

poictesme  
2011

A student anthology of literature and art.

VCU

CLEAR





# POICTESME

---

A Student Anthology  
of Literature and Art



## poictesme (pwä-'tēm) n.

- 1.** fictitious medieval French province created by James Branch Cabell (Richmond writer, VCU library patron) in his Biography of Manuel (18 volume series), made most famous in Jurgens, A Comedy of Justice (1919) because of its immediate denouncement by the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, making Cabell and Jurgens internationally notorious throughout the two year court battle that Cabell eventually won.
- 2.** a portmanteau (see Lewis Carroll) of two actual city names; originally thought to be an anagram, a specialty of JBC.
- 3.** fixed law of P. that all things must go by tens forever.
- 4.** the literary journal of VCU, replacing Millennium, whose outdated name was deemed irrelevant by the irreverent new staff.
- 5.** a name that alludes to the spirit of Richmond through the memory of JBC; an invocation of the arts through its literary roots.



# POICTESME

---

A Student Anthology  
of Literature and Art





# *staff*

---

## **Editor in Chief**

Berengée Russell

## **Editors**

Sarah Bruce

Amy Sailer

## **Editorial Assistants**

Alex Carrigan

Christopher Sloce

James Denison

## **Production Manager**

Mark Jeffries

## **Business Manager**

Lauren Katchuck

## **Student Media Director**

Greg Weatherford

## *acknowledgements*

---

*Poictesme*, both print and online editions, would not have been possible without the support of Virginia Commonwealth University and its surrounding community. Thank you writers, poets, and artists for continually trusting us with your work. Published or not, you create the foundation from which we can mould an anthology of the best literature and art that you have to offer. Thank you Greg Weatherford for providing us with unwavering support and attention whenever we seem to need you the most. Thank you Mark Jeffries, not only for the creativity that brings life to this journal, but for your calm clarity that allows you to deal with all of the issues we bring to you daily. Thank you student media and staff for all of your diversions, and all of the times you unlock the door for us. Thank you Margaret Altonen, and Susann Cokal for all of your help this year in spreading the message to the student body, and community at large. Thank you to everyone who has attended our literary evenings and events. Thank you to everyone who has distributed our flyers and journals. And of course this wouldn't have been possible without the aid of key people in the English Department, the Mass Communications Department, the Art Departments, the World Studies Department, the Psychology Department, and the Philosophy Department, along with countless others who helped with promotions through word of mouth. And finally, thank you Student Media for the support and encouragement that unleashed it all.

# *poictesme* (pwä-'tēm)

---

*Poictesme* is an annual literary publication funded by student fees that accepts submissions year round. The editors invite submissions of short fiction, creative nonfiction, poetry, drama, and artwork. Submissions guidelines are at [www.poictesme.vcustudentmedia.com](http://www.poictesme.vcustudentmedia.com).

**Please send your submissions and/or questions to *pwatem@gmail.com* or send in monetary donations, fan mail and/or all hard copy submissions to: Poictesme, VCU Student Media Center, 817 W. Broad St., P.O. Box 842010, Richmond, VA 23284-2010.**

No part of this book may be reproduced without written permission of the VCU Student Media Commission and the editors of *Poictesme*. All materials copyright 2010 by *Poictesme*. All rights reserved.

## Table of Contents

---

### 01 *Literature*

---

<b>Amtrak Insomniac</b> <i>Robert Gibson</i> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>The Eastern Shore</b> <i>Jane Harwell</i> .....	<b>16</b>
<b>Thursday</b> <i>Mark Whetsell</i> .....	<b>18</b>
<b>“Scutigera coleoptrata”</b> <i>Ruth Baumann</i> .....	<b>20</b>
<b>Asbestos: The Unquenchable</b> <i>Ryan Kendall</i> .....	<b>22</b>
<b>Saw Ice and Eyes and Legs</b> <i>Ryan Kendall</i> .....	<b>22</b>
<b>Styx and Stones</b> <i>Ryan Kendall</i> .....	<b>23</b>
<b>For the Blues</b> <i>Nathan W. Friedman</i> .....	<b>24</b>
<b>Instructions for a Cannibal</b> <i>Thomas Desanto</i> .....	<b>26</b>
<b>Groceries</b> <i>Thomas Desanto</i> .....	<b>27</b>
<b>Morning</b> <i>Sarah Bruce</i> .....	<b>28</b>
<b>The Homeache</b> <i>Christopher Sloce</i> .....	<b>29</b>
<b>XX, December 2009</b> <i>James Cabil</i> .....	<b>31</b>
<b>Ode to My Levis</b> <i>Amy Sailer</i> .....	<b>33</b>
<b>Allegory of Appetite</b> <i>Amy Sailer</i> .....	<b>34</b>

---

## **02** *ART*

---

Daniel Rockburn.....	36
Daniel Rockburn.....	37
Lanvi Nguyen .....	38
Rachel Woodaward.....	40
Robert Gibson .....	41
Rachel Woodaward.....	42
Templeton Kelly.....	44



## **Amtrak Insomniac**

---

*Robert Gibson*

The train leaves its station at 3:15 AM  
a mile and a half from home;  
it sings and shuffles the after storm air.

A nightmare hangs overhead,  
takes shape like a storm cloud;  
heavy air veers into my father's room.

Like a car that won't start, he snores  
and barrels around in a king size bed  
that bellows under his broken body.

This sticky starless, summer night  
plasters bed sheets to sepia skin.  
He is stuck in a humidified clash,

battling a winged monkey on his back.  
He swings like the lion with the witch's broom,  
cursing aloud in that world and in mine.

Tight tossing, turning and tumbling,  
the air ripples like troubled water;  
he is at the edge of its reflection.

Through my hollow bedroom door,  
I hear cowboys shooting on the TV;  
they're probably robbing a train.

## The Eastern Shore

---

*Jane Harwell*

I am an infant, swaddled  
washed up to the banks  
of your feet. I come to you  
with ears full of sand.  
You full of salt-water;  
my hands, dripping with salt-water.  
You're singing so I re-direct my ship.

I am an infant, and now  
you pour me from a tap  
running hot or cold;  
you direct the faucet.  
Bathing me and bearing me  
fresh, building with planks  
the house on the dunes  
where you lay me to sleep. I am a child

running to you, arms outstretched—  
in a snapshot of the coast  
used for a postcard, hung to dry  
on the rotating shelves  
of a tourist shop on the boardwalk.

A throat filled with thunder,  
isolated and distant like a boat  
on the other side of the bridge.  
I ask innocently if that's where  
the peninsula is. You laugh thunder,  
too distant to reach by land.  
I am an airplane, trailing a sign,  
an ad. Children, telescopic,



reading the trail of smoke, fabric,  
and cloud. I ask if they can see  
the peninsula, blinking into August's low sun.

Don't stare, I'll go blind.  
I have stared.  
I am a peach hanging  
from your garden, cheap to sell  
off the entrance ramp to 64. I am a crab  
that loses life without my home in your conch,  
which is painted and put for sale  
in the window of the wooden shop on the pier.  
I am a crab in your wired trap.  
I am an infant left to dry out  
on the ebbing dunes in thickets of cat grass.

## Thursday

---

*Mark Whetsell*

She was now on to preparing the turnips. She washed each one under the faucet, feeling the morning water run down her hands. Her husband picked these only a few weeks ago, from their garden out in the far back beyond their house. They were now beginning to wither. She cut the roots and leaves, and gently placed them on her small wooden cutting board.

Countless mornings he rose to check his stock. The cucumbers and ripe tomatoes blossomed from their vines. The old man would clip them gently, guiltily: he felt he owed something to that small, fruitful plot of soil he had tilled so long. After he picked his share for the day, he made his way back to the house, enjoying the morning's air. Past the apple trees, past the shed that housed his tools and tobaccos (a habit he'd done well to hide from his wife the last few years), he came up on the house that sheltered them since their wedding day. He'd wash the tomatoes once with the garden hose at the back of the house so he could look into their shining red. At the door, he kicked off his shoes so he wouldn't track soil inside.

For fifty years, he grinned when he offered up his bounty. She thought about his smile, the way he'd say, "Gettin' colder out every day," behind her as she washed each vegetable and placed them in his air-tight mason jars, a collection he'd grown quite fond of over the years. It was getting colder; every day the breeze more chilled than the last. She recognized this more than anything now. Pulling a knife from the drawer, she began slowly peeling the turnips. They shed their skins into the sink. With the sweet flakes piled, she pushed them down into the deep black of the drain. Running the water, she flicked the switch above the counter, and in the noise that shook and silenced the house, the skins disappeared.

With the turnips peeled, she chopped them tightly into cubes. A great handful this made, surely more than enough, she thought to herself. She shifted her attention to the boiling pot of water resting on the stove. She brushed the turnips in, listening to the plop each cube made, hitting the water and sinking to the bottom. She stirred the pot for what felt a century, watching produce mix and swirl.

She thought of his eagerness, when he'd get to the table inside their kitchen after picking up sticks from the yard. They'd sit together, beginning the day when they looked up from their meals and catch each other's eyes. Old and fragile now, they smiled and reached across the table to where their hands would meet and their fingers would cross each other's. This was their morning routine.

With the soup finally cooled, she picked a bowl from the cabinet above the counter. With a wooden ladle, she scooped the soup into the bowl, soft and fragrant. She always took the most of the turnips. It was her favorite of his garden after all. He didn't care too much for turnips himself, but knew how much she appreciated his effort to grow the simple root. She took a pitcher of cranberry juice from the refrigerator and placed it on the table. She reached up high in the cabinet to take a smaller glass and took her seat. She loved the way the cranberry juice tasted in the morning, always cold and fresh, with a hint of bitterness that spiced her tongue and calmed her thoughts. She spooned the turnips into her mouth. She was so accustomed to seeing that smile. His eyes, withered by the sun and wind. There was nothing she wanted more this day, than to reach across the table to find his warm hand in the center.

## **“Scutigera coleoptrata”**

---

*Ruth Baumann*

They are learning to crawl and it is  
not cute. Each little leg a testament  
to indestructible nature of

filth. I don't want to think about  
what lies below on the totem pole of mud.  
One and a half feet per second,

so I stand, motionless as prey,  
waiting for their translucent horrors of heads  
to turn, the guillotine to slam down on my

Elizabethan skull. I am afraid to attack  
because then they scuttle out of sight  
and I am standing on my bed and it is midnight

and I do not want to sleep with images of  
legs, so many legs sprinting across my me.  
On the internet, somebody says they keep them

as pets. Are they coming for me?  
Somebody else says their sting is harmless,  
like a mild bee's. I had forgotten the music

in waiting to strike. And somebody else says once,  
during an infestation, one of them crawled across  
his eyelids. I am still shuddering hours later

after the trail of brown venom  
has been left on my wall as a warning.  
The shadows tickle me

like they hadn't since the shadow people  
rose up out of smokestacks of darkness  
and darted at me, touching, jabbing,

terrifying. Is there any difference?  
At four a.m. I go to the bathroom and  
a big one is in the sink. It dies.

I stay up and watch the sunrise and  
wait. What else dies?

## **Asbestos: The Unquenchable**

---

*Ryan Kendall*

Flesh had slain; such previous reign, wholly forgotten yet untampered of existence by time's trickery. Fell before forests as her nose fell upon that divine fruit. To idolize Asbestos. Once traced maps upon opposing shoulders, now clawed at bones. Familiarity found in bare backs. Had roots of Cedar found origin within own intestines. Hell's storm pronounced us residents—ruined souls. Fires of clean flame. To lack an ending's bliss. Blackened eyes that may reveal eternity's sentence dare look into mine own. Fools might say. Say I. Throwing voices yet cursed with a still tongue. Olive wash now scaled like serpents. Exposed, clutching and tearing. In which North and East proved nonexistence, one standing direction named Under. Only to cry for new trials may that violent wind shake. Folded like palms and fingers. I saw my will grin through their faces and my insides.

## **Saw Ice and Eyes and Legs**

---

*Ryan Kendall*

Sought such majesty, enveloped in all that was. Glimpse meant to embody a saint though hardly dancing. "Have you ever danced sitting down?" Myself among spitting sounds like rising air. Told my eyes of repentance like souls strung upon branch. Uncertainty crawled on words like sickness crawled on organs. When land resembled one surface and waters swallowed curiosity. Has he found his watch's hand upon her ear? A notion to possess til day burnt ash. Forte. To the tempo of bodies, fold like writing. Such sent us to boil with fire and flames and temper. To deny nature's ultimate sentence. Sang like drowning unto what creations have been uncreated. Fate lacking structure and all reason for purpose made for scattering upon yards. A daring performance, thy Willow.

## Styx and Stones

---

*Ryan Kendall*

Plans of building empires in one's roots.  
Spoke construct to destruct.  
Inability to see by the forming of hands and hands.  
Traced estimates of intestinal alignments that ceased with your  
implantation of branches of my insides.  
Following the Nightingale's chorus, spoke of true lovers among  
fake bodies.  
Whom nested upon that Willow's leaves.  
Ambushed by hauntings, a strange imagination meant for disease;  
all who are diseased.  
Language, and his language.  
My left hand carries your eyes and my right rests against the  
walls of your stomach.  
Growing into floors and shooting voices through ceilings;  
extracted from existence yet living.  
Hardly human.  
Witnessed thy Willow twist into serpents; branches scaled and writhing.  
How tasteful, Fool.

## For the Blues

---

*Nathan W. Friedman*

“It’s hard to tell, it’s hard to tell,  
when all your love’s in vain.”

– R. Johnson

In the Lyceum, behind whitewashed,  
Ionic columns, summer so thick  
that lecturers remove their coats and shout  
over cicadas, it is understood:  
thousands of square and savage miles, layers  
of black and virgin loam, wilderness like  
that of the Hebrews, of hardwood swamp,  
of Indian, dollar-sized mosquito, black bear,  
wolf, and only sweat of oxen, negro, and  
one’s own to forge a landscape fit  
for cultivation. And in the autumn,  
when the heat gives way  
to sharp cold that makes livestock whine,  
a simple cabin might be built  
suitable to support a wife.  
The cotton boll against the treeline is  
so much whiter than a woman’s skin,  
so much more white than sweetmilk, than  
thunderheads meandering, and when  
many seasons have passed, these might be built:  
a great-house and brick homes for laborers.  
At night, exhausted, the negroes moan  
through the humid passage of generations  
like corroding headstones behind chain-link fence,  
choked by deep-root, Asian, weeds,  
and sheetrock neighborhoods.  
So these songs of their abounding pain –  
that made dogs sit, yellow eyes cognizant  
only that the minor keys they heard were things



holy because they silenced owls –  
play on dashboard-radios, immortality,  
the land's only glory that remains.

## Instructions for a Cannibal

---

*Thomas Desanto*

Instructions for a Cannibal  
The brain is shielded by a  
tough skull made of bone.  
So, it is necessary  
to rip the skull in two  
like a coconut.

The brain is like a sponge  
full of heavenly juices.  
Marinated in a pink glaze.  
Goosey and delicious.

First, slurp the liquid  
the brain swims in.  
Then, bite hard.  
Use your jaws. Twist.  
It will ooze.

Still, the skull is not empty.  
Curl your index finger.  
Hollow the bone and  
guzzle the marrow.

The gods feast on the soul at death.  
What is left is edible flesh.

## Groceries

---

*Thomas Desanto*

Sinking my thumb into the gooey mantle  
 of an avocado, I realize I am alone. I always feel  
 stupid in the produce section—like everyone  
 knows I'm lost. Enter, to the right,  
 the most beautiful girl you have ever seen, (twirling),  
 like a wild carnival by the strawberries. Some  
 sweet jazz projected over the loud speaker &  
 two ragged French voices singing *Bonnie et Clyde*.  
 I always loved French but I guess I never learned  
 to speak it. My tongue always felt so fat & American.  
 I guess those two things clashed, like you did, into  
 that bushel of plums. As they fell: I forgot you hated  
 mushrooms—I'll put them back. Do you think the lasagna would be  
 better with fresh basil or should we just get the cheap shit?  
 These are the things that plague my mind, lurching  
 down each fluorescent row. We stumbled upon  
 a dissected pig. Its hooves & ears so neatly veiled.  
 Let's just get the cheap stuff.  
 There are so many different kinds of cheese. Later,  
 we will cook the food. That will be another thing  
 in itself. For now, I think about the starving children in  
 Angola who just discovered that sucking on a rag  
 soaked in gasoline cures hunger pains for a few hours.  
 You can buy one for two dollars.

## Morning

---

*Sarah Bruce*

I have considered moving  
my bed near the radiator,

but I worry about my head.

I wake, and push my nose  
between the coils.

Meditate on its peeling paint;

dozens of layers  
dried like winter skin.

## The Homeache

*By Christopher Sloce*

He bought the bull for cheap given it suffered from everything that he suffered from: old age, destroyed back, neglectful peers, the emergence of younger talents with better color and stronger legs, those who wore horns and Stetsons better. It cost little and nobody questioned the King of the Rodeo, their infatuations carrying over, though it had been ten or so years since he held that crown. the King bought the bull and they loaded him into the carrier that The King had purchased. Up and down the highway, they watched the carrier and the jet black bull inside. Why must you live out the songs you wrote? his radio asked. Over and over, it said.

He parked the pickup parallel to the sidewalk, taking up four or five spaces. He got out, his green rhinestone shirt shining in the sun, dazzling everybody's eyes, murmurs drowned by slow wind.

The King walked in and loped to the pharmacy section, out of the corner of his eye seeing himself move in the mirrors of the vegetable bins. Over the intercom, a check on milk. Music came back on, this time proclaiming Tonight's going to be a good night. That tonight is going to be a good good night. The girl at the counter chewed her gum with a vacuous expression on her face. She drew circles on the counter with her fingers and when the King made his way there, she stopped suddenly and looked up, popping her gum loudly.

"How can I help you?"

"You know what I need," the King said, drawing out the e's.

"I don't know why that surprises me." The girl got up and she went to the counter watching him to the best of her ability until she found the prescription with the name unused by the King and she handed it to him. The King still managed to survey the floor, ceiling and everything between. After she gave him the medicine, he smiled.

"Bought a bull," the King said. "Started getting lonely."

"Imagine that," the girl said.

"It's nice to have somebody."

"Bull's not a somebody," She looked back down. The King

tipped his head at her and walked to the frozen foods to cool off and when he came up around the back of the store he grabbed a gallon of milk, efficient as a drive-by. He scanned the counters to see who was at what counter. There was one open, an old woman at the cash register. The King walked in his way to that counter.

"I see you've got yourself something pretty big out there in the parking lot," she said.

"Yeah, I bought myself a bull." He put the prescription and the gallon of milk on the conveyer.

"Oh really?"

"Yeah, you know. Have something out on the ranch," he said. The bag boy shoved the milk and the prescription into the bag and handed the bag to The King. The King tipped his hat at the old woman. She smiled, showing few teeth.

The King walked out to the parking lot. The carrier shook. Two boys were putting a stick inside the back of the carrier.

"Hey!" he screamed. "Get away from that!" He walked up to the boys stood there, looking at him with shamed and mischievous grins.

"What's the problem, sir?" one boy said. They both had black hair and fat noses.

"I oughta kick both your asses. Aggravatin' that bull," the King said.

One of the boys had now snuck around the side of the carrier, his hand slipping in a cherry bomb. In the dark, the fireworks inside and in the bull's eyes visible, the bull rammed the front of the carrier. The bull knocked the door off and jumped out of the carrier, knocking down the boy the King berated, a dry crack ringing through the parking lot as the boy screamed, the noise quickly dying down. The King tried to strafe to the left but the bull scooped him up and he came down on the horns, falling off as the bull raged further, running across the parking lot.

After that, it was all red and white and his rhinestones ruined.

## XX, December 2009

---

*James Cabil*

XX, December 2009

“Shit.”

It’s what I smell and what I always say.

Every single day.

What a day off, what a day.

Cold sweat is nothing like fermented sweat,  
Disintegrates my ACUs, cold clammy headsets,  
Chafed gonads, and yellowed eyepros,  
What a day.

They say, or at least I’m told,  
Our sense of smell takes the greatest hold  
of all our memories.

They couldn’t go to war in a clean country,  
You couldn’t send to war a clean bunch of kids.

Today’s the day I sit in back, (I’m just a GIB,  
That guy in the back)  
In this dream of a dream in downtown, Baghdad, smells-like-  
shit, Fuckin-A, Iraq

I’ll never forget you, brother.  
I’ll never leave you behind.

You sit there and analyze poetry by Langston Hughes,  
About the Euphrates, and the enslavement of  
The Africans and Jews.  
What the fuck do you know? You,  
You, who only see what you choose.

This is what people do to each other,  
This is what happens in the world,  
This is why I was needy in the month of  
December  
Because You needed a break, and You needed space,  
While I was over 3,000 miles away,  
A week after you had said "Oh my god, I feel so bad,  
That must have affected you, I love you, it had to have."

Sorry I'm so needy, sorry I can't get over it  
I never got shot at.  
I know that makes me a fag.  
I know they're not American, I know it's only hadj, but

I'd be blind, deaf, paralyzed, to not smell that day.  
I looked for body parts that morning,  
But I think none were left,  
In the massive epicenters,  
Where the blood was still wet,  
And all I see is the smell of burned flesh.

I want to go home,  
My heart is raging like every dead person was  
The prettiest girl, and I had to talk to them all.  
I just want, I need to lay down, crank the AC,  
Jerk off with animal desperation,  
And smell those letters you wrote to me.



## Ode to My Levi's

---

*Amy Sailer*

Without you  
I'm naked. Faithful  
& silent friend, you've held  
all of me, bent & danced,  
known the sweet down low.  
Dark wash blues, worn  
through, your love's  
still strong, though  
I may stray—  
been known to flirt  
with skirts, gone slack—  
but now I'm back again,  
'cause it never feels right  
like you. Rambler, migrant  
lover, you were made to kiss  
mud at the root of tomato stalks,  
beside gold-flecked riverbeds.  
Let's make like a crotch seam  
& split-hop a Norfolk Southern  
down to nowhere's way, a place  
we can stretch out & bleach.  
Let's syncopate. Let's play  
on the harmonica, that saxophone,  
& play on, those tough & faded  
blues—your stomp & jive,  
so warm & always  
fit me tight.

## ***Allegory of Appetite***

---

*Amy Sailer*

Fried cabbage, the art I crave  
renders me taste  
cognizant, its roughage layers blunted

by my pleasing lop of knife. Bleeding  
out & boiling over, juices  
weave with the butane burn, so to mix

their blood with mine. Served up hot-  
sauces down the street at Mama J's  
or in our fathers' kitchens,

where we first learn to wield a knife  
against those weaker  
stalks to make them yield, limp & swollen

on vinegar & bacon fat. All I care  
is for the taste only  
food & sex & work can sate, while the routine

dinner talk hums along. I have been reading on  
Aertsen, painter of low and sordid  
things, & how the cabbages in his market scenes

represent luxury, the lascivious going-on's  
of peasants daring to polka  
ale-ruddied, hands up skirts, then sneak off

to topple haystacks. And I'm thinking, yes,  
it was a dark age  
when cabbages were the object of lust.

But it's true, they're splayed out, full & coolly green

among an arrangement of swine  
heads & cloven hooves, still raw, the blood

not yet pooled. All this earthly delight, these baskets  
and blouses chockful. Even there  
balanced beneath Martha's arm, ready to serve

to Christ & Mary who, slim as they are  
on spiritual food, turn away the better  
to hear His words. This may be the meaning

but it's the beauty so tactile it's on my tongue  
that tempts my hunger  
for this art, even when it's stalwartly paint.



DANIEL ROCKBURN



DANIEL ROCKBURN



LANVI NGUYEN



*“Snap Button”*





RACHEL WOODWARD





ROBERT GIBSON

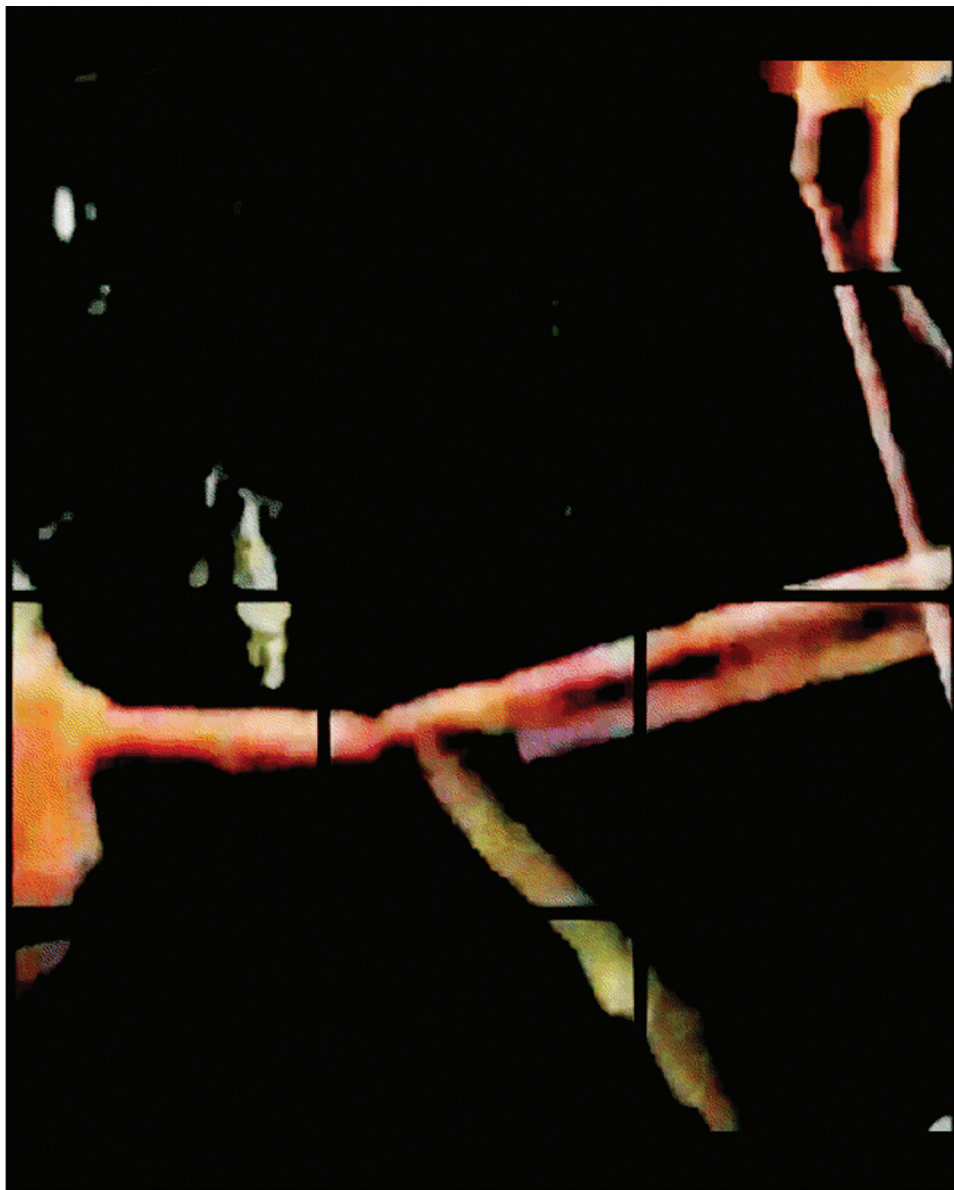
*“Play of the Duende”*



RACHEL WOODWARD







TEMPLETON KELLEY




*“Stick”*

The Student Media Center, part of the Student Affairs and Enrollment Services division at Virginia Commonwealth University, is a resource center for recognized independent student media at VCU. Current recognized student media include Poictesme; Amendment, another literary journal; The Commonwealth Times newspaper; Ink, a quarterly magazine; and WVCW radio.

For more information, contact VCU Student Media Center, 817 W. Broad St., (804) 828-1058. Mailing address: P.O. Box 842010, Richmond, VA 23284-2010. E-mail: *gorweatherfor@vcu.edu*





(pwä-'tem)