

**An ampersand** is a conjunction, a ligature, a symbol. It signifies connection, the progression of thought, that which still needs to be said, and that which resists an ending. In this case, & Vol. 2 is a continuation of a premise and a promise.

The first volume of & was released in 2008, with acclaimed poet Conchitina Cruz as the issue editor. In her introduction, she explained that the idea behind & was to “collect the best work of the year written by both undergraduate and graduate students in the courses of the UP Creative Writing Program,” to be a “space where the imagination—often the first to go in the face of poverty, corruption, plain mediocrity, and sheer market-driven mentality—can be cultivated, cherished, and championed.” However, due to reasons that had nothing to do with the quality and diversity of our students’ imagination and everything to do with the pesky practicalities of production, plans for &’s annual release eventually fell through, and, for a while, the journal’s first volume became its only volume.

But a lot has changed since 2008. In many ways it’s fitting that &’s return is marked by a shift to an online platform. The past 13 years have seen a significant rise in digital publishing, for one thing, and & was always meant to be a journal by the students for the students, many of whom have now grown up with technology at their fingertips. And, perhaps most obviously, & finds itself moving online with the rest of the world as the world’s longest and strictest quarantine drags on. Stuck under ECQ or MECQ or a variety of other creative yet confounding acronyms that make you go AYNAQ, our students are not so much becoming a paradigm of writely productivity in a poor interpretation of Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* (and certainly not all of our students have a room of their own), but more of a cruel parody of the protagonist in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper,” growing madder and madder in every sense of the word as day after month after year passes in confinement.

And yet in the face of poverty, corruption, *devastating* mediocrity, and sheer market-driven mentality, we keep imagining. We keep creating. We keep writing. Despite everything, or perhaps *because* of everything, our students continue to write with a sharp wit and a soft heart. They are fearless in their imagination and ambitious in their execution. In this way, nothing has changed at all. Their writing still demands to be read outside of the classroom, to find a home beyond their computer hard drive, where so many works are often left to languish. With the space available to us constricted both figuratively and literally, we forge new spaces. &, now free from those pesky practicalities of production, has returned as one such space.

In these pages, you will find echoes of the first volume of **&** from students who have likely never had the chance to read that first volume, their work indicative of our students' continued engagement with larger on-going conversations. You will also find fresh perspectives and new ideas, stories and poems and essays and picture books that speak to the deeply human need for connection (though not necessarily told from human perspectives). Several pieces grapple with fear, uncertainty, and hope in equal measure, and some are joyful while some are somber, and some vacillate between both. Though not necessarily the intention when putting this volume together, most of the works here feel as much as they think. They do not treat feeling and thinking as binaries, but explore feeling as the result of thinking, and thinking as the result of feeling. But you don't need to take my word for it; these works more than speak for themselves.

And before this introduction overstays its welcome, a word of thanks to the UP Creative Writing faculty for curating the best work from their classes and sending them our way, to Catherine Regina Borlaza, Thomas Leonard Shaw, Jean Aaron de Borja, and A.X. Ledesma for their hard work and dedication, and to Diana F. David for her expertise in graphic design and turning a Google Doc into a journal.

Finally, a special thanks to our writers, many of whom are being published for the first time. Thank you for trusting **&** with your work. There is no journal without you. As long as you keep imagining and writing, **&** will continue to be a home for minds at work.

And without further ado, I present **&**.

**Sydney Paige Guerrero**

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