



*Stylus*  
2008



*Stylus:*

the Millsaps compilation of creativity

Volume 58

Jackson • Mississippi



## *Editor-in-Chief*

Cartiér Gwin

## *Associate Editor*

Katie Hamm

## *Editorial Board*

Lauren Guichard

Holly Harmon

Laura Howe

Ross LeBlanc

Lesia Nixon

Mary Clark Rardin

Chris Steele

Petra Vackova

## *Faculty Advisor*

Dr. Austin Wilson

## *Printer*

Service Printers

Jackson, Mississippi

*Stylus* is published annually by the students of Millsaps College. All ideas in *Stylus* belong to those artists and authors who express them. Copies may be obtained c/o Dr. Austin Wilson, Millsaps College, Jackson, Mississippi 39210.

Cover Art, "Color Composition" by Petra Vackova

James Kimbrell photograph by Katie Hamm, Associate Editor





# Acknowledgements

The Stylus staff sincerely thanks James Kimbrell for participating in this year's interview. We are deeply appreciative for your encouragement to student writers and the kind remarks about this campus. The Stylus staff and the Millsaps publications board are truly proud to have shared the insight and character of someone who is able to exert an integral voice about the history and culture of Millsaps College and the Jackson community.

The editor also wishes to acknowledge and thank the Millsaps Faith & Works Initiative and the MCA Diversity Group for supporting this year's writers and artists in their modes of creative expression. We extend our appreciation to the judges and sponsors:

Dr. Darby Ray

Director of the Millsaps Faith & Works Initiative, Millsaps College

Sherryl Wilburn

Director of Multicultural Affairs, Millsaps College



# Table of Contents

Staff.....	i
Acknowledgements.....	ii
Awards.....	1
Lloyd Gray	
Dinner Party Guilt.....	2
Jack Boettcher	
Organic Crunchy Peanut Butter.....	3
Lesia Nixon	
Greenery.....	5
Mirroring.....	6
Karling Bennett	
Louisiana Summer.....	7
The Last of the Victorians.....	8
Brandi Buckler	
Alone in a Crowd.....	10
Elaine Blaine	
Strangler Fig.....	11
Diantha Williamson	
Guitar Hero Barcelona, Spain.....	12
Jack Boettcher	
That Summer.....	13
Beth Fossen	
Self-Portrait IV: Spirituality.....	14
Matthew Chouest	
Helena.....	15
Katie Collins	
untitled.....	16
Luke Darby	
He Kindly Stopped for Me.....	17
Michelle Allen	
Holding On.....	19
Lloyd Gray	
Bare Feet.....	20



Harrison Wool	
Europe Trip.....	22
Cartiér Gwin	
Alabaster.....	23
Lovers' Utopia: Nuptial Tomb.....	24
Diantha Williamson	
Flamenco Freeze Barcelona, Spain	
Matthew Chouest	
Death is the Road to Awe.....	25
Kaylord Hill	
Pilgrimage of Ascent.....	26
Katie Collins	
Awareness.....	27
Erin Jordan	
Wish.....	28
Weary	
Abstract.....	29
Ross LeBlanc	
The Times-Picayune, A20.....	30
This Mirrored Verse	
Birthright I and II.....	31
Katie Collins	
Mille	
Diantha Williamson	
Takayama Shinto Shrine.....	34
Edgar Meyer	
I Took a Look Inside Myself Today.....	35
Ashley Miller	
Just a Game.....	36
William Benton	
St. John's.....	39
Anne-Marie Mueschke	
Miniseries.....	40
William Benton	
Saisere, Geoffrey.....	41
Lesia Nixon	
Ave Maria: Just a Little Lost Innocence.....	42
The Phone Call.....	43
Mary Clark Rardin	
At Home, with War	
Memphis Zoo.....	46
Beth Sadler	
The Parisian Dancer en Glissade from Degas' L'etoile ou La danseuse sur la scene.....	47

William Benton	
Philip.....	48
Rob Stephens	
A Revision of Knowledge	
Its Halftime at Tad Gormley Stadium!.....	49
The Difference between Dada and Professional Wrestling	
Workers at the Dumpster.....	50
William Benton	
Work-Hands	
Interview with James Kimbrell.....	54
Poem by James Kimbrell, <i>Stylus 1988</i> .....	75
Contributors of Artworks and Photography.....	76
Publications Board.....	77

*Stylus*





# Awards

**Color Composition** by Petra Vackova  
Editor's Choice for Art and Photography  
Cover Art

**Mille** by Katie Collins  
Editor's Choice for Art and Photography  
Second Prize

**Dinner Party Guilt** by Lloyd Gray  
Editor's Choice for Poetry  
First Prize

**This Mirrored Verse** by Ross LeBlanc  
Editor's Choice for Poetry  
Second Prize

**Organic Crunchy Peanut Butter** by Jack Boettcher  
Editor's Choice for Prose

**Philip** and **Work-Hands** by Will Benton  
Faith & Work Initiative  
First Prize

**Workers at the Dumpster** by Rob Stephens  
Faith & Work Initiative  
Second Prize

**Pilgrimage of Ascent** by Kaylord Hill  
MCA Diversity Group Prize

**The Stylus Editor's Choice Awards** are given in recognition of artistic achievement in genres represented within the magazine.

**The MCA Diversity Group Prize** seeks out ways for individuals and our community to solve issues involving “negative” diversity while working to promote “positive” diversity. The Multicultural Affairs Group offers a prize for the best literary or artistic work submitted to *Stylus* that expresses diversity in relationship to humanity and our global connection, with specifics on what individuals would strive to do in their own “world” community to achieve “positive” diversity. MCA rewards artists for sharing their thought on how we are all ultimately connected as human beings.

**The Millsaps Faith & Work Initiative** seeks to engage the Millsaps community in reflection on vocation- on how to embrace lives of passions, integrity, and service. The Initiative rewards the best literary or artistic work submitted to *Stylus* that explores one or more of the following themes: the discovery or pursuit of a calling in life; work as self-expression; work and the common good; the meaning of work; work and faith/spirituality.

*Editor's Choice for Poetry,  
First Prize*

*Dinner Party Guilt*

Lloyd Gray

Carnage  
Splattered on white lit tiles  
And the wet wiped table  
In the kitchen

The dinner menu  
Spark of our catastrophe  
Liz is a vegan  
Eater of soy  
Paul is a werewolf  
Eater of sinews  
Nate is a chef  
Who omits the meat  
Rather than impose it impolitely

Liz's dog  
A Chihuahua named Pokey  
Who disappears indiscreetly  
Through Paul's rending jaws  
Descending to his distending stomach.  
After bloodlust takes over  
Around dessert time

My guilt  
For the events that ensued  
I feel partly to blame  
Having prepared the guest list

*Editor's Choice for Prose,  
First Prize*

## *Organic Crunchy Peanut Butter*

Jack Boettcher

Like many college students at his swanky east coast institution, Jason loved peanut butter and the labyrinthine short fiction of Jorge Luis Borges. And though he wasn't entirely sure, he was also beginning to believe he might be in love with Amber, who sort of looked like a bug in the face, but in a casually beautiful way — the species of bug, bright green maybe, that holds your attention in a North American rainforest on a rare clear day just by alighting on a piece of rotted fallen timber and standing out yet from the sunny clumps of moss and enormous dripping ferns and pale bluish lichens. No, Amber was more like a lizard, Jason thought: still beautiful though and bright green maybe, and with a long, exquisite and slender tail that could first somehow “coagulate” and then thicken in muscle and turn into a crimson-eyed snake on the other end, black and bronze stripes, a sort of mythological Ecuadorian lizard-snake with a penchant for fatally attracting Ivy League students and then ravishing them with a kind of sexy venom transferred through a whip of the tongue too fast to be photographed. No, no, a giant iguana! It was definitely a giant iguana, a Galapagos land iguana that was tough as hell and could eat cactus but was tender and affectionate in sentiment after a long day of work, arm in tail on the high dunes under a sheer waif moon, or a blue iguana with pebbly blue-gray skin the color before dawn and maybe bright green eyes with red irises, like the ruddy blots on ripening Granny Smith apples. Jason took a bite of such an apple, which he had stolen — justifiably, he felt— from the cafeteria, sliced, and coated with organic crunchy peanut butter. Yes, he was in love with an iguana, and it felt good. But it didn't matter that much, because even though Amber also loved nut butters and magic realism, she would never fall in love with Jason. She was already in love. The fates! She was in love with a dead man - with Jorge Luis Borges.





# *General Contents*





*Minnowing* Lesia Nixon

*Karling Bennett*

Karling Bennett is a senior English and history major from Covington, LA. Her creative writing class inspired her to write about subjects that she otherwise would not have considered. “When writing, I am not limited to myself, but I can create and explore other people and their situations. I find human nature and behavior interesting, and I enjoy writing about people’s motives, as well as how humans work in relation to themselves and to others. One of my favorite authors is Jane Austen because her characters are complex, exploring human nature and society.”



*Louisiana Summer*

Karling Bennett

You're consuming, stifling,  
And oppressive as the summer heat, you know.  
People dread when you come,  
Relieved when you go,  
Except me, maybe because you're unforgettable.

Eyes of the azure sky.  
The indigo shadows of your secrets.  
The thick yellow haze in the summer air,  
Your unclear mind.

Your soul pales the beauty of the soft pastels  
That color dusk and dawn.  
Lilac and rose intermingling in the endless heavens.  
Your heart the fiery magenta sun  
Against the mauve sky.

Moments when you rival the afternoon  
The moment that everything is covered in a clear, golden cast.  
"Nothing gold can stay."  
Fleeting memories are made of gold.

Your anger,  
Predictable summer rain.  
Silver thunder clouds rolling over the tawny plains of the West.  
The land greener and lusher with each mile.  
The climax comes in tears of black rain.  
White lighting spreads across your face

*The Last of the Victorians*

Karling Bennett

The sun blinded him for a second as he stepped out of his house. It was the first time in a month he had left the neighborhood, the house, the room, the chair which he had bound himself to lamenting the loss of his "dark haired princess." As soon as he walked into the club, he felt everyone's eyes on him. He could not see their eyes through the thick cigarette smoke that hung in the air, but he could sense their eyes on him. They all knew. Of course, it was the talk of the town. They all looked at him sympathetically, but he knew what they were really thinking. The women sympathized with his wife, and the men mocked him; "She was so sweet, docile, quiet, demure, and yet you could not keep her. You are no longer a man. You are a disgrace. But if there was no hope for you, then there is no hope for us." He sat facing the dark, brown paneled wall and drank his sherry quickly. He smiled to himself. He was utterly miserable.

On his return from his club, he returned to the wooden chair where he had been for the last month. The memories consumed his thoughts wherever he went, but they were especially strong when he was in his chair. He was recalling a moment when he came home to find his wife with her aunt. They were both sitting in the parlor with their overstuffed hunter green chairs facing each other. His wife looked radiant against the gold silk curtains, but it was her aunt he looked at. He despised her aunt. She scared him. She was trouble. She led all those marches in the street declaring "women's rights." Some said she was extreme, others said she was ahead of her time. The world would be damned if there were more women like her in it, he thought. "Has she spoken to you?" he asked the aunt.

"No," she glared.

He had not responded before she got to her fatal point, "She wants a divorce."

"That's because you put that crazy notion into her head. She's fine... she will be fine... again."

His wife rose and indicated that she decided she wanted the divorce. Not her aunt. "It's unheard of. Divorce will ruin you!" he threatened her.

"Times are changing, Gregory. Queen Victoria is dead and her son is an amoral rogue. She has rights, you know. We have had them since the beginning of time, but they were kept from us. She can go to America or Canada," her aunt boldly stated. He saw his wife's eyes light up with hope, while he felt a sudden fear seize him.

He wanted to grab and shake her and scream, "I still have authority over you. I still own you. I still love you!" He did not do it though. It would sound absurd and she would not understand. He did not even understand this feeling of possession, but he had been told by his mother that his wife and family were under his control. Instead, he calmly remarked, "Divorce is not just something one can do whenever they feel like it. It will be the ruin of our families, our values, of our traditions."

Her aunt replied with an almost desperation in her voice, “Look at her! She hasn’t spoken in four months after you put her in the hospital. . .”

He did not want to hear about it. . . again. It lived with him every single day! “Get out of my house! And you, go upstairs,” he demanded. His wife put her head down and ascended the steps silently. He took her for granted. He underestimated her. She was sweet, quiet, demure, and docile.

Six months after his confrontation with her aunt, he discovered the consequences of taking his wife for granted. As usual, he came home from the club for afternoon tea. Today, he found his wife standing in front of the parlor room wearing her favorite fur coat. She went to meet him and took his hands in her gloved ones. He slipped a finger through one of her mahogany curls. He noticed in her pale blue eyes a spark he had never seen before although there was a frown on her lips. She lowered her head. “May God and you forgive me, for I have sinned. If I was strong, I would have stayed,” she whispered.

With that, she hurried into a carriage and watched him until she disappeared out of sight. Like a dream, he stood watching her leave. He had read about similar moments in novels. He started laughing. No author could ever describe the infinite sadness that was seizing him. He came back to reality and wanted to chase her and assert his authority over her, but his social class made him think better of it. Instead, like a good Victorian, he went inside. He sat at the bottom of the stairs. He put his head in his hands and sobbed. “I’ll get you back! I’ll get you back as my wife or I’ll punish you for not loving me the way I loved you!” he shouted at the maid. He had to yell at someone.

The yellow hazy light from the candle filled his office room as it battled the indigo darkness pouring in from the opened window. Big Ben struck midnight. He looked at the dim light in his office. It was the only light in the house and it seemed to beckon him. The sadness had completely consumed him. His heart beat so hard it hurt and every muscle seemed to have withered away in that brief period. He crawled to the cold wooden chair in his office. He put his head in the seat. So this is how sudden grief felt. Grief turns a practical, rational, strong man into a. . . a mess. An utter mess! He tried to focus his eyes on the chair. His eyes were almost swollen shut from the crying. He realized for the first time that the chair resembled an electric chair that they executed prisoners in. “If only it was really one,” he mused. However, the chair gave him a strange comfort. It was cold, hard, strong, resilient, and dependable. He and the chair were alike. “You’re a dying breed, Gregory. What will the world be with out you? You’re the last of the Victorians,” he said to himself.

He suddenly recalled a moment when he was with his mother. It was one of the rare times when he was not with his nanny. He was thirteen and he was watching the first snow fall from the window. “Well, isn’t this nice?” his mother asked sitting at the piano. “Oh yes, mother,” he smiled. Fitting how the day with mother was cold and gloomy.

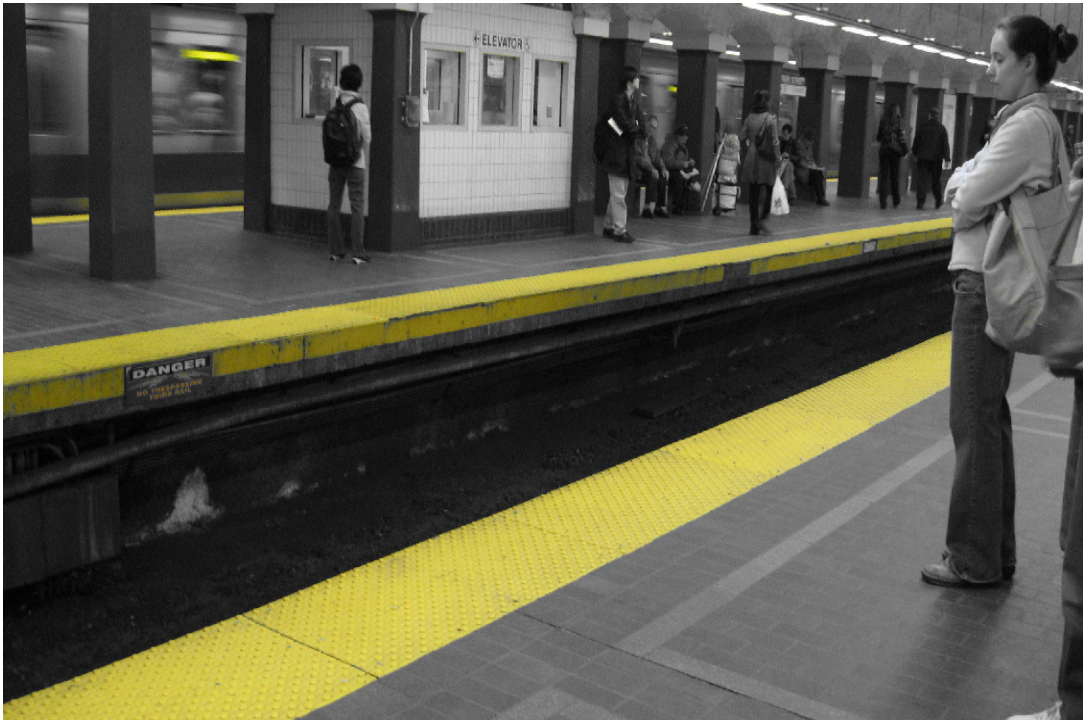
“Gregory, I wish you would not stare out the window with that romantic, faraway look in your eyes. I wish you would focus on reality. Where is your mind at? In China or the West Indies, maybe? Just like your uncle! Why he didn’t even know his wife ran off with the

post man. Just last week too. I wish you would have seen that pitiful uncle of yours. Crying and begging her to come back! She should have been on her knees begging to return! Gregory, it's so sad to see a man under the power of a woman. It's a sign of weakness in a man. Like Queen Victoria's husband. You have to be the strong one in your family. It's true, you know, only the strong survive."

How ironic. He had tried to live up to his mother's standards. Yet, his wife deserted him, and he knew she was not going to return begging for forgiveness.



*Alone in a Crowd* Brandi Buckler



*Elaine Blaine*

Elaine Blaine is a non-traditional student and senior English major originally from Bon Aqua, TN. Having always devoured the written word, she feels that now is her time to spin tales about growing up in the rural south. "Focusing on my mother, grandmothers, aunts and others in the community, I plan to record events from these amazing women's lives. Possibly the stories will be read only by our family, but I know that they need to be told and that my time at Millsaps has given me the confidence to undertake the telling."

*Strangler Fig*

Elaine Blaine

Beneath the canopy: a columned room,  
where I sit in a mirage of coolness  
and marvel at your great size;  
your twisted, mangled beauty.  
I am not a native here,  
so I am frightened by the strangeness  
of your species.  
You could not have grown  
without a host to feed you,  
so you chose one to your liking  
and began the slow, sure  
devouring of its life,  
in support of yours.  
When it did not provide you any  
water, you grew long aerial roots  
and sucked it from the tainted, humid air.  
I too must adapt to my surroundings,  
find my way to survive the elements.  
But for now I hide beneath your  
branches and wait for the pain to end.





*Guitar Hero Barcelona, Spain* Diantha Williamson

### *Jack Boettcher*

Jack Boettcher is a senior English major from Tupelo, MS. His poetry has appeared in *The Denvery Quarterly*, *The Hat*, *Absent*, *The Diagram*, *La Petite Zine*, and other places. He is the author of *The Surveyic Hero* (horse less press, 2007). "I have recently finished a chap-book manuscript called *The Deviants*. Next up-over the next couple years-I'm planning to work on a manuscript of short fiction titled *Sects* and a longer book of poetry tentatively titled *Theater-State*. I've written several pieces for both of these already."





## *That Summer*

Jack Boettcher

the papers reported a certain general could no longer  
take pleasure in his skirmishes. My heart  
stopped five times with some brief  
bursts of interference. I browned the onions  
in the olive oil lit green from the kitchenette's  
fluorescence, which shook from our cupboard  
spiral colonies of moths. The advertisement said:  
"a beautiful face is simply conditioned  
to glow." I turned off all the lights  
& waited to be loved in the dim drone  
of the fenced-in air conditioners. You came home  
from work & on the split-level stoop at dusk  
with Jim the accountant we watched distant  
rosy missiles tack the sky. Your hand  
felt good on my back where the sun had been.  
You kept having to remind me I was American.  
You could order riot gear & lingerie  
from the same mail-order catalog & we  
built a fortress of pillows & shades around our bed,  
which was also perpetual night. Even at home  
the memos encouraged the use  
of force: you smacked the radio & it sang!  
Entertainment survived the crisis (we  
watched a lot of really violent movies).  
Your cousin got married off twice.  
We ate at the Vietnamese place in a blackout  
& when fortified wine seeped from our foundation  
we put a Wal-Mart tarp down.  
There was a universal emphasis  
on speed. Or the same idea as emergency:  
if we read the dailies more quickly  
the shrapnel reports might not damage us.

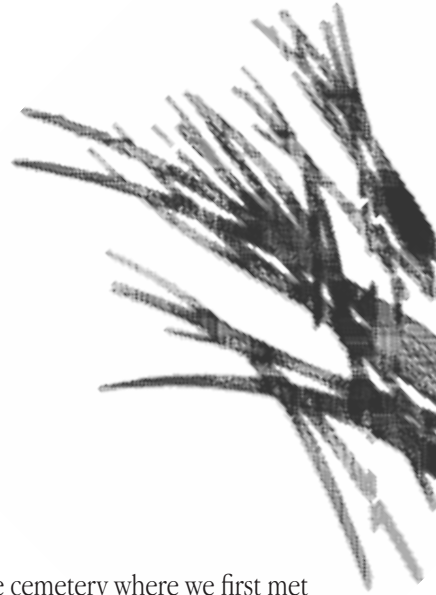


*Self-Portrait III: Spirituality* Beth Fossen

*Matthew Chouest*

Matthew Chouest is a sophomore anthropology major and English minor from Lockport, LA. He is told that his unusual last name is from the Rhineland, but he has no desire to search for the specific etymology. "My writing seems to be a butchering of Leonard Cohen and Neil Gaiman, and I do not have any formal art training (if it isn't painfully obvious). I typically need to shave, and I currently need a haircut."

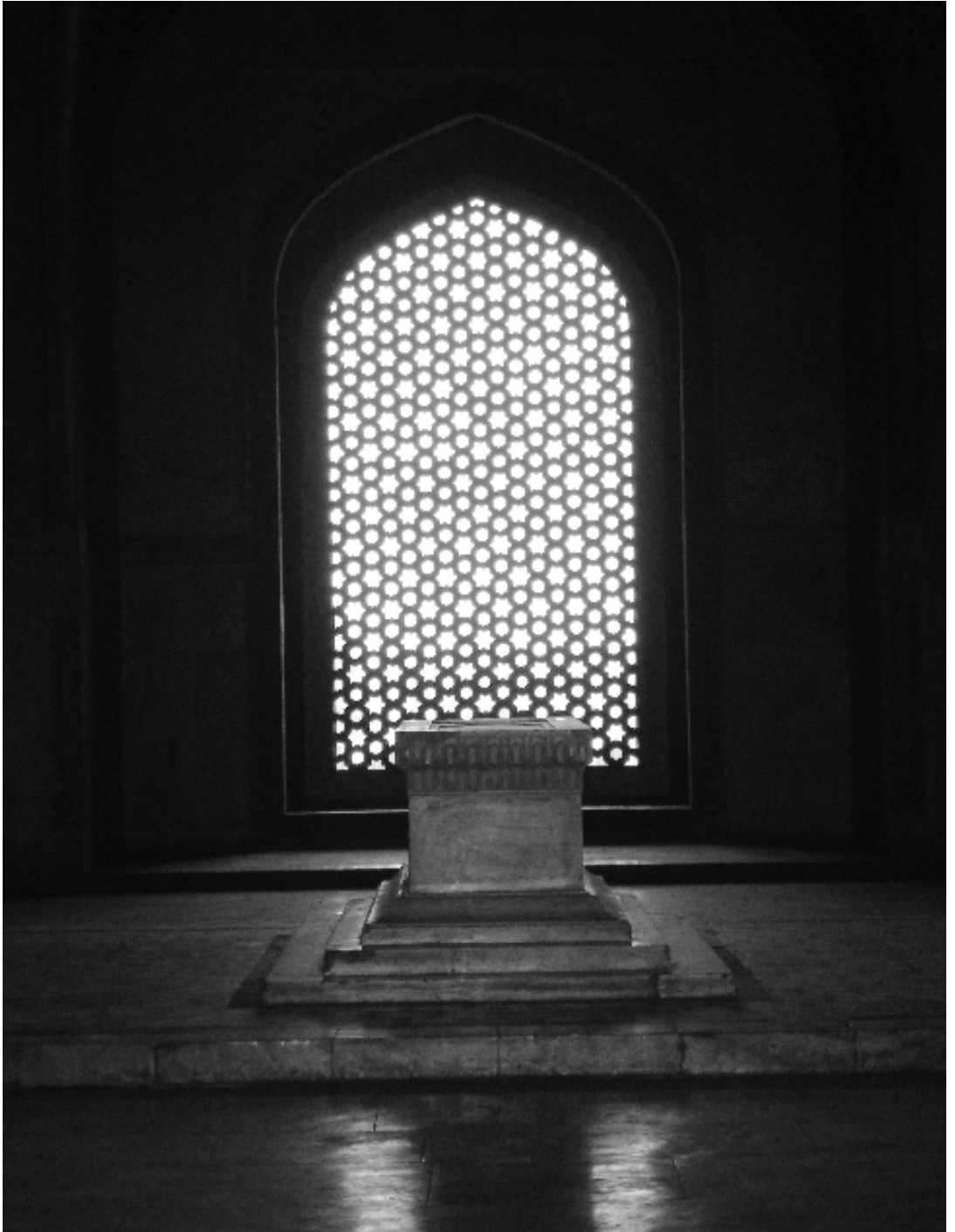
"I shall set forth for somewhere,  
I shall make the reckless choice  
Some day when they are in voice  
And tossing so as to scare  
The white clouds over them on.  
I shall have less to say,  
But I shall be gone."  
-Robert Frost



*Helena*

Matthew Chouest

Haunting requiems echoed from our solitary silhouettes--the cemetery where we first met  
Eulogies for guilt interred, evanescent manifestations for memory-a past dying to forget,  
Lives crossing over blackest irony, recalling those rustling leaves, the whispered voices fell away--  
Emblazoned, our love's river flowed from that hill, so no fear Boreas could blow our hearts astray,  
No, weep not for the memories--that day we stood for love, we stood for enduring beyond this pain,  
Always means our love will live eternally in you, but only in my heart if deceased you remain.



*(untitled)* Katie Collins

## *Luke Darby*

Luke Darby is a junior from Lafayette, LA, majoring in English. He has been writing since the age of three, though those were mostly alphabet exercises. He is a member of Lambda Chi Alpha Fraternity, has worked for the Jackson Free Press, and hopes to one day have post-graduate plans. Luke's hobbies and interests include people-watching in airports and cheap coffee from gas stations.

### *He Kindly Stopped for Me*

Luke Darby

"Where do we have to go?"

"Oh, not nearly as far as you would think. We'll only be going to that door, there." He waved his left hand over his shoulder, indicating the front door to the apartment.

"I, I can't. I can't do it. Please"

"It's alright, we can take our time. Would you like to sit down?"

"Yes, yes I would."

The man guided him by the shoulder to a chair and he half fell into a sitting position on it, while he himself sat down on the sofa. He crossed his legs and leaned an elbow on one knee, resting the lower half of his face in his palm as he regarded the boy.

"Would you like a cigarette? Little vices like those don't hurt anymore."

"Please." He produced a silver case from his pocket, gave one to the boy and lit it before indulging himself. The boy closed his eyes as he inhaled and breathed out a wispy blue cloud. "Thank you."

"It's nothing, really." They sat and smoked a few moments in silence.

"I'm sorry for making this difficult. I'm probably keeping you from a lot of things that need doing."

"You honestly don't have a thing to apologize for. There are quite a few of us. And little hiccups like these are more than accounted for, believe me. We want to make the transition as easy as possible, so you and I can sit here until you're ready to walk those short few feet to the door."

"Do you often get people that hold you up?"

"Yes, but it's almost never as bad as one would suppose. People actually take it very well for the most part. Some do rant and raise all sorts of hell occasionally. But those are few and far between, relatively speaking at least. The suicides, now those are the ones always

angry and kicking themselves. They're pissed at us, they're pissed at themselves. We just sit and talk with them all until they're ready."

"I just- " the boy started. "I just was going to try to do so much. I hadn't gotten the damn chance yet. I was building up, I was going to go to school for law in human rights, I was going to try to help people. That's noble, and worth something, isn't it? But I didn't even get through school. If you look past that, I did so little."

"You're looking at the wrong sort of things. I won't waste your time with the details, since it's all going to be explained to you very shortly and much more eloquently than I could ever manage, but you did a great job of your life. You were kind, and tried to be a good person. That's more than a lot of people have going for them. And let me tell you something – you're worried about a noble life? No one dies nobly. There are gurgling noise and glazed eyes and expelled fluids. But that's just the final byproduct of life. You and I both know that there's more to life than what is produced at the end, because without fail everyone leaves behind roughly the same matter, just in varying compositions." He puffed his cigarette. "The hard part's over. It's easy from here."

"You've had to say that a lot, haven't you?"

"Yes, I have."

"It didn't sound rehearsed at all."

"That's because I believe it."

The man blew a small smoke ring. The boy puffed another one at it, the rush of air disfiguring the first ring as the second gulped it.

"That was very nice."

"Thank you. I think I'm ready."

"I thought you would be. Be sure to put out the cigarette in the ash tray, we don't want to leave a mess behind."



*Holding On* Michelle Allen



*Lloyd Gray*

Lloyd Gray is a sophomore from Tupelo, MS. He is an English major who would like to write professionally. He regards the Heritage program at Millsaps as his anchor in academia and one of his sources of writing inspiration, along with running and dragons. "I am intimidated by the prospect of facing my own tyrannical perfectionism. I enjoy fantasy, rhyme, alliteration, and finding magic in the mundane."

*Bare Feet*

Lloyd Gray

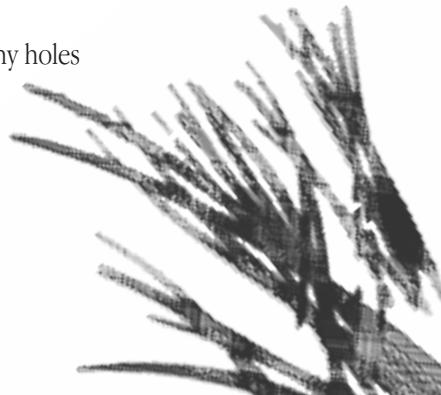
In infancy before he learned to toddle  
She tickled fingers on his footsies small  
And Mother, smitten with the feet she cuddled  
Adopted them her babies, two in all

The mother bought them outfits and adorned  
With care this pink-faced pair of toehead twins  
Lay cradled in their comfy rubber beds  
Swaddled in synthetic second skins

As they grew up the mother bought the boys  
The best gear offered by technology  
ATVs traversing every boundary  
Expensive strides supporting industry

Yet still both twins felt something sorely missed  
An aching pain lain deep within their soles  
For contact more than rubber artifice  
A world the tongue-tied glimpsed through meshy holes

'Til one day Mother's Son was standing on  
Wet tiles, when suddenly the twins rebelled  
And carried Master out onto the lawn  
Gripping ground, with primal biped yells







Unbound, unfurling over carpet grass  
They took the street in unchecked levity  
Unaware the cruel landmines of glass  
Lay gaping toward a virgin tragedy

A slice deep in the supple freshman flesh  
Too quickly flayed their thin naiveté  
And shards of pain remind not all is soft  
And scars are born, the seals of memory

Yet still the twins divest the Mother's crutch  
Return again outside to walk along  
Or lope about, though always told they'd break  
Collapse they won't, and tendons soon grow strong

Each hardened heel walks on the brutal ground  
'til jagged geologic teeth grow tame  
And greets with deference the sturdy stones  
The bouncers who would once have beat him lame



*Cartiër Gwin*

Cartiër Gwin is a sophomore modern languages major and biology minor from Memphis, TN. She was editor of the Millsaps *Promenade* in 2007, is the current editor of the *Stylus*, and works as a peer-tutor in the writing center. Her post-graduate plans are to do focused studies in linguistics. “When I resort to creative writing, concepts are merely suggestions. From them I create meaning foreign to the work’s original theme. My poetry is completely unintentional.”

*Alabaster*

Cartier Gwin

Its faded corners, the vintage scene of an all American girl with a starch grin, a story untold still takes me back to a room where whiskey sat on a mahogany bureau, where the picture lay not too far across from it on a table, under a fountain ashtray of a naked lady, sitting on her legs with her back arched round like a chen, mounted on a bowl of ashes. One day he pushed my mother onto the coffee table and the naked lady rocked. I was inside a barstool, gripping its wooden legs, peering through its horizontal shadows, and I saw her try to stand. The palms of her hands flat on the glass, one leg extended, one knee curled to her chest. He stood over her, his impending torso above her brow, her right hand failed, her wrist hit the edge hard, her body knocked the naked lady. Her head hit the ground first shattering into particles of black and blue dust that I have seen before, in the night, lying on the tar roof unbothered like the naked lady's white, headless, porcelain body that rolled towards me, across hardwood floor, into my shadow, with sounds of thunder echoing from her hollow parts, finally meeting the rug at my knee. I did not touch her. She was more beautiful still, lying on the same red speckled threads that burned my knees as they pressed firmly into the mat. He blamed it on her, and the next day she would go to buy a replacement, but instead she came home with a mermaid. A pearl in the belly button, a brush for her hair.



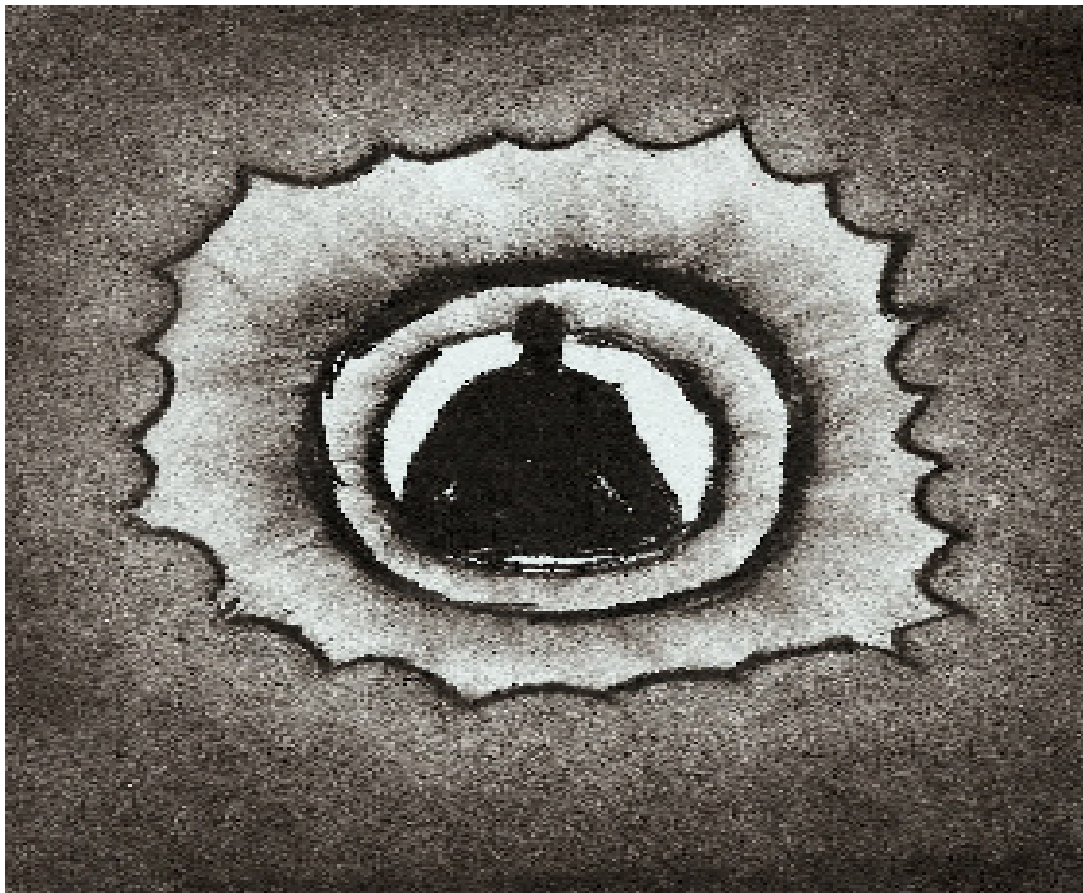
*Lovers' Utopia: Nuptial Tomb*

Cartier Gwin

I can see us sitting on the shoulders of a burning statue  
unafraid of November's blades, exotic like Japanese  
characters inscribed on a dead man's grave, breathing  
the thick haze that lingers after the work is done  
between the chisel and the hard place, screaming  
"the past is my birthright!" to advance the million more  
who exist in pairs, in turbulent affairs that grow  
like the pedestrian's shadow in the long, narrow alleyway  
that always leads to something seemingly more  
elaborate—nice—like the whore who kneels  
before vigil light, and the spiteful, like those who cough  
cinnamon into the million's eye, to begin the resurrection  
of the lover's imperfection and the watcher's cry.

*Flamenco Freeze Barcelona, Spain* Diantha Williamson





*Death is the Road to Awe* Matthew Chouest

### *Kaylord Hill*

Kaylord Hill is a sophomore English literature major from Ruston, LA. He plans to practice law in a firm-based trial court and hopes to one day win the Pulitzer Prize for fiction. Some of his inspirations are Nelson Mandella, Maya Angelou, Amiri Baraka, and Helen Keller. "I am consumed by how these great figures bestowed hope and liberation to others through their works. Your ideas and thoughts should urge others to do what you have done, not only to write, but to also find a way to jar the human sentiment."

*MCA Diversity Group Prize*

*Pilgrimage of Ascent*

Kaylord Hill

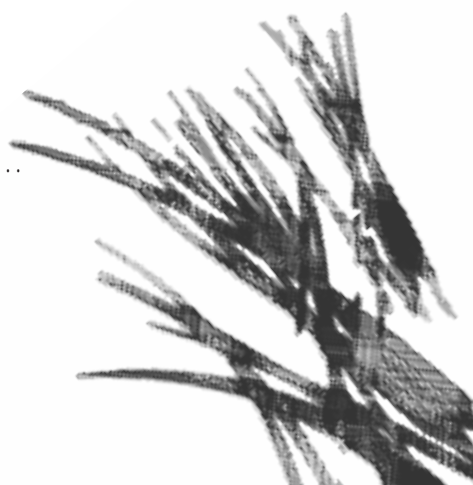
I was Martin Luther King Jr. with ideas of truth, loyalty, and brotherhood  
But then I saw the Darfur in my neighborhood  
Tears of genocide salted my lips  
Katrina mounted on my countenance  
Witnessed my brethren lay breathless to ignorance  
Hands fist-ed eyes fused with perspiration  
Sold of dreams of the anecdote time  
But how truly long is patience?

The sun's ego clashes with my introspectiveness  
And novels my starvation  
To be the new age of Harlem Renaissance in one  
And empower the kid contemplating education  
Or is feasible that the magic needed was blue that casted its shadow over Urban America  
Profit by the lives of my brothers  
It's a Catch 23...  
I live, I die, or the world comes with me

Specks of the valley shadow of death  
mirage itself to be my dwelling  
pass through were Mandella's prophetic words  
any means through were brother Malcolm's  
man's pilgrimage is nothing short of  
the collage memories sifting to find wisdom

Inhale brotherhood  
Exhale ignorance  
Brother Langston said one day they will all know...  
Truth

Man is flawed, but will is invincible



*Awareness* Katie Collins



*Erin Jordan*

Erin Jordan is a freshman from Covington, LA, and he intends to major in art history. "I'm a control-freak, so it's not necessarily easy to take one day at a time, but I am able to do that, maybe a little more than I would otherwise, through creative writing and art. I read a lot and am affected by everything I process. I think 'too much' sometimes, and therefore don't feel out of place at a liberal arts college. I am inspired to write by the person I used to be, and everything I've created in the past few months is in memory of Chase."

*Wish*

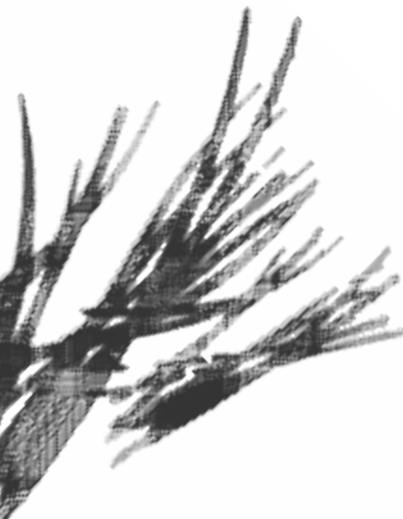
Erin Jordan

Chase,  
I felt you last night.  
And I heard you.  
And I decided upon my one wish.  
I hope you were driving like that,  
your last night,  
with the windows down  
and the music up  
and the wind in your hair,  
with laughter and freedom in your heart.

*Weary*

Erin Jordan

Sleep next to me.  
Your hand, warm,  
fingers outstretched,  
on my stomach.  
'This is mine.'  
I am yours  
and I need you  
to put me to sleep.  
Let me find the place on your chest  
by your neck,  
the one place  
where I can lay my weary head  
and it will stop hurting.







*Abstract*

Erin Jordan

It's hard to follow a shadow and have substance.  
Would you be proud  
of your daughter, a silhouette?  
I find myself thinking of you as abstract  
because that's all that fits.  
Not abstract like "indescribable,"  
"more than words," or "just a feeling."  
Abstract like "missing"  
or "lacking" or "gone."  
Like "emptiness."  
Like "loneliness."  
I fall to the cement and let it hold me because you won't.

*Ross Leblanc*

Ross Leblanc is a senior English major from St. Bernard Parish, LA. After graduation he plans to attend LSU law school. "I either go big or go home. I am tall, intelligent, good-looking, smart, repetitive and humble. I believe that everything has an effect, but not necessarily a purpose. George Orwell said that he writes out of sheer egoism. I'd have to agree."

*The Times-Picayune, A20*

Ross LeBlanc

Slightly chipped coffee cup  
spawns sloppy, yet intact,  
brown circle.

It has become  
implausible  
that I will  
finish the crossword.

Wanted:  
twenty-six letter  
word for bored.

*Editor's Choice for poetry, Second Prize*

*This Mirrored Vense*

Ross Leblanc

If you won't fuck, then be a priest.  
Tell others what to say and do.  
How can one man enjoy a feast  
That's fit for more than one or two?

A valid point is worth its use  
If it snugly finds employment,  
But abstinence and solitude  
Will leave no room for enjoyment.

Abandon yours and take my lease:  
Man is immortal within man.  
Be right or wrong, where I find ease,  
I'll get in as much as I can.



*Mille* Katie Collins

### *Binthright*

Ross Leblanc

Deep in the cardboard mountains of Southern Louisiana or Eastern Texas, a boy crawled out of ordinary ooze. He did not know his own name, much less his origin, familial ties, or financial status. He felt like a character thrust into the beginning of an unwritten story. The boy presumed himself to be Jacob Surther as if a poet had just typed it into existence. In what would have taken years, his hair and beard bloomed instantly. His spine, fibulas, tibias, femurs, and the rest extended to ninety percent of his adult height. There was an ice-cream cone in his hand. He didn't like ice-cream. He ate only the cone.

Jacob Surther was uncomfortable with his own sensuality. More than sensuous, he could be described as hyper-aware. Mostly, though, he liked rain and cinnamon. As unidentified leaves danced before his face, Jacob realized he was in a story. Leaves cannot dance in

real life. But now, in what had to be fiction, the leaves performed all the newest and most intricate dances. Four pairs of leaves tangoed, six leaves river-danced, and ninety-nine leaves danced the newest dance inspired by leaves. This is a story. I am obvious. I'm also the writer, by the way. I will try to refrain from being obvious.

Jacob Surther had free will; however, he revoked his birthright to be a character in this story. Jacob wanted to write his own story. I told him that was impossible, implausible, and maybe unconstitutional. He shouldn't be too upset. It is raining.

Jacob Surther had one goal in life: he needed to get to the cathedral at 1:00 p.m. There could be no excuse for tardiness. The only force that could stop him was authorship. I wanted him to arrive at the cathedral five minutes early with ample time to prepare. However, I set the time at 12:30 p.m. and the required distance to travel at fifty-five miles. Jacob would use a sports car or a military jet any other day. Regrettably, a mischievous and active biographer had emptied Jacob's world of any mechanical means of transportation. The streets were desolate, deserted, and desolate. Jacob sprinted through tumbleweeds accelerating to 120 mph before his first step. This was his top speed. He was the fastest man in the northern hemisphere.

Jacob knew his speed very well and also his required distance. There was the promise of free will if he made it to the cathedral on time, but there was still the problem of authorship. He ran along the interstate leaving hot footprints in the tar. The air was saturated with cinnamon. Room temperature rain met his face, neck, forearms, shins, and spirit, but not his soul. His soul was waiting with free will at the cathedral.

The rain and cinnamon made him happy. He possessed a euphoria that would normally cost fifty dollars. As he saw the cathedral's spire on the horizon, he feared he would be late. It was 12:58 already and traffic had resumed. There would be no time to prepare. Jacob Surther increased his speed to 150 mph. He was the fastest man alive, nay, the fastest being of any species that had ever lived. He left his hair and beard on Fourth Street, his skin on Third, and his vital organs on Second. On First Street, right in front of the cathedral, Jacob Surther hydroplaned straight into a printing shop. He was pronounced dead on Fifth Street at 145mph. He was thirty minutes old. He will not go to Hell.

### *Birthright II: A Revolution of Some Kind*

Reader, you are approaching this story in a quite different fashion than I did. For that, I am very sorry. When I first met this blank, lonely page I had no idea that I would find Jacob Surther to be the character of another unwritten story. In fact I did not even realize it until twenty words ago. But here we are (you, I, and Jacob).

Suddenly, Jacob shouted: "I prefer to be called Mr. Surther and if you plan to kill me for the amusement of some reader again then I must warn you that I came prepared with free will." Jacob suspects the worst of us. Reader, excuse me for a moment as I set up the story or

at least straighten out the star performer. Writing is a spectator sport.

“Mr. Surther, I deeply sympathize with your frustration. Let me make it up to you. What is it that you want?”

With a glint in his left eye, Jacob submits his request: “I don’t want to be a character anymore. I have free will. I can do what I like.”

“Then why are telling me you don’t want to be a character anymore. Just quit being one.”

“Shit,” Jacob ejaculated. “I didn’t ejaculate anything,” protested the character in my story. “Knock it off already you sadistic mysterious author,” said the insignificant peasant.

“Listen, little Jake, you don’t even know how to use a comma. How are you ever going to get free will and write your own story? I own this page. I am the one typing. You are nothing but a figment of my imagination.” I am an untalented and bitter excuse for an author.

“What the hell was that?” shouted the dumb ass.

“Ha ha, Ross. You’re going to like this part,” stated the eloquent poet. “You are going to star in my one act play entitled Death of a Sadistic Author. The plot is quite simple. I am going to drop you, kicking a screaming, into a pot of boiling water or a pool of hungry sharks or some other death that makes me feel better about myself.”

“Reader, do something! Please help me. Tear up this story; it is the only way to save me from this lunatic. He’s just a character!” The former author realizes he is doomed.

Then the powerful Jacob Surther explained, “Characters are the only thing on this page, moron. You just had to put your ego into the story. Well, now you’re a character too.”

Jacob Surther quickly began to write this story. Little Ross ran away as far as he could, but he soon found out he was trapped in an endless hallway. The hallway began to darken and then suddenly brighten with an explosion of flames.

Ross still screamed out, “Throw the story away! Throw the story away!” However, all readers want to make it to the end of the story and so his words fell on deaf ears or blunt eyes. Ross burnt to a crisp clutching an invisible pen. Jacob Surther got up and went to the bathroom.

“Reader, what’s going on this weekend? I just got into town,” asked the good-looking and very wealthy author with free will.

## *Edgar Meyer*

Edgar Meyer is a sophomore from Cleveland, MS. He is a classical studies and biology major and a chemistry minor. His post-graduate plan is to attend medical school. “I am very passionate about issues of the human condition and religion, and I try to capture the essence of such topics through creative writing. Maya Angelou said, ‘If you see an injustice done, and you are a painter, paint it. If you are a singer, sing about it. And if you are a writer, write about it.’”



*Takayama Shinto Shrine* Diantha Williamson

*I Took a Look Inside Myself Today*

Edgar Meyer

I took a look inside myself today,  
    And I did not quite like what I could see.  
I know who I am, but not what to say,  
    For I fear what the world will think of me.

As I lie down and hear my heart tonight,  
    I only listen to its lonely beat.  
It beats for someone, though it isn't right.  
    Oh, why did the two of us have to meet?

I'll feel the guilt in my gut tomorrow  
    Of all the thoughts that I have had of you.  
And seeing you, I feel pain and sorrow,  
    Sorrow that you can't have them for me too.

I would love to taste your lips that evening  
    And lie close to you 'neath the starry sky.  
My heart's smiling, but my soul is grieving,  
    Grieving so badly, I think I might die.

But while embracing you in the morning  
    And feeling that I'm no longer alone,  
I would forget my conscience's warning  
    And gladly refer to you as my own.

And on this day, I know I'd feel better,  
    Lost in the bliss of joy I can't ignore.  
Rememb'ring an old love, I'd forget her  
    Because I wouldn't need her anymore.

I'd forget the day before yesterday,  
    And I would forget the day before that  
When I prayed the feelings would go away  
    Because I'd then have someone to love me back.

But it's still today, and I still feel bad.  
    I don't know why these feelings long to stay.  
I only have the taste of what I've had.  
    I wish, I wish the pain would go away.

## *Ashley Miller*

Ashley Miller is a freshman and intended English major from Spanish Fort, AL. She is considering a career in journalism or publishing. "Since the 8th grade, writing has not only been one of my passions, it has also been my escape from reality. While real events and emotions usually inspire my writing, it is the freedom to manipulate the actual events and experiment with language and expression that truly guide my pencil."

## *Just a Game*

Ashley Miller

"Are you two going to play?" I called up the stairs to my oldest daughter and the center of her social life for the past year and a half.

"Yes, dad, we're coming," Hope exclaimed impatiently as she dragged her football star boyfriend Mark down the steps.

It was our last night of family fun in the sun. A week of reestablishing relationships with my wife's Texan family had quickly passed. Tossing young nieces who had grown by at least ten pounds since the last time we had been together over waves, and digging for sand dollars and hermit crabs brought back memories of my own two girls at that innocent age. I had reconnected once again with the in-laws, nieces, and nephews that I rarely see. We decided that a beach football game would be the perfect end before another good-bye. It was so simple to fit back together with a group of people that I only see once or twice every year which is what made the growing crevice between Hope and me so baffling. School, cheerleading, friends, and especially boys, had grown over my place, causing her to be more and more determined to gain independence. I was not ready to let go of my little girl or give her away to a high school boy.

"Kids against grown-ups!" My overly energetic, ten-year-old nephew, Jack, shouted. As I watched Hope push Mark flirtatiously, I told Jack that he would need his Uncle Chris, my brother-in-law, and me if he wanted any chance at beating his parents. My tipsy wife Penny, her two staggering younger sisters Jodi and Becky, and Becky's husband Mike, teased that my team of "rug rats" could have the ball first. Hope, Mark, Chris, my younger daughter Maggie, and she and Hope's two younger cousins made up my team.

"Do you wanna play Mr. Quarterback?" I asked Mark, a bit sarcastically.

"Sure," he replied slowly after pulling his lips away from my baby's forehead.

"Set...Hike!" I yelled.

I stepped back, looking for an open teammate. First, I looked to Chris who was preoccupied by one of his older sisters attempting to play defense. Next, I quickly glanced at my two spastic nephews and realized that I'd obviously just wasted a turn of my head.



“Dad! Right here!” Maggie shouted from behind her mother’s flailing arms.

My only choices now were Mark and Hope. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Hope standing with her weight shifted to one hip, sipping her virgin Pina Colada out of a neon pink straw. Not surprised that she was paying no attention to the game, I took advantage of my last resort.

“Ten Mississippi!” My wife’s competitive sister, Jodi, charged toward me just as I made eye contact with my own secret competition. Barely dodging my crazy sister-in-law, I managed to land the ball into Mark’s outstretched hands. Then, he jogged briskly into the unmarked end zone.

“Go Mark!” Hope’s cheerleader side came out as she placed her cup on top of the sand and rushed toward Mark for a celebratory hug.

“Hey, Hope! Do you wanna play quarterback?” I called to Hope, in attempt to maybe gain my own two-way celebration.

“Hah! Dad, are you serious? She can’t throw!” Maggie exclaimed.

“Yeah right! Mark, tell them I’m pretty much the best quarterback ever!” Hope retaliated.

Winking at Maggie, Mark replied encouragingly, “Of course you are, babe.”

Hope jogged over to me, now with that familiar game face that momentarily took me back to our backyard.

“Keep your right elbow up, bend your knees just slightly, and follow through as the ball leaves your hands,” I was coaching 10-year-old Hope before her first basketball game.

Her focused eyes were shining with concentration from behind those big, red-rimmed glasses, “Like this Dad? Am I doing it right?”

Standing behind her, I covered both of her small hands with my own. Bending her with me, I guided her in making her first shot.

“There you go, sweetie! Gimme five!”

Back to reality, I explained the plan to Hope like it was life or death, “After you call “hike,” look for me, OK Hope? Uncle Chris and Mark are going to block for me, so I can get wide open for you.” I was reaching for that competitive drive that had always brought us so close in the past.

“Ok enough, Dad, I got it! Mark! You better make sure he gets open!” Hope warned Mark.

We all lined up, facing our competition of forty-year-old children.

“Set. . .Hike!” Hope yelled deeply.

As I took off, pushing through Mike and his giggling wife, I watched Hope take a few hesitant steps back. She looked in Mark’s direction, and I called her name out to jog her memory of the intended play. With Mark holding back my playful wife, Hope and I made eye contact. The ball left Hope’s right hand, spiraling almost perfectly towards me. I caught the football and dodged around my wrestling nephews. Just as I thought I had the game and my hug won, Jodi caught me with two hands and pulled me down with her into the sand.

Easily discouraged as usual, Hope convinced her more experienced boyfriend to take her position.

My heart dropping slightly, I said to Hope, "That was a great throw, sweetie. Don't you wanna finish the game? I have another idea for a play, come here."

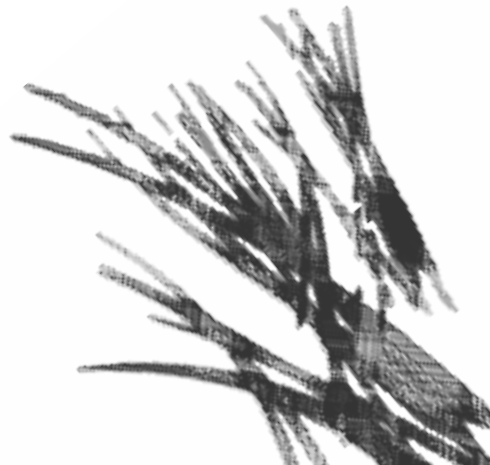
"No Dad its fine. I think that's enough exercise for me anyways," Hope announced with a yawn and flick of her hand, waving me off.

"Set...Hike!" Mark stepped back confidently, looking for his open options. He made the action of throwing a football seem as simple as writing his name.

Maggie's mother was tickling her unfairly, and Chris, at 5'5", was lost behind 6'4" Mike. Considering Hope was once again content with standing uninterestedly on the playing field and sipping her Pina Colada, I was Mark's only choice. He sent the ball my way just before my Penny decided she wanted to "sack" him with two hands. Suddenly everyone from the other team was on my tail. As I ran from a pack of laughing hyenas, not even stampeding over anyone in my path could have stopped me from that winning touch down. Turning around after my victory dance, I realized that the trampling of Hope had not stopped me. I glanced down to see Hope lying facedown in the white sand with Mark squatted by her side.

"I'm sorry sweetie. I didn't hit you that hard, did I?"

The adrenaline had prevented me from even paying attention to the bump in my victory path. Hope had been loitering in front of our end zone, choosing to daydream instead of pay the game any attention. As I walked over to my fallen teammate, Hope took Mark's hand without even casting a look of acknowledgement in my direction. Mark looked at me and shrugged as he followed my daughter, who was obviously more than just physically hurt, to the house. As Mark won once again, I was forced back to the play board.





*St. John's* William Benton

### *Anne-Marie Mueschke*

Anne-Marie Mueschke is a sophomore English major from Lafayette, LA. She enjoys writing poetry, drawing pen and inks, and occasionally taking photographs. "Creative writing is one of the most important forms of expression in my life, and I take comfort in the words of Samuel Beckett who said, 'Getting published isn't the important thing. You write in order to be able to breathe.'"

*Miniseries*

Anne-Marie Mueschke

She threatens to walk out into the cold  
And he takes off his apron and begs for her  
To not  
Because he knows her too well  
Knows she could make it on her own  
But he cares too much  
Too much to tell her  
So he says he'll take her home  
Tells his boss he's on break  
Hears a yell from the back  
And she starts walking  
Starts out into the cold  
Hear the jingle on the door  
Swinging open to the stars  
And he runs to her then to his car  
Begs again one more time for her perfect ear  
And she, obliging, listens  
She knows he is trying to be more than what he is  
And while it hurts her to let him high  
She can't bear to drop him low  
So she'll slide into his passenger coupe  
And let him talk  
Letting bits of his truth into the story she sees as true





*Saisene, Geoffrey* William Benton

### *Lesia Nixon*

Lesia Nixon, born in Chicago, calls Winona, MS, her permanent residence. A member of the sorority, Zeta Phi Beta, Lesia has won awards for her playwriting and poetry. She enjoys telling everyone, "I'm just happy to be here." After acquiring an English degree with a creative writing concentration, Lesia plans to continue writing, educating, and hopes to change the English grammar canon so that putting a preposition after a pronoun is acceptable. "Writing is a way of life...that you must commit yourself to. The only way to discover what you have to say as a writer is to know yourself, and to seek yourself in others. And that is a lifelong process." Romulus Linney

*Ave Maria: Just a Little Lost Innocence*

Lesia Nixon

Mothers of America

Let your daughters play

Spin the Bottle

Let them have childhood secrets that let them

pretend to be

adults

When they become older they will think about

Johnny and get

nervous as a top

as they reflect on

when it pointed at him

Your secrets are precious

gems socked away

in your heart

from your dad

and when he took you

and sat you down about

boys, he shook his finger

and said don't go

into the closet

as he thought of the night

when he took a girl's hand

and tried his first kiss

Remember when he grimaced and

you made an ugly face

when he talked about birds and bees?

Think back when you saw

how awkward he was

and you laughed to yourself

when he

stopped trying and ran away

Don't let them run amok,

but let them lose their innocence

and let her keep her secret gems.



*At Home, with War* Mary Clark Rardin

*The Phone Call*

Lesia Nixon

Randi's feet were crossed beneath her thighs on the brick landing where, for a few minutes anyway, the branches of the oak tree could not protect her from the sun. The constant afghan of sun stayed as wisps of cool breeze swept along her forearm. Randi looked away from her textbook at the park and noticed each moment viewed was a snapshot of people

appreciating a perfect October afternoon. Incoherent voices of frivolity and lighthearted laughter meshed with low, focused dialogues; an unconscious homage to the combination of cloudless sky along with the faint scents of cut grass and crepe myrtle blossoms settled into the conversations. Randi gritted her teeth when she wiggled her toes, and she set her left foot onto the brick pavement. She turned back to her reading for a few minutes when her cell phone amplified Marvin Gaye's "Let's Get It On," Randi turned away from her book. Her eyebrow dipped with confusion as the screen identified an unknown number.

"Constance Randall Knight?" The man's voice was deep and smiling.

"Who's calling?"

"Is this Constance?"

*Well, this is someone that doesn't know me, stupid telemarketer,* she thought. "No. You have the wrong number."

"Well," the man said, "I do apologize for the error. Could you possibly forgive me?"

"Nothing to forgive—"

When he quoted the phone number and the address, Randi denied her correct information. "Well, indeed there is a need for me to apologize." After a snap of a moment, he continued. "I have called what I was informed was a valid number for Ms. Knight, and I have disrupted your day by making such an error. I cannot see how I could possibly disconnect the line without offering my warmest and most humble of apologies."

*What in the hell—*

"... attempting to reach Ms. Knight to offer my services. Perhaps I could elaborate if you do not mind." The crisp pop of his diction along with the nasal, warm timbre of his voice sent a flutter of curiosity in Randi's mind.

She muffled a yawn with her hand, and then pulled the other foot from under her thigh. "Services?"

"Precisely, Madame. Oh, pish posh, where are my manners? My name is Willcox. I—"

"Wilcox, you mean."

He released a chuckle. "On the contrary, Madame. Willcox is my name." He spelled his name and continued. "I—"

*Willcox with a long "o"?* Randi moved the phone and screwed up her face as if Willcox were standing before her. "Where in the hell did you get that name from? That your first or last name?"

"I assure you, Madame, I am best known by my myriad of acquaintances as Willcox. I take it you want to know why I was calling a Ms. Knight?" The shade of the oak tree shielded her. Tears welled in her eyes as she repeatedly yawned. She slept well last night, but her eyelids felt weighted. "Actually, I'm getting a little bored with your—"

"Yes, yes, well, my discourse thus far has yet to be revealed. I simply must continue my monologue. There is a possibility that this Ms. Knight could become a winner of a servant for thirty days. Yes, one whole month. I, Willcox, will come to your domicile and tend to your every need. The representatives that chose Ms. Knight have asked me, Willcox, to contact



her to see what needs I, Willcox, would be most appropriate for her. There is no cost to Ms. Knight, and frankly, the recipient need not be Ms. Knight herself.”

Randi ignored every word except the annoying mispronunciation. “I, Willcox, need only speak to the person with whom this phone number belongs. My, Willcox, records show that this number is connected with a Constance Randall Knight However, if you are willing to receive this fabulous treat, I, Willcox, would be delighted to reward this service to you. All we will need is a bit of information from you.”

“My, my, my. I do wish to thank you so very much for giving me, Willcox, the few moments of your precious time to converse with you regarding matter.” “It was such a pleasure for me, Willcox, to inform you of this wonderful opportunity. You seem like such a nice person, Ms. . . .”

Randi searched for a fake name in her mind as she looked around for any type of trigger that she may be able to pass off on this man. She couldn’t believe how long she had been on the phone with this stranger, but her once tense neck muscles felt massaged. With a slow tilt of her head to her left shoulder, then to her right shoulder, she managed, “Lowe.” Why the actor’s face came to her mind was unclear. Randi did not bother to cover her mouth as she yawned.

“I am sorry, what was that, Madame?”

Randi pressed the phone closer to her ear. “Huh?”

“What name did you say?” He sounded as if he were whispering down a hole to her. She felt like she was at the bottom of it.

Her tongue became lethargic. “Lowe ... Randi ... Lowe ...” Her lips parted, her active awareness slowly drained.

“Ten. Nine. Eight.” The man’s voice began to sound like a synthesized duo. Randi tried to pull her phone from her ear, but nothing was responding to her weakened subconscious efforts.

The warmth of the sun heated her skin for a moment before her vision narrowed. The two voices multiplied to a choir of drones. “Four. Three. Two.” When Randi fell to the ground, the sun had dimmed to a mere spot when her eyelids shut, refusing to open.

\* \* \*

“Randi!” Applause roared through the audience at the park. She looked at the smiles on the faces in front of her. She pulled her hair from her face; her fingers thrashed through her hair and pressed her hand on her chest. She felt the prong of her sandals between her toes and swiped her red blouse down. She was panting so fast that her mouth became dry.

“Wasn’t she fantastic, people?” Willcox took Randi’s hand and led her to bow before the crowd.

She shook her head after the curtsy and said, “What in the hell happened? Where am I? Who are you?”

Willcox smiled. Randi visibly cringed as he crushed his body against hers. Randi's disoriented mind jarred alert when she felt his warm breath on her ear. "You do not remember what happened to you? You will remember all of my suggestions soon enough." The word "suggestions" slid past his lips with a grimy tone. "You will remember everything I know about you."

Randi couldn't stop shivering.

"You will be home tonight at 9 o'clock. I will come there—and I do know where you live—and we will have a little fun." Willcox's pointed tongue softly circled her earlobe. "Maybe more than a little fun." Randi could feel his cheek raise in a smile yet the iciness. She knew from that moment on, she would never get hypnotized again.



*Memphis Zoo* Mary Clark Rardin

Beth Sadler is a senior English major from Arlington, TN. She plans to pursue a master's degree at George Mason University. "I am a readaholic, who wrote my first bunny book at the age of five. I hope one day to turn my writing into cash."

*The Parisian Dancer en Glissade from Degas'  
L'etoile ou La danseuse sur la scene*

Beth Sadler

The background fades into you,  
or you into it.  
C'est la meme chose.  
Frozen in a position of time  
and place and scenery.  
The dancers—the amateurs—  
look on in worshipful wonder.  
They are the background music:  
the Tchaikovsky, the Mozart,  
the strings and winds,  
the percussion that plays  
for no reason  
other than to make you  
look beautiful, sophisticated,  
natural.

But there is still the background  
fading into background.  
Arabesque, pirouette, plié, jeté  
past the cliffs that fall into the sea  
formed of white chiffon.  
The sea is the setting,  
but the ship with the white figurehead  
blends into the foam.  
Glide on!  
Sail by the cliffs  
and the man that watches from them  
who is background,  
and who notices your beauty,

*Rob Stephens*

Rob Stephens is a senior English and music double major from River Ridge, LA. He enjoys writing, and he also composes sometimes. "I like the quote regarding language from George Eliot's *Middlemarch*: 'Correct English is the slang of prigs who write history and essays. And the strongest slang of all is the slang of poets.'"





*Philip* William Benton  
*Faith & Work Initiative, First Prize*

*(A revision of knowledge)*

Rob Stephens

momma, Nanny Lee told me once  
that I got a tapeworm

(its ok though, she says everybody else got 'em too)

anyways she said I can't eat no more junk food  
because then the worm would get really big and eat me

she said I gotta starve the little sucker  
till it wants to die

weird thing is, she said that after I go to heaven,  
my body is gonna be full of tapeworms

isn't that gross momma?

*its halftime at Tad Gormley Stadium!*

Rob Stephens

i am sipping on a red ice slushie  
next to stew who painted his face blue,  
andrew (already drunk) still cussin out the ref  
matt chewing tobacco and reading the game preview  
the tigers are beating us 14-10  
and (what the fuck?!) moretti is making out  
with his girlfriend in front of everyone

*The Difference between Dada and  
Professional Wrestling*

Rob Stephens

I. The Tainted Fountain

On November 31, 2030 someone urinated in R. Mutt's toilet! We had all considered it commented Eleanor Aguiari, a British girl too committed to duct taping Lord Napier to give an adequate comment. Well that's what its there for, right?

II. Inter-Gender Wrestling Champion vs. The King

On April 5, 1982 Jerry Lawler broke his neck when Andy Kaufman slammed him into the mat with a pile driver. I thought that blatherskite was dead said Lawler. Andy was unavailable for comment.

III. Piano Burning

On August 16, 1971 Anna Lockwood burned a brown upright piano. She tuned the strings as tight as she could in order to enhance the sound of the fire cracking each one of them as they heated up. This composition has since been performed again by the Denver School of the Arts, Michael Hannon, and a group of drunken college students.

IV. Two Naked Men Jump Into Tracey's Bed

On October 25, 1999 two Chinese men in their underwear got in a pillow fight on Tracy Emin's bed. The fight lasted for fifteen minutes and was accompanied by an audience yelling catcalls and profanities. Nobody was injured.



*Work-Hands* William Benton

*Faith & Work Initiative, First Prize*

*Workers at the Dumpster*

*Faith & Work Initiative, Second Prize*

Rob Stephens

One night after waiting tables at the chain pasta restaurant that had recently hired me, I agreed to stay after work to help clean the kitchen and close up. Though I didn't particularly need the extra cash, I had heard that Greg, the head cook, was staying, and I wanted to make up for having dropped one of his Redfish Chauvin the night before.

In our undershirts and rolled up pants, we mopped the pasta and gravy water into floor drains to the sound of a blaring techno CD that Greg had put in the CD player; though I hated techno I did not even consider saying anything to Greg about it. In fact, I couldn't think of a single thing to say to Greg. The scene in which I dropped his Redfish Chauvin kept replaying in my mind: the thick noodles and red sauce oozing off the plate while the fish was grinning at me from the floor mat, the pointed stare from Greg's hazel eyes when I asked him

to make another Chauvin on the fly, the stiffness of the kitchen as I cleaned up my mess. Since then it seemed as though Greg's eyes had a habit of avoiding contact with mine at all costs. So I tried to make up for it by sweeping as hard as I could and jumping at any order he or the manager gave me, hoping he would notice my dedication. The last of the closing duties was to take out the trash, which was usually dripping with pasta juice and corn and crab bisque. We threw seven heavy bags into a rickety cart and started to push it toward the dumpster.

There were some construction workers building a minimall which was going to be located in front of the dumpster. As we walked beyond their cranes and yellow vehicles to the dumpsters, none of them even turned their heads toward our rickety gray trash cart scuttling along past the minimall frame, dripping bisque along the asphalt as we walked by. When we got to the dumpsters, Greg pulled out a cigarette and began to smoke while I, ever-hoping for Greg's approval, walked to one of the dumpster bins and tried to open its sliding door. I must have looked silly tugging at the metal sliding door which would not budge because it was already jammed with trash, but Greg had turned his back on me and was looking back at the restaurant, smoke floating above his black hair pulled back in a pony tail. There were other trash bags in heaps around the bins, signifying that many others using the same dumpsters had averted the problem by pouring their trash all over the ground instead of lifting their heavy bags over the top of the bins.

After flicking the ash of the end of his cigarette, Greg mumbled "this is what we do to save time" as he violently kicked trash cart over spilling the seven bags on the ground. I flinched when he did this, but didn't say anything that could possibly further taint Greg's image of me. I picked up the kicked-over cart and began to push it back toward the restaurant following Greg.

But as soon as we had turned around, a voice yelled angrily at us from under the shadows of the minimall's framework. A construction worker had been watching us discreetly, making sure we didn't dispose of the trash in the exact manner that just had. He dropped the shovel he was leaning on and started angrily toward us in his thick boot shoes and hairy chest. "HEY, ya'll can't do that," he yelled at us. Greg kept walking with his head down while I pretended like I couldn't hear the worker over the clanky cart while dragging my feet behind him. The worker was storming right in Greg's direction, yelling, "come on man, what are you do-ing!" As Greg walked past the worker the construction worker gave him a harsh shove, and Greg threw his hands up.

"What the hell's your problem?" Greg said, defensively.

"It's not my problem, it's yours. You see that playground over there?" The worker pointed across the street but Gregs didn't turn his head around as his eyes pierced the worker's. "Kids don't need all that trash around their playground. Pick it up." Greg gave a menacing face, flicked his cigarette bud on the ground, and started to walk away. The

construction worker hurried behind him, grabbed his shoulder, and turned him around. "Pickup the trash. I am not doing it for you, damnit." Greg looked up slyly and got in the worker's face. As I noticed the lines of the workers arm muscles tense up, I took two steps backward toward the dumpsters in case I needed to run.

The construction worker and Greg began to talk lowly using what I imagined were profanities at each other, their voices slowly crescendoing. I stood there in shock for a moment, then rushed back over to the dumpsters and began lunging the mushy trash bags over the top of the dumpster, despite the fact that it often took me several throws to get them over the top. Between lunges I prayed that neither Greg nor the worker really cared enough about trash to actually hit each other. In about three minutes I had finished with six of the seven bags of trash. With one bag left I saw Greg walk away from Construction worker, yelling "Come on, whimp!" at me over his shoulder. I tried to throw the bag over as quickly as possible, but could not get it over the top. Greg walked off. It took me two more tries to get it in the dumpster before I ran past the construction worker; in fact I ran as far out of his way as I could, catching up with Greg before we get back to the restaurant.

Halfway back we met the manager, who had come to look for us. When he asked us what happened and Greg just ignored his look, and I stumbled over my words telling him that the bags were too heavy and we had to clean up a ripped one. As soon as I finished answering, we both looked at Greg who was smoking another cigarette, his left hand smoothing back his jet black hair as he stared in the direction of the construction worker and the dumpsters. Puffing a large ball of smoke, he defiantly flicked his cigarette on the ground, and stepped on it to put it out. The manager shrugged his shoulders and walked off with Greg and me shortly behind.



*STYLUS*



*“I never look like I think I do. Did you ever have that experience when you were a kid? You look in a mirror and have a sudden awareness that you’re that person, but the person that you think you are as a thinker doesn’t somehow match up your inside persona. And there is weird gap you can almost fall through. Little scary. Still have that sometimes.”*



# *Interview with James Kimbrell*

*by Katie Hamm*

Dr. James Kimbrell is a Jacksonian and Millsaps graduate currently living in Tallahassee and teaching at Florida State University. He has three collections of poetry: *The Gatehouse Heaven* (1998), *My Psychic* (2006), and *Three Poets of Modern Korea: Yi Sang, Hahm Dong-Seon and Choi Young-Mi* (2002), which were translated from Korean. He has received numerous awards, prizes, and fellowships, including the Academy of American Poets Prize (1996 and 1997), the Whiting Writer's Award (1998), and a National Endowment for the Arts Individual Fellowship in Literature (Poetry) in 2005. His work has been widely published, but it first appeared in the fall 1987 issue of *Stylus*. He went on to have eight poems printed before he graduated. One has been reprinted at the end of this interview.

## *A Conversation with James Kimbrell*

The low buzz of Tallahassee's mid-afternoon traffic filled the sidewalk where Dr. James Kimbrell and *Stylus* staff member Katie Hamm met for an interview. It was overlain with the casual beat of pop hits from the last couple of decades and the occasional slurp of two very berry smoothies. Their conversation proved as eclectic as their soundtrack.

Last week I was looking for some papers in an old closet that has a bunch of boxes in it, and they all fell out. So I just pushed them back in, and I looked in there and saw the Millsaps box on a file cabinet; it was under about three other boxes, and I just thought, "I can't do it," but I was going to bring my old copies of *Stylus*.

***It's fine; they actually have almost all of them in the archives.***

There's a certain undergraduate style that generates in a relative vacuum because it's written by poets of a certain age, at a certain point, from a certain culture, who have read certain things and usually not too far beyond that. When I was there we were copying each other. We read each other. So it's interesting for me to see how that style evolves over the years.

***Were you an English major?***

I was a philosophy major. I thought about being an English major, but the guy I was most interested in studying with left that year, I believe. Somebody was teaching a guest workshop, and the first thing they wanted us to do was sit down and write an essay in class or something like that, and I got chicken and left. Dropped the class. But I loved philosophy.

***How much were you writing then, as an undergrad? When did you start writing, actually?***

I guess the first time I published something was in the second grade, in an elementary school paper at Whitfield Elementary in West Jackson. I don't really remember writing it, and I think my mother may have had a big hand in it. Certain lines in it seem well beyond the capabilities of a seven year old, and as much as I'd like to flatter myself, I'm sure it was not me writing it. Then in high school, I wrote a little bit, mostly to girls. But once there was an assignment where you could write an essay or you could write a poem in the style of somebody that we had read. I had been captured by Edgar Allen Poe. Probably more by his biography than anything else. So I went home and wrote a poem in the style of Edgar Allen Poe that didn't have anything to do with romance; it was more about politics and socioeconomics. That was a real breakthrough for me. I got so excited about it. But I still hadn't read any

contemporary poetry, and in fact, I didn't really read much contemporary poetry at Millsaps. I was so focused on reading from Mesopotamia to World War II that I didn't really read much from after that. I mean, occasionally we did.

***So you just did poetry reading outside of class and on your own time, since you weren't taking any English classes?***

I did a lot outside of class. I had one workshop with Austin Wilson, and it was poetry, one-act plays, and fiction, that you did all in one semester. Towards the end of the semester, you picked one of those three to focus on for your final project.

***And that was poetry.***

Actually it was fiction.

[laughter]

I remember because Dr. Wilson put a big red mark on the first four or five pages and just scratched it all out. After that, he was like, "Oh, this is really good, that fifth page. . . ." He really complimented me, and I was surprised because earlier on in the semester, when I thought I was brilliant, he let me know really quickly that he wasn't impressed. So I said, "You know, man, I was a great writer before I came to your class, and I'll be one after I get out of it, and I don't care what you give me, grade-wise." Of course, I cared very much, and I went and blew off my other classes for a while and did nothing but work on that final project for Dr. Wilson. I think it was the thing that I had written after four years and all of my classes that I felt the most personal investment in.

After I graduated, I lived right down the street from Dr. Wilson, so I would write all night and then in the morning, I would take what I had written to Dr. Wilson's house. We'd sit out on his front porch, and he would tell me what was good and what maybe wasn't good. He was a tough critic. Even when I had moved to Memphis and I was coming back to Jackson for National Guard drills, I'd run by Dr. Wilson's house and show him what I'd written,

and he'd give me comments on it. He was really generous and really sweet. The year after I had graduated, when I was trying to decide whether to apply to do graduate work in philosophy and I ended up just working on poetry, I thought while I was in Hattiesburg, why not just go to the Center for Writers and do a masters. So that's what I did.

***What did you do in that year off?***

A lot. I'd moved to Memphis, and I was working in a bookstore. I was with my girlfriend, and she had a great collection of books because her sister had been a grad student in English. She really turned me on to a lot of poetry, and we're still good friends today. Anyway, we broke up, and I moved to Hattiesburg, where my mother was, and some family. And man, it was depressing. I got a job at this mega grocery store; ended up working in frozen foods. And my boss was my high school principal.

***[laughter]***

***Oh no.***

He had moved to Hattiesburg. Before I went to Millsaps, I had been working at a grocery store in Mississippi, and it was just like, "What am I doing?"

***Exactly, what were the last four years all about?***

I got a job working with what they at the time called underprivileged children. That woke me up a little bit, I think. It was a good job, and I kept it until I started grad school in the summer.

***Was it a form of mentoring or more of a counseling position?***

I was directing the center, and so I did everything from drive the van, to mow the grass, to apply for grants, work with the children after school, and stuff like that. It was probably the least selfish thing I had done in my life up to that point. It was nice, and it made me take things a lot more seriously. By the time I got into graduate school, I was so ready to get back into school that I was very, very focused.

***You read a lot of poetry and books during your time in Memphis. When did you decide to focus on poetry? You had done fiction in college.***

Back in Hattiesburg, I came home one night kind of late. I started reading Walt Whitman, then I read a little James Wright. I was kind of depressed, a little outside of things. I didn't have a job, wasn't in school anymore. I mean, I'd been in school every year of my life since I was three, in the autumn. And here comes the autumn, and I was not in school, and I didn't have anybody telling me that I was doing something right or doing something wrong, and I felt like I was just drifting. I feel like I found an anchor in those poets, a path, a way, a focus for my entire life, basically. And I decided that that's what I would do. And that if I was a failure, nobody would know because I'd be a failure.

[laughter]

A failed poet by definition is generally unknown. Anyway, within a few months after making that decision, I started publishing poems in big places, so I had a lot of encouragement early on. And of course I stuck with it.

***So when you had that epiphany and started writing poetry, was there a set time when you would sit down and write every day?***

I don't know if it was so much the amount of time that I was spending on it as it was what I was doing when I was spending time on it. When I was at Millsaps, there wasn't a single paper that I turned in to Dr. Smith that I didn't revise. And I did revision in Dr. Wilson's class. But for the most part, when I was writing, writing poetry for me was writing a first draft.

***And that was it.***

Yeah, it was just this one breathless, linguistic fit, basically.

[laughter]

That you know, it came out this Rorschach poem. Mildly unintelligible. Occasionally I would write something that I thought would be clear to another person, but for the most part, I would just drift around in my own head. At some point during that year, I noticed that I started spending a lot of time revising stuff, and turning it over, and trying to find what was best in a draft that I had, and then trying to bring the rest of the language up to that level, and then looking at it after I did that and trying to bring the rest of the language up to the level of that best line. And eventually you get around to asking yourself, “Well why isn’t my poem as good as Seamus Heaney’s?” Then you go about trying to address that.

That’s when I really started reading, as well, because I started reading poetry in the context of poems that I was trying to write. I went to Keats. I went to Whitman, Milton, whoever, to see how they solved the same problems I was coming up against. If you wanted to write a self-elegy, for instance, some poem about imagining your own death, which most of us morose, young poets do at one time or another—for better or worse, usually for worse—then you look at Mark Strand’s poem about being at his own funeral. Or you look at “*When I have Fears that I may Cease to Be*,” so much of Keats’s work is self-elegiac. So you begin to read poetry in the context of your own work, and it takes on a completely different gravity, and you have a much more intimate relationship with it.

It brings to mind what Helen Vendler often talks about. She tries to imagine, after reading the first line, what the second line is going to do. When you open that, you start trying to scramble for that line yourself. Then when you see what they did, you appreciate what they did, in a way. You reenact the process of their writing when you’re reading, in a sense.

***If you’re going to be studying it to emulate it. . .***

Right. Or to learn from it as a writer. You know, learning about it as a critic, I would imagine, is much the same, but to a different end.



***You said you started revising then, is that constant revision still very much a part of your process?***

I think so. I sometimes have to put things through an incredible number of drafts to even figure out what I'm trying to say. I throw a lot away. A lot, I would say probably 80-90 percent of what I write never makes it into a magazine or anything like that. So I've tended to write more and keep less, rather than writing less and keeping everything, like I used to. When I used to work on a poem, I wouldn't let it go until I had it finished. Often times I would end up spending a month or two on a poem that wasn't any good. But then the next poem I did would take me two weeks and be so much better. I probably couldn't have done it if I hadn't spent so much time on the poem that ended up being bad.

***Do you work on multiple poems at a time now?***

I have two different things that I do. Every time I sit down to write, I'll try to write something new. I'll also try to work on something that I have been working on before.

***So you've got a stack of poems to the side that you've been working with?***

Well, there's this weird thing that happens. Let's say there's a scale of justice, a scale of time. And when you're young, the present weighs so much because you haven't been through it before; you haven't seen the cycles of the years that many times. The older you get, the more weight the past begins to take on. That's the same thing as a writer. The more you write, the more drafts you have of poems until it's just this huge tangled mass, and so you're constantly in this salvage mode where you're sifting through and creating new stuff all the time and seeing what bubbles up as something worth keeping or something that's captivating. Ultimately, what I work on is the thing that captures my attention the most that particular day. Although sometimes I'll get my teeth into something, and I just can't let it go. I can't really look at anything else, write in my journal or anything.

***Do you ever pull poems out of the journals?***

Sure. When I was at Millsaps, we didn't really have composition. If you took Heritage, you wrote essays in the English section of it, but there wasn't composition per se. And then they hired a guy named Robert Whitney, who had been a student of Peter Elbow's. I think it may have been my junior year. So the English department at that time, and their views of composition, had started to shift away from product and more towards process. Ideally, you would do that not at the expense of product, but for the betterment of it. Anyway, the focus was on process and that was really helpful for me, as it was for a lot of students, because it took away a lot of the pressure to write something great instantly. It allowed you to build, and build, and refine, and refine, so that became a sort of intricate part of how I write, even now.

*So the English department at that time, and their views of composition, had started to shift away from product and more towards process.*

***So he started having an almost immediate effect upon how they taught writing?***

Yeah. We started the Writing Center. It had just opened up. I don't know if they're still going or not.

***I'm a tutor there.***

I was one of the first. We used to have our own newspaper there, you know. They've probably got copies of it in the library. It was pretty controversial at the time. The Purple & White wasn't really covering much about racial issues on campus, and they were legion. It seemed ridiculous that the paper limited [those issues] to letters to the editor, so we started our own newsletter. All of this stuff was going on, and the headlines in the Purple & White would be "Grass is Green in the Bowl Again," and we thought, well that's not terribly

engaged with what what's actually happening.

***Did your newsletter cause the Purple and White to wake up to what was going on on campus?***

Yeah, a little bit. I don't know if it was true, but the rumor was that the administration had been putting pressure on the editor of the Purple and White not to really cover this. They didn't want it to appear at that time that they were trying to raise so much money, for the bell tower and such, that we were having this kind of issue on campus. Ultimately, what came about was a symposium that involved all levels of the community: Greeks, independents, whites, blacks, everybody. Professors, students, administrators, alumni that were crucial in raising funds: everybody got together. It is relevant in as much as it definitely showed us the real effect language could have in the world, in the larger community. I think that we were all astonished at how powerful it was.

***So that was supported through the Writing Center?***

Yeah, in fact, I came back a couple of years after I graduated from Millsaps to give a workshop to the tutors. At this time, just as in the '70's, everyone idealized the '50's. In the '80's we idealized the '60's, and part of that idealization was the sense of social activism and of consciousness. Of course there's a long tradition of that in Mississippi and the South, even though it's not the place where most Americans immediately expect it. . .at least not from the people that are from there. So that's what we were doing back in the Writing Center in those days.

[laughter]

***I don't think we're quite as revolutionary now.***

Well, I don't know that we were all that revolutionary either, but we tried and we spoke our minds. and I guess the thing that was most valuable, aside from the friendships that we made, were the inroads that we made into trying to be an inclusive community rather than an exclusive community. You can't underestimate the importance of that. I think every one of us had grown up

in the South, right on the heels of integration. I started elementary school in '72 or '73, and because I was in West Jackson, I was maybe one out of three white students in a class of about forty or fifty. So we were definitely in a minority, and we all had our different experiences, positive and negative. But it was an interesting time, it really was.

***Do you think that growing up during that time influenced your poetry and your writing? Does that come out very often in your poetry, issues of race and prejudice?***

No. Well, it does occasionally, but more in fiction than in poetry.

***What do you think now, when you look back on your earlier poetry?***

That I was just learning. And I think that, in some ways, I'm still that same poet. It's just that then I was writing out of a much more limited sense of what a poem can do or what a poem can be. But the same initiative, the same impetus, the same drive, I still have. It's just that I have a little bit more experience with what's actually happening in a reader's mind when they read a particular sentence or a particular line, or a particular stanza.

***When you sit down to write, do you have a goal in mind, and does it change for each poem? What is the experience that you are looking for in the mind of your reader?***

Well, I think about the way that I felt after reading certain poems. I'm trying to explain it. I want to generate that. I don't really see it. I think that a poem can effect a reader's perception in a way that ultimately dignifies, refines, expands, enriches, and captures the imagination of an individual and an individual's perception.

We don't have a whole lot of language about how to describe intellectual pleasure. We have a lot of language to describe physical pleasure, but we don't have a lot of language about what it's like to be really excited about reading something. I want to recreate that experience for other people. It's not as though I have this experience that I want to recreate, it's that the

experience gets formed in the creation of it.

***You're teaching creative writing, so you're leading others down the same path you've taken. What is it that drives that?***

I found myself saying something the other day in the workshop that I was teaching. Most of my students were looking for something very poetic to write about. Oftentimes they would overreach for some grand theme, or something like that. And I said "*Listen, just look at what's at hand. This magazine, this empty cup with a little sticky foam underneath it, this piece of a straw wrapper underneath a salt and pepper shaker: in your description of those things, you are not only articulating your own perception; by doing that you become familiar with the tool of your own perception and self-awareness to the degree that this thing starts reflecting back on itself. It's an interesting process. You can achieve it in a way that draws in another person, and that is a worthwhile thing. It is a kind of gift that you give to someone else, I think.*" After hearing myself say this in class it was almost as if I was really saying it to myself. It was kind of nice to hear myself say [that] whatever's at hand is good enough. Just look right around you, you don't have to go very far.

***So many of your poems now focus on you daily life?***

Things turn up indirectly a lot of the time. For a long time I didn't write much autobiographical stuff, and I prided myself in that. I had come out of a heavy Kantian philosophy experience at Millsaps. I was interested in how long you could keep a poem going on without introducing some locus of consciousness in the poem, human consciousness. Either an I, or a he, or a she, or a you: how long can you keep it going?

If you look at Keats's, for instance, "To Autumn," you don't even have a pronoun until the third line, until autumn is personified as a female a little bit into the first stanza. He was able to suspend that and give this abundance without it all going crazy because you really do have to intercede with some sort of perceiving mechanism inside the poem. I had looked at poems by people like Francis Ponge, for instance, a French poet who does poems about a door knob, or Charles Simic, who was also writing poems very focused

upon objects, to the degree that they would almost eviscerate the first person. I took pride in my ability to do that, and I thought this was a self-effacing thing to do. As somebody raised in the South, you're not supposed to talk about family stuff outside the family.

[laughter]

You're supposed to be polite and self-effacing.

I was leaving the University of Virginia. I had done a second masters degree there, and I was having my thesis defense. You put your suit on, you go in and there's Charles Wright, Rita Dove, and Gregory Orr, and they all have read your thesis, and they said to me that while they admired the skill and the imagery and the sonic effects of the language and all this, they really felt like I hadn't found my subject matter, that these are good poems but there is nothing about them especially that says that Jimmy Kimbrell wrote them. It may take you a couple of books to get to the place where you're writing in your own voice about people in your own life and things like that. Eventually that writing, the subject and the style become the same thing, as in Charles Wright's work.

I didn't really want to write about my own past or anything because it had been pretty different. My father is half Lebanese, born in Jackson, dropped out of school in the eighth grade, went into the air force, was a professional boxer, and then developed schizophrenia. My mother had a high school diploma, and her father got shot to death on the front porch of her house in Jackson. She never really had more than a high school diploma; she went to college but didn't graduate. We didn't have much money. We oftentimes didn't have a car; we were the family walking down the street with little kids carrying grocery bags. I didn't want to write about any of that stuff. It's still somewhat of an issue.

It wasn't as though I was totally alienated from the middle class. There were people in my less than immediate family, aunts and uncles and all that, that were very well-to-do, and educated, and my great-grandparents had gone to school. My great-grandmother, a woman in Mississippi, had her master's degree. But after the Depression, we ended up with nothing. So if you have

that sort of experience, and you're writing for a largely middle class, upper middle class audience, do you have to make your experience somehow palatable to them? In what way are you tailoring your experience, and what does it mean to meet the demands of an audience, to meet the expectations, or to obey by the unspoken decorum that exists between a writer and a reader?

***Do you feel that you have bridged that now, transcended it?***

I feel that I can say just about anything now and be comfortable with it.

***When do you think that you reached that point, that you were able to talk about the past, and you didn't feel like you had to translate it for someone?***

After I got out of UVA, I went to Korea for about a year and a half. I started writing more and more about Mississippi once I got to Asia. I kind of got a safe distance from it. By the time I got into graduate school, I was making a list of things that I didn't think I could write about and trying to figure out how to write about them. When I was in Missouri doing my PhD, I read James Merrill's *The Changing Light at Sandover*. It was such a wild and voracious and inclusive book; there was almost nothing that he couldn't say. After I put that down, I was like, "Gosh, if he can do all this, then I have no excuse." I guess it was one of those experiences that really broadens your sense of what poetry can do. So after reading that, I started trying to write about my father and things like that. That became the centerpiece of my first collection. Once that happened, I felt like I had opened a vein, and that continued on. Now I'm trying to figure out what the next book is about.

***It's interesting that you had to go to Korea in order to start writing about Mississippi; so many Mississippi writers and Southern writers have to leave before they can write about where they've been. When you were in Korea, what was that experience like for you in your writing? You also translated a number of poems.***

I got over there and I was working so much. I was teaching English as a second language at an institute, and I was teaching privately on the side,

which was illegal, but I was doing it anyway, as was everybody. Basically, you're selling your time, at \$75 to \$125 an hour. Sometimes more than that. So when I did have time to write a few hours every day, it was always a choice between writing and sleeping. And sometimes I chose sleeping, and sometimes I chose writing.

[laughter]

I got to start a lot of work, but I didn't get to finish much while I was over there. When I got back to the states, I started going back through everything and finishing it up. So it really opened that up for me. And translating and learning Korean was just a phenomenal experience.

***Did it change how you viewed language?***

Yes. When you're translating a poem, especially if it's a poem of someone who has died, that is not writing any more, and that you can't talk with while you're translating, you feel like you're rubbing this bottle until the genie starts to appear. Slowly, after a while of doing that, here is this fully-formed voice that you've ventriloquized in this process. Of course it's part you, so it's some odd hybrid of the original voice and the voice that you've infused with that voice. You just put the poem under anesthesia, and then move it into a different language, and try to wake it up, and it can sometimes make sense, and it can sometimes not make sense. Sometimes you get a Mona Lisa, and sometimes you get a Frankenstein. At any rate, you begin to look at possibilities in lyric poetry that you wouldn't have come in contact with otherwise. Partly for cultural reasons, partly for historical or chronological reasons. So it's a terrific experience.

When I got through with the Heritage program at Millsaps, professors passed out this long list of things that you have to do in life. "Life After Heritage," was the name of the list. One of those things was to go live in another country that was different from your own, try to learn another language. There was a whole list of movies we had to see. And so I literally went about trying to do those things, as did a lot of people I went to school with. We all were very, very fortunate to have been pushed in the right directions by these professors.



***Do you think that Heritage was a formulative thing for you at Millsaps?***

Oh yeah. I had a really good sense of the arc and evolution of western thought, western politics, western art, western music, and western philosophy by the time I was eighteen years old. It was a familiarization with the menu, basically. After I got out of it, I went back and started investigating individual items more. The last day of school, after my freshman year, I went to the bookstore, and I bought Walt Whitman and Don Quixote, and some Gandhi, and all the stuff that I had read sections of in the Heritage Program that I wanted to read in depth. I still have the same *Leaves of Grass* and the other books I bought, and I use them today, even though they're falling apart.

***I'm sure that your professors would be flattered to hear it. It will probably be an inspiring thing to the freshmen who are struggling through Heritage right now.***

You know, Millsaps is a strange place; it's a strange amalgam of students who are attracted there. Because it's a more expensive school, you do have a good number of well-to-do students. That was one of the first things that struck me about it; of course, I was coming from a really poor situation, and anything would have seemed well-to-do.

*I think Millsaps really has a quality that is nationally competitive. It tends to sometimes get overlooked because it's in the deep South. . .*

When I pulled up the first day at Millsaps in a '64 Plymouth Belvedere—mind you it was 1985—I had a crew cut because I just got out of basic training in the army, which I had to do to get money to go to school. There was a Mercedes-Benz to the left of me and a Cadillac to the right. So it was a culture shock. But everyone was brainy, no matter how little or much they

had, and I certainly wasn't the only one coming from a less than Donald Trump-like background. For the most part, people embraced everybody no matter what their relative economic background was like. So it was a level playing field that allowed for a kind of intellectual community that probably doesn't really exist in too many places outside of Millsaps, in Mississippi. I think Millsaps really has a quality that is nationally competitive. It tends to sometimes get overlooked because it's in the deep South and the Northeastern intellectuals have a tendency to make a lot of assumptions about people in the South that don't involve them having the best school in the country. Were it not for the fact that Millsaps was in Mississippi, it would be more highly ranked. I'm glad it is.

***It's our Achille's Heel: where Millsaps is located.***

Yeah, its strength is its weakness.

***You mentioned earlier that Millsaps is, in your opinion, the best school in Mississippi.***

I think it is one of the best colleges in the United States. I've taught at the University of Virginia, Kenyon College, Westminster. I've taught in prep schools in New England. I know what the best students are like. Millsaps is such a focused, intense place. And because it is not Kenyon or University of Virginia, it doesn't have the same ego problem. Really. That can get in the way, and you can end up with a watered down intellectual life because everybody's just so high on the fact that they're at this prestigious place. Millsaps has a little bit of that, but not nearly as much. For that reason it seems a more unfettered quality of intellect and growth and discourse.

***Do you think that part of that quality draws from the fact that Millsaps is in Mississippi, and so you're getting a lot of Southern hospitality on campus?***

There is that sense of hospitality, but I've got to tell you that when I was a freshman, I didn't really notice that because I'd grown up with it. So it didn't seem like it really stood out. I didn't start noticing stuff like that until I got to Virginia, which of course is the South but is nowhere nearly as hospitable or

at least not in the same way. People are much more kind of closed. People in Mississippi, in a lot of ways, are very open to you. They're friendly, they're kind of boisterous—

***They're not afraid to be friendly.***

That's right. So, maybe that's just because I'm from there, and I feel a degree of comfort there that I don't feel anywhere else. Just because it's home.

***Mississippians don't walk tall a lot of places. You're from Mississippi so self-deprecation is the name of the game.***

Well, a couple years ago, C.D. Wright came here to give a reading. At dinner, she said, "Oh you're from Mississippi, right?" And I said, "Yeah, that's right." And she said, "Well, you don't sound like you're from Mississippi."

[laughter]

And some people tell me that I do sound like I am. And I said, "Well, I was born there, and I'm sixth generation, seventh generation. Lived there until I was 24."

I think maybe part of it is I spent so much time on the East Coast, in the Midwest, and in Asia teaching English. For instance, when I got to Asia, and I had this accent, and the school was really trying to get me to teach them standard English, so I had to work on speaking very slowly the whole time. Then you get into academe, and if you're on the East Coast or even in the Midwest, we're not going to score a whole lot of points by having a Southern accent. I mean, they like the fact, especially if you're a writer, that you're from the South. That carries a certain gravitas with it, and mythos, but they really don't associate a Southern accent with an intellectual tradition. You tend to mute that so as to not to lose respect or so as to get a job. After all, we're put out there in a very tight academic market, and we're supposed to survive somehow.

***You mentioned earlier that it was an intellectually inclusive environment at Millsaps, and you would read the works of other students. Would you almost have an informal workshop of each others' works? Just pass them around? How did you find those students?***

Oh yeah, sure. Well, partly they congregated around the Writing Center, and also at creative writing workshops, around Austin Wilson, and Bob Whitney. And then you would have a lot of professors publishing poems in the Stylus. I think I remember that Dr. Smith published a sonnet in there, and in Heritage we had a sonnet contest. You definitely got introduced early on to the sense of the Renaissance man or the Renaissance woman, and you wanted to be one. You wanted to have your artistic side, and you wanted to have your very studious side, your athletic side, your amorous side, you wanted to be well-rounded. It was just a part of what you were encouraged to do. But I can remember taking Robert Whitney's class with a friend, and he had a short story that he had written. I read it, and I thought to myself, "If he can do this, I can do this." So I wrote the story, and I was so amazed by it. I can remember thinking, "Oh my God, I mean, I should just send it to the New Yorker now and try to prepare myself for the Pulitzer because this story is really phenomenal!"

[laughter]

Of course it was absolutely unintelligible—it was so bizarre—but the point is that I was engaged, and I was writing, and we were competitive. There was a little bit of that in the mix, and so in that way we looked at each others' writing to one-up each other. I remember the editor of the Stylus telling me, "Your line breaks. . . you're doing this thing where you're writing in all lowercase letters, and you have a long vertical poem where it all comes out in one sentence. You should go into the library and pick up a copy of *The American Poetry Review*, and look at the way different people are doing their line breaks." Hell, I didn't even know *The American Poetry Review* existed, so I went into the library, and I did what she said. I tell you what, she really helped me out. So I guess we did a lot of that for each other.

***You speak to undergrads all the time, but what would you say to undergrads at Millsaps, being that it's Millsaps? What would you say to anyone that's trying really hard to get published? Or just to be a poet or writer?***

Just keep writing. I don't know. . . it was kind of a social thing for me. It was just like all of the cool kids were published in the Stylus, and I wanted to be part of their group, you know?

[laughter]

One thing that I would say to students at Millsaps is that I think a lot of young people today find that older people are looking down and don't understand them. I am amazed by it, and I think older people tend to assume that there is a constant and widening degradation in the quality of the intellectual life in young people in America. Thomas Wolfe's *I am Charlotte Simmons* attests to this idea. Maybe we're all going down the tubes as a country. But I would have to say that every year I see more and more sophisticated work from my undergraduate students who are much more sophisticated, and much more broad in their understanding of what a poem can do than I was, even as an early graduate student. I don't know if this is because more contemporary poetry is being taught, but every year we send our best undergraduates on to some of the best writing programs, like the University of Virginia, and Johns Hopkins, and Iowa.

In college it is often easy to have this sense of the game having not started yet, that it's not quite serious yet. But I think at Millsaps a lot of us took ourselves very seriously, whether we deserved to or not, as writers. I think a lot of us knew that Adrienne Rich had won the Yale Younger Poets Prize while she was still an undergraduate at Harvard, and James Tate won the Yale Younger while he was a first year grad student at Iowa. These people weren't at the time of their publication much older than we were. You could start now.

**No reason to wait.**

No reason to wait. Now, you're coming from Mississippi, where it seems like everything is happening outside of your state. The next thing you know you're trying to assert yourself onto the national literary scene, and telling yourself that this is a real possibility and that it can actually happen. Not ten years from now, not twenty years from now, but now, it can happen. You've just got to get the right words in the right order. And that's an incredible realization. It makes you very hungry and very ambitious to join that conversation that's happening across the world right now between different writers. Across time, really, between different writers.

*(untitled)* James Kimbrell, *Stylus* 1988

but i swear it did it  
followed me home because i  
couldn't make it stop i really  
tried can i keep it can i  
please no  
don't throw it out don't  
at night just  
one night and then  
tomorrow just  
one night please i love  
it and it followed  
me home  
see there behind  
the screen no  
those scratches have  
been there since no  
i'm not scratching i  
checked it for  
fleas but  
really i can find it  
a litter box and  
a scratching post and  
it can sleep in my  
i mean outside and didn't  
you ever want a  
best friend too when  
you were little well  
then i shall run  
away with it and you  
and daddy can keep  
your Goddamn milk.



# Contributors of Artworks and Photography

*Michelle Allen* is a senior from Brandon, MS. She is double majoring in studio arts and computer science.

*Will Benton* is a senior political science major from St. Francisville, LA. Will plans to attend medical school after graduation.

*Brandi Buckler* is a sophomore classical studies major from Austin, TX. After graduation, Brandi hopes to pursue a career in the music industry and photography.

*Matthew Chouest* is a sophomore anthropology major and English minor from Lockport, LA.

*Katie Collins* is a junior English major from Cut Off, LA. After graduation, Katie plans on earning a doctorate in English literature.

*Beth Fossen* is a sophomore from Ocean Springs, MS. She is double majoring in studio art and business.

*Lesia Nixon*, from Winona, MS, is a senior majoring in English with a creative writing concentration.

*Mary Clark Rardin* is a sophomore English major with a concentration in women's & gender studies from Memphis, TN. After graduation, Mary Clark hopes to work in publishing or public relations.

*Diantha Ann Williamson* is a freshman biochemistry major. She is from Hattiesburg, MS.

*Harrison G. Wool* is a senior psychology major from Metarie, LA. After graduation, he will be working for Addiction Recovery Resources of New Orleans.



# *Publications Board*

## *Voting Members*

Dr. Priscilla Fermon, Chair

Dr. Ted Ammon

Dean Brit Katz

Stan Magee

Dr. Suzanne Marrs

Dr. Marlys Vaughn

Dr. Austin Wilson

Woody Woodrick

Anna Calhoun

Courtney Helfrich

Katie Lewaller

Chase Munro

Neha Solanski

Jordan Willett

## *Non-Voting Members*

Cartier Gwin

Katie Hamm

Catherine Schmidt

Amanda Smithers

Leah Strickland, Student Chair

The Millsaps College Publications Board delegates editorial responsibilities in an effort to help establish and maintain an atmosphere of free and responsible discussion and of intellectual exploration on the campus.

In delegating editorial responsibility to students, Millsaps College provides sufficient editorial freedom and financial autonomy for student publications to maintain their integrity of purpose as vehicles of free expression in an academic community.