



The Rubicon

Troy University Department of English
Student Literary Journal: Issue 6, Spring 2012

The Rubicon

© 2012 Troy University Department of English

Many thanks to the students of Troy University for their support and interest. We are a small, student-run publication, and your contribution makes a great difference to our work. Please help us in our efforts to bring fresh new writers into your hands twice a year.

Editorial and business correspondence should be addressed to *The Rubicon*, 501 University Ave., Troy University, 274 Smith Hall, Troy, AL 36082.

Submissions may include short stories, poems, literary essays, short plays, and non-fiction. Please include a signed *Contributor Contract* with each printed work submitted; visit *The Rubicon* online at <http://spectrum.troy.edu/rubicon> to acquire the *Contributor Contract*. No hardcopy manuscripts can be returned or mail query answered unless accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Electronic submissions and queries are accepted at litjournal@troy.edu. Manuscripts of original student work are accepted throughout the academic year, although response time will be delayed during the summer months.

Caleb Humphreys, editor-in-chief. Samantha Loff, Claire Mathis, Jessica Scott, Candace Turlington, and Nathaniel Westfall, editorial staff. Dr. Ben Robertson, faculty advisor. Wendy Broyles, publication support. If you have any questions or need any assistance, please contact the editorial staff at litjournal@troy.edu.

<http://spectrum.troy.edu/rubicon>

The Rubicon is published twice annually by Troy University.
ISSN 2153-6279 (print) / ISSN 2159-1733 (online)



The Rubicon

Troy University Department of English
Student Literary Journal: Issue 6, Spring 2012

Table of Contents

1	<i>Poetry</i>	1
	Marrying Libraries <i>by Bridgette Temmis</i>	1
	Structurally Sound <i>by Candace Turlington</i>	2
	Fairy Tales of Hope <i>by Kellie Detter</i>	3
	Pretty Brain <i>by Ryan Spires</i>	4
	Shadows <i>by Nathaniel Westfall</i>	4
	What Keeps Your Attention? <i>by Samantha Loff</i>	5
	Greed <i>by Phillip Pinyan</i>	5
	Dancing Alone <i>by Sarah Looney</i>	6
2	<i>Prose</i>	7
	Sumatran <i>by Emily D. Wood</i>	7
	Cave Tenebrarum <i>by Nathaniel Westfall</i>	9
	Hour of Silence <i>by Phillip Pinyan</i>	11
	Pieces of Me <i>by Sara Mixson</i>	12
	A New Phoenix <i>by Liz Shaver</i>	15
3	<i>Faculty Spotlight</i>	17
	Bear Mountain Bear <i>by Prof. Jason O'Neal Griggs</i>	17
	No Forcing the Sea <i>by Prof. Jason O'Neal Griggs</i>	18
	To Be a Man <i>by Prof. Jason O'Neal Griggs</i>	18
	<i>Artwork</i>	
	For You, I'll Wait <i>by Samantha Pinter</i>	cover
	Edgar Allan Poe <i>by Melanie Deacon</i>	iii

1

Poetry

Marrying Libraries

by Bridgette Temmis

Is it vain that I want him to be the same?
Yes. Like me.
What if we were measured by knowledge?
I peek at his book shelf.

Mine, so subjective.
Slow blossoming,
but, that is for another verse.

Gently, pry at the layers.
Chameleon,
books that I wonder if he
read -- truly read.
I want to read them, too.

as I do, I inhale
worn pages, stale ink, him.

pretending to intend to return
I only take.

as I do, I inhale
worn pages, stale ink, him.

some pages adorned with
faded neon highlights
or words underlined in pen.
anticipation of what caught his
concentration as I turn each page.

Mmmm..

He's so profound.

I wish to honor
his gift of a book
with a gift of a book.
But look, a Nook?

Damn technology!
Kindles, Tablets,
i-This and i-That
displaying screens of
the more tangible, but
less intimate
brain food.

The thought of marrying libraries
with expansion
was so stimulating.
to acquire more, peruse more,
read -- truly read.

as I do, I inhale
worn pages, stale ink, him.

Expansion
has been
technically
compromised.

Structurally Sound

by Candace Turlington

The gears don't quite match anymore
They slip and sputter
Catching and grinding
Seemingly useless pieces
Fragmenting
Ricocheting off the backs of
Seemingly useless eyes
For all appearances dull and

Vacant

The supporting beams are
Failing, lapsing
Forgetting their places

The wires are shorting out
Sending fewer synapses
Slower
Agonizing
And without meaning

Blonde curls and curious sky blue orbs
They couldn't inspire more love
But where has the reaction gone?

And the walls are falling down now
The blood thickening
Molasses
Leaking slowly out of accidental exits
The heart is imploding in slow motion
Collapsing around the numbness

And still the gears turn

Fairy Tales of Hope

by Kellie Detter

When I was young, fairy tales filled my mind.
I dreamt of my prince coming to take me away.
And if my heart cried out,
Love would save me.

But by growing up, every fairy tale became cursed.
There was no prince.
Stars denied my wishes.
And dreams that I dared to dream, never came true.
Hopes faded, as I became jaded.

Life grew dark.
Life was killing the dream.
But I needed to somehow keep those precious tales alive.
With each shattered dream I grew stronger,
finding myself returning to those tales, believing what I always knew.
That someday a wish upon a star would come true.

It wasn't until I heard those voices again,
of love and hope,
Snow White and Cinderella, singing to me familiar songs,
Where I could begin to dream again and live again.
Hope was alive because of those stories.

If you're told something enough times you'll start to believe.
And I did with all my heart, and still do today.
Even though everyone tells me,
"That only happens in fairy tales."
The little innocent girl within refuses to let those tales go.

Pretty Brain

by Ryan Spires

From Prufrock to the particular,
Legitimate personalities not reciprocal.
A chasm causing concrete centrifugal,
Attraction of the intricate.
A Hurricane approached a field of idle artists,
And the Watchtower's head did turn.

Childish traditions retire, they haunt me like
Soundless booming vibrations revitalized zealously.
Bored breaded beings and benevolence,
Intricacy of the attractive.
I am the hollow man with the Watchtower's eye,
And Pretty Brain's head did turn.

The rest are just raindrops of unclear substance,
Eternally withering whimsical wasted aspirations.

Shadows

by Nathaniel Westfall

Where the darkness is so vast, from where every light has passed
So only Nightmares here can last borne of legend and of lore -
No mortal is admitted, for no pure soul is fitted
'Gainst the evil, bared and gritted, fest'ring like an open sore.

Nightmares here are made, where man's deepest fears are laid
For each spectre and each shade to scare mortals to the core.
Ne'er caring for the morrow and bringing only sorrow
These geists seek us to borrow our hope, that we hope no more.

Alas! It chills me to the bone, when, at night, I am alone,
Knowing that light once shone out from where the shadows pour.
The vile black bell is ringing, I hear His children singing
And see His monsters mingling, waiting on the other shore.

What Keeps Your Attention?

by Samantha Loff

What keeps your attention?
Not the flowers, not the company.
The wheels on your chair?
Don't worry; they're locked.
Focus on the fresh air --
it's so stuffy inside.
Cancerous...cozy.
You ask for him again.
So I change the subject.
Don't worry; he'll come along soon.
Just like that cloud. See?
Fleeting. And huge.
Gwen turns to leave,
so I unlock your wheels
and follow suit.
Nope, watch your fingers --
I've got it.
"Such a pretty day," you say.
"Milton?"

Greed

by Phillip Pinyan

Going man, going mad, mad for the money;
Mad rush to the top—hard fall to the bottom.
We look up to see those with all the world;
They look down on us—the Everymen.
Dying mad, dying mad—they die,
Yet the greed does not.

Dancing Alone

by Sarah Looney

You move and smile
A pencil sketch walking away
I feel my loss of you
Coming in slow pulses
Flashes of memory
A menagerie of images
Transparent but full of feeling
The sound of your silence
Rings off the picture frames
Where our smiling faces
Once showed us happy

That image of you
Silhouetted in rhythmic outlines
Somewhere a soundtrack
Underscores your movement up the hill
Muffled music
Like a small, wonderful secret
Hidden in someone's hands
Too faint to hear distinctly
A teasing melody
I almost put a name to

The image shifts
The fantasy belies
Reality reminds
That we are no more
What's left is some memory
Proof of having been
Your indent in the bed
Those clothes in the closet
A shelf of books to be reclaimed
Summer shoes in a forgotten corner
Childhood leftovers in a cardboard box

A half life preserved
Re-wrapped like a gift
That disappoints
Long anticipated but unable to satisfy
The music plays in a minor key
Dissonant and mysterious
Invoking the reasons
My pride kept me still
I did not dance to your rhythm
But swayed to the sounds of
What I knew to be familiar
And now I dance alone

2 Prose

Sumatran¹

by Emily D. Wood

I peer out through the fan-like leaves, crouching low to avoid detection. If these creatures could really see, they'd notice the large amber eyes split with black crescents monitoring their every movement. A tree bearing the unmistakable territory markings of my mate² slams to the ground, startling me out of my concentration. These creatures are formidable in skill. Never have I seen anything take down a whole tree. As I study their movements, I feel a roar deep within my soul; part instinct, but mostly hunger. Since these two-legs moved into the territory, my food source has dwindled. Now I sit, and I watch. Perhaps these things will serve as a replacement for the now-absent prey. Hunting flows through my veins. My senses are sharp, and a displeasing smell like none other surrounds me. Accompanying the smell is the roar of some animal I have never heard or seen before. Round legs? Seeming slaves of the two-legs. My instincts tell me to get out of here and get back to the safety of my den. I cannot hunt here today.

Back in the safety of the den, I look around the cave. I am unsure. My instincts are not giving me information about the two-leg creatures. I cannot afford to succumb to malnutrition. The den provides little comfort now as I lie on the cool, moss-covered stone. My ancestors chose this location at the heart of the jungle next to the stream. The gurgling flow provides a constant supply of water, the occasional fish, and always a relaxing whisper of water flowing over the rocks. I watch as my cubs splash in the water. The memory of the two-legs interrupts my tranquil thoughts.

My cubs and I will die if the food supply continues to diminish. Sure, I have been hungry before, but that is the way of the jungle. I survive in harmony as great Nature gives and withholds. Nature has not brought this fresh hell upon my kind. Nature would never deplete the food supply so harshly. It seems as though great Nature herself is being attacked by the two-legs. My cubs and I are in need of a replacement for prey. We live to hunt. These creatures will have to suffice as a food source.

I set out to stalk the two-legs. I am startled by the sudden presence of a clearing where once a part of the jungle forest stood. I keep close watch, but no move is to be made just yet. As with all prey, I must wait until someone strays from the herd. One of them will surely take on the task of marking his territory. These animals do not seem swift

on their feet. Their movement is nothing like the deer or pigs I usually hunt. I see that the two-legs are taking the trees away again on the backs of the strange animals. I suspect they will return in the morning hours since these creatures seem to maintain habitual routines. I will rest until then.

Daksa starts the fire so as to burn a bit of the small stuff not worth carrying on the truck and so the men can heat up a bit of food. Deep down, he has decided that being here is wrong. He was told they would only take a few trees. Harmless. They would take the trees, and no one would get hurt. He only agreed because he needed the money. And he believed them. The boss had assured the whole crew that the habitat would remain intact. Looking around, he realizes he has been lied to. He has decided that this will be his last day working for this company. Also, he is certain what they are doing is illegal. Never having had much education, he had no idea what he was getting into, just that he needed to feed his family. Now, he knows this is wrong. He has seen no logging permits. Daksa whips his head in the direction of a horrifying sound in the distance. A man is screaming.

The lush greenery accepts me with open arms. I am part of this jungle. We know and protect each other. I am patient as I sneak my way to the edge of the clearing that seems to steadily grow larger. As dawn breaks, the two-legs arrive in the clearing astride—no, inside—these odd animals they use as transportation. It is unlike anything I have ever seen. Now I sit, wait, and listen to the sound of trees falling to the ground. This is what I am built to do. Hunt, stalk, attack. I can be extremely patient.

I will stalk them until one goes off alone to mark his territory. That will be the time to strike. Leave your herd, leave your protection. The two-legs have created something new. I recognize the colors as they are the same ones that cover my body. The creatures gather around this tiger-colored thing as though worship is the intention. Then I see movement. One of them steps out of the group and begins to walk directly into the path where I am hidden. My senses are keen and alert. I creep closer for a better angle. The two-leg unknowingly walks into the vegetation. One wrong step would have him walk right over me. As the creature turns his back to urine-mark his territory, I take him into careful consideration. I pounce rendering him helpless with one powerful bite to his neck. Orange, black, and amber collide with brown flesh. My warrior's teeth-knives pierce deep and mortally. This two-leg has but a short time, but manages to release a high-pitched roar unlike anything heard in this jungle before. I quickly take only part of the meal. I bite off pieces and carefully drag them back to my den. At least my cubs will have a meal this week.

1 Sumatran: Tiger species from Indonesian island of Sumatra who have become endangered due to illegal logging.

2 Female Sumatran Tigers are not particularly territorial. The male would have made the marks on the tree to mark his territory.

Cave Tenebrarum

by Nathaniel Westfall

“Deep into that darkness peering
Long I stood there
Wondering...
Doubting...
Fearing...”

I was told since I was young that the shadows are nothing to fear – there is no evil, there are no monsters. I did not believe them then, and I sure as Hell do not believe them now.

The mysterious has always interested me – legends, superstitions. Always playing the skeptic, I tried not to believe. It was incontrovertible to me: these things must exist. I met the proof that turned me from skeptic into cowering believer on a lonely night in October.

I was not a native of Britain, but with my connections and agile language skills, friends and colleagues frequently sought me in my London flat. It was late, and since the weather was terribly wet and cold, I knew the frantic knocking at my door was urgent. I let my colleague into my apartment, took his coat, and made him a cup of tea.

He was normally a very genial and warm person, but this night he seemed as bleak as the weather. His face was ashen, and he shook as he waited for his cup. He slowly drank his tea and braced himself as he told me about his recent whereabouts. He had just come from a rare book collector’s estate auction. The elderly eccentric had collected volumes as old as writing itself, and, of course, we were all interested in his collection. My friend told me of one particularly old, leather-bound volume – it appeared to be bound in human flesh, with tiny bones sewn into the binding for support (presumably small human bones). LIBER TENEBRARUM was burned into the thick cover.

My eyes slowly lit as he described the tome to me. He asked if I had heard of this particular book. I told him it was rumored that such a book existed, written by Lucifer himself, made from the flesh of his worshipers. I doubted the book’s authenticity, but I certainly wanted to see for myself. I told him to arrange for me to visit the estate the very next evening.

The next evening brought no relief in the nasty clime, so I donned my overcoat and set out to the old collector’s home. It was a brisk twenty minute walk from my own flat, but I figured the fresh air would do me good. I arrived a quarter past nine. The housekeeper expected me, much to my delight. She showed me to the lower library, explaining as we went that there were four libraries, two on the main level (which contained mostly reference materials), one on the second floor (which contained mostly personal favorites, non-collectible), and one on the lower floor (which contained the most prized of his collection).

The room was colder, not just from being underground, and seemed to sap all warmth from the basement. Despite the temperature, the basement was dry, which kept the books in pristine condition. The room was also unnaturally dark, even though

there seemed to be plenty of lighting – too much lighting, in fact. It seemed that the housekeeper tried to battle the eerie darkness. The book of interest rested in the center of the room, flanked by five large heavy shelves.

I bid the housekeeper leave me with the tome, and as she left, she crossed herself visibly. I approached the large volume. It was huge – must have been over ten thousand pages. In addition to its girth, the book boasted a width and length each over a meter. It did indeed appear to be made of human skin and bones. It appeared to be watching me, mocking me, beckoning me to open and read its contents. I did as it willed.

I read the opening line (I will not pen the words here, lest you fall to my own fate). Immediately the room spun and shook. Shadows climbed from the very book and began to overtake each light, one by one, until the room was clouded and hidden by dull, black, vile light. I heard a faint ringing, as if from a hollow, broken, iron bell. I felt true terror then.

I saw ravens, or, at least, ravens' wings. I saw horns and fiery eyes, and sharp fangs. I heard hissing and growling. I knew this book had been written by the Master of Shadows. I watched the hungry, glowing red eyes come closer. They were accompanied by sharp, grinning teeth and horns and wings and tentacles. The vileness of the creature sickened me, but I was scared to my core, unable to move. It was almost upon me – I could smell the reek of sulphur from its breath; I could hear its hideous heart beating; I could feel the claws and tentacles as they wrapped themselves around me. Then, it was over. I stood in front of an old book, bathed in excessive light. The housekeeper was standing at the top of the stairs, whispering that I should not have read from HIS book.

It has almost been a year since that encounter. I bought the book, attempting every way known to man to destroy it. Nothing so much as left a mark. Still, I see him in the shadows, I hear him whisper his name to me, a reminder of his coming. I gave up trying to defeat the book long ago and decided tonight to read more and wait for him to take me.

The apartment is lit up with candles and lights, but it will not stop him. He cannot be stopped once he is loosed upon you. I warn you: Beware the Shadows. Do not ignore the dangers that dwell deep within. Hastur calls the shadows his home, he calls you his meal. I see him now. He is waiting for me. He calls for me.

I was told since I was young that the shadows are nothing to fear – there is no evil, there are no monsters. I did not believe them then, and I sure as Hell do not believe them now.

Hour of Silence

by Phillip Pinyan

Christmas, the season of giving. War, the season of taking away.

I am caught in this dichotomy. In my hometown of Yorkshire, the Christmas bells will be ringing, children laughing in the streets. Here, in the Western Front of France, the sound of gunfire and artillery ring, hearkening in the dreadful sound of agony and death.

I don't know how many of them we've killed; I don't know how many of us they've killed. I know I should keep fighting, keep firing, keep felling them, but I can't. My body will not let me anymore. Not here, not now.

At home, they will be shooting fireworks; here, we are shooting each other.

"They're dogs!" I hear. "Bag as many as y'can!"

That no longer sounds right. When I peer out of this trench, I see distant eyes. Not the eyes of animals. The eyes of men.

When I look around my trench, I see death. The snow is mixed with muddy slush and blood. The blood of men. Does their trench look the same?

This season is the season God sent the babe to save us. It's the season of joy, of happiness, of peace. I cannot feel peace. I'm not killing monsters; I'm killing men.

Didn't God create them too? Those eyes across the field, they have faces, they have bodies, they have souls. Just like me.

At home, they're singing carols. Here, we sing dirges.

Yet, now the only sound I hear is the snow falling. No guns, no cannons... death. My trench is full of men looking over the ledge, their guns left forgotten on the ground. I look over the field and see the same.

Then, one man climbs out of his trench and walks toward ours. Two more follow him, and I see four or five men climb out of my trench. They walk toward the middle of the field. They are not meeting to fight—this is something different. I climb out as well. A man walks towards me from across the field.

We lock eyes; his are red, mine are blurry. We meet at the middle of the field, and, as if there was no other thing to do, we clasp hands and embrace. In this moment, we are men—we are brothers.

For the rest of the night, the two sides meet in the middle of the battlefield and share a Christmas. We bury their dead, and they bury ours. We gather for a moment of silence. In that moment, no Christmas bells tolled, yet neither did the sound of death. All was silent. We are soldiers, but we are also men. We are brothers.

Pieces of Me

by Sara Mixson

It's winter, 1937. Coldest day of the year. Last night was a real bark buster. Got down to 10 degrees. That just don't happen much in South Alabama. Sure do dread that walk to the highway to catch the bus to work. Ground's froze so hard sounds like you're walking on broken glass with every step. Bundled up best I can but that wind cuts right to the bone. Whew, there it comes. Running a little late this morning. Musta had a hard time cranking. Bus might be cold, but at least its outta the wind. Sammy came over to the house yesterday evening and asked me to marry him. Just thinking about him makes me warmer. We'll have a wedding at the house in the spring when the flowers are blooming. He'll be so handsome in his suit. I'll make myself a new dress and Momma one too. Oh, wake up, Kate, there's the sewing factory. Can't go on daydreaming!

Inside, the factory is warm and loud. Smells like a mixture of machine oil, starch, and sweat. There's my station down the second aisle on the left. That presser will thaw me out quick. There's already three carts full of shirts waiting on me. Based on the humming and whirring of the machines, I'll have several more today. What in the world is Maydene in such a run for? She's plum outta breath. "Kate, the truant officer is down stairs heading up here! You gotta go!" Lord have mercy! I don't have time to be hiding from that man today. Maydene rushes me to the bathroom, and I climb up on the toilet in one of the stalls. She closes the door and locks it behind her and climbs up, too. She whispers, "Ms. Clark will come get us when he's good and gone." I can't afford to lose this job and go back to school. There ain't no way to get food on the table at school. There's too many mouths to feed at the house and food's a little hard to come by these days. Every able bodied soul that is blessed enough to have a job, better pray that they can keep it. While we wait, I tell Maydene about me and Sammy. She grins so big and I'm afraid she's gonna squeal, so I cover up her mouth. The bathroom door swings open and the sound of heavy foot steps come across the floor. Can't hardly hear the footsteps for my heart pounding. We huddle together and close our eyes like that can make us invisible in some way. We both breathe again when the door closes shut. Won't be long 'til Ms. Clark comes to get us. I'm ready to get back to those shirts. Sure enough, in about ten minutes we hear Ms. Clark's sweet voice telling us it's safe to come out. I sure am glad that she understands that we need to work much more than we need to go to school. I believe I've learned enough in school. Can't stand to be idle. Momma always told me that 'idle hands are the Devil's workshop'. Can't have none of that! Half way through my cart of shirts, the whistle blows for dinner. Got a little bread and some sardines from a can that Momma opened up last night. I chuckle when I see them in that smelly oil. "Eatin' guts, feathers and all," Momma always teases when we have sardines.

Finished nine carts today. Three of shirts and six of pants. Woulda done more if it wasn't for that meddling truant officer. Oh well, it'll be a while before he's back again I guess. The sun pierces my eyes when I open the big white door to go home. The smell of fresh air is always welcome, so I take in a deep breath. That's one thing about the factory; you can't tell whether its sunshine or rain outside. It's kinda like

getting a surprise every day at quitting time. Not many surprises to be had these days, so I guess I'll take what I can get. That sure was a big one yesterday though. Who woulda thought that on one of Sammy's Sunday evening visits he'd just up and ask me to marry him. Don't think Momma and Mr. Brown were too excited since he's been married before. That wife died having a baby. She lost the baby too. There's still a little sadness in his eyes. Maybe that's why I love him so much. He seems a little lost...like he needs me. On the way home on the bus, I think about that pretty bolt of material that I saw in the store the other day. White with tiny pink roses with green leaves. I could make me a pretty dress outta that. We'll have to wait and see how long the money holds out. May just wear my Sunday dress. Don't really make much difference I guess. Momma and Mr. Brown are talking about moving to Baker, closer to his folks. There's a store down there that he can run. It'd be better money for them. Long way from Dozier where Sammy lives, though. Sure will miss Voncile. Well, home again. Supper to be fixed and it won't be long before I start this all over again tomorrow.

Sun raises me up this morning. Glad the springtime wakes up the birds so early. Makes it easier to get moving when they are so cheery. Today's the day. Had to be on Sunday cause the preacher only comes out here every other week on Sundays. He's coming out to the house after church, and we'll all eat dinner. Momma fried a chicken, and we made some biscuits. Churned some fresh butter yesterday evening, and Sammy brought us some honey he robbed from his bees Friday. I get on my Sunday dress and help Voncile tie her ribbon. She cries a little, and I hug her up. I say, "Now listen here. You gotta straighten up. We alright. We are sisters and nothing can keep us apart too long." I wipe her eyes with my handkerchief and turn her around and pat her tail, and we run off giggling like children. Momma's got them all packed up, and I got my trunk together. This afternoon we'll all hit the highway. They'll turn left and head south, and I'll turn right and head north as Mrs. Katie Lou Watley! Bittersweet.

The bus ride is longer from Dozier for sure. I've passed the road that turns to go to the old house every day for a year and a half now without seeing the ones that used to live there. I get letters from Voncile from time to time, and they are all doing good. Jim and Newton have moved off, and she's found her a beau. Mr. Brown's running the store, and Momma's planting and cooking and sewing like she always does. I sure do miss them. They say they're coming in December when the baby comes. That sure is a cold month for a baby to come. Sammy's gathering extra wood when he can get it. Be glad to see Momma. I don't know what to do with baby. She'll probably laugh at me learning like she did when she taught me to make my first biscuits. Sammy's working odd jobs, and I'm still at the Alatex. Sewing cuffs and collars and hemming trousers now. That presser was getting a little heavy for me. Feels better to sit for ten hours with this belly than stand over that thing. When I get home in the evenings after supper, I sew up some flour sacks for the baby. Voncile said Momma made some outta some White Lilly sacks with flowers on them in case it's a girl. We'll see soon enough. December's here in a few days.

Norma Jean. Funniest little freckle faced girl I've ever seen. Gotta be in the middle of everything! Wonder what she'll do with another little one. She'll be two tomorrow, and this one will be here anytime now. Dropped her off with Mrs. Watley on the way to work. No telling what her and Mr. Watley will get into today. Somebody

came around a while ago and said that the Japs bombed Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. Damn them! Our boys were minding their own business, and now look how many families lost their daddies. Don't know what Norma Jean'd do if her daddy was gone. Worry herself to death I imagine. Get back to work, Kate. Ain't got time to think about such foolishness. You got pants to sew! I get off the bus at Mr. and Mrs. Watley's and walk across the front yard. It's almost dark, but I still hear the hammers and saws. They've been working on that sleeping porch for three weeks now and Mrs. Watley has told them it'll be done before Christmas, so they get the lamps out and work 'til we can get supper done. Sammy and his brothers Darrell and Joe are fired up when they sit down to eat. Mrs. Watley and I fix our plates and one for Norma Jean and eat it in the kitchen. Guess they've been studying this whole Pearl Harbor thing over a bottle of booze or two today. Wish they wouldn't act like that around Norma Jean and get her all stirred up. I have a hard enough time getting her to sleep anyway and I have to leave way before daylight to get to the factory. What are they gonna do about it anyway? Foolish!

Two weeks flew by with a whirlwind of talk about us going to war and all, and now here I am with another baby. Another girl. Jeanette. Norma Jean's good with her, but I can tell she's a little jealous. Sammy's still talking foolish talk about joining the army. What am I gonna do with two little girls by myself? The more he drinks, the braver he gets and he's ready to take on the Japs all by himself! Six months pass, and the next thing I know, we are taking Sammy to catch the bus to go to boot camp. Lord have mercy, that man has lost his senses! Norma Jean is crying and clinging to her daddy's leg. He picks her up and points up to the sky where the moon is just peeking its head above the horizon, and I hear him tell her that if she'll look at the moon every night and say 'I see the moon and the moon sees me. God bless the moon and God bless me.' He'll do the same thing, and they'll be closer. He wipes her little eyes and kisses her chubby freckled cheeks and stands her beside me. He lifts up my face and kisses me softly. I can't cry! I won't cry! I can't do this! Please don't go! I want to say so much, but the words won't come out. Better that they don't. He climbs onto the bus and turns and gives me that silly half grin that gets me every time. The door closes, and the sound of the air brakes makes Norma Jean jump and squeeze my hand. With a puff of exhaust, he's gone and I don't know when I'll see him again.

Life goes on. Jeanette is nearly two now, so I think that my body should be back to normal but this knot in my left breast that I have been blaming on her for the longest is getting bigger. The other day I took the day off work to go to the doctor in town. He kinda looked at me real funny like and went out of the room. He came back with a piece of paper with a name of a doctor and an address. Montgomery! No way! I can't go running off to no doctor in Montgomery! I have two little girls to take care of! "If you want to live to take care of those girls and see Sammy come home, you better go," he warns. Something about the way that he furrows his brow sends a jolt of panic through me. I thank him kindly and walk out of his office onto the street in a daze. Instead of heading straight for the bus stop, I go around the corner to the park and find me a big ole oak tree. I sit down beneath it and begin to cry. Tears shower down my face and onto the front of my dress. I can't go home anyway cause they all think I'm at work. So I cry some more. Where are all these tears coming from? Suddenly, I realize that it's getting late, so I stand up. I steady myself with the tree and begin to

feel the strangest thing. There are no more tears to cry. No more weakness or doubt. I walk to the bus stop and climb on for my trip home. I cook supper, clean the dishes away and get the girls in bed just like I always do. I'm a little surprised by all of this because I don't feel like myself at all. It's almost like I'm watching me do these things from the inside out. Two days later, I watch myself kiss my girls and leave them with the Watleys. Part of me is thousands of miles across the ocean, part of me is standing in front of the little white house with the sleeping porch, and part of me is on a northbound bus. My only hope is that those three pieces come together again.

A couple of weeks later, I return to Dozier with less of my physical self than I left with. The doctor said I would be fine but gave me no real explanation of the whole thing. Just knew it had to be done I suppose. It sure was good to see those girls standing at the bus stop waiting for their momma. As we walk to the house, I laugh as they tell me of all of their adventures while I was gone. When we walk up the steps and open the screen door to the porch, Mrs. Watley hands me an envelope addressed to me. She has a look of anticipation on her face like none I've ever seen. Like she has had this letter for the longest time waiting for me to return to open it. It's Sammy's handwriting so I know he's ok. I read the first few lines asking about the girls and me. About halfway down the page, I read the line, 'Oh, I almost forgot to mention to you that I'm on my way HOME!' I have never seen sweeter words in my life! I call in the girls and tell them the news, and oh the manner of squealing and giggling and dancing around! Finally! I'll be whole again!

A New Phoenix

by Liz Shaver

Outside the minuscule window, the oak trees sway willfully across the murky, pale sky. The steady hum of the computers floats through the air like a daffodil borne on a morning breeze. Above, the fluorescent light bulbs flicker sporadically. The ceiling fan whirrs incessantly, singing soft notes of rhythmic pleasure—a welcome, familiar sound; the busy office is our sanctuary.

I patiently sit, ready for my time. Stacked between each other, we anxiously wait for that moment when we will be called upon. Straight, smooth, flat. I am perfect. Not a blotch or smear can be found on my leaves. Each of us eagerly waits to see if the day will bring us to the top of the stack. A release of pressure, and we know that each of us has moved one notch.

Soon it will be my turn...

We have heard tales speak of the Moment when each ream is offered a chance to prove himself worthy of his plastic. The wrapping fits perfectly against me, smoothly separating me from the rest of them.

A new day dawns, and I find I am closer to the top. I am so close. I can smell the bitter scent of coffee as it lingers in the morning sunshine. I feel lighter today. More

were called away in the evening, and today will be my day. Below, I can see the other reams, patiently waiting, but I know they too are eager.

The hours tick by like days. Another release of pressure, and a weight lifts off me. Another release. So close. Doors slam. Shoes squeak. Heels click. Ceiling fans whirr. Light bulbs flicker, flicker, flicker...

Another release and I am on top! My Moment has dawned! I proudly suggest to my lowly comrades that their time too will come. And then, a hand. A lift. Euphoria. Fireworks. The printer tray. My world is complete. I exist. My Moment has come. And then—

Wait! Something is wrong. Sheet after sheet is pulled through, but the ink runs all over the pages, smearing my beautiful and crisp leaves through the cursed printer. Like a deranged madman, the printer howls incessantly, destroying my very existence with each chaotic jerk until I find myself in a stack of discolored, forgotten paper.

Mortified and humiliated, I sit in an inked-over, disheveled heap. Helpless. Disgraced. An image of dishonor, fit for nothing. What will my destiny bring me? Where will I find myself? I look back at the shelf, and the image of my shattered innocence hangs before my eyes. Another beautiful, clean stack of paper is chosen to take my place. Another victim is given over for the sacrifice.

I wait restlessly for the moment that is to decide my final fate, and suddenly, as with the final blow of defeat, I see it underneath me—the shredder!

My heart shatters against the cold plastic, like a kitten aboard a waylaid sailboat in the world's largest bathtub. I find myself at the closing stage of life. The curtain has fallen, and I am undone.

And so I wait for a Moment never spoken of by reams, never told to the rookies eagerly waiting on the shelf. Without hope and without promise, crushed under the weight of broken dreams. The evening wears on with no sign of my doom's commencement. The nightly cleaning crew walks through the doors and begins shuffling, dusting, wiping, vacuuming. I sit like a forlorn child, sure that these are the demons sent to condemn me to my fate. A firm hand takes hold of me, and I wince fearfully at the sudden pressure. The plastic below looms like a hungry gargoyle, jaws open to receive the sacrifice. The time has come...

But wait—

I am tossed haphazardly into a green basket. The arrows point to a new destiny. The symbol is a welcome sight; a faint memory stirs in the back of my mind. This symbol I have seen before. It is like an old, familiar, comfortable scent. Yes, this is where it all began, I recollect. This is where I first came to be. The green arrows are pointing to a purpose, a future. At the bottom of my green basket are other sheets, crumpled, torn, inked, and wrinkled. Yet, for us unfit specimens, salvation has come. A new calling has dawned. I rest contentedly with all the other misshapen leaves, sure of a second chance, and listen to the soft murmur of the ceiling fan's song.

3

Faculty Spotlight

Jason O'Neal Griggs received his B.A. in English and Psychology from the University of South Alabama, where he went on to receive an M.A. in Literature. He is currently an English instructor at Troy University's Dothan campus. Professor Griggs enjoys teaching creative writing, Southern literature, and grit lit. He has been teaching for nearly thirteen years, five of which he spent teaching ESL in Japan. He experiences coulrophobia, or fear of clowns. In fact, he would rather experience a zombie apocalypse than a clown apocalypse.

Bear Mountain Bear

by Prof. Jason O'Neal Griggs

Bear Mountain Bear,
bear the weight
of my need for
paper products and
fluorescent Post-it notes;
I need the trees more
than you.

You can adjust.
You can evolve.

I hear Tampa
has a nice zoo
this time of year.
Sorry Bear,
don't blame me;
I need my Xeroxes,
newspapers,
and notebooks
just like
everybody else.

Evolve.
Adjust.

Bear with me
here Bear.
We need new
suburbia subdivided
condo complex houses.

Wood.
Wood.

Would you mind Bear?
Bear in mind it's
nothing personal Bear.
Bear with me again.
Would you mind
if I tear your world apart?

Would you mind?
Would you bear?

No Forcing the Sea

by Prof. Jason O'Neal Griggs

Try as you might,
Huff and puff,
pray to whatever god's
accepting collect calls—
There's no forcing the sea.

If you cannot catch fish,
do not blame the sea.
She gives; she takes;
then she takes a little more.

A smooth sea
never a skilled mariner made,
but a rough one's
sent a many to the sharks.

Flat earth fools,
Here there be dragons;
Only those born to hang
Are not afraid of the sea.

No matter how treacherous
the sea, humankind will
always be more so.
Where there is a sea there are pirates;

Better poor on land than rich at sea.
Call on God,
But row away from the rocks.¹
There is no forcing the sea.

To Be a Man

by Prof. Jason O'Neal Griggs

I don't need

a shotgun to kill my lunch or for personal safety
to try to bed every woman 18 to 80, blind, crippled, or crazy
a new sports- 4-wheel drive-convertible-SUV
to eat at Hooters or hoot at strippers
to put a little meat on my bones by eating double-fat, double cheese, cheese burgers
to "keep it real" by acting like a real child
to make or laugh at sexist, racist, or fart jokes
to scratch myself in public or bust a sag
to be frightened of malls, fear fashion, or fawn over power tools
to shun commitment, hide affection from those I love, or hold back tears in sad movies
to like football more than Faulkner or Nascar more than Nabokov

to be a man.

¹ Hunter S. Thompson

Index of Contributors

D

Deacon, Melanie *iii*

Detter, Kellie *3*

G

Griggs, Jason O'Neal *17, 18*

L

Loff, Samantha *5*

Looney, Sarah *6*

M

Mixson, Sara *12*

P

Pinter, Samantha *cover*

Pinyan, Phillip *5, 11*

S

Shaver, Liz *15*

Spires, Ryan *4*

T

Temmis, Bridgette *1*

Turlington, Candace *2*

W

Westfall, Nathaniel *4, 9*

Wood, Emily D. *7*



<http://spectrum.troy.edu/rubicon>

274 Smith Hall | Troy, Alabama 36082 | (334) 670-3286 | litjournal@troy.edu

ISSN 2153-6279 (print) | ISSN 2159-1733 (online)