

# Studio One

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Volume 45

Article 1

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2021

## Complete Edition, Studio One 2021

Studio1 Literary Club  
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# STUDIO ONE

*Volume 45*



## From the Editors

Studio One is a literary and visual arts magazine published each spring by the College of St. Benedict/St. John's University. Its mission is to give new and/or established writers a forum in which to present their works. The magazine's focus is poetry, short fiction, essays, and all forms of reproducible visual art works. Submissions are open to all students on either St. John's or St. Benedict's campuses and to the general public regardless of regional, national, or international location.

In 1976, a student named Clare Rossini had the foresight to create a new magazine for publishing the artistic works of authors and artists living in the surrounding area. As Rossini wrote, "Art is the life current of the community. It is a source of pleasure and pride for us; it unites us with our human predecessors and successors. Art is no luxury; it is a vital human activity. By publishing Studio One, we wish to support the members of our Minnesota community dedicated to that activity and to make their art available to those for whom it was made." While Studio One's reach has extended greatly since its founding in 1976, the current Editors-in-Chief have striven to publish a selection that still supports the mission written by Clare 45 years ago. Without Clare's efforts, we would not be presenting the 2021 edition of Studio One.

Studio One would also like to give thanks to our staff advisors, Matt Callahan and Rachel Marston, along with all the faculty of the CSB/SJU English Departments, Mark Conway of the Literary Arts Institute, Patty Tholen and Palmer Printing, all our contributors, and all those who submitted their work.

## **2021 Staff**

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## About this Volume

You may have noticed that this volume of *Studio One* is a bit different compared to usual. This year, 2021, should have been our 46th volume; there are also two Wagner-Berger Prize winners in this volume.

Early in 2020, we fully intended on publishing our annual volume. Around March, however, the COVID-19 virus swept across the nation, forcing many schools to move entirely online. CSB/SJU was one of these schools; with this came the complete shutdown of all campus activities, including *Studio One*. As a result, we were unable to publish a volume in 2020.

As Editors-in-Chief, we had to consider our approach to this year's volume. We chose to treat it the same as we would in a normal year, aside from some minor changes in response to the issues concerning last year's volume.

The most apparent difference is the presence of two Wagner-Berger Prize winners. Because last year's winner could not be published, we have both last year's and this year's winners in this volume.

The second difference is this note. We felt it would be remiss to not address why the volume looks different and why 2020 did not have a volume, especially for future generations who may not be aware of the effect that COVID-19 has had on the world.

Please enjoy this very unique edition of *Studio One*.

Rachel Linhardt & Sarah Neve  
Editors-in-Chief



# Poetry and Artwork



## THE MAN WHO BURNED HIS POEMS

It was that easy, to light page  
after page after he'd finished the manuscript.  
His hundreds of poems were tinder, their images so vivid  
they turned to tongues of orange and red.  
Poems about lakes and rivers and streams quickly  
threw up their arms  
in flames. They were that ready to

lift themselves from his back yard.  
It was his ceremony, after years of  
in a closed room, writing those verses no one else read.  
He watched his lines, his stanzas, his endings  
igniting as the flickering rushed  
from the corners of the page toward the middle.

It wasn't enough to just write the words, words  
about mountains and lost friends and bleeding pens.  
It wasn't enough to just write about the sheen  
of the sky in the morning, or the heavy wool curtain of  
night, or the bright red cry of a child. He needed to  
make his poems burn, needed to give them the gift  
of fire.

He knows that when the cinders finally sift from the thermals  
and fall back down from the heavens,  
the earth will be sprinkled with something  
so rich that anything could grow in it.

But for now, he just strikes another match and watches  
his words, his love  
float upward in swirling ash  
and fly toward the sun, each poem perfect, finally  
as the wings of a fragile, black bird.

Bill Meissner  
St. Cloud, MN



**Schotia Sunset**  
Cassidy Calcaterra  
Neeah, WI

## **This Morning**

I woke up disjointed, ripped  
the blanket off my head  
to drink some water. I waited  
around last night, downing  
whiskey in my going-  
out best, for anyone  
to light up my phone.

James Croal Jackson  
Pittsburgh, PA



## **Moonblind**

On the day that the sun eclipsed in our town, I  
stared directly at it, as shadow parted from  
candied kiss of fire. Upon that midnighted noon,  
I cared not for my sight.

They told me I'd go blind,  
promised that temptation would scorch my retinas,  
promised this giving sun would turn cruel eyes on me.

That night, the air in our chimney rattled the flue.  
And the bare, unburned wood in our fireplace sang  
to the monsoon knocking at our door. Even dead  
trees still ache for water.

The rain promised me: "I will soothe your aching eyes.  
I can extinguish the fire that consumes your body."  
My eyes did not ache; they did not sting. I begged of  
the sun to make me blind.

I wanted the sun to brand my eyes with its light.  
I wanted to feel it, the fire. Something to raze,  
to make something of me.

I wanted to burn.

E.M. Florence  
Greenwich, CT

## THE POEM, WHEN YOU THINK YOU HAVE NOTHING TO SAY

When it begins, the words rise up  
like the notes of a piano  
filling a quiet room to its dark corners. When it  
begins, you cannot stop it:  
it's like trying to stop the ocean tide from  
massaging the sand, the red glow of sunrise  
from igniting the eyelid of the morning.  
When it begins, you're not sure where  
it's taking you. You might as well be  
driving through the desert during a dust storm.  
It doesn't matter if you close your eyes,  
or let go the wheel.  
You'll still get to where you need to be—  
That place where the sky brightens with blue music again,  
where you finally slow down,  
and, in the middle of the highway, you'll see  
that one wrinkled piece of paper,  
                    that one poem you lost years ago, those  
                    few words, still singing.

Bill Meissner  
St. Cloud, MN

## Morning Rush

It's morning in Portland, and when the sun begins to rise,  
pinnacles of light gently refract across apartment windows.  
Tugboats push barges slowly down the Columbia, then  
disappear in a veil of fog. I'm in a hurry to begin the day.  
As I drive over the Morrison bridge the streetlamps  
are still glowing, a stream of headlights in both lanes,  
and at the stoplight, I can almost hear when life becomes  
less busy, when the traffic pauses. Perhaps the wind  
is another river, ebbing and flowing down Martin Luther King  
Blvd, lifting the shop awnings in synchronicity, dipping  
the limbs of the elms, then returning them to their ease.  
A newspaper revolves in soft semi-circles, like one  
of the pigeons gathering in Pioneer square.

Thomas Mitchell  
North Bend, OR

## **Sugar Bush Dawn**

Winter's white blanket, almost melted,  
A thousand silver slivers of moon  
Reflected in a thousand rivulets and puddles  
Glistening in the woods,  
Followed by a thousand reflected risings  
Of buttercup yellow sun.  
Roots, thirsty, drink melting snow,  
Sap rises as the sugar maples  
Drip sweet heartbeats into hanging buckets.

Larry Schug  
Avon, MN

## **Mornings and Insects**

Waking up early makes me important.  
Now I must find something important

to say. The less I write the more that flows  
when I sit down. No audience.

Always myself. Often, I find a line  
on the wall and trace its path to the end.

A spider ambled across my desk last week  
and like my cat I still expect it there.

The other day a centipede sprinted  
into my pile of laundry on carpet

and I just haven't worn clothes since.  
Sometimes it's better to wear no legs

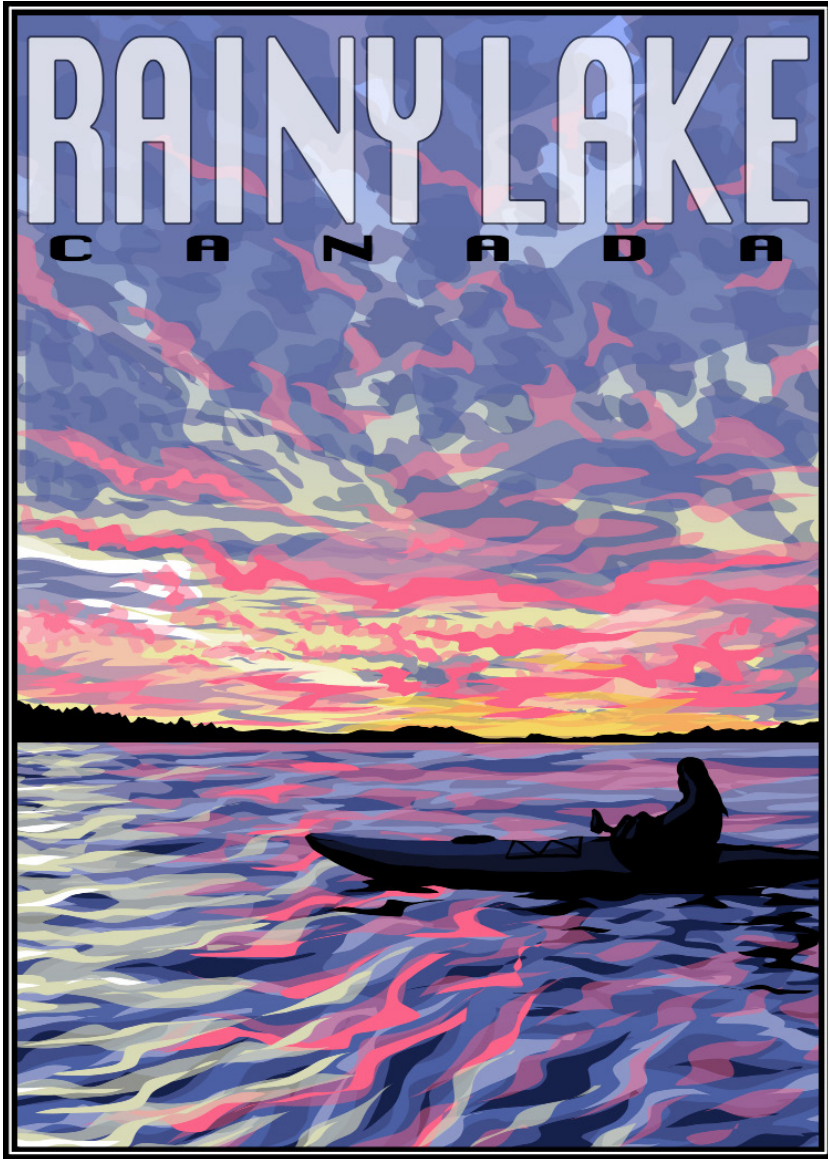
when the alternative is too many.

James Croal Jackson  
Pittsburgh, PA

## **Another Beginning**

Tonight, with the new moon rising  
over the field, I think about you  
quietly sleeping on the sofa,  
and then again walking yesterday  
through the meadowlands,  
walking over grasses, wildflowers  
with wild abandonment. Then,  
like now, there was a stillness  
in the air as the sky changed  
from crimson to mauve, and  
somewhere a bird was calling.  
Everything I have leads back to you.  
Threads of pale moonlight dancing  
on the kitchen floor, the long shadows  
wrapped like fingers around  
the myrtle tree outside this window.  
Now the field is drifting as morning  
begins to take shape. A starling  
by the feeder. Another beginning.

Thomas Mitchell  
North Bend, OR



**Rainy Lake Poster**  
Tia Connelly  
Chanhassen, MN

## LIGHT AT THE EDGE OF THE WORLD

It's always out there, even though  
you might think it's night. It's always  
just beyond your vision, the blink  
of your eye. The light  
is still somewhere, skimming off the lips  
of ocean waves, massaging the sides of granite mountains,  
softly outlining the features on the faces of lovers.

There's darkness out there, too,  
but the light, the light  
always overpowers it, turns it to mere  
shadows that can only hide behind  
what's been brightened.

After these years, I know this much:  
Light is a kind of fire. And  
inside all of us is a place no one can touch,  
a place where, at midnight, we can still see,  
in the distance,  
the first tentative kiss of dawn.

Bill Meissner  
St. Cloud, MN



## FROM A DIFFERENT PLANET

I come from thousands of miles away  
I come from a different planet  
where dark twisted alleys  
    refuse the sun  
have lost their history in the grime,  
where walls shed and buckle  
having worn garb of many eras  
    (scrape some away to find still another color)  
bells clang in a hundred churches  
    that now slump nearly empty  
echoing their fates of lost creeds and gods,  
the river too runs tired  
you can spy its grayness in half-light  
    almost scoop up the liver shade in the shallows.

Here is where I come  
here is where I am  
I stand in forest amphitheaters  
that spring up, it seems, fresh everyday  
    and hills untopped by smoke,  
I court the foaming fury of the sea  
    unburdened by human detritus,  
wild animals become my cohorts  
    (not a broken dog, nor canny rat)  
is this what it takes  
does an expanded chest justify all  
simply a return to nature  
no stewardship needed  
    almost too much to hope.

Ray Greenblatt  
Charlestown, MD



**Hey Stripes**  
Cassidy Calcaterra  
Neenah, WI

## the abyss

we have wandered into the small hours of the night, but somewhere along the way, we became me. just me.

me in this dismal 2 am lacks light. lacks feeling lacks sense of sanity lacks mind. on a rooftop, suffocating beneath a sea of thoughts that won't stop muddling the current. the gravel keeps digging in my skin leaving divots. I was told to look for the stars when it gets dark but they've hidden themselves in clouds, refused to be seen. even summer nights grow cold.

this is zero gravity. this is floating in nothing, sinking in everything, the weight of the entire ocean pressing against my skull. this is endless, bottomless

silence

and I am drowning in my own quench, chapped lips, watching stones sink into the dark black beneath -

*there's a beneath.*

in this dejected, oppressive pit of silence, can you see the sea floor? can you make out the ridges of my torment or are those my shadows forming nightmares again, chasing me away again? maybe I should've buried those stones in my pockets, used them to build my own hollow grotto, trapped in the nothing between.

Sarah Neve  
Minnetrissa, MN

## Swim Lessons

I float, belly down. What floats can drown  
if weighted down  
with burdens lacking air.

Poseidon hears my heartbeat  
and drums upon his skin, the sea,  
to amplify the life-death rhythm  
heavy in my ears.

Whoever swims can suffocate.  
I'll die if I breathe, unless  
I turn to look at sky.

So I will search out a shooting star  
and ask if I am really made  
of the same stuff as the sun.

And Queen Tethys will cradle me  
as if not carrying me out to sea,  
for it was she who birthed my first ancestor,  
who left her depths to breathe.

Like a star, I'll die  
if I burn too much,  
and be dead if I don't burn enough.

In between I'll shed awe's tears  
and remind myself of how  
a thousand tons of steel can float  
and a thousand pounds can fly  
if the first has plenty of air inside  
and the second wings and will to rise.

Erica Silber  
Westhampton, MA

## Winterset

1

Other winters we had to climb  
the plowed snow  
at the neighborhood's dead end  
to enter the oak savanna,  
which wraps the northeast edge of lake  
within its blighted, broken limbs,  
to walk its trail of foot-mashed leaves.

But this winter, rain drizzled down  
the piled-up snow before the city plows  
could heap it higher than dog or deer  
could leap clean to gain the quiet--  
nightfall coming on as certain  
as each of our neighbor's kitchen lights.

2

Then came the heavy wet snow to overstay  
its welcome, wear out our patience  
for that stillness in which nothing moves  
except the sift of snow off rooftops  
and the furnace plumes that rise, then drift  
off into that wash of night  
I'd strive for if I were a watercolorist.

Weeks of despairing cold--  
a windchill that kills the stranded motorist  
dithering, thigh-high,  
through snowdrift toward a farmyard light.

3

In the city the homeless sleep beneath bridges  
in cardboard hovels of quiet ingenuity,  
while overhead commuters rumble home  
from work--apparently unaware.

And the cold in the suburbs  
deepens in the cradles of tire-rutted streets.

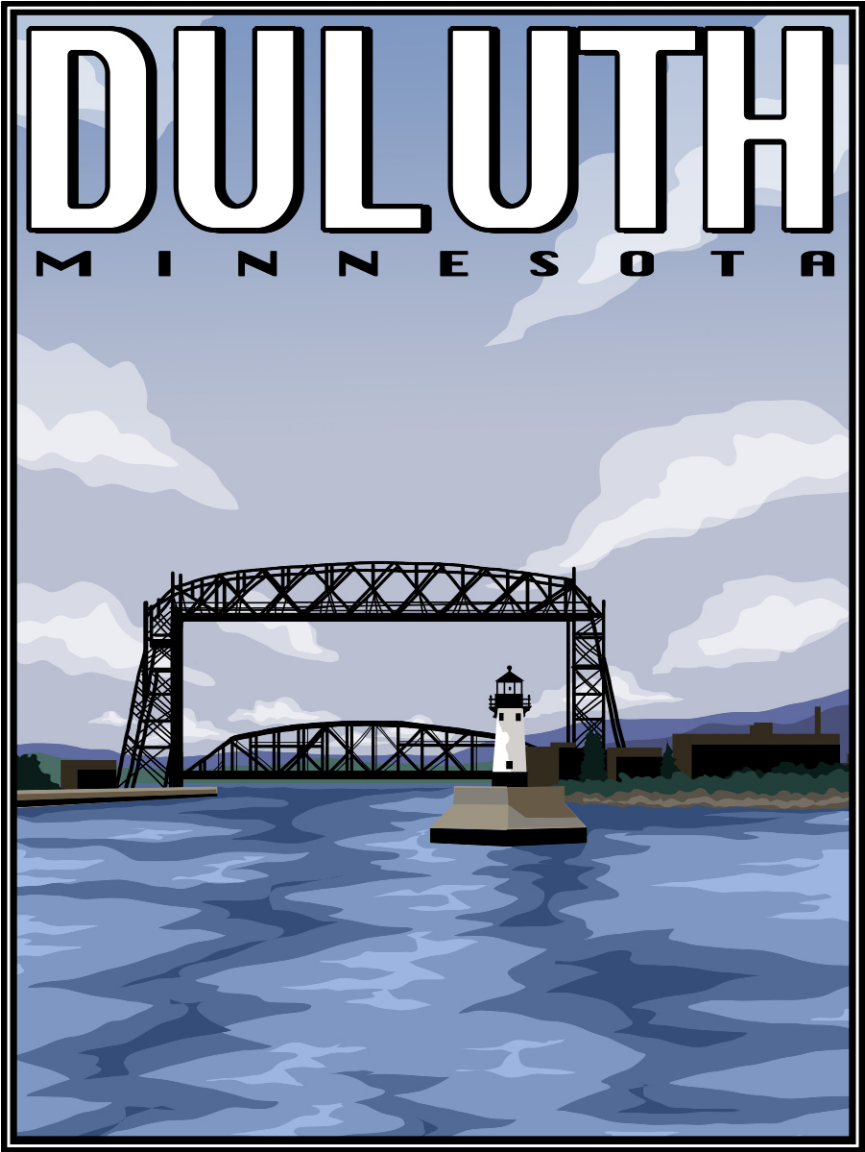
4

I go out late in the night before sleep  
to start my Eurovan and let it run  
while I walk the dog to the end of our street  
where she pulls on her leash toward a wall  
of plowed snow,  
wanting to gain the quiet of the woods  
and to scare up whatever she can  
beneath the sickle-honed moon and stars.

But I am stopped by the cold,  
more than the plowed-up snow that walls us out.

And for a moment . . .  
that holy stillness in which nothing moves.

Chet Corey  
Bloomington, MN



**Duluth, MN Poster**  
Tia Connelly  
Chanhasen, MN

## sonnet: April

It started raining last week.

It rained sideways and I drank whisky sodas at noon with my brother,  
we chain smoked outside at four, I rearranged my apartment and put it  
back again,

and still it rained.

I made meringue that fell and meringue that stayed stiff,  
I made challah that dripped honey and eggwash like a yellowed prayer,  
I made lattes and raised my broken voice louder than god knew what to do  
with,

I dyed my hair pink and brown and blue and then back again,  
I painted my walls and then painted them again, wrote love poems and  
burned them

and still it rained.

Cherries fell from their perches in the wind, and in their places grew eager  
leaves,  
daffodils flowered and shriveled in the cold, wilting with every dawn.  
The world lived and died between each strike of the clock,

In every breath I lived an entire life,

and still it rained.

E.M. Florence  
Greenwich, CT



## FISH COVE

Beneath the dock  
from which he casts,  
the water is shallow and clear,  
the sodden earth  
that bears the weight of liquid  
is speckled with shoots  
that will eventually surface  
into a stage upon which  
the basso bull frog  
will perform his aria.  
Occasionally, a cloud of dirt  
smokes the clarity  
of the transparent lake  
and his searching  
reveals the tail fin  
of a scampering bass  
near the shore to spawn.  
He sits and watches  
amid the Spring warmth  
and delicate breezes  
which incite the lake  
to gently slap the dock.

He no longer dangles the bait  
to tease the unsuspecting,  
no longer allows temptation to linger,  
that same lure  
which spurred him to seek  
refuge and the simple poem  
this silent swimmer  
strokes with her fin.  
To read her verse  
within the enclosure of this cove  
is the remedy by which  
he turns from the commotion  
in his own life,  
a commotion he has no desire  
to impart.

Michael Keshigian  
Londonderry, NH

## THE ISLAND

Who shall stay back  
on this island  
long after we have left?

The hills shall stay on  
until they collide with  
a heavenly star, larger thoughts.

The talks of our own  
childhoods, the transient  
phrases, their lack of conjunctions.

Those many who could not leave,  
because they were never meant to,  
so early, before their full growth.

And a few who were lonely  
like us, looked frail  
because of their deep griefs,

always with us, deep in  
the sea cavities of our minds,  
floating in the salt water, like tears.

Who will remember us, feel sad  
about our going, consoling each other,  
trying desperately to forget us?

Bibhu Padhi  
Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India

## Inside Joke

She wobbles across  
uneven lawn, clutches  
a walker to guide  
uneven steps between  
tables of glassware,  
holiday décor, old  
tools still smeared  
with her husband's  
greasy grip, blankets  
and lawn ornaments.  
She smiles at hordes  
who bid on her  
life-long accumulation,  
unable to believe  
all this stuff fit  
into her house, smiles  
not at strangers  
but at their readiness  
to bear all these  
burdens she carried  
so many years ago.

Richard Dinges  
Walton, NE

## Discussion with An Expert On Metamorphosis\*

I explain to her that when anthropomorphism  
Was new to the human psyche, some remnants  
Of animism persisted. Take Poseidon's beard,  
For example; why do you think it's so wavy?

To emulate the sea, she says,  
Playful yet astute,  
Half-a-grilled-cheese sandwich  
Borne up in her gesticulation of waves.

She is nine years of age.

I conclude that nothing is ever  
Completely lost in transition,  
For she suffers her own changes,  
Her appendages lengthening,

Her ribs separating--  
Growing pains, the doctor consoles,  
A growth-spurt morphosis rocketing  
Her between natural milestones.

I also once told her that as we age,  
Our bodies change so much, our cells dead,  
Clones in their place, that every seven years  
We are like new people.

I regret having told her this.

She weeps some nights  
Over places she has lived before--  
Her connection to various rooms,  
Toys misplaced, neighbors she has known--  
All severed nomadically in transit,

Already the anxiety of being  
A ten-year-old bears down on her;  
For good measure, while biting her nails,  
She hordes every toy and trinket,  
Rocks, even, for she knows too well  
The sad chasm of loss.

When she makes her inquiry to me of Arachne,  
She asks if the transformation of the hapless seamstress  
Into the first spider immortalized the otherwise mortal woman.  
After all, do we not see spiders everywhere?  
Is Arachne herself present somehow in this ubiquity?

She has finished her sandwich, and I my lunch,  
And the urgency of schedule  
Pulls us from this quiet moment,  
As it has done so many times before.

No, sweet child, I promise you this:  
No mortal pain is forever.

Joshua Brunetti  
New Britain, CT

\*First published in *Modern Language Studies*

## DRIVING BACKWARDS

Even when you're not ready, it just happens:  
it's dusk, and your car begins to roll slowly  
backwards. Your leg is numb and you can't quite  
reach for the brake and the landscape in front of you

pulls away, a little faster each second. You panic  
at first, try to move your tingling foot but  
the car doesn't stop, no matter how hard you press  
the brake. You look ahead and

see the past, the places where you just drove,  
sliding quickly beyond you: intersections you used  
to cross, favorite trees you once climbed, houses where you lived  
glide past you and into the flat line of the horizon where  
your windshield is

steadily staring. The car looks suddenly  
newer, the nick on the glass healing over,  
the split on the upholstery sealing itself,  
the chrome shift lever brightening

to a shine, and soon you're  
okay with this backing up:  
You feel the scars on your body  
smoothing over and

disappearing. The odometer, too,  
is reversing itself, each mile sliding up into  
the forehead of the dashboard. You glance  
in the rearview mirror, see

someone who looks like you,  
a teenager standing on the gravel roadside  
hitchhiking, his thumb lifted high as if he could poke a hole  
in the darkness. As you pass him, he looks up at you briefly,

nods in recognition. For an instant you wonder  
if this is what dying might be like: Passing your younger self

without touching. He shrinks smaller and smaller  
into the horizon, and just before he disappears he raises one arm  
and waves at you, the same way  
you're waving at him, if you're saying

hello, or goodbye, or both at the same time.

Bill Meissner  
St. Cloud, MN



## **Anatomous**

If you should rebuild me can you fill me up  
out of a river and replace this slow blood  
wandering around lost inside of me,  
maybe looking for a heart,

install roll-down windows instead of eyes  
that will watch instead of observe, squint  
instead of judge and let in just a little  
of that cool breeze I never see anyway

and maybe you have something to replace these  
old hired hands I tried to give up to the bosses,  
just like they tell you, sacrifice your hands  
but keep the soul, but they wanted all my parts

and speaking of souls, have we decided if  
they exist? I was going to ask for one  
of those too, but it doesn't seem to go that  
well with the world I've been wearing lately.

Casey Killingsworth  
Stevenson, WA



**Inquisition**  
Cassidy Calcaterra  
Neenah, WI

## **Making Do**

We couldn't afford remote control cars  
and they kept the boxes too far from the door

for even the dumbest and most desperate  
of us to think we could make it in time.

So we let gravity take our Hot Wheels  
down stacked encyclopedias, dictionaries

copies of Cosmo and Woman's Home Living  
toward the toilet paper ticker tape, iris

capturing the only photo finish we'd get.  
Eventually we'd be gifted a Nintendo,

half a decade after the neighbors but Mario  
didn't seem to care, so why would we?

Zebulon Huset  
Santee, CA



**Monkey Bridge**  
Cassidy Calcaterra  
Neenah, WI

## ARKANSAS TRUCK STOP

Must be morning  
because the eggs  
are sunny-side up,  
the bacon's greasy,  
and the hash browns  
are near black.

Can't be home  
because there's a huge trucker  
on the stool beside me,  
and two more in a booth.

Can't be home  
because there's no way  
I'd be kissing that cook.

Guy's got a pack of cigarettes  
squeezed between his tee-shirt  
and tattoo.

I read the local newspaper.  
He skims the legs of the waitress.  
One behemoth in the booth  
can use the word 'rig' in a sentence.  
Always prefaced by 'big' of course.

I'm out in the world,  
Rayburns on the counter,  
coffee passing on messages  
to my senses.  
It's just the one place.  
It's just the one kind of people.  
It's off a highway  
some place in Arkansas.

And it must be real  
because I know  
I couldn't just write this.

John Grey  
Johnston, RI

## CONCEPTION

Barefoot in white slacks  
and her husband's sweater,  
she plays the piano most seriously,  
bungling Mozart with a grimace  
then a grin,  
the lamplight  
flickered unnoticed upon her fingers.

The field from where her progeny  
once thrived has withered,  
grown voices and opinions  
have fled the confines of the arena  
where music,  
like a tranquilized tiger,  
swerves again.

Her foot presses pedals,  
fingernails carelessly flit keys,  
and in her womb  
a musician is conceived.  
The house is no longer empty,  
half full with sound,  
she nourishes herself.

Michael Keshigian  
Londonderry, NH

## A Note on Death

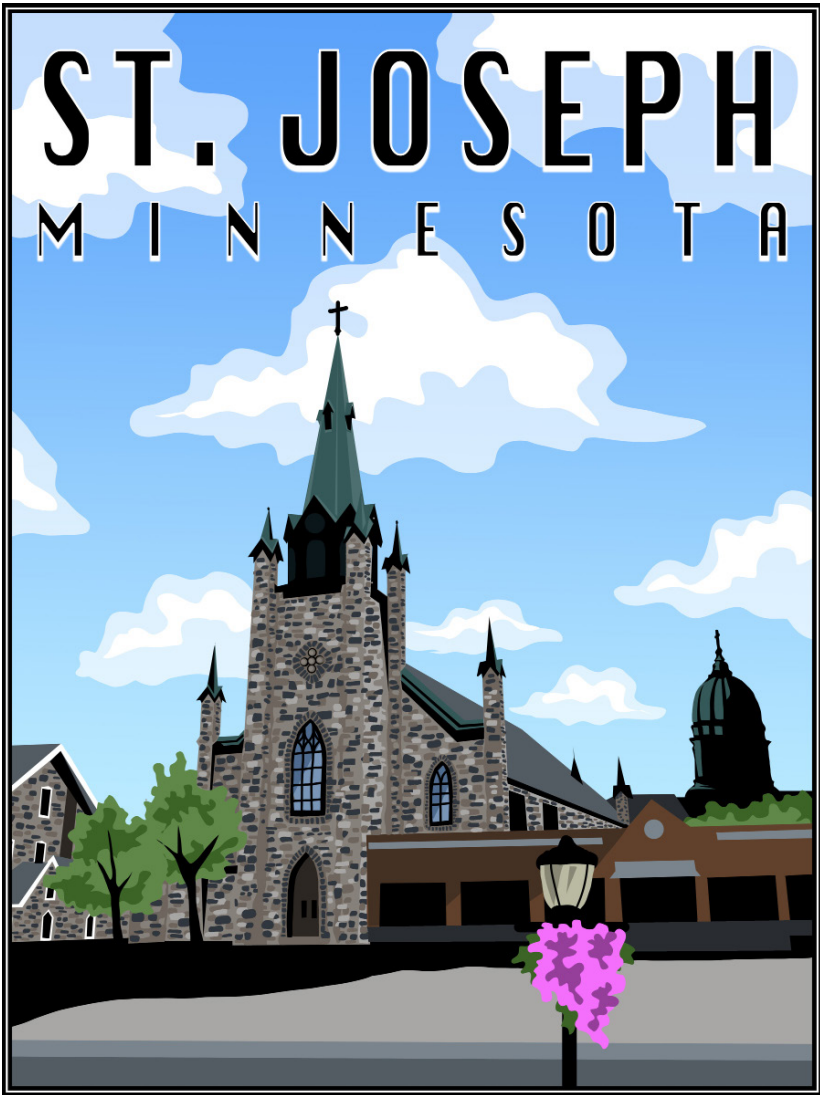
In a city I rarely get to,  
I am reminded that one day I will die,  
and at work, a lull between customers,  
I am reminded then too that one day I will die.  
No one is immune to death—  
the holiday visits to the graves  
remind me of this—  
and my conscious reminds me of this constantly,  
with no prompting except the fullness of a good day.

The more inconvenienced I am,  
the less I am reminded,  
but surrounded by people I can actually stand,  
in a place that grounds and does not jostle me,  
and suddenly, I am a living thing that could easily become a lifeless thing.  
We are all living things that could easily become lifeless things,  
but no one tells God they're not ready to die  
when there's not a loaded gun leveled at their head,  
and no one tells God they're not ready to die  
when they're not trapped in a crashed car that's spewing gasoline.

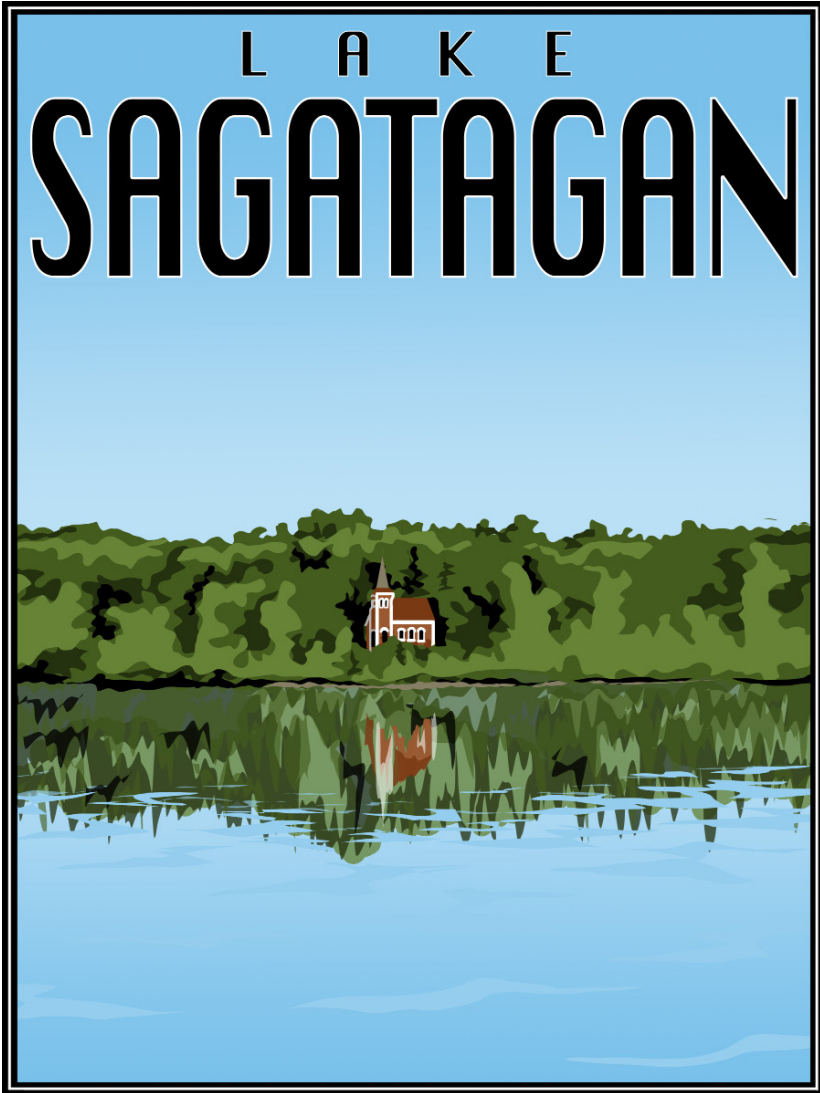
We are all living things that could easily become lifeless things,  
but nobody ponders death the way that I do,  
the way that I do.

Christine Naprava  
Millville, NJ





**St. Joseph, MN Poster**  
Tia Connelly  
Chanhassen, MN



**Lake Sagatagan Poster**  
Tia Connelly  
Chanhassen, MN

## THE SHAKESPEAREAN ACTOR

He's on stage, every night, playing grief,  
be it Hamlet's for his father, Macbeth  
at his vainglory or Othello's  
hard look at his own reasonless rage.

But he puts so much into Shakespearean  
misery that his personal anguish is  
treated almost casually backstage,  
a sip from a bottle as the makeup goes on,

two as it comes off. A fractured marriage  
can't compete with the treacherous minxes  
of the printed page. And what's a friend's  
broken promise to duplicitous whispers

in the ear, a murderous stepfather.  
His family aggravate him but their  
ghosts don't appear on parapets.  
And the news is never encouraging.

But it sure beats the cackling bile of witches.  
He even considered suicide once.  
Trouble was, he could never come up  
with a soliloquy to rival, "To be or not to be."

One day, when he's much older, and his wife  
has left him, and children seldom call, he'll be ready  
to play Lear. Seven nights a week, a breakdown for the ages.  
He'll have no strength left for his own tragedy.

John Grey  
Johnston, RI

## WITNESSING A STORY

This is the small place where  
all thinking stops. There are  
merely amorphous impulses  
that couldn't lead you anywhere.

The tissues do not follow  
each other, but just lie unmoved  
in the skeletal dark, ready  
to eat into the body.

And a little deeper down,  
where a week ago happiness  
stayed to greet you into  
a zone of light and warmth,

winter is lisping its stories  
that are nowhere centred  
so they could hold brain's  
electricity, jubilant quiet.

Who asks for a fibrous stillness  
in muscles and nerves, the brittle thinness  
of bones? Whose day brings back  
only an emptiness, a folded sleep?

Bibhu Padhi  
Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India

## The Quality of Skin

I knew then  
as I watched her on her way out  
that I'd be obsessed with skin.  
Thin, jaundiced skin clinging to bone like  
over-seasoned chicken left to cook too long.  
Toe bones that resembled the cords straining in her neck,  
not enough skin to cover all that height,  
the height of a model gone unused.  
I remember nothing else of her  
besides the quality of her skin.

Years later  
and everyone is at the mercy of their skin.  
Immaculate planes slick with oil  
and aggravated, busy surfaces marked by the same sheen.  
You are this if you have that  
and that if you have this.  
I find myself grouped in with the worst  
but far from that unfortunate few.  
I remember nothing else of them  
besides the quality of their skin.

Years later and what spared me then  
gets me now.  
The aggravated, busy surface that tells my age  
and a trying reaction rustled up too soon.  
Too much questioning from the immaculate  
and not enough empathy from those with skin busier than mine.  
Checking myself in mirrors and faces like Joyce's Connie  
and patiently waiting for the day when my cells decide it's time to shed.  
I remember nothing else of myself  
besides the quality of my skin.

Now I envy the immaculate  
but surround myself with those who aren't quite there.  
Complimenting what thrives on foreheads, cheeks, and chins  
and wanting more of it when all they want is less.  
Always better or never really bad at all in their eyes  
but never any better in mine.  
Still Joyce's Connie but a Connie who makes eye contact  
and degrades herself fewer times in a day.  
A personality trait listed beneath a yearbook photo,  
I am nothing but the quality of my skin.

Christine Naprava  
Millville, NJ

## **Our Galway Time, Fall 2019**

A community poem drawn from student journal entries

I hoped

To see something I've never seen before  
To experience something that's out of my element, that maybe I  
wouldn't usually try  
To experience a deep level of understanding  
To observe differences  
For a time without needlessly worrying about stupid stuff back  
home  
To realize something new

I noticed

How much I talk versus how much I listen  
That I have laughed more in the past few days than in a long time  
How much I struggle just sitting, especially in a lecture  
How much I rely on a routine  
How I need to improve my patience and ability to keep a positive  
attitude  
How much I like a lot of "little comforts" in my life  
That my meds make me irritable  
In a group I'm a huge listener  
I need more organization than I thought I did  
How far my energy will go because I'm so excited  
I have high expectations for my life and when things don't go as  
planned I get stressed  
I notice the negative before the positive.

I didn't realize

I could be so blessed to have this opportunity  
How much I enjoy the scenery of mountains  
That family burial sites are still practiced  
How beautiful the beaches are  
How stunning Ireland would be  
The grass really is greener

I want to remember

Stories we made as a group  
The views  
The exhilaration and fear that I felt  
That feeling of awe and excitement  
The waves  
How vast the world is and how much there is still left to discover

Annette Atkins/2019 Galway Program  
CSB/SJU





**Cows On A Beach**  
Cassidy Calcaterra  
Neenah, WI

# PROSE

## Nighthawks

You have to leave the protest early to cover your nightshift. Several black lives matter community leaders were arrested last night in their own homes. Upwards of 100 people show up at the capitol. It feels like a lot. It feels like too little. When you clock in, Jen flaunts her managerial power by yelling at you for not having a solid color mask. No one is coming into the store right now and she demands you not sit still anyways. You restock the cups. Your coworkers make fun of a doordash workers accent as he orders on the intercom.

By seven you're back in the rhythm of it, order, drinks, cash out, order, drinks, cash out. You ignore the tightening feeling in your chest. A car comes by with a kitten in the backseat. All your coworkers gather to see. A frazzled looking man walks up to the window, voice barely audible. He says he's homeless and has been walking all day. He asks for one taco and tries to offer a lottery ticket in exchange. Jen doesn't let you serve him. A lovely woman has a corgi. He's sitting in the front of her car, and drives for the drink when you hand it out. She lets you pet him. You smile, and then she hands you a platinum mastercard that says Blue Lives Matter.

It's nine, and you haven't gotten your thirty yet. It's just you and Seanray working the whole line. The parking lot is packed seven cars out. Seanray says he was sleeping in the skate park last night, and he saw griffons perching on the roof of buildings. He laughs, that barking laugh he has that's loud and little jarring. He says he knows they weren't really griffons there. But there was something big and crouching, and he doesn't know what. It vexes him. You don't believe in griffons, but when you look out the dark window in between cars, you think you see them too, lurching in the shadows of the parking lot, waiting diligently under the cameras. You feel like you're being watched.

A group of teenagers rolls up to the window, drunk. They're fraternity age. None of them wear masks. They complain about the wait when you fold over and seal the bag and put it in a plastic tin and hand it out with gloves according to the new company policy. You think of your grandfather, and how you were in the same room with him just yesterday. A single middle aged man takes his food from you, takes one look in the bag, and flips you off. You don't know what you did wrong. He drives off before you can ask.

You haven't looked at the clock for a while now, but when you get the chance too, it says 23:04. It's in military time, you see. It takes you a moment to do the mental gymnastics. First minus two, then ten-eleven o'clock. You give the last car in line their food and they drive off. It's empty for once, and Seanray, who was working the line, peels of his gloves and breathes a sigh of relief. You look at your phone and learn from a twitter notification that Ruth Bader Ginsburg died three hours ago. You go to eat a small bag of apples and honey you brought to work. They're soaked through, the honey is water now. She's dead, and your chest is just two plates that are slowly being cracked open, every day something else stuffed into the gap.

Just when you start to sit down, another car pulls in. A doordash order of over \$120 worth of food. It takes you thirty minutes to make it. You warn all the cars behind them. An elderly drunk hispanic man is a regular. He comes this time every Friday and orders a tostada. You tell him for the third time they are discontinued, and he orders something else, asking for salt packets. You don't have a salt packet in the whole restaurant, so you just stuff his bag with sauces in apology. He fistbumps you at the window. The same middle aged man from earlier comes back. He does not order. He simply drives through the line both middle fingers out the window. Trish-- was it Trish working line?-- laughs and says "Fuck him, it will move our times up." You look out the window. The twin headlights of

approaching cars seem to stretch out into infinity, like when you face two mirrors towards each other. You look at the clock, it says 26:42. You don't bother with the math.

There's a long black party limo, and it pulls up to the drive thru, the last window wheeling down. Jeff Bezos is inside, laughing in a half conversation with a friend. You tell him his total is 30.78. He hands you a credit card, not even looking at you, instead sharing in some kind of joke they're all having. "Take this," he says, pulling a twenty dollar bill out of his wallet, offering it up between two fingers. "Buy yourself something." He smiles. He is feeling generous. He's having a good night. A wave of nausea blasts through you with every beat drop of whatever party song is playing. The limo drives off, blaring music into the dark.

You step outside into the dark, street lit alleyway behind the employee door. Trish is there, and she offers you a cigarette. You wave it away. You already feel like you can't breathe. In the far distance, you can hear the sirens, the sound of gunshots and the hiss of tear gas canisters. You wonder if they're still at the capitol or closer. Your brain dances with the graphic images of social media posts you're sure you'll wake up to tomorrow morning. The griffons are still waiting by the security camera, their yellow eyes boring into your head, daring you to move.

"I'm sick of Seanray," Trish says, coughing. "I'm gonna tell Jen to stop scheduling him at night. They've got to transfer his ass. If he's working, I don't wanna be here."

"Yeah" You echo, sipping your water.

"He's so creepy, always saying he loves me, Jen's gotta transfer his ass to another store or I'm putting in my two weeks, I'm gonna go work at the Taco Bell on Sheridan."

"He had a bottle of vodka on the employee drinks window the other day" You offer. "Not even trying to hide it anymore."

"He could get fired for that shit" Trish complains. "Don't know

why Jen keeps hiring these assholes.” Jen was desperate. “I’m twice his age.” She huffs. Seanray was also desperate. You’re not really talking about anything. The distant chants of protestors echo, and then the drive thru bell rings, drowning them out with its pure, insistent ding. Trish sighs, putting out her cigarette on the wall. And you head back into the glaring light of the store.

“When are we closing?” You ask. The clock reads 13:67. You have class tomorrow. No one answers. You’re alone. The middle aged man comes to flip you off one last time. You go to lift your fingers and mimic him, but he’s already gone. There’s three minutes till close. And then the last car of the night rolls in. Ruth Bader Ginsburg comes up to the drive thru. She’s in a red honda. She’s young, like in her movie, on the basis of sex, or the old black and white photos you’ve seen. She orders a single glass of wine. You hand it to her, and she doesn’t say anything, just giving a soft sort of smile, and then driving into the street. Her car is immediately hit by a truck.

You’re closed now, and you’re on dishes. The new sanitation spray comes out red. It’s thick, and difficult to clean with, staining the dishes. You’ve got your bluetooth headphones on, on a YouTube playlist. You work as fast as you can. You want to get home. You think the liquid might be wine. You soak the dishes in it, scrubbing off hours of beans and beef and dirt and mud. Everything in the sink turns red. The color gets on your hands, under your fingernails. You don’t notice your headphones stopped playing music a while ago. You don’t remember coming home.

Robin Buchanan  
Denver, CO



# The Wagner-Berger Prize for Excellence in Creative Writing

In 1987, Patricia and Leonard Porcello endowed this prize to honor Patricia's parents, Louis and Mary Wagner-Berger, and to support college women who are interested in writing short stories and novels. It is designed to encourage and reward excellence in creative writing at the College of Saint Benedict.

The Wagner-Berger Prize for fiction is the first scholarship of its kind at the College of Saint Benedict. It is a scholarship awarded annually to the CSB student who submits the most original, previously unpublished short story. All submissions are judged by a committee of English Department members, and the winner receives an award of \$1,000. *Studio One* is honored to publish last year's and this year's winners, CSB students Anna Spreck and Taja Longley.



## **The Brown Apartment Building**

The man with a trumpet for a mouth was trying to sing again. Or it could've been the elephant, though then again, one could exist and thus eliminate the possibility of the other existing. No one in the brown apartment building really knew if the elephant that always seemed to be just in the next room over was the man with a trumpet for a mouth or its own entity. Mr. Grimace, however, had seen the elephant once or twice, though he did have a bad habit of spending much of his time in a different plane of existence. That was why none of the tenants of the brown apartment building trusted his word. Besides, it was difficult to understand him because his words were always curly from the way they had to twist themselves to escape from his perpetually thinned lips, frozen in an expression of mild discomfort and disgust. This was where his name came from, of course; he always looked like he had narrowly avoided stepping in sun-dried dog poop, or the shedded wings of the small, insect-like bats that were the only other eyes in his apartment besides his own--visitors from his favorite plane.

The man with a trumpet for a mouth was not a good singer, an unfortunate side effect of his facial structure, much like his irritated ideas that he should legally change his name to The Man With A Trumpet For A Mouth because everyone called him that and not his real name. However, when he vocalized these ideas, the tenants responded, animalistic, to the mild aggression in his voice but not his actual words. Besides, whenever anyone mentioned something to do with laws or legality, the tenants' eyes (and some had many) glazed over as they mentally shuffled through the millions of laws they had brought with them to the brown apartment building. All these laws had collided once in a very brief but very chaotic (and very interesting and very lively) period known as The Clash of Laws.

Now, the only laws that governed the brown apartment building were these: the autonomous law that stated all tenants had to do what they must to live in peace (occasionally ignored, as one could expect), and the second, rather cosmic, law that stated there would always be more walls and infinite, doubling corridors in the building than the universe should allow.

Mr. Grimace felt the need to disobey the first law, and so set out to find the elephant who was happily trumpeting away right next door. Of all the tenants, the elephant was the most content to abide by the laws. The speaking gargoyle that lived on the top floor was the least, and he was also the reason Mr. Grimace felt the need to disobey the first law--it was time the speaking gargoyle finally trusted his word that the elephant was not the man with a trumpet for a mouth, and if it came to a fight, so be it. Mr. Grimace did not suffer pain, only war with his words as his grimace worsened. Logically, he knew that picking a fight with a stone speaking gargoyle was not a bright move, but more importantly, he knew that fluorescent lights hurt his eyes anyway.

He stepped into the outside corridor, turning around to lock each lock on his front door. He had six locks to which six different keys fit, but one lock was faulty, as was considered lucky in his second-favorite plane. Once he was finished locking his functional locks and not locking his broken lock, he reached down to pet the shaggy animal that lounged on his porch day and night. Yes, he had a porch. Once, he'd accidentally entered a 1950s American television show and fallen so in love with white picket fences and quaint rocking chairs that he demanded a porch be built for him, complaining his way up to the owner of the brown apartment building. The owner of the brown apartment building had a great amount of extra things, which was why he used dim, non-offensive lighting in his office. He had an extra ear on the back of his head, an extra pair of arms, extra-thick glasses for his extra-bad eyesight, and an extra row of teeth, which Mr. Grimace envied because it made for a brilliant smile. Not a

comforting smile, because his extra teeth crowded the normal ones the way unpleasant men crowd you at a bar to let you know you've somehow offended their buddy--after a couple thrown fists, they'll inform you that there was something wrong with the look on your face. So while it was quite frightening to demand something from the owner, Mr. Grimace kept at it.

Now he had a porch, a small realm in which a five-legged and extremely large animal mostly slept. It woke for pats as Mr. Grimace left, and he always wondered what its face looked like--its shaggy cream-colored fur was so shaggy, in fact, that it completely covered the animal's face. He would approach it while it was sleeping and sift through the fur if not for its huge, gracefully curved, and very pointy horns. He had once witnessed the animal get too excited over a pat and accidentally spear one of the insect-like bats. Or at least, he hoped it was accidental. He'd been rather fond of that particular bat.

The elephant continued to make a racket, causing the Cane family to smack the walls in response. Though they lived on the bottom floor, everyone in the brown apartment building was able to hear them. They were always so vengeful, and seemed to enjoy the strange way sound always carried. Mr. Grimace suspected that the extra walls acted much like telephone wires, picking up sound and transporting it to everyone else. He also suspected that it would create a wonderful sense of community if not for the general irritation this caused many of the residents, especially the group of humans on the second floor. At least, they claimed they were humans; they had two legs, two arms, the proper amount of digits, and most importantly (as stated by themselves), an air of disapproval towards outsiders and an unwillingness to mix in with the other tenants. Too bad their toes were their fingers and their limbs weren't quite where they were supposed to be.

Mr. Grimace began to follow the singing. The eyes of paintings

followed his progress. He attempted to nod cheerfully at them, though they didn't seem to like it when anyone, regardless of how cheerful and non-grimacing they were, acknowledged them. As he walked past them, they rolled their eyes at each other as if to say, "Here *he* goes again." This gave the corridor a dizzying quality, as most of the creatures in the paintings were covered with eyes. This was a tribute to the Many-Eyed Monster, who was very jovial as long as one didn't make eye contact with the eyes not on his face and as long as one didn't remark on the lack of other Many-Eyed Monsters in the world. However, he often frequented the minibar on the ground floor, and after a couple drinks, he enjoyed getting up on the chairs and making impassioned speeches about how often he received dirty looks (which was very often) and how unfair and grotesque this treatment was. Mr. Grimace had been told many times that it was truly a sight to see; the humanoid monster standing atop a chair with arms thrown wide, so impassioned that even the eye on his tongue glared at those who dared to risk a snicker.

Mr. Grimace reached the end of the Many-Eyed corridor and decided to take the false corridor going to the right instead of the real corridor going to left. For Mr. Grimace, this was no problem; he could just walk through it while stuck in the In-Between, a place he didn't normally inhabit as it functioned mostly like a door between planes. However, if he wanted to walk through solid things, like the wall of a false corridor, he had to concentrate on staying in the In-Between instead of crossing directly into a different plane. Besides, he always found it easier to follow sounds in places that didn't really exist. Planes tended to confine sounds, dull them down so they could be contained. And in the In-Between, the man with a trumpet for a mouth's singing seemed to sound an awful lot more like an elephant. Of course, Mr. Grimace did believe that the man with a trumpet for a mouth existed, but he also believed that the elephant existed as well, and separately, furthermore. He was just sick of the speak-

ing gargoyle abusing his gift of clear, intelligible speech to say such unintelligent things as “The elephant does not exist.” The speaking gargoyle sounded like stone when he spoke; he had a low but forceful voice like the crunch of gravel underfoot. Whenever Mr. Grimace had a conversation with him, his grimace worsened. Mostly because the speaking gargoyle’s beliefs were always too firm and unchangeable--he refused to even listen if anyone said something that differed from his own views.

So proving the speaking gargoyle wrong was very important to Mr. Grimace.

After an indefinite amount of wandering the In-Between, ear cocked, he reached a spot in which the singing intensified. He closed his eyes and concentrated on the correct plane... If he took a step to the left, he should appear in the room from which the sound emanated. He took a deep breath, held it, stepped to the left, and opened his eyes to pitch black and pins and needles filling his entire body. He could not move any of his limbs save for his right leg. He quickly held another breath and stepped backward into the In-Between, where he shook out his limbs. The next step he took put him directly into a living room, and not mostly in the wall of said living room. He became aware that the singing had abruptly ceased at some point during this shenanigan. No doubt he had startled the elephant. He himself was a little startled as well; he doubted he’d ever get used to appearing inside walls and other solid objects.

The living room was unsettling because it was an exact copy of his own but completely bare. He figured that a small elephant could comfortably live here, and the lack of possessions was merely an effort to minimize safety hazard.

“Hello?” Mr. Grimace called. “It’s Mr. Grimace. I am just dropping by for a visit.”

All the tenants were familiar with this phrase; nearly all of them had been subject to a “visit” (normally just a quick apology as he often

accidentally ended up in someone else's rooms after coming back from a different plane. It was quite difficult to pinpoint the exact place he needed to exit a plane), and if they hadn't, they'd been warned to expect it at some point.

He heard movement from the bedroom down the hall, and a small noise of welcome accompanying it. Something appeared in the hallway, hidden by shadow. They stepped into the living room, into the light, and Mr. Grimace experienced a rare but very rude moment of pure shock. It rather felt like he'd been punched in the stomach.

It was not an elephant at all, but a man with a trumpet for a mouth.

"Oh--Hello," Mr. Grimace forced himself to say. It was quite difficult to wrangle the words from his lips, as they had suddenly just become even more twisted. His only thought was how miserable he'd be after the speaking gargoyle heard about this. All the confidence he had infused his curly voice with on the subject, invalid! Foolish! Oh, he was ruined!

The man standing across from Mr. Grimace lifted his hands and placed them upon the trumpet, playing a quick, driven handful of notes that sounded like a question.

"Yes, yes," Mr. Grimace said, sweat beading at his hairline, "I've just--" He hit a roadblock, tongue trapped in years of bad shocks and sour situations. He began to make choked noises, trying hard to force out an excuse for his presence.

The man with a trumpet for a mouth cut him off, playing more notes that to Mr. Grimace sounded comforting (at least, in comparison to his own pathetic noises).

"Thank you," he managed to say.

The man with a trumpet for a mouth had, in fact, said, "Having a conversation with you is more headache-inducing than having a conversation with my cousin thrice-removed, and she's a bagpipe! Poor fool!"

"I'll just be going now," Mr. Grimace said with great determina-

tion. “I am sorry to disturb you.”

Once he left the man with a trumpet for a mouth’s rooms, he exhaled. He only felt regret for the ridicule that would inevitably follow when he told everyone, including the speaking gargoyle, that he had been wrong all these years; there was no elephant. It *had* been a different plane, after all.

He shrugged.

He always had been tone deaf, anyway.

Anna Spreck  
Wagner-Berger Recipient 2020

## Baby's Breath

Brother blinked away the whiteness in his eyes and the field of white froth below came into focus. With his elbows pressing into the soil he examined the rolling meadow of Baby's-breath—how it might've looked like clouds of smoke, or perhaps sea foam settling on the shore. He tried to imagine these things as clearly as he could. He had only ever saw those words in a book, but they made him curious. And anxious. He wondered if there was sea foam and smoke where he had to go.

From atop the hill, Brother also took in the jagged fringe of the forest. Where the glorious Baby's-breath faded, towering dark trees stood in arms. Fog weaved itself between their branches, blurring the line between mist and cloud. These were familiar to Brother: Mist, clouds, trees, Baby's-breath. These words settled over him warmly. They were home; they were the world.

Then, strangely, he thought of the word “olive” and his skin speckled.

Olive.

Muted by the pinch of thorns in his skull, a little dumpling child had stood in a forest clearing with his hands clutching wet soil. He liked the feel of it. It was a wonder of the world—soil. Trees forty times his size had leaned over him, their leaves watching the little boy wonder below. The rustling of the wind held whispers of gossip. They would go and tell Bapham that Brother was there almost past sunset. None of the hundred thorn-headed children were to ever wander in the forest past sunset.

But Brother had glimpsed something that gave him a feeling he couldn't quite describe. If he had heard the word before Brother would have described it as “strange.”

It had been his turn to draw water from the well. A dragging hem



of an olive dress had caught his eyes between the clumps of foliage. Then, he had glimpsed pale skin like *snow*. Brother only thought of that word now.

It was Sister, hand in hand with two cloaked figures. She had craned her neck to look at him, old wounds made pink and puffy by a fresh thorn crown. Her lips had been twisted funny, and her eyes were wide with...with... something Brother could not conjure at the time. A sliver of instinct had ignited him, and he found himself tied to this olive hem. He would have compared it to rope if he had known how.

The thing had tugged him toward an aged oak. But there had been no olive hem dragging, nor pale skin, nor towering cloak figures. He felt a rush he couldn't name. It had squeezed his lungs, yet he still held onto his breath. The trunk, mossy and huge, had folded in on itself, as if hiding a secret.

He then understood the emotion that came with wide eyes and twisted lips. In the burning light of a dying sun, her white skin shone like diamonds. No flush of pink except in a ring around her neck where...

He still had not thought of the word "rope."  
... a thing had suspended her in the air. The olive hem lied beneath her blistered feet with the rest of her dress, ripped and torn and ruined. Brother had not thought about nakedness either. He had no thought there was a word.

A stillness had thickened the air and condensed in Brother's throat, causing him to choke. The wind stopped its whispering and gossiping, yet Sister swayed lightly from a tree limb with a grim smile on her face.

"Sssssaaaad." Sister had dragged her cheeks and eyes downward dramatically then puckered her lips. She then laughed, nudging a confused Brother in his ribs.

"Well how do you know?" he had asked her.

"My mother said so." She shrugged.

Sister then lifted a piece of the damp earth, worms dangling from the sediment in her hand. Beneath had been strips of paper, gray and smudged, black things printed all over them.

Brother had watched her carefully, wondering if she was trying to show him “mother.”

“You can’t tell anyone you seen these.” Sister motioned to her pile of half mush.

“What are they?”

Sister had picked one up and handed it to Brother.

“Paper.”

In the corner of the shred, there had been a woman’s face—crumpled and damaged by weather and moisture. Brother examined it carefully, trying to imagine what the other half of her face might look like and why he had never seen her before.

“Who is this?”

Sister had shaken her head. “I don’t know.”

Suddenly, a hand touched Brother’s shoulder and he jolted, reality weighing as heavily on his head as the crown of thorns. Bapham clicked his tongue twice in greeting, then his eyes turned upward in what Brother could only guess to be a smile. He couldn’t be sure with the black veil that covered Bapham’s face.

Clicking his own tongue, Brother scrambled to his knees and bowed his head. The Baby’s breath still rolled in the meadow below, unbounded.

“Bapham,” he said reverently. The cloaked figure lightly ran his thumb across the boy’s pinkened cheek.

He had done the same thing when he found Brother staring at Sister’s deranged face. He was only six years old then. Bapham had kept him close ever since. Closer than all the other children. Instead of kneeling

down beside the other brothers and sisters for prayer time, Bapham escorted him to his personal chambers. Books with spines and hundreds of colors lined the wall from floor to ceiling. Every evening, Bapham read to him. Soon, Brother found himself sliding his finger across the first few pages of several books, trying to decide which one he would devour next. These books described a different world that Brother had secretly fallen in love with. He now knew things like terrified and dogs and coffee cups and a place named New York.

And when his voice began to change and hair began to sprout under his arms, Bapham encouraged him to read more deeply. Often, he would challenge the boy to point out errors in the books. Fallacies, as Bapham would call them. And often, the error lied within humanity.

*Inherent evil.*

Bapham nodded his head in acknowledgement at Brother, then patted him on the shoulder.

“When the sun sets, you’ll go that way.”

Brother turned toward the vast expanse of valley that lied on the other side of the hill. His brows twisted in confused, but Brother listened, remembering the years of training he had endured:

There is more to the world than forest. Than soil. Than meadows.  
He is to go there.

And he is to retrieve a package.

He shouldn’t be afraid.

The books, they help. Remember the books. Trust only Bapham.

*Trust only Bapham*, Brother whispered to himself.

“There is a road. You stop at the road and follow it west,” Bapham said.

Brother nodded, pointing westward.

“You ask someone the directions to the hospital...”

“...But not someone too tall, too bulky. Not someone who can over

power me, or who looks around nervously. Preferably a woman.” Brother recited and the woman’s face from the newspaper shred came back to him. Bapham nodded, pleased.

“You know what to do from there, Brother.” Without another word, Bapham handed Brother a backpack with a change of clothes. A plain brown shirt and jeans. He thought it looked the color of coffee, which he wanted to try when he got to the world. He didn’t tell Bapham.

“Will I get to see a beach?”

The man’s low laughter rumbled in his throat, then he handed him another thing. It was a little square thing that opened. He saw his own face inside one of the pockets. Next to it, the name “John Fields” was printed in stark black letters.

“This is your ID. If anybody asks you who you are, you use this. Say nothing more. There’s danger in making yourself known to evil. But you are strong and above them all.”

Brother slipped the square thing in his backpack, silent.

Streaks of orange melted across the sky, casting a brilliant glow on them. Bapham held Brother by the shoulders rather passionately, as if he was his own son. Nothing else was said. Slinging the bag across his shoulders, Brother set off down the hill, letting the name John Fields roll off his tongue until he liked the sound.

Footsteps echoed against the cold, cream tile. Brother’s eyes darted around nervously, taking in everything at once. People sat in chairs, facing each other, solemn looks on their faces. Off to the other side of the room, people in blue fabric hastily walked, taking things, giving things, talking to each other. Their shoes squeaked on the floor. A buzzing white light in the corner of the room flickered so slightly, Brother dared not blink to make sure. This irritated Brother. Yet, he still walked, the consistent hum of chatter and distant wailing encircling his eardrums.

This was a hospital. His chest fell as he remembered to exhale.

A woman, not too tall, not too bulky, poked her head up from behind the desk and offered him a warm smile. Brother knew that this was a front for evil, as Bapham had said.

“Hi, how can I help you?” She blinked with concern.

“Hello. I’m here to visit the maternity ward.”

The woman leaned back in her chair and reached for an object attached to a spiral thing. A phone, Brother reminded himself.

A few seconds later, she pointed him to an open notebook on her desk.

“Sign your name here please. Then up to level three.”

Brother looked toward the sliding metal doors, unease settling in his stomach. But, he smiled, just as Bapham had told him to, and wrote his name, just as how he had practiced.

When the metal box stopped and opened again, Brother lifted his shoulders and walked confidently past the front desk. The people in blue fabric were laughing to themselves, oblivious. They held cups of something brown. Something that smelled. Brother licked his lips.

The only footsteps he heard were his own now.

*Walk straight down the hall and make a right when you hit the wall.*

He hit the wall. And he heard them before he saw them. Muffled high pitched crying, then deeper voices shushing them.

He came upon a wide window where a dozen tiny bodies lied swathed in blue or pink. He watched these tiny bodies in amazement; how they curled their toes and sucked on their fists. Most of their eyes were closed, flailing their tongues around in search of something. These were babies, Brother noted.

In the corner a woman wrapped a baby in a cloth of some sort while another woman watched, grinning.

*Show interest, he reminded himself. Wait until they are gone.*

This wasn't hard for Brother to do. He found himself naturally taken by the curious little things.

He didn't know how much time had passed until the room was empty.

*You'll only have a few seconds. Grab one and cut their tag off.*

With the fire of Bapham lit beneath his feet, Brother started toward the door, but was held back by the sound of another opening.

A woman waddled out of a room, a baby in her arms and a smile on her face. In the same moment, her eyes fell on Brother, who had been staring at her the entire time.

Though her face was not damp, nor crumpled, nor sad, Brother knew her to be the woman from the newspaper.

"How exciting! New sibling?" she said, her eyes ablaze with joy. Brother cleared his throat, realizing she was speaking to him.

*Sibling.*

Unsure, he followed the woman's gaze through the glass. Brother hadn't heard of the word "sibling," but she didn't notice his confusion.

"Which one?" she pried.

Brother pressed his finger to the glass, pointing at nothing in particular.

"A little sister! How precious." She squinted her eyes, landing on a baby dressed in pink. "My little girl would have absolutely adored a big brother like you..." Her voice trailed and her face fell into something Brother could recognize. Sadness.

Then she perked up again, remembering the baby in her arms. "Your mother must be so ecstatic. I know I am." She bounced her bundle.

Echoing her words, blood rushed to Brother's head as a nausea violently overcame him.

*Sister. Mother.*

"Sweetie, where's the rest of your family? Are you here alone?"

The woman persisted, but Brother had no answer for her. Family?

*Sister. Mother. Family.*

His head dizzied with new questions. He wished he could use the phone downstairs to call Bapham. He wished to know what a “Family” was.

Before Brother could generate a response, the two women returned to their stations in the room full of tiny bodies.

“I think I will go,” Brother managed to say. The woman eyed hm carefully.

“Okay, sweetie. Congratulations again on your sister.” She then started down the hall.

*Sister. Sister.* The image of her limp body hung in Brother’s mind and he found that he could no longer breathe. With his hands stuck to his sides, he watched as the woman grew smaller and smaller with distance. Before the metal doors slid open, she stopped abruptly and glanced at a thing on the wall. She reached out and caressed this thing, then the metal doors opened.

Brother, held in place by a weight in his mind, looked back at the baby girl named Sister. Her eyes were halfway open, a dopey smile on her face. She seemed to be looking right at him, with those olive eyes, telling him something he could not quite understand.

*Did he really have a sister, a mother a family?*

Brother zipped the empty bag closed then half jogged to the metal box. Would it take him up or down? He didn’t know. What else was there in a hospital besides a maternity ward? A terrible thing had befallen him. It punched at him and screamed in his ears, shattering a wall within his mind he did not know was there.

Sister. Mother.

But there were no mothers in the forests. Where were all the Mothers?

Brother stood in front of the metal box, waiting, fidgeting, bag empty. He saw now that the thing was a board with hundreds of babies' faces tacked to it. If he knew what the word meant, he would have seen that all of them were missing.

Taja Longley  
Wagner-Berger Recipient 2021





# Submission Guidelines

## Submission Address

STUDIO ONE

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Deadline: January 31 for spring publication. Reading and judging period is between late September and February. Results will be sent by May.

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