



CGri

THE PEN
May 2024

The Pen
CCRI's Literary Magazine
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Full view of this issue's Cover Photo
Coastline Tides- Infrared
by Zachary Olivadese,
CCRI Student

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From the Editor

Welcome to the fourth issue of *The Pen*! Once again, we would like to thank the CCRI Foundation and the CCRI Alumni Association for sponsoring this endeavor to showcase the CCRI creative community!

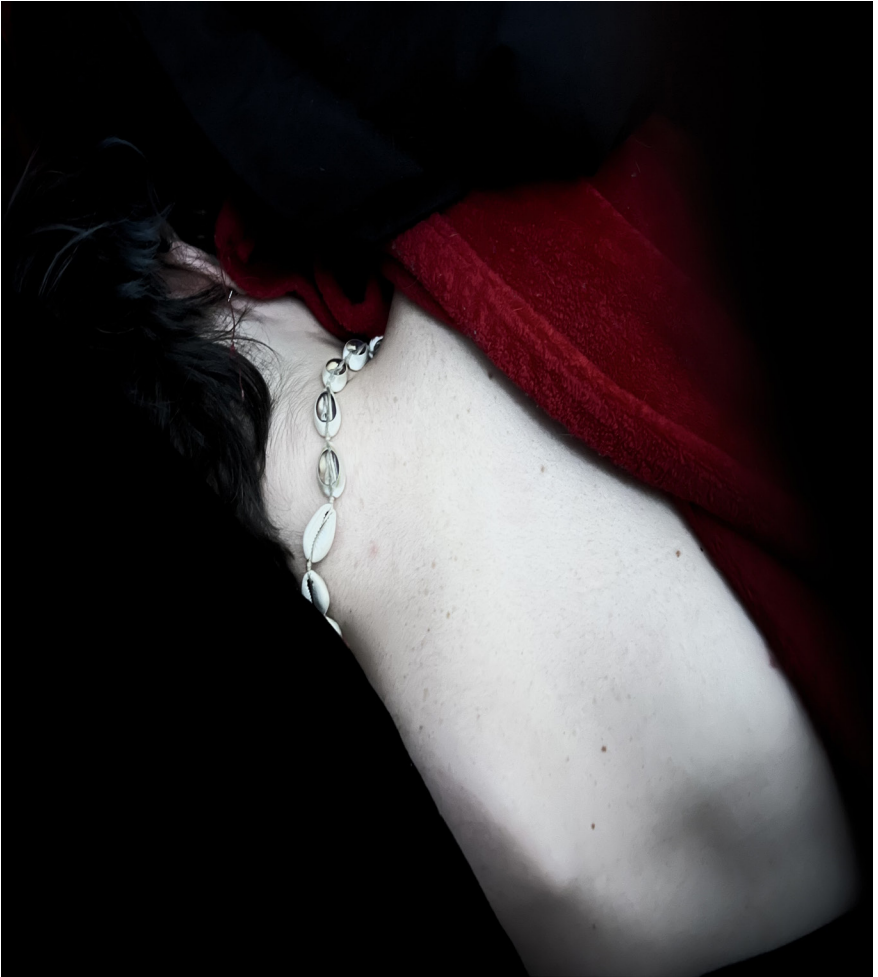
This is a bittersweet moment for me, as editor, since it is my final time curating the literary magazine. One of the first goals when I joined CCRI in 2021 was to start this literary magazine. I would not get that opportunity until a year later, and it has brought me immense joy to grow *The Pen* from a saddle-stitched booklet to a perfect-bound journal. However, *The Pen* is not going anywhere! I am excited to announce that I will be handing off the production of the literary magazine to the students. The magazine will now be a course, ENGL 2240, Literary Magazine Creation, Design, and Production, which launches this fall semester. Students will get work-based learning while they learn the process of designing and producing a literary magazine for public distribution. I encourage all students to register!

In the meantime, enjoy the fourth issue!

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* at ccri.edu/thepen.

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

Fiction



Lavallee by Kiana Rodriguez AKA Eros
Instagram @Cupids_view and @kjr.art

Art piece quote: I have had hands on me non-consensually, and I thought maybe I would always be triggered, but you showed me gentleness and softness and allowed me to breathe. You gave me a safe space to experience intimacy.

The Devil Really Wears Prada by Alexa Regan, CCRI Student

Vivian Lombardi prided herself on her impeccable control, a quality she clung to even in the face of life's harshest adversities. As she sat in the courtroom, her demeanor was one of polished elegance, her designer suit a testament to her commitment to maintaining appearances. She exuded an unwavering confidence, a facade she had perfected over the years.

Behind her, Isabella, her daughter, sat quietly, unaware of the tumultuous emotions swirling between her parents. Vivian's best friend, Diana Almeida, sat beside her, offering silent support, unaware of the depths of desperation hidden beneath Vivian's carefully crafted image of wealth and sophistication. Vivian had shielded both of them from the bitter details of that night, painting herself as the victim in her carefully crafted narrative.

Across the room, Colin Lombardi sat stoically, his gaze fixed on Vivian with a mixture of anger and resentment. They had once been married, but now their relationship was nothing but bitter memories and legal battles.

The courtroom buzzed with anticipation as the judge entered. The proceedings began, and Vivian's heart pounded as the prosecutor laid out the charges against her.

"Your Honor," the prosecutor began, "the defendant, Vivian Lombardi, stands accused of attempted murder against her ex-husband, Colin Lombardi." And so it began.

As Vivian took the stand, her voice trembled slightly, like she had practiced, as she began recounting her tale of that night's events.

"I was scared, Your Honor," she started, her eyes casting downward, trying to muster a look of vulnerability. "I didn't mean to hurt

him. I just wanted him to listen to me, to understand how much he was hurting us.”

“But instead of talking, you chose to attack him. Can you explain why you felt the need to resort to violence?” the prosecutor pressed, his tone accusatory.

Vivian’s eyes flashed with defiance. “I was defending myself!” she insisted, her voice pitching. “He was coming at me, threatening me. I had no choice but to fight back.”

The prosecutor shook his head, “Is that what you want the jury to believe, Mrs. Lombardi? That you were acting in self-defense?”

Vivian hesitated, her mind racing as she searched for the right words. “All I know is that I was scared. Scared for my life, scared for my daughter’s future. I just wanted to protect us.”

The defense attorney rose to speak, offering a passionate plea for leniency. He painted Vivian as a victim of circumstance, but the prosecution was relentless tearing apart her defense.

Delivering with practiced precision, her testimony painted a picture of innocence and victimhood, casting herself as the unwitting pawn in a game of manipulation and deceit. She spun tales of abuse and betrayal, weaving a web of lies designed to absolve her of guilt and deflect blame onto Colin. She knew she was lying and had acted out of anger and desperation rather than self-defense yet remained defiant, her narcissism shining through even in the face of overwhelming evidence. She charmed the jury, manipulating their emotions and playing on their sympathies until she seemed almost untouchable.

Colin stood before the court, his expression somber as he prepared to recount the events of that fateful night. He took a deep

breath, steeling himself for the painful memories ahead. He glanced briefly at Isabella, his gaze filled with sadness and resolve. Then, turning back to face the court, he began to speak.

Colin recounted that evening, coming home from work to find Vivian already waiting for him. “She accused me of withholding money from our daughter, of trying to sabotage her financially. And then, before I knew what was happening, she blinded me with mace.”

The memory of that violent encounter flooded back with startling clarity, each blow and scream etched into Colin’s mind like a scar. He recounted how Vivian had smashed a vase over his head before pulling out a pair of scissors to stab him, with a cruel smirk playing at the corners of her lips.

“I thought I was going to die,” Colin admitted, his voice trembling with emotion. “I begged her to stop, to think about what she was doing. She just kept hitting me, over and over again.” The courtroom fell silent as he spoke.

Nevertheless, Vivian remained impassive, her mask of composure firmly in place with the help of regular botox management. She refused to meet Colin’s gaze, her eyes fixed on some distant point as she retreated into her world of denial and deception.

The judge cleared his throat, his voice ringing across the hushed courtroom. “Ladies and gentlemen of the jury,” he began, “before you are presented with the evidence, I must caution you that the following images may be disturbing.”

With a nod, he motioned for the bailiff to approach, a stack of photographs held carefully in his hands. Vivian’s heart pounded as she braced herself for what was to come. The first image flashed onto the screen, illuminating the darkened courtroom with its harsh glare. It was a photo of Colin, his face contorted in pain, blood streaming

down his cheek from a gash across his forehead. The judge continued to click through the images, each one more damning than the last. Finally, there was the photo of Vivian on the night of the attack, a smirk playing at the corners of her lips, with not a single scratch on her dolled-up face.

The room erupted into murmurs of shock and disbelief as the full extent of Vivian's actions was laid bare for all to see. Diana had a horrified look, unable to separate her friend with the cold-blooded woman in the photographs.

As the last photograph faded from the screen, the judge's voice cut through the stunned silence of the courtroom. "Members of the jury, you have seen the evidence for yourselves. It is now up to you to decide the defendant's fate." The weight of those damning images hung heavy in the air as Vivian Lombardi's future hung in the balance.

"Guilty, on all counts," the foreman said, Vivian barely flinching. She maintained her composed facade. As she was led away in handcuffs, Vivian cast one last glance at Colin, tears streaming down his cheeks. She could not help the evil smirk returning to her face. Vivian Lombardi's psychology is complex, shaped by a lifetime of privilege, manipulation, and fear of loss. At the surface, she presents herself as confident, charming, and in control, carefully crafting an image of wealth and sophistication to mask her insecurities and vulnerabilities.

However, beneath this facade lies a deeply troubled individual grappling with many inner conflicts. One of Vivian's primary fears is losing everything she holds dear. Having grown accustomed to a life of luxury and status, she is terrified of facing social ostracism. This fear fuels her desperate attempts to maintain her affluent lifestyle, even at the expense of her integrity and well-being. "Diana, it's me," she greeted, her voice artificially bright. "I just had to call and tell you how

surprisingly nice it is here. The food is actually delicious, and the other women are so kind to me.”

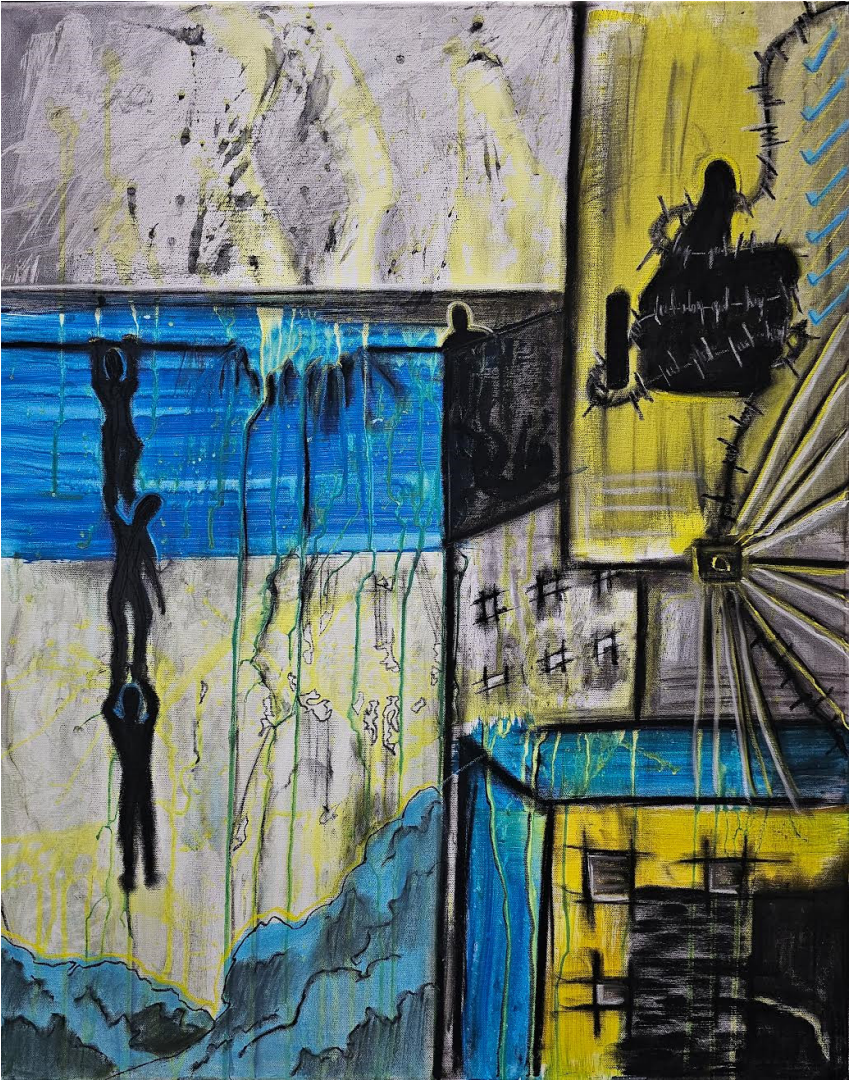
There was a brief pause on the other end of the line, followed by a skeptical response from Diana. “Vivian, are you serious? You’re telling me prison is like a vacation?”

Vivian laughed, the sound hollow and strained. “I know it sounds crazy, but it’s true. It’s not so bad here. I just wish that they let me bring my hair dryer, five years without a blowout!”

Vivian’s manipulative tendencies stem from a need for control and validation. By charming those around her and weaving intricate webs of deception, she seeks to exert power over her environment and ensure that others see her in a favorable light. However, this constant need for validation is a fragile defense mechanism, masking more profound insecurity and self-doubt.

Beneath her polished exterior, Vivian harbors a deep sense of guilt and shame over her actions. Despite her outward confidence, she struggles with feelings of inadequacy and self-loathing.

This internal turmoil manifests as a pattern of avoidance and denial as Vivian desperately tries to escape the consequences of her actions rather than confront them head-on.



Social Construction by Jennifer Mandeville,
CCRI Student

www.jennifermandeville.com

2024

Mixed Media on Canvas

30 x 40"

A Plea from the Future by Lily Caracciolo, CCRI Student

The sun casts through the cracks of the clouds over a small, orderly town called Coreo. The buildings are smooth and round, all aligned, and pathways link them together. The scent of authentic pine trees permeates the city, and the sound of footsteps is all that is heard as vehicles silently zip past them. The air was thick, with a crisp chill from the altitude above, and wisps of mist curled around some areas of the town.

Victor knelt at the side of the bed, waiting for his wife to wake from a 4-year coma. He glared out the window and then back at her, “Sera, I hope you wake up soon.”

He was lost in a sea of memories, their shared laughter and joy, before the accident that had cast Sera into this prolonged slumber. The reality of her condition starkly contrasted their past, a reminder of the unknown event that had led to this. A soft knock at the door broke his concentration as he pondered over this mystery.

“Come in,” he yelled.

There were two men in suits, and one of them asked, “Are you Victor Adams?”

“Yeah, what do you need me for?” Victor asked.

“Follow us, and we’ll give you the answers to what happened to Sera.”

“How do I know I can trust you?”

“We’re part of the Holobox Services and need to discuss some matters.”

“What does a Holobox have to do with my wife’s condition?”

One of the suited men threatened, “You can either follow us, or we’ll force you to come to the headquarters.”

Victor looked at his wife again before getting off his knees and

walking towards the suited men standing in the doorway. They walked side by side down the thin hallway of the hospital, with Victor between both suited men. He glared at each of them nervously, wondering what they could want from him; he hadn't done anything wrong in years. The sliding door opened and presented a white hovering van right before them. One suited man held his hand out, beckoning Victor to step inside the vehicle; he was skeptical before hopping in; the other got into the driver's seat and drove off. Victor began to have racing thoughts as to whether these guys were a scam into kidnapping him and if he might never see his wife again, starting to regret trusting these men.

The van stopped, and there was a banging outside the van, "We're here."

The door slid open, and right before his eyes, Victor was face to face with a tall building he'd never seen before towering over him. He stepped out of the van and looked up at the glowing blue letters that read Holobox Services. Victor followed the suited men in the same fashion that he left the hospital. One of them tapped a code into the pin pad, opening the door before them and revealing a square hallway. The three of them walked down the hallway to Victor; it felt like forever because he wanted to know why he was there and wanted answers about his wife's accident. They stopped at the door numbered 538 and unlocked it, inviting Victor inside.

One suited man patted the interrogation chair, "Have a seat; it'll be a while."

Victor sat down as the suited men sat in two chairs across him, leaving a chair between them empty. Minutes later, a man twice the size of the suited man walked in and sat in the middle chair.

"Call me Mr. Holbrook, founder and CEO of Holobox Services. Do you know why you're here?" he asked menacingly.

"No, but I want answers on my wife's accident," Victor responded.

“We’ll get there, we’ll get there; we need to discuss an issue,” Mr. Holbrook raised an eyebrow.

Mr. Holbrook snapped his fingers, and one of his henchmen got up to scavenge for a Holobox with Victor’s initials, VCA, printed on it.

“What are you doing with my Holobox? They’re supposed to be top secret,” Victor questioned.

“Well, we found it somewhere it shouldn’t have been,” Mr. Holbrook answered. He turned the box around for Victor to unlock it and felt around for a certain Hololetter until he found the one he was looking for, “Care to explain this?”

The letter began, “Heyo Victor here; I’m sending this message from 2060. The world has advanced so much from your day. Self-driving cars, drones delivering packages, AI assistants, and even our first AI running for president never would’ve seen that coming. Yeah, there’s been talk about World War 4, and I’m sorry to break it to you, but World War 3 has happened. Life’s going great and couldn’t be better. But I’m sending this plea from the future to enjoy the past and take advantage of your freedom before it’s stripped away in the future. I’m not allowed to talk about certain events that occurred, and I’ll probably get in trouble for spilling that much of the future because it’s like we’re watched everywhere, so I’ll end it off here.”

Mr. Holbrook had his head on his hands, “We found this in 2025 while doing our time travel yearly cleaning to make sure no future artifacts get sent to the past; we’re unsure if anyone saw it.”

“I was just sending it to my younger self,” Victor stuttered.

“You know that’s a rule that you can’t send to the past; it’ll mess up time,” Mr. Holbrook shook his head, “You understand what the punishment is for disobeying the Holobox Service Rules, right?”

The two suited men looked at each other before reciting, “If you break Holobox Service Rules, especially the top 10, you become “an-

-other brick in the wall” and lose all freedom and dignity.”

“Wait before you do anything; please tell me what happened to my wife,” Victor pleaded.

“About her “accident,” she was accidentally mailed a top-secret Hololetter concerning a powerful entity in Coreo four years ago. A malfunction occurred in some of the vehicles, not being corrected, and they were triggered by an artifact within the letter, resulting in her coma,” Mr. Holbrook informed.

“So, you SET HER UP!” Victor began to raise his voice.

“No, not entirely; the info accidentally got sent to her, and we wanted to make sure it didn’t get spread around Coreo,” Mr. Halbrook responded.

Victor stood up and began storming for the door, and the suited men followed him. To his surprise, the door was unlocked, and Victor dashed for his life. Mr. Holbrook pointed to the door, “We can’t have him spread that information; get him.”

Victor sprinted down the hallway, trying to find the door where the suited men had made him enter, but the hallway seemed endless. He kept searching, but the numbers went up instead of down. Victor spotted the suited men catching up in the corner of his eye, and he had to lose them. He took a sharp turn and hid in a closet, burying himself deep into it until he found a trapdoor to crawl through. He shut the small door behind him and began to crawl; the tunnel thudded with each movement he made. Victor heard the screech of the door opening from the closet before hearing someone else undo the trapdoor, and someone else was also in the vent as well. Victor crawled faster until he saw the cracks of light at the end of the tunnel; he approached the end and elbowed the vent quicker and more aggressively as the thudding got closer until the vent busted. He looked down and was three stories up; he could jump and get injured or surrender. Victor attempted to climb down, grabbing don’t fall, and if your wife awakens, she’ll be without you.”

Victor realized he had a point; if he fell, he could be in a coma or die before his wife woke up and grabbed his hand. Crawling behind them, Victor tried to devise another escape plan, but he had nothing. They reached the end of the tunnel and got out of the closet, walking down the hallway. Victor began to feel lightheaded as he walked, and everything turned black. He woke up in a dimly lit blank room tied to a chair; he attempted to move but couldn't. The room began to fill with a mist, and Victor tried to hold his breath, not to inhale it. He couldn't hold his breath any longer and gave up, breathing in the toxic air before becoming unconscious again.

"Victor...Victor...Victor," a voice called out. Victor woke up and was back in the hospital room, a bit groggy, and couldn't tell if he was dreaming or not.

"Have you been napping this whole time, silly," she laughed. "Yeah, you could say that," he responded.

"What did I miss, and what year is it?" she asked.

"It's...uh... 2064... and what you missed... I don't know... it seems like a blur, Sera," he responded, struggling to remember.

"Oh, don't worry. Just take your time; it'll come to you, but I'm glad to see you again," she smiled.

"Me too. I missed you, and I can't believe you're back," he sighed with relief.

Chapter I: My Name is Umiko (excerpt from *In the Village of Yokai*) by Grace Elizabeth Stearns, CCRI Student

<https://www.deviantart.com/gracepurplewriter>

No one knows what happened that day. Not one person does, except for a few people. Even so, they were not there that day. Not like I was either; I may not know the full story but then again my memory has always been splotchy. My name is Umiko, and I am a descendant of Kuchisaki Onna.

No, I am not her great great great whatever granddaughter, but she would be a close aunt according to my blood, and according to the DNA people. We discovered this when my family was called into question by Karen, or as I and my friend called her, Zankokuna Meinu, meaning cruel bitch. My pure oval-shaped emerald, green eyes were not the product of genetics, my mother and father's eyes being a dark brown almost black. So, one DNA test later showed Zankokuna no, my mom did not sleep with someone other than my father, and a girl who was born in 2001 was somehow related to a myth from the Edo period in Japan. My mom paled when she heard, but it was as if she did not wish to talk about it.

Maybe I should talk about my friend, my only friend, Katana. She dyed her hair purple in middle school when it was the worst time of my life, but she has been missing for over two months now.

My father and mother were arguing one night, but it was not a usual fight. That night, it was starting to get heated, so I decided to eavesdrop.

“No, she is far too young, if we take her to the Yokai Mura and show her her real heritage”, My father sighed. “She may not even be prepared for that responsibility.” I was so confused, “about my real heritage.” What was he talking about?

“No, she is ready. She is old enough. I will talk to my sister.” My mother seemed to whisper as if someone could have been listening in, but then again, it was me. “Allow her to train her, and she will be able to protect our family.

“She is only thirteen, an eighth grader. She is already getting boys from her school to ask her out. She is not ready.” That is when I came downstairs. “Oh, Umiko what are you doing awake?”

“I heard everything, Father, what do you mean by my heritage? Why is Kuchisake onna my aunt, Mom? And since when did you have a sister, Mom, you always told me you were a single child?” They glanced at one another.

“Sweetie, look, the truth is I am immortal and am over 100 years old. Kuchisake Onna is not only your Aunt and my sister, she is my twin sister. People always said she was the prettier one. I am the reason why she got her mouth slit, causing her to die.” I looked at her in shock. “You see, you know how the legend went, that she had an affair causing her husband to slit her mouth from ear to ear using a katana? She never had an affair. Her husband caught me having an intimate relationship and he believed that I was her. I felt so guilty. Then I heard cases of people walking around dimly lit alleyways, so I made a deal and soon I met up with her. I told her the truth, and I swear she looked as if she wanted to slit my mouth from ear to ear, but she did not, and I made a promise to her to protect her, so I became a hunter. I kept people safe, my sister safe, and I used this.” She pulled out a katana with a sliver blade and written in Kanji was Yokai. “It is blessed with silver and magic that allows me to slice into Gashadokuro with ease. But it came at a cost: my mortal life. I became immortal, which meant I could not truly find someone that could stay with me.”

What about Dad? You and he have been married for 25 years, and you met Dad when he was in high school.” I felt my blood boil and

rise. My entire life was a lie. My mom was not human, but a mythical samurai known to kill people that would try and hurt her sister.

“Yes, I met him in high school, but because of my job I could not truly be with him, I love him Umiko, but he won’t last forever. Not like us.” Her condescending attitude was causing me to boil more and more with anger. “Umiko, I ask you not to be angry with me. Tomorrow we will go to the village, and I will train you.”

“Like hell, you will!” I stormed off to my room. My father is a human, my mother is an asshole. I laid down in my bed crying. With everything explained, I closed my eyes and slept. I am a monster, a hybrid, but I know I am not human.

I woke up to the smell of smoke. I did not understand what was going on, but the house was on fire and I heard people fighting. I rushed down and saw my father’s dead body. My mother was holding the katana to the intruders. “Umiko,” she yelled, and that’s all I remember.

I woke up in the hospital to the news that my mother was dead and my jaw was covered in bandages. I asked the nurses desperately for what happened to my mother. They told me they did not know, but it was most likely that she was dead. The next question was what the fuck happened to my jaw. They told me it was best not to show as the scars were healing. I did not understand until the bandages were removed.

Half of my cheek on the left side of my body was torn off, my gums were poking out, and some of my teeth were poking. They told me it was a miracle I survived, but I did not wish for their sympathy. I lost my family, and I was only thirteen. I had to wear a mask to hide the scar and was on a liquid diet. To help with the pain, Katana and I dyed her hair purple while I dyed my hair blue, and I shaved some of it off too, but that was the beginning of my pain.

Family Easter by Erin Catterall, CCRI Student

It was April 3, 1969. The school bus dropped off Debbie and her brothers, Billy, and Eddie, at the corner store down the road from their house. The two boys raced each other home. Debbie liked to stroll and imagine that she was walking home from her job as a teacher. Debbie's mother asked, "How was your day?" when she arrived home. Debbie replied with her usual, "good." "That's great," her mother said, "there are apples in the bowl on the counter." Debbie walked past her mother who was working on her latest granny squares while sitting in her chair by the picture window in the living room, a cigarette burning in the ashtray. Most days after school Debbie played with her dolls in her bedroom. She often replays interactions from school. Sometimes she pretends one of the dolls is her, and it stands up to the bully that picks on her and her best friend Judy. Today was one of those days. She can hear her brothers wrestling around in their bedroom down the hall when suddenly there is a loud crash, and the sound of shattering glass seems to bring on their sudden silence.

"Boys! You're going to kill each other playing' like that!" their mother yelled from the living room, "If I get back there and my lamps are broken you will be in a world of trouble when your father gets home!" Their father was in the Navy. He was on a ship in the Med somewhere, he would write and send postcards when the ship would stop at ports. Their mother had hung a map in her bedroom, and they would take turns putting pins on the locations he was when each letter and postcard was received. Debbie missed him a lot, she enjoyed talking with him at the kitchen table before school when he was home. She would tell him about school and the books she enjoys and would just listen and encourage her to keep reading and learning.

"Debbie, in 15 minutes we need to start getting dinner ready," her mother called from the other room. "Don't know why they can't help for once," Debbie said under her breath referring to her brothers who

continued to wrestle over some toy in the room down the hall. “What was that?” her mother asked, “Okay Mom!” she said. Debbie felt she carried most of the burden in helping her mother with housework. Although she knew her brothers were not capable of following directions that were more than one-word commands, she still felt it wasn’t fair. With Easter coming this Sunday, she would have extra chores to prepare for the family coming over for Dinner on Sunday. Debbie placed her dolls back into their case and pushed the case under her bed. She went to the kitchen to help her mother “There are some carrots in the bag over there Debbie, could you peel and cut them for me?” It sounded more like an order than a question. Debbie washed her hands and began peeling carrots. “Debbie, we need to get the house ready for the family to come for Easter Sunday. That means we will need to take the table linens out and get them pressed also,” her mother said. “Ok mom, can we paint eggs?” Debbie asked. “Sure Honey, tomorrow you and your brothers don’t have school so we can do that then.” Debbie enjoyed painting eggs; it got her excited for the holiday.

The following afternoon Debbie, her brothers and her mother covered their kitchen table with newspapers to protect the table from food coloring paint. Eddie asked Debbie painting a bunny on her egg and asked, “Do you think the Easter Bunny will bring me a basket this year?” Debbie reminded him to stay on his best behavior to ensure he would receive a basket. Debbie remembered the basket the Easter Bunny left last year. It had the most beautiful mint green ribbon laced through it, a chocolate bunny and jellybeans on the inside and a bottle of blowing bubbles. Once their eggs were painted, their mother put them aside to dry and Debbie helped her prepare dinner. Her mother said, “Debbie, tomorrow after we clean up, I need you to come run some errands with me at the Market and drug store.” Debbie whispered under her breath, “of course you do.” and pouted while setting the dinner table.

It was the day before Easter and Debbie and her brothers had

had cleaned their bedrooms just as their mother asked. While the boys went over to play with the neighbors, Debbie and her mother went to the Market and picked up the Ham. Her mother seemed nervous and excited, more than she usually did before a family dinner. Her mother nearly forgot her purse in the grocery store. The next stop was Nadeau's Pharmacy. Debbie was walking through the aisles with her mother, when her mother grabbed three baskets and a mint green ribbon that looked familiar. She grabbed jellybeans and three chocolate bunnies. Debbie was in shock and her eyes began to water. Her mother looked at her and said, "You don't believe in the Easter Bunny anymore, do you?" Debbie said, "no I don't." She had lied. She still believed until that moment. Debbie was crying on the way home. Her mother asked her what was wrong, and she replied, "I wish Daddy was here, I miss him." Her mother smiled and said "so do I."

While lying in bed that night, Debbie felt angry at her mother for telling her about the Easter Bunny. She was angry at her brothers for still being able to believe and not having to help around the house as often. She missed her father. She really did not feel up to seeing all of her aunts and uncles and cousins at dinner the next day. She finally fell asleep after allowing herself to ruminate for an hour.

Easter morning arrived. Debbie woke up and did not yet hear her brothers knocking each other over trying to find their hidden baskets. Instead, she woke up to the soft voice of her mother saying, "Debbie, come in the kitchen and help me get breakfast started." "Coming." Debbie said. She walked into the kitchen and caught something in the corner of her eye, at the table. She turned toward it and there her father sat at the kitchen table drinking his coffee in front of the window. "Daddy!" Debbie yelled excitedly as she ran toward him and hopped on his laugh hugging him. "Hey Queenie," he said, "I have missed you! Tell me all about what you have been learning in school." Debbie's mother fixed breakfast for everyone without Debbie's help today. Debbie sat

and talked with her dad about school for a half hour before the roar of excitement came from the boys' bedroom. Eddie and Billy were focused on hunting down their easter baskets, their mother had hidden behind the armed chair. They tore into them without any thought that anyone else may be in the room. Their father walked in and said, "My boys!" and they screamed like little monsters and began to climb all over him with excitement.

Later that afternoon, while the family was over and the boys were playing with the cousins, Debbie's mother brushed her hand through her hair and said, "Thank you for all you do to help me, I know I ask a lot of you and I want you to know it doesn't go unnoticed." Debbie hugged her mom and said, "I love you, Mom." She then realized that being the oldest was not so bad. She got to enjoy time with her father and help her mom with important preparations.

After the extended family left, Debbie, her brothers, mother, and father all sat at the table and ate dessert together. They listened to their dad tell stories about all the places he had been on this past trip, and they filled him in on what had been happening here at home.

It was just a few days ago but I can recall every detail. Blue dust puffed to a cloud of powder while the pool cue ricocheted against the black felt of the dimly lit table. The eight-ball disappeared into the pocket. I couldn't keep my anger in much more these days. The bartender had been eyeing me since we arrived there that night.

“HEY! Would YA take it easy ova there??” the bartender shouted as though the words had been waiting there behind his gnawing teeth.

Guests at the bar looked at me, ready to hold me down or kick me out. I just turned my head and looked away.

“I always tell him to breathe first, but his aggression gets the best of him after his whiskey shots.... And when I kick his ass and win the game off a bank shot.” She giggled, while speaking to the bartender.

“We're done this time...” her posture, fierce though her face was an intentional secret behind her tousled golden hair.

“I wanted to tell you after our talk recently, we're done.” She repeated.

“Not just this game but you and I.” she continued to speak as her posture began to soften like a wilting flower, her lips quivered, and tears began to soak the ground around us. “You told me your heart was closed, you say you'll change and take care of your healing, but you evade wounds and remain numb.”

“Please, don't leave me yet! We can work on things, I can work on things, I'm trying everything.” My hands were starting to sweat and fingers curl, I could feel my anger coming on again like a cat coils when it feels threatened. That was when I threw the pool cue. I tried desperately to plead with her, but my words were a naïve grumbling of

jargon. I was unable to articulate swiftly in the moment's upheaval.

I watched her grow smaller through the bar windows as she disappeared down the old cobblestone road, past the black street lanterns that were humming in a faint yellow buzz. I could have done better then but the night spiraled and I stormed out of the bar shortly after inundated with a flood of emotion but mostly seething. She always knew how to get attention, no matter the circumstances. It seemed this type of occurrence was happening more and more between us since I started my new job. She left me feeling like an outsider in my relationship with her. She's gorgeous, has a wild side, is very wise but was becoming toxic like me. Acting out in small bouts of anger. She wasn't like that when we first met. I was pulling her under, and it hurt me to hurt her.

The thoughts of our parting had kept me in a cabin fever with days of restlessness and dwelling. My worries of what might happen next was taking its toll. I had to get out of the house, getting some fresh ocean air would help me feel better so I drove to the sea. Before I could find ease by the shoreline, I saw a person fall helplessly into the water. My body was freezing. The scattered dark shards of icicles in the deep waters I was trudging through pierced me all over. It felt like I was moving through vines of thorns and roses yet all I could smell was the salty air. Terrified, I swam as fast as I could. My body dropped under the pressure of each new wave as I sporadically burst to the top of the water for gasps of air.

I lost my shoes as soon as I jumped into the sharp cold ocean. My toes and fingers were numb. I was just an arm's reach away from him at this point. He was fighting the crashing waves as much as I was when I had first seen him fall into the water off the jetty. Soon after he appeared lifeless, yet on his back. He floated softly, like a lotus floats on a lake of lily pads.

Gleams of moonlight showed me his face between the mists of

splashing waves. Thoughts were racing through my mind. Why was I doing this for a stranger? What would I get out of this? I have never even saved my own life before. I grabbed his shoulder and amid my chaos he turned to look at me with stillness in his eyes. His pupils were wide and black with stars floating inside. The waves were still crashing around us as I tried to stay afloat.

“Wild ride out here tonight, you alright?” He said, with no apparent concern for the seismic sea waves we were swimming in.

“I thought you were drowning!!” I shouted breathlessly as the lapping waters were swarming me from every direction. I was furious to see he was well, yet the conditions were concerning. I felt tricked while also feeling relieved, I had finally made it to him. With water spraying us and waves still lifting us up and down the man replied “I come out here every night to watch the waters, sometimes I feel like a swim and just surrender to the waves, clothes, and all. You happened to catch me on one of those nights.”

I could not help but think about the thoughts flooding my mind, swimming as fast as I could to help this man and realize it was leisure for him. “When are you swimming back?” I yelled.

“I saw ya swimming this way and thought I’d wait for you to see what you were doing. You see I was gonna ask if you could do me a favor?” the strange floating man replied.

Before I could respond, my cold body began to feel a shock ripple through every ounce of my being. No longer was it that just my feet and hands were numb, most of my body felt lifeless after the adrenaline rush. In the distance I could see larger waves forming and heading our way. The man flipped onto his belly and dove under the first tidal like a turtle dives deep into the lower depths of the sea, disappearing into the vastness of the abyss we were in. It was then that my vision was blurred, and I lost consciousness.

I felt a slap to my right cheek, turning my head fast to my left side. I was unable to see much; my eyes were still blurred, and it was still very dark out. I started to cough up water and it gurgled in my throat and shot out of my nostrils. I was suddenly jolted to my side and felt another slap on my back as my lungs slowly cleared up with water, I started to breathe in air as though it was my very first breath.

The man and I were back on the beach. “One wave too many will take down anyone, even the strongest swimmers.” The man said reassuring me that I was okay even if I was not strong enough to stay afloat. Now that we were on the sand and the crashing waves were further in the distance, I could recognize that his voice sounded utterly familiar. Yet I was still unable to see that well to make out who he was. I wanted to know if I had known him or what his features looked like. The man wrapped a large warm cotton blanket around me. “Just grabbed this from the dryer, thought it would warm ya up. My house is the one closest to the beach entrance.” He said. “That’s why I sometimes just jump right into the crashing waves, clothes and all and see what happens. Sorry if my doing that confused ya.”

No longer gargling salt and spit, the water was finally done falling from my nose. “I thought you were drowning man!! I was coming to save you.”

“In a sense I was drowning.” Said the man.

My body was starting to regain feeling, the warm blanket smelled like patchouli, pine, and firewood. I was not sure what to say to the man. I was so furious I almost drowned trying to save a stranger. Though, the thoughts that ran through my head brought attention to something I was searching for. Was the man drowning from the worlds woes like I was or was he really sinking in the sea? I had initially gone to the beach to feel something. For months I was trapped in a bitter mindset. I had pushed away most of my friends, focused mostly on work and

My body was starting to regain feeling, the warm blanket smelled like patchouli, pine, and firewood. I was not sure what to say to the man. I was so furious I almost drowned trying to save a stranger. Though, the thoughts that ran through my head brought attention to something I was searching for. Was the man drowning from the worlds woes like I was or was he really sinking in the sea? I had initially gone to the beach to feel something. For months I was trapped in a bitter mindset. I had pushed away most of my friends, focused mostly on work and ultimately lost my love in the process. The new job had taken a toll on me, but it was what I needed to focus on. Though, the thought I had that stood out to me when swimming to save the man was that I never had even attempted to save my own life before.

“What were you drowning from?” I asked hoping the man was going to say he was in fact stuck in the undercurrent for a moment.

“I was drowning in love, with a heart full of bliss.” The man said as he continued to elaborate; “I have had a full life; I have enjoyed achieving many accolades and much recognition in life. I married the sweetheart of my dreams and have a beautiful set of children and grandchildren. I am retired and though my life has been all I could have asked for; the shock of the sea always makes me remember how it can all be taken away at any moment. It shows me gratitude for the unknown and the rage that can ensue within nature.”

Here I was, driving to the sea to find hope in my woes and this man was risking his life to spark realism in his bliss. “What was the favor you were going to ask me for, I’m remembering now before that one wave knocked me under you asked for a favor.”

“Oh, right.” Said the man. He continued, “Well, I could use a friend. You see, I saw when you got to the beach, and I was standing on the jetty. You reminded me of my younger self, serious looking with a stout brow and focused gaze. You are willing to risk your life for others

and I find that admirable. Yet you also looked angry and discerning. My wife says I am too loosey goosey now that I am retired, and I need to find a friend to help me keep diligent and focused on my hobbies.”

In trying to save another I did in fact save myself. “Funny enough, I came here to find some laughter and break free from my rigidity. We just found what we both came here for today.”

I stood up and shook the man’s hand. To find my vision had finally cleared. He looked just like the old man I saw in the mirror. My future self.



After The Decompression by Leia Fifer, CCRI Student

Website: leiafifer.com

Graphite, charcoal

11x14

2024

Prose

Religion and Funerals: “Thank God for the Train” by Katarina Gertje, CCRI Student

<https://www.youtube.com/@katarinagertje3368/featured>

Before N’s funeral, I’d only been to two others in my twenty years of life. The first, when I was twelve, was my Opa’s funeral/wake. It was an open casket and sure, it was sad, but I managed to move on with little trouble. The second was the funeral of a fellow cast member from a show, though I didn’t know him well. My mother and I were only there because we were both in the cast, and he had dropped dead from a heart attack during our dress rehearsal (which also happened to be my 15th birthday- yeah, my luck is like that sometimes).

Neither of them compared to a best friend’s funeral. Certainly not at the age of twenty, after eight years of friendship, when the idea of someone tolerating you for more than a year was a rarity before them. Absolutely not when you had to struggle through the last few weeks of the semester, with one still left after the funeral.

And especially not when it was a rail suicide. Fuck me.

My mom accompanied me to the wake, but my sister was there for the funeral. We woke up early, drove early, and arrived early. Neither of us like waking in the am, but for N, an alarm for seven in the morning seemed but a trivial matter. And thanks to our punctual timing, I managed to give my gift to his mother, C. Emma had bought them the day before and brought them up from Newport with her. It was worth paying her back, without a doubt.

The gift in question was two Christmas tree ornaments. One dolphin, one turtle, for the two necklaces N brought back from his family’s trip to the Bahamas. The white turtle necklace was one he

wore often, but the dark twin dolphins ended up in different hands. Mine. He put it in my hand when I wasn't looking, and that day was the first time I remembered him calling me his best friend. I wore it every single day for the longest time. Unfortunately, the necklace was too heavy for its cheap, flimsy clasp, and my grandmother's attempts to fix it never lasted. Eventually, I gave up on the endeavor and kept it as a memento.

After his death, however, I got it professionally restrung. It's still going strong, despite my growing habit of running and jumping around my home. I know I'll need to get it fixed every now and then for the rest of my life, but that's hardly a burden when I'm fortunate enough to have this kind of memory. I'm only sorry I didn't try hard enough to keep wearing it before.

N's dad belongs to the Seventh Day Adventists, so the funeral took place at their church. N, by the end of his life, was agnostic at best, but I wasn't particularly surprised by the religious venue. Why would his father have had it anywhere else? N's mother, from what I remember, is an atheist. I'm pretty sure of this, since it surprised me at first when I learned of the many, many opposing views and ideologies of N's parents.

Poor C. Even now, I can still hardly imagine how she was feeling. Especially given how her mother had a stroke right before the services, rendering her parents unable to attend.

But anyway.

Waiting for the funeral to start, I greeted N's family (his parents, his sister and his brother) and all my mutual friends with him as they arrived. It was my first time seeing some of them in years. Sometimes, I wonder where that time went. How I went from an awkward, cringey middle schooler to the still awkward, less cringey college student. How those bounds that were so important to me during

that time seemingly fell apart and drifted away. It had taken two days after N's death for the news to get to me, and it wasn't through any of these mutual friends, and I had to reach out to all of them first.

Every now and then, I get angry about it all over again. But that's hardly what this story is about.

Most of my recollection regarding the service has blurred in the days since. One of N's oldest friends (who I knew, just not super well) did a scripture reading. Another friend from middle and high school (who shares a first name with my sister) performed a song. There was a lot of music throughout, and even though most of it had religious and spiritual undertones, they were so well performed I could hardly complain.

(N had always been the kind of person who wanted his funeral to be a celebration, not a downer. I don't think he accounted for killing himself at twenty, or for his father to be alive to go about things the traditional way.)

The eulogy was performed by his maternal uncle. It was long, just a bit, but it was a lovely tribute to N, so who cared?

And yet what I remember most was that homily.

For those of you who are blissfully unaware, as I once was, a homily is a type of religious sermon that usually revolves around some moral theme. It can also be described as "a tedious moralizing lecture," which is my personal definition for it after that day. The homily in question was given by a pastor chosen by N's father. An old friend of the father, who never knew N personally and decided the extent of his research would be the obituary.

And it went all downhill from there.

Forty minutes. Four. Zero. That was how long he spoke. Longer than the eulogy, I'm pretty sure. And if the length weren't enough to make you bash your head in, the content somehow amplified its

insufferability. It started decently enough, as far as religious sermons go by atheist standards. But this didn't last long at all. The pastor's poor research caught up with him, faster than a marathon runner.

“He was clearly very religious... God measures around the heart, not the mind.”

A nice sentiment, but one problem. You might've already realized it.

After all, I told you earlier that N was agnostic.

And even the niceness of the overall sentiment has odd undertones to it. The assumption came from the pastor being blown away by how loved and impactful N was to people. How he was such a good force in others' lives. And yet because the conclusion the pastor came to is “good person = religious,” what does that imply about his opinion of the non-religious? Would he assume I have faith because I'm not a piece of shit?

N was often called a particular nickname by others, and the pastor kept calling him something slightly different. Not only trying to claim familiarity, after admitting to not knowing him, but also getting it wrong. He said the nickname right while explaining it, but every time after it was wrong.

How? How does that happen?

The pastor claimed tattooed people went to hell. My sister, a fellow atheist with several tattoos, got a kick out of that one.

And I'm sure there was more, but by then my brain was dissociating to protect me.

At some point, I had to go to the bathroom (and get a break from the mind-numbing amount of God-talk). Just when I was about to go back to the room, I noticed a mutual friend from high school sitting in the back, near the entrance. With her was a woman I'd never met before. I stayed with them instead, found out the friend wasn't

feeling well, and that the unfamiliar woman was N's first grade teacher. We spoke freely (though quietly) about our opinions on the homily and its length (this was towards the end of those long forty minutes). Somehow, I ended up crying in the teacher's arms, and I vaguely heard the words "angel" and "train," but I couldn't make out the context.

When I returned to my seat at last, my sister almost immediately stepped out herself. At the time, I'd assumed that she also needed the bathroom, but it wasn't until after the service wrapped up that she told me what I had missed.

"C, your son's guardian angel could have pushed him out of the way of the train."

"C, thank God for the train."

...I do not hate religious people for being religious. I don't usually care. But that day, I contemplated the sentence for violently assaulting a pastor. Would it matter if it was a pastor? Or would it be like any other assault? And, more importantly, why did no one else get up there and manhandle him off the stage? Why didn't N's father, who gave this pastor the platform to begin with, take responsibility and do just that?

Ha, ha. I'm joking. I don't expect anything from that man. It would hardly phase me if he whole-heartedly agreed, especially since the Seventh Day Adventists believe in predeterminism.

And of course, neither my sister nor my friends wanted to cause a scene at a funeral. But, in a way, doesn't that enable people to say whatever they want with little regard for how others will feel? If they can get away with it, they become bolder. We ranted with each other as long as we wanted to at the reception, but in the moment, while it was happening, everyone remained silent. For social etiquette? For the family? It hardly matters, since the result was the same. A speech that went unprotested. Misinformation that spread uncorrected.

Callous words, spoken without hesitation.

I wish there was a better end to this story. That sometime during the reception, someone chewed that pastor out for saying something like that to a grieving mother. But that's not the sort of reality I live in. You might be thinking to yourself that you would have fought him in our place, but let's be real- most of you wouldn't have either. Instead, you would've done exactly what we did- complain afterwards while fantasizing about giving him a taste of his own medicine. The need to not cause a scene, to follow a moral compass and to not get arrested outweighs our personal impulses and desires nearly every time.

And I hope I don't have to explain why it was such an out-of-line thing to say. To tell a mother in the throes of grief that their oldest child committing suicide the day before Thanksgiving was God's plan, and to say that to a person who doesn't even believe in your God. And to tell them to thank God for the thing they used to kill themselves.

It really hits when you put it that way, doesn't it?

Maybe, instead of attributing tragedies to higher powers, we should bring our thinking back down to Earth and search for what made them miserable in life. Then, accountability may not be so elusive, and some people will no longer be able to turn a blind eye to their mistakes.

Or perhaps they'll still refuse to see reality. But that's their problem.



Untitled
by Eric Mateo, CCRI Student

Rhetorical Analysis of *Sinead's Hand*

by Elijah Livingston, CCRI Student

The worldwide fight for same-sex marriage has been going on for decades. *Sinead's Hand* is an Irish pro same-sex marriage ad from before widespread same-sex marriage equality, in the August of 2009. It follows a man as he travels across Ireland, asking everyone he meets permission to marry Sinead. The ad takes the tradition of asking for your future in-laws' permission to marry to an almost comical extreme. At the very end, the ridiculousness of the situation is compared to the fight for same-sex marriage. The comparison points out the absurdity of same-sex couples not being able to marry in Ireland. *Sinead's Hand* wanted to make change in the fight for same-sex marriage, so they used traditionally Irish visuals to pull in their audience, then made them sympathize with the cause through logic.

Sinead's Hand was made to motivate people, but they needed to secure their audience. The concept behind the ad already existed in a US version, but when MarriageEquality, the gay marriage group behind the ad, created *Sinead's Hand*, Irish culture was baked into it. In a PinkNews interview, Andrew Hyland, spokesperson for MarriageEquality, told them, "The actor, Hugh O'Connor, is very famous. He was in *Chocolat* with Johnny Depp and also *My Left Foot*. And Lisa Hannigan, who performs the soundtrack, is very popular with Irish people." The ad was for Irish people, but after it was uploaded to the internet it spread much further than Ireland. The ad brought in a worldwide audience because of its quality. *Sinead's Hand* was a part of the large-scale shift in opinion that eventually made Ireland the first country to legalize gay marriage.

Why *Sinead's Hand* worked so hard to pull in its Irish audience is made clear through understanding the bigger picture of gay rights at the time. Ireland was widely regarded as a conservative and traditional country before the turn of the century. It was one of the last countries in

Western Europe to decriminalize homosexuality in 1993, but public opinion of the LGBTQ+ community continued to improve over time. Gay rights had many wins after decriminalization, including the law providing civil partnerships for same-sex couples in 2010. Same-sex marriage wasn't legalized in Ireland until 2015. The decision was put to a referendum which ended with an astounding majority of 62.4 percent of people voting yes for same-sex marriage. This vote's success made Ireland the first country to legalize gay marriage. *Sinead's Hand* was released in August 2009, before same-sex civil partnerships were allowed in Ireland. The ad was originally launched at GAZE, the Dublin Gay and Lesbian Film Festival, and then was promoted online. The ad became a point in the biggest shift of Irish people's opinions of queer people. *Sinead's Hand* made the viewer empathize with queer couples, which ultimately led to Ireland's gay marriage referendum passing with a large majority.

Sinead's Hand needed to make its audience empathetic to the cause to bring about change in Ireland. It was able to do this by subverting the expectations it set up. In the beginning, the audience will assume the main character is asking his future in-laws' permission to marry their child. Our expectations are even built with the name Sinead, which is a traditionally feminine Irish name. These expectations are immediately subverted when the main character moves onto the next house to ask them. This escalation continues for the rest of the ad before it ends with its message: "How would you feel if you had to ask four million people permission to get married? Lesbian and gay men are denied access to marriage in Ireland." The viewer has been primed to empathize with the main character, and when the message is revealed, they are going to be more understanding. Someone on the fence about the LGBTQ+ could even come to the side of support. *Sinead's Hand* makes the viewer put themselves in the main character's shoes and uses that to make them empathize with the fight for same-sex marriage.

It's been over a decade since this ad debuted, and in that time

countless countries have legalized same-sex marriage. *Sinead's Hand* was able to be a part of the change which led to the legalization of gay marriage in Ireland. It's traditionally Irish visuals and general relatability pulled the audience in made them sympathize with the fight for same-sex marriage. Since its release, the ad has become widely regarded as one of the best pro same-sex marriage ads by those who've seen it. The worldwide fight for same-sex marriage is not over yet, but influential places like Ireland legalizing it changed the game. That could not have been possible without ads like *Sinead's Hand*.



Firenze, Italia: Ponte Vecchio at Sunset

by Jessica Araújo, CCRI Faculty, English Department

The Pen Editor

Poetry



Untitled

by Emily Espinal, CCRI Student

[Sea shaped Shore] by Genevieve Kent, CCRI Student

Sea shaped Shore, shimmers,
blindingly. Twilight glimmers.

Stunning mid-summer

Waves steal the shore,
from the places where land greets sea.

Waves steal the shore,
An island zephyr stealing more.
Summer faded, just as gloaming.
Beaches Cove, tide, gently foaming.

Waves steal the shore.

My favorite, rose rims.
Selectively perceiving,
Autumns contention

Waves rendered still.
Crystals form to depict fir trees,
Waves rendered still.
The zephyrs shift into a squall,
Fixed gaze, I watch the window freeze.
Current subdued, for now, with ease

Waves rendered still.

Slowly absorbing,
The warmth out of my coffee.
Sharp winters respite

Ice melts, life springs.
Waves manage to break themselves free!

Ice melts, life springs.
Inspired, the common loon sings,
Lady slippers blossom gleefully,
Caribou slake thirst peacefully,
Ice melts, life springs.

Basking under rays,
Of early springtime sunshine.
Where you can find it.

I Went on a Date with This Girl by Peyton Luiz, CCRI Student

I went on a date with Poetry
She looked gorgeous,
With soliloquies
Lining her arm
Her eyes were windows,
Sure,
Although tinted.
I would talk and listen.
She would speak and hear.
She had rules,
Everyone always broke them.
I didn't.
I followed her rules.
And she still broke my heart.

Innocence by Destiny Boyce, CCRI Student

The awful agony,

It is killing me.

The scratching sounds screeching in my head.

I constantly hear their loud lambasting,

Their never-ending doomful debates.

They tell me it is nothing more than brainless bickering.

But I know.

It is much more like hellish hatred.

Their rotted remarks,

Are what took away

My irreplaceable innocence.



Elephant Jewel
by Destiny Boyce, CCRI Student

Books by Lorraine Rodrigues Louzada

Instagram @lorrainerlo

Take me to other worlds
Remind me how to survive
That is what books do
They keep me alive
I whisper in the shadows
Between the pages
How lucky i feel to love
To love so ardently pages filled with words
Words that i did not write
But i feel them in my soul
Words that stay
And make me feel whole
Of the stories I've read
I wish to start living mine
To be the main character
Of a life one designs

Scattered thoughts of my immigrant life
by Roxana Mercado Rojo, CCRI Student

Time learned to stay, and I learned to watch.

I distinctly recall our *differences*.

I was two years old and *lost*.

They were two years-old and adjusted.

I was *afraid* and *colored*; they were pure and righteous.

I sat in awe, and for several years I watched in *silence*;
intrigued by their *freedom* and their *privilege*.

I admired them and despite my age,

I knew they were the

race of power.

Limits were slapped to the core of my family's *sacrifices*.

Happiness hid in a *forbidden* district and just as the tip of our
fingers sensed its captivating proximity, *it ran*.

But among the longing *emptiness* that gloomed the eight
guts growling at the dinner table, I can genuinely say we
withstood.

When exasperating twelve hours of factory work were not
enough, we *withstood*.

When our mind, body and soul deceived us and the world
underestimated us, we *withstood*.

And when regret invaded our dreams and belonging became
doubt, we remembered.

Meadows spoiled in color, handmade thick-heeled dress
shoes beating in symphony with the rhythm, the traditional

taste of native mouth-watering dishes sweltering within the everlasting worn pots.

Behold perfection and seconds later behold *reality*.

Six feet under the snow.

Four AM mornings.

Temporary jobs.

Limited family time.

Wage theft.

Discrimination.

Miles away from home.

Language barriers.

Living in the *cruelty* of reality.

United States, that is what I thought you were; an *infectious*, trendy and tempting *disease* made up of *false hope*.

You are my *broken* dream.

I *slaved* through long periods of *acceptance*.

Acceptance of myself, my *identity*, and my culture.

Failure caught up to me *physically*, *mentally*, and *emotionally*.

I was drowning in *uncertainty* and *fear*.

Fear of *failing* and everyone watching.

Time is bittersweet and at this point, it was the only measure I had *control* of.

Time, like the *anticipation* of Friday night where a piece of paper would cede my family *worthy* of some food.

Time, like the needy workday mornings at the U.S.

Immigration's courtroom number seven where several
entwined souls *prayed* for *equity*.

United States, you *crushed* my family and our *hopes*
of financial *stability*.

You made me *bitter*.

You made my expression look *sad* even when I was happy.

You tried to make me believe *I would never belong*.

You *drowned* me and I let you.

Dear Jenni, by Kat Taylor, CCRI Student
Student Government Director of Student Relations

If ever I were to sit
in a fancy restaurant
near a lovely pair of ladies
drinking wine and sharing
a laugh over kissing a pumpkin
never would I believe they'd be

anywhere besides rocking
in chairs, together, 40 years
later. That was the plan, since
sixteen, vowed we'd be
on that porch, smoking a joint
for '*Old Time's Sake.*'

Told you I was working toward
my GED, struggling to find
my way and you abandoned me.
Needed a friend more
than anything but you left,
never even called back—

I'm not denying my psychotic
break; it's just, I'd never think

of deserting you during
a crisis. I know how badly
I fucked it all up, probably shouldn't
have called the cops—but Jenni

I genuinely believed you
could die. Not of sound mind—
you saw—Hell, it was you
who said how I had sounded
like a “crazy cult leader”
last time you met me there.

I didn't deserve that.

What's the price for change?

Nothing is the same—yet
I still pay for going insane.
Life's never been better,
and that's mostly ok.



Among the Trees by Jennifer Mandeville,

CCRI Student

www.jennifermanteville.com

2023

Charcoal on paper

24 x 18"

Rabid by Pierce Abosso, CCRI Student

It was just a hint of shine
A cuteness shined a light
Though it could communicate
To brink out reality's sight

The words so white
To make it seem the trend
As the light pulled onwards
With no sight for a mend

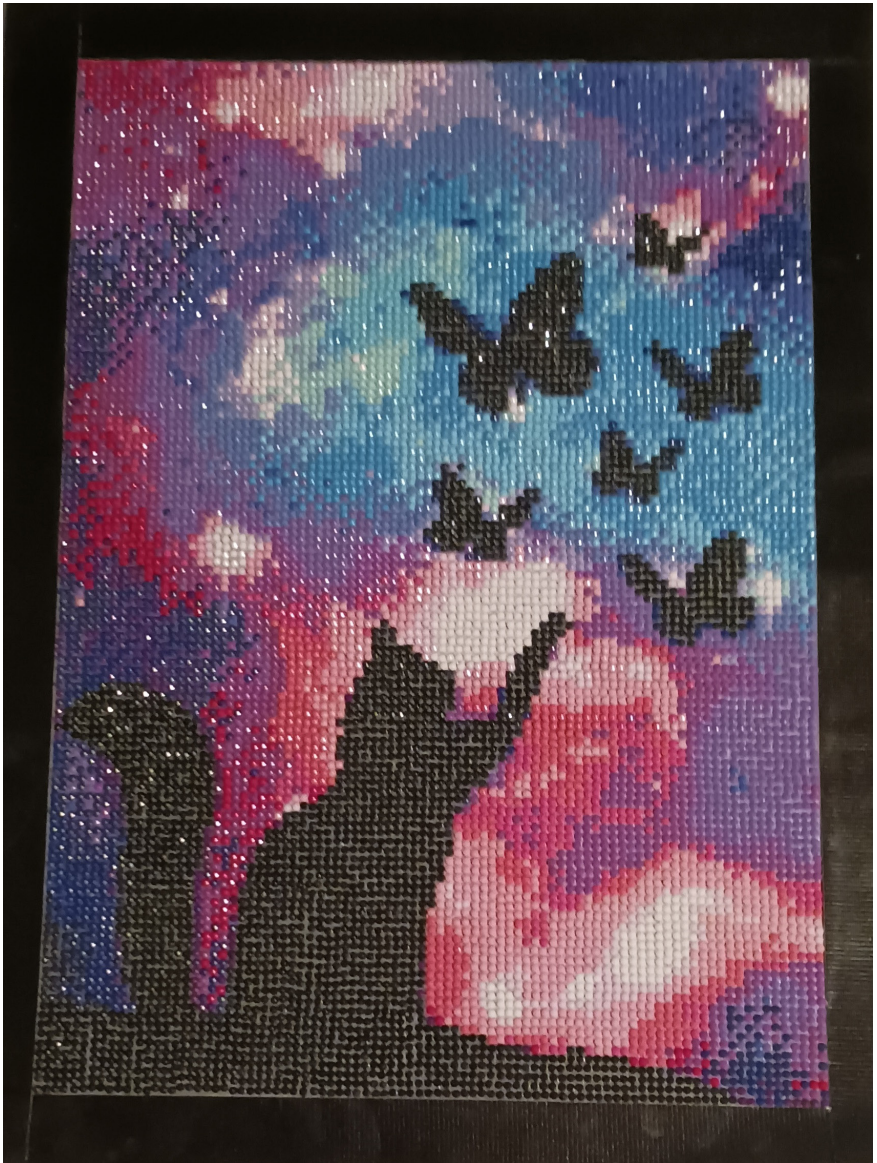
No mind filled in
For the sight of saving bells
As any real thinking
Would drop them in a well

The threat so scarce
As the mind can't think fast
The only thing that saves
If a sin that creates the pass

The cuteness and its games
Have smartly cause the lure
But no conscious to make wound knowledge
Feel anyone secure

As cuteness met craziness
It really went sour
To make the people see
Who really was in power

No one saw the need
To embark on cute treachery
As the cute strings detached
It cutely faded away.



Chasing Butterflies by Shayna Moulton, CCRI Student
Tiktok: Jades_diamond_painting

https://www.tiktok.com/@jades_diamond_painting? t=8lAie0YVubX& r=1

Winter Days by Pre. E., CCRI Student

What a gray city,
with cold days, and depressing nights.
Everybody loves you,
but no one seems to stand you.
Shoveling away fear,
and scary truths that they won't bear.
It's okay my dear,
cut the tree down
Christmas Is almost here.
Whiskey and beer, loud men in bars cheer
Don't forget the women and kids
Show them that you still care.
Twinkling lights and sheppards
Government funding year-round presents
Emptying pockets, capitalism is so pleasant.
The scary truth that they won't bear, shoveling away fear
No one seems to stand you, but everybody loves you
Cold days and depressing nights
What a gray city

Wild Flower by Janina Michelle Mendez, CCRI Student

While you look into their eyes and wonder
about the depth of their being,
they look at you and simply wonder
just the depth from under your clothing.
You're too deep for the world flower child.
You want to swim in the depths of their minds during low tide.
They just want to get a good picture of you for the showoff.
You want to explore the dark corners of their soul, get a taste of their
fears.
You're too deep for this world my unicorn.
They can't handle your energy. You dig too deep.
You reach places in them they never wanted to acknowledge.
You can't be simple, you can't be like these media girls.
Blossom my sunshine.
Be wild. Be bold.
Make them all uncomfortable.
Be as intense as a third-degree burn.
Make them feel.
Make them cry.
Make them scream.
Leave your daring mark whether they like it or not.
We are far beyond the depths of what eyes can see.
Let it be known.
That's,
your purpose!



vilem opus
by Andrew Dawson, CCRI Student

Beautiful Garden by Samuel Aguiar, CCRI Student

Take the flower out of the sand
And plant it in this beautiful garden
We don't have life jackets
We have to tread over water
Don't let the tides push us away
We have to be stronger
It won't be sunshine
There will be thunder

Our hands will have dirt on them
We'll be tired from the work
Just look up to the moon
Ask for rain
And hope our flowers will bloom
In our beautiful garden

Soon, the lilies will grow
And it will be our job to keep them safe
The soil will hug their stem
And give them the chance

It's been 4 Years by Morgin Peloquin, CCRI Student

It's been 4 years since we've met.

The first day I met you there was something there that drew me to you.

Something inside me said you could be trusted.

Something made it easy for me to talk to you.

After that first day, you helped me grow emotionally, educationally, and helped me to come out of the awkward shell of a person that I was.

Over the past 4 years you have become More than a professor.

You have become someone I consider to be family.

You taught me kindness can go a long way.

You have also taught me that it is ok to Be different and have a difference in opinion as long as we show it in a Kind way.

You have helped me fall even deeper in love with reading.

You have also inspired me to constantly

ask questions and make sure others intentions are clear so I don't misunderstand their meanings in conversations or writings.

You have taught me that there is a much Bigger world out there that I was ever Taught about in high school.

You have taught me so much in the past 4 years that it is hard to write how grateful I am to have had you as a professor in several classes and for being able to call you not just a friend but also part of my family.

So, thank you for coming into my life 4 years ago.

In Bloom by Cambria Childs, CCRI Student

With every passing day
my roots run deeper
into her, sprawling
till there is no beginning
or end to them.

She has impregnated me with
the nutrients that cultivate
my once dry leaves to develop
brightly green
and full of life.
My petals undress
to reveal my deep
ruby colors to the soil. b
The soil sighs.

As the sun rays stray
out across our vibrant meadow;
all of nature comes to join.
The sparrows sing their song,
and the crickets play along.
The choir booming out
travels through the fresh air,
while we are intertwined.

She holds me tight,
remembering the rain,
even in my time of bloom.
Because as the seasons change,
and they always do,
she will continue to hold me close.



Untitled

by Eric Mateo, CCRI Student



Cliffside Tree- Infrared

by Zachary Olivadese, CCRI Student

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