

Damaged Darlings

Mary Miller

I always loved Swink's "Damaged Darlings." Described as "an exercise in literary genetics whereby two fiction writers work collaboratively in a specific manner: the first offers a work-in-progress he or she has neglected for some time but still treasures; the second is brought on to take the blemished but beloved narrative and transform it into something new and more complete." They published these collaborations in each of their three print issues, and they're still my favorite stories in the magazine. In *Newpages.com*, Weston Cutter said of the "Damaged Darlings" in *Swink 1*, "The results are fucking brilliant, to be blunt, and both stories within, David Hollander and Nelly Reifler's 'Whatever We Were Beforehand' and Amy Bloom and Chris Offutt's 'I Was Dancin' with My Darlin'' work as stories, as mysteries (which author wrote what?), as strange and beautiful harmonies."

I have a handful of stories that I can't finish, but I don't want to trash them and I don't want to strip out all the "good parts" and fit them into other stories, or (God forbid) try to turn them into poems. Why can't I finish these particular stories? They often seem to be the ones in which I'm trying to follow the trajectory of what actually happened instead of allowing a nonfictional experience to spark a fictional story. How awesome would it be to have a writer who had no idea what had actually happened, or who these characters were, take over? Better yet, how about one of your favorite writers?

It seems that collaborative literature is coming back into fashion, or perhaps it never left. I recently opened up the new issue of *PANK* and read the first two poems, which were co-written by Elisa Gabbert and Kathleen Rooney. The poems are brief and have a singular voice, which makes them even more curious--did they take turns writing a line, pass them back and forth? Did they work in person or via e-mail? What if you hate what the other person has written? I don't know, but I want to find out. I think we should start a clearing house, a place where we can post all of our "damaged darlings" and let somebody else have a shot at them.