Volume 01

poetry

Alex Samuel-Bethel, Amy Savciuc, Asher Ang, Cassandra Myers, Daniela Dampare, E. B. Sorensen, Garvey Hall-Maw, George Yonemori, Gwendolyn Sanchez Westaway, H.N. Liu, Jenny Cai, Kate Irwin, Manic, Natalia Postolka, Nnadi Samuel, Paige Lalonde, Rizwan Moonbow, Sarah-Jeanne Leclerc, S.V. Blackett, Syd I.

prose

Alexandra Groenwoldt, Ayasha Razzaq, Caelyn Corcione, Rachel Abraham

visual arts

Freya Bradimore, Lily Su, Kemmy Walker, Zere Abylgazina

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Volume 01

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APORIA

noun

a state of doubt or irresolution in which contradicting truths, meanings, or possibilies remain unresolved.

Letter from the Editor

Starting a literary journal begins with a vision, a passion, and a great deal of stubborn determination, and I could not be more excited to share this inaugural supplement.

Aporia Volume 01 is an invitation to dwell in contradiction: to question what we inherit, what we remember, what we love, and what we lose. To celebrate aporia in the liminal spaces it inhabits.

The works gathered here are fragments of youth experience that meditate on fracture and formation. They move across bridges between language and culture, war and grief, intimacy and estrangement. They are the breaking and the healing.

Within these pages, we consider what it means to hold on to ourselves as time moves forward. Memory is ephemeral because it changes with us, shaped by our shifting perceptions of the world and of who we have become within it. Yet memory endures because we can capture it: in literature, in art.

Celebrate *Aporia* not in search of a singular truth, but in appreciation of the unresolved —and to find, within that uncertainty, the deepest form of becoming.

Harmony Chen
Editor-in-Chief

Contents

6 **Thinking About War When I Should Be Thinking About Jobs** by Manic
7 **A Mixed Girl's Nightmare** by Syd I.
8 **Gaze of a Salamander** by S.V. Blackett
10 **555** by Amy Savciuc
12 **broken** by Kemmy Walker
13 **Overgrown** by Daniela Dampare
14 **GHOST TEXTS FROM HUMMINGBIRDS** by Cassandra Myers
16 **I Miss the Monkeys Not the Circus** by Asher Ang
18 **To throw a Baby out with the Bath Water** by Nnadi Samuel
21 **Fish Market** by Lily Su
22 **A Spoonful of Memory** by Ayasha Razzaq
26 **SORBET & SECULARISM** by Natalia Postolka
28 **Little Things that Weren't So Little** by H.N. Liu
29 **The Man Behind the Camera** by Rachel Abraham
31 **Apropos of Stagnation** by Jenny Cai
33 **A Book Slowly Written** by Kate Irwin
35 **Out of the Box** by Freya Bradimore
36 **Communication Stalls** by Alexandra Groenwoldt
40 **When Your Mother Called Us "Friends"** by Gwendolyn Sanchez Westaway
41 **The Simp** by George Yonemori
43 **QUEER BREAKFAST DRAMAS** by Alex Samuel-Bethel
45 **Lang(u)ages** by Sarah-Jeanne Leclerc
47 **In a manner of speaking** by Garvey Hall-Maw
49 **When Laela Loved Me** by Caelyn Corcione
53 **Goodbye Yellowknife** by E. B. Sorensen
56 **Traces** by Zere Abylgazina
57 **I was never stolen away, but I cling to my backpack filled with home** by Paige Lalonde
59 **Blissful Ignorance** by Rizwan Moonbow

Thinking About War When I Should Be Thinking About Jobs

Manic

You tell me to write about something other than this war,
But the air sirens are drowning out my thoughts. The skies have opened up,
It is raining metal and blood.

Like dewdrops, they settle,
A kaleidoscope of collateral,
Bending the petals to their will
Until all perishes and wilts.

My city is a corpse,
Burial rites are declared abhorred.

Uncle Sam,
You started this war,
And now you sit and watch us all rot.

A Mixed Girl's Nightmare

Syd I.

Beware of the boxes.
These terrifying beasts render their victim petrified with a single check.
They kill with a single question.
Once captured one will clench you in its hand,
Unhinge its monstrous jaw,
And force its prey to question everything.
Experts advise you to take serious caution.
Avoid the forest of the unknown
And stick to the path of self-discovery
Should you come across one,
Remain calm
Take a deep breath
And pray you'll know the answer to its question.

Gaze of a Salamander

S.V. Blackett

The gaze of a salamander
Talk of pills and not forgetting them.
I want to speak in tongues; no one knows.
Who am I kidding?

Everyone knows this spiralling
This craning of our necks for something more.

Am I chasing something more?
Or am I hiding?

The gaze of a salamander
it feels profound
alas, it's just an angry old man
cursing people for his mistakes.
Maybe I'm the salamander
an incorrectly named fish child
standing on land
ignoring imaginary waves.

I feel it all
wished it showed up on a card
not in the lines of my mother's palm.
I wished I had stayed in the water
it wouldn't be fair to my mother.
Is this the gaze of a salamander?

I feel the gaze of ghosts
so I don't stare in the mirror
I stare at people instead
their details are washing over me
it's a temporary disappearance
if I could dissect my brain, heart, and soul
I'd tell you what I'm hiding from
but I don't have a scalpel
all I have is this kitchen knife
the knife is too blunt
I don't want to sharpen it
I can see my reflection

Gaze of a salamander
call me profound
or call me a fool
anything but lost
the map is staring at me
I just refuse to look.

I'll be an incorrectly named fish child
swimming in suicide pools
my soul crying like an infant
my head wholly out of water
never truly wanting to hide all the way
the gaze of a salamander, haunting me
is someone looking at me?
No one is.

555

Amy Savciuc

After winter's inertia
Hibernation
The rush you crash into me with takes me off my feet and forces
me to hold on to you
Two points of tangency
Stagnation killed us with a dose from the smallest needle but
revived us with a shot to the gut
A secret life given to us by the universe propelled by will
Every factor held between the space we made with our fingers that
couldn't be described with measly calculations on paper was
right except for time
So we made time
Which took time

Anticipation
The translation from the mind to reality
So seamless when it comes to us
It drips across every surface and makes me wonder if this is how
you see the world
in Dublin
Paris
Teleportation from my brain to yours wouldn't make anyone dizzy

And I listen to every song you put in your playlists and manage to
make it about us
Just wait until the action potential peaks
Overshoots
When you collide with me again
Five months of our souls reaching for each other
Whilst we resisted against it
With every bone in our body

Restless
For too long
When the band eventually snaps
And your smile
Your ears, the ocean that is your hair beneath my hands
Comes into clear view
Under flashing lights
Your laugh hiding behind whatever music thumps through our
ribcages
Every secret we've shared will greet us there
Cut and dry, raw
The pushing down the stairs
The staged fights and the matching pairs of keychains laid bare
The five months before those five months
Heaven and hell
Everything will burn to create something new



broken
Kemmy Walker

Overgrown
Daniela Dampere



a whole year. a new season without you.
you crocheted my heart into your sleeve,
weaponizing words substituted needles.
hook me in, detangle my tangled thoughts
purple wool, colours so soft.
you hole-punched my existence and self worth
into a sweater you stretched out,
too long for you to comfortably fit in.

i'd hope my poems, reoccurring smiles,
encouraged jokes, and supportive hesitancy
would be a deciding factor to your love.
a collectible cap in your liquor cabinet,
an addiction you couldn't shake off.
instead, i am but a dirt wool not worth a response,
an ugly christmas sweater you stuff
buried beneath the nicer things in your skeleton.
or a shirt you once loved, but overgrown.

GHOST TEXTS FROM HUMMINGBIRDS

Cassandra Myers

Hummingbirds are the only species that fly both forward and backwards

From: The Bermuda Triangle
To: Amelia Airheart

Thursday, January 25, 2022

See you Saturday?

Today, October 7, 2023

Hey, it's been continents but, my throats
carmined for apology. Banished my wreckage.
My wrongs are dead monarchs littering the
space between us. I'm retracing a cowards
murmurations. I swear on nectar, I cared
for the nest you weaved from your own hair.
Your wit's metallic trill. Wish I showed up
to the foxglove. Promises' failed equinox.

8:05 PM

Wild, you still have my number.
Your pleading, a decluttered absence.
The physics of leaving is bi-directional.
You didn't respond and I sonated questions
to our brief oscillations.

8:07 PM

I want to be better. To make good on my word,
torporing the air. I'll tear my parachute.
Break my legs in landing. Anything to airlift
the burning log jetstreaming my gut to ashen
particles. Spores that never touch ground.

8:10 PM

Your debt has wings.
It swept my floor. Made my bed.
Exit shame's courtship spiral. I believe in repair
more than the hurt we sparrow.
A cardinal's million pardons.

I Miss the Monkeys Not the Circus

Asher Ang

Two years folded
into starched sleeves.
Velcro kissing the nape with barbed lips,
steel barrel counting ribs,
nylon splicing skin cells.
A stone-faced chevron barks:
"Were your parents siblings?"
Left, right, left.

At sunrise we moved as one.
Cohesive, singular, fluid.
Our legs were pistons,
our necks were nests for mortars,
our voice; drums for song.
Left, right, left.

At night our bunk transformed into a circus.
A ring for hushed laughter, a reprieve.
The ring general passed his hat around. We stuck our votes in,
scratched poorly on range pad paper.
He collected them and drew the winning [piece]
"Emily."
The circus roared.
Left, right, left.

Each grain passed,
scratching, screeching, grating,
against the hourglass.
The walls of our circus, hollowed.
Our ring general, clutching his scrap of range paper,
howled. Only we
could hear, wailing
in silence, vowing
never to forget.
Emily.
Her name was going to be Emily.
Left. Right. Left.

To throw a Baby out with the Bath Water

Nnadi Samuel

Touch anywhere near the parroted mouth of my mother, tethered to a gossip,
& she will have you know, not one vagabond of hers, raised by her womb
would remain with a jaw closed tight before an incident of speech.
she knows to disown toddlers who won't wear her proud, razor tongue even before they teethe,
the way she handpicks & flings them out of her life, both baby & the bathwater awash in a blink.
I crawl out of that murky water into mockery. silence as the poetics of distance.
asked her chattiness: *have you seen what beast I turn, when placed beside language?*
tongueless & emptied of my humor. body stiffened by the rigor of words,
with only my humerus bone jutted out in polite asking
to make a laughingstock of me before a crowd.
my frenulum, raised with kicks of spit. the fold of its tissue, instigating a riot on the soft
palate. I wreck the blood vessels in my mouth. the wreath of wound, curled in there like spider
veins. I have seen too many webs in this life to know a tangle by its spider.
my tongue matted around a sentence, licks the subject clean by instinct,
like a wet animal drying the furs of its newborn, before shoving it down the world's throat.
won't you go down with me on all fours. here, you'd need water to survive this story.

ask how a second native speaker of sorrow like me turns their grief into gossip place,
& make heads turn. the blood vessel in the body of others, wreathing slow as a mother's angst.
I am aware of what rage sleeps like a dead rest between my jaw,
& the antics to scare itself awake
when a canine steps and trips over the soft, pink bag of blood.
I milk for tooth, & the tongue rubs around the walls of the mouth in adult wisdom,
before spilling the venom on the plush where a blind reptile panics in the pool of
vinegar, thinking it will never speak again in its one belly-flat life.
I spoke a boy out of language into loss, spoke a migrant out of his mother tongue.
I am giving a lecture on silence—which is a dialect on the verge of extinction:
a passage of time unruffled; you feel the bird flutter within your chest.
the whole landscape, folded up & bounced back to you in one nuclear hush.
nature weaned from the noise pollution that is us, scattered
across the mouth of the world & wedded into breeze.
the constant search for a language that translates into *happily ever after*—
a merriment too loud to make it into this story.
I am spoiler alert, depending on where the climax hits me, at the jaw.
a drama of blood opening my throat to panic.
I drag a passive listener close & force-feed him with tragedy,
weep myself into a genre he could not bring himself to watch.
my mother passes by; baby-water in hand, & it feels like some post-credit scene.

I am given a standing ovation, & I ask myself what I have done other
than bawl my eyes out before a stranger who has no fancy for
handkerchiefs. forgive me, I too set you up for drags with the first line
that says:
touch anywhere near the parroted mouth of my mother.
I know the grip of her beak like my torn back, know her messy swear
words like an uppercut. she's that violent with curses, down to the
chewing raw of victims.
on days we're lucky, it takes a village & a gag to hold her down.
I stay in that held-down position, asking her proud, razor tongue for
    utterance,
as she handpicks & flings me out of her life.
won't you go down with me. this story here, will need a bath water to end.
all my life, I mourn an idiom that washes me clean & throws away its
    darling with the diaper.
a sweetheart & its shit: the hot mess of it all.



Fish Market
Lily Su

A Spoonful Of Memory

Ayasha Razzaq

The sound of spoons against the pot, rapid flow of conversations, ("Doodh ko ubaly kay leye rakh dou" *put the milk for boiling,* "Iss mein thora orr metha dalo" *add more sweetness in this*), filled my ears as I entered the kitchen on Eid-Ul-Fitr. It was a ritual—every Eid morning, the women in the family came together to replicate my grandmother's recipe of Kheer. Even here, in the rapid rhythm of spoons and conversation, lived a contradiction: was this ritual about food, or the memory?

The manual lay open, its edges stained, words faded. Those faded words were aporia itself: precision written down, instinct remembered. It took a lot of effort for them— measuring every ingredient precisely, making sure the heat is just the right amount, taking every precaution to ensure it tastes just the same. But it never did, the taste was always a little off, too sweet or too bland, never quite hers. No one seemed to get it right like she did, there were no precisions when she worked, only years of experience.

Everyone sat around the table after the Eid prayer, from my grandparents to the youngest of cousins. The Kheer was passed around, everyone filled their bowls, some half some full. As I took the first bite, not only did I feel a burst of sweetness in my mouth but also in my memories. I was taken back to a few years ago, sitting at this same table, while my grandmother passed around the dish, laughter echoed off the walls, cousins teasing our elders for

Eidi, loud praises of the Kheer's delicious flavor, and my grandmother's humble thanks. The flavor was not the same now, it, tasted less sweeter, was there a fault in the recipe or in the memory? That question was aporia itself, the contradiction between taste and remembrance, what is cooked and what is remembered.

Years later, in another kitchen , in another country; I stand with the same manual opened before me, the words barely readable, the smell of oil and seasonings strong from years spent in the kitchen. The ingredients are set in front of me; as tradition weighs heavy on my shoulders, it is now my turn to inherit this ritual. The recipe is noted down neatly with clear instructions, it reads as follow:

1. Rinse and soak ¼ cup basmati rice for about 20 minutes. Drain and set aside.
2. In a heavy-bottomed pan, bring 1 liter of milk to a gentle boil. Stir often to prevent sticking.
3. Add the soaked rice to the boiling milk. Cook on low heat until the rice softens and begins to break down, releasing starch to thicken the milk.
4. Stir in 4–5 tablespoons sugar.
5. Add ½ teaspoon cardamom powder and a few saffron strands.
6. Mix in a handful of chopped almonds, pistachios, cashews, and raisins.
7. Continue cooking until the kheer reaches a creamy consistency. Scrape any milk solids from the sides back into the mixture for extra flavor.

(Here too, aporia pressed on me: was I preserving her tradition, or reinventing it in my own hands?)

As I busy myself in the rhythmic process of stirring the milk, the smell of cardamom floods my senses. It brings back memories of filled with constant chatter, a place that has never known silence. This smell would lure everyone, kids and adults, to the kitchen, playful smiles and quick hands trying to get a little bit of taste before anyone else. The soft nagging of my grandmother, than my mother; ("sabr rakho, sab sath khaein gay" *have patience, everyone will eat together,* "bas eid par he kitchen ka rasta yaad ata hai" *you only remember the way to the kitchen on eid*). A smile forms as I, too, find tiny hands lurking around the kitchen counter— these kids have also inherited the tradition of trying to get a sneak peek. I repeat the nags that I have heard in my childhood to them, as they giggle and run away.

The Kheer is readied, and placed on the table, as the family returns from their Eid Prayer, chatters of *"Eid Mubarak"* and *"Khair Mubarak"* fill the room, as everyone settles down on their seats. The same routine is followed, the Kheer passed down from one end of the table to another, praises as they take their first bites, but a comment lingers in the air, like its always has ("bohat achi hai lakin, wo wali baat nahi" *it tastes wonderful, but not like it used it.*). I find myself agreeing with the statement, it does not taste like it used to. The kheer has evolved over years, small changes here and there, but a desperate attempt to preserve its true essence has always been made. But was it really the recipe that

made it *Dadi Kay Hath ki Kheer* (Grandma's kheer)? Or was it the memory? It only became hers when she made it. The missing ingredient was memory itself.

Every year, we tried to recreate it, but more than an act of preserving the kheer, it was about preserving the memory of her. Every year, without fault, the kheer was served, and she was remembered, stories were shared, her wise words were repeated. In the simple dish of Kheer, we saw her, her soft scolding, her gentle smile, her firm affirmations. The traditions we inherited were not the recipe, but the feeling. Every generation tried, but failed, tried again, discovering the imperfections was tradition itself. The misunderstandings that we could replicate were not a flaw but a truth.

The recipe was written down but never tasted the same. Each spoonful carried an aporia: was the flavor in the ingredients of the recipe or the memory of hands that made it? We cooked to preserve but soon discovered, preservation also meant reinvention. Kheer became both: failure and success, loss and belonging.

SORBET & SECULARISM

Natalia Postolka

surgeon / cannibal
(someone i once loved)
grew like mold against me
purée of heart and memory turned loathing, frozen
summer came and time spilled out in front of me
and melted into the space to the right of my heart
(too far to love, too close to ignore, all i can do is hate)
there you lie, melted sorbet, dislodged—
surgeon / cannibal
you'd gnaw on metal if you could
and i think, so would i
we were not made of metal, but—
we took bites out of each other
like we were starved stupid
(aren't all 14 / 15 year old / stupid girls starving?)
you left toothmarks and i left scars
pieces missing, pieces exchanged
what am i if not part of you—
surgeon / cannibal
two types of violence: mouthful & incision
two types of need: the hallowed & the hellish
it was a hellish incision, a hallowed mouthful
an alter built, an alter broken
i don't believe in god, i did believe in you
(still do—)

even to the right of my heart, i worship you
a type of religion, a metallic prayer gone unheard—
surgeon / cannibal, i'm sorry
one thing, before you go?
remove it from me
with scalpel or with tooth—
it is to the right of my heart
it waits for you like i do
(like i always will)
when it's out, please leave it in my hands
let it seep through the webbing of my fingers
because separated doesn't mean gone
(god knows, you showed me)
religion and body; you cannot have both
i will not let you—
surgeon / cannibal
time will spill out in front of me
time will spill into the space to the right of my heart
time won't heal, but it will carry a needle and thread
another stitch, another reminder
you beg for many things, and to be remembered is one of them
consecration is another
but i am not holy and neither are you
though you begged / still beg to be—

Little Things that Weren't So Little

H.N. Liu

Sunlight peaking through the horizon at the first dial of dawn / waving hello to drivers through the windows of the school bus / my best friend's contagious laughter / sunken fingers in the flesh of a plump tangerine / the subliminal vulnerability of a 4am call / the soft smile from the stout man sitting behind the counter / the soft smile from the lady pulling in on the stretcher / wandering a drunken city bathed in fluorescent light, thinking *this is why i have chosen life* / the day you said *this is how you love*: patient and silent / words hanging like a heavy tongue in your lungs / words hanging like the low-dangling moon: beautiful, backlit, just out of touch / the day you drilled a hole in my heart / *sorry you feel a hole in your heart* / deflating lungs after the last ringtone / the heaviness with which you rolled off my tongue / when you wore my name like your ripest reaping / when you discarded my name like reeking tangerines / waiting / waning / saying *i love you* after a fight / saying *i'm sorry* / thinking it was ever enough.

The Man Behind the Camera

Rachel Abraham

I've lived in India for most of my life. 10 years under the same skyline, the same noise, the same heat, the same street dogs that I say hi to on the way home every day. I've lived in Hyderabad for as long as I can remember, but only to date have I found the joy of sticking my head out the window like a golden retriever that finally learned joy was not a trick or always a trip to the vet.

Just a breeze at 110 kilometres an hour, while my dad was driving, right foot steady, hands on the wheel, eyes on the road, and me? I had my head out of the window, ducking just in time so that my skull would not crack on a green sign that read Akbar Road. And for a second, I wasn't the teenager with grades that were sometimes messy and missed curfews and a tendency to surround myself with people who worry him. For a second, I was little me again, the six-year-old running through the rain while he stood under a tree, camera in hand, not calling me back, just capturing it.

For the first time in years, he saw me as that kid again, the one who he thought he might have lost somewhere between entrance exams and slamming doors. I never romanticized Delhi the way that people said I should have. I loved it through a lens, a camera between me and its chaos.

My father was never too far behind. I had adapted to its sweat, its noise, its buzz, but never its wind, its love, its jackass drivers cutting lanes like they're in a Fast and Furious spinoff. On our way home, I made him listen to After Midnight by AP, asked him if he liked it.

He nodded. Asked him if he nodded to please me. He nodded again.

And in that moment, I didn't see him as the man who double checks application deadlines or reminds me that curfew was three hours ago and I missed it, or worries that I'm losing myself with the wrong kind of company. I saw the man who watched me leap through puddles like they were portals. The man who held the camera but never once told me to smile.

Eight years later, I saw him again as the same man, same eyes, same quiet pride. And for the first time, he saw me again.

Apropos of Stagnation

Jenny Cai

The air which I breathe is not mine.
My preaching, unfamiliar.
Names dissolve before they're spoken,
Faces blurring faster than spilled ink.
Memories stretched
Thin, time pulling away,
Farther.
For it fears stagnation,
As one moment thirsts
To be more memorable than the last.

Too many voices, all too reasonable,
Each one alluring with a small truth,
Pulling in selfish ways.
A chorus of whispers,
A gush of ideology
Too loud to ignore. They wail.
They all holler for justice,
For dignity,
For morality,
All for their own values.
And each melody came prepared
With their own bargain.

For I live in time, and I live like time;
Forever evading stagnation.
Morals slip away,
Dragged beneath the weight of shifting tides,
Each voice more authoritative than the last...
Until they, too, are drowned.

The river continues
To tumble over itself.

But never in a finite moment did it hold its shape.
And truth,
Forever my grounding saviour,
Like the river,
Has become entirely unrecognizable to me.

A Book Slowly Written

Kate Irwin

The Girl has always played the narrative that you ruined her life,
Stole so much from her.

Yes, this may be true.
True for only one chapter.
This chapter is called the "Unglamorous Fight Between The Girl and Anorexia."

What are the other chapters? Are they even important?
What about the chapter where Anorexia saves The Girl from suicide?
Or where Anorexia gives The Girl some distorted sense of purpose?

Then there's this chapter called "Death."
This chapter is important - The Girl needed Anorexia for a time,
A time that went too far, where The Girl almost died.

Strength and willingness turn the page to the next chapter,
This chapter is called "Power."
The Girl wins, not Anorexia.
She begins to live her life without you,
She gets help and a second chance at life.

In the "Power" chapter - The Girl slowly becomes untangled.
Untangled from the knot that tied her and Anorexia together,
A tangled chain almost impossible to separate - where two became one.

Finally unstuck,
Separate, The Girl is no longer intertwined in that knot.

This next chapter is called “Courage”
Where The Girl no longer needs you,
The Girl fights back,
She acknowledges that you,
Anorexia,
Showed up for a purpose - that purpose no longer exists.

“Choosing Life” is the unfinished, imperfect, messy chapter.
This chapter is not yet written for it develops day by day,
A draft, a work in progress, and that is okay.

This chapter is where the narrative turns,
To The Girl - To her life,
Anorexia has been killed off,
The Girl begins her journey of redemption.
Slowly this chapter will unfold,
Pages will be filled with joy, excitement, and love.

And when this chapter is done - A new one will begin,
The narrative may change yet regardless of the direction,
This book will be one of resilience.



Out of the Box
Freya Bradimore

Communication Stalls

Alexandra Groenwoldt

Tamara glanced at the dollar store till when the commotion erupted. Some middle-aged Average Joe informed the cashier, a short boy with over-average acne, that "this shit is on sale".

Tamara noticed the neon-pink energy drink cans between the two, just a shade brighter than the boy's face as he mumbled along to his raging customer. He looked barely old enough to work, at least six years younger than her.

She didn't mean to stare, but she wondered. Could the cashier develop a classically conditioned aversive response to pink energy drinks from this single experience? Tamara threw the cookies she'd been debating to buy back on the rack. She needed her pen.

A mist of rain embraced her on the way from the dollar store to the mini mall. She sidestepped the pigeons, scurried through the sliding doors, and passed the grocery store, liquor store, flower shop, and the drug store. Nanaimo's Port Place *Shopping Center* hardly covered the basics to claim the name.

Tamara rushed into the washroom and disappeared into the first stall where she drew her sharpie and considered her options. The tiled washroom wall to the left and the back would feel like vandalism, and was the wall really part of the intimate space? There was the door, but that felt equally public. That left the greying partition wall.

She pulled the cap from her sharpie and stepped closer, like a painter selecting the right spot for the first brush stroke.

The black tip touched the polymer, and she wrote.

"If the unconditioned stimulus is stronger than expected, stimuli associated with it receive excitatory conditioning." If only everything made as much sense as the Rescorla-Wagner Model.

***

Tamara usually spent her Saturdays wandering downtown Nanaimo or, if it poured, reading at Harbourfront Library. Too restless for the latter, she left the mall, but the cold drizzle made her duck back inside. She sauntered into the grocery store, warmed herself next to the rotisserie chicken, and wondered how many degrees Fahrenheit the heater was.

In the produce section, she tried to find a banana that resembled a straight line. No success. Bananas grew however crooked they wanted, unconcerned with adhering to someone's measure.

Tamara left the store after she'd calculated the volume of a can of crushed tomatoes and checked her math on its label. The label was incorrect.

She stopped short in the store's exit when a group of people hastened into the mall, necks bent, hoods dripping. Behind them, the wind whipped water across the parking lot.

They zeroed in on the grocery store entrance while more people pushed out past Tamara. She stumbled out of their way and fled to the washroom, unsure what drew her to dirty tiles except for cover.

She entered the same stall as before and realized she might use it this time, but as she locked the door, the black pattern on the wall caught her eye. She gasped.

Beneath her own scrawls, neat curved letters formed a new sentence.

"The magnitude of conditioning is proportional to the discrepancy between the expected and the actual strength of the unconditioned stimulus."

A smile tucked on her lips, then the letters blurred as her eyes burned, brighter than ever before. She pulled the sharpie from her pocket as if sleepwalking.

"The effects of multiple conditioned stimuli are additive regarding the strength of the expected unconditioned stimulus."

Tamara capped her sharpie and stared at the scribbles, her own and the stranger's, and wondered what it all meant. She felt that some kind of understanding had passed between them through this wall.

She left the washroom, scouted the mall as if expecting her correspondent to be waiting for her, and felt ridiculous. Everyone had better things to do – and people to do it with – than to check a public toilet for messages.

Whenever someone left the washroom, she slipped in and felt a strange rush of disappointment at the lack of new words on her wall. Within fifteen minutes, she caught a security guard's suspicious glare.

Gradually, a knot of people gathered at the mall's exits, waiting for a reprieve from the rain. Their increasing numbers forced individuals closer, reluctant like ions of the same charge.

What if her correspondent had been trapped by the rain too? Tamara bit her lip. She held her sharpie before she understood her mind's plan. The security guard wasn't looking.

She spun and put pen to wall.

"Hey!"

Tamara heard footsteps, but she kept dragging the pen across the tapestry in large swirls, until a gust of garlic breath hit her. She ducked away from the guard and the words on the wall that read "The greater the salience" and sprinted to the exit. Her heart dropped.

"Sorry!" The whisper was lost in her panting, directed at no one and everyone: the security guard chasing her past the liquor store, the workers who'd eventually cover her words with paint, and the people who'd have to face her ugly handwriting in the meantime.

The crowd at the door parted, and she sprinted through the rain across the parking lot. At the road she shoulder-checked but couldn't see the guard. Puddles splashing, she dipped into the shadows of a roofed loading area opposite the bus stops.

Tamara scurried into the darkest corner, dragging her shoes across the concrete to push aside any dirty needles.

She stood drenched in the dark and counted to three hundred, observing the side walk leading to the lonely stop for bus 40.

A young woman in a blazer and a long plaid skirt walked past. Cars rolled by.

Finally, she crept to the bus stop, half-expecting security but finding only the woman in the blazer. Tamara pretended to study the bus schedule when she heard words over the rain.

She wheeled around, her voice below a whisper. "What?"

The woman smiled. "I said, 'the magnitude of conditioning is proportional to the salience of the conditioned stimulus.'"

When Your Mother Called Us "Friends"

Gwendolyn Sanchez Westaway

A hand reaches out in the night,
musk of cedar
gentle lapping of water against stone
like a tongue between heavy sighs, (a
heaving exhalation) and pulsating thighs —
glistening with dew in the grass, summer's dusk.

A hand reaches. out, in the dark
where the world cannot reach,
unshorn by light, our bodies,
soft shapes, tender forms
feminine, and wicked
in all our earthly darknesses.

A hand r eaches out and fingers
meet supple surfaces the warmth beneath
a smooth stomach, Fat gathered in
precious places, a frigid night.. Mouths meeting
, a quiet breath
shared.

The Simp

George Yonemori

A nuclear family
married to middle-class mediocrity.
Daddy flunked high school but has a golden
salary. His mommy left to save the world from
capitalism—look how that turned out. Teenage
pregnancy brought burning burdens of bills.
They were young once.

A baby-vomit green refrigerator filled
with unfulfilled dreams. Mommy
could have been a doctor, an artist, or the president.
Do her babies admire the delicate way she slices
the crust from ham sandwiches?
In the artificial wind of the grocery store,
a single woman buys artisan cherry wine
to celebrate her promotion at the office.
Mommy thinks Daddy should quit
drinking so much but buys beer anyway.
The dollhouse pink
living room wallpaper screams louder than the
airheaded television, "Leave this all behind. It's not
too late. You're still beautiful."
She drowns it out with her 18th birthday gift—
a second-hand vacuum cleaner.
The baby suffers in timeless silence.

The little boy never asked for this
status quo in a floating timeline.
Brat spray paints his story behind
The convenience store. Obese police chief
throws his pencil neck into Daddy's fists.
He prays to a silent God for no final
Snap.
Little sister's brain expands past her
skull—can fix anything except herself.
The girl's only friend is a saxophone because
she needs blues to belong.
Little Lisa never wants kids.
Sons ruin lives.

QUEER BREAKFAST DRAMAS

Alex Samuel-Bethel

It's not existential, but it's the be-all and end-all
for queens and queers.
It's like neon green, the paint on cans of cold tea, and the vibrant blues
preferably viewed by the color blind:
It seems like a violent creed beholden to our words,
and seen in hookup culture.
It emerges in those dichotomous texts that couldn't have lasted close
to a month.

Your bread and butter words:
You wanted him to "stick it in"
at the Barnes & Nobles you'd seen him by.
His tired brown cliched eyes aligned with yours,
and since you were living trigger-happy and he was smiling big,
you let some skin show underneath that gray cardigan –
that gay little signaling the nucleus of your invoking
a nuclear meltdown, the bottomless thirst
of a twentysomething.

And his black-rimmed glasses helped him out
by completing his hot nerd aesthetic,
prompting your obsession with hyperreality,
structuring palaces of mirrors with clouds of thirst and greed:
these vicious qualities prompting
my immediate dispatching of those words:
"It tasted like warm, sweetened porridge."

I wanted to discuss that.
Why? Maybe tastes invited discussion,
or tongues were simply metaphysical instruments.
But regardless: really, girl? What the hell?
Oh, Doctor! Please fix her!
That bitch would sing opera whenever I got tired of her shenanigans,
so I played up my extremities, showing off the postmodern power
of queer hyperbole.
I invoked the Bible, while also renouncing
its rigid doctrines:
Oh, Jesus! Take the wheel!

We broke our fastings in time to break ourselves;
a glimpse into the ajar door of our fears,
and the forces that relayed to us
the pitchforks sewn onto scarecrow hands.

Lang(u)ages

Sarah-Jeanne Leclerc

L'enchevêtrement de mes langues
Is like the in between of seasons
When the leaves have not yet fallen
But the ground is already covered
By a white blanket
Une page blanche
Parfaite pour écrire une histoire
Fière de ses mots

Où certains voient une trahison
Others see poetry
J'y vois une reconquête de sens
Ne pas attaquer la situation
Comme sur un champ de bataille
Because I see the beauty
D'une valse de mots
Sur les plaines
Full of history
Time has passed and now
Je peux garder Montcalm
When I face a Wolfe
Et puiser mon courage
Dans les racines entrelacées
Des arbres généalogiques

Quitte à perdre quelques bouts de langues

Dans les anfractuosités
Des règles nombreuses
Or loose some hair
When learning irregular verbs
Embrace the creativity
That comes with it
Et portons fièrement l'accent
Qui accompagne
Nos dialogues de cultures.

In a manner of speaking

Garvey Hall-Maw

What is the value of words?

When the whistle of bombs becomes more familiar
Than of birds
And whose skies are severed by onyx spears
Man's simulacra of Gabriel's flaming blade

What is the value of words?

When silver tongues promise Eden
Their quivers hiding the arrows poised
Against the throats of the "devil's children"
Who speak of peace yet tie nooses

What is the value of words?

When your skin is taut upon your ribs
Its curve the narthex of an altar
To a god, bronze and glistening
A ceaser, a neptune of flowing blood

What is the value of words?

When a thousandfold weeping
Are drowned in the bang of a gun
As their hands clasped in prayer
To Mars, whose mouth is bound in sinew

What value are your words

When they dilute the bloodied hand
Of empire, whose gilded ring you kiss
Opium smoke obscuring the mass of corpses
Whose cracking lips once prayed to you

filii et filiae patris, gods of self-gouged eyes

When Laela Loved Me

Caelyn Corcione

When Laela loved me, I knew everything about her.

In seventh grade, Laela obsessed over Finn Wolfhard's Take on Me video. She loved Weezer's *Take on Me*, not a-ha's original version.

In eighth grade, Laela lent me airpods. My wired headphones were outdated, not hip, but Laela said: *that's so vintage*. We had ten playlists titled "L+C" for every whim.

In ninth grade, Laela fainted and I rattled off her allergies and intolerances to the nurse. They gave Laela consolation Takis from the vending machine and Laela said: *what would I do without you?*

In tenth grade, Laela smoked at the train tracks and never invited me. I couldn't go home smelling, so she spared me parental wrath by removing me from miscreant outings. Laela's sparse texts read: *bathroom. ASAP.* Laela sprayed perfume on her sleeves to mask the smell, clogging my nostrils with the effluvia of Eau de Overwhelming.

In eleventh grade, Laela forgot my birthday. Her Instagram stories oozed treason.
Laela was in Tofino with the popular try-hards, and Laela went to the MacDemarco concert despite hating current music.

Then Laela was gone. Lost to the clangor of a cooler crowd.

Now in twelfth grade I'm cursed to remain a wallflower.

September bleeds into October of my supposedly sacrosanct senior year. Laela's old flame, Launceston Squire, offers me a Takis. His blonde hair puffs in an overgrown mullet, and he could be recreated with deliberate watercolour strokes.

"Two fell out of the vending machine," Launceston says. "Must be fate."

Launceston is a mouthful, so he's been Launce since fifth grade.

Launce habitually buys two vending machine snacks. It's a corny facade, but he insists it's 'fate.' Either way, his snack routine is comforting.

Launce asks me out wearing a shirt I call 'Launceston purple.' A magenta-adjacent shade, redder than blue; the cousin of dark pink against his skin's olive-y hues.

Suddenly, I'm visible again. When you have a boyfriend, strangers give respectful nods in the hallway if you entwine hands with your significant other.

Launce is opposite to Laela. He skateboards, shops at Hot Topic, listens to Sublime and smokes cigarettes 'ironically.' Launce doesn't understand irony. He couldn't be popular because he hates things 'mainstream.'

"A boyfriend makes you conscious of personal hygiene," Laela used to say. "Because you're always making out, you should brush your teeth more."

I already brush my teeth three times a day, but increase to four to be safe.

Launce calls me at eleven p.m. and we always have the same conversation.

"Hello?" Launce says. I hear typing and clicking.

"Are you gaming?"

The clicking stops. "Are you down to come over tomorrow night?"

Launce's idea of 'hanging' is six hours of Sublime, a horror movie and gauging how many articles of clothing he can remove.

"I don't know."

Come on, Casey," Launce says. "It's not that scary, I swear you just have to–"

"But can't we wait a bit longer?"

"You said you'd think about it." More clicking. "It sounded like a yes to me."

My resolve holds strong but my skin feels contaminated. I wash my hands six times before bed to strip away unidentifiable grime and watch it swirl down the drain in milky suds.
I don't feel much of anything, but at least I have clean hands.

In Launceston Squire's room, the walls are obscured by posters; a parade of cloth and vinyl. His gaming set-up is larger than life, with a multicoloured computer tower and Titan gaming chair.

I remember Laela telling me about her first time sleeping with a boy.

"We were both high," she said. "I think it was better that way."

Launce doesn't share his weed with anyone, and tonight isn't 'ironic' enough for cigarettes. There's no substance to distract being pulled towards his warm flesh. And he's
gentle, but a wail wells in my throat.

If Laela still loved me, this wouldn't have happened.

Launce says my name too many times. Casey. Casey. Casey. It's illicit from his lips.
Caress Me Down booms through his phone speaker.

Launce is finished, but I was done a long time ago.

When I get home, I wash my hands again and again.

Launce doesn't call me for the next few nights. He claims to be on a Valorant streak, and can't hurt his 'Rank Rating.'

A week later, Launce says he loves me, and two weeks after that, he confesses feeling restrained by the shackles of monogamy. Afterwards, Launce wedges a cigarette between his teeth, proving

he understands the concept of irony. I pretend to be hurt, but I can't seem to feel anything.

I'm out of hand soap. The valleys between my fingers crack and peel, but I dig through the cupboard. No cigar, so I dash to the store with a five dollar bill.

That's when I see her.

Laela, willowy and bright, rooting through the hair-dye aisle. Her hand hovers over Punk Pink, then Manic Purple. Magenta-adjacent. Laela suddenly senses my stare.

"Oh my God." Laela's cherry-chapstick lips break into a smile. I glimpse the small gap between her front teeth. "I haven't seen you in forever."

My stomach yearns with relief, disgust, ecstasy, and betrayal broiled in a medley. I want to vomit my guts on the linoleum, or spray hair dye at her like a weed-killer.

Instead, I say: "It's been, like, a whole minute."

Laela doesn't look at all flummoxed.

Now I know I was temporary to Laela. Disposable. A set of holiday napkins whipped out at Christmas, then buried in a junk drawer. Forgotten.

Laela blabs about boys, physics, unlikeable teachers and prom dresses. Laela's life summary is an amalgamation of conversations we would've had if she still loved me.

"We should hang out soon," Laela says.

"Totally," I say.

If Laela wanted me, I'd let her back in a heartbeat. But if Laela really loved me, she wouldn't have left.

I buy three bottles of family-sized handsoap. You never know when they won't have lavender-scented.

Goodbye Yellowknife

Elle Sorensen

Goodbye Yellowknife
Thank you for the tangerine sun that one sepia evening
It looks like Mexico in Breaking Bad
At Hognose hill tented up and wildfire helicopters circling
But the smoke drifted away come morning
And I'd turned 23 on a slate tent pad
then sang to a candle stuck in can of pork paté

Goodbye Yellowknife
Thank you for the honey berry bush in the front lawn
where my cousin gathers lunch dessert in the pleats of her skirt
and I, in a red plastic colander
for the hascap harvest in equal parts sugar
Fermented fruit syrup goes good on everything
Grandma's cooking makes the memory taste sweeter

Goodbye Yellowknife
Thank you for the hi-vis sweepers
Keeping the sidewalk clean like a kitchen floor
Masked up to save from dust kicked up in the morning rush
Hunched over concrete in search of Gold that's paved with streets

Goodbye Yellowknife
Thank you for the sharp-tongued street-smart banter
While I sit at the wheel of a borrowed car outside the Liquor Store

The bald man I always see around there offers me a joke when I
had nothing to offer him:
What's the difference between a crackhead and a Yellowknifer?
I'm not sure
They both can't get off this damn rock
He smiles, tells me to have an Indigenous Day

Goodbye Yellowknife
Thank you for the 10 glorious pounds I gained from Grandma's cooking
Soon I'll return to making my own meals
of $1 chili beans 5-minute white rice coleslaw mix with tortilla chips
slipping instant oatmeal up my sleeves at the campus food pantry
Missing Granny Vi's chicken thighs gumbo fresh-picked rhubarb and
Shanghai stir-fry
She asks, as I bolt through the kitchen, *Are you finding food?*
I am, just fine.

Goodbye Yellowknife
Thank you for burrowing your way into my bones
like that scraggly fox that everyone painfully calls Anubis
Might burrow into a baby's soft spot
And that trio of kits who kinged Sir John highschool and flounce
about the gravel lot crying
You drunkard! Get on home before grandpa checks your location and shakes his head!
The midnight sun won't set but your time at the Black Knight pub has!
Stand here any longer and the mosquitos will get drunk off your blood!

Goodbye Yellowknife
Thank you for cradling me in your Boreal arms
For your welcome to these barren lands that teem with life
From the bison I biked beside, to the woman who called me beautiful
And said I dropped my smile
I've left my heart beneath the pink rock behind the hospital
Where my mother spent her lunch breaks many years ago



Traces
Zere Abylgazina

I was never stolen away, but I cling to my backpack filled with home

Paige Lalonde

my grandmother says métis
like a cartoon pirate. *we're matey.*
my grandfather says his mother looked like a regular white.
just a normal white lady
she died when he was twelve, sepsis swimming up her thigh where the baseball hit her
died in her farmhouse. the doctor didn't come

I am laid thin across linear time
but I keep trying to pick it up and wrap it around me
swallow it like a rope still swinging from my mouth
tie it like a tourniquet around my thigh
stop the thing from coming.
in dreams, linearity is intangible
I am something, and completely something else at once
I will dream a dream that feels it takes up the whole night, me falling from the sky
only to awake with a thud on the floor
how did my dream know for so long that I was falling?
I open my mouth in the morning to tell of what I dreamt, but it's wrong, and it always was.

arlene told me that we are a successful residential school story,
and I churned to hear *success* used in that way.

but I suppose that's what it means. the completion of that which
was always intended.
whiteness as a success maintained and enforced
my body rejects linear time, holds the pain that has come, the pain
that will.

I dreamt once—
and please know that these words don't tell it right, as they never do
with dreams—
but I dreamt of my great grandmother.
she was an umpire.
she was wearing the dust from the diamond as clothing. she felt pretty.
her face and hands disambiguated blurs in a way that only exists in
dreams
I touched them. they were solid, granular, rough.
silky. pillowy. rotted. they smelled like pavement. they were not there.
I awake and start to tell of the dream
but her face fills in with some sort of regular white lady that I do not
know.

Blissful Ignorance

Rizwan Moonbow

Peeping through fractured glass
is not worth
the painful gags
from the mere aftertaste
of pathetically familiar faces.

I run relentlessly
from potential tarnishers
of my fragile platform,
investigating solemn corners,
slicing gateways
to observe hollow burrows,
taunted by the illusion
of redundant echoes.

Tip-toeing heel to toe,
flashlight outstretched,
I squint and shiver
as light is bestowed upon me.

My sister proposes
it is Paranoia
who spites me,
with wee chuckles

and cheeky pinches
at my clarity.

So I refuse to peer
through transparent shards.
My gaze sees past flesh.
The pulsating eyeballs
that once traced
the soles of my slippers
are conveniently missing.
Where did you all go?

My peers' backs collapse,
bones snippity-snap,
as I shine my light
into every dim crevice.

Petty murmurs escape me —
Everyone is so kind,
so cute.
Gossip, a conspiracy.

Some call it delusion.
Maybe it is.
But hurt is nothing
without her worshippers.

Some aim arrows,
ribbon-tied daggers,
to sedate my optimism,
to sew my smirks
into scowls,
my soaring arc
into a plummeting plot.

They flash crooked teeth
at the sight
of my robbery
of their tissue boxes
and sympathy baskets.

They cling to my foot,
defer my attention
with holes in the sidewalk,
indents shaped
like shaky kneecaps.

And so,
I would rather tattoo
lopsided scars of smiles
and pretend
I didn't see
anything at all.

Contributors

Alexandra Groenwoldt is a German writer studying on Vancouver Island. She served as Co-Managing Editor, Acquisitions Editor, Fiction Editor, and Copy Editor for Portal 2026 and 2025. Her short story "How to Make a Sand Cake" appears in GOOEY 2024. She received a Pat Bevan Scholarship for Fiction in 2025.

Alex Samuel-Bethel is a second-generation Grenadian immigrant born in Toronto. At the time of writing, he is an undergraduate student at the University of Toronto and a developing poet/essayist. Talk to him, please! It's lonely in the city.

Amy Savciuc is a Canadian-based poet and writer. She loves music, cinematography, and writing -- especially dystopian, thriller, and psychological fiction.

Asher Ang is a second-year student majoring in creative writing at Vancouver Island University. His play Catharsis was selected to represent the student body at VIU's Two Truths and A.I. Festival. He enjoys writing in any format that allows him to dabble in the surreal and horror.

Ayasha Razzaq writes to preserve fleeting moments and to explore how memory shapes identity. When not immersed in her studies, she finds inspiration in the rhythms of everyday life and the sciences she is drawn to. “A Spoonful of Memory” is her first publication, and she hopes it will be the beginning of many more.

Caelyn Corcione is a Vancouver Island University student with an interest in writing about identity and belonging. Her work focuses on personal experience and observation.

Cassandra Myers (My’z) (they/she/he) is an award winning poet, performer, dancer, illustrator, and counselor from Tkaronto, Ontario. As a queer, non-binary, South-Asian-Italian, crip, mad, survivor of sexual violence, Cassandra’s work has won national literary and spoken word titles including the National Magazine GOLD Award in Poetry and Champion of the Canadian Festival of Spoken Word. Find them @cass.myers.poetry or at cassmyers.com

Daniela Dampare is an African Canadian poet and writer born and raised in Toronto, Canada. She is the fourth poet laureate of Sheridan College, graduating with an Honours BA in Creative Writing and Publishing. Her poetry is featured in Poetry Pause (2026), and she was a finalist in Stage 32's TV Comedy Screenwriting Contest (2025).

Freya Bradimore is a teen, queer, visual artist from pickering Ontario. She credits her father for introducing her to the world of visual creativity and creation. She's been learning from the best, taking every art class school offers, as well as any additonal classes her supportive family can afford.

Garvey is a grade 11 writer.

George Yonemori is a Chinese-Egyptian writer whose work has been featured by Blank Spaces Magazine, Scarborough Arts, Global News, and the Royal Ontario Museum. He has received literary awards from Rodney Diverlus and Canisia Lubrin. He has been hand-selected by the Writers' Union of Canada for mentorship.

Gwendolyn Sanchez Westaway is an emerging poet and fourth year student studying in VIU's creative writing program. She has had her prose published in the Navigator, has presented her short story piece, "A Garden Full of Wild Flowers" at January 2026's Portent reading series, and has a forthcoming poetry publication in Portal magazine's 2026 issue.

HN Liu is a 17 year-old writer from Toronto. She writes about everything from her feelings and fears, to secrets and angry confessions.

Jenny Cai spends her free time in the suburbs of Ottawa exploring her new hyperfixations or practicing ballet as a means to justify procrastination. For the past few years, she has developed a newfound appreciation for literature that discusses the subtleties of human nature and what makes an honest person.

Kate Irwin is a university student in Calgary. Poetry has always been a way for her to express her emotions. As a social work student she has began using her poetry as advocacy as it attracts more viewers and brings forward what is uncomfortable and giving it a voice.

Kemmy Walker is an artist who loves to express himself through realism. Growing up in Grenada, a small yet vibrant Caribbean island, has inspired him to bring the beauty and authenticity of everyday life into his art. He strive to capture the small details and emotions that make up our world, from the bustling streets of Toronto to the serene landscapes of Grenada. His work is a reflection of his journey, both physically and emotionally. Through his realistic pieces, he hope to provide viewers with a glimpse into his experiences and ignite a sense of nostalgia and connection.

Lily Su is a first generation immigrant, aspiring artist, and student. She has been painting for as long as she remembers and seeks to use her art as a way to connect with her culture. Beyond the arts, she loves strumming her guitar, singing karaeoke passionately, and Chinese dance.

Manic studied psychology, though no, she cannot read minds, not even her own half the time. Her thoughts are thorns, unruly and sharp, pricking at odd hours. So she stitches rhymes over them, petal by petal, until the chaos almost looks like something soft, something beautiful, something she hopes will make you feel heard.

Natalia Postolka is an aspiring author and filmmaker that spends her days immersed in any and all forms of media. She loves jewelry, weird/whimsical horror and themes of coming-of-age. When she's not writing, you can find her working at the library or haunting a thrift store.

Nnadi Samuel (he/him/his) holds a B.A in English & literature from the University of Benin. His works have been previously published/forthcoming in Westerly Magazine, PRISM, Yolk Literary ReviewEx-Puritan, Carte Blanche, Plenitude Magazine, The Capilano Review & elsewhere. A 3x Best of the Net, and 8x Pushcart Nominee. He won the 2020 Canadian Open Drawer Contest, the John Newlove Poetry Annual Awards (Ottawa, Canada), 2023 the Vera Manuel Poetry Awards, 2023 Surrey Muse Art Society (Vancouver, Canada) and 2025 Capilano Review Fall Writing Contest guest-judged by Hari Alluri (Vancouver, British Columbia). His third micro-chapbook "Biblical Invasion, BC" is published @Bywords Publication (Ottawa CA) in 2024. He tweets @Samuelsamba10.

Paige Lalonde is a history student, disability advocate, and educator. A member of her neighbourhood tenant union and a French journalist for her campus newspaper, she has found a profound love for all that can be found at the intersection of community work and creative writing.

Rachel Abraham is a Grade 9 student at St. Robert Catholic High School in Thornhill, Ontario. She loves science, especially biology, and hopes to become a doctor one day. When she's not studying, Rachel plays tennis, piano, and takes photos. She also enjoys cooking, reading, painting, and writing. Always curious and creative, Rachel is just getting started on her journey.

Whether crafting short stories, delivering speeches, or indulging in the occasional cheesy pop song, **Rizwan Moonbow** loves all forms of writing. Of Iranian heritage, his work often navigates faith, culture, and desire with a touch of naive wonder.

Sarah-Jeanne Leclerc is a student based in Montreal. She is passionate about everything related to literature, cinema, theatre and poetry. She likes to explore languages and play with words to create pictures and depict the world that surrounds her.

S.V. Blackett is a poet and recent job-searching graduate from UofT. She spends her free time attending open mic nights and biology lectures instead of finding a full-time job. She once wrote a series of cut-up poems using her textbooks, which happened to be the first time she opened them. Her Sri Lankan immigrant parents were impressed.

Syd I. is in their second year of university studying Linguistics, Psychology, and Sociology. Creating and consuming the written word has always been a part of their life. In their poetry, they discuss themes of identity, belonging, and self-discovery.

Zere Abylgazina is an artist, curator, and arts facilitator whose work is a vivid exploration of Central Asian identity, culture, and personal narrative. Born in Kazakhstan and based in Toronto, Zere brings a unique cross-cultural perspective to her art and curatorial practice. Zere blends traditional techniques with modern approaches, crafting pieces that are both introspective and engaging.

About the Journal

Aporia is a youth-led literary journal dedicated to amplifying youth voices of Torontonians aged 15-30 through the literary arts.

We began with **aporia** [*a logical contradiction or a philosophical, insolvable paradox*] in its most familiar form: uncertainty. The kind that comes from scrolling through the news and seeing completely opposing narratives about the same event, the insincere doubt that arises when truth feels either fragmented or distorted. For many young people, these contradictions shape how we understand identity, belonging, and home.

Aporia exists to make space for that uncertainty, and encourages young writers to examine identity in relation to self, family, community, and the wider world. What happens when intent is misunderstood across generations? When an ordinary habit suddenly feels ritualistic? When trying to explain something personal reveals both connection and distance at once?

Through poetry, prose, and personal essays, *Aporia* is a collective of work that grapples with the tensions young people live with every day. From culture to country, online discourse to real-world settings, we believe that literature can be both beautiful and catalytic: a form of art, witness, and advocacy.

Aporia Volume 1.

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