

PAGES D'ART

FRANCOPHONE LITERARY & ARTS JOURNAL

LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY

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Editor's Note

For many years, our university has been home to a vibrant Francophone and Francophile community, largely thanks to our top-tier Department of French Studies. This unique bilingual literary journal is continuing the French tradition at LSU by encouraging appreciation and production of Francophone-inspired creative works.

Pages d'art evokes the multi-layered nature of the word "art" by featuring literary works along with visual images. This debut edition highlights poetry and photography, including references to other art forms.

I invite you to explore these pages for an aesthetic journey through the Francophone world, from Arnaudville to Africa to Annecy. On the way, you will arrive at a fuller understanding of our common human experience. After all, isn't that what art is all about? Exploring our existence, our joys and pains, our place *à la recherche de la joie de vivre*. May you find a glimpse of *ce que nous sommes* within these pages of art.

Christine Pyle

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BLAKE STEPHENS

EVERYMAN A KING

Our backyard is the Mississippi river this morning
and if I step into it I will drown in its waters.
I try to hold my breath but your voice on my neck spooks me
and I gasp for breath, tasting the wet air.
We squint, searching for the oak tree
and see The Kingfish, standing on the River Bridge
pointing at the far shore and shouting,
“God don’t let us die, We have so much left to do!”
And from the floodwaters below, the fish leap up
beating their fins on pecan shells and chanting,
“Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité!”
They slip into the creaky Boat of Hope,
a compass leading them through their calm blue sea,
and suddenly I smell death.
“Can’t they see with their whining eyes,”
you say, still breathing on her ears,
“Frottoir, these fish will drown in the undertow
or I’ll be damned.”
Turning to stare at you, I reach for my fish-skin,
pulling it over my head and down to my ankles.
“I knew from the sweet smell of the marsh this morning,
that today’s sun would rise with drums in hand,”
I say as the cadence reels toward us,
and I join them—
a true fish this time, scaly, slimy, and mauve.
We paddle our boat to the river bend
where the current is strongest
and poke holes in it and slip through them,
enlisting in the ranks of the swamp.

frottoir: a washboard known for its use as a musical instrument

STRONGER SWIMMER (RIVER RIDGE)

Daddy took me out to the levee to see the river's ridge,
and we climbed the tower, the wet metal ladder
and sat there, over the sinking sand.
He said I almost died here, in the pull of the Mississippi, Mississippi,
and daddy was a stronger swimmer than me.

Claire and me walked barefoot underneath
the mulberry tree.
She said she didn't like the sour flavor
that stained her purple feet.
When Rosie found a dragonfly fossil
under the rotten balance beam,
we raced down to the old canal,
but Rosie was a stronger swimmer than me.

I didn't walk near the railroad tracks,
where the boys flattened pennies
and burned brown leaves.
When I sleep walked out the creeking backdoor,
there was water in the street.
Broken pecan shells floated in the backyard floodwaters,
Mississippi, remember, you're a stronger swimmer than me,
save me.

'Cause I've been caught in the pull daddy said of the Mississippi,
and Claire and Rosie, Claire and Rosie have grown away from me.
Metal tower, sinking sand, don't get too weak for me.
Standing on the river's ridge, daddy, you're a stronger swimmer than me,
save me.
And daddy, you're a stronger swimmer than me, save me.

IKANGA NGOZI TCHOMBA

VIE SANS ESPOIR

Comme si nous n'avions plus d'âme humaine
S'envolait de plus en plus l'espoir de vivre
Dernier sentiment que partagent les humains
Rien autour de nous n'en donnait plus un seul
Tout n'existait plus, même le monde lui-même

Comment en avoir encore un comme espoir
Dans une ville où, en rebelle grave, s'imposent
Des eaux que personne ne peut contrôler
Belle de sa nature, toute la Nouvelle Orléans
Carrefour australe devint un vaste stade sans pareil

Seuls des cheminées comme têtes visibles
Des quelques pas des eaux sur toiture nous voici
Vite pareille à l'aiguille de seconde sans pitié
Elles s'approchaient. Quel prochain espace?

Ces eaux fortes et écumantes en perte de vue
Qui trois jours durant sans aucun secours
En habituelle nature se transformèrent
Quel salut futur ? La noyade, la mort.

Regards et mains levés au ciel criant secours
Aux pauvres oiseaux en vol enviions le sort
Pourtant à jamais insouciant et contents
Voltigeaient librement et de la grandeur humaine
Apparemment se moquaient nous voyant
Incapables dans notre orgueil vidé mal perchés.

Ô pauvres oiseaux, que grands vous êtes, dis-je
Un seul moment dans vos ailes, mon salut !

En quelle langue les leur dire ?
Un simple geste les fait écarter de nous
Solitude dans le malheur. Humains !

L'objectif était différent !
Les hommes le salut
Les oiseaux la proie

Une descente dictée par l'odeur des morts
Faisait pour eux la fête sur nous et nos biens
Sous un ciel libre de nous voir en péril

Notre père qui est aux Cieux !
Notre père qui est à W... !
Notre peur qui est dans nos cœurs !
Notre mort qui avance vers nous

Les eaux de la vaste Mississipi !

CE QUE NOUS SOMMES

Planète des menteurs et menteuses
Quelle grandeur est la nôtre
Humains !
Supérieurs aux bêtes et plantes
Nous nous réclamons !

Intelligents grâce à la parole
Maîtres de tout nous sommes
Du mensonge aussi !
De la mort surtout ! Pitoyable !

Nous nous mentons
Dans nos amitiés
Dans nos amours
Dans nos contrats
Que des traités signés
Aucune réalisation
Traité éphémères
Race de signataires !
Perdu le poids de la parole !

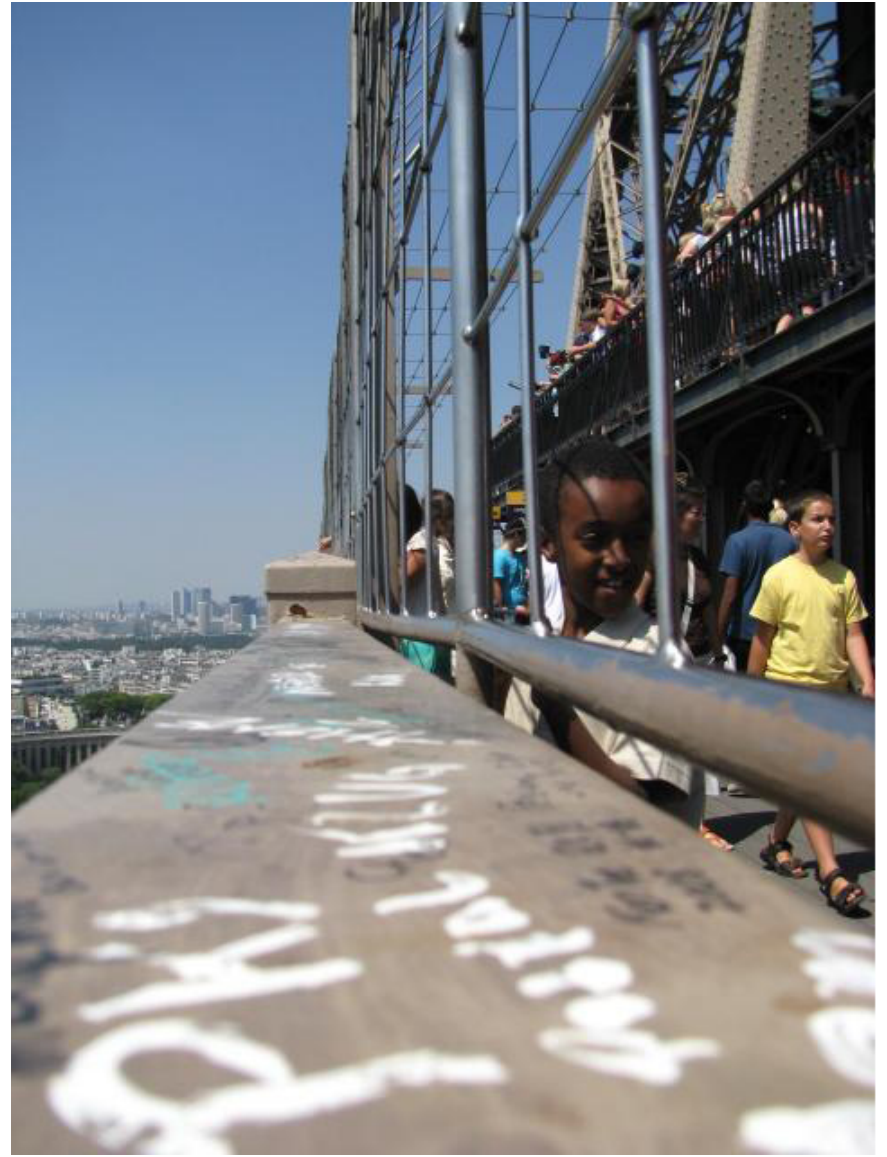
Disciples du mensonge
Esclaves de l'argent
De nous s'éloigne la paix
Des guerres nous définissent

En déséquilibre le monde
Faim et misère partout
S'écroule-le monde
L'homme s'étiolle
Bravo à nous-mêmes

Bêtes et plantes nous guettent
Se moquant de grands en silence
L'équation s'inverse, c'est la vraie
A elles notre secours et recours
Catastrophe dans nos cités

Que d'hommes tués par l'homme !
Que d'hommes affamés
Que d'hommes malades
Que d'hommes misérables en face !
Et cette intelligence-là, notre supériorité
Où est-elle passée ? Vides nos discours
Vides nous-mêmes. Pauvres menteurs.





La Tour Eiffel

LE PILIER DE LA VIE

À AMADOU OUÉDRAOGO

Voilà que tu me retrouves
Je suis le chiffre trois
Je fais ta vie, moi trois

La mère, le père et l'enfant
C'est moi
Les trois pierres du foyer
C'est moi
Le devant, le milieu et le derrière
C'est moi
Hier, aujourd'hui et demain
C'est moi
Le chasseur, le chien et l'animal
C'est moi
La tête, le tronc, les membres
C'est moi
L'enfant, le jeune et le vieux
C'est moi
Le sous-sol, le sol et l'espace
C'est moi
Les fiançailles, le mariage et le divorce
C'est moi
L'intention, la décision et l'exécution
C'est moi
La faute, la conscience et le pardon
C'est moi
Le néant, la vie et l'au-delà
C'est moi
Les nuages, la pluie et le beau temps
C'est moi
La naissance, la vie et la mort
C'est moi



Le trois, chiffre de la vie
On me trouve partout et en tout
Il suffit de bien regarder
Tu ne peux pas me manquer
Car c'est moi le pilier de la vie.
De moi personne ne se passe
En moi tout le monde puise
De moi tout le monde vit
A tout le monde je donne
De tout le monde je retire

MICHAEL PICKERING

SANS L'ODEUR

J'avais vécu, j'avais mangé, j'avais aimé;
Mais j'étais tout seul,
tout seul sans raison;
et je suis mort comme cela;
tout seul,
sans raison.

Je me souviens une chose de vie,
c'est l'odeur,
et je ne me souviens rien d'autre.

Un jour, je suis né;
et le jour prochain,
je suis mort,
oubliant tout,
mais l'odeur,
il reste toujours.

Sans l'odeur, il n'y a rien.
La nourriture est sans goût,
La fleur est mal,
La mer est vide,
Il n'y a pas d'albatros.

Sans l'odeur la vie n'a pas des sens,
Les sensations n'ont pas de joie,
et tu es toute seule,
toute seule comme moi,
Sans moi,
et sans raison.

À CAUSE DES SENS

Un jour, j'étais là,
Le jour prochain, j'étais pas.
Je suis allé ou?
Je sais pas.
Mais je suis parti,
Et jamais retourné.

La vie est sans sens,
Il n'y a pas d'odeur,
Les yeux voient noir,
Les oreilles n'entendent rien,
Je n'existe pas,
Pas comme cela,
Pas jamais.

Si j'existe,
C'est seulement à cause des sens,
La terre est verte,
La mer sent de sel,
L'albatros chante,
L'air goûte de pluie,
L'herbe est douce,
Mais sans les sens,
Tout est noir,
et nous n'existons pas.



Lovagny, France



Chamonix, France



Annecy, France

JADE BENOIT

LACKING

My mother was 23 when I started kindergarten. There was a time when I lied to every other child who asked me, how old is your mother? I added years to her age, so that they could tell their families that mine was sweet, normal. I also stashed the truth that my father crushed pills in his teeth that weren't poured into his palm from a crystal-orange bottle, his name tapped into the label. He kept them in wrinkled bag, handed to him in a bone-colored kitchen. My brother and I played poker in the back room. We were never children. Clutching a Budweiser, my mother swayed with her white t-shirt tied in a rubber band, and I wondered if she, too, lied to others about herself. She wore sunglasses to cover her purple eye sockets, where my father's fists had turned in them like doorknobs. I sat next to him on the steps when she flung our clothes in the trunk of her car. Then, he whistled at a woman, bending over in her yard, flesh bubbling from her denim cut-offs and said, this is the kind of woman I want you to be.

My father's socks used to rub the floor, but now he sits and breathes and smokes cigarettes with me by wood-paneled walls. He drove his car into a tree and slurred speech tumbles from his tilted mouth, spittle seeping from the corners. He tells me he's sorry for all that he's done, so I apologize for the other me inside of myself that trembles and struggles to love him. I confess my sins: I tell him I can't love. And even when love knocks on my door, says, let me in, sweetheart, honey-bear. I say, you can look around for a while, but I'm really not comfortable being alone with you. I let him walk through the rooms, eyes scanning leftovers in the refrigerator. I feel claustrophobic. So I tell him to leave. But I like the way he looks in the faces of strangers or in an episode of *The Office* when he looks like Jim Halpert, handsome and flipping grilled cheese sandwiches on rooftops. But when I look at my father, I see a man bleeding into a ghost, and that ghost confesses that he can't love, either.



Annecy, France

And the question remains for everyone: why do we spend so much time imagining who we're not, rather than living according to who we are? I never really live my own life, never have. Instead, I pack my parcels and secretly settle into the lives of other people, spending most of the time wishing they were my own.

When I read the newspaper, I see the lives I live:

A 47-year-old patient of a Washington mental hospital escapes during a fieldtrip to a local park. In 1987, he slaughters an elderly woman and soaks her body in gasoline to extinguish the scent. He pleads insanity. He spends his days talking about his mind, thinking about his mind, turning stomachs because of his mind, and ultimately curling up and falling asleep inside of his mind. The minute he's back in the real world, he chases what he doesn't have: a chance to breathe, apart from his mind. The police suspect he's heading to Sunnyside to see his parents. I think of him when I turn in my sleep at night, because I, too, would escape to a place called Sunnyside if I were confined to my own headspace for 22 years.

And beneath the lights that flicker in the alleyway, I am just like this man. I stagger into my own mind and lay on the dirt-thick floor of it far too long.

ALONE, I EAT A HEALTHY CHOICE MICROWAVE DINNER WITH GASOLINE-COLORED BEEF TIPS AND THINK ABOUT LOVE

I want to slip my fingertips in each crease of love's knuckles,
pierce through the rain, sit on the floor, wet hair in caked strands.
Stories swarm between us, whisper as we rifle through clumps
of old photographs in the yellow spatter of a pinewood candle.

Or sling my legs over love's car door, zip through night air, let the roof
peel open and trees rake their fingers in my hair. We tread over the
border, play accordions, whirring in the granny-smith green of the city,
kids splashing puddles where our hearts bleed on the sidewalk.

I want to collide with love, drag my lips over the inside of its mouth,
trickle through its throat, its chest. But my eyes wince from the glare
in its teeth, sallow and thick with foam, itching to unfurl the skin
of my heart: caged within me, shuddering at the thought of being nude.

LAC DE NUIT

une lueur maussade sur le
feuil du lac
crée des scintillements sur l'eau agitée
et brûle un orange brillant
et même distant sur la surface
de mon âme
à travers la brume sombre et le
feuillage branchu.

le vent souffle-
faisant tout circuler.
et nous tous respirons
des petits morceaux de
Gandhi et Dr. King.

l'odeur mourante et même douce
de l'eau de bayou,
emportée par le vent,
nous raconte l'histoire de la terre.
c'est là-
sous les reflets de la lumière
qui font des cercles
sur l'eau fâchée- vive.

le vent souffle-
faisant tout circuler.
et nous tous respirons
des petits morceaux de
Judas Iscariote et Benedict Arnold.

on vit-
on plante des graines dans le sol.
on mange les fruits
de cette main-d'œuvre.
on meurt-
et puis on est enterré
dans le même sol,
le sable riche de la rivière.

le vent souffle-
faisant tout circuler.
et nous tous respirons
des petits morceaux de
Jésus Christ, Mahomet et Abraham.
les vagues se roulent et se lâchent-
les eaux se mélangent.
tout se recycle,
tout refait surface.
comme un cycliste qui
fait des tours d'une piste-
inhalant.
exhalant.

le vent souffle-
faisant tout circuler.
et nous tous respirons
des petits morceaux de
César, Napoléon et Gengis Khan.

le poète enlève du sable
de ses pieds- d'entre ses orteils.
les cendres aux cendres-
la poussière à la poussière.

mais de cette poussière
pousse une revenue
qui revient-
toujours.

le vent souffle-
faisant tout circuler.
et nous tous respirons
des petits morceaux de
Picasso et Baudelaire.

PAGES D'ART CONTRIBUTORS

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Ashley Herrick graduated from LSU in December 2008 with a bachelor's degree in mass communication and currently serves as an English Teaching Assistant in Annecy, France. She is also a foreign correspondent for *The Ponchatoula Times* newspaper and *City Social* magazine.

Michael Pickering is a native of Houma, LA. He was born on the bayou, loves the bayou, and loves all the Cajun heritage that comes with it. He says his writing in French is a way of honoring that heritage and preserving it for generations to come.

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