

# The Hampton Review

Issue Six

Spring 2026

Welcome to Issue Six of *The Hampton Review*. This issue showcases the work of seventeen writers, including thirteen from Loyola Blakefield, in Towson, MD, as the inaugural Featured High School installment. This issue also continues our interview series, From The Desk Of, hearing from Violet Binczewski, a four-time contributor, one final time, and also gives a look at two teachers who have worked with contributors: Mrs. Kate King, Violet's teacher, and Mr. Sean Flanigan, a creative writing teacher at Loyola Blakefield.

Enjoy the new work and the inside stories of our contributors.

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Think of the Butterflies  
Violet Binczewski

Think of the butterflies  
The way their wings flutter with such certainty  
If only we could sew them to our backs and fly away

Even if we are too old to catch them  
Like we used to in our chubby little hands on summer nights  
We can imagine what they must look like now in the moonlight,  
Flying to someone else who yearns for beautiful things

And when we look for pink and purples outside of the thin film of a curious creature's wings,

We need not search too far—  
Taste the colors in the grass beneath our feet, in the warm sunlight on our shoulders, in the sweet  
memories that grasp our fingers too late into night  
Just a gentle squeeze is our undoing

Think of the butterflies  
The way they came out when the weather was warm  
We always said they flew to paradise when the ground turned cold  
And we vowed to join them one day,

Even if we knew that no wings were to grow while we played

And so I say to you,  
When we forget how to run,  
And are knocked to our knees by the winds of today

Think of the butterflies,  
Appearing on some little girl's treehouse swing,  
With wings outstretched,  
We can live in her dreams, you know  
Be the flicker of the candles on her birthday.

From The Desk Of, No. 7  
Featuring Violet Binczewski

*The Hampton Review:* Butterflies appear throughout the poem as a central symbol. What do they represent to you, and why did you choose them to carry the poem's message?

Violet Binczewski: Butterflies always represented a feeling of freedom to me, as do many creatures with wings. But butterflies also have a certain nostalgia. I remember looking for butterflies when I was a little girl and wanting to fly like they did, and so the butterfly serves as a symbol of those times in my life, the times where I was encompassed in imagination and the feeling that I could fly. That is why I thought butterflies were the perfect vessel for the message of the poem.

*THR:* The poem contrasts childhood experiences with growing older. How did your own reflections on aging influence the way you wrote this piece?

VB: I've definitely been thinking about getting older and closing certain chapters in my life, especially as I finish high school. I had this sense of joy for some of the best memories that I've ever had with my childhood best friend (who is still my best friend to this day), but also a feeling of sadness that I would never feel that way again or live that way again. I wrote this poem because I was trying to understand this ball of simultaneous happiness and looming endings.

*THR:* Lines such as "Taste the colors in the grass beneath our feet" encourage readers to find beauty in everyday moments. What inspired this sensory approach to describing hope and happiness?

VB: I really love to play with the senses in my poetry, but I felt it was especially important in this poem. This piece reminisces on what it was like to be a kid, and kids love to experience the world through their senses, whether that be rolling in the mud or tasting ice cream. I wanted to make the memory of that as vivid as possible.

*THR:* The poem suggests that even after we are gone, we can live on in memories, dreams, and small moments of joy. What ideas about legacy or remembrance were you exploring?

VB: I knew that even though I was embedding the memory of being a kid in this poem, I knew that didn't mean I would get to experience that again. But the great thing about memory and remembrance is that you can hold onto something that is now gone. You get your memories as a souvenir. And even though the physical time is past, you are reminded of it through moments of small joy and beauty. Even the smallest of sensations can bring back the greatest feelings. It's not gone if you keep it alive in your memory.

*THR*: The ending imagines becoming “the flicker of the candles on her birthday.” Why did you choose this image to conclude the poem, and what feeling did you hope readers would be left with?

*VB*: I knew I wanted to end on a moment of hope, and I think birthdays are the perfect example for that, especially when you are a kid. Even though a year of your life is ending, it allows you to make wishes for the next. And even if you yourself are no longer the little kid blowing out the candles, you can be the hope in the flicker of the candles, remembering your own moments in someone else.

From The Desk Of, No. 8  
Featuring Mrs. Kate King

*The Hampton Review:* What do you enjoy most about encouraging a love of reading in an all-girls school, and are there particular books or authors that consistently resonate with your students?

Kate King: What I love most is watching a girl discover a story; one that some author, in some other time and place, understood exactly what she was feeling and gave it language. That moment of recognition is everything. In an all-girls environment, there's a particular freedom to that experience. Girls don't perform their reactions for anyone. They just feel them.

Fredrik Backman never fails. *Beartown* consistently stops my students cold; the way he writes about belonging and exclusion and the cost of silence hits differently when you're seventeen and figuring out your own loyalties. Julia Alvarez is another. The Mirabal sisters in *In the Time of the Butterflies* give my students a model of courage they can hold onto although they struggle with the novel at first. And my fave!! *The Great Gatsby* always hits home. We have so many real conversations about that story and the selfishness of the Buchanans right alongside the sadness yet hope of Gatsby.

*THR:* How important do you think reading is in developing young writers, and what kinds of reading experiences most influence their work?

KK: Reading is the whole foundation. But not all reading experiences are equal. What changes a writer isn't passive reading; it's the moment a student stops asking *what happened* and starts asking *how did the author do that to me?* A sentence that stops them in their tracks or an ending that makes them close the book and stare at the ceiling. I love taking those experiences with books and helping them name what they see there, how the author creates meaning!

*THR:* How do you help students move beyond simply reading for plot and begin to notice an author's craft, such as structure, voice, and style?

KK: I teach them to read like thieves. Good writers steal, not ideas, but techniques. So we'll read a passage, and I'll ask: if you were going to steal one thing from this author, what would it be? That question changes how they read. Suddenly, voice isn't abstract. Syntax isn't invisible. They're collecting tools. Socratic seminar helps enormously here, too, because when students have to defend a claim about craft to fifteen other sharp girls who will absolutely push back, they develop genuine analytical precision. They stop saying "I liked it" and start saying "the shift to present tense in that chapter creates an intimacy that makes the betrayal land harder." That's a reader becoming a writer. Seminars were one of the activities that they asked for more of in AP. They loved digging deeper and hearing how everyone else interpreted the story, especially when we read *Othello* and *Beloved*.

*THR:* How does close engagement with literature help students develop confidence and originality in their own writing?

KK: Confidence in writing comes from having something real to say and literature gives students the framework to locate what that is. When a girl spends three weeks living inside a novel, arguing about its characters, defending its ambiguities, she builds the habit of having a

perspective. And a writer with a genuine perspective is already more than halfway there. The more a student has read, the more voices she's absorbed, the more structural choices she's witnessed, the more she has to draw from. Originality isn't manufactured from nothing. It's a recombination; she is taking what she sees and tries to craft her own work.

*THR:* What do you see as the lasting benefits of reading, both for students' academic development and for their understanding of themselves and the wider world?

*KK:* I just love my AP classes. They are like large book clubs where I get to have great book conversations with 15+ best friends. I want them to take what we do with our literature and treasure it, to fold it into their story of high school with confidence and love. The benefits are clear academically: increased vocabulary, analysis of characters, and ability to synthesize. But the other benefits are lifelong through the joy of sitting with a novel and allowing that sustained intimacy to change their perspectives. Most importantly, and still after 30+ years of teaching, I want them to LOVE reading.

Liberty  
Brandon Bonds

gray static shivers up

and forms cups around my ears

the people around me

faces illuminated and distant

get their own too

for some, fear grips their mind

it heightens the senses

sharpens the teeth

and we see how much they can really take

for me

it widens my eyes

I don't see more but

I feel a sense of awareness

that I know I have had

but have never used

I grab at the static

like smoke it clings to my hands

I condense it in my palms

put it in my mouth

and out comes the flames of liberation

I become

the signal through the noise

rallying people to my flame

and giving their faces shape

once again

until we are one again

Cristero War  
Yaa-Miniya Robinson Leach



rosses burn on cathedrals the Cristero  
Wars explodes full rage, the masses run  
from mad gunmen riding on horse moon to  
morning. Priests die praying wrung by their  
neck by their unrepentant devotion,

blessed are the meek but cursed  
blasphemers! Courageous Jose

are the

young but brave stood for justice's jurisdiction and

Miguel bestowed the heavenly crown of holy martyrdom  
to heaven's gates. Mexico's artisans were willfully blinded my pride all the  
murders aside, mothers were hurt and wounded and their sons  
hit the hot battleground ground

their;

graves sunk in the dirt soiled in tears some unnamed,

people spit on their tombstones without a care

when it comes time for you to attest what will you say

Will you fight for the foe or the fair?

Echoes In Empty Rooms  
Danica Miller

I walk these halls where silence speaks in tongues,  
Each shadow heavier than the one before.  
A mothers absence hums beneath my lungs,  
And fathers leave their footprints at my door.

I clutch the fragments of a love I've known,  
A hand that never stayed, a gaze that fled.  
In mirrors, I am always just alone,  
The living echo of words never said.

Yet in this dark, a stubborn spark remains—  
A pulse that whispers through the hollow ache.  
Though pain has carved its map across my veins,  
I choose to rise, to mend what hearts would break.

The past may haunt, yet here I claim my name.  
No ghost can tether me; I fan my flame.

## FEATURED HIGH SCHOOL: LOYOLA BLAKEFIELD

This Shelf is Small

Yari Butcher

Rows of possession.

Prestigious or trivial, scared or profane,  
Vibrant or gray, colossal or mini.

They're packed,

Beg for space, pleading for legroom.

Some descend, smash

The floor.

Others stand, refuse to defect.

They push and pull, compete

For space.

They kill.

Those lucky, stubborn

Or scared,

And to those that are unlucky,

Dead and gone,

Do not weep; I know the game

Rest assured knowing,

Like you,

The shelf will give wear.

## Leftover Pottery

Alex Zic

You were found in a shipwreck deep  
under the Mediterranean

What was it like seeing

Zeus, Socrates, Jesus?

Rivers of Marble flow, turquoise, dark blue, copper and ivory

The colors change like your gods, colliding,

rival truths cause a storm

Olive oil or wine, or myths, or Plato's secrets,

which did you hold?

Can you still hear the hedonists partying,

the philosophers arguing, the Christians praying?

Still your marble skin is smooth, preserved from wreck

Blankets of sand kept you safe, deep blue veins and ivory swirls

Your knowledge must be vast, centuries of Greece fit in my palm

## The Carol Burnett Show Luke Springer

Hollywood has whittled laughs  
from Burnett's family over time.  
Burnett learned how to disassociate  
a comedic performance.

She and other local kids would act  
out scenes from films  
in a Beverly Hills mansion  
throughout the years.

Burnett for almost sixty years, pursued  
a career as a reporter.  
Later worked in college musicals  
at UCLA learning comedy.

The Carol Burnett Show was born two years later.  
Sketches were sharp, sometimes dark.  
Burnett commanded the stage, holding all  
of the attention without forcing it.

Awards came but never defined her.  
The comedy industry transitioned  
influencing performers who idolized her.  
The cameras stopped rolling,

The echoes of her presence remained  
Hollywood may have tried to shape laughter,  
but Burnett carried it like  
something worth saving in.

I HAVE ACHED FOR SO LONG  
Colby Shilling

I have ached for so long, love,

The kind that lingers beyond

Goodbye.

Your voice still hums,

a song that never wants to end.

I see your name in sleepless nights,

drifting across the ceiling with passing headlights,

each letter slow and careful,

bright as sunrise sneaking through open curtains.

It feels like your voice saying my name,

like knowing exactly where I belong.

I hear my heartbeat in the silence,

echoes of you beneath each breath.

I wear the ache like a tattoo.

ANGIE  
Ethan O'Neill

The one I miss so dearly.

The shimmer in your eyes glistened  
like the moon reflecting upon  
a lake at the midnight hour.

The words spoken from your  
velvet-glossed lips had no purpose  
to a stranger, but everything to me.

All your kisses still taste sweet.

They remind me of a lollipop,  
Wanting to savor every bit,  
Never wanting the sweetness on my tongue to run out.

The one sentence still haunts me,  
“But ain't it time we said goodbye?”

After the Rain Before the Dogs  
Brody Hager

After the rain, the streets calm.  
Quiet. Puddles reflect the grey skies,  
declaring apathy. The air cold, perfumed  
of woodsmoke. Far off, an owl  
hoots, speaking to companions.  
Rain drips from the gutter, a rhythm  
without intent. Crickets resume their counting.  
The world remembering itself, one sound  
at a time.

Before the dogs, howling at oblivion.  
A tire screeching over wet concrete.  
Kids shouting, the kind of yelling  
that made the silence hide. Wolves shriek  
throughout the woods. The air  
pungent with the odor of gas.

The sounds of mankind clutter the earth,  
It somehow peaceful. Tranquility feeds  
off the sounds of people's everyday lives.

Pumpkin  
Bennett Dieter

A vast field: barren and rustic,  
is littered with hundreds of small, orange spheres.  
Creases run pole to pole—top to bottom.  
They branch from vines and sit in the mud,  
waiting to be picked up and taken home.

“Mom, I like this pumpkin,” the voice of  
a little girl radiates as her toddler-sized shoe crunches  
through the leaves.  
After a “snip” on the stem and a lift,  
a “thud” shakes the ground as it falls into a wheelbarrow.

Incisions are made; cuts are opened  
at home to create a face with jagged teeth and oval  
eyes. The pumpkin is carried  
to the porch steps: Its final resting place,  
where it will lie and soon be ravaged by squirrels  
until its remnants return to the  
dirt from which it was born.

## Lines of Best Fit Landon Wilkinson

Data distilling raw experience  
into a model of the world  
A baby, exploring, guesses  
testing what comes next.

Connections between neurons  
adjust over time,  
capturing regularities.  
The neocortex understands  
sounds, sights,  
and predictions

Memory triggers perception,  
recalling nearby memories,  
causing new thoughts.  
Thinking against instinct  
reroutes the mind's circuitry.

Deep learning networks learn subtleties,  
predicting text with sense.  
Gradient descent improves accuracy,  
by moving downhill, slowly.

Cognition becomes recognition,  
seeing a patch as something.  
Neurons fire in patterns,  
causing other neurons to fire.

Understanding changes a way of seeing,  
a way of thinking.

A model trains, predicting when next token

Compression mistaken for thought.

Apple  
Zach Moneymaker

An apple sits in the bowl's middle.  
Small, slightly scarred, it somehow stands out.  
No stem on top, its skin all bruised and spent;  
the most charming fruit present.

The others stand tall, their stems straight.  
This one leans, slightly off balance.  
But something in it feels honest and real  
not dressed for praise, not afraid of how  
it might make someone feel.

It doesn't ask to be chosen or held first.  
It waits, certain in its worth.  
Being itself is enough,  
its time will come.

Fork in the Road  
Enzo Capone

It lay in the wasteland gleaming  
Like a fallen star. Picking through the rubble  
And dust of ages, I saw its form  
Take shape.

The cutlery was jagged, bent  
Awkwardly,  
Sticking out of the dirt  
A flag of triumph.

I snatched it from the ruins,  
And reeled with memory  
Of little hands learning to be decent.  
Here, decency was silence.

I held the utensil,  
Feeling the hill-and-valley grime  
Grate against my flesh, before abruptly  
Dropping it.

The small *clink* was swallowed  
By the silence while  
The hulking ruins huddled  
Around their prize like dying giants.

Spinner  
Ari Rogozin

Black, gold, silver. The colored metal shines  
like the moonlight over an undisturbed lake.  
As its body spins, spins, spins.

Click. Click. Click. Click. It's gears click like the clock  
that hangs in the basement of my grandparents' house.  
It spins around the wheel of  
time. As time flows, it continues to  
click, and click, and click,  
until I bring it to a stop.

It sits on my desk like an hourglass.  
Unlike hourglasses, it keeps minutes, not hours.  
But that minute of revolution is more fulfilling than watching falling sand.

Summer Among Friends  
Jordan Crawford

Kelly watched Jean out of the Mickey Martinez's.

“Have you set a date?” “Was it like  
in a dream?” “Did he get on a knee?”

“Where's the ring?” “Why didn't you introduce me  
to Wole when I was in Atlanta?”

She and Wole had been lying in bed.

It was a Saturday morning. Wole was chuckling  
while telling a story about his academic advisor  
and his wife, who home-schooled their children.

She was pre-law but didn't get her M.R.S. degree.

Jean and Kelly and their friends spend afternoons  
down to the World of Coca-Cola and Braves game.

## The Color Blue

Nicholas Neaman

Blue is the color of the skies,  
Oceans stretch in shades from light to dark.  
Their blue holds secrets, dreams, and stories untold.

Blue reminds the mind of calm or rough waters.  
It helps the soul when hearts feel heavy.  
The color stands as a symbol  
of trust, wisdom, and quiet power.

Artists reach for blue to paint emotion's depth.  
From sapphire stones to faded denim jeans, it lives.

The morning sky begins light blue and brightens.  
By twilight, it darkens, to inspire deep thought.

Blue ripples gently, then crashes in sudden waves.  
It pools like morning rain, cold and restless,  
yet sunlight threads through its waves,  
hinting at tomorrow.  
We wrap ourselves in blue overcoats,  
letting the color steady our minds.

From The Desk Of, No. 9  
Featuring Mr. Sean Flanigan

*The Hampton Review*: What do you enjoy most about teaching creative writing in an all-boys school, and do you find that the students bring any distinctive perspectives or energy to the writing process?

Sean Flanigan: I enjoy many aspects of teaching creative writing. I work with Freshman, Juniors, and Seniors—but creative writing is only for Seniors, so I see them for their last year at Loyola, when they are more mature and effectively young adults. Often, I have taught several of the students when they were younger, so I'm already familiar with their academic, expository writing. It's enjoyable to teach them (help them) to learn to break rules and experiment with different forms and modes. It's highly enjoyable to foster their imaginations. I do believe that traditional curricula somewhat squashes or, at best, tempers creative pursuits, which might be necessary for a time.

I have taught creative writing at different levels, including undergraduates at university, so I don't know if working with all-boys is really that much different from a co-ed classroom. I do spend a couple weeks confronting false bravado and helping the students to be vulnerable with themselves and one another. I'm always impressed with how far they come, especially with their creative nonfiction. By the year's end, they are well versed in the process of a creative writing workshop; they know how to criticize well and how to criticize constructively. They don't shy away from difficult subjects, and they support each other well.

*THR*: How do you develop the writing prompts you give to students, and what makes a prompt effective in inspiring creativity and original storytelling?

SF: I like to keep fresh and interested, so I change the prompts quite often. I have been teaching this course for 15 years or so, so I've tried all sorts of prompts and exercises. I retire the old; I keep the tried-and-true. I also survey the students throughout the year to learn what appeals to them and what feels too much like a chore. I adjust. I find that it helps for us to read contemporary texts together on a regular basis. We read *The New Yorker* often, *Brevity* (Creative Non-Fiction), and we live on *Poetry Foundation's* exhaustive website. I also use a textbook by David Starkey entitled *Four Genres in Brief*. It's a fantastic primer, I find.

Many prompts and original texts are born from automatic-writing exercises. We study a little psychology and surrealism in the opening of the year, and we mind the subconscious. We have kept dream journals; we have written texts based on images and photos. We invent a class character with an extensive backstory, and they all write a narrative based on that character. There are infinite approaches.

*THR*: To what extent do your students study the structure and techniques of published works, and how do you balance learning from established authors with encouraging students to find their own voices?

SF: We study many, many published works—both canonical and not so much. Depending on the year and size of the class, I like to hit at least 15-20 major poems, 10 short stories, and about 10

essays that are representative of each genre. While they are working on their own texts in the background, I lecture on the major works. Following our formal study, we then switch into workshop mode. It takes a couple of weeks to get everyone through a full workshop—but it works.

I've also like Wilde's quip: "Be yourself. Everyone else is taken." It's something of that nature. At Loyola Blakefield, all Junior English classes conclude with work on the College Essay. All Senior class begin with work on that same essay. Having the students end 11<sup>th</sup> grade and begin 12<sup>th</sup> with a text about themselves and their own experiences really facilitates the process of finding their own voice. That's a long process, of course. I don't think imitation is wasted time, either. If a student really responds to a particular author, I encourage him to try writing in that's author style. Voice is such a nebulous thing. I think imitating style is good practice for learning how others sound: When those lessons begin to stick, it's easier to then ask, "Well, how would you say this?" Again, it's a long, arduous practice with many failed attempts, which are also information.

*THR:* What do you see as the educational benefits of teaching creative writing, particularly for students who may not initially think of themselves as writers?

SF: It's a difficult question, and I don't think my opinion is new or different. I don't believe the art (the mystery) of good writing can be taught, but the craft can be taught, for sure. I often tell the students, though I don't love sports metaphors, that anybody can be taught to dribble, to pass, to screen, to defend, to shoot. Anyone can learn the basics of basketball, but everyone learns best by doing. It's the same thing in a creative writing class. We can learn the aspects of the craft, and we can practice them. How someone becomes Michael Jordan or LeBron James or whomever, I have no idea. I don't think anyone really knows, which is fine. I do remind them to take pleasure in the struggle and the process.

I tell them early: I can't grade creativity. No one can. I can evaluate process and effort. For their midterm and final portfolios, along with their revised works, they also have to write extensive letters about why they changed what they changed in the revising process. They learn to see their own thinking, which is useful in any endeavor.

I'm more interested in their thinking about process than I am in the final edits. Sometimes they produce great pieces; I have been impressed on many, many occasions. And they often impress themselves and one another—but they can explain, in class expository process, why they enjambed a line, or broke a line, or moved from tercets to quatrains, or opted to abandon some form for free verse, that's where I see the learning.

*THR:* Beyond producing stories, what are some of the personal or lifelong benefits that writing can offer young people, both inside and outside the classroom?

SF: I think writing is great meditation and an expedient way to confront the self. I also think's it daunting and difficult and sometimes I really do hate it—but the unearthing is real to me. It always has been. Like Orwell and Dillard and so many others, I do write to see what-it-is I am thinking and *how* I am thinking. There's pleasure there in the self-knowledge, or if not knowledge, in the reflection and distortion that comes like staring into the mirror for an uncomfortable length of time.

In the fiction unit, especially, we concentrate on allowing our characters to be as real as possible. I encourage the students to talk with their characters, imagine texting with their characters, eating, socializing, arguing with their characters. When the characters become more and more real to the students, their writing becomes more empathetic and sympathetic and vitriolic and loving and forgiving.

When that happens, it's joyous to remind students that the characters *are* real because they are coming from within themselves—the characters are themselves. When that epiphany opens, I do see a kind-of grace and tenderness emerge. There's a deeper awareness. We all need that both in and out of the classroom.