

OLSE



# **PULSE**

The Literary Magazine  
of Lamar University-Beaumont  
Volume XXXVII, Number 1  
Spring 1993

Department of English and Foreign Languages  
Lamar University-Beaumont  
Beaumont, Texas

**Editor**  
**Assistant Editor**  
**Cover Artist**

Vic Odegar  
Brie McCain  
Tracy Silverberg

**Faculty Advisors**

R.S. Gwynn  
Jim Sanderson

**Department Chair**

Tim Summerlin

**Judges**

Carolyn Comeaux  
Lloyd Daigrepoint  
Edwin Duncan  
C. Renee Field

Andrew Preslar  
Dale Priest  
Sallye Sheppard  
Gwen Whitehead

We wish to express our most sincere thanks to

**Eleanor Perlstein Weinbaum**

for her continued generous support  
of *Pulse* and the liberal arts of Lamar University.

## Table of Contents

### Poetry

Michele R. Nunez	Possum Dream	7
Allison Quinn	Chicory	8
Allison Quinn	Observation of the Skink	9
Erin Kahla	The Barn	10
Kenesaw L. Bernsen, Jr.	Vanquished	10
Jody Pate	Way Up In the No-Pull of the Air	11
Allison Quinn	The Starry Night	23
Erin Kahla	Skin	24
Allison Quinn	Amulets	24
Jody Pate	A Parable	25
Jody Pate	Winter Town	26
Kevin Poston	[The Chinese Character Ming]	34
Erin Kahla	Storm	35
Brandy Copley	Lifeguard	35
Brandy Copley	Daphne	36
Allison Quinn	Dorothy	37
Erin Kahla	Nursery Rhymes	41
Vic Odegar	Sacraments	42
Catherine Preslar	Resonant Light	43
Vic Odegar	Grooming	44
Jody Pate	One Thing I Have Never Seen	53
Jody Pate	Another Thing I Have Never Seen	53
Catherine Preslar	Ice Age	54
Margaret Hynes	Offspring	55

### Fiction

Mark Bankston	Hannah, Jonathan and the Fish	12
Allison Quinn	The Proverbial Reward	27
Vic Odegar	The Convenience Store Clerk's Apprentice	45

### Nonfiction

Catherine Preslar	The Musical Past	38
Allison Quinn	The Cinderella Myth in <i>My Antonia</i>	56

### Awards

<b>Eleanor Poetry Award</b> for best poem overall Michele R. Nunez "Possum Dream"
<b>de Schweinitz Poetry Award</b> for best poem in open form Kevin Poston "[The Chinese Character Ming]"
<b>Barnes Poetry Award</b> for best poem in traditional form Allison Quinn "The Starry Night"
<b>Rowe Poetry Award</b> chosen by the <i>Pulse</i> editors Allison Quinn "Observation of the Skink"
<b>Pulse Essay Award</b> for best essay Catherine Preslar "The Musical Past"
<b>Pulse Fiction Award</b> for best short story Mark Bankston "Hannah, Jonathan and the Fish"
<b>Rowe Critical Paper Award</b> for best critical paper by an undergraduate Allison Quinn "The Cinderella Myth in <i>My Antonia</i> "

*Eleanor Poetry Award*

**Possum Dream**

the possum passes every spring under the light of the rainmoon ring  
she wanders slowly making March her Southern Capistrano  
she sifts through soil beneath my pines and spring she stirs in me  
she speaks to me within my sleep and sniffs about my dream

the possum passes every spring and so the dogs will sing  
the cats recoil with backs that arch and then she wakens me  
possum star tracks beckon me to join her in her nightly feast  
to capture words for what I feel though she knows not of me

the possum passes every spring and sets my beagle singing  
she stops to sniff at roots and grubs, contemplating fatter bugs  
and wallowing now in eating bliss her fullness sings to me  
still she stumbles on to seek more pleasure on her nocturnal constitutional  
as silent as the felines, mocking stupid canines  
she fills with bugs and berries, she heads for home and sleep

the possum passes every spring and brings me one sweet moment  
to couple with the fertile night and touch the birth of spring  
she stirs again a spring in me where I wander much like she  
to seek the songs to fill my soul, to eat up images I need  
to fill my heart with poetry until I also sate on spring  
so fed and full I now stumble to my home and sleep

under the light of the rainmoon ring the possum passes every spring  
she slips inside my sleepyhead and frees the feelings there  
soon we share a lullaby, two southern soul sopranos  
while dogs, bewildered, nod to sleep; suspicious felines keep their feet  
and dim within my peaceful sleep the fleeting furry image of  
a waddling ball with feet sneaks into my dream

**Michele R. Nunez**  
**Speech Language Pathology, GS**

## Chicory

You misunderstood species.  
A wayside weed, coffee substitute, superb salad.  
Do you cleanse the blood, bind the bowels,  
Cure kidney stones, jaundice?  
Were you Queen Elizabeth's only nourishment  
on her death bed  
you succory broth of royalty?

You mysterious vegetation.  
A powerful plant in the twilight world of folklore, magic.  
Do you render your possessor invisible, or open locked boxes  
when your leaf touches the lock?  
But only if you are cut in silence, on St. James' Day,  
with a golden knife?  
Would I die if I spoke?

You wild cultivar.  
Your texture tender, a forced winter delicacy.  
Do you taste ethereal, bitter, nutty, tangy, sharp?  
A treat for a jaded palate?  
With your crisp, pale, wispy leaves, do I smile with pleasure?  
Are you paradise?  
Must I acquire the taste?

Allison Quinn  
English, SR

## Rowe Poetry Award

### Observation of the Skink

Beneath dank rocks and woodland debris  
The skink lies slippery in wait,  
His obsidian skin waxing.

Blue racer stripes  
Sliding head to tail, twitching -- decal  
The sleekest of serpents.

Among moist sassafras roots and leaves  
He darts through warm narrow burrows,  
Along his speedway slithering.

Electric-arc  
Warning mealworms and beetles -- beware  
The lone lightning lizard.

Into a saturated sweetgum  
The sinuous creature retreats,  
Braking with suction toes and feet.

Pit-stop tank up  
Soaking in sap and rainwater -- fuels  
The cold-blooded cruiser.

Allison Quinn  
English, SR

## The Barn

abandoned  
red curls of paint  
blistering  
the sagging door

and inside  
dense dark thickens  
with cobwebs  
old threads of dust

underfoot  
hay crackles soft  
startling mice  
blind men scattering

nostrils burn  
with manure, oak  
rotted feed  
dried up leather

Erin Kahla  
English, JR

## Vanquished

autumn does not  
yield  
but sees the  
game  
to end

his pieces taken  
one  
then one  
as color blaze

fades  
into winter's  
brooding restful  
grey

her body  
warmed  
heart flames

dance  
and embers  
flicker  
close to the  
earth....

Kenesaw L. Bernsen, Jr.  
Psychology, PB

## Way Up In the No-Pull of the Air

the reason to know involves  
a reason to destroy. the power  
to confuse offers surety. of.

see a forest.  
in the trees scream upward  
with soundless boundries  
to light. place a child in  
the forest. turn out the lights.  
the slow witch-hunt of shadows  
fill him, the dark pries at his eyes.  
his pupils busily replace.  
see the black sky in mortal swinging.

leap him around in the tops  
of trees, bouncing harshly  
on thin leaves thin as halved  
apple peels above unallowed nothing.  
all aspect of tree is gone.  
all vision of ground is gone.  
all thought of autumn, falling is gone.

life is defined by opposition.  
endless life is a self contained  
mosquito breeder. you are a stand  
over. inhale a nest of yellowjackets, say,  
let them whelp your lungs.

we plead with the cruel authors  
for books with softer meanings.

Jody Pate  
English, JR

## Hannah, Jonathan and the Fish

Hannah keeps things to herself, until she paints and she lets it all hang out. Her husband Jonathan is outgoing and that quality has made him a successful businessman and deacon in the church. He's also an eccentric. Jonathan does things like skydiving, white-water rafting, shooting black bears. He has done it all and now it's all boring to him and he is looking for a new thrill. Lately, he has been talking about swimming with sharks, live, in the ocean. He has dared me to go with him, since I've done some diving in the past and Hannah thinks he's crazy most of the time, but she wouldn't tell him that to his face. I don't think she has told him anything in the past seven years, and if she has, I doubt if he has listened. Jonathan never listens to what you say to him because he's always thinking of what he's going to say next. Whenever I try to beg off from going down to Padre Island with him and swimming with sharks in the open water, he manages to fire away at me with challenges and dares and pleas, so rapid it sounds like the sanest thing in the world, and he has almost talked me into doing it.

Hannah hardly ever tells me anything either, at least not straight out, but I hear her. I know what she's saying. She and I have the same language. We met at the museum where I work as a docent and sometimes she gets to hang her paintings there, which can be pretty good, and she even sells some of them. The people who buy her paintings are not bluebloods, not descended from old southern families, but new-money people who do what they think rich folk do with money and they buy art. I don't care one way or the other. The museum is sparkling, its wood floors varnished and walls white, smelling of paint, like crisp, freshly-inked bills, and I think, in some ways, I am more in love with the museum itself than with the art.

Those new-money people like to have showings, where they can meet the artist and mingle with one another, drink martinis and look at the pictures, the sculptures. For some reason, this small southern city, born of oil and lust, has a preponderance of artists, most of surprisingly high quality, some of them nationally renowned. And when they are all busy working on new projects, the neo-wealthy will foot the bill to bring in someone from out of town, say Houston or Austin, sometimes even farther away than that. Lucky for them, Hannah has just finished a set of paintings, and tonight there will be a showing, and perhaps she and I will be able to look at each other eye for eye and talk about what happened between us last week.

Everyone has come for the showing, the whole neo-wealthy crowd,

and Hannah and Jonathan have arrived, too. I'm keeping a low profile, hiding really, thinking of what there is to say to a friend I know so well and who suddenly is like a stranger to me. It's a Saturday night and there is a big enough crowd to disappear into for awhile, but after only a half hour, Jonathan spots me and approaches.

"Hello, lovely," he says, arms outstretched. Jonathan sneaks a kiss near the lips as I'm accepting his hug. "How's life been treating you? We haven't seen you in days."

"I know. I've been pretty busy," I tell him.

"Hannah's been searching all over for you. Let me call her over here." He turns toward the opposite end of the room and shouts his wife's name.

"Jonathan," I start to protest. "Don't make a scene."

"Hannah, come see who I've found."

Hannah and I cross glances and I can't conceal a smile as she comes forward, moving through the crowd like something liquid. She's dressed fashionably, as always, in jeans, a white cotton T-shirt, and a lipstick red blazer, minimal jewelry, minimal make-up, not even trying to be Jonathan's perfect little Junior Leaguer. It wouldn't suit her, of course.

She leans in, says hi, and presses her cheek to mine and, perfunctorily, "I love your outfit," she says.

"Yours, too," I answer and watch her face for notable signs that things are either back to normal or worse than before. No eye contact, in fact, an avoidance of it. An immediate clutch at Jonathan's elbow and then a question, directed at him. "Did you tell her the good news?"

"What good news?"

"About the offer."

Jonathan turns to me. "It's not all that good."

"What is it?" I ask him.

"I've been asked to oversee some missionary work in South America."

"You don't sound very enthusiastic about it."

Jonathan sips his martini, purses his lips and shakes his head. "I've never done any of that kind of work out of the country before."

Hannah's eyes have been on her husband all this while, but she turns to me to ask, "When's the last time you heard such modesty?"

Jonathan interrupts, "I've got some better news for you, Ana."

"What's that?"

"I've arranged for us to go down to Padre this weekend. I know of a fellow down there, a fisherman, who says he'll take us out to see the sharks. You game?"

"I don't know, Jonathan."

"C'mon, now," he says. "You can't leave me on the hook all by my



lonesome. This woman has zero sense of adventure, and I've got to have a buddy to dive with."

Judging by her expression, Hannah is miffed. She finally looks me in the eyes, with penetration, and says, "You don't have to do anything you don't want to do. Don't let him talk you into it."

"I think she wants to," Jonathan argues. "How about it, Ana?"

"Anastasia," Hannah says, almost scolding.

My answer sticks in my throat, my glance darting back and forth to him, to her. I'm not sure what to answer and I feel somewhat guilty for taking pleasure in coming between the two of them. At last, I declare, feeling uplifted, "Why not?"

Jonathan celebrates and Hannah glares at me. She is revealing too much in her expression, more than, I think, she realizes.

Although the maps all say otherwise, Riverport is not part of Texas; it is of the Deep South, of swamplands and pine forests, sweltering climates, sultry nights, cotton. It is not, however, of the Old South; the town was established nearly thirty years after the end of the War, which is why there is very little old money. You have to drive a long way west of Riverport before you're really in arid, wild Texas, land of bluebonnets, plains that expand to the horizon, longhorns, desert, lawlessness. Like other places along the Southern Coast, the Gulf is brown where Riverport is, near the Louisiana border, murky with mud from the Mississippi, and the water only begins to clear once you're well beyond Galveston. When you reach Padre Island, it's beautiful. To get there, Jonathan is taking Highway 35 into Corpus Christi, and we'll go down to Padre from there.

It's good to be away from Riverport for awhile, but the trip otherwise has not been a pleasant one. I had the distinct impression when Jonathan and Hannah picked me up this morning in his Mustang convertible that there had been some gnashing of teeth over this journey and all day the feeling among us has seemed tense, Jonathan feigning cheerfulness toward me, Hannah listening to a portable disc player, hardly speaking. I'm just sitting in the back seat, my hair tied in a pony tail to keep it from blowing in my face, trying to read O'Connor. Anyhow, as we're reaching Corpus Christi, the clouds begin to darken and roll.

Jonathan pulls over to the shoulder of the road. "Better raise the top. Looks like a downpour," he says and hits a button that puts the roof back on the car. He gets out and secures it.

Hannah removes her headphones and takes off her sunglasses. "Y'all might as well forget about diving this weekend," Hannah says.

"You know what the weather's like in Texas. Wait five minutes; it'll

change." Jonathan gets back behind the wheel and starts to merge back onto the blacktop.

"You know what I told you this morning," Hannah argues. "The forecast is calling for rain all weekend."

"Lord knows you can always count on weathermen to be right."

Hannah turns to look at me. "Will you help me talk some sense into him? You can't go diving with the weather bad."

I can hear the concern in her voice, sincere, and I have to wonder who it is for, me or him? Probably both of us. Hannah's charity is deep as any abyss but not empty like that. It's really a thrill to hear her sound that way again, after what happened, which is the thing, I'm sure she feels, we dare not discuss. Not wanting to take sides this time, I cop out and answer, "Let's wait till tomorrow to see what the weather's going to do."

Hannah twists back around and low, almost to herself, she says, "I'm never going to forgive you two for putting me through this."

The next morning it's overcast and drizzling, but Jonathan has dragged us out to the marina anyway to find the fisherman who is supposed to take us out to find sharks. Hannah's mood matches the weather. Jonathan, as expected, can barely contain himself, reminding me of whenever someone is trying to turn me onto some "hot" new artist they've just discovered and they're so full of hype I just know I'm going to be disappointed. Besides that, I'm starting to feel a little uneasy about this whole idea, and as we're walking around the marina, carrying all our diving gear and looking for the boat, *The Last Tango*, I keep expecting to wind up face to face with Robert Shaw.

What we end up with, however, couldn't be further from my preconceived notions. The captain of *The Last Tango* is a slight man, narrow in every way, his build, his eyes, his mouth, everything. It's hard to tell how old he is because his face is freckled and wrinkled from spending so much time in the sun, and I suppose he could be much younger than fifty years old, which is what I have guessed him to be. His name, Jonathan informs us, is Nystrom, and he is originally from Finland. Nystrom's fishing boat, which Jonathan tells us has its name because in Finland the tango is a kind of religion, looks as slight as he is; it's narrow too and weighted down by what can only be a small shark cage, disassembled, resting on the starboard side. An unpleasant pressure pushes against my insides as Nystrom jumps from the boat to the dock.

After introductions go around, Captain Nystrom says, while rubbing his thin, freckled hands together, "Not a good day to go out."

"Thank God someone has some sense," Hannah blurts out.

Jonathan hitches up his gear. He is not deterred. "The weather's going to clear up. You can bet on it."

"No good for what you want to do," Nystrom tells Jonathan, his voice tinged with the Scandinavian accent. "The water is to be very rough today."

"I'm paying you a lot of money for this trip, friend," Jonathan says in a commanding tone. "Now we're going today."

Nystrom seems to be at a loss of how to counter Jonathan, who stands almost a foot taller. "Not a good idea. It can take a very long time to bring the sharks, hours, and the water is to be very rough. A storm is coming."

"Listen to him, Jonathan," Hannah says. "He's right."

Jonathan drops his gear to the dock and slouches, glaring at the small Finnish man. After a few tense seconds, he approaches Nystrom, puts an arm across his back and leads him away from Hannah and me. The two of us exchange a glance, then turn to watch Jonathan give Captain Nystrom "the treatment," as Hannah calls it. She claims to have seen him use it on countless occasions before, giving it to business associates or small-time politicians at cocktail parties and church. The few times I've seen him use the treatment have been at showings at the museum. It is failsafe. An arm around the shoulders, the head bowed forward, a variety of hand gestures, a cocky tone of voice, all intended to intimidate the hell out of the receiver. Hannah thinks he picked it up from watching film of LBJ. A couple of minutes later, Jonathan reaches into his pocket, pulls out two bills and hands them to Nystrom. The captain lowers his chin and jumps back onto the boat, while Jonathan walks back to us and picks up his gear. "That takes care of that," he tells us.

"You're not serious," Hannah says. "This is too dangerous."

"Stay if you want to. What about you?" he asks me.

Caught in the middle again, I really don't know how to respond. Hannah is looking at me, daring me to take his side again. "Maybe we shouldn't," I suggest.

"Fine. Stay here and babysit her," Jonathan says and turns away.

"No, you don't," Hannah says, following her husband. "If you're so hellbent on getting yourself killed, then I'm going to be there."

"Suit yourself," Jonathan tells her, then tosses his gear to a member of *The Last Tango's* crew. I grab my stuff and do likewise, then we each take turns jumping onto the boat. In no time, Captain Nystrom orders his first mate to steer us away from the marina and out into the Gulf.

\* \* \*

We've been waiting for hours for the sharks to come and it has been raining off and on all day. In between showers, the first mate has been

scooping out a chum line of fish bits and blood, setting pieces of meat on lines as bait, and the smell and the motion of the water, which is rough as Nystrom warned, is making us all ill, even Nystrom, I think, although he tries not to let it show. Finally, the rain stops completely and we all go back on deck, Jonathan and Nystrom teaming to ready the shark cage and check the diving gear, Hannah and I climbing up to the bridge. It's almost like we don't have anything in common anymore, except what happened, and neither one of us seems to want to bring up that subject. We stand there without speaking a word for several minutes, Hannah gazing out at the Gulf, me pretending to be interested in the activities below us. I search my thoughts to find some worthy thing to talk about, some crack to get through, until watching Jonathan, shirtless, the muscles in his broad back working, sweat shining on his skin despite the overcast sky, I latch onto something.

"Do you want Jonathan to take that missionary job?" I ask.

Hannah continues to stare at the water and answers, "It doesn't matter. His mind is made up."

"Maybe he'll change his mind. Maybe you can persuade him."

Now she does look at me, out of the corners of her eyes, her chin tucked in. "Remember who we're talking about here," she says.

"But do you want to go?"

She stares out at the Gulf again. "Sure. I'd like to spend some time down there, like to see what I could pull out of myself living so close to nature, without our creature comforts. I'd like to see if there's any true art really in me."

"What do you mean?" I ask and lean slightly forward. She has intrigued me, as she always manages to do when speaking to me about her craft. What she tells me, I like to think, Jonathan would never understand, would never try to understand. It is our language, and although I cannot speak it myself, I do comprehend it.

"I'm not quite sure," she answers. "I've always felt that there's an artificiality in everything I paint, like whatever comes out goes through so many filters that it never really captures what I've intended, or thought I intended at the time. Maybe 'true' is not the right word. Maybe it's purity I'm after. I suppose there's really no difference."

"That's strange," I remark. "Jonathan is always trying to get you to do things with him, outdoor stuff, and you always refuse. Like right now, we're close to nature. In awhile, Jonathan and I will be even closer."

This time she looks directly at me and says, "I never go along with his foolhardy stunts because he's tempting nature. That's not what I'm talking about. Jonathan doesn't want to be close to nature. He wants to conquer it. To prove something. To himself, to me, to anyone who will sit on the sidelines and watch. He'll never accept that missionary job because it would

be like admitting defeat for him."

I'm listening to Hannah's words, some of the most direct things she has ever said to me, my eyes dropping down several times to her lips, drawn to them. I want her, as my mind begins to defy the senses and ignore time and place, to lean in softly, kiss me, let me kiss her, replay that moment from two weeks ago, the one that for an instant brought us so close together, then separated us thereafter. I was posing for her; she was painting me. We were connecting with each other through our language and then we began to learn a new one but abandoned it so quickly. I search her eyes for things, telltale dilations or contractions of the night black pupils, an invitation, a refusal, something I can deal with. Not knowing is the hardest part. But I find nothing certain, at least, nothing I can interpret and seconds later Jonathan's voice booms out, "There's one. You see it? I'll be damned if that's not one. Ana, our friends have arrived."

They are just blue sharks. Jonathan is disappointed and I am relieved. The rain has started again and the men have lowered the shark cage into the choppy Gulf. The water is dark green and the sky is charcoal gray. Hannah looks down at the water as if she can see her reflection and all that can be seen are the shadows of the sharks, three or four of them. Jonathan and I go below deck to squeeze into wet suits.

"Nervous?" Jonathan asks.

"Are you?"

"Never."

"You seemed disappointed when he said they were only blues."

"I was hoping we might see something bigger, something fiercer."

"I think we better work our way up to the bigger, fiercer ones."

"You are nervous, then."

"Yes."

"Well, don't worry. We'll be safe in the cage."

It isn't like Jonathan to be so reassuring and I know he is just as nervous as me. I'm starting back up to the deck. "Ready?"

"In just a minute," he replies and clasps his hands in front of him. I stand on the steps for a moment, watching him bow his head, close his eyes, move his lips. I am not inclined to join him and respecting his privacy, I leave quietly.

I find Hannah on the deck standing alone, not even trying to cover herself from the light rain falling, looking solemn and pensive. "You shouldn't go through with this," she says.

"Everything will be fine."

Captain Nystrom interjects, "We should go back to port before the storm is worse. Before we all end up in the water with the sharks."

"Right," Hannah says.

"You all have no sense of adventure," Jonathan complains, coming on deck, his tone more serious than I've ever heard it.

"And you just have no sense," Hannah tells him. Jonathan gives her a hard look and he and I help each other into the scuba gear.

As we are about to dive, Nystrom says, "Do not stay long in the water. The storm will be worse."

"Whatever," is Jonathan's reply, his voice pinched because of the face mask covering his nose. The shark cage is tied to the boat and drifting in the rough waters five feet off the stern, its top trap door open. Jonathan jumps from the diving platform through the door and into the cage, making a large splash. I glance at Hannah and smile before stuffing the breathing apparatus into my mouth and following Jonathan into the cage.

Jumping into the water there is a jarring and then several seconds of disorientation, the ocean pressure squeezing my body, the diffusing of the gray light, the coolness of the water against my cheeks. It takes awhile for my senses to adjust and the water is murky because of the lack of sun. I'm aware of only the water, the cage as it is lowered to several yards below the surface, and Jonathan next to me. He is pointing at something, a silver form gliding through the ocean thirty feet or so from the cage, which makes me think of Hannah, the way it moves, like liquid. I've seen some sea life, different kinds of fish, lobsters, corals, turtles, weird things, that didn't look as though they belonged in the ocean. But the shark, I realize looking at another one cruise past the cage, closer this time, the shark was made for the water. The cage seems flimsy compared to the sharks. I do not feel protected by it.

One of the blues, which I guess to be about eight feet long, comes close enough for Jonathan to reach out with his bare hand through the cage's narrow opening and stroke it as it passes. Maybe it's because the blue isn't as fearsome looking as other kinds of sharks, those that have a smile full of jagged teeth, but I find myself relaxing as I witness Jonathan's ease with the fish. It darts away from Jonathan's touch, as if frightened, and another comes by to investigate, bumping the cage with its snout. It veers left and snatches one of the pieces of meat we've been using to attract them, its jaws snapping closed, white eyelids rolling over its black eyes, head thrashing from side to side, wrenching the meat free from the line. Several minutes later, Jonathan nudges me and points to something behind us. I twist around and see a new arrival, what I guess to be a tiger shark, judging by the stripes on its back. Adrenalin surges through me at the sight of the animal, which is almost as big as a station wagon. It seems oblivious to our presence as it tears a chunk of meat off a line, with little effort, and swallows it whole. For the first time, I'm

really getting scared, and it's a tremendous relief when moments later the cage begins to rise toward the surface.

The top of the cage breaks the water and Jonathan raises the trap door. We both come up for air, removing our mouthpieces, treading water. Jonathan calls out to Nystrom, "Ten more minutes."

Nystrom shakes his head and shouts back, "No. Time to go."

Hannah says, "I just heard a weather report, Jonathan. They've issued a small craft advisory."

"Five minutes. There's a tiger down there."

"No," Hannah tells him. "Get back in this boat, both of you, right now."

"She's right, Jonathan," I say.

He looks at me. "I guess it's time, then."

"It was incredible, Jonathan. Unbelievable, really. But we need to get back."

"It's definitely time," he says.

I glance around to see if any of the sharks are near, so I can swim the ten feet to the boat, and I hear Jonathan say again, "It is time." I whip my head around and see him push himself out of the cage and dive below the surface.

Hannah screams his name and Nystrom and his first mate both rush to the side of the boat. "Oh, Jesus," I mutter to myself, not sure what to do. Without really thinking, I pull the mask back down over my face, shove the breathing apparatus into my mouth, and go back under.

Jonathan is swimming alongside one of the blues. Frantically, I scan the area for the other two blues and the tiger. One of the blue sharks is cruising about forty feet beneath the cage, while the other one is by *The Last Tango's* stern. The tiger is nowhere in sight. Jonathan is having to kick hard to keep up with the blue. He reaches out for it, caresses it, and it flicks its tail and rockets away. Jonathan comes to an abrupt stop, snatches his hand back and grabs it with his other. A small cloud of red rises from the hand. Bubbles erupt from his mouthpiece and stream toward the surface. He must have stroked the shark against the grain of its sandpaper-like skin. Placing the hand under his armpit, he squeezes his arm against his flank, trying to stop the bleeding, but the blood has already aroused the interest of the other two blues and the tiger, which has reappeared from the other side of the boat, moving fast. In a panic, I begin waving my arms at Jonathan, motioning him to swim for the cage.

It takes a few seconds for him to look up and see me, seconds more to realize what is happening, the danger he is already in. The tiger closes as he starts toward the cage. Jonathan doesn't get very far before the tiger

reaches him, rolls on its back, opens its jaws, hits him. The shark jerks its head violently from side to side, its entire body rippling. Jonathan is like a straw-dummy in its mouth. This goes on for mere heartbeats and the shark turns him loose, moving away, joining the three blues, which are already circling. Fear has frozen me. I know what has to be done, but I cannot make myself do it. Jonathan is struggling in a fog of his own blood to get away. I think of Hannah on the boat, if she knows what has happened, if they are doing anything to help. Jonathan is flailing rather than swimming in any one direction. I don't think he knows where the boat is, where he is. In a sudden rush, the fear, which has paralyzed me, turns into adrenalin and I bolt through the opening of the cage, kicking as hard as I can. The closer I get to Jonathan, the more I start to see things, parts of his rib cage, muscle, gristle. I don't know where the sharks are. When I grab Jonathan, he tries to slip away from me obviously thinking that I am one of the sharks coming to finish him. But I hold him hard and look at his eyes opened wide behind his scuba mask. He must recognize me, because I feel his body relax a little. I wrap an arm around his chest and we start for the cage.

One of the smaller blues makes a move toward us, its eyes peeling back white, mouth opening. My fist smashes across its snout. It turns its head and my fingers rake its gills, like a cat clawing a squirrel. The blue flees and I hear a kind of whooshing sound. I crane my head to glance at another blue and see a spear sticking out of its back near the dorsal fin. I kick harder, feeling the muscles in my thighs, calves, and ankles strain from the effort. The cage is just a few feet away. Stretching, I grab the metal bars and wrestle Jonathan through the slot. I waste no time following him in. Then I drag him up to the surface and when our heads get above the water, he spits out his mouthpiece and lets out an inhuman shriek. The next thing I hear is Hannah's voice screaming and the sound of a motorized winch raising the cage out of the Gulf.

A life-flight helicopter meets us at the marina and whisks Jonathan away to a hospital in Corpus Christi. Hannah rides with him and I take the Mustang. We managed to slow down the bleeding on the way in from the Gulf and he stayed conscious the whole time, mumbling things. I find myself, while following the helicopter paramedic's directions to the hospital, hoping, even praying that Jonathan is going to be fine, if anything, for Hannah's sake. I know she cares for him. Maybe even truly loves him. There's no way to tell for sure with them, the way they hide things. It takes me quite awhile to get to the hospital.

The emergency room receptionist points me to a waiting room, where I find Hannah. When she sees me, she rushes toward me and hugs me.

"How is he?" I ask.

"Still in surgery," she says, her voice hitching.

"He's going to be fine. You'll see."

"Thank God you went with him. If you hadn't been there..."

"I know. Let's sit down."

I leave my arm around her and she rests her head against my neck. We stay that way for a long time, before a doctor finds us and tells us that Jonathan is stabilized and in the recovery room. The doctor makes us wait a couple of hours and then we go in to see him. Hannah goes immediately to his side and takes his hand, the one he cut. I feel my heart suffer. His eyes flicker open and shut, then open again. He tries to say something and Hannah leans close to be able to hear. She nods and tells him to rest. Jonathan's eyes shut again.

"What did he say?" I ask.

Hannah brushes the hair out of her face and tells me, without turning to look at me, in almost a whisper, "He said, ... 'South America.'"

**Mark Bankston**  
English, SR

*Barnes Poetry Award*

**The Starry Night**

The campfire smolders in lamenting dirge  
As shrouds of darkness cover evening's face.  
This night's convulsive birth begins to surge,  
A gift to those apprenticed in this place.  
Now we lie here and watch the cosmic showings,  
The astral aerobatics without flaw.  
We gasp at sudden incandescent glowings,  
Hearts pounding out applause in humbling awe.  
Yes, Vincent, we can see your "Starry Night,"  
Your sweeps and spirals of celestial fire.  
The frenzy of phantasmagoric might,  
That lured you far beyond the steeple's spire.  
Can you see, through your universe so wide,  
Two finite gazers on this mountainside?

**Allison Quinn**  
English, SR

## Skin

I drape and cling and hang like  
velvet or petals, or hide  
with the soft glow of roses  
and cherries, whipped by winter,  
or pale like cream and old bones,  
perhaps tinted sun-tawny  
the tanned tattoo of the sky,  
or like dark obsidian.  
I can be as soft as sleep  
or rough like dead maple leaves.  
I'm accused of deciding  
where or what, richer or poorer,  
either colonel or a plebe.  
The walls that I build stand strong  
and they are slow to crumble,  
but Beauty is only this deep.

Erin Kahla  
English, JR

## Amulets

To walk through a door  
with a smile overhead  
of curving, forged iron lips,

To find a budding  
trinity blessed with  
mutant overgrowth,

To happen upon  
a presidential  
profile gutter gift,

To carry a bit  
of mutilated  
kismet cottontail,

These are the things  
that put illogical  
spring into the step,

That make one welcome  
a doubtful day  
with cocky confidence.

Allison Quinn  
English, SR

## A Parable

And Behold: into the  
yard of a man came  
a tree, of nine feet.

Saith the man to the  
tree of nine feet:  
"Thou art taller than  
me, yet Thou dost  
not reach the sky."

Saith the tree to the man:  
"The sky followeth me  
from Tulsa. It is  
pulled by a string."

Saith the man:  
"To what is tied  
the string, which  
pulleth the sky  
from distant Tulsa?"

Saith the tree:  
"The string is tied  
to my voice, and my  
voice speaketh the truth."

Saith the man:  
"I shall cut the string."

Saith the tree:  
"Beware, mortal. The  
string which pulleth  
the sky from Tulsa  
hath no form."

Saith the man:  
"I shall cut the string."

And Behold: the tree  
of nine feet stayeth in  
the yard of the man,  
lest the sky fall.

And the man muttereth:  
"I shall cut the string,  
i shall cut the string."

Even unto this day.

Jody Pate  
English, JR

### Winter Town

the ice man springs down the hard cold road mud.  
the air in the trees is a fast tiny crystal bell.  
(the town crouched in the evil smile of the ice night.)  
the tinny laugh down the hard still road mud.  
eyes glass crashed on cold steel mud.  
(the town cowered in the huge clear smile of the ice night.)  
the town is broken eyes glass in the hard cold road mud.  
glittery toward heaven colorless toward earth.  
a creeping blacksilver finger the ice man the ice man.  
pounds down the cold hard road mud eyes glass.  
smooth blow at the town.  
(the winter town crying in the curled mouth of the ice night.)  
and the soundless feet of much hunger. feel.  
feel. into spring and the glass eyed trees.

Jody Pate  
English, JR

### The Proverbial Reward

The Sunday school teacher paused as Benton Miller slowly made his entrance into the class. Benton looked especially handsome today, with his newly-fitted Sears and Roebuck three-piece suit. He felt confident that last week's gravy stain on his lucky paisley tie was well concealed beneath his gold-plated retirement pin. His over-sized false teeth sparkled as he smiled at the teacher. The sweet aroma of Lilac Vegetal, splashed over his creviced face and neck, filled the room. He scanned the class until he saw what he was looking for -- an empty seat next to Grace Meyers.

"Good morning, ladies," Benton said, oblivious to the few men in attendance. "And good morning to you, Grace," he nodded, as he sat down beside her. Grace was in the process of passing out her latest recipe-of-the-week, and the ladies were all discussing her famous butter pound cake. Benton settled in, and placed his coffee-table Bible in his lap. He was ready for anything. What he got was a one-hour lecture on how humility is a virtue. He couldn't help but think that anybody his age ought to be proud to look as good as he looked. He also thought it was impressive that he found the book of Ecclesiastes faster than Henry Matheson. Benton was sure that all the ladies noticed that. Old Henry might learn a few things if he watched Benton. Henry had been a widower for more than a year now. Benton wondered how long a man could go without noticing the covey of opportunity right under his nose.

Other than a few old spinsters and the obnoxious "Preachy Pearl" Johnson, Benton considered this class to be wide-open happy hunting grounds, and his sights were set on Grace Meyers. Besides her, there was the tantalizing little dove, Maggie Henderson. Benton liked Maggie's smooth voice, and how she kept her hair a soft light-brown, instead of the bluish-gray of the other ladies. He also thought she might have been left quite well-off, because she had started wearing a fur wrap on Sunday mornings that looked to Benton like the real thing. She was constantly picking invisible lint off of it, and Benton wasn't sure if it was a habit or if she was just trying to make sure it was well-noticed. He decided she might not be a bad choice either and reached up to adjust his paisley tie for luck.

He considered catching a few words of the lesson, but his thoughts turned to Grace. There she sat, plump as a partridge, with white-gloved hands folded modestly in her sizeable lap. Her skin had a lovely pink glow, and Benton thought she must be the healthiest lady in the class. She was certainly the best cook. He remembered how the roast beef she had brought to their class dinner last week melted in his mouth -- and dripped down his paisley tie. He took the tie off so Grace could try to clean it and when she

returned she tied it back on him herself. Benton sighed as he remembered how her hands fluttered over his chest. He decided then and there that the tie was his "lucky" tie.

The Sunday school teacher's voice finally broke through to Benton and he heard him ask, "And what does Proverbs 3:34 say that the Lord gives to the humble?"

"Grace," answered Benton, trying to control his grin.

He saw Grace timidly turn to look at him, so he gave her a quick wink. She turned her head back so fast, Benton thought she could have hurt herself.

"That's right, Ben," continued the teacher, "and He mocks the proud..."

Benton nodded in agreement, ignoring the teacher's barb. He didn't mean to embarrass Grace. He was just thinking about what he was going to ask her. It was obvious that she would be a fine trophy for any man, and Benton had an idea that Henry might have his eye on her too, before long. He remembered his tie and touched it again.

Benton made it through the hour well enough. At least they didn't get the lesson on purity of heart. That one always seemed to keep the ladies uppity for weeks.

After Sunday School, the class made their way to the sanctuary for the morning service. Benton sat in his usual place, and Grace and Maggie sat on the pew in front of him. While everyone milled around, finding their seats, Grace and Maggie turned around and talked to Benton about their gardens and planting and such. He regularly asked them out to lunch after services during this time, and everyone had the routine down well. He decided he'd make them keep up the conversation a little longer today, though, let them fret about it a little.

"Henry Matheson told me I'd better forget the purple hulls this year. Said we've had too much rain. What do you think about that, Ben?" asked Maggie.

"What does a pig farmer know about peas, Mrs. Maggie? Purple hulls will grow in a rice field. You listen to old Ben, ma'am. You'll have a fine crop. That's for sure," said Ben, and the ladies nodded in agreement. Maggie pursed her lips at the audacity of Henry having suggested such a thing.

"And Ben, do you think it's too early to plant turnips?" asked Grace. She had asked him the same question last Sunday, but he knew they just couldn't get enough of his wisdom. "By the way, will you ladies be joining me for lunch? I thought we'd ride out to the cafeteria today."

"Oh, I don't know. What do you think, Maggie?" asked Grace, acting as non-committal as possible.

"I guess we could go. The baked ham is supposed to be especially good this week," said Maggie, "although I'm sure it's not as good as yours, Grace."

The organist began the service by playing the introduction to "Count Your Many Blessings," and as Benton looked at the row in front of him he could think of a couple right away. Maggie's fur wrap hung over the back of the pew and Benton was able to get a closer look at it. It was genuine, just as he had suspected, and Grace's perfume smelled as sweet as his rose garden. They stood to sing and Benton's deep bass inspired Grace and Maggie. What began as a chirpy soprano duet evolved into a squawky duel between the two ladies. The only woman in the whole place who was possibly singing any louder was "Preachy Pearl," up in her self-appointed seat in the choir. Benton was relieved when all the songs finally ended.

It was time for the sermon and Benton, as usual, started to nod off. Then he saw Margaret Morrison sitting in the choir loft with her legs crossed, exposing the greater part of her thigh. He quickly became alert and sat back to enjoy the show, knowing any minute Grace and Maggie would notice the offense. Before he could count to ten, Grace's jaw fell open and Maggie gasped out loud, covering her lap with her fur. The pastor must have known he was having trouble getting eye-contact because, when he walked to the right, eyes were to the right, but when he walked to the left, not a head moved. The organist tried to signal to her, but Margaret was the only one who didn't notice. Grace and Maggie looked quite mortified. Little Frankie and Bobby Flannery turned around in their pew and started pointing and giggling, and Benton could tell their mother didn't know whether to cover their eyes or their mouths. Finally, old Pearl figured out what all the commotion was about. She passed the word down the choir row, and Margaret realized she had sinned. Her face turned as red as her shoes. The whole ordeal had kept Grace and Maggie pretty much aghast. Benton was pleased. The lucky tie was working wonderfully. He felt this was the best service he'd attended in a long time.

After church, he went out to the "Blue Moon," his freshly shined, midnight blue Pontiac Catalina, and there they were: Grace and Maggie -- and Pearl Johnson. She had managed to butt in again. Somehow she always seemed to chisel herself into his plans. Every time he looked at her, her stockings were rolled down and she always quoted Proverbs just when things started getting fun. He knew his looks attracted them all, though, and he



couldn't blame them for that, not to mention the fact that he was the only man with a valid driver's license who would take them out on Sundays. He felt it was the least he could do since the Bible did say to care for the widows.

Benton tried to help the ladies get in the sedan, Pearl and Maggie in the backseat and Grace up front beside him. Pearl creaked right in, but Maggie fussed with her wrap, afraid it would get caught in the car door. Benton watched attentively as Grace leaned in. He thought about touching his tie for luck again, but decided after seeing Margaret's thigh anything else might spoil the memory. The ladies finally got their purses and Bibles in order and they left for the cafeteria.

"Benton Miller, must you drive so fast? Proverbs 19:11 says, 'A man's wisdom gives him patience.' Now, you do have wisdom don't you, Benton?"

He was wise enough to know he'd better not say what he had a mind to. Mrs. Pearl was Grace's cousin and he wanted to stay on Grace's good side today. He looked over at Grace. Her complexion was smooth and rosy, and he noticed how her make-up didn't crack over the wrinkles like some of the other ladies'. He thought this might be a good time to try a compliment. "Grace, your skin always looks so nice. You really know how to guild the lily."

Grace smiled shyly and said, "Thank you, Ben. You're so kind."

"I don't believe in wearing make-up," interrupted Pearl. "It's not right for women our age to wear cosmetics. It makes you look like a...," she paused for effect, rolled her eyes, then whispered, "a floozie."

Benton couldn't resist, "Why, that's preposterous, Pearl. Anyone knows that a fresh coat of paint never hurts any old barn." He laughed deeply and thought he saw Grace stifle a smile of revenge, but Maggie was frowning, furiously picking at the lint on her wrap. Pearl's arms were tensely folded across her chest and her face looked mean enough to stop a freight train. Benton decided he should learn to keep his mouth shut, if at all possible. He looked in his rear-view mirror at Pearl. She was pulling up those stockings again and he couldn't help stepping on the gas pedal a little harder.

Grace and Maggie discussed Henry Matheson in the car and it got Benton aggravated. He was the one going out of his way to see to it that they had an enjoyable afternoon, and Henry was the one on their minds.

"Do you know why he's so shy, Ben?" asked Grace. "He could try harder to make friends."

"Maybe he doesn't want friends yet," answered Ben, trying to hide the irritation in his voice.

"He seems so lonesome. I heard he left his home town after his wife died, to make a fresh start," said Maggie.

"Proverbs 27:8 says, 'Like a bird that strays from its nest is a man who strays from his home,'" recited Pearl, "but he may nest again pretty soon."

\* \* \*

Benton wanted to stand by Grace in the cafeteria line, but he somehow ended up beside Pearl.

"Proverbs 23:2, 'Put a knife to your throat if you are given to gluttony,'" preached Pearl, as Benton reached for a big slice of apple pie for dessert. He put two slices of pie on his tray and rang the bell for assistance.

"This old lady needs someone to carry her tray," he told the waitress, loud enough for the entire place, and pointed at Pearl. He was sure Grace noticed, but he had to do something to defend himself.

They ate their lunch and Grace obviously disapproved of the ham. Benton was completely stuffed even before his dessert, but he was determined to eat both slices of pie, even if it killed him. He tried to keep the conversation off anyone else but himself. When he talked about his rose garden Grace seemed to hang on his every word. He decided he would positively ask her out today.

As Benton paid for the lunch, Grace jotted down a recipe and handed it to the cashier. "Here, honey. This is my tried-and-true recipe for baked ham. I'm sure the cook will find it much simpler and tastier."

The cashier looked surprised, but Maggie and Pearl were nodding in concordance so she just told them thank you and stared blankly as the group walked away.

Grace had a lot of baking to do for their annual cake sale, so she had asked Benton to take her home first. Benton was mad at himself for not touching the paisley tie before getting in the car. He decided he would definitely get rid of Pearl next.

As they arrived at Grace's house, Benton left Maggie and Pearl in the car and walked around to open the car door for Grace. She picked up her Bible and purse and thanked Benton for lunch. He walked her to the door and knew it was time to make his move. Before she went in, he asked her. "Grace, do you have an escort for the banquet next week?"

"The senior citizen banquet? Well, actually I invited Henry, Ben. I thought it might help get him back into things. I felt it was my Christian duty."

"Henry Matheson? He'll just sit there like a bump on a log, telling you about his latest doctor's visit. Besides, you would have to ride in the old church van. My date will get to ride in high style, in the 'Blue Moon.'"

"Sorry, Ben, we've already made arrangements. Maybe next year..."

"Sure, next year. Goodbye, Grace." He watched her walk into her house, his heart pounding as the door closed. Benton got back in the car and he noticed that Pearl had a strange smile on her face. He hoped that she hadn't seen Grace's rejection. She was probably just trying to think up some

new verse to throw at him. Maggie took Grace's place in the front seat. He looked over at her. She was dusting her fur and he decided that maybe she was really the best catch of all. He thought he had better do everything he could to ensure a "yes" from her, and the first thing to do was to get rid of Pearl -- quickly. He didn't want anything to botch up this attempt at romance. "Well, Pearl, I'm sure you have a busy afternoon too, but that's no problem. Your house is right on the way to Maggie's."

"Actually, Ben, I was wondering if you could drop me off at my daughter's house across town. It's just a few miles past Maggie's apartment building, not too far out of the way," said Pearl. "Maggie would probably prefer to get home sooner anyway. Right, dear?"

"I suppose I really should," answered Maggie, to Benton's displeasure. "I am expecting a call from my son this afternoon."

Benton did not know how Pearl managed to always interfere with his plans. He would have to try to ask Maggie somehow today. In the meantime, he tried to set the tone for a yes from her. "Maggie, you're looking younger every day. You really should give the other girls your beauty tips."

Before Maggie could accept the compliment, Pearl interjected: "Proverbs 29:5, 'Whoever flatters his neighbor is spreading a net for his feet.'"

"Thank you, Ben," Maggie said, glaring back at Pearl.

Just as they were nearing Maggie's apartment, a light rain began misting the windshield of the "Blue Moon."

"Oh, Ben. Just let me out under the awning, please. I mustn't let my fur get the least bit damp," said Maggie, fussing over her wrap again.

Benton pulled to a stop under the apartment's awning and knew this was it. He had to ask her before she got out of his sedan. "By the way, Maggie, do you have an escort to the banquet next week?"

"No, I don't, Ben, but I'm afraid I won't be attending this year. I'm going to visit my son in California for a few weeks. I do thank you for inviting me, though."

Ben's heart sank again. As Maggie got out to go into her apartment, Pearl moved to the front seat. She still had that strange grin. Benton knew she was up to something.

"Pearl..."

"I'd love to! Just be at my house at six, and a pink corsage will be fine because my dress is sort of maroon. That will look lovely when we have our pictures taken at the banquet. I think I'll get a couple of eight-by-tens for my daughters and..."

Benton said, "Proverbs 29:20, 'Do you see a man who speaks in haste? There is more hope for a fool than for him.'"

"...I am going to get an appointment at the beauty salon that day, and I think that your gray suit will look fine..." Pearl went on and on.

They passed the new Methodist church on the way to Pearl's daughter's home, and Ben saw quite a few attractive ladies serving the food at their dinner-on-the-ground.

Ben looked over and said to Pearl, as he straightened his paisley tie, "Have I ever told you that I was thinking of becoming a Methodist?"

Allison Quinn  
English, SR

日月

[The Chinese character MING, or "bright,"  
made up of the characters for "sun" and "moon"]

The sun a box,  
A square bucket in the sky,  
Solid, stolid, flat and implacable.  
Within the box a single line  
Declares his strong finality,  
The scale of justice eternally balanced.

The moon a loose carriage,  
Her melted heart streaming  
Across the sky behind her.  
A box with wings,  
The moon owns curves to express  
Her wild jackrabbit heart.

Together they dance  
Stiffly but decisively,  
Caught up in the ritual.  
Sun mourns his dead brothers,  
Moon consoles him,  
And they shine in everlasting sympathy.

**Kevin Poston**  
English, GS

## Storm

The sky is thick and damp like dirty cotton.  
The moisture quivers, hanging like a vow  
you'd spoken long ago and then forgotten  
without a second thought for me, and now  
the clouds are hovering over, smoldering black  
as tar. The light, it silken through the heat,  
shattering the onyx mirror with a crack  
that echoes in my throat until the sweet  
and tepid water trickles down. You turn  
to me and raindrops trace a pattern down  
your cheek, like tears you'd never cry. The burn  
of droplets pelting, stinging, hurling around  
can hurt, but not in any lasting way.  
Unlike the future, ended here today.

**Erin Kahla**  
English, JR

## Lifeguard

I shouldn't even try to talk to her --  
so far above me on her wooden throne.  
That golden flesh -- tan, firm, begins to stir  
my thoughts. I really need an ice cream cone.  
O goddess -- princess of sand, sun, and lotion,  
forever staring at the churning sea  
with whistle as her scepter rules the ocean --  
I wonder if she ever thinks of me?

Oh shit. My balding, denture chomping friend  
is back today. I wonder, could I sneak  
away? Oh well, my shift's about to end.  
Old buzzard must come down here every week.  
Those liver spots, that medic alert tag.  
His lecherous smile even starting to sag.

**Brandy Copley**  
Political Science, JR

## Daphne

The boys are pulling at my hair again.  
but it's no longer hair -- it's only leaves.  
But should I not have run that day? Instead,  
should I have stopped, and stood, or boldly said  
"I now renounce all vows of chastity?"  
Should I have fallen, stumbled, cried out lies  
that I could not be blamed if I was not  
so fleet of foot as he that yearned for me?

I ran, moss cushioning the impact of my feet,  
sharp thorns and briars ensnaring my long hair.  
I ran from one who called out words of love  
and praise -- even as I was fleeing him.  
Now my once hurrying feet are fixed and bound.  
To my eternal woe, my goddess heard  
my fervent cry for help -- Diana please!

My dainty ankle, my graceful arch are now  
a thick and twisted root entombed in dirt.  
My slender waist is now a sturdy trunk.  
Two cobalt eyes are dull knot holes where bugs  
and spiders like to crawl. Most sad of all,  
I can no longer brush and tend  
my hair of flaxen blond, nor feel it touch,  
caress my back with tiny strands like fingers.

I crawl and squawk with life each spring, and age  
and die each fall, shivering with wind and frost.  
But I must be content, my vow fulfilled --  
my sanctified virginity intact.  
And laurel boughs are crowns of victory.

Brandy Copley  
Political Science, JR

## Dorothy

They're gone away, the days of childhood games,  
of checkerboards and saddle-oxford shoes,  
of climbing on the shaky fencing rails  
that separate my landscape, void of hues.

I run away, so sure that I'm prepared  
to find the colors that belong to me.  
Along the way, a crystal-ball reveals  
demands of life between the black and white.  
I must be wrong -- perhaps I should go home,  
but I arrive, and no one's there for me.

The sky has changed. Great thunderheads of gray  
all funnel down -- and I, in vain, attempt  
to sing a simple rainbow into place?

The swirling roar envelopes like a dream.  
Kaleidoscopic scenes are rolling by.  
I'm wearing magic slippers, ruby power  
unrealized, that click a rhythmic lore  
with every step along a topaz trail.

I paint the apples, poppies, trees, and sky  
in brilliant strokes that cover all the grays.  
I gather simple treasures as I traipse  
the sunlit road, and hope that I can take  
them all back home: a silver-lined diploma,  
locket heart of purest gold, heavy  
royal purple medal with inscription  
bright and bold, "For Courage, Dorothy."

As I awake I see familiar sights  
surrounding me, but color-wheels are spinning  
in my head. I know that I must face  
the grays of life outside my door, but I  
decide to paint my fingernails instead.

Allison Quinn  
English, JR

## The Musical Past

When the first courageous settlers climbed aboard the vessels bound for Roanoke or Jamestown, part of their cultural baggage was music. Elizabethan England was rich in it. Much of the Elizabethan culture was abhorred by the Puritans, but they too carried with them a great love for music when they set sail for the new world. Through music, the colonists were able to express their faith, lighten their hearts, and improve morale during the hardships of voyage and settlement. Likewise, the ships leaving Africa carried in their hulls, along with thousands of prisoners, a musical heritage that would find expression and become a part of the American musical tradition. Each subsequent wave of immigrants would bring hymns, ballads, and folk songs that would eventually influence a developing culture. Conversely, a new and unexplored land full of trials and new experience would have an impact on the music of all its inhabitants. The importance of music as an expression cannot be overstated and in the song books and folk songs of the oral tradition, from Jamestown to the Civil War, we can see American history unfolding. Perhaps the simplest approach to a brief look at this period through music would be to look at it from three perspectives with three types of music. Secular, African-American, and religious music each had its own personality and each served a somewhat different function. African-American music contained within it both religious and folk music but is so distinctive that it is best viewed separately.

We have little record of secular music of the 17th century but we can safely assume that the earliest colonists had their folk songs, ballads, catches, and glees to pass the winter hours and boost the morale of those trying times. These songs must have changed with the American experience as surely as the colonists did. The 18th century brought with it an abundance of songs associated with the American life like the tragic story of "Springfield Mountain," which produced many variations throughout the frontier. Songs like "What a Court Hath Old England" and "The Liberty Song" began to reflect the growing hostility between the colonies and the mother country. Many songs became increasingly political and revolutionary and the American sentiment comes to life in them. Some originally British songs became American symbols of independence like "The World Turned Upside Down," played at the surrender of Cornwallis, and "Yankee Doodle," originally intended to poke fun at the inept colonists. Though music continued to be a means of political expression through the Civil War when each side had its individual marching tunes and martial music (still associated with those

sections), it also tells another side of American history.

As the colonists began to prosper, they became hungry for the cultural arts. There was time for concerts and opera and American musicians began to compose. Musicians like William Billings and Francis Hopkinson would pave the way for others. Later, Daniel Emmett and Stephen Foster would usher in the minstrel era of truly unique American style, and Louis Moreau Gottschalk would win international acclaim.

Yet another side of music history tells the story of immigration. Each arriving group had its own tradition and would influence American music as a whole just as the adventure of being a part of a rising nation would influence them. The Germans and Scotch-Irish in particular brought with them a rich musical heritage that they would cling to tenaciously, but the power of the American experience would eventually win out and produce a music rich in diverse cultural influences. There remain today isolated ethnic pockets where music and language are virtually unchanged. From the Appalachians to the American Indian reservations we can find the almost undisturbed roots of our culture -- a testimony to both the strength of the heritage and the dynamics of an evolving country. No group would be more influential than the Africans. The tribal musical traditions of west Africa involved complex rhythms that continue to enrich today's "rhythm and blues" sounds. Part of the plantation owners' plan to subdue and sublimate the African spirit involved depriving him of his own culture so slaves were very limited in their expression. Deprived of meaningful gatherings, legal marriages, and security of family, the transplanted African learned to survive in a hostile environment. They convinced the slave owners of their docility, but, beneath the surface, their spirit thrived and it liberated itself in song, the only available form of creativity. Some of the African songs survived, at least in part, by oral tradition like "Baya-Bulako," a farewell song that was part of African burial customs. But these uprooted people were forced into American culture and eventually accepted its religion and language. As a result, we have a rich supply of black spiritual and work songs that portray the steadfast heart of the American slave. These songs reflect aspects of American music, and the work songs often incorporated a call and response pattern associated with hymn singing but also found in West African work chants. The black spiritual songs were sometimes mixed with the pagan tradition of Africa (especially on the geographically isolated sea islands) and were already emotionally charged. The great revivals swept across the fields of the South and mixed with proclivity, producing the Negro spiritual and a movement that was not to be stopped short of emancipation.

As anti-slavery sentiment mounted and the imprisoned blacks found friends to help them in their quest for freedom, these songs became tools of escape. "Follow the Drinking Gourd" guided potential escapees north by the

Big Dipper using river banks for roads, and "Moses" cryptically spread the word of the freedom movement and the underground railroad. Many of the Negro spirituals, whether allegorical in nature or not, helped raise the spirits of a people in bondage and remain precious to African-Americans as part of their high priced heritage. "King David" eventually won white acclaim, and the rhythm, tone, and style of black music began its pervasion of America.

Religious music began and remains an integral part of American culture. The Puritans and the Pilgrims found Psalm singing vitally important. In fact, the first book printed in the colonies was *The Bay Psalm Book* printed in Massachusetts in 1640. It contained only the words, but at that time the tunes were familiar to the small number of colonists. With increased immigration came increased illiteracy, and Puritans in particular found it necessary to innovate to keep secularism at bay. "Lining out" (where a deacon reads a line and the congregation responds) was distasteful because of the time consumed. These problems precipitated the introduction of the singing schools early in the 18th century. These best-laid plans went somehow awry of Puritan intent but became a social phenomenon that spread throughout the colonies and would influence both religious and secular music for a long time.

The first Great Awakening was also Puritan-inspired and intended to call in the flock. It ignited a wave of camp meetings and inspired singing that swept the country. The second revival movement almost a century later would have even greater consequences and would take both religion and its song even further from the Psalm singing of the Puritan. Folk hymns and rousing songs like "The Promised Land" crossed all sectarian lines and also infiltrated the slave population, giving rise to the Negro spiritual that would affect all distinctively American music.

The evolution of America's music is a result of religious, political, ethnic, and geographic influence. With these abundant roots, it is no wonder it has blossomed.

Catherine Preslar  
English, SR

## Nursery Rhymes

I used to be proud of being Daddy's girl  
I'd primp and preen and pirouette with joy  
I'm older now and darkness seems to frighten  
a small and secret spot inside of me  
A soft insidious chant some game or rhyme  
that creeps about my neck a forgotten friend  
wrapping its hands over my mouth to cover  
a scream that wells like the iron taste of blood  
(the itsy bitsy spider climbs up my  
tiny leg and daddy loves me more  
just for being quiet I'm his brave  
and special girl and daddy loves me more)  
I wake shivering in a tub the water cold  
my legs and arms won't move because I hear  
the sighs of footsteps sliding slowly towards  
the door the knob is glistening as it turns  
I know who's coming daddy's coming  
his shadow looms above and swallows me up  
until I shrink and fade and float away  
to hide in the corner of the room with cobwebs  
shrouding my face because daddy loves me more

Erin Kahla  
English, JR

## Sacraments

Apologies for waking you this late --  
I'm leaving town this side of 3 a.m.,  
You see, and must confess before I go.  
You know the rectory's not the place for this.  
I want it to be formal. So we're going  
To the confessional, if you will lead  
A sinner through your church's polished pews.  
Never mind your slippers, Father John.  
The marble's cold, I know, but nothing much  
To one who's vowed his life to poverty.

Open the door and take your place inside,  
Perch on your creaking hardwood bench, my crow,  
I'll take my place across from you. That's good --  
It's dark, just right for men like you and me.  
Ah, even through this gridiron for the shameful,  
I see that you don't like the comparison.  
I only meant that dark's the place for secrets  
And those who keep them, men like you and me.  
But, yes, you're right to think it's off, for I  
Keep secrets my way, you keep secrets yours.

I know you've guessed, but still I'll tell the secret  
For which we're here. I think I've broken commandment  
Number six (not beyond repair, I hope)  
And so I've come to ask for cleanliness.  
Bless me, my janitor, for I have sinned,  
And keep in mind as I take your confidence:  
I've got a knife, so make the penance light.

To nourish yourself by eating others' sins  
Must curdle your stomach every single night.  
I'll relieve you of that by showing how  
Men of my profession keep their secrets down.  
I know the metal's cold, but don't despair.

Bless you, my janitor, for you have cleaned  
And now absolve, with the drippings on your feet,  
A late-calling sinner, who, just for you,  
Will wash his hands in the water at the door  
And ring your brothers to give you last rites.

Vic Odegar  
English, SR

## Resonant Light

At dusk even the laughing Llano River  
seems to slow its pace and invite  
the last rays of sun to leave. Reluctant,  
they linger on the surface, glittering  
like a 49er's dream. My eyes  
hurt from the brilliance,  
yet cannot move. Every other sense  
vanishes. The water bounces over rocks  
in utter silence; no breath of air  
stirs.

And for the last moments  
of the day, no thought disturbs  
my peace. The ripples on the river  
change from gold to deep, dark blue  
and crimson red.

And for those last moments  
my whole world is quiet color.

I tore myself away once, in violent  
defiance -- afraid to lose control. Afraid  
to lose a moment of reality. Now,  
I trade as often as I can.

Catherine Preslar  
English, SR

## Grooming

Sometimes there are lawnmowers in graveyards.  
A man in a truck pulling a lowboy  
Will show up every week in the grassy season  
To make sure those who were left behind  
Won't lose themselves in the weeds.

Sometimes there are vacuum cleaners in rest homes.  
A woman with a tight bun and veined hands  
Will push a buzzing Hoover over dead carpet  
To pick up lint and strands of gray hair  
So they won't know who's going bald.

Often there are alarm clocks in bedrooms.  
A digital Spartus on a nightstand  
Will inhale from a wall socket at 6 a.m.  
And scream at the mussed, blurry dreamers  
Until they get up to groom themselves.

Vic Odegar  
English, SR

## The Convenience Store Clerk's Apprentice

In the plate glass window of the storefront, I saw Billingsley wipe his nose on one of the orange sleeves of his Bright Stop shirt as he came out of the restroom at the back of the store. I watched his reflection in the window as he walked past the refrigerator stocked with Budweiser and Miller and Coors then down the candy aisle, where he bent over to pick up a crackling package, which he put in his pants pocket. He came out of the candy aisle and walked past the checkout counter, at which he didn't stop to pay for whatever it was he'd picked up. I guess it didn't really matter because his father owned the store. Besides that, I didn't feel like walking to the register to ring up the sale or telling him, again, how to do it himself. I was standing at the front of the store by the magazine display, which was filled with tattered issues of *Street Rod Girls* and *Gumshoe Beat* and crisp copies of *Quilting Quarterly*, *Statehouse News*, and *Poetry and Fiction for the Erudite*.

Billingsley walked up and stood beside me. I looked at him. He looked at me then started tucking in his yellow shirt tail, on which, apparently, he'd dried his huge and hairy hands. Whatever he'd snagged in the candy aisle made a big bulge in his pocket.

"He left about forty-five seconds ago without buying anything," I said. I looked at the parking lot, from which our last visitor had just departed on a bicycle with no tires on the rims. The lot was empty. I could have counted every oil stain and probably would have if Billingsley hadn't been there. Our dim downtown street was empty, too, except for the bicycle rider, who I could see steering his wobbly mount toward one of the many nearby bars, all of which, with their dingy windows, sagging roofs, and signs with faded letters, looked out of business but actually weren't.

"I don't like it when they don't buy anything," I said, turning to look at Billingsley, who had tucked in his shirt so that the buttons were in a diagonal line that missed his fly by about three inches. "It usually means they've stolen something. Watch out for people like that. Nobody browses in a convenience store." I looked at my wristwatch then again at Billingsley. "Especially not at 2:33 a.m."

If Billingsley had been a vampire I probably wouldn't have had a very good idea of what he looked like; most of what I'd seen of him had come as accidental glimpses of his reflection in the window. I'd been avoiding looking at him directly, making exceptions only when I had to make a point. I was hoping I wouldn't have to make many more points before leaving Bright Stop at the end of the week because I didn't like to look at Billingsley. Even though he didn't act much like him, Billingsley looked like his father, my soon-to-be ex-boss.



Mr. Billingsley was making me show his son what a convenience store clerk does in the middle of the night besides flip through skin mags, pick his nose, and count floor tiles. I was showing him as well as I could because I was a professional and Billingsley, judging by what I'd seen in my first two and a half nights with him, seemed to have gotten the job despite being reasonably good only at nose picking. I'd have to teach him about the skin mags and floor tiles -- not to mention what Mr. Billingsley had told me to cover (how to respond to an obese -- or, on occasion, a possibly bulimic -- customer who wanted to exchange a "faulty" package of Fudge-o blocks, more than half of which he'd already eaten; how to operate the cash register without taking the thumb -- or fingers -- out of wherever they might happen to be; how to stay conscious while someone paid for three dollars worth of gas with pennies).

Billingsley rubbed his eyes then squinted out the window as he struggled to keep from yawning. "What was he looking for?" he mumbled. "Did you ask him? Daddy says you can get everything under the sun at Bright Stop -- even when the sun's not out." He smiled like a boxer who's gone fifteen rounds and thinks he's won.

"Follow me, Billingsley," I said. I walked around to the rear of the checkout counter to the cash register. "Show me where the alarm button is."

"Right here, Mr. --"

"Don't call me mister," I said. I stared at the grimy floor. I wanted nothing more than to sweep it. "Don't forget."

"I can remember the alarm just fine."

I started to tell Billingsley I wasn't talking about the alarm but instead brushed past him and went to the corner by the restroom to get the frayed broom with the peeling red handle. I picked up the broom and began to sweep with my back to Billingsley and the front of the store. I tried to concentrate on the soothing swish of bristles on tile and block out the buzz of fluorescence. Before I'd had a chance to push much dirt around, I heard the thin clanking of the bell hung above the double doors.

I turned and looked toward the entrance to see a man with -- proportionally and formally speaking -- a bowling ball body and a pinball head, on which there was a cowboy hat. He didn't really walk in. He swaggered. I wondered if it was because of the cowboy hat or the geometry of his body.

He approached Billingsley, who was slouching behind the checkout counter with his arms crossed and his back against the wall of cigarette packages wrapped in cellophane. The man put one hand down on the counter as if to steady himself.

"Excuse me, son, got any Pepto Bismol here?"

I leaned on my broom and waited to see how my understudy would react.

"Ask him," Billingsley said, unfolding one arm to point at me.

I started to give Billingsley a scowl then turned it into a half-smile for the customer. "I think we do, sir," I said. "Just a minute." I walked to the third row. The middle sections of the four shelves to my left were filled with small parcels of medicine at big convenience store prices. I glanced through the tubes and bottles and boxes, their contents cooked up for sufferers of hemorrhoids and PMS and hay fever, and finally saw a cluster of pink and yellow bottles on the bottom shelf. I picked one up and rubbed the dust off the cap with my thumb as I looked over the top shelf at the man, who was still standing by the checkout counter. He had splayed the fingers of his left hand over his bulging belly.

"All we have is liquid," I said. "No tablets."

"Fine, son, fine. Just hurry up." He put a fist to his mouth, belched, and made a face. Billingsley, who had opened a bag of peanuts from the wire rack on the counter, was nibbling on them and staring at our client.

"Kind of small," the man said as I emerged with the bottle.

"Only size we have," I said. I stopped and backed up a step toward the aisle. "Want another one?"

He put his fist back over his mouth and squinted. His cheeks puffed slightly. His puffing seemed to discharge an aroma of sourness. In the plate glass window, I could see Billingsley's ghost leering at him expectantly. The man took his fist away from his mouth and shifted his eyes, which had been on me during his squinting and puffing, to Billingsley. I wondered if the peanuts, which I could smell from where I was standing, were making the man nauseous.

"Bring me two bottles," the man said.

"How about a six-pack?" Billingsley mumbled. Some peanut crumbs fell out of his mouth as he spoke.

"On the night shift it's always one customer at a time," I said as I lifted the mop from the bucket and wrung it out. I sloshed it down into the puddle the round man had left in front of the checkout counter and wondered what else I could mutter about to keep my mind off what I was cleaning up. "Everyone who comes in between 10 p.m. and 6 a.m. is alone and no two of these loners are ever in the store at the same time. Sometimes you might start thinking about talking to them -- saying something besides, 'Can I help you, sir? Why, yes, we do have cream-filled cupcakes. They're in aisle four.'"

As I pushed the mop through the filth, I squinted at my blurry reflection in the floor's wet shine. For a second I was afraid I looked like one of my customers, whose skin was usually somewhere between blue and gray, as mine seemed to be at that moment. Maybe the floor just wasn't being kind

to me.

"Don't bother trying to get past 'can I help you,'" I said. "I've tried. All of them are alone for a reason and none of them wants to talk about it."

I'd been going for about five minutes. My sentences were coming out in short, choppy phrases because I was trying not to breathe. The air smelled sour and peanuty, with the burning stench of disinfectant staining everything else. To relieve my watering eyes, I was monitoring the attention of my co-worker, who was stationed on the clean side of the counter, by occasionally glancing at the plate glass window, which I was facing. I decided to check on him again.

I saw Billingsley pop a peanut into his mouth as I looked up. I decided that was enough for one glance and turned my eyes back to the mess on the floor. I didn't understand how he could be eating, least of all what he'd been eating when the man had, in workmanlike fashion, heaved up his breakfast, lunch, supper, and between-meal snacks. Maybe Billingsley had something going for him as a night shifter besides nose picking, which he seemed to be practicing between peanuts.

"I watch all loners closely, especially if they're suspicious." I coughed and blinked. My nose was tingling. "After midnight, just about everybody is."

"That guy who was here a while ago seemed OK," Billingsley said around a mouthful of peanuts he was sluggishly turning into thin but chunky peanut butter. "I mean, if he hadn't vandalized the floor he would've been OK."

"Are you listening?" I looked at the plate glass window. Billingsley's right hand snapped from his nose to his side, which it did every time I caught him hiding the tip of his index finger in his nostril. "I said just about everybody." I stared at the filthy, cracking floor tiles for a couple of seconds, wondering where it had all come from, then glanced quickly over my shoulder at Billingsley himself. He was chewing with his mouth open. Wet brown crumbs dotted his yellow shirt front.

"But that doesn't mean anything anyway," I said, looking back at the floor. "Whenever someone comes in, no matter what he looks like, I start imagining how I would describe him to the police." I moved the mop in a few slow circles then dunked it in the sudless gray water in the bucket. "Which doesn't mean I want to be a hero or anything. I may be skinny, but I'm not Barney Fife."

"Ever had a chance?"

I wiped my eyes on my shirt sleeve then looked at Billingsley. "A chance for what?"

"For being a hero."

I took the mop from the bucket and slapped it onto the floor without bothering to wring it out. Dirty disinfectant crawled under the soles of my

canvas tennis shoes. I slowly pushed the mop back and forth and thought of the time a pale bald woman with a scrawny ponytail had come in around 4 a.m. on New Year's Eve. She'd walked right up to the counter, just like the man with the bowling ball body, and, unlike the man with the bowling ball body, had pulled a buck knife out of the pocket of her leather pants, opened it, and started to pare her nails.

"You talking to me?" I'd asked her, trying to sound like I had relatives with names like Fabrizio and Carmine. Then I'd realized she hadn't said anything.

I held the mop up so Billingsley could see it. "This is the most heroic thing I've ever done at Bright Stop."

He smiled, too widely, the Bright Stop smile all Bright Stop clerks were supposed to not only have but use. Even if I'd had it I never would have used it. Still, I would have counted that skin-stretching grin as one more unexpected advantage for Billingsley if he'd been using it when someone other than a co-worker was in the store -- and if it hadn't revealed bits of peanut stuck here and there between his teeth.

Billingsley threw some more peanuts into his mouth and grinned as he chewed them. "So you've never done an actual heroic act? You've never been in a holdup? You've never caught a shoplifter? No wonder Daddy's making you leave."

I plunged the mop into the bucket and started to look Billingsley in the eye but looked at his reflection instead. For some reason he no longer seemed tired. He hadn't yawned since the round man had left. Either he was finally getting used to the hours or the smell of bile and disinfectant had invigorated him.

"I'm resigning, Billingsley, so I can go to school full time and then get a real job." I leaned on the mop and stared at his reflection and saw him brighten even more.

"Daddy doesn't like quitters." His glossy orange and yellow reflection cackled. "No wonder he's giving me your job. I won't quit. How long have you worked here? I bet I can stay longer."

I was saved from having to respond by a siren. It was quite loud and obviously coming from a vehicle on our street, which emergency vehicles of all sorts brightened regularly. Bright Stop, splashed with orange and yellow, stood out among the street's few immobile bright spots. The blue-and-white Hank's Handi Station, which was a couple of blocks south of Bright Stop, seemed like a light bulb next to the sun. Sometimes as I would pull into the parking lot a little before 10 p.m. and, squinting in the glare of the store, try to make out two yellow lines to park my car between, I had to wonder how the sound of a mere siren could be heard over something as loud as the colors of my workplace.

Billingsley heard the siren, dropped his peanuts, and, like a dog, rushed from behind the counter, skidded across the wet floor, and ran out the entrance, jangling the bell as he shoved open the door. I listened for a minute to see if he'd start barking, but I didn't follow him outside. I'd heard plenty of sirens in my eight months at Bright Stop so I didn't care much about seeing what this one was screaming about, even though I could have used some air.

About fifteen minutes later, Billingsley trudged back in. He went behind the counter, picked up his bag of peanuts, which he rattled then tossed down, and slouched.

"We missed our chance by two blocks," he said, folding his arms and frowning. "If those crooks had picked us instead of Hank's Handi Station we could've been in the paper."

I'd finished mopping while Billingsley was out chasing the siren, so I didn't have much to do other than listen to him mope. When I realized I was not only listening to but looking at Billingsley for no good reason, I went to the magazine display to find something else to which I could pay attention. I kneeled down and started to dig through the display. Though this obscured Billingsley from my sight, his voice floated to me through the buzz of the lights and the haze of the air, which seemed to be wavering because of the potency of the disinfectant.

"You know, Daddy says they never hit Bright Stop because it's part of a chain. Security's better at chain stores, and they know it."

Noticing the letters "OY" in a telltale typeface on a mostly obscured magazine cover, I reached to the back of the display and fished out a three-month-old copy of *Playboy*, the cover of which was torn and the pages of which were crinkled. Still, it was considerably better than Billingsley. I sat down Indian-style in front of the display and began flipping through the magazine.

After a few minutes, I realized Billingsley's prattle had stopped and, wondering if he'd choked on disinfectant fumes, I started to look up. Two orange-clad legs stood before me. I didn't look any farther. "It's not what you think, Billingsley. I'm just reading the articles." I looked at the magazine, which was opened to a pictorial feature titled "Meltdown" and subtitled "Bombshell Nuclear Physics Majors," and flipped through it until I came to a page with more text than flesh.

"Daddy always says if you're going to read the magazines you should pay for them."

"OK, I was looking at the pictures." I flipped to the centerfold, unfolded it, and looked up. The Bright Stop smile was nowhere in sight. I started to ask Billingsley if he'd paid for his peanuts but instead glanced once more at the centerfold, folded it up, closed the magazine, and tossed it back

into the display. I stood up and walked away from Billingsley to the back of the store to get my broom, intending to count floor tiles while pretending to clean them. I didn't care if he watched while he picked his nose, but I wasn't going to tell Billingsley what I was really doing. He'd have to learn about the floor tiles on his own.

The man with long, greasy hair, a diamond stud in his nose, and a tattoo of a bullfrog on his right cheek was rubbing his wrists, making it seem like he'd be more at home in a holding cell waiting for a public defender than in Bright Stop looking at the magazine display. I was watching the man from the opposite end of the front aisle, where I was pretending to organize cans of motor oil. Billingsley was behind the counter reading a copy of *Gumshoe Beat* he hadn't paid for. He'd explained to me it was OK for him to read it without paying for it because he had a subscription to GB, as he called it, but this month's issue was late -- maybe even lost in the mail.

I was getting tired of the man with the frog on his face. Being nervous always made me tired. He'd been gazing at the magazine display for twenty minutes and hadn't even picked anything up. I slowly walked over to him, almost tiptoeing. "Can I help you find something?" I said, only then realizing I had a can of Quaker State in each hand.

His head twitched in my direction. It took his eyes a second to catch up. "Mmm-mmm-nnn-rrr-rrr," he said.

I shook my head. "No, we sold out of it last week," I said. I held up the cans of oil. "But we do have Quaker State -- it's on special, too." I tried to smile the Bright Stop smile.

The man, who apparently didn't care about the Bright Stop smile one way or the other, left the store without looking back. As the door swung shut behind him, it caught Billingsley's reflection. He was still staring at his magazine. He hadn't noticed my heroism.

Billingsley had been gone fifteen minutes by the time Paul, who was the day clerk and looked as if he'd once had a tan, came in at 6 a.m. I didn't really care that Billingsley had left early. I wanted to be the one who finished things up, even though there wasn't anything to finish up and, even if there were, Paul was there to start things up all over again.

As I pushed open the door to go outside, I turned and half-raised one hand to Paul, who was behind the counter. As usual, he was standing stiff as a soldier with his hands behind his back and his eyes straight ahead, and he didn't seem to notice my hand-raising. I sometimes wondered if he saluted the first customer of the day, but I'd never had a chance to find out. For some reason no one ever came in between Paul's arrival and my departure.

I stepped from the doorway to the pavement and went to my car at the edge of the parking lot, which was strewn with aluminum cans and broken beer bottles. Before long it would be difficult to count the oil stains. The morning people would be swarming in for their coffee, gas, and newspapers.

I got in my car and settled into the creaking bucket seat, where I sat wondering if the sky, which was still dark, would be clear. Sometimes I waited for sunrise -- seeing it was about the only way to tell I'd gotten any work done -- but usually I didn't because of the morning traffic, which was one thing I wasn't paid for sitting through. I looked once more at Paul, who was little more than a blur within the glow of the store, then I started my car, put it in gear, and flipped on the brights as I headed for the street, which was still empty of everything but shadows.

**Vic Odegar**  
English, SR

## One Thing I Have Never Seen

i have never seen a green flower.  
green in the sense of chlorophyl.  
the leaf green of unripe pecans.  
but with a mighty exchanging gesture.  
this too will change. i know.  
that a green sunflower will precede me.  
into the porch. the porch of much sweeping.  
of untypical leaves of chameleon bronze.  
of deep metallic blue and cold pink.  
blowing out and in at the base.  
of the green sunflower and becoming.  
suddenly bleached clear.  
as a dead woman's face.

**Jody Pate**  
English, JR

## Another Thing I Have Never Seen

i have never seen a road moving.  
a road is flat. for laying.  
a road is long. for looking.  
a road is still. for breathing.  
a road is outside.

a road moving is a man.  
a man stopping is a road.

a road sideways splits a man.  
in two. a road is left and right.  
for the sun.

a road is latticed.  
with microscopic canyons. a.  
road. is very. very. quiet.

**Jody Pate**  
English, JR

## Ice Age

The spring thaw never came that year.  
The creeks did not rise.  
The water did not go tumbling  
joyfully down the mountainside  
white foam and roar  
for a reunion with the thirsty river bed  
parched and cracked.

New Aspen buds did not shimmer  
in morning sunlight.  
Hummingbirds did not glisten at feeders.  
Rabbit and Elk were not at play.

"Persephone must be dead," she thought,  
looking out the winter frost pane.

Catherine Preslar  
English, SR

## Offspring

Cardinals, bees, gold-budding trees;  
a shimmering light athwart the porch;  
a zephyrus, a transient breeze,  
pale butterflies, beruffled peas;

young fiddle-fern, snowdrop demure,  
Dutch iris' slender, ice-blue torch;  
Alfred, crowned; azaleas sure;  
pearblossom bride's white-lace allure; -

conundrum this, to teach, to tease:  
drab February gave us these?

Margaret Hynes

*Editor's Note: "Offspring" and "Letter to My  
Son, Four Months Later," also by Margaret  
Hynes, were published in previous issues of  
PULSE but not properly attributed to their  
author.*

## The Cinderella Myth in *My Antonia*

by Allison Quinn

In *The World and the Parish*, Willa Cather writes, "Surely we all know that the books we read when we were children shaped our lives; at least they shaped our imaginings, and it is with our imaginings that we live" (852). Cather later writes, in *The Kingdom of Art*, how her childhood reading was steeped in fables and legends, including Grimms' *Fairy Tales*, *The Arabian Nights*, and Germanic-Norse folklore (36). Clearly, myth shapes Cather's imagination. She blends an abundance of allusions from Shakespeare and opera throughout her work, both of which draw heavily from fairy tales. Aldo Celli points out that Cather's work reveals a strong archetypal dimension: "Like fables, Willa Cather's tales and novels are based on essential situations ... Like the folktale, Willa Cather's novels have the recurrent process of elaborating common material in a multidimensional context" (115).

According to Marilyn Berg Callander, "Cather enjoyed inventing tales for her younger brothers when they were children, and many of these tales are laced with fairy-tale conventions" (2). Callander also reveals that Willa Cather once wrote her own fairy tale, "The Princess Baladina -- Her Adventure," published in Pittsburgh's *Home Monthly* in 1896, under the pseudonym Charles Douglass (3). The charming story, now in Cather's *Collected Short Fiction*, shows how thoroughly familiar Cather was with the narrative patterns of fairy tale, in particular, the "Cinderella" tale. But Cather's princess (instead of being docile and submissive) scratches and bites the nurse who combs her golden hair and is tempted to cut it off for the fact that if a prince "should happen to come that way it would be awkward not to have any golden hair" (568). The princess is in search of her own fairy tale; she runs away to find her prince, who, when she locates him, is too busy with the royal hunt to bother with a princess. Written just short of 100 years ago, Cather's fairy tale resembles the feminist fairy tales we read today where heroines no longer wait passively to become a mere prize for their daring prince but flaunt convention by insisting on ruling their own kingdoms.

Although enchanted with the fairy tale form, Cather apparently also has an awareness of the unnatural and potentially destructive tendency that many of the classic fairy tales have on behavior, particularly female behavior. Throughout much of Cather's fiction, fairy tale allusions produce contradictory effects. The motifs are familiar, but the outcome of the stories may be somewhat surprising.

Bruno Bettelheim reminds us that "Cinderella" is a story about

"wishes coming true, of the humble being elevated, of true merit being recognized even when hidden under rags, of virtue rewarded" (239). Unlike "The Sleeping Beauty" and "Snow White" -- equally famous fairy tales which Cather draws upon extensively in her works, and in which the princess is traditionally passive -- "Cinderella" is a tale in which the princess acts: "essentially it is through her own efforts, and because of the person she is, that Cinderella is able to transcend magnificently her degraded state, despite what appear as insurmountable obstacles" (243).

Cather's use of the "Cinderella" theme in her novel, *My Antonia*, reflects her ambivalence toward the social conditions of her time. Josephine Donovan reports that the early 1900's was a period of extraordinary opportunity for women, offering them the possibility of entering professional fields hitherto barred them, of entering the "man's world of public life" (72). At the same time, however, such opportunities required the difficult decision (perhaps the "insurmountable obstacle") of leaving the traditional woman's world of "love and ritual," of domesticity -- the world of the mothers.

Cather faces this dilemma of the "new woman" in *My Antonia* by threading the "Cinderella" theme through the choices and lives of two female characters, Antonia and Lena. She turns over the narrative responsibility of the two women's stories to Jim Burden, her author-surrogate. Throughout the novel, Jim (i.e., Cather) expresses his memories of how life in a desolate Nebraska country affects those around him, especially the lives of the two women. Jim views his memories through the lens of fairy tale, examining Antonia and Lena's "Cinderella" pasts. Like the classic Cinderella, both Antonia and Lena have an unusual relationship with a father figure, spend time in a degraded state, have a "fairy godmother" experience, and face "insurmountable obstacles" which aid in the discovery of their separate identities.

A series of fairy-tale scenes, filtered through Jim's cherishing memory, brings Antonia to life. She first appears as the pretty little Bohemian girl, unable to speak a word of English, and the object of her father's adoration. Bettelheim reminds us that Cinderella is the classic fairy tale of a "princess" whose father loves her best because she is special -- usually more beautiful, clever, and talented than her siblings (249). Antonia's uniqueness catches not only her father's eye, but Jim's as well. He describes his meeting of Antonia and her sister: "The little girl was pretty, but Antonia ... was still prettier." Her eyes "were big and warm and full of light, like the sun shining on brown pools in the wood" (23). Antonia and her father, Mr. Shimerda, have a special bond that Jim notices immediately. As Antonia and Jim see Mr. Shimerda walking toward them, Antonia runs to meet him. Jim writes, "Antonia reached him first, took his hand and kissed it" (27). Jim later

replies, "Antonia loved her father more than she did anyone else" (90).

Cather presents a different view of the "Cinderella" theme in the young life of Lena Lingard. Jim describes Lena's father as being an unsuccessful farmer, doing what he can to provide for his large family. This leaves Lena "out among her cattle, bareheaded and barefooted, scantily dressed in tattered clothing, always knitting as she watched her herd" (165). Although Lena's life is hard from the beginning, her special beauty and uniqueness surface and stir Jim immediately: "Her yellow hair was burned to a ruddy thatch on her head; but her legs and arms, curiously enough, in spite of constant exposure to the sun, kept a miraculous whiteness. I was astonished at her soft voice and easy, gentle ways" (165). Despite the ragged clothes and difficult life, evidence of her father's neglect, Jim recognizes Lena's beauty and virtue.

Both Antonia and Lena endure various adversities in their young lives. Just as Cinderella finds herself reduced to a cindermaid by her wicked stepmother, so Antonia soon discovers her fate as a workhorse for her brother, Ambrosch, after her beloved father's death. Not only does Ambrosch begin to direct Antonia's work but also her "feelings as well as her fortunes" (127). Jim's grandmother watches Antonia working the fields and, knowing Mr. Shimerda wanted better for his daughter, replies, "The oldest one was his darling, and was like a right hand to him. He might have thought of her. He's left her alone in a hard world" (98). As Jim tells Antonia about school, she shares with him, in tears, her father's life in the old country: "My father, he went much to school. He know a great deal; how to make the fine cloth like what you not got here. He play horn and violin, and he read so many books that the priests in Bohemie come to talk to him." Antonia doesn't consider her father's former life a possibility for her, though: "I ain't got time to learn. I can work like mans now" (123). Ambrosch continues to work Antonia, putting upon her "some chores a girl ought not to do," until "farm-hands around the country joked in a nasty way about it" (126). Antonia does her chores dutifully, however, just as does Cinderella, with her "growing piles of ashes and cinders ... the only evidence that the ... process of life went on at all" (220).

Lena's time of degradation comes about after a scandal involving her takes place on the settlement. A variation of the oedipal problem, which Bettelheim tells us is a part of the classic Cinderella story (241), arises in Lena's life. Ole Benson, a neighbor farmer, appears as a sort of father figure for Lena. He constantly wanders off to wherever she herds her livestock, and sits to watch her. The entire settlement begins "talking about it," telling Lena she "ought not allow it" (167). Lena later tells Jim: "There was never any harm in Ole .... People needn't have troubled themselves. He just liked to come over and sit on the draw-side and forget about his bad luck. I liked to

have him. Any company's welcome when you're off with cattle all the time" (282). Not only is Lena "talked about" but her life becomes an endless cycle of herding cattle and tending her younger siblings and her sick mother. Eventually, Benson's wife, "Crazy Mary," threatens Lena with a knife, and Lena knows she must find a way to leave the prairie.

Antonia and Lena both have a "fairy godmother" experience that helps them realize the possibility of finding a way out of their drudgery. Jim's grandmother arranges with Ambrosch to hire Antonia out to a fine lady in town, Mrs. Harling. Like Cinderella's fairy godmother, Mrs. Harling sees to it that Ambrosch leaves part of Antonia's wages as an allowance for her clothes and pocket-money, although Ambrosch argues that she only wants to "take his sister into town and dress her up and make a fool of her" (152). Antonia's appearance surprises Mrs. Harling when she goes to pick her up. She tells Jim's grandmother how Antonia was "barefoot and ragged." Jim's grandmother explains, "When she first came to this country and had that genteel old man to watch over her, she was as pretty a girl as ever I saw. But, dear me, what a life she's led, out in the fields with those rough threshers! Things would have been very different with poor Antonia if her father had lived" (154). Mrs. Harling agrees to pay Antonia three dollars a week and keep her in shoes, her first "Cinderella slippers" -- symbolizing her new opportunities in life.

Lena's "fairy godmother" comes in the form of the town dressmaker, Mrs. Thomas, who offers her a job sewing. When Jim next sees Lena he barely recognizes her, saying he "had never seen her before with a hat on her head -- or with shoes and stockings on her feet, for that matter" (160). Lena announces that she is "through with the farm," and is going to be a dressmaker" (161). She focuses her time on creating a career, her means for securing her future. Through Lena's unconventional choice, Cather, in an early feminist fashion, reveals her ambivalence toward the preset gender roles defining the American women of her time.

Antonia and Lena must face "insurmountable obstacles" to find their separate identities. Jim describes Antonia like a virtuous Cinderella, "everything she said seemed to come out of her heart" -- the source of her power (176). The limitations of Antonia's heart soon begin to appear, however. she admires Charley Harling, Mrs. Harling's son, and thinks of him as a "sort of prince." Jim writes, "Antonia had made herself cloth working-slippers out of Mr. Harling's old coats, and in these she went padding about after Charley, fairly panting with eagerness to please him" (155). "The trouble with me was," she later explains to Jim, "I never could believe harm of anybody I loved" (344). Antonia's "all heart, no head" approach to life leads her directly into the arms of Larry Donovan, who only wanted to take advantage of the hired girls. Jim remembers that Larry's "unappreciated

worth was the tender secret Larry shared with his sweethearts" (305). Against her better judgement, Antonia participates in the mythology of the transforming power of women's love: "I thought if he saw how well I could do for him, he'd want to stay with me" (313). Judith Fetterly relates, "The arms of Larry Donovan open directly onto the realm of the seduced and abandoned and 'my' Antonia is 'poor' Antonia now to Jim and to the town" (133). Just as Cinderella must return before midnight to her life of degradation after tasting the delicacies of freedom at the ball, so must Antonia return to a home of drudgery and gossip. But like Cinderella, Antonia never gives up hope of finding the life she desires. Antonia must rear her illegitimate daughter alone and, instead of allowing herself to become the object of pity, she faces this obstacle with great pride and independence. Clara B. Cooper responds, "Her greatness gradually assumes mythic proportions; a new strength and gravity is discernible in her face ... and though she is 'battered' she is in no way 'diminished'" (33).

Antonia chooses to return to the country, where she triumphs over disgrace and finds her identity, not in the husband she takes (who Jim describes as "the instrument of Antonia's special mission") nor the many children she rears but in her conquest of the pioneer life she loves (367). She achieves victory over her own hard early life and over the forces of nature in Nebraska. Antonia lives "happily ever after" through her transformation into an archetypal mother, which now signifies nourishment, protection, fertility, growth, and abundance; the source of the fertility and energy that has transformed the barren Nebraska prairie into a rich and fruitful garden. Like Cinderella, Antonia attains the future rightfully hers, an achievement primarily made possible through her own strength and effort. After seeing her as a triumphal figure in the midst of her family, Jim thinks that Antonia had always been a woman to leave "images in the mind that did not fade -- that grew stronger with time." He searches for the secret of her inner beauty: "She still had that something which fires the imagination, could still stop one's breath for a moment by a look or gesture that somehow revealed a meaning in common things .... She was a rich mine of life" (353).

If Antonia survives as the frontier spirit, Lena embodies the frontier flesh. Lena faces the "insurmountable obstacle" of rejecting the traditional role of the pioneer woman with gusto. In contrast to Antonia, Lena moves through the world with perfect English and composure (160). She is "crazy about town" (164) because she sees it as the way up and out. "Through with the farm" and through with family life, Fetterly writes, "Lena is determined to be economically and personally independent" (134). Instead of searching for a "prince" through whom she will find her identity, Lena determines to create her own future. She does not have an aversion to men but to marriage. Jim sees her as practical and sensuous, "a waltz with Lena was like coming in with

the tide" (222), and somehow perpetually innocent. Susie Thomas writes, "Even as a smartly dressed townswoman she still seems like the cowgirl with white legs who unwittingly drove Ole Benson mad with desire" (59). When she goes to meet Jim for a walk along the river bank, Jim sees that her "Cinderella slippers" are now unconventional "high-heeled slippers" (239). Lena concentrates her full determination on becoming independent and helping her family, but she has no intention of marrying: "She remembered home as a place where there were always too many children, a cross man and work piling up around a sick woman" (291). In the end she lives comfortably, takes lovers when she chooses, and turns down all suitors for her hand: "It's all being under somebody's thumb" (292).

Throughout the novel, Cather's awareness of the lack of choices for females of her time appears obvious. Her juxtaposition of the two female characters in a variation of the "Cinderella" theme reveals the liberating possibilities available for women who are courageous enough to break the molds placed on them by society. Both Antonia and Lena, like the mythical Cinderella, learn through their unusual relationship with a father figure, time spent in a degraded state, a "fairy godmother" experience, and the facing of an "insurmountable obstacle" to find their identity. Whether becoming the "frontier spirit" or the "frontier flesh," the women, like Cinderella -- and, indeed like Cather herself -- deny the passivity of their assigned roles and become their own vital sources of meaning and fulfillment.

#### Works Cited

- Bettelheim, Bruno. *The Uses of Enchantment*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976.
- Callander, Mary Berg. *Willa Cather and the Fairy Tale*. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1989.
- Cather, Willa. *The Kingdom of Art*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966.
- Cather, Willa. *My Antonia*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1918.
- Cather, Willa. *The World and the Parish*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970.
- Celli, Aldo. *The Art of Willa Cather*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1974.
- Cooper, Clara B. "The Central Androgynous Characters in *My Antonia*." *Antonia*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1991. 32-34.



- Donovan, Josephine. "The Place of *My Antonia* in Women's Literary Traditions." *Approaches to Teaching Cather's My Antonia*. Ed. Susan J. Rosowski. New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1989. 71-76.
- Fetterley, Judith. "My *Antonia*, Jim Burden and the Dilemma of the Lesbian Writer." *Antonia*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1991. 132-147.
- Thomas, Susie. "The Golden Girl of the West: *My Antonia*." *Antonia*. Ed. Harold Bloom. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1991. 58-61.

## PULSE

*Pulse* is a student publication intended to exhibit works by student writers. It is distributed once each long semester. Cash prizes are awarded in each category. Entries are judged by a panel of qualified professors. All submissions are subject to editorial discretion.

### Rules for literary submissions:

1. Entries must be typed and double spaced. Clear photo copies will be accepted. ENTRIES WILL NOT BE RETURNED. Keep a copy of all work.
2. You may submit work on IBM compatible disks for use in WordPerfect 5.1. Be sure to label the disk with your name and Social Security number. You must have your student ID card to claim your disk.
3. Author's name should NOT appear on the submission. One submission form should be used for all entries by a single author. Forms are available in the Maes Liberal Arts Building in office 03 or 04.
4. Poetry submissions are limited to ten per author.
5. Entries must be submitted in Maes 03 or 04.

POETRY ESSAYS SHORT FICTION

FOREIGN LANGUAGE TRANSLATIONS

