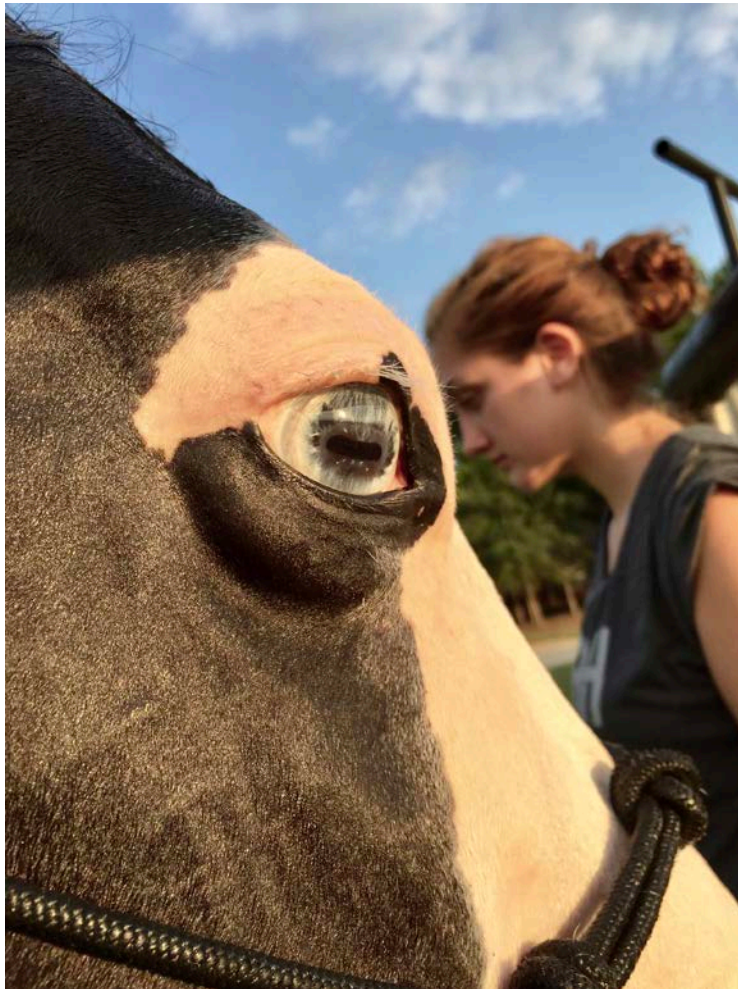


The Stone Circle

VOLUME 22, ISSUE 1

FALL 2022



Amber Stephens

Minds Aligned

McLennan Community College
Journal of Literary and Visual Art

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

The Stone Circle is not interested in acquiring rights to contributors' work. All rights revert to the author upon publication, and we expect *The Stone Circle* to be acknowledged as the original publisher in any subsequent chapbooks or books in which the work appears.

Our address is: Editor, *The Stone Circle* c/o The English Department, McLennan Community College, 1400 College Drive, Waco, Texas, 76708.

Print versions of the magazine are published by OneTouchPoint.

The views expressed in *The Stone Circle* are solely reflective of the author's perspectives. MCC takes no responsibility for the creative expression contained herein.

Cover Art: Amber Stephens, "Minds Aligned," First Prize (Visual Art)

www.mclennan.edu/stone-circle/

ISSN: 1931-3381

Table of Contents

Prose

Haden Rhodes, "Close Encounters of the Farm Kind" (First Prize - Prose)	3
Memphis (Mat) Thiele, "Overstimulated" (Second Prize - Prose)	5

Poetry

Jamie Smith, "Leave a Message" (First Prize - Poetry)	8
Emily Smith, "Am I Ever Really Mine?" (Second Prize - Poetry)	9
Chloe Thorburn, "Enigmatic" (Third Prize - Poetry)	11
Justin Kennedy, "Vacío" (First Prize - Poetry in Spanish)	14
Maritza Hernandez, "Octubres agridulces" (Second Prize - Poetry in Spanish)	15
Jamie Smith, "Society v. Women"	18
Alfredo Gutierrez, "Corriendo en mi mente"	21
Eleanor Sullivan, "Covered in the Tears I Haven't Cried"	22
Judith Jurado, "Melodía de las hojas otoñales"	23
Emily Smith, "You Are Good"	24
Eleanor Sullivan, "Who I Am"	25
Emily Smith, "Four Stages of Heartbreak"	26
Jamie Smith, "Saying Goodbye"	27

Visual Art

Amber Stephens, "Minds Aligned" (First Prize - Visual Art)	(Front Cover)
Alfredo Gutierrez, "Brightened Future"	7
Macie Martin, "Heavenly Heights"	7
Jessica Millsaps, "Starry Avenue" (Second Prize - Visual Art)	12
Yvette Carrera, "TSC" (Third Prize - Visual Art)	13
Haden Rhodes, "Serenity Tide"	14
Valencia Jones, "Neverending"	16
Kirwin Foster, "Lilly"	17
Alfredo Gutierrez, "Dark Blossom"	17
Jasslyn Luna, "Benjamin Franklin"	19
Valencia Jones, "Angles"	20
Alfredo Gutierrez, "Neon Jelly"	20
Amber Stephens, "Between the Barbed Wire"	24
Rebecca Sherburne, "Blue Skies, Blue Water, Crisp Air"	28
Jason Clark, "Starlit Night"	29
Macie Martin, "Electric Chaos"	(Back Cover)

Close Encounters of the Farm Kind

by Haden Rhodes

First Prize - Prose

A good portion of our society possesses a deep fascination with the absurd, bizarre, and curious. These interests range from aliens that were in the backyard just a minute ago to unusual animal behaviors, and a plethora of other topics best left buried in a dark closet. I hold no claims of expertise regarding the odd and bizarre, but what field analysis I do possess would make any extraterrestrial scientist look like little Flint Lockwood. Here is my case.

As a child, you have probably visited those farm parks in the fall with the pumpkin patch, cider and produce stand, mazes, or even worse, the hayride. Occasionally a crazed individual will have the audacity to put real, "live" animals on display and you could feed them after paying the farmer's exorbitant prices. In truth, these synthetically bred beings bear no resemblance to real creatures, and their sole purpose and function is to eat out of children's hands. Well, I know for a fact that *REAL* goats are never this tranquil and demure. I mean, there is a reason why they have horns, and it's not because of predators.

The goats that I know are creatures of malice, greed, and temerity. Plus they did not originate in a lab. Some are so temperamental that they will try to hurt the innocent person feeding them or just simply passing through their pastures. Others are so skittish that, even if you were holding a full scoop of corn, they would run AWAY from you, screaming bloody murder all the while. One specimen that I know personally will water the grass just at the sight of me approaching. Don't bother restraining these beasts. They will burn the rope out of your hands and slice off your digits by tugging the chain taut at the crucial moment. If you ever encounter one, back away slowly, maintain eye contact at all times, and report it to your local authorities. Tell them that my goats got out again.

Enough on goats. Though it is said that dogs are "Man's Best Friend", I assert that the farm dog is an unruly, wild beast. It traverses long distances in only a few strides without being winded, and I have seen a younger one carry a small girl on his back. The dog, named Scout, was in a playful mood and ran a couple of laps of the pasture with her. She wasn't injured, but she needed a few seconds to calm down after her ride. When the specimen is in a frisky mood, especially when in the company of others, their passion surges, and they fight for your undivided attention. Best to step back and return to your duties.

Like the farm dog, chickens are both fascinating and frustrating creatures. They know that everyone wants to eat them. While their brains are only the size of black-eyed peas, they use them well. In self-defense they will bolt in first one direction, then another, then change tracks again, often squeezing through an impassable hole in the fence or sending clouds of dust airborne to blind their pursuers, even if they are just bringing out their food. If they know you plan to feed them, they will crowd around you until it's impossible to walk. I've seen

chickens run around with rubber gaskets and spray paint caps clutched tightly in their beaks like treasure. To the other extreme, we have pigs, who are prim, picky creatures. Even if I throw in a marshmallow to entice them to eat their wholesome sweet potatoes and carrots, they would gladly trade them for rotting slop. They are also excellent at locating and exploiting any weakness in their paddocks and enclosures.

Finally, the farmer himself is a peculiar specimen, known to possess many strengths, secret powers, and mystic arts, including the ability to function at un-earthly hours. He will consume only coffee to ensure his image in society, where in truth it is a luxury to him; he is capable of working without it. Farmers delight in using special items called "hand tools," "chores," and "work boots" to drain every last ounce of energy from their victims. They lure these fools in with a promise of "honest pay." Oftentimes, it works, and even I have fallen victim to their ruses. It's a pretty good system, too. The old folks get to relax, and I make money. I am, however, one of the lucky few that can be safely hired by these beings.

I know these facts firsthand because I live through them every day. I live on a regular, normal, ordinary multi-product family farm. I am no stranger to the odd and bizarre because, as a genuine flesh and blood farm boy, anything and everything can happen on a farm. It's an occupational hazard. At least, that's what they want you to believe.

Overstimulated

by Mat Thiele

Second Prize - Prose

Dalton wasn't having a good day. Usually, he could stand it, but today everything just felt off. It was too bright and loud. The buzzing of the lights, the voices, the noise of the outside world. It was too much.

"Dal?"

He flinched at the sound, shook his head, and shoved his face down into the space between his knees. The door creaked. Soon, a heavy weight settled over him; it was wonderful. He pulled the blanket down to cover his entire body, to muffle the world outside. He almost didn't notice the person who settled beside him.

"How ya doing?"

He knew the voice. It was Miles. Of course it was. Who else would come to check on him? Wait, he had to answer, didn't he? He opened his mouth, but his words wouldn't come out. He gave a frustrated whine and shrugged his shoulders.

"That bad?"

Dalton nodded and held the weighted blanket tightly around him.

"Need anything?" Miles asked, his voice soft, careful.

He shook his head. The body beside him shifted. Dalton stuck his hand out, grasping for anything. He grabbed Miles' arm. The movement made him ache after so long sitting still.

"Whoa! Okay, okay! I won't leave," Miles said.

Dalton drew back his arm and returned to his original position. His mind screamed with relief as the world finally calmed down.

"Nic said we could reschedule," Miles said, "I told him you were having a rough day."

Dalton didn't like Miles' brother all the time, but then he felt grateful.

"Maybe we should soundproof the room," Miles said.

Good idea, Dalton thought. Soundproofing and some good, thick curtains. The tension in his shoulders finally released.

"I'll see what I can find next time I go out," Miles said, "It's almost noon. Be lunchtime soon."

Almost on cue, Dalton's stomach rumbled. He glared at the floor; he hadn't eaten all day. Stupid body betraying him! His frustration doubled when he heard

Miles laugh.

"Sounds like someone is hungry," Miles said.

Dalton smacked Miles.

"Ow! Uncalled for!" he said.

Dalton snickered. His tension eased, and he leaned against the wall with a sigh. His muscles and joints ached. Maybe sitting on the floor wasn't the best choice.

"You good?"

Dalton didn't respond. Then he tugged the blanket away from his face and turned to his friend. The blinds were down, and the light was off. He still had to answer, so he nodded.

"Great! Hate seeing you all messed up like that," Miles said, and then lowered his voice, "Sorry... Anything you need?"

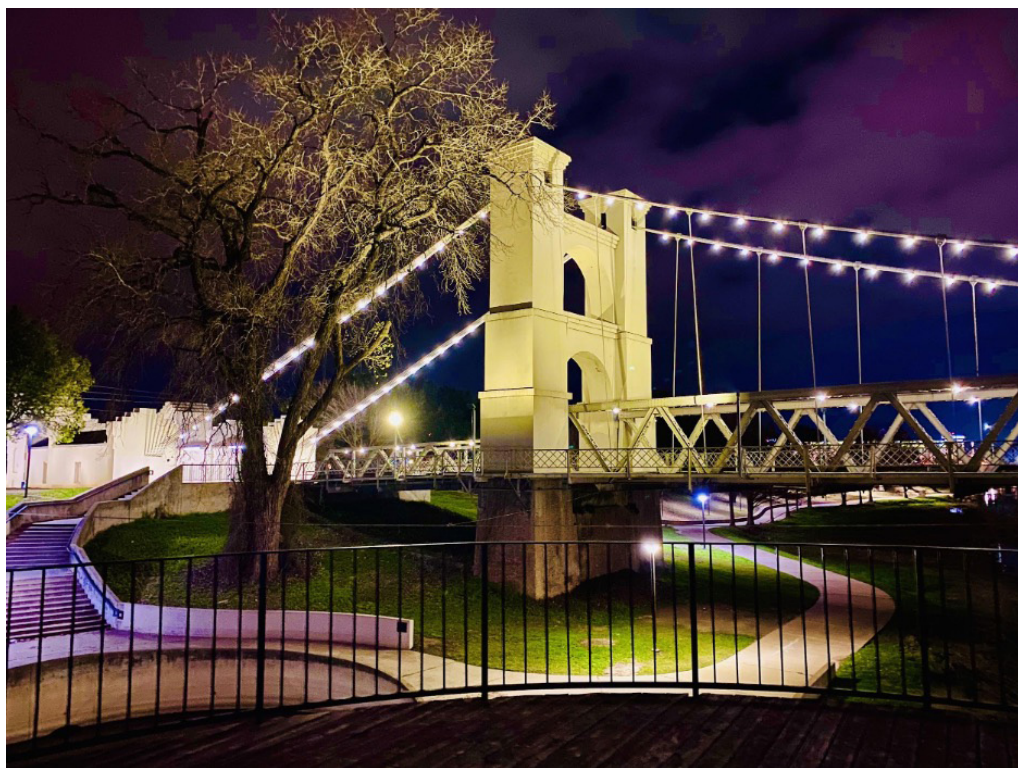
Dalton shook his head.

"I'm gonna go start lunch then," Miles said.

Dalton watched his friend cross the room. Before he disappeared, Dalton cleared his throat, his voice hoarse.

"Thanks," he said.

Miles turned back and said, "No problem."



Alfredo Gutierrez

Brightened Future



Macie Martin

Heavenly Heights

Leave a Message

by Jamie Smith

First Prize - Poetry

Hi, it's me.

I can't come to the phone right now,
because if I'm being honest,
I'm tired.

I
am
so
tired.

The sun has been hiding for days
and this room is too heavy to leave,
like some gravitational pull pinning me against the wall.

My legs ache though I've slept all week.
My chest feels empty though my heart is there.
Its pulse beats time in my ears.
My voice cracks when I try to speak,
but nobody's asked for my opinion in weeks.
Empty water bottles lie like bones in an elephant graveyard.
I am a desert,
No, a wasteland.
The sky opened and swallowed me whole.
Once I found comfort in that idea.
Now, I'm watching my funeral unfold,
and I'm the sole attendee.
The only speaker.
The only person who knew me well enough to say I was unwell.

Am I Ever Really Mine?

by Emily Smith

Second Prize - Poetry

I tend my body with care—

Under a warm embrace,
the light of my love,
and the salt of my tears,
it has grown.

Why do I persist in
gifting my garden to a man
for him to make his property,
To tend with rough, cold hands?

As a woman, am I ever really mine?

I do not owe my body,
my skin, a soft, speckled canvas,

to a man hungry for more,
to a man who will not stop
until he has devoured
every piece of fruit
and left the branches broken, barren
so nothing grows anymore.

My lips belong
to glass cups
and gummy smiles;
forehead freckles
and honey chapstick.

My thighs belong to
to the roads I run
and Sunday squats;
the concerts where I stand
and pets that sleep on them
as if they were soft pillows.

My hair belongs to
Christmas-stockings scrunchies
and pigtail buns;
bad box-dye jobs
and break-up bangs.

I belong to
the thoughts I speak,
the world I create,
and the truth that rests in my heart—

and the truth is that I am more
than what I bring to a man's bed.

I am mine.

Love can be found elsewhere.
I can let go of his hungry hands.

Enigmatic

by Chloe Thorburn

Third Prize - Poetry

It's that person you're trying to avoid in the dead of night,
The one whose image you see in the mirrors you hurry past,
The one whose voice echoes desperately in your head.

It's the person who grabs your shoulders and yells,
"Run faster; no breaks allowed!"
Or strokes your back to comfort you when you collapse, exhausted.

It's that person, the one who wants it all to end,
Who sobs in the corners of forbidden, dark places.
It's the person who laughs until they cannot stand,
And who can't stand the thought of not being alive.

But that person is never entirely there.

They flash by like a train as it thunders through the subway,
Or the flicker of a dying flashlight.
The distant memory you know is there,
But can't seem to pull out of the dark.

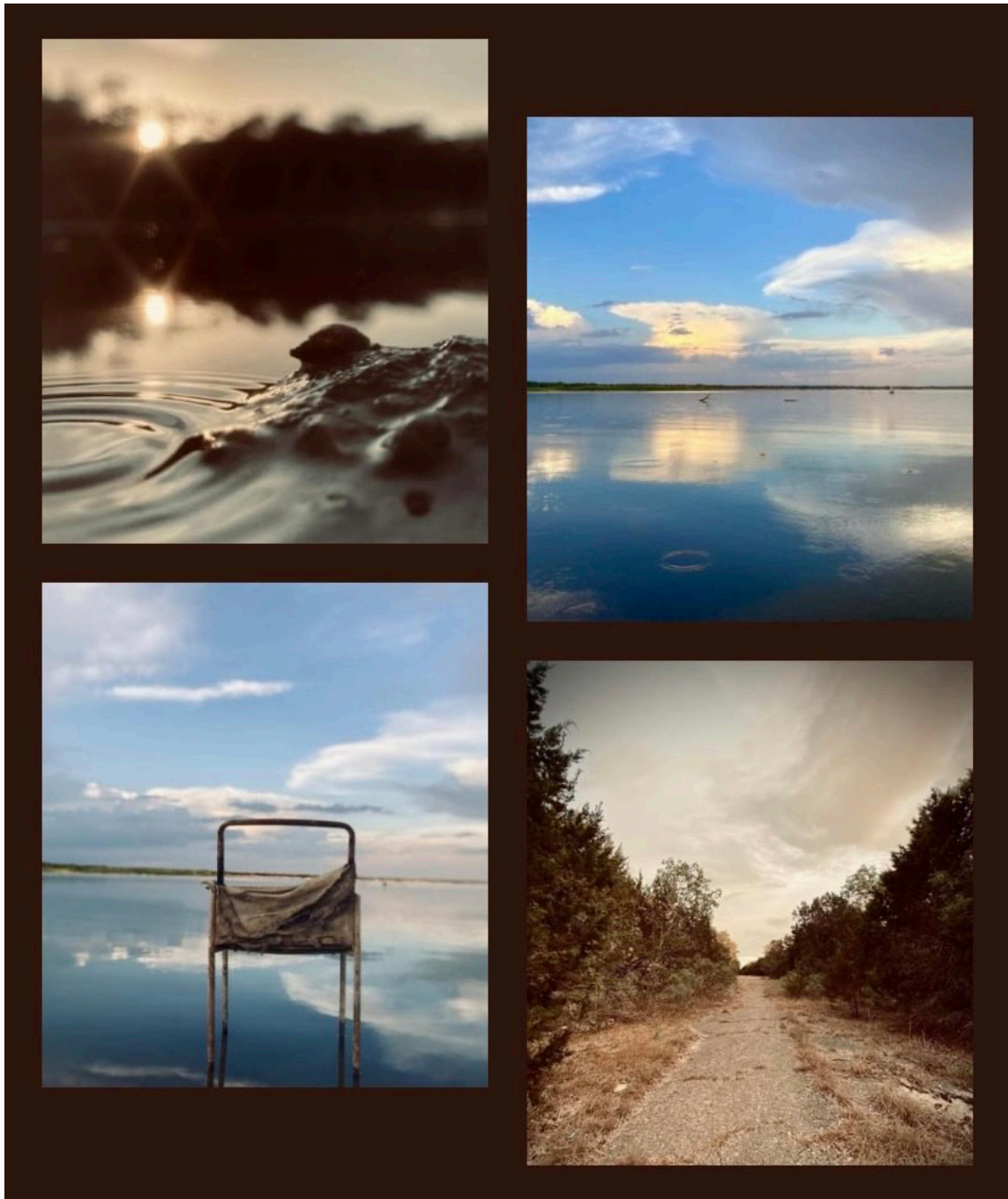
It is love.
It is war.
It is courage.
It is fear.
It is silent.
It is flawed.

It is you.



Jessica Millsaps
Second Prize (Visual Art)

Starry Avenue



Yvette Carrera
Third Prize (Visual Art)

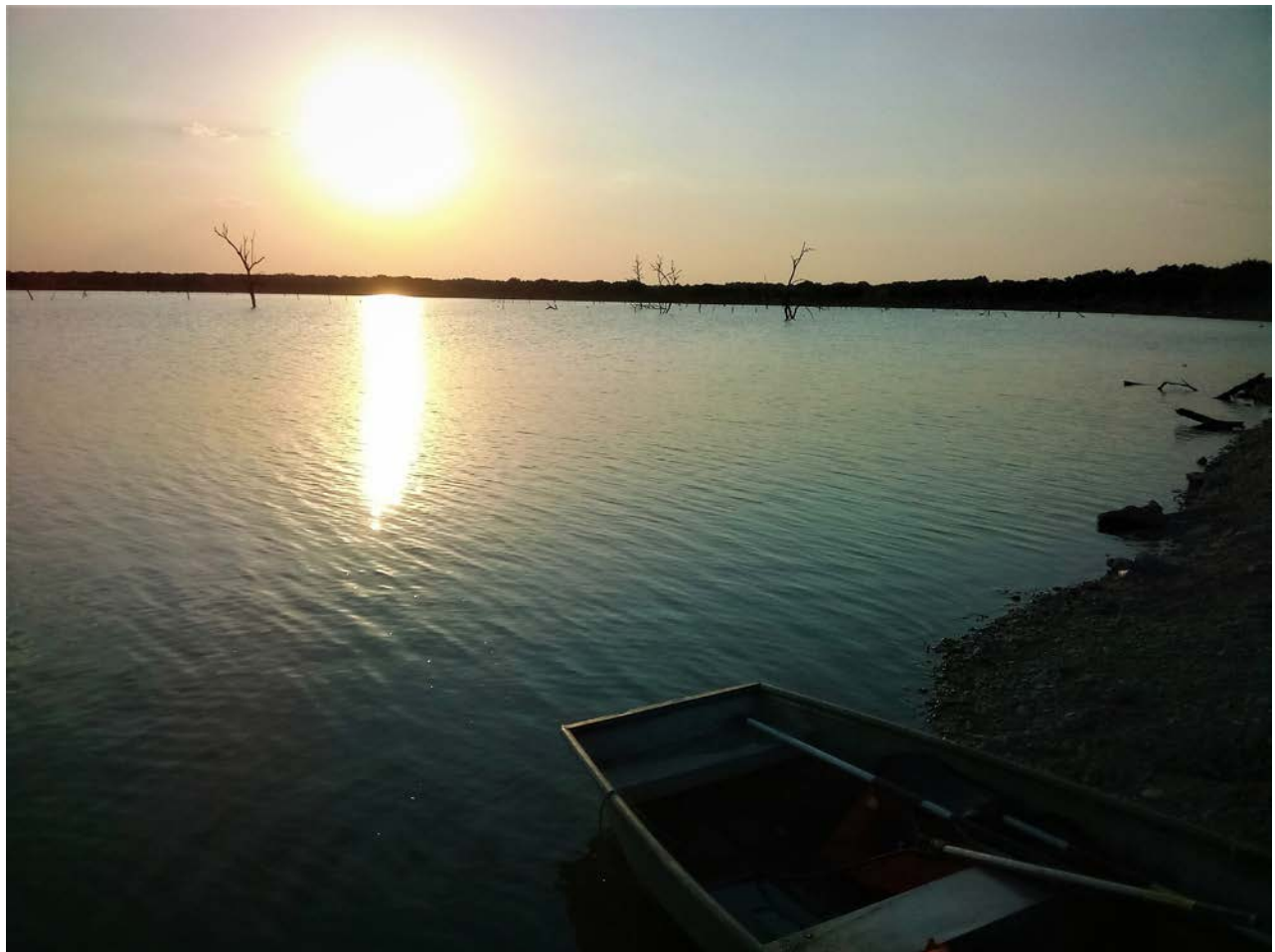
TSC

Vacío

by Justin Kennedy

First Prize - Poetry in Spanish

Cada día me siento menos y menos.
Todas las cosas que hago causan angustia.
Se siente como si no pudiera seguir el ritmo.
Busco algo sin saber lo que es.
Algo que ha estado faltando durante mucho tiempo.
Algo que llenara el vacío interior.
Tal vez sea la felicidad y la paz mental.



Haden Rhodes

Serenity Tide

Octubres agridulces

by Maritza Hernandez

Second Prize - Poetry in Spanish

De nuevo es octubre, y de nuevo las hojas se caen con el pesar de mis lágrimas otra vez, se siente esa extraña costumbre de sonreír mientras mis lágrimas bailan hacia la nada.

El viento me recuerda cuando pasábamos horas riendo, e imaginando que aún sigues aquí, que cada decepción valió la pena. Que valió la pena tener mi corazón roto porque, aunque tú seas el responsable de mi miseria eres la única persona que es capaz de devolverles el brillo a mis ojos.

Aunque ya pasaron dos otoños aún tu ausencia se siente fresca como la mañanas. Debería estar feliz que hayan pasado demasiadas cosas que me gustaría contarte, dijiste que llamarías cuando llegaras sano y salvo....

Pensé que mi corazón estaba helado por el duro invierno de febrero pero era el resultado de todas las promesas que nunca llegaste a cumplir.

Todos estos pensamientos me mataban lentamente. Dormir ya no era opción; se convirtió en una necesidad para escapar de la nueva realidad en la que ya no formabas parte de mi vida.

Pero de nuevo es octubre, lleno de susurros que el viento hace para brindarme compañía, recordándome cómo en tan poco tiempo ya de nuevo es octubre.

Espero en el café de siempre cada octubre esperando verte por casualidad pero no creo que Dios permita que uno de sus ángeles baje para tomarse un té conmigo...

Aunque de nuevo sea octubre...

Voy en camino hacia el puente observando el tráfico; tal vez si camino en dirección al despejado Cielo pueda verte como en los viejos tiempos...

Ignorando los gritos y las quejas de la gente, miro como me esperas del otro lado del puente. ¡Ya voy! ¡Ya estás más cerca! Ya miro tu mano en dirección hacia mí...

De pronto todo se convierte en oscuridad y silencio. Ya no siento dolor. De pronto abro mis ojos y te miro a ti mirándome fijamente. Por fin te he vuelto a ver.

Que dicha siento porque de nuevo es octubre.

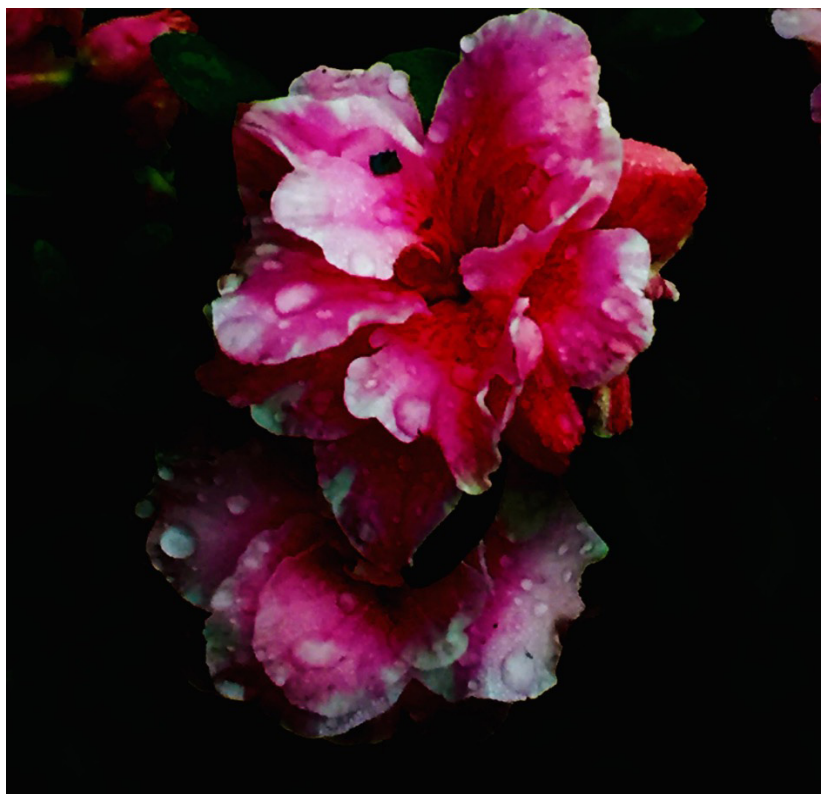


Valencia Jones

Neverending



Kirwin Foster
Lilly



Alfredo Gutierrez
Dark Blossom

Society v. Women

by Jamie Smith

They tell me to eat a salad,
That I need to drink more water,
That boys don't like chubby girls.

Then they tell her to eat a burger,
That she needs meat on her bones,
That boys don't like 'toothpicks.'

Should they decide which of us is prettier?
Fat to skinny, and back again,
the moment we find our self-confidence?

Why do they dictate our worth?
Why can't I stand beside her and feel equal?
Why can't we stand together and be loved the same?

Is it that they don't hate fat women,
Or that they hate skinny women,
But that they just hate women?

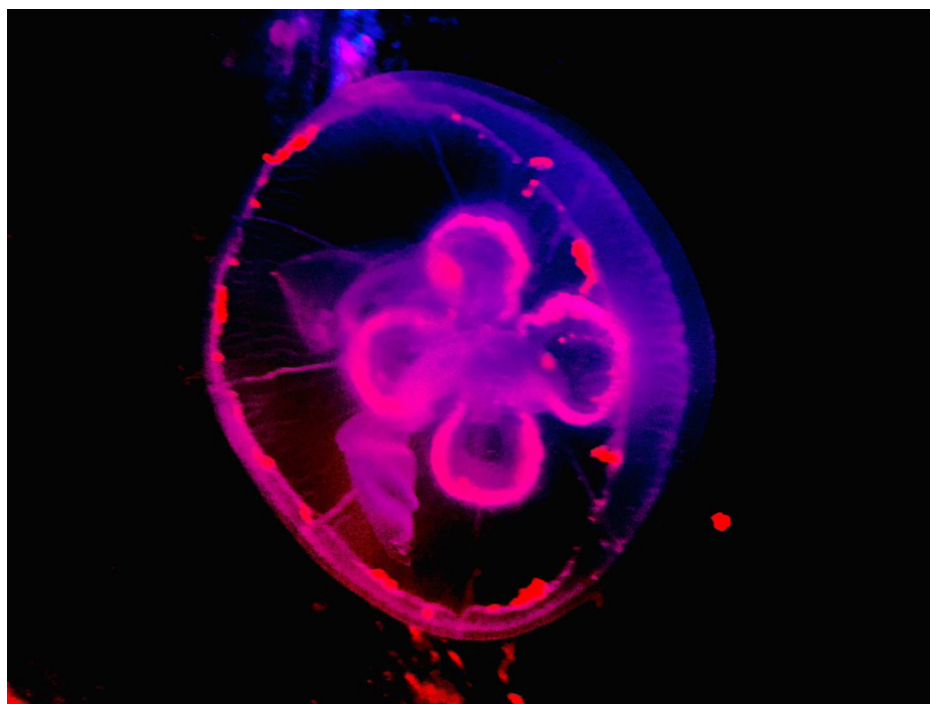


Jasslyn Luna

Benjamin Franklin



Valencia Jones
Angles



Alfredo Gutierrez
Neon Jelly

Corriendo en mi mente

by Alfredo Gutierrez

Siempre estás corriendo en mi mente
Siempre estás presente
La única en la que siempre estoy pensando eres tú
Estás pegada en mi mente como un tattoo

Aunque pasan los años
Yo todavía no te he olvidado
No sé si es esa sonrisa
Lo que no me deja que te olvida

Sé que tienes a alguien a tu lado
Y yo que solo pienso en el pasado
Solo dime cómo olvidarte
Si al solo verte empiezo a enamorarme

Como la primera vez que te vi
No pude dejar de pensar en ti
Como quisiera volver el tiempo
Para decirte todo lo que siento

No necesito el 14 de febrero
Para decirte cuánto yo te quiero
Y demostrarte todos mis sentimientos
Por eso siempre estás corriendo en mi mente

Covered in the Tears I Haven't Cried

by Eleanor Sullivan

I'm not crying because I miss you.
I'm not crying at all.
But I miss who I was before you,
and I resent all the pain you caused.
I can't stand how it still affects me,
a shadow of the past.
Because even though I don't need you,
I miss who I used to be.

I'm covered in the tears I haven't cried,
I'm waiting for the pain of the past to subside
because every time I sleep I can't forget
that I ever let
you in.

All I know is that
I was more for me than you ever could be,
and I was more than you could see.
And all I'm saying is
I was more for me than you wanted to be,
and I'm more for me than you'll ever be.

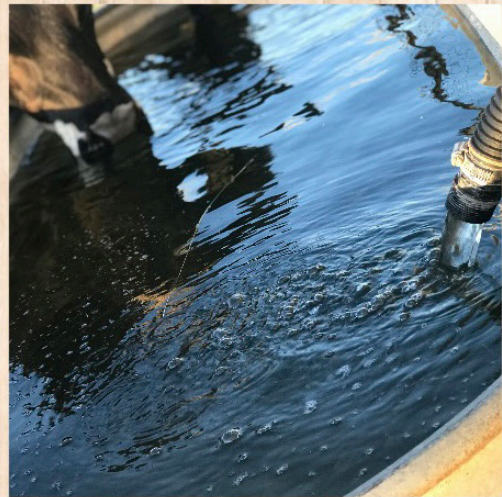
Melodía de las hojas otoñales

by Judith Jurado

De pronto se escucha una suave melodía,
acompañada de una suave brisa,
que golpea suavemente a todo aquel que pasa por su vista,
Son unas hojas marchitas que caen desde el espesor,
que un día en su verdor miraba quien pasaba
y no procuraba dejar sin aliento a quien de ella dependía,
el calor intenso que a ambos abrazaba,
pero que el verdor emitiendo frescura y resplandor,
consolaba con su sombra sin dejarla en agonía.

Vuelve a susurrar el viento, son menos los que están sujetos,
los que antes decoraban el verdor ahora decoran el suelo,
con un tono de colores que al mirar desde lejos
resplandece ahora desde el suelo hacia el cielo,
con un color amarillento, rojizo tornando a marrón,
va cubriendo el espesor formando un bello tapiz;
¡mira quien pasa ahora! es el que estaba en agonía,
son ahora son sus pies quienes reciben calidez por el terciopelo que pisan,
dando suavidad en cada paso que dan con un suave murmurar.

¡No, aún no te despidas! que aún no termino este verso,
que el viento se ha empeñado a juntarlos como colinas,
para hacer jugar a los niños como mixtura en sus cabellos
y al anciano el calor abrigador ayudando en sus leños,
aún se escucha la suave melodía de las hojas otoñales,
son las últimas hojas que con una suave brisa
se deslizan tras el viento enrollando en su camino,
susurrando que algunas van juntas y otras van solas,
pero acompañadas siempre de una melodía.



Amber Stephens

Between the Barbed Wire

You Are Good

by Emily Smith

Softness rests inside of you,
An infinite supply.

In the past, your speech was tainted with hurt,

passing your lips with ill intent,

giving life to lies and
the world to what is wrong.

Can you start over,
Or is your goodness gone?

Look inside.

See the endless cycle—

seeds of softness
grow into a garden of love.

No matter what you have done
you can start over.

Who I Am

by Eleanor Sullivan

My heart is twitching,
Fingers itching.
My feelings over pouring,
Roaring.

Write it down, get it out, feel it now.
Pen to paper,
Like cuts on the seams of my soul.

Sometimes, it seems like I'll always be
A broken version of me.
Not that I'm not complete—
I know that I'm entirely me,
But I wish that the pain wasn't part of my story.

I'll hold the dichotomy.
The truth that I'm hurt,
But still me.
For the only me,
is the me I am
presently.

Four Stages of Heartbreak

by Emily Smith

I.

Cradled by sunlight as you wake,
open your heart to this clean slate.

Take what is yours and resonate

because there is only so much
accountability you can take,
and self-deprecation you can make,
before it turns to blame.

II.

Create for yourself gentleness,
like cold water and clean sheets.
Be a tender lover to yourself,
patient and kind.
Caress your skin and clear your mind.

III.

Realize that love is soft and slow.
Dandelions and dogs,
breakfast and babies,
are how you know
love is real and lives inside of you.

IV.

Trust that when it is right,
you will know.
Life has a subtle way of leading you
where you are destined to go.
You will never miss what is meant for you.

Saying Goodbye

by Jamie Smith

I remember my high school graduation night vividly;
I sat next to kids I had grown up with my whole life.
We were all going to new places with new people,
but none of us realized that until it was too late.

How do you say goodbye to a friend?
You're both going to succeed in life,
both going to become better people,
but that doesn't lessen the hurt.

You used to binge watch shows,
study until two in the morning,
talk about your teachers,
and the colleges you dreamed of attending.

Now you're there, though, alone.
You leave hearts next to their pictures
and halfhearted comments saying,
"Hey, you look great. I miss you."

Authors and singers and poets talk about romantic love,
the phenomenal parts of it and the heartache that follows when it leaves.
You learn all the emotions you'll experience when it comes to love.
Yet you never learn how to say goodbye to a friend.



Rebecca Sherburne

Blue Skies, Blue Water, Crisp Air

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

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

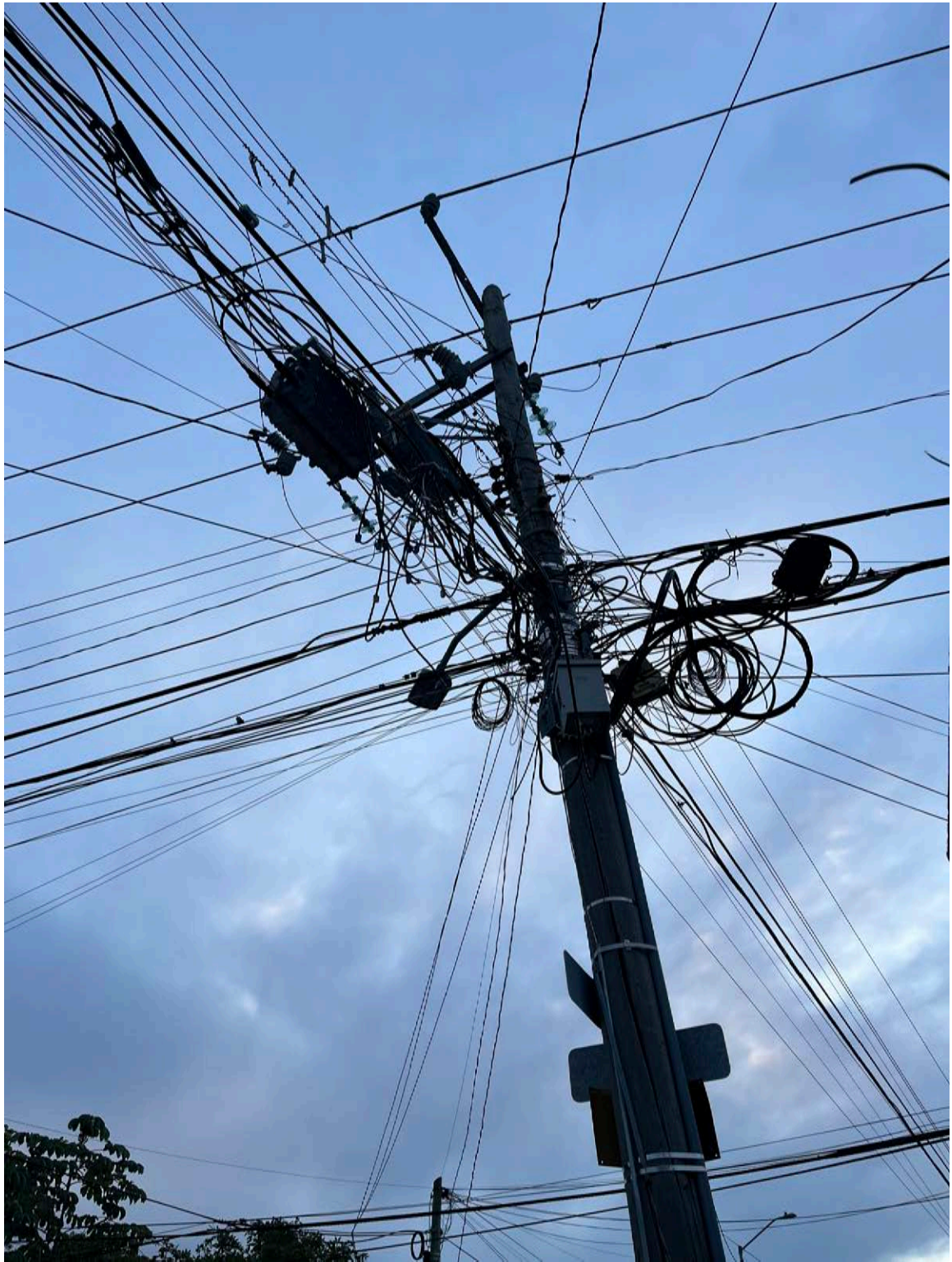
Thank you to all the faculty and staff whose donations to the MCC Foundation make this magazine possible. Without your support, we would not be able to fund our prizes and recognize our students' exceptional talents.



Jason Clark

Starlit Night

Submission deadline
for Volume 22, Issue 2 of
The Stone Circle:
March 17th, 2023



Macie Martin

Electric Chaos