

# RAMIFICATIONS

Berry College Literary & Arts Magazine

In a new age

Full of new ideas

Survives only  
when the new

Cannot replace  
the old.

- GKT 1987  
Ramifications



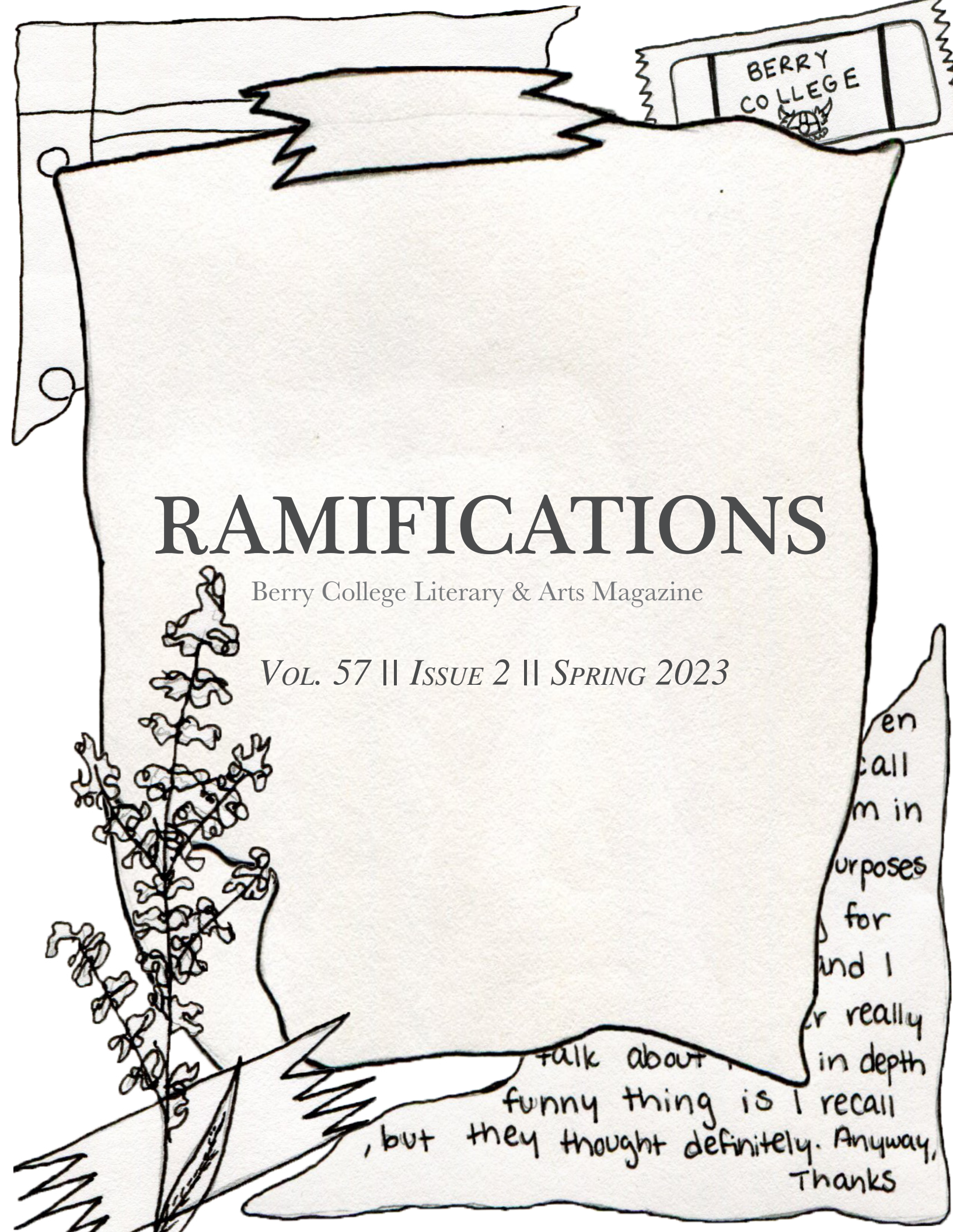
Spring

55 Years

2023

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en  
call  
m in  
urposes  
for  
and I  
or really  
in depth  
talk about  
funny thing is I recall  
,but they thought definitely. Anyway,  
Thanks



Hole in the Wall // *Quinn Dankesreiter*

## Tongue Twister

*Jessica Ford*

I am told that it is the way I speak, of course.

Down to the molecule of every word  
and the sharp edges that have fine-tuned  
and carved my syllables.  
Similar to the biting edge of frost on a house gutter  
when the earth has grown too cold to hold water.

It is the way I speak, of course.  
The inflection that would be no burden  
if a man were to hoist this voice  
upon his tongue.  
If a man were to carry this weight  
of inflection and diction.  
To him, it would be a strength.  
Oh, how he carries the weight so well.

But I am crushed beneath the heave of my own voice.

It is the way I speak, of course.  
How my tenderness and carefully chosen vocabulary  
which I have scoured over time  
and time again  
to force myself to memorize,  
every single word specifically picked out  
to ease the blow  
of how my tongue curls  
is overridden, trampled  
in the face and harsh contrast  
of the way I speak.

And so I am told that my vocabulary—  
all my crafted words—  
do not matter in the face of my brutality.  
My ever-turning and ever-violent expression.

I am told it cannot soften the strength  
with which  
I speak.

It is down to my diction.  
It is in my inflection.  
It stays lodged in my lisp  
and every single breath I breathe  
that comes across as too strong.

It is the way I speak, of course.  
And it would do me well  
to learn another way.

## A Child's Mind

*Faith Pennino*

i look at you and soft gold  
wonder  
blossoms in my chest  
and i know you  
and your favorite color is  
blue  
so i ask you in blue  
loud and with a smile  
but you can't seem to hear  
me  
with a faltering smile i decide  
to ask you  
in green  
because why not  
and you still don't seem to  
hear me  
the soft gold in my heart  
peels and tears  
my heart is heavy and  
beats quicker  
how many colors are there?  
maybe i can ask you  
in them all  
and then maybe you'll hear  
me  
wait  
please  
why won't you even  
turn and look at me?  
maybe i could ask you in red  
i know it's your least favorite  
color  
i turn and ask you anyway  
in red  
the color of my blood  
and heart  
and love  
and i ask you  
with the color that is every-  
thing i am  
the color you hate  
and now you finally look at  
me



**The Great Conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter // Caroline Lord**

## Passion Fruit

*Norine Moore*

The tough, leather-paper skin  
Hiding caviar of the tropics –  
Slippery seeds swimming in their wrinkled husks.

Passion fruit.

Years have passed since I tasted  
the sickly sweet, dainty fruit.  
Since I've heard the sharp ringing  
music of gamelan – an orchestra of bells.

I wept.

But only once,  
Thirteen and bereft after the first day.  
New school,  
New life,  
New “home”.

I remember.

My mother's whispered promise:  
“you can be whoever you want in America”  
Change your name, your clothes, your identity.  
Blend, but don't forget who you are,  
Or where you came from.

It is normal, this change,  
A part of growing up and becoming  
Someone new.

I left it behind,  
But why do I sometimes find myself  
Happy, anxious, loved,

And yearning for passion fruit?



**Pomegranate** // *Lacy Gilreath*



**The Beauty of a Maine Winter** // *Brianna Paine*

## In Gloaming

*Meredith Stafford*

Chasing horizon as it sets,

the tang of autumn  
stings my nose like ginger,  
earth still and benevolent,  
a soft cavity to sink into.  
Like the space a tooth  
used to fill,  
flesh tender and aching:  
sensation whole yet empty.

Asphalt beneath my feet  
turns to a dark river twining  
through mowed riptides of grass.  
Wrens and robins flit  
between branches, flurries  
of brown leaf-husk wings.

Two young bucks spar  
in tall grasses, antlers tangled  
between bodies, heads bowed  
in the shape of a heart.  
Their whitetails flick up and down,  
limbs and necks stretching, captured  
in a delicate tango.

Deer curl around them,  
bodies bathed in sunlight,  
warm and rounded like  
fresh loaves of sourdough,  
twitching an ear towards me  
and then relaxing.

The bog stench of still water  
stops me,  
conjuring images of fly larvae  
dancing across the muddy surface,  
thin flecks of life breaking  
from rice-grain eggs.

A quiet embrace of earth:  
the encroaching night sky  
becomes an exhale, soft and slow.  
My heart is tethered by  
umbilical cord certainty  
to the satin breeze, steeped  
in the gray-blue light.

Lightning bugs pepper the air  
to herald in gloaming  
as clouds fan out  
into a cotton ribcage  
against the pewter sky.  
Two geese cry out in tandem,  
wingspans overlapping,  
carrying one another into the night.  
I am an infant cradled inside its mother,  
floating in utero.

## A Tour Through an Appalachian Modular Home

*Quinn Dankesreiter*

“This tour begins with chickens. Various colors, one for every preference. They do not belong to this family, but they do certainly add character. Do not be afraid when they swarm you like raptors, they mean no harm. They simply desire your sweet, sweet breadcrumbs.

“This home does not have a garbage disposal. That’s why they borrow the neighbor’s chickens. Sometimes, they even eat chicken, when the Lady of the manor forgets that chicken shouldn’t eat chicken.

“Please watch your step, be mindful of the mud. This driveway hasn’t been paved or graveled since 2009 when the last inhabitant died. Yes sir, this house has a bonafide death count of exactly one! Please do not add to the count as you ascend the side stairs of this humble abode. The wood has worn through in a few spots, and the stairs look hungry for feet.

“Ladies and gentlemen, I know the landscape of Appalachia is enthralling to the human eye, I mean have you ever seen so much corn and poverty? But if you will please turn your attention from those far-off hills and instead focus on this copy-pasted modular home, it would be greatly appreciated.

“I believe the color is called duct-tape grey. The builders of this home call it that color because they held up a roll of duct-tape after a hailstorm, but that could just be hearsay. As we enter the home, please take a moment to appreciate the lawn ornaments. The current owner has worked hard to put out these live, laugh, love signs, and said I’d become a hood ornament if I didn’t mention it.

“Anyways, remember how I told you to wear boots? Discard them here. You can’t come in the house with them. It scares the cats, of which there are five. The owner considers them part of the household, but the IRS won’t let them claim the little hell-fiends on their taxes. It’s quite tragic.

“Once you discard your boots in this all-too-tight hallway, try to be polite and not hear the toilet flush from the next room over. Maybe whistle a little bit so you don’t hear the owner piss. That would be preferred. Also, mind one another’s limbs, it is easy to be tangled in such tight quarters.

“We open now into the dining area. This piece-of-shit table is an authentic, European an-tea-quew. The leaves of the table are marked with black sharpie from the grandmother of the current owner. Now, they cover it in dollar tree cloths.

“Ladies and gentlemen, before I turn your attention to the next feature of the home, I ask you not to scream. She looks scary but does not bite, and I assure you she is contained to her mortal form. But, if you look up on top of this cabinet, please note the delicate features of this vintage porcelain doll. The cousin of the owner when house-sitting said she heard the clinking of glass feet, but the owner’s daughter says she full of it, as the pendulum session assured her that the doll was neither haunted, nor possessed. But it does serve as an adequate guard-doll, nonetheless. The cats certainly don’t do anything quite so useful.

“Please do not lean too hard on the counters and especially the oven door. Far too many things are super-glued into place. Additionally, if you require a refreshment, please open the fridge door from the top, as there is no handle. Not really sure what happened with that one, to be honest. However, after fighting the door open, I assure you, you will be sorely disappointed. The Lady of the Manor is an “almond-a-day” kinda gal, and usually only drinks water and maybe a slice of lemon if she’s feeling adventurous.

“There was an attempt at an open floor plan when building this modular home. Therefore, a few of you crowding around me right now are technically in the living room. This house really wasn’t meant for more than 2-3 people. Anyways, the living room is composed of entirely second-hand furniture, which the owners tell people are antiques, mostly to make themselves feel better about being poor. Also, the fireplace is fake, and mostly just drives up the power bill.

“We won’t bother much with the master bedroom, though the master bath does have one of those fun and funky squishy toilet seats for old people. The woman who used to live here (who died) mostly slept in that room. At least we can deduct from her choice in toilet additions that her bowel movements were comfortable until she passed.

“The second bedroom is only temporarily occupied by the Lady of the Manor’s daughter. She is supposedly proud of the layout, but does report that a window directly facing a main road is a poor choice. Forgetting you didn’t close the blinds before changing and then hearing honking from the main road is not a pleasant feeling. At this point, she’s unfortunately sure that most people that live on this road has seen her tits. Nothing like community bonding, am I right?

“The last rooms in the house are the third bedroom, now cat bathroom and storage, and the human bathroom. Weirdly enough, the human bathtub has an unusually high lip, oftentimes making the daughter fall right out of the shower. She reports that she picks herself up, usually covered in discarded bits of cat food, because the bowel is right by the shower. Frankly, it’s a terrible plan and setup, but what other sane landlord would let someone have five cats? I suppose these folks take what they can get for \$850 a month!”



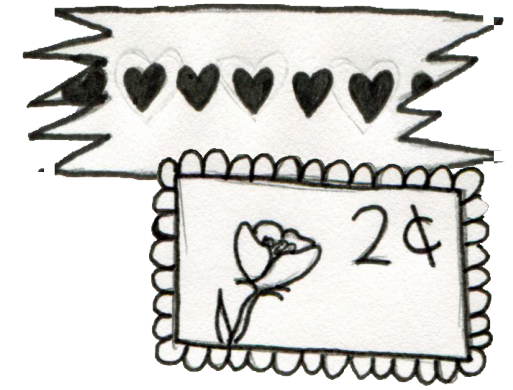
**Salthill Leap** // *Parker Luellen*

## Sonnet VI

*Ever Dagers*

The most precious blossom was gifted me,  
 One much like the evening’s golden silk;  
 The intertwining and outspread of thee  
 Burst and bled away: stolen heaven’s milk.  
 How lush and victorious it did bear  
 The most evergreen of all foliage—  
 Oh how dull, but so crisp, the borders; there  
 Lies no animosity on an edge.  
 The veins: so delicate! The curves: so soft!  
 To compare myself, I am a disease,  
 One that would tarnish the littlest loft  
 Like a sickle to the harvest with ease.

And yet this treasure I was deemed worthy—  
 “It is to you, I give this to”—dearly.



## Labrynthine

*M. Lamar Berry*

Compounding deceptions disguise old tracks as they overlap, memory’s faults, growing in layers.  
 Deeper I tread, cleaving through rooms until they  
 writhe together. They bleed together.  
 Wounds become walls,  
 the ouroboros  
 self-inflicts,  
 thoughts  
  
 stop,  
  
 drain,  
 canvas  
 endlessly.  
 At the center of  
 too similar infinities,  
 crystal seas run caustic with chronic lies. My truth died  
 mapping those dead ends, my faith dead with my head held under. Oddly, I still crave that touch.



**Balance** // *Camille Schmied*

## Easy Street

*Linzi Moore*

There's always an insistence that staff members dress up for the holidays. Managerial staff wanted them to appear festive—celebratory, even. Something about maintaining morale for the patients in order to distract them from their loss of typical annual traditions.

St. Patrick's Day was just two days away, meaning that the employees had been donning egregious green scrubs for a week straight. A few had gone the extra mile and taken to sporting shamrock headbands or golden beads, some took it as far as ironing small cartoon rainbows and pots of gold to their front pockets.

Amy's scrubs were not decorated in such a way. She had opted for a dark emerald rather than the offensively bright lime worn by her coworkers. Her pockets remained plain, her neck free of any tacky beads. Her superiors didn't mention it to her, but it was clear her coworkers found it lazy.

"I told him I'd pick the kids up from now on, I don't trust him to get there on time anyways." A wide-framed woman with leprechaun earrings leaned on the brick wall next to Amy. A nicotine patch was secured on her pale arm, a charming juxtaposition to the Marlboro clenched gingerly between her fingers.

"Yeah, I don't blame you." Amy replied absentmindedly, taking a puff of her own cigarette. She didn't find any pleasure in smoking. The pack of Camels in her car lasted her longer than they would any other smoker, but taking a smoke-break was one of the only ways to have a moment of peace at work.

"He left Bennett waiting outside in the parent pick-up line for half an hour. Marissa said he was bawling his eyes out by the time he actually got there. I called him that night and told him to piss off." The leprechaun earrings seemed to sneer in the sun at Amy, who was beginning to realize she had been speaking to this new nurse for nearly a week now without knowing her name. She didn't plan on asking.

The nurse took a hefty drag of her cigarette, and one of the party-store necklaces she had attempted to fashion as wallet-chain fell to the gravel. The green plastic of the small clover reflected the light in a way that momentarily distracted Amy from the complaining of the nurse sharing the bricks.

Suddenly, the idea of preparing the evening medications sounded like a relief, and Amy put her cigarette out under her sneaker, swiftly pocketing the fallen necklace when she leaned down to collect the butt. Without speaking another word to the woman next to her, she went back inside.

Amy crinkled her nose as she walked back towards her workstation, the bottoms of her shoes sticking every-so-slightly to the linoleum tiles. After a year of employment, she had gotten used to nearly every aspect of her job—apart from the stench. The automatic air fresheners did little to mask the perpetual odor of stale urine, boiled eggs, and bleach. She often scrubbed her skin raw in the shower at home to remove what was left of the unwanted perfume.

Every few hallways she would have to dodge an abandoned wheelchair, some of them accompanied by displaced patients. They drifted around the nursing home like ghosts, the images of the homes they left behind haunting what remained of their brains. Their eyes stayed glued to their shriveled palms, and Amy often wondered if they were lost in thought, or if all thoughts had been lost. The trickle of piss trailing behind the chair suggested the ladder.

Amy unlocked the door of the medical storage room and was pleased to find it vacant. She had been prepping her patients' medications early for quite some time now. Velcroed to the medicine cabinets were the dosage charts for each hallway, neatly arranged by room number and covered in childish stickers.

*Mr. Alan Howard, 313B: 15mg Razadyne twice daily w/ food*

*Mrs. Eileen King, 314B: 5mg Donepezil one daily w/ food*

*Ms. Harper Chen, 315B: 20mg Lisinopril, once daily w/ 8oz water*

Amy hardly needed to finish reading the rest of her clipboard, she had the dosages memorized for every one of her patients. Each hallway was named after a street in town—Maple Boulevard, Jennings Parkway, Naples Drive—it seemed cruel, though she hardly understood the word. She imagined the patients looking at the names of familiar streets and being confused as to why they weren't seated at their favorite diner or pulling into a local park to pick up their grandkids. It almost made her feel sad at times.

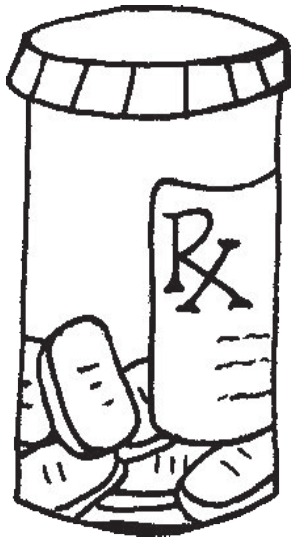


For a couple months, Amy's rotation had landed her on Vermillion Trace. In town, it was lined with expensive colonial homes draped in kudzu and private offices inhabited by people like financial advisors, or lawyers, or psychiatrists. Here, it was inhabited by those who could hardly remember how to spell the names of their parents.

The pills—mostly cognition-enhancing drugs or cholinesterase inhibitors—made tiny rattling noises as they landed in their respective plastic cups. The impacts seemed to echo against the tastelessly decorated walls of the medical storage room and reverberated in the front of Amy's skull. To a nurse, the orchestra of pill bottles and heart monitors becomes the background to a life once promised to be full of purpose. Purpose. Amy tried not to dwell on it most days.

The symphony of modern medicine came to an abrupt close when Amy reached the final name on her list.

*Ms. Cheryl Jules, 323 B: 20mg Namenda once daily w/ food*



After checking her surroundings, Amy gathered a single 20mg tablet of the medication from the bottle on the top shelf. Her movements didn't slow for a moment as she tossed the tablet into the garbage can by her desk and located a bottle of ibuprofen instead. To an untrained eye, the two tablets would be identical. Like the closing crash of a symbol, the pain-reliever ricocheted into the final plastic cup.

Amy closed the door behind her, and casually made her way towards Vermillion Trace. She repeated the same routine—knocking before entering, brief small talk, ensuring the patient took their medication, and leaving as soon as possible. She wasn't paid for hospitality, and it was likely that any falter of manners would be forgotten by the inhabitants of Vermillion Trace before their neighbor could swallow a pill.

As the numbers on the frames climbed, the cups on Amy's medical cart fell until only a single one remained—Ms. Jules.

Amy pushed past the purple beads that draped over the doorframe of 323 B and was greeted by gawdy tendrils of purple beads, outdated lamps, silk sheets, and stacks of dusty *Better Homes & Gardens* magazines. Amy could never tell if she found it more ironic

or unfortunate that Ms. Jules no longer had a home, nor garden. Today, she settled on ironic.

A broad smile plastered itself to Amy's face and her cheeks twitched from the unfamiliar movement.

"Good afternoon, Ms. Jules." A sing-song voice that was hardly her own emerged. The body on the bed shifted, causing the silk sheets to fall and reveal the patient, who could best be akin to a knockoff Blanche Devereaux.

When Ms. Jules first arrived two months ago, she would wake up every morning to do her makeup and hair. She would adorn her sunken skin with lotions and perfumes that smelled like baby powder, and occasionally slide on a pair of heels. Several weeks ago, she had convinced herself that her late husband was taking her out for an anniversary dinner and insisted that Amy help her shave her legs. Out of character for Amy, she obliged.

Most of the other nurses weren't fond of Ms. Jules. They said her reluctance to admit she was ill made her a stubborn patient—a rude one, too. They weren't as keen as Amy on being in Ms. Jules's good graces. Although she had never asked, she heard the rumors when Ms. Jules first arrived. "I heard she's lived in that big ol' house by herself ever since her husband passed."

"No kids, just a pack of Pekingese the neighbor took."

"Said he called the cops after he found her trying to uproot his garden. Said she was getting her chrysanthemums ready for a competition that happened six years ago."

Rumors aside, Amy was aware that Ms. Jules had never received a visitor. Every weekend, event, or holiday, Ms. Jules sat alone in her room while other patients were hugged by grandchildren and gifted foods that didn't begin as powders. On New Year's, she didn't seem too bothered—chatting with Amy about what the holiday was like thirty years ago, reminiscing on the silver cocktail dress she sported to the Times Square ceremony—by Valentine's Day, she had taken to staring out of her window. Amy watched her from the door

and couldn't discern if the change in her behavior was a symptom of reality or dementia.

"Abby? Oh, Abby." Ms. Jules feebly attempted to pull herself to a seated position.

"How are we feeling today?" Amy placed the medication on a tray by Ms. Jules's bed and began filling one of the woman's floral mugs with cool water from the tap.

"I just, you know, you're welcome. Hey, you, yes..." Her words trailed off into a slurred sentence of gibberish. Amy, unphased, returned from the sink.

The old woman's face neared closer to the color of her plastered walls every day. Only the purple of the varicose veins lacing around the perimeters of her jaw produced any hue. Her permed hair had grown out, producing grey roots and a rough transition into kinky spirals that reminded Amy of broom bristles. The whites of her eyes yellowed as they neared closer to her irises, allowing Amy to see the reflection of her own clownish grin against a backdrop of crimson thread and white eyelashes.

As Ms. Jules drifted back into her usual comatose state, Amy wandered around 323 B as though she was visiting a museum. A few portraits of Ms. Jules and her husband lined the dresser—as well as a photo of her infamous pack of purse-dogs—but there wasn't a single photo to indicate that the woman ever had a family. No one to leave her name to. Her stories of New Year's in Times Square. Her riches.

In the pictures, Ms. Jules was adorned in expensive diamonds and lavish emeralds. She stood in the front yard with her husband, posing like a figurine in a fountain. Behind them was the mansion they had infamously shared for decades. Amy drove past it on her way home from work occasionally and last week she noticed a sign for an estate sale erected in the Bermuda.

Pots of fake peonies and orchids were perched on the windowsill, placed meticulously as though they still needed the sunlight. Ms. Jules had brought her own curtains and they suffocated the room with heavy beading and mauve glitter. In her earlier days at the center, Ms. Jules would insist that Amy open the curtains every morning. Requests, and words of any kind, had decreased exponentially. The doctors were surprised that Ms. Jules wasn't responding better to such a high dosage of Namenda, but they seemed unmotivated to try much else. Unbeknownst to them, Ms. Jules's dosage of the drug had been meticulously decreased to 0mg for nearly two months.

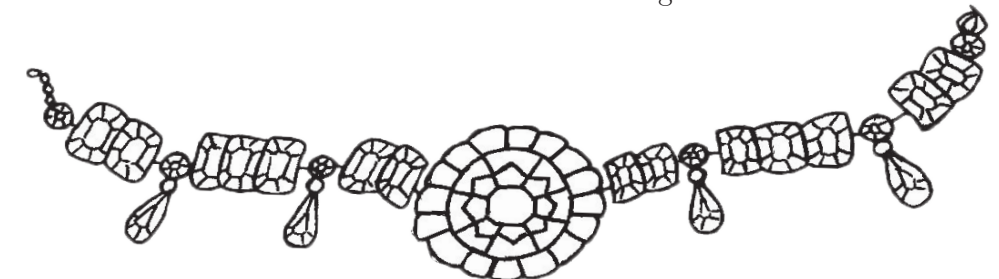
Finally, Amy turned to the large jewelry box in the corner. It was a finely polished wood, perhaps a mahogany. The edges of it were carved into ornate swirls, each crevice packed with a months-worth of dust. They made shadows on the walls that mimicked creeping vines of ivy, crawling further towards the ceiling at the night crept closer. Small panes of frosted glass decorated the front drawers, failing to conceal what Amy already knew to be behind them.

"Ms. Jules? Can I get you anything?" Amy nonchalantly called, her eyes glued to the entrance of the room. She already knew Ms. Jules was perfectly unresponsive at this stage of illness.

A few moments, and nobody passed through the hallway. Amy's hands delicately opened the golden knobs of the jewelry box, revealing every diamond, ruby, emerald, or sapphire Ms. Jules had ever decorated herself with.

A dancing mirage of thousands of dollars hypnotized Amy for a moment. From the collection of jewels, the sparkles of the boldest diamond necklace drifted across her skin. Gingerly, she slipped the necklace from its loop—likely the first time it had been moved since Ms. Jules began forgetting to put her jewelry on in the morning—and placed it into her back pocket. It was swiftly replaced by the stolen party-store chain. Amy stared blankly as the four-leafed clover adhered to the plastic beads appeared to wither.

She shut the door to the jewelry box and was faced again with the frosted glass on the outside. Through the fog, she could make out her own reflection. It smiled back at her—genuine this time.





## The Man Who Grew Corn

Abby Grace Shrader

*Corn is also called maize (from the original term - Zea mays).*

I wish I could have known my grandfather when he was young. There is a photograph, a school portrait actually, when he was in the second grade. It folds open on the back so that you can prop it up on a table. In the picture, he is making the meanest face, like he is about to tear into the person making him get his picture taken. It is the exact same face he would make at all the grandkids when he wanted to pester us. It's the same face I see on my niece all the time. On the back of the photo, he wrote his name — Howell. I stare at the scribbles, wondering how he held the pencil in his small, boyish hand to move it across the back. Howell.

*92% of the U.S. corn crop is genetically modified to be herbicide tolerant. This means that the weeds around the plant will be killed, but not the corn itself.*

My grandpa played football in high school. He played basketball for a little while, but being the quarterback for Sylvania High School was what mattered. His face would light up whenever I asked about those days. At my grandparents' house, the tv was always on the SEC network, watching football.

*Corn is categorized as a monoecious flower. The tassels (stamens) produce 2-5 million grains of pollen.*

I can remember sitting in their kitchen, at that round table. The floors are a pale yellow. It's cramped. There's buckets at our feet. I am shucking corn. It's summertime, I think. My grandma pours pans of creamed corn into plastic bags to freeze it for later Sunday lunches. My grandpa comes in, tan as can be, with another bucket of corn. He is wearing denim shorts, tall white socks, and a straw hat. His bottom lip juts out with chewing tobacco.

*There are three categories of corn: dent corn, flint corn, and sweet corn.*

When I was fifteen, I learned what dementia was. He was still okay, then, but I knew that I had to start talking to him as a person, not just as my grandpa. I started going to see him multiple times a week, and when I started college, I made sure to see him every other weekend at the very least. He wasn't as good, then. But I sat with him. I talked to him. I showed him pictures and asked him questions. At his funeral, my grandma squeezed my hand and said matter of fact, "You were his favorite, you know."

*Each kernel (800/ear) has its own silk which is fertilized by an individual grain of pollen.*

In a town of 2,298 people, everyone knew my grandpa. He drove through town in a green jeep with all the windows down, his dog sticking its head out the back. People came to his house to buy the corn he grew - ambrosia and peaches and cream.

*Stalks of corn can be tilted into the ground and baled for livestock bedding.*

I am walking into their house. He is sitting in his recliner. I try not to startle him when I come around the corner. He smiles when he sees me. In that strong southern voice, quick to the draw, "Hey gal." Even until the very last time I see him.

*Grain is the most common means of corn harvest.*

Before his mind became cloudy, he was always outside. He had the worst watch tan line I had ever seen. The sliding glass door opened and closed, opened and closed, as he went back and forth to his garden and to his shed. His garden was huge. It was in the backyard, between his house and what was his parents' house. Rows and rows of strawberries and squash and okra and corn. He walks through, wearing an Alabama cap, adding produce into buckets. I go out to join him, my bare feet slapping the ground. My mother warns me I am going to step on a bumble bee and it will "hurt like the dickens" but I ignore her. When I run up to him, huffing and puffing, he hands me a strawberry. He hasn't washed it off; Says it'll make me tough. I bite into it and it is the best thing I have ever tasted.



Soaring // Mads Muraoka



Spirit of Connemara // Mike Myers

## Blown Out Match

*Pen Name Pending*

That was my dad. On the news. An unknown man is the caption, and the name is repeated by the newsmen on Channel 8.

“He’s not unknown!” I wanted to scream at the tv. Even if he can’t hear me, I need to hear it. From the deepest part of my gut, with all of my soul, with all the voice I can muster, “He’s not unknown! That’s my dad! That’s dad!”

Mom turns off the tv before I can even unfreeze or react, four feet from the screen—forty feet. I want to cry, but everything is so much. I feel so full but so empty.

“Jesus,” she covers her mouth like she’s shocked—like she cares. I want to punch her in the jaw and watch her bleached curls hit the floor.

“If it wasn’t for dad you wouldn’t have your precious blonde hair!” I’m stuck to the floor, on my knees, four feet from the screen—forty feet.

“I didn’t mean it, you jackass,” she mumbles before she goes to the fridge and opens one of dad’s good beers. Like this is some sort of celebration. Like the sick woman she is. She chugs it and opens another and another. I stare at the screen four feet away—forty feet. That’s why he was looking for grandpa’s lighter. A pretty little golden lighter with K.S. engraved on it. It always reminded me of a locket, but instead of photos, fire. It’s still in my room, hidden under my bed.

I was scared he’d take up smoking. I guess he bought matches. I wonder if he was listening to “Rockin’ Robin” on the radio. That was our favorite song. We’d sing it while he drove me to school. I’d sing the tweets, and he’d sing the rockin’ robin. That drive was more than forty feet. He got laid off yesterday. The company was already dying when he got hired. He thought he could help, but he couldn’t. He and mom argued about it when he got home. They argue about everything. Everything. Mom wants a divorce. She was going to start to file for one next month. He was trying to convince her not to. This is her fault. It’s her fault. Her fault. Forty feet. She screamed in his face last night to get away from her. He asked what he was supposed to do.

“Run away! Drive away! Fly away for all I care!” was her response. This is her fault. She should know men can’t fly. They can’t fly. They’re not robins. The suit jacket in the closet is gone. Everything with his name is gone, all burned to ash in a trashcan. The car is in the driveway. He walked. He walked more than forty feet. I thought he was afraid of heights, forty feet is supposed to be too high. Hotel windows should have locks. Mom should have kept her mouth shut.

I should have woken up earlier. I should have gone into town with him. I shouldn’t be here four feet from the tv. You shouldn’t be forty feet gone. You shouldn’t have tried to fly. I’m crying now. My stomach hurts. I turn the tv back on. They’ve moved on to the next story. An unknown man leaped from a four-story hotel window and fell forty feet to his death is no longer playing across the screen. I turn the tv back off.



## Man’s Best Friend

*Brayden Kimbrough*

The echo of a gunshot rang through the trailer in the early hours of the morning.

The Boy’s father, the smell of whiskey still on his breath and work clothes wrinkled, jolted from atop the bed covers. The Boy’s mother, frying bacon in the kitchen and smoking a cigarette, stopped sharply.

The Boy, adorned with a cowboy hat and badge made of aluminum foil, stood over the body of the family’s Golden Retriever. Dark red blood oozed from its fur onto the carpet as the dog let out a high-pitched whimper. The Boy’s parents, arriving hurriedly, stood in shock over the body of the pet, still writhing in pain. The mother, holding back tears, grabbed the Boy by the wrist and dragged him away into his bedroom.

The father, noticing the handgun on the floor, looked at his dog who was softly wincing. He solemnly bent to the carpet, grabbed the gun, and spoke tenderly to the pet. A second gunshot sounded, followed by silence, and eventually, the chirping of songbirds.

In the days and years that followed, the Boy vehemently denied that he had fired the gun, but on mornings when the sun cuts through the blinds just right, he can still smell the pungent stench of ammonia and bleach. The Boy went on to become a successful accountant and raised a son of his own. His son would grow up wondering why his father never caved to his requests for a family pet.



**A Collection of Curiosities // Riley Larksworthy**

*\*All pieces are made entirely made of ceramic*



Straight Out of a Spanish Textbook - Seville, Spain // Addison Howard



The Comforts of Home // Chloe Spector

## Scene at the Barber Shop

Asa Daniels

I came once more to his barber shop, as it stood along Main Street in its brick box with its white detailing and arched door. Through the glass, I could see he was busy cutting someone's hair and heard the echo of the *plip* in my skull as I watched the small drip fall onto the cape. I pulled open the door and nodded to him and he nodded at me and I took a seat in one of the wooden chairs along the window, watching again as he worked. The man in the mirror looked similar to an onion in shape and his face was sandpaper, would be rough to the touch if I put my hand on his cheeks. In my daze, the barber finished and the man rose, giving a few bills.

"Much obliged, Thomas," the man said to the barber.

"Sur' thing."

I too rose, nodding once at the man as he left through the door and watched the barber as he went to the opposite counter in the back of the room and placed his money in a chest I couldn't see. The *clap* and *clip* of his dress shoes was the sound of horse hooves across the cobbled street, a fine horse the source of that sound. His face even took the narrow appearance of a horse's own, everything pointed downward to an invisible center. He motioned for me to take a seat.

As I did, he changed the station on the radio, though I couldn't tell exactly what it was playing. The noise garbled and sapped, as though a storm were coming through. I looked out the window to see the sunny sky above, a shiny blue. He hit the radio with his hand and it sounded out the music of a gospel song.

"Always a great time with the Louvin Brothers, am I right?" I said with a side chuckle.

"Sur' thing," he said.

He walked with his clop up to the mirror and looked with me, with that single nod of his head.

"I'd like a cleanup on the back, get me good for church tomorrow. Reverend Sheen is coming to visit from Coosantola county."

He nodded and I let him drape the cape over me and felt him tie the knot on the back of my neck. I could hear the chewing in his mouth. He leaned forward to the counter and grabbed the water spritz, soaking my hair lightly. He then leaned forward to the counter again and took up the comb and the scissors. We didn't customarily talk, he and I, so there was the silence of his building and there was the chewing of his mouth.

I knew it was going to happen, sure as the sun did rise and the Lord counted every strand of hair upon my body, and I waited in tension for it to happen. The moments that made up that suspended period of time were slow and dense, as though dipped heavily into a vat of molasses and then made to crawl upon a surface with too much friction. The inertia of time is a painful thing, all the more so unbearable when its stillness leads to something dreaded, somehow. I waited and I watched his chewing mouth, imprinted the image of his yellowed and darkened teeth in the little flashes of exposure they made every time he parted his lips a bit, watching and waiting. Then, it began: a thin, slimy streak of spittle rolling slowly down the corner of his mouth and towards his chin, flowing like syrup or wax down along a lit candle – any sensation of time now was suddenly quicker, as the motion of that vileness followed down his face and then turned inward at his chin, gathering, gathering, and gathering – until the forces of gravity let it fall down onto the fabric.

By now he was leaning closer to me, the chewing all the more loud and the drip of his tobacco spit all the more clear as it did a *plip* onto the fabric and splattered a little onto my own chin and cheek. The pool grew slowly upon the fabric and rolled down the cape. It felt warm, still. The stains of older dribbles were visible on this piece of worn fabric, faded little markers that told their own stories of how he had happened to lean that day or the haircut he had happened to provide that time.

He nodded up again, asking if that would do.

I darted my eyes towards my own face in the mirror and glanced along my forehead and along my side, then at the small piece of glass – without a frame – he held in his hand, slowly moving it left and right to show the back of my head.

I wished not to speak. "Could you do it a bit shorter along the upper backside over there? In the center."

He nodded once and then placed the shard back into his shirt pocket. "Sur' thing."

The chewing resumed before the clipping and I felt the chewing in the comb that went across my hair and I felt the chewing in the snip snip snip that felled my hair and I felt the chewing within and without, in the *plip* and the near inaudible grinding of his teeth. It was a thing like the wind that blows across the grassland, or like the soft cooing of a baby in a silent room with dim lighting, or like the song I recall in the midnight.

He leaned forward and put away the scissors and the comb, undid the knot of the fabric and shook it once, the remaining hair on it falling to the floor. I rose and pulled out my money clip, slipping a few dollars from it and placed them on the countertop. He nodded once.

"Thanks," I said and stepped out the door.



Fall Reflection // Arden Koch

## Ballad of the Changeling

*Connor Coltrane*

They called me Changeling,  
Because it seemed  
I was snatched from my  
Cradle and spirited away to a world  
Where things don't make sense.

They called me faerie-child back  
In the day,  
When the assault of a church bell  
Like a brass hammer pounding  
My skull was enough to sentence me  
For blasphemy.

They called me "wyrd," in the early years  
For failing to grasp the strange decorum  
Of the human world  
Where your word was not  
Your oath,  
And where every act and intent was couched  
In arcane courtly decorum.

And soon they called me,  
"Aspie,"  
"Autist,"  
"Neurodiverse,"  
A thousand pointless names

For a stranger to this land,  
A walker in a world that wasn't meant  
For me.

"Autism stole my child!" they've cried, like the  
Ones who bemoaned theft by faeries long ago.  
But if I am stolen, I am stolen  
From a world of my kind, a world I'll never belong to.  
Nowadays, I have many names but  
You may call me  
Changeling.



*Sunday Afternoon // Alexys Serrano*

## To Terfs, With Love

*Emma Buoni*

It is not your breasts that make you a woman  
But the heart that lies behind your ribs  
Pounding with life and vigor  
And, ultimately, love.

It is not the blood between your legs that makes you a woman  
But the blood in your veins,  
Carrying the power of your ancestors,  
And their heritage of strength.

It is not your pain that makes you a woman  
A concept like that cannot be based on suffering,  
But your happiness and life  
A life not only made of misery, no matter what they may say.

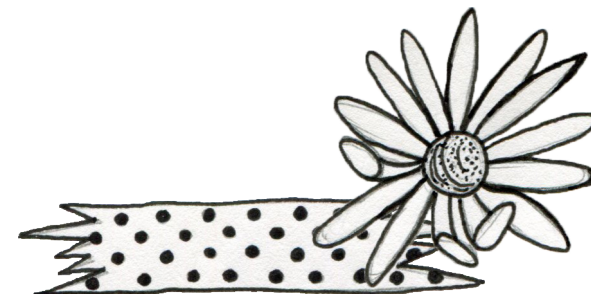
Women, fearfully and wonderfully made  
If not by a god then by the universe  
If not by the universe then by her own realization  
Without thought for your thin definitions.

“What is a woman?”  
Fine, then what is life? What is God?  
Define for me euphoria, grief, and hope.

You sputter, with drugstore lipstick  
(I’m sorry, but it’s true)  
“I know it when I feel it”  
I can only assume she does too.



**Miss Nora- A Reflection** // *Marry Harrison*







Heavenly Entrance // Katrina Bobson

## Eidolon

*Caleb Long*

The Disease took you, but not from me.  
It left your imprint still seeped into the mattress.  
Your silhouette still here without its head,

crouching in the corner by my nightstand.  
Silence filled hospice—drowning your wails for help—submerging madness,  
the Disease took root, making you the absentee.

I remember visiting that lifeless room, holding on to paper thin hands,  
those same cold and purple fists that cast stars on my sight—a redress.  
Your shadow still here, bludgeoning with conviction—without God

Who crawled His way into you and came out as bile, into the pan  
mixed with kitchen songs—those moments unmanned with unwelcome guests.  
The Disease sprouted through your mouth, making you the devotee.

Your false Messiah, the dull holy light, you didn't know you were already damned  
to your death bed—etherized, did you think you were blessed?  
Your silhouette saw me laughing when I carried the coffin,

funny how we tried so hard to reach you in no man's land.  
Our melting arms burrowing into Hell to grasp something already possessed.  
The Disease stole your soul—nothing left for me, or God.  
Your Blast Shadow now pressed onto every sidewalk—a residue I step over.

## Meet the Staff

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### About Us

Ramifications is an arts and literary magazine. We showcase student talent through our publication and strive to reflect the Berry community through our selections. We have been publishing our magazine for over 50 years, including genres such as poetry, fiction, non-fiction, essays, musical compositions, drama, and all types of visual art.

### Review Process

All submissions are compiled into one anonymous word document and given to staff members to vote on. Staff will vote on a scale of 1 to 5 and submit their scores to the Editor-in-Chief. From there, the Editor-in-Chief tallies the votes and presents them to the staff during a selection meeting. The highest voted pieces are discussed and final selections are made.

### Editor's Note



Ramifications turned 55 this semester. It's amazing to think about how much time has passed since the first issues and to wonder how much has changed - and has not - since 1968.

It is also mindbogglingly crazy to me that this is my last issue of Ramification. It is amazing how fast time has gone. I still imagine that my first Ram meeting was just a week ago, instead of seven semesters. I have met many amazing people during my time here - who have inspired, taught, and helped me throughout my entire time at Berry and with Ramifications.

To list just a few of the folks, there's Kevin Kleine, our advisor, Shannon Rainey, the editor-in-chief before me, and everyone on my staff, both while I was a volunteer and now as editor-in-chief. There are many, many more people I simply cannot fit in a short note, but I hope they realize the limitless gratitude I have for their support and encouragement. I am also excited to announce that Em Buoni will be our next editor-in-chief! I look forward to seeing the work they do and I know they will do an amazing job.

I give thanks to our artists and writers who have trusted me with the work that means so much to them and to share it with the Berry community. And I give thanks to you, reader, for giving us your time.

— *Asa Daniels*



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*Bailey Casey*



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