COLLAGE

A Journal of Creative Expression | Spring 2017 Vol. 25

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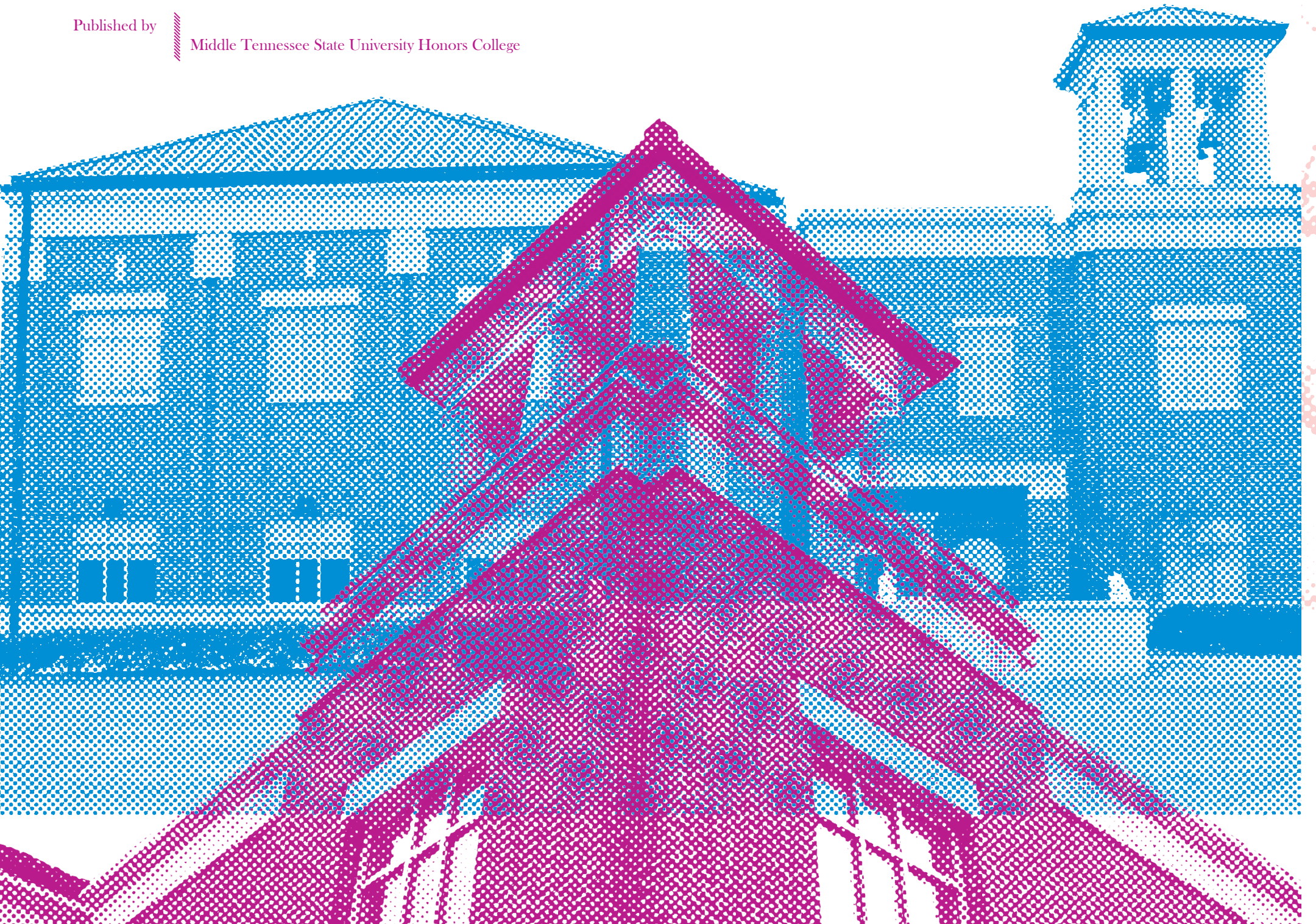

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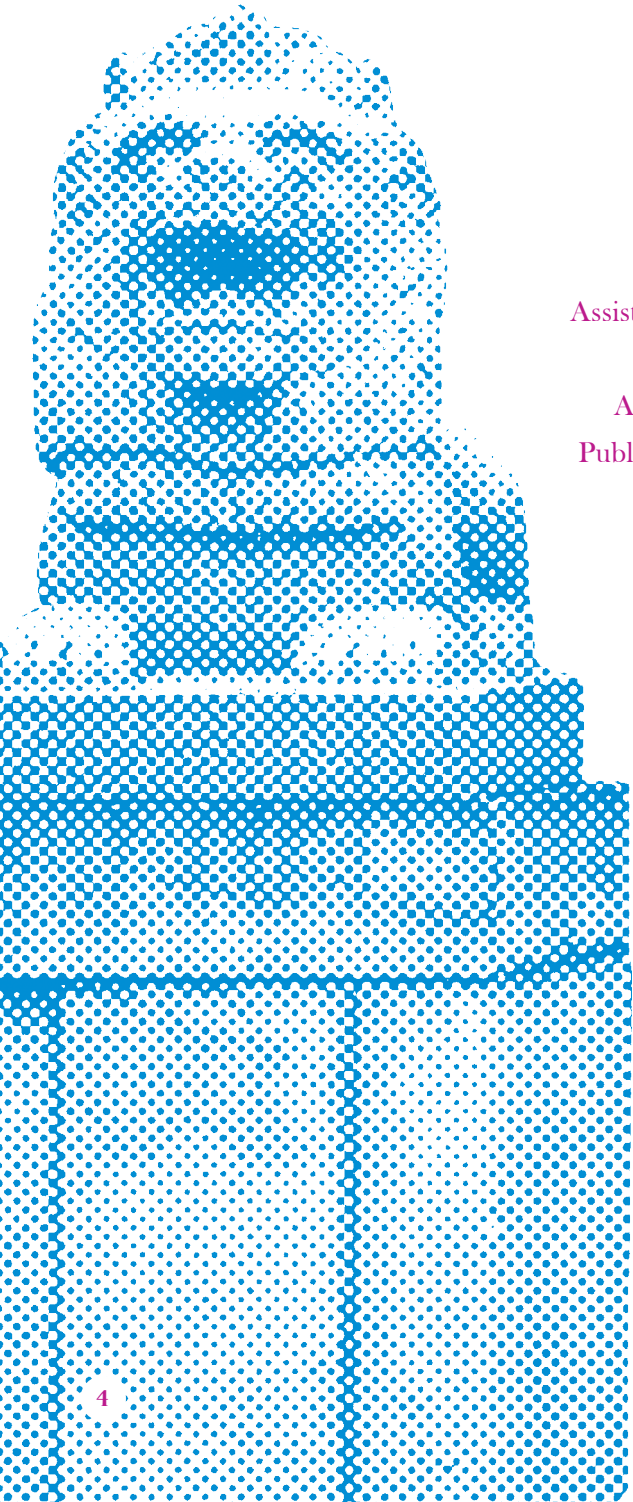

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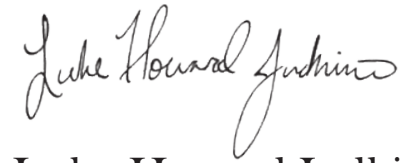
Letter from the Editor

"We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time." T.S. Eliot's wise words can show that by continuously exploring the depths of artistic vision and technique we can see the world and the self more clearly. Certainly, exploring the works presented in this new installment of *Collage* brings a new understanding of ourselves, the student body of Middle Tennessee State University, and the world through these diverse media of expressions. Browsing through another record-breaking number of extremely competitive submissions this semester, my belief that the experience of Art can ultimately transform and provide a deeper understanding and familiarity of the self and the world is moreover resolute. I trust that exploring each spread of this issue of *Collage* will bring new realities, experiences, and perspectives that enrich and engender a true familiarity of the self, the campus, and the world in each reader.

Before embarking on this journey through these magnificent works in the following pages, I would like once more to thank the staff members who always devote a tremendous amount of hard work and talent for the sake of this Art. I would also like to recognize and thank our beloved role model and adviser Marsha Powers who inspires the staff in so many ways. Finally, I would like to show appreciation to all of the submitters who make this journal possible with their abundance of marvelous submissions and to the readers who take time to enjoy such Art. As my final semester with *Collage* concludes, I would like to express what an honor and joy it has been to be part of this legacy for the past several years. Since 1968, *Collage* has continued to provide a platform for Art, and it has been my pleasure to serve as it continues to achieve such means. It is now time to turn the page and explore.

Without further ado, I am honored to present the spring 2017 installment of *Collage: A Journal of Creative Expression.*



Luke Howard Judkins
Editor in Chief

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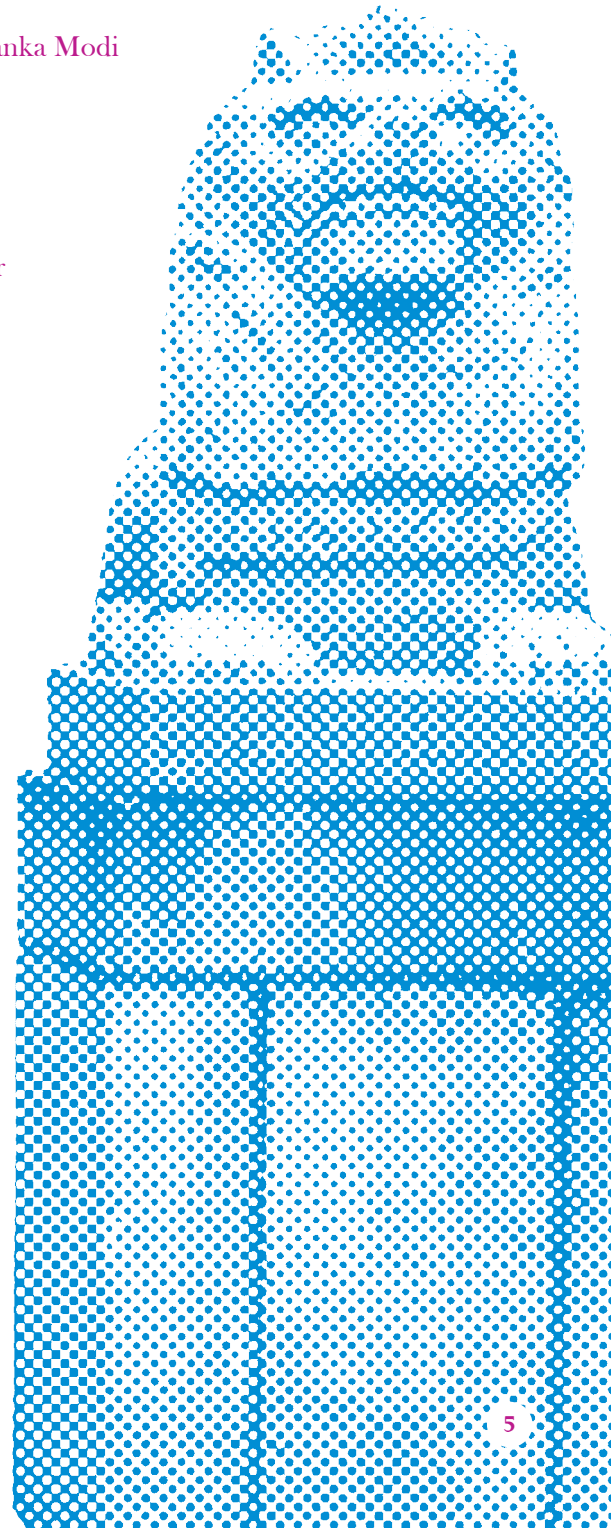


Bless Our Hearts

StarShield Lortie ⧛ poetry

the cotton fields
the poke weed
the run down row houses far away from the tree-lined streets
and old empty slave quarters on plantation tours.

the southern pride
the legacy of southern hospitality
the Confederate flag
and the heritage that runs through the land
like blood in family veins.

the long history
the deeply scarring epithets
the creaking magnolia trees
and the men in masks burning wooden crosses in front yards.

the million stereotypes,
at once both living legacies
and ancient stories passed down on porches
as the summer locust songs swell and fade, swell and fade.

we leave things unsaid
because we are deathly afraid
it will all start again, or that it never really ended,
and drown out the courage in the face of so much hate.

Transition: Discernment

Ian Cooper ⧛ multimedia painting

Let's Get Breakfast, Temporary Memories

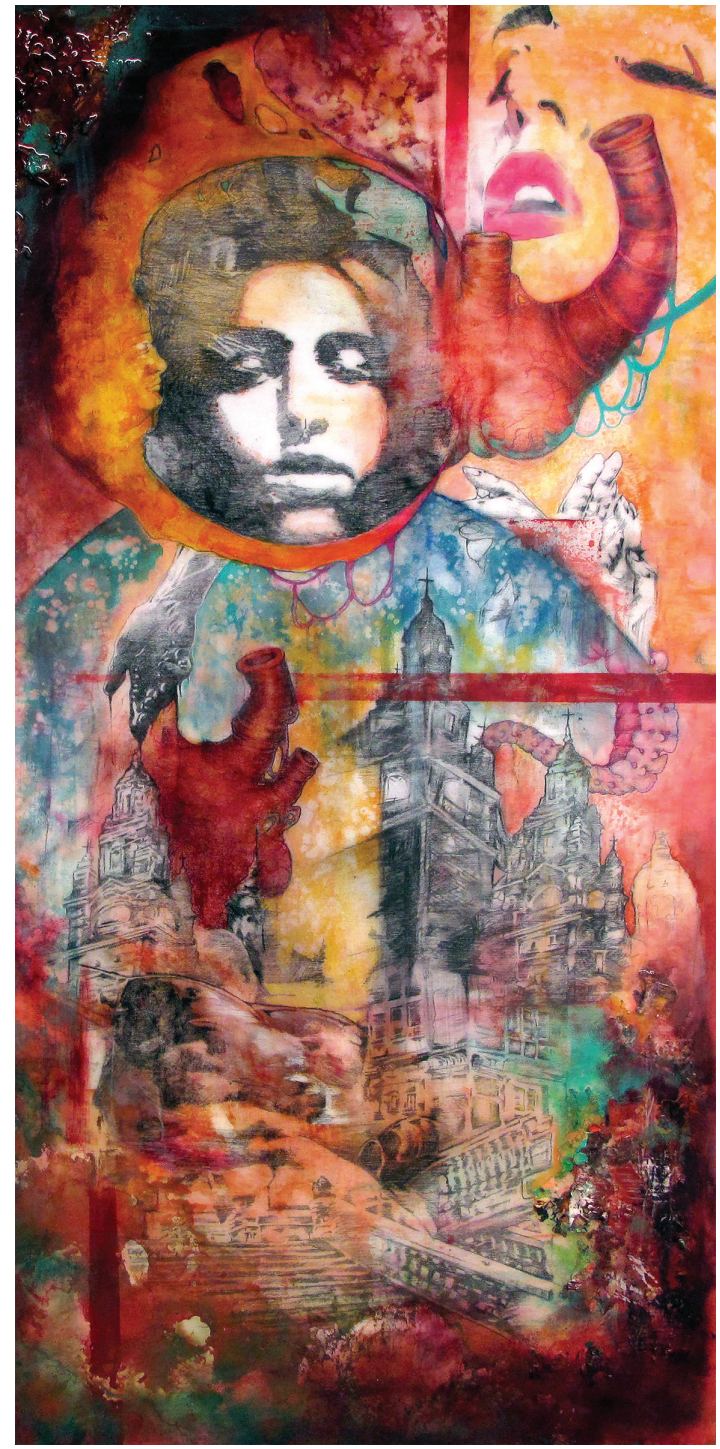
Priyanka Modi ⧛ 35 mm film negative collage

Underwater Secret

Oscar Davila ⧛ letterpress

Jellyfish

Blake Mason ⧛ digital photography



Deodate

Ian Cooper ⧛ mixed media

Canary

Kara Stallings ⧛ poetry

You were Yellow once.
Bright.
Distilled.
You bloomed.

Intense Lemon pool flooded your spaces like an overwhelming cup, humming sweetly at frayed edges.

The traces, although brief and few, sparked together like chips of flint within our amassed brush.

It was in the gulping waves of a Charcoal noon when pale hues were sent fleeing down neck and back. Their absence cracked with a scream but died before the sound found your lips.

Brown was the color soon after. And at that time, I almost welcomed the thick, muddied tints favorably. They kissed back often enough but the taste left bitter pricks like scorched coffee sizzling on infant tongues.

If I remember correctly, I preferred Red back then. Though, you know as well as I, shying away from any dominate shades is what I do best.

Next came Blue, and you reminded me the permanence that some colors bore. These deep hues adhered across my skin like dewdrops clinging for life atop rotten wood. I tried mixing them in with my remnants of Red but the stain dried far darker than I had hoped.

Maybe that's why Purple found you.

I choose these words because you and I both know Purple wasn't your color. You snatched it, stole it, and paraded it around as though it were yours from the beginning. It instead festered itself like an oozing cavity where my hate swelled in comfort.

Like all the rest, this fissure was quick to become all I knew. Purple ate its way into my familiar, and you too, sucked me to the bone like a bursting tick.

In the muddled songs of a Green night, you left me.

Along with your absence, these colors I chastised myself with became mute and detached as though you were a movie I had watched a hundred times played in reverse. I laid you down in the lush Plum shades the world grew to love on you.

Fifty Shades Darker

Sixela Samone Esuoh ⧛ digital photography

Knowing better than to relive the pigments you left only for me, I pretended along with everyone else that this passionate color enveloped who you truly were.

But I,
Only I,
Just like you once,
House the same Yellow.

The Letter
Madison Pitts ⧛ digital photography

Northwestern Winds
Ryan Bearden ⧛ poetry

Antebellum houses
sit on golden grass.
Spacious skies above them
smile as they pass.

Harvest season cometh
rocking horses creak.
Barren fields around them,
sheds and silos speak.

Granger families inside
tawny timbered walls,
huddle by the fire
while the moonlight palls.

Tin roofs cry rainwater.
Barns whitewash the want.
Cloudy faces stare
ever growing gaunt.

Earth swallows the patchwork,
dust produces bones.
The sun, it holds them dear
some no longer homes.

Antebellum houses
sit on golden grass.
Spacious skies above them
smile as they pass.

People of Questionable Quality

Patrick Shanks ⧛ short play

Characters

Seth: Early 20s. Dying of a gunshot wound to the thigh.
Early: Mid-30s. Dressed in a ragged butler's uniform.
Dracula: Think Bela Lugosi.

Setting

Not Earth, but close. Somewhere in the low desert.

Time

Just before dusk.

At rise: Early drags a beautiful coffin across the stage. It is heavy ,and Early has clearly been at this all day. The coffin doubles as a sled as Early has piled water and food atop the polished surface. Across from him, Seth sits propped against a rock.

DRACULA: (From inside the coffin) Are we there yet?

EARLY: No, my lord.

DRACULA: Is it almost night?

EARLY: Almost, my lord.

DRACULA: How long?

EARLY: Hard to tell. Time is strange this far North.

DRACULA: Indeed. What's that smell?

EARLY spots Seth propped against a rock.

EARLY: Seems to be a dead body. Exsanguinated, from the looks of it.

DRACULA: Pity.

EARLY resumes dragging the coffin. SETH stirs.

SETH: Water.

DRACULA: What was that?

EARLY: Nothing, my lord. I'll be back in a minute. The man might have something useful on his person.

DRACULA: Very well.

EARLY grabs a canteen and approaches Seth.

EARLY: Be quiet. If you're quiet, you can have some water.

SETH: Water. Please. I'm so thirsty.

EARLY: Not so loud. Here.

SETH drinks noisily. He uses some water to wash his wound and sucks air through his teeth.

Quiet, for the Seven's sake.

SETH effortlessly draws a pistol and aims it at Early.

SETH: Back up.

Between drinking and bathing his wound, SETH empties the canteen. He throws it away, and it clatters on the ground. He rises slowly.

EARLY: Listen to me. I need you to be very quiet until I'm gone.

SETH: Is that a coffin? Are you here for me?

EARLY: No. I'm just passing by.

SETH: Dragging a casket. Is it empty?

EARLY: No.

SETH: OK then. Help me up.

EARLY does not move. SETH thumbs the hammer back.

I said help me up!

Continued on page 12

DRACULA: Early?

SETH: What was that? Did you just say something?

EARLY: Just be quiet. One second, OK? (To Dracula) My Lord?

DRACULA: What's going on? I hear strange noises.

EARLY: It's nothing, my lord.

DRACULA: Early. Tell me the truth.

EARLY: Seems the man has some life in him yet.

DRACULA: Enough to last until dusk? I'm hungry.

EARLY: Hard to say, my lord. Probably not.

DRACULA: Very well. Let's go.

EARLY looks back at Seth and shrugs. He picks up the tow rope.

SETH: You've got a live body in there? You're toting a live body around in a casket? What kind of sense does that make? What kind of man are you anyway? That posh-looking prig has you dragging him across the desert. Don't he have legs? He can't walk his own self a couple of miles? (To the coffin) Hey! Come on out here.

EARLY: You don't know what you're talking about, so just shut up.

SETH: Shut up? Do you know who you're talking to? Do you see these scars on my face? Every one of them is a crime, man. I'm a bandit. I'm a bandit, and I've got a loaded gun pointed right at your head, and you tell me to shut up? You know what? I am insulted. For that, I'm going to take everything you have.

EARLY drops the tow line and approaches Seth.

DRACULA: Early?

SETH: Anh anh, that's far enough.

EARLY does not stop, but forces the pistol barrel against his forehead.

EARLY: You'll be doing me a favor.

DRACULA: Why aren't we moving?

SETH lowers his pistol.

SETH: You are some kind of crazy, you know that?

EARLY: *Listen!* You don't have much time. Not the gunshot, but him. He likes the dark, you know? And it's getting dark. In a few minutes, he'll come out of that coffin, and he'll kill you.

DRACULA: EAR-LY!

SETH: Well why didn't you say so?

SETH limps toward the casket. EARLY follows him, and when they continue talking, DRACULA can hear them.

EARLY: What are you doing?

SETH: I'm going to shoot him.

EARLY: By the Seven, don't you know the rules? You can't kill something like him with a bullet.

SETH: I was part of the hunting party that bagged the Black King. There ain't nothing a bullet can't kill.

EARLY: I'm not talking about some kind of mutation. He's . . . Let's put it this way. If the Seven had actually been the Eight, and the rest of them voted the Eighth off their mountain . . . that would be him.

SETH: I'm just going to shoot him in the head. You'll see.

EARLY: It's not going to work.

SETH: These are hollow points. He won't have a head left after I'm done with him.

EARLY: It won't—

SETH: Will you be a man? He's making you drag him across the desert, and for what? Because he doesn't want to walk? He doesn't want to ruin his white skin? No, my friend. No. That won't fly with me.

DRACULA: (Laughing) Oh, this is rich. You really have no idea, do you?

EARLY: That's it, then.

EARLY sits by the rock.

DRACULA: A gun deals damage in two ways. The first is obvious. A small, dense object is fired at high speeds into a relatively soft target. The soft target in question is full of very important working parts. Heart, lungs, intestines, brain, blood. There are very few extraneous parts—toes, gall bladder, et cetera—in the human body.

SETH clears the coffin and fires once.

The second way is more insidious. The human body is 70 percent water.

SETH fires a second round.

The introduction of a projectile moving at high speed creates a shock wave that moves through all the squishy bits and can injure or even rupture organs that avoided direct impact. It's a phenomenon known as hydrostatic shock.

SETH empties his pistol. Silence. EARLY perks up.

But.

EARLY despairs. SETH gawks.

The problem here is that you have assumed that your target is, in fact, soft. You have failed to consider that your target may be harder than any chunk of soft lead.

SETH reloads.

Early? Is it time yet?

EARLY: Not yet, my lord.

DRACULA: Liar.

The coffin opens, and Dracula nosferatus upright. EARLY covers his eyes. Blackout. Gunshots. Screams. Silence.

You can open your eyes now, Early.

Lights up. EARLY uncovers his eyes. SETH lies in a heap. DRACULA picks his teeth. Blood smears his mouth.

Early, Early, Early. What am I going to do with you? Fetch me a cloth, will you?

EARLY searches the scattered supplies and returns with a handkerchief. DRACULA wipes his mouth daintily.

EARLY: Forgive me, my lord. I was weak.

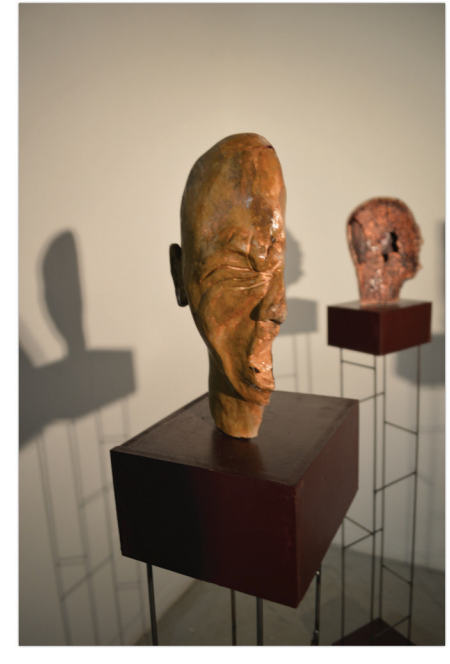
DRACULA: Indeed. Well. Pack the coffin.

As EARLY works, DRACULA kicks Seth's foot.

That was supremely disappointing. No, not you. Him. You've been with me long enough that I expect you to try and assassinate me from time to time. Who knows? One day you might just figure it out.

EARLY: No, my lord. Never again.

Continued on page 14



Painful Silence

Cesar Pita ⧛ ceramics, wood, and metal

DRACULA: Half empty and he tasted like fever. Ugh. I'm still hungry. Do the days really have to be this long?

EARLY: Would you like my arm, my lord?

DRACULA: No, no. I am ravenous. Simply ravenous. If I started I might never stop, and then where would we be? I'd be lost without my butler.

DRACULA mounts the rock and looks off into the distance with his back to Early.

You know, I think our sojourn might be over. We have seen enough of the north, don't you think?

EARLY spots the gun. He picks it up.

I find I dearly miss the Dead City. Isn't that funny? I even miss the politicking. Yes, even that. Things are just so dull here.

EARLY puts the gun to his temple.

And the people here are so tough. Their skin is leathery, and they taste like sand when they don't taste like disease. It makes me want to cut out my tongue, I tell you.

EARLY pulls the trigger. The gun is empty. DRACULA turns around.

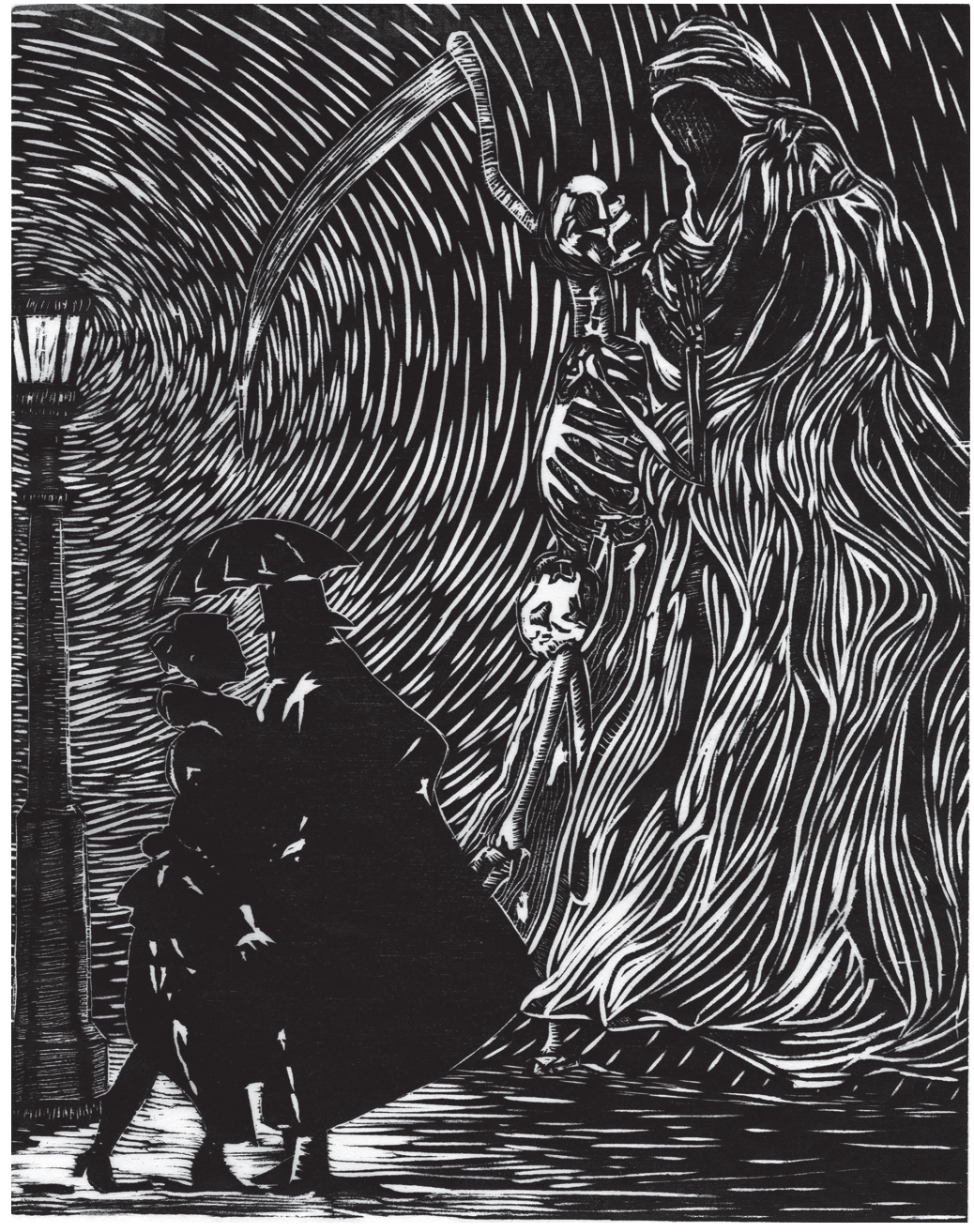
Early? Oh, you poor thing. That settles it. We shall return home. Wouldn't you like that? We'll be back among people of real quality. All packed?

DRACULA picks up the coffin in one hand.

Would you look at this? My beautiful coffin, ruined. Ah well. Come along, Early.

DRACULA walks away. EARLY looks at the gun, at the bullets gleaming on Seth's belt. He tosses the gun away and trudges after Dracula.

Blackout.
End. ●



Ripper's Shadow

Iska Frosh ⧛ woodcut relief print

Erosion
Kellye Guinan ⧛ poetry

Eyes blaze with determination.
She sits, focused,
unmovable from her goal
like a stone wedged in the mud
of a great, flowing river.
But like the stone,
nestled in the depths,
she becomes worn,
her rough edges smoothed
by the passage of time.
Her foundation shifts,
and she finds herself
struggling among the waves,
trying to keep her head above
the current that has held her so long.

Saviorself
Christopher Banyai ⧛ encaustic

Love Song?
Griffin Winton ⧛ song lyrics

Am I allowed to love you like this?
Like a secret? Like a prayer? Like a wish?
There's a blood-stained barb on the fence outside
that's shaking in the breeze and the morning light,
while I'm left here to tremble
when thinking of your kiss.

Could all my searching lead me to your arms?
All my tricks and lies and cheats and charms?
What's the color of the rain when it's rolling in
if it doesn't look the same when it hits your skin?
So camouflage your heart lest I see it once again.

Only fools love the morning
when they're crying in the afternoon;
only God loves forever,
though many claim to.

My chest cannot contain my eager heart.
My tongue will not corral this listless lark.
I'm more than I can handle,
ask my bruises, scabs, and brambles.
I'm a thistle flower blooming,
catch your eye and leave you with scars.

So skip to my lou, my darling.
Skip anywhere that you please.
Strangle in your garden
what is left of me.

Am I allowed to love you like this?
Like a secret, Like a prayer, Like a wish?

Appalachian Father

Traci Cruey ⧛ poetry

My father never knew his father.
Possibly some bastard
coal miner drunk on moonshine
and Hitler's suicide,
knocked up a mother
who never wanted him.
We don't know. Truth
has been ingested in mouths
of maggots and earth, long gone.

The man he called father
never mentioned his own.
Coal fell from his pickaxe like diamonds
as canaries sang a jaunty tune.
Ghosts of their voices constantly rang
in dust-clogged ears and blinded vision.
It was a privilege to be a part of it.

He taught my father how to make a fist,
spear a worm for bait,
and to bury your heart
so deep in the hollow
it runs through your veins.
He worshiped God and Scrip and
Country,
supported children not his
from below the ground
before and after.

My father asked about his father,
either of them,
asked "Who were they?"
to learn "Who am I?" Wanted to
hamfist shove the memories into his
eardrums
until they ruptured,
but she wasn't made for a petticoat
government,
went on benders of tasteless vodka and
men.
It makes the skin hum like cicadas, she
lamented.
It makes everything dead.
He learned not to ask, forgot to remember.

My father had a son
with a woman who spewed black sludge
from her tongue in the shape of father,
thrust her nails into the son's mind,
planted deceiving seeds until they grew
roots
and he didn't call him "Father" anymore.
"He'll mourn me when I'm gone," my
father says,
"He'll mourn me like I mourn him now."

Perhaps he's right.
Perhaps when my father has been
ingested in mouths of maggots and earth,
long gone, as will we all, as will our truths,
that is when my brother will bring his son
that isn't his, finally acknowledge his father,
and regret.

Colorado Nights

Guy Shelton ⧛ digital photography

Mama I

Alena Mehic § oil painting

Fairytale Blues

Olivia Powell § poetry

I say goodbye to the baby
blue kitchen my mom painted.
Hello, neutral gray.
Or is it tan?

She's not the Grimms'
idea of a stepmother—but
the pictures are different.

A scene of Mardi Gras sits
where a fog-covered forest of evergreens
used to be.
The snow-covered elk,
replaced by her daughter's senior portrait.

I feel sorry for that elk.
Once proudly displayed
in the living room.
Now lonely lying
in the upstairs hallway.
I imagine he's as blue
as the kitchen used to be.

The Dancer

Bliss Buehring ⧛ fiction

Deftly pulling the fibers of her muscles, she rocked back and forth, stretching her arm across her chest. The room was empty but for a small speaker system and her little green iPod. Three walls of mirrors surrounded her in a glass castle, scattering the light from one dim overhead fixture. A sea of light wood floor broken up with three tall pillars—a blank canvas for her movement.

She rolled her head around her neck, sore ripples shooting through her upper back—the stiffness coming from the inside more than from her aching body. The movement grew bigger as she swung her arms and stretched out her calves, sending warmth through her body, fighting its way past the discomfort. The warmth stretched even to her heart as her thoughts slowly faded like stars before the sun comes up.

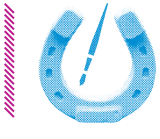
Her body was primed, bubbling at the surface, ready to be thrown and broken with its arms open wide in total surrender. She chose that one song and stood still in the back-left corner of the room, just out of reach of the yellow glow of light. The first notes of the song were a deathblow to any hope of thought or awareness. Her body melted into the melody like butter into hot toast, and the miracle took place. Her mind commanded movement, and her body obeyed—a poem of servant and master, a fight against limitations.

She moved. She danced. She woke up the soul that he left in the cold parking lot that night. She swayed on the legs that weren't as good as that blonde's. She fought against the reflection of herself—the one he didn't want. She flung to the ground without pain. Numb. She whirled around the room, trying to escape the memory of him at the coffee shop, avoiding her eyes, jaw guiltily set, as the oblivious blonde made conversation.

Dancing to *that* song, as memories of his snapping green eyes chased her back and forth, her body lifting and winding to shake it off. The lines around the left side of his smile. The way his nose wrinkled when he laughed. When he would play with her fingers, rolling hers between his thumb and finger, swallowing it up in his strong hands. When he looked in her eyes in his car and said,

Untitled

Karlie Tankersley ⧛ oil on canvas



> She woke up her **soul**, if only for a moment

"You don't have any reason to worry, little one." She had premonitions that night but ignored her gut and trusted him. Now that gut was twisting and flying and threatening to boil over.

Like when children dip their fingers in hot wax, the burning ache seared and covered her, coating everything she had

ventured to expose. It felt like death by drowning, sinking under crashing walls of empty horror, being pulled under and losing sight of the sunlight. The stomach and heart in constant battle, both swirling and swimming in heavy nausea. She had been conscious of every breath, every shiver, trapped in her body. The body that was not good enough for him.

So she danced. She did the only thing she knew would drive every bit of awareness out of her decaying state. She let herself be consumed with music and movement and calculated trust in gravity and inertia. For the first time, she forgot to breathe as the need for air overcame the pain in her lungs. She moved. She danced. She woke up her soul, if only for a moment.

And as the last strains of the song died out, she found herself facing her reflection with hot tears running down her face, panting. Finally awake. ●

A Close Reading

Hayley Wilson ⧛ poetry

The pages of your book are all wet.
I watched the words magnify, swirl
blur in spatters
over someone else's heartache,
a lonely breeze through an empty
window,
a moment suspended in the static
of an unseen conflict bristling beneath
the salt-stained surface—

the pages stick together
like the words in your throat,
you refuse to let your eyes
wander from the page to meet mine
between lines because
you know I can read
them.

10,000 words between
the palms of your hands,
you can't find

a single one.

Afro-Millennials "Affection"

Anthony Alexander ⧛ digital photography

Can't Go Home, Can't Stay Here

Beizar Abdi ⧙ copper etching

Proljeće

Alena Mehic ⧙ oil painting

Until the Rain Stops

Corinne Burris ⧛ prose

The car's still on, but the parking brake is set. Cold rain drizzles on the windshield, and I listen to the rhythm of the wipers swish back and forth across the glass that separates me from the cold outside. Her green Mini Cooper sits arrogantly in front of me, the shiny, emerald color glistening in the rain and taunting me from my decrepit Mazda. I haven't seen that car in a long time—not since moving two hours away to Murfreesboro for school. I hate that car, and I watch it sit idly in the driveway, remembering the person who drives it and the reasons we don't speak. There are more reasons than I can count, more than I can remember, and more than I can forgive. It doesn't feel like Christmas while I watch the car. I almost forget that I just drove back to Chattanooga to Mom's apartment for Christmas break. All I remember is Rachel.

Rachel at 18, pregnant. Rachel high and wrecking every car she ever had. Rachel with a face of hate and eyes of guile. Rachel neglecting her daughter—using coffee filters for toilet paper, serving potato chips for dinner, and sending her to daycare with holes in her shoes and no jacket in the winter. Rachel snorting pills behind the wheel of her car, and leaving her child with drug dealers for the night. Rachel injecting a liquid demon into her veins, breaking our hearts, and forcing us to watch her destroy the person we knew, the person I shared a room with as a kid—and played dolls with. My big sister—my friend who stood up for me at school when I was picked on. What happened to her? She used to be so pretty. Now she looks like drugs and cigarettes, like she's perpetually hung over and dehydrated. Now I don't recognize her. I just watch the scenes play in my mind.

Flashes of the past strike like lightning through the storm of memories. Rachel evicted for not paying four months of rent. Her life thrown in the dumpster and me, alone, scavenging for valuables to save from destruction. Rachel homeless. Rachel high. Rachel in rehab to get clean, only to leave and relapse within weeks. I once believed in her and played a role in her sad, stupid story of self-destruction. Now I can't even stand the sight of her car. Now the only thing we share is distance. Now I don't know who she is, and I don't want to. She used to be my sister, my family, and once upon a time—a time that feels so long ago—I loved her. But she's gone now, replaced by a shadow of who she used to be, fading into the darkness of bad memories that are slowly dissolved by time. There's no love anymore. I tell myself that I hate her, and often it feels true. But you can't hate someone that much unless you used to love them.

> But you can't **hate** someone that much unless you used to **love** them.

I remember us in her apartment, sitting on the couch. It was right after the Department of Child Services gave Addy back to her. She was about to relapse, but I stopped her. She cried, and I hugged her and told her I wished I knew how to help her. She cried harder and held me tight, like she thought I would float away if she let go. "I'm an awful person," she whispered, and only inwardly did I agree.

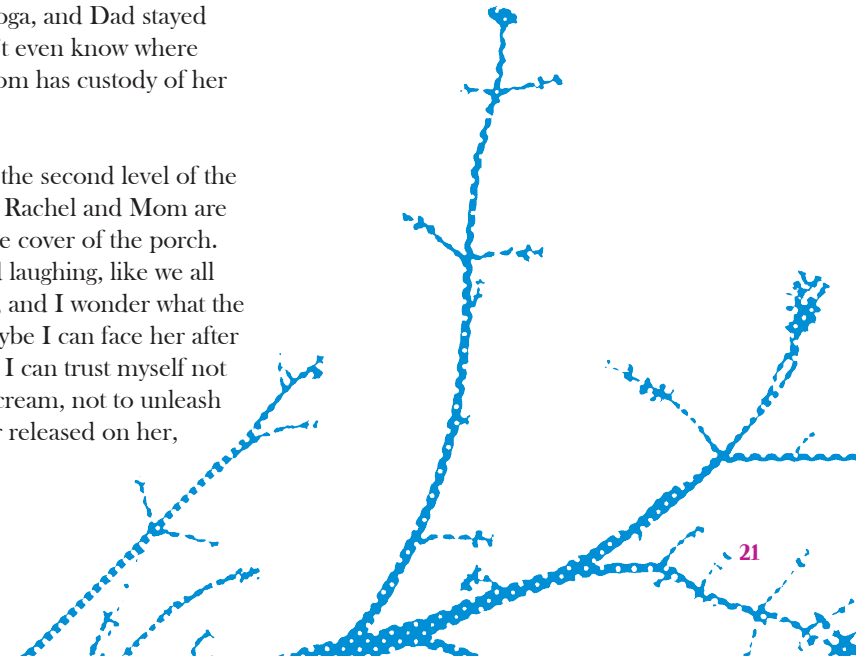
"You don't have to be," I said. She whimpered against me.

"What is wrong with me? Why am I like this?" I didn't have an answer, but it's not like she really expected one. "I love you," she said in a barely distinguishable sob. "Thank you for believing in me." Two days later Rachel was gone. Physically she was there, but she was using again and the tears and I *love* yous turned back into *damn* you and I *hate* you, bitch.

Mom is the only one who speaks to her now. The family isn't the same. Sides were chosen and unchosen, and words and anger were vented on the wrong people. None of us even live in the same town anymore. I moved to Murfreesboro, Mom moved to Chattanooga, and Dad stayed in Cleveland. I don't even know where Rachel lives, but Mom has custody of her daughter.

It's still raining. On the second level of the apartment building, Rachel and Mom are smoking beneath the cover of the porch. They're smiling and laughing, like we all used to do together, and I wonder what the hell is so funny. Maybe I can face her after all this time. Maybe I can trust myself not to slap her, not to scream, not to unleash the rage that I never released on her, because if I do, she might not survive the tsunami of anger and pain I feel toward her. Maybe it won't be so bad. Maybe she's sober and became a real person again instead of a walking, talking opiate. Maybe enough time has gone by that things can be different. What if she apologizes? What if she's sorry? Truly sorry and sober and wants to change from what she's become? What if I can forgive the abuse she subjected my niece to and the torment she put our parents through? Maybe things can change if I let them, if I just turn off the car and walk onto the porch. Maybe she will cry and hug me and say she's sorry. Maybe I'll cry and forgive her. Maybe we can be sisters again.

Or maybe I'll stay in my car until the rain stops. ●



Through the Winter

Ad'lynn Carroll ⧛ poetry

Winter days don't remind me
Of the hours I spent with you.
My head bowed against the snow,
Skirting the melted puddles,
And my frozen fingers deep in my pockets.

It's too cold to hold your hand, anyways.

Maybe if it were raining, then I'd be thinking about you.
The time I told you I didn't mind the rain,
But you held an umbrella over my head anyways.

Maybe if the sun were unbearably shining,
Then I wouldn't be able to get you off my mind.
I'd think of waking up
With you by my side,
Smiling before we even broke
The silence of early morning.

But this weather gives me a break from your memory
That I carry with myself in every other season.
This snow helps me find peace of mind,
Because no one has ever loved me through the winter.

Americano

Patrick Murphy ⧛ 35 mm double exposure

Custody

Joshua Tilton ⧛ poetry

We played house like real adults
—found a 1 br sandbox—
and you made mud cakes. We found
a yellow lab all alone
at 4 weeks. You named him Blue,
I thought it was silly. I called you honey,
you thought it was demeaning. I rode
the bus beside you on Tuesdays
and Thursdays and
we were happy in the back seat.
But then I grew up and
we'd never signed
a pre-nup so the split was harder
and you never called me
anymore. The dog
—proxy baby—
stayed with you
(is his nose still dry?).
I'll walk him on Tuesdays
and Thursdays and
every other weekend
he rides in my back seat,
his paw on the window control,
my finger on the child
lock. You'll buy him a collar
that looks good and I'll buy him one that
fits. Whining, crying—in the mornings
I don't wipe the sleep from our eyes
or put his bowl outside
while he takes a shit and I
don't know what to do
with all this
free time.

REPU

Kyle Brown ⧛ photography

I-24

Hayley Wilson ⧛ poetry

Hell is hot
says spraypaint salvation,
nailed to a tree &
displayed for
four lanes of sinners
headed there at 70 miles per
hour.
But this isn't Calvary—
the crown grows berries
and the nails have rusted,
purity faded by
the Bible Belt sun.

The Conjugation of Happiness

StarShield Lortie ⧛ poetry

Mamma never showed us
any sign of joy, our attempts
to soothe her martyred soul
never pacified her for long.
When she died I caught my
brother and sister laughing
hysterically in the pantry,
passing a joint back and forth,
happiness bursting through
their grief. It took me
longer to find that sense of peace,
unable to soothe my own
melancholy, admit my
view of the world was filtered
through Mamma's lack of joy.
It wasn't until that dog leapt out,
his excitement at finding
his forever family
exploding in whines and grunts,
that I understood happiness
wasn't payment for worthiness.
And one sweltering summer night
I joined my brother and sister
on that cold pantry floor
where we laughed
until our bodies ached
with bliss and we fell asleep
across each other's laps.

Portage, AK

Eric Goodwin ⧛ digital photography

Bass Harbor Lighthouse

Kyle Brown ⧛ digital photography

Influence

Yvette Swain ⧛ wood, wire, and peach seeds

Hummingbird Hue

Oscar Davila ⧛ watercolor painting

Cat Series

(The Hermit, The Magician, High Priestess)

Nicole Zelenak ⧛ watercolor and ink painting

Forward Bound

Dana Tri ⧛ oil and acrylic painting

The Bird

Leah Bailey ⧛ fiction

"And who is this?" Mrs. Baxter's cheerful voice heralded her sweeping entrance into the room, shoulders back and a bright smile fixed firmly in place. She faltered as she stepped through the doorway, however, her eyes growing large and her smile slipping away for only the briefest of moments as she took it all in.

Though the furniture was sparse in the small room, it was neat and comfortable in appearance. The window over the bed framed gold and red leaves on the branches of the tree outside. In the right hand corner nearest the door, a small television played a children's show from the 1970s. Opposite the television, a woman sat at a small table, busy at her work.

But this is not what drew Mrs. Baxter's eye. It was the birds. They covered every surface in the tiny room in a multitude of colors and shapes. Rows of shelves and bookcases filled with birds lined the walls and bordered the window and door. They hung from the ceiling on thin strings, frozen in mid-flight. Mrs. Baxter pulled her shawl close to her thin body as she gazed in awe, one hand pressed to her chest.

"Amazing, isn't it?" The nurse stepped lightly around Mrs. Baxter and entered the room. She nodded proudly at the quiet woman working in the corner. "This is Sarah. And these are her birds."

"They are beautiful," Mrs. Baxter breathed.

"I thought you might like to work with her today."

Sarah ignored the women as they crept about her room, talking in low voices about her birds. She focused instead on the tiny body of a little bird resting in her cupped palm. Slowly, she selected feathers, adding them one by one as the women talked. Rows of bins filled with miniature jet black eyes, beaks, and skinny legs lined the desk in front of her while colored paints and pencils crowded several jars. Sarah chose a brush from a packed tray and settled the feathers into place, first with the brush and then with one gentle finger.

"And what is wrong with her?" Mrs. Baxter asked as she stopped to watch Sarah work.

"Nothing is wrong with me," Sarah replied. She spoke in a soft and measured tone.

Continued on page 28

Mrs. Baxter started in surprise. “Oh, she can talk?” She directed her question to the nurse once again.

The nurse nodded, lips pursed in anger. “Yes, she can. Can’t you, Sarah? Maybe you should direct your questions to Sarah.”

The room became still as Mrs. Baxter cleared her throat and shifted her attention to Sarah. Only the quiet singing emanating from the television broke the silence.

“Well, then, why do you make all these birds?”

Sarah selected a tiny jet-black bead and carefully glued it in place. “Now it can see.”

Mrs. Baxter shifted uncomfortably.

“Just watch,” the nurse said.

Minutes ticked by as Sarah worked on the bird. It was almost finished. A second eye, a beak, opened in the semblance of a smile. The bird’s steady gaze never faltered as it gazed up at its creator.

“I’m an artist,” Sarah said, and Mrs. Baxter smiled.

“Where is her family?” Mrs. Baxter whispered to the nurse.

“Mama died a long time ago,” Sarah replied. She paused, her gaze fixed on the bird in her hand. “We used to look at the birds together.” Sarah spoke slowly and carefully as she resumed her work. “I miss her.”

“What about your Daddy?” Mrs. Baxter asked.

“He died a long time ago, too. When I was a baby.”

“Then who pays for all this?”

“Her family left her some trust money. They knew she would need assistance after they passed. And she has distant cousins who help.”

Sarah added two twig-like legs to the bird’s plump body. “Now it can walk.” Sarah skillfully bent the wire legs underneath the body. One by one, she added the open wings. “And now it can fly.” She kissed the miniature being on top of the head.

“How sweet!” Mrs. Baxter said as she smiled at the nurse.

The nurse did not return her smile.

“Can I buy one? How much are they?” Mrs. Baxter tried again. She clasped and unclasped her purse.

“She doesn’t sell them,” the nurse said. “Do you Sarah?”

Sarah shook her head, still staring at the bird in her hand.

“So this is how you spend your days?” Mrs. Baxter asked. “Making all these birds?”

“Some days,” Sarah replied.

“Tell her what else you do,” the nurse urged her.

“I visit with my friends, and we go on trips. I learn things and watch television and we go for walks outside and look at the other birds. But I like making my birds best.”

“And do you like it here?” Mrs. Baxter asked as she fidgeted with the snow-white shawl draped over one shoulder. She was restless.

Sarah nodded, and Mrs. Baxter sighed, “Never a bad day for her, I suppose.”

“I have bad days,” Sarah said after slow consideration. “But I have good days, too.”

Mrs. Baxter adjusted her shawl once more and checked the watch on her wrist.

“Well, I really must go. I’m late for lunch already,” she paused. “I was so caught up in watching you work, Sarah, I lost track of time.” Reaching into her purse, she pulled out a pair of gloves. “I believe this satisfies the time requirement, give or take a few minutes.” It was more of a statement than a question, and after a brief hesitation, the nurse nodded.

“I’ll write you a note.”

“Thank you. The committee is very strict on volunteer hours for its members.” Mrs. Baxter glanced around the room again, her eyes lingering on the birds. “It’s almost like time doesn’t exist here.”

“I wonder what it’s like,” the nurse ventured, “to live such a peaceful life of purpose.”

Mrs. Baxter hesitated as she pulled on one glove and looked up, confused. “What do you mean?”

"Never mind," the nurse said. "I don't think you see what I see here."

Mrs. Baxter stared at the nurse, her lips trembling. "I don't think I do," she said shortly, and she started for the door.

"Here," Sarah called after her. She held the bird out in one hand.

"Oh, you'll sell me one?" Mrs. Baxter exclaimed. "I knew we were friends," she said with a pointed glance at the nurse. "I'll show it to the committee at lunch and . . ."

"No," Sarah said. She deliberated as she regarded the bird. "You can have it."

"I couldn't possibly . . ." Mrs. Baxter began, but the nurse stopped her.

"It's a gift."

Mrs. Baxter stared first at the nurse and then at Sarah. Slowly, she reached for the bird. "Oh, but Sarah, it can't fly. It's missing its string."

"It doesn't need a string," Sarah said. She stared at her work surface.

The bird rested in Mrs. Baxter's hand, wings open and legs curled for flight. Its open beak and black bead eyes seemed to call to Mrs. Baxter. "But . . ."

"It doesn't need a string," Sarah stated firmly.

Sarah began to assemble her workplace, making her tools ready for her next creation. Her movements were calm and deliberate. "Winter is coming. Make sure he's warm."

Mrs. Baxter hesitated in the doorway and turned to the nurse. "I really can't take this without paying for it. She has nothing."

Her eyes scanned the room, taking in the woman working quietly in the corner and humming along with the song on television. Over Sarah's bed, a single bird dangled from a string in mid-flight. Out of all the birds, it alone faced the window and the world outside. And, out of all the birds, it alone swayed, moving forward to the limits of its string before drifting backwards.

It was a cozy scene, and peaceful. Mrs. Baxter shook her head. "I really must go. Duty calls." Without another word, she tucked the tiny bird in her palm into her purse and hurried away.

The man on the television smiled, and Sarah smiled back. She glued the first feather onto the small round body, stroking it gently into place. Leaves drifted off the tree outside the window, tapping softly against the window before falling to earth. ●

A Study in Pink

Amy Maggard ⧛ oil painting

Say Uncle

Traci Cruey ⧛ poetry

His khaki pant was scrunched
up past his knee,
thick hair against a fat calf,
pale, my uncle wheezed a yarn of surgeries
during a rare visit to his doublewide,
black lung coating his words,
mucus thick and deep in the back of his throat.
Cough. Cough.
He spits the yellow fluid between red chubby cheeks
and past thin lips into a napkin. Tales of his youth
nestled between us, reminiscences
of a time when he was
Big Red going into the mines
rather than aging flesh who lives
in a chair. He presents his knee
as an example of his mortality
with swollen hands
that can no longer fist or squeeze
a thing, a parody of a knee,
like an alien trying to figure out human parts,
the cap protrudes to the right, bulging
where it shouldn't, sinks and concaves
at the front. Pink lines and scars
mottle the skin and I just want him to put it away,
cannot face the perversion, turn away
from the sound of the ticking clock,
his calm resolve, the proof
of my cowardice stamped
in the footprints leading out the door.

A Canary's Anthem

Kara Stallings and Beizar Abdi ⧛ hand-sewn mixed media

Dikki Hill

Julian Jennison ⧛ digital photography

Emotion

Jake Bruce ⧛ scan of mixed media

I Remember These Times

Megan Starling ⧛ poetry

I remember the years
My cousin and I spent
In imaginative laughter.
We were the princesses
Who went on adventures,
Found our princes,
And lived happily ever after.

I remember the months
We devoted
To curious exploration.
We shared hobbies together
That became our new haven
And quenched our desire
For artistic creation.

I remember the days
We traveled
Beyond our backyards.
We were scientists,
Zoologists,
Columnists,
And dramatists.

I remember the nights
We stayed
Up past our bedtime.
Too restless to sleep,
More wild than thyme,
Giggling and chattering,
For a very long time.

I remember the hours
We practiced
For the children's summer show.
We were singers
With solos to know;
We were dancers
To be awarded a rose.

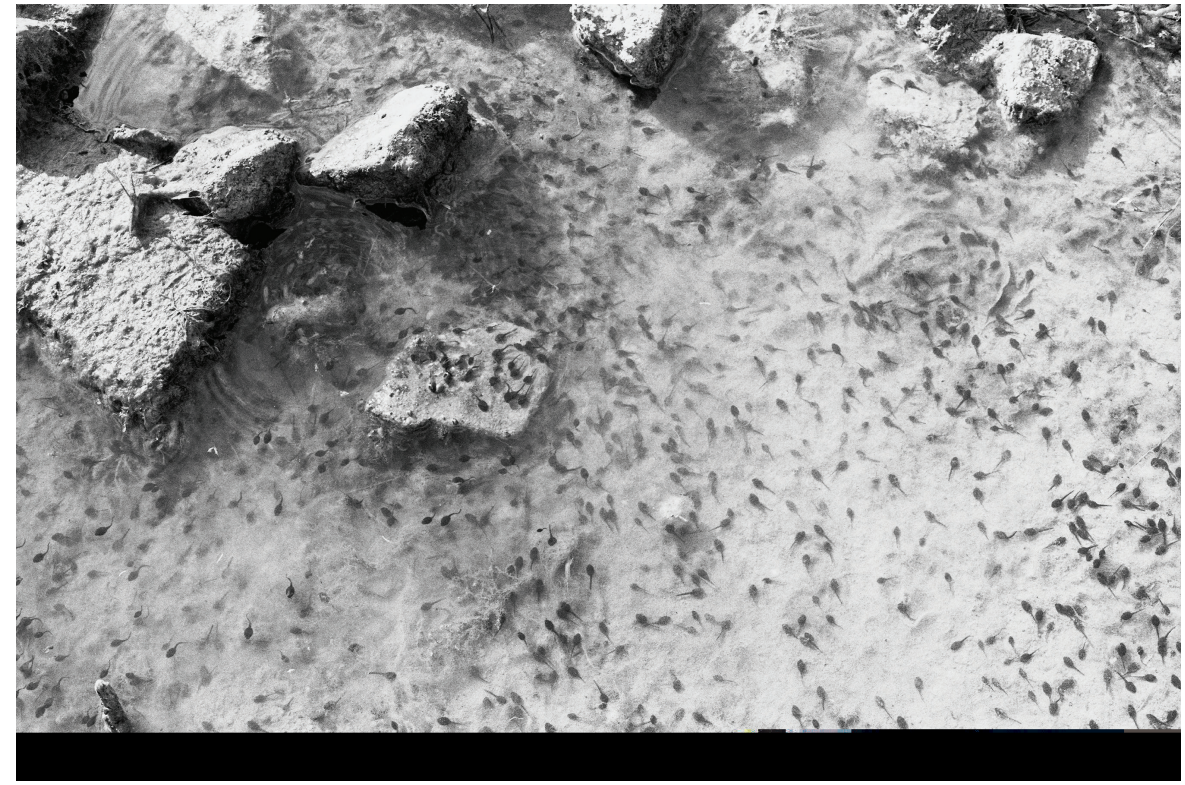
I remember the minutes
We battled
With our hot-tempered words.
We sometimes got moody
Too easily stirred,
Tearing at each other
Like irascible birds.

I remember the seconds
We needed
To patch things together.
We were closer than friends
Our bonds stronger than leather.
Our relationship could withstand
All types of weather.

I remember these times
My cousin and I share
Within our hearts.
Though now far apart,
We are together yet
Because my cousin is a friend
I could never forget.

Tadpoles (Creek Series #2)

Patrick Murphy ⧛ 35 mm film photography



Yellow Flowers

Hannah Berthelson ⧛ poetry

Tiny blossom of hope bursts
Through the winter's freeze
Like the warmth of a smile permeating a crowd;
The sun followed suit, asking the clouds
To move so she could breathe
And we all began to look up instead of down.

In the Moment

Dana Tri ⧛ oil and acrylic painting

Lost in Translation

Beizar Abdi ⧛ digital collage

Awards from the Columbia Scholastic Press Association

Gold Medalist Certificates	2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, and 2016
Silver Crown Awards	2007, 2008, and 2011
Gold Crown Awards	2012, 2013, and 2015

Southern Literary Festival Writing Contest

Third Place Literary Magazine	2016

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Collage accepts submissions year-round. Submission forms and guidelines are available at mtsu.edu/collage. Creative work, such as art, photography, short stories, essays, short plays, song lyrics, and poetry, may be submitted digitally to mtsu.edu/collage or may be turned in at the *Collage* office, Honors 224, between the hours of 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. Submissions are accepted from MTSU students and recent graduates.

Policy Statement

Collage: A Journal of Creative Expression is an arts and literary magazine featuring submitted work chosen by a volunteer staff in a blind grading process. The staff attempts to choose the best work without regard for theme or authorship.

Although *Collage* is a publication of the University Honors College, staff members and submitters are not required to be Honors students. Staff members are selected each semester from a pool of applicants and must have at least a 3.0 GPA and two recommendations.

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Creative Expression Awards

Each semester, four submissions receive Creative Expression Awards, one from each major category: art, photography, poetry, and prose. Literature winners receive the Martha Hixon Creative Expression Award, and visual winners receive the Lon Nuell Creative Expression Award. Winners receive $50 awards.

Art *Untitled*
by Karlie Tankersley

Poetry "Say Uncle"
by Traci Cruey

Photography *Afro-Millennials "Affection"*
by Anthony Alexander

Prose "The Bird"
by Leah Bailey

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