

# Speech Leapin'

Ryley Fallon

—Poetry Competition

With my tongue, I wage the Mississippi River,  
Against the current, up to Illinois.  
My mother's homeland, bound by corn.  
She spoke her first words  
Three hours south of Chicago.

In the summer of 1999,  
She slammed her Lincoln-tagged talk  
Into a Toyota Camry and moved South  
With her Gulf Coast-bound accomplice.  
For their Last Supper, they shared a "pop."

My mother met my father through a blind date,  
But his voice stuck with her.  
With a golden, cross-engraved band on her finger,  
My mother promised to love my father more than  
grammar  
And to pick baby names that rolled off the tongue  
Nice n' easy.

From birth, my mother and father  
Had me leaping between voices;  
Mom did her best to mimic my father and his  
community:

"You're dad's fixin' to get off of work."  
"Get out from under us, this is adult conversation."  
But her mother was to be called "Grandmother,"  
Nothing more, nothing less.

I can tell if my mother has been talking to her family:  
She tucks her voice into a neat package, tied with  
ribbon,  
Her words, tailored to her tongue  
With inches of phonetic fabric cut to fit her,  
Pinned with precise pronunciation.  
The sound of her childhood.

My mother listens to advice  
At her Wednesday night Bible study:  
How to raise "young-un's," memorize verses, and clean  
pans.  
She nods to a group of women she trusts.  
There's one thing she will never share with them,  
though:  
She doesn't make me call her "ma'am."



## Trippy

Auriel Quiroz

Painting—oil, gouache