



# ENTROPY

OBU SCRIBLERUS 2017

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The Scriblerus is a cooperative effort between the OBU Creative Writing Program and the Chi Delta Chapter of Sigma Tau Delta, International English Honor Society.

#### A Letter from the Editors,

Last year's theme was "getting it done." *The Scriblerus* has been an OBU tradition and it's one-year hiatus in 2015 needed to be rectified. This year, we wanted it to bigger and better. And while it may not be longer than last year's, featuring fewer works in both categories, it is definitely better. We have many people to thank for that: Dr. Myers for keeping us on track, Tyler Henson for the theme, and Karly Hazelrigg for our wonderful cover art. We also want to give a shout out to caffeine for making all of this possible.

Entropy is (1) The gradual decline into disorder.

- (2) Also, a short story by Thomas Pynchon.
- (3) Also, a scientific term to denote a thermodynamic quantity.
- (4) Also, this year's theme of the 2017 *Scriblerus*

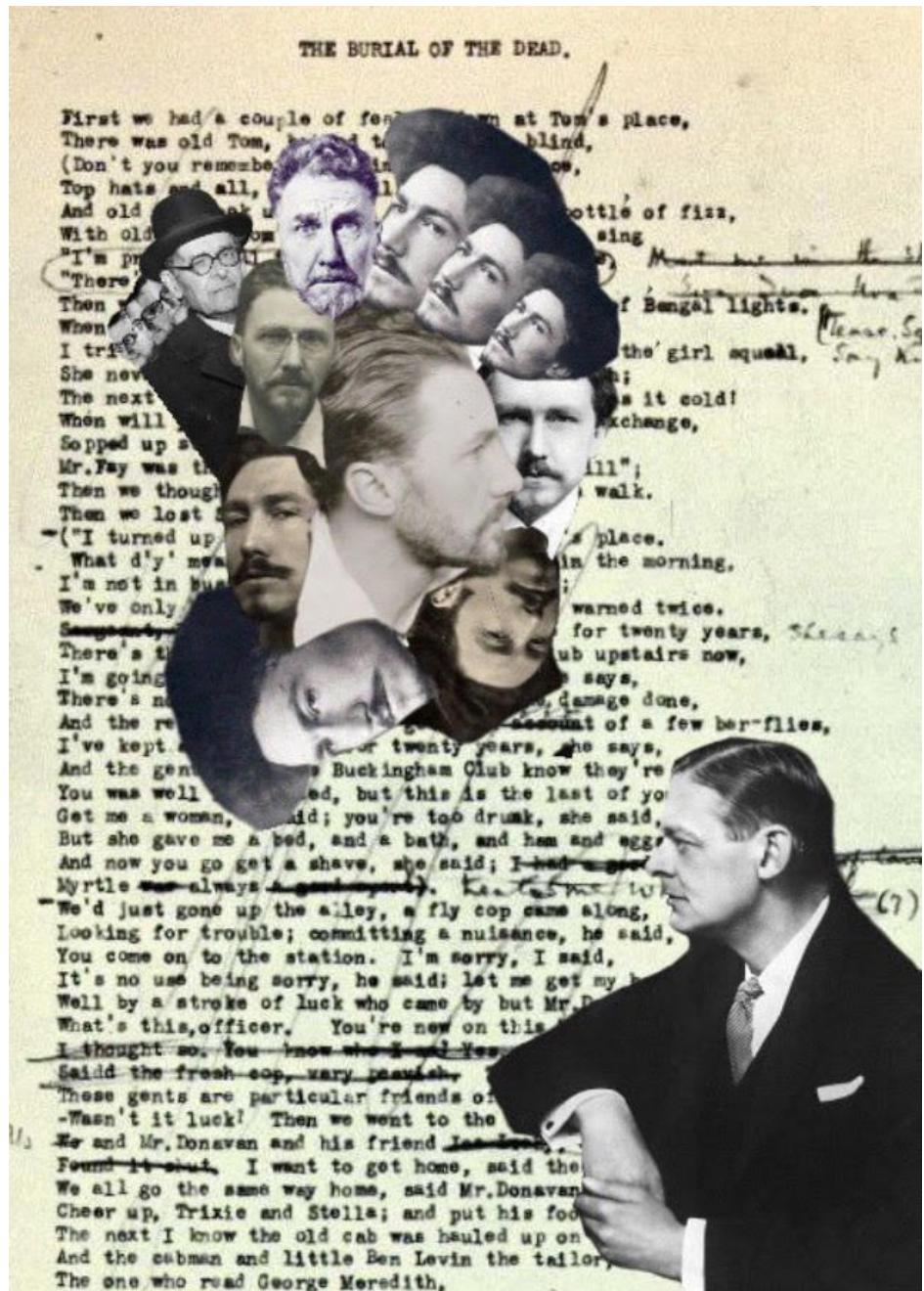
When we were designing this issue, we contemplated just throwing the pages of the submissions to determine the order. We also looked for the most chaotic font possible. But as some of the works selected will illustrate, entropy is not just about chaos. Entropy encapsulates a lot of ideas, some of them even more complex than we can understand without the help of annotated anthologies, whiteboard drawings, science demonstrations, or as we have attempted to illustrate here, through literature.

Sincerely,  
Jonathan Dent and Noah Golaboff, Co-Editors

The name for the *Scriblerus* comes from the Scriblerus Club, a group of writers organized in London in 1714 by Jonathan Swift. The selections herein do not necessarily represent the views of the editors or faculty and administration of Oklahoma Baptist University.

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by Jonathan Dent

The

"Meaningless!

Generations come

All streams flow

I, the Teacher, was king

"Laughter," I said, "is madness. And what does

Then I said to myself, "The fate of the fool will overtake me

I have seen the burden God has laid on the human race. He has made everything beautiful in its time. He

Much dreaming and many words are meaningless. Therefore fear God. If you see the poor oppressed in a district, and justice ad rights denied, do not be surprised at such things; for one official.

Obey the king's command, I say, because you took an oath before God. Do not be in a hurry to leave the king's presence. Do not stand up for a bad cause, for he will do whatever he pleases. Since a king's word is supreme, who can say to him, "What are you doing?" Whoever

Fall  
By Stephen Briggs

Leaves on their leashes wait to be stirred  
loose onto pavement  
and into gutters growling

with the loosed world.  
Drowning with Charon  
churning on rivers wrung restless.  
Spirited, sprightly,  
spiraling down pipelines  
the body unwinds,  
The cellulose tethers tatter.

A compost freeway:  
One crazed body  
Lumbers down  
Migrating.  
A creature of physics,  
Answering its instinct

**The Snowflake  
by Sydney Barness  
2<sup>nd</sup> Place Winner in Fiction**

Jacob is small and cold and helpless. He lives with many brothers and sisters, all of them just as small and helpless as he. For now, they cannot go anywhere, but maybe some day they could. Someone could pick a few of them out, take them home. If they're lucky, a whole new world will be open to them.

Jacob has a lot of potential.

Marie does not go to school. She does not see her friends, she does not run and jump on the playground. For the most part, Marie stays at home with her mom, with the exception of that dreaded weekly trip. To go out elsewhere is to put herself in danger.

"How are you feeling?" her mother asks, seeing her pick at her food. She is not feeling hungry.

Someday, Jacob might be a chef. He will construct masterful recipes, carefully procuring the finest ingredients. He will open his own restaurant in the middle of town and all the people will flock to it. Jacob will be able to look out and smile, seeing all the hungry people he is delighting with his delicious concoctions. Jacob will feel good.

"We have another appointment today," Marie's mother says softly, rubbing her thumb over the thin skin of Marie's hand. Marie nods and fetches a stuffed rabbit from her room. It is

pink and velvety, but in many places the fur had been rubbed off. In fact, the rabbit is riddled with bald spots, making it look splotchy and sad. Marie does not love it any less for this.

Marie straps herself into her seatbelt behind her mother. She is still too young to sit in the front. “How about some music?” her mom asks with a smile. Marie nods, clutching her stuffed rabbit to her chest, fingers digging into what remains of its plush fur.

Jacob might be a toymaker. He will make dollhouses and little choo choo trains that send up a puff of smoke as they chug along plastic tracks. He will make burly action figures and soft, cuddly teddy bears, and when a child comes in and asks for something unusual—I want the house to have a secret lab underneath, I want the dolly to have twelve purple eyes and fangs, I want the puppy to have a wheelchair like me—he will write it all down, even as their parents apologize and insist that he needn’t do anything like that. Not a week later, that child will have their new toy, complete with every little peculiar twist the child had added. Those same parents will sputter their thanks through a grin nearly as wide as their child’s.

At Christmas, Jacob will make a special batch of toys, don a big red suit, and take them down to the Children’s Hospital for the ones that couldn’t make it to his workshop. The nurses and doctors will fondly refer to him as Santa Claus, and every year all the children will peek out their doors, hoping to catch a glimpse of the man with a bulging bag slung over his shoulder heading their way.

Perhaps someday, Jacob will have his own children, and be as loving a father as his own is.

A woman sat on the hospital table, her belly round and taut. Her husband stood beside her, gripping her hand and watching the image of a baby squirm on the ultrasound monitor with fretful eyes. The doctor, who had been performing the ultrasound, looked up from the monitor and smiled.

"Everything appears to be going perfect," she said. "It looks like the treatment worked beautifully."

The husband let out a deep breath, his body becoming limber again. He kissed his wife's jaw and beamed. His wife nestled her head against his shoulder, smiling at the doctor.

"That just leaves one little matter," the doctor said, producing a clipboard from a nearby table. She handed it, along with a pen, to the woman. Her eyes scanned the form; from over her shoulder, her husband did the same.

"Donation?" she asked.

"I don't know if I'm comfortable with that," her husband said. "It would be like killing our own children."

"If you aren't going to use them, then they will stay frozen forever," the doctor said. "They're a long way from developing a nervous system. They won't feel anything; they won't know." She smiled reassuringly. "Maybe they can save someone else's child."

The woman paused, looking over the form and then at her husband. She clicked the pen rapidly on the clipboard and bit her lip. Her husband gently squeezed her shoulder.

Jacob might be a doctor. He will be a pediatrician, taking care of the little ones. He will wipe runny noses, he will stick colorful bandages over injection sites and give out huge lollipops wrapped in plastic. He will bounce crying babies on his hip. He will greet the children who come

to visit him regularly with hugs and slip them candies when he can. Someday, he will have to look in the face of one of his children and say

“The treatment isn’t working.”

Marie sits on the cold table, swinging her legs. Her mom is standing, talking to the doctor. “Experimental treatment,” he says. “Stem cells.” “Membrane proteins.” “Possibly her only chance.” Marie looks down at her feet swinging and red rushes to her cheeks, then behind her eyes. Her face crinkles and her head collapses into her arms. Her mother snatches her, clutching her daughter’s face to her chest and gently stroking her bare scalp. Marie sobs into her mother’s shirt, her face burning. “It’s going to be okay,” her mother coos. “The doctors have a plan. No one is giving up on you.”

The doctor hands her mother the form.

Jacob could be a scientist. He will spend his days peering through microscopes, scribbling notes, conducting research. Someday, he will find something very exciting, a new treatment, a cure to a disease. He will publish it in a scientific journal and help countless people. He will celebrate with his team of fellow scientists, all clad in white jackets like the person who is coming for him now, to take him away.

Marie will only cry a little as the nurse inserts the needle into her arm. Her mother will hold her hand, gently rubbing it with her thumb, trying hard not to let any tears flow until Marie closes her eyes. The doctors will roll Marie away and her mother will wait, thinking of her child on a cold table somewhere on the floor. She will not try to hold the tears back now.

But Marie will wake up and it will be the last time she is poked and prodded in a hospital. The next time she comes, the doctors will tell her the cancer is gone. For the first time in a long time, her parents will take her to the pizza place that is swarming with children. They will eat ice cream cake and play games together until it's closing time and they are the only people left. Marie will go back to school. Her hair will grow back. She will tell all her teachers she wants to be a doctor, that she wants to help little kids just like her doctors helped her. Someday, she could be a doctor. She could even be a toymaker, a chef, a scientist, or a mother. She can be.

Daughter  
by Sarah E. Anderson  
2<sup>nd</sup> Place Winner in Poetry

My mother rearranges the empty shampoo bottles  
every time she showers  
and when my father hits me  
it's a kiss  
A heatwave  
chokes my throat like radio fuzz

D is a manager at Home Depot.

A little less teeth.

D runs his wind chime fingertips through my tangled hair  
D's a smokeshow and I'm a hand grenade.

My father counts his Mitt Romney's  
and eats peanuts.

My brother prays  
but Saint Christopher  
is a concrete slab.

My sister is a porch dog  
who sings like sliced apples.

My mother shows me polaroids  
of my father who smiles like a cult leader.  
She says, "Kissing my husband  
is just  
drinking sugarless koolaid."

**7 Years Old**  
**by Trudy Hammons**  
**1<sup>st</sup> Place Winner in Poetry**

Dad didn't hear me  
run through the house  
to greet him after work,  
I was already waiting,  
on the roof outside  
my sister's window,  
with a pellet gun  
aimed at his greying hair,  
he pulled in  
with the top down  
on his sky blue vintage jeep,  
a collectors 1964,  
the year he was born,  
his second jeep,  
green—bought it from a man  
he met doing business,  
his cars took up the majority of the driveway,  
and then his bowling bag, motorcycle,  
golf clubs, fishing poles,  
canoe, and ping pong table,  
took up the garage.

/I hear the voices  
in his head,  
they whisper during the day  
like the violin in an orchestra,  
trumpets go off at night/

He brought me to his office,  
sat me on his lap,  
and like all good dad's  
released my fidgety body so I could retrieve the sword off his wall  
he got it from a garage sale  
or perhaps he got it fighting  
with the gladiators, I believed both  
stories,  
I swung it above my head  
"I will destroy you, you have no right to be here..."

we got skittles, yellow [green to him] [[green so we could argue]] Gatorade, snickers, and  
more skittles from the gas station on our way to fish

we shot guns outside our house  
he shot the wall  
the bullet is still there  
we never told Mom  
never told her about the stitches I got  
from running into a barbed wire fence.

On the way to the ER Dad said "don't worry, your four wheller will be ok"  
we ate 97 cent tacos  
in the waiting room  
he told me someday I'll like the extra hot sauce  
and he put some on his leg to match  
the blood on mine,

I broke my arm jumping off a chair  
trying to slam dunk  
before the surgery dad asked if I had made the shot

I hit a tree with our golf cart  
Dad made me apologize to Mother Nature

sorry Mother Nature  
for the times I'd rather spit on you  
and curse your name,  
because I can't curse God's  
cause God is hope  
and silences  
trumpets and violins

Dad threw the football  
too far, with his fast arm  
he set a record at the state fair  
baseball throwing contest,  
at least 200 mph,  
I slid into the pond  
to catch it,  
my dad said it was legendary,  
And then he accidentally called me by our puppy's name,  
she was white as printer paper but  
without a bath she was white as smokers  
teeth  
"Crystal!!!"  
I brought the football back  
I brought it back  
back to him.

The Garden  
by Jessa Chadwick

The dirt between my toes, underneath my fingernails. I flick it off disgusted while my mother does therapy in the shade of a tree. She sings to herself and tells us in the dirt and rocks is the only peace she can get. All of my plants die.

Line breaks down on the side of the road  
by Madison Jones

Breaking the line by breaking your opinion  
cracking your vision open smash  
the father's glass shards shatter  
so much depends upon  
a broken in line leave the well  
wrought urns at the bottom  
of the sea for a whale to swallow  
three whole days throw the pieces  
on the floor shuffle them into a corner  
board the hole nail the lift lift your hands  
into the sky nail them to the wood  
planked wall a plaid wearing jesus  
turned away no room in the private university

Ancient Words  
by Stephen Briggs  
1<sup>st</sup> Place Winner in Fiction

We all heard the cries when it happened. Two voices wailing like the spirits of the wind. One was high pitched, of brief terror. Young. Cut off in a gurgling, choking flash. There was a moment, and then the screaming came from the spirit itself. This one wasn't as horrible. We knew it wasn't in pain anymore.

The second voice came after. This one lasted much longer.

It was the cry of the mother.

Mealza is inside the temple with the chieftain. The fires are lit and smoke puffs out in a wavering white pillar. When it attacked, the panther had taken the child's body, leaving only shredded and bloody rags in the mother's hands. Although the ritual of passing will be easier to perform with the scraps, it is harder without the child's body.

We can hear Mealza's cries from the temple. Throughout the day, the rest of the village stop at the front steps and kneel in prayer. Now and then we hear the chieftain. His voice, though softer than the mother's, carries like a pulse and echoes in our chests. He talks in a tongue our ears cannot grasp, but our spirits understand.

After night pitches her tent over the sky, Trailley's spirit returns. At her coming the torches outside our doors go dark. We see by the lightning arcing in the air, covering the sky with skeletal fingers.

The child's presence is cold like a northern spirit, and in the lighting we see her in brief, ephemeral glances. Her soul, fresh from the body, still bears her former figure. Her hair lays still just past her shoulders. Her hands hang open by her side. She wears beads in her hair, one for each lunar cycle she had lived through. There are only three strands full.

She passes by us and into the temple. We go inside our homes and take our children away from the windows.

It is not long before Mealza, the chieftain, and Trailley leave the temple. We know when it happens, as all the torches leap in flame. They light up as though the whole village were on fire, but no one, not even the curious eyes of the children look out the windows as the three pass by.

We hear Mealza speaking to Trailley as they walk. She is trying to explain what it means to die.

When the mother returns to the village I hear her spirit whispering to mine. It speaks ancient words taught to me by the last chieftain's spirit, in a language

never to be written down. The others cannot hear the words, instead they hear a spirit's song.

I gather the village around the fire in the temple. Its white smoke fills the air and our lungs, and with it the ancestors cloak themselves. Their souls, malleable after so long dead, appear as wisps in the fog. As our village is old and its graves full, the souls that appear at each gathering differ every time. Some we greet whose names we've lost, and some we greet with shaking arms. Some we greet with loving hearts, and some we greet with thorned tongues.

I gather the people. They sit on the mats in families, and Mealza comes to the fire. She speaks to the spirits, telling the story of Trailley and the Panther, but as I serve as the speaker between the worlds, I tell her story in the ancient words.

It is said the ancient tongue taught people to sing and inspired them to take up instruments. But the story I tell is not one bound in notes and rhythms. There will be no drum tapping, or the silvery sound of the pipe. This song will stir no dancer's feet.

Measured by the ear, the song I sing comes softer than a lover's first kiss beneath the night time furs, but in volume it can only be matched by thunder. It is a song of black claws and screams in the night. It is a song of a red river wrung from a raging heart. It is a song that could be sung by lightning, and by the cyclonious

winds that rip bark from the trees. It is a song well known by our tribe, and it is one that never truly ends but is continued with every performance.

When I stop speaking, the ancestors draw their judgment. They speak their will through me.

“Go to the druids and be recompensed,” I say. “Put down this beast.”

And so, by the ancestor’s blessing, we march to put it down.

The chieftain readies the tribe for the hunt. Our warriors arm themselves with bows and paint their faces with the blood of berries. In the firelight the juice glistens like tears beneath their eyes. The midnight air is still and quiet, but a song of war pounds beneath the stretched out flesh of our chests.

Our ancestors stand with the hunt. Not in visible form, but in the totems and reliques we carry. They are in our hide vests, moving as we breathe in and out, our stomachs like the great tide of the waters. They are in the shafts of the arrows that wait in thirst on our backs. They are in our necklaces, our bracelets, our earrings; they are in the ink tattooed on our skin; they are in our clenched and sinewy muscles held taught like drawn cord; they are in the beads of our hair; they are in our hands that clench for war; they are in our mouths, in our molars drenched with saliva. They stare out from our eyes.

And our gaze would make the stars turn away if they could.

The ancestors lead us to the panther through our chieftain. We walk through the forest with our eyes on the shadows of the trees. The forest itself stares from behind night's black canvas.

We are a people known for our familiarity with death. Other tribes say that, to us, death is just another stage of life. As we march, we invite death into our presence. We feel it beside us, as real as our own ancestors. But we do not welcome death. As we march, we cling to our weapons not for revenge, but out of fear, as though we stand beside our own death mats. We cling to our bows and our spears as desperately as the dying cling to living hands. As though our grip could keep us here any longer. As though our sticks and stones can match tooth and claw.

There is a restlessness in the air. Deaf to all the natural senses but felt in our spirits. Our pounding hearts, our blood rushing like the new year's rains. We walk in the midst of a primal tragedy, the kind our ancestors sing to us in the winter nights as the snow blows around our tents. A song we soon will sing.

I hold my hand up to stop the clan.

I do not see the panther yet, but I know it is here. I know because the druids are here. I see their spirits like a dozen crimson fires. They sit in the trees and lurk

on the ground. My eyes find the panther, sleeping in the bough of the branches, flicking its tail and twitching its ears.

I speak, “Has the day finally come when the wild itself forbids the hunt?”

“The wild hunts for survival. You hunt for vengeance,” a druid answers from the trees. “Do not come bearing your wrath in here.”

“Our tribe has lost three members to this beast in the last season,” I say. “Their spirits walk this woods. They led us here. Would you deny the dead their right of rest? Would you deny the living their duty of honor?”

“How your tribe finds rest and honor is something you are to do among yourselves. But as I said, do not come bearing your wrath in here.”

“Will you stop us?” I ask. “Have you come to spark war between our people?”

“We do not come against you now. We deliver only a warning: the wild will not be tamed. Not every beast is as submissive as the horse, and for the animals that will fight, we will stand behind them.”

When the druid finishes speaking the fiery souls depart with the sounds of wings and rustling sticks. For a moment, the only open eyes in the forest are our own.

Then a roaring hiss sounds from the canopy of branches. The panther leaps from the trees and comes to the ground with a firm thump. It stands before us as a

long, living shadow, a mere black outline against the earth. The muscles of the beast coil within its skin, tightening into knotted bulges. Its breath moves its body in silence and its eyes speak a frightening intelligence. In its gaze I see both wisdom and fury. It faces us, our spears, our bows, and our ancestors, and it growls a familiar song.

It leaps with a roar that nearly rips the weapons from our hands. It comes like a fire, with claws that slash like aquiline talons. Together, we fight as our own animal. Our spears match its claws, our cries match its roars, and our flesh match its fur.

Its first leap lands on Horack, one of the biggest of our tribe. He falls and the panther swipes, rending pouring lashes into his chest. We come upon the beast, and it looks to us with eyes betraying a ready fear. It swipes, breaking the head off the end of my spear. I fall back and draw my bow. The beast leaps back into the forest, and we gather in a circle. Our shoulders close like gates.

But our wall of flesh and bone is all too weak. From behind me, I hear the panther's roar, our cries, and the heavy snap of spears. I turn and see Torpin and Shelda both bleeding, but this time our tribe is quick. Boold and Fashee shoot their spears into the panther's side. Its yowl resounds in the forest.

The chieftain draws a dagger from his waist and cuts the throat.

We travel back to the camp, carrying the bodies of the panther and our warriors. I feel the ancestors beside me. Their arms support the weight of the panther.

I see the animal's spirit. Its long body walks beside us. Its shoulders bob as it moves, and it steps every bit as silent as it did when it was alive. It is every bit as fierce as when it was alive, but it holds no anger for us.

Trailley's spirit walks beside the panther. Her hands and legs leave misty trails in their wake. At one point she reaches out her hand and pets the beast's head. Her touch is not one of playfulness. It reminds me of the last chieftain's touch when he gave me the tribe's staff.

At the village, Mealza stands in front of the town's wall, her face veiled by torchlight shadows. As we approach, the widowed see the bodies with gasps.

I lead the newly widowed into the temple and bring the fires to life. The panther and Trailley come alongside us. The panther curls down on the other end of the fire and Trailley nestles herself against the cat's belly, beneath where the spears had pierced it.

It does not take long for the three new spirits to return. The panther and Trailley stand as they enter. The warriors' spirits walk to the other side next to the

panther. Horack bares his breast, and the panther sets its great paw across it. Torpin and Shelda each lay their hands on its head, then Trailley and the panther leave.

Together, our spirits sing the ancient words.

## Drinking Coffee with Caesar by Jonathan Dent

I remember the day I lost my life. One could say I'm being dramatic, but the scalding drops sliding between the brown mounds, dripping into a mug that says "Best Dad Ever" was the equivalent of *et tu, Brute?*ing myself. Almost as bad as when I actually started enjoying naps. But straining against change never holds it off long. The knives fall, so too must regimes, and so too must Caesar. Drink it black. As if enduring a slight bitterness will make me a martyr for my youth. The styrofoam senate spills the blood, and maybe theirs was an addiction too.

## Our Young Hearts

by Sarah E. Anderson

I'd rather drown  
in my brown, mucky  
bedsheets that are actually white  
like the Winter Palace  
that the Russian Bolsheviks stormed  
in 1956 or 1917 or 1410 or something  
because they were pissed  
about toilet paper and Jello shots being illegal  
and the Russian Mothers hated Birth Control  
since it made their Daughters fat.  
They didn't use guns  
because they're loud  
but they paid attention in algebra and physics  
and crafted crossbows  
from Cheerios and cottonballs.  
They would have won the revolution, too, if  
it wasn't for the damn wine stores.  
So basically, the Bolsheviks  
stormed wine stores  
and the Winter Palace got in the way.  
I bought a new  
pair of old  
jeans at a garage sale  
and patched a hole in the thigh  
I think of this while I wash the dishes.  
Really, I'm not sad.  
I just don't want to be fat.  
Inhale, never  
exhale  
the chill of the woods  
where I played on the  
prickly evergreen thistles  
with bare, cold feet.  
Me and my brother drove  
Hot Wheels over stained carpet  
until his friend came –  
named Brady Buss from Trophy Club, Texas  
whose mother's name was Misty –  
and a wire hanger  
caught on my foot and left a long, violent gash.  
They laughed  
because I was bleeding,  
and, from the kitchen window,  
I watched the bird nest  
that I only knew about.

a rose would just be another flower  
by Jessa Chadwick

Isaiah said God will set up a better name in his house  
mine means "God sees" and comes from a movie  
my brother watched of a mountain man on a mountain horse  
I remember how my nephew  
couldn't pronounce my whole name and  
how I don't like strangers to know  
Hagar said that God saw her sitting on a rock  
she gave the rock a name that's not mine

I. Silent Vespers  
by Stephen Briggs  
3<sup>rd</sup> Place Winner in Poetry

There is dust congealed inside the window pane,  
With pawprints pressed in the surface.

There is not any laughing  
Once the lights go out  
But there is the smell  
Of roasting  
Of pecans  
Of spices that linger too long.

There are shadows  
Cast from streetlights through windows.  
They think they are salt shakers  
They think they are a table  
They think they are needles  
And thread.

There are days when fog  
Lasts into the morning  
To paint the world orange.  
And there are mornings that last  
Long into the day  
Becoming sidewalk prophets  
Dressed in orange robes with crimson  
Veins in their eyes, and chins shadowed  
With coarse scrubble.

There is a smoke stained mirror  
Above a sink filled with water  
And shaving cream. A few fresh hairs  
Remain in the strainer.

That rusted lock  
The moss-stained ceiling  
Sunlight trembling  
With the gasping curtains.  
My friend, sit to my left,

Let the crescent moon lie  
in the bed, bringing  
shadows that linger too long.

**Air, Land, and Sea  
by Rachel Lowe  
3<sup>rd</sup> Place winner in Fiction**

Air Force rookie Peter Clemmings flew his Cessna as low as his commander would allow him, scanning the earth for movement. The cloud of dust had made for low ceilings and hazardous flying for the past two days, and even now the searches were risky. This was his third fly-over in the past five hours, and at this point looking for survivors of this atomic hell seemed ridiculous.

He wouldn't have even taken this last fly-over, but there was a growing crowd of people flocking to crumbled runways of Regan National Airport and things were beginning to get out of hand. People had heard relief forces were starting to search for survivors and came running, driven by mob-mentality and desperation. Peter couldn't stand them.

The crowds reached through the perimeter fences with filthy fingers, some attached to hands that were severely burned and peeling with rotten flesh. Some people thrust money in tight fists towards the pilots; while others stood back waving school portraits stored in wallets and framed photos from bedside tables. They screamed at pilots and commanders to search the hypocenter once more. Always just once more. Peter would surely find their son if he searched just once more.

Their wails and pleas hung frozen in the polluted air and they wet the dust with their tears, spit, and snot. They were prisoners, held captive by their damned optimism. The people seemed unreal as they clutched at the wire in their dirty clothes, with wounded bodies, and wide, pleading eyes full of despair and hope.

Peter couldn't shake the image of them as he flew north, noting what used to be the Pentagon to his left. He turned his plane slightly to the east and instinctually began scanning the

skyline for the Washington Monument. He found it in its new state, the bottom half in a prostrated heap, the top half blown into the side of the Lincoln Memorial. He made a loop around the monument, and for the third time noticed the president's stone head staring up at him with hollow, dignified eyes.

Peter had once boasted having the sharpest eyes in his unit, but his vision now swam with an inexpressible rage. His knuckles tightened on the controls, and he watched his hands lose what was left of their pallid color. With everything in himself, he loathed those soulless Russian animals with their heinous atomic weapons and intolerance of decent people. He wanted to wipe every last one of them off the face of earth. He wanted them to stare into the eyes of their decapitated government from the air.

Peter thought about flying one of the B-1 Lancers over Moscow, pressing the button to drop the bomb that would obliterate *their* capitol. He imagined the curved, colorful domes of St. Basil's Cathedral bursting in flames and raining fiery slabs on the heads of businessmen. He pictured politicians, waitresses, and swollen women grasping the tiny hands of future communists on chubby legs. He saw them all scattering with the descending flames, like ants under a magnifying glass. He pictured the hypocenter at the capitol, the atomic force peeling skin from muscle, melting fat off of bone, and setting blood to a brief boil before sending those spawn of Stalin back to hell. Let *their* families gather behind the airport fences. Let *their* babushkas offer their money and blood and bodies for hope of survival. Let *their* pilots fly an endless loop over a decimated wasteland.

A brief blotch of color against the grey ground interrupted Peter's fantasies. He slowed his loop around the Lincoln Memorial, fumbling for the radio button that activated his headset.

“Tower, this is Cessna 3412. I’m at 150 feet at the Lincoln Memorial. I may have found something.”

“*Cessna 3412, this is Tower standing by.*” His headset garbled.

He circled back around, staring intently at the spot. No movement. He grabbed his binoculars, and saw what appeared to be a flamboyantly crimson backpack peeking up from the ground. It was partially covered by something, which must have been how he had missed it on his previous flight. Peter couldn’t tell if it was concrete, dirt, or burned flesh covering the pack... but whatever it was, it wasn’t moving. Peter became aware of his quickened heartbeat as it dropped like a rock into his stomach.

“Tower, this is Cessna 3412. False alarm.”

Peter let out a loud sigh as he ended the call. He hoped his disappointment wasn’t too obvious to them.

October 12, 2019 was indeed, the greatest day of my entire life. I had been counting down the days in my planner for eight months, carefully drawing X’s in each little box and updating the numerical countdown in the top right corner of the page. I even forgot to take notice of my birthday on the tenth because I was too distracted by the dozens of circles I had drawn around *Washington D.C. Trip* written in bright red ink two boxes to the right.

I had taken a job sweeping my uncle’s Laundromat, picked up an extra paper route, and spent a laborious summer mowing cranky old people’s lawns to save up for the trip that my middle school academic bowl team was taking to the nation’s capitol. On September 31<sup>st</sup>, I sat crisscross on the living room floor and carefully counted out all my summer savings I had been stockpiling in an old coffee can in my room. I had an empty manila envelope beside me, ready to

be filled with my hard-earned money and delivered to my academic bowl coach first thing tomorrow morning. My dad sat across from me, looking quietly at the piles of crumpled bills, towering stacks of quarters, and colonies of sidewalk pennies.

*Eight hundred sixty seven, eight hundred sixty eight, eight hundred sixty nine, eight hundred eighty...*

I faintly heard my dad's voice somewhere outside the walls of my castle of concentration. "You know, son," his voice distantly echoed, "I'm really impressed at all the hard work you've done this summer. I didn't know if an eleven year old boy would be able to pull off everything you have and... well, I'm just really proud to be your dad."

*C'mon, dad. You know I can't handle sappy Hallmark movie conversations when I'm counting things.*

*Eight hundred eighty six, eight hundred eighty seven, eight hundred eighty eight, eight hundred—wait a minute.*

I jumped up and turned in a circle, scanning the floor for the change I surely must have dropped somewhere. I seized the empty coffee can and held it above my head, praying I would find some money miraculously stuck to its metal bottom. Some of those bills I earned in July were pretty sweaty, after all.... but all I got was my own distorted, yet strikingly clear, disappointed reflection.

Dad's bushy eyebrows furrowed, almost covering his eyes. "Samuel? Is something wrong, buddy?"

I sank down hard on my knees.

*This can't be happening.*

"I'm exactly one hundred and two dollars short," I said, my stupid voice cracking before I could stop it. My eyes were starting to mist and Dad's bushy eyebrows began to blur into his mustache.

Dad made a loud breathing sound, like a really big balloon letting its air out. I took a deep breath and tried to keep it together, but all I could focus on were the soft teardrops beginning to stain the bills still in my hand.

"I worked so hard," I whispered, unable to stop my quivering lip.

Dad just sat there slowly running his fingers over his mustache for a long time. "I'll strike you a deal, Sam. I'll float you the money," he finally spoke.

My head shot up.

*Don't you kid me right now, old man.*

Dad's lips curled into a big smile. "...*IF* you let me come along as a class sponsor."

I couldn't believe my ears. I lunged forward and hugged my dad around the neck as quickly as I could (Well, dad says it was an aggressive headlock, I say debatable./) before scooping all the money back into the envelope and running to call my best friend Andy.

I spent the entire month of September blowing off pre-algebra and reading biography after presidential biography behind my textbooks in preparation for the trip. At night, I studied maps of Washington D.C. and the national mall, highlighting the routes our academic team would take. On my twelfth birthday, my mom and dad presented me with a three hundred page book titled "Exploring our Nation's Capitol: The Academic's Guide to Washington, D.C.".

I now held that book in my hands; ignoring the crowds streaming around me as I glanced from the Lincoln Memorial, to an illustration of it being built in 1917, back to the memorial

again. The president sat stoically, with a dignified gaze resting on a strong neck and shoulders. It was everything I have ever dreamed of.

“C’mon, Sammy! There’s an ice cream vendor by the Reflecting Pool and she’s a HOTTIE,” yelled my best friend Andy. He began tugging at my sleeve, but I shooed him off.

“Just a minute, dude. I want to stay here for a little bit longer,” I said, trying not to break eye contact with Mr. Lincoln.

Andy shrugged. “Whatever, man. I can’t believe that you’d rather stare at a stone dead guy than a hottie with ice cream,” he yelled over his shoulder, being swallowed once again by the crowd.

I began reading a section on how work on the memorial slowed in 1917 because of the First World War, and was so absorbed that I almost dropped my book when Dad tapped me on the shoulder.

“Oops. Didn’t mean to startle you,” he chuckled, adjusting his ball cap and staring ahead at Mr. Lincoln, “Is it everything you hoped it would be?”

“You have no idea,” I said, dreamily gazing back at the president.

“Listen, I know you’re having fun, Samuel, but you need to take better care of your stuff. You left this on the bench where you and Andy ate lunch,” he said, handing me my bright crimson Roll-Tide backpack.

I grabbed it, hugging it close to my chest. I laughed a little and stared up at my dad.

“It’s not like we wouldn’t be able to recognize it, right?”

U.S. Naval Admiral Leroy Henry stood in the control tower of his aircraft carrier, looking through his binoculars at the shoreline twenty miles to the west. Beside him, White House Communications Assistant Wesley Whitaker stood shuffling his weight between his scrawny feet and shaking his papers with his bony, manicured hands. The Admiral kept his gaze steady on the shoreline, but he was approaching his twenty-fifth year in the service, and this seasick, Washington pencil pusher was quickly testing his patience.

Mr. Whitaker cleared his throat after several minutes of silence. "Shouldn't be long now," he muttered, checking his notes for information he must have read a thousand times by now.

Admiral Henry quietly lowered his binoculars and stared at Mr. Whitaker. He was a tall, lanky man with sandy blonde hair and a nervous, rodent-like way of twitching his facial muscles. If he were a sailor, he'd have been eaten alive before the end of boot camp. The only reason he was even on the ship was due to his direct relation to the First Lady and his family's incessant need to feel important. Admiral Anderson had difficulty discerning whether he was more irritated with Whitaker's undeserved job title or his inability to stop shuffling his damn papers.

"Are you restless, Mr. Whitaker?" the Admiral inquired smoothly.

The young man quickly stilled himself, clutching his clipboard tightly with self-consciousness. "Just a bit, sir. I'm wanting to be back on land soon to get settled into my new office."

The Admiral raised an eyebrow. "Got some paperwork to file, I assume?"  
"Yes. And it'll take quite awhile to get to the filing cabinet too," the rat man said becoming rather quiet. "Truth be told, Admiral, I've been feeling some trepidation over the move."

The Admiral returned his gaze to the shoreline, his hands clasping the binoculars behind his back. The two gazed quietly at the westward shore as the awaited bright flash caused them both to instinctually blink at the same time. The light gave way to the ball of fire, and the angry reds, yellows, and oranges climbed higher and yielded to the consuming pillar of black smoke. A powerful wave rolling from the direction of the shore shook the aircraft carrier, and the loud boom finally reached them.

Admiral Henry released a long breath he hadn't realized he'd been holding. He slowly put his binoculars back in their case. "Take it from an old sea dog, Mr. Whitaker. Eventually you become accustomed to just following orders."

Mr. Whitaker didn't respond, but only gave a slight nod as the two men watched the MQ-9 Reaper fly eastward and gently touch down on the starboard bow of the ship.

Admiral Henry noticed only a slight tremble in Whitaker's hand as he lifted his radio to his mouth.

"This is CVN-78 reporting. Mission successful."

## Word Play

### by Stephen Briggs

b0 = "Bits run according to the clock"  
 b1 = "A well-ordered fervor: mechanical in nature"  
 b2 = "Maniac in practice. Brilliant minds"  
 b3 = "Shape words with the struggle of a child."

```
b0 = b0.lower()
b0 = "From " + b0
b0 = b0[0:17] + 'to {X} ' * 3
myList = "bytes,data,Big
Data".split(sep=',')
['bytes', 'data', 'Big Data']
for i in myList:
    a0 = a0.replace('{X}', i, 1)
```

```
myList = "production ,pipelines ,in ,network
,together ,and ,machined ,stacks ,Minds
,Software".split(sep=",")
```

```
b1, b2 = "", ""
while myList != []:
    b1 = b1 + myList.pop()
    b2 = b2 + myList.pop()
```

```
b3 = 'i' * 3
b3 = 'h' + b3[0] + 'h' + b3[1:]
b3 = 'w'*2 + b3
b3 = b3[0] + 'e' + b3[1:4] + 'e' + b3[4:]
b3 = b3[0:5] + 'n' + b3[5:7] + 'n' + b3[7:]
b3 = b3[0:7] + 's' + b3[7:] + 's'
b3 = b3[0:10] + 'c' + b3[10:11] + 'c' + b3[11:]
b3 = b3[0:4] + 't' + b3[4:14] + 't' + b3[14:]
b3 = b3[0:3] + 'u' + b3[3:14] + 'u' + b3[14:]
b3 = b3[0:3] + 'r' + b3[3:14] + 'r' + b3[14:]
b3 = 'a' + b3[0:12] + 'a' + b3[12:]
b3 = b3[0:5] + 'o' + b3[5:]
b3 = b3[0:3] + 'b' + b3[3:]
b3 = b3[0:17] + 'd' + b3[17:]
b3 = b3[0:12] + 'f' + b3[12:]
b3 = b3[0:13] + 'l' + b3[13:]
b3 = b3[0:8] + 'g' + b3[8:]
```

```
b3 = b3[0:1] + '' + b3[1:4] + '' + b3[4:11] + '' +
b3[11:13] + '' + b3[13:18] + '' + b3[18:21] + '' +
b3[21:]
```

b3 = b3.capitalize()

print (b0, b1, b2, b3, sep = "\n")

Bits run according to the clock  
 A well-ordered fervor: mechanical in nature  
 Maniac in practice. Brilliant minds  
 Shape words with the struggle of a child.

bits run according to the clock  
 From bits run according to the clock  
 From bits to {X} to {X} to {X}  
 ['bytes', 'data', 'Big Data']

From bits to bytes to data to Big Data

['production ', 'pipelines ', 'in ', 'network ', 'together
 ', 'and ', 'machined ', 'stacks ', 'Minds ', 'Software ']

b1 " b2 "

Software stacks and network pipelines  
 Minds machined together in production

iii  
 hihii  
 wwhihii  
 wewhiehii  
 wewhinehnii  
 wewhineshniis  
 wewhineshncicis  
 wewhtineshncicis  
 wewuhtineshncicuits  
 wewruthineshncircuits  
 awewruhtineshancircuits  
 awewrouhtineshancircuits  
 awebwrouhtineshancircuits  
 awebwrouhtineshandcircuits  
 awebwrouhtinfeshandcircuits  
 awebwrouhtinfleshandcircuits  
 awebwroughtinfleshandcircuits

a web wrought in flesh and circuits

A web wrought in flesh and circuits

From bits to bytes, to data to Big Data,  
 Software stacks and network pipelines,  
 Minds machine together in production  
 A web wrought in flesh and circuits.