

CGI THE PEN



The Pen
CCRI's Literary Magazine
Issue 1, Volume 1
December 2022

**Cover Art by Jason Bartlett, CCRI
Student**

Contents

From the Editor	I
“Dear John, It Was Hers First” by Kat Taylor	3
Art by Hope Allison	6
“I Thought of You” By Andrea Lantigua	7
Photo by Zoe Guzman	8
“ Strawberry Yum-Yum (or as some family members refer to it—Strawberry Yuck-Yuck!)” By Dr. Alyson Snowe	9
3D Ceramic Art by Michelle Peterson	12
“River of Feelings” By Rosa Padilla	13
“construction begins” By Velma Sterling	14
“The Ghost Light” By Dr. Kyle Gamache	15
“Someone Saw Me Kiss Melissa” By Jessica Araujo	22
“Ode to The Girl in the Mirror” By Sophia	23
Anacleto <i>Jack in the Box</i> By Sophia Anacleto	24
“Every Day Felt Like the Last” By Casey Duclos	25
“The Pillow” By Adnel Lopez Medina	26
“Untitled” By Nicholas Zonfrilli	27
<i>Neoregelia</i> By Philippe Dwyer	28
“Untitled” By Brooke Marion	29
“metronome” By Jessica Chandler	31
Photo By Zoe Guzman	32
Multimedia piece by Jared Smith	33
Art By Jason Bartlett	34

From the Editor

The CCRI community is diverse in its people and its talent. *The Pen* aims to celebrate the artistic voices of CCRI's students, alumni, faculty, and staff. The arts are a mirror, and our inaugural issue hopes to reflect the joy, wonder, pain, love, activism, and fantasy of our contributors: facets of life exhibited through poetry, prose, and visual arts. To submit for future issues, please send submissions to thepenlitmag@ccri.edu. Please limit prose to 2,000 words or fewer. In the meantime, enjoy the creativity flowing through *The Pen*.

Best,
Jessica Araujo
Assistant Professor
English Department
CCRI-Knight Campus

Dear John, It Was Hers First
Critical Essay by Kat Taylor

Music, movies, and social media, our lives are centered around entertainment, and the people who do the entertaining.

We place celebrities on pedestals, viewing them as role models, but what happens when they become involved in scandal, abusing their status, or even other people? Oftentimes, we overlook behaviors we wouldn't normally find acceptable. It's easy then to imagine how it would feel to be a young person, trying to forge a successful career in an industry known for its quick cycling popularity, to have an older, established star suddenly showering them with compliments and advice, providing reassurance, encouragement, and a sense of protection, in a dangerous feeling environment.

It seems to be a popular theme in Hollywood that the older a male celebrity gets, the younger his partner should be. Fan favorite Leonardo DiCaprio, 47, is one of the biggest repeat offenders, whose girlfriends all seem to "age out" by their mid-twenties. He allegedly began dating his current girlfriend, 25-year-old model Camila Morrone, when she was merely 20 years old, and if he sticks to his usual relationship pattern, it's highly unlikely we'll be seeing many more magazine covers featuring "LeoMila."

While we can never assume to know the intimate details of a person's private relationship, we should be questioning why someone so much older would be seeking out partners fresh from high school. One celebrity who has bravely related to their fans their own experience with this toxic dynamic is Taylor Swift, who details in two powerful songs, written 13 years apart, a relationship she was involved in at the age of 19 with actor John Mayer, who was 32 at the time.

Dear John, which was written by Swift immediately following her split from the actor, makes it heartbreakingly clear that even at an age of assumed immaturity, she was grown enough to see how wrong this relationship was. However, it is not until we hear her most recent song,

Would've, Could've, Should've, that we understand how her viewpoint has evolved over the years. Now, the same age Mayer was then, Swift emotes her feelings on the 13-year gap, with obvious disgust and regret.

To hear of the tumultuous sense of unease described in Swift's earlier, sorrowful tune, it is not hard to imagine how her partner used his age to keep the upper hand in a relationship based on manipulation. With lyrics like, "*You are an expert at sorry/ And keeping the lines blurry/ Never impressed/ By me acing your tests/ And I lived in your chess game/ But you changed the rules every day/ Wondering which version of you I might get on the phone, tonight,*" we can see the way Swift continually needed to prove her worth in the relationship. Meanwhile, Mayer would behave out of line, or just treat her and the relationship with indifference, and then deflect and offer empty apologies the moment she would question it. She expresses her anxiety associated with his fluctuating moods, resulting in her feeling that the rug would be pulled out from under her at any moment, with the lyrics, "*Counting my footsteps/ Praying the floor won't fall through, again.*" This correlates to lyrics in the newer song, *Would've, Could've, Should've*, where Swift laments, "*All I used to do was pray/ If you'd never looked my way/ I would've stayed on my knees/ And I damn sure never would've danced with the devil/ At nineteen/ And the God's honest truth is that the pain was heaven.*" She acknowledges that there was a thrill involved, however that thrill was connected with deep pain, and that pain, we will see, has only deepened over time.

In Swift's new song, we can feel how haunted she is by her past, with lyrics such as, "*Now that I'm grown, I'm scared of ghosts,*" and, "*God rest my soul, I miss who I used to be/ I can't let this go, I fight with you in my sleep,*" a stark contrast to the Taylor of 13 years ago, who boasted, "*I took your matches/ before fire could catch me.*" It's clear that years later, the trauma lingers and that the "blind optimism" for which she blames herself in *Dear John*, has turned to bitter regret, as she had wisely predicted years prior, stating, "*I'll look back and regret how I ignored when they said/ Run as fast as you can.*" Swift's mournful tone as she repeatedly sings in the newer song, "*The wound won't close, I keep on waiting for a sign/ I regret you all the time,*" emphasizes the sad

reality that she did not escape the fires of this fling unscathed, as she had once believed.

Immediately following the break-up, Swift became very much aware of her own youth, and of the way Mayer took advantage of this, as she reflects with, "*Dear John, I see it all now, it was wrong/ Don't you think nineteen is too young/ To be played by your dark twisted games, when I loved you so?/ Don't you think I was too young? You should've known.*" The older Swift gets and the more distance she puts between her age, then to now, the more pronounced that gap becomes to her, and her repulsion and anger is evident as she sings, "*If I was some paint, did it splatter/ On a promising grown man?/ And if I was a child, did it matter/ If you got to wash your hands?*" She directly calls her ex out for the highly inappropriate age discrepancy, referring to herself as a child, which she effectively reiterates at the chilling climax of *Would've, Could've, Should've*, as she achingly wails the words, "*Living for the thrill of hitting you where it hurts/ Give me back my girlhood/ It was mine first.*" Swift's agony is so palpable, we can sense the waking-in-the-night, nauseously shameful remorse haunting her, forever raw, no matter how much time passes.

Not all relationships with wide age gaps are wrong or ensure that the older partner is taking advantage of, or manipulating, the younger person, but we have to wonder what is alluring about the idea of a partner so much younger. If a pattern of suspiciously inappropriate relations is established by a major celebrity, we shouldn't be dismissing it simply because, "they make really great movies, or music." Instead of celebrating and applauding the older celebrities for their sexual conquests, we should be protecting these young stars from believing that it is just what's expected of them, because the threat of being blacklisted can be a powerful motivator for them to accept the unacceptable.



Art by Hope Allison, CCRI Student

I Thought of You
By Andrea Lantigua
Class of 2018

I thought of you today

It was as normal as the breeze running through my hair

As beautiful as midnight lights glare

The feeling of the sun's rays on my face

A reminder of our love as summer's grace

The warmth of your touch as your body lay next to mine

Our eyes interlock to lover's delight, a reminder that you are mine

Your fingers roam through my hair, the scent of you that awakens me
just here and there...

A glimpse of hope that...you also thought of me

My love, does your body crave just me?

I thought of you today my love, but did you think of me?



Photo by Zoe Guzman, CCRI Student

Strawberry Yum-Yum (or as some family members refer to it—Strawberry Yuck-Yuck!) By Dr. Alyson Snowe, Assistant Professor

The recipe is not mine, but it is hand-written, in my handwriting, on a lined 4 ½ by 3 ¼ inch recipe card. The top of the card reads “My Favorite Recipes,” and appearing on the bottom right hand corner is a picture of a pie with an American flag, a large bronze canning pot, a round cheese block on a white plate with a blue lined edge, and a knife, all sitting upon a light blue and navy blue butcher block cloth. From and serves has been left blank, but I know to whom this recipe belongs.

Some of the ink is blurry from getting wet, and there are round red stains, presumable from drips of boiling strawberry gelatin.

1. Dissolve two 3 oz. packages of strawberry gelatin in 2 cups of boiling water and one package of unflavored gelatin.
2. Add (2) 10 oz. packages of frozen strawberries; stir until thawed.
3. Add one 13oz. can of sweetened crushed pineapple and one large banana finely diced; add juice of pineapple.
4. Pour ½ into 8X8X2 inch pan.
5. Chill till firm; then spread evenly 1 cup of sour cream. Pour remaining gelatin on top—chill till firm.

On Thanksgiving, Strawberry Yum-Yum is an obligatory dish, but at Christmas time the Yum-Yum is an optional festive addition namely because of its color. A sweet and savory alternative to cranberry sauce, I’ve never celebrated Thanksgiving without this beloved tradition. Mémé often put in the bananas, but Mom excluded them. I added them once or twice, but the leftovers are plagued by browning banana chunks.

Beckoning from the center of the table, I don’t think I could bear a Thanksgiving without the quivering red pie, bejeweled with chunks

of strawberry and pineapple. The sweetness of the fruit and Jell-O is perfectly offset by the slight tang of the sour cream—and a cool dish is welcome and refreshing accompaniment to the warm traditional trimmings.

When I began investigating the origin of my family’s revered recipe, I discovered that Kraft was most likely responsible for its evolution. This iconic salad that met the need for sweet indulgence reached its peak of popularity in the 1950s. Jell-O Salad, Congealed Salad, or Perfection Salad is seemingly not attributed to my Mémé. It belongs to a class of molded gelatin salads made popular by food companies around the turn of the 20th century. I searched online and found a similar recipe titled: Strawberry Pineapple Gelatin Salad. This was closest to my family’s recipe. There were copious variations: some added nuts (Pecans) or pretzels, and mixed cream cheese with the sour cream. Others made radical embellishments. Jell-O is a culinary blank slate.

In 1905, Charles Knox ran a recipe contest that launched the Age of the Molded Salad. Mrs. John Cooke of New Castle, Pennsylvania, submitted her recipe for Perfection Salad, a tart gelatin mold strewed with bits of cabbage, celery, and sweet red pepper, which the judges—Fannie Farmer among them—awarded third prize. Knox printed the recipe. Perfection Salad inspired cooks as few recipes have.

Again, at the end of the 19th century the domestic home economics movement took hold and Jell-O resumed its popularity. Proponents of this new science were obsessed with control. They considered tossed plates of mixed greens “messy” and eschewed them in favor of “orderly presentations.” A heap of raw ingredients in disarray plainly lacked cultivation, and the cooking experts developed a number of ingenious ways to wrap them up. The tidiest and most thorough way to package a salad was to mold it in gelatin. American cooks were already accustomed to making fruit and wine jellies or serving a decorative main dish such as boned turkey in aspic.

After learning of its composition, one might think twice about using Jell-O for anything but a decorative centerpiece. The fine powder that makes up gelatin is created from collagen. Gelatin can come from the collagen in cow or pig bones, hides and connective tissues. Today, the gelatin in Jell-O is most likely to come from pigskin. It is simply a hydrocolloid protein that can be extracted from animal collagen in tissue and bones. Cooks today can create vegetarian jellies by substituting agar, a gelatin made from red seaweed, for one derived from animal bones.

I don't know what is more revolting, Canadians' fondness for poutine or middle-class America's tendency to add anything, even olives and mayonnaise, to colorful gelatin made from animal bones. When I hear the word congealed, I can't help but think of blood clots; it mustn't be used to describe something edible. I am guessing the name "Strawberry Yum-Yum" was an attempt by my Mémé to make the dessert sound more appealing. I wonder if Jell-O salad is still an American side-dish or just the official state snack of Utah?

Our family gatherings wouldn't be the same without strawberries and pineapple in ectoplasm. It stays nice and firm, and travels well. It's the perfect potluck for a harried housewife. Jell-O invites culinary exploration! It is versatile, fun to look at, and inexpensive—the perfect food during a government shutdown. Tomorrow night, I just might mold a masterpiece of orange Jell-O and mandarin oranges to spruce up our dinner table.



3D Ceramic Art by Michelle Peterson,
CCRI Art Department

River of Feelings

By Rosa Padilla, CCRI Student

It's like the rivers flow, at its own pace.

There is no rush and no agenda for the day.

It is the feeling of numbness even when you aren't numbed.

It's overflowing, it's everywhere.

It spreads, keeps on going, it's like the water and fits in every small place.

It is the feeling of loneliness that just flows through my body, as if I'm here but I'm not.

It's the inconsistency of not having feelings but feeling numb.

I can't escape it, it's overbearing; more than my small body can take.

I'm drowning in the feeling of not feeling but feeling it all.

Can I escape it without harm or will it drown me as it keeps flowing through my body?

as I stood before you
I planned to stand tall like a mountain

grounded steady strong

for you were here to explore
not to reside

so I removed my nourishing waters
hid my sheltered caves
left the land barren for you

no treasure to be found here

I let you travel endlessly across my terrain
and instead I became
pliant fragile soft

Ruler of the wasteland
I shaped out of fear

But soon the weather turned cold,
I let the clouds roll in and I begged the wind to take you away
when you left rivers of relief flowed again

and I vowed to start build a village

-construction begins

By Velma Sterling

The Ghost Light
By Dr. Kyle Gamache,
CCRI Advising and Counseling Department

“All theaters are haunted, that’s why there’s a ghost light”

This is what was told to me when I started working in the theater. Neither part of the statement is a surprise to someone that has been a part of theater, even if he or she has never heard the phrase. Theater has an energy, a passion. The stage is a place where magic happens, where the line between fantasy and reality blurs---if only for a few hours. Actors transform into new personas and audiences can be a part of a story beyond their own. As with any place with such passion and memory, theaters attract ghosts. All good theaters are, at the very least, haunted by this emotion, and the superstitious say all are haunted by a trouper poltergeist. The Barker Theater is no exception.

The Barker Theatre, lauded as the oldest “little theatre” in America, is nestled in the historic College Hill neighborhood of Providence, Rhode Island. The history of the municipality boasts that Providence, like the famous Eternal City, is built on seven large hills. The affluent East district of the city holds three of these great hills: Tockwotten, Constitution, and the famous College Hill. Rising from the eastern banks of the Providence River, College Hill dominates the border of the city with the celebrated Brown University perched at its top. This old neighborhood was once a haunt of Edgar Allen Poe, who briefly courted the wealthy widow Sarah Whitman by reading poetry to her at the Providence Athenæum, before finally proposing to Whitman at the Old North Burial Ground. Although their relationship ended prior to marriage due to the troubled writer’s intemperance, but the story is etched in the history of College Hill. Other writers have called eccentric Providence their home as well. H.P. Lovecraft, whose love for his home city bordered on infatuation and dependency, also lived on College Hill where he spent his short, lonely life writing weird tales.

Besides the patronage of these strange writers, and scores of other misanthropes, Providence has earned a reputation as a haven for artists and outcasts since its founding in 1636 by Roger Williams. A massive statue of Williams, a Massachusetts minister exiled for his free thought in the Puritanical Bay Colony, overlooks the city from its perch above the river on College Hill. Because of this history and character, it is of no surprise that a number of apparitions supposedly haunt the College Hill neighborhood. The district lends itself well to be the setting of an archetypal ghost story, with its the ancient brick mansions, narrow cobblestoned streets and gas-lit street lamps that seem to come right out of a gothic tale. Yarns of spectral carriages, disappearing pedestrians, strange lights and --of course--the ghost of the heartbroken dipsomaniac who penned macabre tales are told every night on the local walking ghost tour. However few tours stop at the old Barker Theater, a theater reputed to be haunted as well.

Located on the corner of old Benefit Street and Transit Street, the Barker slopes down College Hill towards North Main Street. A large stucco building of neoclassic design, the Barker was built in 1839 as the St. Stephen's Episcopal Church. It shares the impressive, pillared entrance of Greek Revival style, and once had a tall spire to match the First Baptist Church on the opposing slope of College Hill. The belfry and spire were removed once the building was no longer a church, but the edifice has kept the feel of the Classical design; appearing like an acropolis on the haunted street. Yet before this church occupied the spot at the corner of Benefit and Transit, a multi-family mansion had stood for almost a hundred years. The old church was purchased by the Barker Players to be their permanent home in the 1930s. For decades the troupe has called the building home, dubbing it the Barker Theatre and performing multiple shows every year. It has two functional stages: the upstairs main stage and the basement "green room" stage. Only the main stage is a traditional raised stage and, as such, after every performance there is a ghost light placed on the stage.

The origins of the ghost light legend are complicated but, at its core, the light is relatively mundane. The vast majority of theaters have a

light put out or hung to illuminate the stage after the actors and audience leave referred to as the “ghost light”. The ghost light certainly has a non-mysterious purpose as stages often are several feet above the main floor, and a person who can not see in the dark may plunge into the orchestra pit. But a ghost light is found in almost all theater spaces, even those without a raised stage.

As for the fantastical explanations for the light, the legends vary. Some say that if the theater is ever became truly dark, a ghost will take up residency and cause mischief. Others say that the light remains on for the resident ghosts that linger to act in the stillness of a darkened theater. Regardless, being in a darkened theater is an eerie experience; as being in a room that should be full of people and energy but instead is empty as a tomb is disconcerting. All the while, a lonesome light burns in the darkness.

I had always been involved in theater. I grew up with thespian parents, was dragged to community theater performances, and participated in my schools’ drama clubs. Throughout college, I worked at a semi-professional theater as a grip, spotlight operator, fly master, and any other numerous non-performance tasks of the theater. Inglorious work for sure, but I loved it. But most of all I loved putting out the ghost light before we left and wondering if any ghosts had appreciated the light I had left behind.

One year, I was in-between seasons at my regular theaters when my girlfriend Rebecca, who was cast in an upcoming show, drafted me into working as a technical director at the Barker Theater for the autumn season shows. I readily agreed, as I was eager to work at such a prestigious local theater. And, even though I knew it just by looking at the building, Rebecca excitedly informed me the Baker Theater was haunted. She had a tale about an encounter with a ghost at the Barker in the form of flickering lights. Rebecca was artistic and passionate, and told her fanciful ghost story splendidly. She would recount her story to many listeners, from the troupers at the Barker to Halloween partygoers, with

dramatic gasps and laughter, miming her race through the theater in pursuit of the ghost. I would laugh along with the others, but I never told her about my spectral experience during the last show I worked at the Barker Theater.

That bitterly cold winter I began my work on the season's last show: the archetypal dark comedy *Arsenic and Old Lace*. My position was board operator, where I worked through the rehearsals, synchronizing the sound and lighting effects to the actors' movements. My favorite sound cues were the bits of rolling thunder that played every -time Jonathan Brewster entered the stage in his Frankenstein makeup. Work in the old theater with a jovial cast that bonded quickly was a pleasure and our sense of camaraderie developed within a few short rehearsals. We spent many nights together laughing and telling stories long after rehearsal was over. After we finished our stories, when everyone finally drifted home, my job was to set the ghost light out on stage as I left, shutting off the main lights and leaving the solitary lamp blazing white in the darkened theater. Each time, before leaving the auditorium, I would always look out from the mezzanine to see if any ghosts had made an appearance.

Then, on the day of the dress rehearsal, the director wanted to meet in the morning to go over the cues before the actors arrived. I had been asked to open the building for the actors and prepare for the final rehearsal later that morning. Having stayed in the theater until the small hours of the night, it was difficult to awake at dawn. I finally succeeded in entering the lower level of the building, finding myself in the green room underneath the main stage. After turning on the lights of the basement room and the heat, I waited for the director to arrive. When he did not arrive, I called him to confirm our meeting. The director informed me he was going to be late so, being exhausted from lack of sleep, I quietly laid down on the nearby couch to nap until he arrived.

Though my sleep short and shallow, my dream was not. My dream

was a vivid and haunting dream. In the dream, I watched as dozens of people danced along a stage. It was a party or perhaps a performance where the dancers imitated a revelry. The edges of the stage, and the audience beyond, were obscured in shadow. However, the dancers were vibrant and clear. They wore costumes of brilliant color, but there was no theme or cohesion. Instead, the dancers were dressed in clashing flair and design, a mishmash of periods and style. They spun and twirled wildly to music I could not perceive, laughed with voices I could not hear. All I could hear was the thundering of their feet whirling chaotically on the floor. I had a strong urge to join them, and was preparing to do so when the dream suddenly ended.

I awoke in the cold basement and I was left with the thundering of the dancers' feet in my ears. Initially I took this sound as the lingering phantasmagoria of the dream but, very quickly, I discovered that I had been awakened by a loud sound. Perhaps the source of my dream was this sound itself because I heard footsteps on the stage above me. *Who was on the stage?* Embarrassment washed over me, as I figured that the actors had found me asleep on the couch and moved upstairs without me. I composed myself as quickly as I could and raced up the stairs.

When I reached the top of the stairs, I was confused. The top landing opened onto backstage behind the curtain legs and I could clearly see that the lights in the theater were still off. The wings were dark but I clearly heard footsteps on the stage ahead. *Why hadn't the actors turned on the lights?* It was somewhat perilous to walk on stage with just the ghost light. I was further confused, our cast was relatively small for *Arsenic* but I heard what sounded like a throng of people. I walked out onto the stage to find out who was on the stage.

I still do not know if I believe what I saw on the stage. The stage was empty and the theater was dark, but footsteps continued to abound. Maybe I was still asleep, because it sounded like the thunderous dancing of my dream. But, there was no dancer, no one at all on the stage, save for the ghost light itself --- that was more spectacular than the

phantom footsteps. Normally the ghost light was a simple, tall shadeless lamp that stood in the center of the stage. Now, the light had swelled to a blindingly glowing orb that had detached from the lamp pole. The ghost light had become a will-o-the-wisp, a burning effulgence in the stygian dark, dancing around the stage with the invisible danseuses. As I watched, the light swooped and bobbed, causing the shadows to shift in kaleidoscopic movements. The shadows which stretched along the floor and wall were not the shadows of the curtain legs or rigging. No, the images were silhouettes of people. People dancing. The floating ghost light was projecting the shadows of invisible performers on the stage while their footsteps echoed through the theater. I stared at the shadows to understand the ethereal, unseen dancers, feeling the joy and excitement of their dance. I couldn't understand what I was seeing and that sent my mind racing. Was this because of my dream? Was this the dream? Who did these shadows belong to? Were they the ghosts of old casts, mingling together once more under the ghost light? No answer materialized, but I continued to gaze on still. The scene was as overpowering as it was eldritch; I found myself gripped with awe and a bit of fear.

It felt like I observed this spectacle for an eternity, all the while holding my breath. My sudden, uncontrolled exhale startled me and apparently startled the ghost light. All at once, the manifestation ended: the footsteps vanished, as did the glowing orb. The shadows crashed back into stillness and the stage was silent. All that remained was the lonely ghost light at the top of the lamppost, back to the way it had always been. The stillness was oppressive; I could hear my breathing thundering in my ears, but I sensed the room was far from empty. Staring at the ghost light, I could feel the weight on unseen eyes peering out from the dark. I knew I had intruded on something not meant for me. I wasn't part of that cast, at least not yet. I turned away from the ghost light and retreated to the basement.

Though the theater attracts dramatic personas, I'm no story-teller. I swear that this story is true. There is not much more to tell. Of course,

the Barker is known to be haunted, but no one can agree by what. I have no shocking twist about a famous dancer that perished on the stage, nor any other distinct stories about ghosts in the Barker. Everyone just assumes that the building is haunted, as all theaters are. As for our *Arsenic and Old Lace*, the performances went well and, after the last show, we had our bittersweet goodbyes. Some of us returned to the Barker. I did not. I knew it was haunted and I felt like I had intruded enough.

Someone Saw Me Kiss Melissa
By Jessica Araujo

Someone saw me kiss Melissa and told my husband, who, discovering my disloyalty to him, remained faithful to the source who snitched. “So, are you a lesbian now?” “No, Hugo.” “Is this to get back at me for the text messages? I curved her as soon as she got inappropriate.” I shook my head, which he took as a denial, but I meant as incredulity that, yet again, he’d made things about him.

“Then, why?” “It just happened,” I said. I walked over to the sink. He’d dirtied three glasses. I smelled each one. Apple cider vinegar. “You have the runs?” “I just found out my wife is a cheating lesbian!” “So, you’re too distraught to reuse a glass?” “Do you want a divorce?” I poured soap on the sponge, opened the faucet, and let the water run.

“Why does it have to be so serious? Doesn’t mean I love you less. It just means I kissed Melissa. If it makes you happy, I won’t do it again.” “But what did the kiss mean?” It meant Melissa, whose full lips had consumed my mind since high school, finally kissed me in the food court at the mall. Her breath, or mine, tasted like the chicken teriyaki we’d had for lunch. I didn’t stop to think what it meant while I pressed my tongue to the roof of her mouth. Hugo loved when I did that, so I went with what worked. I didn’t stop to think what it meant when, in an endless throng of people trying to find a clean table to gorge their fries and Sprites, I scarfed down her barely audible moan and sucked all moisture from her lips. “It means,” I said, closing the faucet, *that I’m glad no one saw what I did to Melissa in the Level 2 parking lot.*

Ode to The Girl in the Mirror
By Sophia Anacleto, CCRI Student

Looking at myself in the mirror.
There I Am
but I also see someone else.
I don't know her.
I extended my hand to my face.
Slowly, the girl in the mirror joined me.
The chilled tips made the girl flinch away;
it burned down my cheek,
crept onto my jaw,
and trailed, as it began kneading my stomach.
The girl in the mirror winced.
My eyes fell down to my own body:
When I looked back up
she was yanking at her hair strands in clumps
Ripping off her littered skin
I knew who she was;
glaring at me with hatred and rage
Wishing that I could fade away and shrink into nothingness
I knew the girl in the mirror.



Jack in the Box By Sophia Anacleto, CCRI Student

Every Day Felt like the Last
By Casey Duclos, CCRI Student

Every day felt like the last,
The heavy chested feeling
While crowds walked by
The book whispered in a dull voice.

The professor looked as happy as a school
The boy dropped his ice cream on the scorching pavement.
The school was a dark room with no pictures,
It was a coloring book colored,
with grey and black crayons
Every day felt like the last.

Work felt like a dictatorship,
The more ass you kiss the more
The money you make the less they
Acknowledge the rule book

The more hours worked
The brighter the star shines
Above their head and the
More tasks they are
Responsible for
Making them closer
To their breaking point.
Every day felt like the last.

The Pillow
By Adnel Lopez Medina, CCRI Student

First, a pillow must be fluffy.
Then happy as a ducky.

It must be dreamy,
And it must make you dreary.

It must be soft as a sheep,
And it must make you sleep.

It must never be betrayed,
And it must not be thrown away.

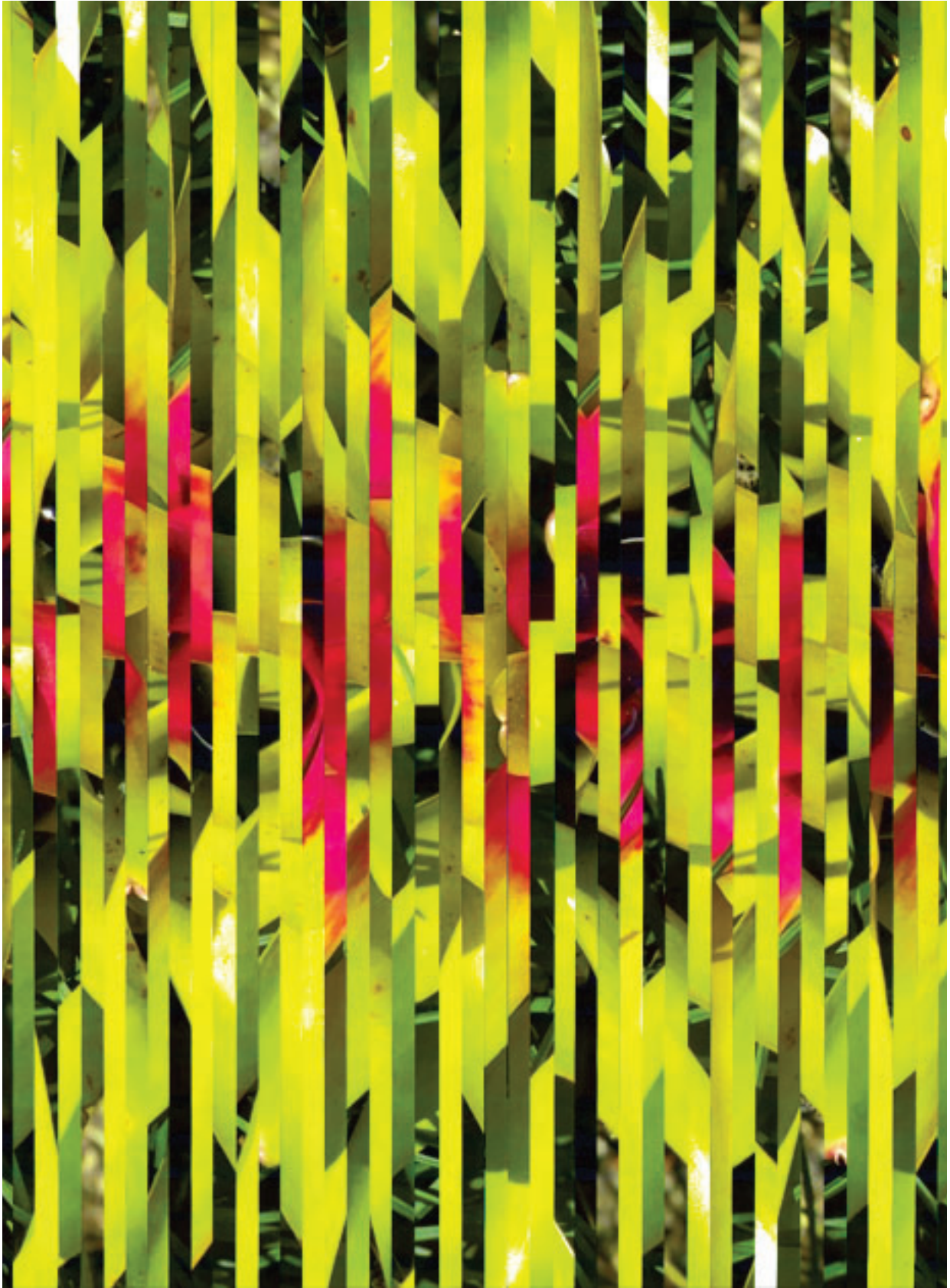
It must always stay with you,
Like the laces on your shoe.

It must be gentle,
But can never be judgemental.

And a pillow is your friend,
So its happiness can never end.

By Nicholas Zonfrilli, CCRI Student

In a home of lush green and flowing water, amid
Fall's foliage set in pictures of the crisp-air country side,
Where young prowess on ambition's edge does totter
To hastily leave his home with all-intent to thrive
But want of foreknowledge brings him to a stranger land
Alone. A land of arid dearth brooding under the sun's furnace
Replaces familiar pillows of grass and sifts them to endless sands
And a new desperation for contact conjures the web's temptress:
Her importune ploy, waiting for prey, is time's proven strategy
and easily enacted when her desperate prey claws for care.
Like a moth's attraction to a flame, he is soon given her fee
In exchange, his soul's ornament becomes another snare.
Henceforth a cycle of pain occurs once, twice,
And excelleth far beyond the count of thrice.



***Neoregelia* By Philippe Dwyer, CCRI Student**

By Brooke Marion, CCRI Student

As I stare into the abyss on late night drives or at the mountains of homework I should have started weeks ago, a single question stares back at me, “*Why?*”

Last year, failing to answer this question, I was left wandering aimlessly. The weight of my classes hit me like an existential truck. School had become a series of hoops that required all my effort to jump through, and as I cleared the hoops, I was met with more with no end in sight. As I grew tired, moving through took more and more willpower, until eventually, wondering why I was jumping at all, I quit jumping altogether.

My attendance record became marked with late arrivals and absences as my grades began declining while I spent my time rotting in front of my computer, mindlessly watching Netflix before escaping into a dull slumber. Sleep-walking through life, I senselessly chased instant gratification.

Despite this, there were moments I snapped out of this daze and eagerly engaged with the world around me. During lunch, my friends and I discussed everything from the viability of Andrew Yang’s Universal Basic Income, to the infinite regression argument for God, to how decriminalizing drugs in Portugal solved its drug crisis.

These discussions ignited a curiosity in me that never left. Without realizing, seeking answers to these questions helped me dig myself out of the nihilistic hole I found myself trapped in. The more I sought answers, the more I found questions. These questions guided me to worlds I had yet to explore: philosophy, astrophysics, anthropology. In these worlds, I began finding answers to *Why?*

From philosophy, I contemplated Nietzsche’s journey to becoming an Übermensch, Camus’s vision of a happy Sisyphus, and Kierkegaard’s push for a leap of faith. I learned from people who found meaning in a world that did not hand them one.

From astrophysics, I explored the reaches of the universe with Neil Degrasse Tyson. I still get chills as I imagine him whispering in my ear that I am made of stars and that I am inextricably linked to the universe because the universe lives within me.

From anthropology, Dr. Yuval Harari led me through the human timeline, from building tools, to creating languages, to organizing societies. I was reminded of the infinite potential that lies within being human.

Learning instilled in me a sense of purpose, and as I learned to see the world from different perspectives, I developed an insatiable hunger to seek out more worlds unknown to me. And while I continue learning, the hoops that I jumped through at school slowly transformed into lenses I used to view the world.

I realized calculus was not about finding the derivative of arbitrary equations but rather about deepening our understandings of the universe from helping construct economic models revealing the movement of planets. School became far more than force-feeding myself to isolated sets of facts. I began leaving class eager to see how those ideas interacted with the world.

Moving into the future, the challenges I tackle no longer revolve around me. My own existential angst takes a backseat to challenges like helping the millions who are losing their jobs to automation or bringing together a country wrought with tribalism. While I still do not know which problems I will dedicate my life to answering, I know that the ability to see the world in different ways and search for knowledge will aid me along my journey.

So now as I stare at the night sky, I do not see an empty abyss; I see an endless universe—one full of stars, black holes, and supernovas. I think of all the worlds I have explored and consider all the galaxies left untouched. A single thought flashes across my mind like a shooting star

You do not know, what you do not know.

So I explore.

metronome

By Jessica Chandler, CCRI Student

Why...2...3...4...

The inescapable ticking

of my broken heart

Commemorates an offensive arrangement

A staccato symphony of love

Your song

Grandma

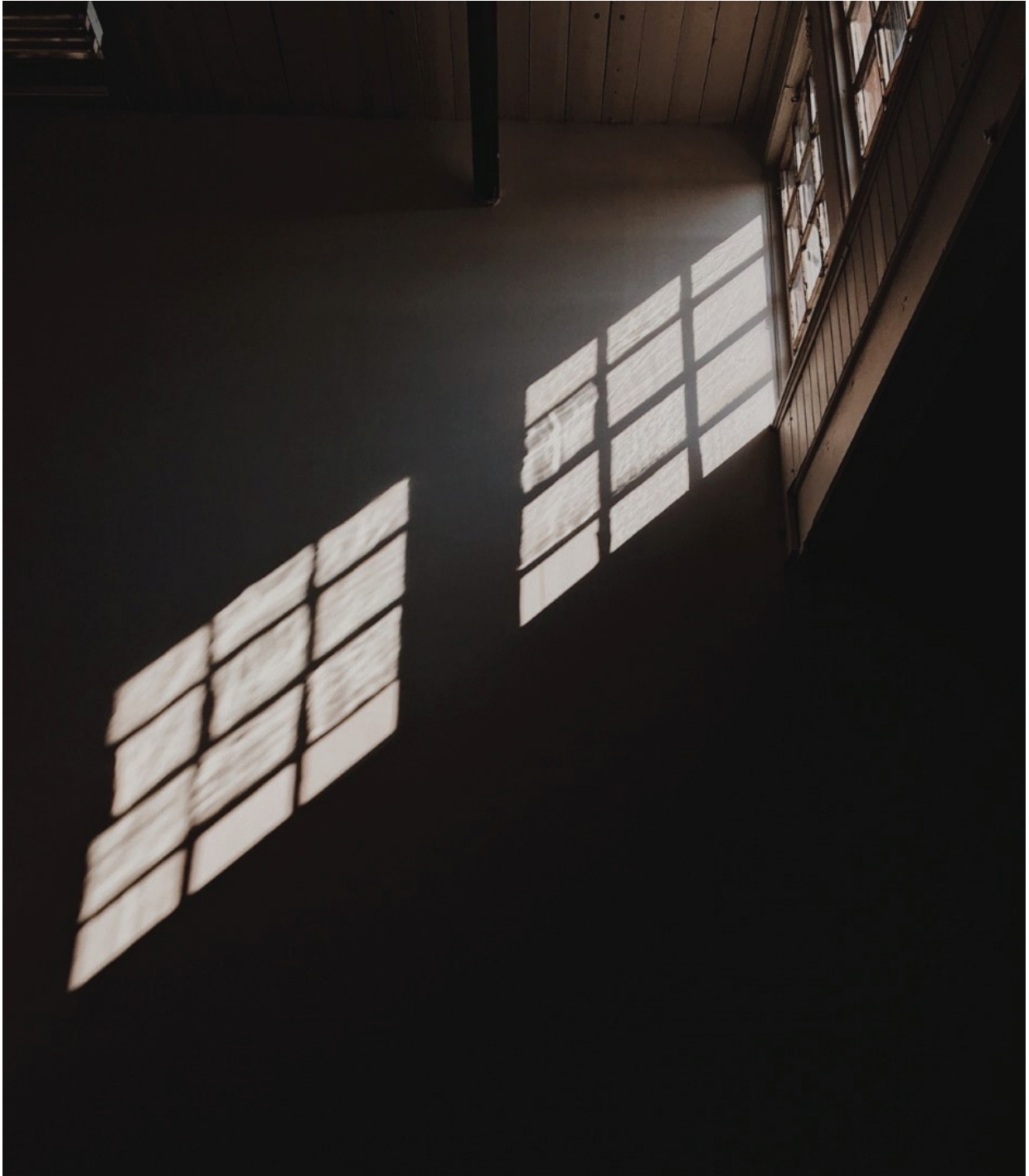
A sweet melody, modulated to

A key I don't understand

Dissipating

Measure by measure

An unwelcome coda

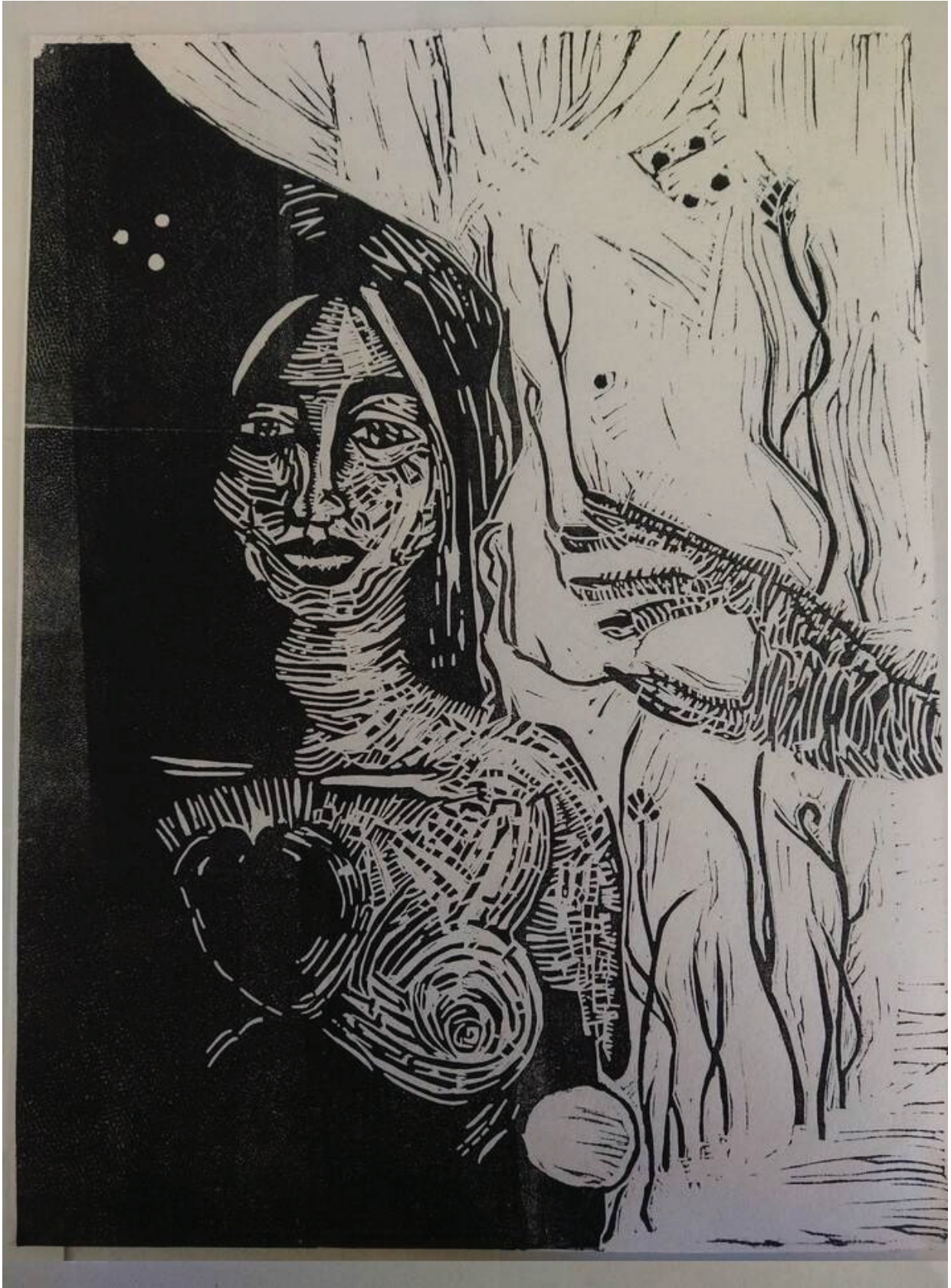


By Zoe Guzman, CCRI Student



From the artist, Jared Smith, CCRI Student:

This is an untitled multi-media piece pointing to the parallels of the recent actions taken by Vladimir Putin and the Russian army to that of Adolf Hitler and the Nazis. Most of the imagery speaks for itself, but with this piece I hope to spread the knowledge of war crimes and atrocities being committed by the Russian Army in Ukraine now, as well as similar crimes committed by the Nazis in WW2. Most of the images used were sourced from a series of old WW2 history books, glued onto an 18"x24" canvas.



By Jason Bartlett, CCRI Student

The Pen
CCRI's Literary Magazine
Issue 1, Volume 1
December 2022