

COLLAGE

A JOURNAL OF CREATIVE EXPRESSION

FEATURE:



KATHLEEN O'CONNELL

... "The book will not die."

In this current issue, *Collage's* staff believes a feature detailing Professor Kathleen O'Connell's passion for printmaking emulates all the values this journal holds dear. She doesn't believe print media will ever die at the hands of technology. It will endure, so long as people strive for patience when crafting works of art.

GET SHOWN
SUBMIT
YOUR
WORK
NOW

CANDACE B.

PRESERVING A CREATIVE LEGACY

Our Journal of Creative Expression is a sixty-year tradition. Sixty years. That's no small legacy to uphold. Trust us, we know. The desire to leave *Collage* better than we found it is our most profound goal. Art, after all, will always need to be celebrated, whether it is photography, painting, or storytelling through audio and literature. At *Collage*, we publish it all.

REAL ART IN THE AGE OF AI

The celebration of art is especially important now in the 21st century. *Collage* exists not only for students to build their portfolios but also to honor the dedication that they have poured into their pieces. Through *Collage*, these works will live on, commemorated in the pages of our magazine. In an age when art is cheapened by AI knockoffs and art-

COLLAGE BY COLLAGE

ists ripped off by anonymous copycats, seeing your work featured in a print magazine, hand-picked by a devoted staff, can be just the motivation you need to continue to produce great art. It is our joy to quiet that noise.

the creator of the best work. Coupled with an Instagram feature and interview, we are serious about giving artists the recognition they deserve.

VISIONARY VOICES

In each issue, we also author our own feature about



OUTSTANDING WORK

At *Collage*, we are not quiet about celebrating our winners. In all categories of art, we award a \$75 prize to

people we believe exemplify *Collage's* mission to honor great art. In this issue, *Collage's* staff have selected Professor Kathleen O'Connell. Her

HOLLY P.

passion for printmaking emulates all the values this journal holds dear. According to Dr. O'Connell, print media will never die at the hands of AI. It will endure if people strive for patience when crafting works of art.

ENDURING LEGACY

In the future, *Collage* strives for consistency. We promise to maintain the quality of this magazine, not for our own sake, but for the sake of the artists we have published. We want them to be able to look back at their works in *Collage* with pride, knowing that they have contributed to something great, and that they themselves are great because of that. We hope their credit in *Collage* will bring them future success and will be included in their bios and resumes as proof that they are

WORTH WATCHING.

BIG SALE

ALL WORK MUST BE SHOWN

PREPARE TO BE

x **WOWED**

x **Empowered**

x **INSPIRED**

x **Emotional**

AMAZED



Letter from the

EDITOR

Each semester, *Collage* reminds me why creative spaces matter.

Behind every piece in this magazine is a moment of courage. Someone sat down to write a poem or a song at 2 a.m., captured a photograph between classes, or spent weeks shaping a story before deciding to share it with strangers. Submitting your work is never a small thing. It means allowing others to see how you think, how you feel, and how you interpret the world. There is something quietly brave about that choice.

What makes this magazine special is not only the talent of the work inside it, but the willingness of students to participate in the creative life of this university rather than simply pass through it. Every submission adds to a tradition that has been growing for years, shaped by generations of students who believed their ideas and stories deserved space.

This semester's special feature also invites us to reflect on a much longer story. As we approach the 250th anniversary of the United States, we are reminded that freedom of expression has always been at the heart of democratic life.

Remembering that history matters. The voices that shaped the past remind us why protecting the freedom to create, question, and speak openly remains essential for the future. In many ways, the work you see in this issue is part of that living tradition.

To everyone who submitted their work this semester, thank you for your boldness and your trust. Your creativity keeps this tradition alive.



I am deeply grateful to our *Collage* team, whose creativity, thoughtful work, and careful decisions helped shape this issue.

I would also like to extend my sincere thanks to Professor Kathleen O'Connell, Print Media | Visual Arts B.A. and B.S. Degree Coordinator, for her thoughtful contribution to this feature.

As you read these pages, I hope you take your time with them. Let the work surprise you or help you see something in a new way. And if you feel inspired to create something of your own afterward, then *Collage* has done exactly what it was meant to do.

Thank you for being part of this creative community.

Enjoy the issue.

With appreciation,

Raquel Barbalat

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, *Collage*

Meet the *Collage*

STAFF



Front row (L-R): Haylie Thurman, Kaylee Wilmoth, Katy Clemens, Candace Bohne.

Back row (L-R): Jordan Chambers, Holly Pfeiffer, Raquel Barbalat, Arianella Myers, Ava Houghton, Chloe Rafferty, Gabrielle Terry.

Not pictured: Juliette Keller, Marissa Medina, Ethan Jaurigue.

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Collage is built by students—writers, designers, photographers, and editors—working together to create something lasting. Whether you want to critique, create, or contribute, there's a place for you here.



Join the team.

STANBROO

2	BY THE TIME- POETRY	MITZI CROSS
2	PROPHETIC TOGETHER- POETRY	MAVIS WOLFF
2	SAVE THIS FOR POSTERITY- VISUAL	EMILY ROGERS
3	LIFE WITHOUT YOU-AUDIO <u><u>*WINNER*</u></u>	RILEY RODGERS
4	THE VESSEL OF DREAMS- PROSE	LUCY WILSON
4	CW=CHROME- AUDIO	CARTER WRIGHT
4	YOUTH- VISUAL	EMILY ROGERS
5	END UP PLACES- POETRY	MAVIS WOLFF
5	HEAR NOTHING SEE NOTHING SAY NOTHING- VISUAL	AVERY THOMAS
6	SALINA- PROSE	MITZI CROSS
6	MIDDLE CHILD- VISUAL	TRENT WILSON
7	BODY LANGUAGE-AUDIO LYRICS	JACK ROBERT
8	KNOCKING ON HEAVEN'S DOOR- PROSE	PATRICIA CUNDIFF
9	'THE ARCH OF ST. LOUIS'- PHOTOGRAPHY	ARLO KEPLER
10	BRIGHT SIDE- VISUAL	ZION BLOUNT
10	VOYEUR, VULTURE- POETRY	LEIGH RICHMOND
10	AMEILA WAY- POETRY <u><u>*WINNER*</u></u>	LEIGH RICHMOND
11	OUR ODE TO SILENCE- POETRY	MAVIS WOLFF
11	JUST LIKE ME- VISUAL	ROWANE SYLVESTER
11	ARCHITECTURAL PHOTOGRAPHY- PHOTOGRAPHY	AMANDA MALDONADO
12	RITES OF WOMANHOOD- POETRY	SABIRIN ELMI
12	DUAFAE- VISUAL	ISSAC SNYDER
12	BEAUTIFULLY GROWN- VISUAL	SHANIA PANNELL
13	BAD SLAVE- VISUAL <u><u>*WINNER*</u></u>	ARIANELLA MYERS
14	BURYING THE PAST- PHOTOGRAPHY <u><u>*WINNER*</u></u>	MITZI CROSS
14	MUSE- POERTY	MITZI CROSS
15	UNTITLED 6021- VISUAL	MORGAN PENNY
15	GAIA- PHOTOGRAPHY	MITZI CROSS

DREAMS OF MARGRETE FULLER-POETRY	MITZI CROSS	15
ELEMENTS-POETRY	SABIRIN ELMI	16
BIRTHDAY-PHOTOGRAPHY	JOSHUA CURADA	16
THE WANDERER-PROSE	LOGAN ENDRESS	16
<u>*FEATURE*</u>	PROFESSOR KATHLEEN O'CONNELL	17
DINO AT DARK-VISUAL	TRENT WILSON	20
DUST BOWL BLUES-LYRICS	MITZI CROSS	20
THE FLIGHT OF FREEDOM-POETRY	NELLY CHUQUICALLATA	20
DIVINE LOSS-VISUAL	TRENT WILSON	20
EXPOSED-VISUAL	JORDAN WILLIAMS	21
GWEN WETEKAMP-VISUAL	GWEN WETEKAMP	21
THE LIMITS OF MY LOVE-POETRY	SABIRIN ELMI	21
CASSEROLE-POETRY	LEIGH RICHMOND	21
MILITARY CORNERS-PROSE <u>*WINNER*</u>	HOLLY PFEIFFER	22
FIRST-WOMAN DRESS-POETRY	LINDA-RAVEN WOODS	24
SELF PORTRAIT VISUAL	FAITH RODRIGUEZ	24
ROCK 'N' ROLL WIDOW-POETRY	LINDA-RAVEN WOODS	24
TUESDAY-POETRY	KIRSTIE FRANK	25
BRUCE AND THE END-PHOTOGRAPHY	MIA DEACON	25
I THINK THEREFORE WE ARE-VISUAL	RAE MEDLOCK	25
I HAVE A QUESTION-POERTY	RAE MEDLOCK	25
SERVIAM-POETRY	SABIRIN ELMI	26
TRUE BELIEVER-VISUAL	SIERRA ROBERTSON	26
GOLDEN-VISUAL	SHANIA PANNELL	26
"ELI"-DOCUMENTARY VIDEO <u>*WINNER*</u>	THOMAS EDWARDS	27
THE ORANGE HOUSE-CREATIVE NON-FICTION	KIRSTIE FRANK	28
GROWING PAINS-VISUAL	ARLO KEPLER	28
CAIRO, ILLINOIS-VISUAL	KATHRINE NARRELL	29



SAVE THIS FOR POSTERITY

EMILY ROGERS

PROPHETIC TOGETHER-POETRY

MAVIS WOLFF

My new muse:

Prose glinting off oak locks
and grown-out roots; verse
breathing where pads of
fingers rest.

Crochet dripping
off the torso, and
an arm,
lackadaisically slung around
a buzzing waist— we are
hymns and my pen is a
prophet at the altar.

Speak to me in a
familiar tongue,
your voice first unfamiliar.

Your teeth are keys to
forgotten doors;
flashing canines deftly
picking locks.

Embrace blooming amid
a final frost; delicate
sprigs of lavender,
swaying trios,
strong like sinew in
fleeting wind.

Man's most frequent foe
snaps the hands of the clock to
race past the unready, yet
he no longer traces his nails
along the bristling
nape of my neck.

I consider the
utterance of
liberated phrases
each hour,
and time is the bit
that bars my
tongue.

You shared these
same sentiments, but
I could not
confess that they
exist in the
flutters of my chest
all the same.

With presence and
its coital pleasure—
no loss yet to fathom—
your head collapses onto
my shoulder's plane.

Together,
we fall into place.

BY THE TIME-POETRY MITZI CROSS

By the time...

By the time she was born,
her grandfather's bones had thinned,
like old trees, his branches struck by
lightning, waiting to fall and
crumble back into the earth.
His joints full of fire,
and the ache of anger,
But by the time
she was born, he had slowed down,
his whiskey bottle ran dry.
His teeth had grayed like mushrooms,
he'd lost his chew and his lungs
rumbled like a broken tailpipe.

As a child, she watched her mother
draw up like a turtle,
when he reached for her wrist.
She didn't know the memories
her mother stored in her body,
like the scent of his hand-rolled
cigarettes clouding their rooms
like a tobacco barn,
smoking up the house
so no one could find a way out.
She dreamed of his balled fist
against the kitchen table as she hung
her head and stirred her vegetable soup,
or the sound of the teeth
on his zipper, the smell of his copper
sweat dripping on her face.

Her mother learned to walk softly
around the angry dog he'd become,
to disappear beneath layers
of clothes, trying to hide from
his hunting eyes.
She grew into a bird-boned
woman, thin and hollow as dried bamboo.
She stopped eating and grew wings
to fly out the window, out of her bed,
out of her body.

By the time she was born
her grandfather's secrets
lay buried beneath the
dwindling fire in his eyes.
There would be no more
logs to burn. His children
were trees he'd chopped down,
three daughters and a son,
their childhoods burned
up for firewood.



LIFE WITHOUT YOU-AUDIO

RILEY RODGERS



AUDIO WINNER

THE VESSEL OF DREAMS-PROSE

LUCY WILSON

The typewriter sits atop my bookshelf. Hardbacks, paperbacks, and journals hold up its black, metal frame. Lifted by thousands of words. Millions of dreams before mine. When I place my fingers on the circular keys, I feel the presence of so many writers before me. Some elevated, some repressed. Maybe the same dream of sharing the story they kept inside for so long.

I imagine a writer. A girl. Fifteen years or so. Around ninety years ago. Wearing a long, red dress. Sitting at her sun-soaked desk. Punching away at this typewriter. Watching the ink letters multiply on the page. Hearing the satisfying dinging sound when the letters reach the page's edge. She must have worn that same, excited smile I had at that age. The one I still wear to this day.

However, this antique typewriter can no longer type. It has no ribbon, no ink, no working keys. Black paint chipped away at its front, inviting a faint layer of rust. This was how I found it. In the back of an antique store. Without a price tag. I lugged the twenty-pound object to the front of the store. The woman at the front desk looked surprised. She appeared to have forgotten the object had existed amongst the store's clutter. She said she'd take twenty-five dollars. She kept reminding me that it didn't work. That doesn't matter. There was a time when it had a ribbon, ink, and working keys. When it unlocked stories that are just as real today. When it helped girls like me find their voice in the clicking of its keys.

Each day, the typewriter greets me on my way to my desk. It watches me as I sit down to create new worlds, ones inspired by the hardbacks and paperbacks squeezed tightly onto the shelf. I wonder if any of these books I hold so dear were transcribed on my vessel of dreams.

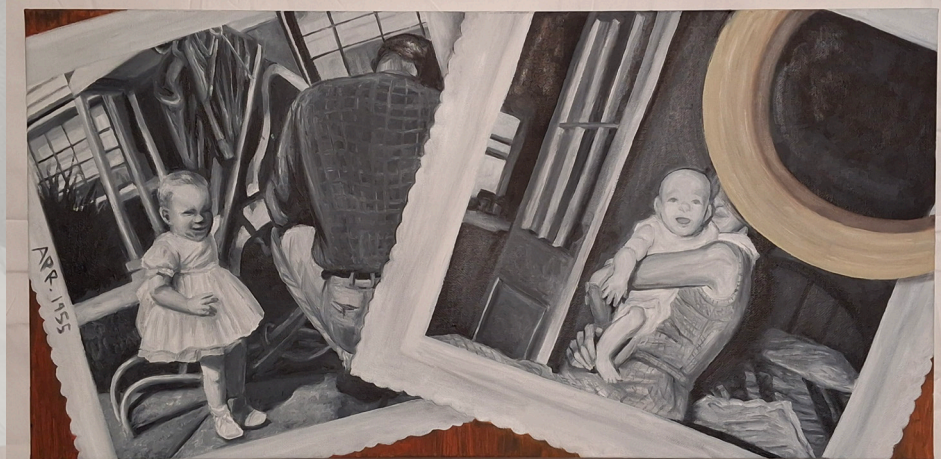
CW=CHROME-AUDIO

CARTER WRIGHT



YOUTH

EMILY ROGERS



END UP PLACES-LYRICS

MAVIS WOLFF

Sometimes you are in Tennessee. Hills and hills and hills and hills. Valleys converging into the middle's shallow bowl. Holding a soup of pollen and vicious humid days in clammy palms. Begging for the evening's cool whispers. Everyone sits on plastic Adirondack chairs that crack at the feet. Puffing cigarettes and laughing the smoke into your face.

“Bless his heart.”

West calls in a jangling song. Pyramids and clay anointed in ivy. East supplicating with rolling corn fields and jagged mountains. Greyscale nails shredding the horizon. No surface untouched by April's matte yellow. Knees painted in dirt the color of prison jumpers and staining lime. Croon over your glass at the only bar worth going to with the only people who know you. Puke moonshine in the morning.

Sometimes you are in the unfamiliar city. Great figures blur as they ride past you; silver, sleek bodies writhing through perfect tunnels. Spitting out on wooden stilts. Careening through an undulating sea of concrete. Never-ending movement. Heels kissing the sidewalk in staccato beats. Endless evenings spent in clubs with pretty drinks and prettier women. Grovel for shrieking noise and everlasting interest. A metropolitan hamster wheel of lustful entertainment.

Obsidian sky pierced by the first trailing tendrils of dawn. Gin burning a hole in the back of your throat. Craven before the soybean farms. Dotted landscapes past all the metal and scaffolds and miniskirts. Neat rows sown in fertile soil. Men and women—them and their livings. Coming home to splintered plastic chairs. Abandoned buildings, stripped of copper wire.

There are no hills.

HEAR NOTHING SEE NOTHING SAY NOTHING

EVERY THOMAS



SALINA-PROSE

MITZI CROSS

Salina shaved all the hair off her entire body. Her white armpits fumed with a metallic, sickly, sweet onion smell. She slathered Colgate shaving cream over her body and mowed the remaining grass. She was born a toe-headed blonde, but puberty drained her buttercream yellow into dishwater brown. She knew deep down that she was really a redhead. But over the years, that head of hers could never grow any red hair, no matter how many different seeds she planted or how rich the compost, it always grew back tumor brown.

“Take a few deep breaths,” the doctor winked while muzzling her.

She didn't wait for her petals to wither and fall. Instead, Salina grabbed the hedge clippers and buzzed her head clean as a cue ball. As the mass grew, she was convinced hair was not a good conductor of energy. Her bald head felt less static when she walked under power lines, often having to stand on one foot to tune in like a radio station, to the myriads of conversations whispering in the ether. She thought that if she shaved her body, the voices would settle, convinced that hair was the culprit. It was preventing her from

excelling in meditation and her attempts at astral travel. She kept the shorn hair in baby food jars, which she lined up under her bed. She liked the tight seal and pucker of metal when she turned the small lid closed. Frequently, she tucked little heart-shaped pebbles in with the hair.

“All right, I need you to count backwards from one hundred,” the doctor said cupping his warm hand on the bald egg of her head. She closed her eyes and counted out loud. “One hundred, ninety-nine, ninety-eight...”

Hair needs a proper burial, Salina thought as she drifted away from the earth. Baby oil had arrived on her doorstep by the caseload, and she stacked the boxes in the corner of her bedroom closet. After her body was bald, she emptied entire bottles of oil into her bath. Her skin was soft as a lamb's nose, pink as calamine, and tender to the touch.

She and her lover stripped down naked and polished each other with oil. They slipped and slid over valleys and slopes of wet marble. Their bodies rode knuckles and thumbs,

spinning on a Ferris wheel of tongues. The slow turn of the wheel lifted Salina towards the stars where she sat above her lover's thick lips. She stared down into a circus tent; She swan-dived into a teacup full of rose water as she rode the teacup slowly, slowly, down, down, down until she fell from her perch, like a shot, red-tailed hawk.

“Scalpel.” The doctor's blunted voice rose from beneath the water.

Salina was a firm believer that baby oil was a good conductor. She learned about oils and their healing properties from her friend, Sonal, who was a strong, saffron woman Salina had followed to Calcutta, where she studied with the Tantric Essenes. In her initiation, the women oiled her hair with the hands of a thousand Shaktis', massaging her head into hallucinations. She squinted and blinked in disbelief as Eleanor Roosevelt charged up riding a white wolf. She gestured to the Gods and commanded a thunderbolt to split open the heavens like John. She showed Salina a life without her body, a life free of form or matter. A will, free to choose its next incarnations: “And what or who will you become, Salina?” Eleanor spoke but her mouth did not move. Her words penetrated Salina's brain and flashed across her screen her many lives as an oak tree, a blue heron, a female pope, a sour-smelling sailor on a sinking ship, and she had even been a single red curl growing on a full head of hair.

“Electricity,” Eleanor smiled. “It's the wave of your future. Keep standing under those power lines, and it will burn up those weeds and sing the tentacles of that daffodil bulb you've got growing in your head.”

MIDDLE CHILD

TRENT WILSON



BODY LANGUAGE-AUDIO|LYRICS

JACK ROBERT

Could you stay up all night with me
 And talk me through my insecurities?
 My problems are like ink on paper, if your presence was the back of a pencil
 I don't need words to say to her, your presence is more than sensual
 Speaking in tongues, speaking of I'm in love
 And sure our lips could say words
 But what if that's not how this works
 Talk to me in body language
 Get tongue tied learning a new translation
 Don't need to speak it you know what I'm saying
 So talk to me in body language
 Oh we're speaking in our body language
 Get tongue tied learning a new translation
 Don't need to speak it you know what I'm saying
 Just talk to me in body language
 Talk to me with our lips, talk to me with our kiss
 Oh I love it when we talk like this
 Don't push me out and I'll pull you in
 Put on the song I've had on repeat cause it makes me think of you
 Put your hands on my cheeks, you know we know what to do
 Talk to me in body language
 Get tongue tied learning a new translation
 Don't need to speak it you know what I'm saying
 So talk to me in body language
 Oh we're speaking in our body language
 Get tongue tied learning a new translation
 Don't need to speak it you know what I'm saying
 Just talk to me in body language
 Talk to me like you move, I move
 Come in a little closer, we're stuck like glue
 Going back and forth you that I just need you
 Stay here tonight I just need you
 Talk to me in body language
 Get tongue tied learning a new translation
 Don't need to speak it you know what I'm saying
 So talk to me in body language
 Oh we're speaking in our body language
 Get tongue tied learning a new translation
 Don't need to speak it you know what I'm saying
 Just talk to me in body language
 Body language
 Talk to me in body language



**KNOCKING ON HEAVEN'S
DOOR-PROSE**

PATRICIA CUNDIFF

A Journey of Alzheimer's

The walk is short and energizing during the warm summer months. The half-mile trek to my parents' home from my own in the rain is hardly more than a heartbeat in my car, but the winter's ice and snow have made walking my only option. I pull my knees high, lifting the increasingly heavy boots to clear the way for the next step. However small, the hill between our homes is treacherous.

My husband argued that Phillip could handle everything. A godsend as a caregiver, Phillip has stated emphatically that he doesn't want to give the necessary meds to my father. My mother is a handwinger, always has been, unable to handle the must-dos of the day, which is probably why I am just the opposite, to the extreme. As an only child, what other choice was there?

I do not need the small flashlight in my pocket; the brilliance of the white snow offers the look of early dawn, though it is well past supertime. Stars peek out from above as the wind brushes away the last of the snow clouds, although the full moon is nowhere to be seen. I need this time to think, to plan. My thoughts are in a tailspin after the news. Watching my father disappear into the Alzheimer's black hole has been the most difficult time of my sixty years. Consoling my mother and myself with platitudes that he has lived an amazing eighty years, and he didn't seem to have any physical pain, did little to reduce the agony of seeing a stranger invade my father's body.

His mind has been trampled quickly, stealing the well-read and articulate man I knew, laughter reverberating throughout the house. He had watched over my mother with passionate intensity, caring for her as a delicate flower, which she was, and is.

For four years, I have attempted to accept this pronouncement about my father. Once Phillip became a part of their home to help with the day-to-day activities needed, I tried to help my

mother remember the man that was, and see the man who lived in her home and who cursed and became unrecognizable as not her husband and my father, but an evil disease that had taken over his mind.

Still, I need to think, to plan. The doctor called; my results are in. By the miracle, or possible detriment, of modern medicine and science, blood-based markers identify the probability of Alzheimer's, sometimes years in advance. Knowing the disease had taken my father's mother and was taking my father, I had the test. My results are positive; I have the marker.

I stared at myself in the mirror a short time ago, loathing my appearance. Who is this person? I want to look as I did thirty years ago; even ten years earlier would be better than this old woman looking back at me. What does my father see when he looks in the mirror? Does he know himself? Would he recognize the pictures of his youth?

My mind gallops around the outside of the most critical thought, not wanting to continue the introspection.

A moment a few weeks ago pushed me to action. For a split second, I forgot where I was and how to get home. I told myself at the time it was simply because I had so much on my mind, but it scared me. I could see my home in my mind's eye but couldn't remember how to get there. It was over in a matter of seconds but frightening just the same.

I couldn't tell my husband; our marriage had ended when our last child left home. We were roommates, it seemed, and nothing more. The temporary scare of breast cancer two years previous had settled the question of dependence. This man, with whom I had shared a life for forty-one years, said that he had thought about it, and if I had cancer, he would stay and take care of me. That he had to think about it let me know that he would not. He would run at the first inkling that I would follow in my father's disease.

My children. Of course, they would be supportive and tell me the times-old clichés of how they would take care of me.

An action that I know from personal experience is loving, and so frustrating and depressing.

Loving someone with fragile memories or no memory is heart-wrenching. For everyone. That pain in my throat as if I'm choking, in my chest, when I let myself think about it; I don't want my children to live with that. I want to see joy and happiness in my father's face, and I fear I will never see those emotions from him again. My children should not have to yearn for that, as I do. How can I possibly tell them?

I won't tell them. I decided on my course of action after receiving the results. I will stash away a few pain pills at a time. I can hide them until the time is right. Even with the likely early onset, my mind won't just immediately go away; I'll have time to take the pills, to make it right, to save my children from this.

Prayer seems to have left me; this faith that has sustained me through years of both joy and sorrow has deserted me. I fear forgetting my own story. *Yet, I am not afraid of facing death; I am afraid of facing life.*

A problem remains, however. My father. My father will likely outlive me. He remains in good physical health and will, hopefully, remain so. I am there three times each day to administer the medication. I must convince Phillip to do it if I, for any reason, cannot be there. My mother. Who will hold her hand and console her? Old and frail, she wouldn't deal with my death well; I am her only child. An only child born to parents from farming families, an oddity. Living still on the family farm for three generations.

My shuffling walk finally brings me to the porch steps of my parents' home. The cold doesn't seem to affect me, though the wind is stiff with slivers of sleet blown about. Stomping my feet at the bottom of the steps, I notice that the front door is ajar, with footprints in the snow facing me.

Removing my boots and coat at the front door, I yell into the darkened hallway.

“Hello?”

Walking into the kitchen, my mother talks to Phillip, who is holding his head in his hands, with a small cut on his temple.

“I tripped and fell going out to get firewood,” he said. “Blacked out for a second there, I guess. Your mom has been tending me.”

“Are you okay?”

“Yes, I’m fine. Just a little frazzled, I guess you could say.” “Where is my father?” I asked, looking around.

“In his room, watching an old John Wayne flick. Cursing the villains as if they were in the room with him. Loves watching the horses, though. Didn’t you see him?” Phillip frowned.

“No. I looked in there before I came back here. He’s not in his room.” “He said he would be right back,” my mother said, unconcerned.

My breath caught. “Where did he say he was going?” I asked.

“He didn’t say.” She looked up at me and smiled. “He’s doing much better. He called me ‘Mother,’ you know, like he always did after you were born.” She pulled out a Band-Aid from the box she was holding and gave it to Phillip.

Phillip looked at me in alarm. He started to stand, and I stopped him.

“Stay here; you might have a concussion. I’ll go look for him.”

“If you don’t find him soon,” Phillip began, concern across his brow, “he’ll freeze out there. Maybe he’s getting more firewood.”

“No,” I replied. “I came that way. He’s not at the woodpile. I’ll go,” I said again.

Standing at the front door, I’m not sure where to go. Boots back on my freezing feet (now I feel the cold!), my coat hugging my chilled body, I’m back outside in the snow, no longer thinking about my diagnosis. Where is my father?

His coat is still hanging on the hook; I take it. He’s likely in house-shoes, which won’t offer much protection against the depth of the snow. Wind is blowing the

snow, quickly covering any tracks. Faint footprints circle the side of the house, then fade to nothing.

He had to go that way; I came from the opposite direction. Pulling my coat tighter, I know I’m in alarm mode and beginning to panic. God, I prayed for the first time in too long, help me find him.

Standing in the silence of the whispering wind, I can see my breath in front of me.

I understand what ‘silence is deafening’ means. It’s this. No neighbors this far out. At the edge of the workable fields, mountains lay on the property line. My father would joke that you had to head back to town to hunt; we were so far out. No children playing in the snow under the starlit sky. This moment. Standing still, my mind settles, takes it in. I feel the earth move. While my mind tells me it is the wind, my soul whispers that it is indeed the ground slowly moving in a never-ending rotation in this grand universe. I can feel it. I know where my father is. The crunch of the frozen snow as my boots fall is the only sound now.

The horse barn, my father called it.

No horses in the stalls since his childhood, he continued to call his escape and hideaway the horse barn.

Warming his hands around the oil lantern he lit, he looked up when I stomped my feet inside the door.

“Hey there, baby girl,” his name for me rolling off his lips as if he had never forgotten me. “I came to check on Blaze; she must be out in the field. She’ll come home when she gets cold.”

Blaze was his horse before he met my mother, before they had me. Time escaped him, escaped his memories. As his memories leaked away, so did the chronology of events.

I wrap his coat around him, hesitant to speak. Not wanting to lose this small bit of clarity, I hold on.

“Yep, we all go home when we get cold, don’t we, baby girl?” he said, pulling me

close. Tears trickled down my cheek.

“I love you, Daddy,” I said, my voice sounding strange in the old barn.

A squeeze on my shoulder, and he stood. “We’d best get back to your mother. You know how she worries.”

Nodding, I stand, and we walk back to the house, his hand gripping mine as it had many years ago when I was a young girl.

The snow didn’t seem quite as deep as it had been when we returned home. My father, now deeply entranced by a decades-old western on television, his mind and memories receding as the familiar stranger emerged once again, was welcomed and warmed with blankets by Phillip and my mother.

My husband awaits my return, perhaps not warmly or eagerly, but with the repeated expectation of food and clean clothes. And maybe even a little conversation. It is enough. For now. I can make the first move to make it more. There is time, I hope.

The wind has calmed, having blown the clouds away. The stars seem to sparkle with the snow, the moon high in the sky, spreading its light over the beauty before me.

I found my father. I hoped my children would have the same opportunity. I looked up into the brilliant night sky and closed my eyes in prayer.



‘THE ARCH OF ST. LOUIS’ ARLO KEPLER



BRIGHT SIDE **ZION BLOUNT**

VOYEUR, VULTURE-POETRY **LEIGH RICHMOND**

Fujifilm disposable me
is a red-eyed monster

Perfect everything
in the lowest quality

Only twenty-seven shots
A year in the making

My twenty-third birthday and his
Our dogs our drinks
The train in Portland
past the giantstrawberry

Memories I collect in a
plastic tube and share
with the lady at Walgreens for
fifteen dollars

I wonder if she took a peek
if she saw the one he snapped of me
In my bra getting ready
pale and paunchy on a grey duvet

Bird's eye view
Does she think I'm pretty too?

AMEILA WAY-POETRY

LEIGH RICHMOND

Endless forest at the end of an empty cul-de-sac
and red clay dust on my Skechers

Shooting overripe crab apples from trees
A Red Ryder I could hardly use

pointed at green dots in the dusk
Pulp rains down on three toothy grins

Endless forest at the end of an empty cul-de-sac
and red clay dust on my Skechers

Early memory of skin-hot fear
The curve of a PVC pipe pulled around a tree

Ansley can't breathe
I've knocked the wind from her stomach

Endless forest at the end of an empty cul-de-sac
and red clay dust on my Skechers

We picnic out here alone together too
young to know what might hide here

There's a man coming this way
Run, girls, run

Endless forest at the end of an empty cul-de-sac
and red clay dust on my Skechers

I find geodes under those trees by the pond
You're out on the boat, paddling alone

and I'm too scared of snapping turtles waiting
for me in the slimy under-toe

Endless forest at the end of an empty cul-de-sac
and red clay dust on my Skechers

Two mice running away from their plastic homes
and two red-kneed girls crying over snakes

Some things aren't better off free
They're only mice anyway

Endless forest at the end of an empty cul-de-sac
and red clay dust on my Skechers

A foot taller and there's been a development
and the trees are gone but I'm gone too

**POETRY
WINNER**

OUR ODE TO SILENCE-POETRY*Our Silent Elegy*

when I have
used up
all my words
for the day

on the
mailman
who always hides
my packages

or the

woman at the front desk
and her solar-powered
dancing aloe
on the wooden helm

or the

cashier
with the
pink, bedazzled
hoop earrings;

let our bodies spark
percussive conversation
against microfiber sheets,
and let the strands of
my hair,
plucked from the seams
of your clothes,
craft the melody

MAVISWOLFF



JUST LIKE ME

ROWANE SYLVESTER

ARCHITECTURAL PHOTOGRAPHY - 35MM, PENTAX ME SUPER AMANDA MALDONADO





DUAFE

ISSAC SNYDER

RITEs OF WOMANHOOD-POETRY

SABIRIN ELMI

1

Hooyo was five the day she became a woman. She lay on the scorching sand floor, her legs bound like a pig roasting over a spit fire. The village medicine woman slices the sinful flesh from between her legs with a razor and sews her up with acacia thorns, leaving an opening no bigger than a pinhole. She is made pure; sealed for her future husband with a sticker that reads Do Not Use If Protective Seal Is Broken. She lies on the floor of the hut for days, the ropes burning against her blistering arms and legs. Her flesh knits together like the teeth of a zipper. She watches a glistening army of black ants carry her tainted flesh away to their ant hill on their backs.

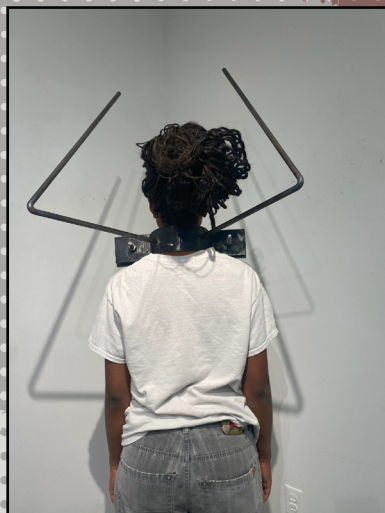
2

My body sheds the last traces of its youth the summer I turn fourteen. It is my second summer in Somalia, my foreign homeland. Where my Somali jabjab, like the war-ravaged roads of Mogadishu, betrays me as a child of the West, as other. The wind molds my lilac jilbab to the dip of my waist, the curve of my hip as I walk home from the bakery with loaves of bread. Every man I pass rakes across my body with his eyes. Not one raises his eyes to look into mine. My dugsi macalin caresses my thigh with his hand that summer during a Quran exam and tells me I am beautiful. His warm hand rising, his mouth parted as he tells me no one has to know. I tell no one. I don't want to hear how it is my fault. How I did not lower my gaze. How I carried myself with pride in every line of my body. In the swaying of my hips, in the sheen of my gloss coated lips. I dream that night of the summer I ran through the sprinklers in my backyard with my brothers. Our chests bared, and our faces tilted to the sun. In the dream, I do not listen to aabo when he tells me to wear a shirt. When he says I am too old and it is ceeb now. I run after my brothers, the sun dancing across my back, and catch the rainbows forming in the cool arcs of water sprouting from the sprinkler.

BEAUTIFULLY GROWN SHANIA PANNELL



BAD SLAVE



BAD SLAVE

ARIANELLA MYERS

VISUAL WINNER

**PHOTOGRAPHY
WINNER**



BURYING THE PAST

MITZI CROSS

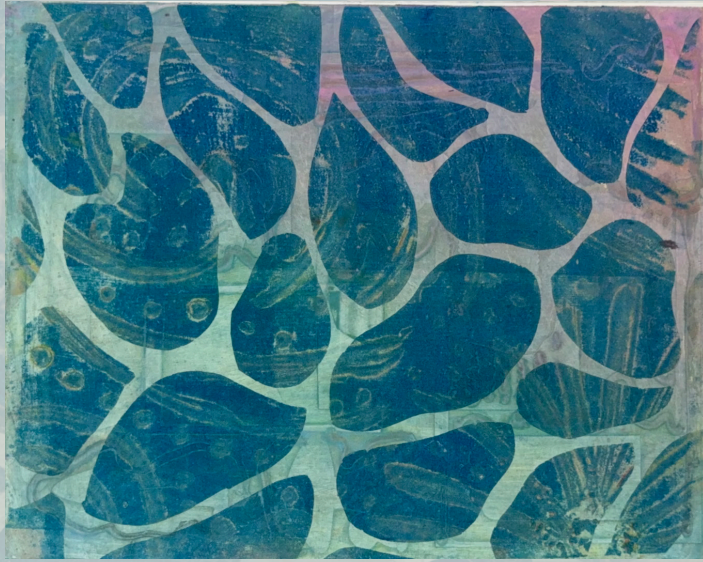
MUSE-POERTY

MITZI CROSS

Muse is an ephemeral saffron,
a dandelion giving up her ghost
to Aeolus.

Galatea, birthed from
Pygmalion's ivory womb,
a creation story of inspiration guided
like a yang quiver of flaming arrows,
impulsed to penetrate the air, wood, fire,
papyrus,
canvas, or marble,
to carve out a fissure in the rock
and pry open, dig
into the limestone cave of Delphi.

Muse is a single strand of red hair:
a storyteller in utero,
braiding yin with yang in a cobra dance
of long necks gulping air, undulating
frequencies into a double helix -- Tiger to
Dragon,
Sun to Moon, black to red,
XX to XY, a forgotten combination to a lock.



UNTITLED 6021

MORGAN PENNY

GAIA

MITZI CROSS

**DREAMS OF MARGRETE FULLER-POETRY** MITZI CROSS

Fifty yards from the shoreline of Fire Island, a cargo ship hit a sandbar, splitting it in half. Margaret held on to her baby boy as she fought the sea. For eight gasping hours, waves slammed her trembling body as she clung to the sinking ship. Bone-soaked shivers screamed from the child's quivering mouth as she buoyed him above the crushing, black waters. In desperation, she handed the small, howling bundle to a crewman trying to swim to the shore. Her eyes burned from sea spray as she wailed while watching the foaming sea devour her infant beneath the surface. Her heart sank, and the tides tugged at her will until finally she let go. She was swept away and stirred back into the churning sea.

I.

Emerson gasped awake, choking on a dream of water. He sat on the edge of his bed with heavy heartbeats thumping at his gray temples. His wide hand rested on his chest, which had ached since she left. He sank his large feet to the wooden floor, assuring himself he was not at sea, but alone in his bed, anchored in Concord.

II.

A moment later, Nathaniel dreamed of his Zenobia with a peach lady-slipper orchid falling from her hair. His Hester Prynne and her red letter "A" sank into the ocean. Hawthorne wept and sat up in bed, jerking the covers from his face. "I can't breathe," he whispered into the stillness of his bedroom.

III.

Thoreau awoke from a nightmare, caught in a violent storm with waves crashing over his small hovel. He wrapped his sheet around his shoulders and lit a white candle as he peeked out his narrow doorway. Far off in the woods, he thought he heard a woman's voice and a child crying. But there was only the black, starless sky and the dry winds sifting through the trees.

Margaret Fuller was a brilliant and highly educated member of the Transcendentalists. She challenged and inspired Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Henry David Thoreau both intellectually and emotionally. She shared deep friendships with all three men. Years later, she, her husband, and their infant child all perished in a shipwreck on July 19, 1850, only fifty yards from the Fire Island shore.

ELEMENTS-POETRY

SABIRIN ELMI

fire
 you lit a fire in my heart
 our love ran rampant in the blaze
 blinded by a smoky haze
 i never saw it coming
 inevitably burned by your carelessness
 you set fire to our "love"
 let it run free
 not worried about the destruction it
 could cause
 as it spread to the ends of the earth

earth
 your touch is soft
 like damp soil on my skin
 the mud beneath my feet
 cradles me as i walk
 i sink into the earth
 covered by flowers and ferns
 slowly dying from a lack
 of attention to their needs
 parched without enough water

water
 you flooded me with emotions
 a feeling that took over my senses
 covered my body
 like a giant wave crashing down
 drowning me
 pushing me farther and farther down
 until i'm much too far from the surface
 to come up for air

air
 i long for the air that you breathe
 i wish you were near me
 you make me feel like i'm floating
 carry me through the sky
 like a bird flying with the breeze
 the wind picks up
 carries me too high in the air
 until suddenly, i'm dropped from a height
 i never intended to reach
 the sudden fall from the high
 was far too much for my heart to bear
 i crashed and it shattered
 never to be fully repaired
 forever damaged by the elements

THE WANDERER-PROSE LOGAN ENDRESS

It was a cold, rainy morning when the stranger came to the tavern. In many ways he appeared to be a ghost when he emerged from the gray drizzle, wrapped in his worn cloak. The stranger entered the tavern soundlessly; the only indication of his presence was the slow drip of water from his sodden cloak.

"Can I get you anything?" asked the barkeep. "A mug of ale and a bowl of stew," came the stranger's reply, "nothing else."

As he sat down, there came a loud shouting from outside the tavern door. The patrons turned towards the door to see what all the commotion was about. The stranger did nothing.

"Make way! Make way!" A cry came from the doorway. "Make way for Caulid, Lord of Healfarr!"

Many groans were issued from the patrons. Among them were comments on this so-called 'lord'.

"Hasn't this arrogant arse-hole have enough by now?"

"'Lord of Healfarr,' more like 'Lord of the Sewers.'"

"What does he want now? All the women in the village?"

There soon came the jingling of horses and the clatter of mail-shod shoes. It was then that 'Lord Caulid' entered the building proper. He was a short, squat man with small, shrewd eyes. He wore a rich fur coat with gold trimming; his fat, stubby fingers were loaded with so much gold and gems it was surprising they didn't just fall off.

"All rise for Lord Caulid!" A soldier cried out from the courtyard in front of the tavern.

Grumbling, all the patrons of the tavern rose and turned toward the disgusting man. Except for one, the stranger in his dark cloak remained sitting, seemingly focused on his meal. His eyes narrowing, Caulid turned and barked an order to his men outside, two ruffians who looked more like bandits than soldiers entered and walked briskly to the stranger's table.

"I said rise for Lord Caulid!" Shouted one of the ruffians.

"Why should I rise for a man who has no power over me?" came the soft voice of the stranger.

The silence was profound. Not even a cricket stirred. The ruffians, mouths agape, turned to Caulid.

BIRTHDAY

JOSHUA CURADA



“Seize him and teach this ignorant fool some manners,” came his wheezing chuckle.

The ruffians nodded and turned towards the stranger.

It was a dark, silent night. Within the forest, not a soul stirred on this moonless night. Not even the owls with their famed sight. Amid this forest stood a clearing. Not much is known about it except for rumors of evil witches and wizards summoning foul creatures there when the moon is high. Those rumors hid the true purpose of the glade. For this glade was a special place to those who are sensitive to the magic of nature. The glade was a portal to a different realm. A realm of fairies, spirits, and magic. A realm of Fey creatures, both good and bad.

At this moment a man stood in front of this glade. He wore a dark, worn cloak over seemingly simple leather armor with a sword strapped to his side. He had neither a pretty nor ugly face, but a fair one overall. His pale hair lay flat despite the wind as he stared towards the middle of the glade.

“And what brings you to this sacred place, hunter?”

The hunter turned towards the melodious voice with no hint of surprise on his face, “I could ask you the same Réalta.”

What came into the hunter’s eyes was a beautiful woman with long, blonde hair, slender arms and a dazzling smile. She wore a simple sleeveless white dress and seemed to almost glow with an inner light. She was an elf.

“Me?” Réalta responded. “I am simply checking in on an old friend who should learn to settle down.”

The hunter grunted and turned back to the glade, his eyes searching.

“They can’t give you any answers you know,” Réalta said softly, “You of all people should know that.”

The hunter’s shoulders drooped, as though tired from supporting a large weight. “I know,” said the hunter.

“Then why are you here?”

“Because I have to try, for them.”

The ruffians’ breath smelled of sour garlic. Mixed with the stench of sweat coming off their clothes, the hunter wrinkled his nose. Did he really have to do this? No, but he had a promise to keep.

“I would stay back if you would like to keep your heads,” came the hunter’s soft words, “or do I have to send you off the hard way?”

The ruffians stilled, their eyes darting about nervously. As one, they glanced back at their employer. Caulid did nothing but gesture them forward with a negligent shake of a heavily jeweled hand. The ruffians nodded and turned back to the hunter drawing crude blades of iron.

“Don’t say I didn’t warn you,” sighed the hunter before drawing his own blade.

The hunter’s blade hummed as it was drawn; the archaic runes down the center lighting up on their own accord.

The first ruffian lunged forward, his blade extended. The hunter parried the poorly aimed strike and spun to his right before slashing his blade across the ruffian’s exposed belly. Before the first had even dropped the second leapt towards the dark figure. With a quick sidestep the hunter easily dodged the blow and returned with one of his own, surgically slicing open the ruffians back with the tip of his sword.

The patrons screamed and hollered at the gruesome display while Caulid turned white as a sheet. The hunter calmly surveyed the tavern before locking eyes with Caulid.

“Do you have anyone else to send at me or do you want to try yourself,” the hunter asked calmly.

Caulid, gibbering in fear, quickly ran out of the tavern and the clatter of a horse was soon heard leaving the tavern. The hunter calmly cleaned his sword on one of the ruffian’s tunics, sheathed it, and turned to the barkeeper.

“Sorry about the mess, I hope this makes up for it,” spoke the hunter, handing over a pouch of gold he had found on one of the ruffians.

The barkeeper took the pouch in trembling hands and looked at the hunter, “Who are you?”

“A wanderer,” the hunter replied shortly before taking his leave.

The barkeeper shuddered at what he saw in the hunter’s eyes and never forgot what he saw there.

The eyes of a man who had lost everything.

“Must you always try?” Réalta whispered softly, “It has been 10 years, most would have moved on by now.”

“Most,” the hunter agreed, “but not me.”

Réalta sighed, “No, not you. You are too stubborn for your own good, Einor.”

Einor watched the glade with tired eyes. Privately, he wondered how long it had been since he had slept. Two days? Maybe three? It all blurred together. He didn’t bother turning as Réalta placed a hand on his arm.

“Even if you did succeed in finding them, you would be no good to them half awake.”

Einor grunted; he didn’t realize she had noticed how tired he was. “Even so, if there is the slightest chance I can reach them...”

Her finger on his lips stopped him.

“I know,” Réalta said simply, “I was there when you came out of that dreadful place. Half dead and alone, and I was there when you left only a week later swearing that you would find them and bring them home.”

Einor closed his eyes against the memory. The jagged black rock jutting out of the ground, a tower spiraling out of the ground and framed by a burning sky. He shuddered, stepping back from Réalta. “I have to know Réalta,” he said shakingly, “I have to know if they are still alive.”

Réalta’s hand on his chest stilled him. Einor could smell the scent of summer air and crushed pine needles that always clung to her.

“I know,” Réalta whispered, “Just promise me that you will return next year.”

“I won’t be able to stay for long,” Einor said, grief choking his words.

“That’s fine,” Réalta whispered, “So long as you come.”

Einor felt Réalta’s arms wrap around his neck before he felt her lips on his. As always, he felt the taste of fresh berries plucked from the ground, and the soft warmth of a hearth-fire at her touch. He wished she could stay, so that they could sit and talk like so many times before.

Einor opened his eyes and looked out across the empty glade where not a soul stirred.

The rain fell as the hunter walked down the cobbled road; his worn cloak pulled close against the cold. He looked out at the empty road from under his hood, watching the rain fall.

“I promise,” Einor whispered. He pulled his cloak closer and continued down the road. Réalta was waiting for him, and he had a long way to go.

Kathleen O'Connell

Ink and Meaning

Professor Kathleen O'Connell and the Living Power of Print

By Raquel Barbalat Editor-in-Chief, *Collage*

In a world dominated by glowing screens and endless scrolling, Professor Kathleen O'Connell reminds us that some things demand patience, touch, and intention.

Her path into printmaking began not with a grand plan, but with a scheduling mishap. In 1997, she tried to enroll in a ceramics class; when it was full, she signed up for printmaking instead. What seemed like a minor detour became a lifelong calling.

"It ticked all my boxes," she recalls. "It was hands-on. It was making art. There were machines involved. I loved it. I knew at the time that I wanted to do this for the rest of my life."

That accidental beginning became a career shaped by curiosity and deep human connection.

Teaching as Creative Partnership

For O'Connell, being both an artist and an educator is not about having two separate identities. They coexist and inform each other. Her students, she says, constantly push her thinking in unexpected directions.

"My students ask me wild questions—things I would never think about," she says, smiling. "It makes me smarter."

She admits she often thinks about her students outside of class, making connections months later, remembering ideas that might help them. What comes through most clearly is her affection for the individuals in front of her.

"I love working with students in that way," she says. "I love individuals."

Patience in an Age of Instant Gratification

When asked what students need most to succeed in printmaking today, her answer is immediate.

"Patience."

She sees the effects of a culture built on instant gratification—where phones deliver constant dopamine hits and fine motor skills are increasingly rare. Even basic hand skills that once felt common now surprise her.

"It used to be that many students had tried sewing before. Now, if one of them has tried sewing, I get excited."

But the skill she finds most endangered is face-to-face communication. She speaks openly about how digital culture and the pandemic have weakened such communication, but she sees growth when students practice.



“Some students tell me, ‘This is the class that I’ve talked the most in.’ And that’s a huge win.”

The Franklin Press: A Living Replica

One of the most distinctive features of MTSU’s print studio is its working replica of a Franklin-style printing press, modeled after early European presses. The press was originally built through a collaborative grant effort involving faculty, MTSU’s cabinet shop, and hand-forged metal components. Some parts were even sourced from a wagon builder.

When administrative changes threatened to place the press in storage, she intervened. She rearranged her studio to make space for it. Today the press is not merely a museum relic. It is a hands-on teaching tool. When students visit and print on it, she sees something shift.

“They understand it in a physical way, in their bodies, in their muscles,” she says. The process is slow, messy, and transformative. She adds, “It’s like you get to interact with history.”

Print in a Digital Era

O’Connell resists the idea that print and digital media are in conflict. To her, they are simply different expressions of the same impulse to communicate.

“Everything is print media in my little brain,” she says. She notes that even scrolling on a phone involves typography, repeated images, and design choices. She compares print to vinyl records and books. Digital formats dominate, but physical objects endure because people crave something tangible and meaningful.

“There’s still space for all the things,” she says. “The book will not die.”

An Invitation to Students

For students curious about printmaking or typography, her advice is direct: “Come talk to me.”

She explains that print is not confined to one discipline. In her view, print media exists everywhere: in books, posters, packaging, digital layouts, and even in the way we scroll through our phones.

At MTSU, students can explore print through studio courses, minors, workshops, and the student-run club Tulip Poplar Press.

But above all, she hopes they gain patience. In a culture built on speed, printmaking demands time, problem-solving, and persistence.

“You’ve got to start somewhere,” she says.

In a year marking the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence of the United States, the presence of a working historical press inside MTSU’s studio carries special significance. For Professor O’Connell, it is not about nostalgia, but continuity.

Printed words once shaped public thought and revolutions. Today, in a classroom where students ask “wild questions” and experiment with ink and type, that tradition is not preserved behind glass; it is still being used.





DINO AT DARK

TRENT WILSON

DUST BOWL BLUES-**LYRICS**

LEIGH RICHMOND

Liquor ran heavy when the creek ran dry
 If you could water crops with a teary eye
 The dust would settle and the flowers would bloom
 But our tears won't solve our dust bowl blues

If thunder would roll 'stead of dust in the skies
 Mommas wouldn't starve and their babies wouldn't whine
 If their daddies hadn't tilled the soil to dirt
 Then the bars'd be shuttered and they'd have work

If you could fill a well with a mourner's song
 Then the dead would rise to a dust-free dawn
 The levies would burst and flood their tombs
 But our cries won't fix our dust bowl blue

THE FLIGHT OF FREEDOM-POETRY NELLY CHUQUICALLATA

On the shores of Paracas, San Martín fell asleep,
 Dreaming of a country with a promise to keep.
 He woke to the sound of wings in the sky,
 As a flock of parihuanas went flying by.

He looked at the horizon, the sea and the sand,
 And saw the future of this beautiful land.
 The birds flew high, so wild and free, The
 perfect colors for everyone to see.

Their white breasts stood for peace and light,
 Their red wings burned with a hero's might.
 In that simple flight, the colors were born,
 A brand new flag for a nation's morn.

Peru is free, bold, and grand,
 Born from the birds of our own land.
 Red for the brave, white for the soul,
 Freedom is finally our only goal.

DIVINE LOSS

TRENT WILSON



THE LIMITS OF MY LOVE-POETRY

SABIRIN ELMI

Just moments ago, I pulled your trembling body into my lap and rocked you back and forth as I whispered, I love you, I love you, I love you into your ear, as you draped me in sadness.
 Before you broke into tears, you told me that you missed our brother, and I who would do anything for you, even die—
 like that night those bullets tore through our house like hail, and how I covered your soap slick body with mine as I bled—
 cannot bring him back from where he sleeps
 in that forest clearing where it is always raining.
 At eight, you are too young to know that death is a slumber you cannot return from. Now, the bright peal of your laughter washes over me as you wobble down the street on your scooter.
 I follow closely behind, your protector as the dusk sky stretches into black night, wishing that the only tears you cried were from skinned knees you let me kiss better.

EXPOSED

JORDAN WILLIAMS

GWEN WETEKAMP

GWEN WETEKAMP

**CASSEROLE-POETRY**

LEIGH RICHMAND

hot chicken fat
 drips down my fingers
 slips into wintered knuckles
 stings with salt and spice

i slice each flimsy breast
 down the center and drop the knife
 shred cooked muscle
 thinking twice about my own

tender flesh tendons and veins
 straining against pale skin of wrists
 —i digress

a pound of shreds pile
 sweep them off the cliff
 a pool of seasoned slurry
 soup, cheese, spice, cream, seed

this is my mother's recipe birthdays,
 Christmas, Sundays favorite-stained
 copy paper black and white grainy
 picture

until i wrote my own hand without-
 measure
 decided mine is better

hers knows no salt no spice over-
 cooked without bite too easy on the
 tongue
 —and yet

mix slurry with broken silicone spat-
 ular an essential ingredient
 ungreased dish nine by thirteen
 just scoop plop swish

brown butter in spent juices com-
 bine with crackers Ziplock crushed
 plop don't pour on top

broken mom's best effort
 every night dirty dishes
 no thanks in the trenches
 her memory won't sour

bake at three-fifty for half an hour

Harvey sits in the corner of his bedroom, watching me with puffy eyes as I put fresh sheets on his bed. At first, I'm not going to tuck them in—after all, he'll probably wet the bed again tomorrow night—but Dad always insisted on military corners when I was a kid. I felt secure as I was falling asleep, face up with my arms pressed to my sides. I knew that I was where I was supposed to be. Instead of doing things my way, I do what he would have done. When I'm finished, I draw back the covers and pat the mattress, looking expectantly at Harvey.

"I don't wanna go back to bed," he pleads.

"I know. But you have school tomorrow."

"I don't wanna go there either."

"Fair enough. I didn't want to go when I was in the third grade," I admit.

"Can I stay home then?" Harvey asks.

"You'll have to talk to Mom about that one, but probably not. Besides, you'll feel better after you sleep. I know it doesn't seem like it, but it's really true."

"No," he mumbles.

"Harvey," I sigh. Harvey, I'm so tired is what I don't say. As the throbbing in my head increases, it takes everything in me not to insist that he goes. His therapist said I shouldn't insist—not at first. Harvey, please," I say instead. "I'm just trying to help you."

Harvey stares at me, breathing through his mouth, his nose is stuffed up from crying.

Slowly, he nods. He crosses the room, gets into bed, and pulls the covers up over himself.

"Goodnight, Harv," I tell him, but as I'm turning to leave, he grabs my sleeve.

"Are you mad at me?" he asks. I get down on one knee beside the bed and take his hand.

I can feel his pulse in his wrist; his heart is beating fast.

"Harvey, you have to try and go to the bathroom next time," I reply.

#

I'm awake at four in the morning, sipping a cup of coffee that's still too hot to drink. In five minutes, I have to start my commute. Sitting across from me at the kitchen table, Mom wears her old, frayed purple robe. Her expression is pensive.

"Do you want me to scramble some eggs for you before you go?" she asks.

"That's okay, Mom," I say, forcing myself to swallow more molten coffee. "Are you going to be fine here by yourself?"

"Yes."

"Call me if you need anything," I add.

Finally, she looks at me. "Alex, please, stop that. I'm your mother. You don't need to take care of me. You just think you do because I've never lived by myself."

I pause. "It's not just you. Harvey needs someone."

She looks down at her hands, picking at her cuticles absently. "You're right about that," she says. "But I know what you really want, that's all."

"I want to do the right thing. I want to help," I reply.

"I was beholden to your father. I guess now I'll be beholden to you."

My stomach clenches. "Harvey needs me," I insist. "I don't know what I'd do if Dad hadn't been around." I stand up, grab my bag and my suit jacket and head for the door.

#

Harvey and I sit at the old picnic table behind the house. Before he started crying, I was trying to teach him heads-up poker. Now, poker is the last thing on our minds.

"Harv," I say, exasperated. "Harv, stop. It was just a joke. I didn't call you an idiot. I said you were acting like one."

Harvey throws his cards down on the table and storms off. I remain stubbornly at the picnic table, my stomach flipping. Fine. No more poker. He'll have it his way.

Later, at dinner, Harvey starts playing with his food halfway through the meal like he always does. He's done it every night for the past month, and Mom hasn't said a single thing about it even though he usually shovels half his plate into the garbage disposal.

His therapist's words flash through my mind. Don't pressure him. He's scared.

But how will he know that his family cares about him if nobody makes him do anything?

The leeway will probably make him feel Dad's

absence even more.

"Harvey, before you go to your room, you have to finish your food. Or at least your vegetables," I say.

"I don't want to."

"I know you don't want to. Wanting has nothing to do with it." Harvey glares at his plate.

"Your Mom made that food for you, Harv. She worked hard on it."

"Just let him go," Mom says.

"Nope," I reply, leaning back in my chair and crossing my arms. "I'm not going to stand for this anymore. Someone's got to show him that the whole world doesn't just grind to a stop because he's upset."

Harvey gets red in the face. "I'm just not hungry," he whispers.

"You were hungry enough for the mac and cheese," I counter.

"And now, he's full," Mom says.

I grind my teeth. "Harvey, you have an obligation to eat the food your mother makes for you. Do you know what an obligation is?"

"Something you have to do."

"Exactly. So eat your vegetables."

"Is that what I am?" Harvey asks.

"What?"

"Am I an obligation?" he says, voice barely louder than a whisper. Instantly, I turn to Mom.

"What have you been saying to him?" I ask.

"Nothing."

I close my eyes and purse my lips. Having centered myself, I remind Harvey, "Didn't you say you want to play basketball next year? Eating your vegetables will make you get taller."

"Tall like you?" he asks in a small voice.

"Maybe taller."

"I don't wanna grow at all if I end up anything like you," he says, his eyes filling with tears in that very immediate way that only happens when you're eight. "Or Dad!" he shouts.

Seeming horrified by his own words, he snatches his plate and leaves the table.

I stare after him. My head hurts worse than it has all month.

#

I moved all of Dad's stuff out to the garage after he died so Harvey wouldn't have to look at it. Ever since, I've been sorting through it, trying to decide what's important enough to keep, and what Mom would never be able to get rid of on her own.

All of the clothes, certainly, can be donated, but not his old Navy uniforms or his medals, and especially not the one they sent us three weeks ago. That one stays on the top shelf of the bookcase by the stairs, out of sight until Harvey is old enough and tall enough to see it. Of course, his getting taller is dependent on if I can get him to eat his vegetables again, but that's tomorrow's problem.

Sorting out Dad's things shouldn't be a job that has taken as long as it has, but it's hard for me, too. I spend every night pouring over his things. His books. His CDs. He cared a lot for science fiction and classic rock. He kept meticulous journals in which he never wrote anything illicit, only the contents of his day. Awake at six. Shower at seven. Et cetera.

The door creaks open. Mom stands in the frame.

"I can't let this go on," she says as she steps down, still wearing her frayed purple robe. She walks past me to Dad's work bench, free of sawdust ever since I swept it all away. She bends down and reaches under it, retrieving a black shoebox. "This is where I put all the important things before you could decide what they meant to me."

I hold my breath as she sits down on the concrete beside me. She removes the lid of the box and sets it down. "Alex, in case you think so, I'm not mad at you. Your father was a lot like you. He believed in doing things the right way, which is why there is a part of him you never knew."

"What do you mean?"

She pulls out a small, brass instrument. "Well, for one thing, he played the harmonica."

"He did?"

"But only when he got stoned."

"He what?" I demand.

"Well, sure he did, back before he joined the Navy. All the time. He was just a kid. Your age." I stare at her, but she calmly continues. "And another thing is, before he had the Civic, he

drove a Dodge Demon—and got his license revoked for a speed contest." As if to prove it, she rustles around in the box until she finds a polaroid picture of Dad standing proudly beside a cherry-red Dodge. "That was before I met him. He was beginning to straighten himself out by then."

She takes a few more things out of the box.

"I think the thing he was most ashamed of himself for was never graduating high school," she says. "When I got pregnant with you—which was, by the way, a few months before we got married—he started working on his GED. This is what they gave him when he got it."

She hands me a diploma with his name on it and the date. Doing rough calculations in my head, I realize he was about my age when he graduated.

"Getting a GED instead of a high school diploma is nothing to be ashamed of," I murmur. "He always thought it was," she replies. "That's why he never told you any of this. He wanted to set a good example." "He did. He was great."

"Your father wasn't perfect. You still thought he was when he died last month. Now, you're taking over for him with Harvey. You're trying to be perfect."

"Harvey needs—"

"His brother," she interrupts me. "I always thought it was such a shame that your Dad felt like nobody could really know him and love him at the same time. I don't want you to do that to yourself, and I don't want you to make Harvey feel like he needs to do that, either. Right now, all he really needs is some understanding. He's eight years old and his Dad just died. Of course he only wants to eat the foods that taste good. Of course he doesn't want to get out of bed in the middle of the night to go to the bathroom. He's afraid of the dark, and his protector is gone."

"I know all of that. I know. But the reason I had any success at all is because Dad pushed me," I protest.

"Well, maybe. But do you really want that for Harvey? Do you really want him to win because he thinks it's the only way to impress you?" she asks.

#

Later, as I'm walking down the dark hallway to go to bed, I hear sniffing from the door of Harvey's room. I double back and knock on the frame.

"Harv?" I ask.

"Go away," he says. "I'm fine."

I open the door and flick on the lights. Tears streaming from his face, Harvey is struggling to pull a fresh fitted sheet over the bare mattress of his bed. When he looks at me, his sobbing becomes uncontrollable.

"Harvey."

"I said go away!" he shouts.

"Harvey, let me help."

He shakes his head, but I walk over to the bed and lift the mattress for him so he can get the fitted sheet over the corners. Then, I help him with the top sheet, and finally, we pull the cover over the bed.

"How do you do the corners?" he snaps.

"What?"

"Like Dad used to do."

Military corners. I shake my head. "Harvey, it doesn't matter. You don't have to do it like that."

"You always do."

"That doesn't matter either. How do you like your bed to be made?" I ask.

"Well, like this," he says sullenly. "It's too tight when it's all tucked in."

I nod carefully. "Then, you don't have to do it like that again."

"I guess you hate me because I messed up again. I tried to fix it before you found out."

His words are like a punch to the stomach. I get down on my knees beside him. "Harvey, I could never hate you."

"I tried to fix it," he says again like he doesn't believe me.

I pull him into a bear hug, my eyes stinging. "I know. It's okay. It would be okay even if you didn't try to fix it. I love you, Harvey. I don't care."

PROSE WINNER

FIRST-WOMAN DRESS-POETRY

LINDA-RAVEN WOODS

(Note: In many indigenous American tribes, a girl would traditionally be gifted a beautiful buckskin dress after her first menses. The name of this dress, symbolically representing her arrival to womanhood, translated in English to "First-Woman Dress.")

I never had a First-Woman dress,
 never wore firestone blue,
 never painted vermilion
 down the part of my hair
 nor painted a circle on my cheek,
 never took a boy beneath a blanket,
 never wore a chastity rope between my legs,
 never failed to look a man in the eye
 just because he is a man,
 never thought the sun was a god.

SELF PORTRAIT

FAITH RODRIGUEZ

**ROCK 'N' ROLL WIDOW-POETRY**

LINDA-RAVEN WOODS

A moment at the tombstone of Gary Rossington,
 a little gold car pulls up
 and she steps out—it's her,
 a tiny, frail shadow in black
 and the wild hair that billows
 and her body a willow
 that has bent a few times
 too many.

She doesn't walk; she stumbles
 And clutches her daughter for strength
 But I see my tour guide's eyes light up
 Because he's remembering
 Forty years ago, of a sudden—

"Well, I'll be. Look who's here. Dale—"

And I'm remembering a voice, her voice—
 Big as that wind she was riding to find her way to him—
 How that voice swept a summer away
 When I was seventeen
 How it lifted, carried me
 But her hand, tinier than mine, trembles now in my grasp
 And her back bows in the middle
 A warped center beam that no longer

Supports like it should
 And she hugs my tour guide who is an old friend
 And with another gesture waves him off,
 Hasn't got time for his remunerations
 On this Sunday when all she'd sought was a little
 Peace and solitude with her husband, her soul mate

The one with whom she'd shared a soap opera
 Bigger than Daisy Jones & The Six,

Bigger than Lindsey & Stevie.

"All that is past," I heard her say, in that way that leaves no
 room for arguing the matter.

Her daughter Annie, quicker now, younger and nimbler,
 Sprays down her father's tomb with Windex,
 Polishes and spiffs.

I say it's a beautiful headstone and Annie says yes, it took
 us forever to get it

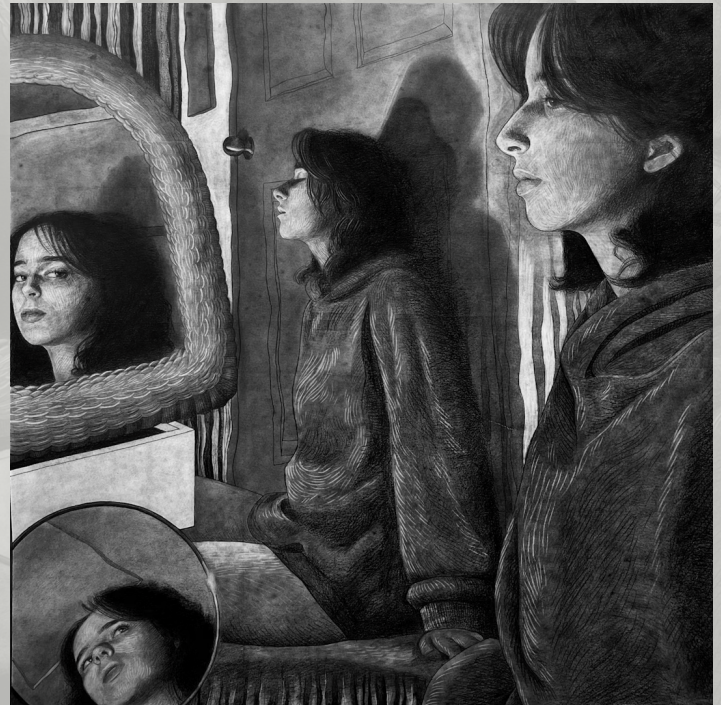
And when we leave, my last sight of Annie's mother is

A stick figure in black
 Who kneels at her own grave

The side where her name and birthdate are etched
 But only a blank space after the hyphen
 Waiting to be filled.

TUESDAY-POETRY**KIRSTIE FRANK**

I am in the fish tank.
 The fish are on the table.
 They don't know that I can see them
 flopping, flailing,
 searching for the water
 they can't reach.
 I'm not even
 a passing thought in their minds,
 if they know I'm here
 at all.
 To me, everything is magnified,
 to them
 so much smaller than usual.
 Even as I drown
 I want to scoop them up
 and drop them into the tank
 so that their gills may
 be free from deprivation,
 the struggle may end,
 the suffocation, release.
 I think we all should
 feel free to breathe easy.
 How are we both
 inside and out
 of what we need
 to achieve that?

**I THINK THEREFORE WE ARE****RAE MEDLOCK****I HAVE A QUESTION-POERTY****RAE MEDLOCK**

I have a question...

When you look around your room do you see me in every
 picture every shelf, every poster

every decision?

Do I haunt or comfort?

When you think of me,

is it solace you look for?

The tension sits heavy

like the breath I felt from your lips Slightly unpleasant,
 but easy

familiar, remedial, appeasing

If I break the walls that protect you

and inhabit the ones that surround you,

Would you feel safe?

**BRUCE AND THE END****MIA DEACON**

SERVIAM-POETRY

SABIRIN ELMI

Hooyo and I drive home from the masjid on the forsaken, snaking lanes of the highway. Our bones aching from scrubbing the white tiled floors caked with mud until they gleamed with Pinesol. From working the vacuum up and down the sprawling expanse of the men's side with its lofty ceilings, until the belly of the vacuum filled with a mountain of red-carpet dust. In the driver's seat, her face shrouded in shadows, hooyo tells me she fears I am straying from Allah, from the righteous path. Summer is waning, and I am still drowning in this sadness, this grief. She is worried that I will not try to swim to shore, my lungs waterlogged, my pulse faint but still beating a desperate drum tattoo against my wrist, my neck. She tells me that hardship is a gift from Allah and to have sabr. To turn back to Allah and to seek the comfort of his mercy. I want to tell her my suffering is not holy. That it does not purify me. That perhaps when her stomach swelled with the breath of life, and she named me Sabirin, she had destined me for a life of enduring struggle after struggle without complaint. A life of biting my blood coated tongue. Hooyo tells me she is sorry for the years she forged me into a daughter with her fists. You can pretend I am not your mother, she pleads. You can unfetter yourself from this life, from me. I want to laugh, to tell hooyo: doesn't she know daughters can never leave? I am in the passenger seat watching the black stretch of asphalt unfurl over Tennessee hills, our car's headlights, two suns carving through the night, because I cannot let hooyo suffer alone. We are exhausted to the marrow, expended from making Allah's house a home, three nights a week, to send money back home to Somalia. To my ayeeyo who carted my hooyo off to be a maid at the age of five. Hooyo is not free from her mother, who is an ocean away. Can't she see that I will never be free because I am her daughter? Hasn't she learned that daughters do not belong to themselves?

**TRUE BELIEVER**

SIERRA ROBERTSON

GOLDEN

SHANIA PANNELL



“ELI”-DOCUMENTARY

THOMAS EDWARDS



“ELI”

VIDEO WINNER

“I don’t think these years were wasted. I think it will be okay..”

...

“It will be OK”

END



THE ORANGE HOUSE-CREATIVE NON-FICTION

KIRSTIE FRANK

I. 13

I met you with rose colored glasses,
 you met me with tunnel vision.
 You were my older brother's friend, 18 and charming,
 and you paid attention to me.
 I still remember the first time I touched your hand.
 Electric shock through me,
 you let me paint your fingernails.
 It was innocent and messy.
 Me and the girls giggled when you left.
 After that, your gaze would always linger
 a little longer on me.
 I still have the handmade card
 you made for my birthday.
 What does that say about me?
 When you got me alone,
 you were a different person.
 You were gentle, deliberate—
 a far cry from the boisterous,
 chaotic energy you liked to present.
 I thought you could be
 everything I ever dreamed of.
 Sweet. Caring. Emotional.
 Why would you ever want me?

II. 14

It started once we moved away.
 You were running away from something
 and I was desperate for someone to fix.
 The wool you wore barely covered
 your bloody maw,
 but you paraded around like a wounded thing.
 You needed saving;
 your girlfriend
 couldn't help you like I could.
 Callous and cruel,
 she guided with a spiteful hand;
 I was patient.
 I was kind.
 You would wait.
 On Valentine's Day, I awoke,
 your face inches from mine in the dark,
 thorny rose offered in your hand.
 You rushed off before
 I blushed the bashful scarlet of my flower.
 I would bleed the same shade.

III. 15

Your poetry was purple
 so I paid no mind to your blues
 and reds.
 Lilac,
 lavender,

plum—
 your colors bled
 as you blurred the lines
 between brother and lover.
 You made me forget
 you were taken;
 I welcomed your scrutiny.
 You flirted and my colors—
 antique—
 gave yours a missing depth.
 I still remember how you tasted
 the first time you kissed me,
 a sourness you tried too hard
 to mask.
 Months after gorging yourself
 on the cake you had,
 you left her. You told me
 she lost it.
 I wonder which part
 set her off the most.
 I hate that you gave me the stars;
 I have since renamed your constellation.
 Things moved quickly after that.
 You would violate me in the room
 next to where my father slept.
 You would do all the things
 my consent could never reach,
 had I even the words for it.
 I told myself it was what I wanted
 because I cared about you.
 That you would never hurt me.
 You would never stop hurting me.

IV. 16

I'm not exactly sure when you shrugged your woolen wares.
 It happened in the dead of night,
 sight compromised.
 You were depraved, and my tenderness,
 my submission only made you worse.
 Your crocodile tears won your place in my bed.
 My family housed a predator,
 locked me in the same cage as prey.
 You muzzled me.
 Shock collared me.
 You guided my hand
 and scolded me
 when you placed it in the fire.
 You were the eagle
 feasting every day on my liver
 offering scraps to your friends.
 My body was your landfill,
 your playground.

**GROWING PAINS**

ARLO KEPLER

A rec room
 a wreck room
 a wrecked room.
 V. 17
 When your mind became too much
 you escaped in every method you knew
 every chance you got.
 I was never so lucky.
 My thoughts were a prison that kept me shackled
 to you as you self-destructed.
 I often wished to implode
 like a dying star,
 matter scattering in the aftermath.
 To be consumed in the vacuum,
 everything and nothing all at once.
 Could you still find me through infinity?
 Would you still try?
 Our body purged you like a cancerous growth.
 I felt the absence, the loose skin
 like the rapid shedding of dead weight.
 You could never leave quietly though.
 Bull in a china shop
 meet porcelain doll.
 In your death throes,
 your shockwaves radiated
 throughout my vulnerable
 sleeping frame.
 You hardly tried to hide your brutality.
 After three years
 I'd sucked
 all the candy coating
 off your vicious, bitter husk.
 How was I left to clean up
 the damage of your earthquake?
 To fish out that fishhook
 you pierced me with as I slipped through your fingers.
 To scrub the prints
 you branded on my skin.
 Steel wool could never
 re-surface the flesh you tainted.
 When I left you,
 you approached, again,
 like a wounded animal.
 Harmless.
 Repentant.
 I let you try a bite
 of fledgling flesh
 like you'd always wanted.
 Starving, you salivated
 soaking me in putrid spit,
 pushing past the dinner line.
 I don't think this is going to work.
 No. Stop.

Relax. Just relax.
 My garden bed was soiled and rotten,
 riddled with weeds and black flies
 before I ever had the chance
 to plant the rose you offered me.
 VI. 18
 Distance dispersed the mirage.
 I found others,
 rabbits escaped from wolf packs,
 field mice evading birds of prey.
 The wounds were always the same.
 Your talons clutched my gushing heart
 so I let the beating fade.
 I took away your power.
 I escaped your control.
 A fire blazed in me
 that threatened to burn
 that ugly orange house to the ground.
 I forbade you access.
 I would wear the old sheep's clothing you left behind.
 VII. 24
 I dreamt of the house you raped me in.
 Across the street, your family's home
 teal and purple;
 the colors poignant
 now that I wear their ribbons.
 The windows of the orange house were huge,
 the natural light trickled in like honey dripping from the sky.
 One time, when I was still 17
 you told me to lie there—where the sun streamed in—
 so that you could take pictures of my naked body.
 In the room where it happened,
 hardened candle wax clung to a ratty bed sheet,
 forever a reminder of the twisted ways
 you tried to burn me.
 You nicked my skin with a blade
 as if I hadn't already
 sliced myself up enough to belong to you.
 I was ashamed of the thrill
 as tiny beads of blood
 pooled in the knife's path
 Is that why I hate orange so much?
 Would I feel empowered now,
 free of your tether,
 if I returned to the house you broke me in?
 I have plucked out the thorns,
 sewn up the skin tattered by your sharp teeth.
 My skin has healed up nicely,
 barely-there scars a tender reminder
 of the softness you couldn't steal from me.
 I am a distant star in the sky you can't see.
 I am Prometheus released.

CAIRO, ILLINOIS KATHRINE NARRELL



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ISSN 2470-3451 (print)

ISSN 2470-3494 (online)

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Thank you for taking this in.

-Lead Designer



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COLLAGE: A JOURNAL OF CREATIVE EXPRESSION
SPRING 2026

Made with intention at
Middle Tennessee State University

Printed by MTSU Blueprint
mtsu.edu/blueprint

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MTSU Honors College

