



**Brampton Arts
Organization**



2SLGBTQ+ Artist Residency for Writers

November 2022 to February 2023

The 2SLGBTQ+ Digital Residency for Writers is the third iteration of the 2SLGBTQ+ Digital Residency Program run by the Brampton Arts Organization. Across four months, eight 2SLGBTQ+ (Two Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning+) paid, spoken word poets, prose writers, and screenwriters came together to work on their writing, meet other queer and trans artists, and to learn from each other. This Zine includes a small selection of some of these artist's work.

This residency was co-designed with Allegra Morgado of Allegra Tate Consulting and facilitated by Namitha Rathinappillai.

The 2SLGBTQ+ Digital Residency for Literary Artists is the third iteration of the 2SLGBTQ+ Digital Residencies run by the Brampton Arts Organization. I have been lucky to be a part of all three; however, I will say, as a queer writer this one holds a special place in my heart. Over the past few months I had the chance to watch our writers blossom and open up with each other, create a safer space in which to be vulnerable, share incredible writings from both prompts and created from their own inspiration in their dai-



Cover photo of Cece (artist) by Alessandra Bishai. Photo below of Paradis (artist).

ly lives, and form bonds with each other that we hope will go beyond the end of the program. I am excited to see what comes next, both for the BAO and for these artists, and am excited for their chance to share with you, the reader, the work that they have been doing.

—Allegra Morgado (she/her), Allegra Tate Consulting

I am so grateful to have been a guest facilitator for Brampton Arts Organization (BAO)’s 2SLGBTQ+ Digital Residency for Literary Artists. To meet not only fellow queer writers, but fellow writers that are queer “and”, has been an experience beyond words. The writers in this group have challenged themselves to write pieces that are raw, insightful, vulnerable, and awe-inspiring. I am so incredibly proud of the ways in which the writers in this group have shown up so authentically, and I hope life-long friendships have been made. I hope the following pages inspire you the way I am inspired by them. —Namitha Rathinappillai

ABOUT THE BRAMPTON ARTS ORGANIZATION (BAO)

The Brampton Arts Organization (BAO) is a unique organization incubating within the City of Brampton. BAO champions Brampton’s diverse creative community and advocates for the city’s creatives. BAO aims to build a thriving, confident, and valued creative scene and cultural ecology in the heart of Brampton. In this, BAO is a key partner in fulfilling the City’s strategic vision and Culture Master Plan. ✨



Reverend Reed

by Mel Thompson

Mel Thompson (they/she) is a lesbian poet, playwright, dramaturg, and educator. Their work, existing in prose, poetry, theatre, and music, is based in the intricacies of queer relationship dynamics and how they are influenced by sexual identity, gender expression, and mental illness. @melthompsonmelthompson is fascinated by contemporary relationships between neurodivergence and religion, which is where their work will take them in this 2SLGBTQ+ Digital Residency. Mel holds a degree in Theatre and English Literature with a Certificate in Playwriting from York University.

Mel was awarded the Jessamy Stursberg Poetry Prize for Canadian Youth in 2018 and has written and directed numerous original plays over the last several years. Select theatre credits include “Super Liked” (2020), “words that start with L” (2021), “digging for sunshine” (2021), “Dead Things With Sticks: The Musical” (2021), and “Kinda You, Kinda Me” (2022). Mel’s debut poetry collection, “*Lovers’ Qualms*”, is currently in development and their work, Taylor Swift meltdowns, and other musings can be found at @prosebymel.

REVEREND REED

Reverend Reed has soft hands and a smile that shouts in my ear.
I am nine years old, communion wafer pressed into my palm,
as I wait for the wine to reach me.
Her lips have touched the cup.

The congregation prays for my Nan, who taught Sunday school
1972-91, and for my Grandfather Cane
who sanded these pews when they were rebuilt in '53.
My Great-Grandmother's name stares
from its engraving in the pulpit.

Eleanor, who sits beside me in youth group each Tuesday afternoon,
holds my pinky in hers as we wait for the Eucharist.
She wears my pearl headband and I her clip-on earrings,
and we are a picture of heavenly composure
even when Mrs. Crouch dozes off in the front row
for the third consecutive Sunday.

A life devoted to Christ, the Reverend said in her sermon,
requires the refusal to temptation, to the affectations of the heart.
Mine pittered in my chest as she had us repeat:

I know that He knows me fully,
I know that He sees me clearly.
From Him I cannot hide, to Him I cannot lie.
My knees grow itchy in my wool skirt
as I kneel upon the altar.

When the communion cup reaches me,
the chalice is warm to the touch.
I clutch it with both hands,
then drink deeply. Savouringly,
despite the bitter taste.
I swallow.

The Reverend stands above me,
robes as white as Eleanor's cheeks are pink.
I meet her eyes, green, as she goes to grasp my palm:
Peace be with you, she says.
And also with you.
I will never grow to understand its conditions.



Away From Home

by Abhay

Abhay (they/them) is a trans and gender non-conforming artist who focuses their writing on the nuances of intersectional identities in oppressive frameworks. They have written a provincially-recognized play, *Brown Kids, Slay Monsters*, which received a workshop at the Citadel Theatre in Edmonton and a production with Nextfest! They're also working on their poetry collection labelled *Trans Tears*. Abhay is currently a 2nd-year student at TMU's RTA media production and is focusing on writing and audio. They hope to be able to expand their abilities as a storyteller by combining poetry and playwriting during their time with BAO.

HOME

Home was never a bed and stove
Home was sitting on a familiar toilet in a washroom
I'd gotten to know over the years.
I remember coming home to the smell of home and guessing
what my mom had made before I got to the kitchen.
I remember sitting at the computer in my parents room.
I remember fresh tasting wind that would hit spots
on the blinds and make sounds filling the home even in
its empty. I remember having a deck, I remember
the sun and the plants.
I remember warm sun shining into a house where we
had water and food and summer and air
And I'm grasping for words that are failing to
observe or care
About the home I had, the house I lived in,
And now it's just housing, and I'm in need,
sometimes a priority,
I'm glad there are services, and I'm glad I'm in Toronto
I think they keep me alive, just enough to wallow
in smells of home, and glimpses of home, and in pain.
Because I don't think home is or will be, I think home was.





FLUENT

I used watch this show on
Sony TV with my mom and sister
when we were younger.

Jhansi Ki Rani, or the
Queen of Jhansi.

She was an Indian freedom fighter
who fought the British.

It's really funny because the
theme song would just say Jhansi
Ki Rani is here, Jhansi Ki Rani is
here. Run foreigner run. One of
it's earlier title sequences had her
covered in mud during battle and
wiping it off her cheek.

In Grade 1 I put dirt on my forehead
and told my teacher that's what
we did in my culture

She said I had weird culture.

I also used to write my name as
Krishna instead of Abhay on all my
Kindergarten assignments.

My mom used to sneakily draw
mendi on my hands — only letters
and names. Sometimes my dad's
name so that the servitude of my
femininity would please him too.

Could you imagine if running
away from abuse was as simple as
writing a man's name on yourself.
I'd ask every staring stranger to
just grab a piece and sign it. I'd ask
every bride to turn her mendi into
a Tattoo because she'd need it.

Anyways, I want to talk to the
pretty Brown girls at weddings
and know what they think of me.

I want to be with them and group
of boys, having awkward banter,
looking at each other, to see if
they're the one. To sneak in some
form of accepted romance. To
figure out who's dad is which one.
To go talk to him. I just, I want to
be with them, and see if there's
just any space for me.

Do I get to be a part of this?
Do you just continue and do all of it
around me. Do I just sit at a Punjabi
wedding, as it happens around me?
I just want to know.

I can read in Hindi, I'm fluent in
Hindi and Punjabi, these were
the only languages I knew until I
started school. I might be able to
find some Indian clothes in my
suitcase I brought to Toronto.

none of the words I can write can
take me back, no name on my
body can make space for me now
— so sometimes I just put on my
lengha and makeup and just sit
in the bathroom. There's a floor
to ceiling mirror that forces me to
look at myself. Could you imagine
if someone called out to tell me
we were running late?

none of the words I can write can
help that I'm starting to forget
more and more everyday.

The colour of my skin feels paler
everyday. (the irony)

I never thought I'd say this,
but I miss being Brown with
Brown people so much.





Sprouting

by Hayotha Thill

Inspired by the little things, **Hayotha Thill's** surreal writing is rooted in experiences exploring the world, working downtown, and her personal life as a young Tamil Canadian woman. Raised in Brampton's suburban and eclectic communities, the pursuit of success and happiness played an overarching theme in her life. Much of her writing reflects upon the experience of being a second-generation Canadian, engaging with topics of identity, nationality, sexuality, class, and madness, through the context of a socially-connected, capitalistic, ego-fueled culture. Hayotha Thillairajan was born in 1998 and graduated Ryerson University with an BA in English in 2020.



GOD IS A QUEER

Tell me there is gray.

There are binaries,
and so,
in between these binaries,
there must be something.

To get from somewhere to somewhere, you must walk.

Sometimes,
along forests made of ancient trees and beautiful people.

A crow that sing the most angelic of song.
Not the dove, nor the swan, nor the morning birds.
But a crow,
every night,
carrying us into soft slumber,
the sweetest, most romantic lullaby.

Some believe that the Gods are beyond gender,
beyond the comprehension of a mortal mind.

I like that.

When I was young and pure and shy,
and my heart engulfed with flames,
I would smother, hard and swift,
lamenting,
never letting body catch.

Now,
with chaos and order
I know what came first.
In Nature and nurture
I know what came first.

Now I am ablaze amongst other fires,
laid out on earth and plants,
who do not know not if they are flowers or weeds.

See, this forest I walked by today,
was a magical forest,
with wet meadows and waterfalls mazes,
And wild fields of feathers where time slows in the sun,
little tunnels in trees, caves carved over centuries.
And y'know the fairies they talk about,

WE ARE THE ACTUAL FUCKIN' FAIRIES.

And I wonder about the people in the towns who've never left their home.

I wonder about you.

But will be ok alone here too.

A close-up photograph of pink tulip petals, showing their delicate texture and vibrant color. The petals are layered, with some showing a gradient from light pink to a deeper magenta. The lighting is soft, highlighting the fine veins and ruffled edges of the flowers. The text is centered on the image in a simple, lowercase font.

gayyy

kissed pink tulips
and in that moment
i knew that there is more to this

the biggest bang

by Pardis Aliakbarkhani

Pardis Aliakbarkhani (she/they) is a multidisciplinary artist of the Iranian diaspora. Her writing focuses richly on the nuances of navigating queerness, love, and difference in the West with roots in the East. She has published several poetry anthologies, including her most recent collections titled *For Pomegranates* (2021) and *Saffron Dreams* (2022). Her forthcoming poetry collection *Writing From the Womb* (2023) will focus on family trauma, abuse, and celebrating survival. She is also in the process of writing a collection of personal essays and poems titled *Genesis: Wild girl becomings* (2023) which will chronicle her coming out experience as a queer person from a religious Iranian family. Finally, she is also in the process of writing her first play, *The Sun and the Moon are Sisters*, which will explore the power of sisterhood in validating and healing sexual trauma. You can follow Pardis's writing on Instagram @pardisalia



god is so dynamite in my culture that the concept of him blows up otherwise polite family gatherings, soft rearings, and tender courtships. my mother warned me against the perversions of sex as if the act were akin to spitting in the eye of god himself when i was 6. boom.

her and my father laboured so tirelessly throughout my childhood and sacrificed so many comforts of their own so that my sister and i could have our needs met. we were always distinctly made aware of this fact, especially by my father, who couldn't care less about god and only loved money and his freedom with the same vigour.

with that said, a pious leaning felt like the smallest patronage to offer to the god and goddess that nursed, fed, and clothed us. we weren't burdened with abundance but gratitude was always the first meal my sister and i ate for the day. even if god and his teachings were of little consequence to my father, consistent devotion to faith meant that we were part of a community, surrounded by "good" kids from "good" families. maybe he overstated the importance of community for us not as a basic human need, but as a means to quiet his conscience and god for how absent he was in our lives. we had something to fill the void. a village and their writings.

there was goodness to be found in the teachings, friends to be made, festivities to be had. tensions that rose because people were, well, people, quickly melted away. petty squabbles that darkened our door disappeared when the light of his praise

THE BIGGEST BANG

entered a room. i was a radiant child, alight with a simple wisdom for what god meant: love. i loved god. i loved people. i loved animals. i loved the sky. i loved the trees. i loved so much that loving felt like being loved back by god himself. it was so easy.

in time, god became different things. limitations. judgment. wrath. i couldn't talk to god freely anymore. his intentions were translated into my ear in succession by followers and through my mother's indignant scowl. love had a purpose and place, and for the first time i felt i wasn't doing it right. when i fell in love with a female friend at 12, something shifted. love wasn't something i saw conflating with god and goodness. love was a perversion of my making, a corrupt consequence of too much time on the internet and not enough time praying.

people...being people, made my mother even more adamant that we remain chaste and devoted to our religious path. how would it look if a single mother had two heathen daughters? it would bruise my mother more than her abusive marriage had. my sister and i straying from god would be a loud confirmation of whispers she'd heard for years and tried (poorly) to shield us from. she hid her fears in beatings. in cruelty. in pressed linens masking markings before worship. how could she think she could leave and survive on her own? her children won't stand a chance? her daughters will be emotionally scarred screw-ups? she is not enough.

when my queerness entered the equation i automatically deducted god, community, and my mother from future realities. i was convinced that

if this is who i was going to be, i would be shunned. there was no place in the community (half true) or my family (untrue) for someone like me. i left god on read when he did try to speak to me through partners. women who i would've bled on a cross to know. whose grace surpassed my own. whose beauty reminded me of why i loved the world and all it's creations to begin with. i wasn't ready to give up the home that i had built in the sanctuary of shared faith.

i danced in and out of the closet clumsily, drunkenly proclaiming myself gay one night and reconciling with an ex-boyfriend the next morning. it was a less than holy cycle. i was leaving out parts of my faith (i.e abstaining from alcohol) in exchange for greater sins (loving women). it was an unsuccessful juggling act, especially with broken vodka bottles that cut on impact.

shrapnel in skin. boom. who was benefiting from this? me? my mother? god? i was miserable and distant. my mother was a forest fire. god had been mia since i rebuffed his creations. i woke up as if from a dream: lazily, indignant, stubborn to the understanding that i was writing a fiction. slicing in narrative from believers who were divorced from god the moment they supplanted his truth with their hate. god hadn't abandoned me or shattered his loving commandment. and love. sex. queerness. they were all equal hand, arm, limb, to his embrace. my gayness hadn't failed me. people did. if i wanted to serve god, the greatest tool i had to disarm the weapon that religion had become, was to be precisely myself. loving. sexual. queer. me. ✱

Revelations

by Cece

Cece/Cedric (they/him/her/siya) (@creamymemeylinguine / @bruhrchive) is a Ilocano/Pangasinanense-Canadian trans, gender non-conforming, multidisciplinary poet, photographer, historian, anthropologist and community activist. They hope that through their conversations in person and in his art, people feel the hum of the rhythm, the beat of the story, and this inspiration to take the leap of faith.

Her work centres itself around themes of Transcendentalism, Existentialism, the Filipino/Filipino-Canadian identity, Pan-Humanism, as well as anti-oppressive and decolonial frameworks of thinking and process.

REVELATIONS

Disheveled and level-headed,
sweaty tears are freed in a devil's bed while I find
their horns deer to me.
Their Voided pearls stir up swirls of candied confusion

Stunned by glazed ogling
As cherry blinds bloodied our bodies I was
coaxed in the shade
cloaked by their gaze
my ropes set ablaze
We smoked through the night.

Sweet love in bites
Eaten bones and thighs
Choked by our cries we croak and we die

I was reborn through sunny rings round blackened eyes
A fallen star marred and mangled sang to me in bitter signs
Stories of succubi told lies of a malicious promiscuity
A sinful queer conspiracy
God tell me why heaven is in hell's eyes?
But shall I close mine lest I love this lust to consume me?

I say it's fair to see these Pharisees parade as fairs of deceit
 Cataclysmic catechismic scrutiny has ruined me.
 Though rooted in heavenly vines of purity,
 I cannot photosynthesize in the light of God.. all I do is burn.
 I can no longer drown in holy water...
 This body aches for wine.
 I cannot keep flying high with the many-eyed Michael.
 Clip these wings 'fore the fiery fear, the Godly sun
 dines on
 Icarus—

Leave me with the cooing crows,
 the discombobulated queers, sheltered by the veneer
 of yesterday's poems and pansies.

Still disheveled, a bed no longer regretted,
 a singed brand of hope, the comfort of the forgotten,
 these are my revelations.



Contributors

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Abhay

Hayotha Thill

Pardis Aliakbarkhani

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