

The Hampton Review

Issue Four:

From The Desk Of

Welcome to Issue 4 of *The Hampton Review*. This issue is the launch of our interview series, From The Desk Of, and for our first installment of this series, we will explore the work and process of three previous contributors: Violet Binczewski (Issues 1, 2, and 3), Taylor O'Neill (Issue 3), and Samantha Springer (Issue 3). Each interview is accompanied by a new work as well.

Enjoy the inside stories and new stories of each writer!

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From The Desk Of, No. 1

Featuring Violet Binczewski

The Hampton Review: Tell me about your poem, “Toy Store,” that is in Issue Three of *The Hampton Review*.

Violet Binczewski: “Toy Store” is a poem that I actually got the inspiration for on New Year’s Eve in 2024. My friends and I were reflecting on our year and we all realized that we had very similar experiences in our love lives and we all felt kind of used, like a toy that someone thought was shiny, picked up, and then put back down when they got bored. I thought that was such an interesting concept, feeling more like a toy than a person, and decided to explore that theme in a poem. “Toy Store” was the result.

THR: What is your process for writing? Do you start with a theme or specific line in mind? Do you return to a poem multiple times before you feel that it’s finished?

VB: It varies, but I usually get an idea or come across an interesting concept and tuck it into the back of my mind. Sometimes I get an idea for a rhyme and I build the poem from there. Sometimes I sit down and don’t quite know how I’m feeling so I try to make sense of it in a poem. There are some poems that have been sitting in my notes app for a while because I just don’t know how to finish them, and there are others where I write it down once and don’t change a word. Overall, I usually write a poem and tweak a few things, but the skeleton of the piece never really changes. Part of why I love writing is because it is so different every time.

THR: What inspires your writing?

VB: Everything. It can be a song, another poem, what is going on in my own life, my friends’ lives. Typically it is something that just gets loud in my head and writing is the only way to quiet it. I write about absolutely everything that happens to me. You can find inspiration in anything if you look hard enough.

THR: Who are some writers or artists that inspire you or that you always find yourself coming back to?

VB: Sylvia Plath is one of my favorites; I think that her writing encapsulates the feelings that we don’t have names for and I always feel inspired after reading her work. I also find myself coming back to Fiona Apple, because her lyrics feel like pure poetry and are unapologetically raw. That is what I aim to achieve in my own writing.

THR: What book are you currently reading?

VB: *Beautiful Boy* by David Sheff.

THR: Where else can we find your writing?

VB: My book “The Ocean and Her Shadows” is available on [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com), as well as other book seller websites. I’ve also had a few poems published in Philadelphia Stories Junior, The America Library of Congress 2024 Collection of Poetry, and Moonstone Press. I’ve also written articles for Mount Saint Joseph Academy’s *The Campanile*.

“Words Words Words” by Violet Binczewski

They asked me why I want to be a writer

But it’s never been something I wanted

It sits like dirt under my fingernails

I don’t want to be a writer

I just am

And most of the time it burns

Words like pills that I swallow

Down

Down

Down

That burrow in the pockets of my belly

That I wear like scrapes

That simmer like water in my mind

Until it boils

And the steam shrieks over the edges of the pot and burns my scalp when the words tumble out

“It hurts!” I scream

“It hurts!”

But then when they go to fix me back up all they can use is

Words

Words

Words

And when I try to go outside

The sidewalk screeches on the underbellies of my feet

And I feel fire on my shoulders

And I sink in the pool until words float like bubbles up to the surface but no one hears me
scream

The words billow like cigarette smoke through the air

Tight like new hair ties around my wrists

Scalpel over my chest

When they cut me open

All they find is words

Words

Words

Where's her heart? Where's her lungs? Where's her kidneys?

All that's in here

Is words

Words

words

I'm so sick of words

Words

Words

I suck on them to fall asleep

They're my bandaids when I bleed

And I spit them out when I wish instead of writing I could see

They taste like dirt

And they're the echo of my screams

I want to choke on flower petals

But all I've got are these pathetic words

Sitting in the pits of my stomach, gruesome and growing like seeds

Hissing vermillion words

on the tip of my tongue as I set fire to the trees

all I know to do is to write,

To burn

To keep.

From The Desk Of, No. 2

Featuring Taylor O'Neill

The Hampton Review: What first got you interested in writing?

Taylor O'Neill: When I was younger, I was an avid reader. Every chance I got, I was starting a new book or thinking of stories. Daydreaming is also a habit for me, so sometimes, I just need to get an idea I've been developing so much in my head out of my system.

THR: Who or what inspires your writing?

TO: It's most usually real-world events or my own personal life that inspire my writing. Whenever I'm developing a story, I try to incorporate a particular motif from my past or a character whom I can draw from someone I actually know. It makes my stories more individual and helps me fully flesh them out, since I feel more connected to them.

THR: Are there any authors or books that have shaped your style?

TO: I believe my style to be quite ornate in anything I write, be it essays, poetry, or novel ideas. An author I heavily admire is Holly Black, who created the Folk of the Air series. Her language is so beautiful and really adds to the fantastical, faerie aspect of her work. My favorite poet, whom my style is also influenced by, is Edgar Allan Poe. His work is timeless and transports me back to his era effortlessly. The way in which he wrote dark stories that still hold romantic sentiments and literary beauty is incredibly commendable and I hope to someday achieve it.

THR: What's your writing routine/regime?

TO: Whenever I'm trying to come up with an idea for a longer story, I usually turn to things like random image generators. I compile a collection of photos that I think fit together, and create a story from there. I then make an outline for the entire plot, turn on some music that fits the vibe or gets me creative, and start writing. I use Google Docs for my work since writing physically tends to make my wrist very tired, and I don't have to worry about losing anything. Another tool I use quite often is an online thesaurus because one of my favorite things is finding new, descriptive words for my writing.

THR: How do you edit or revise your work? Do you share drafts with anyone?

TO: I have a bad habit of rewriting sentences tens of times before moving on, instead of just getting it all out and editing later. After I have finally finished a piece, I usually look over it a few times to identify any spelling or grammatical errors. If I don't find any, I'll pass it along to a friend or a family member to give me feedback.

THR: What's the hardest part about writing for you? What advice would you give to other high school students who want to write?

TO: An extremely hard part of the creative process for me is simply sharing my work with others. I often get nervous or anxious about what they're going to think, and even if they do like it, I'm scared to share it on a larger scale. It's difficult to listen to someone's thoughts on my writing, but it's a necessary part of becoming an actual writer. Intaking, creating, and helpfully criticizing art is the only way one can become better at their craft. That's the advice I would give

my fellow students who wish to write. Reading and interpreting prose and poetry is extremely important for the development of your style and literary voice. Writing pieces is the only way you can put that development into practice. Constructive criticism, both of your own work and others, is what's going to truly shape your writing into something substantial. So, no matter how uncomfortable it may feel to put yourself out there, just do it. It'll help you considerably in the long run.

"A Child's Reverie" by Taylor O'Neill

Young bodies weave in and out of an intricate dance, their movements perfectly pliant and fit to portray the play they put on. No one in the room is hoodwinked by each other's exaggerated grandiose, but they all still believe themselves to be geniously deceiving their peers. That is the pinnacle of humanity's foolishness though, is it not? Especially so for those born in the most auspicious of homes, their every step choreographed to a specific tune that they must uphold, lest they fall from the grace they were only lucky enough to receive at birth. Debutantes' giggles are lost to time and swallowed by the watchful gaze of their parents on a night that should've been for their enjoyment alone. Boys in expensive suits share esoteric glances with one another as if to condemn the frivolous girls they dance with, though it is only a slight, delusional reprieve from the stage they are sharing with said "idiots." Mothers absentmindedly swirl their blackberry wine into a miniature whirlpool, and watch their daughters carry out the arduous task that they've been training them for since birth, that of appeasing whatever the culture expects of them. They've been silently hoping that someone would save their girls from what they wished they could have escaped in their youth, but alas, a cycle such as this never ends. The land of the free will keep moving as its people try to escape the fate predestined for them, to no avail. Marriages shall be arranged, scandals covered up, and young, "unrealistic" dreams sacrificed for the sake of preserving the fragile facade of an intrepid upper class. However, it's not only those born into lace nightgowns and pompous family portraits that are affected by this vile circle of civilization. Their less wealthy counterparts are also subjected to the push and pull of a daunting task, one that was given to them as soon as they could understand its words. They must rise into the parts their birthrights have laid out for them and undergo the eternal struggle of poverty. All's childhood, in this day and age, lacks just that: childhood.

The lot left to this generation's youth affords them no rest, no semblance of peace, for it only pushes the deception of a better life that everyone knows in their hearts will never come true. It was absconded from them centuries ago, in a fight that humans will never claim victory against and disentangle themselves from, the battle that they started themselves yet can't seem to put an end to. The only idea that mankind is ever criticizing yet always praising, because it can't attest to its own folly. The strangling thing that kills their young, drowns their elderly, and only tires those in the middle. The flames that scorch them all, that they can still stop now, but only add kindling to instead of water.

That man-made war is, of course, society.

From The Desk Of, No. 3

Featuring Samantha Springer

The Hampton Review: What inspires you as a writer, and do you have a certain process/regime that you follow?

Samantha Springer: What inspires me as a writer is truly my emotions, writing and art have always how I've expressed myself best and they are truly my muse and creativity. I don't have any specific process when it comes to writing, it is truly just focusing on whatever emotion I want to convey and then finishing the piece in the same time frame I started it because I don't like leaving this unfinished.

THR: The poem "My Safe Place" deals with nostalgia. Can you comment on what it's like to write about a specific memory and how your writing confirms or distorts a particular memory?

SS: When writing about a memory, I really like to portray all emotional aspects surrounding said memory and reflect on them through physical details that are connected to those emotions. I feel like when I write about a memory I don't necessarily distort it, rather I just see it from a different perspective than what I saw it as when I originally experienced it, trying more so to incorporate how that memory has shaped me into who I am today.

THR: Ten years from now, what will you be writing about?

SS: I hope that in ten years from now I am in a position of success and achievement and I would love to write about my overall experience to getting to that point in order to inspire people.

THR: What's next for you after high school? Are you staying within the realm of writing and literature?

SS: After high school, I'm attending Saint Joseph's University to study marketing and my dream job is to be an art director and work on creating ad campaigns, though I hope to continue my passion for writing as a side hobby.

THR: How has writing helped you as a high school student?

SS: As a student in high school, I have had the privilege to take many writing classes with amazing teachers that have helped push me to grow as a writer and through this I feel like writing has been an outlet that displays my growth journey as well as my passions towards different subjects and topics.

"My Safe Place"

Even though scary things happened within you,

You always gave me shelter, a feeling of safety,

You gave me some of my best memories.

Oh what I would do to see you just one last time
What I would do to drive past you on my bike like I always used to do
Now you have new people to look after, yet I find no comfort in that.
You were mine and I loved you the way you were,
yet they took you away from me
Ripped you up and flipped you for “better resale value,”
Your vintage grandma charm brutally swapped for plain Jane modernism;
If you can even call it that.
You were where I truly felt safest and most at peace
and now you’re just another cookie cutter modern home.
Oh how I miss grandma’s house, the only place I felt at home