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## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

At the 2017 Sigma Tau Delta convention—a few months before I even became an alumna—members of the Alumni Epsilon chapter conceived the idea for an alumni journal that would give alumni an opportunity to continue using, honing, and sharing their skills and passion for writing with others. The road toward realizing this vision was a long and twisting one. Again and again, life got in the way—but, through the perseverance and devotion of numerous Alumni Epsilon members, Volume One of the Sigma Tau Delta Alumni Epsilon journal, *Inkblot*, was published in 2019.

When I volunteered at the 2019 convention to organize the next volume of the journal, I never could have imagined the year and a half ahead. It has been a tumultuous time: for the world, for the US, and for me. As happened during the making of the first volume of *Inkblot*, life got in the way. Throughout it all, though, working on this journal—even when I only had a few minutes a week to devote to it—has been a source of happiness for me. From reading all the wonderful submissions to organizing the accepted pieces, I have enjoyed it all. I'm grateful to everyone for entrusting me with this job and especially grateful to the authors for entrusting me with their work.

The works contained within this journal are all very different. In fact, at first glance, they might seem to have nothing in common. If you look closely, though, you'll find a common thread running through them. In the simplest terms, the pieces compiled here each contain a truth about life—its heartbreaks and its failings, its quiet triumphs and its tiny joys, its mysteries and atrocities and greatest treasures. I hope these pieces entertain you when you need it most or make you think when you've gotten complacent. Most of all, I hope these pieces inspire you to pick up a pen—or sit down at your computer—and write about your truth.

Rachel Skelton, Editor and Organizer

## A SERIES OF LOVE AND LOST

Nikolle Dixon

### Remember

I can remember learning to tie my shoes in kindergarten,  
and walking to school by myself in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade.  
I left that small town in the 4<sup>th</sup>, and I  
replaced sweats with jeans and books with writing.  
I lost the spelling bee in 6<sup>th</sup> grade—my mouth went faster than my brain and I  
confused ‘c’ with ‘s’  
S-I-N-S-E... I knew how to spell it.

S-I-N-C-E I was growing up, I left the school that  
I had grown to love. From bulldog to cougar and now a ram.  
No longer the straight-A student.  
Classes were harder and new friendships were formed.  
7<sup>th</sup> grade brought the alto into my life. I got my first C.  
I got my first period in the library during the 8<sup>th</sup>.  
Ashley fell down the three steps in the hallway, trying  
to get her hands on my Jesse McCartney calendar.

As a sophomore I became a rebel. Loud & proud.  
Early-morning rehearsals. Late-night football games.  
Stolen kisses in the hallway with a boyfriend,  
whose name I can’t even remember.

Remember graduation, where we sat next to each  
other, till they forced us apart.  
My heel got stuck in the mud, but he was the first person I saw.  
An infectious grin and Spanish mutterings. My love.  
*Te quiero. Estoy muy orgullosa. Mi amor.*

I can remember little aspects of my educational life,  
but I’ll never forget the aspects of him.  
When we met. When I fell in love.  
When he proposed, and I  
said yes.

## **Amarillo Yellow**

Yellow is an odd color. I  
always thought it was  
too obnoxious. Happiness  
was grey skies and solitude. But maybe,  
maybe that was just peace.  
I wanted peace, desired happiness  
and yellow... yellow is happy.

Yellow was lunch  
at La Huertas with Sarah,  
practicing our broken Spanish on unknowing waiters.  
Yellow was study dates with Matt,  
huddled over a book and a half-eaten plate of pancakes  
in the same IHOP booth. Every night.  
It was lying on the campus green,  
laughing as we danced to the music only we could hear.

Yellow is the binding on  
my favorite book, encouraging me to wander.  
And wander I did, through the streets of Ohio,  
sharing smiles with my mom, the snow swirling  
around, as if we were mere figurines in a globe.

Yellow is the shirt I wore to celebrate God as a child.  
Yellow is the streaks of gold  
breaking through the lining of almost-too-fluffy clouds.  
Yellow is the sun's rays across my freckled skin, as  
I enjoy watching Menina explore her tiny world.

Yellow taught me that grey  
is not happy, and that I don't desire solitude  
or loneliness, but the complete opposite.  
Yellow is happiness;  
I like being happy.

## **Afghanistan**

I

it feels as if  
it has been a lifetime  
since you were trapped  
in my arms, and I in yours

II

I have cried myself to sleep, so  
so many times.  
My endless desires sparking the flames of  
my own destruction;  
I have clawed my way out  
of the darkest corners of depression,  
only to become even more broken.

III

Our empty diner booth mocks me,  
taunting me...  
no new memories will ever form.  
My heart aches.

IV

I've thought about our last moments,  
dozens, if not hundreds, of times,  
and I wish I would've known.  
I could add so much to that conversation.

V

My heart doesn't remember  
ever feeling so abused, and I know  
I should stand up. Shake it off.  
But Band-Aids can't fix bullet holes.

## **PARK 9 DINER**

C.s. Ambrose Lo Baido

*[for Linda]*

I fell in love like a thug.  
Neurotic to the hippocampus core;  
Maybe for a dive into your cosmic  
Eyes—a fix worth monitoring quarks  
Through an omelet field of statistics.

Where do we go from here, my friend?  
The future writes opinions that decisions can't cash.  
Your smile decodes the Mona Lisa  
Into cranes of photons  
Sun surfing.

It's Friday night on the edge of oblivion.  
You speak of divorces as a literary movement.  
Teenagers pack the place like pancakes  
Feeding good actors bad lines.  
We are those kids of 30 years ago.

I trace your face & believe in New Hope.  
You're correct: the universe wasn't born in a day,  
But I believe these home fries  
Are onto something.

I reach for the ketchup bottle as Chaucer.  
Your laugh reels me in—Shark Week.  
We could spend centuries in a minute  
To prove fun is a beautiful thing,  
Minus the particle physics.

It's time to go. I don't want to go.  
The East Wind plucks dandelion wishes.  
Our lips lock under a neon green banner  
& we flicker w/ crickets  
A New Frontier.

## ONCE UPON A TIME IN A KITCHENETTE

The Poet Darkling

                    Their mother  
sells snippets  
                    of sunshine  
to lonely old men whose wives  
think they're happy.

                    The manager  
takes food stamps  
or ... whatever...  
                    (let's say)  
"kisses"  
he can con  
from mom  
                    each week.

Garish drapes  
are kept  
                    drawn against  
dark  
                    and  
                    day  
                    and  
                    the prying eyes  
of  
                    neighbors.

Bent spoons burnt black  
                    on the  
bottom  
serve cereal  
                    to  
children starving  
                    for love.

The children  
sometimes  
                    race roaches  
and  
                    see rainbows in  
window cracks  
and  
mother's smile. The



## MESSAGES

Mary Papham

“By the way,” he says, “I’ve got a message for you from my sister.”

I angle my glass in my hand, suddenly finding interest in the traces of whiskey slipping around the bottom. “Oh?”

“Mm.” William lifts his own glass, draining what little is left. “I think she’s a bit put out that you haven’t come to see her yet, Charlie.”

“I’ve been busy.”

He smirks. “Don’t think we’ve forgotten. Still, you can’t blame her. How long’s it been since you left St. Agatha’s? If we’d known it would take a murder to bring you back, maybe we would have killed someone sooner.”

Catching the sidelong look I send him, he throws up his hands. “*Sorry*. It’s just that everyone has been so on edge lately, and I for one am sick and tired of all the tension.” He flags down the barman for another shot.

“Eight years,” I hear myself say. “It’s been eight years since I left.”

“So let me get this straight,” he says. I turn a little more towards him. “After eight years, Scotland Yard realizes that they have made a grave error in hiring DC Charles Langley and decide to sweep their mistake under the rug by sending him back to little, out-of-the-way St. Agatha’s?”

I smile despite myself. “Something like that.”

He takes a drink, shaking his head slowly until his throat is clear. “Well, for my own sake, I’m glad to see you, but for your sake, I’m sorry you got assigned to this piddling excuse for a case.”

“Actually, I volunteered.” I catch the barman’s eye and, at my nod, he refills my glass. “Although I probably would have received the assignment regardless because of my connections here. And this case is hardly ‘piddling.’ Bancroft was an important man, and the case has the local constabulary positively baffled.”

“If that’s all it takes to get Scotland Yard’s finest sent our way, they might as well relocate you here permanently.” He’s smirking again—although, truth be told, I think he was born with a smug look on his face, and he’ll probably die with one on it, too. His sister would agree.

“By the way—you were saying—Wyn’s message?” I glance over at him.

“Mm. Yes. She was sorry to miss your arrival the other day; she was in Brighton. Caroline Caldwell—Abbott now—just had her first. A little girl, Wyn said. I don’t remember all the fine details, but you can be sure Wyn told me all of them. She’s become quite the gossip of late. Sticking her nose in where it doesn’t belong. Since the murder, I told her she’d better start taking care. If she says the wrong thing to the wrong person—well. Who knows what could happen? She’d have no one to blame but herself.”

Despite the fiery liquor in my hand, a shiver seizes my spine. I take a drink, hoping the burn will fortify me against the chill. “Or, you know, the murderer.” I drain my glass.

“What? Oh, yes, of course.” He pauses. Now he’s the one turning his tumbler, long since emptied, over in his hand. “You know, I’m glad you’ve come, but don’t you think your being here—Scotland Yard sending you—well, don’t you wonder what kind of message that will send the murderer?”

“If he’s still around, that is. If he’s smart, he’ll be long gone.”

“If he’s really smart, he wouldn’t need to be.” He sets his glass down on the bar and pushes it away. “Besides, if anyone had come and gone, we’d know it. St. Agatha’s telephone line isn’t that long.”

“Well, if my presence does anything, hopefully it will make him scared and stupid or cocky and careless. I can work with either.”

A silence falls between us. In absence of my voice, my mind begins to talk, but its thoughts are muddied. I had told myself I wouldn’t let William buy me a drink—but the day was over, and it had been so long since...

Details of the case float as debris upon the surface: Arthur Bancroft, found dead in his wingback chair by his five-year-old granddaughter, stabbed—in a poor attempt to hide the fact he’d been poisoned. Everyone in the household, anyone with a clear motive, had an alibi, twice checked and cross-checked.

I close my eyes. In most of the cases I come across, the answer is simple—the culprit, obvious. But this is like something out a Sherlock Holmes story. How tenuous will the connection between victim and culprit be? What small, seemingly insignificant clue will lead me to it and set this whole tangled mess unraveling?

We used to play at Sherlock Holmes as children—Wyn and William and I. Wyn was my Dr. Watson, and William our Moriarty. He would hide things, and we would track them down, examining the mud on his boots, the leaves in his hair, his prints in the dirt. With each and every “case,” we got better, and so did he. I just took it one step further, leaving St. Agatha’s—leaving them—to pursue my calling and career.

Wyn. “William, you said Wyn had a message for me. Or was that it—what you said before?”

“Oh, good heavens, I’m sorry, old chap. Yes—she told me to tell you she was sorry to have missed your arrival—should have liked to have been here to greet you. She was miffed that you hadn’t come to see her—looked forward to seeing you. Said once this all dies down—sorry, once the case is closed—that you should come by for tea so you can catch up.”

He pauses. I stare. “Is that all?”

“Of course not. You know Wyn.” That smirk again. “She wanted me to tell you she only wishes you had come back under better circumstances—that we could go back to the days when all of this was just pretend. Remember how we used to make up mysteries to solve? You were a regular old Sherlock Holmes back then. I hope you can pull it off now. Anyway, she wishes we could go back to when it was all pretend, and her dolls were the only casualties, and she wishes ‘that our last case

had stayed our last, in the past’—that bit is word for word; I had to repeat it to prove I’d remember it all.”

I had forgotten about the dolls. As our cases became more involved, the stakes became higher, accordingly: William began hiding his sister’s dolls. We always found them, so that wasn’t a problem—until it was. Our last case was our last because when we unearthed Wyn’s doll, she wasn’t buried in a box like the others, but right in the earth—bloody dress and all.

It was only chicken’s blood, but it upset Wyn—and, although I didn’t admit it at the time, it shook me, too—so their mother put a stop to our game. William tried to convince us to continue in secret, but Wyn’s heart was no longer in it. Neither was mine.

“I say, Charlie,” William says. “Fair warning for when you do go see her, she’s not the same girl she was eight years ago. Hell, she’s not the same girl she was a week ago. This murder has really rattled her. Has rattled us all,” he amends.

William had apologized at the time, and Wyn had never mentioned it again. It was a long time before she would even talk about the game, and then, never about our final case. And when I told her I was leaving? “I want to help real people, Wyn,” I had said. “Not just dolls.” It was the only time I ever thought twice about going, simply because I hadn’t thought twice before speaking. In the space of a word, gone were her passionate pleas, replaced with cold silence. Her message was clear then. Can eight years really have been enough to soften her memory? I can’t see how.

But suddenly, I do see: Wyn has a message for me.

“Well,” I manage to say, slowly, as I stand, rooting in my coat pocket for change, “hopefully this case will be over soon and I’ll get around to seeing her in person. Then you won’t have to be the messenger.”

William grins. “Well, I’ll take just about any excuse to see you again, old chap—just about, mind you. You know, she was most insistent that I remember everything. You don’t suppose I’ve missed something, do you? Oh, how would you know?” He laughs, and I swear I can hear his smirk in it.

I force myself to smile, even going so far as to chuckle for good measure as I set a crumpled note on the bar. “What other message could there be?”

## PUDDLES AND BODIES

The Poet Darkling

Flies, fat and black,  
in a swarm  
reminiscent of Amityville,  
gather in the window  
in want of a view—  
as flies are wont to do—  
but the view evades them.

In its stead  
lie low-hanging clouds,  
fat and black,  
reminiscent of judgement  
and a flooding of Earth.

They press against the pane,  
each on their side,  
seeing the other,  
fat and black,  
wanting in,  
not understanding why  
they cannot overcome  
that which they cannot see . . .

the flies buzz,  
the clouds burst,  
the room is hot and close,  
so is the earth;  
the rain comes down in torrents,  
the flies drop as flies are wont to do  
and the sun bursts through  
to dry up both puddles and bodies.

## CRUCIBLE

Paul Harmon

The heat of the day plays tricks on me.  
Distant streets shimmer,  
Water materializes to quench my thirst  
Until I get closer  
To puddles, now  
Disappointing mirages.

The heat calls forth the trials  
Of a child  
I was long ago.  
Foolishly innocent, starry-eyed  
First tasting freedom,  
But the first taste turns sour, then ashen.

You see,

The heat between us played tricks on me too.  
Our hearts shimmered  
And you materialized to quench my soul's thirst  
Until I got closer  
To you, then  
A devastating mirage.

Self and strength and understanding materialized.  
Rose-tinted lenses shattered by  
Enlightening mirages.

## LOVE LETTER, 1942

Mary Paplham

*My love*, you say,  
but not to me,  
softly at first—  
in the slight tilt of your hand,  
in a slow regard for each word,  
mouthed and set down with a smile  
—more passionately later,  
in the speed of your pen  
in the outpouring of your soul  
outspoken  
*with love*.

You hold me  
at once familiar—  
caressing my face with soft fingertips  
bathing me in citrus and violets  
in joys and hopes  
—at once uncertain,  
fingers trembling  
in doubt and fear  
washing me in your tears as they fall.

\*

*My love*, I say,  
though not aloud,  
but I know you hear me—  
above the gunshots and bomb blasts  
above the screams and shatters  
the bleeding and the dying—  
because I speak with another voice  
that carries—I carry—across oceans  
to you.

You hold me  
close at first—  
firmly, as though afraid you'll lose me,  
tenderly, as though afraid you'll break me—  
then bring me closer—  
breathing in citrus and violets  
breathing out gunpowder smoke and decay  
—and hold me closest

as we lie together, sleeping  
dirt-smudged  
to tear-stained cheek.

\*

*My love*, you think,  
but not of me,  
when we meet again—  
when you stumble across me,  
catching sight of my face  
under the brim of a pillbox or homburg  
looking just as you remember  
under a lifetime  
of hair ribbons and neckties  
—when we read one another  
and find  
that while *my love* has faded  
yours deepened with time.

You hold me  
gingerly, at arm's length—  
as though I will turn to dust  
between your fingers  
as though, after all this time,  
I will break, and you will lose me, too  
—and slowly draw me closer  
to smooth from my cheeks  
years of wrinkles and creases,  
to wipe from my face  
months of dirt and tears,  
to smell on my skin  
nights of citrus and gunpowder.

—and when you hold me,  
my love, suddenly  
an ocean apart  
doesn't seem so far  
after all.

## MOUNTAINS

Dyllan Squires

There is a range of mountains  
Cut from ice, exuding a brumal mist  
They are dark and they are treacherous  
A jagged silhouette against an unforgiving sky

Before the mountains lies an ocean  
Ebbing and flowing with warmer waters—  
The salty air is cool, but it seems a comfort  
May drift aloft from over the waves

It is almost inviting, is it not?  
To feel the warmth that rises with the gentle ripples?  
As though one might set sail along with them  
And find the waves good company?

Beyond the ocean and beyond the mountains  
There lies a pit as dark as *Ginnungagap* of myth  
To gaze into it is to question whether flame or frigid icicle  
Could ever exist there . . .

Indeed, there is a fire—an affectionate warmth  
Hidden deep within the darkness beyond the ice  
The fire's light is bright as a lover's eyes  
And it burns at the heart of the matter

The flame is true warmth, should you seek it sincerely  
A steady companion on a long, cold night  
And a genuine friend, and bringer of light

But do be careful—a fire is a fire.

And to get to the fire, you've still got to cross the ocean  
And make it through the mountains.

## CARRYING THE FIRE: FACING THE ABSURD IN *THE ROAD*

Jamie Simpher

Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* presents a world in which there is no hope left. Most of humanity is dead. The sun does not shine. Even the ocean is colorless and gray. The world's food supply is dwindling, and in the end, all roads lead to death. But in spite of their inevitable demise, the man and the boy focus on the road. Against all reason, they choose to continue living. This choice is the crux of existential philosophy, and is addressed by Albert Camus in "The Myth of Sisyphus," in which he describes "the absurd": a condition "born of this confrontation between man's call [for reason] and the irrational silence of the world" (Camus 13). The inevitability of death leaves no room for hope and renders life meaningless, but the choice to face the absurd makes it a life better lived.

The man's cough appears early in the story and has the man "bent with his hands on his knees, coughing . . . On the gray snow [there is] a fine mist of blood" (McCarthy 30). When the boy asks if they are going to die, the man tells him, "Sometime. Not now" (10). Still, the man's ever-worsening cough reminds the reader that death is certain, and "through the death-like lighting of our destiny, pointlessness becomes visible" (Camus 11). By virtue of their journey, the man and the boy refute this pointlessness, but other characters surrender to it. The old man they come across thinks that "things will be better when everybody's gone" (McCarthy 172). This is a statement of ultimate nihilism: because everyone will eventually die, there is no reason to live. Before she died, the boy's mother called them "the walking dead" because it is only a matter of time (55). Soon the man can no longer hide from his son that his cough is killing him. "Death emerges as the only reality" (Camus 22).

There is no hope. "When your dreams are of some world that never was or of some world that never will be and you are happy again then you will have given up" (McCarthy 189). It is not a fatalistic attitude, merely a realistic one. If the boy begins to live in a world of beautiful dreams, he will cease to live in their reality. "The deadly *esquive*<sup>1</sup> . . . is hope. Either hoping to live another life . . . or cheating as done by others who live not for life itself but rather for some greater idea that transcends it, exalts it, gives it a meaning, and betrays it" (Camus 7). They must live in their reality or perish. The boy's mother "[doesn't] dream at all" and her "only hope is for eternal nothingness and [she hopes] it with all her heart" (McCarthy 57). They will perish regardless, but "the absurd enlightens one fact: there is no tomorrow" (Camus 23).

Life is inherently meaningless, which brings up the question of suicide, represented by the gun the man carries with him. This is the whole concept of the absurd: "This world in itself is not unreasonable . . . But what is absurd is the confrontation of this irrational and of the wild inward desire of clarity whose call echoes in the human heart" (12). The boy's mother demands meaning from life, believing that though the man "[talks] about taking a stand . . . there is no stand to take" (McCarthy 57). When the man begs her not to leave their son, she replies only that she "[doesn't] care. It's meaningless" (56). For her, the meaninglessness of life necessitates ending it.

---

<sup>1</sup>French for "dodge"

“Suicide . . . is acceptance to its extreme limit . . . Suicide is a solution to the absurd” (Camus 20). The gun they carry is their solution and their escape.

In fact, the mother “would take [the boy] with her if it weren’t for [the man]” because “it’s the right thing to do” (McCarthy 56). While the man resists the nihilism to which she has surrendered, he recognizes the death as a viable solution. “To die voluntarily supposes that one has recognized, even instinctively . . . the absence of any profound reason for living . . . and the pointlessness of suffering” (Camus 5). The man keeps the pistol to set the boy free if he can no longer protect him. When they hear voices, the man gives his son the gun and tells him that “if they find [him, he is] going to have to . . . put it in [his] mouth and point it up [and] do it quick and hard” (McCarthy 113). Though the man wants to protect the boy from death, it is more important to protect the boy from suffering. As his wife said before her suicide, the man “won’t survive for [himself]”; only for the boy (57). When the “absurd man thus catches sight of a . . . universe where nothing is possible but everything is given . . . He can then decide whether to accept such a universe and draw from it his strength, his refusal to hope, and the obstinately enduring evidence of a life without consolation” (Camus 24). The mother cannot accept this universe, but the man decides that he must. He obstinately endures life without consolation.

Therefore, although there is no meaning in the world, and although his wife accepted this and solved it by killing herself, the man chooses to find meaning. “Living is to keep the absurd alive. To keep it alive is above all to face it” (20). He must constantly live with the fact that there is no reason to live. So he lives for his son. The choice to live is represented by the road; though the man “[knows] he [is] placing hopes where he [has] no reason to,” he hopes it will be brighter at the coast (McCarthy 213). They are not surprised when the ocean is as gray and desolate as the rest of the world; it is disappointing, but it was the journey that was important. “It [was] not aspiration, for it [was] devoid of hope. This revolt is but the certainty of a crushing fate without the resignation that ought to go with it” (Camus 20). Though all roads lead to a gray place in the end, they find it important to take a road.

“There is only one truly serious philosophical problem: suicide. To judge whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy” (4). The man and the boy have judged life to be worth living, regardless of whether it holds meaning. “It was previously a matter of finding out whether or not life had to have a meaning to be lived. It now appears, on the contrary, that it will be lived all the better if it has no meaning” (19). In the absence of a clear reason for their lives, they are free to choose their own reason.

For the man, the boy is “a god” (McCarthy 172). He is what he believes in and why he chooses to live. The boy, born into a pointless world, struggles with what life means. Even the man admits he “[does not] know what [the boy] believes in” (174). He cannot explain why the boy wants so badly to help the old man, the broken people trapped in the basement, the dog, or the little boy he may or may not have seen. Born into a world in which morals are antiquated, he is still possessed of an innate need to trust others and be kind. More so than the man, the boy is trapped in a wrestling match with the absurd. “. . . This wrestling match with the absurd implies a total absence of hope . . . a constant refusal . . . and a conscious dissatisfaction” (Camus 15). His obsession with finding the other “good guys”—or at least finding the good in the other guys—is what drives him (McCarthy 137). He chooses to believe in humanity. “If the absurd cancels all possibilities of eternal freedom, on the one hand, it gives back and intensifies my freedom of action. The privation

of hope and future means an increase in man's openness to the world" (Camus 22). The boy freely chooses to believe in something, and therein finds meaning.

He is "carrying the fire" (McCarthy 283). The man and the boy "do not know whether this world has a meaning that transcends it. But [they] know that [they] do not know that meaning and that it is impossible . . . to know it" (Camus 17). To carry the fire is to find meaning despite the pointlessness of their world, and therefore choose to survive. "Through the mere activity of conscience, [they] change into a rule of life what was an invitation to death—and [they] refuse suicide" (28).

The lives of the man and the boy in a post-apocalyptic world are symbolic for our own. Though our sun still shines, the road ends in death for all of us, and it is inescapable. We all struggle with the absurd, trying to find meaning in our lives which have none. We must choose to live, choose to focus not on the gun but on the road. We must carry the fire.

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## THE LAUNDROMAT

Jesse Fowler

### *I*

I light up a cigarette  
to drink it down before the wind  
storm like you do into the living room  
every Sunday while I watch the game  
of our life begin to end too soon.

### *II*

I try to pick up my  
self from upon the floor  
bored of our future together.

You don't  
seem to care –  
just glare with that red flare  
in those green eyes  
like the fallen angel you've become  
fond of.

### *III*

*Let the fire burn*  
she reminds me  
that it can birth and  
destroy my life now a gesture  
trying to make you smile.

Still, I lie  
on the couch to  
brave the blaze.

Let the fire burn.

*IV*

The clerk at the laundromat wonders why  
I walked away without my 300 pesos  
in change.

He tells his friend, thinking I can't  
understand:

*No nos comprende. Él es americano.*

But what he doesn't know is that  
I stayed up all night, wondering why  
she doesn't love me anymore.

*Gracias,*  
and I go on my way –

## 11.16.2017: THE DAY I REALIZED HOW MUCH I'D MISS UNIVERSITY

Nikolle Dixon

Sunlight glares upon the dying grass,  
the heat baking any creature trying its luck.  
Paws turn red as they seem to sizzle against the concrete,  
eagerly returning to the arms of their human.  
The trees try to help, growing taller and  
sturdier, quaking in the winds of the approaching storm.

It is during these instances that I emerge,  
body instantly dampening with sweat,  
my once tight bun flops dangerously on my head,  
carrying the evidence of today's trials in a light blue bag,  
zipped and locked—for protection.  
Protection from the elements and from myself,  
I carry the books of noble ideas and  
the tales of women stronger than I.  
Those who fight racism, assault, and injustice.  
I carry the pages and learn from their actions.

Through the branches, a small breeze of scented  
elm graces the presence of those around.  
Head tilted up, sunlight flickers through the leaves,  
while the squirrels rush by; the birds chirp.  
The smell of rain is drawing closer, and  
even I  
am able to witness the true beauty of this place.

And, of course, I went back to class  
the next morning. Like you,  
like all the others, like the professors who invite us to their offices  
to offer us bubble tea and exotic snacks.  
Like the professors who prey on unsuspecting girls,  
like you, I returned to my seat—but now there was  
a difference. A new light  
had emerged from the leaves of the elm  
and the cedar and it  
consumed my thoughts as I tried to focus on what  
she was saying.  
Was is Bradford? Bradstreet?  
*Upon the burning of Our House*—Bradstreet!  
Good ole Anne... her house is gone and she's  
calm enough to write a poem.

The morning light is trying to breach  
the barriers created by the still-brewing storm clouds—  
large, rolling, and black.  
Today, there will be no light,  
but still, my mind returns to that squirrel  
from yesterday, rushing up and down the trees.  
I doodle more magical supplies on my notes, careful  
to leave the words visible.  
Tonight, I'll recopy them.

Her words were winding down, as the  
wind was winding up. The leaves forcibly detaching,  
and all eyes flickering to the windows—they rattle  
as if they can feel the multiple stares.  
Books are closed and voices chatter, soon silenced  
by the rumblings of the storm.  
My heart thunders in my chest, knowing the Eye is  
growing closer.

I wonder how it'll feel in a month,  
when I am gone. I stare out the glass door  
as God's fury is unleashed.  
Graduation is in 27 days,  
but class starts in 10.  
As the pellets drench my skin, I notice  
the squirrels are gone.

## TREES IN THE WIND

by Carol Lee Saffioti-Hughes

a thousand  
no, thousands—  
pencil rows  
planted by city men  
plucked from the soup lines:  
escaped  
to work's rustic progress  
carved their initials  
as they hoisted park shelters  
planted seedlings  
in the stripped forest floor  
ghosts of old growth  
murmuring in the winds.

You can drive forest roads now  
looking down the comb-tine rows—  
God doesn't plant straight lines—  
when these trees are wind-whipped  
matchsticks snapping  
they sway with their doom.

A 60-footer cracked in the storm last night  
fell across the shed and Jon boat:  
sooner or later  
this house too will cave.

## WEST COAST SWING

Andrew Maust

Your fingers nest in my hand  
As I guide you along  
Every blunder forgiven  
As I step on your feet  
And forget the beat  
Back and forth  
Across the plank

I never was good at dancing  
But I love the way  
It makes my heart  
Face your heart  
As we move together  
Back and forth  
Across the plank

**THE GREEN GIRDLE:  
THE KNOT BETWEEN GAWAIN AND THE IDEALS OF THE PENTANGLE**

Mary Foley

In Pearl Poet's *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the green girdle has caused great strife between Gawain and the idealist expectations of the pentangle. The girdle, a gift from Lady Bertilak, which Gawain conceals from the final ritualistic exchange, has numerous speculative properties, including sexualization, reception of penance, and humanity's impractical desire to be perfect. In a surface reading of the receiving and concealing of the green girdle, the reader is able to witness deceit and cowardice, qualities that are against chivalric code. Yet, does this acceptance have a greater and more profound meaning?

In Albert Friedman's, John Burrow's, and Geraldine Heng's works, Gawain's intent is examined much more closely. In each argument, the sole promise that the green girdle grants invincibility is questioned: Has Gawain finally indulged in Bertilak's wife's offer for a sexual relationship? (Friedman) Was Gawain aware that the acceptance of the green girdle would invalidate his absolution? (Burrow) Are both these elements intertwined? (Heng) These questions all lead to the central point of my argument: that the pentangle is intended for idealists and that application in real world circumstances is nearly impossible. Gawain's noble behavior is an attempt at achieving divineness, but due to human nature, he fails, with many speculated reasons.

Many of the endeavors Gawain faces in this poem require him to honor chivalric code, as inscribed on his shield: "Therefore [the pentangle] suits this knight and his shining arms, for always faithful in five ways, and five times in each case, Gawain was reputed as virtuous, like refined gold, Devoid of all vice, and with all courtly virtues adorned" (lines 631-35). The expectation is for him to live like Jesus Christ, a divine figure that surpasses all other beings in existence. Free will and the imperfection of humanity, however, make it very difficult to fulfill the requirements of the pentangle in every way. Despite Gawain's best efforts on his trek to the Green Knight's chapel, in Bertilak's castle, and in resisting engaging in a romantic relationship with Bertilak's wife, he is unable to resist the chance of invincibility promised by the acceptance of Bertilak's wife's green girdle. In taking the girdle and withholding it from Bertilak's exchange, "the endless knot [of the pentangle] has been superseded by the knot of green silk," (Friedman 301) putting his faith in fabric before his faith in God, which is a serious offense.

As a humble servant to Arthur's court, Gawain recognizes his wrongdoing, even before the final exchange takes place. Gawain seeks out absolution by a priest, where "he confessed himself honestly and admitted his sins, both the great and the small, and forgiveness begged, [. . .] and the priest absolved him completely, and made him as clean as if the Judgment were appointed for the next day" (lines 1877-82). Though it is not directly stated, since the sacred confidentiality of a confession should never be revealed, it heavily implies that, prior to meeting his fate, Gawain must express what is on his chest, especially what is tied under his garments. Perhaps he hopes that this confession will excuse him from exchanging honestly with Bertilak and enable the unknown and magnificent power of the green girdle. Yet, after surpassing the surface-level elements, scholars like Friedman, Burrow, and Heng speculate the green girdle's meaning, the intent in Gawain's acceptance, and the following consequence of his deceit and cowardice.

According to Albert Friedman, author of “Gawain’s Girdle as Traditional Symbol,” the pentangle and the green girdle are parallels of one another. They are like interwoven pieces of fabric; the pentangle is represented as a “diagram [of] Gawain’s virtuous perfection” (Friedman 301) while the green girdle represents the knot that disrupts such virtue. Throughout his article, Friedman questions whether the acceptance of the green girdle was not only out of the promise of invincibility, but was also a representation that Bertilak’s wife had successfully seduced Gawain. The green girdle has been described as a “love token” or a “sexual symbol . . . [or] trophy” (302), but Friedman appears to be hesitant to accept this concept; he believes that the term *girdle* was mistranslated. Friedman clarifies that the girdle should not be confused for a “modern undergarment”; rather it is “a belt worn about the waist,” (302) desexualizing the acceptance of the girdle.

Despite this clarification of the term *girdle*, I believe that, though it is not stated explicitly that Gawain engaged in any sort of infidelity, accepting the girdle from a woman who previously tempted him in a sexual fashion makes it appear that there was some interest there. In accepting a gift from the temptress, he has left the ideals of the pentangle behind, pursuing further his own human nature. The knot is now in place, only to be tightened when Gawain withholds the girdle from Bertilak in the final exchange. Of course, Bertilak will receive his payment in full, for “everything [he has] ever promised [Gawain, he] shall readily give” (line 1970). The slight cut on the neck Gawain receives from the Green Knight, who was disguised as Bertilak the whole time, fulfills the obligations of the exchange; in place of the green girdle, Gawain indefinitely wears the cut outside his dress as a penance for his deceit.

Speaking of penance and absolution, John Burrow’s article, “The Two Confession Scenes in ‘Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,’” addresses the scene prior to the final exchange, where Gawain seeks a priest for confession. Burrow believes that this confession, in which Gawain reveals his sins, big and small, is invalid, since he fails to give the green girdle to Bertilak in the exchange. It is important to note that this confession comes before he even seeks Bertilak for the final exchange of gifts. So, in the eyes of Burrow, “he goes to confession, rather than to Mass, because he realizes that he has sinned in agreeing to conceal the gift of the girdle from Bertilak, against his promise; but, though, presumably, he confesses this, he neither makes restitution by returning the girdle nor resolves to sin no more” (75).

The invalidation is due to Gawain’s unwillingness to surrender the girdle as a form of penance for his sin of falling into temptation. The acceptance of the girdle, regardless of whether it was as “a magical prop” (Friedman 301) or a “love token,” and the concealment of it is the sin. The confession is more of a show than an act of true penance, Burrow believes, since there is no remorseful following action of exchanging the girdle to Bertilak. The balance is only restored through Gawain’s altercation with the Green Knight/Bertilak. Burrow interprets this scene as an informal form of confession, with the Green Knight as the confessor and the three mock blows as “contrition, confession, and satisfaction” (75), the final being the gentle strike to the neck.

Geraldine Heng’s article, “Feminine Knots,” combines the ideas extracted from Friedman and Burrow, stating that Gawain gave into the erotic temptation of Bertilak’s wife and that the true penance for his actions is the nick by the Green Knight. She states, “the Lady marks Gawain with her personal sign [. . .] or sexualized signifier, which is later disseminated throughout the Arthurian court—as well as with a small neck wound, a token cut that leaves a scar” (Heng 501). Bertilak’s

wife leaves her mark on Gawain, both sexually—through the green girdle—and physically—through the scar on his neck he receives as a result.

Gawain returns to Arthur with his head between his knees, forlorn about his failure, and tells Arthur the truth: “his belt caused the scar that I bear on my neck. This is the injury and damage that I have suffered for the cowardice and covetousness that seized me there. This is the token of the dishonesty I was caught committing, and now I must wear it as long as I live” (lines 2505-10). Forever Gawain will remember his cowardice, and the citizens of King Arthur’s court will, too; they copy his dress with green girdles of their own, a symbol of forgiveness without forgetting.

The green girdle is an important symbol throughout Pearl Poet’s *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and after much speculation, I believe that Gawain expresses the dilemma of all man: indulging in sexual temptation and asking for penance afterward. I do not think that these two concepts are meant to be separated, since that intent leads to the action, which then leads to the confession. Satisfying the many requirements of the pentangle is an idealistic pursuit that cannot be ventured by man. Gawain’s journey appears to be a criticism of the pentangle and its many stipulations, since, despite his nobility through much of the poem, he falls short with the final encounter with both Bertilaks. The green girdle is the knot that halts Gawain’s pursuit of perfection through the pentangle. The only means of redemption, however, is to learn from this experience, wear the green girdle, and recognize that “a man may hide his misdeed, but never erase it” (line 2511).

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## **SORRY**

Dyllan Squires

I'm sorry for all the times I didn't believe in you —  
For every time I let you quit before you even had a chance to try,  
For every time I let you run away  
Before you ever found out whether you could cross the finish line

I'm sorry I let you throw in towels  
And write "forfeit" in spaces reserved for "victory,"  
I'm sorry I let you close your wings  
And cling to things you knew would hurt you  
Rather than pushing you to take flight  
And go after the things that could have been better

I'm sorry I let fear control you—  
I didn't know for sure what could have been  
Because we never really do know

But then again,  
We always know, don't we?

We always know when it isn't right on the inside  
So I'm looking inside and saying "I'm sorry" to you

Life is too short to give up on oneself  
Let's do better this time.

## FINGERWING

Carol Lee Saffioti-Hughes

This is a story about a bat—  
or, perhaps her story about me.  
I would be no friend to a colony—  
such the name for their  
gatherings for survival.  
No fling, or flailing formation  
of many wings  
in the dark.  
Just two outstretched wings.

I walked into her life  
when she was trapped  
in a madness of fluorescence and concrete  
her high-pitched screeches  
somehow pinging only me.  
Fingerwing, she said—  
her name.

There were things flying in the air  
jackets, books, soda cups  
the crowd whipping  
their collectively Grimm dreams  
into a bad black-and-white flick:  
Stoker and Lugosi, the maestros  
in the cacophony of their brains  
but she  
was failing  
striking glass and stone  
spiraling down  
surrendering hope of escape.

I simply told everyone:  
Leave.  
My hand lifted puppet-like  
pulled by some shared sense  
of ancient anatomy of flight  
Her finger-wings beckoning mine.

I walked the stone floor  
arm raised, my hand widespreading,  
let her wingbeat and breathing calm  
to mine.

Air could no longer carry her.  
She fell.

Not looking back, I heard  
some desperate scrabbling  
behind me.  
Ground-bound she bore no magic:  
more vulnerable than a mouse.

Still she followed.  
We reached the glass walls that bound her.

Failing, she gasped  
as she crossed the opened door.  
Out  
under the sidewalk lamp  
she enfolded her force.  
And then  
she flew.

## TO THE VULTURE

Andrew Maust

Your Quasimodo shoulders  
Tower over your twisted neck  
As you limp toward a bloody corpse  
Your wrinkled and bare head  
Dips into exposed ribs  
Tearing rotten flesh  
Soft and bloated in the sun

Eyes avert their gaze  
And noses wrinkle at your filth  
At your mere sight people shudder  
And fear your presence as an ill omen

Despite universal revolt  
You dutifully eat diseased bodies  
That we hardly dare touch

But at a distance you, with your outstretched wings  
Might be mistaken for a noble eagle  
As we remember what is good is not always  
What is beautiful

## STARS IN D DARK

C.s. Ambrose Lo Baido

D stars in D dark float like mined marines  
    Bouncing off superposition ideas.  
    They bristle on D edge of a furious  
    Hope 4 love 2 conquer her needs.  
Call all odds & alert D music gods,  
    It's time 2 pay attention 2 D  
    Violence of humanity.  
D pronoun 4 D future is past.  
    What's past is D map of R universe now.  
    Someone is glaring @ R sun  
    Somewhere & witnessing R life  
Lived a billion years ago. Y, hello!  
    Do U see R star in D dark glow  
    Like an atomic scar stretched  
    Across a roadmap of psychosomatic ilk?  
It defines war as a beautiful thing,  
    Or D future as a true  
    Instrument of D past!

## DNA

C.s. Ambrose Lo Baido

DNA spelled backwards is &.  
& the saints go marching on.  
& the world's an isotope.  
& the powers that B, just B.

DNA is the color of IOU.  
DNA put the F U in fun.  
DNA is the code of relevant crossroads.  
What R we 2 do 4 fun?

Radar spelled backwards is radar.  
Radar spelled forwards is radar,  
Like a rendezvous w/ déjà vu.  
Have we been here before?

A drink away from falling in love?  
A kiss away from absolution?  
*"I need you 2 B w/ me."*  
Quote serendipity.

2 B is written in the stars.  
2 B has been written in journals.  
2 B has been practiced in law.  
2 B in any language is 2 B.

DNA spelled backwards is &.  
The saints go marching on.  
The world's a battle of egos.  
The scars of R past attract each other.

& the powers that B, just B.

## SOME WILL FALL IN LOVE WITH LIFE AND DRINK IT FROM A FOUNTAIN

Richard Henkle

The sun hung low over the hills that ringed the bay as he settled into a vinyl beach chair. The sky was clear, save for a few puffy clouds in complementary shades of orange, pink, and purple near the horizon. Once seated, he took off his polo shirt and draped it over the back of his chair. Even at dusk, it was still quite warm out, and the thirty-meter walk to the edge of the sand had brought a hint of perspiration to his brow. Fifteen minutes, and the shirt would be too soaked in sweat for him to feel comfortable wearing it to dinner later in the evening.

His hair had more salt than pepper these days, but showed no signs of thinning. Life had been good to him, and now, with fewer years ahead than behind, he took increasing pleasure in the simple things around him—the contented coo of a child, birds chattering at each other outside his window, time with those he loved. He had planned this trip to the beach for just that reason. He was here to watch his family enjoy being family together.

The sun had heated the ground in front of his chair beyond a tolerable level, and he dug his feet into the sand in hopes of finding some relief. A couple inches down, the sand was damp and cool, and his excavation ceased. Now settled comfortably, he began to take in his surroundings.

To his left, a father was chasing his toddler around, encouraging him to kick a beach ball, the small boy giggling with each cheer from his dada. It brought a smile to the man's face as he recalled watching his own grandchildren teeter around chasing balls the same way. Now in their teens and twenties, several of them were running around on the beach playing soccer. The skill level varied widely, but that didn't seem to matter; the laughter, words of encouragement, and supportive slapping of palms gave clear indication they were enjoying the game.

A local strolled by, a tray of small plastic cups of warm ceviche supported deftly on her shoulder. The idea of the raw fish pickled in lime juice appealed to him, but not from a beach vendor. These cups had been sitting out in the sun much too long for him to consider purchasing the snack. Perhaps for dinner, he thought as he smiled apologetically, shook his head, and waved the woman away.

Behind him, a portable stereo pumped out Latin dance music for a trio of sunbathers in their early twenties. The song wasn't loud or obscene (at least from what he could tell), but he wished it wasn't there. The wind in the palm trees, the waves crashing into the shore created a much more pleasant soundtrack to his afternoon, and he turned his attention toward them instead.

Down near the water's edge, one of his great-grandsons, age four, rolled around in the nearly black sand, building small piles only to have them swept away by the incoming tide. Undaunted, he took a few steps to one side, plopped down, and built another pile. A wave, perhaps a foot high, crashed into the sand a few feet away, sending the boy tumbling through the mix of salt water, sand, and sea foam.

The boy's father, standing waist deep in the ocean, one of several shifting knots of conversation amongst cousins and their spouses, came running to help the boy up. The father brushed sand and tears from the boy's plump cheeks as the child threw his plastic shovel in frustration. Picking him up, the father soothed his son, found the shovel, and they sat down together to build the next

temporary castle. It was gone in five minutes, but no one cared. What was important was the time being spent together. The man loved watching it; the progeny loved making it.

Just beyond the shore, the water was peaceful, only small waves occasionally interrupting the gentle lapping against the beach. Twenty-five meters out, where several of the man's children—either by birth or their spouses—were standing, the sea looked like dark, smoky glass, periodically disturbed by the random jumping fish. He breathed deeply, taking the fresh salt air into his lungs. A faint smell of someone putting meat on a grill wafted over him, mixing with the scent of the sea.

His eldest grandson, thirty-four, walked up from behind the man and lowered himself into an adjacent beach chair. He extended an open bottle of Pepsi to his grandfather, who took it with a smile and a nod of appreciation, but said nothing. To their left, the sun completed its trek across the sky and disappeared behind the hill, the light on the bay fading from orange to rosy pink as the sun dipped farther below the horizon. Several silent minutes passed as the last red streaks of its reflection faded from the water, leaving only an ashy grey calm spreading out away from land.

The beach began to clear out. Small clusters of teens, parents with young children, and the occasional runner moved past the two chairs, all headed home for dinner. But the occupants did not notice. They sat serenely, savoring the panorama spread before them.

Finally, after taking a long, slow pull of his Pepsi, the patriarch spoke, his voice barely above a whisper. "A beautiful sunset. My family around me. If this isn't nice, I don't know what is."

His grandson nodded in agreement, but said nothing. Sometimes words aren't necessary to share a moment. They smiled at each other, sat back, and watched the bay disappear into the darkness of the evening.

## CONTRIBUTORS

(in alphabetical order)

**The Poet Darkling** earned her bachelor of arts in creative writing and English with a concentration in poetry and a minor in professional writing from Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU) in 2018, where she was also inducted into Sigma Tau Delta's Alpha Phi Beta chapter. She earned her master of arts in English and creative writing at SNHU a year later. The Poet Darkling has works published in various journals, most notably the *Penmen Review* and the *Scarlet Leaf Review*, and she is a member artist of Preserving a Picturesque America (PAPA). In addition to her humanitarian and environmental activist pursuits, the Poet Darkling currently collaborates with filmmakers, actors, musicians, and other poets to produce poetry video shorts for the independent film community.

**Nikolle Dixon** has been a part of Sigma Tau Delta since 2017. She is the current vice president of Alumni Epsilon and stays involved in the English community by visiting high schools to further their knowledge of Native American literature, publishing poetry and fiction, and speaking at conferences around the nation. Nikolle graduated from the University of Arkansas - Fort Smith with an associate of arts and a bachelor of arts in English with a minor in creative writing.

**Mary Foley, MEd**, is a certified high school English teacher, currently residing in Chelmsford, MA. During her undergraduate (*magna cum laude*) and graduate studies (*summa cum laude*) at the University of Massachusetts Lowell, she was treasurer and then president of her Sigma Tau Delta chapter, Alpha Theta Rho. She was published in the Sigma Tau Delta Eastern Region academic journal, *Mind Murals*, and has presented at two conferences: one hosted by her alma mater and the other Sigma Tau Delta's International Convention in 2017. She continues to remain active through membership in Alumni Epsilon, hoping to encourage the next generation of writers and readers to pursue their dreams, wherever they may take them.

**Jesse Fowler** has been a Sigma Tau Delta member since 2016. Fowler's poetry has been internationally published. Throughout the United States, he has presented and read his academic and creative works. Fowler is also a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer. As a Volunteer English Professor, he served at Universidad Tecnológica de Xicotepéc de Juárez in the State of Puebla, Mexico. There, he established and directed the university honors program, amongst other accomplishments. In 2017, Fowler received his bachelor of arts in English from Biola University in La Mirada, CA.

**Paul Harmon** has been teaching high school English for the past twenty years. He joined Sigma Tau Delta while an undergraduate at Framingham State University. He finalized his master's degree at Worcester State University and uses nearly all the classwork he did there in his classrooms, especially in his AP Literature course. He later joined Alumni Epsilon. He was a presenter at the 2019 Sigma Tau Delta International Convention.

After more than ten years working on Capitol Hill, **Richard Henkle** decided if he was going to be around people who acted like children, they should be children. To achieve this, he left the world of politics in 2014 to pursue his master of arts in literature and humanities from Marymount University, where he was an active member of the Alpha Kappa Gamma chapter of Sigma Tau Delta. Richard currently teaches middle and high school humanities classes (English, grammar, logic, history, and composition courses) at a private school in northern Virginia. He lives in Herndon, VA with his wife and two boys.

**C.s. Ambrose Lo Baido** has been a member of Sigma Tau Delta since 2016 and has performed original poetry at the 2017 Louisville, KY and 2018 Cincinnati, OH conventions. His recent batch of poems, *Mirror Canvas*, was selected as a 2019 finalist in the *Iowa Review* Poetry Contest. Lo Baido is the author of seven books of poetry, the latest being *Love & the Revenge Machine*. His works have appeared in the *Manatee* lit journal, *Four Ties Lit Review*, and elsewhere. Lo Baido earned his bachelor and master of arts in English and creative writing from Southern New Hampshire University and is currently working on his PhD in psychology from Grand Canyon University. He is a retail manager, educator, and writer from New Jersey who lives in Oklahoma.

**Andrew Maust** has been a member of Sigma Tau Delta since 2012 and has presented creative and critical works at four Sigma Tau Delta conferences. He completed his master of arts in English at McNeese State University in 2016. In 2017, Andrew began teaching English for Pennsylvania State University. His work has recently been published in the *Raven's Perch*, *MockingHeart Review*, and *Defenestration*.

**Mary Papham** is a writer, editor, and graphic designer from the greater Green Bay, WI area. She is a 2017 graduate of St. Norbert College, where she earned her bachelor of arts in English, emphasis in creative writing, and minored in communications and classical studies. She joined Sigma Tau Delta as a junior in the spring of 2016, has presented her work at convention every year since, and is a member of the Alumni Epsilon communications committee. Currently, while she prepares for a career move into publishing, Mary divides her time between two local libraries.

**Carol Lee Saffioti-Hughes, PhD**, professor emerita, English Department, University of Wisconsin-Parkside is a former member and former co-advisor of Tau Psi, the Sigma Tau Delta chapter at UW-Parkside. She is a graduate of the University of North Carolina and Princeton University, in English. Currently she is a member of the Root River Poets of Racine and Kenosha, WI and Spectrum School of the Arts in Racine, WI. She is also the former advisor for Sacred Circle, the Native student organization at UW-Parkside.

**Jamie Simpher** helped found the Alpha Tau Iota chapter of Sigma Tau Delta at the University of Iowa and presented at the 2014 Sigma Tau Delta International Convention before graduating in 2014 with a bachelor of arts in English and a bachelor of business administration in marketing. She currently works as a senior writer at an ad agency in St. Louis and frequently participates in creative challenges such as NaNoWriMo, the 3-Day Novel Contest, and the 48-Hour Film Project.

**Dyllan Squires** is a graduate of Lesley University and holds a bachelor of arts in English and drama. A Sigma Tau Delta member since 2017, Squires has long been drawn to literature and the arts for their ability to connect people and cultures across space and time. Today, Squires remains a lover of stories and an avid writer of poetry, drawing inspiration from classical and modern literature, life experience, music, comic books, and a variety of mythology. While Lesley and Sigma Tau Delta have had a profound impact, Squires also attributes their relative success as a human to several years spent at North Shore Community College prior to pursuing a four-year degree.

### **EDITOR**

**Rachel Skelton** joined Sigma Tau Delta in 2014. She became treasurer and then president of her chapter, Eta Mu, before graduating *summa cum laude* from William Woods University with a bachelor of arts in English and a bachelor of science in business management in 2017. She now works as a freelance editor, specializing in speculative fiction, for publishers and independent authors and is an active member of Sigma Tau Delta's Alumni Epsilon chapter. Currently residing in the Bootheel of Missouri, she spends her time with a perfectly respectable number of both books and cats.

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