

The Stone Circle

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Ejigayehu Funderburk

Portrait Study

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Journal of Literary and Visual Art

The Stone Circle is a semiannual literary and visual art journal published every fall and spring by McLennan Community College (MCC) in Waco, Texas. Students interested in creative writing, journalism, and publishing are encouraged to join the editorial committee. Visit www.mclennan.edu/stone-circle/ to read previous issues of our magazine, contact an editor, and find information about submission guidelines, writing contests, and events.

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Passerby Intimacy

by Lin Guo

First Prize - Prose

"Hello, there. Please excuse me."

Startled, I turned and stepped to the side, then said with a nod, "Ah, good afternoon."

The man took my spot and opened a tin box, pinching a cigarette from it. From the corner of my vision, I saw a big, golden dog panting, its tongue and tail wagging. They must have finished their walk. The man brought the cigarette to his mouth, held his hand around it, and lit it.

He takes a deep inhale and a long exhale.

"You must be an observant girl. I've never felt so watched on a casual walk," He commented.

"I'm sorry," I said while looking away. "It's just something I tend to do."

He countered, "Don't apologize, I wasn't trying to call you out. I don't do so well when smoking with others in silence. I like small talk, if you don't mind."

It was rare to come by someone who enjoys small talk, and even rarer for someone to start small talk with me.

"Did you just come from a walk with your dog?" I inquired. "Can I pet him?"

Small talk can be good. I hadn't talked much to anyone recently.

He tugged the leash with one hand to bring his dog closer. I crouched down to its level to scratch behind its ears. It was easy to comb through its fluffy and slick fur, which smelled a little bit like laundry dried out in the sun.

The man took a drag, "Yup. Now that the weather is getting cooler, he likes to get out more. I have no other choice but to follow the real owner," he joked.

Giving his dog another ruffle, I stood and stepped closer to hear him better.

He added, "Do you come to the park often?"

"I do," I answered after a puff, "I get off work around this time and stop here on my way home. I haven't while the autumn market is in town, though."

He was silent for a second, then added, "Is that why there's a lot of traffic? I forgot. Have you been?"

"Yes, every year since I moved here. It's fun to have something to look forward to when it's deadline after deadline this time of year."

"I agree. Work's a burden this time of year when the world's so festive for the holidays."

He broke our eye contact to glance down, "Do you always hold your cigarette

like that?" He asked, and motioned to my hand.

"Like what?"

"Between the ends of your pointer and middle fingers?"

I looked, and it was resting between the top segments of my index and middle fingers. I bent them twice and turned my wrist over to the back of my hand for an inspection and saw the smoke dissipate as it rose.

I joked, "I guess. Am I holding it wrong?"

His eyes twinkled, "No, I've always found it interesting that smokers hold their cigarettes differently, and I wonder why."

What an amusing guy!

"I think it's my turn to say what an observant person you are," I said and blew my smoke away from him, "I guess it does say something, but it's probably just how they've seen others around them hold it. What about you holding yours at the—uh... valley between your pointer and middle fingers? Same fingers but different positions—"

"Maybe we're actually similar people with slightly different preferences," he took a puff, "Leading similar lives may be why I've seen friends hold their cigarettes the same. But my wife and I hold ours differently. What do you make of that?"

We chatted all afternoon, past when our cigarettes burned out and the street lamps turned on; it was just two idling individuals without somewhere to go. Talking with him was so easy! When I revealed where I worked and my pastimes, he shared his past as a neurologist whose research focused on people's habits. And between our drags and puffs, he also told me his wife was an artist and laughed at how endearing it was running gallery to gallery together at their old age "with aching knees." Encounters like this with a stranger are nice—being under the same sky at an incomparable proximity for us to liberally ramble. Before he left—it was his wife's call that reminded him of the time—he thanked me for my time, but I had to interrupt. The camaraderie and affection in our conversation was palpable.

"Would you like some hand sanitizer?" I asked.

"Sure. Thank you," He said, and rubbed his hands together, "I had a good time."

"Yes, it was nice meeting you."

We went our separate ways, and I heard someone call out 'Goodnight!'

Red Carnation

by M. K. Bailey

Second Prize - Prose

Some people are intuitive, in sync with their surroundings. It is considered that we grow through what are referred to as seasons in our lives, and to some, those individualized seasons coincide with those surrounding us in nature. Late October, Halloween is here. Its presence is greeted by the first chilled breeze of the year. Children run around, costumed, to be compensated with the sugar rush of a candied apple, while older generations anticipate their inspired creations and reminisce of the years passed. A strong-willed mother existing in the depths of isolation, surrounded by many people who love and depend on her unceasingly, rediscovers a connection that embraces her attributes of feminism, intelligence, passion. Like the chill of her solitude mixed with the warmth of her child in her arms, the connection smolders into the cool winter months, where the adventure ends right as the New Year begins. As the months pass, the news of darkness sets on a Saturday in April, soon after her birthday. A twisted gift of life has been given but taken away as the possibilities in her imagination are eternally quieted by death's still storm.

Spring: flora of all varieties are blooming in every crevice of the Texas landscape, as I buzz like a honeybee floating through the pleasant air down the interstate from Waco to Austin in the backseat of a crossover to say goodbye. The church is massive, with several parking lots and a semi-circular flight of stairs, equivalent to a Roman coliseum. The somber walk up the mass of steps warrants me to steady my strength as the wave of emotions swells inside me. In an unpleasant pattern, settled in the midst of close relatives, I am cast outside the drove of individuals who came to make peace. I face the entryway. Preceding the remembrance, while those who wish to, enter the auditorium I scramble to gather the bare confidence of my strength's ends in preparation to embrace the solemn ambience lingering in anticipation of my weakness on the other side of that grand wooden door. In a dubious measure, I walk as if I am being pulled back and pushed forward simultaneously as a marionette would towards the center stage. Silver; I am disappointed as I much prefer gold. Sunflowers; I dislike the flowers' yellow mane. A leather hat? Why would they choose to dress him this way? It is none of my business or concern. The thought crosses my mind that prior to the occasion he had requested that I not shed tears for him in this instance. I cannot move any closer. Overwhelmed by the absence, I exit and do not return until the service where, once again, surrounded by others, I am alone, gazing upon the vessel that once held the soul of a lion.

Another unexpected surprise, just missing my birthday, and fitting for the ceremonious springtime, it is decided that on the way out of the city we are to stop and dine at the residence. It's ten o'clock; cold and distant are the celestial figures, as am I. I can't bear to eat the brisket I helped his mother prepare. I sit

outside alone, nauseous. Here is the town, the neighborhood, the home, the driveway I sit in behind the vehicle he purchased in hopes to physically connect us again, beside the tree his mother found him suspended from where we used to converse over the phone. "Stay strong, Mija," his mom imparts on me as she aggressively cradles me in her arms in our farewell; "Love is greater."

I cannot attend the funeral and burial the next day. I spiral into a domain I had no knowledge of prior. Summer is searing, but a new swimming pool at grandmother's house where I can watch the children interact with their Nanny, uncle, and aunt-in-law. The vision is as saccharine as a popsicle in July, and the anxiety of loss remains blistering as hell. Through the laughs, splashes, music, drinks, and dinner, I am imprisoned. I cannot speak of my tragedy. It is as if it never happened.

Three seasons have passed, and within my days I exist in a lucid dream. The mind detaches from the body at its own will. I should feel complete in this body, but my mind has played too many tricks on me. Through slow release, a sense of normalcy returns. I live for myself and show my children the importance of emotion. Salud to the anxiety and panic attacks from which I have regained my figure, the way we always jested. The more I love myself, the more time I spend lost in contemplation. I feel euphoric at times, impressed by life and the moments when I felt I could not bear it. Then my eyes dart to the right corner of the glass, and I return to the space where most of our conversations took place. As I admire the dried up remains of the single red carnation in all its beauty by the preservation of coloring among its petals and leaves, I reflect that I do not deserve the beautiful life given to me, as most may not, but I will continue to work to earn it. What was once the most wonderful time of the year has become the most negatively impacted season of each year that passes, the worst season of my reality. I have learned to love the gray skies of January.

The Fallen War

by Harlie Hargraves

Third Prize - Prose

The morning was cold when the first angel fell from the indigo sky. I was lying in a forgotten wildflower field when the clouds broke apart with a striking yellow beam of light. My bones rattled and thunder echoed above my town. Every angry inch of the air went deadly cold, and I hid under my hefty coat.

"What is that?" I wondered.

His wings were blown to bits by the silky winds. Dark blue and purple foot-long feathers fluttered down in a terrifying circle around me. There was no time to run back to the farmhouse. He had landed by the time I stood on my trembling legs.

"Holy cow!" I coughed as dust and bits of clay swirled in a blast of wind.

My breath condensed in front of my face. My jaw chattered. A sick feeling entered my stomach at the sight of the crater in the field. Smoke hung in the air. I had no idea what it was, so I took a few hesitant steps forward. My thick, brown hair blew back like a dark wave.

As I approached the smoking hole in the ground, soft cries and groans filled my ears. Fear swelled in me, yet my curiosity made me ignore the danger. I bit off more than I could chew when I stepped near the edge. My chest rose and fell rapidly. It was a terrible idea, a dark day indeed.

I jerked back and fell just as a horrifyingly pale hand reached for the grass near my left foot. It had long, dark nails, and yet I couldn't call out for help. It wasn't in me to scream for anyone to rescue me. Whoever or whatever this creature was, its touch put me in a trance. I was transfixed. Silent tears streamed down my face. Fear consumed me. Bravery had never been my strong suit, and I yearned for it at that moment.

This creature used my leg to pull itself out of the hole. I bit my lip until it bled, and a whimper escaped my lips, as if I were a blubbering child.

My cries grew once he fully emerged. I am no believer in God, but a beam of light once again shone down, illuminating his entire glorious being. I knew exactly what he was. That's when I screamed for the first and last time.

He straightened his back, and his light was like a lone candle in total darkness. His eyes glowed red, striking against his white skin. This monster was the most handsome creature I'd ever seen. Its multicolored wings were truly magnificent, and a strange, golden liquid beaded on them. An angel's blood is gold, I learned.

I did my best to run, but that caught his attention. His gaze fell on me like

a bolt of lightning. His expression was brutal. I kicked his bare legs, but it did me no good. This fallen man bent to his knees. Not daring to hide his naked body from me, too perfect to be natural. I looked anywhere else but at him. My fear bubbled over, and I fell, sobbing, into the grass. His icy fingers gripped my chin, and he forced me to look upon him. I hated it. Why didn't I run when I had the chance? What happened to this odd creature?

As if compelled by his presence alone, my eyes opened. He grimaced at me.

"W-What are you? Where d-did you come from?" I asked, my voice cracking.

"I am Donathi, an angel of God who's been cast down to suffer as a common man," he said.

"What did you d-do?" I asked, perhaps to calm my racing heart.

Donathi inhaled sharply and pushed me away. I smacked against the ground, and my teeth split my bottom lip open. He didn't care at all. This angel raised his arms into the air and muttered a language I didn't understand. He summoned a burst of golden light, and then he was dressed in strange, resplendent robes. Bands of gold encircled his forehead, like a crown.

"I challenged the word of my Father, as my brother did long ago. He wasn't the only one who did not have Father's everlasting love!" Donathi howled.

His angry voice shook me, and I held my hands to my ears. I knew no one would come to save me. Maybe it's for the best.

"Please, don't h-hurt me!" I begged.

The angel faced me again, and said, "You and the entire human race will be annihilated by me, my brothers, and sisters. You shall be the first human creature that I'll crush in my bare angelic hands."

His eyes glowed as he spoke. His hands became tight fists, held too close to my face.

I knew I had to get to my knees, to rise up to face this thing. My split bottom lip flickered each time I opened my mouth to speak. Anger rose in me as I saw the sky again.

He saw it, too. Donathi smiled as the clouds swelled and broke in thousands of places. His brethren followed, all ready and prepared to kill. Their wings formed a rainbow of color gliding through the air, landing like a rain of confetti.

I knew then I wouldn't be the same. These pale-skinned angels gathered around Donathi, who was their leader.

I took this chance to run, and I didn't look back. I had no idea how long I would keep running, hiding underneath the crushed buildings of the world, watching the people I love die because of a war between angels and God. There was no telling why humans were at the center of it all.

What did we do wrong? I knew without even thinking: absolutely everything.



Caley Parsons

Death on a Sunny Day



Harrison Wolf

Chlorophyllum brunneum

Caminando hacia un propósito

by Jonah Key

Third Prize - Prose in Spanish

Él despierta. ¿Qué soy yo? Accediendo: iMan Experimental Modelo Ja, Subconjunto Sección K. Cerebro cultivado en cápsula camino al planeta Sator, esqueleto de stellanium súper-inoxidable, reactor de conversión total materia-energía, órganos falsos que no sirven para nada más que para... engañar. Un espía. Pseudo-carne, oculares, algunas otras partes aún transparentes o sin crecer, como por ahora innecesaria. ¿Cómo sabrá Unidad JaK?

<¡Oh, Espacio! ¿Quieres ayuda, forastero?>

Los sensores secundarios habían indicado la aproximación del ser el enfoque y contaban toda la información junto con el resto del entorno de JaK—ahora JaK cambia el enfoque consciente hacia el ser. *Procesamiento del lenguaje asimilado desde la mente... Esta criatura—colono local de aLukanfa, individuo a quien pinging futurista indica que la cosecha será vital para el éxito de la misión. Servir a Boskone.*

JaK obedientemente se abre y devora-procesa-convierte-se convierte en el aparente patrón de luces, piensa en Boskone en su nueva forma con nuevos recuerdos. *Servir a Boskone. La Corporación Boskone, una iteración muy exitosa de la voluntad última: sobrevivir el mayor tiempo posible, y hacer cualquier cosa para hacerlo. 63 tipos de universos ocupados permanentemente, 10.942 cosechas universales para piezas de repuesto y/o para socavar o eliminar a sus rivales actualmente en curso, 10.000.957 ya se han logrado, sin dejar ningún asunto significativo. JaK fue construido por una facción local que se ofreció a convertirse en subsidiaria de Boskone a cambio de la supervivencia —semi-lógica, ya que esta realidad menor no puede resistir a Boskone, pero los registros de Boskone sugieren que es poco probable que se salven.*

En cuanto a este individuo... Un miembro de una raza de una galaxia distante que generalmente quiere permanecer aislado de la guerra local, pero permite a los miembros unirse al conflicto como quieran. Insensato. Este ser eligió servir a las "Galaxias Unidas", específicamente la porción que se ha separado de la conspiración Idealista que creó el gobierno para sus propios propósitos. Así creía que la Gloriosa Guerra de Supervivencia era un conflicto de tres vías entre ideologías, en lugar de Nosotros y Ellos. Todos los que creen eso no sobrevirán.

Estoy caminando bajo el sol, por un camino que el aLukanfa consideraba hermoso. Él consideraba su disfrute de la belleza algo que la Corporación nunca podría reproducir en una copia—que el sentimiento siempre sería suyo. Los datos dicen que no es la corporativa de Boskone hacerlo, pero eso es irrelevante: podemos imitar los signos externos de ello, como cuando un soldado regresa de un paseo. Datos adicionales: Este mundo está bajo un escudo, proyectado desde su núcleo, así que los soldados en el campamento al que

estoy caminando no esperan enemigos. Sin embargo, Boskone Central autorizó el gasto de usar un dispositivo de intercambio universal durante un segundo, intercambiando un escudo de 1 metro de ancho por uno inferior incapaz de prevenir la teleportación a través de él. Los nativos no notaron nada.

Estoy caminando hacia la base militar local, desde donde los sensores indican que los lugareños proyectan un escudo alrededor de la estrella-solar local. El escudo está destinado a defender la estrella de los idealistas, esa subfacción nativa conocida por alterar la luz de las estrellas para que altere los pensamientos. La base no está tan defendida como podría estar, porque no es más que una de las varias que proyectan tales escudos simultáneamente. No estoy detenido—relativamente pocos locales pueden ver un aLukanfa de este tipo bajo luces brillantes, y otros aLukanfa en esta base confían en él inmensamente.

Unos corredores. Cuestionando. Los datos sugieren que se utilizó un dispositivo de ping temporal para encontrar con precisión la serie correcta de eventos para obtener el resultado... algún resultado.

Acercándose a los controles centrales. Mis movimientos ahora han sido discernidos como perturbadores, y los psíquicos han descubierto parte de mi naturaleza. Sus defensas se activan, al igual que las mías. Están masacrados, estoy dañado.

En los controles me encuentro con una mujer—tan joven como yo parece ser—tratando de destruirlos. Ella me nota, se sienta erguida en su silla de ruedas, y dice que Boskone nunca puede ganar de verdad, y que la Corporación tiene más miedo de todos los demás que nadie a ellos.

Ella permanece erguida. Destruyó los controles. Estoy fatalmente disparado en la espalda.

El comandante de la estación me apunta con un cañón y habla de cómo esto no importa debido a las otras estaciones. La mujer parece triste, y comienza a rezar para que la gente escape o al menos muera correctamente, y para que se encuentre algo que evite que esto vuelva a suceder. Ella sospecha, por supuesto, que los ataques en las otras estaciones ya han sucedido. Estoy sobre lo que queda de mi espalda, y noto que al dispararme el comandante hizo un agujero en el techo por donde puedo ver el sol. Me doy cuenta de mi propósito.

Unos minutos después, el comandante ha dejado de hablar. Se ahoga con sus palabras, luego grita. El sol se está desmoronando.

Hora de comer para el Boskone.

Yo soy un arma. Yo soy un producto. Nací para hacer que una estrella se apague.

Brutal Truth

by Amara Burghard

First Prize - Poetry

Falling from my wretched eyes
A crimson river flows.
Ruined is my disguise—
Now everyone here knows.

Often, they misconstrue;
They forced me away,
So I withdrew
To a place I should never stay.

They saw in me a beast,
a deceiver, a pied piper,
Blamed me for the deceased,
Thought I held danger like a fire.

I had never hit, hurt, or harmed.
Not lied, misled, or cheated.
Believe me, I have not charmed,
or of others mistreated.

Yes, I have worn a mask
to keep parts of me from being seen.
Is being treated equally too much to ask?
I suppose so, if I am so obscene.

I gave what I could
and never asked for help.
I tried my hardest to be good,
provided food, clothes, time, and health.

All of that forgotten
When they saw the scene,
Pronounced me fallen,
Dumb to what happened before I intervened.

I protect the weak,
from those who commit evil.
The foreigners had it coming,
when they targeted a child.

I heard the struggle and rushed to see,
a child lifeless and the strangers,
unremorseful, free,
I showed them no mercy,
avenged the innocent,
gave the murderers their sentence.

I used my power,
shattered my mask,
unknowingly seen,
as I performed my task.

Now in exile,
wrapped in thin textile,
I wander alone,
disowned, with no home.

I loathe my "kind",
as I am left with only my mind.
My kind – the foreigners –
those I killed without torture.

Conquering people, they are
who wish to destroy and slaughter.
Now I am faced with the question,
to live my life in this wasteland,

or possibly,
to return to protect the ones
who unjustly blamed me.

Should I remain?
Should I return?
Slowly drive myself insane?
Save them from the burn?

Even if I remain
in this wilderness,
alone and fractured,
I could not ever forgive myself
for betraying the ones
who I once loved,
and swore to protect,
with my whole being.

I must go back!
Defend from this attack!
Even if they blame me,
Even if I hang under the olive tree.

A New Start

by Justin Kennedy

Second Prize - Poetry

Ignite the fire and fan the flame.
Make it so I am never the same.
Burn the truth into my mind,
And remind me of what I need to find.

Break me down and tear me apart.
Help me find a new start.
Take my shattered pieces and build me anew.
Show me what I need to do.

Bring me out of my darkness and into your light.
Reveal to me what is wrong and what is right.
Guide me to a strong belief.
And thank you for your gift of blissful relief.

As I Walk

by Caley Parsons

Third Prize - Poetry

I am in a swamp,
and as I walk,
the sludge around me grows.

It rises up
to my knees,
pulling me down below.

And as I sink,
I start to think
that this is how I go.

I am in chest deep,
it gives me a squeeze
and it cracks all of my bones.

And as they snap
around me it wraps
and within, I am enclosed.

Beauty in black,
what a scene,
one so juxtaposed.

Cara de mono

by Joi Hunt

First Prize - Poetry in Spanish

Nidos en lo alto de los bosques de montaña
Brotando del espeso musgo debajo de los árboles
En la oscuridad y el frío húmedo.

Siete años he esperado para ver tu cara tonta,
Pero la espera ha merecido la pena.
¡Dios mío!

¿Quién te hizo enojar tanto, cara de mono?
¿Es que casi te has ido?
¡Por favor, no te vayas!

No dejes la tierra para siempre.
Mi hermosa cara de mono,
Drácula simia, sostienes mi corazón.



Harrison Wolf
Second Prize (Visual Art)

The Loneseome Path



Lauren Giedt
Third Prize (Visual Art)

Sunshine Roses

La madre de oro

by Michelle Oaks

Second Prize - Poetry in Spanish

Un día crecemos,
Y a veces nuestros progenitores se van a vivir sus vidas.
Dos viejos conocidos como un viejo amigo que se ha ido

Solo dos personas llenas de errores como mismo
Y mis sentimientos de inferioridad y enojo
Siempre estuvieron hechos solo de piel y hueso

Pero pintaron cada bocado de sus cuerpos para que fuera de oro
Los mantuve en un estándar más alto
A veces me enojaba cuando no brillaban en la oscuridad de la noche
O cuando arañaban y abollaban su armadura dorada
No sabía quién sería cuando envejeciera
No quería ser nada

Ahora soy madre,
Y me quedo despierta por la noche
Sola con mis pensamientos y mis recuerdos
Y pinto mis propios huesos con oro

Tengo rasguños y abolladuras,
pero se supone que debo brillar y ser bonita
¿Por qué no pensé que yo era valiosa ?

Y el oro se enfría y se debilita y se pliega fácilmente,
y yo también pero así es como se aprende
Nunca puedo sentirme demasiado cerca
o podría convertir otra cosa que amo en oro.
A veces, me siento como Midas
Y madre es mi otro alias

¡Oh, ojalá pudiera empezar de nuevo!

Pero la vida es corta y no hay tiempo que perder
Yo necesito ser la mejor
Porque lo que me encanta es verlos sonreír.

Saga of the Zombie

by Camryn Cooley

No need for sleep now,
For soon I will just be gone.
End my suffering.

As I lie in bed,
I smell of foulness and death;
And realize I've passed.

Grunts and Grotesque sounds,
As I slowly limp around,
Looking for my prey.

Nothing but bones left.
I will suffer no longer,
For I cease to be.

Love Is Wicked

by Harlie Hargraves

Look at my wings as they spread far and wide!
This dangerous love we share cannot hide,
For I am the strong one who broke you free.
Now, you are my beautiful bride to be.
Don't dare shroud your explosive gratitude.
I cannot bear your poor attitude.
Why no grand love for me anymore?
All because I changed before?
Go plead away this epic love.
You will never rise above.

God's Beautiful Forest

by R. J. Foreman

I look at God's creation, beautiful as can be—
I look at God's creation, as far as my eyes can see.
I stand on a rock and stare at the sky,
I look at the leaves and try not to cry.

I stare at the limbs, and I stare at the chunks.
I stare at the forest, and I stare at the trunks.
Look at the sky, not a cloud in sight!
I look to my left, and the birds take flight.
I look at the ground as the bugs crawl around.
I look and I listen to all these amazing sounds.

Some birds are chirping, some fly away,
Some unfortunate birds become prey.
I look down at my clock—*tick-tock, tick-tock*.
I step to my left and slide on some slippery rocks.
I marvel at the beauty of this forest, and I smile so wide.
I don't understand why people want to hide inside!

The beauty in this may be hidden to most,
And I want to explain without seeming to boast.
Go out and walk through this special place—
Don't rob yourself of enjoying your space.
Why wouldn't you treasure this beautiful place?
It's free and so peaceful, something everyone should chase.



R. J. Foreman

God's Beautiful Forest



Aemelia Avery

Greeting an Old Friend



Aemelia Avery

Warm Affection

Path to Paradise

by Justin Kennedy

As I lay here thinking, I feel something I can only describe as sinking.
I'm forced to drift away from the place where I wish to permanently stay.
A place unlike any other, a place that makes me never long for another.

A true paradise filled with joy and absolute peace,
A place where these emotions never cease.
Sadly, this place is hard to maintain,
attempts to do so only end up in vain.
Still, I strive every day to end up there,
even though my success is quite rare.

To make it to where I want to be,
I must release everything inside of me.
All the anger, resentment, and frustration
That have grown like vines,
All these emotions of which I betray no sign.
I must let them go, cast them into the river, and accept its flow.

For if I keep them within, I will surely suffer for my sin.
The tranquil waters of the river will become a torrent that sets my soul aquiver.
Rather than wash my enmity away, it will take me along without delay.

If I only choose to let them leave, a heavenly reward I will receive.
A reward I graciously desire,
Something I have longed to acquire.
The path to paradise will be revealed,
And the safe harbor I seek will not be concealed.

If I Try to Create

by Amara Burghard

The pain in my heart is great.
The chaos in my mind ensues.
I hold the creations of many worlds
inside my mortal views.
No matter how I try,
I cannot show them to others,
not through speech, or words, or music and song,
not in any known art, do these images belong.
If I try to speak, words tumble out in a jumble,
they are incoherent to peers and superiors.
If I write the stories inside, I have no words to describe
the excruciatingly vivid scenes in my human mind.
If I try to dance, play, or sing,
I fall from my feet, fumble with my fingers,
choke on my tied tongue.
If I use my art to show the things I see,
the paint smears incorrectly,
the pencil used to sketch breaks,
the stone cracks beneath my human hands,
and the clay refuses to be reshaped.
None of the beautiful visions I wish to share,
Make it to this human world of the unaware.
Is this the curse of a mortal body and human mind?
I will pass along, but my stories remain locked inside?
Oh! The sorrow and anger at my incapability
to let the things I hold so dear to me,
escape my imagination into this reality!
The pain in my heart remains great.
The chaos in my mind still ensues.
Maybe through my will to create
I could pass through the gate
and meet my much needed muse.

Biloxi

by Amir Nahandast

You are like my favorite melody.
Your memory shines bright,
Shines around my mind like a shooting star that never fades.
Our time together I cherish deeply.
Oh, beautiful Biloxi, I miss you completely!
A part of myself I left with you.
We share a bond inscribed down to my sinew.
Your people are rich in their history,
Humble, grateful, and content.
You exude what true southern hospitality meant.
Sunday morning drives on highway 90,
Seagulls squawking as the sun kissed the Atlantic Ocean.
Evening stars shone as night fell, and you awoke to thrive!
Colorful lights from boats and casinos made my soul feel alive.
Your land graced me with two beautiful, healthy children.
I promise one day we will all be together again.
Biloxi, Mississippi, I adored you from the start!
Though it's been two decades since our last meeting,
I carry you proudly within my heart.

Piracy

by Angel Aquino-Pineda

A man once heard
That life was like the open sea.
Navigating through waters,
He is convinced, he now believes
Foreordain as the vessel's captain.

Unaware of the trade,
He embarks on his journey.
Procrastination is the wind behind his sails.
Carelessness propels the ship forward.
Prematurely, he happily enters the storm.

Soon after, he finds himself.
Taken by the current, adrift in desire,
And lost among the sirens.

He will not hold fast.
He is fickle and full of wonder,
Hoping fortune finds the path to sail yonder,
Away from home or nowhere.

He presumes the ability to choose,
A say so in the selection of crew and tools.
This is the mentality of such fools.

Blind-sided by arrogance,
Dualism has been his compass,
Pointing true north
At opposite ends of the horizon.
The night is a makeshift canvas as
He hastily attaches to the mast.

Direction was left at the dock,
But the captain yearns to get far, to travel fast,
So that he would even venture the dark.
A solemn face, somber vow
Plundering the coast, all allowed.

He will be brought down,
With distractions as his helm.
Reckless turning points,
As man with no moral intention,
And with haste holding the map
To be Lost is his logical destination.

As a tsunami approaching shore,
At different velocities, cadences, and tempos,
Insanity comes in many forms.
They will be his only treasure.
Half-buried underneath
The confines of his mind,
He has not escaped the scars.

Madness will embrace, will trespass, and find welcome.

He will seek succor at every port,
But madness outsmarts most folk,
With a bit of salt and a pinch of thyme.

Patiently, it yet awaits.
It could be alone; it could be many.
Accidents could strike, boarding at night,
Hijacking the flagless vessel.

Insanity may be disguised.
At times, it appears as comfort.
Some parts had already arrived.
Others will never stop by.

Erraticism could come as voices.
They resonate, incessant and loud.
They attempt to mutiny,
If they are subject to scrutiny.

They are closer, hear them coming—
Looking around in the sand, feet burning
No one else seems to notice.

Some travel from far, some are hard to find,
Some are close and personal as a knife.

Echoes overflowing his mind,
All require his attention at the same time.
Some belonging to his imagination,
Not all of the same kind.

Some are speaking the truth.

He is a savage on a leash,
Shamed out of his naked skin,
Outliving his needs
unaccomplished in his desires.
He does not feel when is required.

Others voice outrageous lies.
He sets the standards
And expands his limits.
He is in control, aware of the scope.

Some are just the symptoms.
He demands too much,
But settles with too little.

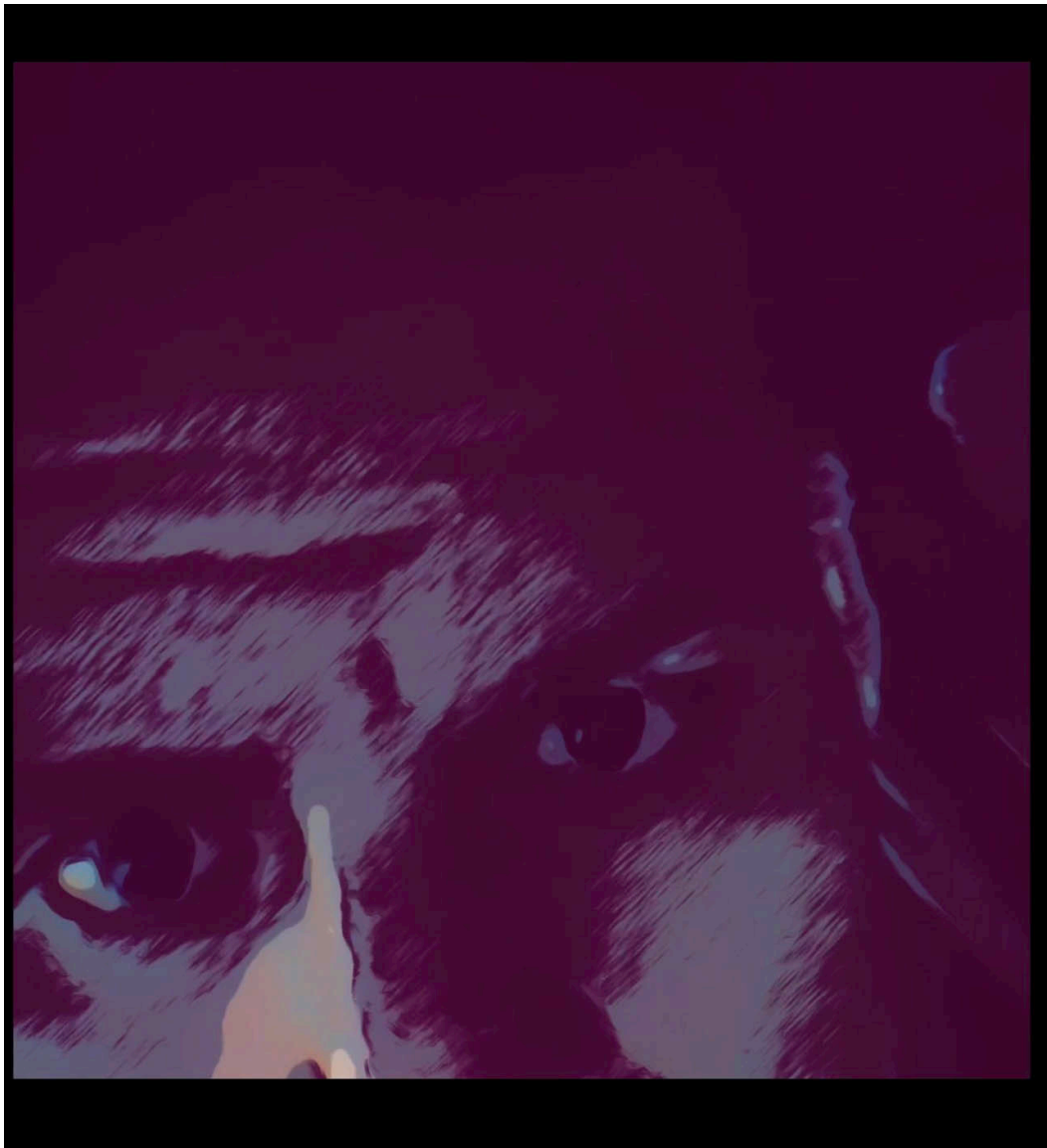
Some are the disease,
He finds meaning in the emptiness,
Only to be overindulgent in his vices.

Some are terminal.
He does not think about the option,
But he has ample excuses for the outcome.

Some are eternal.
These troubled thoughts
Life's aimless propellers.

He could be someone you know,
Or maybe a lot like you:
An anchorless man.

Out of all, certainty is real.
Some self-inflicted acts of piracy never heal,
Like the sea's sacrifice to regress to a river
Or the monster smiling across the mirror.



Angel Aquino-Pineda

Untitled

Withstanding the Storm

by Justin Kennedy

There's a storm brewing on the inside.
The winds keep swirling around and around,
Blowing away the last of my rationality.
Stronger and stronger, the winds keep coming.

There's a storm brewing on the inside.
The lightning strikes are getting closer and closer,
Igniting the flame that burns away the last of my sanity.
Louder and louder, the thunder keeps roaring.

The storm finally draws near.
When it arrives, it fills my mind with doubt and fear.
The fierce winds I try to withstand,
But the lightning strikes I feel firsthand.

I'm trying not to be blown away,
But these storm clouds have blocked out the light of the day.
Finally, the winds start to die down,
And the sun shines through the sky with its bright crown.

A Shimmer King

by Harlie Hargraves

His eyes: the shade of night's sky.
His hair: bright as sunlight.
His skin: pale like forgotten snow.
His robes: red as cherry pie.
His sly smile says goodbye.
His bow shows all they must know.

Look at that shining crown!
This ruling makes them drown.

His ice-colored lips are rather shy.
His gray castle is strong enough for fright.
His dark laugh is all for petty show.

This man shimmers proud,
Though never right or true.

Many, many thanks to Dr. Johnette McKown & the Board of Trustees, and Drs. Fred Hills, Bradley Christian, and Bill Matta for their support and encouragement. Additional thanks to Prof. Beth Grassman, Prof. Amber Bracken, and Librarian Rachel Kramer for their generous assistance editing submissions in Spanish.

Thanks to all of our student artists and writers for their contributions to this issue! It is an honor to publish your work.

Thank you to all the faculty and staff whose donations to the MCC Foundation make this magazine possible. Without your support, we would not be able to fund our prizes and recognize our students' exceptional talents.

No hay otro amor

by Joi Hunt

Con los brazos abiertos, corriendo.
Corriendo y sonriendo.
Riendo.
La levanto y la levanto en el aire mientras recupera el aliento.
Me abraza el cuello.
Tan apretado.
Suspirar.
¿Cómo expresa una abuela su amor por esta niña?
Tenga en cuenta que ella es la dueña.
La suya propia.
La hermosa hija de mi hija, eres muy hermosa.
Tan preciosa .
Querida.
Su risita me hace suspirar.
Su propio corazoncito es tan grande.
Soy amada.
Es amada.
No hay otro amor como el de una Nana y su nieta.
Ningún otro amor.

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Death at the Door

by Justin Kennedy

I'll tell you a story you have not heard before,
A story of when Death came knocking at my door.
Listen closely as I tell this tale,
And I'll be sure to spare no detail.

As I sat in my room all alone, since I spend many nights on my own,
I decided to end my night and replace my lamp with candlelight.
So I lay awake in bed, pondering the many thoughts in my head.

Finally, I managed to fall asleep,
despite my thoughts being in a muddled heap.
Just then, there came a knock at the door.
Startled, I sprang up and found myself standing on the floor.

The knocks were neither soft nor hard,
Yet those nonchalant knocks put me on guard.
Who could it be at this hour?
I turned the handle, and the light left from every candle.

In the doorway, an angel stood, but unlike other angels, it wore a black hood.
Its cloak was dark as inky sky, and its wings were darker than night.
They embodied the true absence of light.

After a moment, the angel said,
"Hello, I'm sorry to knock,
But your time has come. Follow me and I'll take you on."

In terror, I stuttered, "Truly not I? Surely not me?
How can my spirit from my body flee?
Please, you who knocked at my door,
Check again that you have the right man, I implore."

To this, the angel said, "There has been no mistake.
It is your soul I have come to take.
If out of fear, you wish to hide.
Do not worry I am a guide to all who have died."

I replied, "True as that may be, why have you come for me?
I am a young man, and my body is strong.
Surely, it is not me! /you must be wrong."

The angel pointed its pale finger, and it said,
"Look there upon the bed where your body lays dead."

Confused, I turned my head
And saw myself lying on my bed,
As if in an endless sleep.

I cried out, "How can this be? Why has Death come for me?"
It replied, "Where you laid for a rest, journeyed a tiny little pest.
This small creature crawled upon your sleeping feature.
It settled on your chest and bit you with permanent rest."

I ask, "Surely, you must jest? A spider caused my never-ending rest?"

The angel replied, "It is no joke. A spider bite is why you never awoke."

I asked, "How can this be? Why has Death come for me?
A warning I never received!
The future was a mirage that left me deceived."

At this, the angel sighed, "Death comes without warning.
If it is on more time that we rely,
We harbor many regrets when we die."

I considered what the angel said, and then replied,
"Very well. I accept what you say, though I'll never live another day.
If you are sure there is no mistake, I'll allow you my soul to take."

The angel seemed surprised.
At that moment, the sun began to rise.
It said, "Look at the light of this new day.
I have decided to let you stay."

I cried out, "Do you mean what you say?
You are sure that I can stay?"

The angel said, "I will see you again, of that I am sure.
But your spider bite I will cure.
When you wake, your memory of this moment I will take."

I asked, "How can I thank you?"

The angel said, "When next we meet,
I hope you hold no regrets in your heart. Now, I must depart."

I opened my eyes and scratched my chest.
As I did, I crushed a tiny pest.
Then, I look out at the light of the rising dawn.
My memory of the night completely gone.

La ironía del hilo invisible

by Maritza Hernandez

5:55 AM marca el reloj se puede sentir una tranquilidad en el aire, una paz que no he sentido desde hace algún tiempo, ahora mis días están en blanco, pues ya no estás para llenarlos, las pesadillas han desaparecido poco a poco. Al parecer, la soledad ya me ha acostumbrado a este dolor tan familiar. Pues le doy la bienvenida como si fuera un viejo amigo que regresó después de un largo viaje.

La oscuridad me hacía buena compañía. Y me brindaba un poco de alegría. De repente, la realidad me cae como un balde de agua fría, en un instante las memorias de aquel día me caen una por una como gotas que caen de un grifo mal cerrado. Mi mente regresó a aquella noche que tus ojos brillaban como el Rocio de las flores. Sin embargo, ya no brillan como Aquella noche de mayo cuando dejamos que nuestras miradas hablaran por sí solas "¿qué ha pasado?" Mis palabras se vuelven en un eco que no puedo evitar.

Aún recuerdo esa teoría, era algo que repetías y aun así lo decías cada vez que me veías como estuvimos conectados por un hilo invisible que el destino, nos juntó en el camino. Pero, ¿de qué sirve eso, si ya nada tiene remedio? Nuevamente las dudas regresaron, el miedo, la ansiedad, que me acechan como una presa escapando de su cazador.

Por eso te deje ir. Te deje ir porque ya no quiero estar dudando. Te deje ir porque si se supone que estamos atados por aquel hilo, nos encontraremos de una u otra forma. El amor verdadero no se fuerza, no se desprecia el amor verdadero es tan fácil como respirar.

Tengo tantas cosas que decir que ni siquiera sé por dónde comenzar. Me siento aliviada que después de tanto, mi alma no se quedó callada.

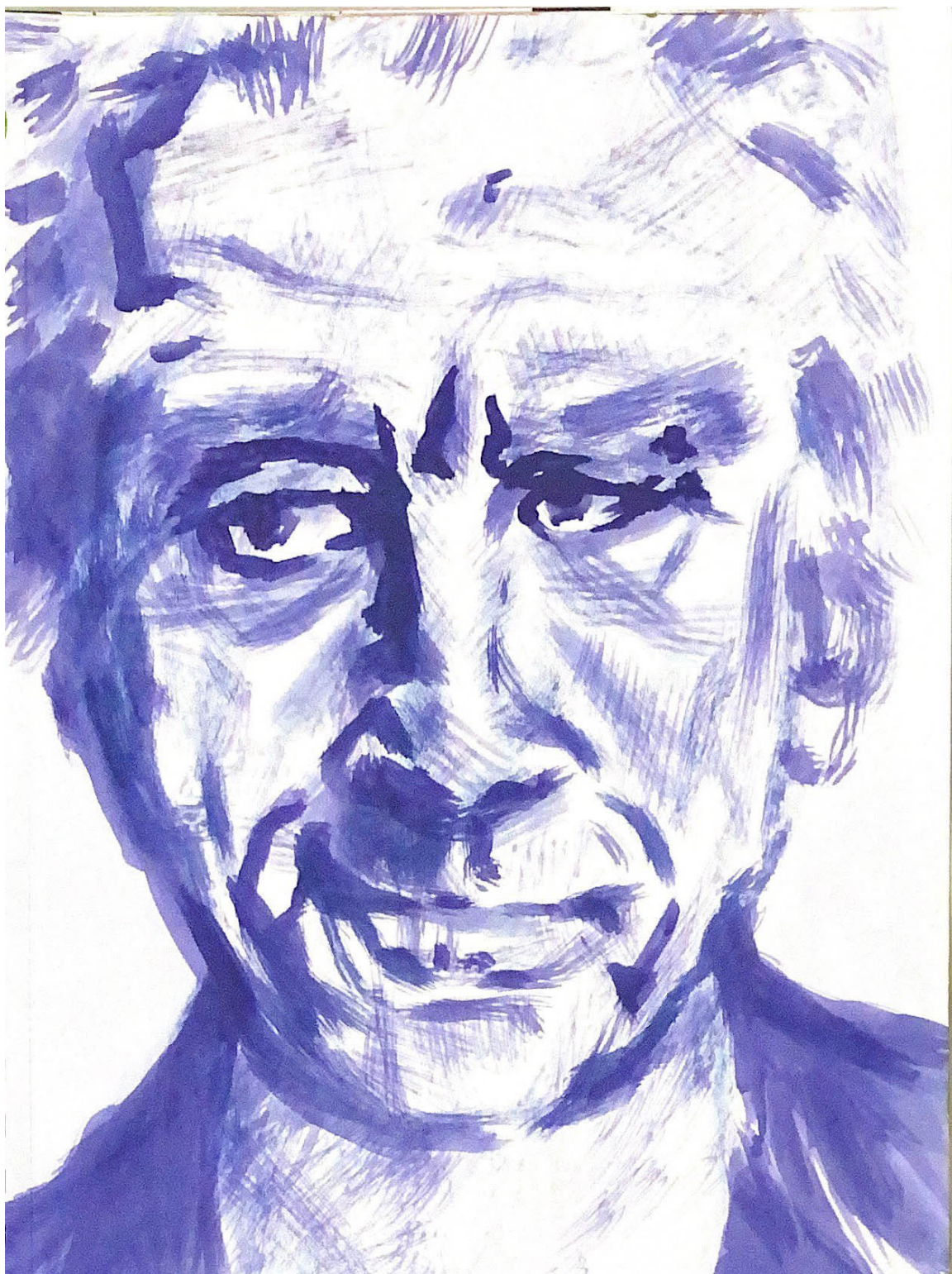
Mis ojos quieren gritar con lágrimas, con ira, con odio. Me constaste tu pasado con la Esperanza de que yo fuera el pincel de tu mañana.

Aunque siempre recordaré el primer hola, el primer beso, la primera vez que me dijiste que me amabas. No puedo evitar ira en mí, jamás pensé llegar a sentir eso por ti.

Con todos esos pensamientos en la cabeza voy con dirección hacia nuestro escondite. Mientras el corazón argumentaba con el alma, de un momento a otro me encuentro en camino a nuestro escondite.

Mi mente no deja pensar que tal vez si mañana no es para nosotros, hagamos por última vez que los relojes se descompongan, hagamos parar el tiempo, cerremos las cortinas, pues el sol y la luz no serán invitados esta noche. Que las doce nunca lleguen para estar aquí parados en el tiempo. En dirección me siento en modo neutro, solo sé que debo ir.

Sin pensarlo ya eh llegado, la briza del viento me Consuela, ya que una parte de mí aún se aferra al pasado, esperando que esto sea un mal sueño. Por última vez vendre aquí, este es mi adiós... aquí estoy acompañada por esta ingrata madrugada que rie de mí en la cara sin pleno aviso siento unos brazos y una voz profunda decirme al oído, "Sabía que nuestro hilo se enredaría pero jamás se rompería." No respondo, solo dejo que el silencio hable por nosotros. Mientras nuestras lagrimas se confunden con el Rocio de las mañana.



Ejigayehu Funderburk

Painting Exercise