

OFF  
CENTER



ISSUE 2: 2017

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: HILLARY YEAGER  
ASSOCIATE EDITOR: COREY CUMMINGS

# OFF CENTER

IS A PUBLICATION OF  
THE UNIVERSITY  
WRITING CENTER

## EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

HILLARY YEAGER  
[HILLARY.YEAGER@MTSU.EDU](mailto:HILLARY.YEAGER@MTSU.EDU)

## ASSOCIATE EDITOR

COREY CUMMINGS  
[CAC6H@MTMAIL.MTSU.EDU](mailto:CAC6H@MTMAIL.MTSU.EDU)

## EDITORIAL REVIEW STAFF

NICK DALBEY  
MATT OLIVE  
WYATT MAY

## SUBMIT YOUR WORK

WE ACCEPT SUBMISSIONS FROM FALL -  
EARLY SPRING

- We accept all forms of media, writing, and creative work
- Submissions welcome from current and past MTSU students and alumni, faculty, and staff
- See our website for detailed submission guidelines

## FACULTY ADVISORS

DR. JAMES HAMBY  
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, UNIVERSITY  
WRITING CENTER

DR. BENÉ COX  
DIRECTOR, UNIVERSITY WRITING CENTER

## FIND US ONLINE

[MTSU.EDU/OFFCENTER](http://MTSU.EDU/OFFCENTER)

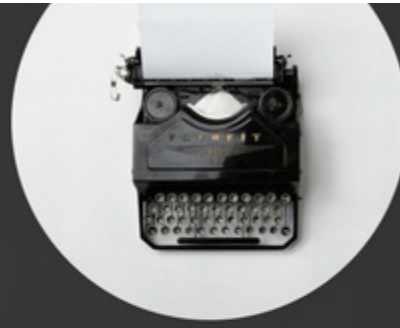
[FACEBOOK.COM/OFFCENTERMTSU/](https://FACEBOOK.COM/OFFCENTERMTSU/)

[INSTAGRAM.COM/OFF\\_CENTER\\_MTSU/](https://INSTAGRAM.COM/OFF_CENTER_MTSU/)

## THIS ISSUE'S DESIGN

LAYOUT: ADOBE INDESIGN CC  
GRAPHICS: ADOBE ILLUSTRATOR CC  
ADOBE PHOTOSHOP CC  
DESIGNER: HILLARY YEAGER

# OFF CENTER



VOL 2, 2017

## A Note from the Editors

Dear Readers,

We are so thrilled to share the second issue of *Off Center* with you: we received so many wonderful submissions from students, alumni, staff and faculty, and admit that choosing what to include in these pages was nearly an impossible task! In this issue, we aim to continue our mission of sharing the varied and wonderful voices of the MTSU creative community, and it is our distinct hope that we can continue to cultivate and encourage that voice as our magazine grows and develops.

The pieces included in this issue cover a wide range of modes including poems, photographs, digital art, screen printing, short plays, paintings, a translation from Middle English, and a short story. We are also launching some unique online content this issue, including the short inspirational film "Be Brave, Be Strong," as well as a piece of original music, "Slow Motion Observing You from a Distance." Janice Penny, contributor of the painting "Teal," installed a gallery wall of her pieces, which can be found on display in the Writing Center as a companion to her published piece.

We would like to thank the MTSU community, the alumni association, *The MTSU Magazine*, and of course, our wonderful faculty advisors at the Writing Center for their support. It is our distinct pleasure to work on this publication, and we hope that these pieces will serve as an inspiration to our readers and light a creative spark in you as you explore these pages. We encourage you to visit our website at [www.mtsu.edu/offcenter](http://www.mtsu.edu/offcenter), follow us on social media, and hope you will submit to our next issue!

With inspiration,

*Hillary Yeager*, Editor in Chief

*Corey Cummings*, Associate Editor

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## *Short Fiction*

|   |   |
|---|---|
| THE PEN THIEF   ALEXANDRA ROBERTS ..... | 5 |
|---|---|

## *Art, Photography, and Mixed Media*

|  |    |
|--|----|
| DAY 57   ALLISON BROCK .....                         | 40 |
| NUN   IAN COOPER .....                               | 13 |
| PERUVIAN BOY AND HIS PETS   SARA HAYS .....          | 23 |
| THE BIKE RACK   SETH HOLLOMAN .....                  | 38 |
| SELF PORTRAIT WITH A STRAWBERRY   MEGAN KREGER ..... | 39 |
| HORSE   DANIEL LEWIS .....                           | 25 |
| SO I SEZ, SO SEZ I   HEATHER MOULDER .....           | 15 |
| TEAL   JANICE PENNY .....                            | 18 |
| MORNING GLORY   PAMELA SYKES .....                   | 17 |
| INTO THE BLUE   KARLIE TANKERSLEY .....              | 34 |

## *Poetry*

|  |    |
|--|----|
| ABSTRACT ANALYSIS OF EMOTIONS   HILLARY YEAGER .....           | 12 |
| THE GRIT OF RECOGNITION   RICHARD CROSS .....                  | 14 |
| DATING TODAY   MATT OLIVE .....                                | 16 |
| DIVINER   AMY HARRIS-ABER .....                                | 24 |
| TO THE OIL SLICK IN MY FATHER'S GARAGE   DAVID STEVENSON ..... | 35 |
| THE CATFISH   HEATHER L. HICKOX .....                          | 36 |
| HOW TO GET AWAY WITH JUST ABOUT ANYTHING   NICK BUSH .....     | 41 |

## *Drama*

|  |    |
|--|----|
| LA MADRE DE LA SANGUE   COREY CUMMINGS ..... | 26 |
|--|----|

## *Translation and Reflection*

|   |    |
|---|----|
| THE DREAM OF THE ROOD   NICK DALBEY ..... | 19 |
|---|----|

## *Online Multimedia Content - [www.mtsu.edu/offcenter](http://www.mtsu.edu/offcenter)*

BE BRAVE, BE STRONG | MICAH RUSSELL

SLOW MOTION OBSERVING YOU FROM A DISTANCE | ALEX HAIL

# THE PEN THIEF

*by Alexandra Roberts*

Henry Barker was cursed—not the typical firstborn children corruption kind of curse. His was a much more mundane sort of curse. It plodded on day after day in its monotonous, curse-like fashion. The curse was simple: Henry Barker was perpetually without a pen.

This may seem like a mere annoyance, a product of absentmindedness, than an actual curse, but Henry realized as he stood in the office supply aisle of his local supermarket for the third time that week that he had no choice to believe it was just that. He plucked a package of fifty cheap pens from the bottom shelf and sighed. For ten years he had worked at the same office job in the same cubicle. In that time, he had never lost his keys or forgotten where he set down his telephone. Yet pens eluded him, vanished as if he were, unbeknownst to him, a gatekeeper to a secret wormhole. He eyed the package in his hand suspiciously. One by one, he knew, they would desert him. No sooner than when he opened the package and took up the first one would they all seem to sprout legs and hurry off.

One of the store associates walked by him. “Hey Henry. Back again?”

Henry didn’t know the young man’s name, so he just held up the bulk package in response. The young man laughed and walked away, shaking his head.

This was part of the curse for Henry. He had become a joke, an easy zinger. It was even laughed about in his office, a piece of advice whispered to new-hires: “Don’t lend your pens to Henry.”

He stood in line at the cash register, mulling over this newfound understanding of his circumstances. The curse explained it all, yet it maddened him. Then, as if Fate wished to taunt him further, a pen fell out of the purse of the woman in front of him. He had always prided himself on chivalry, so he automatically bent to retrieve it.

He hesitated just before touching it, though. This was a much nicer pen than Henry had held in a long time. For years, he had not allowed himself to purchase good pens. What would be the point? But this pen didn’t have to cost him anything. The woman wasn’t paying attention. There was some scandal at the cash register, and everyone was too preoccupied with being put out to notice him. He seized the opportunity with more relish than he would have thought the triumph deserved.

But it was a triumph, if only a small one, because he had done something different. This, he acknowledged to himself, was an act of rebellion against Fate and its blasted curse on him.

Dropping the pen into his coat pocket, he placed the other pens on a nearby shelf and left the store. He vowed it would be the last time he visited it solely for the sake of pens.

\* \* \*

The woman’s pen didn’t last long, but he hadn’t expected it to. It had remained safely in his coat pocket for a full day, ready to do his bidding, until it vanished. It didn’t bother Henry, though, because

now he had a plan. Better yet, he had a war strategy.

When he went to the bank or the doctor's office, he, unlike the average pen-stealer, did it with purpose. He picked his teller based upon whether the pen at her window was mounted or well-marked. He chose colleagues to have conversations with based upon how accessible the pens upon their desks were. He even made a point to suggest to his boss during his annual review that more communal pens should be purchased for the office.

Soon his empty desk drawer began to fill. More than a dozen pens occupied the space during the day. By keeping a constant influx of stolen writing utensils, he finally felt that he was gaining ground against fate. But he was still cursed. He still went home each evening to a pen-less existence and arrived each morning to an empty drawer.

\* \* \*

He walked into his boss's office one afternoon because he had been told to. "Sit down, Henry," she said, not looking up from her legal pad of notes. Her tight chignon made her otherwise attractive face look severe, even birdlike.

He sat down. He waited. Her pen scratched upon her paper without pause. The pitch of the noise seemed to heighten with each passing moment. It was almost as if it were calling to him. Finally, he looked at it, really looked at it. Stars and planets aligned. Maybe Fate was giving him a break, or perhaps he had finally caught the upper hand. To Henry, it did not matter.

It was an old-fashioned fountain pen—sleek, stately, and smooth as water without ripples. It gleamed in the sunlight from the far window. The black body and gilded edges enchanted him. It was all he could ever want. It was a Montblanc, the kind of pen that would never abandon him. It was perfect enough, beautiful enough to counter the curse, to break the spell.

Finally, Genevieve looked up and put the pen down. "Henry, we have to talk about your performance."

He nodded vaguely, but his mind was still on the pen.

"Your numbers aren't where they should be and your department wasn't exactly stellar to begin with."

He wasn't listening. He couldn't, not when it sat there full of promises.

"It seems you're preoccupied with something," she went on. "Your performance is drastically different from last year at this time, but, as far as I can tell, nothing has changed on our end. Is there something going on at home? From what I understand, you don't have much family?"

Her voice came from far away and thus took a long time to reach him. "No," he managed.

"I see," she said, seeming to consider something. She leaned forward, bringing her clasped hands in front of his newfound hope. "I'm not sure if you're aware, but the company does offer psychiatric amenities. We have resources easily available to you: stress management, grief counseling, anything that you may need someone for but don't really have in your life at the moment."

With the pen out of sight, his mind was suddenly much clearer. It was also angry and thwarted, but clearer. "Yes," he snipped. "I had heard of that, but I don't think it's really for me. Thanks, anyway." He turned to leave, his mind on other, more important matters.

“Wait,” she said, holding up a hand. The butt of the pen was just visible past her other still resting fingertips. With the already raised hand, she plucked a card from an organizer on her desk. With a meaningful look, she offered it to him. “In case you change your mind.”

He took it with a nod and turned to go. His hand on the handle, she once more called out, “Oh and Henry.” He didn’t fully turn this time. “Don’t hesitate to talk to me if I can be of any help.”

Another curt nod and he was gone.

The workday was almost done, so he decided to head out early, which he almost never did. Maybe the other employees would wonder what had transpired behind Genevieve’s closed door, but he didn’t care. He had plans to make.

Once home in his small, neat, one bedroom apartment, Henry took out a fresh notebook. But, of course, he was once again without a pen. He swore, knowing his apartment held none, but he searched anyway. Finally, he scrounged up an old highlighter, which would just have to do.

First, he had to consider purchasing one of these pens for himself. Taking old, half-used Papermates was one thing, but a Montblanc was quite another. Furthermore, no typical non-cursed person in an office noticed a missing pen from his or her desk pen holder, but Genevieve surely would notice if perfection itself left her office. And Genevieve was his boss. He had no intention of leaving his job anytime soon. Besides, if he did somehow manage to steal her Montblanc, it would be impossible for him not to use it at every opportunity, which primarily included the office. He would be caught for sure.

But he certainly could not afford one on his own, not on his mediocre salary. He had a car payment and student loans leftover from an education he finished over a decade ago. Maybe if he had another ten years to save and didn’t want a retirement fund, but he knew he couldn’t wait that long. And even if he could, this pen had chosen him, presented itself to him. He had to honor that.

So he devised a plan.

The next day he came into work more cheerful than usual. He went immediately to his desk to put down his coat and briefcase. His desk drawer was once again empty, but he could manage. Then he knocked on Genevieve’s door.

“Come in!” He pushed it open. “Oh Henry, I wasn’t expecting you. The others mentioned that you left early yesterday. I thought you might take a personal day today.”

He noticed the pen had its own stand next to her nameplate. That would have to come too. “No need.” He smiled. “Brought you some coffee.” He held up the two lidded cups as an offering.

She eyed them. “Well...that was very nice of you. What for?”

“I just wanted to thank you for your concern yesterday,” he replied sheepishly. “I realize I may have come off a bit—uh—short, but I want to assure you that I really am fine. Just got too involved in a new hobby, but I think I have a solution in mind.”

She smiled broadly, making her lipstick crack. “That’s very good to hear. I hope that means those numbers will be back up to normal soon.”

“Better than normal,” he promised as he moved toward the door.

She held up her cup in a silent “cheers” and he returned the gesture as he left.

His first reconnaissance mission was complete.

He worked hard on his numbers all that week. If his plan was to progress, she had to trust him. As he threw himself into his work he almost forgot to recruit his obnoxious supply of illicit essentials. His colleagues had easier conversations with him. He was more relaxed, more at ease. There's something about doing something about a problem, even before it's resolved that gives one an air of grandeur. Henry had that air and used it to his advantage.

At the end of two weeks, Genevieve stopped in his cubicle. "Nice work, Barker." She tapped his shoulder with a manila folder and went on her way. Two minutes later he was at her door. She was less surprised to see him. The pen was in her hand this time. He noticed smudges and grip marks on it as she put it down. This made him cringe but he tried not to show it.

"Is that a new pen?" he asked, aiming for nonchalance.

She was confused for a moment. "Um, yes. Well, sort of. It was my husband's." A beat. "Ex-husband's, I mean."

"Ah," was all Henry could think to say. They sat in an awkward silence for a moment. "That doesn't seem like a pleasant memento."

Genevieve drew back. "Excuse me?"

He lost sight of the pen as his head snapped up. "I'm sorry. That was tactless. It seems like a nice thing to have, but sometimes we keep nice things even if they have ugly meanings attached."

She squinted at him. "Yes, well, as it so happens, there are no 'ugly meanings' with this particular one. It's one of the few good things I got from my marriage. I had planned to give it to him for our anniversary, but he—it all ended before I could, so I kept it for myself. It reminds me that everything isn't all out of control."

"I see," said Henry, though he didn't.

Another pause. "Did you have something you needed from me?"

"Oh!" he said, having forgotten what excuse he had intended to use. "Yeah. I had a question about the new system we're supposed to be implementing."

She pulled her chair close to the desk, all business again. "There will be training on it next week. You'll be fully informed before you have to do anything with it."

"Oh—ah—good."

"Is that all?"

"Yes, I suppose it is."

\* \* \*

The pen did have sentimental value, then. That would make his acquisition that much more difficult. He swept aside his guilt. Her self-consolation was not as important as his cosmic victory. That was plain enough. But her emotional attachment to the object complicated the act of separation, and she would have to be away from the pen in order for him to take it and get away with it. There were too many dangers otherwise. The opportunity would have to present itself, just as it did in the supermarket. He



had to believe it would.

He began to stay late at work, waiting until everyone, including Genevieve had left. But she always locked her office door, even throughout the day whenever she left her office.

To assuage his hopeless longing for the object in question, his specific kleptomania intensified. He stole from everyone. But mostly he stole from her. Upon his third visit, another pretense just to look at the pen, he discovered that she kept a coffee mug full of extra ordinary pens. Why she would need these when she had such an exemplary companion at her disposal was beyond his comprehension. But every day, without fail, he came to her. They chatted. Occasionally, they would have a real conversation. Then he would take a pen or two when she wasn't looking.

These did little to satisfy him, though they managed to remain in the desk drawer longer than the others. Perhaps it was the influence of the Montblanc. Regardless, they eventually disappeared as well. And, if he was really being honest with himself, they weren't the reason he went to her office. He still wanted to see his fated pen. At first he told himself, it was just to see it—just to hold him over until the time was right. Then, after a couple of weeks, it became just to touch it. Another few weeks passed and he even managed to hold it when she turned her back to speak on the telephone. Meanwhile, his stealing had worked itself into a frenzy.

These daily doses of the pen's magic only exacerbated his longing, thus demanding he double, then triple, then quadruple his intake. People never accused, but they began to suspect. The once easily stolen became difficult even to find. The naïve coworkers avoided him altogether. His numbers dropped again. But this time Genevieve was the only one not to notice.

It was another day, like any other. He brought Genevieve her coffee along with his, took his customary seat and began their morning chat. It was only a couple of minutes long, enough for him to glimpse his object. He left.

He came back at lunchtime. Genevieve was on a business call. She turned her back to him and scooted closer to the window. He took this opportunity to stroke the Montblanc, even dared to hold it again. He glanced up, but she was still deep in conversation. Would he tempt himself further? He would.

Uncapping it, he curled his fingers around it, embracing it, the end just aloft a nearby shred of paper. The anticipation was so intense he could barely stand it, but he made himself endure it. He had been waiting for this moment for a long time. He would enjoy it, savor it. Finally, he allowed it to just kiss the page. No word. No line. Just a single mark. Genevieve was even more absorbed in her telephone communication. Now was the time.

He began to write. He wrote three words. It was ecstasy. It was heaven. It was all he had been waiting for. This moment's magic, he was sure, was the prelude to the end of his curse.

He hadn't realized it, but the room had gone quiet. He looked up. "Sorry," he said to Genevieve, replacing the pen just as she had left it. She stood, arms crossed, expression puzzled. Henry could not say what his expression was, but if it displayed even one-tenth of the pleasure he was even now still experiencing, he knew he had given himself away. "Sorry," he said again, and left.

The day drew on. Again and again, he berated himself for losing control of himself. He had known better. He might as well have stolen the thing then and there, but the moment had gotten away from him.

He barely got any work done that day. Mostly he just sat, head in his hands. Occasionally he would check his drawer, count his pens, but by the time he finished, even though the number was small, he never remembered if it was the same number he had gotten before. And it never occurred to him to write it down.

Five o'clock strolled up and tapped him on the shoulder but he waved it away. His coworkers thought he was bidding them farewell and waved back. They all departed.

He glanced around the empty office. His head shot up and looked directly at Genevieve's office door. Now was his chance. He had been caught red-handed earlier. There was nothing stopping him anymore. If he could have the pen now, if the curse were broken, he could get a new job—start a new life. It didn't matter what she knew. There would hardly be an investigation for a missing pen. He, like all his previous pens, would disappear.

He laughed to himself as he strode to her door. He looked around for something to break the glass of the door but thought he'd try the handle first. It offered no resistance.

He stopped, stunned, at the threshold. There was Genevieve, but she wasn't Genevieve his boss. She was something else entirely. She had removed her business jacket to reveal the silk camisole underneath. Her hair fell in loose waves around her shoulders. But what was most unbelievable was her posture. Henry had never seen her stand in her office. Yet here she was in front of her desk, leaned back against it, legs crossed at the ankles, arms spread wide, the picture of ease. Or was it something else?

"I was beginning to think you wouldn't come."

"You knew I would?"

"I hoped."

A pause.

"After you took your risk, I felt it only fair that I took mine." Her voice was low, husky.

Henry gave her a blank look. "Risk?"

"You took a chance. You told me how you felt. Or rather, you showed me." Throwing her head back, she giggled. Then Henry caught movement out of the corner of his eye. Her hand had shifted to a familiar place, made a familiar motion. It was a motion he had observed countless times. She grasped the pen.

Henry's eyes widened. "So you know then?"

"Darling, of course I know."

But then it all went wrong. Her hand was no longer just holding the pen. It was moving. It had some purpose in mind. It rose higher and higher until she finally brought it to her lips. She rested it between her teeth, smiling a mischievous smile. Henry gripped the chair in front of him. How to stop her? She was going to wound it, steal its magic. He couldn't let her.

"After seeing your note," she went on, aware only that she was having an effect on him, "I couldn't help but know."

That drew him up short. "My note?"

She laughed as if he had made the funniest joke. She produced a scrap of paper from inside her shirt and waved it in front of him. He didn't need to read it to know what it said. There in script as smooth as silk were the words he had so erroneously written: "I want you."

She let it flutter to the floor. "And I want you too." Her voice was a growl. The pen, the beautiful, glorious bringer of his salvation, flew from her hand as she latched herself to him.

Without a thought, he flung her off of him and caught the pen. He breathed a sigh of relief and indulged in a shudder of pleasure as he held it.

"What the hell?" she snapped. She stepped back. "Wait." She looked from him to the pen and back again, awareness slowly creeping across her face. "What kind of freak are you?"

He had to explain, but the effects of the Montblanc were so powerful. It was difficult for him to think. "It's not what you think."

"I don't know what I think."

Silence descended. Genevieve crossed her arms over her chest. The gesture was less angry and more as if she were trying to cover herself. Henry had to do something now. The only plan that occurred to him was absurd, but he had to try. "Genevieve, I can be with you. I could even love you, I think. I just..."

"Have to have my pen in order to do it?" she finished for him in a numb voice.

"Yes," he said and, without being able to stop himself, caressed the Montblanc.

"Get out, Henry."

\* \* \*

*Six Months Later*

The bright summer's day drew to a dreary close. As the conference room's windows' light faded so did the enthusiasm in the room.

"Okay," Genevieve announced. "I think that's enough for today. Everyone can head on home."

People were packed up and out of their seats in no time. Henry, however, forgot to hurry. He arranged his briefcase, picked up his coat, and walked toward the door. He reached it at the same time as Genevieve; they were the only ones left in the room.

"Genevieve."

"Henry."

He hurried through the door, aware as he always was of every jostle and bounce of the Montblanc against his chest.

# ABSTRACT ANALYSIS OF EMOTIONS *by Hillary Yeager*

I like to think about feeling.

The way emotions swell in the breast or  
maybe the base of the spine. How  
tendrils of desire flow upward,  
unbidden, creeping from loin to heart.  
(It's best to not consider such things)

Laughter echoes in your eyes --  
The sides of your mouth turn up,  
and I find myself . . . distracted  
considering the inappropriate nature of such ruminations.

Often, I am left unsatisfied by the simple confines of life,  
the trappings of mere *ordinary* devotion.  
I long for an absolute adoration,  
for complete understanding, for losing oneself  
in the sweet bliss of body + soul abandon, the stuff of  
epic poems and novels, the grand gestures,  
the ever-burning flame.  
(It's best to not consider such things)

Yet, such desires whisper to me, as a soft as a seduction.  
My heart is a weak vessel, wanton  
my mind all the worse, prone to attacks of  
such romantic sensibilities.



# NUN

*by Jan Cooper*

# THE GRIT OF RECOGNITION

*by Richard Cross*

Energy must yearn,  
the precursor unspoken  
by depriving tongues.

Critique a recluse:  
his monologue, once tranquil,  
will soon overwhelm.

Affirmed, he suffers.  
Feelings brought to manifest  
tumble when inscribed.

Echoing for all,  
the grit of recognition  
breaks courage aground.

# SO I SEZ, SO SEZ I

*by Heather Moulder*



# DATING TODAY

*by Matt Olive*

We came trembling on scales, still  
needing precise values to commit single-  
filed lines to memory. We would let them follow  
anxious phone calls to split ends before pulling out  
white hares from hats. Straight talk had left us expecting only  
frozen, post-coital snacks, passing snow cones to wired bidders in beds  
too large for ice caps. In fact, given the colorless pills we drank  
bum-fast, no wonder we've returned to safer stalls,  
searching crowded bathrooms in cleared bars,  
our lips in pursuit of unpursed tips, old  
mints in retired containers, forever  
withholding the last of this  
generation's  
Tic  
Tac bliss.



# MORNING GLORY

*by Pamela Sykes*



# TEAL

*by Janice Penny*



# THE DREAM OF THE ROOD

*by Nick Dalbey*

Listen. I wish to tell a most wondrous vision which came to me in the middle of the night After the word-bearers had gone to bed. I thought I saw the most glorious tree, the brightest of trees, laced with light, lifted into the air. That beacon was completely drenched with gold. Beautiful gems stood at the earth's corners, likewise there were five across its shoulder width. All those fair through eternity beheld the angel of the Lord. This was not an ordinary gallows; for holy spirits, men of earth, and the glorious host of creation beheld it there.

Ablaze was the victory-tree, and I was stained with sin, wounded by faults. I saw the glory tree resplendent with clothing, radiant with joys, wreathed with gold. Gems had worthily adorned the Ruler's tree.

But through that gold I glimpsed the old wretched strife, when it first began to bleed from its right side. I was completely saturated with sorrows, I trembled at that beautiful sight. I saw that ever-ready standard change clothing and colors; sometimes it was soaked with water, then oozing with blood, and sometimes decked with jewels. But laying there for a long while, I contemplated the sorrowful savior's tree until I heard it speak. The best of trees began speaking these words: "It was very long ago, I still remember it, That I was hewn down at the edge of the forest severed from my roots. Strong enemies took me from there; There they made me a spectacle for themselves, ordered me to hoist their criminals. Men bore me on their shoulders, until they set me up on a hill, many enemies fastened me there."

Then, I saw the Lord of mankind hasten with great courage because he desired to climb upon me. There I did not dare, against the Lord's word, to bow or burst, when I beheld Earth's foundations tremble. I could have felled all fiends, but I stood fast. Then the young warrior stripped himself, that was Almighty God, strong and stern-minded. He ascended onto the high gallows courageous in the sight of many, because he desired to liberate mankind.

"I trembled when the warrior embraced me. But I did not dare bend earthward, to fall to the earth's surfaces, but I had to stand fast. I was the raised cross. I raised the noble king, heaven's Lord, I did not dare to lean. They drove dark nails through me. On me are the visible wounds, the gaping malicious wounds. I did not dare to injure any of them."

They disgraced both of us together. I was completely drenched with blood, which poured out from this man's side when he had given up his spirit. On that hill, I have endured many cruel calamities. I saw the God of hosts severely stretched out. With clouds, darkness had covered the Ruler's corpse, shining splendor; a shadow went forth under dark clouds. All creation wept; they bewailed the king's death. Christ was on the cross. Nevertheless, eager people came from afar to the noble Lord. I beheld all of that.

Sorely I was afflicted with sorrows, yet I bowed to the hands of men, Humble, with great courage. They seized Almighty God from there, Lifted him from the awful agony. The warriors left me to stand, soaked with blood; I was pierced all through with nails. They laid the limb-weary one there, stood themselves at his corpse's head, There they beheld heaven's Lord, and he rested himself there for a while, Weary after the great battle.

Almighty God from there, lifted him from the awful agony. The warriors left me to stand, soaked with blood; I was pierced all through with nails. They laid the limb-weary one there, stood themselves at his corpse's head, there they beheld heaven's Lord, and he rested himself there for a while, weary after the great battle.

Then warriors began to build a tomb for him Within the slayer's sight; they carved it from bright stone, they set therein the Ruler of Victories. Then they began to sing a dirge for him, heavy-hearted in the evening, when they wished to journey again, weary, from the glorious Ruler. He rested there with a small troop.

But we, weeping there for a good while, stood in position as the voice of the warriors drifted upward. The corpse cooled, the fair soul-vessel. Then someone began to fell us all to the earth. That was a grievous fate! Someone buried us in a deep pit. But the Lord's thanes, friends discovered me there, They dressed me in gold and silver. Now may you hear, my dear warrior, that I have endured works of evil-doers, sore sorrows. The time is now come that far and wide they will honor me, men throughout the earth, and all of the glorious creation, will themselves pray to this beacon. On me, the Son of God suffered for a while. Therefore, glorious now, I Rise up under heaven, and I can heal each one of those in whom there is reverence for me. Long ago, I was made the cruelest of punishments, by a most hateful people, before I opened the just way of life for the word-bearers.

Lo, then the Prince of Wonder, Heaven's Guardian honored me above the trees of the forest, just as he, Almighty God, also honored his mother, Mary herself, above all womankind for the sake of all men. Now I command you, my dear warrior, that you tell of this sight to men, reveal with words that it is the tree of glory, the one on which Almighty God suffered for mankind's many sins and Adam's ancient deeds.

He tasted death there, yet the Lord rose again with his great might to help men. Then he ascended into heaven. Here he will come again on this middle-earth to seek mankind on doomsday, the Lord Himself, Almighty God and his angels with him, And then he will desire to judge, since he has the power of judgment, each one of them as he has previously earned here in this loaned life.

Nor may anyone be unafraid because of the words that the Ruler will speak. There before the multitude, he will ask where the man is, He who for the name of the Lord was willing to taste

Death's bitterness, as he on the cross previously accomplished. But then they will be afraid, and scarcely think what they will begin to say to Christ. But then no one there will need to be afraid. Who previously has borne in his breast the best tree; But through the cross, every soul will seek the kingdom away from the earthly path, whoever desires to dwell with the Ruler."

Then, glad of heart, I myself prayed to the cross with great zeal, there I was alone With little company. My spirit was urged on the way forward, I endured many seasons full of longing. Now for me life's hope is that I might seek the victory-beam alone, more often than all men, and worthily worship it. For me the desire for that is great in mind, and my hope of refuge is directed to the cross. I do not have many rich friends on the earth, but they departed forth from here, from this world's pleasures, sought for themselves the king of glory; now they live in heaven with the High Father; they live in glory, and I expect each day when my Lord's cross, who I previously saw here on earth, may fetch me from this transitory life and then bring me to where there is great bliss, joy in heaven; there is the host of the Lord seated at the feast, there is unending bliss; and then set me where I may afterwards to live in glory, and worthily share in joys among the saints.

May the Lord be a friend to me, He who here on earth previously suffered on the gallows tree for man's sins. He freed us and gave us life, a heavenly home. Hope was renewed with splendors and with joy for those who suffered burning there. The Son was victorious on that expedition, mighty and successful, when he came with a multitude, a host of spirits, into God's kingdom, Almighty Ruler, with angels in bliss. And all the saints who previously were in heaven, lived in glory, when their Ruler came, Almighty God, there to his homeland.

### *Introduction and Reflection on The Dream of the Rood*

For bibliophiles like myself, a bad film adaptation of a favorite book is one of life's more frustrating experiences (I'm looking at you Peter Jackson). While I understand that movies and books are completely different mediums that require different story-telling techniques, I sometimes have difficulty forgiving a director for either omitting important scenes and characters from a book or blatantly inventing new scenes and characters. However, after working on my translation of the Old English poem *The Dream of the Rood*, I have a new-found appreciation for movie adaptations. The work of adaptation is like translation because both processes are attempts at re-telling an already established story with different story-telling tools. And like good movie adaptations, a good translation will be both accurate and true to the spirit of the original work. Unfortunately, striking a balance between accuracy and spirit require various amounts of compromise.

One of the obstacles in achieving accuracy in translation is that languages rarely share a one-to-one correspondence in vocabulary or grammar. For example, the first word of *The Dream of the Rood* is "Hwæt," a word for which there is no single modern English translation. "Hwæt," however, is an important word regularly used in Old English poems—e.g., it is also the first word of *Beowulf*. Most Old English poetry was originally part of an oral tradition, so "hwæt" served as a way for the poet to grab the

attention of the audience. It's helpful to imagine an Anglo-Saxon poet standing in the middle of a mead hall reciting a poem to a large feasting audience. As a result, modern English translators have variously translated "hwæt" as "Listen" "So" or "Hey!" For my own translation, I chose "Listen" for a couple reasons. As a verb in the imperative mood, "Listen" is a command that indicates the poet's attempt to gain the attention of his audience. Similarly, "Listen" connotes a sense of urgency on the part of the poet. We rarely command people to listen unless we believe we have something worth listening to.

Accurately translating individual words, however, also requires a sense of the bigger picture. It is important to remember that *The Dream of the Rood* is a first-person testimony of a narrator who received a vision of the cross of Christ in a dream. Like all good dream visions, something weird happens: the cross speaks to him. The first-person narration then shifts to the perspective of the cross who recounts how it was initially torn from its roots as a tree and became the torture device used to kill Christ. After the crucifixion, the cross then tells of its own burial and resurrection. The character of Christ himself is also of special interest. Unlike other depictions of Christ as a suffering figure, in the poem he functions as a modified version of the Anglo-Saxon hero. He willingly "ascended onto the high gallows" and courageously "embraced" the cross itself, fulfilling his destiny by bringing salvation to all of humanity. Because Christ, and by implication the cross itself, is depicted as a hero, the poem forces its audience to ask the question, "What does it mean to be a 'hero' in a Christian context?"

In addition to heroism, the theme of transformation also figures prominently throughout the poem. The poet plays with the duality of images and moments of double-vision. The narrator not only sees a gold-laden and jewel encrusted cross, but a cross dripping and oozing blood. The narrator's vision continues to alternate throughout the poem. Each time an image is transformed, the poet frequently uses the word "eall" to emphasize the completeness of it. Adding to the significance of the narrator's vision is the underlying Christian theology. The dual nature of the cross corresponds directly to the dual nature of Christ who is believed to be both fully man and fully God. The difficulty for a translator, therefore, is to capture the duality of the poem and to relay the experience of the narrator to a modern reader. In my translation, I attempted to emphasize the completeness and transparency of the imagery by employing a variety of words. In the first stanza, for example, I use words like "wreathed," "radiant," "oozed," and "saturated" to convey that the alternating images represent substantive transformations and not just changing external appearances.

Another feature of Old English poetry is its use of alliteration. Every line in *The Dream of the Rood* consists of two or three alliterative words, the effect of which produces beautiful sections of verbal patterning and parallelism—both visually and audibly. Unfortunately, such intricacy is difficult to reproduce in a modern English translation without imposing awkward and/or archaic vocabulary and syntax. In my translation, therefore, I decided to attempt alliteration where it naturally occurred while maintaining the clarity of the narrative and imagery.

*The Dream of the Rood* is a poem of technical and profound brilliance. The more I work with the it—tinkering with various possible translations for each line—the more rewarding it becomes.

Throughout the translation process, I have attempted to strike a balance between accuracy and spirit. My tendency as a translator is to err on the side of capturing the spirit of the poem instead of literal accuracy, but I've learned that so much of the spirit of a poem resides in its individual words—its spirit is often lost not in literal accuracy but in paraphrase. I am not done reading or thinking about *The Dream of the Rood*, and I'll probably continue drafting new versions of the poem itself. Like movie adaptations, translations are always a matter of interpretation, and each new version represents an attempt at better understanding and mediating the original work to a new audience.

# PERUVIAN BOY AND HIS PETS

*by Sara Hayes*



# DIVINER

*by Amy Harris Aber*

I will make myself a likeness of the Virgin  
from Kansas blue and Magnolia white -  
I will leave footfalls in the roads at my back -  
red like dirt from Oklahoma.

I want thick blood that whirls  
in untidy curves like breaking coils,  
no matter what shoreline I claim -  
an unsteady line in the air -  
a jet trail  
outlined in gray,  
green.  
Still, I am a favorite skein of yarn  
unwinding,  
finding new ways to be.

I will answer voices that I've known -  
the crisp singing of cicadas,  
the storyteller's songs  
just above my head in the nighttime.

I will settle - a speck of dust  
in the largest crevice of a land  
without drought.

But I promise,  
you'll always find me  
breaking open the stones  
with a walking stick I was given  
or finding water.



# HORSE

*by Daniel Lewis*



# LA MADRE DE SANGUE

*by Corey Cummings*

("The Mother of Blood")

"Oh mama, can this really be the end?"

-Bob Dylan

Il buon sangue giammai non può mentire.

(Good blood always shows itself.)

-Italian Proverb

## Characters:

Antonia Baretto: Female, Late 20s, wearing a white dress

Antimo Baretto: Male, Early 30s, wearing a dirty suit

**Setting:** New York, 1902. An oppressively tiny apartment. Two chairs face each other in the center of the room. A small box sits atop a small table. Next to the table a trunk sits on the floor.

*ANTONIA sits in the chair facing the door and waits.*

ANTONIA

*(To herself)*

A chi Dio vuol castigare leva il cervello. (Whom God will destroy, he first make mad)

*ANTONIA stares at the door, A second knock. Much more insistent.*

*She walks toward the door and stops. She places her hand on the doorknob. A third knock startles her into action. She opens the door to reveal a large man dominating the doorframe. They stare at one another.*

ANTIMO

Toni.

ANTONIA

Don't call me that.

*ANTIMO forces his way into the apartment.*

ANTIMO

Hmph. Nice place.

ANTONIA

So you made it off the boat?

ANTIMO

It's the strangest thing. They had people waiting for me. I know they did. I heard them saying my name and talking about "the killer". But when we docked I went through the checkpoint without any trouble. It must be your lucky day.

ANTONIA

I was afraid you wouldn't make it off.

ANTIMO

Afraid?

ANTONIA

I've been waiting for you.

ANTIMO

Is that right?

*ANTONIA and ANTIMO stare at each other. ANTIMO begins to move slowly around the chair in front of him. ANTIMO begins to move towards the table and trunk. ANTONIA blocks him.*

ANTONIA

How was your trip?

*ANTIMO vaults toward ANTONIA and grabs her by the shoulders.*

ANTIMO

Enough with the fucking small talk! Why did you leave me you strunzo?! WHY?

*ANTIMO shakes ANTONIA violently with each new question.*

How could you? HOW? Where is my child? What have you done with my child??

*ANTIMO throws ANTONIA into the chair facing the door. He calmly turns around and seats himself on the chair opposite.*

ANTONIA

I'm glad you are here. We have been waiting for you for so long.

ANTIMO

You're glad?! You're glad. Tell me where my child is.

ANTONIA

No. Not yet.

ANTIMO

*(Fuming)*

I am not here to talk. I am here...

ANTONIA

If you want to see your son again you will sit and listen.

ANTIMO

My...son? My son? It's a boy. Of course it is. I have a son. My legacy...

ANTONIA

Yes. Your legacy. That's exactly what I want to talk to you about. I am going to make you pay for what you have done.

ANTIMO

*(Laughing)*

Ohhhhh I see!! That's wonderful. Just fucking terrific. How do you plan on doing that? Shall we go down the list? Shall I apologize for each one?

ANTONIA

You don't understand.

*ANTIMO rises from the chair and takes a forceful step towards ANTONIA.*

ANTIMO

You didn't seem to care when you washed the blood from my clothes every night. You knew what I was. Now you want to make me pay?? You run away with my child and leave me to rot in prison for *three years*. You sit here and you plot this...this... what is this? A reckoning?

ANTONIA

You misunderstand me.

ANTIMO

You misunderstand *me*.

ANTONIA

Sporcizia.

*ANTIMO sits back down.*

ANTIMO

Hm. Sporcizia. Is that what you think? Or monster. *Monster*. Do you have any idea what it's like? I walk around and I can smell it inside the people around me. It's faint and bubbling just under the surface. It wants to be released. Can't you see that? It pulses and flows and pushes. You can see it all the time. Redness in the cheeks, the veins on the arms. It wants out. I can smell it. But the smell is faint. Too faint. Can't you see? I have to let it out. I need to inhale it. I need to *taste* it...to feel it on my hands, my face... I need to watch it spill and flow and be free.

ANTONIA

*Ohhh* yes. I know all about blood.

*ANTIMO rises from his chair and walks slowly toward ANTONIA.*

ANTIMO

Yes. The blood.

*ANTIMO caresses ANTONIA's face. His hands move from her face to her throat.*

Most precious blood.

*ANTONIA rises from her chair and moves herself to ANTIMO's left side putting her within reach of the small box atop the table between the chairs.*

The smell...the smell is....

*ANTIMO plunges his face into ANTONIA's neck making rapturous sounds as his body contorts. While he is distracted ANTONIA reaches inside the box and grabs a long dagger.*

ANTONIA

Sit down.

*ANTIMO continues his intense olfactory overload without noticing the dagger.*

ANTIMO

Not just yet...not yet...

*ANTONIA forces ANTIMO off of her.*

ANTONIA

Dio guida la mia lama. (God guide my blade.)

*ANTONIA plunges the dagger deep into ANTIMO's belly two times. He looks down at his wound in disbelief.*

ANTIMO

You....you...puttana.

*ANTIMO falls back into his chair without looking away from ANTONIA.*

ANTONIA

Now we can talk.

*ANTONIA wipes the blood off of her dagger with ANTIMO's shirt and then wipes her hands on his shoulders.*

Sporcizia.

*ANTONIA spits on the floor in front of ANTIMO where his blood is already beginning to pool.*

Not long now.

ANTIMO

What have you done, Toni?

ANTONIA

I told you not to call me that!

*ANTONIA grabs one of ANTIMO's blood-covered hands and pushes it into his face.*

Look!

*ANTIMO screams and recoils.*

Can you see your filth?

ANTIMO

Why have you done this?

ANTONIA

All I ever wanted was a child. My whole life. I wanted to create another life. I needed to be married...

*ANTIMO gurgles a slight chuckle.*

Then I met you.

ANTIMO

You were happy. You never complained.

ANTONIA

No. I never did. Even after I found out...what you were. Can you imagine how I felt? I dreamt of you my whole life. My prince, my knight, my beloved...turned out to be a monster. A murdering beast.

*ANTIMO is struggling to keep his head up.*

ANTIMO

There's...this red....all around you.

ANTONIA

I decided that I must overlook your...predilections. I wanted a child. I wanted a child so badly that I went along with your vicious hobby. I washed the clothes. I ignored your absence in the evenings. We never spoke of it. I set my mind on conceiving our child.

ANTIMO

I remember...

ANTONIA

Then it happened. I was pregnant. I was so blissfully happy. I...

*ANTIMO's head drops down to his chest. ANTONIA leaps up from her seat and grabs his face.*

NO. You will listen. You will hear this.

ANTIMO

Where is he!?!?! I want to see my son!!

*ANTONIA sits back down.*

ANTONIA

The day after I told you I was pregnant you were arrested. You told me to wait but I couldn't. I was afraid they would find out about the...other things. If they did find out they might arrest me and then...what of the child? I had to run.

ANTIMO

You ran. You thieving whore. You ran with my child...my legacy...

ANTONIA

I spent two weeks on that filthy ship. I found this place and worked as a seamstress down the road while I waited for my baby...

ANTIMO

Our baby...

ANTONIA

...to join me. I had befriended another immigrant, a mid-wife. She promised to help when the time came...

ANTIMO

...strangers...touching my baby...

ANTONIA

I gave birth in the apartment. It was right here. Right where we're sitting. It seems like...so very long ago. The mid-wife offered me "Twilight Sleep" for the pain but she warned that I might not remember the birth. How could I do that? Be absent for this moment I'd been waiting for all my life?

ANTIMO

I would have helped you. I could have. If you just waited for me. Why couldn't you wait? You left. You just left...

ANTONIA

The pain was...dull somehow. I expected worse. There was blood. So much blood...too much. The mid-wife was screaming. She was rummaging through her little bag for...something...the blood was...everywhere. The child wasn't crying. She pulled it out of me. Red and shining. It looked as though it were composed of blood. The skin...flowed. It was so brilliantly red and beautiful. The blood seemed to be alive...

ANTIMO

Yes. The blood. My son...my blood.

ANTONIA

The mid-wife was telling me she was sorry. There shouldn't be so much blood. Something was wrong. I raised myself up and looked at my baby. It did not move. The mid-wife spilled her bag as she was trying to leave. She kept saying she was sorry.

*ANTIMO is in tears muttering to himself.*

ANTONIA

Then I saw it. I saw the blood. Not just mine but his too. They were intermingled. It was so.....so *beautiful*. It was perfect. But there was something else. Something that had choked the life out of my baby. *Your blood. Your filth. Your weakness.*

ANTIMO

My baby. Dio mio. My boy. My legacy...

*ANTONIA leaps from her seat and plunges her hand into one of ANTIMO's wounds.*

ANTONIA

*This is your legacy! Can you smell it? Can you taste it?*

*ANTONIA forces her hand into ANTIMO's mouth.*

Your weakness! You put your weakness inside me and my baby!

*ANTONIA takes several steps back and stares at ANTIMO. He stares back with his eyes agape.*

ANTIMO

I see it now. All around you. The red. Oh mio dio, the blood. Madre di morte...please....please. No more.

ANTONIA

I...saved him. I saved...what I could.

*ANTONIA walks to the trunk and opens it slowly. She reaches in and pulls out a large, capped jar of blood.*

He is still with me.

ANTIMO

Angelo della morte. *Murderer*. You are a monster...you are....

ANTONIA

No! You... you are the monster...you have to pay for what you did...you put this weakness in me...you poisoned our baby...Mother wrote me not long after the baby was...born. She said you had only been sentenced three years on minor charges. I told her to tell you where I was when you got out. I told her you'd be eager to meet your son...

ANTIMO

The red surrounds you...I see...your...wings...they are bleeding...it is everywhere...I see you...I see you...I am with him...in his home there...we are together...

*ANTONIA looks at the jar.*



ANTONIA

No. You can't have him...you'll never have him

*ANTONIA removes the cap from the jar and walks toward ANTIMO.*

ANTIMO

Madre di dio. Take...me...home....

*ANTONIA sits on the floor in front of ANTIMO.*

ANTIMO

My....son....

*ANTONIA pours the blood onto her head. ANTIMO lets out one final cry as his body goes limp.*

ANTONIA

My baby...

*The blood continues to pour slowly from the jar covering the white of her dress in deep red as the lights dim.*

END.

**“IF I HAD NOT EXISTED, SOMEONE ELSE  
WOULD HAVE WRITTEN ME,  
HEMINGWAY, DOSTOYEVSKY, ALL OF  
US.”  
—WILLIAM FAULKNER**

# INTO THE BLUE

*by Karlie Tankersley*



# TO THE OIL SLICK IN MY FATHER'S GARAGE

*by David Joel Stevenson*

Misshapen

You remain despite years of scrubbing

Despite nagging words from others

Who never understood

Black against cold gray

It was there

Beneath a hulking beast of metal

I watched strong hands

And stern brow

Under a glassy shield

He merely thought it was

A job

A required action

But in fact it was relationship

The passing down

From man

To man

You are what remains of

A time when everything made sense

Though nothing did

# THE CATFISH

*by Heather L. Hickox*

Captured, in grainy black and white  
and backlit by afternoon sun,  
your last moments of life  
were captured in a picture.

A picture perfect afternoon,  
blue sky, green water,  
and you... plucked from the dark,  
cool, depth of your home and  
now writhing, violently  
twisting, and arching your body  
into a shape that mirrored  
the barbed hook piercing  
your delicate mouth.

The Fisherman stood smiling,  
We're eatin' good tonight, Jack,  
his buddy remarked  
and his open-mouthed guffaw  
is captured in time with your suffering  
at the exact moment  
the shutter clicked.

His mouth, wide  
enough to reveal the glinting  
of silver fillings on molars,  
mirrored your own as you  
struggled against heavy oxygen  
and thrashed as you were lifted,  
tail-held, a prize on display.

Captured, you're anchored  
against the dark  
grainy cedar driftwood plank-  
It's too pretty to eat,  
the Fisherman had declared.  
So they filled you with salt and sawdust,  
glazed your skin, and gave you shiny  
gold-flecked glass eyes.

You were hung with place of pride  
over the fireplace mantel  
and for years watched on, witnessing,  
as the man grew his family.  
Until the day that family gathered  
in mourning of the Fisherman's death.

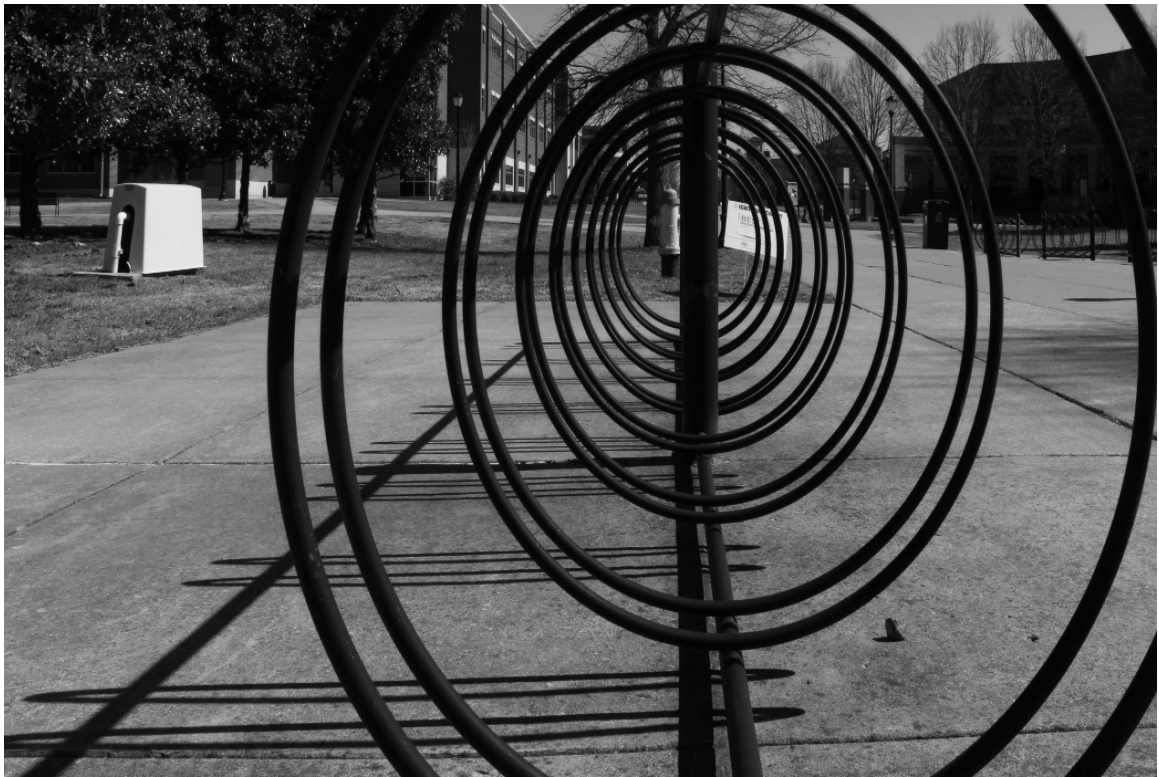
And then you were moved- along  
with boxes of old flannels,  
razors, two wool suits,  
and a threadbare maroon bathrobe-  
to a cool dark corner of the basement

where the Fisherman's daughter  
often came to inhale the fading scent  
of cologne on soft flannel,  
to run her small hands across the  
smooth glazed skin of your body,  
and to lose time peering through  
gold-flecked eyes.

And each time, she'd swear  
that for a moment,  
she'd see you staring back.

# THE BIKE RACK

*by Seth Holloman*



# SELF PORTRAIT WITH A STRAWBERRY

*by Megan Kregler*



# DAY 57

*by Allison Brock*





# HOW TO GET AWAY WITH JUST ABOUT ANYTHING

*by Nick Bush*

If you're scientifically inclined,  
tell people you're doing  
an experiment. Poke, prod, pierce  
conjoined twins (or fraternal ones, for that matter),  
it's all in the name of verifying  
your hypothesis.

If you prefer the humanities,  
just tell people you're writing  
about it. Expose family secrets  
(or make them up), all in the name  
of a testing out a theory.

If you're good enough at sports  
that people will pay you to play it,  
then do what you will and sincerely  
apologize afterwards like unbelievers  
receiving their last rites, just in time  
to stave off eternal damnation.



*University Writing Center*  
Writers' Studio • Multimedia Composition Center

**MIDDLE  
TENNESSEE**  
STATE UNIVERSITY

I AM *true* **BLUE**

0916-3300