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perceptions
The purpose of this anthology is to bring the reader a distillation of the best short fiction and poetry that has been written by Gainesville College students this year. The magazine will entertain and, we hope, challenge the reader. The short stories and poems contained here span a range of emotion from tragic to zany; they also cover a range of concerns, from cars to religion. Many of these works are the product of the Creative Writing course taught by Professor Tom Sauret. The challenge was to cull through the submissions and choose the select few that appear in this magazine. We proudly present the winners of the Gainesville College Writing Contest and other fine works of the imagination, including the best of the visual arts contributed by our Art Department.

If nothing else, we hope you read this magazine and enjoy the quality of work that has been produced by the students of Gainesville College, and we hope that they will entertain you. On a deeper level however, we hope that they inspire you to think, to question, and if needed, to make adjustments in your perceptions.

Sincere thanks to the English Club members for all of their work and wit, to contributing faculty members Carol Pinson, Bob Croft, Glenda McLeod, and Anne Bassic, to Janice Nylander, to photographer Alex Bieri, and to our proofreaders Barbara Thomas, Bob Croft, Belinda Sauret, Thomas Tuggle, Sallie Duhling, and Kori Hall. We would like to give special thanks to Tom Sauret, our birthing coach and staunch supporter every step of the way.

micki licciardi
john hope

We work in the dark—we do what we can—we give what we have.
Our doubt is our passion and our passion is our task.
The rest is the madness of art.
— Henry James

editor's page

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Like a song whose words he couldn't recall, the story remained just out of earshot, just beyond his grasp. David Tabor had spent the past week chasing ghosts through the mountains north of Taos, to no avail. Visiting the century-old haunts of his characters had failed to stir them to life. Tonight he was looking forward to a hot shower and a soft bed in Albuquerque, maybe a little cable tv.

The BMW R-90 engine ticked away hypnotically as the yellow centerline swept past in the headlights. He had raced the sun all afternoon, and lost. Darkness caught him on New Mexico 15, just south of Santa Fe. The night had turned off cold and a dense, low-lying fog enveloped him. The moon had not yet risen. He leaned forward and hugged the gas tank, trying to catch some of the heat blowing off the engine.

Road stories had become his life and meal ticket. Memories of faces past flitted through his mind like mile markers on the highway. He'd come out of 'Nam with a puckered scar and an attitude. The wild street-talk of revolution was the stuff of dreams for an adrenaline-starved veteran. David quickly fell in with the radical anti-war movement and graduated from journal writing to journalism. He made a name for himself in the underground press with interviews of Angela Davis and Russell Means. It was Means who suggested he take his show on the road.

"Get out in the streets, Man! Talk to the people. See things through their eyes. Write their stories. That's where the truth lies, Man!"
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"Get out in the streets, Man! Talk to the people. See things through their eyes. Write their stories. That's where the truth lies, Man!"
The eyes of a dog reflected red in the headlight's beam. David did a quick mental calculation and decided it would reach the other side before he needed to brake. The eyes grew closer. He backed off on the throttle and steered over onto the centerline. When the dog crossed into the right lane, he would pass on the left. The eyes floated across the centerline.

A hulking, horned silhouette suddenly materialized out of the dense fog. "Jesus Christ! It's a damned bull!" There was no time left to brake. He kicked down on the gear shift lever, banked hard left, and passed the steer on the loose-gravelled shoulder of the road. He sensed the mountain dropping away to his left. The rear tire fish-tailed, then caught as he banked back onto the asphalt.

"Jesus, Joseph, and Mary!" David felt his stomach turn to water. He could hear his pulse pounding inside his helmet. He needed to get off the road for a while. With trembling hands clinging to the handlebars, he crept into the city limits of Madrid.

Madrid, according to the travel guides, was an old coal mining town that went belly up when the coal industry bottomed out. In the sixties, a group of hippies moved into the abandoned miners' shacks, and a sort of counter-culture community developed.

The sign outside read: Mine Shaft Saloon. David recalled a Rudolfo Anaya line, "All good stories begin at a cantina." He waded through the cigarette smoke and stepped up to the bar.

"What'll it be?" asked the fortyish looking bartender. Streaks of silver accented his shoulder length dark hair. "Tecate, no lime."

"You got it." The bartender bent and scooped the red can out of a tin tub of iced beers. A sign over the bar read: "We Don't Have A Town Drunk. We All Take Turns."

"Need a glass?"
"Can's fine."
"Too bad about Jerry, huh?"
"Jerry?"
"Garcia. Jerry Garcia. He died, you know."
"Oh yeah, too bad. Sorta like hearing your neighbor died."
"Exactly, Man. I grew up with that guy! Anything else I can get you?"

"Naw, I'm good."
"Okay, that'll be three bucks then, partner."
David dropped a five on the counter. "Keep it." Best to keep 'em friendly, he thought. He dragged a ladder-back chair up to one of the wire spools that served as tables. It was Friday night, and the band was just setting up.

"Sir, would you mind sitting back there?" The waitress pointed toward the back of the barroom. He noticed her top front teeth were missing. "We need to clear space in front of the stage for dancing."
"No problem."
"You plannin' to stay for the music?"
"I might."
"That'll be two dollars, then."

David fished in his pocket, hauled out two bucks, and handed it over. He wished, now, he'd kept the tip. He found another chair in the back. Three men in cowboy hats occupied the table next to him. One of them nodded.

"New in town?"
"First time through."
"I see Emma stuck you for the customary two bucks."
"She got me all right."

The man laughed. "With Emma, everything's two bucks." He extended his hand. "Name's Butch." David noticed he had a ten-inch Bowie knife hanging from his belt. "I'm the mayor. That's Kelly, and that one over there is Ned." They shook hands all around.

"Good to know ya," David said.
"You'll like it here. No hassles. You ain't a cop are ya?"
"Not in this lifetime. I claim to be a writer." Their eyes brightened.

"Wrote anything recent? Anything we might've read?"
"Maybe. I wrote 'Lola's Vengeance' for Louis Lamour's Western Magazine."
"A western ya say? Naw, we ain't read it."
"You take Field and Stream? They ran one of my poems, 'The Dog and the Corvette.'"
"Naw, not that one neither."
"Well damn, sorry boys."
"Say, we're sorta famous ourselves," Butch said. "Folks round here call us the Hole in the Head Gang to our faces. When we're out of earshot, they probably relocate the hole."
"Hole in the Heads? Whaddya mean?"
"We're wanted men. Back in '68 we robbed a bank in Indianapolis. Got away clean with all of two hundred dollars, cash money, just enough to get us here. Been here ever since."
"You've been holed up here for twenty-seven years over two hundred dollars?"
"Hey Man, robbin' a bank's a federal offense. Uncle Sam don't never stop wantin' you for that. Besides, we was expectin' more, but that's all the woman stuck in the bag at the drive-through."
"Oh yeah, I remember you guys now! You were on America's Least Wanted!" David ordered them another beer.
The band started up. They weren't bad either. Seemingly hovering over the microphone in the blue-white light, the lead-vocalist, with a voice like Tom Waits, belted out a poignantly poetic message about hard times and love gone bad. David was sure of it, even though he couldn't make out the lyrics. The kid kept a six-ounce glass of bourbon on the amplifier next to him, cultivating that gravelly voice.

The floor began to fill up with dancers. A wiry-haired, balding guy stood in the middle of the floor, not moving his feet at all, but teetering and arching his back, while his arms waved about in all directions. Some guy wearing a bowler hat and suspenders, looking for all the world like Lippy in Lonesome Dove, was shakin' it up with an auburn-haired beauty.

"Old Emma sure can dance, can't she?" Kelly said, pointing at the waitress.

David looked where Kelly indicated and, sure enough, there was Emma, doing something that vaguely resembled an interpretive ballet. At the front of the crowd, nearest the tables, a young girl, dressed all in white, pranced and pirouetted on bare feet. She couldn't have been more than ten years old. Her blonde hair was spiked short. The feverish glow from her feral eyes could be seen, even from the back of the bar room. Her tight smile never seemed to light up the rest of her face.

"Who's the kid?" David asked.
"That's Emma's kid. Cute, ain't she?" Butch replied. "She's mine too, only she don't know it. Hell, I doubt even Emma remembers it. She ain't quite right, you know. Bad acid. Hey, you wanna take a ride with us?"
"Where to?"
"Just out in the flats, toward Santa Fe. You know what JATO bottles are?"
"Jet Assisted Take-Off?"
"Yeah. I got a buddy who's an aircraft mechanic over at Kirtland. He ripped me off a couple. I got 'em bolted to my Impala. We're fixin' to try 'em out. Gonna be a helluva ride!"

David glanced at the black velvet El Muerte painting on the wall behind Butch. Three skeletons sat on a cliff-edge, laughing and passing a bottle between them. The smoking wreck of their automobile lay at the bottom of the cliff.

"Thanks, I'll pass. I just came from that way."
"Not like this, you didn't!"
"Guess I can't argue that. Thanks all the same."
"Fair enough then, Dave. We gotta be hittin' the road. Been good talkin' to ya. " The three stood, and David rose with them. Again, they shook hands all around. Butch clutched his hand in a vise-like grip, his bloodshot eyes shining like rubies through the cigarette haze. "What's your story, Dave?"

"I shot a man in Reno just to watch him die," David sang in a Johnny Cash voice.
"Naw, for real man."
"I dunno. Maybe it's not written yet."
"I think everybody's story is written, but nobody knows how theirs'll end up. People think they're going one place, but then they wind up somewhere else, completely different. Know what I mean?"
"Yeah, maybe."
"We'll be seein' ya."

David watched the Hole in the Heads leave the bar. He felt an eerie sense of déjà vu. The band launched into a version of "All Along the Watchtower." He looked to a table near the stage, where the feral-
eyed girl sat at Emma’s feet. He stood and walked toward them.

"Mind if I sit?"

"That’ll be two dollars then."

He smiled, dug the money out of his pocket, and dropped it on the table. "What’s your name?" he asked the girl.

"Abbey Road."

"Her old man’s dead." Emma offered.

"That’s tough. I’m sorry. How’d he die?"

"We don’t know. They wouldn’t say. I just figured it out when I saw the album jacket."

David had no idea how to reply to that. The band began to play a slow, acoustical number. He looked at the girl.

"Do you like to dance, Abbey?"

She smiled her tight smile and nodded. There was something in her expression he had seen before, but he couldn’t place it.

"Would you dance with me?"

The smile grew wider and, for a moment, the child within shined through. She took his hand in an unnaturally strong grip and led him out onto the dance floor. David wasn’t much of a dancer, but it didn’t matter. He mainly held Abbey’s hand and shuffled his feet while she pirouetted around him.

"Do you go to school, Abbey?"

"Mama teaches me."

"What do you want to be?"

"Something else. Mama says I’m gonna be something else when I grow up."

The music stopped, and they returned to the table. Emma sat alone, staring away into the distance, perhaps back to Abbey Road. David stared at Abbey. It came to him then, and he was filled with a great sadness. The legacy of the Age of Aquarius sat before him. She bore the same haunted expression he had seen in the faces of children in the burned out villages of Vietnam.

Butch was right. People set out for a destination, but the road sometimes takes them elsewhere, to a place they never anticipated. A story began to unfold in his mind about the casualties of a social revolution, about the way a generation moved on and left these walking wounded in its wake.
When the dog collided with the Corvette, I don't know what he was thinkin'.
The sheriff arrested the driver 'cause the whole town said he'd been drinkin'.
But the dog had it in for the driver.
I seen it. I know that it's true.
He never did like Corvettes much and he hated Cadillacs too.

No fancy gourmet diets, just rabbits, squirrels, and such,
and he never rode'n no convertible, but in the back of a pickup truck.
His biscuits were those left over.
They were never bought in a store.
He slept outside under a cedar tree, and never expected anything more.

Class warfare made him do it.
It's the only thing I can think.
He'd spot a Corvette a mile away, head down to the creek for a drink, and pass by the rest of Detroit's best just to pee on the Corvette's tires, then march back proud with his head held high like he'd just pulled a kid from a fire.

When the dog kamikazed the Corvette, he'd bit more'n he could chew.
He smacked the quarter-panel at sixty mile an hour and the fur and fiberglass flew.
Now the driver's doing time in the pokey and the dog's buried out in the yard.
I sit in the rocker, wax philosophical and try not to take it too hard.

But I'll carry on the rebellion and I'll never give up the fight.
I'm goin' out tonight with a ballpeen hammer and punch out a Corvette's lights!
an architect's mid-life crisis
alfred barker

I pop and crack as an old wooden bridge
carrying a burden or an old house that
is making noises in the cold and wind.
Aged, as the pyramids of Giza, eroded
by time, I no longer possess a polished exterior.
Love has been stolen by life’s brutal robbers,
the kind of love, like granite, eternal
with its patterns of gray, white, and black,
unbending to the pressures of infidelity,
formed the great Athenian halls.
Granite, tested by fire, unlike sandstone,
brick, or wood has been made permanent.
And if love is to be permanent then I would no
longer be old, but young in the eyes of eternity.

a literary historian’s moral dilemma
alfred barker

Like Odysseus captured by Calypso
on the Isle of Ogygia for seven years,
I too have desired love and wanted to go,
to flee my imprisonment, to shed my fears
of never being loved, but today I met Aphrodite.
She was clothed in a short crimson gown.
My tongue tasted the lust within me.
The goddess of love who came down from heaven
spoke and, like Pegasus, my heart flew free.
Together we talked of how lovers embrace
as ivy that clings tightly to a wall.
Afraid to look directly into her face,
I desire the love of Aphrodite most of all.
Yet, Poseidon’s Charybdis keeps me at bay
and his daughter still haunts me to this day.
dear god

alfred barker

I looked into a stream and saw life
as a twisting tornado caused by a stone.
I saw sand dancing like thoughts seemingly
controlled by the turbulent waters
which were spinning, creating,
to the stream's rocky bottom,
a cone shaped hole--empty
like someone void of
relationships or religion.
I shuddered, wondering
if this was all. So,
I reached into the
frigid water and
removed the stone.
The sand settled
and the blue-green water
became
smooth
like
glass.

It was then I saw my face and asked God to reach
his hand into my turbulent life to remove the stones.

It's a sad fact that Buddy was badly wounded when a bomb
struck near his position during the Battle of the Bulge. The force of the
explosion threw him up high into the smoky air. He landed in an
unconscious heap and was left for dead for several hours. Some
soldiers picked up his body and slung it like a corpse onto the back of
a truck with a load of real dead bodies. They drove down the road,
rolling slowly across the torn ground. A soldier walking alongside saw
a movement among the bodies in the truck bed. With yelling and
gesturing, he got the driver to stop, and several men climbed up into
the back of the truck. Stepping among the bodies, they reached Buddy
and pulled him down. It was a fact that he wasn't dead at all.

But he did leave some portion of himself behind when he
returned home to live with his sister Carolyn and her family. The war
had silenced Buddy. Carolyn feared he would never speak again, but
the army doctors said that Buddy was fine; his body was intact. They
agreed that it was shell shock that silenced Buddy, and one day, they
assured her, he would talk again.

But since his return he had sat all day long on the horsehair sofa
in the front room staring at the walls or furniture and smoking filterless
Pall Malls. The young nephews, Jamie and Scott, had begun to sit in
the front room opposite Buddy and speculate about his strange silence.
They imagined that in pulling him from the death truck, the other
soldiers had been sloppy in their excited haste and some of Buddy's
brains had been left behind, smeared onto another soldier and buried
forever in a grave in the Arlington cemetery. They watched him smoke cigarette after cigarette, holding them less than a breath away from his lips as though the effort to drop his bony arm and raise it again to inhale was too much for him. Jamie thought the smoking reminded Buddy of the battles he’d fought, and Scott thought maybe it fogged the pictures in his mind and helped him to forget the war.

Buddy coughed, and both boys looked at him. “Why can’t he just open his mouth and say something?” Jamie asked.

“Why don’t you ask him, boys?” Carolyn replied as she entered the room. “Buddy? Will you answer the boys?” Buddy only blinked and coughed again.

Just when the family began talking about bringing Buddy back to the V.A. hospital for more tests, the war ended. Celebrations broke out everywhere. Carolyn was humming in the kitchen while she prepared a dinner appropriate for the occasion, and her husband Donald was home early from work. Jamie ran into the front room and shouted, “Uncle Buddy! Did you hear?” He turned off the radio and spun around to face his uncle. “It’s over! The war’s really over!”

Buddy slowly stubbed out his cigarette and said, “Shoe size: 10. Times I flew a kite: 7.”

“Mom! Dad! Come quick!” Jamie shouted.

“Jamie, what’s all the fuss about, son?” Carolyn entered the room, drying her hands on a dishcloth. “Home runs hit: 8,” Buddy said. She dropped the cloth, and both hands went to her mouth as her eyes opened wide and filled with tears. She moved toward Buddy slowly then reached her arms out and held his face with her hands. “Oh, Buddy. Welcome home, baby brother.”

Donald entered and approached Carolyn and Buddy. “Well,” he said, grinning. He squatted down directly in front of Buddy and looked into his face. “Buddy?” He waited for a reply. “Buddy?” he repeated. Buddy sat silent and still, without meeting Donald’s eye. Carolyn backed away and looked at Donald in bewilderment. Donald patted Buddy’s knee and said, “That’s okay. We can talk later. It’s just good to have you back. Real good.”

Both he and Carolyn left the room, whispering and looking back over their shoulders at Buddy. Jamie kept sitting and waiting for him to say something else, but Buddy only reached for another cigarette.

The celebration dinner was eaten on trays in the front room that night. Everyone sat close to Buddy. “Look, Uncle Buddy. The mashed potatoes are lumpy, just the way you like them,” Jamie said.

“Tell us about the war, Uncle Buddy,” urged Scott.

“Times I climbed a tree: 12.” They all paused in their eating and waited for Buddy to go on.

“Number of baseball cards owned: 143,” he said and ate a bite of potatoes.

Donald cleared his throat and said, “Mr. Harper down at the plant wants to know if you need some work, Buddy. Says he’d be proud to have a vet at the place.”

“Number of dog tags lost: 1,” Buddy said. Scott snickered until he saw the pressed lips and small shake of his mother’s head.

“Well, I’ll tell Harper that we’ll let him know later then.” Donald glanced at Carolyn. “No hurry.”

“Hat size: 7,” Buddy said. He poked his fork into the green beans and stabbed one onto each tine, then studied them for a moment before putting the fork in his mouth and slowly extracting it. He chewed deliberately before swallowing and staring straight ahead; he said, “Times I went deer hunting: 7.”

The family watched all of this in silence and became aware of the steady tick-tick of the mantle clock as they followed where Buddy’s gaze rested. The ticking suddenly seemed too loud for the small room. Carolyn drew her napkin across her mouth and said, “Who’s ready for dessert? Buddy, I made your favorite! Apple pie.”

“Haircuts: 216,” he said. Suddenly the room was filled again with dinner noises as Donald and the boys rushed to help Carolyn clear the trays for dessert. Before the war, Buddy had been good with numbers—a math whiz. And it soon became apparent that this flash of brilliance was all Buddy brought back home with him. Pressing his back into the horsehair sofa every night after dinner, Buddy smoked his cigarettes and enumerated
his life. Occasionally the numbers would stop, and his eyes would focus on something that no one else could see. He would sit in silence, a miasma of smoke floating around his head.

Buddy’s litany took over the front room. He only joined the family for dinner. He would push himself up from the sofa and shuffle to the kitchen in his slippers. The family watched him seat himself on the edge of his chair as though ready for a fast getaway.

"Number of apples stolen from neighbor’s tree: 82. Automobile accidents: 1."

They all cut glances at him but avoided each other’s eyes. Dinner became a hurried affair with no one else speaking except to pass the beans or the salt. Soon, it seemed that everyone ate perched on the edge of his or her seat.

One morning Carolyn brought a pad of paper and a pen into the front room and set them on the end table beside Buddy. She checked the pad several times a day for a while, but soon slid it back into the desk drawer one day after brushing ashes off of its blank surface.

Buddy began sleeping on the sofa. Smoking into the night, he would finally go quiet and slump over. In the mornings Carolyn scolded Buddy for his carelessness. "You mustn’t smoke when you get sleepy. You’ll burn the house down!" But Buddy seemed to smoke more all the time.

Carolyn finally pulled up the carpet, pockmarked with burn holes from dropped cigarettes, and replaced it with cheap slate tiles.

"It’ll get marked up too," Donald protested. "But it won’t catch fire and burn us down," maintained Carolyn, holding out her hands which were clasped together tightly. Donald grasped her wrists and stared into her eyes. "We’ve got to do something."

"Holes in carpet: 19," Buddy said. "Number of fish caught: 34."

The front room began to smell like stale smoke and used bedsheets. The boys no longer brought friends in to trade baseball cards or look at their uncle’s war medal. Donald walked past the room and instead sat at the kitchen table to read the evening paper. Carolyn frowned as she emptied ashtrays and changed sheets that were scattered with ashes and food crumbs.

The boys heard their parents’ harsh whispers in the night mingled with Buddy’s litany:

"Do something."
"What can we do?"
"Watermelon seeds spit: 519."
"We can’t live like this. He’s practically taken over the house."
"Rocks skipped: 328. Number of slow dances: 11."
"I don’t know what to do."
"Ferris wheel rides: 6."
"Do something. Soon."

They quit giving him cigarettes and aired out the front room. Everyone helped with a thorough cleaning, while Buddy sat silent. They put the radio on to make up for the lack of voices and scrubbed the floor and the walls. Buddy stared straight ahead with his arms hanging limply at his sides, hands resting on the sheeted sofa. Carolyn brought him a lunch tray and returned to the kitchen to eat with the family. When she went back to clear Buddy’s dishes, the food was untouched, and Buddy sat unmoving.

"How many dogs did we have as kids, Buddy?" she implored. "Remember Grandpa’s gun collection? How many did he have?" She waited a moment in vain for a reply, then went back to the kitchen.

"Donald, you go right out and buy him some cigarettes."
"We just got the room cleaned, Carolyn."
"I don’t care. I’d rather put up with the mess and smell than with his silence."

One morning the children woke up to Uncle Buddy’s screaming. A dropped cigarette had burned a hole clean through his sock. Carolyn was just entering the room with his breakfast tray and quickly dumped a glass of cold milk on the smoldering sock and flesh. She called for the children to get her first aid kit and knelt at Buddy’s feet.

"You go wait in the kitchen, boys." Her movements were quick and deliberate as she tended the burn. "Buddy, we aren’t helping you. Now you’ve gone and hurt yourself." She applied some salve and placed a piece of gauze over the wound, covering up the reddened skin with the ugly blister in the center. "It’s not too bad. This time." She
dancing with eve
third place
micki licciardi

I feel the bass
down in my womb
as it beats a heart rhythm
I recognize.

But I can’t get these chalky European
limbs to lift
or these heavy white feet to move
in remembrance.

Oh mother,
brown mother,
why are you so far away and quiet?
And why did you not first teach me
how to dance?
michael daniels
scratchboard 10.5 x 12

chris brady
 ebony pencil 14 x 19
mark cudd
ink 14 x 17.5

adrienne wilder
graphite & conte crayon 16.5 x 21
boongnune vongkhamchanh
graphite 18 x 13

maresa wheeler
conte crayon 11 x 16.5
stacie carvill
conce crayon 13.5 x 16.5

tracy stanley
scratchboard 12.5 x 10.5
high places
micki licciardi

Christ!
Have you noticed all the awful little men in high places
who like to tell you that sex is bad?

They like to give young boys
holy jobs at the altar.

And they hate homo-sex-uwals.
God! Half of them run around
in long skirts and gold necklaces
giving benedictions to blue-hairs,
and you positively must kiss their ring
-- it's to die for!

They say that Adam and Eve
were the first of everything,
but especially the first sinners.
I want to ask them:
How was it a sin
to eat the juicy fruit
if they didn't know right from wrong
until after
they ate of the tree?

God said eat and die,
but the serpent said eat and know.
And they ate and knew they were naked.
So who was the liar?

All those preachy tongues
with their click-click-clicks.
The manicured finger points
"You there, you smoke! You, foul mouth, swear!"

And you drink whiskey and beer!
They tremble from the exertion it takes
to maintain this level of holiness.
(You little pieces of lint.)

You scream at mothers and babies
"You're all going to hell!"
"Amen!" you want shouted,
but your god is dead.

And Dad is sitting
reading the funny pages
in a quiet house.

I'm done with your hatred and shunning.

Besides, it's God's truth --
all any of us really want is a
second coming.
change
first place
micki licciardi

I wish I had never had you, child
for now I know too much.
I wish I had never felt you pull at my womb
for sex will never be the same;
half its mysterious thunder at last understood
and wrapped in softened blankets.

Motherhood laid her grip on me
in your tiny hand splayed across my breast.
Now I know
slivered moonlight must feel like
the soft pads of your new fingertips.

hush
micki licciardi

How come we women
don't come back to life?
We just stay dead.

JFK,
Elvis,
Jesus,
You are still with us!

Why, you still shop at Wal-Mart
and eat at Waffle House
and cast useless crutches
into church aisles.

You still advise leaders,
break hearts,
and save souls.

Where are you
Jackie O?
Patsy Cline?
Virgin-Mary-Mother-of-God?

Why aren't you somewhere
redecorating great houses,
or falling to pieces,
or pushing gods from your womb?

Instead we are told,
Lie down woman, lie down.
Die. Stay dead.
Hush now,
hush.
spring cleaning
charles penland

Mother wore a blue bandanna
wrapped around her head
and armed herself with old rags
that were drenched in lemon scented Endust
and pine tree Mr. Clean.
She scrubbed the porcelain tub,
that stood on four legs like a tiger on the prowl.
Mother dusted the furniture as if giving the wood
a massage with oil and perfume.
All this on the first day of spring.
I awoke early in the morning to see her work.
In my footed Tigger pajamas, I rushed to hear her
sing whimsical melodies that played
my ears like the musician with wiry glasses
who caresses each string of the harp.
She brought spring with just her
melodious hum and diligent cleaning.
One fall, as the leaves descended
and the flowers dried into crispy stalks
that crunched under the feet of children at play,
Mother died.
Spring will no longer hear her singing,
Yet spring will come again and again.

a triptych for the beverage: ale
curtis durham

Because there is the need for poems ending in man.

When you cannot cope with life
And your woman buys the Spam
When the dogs howl their total strife
A pint of plain’s your only man.

When Spring grows young girls frisky
And a rest is given your hand
When your habits become risky
A pint of plain’s your only man.

When your day pierced bright and sunny
And the rays shone on the land
When the tragedies glossed funny
A pint of plain’s your only man.

Because there is a need for poems ending in lad.

When you’ve stubbed your tender toe
And your hand is burnt real bad
When things for you just won’t go
A pint of plain’s your only lad.

When the morning finds you risen
And the moment must be had
When she is like what she isn’t
A pint of plain’s your only lad.

When the day starts out real sucky
And your boss plays a wiener nad
When the morning coffee’s yucky
A pint of plain’s your only lad.
Because there is a need for poems ending in gal.

When you force a wolly hocker
And it spews upon your pal
When you cough and heave and balker
A pint of plain’s your only gal.

When you catch the fairer light
And the scene crisps clearer now
When the mood acts like the right
A pint of plain’s your only gal.

When the music paints the air
And happy is yonder cow
When spelling notes can spare
A pint of plain’s your only gal.

caffeine
curtis durham

Caffeine has a way of shaking things up

I first saw her at a coffee house. It wasn’t a coffee
House like those in the movies about the 60’s.
There weren’t any beatnik poets all dressed in black, sporting
Goatees, berets, horned-rimmed glasses, and wide awake, exhausted
Eyes. Yet, there were a few there sporting goatees.

"My name is Lindsay," she said, through lips like satin pincushions.
She smiled. I thought maybe she was shy. Not shy enough,
However, to show that gap between her two front teeth like a
Narrow eastern European alley. She told me she wanted to have it
"Fixed," I told her it didn’t need "fixing." If that little gap needed
Anything, it needed my tongue.

As I sat staring at her, I put my tongue
Between the gap of my own two front teeth.

It fit perfectly.
An explosion tore open, for a split second, the chilly night air of Paris. "Gee whiz, Lisa," said a young American as he rolled his eyes. "That's the seventh car bomb this week." He sat naked in a scarred, ancient, ceramic bathtub, stained with many years of bathing service. A pale, petite, French girl with fire-orange hair and violet eyes poured hot water from a large saucepan into the bath.

"I despise the violence of course," she said, "but the explosions fill me with such a shivering. My whole body prickles like the anticipation you feel before you eat a pickle."

Through the window floated upward the sounds of disaster aftermath as snow drifted downward. The urgent shouts and painful screams became reduced to muffled sobs and quiet pauses. Moments later French police and ambulance sirens screamed knives through the hazy air in the street below while flashing emergency lights danced on the wall. The scent and smoke of charred things swirled lazily in the light, bleeding into the room through the window.

She scrubbed his back with a raggy, white t-shirt while she absently picked the dirt and cotton lint from underneath his toe nails. "Lisa, would you please turn on the CD player? The sirens are bugging me."

The young French girl reached over from where she was sitting to the small table that held the cheap, imported boombox. She randomly picked up a CD from the numerous ones scattered on the nightstand. It was the album "100% Fun" by Matthew Sweet. "Nothing like good music to cover up annoying sounds," he said as he reclined in the tub. "Turn it up will you please?"

"I am sorry, Conrad? What did you say?" Lisa grinned as Conrad started to repeat his request. He caught himself and smirked at her. She turned and picked up a bottle of shampoo from off the floor. After inspecting the bottle, she then measured out a good quarter-sized glob of the stuff and massaged it into Conrad's hair.

"Conrad, when are you going to go back to Hamburg? Are you not starting your classes soon?" asked Lisa.

"Well, yeah," he paused and screwed up his face in a quizzical way. "Actually, I think they started last Monday."

"Conrad! Why are you not there? You are missing your classes! Will your parents be upset?"

The young man shrugged, "I guess so." As he dug his pinky into his nose, he thought over the situation. "They did give me four grand for living expenses. But you know, Lisa, I like to think of this as my 'alternative' education. Besides," he said, just before submerging his head in the tepid dirty water to rinse it of suds, "School sucks."

Outside the window the noises had calmed, and a constant murmur of voices created a blanket of sound.

"They sound very quiet now," said Lisa. "I wonder what is going on outside?" She had finished rinsing his hair and was now scrubbing on his left arm.

Conrad reached his right arm out of the tub to retrieve a text book from a stack that had been sitting in the same spot since he put them there when he had arrived at Lisa's flat in Paris two weeks before.

"German Literature of the 20th century," he said looking at the cover. With a deft movement Conrad flipped the book like a frisbee right out of the window into the street below.

Outside on the street below passersby marveled at the horror before them. A couple holding each other close watched with disbelief as rescue workers tried to aid the victims of the bomb.

"Mon Dieu, François," whispered the woman. "This is so terrible. I can't imagine anything worse than this."
The man ran his hand through his greasy black hair, cradled his scalp, and shook his head in disbelief.

"It is terrible, mon cheri, I cannot imagine," he agreed.

Suddenly, from out of the sky, fell a book. It landed at their feet with a loud, dull thud.

Inside the window above the street, Lisa cleaned Conrad's toenails with a stiff, nylon brush.

"Well," the American sighed, "where shall we go tonight?"

"I know the perfect place to celebrate such a horrible disaster," Lisa replied, "It is called 'Club Pointe du Lait', a place where they read poetry. Tonight is the night where anybody can recite original pieces."

"Can we bring our imaginary friend, Mr. Castleberry?"

"Of course he can come along; they do not discriminate on the basis of reality. Do you not know that this is Paris?"

"Well, I don't know. I mean, the last time I took Mr. Castleberry with me to a bar, three very large neanderthal football players hurt me." The American raised his arms to allow the French girl to scrub his armpits. "I never go to that place nowadays," he stopped. "In fact, they don't even let me in anymore."

"Conrad I hope that you never do. Someone like you cannot possibly have an enriching time in such a place. Violence does not equal fun."

"I know--I know. So, this place accepts oddities such as ourselves. We shall fit right in then," said Conrad.

Lisa fetched a slightly damp towel from the back of a metal folding chair as Conrad stood. His wet, naked body shivered in the cold draft coming from the window. He quickly grabbed the towel from her hand and wrapped it about his body. The dark concrete floor froze the bottoms of his feet as he stepped out of the old tub.

"Aaaahh! It's freezing cold!" he yelled. "That does it!"

Conrad strode over to the kitchen table. He took the small wooden chair sitting next to it by the back and lifted it above his head. As he brought it down upon the table as hard as he could, another smaller blast rocked the building as what must have been the gas tank of one of the burning cars outside exploded. Naked, Conrad held the remains of the chair and looked at Lisa. Slowly their eyes turned to the window.

Lisa reached for an open bottle of Beaujolais sitting on the floor near the bed as Conrad picked up smashed bits of wood. He stacked the remains of the furniture hazaradly in the small but serviceable wood burning stove and doused them with Zippo lighter fluid.

Lisa poured the red wine into two glasses and handed one to Conrad. As he took his first sip of the stuff, he lit the fire.

"Lisa," he whispered, "Watch this."

Lisa cackled as Conrad danced a jig. The shadows caused by the leaping flames looked like dancing devils upon the wall.

"Oh Conrad! You have such a heart of darkness!"

Quickly, Conrad dressed. He wore dirty jeans, soft, supple and slightly greenish from two weeks constant wear, a stained, white t-shirt, green woolen sweater, and a heavy oilskin jacket. He rummaged through a large collection of Lisa's clothes heaped in a pile in the corner of the room and found one dark blue sock and one with green and white stripes.

"These will do fine!" said Conrad smiling. "Do they smell? Hmmm. Not too badly."

"Hey! Those belong to me!" teased Lisa as she wiggled into a red, crushed velvet body suit. "Besides, they haven't been washed in several days."

"Oh, so they are clean then?" Conrad smirked.

The two walked out into the hallway of the antiquated apartment building. The lights mounted high above shone dimly in the musty scented hall. After Lisa locked the three separate dead bolts, they made their way down five flights of stairs and out the front doors onto Rue Olivier Serres.

Outside was a confusing collection of liquid images. Ambulances and police cars navigated through an ocean of bystanders and roadblocks, their sirens silent now.

On the opposite side of the street was the disaster area of a car bombing. Bodies covered in blood-stained sheets scattered about in a shining sea of shattered glass. Blood painted the nearby walls, the street, the cars, the people, everything that was close enough to the car that had only minutes before erupted into a brief but devastating
Onlookers nervously viewed the scene as policemen tried to assess the situation. Faces, wet with human juices and gray with ash stared blankly at medics or were twisted into impossibly petrified positions.

Smoldering cars, gutted by fire, remained where they had been parked, lined up alongside the road. The concussion of the blast had shattered many windows of nearby cars and buildings, and the glass sparkled like diamonds on the ground. Bits and pieces of all sorts of things littered the scene. A severed, bloody arm with wristwatch intact lay in the gutter. A bicycle, warped and blackened with smoking rubber tires, rested atop the roof of one the damaged cars. In front of the pair, an accordion, burnt and melted, with a smashed keyboard and ripped bellows laid strewn across the sidewalk. Acrid smoke smelling of burnt rubber, gasoline, and crisped human flesh made the air slightly opaque.

"Wow," said Conrad as he picked his nose with his pinky, "what a mess."

The other side of the street was home to an outdoor cafe which, unaffected by the blast, was gradually filling up.

"I bet they sell a lot of alcohol there tonight," he said, gesturing towards the cafe, "and I don’t mean wine."

Conrad glanced at Lisa who was quietly taking in the sight of so much gore. The somber, stoic mask she wore was betrayed by the tear pooling upon her eyelid. As it burst over the edge, the tear, hot and wet, slid effortlessly down her smooth, rosy cheek and made a tiny splash in the slushy, pinkish snow below.

"No one deserves such a horror that has come to this place," she whispered. "These people will never dream peacefully again. Their dreams will scream red with their children exploding into shards and pieces."

Lisa seemed to convulse very slightly as she stared at the sidewalk. She blinked and looked at Conrad.

"Come on, let us go to the club, I know a shortcut," she said.

Ten minutes later, they stood at the entrance of a metro, looking down the stairs into the darkness.

Lisa smiled and turned to Conrad beaming.

"It is here," she explained pointing down the stairs, "that I played my guitar with an old man. His singing was so bad that I had to laugh. I as not able to play very well at all with him. I could not keep from laughing. He was singing like an old cat and playing the..." the smile on her face relaxed into blankness as she turned her head and looked down the stairs, "accordion."

Conrad raised his eyebrows and placed his hands on Lisa's cheeks.

"Surely it wasn’t his," he said.

"It was an excellent experience," Lisa continued flatly, staring into the depths of the metro. "For the two hours I was here, I felt there was a fire. A fire inside of me."

Conrad smiled and held both of her hands in his.

"Then this tunnel is infused with big music magic. Come! Follow me! We must find this old man!" he bellowed.

Lisa looked up at him, and the smile slowly returned to her face. He ran down the stairs into the darkness imitating the noise of chickens during a feeding frenzy. Lisa tore after him, screeching the language of African monkeys during mating.

Several streets away, a couple silently kissed on a park bench.

"Mon Dieu, François," blurted the woman, "did you hear that noise?"

"It sounds like some deviant is raping a stray cat with a chicken," said the man.

"Maybe we should call the police," she said. "It could be a murder!"

Just then, the woman noticed a couple emerging from the metro outside the park where the noises seemed to come from.

"François? Do you see them? What must they be up to? I believe we should follow them."

"Mon cheri, don’t be silly," said the man. "Leave those people alone. It is none of our business what they do with cats anyway."

"Come, François," the woman got up from the park bench and yanked the man by the arm. "We are going to follow them."

The man ran his hand through his greasy black hair, grasped a handful, and shook his head.
Lisa and Conrad continued to walk down the narrow cobbled street. A speeding police car rounded a corner and passed them, hurrying in the direction they had recently come from.

"He must be going to the accident scene," said Conrad.

"I wonder why he would be traveling so fast?" asked Lisa.

"I don't know. I imagine there are enough police there already."

The two shrugged and held hands as they continued their walk to the club.

Bright street lamps lit their way past pharmacies, banks, travel agencies, and bakeries, all dark and closed. Soon, the pair noticed a neon sign flashing "Pointe du Lait" in bright blue, hanging over a descending staircase.

For one minute the young French girl and the American boy stood at the top of the stairs. Soft sounds of modern ambient jazz filtered up from the depths below. Carefully the pair made their way down the steps. Candlelight flickered a beckoning welcome in the window of the door at the bottom of the stairs.

The handle of the door turned quietly in the hand of the young man as the nimble, velvet-clad figure of the young woman waited. Once he had it opened, she passed through.

Inside, the impact of smoke struck the two and curled about their bodies. Conrad made sure to ask the door man if Mr. Castleberry was allowed to enter. Perplexed, the French man babbled in an unintelligible accent. Conrad smiled and showed the imaginary Mr. Castleberry inside.

They found a small, rickety round table of questionable integrity in front of the minute stage made from wine crates and plywood.

The chairs were wooden and looked as if they predated the second World War. Uncomfortable as the squat chairs appeared to be, the couple sat in them relaxed.

Seated in booths and at tables, human oddities of every mother's nightmare lounged in quiet conversation, or in silence. An old, bearded man wore a tutu over army fatigues and a widow's veil over his face. Despite the veil, Conrad could see his large, vulture-like eyes popping out in the direction of a young woman seated at the next table. He seemed ready to pounce and gobble the woman's svelte figure dressed in flapper's attire. She completely ignored him and smoked a cigarette from a six-inch filter.

A gaunt boy with enormous ears and stained buck teeth watched with weasel's eyes, the crowd in the room. In many of the booths sat French boys dressed as James Deans with French girls looking like Marilyn Monroes at their sides.

Conrad and Lisa ordered glasses of milk and cookies. Mr. Castleberry asked for a plate of pickles, but the waiter did not hear him. A man wearing the typical costume of a Frenchman, a striped shirt, black pants, and a beret, took the microphone from the stand. He spoke something in French that Conrad could not understand.

"He is asking the people who wish to recite poetry to sign on the paper that is being passed around," translated Lisa.

When the paper reached their table, Conrad signed their names to it.

Several minutes passed, and the man in the beret walked up to the microphone and spoke again in French. Conrad made out the name "Nicole."

"I will translate for you, Conrad," said Lisa.

The woman in the Flapper's dress ascended the stage. After giving the room a serious stare, she flipped back her head, posed, and proceeded to recite her poetry in French.

"In the heat of the night," translated Lisa, "my arms become magnets. They swoop you up with power and force your face to my breast. You suck and suck, but are never satisfied. For in the moment before you explode in pleasure, I snatch you away and devour your head. All passion is mine, and I throw your husk onto the floor."

When the young woman had finished, several members of the crowd clapped politely or nodded their heads slightly.

"O.K." said Conrad, "remind me if I drink too much milk not pick her up this evening."

"Very silly, Conrad," said Lisa as she stealthily slid her hand underneath the table and placed it between Conrad's legs. "I can tell by your erection that she turns you on. Maybe I shall ask her to come home with us tonight. What damage do you think the two of us could do to you?" Lisa winked at him.
Mr. Castleberry who had previously been distracted perked up at Lisa’s words. "What about me?" asked Mr. Castleberry. "What about you?" snapped Lisa. "I will just think you into a vibrator. How does that sound?"

Mr. Castleberry, flustered, changed the subject, "Where is that waiter with my pickles?"

After several more people recited their poems, the man in the beret mumbled in French. Conrad recognized his name and turned to Lisa.

"That would be us," said Lisa.

Lisa grabbed Conrad by the hand and led him to the stage. He looked out through the blue haze of smoke at the people gathered in the club. The bright stage lights made it difficult to see, but he could make out the silhouettes of the patrons seated in chairs at tables or in stools at the bar.

"I’d like to introduce to you my good friend Lisa Jeannin," Conrad spoke in English. "She shall translate a poem I composed on my walk here tonight."

Conrad waited as Lisa translated to the crowd what he had said. "It is called, 'Disaster.'"

Conrad took the microphone in his hands and raised it level to his lips. He fastened the stand and looked at Lisa.

His eyes popped open wide. He stretched his jaw until his mouth was huge. A noise similar to a gargle of water started quietly within the depths of his gaping orifice. The sound became louder, louder, and still louder until it was a thunderous mucous curdling, jet engine scream of sonic, catastrophic death. While he continued to scream, his arms flailed madly about, and he stomped his feet upon the flimsy plywood of the stage. Finally, Conrad jumped into the air and landed on his back, twisting, jerking, and wailing. Then he became very still and did not move.

Absolute silence embedded the small room. Not a glass was lifted, not a cigarette puffed. Many stared with their jaws open.

Lisa smiled wickedly. She looked at the audience with wild eyes, drew in a breath, and shrieked the hunting cry of the falcon into the microphone with the force of rifle fire. The sound penetrated the souls of the bar patrons and caused them all to hold their hands over their ears. Lisa flapped her arms like falcon’s wings and appeared to rise into the air. Her eyes beamed lasers into the crowd and burned in their memories the scene they witnessed. The falcon swooped and descended upon the body of the dead man below.

When it was finished, Conrad and Lisa rose from the floor of the stage and walked quietly down past the frozen figures of men and women to the door behind.

From a corner booth a couple watched the pair descend the stage. The man and woman looked at each other and said simultaneously, "Mon Dieu."

"François, I cannot imagine anything more wonderful. These two must be old souls, come back to us to show us the truth. To enunciate their primal scream and show us the way. There was such beauty in their vocal chords. François? Do you not agree?"

The man cocked one eye at the woman and shook his head. "They were a couple of freaks!" he paused and sipped his wine, "But if you say so, mon cheri."

Lisa and Conrad climbed the stairs solemnly. When they had reached street level once again, they looked at each other, smiled, and erupted in an explosion of laughter. They laughed so hard they fell into the snow crying. Mr. Castleberry, very happy now to be having fun, joined them wrestling in the snow. The sounds of play echoed off the tall buildings and faded into the cold night sky. For several minutes they lay still in the snow with their heads touching.

"Lisa," said Conrad breathing slowly, "this place is hell."

He pinched a small bit of snow with his fingers and watched it melt into water, run down his hand, and splash into the white powder. Lisa arched her head, lying in the snow to see Conrad’s face, "Yes, Conrad, but this is still Paris."

"Yes, it is," Conrad sighed, then smiled; "it certainly is."

For minutes, the group lay in the snow admiring the architecture of the buildings lining the cobbled street. Several feet away they heard
the approach of footsteps crunching in the snow. Above them appeared
a slim figure wearing a flapper's dress."

"Hello," said Conrad, "I'm Conrad."
The young woman smiled wide, showing her large, perfectly
formed teeth through satin pincushion lips. She took a deep drag from
her cigarette in its six-inch filter.

"What you did inside was incredible," she took another long
drag. "It filled me with such a feeling. Like the prickling shiver you
feel as you..." she paused and blew smoke in Conrad's face, "Bite into
a pickle."

Conrad looked at Lisa and almost imperceptibly winked.
"The screaming?" he asked. "Thank you. I do it regularly."
"I can imagine," the flapper ashed her cigarette and licked her
full lips.

Conrad motioned towards Lisa, "This is Lisa. She translated."
"You scream very nicely," said the flapper smiling at Lisa. She
tilted her head and addressed Conrad once again, "But why do you not
introduce me to your other friend?"

Conrad and Lisa looked at each other with huge, dish-plate eyes.
"Why, I'd like to introduce you to my good friend, Mr.
Castleberry."
my consultation with the poet, james whitehead

lee rider

My turn had come: The instructor of my instructor was here.
It was like learning the moonshine secret in a cornfield.
We went outside, so he could smoke. He'll quit, maybe next year.

He related my story to me just as I meant for it to be read.
To clarify the conflict, he said that I needed to add a scene.
My gut burned like lava, but his face eased my mood.

*There are no wolves in Oklahoma, so what do they mean?*
My hero needed strong family ties, as these animals had.
*Well, there are lots of coyotes* and flicked his cigarette again.

*Look at that rabbit,* he pointed, but I saw only a bird.
A sparrow, with a beak that could lance the smallest insect.
Then I saw the rabbit, shredding an acorn like a saw cuts wood.

We watched the pair, when from a hole crept
A small, sightless vole. *It looks like coal,* I heard him say.
Sniffing near the sparrow and rabbit, it found a nut.

I felt like I was in Eden, and my mind ceased to worry.
J.W. and I looked at the trio, waiting for more.
He said that even the animals had come to hear my story.

The ideas now grew like sprigs on a forest floor.
I thanked him for his help and shook his hand.
As I turned to leave, I met my instructor at the door.

He asked if I had learned anything, and I told him, *Yes, indeed.*
*My story was almost complete. It just needed a front end.*

coldstream taggart, the college traveler,
introduces his country doctor friend

james whitehead

Troubled Zenner Doctor Annie loves
The clapboard cottage where she lives alone
Except for Bach and Jesus and her dream
Of working out her faith until she dies
At a ripe old age, she hopes, devoutly prays.

Death, professional familiar,
Is not her friend at Smith Memorial.
She does anxiety, somewhat of fear.
She says at work it closes on her heart
With every diagnosis as she listens--

Or studies ghostly pictures—or draws some blood,
Death stands around the room at every birth
Of every child she brings into the world.
Nothing strikes her like a child's first cry.
She doesn't want the family in the room.

When winter comes she writes to say come down
To spend an afternoon she's not on call.--
She'll play the great baroque and touch on things
About the value of our simple lives.
The winter rain is never simple there.

Last time was Jesus in Jerusalem,
Who knew he'd be afraid to suffer and die,--
And Buddha easing out of every thing,
Sweet and wise but never crucified,--
And how Bach's music is the mind of God,

Atomic particles in all our graves,
Perfect oblivion music from the ground
Made audible and pleasant to the ear.

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James Whitehead, poet and author, visited our campus in the first week of November 1995. He is the author of three collections of poetry and the widely acclaimed novel Joiner. He read from his work, conducted the creative writing class, and gave manuscript consultations. On Sunday, November 5th, the three of us gathered at Mr. Sauret’s home to talk shop with Mr. Whitehead. The following is part of our discussion. We are grateful to him for his time, patience, and kindness. It was an afternoon we won’t soon forget. It was an afternoon when we felt like writers.

Perceptions: Who are your top five poets since World War II?

James Whitehead: Lists like that are revisable every day. And there is nothing in stone, and your tastes change regularly. Philip Larkin, Elizabeth Bishop, Robert Penn Warren, R. S. Thomas, not Dylan, R.S. He, too, is a Welsh poet. I enjoy the early works, not so much the later stuff. And this week, Howard Nemerov; his late work is dazzling.

Perceptions: What do you find special in each of these poets?

James Whitehead: Mind and Passion and Form.

Perceptions: Who are your top five 19th century poets?

James Whitehead: Browning, Browning and more Browning. Browning was the beginning of modern poetry. Also, from the 19th century; Keats, Wordsworth, Byron, lots of Byron. "Eve of St. Agnes" by Keats made me want to be a poet when I was in high school. It’s
a medieval romance. I think you should read everything. Including Tennyson.

Perceptions: Who would you recommend in fiction?

James Whitehead: As a kid growing up in Mississippi, I read a lot of Faulkner. I still like a lot of it though it is a little uneven. There’s a great deal of great Faulkner and some bad Faulkner, but the great Faulkner is absolutely brilliant. I also like John Cheever and Eudora Welty. One of the people I pay close attention to is Joyce Cary, especially his first trilogy. Herself Surprised, To Be a Pilgrim, and The Horse’s Mouth. Lately I’ve enjoyed reading Cormac McCarthy. He imitates Faulkner and Hemingway and gets away with it.

Perceptions: Why is Cary so important? What is to be learned from him?

James Whitehead: Everything there is to learn about how odd people are. He presents our strangeness very, very well. He doesn’t cut corners in characterization.

Perceptions: Of the students you’ve taught creative writing, how many continue to write and make writing their livelihood?

James Whitehead: About 20%

Perceptions: Are the students coming into your classes well read?

James Whitehead: Some are and some aren’t. Too many people try to write before they have learned to read.

Perceptions: To what do you attribute this problem?

James Whitehead: T.V. and bad teaching.

Perceptions: What was the thinking behind the novel Joiner?

James Whitehead: I wrote it because I needed to. Joiner is the first book of a trilogy I’ve planned. It took me eight years to write Joiner, then I wrote poetry for twenty years. During that time I also worked on the other two novels of the trilogy, drafted them. The novel I’m writing now should be completed in about two or three years. I’ve been working on it for two years, the second book of my trilogy.

Perceptions: What are some of the problems you encounter while working on a novel? James Whitehead: Making it credible and making sure the point of view is working.

Perceptions: What do you mean by point of view problems?

James Whitehead: Point of view is about who is speaking—to whom they are speaking—and what they are talking about. Where the voice is coming from is very important.

Perceptions: What are some of the biggest problems a writer faces?

James Whitehead: Reading. There’s a difference between reading for pleasure and reading for technique. The real problem is reading, creative reading.

Perceptions: What exactly do you mean by creative reading?

James Whitehead: The writer who reads must pay attention to formal problems in the work being read.

Perceptions: Do you feel that poetry is a dying art form?

James Whitehead: Poetry is also song. Poetry of the page is in a bad way partly because hyper-modernism has caused poetry to be beyond the average individual College professors have made is more difficult than it really is.
Perceptions: What common mistakes do you see in the works of beginning fiction writers?

James Whitehead: They don't know how to tell a story. They don't understand plot, the backbone of a good story, nor the texture of characterization. And they confuse descriptive writing with narrative writing. Scenes, dramatic action and plot evaluation. Every image should be a function of characterization. Dialogue should simultaneously characterize and move the plot forward.

Perceptions: Storytelling?

James Whitehead: Storytelling is an experience the body and brain really want to have. Telling a story is a fundamental and natural human activity. Without stories we are lost--don't know who we are--without song, we don't know what we want to be. Tell excellent stories. Learn to sing. Dancing is important. Learn to dance.

Perceptions: What starting advice do you give to aspiring writers?

James Whitehead: When giving lectures on how to write a short story, I give this advice: read all you can, write out, for example, a John Cheever short story by hand, to get a feeling of how much time and effort it takes to create a good short story. Copy stories. Copy thousands of lines of poetry. Memorize hundreds of poems. Try.

Zada Ardoin was born in South Louisiana. She is an English major. She wants to teach, write, and grow roses.

Alfred Barker, a former Marine, is majoring in Computer Science. He has found the creative writing process to be very enjoyable. His desire is to return to the classroom to teach.

Dennis Blalock, a native of Demorest, has served in the Marine Corps and has earned an second degree blackbelt in the Japanese art of Bujinkan Taijutsu. He is majoring in anthropology.

Curtis Durham is a native of Miami, Florida. He has lived in Gainesville for the past three years. He will transfer to Georgia Tech in the fall to take a degree in Mechanical Engineering.

Cynthia Johnson is an English major attending Piedmont College in Demorest. She lives with her husband and son in Banks County.

Micki Licciardi is an English major at Gainesville College. She lives in Oakwood with her husband and their two daughters.

Charles Penland is a native of Hall County. He enjoys writing and is an English major. He is now a sophomore at Gainesville College.

Lee Rider is currently employed as a machinist with S.K.F. U.S.A. Incorporated, a bearing manufacturing facility located in Flowery Branch, Georgia. Hobbies include working with computers, collecting Doctor Who and Star Trek memorabilia, collecting comic books, and playing Magic the Gathering with friends.

John Hope is an English major and the president of the English Club. He has a keen interest in contemporary music.