

Issue I

January 2024

NINE MUSES REVIEW



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Edited By Katie Baughman, Abhinav Aitha,
Lily Baughman, & Jacob Myron Cerdeña

Cover Design by Katie Baughman (Photo from the National Gallery of Art)

Interior Design by Katie Baughman and Abhinav Aitha

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Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers,

I am so excited to introduce the first edition of *Nine Muses Review*! I started this journal with my friends and fellow editors Abhi, Lily, and Jacob in the hopes of being a place for literary creativity. I hope we can always share your work with care.

We are so fortunate to have received many incredible submissions of art, prose, and poetry for our first edition! I'm so thrilled with the pieces we were able to accept, which make up the contents of this journal. Every piece is so uniquely beautiful, and I'm glad to be a small part of shining light on these works.

This past winter, we also had the privilege of hosting two contests (poetry and prose) and awarding prizes to five fantastic pieces of writing! I was ecstatic to learn that *Nine Muses* received over 200 incredible contest submissions. Choosing these pieces was a challenge and a responsibility I'm so grateful you've trusted me with. It's my honor to share Claire Beeli (1st place), Shahryar Eskandari Zanjani (2nd place), and Marina Kraiskaya's (3rd place) poetry, and Brett Ann Stanciu (1st place) and Ray Hoo's (2nd place) prose. I was so moved by each of their works. They each share something incredible with us all.

It is my hope that this edition honors and supports all its incredible poets, writers, and artists, and that we can continue to bring stories to life. To anyone who has a journey to share: we urge you to write, write, write, and keep writing!

Forever grateful for everyone who has shared their work with us, and forever grateful for you, for reading.

Katie Baughman, EIC :)

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Hello, Goodbye

Photograph, 35 mm

Liz Walker is an artist, freelance writer, and co-host of the *Unsolved Mysteries* podcast *Perhaps It's You*. She resides in Minneapolis, MN with her husband and their two mutts, Lennie Briscoe and Rey Curtis. You can see more of her work on Instagram as @EverybodyLikesLiz

burning photographs / empty cardboard boxes

are you the concrete on my hands?
my face is scarlet with despair.
hunched over molten stacks of photographs,
I scrape my cheeks and
gouge my eyes.

I cannot bear
the muddied faces flinching
and contorting. the eye sockets and
empty mouths elongate and
distend.

oh God, what have I done?

I'm sorry, I was restive.
too conscious of the leaves
that had swept up and
gathered at my door.

too weary of the gaping sky, the
gaping road, the gaping trees,
this gaping home of waiting,
aching, watching cardboard
boxes where you'd sleep.

Sylvia Sun is a 17 year old from the United States who adores literature, nature, music and art. She spends most of her free time writing poetry and has been published in *Tiger Leaping Review* and *Adolescence Magazine*. She can be found on Instagram by the username (@sun.poetry__)

The Geese Fly South

Zane's mother smacks open their door. The door's a cheap aluminum piece of junk and smacks against the shack's wall. Zane doesn't know who cobbled the shack together, pallets that are nail-gunned together, with mismatched metal roofing a substitute for siding: red and silver and a green square on the back. Inside, the insulation has fallen in places. His mother has thumbtacked it on the pallets. The floor is an orange rug that Zane sometimes thinks might have once been a cool thing somewhere else. His mother cleans a rental yurt on Hoblin Hill Road where crystals hang in the skinny windows. He's never met whoever owns the yurt but his mother sometimes brings him, and he gets to eat the Apple Jacks or stale danishes, whatever remains.

Her bottom lip shoves out, mad. She's wearing the white-turned-dirty overalls she's been wearing, damn near every day, for a few months now, round belly pushing hard at the front pockets.

She grabs his shoulder and commands, "Stop."

Stop what? He's not going anywhere.

Her phone is pressed against her ear while she digs in her pocket. "Whatever, whatever. Like, how long? I mean, that's the only fucking question, isn't it? How long until he's out?" She glances up at a skein of hurrying geese. "Sure!" She holds the phone above her head — what is she doing? — and shoves a handful of crumpled bills at Zane. "Go. Get Pepsi. Now." Her mouth is crumpled in that bad way, where her crooked teeth hang out. His little sister, not even yet born yet, is hurting his mom, banging up her inside belly. He hates the baby already, and she's not even born yet.

She pushes him off the step with her knee. The phone is at her face again. "Bastard. That bastard."

She's crying, shoving him off, saying, "Go! Go!"

Overhead, those geese. He stands there. The skein unravels across the sky, the layers of sunset like a great big pan of baking lasagna. Where he wants to be.

Brett Ann Stanciu is the author of *Unstitched: My Journey to Understand Opioid Addiction* (Steerforth Press, 2021). A recipient of a 2020 Vermont Arts Council Creation Grant, her essays and fiction have appeared in *The Rumpus*, *Memoir Monday*, *101 Word Story*, *Vermont Almanac*, *Taproot*, *Vermont Literary Review*, and *Green Mountain Review*, among other publications. Her novel *Hidden View* (Green Writers Press, 2015) portrays the challenges of a hardscrabble family farm. She lives in Hardwick, Vermont, in a 100-year-old house surrounded by lilacs and blogs at stonysilvermont.com.

In Plot 47, Long Beach Community Garden

My father plants
like it might save him.

Tomatoes, snap peas, kale, carrots,
woven trellis-structures swaying.

He hides them under soil
like they'll show us who he is.

Coffee houses are sick of him
and his fertilizer hunts,

he won't pay for what could be free. His car
always smells of pungent grounds, seedlings.

We have dinner
sometimes, now.

There is dirt scattered like
snow on his hair. He smells

like an earthworm,
like he's been burrowing with the seeds,

and his smile
stands out, brighter.

The tomatoes, lettuces, radishes,
these bitter things for him

are fodder for salads in bowls
wide enough for a young girl to sit in.

The rest,

they are different.

The snap peas we chomped on in expensive trays,
climbing his wooden lacework.

The lamb's ear I pocketed and held
to my cheek, frosted leaves cool and soft.

Pumpkins planted in May,
in hopes of carving again, come fall.

Strawberries because he budgeted for them,
when we ate cartons in a sitting,

daisies
because my sister liked the way they sprouted.

He still brings us baskets of limes
from that gifted tree, years ago.

Hundreds every spring. We can't take
so many,

maybe two or three stuffed
in pockets each dinner,

but still he smiles, wide and bright
against so much dust.

Claire Beeli is an emerging writer from southern California. Her work is published or is forthcoming in *Block Party Lit*, *Rill and Grove*, and *The Apprentice Writer*, among others. She is her city's 2023-2024 Youth Poet Laureate and a 2024 YoungArts winner in Poetry and Creative Nonfiction.

Mo(u)rning of Youth

F o r

Mahsa Amini Gone

too soon, A girl gorgeous “like

the moon” A hapless stranger

here to visit family Sentenced

to death in helpless horror

And now the whole world Is

her family The pool of dried blood

outside your ears

Put life back in the

long dried-up well of my

eyes —Now brimful of

tears— As well as blood-red

ink in my poetic inkpot And I

now write this in diluted red:

Though the cruel punches of the murderous

“morality police” Punctured your fragile skull

The statues we will raise in your

remembrance shall never fall Though the

brain-dead hit your head With wanton

violence Over and over... and over Until you were

brain-dead And then dead dead Right in the morning

of youth You imbued with visibly renewed life Iran’s youth

You drove away from the depths of my desperate soul That

small secret sliver of doubt The rust, the reason my sword Of

a pen was growing blunt As I now brandish my shiny

sword With a new-found, almost childish joy I appreciate

you For you showed me the frail sheath It has finally found

freedom from Was forged from fear MY fear! OUR collective fear! As

we mourn your departure I can’t help but pity Our poor patience stone

Its face was more crumpled And its forehead more wrinkly Than it had ever

been in our history After the brutal murder of Navid Afkari So just this once, my

brothers and sisters, Let us take our tears elsewhere... I feel my cloth of self has been

rewoven Seamlessly With a warp of strength And a weft of Kurdish courage And with

my mighty pen I promise You did not die in vain***

Shahryar Eskandari Zanjani is a writer, teacher, and editor. His debut book, *English Phonetics and Phonology for Farsiphones*, was published by Booka (2020). He has edited several books at ATU Press and is the translator of *Zabbak's Inferno* (Markosia, 2024). His poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in Willow Review, Sky Island Journal, Raw Lit Magazine, Rill and Grove Poetry Journal, and Aureation Zine, among others.

Shahryar lives in Tehran, Iran. Life in the capital of a country that is on the cusp of a major political and cultural revolution is his main creative muse.

Tyrrhenian Sea

I crescent the length of your body,
wading and poling through
yielding delirium. the copper of
the last century warms, whispers,
then whistles through the room.

we move as slowly as the sailors
who drift inland through late afternoon
to each wine-stained, fluid, curtained space
as though in the interior of their own sheathing,
decadent with the newest fodder of the shore –

some distended in obscurity, others as sharp
as soldiers of the ancient galley, their hands
and arms clean as they hale their instruments –
their ears and mouths still brimming with ocean,
the cries of their labor billowing always in after them.

Marina Kraiskaya (Brown) is a Ukrainian-American poet and editor of the journal *Bicoastal Review*. She has been nominated for the Pushcart and Best New Poets. Find her writing in *Southeast Review*, *Poetry International*, *The Los Angeles Review*, *Zone 3*, *The Shore*, *EcoTheo*, *Leavings*, and *Pollux*, among others. Please visit mkraiskaya.com for more.



Holy Mother and Child

Mixed Media

Oliva Wallace is an artist and musician based out of Chicago. She strives to alchemize everyday experiences into art that is resonant and relatable. Weaving holy imagery in with the more mundane, Wallace illuminates ordinary moments, creating pieces that are both funny and profound. You can find her on Instagram under the handle [@sickday_music](#) and on stages across the midwest playing with her indie band Sick Day.

the twelve disciples of a poet

pride

pride latches onto glory like a drug, tempered only by the iron grip of failure. pride pushes a poet to be more than a poet should ever be. pride gives your voice a name and tells you that the whole world should know it. pride puts that coat on your shoulder and tells you to square up with the best of the best. pride knows that you have your own story to tell. pride will see that story through.

guilt

guilt lurks in the alleyway below your window, wishing to devour your every word. guilt wishes for the most vicious words that will cut your insides open until you are nothing but a vessel for it. guilt carves out your insides to make way for the unsaid. guilt is the cruel artist to your quiet poet. guilt only knows how to haunt. guilt wishes it does not.

wonder

wonder is thrumming against your windpipe, singing to be let out. wonder is the biggest hummingbird in a field of flowers you've never seen. wonder never picks up after itself, for it will have you running after it as long as it shines. wonder will have all of a poet's words and still you will find more. wonder rises and it never comes back down.

longing

longing curls up in a poet's gut, wishing for a different name. longing stands in those doors left swaying in the cold. longing stares at hunger and calls it impatient. longing sinks into your skin until you don't know where it starts and you end. longing watches them leave. longing does not call out for them to stay. longing waits. longing always waits.

love

love takes the form of any muse on any canvas. love is the enigma who doesn't need to ask to be captured. love curls up your spine and you realize it's been there all along. love knows many names but it wishes to learn yours. love wants to live in the spaces between your words. love gives you something to write home about. love is home. love will be here in the morning.

grief

grief has ink-tipped claws for hands and pockets of debt. grief constantly looks over your shoulder, waiting for the next best thing to call its own. grief sits in the bath with you and coerces you to remember. grief covers a poet's eyes with both its hands until it is the only thing they see. grief always comes when a poet calls. grief comes even when there is no call to heed.

faith

faith waits by the door waiting for you to come back. faith is staring into the jaws of death and leaping off the cliff anyway. faith throws a poet headfirst into the deep, knowing that they will find their way back to the shallows with the best stories to tell. faith is a loving and cruel hand, guiding a poet towards what couldn't be known.

pain

pain lives inside a poet's ribcage and plays bingo with their heart. pain drums its fingers down your sternum, playing a tune only you can hear. pain molds like water to fit the spaces inside your breastbone, inside all the places it does not belong. pain burns like fire until you don't know how to live without the taste of it on your skin. pain begets the kind of beauty only a poet can capture.

beauty

beauty leaves you starving. beauty is too much for a glance to linger. beauty seeks out every ounce of fear and laughs. beauty is its own incarnate and all you can do is write about it. beauty is the cardinal sin of a poet. beauty has its fingers laced around your throat and it is the last thing you see before you black out. beauty does not care. beauty simply is.

cruelty

cruelty loves to feast. cruelty sings you to sleep until you can't stop seeing it in your dreams. cruelty drowns the voices out and replaces them with its own. cruelty loves a poet who cannot stop writing to survive. cruelty is the nail in the coffin that a poet claws their way out from. cruelty does not forget you, and nor do you it.

hope

hope does not know where it comes from. hope has all the answers and none of the ways to tell you. hope sits just out of reach, knowing that you'll always find a way back to it. hope will live as long as you pick up that pen. hope lives on even after the ink dries. hope borrows bodies to keep itself going. hope has chosen you.

vengeance

vengeance is the doppelganger of a shattered heart. vengeance is the lifeblood of those who know what it feels like to lose. vengeance burns itself into your page. vengeance knows how to keep a dead body walking. vengeance promises to keep your hollowness filled. vengeance loves nothing more than to color the obsessions of a poet. vengeance knows you don't have to win.

Ray Hoo is a 20-year-old creator from Singapore who is fond of exploring literary transcendence through a refreshing mix of both intellectual and emotional inspiration. The co-owner of creative and copywriting brand TheGildedRaven has grand plans to publish a speculative poetry book and a novel in the next five years, on top of starting up a literary magazine for the bizarre and the wonderful. Their brutally vulnerable and evocative pieces offer no shortage of emotional complexity, and they are not afraid to play with visceral images and crazy concepts to bring the worlds in their head to life. They write to haunt, to provoke, to inspire. A full-time demon and a dedicated experimental poet, you can always expect them to be overdressed for any occasion while indulging in a hot drink and a good book. Similarly, you can expect them to be hunched over the drawing board, peering out at the world from behind a camera, or whipping up something new in the kitchen. You may find more of their works at @thericedemon on Instagram, as well as publications such as *Queer Gaze Magazine* and *Cathartic Youth Literary Magazine*.

“Why’d You Cut Your Hair?”

question asked by Jeff Santosuosso

The 1980s were over, & I was
a college freshman who never fit in.
My dreams of being a rock star
ran into the sliding-glass door
of two clumsy hands fumbling over the fretboard
as if struggling to open a combination lock.
Music screeched in angrier tones.
I no longer knew what I wanted to be
when I grew up—*normal* a word that came to mind,
though I couldn’t play its song.
I heard once that in an existential crisis
men get a haircut.
I chose the role of a different man,
one with wit & charm &
a look that didn’t say *Arrest me*.
Can’t say I’ve felt any comfort since.

Recurring Dream Analysis, Forty Years Later

My nightmares were of tidal waves,
my father driving,
turning left to find another coming.

What would Freud make of it,
or Jung? I knew no external fear
of water, drowning; everything but that.

I could swim like a pearl diver,
hold my breath for a century & a half.
I loved the ocean

which I saw once a year on family vacations,
letting it bash me against wet sand.
Though more existed beyond whitecaps

that could harm,
I played in murky greenish-blue
as if the last imagined castle of my youth.

Ace Boggess is the author of six books of poetry, most recently *Escape Envy*. His writing has appeared in *Indiana Review*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Notre Dame Review*, *Harvard Review*, and other journals. An ex-con, he lives in Charleston, West Virginia, where he writes and tries to stay out of trouble. His seventh collection, *Tell Us How to Live*, is forthcoming in 2024 from Fernwood Press.

Foreclosure

I would say to love anyone at all is to build a house
out of preemptive grief,
but I think my grandfather actually believed
she would live forever.

He did not ready himself
for her ashes in the Spokane river,
no matter how often my grandmother said it.
This is how it always ends:

crematorium paperwork,
returning the oxygen tank,
waking to an empty house.
One day I will be a vacant residence.

When widowhood finds her way to me,
I will hide as the doorbell rings over and over.
I, too, believe my spouse will live forever.
My daughter will live forever. I will live forever.

I am not convinced of a last breath, even now.
Even though my grandmother's chair is empty
when I visit, no card on my birthday.
I tried to die once, but perhaps even then

I didn't think I really would.
I cannot ask that teenager
what she believed about death.
I do not remember.

When I become nothing but abandoned rooms,

my daughter may be alive to love me still.
Even when the roof caves in,
I will feel the rain as it falls,

ruining the furniture
but reminding me I am alive for now.
I try to embrace grief with eager arms.
Our impermanence is our holiness.

A sandcastle celebrating the incoming tide.

I want to be ready,
but I know I have
too much of my grandfather in me.

Danielle Estelle Ramsay (she/her) is a queer and neurodivergent poet and writer based in the Pacific Northwest. She writes at intersections: grief with faith, queerness with religion, parenting with childhood, and so on. She is a United Methodist pastor, a fiber artist, and was once described as the poet laureate of love.

There Is More Going on Here than Just Entropy

I may seem sedentary, but on a cellular level, I'm quite
Busy loving someone right down to the electrons
Circling the nuclei in each of his atoms. Everything
I've ever done was leading me here, to this bed,
On which I spend really an appalling amount of time
Remembering instead of observing—I mean, even Proust
Would be alarmed. But memory's utility, if I recall
T.S. Eliot, is to make us more than we are
Physically, to project our feelings outside of time,
And if we have souls at all, they must, I think, reside
In that intangible, infinite space, wherein nothing decays.

Francesca Leader is a self-taught, Pushcart-nominated writer originally from Western Montana. She has poetry published or forthcoming in the *Sho Poetry Journal*, *Frost Meadow Review*, *Door is a Jar*, *Stanchion*, *Nixe's Mate*, *Streetcake*, *Bullshit Lit*, *Cutbow Quarterly*, *Literary Mama*, and elsewhere. Learn more about her work at inabucketthemoon.wordpress.com

Iron Grip, Golden Touch

Sir Dexter Wolfe is a patient man, yet no sucker for the inferiorities. A man as affluent as he would have no reason to – nor would he ever need to – expend even a passing glance at those less fortunate than him. He was a man of class, cruelty, and conniving charm. It is a path you couldn't turn back on, once you had established yourself in the uppermost echelons of society – not that Dexter would, given the choice.

Though patience is a virtue, with Dexter's own growing thinner, he thinks perhaps the fool before him should have begged for his life instead. How could a secretary with so many qualifications fail in presenting a watertight business proposal on his behalf? After *three weeks* of intense briefing and rigorous explanation? This man has more qualifications than the number of times he had made Dexter's honeyed smiles sour – and believe him, it had been a lot.

“What was your name again?” Dexter asks suddenly, cutting off the sorry man's string of apologies. It is little things like these – subtle dismissals that reminded people of their station and demarcated them from Dexter – that often helped to relieve a bubble to the surface of his ever-simmering pot of frustration when faced with incompetencies. The man, who made little effort to hide his offence, despite talking to a dignitary standing far above where he would ever reach in life, reiterated his name.

Banking and finance were not perceived to be reputable professions in Dexter's nation, where military might trumped all, until the young Wolfe took up the profession, precisely six and a half years ago under his father's guidance. But much of his so-called “help” was dross; a goodhearted, pitiful man who had neither the wit nor resource to succeed in a world where it only took a single drop of blood for a frenzy of loan sharks to rear their ugly heads. His father only had the business because he had assumed it from his late father – and had driven fifty years of work to the ground. What Dexter's grandfather would do if he heard of the state of his life's work today would surely shake gods. Not that he particularly cared for his father's fate.

“Better it is to be of a humble spirit with the lowly than to divide the spoil with the proud,” his father had constantly cantillated, a motto, a mantra; chanted under

hushed breaths whenever the table was devoid of food for the night. “*Remember that, my boy.*”

If you asked Dexter, it was his father's foolish attempt at trying to convince himself that the situation was not utter misery. He had a stubbornly – sickeningly – risible way of finding the good in everything. His father's business was failing – he had always been too benevolent a man who cared too much about the unfortunate and lazy, and not nearly enough about the rich, where he (had once) stood – and his family had to pay the price for his unwarranted altruism. All his jargon drove Dexter insane with little effort.

Dexter gathers the secretary's notes and feigns scanning over them in a brief but fastidious sweep of his gaze. Patience nurtures profit, except his profit was withering before his eyes. “Well, the outcome of the meeting was certainly unexpected. I will need time to evaluate a plan of action. Nevertheless, expect my regards in due time.”

The secretary, pleased with the prospect of Dexter still keeping contact, gushes a sickeningly obsequious thanks. “Your generosity precedes me, Mr Wolfe.” Dexter's saccharine smile twitches for a moment, though he keeps face. What a simpleton – to serve such a man and *still* address his superior with the wrong honorific. Yet there the secretary is (can one call him a secretary if he dares denominate Dexter as if they were coworkers?), simpering at his feet with mere careless acknowledgement from his silver tongue. Repulsive. Utterly repulsive. Even the thought of the term ‘*coworker*’ is enough for Dexter to break out into hives – but he wouldn't, of course, for nothing felled this impervious Wolfe. Indeed, he has grown to learn that simple people are pleased by simple words, and that it is within their nature to act as such. He cannot blame them for being born ignorant, Dexter thinks, so he proffers a hand to the man with well-concealed disdain nonetheless, correcting the impertinent man:

“*Sir* Wolfe.”

“My apologies, Sir Wolfe.”

An untimely death, it was, when Dexter's father was killed in a freak accident days before his son turned eighteen – though it seemed that the heir-turned-CEO was coping surprisingly well with the grief. News spread like wildfire: Dexter Wolfe had inherited an incoherent failure of a company. Only Dexter knew the truth. He had

usurped his father, that pathetic mess of a man. Dexter knew what made the world *tick*.

He fine-tuned his craft until the pitiable harmony that was his life sounded like a symphony worthy of reverence, his aria of misery transposed into an haughty, silken reverie. It didn't take a genius to conclude that money was the brain, heart, and lifeblood of the world. As long as Dexter kept cheating transactions, rigging contracts, weaving through loopholes, he would profit, while those incompetent were simply left to drown in their own self-inflicted failures. It had gotten him to the top, and it was a flawless scheme that would only succeed time and time again, as long as people continued to be as greedy as they were now. All Dexter cared for about these malefactors was that they kept his silver heart beating for him, through whatever means necessary, be it fraud or homicide. These types of people were easily replaceable, even easier forgotten.

Dexter dismisses the secretary and watches him leave. He closes the door behind him with a jarringly loud sound – that door was *designed* to be silent, so the man had to have put some real force into banging the door shut unscrupulously. That, or the man had detestably uncontrollable brute strength. Dexter cannot tell which is worse. Both make him shudder in contempt and avert his eyes from the door before he does something unimaginably unbecoming of him – at least to the public eye – like going after the man and wiping away that unctuous smile with a deft slap to the face. The only faces he has eyes for are the golden faces of his coins. He would have to call for one of his servants to disinfect the doorknob and polish it again after those middle-class, incompetent hands had laid waste upon the shined brass.

People of the likes of Dexter exploit the needy and destitute, tempting them with the allure of wherewithal, only to whisk up the carrot on the string out of reach. Pigs cannot lift their heads to look up, after all. He forces people's hands, traps them in situations impossible to escape unless through his own solutions: servitude. Of course, even his bodyguard had once fell into the same trap, except the former soldier was smart enough to comply and concede for his own good. Dexter may be cruel, but he is not wasteful. Perhaps a lingering trait dating back to his own impoverished upbringing: waste nothing, find resource in everything. He, surprisingly, does reserve a modicum of merit for those he deems deserving of his attention – namely, those he can find other uses for. As for his bodyguard, Dexter has graciously allowed the man

to stand on the same ground as him and assist him in lieu of kissing and shining the leather of his shoes.

Dexter has a long way to fall, but his pockets are deeper. He hasn't cut himself with his sharp tongue yet, and he never intends to. He wasn't dividing the spoils among the proud. Don't get him wrong, Dexter *is* the proud man his father used to frown at. His profit is all his, and his alone, so he wasn't exactly dishonouring his father, as much as he would love to sully his name.

“Kill him,” Dexter says, penning elegant numbers onto paper, “and do it swiftly.” He slips the paper into an envelope, seals it in a single fluid movement.

“Proceed with standard protocol to avoid dissemination of information—” he gestures with his pen, waving it airily, as if conducting an orchestra, and hands over the cheque to his bodyguard— “Send my regards.”

Eunice Ooi (15) is an avid lover of all things academia from the UK. You'll find them on the floor clutching 'This is How You Lose the Time War' in their study sobbing violently (the seventh time this month, and counting), or running the physics hate club as the (self-appointed) president. They find both succour and spirit in writing, whether in self-indulgence or in stories to really leave an impression – that is their goal. To articulate and to inspire. This will be their first officially published work, with many more certain to come if they have to say anything about it.

CRUSH

The first time I saw you I thought
who the hell is that?
& the second time I saw you
I was just glad I was seeing you a second time.
Now that I've seen you about
seven times on separate occasions
you still don't seem any less majestic to me
but not in an overblown, grandiose way
like my romantic poetry
but in a quiet shy sweet humble kinda way
like you don't know how good you are
or maybe you do but you'd never admit it
or maybe you do most of the time
but you've got your moments of doubt
& it is in these moments that I hope my
overblown, grandiose romantic poetry
will reach you
like a paper plane upon the breeze
of a one-sided promise
or a message in a bottle
upon the sea of my intensity.
Cos I know most people think it's weird
writing love poems for boys you barely know
but firstly
this is not a love poem it's a like poem
which nobody seems to differentiate between
& secondly
everybody's got their different realities
& their different perspectives
& my perspective
is that there's nothing creepy or obsessive about this

cos my intentions are entirely pure & good-hearted
& I just want you to know that I
think you're lovely
& I know I don't know you that well
in which sense you're a good book
& I'd like to keep on reading if
that's alright with you.
See, I reckon in the context
of the hypothetical concept
of God the Creator crafting men out of clay
he must've been tripping on MDMA when he made you
he must've been in a good fucking mood
& then I bet in his head he said
hey Devon check this one out
I reckon he's your type
as he made the lines of our lives cross
cos how could anything other than divine intervention
have put me in the proximity
of a boy so fine as you?
& look
I know you're busy
but if you've ever got an extra moment
I'd love to take it off your hands
cos I wanna talk to you about
space & fate & magic
& consciousness & divinity
& every cosmic concept between
here & the furthest planet from the moon
& I wanna listen to your music
cos it sounds like soft rainfall
at dusk or dawn
when the light is only half-shining
& everything is sparkling with promise
& it sounds like tomorrow

like this aching in my chest
this desire to tell you that
bitch I like your dancing
& bitch I like your style
& bitch I like your shy little smile
all of which I cannot tell you to your face
cos your face ties my tongue in knots
& your space makes me shaky
like there's a miniature earthquake right beneath my feet
& if I step any closer the whole
foundation's gonna crack
so I'm keeping my distance
& I'm overthinking
but I wish I didn't have to do either
& I wish I could tell you
that I think you're beautiful
so here
let me tell you in this poem
in this message in a bottle
upon the deep dark shimmering sea
which is my
emotional sincerity.

Devon Webb is a 25-year-old writer & editor based in Aotearoa New Zealand. Her work has been widely published worldwide & revolves around themes of femininity, vulnerability, anti-capitalism & neurodivergence. She is an in-house writer for *Erato Magazine*, an editor for *Prismatica Press* & *Naked Cat Publishing*, & is currently working on the final edits of her debut novel. She can be found on Instagram, Twitter, Tik Tok & Bluesky at @devonwebbnz.

marsh (in conversation with Akwaeke Emezi)

the spirit gods
have lost my mind
foolishly,
much too often,
invoked them
bleed me
with the beyond
beyond the gate
liquidate me
with synchronicity
make me
a prophetess
shake me
out of and into dreams
could not tell you
when/where/why
the furniture in my bedroom
moves daily
decisions belong
to the other side
of the
gate

forgot to question
the other side
crossing
sealed circles
bending out
mirrors into
pregnant curves
one day
it will pop
and the endless
children will slither

into human frames
clueless, we have all been
treated as clueless
the egg mother
watches
she won't cross
the black salt
boundary
she won't hear
begs

Babylove,
(babylove)
you Will Give Me
the Strings
and I Will Put you Up
as a Star
(star)
you Will Sink Deeper
and I Will Marbleize you
you, Close your Eyes
to My Atrocities
and I Will Let you
Share This With Me
(i will let you)

soul lived as
too human
too long
jealous sleep
makes me
sicker than a
nonbeliever
an altar cannot
be dismantled

after entry
my first meal,
your stones
off the blister
of my hand
prick of blood
to tell you
to tell you
to tell you
what
are you trying to tell me?
how much
would you love me
if we
were both human
and you
were not always thinking of how
to use my body
to forget home

lived as yours
too long
too many prints
of you
on my skull
could never call you
devil
if i tried

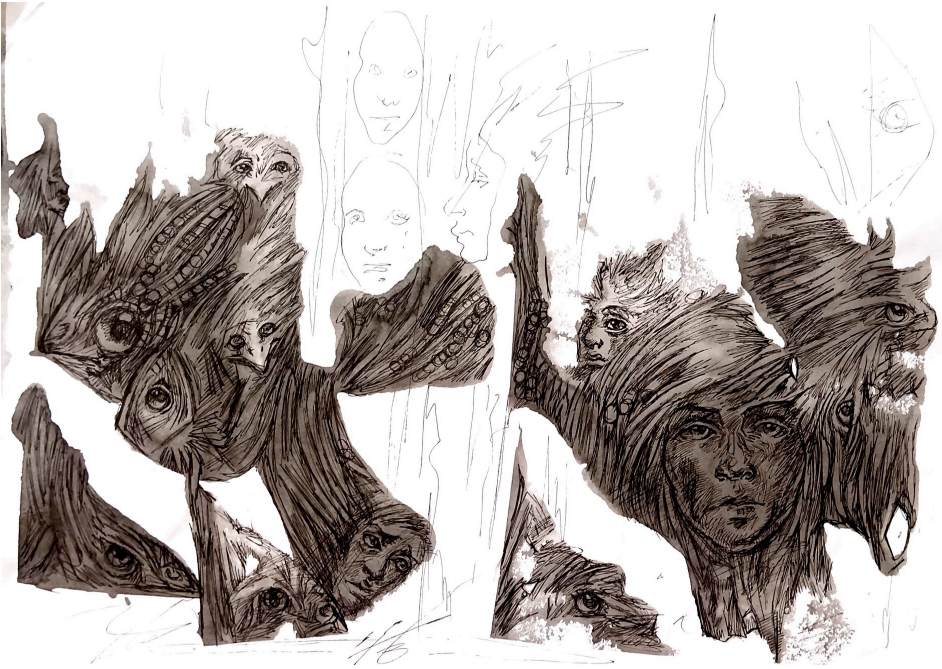
Tori Ingram is an undergraduate student at the University of Massachusetts Amherst who has a special interest in discussing spirituality through a bicultural lens. She is finishing up her studies in English and Creative Writing and is currently the head poetry editor for the university's literary journal *Jabberwocky*. Her work has been published in *The Foundationalist*, *The Scribe*, and *Jabberwocky*.



Siin. Sad Days

Ink, paper; 10x15 cm

2023



There are a lot of them...

Ink, Paper; 40x30 cm

2023

Irina Tall (Novikova) is an artist, graphic artist, illustrator. She graduated from the State Academy of Slavic Cultures with a degree in art, and also has a bachelor's degree in design. The first personal exhibition "My soul is like a wild hawk" (2002) was held in the museum of Maxim Bagdanovich. In her works, she raises themes of ecology, in 2005 she devoted a series of works to the Chernobyl disaster, drawing on anti-war topics. The first big series she drew was The Red Book, dedicated to rare and endangered species of animals and birds. Writes fairy tales and poems, illustrates short stories. She draws various fantastic creatures: unicorns, animals with human faces, she especially likes the image of a man - a bird - Siren.

The Muse

I still look for traces of myself
behind weighted words
well-worn for weeks,

I still look for signs of rebellion
behind riddles,
well-versed in vain
vindication

I still look for you,
at the back of my throat
in love
languages lie
stifled —

I still look for us, only

to find nothing

between

the lines.

The Writer

The lexicon was the first to leave,
the slow loss of a language
that would come to grief
within a mile of her.

This pen was once an organ
pulsing for my woman
behind me; leaking ink
on the desk space
of love grown tiresome, her face
close to featureless now.

Weeks went on this way,
tongues weighed over with words
failing to translate; a tone change,
the tell and talk of voices raised.
My mouth is a wasteland
for stories I no longer want
her in. Folded edges
and familiarity switched,
for passion found
in virgin spines —

On my table, light languishes
in blank lines and searching eyes,
waiting for words
that never worm through.

Nisa Lee is a 25-year-old Malaysian poet and editor who graduated with a Bachelors in English Language and Literature. After publishing her debut poetry collection *Dreams, Delusions, and Made Decisions*, Nisa has continued to craft new verses for her latest collection. Beyond the page, Nisa is also a passionate advocate for mental health while risking her own at her day job teaching 6-year-olds how to read. You can find her on Instagram at @nrhanisarz.

The End

Thank you so much for reading.

See you soon!

- Nine Muses Review

