



the **W**  
2014

Watershed

# **Watershed 2014**

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baker university's literature and arts magazine

# **Production**

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with special thanks to  
baker university's humanities department

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Between my finger and my thumb  
the squat pen rests.  
I’ll dig with it.

Seamus Heaney, from “Digging”

Ars Poetica

sydney johnston • poetry

Poems are like salad, tossed and lightly dressed, stuffed with your choice of ingredients. Some prefer a heavy poem, thick with lengthy words and plump stanzas, dripping with dashes and commas and colons. Overwhelmed. Others like the dressing on the side--plain language, no punctuation. I prefer mine chopped. Crisp line breaks and lines sliced thin by periods. The secret is in the filling. Much like a salad fraught with too many vegetables, taste is sacrificed for flash. Simplicity is the key. A poem should contain rich words complemented by clean punctuation and no superfluous fluff for the sake of wordplay. Hiding behind SAT words is for pretend poets; people who believe complexity and abstract thoughts prove poetic brilliance and those who can’t decipher their lines, well, they obviously have no grasp on art. But sometimes, a poem is just about salads.

Monarch

melinda hipple • poetry

She hangs weary at the browning edge  
of the echinacea garden, her proboscis  
curled in place, too tired to eat.  
She has been battered by wind, scarred  
by one narrow escape after another.  
My hands—scarred and darkening—  
steady the lens, pause  
as I look for her best side.  
She has no best side.  
Glamor shots become documentary.  
I wonder how old I would be  
in butterfly years.

Coffee Filter

jordan miller • poetry

A lovely lily until I filtered your polluted rain

# Hot Fudge Sundae

jackie albin • creative nonfiction

# Can Opener

hayley seibel • poetry

you and your wheel of teeth carve a path to my sweet sugar-glazed peaches.

# What She Could Do

rachel haley • poetry

On warm summer evenings, my father loved to take my sister and me to the Dairy Queen on Barclay Avenue. It was a special treat for the three of us. The delayed bedtime. The cold, sweet ice cream glistening in plastic chalices. Catalog-worthy photos of creamy concoctions reflected in a dozen childlike eyes, anchoring our feet to the unkempt tile floor. But my attention was captured by a gleaming silver canister with a thin delicate faucet. Rich hot fudge was hidden within this thick vat, simply because allowing such splendor to flow freely would surely have resulted in a chaotic frenzy of chocoholic greed. Rather, it had to be rationed among the masses, like a rare batch of medicine. One well-proportioned spoonful of delicate soft-serve and thick hot fudge kissed the soul of the recipient. As I listened to the mundane requests for cones and fries, I realized I alone understood the depth of power that this delicacy held. I briefly contemplated shouting the good news. Everyone must be made aware of my discovery. *But no.* I held my tongue quietly between three determined baby teeth. To relinquish my secret could endanger the limited supply. Instead, I sat silently in our brittle orange booth, savoring each glorious mouthful of the remedy I have yet to take for granted.

Brew a strong cup of Earl Grey  
in her paisley blue teapot.  
Read the morning paper, clip  
wedding announcements. Mourn  
old friends in the obituaries.  
Write a thank you letter in cursive.

Cross-stitch a rug, sew on a missing  
button, hem a dress line to a T. Prick  
her pinky on a threaded needle.

Lose herself on Old Farmer’s Turnpike,  
find her keys inside the icebox; apply  
lipstick  
in the side view mirror. Be an example  
of God’s grace and our reason  
to never frown. Whistle  
off key. Grin proudly. Nap  
through the Sunday sermon.

*with apologies to Elizabeth Holmes*

# The Boulevard Montmarte at Night

from an oil on canvas by Camille Pissarro

kate colby • poetry

Thin tires rattle over cobblestone as taxis  
race through drenched boulevards,  
stopping for gloved hands, for young women  
who shiver as rain drops slip down  
the backs of chiffon dresses.

Street lamps glisten through gray rivers,  
flames burning safely behind smoked glass.  
Around them, the city blurs, watercolors  
smudged on my window pane. The streets of Paris  
are washed away.

# How to Hold a Violin Bow

erin wilson • poetry

Do not pick up the bow  
yet. Position your right hand in front of your chest  
and relax. Note that we will only use the right hand  
unless otherwise specified. Make your hand  
into the shape of a llama shadow puppet.  
Place the tip of your thumb in the first crease  
of your two middle fingers. Bend and soften  
your index and pinky fingers. This is your dog.  
If your dog has been good give him  
a bone. Rather, if your hand  
is not stiff, place the bow between  
your thumb and middle fingers. Gently  
lay down your index finger, and place the tip  
of the pinky on the stick of the bow.  
Assure there is no tension.  
Practice the above procedure  
with your toothbrush or pencil.



May in Ayemenem

a prose cutting poem from  
*The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy, 1997

caroline berblinger • poetry

They were nearly born on a bus;  
inching along insides, *soft*,  
folded like cloth. A quiet  
bubble floating on a sea  
of noise.

This was the whisper  
and scurry of small  
lives: white edges crisped  
and curled. Sweet singing  
complaints suffused  
with sloth; damp  
air, brooding dust –

the ancient  
fetal h e a r t b e a t.

The time was ten to two.

Staircase  
in the Long Room  
at Trinity College

erin wilson • photography



Untitled

chad phillips • photography



## Endless

teresa morse • poetry

Boats skim over warming Gulf waters, skirting islands  
spotted with marinas and vacation homes. They race  
the sunset, break the sun's surrender-rays, fragment light  
in ocean spray. On the beach the sand packs tightly  
and I walk where the water laps,  
leaving no marks. Birds I cannot name fly low,  
land above splashing foam. Their toothpick legs blur  
as they run from incoming waves.  
I squish my toes into the wet sand, relish the prickle  
of goose bumps on my legs. The ocean stretches  
until it meets the sky at the cusp of the earth –  
I cannot tell water from clouds from foam  
and I do not know if I am here.

## Raw

rachel haley • poetry

I am a meat-free-  
with-a-side-of-carrots- and-celery,  
please *hold the mayonnaise* woman.  
I am a Birkenstocks-with-socks,  
hair-past-my-waist,  
fresh-squeezed-lemonade woman.

I am a stand-out-of-line,  
hug a stranger, hang my bare  
feet out the passenger's side window woman.

I am a *Sorry-I'm-not-sorry*,  
*It-is-what-it-is*,  
*Forgive-but-never-forget* woman.  
I am an Amy Winehouse on vinyl,  
whiskey with cherry,  
drug-free-since-1993 woman.

I am a raw to the bone woman.

# The Doghouse

kate colby • creative nonfiction

The shower insert was left behind by the people who lived here before us. I suppose they intended to install it in one of the bathrooms, but they were drug dealers who never even put up sheetrock and had to move out quickly when the head of the family went to jail. Or so my parents told me. Regardless, the linoleum shower insert was left out in the yard, standing erect, just waiting to be stuck into a bathroom wall. However, instead of using the shower for its intended purpose, my dad, ever the resourceful carpenter, decided to turn it into a doghouse.

Once converted, you would never have guessed that it had been a shower. My dad laid it shower-side down, so that it formed a gray dome over the ground. There was a hole in the former bottom, where the drain would have been, which Dad covered up with two strips of duct tape. On the other open side, what would have been the top of the shower, he nailed a large piece of plywood, into which he cut a large, half-oval – slightly to the right – to be used as an entrance. My mom and I used the leftover paint from our house to complete the project. We painted the plywood gray, and I used the leftover maroon from the shutters to inscribe *Linus* over the entrance. With those touches, the doghouse was finished.

I was always a little scared of Linus. He was a Doberman, brown, with a knob where his tail had been and tall, pointy ears. It wasn't his size so much that scared me, as his intensity. He *loved* his people, and whenever one of us would venture into his yard to visit, he would lunge and jump and run circles around us. Despite this, I frequently snuck into his yard to play. And one day, I decided to explore further than normal. I had always been curious what his little home was like on the inside, whether it was warm enough in winter, whether it was filled with treasures he had scavenged over the years, whether I could even fit through the door. I had to find out.

I looked from Linus to the gray, rectangular structure on the ground. He perked up his ears; I took this as permission. I got on my knees and crawled inside his doghouse, the rough wood of the entrance scraping my sides. Once inside, I surveyed the premises. The floor was covered with hay, his bedding, and it was matted down in the far, left corner, next to his blue blanket. I crawled over to the spot and fluffed up the hay, trying to make it softer for Linus to lie on. Next, I sat down in the corner and placed my hand over the duct taped drainage hole. A slight breeze licked at my palm. *Hmm, I'll have to tell Daddy to tape that better.*

Linus followed me into his house and began digging in the hay, creating little poofs of dust and dirt. He buried his nose for a second and emerged with a blue ball with green polka dots clenched between

his teeth. *Squeak squeak.* I extended my hand, offering to take the ball and throw it out the door for him to chase, but he turned up his nose, spun in a circle, and laid down on his blanket beside me, ball still tucked in his mouth. I laughed and scratched behind his ears.

As we laid there together, I looked around at his ceiling and linoleum walls. They appeared tan and grainy, like sandpaper. I ran my fingers along the wall, watching the grime crumble away, little white streaks breaking through the dirt and hay dust. I blew the residue off of my fingers each time I made a swipe. At first, I thought I would clean the entire house, but that would have required getting up, and I was surprisingly comfortable in the hay with Linus warm at my side. Instead, I traced a heart, a leaf, a dog.

Eventually, I remembered I was human. I realized the fluffy hay was actually poking at my neck and through my jeans into my thighs. The dusty air began to feel heavy in my lungs. My fingers were either grimy from drawing on the walls or greasy from petting Linus' unwashed coat. I felt dirty, and the doghouse felt small. I needed out.

When I went to leave, Linus jumped up and started pacing in front of the entrance. Every time I tried to move around him, he would step in front of me or sit down and nose me back into the doghouse. I tried to distract him by lobbing his ball at the back wall or knocking on the linoleum. My attempts failed, and Linus continued to sit sentinel, guarding me from the door. Eventually, I did what any sane little girl would do: I hollered for my dad.

After about twenty minutes, my dad heard my cries. At the sound of my dad opening the gate to his yard, Linus backed out of the doghouse and went bounding towards him. I scampered out of the doghouse, fearing that Linus would sneak back and trap me again. When I emerged, the outside world felt wide and cold. The sun stung my eyes, and the breeze nipped at my wrists. My dad and I played with Linus for a few minutes before he tired of us and went back to sit in front of his house. As my dad and I walked to the gate, I looked back at Linus. For a moment, I felt bad, leaving him alone in his yard with nothing but a blanket and a ball. But then, as he cocked his head and trotted back into the doghouse, I heard a faint *squeak squeak*, and I knew. I knew his world now, knew that he was cuddled up next to his blanket in the far left corner, under the Big Dipper I had traced on the ceiling, knew that he was happy in his home.

## Apologies

“Pluto Not a Planet, Astronomers Rule”

— *National Geographic* (August 21, 2006)

caroline berblinger • poetry

We do not mean to patronize you  
by calling you our *dwarf planet*.  
(A minor-planet designation  
surely cannot bother you – the largest object  
in the Kuiper belt). We are sure  
you will understand, continue  
to swirl uninhibited by our current  
state of planetary unavailability.

Send our apologies to your five  
moons – although Charon  
is sure to pout. As for Venetia Burney,  
we will break the news softly  
over mashed peas and fish  
(though we hear she does not  
think of you so often now  
in her eighties). Poor girl,  
she could not know the burden  
of her naming; it was an unwanted  
title she forced the scientists  
to bear. Perhaps we could have loved  
you then – loved you without a name,  
*no strings attached*.

If only you could have given us  
more mystery, could have collided  
into Neptune’s orbit or finally battled  
with Triton for rights to your trajectory.  
But, dear Pluto, please know it was not you,  
your black gold atmosphere  
or your methane perfume;  
the problem was each one of us,  
our vanity and our scientific  
hearsay.

## Balut

william brust • creative nonfiction

Sit down. Relax. It’s not as scary as you think. You will need one fertilized duck egg, one lime wedge, salt, black pepper, and a bowl or trash can for spent shells. Find the hollow end of the egg and crack a hole in it, be careful not to let the liquid inside spill. Some say it’s the best part of balut, some even say it’s an aphrodisiac. Be the judge for yourself, put the egg to your lips and drink the mild brine. Let the subtle flavors glide over the flat of your tongue. Note the soup-like texture and bits of duck meat as they cross over your taste buds. Crack the shell more. Peel a corner and see the white of the egg lined with thin, pale veins. Peel more. A feather sticks out against the white background, a wing. Keep peeling. The remnants of a yolk are revealed along with the face of a young duckling; lifeless eyes and a beak that gives to your bite like soft shell crab. A squeeze of lime, a dash of salt and a pinch of pepper and it’s ready. Eat the egg whole and relish in the textural playground. Repeat as desired.

# Untitled

krista hooper • poetry

Last November—  
I yanked the lovebirds from my hair  
I bent their little golden  
beaks and I broke their tiny  
hollow boned necks;  
all but one.  
I saved her, until August.  
Her voice shattered and I built  
a funeral pyre from the wooden  
perches in her cage. Birds do not  
sing  
while burning, they scream  
like the rest of us.

# Lighter

kelsey campbell • poetry

I strum my thumb and stir your fire



# Untitled

robert hodgson • photography

# This is Just to Say

jessie holmes • poetry

I have removed  
the ‘55 Bel Air  
that was in  
the garage  
  
and which  
you were probably  
saving  
for the National Car Show

Forgive me  
it was irresistible  
so luxurious  
and so loud

*with apologies to William Carlos Williams*



# Tree Totem

kortney voss • ceramics

# Lemon

samantha oehlert • poetry

You are  
bruised and battered,  
with blemished pores,  
irritated skin,  
battle wounds and birth scars—  
if only people could see  
who you really are.

You  
protect from poison,  
pulverize pain,  
alleviate anxiety,  
abolish blemishes,  
put insomnia to rest,  
fight fatigue,  
smite bug bites,  
save the stomach,  
kill canker sores—  
you are holy,  
healing  
power.

Oh sunny, porous sphere  
you rest perfectly in the palm of my  
hand.  
But as ordinary as you seem,  
I can’t be fooled.  
Beyond your waxy skin,  
a citrus sunrise waits.

Beads of citrus sweat  
ooze through your pores.  
You see the sugar.  
You see the smasher.  
You are  
nervous.

Divination

taylor winkler • poetry

As I tip the mug back to catch  
the last drops of hot chocolate,  
the remnants create  
an image: a person with arms outstretched,  
as if in praise—or elation.

I don’t believe in reading tea leaves  
or interpreting leftover coffee grounds. Still,  
I can’t help but take this figure,  
frozen in heightened emotion,

as a sign.

captive

melinda hipple • poetry

as are moths  
I am free to fly  
yet I turn  
in this endless circle  
around your artificial light

Antes de la Boda

from the oil on canvas by Antonio Muñoz Degrain

kate colby • poetry

The bones of her corset creak against her ribs  
as she breathes, *Necesito un momento,*  
*por favor.*

She dreams of salt water dried on her skin,  
of the warm breeze tangling her curls.  
Of Valencia. Of home.

She clasps her right hand, wrist  
bruised and aching from her father’s  
grasp. Wrapped tightly in satin  
and trimmed with ribbon,

she is the gift. White and soft,  
she is the dove. And her bouquet,  
the olive branch.

## Case Hall

samantha oehlert • poetry

When we aren't winded from the stairs, we're winded  
from the stench. Our clothes are soaked,  
our skin stained,  
with the permanent soggy smell.

We know it never leaves,  
but every time we enter, we sniff  
to check

just in Case.

## On Being a Southern Gentleman

william brust • creative nonfiction

You wouldn't know it by the inflection of my voice, but I'm a Southerner. Not by birth, but by inheritance. My mother was born and raised in South Carolina, and from an early age, the fine art of Southern social niceties was instilled into my psyche. But it wasn't until I was fourteen that I had the privilege of living in the portion of the United States known as "The South." By that time, however, I was undoubtedly southern in my mindset. I regularly found myself craving shrimp and grits; I thought nothing of it when I came across a Confederate flag waving proudly in the wind; and I knew that sweet tea was at its best when it slowly melted the enamel off of your teeth. More importantly than just being southern, I was well on my way to becoming something that few can call themselves, a bona fide Southern gentleman.

One important thing that I learned while living in the South was that the terms "gentleman" and

"Southern gentleman," while similar, are not synonymous. It took a while for me to understand the distinction as, on the surface, they appear to be identical. Both terms conjure up images of well-mannered men, polite men, respectful men, basically, men who hold themselves to a higher standard of social interaction. The difference isn't that gentleman and Southern gentleman behave in a dissimilar fashion, nor is the difference merely geographical; the difference is, de facto, foundational. As I got to know people in the South, particularly people of older generations, I started to notice parallels between Southern ideals and the code by which the knights that I was forced to read about in High School English lived. After pondering the reasons for these similarities for some time, the answer dawned on me; while a gentleman's basis for conducting himself in a gentlemanly manner is to demonstrate his inherent decency, a Southern gentleman does so because the convictions of honor and chivalry are deeply rooted in Southern culture.

Following my epiphany, I began to understand why the archetype of the Southern gentleman was so valued. It isn't just a demonstration of cultural pride; it's a concept that is interwoven with the romanticism of a unique culture and the rich history that shaped it. Being somewhat of a romantic myself, I was enticed by the idea of embracing such a model. In many a daydream, I would picture myself as a gentleman in a Southern utopia. There, I would bask lazily under the shade of a palmetto in a freshly pressed seer sucker suit, slowly sipping a mint julep while the warm summer air coaxed droplets of condensation to congregate on the sides of my glass. The draw of making such a fantasy real set me on a path. I didn't just want to be Southern; I wanted to be a Southern gentleman.

In order to jumpstart my transformation, I thought it necessary to look the part. I began sporting colorful paisley bow ties, khaki pants with pastel button downs, the sleeves rolled to my elbows; I even became the proud owner of the seer sucker suit from my picturesque musings. Eventually, my wardrobe extensively consisted of dress clothes which I wore every chance I could. I found that my new inclination to be a clothes hound melded perfectly with my passion for food. Whenever I had the opportunity to eat in an upscale establishment, whether it were a fine dining restaurant or the local country club, I would put on, as they say in the South, my Sunday best, regardless of the existence of a dress code. Many times my coat and tie constituted a stark contrast to the sea of blue jeans and t-shirts that the other patrons draped themselves in. In retrospect, I may have looked a mite foolish in my choice of clothing at times, but I was trying to exemplify the dress of a Southern gentleman; if I happened to stand out like a sore thumb, I wasn't bothered by it in the least.

Looking dapper was only a small part of the image of a Southern gentleman that I formulated in my mind. Like all personas, being a Southern gentleman requires a certain pattern of thought, a specific attitude, a particular approach to life. In order to be more than a wannabe, I had to adopt a Southern gentleman's perspective. The way a Southern gentleman views his designation is traditionally grounded in the



antiquity of Southern history. Honor is the name of the game. While I had always been taught to behave in a gentlemanly fashion, and tried my best to do so, I had to develop my actions within the framework of being honorable.

My mother was somewhat adamant about etiquette and manners as a symbol of honoring others. I was taught respect as one of the highest values and was promptly reprimanded if I made the mistake of being disrespectful to her or anyone else. It became natural to use “Sir” and Ma’am” to address people significantly older than I, to stand when a lady entered a room and pull out her chair at the table, to pay attention to “wallflowers” at social events, and even the proper fork to use at different stages of a meal. She was also relentless in ensuring that I knew how to communicate, to express myself verbally and in prose, to appreciate art and history, to display a degree of refinement, and most importantly, to care about others. When I embraced the goal of being a Southern gentleman, her sage advice took on new meaning. The result was that I acted essentially the same as I always had, but now I had an image to fulfill.

My mother, like many others who grew up in the South, was utterly sincere in her commitment to a traditional Southern way of life, rooted, as it were, in a day when Southern culture was young and marked by authentic honor, dignity, and integrity. There are still Southern gentlemen who share a similar value system today, but I came to notice over time, that qualities which had been part of the very DNA of Southerners, had, in many cases, faded to a mere veneer of gentility. Hypocrisy replaced sincerity as a way of life. Position, social standing, appearance, genealogy and nagging concerns about what people would think or say resulted in a façade that hid internal struggles, insecurities, dark secrets and the most ungentlemanly of inclinations. With this realization, I, in turn, saw a similar pattern in my own methods. I hadn’t just bought into the veil of deceit; I was living it.

This unwelcomed change in perspective was forced upon me while I was at a friend’s house. This friend, Ben, had a father with a reputation as the quintessential Southern gentleman. My friends and I were roughhousing in the loft over his room, as boys often do. Ben’s dad soon stumbled up the stairs toward us, the stench of bourbon trailing behind him; it reeked of fraudulence. Just as I was about to throw a plastic football to one of my buddies, I felt the threatening embrace of a man twice my size as he held my arms down to prevent me from tossing the ball. “You kids need to keep it down,” he slurred, “you’re being a pain in the ass.” In that moment, all respect I had for him vanished like the early morning mist over a Carolina pond. In addition, a weight descended on my conscience as I realized the gravity of my self-deception. I had made a habit of working to *seem* like a gentleman when what I really desired, was to *be* one.

After that night, I started to redraw the portrait of what I believed a Southern gentleman looked like. The attire, the language, the outward self presentation—the superficial—none of these things satisfy the essence of what a Southern gentleman truly is. My dramatic revelation gave me new eyes, renewed perception, and increased awareness. Authenticity’s brilliant light accented the shadow of hypocrisy, and I began

to notice when those who didn’t fit the external mold of a Southern gentleman, were exemplary in their internal convictions. At times, I came across men whose appearance lacked perfect grooming, whose speech and manner lacked polish, but who, nonetheless, radiated sensitivity, gentleness, compassion, honesty, and character.

Such true Southern gentlemen awakened a desire deep within me to be genuine. I came to understand for the first time the true meaning of chivalry and honor, ideals many would consider archaic and meaningless in our enlightened, progressive society. I made peace with my Southern heritage as I laid to rest the ghost of false gentility and embraced instead a mind and heart that seeks to be real, appealing to a higher standard than mere appearance and vain societal approval. The values and lifestyle are much the same, but I have been transformed.

# Self-Portrait

claire white • scratchboard



## The Farmer's Summer

caroline berblinger • poetry

I already miss your thickness – the slow drip  
of sultry sun over my worn hands.  
You have forfeited your sound, your symphony  
to wild winds of an early autumn. I long  
for the cicada's drone, the shriek  
and splash at the county pool, the motor creak  
of harvest trucks laden with seed.

It snowed on Thanksgiving in Western Kansas  
this year. I silently counted the inches  
of white dust in my hand, imagined the weight  
of four months' snow upon my palm. Your coming  
is so unpredictable, so green, so necessary.  
I stand on your planted promise – seeds  
lying dormant under my feet. I bury my heart  
with the seed. You will come.

You will arrive in the collision of heat  
and chill, a swirling beast at my door. You  
will come in the way of a lion. You will come  
in the way of a lamb. I cannot trace you  
upon the pages of my *Almanac* – but know  
you will come. Today, I wait with my palm  
pressed firmly against frozen earth, caught  
in the ceaseless expectation  
of your return.

## To Colleen

jackie albin • poetry

I did not cry at your funeral.  
Though your body and my body were present,  
our spirits were elsewhere.  
You and I were baking carrot cookies  
in the kitchen where you once lived –  
you, the only woman I have ever known  
who measured chocolate *by the chip*.

Mother of two, you extended grace  
to children beyond your own. Kissing  
scraped palms of nieces, you  
listened to nonsensical stories, laughing  
at all the right parts. But mostly,  
*you listened*.

I do not foresee myself knowing another angel  
who would share in my loss  
of forgotten teddy bears sentenced  
to perpetual hotel-life. And filled with delight,  
you declared the water bed my  
*indoor trampoline*, should I desire it.

I do not ache when I think back to our summers.  
I toss two skipping stones into the creek,  
one for me, *one for you*.  
I dig through cluttered drawers  
and unearth your cursive scrawl,  
written upon love notes and  
letters that melt stone hearts.  
And every so often, I  
write one back.

# Hunger

jordan miller • poetry

peers into McAlister’s window  
wearing an oversized shirt  
and longs for the abandoned bowl of chicken soup.

# Fingernail

kelsey campbell • poetry

Drag me down a chalkboard and lure all neck hairs to a standing ovation

# Ditch Weed

cody keener • creative nonfiction

You’ve probably seen it before, though you may not have known it at the time. It’s a sturdy plant, capable of growing in most climates. It pollinates easily, and springs up frequently along the sides of country roads and the edges of public parks. Though it’s useless in any practical sense, cannabis ruderalis, ditch weed, skunk weed, or whatever your friends knew it as, is a master of stealth amongst other plants—completely incognito to the untrained eye.

The banks of a small creek by the community swimming pool were lined with the stuff. Part of an intricate network of creeks and rivers that were essential to the town economy at a time when that sort of thing *was* essential to a town’s economy, the area was unimaginatively named the Park by the Pool by the angry kids and future drop-outs that frequented the area. On one side stood the fenced-in swimming pool and a shoddy set of monkey-bars. A squeaky swing set and wooden storm shelter stood on the other. A wooden footbridge connected the two banks in a small ravine, and there we would crouch in the dark — hidden from the street — to get high, fist-fight, make-out, drink whiskey (passed around in Taco Bell cups), and smoke cigarettes (bought from our older peers at an outrageous mark-up). We would toss our refuse — seeds, ashes, cans, bottles — into the creek and stumble off into the night to attend the final minutes of high-school football games or to reconvene at the other park across town.

Civic investment can do some surprising things. A newly-erected jungle-gym now sits on the north-east corner of the plot, close to the street. A freshly painted sidewalk lined with new benches and signs boasts helpful suggestions for parents to enrich their children’s playtime: *DESCRIBE, COMPARE, LEARN. Look at the shapes on the ground. How are they different? Are any of them similar?*

The banks are neatly mowed now. The bridge and shelter have been redone. New planks and panels cover the song lyrics and FUCK YOUs we etched with fountain pens and pocket-knives. Just around a bend in the creek, however, a lush patch of unassuming stalky, leafy plants cluster resiliently: an invisible garden, unknowingly nurtured by the reckless love of a long-gone gang of invisible teenagers.

## Diligence

teresa morse • photography



## War

kate colby • poetry

is the dog(tag) catcher,  
the cannon fodder rain,  
the sloppy mud trenches  
that caused the insatiable itch

in your missing arm.

## Night Terrors

from *Angus* by James Wyeth  
black and white portrait, 1974

jackie albin • poetry

I am haunted by beady black eyes  
slicker than icy sidewalks.  
I detest thick, matted hair, still damp  
from melted snow and sweat:  
*it sickens me.*

Stale, wet breath bites at the frayed lip  
of my sweatshirt collar, and foggy lungfuls of it  
curl around my shoulders,  
leaving a soggy film on every inch  
of exposed skin. I refuse to turn  
and taste the dense sour mist  
that hangs in the air, already crystalizing  
upon each fallen strand of hair.  
I run unswervingly from black beasts.

Angus ire pulses through those  
unyielding hooves, thawing crisp patches  
of buffalo grass, frozen beneath.  
I abhor any V-formation of barrel-bodied  
creatures and beg to wake from this black and white  
nightmare.

**The Man in the Window**  
erin wilson • poetry

is dead. Eyes closed, hands folded neatly  
across his chest, dressed in black, he is  
in the casket, and I am at the wake. I find it odd that no one  
has removed his face mask, rendered useless. His wife  
and children are here with flowers and incense,  
accepting gifts, and holding back tears. Silently, they remember  
the last time they saw him, before he boarded the subway  
where he suffocated.

If this man is not dead, he must be some type  
of cryonic experiment. The glass before him,  
moments ago covered with a thin sheet  
of ice, now reveals the man thawing from his vitrified form.  
Will he remember his wife? Or his children, now older  
than he when the experiment began?

— After seeing *Tokyo Compression* #75  
photograph by Michael Wolf

**Edward Hopper *Nighthawks***  
oil on canvas, 1942  
sydney johnston • poetry

They are America.  
Red, white, and blue patriots,  
patrons of the night, burdened  
by empty streets and lipstick-stained  
mugs. New York holds little solace  
for the sleepless, but this cherry wood counter—  
a haven for thread barren souls,  
seats soldiers, ones without rifles  
or purple hearts. Isolated.  
Here, fingertips do not touch, eyes  
do not meet, and no words  
are uttered apart from *black coffee*.  
Beneath this false light, they are  
illuminated: pensive proprietors  
battling personal wars and trapped  
in a café painted  
with no doors.

# Edinburgh

william brust • poetry

Ah dinnae ken  
how come the bird calls tae me.  
The heavy? The cratur? Na,  
tis th’ wey o’ Embra.

Daft headed hipsters drammin’ in the pubs  
afore th’ lang donder tae Castle Rock,  
pished and stammlin’ oan th’ wey  
till the lads skelp their heids  
oan th’ solid Baltic stone,  
while ah boaby keeks oan.

Bit ah bade fur anither hauf’  
In th’ shneeby auld pub,  
keekin ah plate o’ cauld tatties  
while ah doo’s peekin’ the rubbish  
fae the floor.

I don’t know why  
she beckons me to follow.  
The beer? The whiskey? No,  
it’s the way of Edinburgh.

Fool-hearted hipsters drink in the pubs  
before the long walk to Castle Rock.  
Shit-faced and stumbling,  
they hit their heads  
on the hard cold stone  
while a cop keeps watch from a distance.

But I stay for another nip of whiskey  
in the smoky old pub,  
eyeing a plate of cold potatoes,  
while a pigeon pecks  
the crumbs from the floor.

# Rug

gunnar mckenna • poetry

I invite you in, and you walk all over me like this is *your* house.

## Swirl Jar



## Fish Mug



## Bubble Jar

kortney voss • ceramics

# The Fifty-third Christmas

teresa morse • fiction

Agnes was just glad she’d had the presence of mind to ask her neighbor, Cindy, to lower the attic ladder the last time she had dropped by. Osteoporosis had smoothed her back into a gentle hump, and she couldn’t reach the handle even while standing on a chair. Slowly Agnes mounted the steps, encumbered by her clunky white orthopedic shoes. The sleeve of her green knit sweater snagged on the un-sanded wooden railing as she used it to pull herself up.

Dust particles swirled into the air as she stepped into the attic. Agnes sneezed and watched as the specks danced, illuminated by the light from two small windows. It took a moment for her eyes to adjust to the dim light, allowing her to survey the neat stacks of her possessions. She hadn’t been up here since last year, when she and Oliver had packed up the decorations on New Year’s Eve.

Using a plastic tub as a makeshift chair, Agnes eased herself down next to the large trunk, its leather stretched tightly and worn at the corners. She unlocked the trunk with successive *snaps* and sang softly to herself as she surveyed the contents.

“It came upon the midnight clear, that glorious song of old,” she sang feebly. An assortment of Christmas decorations passed through her frail hands – crinkly strands of tinsel, strings of broken Christmas lights, tree ornaments like a porcelain cow and a tiny nativity scene. She paused at one, a yellowing sheet of construction paper with a tiny purple handprint in the middle. Agnes ran her fingers over the ridges of the chipping paint, smiling to herself.

“Peace on the earth, good will to men, from heaven’s all gracious King,” she continued, pulling out a pair of stuffed reindeer and a plastic tablecloth printed with hundreds of Santa Clauses.

“And still their heavenly music floats over all the weary world, above its sad...” Agnes trailed off into a hum, forgetting the words.

At the bottom of the trunk her fingertips brushed against a bundle of letters. With a sigh, Agnes lifted them from beneath a snowman figurine, its carrot nose chipped at the tip. Humming the melody of a forgotten carol, Agnes pulled the last letter from the stack, easing the sheet from the envelope.

*Dear Agnes,* she read in his shaky scrawl. *It’s our fifty-second Christmas and I love you.*

# To be a Woman

sydney johnston • poetry

They say I am to be a mother,  
a wife confined  
to a kitchen and children—  
my purpose, my happiness.  
I wanted to be a painter—  
to capture life in brush strokes, to see  
the ocean, but these dreams are empty  
like the blank canvas  
I will never color.

They say I am to be a mother,  
but they did not ask. To sacrifice my soul  
for cleaning tiny hands  
and tidying a prison masked  
by a white fence would be  
my ruin. If happiness  
lies within the home, then I will sleep  
beneath the stars.



# Farmhouse

caroline berblinger • creative nonfiction

The year I finished first grade, my parents bought a house. A big farmhouse on thirty acres of land outside of town. The last owners had left it – windows open and doors wide – when they went bankrupt and ran from the men in suits wanting their money. The bank sold that farmhouse to us in April, and it became ours. Our house with its sour-wet smell and peeling wallpaper and creaky wooden steps that moved upwards in the shape of an “L.” The renovations lasted all summer. Fifteen years later my Nana tells me she thought they were crazy, my parents. *They were building their dream out of rotting wood*, she said. I remember carrying glasses of iced tea in each hand to my father during the afternoons, condensation cool and wet against my fingers. Neighbors helped us tear down walls, and my grandparents moved in to help paint the ones we erected. My brother and sister and I were kept away from the construction, told not to distract Papa and Jake up there on the roof when they began their hammering on the shingles of our house. We left the adults to their pounding and painting and dust. But on some days, we were allowed inside. We ran through the upstairs, choosing what rooms could be ours. We sucked ourselves thin through wooden panels that marked where new walls would soon be. We climbed the attic stairs like conquerors of dust and darkness. Only the mice heard our decrees.

# Untitled

chad phillips • photography

# Lecompton, Kansas

rachel haley • poetry

South of the mouth of the Kansas River  
lies the home of the war on slavery—now free and unbound —  
where the ghosts of free men still fight to silence  
the cry of Confederate hearts  
that forever haunt Elmore Street  
beyond John Brown’s grave.





# The Cellar

melinda hipple • creative nonfiction

If it had been empty, I might have been even more afraid. The sterile concrete box with a bare bulb in the center of the ceiling resembled every prisoner-of-war cell or G-man interrogation room I’d seen in the movies. Film noir in our basement. But the room wasn’t empty. Along the gravel-pitted walls, two or three layers of cardboard boxes housed Mother’s random attempts at canning beans, tomatoes, corn. Occasionally she sent me down before dinner to collect a jar. Reluctantly, I descended the stairs and crossed the basement playroom to the black hole in the corner. Shuddering, I tiptoed to the middle of the room and waved my arm in search of the pull chain. *Snap*. Dull light flooded the gray space and gleamed faintly off the metal lids. I checked my feet and then searched for movement between the boxes where a community of recluse spiders had hatched, mated and died, leaving their birdcage carcasses to litter the floor. Glancing at the reinforced concrete ceiling, I thanked God my arm hadn’t wrapped itself in a dangling cobweb.

An eight-year-old’s fears should be limited to spiders and spankings and, perhaps, a boogie man in the dark. Spiders were a distraction, certainly, but I could not cross the threshold of that room without taking on another burden. My mind would skip briefly to those *other* films rerun in cement gray every Saturday afternoon—the ones where humans hid in concrete boxes while atoms erupted into temporary suns and morphed benign grasshoppers, spiders, even rabbits into man-eating terror. I did not know the extent to which Castro and Khrushchev had jeopardized my wellbeing, but I could read my parents’ faces and piece together their fears. No amount of canned corn could have persuaded me that this was a cellar and not a bomb shelter.

# Prairie Grove

found poem from Noble L. Prentis’  
*Kansas Miscellanies*, 1889

erin wilson • poetry

Yet, suddenly, as one may say,  
these wooded hills and rugged hollows,  
these rough and rocky  
solitudes,

the banks of these swift streams  
accustomed to no sound  
save their own dashings,

the passes in these unfrequented  
mountains, the scattered fields  
of a careless agriculture, the red roads  
that clambered up and down, the paths  
that threaded the brush and brake,

the little prairies that stood  
like islands  
in the ocean of forest,  
were filled

with armed men.

# Brooklyn Girl

rachel haley • fiction

She moved into the upstairs loft on Cunningham Street west of the Brooklyn Bridge. On a Monday she painted her walls deep lavender and dusty rose without asking for permission. Her living room was centered on a paisley loveseat and white rocking chair that she had salvaged from an antique storehouse down the alleyway. In every inch, her four bedroom walls were covered with starving artist drawings. She found sketches in dimly lit bookstores and in display windows of old gallerias. She bought them and hung them one by one in a room on her walls.

On Tuesdays she would paint. She painted watercolors on her balcony by day, canvases on her terrace by night. She painted the strangers passing on the streets below. She captured the lights and sounds and fading noise of the city in the dark. She mostly painted the skyscrapers surrounding her building, trying to secure their beauty on paper. The bristles of her paint brush carried her between a surreal state of daydream and reality. Back and forth she painted for hours, for days. She slept only when she could no longer hold her eyelids open to see where her strokes were landing on the canvas.

On Wednesdays she wrote with her typewriter. Her writing was best in the morning when she sat by the window overlooking the city skyline with a cup of tea in hand. When her teapot ran dry, she drank coffee black with two sugar cubes. With her typewriter she wrote of prohibition and of the Depression and of the revolution on Wall Street. She wrote of the Upper East Side bliss and of Harlem misery. She wrote love letters to the man that lived on Madison Avenue. She wrote all through the night, filling empty sheets with every thought, every word. She wrote until nothing was left.

On Thursdays and Fridays she read to pass the time. She preferred Fitzgerald when she was waiting at the bus stop for work. She carried a copy of Hemingway in her purse. She fell asleep to the words of Steinbeck and could recite any line from the East of Eden if needed. She knew the chapters and page numbers of her favorite quotes from the Catcher and the Rye. On occasion she enjoyed poetry from Dickenson and Cummings and Frost. She studied each stanza and verses of their work, memorizing each turn of phrase. Line by line she read each vowel and consonant aloud, keeping a steady pace.

Every Saturday afternoon she walked through Central Park. She carried a roll of one dollar bills in her front pocket. She gave them away to the man playing violin on the corner. She spared a bill for the homeless women holding a signs: Hungry and Poor. Anything Helps. God Bless. She listened to the young boy playing his guitar along to Bob Dylan. She placed bill after bill into the hat in front of the painter by the

entryway. She walked until her billfold was empty.

On Sundays she wore a black dress to Catholic Mass on Hemlock Parkway. She carried a scarlet rosary around her neck and sang each Alleluia refrain. She fanned herself with the bulletin and knelt during confession. She ate of the body of Christ and drank from the cup of salvation. From the last row of pews, she prayed in silence for her mother and father and sisters and brothers. She prayed aloud for the world in need, for healing. For health and wealth and happiness and peace among all nations. She hoped for strength and courage and answering of prayers from the One above. She wept in joy and in sorrow for each blessing – for the lilies of the field, for the birds of the air, for the meadows and valleys and streams. For sunsets and sunrises. For the small beauty found in living things. She prayed for everything under the sun. She prayed till Kingdom come.

# Paper Clip

kristen finger • poetry

O elbow of metal, you cradle my notes

## Untitled

chad phillips • photography



## Leaf

dani carlson • poetry

In my death, I rust.

## Autumn

from *Chill October* by John Everett Millais  
oil on canvas, 1870

samantha oehlert • poetry

I come  
to this place of perfect peace  
to meet with myself  
and my Maker  
where solitude is sacred  
silence is savored  
and all secrets kept.

I come  
to humble myself before the change-  
the falling  
the flying  
the crisp  
                    crunch  
                            crunch beneath my feet  
and the beautiful death of it all.

I come  
to remember how *being* feels  
at one with these mountains  
that wind  
those trees  
and this lake  
where in the water  
the earth reflects itself  
as gold.

But once we have tasted far streams, touched the gold,  
found some limit beyond the waterfall,  
a season changes, and we come back, changed  
but safe, quiet, grateful.

---

William Stafford, from “Allegiances”

**To all the writers and artists and readers—**

This magazine is a testament to the hours spent writing, building, revising, and perfecting creative works. *Watershed* would not be possible without the creative contributions of Baker University students, nor would it be of value without thoughtful readers like you.

**Thank you.**

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