Aquila Review

Volume 1
Fall 2008

Texas A&M University-Texarkana

2008 *Aquila Review*

Aquila Review is a nonprofit arts journal published twice each year by Texas A&M University-Texarkana. Funding for this publication is provided by Texas A&M University-Texarkana's English Club and subscriptions to the journal.

Communicate with the staff of *Aquila Review* using the following contact information:

Aquila Review
Texas A&M University-Texarkana
Department of English
P. O. Box 5518
2600 N. Robison Rd.
Texarkana, TX 75505-5518
(903) 223-3022
www.tamut.edu

Submissions

Aquila Review publishes original art, creative nonfiction, drama, fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. Unsolicited interviews and reviews will not be considered. Manuscripts are not read during the summer months.

Submissions may be sent as hard copies, or submissions may be sent in the body of an e-mail to brian.billings@tamut.edu. Simultaneous submissions are encouraged. When mailing hard copies, please include a self-addressed stamped envelope. Submissions without a self-addressed stamped envelope will not be returned. *Aquila Review* cannot accept responsibility for the loss or damage of any materials sent by mail. Sample copies of *Aquila Review* are available upon request for $8.00 apiece.

Contents

Art

Creative Nonfiction

Fiction

Murder in Frogtown
Cynthia Wilson

When the clear heavy light
turns to indigo,
and the air takes rest
on the leaves—
when anxious eyes are
brightened by fireflies,
there's murder in Frogtown.

When the ticks are fat
with stolen blood,
and the clean forgotten nests
are souvenirs—
when cicadas scratch their itch,
and crickets hang in the shadows,
there's murder in Frogtown.

When the grasshopper cuts his legs—
he's a cutter—
and the whippoorwill calls out
solitary echoes—
when everything finds its way
inside the darkened silence,
there's murder in Frogtown.

And when the bullfrogs are gathered
on banks in gangs—
eager, rapacious young males,
puffed up
with all their macho bull—
and one of them screams,
there's murder in Frogtown.

Fixin’ the Blues

Cynthia Wilson

Sun goin’ down—
a pink-skinned peach—
turns gravel
to mother-of-pearl.
Sittin’ on the porch; hot
jazz beatin’ with the
rhythm of the fan.
Ginger snaps warm
from the oven on
a cracked china plate
with a ten-year-old
tawny port—brown
and sweet like the mama
who raised you
to appreciate the fine ways
the blues come to visit.

Still Standing
Agnes Tirrito

Roof's on the ground.
Pieces of mangled tin
cast aside by an angry wind.

Jumbles of peeling wood—
blue-gray, fading fast.
Rusty nails.
Weeds and wire.
Pick up the pieces.

Oak tree's down.
Save a twig.
Dip it in an inky well.
Paint on paper.
Start over.

<u>Barn</u>
Agnes Tirrito

Goodbye, Home

Agnes Tirrito

Distant music draws us in.
A skeleton key opens the lock.
I look through yesterday's windows
at where the garden was—
where he came in from milking.
I listen for clanging buckets,
lowing cows, jingling bells . . .
the scratching of the screen door
saying he's home.

A breeze whispers
through the front-porch screens
while I rock in a gray metal chair,
feeling diamond indentations
patterning my legs.

Smile at a photograph,
stare into an oak-framed mirror,
roll eyes at ten jars of coffee
(never opened), and wonder
what to keep.
I want that, and so do you.
Move to the next room.
Remember a story.
Defend an action,
a father, a mother . . .
Touch fingers to each door frame.
Touch . . . then enter.
Hear the New Year's toast.
Dance again to an organ's melody:
"Jingle Bells" or "Annie Laurie."

Soak in every wood slat,
every piece of rippled light.
Some things don't fit in a box.

<u>1964</u>
Agnes Tirrito

Mountain Wonderments

Michael Perri

Pinnacles reach to empyrean
But must cling to the earth
Of which they are.

Forests reach for the pinnacles
But cannot pass the taluses.
A few pygmy trees cling to ledges,
But they miss their communities.

Gazing at the peaks,
My mind wanders into spaces it cannot know
Until the wind reminds me of my tethers.
Still stymied, I return renewed.

Go

Karen Linstrum

Through the windshield,
trees are dirt-sprinkled with nails.
The view is wall-to-wall
with tires needing air
and deadwood needing fire.

When Mama Hung Robert Redford

Doris Davis

When Mama hung Robert Redford
on her bedroom wall,
Daddy called it quits,
moving his work shoes and khakis
to the sleeping porch.

Bad enough
to stare at that charcoal
over the bathtub,
but in the bedroom . . .
Daddy lost his self-respect.

The sunlit hair and toothy grin
nettled him like a poke in the eye.
He tore up Mama's pillow
and let the feathers fly
under the high cheekbones
of Hollywood.

After the storm . . .
Mama had mercy and put him in the closet.
Twenty years he's suffered
smudges from Mama's long wool coat—
his eyes bleeding blue rivers into
his even teeth, his perfect skin relaxing
into puffy mildew
with legs that trail off.

Yet even now he's smiling
into the dark,
smiling hard into the dank corners
of his cropped world,
sure of the moment—
smiling to be sure.

Rollin' on the Water

Doris Davis

Irene Murphy was thirty-five, but people often thought she was older. She had limp brown hair and a distant look about her eyes. She was not what anyone would call pretty. Her own mother told her she'd better work on her personality to compensate, but Irene didn't have much personality, either. Quiet. Shy. Timid. If you thought of her, these words came to mind.

Still, she had her job at the office, a small mortgaged house, her TV, and food. She was a good cook, but mostly she ate junk because she couldn't help herself. Her pantry's shelves bulged with candy, cokes, and cookies. She especially loved chocolate, often eating piece after piece until she was sick. She had never been slender, but now she was a stocky, pear-shaped woman. She ate each evening until she slipped into a pensive sleep on her mother's cast-off colonial couch.

Each day, she woke with the vivid impression that something would happen. Something would occur which would change her life. One night, she dreamed of a lover who, sent to prison, involved her in a scheme for his release. Called Fred, he smelled of tar and burning leaves, and she felt an obsequious desire—a limpness like her mother's sheets flapping on the clothesline—when she bent forward to unhook the lock on his cell. But as she did so, she floated peculiarly through the bars, waving her skirts indecently. When she reached out to touch him, he drifted away, suddenly becoming a passenger on a plane. "Fred," she cried, "I am your own Irene," but the words were sucked up in the roar of the engines.

The morning after the dream, Irene woke to a feeling of dread. When she went into her yard to get the Saturday paper, a man was leaning against the sweet gum.

"Hello, ma'am," he said. "Got any work to do around here? I'm good with my hands."

"No, sorry," Irene muttered, but when she went back inside, she slipped to the window and peered out. Still standing out front was the man. *About thirty,* she thought. Sandy hair grew two inches over his collar. He wore cowboy boots and a T-shirt that read, "Wiser than a tree full of owls."

She thought it might be her imagination, but he had a peculiar resemblance to Fred. He had the same tired look around his eyes. She went back to the door and called out to him, "Hey, mister, I forgot about the leaves in the backyard. If you want, you can rake them." And then quickly, "But just for five dollars. That's all I can afford."

Not until she had gotten him the rake did she notice he had only one leg. He must have been standing sideways, leaning up against the tree with his crutch

behind his back. Otherwise, she would have noted a detail so striking. She handed him the rake and almost said, "Look, you can just have the five dollars," but she didn't. Perhaps the T-shirt held her back. She'd never seen one like it.

She watched from the door as he raked the leaves into small brown piles, balancing his weight on his leg and the rake. She thought he resembled a grotesque flamingo, and then she felt ashamed. She watched him swap the rake for his crutch.

"Hey, mister, want some water?"

"Sure do, lady," he answered. "The world is a lonely place. Water is a wonder."

She brought him the water in a glass.

"Well, it's just water out of the faucet," she said, looking at his dirty fingernails when he came closer. "Just plain, old city water."

"It's a delight, ma'am," he said, and then he gulped it down. "Yes, sir, a real delight. I want to tell you, lady, people take everything—especially water—for granted nowadays. Water heals us all."

She had looked at the straggling hair on his neck as he drank. She had watched his Adam's apple move as he swallowed. Suddenly, she felt irked that he was in her yard. *Water heals us all*, she thought. She remembered that she hadn't listened to the morning news. He might have escaped from somewhere.

"Now, take you," he said. "You're in trouble. You need water and don't even know it. That's the way with the world these days. People are so scared they don't know they need the water."

"I don't know what you're talkin' about," she muttered.

"Course not," he said. "That's 'cause you ain't ready. You have to think about it long and hard. I saw the look on your face when you opened the door. That look of needin' water. The watery look of loneliness around your eyes."

"I am *not* lonely," Irene returned.

"Well, if you ain't lonely, why have you been watchin' me out the door for the past hour? Why are you talkin' to me now if you ain't lonely?"

Irene felt her face grow hot. Anger surged through her. She imagined herself hitting him, jerking the crutch away, and pushing him over. He was nobody. A tramp. She had a house, a yard, and a job. He had nothing. Not even two legs.

"I'm *not* talking to you!" she yelled. "Get off my porch!"

But she didn't close the door. He spun around on his crutch as though dancing and lifted his head slightly. He began to sing,

Left a good job in the city
Workin' for the man ev'ry night and day
And I never lost one minute of sleepin',

Worryin' 'bout the way things might have been.
Rollin', rollin', rollin' on the river.

It was absolutely ridiculous. He probably wasn't dangerous, but he was strange. She remained at the door, staring at him, tracing with her eye the irregularity of his nose with its peculiar ridge—like a sudden twist in a road. *Probably broke it sometime*, she thought.

"What you need," he said, "is adventure, the water of adventure. Just follow the flow of the water . . . around the bend, down the road as it makes its way to the stream. I can see how tired you are in your eyes. I see how you live other folks' lives without drinkin' your own water. You eat, but you never drink the water of life. Yes, sir, you've been waitin' for someone to tell you. Waitin' for years. I know. I've watched you for a long time. Known your thirst, your parched tongue, your soul. Open your soul for the *waters*!"

He pointed to the heavens.

Irene wanted to cry. She hated him for saying those words, and she hated those words so badly because they were true. She had been waiting. She had been longing. Who was this man?

"I don't know you!" she cried.

"Don't wait any longer," he charged. "Begin now. Rollin' on the water. Sing it with me."

She couldn't help herself. Another person had taken charge of her. She heard her own voice, the familiar sound of the voice she'd know since childhood, proclaiming with this unknown man to "roll on the water."

He took her hand and together—an absurd couple of flesh and disfigurement—they danced in her front hall, taking in great gulps of air, waving arms and legs, flapping their clothes, flinging their hands and bodies. Around and around and around. After a few minutes, she was exhausted. She had to sit down. She felt confused, too, but she distinctly heard what he said.

"You know, when you smile like that you are a *pretty* woman. Yes, sir. Get on up and roll . . . rollin' down the river!"

That was all she remembered. She woke up on the old couch no longer tired. Hours may have passed. She had no idea. She felt good and strong and young . . . so young that anything might have happened.

She got up and went to the bathroom to wash her face in the sink. On the way back, she noticed her purse opened on the dresser. The two twenties she'd had in her billfold were gone, but there was a note printed in black ink on a scrap of brown paper: "Irene, keep on rollin'. Fred."

She read the note twice to be sure. Then she caught sight of her reflection in the mirror. She craned her neck up close to its surface to scrutinize her face, her eyes

and her hair. She hardly recognized herself. She had the look of one raised from the dead—of someone whom a doctor had just resuscitated on the operating table. The haunting look of life peered out of her bright green eyes. A ray of light settled on her shoulders, filtering bronze through her hair and dusting the room's ivory walls with warmth. She gazed with wonder at her face, tracing her features, and she stopped at her nose. Slightly discernible—had she never noticed it before?—a tiny, playful curve shot up on its bridge.

With unaccustomed coyness, she shot the mirror a faint smile to see if the "pretty" might appear.

It did.

Teacher

Kimberlie Starnes

They tell me times have changed.
Every child is no longer the same.
Are you saying I will no longer have
Classrooms full of
Hungry, inquisitive minds?
Ere I believe such folly, I will
Remember I was once a child.

<u>Granny</u>
Gergely Kovacs

The Bride

Doris Davis

Her apparel:
a mask of exotic design,
blood-red flowers,
a gown of white tulle
soiled by bodies
on the road.

An almost perfect day
marred in the east
by fallout
and a slight mushroom cloud
of gas above.

Should the groom return,
they plan a honeymoon
in a remote cave
somewhere undisclosed.

<u>Bride</u>
Gergely Kovacs

After That War

Wendy Carlisle

When I couldn't remember the past
because I was in it, he didn't call it war.
He called it me being a bitch, and he knew
too much about a range of small cruelties
to step aside or break the harsh quiet
which seemed useful in the jungle
and back home clicked like a glass brick
into the afternoons we were crafting.
We lay down; he rose up
in his beautiful, whole skin. Returned,
his arm hairs curled red gold, a trick of light;
his always-cold feet had the memory of swamp.
Dried off, he never cried or cursed, at least at first.
Still, I imagined the future as dust. The future was.

Holocaust Pennies

Zachery B. Donaldson

At various times
At various jobs,
I've had to count money.
Pennies are last.
I always dump them into
the left hand.
Some fall to the fingers.
The others slide neatly
In a row, stacked
Together in the crevice of my palm.

I sometimes feel
Like a Hitler operative,
And the pennies in the crevice
Are Jews stuck
Together for years.
They barely know each other,
But still they want
To be counted
With the pennies they know.

Rats in a Cage

Alisha Jael

Restraining walls:
white enough to see
stains of past sins.

Callous metal bars:
cold enough to bring
shivers of regret.

Naked glass windows:
constant reminders that
freedom cannot be touched.

Rats in a cage—
running circles in their minds.
Night and day fading.

Always hoping to wake
and find themselves
on the other side.

Mainliner
Christian W. Thiede

Okay, I'll admit it.
I'm an addict.
I mainline poetry.
I know I'm weak,
but the temporary ecstasy
is worth it.

I've even gone to
Poets Anonymous meetings.
My family does its best
to deal with the shame.
I don't have any other poet relatives,
so there's no rhyme, rhythm, or reason for it.

I'll forever be the bad seed—
the one whispered about
in grocery store isles
and church pews.
The one others get
a perverse pleasure
from putting down.

I would not feel so bad
if I only hurt myself in this delirium
but—as the surgeon general says—
second-hand poetry
is a killer.

They say I'm responsible for societal
unrest and disillusionment.
Just last week, I brought a cousin
to an open mic.
The very next day,
he quit his corporate job
and joined the Peace Corps.

I whispered a haiku
into a friend’s ear,
and she left her husband.

After publishing a book,
I got complaints about people
going for their dreams.
Seems there’s no end
to the problems of poetry.

Just when I think
I have left it all behind,
I’ll light up a little lyric of alliteration,
maybe lilt a limerick.

Next thing you know,
I’m smoking a sonnet or sestina.
It’s all
    down-
        hill
            from there.
I end up all strung out on poems,
my mouth making metaphors,
hanging with my bad boy, Trouble.

I’m sorry about all this—
truly I am—
but I'm an addict,
and I need some help.
Hey, brother,
can ya spare a line?

My Sister Gave Me a Pedicure

Lori Parault

My sister gave me a pedicure.
It really was a treat.
She put some purple polish
On the toes upon my feet.

My toes all looked so pretty;
I felt just like a star.
We were having so much fun . . .
We went a little far.

I let her curl my stringy hair
And powder up my nose.
She told me that the rest of me
Should match my lovely toes.

And now I have a problem.
Our fun was not so wise,
For now I have to go to school
And face the other guys.

Flip-Flops
Philesha Southern

You can buy them in any color:
Red, yellow, green, or blue.
You may like new ones better,
But you like your old ones, too.

Aunt Bunni Has a Moustache[1]

Lori Parault

Aunt Bunni has a moustache
Growing on her lips.
I hate it when she visits.
She always wants a kiss.

Aunt Bunni played the circus
Many years ago.
She was the bearded lady
In the circus midway show.

She had to shave her beard away
To marry Uncle Rich.
I wish she'd shave her moustache, too.
Her kisses make me itch.

And now she's coming over.
She'll kiss me on the cheek.
I know it's gonna happen.
I'll have nightmares for a week.

I'm scared of itchy kisses.
I'm scared of hairy lips.
I'm scared when she comes near me
And traps me in her grip.

Aunt Bunni has a moustache.
Whatever will I do?
Please don't make me kiss her.
I'd rather she kiss you.

[1] This poem was inspired by the comedy of Eddie Murphy.

Mister Montgomery H. Piddlesink
Jonathan Elder

Today when I went to my first day of school,
I met my new teacher, who said, “You’re uncool.”
His name is Montgomery H. Piddlesink,
But I call him Mister Montgomery Stink
Because he has sort of an odious smell
Like camel poop all blended up in a pail.
He has a big nose, and he wears a bow tie.
They say he can make our own principal cry.
He uses a pointer so you’ll plainly see
All that he says about dull chemistry.
His briefcase is made out of elephant skin.
To touch it would be a most blasphemous sin.
His moustache is full of a special red tint . . .
From kids he’s devoured (to give you a hint).
He uses a whip on the kids who are late.
I’m sad to report their unfortunate fate.
He has a bookshelf that has never had books,
Just daggers and crystals and dirty meat hooks.
His desk is quite big with a grimy dark hue
The color of mud on the sole of my shoe.
He has two kazoos in his bottom-hand drawer
And lots of cool toys (maybe three, maybe four).
He likes to give piles of homework galore.
I know if he could, he would give us some more.
He likes to surprise us sometimes with a quiz:
“Tell me what the theme of *Beowulf* is.”
And he’ll often test us on something absurd
Like taxes or maybe the Kansas state bird.
If your work isn’t finished, then just say, “Goodbye”
Because with the worms and the dirt you will lie.
I know if I make him too mad, I will be
Six feet underground hearing my eulogy.
I can’t think about any time when he’s said,
“In place of schoolwork, let’s go outside instead!”
His room is compact, so you cannot escape.

No windows for light to help illuminate.
They say he has kids, but I doubt this is true.
I cannot imagine what they would go through.
I think he becomes a mean troll in the night.
He hides in your closet to give you a fright.
I won't recommend him to any student.
It would be a crime like malicious intent.
I can't wait till school's out, when he'll cease to be
My teacher for what's left of eternity.
I know what I've learned after taking his class:
No matter the teacher, work hard and you'll pass.
Next year will be great—much like Heaven, I think—
Without Mister Montgomery H. Piddlesink.

One Hundred Thoughts

Kemily Chandler

One hundred beautiful dresses make me feel pretty.
Ninety strawberries taste delicious.
Eighty waves sound inviting.
Seventy angels look like Heaven.
Sixty tears flow over my fingers.
Fifty flowers smell wonderful.
Forty ballerinas remind me of my past.
Thirty dreams can be chased.
Twenty miles are too long.
Ten hugs make my friends smile.
One sunset is miraculous.
No boyfriend. Too bad.

The Boy Who Loved Riddles[1]

Doris Davis

Near the banks of the Mekong River, where water buffalo plow wet fields of rice, there once lived a boy named Minh[2] who loved riddles. He was so smart he could make up a riddle as fast as a monkey can scamper through grass.

"What wears layers of clothes and hugs the pond's edge?" he teased his mother. Before she could answer, he shouted, "A banana tree!" and ran laughing around their straw-roofed house.

"What holds two swords and eight spears and dresses in a cow-leather tunic?" he quizzed his father. Before his father could guess, he yelled, "A crab!" and bounded off giggling.

It was fun to play with words.

In the village lived a rich man, a moneylender. He was as smart as any lawyer (or so everyone said). His big house had a perfect garden with a pack of mean dogs guarding it. The moneylender grew richer each day because poor people paid to borrow his money.

One afternoon, the moneylender strolled out to collect fees and came to Minh's house. Minh was in his yard playing with rocks and making up riddles.

"Are your parents home?" the rich man asked.

"No, sir," Minh replied.

"Well, where are they?" the rich man demanded. "Speak up!"

Minh stared at the gold rings on the rich man's fingers but said nothing.

"What's wrong, you stupid boy?" the rich man snapped. He was in a bad mood because his stomach had begun to hurt. It was stuffed too full of the baked duck he'd had for lunch.

Looking at the man's silk shirt, Minh mumbled, "My father's cutting down live trees and planting dead ones. My mother's at the market selling the wind and buying the moon."

---

[1] This story is based on the Vietnamese folktale "The Fly." "The Fly" appears in *The Toad Is the Emperor's Uncle: Animal Folktales from Vietnam* (1970) retold by Mai Vo-Dinh, Joanna Cole's *Best-Loved Folktales of the World* (1982), and Jane Yolen's *Favorite Folktales from around the World* (1986).

[2] *Minh* means "bright" or "intelligent" in Vietnamese.

The rich man belched, and his black eyes popped wide in anger. "What on earth are you talking about?" he blared. "Selling the wind? Buying the moon? Nonsense! Now tell me where they are. I don't have all day!"

"Figure out the riddle, sir, and you'll know where they are," Minh challenged. "My father's cutting down live trees and planting dead ones. My mother's selling the wind to buy the moon."

"Boy," the rich man blurted, "do you see this piece of bamboo?" *Cling, clang* went the walking stick as he hit it on the fence post. "I'll give you a wallop if you don't tell me where they are. I don't have time for riddles!"

But Minh wouldn't answer.

In a second or so, a smile began to tickle around the edges of Minh's mouth.

"Don't you have a clue, mister?" he asked.

The moneylender's fat cheeks twitched in anger and puffed out like a toad's. For some reason—perhaps it was the smile that darted across the boy's face—he wanted desperately to know the answer to the riddle . . . even more than he wanted his money (at least right then).

"It's a disgrace to be stumped by this little scamp of a riddler!" he said to himself.

Turning his back to the boy, he repeated the riddle to himself, flipping it upside down in his mind, sliding it along the top of his fat tongue until the words fell out —"cutting trees . . . selling wind"—but no answers came. His mind was as empty as a deserted village.

"All right, boy," he said at last, his face white as a melon. "I came here this afternoon to get the money your parents owe, but . . . I might be able to make a deal with you. Yes. Yes. I tell you what I'll do. If you tell me the answer to your riddle, I'll forget their debt. What do you think about that?"

Minh frowned. "I don't believe you," he said.

"I promise," the rich man coaxed. "See that big fly on the fence post? He can be our witness." The rich man poked his hands into the pockets of his fine black jacket and crossed his fingers. "What a fool this boy is," he muttered to himself, smiling. "I'll show him."

"Well, all right . . . the fly's our witness," Minh said. "My father's cutting down bamboo trees and using the sticks to make a fence. That's cutting down live trees and planting dead ones. My mother's selling fans to get money to buy oil for our lamp. That's selling the wind to buy the moon. Now do you get it?"

"Very clever," the moneylender admitted . . . but he didn't laugh. He didn't even smile. "Yes, this is a very clever boy," he thought. "But not smart enough if he thinks a fly can be a witness!" And he swatted at the fly with his walking stick. *Swish, swish* groaned the stick as it cut the thick air.

The next morning before the sun skimmed the top of Minh's house, the rich man appeared again. All night, his anger had simmered like a rice pot boiling.

Brushing a piece of lint from his jacket, the moneylender banged at the door, calling for Minh's father. "Give me the money you owe," he demanded. "If you don't, I'll take whatever I want."

"Really, sir," his father began. "I thought you and Minh had made a deal. I thought—"

"*Now*!" roared the moneylender.

He made such a noise that Minh ran out.

"Father," he cried, "you don't owe him money. I told you he promised to forget the debt!"

"That's crazy!" the moneylender cried. Shaking his stick at the boy, he shouted, "I never talked to this boy. Now are you going to pay or not?"

The moneylender thought of what a fool the boy had made of him, and—before Minh's father could answer—he stormed into the house like a summer monsoon, snatching up the family's full rice baskets and slinging them over his shoulders with their carrying pole. Grabbing two cotton shirts, a jar of coffee, and a large piece of limestone, he blew out the door.

"Stop! You can't do that," Minh yelled running after him.

"I can, and I will," the rich man shouted.

When he realized he was being chased, he picked up speed, hurrying around the house.

But Minh stayed at his heels.

The moneylender's belly bumped up and down as he ran. Around and around the house they charged, frightening the ducks, who flew up in a cloud of feathers, quacking and squawking. Down went the rice baskets on the ground; down fell the shirts; down came the coffee; down slid the limestone . . . and down dropped the moneylender with Minh sprawled on his back.

Such an enormous argument could only be settled in court.

"Your Honor," Minh explained the next day, "this man promised to forget my parents' debt if I gave him the answer to my riddle."

"Your Honor," the rich man argued, "I never spoke to this boy."

"Well, boy," the judge said, "even if this man did promise you such a thing, it's only your word against his. You have no witness."

"Oh, but I have," Minh exclaimed.

"And who is it?" the judge asked.

"A fly, Your Honor."

"A fly? Now, boy, be careful. This court allows no foolishness."

"But, Your Honor, it's true," Minh declared and jumped from his seat. "The witness was a fly that was lighting . . . *on the moneylender's nose*!"

"On my nose!" the rich man bellowed. "You little imp! You know that's a big, fat lie. The fly was not on my nose. It was on the *fence post*!"

Then he stopped—dead still—with a face that looked like an overripe tomato . . . but it was too late.

The judge forgot himself and burst out laughing. Then everyone in the courtroom joined in, even the boy's parents (although they didn't laugh too loudly). The boy laughed, too, and, finally, the rich man, embarrassed as he was, smiled and gave way to a big, hearty chuckle.

Waving his hand at the rich man, the judge said, "Now, now. Everything's decided. You did, sir, make this promise to the boy, and the court says you must keep your promise."

Still chuckling, he dismissed everyone from court. Minh's parents smiled contentedly as Minh sauntered across the room while the judge gave him a sly wink.

Suddenly, a riddle fell out of Minh's mouth!

"Your Honor, do you know what robs whole villages but is no bigger than a squash?"

Before the judge could answer, the rich man yelled, "No! No! No! No more riddles today. You're too clever for us!" he shouted, and he flipped his walking stick playfully against the floor. *Tap*, *tap*, *tap* the stick agreed.

They all laughed once more and went home . . . and no one guessed the riddle.

But what about you?

Can you guess the answer to Minh's riddle?

Answer: Rat

Song and Dance
Mary Collom

Buzz and be buzzed.
Tighten the lips.
Surprise moves those hips.

Screeching and blaring.
Muting the half notes
and tonguing staccato notes
short
and
sassy!

A brass en masse.
A collection of red-lipped lunatics,
madcaps swinging and swaying.

Call out the stray cats,
and dance through the fog
drifting from those Cuban cigars.

Groovin' and movin' and
leanin' on that eighth note,
takin' care of business.

Slow it down some, son.
Listen to the crowd
And the what, when, and how.

Bring it in with a four-four beat.
Mop up the sweat and bliss.
End your whole note
with a high-C kiss.

Missing Pieces
Colleen Narens

First sang me songs.
Second wrote me love letters.
Third's only flaw?
He wasn't Second.

Along came Four,
who also became husband,
soon becoming X.

Five said, "Hello" . . . and I was gone—
lost in sweet country twang, green eyes,
and the promise my feet would never
touch the ground.
Then I fell . . . hard.

Right into Six's lap.
He was blue-eyed and dimpled,
always making me laugh
ever after after that.

These loves have come and gone
and come again,
leaving pieces of them
taking pieces of me.

And pieces are all that is left . . .

Persephone on the Metro

Wendy Carlisle

She rushes down the stairs. Her mother's
voice trails out behind, *Please don't be gone
all night*. She barely hears; she's busy trying not to
trip on narrow stairs or drown under the waterfall
of *hommes et femmes* that sluices wildly in,
as if the subway was their final destination,
as if they could exactly pinpoint when
their train will come. The *au pair* rocking
someone else's baby on her hip and the skinny
undergrads look just the same here . . .
and the buzzed-up business dudes here—
as at home—are flushed with progress.
She can see they've all been down these steps before.
Below *les rues*, it's all fresh news to her.

Below the streets, she pokes along; she reads
the ads for cheap vacations, ads
for cinema. She says her train's direction
to herself, repeats the strange name of her stop.
Her car shrieks up. She quicksteps in, does not
look back. Commuters here seem frozen:
women holding small dogs, a few quiet teens,
some men with their baguettes. The sulfurous
stranger doesn't blink but stares hard until she turns
around to look and they are *vis-à-vis*.
This underground is loud and dirty. She can't recollect
what mother shouted at her as she left. Graffitied
walls flash past . He gets up then and takes her hand.
He leads her out and to the stairs, then farther down.

Black and White
Catherine Kennedy

On a busy street in Athens, the early morning dust blows and whistles its way between small cars, rickety trucks, and rumbling buses. It rises, only to lose its intensity, and leaves a dusting of city residue on a cracked and bleak balcony above. Over an abandoned junk-littered store, the terrace door and window stand open day and night. A large heap of tattered blankets is strewn in one corner of the balcony. As Athens awakens, the cloth pile takes on a life of its own. It heaves upward and then begins to slide downhill like a lethargic flow of lava. Squirming from her resting place, a toddler rolls out into the morning light. She rubs her eyes, rolls up onto her knees, and rises to peek through the balusters at the hotel across the street.

Behind the little girl, the sleeping area continues to diminish in size as other family members arise. Her older brother, a dark-haired youngster, pokes his head through the top of the blanket heap and tosses aside the old towel and wrinkled shirt that had protected him from the night's chill. Another blazing hot day begins.

Across the street stands a Hilton hotel. Its spacious balconies, covered with cheerful awnings, are decorated with luxurious patio furniture and large healthy plants. Behind a spotless glass door, the curtains part slightly as a woman looks outside. The air conditioner purrs softly in the background, maintaining cool, crisp air throughout her opulent suite. Having seen nothing of interest outside, she turns from the window and takes a draw on her first cigarette of the morning. She wonders what the day has in store for her. *Perhaps a quiet breakfast on the terrace and a little reading before going out today*, she thinks. She will ease into it and savor all she can of Athens. After all, this is the day she has long awaited. Today, she will experience Greece for the first time—the real Greece.

Yes, she ruminates, *most tourists rush frantically about the city as if trying to gobble it up. What pigs. Oh, and then there are the inane purchases they cart back to the States for all their relatives and tacky friends. In the end, what do they have to show for it*?

No, that's certainly not for me. I have other plans. It will be nice to relax, blend in with the natives, and savor each moment. Perhaps I'll request a driver later to take me to the Plaka for some baklava and a touch of atmosphere. Then, after a nap, I can take in the Acropolis and the Parthenon. To think of it! *Athens, Greece. The beginning of man's cultural freedom. But, for now, I believe I'll have my morning coffee on the balcony, write in my journal, and simply enjoy the sounds of the city. What a change from New York City.*

She turns, reties the sash to her silk kimono, and calls for room service.

Outside, the traffic, noise, and dust pick up. Young men and women speed by on motorbikes and, like daredevils, they dart between autos, trucks, and tourist buses. Disembarking from a shiny new tourist bus, a tall woman yanks her gangly thirteen-year-old daughter out of the way of an oncoming truck.

On the small balcony across the street, several of the smallest children chatter as they hang over the terrace's railing and point at the rich American tourists. Their older siblings scratch their backsides and wander into the one-room apartment. A color television, left on all night, drones loudly in the background. One bare light bulb hangs from the ceiling in the center of the room. Like the television, it's never turned off. Sitting on the dirty linoleum floor, a wet baby whines as his mother wipes his face with a dirty tattered rag.

Standing in a pink marble shower in her immaculate hotel room, the woman rinses her jet-black hair. Having Anthony cut her hair in a short, sassy bob was a great idea. Now she can fluff it with her fingers and go on her way. She carefully wraps her hair in a thick white towel and steps back into her spacious room. Hearing a soft knock at the door, she slides on her kimono again before opening the double doors to the hallway.

Steaming hot coffee, croissants, butter, fruit, and feta cheese have arrived. After much gesturing, the Greek porter ascertains that "madam" wishes breakfast to be served on the balcony. After leaving the tray in the room, he dusts the outdoor furniture and sets the table properly before bowing several times as he backs past the open door.

Across the street, the children meander back and forth between the small terrace and the dark apartment. They chatter to themselves and play with anything handy: a tattered cloth, a mangled cooking spoon, or a dented coke can. The little girl folds a cloth around the empty can and carries it lovingly as if it were a baby doll. Finally, the children boost themselves up on the balcony railing to watch the street action below.

Their older brother quietly joins them and pulls them away from the railing. Naked from the waist down, their youngest sister appears. Her hair is matted from neglect. Inside, there seems to be some effort by the adults to clean the other children; however, another one—a little boy—manages to venture outside without clothing. He picks up a large shoe and flings it through the open window into the apartment.

Inside the Hilton, the world traveler finishes her breakfast and pours a second cup of coffee from the dainty silver pot. Another dab of thick cream and a final bite of a well-buttered croissant complete her morning ritual. Leaning forward, she admires her short hair in the reflection of the glass door. Leisurely sipping coffee,

she meticulously paints her toenails a new color. *Pearl was definitely the right way to go*, she thinks.

Half an hour later, she is driven to an exclusive shopping area. She orders the chauffeur to wait until she returns. He parks under the shade of a large tree and chats with several other drivers who make the same daily run. After an hour passes, he and two others begin to play cards on the hood of his vehicle.

Carrying several wrapped packages out of a posh store, the woman is thrilled with her new designer outfits. She is certain no one in her social circle will wear anything similar this fall. Perhaps she should consider purchasing some jewelry—preferably gold—before returning home. Should she purchase a piece actually made in Greece? What a pleasing thought. After all, this is Greece—the real Greece. She chuckles with delight while heading downhill to the car.

Fortunately, the chauffeur sees her turning the corner several blocks away. When she arrives at the car, he is holding the back door open for her. She dumps the packages into his arms and slides silently onto the seat. The man carefully closes the door behind her. He dumps her purchases carelessly into the trunk and winks over the top of the car at his friends before slamming the lid.

Across town in the apartment, the oldest boy, who is seven, dresses for work and leaves by mid-morning. Carrying his tiny accordion, he heads for the Plaka. As usual, the square is teaming with tourists. It's early, but many of the foreigners are already exhausted from walking around the city's rolling streets in the morning's heat. Sitting at rickety wooden tables in the outdoor restaurants under sweeping canopies of old trees, the tourists drone on and on while eating gyros and drinking large bottles of iced water. A band of Greek musicians begins to work the crowd, singing at each table. Foreigners enjoy the ambiance, but many annoyed Athenians give them slight nods to keep them moving.

Searching for Americans as he enters the Plaka, the boy immediately spots three elderly couples relaxing at a table in the shade. They are laughing loudly. He notes their expensive clothes and cameras. Yes, these are the ones. Moving to their table, he puts on a sad face as he begins to play a cheerful tune.

The tourists' faces brighten with amusement. The cute little fellow is quite talented. His somber look while playing puzzles them. One old gentleman decides that it's a ruse, and he attempts to coax the child into smiling with praise. The ploy eventually works even though the boy tries to hide his smile.

Finishing the song, he now has a broad smile for everyone. They applaud and drop coins into a tiny cup attached loosely to his accordion strap. He turns away for a moment to tuck the money into his pocket. Then, turning back to the group, he shakes the cup beside his ear, stares upward, and pretends to be mystified that it is empty. Laughter breaks out around the table. Charmed with his act, the group

gives him a very generous second round of tipping.

He is quite pleased with himself when he leaves the tourists. Passing an abandoned table covered with half-empty plates, he snatches part of a leftover sandwich and darts behind a wall to wolf it down. *This will be a good day*, he thinks while wiping his mouth. He moves on to another table of what he hopes will be more rich Americans. His father will be proud. Long after the sun sets, he will still be working the tables.

Later in the day, the woman at the Hilton rises from a nap. She applies a new line of lipstick and fluffs her hair. *Good to go*, she thinks, turning her head left and right to study herself in the mirror. She rings the front desk and announces that she is ready for her driver. The gentleman at the desk assures her that the car is ready. She hangs up the phone and grabs her new Nikon digital camera. She'd completely forgotten that she brought it until she'd uncovered it in the bottom of one of her suitcases. Lugging it around will be a pain, but she needs a few photos to prove that she's actually been to Greece.

Riding through the city, she thinks of how much the wild traffic reminds her of home. *At least there's something to do in New York*. She relaxes in the air-conditioned car while glancing at the Greek ruins on the right. A tour group stands bunched on the sidewalk as a man lectures about Greek gods and leaders of the past. The car accelerates past the group while the woman nibbles on Greek candy. She yearns for a Nestle's Crunch.

Leaning forward, she pokes her driver on the shoulder. In the rearview mirror, his eyebrows rise in question. He'd hoped he could avoid talking with her this afternoon. Thankfully, she only wants to know where the Acropolis is located. He tells her they have just passed it. She finds that rather amusing. Now that the day is almost over and gritty dust is blowing everywhere, the thought of climbing a zillion steps up the Acropolis to see the Parthenon seems less appealing every minute. *Really*, she thinks, *there's not all that much to this city*. *Besides, it's so filthy*.

At a stoplight, a busload of tourists pulls up beside her car. All the buses seem to be the same blue color with the same blank faces peering from the windows. She realizes that everyone is either sleeping or terribly bored. On impulse, she snaps a picture of a man staring at her from the bus. *At least I'm having a great time*, she thinks, raking her fingers through her hair.

Sometime after 10:00 p.m., the boy returns from his day at the Plaka and climbs the stairs to his family's apartment. The abandoned television now plays to an empty house. Its audience has evacuated to the rooftop to savor the night's cool air. Lowering his accordion to the floor, he searches the cluttered table for leftovers. Finding nothing there, he moves on to the sink and discovers a half-

eaten hard roll on the drain board. He grabs it eagerly. Roll in hand, he takes the rickety stairs two at a time up to the roof where his family is gathered. His mother hushes him and the other children as their father sleeps off another drunken evening on a bare mattress.

Exhausted, the boy eases down quietly next to his father and nibbles on the roll. He soon falls asleep, his father's alcohol-laden breath wafting across his face. The hard roll slips from his hand and tumbles a few feet away. One of his brothers rushes past, snatches it, and retreats to the far corner of the roof.

Across the street on the hotel's rooftop restaurant, the woman flips her shiny hair in the evening's breeze. *What an improvement over the day's ghastly heat*, she thinks, leaning back in her chair to gaze at the well-lit Parthenon a few blocks away.

With the cool air caressing her gently, she ponders: *Actually, there's no reason on Earth why I should climb all those stairs tomorrow*. *The view is splendid from here*. She looks away to admire her new gold bracelet. She takes a sip of the excellent dry white wine and smiles at her new companion. *Now* this *is the real Greece*.

Driving in Italy

L. McKenna Donovan

You must be insane to drive in Italy, but if you drive like an Italian—with a fervor, a soul-baring commitment to the moment, and a determined focus—you can get anywhere. Of course, you'll need these eight hints for driving like an Italian.

1. *Ignore the road signs*. They're not meant to help you get where you're going; they're meant to point out the general direction of every village within a six-hour radius. Italians take pride in their places of birth. They stack signs on poles; they stack signs on trees; they stack signs on signs! You'd have to park your car in the roundabout and stand in traffic for six minutes in order to read all the signs. Learn to skim the first three letters and check the direction of the arrow; then step on the gas. Just be aware that when you finally realize you're lost, they stop putting up signs.

2. *Be creative in the larger cities*.

   - Florence—long known as the artistic pulse of Italy, the center of creative effort—is a paradise for the driver with creative instincts. Unlike the roundabouts in America (with well-defined lanes and warnings stamped on the pavement in the order you drive over them), the Florentine roundabouts are open circles of paved-over cobblestones. Drivers use all of their creative talents to get where they're going . . . preferably before you do. Don't expect cars to be pointed in the same general direction. A moving mosaic of metal shifts your instincts into high gear even as your five-speed transmission stays in first.

   - Lucca—well known for its ancient, walled city—is cradled by a multiple-lane road that holds you captive. Not the place to be at rush hour. (I never did figure out how many lanes there were; they kept appearing and disappearing.) Only sharp eyes can find the tiny sign that points the way out of the city. But do visit! With moderate—and slightly impolite—quickness, you can actually find a parking place.

- O Spoleto—long known for its twelfth-century aqueduct—challenges the driver with its profusion of narrow, twisting, hill-climbing streets. If the sign reads "*Traffico Limitato* 1.35 M," it means the street is only 1.35 meters wide. The chipped building at the entrance to the street displays the results of drivers with a limited understanding of width.

- O Rome—in one word: *Don't*!

3. *Obey traffic lights in smaller towns*. Roads meander across the countryside, affording a view of Italy at its best, but when the road flows into town, watch for the red light. It's probably guarding the one narrow, cobbled lane jammed between ancient stone homes. Make your driver's education teacher proud. Stop. Traffic is coming at you; you just don't see it yet.

4. *Bring a blindfold for your passengers*. They don't want to know how you got where you are.

5. *Pass as if you paid for the road when you went through Customs*. Just edge out to the left, blink your headlights, and . . . *presto*! The Italian driver in front of you moves to his right; the Italian driver coming at you moves to his right; and suddenly there's a third lane on a two-lane road—right down the middle. That's the soul-baring part of the Italian driver. Even St. Christopher closes his eyes.

6. *Stop converting kilometers per hour (KPH) to miles per hour (MPH)*. Won't you be more comfortable moving with traffic at 150 KPH without knowing that you're doing 90 MPH? Commit yourself to the moment.

7. *Carry cash for gas*. Automated gas pumps gulp your cash *before* you pump the gas, so figure on watching an ATM-like machine eat dozens of euros so you can have the privilege of continuing to drive in Italy. Trust me; it's worth it.

8. *Learn to say "I'm sorry" in fluent Italian*. A mistranslation could be taken to mean that you feel sorry for yourself. That doesn't go over very well at toll booths when you don't have a ticket showing where you got on the tollway. (How was I supposed to know the portable

traffic light at the highway construction site housed a ticket I was supposed to take?)

But for all that, you've got to love the Italian driver: the truck driver who gives you a thumbs-up for a quick maneuver through an almost-red light (okay, okay . . . it was red); the businessman who purses his lips at the six-inch layer of dust on your rental car; or the motorcycle-riding youth who, after glancing surreptitiously around the parking lot, lifts one tightly-clad jeans leg and adjusts his lower anatomy . . . unaware you're in a window right over his head.

So paint me insane; I'd do it again.

What I've Learned from Watching Disney Movies

Lori Parault

Never trust an old lady peddling apples. (*Snow White*)
The right pair of shoes makes all the difference. (*Cinderella*)
It only takes a little pussy to bring down the king of the jungle. (*The Lion King*)
Never sign a contract that glows in the dark. (*The Little Mermaid*)
Mirrors don't lie. (*Snow White*)
Clowns are freakin' scary. (*Dumbo*)
Don't let other people pull your strings. (*Toy Story*)
Sometimes, you just gotta slow down. (*Cars*)
Always go to bed looking good; you may see your prince when you wake up. (*Sleeping Beauty*)
Never date anyone who thinks he's prettier than you are. (*Beauty and the Beast*)
Girls *can* fight. (*Mulan*)
The Queen of Hearts is a bitch! (*Alice in Wonderland*)
Dogs don't make good babysitters. (*Peter Pan*)
Don't trust Republicans. (*Atlantis*)
White people suck! (*Pocahontas*)
Never, never, never drop acid. (*Fantasia*)
Crabs are hard to get rid of. (*The Little Mermaid*)

Eyelids Closed in Prayer

Zachery B. Donaldson

Today I joined my family in prayer.
I remembered my younger days
When morning sun crept into the church
Through stained glass and crawled
Onto my face, and the choir sang
An off-key Southern version
Of a tune from the past when men ate
From cans and killed wildlife.

We prayed for my grandmother
Who was dying under X-rays,
Tests, tubes, needles, and meters.
The room was senseless—sterile—
And smelled like flowers and syringes.

My mother's soft voice led us
In prayer as she spoke
To her far-away father
Like letters from a soldier
In Vietnam.

I wanted my grandmother
To get well, too, but I couldn't help
But look up at those faces
With their tightly closed
Wrinkled eyelids.

<u>Portrait</u>
Gergely Kovacs

The Unsure Girl

Tamara Richert

She stands uncomfortably
In her emerald dress,
Her dark-skinned arms
Delicately hanging at her sides,
Her hem dancing below her knees.
She stands out of place
In a dress that tells the lie
That she is the same
As those who stand and view her
Through their retribution.

Shadow behind the Ear

Shanti Bannwart

Ice crystals formed in the air in front of my mouth. The cold pierced like needles through my flesh and into my stiff bones. February of 1947 was one of the most ruthlessly freezing months in Munich ever. This was the funeral of my mother, and I was nine.

They thought I needed a pair of black shoes and a black coat and a black hat. They borrowed the clothes from our neighbors and hung them all around my small, cold body so I would look appropriate—how one has to look at a funeral, even as a child.

What I really needed was a hand to hold. My father had his hands folded in his lap and inside his gloves; I didn't know how to reach over to him because I couldn't move. There were yellowish tiles on the floor and blind crystal lamps along the walls like scratched glasses half full of sour milk: their light didn't penetrate the gray darkness. My legs were too short to lean against the back of the bench. The edge of the seat cut into my thighs.

My father, my sister, and I sat in the first row. Nobody else was with us in the first row because these seats were reserved for the ones who hurt the most. In the next row were Aunt Hannie and Uncle Ernst, my father's brother. Their faces were pale and gray like the dirty snow outside.

In the following rows sat neighbors—only a few. They didn't really know my mother because we had just moved to Munich and people were still strangers to us. Those strangers sat further away from the big brown wooden box in the middle of the stage. My mother was inside the box—that's what my father had told me.

Since she had left our home some days ago, I had not seen her . . . and I would never see her again. She was alive then. She smiled at me, and I smelled the sweet and warm scent of her skin and hair and saw the little shadow that her earlobe cast on her neck. I observed it as I nestled my head between her shawl and her hair when she held me in her arms to say goodbye. The memory of this little shadow behind her ear was frozen inside my brain to prove that my mother was real once.

I was so close to the box that I could have touched it, but I didn't dare reach out into reality. The ice crystals stuck to my skin and to the black coat that I wore. It was my friend Christle's coat. She lived in the apartment above us and went to school with me every day. Right then I didn't go to school because I couldn't look into the faces of my classmates; they were filled with fear. My teacher said I could stay home for some days. Christle and I never talked about my mother's death. I think she, too, like everybody, was afraid of saying words like *death* and *forever*.

A man in a black cape stood near the box; he twisted his hands and mouth. He lifted his heavy eyelids and folded his forehead into layers of skin. He said things that I didn't hear or understand. I wondered if he still had a mother and if he talked to her like he talked to us: uttering sounds without any meaning. His words slithered out of the door into the cemetery and gathered like dry leaves in corners between the granite-covered graves.

Two men in black suits with black gloves walked slowly towards the box. They put their glove-covered hands at the corners of the box and pushed it gradually towards the big door.

The box moved on rollers and I knew—how did I know?—that my mother inside this box would now be burned and turned into ashes and smoke. The little shadow behind her ear would melt and would only be real as long as I lived and remembered it. I didn't want to live without my mother's ears and smells and warmth. Why would any child in this world want to live without the warm body of Mother to fold into and to know from that place in the fold that life made sense?

The gate opened in two pieces like two dark wings and uttered a muffled screech that mixed with the organ music into a hellish song. I was told there was fire which I could not see behind the next iron gate. The box slid into the dim space behind the black wings. The wings screeched again; they flapped and shut closed, and I thought that this might be the moment of *forever*.

My mother would now turn into fire and light and smoke, but I was drowning in ice crystals. They poked through my eyes and throat and pierced my body like nails. I wanted to be sucked into the big black hole that was inside me. I wanted to coil into my own black middle and never come out. The black winter coat from Christle slid down my shoulders, and my father lifted it back into place. I had forgotten he was there; I had forgotten anybody was there with me.

Tattered ribbons of music wound themselves around us three in the first row. They hung between the seats as if tethered to that moment. Then my father, my sister, and I got up and stood beside each other, arranged like puppets on father's left and right side and flanked by two white columns.

People slouched by in front of us and shook our hands; some of them had tears in their eyes and uttered small clouds of words that stood in the cold air, hesitant to dissolve. I had to lean my head back to see their faces underneath the rim of the black hat pinned with a clamp to my hair. Some people looked as if they knew about those boxes that disappeared into dim spaces with fire waiting to devour them. Some people had no faces at all, and I would see through them into a far distance where everybody had lost somebody loved.

The black shiny shoes from my friend Christle were too small for my feet; I felt my toes clenched together and screaming for space. The pain called my attention

down, and I woke up to the sensation of my own body and to the strange place where the soles of my feet touched the ground. I saw the black shoes standing on yellow tiles scratched blind by the shoes of hundreds and thousands of people who had shaken hands here with others after their boxes had rolled through the forever-door and caught fire. I was part of a long line of children and grown-ups who had stood here over the years. They had touched each other's hands and had passed by, looking into the eyes of people who didn't want to be there. These hands were intertwining and holding on to each other so they wouldn't drown in ice crystals or turn into ashes. My feet ached and signaled to me that I was still alive inside this small and numb body.

My mother's feet would never hurt again because she was right now turning into smoke while the tiny shadow behind her left ear disappeared forever. Her warm smell dissolved in the heat; it mingled with burned flakes of her skin and twirled out of the long chimney into the winter air.

The mother-smoke staggered along the roof of the building and lingered in the barren trees along the path where we now walked in silence. There were no words that could pierce the loneliness in a world where my mother's body and the shadow behind her ear had turned into fire.

Marble Garden
Eric Bilyeu

Among the flowers
Made of stone
Marking places

Where loved ones lie
In solemn slumber
Unaware

Of day or night
Or the season's change,
The old man sits

Beside the rose
Of stone that reads:
"Here lies . . ."

Dust from Daddy's Tires

Zachery B. Donaldson

A tear ran down my cheek.
It was only dust from Daddy's tires.
(Boys in East Texas don't cry.)
Daddy yelled at Momma.
She threw his clothes out.
He slammed his truck's door.
Black smoke from 1972 tailpipes
Danced around uncut grass,
Surrounded the rusty swing set
That could cut flesh.
We slept with Momma that night
On a wet pillow between
Aluminum-foil walls that could
Let in night air . . .
And demons.

Smoldering Resentment

Lori Parault

The first time I saw my father hit my mother, I was seven years old. I knew she would leave him. I was wrong.

It was the day my mother was named partner in the law firm where she practiced. A small party was given in her honor after work; she was ten minutes late arriving home.

My father was waiting by the kitchen sink and smoking a cigarette when she rushed into the room. She set her purse down on the table and began to apologize. He never said a word; he just stuck out his foot, tripped her, and shoved her hard as she fell.

He finished his cigarette as she lay on the floor. Dropping the butt next to her, he crushed it out with his heel and walked out of the house.

My mother picked herself up and made his dinner. I watched her like I was watching a movie, not my mother. My mother would never put up with this type of treatment.

For ten years, I wondered why she took it. For ten years, the clip of that day played over in my head as I fell asleep. For ten years, I wondered why he slipped up that day and let me see him hit her.

He finally made the same mistake again. I think he didn't know I was there. I like to believe that.

It was the last day of February in 1981. He stomped out his cigarette on her skull, and she broke.

Passing

Tamara Richert

I've been missing your face
And the unfinished tattoo
On your back.
Everything was left undone:
The skull painting by your bed
And the broken relationships.
I have not learned to dance yet.
When I take that first beat,
The emptiness moves in
And the music stops.

Lost in Loss

Tamara Richert

Trying to pull myself beyond
The standstill of my life,
I live in slow motion
Attempting to survive what's lost:
A husband, a daughter, and a brother.
"Does anyone recover?"
I ask myself, and I contemplate
Whether I should wave
My white flag or jump in
And fight for what
I am not sure.

The Making of a Musical[1]

R. Rex Stephenson and Emily Rose Tucker

According to the *American Heritage Dictionary*, collaboration means "to work together, especially in a joint intellectual effort" ("Collaboration" 260). The intellectual efforts of R. Rex Stephenson and Emily Rose Tucker have been geared towards the making of musicals. They have written three musicals together: *The Just So Stories, Jonah and the Big Fish*, and *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. They have also created two short children's scripts: *Two Lost Babes* and *Catskins*.

Their musical collaboration began accidentally. While working on *The Prince and the Pauper*, Stephenson wanted some music to introduce the King, so he asked Tucker (an actor in the show) if she could compose it. The music she produced suited the play nicely. During the next season, Stephenson tried to work on a musical by using the Internet. He sent lyrics to the composer, and the composer sent music to him. Stephenson found this method lacked immediacy and prohibited his open communication with the composer. To eliminate these problems, Stephenson asked Tucker if she would consider composing for him when he began writing a play about the biblical character Jonah.

The idea was to bring the composer in from the very beginning of the writing process and share all aspects of the completion of the script. While Stephenson and Tucker did not sit down and say, "This is the way we're going to do it," this is the process that has evolved over the past three years.

Before delving further into the way Stephenson and Tucker work, one should consider how other writing teams have worked. Occasionally, collaborators will take joint responsibility for an element of the work, as when George and Ira Gershwin co-wrote the lyrics of "I'll Build a Stairway to Paradise" (Lerner 77). Most teams include one lyricist and one composer: W. S. Gilbert and Arthur S. Sullivan, Richard Rodgers and Larry Hart, George and Ira Gershwin, John Kander and Fred Ebb, and Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice.

While lyricists, librettists, and composers generally enjoy working together and opt to take joint ownership of a finished product, not all successful writing teams have followed this model. According to most accounts, Gilbert and Sullivan could not stand one another; they collaborated mostly by post (Citron 117). Critic Mark

[1] Much of the material for this article was freely adapted from Emily Rose Tucker's master's-degree thesis: "Discovering the Creative Process Through Reflective Practice" (Union Institute and U-Montpelier, Montpelier, VT 2006). Karen Massey served as a research assistant for this article.

Steyn, writing about Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber, has noted that "Tim Rice is a brilliant lyricist, but everyone knows that Andrew doesn't want to work with . . . lyric writers who are his equal" (qtd. in Citron 119). Stephenson and Tucker readily acknowledge that an important element of their success is their respect for each other.

Many essays have been written addressing whether lyrics should be written before a show's music or vice versa. Richard Rodgers wrote music to which Larry Hart added lyrics; however, when Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II wrote *Oklahoma!*, Hammerstein wrote the lyrics first (Lerner 153). While the order of creating music and lyrics seems to be a matter of personal preference, Stephenson and Tucker recommend creating these elements simultaneously.

The Process

Stephenson and Tucker begin by agreeing on what to dramatize. So far, they have chosen to create adaptations of familiar stories. There is nothing formal about story selection. They ask each other, "What do you think about this?" Then they begin the process of writing. Stephenson dictates the script to Tucker. He does this because he wants to hear how the words sound aloud. Tucker likes being involved at this stage of the process because she receives a firsthand look at the needs of the show. She gains a better understanding of the shape of the plot and the natures of the characters. She can ask, "What does Rex want this piece to be about?" She can agree with Stephenson or suggest how to shape the show differently.

While the piece is being written, the writers decide where to place songs. They tend to agree with Harold Arlen that four questions should be asked:

1) Does it work theatrically?
2) Does it motivate the action?
3) Is the song, in a sense, a part of the dialogue?
4) Does the music capture character without getting out of the framework of the show? (Green 183)

Stephenson and Tucker would add to this list that while most songs should move the action forward, some songs can be reflective, serving the purpose of letting people inside a character's head. When an appropriate spot for a song arises, the writers may develop a title, an idea of what the song might encompass, or even a line or two for the song.

While working on *Jonah* and writing lyrics for "Be Who You Were Born to Be," Stephenson remembered some passages in the book of Ezekiel that would fit into the idea of the song. Tucker suggested some passages from Isaiah that would also work. After combining these passages, they completed the lyrics for the song in about fifteen minutes. However, this speedy completion of a song is the exception and not the rule. When the script is completed, Stephenson begins to work on the lyrics, and Tucker begins to compose.

Tucker finds that each song suggests its own form. There are instances when she will take Stephenson's words in the order he provides. At other times, she will suggest a chorus or request repetition of a section, or she may ask him to make alterations to the lyrics to match her music. She finds that the rhythms of the lyrics influence song construction more than any pattern or template. Once the form of a song is established, the melody—or at least a melodic idea—is its sensible successor.

Tucker does not request significant changes to the lyrics of a song. Each piece experiences several revisions before the opening of a show, and Tucker tries to follow Stephenson's original lyrics closely. This respect for his work often pushes her to create new musical ideas. When she reads lyrics for the first time, the rhythm of the words suggests a tune. Even when she is writing lyrics, the melody rises from the words on the page. Generally, she allows a piece to rattle in her head for a few days, but the initial melodic ideas rarely change.

Having worked with Stephenson for several years, Tucker has a strong sense of his writing style. She is able to envision a scene as they write, which helps her consider what will suit the scene musically. Tucker often jokes that she "speaks Rex," and Stephenson notes that he "trusts Emily." For example, if Stephenson is finished with a song—or even a scene—but it lacks dramatic punch, Tucker knows that adjustments will be made during rehearsals. Similarly, if the music does not fulfill its potential, Stephenson trusts that Tucker will make alterations. Problems may appear before an audience, and these problems are immediately addressed. A show is always a work in progress.

Work in Progress

Stephenson and Tucker know in early October not only the date a show will open (usually within ten months) but also the exact time of the first rehearsal. One may assume that this forewarning allows for a period of leisurely creation. However, writing is often performed in snatches of time. The official writing does not begin until January, and Tucker prefers to let her ideas develop as the script evolves.

Stephenson and Tucker are convinced that creativity and tension go hand in hand, and a down-to-the-wire atmosphere works best for them. Problems without adequate time for resolution must be approached optimistically and realistically. They like to view these problems not as obstacles hindering the drama but as issues that can be solved uniquely. This approach is one of the reasons for their success. They also have the advantage of working with a resourceful executive producer, Jody Brown, who takes care of a number of ancillary tasks throughout the production process so the writing team can be free to concentrate on solving problems. Nevertheless, Stephenson and Tucker have learned that composers and playwrights should work together in a manner that suits not only their temperaments but also their artistic sensibilities.

This work-in-progress method occasionally yields a product for rehearsal with which the writers may not be completely satisfied. However, they may then take inspiration from the creative abilities of the actors, singers, and musicians who populate the show. Stephenson and Tucker have the luxury of working in a theatre that expects them to produce a new musical each year. In addition, they use many actors repeatedly, so they know a great deal about their actors' strengths and weaknesses. Certain parts are written with specific actors in mind. Since the new musical is always the last show of the season, Stephenson and Tucker can work with the actors for at least six weeks prior to the first rehearsal. This is a great advantage to Tucker because she can adapt the songs to fit the actors. She feels that these adaptations are a form of collaboration beyond the standard playwright-and-composer partnership.

The rehearsal process profoundly affects the composition of songs. Tucker feels that giving and receiving musical ideas through personal interaction is a wonderful part of the creative experience. She likes to score the most important components of each piece and then discuss the stylistic elements with the pianist. Stephenson and Tucker are blessed to work with an extraordinary pianist, Fair Robey, who has been the accompanist for their musicals. Her skillful ear and confident hand bring the music to life in new ways.

Tucker allows Robey and the cast members of a musical to make choices that best suit their abilities. Tucker does not relinquish artistic control, but she listens to what singers and musicians suggest. She finds that this open-mindedness stimulates creativity and leads to a more efficient rehearsal process because she need not dictate every nuance of performances. The show is more important than ownership of words or melodies.

In the beginning of the rehearsal process, music rehearsals are designed to teach music and bring interpretations of songs to a performance level quickly. Only two or three weeks of rehearsal are available, and there are a variety of skill levels in

the company. The company is sometimes supplemented by a large number of young people. While some people might adopt a business-like approach for the opening rehearsals, Stephenson and Tucker prefer the atmosphere of a casual group sing-along. Tucker believes that before music is integrated into dramatic action, the technical needs of the music must be ingrained in the minds and vocal muscles of the singers. This method helps the actors later when characterization and choreography interfere with the singers' abilities to stop and reflect during a number's rehearsal.

In order to facilitate an efficient learning process, Tucker focuses on the shapes of melodies and songs' precise rhythms. Once these song elements are learned by the company, she encourages the adult singers to harmonize by ear. She asks Robey to emulate a certain style but allows her to improvise when necessary. The basic melodies and specific rests and rhythms are observed and learned, and pieces mature swiftly. During this time, Stephenson makes suggestions relating to lyrics, dramatic emphasis, or length of the pieces. For example, he has been known to approach the piano and sing something like "bum, de-bum, bum" in Tucker's ear to indicate a tempo change, a change in melodic direction, a fermata, or any number of other musical alterations. Because Tucker understands his intentions, she can quickly communicate changes to the cast.

A weakness in the drama may rise from many sources. Is there a problem with the script, the music, an actor's performance, or the overall interpretation of the show? Discovering the nature of a problem is difficult because the actors are struggling to remember lines, songs, and blocking. One example of dealing with a problem occurred during a rehearsal for *Jonah*. Stephenson watches rehearsals from a landing above the rehearsal space, and there is a blackboard on which he writes notes or makes corrections during a show's run. There is a pivotal point in the show during which Jonah debates with God inside the belly of the whale. The role of Jonah was being played by Mike Trochim, a talented actor with whom Stephenson and Tucker have had a long and productive relationship. Stephenson asked that the scene be replayed. He began scribbling on his blackboard. Everyone at the rehearsal knew he was writing new or revised lines or a new song. At the end of the scene, Stephenson came down from his landing and said to Tucker, "Give them a fifteen-minute break. We need a song in place of Jonah's debate with God." Stephenson had already written most of the lyrics, and Tucker began working on a melody immediately. The new song was added by the next day.

Each piece is continually evolving with the input of both the playwright and the composer. Stephenson and Tucker's involvement throughout the entire process may be unique. Stephenson does not feel the need to direct performances. He has

often used other directors such as Pat Whitton, Joe Ray, and the late Nellie McCaslin, all of whom created successful productions. Many of their ideas were incorporated into the finalized scripts. Tucker, on the other hand, needs to work with each cast, and she enjoys adapting the material to feature strengths and hide weaknesses. She always asks, "How does it need to sound?" While attending a performance of one of their plays, Stephenson held Tucker back so she would not rush up to the pianist and correct the tempo of a song.

While the importance of the rehearsal process in creating a finished product has been noted, this does not mean that the work-in-progress philosophy applies to the production the audience sees. Allowing for changes until the final performance does not indicate that the show should have an unfinished quality. Stephenson and Tucker strive to match the show as closely as possible to their joint vision. There have been times when they have had to address problems in later productions or when revising a show for a publisher.

Respect for the work is crucial when crafting a successful show, but the librettist, the lyricist, and the composer must also respect their audiences. Stephenson and Tucker have become aware of the various tastes of audience members after working for many years with Stephenson's Blue Ridge Dinner Theatre. Show-writers must remain aware of the needs and preferences of their preferred spectators. For example, Stephenson writes funny lyrics and what he calls "discovery songs" (songs driven by character epiphanies) that appeal to children. Tucker writes ballads with child-friendly lyrics. Their creative abilities have been honed by remembering their audiences.

Synthesizing the Process

Mark Twain stated that one cannot reach old age on another man's road ("Age"). Each person must find his or her own road. This sentiment applies to collaborations between writers and composers. Nonetheless, there are some basic guidelines to follow when completing a collaborative musical.

First, the composer and the playwright should share the same artistic vision. This vision must encompass the original material (if the piece is an adaptation), the style and range of the music, and the work-in-progress nature of the process. Second, the collaborators should share the same artistic temperament; if they do not have similar work habits, they should be tolerant of each other's idiosyncrasies. Tucker does not mind receiving scribbled lyrics on a restaurant napkin, and Stephenson enjoys hearing Tucker play a new song on her mini piano. Finally, collaborators must trust each other and abandon their egos. Both parties must be willing to accept, distribute, and use criticism. If a problem cannot be solved

during the writing process, then fresh inspiration must be sought from the performers during the rehearsal process. Theatre must always remain collaborative.

Works Cited

"Age." Twainquotes.com. 10 June 2008 <http://www.twainquotes.com/Age>.

Citron, S. The Musical from the Inside Out. Chicago: Elephant, 1992.

"Collaboration." The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language. Ed. William Morris. New York: American Heritage, 1969.

Green, S. The World of Musical Comedy. New York: Da Capo, 1980.

Lerner, A. J. The Musical Theatre: A Celebration. New York: Da Capo, 1986.

Works Consulted

Stephenson, R. Rex. The Prince and the Pauper. Orem: Encore, 2002.

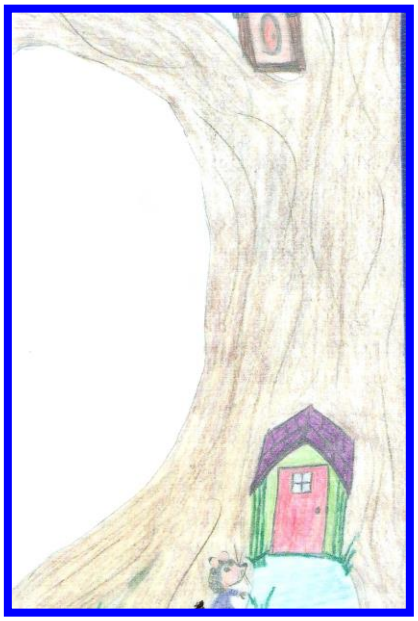
Tucker, Emily Rose. "Discovering the Creative Process Through Reflective Practice." Thesis. Union Institute and U-Montpelier, 2006.

What a Carrot-astrophy!

Mary Katherin Mauldin

It had been a long hot summer, but autumn was beginning to show its presence in the air. A mild, soothing breeze blew the brightly colored leaves off the trees as Teddy Rabbit ran around the tree where Betty Bluebird was singing at the top of her lungs. As the orange and brown leaves fluttered to the ground, Melissa and Benny Mouse ran to hide under first one then another.

Missy, as everyone called Melissa, squeaked with glee as she ran to the base of the huge oak tree. This was where Benny and she lived with their mother, Mrs. Lucy Mouse, and their baby brother, Jonah. Benny was the oldest, but Missy was sure she was the fastest runner.



Betty Bluebird lived above the Mouse family with her mother and father. Betty didn't have any brothers or sisters, but she had lots of friends to play with, including all the Rabbit kids.

The Rabbit family was out that day, too. The cool air that could be felt in the early morning and late afternoon had made all of them feel extremely frisky. Mrs. Louella Rabbit—"Mama Lou" to all the kids in the neighborhood—was watching her twelve offspring play hide-and-seek. Mama Lou often said laughingly that she should have given them numbers instead of names because there were so many of them.

Mama Lou's little ones were Penny, Nicholas, Marty, Jenny, Susie, Sarah, Jack Junior, Daniel, Zeke, Kayla, Teddy, and Mary (the baby).

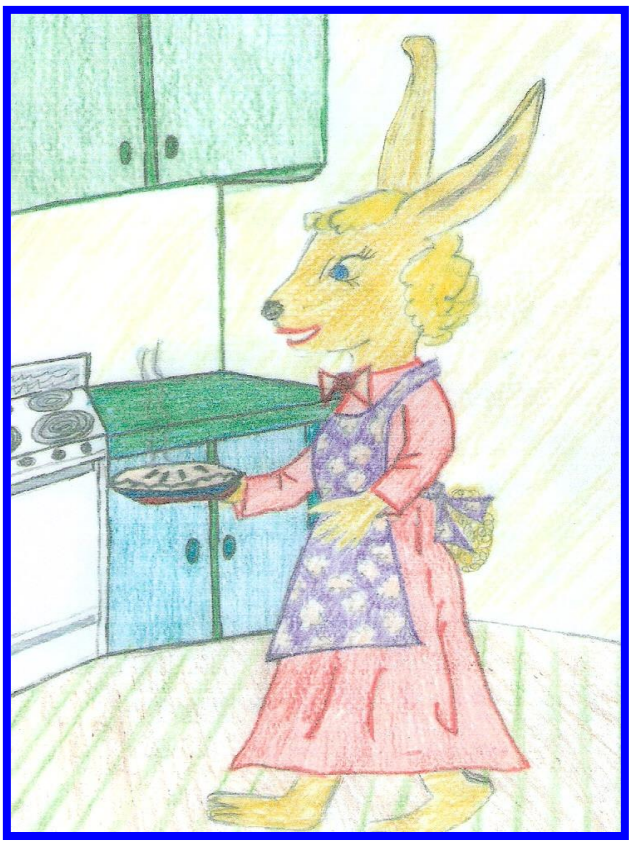
Mama Lou was beginning to tire. "I wish I had just half the energy of these kids," she said to Mrs. Lucy Mouse, who was standing nearby.

Mrs. Lucy just squeaked with laughter and replied, "If we did, we would never work. All we would want to do is play. Then no one would have any energy because no one would eat. Speaking of eating, it's time for me to fix supper. I'll see you later."

She scurried toward her house with Jonah in tow.

Mama Lou looked lovingly at her kids. *I'll fix something special*, she thought. *I know that carrot pies would make this bunch happy, especially Teddy. He could eat a whole pie all by himself. I'll fix a large salad, potatoes, beans, milk, and fresh bread . . . with carrot pies for dessert.*

As Mama Lou went into the house, she heard Missy and Benny call out to Sarah, Susie, Jack Junior, and Marty, "Come on, guys. Let's play kickball."



Soon, Mama Lou set three scrumptious-smelling pies on the window sill to cool. The harvest of carrots this year had not been as good as usual, and Mama Lou had used her last carrots in those pies.

"Oh, I do hope three pies will be enough," she whispered as little Mary Rabbit hopped around the kitchen at her feet. She decided to bake some cookies, too.

Just then, Teddy Rabbit's nose flew up in the air. "Oh, my. I smell carrot pie," whispered Teddy.

Teddy eased over to the porch and slipped around the corner of the house. He could not help himself. He had to have a taste of that pie. *Oh, boy*! *Mama made three pies*. *Maybe she won't miss one*, thought Teddy.

Teddy knew he would be in trouble with a capital *T* if he got caught, but he did not seem to have any control over his body.

His hands reached up and grabbed a pie. His head was telling him to stop. His mouth was watering, and his legs started running as fast as they could.

Mama Lou heard the other kids shouting, "Teddy got a pie! After him!"

She ran to the window. She reached it just in time to see Teddy stumble.

Teddy's legs stopped without warning. Suddenly, he was flying straight toward Betty Bluebird, who was perched on a low branch watching Teddy's attempted escape.

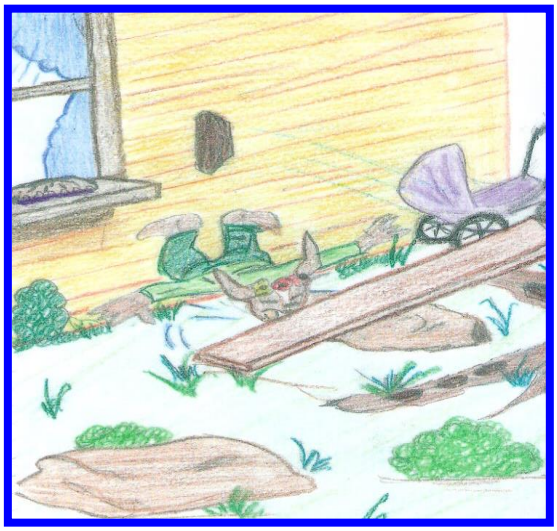
"Oh, no!" shrilled Betty when Teddy lost hold of the pie.

Nicholas, Daniel, and Zeke Rabbit were playing cowboys and Indians on the ground directly under Betty; and Penny, Jenny, and Kayla Rabbit were putting mud pies on the oak tree's roots to bake dessert for their dolls' supper.

“Look out!” screamed Teddy, but it was too late.

The pie slammed into Betty, knocking her off the branch. Betty fell right in the middle of the boys, knocking Zeke backwards.

Zeke fell into the mud pies while Daniel and Nicholas pushed over one of the doll carriages. The carriage hit the other carriage, ramming it into



Kayla and knocking her into Jenny and Penny.

Penny fell onto the board that held the last mud pie, launching it straight toward the house.

And then . . . oh, my goodness!

What a carrot-astrophy!

The mud pie hit the window.

The window fell closed, catching the edges of the two remaining carrot pies and sending them sailing straight at Mama Lou!

Both pies hit her!

She stood frozen in place.

When everything stopped, Teddy looked around, totally shocked by the mess his actions had caused.

Teddy began to cry.

The pies were splattered all over Mama Lou. The Rabbit kids would have no dessert for supper.

Try as hard as they could, all the other kids could not help laughing. They fell down, rolling in the grass. They laughed so hard that tears began running down their faces.

Just as Teddy was about to run and hide, Mama Lou—wiping off the pies—started laughing, too. Teddy could not understand how he could be so lucky. Mama Lou's laughter told him that he was forgiven and that she loved him even when he boo-booed.

Mama Lou and the others surveyed the whole scene as they laughed. Mama Lou went outside and wrapped her arms around Teddy, and everyone gathered in the yard to have milk and cookies.

About the Contributors

Shanti E. Bannwart is a licensed counselor and life coach, a writer, a spiritual seeker, and a wise elder. She lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and she is devoted to reflective activism on the issues of war and peace. She is a fourth-semester student at Goddard College, where she is earning her MFA in creative nonfiction. Her essays have been published in national and international magazines.

Eric Bilyeu is an English education major at Texas A&M University-Texarkana. He is currently the president of the university's English Club. He enjoys reading literature of all kinds, but he especially loves the classics. He currently writes as a pastime, but he hopes to pursue writing professionally in addition to teaching literature at a secondary level.

Wendy Taylor Carlisle is the author of two books: *Discount Fireworks* and *Reading Berryman to the Dog*. Her work has appeared in *The Poets Grimm*, *Is This Forever, or What?: Poems and Paintings from Texas*, and *Letters to the World*. Her chapbook, *After Happily Ever After*, was the fifteenth collection in the *2River Chapbook Series*. She has recently finished a new chapbook, *The Storage of Angels*.

Kemily Chandler is a student at Texas A&M University-Texarkana.

Mary Collom has recently earned her master's degree in English from Texas A&M University-Texarkana.

Dr. Doris Davis is an English professor at Texas A&M University-Texarkana and the director of the East Texas Writing Project. She enjoys playing the piano and spending time with her grandchildren.

Zachery B. Donaldson is a poet, a songwriter, and a father. He lives in Texarkana, Texas.

L. McKenna Donovan graduated from the University of Mary Washington with an intense education in French, Italian, and Russian. She is currently earning her MFA in Creative Writing. Her published works cover a broad spectrum of fiction and nonfiction, including flash fiction, short stories, and essays. Her current work-

in-progress is a novel of transnational intrigue covering seven million years of Earth history.

Ashley Easley lives with her husband (Tandy Easley) and her two dogs (Max and Sam) in Atlanta, Texas. She is a student at Texas A&M University-Texarkana in the EC-4 program with an emphasis in special education. *Aquila Review*'s cover art (*Quirky*) was inspired by an art class she took during the spring semester of 2008.

Jonathan Elder is a native of Texarkana, Texas. The fall semester of 2007 and the spring semester of 2008 marked his first experiences as a student at Texas A&M University-Texarkana. He is an English major, and he enjoys writing music. When he is not at school, he works at Christus St. Michael Hospital as a certified aerobics instructor and personal trainer.

Alisha Jael was born in Texarkana, Texas. She is a student at Texarkana College, the co-founder of the Texarkana Poet Society, and the mother of a beautiful three-year-old daughter (Zoe).

Catherine Kennedy is a former journalist for newspapers in Illinois and Arkansas, including the *Peoria Journal Star*. Her work has appeared in national and regional magazines. A native of Corpus Christi, she now resides in Texarkana, Arkansas.

Gergely (Greg) Kovacs is a student from Hungary who has just finished his first graduate semester at Texas A&M University-Texarkana. Art is his hobby and his means of expressing himself. He does not have a preferred medium, but he favors working with digital design. Other than art, he loves foreign cultures. In his free time, he tries to learn new languages.

Dr. Karen Sue Linstrum was transformed after reading Kenneth Koch's *Wishes, Lies, and Dreams*, a 1970 book about teaching poetry to children. Dr. Linstrum enjoys poetry therapy and other forms of bibliotherapy. She worked primarily with children, adolescents, and families in the psychiatric field as a Licensed Professional Counselor for over twenty years before returning to college to earn a PhD in counseling in 2004. Dr. Linstrum is interested in the correlation between a child's reading ability and a child's self-confidence.

Mary Katherin Mauldin lives with her husband (Jay) and her wonderful daughter (Kayla) in Texarkana, Arkansas. She writes poetry and stories for children.

Colleen Narens has been writing since a young age. She attended Texas A&M University-Texarkana's Young Writers' Program each summer from 1994 to 1997, allowing her the chance to experiment with writing prose, poetry, and short stories. She is a recent graduate of Texas A&M University-Texarkana with a bachelor's degree in English, and she is currently pursuing the master's degree in English offered by the university.

Lori Parault was born in New Orleans in 1964, but she grew up all around the southern United States. She attended the University of New Orleans in the early 1980s, but she left school to become a wife and a mother. After working in a variety of positions, Lori returned to college in 2006. Lori is currently attending Texas A&M University-Texarkana and is pursuing a Bachelor of Science degree in English with a minor in history. Lori plans to attend law school after receiving her bachelor's degree. She is a member of the Sigma Tau Delta and Phi Alpha Theta honor societies. She currently resides with her husband and children in Ashdown, Arkansas.

Dr. Michael Perri teaches history at Texas A&M University-Texarkana. He enjoys hiking in the Sierra Nevada mountain range and spending time with his wife and daughter.

Tamara Richert is a college student from Texarkana, Texas; she writes for fun and as a release from daily chaos. Her poems are dedicated to her brother (Randolph Michael Jones), who died on September 27, 2007.

Philesha Southern is a student at Texas A&M University-Texarkana.

R. Rex Stephenson has published more than twenty plays and musicals (primarily for children and young adults). He is the artistic director of the Blue Ridge Dinner Theatre and the Jack Tale Players. A graduate of Ball State University with a PhD in Educational Theatre from New York University, he taught public school in Indiana before joining the faculty at Ferrum College in Virginia. Stephenson works with Emily Rose Tucker presenting storytelling and teacher education workshops.

Kimberlie Starnes is a full-time student at Texas A&M-Texarkana who lives in New Boston, Texas. She is majoring in elementary education, and she anticipates graduating in May of 2009. She has been working for Texarkana Independent

School District since August of 2008 as a student intern in the Westlawn Professional Development School. She is also employed by Texas A&M University-Texarkana as the Student Activities Programmer and as a Student Ambassador. In her time at the university, she has served as an officer in the Science Club for Educators and the Future Teachers Association. She has also served as a member of the Student Affairs Council.

Christian W. Thiede is a member of the Almost Uptown Poetry Cartel (http://www.almostuptown.com). Currently, he is enrolled at Goddard College in the MFA Creative Writing Program. His work can be found in the *Pitkin Review*, *The Cerebral Catalyst*, *Zygote in My Coffee*, *Bent Pin Quarterly*, *Harrisburg Review*, and *Fledgling Rag*. He has published two chapbooks of poetry: *Gazing behind My Eyes* and *Random Poems Now with Homes*.

Agnes Tirrito is employed by Texarkana Independent School District. She is a lead teacher at Westlawn Elementary's Professional Development School, where she mentors teachers in training and teaches fourth grade. She is an adjunct faculty member at Texas A&M University-Texarkana. Mrs. Tirrito is a co-director for the East Texas Writing Project, a National Writing Project site.

Emily Rose Tucker has been composing music in collaboration with R. Rex Stephenson for seven years. She is the Music Director at the Blue Ridge Dinner Theatre and an instructor of music at Ferrum College. She received her Bachelor of Arts from Alfred University and her Master of Arts in Music Education from Union Institute and University/Vermont College. She formerly taught music and drama at Benjamin Franklin Middle School in Virginia.

Cynthia Wilson is currently a candidate for an MFA focusing upon creative writing at Goddard College. Her poems have appeared in *The Pitkin Review*, *Hyperbole Magazine*, and the *Taj Mahal Review*. Her short stories have appeared in *Heavy Glow Fine Flash Fiction* and *Hyperbole Magazine*. She is writing a novel and an anthology of her short stories.