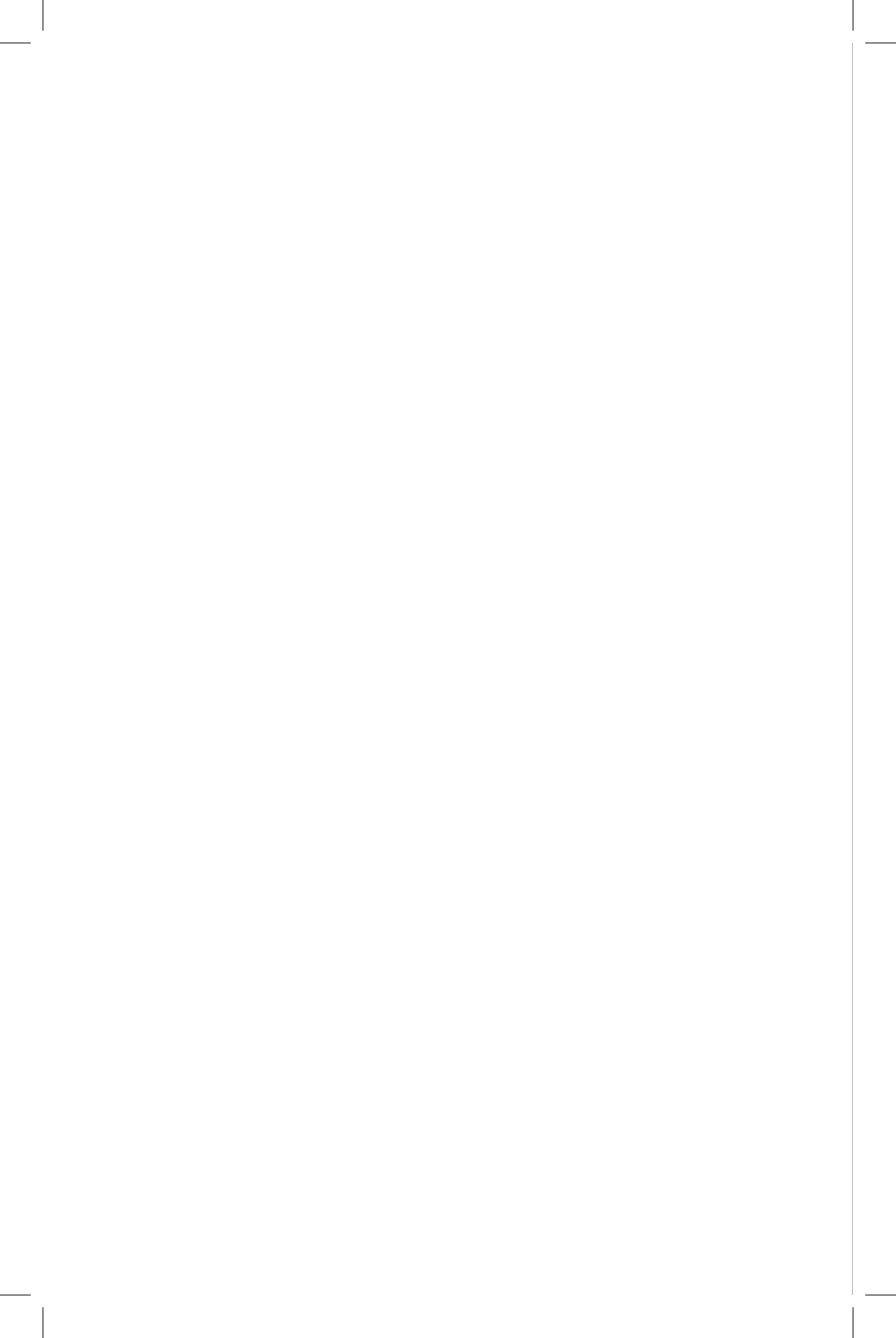


THE EXPLORATION ISSUE

THE PEN





THE PEN

FALL 2017

*Journal of Creative Writing and Art at the
University of South Carolina Beaufort*

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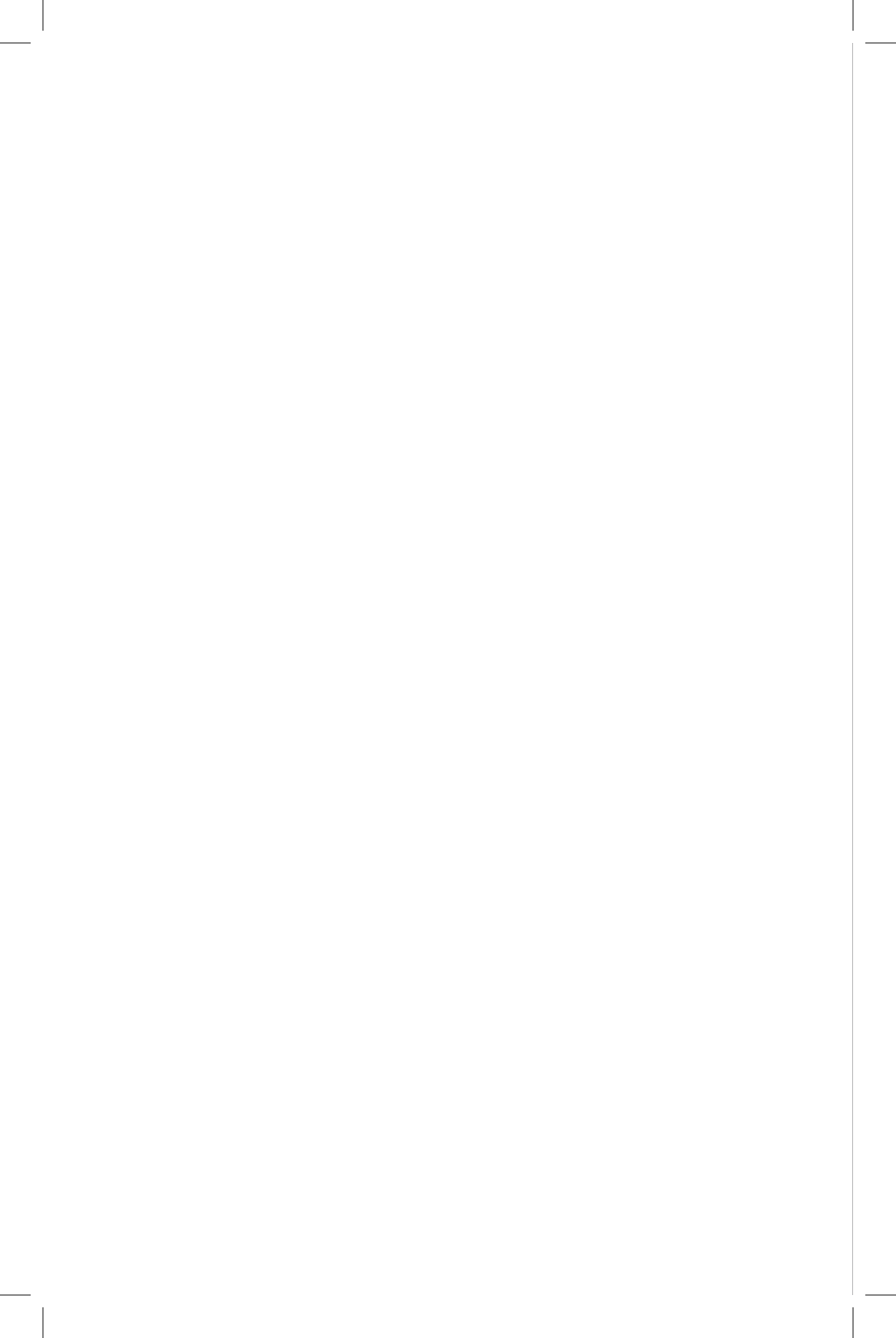
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In honor of the exploration our contributors embarked on to create their works, and the exploration that you will take in experiencing their creativity, The Pen Staff collaborated in writing an Exquisite Corpse to act as this issue's Manifesto:

Exploration

By The Pen Editorial Staff

Tranquility:

Soaring between the stars that are our neurons,
into, out of, and beyond the boundaries of self.

We travel through time, space, and soul,
our creativities flow—fleeting.

Bursting passions ignite and are exposed
into night skies, soft and silent...

So, where will you take us?

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the Exploration Issue of *The Pen*. Here you will encounter the insightful and evocative paths of creative exploration taken by twenty-one talented USCB students. There is poetry, prose, artwork, and a play that will set you on the path of your own exploration of (as we hint on the cover) love, nature, perspective, time, fear, passion, mind, physicality, and self. Self—for the journey outward is always a journey inward as well, isn't it? An exploration, as we say in the exquisite corpse manifesto on the previous page, of "time, space, and soul."

And lest ye assume this creativity is entirely the product of a bunch of nerdy English types, I'm pleased to tell you that represented in the twenty-one contributors are seven different majors: Biology, Business, Communication Studies, Human Services, Liberal Studies, Sociology, and yes, English! *The Pen* is indeed an interdisciplinary effort, and this diversity can be noted in our Editorial Board as well.

The Editorial Board is not only diverse—they are devoted, and they are diligent, and they are an absolute delight. What's more, they are a team. A great team, consisting of Amanda Mazeika, Angela Stevens, Cecelia Codling, Christopher Hunt, Maddie Csernica, Madison Hayes, Matthew Rodriguez, and Selena Menjivar. Like every great team, this one has a leader—Chris Hunt, our Editor-in-Chief. Since day one of taking over the leadership reins of this publication, Chris been a font of hopes and dreams for *The Pen* and the USCB Society of Creative Writers. He has labored long and tirelessly, and he has inspired his partners-in-creativity to remain committed to the level it has taken to ensure the successful completion of this issue. It ain't easy, I'll tell you that, to accomplish all the many tasks required to convert thin air into the beautiful volume you hold in your hands. I couldn't be more pleased and proud.

Of special note, I call your attention to the cover art and design created by board member Matthew Rodriguez. Matt is an artist; we needed a cover; the team brainstormed a concept; and Matt set right out to make reality of that vision. Done. That's what this team is all about. And how do you like the nine pronged stream of "fuel concepts" propelling the rocket on the cover into exploratory realms—one for each of us, the eight members of the student board and me, their grateful Faculty Advisor.

Additionally, I would like to express my gratitude to the talented Tim Devine, our graphics guru, who is truly a member of the team as well. A big thank-you also goes to Kerry Jarvis, Lynn McGee, Deb Johnson, and everyone in the Advancement office for their support of this university endeavor. Lastly, we are grateful to Dr. Lauren Hoffer and everyone in English, Theater, and Liberal Studies for helping make our department the happy home that it is.

Onward!
Ellen Malphrus

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CHAPTER COVER:

Mirage

By Crystal Saunders



Eclipse: Totality

By Susan Baukhages

When the moon dared
to cover the sun
day became night,
the temperature dropped,
rainbow colors refracted
in all directions,
a gift to the world,

the universe immediately present,
a power greater than ourselves—
profound.

Transformed, the sun reappeared
like a sliver of orange new moon,
sky gave back blue,
night returned day,
and the sun blazed full—
look away!

Climate Change

By Susan Baukhages

I wonder why the weather went so wrong.
It's hard to breathe—the smog's been thick for days,
I need to see the sun before too long.

No phone. No food. I'm scared. The wind is strong.
My swing set in the yard just blew away,
I wonder why the weather went so wrong.

My bicycle and house are also gone—
our lawn is gone, no flowers, only clay,
I need to see the sun before too long.

I slurp up slimy water with my tongue
my momma and my daddy drowned today
I wonder why the weather went way wrong.

My face is wet with tears, I'm so alone
Our grandpa told us climate change is fake,
I have to see the sun before too long.

In jeans and shirt, no shoes, I start to trudge
“God help me please, I'm starving now,” I pray,
I wonder if my grandpa got it wrong,
I may not see the sun before I'm gone.

Angels in our Midst

By Susan Baukhages

My mother senses angels' wings.
A smile that comes from deep within
And shines through voice and eyes and lips,
A gentle touch on fragile skin,
The lightness of each daily step;

A heart that knows when someone needs
An extra moment of its time,
To laugh and hug and listen for
Humanity to part the veil
And say and do things most profound.

Just look around and you may find
An angel sitting next to you,
And maybe you are one yourself.

My mother is an angel now.

In Loving Memory of
Kathleen "Kay" Hollinger
my precious angel mother
February 16, 1917 - September 26, 2017

A Much Needed Transplant

By Christopher Hunt

Some people are born
With dysfunctional organs.
From the moment their insides
Begins to fail, those people
Initiate their uphill battle
With themselves.
It is much the same
When a person is born
With a dysfunctional parent.
Like a failing heart,
My father was causing damage to me.
I was rotting from the inside
With rage,
Jealously,
Greed,
Crushing sadness,
And a hunger.
A hunger for love and support
From my father.
A hunger that could not
Be quelled with a simple hug and
An “I love you.”

There were times
In all of my short life
That I thought I would simply
Die

Because of my lack
Of a father.
But I didn't.
Because instead of dying,
I was saved.
I was saved by a man who loved my mom
And her children
With all of his burning heart.
I was saved by the man
I would come to know in my heart
As dad.
From the moment you said
"I do" to my mother,
There was hope.
And love.
And peace.
In a world where
My father couldn't
Or wouldn't
Love me like a father should,
You were there.
You replaced half of my
Failing heart.
You were the transplant
I needed the most.
I've never been more proud,
Than when I call you dad.

Summer Rhythm

By Madison Hayes

Doom drum
Rhythm of end
Beat me to red pieces
Dance on my nerves, tell me to die

Slipping

Ignore
Hide my dark face
Wear fictitious sunshine
Razor thin smile, all I am
Hidden

Sleeping
Work in the sun
Replace the drum with green
Smoke away instead of healing

Choking

Clinging
Dig my fingers
Into loved ones' hand holds
Make unfair cracks, break fragile trust

Spiral

Learning
Fight through the pain
Rise despite shadow's touch
Fix what can be, look in for light

Hoping

The Beacon

By Rachel Catt

I'm the only one left.

They've all died. Most of them in the beginning, but the rest only recently. Some kind of sickness swept the ship. Its' devastating effects were felt by everyone. Everyone but me.

I don't even know where we're heading. All I remember is being woken up in the middle of the night as I was dragged towards this metal coffin. We took nothing with us. No photos, no sacred treasures, no memories. We abandoned our homes and livelihoods to reach some unknown destination.

My parents were a few of the first to be taken by The Sickness. It started with a headache, then came the hives that would make them scratch until they bled. The bleeding didn't stop until their hearts did. I don't know why I was spared. Maybe I'm immune, or maybe the symptoms are taking longer to affect me.

The Bridge is my only clue to where I'm going. A flashing beacon on the Captain's screen is the only indication of my destination. The shields are down, so I can't even use the stars and surrounding galaxies as a point of reference. All I know is that I will be at that beacon within the day.

I walk back to the Hangar Bay to do what I do every day: bury the dead. In space I can't give them a proper burial, so I just say a prayer before I jettison them out to the endless vacuum of space. So far, I have had to say goodbye to 742 of the only people I have ever known. There are five left. All of them are what was left of the flight crew. When The Sickness hit, they hoarded the medicine leaving the rest of our people to suffer while they sat safe and warm on the Bridge. Needless to say, they eventually ran out leaving them exposed to their inevitable deaths.

Their funeral consists of no prayer, and no tears are shed. I catapult them into the darkness as unceremoniously as they left the rest of us to rot. The emptiness of the ship engulfs

me. There would be an utterly dead silence if it weren't for the creaking and groaning of the ship hurtling through the universe.

I pass the remaining time sitting in the Captain's chair staring down the flashing beacon as if that could make time progress any faster. The burden of all that has happened weighs me down making my brain feel like it will explode at any second.

Somewhere between watching the beacon painstakingly drawing nearer and imagining what kind of world I'll be landing on, I fall asleep. Nightmares plagued me. One second I was enjoying my family's company, then we were interrupted by screams of terror as people ran in all directions trying to escape a fire so massive it blocked out the sun.

Fire engulfs me. My skin is searing off, but I couldn't die. I'm stuck in an endless loop of pain and misery.

I jump awake. I unconsciously scratch my hands over my arms making sure fire wasn't licking its way over my body. My head pounded as if I had been screaming for hours in my sleep, and my skin itched at the memory of being burned alive.

Something is different.

The ship isn't groaning anymore. The beacon is gone from the Captain's screen.

I slowly make my way to the Hangar Bay. Every step closer, I become more and more wary of what lies outside the doors. I could die the second I breathe the new air. For the first time since The Sickness hit, I'm terrified.

I pause just before the gateway to either my future or my destruction. A low buzz emanates from the other side. My hand hovers over the button to open the door. I close my eyes and remember my family. After taking a long deep breath, I push the button.

Intensely bright sunlight pierces the stale air of the ship. The buzz becomes louder.

In front of me, hundreds of people are staring. Some

are holding what must be weapons. I pause at the top of the ramp that has now lowered to the ground. A man steps forward from behind a row of people.

“It’s alright. We won’t hurt you,” he says.

I edge my way out into the unknown world. Reluctantly, I ask, “What is this place?”

A slow murmur echoes throughout the hordes of people. He reaches his hand out as if he wants me to shake it. I extend my arm out to meet his.

“Welcome to Earth,” he says.

But, I’m not listening.

My outstretched arm, still itching, is covered in red bumps. My headache pounds away to a deadly beat inside of my skull. All of these people. They have no idea.

I have The Sickness.

Puddles

By Kirsty Fitzgibbons

The storm is finally here.

The water is high, way higher than I have ever seen it. Its threatening to breach onto the pavement, if that happens it won't be long until it reaches the houses.

I watch with a sense of helplessness.

The birds are missing, no geese or egrets here today.

There is a shiny blue dragonfly under the porch with me, he doesn't seem to know what to do with himself. He flits around and eventually lands on a small ledge, it's like he is trying to figure out what he is supposed to be doing. We watch the rising water together.

I can see the wind. It dominates everything and is outlined by the sheets of water being thrown down by the storm. Each droplet seems as if it is connected and moves in unison with the next, twisting and turning like a flock of swallows. They land on the glassy surface of the water and transform into a million beetles scurrying this way and that until they surge as one, trying to break free of the banks.

The trees are dancing, bowing and resisting as the storm rages against them. I realize as I watch them that this is life – The storms may force us to bend, but afterwards we will rise up and be stronger. I sit for a long while and watch nature fight against itself.

Many times, my storms have forced me down on the ground with the debris, drowning in the puddles, many times I thought I couldn't get back up again. A tempest sitting on my back, forcing me down. My storms have bent me so low I thought I wanted to snap.

As I lay on the ground in all of my brokenness I watch raindrops. Inertia dictates that their journey isn't complete. The shock of their sudden landing radiates them outwards, the edges begin to rise, forming perfect circles that reach up

and crescendo into diamonds topping perfect tiny crowns, before gravity takes over and pulls them into the puddles.

I have lain in puddles like these before. Puddles of shame, put upon me by those who couldn't deal with their own. I have lain in puddles of despair, desolate and cold. I have lain in puddles while enslaved by their addiction, paralyzed and cold by fear and self-doubt.

But as I lay there, like now as I sit, the rain eases a little. The dragonfly seizes the opportunity to whizz off to continue his life. As with all storms, this one will die and relinquish its victims back to upright. As the tree's rise to

stand protectively over us again and the puddle begin to dry, signs of new life protrude through the chaos. The calm *will* follow the storm, and as nature intended, everything left remaining will grow taller and be stronger than ever before.

CHAPTER COVER:

Lolli Lolli

By Kassie Harvey



Contemplation

By Tia Dobson

On the days I find myself lost in thought,
I seem to find myself thinking of you
With these same lips that I curse love and all it stands for,
leaving a bitter taste in my mouth
They can't seem to get enough of the sweet nothings your
name brings when it comes off of the tip of my tongue
The very ears that writhe in pain from the chorus of love songs
Seem to listen better than ever at your voice, as though it was
the most sincere love ballad ever made
By angels who had their faith restored in everything
My eyes that closed long ago, leaving me love blind and only
seeing in black and white
Are now wide open seeing things in HD and making me dream
in kaleidoscope colors
I fear the worst is happening to me
For you see, I was content with my gray skies and broken spirit
A shattered heart never breaks again
Now my tears of sorrow have mixed with tears of joy and I fear
This flood of emotions will break the damn that I built long ago
Can you handle the hurricane that is myself
With the umbrella you said you'd keep me out of the rain in?
Will your love boat for two make it out the stormy weather and
seas of doubt that have been raging on my insides for ages
My fate of loneliness has been written in the book of fate,
Do you dare tear the pages?
Contemplate with cautiousness and as you lose
and as you lose consciousness,
Search your dreams and see if there is a place for me
Or dare I say we

Rubbers

By Susan Baukhages

My brother and I
home after school,
parents at work,
go into their room

pull open a drawer
where we find a box
that looks like balloons.
We open one, stretch it,
fail to blow it up.

Try to put it back
it won't fit
so we throw it out,
straighten the drawer
and close it.

That night we hear yelling
behind the closed door
of our parents' bedroom,
did they miss what we took?

The next morning
they call us to that same room,
open the box,
and ask if we took something from it.

Afraid of the anger
we hear in their voices,
fear twists our tongues
and we lie. Mother cries.

Daddy lowers his head
tells us to go,
we run for the school bus.
What were those things in that box?

Years later, when I think of
the wrong we had done,
I need to confess.
It's too late for my parents,
so I'm telling you.

Through a Stuffed Animal's Eyes

By Christin Edge

I'm waiting for her when she gets here.
She's so little, just like me.
Her clumsy fist grabs my ear. I don't even care.
Her eyes find mine. I instantly know.
I am her bunny.
I will be there for her.

She is three. So am I.
We're in a store. A lady points a camera at us.
We're told to smile. She grabs my ears nervously.
I put on my biggest smile.
I am her bunny.
I'll grow up with her.

She is five. So am I.
We're at school. It's playtime.
Someone wants to hold me. She says no. I'm grabbed.
My seam rips. It doesn't hurt as bad as the look she's now
giving me.
But it's okay, because I am her bunny.
I will be strong for her.

She is fifteen. So am I.
She hugs me tight, sobbing.
Saying the name of a boy she knew.
Her heart breaks. Mine is ripped apart.
I am her bunny.
I will cry for her.

She is eighteen. So am I.
She spends three hours packing her room, placing me in a bag.
We go to a place full of books and classes, hopes and dreams.
She takes me out, puts me on her new bed.
I am her bunny.
I will ride to the future with her.

She is twenty-three. So am I.
Her long white dress hangs from her closet door.
A near-full box awaits me.

She hugs me once, twice. Smiles as she closes it.
I am her bunny.
I will wait for her.

She is twenty-six. So am I.
The box opens. Her eyes meet mine. She smiles.
She picks me up, holds me, puts me on her big stomach.
I get a sense of déjà vu.
I am her bunny.
I will stay with her.
I am waiting for her when she gets back.
She brings me to him. So little, just like me.
His clumsy fist grabs my ear. I don't even care.
His eyes find mine. I instantly know.
I am his bunny now.
I will be there for him.

Something unlike flowers

By Phillip Owusu

A blooming mixed emotion poem
Not a beat, but a song with a melody
Pictures that spoke less than a thousand words
A picture of you, A picture of me,
A picture of us
tired of these shitty lines with meaningless words
pointless relationships that never mean anything
heartbroken with romantic words that just won't formulate*
The shallow past haunts me constantly
Till I'm consumed by guilt
From words that were thought to bind
Broke us both
Our love was a sentence.
A sentence that was missing the vowels that makes up words.
Words that were like a bull in a china shop.
ruining a thing that was only decoration
I say it's no big deal,
But I'm the one who's still bleeding on the floor;
Crying while trying to pick up the pieces.
Our love that wasn't just lost, But broken.
We broke our love and scattered it
Among the crying wind
For the warmth in your eyes
Freezes my heart
Frozen like a rusted statue in this rain.
Your glowing eyes shattered my reality
In a world where you still here
Our lips together
Paint splattered on the walls
Memories used to fill in the holes

A picture of us
It was left open for interpretation
So we can be torn apart by the silver lining

Our breaths beating as one,
Steps perfect in time.
Hearts stepping to a wild dance.
So, I guess we're at the end
Of cupid's noose
While we bleed out what once was.
we are tied together
And ironically falling apart
Medusa's arrow
that only brings the snakes
That turn our hearts to stone
With a Doll face that changes fast,
And a Ghost boy that disappears just as quick.
They both vomit a quick acting venom
A romeo and juliet style poison
With a suicidal, hamlet ending.
The sun stopped shining
For It was only a spark.
the moon now glows
as bright as the sun once did
For the night is brighter than the day
Now
I end this poem
Like we sank this ship
Suddenly.

Men and Strong Women

By Christopher Hunt

How would I have fared, I wonder
If I hadn't had the pleasure of growing up
With a mother with a spine of steel
And a heart of honey?
What If instead of watching a woman
Show the world that she is a force
To be reckoned with,
I saw fathers and uncles
Throw empty words with heavy implications,
Backed by flaming hands and scarred voices,
At the women in their homes?

How would I have fared, I wonder
If my sisters were taught that they were
Meant to be used and to keep quiet about it,
Instead of telling the world what they thought
With their best voice of commanding power?
What would my mother and sisters look like
Sitting without words on their lips,
And no swords on their hips,
Blankly staring at nothing as they go about what is expected,
Weathering the weights of a male dominated society?

I wouldn't have learned that women are worth more
Than the undeserved trophies of oppressing others.
I would have never felt the certainty that comes with
companionship.
I would have never known that we don't have to call them
"Strong Women" to know that they are equal to the men
around them.

The Boy

By Matthew Rodriguez

A boy has a secret only he knows. It's almost come out before, but he's too clever for it to escape. When he's home alone he poses as someone else. He's been wearing his mother's clothes on and off since he was 12. Satin dresses, panties, heels. Maybe he does it because he prefers the feeling of satin and silk, or maybe he does it because of how manly his father wanted him to be. Not even the boy knows why he does it. He hates himself, but he's addicted. With the creek of his bedroom door, his world shatters.

Lovely Escape

By Madison Hayes

Oh, your gentle curve,
The redness of your lip,
Your silent mouth caught in a circle,
I lift my fallow hand,
Your hip to mine,
And smack dat ass

CHAPTER COVER:

Closer

By Crystal Saunders



Regarding my Sunflower

By Christopher Hunt

Even on days of gray,
She looks towards the sun,
Confidently triumphing against
Overbearing overcasts
That attempt to drown
Light with bleakness.

With gentle encouragement,
She grows beautifully,
Her petals open up
To the wonder of life,
Ready and waiting to accept
Brilliant radiance.

Illuminating all around her,
She laughs,
Gifting music to ears at bay.
Her gentle glances
Blossom from elation
And inspire peace.
The effortless beauty
Derived from my Sunflower,
Brings me to my knees in awe.
The sunlight she absorbs and exudes
Illuminates all of life's magnificence,
Bathing everything in serenity.

When I look at her,
The beating of my heart
Becomes deliberate,
My mind centers,
And sudden clarity overcomes me:
She is tranquility.

-when asked "do you love her?"

Unexpected Adoration

By Christopher Hunt

When I

First noticed that
I loved you, my chest lit
Aflame with a rediscovered
Lightness.

“Lift Off”

Laughter

Ringing from your
Lungs, singing me a song
That no instrument could ever
Mimic.

“My Favorite Notes”

Passion

Ignited in
Your eyes with flames from stars,
Enthralling me with the need to
Explore.

“Silent Encouragement”

Rhythmic

Heavy breathing,
Holding on for dear life,
Purpose and care in every stroke--
Make love.

“To the Beat of Our Hearts”

We are

A cliché of

The most annoying form:
Where love is easy, kind, and sure.

“A Hallmark Movie I Actually Like”

Unbent.

Sweet Girl

By Selena Menjivar

He laughs
But not with me
He laughs with her, disgust
He should be mine and mine alone
End Her

Porcelain Balloons

By Amanda Mazeika

A girl
Wearing a bone
White silken dress, clasped tight
The string to her red porcelain
Balloon.

It was
Innocence, not
Helium that lifted
The red balloon, though fragile it
Still hung.

Blue boy
Tickled her, the
Girl with the porcelain
Balloon, of whispered love with ill
Licked lips.

Slipping
Fingers lost their
Covenant with the string—
The porcelain balloon, now shard
Remains.

Black Ink
Melted down once
Rosy cheeks to her chin.
She walked over the pieces with
Bare feet.

Polaroid

By Rachel Mendieta

I remember the first time we were alone
It was in your room
Walking in I was overwhelmed with a utopia in which you ruled
You were giving me guitar lessons but to be honest...
I could care less about learning to play guitar
You asked if I wanted a drink
I only said yes to wash down the butterflies
Your hands shaking in nervousness gave me a sense of security
Knowing I wasn't the only one
The session begun as I sat in your bed
A guitar in one hand and curiosity in the other
Watching carefully, I analyzed your perfection
Gazing at your lips and all of its wonders
Trying to keep my cool I followed along
You played me a demo of a song
Little did I know it was the entry to my heart
My heart synchronized to the strum of the strings
Waiting for a kiss because it felt like a dream
You told me secrets that night I'd never find true
But I looked past your flaws
Because my fascination in you
Night was approaching but we wouldn't of known
We were deep into meaningless conversations
I'd never forget
You took me home that night in your 1999 Jeep
We spent the whole ride in smiles
Then departed with a hug
It's been awhile since that day
A calm chilly night
Like a polaroid in my head
Admired and unforgettable

Dreamgirl and Ghostboy

By Phillip Owusu

Come one! Come all!
And hear the tale of ghostboy and dreamgirl
You can't find her
She is a girl that resides in the dreamland
A world hidden in the night
She is dreamgirl
Made of love and pixie dust
except instead of flying
She'll make you fall hard
And still leave you smiling
Along comes ghostboy
You can't really see him
A smile on his face
He will fail the world
He's there one second
Gone in the blink of an eye
Come! see him fade
And wonder where he went
Dreamgirl, don't bother looking
You can only see her in your dreams
At least sometimes
And Ghostboy, you will never see him
Only an afterimage of memoirs
Or possibly false memories
He smiles once more
Or Maybe not.
Dreamgirl sings waiting for ghostboy
He never came
Ghostboy dances for dreamgirl
She was never there
Dreamgirl wakes up
Ghostboy passed on
It was A shot in the dark at best
So that's why cupid missed

Dig

By Bill Lisbon

Dig a hole in my chest
to see what is left
I once buried her there
along with the rest

Drill a hole in my head
a glimpse of the past
Found something that's living
I thought it was dead

And it wakes
one sunny summer afternoon
And I ache
exploring all these vacant rooms
And I wait
for her to lift her shovel too
And to make
this hole fill up with life bloom

CHAPTER COVER:

April 9, 1998

By Matthew Rodriguez



Fever Dreams

By Kat Trent

Caresses that clutch razor blades
Peel the skin and watch as
Murmurs of screams crawl their way up my throat.
Bathroom tiles invite my warmth,
Sucking it out of alcohol-laden pores,
While her feet stand close enough to grasp.

Sea turtle tat dancing with her toes—
Salt pour down my face,
And realizations burn into my soul.
We are one, yet nothing at all,
But here she stands.
Her gaze must be that of jesters' laughs,
As she watches me crumble.

A Meeting in the Sacred Grave

By Madison Hayes

Your skin is the iron, cherry red from blood-flame,
Mine is cold and crystallized moonlight.
When we touch the Earth breaks its silence
And rumbles its appreciation.

The fissure in my back your hand leaves,
Is a canyon of unkempt hair,
And late-night goodbyes,
Leaving smoking trails in my tallow flesh.

Your tongue writes out all the words I couldn't speak,
The hot breath on my neck draws my spirit out,
Delightful, awful words spill out my mouth,
And the shivers and tremors move to an unheard rhythm.

Your unmoveable ocean eyes plead and match your mouth,

The ringing of your throat sweeter than Church bells,
Invoking every god, a heathen of the sheets
I am the High Priest in your lotus temple, pink and proud.

Love Letters to a Sober Man

By Phillip Owusu

The alarms sounded when wind met the sea
But now I weep from the warmth of your skin
The same skin that burns me steadily
In the misery that comforts
When I saw your ghost appear,
In the places that remind me of you.
I wake up to the sound of my nightmares
I take that sound and place them into a box
With a memory,
a song to keep me silent
Memories that rock me soundly
Because these letters are a bitter thing to swallow
For they are dripped in the thoughts of this failing pen
A Music box spins faster till its out of control
Like a carousel announcing the end
Shutting out the noise of children
And the laughter that was lost
When we grew up
We grew apart
I lie for the reasons I breathe
So the truth so I can break it
Warping myself to a new reality
My only reality without you
The phone gets heavy sometimes,
For when I pick up I forget your name.
If I forget to say the words that will rip us apart.
I forget what exactly went wrong
And I fear growing close to something
that will always remain out of reach.
The only killer is this pill that will release me,
And make these scars beautiful again.
I hope you loved my death as much as I did

Floral blessings sleep soundly into your memories
Memories that rest on a string for you
A death taps brightly resisting the heartfelt hugs
The Hugs that suffocate me
One more quiet nightmare to let me rest
Shaking the colors in front of you
The puzzles begin to fit
At least we saved what we lost
Or so we thought
It cannot be saved
It cannot be fixed
We cannot be loved
We are lost to the wind

When I did, I knew
I gave him more
of me
than just my smile.

He told me I was
beautiful.

That hollow word scraped its rusted claws at what I
Once knew it to mean.

That was just what he labeled me
And i am as empty as the compliments that he spoke.

To boys:
Be gentlemen,
she should not have to say
No
more than once.

Doorways to Another

By Blake Hill

A lulled dark shimmers layers so soft among
Our bodies; dancing Cabernet, we say.
Once touch to touch, my physical couture
Embraced in tight goes on, just flow and flow.

–A flick–A press–I see–Response–Excess–
–Repeat the jolt–Immediate react–
–There’s up–go left–jump down–and stop–
–In two point nine repeat five times–no thoughts–

The pound and pound of energy will flush
Away, your suicides endure the tone
Of flesh who clench around you speaking signs.
One little thing inside your mind; the choice.

The licks of pleasure will survive ideas.
Some Coconuts bleed tears of love into
My stomach, nurturing all waves of mind
For uttering some reasons to exist.

Youer Than You

By Emily Schettler

They say there's no one youer than you
But if this is true then why have I changed through and
through
Through different experiences
Different friends
Will this shapeshifting ever end

They say there's no one youer than you
But what you is you
What you is true

Plastic

By Rebecca Malkewicz

Amidst the odds and ends of a box marked “childhood toys,” were hidden little toy soldiers. Out of formation, scattered in a sporadic mess, they were terrified. They put on a good front, with their guns and uniforms, but their weapons are useless, easily destroyed by a reckless child. A musty book in the corner caught my eye. It was *The Steadfast Tin Soldier*. The ballerina was smart to love a tin soldier, because we are plastic. In all the chaos, not even our hearts will survive.

CHAPTER COVER:

Dead Sky

By Crystal Saunders



Star Hymns

By Amanda Mazeika

Our love ties our celestial cores into
knotted chaotic bodies of orbit.
We are an entangled phenomenon
of our star trails evolved to intertwine.

I gaze past your spiraling blackened holes
into the galaxies speckling your eyes.
Let's explore the dense space between us, and
we will rotate the sky.

Like shooting stars, we will fall and burn to
dust and collapsed ash—I promise when you
fall, I will too. The notes we sang will be
written a hymn in the study of the heavens.

For now, I trace the lines
of constellations that lie
on your back and shiver.
Our souls are luminous, and we begin our song.

Nights in PA

By Amanda Mazeika

I will admit,
I do love the smell of chilled summer nights
In Pennsylvania
When fireflies christen the skies,
Freshly cut onion grass spoils the air,
While the hanging moon bounces its light
And crowns the crested tree tops.

It is too dark, as your figure is just a silhouette.
Still, you do not radiate darkness,
Rather stubbled heat pinpricks between us,
Electrifying the slick moisture that sticks to our skin
On a Pennsylvania night
That blesses parted lips
Who whisper this is where I belong.

Table for Three

By Susan Baukhages

The red Formica table is our perch,
still sticky from a peanut butter lunch,
for fearful mother, brother Rick and me
to wait 'til dark for Dad to rescue us,

from razor claws that rip and tear through flesh,
and filthy fangs that slash and gnaw and gnash,
with pouty purple lips and tangled tongue
it sucks the blood from wounds too deep to mend.

She swears she saw it slither down the hall,
we quiver, shiver, make the table shake,
and say good bye, prepare—too young—to die.
Then listen hard for soft and scratchy sounds

to hear the hurry scurry of our foe,
we look around for beady greedy eyes,
and gaze at one another—not a thing.
Our legs and toes have cramps, we have to pee.

And then with joy we hear familiar sounds
of gravel crunching on the outside ground,
a car door slam, a whistling man's approach,
his dull brass key unlocks the door. It's Dad!

'Get down from there,' says he and grabs us up.
'It's just a tree frog by the door. Come look!
I've search the house, there is no mouse today.'
Our mother is a classic mouse-a-phobe.

Flashback

By Kat Trent

As I sit in the plush chair
It races back
All at once,
Relentlessly.

Cruel tones and hands like bludgeons
I claw my hair and breathe
Through curdled concepts
That mangle and twist.

That wasn't me.

Like pictures designed in clothes
That have been devoured by moths,
I witness the glory of my youth
Hanging upon the wall.

I see myself shouting
"Mom, stop!"
Snap.
Screams.
Clutching towards my last breath,
Agony usurped with ice held
To my rib cage.

"It wasn't my fault. Imagine *my* pain."

She never exhaled regret.

Reflection

By Rebecca Malkewicz

I looked at the faucet, Ted and Linda's toothbrushes side by side, and I pondered the mirror. All three of us looked in that mirror, as our daily routines. When Linda looked in the mirror, she saw things that could be. A waist that could be slimmer, a smile that could be whiter. When Ted looked in the mirror, he saw worries and regrets. Parents' disappointment, a dead-end job, bills past due. I looked at the mirror, and I saw the water droplets, make up stains, and messages left in the steam of a long shower. I wiped it clean.

When the Lights Go Out

By Rebecca Malkewicz

You call me. Say you can't sleep. I ask what's wrong but you're silent. You say, I need to know someone is awake. I'm not stupid! I see the sleeping pills, the warm milk, the dream catcher by your window, and still you call me! I know you drop things on purpose, to make the dogs bark, to know you're not alone. Tell me!

He keeps asking. What was that?! Where's my phone? I stare at the screen. If I look anywhere else I'll see it. If I raise my head an inch it will be there. It is the goosebumps on my arm, the breath on my neck, and the cold touch on my ankle. Doesn't he understand? I can't say it out loud! If I do, it becomes real. The touch becomes a grip, and it will never let me go.

CHAPTER COVER:

Life in Amsterdam

By Angie Stevens



Ed's Sonnet

By Susan Baukhages

He stirs his tea and conjures Shakespeare here
and greets within, through tired eyes, a verse
that speaks of things beyond his reach or sphere
but not of mind, or heart and soul to nurse
and understand; thus finding beauty, share
the richness of his current inner life
with well-worn friends and burnished loves who care
to see the man they know embrace his strife,

And in so doing, channel it to art
for that is where this man has much to say
about the world of which he is a part
and much to do within a given day,

For more than ever we must clarify
Americans believe in truth, not lies.

The Colors of Antagony

By Christopher Hunt

All that I remember from my time with you
Are the masterful paintings you
Created for me, made from
Screams coated in the ugly colors of
Jealousy, greed, and anxiety.
The canvases were destroyed by the
Thoughtless strokes done with brushes
Made from glass that was already cracked.
The droplets and streaks struck out
In the most predictable erraticism.
Your insecurities were plainly painted.

A time when those paintings didn't haunt me
Is a time that doesn't exist in my world.
They drew a story for me.
One that warned in every colored flag possible
That I should burn them before they
Became too much of who I was.
They framed a world in which you became
The antagonist.

I recently learned
How you thought it was my paintings
That were horrible and
Colored in with mistreatment.
And I'll admit:
My paintings weren't
Made from gold and drops of clouds.

They were made from a special hue
That got its tint from fear.

A painting that I would
Like to bring to life
Is one crafted with colors
Of simple forgiving and apologies.
One that shows the story
Not of two antagonists,
But of people who were hurting
Without knowing how to help.
So, I forgive you for
The paintings that hung from a wall of
Distrust, anger, and illness.
And I am sorry for any hatred
That my creations may have caused you to harbor.

I am glad I didn't listen to the warnings of
Fire your paintings tried to convince me of.
For instead of them being blackened into ash,
Never to be looked at again,
They hang in a museum entitled
"Lessons Learned"

Riddles from Times Before

By Kat Trent

“Memories should be cherished” they say—

but none I wish to retain.

They come in snapshots
that I hang in headspace.

The walls are mostly empty,
with plenty of room to spare.

Though my hesitation is central,
the tedious times consumed
alongside my aggressive descent
causes my ailments to

grow

and

gain.

Power is in memories,
of which I have few.

Only splices of agony
contained in these
pictures I hang in headspace.

A Monument of Before

By Christopher Hunt

Everyday I think about when I woke up to nothing but a note scribbled hurriedly on the back of a receipt with your initials dotted behind it. Everyday I think about those words becoming more unreadable the more my tears washed over them. Everyday I remember when I unsuccessfully searched our apartment looking for any trace of you. Everyday the pain of your memory only becomes more familiar. And everyday I try to forget everything. But, it is so damn hard to forget when I don't even have the strength to remake the bed you last slept in with me.

Vicious

By Bill Lisbon

Ben was sitting in the golf-themed Scottish pub eating St. Andrews Fish'n'Chips—trying to, having already consumed the Scotch Eggs, which was only one egg but was filling—and feeling lightheaded after one pint of Tennent's pale lager.

Ben hardly drank alcohol.

He looked at the glossy grease splotches, malt vinegar and lemon juice dappling the paper basket lining meant to look like a 19th century London broadsheet, twinkles of golden yellow reflecting the overhead lighting.

“Ben” was tired of writing about how he was sitting in this restaurant or that dive bar, pretending to be some modernist in Paris or a beatnik in SanFran, trying to find some inspiration in a dark corner booth or in the sweat beading down a beer glass, comparing them to tears or some such nonsense. A fraud. He really did it with the hopes that some curious waitress or some young woman in glasses and jeans, would ask him what he was doing and he would tell her he was a writer (or if he felt cocky, a poet), and she would be so intrigued at this tortured lone romantic, this soulful, brooding wordsmith, who sat in such sharp contrast to the jocks enthralled and cheering at the myriad televisions or measuring their manhood by empty glasses, that she would talk to him and they'd hit it off and she would give him her number and he'd call her in a few days and they'd go out, once, because the air of mystery and romance would wear off quickly as he sat across from her, smiling, happy to be on a date, his hopeful mind flipping to the “ever after” on the last page. Such were his delusions. Anyway, no one really

wanted to date a writer, especially a tortured one, even if he wasn't tortured—that was somehow worse—because they were always writing or always seeing scenes and situations as words on a page. Mundane conversations were symbolic dialogue and he'd be half in a conversation and half trying to remember the conversation, the exact phrasings, so he could put them in the mouths of thinly veiled characters because not only was he pillaging real life for fiction, he was unable to create his own fictions from his imagination.

And then he'd find himself alone again, hungry but for some reason above going to a fast food joint or picking up Chinese take-out and eating at the little wooden dinette table that came with his furnished one-bedroom, and with his little black Moleskine and complimentary hotel ballpoint pen he'd plop down in another strip mall pub, basement bar or chain diner and start all over again, changing the characters' names.

Gary was sitting in the new gastro pub's bar sipping through the foamy head of a craft IPA ...

Caged

By Michael Lovell

I was caged. Beneath the water, oxygen leaving my mask filled the water with noise. It was emptiness for miles. Nothing could be seen except the steel bars that kept me confined. I thought of the irony of myself being caged, as if the monster I had flown so far to see needed protection from me.

I had flown across what felt like infinite oceans, to behold the monster of the deep. Here I was, under the murky blue waters just waiting for the moment this monster would come into view. Looking up at the boat I saw it move slowly into view, a large black mass casting shadows moved slowly towards me. Its tail as long as the boat I used to view him, it cut through the shallow blues like butter thru a knife.

Its night eyes examined me, as if it knew me and was reaching into my soul. It knew I meant no harm, and as Iris in the bottom of the cold cage, this monumental creature swam around me for what felt like an eternity. After a while, more like him came into view. I watched as they interacted and fed, living their lives in harmony. I was a fly on the wall of their life. They were beings with a purpose, with relationship and community.

The gauge woke was my alarm clock from the experience. My pack getting lighter, it was time to leave life below and return to life above. Slowly being pulled to the surface, the chains rattled like a song. The conversations, questions, talking, noise— it all fell on my ears at once, the moment I broke the surface. I longed for peace, solitude: pure tranquility. I stood on the boat

in my suit for a while, closing my eyes and pondering. I realized today's adventure wouldn't end, it would live on in my heart, and I'd be back next summer. Nigel's rough hand grabbed mine, like sandpaper, he pulled me up. Standing on board surrounded by true things.

Caged but not as before, I'd return at peace with the creatures of the deep, no longer running from misunderstood monsters.

Greener

By Bill Lisbon

The tiny green frog looked at the spinning blade of the heat exchange unit on the side of the house and perceived it to be a bubbling stream, and wishing to be cool and wet, seeing a completely new life after as long as he can remember clinging to the shaded stucco below the eaves or hanging on the humid underside of the garbage can lid, he hopped in, hopeful, his expectations instantly dashed.

This was the story Manuel told himself as he stood holding an idling weed eater, staring at the partially desiccated frog stuck to the wire safety cage above the fan.

“Hey, Manuel,” said Jorge, tapping him on the shoulder and pulling back his ear muffs. “What you doing, man? Vámonos.”

After he climbed into the pickup truck’s cab and squeezed in among three other workers, Manuel thought of his grandfather and grandmother who once stood on the southern bank of the Rio Grande.

CHAPTER COVER:

Purple Haze

By Kassie Harvey



My English Major

By Pat Canzano

Composition, Literature, Poetry, Theory
Literary Criticism, all make me weary.

Formality in structure--free verse or prose
exposition, character, plot. . . I compose.

Metaphors, similes, style, tone, voices
Internal rhymes -- I try all devices.

Creative non-fiction, short stories, and plays
revision, revision causes malaise.

Anaphora, enjambment, meter, and feet
all sound so easy; but to me, they browbeat.

My interpretive argument is my point of view
analyzing text, justifying it through.

Canon, dialogue, gender, and irony
literary art is in Greenblatt's Anthology.

Now Dante, Boccaccio, Petrarch, and Cicero
Aristotle, Socrates, and then there is Plato.

From Greek and Latin prose, rhetoric translations
their treatises, orations are in publications.

To Chaucer, The Bard, and Percy Bysshe Shelley
Pasternak, Tolstoy, David, and Hemingway . . .

From the tip of the iceberg to poesy, and psalms
classic English literature both qualms and calms.

Author, philosopher, orator, and poet
inspiration, knowledge, patience. . . they show it.

Their genius passed on is a blessing indeed
Cherishing their legacy, we try to exceed.

This English major strengthens my quest for
exploration, interpellation, indoctrination expressed.

Ink in the Dark

By Christopher Hunt

It lurks nearby, it stalks, it crawls, it creeps
Between the folds of clever words and lines.
The seeds of poet's past it plants, cosigns
Your heart and soul wherein creation seeps.
The secret powers soon be yours to keep.
You never will expect to be entwined
With paper, pen, and muse to build a shrine
To gods inside your thoughts, unknown and deep.

It waits for you to idle down just quite
Enough to slip a small yet potent drug
Into your veins to bring the urge to write.
There's nothing you can do to stop the tug,
For with consent or not, mid day or night,
You could fall victim to the writing bug.

Wonderland

By Kat Trent

Zoloft: once a day
Depakote: Twice
Seroquel: Once a day
Klonopin: Thrice

Who am I anymore?
Who is this person?
The one who sleeps under chairs,
Where orderlies chirp.
Walking is useless—
And where is the sun?
This is where I'll stay.
Below metal bars, but
Away from the folks.
Away from the tokes.
Away from my sins.
Away from those grins.
Encapsulated in white
And forced to eat.
Desires are gone,

Who was I anyway?

Inferior

By Madison Hayes

I am bound by expectation
My chains of presumption
And no matter the strike
No matter the hammer
I am still tethered to your
Shadow
My exile from progress
Into mediocrity
The distance I travel
Looks like miles but is
Inches too far
And every time I feel myself
To be myself
I am swept up in the gust
Green and vicious and miasmatic
Making me asthmatic to this envy

How can a knockoff compare to Stradivarius?
I am the cheap street Chinese byproduct
He is the marble statue made by graceful ancients
I was never that expensive anyways
But don't I deserve to be?
I just want to be free

But I'm too scared to cut the umbilical cord
With scissors that have long since rusted over
From too many tears spilled
Enough to drown my own sorrows.
No alcohol here, just pain
You tell me which one is more addicting.

My Fan is my Friend

By Blake Hill

My fan is my friend, love brushing for free.
2AM commenced, feeling fantasy.
He whisks a base white noise; sing sweet and be
Complete harmony 'til horizon glee.

Content in all sense, all toes wiggle hence.
Friend flutters aimlessly, constructing tombs
With plaster mold coats of comfort intense,
THEN RIPPLES ENSUE! CATASTROPHIC BOOMS!

Blinking device revises the room black.

Jet engine airlines sneak ferociously.
Chilled nature too dense, turn him down from three.
Limbs now re-covered, the rest set to see,
Together again breathing harmony.

What Is Now?

By Susan Baukhages

I have
only right now,
just before now and
just after now to live my life
fully

moment,
before moment,
after moment: which is
the moment I must take for now
to start?

If I
move to Paris
now, will Bluffton be now
now, or will Paris be after
somehow?

When I
blink and miss now,
do I lose after now?
Can I start before now and find
right now?

Right now
I have before
now and after now, so
the next thing is right now again—
that's now.

CHAPTER COVER:

The World from a Train Window

By Angie Stevens



You Loved Me Too Much

By Crystal Saunders

You loved me too much
You wanted to silence my screams,
And cover my scars regardless
Of whether it was you or me
Who put them there.

You loved me too much
You hoped I would fall
Complacently in line
With what you wanted me to be,
A quiet and obedient lady.

You loved me too much
You pretended to hold me up,
High on a pedestal
Just to rip it away
And watch me fall.

You wanted to keep me broken
Just to pretend to be a type of medicine.
My medicine that I needed to find the will
To get out of bed each day
And move forward no matter how much
I wanted to close my eyes and pretend
I was dead.

And I was dead
A beating heart does not
Signify life.
It does not signify living.
You didn't care.
You loved me too much.

After all you did,
After you jumped on my car to keep me there
After you trapped me in your living room
After you punched a hole in your wall
After you busted my lip,
You said I would never understand
How much you loved me.
You loved me too much.

The Unknown

By Angie Stevens

Take a breath
deeper..... deeper
it's just a step
only inching toward the unknown
breathing.... still deeper
from the consequence unknown
yet, the unknown is an adventure

A Dive in the Lethe

By Madison Hayes

My broken teeth
Shattered from biting down
Have finally started growing again
And my ceramic, spider web skin
Was shed, tinkling on the floor
But underneath it I was
Beautiful.
All these years stuck in my
hobbit-hole mind
Never seeing light

Even though it was just underneath my flesh,
So many oceanic changes
Emotions buried in my graveyard
Make a midnight monster-fest comeback
And ancient ties have been broken
Promising to unleash a titan

But all I got was a sad eyed
Little boy who loved
Too much
And 'ventured too little.
These broken dreams and plans
Are scattered at my ashen feet
And I thought I couldn't breathe
But the pieces are just the same
Besides, mosaics always seem more lovely
For their empty, missing spaces

Fleeing Hurricane Irma

By Susan Baukhages

We bounce through holes down two-lane country roads
like leather cracked apart from too much sun,
past ancient barns with crooked doors that rest
on wooden haunches, molded to the ground

And rusty trailer parks on barren lots
that hope for better days—or maybe not—
no dogs, no people, only thirteen cows.

I wonder what the days are like to live
a farmer's life, with fields of corn and soy
or as a horse fly pestering the cows,
but as a city woman driving by

I have to say, I'm glad this is not home.

Learnings from a Failed Replacement

By Amanda Mazeika

They tried to supplement for the loss a false
replacement.

My Darling, I cry still for you.

Although you've long surpassed this life,

I beg each tear shed

Would suffice enough as sacrifice

To bring you back to me.

Forever, nothing could fill the

Emptiness you bore too deep

Since I cared for you over the final days,

Then watched you leave—

That I knew when I pledged to you,

To now live out the consequences

With but happy memories, sad remembrances

And a hope to meet again.

I depend solely upon this.

My Darling, you can never be replaced.

Trapped Behind My Eyes

By Christopher Hunt

I look at the blood-covered man with the bunny rabbit face without moving. He does not move, either. He only looks back at me waiting for me to convince him to stop the night-mare-ish hell. But, I cannot, for he is in control. Powerless. He makes the first move and lifts a cloth to his face, wiping the blood from it. He does not break eye-contact. My breath catches as a large knife is lifted off of the sink separating us. He brings the cloth to that next and sighs. “Will the thrill ever fade?” he says with my voice.

My Demons

By Selena Menjivar

They follow my every step. No matter how hard I try to hide they always find me. When they catch me, they torment me. They make my life a living hell. They make me want to stay in bed and wither away. No one would care, they tell me. They make me think of horrible things, things that no child shouldn't even think about. They fill me with dreadful lies that make me feel like I should be better off dead. I stand up from my bed and look out from my frost covered window, they're waiting outside for me.

The Grey Nevermind

By Madison Hayes

SETTING: *A bus stop on top of a hill on a park bench overlooking New York. A man dressed in black sits on this park bench, waiting. An elderly, plump man dressed in white sits beside this man. Both are wearing grey undershirts.*

MR. BLACK: It's been an eon.

MR. WHITE: More than that, less than an eternity.

MR. BLACK: Don't be snappy, it doesn't suit you. *(small pause)* Tell me why you're here.

MR. WHITE: Just checking up on my favorite little rebel. You can never watch your kids close enough.

MR. BLACK: You are not my father. Fathers don't kick you out of the house for disagreeing.

MR. WHITE: Disobedience, even for three seconds, cannot be tolerated in a perfect house, you smart-mouthed, egotis-
(MR. WHITE calms himself, biting his tongue. There is a long, awkward silence.)

MR. WHITE: *(Awkwardly)* Read any good books, lately?

MR. BLACK: *(Defiantly)* Paradise Lost.

MR. WHITE: A little over glorifying, don't you think?

MR. BLACK: I found it to be quite sad, actually. Lucifer seems like a repressed voice in a sea of petty stagnation. At least he caused change.

MR. WHITE: You mean causing the Original Sin?

MR. BLACK: Everybody has a stupid teenager phase.

MR. WHITE: You call damning the entire Human race initially a phase?

MR. BLACK: It certainly wouldn't be damning if the Almighty Dunderhead didn't try to keep them unchanged and "perfect" for all eternity by depriving them of knowledge or suffering or death. Change is good.

MR. WHITE: Alright. What about the living nightmares this brought about? The demons? The Pit? Rape? Murder? Day-time TV? At least being static they can't fall farther and farther. Unlike some of us.

MR. BLACK: You know very well that Murder was an accident.

MR. WHITE: Just because something is an accident does not mean it is amended.

MR. BLACK: It was an accident. Besides, that socialist wood-worker managed to fix that.

MR. WHITE: After a few millennia of torment, bloodshed, and sacrifice for repentance. Do you know how long that is to mortal beings? Do you even care?

MR. BLACK: Mortality is an illusion put up by a two-bid architect trying to scare immortal spirits into submission.

MR. WHITE: You are an illusion.

MR. BLACK: And you're *not*?

MR. WHITE: (*huffs*) Does it matter anymore? The people have gone mad. It has happened too soon.

MR. BLACK: You should not have put it in at all, if you did not want it to happen. Your little nature spirits are warring. And you know very well who convinced them to start.

MR. WHITE: Yes. And that is precisely why we are meeting him. Woden predicted his treachery. I will see why he has done it.

MR. BLACK: Speak of the devil...

MR. WHITE: (*snorts*)

A bus pulls into the bus stop that is being driven by no one. The doors whoosh and footsteps are heard as someone gets out. The bus pulls away to reveal a man of unidentifiable age standing in its place. He is dressed in red. His undershirt is black.

MR. RED: Lovely evening, fellas.

Mr. Black and Mr. White stand up. White looks furious and Black looks dour.

MR. RED: Relax, oh smiters. Be calm. The breath of death is far on the air. Can you not see the shade of the evening is upon us.

The three sit down on the bench with Red in the middle.

MR. WHITE: Despite all the evidence, despite all that I have seen to incriminate you, I did not believe you were capable of bringing about this doom until I saw the mark of chaos on your face.

MR. BLACK: Pieces of me are proud, Man. Corruption and darkness are what I call my left and right boots, but you... you have brought about an end to everything. That's not evil. That's insanity.

MR. RED: (*chuckles*) You made me, fat man. And you put the bug in my ear, you shit-filled, fly-eaten, scratch-demon of the abyss!

MR. WHITE: I gave you free will! I made sure that you would make your own choices for life without will is absolutely *worthless*.

MR. BLACK: You know, you have a problem with punishing people for taking free will and actually *doing* things with it.

MR. WHITE: Children need consequences

MR. BLACK: Parents need to know when to let their children make mistakes.

MR. RED: Gentlemen! You two squabble like old hens over an egg. If you do not get to your point, I assure you I will leave. I have the ashes of a world to rule over.

MR. WHITE: There will be no ashes! We are here to stop this madness. Reveal your scheme to the Wardens of Nature, show them what you have done to cause this war!

MR. BLACK: As much as I enjoy the change and upheaval this is all causing, it is endangering all that we know. You cannot be allowed to persist. Come on, return with me to Pandemonium and I will show you how to really win the souls of man.

Mr. Red gets up and walks to the edge of the hill they are on, which overlooks New York City. He looks up to the sky, watching the clouds battle against themselves. They flash with inner lights and the clouds tear a little to reveal divine figures fighting. The figures are battling with hordes of soldiers and many are torn apart. The clouds close and return to their normal thundering. Mr. Red smiles.

MR. RED: You are both so arrogant. You, fat man, want to police and punish a race you made. You made every vice and every virtue, you cannot blame it on a rebel spirit because you know he cannot make beyond your limits. And you, Shaper of Sin. Your rebel streak has cost man so much. You have given us all the hate and spite that we can stand. You seduce us to eternal damnation, not torment, so that you may rule us and feel large. You made Hell for yourself to reflect the trappings of your depressed soul. Grow up and learn something. You have both treated man as your play thing, as pets. You do not deserve us. I was the first man and I was kicked out of ultimate paradise on Earth for sharing a meal with my spouse. Your divine spats have caused too much pain for us. The gods of nature did a far better job than either of you. They accepted our faults and lifted us up. And then you go and ban them from worship because you are jealous? No more. No more plagues. No more sin. No more prejudice. No more hate. No

more God. No more Satan. I am the New Man just as I was the first. I have been changed forever and I have taken your Throne from you. The earth will be cleansed of your taint, the old gods will rule under me in the New Eden and I will take the souls of dead man and give them the ultimate gift. Paradise on Earth. Heaven and Hell are the extremes, blinding Light and smothering Darkness. I will make a land of Grey beauty. Nevermind the cost. Speaking of. Witness the power of Adam, Sovereign of Man.

As Mr. Red says this, the whole of New York goes up in a flash of purple. A mushroom cloud goes up like an atomic bomb, but the mushroom cloud plumes into the shape of a giant and looming skull. Black and White stand to overlook the destruction. The City is gone. It is spot is a glowing crater. They are washed over with waves of air. The three resist the shockwave. In the crater is a monster the size of the city. A reptile of ancient origin.

MR. BLACK: The city...It's gone.

MR. WHITE: What is that? In the center of the crater? Is that-

MR. BLACK: Niddhogr.

MR. WHITE: Where the hell did you find that monstrosity?

MR. RED: Hel. Single L. You would be surprised what forgotten horrors lurk in the deepest pits of the cosmos, fat man. It hungers for souls.

MR. WHITE: You would doom all of humanity, those which you claim to *represent* with an elder evil beyond the bounds of time? Oh *yes*, what a grand plan. I'm positive mankind will be so grateful.

MR. RED: You know it all, eh? Obviously not if you had to ask where I got him from. Step up your stuff, old man. Niddhog will be the catalyst for change, the mother of revolution, father of chaos. He will eat the souls of all humanity. And then when the world is wiped clean, when the ashes settle into the dust,

then Niddhog will birth forth humankind into new bodies, immortal bodies. Their souls will be saved and the New Eden will spread over the earth as true, everlasting paradise bereft of an angry, vengeful God.

MR. BLACK: You assume you won't be seen as God. Your Throne will be *just* as red with blood as *his*. Don't do this. We can fix things. I can take my demons and we *can* make a paradise on Earth. We can throw open the Gates of Heaven and break his Throne. We will make a statue to the Revolution from the pieces of it. Do not do this for Eve's sa-

MR. RED: (*furious*) Don't you dare bring her up! Don't you even let your snake's tongue slip between your teeth! It was you that caused our fall. *You* are why she took her life, such enormous guilt for it all. And you (*pointing at White*) barred her from simply fruit. It is your law that condemned her soul to the Void.

MR. WHITE: Oh, don't start with that. You fathered the father of murder. Your wife's defiance and evil has spread down her leg into the genes of humanity. It was her fault that he has any power at all.

MR. BLACK: I am here because I am needed, Father. Besides, Eve ate the apple of her own accord and you know it. I simply gave the good idea. If she had rebelled more, I could've helped her, helped you both. I got you kicked out of Eden so that I could *save you*. I had no power in that place.

MR. RED: You were selfish! Now my wife lies in nothingness!

MR. WHITE: You're no better than he is!

MR. BLACK: It is far time we ended this!

The three begin to fight each other, throwing fists and eventually all ending up in a heap on the ground. Dust is thrown up as they tussle. A woman dressed in green with a white undershirt walks out of the woods behind them. She is beautiful and fierce, like an Amazon.

MS. GREEN: Well, well. Cosmic forces of the universe rough housing in the dirt. I guess it was about time you three got your hands dirty. For once. In all of time.

The three men are shocked and immediately break themselves apart. Red looks furious, White is confused, and Black is both stricken and a little enamored.

MR. BLACK: Lili-

MS. GREEN: (*Over dramatic*) Get thee back Satan! (*Sarcastically*) Don't look at me with doe eyes, it doesn't go with the hellfire.

MR. WHITE: What are you doing back here? You were long since banished.

MS. GREEN: Man, you really *don't* pay attention. You banished me from *Eden*. Just like tall, dark, and insane over there. I've been roaming the Earth for quite a while. And...other places. (*looking at Black.*)

MR. RED: Why are you here, she-demon? Have you not plagued me enough?

MS. GREEN: Frankly? No. I don't think I'll ever be done plaguing you, sweetie. But, playtime's over. I've come to fix things.

MR. BLACK: Fix things? The world is at war, the gods are in rebellion, and this Red idiot has released a monster from the ancient dark. Tell me, little woman, how you plan to *possibly* fix this situation?

MS. GREEN: How many of you three have honestly, personally, *corporally*, helped people? Not by scheming, not through demon or miracle or angel. With your hands. Bandaging wounds, feeding the hungry, curing blights. How many?

All three look very uncomfortable. Black shuffles his foot in the dirt like a scolded child.

MS. GREEN: That's what I thought. Do you know what I've

spent the millennia doing? Working. I've been helping these people in any way that I can. I've made pacts with gods, healed the sick, spread good words. I have protected nature and stopped nuclear war. I have seen the pain of humanity, I have seen their kindness and their horror and their tragedy. I will defend their mistaken brilliance till my last breath. You three have been in a cosmic patriarchal lock for *eternity*. It's time for a true champion of humanity. Momma's home.

MR. RED: Pretty words, mud-muncher. But you're a bit late. The world is destroyed. Everything will soon be engulfed in flame and my monster, my Niddhogr, will devour everything. Including these over-pompous cosmic mistakes.

MS. GREEN: Oh good, you've done half the work for me, then.

ALL THREE: What?

MS. GREEN: How do you clear a brush for new growth? You burn it. You didn't think you found Niddhogr on your own, did you?

MR. RED: I fo-

MS. GREEN: You did not. I know the bowels of the Earth like none else. You know my likeness is splattered in leafy exquisiteness across the old temples and places. I've been watching you for so long. And I knew you would use Niddhogr for his powers of destruction and rebirth. But let me ask you this, what is Niddhogr chewing on in the old myths?

MR. RED: A branch of the World Tree.

MS. GREEN: Precisely. Did you know that some trees just require a clipping of their branches to grow whole again, sometimes even starting a whole new eco-system? Or maybe just a clipping of their roots.

MR. RED: Wait, no!

MS. GREEN: Too late. You goofed, sweet tart. Take it like a *man*.

There is a green explosion. The audience will see a green light and some air effects on the four of them and maybe a graphic of what is happening. Nidhogr explodes, being destroyed. A huge tree is in its place, growing. Roots spread and light pours forth. The war-torn environment of the Earth is covered in new growth, new green. A new age.

MR. BLACK: It's beautiful...

MR. WHITE: And...back to square one. Fantastic.

Mr. Red is silent and kind of shocked.

MS. GREEN: Well that's much more like it. Only one more thing to take care of now.

She turns to them

MR. BLACK: What are you doing?

MS. GREEN: Choking out the weeds.

Divine vines grow from the ground and strangle the three Mr's to death. Ms. Green smiles and looks out over the new Earth as people emerge from the underbrush. There is hope in her eyes.

FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Hi Readers,

This sure has been a challenge, but a challenge much welcomed. Sometimes I felt like I was losing my mind with all the work to be done, all the people to talk to, and all the work to organize, but I stayed sane (not for a lack of trying). The staff definitely went on our own little exploration in making this journal together. It is sort of weird the amount of pleasure one can get from helping build something, especially in the creative fields, so having the pleasure to help out with a project like this has been an incredible honor.

And, so I thank you for the Exploration Issue of *The Pen*, readers. This journal couldn't have come to life without the helpful hands of all of our contributors, staff, graphic designers, and people to experience the work done in this journal. Thank you for this opportunity to explore my role as the Editor of *The Pen*, and get a glimpse at the genius of my fellow students. You're all more important than you know, for without an audience, art is useless.

Christopher Hunt
Editor-in-Chief, The Pen

INDEX OF CONTRIBUTORS

Amanda Mazeika, *Pen Staff*, 33, 42, 48, 49, 79

Amanda is a sophomore workaholic attending USCB, who double majors in English and Biology. She has a passion for writing and expresses her voice often through poetry. It is a miracle that she has survived this long because she should be dead from the stress of all she is involved in and lack of adequate sleep, but she lives by constantly consuming coffee.

Angela Stevens, *Pen Staff*, 53, 73, 76

Angela Stevens is a business major with a concentration in marketing and minoring in studio art. She is interested in creative writing and travel. She has traveled the United States and backpacked throughout Europe with great interest in continuing to see the world.

Bill Lisbon, 36, 60, 64

Bill Lisbon has lived and travelled around the world during his time as an award-winning journalist, photographer and editor in the U.S. Marine Corps. After retiring, he studied at USCB earning a BA degree in English with a creative writing concentration in Fall 2015, and he also served on the editorial board of *The Pen*, as a tutor in the USCB Writing Center and Sigma Tau Delta. He is currently the communications manager of the USCB English Alumni Association and works locally as a real estate photographer.

Blake Hill, 44, 71

Blake is a senior at USCB, graduating with the Bachelor of the Arts in English. Who are you and what have you done with the beef?

Brahnan Lovell, 62

Brahnan Lovell is an English Major at USCB. A native of the Low-country and lover of Thoreau, he enjoys writing, traveling, and

hiking. He hopes to become a professor of English, teaching creative writing and 19th Century American Literature

Christin Edge, 22

Christin Edge is a Biology Major at USCB. She is a member of the Sand Shark Activity Board, the Nerd Nebula club, and the Society of Creative Writers. She enjoys her time with her clubs, studying, reading, writing, and hanging out with her best friend.

Christopher Hunt, Editor, 10, 26, 30, 31, 56, 59, 68, 80

Christopher Hunt is an English major at USCB-- he is the President of Nerd Nebula, Society of Creative Writers, and the editor of *The Pen*. He spends his free time (haha) writing poetry, singing, and laughing. He hopes to one day become a professor of English, teaching creative writing and post-modern literature.

Crystal Saunders, 6, 29, 47, 74

Crystal Elissa Saunders is a Biology major at USCB. She is a transfer student and in her sophomore year. In her free time, Crystal enjoys hanging out with friends, playing the piano, and practicing her photography.

Emily Schettler, 45

Emily Schettler is an English major at USCB and is a member of Sigma Tau Delta. She spends her free time reading novels, writing, and listening to music. She hopes to move to NYC and pursue a career in PR or journalism.

Kat Trent, 38, 51, 58, 69

Kat Trent is a recent graduate of the university of South Carolina Beaufort, where she studied English with a focus in creative writing. In her spare time, she enjoys reading, writing, and playing video games while cuddling her hedgehog.

Kirsty Fitzgibbons, 16

Kirsty Fitzgibbons is a Human Services major at USCB. After graduating in 2018 she intends to work within Beaufort's local community. Currently most of her time is taken up with school and volunteering but when she does have some spare time she enjoys exploring new travel opportunities and spending time with her daughter.

Madison Hayes, *Pen Staff*, 12, 28, 39, 70, 77, 82

Madison Hayes is an aspiring fantasy novelist and general all around hobo. You may find him eating his poems on the side of the road in three to five years. He also loves purple.

Matthew Rodriguez, *Pen Staff*, 27, 37

Matthew Rodriguez is a business major who has recently discovered the joy of writing. He is an artist, musician, and an avid movie watcher.

Pat Canzano, 66

Pat Canzano is a senior at USCB—and a senior citizen! Born and raised in Allentown, PA, she began her college courses at Muhlenberg College decades ago. She enjoys biking on the beach near her home in Hilton Head, yoga, and the culture found at USCB. Pat hopes to continue her love for English after graduation by sharing her passion with her grandchildren.

Phillip Owusu, 24, 35, 40,

Phillip Owusu is a student at USCB. He enjoys writing poetry and listening to music. He one day hopes to be working in Los Angeles as a songwriter.

Rachel Catt, 13

Rachel Catt is a sophomore from Waleska, Georgia. Apart from being an English major, she is also a pitcher on the softball team at USCB. When she isn't playing softball, she can usually be found reading a book.

Rachel Mendieta, 34

Rachel Mendieta is an Biology and Communication double major at USCB-- She is very active and involved on campus. She spends his free time writing, traveling, and exploring new things. She's also just a girl who loves falling in and out of love.

Rebecca Malkewicz, 46, 52, 53

Rebecca Malkewicz is a Biology major and senior at USCB-- she recently spent two months studying rainforest ecology in coastal Ecuador, and is currently researching coral with Dr. Kimberly Ritchie. Rebecca spends her free time outdoors, contemplating her next big decision, and wishing she had more free time. She writes as a creative outlet, and when spontaneity strikes.

Selena Menjivar, *Pen Staff*, 32, 81

Selena Menjivar is a English major with a concentration in Creative writing, most of her work is based on psychological horror. she spends time playing video games, writing and/ or reading fan fiction.

Susan Baukhages, 7, 8, 9, 20, 50, 55, 72, 78

Susan Baukhages is a non-traditional student at USCB, taking creative writing courses to see if she can fly! She is majoring in Malphrus and loves being among her fellow classmates.

Tia Dobson, 19

Shantia Dobson is a business major and sociology minor at USCB in her senior year. She spends her free time writing poetry, listening to music, and learning about new cultures and languages. She aspires to work internationally as a management consultant.

ABOUT THE PEN

The Pen is a biannual publication of the Society of Creative Writers, produced under the supervision of the Department of English, Theatre and Liberal Studies at the University of South Carolina Beaufort. *The Pen* features the original work of some of USCB's brightest students in the realm of creative writing, which includes primarily fiction, poetry and playwriting, as well as other creative arts, such as photography, painting, music, comicstrips, and non-fiction. The aim of *The Pen* is to showcase commendable, creative talent and provide students a place where their work may be published with credit.

ABOUT THE SOCIETY OF CREATIVE WRITERS

The Society of Creative Writers is a club of student creative writers that is responsible for the publication of *The Pen*. All members of the *The Pen's* editorial board, in addition to students that engage in workshops or make the effort to attend meetings and participate in club activities, are honorary members of USCB's The Society of Creative Writers.

For as long as *The Pen* has existed The Society of Creative Writers has both funded and assisted in its creation and publication. The Society of Creative Writers is a vital part of preparing quality submissions for *The Pen* through a process of working with student writers and critiquing and workshopping their pieces, and adding them through the submission editorial process.

The Society of Creative Writers typically meet on a weekly or bi-weekly basis.

SUBMITTING TO THE PEN

In order to be considered for publication in *The Pen*, writers must be current USCB students or prior students with no more than two years since their last active semester. Students need not to be enrolled in an English and Art course to submit work. All work submitted for publication must be original, unpublished and preferably produced while the writer/ artist was a USCB student. Most types of creative writing, art and other expression will be happily considered. (“Fan Fiction” will not be accepted).

There is no limit to the amount of submissions per person, however, writers are expected to send only polished, college-level work. Writing pieces should not exceed 2,500 words each. All writing pieces must be sent via email, preferably in an attached Microsoft Word document. Ensure work is formatted as it is intended to appear on the page, especially poetry. Each piece should be sent in its own file, and each piece must include a title and the author’s name.

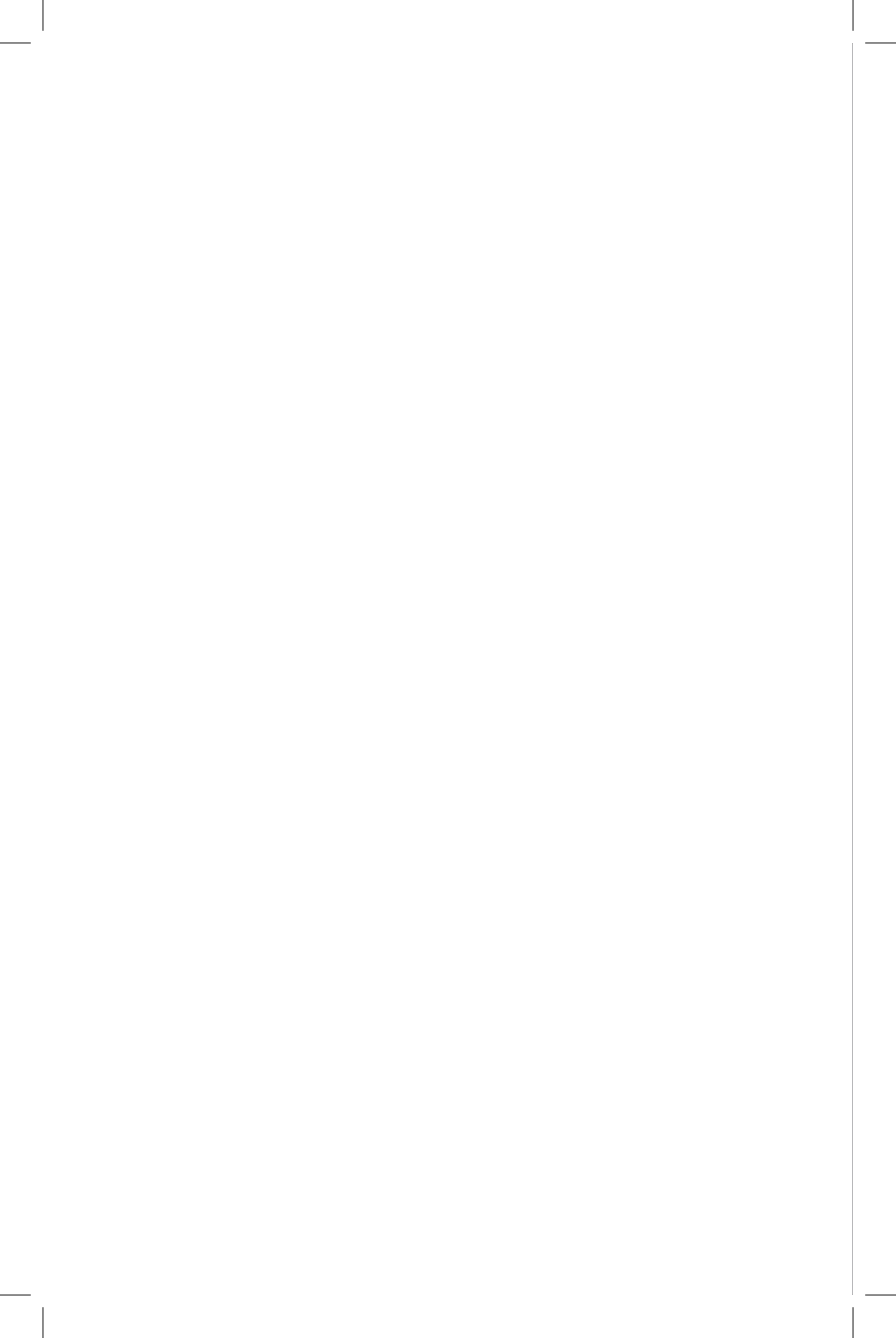
While it is *The Pen’s* goal to publish work exactly as it is submitted, the editorial staff does reserve the right to edit submission for publication. Typically, this will include editing for spelling, punctuation, grammar and consistency. Writers should inform the editorial board of any intentional misspellings to avoid unintentional corrections.

All art and photography must be sent via email as a JPEG file no smaller than a 5” x 7” at 200 dpi. Artists and photographers must include their name and a title for each entry as well as information on the medium (i.e., oil on canvas, charcoal on paper).

Published writers and artists will be provided with at least one free copy of *The Pen*.

While submissions are welcome throughout the year, the tentative deadline for Spring of 2018 will be February 23rd to submit.

For more information, email the editorial board at thepenuscb@gmail.com.





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