



# LAMP

SPRING 2009

*Cleen*

Grace's Tables  
Full with Silence  
Miraculous World,  
Miraculous Words

*o o o*



LAMP is a literary magazine which publishes creative pieces and critical essays written by current students and alumni of Liberty University; the views expressed are those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect those of the LAMP staff or Liberty University. LAMP aspires to stimulate readers both within and outside the University with the creativity and critical work of its contributors.



We would like to thank Mr. Danny Horsley and Seckman Printing for the printing of this issue. Their generosity has helped to make this issue possible. Visit them on the web: <http://www.seckmanprinting.com>.



All authors and artists retain copyright for the works published in LAMP.

*General Faculty Advisor*  
Dr. Karen Swallow Prior

*Graphics / Layout Faculty Advisor*  
Professor Edward Edman

*General Editor*  
Ryan Knight

*Editor: Graphics / Layout*  
Kathleen Ostrom

*Editor: Media, Culture*  
Nick Olson

*Graphics / Layout Assistant*  
Janine Gleason

*Editor: Philosophy, Christianity*  
Samuel Loncar

*Fiction Reader*  
Mr. T. Marcus Christian

*Poetry Reader*  
John Gosslee



## Contents

4	..... <i>art</i> .....	Untitled NATHAN GILMER
5	..... <i>essay</i> .....	Miraculous World, Miraculous Words RYAN MASTERS
8	..... <i>art</i> .....	Beautiful Feet JULIE SAGAARD
9	..... <i>poetry</i> .....	Rain ALEXANDRA BARYLSKI
10	..... <i>essay</i> .....	Cultivating the Mind: An Essay on Learning ADAM MYERS
12	..... <i>art</i> .....	Dusk JANINE GLEASON
13	..... <i>fiction</i> .....	Closet Space LAUREN MULLER
18	..... <i>art</i> .....	TEN/twenty JOEL COLEMAN
19	..... <i>poetry</i> .....	Grace's Tables JOHN GOSSLEE
20	..... <i>non-fiction</i> .....	C JENNIFER SCHMIDT
22	..... <i>art</i> .....	Fallen JENNIFER GELAR
23	..... <i>fiction</i> .....	Full with Silence LAUREN ROTH
26	..... <i>art</i> .....	Untitled SARAH VEAK
28	..... <i>poetry</i> .....	To Prufrock's Dismay RYAN KNIGHT
29	..... <i>poetry</i> .....	Still RYAN KNIGHT
30	..... <i>art</i> .....	Homeless BRETT HASTIE

FRONT AND BACK COVER BY KATHLEEN OSTROM  
LAMP LOGO BY JOHN CARL





## Miraculous World, Miraculous Words

Ryan Masters



Little children use language playfully because, for them, ordinary life is full of magic. The mere appearance of objects quickens them as their eyes are filled with color that swells and bursts in their stammering mouths: “Ball!” “Orange!” “Orange B-b-ball!” They realize intuitively the power and mystery hidden under the skin of an orange; there is no need to contrive a diet around it for them to see its worth. Even in the innocent eyes of children, it is not enough for things merely to be seen; they must be named as well. Such are the unique demands ordained for man by God: he must not only see things for what they are, but must also say something about them in response.

After God planted his garden and lifted Adam out of its soil, one of the first tasks He gave him was to translate life into words in addition to cultivating the earth. Drawing the multitude of living creatures near Adam, God desired to “see what he would name them.” At this point the created world was good, but incomplete: man had yet to become involved in the life of the things around him. Adam was to participate in two divinely-appointed tasks, through which he would experience and become an integral part of the living creation: farming and naming. By his hands he would work the land; by his words he would enjoy and bring it into his soul. And so, when he saw his perfect love, the unashamedly nude woman harvested out of his own flesh by the hand of God, he responded by bringing her into his soul with

his song of reverent contemplation: “This is now bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh.” Therefore, words live as soil does: where seeds of truth are intelligently and affectionately sown, the farmer-author reaps the miracle and mystery of the divine life hidden in creation and revealed to the human soul through beautiful words.

When Wendell Berry, a harvester of words as well as the earth, says in his essay “Tilling Word and Land” that he has “farmed as a writer and written as a farmer,” he is writing with a deep sense of the very essence of language in its relationship to the natural world. His mind wanders over a phrase as his hands wander over a thicket

of weeds, pulling out what complicates the simple but sacred growth of plant and poem. He sees the shape and substance of his farm as dictating the form and meaning of his writings; because land and word are alive, both require careful, affectionate attention. The farmer-poet must be attentive because, as Berry says elsewhere, “life is a miracle,” and we ourselves participate in and witness that

miracle when we attach words to things and people, speak to them, write about them: “We need that word ‘miracle,’ honestly used, as we need all the rest of our words, but we need this one especially, as a part of the language of sanctity that we have come so near to losing.”

Berry’s concern is that the modern attitude toward land and language is one of exploitation rather than reverence. Rather than cultivating the soil of language so that it will unveil the potential of creation to be filled with the glory of God, men instead strip words for their resources and use them “practically,” for charming a woman or selling some cheap get-rich-quick sham or amusing an audience. Compare, for instance, Gerard Manley Hopkins’ declaration that the grandeur of God is in the “dearest freshness, deep down things” of nature with the advertiser’s insistence that a certain body wash can offer one a deep, refreshing cool, all the while implying that one also becomes a more endearing person as a result. In this case, the language of depth and freshness has been lifted from its original subjects—creation, humanity and God—and has been counterfeited to represent some supposedly equal chemical gel. Because these words are powerful and beautiful, yet fragile and vulnerable, the opportunistic body wash hawker lifts them from their proper places and ties them to something that will sell. In the same way, when we maintain an exploitative attitude toward language we constantly risk trivializing it. Instead of considering the

Therefore, words live as soil does: where seeds of truth are intelligently and affectionately sown, the farmer-author reaps the miracle and mystery of the divine life hidden in creation and revealed to the human soul through beautiful words.

orange’s rightful place among the flowers of the field, we will break it into nutrition-jargon and talk blandly about calories and Vitamin C.

Father Zossima, the revered monk of Fyodor Dostoevsky’s novel *The Brothers Karamazov*, warns his followers of falling into this same malaise through a memoir written for his bewildered, cloistered followers. As he approaches death, he encourages them to leave the sterile, sheltered life of the monastery and love the world, while still maintaining a devout, Christian hope:

God took seeds from other worlds and sowed them on this earth, and raised up his garden; and everything that could sprout sprouted, but it lives and grows only through its sense of being in touch with other mysterious worlds; if this sense is weakened or destroyed in you, that which has grown up in you dies. Then you become indifferent to life, and even come to hate it.

The refusal to see creation properly as revealing the world beyond and behind, where holiness dwells, results in words that die from indifference and turn into cheap, gaudy cliché. Such a world as ours no longer resonates with beautiful words because very few remember that we sing because we live and, like life, words are miraculous. 🌱







## Beautiful Feet

Julie Sagaard



## Rain

Alexandra Barylski

*Cleen*

You send us scrambling through doorways,  
hurry us to cars,  
bunch us under awnings,  
stay all day at the windows  
and wait patiently outside for our teary reunion.

Soggy shoes squish their way through puddles  
which cannot soak into unyielding concrete, but I surrender—  
white socks waving in my hands. Shoeless,  
into the muddied clay, defenselessly,  
I let my spirit inhale the supple soul of the grass.  
The ground's tenderness humbles me,  
its molding to my unprotected toes, heels, insteps.  
Soils and grasses yield, accept, drink up your blessings  
and become soft. And I wonder as I stand without  
a coat, shoes, socks or self-deceiving charades  
how many days pass that I am like a sidewalk:  
rough and unyielding, suppressing blessings everywhere.

# Cultivating the Mind: An Essay on Learning

Adam Myers



What does it mean to learn something? How does learning something happen? What should learning look like at a liberal arts institution? These questions are important to think about, lest a person fool herself into thinking that she has learned something when, in fact, she has not. For we tend not to think too highly of people who pretend to great knowledge when clearly they don't have it, or of those with narrow minds whose monomania blinds them to their own ignorance. Such bigotry can be avoided, I hope, in exploring these questions.

And fortunately, for us, we are not the first to explore this terrain. Think of Socrates, famous for revealing the ignorance of the wisest of Athens, who once thought they knew something but came to see they did not, for their answers to Socrates' questions were ultimately 'I don't know.' Of course, this is the great lesson of the 'Socratic method,' that only once one is convinced that one does not have knowledge (or wisdom) is one capable of seeking it at all. After all, who seeks after what she already has?

It seems, then, that one key element in what makes learning possible is the conviction that one has something to learn, that one is ignorant of something. This sort of conviction resonates deeply with Christian virtues such as humility. But like many, I have spent much time in classes with people, even Christians, who do not at all appear convinced that they have any learning to do. In fact, sadly, I have been that person before. So the sharpness of this conviction must penetrate deep into our approach to learning if our learning is to be done Christianly. In humility we ought to be less anxious to dismiss and to judge and more keen to listen and to ensure right understanding.

But this conviction by itself seems insufficient for proper liberal learning. Once I really believe that I have learning to do, what next? Well, one might say, go to class and read books. Take notes at lectures and participate in discussions. Write papers

and essays and absorb information to pass tests. Do this for a variety of subjects and in four years, and you are bound to become educated. Right?

This too seems insufficient. Attending class and reading books, I admit, are necessary for learning, but I think this sort of answer betrays a few misguided notions about what it means to learn, one of which is that learning is somehow reducible to

In humility we ought to be less anxious to dismiss and to judge and more keen to listen and to ensure right understanding.


mere fact-collecting, to the absorption of data. A learned person becomes like an encyclopedia, a big book of facts compiled into thousands of individual entries. To be learned then is just to have great knowledge about various subjects.

Now this sounds a lot like young children who spend their schooldays memorizing U.S.

states and capitals, the dates and figures of the French Revolution, or, perhaps on Sunday, their church catechism, and this simply demonstrates that there is something indispensable about the passive acquisition of what John Henry Newman calls 'mere knowledge'. But I, following Newman, contend that, however necessary it must be that those who wish to learn have the merest knowledge of liberal subjects, the full scope of what liberal arts education ought to look like consists in much more, not merely the passive acquisition of data, but the mind's active and energetic ordering of its knowledge and experiences.

Newman claims that the student who wishes only to aggregate facts will never sufficiently learn anything, for true learning transcends mere knowledge and involves the relations of knowledge. The processes by which we come to understand these relations—how, for instance, political events have reciprocal effects on literature, and literature on music, and philosophy on politics, and politics on science, and science on marketing and economics, and economics on music and the arts, and so on and so forth—these relations that we come to understand, and not the mere facts, constitute the objects of a true liberal arts education. Books and lectures are the material, yes, but one's mind is its formative principle—and here liberal education seeks to cultivate perfection. Until the mind is trained to discern the relations of things, it will be like the Dead Sea, where everything flows in and nothing out. And the mind will be dead in other ways, too, incapable of growing with respect to new experiences and ideas. It will become like a dead tree, burdensome deadwood that grows stiff at first and then rots away in lifelessness.

For the Christian engaged in the liberal arts, there is a temptation to refuse to grow, to learn, as I've described it, and instead to use one's faith as proof that one knows everything or, more accurately, that one knows enough so that nothing

anybody says can seriously modify one's position. Such minds are dead trees. But this is to turn faith into bigotry, and though the two can often be confused, they are certainly distinct. Yes, it is true (as the Apostle Paul tells us) that now we see in a mirror dimly, that we know only in part; so faith, like bigotry, is based on incomplete knowledge. But faith is chary of too much systematizing, whereas bigotry has no such qualms. Liberal learning, however, proceeds slowly and carefully. It makes judgments and draws relations only insofar as one's understanding of ideas and experience allows. As one grows, surprises and new ideas are sure to abound. But it is true faith that allows us to meet with equanimity these unanticipated wonders and to grow by them, to be enriched and enlarged by them. The Lord is to be trusted, His Word obeyed, and His Church served; but He is not to be employed as a reason for thinking one has nothing to learn. Such a conceit, though it may ever be mixed with faith, is just that from which the liberal arts seek to deliver us. 



Dusk  
Janine Gleason



## Closet Space

Lauren Muller



"You gonna tell me what's up?" Samantha asked with the slam of her book. Chris stared. "You're staring." She narrowed her eyes. "And you look guilty."

"I do not," Chris answered.

"Chris, these past two days you've been moodier than a teenager. You look like you've killed something." She gasped and her eyes searched the room for the black and white mass. "You didn't kill him, did you?"

"No! I didn't kill Closet Space!" Chris shifted his weight in the armchair next to the bed where Samantha sat. "I was just talking to him. He's still miffed there's only one sunspot in this hole."

Samantha looked amused. "What else did he say?"

"Well, after he uses the towels instead of his box, he's going out to band practice. I listened to The Sweet C Band's new stuff." Chris made a face and shook his head. "Yikes."

"But honestly," Samantha said, "tell me what's wrong."

He glanced around at their windowless, doorless shoebox bedroom lit dimly by a dull yellow light. "Besides Closet Space's band getup - nothing's wrong." He stood quickly and tripped over Samantha's pile of books on the way to the bathroom. It was the only room with a door, not a real door but a sliding closet door that needed to be sweet-talked or kicked to move.



Out of the corner of his eye he saw Samantha follow. He tried to quickly slide the door shut, but it resisted. Thankfully, she tripped over the same pile of books. She shot him a disgusted look as the door surrendered and lurched shut.

"Chris, are you ok? Seriously."

"Yea."

"Was it something you ate?"

"Maybe."

"Did you take anything?"

"No."

"Could you just tell me what's wrong?"

"Just give me a couple minutes!" There was silence. "Please."

He heard her sigh and say, "I'll be back to check on you," as she trudged into the only other room in the apartment. It contained a couch, a TV, something like a kitchen, and piles that crept out of the doorless closet. It also had the only view to the outside world through a warped glass door to a decrepit porch that looked out over a parking lot.

Chris sat on the hamper and propped his feet up on the sink. His eyes adjusted to the dark bathroom, and he could just make out his tired frame in the mirror thanks to slivers of light through the slits in the door.

He could hardly believe that he, Samantha, and their cow-colored cat had moved into this apartment less than a year ago. It was supposed to be temporary, and he swore they could make it work. They could afford nothing else because, around here, most of the kids Chris taught drove nicer cars than he ever would. While house hunting, he and Samantha had been ecstatic that last tenant of 121 D North Union had died so suddenly, leaving the cheapest place they had found to rent in the city.

Their previous apartment had been a paradise compared to this, but they had to sacrifice for Chris' new job. Now most of their belongings were in a storage facility. And the lack of sunlight took its toll on everyone, especially Closet Space. He took his anger out on the pile of towels in the bathroom.

Despite all the adjustments, they had been happy. They had stopped going out, spending quiet evenings during the summer months on their porch where they set up plastic chairs around a mildewed wooden crate to eat dinner by moon and distant kitchen light, listening to city traffic on the other side of the building. When the cold came, they were forced inside and were kept cozy by their tight quarters.

But in a moment, things changed, as they often do, when that unexpected bill arrived. Chris taught more classes and Samantha worked longer hours at the bookstore to try to save their money. Chris came home miserable but refused to

complain mostly because Samantha didn't. An awkward silence prevailed.

Chris thought back to a month ago when they had had a spat. It was a fluke warm night in December. As usual, he had forgotten to scoop the litter box before Samantha came home.

"Honestly, Chris, I asked you to do one thing! Maybe," she said, "I should ask Closet Space to do it because there's a better chance of him getting it done. Or maybe he could just use the toilet."

"Well, he's in the bathroom enough," Chris answered. Samantha's glare checked him. "I'm sorry," Chris said.

"Don't be sorry. Please stop being sorry and just do what I ask once in a while," Samantha begged as she continued to violently make dinner. "Go set the table outside. Dinner will be done in a second." He stepped out through the screen door. It slapped shut behind him. Samantha groaned.

He was leaning over the railing looking down at the parking lot when he said, "I wish we had more money. Money would make us happy again."

"Okay?" Samantha said as she stepped out on the porch with the food.

"Never mind," he said as Samantha continued to set the table. Then he asked, "Has there been a night when we haven't fought since we moved here?"

Samantha looked defensive. "Yes. Plenty."

"I'm not making as much money as I thought. I hate the kids I teach."

"Work is hard on me, too, you know."

"I know. That's why I don't complain, but I'm sick of this place."

"What are you trying to tell me?" she asked.

"I don't know." He slumped down in a chair. "Maybe I should take up gambling."

"Don't you dare. That's not funny. We are poor enough without you having a habit," she said as she stomped back into the house, letting the screen door slam again. "Money can't buy happiness," she called out. "And blaming money is crap. If we aren't happy, it's our fault."

That night Chris ate dinner by himself. Closet Space sat stiff in the doorway, black against the light from the kitchen. "What? You're the one who destroys the towels." "M-ow," was all Closet Space would say.

---

"Why don't you turn the light on?" Samantha yelled from the kitchen.

"Forgot." Chris flicked the lights on and waited again for his eyes to adjust. He could picture the look on her face, the disgust or worse, the disappointment, if he ever mustered the courage to tell her.

"M-ow." Startled, Chris carefully slid the door open a little, keeping it on the



track, to let in the slinky body. Closet Space stared up at Chris. "What?" Chris asked. Closet Space stared. "M-ow."

"Are you alright, Chris?" Samantha asked from the kitchen.

"Yea!" He squatted down next to Closet Space and spoke in a frightened whisper. "C, you have to tell me what to do!" He grabbed the cat and held him at eye level. Closet Space didn't answer.

He put the cat down. "If I tell her, she's gonna know." The cat pawed at the towels on the floor, not listening. The microwave beeped in the kitchen. "I have to tell her." He sat on the hamper again. He felt heaviness in his chest and put his hand over his heart, as if vowing that he only wanted things to be better, wishing that all he had to worry about was a vengeful cat.

A gentle *shh* sound caught Chris' attention. Chris looked at the cat on the pile of now soggy towels. "You just had to, didn't you?" The cat hopped in the bathtub and padded around in the leftover shower puddles.

"That's it," he heard from the kitchen followed by heavy steps toward the bathroom. "That's it!" Samantha yelled as she pulled at the door until it gave up and fell off the track. "What are you doing in here? Out with it!"

"Closet Space went on the towels again," he said. Samantha stared. "Seriously, why did you even let him in?" She stepped into the bathroom and searched his face. "What's the matter with you?" she asked. "Why can't you talk to me?"

He sighed and with a little stomp said, "Ugh, fine. Sit down." Samantha sat on the toilet seat. They both looked at Closet Space, who hopped out of the bathtub and disappeared into the hall.

Chris sat cross-legged in front of her, staring at his lap. "I just had to see. I regret it, the move, my job, everything. We never had a lot of money, but we used to be happy."

"What did you do?" she asked.

"I won a lot of money."

"That's not funny."

"No, I won a lot of money. When I went to Atlantic City for the conference, I told you that I didn't feel like playing, but I did. I found a hundred bucks and thought, 'Hey, what the heck?' And I just kept winning and winning and winning. But I just couldn't tell you. The money is sitting in a bag under the dresser. You said that we couldn't blame money for where we are. I didn't want you to think I was copping out, but I wanted to try. Just to see."

It was a sad silence for Chris before Samantha answered, "It couldn't hurt."

Chris looked up at her.

"The money. It couldn't hurt," she repeated.

"Really?" Chris asked. Samantha nodded. "Maybe we could donate some of it to The Sweet C Band," Chris said with a smirk.

"Money well spent," Samantha said as she wiped the tears that had leaked out.

"Or some fancy private school. We could have a library named after us."

"I'm hungry," she said, standing up.

"We can discuss that over some Taco Bell," he suggested. "Or maybe we could buy the franchise instead, hmm?"

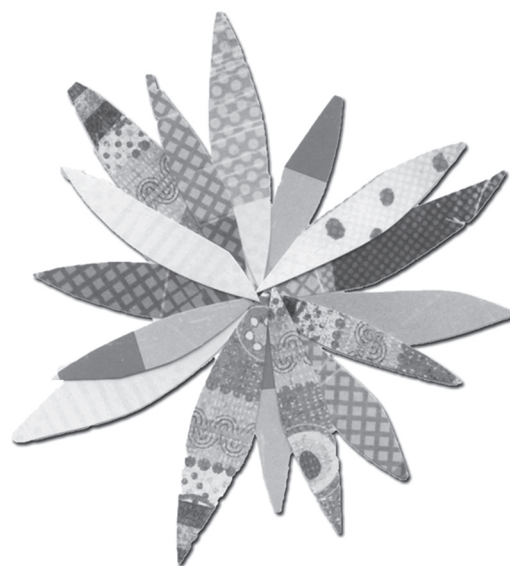
"There's that much?"

As they left the bathroom and passed the eavesdropping Closet Space, Samantha asked, "Really, how much is it?"

"Really, I'll tell you after we eat," Chris answered.

"Maybe we can get a bigger apartment, with a room for Closet Space," she said smiling as they put on their coats.

"Keep walking," he returned and nudged her onto the porch. He shut and locked the door behind him. Closet Space waited until the footsteps faded before laying down where a sunspot should be. 🐈





## Grace's Tables

John Gosslee

*Joel Coleman*

She rinsed her hands, cut the beans and squash,  
hummed about a home on a hill where  
she had sat with her husband and children.

Though this evening supper was served on the ground as  
bullets larked through their refugee camp,  
they ate lying down.

Urgency shook fork to mouth, then hand to  
syringe: she helped aid workers sew up soldiers  
demoted back to childhood.

Before the coups she had worn a chef's hat,  
she had called the kitchen staff to order:  
tonight they were cooking for a new president.

But that was then; tonight they would  
take turns walking around the tents,  
hoping the lights in the distance stayed distant.

## C

Jennifer Schmidt



Since the age that my memory was born, I remember Grandmom's voice reading to me. None of the stories remain, only the rhythm of her voice. Sometimes we would just sit on the couch in the den, and she would scratch my back with her soft, veiny hands – ones that, compared to my smooth ones, bespoke the valleys and triumphs of a long life. My finger would trace those mazes, imagining the memories that carved them and hoping I might earn some veins of my own one day.

Grandmom Claire was the type of person who had a distinct smell; it was fresh and clean with a hint of something too sophisticated for my young nose to identify. I heard once that Grandmom wore men's cologne, which has forever left me with the impression that men who wear cologne must be effeminate because she was anything but masculine.

She was the essence of class, a regular Elizabeth Taylor, turning mediocrity into elegance at a simple touch. Her nail polish of choice was mauve or raspberry – grandmother colors – and she all but exclusively wore turtlenecks neatly tucked in. A simple gold necklace adorned her neck, while I envied her dark curls. Luxurious, in my mind, compared to the platinum towhead I saw in the mirror.

Every Thursday, Grandmom would arrive, Dunkin' Donuts on the passenger seat of her car. While pretending to study, I would listen as she ranted about Bill Clinton and my mom prepared lunch. Naturally, I was a Republican too.

Some people describe voices as sounding like music, but hers was more of a safe harbor. It was a familiar idea, a sigh of relief whenever I encountered it – resonating with buoyancy and welcome. She never once called me Jen, only Jennifer. Even today I miss that sound.

One word that embodied Grandmom Connie was "earthy." A bit rough around the edges, she exuded rustic charm. I loved her hands too – nimble, not too soft but always steady and warm. She reminded me of autumn – colorful and intense. Her laugh was the image of leaves gliding down rays of sunlight. When I hugged her,

I sank into her baggy clothes like a pile of crunchy leaves. Nothing ruffled her – she flew by the seat of her pants and without a watch. Maybe that's why I'm late all the time.

I loved how she talked to us about adult things with adult words, unpronounceable for our baby tongues. She introduced us to birds and animals, leaves and trees, fully embracing nature in its raw glory. Everything was "beautiful" in Grandmom Connie's estimation. Tiny ants were worthy of careful study as were rocks by the creek.

Funny necklaces in looping strands hung from her neck, and she didn't tuck her shirts in. Even so she carried herself as one who knew propriety but didn't put much stock in it. She probably just liked being comfortable.

I remember when we first noticed her mind was disappearing. We had arrived for Christmas dinner, but all she had out to eat were clementines. I didn't know what was really going on, but somehow I figured out that she had forgotten to cook the turkey. It shook me to see her hands trembling, outstretched as if she was physically groping for the words to explain herself. But later she sat with us, calm again, and taught us how to peel the orange skins. She could remember that.

In contrast, I cannot pinpoint when Grandmom Claire's mind started to slip away. But at one point, there was the forgotten name – maybe it was just a slip of the tongue? But later – a blank look in response to a question, and then the day when she didn't answer to her own name. None of these things can be denied.

For both of my grandmoms, there was a steady decline. Two very different women, claimed by a very similar villain. Day-by-day we couldn't recognize the ever moving descent into ambiguity, but it happened. Over the years, they were disappearing like shadows gradually creeping across a floor in waning sunlight. No one ever

Doctors never gave us a name for the disease that stole their memories, their ability to think and reason, their laughs in recognition of a joke. I wish they had so we would have known what to hate, what to pray against, what to curse.

knows exactly when the shadow's length finally overwhelms the last long rays of light because it happens so slowly.

While their bodies sagged with wrinkles, their minds slipped backwards in time. One year they forgot how to cook. The next they forgot how to stand.

Doctors never gave us a name for the disease that stole their memories, their ability to think and reason, their laughs in recognition of a joke. I wish they had so we




would have known what to hate, what to pray against, what to curse. If they had, we would have had people's respect instead of "It's just old age" sentiments. No – it was a thief.

When the shadows had really darkened, we would simply sit and talk to them, while I wondered what was happening in their minds. What did they actually *think* about? Did they think in terms of abstractions – as if watching themselves from afar? Could they comprehend everything they had lost? Did they simply function off of emotions, or the basest of instincts, comfort and pain?

I cannot remember them as the shells they were, dying a fraction at a time. Instead, I see Grandmom Connie sitting by the beat-up piano with the scratchy keys. She is reclining in the chair with her legs casually folded over one another, her style reminding me of Meg Ryan in *You've Got Mail*: casually hip. There is a smile on her face wide enough to show her teeth, and I can hear her low, rumbling laugh.

I miss her. I wonder what she would say of me and my life. The clothes I wear, the work I do, the boys I date. I have a feeling her eyes would dance a bit. Maybe she would wink at me too.

"Beautiful," she might say. 



Fallen  
Jennifer Gelar

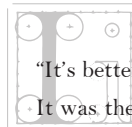


## Full with Silence

Lauren Roth

She turns and looks a moment in the glass;  
Hardly aware of her departed lover;  
Her brain allows one half-formed thought to pass:  
'Well now that's done: and I'm glad it's over.'  
When lovely woman stoops to folly and  
Paces about her room again, alone,  
She smooths her hair with automatic hand,  
And puts a record on the gramophone.

– T. S. Eliot, *The Wasteland*



"It's better that he's gone," Lena thought.

It was the first day of winter, and the sun was gradually withdrawing from the sky. She sat watching the bright, chalky rays of orange and pink settle onto the gut of a dark and drooping horizon. The Cleveland atmosphere was swelling with the kind of bitter cold that would preserve months of snowfall, and keep the tip of each icicle frozen and round. The car engine had been turned off for at least an hour, yet Lena sat unable to move as she stared flatly at the street outside of her apartment. The silence began to make her uneasy, and so Lena generated small thoughts like "I need to get a space-heater." Her fingers were hooked loosely around the bottom of the steering wheel, and she watched her warm breath etch its way through the frosty air and then slowly dissipate. Lena's stomach still hung on to the strange feeling she had gotten when she walked into the doctor's office this afternoon and

everyone looked so normal, like the people at the grocery store, like people that did not need professional help. She thought of the way her doctor looked so young as she sat behind her desk in an aqua turtleneck. Gently biting her lower lip, Lena thought of the laminated “rate your feelings” cards, left over from the seventies, which were tacked on the walls. The poster’s generic-looking graphics formed varying smiley or frown faces: point to which one describes you. Releasing her bottom lip, Lena shut her eyes and tried to breathe. Thoughts about all the insufficient help plagued her. She thought of her doctor’s powerless-looking eyes and practiced words, which, despite Lena’s earnest questions, couldn’t seem to help her. It’s better that he’s gone, she tried to convince herself again. Lena began to pretend that when Nate left, it didn’t feel like forty extra pounds had crawled into her stomach, suppressing her posture as well as her appetite. She could remember just how his voice had sounded when he told her – “I just don’t ever have healthy relationships with women.” He handed Lena his excuse like a pink slip and then walked out of her big wooden door without an apology. Nate left her the same week her dad had left her mother; just thinking about it made her extremely tired. She remembered that she hadn’t fed her cats since yesterday morning and became concerned about their state of health. She opened the driver side door and got out of the car.

Lena’s apartment was on the third floor of a crinkled-looking gray building that appeared as if it was made out of recycled cardboard coffee holders. A flower garden lined the front of Lena’s building, where a petite old man was always sitting on the edge of the courtyard fountain almost every time she looked outside. If the man were to ever turn into a bird, Lena thought he’d make a cute sparrow. He had a modest variety of flannels, and a dated newsboy cap was always on his head no matter the weather. On the days he wasn’t perched on the fountain edge, Lena felt a hint of disappointment pinch at her stomach. As she hurried into the building, Lena made sure to peek out from inside of her furry coat hood long enough to see the old man give her a nod and a wink with his gentle eyes.

Lena fought against a strong wind as she tried to pull the lobby door shut against the cold. She cursed and quickly closed the latch. As she made her way up the dark, narrow stairwell, she paused in front of Crazy Carol’s apartment. Lena thought that Carol was nuts ever since the old woman confessed that she had lipstick permanently tattooed on her mouth. Even though the skin on Carol’s face was paper thin, with delicate wrinkles woven around her eyes and mouth, Lena still thought she was beautiful. Carol claimed she had lived in the building since the fifties and would stop Lena every now and then to tell her eccentric stories of past residents, or about the wild things she used to do with her husband before he died. As she stepped up to

the door, Lena heard an old tape player crackling out *Ave Maria* as Carol warbled along in the background. She could tell by the sound of pans and the smell of spices that Carol was making her authentic *arancini di riso*. Through a small crack in the doorframe, Lena could see that Carol’s large copper locks were bolted shut. Too afraid to knock, Lena lingered a few minutes, hesitating to go through her own quiet door.

When she finally went into her empty apartment, Lena secured all her locks and double-checked the windows to make sure they were all sealed shut. There had been a gang shooting just down the block earlier that week. Now that she was alone, Lena never felt safe. The cats bustled around Lena’s feet, begging for food. As she poured cat nip into their dishes, hunger pangs began murmuring from Lena’s stomach. She thought about checking the windows a third time, but halfway through decided to make tea instead.

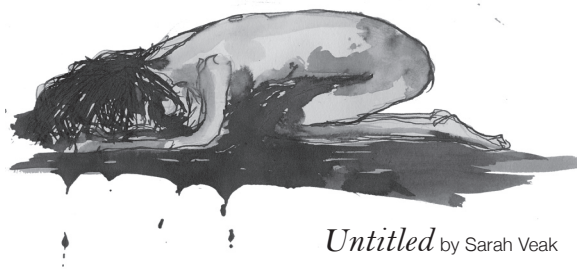
While she was waiting for the water to boil, Lena dumped the contents of her stained, khaki messenger bag onto the counter. A crumpled Anger Management Log came out, along with a bottle of Carlo Rossi and an assortment of prescribed medicines. Lena gave a half-smile as she tossed the anger log into the trash. After pouring a glass of the cheap wine, Lena slid the bottle to the back of an empty cupboard. Balancing the wine glass in her left hand, Lena’s free arm shook delicately as she picked up a transparent orange bottle. She made weak but persistent attempts to open the container with one hand. As she popped the lid, it dropped and rolled underneath the oven. Slowly bending to pick up the bottle cap, Lena accidentally scattered the little yellow pills across the floor. Kneeling, she gathered the tablets that lay closest to her into a small pile, and hungrily took them in one swallow. After she felt all the pills go down her throat, Lena pushed herself up and put her glass, still full of wine, into the sink.

Lena left the rest of the medication on the tile and poured her tea – nearly forgetting to turn off the stove, which she rarely used for anything but boiling water. She wandered into the front room, and her ankles cracked once, as if they were thankful to be out of their shoes. As she looked out from her third story window down into the courtyard, Lena saw the old man still sitting on his ledge. He was rubbing his hands together and staring to the left, watching the cars come off the highway exit ramp. She pulled a chair over to the sill to watch him. It had begun to sleet outside and Lena wondered why he still sat there. She didn’t even know his name. Lena thought it seemed like the man was hoping that someone – a long lost daughter, for instance – would visit unexpectedly. After bearing a few minutes of the sleeting rain, the man stood up slowly and began to walk back inside.

As Lena brought up her deep-bowled mug beneath her chin, the warm chamomile steam rose and reached its wispy fingers up and across her face, pressing back the line between her eyebrows. She shut her eyes and attempted to take a deep breath the first time that day. As she sat waiting for the pills to work, Lena burrowed her way down deeper into the blanket, elbowing her thoughts away. She imagined them one by one, like her yoga teacher had said, coming up onto a stage. Then she imagined herself closing a curtain upon them. It wasn't working. Each time the curtain would give way to faces, names, and words (spoken and unspoken). Accusations, pleas, manipulations, rejections: they would all rush onto the stage and swarm her mind. Her only choice was to not think at all; Lena became silent and still.

The empty room held her as it began to darken. The sun was gone and all the clouds were curling away like the smoke after a candle or match has been put out, leaving a matte black sky obscured by the light of the city. A tedious hour passed. The tea was cold but still in the same spot as before. One of her cats rattled out purring noises as it pawed at a plastic bag. Staring out at the street, Lena thought about her mom a few cities over, alone, just like her. She began to think about where her brother might be. She hadn't spoken to him since their dad left. Thoughts of where Nate might be, or whom he was with, started to slither in from the back of her mind. Lena tried to draw the curtain in her mind again, still staring listlessly, still drawing something resembling a breath. The loneliness was all-encompassing and she felt it pushing her to the edge of something dangerous, guiding her somewhere completely unknown, without moving her at all. Lena didn't know how to fight the quietness.

She had forgotten she was holding something, and the teacup slipped from Lena's hands. It shattered, and the tea began filling the small wooden cracks in the floor. She sat a few minutes and then got onto her hands and knees to scoop in the little ceramic pieces. One of the edges cut her palm, and a stream of blood slowly trickled into the tea. Lena waited for the wound to throb, but she couldn't feel anything. Her ears perked as if she heard a scream, and the silence felt like the pressure of a thousand pounds upon her eardrums. She watched the deep red swirl its way through the tea. To her surprise, tears crept down her face. "Oh God," she cursed; the sound of her voice interrupted the stillness.



*Untitled* by Sarah Veak

Lena's head dropped toward the floor and her mouth opened as if she was going to scream but nothing came out except a few sparse strands of spit that eventually settled on the corners of her mouth. She inhaled sharply and choked on the air. Half a minute crept by. Inch by inch in the air around her, the silence began to harmonize itself with her incessant and rhythmic weeping. The ends of her long brown hair were wet and curling as they soaked up the mixed mess on the floor. In less than a whisper, her mouth barely open, she cried out "...oh God". She pressed her forehead against the floor, losing hope that the pills could ease her mind.

Rocking back and forth on her knees, Lena stayed in the same spot until she caught her breath. As she began to feel tired, Lena's fearful movements ceased. She rose slowly, wiped her nose, and walked over to the window. She opened the glass windowpane and pushed out the screen. The cold air violently ripped a path into her living room and caused her to shut her eyes. Shivering, she swung her legs over the windowsill and sat. The hair on her arms stood on end and another swirl of warm breath crawled out of her mouth. She blinked as the tear streaks dried on her cheeks, making her skin feel tight. Lena stared over the tops of all the buildings on her block. Looking down at the vacant courtyard, Lena saw that the lifeless flower bed was covered in frost. She leaned forward to get a better look at the skies. A few twinkling stars dripped their light through the haze of pollution, and she whispered, "Oh God." The sleet had turned to flakes of snow. One of the ice crystals landed on Lena's lip and then quickly melted. The cold air burned her lungs, and she thought of how glad she was for the taste of it; she was glad for the taste of anything. <sup>1</sup>





## To Prufrock's Dismay

Ryan Knight

*Cleen*

Two years, ten years, and shoppers ask,  
    "Now where are we?  
And what thrift store is this  
    which sells white flannel trousers rolled?  
Why, even the back pocket has  
    sand in it still—and a stained coffee spoon!—  
and you'll hardly believe what I've found now:  
    a book of mythology  
    with asterisks by the section on mermaids  
    in the table of contents."

"Strange, indeed."

I am anonymity.  
Let me sing to you.



## Still

Ryan Knight

*Cleen*

No one knows why I volunteered, my arm  
raised to play the doomed part of Oedipus,  
oblivious to the omen-beaked birds  
overhead. Am I one given to harm?  
Hamartia? Ought I raise a great fuss  
and snap every prophet's staff found in fjords?  
I empty libations across my farm  
and these fields. My stone cellar a surplus  
of hollowed gourds, canned foods, and words, such words.  
Our theater company slept down there,  
fidgeting, sleepless, tearing at their hair  
when one read the deed and screamed *Here!* Such fear.  
Still the birds overhead. Still, still the birds  
and still the wide-winged prophetic words.





## Homeless

Brett Hastie

“ [W]ords live as the soil does: where seeds of truth are intelligently and affectionately sown, the farmer—author reaps the miracle and mystery of the divine life hidden in creation and revealed to the human soul through beautiful words.

—Ryan Masters  
from *Miraculous World, Miraculous Words* ”



The LAMP staff would like to thank the following individuals and organizations at Liberty University:

Dr. William Gribbin  
*Dean of the School of Communications*

Dr. Mark Harris  
*Professor of English and  
Director of the Master of Arts Program in English*

Dr. Emily Heady and the Graduate Writing Center

Mr. Danny Horsley and Seckman Printing



Contact:

Dr. Karen Swallow Prior,  
(General Faculty Advisor):  
[kprior@liberty.edu](mailto:kprior@liberty.edu)

Ryan Knight  
(General Editor):  
[crknight2@liberty.edu](mailto:crknight2@liberty.edu)



