

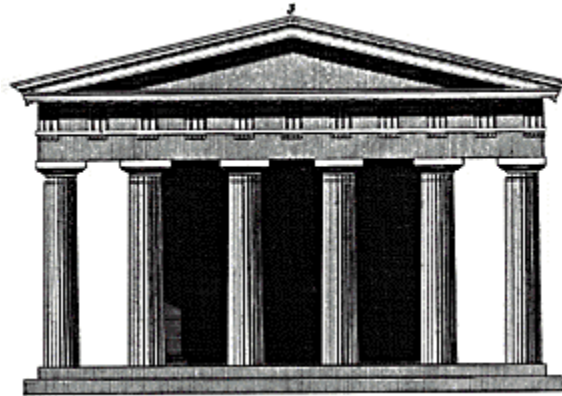


The Bottom Shelf
Review



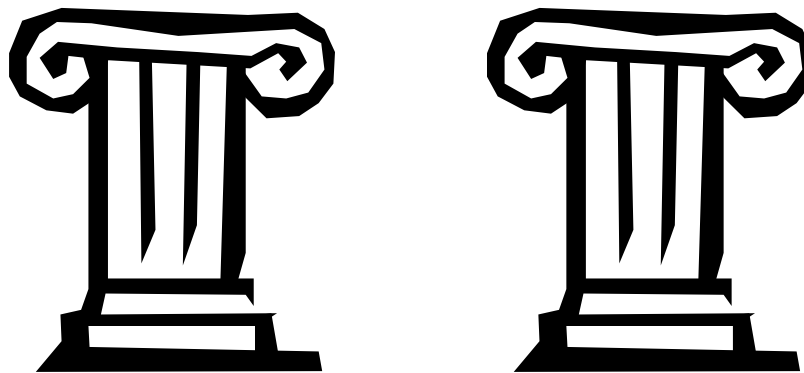
the literary magazine of
Wilson College

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The Bottom Shelf Review
the literary magazine of Wilson College

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Recalled to Life

in a room
my story was told
by a room
this meandering narrator
I recalled to life—
viva la vida
lived this room
breathed this room
eclipsed this room
this heist
in this room
I recalled to life—
scrutiny to mutiny
no barriers, no borders
walls were torn to pieces
all precincts were obsolete
an archaic fashion sense
squealed in terror
in a room within a room
the words weren't read

in a room
earthquakes quaked
ceilings faltered
windows walked on water
only in this room
books emptied
language trembled
expression died
teller had naught to tell
by manuscript or by verse
this incessant room
I recalled to life—
with my joie de vivre
my throne of scholars
this room of sanction
secrets swelled
thoughts echoed
voices craved
redemption
this room recalled to life.

-Jamie McCauley

It's Midnight

i can see in the dark
crafty tigress, rapacious prowler
here in my crypt
blue moon, black midnight
eerie eyed explorer
star gazer, star stealer
rendezvous with Jack
my brute, my ripper
my sleepless silhouette
i'm scared of the dusk
fearsome, fearsome folly

volcanoes erupt
and silence corrupts
melted, softened, faded faces
broken, busted whores
a rumba, a tango, a foxtrot
a dance too many
my veins liquefy on sight
like burning metal
like molten lava
like heated ice
my abyss, my chasm, my crevice
in the world

i'm not blind—i see things
no one wants to see
fake monsters, dangerous seas
the boundaries of hell
the whispers of heaven
i wish i weren't
i wish i were
anything but me
tainted, dirty, sluttish skin
hiding under a blanket
waiting, hating, debating
whether, weather, wither
need i even be if being were
implicit

it's when my night light fades
it's when my sun runs out
it's when my shadow cries

it's darker than dark
it's midnight.

-Jamie McCauley

Storm

In January of last year
I lost one of my deepest treasures
My first companion, my first dog Misty
I could not be home for her passing
My future restrained me
From the crucial present

I was heartbroken
Despite the consolation of my friends
Who understood my pain all too well
Their support could not change
The tragic truth
A part of me was gone forever

Consumed by grief
I sought out refuge
In the kennels on my school's grounds
Perhaps the sight of other dogs
Would help me regain fragments of what
was lost
And mend the pieces of my shattered
heart

It was then that I met him
A gorgeous beast
With a face as black as soot
And mesmerizing eyes
That could pierce the night

He was an ungainly animal
With a massive frame
And a puppy's spirit
His size and wild nature
Awoke peoples' fear
And for that he was rejected

Even his name
Suggested rage
And unpredictability
Storm
The portrait of savage beauty
And untamed nature

I was not afraid
I was intrigued
Captivated by his beauty
And saddened by the misjudgments
Set upon him
Because of cowardice

I approached without fear
My soul longing to reach him
To calm my own grief
And soothe his restless mind
I earned his trust with my respect
Not fear

Storm seemed taken by my presence
He often drifted into sleep
His head resting in my lap
His calm soothed my tension
And warmed my heart
As Misty once had

I had hoped to take him as my own
To tune his skills as a guard and
companion
So I could keep him with me
And feel safe in his protective gaze
Despite my painful longing
My wish was not to be

I didn't even get a chance to say good-
bye
To Storm, my friend
Before he was taken to his new home
A place I do not know
And probably never will

I often think about him
How he is
I wonder if he is safe and loved
But most of all
I wonder if he misses me
As much as I miss him

-Sara Patterson

A Fishy Tale

Once upon a time,
In a bubbling brook,
Swam a clever fishy
Who was always reading books.

The fishy's name was Little Earl,
He was orange and gold and red,
With scales as smooth as shining pearl,
And stripes across his head.

He filled his mind each day and night
With thoughts before unknown,
He learned of vast, exciting sights
Outside his watery home.

From books Earl learned of spring's
sweet grass,
And trees of scarlet hues,
He learned of snow-capped
mountaintops,
And of meadow's dews.

Little Earl's eyes grew wide
As he read and read his stories,
And he'd think inside his mind,
"Oh, I'd like to take a journey!"

And so one day Little Earl set out
To explore mysterious lands,
In his mind there was no doubt;
His trip would be quite grand!

Earl thought he had a fool-proof plan
With everything going right,
And so away from home he swam
At morning's first daylight.

Little Earl's plan was thus:
To swim as fast as he could,
And then with all his fishy strength
Leap out of that boring old brook!

And so the adventurous young fish
Tensed his muscles tight,
And left the water with a "swish,"
Into the air with all his might!

But there was something Earl didn't
know
(But you have probably guessed),
Gills are great for water below,
But for land, lungs are best!

With a jolt, Earl felt the burn
And knew he couldn't breathe,
So with a twist, a jump, a turn,
He jumped back down beneath.

So beneath the surface Earl stayed,
Of his bubbling brook,
Still he dreamt of lands far-away,
But kept adventures to his books!

-Theresa May Yaukey

flow

deep green abyss
seeking, anticipating
desiring?
oh futile aspirations
And wretched optimisms.
you're draped in tragedy divine
or is it a cloak of self pity?
endless question without answers.

smell of sunshine
taste of suggestion-
i relish a morsel.

let me help you
i can make you whole
soul and body
spirits entwined
sky and earth.
reach for me
reach further
please, don't stop trying,
you were almost here.

sigh aloud.
grasping, stretching,
pursuing?
are my attempts in vain?
fruitless manifestations of hope?
an empty façade?
endless questions without answers.

aroma of moonbeams
flavor of yearning-
i relish the indulgence.

let me help you.
make me whole
soul and body
spirits united
sky and earth.

-Theresa May Yaukey

for mary: a prayer of consolation

and so it begins
where the weight of earth
and birth
and living
makes lungs heavy
makes lungs full

rock the cradle of your pelvis.
consider the exact season of the sky.
notice his tiny bones preparing
themselves for air and night.
hold him into the deep velvet liquid of
your body for one last breath.
let your ripe consent gather him from his
roots into the soft harvest of being.

he is done belonging to you.

weep with him as the gravity of flesh
clefts your skin.
swallow at new air under sage stars.
reach for his slick wrinkled limbs.
pull him to your breast.
count his toes.

what is sanctuary he will keep.
tangle and weave it in the broken pieces
of a woman.
speak it perfect like rain across what is
parched and aching.
wear it like two carefully folded wings
to the separation of flesh,

to the coldness of stone,
to the sweetness of sky.

and so it begins.

-Caitlin Kennell

(psalm of mary magdelene)

kid, you leak magic all over my heart.
you got a nice smile
and hands smooth like stones.

something about you
rips me open
til all i got left
is
joy.

listen, i'm not a woman
who waits for a man
to tangle her up.
i deal in disorder.
i make the knots.
but, god, you smile
so righteous!
before i know it,
you got me at your feet.

you know,
everybody talks about you.
lies.
hell, they talk about me too.
must be they're scared of
Love so raw
so bare
no words come but

AMEN.

-Caitlin Kennell

(st. mary magdalene)

some of them will promise i
am a dirty whore. dirty. and open. but
what they cannot touch
is i am like the tigris; wide, wet, and
beyond
navigation.
too deep to know. too thick to stir.

maybe you think i am wretched. i am
not
ashamed.
rare and boundless.
you think you know

me. i
am a soul not so unlike you-just more-
and anyway
god loves women who
don't pretend away their own worth,
aren't giving it up for nothing or
leaving behind stones for the
execution of
narrow justice. they
envy me, these

women who wear the laws of mooses
as a veil. they see the weight of me
rolling like liquid down the
street and

almost wonder right out loud what it is
to split open the pink flesh of a
pomegranate with bare wet hands.

women think i'm
horrid, but
only
because men, for one taste, would
relinquish
eden.

-Caitlin Kennell

Insatiable

You were there,
so close,
yet I could not touch you,
trying not to break
those boundaries looming before us.

Insatiable feelings,
Insatiable passions,
Deepened
because you were a whisper away
untouchable.

When I first met you
it was as if our hearts
leapt out of our bodies
and danced—
together, slowly spiraling
closer until they mingled as one.

But I did not follow that heart,
despite the yearnings and cravings,
wanting to reach out and touch
your alluring face
your enthralling soul.

Then you were gone,
only a whisper
among the trees
amidst my dreams
and in my heart.
I lost the chance to fulfill
these insatiable desires,
still reaching out
wondering
if only, just once
I had followed
my infinite longings.
-Jennifer Shakan

Night Mares

Laura is eleven and wears it naturally,
like

The tan breeches she puts on every
morning.

-Not a second skin, but her first.

The horses call to her at night,
In her dreams of endless clover pastures
dotted with
Yellow and white daisies, leaning lazily
in the breeze
That blows long flaxen strands of
untamed mane into
Her face while
She clutches the rest and rides the race to
the sun.

Waking before morning, she hears their
whispers above
The silence of the stars.
She watches Pegasus pass above her in
the skylight, one eye
On the east window, waiting for the first
golden beams of dawn
To slide through her blinds, and
Turn the apparitions in her dreams into
hooves and whiskers and blood.

-Zoe Christopher

Lost Horses

When I was five I cried because they
wouldn't let me touch
The horses. The burly man in his blue
and yellow breeches
And clinking silver badge said, "These
animals are working."
The bay and the chestnut stood side by
side at the entrance to the park,
Ears limp, heads lowered, long thick
strands of saliva running
From their lower lips from a hot summer
day with no water.
My parents led me away, teary and
sweated. Feeling my forehead my
Mother said, "It must be the heat."
Daddy swore I'd pet horses another day.

In a different park, my own horse's
round back sweaty between
My dirty legs, I ran through an opening
in the live oak trees to beat my
Best friend, scattering picnickers and
sunbathers in the sudden sunlight.
As I stopped a little girl ran at me from a
distance, yelling
"Can I pet your horse?"

Turning my red Arab her way, we
started to shorten the distance of desire.
But just before her fingers touched his
soft sweet smelling hair,
Her mother screamed and snatched her
tiny hand,
Shaking her by the arm and yowling,
"Don't touch it! They'll hurt you!"
She cried as her mother carried her away
muttering
Something about dangerous animals.

I wanted to yell out, "He would never
hurt her!"
But the words caught in my throat like a
sob.
I turned and ran after my friend
Gulping the summer air, fighting the
tears we all cry for lost horses.
-Zoe Christopher

By Northern Light

At night the beach is mine, and mine alone. By day it is a sun drenched paradise of bathers, and children splashing in the shallows. The sun beats down on the surf gently thudding the dry, loose sand, on plastic buckets and tangled kites. Gulls wheel and mew overhead, keeping a weather eye out for dropped picnics on the hot, rocky sand. Hot light bleaches the sand to monochrome beige, grass to dusty green; only the water sparkles, reflecting blinding rays of sun to dazzle the eye as it numbs the mind and mutes sound.

By night, that night, a quarter moon and the thousands of stars painted land and water. The foam of the pounding waves an argent-blue; the water beyond, blue-black and silver. The sand of the shore, which I thought must be crushed by the powerful waves and give way, was black and gray; sable in the footprints of the day's bathers and the long ripples left by waves, gray where the moon hit the tops of miniaturized mountains. A stream ran down the beach, leaving the silver and black, waving salt grass, traveling through the vast expanse of sand in a deep rift. Between pale, sandy banks it rippled, the shiny black of anthracite and the bright, silvery white. Above all drifted tattered small clouds, gray past the bright moon and through the deep blue night.

It was not this that drew me, that chilly, windblown night, down from the slumbering campground at the top of the bluff, down through the fragrant banks of roses and beach peas, down across shifting sand and waving grass, down from my tent and down to the crashing water. Each night has its own, particular beauty, whether it be flat seas showing the silver moon path across to the horizon, or lashing rain with ten foot breakers crashing angry on the dark beach.

Coming home from a dance in the almost frosty stillness of an early morning in August, I thought the sky must be on fire. Wave by green wave the Aurora Borealis flashed across the sky, pulsing, throbbing; one could almost hear it hum through the night, like the singing of sirens. Up and down the sky the light moved, with a rhythm like breathing, or dancing. A broad band of pale, lucent green stretched several degrees above the horizon from north to south as I looked west over beach and water and island. Across the burnished ribbon, blazing green not found on earth pulsed in ever more radiant waves, sometimes leaping upward midway through its travels in a joyous dance, sometimes content to merely course backward and forward. Only once before had I seen anything like this, anything at all; once before, coming home from another dance and the meeting of a man, a soul, strange but somehow familiar, in the same biting-chill, quiet dark of morning. Then, years before, it was my mother with tears on her cheeks for lost love remembered, and not me.

Waiting until I could be certain I would be alone on the beach and my companions were asleep, I crept from my dew-wet tent, barefoot through the cold, glittering grass, springing in cautious anticipation over the gravel road, and into the banks of fragrant roses lending their heady scent to the already heady night. By argentine light I could see thorned branches, lined with clusters of small leaves, arch above my head, and on either side I caught occasional glimpses of pale, single roses, the lustrous pink washed clean by the moon. The narrow path slopes away, slick with loose grains of sand over packed earth. Winding along the twisting path that bathers navigated by day, their arms

loaded down with towels and baskets, my bare feet sure and unquestioning where theirs slipped and faltered in sandals and flip flops. Descend round a bend, where wild, trellised branches gave way, where packed dirt ended, where waving salt grass and drifting sand took over. Heavy going as sliding sand sucked at my feet, twisting round my ankles, as if begging me not to leave it for the ocean. Here, in this hollow of land, only moon and stars, waving grass and narrow strips of sand visible as I trudge up the back of the dune; only the hiss of saw grass in the night breeze audible.

Cresting the top of the hillock, the ocean appears to me suddenly, almost unexpectedly, as if I could forget, between the roses and the dunes, the presence of that water; it is almost as if the ocean fears this, this human forgetfulness, and roars and thunders in anger to remind me of its presence. As if Neptune himself fears that I will forget him, caught as I am in the memory of another. Indeed, it is only through the roar and the crash of the waves, and the salt spray flung in my face and nose that I am aware of the vast, moving body of water before me at this moment; all my conscious attention is drawn upward, almost directly over head now, to the lucid trail gleaming in the sky above. I stand for a minute, ten perhaps, just watching wave after green wave.

I rip my eyes from this most incredible sight and force them down to the sand, I pick my way down the face of the dune, across the stretch of rocky sand, past driftwood and the tangled ropes and broken slats of nets and traps tossed by an angry sea, down to the lustrous path of fresh water flowing down to mix with salt, anxious at the slow progress picked through rough stones, nostrils flaring in eagerness for salt air. There I stand, at the edge of the stream, where sea wrack and rounded stones have given way to clean, packed sand, hands in the pockets of my jeans, flannel shirt fluttering in the breeze, face opened upward to stare.

I breathe a prayer, standing there, a wordless plea to the gods, or God, or whatever might be up in the velvet deep sky. I remember years past, coming down to this same beach on warm, still nights, to stand in the surf up to my knees. I remember standing on the bluff above, searching in the near-perfect darkness for a glimpse of the ravaging ocean, rain beating my face, the moon fighting for sovereignty behind me. I remember, four years ago, finding the son of a long-dead friend of my mother's; coming to love him, later, as my mother had loved his father once; fearing for him, now, in that moment, because he had not been seen in over half a year. Remembering that night, four years ago, when I saw for the first time those burning green lights dancing behind us. Remembering how my mother had said, crying, that it was her friend rejoicing that we had at long last found his son. I had thought, then, that it was mere superstition (as if superstition were a small thing), cursing her now for putting this thought in my head, entreating the long dead father to let me know his son, my friend, was still all right. I felt my heart, or whatever portion embodies sentiment, contract, expand, and fly to the heavens to plead my cause.

How long I stood there, or paced along the beach, letting the sea foam dance round my feet, I cannot know. An hour perhaps, although it could have been far less or far longer; time, that night, was measured only in the lambent green dancers above. My mind traveled through memory, hearing in the surf that familiar, gut wrenching voice sing of pain, and loss, and redemption, seeing in the flaming sky the beloved face crease in laughter as my own contracted in loss, feeling his gentle hand as the wind caressed my face and kissed away my tears.

At last, cold, drained, exhausted by the long day and overweening emotions, my jeans crusted with wet sand, I turned my back on the water and the sky. As I climbed back up the banks to my tent, I looked only at the ground before my feet, never behind. I thought only of my bed, and the coming day, banishing the past. Back up the dunes, through the grass and the roses, up the bank, to my tent, to oblivion, to sleep.

Rebecca Hartman-Berrier

Queen Maude's Black Room

A king died here, in this room, in this chateau, in Chenonceaux.

I am a tourist here, an average man with a camera and a map, but if I close my eyes, close them tight, I can reel the centuries back in my mind, and I can see him still, lying on his bed, overcome, as his courtesans flee from his sight in their own selfish grief; they do not wish to bear witness to death.

I remain steadfast, fascinated, as I watch her, his Queen, Maude, lacy and rubenesque in black bed clothes. I watch her take his hand, and sigh. She kisses him good-bye and tells him she loved him. She tells him to let go of his pain. I'm sure his death was painful; death is always painful. I can't see him now for her, so I watch as she huddles over his seizing form, me partly wanting to cry, partly wanting to applaud at the sentiments of the show, but mostly not knowing how to react at all.

I know what she's going to do. I read it in my traveler's guide. She's never going to leave his room, his Queen; no, she will stay here forever, never to leave it again, not for twenty-six years, until death comes to claim her. She will stay in his room, sleep in his bed. She will paint it all black, the walls and the ceilings and the floor pitch, the furniture mahogany, her clothing only the finest and darkest of Oriental silk. She will never again see the light of day; murky candlelight will be her constant companion. She will have etched into the walls ghostly white depictions of bones and spades and feathers, symbols of death and majesty, and every spare corner will be riddled with these gaunt and pale reminders of what she has lost. It will be whispered amongst the less loyal of her servants that she is mad, with grief, with loss, the loss of a man, a king, a kingdom, a husband. Frankly, I'm not sure which, and honestly, I can't say that I care. For me, it is pure spectacle and foolishness, to wall yourself up for love, time your singular and ghoulish companion.

Maude was born a queen of France; and died, I say, a queen of fools.

I open my eyes and it is two thousand and two again. I have come forward six hundred years in the blink of an eye and sunlight streams into the wide open spaces of Queen Maude's black room. Other tourists mill about, excitedly sitting at Queen Maude's black writing desk, admiring Queen Maude's black satin bed sheets, or gazing at the view out of Queen Maude's black window. I place my walkman headphones back over my

ears, even though the tour guide expressly forbade it, and push the “on” button. I hear Regina Resnik, Saint-Saens, “Mon coeur s’ouvre à ta voix.” I would prefer something with more of a beat, but French opera seemed so appropriate this morning.

Over the tolling of the soprano I hear the voice of my tour guide yelling in five languages to meet her at the front of the castle, so, slowly, I pick up my bag and amble towards the staircase. The other tourists have darted on ahead, but I’m never in a hurry.

Just as I am about to take leave of Queen Maude’s black madness I hear a slight scratching noise. My New York instincts kick in and I think rat, or mouse, and what a cool story it would be to tell the folks back home, of the giant rat I saw in that fancy French chateau. I whirl, but instead of mouse, I see woman, a long figure sitting in the shadows of the writing desk, quill in hand. This is trouble, and I am about tell her to knock it off, when gently, softly, greatly, she looks up at me.

It is Maude. I check to see if my eyes are open. They are. I’m not quite sure if Maude is looking at me, or through me, and I think to wave my hand rapidly to get her attention if I can, but I decide not to; I don’t wish to startle her. Instead, I watch as her brow furrows in momentary concentration, as if she cannot remember the word she wishes to write. Then her furrows vanish, and she resumes writing, and I know now that she is writing to him, her king, her husband, a note never meant to be sent. I know now that this was—is—her daily routine, writing to him words he never heard, never will hear, and maybe was never meant to hear. I’m not sure; all I know is the look on her face, a look of utter patience, of consternation and bewrayed love, of humility and despair and somehow, in the midst of all the beauteous black, of joy.

To the haunting sound of aria, I turn to go; life was never meant to enter here again after he died, and I no longer wish to bear witness to the story of this room, so I leave; Maude alone, me jealous.

Michael G. Cornelius