Editor’s Note:

This issue is the first for me and the current editorial panel. When we began to plan this issue we were sure that if nothing else, we wanted to proceed in the path of excellence mapped by our predecessors.

After much deliberation, we decided against making this a themed issue. We thought that this would limit the scope of the many willing Coppinites who seemed almost more excited than we were at the prospect of sharing their hearts with us—and with you.

As submissions poured in, much to our surprise (my delight), the majority espoused one central theme: LOVE. This, however, was not simply love in all of its rose-tinted glory. It was the stuff of longing, waiting, living in the shadows of the forbidden and being left to languish in the slow burn of love lost or unrequited.

While corresponding with our contributors, it became clear to me that each had undertaken a labor of love, but many shining pieces we were not able to include. We hope that this issue acts as a beacon to the many midnight poets who were not inclined to submit their wares, and we thank our writers for opening their truest selves to the CSU audience.

It would be remiss of me if I didn’t take this opportunity to thank our advisor Dr. Kathleen Hellen for trusting us with this undertaking.
Raise up
Student Literary Journal
Department of Humanities, Coppin State University

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The works presented in this journal are not the expressed thoughts or opinions of the staff or administration of Coppin State University. They are the artistic visions of its students.
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Grateful acknowledgement to the Department of Humanities

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SILVER HILL

(Oistins, Barbados)

By Jason Francis

It’s a slow, wind-scissored afternoon.
So sleep, Darisa. Rest on
the makeshift sofa of our
common inclinations.

Yes, it’s that time, this hour
to make a ritual of afternoon
under heavy-haired ackee*
and scrunched lime tree.

Let your glasses toss.
It’s not sight that’s lost.
Dark eyelids close over
the sky’s opalescent eye

*A sapindaceous tree native to tropical Africa and cultivated in the Caribbean for its fruit, edible when cooked
All For You

For A. Perouze

By Sunil Whittle

Warm as the sun dipped in black,
you arrive,
and now I can breathe.
I smell the toxic, sweet love,
burning deep within my cypher,
bubbling to overflow—
All for you.
Perfect. All I wanted was to look like them, to be just like them. I wanted the long, silky hair that flowed down their backs. I wanted the clear, blue eyes that seemed to sparkle and light up their faces. Their faces, so beautiful. I wanted the rosy-colored cheeks and the perfect little noses and mouths. I wanted their bodies; bodies with curves in all the right places, bodies that made any outfit look amazing. I wanted to be that girl adored and loved by so many others. I wanted to be perfect, just like them. But I wasn't; my face was plain and ordinary, no excitement. My body was awkward and disproportionate and my hair was short and greasy with split ends. My clothes were nothing glamorous; t-shirts and jeans made up my wardrobe. My eyes didn’t sparkle in the light; they were as brown as dirt. When people saw me, they didn't stare in adoration but in disgust. No one wanted to be me; no one envied me or wanted what I had. I had nothing to offer. I might as well have been invisible because I made no impression on the world. How I longed to be what I desired most; to be perfect for all the world to stop and notice me. Perfect they were, perfect is how I wanted to be. Every doll displayed in the toy store window. Exactly how I wanted to be. Perfect.
Weight

By Renita Dorsey

The bags are full for a single mother.
Neighbors look and speak but do not offer a hand.
A single mother, lonely, hopes for a lover.

Her apartment is dark, but her kids give it light.
There is an obvious need for a man.
The bags are full for a single mother.

The kids carry bags with heavy weight.
This was not her plan.
A single mother, lonely, hopes for a lover.

Their ages: five, six, seven and eight.
Her plan: married, soccer mom, with a mini-van.
The bags are full for a single mother.

In her dark apartment, life isn’t so great.
No one was ever strong enough to stand.
A single mother, lonely, hopes for a lover.

The children hope their mother will find her soul-mate.
Four children, no father, she will make it, she can.
The bags are full for a single mother.
Photo: Denise Garrett
The Other

By DylanR

I am the other.

The secret, the lie.

I am the shadow that stands to one side

To avoid where the sun resides.

Invisible in light, I wait for night.

In the night of day

I wait for her to shed her day-skin

To dwell in the shadows that I weave for her.

Aching to hold her with outstretched arms

Longing to kiss her,

Falling deep into the eyes that mesmerize,

I hold tight to what is mine in the light of night.

I am the other.

The master of her secret desires,

Whispering words of love and adoration.

I am the other,

Living in pain and fear

Until the day falters and the comfort of night is desired once more.
Awaiting a battle, a crowd gathered in a circle around cardboard. Murmuring and taunting, they encouraged the battle to begin. They pressed in, bumping into each other, tripping over one another, stepping on each others’ toes to observe the very personal battle between Mind and Heart.

Heart stepped up, weary from years of breaking, and prepared to battle. She stretched in her loose, flowing skirt that swayed over her full hips and down to her ankles. Pulling the skirt to her knee, Heart exposed her muscular calf as she adjusted her cowrie shell anklet. After an earlier application of oil, her skin was soft and smooth. She reached up and secured her wavy brown locks in her head-wrap. Hair flowed from the top of her head like a pineapple’s leaves. At the edge of the cardboard, earth mother-goddess-soul sista, Heart stood on an arrow that read: “This side up.” Heart’s eyes were swollen and carrying bags from lack of sleep. Dreaming and dancing alternately and sometimes simultaneously had worn her out. Heart said a silent prayer, then she was ready.

Mind saw him send a text message to someone on his T-mobile Sidekick. She locked in on him, squinting as she stepped up to her side of the cardboard. Mind was a show-stopper. She was a fly girl who could shake her moneymaker. Her bone-straight hair was pulled back into a single French braid. Golden twine weaved in and out of her braid and she anchored it at the nape of her neck. Golden doorknocker earrings hung from her ears. She pulled the tilted wool beret from her head. Then she stuffed it behind the golden horse embroidered on the back pocket of her jeans. Her pants tapered down to a pair of bright, white Adidas’ shellheads with fat white laces.
The DJ began to spin Mos Def’s “Ms. Fat Booty”. Mind executed a perfect windmill. Thoughts began swirling around inside of the active organ. Mind spun out, “This situation—which is clearly not a romantic relationship or intertwining—is just another tiresome exercise that does not look like a good move.”

Heart, hope-full, faith-full, heavy, slow and steady danced out the words: “My crush loves me.”

Mind, clear, precise and all about technique, recognized that dance requires more than mechanical movement. Mind acknowledged Heart’s feeling, style, and passion, but Mind had her checklist. She began the centipede, pedantically articulating each point:

*He does not call.*

*He does not introduce you to his friends.*

*He does not take you to see new Spike Lee movies.*

*He does not take you to Atlantic City.*

*He does not laugh at Sarah Palin with you.*

*He does not take you out to dinner.*

*He does not watch Law and Order with you.*

*He does not kiss your lips.*

*He does not pick you up from school or play rehearsal.*

*He does not see you home safely.*

Heart:

*He supports my dreams/ & likes my poetry/ & when he touches me/ I feel chemistry/ a nervous shaking/ & his energy feels so good to me/

*He has a groove on my hip/ his hand hits /when he hugs me/ I really feel the chemistry/ the tremble originating from him/ or is it me/? It’s like we are popping & locking/ passing this feeling between—*

Mind moves in quickly and brings Heart to her knees:

Who controls the imagination you or me?
Contrast  By Christopher Haskins

As I am watching tv on my pastor’s couch, at the other end is a church member who is the same age and probably the same weight and height as I am. We are both here to help out. He’s a fervent member of the church and happy he has made a change in his life. I, on the other end, have been absent from church for a month now, even though I was raised in the church my whole life. He’s a white boy and I’m a black kid. We are both twenty–two. One of us has a clean record, loves rock music, has been working and going to school, and hopes to get his master’s degree. The other has been in and out of juvie and jails his whole life, is tattooed, likes rap, and hopes to make it as a rapper someday. I don’t know when I’m going to graduate or if this guy is going to end up back in jail. Even more confusing— who of us is good and who is bad? My faith lost, or his past. As the tv distorts, I see images on the screen reverse colors beautifully for a moment.

Illustration: Denise Garret
Wet Thirst By Jason Francis

It has been long since you called by my harbor
so you must know my head is full with thoughts of you.
Surely, my teeming head is spilling over,
brimming over with blooming bougainvillea.
Over the wall of my mind, ripe thoughts pour
that yearn desperately to reach you.

Sometimes I lean on my dry window
seeking you among the yellowing crowd
bobbing on a current of ordered lines to and fro,

but I can only find bliss in your green memory
and even that fades, withering quickly,
like once-verdant grass in this drought of absence.

Summer finds me again learning patience.
In this sun seasoned furnace, Vieux Fort pants senselessly
like a sun-stroked dog; my head is in a frenzy.
The air I breathe thickens with the fragrance
of your warm body I lift in reverence,
but slowly my mortal arms grows weak.

Enthused with longing for you, I ride sorely
on the back of my crippled patience.

Still, I return to where we once bathed
in the wet valley of our unseasoned morning.
I see you in the docile crouch of Maria Island.
I see you poised in front of a waterfall smiling.

But for now, the milky air veils the hills,
as I resign my raised hand,
held to squint at the faraway horizon.
Perhaps, you stoop singing to birches
as you tend to your old flower garden,
etched in a bluing valley,
against a distant powdery slope.
Brain Love

By Hope Livingston II

I want to be in your prefrontal cortex
Help you relax on a rough day
Keep you focused on what matters most
And rub you the right way
Use your cingulate gyrus
And shift your attention to this
Your heart, and what direction it’s in
Use your limbic system to the T
And bond with me; smell...touch...lust for me
Process your pain with this pleasure
As a grain of my love forever
Another Love Poem (#49)

By DylanR

Show me the way to repent for my sins.
Teach me the errors of my jaded heart.
Reveal the secrets of your soul.
Tell me the liquid laws of love.
Inspire the lost poet in my soul.
Enrage the warrior of my heart to
Fight for that which I would have for my own.
Honor me with your favor
As I kneel to none but you,
Queen of my heart.
A rancid alley separated two apartment complexes. Both of them went up twelve floors, and no one bothered looking out of their windows to where he was below. I waited for him to pass.

The knife I had promised my mother I would never use again I concealed—just in case things got hairy. My mother told me that if I went through with this, I could end up in prison. Prison? Not exactly scary. It would have been scarier last week. He would get what was coming to him.

It was almost like the lights were following him. I darted out, following closely. He paid me no mind and crossed the street towards the better side of town. Why was he walking when he was obviously loaded? I contemplated saying thousands of things to him. The city around me was so quiet that I could swear my thoughts were bouncing off the barren walls of apartment complexes and old buildings. No more could I hold out. “Hey!”

He turned around and now the lights were on me.

“Yes?”

“Father….”

“Enrico?”

“Yeah. I need you to help mom….”

The confident look on his face did not change. “All right.” He drew a gun from his coat. “Problem solved. One less child to pay for.”
SPACE RESERVED
FOR
TIME PRINTERS