wooden teeth
The George Washington University's Student Art & Literary Magazine

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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 left at Marvin Center 431 or sent electronically. All submissions should be typed with name, phone number, and email address. Limit of three submissions per person per semester. If you choose to submit via e-mail, please send a new e-mail for each submission. No literary work is 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/woodentineeth/

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Cover Art: Paula Mejia. Suspended

Contributor Biographies
Josie Price

Trojan Whores

Because not once did he care to wear one for you, you mind
his rubber in the bin, that flaccid piece of sole
trash in the bagless rubbish tin, translucent xanthic thing
flattened beneath the fat foot of gravity, its gold ring
root plowing alien-neon against the unforgiving static
stannic metal depth, a pale dead face in a cold dark well,
the empty tomb suddenly and stunningly full.
Foxholes

Dreams

of brightly starred evergreens
in a blanket of dark sky.

The frosty air makes
warm holding hands.

Crowded streets in perfect intimacy
among one knee songs and Christmas jingles.

All of these welded into place
using resources readily available.
My actions corrode
my structural plastic love
as pure economic decisions pollute pure hearted guidance.

Shoveling deeper into
books and notes and readings and mathematic problems
I appreciate
my foxholes
in the cold steel of December.

Write Rhymes Outside

Trashcans

outside these castles of glass and concrete
i appreciate the view from the first floor street.
and sure it gets cold
as i watch men, young and old,
see their dreams unfold
in these ivory towers,
but hey, that's life, right?
livin' day to day, night to night
every drug deal, sick day and bum fight.
they got theirs and i got mine.
see, this same pigeon walks by each day
in his nice feather suit of black and grey
and every time i cry out hey, good luck brother
he turns and flies away.

i write rhymes outside trashcans,
but sometimes it's just not my day.
Claim

You should be touched.
Harsh and determined
like ink scrolling across paper
or newly shaven skin.
You should be held
like the immense intake of air
the last before drowning.
You should be kissed
like the blue green flames
that lick the salt dry off driftwood.

I kissed you,
shook the rain from my hair.
The sweat you left on my upper lip
clinging like a small child to her fathers leg.
I held you
with white knuckles, fingertips
slipping from the tight rope
that tied you to the bed.
I touched you,
bushed the dirt off your face,
tasted the blood that dripped
down your defiant chin—
I tasted my sin.
Like that.

Riders On The Storm hollered
out of the speakers of my dad’s white Sebring.

The Doors mixed with the moonlight coming
from the passenger window to bathe your tan skin

in a fine film I would learn to call desire.
Your bare legs stuck to the worn leather

like suction cups, gently resisting
before letting go.

I remember thinking of octopuses
when you asked me what I wanted.

Your gaze seemed to dance
across the cup holders between us, settling

on my belt buckle. I felt the light pressure
even though no one had ever touched me

like that. “I want to do it,” I
sputtered like a false-starting car, not knowing

what to do, how to begin.
Before I knew it I was inside you

then outside you,
outside the car,

inside the world,
covered in summer,

wiping the virginity from me with a maple leaf.
Up until the day the towers fell down, James had kept telling her that girls were supposed to like boys who carried guns around. He had always spoken in grand, dry-erase statements: they wiped away but left remnants, reside, their outlines showing up in faded versions on the board and in the back of her mind. He had told her to be honest with herself, he had told her something like, Julie (though that wasn’t her name, not at all), Julie, let’s say one day you’re at a party, and at this party, there are two boys who look exactly alike—totally identical—except one is in uniform and knows how to fire a gun, and the other is just standing there sipping his Kool-Aid. You got to pick the soldier over the plain kid, he would tell her. You got to, because he has a gun, and any girl who says she doesn’t feel attracted to a man with a gun is full of it.

Giselle had just gotten used to the feeling of walking by herself before it all happened. Before she needed someone to walk with to feel happy—and far before she needed someone to sleep with to feel happy (before she needed to sleep with anyone at all)—there was that one Sunday subway trip all the way from 190th Street to Union Square. She was transferring at that really big, dirty station—bigger and dirtier than the others, somehow—and she saw those, well, sort of disturbing words as she walked along underground. Someone must have put them there, painted them or whatever, and someone must have said to the painter, “We want these words here,” or something curious like that. And yet they sat there in faded black lettering, still sharp, almost hidden along the corridor from the 1 train to the E, looking down at passengers from the ceiling. They came one at a time. In stages.

The first one she noticed said, “Why bother?” Perfume clacked by, voices murmured, silence. Then the next set of words, spelling out, “Why the Pain?” Next, “Just go Home,” then finally, a few more steps, and, “Do It Again.”

She laughed a little, stretching the front of her neck back toward the heavens, blocked by the tunnel’s roof and the tourists who were far away, walking above and unaware of these accusing words. And that was when she realized her coat was too heavy to be wearing it alone, and the space between her legs was still hurting, and why did James think she would be okay. But she didn’t see those words until after the towers fell down, and this story is about what James had said before, about guys and girls and guns, before he used one on himself.

“Please call me by my real name,” had been her usual response.

“Giselle is too slutty of a name for a girl your age,” he had told her. “Julie is sweeter. Cute little syllables like that: Julie. You see?”

“Alright, Jimmy.”

“No, it’s James. Don’t you get it? It’s James for me.”

Far up in Bronxville, she and James had sat in stale August for the train into Grand Central Station. She heard those words—Grand Central Station—like in the riptide voice of a desperate salesman, a salesman of used cars or exercise equipment. Grand! Central! Station! The skinny university girls waiting at the train station liked to pair their sheer floral dresses with worn-in Doc Martens and leather headbands. They smoked from colored cigarettes—lavender, black. They stood while waiting, but James kept her stuck on the bench, waiting and waiting, reading the tiny comics from Bazooka bubblegum wrappers. James’ legs, scabbed and not yet hairy, swung back and forth from the bench as he smacked the sweet pink stuff between his yellow little teeth. He gazed at his ruddy tennis shoes up and down, up and down. He was humming too loud. Don’t you chasin’ waterfalls. Giselle wished for pitch black sunglasses, the kind that keep your eyes hidden, the kind so that not a soul can see where you’re looking or even if your eyelashes are sticking crammed against the lenses. The Sarah Lawrence girls had hardly seemed like freshmen then, had hardly been transplanted from their small corners of America and dropped into the suburbs of New York City, scared to death.

When they reached the final stop, the train let them out in the brown basement of the station, near the fast food, the cafeteria. James reached out his pink hand to her as she jumped between the gap of the train and track. She let go as soon as she landed, then wiped her hands against the fabric of her shorts. Her legs had never been so perfect as they had been right there, as they had been when she was thirteen. She wanted to cover herself in marble, to paint her neck back like she was about to be kissed and stare up at the stars and outlines of the zodiac that sheltered the station. She wanted to rest near the bright round clocks and families with rolling suitcases and couples taking turns with the Walkman as they waited for their ride home. There must be no better feeling than going home after being away for a long time.

“I just don’t feel right walking like this,” James had liked to say when they were walking out on the streets. He was her shield, his—truly, not even slightly stubborn—he was blocking her from the taxi cabs and tour buses, keeping her close to decorated store windows of wedding gowns and suede high heels. Fur collars, fancy underwear. He did this even on the nicest of streets, even if they just wanted to dance on the giant piano at FAO Schwartz. James would have probably held her fucking hand if he hadn’t been so afraid. He would have held her hand as they wandered from the 6 to the E so she wouldn’t get lost with the crowd, but he never did; if he had, she would have ended up leading him.

Giselle knew well—she must have known—all the connotations that went along with being thirteen and a girl, all the flouvery ideas about love and change and similar bullshit. And yet she lived above it sainly and untouchable, she would at least attempt, and if the girls in her class looked at her with the same pity that she had reserved for James, then they were the sad ones, their lives scribbled with broken puppy-love hearts and glossy magazines with pretty faces staring out like hypnotized, disposable dolls.

She didn’t mind James watching as she ate her red velvet. Soon he would turn on her, say she eats like a cave-
man. Criticize her when she gets the bubble of phlegm in her throat and she needs to spit it out.

If James could, he said on the walk to Battery Park, he'd make a web like Spider-Man and crawl between the twin towers, where his father works, all the way to the top, and look down at everyone. Take a piss or something. He kept going on about it, talking about the hero's uniform. But it doesn't really count as a uniform, does it? Not when you're the only one wearing it.

"Not like the uniform you're going to start wearing next year," he said.

"More like next week."

The thing Giselle liked about her new private school was how the nun who greeted her was so pretty, at least for a nun. Not one wrinkle. She had never thought about nuns without wrinkles before. James always asked her why she was going there, what was so wrong with Bronville High. What was so wrong with him? She repeated herself. She wanted to go to a good college. One of the good ones. To run from class to class with books and big black glasses and v-neck sweaters that showed off her full breasts that had to have been on their way and, of course, long ginger hair. It was very important that she have long ginger hair. James had decided on the army after high school years and years ago. His sister, his younger sister, she has these big, glassy eyes, you see. And even though Bronville is a wealthy place, so are lots of places, and James' father had been alone in raising them for as long as Giselle could remember. And his younger sister could never have so many of the things she asked for, and their father often said she was stupid about it, and he would yell and sometimes push them around. So James' sister would look up at him with big glassy eyes and he'd look back down at her, desperate, and it was enough to send any boy into the military. Only, that day, he said the reason was the uniform and the guns and all the ladies he'd acquire.

"If you need to keep a gun around to get a girl in bed, I think you've got some bigger problems," she told him. They had settled near a pond in the park now and James had just taken up smoking, the scent of his cigarette growing stronger as he settled in beside her. He had started smoking, at first, behind the corner of the big brick gym of their junior high school during a dance. Usually some girls would bring their dates or whoever around that corner and get on their knees, let them touch, all of that; but there were also boys who would go out and smoke, and James wanted to be one of them.

* * *

In gym class the girls afraid of showing it took off their shirts while facing the wall. They were double As and didn't wear bras everyday but made sure to do so on gym days so their double As would be fastened in safe. The girls in Bs and sometimes even Cs wore lacy bras that usually got laughter from the other girls because they looked too much like a woman. It was best to go with a bright color and with butterflies powdered around it. Giselle always had those light kinds of bras. And their shorts, their shorts they rolled once so the waist band looked white instead of red. The double As were thankful because they thought that when they started to bleed, when that great mystery finally caught up with them, no one would notice. Giselle smiled when she heard them say this. She wanted to tell them the red of your shorts and the red of your blood are two different shades entirely, you'd be safer in black, but barely. The worst thing was, and she would never have been sent to that school if her parents had known, was that many of these girls were already cussing and fucking before they even started to bleed. It was all in their e-mail addresses—you could tell a great deal about the girls from their e-mail addresses, where they placed their Xs and Os and how they spelled their names using numbers instead of letters, 3s for Es and 1s for Is. James' e-mail address was asexual at best: jlwsi@aol.com, like a father's.

The girls in her class, they would write e-mails to one another in hot pink letters and ask each other the next day, hungry, did you get my e-mail? Check your e-mail. James sent Giselle chain letters they were all too young to ignore, sometimes an instant message, sometimes. One weekend, just inches into being at her new school, Giselle had been wearing another uniform, the one for weekends, the one made up of miniskirts and denim and platform clogs with sparkling butterflies perched in their hair. She was alone, standing like the college girls and waiting for the train, waiting to meet some classmates in the city. She could see across the tracks and to the front of the movie theatre, could see different groups loitering there. Public-school boys in baggy clothes with their boxes showing and wearing the hoods of their sweatsuits up over their heads. For no reason, no rain or snow or even cold fog. One of them had looked like James, only now with a light coat of hair across his arms. The train came right then, taking her into the station with the dome of zodiac constellations. Aries, Virgo.

* * *

James' idea about the military made the most sense to Giselle the summer she applied for financial aid at Columbia University. She was shy about the school, but still answered with a clear voice and open eyes when people asked her. The first and only time she could laugh about the tuition cost was when her orientation group had to make up six-word stories as an ice-breaker, a bonding exercise, and someone said, "Twenty-five thousand in singles pays tuition." If James had been there, he would have stared down at his rusty tennis shoes, laughing behind the rest of them, working out the joke and pretending to laugh.

Giselle's first morning of class started with a freshman seminar on the opposite side of campus. She was placed in one of the campus' single-room dormitories, open all winter, through the break, through the summer, gaping open like wounds up and down her legs. She walked to class alone. She had never spent this much time so far uptown, so much in Harlem. The grass on campus had little black fences around its blocks, guarding those treasured green patches. All sorts of couples spread out across them. Friends, lovers. They walked together. "It looks like someone had a good summer," they were saying, touching each others' arms, feeling each other's hair. They talked with the sound of home, and they talked it again and again.

Giselle wanted to go home too, wanted to let it fill her up with enough air to go back to Harlem until school and walking emptied her out. At the station, in the ugly basement cafeteria, she saw some Sarah Lawrence girls huddled around a dirty table, laughing and smiling and sipping spiked soda. She got on the train
and the city moved up outside the window, stretching over the real streets of Harlem, the non-Columbia streets, the textbook definition kind of streets, and then deep into the Bronx after stopping at Fordham.

A collection of uniforms, all up and down in tan pants and tan shirts, framed with sharp hats and pitch black, polished shoes, filled into the train, filling the car like beige syrup. Her seat on the train soaked through with James as they rode home to Bronxville together.

He had a jaw now, a defined one, and his curls were snipped away, his scalp tight under a dark shell of hair. He looked at her full in the face as he recited his plans, his achievements, his something that he found for himself, his ROTC training base at Fordham. When they were much younger, just barely twelve years old, he had once remembered to bring Gisele her homework when she missed a day of school, and he held the papers and textbooks close to his chest. He had finally accomplished something, she had thought. He had finally done something right.

He carried a large navy duffle bag for the weekend, a pack of cigarettes peaking from the front pocket. A single one behind his ear. Still calling her Julie, always little easy Julie. They would ride back together, they decided, 7:30, that Sunday. As she got out of the train, he held out his hand to help her.

She slept under the canopy in her purple room. The worst part was leaving home and planning when to come back and thinking about having to leave again.

James was standing, waiting at the station on Sunday, wearing the uniform again. What for? He took her luggage for her, carried it with one hand, his own in the other, and she got on the train first, before him. He lifted the bags above their heads on the cold silver racks. They stayed in place the entire time. And she didn't listen, not once, to the Sarah Lawrence girls, or to the Columbia upperclassmen who could put a finger on each other's changes.

"Why are you crying?"

Her face was probably blotched in spots of red, make-up smearing, her face a palate dripping in sweat and blots. Soon the train would reach the Fordham stop, and he would leave, and she would have to get her suitcase down from the railing, and then she'd reach the beautiful dome of Grand Central Station, and ride all the way back up to her empty room and her color-coded notebooks.

He put his hand, a smoother, bigger hand now, on the small of her back. The Fordham station started in at them on the bench and the doors shut, taking them to the constellations, to familiar patterns. They took a taxi to Columbia. It was expensive, but she figured he would pay anyway, and he did. He sat close to her on the ride back, their legs running parallel with one another, touching lighter and harder as traffic shifted and the car swirled. She wanted sleep and he was humming, his chest breathing up and down, filling her up.

"I don't know what I expected to happen," she said to him when they reached her room.

James looked nervous—a strange, foreign kind of nervous to see on him. His hands were stuck into his pockets and small creases of sweat came across parts of his shirt. Gisele's guidance counselor used to tell her, when Gisele sat across from her in that dark, dim office, staring at her like she was running out of breath. She used to say to Gisele, just wait. Applying isn't the scary part, she would tell her. Once you get in, though, once you get accepted, that is when you should start being scared. And James—James looked like a boy who had finally gotten in.

It must have been almost 3 a.m. when Gisele looked over at the quad to close the window. An empty forty sat in one of the fenced patches of grass. Some of the trees lining the campus had started to shed already, just after one week of September. She kept the sheet close to cover herself. James woke up.

She lay back down to look at him. He had such short hair now. The darkness left nothing except the outlines of his face, coated gray, except for his eyes. They were glassy, shining. She lay so close to him, she could see herself in them (or at least imagine herself in them), young and tired.

"Do you really think you're going to go to war or whatever when you're done with this?" she asked him, trying to whisper, trying to make him hear her.

He moved very little but she swore the bed had shifted, and he darted his eyes back and forth to look at each of hers. "Of course," he said with his lips barely open. He wanted to fight. He was convinced.

He didn't continue, just turned over so that Gisele's body was covered by his. Easy and warm, the heat with two backs. Another joke he would never understand. Far away there was a muted bullet. It sounded so distant; it may not have been real. It could have been her imagination, all her superstitions about Harlem making tricks on her. She couldn't imagine James carrying a gun like that. It had never been true, all those stories he told about guns, about girls liking guns, all of that. It wasn't real, and she knew it then, but she was still beneath him. How would he ever learn how wrong he was? Looking at him like he the hungry.

He didn't leave her in the morning the way that she has learned men tend to do. But she was awake early. It was Monday, and she needed to go to her early class, the one across the quad, across the patches of grass and concrete. He walked with her through the campus, not quite holding her hand, but giving her something to walk with. It wasn't as sunny as it usually was. After a snowfall, at least in her suburban winters, the morning afterward had always been bright from the sky and the ground, the two reflecting one another in torture. The quad was usually like that, at least so far. It was so wide and exposed and flat, so crisp. But that morning it was comfortable with a soft shade of clouds.

"I really meant what I said about being ready," he told her. "Ready to fight, I mean. To like, go to war. Why wouldn't I be?" He took out a cigarette and lit it, blowing smoke above her head. His cheekbones, his collar bone, each were very clear. The same beige uniform, the dark sunglasses hiding the direction of his eyes. He held his cigarette tight between his fingers for a long time before bringing it to his mouth. His hand, his voice, shaking. Ashes falling on his shiny black shoes.

She is looking up at the sky now. The skyline. It was Jimmy, her Jimmy, born with a burden past the subway signs and through to the heavens. There are ideas he made for himself that she never understood, and
when she looks up at him now, she thinks, maybe. Maybe one day one of them will know the answers.

"How about I come back tomorrow night, on Tuesday," he said. She said okay. The idea of waking up alone again, the idea of walking to class by herself, for all of that she needed James. She would even listen to him talk about guns, about fancy militant guns. She would listen to whatever he said about anything. She would listen to whatever he said about guys and girls and guns before he used one on himself.

In the middle of the night, in the passage from Monday into Tuesday, there must have been another gun fire. It couldn't have been her imagination that time. She fell back asleep easily. She closed her eyes and, thinking of warmth, woke up just in time for her first class.

Now it feels like the end, all the time. After it all happened, after everything that was strong and stiff and sturdy—everything worth anything to Jimmy—burned away, it started to feel like the end, like homelessness. Just taking the subway was too impossible. She imagined sitting in the orange of the car and watching her body twist in all directions, off the track, colliding with neighbors, dragged by strangers. Fooled by everyone there. By her peers, her only peer. It feels like the end, but that was just the start, and it still hasn't stopped.

It's strange, telling people what happened, and thinking if Jimmy is telling the story too, telling the story from far away. Saying, I once knew a girl who felt to grief under the gaze of a boy she could never bring herself to love. Saying how she took a nap one afternoon in Union Square and when she woke up her coat was sticking to her body in uncomfortable positions and the hair was sticking to the back of her neck, little dark curls just glued on like macaroni. How it had been his arms, his arms that made her sleep in the grass like a bum in Ivy League clothes. How his arms had slain himself, in so many words, how he had shot a gun in his mouth after 9/11 because his father died and his little sister had been looking up at him with these big glassy eyes, and her hair had still been so light and blond from the summer, from the summer when they kept riding bikes up and down the street, weaving in between traffic, only two years apart in age. But he kept looking down at his sister and she kept looking up with big heavy glassy blue eyes and all of the sudden she was three years old again, and she wanted a kitten, not a puppy, a kitten, and he didn't know how to get her one.
jose ginarte: The Potato Man

(Excerpted)

I could have written an encyclopedic manual re his footnotes and precise illustrations that list all the reasons why my parents should not have sent me to that bare-bulbed studio apartment on the leakiest block of Union City. Getting me in the car to drive there was like roping up a methamphetamine-fed bronco and conditioning it to behave like a golden retriever. And my mother did that three times a week, so I could have a perpetual staring contest with my schizophrenic ex-convict grandfather. He and I were two curious strangers who shared the same chin and were arranged to baby-sit each other by those responsible for us. It was a bleakly perverse sitcom and we were cast for the lead roles.

A sound bite from one of our 30-second spots during the evening news:

There's a secret package for me at the corner store, can you pick it up? Ok.

Look out for the condors when you cross the street... if they ate your heart, what would I tell your parents? They would kill me.

Ok.

Laugh track. Theme song. Show title scrolls across the screen.

I would color for an hour sitting Indian-style on his unmade bed, stubbornly pretending that I wasn't haunted by the jagged scar that curved from his carlobe to the back of his neck. Or I would do multiplication tables on his kitchen counter in awe of the leafy cigar unblooming itself in the phlegmy blackness of his bulldog mouth. When it seemed appropriate, I would offer him an ashtray - an empty can of beans, to catch the dust on the sticky lesions of its ribbed interior. He would acknowledge such gestures with raspy grunts that billowed into wheezy coughs, and continued idling in a toothpick wheelchair emblazoned with his hospital's name on the back upholstery. He would spend a lot of time anchored to the custard linoleum flooring by his window in that wheelchair, waiting for the light to change, hesitantly whispering to me that fedora-clad government agents would torture him with corrosive acids him by sundown. Each visit was my first baffling experience with déjà vu. He told me I had been seeing the future in my dreams.

After my third or fourth visit, I only referred to him as the Potato Man around my mother. The Potato Man could suck in and push out the world through the embers of his cigar. In 1989, his cardiologist published his inexplicable survival from a near-fatal stroke in a prominent medical journal; in the months preceding the stroke, brought on by a life-long diet of unfiltered tobacco and red meat, his heart had phenomenally self-generated a new artery to bypass a rapidly forming clot. He became a curious event in the world of cardiology right when he was coming up on his fourteenth year as an inmate of Danbury Federal Prison. His warden always stood camera-right when big name newscasters interviewed him on national television. Viewers at home
were confused to find a severely undiagnosed mental case on the news, replying to medical questions with spasmodic observations about how his baldness was sexy even though he liked balsamic vinegar. I was watching ten hours of television each week with him, a mythical beast sentenced to decay alone in that small, dim space.

* * *

On a snow-in visit in late January, Peter Jennings had commandeered attention. Monica Lewinsky’s infamous semen-stained dress was at the top of world news at the moment and Clinton was making his last stand. I didn’t know what semen was, but I did know exactly how many inches of snow would have to fall for my mother’s 4x4 to be rendered useless that night. I also knew that the looming possibility of spending the night in that dank room meant I would get a front-row-center seat to the horror show of unworlthy noises that emanate from the Potato Man’s sleeping head.

Commercial breaks were times for clarification and explanation:

Your president is screwed.
Audience goes silent.
He’s not your president too?
My president died in the sixties. Anyways, it’s a shame that no one knows that yours is telling the truth.
How do you know he’s not lying? (Points to Clinton biting his lip)
Look. I know that face. That’s the face that people make when no one understands what they know.
Fade to black.

Until then, I was mostly skeptical of everything he said to me. I would’ve stayed that way through the grounds swell of the Lewinsky scandal, but no one else would explain to me what was going on with as much brute honesty. My parents often decoded current affairs with oversimplified analogies that they conjured up while sitting in the backseat. My teachers completely avoided the subject, leaving my friends and me to exchange words like enpeachmint and blaugip over chocolate milk in the cafeteria. Words with so much un-discovered meaning boxed inside of them, yet we always enunciated them with a chest full of visceral gusto. I was the only one that really knew the truth about the dress and the stain and what would have had to happen between the President and Monica in a suddenly intimate setting with doors locked and blinds drawn for the fluid that caused the stain to be produced. Even though I knew that wasn’t what happened. And I kept it all to myself; I was Charlie with the golden ticket folded neatly in my wallet, walking around Union City with a step that said I got it but I won’t show it to you.

* * *

The sickening sweet taste of peach slips off my tongue quickly As it’s replaced by metallic and crisp water from the tap.
Sliding off the kitchen stool onto the worn wooden floor,
I glide in your frayed cotton socks, this at the toes.

I touch the window’s dusty glass warm with summer sun
Leaving my trail of smearing fingertip patterns.
I squint into the blue sky,
Thinking only one full year ago you were here
Biting from the same peach my lips had touched.
Do you remember when you were happy?
Big sister, I loved your laugh and the way your eyes giggled too
When you took me down to the library and held my hand
Walking down the street, skipping and sweaty,
What went wrong? didn’t I make your world okay?
We had sat on the deck dripping peach nectar from our chins,
Watching moths crash their tired bodies into the flickering candles
Just like headlights swerving on a twisting road.

I hardly remember the last time you told me you loved me.
You came in the house late, slipping into my bed next to my body.
Your hot and sweaty breath clung to my sheets for days.
I listened as you inhaled deep and kissed my groggy cheek,
Whispering to me in the dark when you thought I was fast asleep.
There are peaches left in the kitchen that I haven’t eaten yet.
They’re overripe because that’s how I like them now.
Their stench is of death and sickly sweet candy.
I will always have them as a memory, your favorite food.

Sometimes I dream you come banging in the screen door calling my name,
Or I walk into a room to find you, legs dangling off our scratchy couch.
Then I awake to my room, dark with night shadows,
And my pillow smells faintly of peaches.
Joshua Tallis: A Poem About Grace
Sitting on a cold wrought-iron fence, 
coarse and windswept by bitter-salt kisses, 
she thinks about a life lost on hold. 
A life she never knew, never loved, 
ever held in her arms and touched softly. 
As dark swirls of gray foam ebb 
in the chasm far below 
she imagines nothing, a world unnoticed, 
unimportant, unmissed and unseen. 
She thinks accidentally about friends, 
aquaintances and half-loved lovers 
before she composes herself 
够足 to really let go. 
There’s no such thing as Grace.

Cody Lee: Of The Streets
The shadowed winds whip through the black city streets 
Like fevered feral dogs dying to eat: 
Their dry tongues dangle, their hallowed chests heave; 
You can hear their claws scraping through your sleep. 
Their empty eyes devour headlines like they matter: 
USA Today is torn into tatters. 
Their white lips snarl; their cracked teeth chatter: 
The broken beasts circle worn, burdened fathers. 
Fathers with no daughters, fathers with no sons, 
Fathers of the streets, they’re the ones 
Who call the corner home, who call trash food, 
Who everyone passes, who everyone concludes 
Are rude, are crude, are fevered feral dogs --
Nothing more than winds blowing through the fog.
eve kenneally

On Fridays
Her eyes, cobwebbed
Half-moons gleam with flaking gold.

I paint, sparkling garish hues that glare
On patches of freckles and cream.
Lifting lashes that submit, standing spiked and alert,
Protesting on a face that cradles
Spider-creeping cracks.

The palest of pinks kisses and slips –

Life on Mars
here at dad’s house
there are more channels on the tv
than at mom’s.
there is also a shelf,
all his own. it starts with
the fights (Muscle Cars of the ’60s), then
the separation (World War II Aircraft) and now
the divorce (Mars Rover 3-D)
“Outside!” calls dad.
he pockets his Lego Rover,
he made it himself – looks just like
the one he saw on tv.
the screen door slams.
a crop duster passes overhead.
he doesn’t even hear it, because
he’s already thinking about
that patch of dirt that borders the neighbor’s pasture:
where the sandy soil is an angry red.

christina beasley

Anomoly, Anatomy, or, Animalia

This particular breed of hedgehog will only
sleep inside of your corpse at its freshest.

The first of them slips into the furrow dug between
your bellybutton and heart by careful morticians.

They, too, have pupils: widening when there is no
more light. Treading lightly on a ligament highway,

pointy and abrasive, rest weary heads
on your spare kidney. An excellent pillow.

Muscles relaxed with the weight of them;
they do not eat you, of course. Hedgehogs

are insectivores. But your liver, stuck to one’s leftmost
of quills, is wet and thick. A cosmos pours out:

it is a good thing that hedgehogs can swim, and do not
mind a warm gally of blood against their spines.

Amongst all four toes. Lick your bones and shout their poses
in your scent; scientists call this process, “anointing.”

Their nestling and grunting skin to what a baby does
as it settles into its mother’s tired lap. Replete

and satisfied in your boisterous unmaking,
daria-ann martineau "EYE"

Walking in the violent wind of 21st
between K Street & Pennsylvania.
Never knew an October this cold in childhood.
Afternoons at my parents' home would gouge
blinding sweat from pores
tracing discipline like Braille.
Something in being far away
makes me wonder am I committing patricide?
Am I taking my father's life?
becoming him?
People say I have his eyes
(Never that I have eyes like him)
Through them I watch my feet go linear
find no lyricism in this
wish for the eyes of a poet
instead mine reflect my mother
in all her old and childlike contradictions
crows feet and girl hands
afraid to sully thumb and index,
ink my vision.

When I was young I saw
my parents' irises wink and nod
"so it shall be" as I crossed the street to school
in the blanket of their view.
Now I think of those telling black holes
as I move into the gaze of headlights,
cross, wondering
if there is any way, any desire
more than superficial to change
the path they laid for me?
Feet not remembering where to head
I look up at the street sign to decide
then watch the lights for a glaring image
of a man in movement,
"WALK"
C. Stories You Tell Your Children

i.
The textbooks asked me, *What does it mean to be a Catholic?*
Nine years old. Elementary school. They were already asking me about God; they were already asking me to form some kind of opinion.
Nine years old.
They told me Catholics are kind, generous, loving. Catholics believe in the Father and Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Three persons in one God.
I didn’t know it then, but all those empty words just described a person who has not yet been fucked over by the world.

ii.
I was not baptized with fire. Cold water slid over my forehead, slipped into my eyes and burned them, the same water that comes out of taps, except perfumed with that particular smell of holy water. Stuff from the Hudson would have been closer to fire.
Five years old. Given a birthright. A life in Christ.

iii.
"How many of you are against abortion?"
A loaded question. You know what a thing is in theory, you know what they tell you; but all the spin they put on it, all the opinion they feed you just in their inflection, in the raising of their eyebrows—you figure that out later.
Little hands went up. All except one. We stared at her, said nothing, but judged, were taught to judge.
Twelve years old. I did not know what rape meant, what it was to have something filling you up, a thing you did not want, the only way to be rid of it ridiculed and feared by so many seventh graders.
vi.  I pulled Bibles out of hotel drawers, read the familiar lines, the ones I had once known by heart and which now came back to me like so many half-remembered ghosts, fragmented with time, stripped of their meanings. Stripped of the devout.

In the beginning. The resurrection and the life. In the beginning there was only an explosion and hot dust; in the end there will be nothing.

I wanted to ask Joseph how he felt about never being able to fuck his wife, move over her in the dark, touch that virgin skin and listen to her moan, hear her breath catch as he entered her for the first time. I wanted to ask Mary if she ever wondered what it would be like to be a whore.

Stories to tell your children.

vii.  The last dredges of my faith, the last gasps of belief died with you.

It was then that I understood. God takes the wrong people. God took you, left everything else empty.

So I wanted to leave him empty.

It was lonelier than I thought it would be. Eighteen, and nothing to believe in.

viii.  To Canada. A pilgrimage of sorts; we saw so many churches. A bus. Legs cramped. Claustrophobic.

An oratory. I climbed the stairs, gave the burning in my legs and my lungs to Christ. Something like that. Looked down from above, all those stairs, the middle section for the penitents.

Crawl up on your knees. Let bone hit stone, let your skin bleed. Say you're sorry. God, I'm so sorry.

Sacrifice. Your first born sons, your virgin daughters. Drink their blood.
The inside was spare. In the back, the tabernacle, a name that dripped from one’s lips like spun gold. The resting place of the Lord’s cardboard-flavored body, his intoxicating blood.

Everything in me held myself taught, defensive, still expecting hellfire, trained to expect punishment for my blasphemy. Nothing happened. The nave echoed with footsteps, not all of them the walk of the faithful.

A young man knelt in front of the golden box, pressed palm to palm, prayed. Such a soft face. Such devoted eyes. A rapture. I had forgotten what faith looked like. I had forgotten how it could fill you.

My stomach felt hollow. Something missing, always missing, but it had never fit quite right in the first place.

x.

We went to a shrine. I stepped inside, stepped out, hopped from foot to foot—a Mass going on. Did I want to see this?

A rapt congregation judged by the statues of the saints, the stained glass windows, the face of a dying Christ. Crown of thorns. Nail my hands to wood, raise my cross, watch as my lungs collapse, my heart buzzes.

I still remembered the prayers, when to sit and when to stand. Mechanical. Like it always was. What could it mean to me now? Give nothing to someone who has lost everything. They no longer understand how to own.

I watched as they lit candles, thin stalks of wax. The light of the world. May it shine before all. An intercession. Heal those who are struggling with their faith. I have no faith. Do not mistake me.

Faces aglow, eyes alight. That rapt congregation, the definition of belief. What had I been missing all those years? What was I missing now?

You may blow out your candles now. Darkness, and a hush. There was no illumination, no epiphany, no revelation.

But I missed belonging, the hope in their eyes, the trust. Faith in their God. Belief in their customs.

Two thousands years of tradition thrown out to sea.

He once told me, God should be about love.

No, darling. God is about being alone.

christina beasley  

She Poem

She has this big city of a swathing sadness

that breathes like a radiator and gasps

like hot water from the pipe.

I want to say that I love her but her Picasso-feet

leer at me from beneath each skirt. I want to knit

myself between her fingers like how a spider

weaves its feast. I walk through the parking lot,

making a chrysalis between lips. Touch the nape

of her neck, find rocky crags between her pores.

Nights I dream of the time when she built

a sun catcher of her cotton candy tears; quiet

on the mirror of our porcelain bathtub. When

I told her to keep living because there are

roller coasters, and bees. Sobs cracking;

thrown against the tile like broken marionettes.

The lexical design of her sigh, a favorite sonnet.

She paces and stutters, thick as peanut butter,
imprecise and strange. The diary of a fairytale
creature in every movement. Sometimes, when

I pick the lint from her sweater with the intricacy
of hanging a Christmas ornament, she closes

her eyes and forgets. She opens her arms wide

across the doorway and owns everything.

It is only enough to keep me when she looks softly

and asks, delicate as wet concrete, how exactly

one learns to swear in another language.

She means really swear, she means say words

that should never be said.
Virtual Flower
for a Virtual Grave
(I.M. L.L.)

Look after all my love
it's a virtual age - I know Luke
would be saying shoulders swaying right
and left in time
with his contagious twister on my account
then one last single-fingered push
of those rose-rimmed frames up the world-wide
line of his nose yes no well who knows
what it is but this
what it's come to now
signing on and off and into a guess-book of faces
traded in favor of a funeral's guestbook of names
the memorial for these too new times it times new
roman ticked off at two a.m. type type come now it's time
I too am now one of them how one of them
pinning the collected collective mind for my own
lily to lay lie lay on the pile Like it like type it
just another of the tired type
with their tipsy-tight mis-spelled eulogy after miss-
penned elegy each hallowed-born word clipped
clean to the dirt of a hollow abbrev r-i-p--
buried under the shrunken thumb nail of his face
21 already instantly dated doomed to be
with the monitor's leaking light a pale hot halo
of dusted pixels cyberspace where it's cemetery-silent tonight
after yesterday's death died over and over inside
every backwards forward
of the text lassie's over dosed heroine
verbatim verbose the dis-
case of our time via the verse
for better or worse he my hero of black top tar-
rying lit and fixed bad for good
his and my wise wry smile behind one night's hot split
bit by a split lip mouthing words and our burnt-off kiss
Why my love thank god for The Internet kid
as you might recall so soft and slow we fell in
christina beasley Where to Kill a God

Inside of grandmother's lungs is a circus. A delinquent aching in soft wrapping paper.

Styrofoam and plastic splay the gravel; hollow shells, like so many tired rosaries.

The loose faucet of my presence easing over shooting booths. Twisting the air. I mull here.

like a Dante, in locks of wet smoke. Puckered velvet toy clouds, small and spent.

The prize goldfish mumble amongst themselves, exhibiting their dullest angles; scales flickering candles.

Each peripheral tree moans toward its fraying swings. Heard amongst the whine of machinery, heavy ghosts.

I find myself lost, a wandering trespasser. How a place can sing! How it prances, weak and scattering.

It's only us. The breeze weakens; rich with the sweet scent of night. There is a gate locking,

there is popcorn rattling her bones. There is a final cigarette, delicious as death in its ringmaster's suit.

joshua tallis Sisyphus

I need someone to reach down my throat, pull out my heart and throw it at me.

Someone to squeeze it, poke it, tie it to a string and hold it in front of me on a stick

because right now this paperweight boulder just sits on my chest pinning me to the inside of my head.

I wonder if everything would just fly away if I didn't chase it...
Christina Brosky is a rising senior studying Conflict and Security and Europe and Eurasian Studies in ESIA at The George Washington University. She holds minors in Creative Writing, and Political Science. She has studied with poets such as Thomas Sayers Ellis, Greg Pardlo, David McAlavey, and Jeff McDaniel. She has held fellowships at the Atlantic Center for the Arts as well as Southern Illinois University, and holds a Davidson Fellowship in Literature. She enjoys trapeze lessons, photography, and film noir.

c would like to thank you for buying Wooden Teeth and supporting her college tuition. Oh, wait, this is free?

Sarah Durante English major with Creative writing, class of 2013. Thanks to Greg Pardlo for all your help.

Hopes to one day be a published starving artist living in a basement.

Ben Gillen is a sophomore from Holliston, Massachusetts studying economics. He enjoys snowboarding but hates cold weather. He enjoys playing ultimate frisbee but can’t run quickly. Math frustrates him but if you ask any of his friends they will tell you “he is good with numbers.” Talk to him anytime about philosophy.

José Giorno also known as Jose B or “Joe” (pronounced with a soft J), is a senior majoring in Hispanic languages and literatures. Despite his impractical major, he would like to pursue three careers at once while developing his passion for writing short stories. He thanks Wooden Teeth, his family, his friends, and Greg Pardlo for their support.

Eve Kenney is the worst.

cody Lee is a blank page slowly being filled with (hopefully) the right words.

Dana-Wei Martinez is a poet disguising herself (badly) as a Speech and Hearing student. She thanks her peers and teachers for helping her come out of the literary closet. She will miss GW come May 15th.

Hyacinth Mascarenhas’s artwork titled “Afghan Girl” is published on page 32.

Paula Miejs’s photograph titled “This is Not An Illusion” is published on page 26.

Marielle Mondon is a senior English & Creative Writing major. Those who know her best might say she’s a French-ass girl. She enjoys Dave Eggers, reading horoscopes, and singing opera in the shower. Don’t take her food without asking.

Julie Prado is a former editor for GW Wooden Teeth. Love and muchas gracias to Aaron(!), Jane Shore, the baby, and airport motels for making it all happen, on paper and in real life.

Justin Roy Ritchie was born Justin Aaron Ritchie, wrote a draft of his life story earlier today. No mention of the word writer was made, and the only things worth noting were his desire to remain detached from the title Justin Ritchie, his inability to hold on to things, and his predicament about always being on the run.

Anna Sobol is a sophomore majoring in psychology. She hates pants, loves tattoos, and is appreciative of every fool who has let her take their picture. She is currently investing in a caffeine IV drip. All donations are welcome.

A photographs titled “Don’t Go Breaking My Heart” and “Off Track” are published on pages 13 and 22.

Mia Weissbrod is a sophomore from Portland, Oregon, majoring in International Affairs with a concentration in Global Public Health. She enjoys picnics with friends, wandering the planet, and drinking tazo bubble tea. She will be spending next semester studying abroad in Chile.

Bella Effie’s poems titled “A Poem About Grace” and “Sisyphus” are published on pages 26 and 41.