muse: def.

**muse v.** To ponder or meditate; to consider or deliberate at length. 2. To wonder. N. (Greek Mythology) Any of the nine daughters of Mnemosyne and Zeus, each of whom presided over a different act of science. 2. In general, the spirit, or power inspiring and watching over poets, musicians, and all artists; a source of inspiration. 3. (Archaic) a poet.

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*Cover Art: “Mediation,” by Darius Parker  
www.calhoun.cc.al.us/muse*
Educate Me

By Bette F. Terry

Educate, entertain, and elucidate me,
While insuring my viable commodity.
Infuse my meager little gray cells.
While ringing ivory tower bells.
Sweep the hollow, hallowed halls,
While posting ads on concrete walls.
Prove your worth to the academician,
While turning out the new beautician.
Refinish the pitted floor of the gym,
While praising Rudyard Kipling’s Kim.
Showcase the Hamlet of the future,
While teaching Yorick’s every suture.
Hawk the tome of Faulkner fiction,
While modifying soft Southern diction.
Recite the ancient mariner’s rhyme,
While espousing a nouveau paradigm.
Make a place for the high school jock,
While stimulating MENSA stock.
Be all things to every student,
While remaining financially prudent.
Tell me of my unique worth,
While for scholars, there’s no dearth.
In short, fill me with all knowledge;
A small task to ask of a community college.
A Day in the Mind of a Child

Amanda B. Roper

A winged flight to worlds unknown,

   A- dragonback,

The imagination wild has flown.

To a world of Queens and Kings,

   Of Lord and Ladies fair,

Where Knights fight and a minstrel sings.

To a place where it always snows,

   And children are at play.
   When will winter end?
   No one cares, no one knows.

To a time when dinosaurs roam.

When Mr. Rex calls him to dinner

   He'll wish he was home.

A winged flight to worlds unknown,

   A- dragonback,

The imagination wild has flown.
Anything You Say

Anything you say dear, working on a similar dialect slipped from a similar tongue, drifting in with shades of light. Oh, to be wrong—to be guiltless for a moment.

Anything you say, anything at all, would fall so sweet from your lips into the drinking hands of night whose grasp has lack of motive. Oh to be still—to be timeless for a moment.

In the foggy moonlight, by sunlit coast; anything you say would fall like morning mist. Anything you say would fall to the dusty table bedrock of my mind. Anything at all would fill my ears like strange music not heard in many years.

The resident silence that so much pervades my life would be gladly broken in little streams as your voice melted the winter. To hear your voices bathing in the meadows of my mind—the rendering of childhood, the visions of madness, the fire of fury, the calm of night; all fall from your lips in one stanza.

Joel Fry
A Place
By Matthew Nolan

A place together.
A place to see.
The flight of a dove,
gliding under a tree.

A place together.
A place to feel.
The bustle of people,
nipping at my heel.

A place together.
A place to hear.
The rumble of the airplane,
the cry of tears...

Our full tears,
emptying our hearts.
A bitter tearing,
that takes us apart.
Thus, tears come from tearing.

It is a story even the eyes can’t tell,
So, instead of talking,
The eyes drop a salty river,
between me and you,
That fills into an ocean,
and carries us
on a wave to...

A place together.
A place to be.\nAnywhere,
Dirt, Concrete, or the Sea!
Anything to be with thee.
Anything if I could see...
You with me.
Anything to be with thee...
I remember the light that glowed so gently
from the edge of the barn like slow music,
like peaceful air in the midst of night. In the still
calm darkness that shows no fear, under the milk-
moon sky, your transcendent figure stood between
heaven and earth, and your shadow on the soft pallet
of sod displayed a type of wordless love, a frozen
cadence beating in the long distance of night. The
visage of good and evil swimming in your eyes. While
wars in strange lands raged on, the solemn earth stood still.
The saber sits nestled in the closet amongst the clutter of old photo albums, clothes, and debris of days gone by. The crude iron scabbard is pitted and worn, a resting place for a high-ranking officer’s name and company.

As I pull the saber out of its iron sheath, the sound of metal scraping metal fills the air. The blade is so long; I wonder how even a large man could pull it out in his time of need. I look over the still shiny pocked blade and identify its intricate markings of the eagle holding its prey in its talons “E Pluribus Unum.” I flip the blade over to the other side, and my eyes catch the words “US” scrolled upon its side. My eyes follow up the blade to the basket where I see an eagle and the words US cut out. This basket is also protection for the hand. The handle, once covered with sharkskin and roped wire, is now dried cracked wood. I look at the blade again with a magnifying glass and read the inscription, “24,” and “1862.” I see my reflection in the blade looking back at me. In my solitude, I smile, thinking of my Grandmothers Thu-tah’su-cah and Sarah.

In that instant, I am proud. I say to myself, “Who Won?”

With my mind wandering, I travel to Grandmother’s house, a small one-room home with a screened-in porch. The inside is simple, with a black wood-burning stove placed in the middle of the room, saw-horse beds, and a table in the corner. I see bundles of flowers and herbs hanging upside down from the ceiling to dry, their ends tied with strips of cloth. I hear the rustling of pots and pans in the other room. I follow the sound and see a woman bent over wearing a calico dress and apron. She is looking for just the right pot to use to begin her daily routine of fixing supper. “Ge’om,” she says with a smile. Her long white hair frames her face, bringing out her coppered colored skin and her deep lines of beauty. She needs help, and I am glad to assist her. Grandma Sarah sometimes needed help lifting things. I never asked her why she had that far away look in her big brown eyes.

I am a little girl again, and we finish supper laughing and giggling. Grandma always made me feel good, and everyone treated this old woman as royalty. To me she was my Grandma, and I loved her deeply. There was nothing about this visit to Grandma’s that was different. We cleaned our dishes from supper and sat around the wood-burning stove where Grandma would sip her coffee and tell me stories. This was always my favorite part of our visits, and I would listen with amazement and excitement, thirsty to hear her tales about buffalo hunts, raiding parties, and treasure hunting expeditions in the mountains.

“Little girl, I have a story to tell you that I want you always to remember. This story is a part of you and our family’s history.” This is what she told me: “When I was a young woman, your Great Grandma Thu-tah’su-cah was in a battle called the Black Kettle Massacre. What I say to you is true. The history books do not tell the true story. There are many stories of bravery, and this is one of them.

“Our family and other Kiowa families were invited to Black Kettle’s camp to celebrate. The
celebration was for Black Kettle, a famous Cheyenne chief who had just signed a treaty for peace with the United States government. Our family was invited because your Great Grandfather, Chief Santanta, and Black Kettle were friends. The next day, they set out for Black Kettle’s camp. His camp was located along the Washita River in Kansas. It was a glorious celebration with singing, dancing, and feasting. Everyone was excited and happy for peace to come to the plains. It was truly a good day to die.

“Grandma Thu-tah’su-cah met some of her friends there that she hadn’t seen in a while. They celebrated well into the night. The next morning as the celebration continued there was a commotion. Several of Black Kettle’s scouts came into camp to see their chief. The scouts and Black Kettle went into his lodge. You see, the scouts were always protecting the perimeter of the camp, many times as far as three days rides away to insure the safety of the camp and give fair warning to the Chief in case of danger.

“Black Kettle and the scouts soon emerged from the lodge. Black Kettle announced, ‘The Long Knives are three days’ ride away and heading for the camp.’ He continued, ‘It looks like trouble and anyone who wants to leave should leave now.’ When others asked Black Kettle if he thought the Long Knives would war, Black Kettle said, ‘I do not think so because I fly a flag for peace, and I believe that the peace will be honored.’ Some left but many stayed behind thinking that everything would be fine and that the Long Knives would ride on by. The celebration resumed, and no one seemed too concerned with the Long Knives.”

Grandma paused to sip her coffee. She continued, “The camp had no weapons because the weapons were handed over as part of the treaty. Grandma said sure enough three days’ rides later, the Calvary came in sounding their bugles.” Grandma’s voice began to crack as she looked down at the floor. “The soldiers did horrible things. The community scattered looking for their children and loved ones. Many were shot and mutilated. Women and children were pulled screaming out of their lodges and killed. Many soldiers took the dead babies and hung them from their horses. It was terrible! Your Grandma Thu-tah’su-cah ran for the creek with her friend. Thu-tah’su-cah said there were bodies scattered everywhere. Running, a soldier on a horse rode after her. He knocked her down and drew his saber. He swung violently cutting the air and missed her. She ran for her life as she felt the saber cutting across her chest. Somehow she managed to knock the soldier off of his horse. Turning the saber on him, she killed him. Bloodied, scared, and in shock, with the saber in hand she made it to the creek. Her friend was there! They burrowed themselves inside the bank of the creek. During that harrowing moment, the Spirits gave Thu-tah’su-cah a song, a song she cherished and sang whenever she was scared. They made no sound hoping no one would find them.”

With tears rolling down her face and her chin quivering, Grandma Sarah said that she did not know how long Thu-tah’su-cah and the other girl stayed there.

Grandma Sarah said that when word got out about the battle, reinforcements were sent to Black Kettle’s aid. These reinforcements found Grandma Thu-tah’su-cah with her friend. Tired and half dead, they brought them to a medicine man who cared for them.

Grandma wept and shrieked as she sang Thu-tah’su-cah’s song. I felt angry and hurt. “Why?” I kept asking over and over again. Is this why Grandma Sarah seems sad? What did
honor mean? What did life mean? Could anyone answer these questions?

Grandma finished her song and said, “Now this is your song. It is a good song, for whenever you need help or you are scared, sing this song.” I did not want to. I was mad. I wanted to get that soldier that hurt my Great Grandmother. She had been only a young woman!

Grandma got up and went to her cedar chest that was against the back wall. She opened it and pulled out a long metal sword. She came to me and said, “This is the Long Knife that was Thu-tah'-su-cah’s from that battle. It is yours. Do not forget the story I told you and the song I’ve given you. I am proud of you little girl, don’t you ever forget that. I want you to tell this story to your children and their children. It is what will keep us alive.” I did not sleep for several days after I was told the story. I cried and was scared of the saber. It was Custer’s 7th Calvary who pillaged Black Kettle’s camp in 1864.

It is 1999, and I am still haunted by that saber. I have been offered money for it as it is rare, but I will not sell my family history. I see myself in the reflection of the pitted and shiny blade. I see my Great Grandmother, Grandmother, Mother, and my own image reflecting back at me and truly wonder, “Who Won?”
And so we sat.
Each looking away to hide the tears we cried for
each other.
He could break my heart
And make my day
In the same moment.
Only his soft touch, his soul-filled eyes
Could heal the pain they had caused.
My poison is my antidote.
My soul screamed for his touch,
Begging him to know me.
He heard my silent cries
And soothed me with an angel’s caress.
And I began to live again.

Tracey Sykes

CANCER

Vicki Ramsey

He parades a pleasant smile
As if all is well with the world
Despite having become a new frontier
Where pilgrims migrate and settle.

His body now stands vigil
Like the lady of the island
Receiving foreign families
Providing the resources
Upon which they thrive.

Within his fertile territory
They multiply like rats
Annihilating the natives
Exploiting the environment
Until little remains
Of the harboring host.

Only behind sympathetic doors
That recall virgin growth
Does he liberate oceans
Of anger and despair.

Shattered Dreams

Joseph Lowery

countless dreams are shattered
scattered all across the floor
slivers of lost hope
and after all what for
carefully constructed futures
that will forever cease to be
the only thing to hold on to
are the stale memories
when futures become the past
and the past goes unclean
you can hear them all shatter
dream, after dream, after dream.
Fire Exit

by Michael Pollick

For all the men in the Disabled Veterans of America.

Do not whisper near them, sweet children, for war is loud.

Men who served with General Anzio
Find time for the occasional Bingo
And find that corn on the cob can be quite the challenge.

I am sitting here among these men with steel
Feeling like I haven’t defended a bloody thing
And discussing the weather like it really matters,
And avoiding direct eye to wound contact
As if he weren’t aware that something was missing.

I steady my plate of civvy rations, chicken and barbecue,
Presented by the galley wives and
Blessed by a man dusted off from Iwo Jima.

I am a fake and a fraud and a phony tonight
Surrounded by real men, with real stories
About fish fries and city council requests,
Moving crab-like towards the banana pudding

Tonight I shook the hands
Of the luckiest men
On the face of the planet,
And felt like something inside
Was going to fall apart any minute now.

Do not stare directly into the flare, dear children, for War is patient-

It invites
us all
to
meetings...
Funny How

By Charity Campbell

Funny how...
Funny how life passes you by,
And doesn’t leave you time to cry.
Because we wish to grow up so fast,
We soon wish for the past.
But time goes by quicker than thought.
It is like this more often than not.

Funny how...
Funny how we all begin life as friends,
And when we grow up,
True hatred begins.
Because when we are very small,
We love one and all.
As children it is not color of skin,
But inside where real friends live.

Funny how...
Funny how we all look for more,
Than what can be found
Through our own front door.
And we always wish to find,
Something more than what’s in the mind.
And things we seek in another place,
Are usually there in front of our face.

Funny how...
Funny how women and men
Look for love around every bend,
And look for complete perfection,
Instead of the inner connection.
And in the end when they lose out,
They scream, yell, fuss, and pout.

Funny how...
Funny how we put blame on others,
When things don’t go just right.

We yell, scream and fuss at them,
And don’t understand why they want to fight.
After all, it’s all their fault,
Who’s else could it be.
If you only look inside,
But nobody says it’s me.

Funny how...
Funny how I can write all this,
And never bat an eye.
I point fingers at everyone,
But mostly I point inside.
For when we find our badness,
Our goodness starts to shine.

Illustration by Darius Parker
Photos by Nancy Bates
HIDE AND SEEK

By Vicki Ramsey

bout the end a dog days
an school comin up shortly
IT countin to a hunnert closed eyed
an all us kids runs n hides n holds our breath
tryin not to bust up n be a dead giveaway
but we jus keeps on runnin
jimmy n me
cross the alley to the next block over
getta dog to barkin coupla times
an jus keeps runnin
arms n legs flyin
an us getting sorta tangled together
till we fallin down laughin behind some bushes
an we laugh n laugh till we kissin on the mouth!
right there in the spiders webs an stinkin a sweat
then gets all quiet like cept breathin hard
till IT hollerin olly olly income free
an we walkin back to base real slow
like a secret or something
Immunes

by Michael Pollick

and with each passing day
he shoulders the weight,
as if he were the only strongman
left in his own heart’s circus-

there will be more stiff breezes,
and more Spring blankets to chase;
but there will be no more Maggies
to catch them on the fly.

and with each passing year
he cradles the memories,
as if he were the only gatekeeper
left to tend the garden.

there will be more silent dances,
and more Summer chances to take;
but there will be no more Maggies
to seal them up good and proper.

and with every passing moment
we carry the burden of proof;
as if we were so immune
to such as such...

In These Dim Hours

By Joel Fry

As I lie here, soft pillow under head,
hearing all the busy cars spin away from a
single point, I am alone in the utmost way;
Alone in my immense freedom, miring in the
pool of melancholy. No great thunder will split
this night, no thought of fury or passion, no emotion.

As I sit here slowly sleuthing the last cigarette
knowing I will never quit, an overgrown image of
a textbook drifts in my mind. It lingers a little
then is gone. Beyond these impending walls
a leaf floats in a sea of cool air. Clouds like ice
cubes melt in the dark hue of the stratosphere.

A lone image of Isaac Newton arises across
the Cumberlines of my mind. He knew times
like these. The constant barrage of condemning
voices milk slowly in my ears. They fade only
slightly in the waning hours, then disappear into my
dreams.
I would give my heart to make yours light
I would give my wings to help your flight
I want nothing more than to see you soar above
Like I know you will someday.
One day dawn will break
And things once hidden will become known
And you will find the will to make your time your own
And you will know peace.
But if that day is not tomorrow
Or even the next,
Keep the faith.
For the day will come when your bare feet run through fields of passion flowers
And your soul will shine like the sun,
Warm like summer rain.

*By Tracey Sykes*
I lie beside her in bed
dressed in her damp sheets.
The sheets feel warm from our movement.
I breathe heavy from my chest and not from my face.
She breathes heavy from a smile on her face.

She bounces out of bed to get my water.
I turn on my side and stare at my reflection in the window.
It is a picture of a jack-o’-lantern.
The cold night air seeps beneath the pane and cools my body.

She returns and sits on her bed with a glass of water.
I turn from the window to her shining eyes and hopeful face.
My lips can’t open to kiss
or to talk
but to sip the water only.
I turn on my side again towards the window
and blindly hand her the glass.

Soon she will snuggle up to me.
In time
She will leave me
because I can’t feel
because my back is always to her
because I am a jack-o’-lantern
in late December.
Love and Lagniappe

by Michael Pollick

This is how easily two stiff souls can learn to bend,

And pivot around the mulberry times

Like dancers, defining their time and space.

I find my portion has mingled with your portion,

Losing nothing in the exchange,

And leaving all doubt in its wake.

This is how perfectly two wounded birds can learn to sing,

And sweep away the ghosts of the hunters

With authority, not wanting for anything,

I find my journey has intersected with your journey,

Losing no ground in the meeting,

And abandoning all fear in the flight.

You are in word and in spirit my certain Ballerina,

And I celebrate our dance every day.
ON DUTY

By Vicki Ramsey

I rolled down my window and railed
At her innocent hold on her son,
Her cooing and bouncing
Him on her knee
Naively awaiting the green.

She glanced at my pallor,
My starched white cap
And at my red mouth spouting,
"Strap that baby down
In the back seat right now."

She rolled up her window
And her eyes.
She hadn’t seen the blood on my shoes
Or heard the mother’s guilty cries
Just minutes before
My shift should have ended.

Oven

By Michael Pollick

I see in her mottled skin
such visions
of dishwater pain,
The desperately overturned
second-hand furniture,
stripped bare of our lunch money.

Here in the crispest of mornings
lies purpose- in oatmeal, in Praise the Lord,
in sitting still while the tea boils;
Here in the emptiness of my third grade,
she is free to be trapped in polyester,
Free to consider all the worlds
her hands have had to make
from scratch.

(He is a forgetful bastard this morning,
All caught up in his steering gears
Without a drop of change.)

So this is what warmth can be,
as we huddle by the gas oven for heat,
and stare holes through the blue flames.

She is not my mother this morning,
She is a scalloped-skinned mutt,
Carefully trampling down the circles
where she may find tea-stained redemption.

I would tell you more,
but sometimes yellow trucks
stop by,
to rescue small children
from all matters human...
Five disabled dollars later, this man is cleansed-
Briefly allowed to borrow some human sunlight
On another stranger’s bench.

His heart is now as hard as a claymore,
Pointed at some forgotten enemy,
Beating eight to the bar like some slopehead jukebox,
Pulsing with the bagged donations of o-positive neighbors back home.

The barber sweeps away the remnants of this man’s raincatchers;
He knows how close they were to being brothers to the dragon-
He has breathed its jellied fire before;
He shut that door with a shiny trade school license,
His talk gets smaller as the years allow.

For six hungry weeks, this man could be Westmoreland himself,
Safe in the knowledge that anyone could love him;
He could limp and clang with the best of fatted Rotarians,
Eating the center of the rubber chicken every Monday at twelve.

His neck stiffens in the breeze with the steady burn of Pinaud’s Tonic,
He has become temporary master of all he can remember,
He rises to greet his brethren with a one-legged kiss,
He embraces the illusions of a town that evaded him.

(I gave him a cup of water, and he spilled it all over the place.)
PORTRAIT BEDECKED

By Vicki Ramsey

She wears her lost lovers
like battle scar jewelry
14-carat bold and carbon
facetted as insect eyes

Bound hand and neck
by bangles and chains
she shimmers and rattles
like ghosts in filigree cocoons

Medallions for bravery
alchemized from spit and bone
relics of love’s casualties
and every arm she could not adorn
Photo by Laurie Hargrave
Storm Shelter

By Matthew Nolan

I dance a shake of terror,  
as the rain pounds out it’s beat.  
This underground cement closet reeks of stale water heat.

I perch my body on a rotten wood bench  
stuck between two cement walls.  
I squeeze myself into a sponge ball.  
My knees press against my ears  
to seal out the water and muffle the crackling thunder.

Even on this perch so high,  
the flood creeps up my feet  
to my thigh.  
The rising water tickles each hair.

My spine curls up and out.  
I pucker my lips like a water spout.  
Water indeed  
as this box folds inward  
and I taste stale water on my tongue.

The rhythm of the rain is rapid shelling with a chorus of thunder.

My joints ache in this tight ball.  
My breath swiftly moves ripples of water from my lips.  
Now my breath gurgles with water.  
Only my eyes are left to see lightening flicker  
with my quickening heart.  
The water consumes all my breath  
and then my eyes.

My body unravels from a tight ball  
and floats softly with open arms  
to the bottom of this cement closet.

All is silent...  
All rain, thunder, and lightning.
Illustration by Darius Parker
The Eternal Outcast

(A Meditation of Merlin)

by Amanda Roper

In my life I have been many things: a dreamer, a druid, a sorcerer, mentor and advisor to the King, but I have forever been and eternally will be an outcast. Even now in death I am alone. The only home I have ever had has been the solitude of the forest. It is even now in my tree-tomb, which stands alone in this clearing.

From my earliest memories, of running free as a wild boy, until now the forest has been the only place I have not been forced to flee. I was, and am now, a hawk, a hobby, a Merlin. Master Robin tamed me, taught me. He returned my rightful name. He was the only father I ever had, but I did not understand my powers and could not save him and his family. I lost everything when I lost them to the flames.

King Vortigern was grateful for my help. Without me, his castle would have fallen, lost forever to the hidden waters. However, he feared my prophecies and returned my help with swords and the teeth of dogs.

I fled to the forest; there I met the wodewose. They took me in, but even among the outcast I was an outcast. Arthur was among them. He was a beautiful, fearless child. He and I alone escaped the bloodbath caused by Vortigern’s men. It was then that I saw the destiny of this wild cub. I named him Artus; he became my son. He never feared my powers, nor did he question them. He alone trusted me. He alone loved me.

I’ve grown old. Arthur has made his journey to Avelon. Viviane is my legacy. She was my destruction. Camelot has fallen, but Britain stands united. My time has long since come; my work is done.

Based on Jane Yolen’s Young Merlin Trilogy.
THE BOOK BURNER

By Vicki Ramsey

Says the smell turns his gut
but he burns them anyway
reciting, “I hate them rabbits”
in vain attempts to divert the smoke
from his sun-jerkyed face.

Hard hands of honest toil scrape
years of sweat from a forehead
more furrowed than the fields he ploughs
as recklessly as his own daughter.

He’d found them under her mattress
along with the flashlight from behind the door
used for taking aim and blinding night strangers
that ‘got no business nosin around’.

Through road map eyes
that never traveled pages
or ventured upon tender scenes
he watches the evil return to ashes
no Phoenix dare rise from.
The Forgotten People

By Charity Campbell

As the lights of the city,
Sparkle and dance.
Nobody remembers the forgotten people,
Who were never given a chance.
As people live their happy lives,
With love and family.
Not a thought is given to the forgotten people,
Who never knew the need.
As night falls down on the world,
And stars from heaven are clearly seen,
Who are the forgotten people,
Who never got a chance to be.
When the sun is out on a summers day,
And everyone comes out to play.
Where are the forgotten people?
No one bothers to say.
Driving down life's highway
In a brand new car.
The forgotten people are behind us.
Look back,
Their not that far.

Photo by Laurie A. Hargrave
Now!!

by Jeremy Franklin

When the day comes that your hands have grown idle, 
Call the eternal watchman and let him know that it is time. 
When the day comes that you wish only to sit complacently, 
Call the eternal watchman and let him know that it is time. 
When time grows slow and fades into eternity, 
Call the eternal watchman and let him know that it is time. 
When you complain of nothing to do, 
Call the eternal watchman and let him know that it is time.

Go forth my friend and live, 
For tomorrow may never come. 
Try that which you wish to do, 
For you might not try again. 
Dare to attempt... 
For even the failure leads to new things. 
Be yourself now and always, 
For time allows only that.

Go now. 
Be now. 
Do now. 
Love now.

LIVE NOW!

Photo by Nancy Bates
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Current and former Calhoun students are invited to submit poetry, short stories, essays, photography, art, and other creative work to MUSE for possible publication. Work will not be returned, so please retain a copy. Mail work to MUSE, c/o Calhoun Community College, P.O. Box 2216, Decatur, Alabama 35609-2216.

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