From the Editors,

First, thank you to all the contributors whose work we reviewed for this issue. Though we couldn’t include every submission we received, each one impressed us with a fresh perspective, an arresting image, or vivid language that lingered long after we’d finished reading. Your work is extraordinary, and we are honored to publish it.

This issue was a collaborative effort on behalf of Profs. McKeown and Zbeida. Working together gave us the chance to navigate all the minutiae of publishing a magazine as a team. We shared useful strategies about promoting student work and teaching creative writing, gushed over our favorite books, and swapped war stories about graduate school. Regardless of how long we’ve been reading or writing, there’s always new things to learn and new people to rekindle our passion for our craft.

Though Prof. McKeown is moving on to new endeavors, his legacy continues. As long as there are people in our community with something interesting to say, The Stone Circle will be there to amplify their voices. We look forward to all the great stories, poems, and art still to come.

--The Editors, Profs. Jim McKeown and Jessica Zbeida
Jaybuson Perez  Daddy Long Legs

Cassandra Stienke  Dragon Fly
The Gentleman thumbed through the newspaper until he found the obituaries. He drank his warm beverage and waited for other patrons to trickle in before starting his job.

Occasionally, he would indulge and solve a crossword puzzle—but not today. The frigid, icy weather eased itself through the walls and into the warm atmosphere of Coffeehouse Mandala. It was unusual, as the cold seldom ached his joints unless it was a precursor to an eventful day.

Coffeehouse Mandala fit snugly behind grander buildings, offering respite from the February chill. The coffeehouse itself was in an obscure location, fashioned with dark brickwork and an ornamental, nineteenth century wrought iron gate. Gaudy nearly defined the architecture, as it clashed with urban life and all, but The Gentleman didn’t mind. Inside, there was a sort of kitschy charm about the fairy lights and strange succulents scattered throughout the establishment.

After reading through the recent deaths, he received a text from Vita: Where are you? Interview scheduled at Styx Steaks on Cielo Avenue.

He swiped to respond to the message. Afterwards, The Gentleman set his phone down and returned to his newspaper. Just then, a group of young adults shuffled through the door, ushering in a layer of cold and intrigue. While their voices were low, The Gentleman couldn’t help but overhear a snippet of their conversation.

“Can you believe it? Arden, Han, and I were here yesterday and saw him. I can’t believe Dante’s gone just like that…”

“He was such a great guy too. Captain of our varsity tennis team—he was always supportive of us, you know?”

“I genuinely feel bad for his family and girlfriend. It must be rough for them…”

The group exited the coffeehouse as soon as they purchased a few pastries and coffee. As the last one left, the door swung shut. The Gentleman glanced back at the obituaries and confirmed that the group had been discussing about the recent death of Dante Bellerose—star athlete, handsome, involved in extracurriculars, crowned prom king—and how he was the family poster boy of a Good Son with a Bright Future…only for an unfortunate accident to claim his life.

Sympathy gripped The Gentleman, but while it was tragic, it was not unheard of. The Gentleman then moved his newspaper and drink aside as he produced a laptop from his terracotta brown messenger bag. He opened a blank document and set his fingers to the keys. After a moment into typing, the door swung open again.

This time, an androgynous looking individual in a tan trench coat with light hair stepped inside. Sunglasses obscured their eyes, but The Gentleman shivered as he became a recipient of a simmering glare.

“Ah…Vita. How nice of you to join—”

“This interview is starting to reflect poorly on you.” Vita retorted pointedly, sliding into the booth across from The Gentleman. After seeing the sheepish grin from the latter, Vita sighed. “Look. I understand you don’t like going under this pseudonym, but Morti wants you to. Out of his list of potential candidates, he knows you’re capable of continuing it in his steed.”

The Gentleman’s face turned melancholic. “I know. While I was looking for a job, I never intended it to be like this. But I’ll do it as long as I could do it the way I want to.”
“Of course.” Vita’s expression and tone changed into a tender one. It lasted only for a moment before Vita switched to a professional quality. “Now, could you begin working? Your deadline is by the end of today. Once again, I apologize for always being time crunched.”

From there, The Gentleman clattered away on his laptop while Vita pulled out a novel. Its appearance suggested an ancient text, something well-read and well-received throughout the ages. Amusingly enough, as The Gentleman glanced up from his screen, the title Vita read went something along the lines of a harlequin novel. He suppressed a laugh and continued to type, inspired by his companion’s shameless selection.

For the next few hours, customers strolled in and out of Coffeehouse Mandala. The Gentleman listened to conversations that drifted through the air, making note of snippets that left an impression on him. Some conversations held trivial matters, while some touched upon grim subjects. While he disliked eavesdropping, it made his job easier as he wove in elements from another person’s life. He didn’t have to form ideas from scratch—just borrow the ones from existing customers. Other people’s stories were his template. He could fill in the details with his own creative license later.

The elderly couple from earlier would cross through a traffic congested hour, hand-in-hand, recreating their first date while unaware of their last moments approaching…The two high school friends who sauntered in today with grins on their faces would have their life cut short by an accident after graduation…The young man with bright prospects would be diagnosed with a tumor growth in his brain after his annual checkup…An elderly father with his cheery daughter would enter, only to return to a burglarized home with someone waiting for them…

Stories streamed in his mind and The Gentleman found that his thoughts outpaced his typing speed. At last, the deadline approached. The clouds outside parted, and a sliver of sunlight warmed the small section of their booth. The Gentleman neared completion with his stories only to realize something was missing.

The Gentleman hesitated.

“Morti expects results—six o’clock sharp at his office.” Vita said, startling The Gentleman. “It’ll get easier in the future, once you’ve established a better schedule. I also know you’re reluctant to show me your progress, so how about I start the interview?”

The Gentleman let out a nervous laugh. “You keep calling it the ‘interview’ even though I’ve already gained the position.”

Vita gave a half-hearted shrugged. “It’s company policy and a courtesy. Anyway, tell me your process. How do you like to get material for your work? You have a rather…modern approach.”

The Gentleman rolled his eyes. “Yes, because going to door and reaping souls is more effective than my method. OK, jokes aside—” The Gentleman leaned back in his seat and closed his eyes for a moment before reopening them “—coffeeshops are a great place to observe and write about others, you know? I sit around in my corner and watch everyone around me.”

Vita nodded their head. “Go on.”

“While I don’t like to eavesdrop, the occasional gossip or story reaches me—it gives me inspiration on how to continue.” The Gentleman glanced at the door, seeing a father and daughter pair enter. He paused and typed down a few details before he continued. “The things I hear and observe become a template for my story. So, by the end of the day, I have stories about people I don’t know. It’s an impartial process, you know.”

He paused, taking a sip from his cold tea. Vita only watched him, intrigued.

“Sometimes I pen golden endings, sometimes not. Like today, a series of tragic events streamed in my mind. It’s not that I wanted it to happen, but it’s what I sensed.” He frowned and drummed his fingers against the
keyboard. “Vita, why does this have to fall to me? Don’t get me wrong, I enjoy writing but the genre I’m assigned to is hardly my strong suit.”

Vita gave a rueful smile. “If I had the power, I would change it. I’m…only relaying orders from the higher ups.”

The Gentleman did not appear convinced, but he mirrored Vita’s smile. “It’s a hard life, you know?”

“Of course. Our professions mirror each other. How about this—” Vita placed their elbows on the table and leaned forward to proposition The Gentleman “—I’ll come by tomorrow at five and pick up the draft. That way, if you change your mind, you can alter some of the endings. Sound good?”

“I just don’t think it’ll make a difference if I change the ending. It’s just sweetening the inevitable…”

Vita made a face. “You and your penchant for tragedy.”

The next day, The Gentleman occupied his usual corner, flipping to the obituaries. He took a sip from his warm beverage only to look up and see Vita standing in front of him with an inquiring gaze.

“You may have creative liberties, but I fail to see how being struck by lighting is a ‘sweetened end.’”

“It’s mundane if everything’s the same.” The Gentleman shrugged and gestured to the paper in his hands. “Plus, it’s hard being a writer. Especially when your penname is Death.”
A generation unloved
Longing for acceptance
Lost in a world of thorns
Hated for being and feeling
Hurting because they are happy
Wishing for a future
Hoping for the simple right
To love

Sandra Cubilla

The Beach
He was a man without a face,  
his form as nebulous as a dream long forgotten,  
features obscured like condensation on a glass pane,  
rendering what was on the other side ill defined.  
But his eyes, oh darling, his eyes, they existed  
they contained more than stardust, tears, and wanderlust,  
they were golden like honey but raged on like wildfire,  
eyes set aflame, alight, and afire.  
As he always searched but never found,  
the holy grail nor the fisher king nor the healing question.  
He yearned more than what was given, soared too close like Icarus and melted,  
he chased fallen stars and angels, only to capture glow flies in a jar.  
He savored the taste of wine, glory, and freedom  
as luxuries only graced his lips thrice and no more.  
Anything to ease, to satiate, the vacuum inside  
he always wondered—was he the fool? The hanged man? Or the magician?  
For he was a man without a face,  
one that reflected an ocean full of stars,  
for he was the one that bridged the gap between dreams and reality,  
but he was only a man in name only.
Third Prize -- Hold that Thought by Malissa Hyatt

Ideas, wishful thoughts, written on the winds of imagination. Hopefully to stay until they can be captured in the confines of a paper corral. But, alas, precious and few are the ones snared. In our minds, in our hearts, they run free, wild and untamed. Try as we may, we will never imprison them all. We poets and writers, no amount of praise will console us for the ones that got away.

Poetry Honorable Mention
My Struggle by Madison Warren

My eyes block out the light
And I wonder why I am engulfed in blackness,
Utterly lost.

I search for the light,
Squinting desperately for salvation.

It welcomes me,
Yearning to be a light to my feet
And save me from the dark.

Yet my eyes clam shut at just a glimpse
And I am consumed once more.

I feel the warmth of the light,
I cling to the memory of its radiant beams that guided me,
Yet my eyes remain shut.
Who Would Chose This? by Elizabeth Huisman

Who would choose this?
Who would choose to be hated?
Who claims an identity soaked in hardship
That comes with free pain.

I didn’t choose this,
I am weak.
If I could change myself, I would.
Throw in the towel, Enough! I would.
In a heartbeat, rip off my label
Be done with the stress and depression.
The feeling of rejection.

I am unloved because of who I am not what I do.
Saying “I’m gay,”
automatically makes me evil
untouchable, a sin.
You don’t know where my lips have been,
where my hands have held,
whose smile brings me joy,
Girl or boy,
other or none.
Just the title of bisexual
Erases everything you knew of me
One term makes you forget a lifetime of trust.

Who would choose this?
A one second stop to dejection.
To say it’s a choice tells the lie,
that there’s an option.
freedom doesn’t exist without pain
because people like you say we want this.
People like you say we want attention
You are wrong, we just want acceptance.
Walking Arthur’s seat was all I need
The push to pull you from my mind
Forcing this heavy weight of you on mine
Drop like the sweat from my cheek
Deep in my heart I know your meaning
Time to throw it down the hill with you leaving
In the midst of the uncertainty of the wind
I try to define the reason why from within-myself

Neither here nor there but somewhere beyond the horizon
Scattered to and fro beyond and below I realize-that

It was all a disguise that hypnotized the lies went
Into a sacred dimension of my heart

The part was good that you played very well like charades
This cannot go on one more day leave me be this I pray

In the midst of the uncertainty of the wind
I scatter to find somewhere to hide within-myself
Light/Dark by Hannah Kitner

A girl so smart
She could build robots.
A girl so sweet
She always knows what you need.
A girl full of faith
She is strong as she waits.
What can a girl do,
When he comes and changes everything for you?
A boy so smart
Writings stories as dark as his heart.
A boy so kind
He knows what you have in mind.
A boy so full of emotions
He can't keep up the notion.
What can a boy do,
When her light is what shines through?
She thanks God,
He sent the boy for her strength.
He thanks no one,
But her for seeing through the pain.
Even in darkness,
She is his shining light.
Even in sadness,
He is her rock with high might.
She was falling,
Losing hair and faith.
Cancer is no weakling,
It is scary and great.
She thought it was over,
She lost all hope.
He stayed and loved her,
Gave her strength for more.
She started Chemo,
He never left her side.
Praying before
The end comes in sight.
Her light started to fade,
He held on to her tight.
She knew their love was fate,
Even if she didn't last the night.
He kissed her one last time
As her eyes closed for good.
He prayed to her god,
Welcome her into you.
Her memory changed his life,
He will never go back
To the darkness of night.
Awards for Creative Excellence in Photography

Second Prize
Anele Rogers -- Running
Third Prize

Ricky Galindo

The Office

Skin by Sandra Cubilla

Those fingertips dare touch my skin again
But instead it digs its nails in with poison
And like everyday
I wait for my daily dose of you
Searching for hope
Searching for peace
Searching for spirit
Searching for me

Searching for life
Searching for love
Searching for who
Searching because

Searching for God
Searching for clues
Searching for dreams
Searching for you
Honorable Mention

Desteny Ramirez
Doris Miller Memorial
Anela Rogers                              Morning Coffee
The Wedding by Kendra Watkins

As I gaze into your beauty
I feel a sense of duty
to comfort you

No other love I’ve known
than that which you have shown
you are so true

Let the announcement ring clear
there is no other not far or near
do you hear

My heart sings a ballad
when I think of you it gallops
Into a sea of love

Let the doves be released
into the heavens and on the streets
We dance to our own beat

I am for you and you for me
For better or worse
this we repeat in matrimony

All of You by Sandra Cubilla

Take all your demons
Set them free
Then maybe you could be holy
Your past can’t take you
Nor your present restrain you
Every moment should be learned with ease and hard to carry
Many, many thanks to Dr. Johnette McKown & the Board of Trustees, and Dr. Donnie Balmos, Dr. Fred Hills, and Dr. Bill Matta for financial support and encouragement.

A special thanks to all my colleagues and students who have assisted with the selection of poetry, photography, and short fiction:
Brenda Bradley -- Londa Carriveau -- Glenn Downing -- Yolanda Gonzalez
Marianna Hampton -- Ganna Iushchenko -- Laurice Jones
Jacob Koehler -- Carol Lowe -- Jenna Lowry -- Reid Makowsky -- Bill Matta
Ramona McKeown -- Cynthia Prado -- Stacey Teal -- Ryan Thompson
Nick Webb -- Christopher Whitehead -- Jessica Zbeida
Yesterday I was sad. Yearning for my boy kitties.
Yesterday I was frantic. Not understanding my homework due yesterday.
Yesterday I was tired. Holding it together from 7am until 2:30pm.
Yesterday I was warm. Sharing pizza with friends.
Yesterday I was brave. I registered for English comp 2. Yesterday I was all this at once.
Beautiful by Kendra Watkins

She is beautiful
She is a dove
She is an Angel
She is love

She is real
She is strong
With her is where I belong

She is patient
She is kind
Hearing her voice eases my mind

She is bold
She is a queen
To know her is like a dream

She's hated by many
She's loved by few
I love her so much—if she only knew

She is a goddess
I place her above
She's my beautiful mother
And she is love

Submission deadline for
Volume 19, Number 1 of
The Stone Circle: October 8th, 2019