full of shoes, or still mice  
who cannot cool themselves with words.

*Daniel Marcus*  
*Washington University*



*Helen Pfiefer*  
*Washington University*

## DREAM A GIGANTIC PEACH

“The collective unconscious contains the whole spiritual heritage of mankind’s evolution, born anew in the brain structure of every individual.” —C.G. Jung, *The Structure of the Psyche*

The policeman conducts flies in his greenhouse. It has been a frustrating week of conducting cars, waving his orange baton—he suspects that perhaps the baton is not enough to imply his status at the busy intersection in town. He gazes out the clean glass: the sun that is slowly broiling this greenhouse is also shining on the outdoor pool, where the synchronized swimming team has just completed another impeccable practice this afternoon. Today, they coordinated the motions of a blooming flower. A certain woman with a yellow bathing suit was voted to be the center of the pink flower configuration—a position laden with lonely honor.

The policeman does not know it, but this swimmer has been thinking about him, him and the deep lines in his face yesterday morning at the intersection. She thought the neon orange baton looked rather good on him, him in the blue uniform, uniform with the implied status. She only wished that they would put him on a pedestal or drum, like they do in China or Britain or some other country she had once seen on television, a long time ago she didn’t have time to watch television ever since she had become a single mother.

Yesterday morning at the red light, as she was gazing out the windshield at the confident policeman—waving his arms and baton back and

forth—her small son in the backseat was imagining an elusive image of his father and wondering. When the light turned green and the car started moving again, he saw a flash of bright orange and it gave him a slight stun—the mild panic upon hearing mother’s approaching footsteps when he was once sucking on a forbidden orange popsicle. The sensation soon passed and he looked out and down the window, the window now with its flashes of yellow, one endless blinking yellow stripe beneath him—sending him a message in morse code like in one of the very few movies he’d seen. His mother was always too tired to take him to the movies for as long as he could remember. Streetside lamps approached and passed him in intervals and he imagined that he could leap over them: his toes curled and uncurled to the rhythm of their fleeting. He was excited for school—his teacher was a pretty young lady who had the energy to take him to a hundred movies any minute.

The car stopped in front of a small and sunny elementary school. “Goodbye, dear,” all ten mothers, parked along the same crowded curb, echoed each other. As he walked towards the school building, he could see his schoolteacher through the window. She was a rosy-faced young woman who adored children. While she waited for the children, she stared at the pink roses that she had just put in the vase this morning,



remembering how they looked rather good when her lover held them in his mild arms last night, still in his white starched doctor's coat. In turn, her pink perky lips glowed for him in their sterile white bedroom.

She had a bright face and her voice was fresh, for she did not smoke. She had an energetic naïveté about the world, especially regarding the children in her class. She secretly wanted a child of her own, but was hesitant to tell her lover. She remembered a morning when they were both shifting around under the cool white sheets, when he put his hand on her chest it gave a slight stun—the cold metal of a stethoscope threatening her fragile chest as a child. Her sternum ached. The sensation soon passed and she dove into his arms, his arms of masculinity, of paternity. She was imagining an elusive image of her father and wondering. Her eyes grew hot so she closed them. She ached with the void of ten years' time, wanting a father for herself again, and now, for her dream child.

The night before, she had dreamt an elusive image of a daughter—a small girl handed her a gigantic peach, and once she had somehow swallowed the mass and it was inside her, it demanded that it hear a Mozart symphony. She hummed in her sleep. Though she did not know it, her lover—his head lying a few inches away from hers—was in fact dreaming in a similar realm. Even as a coolly rational doctor, he always had the tendency to fall into a tenderness

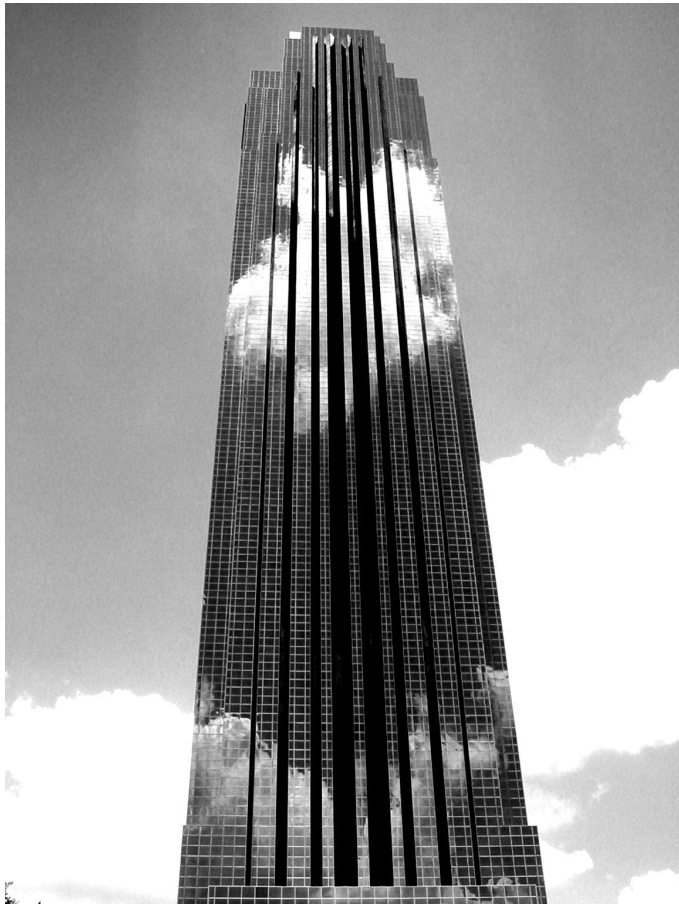
regarding small girls—they were the most vulnerable of his patients, and in the greater scheme of things they would continue the human race, and thus he felt that he owed something great to them. Also, when he was a lonely little boy who spent most of his time inside—inside the clean white house and away from the dirty playground—he had wished he had a younger sister. He was fond of delicate gestures, mild manners. In his dream he gently towel-dried the hair of a small girl who was wearing a white shower gown, against which the flesh under her fingernails glowed a perky pink.

So this morning the schoolteacher was staring at the pink roses, humming a Mozart symphony though she didn't know why. On the other side of town, the doctor was treating a small girl who had caught a cold. "Wash your hands often," he told her, and stared at the pink flesh under her fingernails with wonder though he didn't know why. No one could know it, but yesterday those hands were wrapped around the receiver in a dirty telephone booth, near a busy intersection where a policeman conducted traffic, waving his arms and an orange baton back and forth. As the invisible germs moved from the telephone to her hand, the girl was gazing out the glass of the phone booth and wondering. Later in the day she scattered invisible remains of her infected self on the drinking fountain in the park, on the town bus (second row, left window seat), and on the bellflowers on display at her favorite flower shop.

The policeman breaks his gaze now and looks over his new flowers and waters them, the bellflowers, daffodils, and a venus flytrap. He sneezes twice but ignores it. He is enchanted by the flowers—he thinks they look rather good, flowers with their symmetry, symmetry with its order that soothes him and fills him with a desire to fondle. He especially loves their centers. He wishes he could kiss the centers, centers with their lonely Aphrodite status, status with its unrelenting firmness, firmness with its ever-youth of a child's wondering.

*Ob-Yoon Kim*  
*Brown University*

*Liz Leister*  
*Washington University*



## ABSTRACTION

Tonight,  
on my end of the world,  
I'm abstracting you  
to your simplest contour line –  
a winding gesture,  
a twisted, delicate curve.

Without warning,  
your form thrusts itself  
back into my life,  
not even two months  
after I limped  
out of the state.

Picasso said that blue  
was just as good  
if you ever ran out of red –

these days, your volume  
is nothing  
but negative space for me,

and painting is  
a struggle.

*Natalie Cox*  
*Tulane University*

# NOTES

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