

SPRING

NOTED

2011

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT



**Editorial 3 - Features 4 - Film 7 -
Creative Writing 8 - Impressum 20**

Contents



Editorial.....3



Features4

Note from the Directrice4

Departmental News5

Staff News.....6



Film7

Film club schedule7



Creative Writing8

Colours.....8

Ourobouros my love.....9

Hermit Crab9

Alone in a dark room or Solitude
cramped between feverish elbows
and thighs? 10

Threshold11

Untitled by M.M.Hauser12

A Quiet Place13

Dear Mom, Love Jason.....16

Impressum.....20

Editorial



As the Spring semester is about to begin, it is to be accompanied by a small issue of NOTED. As you may know, the Newsletter of the English Department is mainly made of students' contributions. It means that the content of the newsletter is proportionally linked to the involvement of the students. The current issue, as I have already mentioned, is rather small, therefore denoting little participation. Remember, NOTED is your Newsletter and it is your responsibility to keep it alive! That being said, I would like to say a huge thanks to those two students who provided NOTED with excellent pieces of creative writing.

Aurelia Clavien wrote two short stories called "A Quiet Place" and "Dear Mom, Love Jason." The first is about a child's retreat into her mental space when confronted to traumatic events. The vivid descriptions of the ocean shore of North Carolina are splendid. They will give rise to a nostalgic mood to all who have wandered lonely on a beach as a child. The second is about the impressions of a young soldier as he is faced with the environment of Iraq during the Second Gulf War. The disillusionment with war is evident in this short story.

Our second student contributor is Mélodie Morgane Hauser. She wrote several poems revolving around themes such as mythical or real animals and the colors in nature. She also reflects about our connection to our past and to an unknown future. Thanks to their simplicity, her themes reach some of our deepest thoughts, such as our attitude to the past and the future.

I would also like to thank Professor Deborah Madsen, our Directrice, who wrote a particularly interesting "Note" about the backstage of the English Department, notably the part of the staff's work which is not dedicated to teaching. I believe it is important for students to know about their teachers' work, because it will necessarily increase the students' motivation and understanding. I would also like to congratulate students who have a part-time job and who still manage to carry out their studies. It is not an easy undertaking, and they deserve to be mentioned and encouraged!

I wish to conclude this editorial by reminding you that we are looking for contributors. **For those of you interested in journalism, it may be a good start, and it would surely increase the value of your CV to have some articles published in NOTED.** In the section "Features", we are interested in articles about anything that might be related to the English Department. It ranges from an article about an anglophone country, a report on a conference or colloquium, a novel or short story review, or even an article about the English Department, the Faculty of Letters or the University of Geneva itself. In the sections "Theater" and "Film", we are interested in articles, reviews and reports on plays and films that you have recently seen. Note that this list is not exhaustive.

I wish you all a wonderful start of Spring semester!

Arnaud Barras



Features



Note from the Directrice

Over the past few weeks, as students have come into the Comédie to collect essays or speak with their teachers, I have seen something that I think is noteworthy. As the student says goodbye, he or she remarks “Enjoy the rest of the holidays” -- or something to that effect. Upon which, the teacher suppresses a frown or a roll of the eyes that says, “What holidays?” After witnessing this a couple of times, I thought it could be interesting to note down some of the reasons why teachers and administrative staff might react like this. In other words, why might we feel that we are not “on holiday” when classes end?

The most obvious reason is that when our teaching work ends, our research work begins in earnest. But what does that mean? The English Department's home page includes the following paragraph: “The department's distinguished record in research and scholarship serves the cause of good teaching: the department's instructors are also scholars actively engaged in defining their respective fields; as teachers, they are committed to making the study of English an intellectually challenging and rewarding experience.” So when we are not actively teaching in the classroom, we are engaged in the kinds of activities that define how our specialist areas develop. All teachers in the English Department

are engaged in research: assistants are all working on their doctoral theses; senior members of the department write books, which are to be found in the English Library, and scholarly essays that can be accessed electronically through JSTOR and Project Muse, for example, as well as in print journals and books. We contribute to the important reference works in our fields, such as encyclopedias and bibliographies. Not only do we write the material that is used as critical reading for courses, we also play a part in determining which books and essays are accepted for publication. We read book-length manuscripts for scholarly publishers and we evaluate the work of other scholars when it is submitted for consideration for journal publication. In that respect, we are among the “gate-keepers” who help to ensure the reliability and quality of the books that appear on the library's shelves.

The exchange of ideas and information via the written word is fundamental to our work but the opportunity to hear, speak with, and share knowledge with professional colleagues is also very important. Conferences that range from major international meetings like the annual meeting of the Modern Language Association which attracts thousands of participants to local events like the “Traces de rêves” colloquium co-



hosted by MEG and History of Religion at Uni-Bastions in early February, offer the chance to test ideas and broaden knowledge in ways that benefit our teaching. And when the conference is over, often the work continues in the form of conference essays that must be selected and edited to be published as a book, such as the series of conference proceedings that comprise SPELL (Swiss Papers in English Language and Literature) of which Professor Erne is the General Editor and the most recent issue of which I am currently editing with my colleague at the University of Innsbruck, Professor Mario Klarer. The writing of conference presentations and their revision into essays and then editing into books -- like the writing of monographs and other scholarly efforts -- takes place primarily during the inter-semester breaks from classroom teaching.

Not all time away from the chalkboard can be devoted to research and writing, however. In recent weeks, we have been studying the feedback provided by first-semester student evaluations to determine how well the new *plan d'études* is working and where we might make improvements. The result of some of our discussions can be found in the revisions to the departmental webpage describing exam regulations. Both in evaluations and via the Commission mixte, we learned that students generally approve of the introduction of a mid-semester assignment that enables progress to be monitored and so this has been recommended as a formal requirement for some of our modules. We also learned that some students struggled with multiple assessments in the final week of the semester

and so we are considering ways to diversify modalities of assessment even further. This is the time of year when such issues must be thought through. For academic and administrative staff alike, preparation of the timetable for the next academic year starts before the spring semester has even begun. This means not only deciding the topics for seminars but also identifying relevant literary texts and scholarly contexts so that decisions can be made about which books to assign as seminar reading and which to place on the seminar shelf in the library. Of course, if the library does not hold copies of these books then they must be ordered, after a check is made that they are still in print and so available as required reading. This we are doing while preparing materials for the spring semester seminars and courses.

As it says on the departmental website, we are "committed to making the study of English an intellectually challenging and rewarding experience" and the behind-the-scenes work that is required to fulfill that commitment is, in fact, challenging, stimulating, and rewarding in itself. But the work is no vacation. So do not stop the cheery greetings or passing on of your good wishes but the next time you wish your teacher a good holiday, think first about what kind of "holiday" that might be.

In the same spirit, I wish you all a challenging and rewarding spring semester!

Deborah Madsen

Departmental News

By Deborah Madsen

Assemblée générale

The annual meeting of the English Department will be held on Wednesday 2 March, 19h in B104. All members of the department, staff and students, are cordially invited to attend.

The move from the Philosophes Building is now complete, with the following changes: the Writing Lab has been relocated and is now in CO 213, the office occupied by Drs Fehlbaum and Oettli has moved to Bastions 218, and the English Library is now housed in the basement



of Bastions.

Not so much news as a warning is needed concerning recent thefts and intrusions in the Comédie Building. On several occasions over the past few months, intruders have entered the department to steal items left or stored in public areas. Please do not leave anything of value in the staff mail trays; rather, place books, DVDs, and the like in an envelope addressed to the staff member concerned and leave the envelope in the secretariat. University security has been informed of each incident but we each

have a personal responsibility to ensure a minimum level of security for belongings in our hands.

The Prix Thomas Harvey 2011 has been awarded to Julianna Bark to support a research visit to the Bodleian Library in Oxford and the British Library in London as part of her doctoral research project on printed author portraits in the early modern period.

Staff News

By Deborah Madsen

We welcome a new assistant in English linguistics, Richard Zimmermann. Richard comes to us from the University of York, where he recently completed his MA in General Linguistics, with Distinction. He took his first degree at the University of Heidelberg, which included a year as an exchange student at Queen's University in Kingston, Canada.

Claire Forel has now taken up her post in the IUFE (Institut universitaire de formation des enseignants) and will be replaced for the spring semester by Eszter Varga, who will be teaching Travaux Pratiques and Practical Language in module BA2.

Simone Oettli is on research leave in New Zealand for the spring semester. Dr Oettli is working on her Maori literature research project.

Eric Haeberli has returned from sabbatical leave and has now taken back responsibility for Erasmus and other study abroad schemes.

Guillemette Bolens will not be teaching in the spring semester, while she prepares for her role as Vice-Rectrice. We are in the process of appointing a four-year replacement during her absence in the Rectorat.

The English Library continues to be short-staffed, not least because of the recent accident that befell Mme Rochat. We wish her a rapid recovery and continue to work to resolve the staffing situation as soon as possible.

Commission Mixte

The members of this important departmental committee are Deborah Madsen (president) on behalf of the corps professoral; Valerie Fehlbaum and Erszi Kukorelly on behalf of the corps intermédiaire; Lilia Aghzafi, Nicholas Weeks, Giorgos Kottas, and Emily Chaffar on behalf of the student body. If you are interested in becoming involved with the Commission mixte, please attend the departmental Assemblée générale on Wednesday 2 March, 19h in B104 when membership of the committee for 2011-2012 will be decided.



Film



The English Department Film Club - Spring Semester 2011

Schedule: Every Thursday evening.
Place: Room B112 at Uni-Bastions
Time: 19h30
Who? All students of the English Department are welcome.

This programme is also available online on our department website, together with more detailed information about the film club: <http://www.unige.ch/lettres/angle/vie/film.html>

Date:	Film Title:	Director:	Propose by:
03 Mar. 2011	Les Triplettes de Belleville (2003)	Sylvain Chomet	A. Iatsenko
10 Mar. 2011	Stranger than Fiction (2006)	Marc Forster	D. Madsen
17 Mar. 2011	Warming by the Devil's Fire (2003)	Charles Burnett	A. Iatsenko
24 Mar. 2011	A Midsummer Night's Dream (1999)	Michael Hoffman	F. Tolhurst
31 Mar. 2011	The Country Wife (BBC, 1977)	Donald McWhinnie	E. Depledge
07 Apr. 2011	Leimert Park: The Story of a Village in South Central Los Angeles (2006)	Jeannette Lindsay	A. Iatsenko
14 Apr. 2011	Volpone (2003)	Frédéric Auburtin	J. Bark
05 May 2011	The Taming of the Shrew (BBC, 1980)	Jonathan Miller	F. Tolhurst
12 May 2011	Good Hair (2009)	Jeff Stilson	A. Iatsenko
19 May 2011	Apocalypse Now (1979)	Francis Ford Coppola	D. Madsen
26 May 2011	Tom Jones (1963)	Tony Richardson	E. Kukorelly



Creative Writing



Colours

By Mélodie Morgane Hauser

Reptilian blue strokes on rainforest greens, set on cosmic black
The stars are sprayed dots the colour of the rainbow - they look white at a glance

To be red, is to be as venomous as a coral snake.
Blue is rare, there is already so much of it in the sky
Reflected in the deep.

Blue black white
Green
Brown grey
Are the strata, tools and horizons in which
Yellow orange purple red
Cartwheel and play
Hidden in the foliage.



Ourobouros my love

By Mélodie Morgane Hauser

Dashing words on my
Prickly shell
The bloodhound howls

Cover your jowls
You monstrous beast
I love you so
Let's have a feast-
No none for me thanks
How could I eat
The very members of my four feet?

Enjoy yourself
Go on and guzzle
Dig in deep
With your muzzle

I said we'd have a celebration
I did not give my commendation
So relish it, don't diminish it
And enjoy it while it lasts
'Cause when you've finished, you will find
That you have left me far behind.

Hermit Crab

By Mélodie Morgane Hauser

I miss your shell, I knew it well it kept me warm inside
'Tis how I fell, when you bade farewell, that proved you were outside



Alone in a dark room or Solitude cramped between feverish elbows and thighs?

By Mélodie Morgane Hauser

The wings are spread-eagled,
The hub is lost,
How can I grow feathers
And be my ancestors' host ?
Sweep up and snatch me,
I'll feel the tremors of your body
Your hollow bones
The grievance of your claws -
But I'm too heavy a burden.

~

The sea leaps to meet me
It's my beloved Pacific
We'll crash and mingle
With the next tide
Turbulent
Rowdy
To be lost on the shingle.

Your piercing eyes will never find I,
A pebble amongst stones,
But you'll always feel a pull from me.
The only light I'll agree to see
Is the myriad sun shards
Between your shafts
And the master of tides'
Silent brightness
Glancing off your seamless back.

But what a waste!
I could not stand
To watch you, mighty beast,
Tattered, lank and rotten,
Deteriorate and get eaten
From inside out -
A senseless kite,
Ever trapped to this beach.
Return to the veld!
You are no fishing bird
Your fathers did not in the spray frolic
But lived lives straight and heroic.
Scare the zebu
Hunt the tender
And forget me -
My amusement is not worth this folly



Threshold

By Mélodie Morgane Hauser

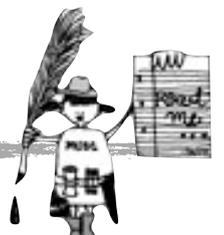
The words I hear
Are far and near
For in my sleep
My mind I keep.

I listen, still,
Poised on the sill
Of conscience pale
As it does fade.

The mingling,
The wondering
Of noises soft
And rhythms low,
Come from aloft
And far below.

The ethereal
I sense, enthralled,
Its boundless space,
Its vast embrace.

Then light made form
Softly wakes me
To the great realm
Of presently.



By Mélodie Morgane Hauser

Smiling

Odd japanese calligraphy
of your face on the
Pavement of my street

It feels awkward
to steal from those
who gave you - your life
I guess you'd call it

Lose this awe for the past and the Great
They are you, dancing in your crusty trainers
They are you, dreaming to touch their own
Stars

Praise with great praise
in a general direction
It being unknown
is already worthy of a lifetime's devotion

I like you
I like you, with your shifty eyes
I like you, with your dreamy smile

Sinewy swaying
pounding
pounce
on the beat
just as it darts out



A Quiet Place

By Aurelia Clavien

“I swear I’ll leave you, John! You can’t go on treating your family like this, stumbling home late at night with the stench of smoke and alcohol on your breath!”

“Foolish woman! You would never have the guts to leave me. Without me, you’re nothing.”

Stephanie sought refuge in the corner of her living room, and pressed her palms firmly against her ears. There had been a time when her parents would hold hands and gaze amorously into each other’s eyes. Yet, when her father lost his important position during the financial crisis, this image of a jovial family crumbled to pieces. Since then, bouts of laughter were replaced by shouts and the sound of dishes crashing to the ground. Stephanie had become quite the master at blocking the dreadful noises out. Crouching down close to the floor, she had developed the habit of closing her eyes and gently drifting off to her “quiet place.”

Every child has a space locked away in their imaginations, where they may feel safe and warm, far away from all the troubles of the outside world. Come adulthood, that space is often disregarded due to impending responsibilities. It is still possible to catch a glimpse of it, whether through meditation or simply in dreams. However, great care must be taken; for, once remembered, reaching such a space can rapidly become the mind’s sole obsession.

Stephanie’s “quiet place” was taken from her most tender memory. Three years ago, her parents had rented a spacious beach house, just off the coast of North Carolina. Living in mountainous Colorado, this vacation represented Stephanie’s first encounter with the ocean. It was love at first sight, as she experienced a powerful connection with the rebellious waves. The ocean possessed a

restless soul in search of adventure, which reflected her own heart’s desires. Though she was only five years old at the time, she absorbed all the elements of her surrounding with surprising sensitivity. During the day, she could spend hours sinking her back into a bed of sand, caressing her fingertips against the reefs and inhaling the stinging taste of salt carried by the breeze. Whereas most of the other children spent entire afternoons splashing through the ocean waves or flying kites with their parents, she preferred simply walking along the shore, collecting seashells and listening to the laughter of the seagulls flying above her head. At night, she would lie on the gray, wooden terrace of the house, gazing up at the cluster of golden stars lighting up the pitch-black sky. If she was lucky, a firefly would flutter past her sight, and she would quickly rise to her feet in an attempt to capture it within the palms of her hands, a childish game common to the south. Her parents, comfortably sitting in the rocking chair behind her, would chuckle at the sight of her jumping up and down, the little speck of light swiftly escaping her grasp. When the moment came to say goodbye, Stephanie climbed to the top of one of the largest dunes on the island, ignoring the warning sign at its foot, stretched her arms out wide, and filled her lungs with cleansing sea air. Stroking the wind, she was determined never to forget the scene playing out in front of her—the pelicans diving headfirst into the waves in search of their next victim, the ocean shrubs swaying to a music only they can hear. Despite the seclusion of the island, Stephanie knew this was the only place, where she could experience absolute freedom and joy. Tears blurred her vision.

Thus, whenever the world appeared the bleakest, Stephanie would return to that place safeguarded deep within her thoughts. She would close her eyes, and let her present situation slowly fade away, in order to once



again find herself sitting cross-legged at the peak of the dune. Her hair fluttering wildly in the wind, a gold strand tickling her upper lip, the only sound surrounding her would be the tumbling of the ocean waves onto the soft beach before her and the palm trees struggling against the humid breeze. Her mind would feel emptied of all previous preoccupations, liberated from the darkness that had clouded it.

“Stephanie, sweetheart. Don’t be scared. Mommy and daddy are just having a bit of a disagreement. It’s time for bed, alright?”

At the sound of her mother’s voice, Stephanie was carried back to reality. She nodded, as was custom, and blankly climbed the stairs up to her bathroom. Ten minutes later, her teeth brushed and her pajamas on, she crawled into bed. Stephanie had not uttered a single word. In fact, over the past three years, she had remained perfectly silent, as if speech were unnecessary in bettering her circumstances.

Life at home had become marked with anguish. Yet, while many children could seek refuge amongst their friends at school, solitude and grief followed Stephanie with every step she took, like two detectives spying on a crime suspect. She struggled against her anxiety to allow light to slip itself into her daily routine, and freely relish in the same games as the others, but she would rapidly find herself back to the bottom of the dark pit she had long stumbled into.

“Stephanie, your book report is insufficient. The assignment was to write two full pages about the different elements we discussed in class, including your own impressions. You handed me half a page of summary.” Mrs. Fischer let out a sigh of exasperation.

Stephanie stood expressionless before her. Suddenly, a seagull landed on Mrs. Fischer’s shoulder, and her desk wobbled, as a wave crashed down onto the floor beneath it. She let a smile seep through.

“Are you listening to me?! Do you think this a laughing matter?” Perplexity overcame Mrs. Fischer’s face. In twenty years of teaching, she had not come over such a peculiar pupil.

Stephanie’s classmates, who were peeping in on the scene at the front of the room, chuckled quietly.

“She doesn’t care about anything! She doesn’t play or talk with us; all she does is hide away in her dreamland,” one boy sniggered. Sensing that he had obtained the attention of his peers, he stood up from his chair, and began to act out an imitation of Stephanie. He walked a few steps with his nose in the air, until purposely bumping into the side of another student’s desk. The classroom flooded with laughter.

A tear began to run down Stephanie’s cheek, which burned red with shame. Once again, her walls were crashing down, and she needed to run for shelter. She escaped to the far right corner of the classroom, beneath the powdery blackboard. Hands on her ears, eyes closed, she drifted away. What seconds before had been a bright ceiling lamp blinding her eyes, was now a gorgeous orange sun setting on the ocean. A cloudless sky lay before her, with blended taints of light pink and purple glistening onto the sapphire blue water.

“Silence everyone! William, go back to your seat. You too, Stephanie.” Mrs. Fischer attempted to salvage what was left of her class. She knew that pursuing the conversation with Stephanie would be futile. Instead, she would call in her parents to intervene in on the situation. Perhaps, they could shed some light on their daughter’s awkward behavior; for, where there is a troubled child, there is often a troubled family concealed in the shadows.

Having eventually emerged from her corner, Stephanie remained silent for the rest of the afternoon. Once she arrived home, she ignored the tea her mother had prepared for her, and isolated herself within the tiny garden she had



arranged when they had first moved in. Seashells decorated its edges.

Two evenings later, Stephanie's parents came home looking strained, their faces having abruptly aged with worry. Their meeting with the schoolteacher had brought them to confront their demons, and realize the effect of their never-ending disputes on their only child. It was as if they had always been secretly aware of their family's fragility, but had needed a stranger to force them to bluntly admit that there was an issue to face. Mrs. Fischer had sat them down for over an hour, in order to first pin down the situation, before then calling in the school psychologist to propose possible solutions.

"I believe you foremost need to have a serious discussion with Stephanie. Show her that you care, and that your disputes have nothing to do with the amount of love you both share for her. Secondly, I would advise you to seek help with a professional, in order to sort out your personal issues. Perhaps, a good idea would be for the three of you to take a small break, and go somewhere to clear your minds." The psychologist's suggestion seemed to appeal to Stephanie's parents.

Back at home, they summoned Stephanie, and recounted the previous discussions of that evening. Stephanie twitched uneasily in her chair, as she silently listened to her parents apologizing for the hardships they had submitted her to over the past years. She nodded. Her soul, however, was not lifted.

"The psychologist advised us to go on a vacation, in order to get our family back on track. What do you think? We can go to a place a little more luxurious, seeing that your grandmother, in an attempt to help us move forwards, is offering to lend us money for the trip. Is there somewhere special you'd like to go?" Stephanie was surprised to not smell alcohol on her father's breath.

She shocked her parents by answering her father in the most confident and steadiest of voices. "Yes. I want to go back to the island, off

of North Carolina. Traveling to any other place would be useless." An idea rummaged at the back of her head.

A month flew by. Her parents' promise had been short-lived. Though they avoided offending one another at the dinner table, Stephanie could still hear their yelling behind closed doors, as her nightly lullaby. Nevertheless, they had maintained their plan to travel back to the place Stephanie desired the most. Despite her grandmother's assistance, her parents were unable to acquire the same house they had formerly stayed at, only managing to rent a small three-bedroom at the beachfront. None of this mattered to Stephanie, for she was not planning on sleeping in a cotton bed that night.

On the flight over, her parents had spoken of relaxation and finding peace. Yet, once the bags had been lifted out of the taxi and laid onto the front step of the beach house, the missiles were launched once again. According to her father, Stephanie's mother had not selected the appropriate house out of those offered. It was not spacious enough, too far away from the main harbor, and plainly not to his satisfaction. The taxi swerved away, and Stephanie was left standing motionless beside her parents. This time, however, she kept her arms hanging loosely at her sides and her eyes wide open. Their flight had gotten in late, and night had already thrown its veil above this floating piece of land. Crickets had begun chirping lullabies to the pale moon, whose light guided lost souls beneath her. The cold sea breeze flowed through Stephanie's hair, carrying with it a most melodious voice. "It's time," the voice whispered sweetly in her ear.

Stephanie dropped her duffle bag to the ground, and ran as fast as her legs could carry her in the direction of the beach. Caught in their argument, her parents hadn't even remarked her absence. In a blink of an eye, she had passed the back corner of the house, and following the wooden boardwalk, was relieved to finally feel her feet sink into the cool sand. She stood still for a moment, gently breathing in the salty air. Over the last few years, she had felt like the ugly duckling in Andersen's fairytale,



unable to find a nest for herself in the world she had been born into. Now, a surprising tranquility surrounded her. Abandoning all thoughts, she slowly closed her eyes, and let the tumbling sound of the ocean guide her.

A wave embraced her waist. "I have been expecting you," it murmured.

Stephanie put a halt to her march, and keeping her eyes firmly shut, she sighed, "I have made it home."

Like a bird about to take flight, she spread out her arms, and let herself fall lightly backwards. In eager splashes the ocean's arms wrapped tightly around her. The seahorses had prepared a cradle of seashells, and the sand had formed a soft pillow for her golden head. In the dark sky above, the stars bore sole witness to the child peacefully disappearing under the water. That night, Stephanie fell asleep smiling.

Dear Mom, Love Jason

By Aurelia Clavien

I will never forget the time when Jason first left for the war. It was a crisp autumn day in September. The trees were colored in all shades of gold, and leaves were carefully stacked at the corner of every street. The tumbling of the ocean waves onto the soft sand seemed to reflect my inner torments. Dressed in his beige uniform, Jason already seemed to fade away amidst the changing scenery. His eyes glittered with hope, as he whispered goodbye in my ear and laid a tender kiss on my cheek. Before I even had the time to wipe the tears from my eyes, he was out the door and had slipped into the jet-black car, awaiting him by our front porch. The next three weeks were the longest of my life. Each night I was woken up by the same heartrending nightmare, in which an official knocked on my door to announce that Jason had not made it through the journey to Iraq. My only comfort would come during my long evening walks on the beach, as I would stare up at the moon, imagining that my son was doing the same and we were once again connected through the night sky. It was only when I received the following letter in my mailbox that I was able to let out a deep sigh of relief:

October 13th, 2008

Dear Mom,

The journey to Iraq was one of the most challenging, not to mention exhausting experiences of my life. I thought it would never end. The superintendents had warned us about culture shock during the information session back home, but never in my wildest dreams could I have pictured the horror of the situation over here. As American soldiers, we are confined to an enclosed area outside the center of the city. When we do travel to the town, we are bombarded with the fearful and sometimes hateful stares of the local people. Not a single man stands without a weapon, or a fully protected uniform. We can't take a step without hearing a fired shot or explosion. Do you remember how, after the car accident, I would suffer terrors every night, seeing flames all around me as soon as my eyes were shut? Though I was only five years old, my stomach felt as if it were being ripped at by interminable shocks of anguish. This same sensation returns to me today. Having just arrived, I am not yet hindered



by the extreme fatigue as some of the others. But I fear that after a few months, it will become harder and harder to remain alert. Nonetheless, I am prepared to take on all my assignments. Our chief gave an inspiring speech yesterday. The entire squad was filled with such a great sense of purpose. We are here to prove our capability to serve our country in the war against terrorism, delivering its noble democratic teachings, in order to free those who have been suppressed. I feel a strong sense of pride to have been called upon to help those in need. Afterwards, I'll hopefully be able to apply what I've learned here in my studies at medical school.

Nevertheless, mom, I do miss the reassuring breeze of the ocean wind and the sound of your sweet voice. The Iraqi desert brings much solitude, as our eyes burn with dust and our throats never cease to be parched by the heat. Know that your son is showing more courage than he ever has, and that, despite the rigid conditions, he is staying strong and is sending you all the tenderness of his heart.

Love,

Jason

After reading the last few lines of his letter, my heart felt as if it had suddenly stopped. I became completely frozen, sitting alone in the oppressive darkness of my living room. The wind was howling through the trees outside, while the sun was slowly sneaking off to bed. But, the only image that lingered in my mind was that of a soldier, alone and tired, fighting to write a message of comfort to his loved one. I knew that Jason was doing his best to sound positive about his role in the war, in order for his mother to obtain some feeling of reassurance. Though I am proud of his incredible bravery and determination, he must know that a mother will always worry about her children. I will be unable to rest, until I may once again hold him

safely in my arms. We had promised to take turns and write to each other only once a month, but before I knew it, my hand had already grabbed the nearest pen and I was scribbling down a loving reply.

December 13th, 2008

Dear Jason,

Winter has finally traveled down to the south, covering the sandy beaches with a blanket of soft snow. The restlessness of the usual coastal breeze appears to have been replaced by an oppressive silence. Without the warm weather tourists, the beaches are deserted nowadays. Only the local children, licking icicles and building snowmen, seem to be enjoying the change of seasons. Everyone else, including me, has tucked themselves away, nestled between covers, in their homes. Though I sit watching snowflakes drawing beautiful shapes against my window, my thoughts are overtaken by images of you alone in a burning desert, the sounds of explosions threatening your every gesture.

The day you left for the war will remain marked in my memory forever. I will never forget my incessant cries to convince you to turn back on your decision. Your father was taken from us too early, and one funeral is all that I could bear. Solitude and struggle have been dominating themes in our life; but, even working three jobs seven days a week was worth my pain, as I hoped it would enable you to pursue a good education and make a name for yourself in this harsh world. When you announced to me, fresh out of high school, that you wanted to enroll in the war, I felt as if all my hard work had been for nothing. I realized you needed to affirm yourself, and perhaps venture to a world much different from our own. What else could I do, but to allow you to leave? Deep inside, you are just as strong-minded as your father was.



Yesterday, I decorated the Christmas tree. As I hung the wreaths on all the windows and drew trays of cookies from the oven, I found myself recounting Christmas stories and glancing at a vision of you by my side, as has been our tradition since you were a little boy. I wish snow would not melt, so that I may be able to collect a handful of it into an envelope and send it to you—a token of peace, a gift of refreshing reassurance—

Next week, I will be celebrating Christmas at the parish with the local mothers of other young soldiers in Iraq. They are the only people I feel I can truly talk to these days. Together, we share the same sleep-threatening nightmares as well as hopeful dreams. At the stroke of midnight, we have all agreed to each light a candle for our loved one across the ocean. I pray that this light will reach you amidst the darkness of the night sky, and that you have also found a caring group to turn to in times of doubt. May you find a glimpse of joy on this Christmas day, and may the New Year bring you home to me.

Love,

Your mother, who will forever be proud of her son's remarkable bravery.

Months slowly chased one after another. The days on my calendar were evidence of the usual passing of time, though I seemed to be standing still in a somber void. With each new letter Jason sent, my dread ripped deeper at the pit of my stomach. His letters no longer contained that note of optimism or pride found in the account of his arrival in Iraq. He appeared to be growing more and more pessimistic in his descriptions of the war, not to mention confused at the role he was playing within the Iraqi community. Jason wrote to me of the change in his chief's attitude, only administering orders and never answers. He was no longer looking up to him as a model to

follow, but rather a man full of complacency and injustice.

May 9th, 2009

*Dear Mom,
I feel empty due to a lack of purpose in my mission. I asked Sergeant Wilcox what I could do to bring further aid to the locals, as with the construction of new institutions. When I breached the topic of Weapons of Mass Destruction, he merely replied, in a most aggressive tone, that I needed to concentrate on doing what I was told and minding my own business. How can he say such a thing? Is this not my business? Is this not the reason, for which I was called to Iraq? [...]*

All around him, men were falling ill from exhaustion and lack of hygiene. He had already witnessed six of his friends disappearing to the hospital ward. One of them had lost two limbs to a landmine, while another was tragically shipped back home, having not survived his operation.

More than ever now, my biggest fear seemed to be holding a menacing knife to my throat. Could this then be how it will all end? Would I, too, get my son back in a large, wooden box, only dignified by the patriotic covering of the American flag, like an excuse for the atrocities he had been subjected to? And, even if my son did make it home to me safely, would his spirit not be changed forever, unable to cope with leading an average life after having seen the world at its darkest? Such questions now dominated my every thought, causing my own limbs to tremble with every movement.

That following Christmas, the angels offered me the only gift my heart had so deeply desired—My son came home safely from the war. Needless to say, the first few months were difficult on the both of us. Jason would avoid crossing gazes with me and would never answer questions about his experience. Instead, he seemed to find peace only in his own silence, and barricaded himself in his bedroom, where he would spend most of the



day endlessly writing letters. I found it strange that he never went to post the letters he had written, never even dignifying them with a mailing address. Perhaps, he felt the need to transcribe his inner terrors into words, so as to liberate them from the prison cell of his mind, or he was writing to the soldiers, the friends he had learned to know and lost in Iraq. It pains me to know that I will never be able to mend some of my son's deepest wounds, as his greatest pains remain a mystery locked deep within his mind and to which he refuses to give the key. What I do know, however, is that after having been left to cope with his thoughts for a year, Jason appeared to have grasped a newfound strength from his mourning.

One morning, as I lay his usual hardy breakfast of bacon and eggs in front of him, Jason announced that God had allowed him to live while others had not been so fortunate, and he would not let this life go to waste. Every trying experience in life brings a flood of tears, but once the monsoon has passed, only strength and courage may call the sun back. Those who are attentive to the monsoon, learn to build homes in safer places, such that the sun shines brighter than before. That very evening, Jason applied to Duke Medical School, which enabled him to follow the path God had chosen for him.

After years of study, he had established himself as one of the most recognized heart surgeons in the country. Despite his successes, his experience in Iraq maintained a cloud above his head, where the faces of those passed remained at rest forever. It was this, which led him to donate all the time and money he could to the construction of a modern hospital for injured soldiers. Next to the hospital could also be found an assembly house for their families and friends, where I would arrange group meetings and offer a reassuring shoulder as best I could. Peering into the tired, red eyes of grieving mothers, wives and sisters, I would see my own ghosts from the past reaching back at me. Not a single night went by that I did not pray for each family subjected to the same agonizing fear as I had been. Mainly, I prayed that they would be as fortunate as I had been to see my son run free once more; but also, that their sons would grow into men as passionate and valiant as mine had. Looking into the mirror, the image of a fearful woman, glaring out at the stars from her misty window, was now replaced by that of a proud mother, a woman with an inner peace she hoped would linger for generations to come.



Impressum

Contributors

Arnaud Barras
Deborah Madsen
Michael Rösli
Mélodie Morgane Hauser
Aurelia Clavien

Editors

Arnaud Barras
Susanna Gebhardt

Other

Illustrations & Logos Jennifer Wong
NOTED Logo Jonas Hauert

Newsletter Layout

Arnaud Barras

Proofreader

Arnaud Barras
Susanna Gebhardt



NOTED is a biannual newsletter produced by the staff and students of the English Department of the University of Geneva. Find your free copy of NOTED at the Department (Comédie), the English library (bd. des Philosophes), or online: http://www.unige.ch/lettres/angle/vie/newsletter_en.html



**UNIVERSITÉ
DE GENÈVE**

Publication of the Next Issue:

Beginning of Autumn term 2011-12

Deadline for Contributions:

31 July 2011

For Contributions and Feedback:

noted-lettres@unige.ch