

Issue 1

Spring 2022

The Hampton **RENAISSANCE**

IDENTITY



FEATURING
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Dante Belcher
Mabintou Bagayoko
Makaela Stokes
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Xavier Hawkins
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A Note from the Editor

Welcome to the inaugural issue of *The Hampton Renaissance*. This first issue has been a long time coming and the editorial team and I are so excited to share it. Back in January, we asked “who is Hampton”? With students back on campus for the first time in over a year, it seemed a necessary question to ask. This is a student body on the cusp of a major administration change, dealing with the stressors of a global pandemic on top of the normal stress that comes with a collegiate education. This is a student body whose personal and communal identity is shifting rapidly and at *Hampton Renaissance* we felt it necessary now more than ever to provide a space for students and faculty alike to share what identity means to them.

We wanted to show that Hampton University, our home by the Sea, is more than its physical property, more than the neatly trimmed grass, more than the brick and stone academic buildings. Hampton’s identity is encompassed in the minds, beliefs, and actions of its students and faculty, both of which are featured in this issue. With this inaugural issue, we wanted to shine a bright spotlight onto the individual voices that bring all the life and vitality to campus. We strive to showcase the talents of the Hampton faculty and student body as well as preserve our reflections on an ever changing world, but most of all, we strive to provide a space for students and faculty alike to share a little bit of themselves and be heard.

This issue is the first of many we plan to do under the name *Hampton Renaissance* and we thank all of our readers, writers and supporters. Thank you for giving us your time and your energy, thank you for sharing your stories with us, and thank you for trusting us to listen.

I Fantasize

by Zyen Smoot

I fantasize, dreamy desires of warmth
I fantasize, darks hands danced danced
and pranced with me
In a living room with open doors
I fantasize, love as sweet as the smell of your lotion
Smooth and leaving a shine so intoxicating
I fantasize, about how good it is

4C Hair

by Zyen Smoot

Diaspora roots
Mirror bushes, mirror trees
Brown like bark, like skin





“You Are My Dream”

by Zyen Smoot

There is something that I would like to say. Something that desires me to give greetings of gratitude.

Today I realized how beautiful I was after looking at a locked-down mirror. With fresh eye boogers and the silkiest bonnet, my sister could find on Amazon I finally saw what others desired in me. Some fantasized, of course, of what they could do with me surrounded by these pink walls.

And yearly yearnings of random messages from frustrating flings folding at the sight of me, I decided to entertain the thought of being with each of them. A bachelorette in training for the next season of *She’s Gotta Have It*. Yet, before I finished admiring myself my nose circulated a familiar smell of a *Dora The Explorer* 3.99 lotion. A young girl with sticky fingers of insecurities stared at me.

She said,



A Tribute to Myself

by Zyen Smoot

Turbans tied, circled sativa laced eyes
Manila moisturized against my skin
Diasporic southern-creole voices
Caught in the swirl of my hair growing up
Bounced and echoed my jewelry going down
Spiraled around my arms lifting forward
Smothered and lowered, graced Jazz melodies
Dangled with purple and green beads, I sang

Let my Blackness hold the warmth of the sun
Let the sun reflect the blue in my hue Let the
hue grow darker with the seasons Let the
seasons bring vibrant history Let the history

be my own story

Of a turban tied, sativa laced eyed

An Ear to my Hair

by *Amarah Ennis*

I have never been good at listening to my hair.

It doesn't help that it's an absolute diva most days. Snarling and tangling as soon as I try to pull a comb through it, dropping white flakes of dandruff on my shoulders, laying limp when I want curls and shrinking when I want it straight. It is a cruel mistress, impossible to please.

When I was little, my mom used kiddie perms on my hair to keep the bramble bush on my head manageable, and that was just fine with me. As a girl who shared lunchtimes and class projects with white girls, straight hair made me feel less other. When my hair was straight, my friends could braid it at sleepovers, comb through it without sorting through tangles of coarse kinks.

My mom had straight hair, too. She was my ideal for hair: long, thick, straight, and tough as steel wire. She could do anything to it and it'd grow just as healthy as ever. My hair, on the other hand, was thin, wispy, grew slow and broke as often as a glass hammer. It was frustrating. It also wasn't my problem, not back then.

Little kids don't have to listen to their hair. At least, I didn't, when I was little. My mom would tell me, "Here's what you use on it," and "here's how you twist it", and I'd clumsily follow her directions. I never paid attention to the creams and oils she put in my hair, or took note of how to flat-iron it correctly; I'd just close my eyes and try not to flinch at the heat on my scalp.

It was only after my mother lost her hair to chemo that I opened my ears to my own hair.

I am loath to say that anything "good" came from my mom's breast cancer diagnosis and treatment: chemotherapy ripped every hair in my mom's skin from its bed, exhausted and weakened her. But, after beating the disease, she was gifted a head of new, baby-soft, and completely differently textured hair. As the natural hair movement surged among black people across the nation, my mom had been given a chance to start over.

With new hair and a new commitment to her own blackness, my mom started her own "naturalista" journey. Truthfully, it's a journey she's still on, as she consults YouTube videos and Facebook articles looking for new ways to take care of her now shoulder-length hair.

Her own commitment to her natural hair, and all that came with it—the new hair products, the alternate washing methods, the protective styles—sharpened my ears to the needs of my own mane.

"My ends are splitting, you'll need to trim them."

“You can’t wait so long to wash me!”

“This shampoo really dries me out, so could you stop using it?”

It was through my new connection with my hair that I learned how damaged it was. As much as I loved its length, to the tops of my shoulder blades as I entered high school, I could no longer ignore its pained cries. I’d get out of the shower after washing it and look in the mirror, still dripping wet; half of my hair, near my roots, swollen and puffed like a mushroom cap: the half near my ends hanging like wet dog fur.

But I was still surrounded by white people at school, and the ideal of long, straight hair was high in my mind. I stubbornly held onto my damaged hair, hoping that time and regular trims would get rid of it all within a year or so.

It was only after entering college that I really understood my hair, though.

Nothing made me more self-conscious about my hair than seeing other black women with no problems taming their own, so what place could be more terrifying to me than an HBCU? A generous scholarship was the reason I attended Hampton University, and my fear of being seen as other for much more than my poorly-maintained hair raged deep into the first weeks of college.

But finding my niches as an actor and an anime fan—and seeing them filled with black people—helped me to get used to the campus. My feelings of isolation and alienation melted into interest and excitement. I finally got caught up on modern slang (with the help of Urban Dictionary, I have no shame in admitting). I went to an anime convention for the first time. I made black friends for the first time in a long time. And, with no reservations, I talked about hair.

I can’t explain how freeing it felt to walk into my dorm’s common room and see twenty girls wearing bonnets and scarves, or how it felt to complain about my lack of curl pattern and have people empathize. Hampton helped me embrace my own blackness, and to think more positively about my own hair.

I still love how my hair looks when it’s straight, but now it feels like one option of many instead of the standard. I’ve had my hair many ways, shoulder-length and pixie-cut, braided and cropped. I’m happy with all of them now, and I enjoy taking care of my hair.

Well, no. That’s a lie. My hair is still unpredictable, and I dread washing it with no idea how to make it look like more than a mass of black wire. And there’s still plenty I don’t know: To this day, I couldn’t tell you what hair type I have, and I honestly don’t know if I’ll ever be able to. But, at twenty years old, I’m finally ready to confront the questions that the beast on top of my head has been asking me, and to embrace a part of my identity that I have always neglected.

I am finally ready to listen.

Slouchtalkin'

by Amarah Ennis

The posture of my tongue has always
been perfect: in-line, every white tooth on
every white teacher who taught me to
talk upright. But my mama, my daddy,
my sista and my brotha and the
kitchen cabinet are all warm brown-lookin',
logs feedin' fire under rigid winter rulers.

someday i will love amarah ennis
after frank o'hara, roger reeves, ocean vuong
by Amarah Ennis

nothing can be sacred, not god nor grandma's deviled eggs. i'll leave the cleaver and the raw cubes of every person i've loved on the cutting board instead of hiding them between my teeth; cover them in plastic wrap. grease soaking through the paper plates, drippings and trimmings dangling from fork tines and shiny lips. i'll down macaroni and greens, coffee cake and cheese tarts, memory sitting heavy in the fat of my thighs; i'll pillow heads with the softness of my past.

past myself i will lust for nothing, not the jewels of a woman's eyes nor the diamond droplets from her pool-wet hair. traversing the plains of my arms and valleys of my face, i will map the topography of my years, sew the tears made by my tears. i will address my letters to each of my lovers in turn: to the swell of my cheek, to the crook of my elbow, to the sharp edge of my shin, to each pair of lips curled around my name.

names descend on each pretty era of my past: my babyhood now "paper lavender"; my childhood now "firesparked". i will know the odor of my coming age; i will relish it, the scent of burning flowers under a wide night sky. i will see myself in the stars and know my place among them, under them, all of us caught in an explosion too slow and too far for human eyes to see. my faith lies only in the celestial bombs—they consume just as well as i.

i have been given a beautiful name, and i will weave grace and garlands of it. crowned by my title, i will knight all who protect my cave kingdom: sir feathers-on-sidewalks, dame paint-on-skin, and the path of my own crooked hands, my royal adviser. robed in atoms and comet dust, i will walk the garden labyrinths of fingertips, pork rinds crumbling against my tongue, and survey all that i have built with pride: nothing, nothing.



A Hair Story

by Ran Walker

“When you gon’ cut that boy’s hair?” Uncle Morgan asked.

“He can grow it as long as he wants. It’s his hair,” my mother responded.

“You ain’t worried about him lookin’ like a girl?”

My mother paused a bit too long before answering, “Nope.”

I sat between Grandma’s thighs on the house steps, her hands smelling like coco butter and coconut oil, as she braided my hair, which was now down to my shoulders.

“Samson’s strength was in his hair,” Grandma reminded me.

“But do I look like a girl?” I asked.

“You look just like one of God’s children.”



Lonely

by Ran Walker

He was from a big city, where people were always on a quest to find the latest and greatest of anything, but she was from a town so small the local DJ, who'd had a stroke and his voice slurred heavily, held down the number one radio show in the county, purely based on the respect afforded him by his longtime listeners.

She knew deep down that they saw the world too differently, but loneliness was a beast that forced her to look past who she was in order to become someone whose main attribute was that she wasn't lonely.

Searching for Water Where It Never Rains

by Ran Walker

They fancied themselves the up-and-coming moguls, the ones who would take over the city, the recent graduates who populated the bars, the gentlemen puffing Cohibas, the ladies holding court on the finest of French wines, preparing their pretentious palates for a wealth that awaited them, like seven-figure gated estates, where their neighbors were top draft picks or music producers who were no strangers to the Billboard charts, but amid this atmosphere of affluence, they complained not of the money, but of their lack of significant others, the people for whom they'd left just enough space for their mahogany trophy cases.





Poem #2

by *Dante Belcher*

it's sunday night
shortly before a holiday
sitting here thinking about everything
im finally realizing that im moving towards a
place where i'll finally be happy
maybe this feeling is temporary
maybe my depression will flair up again in
a few days
but im realizing one thing
i'm finally learning to put myself first
no more being pressed for a relationship
no more putting someone who doesn't care for me ahead of myself
when the first person comes, i know i'll be ready
but this isn't about them
it's about me
and i'm realizing my true self
this is real
this is me
and i now i know where exactly i'm going



To Anticipate Destruction

by Mabintou Bagayoko

My whole life, I've been told that I wasn't good enough. "No man will love you if you cannot cook, clean and bear his children with egos bigger than the universal lie." Ok. Maybe I lied about the last part but it does not change the fact that my whole life, I still wasn't good enough.

I am a first generation African American and I will be the first to graduate in my household. I will be the first to go to college and I was first to be told that no man sees further than what is between my legs and so I've always been that girl that wanted someone to come checking for me. The real me. And yet when an Angel walked into my life, I waited and waited and waited for him to tell me that my mother is right by leaving me because I am not good enough.

I want to be married one day. Or at least I think I do because even if my intellect isn't enough, at least I'll be another kind of trophy. Reality is, I've been taught that marriage is the ultimate way to keep a man through my mother and yet her marriage with my father fails everyday, and the only reason why she stays is because of the fact that she can cook, clean and she had beared him 4 big egoed children, bigger egos than the lie that marriage is the ultimate way to make someone stay.

I want to bear children. To multiply when I am sure that I can divide myself into two for innocent lives that are to exit my body in one of the most painful yet beautiful ways possible. I want that child to know that not every man wants you to feel the wet flesh between your legs. And you ARE good enough.

I want to be enough. I really wish I was. I wish I could trust myself not to trust my mother's word. I wish I didn't measure my capabilities through the ability to fall in love with a man or how many cellular eggs will turn to people with the help of a man. But, I do. And so I respond to my mother by saying "You're right. I am not enough."



Me-and-(h)er

by Makaela Stokes

Meandering is the easiest way to find me. Living vicariously through others as I hide behind the fact that I don't know who I am. Often it is easy to latch on to the people closest to you and absorb every inch of their life to falsify one of your own. At least, that's what I did until I met him. He knew exactly who I was before I could and led me through the winding course that is life until I found out who I was. Now I'm here, writing about the very thing I was searching for: myself.

Simple

by Xavier Hawkins

When life was simple,
I'd saddle Whitey—
a nag named for his snowy coat—
and we'd ride down to the center
of the pasture to care for the cows.

When life was simple,
the cattle flourished:
ate the hay and prepared to procreate
so the cycle could continue.

When life was simple,
We'd chop the trees to
furnish firewood and heat.

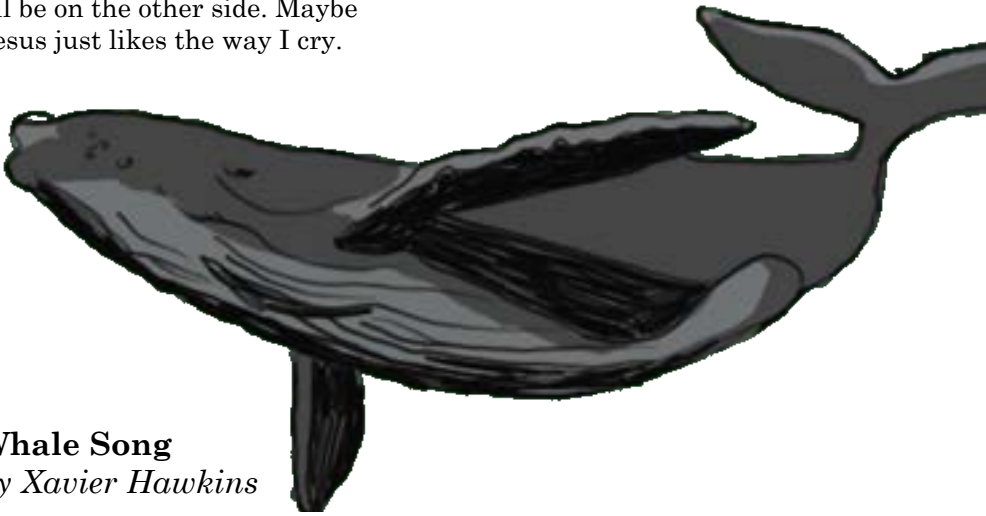
When life was simple,
I longed to never leave.

It's been ten summers since
life was last simple.
Whitey has passed and the cows
have become the grass.
The cycle continued.
Maybe life is still simple.

I Cry Cute

by Xavier Hawkins

Every soul's goal is to garner glee.
Nobody can control what they're feeling except
Jehovah. As Christ eyes my futile pursuit
of joy, He must be smiling. Maybe
God smiles because He knows how pleased
I'll be on the other side. Maybe
Jesus just likes the way I cry.



Whale Song

by Xavier Hawkins

With four hundred pounds of love lodged
inside, I dive three hundred feet into
the sea to see if I can't
escape reality. My elusion is limited. When
I expel painful past and inhale hopeful
present, please meet me at the surface.
I'll show you how shallow I'm not.

Who We Are...



Dr. Scott Challener

Faculty Advisor, Managing Editor

I'm a practicing poet and the managing editor and faculty advisor for the Hampton Renaissance. I joined the department of English & Foreign Languages as an Assistant Professor in 2021. I teach courses on twentieth and twenty-first century literature and critical theory. My poems and essays appear in *The Nation*, *Poetry*, *Gulf Coast*, *Lana Turner Journal*, *Mississippi Review*, *OmniVerse*, the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, *The Rumpus*, and elsewhere.



Zoe Treadwell

Editor-in-chief

Hi! I am Zoe Treadwell, a senior psychology major, English minor from Chicago, IL. I am the current Editor-in-chief of *Hampton Renaissance*. I love to read and write and am passionate about the work we do at *Hampton Renaissance*. We began this magazine in the spring semester of 2022 in order to create a space for the arts on Hampton's campus, and I am so proud of what we have made.



Zyen Smoot

Social Media Coordinator

My name is Zyen Smoot and I am a third-year English major with a concentration on creative writing. In addition to my major, I am also the social media coordinator for the Hampton Renaissance. I am in charge of posting, promoting, and, initially, hosting the events. I was born in Varnado, Louisiana which is an hour away from New Orleans. New Orleans is a city known for its vibrant artistic expressions. Due to its closeness to my hometown me and my family often visited and since then I have always had a passion for the arts. I hope to create the Hampton Renaissance into a safe haven for all artists alike and help others find their passion for the arts.



Arielle Thomas

Hi all! My name is Arielle Thomas and I am a second-year English major, on the pre-law track from NYC. In my spare time, I enjoy dancing, reading, practicing yoga, and exploring new hobbies. Currently, my professional goal is to pursue entertainment/real estate law and I also wish to study abroad. As a person who enjoys different ways to express that others express themselves, I am grateful for the Hampton Renaissance as a platform for artists of all trades to freely exhibit their literary works.



Erin Townsend

I'm Erin, a second year English major with a concentration in creative writing from Atlanta, GA. My hobbies are painting, embroidery, and now editing literary magazines. I love publications that add a visual element to written pieces, and my work on the Renaissance makes sure the same is true for our literary magazine.



Jenay Conway

Hello! My name is Jenay Conway. I am a third year English major with a concentration in creative writing from Fayetteville, North Carolina. My passions include creative writing, and sketching. I am proud to be a contributing member and editor for the Hampton Renaissance literary magazine.



Amarah Ennis


Hey, I'm Amarah! I'm a junior journalism major, political science/theatre minor from Chesterfield, VA. In my spare time, I enjoy writing, writing, and more writing, in-between other non-writing hobbies like watching anime, playing video games, and talking to myself. I'm happy to be both a contributor and a staff member to the Hampton Renaissance, and hope to see even more visual and literary works from fellow students in the upcoming issues.




Alex Dameus

Hello, I'm Alex
Editor, Artist, Poet, Musician
Biology Major, Pre-med track



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