gardy loo!

volume 3 number 3
gardy loo!

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Spring 1999

submission process:
all submissions are judged anonymously through a democratic process by the staff of gardy loo!
to submit:
send submissions to JMU box 8286,
include a cover page with name, phone # or e-mail, and a list of works submitted.
do not put names on actual submissions.
poetry and prose will not be returned unless requested.
direct questions and/or comments to:
club-gardyloo@jmu.edu

gardy loo! is a student-run magazine covering the arts at JMU. Everything published does not necessarily reflect the opinion of gardy loo!'s editors or staff. Please direct questions or comments to the editor, JMU box 8286, 800 S. Main St., Harrisonburg, VA 22807.

When gardy loo! was formed, there was only one moon in the sky. To summon the staff, we must chant rhythmically to the music of Gloria Estefan. One day in February, we tried desperately to overthrow the Breeze, but after awhile, we just didn't feel like it. If you ever need any favors, don't forget your gardy loo! May 22nd's lotto numbers will be 7-5-4, and 4-5-6-7. There are so many people in this world who want to be, but just aren't. No, my child, this is not my desire. I'm digging for fire. These are liner notes.

JOIN THE FUN, BUCKAROO!
WE ARE LOOKIN' TO LASSO SOME HOMBRES FOR NEXT YEAR.
YOU LIKE THE ARTS? YOU LIKE CATTLE? WELL, JUST EMAIL CLUB-GARDYLOO@JMU.EDU FOR INFORMATION ABOUT HOW YOU CAN GET DEPUTIZED, GARDY STYLE. WE ARE MORE THAN JUST A MAGAZINE...WE'RE YOUR HUCKLEBERRY. YEE-HAW!
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Well it's here. With less than one week left of classes the third and final issue of gardy loo! is now in your fingertips to help rid you of your Spring Fever. You have troubles? Read this and you'll discover who really has troubles. The spread on Aaron Carlson, for instance, peers into the mind of a poet who will hopefully become a hero of the future. Will he? I don't know, but he actually might just end up the international anti-hero of our generation. Read his article and guess for yourself. We also have a slew of poetry exploring depths of the human condition that scare me, an essay by prose editor Matthew Ducker on Arts Week, and two strong works of fiction reflecting on past experiences.

This is my last issue as editor of gardy loo! The year has been long but, in retrospect, definitely well worth it. We've had a few impediments that have caused us pain but nothing we couldn't overcome. Next year, the new editor, Tim Hartman, has a few tricks waiting for JMU. Beware!

I'd like to thank a few people who have helped gardy loo! become the increasingly better magazine it is becoming: Tim Hartman, without whom I'd still be working on the first issue; Donnie Mongold, whose patience as our middle man and enthusiasm for our magazine's success has smoothed our bumpy start; Rinn Siegrist, the friendly graphic designer who donated her time for technical questions and support; the gardy loo! editors, who have made my job easier by taking on a load of work; and the gardy loo! staff, without whom the magazine wouldn't even work. Thanks to all those who read gardy loo! and those who will read it in the future.

Goodbye and good luck,

Jacob Wascaulus
Who Wants to Kiss Dried Lips?

by Mona Railan

It happened around the same time that I started hating my mother. I guess it was a good time for it to happen. I mean, if it had to. Which I don’t think it did. But I was already learning how to hate, thanks to my mom. She always tells me this bullshit about how everything bad that happens is just an opportunity to build grace. Grace in handling bad situations. So the more bad things that happen to you, the more graceful and dignified and holy you become. Can’t you just hear the angels singing and see the soft white light glowing around me? With that theory I would be a tucking saint by now. According to my shrink, all that stuff about grace is just my moms’ way of dealing with everything, she says that it helps to obtain something good out of the bad things that happen. Good luck dragging something positive out of this tucking mess. This is the sort of thing where grace is pretty much out the window, along with anything positive at all. My mom is big on that kind of stuff. Grace, dignity, refinement, that sort of bullshit. Not me; I tried that route for like, a week that summer. Didn’t work at all. So now I’m trying this.

It was the summer before my senior year of high school. I was working at this convenience store a few miles from my house. It wasn’t exactly what my parents had in mind when they demanded I get a summer job to “learn some skills”. But what the hell. My hours weren’t too bad, I was still a kid, so they never made me work past dark, god forbid a good little suburban girl get shot during some random robbery. Nice and safe, my job was. My mother was totally paranoid about me getting killed during that summer job. It’s funny that she thought the convenience store was a scary place. That’s where I ended up going when the rest of the world let me down that night. I wonder if she was glad that I had to quit, I wonder if she felt that I was any safer. After I told her I got a job there I remember she got all wide-eyed and asked, “Do they keep a gun under the counter?” I said no, just a rosary. I thought that was pretty funny, but my god-fearing mother didn’t.

Looking back on it, it was a pretty sweet job; I wonder if they would hire me now? I hooked my friends up with free cigarettes while I was there, and when I was bored I would sit on the counter and try on all the tacky sunglasses. Usually after an hour of this, the manager would yell at me to stock or clean or something. And then once I just cruised from aisle to aisle, sitting on the floor and painting my toenails, far out of his view. It was only, like, three weeks into summer when I had to quit.

Blair came by the store after I got off work and while we sat on the curb smoking, she told me about some party her older brother, Darby, was going to. She got along well with him, and so did I. He was one of those spectacular kids who you want to bring home and drink tea with. Blair was pretty spectacular too, I loved her to death of course. But she wasn’t a tea drinker. Darby and Blair were my two closest friends, and I was lucky they decided to stick around after that summer.

“I think that Greg will be there, remember that kid who was over at my house last weekend? I think this party is at his girlfriend’s house.”

Blair didn’t sound too excited about going, thank god. How could I forget Greg, or his goddamn girlfriend? Last weekend Blair’s mom had gone away for a night, so Blair and Darby had some people over. I was sitting on the floor in their living room talking to Greg. We were all pretty drunk; Blair, Darby, Greg, his girlfriend and I. Between the five of us we downed about 3 bottles of spiked rum. Blair was passed out and Darby and this girl were outside smoking. So there we were, me and Greg, talking about nail polish. I had just painted my toenails bright red that night and he was impressed. It was a harmless conversation. Me and Greg and my toes. We were slowly passing out, I was doing that thing where your head suddenly snaps upright and you realize you’ve been sleeping for like 10 seconds and everyone laughs at you. I do that in class a lot.

Well, suddenly his girlfriend comes charging into the room, cigarette in hand. She sits on the floor in front of us, her eyes totally glazed over, and I swear she must have been under 15 of us each. She crawled forward until she was practically sitting in Greg’s lap, and they start making out as if it was time to repopulate the earth. Greg suddenly pulls away to glance over at me. So then she looks over too and says,
"Hold my cigarette" and starts pulling her shirt over her head as I'm holding her goddamn cigarette. That was the last I saw, I tore out of that room pretty quick. I don't think she even remembered the next morning; she barely glanced in my direction when they left. I didn't like that girl one bit.

You know how sometimes you start thinking about one thing, and then that makes you think of something else totally random, and your mind just wanders? Well it's weird, but I remember practically every goddamn thing that went through my head that night. After we finished our cigarettes we went into the bakery next door where they gave out free slices of fresh bread. We saw this little girl in there; she was sitting on the floor next to the counter drawing a picture while her mom worked. I looked at her and remembered Blair and I when we were younger. We used to play this game where we would stick our tongues out and inch closer and closer to each other, trying to get as close as possible without letting the tips of our tongues touch. After the inevitable collision we would shrink and bounce back, horrified at the fact that our tongues had come into contact. I was wondering if that little girl ever played that game while we walked back outside and Blair continued to provide me with vital details about what was going on that night. But after recalling Greg and his girlfriend I decided against the party.

"Um, I don't really think I want to go," I told Blair as we sat back down on the curb. The possibility of another drunken encounter with Greg's girlfriend was a little short of terrifying.

Blair tilted her head to the side and let her elbow rest on her knee, slowly pulling the crust off her bread in a perfect line.

Blair's parents divorced when she was nine, and Darby says the last time they saw their father he was standing in the foyer talking to their mom, his arm around another woman.

Well we decided against the party while sitting in the parking lot outside the convenience store. I remember I was wearing this sparkly tube top that night. My mom hated that shirt, in addition to many others. I usually wasn't much for the clingy look, and I certainly wasn't a huge fan of tube tops. But this top was sparkly so it won me over. It was pink and purple and I loved that thing. I was wearing that top and a pair of jeans, not tight or anything, just a regular old pair of jeans. So it wasn't as if I was dressed like Daisy Duke or something. I had flip-flops on, and my toenails were still painted red. My manager scowled at me all day for having a tube top on. Whatever, it was a convenience store. People aren't looking for professional attire in convenience stores; they're looking for cigarettes and beef jerky. I blew him a kiss on the way out that night, my manager. I was feeling like a rock star in that top.

Blair and I walked back to my place, trying to sing Blondie songs. I think we really slaughtered "Rapture" that evening.

And you go to Mars
And you eat some cars
And you don't stop
Do the punk rock
You just keep eating cars

I'm sure that's not how it actually goes, but it's the version we were singing. I remember singing that song in my head all night. Even much later, it was still running through my head like some broken and forgotten promise from second grade. We ran up the steps and inside my house, the screen door bouncing shut behind us. My mom turned around upon hearing the commotion and I watched her wince with every metal clang of the screen door. "Could you girls please try to be more careful with that door?" And with that she turned back towards her reading. That's the extent of our conversation that night. Mom bitching about that goddamn door.

We got upstairs and while Blair sat on my bed slowly unraveling my comforter.
I went through my desk looking for an old pair of plastic gloves. We had finally settled for a fun-filled night of hair dye instead of that stupid party. I had chopped all my hair off a few months ago in a fit of boredom, and since Blair was too paranoid about not "feeling like a girl" she said she would dye her hair instead.

"Don't they have gloves in the box?" She asked, slowly pulling blue thread out of the blanket and wrapping it carefully around her finger.

"Yeah" I mumbled. "But those things are crap." She finally got bored of watching me and left to find a drink. I could hear her footsteps fading as she got further down the stairs. I was still searching when she came back, armed with Cherry Cokes and Twizzlers.

"Have you seen Chris Vaccaro's hair lately?" asked Blair.

"Huh? Wait, here they are!" I pulled out the gloves triumphantly and turned around.

"Well he bleached his hair. Right after school let out. Pretty impressive too." Blair smiled and then immediately looked down at the floor, pushing the toe of her sneakers against the carpet. I rolled my eyes and chose to ignore her. She continued to smile and said, "He wears tight sweaters and baggy pants."

I guess Chris would have been her flavor of the month. But the way things turned out that summer cute boys weren't exactly the main topic of conversation. Blair chewed up boys and spit them out, usually still alive and writhing on the floor in misery. Too injured to do anything, but alive enough to understand what was happening. She was a good friend to have around that summer. "Be a ninja," she used to say, but that summer I felt more like a plate of smashed Jello.

Blair's parents divorced when she was nine, and Darby says the last time they saw their father he was standing in the foyer talking to their mom, his arm around another woman. This "young little blonde thing", as my mom likes to put it. Darby was nine or ten I guess, and the only one who bothered to explain to Blair what was going on. "I told her our daddy was a jerk, since that was the only bad word she knew at the time," Darby told me once. "And that he made mommy cry." I could picture Blair sitting on the couch with her thick brown hair pulled into two messy pigtails, feet dangling off the cushions, her brown eyes wide in confusion and surprise. Parents are supposed to be perfect at that age. Most of us don't realize how much they actually suck until about middle school, maybe high school or college for the really lucky ones. But Blair figured out how much of an asshole her daddy really was when she was only nine. Supposedly after that day their mom didn't get out of bed for like three days, and Blair curled up into a little ball on the floor next to her mom's bed and just lay there and cried for hours. But her mom was sound asleep and never budged. Darby finally dragged Blair out of there at about 6 the next morning and brought her over to my house.

My dad later said he would never forget the sound of that little boy whispering into the phone that his mommy and daddy
I was quiet, and cool, and the air smelled sweet that night. And all there was in the world was Blair and me sitting cross-legged on the pavement. She was peeling the polish off her nails, carefully so it would come off in neat little strips. You had to really goop on the nail polish to make it peel like that; otherwise it would just chip. I pulled out a cigarette and tried to light it, flicking the lighter over and over again until I burnt my thumb, with no luck. I looked over at Blair who was now lying on her back singing softly to herself, her eyes closed. I looked up hoping to see stars, but there were too many lights in the shopping center. I’ll bet they were bright that night. We were reveling in the stillness of our suburban bubble, and I remember feeling super peaceful and content. I felt safe that night, well, most of that night. That night the parking lot, for a half-hour or so, was mine. I watched a pair of headlights come down the street in front of the shopping center. As it got closer it slowed down and I could hear music blaring from inside. It was light brown, an old Toyota or something. I pulled Blair’s sleeve to wake her up as I watched it pull into the parking lot and speed up towards us.

“What?” she mumbled sitting up. She rubbed the back of her head with her palms and watched the car as it came closer.

“That car looks familiar doesn’t it?” I asked.

She nodded as it pulled up in front of us.

The first thing I remember noticing was his face. It was tiny and round, and much too small for his head. His eyes were light brown, almost the color of his old car. He leaned over the passenger seat and smiled at us. I recognized him from school, not a janitor, but not a teacher either.

“Hey” said Blair suddenly; “This dick gave me detention twice last year!” Before I could respond he started talking: “You ladies go to Paint Branch High School don’t you? I sub over there sometimes. Recognize me?” I nodded and Blair didn’t respond. He smiled. He looked like a weatherman I thought to myself. Like that guy who does the weather on Channel 6. Except I bet that guy has a better car. With a sunroof I bet.

He was wearing blue sweats and brown hiking boots, and a crusty old sweatshirt that said something about baseball on it. “Babe Ruth All Star League” or something dumb like that. He didn’t take his boots off that night. Just pulled the sweats down around his ankles, his boots scraping against the inside of my ankles the whole time. I didn’t notice it at the time; I didn’t notice anything but the inside of the car. But afterwards my ankles hurt like hell. That was where I was hurting the most. Well, second most. But anyway, he really managed to rip my ankles up, that bastard. For the longest time I couldn’t figure out where the tiny red marks came from. There was dried blood on my socks. I was wearing polar bear socks. Blue with white polar bears and icebergs. Cute socks.

“What are you girls doing out here?” He asked it in such a friendly manner, not even with that edge of parental authority, that I didn’t mind talking to him. “I mean, shouldn’t you be out with your friends or something fun like that?” He gave another laugh, “when I was your age, we certainly didn’t hang out in parking lots during our summer break!”

I smiled blandly; this guy was really a tool.

“Yeah and when you were our age you probably still had your head up your ass,” Blair muttered under her breath as she looked down, flicking tiny stones across the pavement. I tried to suppress a laugh and tugged on her sleeve. She smiled and looked up.

“Why don’t I drive you girls home?” he offered. “I’d feel irresponsible just leaving you girls here.”

Impressive. I thought later. His concern with responsibility. My knight in shining armor, driving a beat up old Toyota. I guess now you think we were stupid to get into the car. I mean, all that bullshit you learned about not talking to strangers. Well, yeah, I learned it too. But give me a break, I mean, we learned that shit back in like, third grade.
I don’t know. Maybe it was really dumb. People do dumb things all the time, every day, all over the world. They don’t all get the same punishment I got. My mom and I got into a screaming match over it once, she asked me what I expected with “that shit on” and why I thought it would be okay to get in the car. I don’t know why, is all I can say. I don’t know why. And I am sorry, I am so very fucking sorry that I thought the world was a decent place and instead it turned out to be inhabited by psychos. Now when I picture that smiling face leaning over to unlock the doors it makes me want to throw up.

I called shotgun and Blair sat in back of me, I could feel her knees pushing up against my back through the rubbery seat. As he glanced into the rearview mirror and smiled, saying, “Seatbelts please,” I realized that we didn’t know his name. I felt kinda bad, I mean, I’d probably had this guy like, 20 times my sophomore year when my homeroom teacher was perpetually ill.

“So who’s first?” he asked, pulling slowly out of the parking lot and onto the street. Doesn’t matter, I thought to myself, at the rate he was driving it would take about 20 light years to get anywhere. I turned around in my seat to look at Blair who was pointing at a pair of white briefs lying on the floor behind his seat. I had to stretch my neck a little to get a good look at it, and the sound of Blair snickering in the back seat probably gave something away. He frowned a little, and cleared his throat loudly.

“How about you, where do you live?” he asked Blair. She tried to regain composure and leaned up towards the front seat.

“Um, I live on Cedar Lane,” she said smiling widely.

“No, I meant your school,” he replied, still frowning. After pulling up to Blair’s house she got out of the car, still snickering. She leaned in my window and kissed me on the cheek.

“Bye darling. Call me in the morning.” She leaned in further to smile at our generous driver and embarrass him further.

“Thanks Mister, um, whatever, Mr. Substitute,” and then laughing, she turned to go inside her house.

He tried to look calm while I smiled apologetically. “She’s just being silly,” I reassured him. As if Blair respected substitute teachers more than she was letting on. She asked me later, crying, if she had pissed him off really bad. If maybe it was her fault for being such a smart-ass. Of course I told her she was over-analyzing, and that psychos are just psychos; whatever you do, or don’t do, they’ll eventually lose it. But she was unconvincing, I was probably a little unconvincing myself.

I can’t really tell you all the details right now. I still don’t remember all of them. My shrink says its going to take a while, something about my “defense mechanisms” maybe. Whatever. I remember his car really well though. I remember lying on my back on that rubbery seat cushion, feeling the sweat build up between my lower back and the vinyl, while the rest of my body was so cold. I remember staring up at the ceiling. Nothing is happening, I kept telling myself. I’m just examining this lovely pattern on the interior of his car. While he tore through my body, my eyes tore through his car, memorizing every inch. The spots where the fabric was tearing off and you could see the metal underneath. The stains on the back of the drivers seat. I looked in the front of the car and noticed the stickers on the windshield. I memorized all the numbers on those stickers that night. Backwards. That’s the only way I could see them, I saw the backs of those stickers: registration stickers, parking decals, a bunch of different ones. Sometimes I redrew them over and over again. I still haven’t bothered to figure out what the numbers are if you looked at them from the outside. I guess the cops figured it out.

That summer was full of cops. And that’s bad news because I hate those creatures. Never have I felt safe around a cop. Even now. You’d think I would run to those pigs every time I was scared but flashing lights and uniforms don’t exactly inspire comfort. If it’s comfort I’m looking for I’ll take a super long shower and scrub myself clean, or build a fort in my living room with Blair, and we’ll crawl inside and cry for a

by Russell Staggs

Egyptian Musk

I.
She stood under the midnight streetlamp
arms folded languidly around her crimson flower
hazy wind wisping coattails
loosely around her legs,
long and slender,
cut at her ankles by the trenchcoat
or the mist, her body
folding with the tendrils of smoke
she left petals of satin red on the sidewalk . . .

II.
It was last weekend, or close to it
when I walked the cool streets of Chicago 1993
the wind smelled loosely of Edward Hopper
I saw the lucid colors of blue midnight dancing softly
across coffee shop windows and car doors.
She stood under the corner lamp,
her breath a foggy gray, quick
lifting whisps of smoke like hot cider
(it was colder than normal)
I pictured her motioning to me,
a smile played on her shadowed features . . .

III.
I felt the ground shake
as the stem hit the ground
she left the flower as she ran
around the corner, down the street
becoming mist as she passed the lamp lights
running from me, or to someone else
trenchcoat whipping her heels
dancing softly around her calves,
past her thighs,
a dip in her back,
the curve of her shoulders smelled sweetly
of sex.

IV.
thump, thumpthumpthump, thump,
lightheaded and surreal
her heels played in my chest
my legs moved closer to the corner
I remained a distance
My hand reached for the satin petals
a carnation, like egyptian musk
remained near my nose
overwhelming, my eyes watering
I could see her fragrance
could see her floating with the mist.
good long while. Until we get tired and crawl back out for some ice cream or to go smoke a cigarette. My parents know I smoke now. After that summer they pretty much let me get away with all sorts of shit. I haven't had to clean my room in a long time.

I guess this isn't so bad. I thought it would be a lot more boring. I like it a little. It's fun to tell you all about Blair and Darby and all the stupid shit I think about. I guess it doesn't really make a lot of sense but I don't really give a fuck. No one's really going to read this anyway. My shrink says it will help me see things in a clearer perspective. Or maybe she said something else. I don't really remember what it was exactly. So many words from so many people, all trying to help and none of them working. I hope none of them expect me to heal anytime soon, because shit doesn't exactly happen that way I am sorry to tell you. I haven't found god or my inner strength or a sense of forgiveness or any of that crap. I'm pretty pissed off actually.

I wonder if I deserved what I got, or if maybe someone else deserved it and I just got in the way. Or if it was destined to happen to me, sooner or later, like some sort of fate thing. But there's another load of crap, that it was supposed to happen like all those other terrible things that are just supposed to happen. Did it ever occur to anyone that maybe I was supposed to be happy, and healthy, and okay? And that some psycho came along and just fucked it all up for me? We learned in school once that it was something like one out of four girls who go through this. So maybe what happened to me can just be dismissed as another I in 4 story. With odds like that people get numb to this sort of thing. Too many made-for-television movies and all that crap.

Well unfortunately I can't look at it that way. You have no idea how pissed off I am. I just wish I could stay angry long enough to keep myself from crying and then maybe it would all come at once, and I could just conquer it. But it keeps coming in little spurts, like someone standing in the corner throwing things at you. You just wish they would throw them all at once, get it over with. But they come one by one. Some a little harder, some a little softer. Blair and I tried that once. Throwing things. Don't worry, nothing big. Usually just stuffed animals. I had them all packed up just a few months before it happened, and my mom put them away. One night Blair and I went into the attic and brought them down. Then we slammed them, one by one, into the wall. It felt pretty good for a few minutes. Whatever. You wouldn't really be able to understand it anyway. There's probably not much you could relate to here. So all I really need for you to do for me is to shut up and listen.

---

Compass

I found my compass in the grass,
a gumball machine compass,
red and yellow arrows,
hole for a string,
a little backwards N at the top.

She wore it around her neck,
resting slightly sideways on her left breast,
the string found the dips and turns
around her collar bone.
That day she had a blanket over her shoulders,
reminded me of her eyes,
reflected bright the blue motionless canopy.
Wind ruffled the bottom edges,
around her delicate calves,
revealed the tiny curves of her knees,
showed me the dancing shadows on her thighs.

We wore the blanket together,
soothed our bare backs,
pulled tight the careful seams.
I felt the compass on my chest,
pressed smoothly between hers and mine,
blushing a small indentation in our skin.
The string fell from her tilted neck,
brushed my shoulder,
a rush of goosebumps,
a rush of blood,
sunlight pierced the shadows,
bounced from the compass face,
from her face,
through the grass below our bodies.

by Russell Stagg

---

to taste and to try to forget
is like the man who looks in the mirror
then walks away and can't recall
It Is foolish to believe
that dark cycles and blind desire
on couches
in sheets
will not tumble to lips
in sweet seductive supplication

taste and see that
it was Good
before corruption
(and after)
fall on your knees
come and kneel
before the castle
that drives
sould from passion
to feel
thron penetragre flesh
is like devouring and vomiting
nectar on lips
rotten fruit from the pit
It Is unadulterated bliss
that pushes hands up and down
to clasp one another
in penitent lamentation
of committing and omitting
and places untouchable

by Louise Ingram
Sycamore House
103 South Main Street, Harrisonburg, VA 22801
(540) 434-0672
Tuesday-Friday 10-6  Saturday 11-5

May 4 – June 12
Jean Johnson
Wall Sculpture
Opening reception May 6, 7-9 pm

June 1 – July 10
Arun James
Photography
Opening reception June 17, 7-9 pm

June 29 – August 7
Mary Giehl
Installation
Opening reception July 1, 7-9 pm

July 27 – September 4
Richard Weard
Oil paintings
Opening reception July 29, 7-9 pm

May 18 – June 26
Central Shenandoah Arts
(previously Rockingham Fine Arts Assoc.)
Group with Variety
Opening reception May 20, 7-9 pm

June 15 – July 24
Nicole Welch
Paintings
Opening reception June 17, 7-9 pm

July 13 – August 21
Steve Dordich
Acrylic paintings
Opening reception July 15, 7-9 pm

August 10 – September 18
Shenandoah Valley Watercolor Society
Group show with variety
Opening reception August 12, 7-9 pm
Born 1923

There were patches on
the knees of those
pants, occasionally
c caught on roofing shingles,
then covered by a darker
hue of work-a-day
brown, the contrast
between hard-earned pay
and downright luck.
When the shadows drew
long, the patented
Timberland boots etched their
way down the ledge;
the matted, cracking leather
gloves slid his lifestyle
into the loop on his belt,
and he smeared his
brow with accumulating
dust and anticipation
of the 1940's Radio
Hour, every Saturday
night 7:00 sharp.
By 7:45 his eyes
would rest, and
slowly open to
jingling of the trademark
Timex alarm clock,
signaling the continuing
of leather-bound life,
he ended with a trip to the coast--
where he cast the fishing rod
into the sea and
waited for faith
to fall into his arms, the faith he built,
from grit and a few nails--
he caught his break.

by Russell Staggs
room 302

four souls connected silent
smoke drifting in and out of tired lungs
trough stilled nostrils
crawling in and out of quiet minds
stirring colored thoughts

we sit across a cluttered room
hazed
dazed smiles

fire burning an end of paper rolled
between two fingers
rests idle
stretched ash

faded energy
through toasted cheese sandwiches
sliced pickles

dripping eyelids over red eyes
three am warmed morning
connect four
soul sharing
over a melody
heighting ears

wonder dripping saliva of words
falling over sun kissed
skin

by Jeanine Minge
"We are losing now, and doubtless we will go on losing, and there is a sorrow in that, because many of the best students will abandon us for other disciplines and professions, an abandonment already well under way."

- from Harold Bloom's *The Western Canon*

An essay by Matthew Ducker

# Arts Week Retrospective

Arts Week began with a student desire for the recognition of aesthetic creativity. In this sense, Arts Week is an entirely grassroots movement—which may be, overall, its most significant claim. One of the characteristics of JMU over the past few years has been an uncomfortable anxiety over the state of the university and the arts in general: whether such a unified art community even exists; whether, if it does, it is being drained by campus expansion; whether there is any future role for the arts as JMU rolls on its progressive way toward national recognition; and what that role could possibly be.

JMU may, in a sense, be simply playing the part of social microcosm. It is never easy to justify the role of creativity and imagination in the face of a sprawling institutional expansion, especially when that expansion draws off of material resources—however limited or unlimited they may be. To force any artist to graph the institutional affectivity of a labor of love is to subdue the labor before it can begin. And while a certain amount of innovation is, admittedly, always necessary for any kind of structural growth, the arts always seem to aspire to a much less practical (one might say less secular) purpose—albeit one that is debatable and one whose definition will shift from decade to decade. This constantly-morphing foundation will likely always cause some anxiety or even paranoia.

As far as JMU is concerned, such fears may indeed be entirely baseless; but it is true that, for many students of the arts, the university's drive for institutional maturity is a source of apprehension. No one can deny that the changes have occurred with unbelievable speed—many of us here are still old enough to remember when there was nothing but a field and a mudhole across the interstate. General Education has been the controversy of choice over the past two years and a large amount of attention has been given to the emergence of the new College of Integrated Sciences and Technologies. The CISAT tower itself has a sleek, even cultish look to it; and for those students whose classes are still held in an old bluestone whose floor creaks like the deck of a ship, or in a converted elementary school, or in Godwin Hall, or whatever similar problem is noticeable, the changes themselves can quickly become a target of resentment and derision.
Regarding artistic development, this may be exactly how it should be; there is always a limit to what any program can offer, no matter how stylized, and the most able professor can only offer technique and knowledge—not the will and not the desire. Art may even be something that will necessarily fail (and fail miserably) in a climate that encourages such applied skills—if only because they might end up usurping introspection and self-deliberation. But while an artist perhaps should not be a product of specialized training in the same sense that a programmer or a physicist is, it is true that a lack of technique and knowledge will always cripple a work.

Still, somewhere in the middle of all these arguments are the JMU directors, dancers, musicians, actors, painters, sculptors, choreographers, producers, writers and readers of imaginative literature, weavers, photographers and many others who softly go about their labors of love. Arts Week is not meant to be a reaction against or a statement about anything; it is a salute to these labors. If many artists are not specifically recognized, or their medium not acknowledged, or if some were not even aware of Arts Week, it is through sheer limitation. But it would also be a misstatement to say that Arts Week was entirely about an art community at JMU. To make the any artists at JMU an exclusionary subculture and Arts Week their private celebration would be to cheat every other member of the student body and to solidify a worthless alienation—and there are always strict limits on creation through inbreeding. Arts Week is not meant to be about a collection of individual artists; it is about the collection of their individual efforts.

Three days ago Dr. Linwood Rose kicked off Arts Week with the dedication of the sculptures in front of Duke Hall. As with many of the events, good luck played an important role in Dr. Rose's connection to Arts Week. The sculptures were already in place and waiting to be dedicated, but flexible planning on the part of the Arts Week planning committee allowed for him to speak his mind about the arts to those gathered for that purpose and, also, to add a certain officiality to Arts Week that it might not have otherwise had. There was already a semi-large crowd gathered outside of Duke by the time Dr. Rose ascended the steps the hall and began to speak. Some students were even let out of class during his dedication and stopped to listen out of curiosity.

The sculptures in front of Duke are "Requiem," by James Florschutz, "Multiplicity," by Leah Jacobson and "Angels Gate" by Jim Galucci. These works have already become familiar sights to many JMU students who pass through the quadrangle on their way to Anthony-Seege and Duke Hall—apparently, even the football team collected some first downs by way of "Angels Gate." Dr. Rose expressed his gratitude to a number of individuals responsible and then turned his attention to the state of the arts at JMU. He stressed the need for the arts and maintained a positive spirit for their continued success. He specifically singled out Tim Hartman and Kristen Reed for their efforts in making Arts Week a reality. There was even, to add an unexpected presence of comfort and peace to the event, a man in a red sweatshirt sleeping beneath "Multiplicity" throughout Dr. Rose's speech. The dedication concluded with refreshments, which the nearby students were more than happy to partake of, and the cameras from "One Day, One University" were on hand to secure the moment.

The Arts Week Student/Faculty Forum was held later that same night. The group itself was limited—some half-dozen students, four faculty members and a representative of the JMU Centennial Commission—but the discussion was not. In many ways the Forum was the heart of Arts Week: while the rest of the events have centered around showcasing various artistic endeavors, the Student/Faculty Forum addressed the core issues of Arts Week—its motivations, its concerns and possible strategies for any future action.

The opening topic was the Forum itself; each of the faculty members introduced themselves and gave a short statement on their feelings regarding the arts at JMU and Arts Week. The notion of Arts Week as a new student effort for arts recognition seemed significant to Dr. Thomas Arthur, who referred to a previous
festival of the arts at JMU and the attention it drew from noted professional artists across the country. Many of the faculty members seemed fairly confident that the Rose Administration would fulfill its promise and turn its attention back to the arts.

The opening exchange also outlined some minor differences between the students and faculty; oddly enough, the faculty seemed to share a more positive view of the current state of the arts at JMU than the students. The students pointed out that one of the central ideas behind Arts Week was to address what they felt was a sort of vacuum of aesthetic awareness among their peers. Regarding the state of the arts in general, some even suggested that the arts themselves might be nearing a point of utter insignificance, disregard or ironic insincerity. The difference between the students and faculty seemed to stem from a simple difference of information sources—the students, for example, relied upon personal peer observation to lend credence to their opinions; the faculty offered a certain amount of institutional information not available to the students. In any case, the result was a discourse vital to the original intentions of the Student/Faculty Forum.

Dr. Bob Bersson believed that the arts at JMU have become a little too mainstream; he favored a more avant-garde approach that might be currently lacking in many student efforts. Such works, if increasingly peripheral, might be indicative of a growing desire to explore new structures of artistic possibility—the innovation of an avant-garde would itself be the proof of a desire for artistic preservation, while its absence might similarly be evidence of an artistic neglect or withholding. Dr. Bersson remained, however, positive about the arts at JMU.

Dr. Mark Facknitz referred to the possible necessity of a certain amount of antagonism between the artist and his environment—that the successful creation of art depends upon an adversarial relationship between the private experience of the artist and the public experience of the environment. In such a situation, the expressive creative act always results from a certain amount of friction. Whether the intention of the art, then, is to manifest traditional sentiments or to astonish the bourgeoisie, it is the required but limited self-marginalization of an artist that sets the work outside or above its environment. Dr. Arthur himself even professed to enjoy a certain amount of personal eccentricity.

Whether marginalized or not, however, all of the JMU artists are students of the arts, and many of them have ambitions of attaining a professional status. One of the more important issues addressed at the Forum, therefore, was the state of the arts in American culture in general; in this case JMU did take on its expected role of a microcosm in which the recognized center shifts further and further away from a notion of traditional aesthetic drive; and any Dionysian thrust is consequently somewhat starved or rejected altogether by an all-embracing complacency and selfish indifference. America naturally relies upon the future maintenance of its own cultural stability, however fat and comfortable it may be. Any discussion of the future of JMU is impossible without returning to the subject of ISAT. While some of the students at the Forum referred to ISAT as the primary adversary of the arts at JMU, others wondered if perhaps ISAT is often too easily viewed as a scapegoat for any woe that befalls the more traditional academics; especially, as the faculty pointed out, since all ISAT has done is bring badly needed resources and recognition to the school. Peter Ward, an economics major who maintains a personal interest in the arts at JMU, even labeled ISAT the "phantom menace"—referring to a sense of anxiety that has accompanied its sudden appearance. For many on campus, in fact, ISAT and General Education are often simply used as synonymous tropes for the cluster of changes that have taken place at JMU over the past few years.

The result has often been what the students at the Forum referred to as an on-campus polarity. Concerning this particular subcultural ethic, there seems to exist a sort of self-segregation between the traditional students of the liberal arts and the newer, increasingly distant students of ISAT. A third "community" might even be drawn: that of the business students. But whether a division exists between what one student referred to as the "ghetto of the arts" and the denizens of Zone-Snowker, or between the two sides of the highway, or perhaps all three, the creation of these "communities" increasingly lends to JMU's self-conscious atmosphere as a sprawling, quickly dividing university in which none of the communities meet; and none of them mingle. Such general groups are, perhaps, unavoidable in a university the size of JMU; but in any system or institution where separate factions form and remain distinct, there naturally exists a concern that one of the communities will inevitably overshadow the others. Such faux-communities do not make room for a true JMU "art community," as they, by nature, would be too exclusionary to adequately represent the creative efforts of JMU students. The faculty pointed out that such growth also gives more variety to the campus; and for the students involved in Arts Week, the bringing of the works of JMU students into the university spotlight is one such attempt at blending, mixing and recombining the variety. The topic of funding and future projects naturally emerged from this discussion; the Centennial Commission is, as stated, open to any possible suggestions regarding the future of JMU; whether artistic or not. Dr. Bersson referred to the possibility of actual institutional expansion of the arts, with a new building and a museum for the display of a variety of works. Dr. Facknitz suggested a reading series—and referred to previous reading series held at JMU—that might help bring into being and add cohesiveness to such a community. He also pointed out that the Artful Dodger already shows the signs of becoming one such center for those with a creative bent.

Regarding the individual artists themselves, at least one of the students expressed a feeling of discouragement that she too often found herself reducing her ambitions
ambitions because of the pressure to chose a more "practical" goal. For those students who do dream of being professional artists, the need for artistic independence often inevitably collides with the good intentions of an institution designed to produce an employable labor force. Whether the "poor artist" or the "useless major" cliches are viable or not, there is often a feeling of hopelessness regarding individual creativity and the certainty of a material future—whether they are in eternal conflict or whether they can gracefully meet. Even the most ambitious student artist is well aware of a division between the artistic paradise and freedom that exists outside the pragmatic reality of college and material concerns that, as graduation approaches, suddenly gain a new significance. In response to this hopelessness, Dr. Arthur volunteered that despite the circumstances of any environment—however indifferent or even discouraging they might be—if the desire is maintained, it will find its way to realization.

Three days later it seems the first Arts Week is almost over. Last night both the Theatre II Players and the Madison Project performed at the Arts Week showcase, and the next night the Arts Week poetry reading was held in Zirkle House while Dr. Hunter Ingalls presented a slide show and accompanying poetry in the nearby Sawhill Gallery. All the events drew students who actively sought out the arts. Arts Week will finish up with the WXJM-sponsored Mid-Atlantic Radio Conference (MACRoCk) and Dr. Cynthia Gillatt's Milton Madness—the various facets of Arts Week run the gamut from contemporary to classical, from amateur to professional.

So as Arts Week moves toward conclusion, it will pass having tapped a preexisting energy at JMU and, perhaps in retrospect, how an art community's position within the growth of the university can offer a particular but difficult chance to insist on an ideal. The sensation that one is becoming an aesthetic martyr always grows more paralyzing when encountering the ineffable fear of increasing artistic numbness—that the artist, whether student or master, will inevitably slip through the cracks of massive upheaval and uncertainty, or that the labor itself will be made subordinate to more towering, generalized concerns. As a small segment of time drawn from the semester and offering a severely limited taste of the works available on campus, Arts Week best earns its name as an effort on the part of a handful of students to demonstrate that nothing desired needs to be lost; and, if lost, it can always be regained.

gardy loo! would like to recognize Dr. Bob Bersson, Dr. Thomas Arthur and Dr. Mark Facknitz for their participation in the Arts Week Student/Faculty Forum and for offering their opinions on the effort. We would also like to thank Dr. Linwood Rose for opening Arts Week, The Theatre II Players and Madison Project for performing, Dr. Susan Facknitz, Dr. Kamau and all the student poets who read, Zirkle House for housing them, Dr. Hunter Ingalls for presenting his work at the Sawhill Gallery, WXJM for sponsoring MACRoCk, Dr. Cynthia Gillatt for speaking on behalf of John Milton, Dr. Cole Welte, the head of the School of Art and Art History, Stuart Downs of the Sawhill Gallery, Greg Kundolf and The Breeze for the good press.

And, finally, this writer would like to specifically thank Tim Hartman and Kristen Reed for being the nurturing parents of Arts Week—and all the gardy loo! staff members who came out to assist in the delivery.

DEMOCRACY IN ACTION

gardy loo! is not just the neighborhood arts mag... We sponsor lots of other events, too! We need lots of input and help to make these events successful, so come out and see what we're all about. The revolution will be televised.

For info on how to join, email hartmatd@jmu.edu

Photo by Alex Vessels
Late Night Trip to Vienna

by David Loughran

From 15 to 18 we were John and Yoko. The only difference was that during our bed-ins we weren’t “only trying to get us some peace.” Peace is nice, but wasn’t our goal. During one of these hibernations I was asked to fetch water. They say a human can survive up to two weeks in a bed without food, but won’t last half that long without water. I agreed to play butler; if she went it would mean her getting dressed. I tripped into plaid flannel boxers, fought through a solid blue t-shirt, walked to her door, kicked her underwear into the hallway (nobody’s getting dressed just yet), looked over my shoulder, and smiled. She wasn’t lying in one of those phony magazine poses, on her side, twisting herself into uncomfortable curves. No one in real life lies like that. They lie on their back with the covers pulled up to their chin. I laughed. “What? It’s cold!” “You’re beautiful, you know that?” She wrinkled her nose. If you can look beautiful on your back with the covers pulled up to your chin... you’re beautiful.

In the kitchen I shifted from foot to foot to lessen the tile floor’s chill and yawned. The covers, embraces, and warmth waiting upstairs enthralled me in a daydream until the unlocking back door of her house returned reality to the kitchen. Within seconds her mother and sister would enter from a day of shopping. Hi guys. Need help with your bags? Let me put on some pants and I’m at your service. Suddenly mobile and agile, I launched back up the three flights of her Victorian-in-the-middle-of-suburbia house. Old wooden stairs groaned beneath my two-at-a-time stride. Water splashed, toes stubbed, oxygen failed me.

“I think your mom and sister are home,” I panted. Staring at my curly, matted hair and water splattered ragged attire, she paused. Before I could ask, “What?” she erupted into laughter. I paused... then pulled down the covers and spit half a mouthful of water onto her right nipple. This initiated a semi-viscous wrestling match. Semi-viscous because I eventually gave up. There’s no need to detail reasons behind allowing yourself to be pinned by a gorgeous, naked girl. She kissed me, said, “I love you,” then poured a cup of water onto my crotch.

From 18 to 20 we were Archie and Edith. The only difference was that when we sang “Those were the Days” our voices were further off key and our piano plinking digits weren’t impeded by arthritis. We made vague plans for the future and forgot our present. Even though we still talked frequently while spending breaks on different coasts (her family moved after graduation), we said little. “What’ve you been up to since the last time we talked?”

Well, yesterday I got up early, sipped coffee, and watched cartoons all morning until the guys woke up and called me. We spent most of the afternoon drinking Straub on Jason’s porch. At five or so, Todd tossed a bottle of rum in his backpack and we jumped the trolley to town for the ball game. We sat in the cheap-seats, emptied the bottle by the eighth inning, then passed around two poorly rolled joints in the ninth. It was fireworks night. Fireworks night at the game is always better when you’re high. After the game we stumbled out and caught the last trolley back—had to run to catch it—then raided 7-11. Do you realize how much food you can get for two-fifty at 7-11? After that I passed out listening to Coltrane at the Village Vanguard. This morning I groggled into work, hung over until 11 o’clock and my fourth cup of coffee. If cups one, two, and three don’t work, four always gets you rolling.


New wave bed-ins at school were nothing more than one of us deciding the snooze alarm was too loud or too frequent and should be shut off altogether. Somehow, sheer exhaustion and missed classes are not as exhilarating as naked wrestling. We joked about that story, and a million like it as we watched Law & Order or Dateline, but any attempts to recreate those memories were met with “Not right now,” or “I’m too tired.” The days of rewinding movies to see missed scenes due to

She wasn’t lying in one of those phony magazine poses, on her side, twisting herself into uncomfortable curves. No one in real life does that. They lie on their back with covers pulled up to their chin.
the uncontrollable outbreak of passion were gone. The days of rewinding movies to see missed scenes because of the uncontrollable urge to fall asleep had arrived.

At the dawn of 21 we were Bill and Hillary. The only difference was that I had more to lose than the presidency, and was unconcerned with how historians would view me (I was convinced they wouldn't at all). Our relationship was a 15 round prizefight. Like two old, cagey, battle-worn combatants, we circled each other and struck with subtle yet effective jabs of minor disappointment and misunderstanding. The way she looked at me when I showed up at her apartment on a Saturday night to pass out was simultaneously a blow to my stomach and a pop to her forehead. The way I'd sit on a bench, waiting for her to make a lunch date we both know she was going to be "too busy" for, was a point for her. The way I made it obvious I cared, but wouldn't admit it, even when asked, was one for me. Then, tied at seven rounds apiece, when it's too late to hug, call it a draw, and go home with a tie, I hit her with the indefensible me-and-this-other-girl right hook that effectively ended the match. We both lost.

As I sat there in the cold, sweating from body shaking sobs and told her what I'd done, I realized that the ironic thing about finally communicating hidden honesties is that if you've been lying about them for weeks or years it just doesn't matter that you've told the truth.

Today we are alone, except for her weekly phone calls when she gets upset, angry, then upset. This newly discovered peaceful turmoil is probably, no, definitely, for the best. When I rewind time in my dreams and writing I never throw that punch. But I did. And if I could go back, I would learn to love the phrase, "Wake up, the movies over. Let's go to bed." But I can't. We can't. Hopefully we'll both discover a new sense of individuality while we're alone. And if we do, then maybe (and I realize it's just a maybe) we'll be able to share a simple happiness again. If not, however, then with the same assuredness that we used to agree, "We're meant for each other," we'll have to agree that we're not.

Mud

Feel the mud hug beneath the rock
sun kissing soft
drying in sharp
cracks hot mud

Taste the mud smush between your lips
kissing tongue tough
teeth biting mud
hugging the roof
like peanut butter bread

Speak the mud a
tired language
squish slag thud lips
move sticky with gum
open close ooopen
words mush mouth mud

Jeanine Minge

Old Plank Road

I try finding the slats of Old Plank Road,
where my grandfather walked the cornfields
shoeless, ragged shirt, suspenders,
carrying fertilizer in his pockets and bare hands.

It was then he learned about life,
scaling the planks with ease,
careful the splinters in your sole.

His father, Minyard, built it tree by tree,
hard pine backbone of Eclectic Alabama.

Were it there, I would listen to the wood speak,
hear it groaning under heaves or barrels,
drinking the Alabama thunderstorms,
('cause thunderstorms are different there),
preaching the revival, a church 200 feet away.

I dream of its significance,
trudging across the warped and crying boards,
smelling the mildew in the cracks,
rust stains dripping from the spikes,
marvelling at my senses: are these wounds?
Do the scars speak in vain?

Russell Staggs

All this in one unique guy at our state-supported university. How does one who has known Aaron Frederick Carlson since we were both freshmen in Hillside Hall conduct an interview in order to inform inquiring gardy loo readers’ minds about this featured artist?

I was in the kitchen when Aaron let himself in the front door without a knock or a ring: “I’m home.” It felt like ages and just yesterday since he had lived in the now-pastel room above our heads. We had been three English majors and one history major living in the ghetto this time last year. Aaron had come to JMU undeclared, but was soon won over to the English Department by the brilliant visions of a successful future in the professional world as an English major, Philosophy minor. He now devotes vast quantities of time to the Wampler computer lab like the rest of us that don’t have computers and have to crank out papers at lightning speed.

We settle down in my room, reclining on the only place to recline in my tiny box-sized room: futon on the floor. Aaron kicks off his shoes, takes off his button-down and stretches. His light blue Washington, D.C. shirt scoots and shows red plaid boxers under navy corduroys. He had proudly come home a year and a half ago on his birthday after a trip to D.C. sporting his five-dollar find. After saying that we really ought to start the interview a number of times despite our continuous tangents (or non-tangents if a tangent is a deviation from the desired topic of conversation), I finally ask Aaron how his writing has changed since he started writing in high school. He begins by mentioning his influences at that time: his eleventh grade creative writing teacher and Kurt Cobain. Aaron props his head on my pillow and explains, “I’ve become a lot more abstruse...The high school poetry had a lot of yearning, very direct passion that makes for good emotional exploration but maybe bad art...I’ve kind of molded them together into a strange
universe." We digress as Carlson allows himself to dwell on his inspiration of yesterday.

I attempt to return to the task at hand and ask the distracted artist what he would have done differently with his college years. He resents the thought-provoking question and asks it of me without answering. As I tell him that I’m not the one being interviewed, he gets up and retrieves a sweater from my closet that I had “borrowed” from him about three years ago. He pulls it on and grins, “I would have been an ISAT major...so I could get a job.” I laugh as Aaron storms out of the room (forgetting his shoes) ranting, “You’re just like the other academic bullshit artists!” “You’re not really claiming it, are you? C’mon! It looks better on me!” I tell him as he comes back after finding the mirror in the bathroom and attempts to return the sweater to its neatly-folded state on my shelf. “I know; you can keep it,” Aaron concedes. He stretches out again and thumbs through a book of Pablo Neruda’s love poems from my cabinet and tells me to include the fact that he’s thumbing... and the fact that he said that...

“I know you too well to do this, A-nuts,” I tell him and ask, “What do you want to say to gardy loo readers?” Aaron ignores the question and starts telling me about last night’s exploits. He interrupts himself and tells me to stop writing: “Make sure my grandparents can read this.” Aaron embarks on the story of his night that began with large consumption of...orange juice...

“Okay, what about your integration of...” I try to bring the conversation back around. “Of sailing imagery?” Aaron cuts in. “And word and...or sailing imagery, sure.” “Let’s go with sailing imagery...I met this girl in Charlottesville and we were looking at her photo album that had pictures of sailing in it. ‘Are you a sailor?’ I asked her and said, ‘Me too!’ I said, ‘Well, I’m a sailor...metaphorically...I employ sailing imagery. Here’s an example. Girls are schooners. There’s this other girl, Julian. We ate at Neato Burrito in Harrisburg - Did I tell you this? (I shake my head) - Kara’s friend Julian is from a well-off family...our socio-economic differences are apparent...you know Haverford vs. JMU...Julian was giving some pretty stereotypical examples for the feminist argument and she seemed to be taken aback by my intelligent comments...I described it to (Aaron’s friend) Mike by saying that she was like a British vessel and I was a little rebellious schooner.” Aaron breaks into British-girl-voice: “The Americans are firing upon us!” and concludes, “Julian is also a sailor...in Minnesota lakes.”

We pause to listen to The Future Bible Heroes that play in the background above our heads and Aaron laments the fact that he has to start his take-home philosophy test soon. “Plato is so gay,” Aaron complains and adds, “Don’t write that! If you say that Plato is gay then you have to explain that me and my friends...it’s totally different...it’s wrong but...it’s funny. I have a lot of gay friends and I said it once...big faux pas so we shouldn’t include that.” He winks. “Right.”

...With my brand new boyfriend...- The drifts from the speakers and Aaron declares, “Brand new boyfriends suck, man...It’s the old ones that are good, you know?” I say, “Sure,” and ask, “So what’s next?...I know the answer...” “Flu study.” “You’re doing it again?” “I’m gonna try.” “Ask me what I’m doing for the future.” “That’s what I meant.” “We were walking home...” Aaron begins another story in typical Aaron-style: without necessary details. “Who?” “Me, John, and Erin the girl (friends of Aaron’s)...We were walking home and talking about how we see ourselves in ten years...in a ditch... (grins). No, I’ll be married to a rich professional girl. I’ll be the guy playing songs at coffeehouses, working on a beat little book. - Did I tell you this already? (I shake my head) - Her folks think I need to occupy myself so they buy me a Bed ‘n Breakfast to run...but I’m really just the figurehead - no real work, just shaking people’s hands. I’d be a puppet. That’s the future. I’m going to Athens (Georgia, not Greece) then Scotland.” Aaron removes his glasses and plays with his hair, resting his other hand over the map of the US on his chest. “It’s cool in Athens. Have you been? It’s like the cover of R.E.M.’s Murmur...all creeping underbrush...This article is my resume; don’t write THAT! It really is but it can’t appear as such...” We both laugh. Aaron, grinning, says, “Yeah, that’ll be really good.”

Aaron roots through the piles of stuff on my floor (as usual), puts the cordless phone on his stomach, and looks through my pocket calendar. “Wow, you’ve got a lot going on...I dunno if I like this song...Wow, DNK cookout...you gonna go?” “Yeah, I gotta help set up.” Aaron picks up the phone from his stomach. “Who are you calling?” “My house...see if I got any messages, you know...Hey, Jake. What’s up...chillin’...Oh, this is Travis? Brian!!...I’m doing my gardy loo interview at Rache’s...” I’ve heard that even their parents can’t tell the four guys apart at the Faraway Beat house.

I think back on my first impression of Aaron when he chats with his housemate, Brian. Aaron Carlson had been the guy that lived downstairs, in 1A, who liked British music and had a photograph of each parent up on his wall. My roommate had told me that the two of us should meet after he had met her and seen my CD collection. I tell Aaron what I’m writing as he takes his time getting off the phone. He holds the phone up to the speaker as “London 1888” by Momus comes on. Aaron eventually gets off the phone and what
poems:

sad pilot, could you happen? (from the blue pilot series)
(thanks for) happy irrational piloting (from the green pilot series)
chilly on the wharf
winding admiration banks/friends underwater

---

sad pilot, could you happen (from the blue pilot series)

you alone you
blank soldier,

once a large trumpeter,
a fox pelt collector,
presenter of bright honeydews
romper
of profuse tiger flower fields.

you alone
you’ve only your metal shards
and dark tankers,
those pale eyes rally no
red letter bloomers.

you’re clutching really corrugated faces.
you’re relegating lovebirds and pantomiming kisses,

this windshield is a sunscreen.
this black black cultivation.
black fruits tangled in and out.
far out in polynesia
grass skirts turn up as refugees
under the carcass of hollowed out robot man.

---

chilly on the warf

we warbled like cold little doves,
spoke like monks, and cried as captains;
we climbed on sand dune mounts
and castled forth flying kite aspirations,
mighty like kings
or gulls squabbing for dried crabs’ eyes.

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I had said earlier registers; “What was your first impression of me, I can’t remember...Oh, let it be a surprise...No, tell me.” I remind him and he asks, “Did we talk about popular synthesized music?” I nod and we reminisce. Aaron: “That was fun.” “Remember our mousse fights?” Aaron used to come into my room and while I wasn’t looking, he’d sink by the dresser, grab my mousse and inch his way over to his unsuspecting prey while trying to act naturally. He sometimes succeeded, sometimes didn’t, but the result was always the same: extensive chases around, inside, and outside our dorm and big mousey messes. Aaron: “Yea...Remember that epic snowball fight with McGraw Long?” He mentions last night again and we decide that when his finger is in the air, I edit the sensitive material. “What are you writing?” “I’m writing ‘edit’.” “When I raise my hand, we’re not interviewing.” He picks up my shoe that was next to him, bends it in half and waits for the next question.

“Are you gonna miss it here?” I ask Carlson. “I think so...I was thinking about the final drive out of Harrisonburg...Maybe I’ll just work here this summer. I spotted a promising factory on Rock Street...They have a plant room to, like, relax employees.” “That’s cool...maybe not though, if they need to be relaxed.” He’s not listening anyway and is pulling out R.E.M.’s Green. He settles down again and raises his hand. I quit writing, then we continue. “...So we came home,” Aaron continues. “After talking about the future?” I request the details. “No, a different time,” this time he supplies the friends involved. “We put on this beat Japanese animation cartoon...the superhero saves hungry animals by giving him pieces of his head...” Aaron explains that they played Olivia Tremor Control’s Dusk at Cubist Castle and how it was like playing Pink Floyd’s Dark Side of the Moon with “The Wizard of Oz.” “We were into it...Mike (friend of Aaron and his housemates) said, ‘My, this is a beat house.’” He smiles, remembering, and begins, “Last night...” while holding up his hand, index finger extended toward the ceiling. Carlson concludes his story with a smile, “Last night was a beat evening...Okay, resume the interview.”

“What happened with the soundscapes?” I ask Aaron in reference to a project he was working on with a mini tape recorder that he carried around in order to record people’s words. Without warning, Aaron jumps up and spits out, “Fuck
this.” “Aaron! Your grandparents! You can’t say, ‘Fuck this.’” He stands in the doorway trying not to laugh: “Man...Golly...I can’t deal with these artificial pretensions you’re creating. You’re a good person, but you don’t understand me.” “You know I know you too well.” He turns on heel and exits, his shoes still on the floor. “You forgot your shirt!” I call after him. “Okay, you got me. I gotta use the loo...the loo...twice, did you get that?” R.E.M.’s “Stand” comes on as he returns from the water closet and I tell him I had heard him pee. Carlson stretches out and sighs, “Mmm... I don’t wanna do my paper.” His words are muffled as he speaks into the pillow, “I’ll do it...It won’t be that bad. I love this song (“World Leader Pretend”).” “Me too. I used to play it when I’d get pissed at people for saying I’m closed off.” “I remember when I learned to play this on my guitar...I used to have The Pixies’ Bossanova and this (album) in my walkman in eighth grade while I went along with my sister looking at college campuses...all beautiful campuses...I thought, ‘I gotta get here. I can study up and get here.’ It approached a Krislund experience...Don’t write that.” “You could talk about it.” “Camp?! What does that have to do with anything? Now I have to think of a good camp story...It taught me to live poetically...no, don’t say that...but I guess it did.”

Carlson curls his arms and rests his head on them, then raises his hand and says, “You can write about this signal if you want.” I form another thought-provoking question: “A year ago you summed up your purpose in life...” “Where is it?” “Where is it?” Aaron glances around the room; he looks as if he half expects it to appear before his eyes. He knows I have the yellow corner of paper with his writing on it tucked into a scrapbook somewhere. “It’s packed in my mom’s attic.” He looks disappointed that I can’t procure the fossil in seconds and asks suspiciously, “What did I say?...You can write, ‘...he said cinematically...’” He raises his hand...we laugh. “Don’t make it seem like I’m trying to control the article too much.” Aaron’s hand is at his side. “What were we talking about?” “Your purpose in life.” “Yes, tell me.” “Okay. It was to love fully...I don’t remember the exact words...but, to love fully without expectation...That was it, in a nutshell.” “That sounds right (muffled, face in pillow)...I might say that more eloquently on the Shrouded Stranger’s debut album Yes, We Are the Shrouded Strangers.” He rolls over on his side and looks at me. “Who are the Shrouded Strangers?” “I was mid-sentence. Write more furiously,” Aaron says at my request for him to slow down his spurting wealth of insight. He continues, “...on the track ‘We Choose to Love’ - available now on Frozen Foods Music.” “Now?” “Yes.” “Yes?” “No.” I didn’t think I had not heard about his latest completed masterpiece.

“Hey Rache, you can quote me on this (laughs). Good luck on trying to homogenize this quirky weird interview (sneers) for the mass consumption of literary establishment. Just kidding. Don’t quote anything. I’m spouting quotable sentence after quotable sentence...Let’s
talk about poetry. I owe your readership...”
“An explanation?” “No, you owe your readership an explanation. I owe them nothing.”
Aaron pauses for effect and continues, “What were we saying?...Both reader and writer are trying to make connections that they wouldn’t ordinarily make...strange almost inexpressible connections between images...but lately especially in my...lately I’ve been a little more straightforward...”
“In your poetry?” I ask, doubtful that the poet who defies interpretation has become at all candid or confessional. “Yeah, very recently.” It’s clear he won’t expound so I ask Aaron, “In the past you’ve written poetry in stacks of images for an overall effect...Do you still?” “Overall effect? Whadyou mean?” “Umm,” I think for the right words...Aaron: “Yes! I still do.” “Do you consider yourself an imagist?” “Post-imagist,” Aaron says slyly smiling at me. “You knew I’d say that, right?” He’s right.
“Think you’ve got enough?” Aaron asks, impatient. “Yeah... Do you want to talk about your pinky accident or your hairdresser, Doreen (who’s not always busy or on fire)?” “Nah.” Aaron speaks the line: Run a carbon black test on my jaw and you will find it’s all been said before as Michael Stipe croons it out of the speakers. “Is that your closing statement?” Aaron scratches his ear and informs me, “You can just find a good way to end it...I guess...” He turns away and briefly closes his eyes, “Are those other speakers on?” I’m grateful to Aaron for his generosity exhibited in his allowing me the honor of wrapping this up in my own words. As Aaron Carlson and Michael Stipe so eloquently state, and as I have tried to tell a Philosophy major friend of his: It’s all been said before. I’ve said it to Aaron before, but it deserves to be repeated: I love knowing Aaron Carlson. Whether or not his titles and reputation precede him in his future endeavors, Aaron will continue to successfully embody the term, “unique,” more completely than anyone I know.

Desert Reflections: Spoon by Russell Coleman