special thanks

B&B Duplicators, Jessica Serego and the staff at SASS Communications, The Student Association, The Marvin Center Governing Board, Joan Mitchell, Tom Mallon and the English and Creative Writing Department, and The G.W. Review.

submit

Wooden Teeth is published twice each year and is open to all members of The George Washington University community. Undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, alumni, and staff are encouraged to submit their poetry, fiction, non-fiction, and art. For additional information, please refer questions to:

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Submissions can be sent electronically to gwoodenteeth@gmail.com. All submissions should be typed with name, phone number, and email address. You may submit three literary works and three pieces of artwork each semester. No literary work will be returned, but art will be returned at the request of the artist. If art is not claimed after four semesters, it becomes the property of Wooden Teeth. For more information, including deadlines and selected pieces from this issue and others, please visit our website listed below.

http://studentorgs.gwu.edu/woodenteeth/

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WASHINGTON, DC
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American Genesis

Let there be people.
Let there be sauce, for everyone's pasta. Let there be pasta. For everyone.
Let's all go have chowder! Mini quiche! Bacon bits! Sausages! All different kinds of sausage. So many sausage.
Let's not!
I believe we all belong to each other, so we're all debt men walking.
Blasphenie! Buffoon! Bifurcatement!
Let some guy come outta nowhere to tell you how to catch the right bus.
Let there be Starbucks. Let there be kids with no moms. Let there be the Cock Brothers.
Let there be well-hung studs and 18 y/o nympho babysitters.
Let there be plenty of good drugs. Let there be random murders. Let there be Juarez.
Let there be GDP. Let there be Growth.
Let there be democracy.
Let there be occupied territories. Central banks.
Christmas lights. Nike store. RJ Reynolds.
Let there be anything you want.
Slow down
Pause
your mind.
Take your
Hold
time.
Realize that
Look
you are
alive.
Breathe in
Expand
and release.
Find sanity
Feel
in reality
Realize that
See
you are
fine.

antarah crawley Under
There's something really beautiful about being under rather than above.
ground
Robert beams up at you from the paper. You haven’t seen him in half a century and he looks different. He smiles at the camera face-on instead of sideways the way he always looked at you. He has his arms around a woman about his age and a younger man. Something blurry is written under the picture.

You knew the baby would be a boy. You felt him take root inside you and you knew. You knew everything about him. His little hand pressed against your side from within and you knew. You knew he was yours, and you knew that could never be.

The labor lasted over thirty hours. He didn’t want to come out; you felt his little hand grasping. He knew. That was the hardest thing, the knowing. He knew what you were going to do. There was a lot of blood. You tried to stop pushing and keep him safe but the doctors gave you something that made you forget and when you woke up you were on clean sheets in a new room and he was gone.

They asked you for a name before they gave him away to the new family and you said, “Robert.” You didn’t know why. You still don’t. But you’ve always imagined that he was called Bobby until he outgrew it. You imagine him for the millionth time as a teenager rolling his eyes (he has beautiful green eyes just like yours), “It’s Bob, now, Mom, okay?” You never imagine the Mom character. You imagine he is allergic to bees like you.

You force yourself to read the caption: “Robert Andrew Johnson with his wife of forty-two years, Edith, and their son Jason, 39.”

After your husband died you went really crazy for sassafras tea. You drank eight, nine cups a day. You were out in the garden every day digging up roots, peeling them, laying them out to dry. They took up two shelves in the refrigerator. You went for monthly liver checkups. Every time, every goddamn time the results came back normal, better than normal. You were so fucking healthy. It was so unfair.

You tried to find him once, on the internet, but what did you know about computers? You tried to email your contact information to one of those groups that reunite adoptees and their birth parents but you were never sure if they got it. You were using a computer in the public library and other people were waiting. The young librarian tipped behind you and asked you ever so politely to shove off. You just needed someone to help you. You tried to explain. What came out was nonsense and you were quietly led away.

You are so old. So old and so tired and so empty. Something was ripped from you fifty years ago and it grew back twisted and pale. All you want is to fade quietly like your husband, who died alone while you ran to the grocery store for some chamomile. You came back and he was still seated at the kitchen table looking out toward the sassafras tree where you’d left him, settled and serene.

With the vegetable peeler still in your hand you trace a vein in your wrist. Your breath catches. It’s so stupid. You can’t do anything right. The shears in the drawer are gleaming when the telephone rings.

Your knees buckle. You are clutching yourself and sobbing. I’m sorry, I’m so, so sorry. It wasn’t your fault. You know. The phone is still ringing. You reach for it and feel something you recognize, a hand reaching out for you through the wires like a leaf.

“Hello,” says a voice you know. “My name is Bob.”
abra katz

The Plumber

Author's Note: This poem should be read with bongo drums and rainmakers in the background.

Plunging.
Bumming.
Drumming.
Spelunking.
Flounder swim among the toilet paper squares,
Silence.
Broken only by the harsh gargle
from the basin of the bowl's underbelly.
Soft screams from Splinter
are heard in the distance.
Peach adjusts her brooch
as she ponders the loopholes
of her marriage contract.
The squeak of the wrench
harmonized in dissonance
with the crinkle
of the ever-loose
jeans.
They have entered the homily of the matrimonial rite
Turning, turning, body and mind, to the artifice
Early in the incensed August night.

He asked why she'd not asked him to go drinking on the beach —
"Preach, my dear!" (He might have said.) "Oh, preach!
Tell me how the polite years we've spent have aged you,
How there is a younger woman smothered beneath
The wine glasses and the talk of heres-and-theres
Visited when romance was a fine bottled thing
Admired from a distance, better with age
So wait, you said, and drink the cheap stuff now
Till the last drops trickle down our cheeks
And we'll have wine and cheese and stories to tell.
At dinners with the Lloyds and the Bells. Oh, preach!
Tell of the routine sacrifice
Devoted to the virtue or the vice
And how we chose the latter, intending soon
To repent of lust and avarice
And be as domestic as a kitchen sink
A covered couch, a guestroom's fill of sin."

A helpless student in a healer's smock
Seduced unwisely by flirtation with mortality,
Her skin drawn back, the smiling face of death,
The sunken-eyed and white-toothed face of death,
The vulgar scent of perfume and cosmetics
Promising a stylish night in a modern city
With coy impressions of dejection and pity
As slowly, with the sterling silver of her ring,
She chipped away at his marble colonnades
To destroy him, rebuild him, love him in return.
I think about the mornings it saved me,
the uneven worn down track
with divots of weeds poking through,
the tread of my sneakers shaking off
bleary-eyed slumber that still clung
to my sweats that I'd put on backwards.
Every lap around the ellipse
was counted by his lips and a quick burst
blown through a rusted whistle.
The kids across the field were lighting up,
snapping lids of aluminum open
before the first bell rang.
I think about the mornings he met me,
would cycle beside me setting my pace,
distracting me from the aimless youth,
keeping me from joining the wayward
ripped-jean-wearing, beer-carrying peers.
I remember the ache of my muscles,
the cracks of growing pains and the salt resin
that stained my favorite t-shirt he'd helped
me earn, the shirt that said I was presidential,
in fitness at least. The walk back after the final lap,
the cool down, and a gentle pat on the back,
and his eyes, his glowing eyes, constantly watching,
guiding—ready to answer all my unanswerable fears,
all of my uncertain Who is John Galt? questions.

I think about the mornings he saved me,
every morning for six years, even after the track
had been resurfaced, and my joints had stopped
popping with puberty. His strength was sculpted
like steel, and I was the burden, the world, he gladly
held up upon his back, until the one morning
he needed saving, and the track, my laps,
could do nothing, and the rusted whistle hung
silent around my neck before I laid it down, heavy
with a handful of dirt on his flag-covered casket.
britt moorman

Purple Moth

Her home was on the fourth floor, down a fried-fish, dust-bitten hallway that seemed to stretch on during the long weeks and was a quick skip to the stairs on the better weeks. She sat on her bed and looked out the window, watching the day melt into unrecognizable shapes. Purple was always the color that came to mind, but she could never figure out what exact purple—the name of it on the tip of her tongue—a paintbrush spinning in stale water. Voices pinpricked below, a moth buzzed through a small tatter in the screen and landed on her arm. "Do you know what kind of purple is out there?", she asked. She felt its spindly legs climb up the white of her forearm, like when she used to play that game on the bus where you would close your eyes and tell the person to stop when you thought their fingers had reached the crease by your elbow. The piano was broken. There was nothing she could do about it. Her hands lay limp at her side like rejected flowers, bowing to the ground, petals flung carelessly.

The heat receded from the room, and by the time she looked down, the moth had flown somewhere else. Her socks whispered across the floor and into the kitchen, the luminescence of the refrigerator harsh on her eyes. A loaf of bread sat, looking back at her, cruel and unsatisfying. She slid down to the floor, sitting for so long that when she got up there were creases across the back of her legs and ass. Then into the bathroom, maybe the moth was in there; no, only her face shadowing back at her. She retreated to the kitchen, took out a small chipped bowl, turned on the tap, and let the last of the sugar dissolve into the murky water. Her father had once told her that the way to attract butterflies was with sugar water, and that if you stood real, real still once they came into the house, they would stay on your arm flex their wings like the gentle pulsing of a sail.

The water rocked, swayed, she losing her balance. Everything mute, her head swelling, a feeling like being words that were too big for the page but still caught in two dimensions, black on white.

The windows were the next to go. One day she woke up and found bugs crawling all over her, ladybugs, which were supposed to be lucky, but crawled into her ears and beat like the absence of the piano. The shadows appeared to be black and the room bathed in an impossible red. Her lips felt too big and she couldn't breathe and then feeling passed into no feeling and then beyond no feeling into no being.

She heard the scrape of a chair downstairs, and the notes floated up as the ladybugs rose and fell with her breathing, small blue buoys bobbing on the ocean, then all was still. The paint lay, drying, the moth stuck, stagnant, like a saccophagus.

Her mind, floating, somewhere else... I'll call it pinprick.
Is it my shoulder on which you depend,
the atlas which your weary heart amends?
Slow down, low heart; to paper put your pen,
Salivate, thick tongue; stamp the letter; send
me your curlicues. Are your distresses
limping longhand down your chestnut tresses?
Woes gathered in bouquets of irises?
Fill me in now; fill in the addresses
on your buckled envelope. Hurry, catch
the mailman who forgives my tired scratch
when my pen is dripping ink and I latch
onto you, Lula—have I met my match?

If I’m gunned down by Algerian spies,
perch on your postbox—I’ll still send reply.

His aging fingertips and furrowed brow
Concentrate with firm obligation.
Bending down his already curved spine,
The kindling catches fire from the tinder.

Another draft of cold air, and he puts on
A second pot of tea, hot and bitter.
Its taste stains the unfinished wood,
And he is so complete without company.

The last rays of sun promise more.
Another coming day, so sleep soundly
As treetops blow in the fierce winds.
He is a stranger in a land of sunsets.
Davis said that if I took her mud-splattered
stop-sign red Ked in my hand,
we could climb the trees—
scale its knotted limbs like parentheses,
run our hands up and down its chipped
chocolate bark.

I trusted her hands, scented
with maple and soft like lace.

In high school she would ask me to come
meet her at the tree house and nurse
a bottle of fruit-flavored vodka
while she slurred about some boy and how he touched
her with a verse or rose.

And she would grab my arm rough
as salt and clasp our palms to say
Bless us O
Lord and these Thy gifts which we are about to aggrieve
forever and never amen.

When she fell asleep I would watch
the night tug at her eyelids,
a sticky current curled round my hips,
arms folded thin as prayer.
Josh Tallis

Sand Castle Suicide

Half-noticed footprints,
left behind by half-worn,
half-hearted souls
leave no impression upon the
shallow shores of this beach.

Covered in the refuse of
lives lived
and memories made,
these steps won't outlast
the crinkled crap left along the
shallow shores of this beach.

Relentless sludge
nibbles at the heels of
indecent exposure,
and all the while
empty ovals disintegrate
where a life may have been
along the shallow shores of
El Cielo

The Pope billows into the mexicano sky, his robe eclipses the moon and then reveals it. Como un mago with
a smooth egg—now you see it, now you don't.

Leon is no more than darkness, la gente linger under pinprick streetlamps. Abuela, ahora viuda, has sewn a
blanket from her deceased husband's clothing. Soft denim knees—mouth faded handkerchief—shirt they
wrapped their newborn in. Carmela Carmela se llama Carmela; she had opened her mouth to the name as the
ocean does to a river.

Three nietos fell into that river and now shiver under the blanket. People fall at the knees of the Pope like trees
bending down to the soil. Algunas personas no recordamos que es la lluvia y no la tierra which keeps things
alive.

Sin la lluvia, nada existe, Francisco raps to Carmela. They walk along a ghost of a rio, hot dust twists and hisses
around their ankles. Cracked lip, final kiss and they flop side by side like last chance fish. And then the still.
Hundreds of tiny scales scattered among bleached bones.

Years ago, Francisco told his three hijos a story about an egg that fell from el cielo and when the shell shattered
into a million tiny pieces all the pieces became hombres y mujeres y niñitos y bebes. The eldest cannot remember
much else about the story, just that it was called “Las Estrellas de la Luna”. Ahora lo ves, ahora no.
There was a thief
Black as night

As night!

They cried
For he had stole
He took his toll
He had been swift
He rode on death
And death he did

Take my—

Brother, sister
Mother, child
He took them all
He left no name
And disappeared
From where he came

He's gone!

The loss!

They cried
And cried so long
For he had snatched
Every one

My loves!

He took
Every one
Till end of night
And rising sun

The sun!

They cried
But what is this?
The sun it comes
And shows he missed

I shows!
There is friction between my shoulder and the wall
rubbing, bouncing, staggered. There is friction
in my head, behind my eyelids, closed.
There is friction early in the morning, when you slide inside
and wake me, dry. There is friction, grating
and digging under nails with a row of bottom teeth—
brushed clean, arm and hammer, bristles scraping, this is friction,

There is friction in feet shoved into shoes, hair pulled back.
There is friction in fingers, opening the creaking door.
There is friction in bustling bodies bumping.
There is friction, a jackhammer chewing bunted gravel, hot.
My ass, numb, mind dumb, there is friction in me.
in this desk seat, spewing from the professor’s lips. Walking home
there is friction, I trip, knees bruises. The sun sinking
collides at the edge of my window. There is friction,
tense, dwelling dark beneath the sheets where our skin, thick
with friction sweats. Fluid spurts, drips off the tip, coats my hip—
this is friction.
I Will Write the Finest Rhymes

When I am old and at my window
I will write the finest rhymes
Write of the apples blooming in the trees
And of the life I spent, and sometimes misspent
And of the company I kept.

I'll go back to the passions that have
Long since run their course,
And veil my fear of mortality
With sweet home-grown metaphors, and
A wise twinkle in my eye,
With my gold-rimmed glasses perched on my nose
And my wild grey hair all a mess.

When I am old, and I have had a good night's sleep,
And I sit by the window with my notepad and tea,
I will write the finest rhymes
Since youth will be an old man's dream,
A thing to daydream but with all
The fire spent. And with the sunlight at my back,
I might at last sort through the ashes and see
What gold nuggets old age has left me.

And when my darling passes by the window
Working in the garden or reading in the shade,
I will look on her soft face as I always have
And greet my Muse, her fingers in the apple-trees.

But what she does not teach me, then in time
I might gather from her memory
Or from these bony fingers in the apple-trees,
So when I am old I can write the finest rhymes,
contributor biographies

As a senior at GW, jo.c grudgingly does physics and math to pass the time. Fortunately the arts keep her sane.

anerah crawley's poem "Under" can be found on page 8.

nicole cunningham is a junior from Sarasota, FL majoring in Dramatic Literature. Up until this point, she has only written plays, but is grateful for this opportunity to explore poetry. While David Lindsay-Abaire reigns supreme as her theatrical idol, Dylan Thomas certainly holds that position for her in the realm of poetry and is the inspiration behind "The Soul Thief."

m.w. davis has sailed the seas and come to the holy city of Byzantium.

jacqueline drayer rarely throws tantrums but often throws frisbees.

saraj durrance is a senior English major hoping to continue studying creative writing at U Hawaii for an MFA. She'd like to thank Bruce Snider, who has helped her grow so much, Greg Pardlo for being awesome as ever, and Richard Kline, her muse.

abra katz's life goal is to be Vladimir Putin's next mistress.

ev.e kennelly is a senior majoring in English and minoring in creative writing. Her interests include writing, acting, Florence + the Machine, Ireland, and Ron Swanson. None of these things make her more employable.

"Allegedly: The britt moorman Story."

jimi patalano is a junior studying English and hoping to add a Sustainability minor. He has deep spiritual feelings about things like food and the internet. His friends often remind him to "get his tendrils back in reality".

sarah perillo is graduating next semester. LOL.

rob reese transferred here from a forgettable community college outside of Detroit (original Freudian keyboard slip: "destroy") three years ago as a junior; he remembers Wooden Teeth's Halloween masquerade reading in the Fishbowl that year with quiet fondness. His poem you read here was the first thing he finished writing in easily five years. He is a little proud, a little flattered, and a little surprised it made it.

emily reuss is a proud Coloradan, dabbles in art, and has mixed feelings about the predicate nominative.

samantha schmoev is born in China, hails from Houston, TX but was raised in the fjords of Norway. From mountain survival training, she has acquired the unique skills of igloo building, white-water rafting and rappelling. She has seen the Northern Lights and a total of 5 shooting stars in her short 19 years of life but would like to see the Southern Lights and visit all 7 continents.

schweinhaut is a registered trademark.

sia is a proud Mainer and aspiring Viper pilot. She dedicates her photos to her cat, Babette.

shoestring allows a lot of time for audacious activities.

sophie tallis is a senior in his final semester at GW. He has loved working with Wooden Teeth for the last three years, and hopes to keep writing as he starts a lifelong endeavor to avoid the "real world."

svetlana vlasulina is a senior from Portland, Oregon, majoring in International Affairs. She actually doesn't like international affairs and will pursue public health after college. She has a food blog, wishes she majored in English, and enjoys browsing hardware stores.