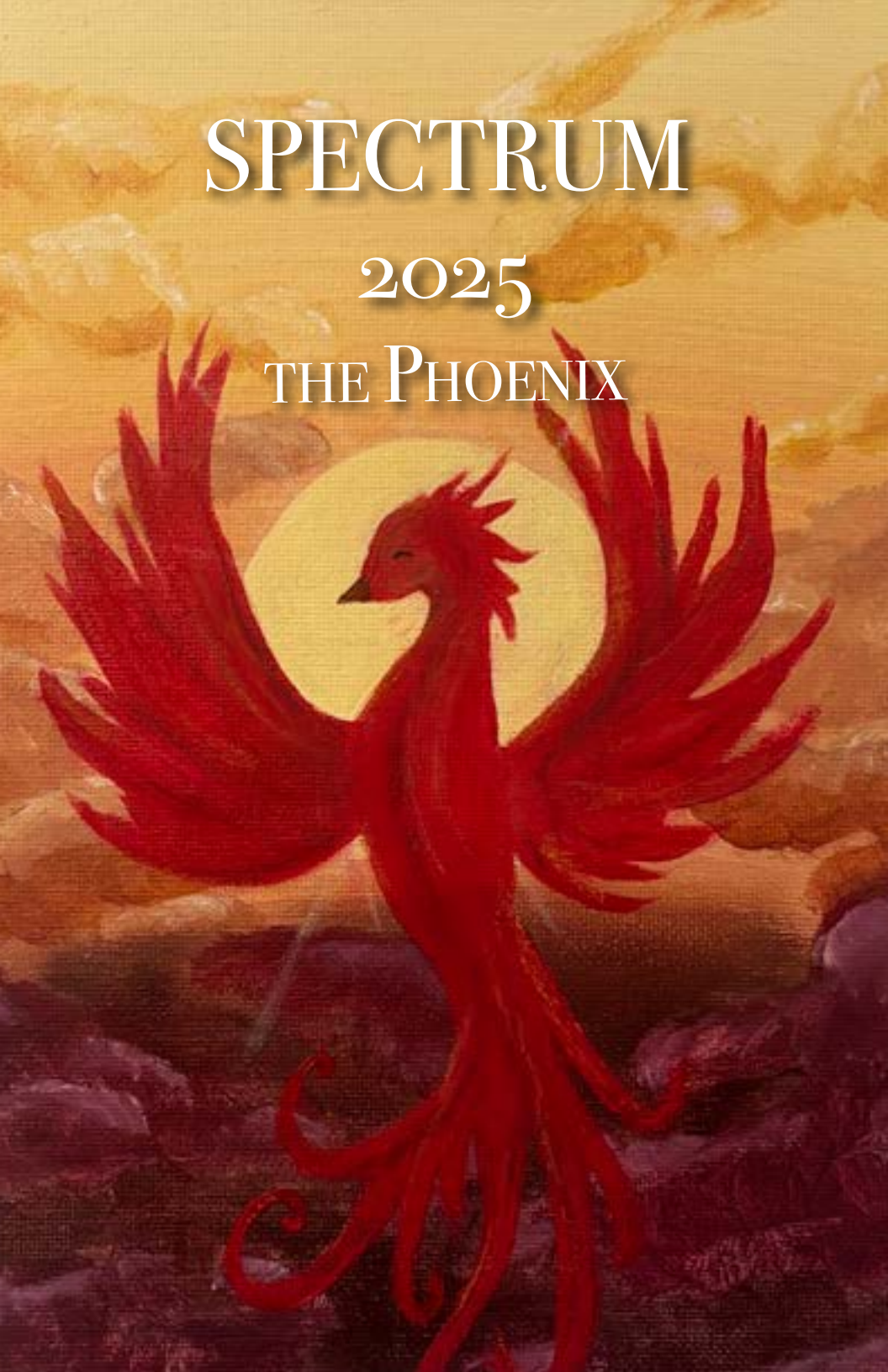
SPECTRUM

2025

THE PHOENIX



SPECTRUM

Literary Arts Magazine

Volume 56: The Phoenix

Detroit Country Day Upper School 22305 West Thirteen Mile Road Beverly Hills, MI 48025

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About Spectrum

Spectrum is Detroit Country Day School's literary-arts magazine organized by *Spectrum* club members. Our goal is to represent the student body through creative writing and art. This annual issue is the culmination of both club members' and non-club members' work. As a club, *Spectrum* offers student writers the opportunity to write, edit, and ponder once a week every Tuesday. We also have an insert in the school newspaper and create yearly posters to showcase our students' work. *Spectrum* offers an inspiring environment for students to produce their original writing and artwork. Students explore the artistic process of writing with the aid of staffers, the review of their writing, and the pride of published work.

Submissions are accepted year-round and can be sent to the staff or the faculty advisor Mrs. Hannett-Price by dropping off hard copies in room 130 or by emailing work to BPrice@dcds.edu. After careful review from Mrs. Hannett and the Spectrum Staff, submissions will then be accepted for publication in a future issue. We welcome all forms of creative writing and art and encourage writers to submit multiple pieces.

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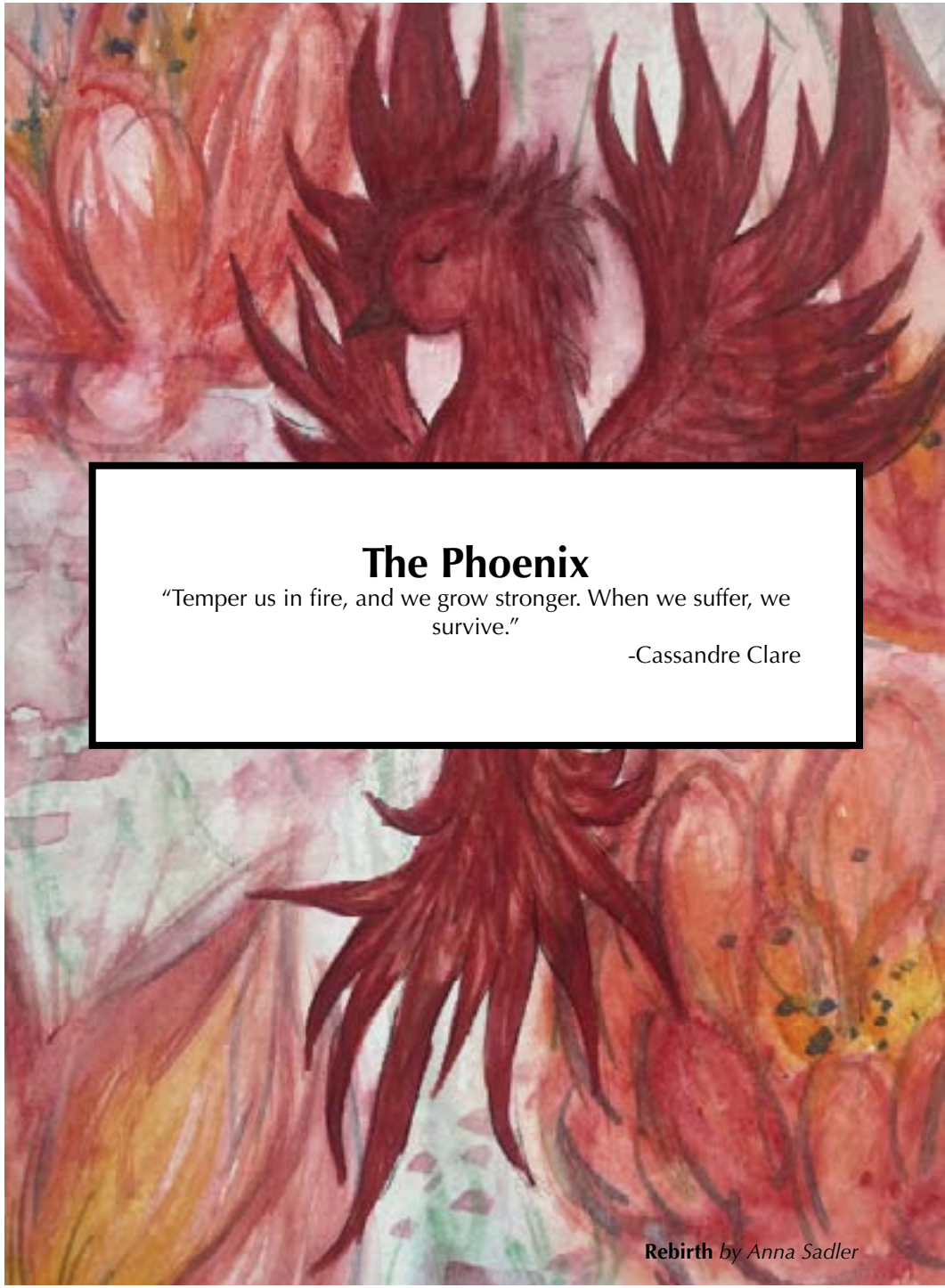


The Phoenix

"Temper us in fire, and we grow stronger. When we suffer, we survive."

-Cassandre Clare

Rebirth *by Anna Sadler*

Letter from the Editors *by Lara Hammoud*

The theme for our 2025 issue of Spectrum is the Phoenix, a symbol of both destruction and rebirth. Just as flames consume the Phoenix so it can rise from its ashes, our lives are shaped by cycles of loss, transformation, and becoming.

The heat isn't always outside of us. Sometimes it burns within from the pressure of identity, to change, to trying to belong. And then there are the infernos: the moments when we lose a version of ourselves, let go of a dream, or watch a world we knew go up in smoke. But in that fire, something fierce is forged. Ashes aren't our ending. They're beginnings in disguise. Scattered among them are fragments our of memory, pain, strength, and hope. Rebirth doesn't always come with a blaze. Sometimes it arrives slowly and quietly. But it always carries the promise of something new. In exploring the Phoenix, we confront the fire in our own stories. But more importantly, we embrace the truth that to grow, we must sometimes burn.

We invite you to feel the flames, sift through the ashes, and rediscover who you are. Welcome to Spectrum 2025: Phoenix. May our pages offer warmth, courage, and a spark to rise again.

Yours truly,
Spectrum Staff

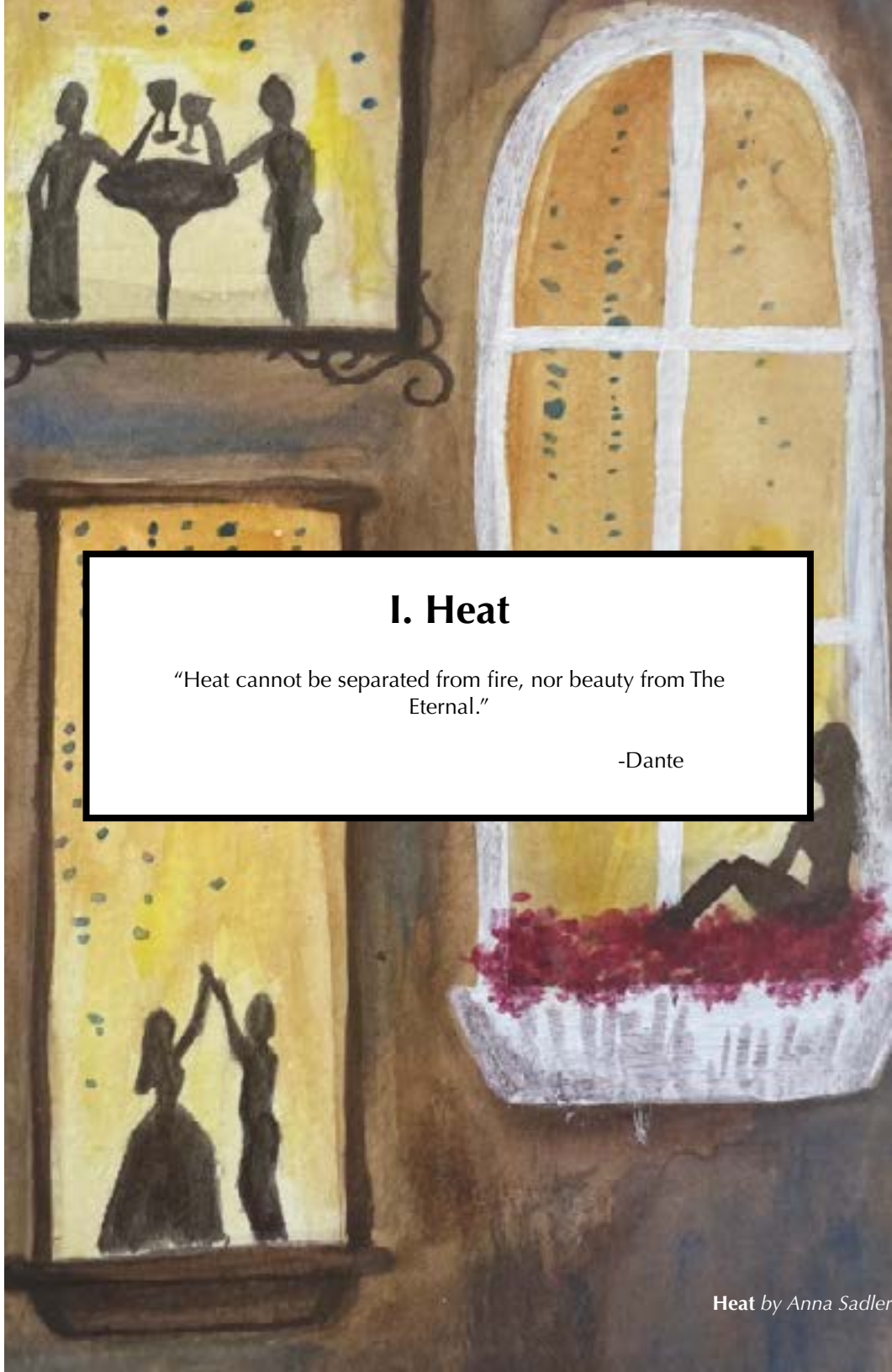
The Phoenix *by Spectrum Editors*

i. Heat
From the darkness emerges a flickering flame.
Faint but flickering and clawing with sweltering zeal.
Borne from Sol
Harbored by Mother Earth
Nourished by Boreas and Zephyrus
A sole ember takes flight
into the haze of a smoky
impending dawn.

ii. Inferno
Flames lick her feathers,
Still she doesn't scream
She doesn't hide.
Ash rains down.
As she says one last goodbye

iii. Ashes
Smoke wraps her wings.
No color left, no sound, no fight
Just ash and gray, pale and white.
Not gone, not free,
Hardly a trace of what it used to be.
What was once strong and fierce,
The humbled phoenix is now at rest.

iv. Rebirth
From the ashes, comes a whispered hymn
Born from the kiss of the sun,
She emerges once more
Shades of ember trace the skyline like carnelian, something emergent
The hymn grows stronger - defiant, yet with humility
The call of the phoenix



Heat *by Anna Sadler*

Heart *by Ada Gong*

In my heart is someone like who again?
A young girl who

Likes to read and write, who Laughs with her friends, who Sings in the shower, who Misses the beach, who

Walks through the millions of sand grains
Barefoot, and Works hard.

But not hard enough, since, It doesn't matter, even if I have a heart of gold.
I need a golden heart, One scinetallic, heavy, cold,

Hard, more expensive than mine.
Scientifically, but not quite, I question:

How does the golden heart function?
Does it go lub dup, or does it go clink clank?

Does blood run through the vessels, or does oil?
Or perhaps the blood of the enemy?

How does one acquire the golden heart?
I think, but we arrive at the gate.

Before the metal detector to cross the terminal,
My peers and I line up

I'll go first.

Swiftly, I pass through, as expected, And wait on the other side.
Holding my breath, not sure of what I hope for, As the golden heart

walks through the detector, The buzz starts, the alarms go wild, and then The guards, making it step back.

As I peer through the gates, At my peers, I beckon them,
They stand still.

Like grains of sand, floating in place, Not one steps forward,
Not one crosses the gate.

Goodbye, each of their eyes said,
Each of their metally eyes,

As the hourglass reverses,
And they each lift up their feet and take a step Back.

The granules start flowing one by one, Trickling, like a river, from those orbs Called my eyes. The glass cracking,

Tumultuous, the storm inside pounds within me.
Alone, again.

If I had a golden heart,
Would my tears be liquid gold? Or even sterling silver?

Perhaps, I would be more valuable then.

Sleeping in the Car *by Anand Kesliker*

When you think of someone who sleeps in a car, what do you think of? Most picture a shaggy, worn-down person, with their belongings packed in the trunk and the smell of old food emanating from their windows. Others picture an RV, with worn-out tires, on a cliff in the middle of a forest with the sun beating on its hood. I, however, picture the serene view of a parking lot, filled with cars from left to right. Sometimes, in the scorching summer heat, I would find myself unbuttoning my school uniform and undoing my tie. At other times, during the frigid Michigan winters, I would find myself wrapped in my blazer, shivering and cold. In all these instances, however, I found myself sound asleep, regardless of the weather or context. After a busy day of school, the car was my Garden of Eden.

Rush Hour *by Evangeline Greenwald*

Big World *by Adam Ahmad*

There were times I had to hide a part of me,
Just to fit in, like a piece that didn't match.

Felt like I was under so much pressure,
Trying to be someone else to blend in

But when all of me is seen and welcomed,
It feels like I can do anything with those people, no pressure, just me, free.
That's the kind of way that makes life feel.

The phrase "All-American boy" brings up a classic dream, a
kid who loves their sports and talks in that American slang.

People might have different takes depending on where they're from,
but I think they'd all see a version of that dream.

I do feel "All-American" in my own way,
with my love for American sports and that laid-back slang.

IAnd learning Spanish, that was a journey.
started in

I started in first grade, but really took off in sixth when I came to DCDS.

Before that, I didn't know much, just the basics,
But since then, I hit sixth grade, it all clicked.

Now I've got some mix of language and culture,
all come together to make up who I am.

I embrace the diffrent sides of me,
each part adding to me,
creating a picture of who I am meant to be.

No longer hiding, but proudly standing,
With a sense of belonging and understanding.

In this big world,
I find my place, with a smile on my face.
I'm here to experience.

Some Enchanted Evening *by Huawei Ye*

Oda del Papel Ada Gong

Papel,
Eres un espacio de blanco, Eres infinito, eres puro, Un paisaje homogéneo.

Eres la tierra en el invierno, Un ambiente pacífico,
En el mundo que no hay nadie Para cambiar en él.
A menudo,
Yo imagino que estoy contigo

La nieve fresca de ti, En la soledad. En mi soledad, No tiene las personas.

No hay los animales ni vida.
Solamente yo, y la voz dentro de mí.

Yo sigo la voz,
Y hago la primera marca en el papel, Una huella en tu nieve,

Es una línea del lápiz.
Una huella más. Una línea más.

Yo bailo en tu nieve
Mientras mi lápiz se escribe.

Creo las marcas nuevas
Afiladas, oscuras, hermosas,

Perfora del blanco, de la monotonía, De la nieve, y la soledad.
En el papel, Yo soy mi lápiz

Porque, en mi corazón,
Soy una poetisa,
Y eres mi vida que yo creo.

Self-Hating Teenage Minds *by Brooke Lopez*

Dear Self-Hating Teenage Minds,
I don't understand why people dislike me. I mean sure, I make you nervous when an ugly, red, and bulging pimple appears in the middle of your forehead, and it refuses to leave. So, by default, you start blaming me. Like, there was a time when a guy said that a girl was just "a little fat," so she started eating like NOTHING. Then everyone blamed me for her feeling like that, but I didn't make her do that. Sure, I'm the hidden feelings that you try to shun away in your prime years of comparing yourself to everyone and everything. But I'm tired of you always calling my HR department, so I've decided to write a formal complaint to the teenage brain.

Here's why I'm not the only factor in your misery:
First off, you should really be taking this up in the Jealousy department. We always argue when it comes to who is responsible, honestly, I think they're jealous of the other emotions. I know, I know, they're very- stupid. Back to my point, look- if she got the guy and you didn't, that's got nothing to do with me. Like yes she's pale but think of it- am I the reason you think your skin color sucks? Maybe, well, probably, but who even made you think that in the first place? Well- admittedly it was that one time in 7th grade with that girl who was always mean to you- but that was like 5 years ago, so it shouldn't matter that I bring it up when you're about to sleep. I mean, you can't change your hair, eyes, or height convincingly anyway. Ultimately, this is more of a jealousy management issue (they have a lot of issues), rather than mine.

Second, some of the things you teenagers complain about can be fixed by you. Do you feel unhealthy? Eat better food. You feel embarrassed that you're sick while hanging out? Why didn't you just drink some soup and stay home? Like, take some accountability for once.

Honestly, I recognize the Accountability Quarters are a little- unavailable during these years, but that's not my fault. I truly think if you had the mentality of "I can" rather than your boringly depressing "I can't," all of you would be severely better off.

Thirdly, STOP BEING COMPETITIVE. I feel I need to emphasize this because unfortunately, you don't like to listen. This is excruciatingly important because 90% of what you do now won't affect the rest of your life. Just because your grades are a little worse, does not mean you have to go into a self-hating, 5 hour long rant to your friends and family. Like go outside, do something new, instead of a hyperfixation on everyone, rather than on your mental health. So please, again, if you feel down, get out of your bed, go drink some water, and go do something. I can't affect a mentality that isn't there in the first place.

Lastly, life gets better as you get older. You guys are young, you have your whole life ahead of
you. I assure you that the boy you like now and the grade you didn't get won't matter to you in a I will go away eventually, so I promise, it will get better. So please, be nicer to yourselves. I know that's what I would do if I were you, and I'm only one emotion. Don't let the other year. departments (talking to you, Anxiety) get to you. Look, let me be clear, I'm giving you an ultimatum. So, get it together because you have college coming up, and I've already given my year's notice resignation.

Your Favorite,
The CEO of Insecurity Company Inc

Poor little Lillies *by Brooke Lopez*

I looked at the pond in front of me.
It always held me, ever since I was a baby.

It had every plant known to me,
my favorite was the little lilies.

The pond became more astray,
as the water leaked out every day

“Poor little lilies,” I thought.
But nonetheless, I carried on.

As I hugged the pond, it cried in my arms
It asked me to stop, but I couldn’t if I tried

I whispered a sweet, “It will be all right”.
Then I took the water from my pond,
“It’s for the greater good” is what I was taught.

Walk to Remeber *by Graham Goodman*

Drumeline *by Cameron Costello*

A drum in my chest,
not music, just warning,

a rhythm too fast
for a calm morning.

Boom.

Like thunder with no storm.

Boom.

Like footsteps that never form.

Boom.

Like a secret I forgot to keep.

Boom.

Like breath, I'm too scared to breathe.
My hands know the beat;

They tremble in time.

My thoughts trip over
each agitated rhyme.

The world doesn't pause, but my mind does spin, like I'm outside
myself looking in.

I beg the drum
to quiet, to disappear, but it pounds like truth I'm too afraid to say.

And still it plays
as I sit, as I run,

a heart that forgets
that peace weighs a ton.

Not war, not battle,
just noise I can't escape.

A drum in the dark,
and it's playing me.

The Koi Pond Out Back *by Anand Kesiler*

In the back of my yard,
A koi pond rests.

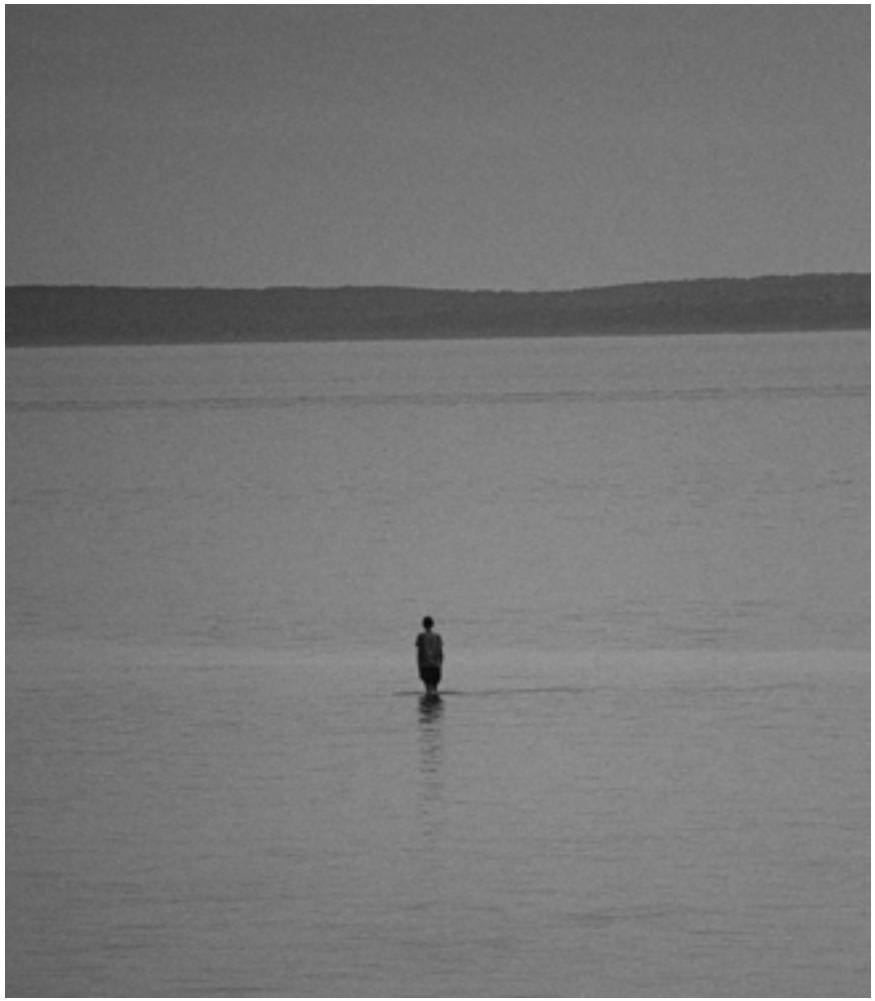
Rests on a field of grass and poppies.
Its shape accentuated,

By the rocks that line it,
Rocks, soft and round.

Looking at the Koi pond's waves,
Its translucent nature,

Fixes my gaze.
The frogs skip,

And the blue jays sing,
The goldfish swim,
Under the koi pond's waves.



Reflection *by William Zhu*

The Stone *by Evangeline Greenwald*

The Pavement *by Brooke Lopez*

The pavement in the beginning hugs me tight

The pavement in the middle smile with delight

The pavement in the end lays me down for the night

I'll fall for the pavement the next day, with a smile so so bright.

Types of People *by Edward Henderson*

There are many types of people; some enjoy having fun, others work hard, some are focused, and some are not paying attention.

Many people share various traits, and that's what makes a society a society. Everybody is unique, and that's nothing new.

Although some people may not notice these differences in characteristics, understanding each other is crucial to creating a happy community.

There are many people, but all of them share one thing in common: they are doing what they believe is right.

To downplay others is to downplay oneself. There are many people, and we must all learn to understand each other for the betterment of our community.

There are many people.

The Piano *by Zoe Balogh*

Scratches etched into its dark cherry-red wood
Rings of the lifetime patterned from a once tall-grown forest

Keys yellowed and dusted with generations past Eons ago half-varnished legs from shoe-shines
A leather seat tearing at the seams with flaking bits of forest green exposed to bright, still light on dull wood floor

Tiny, hardworking, and worn once snow-white hammers beating heavily but faintly tapping out each note

Some sing with distorted, twisted, or warped tunes
Others with the sweetness of a melody from the good-old nostalgic times

Wheels unmoving and lingering in ancient times
Music books in beaten-up plain cardboard boxes taped up and shut off in a closet of a bygone era

Photos of maestros, intermediate musicians, and novice pianists crowding over the lid
Some have an aura of confidence in their posture and a fire of determination in their eyes

Ready to perform in concerts of the highest degree with their most prized pieces
A fair few with enough knowledge to succeed but still contemplating their discernable future

Aware of the geniuses that intimidate and the novices that look with awe
Others exhibit a newfound shine to master everything all at once with a childlike wonder

Revising repeatedly for a future that may materialize with enough practice

The piano remains, regardless, waiting for its next pianist

The History of Fandoms *by Zoe Balogh*

On March 22nd, 2025, I sat down for an interview with an old friend to talk about the show Octonauts. While Octonauts is geared towards young audiences with a rating of 3+, she fell in love with the show regardless. When asked what introduced them into the show, she responded, “I had been introduced through art from fans, so I decided to look up what it was”. Unexpectedly, they instantly fell in love with the show and all its characters: “My favorite would be Shellington, the otter, he’s so kind, and a fun scientist type of character”. She continued, “The amount of time the producers put into making this show educational yet fun to watch is absolutely astounding. It’s one of those fandoms that’ll bring people of every age together over something they all love”. Shows like Octonauts gaining such a loyal following of hyper-obsessive fan communities or a “fandom” may seem like a strange new thing, but fans such as these have existed for a long time. A desire to share passions, enthusiasm, and knowledge is truly the heart and soul of any fandoms of which I set out to investigate.

The Beginning

One may ask, what is a fandom? Contrary to popular belief, fandoms- communities that join together over a shared interest in books, games, TV shows, movies, or figurines- are not a new concept, they date back to the 1900s. Fans of the famous Sherlock Holmes series found themselves disappointed with the end of the series. Hilariously fueled by passion from their favorite series, fans even rewrote endings to “revive” characters and shared public grief over the ending of the program.

As fan culture became popular, the next series of historical events in fandom history was conventions. The modern experience of convention can be overwhelming. On your left, you see elaborate costumes decked out in shiny golden-plated armor and gleaming jeweled swords alongside ornate dresses with frills and gleaming sparkles with all the bells and whistles. On your right, winding hallways of stands decked out with trinkets, flyers, and multi-part charms of fabled characters, with thousands lining up from booth to booth.

Despite modern-day conventions being quite packed, the very first convention included only 9 members, including Milton himself. This convention marks the earliest instance of a convention, which only continued to get bigger as years passed.

The Revived TV Show

When TV became a staple in households in the 1950s to 1960s, the era of television saw the rise of more mainstream fandoms such as Star Trek. The show followed the stellar crew of the starship USS Enterprise, whose altruistic mission was to document the farthest edges of the universe. As the slogan goes: “to seek out new life and new civilizations, to boldly go where no man has gone before”. From just the plot summary of the story, you would think that critics would enjoy such an interesting, outside-of-the-box story, right? Well, critics couldn’t say same. From the official Star Trek site itself, a critic of the 1960s said, “Star Trek is, frankly, weird. But the costumes and visual effects are right out of the old Frankenstein movies. It’s a shocker baby - if you’re easily shocked”. Harsh right? With many reviews like this one, the show was cancelled on its third season due to poor audience and critic ratings. But that wasn’t the end.

The show suddenly received an overwhelming tsunami of positive reviews after the cancellation of the first generation. Fans of the show, “Trekkies”, created stories or “fanfiction” of their favorite characters online, which spurred fanzines, or fan magazines, and then “ships or relationships between main characters. The once-failing TV show that NBC canceled due to low ratings became a thriving franchise with multiple generations and generational dedicated fans that exist to this day. Its famous community became one of the earliest fandoms to date.

The History of Fandoms *continued*

The Internet & Fandoms

With the advent of the Internet, anything that was once a solitary activity had the potential to become a thriving community through newsgroups, fan forums, and dedicated fan websites. While Star Trek had an active fan base, the Internet magnified fandoms to an extent to which communities could never have anticipated. Fans had more inside jokes and references to pass around, and could enjoy watching the same events and news live. It truly allowed for many modern-day fandoms to thrive in the modern era.

Animation & Cartoons

While cartoons and animation initially started in the West with simple, short silent films and "rubber hose" kid animation, nowadays, anime from Japan has become one of the biggest animation industries targeted towards older fans. One of the biggest debates over animation and cartoons has been whether it is just for kids. The rise of anime was an important medium that allowed critics and the average viewer to look towards animation as another form of storytelling, rather than something reserved just for kids. Anime has touched the hearts and created communities for people within even the simplest of comedies. Haikyuu!! was a show that was just like any ordinary sports anime that a friend of mine and fan of the show watched, but she soon found a new community to belong within the fandom space. "Binging each episode after a long day at school became a fun routine". It was only when they had discovered the community in the second season that they had discovered a whole other world. "I remember watching this scene from an episode where that volleyball comes out of Shiratorizawa and Hinata jumps in front of it and catches it infront of Ushijima. So many edits and all the fanart made it such a fun scene to rewatch".

The Boy Band Era

The Jackson 5 was the first official boy band with a unique sound. Their music, which they called "bubblegum soul", broke the mold of music by taking inspiration from several music styles: pop, R&B, and hip-hop. While they ultimately split up, their music served as the blueprint for further boy bands. The Golden Age of boy bands truly occurred with artists such as the Backstreet Boys, who became the record-breaking group with over 130 million albums sold, as reported by the Rolling Stones. What made them stand out from the crowd? According to Business Insider, the manager, Lou Pearlman, took inspiration from a past boy band: New Kids on the Block. An article from the Edge on New Kids on the Block writes, "they are created to make sure that every single section of society is covered. You have the sweet, sensitive blonde one, the dark-haired rock one, the one who is always topless, the one with good hair and finally the parental figure of the group. No matter your type, there is a least one member you can relate to". Currently, much of Western boy bands have died out, but the rise of K-pop indicates a new trend in the territory of boy bands.

The Rise of K-pop

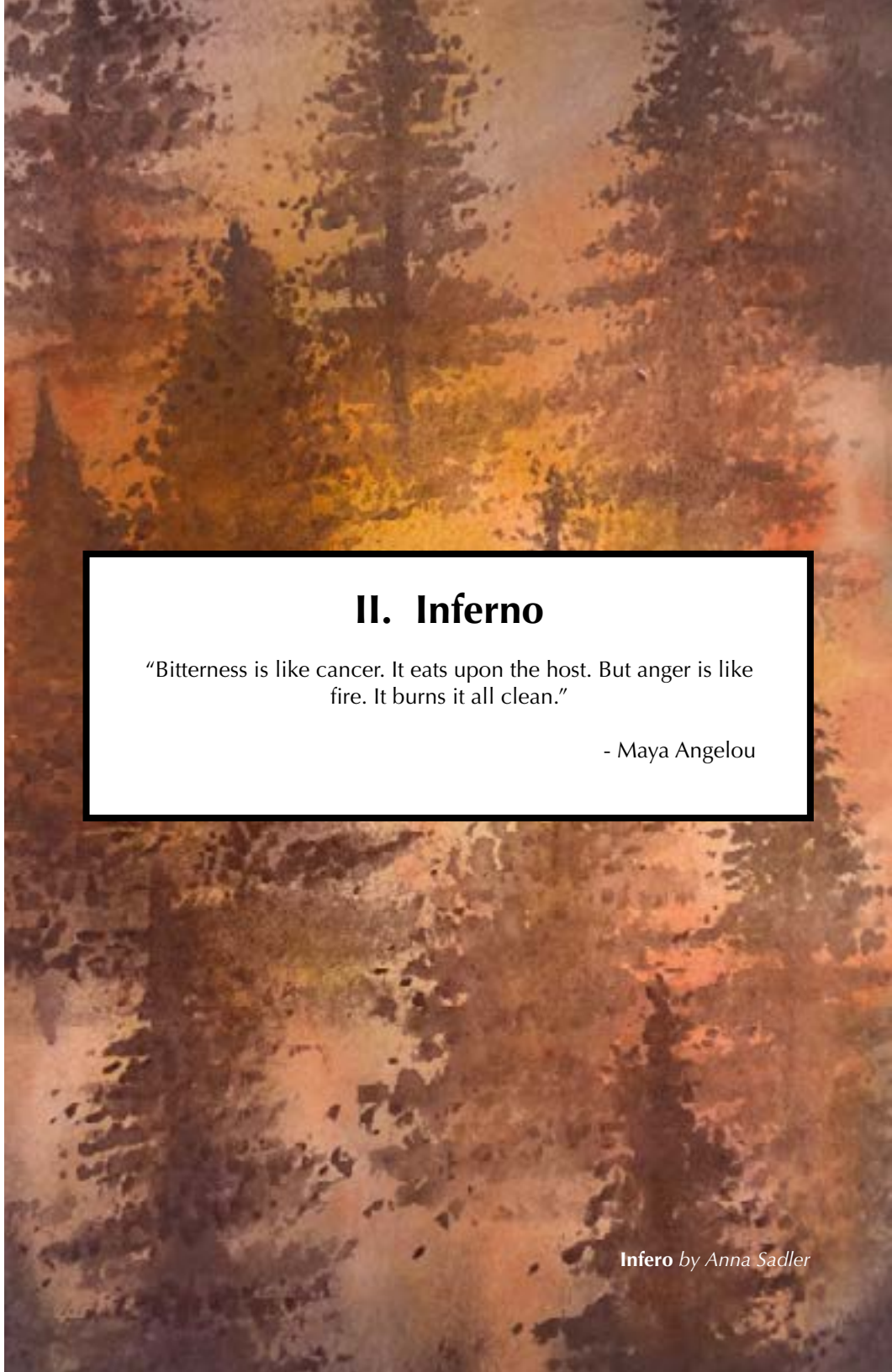
K-pop or Korean pop, in fact, takes a lot of its inspiration from the Western boy bands of the past era. Much of the music in the K-pop genre has roots in hip-hop and R&B, similar to the Jackson 5. K-pop also follows the same trend as Backstreet Boys with specific auditions and "roles" that members can fit into. To learn more about why so many people find themselves enamored by these idols, I interviewed a dedicated fan in the field about their first interaction.

The History of Fandoms *continued*

A friend of mine remarked, “When I first stumbled upon K-pop, I think it was from some of my friends watching and reacting to performances from idols on stage. I had always been aware of K-pop but never really got into it until I decided to dig into it”. She mostly started by listening to the top hits from K-pop, but began to find her favorites. “I became a fan of the group Ateez, because their community was really sweet and only wanted the best for their idols”.

Why are fandoms important?

To an outsider, fandoms can seem like a strange group of unhealthy obsessors of media, but they are dynamic communities full of their own culture, creativity, and a place for true connections. Fandoms may allow people to escape the real world into a creative space to deal with stress or negatives of life, or just for casual fun. So take the opportunity to dive into a fandom of your own with like-minded people, I sure have.



II. Inferno

“Bitterness is like cancer. It eats upon the host. But anger is like fire. It burns it all clean.”

- Maya Angelou

Infero *by Anna Sadler*

American-Born Chinese *by Ben Chang*

I wanted to be the same, but I knew I couldn't be. I
wanted to have no accent, but I couldn't help it.

Learning a new language, I would practice every day,
at home in my room, practicing new words.

I watched their mouths, trying to copy the sound, but
my tongue twisted, and the words fell. Their laughter

hurt, repeating constantly in my mind, wishing I could leave this
part of me.

I'd practice at night, quiet whispers to myself, hoping
that tomorrow, I'd be something other than me.

But still, they'd ask, "Where are you really from?" And
though the question was over,

the thought of it was never gone.
The words I say, always mispronounced,

over and over again, like I didn't belong.
But in the mirror, I saw my old child-self

looking at me with those eyes,
with no insecurities.

So maybe my voice isn't meant to be expressed.
Maybe my accent is where I am dierent.

I carry my roots in every word I say,
learning to love them.

Cooking Past *by Thompson You*

Do As You Should *by Jaden Jaiyesimi*

I used to quiet my voice, speak softer, less bold,
hiding parts of myself,

blending in, acting dierent, like a robot to the world.
Should I do what others do?

It feels wrong, like I'm hurting myself,
hiding myself for the joy of another.

What do I do, when a rift is inside me?
Should I be myself even if it divides me?

But when I am seen, I feel so right.
The dots are connecting like the stars.

I feel condent, I feel bold, I feel smooth like Shai. I
feel welcomed, I feel smart, it makes my day.

"All-American"—a phrase so simple.
But what does it mean to me?

Freedom, a ag, a home.
Or maybe a sports event.

I am American, no question.
My dad is Nigerian but I was born here.

No need to prove, no need to glow.
America is a place, a house, a home.

I learn, I grow, I try,
I learn Spanish,

but the words never stay in my mind.
I learn, I grow, I try, I shine.

All of me is right, no part should leave.
I try to be myself, and stay true to me.

I am enough, I am good.
Never change for others

Do as you should.

Trapped Between the Lines *by Evangeline Greenwald*

Every Step *by Graham Gibson*

Growing up, I moved from North Carolina to Michigan,
from the warm to the cold,

and my life became the opposite of golden.
With almost no friends at all,

I did nothing that first autumn.
On September 5th, I went to Detroit Country Day.

The first day was overcast,
but later in the week, I made friends.

I realized I was looking at life through the wrong lens.
While trying to make friends,

I made some big mistakes.
I realized I was acting like a serpent.

I was hiding my passions.
But slowly, I began to stand,

letting go of fear, lending a hand to others.
I shared my life, my hopes and my heart.

I learned that my friends arrive
from being a part of something cool,

Not just something for show,
But something that builds on trust

and let all of my passions out.

From North Carolina's warmth
to Michigan's cold, I found a home,

as golden as always.
In friendships and through struggles,

I learned to see the beauty in change,
And I gained the power to set sail.

Through storms and shifting friends,

I discovered a strength I never knew I had,
from North Carolina's warmth to Michigan's cold.

Morning Jog *by Evangeline Greenwald*

Hit *by Tyler Newby*

First day of practice
I'm hot, sweating as if I had been running 15 miles

I hear the whistle but don't know what to do
Or where to go

First hit
I fall like a lifeless body

Breath knocked out
Body tingling with pain

Laughter brewing among the team
First visit to the locker room

I hear tape ripping
Pads rustling

And the drums of the lockers being closed
I sit quietly undoing my laces

Wondering why no one has said hi
Or even looked my way

Then this cloud of loneliness was put over my head
So I made a change the next day

I see everyone's faces straight
So I do the same

Everyone's sts closed shut
So I do the same

There is a sea of faces strong and tough
So I do the same

We start the hitting drills
And this time I was the one laughing at someone

It felt good at the time but not so great after
I walked back to the line

Seeing now a sea of smiles looking my way
We get into the locker

And I'm talking to my new teammates
Feeling a part of a team now

But then I look to my right
And see my cloud over that kid I hit

But my teammates tell me not to care for him Being so
scared to lose my position in being part of the team I listened

and never looked his way ever again.

Who am I Today? *by Sophia Novotny*

When you want to recreate yourself,
you have to gure out what to keep
and what to leave.

Should I say something about my parents?
Should I say something about my past?
Or should I just keep it in?
Which thoughts to hide?
Which faces to display?

Each school—
Each class—
Each club—
Each sport—

There is a dierent version of me
everywhere I look.

Shaped by the space I am in,
molded by who I am around,
each has a box stored in my head,
some locked tight, some left slightly open,
waiting for the right person to peek inside.

Some know real parts of me:
the laughter, the fears, the dreams.

Some know just bits:
scraps of stories,
pieces of a puzzle, never complete.

I can be the quiet girl, lost in thought.
I can be the class clown, daring a laugh to break the silence.
It just depends on who I am around.

Tied Together *by Evangeline Greenwald*

11:59 *by Ada Gong*

11:59. moments before.
Tick tack. Seconds pass through, An odd sense of intermission.

Not outgoing, but loud
Not calm, rather passive.
Not kind, nor hardworking,

But people-pleasing, and
Selfish. Oh, the selfish night,

12: 02
Neither black or white, nor gray,
Not even good enough, but right in between.

Like a scientist, one looks through the lenses
To dissect the night.

Pick it apart,
Every celestial body in the sky, every scar on my body,
Every shooting star in my mind.

Through those lenses, fine, perceive me as you wish,
Refuse to acknowledge my achievements,
Forget to celebrate my victories,
Pretend to not notice

The dying star, burning brightly, too brightly,
Yet still, drowning within

The selfish night, and the long lists.
Put me last on those lists, your lists -

Who decides
Where am I?

Who decides
Who am I?

Who decides
When a day ends?

Who decides
What's last? What's the last?

The universe, the nonexistent moon today, The sun, killed by a plague of darkness, The speckled stars like impurities in the sky,

All coming together and working together
Against- through the lenses, can you see it? through the lenses, can you see it?

The natural institutions of life, like a circle,
Binds us. But,
Makes us up. But,
Binds us. But,
Makes us up. But,

Waiting. Waiting. Waiting through
The long seconds,
Dragging
Out
Like
This
Right

11:59 *continued*

Before-
12:00.

the explosion.

boom.

Finally.

New and exciting,
Unbounded and full of possibilities, yet
Same as the 11:59, still dark,
No dramatic explosion of the dying star, Nor rebirth of the light,

Just a single tear
sliding
down
my
eye.
Even as the start
Of the arbitrary new day
Arrives, the selfish cloak
Remains.
through the lenses, will you see it?

We're finally
Out of the intermission.
Right?

But alas.
Later. Soon.
The cycle of time,
Bound to roll around again. At
11:59.

Lost with Myself *by Quinn Norlander*

High Speed Train *by Ada Gong*

High speed train
The breeze from the window almost felt

Like someone's breath from a tiring day, or perhaps A sigh, tickling
my eyelashes and pink

Cheeks. I hold my hand out, imagining
I am in a high speed train with the window

Open, drinking the day-old sky's dew,
Observing the blurs of the buildings, the music coming

Undone like the heavy hard and metallic knot in my body. The lights
roses and broken hearts, the

Shattered bottles ripped letters and decaying memories Supposed to
be contained but out, vulnerable like

The little girl crying on the playground
The other day. The gust ruffles my

Black hair like my mother did through the sleepless Nights that cov-
er my eyes nose and mouth. Now,

Instead of sheep I count
Buildings flowers and lights. Imaginary roses and real

Broken hearts like the scars in my mind, the
Same scars I leave on my paper when I pick up

My pencil and curate flimsy homes for The wandering thoughts in
my head,

The unforgotten memories that wish to
Be forgotten, and the young girl who hates

Machines, or rather, the people who

Make them. I close the window shut, my hair
Already ruined, sticking to my

Face forehead and sweater in awkward angles that are
Unattractive unappealing and static, devoid of the

Aesthetic of the mind brain and soul, like the Medicine in my
tongue, that shirt

Free Falling *by Huawei Ye*

The View on Street Avenue *by Brooke Lopez*

Deary deer
Deary deer
Where have you been?
Lying in the shadows,

Lurking in the tim-
mid looking for a sin-
crinized way to spin-
This story round andround.

Oh how dizz-
y

and-
over-
whelming Street Avenue

has been
Over the hills oh now
Look at
the
view
Deary deer
Deary deer
Don't look so drear
y.

Oh how you smile

Stay a little while-
longer so you can stop-
spinning round and

round andround.

And so you can see the
Shadows are still gleaming
Overtop the view
Oh how dangerously cute
You fall into

the dizz-
y round andround on

Street Avenue

Leading Line *by Christopher Anton*

Chateau Marmont *by Sarayu Koli*

"I drink too much coffee and think of you too often in a city where reality has long been forgotten. And are you afraid? Because I'm terrified. But you remind me that it's such a wonderful thing to love" -anon.

I feel like a fake intellectual. Recently, I've been in the headspace of a mature, vaguely pretentious young woman. The way I envision her, she has sleek walnut hair and always smells like the cold. A quiet sophisticate. I've started listening to jazz music, reading Nietzsche, and I've grown to love the subtle yet desperate act of being in love with a city, because there is something about trying to cage a place, a moment in time that belongs to the world, to lock it away in your heart, that's so childishly endearing.

Cities are a loss of self, indulgence - a drunk dissociated walk home that Sylvia Plath drones on about; a moment to be kept in the confines of her human heart. The French countryside might be a better place for introspection, in the quiet, your thoughts become louder.

You won't realize it then, but those thoughts don't belong to you alone. The Earth speaks. The dragonflies whisper as they buzz by. The moon hides behind the stars out of fear of being heard. Your connection to the world becomes tethered and woven along your spine in the shape of grass blade imprints; your connection to yourself becomes subconsciously weaker.
That's why I was wrong. The city is the only place where people can deeply belong to themselves. Because the town represents the self. You learn things about yourself through
feeling the heartbeats that aren't your own.

01. The second-hand cigarette smoke outside the opera house hangs in the air the same way imposter syndrome hangs in my lungs. A group of teenagers laughs and coughs, passing the Marlboro red around. Bitter and heavy air whirls around in their mouths. And suddenly, the boys in the group start looking a lot like my dad when he flicks his cigarettes to the ground, angrily. He's an angry man, but I still love him. I called him that night

02. The little girl in the restaurant won't stop looking in my eyes because they're brown like her favorite planet, Venus, and I let her, because her eyes are ivy green like the vines climbing up the brick walls of my childhood house. I remember running on bruised soles back to those walls, a jar of lightning bugs in my left hand and the willingness to let them go in my right. Youth pulsing through.

Crimson *by Cameron Costello*

To be “burned in crimson” is to submit to the fire within when the world pushes. Crimson red, raw and powerful, roars. It is the color of clenched fists and bitten tongues. It is the heat that rises when your voice is ignored. It is the heat when someone you love gets hurt. Its demanding presence needs release. This feeling of being “burned in crimson” is fierce with purpose. It is the moment before action. To be “burned in crimson” is to care so deeply it hurts.

When I’m “burned in crimson,” I see things too clearly. Every action is a blur. Every injustice glows. Every silence screams. My thoughts don’t drift, they collide. A manifestation of pent-up emotion. This state of mind isn’t comfortable, but it is honest. Just as sapphire offers peace in motion, crimson offers power in stillness, when you’re holding it all in. Sometimes, that fire is necessary. It pushes you to speak when you’d rather stay silent. It fuels the fight. To be “burned in crimson” is to stand in your fury and not apologize for it. There’s beauty in that. Not in the rage itself but in what it reveals: passion, loyalty, and a fight for your values. It shows you what you care about enough to burn for.

Afterparty *by Huawei Ye*

Day and Night *by Edward Henderson*

Day and night, I work my hardest. I try my best to find success, but sometimes it seems too far out of reach. Day and night, I try to see my way through, but sometimes that way through is too narrow. If it were easy, everybody would be doing it, but everybody is trying. There are sometimes no clear answers on what to do and how to be confident, but the only thing that's guaranteed is that if full effort is not given, then failure will occur. That's the only way to know how to fail, but knowing how to succeed requires sometimes more than full effort given; however, that's the only way to understand how to succeed: day and night. There's no way of guaranteeing success, but there's a way of ensuring effort, and that is what is necessary to succeed.

Mime *by Huawei Ye*

The Lovers *by Elizabeth Lau*

Red appeared the girl
In a Qipao
With accents of white

Cloth draped on her head
Kissing a mannequin
Wearing western business attire

His maroon tie runs straight
infecting the vibrant color
of Red's buttons.

No one stops them
For one is blind
And another is blinded

They don't seem to mind
the cloth blocking their eyes.

A Castle Made of Twigs *by Elizabeth Lau*

I built a twig castle, sectioning me
From the haunting, stalking eyes
Eternally smiling at me through the gaps

I fell too deep into their luring, smoldering pupils
How I wanted a piece of them, to own a piece of friendship, love, and approval

Instead, I busied myself with the construction of my castle
An internal voice harped on: "higher, larger, stronger".
Chimneys, towers, grooves, vines, moats, valleys, clouds, galaxies,
I became a landmark.

The smoldering eyes were replaced with admiration.

Still,
I waited. And waited…
Until clocks started malfunctioning,
But still, I waited and waited.

But

But no one peeled the door open
Maybe, there was never an entrance, nor exit
But still, I wanted someone to find me
To peek into the crevice
Like I peered out.

As I peered, I encircled my perimeter.
Collected twigs and stacked them
Higher and higher…
Larger…
Taller…
A little
Too
big.

Love as they may,
They charged tourists fees for the sight
"Highest tower in town," They'd proclaim
For every gawk, they charged,
And added to the weight of
my collapsing facade, I kept up

The strangers exalted at the height of my tower,
almost fading into the clouds
"How did a child build this?" they'd ask.
But no one ever looked straight,
Into my eyes
Into the one-way window,
Except for occasional, timid, tongue-tied children my age.

I wanted to leave,
To attract some attention to myself,
And away from the masterpiece,
Away from the ridiculous expenditures and expectations

But soon.
People proclaimed, spread heresies, that the castle was a safety hazard.
That it would crumble
But I could still withstand it.
right?

I couldn't escape.
I had no door connecting me with the outside world,
Only an open ceiling
Too high to reach.

If I twitch,
Will my skyscraper
Bury me along with my legacy?
That wouldn't be such a bad end… surrounded by my life's work.

A Castle Made of Twigs *continued*

But still… something in me wanted to see those innocent eyes that saw me.
So, when you, with your familiar eyes, appeared out of nowhere,
When everyone left,
Fearing their own safety,
I clung my thorny heart onto your armor,
Extending my poisoned vines towards you for a hug, maybe even a peck.

Maybe… that hug suffocated you,
I must have tortured you,
For allowing you to be surrounded by Chimneys, towers, grooves, vines, moats, valleys, clouds, galaxies,
Maybe if I let go,
You would have shown me a hint of mercy.
When you scratched the unlit match against the rough phosphorus coat of the box
and coldly tossed it inside

Maybe you didn't know of my burning.
You couldn't have
Known for my burning, my red flesh, filled with unrequited love and unrealized potential,

Tore.

My thorns instinctively aimed at danger
Along with the roaring ribbons of crimson fire
But I stopped them,
Held onto them with dear might

For if you died because of me,
I couldn't bear myself.

If this is what you wanted, for you, I would.

Maybe

This is the only way for me to remain by your side.
Even though I, my flesh and blood, cannot cling to you anymore,
My ashes and the debris can.

Reflection *by Zain Halabi*

Buffalo On The Road *by Evan Stark*

The Valley *by Anand Kesliker*

The sun rises along a tree line's edge,
The hill's shadow cast on a lively valley.
A forest at the edge of the world,
Lined by lawn and grass stretching edge to edge.
The fish in the koi pond,
Play in the sun.
As a winding creek,
Creeps up from beyond.
The translucent creek carves through the valley,
As deer run and play around its banks.

III. Ashes

"I tell you the past is a bucket of ashes, so live not in your yesterdays, not just for tomorrow, but here."

-Carl Sandburg

Ashes by Anna Sadler

A Starry Sky *by Anand Kesliker*

The starry sky lay engraved into my mind,

As I lay flat against the cold, soulless ice. Despite the ice biting at my back, my mind stays steady and content.

The wind throws snow around my body, Snow that flows peacefully in the harsh wind. Harsh wind that pays no attention to me,

As I lay there alone.
Above my head,
The stars flicker with grace,
Among a flurry of snow and wind.

Fight *by Christopher Anton*

Who Are You? *by Rye Clegg*

Do you hide your feelings
to hide the truth, to keep others blind, to hide
from the people that won't understand, to
hide it because they wouldn't see you? Or do
you express yourself
and show yourself all the time,
to show how you feel
about things?
So what do you do:
show yourself or hide?

If you hide,
people don't know you, your inside. You
won't agree with what everyone says, yet
you decide to set aside your fears. You
listen and decide.
What you think is a lie
you agree with . . . from the inside.
The question I ask is:
Are you friends or just a guy on the side?
If you can't be yourself
Are you really happy . . . on the inside?

If you are yourself,
you wonder if your friends
are hiding themselves
or showing who they are?
If they agree with you,
are they at least honest with you
when they disagree?

Those are the signs of true friendship,
the ones that are honest,
because at the end of the day,
if you aren't yourself, who are you?

Legacy *by Ada Gong*

"Speak,"
They say.
So I spoke, but then,
" Stop,"
They say.
The act of speaking,
Too much and not enough, afraid
To cross
The line knots itself on my
Lips, forming a ribbon, very elegantly
Displayed, with all its glory, unassumingly On top of a present, except

Past is present. Future is present.
It will never be the present.

So I'll keep my bow on, close my
Lips, prevent the thorns from Overfilling and

When I speak, part
My lips slightly, and flowers will

Fall out.
Except, the
spilling out. And standing out.

Flowers
Are ever-lasting. Sealed, perfectly
With shine and color,

Never dying, but never quite
Alive.

Conscious of the present,
Not the seed of the past, swept

Beyond the feet.
Not the wilted remains of the future, but

Shiny, colorful, and perfect.
Those flowers fall out my mouth, leaving

Behind
A trail of

beautiful,
ever-lasting
flowers,

The ones I call
Legacy.

Blot my mouth,
Cover my face, Envelop me whole,
But,
It will look beautiful.

Why Heaven's Gate Will Open for Me *by Anna Ryan*

Much like many words in the English language, joy is purely subjective. Without a shadow of a doubt, despite the subjectivity of the word, I have both managed to bring joy to not only others, but to myself. As I found myself faced with the daunting concept of determining my entrance to heaven, I took time to reflect on whether I have truly brought joy to myself. It is easier to bring joy to others than it is to bring to yourself. In my life, my joy is derived from achieving my goals, one of which is caring for others around me. All my years full of joy, both being the source for others and finding what brings joy to myself, make me confident Heaven's gates will swing open wide for me.

From the moment I was born, I brought joy. To my siblings, I was a joyous addition, but especially to my sister, Katie. She finally had a sister. Some of my first memories are of her and me. We brought joy to each other and still do. Our relationship has changed over the years, but our joy in each other's presence hasn't. Gone are the days of us sneaking cookies into our bedroom, thinking our mom had no idea despite the blue frosting on our faces. Nowadays, we confide in eachother and share our goals, but there is a joy that I have found in the change. I have found a person who is my greatest support and gives serious advice but also knows when I just need to be hugged, and I provide the same for her. Often forgotten is the fact that hugs go both ways, which is something my sister has taught me. When you give another a hug, you also receive one from them. Not only are you providing them with joy or care, it is being reflected back on you. I find myself not only bringing joy to others through such a simple gesture, but finding myself feeling joyous. The joy of others bringing me joy is a trait I can attribute back to my mother. For as long as I can remember, my mother always told us to pursue what made us happy. Whether it was sports, art, music, or hobbies, she encouraged us to pursue it.

She always told me her greatest joy is watching her children grow, forge their future, and find the best the world has to offer. Never was there a doubt in my mind that my mother was being truthful, but recently I was reminded how incredibly she shows it. One day, I came to her with tears in my eyes and said I was worried about leaving her home as I traveled, but her words in response will stick with me for the rest of my life, "Do you know how happy I am because you get to go? I know you are going to have the best time and that makes me so happy." After thinking for a while, I realized that I was proud to call myself my mother's daughter because I would have said the same to my own child. Finding my joy knowing that she was finding hers.

If I were asked if I had brought joy to not only others but to myself, at Heaven's gate, I would answer yes. I follow in the footsteps of my sister and my mother who always provided joy to others and found their own joy in the task. In my life now, I try to constantly bring joy to all around me. On the field trip to Bennett Elementary, I found myself doing all I could to make sure all the kids were having the best time possible. Playing games, telling stories, and also listening to all they had to say, brought me so much joy. I spent the remainder of my day grinning from ear to ear thinking about how happy the children were to have someone spending time just getting to know them. However, it isn't just younger people that appreciate someone taking a genuine interest in who they are, an example would be my team. Every year the freshmen are scared that they won't find friends, but I always make sure to make them feel at ease and seen in such an unfamiliar environment. I am never happier than I am when I am caring for others. Often many people struggle to find their own happiness, but maybe instead of trying to find their happiness is shallow pursuits like the amassing of wealth, or other materialistic pursuits, they should try finding joy in bringing joy to others. As I stand at the gates of Heaven answering the questions, I would see the gate slowly open and I would enter. Knowing that joy was the reason why Heaven's gate opened for me.

Against the World *by Edward Henderson*

Me against the world, that's how it's always felt

As I pace myself as life moves on, I can see the circle closing on me
My chances of achieving my dreams are close

But as the circle closes, I notice my adversaries are closer to me
We all want the same thing.
Victory
But only one of us can achieve it.

In a world where it seems like there's a hundred people that want what I want, there's only one of us who can claim to be the winner.

My journey is endless, going from shores that seem snobby to dense, weeping, woods to lonely lodges.

Although I haven't been dealt the best hand as my adversaries, I have one thing that they lack.

My will to survive and to claim victory.
When in reality this journey is only 30 minutes, it feels like a fortnight.

Jumping In *by Anna Ryan*

Sitting, limbs heavier than the weights that my brothers use to compare their relative
worth,

I waited gripped by the hands of my own pain and anxiety. The icy bench felt like the only thing keeping me from falling into an abyss that is my own negativity.

Hearing the shouts of
the coach echoing against the walls, which for the next few years would become my prison, urther sunk me into my mind.
Go Go Go.

If only I could, but I would not be going the way he was implying. The way I would go would leave a smoke ring in the outline of my body, as if I were a cartoon character making my escape.

As if my mom sensed my desire to flee, her warm hand moved to hold my ice cold one.

Urban Portrait *by Owen Marsh*

Animals *by Elizabeth Lau*

A disheveled black cat
roams
Catches a bird
Swallows its eyes whole
Leaving an empty carcass

People leave
Disgusted at
Nature

As if
Neanderthals
Didn't do the same thing
Because We are better than animals

Maybe We are no longer
Animals
Nor a part of history

Homing *by Thompson You*

Lighthouses *by Zoe Balogh*

Lighthouses shine a guiding light into the sea of unknown, lost souls
They are Imposing but kind

Towering high above, searching high into clouds of limitless possibilities yet remain anchored to the ground aware of living beings and all events that pass through

Built up tall, brick by brick with each new story

Prone to crumbling by enormous waves of unpredictability that crash onto the rocky seashores

They break down
yet remain standing even in the highest of tides

It is only then that I worry when the wear and tear of old scars builds and builds

That the lighthouses of the world all fall, and the world may fail to function

Yellowstone by Evan Stark

Letters I Never Sent *by Sarayu Koli*

My dad used to tell me stories of killing scorpions. I'd imagine him, crouched under the wilted roots of a guava tree, bringing the insect up to the dirt caked lines of his boyish face, seeing all the legs and eyes of the thing. And there, in the red heat of it all, I'd see him for the first time. My earliest perception of my father : a buzzing, distorted memory, from a far-away land, that I wasn't a part of. By this time, though, I had come to believe there was much of his life that I wasn't part of.

My father came home late in the evening, floating through the house like a spector, Bergmann leather shoes creaking softly against the cedar floor. He'd make his chai in the kitchen [with 2 spoons of sugar and dash of saffron], and I'd wake from the corner of the couch. Some days, I would hug him. On his wool coat, lingered the smell of outside, the bleakness of cold air, and the acrid smell of Marlboro smoke that I never could decipher. Other days, we'd sit, mostly in silence, the heater rattling off a static hum in the dim light, his eyes as silent as God. It was there, where I'd come to appreciate the gentleness of silence. My father never means anything by his silence, it's not indignance, or indifference, it's not fatigue, it just is. And so I never resented him for those nights. I never wondered why it was that he had no interest in talking to his daughter, I just knew, as a matter of fact, that my father worked very hard, and that it might have been indignance or indifference, or fatigue, and I certainly didn't understand him then as I still don't now. But some nights, he would stand between the sink and the corner cabinet, peeling fruits, and he would talk to me. He'd talk to me like no man would talk to a child, with a certain indecipherable worldly wisdom, his sentences ones that I couldn't conceive, in the delicacy of my mind.

And so these stories came to be. In the fleeting midwest dusk, over persimmon pulp and great big mango
seeds, I saw my father for the first time. Running along train tops and jumping into sewer drains, deciphering russian philosophy on the 5AM bus, dropping the scorpion with all its legs and eyes into the scorched earth and bringing a stone over it.

I'd imagined he turned the stone over, seeing it all blue-black with blood and guts, and, being the unsentimental creature I'd thought him to be, threw it into the weeded undergrowth, looking down at the hollow corpse in a solemn mourning, no longer a vicious creature, only, a victim of his emerging manhood.

Compared to my grandfather, though, my father was far from unsen timental. My grandfather, hardened by the ghosts of war and poverty, was, at best, stoic, and at worst, apathetic, in his compass of expression. It was for this reason, I'd believed, that my father obeyed him so unequivocally, so thoughtlessly. He gave even less thought to it than he did his silence, than he did to me. Unlike my father, I wasn't raised with the rigidity of foreign manhood, the kind claimed allegiance to, the kind that he believed grandpa's acceptance would allow him to lay claim to.

So every morning, when the sun laid paneled rays through the titled windowpane and suspended dusted air in its wake, I'd dance around my grandfather's room. He'd lay quietly, letting my laughter rise like steam from asphalt over his solemn face. He never smiled, but he also never yelled. I'd seen him yell before, the same way my father did, angry, often, with something to prove. But he never yelled at me. He reserved himself to a certain silence around me, the kind that is inexplicably vulnerable, like a soft spot. At least, that's what my family called it. I wonder now, how there could be softness inside a man who had abandoned himself, a man who lived as a product of the historical wounds of the far-away land, littered with scorpions and ashes.

But, in my youth, I came to the conclusion that there was nothing he felt he had to prove to me. And so, every morning for 3 years, in the pale flesh of the morning light, he'd watch my dance, swinging like knuckles, curving like swan spine, breathing like dragons. dragons. Washing over and through him, like the ice-capped waves of coastlines he once knew. And I'd wonder what he saw in me. I wondered if there was anything to see,
or if the day would come when he'd finally look up at me, and he'd look at me with the same silent eyes my dad did, like I was transparent.

Letters I Never Sent *continued*

And by the time spring came around, and the earth had begun to thaw, I was beginning to believe I was. My grandfather grew weaker. I wasn't allowed to do my swan dance anymore. I'd lay in bed, leaned over the crested windowsill, watching clouds of pollen sleepwalk across the morning sky. I can't exactly recall how many mornings it took for my grandfather to lose half the weight in his body, or how many swarms of pollen had dizzily passed my window before he had moved into the nursing facility.

By March, my father started coming home earlier. His coat smelled less like outside and more like velvet now, that same acrid smell growing stronger, more lucid to me, when he whipped around in it in the doorway, before leaving. Everyday, he would go to the place where my grandfather was staying, the place I hoped was warm, and had swan dance, and laughter, and I'd hoped the dust never settled there. Unguided hope, I'd learn, was the only thing that transparent girls had. So everyday, when dad, and his smell, left, I chose to leave the dust of the cedar house behind. I'd go to the woods, with his adult books, and try to conceive his wiseness, like I had all those months ago, over persimmon guts. I tried with Carl Sagan, Kafka, with Jhumpa Lahiri, and the words tunneled through my brain, hollow as scorpion corpses, indecipherable as the birdsong above.

I began to write letters to my grandfather, dozens of them, asking all kinds of questions, the kind he wouldn't answer. The kinds about sacrifice, love, everything he did, or didn't.

Dear grandpa,

Your son told me you couldn't love. But I don't believe there is a person incapable of that feeling, the one that could eat you down to your bones and leave nothing of your humanity in your body. I'm trying to believe that you could be human, if you never loved.

How did you never ove? Love is a feeling you can't choke down, not like pills down flesh pipes, or bodies in the stone earth, not something you can skid over like glass shards in stuffy wired alleys with bluegrass sax playing through the rat-trap windows above. Love isn't a rat-trap, love is to be free, but I guess you weren't, even in all your sacrifice. I guess then, if you didn't love, it was all for nothing. All the labor, all the blood, all the silent hatred it took for your son to become who he is. I guess it was for nothing, then.

All it took was a machine to put it into his language. I wondered if his mother tongue would twist my words, bite down, turn them into scorpion guts, and I would be transparent again. And so today, I told myself, would be the day I gave my father the letters. But, day after day, I was silent, tongue stiff like addict limbs. For all my audacity, my courage, my visceral tenderness, I had become the poltergeist my father once was, sweeping through the house in the darkness, eyes silent as God. Later, in my empty house, the narrow shelves of the bookshelf creaked with indignation as I shoveled through for the book I had seen the day before, the one that was the color of papayas from the Moroccan market. The day my dad stood at the counter, peeling their coral flesh, he told me that he loved me for the first time.

"I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings". I looked over the author page on my walk to the old treehouse that day. Nestled in the branches of a great big tree, slabs of wood, and an old ladder that wouldn't be able to hold my body soon. My skinned knees dangled over aching birchwood for 4 hours that day, 3 the next, and 2 on the day when the rain came home before my dad did. A lightning bolt arched like the bridge of a fallen handstand melted into another, and another, and another, until the skyline traced with shades of cool and Maya Angelou's words began to melt in my hand.

Letters I Never Sent *continued*

I finally understood one of my father's books. But I still didn't understand him. That day I ran inside. But for all the days after that, I stopped burning my soles running. I became the fire.
Maya Angelou taught me how to love. Not the kind of love I saw at my friends' houses, parents who wear their hearts for each other, kids with pale skin and hair like the beach, and a deep-understanding of each other. I didn't understand my grandfather, my dad, the ghosts of my family, the ghost of my motherland. I understood my mom, but not her strength. She never wanted to be married, but even when the dowry cleaved a hole in her chest, she was still a dagger of a woman : tough like jackfruit. I didn't know how. I never would. But Maya taught me how to love the things I didn't understand.

Maya didn't understand why her life came apart so many times, dissected like pulses, like heartbeats. She didn't understand why she was abused, why her skin was a vice, why she felt like all of it was her fault. So she stopped talking. For 5 years, Maya was a ghost.When she found her words again, she was in a quiet library in St. Louis, reading the old writers, their old words. She learned to be a fire there. And in her words, her story, I learned to be one, too.

I stopped chasing ghosts. The day my grandfather died, we walked to a great big willow tree, to scatter his ashes across the salted earth. He used to walk here, back when he could, and he would carry me on his shoulders, hold my knees in his hands. The day he saw crimson marks on them from his gold watch, he set it on his nightstand, and never wore it again. Not even when I couldn't sit on his shoulders anymore. Not even when his standing turned into laying, and his life turned into stone. So, when I walked into his room that day, I knew it would be the only thing left of him, of a man who thought his son a vice, and his wife a prisoner. And still, I loved him. But to understand him? I don't think I ever wanted to. It would've taken me lifetimes to understand him, his abandoned body, his guilty mind.

But I think that trying to understand him, for all those years, was the greatest love that I could give him, and the only love that he knew how to accept. I never gave him the letters. I don't think I ever would have. I left them there that day, under the wooded windowpane, where light and I would dance every morning. My questions about him will always be unanswered. I'll spend this lifetime like Maya did, becoming a fire of a woman, finding my words in Sagan and Kafka, all the books I never understood. My grandfather never healed his wounds, but I will. But he will never be a ghost to me. To me, he's laying, stoic, on tufted sheets, watching my swan dance. Except this time, he looks up, and his eyes aren't silent. This time, they are full of words.

Man in Street *by Lyle Stover*

The Journey *by Cameron Costello*

Maze
The yellow stared, staggering a foot above,
Wearing rough, green coats, only the head lay visible, Walking past hundreds, only to never be found,
lost in a sea of mazes.

A Choice
When I'm on the borderline,
Toss the sails up and fly free,
20 years down the road,
Regrets will be an afterblur of the opportunity you took.

Fury
Red flashes through my eyes,
rage thunders like cleats on turf,
flags fall, but I do not.

Flow
Rain falls on the ground,
A loud song fills up the sky,
The truth starts to sing.
Regret
A pain found through omission
A failure is better than no action at all,
Love that could be,
Or love that never was.

The Ride *by Caroline Nielson*

Purple Haze *by Evangeline Greenwald*

The Starry Sky Above My Balcony *by Anand Kesliker*

In the sky,
The stars glisten,

Reflected in my eyes.
A ghost raises,

And embers fly,
As I take a deep breath,

And reflect upon the times.
I lay there alone,

In my solemn place.
Gazing up at a starry sky,

As the moon smiles back at me.
The sound of crickets and water, Fill the valley.

The creek lay alone in the dark, Reflecting the moon’s smile.

The Congress of Berlin: A True Turning Point in History

by Julia Berghea

The beguiling and stern German Secretary, Otto von Bismarck, was the master puppeteer of the European continent prior to the outbreak of the First World War. Bismarck was able to masterfully orchestrate and maintain peace on a divisive continent that was constantly embroiled in ethnic and nationalistic confrontations. The Balkans, in southeastern Europe, were a region where ethnic minority groups, such as the Bosnians, Croats, Serbs, Montenegrans, and Slavs would clash with Ottoman rule, often violently. To Western powers though, the most important issue concerning the Balkans was the "Eastern Question." This was the question of what would happen should the already weakened Ottoman Empire collapse, creating a power vacuum in the Balkans and the potential for a disastrous war. The cause of the Congress of Berlin was the Treaty of San Stefano, which resulted from the 1877 Russo-Turkish War. Otto von Bismark, fearful of the potentially disastrous consequences of the this treaty, orchestrated the Congress of Berlin in 1878 to restructure the Balkans and prevent a spark that could ignite the powder-keg which this region had become. European powers and diplomats understood the precarious situation of Europe, wanting to avoid the violent consequences of a disastrous and widespread conflict. They carefully kept in mind the situation in the East, as well as the ever-changing alliances interconnecting European nations. The Congress of Berlin was, in short, an attempt to stabilize the power imbalance in Europe following the events of the Russo-Turkish War. he Congress of Berlin was one of the major turning points in European history, as seen through its humiliation of Russia and rearrangement of European power dynamics and alliances, the ripple effects it caused regarding the Eastern Question, and the resulting rise in Balkan nationalism.

To truly understand the Congress of Berlin, it is important to understand the political environment in which it convened. Russia's preliminary Treaty of San Stefano, signed after the Russo-Turkish War, had multiple components. First, it attempted to establish a territory called Greater Bulgaria, an extremely large autonomous principality overseen by the Russian government, and occupied by a Russian army of 50,000 men.

This territory would give the Russian navy access to the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas, allowing it to potentially threaten British trade with India. It would also free the Russian navy from the Black Sea, where it was trapped. Furthermore, the Treaty would have granted independence to Montenegro, Romania, and Serbia, as well as autonomy to Bosnia and Herzegovina. In monetary terms, Russia intended to impose an outrageous fine of around 1.41 billion rubles on Turkey, which the struggling country would have been entirely unable to pay. In addition, Russia demanded forty million pounds in bonds from Turkey, subject to interest, as well as considerable amounts of territory. Austria-Hungary was especially worried about the treaty due to the Russian military occupation of Greater Bulgaria, which threatened its southern border. Not only could Russia gain access to the Mediterranean Sea and potentially British trade routes, but it would also manage to establish a standing army uncomfortably close to Austria-Hungary and the very volatile Balkan region. Russia would receive a fortune from Turkey as reparations and gain what would have been viewed as an unacceptable amount of power, while all at once destabilizing the Ottoman Empire and potentially creating the perfect conditions for the explosion of the power vacuum which the other nations so dreaded. Given all of this, it makes sense that the Congress of Berlin met with the goal of rewriting the treaty. Europe was wary of the power imbalance the Treaty of San Stefano would create, and multiple countries were scared of the power Russia would gain should the Treaty go through. Thus, the powers that be convened to create a new, more favorable plan. The Congress of Berlin, attended by Russia, the United Kingdom, Austria-Hungary, Germany, France, Italy, and Turkey, aimed to revise the Treaty of San Stefano and make it align more with Western Europe's ideals, though it also attempted to solve the "Eastern Question" and ensure that Europe could remain peaceful. The Treaty of Berlin, a product of the Congress of Berlin, first moved to reimagine the Greater Bulgaria proposed in the Treaty of San Stefano so hated by England and Austria-Hungary. It instead created a smaller, autonomous principality that was much less threatening to surrounding countries.

The Congress of Berlin *continued*

In addition, Romania, Serbia, and Montenegro were allowed to keep the independence given to them by the Treaty of San Stefano. The Congress also created Eastern Rumelia, which was to be a "buffer zone between the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria."

The Treaty of Berlin eased the military tensions that could have arisen from Russian military presence along the Austro-Hungarian border, as well as in the Balkans. It saved Turkey from crushing debt and England from the threat of Russian access to its trade routes by way of Greater Bulgaria and the Black, Aegean, and Mediterranean Seas. Here it can be seen why Russia felt thwarted. After a long, expensive war against the Ottoman Empire culminating in a Russian victory, Russia was stripped of what it saw as its rightful prizes: money, power, and land. Exhausted by a long war with Ottoman Turkey, stripped of its traditional allies such as Prussia, and threatened with military action from the greatest powers on the continent, Russia had no choice but to accept the Treaty of Berlin. Chancellor Gorchakov, one of the Russian delegates at the conference, wrote in a letter to Alexander II, the Russian tsar, that "Almost all of Europe united its ill-will against us," to which the Tsar responded "Too true!" Although Russia and its diplomats felt deeply betrayed by the Congress of Berlin, the same cannot be said for the rest of Europe. A German newspaper described the overturning of the Treaty of San Stefano as "a triumph of moral strength." Meanwhile, Benjamin Disraeli, the Earl of Beaconsfield and a British delegate at the Congress of Berlin, was hailed as a hero upon his return to England. A poem written by Mr. Houghton states "Welcome home, thou noble minded Man, Herald of Peace, to thine own Native Land, For through thy wise counsels many thousands were saved, From a fatherless home and a premature grave[...]".The German and British response to the Treaty of Berlin contrasts markedly with Russia's somber acceptance of defeat. Germany and Britain saw their diplomats returning from what was undeniably a victory, while Russian delegates went home humiliated. This disparity was one of the harbingers of the political tension and change that Europe saw after the Congress of Berlin.

One of these political changes that occurred after the Congress was a growing animosity between Russia and Germany. The two had been, if not allies, then hopeful allies before the conference. Germany was a relatively new country, recently unified through the efforts of its Chancellor, Otto von Bismark, who was a very powerful player both in politics and at the conference. A traditional ally of Prussia, a German kingdom, Russia had hoped that Germany would take its side in the Congress, fighting especially for the creation of Greater Bulgaria. This was, in fact, not the case. Bismark was wary of supporting Russia wholeheartedly and potentially alienating surrounding countries such as Austria-Hungary. In an effort to maintain the balance of power, Bismark not help Russia achieve its goals. Russia left the conference humiliated and angry, screaming betrayal and threatening war at every opportunity. Unsurprisingly, Russo-German relations never recovered.

The tension between the two countries eventually grew to become a significant determining factor in the First World War, a conflict that took place between the Triple Alliance and the Triple Entente, with Germany participating in the former and Russia in the latter. As Bismark was dismissed from his position as Chancellor of Germany, and Kaiser Wilhelm II refused to renew treaties between Germany and Russia, Europe began to descend into war. The development of these alliances demonstrates the impact of the Congress of Berlin through the new power dynamics that were formed. Had the Congress not soured Russo-German relations, World War I might have lost part of its explosive nature. Without the conflicts determining the two major blocks between which the war was fought, much of the force driving the war could have been lost. By tracing the effects of the Congress through just a few decades, it's impact on the world is retrospectively quite clear, driving a stake between Germany and Russia and foreshadowing the alliances that would develop as World War I drew nearer. In addition to impacting Russo-German relations, the Congress of Berlin also affected the political relationship between Austria-Hungary and Germany.

The Congress of Berlin *continued*

The two became close allies after the Congress, signing a defensive military alliance in 1879, to protect themselves against possible Russian attacks. This alliance was known as the Dual Alliance. It lasted through the end of the First World War, marking the cooperation of two countries that may not have worked together without the Congress to spur their partnership. This example demonstrates again the incredible influence of the Congress of Berlin. Alliances were torn down and reforged as Germany found its place in the political sphere of Europe. This too set the tone for World War I, and the events that occurred at the Congress influenced how Europe would be divided when chaos finally broke out.

The potential for a major power vacuum in the southeast also weighed heavy on the minds of the delegates. Should the Ottoman Empire fall, Europe could descend into chaos as countries scrambled to take advantage of the situation and win territory and political advantages for themselves. Under the Treaty of San Stefano, Russia attempted to solve the Eastern Question by itself. Taking full advantage of its victory over the Ottoman Turks, Russia sought to reap as many benefits from the Ottomans as possible. Of course, the Treaty of San Stefano would have caused a disastrous imbalance in Europe's power structure. Russia would have seen not only monetary gains, but also territorial gains, potential military advantages over Britain and Austria-Hungary, and greater control over the Balkans. A power imbalance of this magnitude, especially when it benefitted only one country, could have had widespread impacts, potentially leading to conflict between Britain and Russia over the creation of Greater Bulgaria, and between Austria-Hungary and Russia due to the proximity of the Russian army. If the Eastern Question had been resolved in this way, it would have left many nations scrambling to protect themselves against Russia's new power. Fortunately for the Western powers, Russia did not get the chance to claim all of the Ottoman Empire's power for itself. It was instead divided among many nations, ensuring that balance was preserved and no single nation became overly powerful.

This was done through several mechanisms outlined in the Treaty of Berlin. First, Romania, Serbia, and Montenegro enjoyed continued independence. This eliminated the need to decide which nation would assume control of them. Greater Bulgaria was split between multiple nations, diminishing Russia's monopoly over Eastern Europe and placating Great Britain and Austria-Hungary. Although the Congress of Berlin may not have solved the 'Eastern Question' for good, it did prevent Europe from dissolving into chaos for a period of time. Russia was humiliated by the Treaty's decisions, but the Balkans and Western nations were mostly content with what they had received. The Congress of Berlin thus achieved its goal of preserving peace in Europe, at least in the short term. With the volatility of the Balkans as well as the rest of Europe kept in mind, this achievement is certainly monumental. Large-scale war was successfully delayed for decades, and Europe remained relatively peaceful thanks to the efforts of the Congress.

Finally, the Congress of Berlin led to an uptick in Balkan nationalism. The most important of these was Serbian nationalism, which can be traced through the decades as the spark that started World War I. In 1876, Serbia waged war against the Ottoman Turks in an effort to gain territory it believed belonged to what was termed "Greater Serbia." The Ottomans crushed Serbia easily, and Serbia gained nothing from the war. Despite this defeat, the war was incredibly important for the future of southeastern Europe. It further destabilized the region and thus helped set the conditions for the Russo-Turkish war as Russia stepped in to protect Bulgarian Christians from the Ottomans. As was stated earlier, this war resulted in the Treaty of San Stefano, and, thus, the Congress of Berlin. Through the resulting treaty, Serbia gained both the independence and territory that it had been fighting for. These gains in turn spurred nationalistic sentiments as Serbia gained confidence and its ambitions to win more of its "rightful" territory grew.

The Congress of Berlin *continued*

At the same time, the Ottoman Empire was weakened as it lost territory, rights, and money under the Treaty of Berlin. The weakening of Serbia's enemy also contributed to a rise in nationalism. The importance of this lies in its impact on World War I. As nationalism grew more prominent, Serbia became increasingly antagonistic to its powerful neighbors. Spurred by the nationalistic idea of Greater Serbia, the country believed that Austria-Hungary and surrounding countries unrightfully ruled over Serbian territory and people. Finally, on June 28, 1914, a Bosnian Serbian named Gavrilo Princip assassinated Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, creating the spark needed to launch all of Europe into a devastating war. As Germany rushed to Austria-Hungary's aid and Russia took Serbia's side, all of Europe became embroiled in one of the largest wars known to mankind. The Congress of Berlin thus had a direct impact on the outbreak of the First World War, feeding the flame of nationalism that would eventually explode into southeastern Europe and beyond.

From a bird's eye view, it is quite apparent what an incredibly significant impact the Congress of Berlin had upon Europe and its future. The combination of shifting alliances and rising nationalism, spurred by the growing volatility of the yet unresolved "Eastern Question" sent Europe teetering towards the outbreak of devastating war. The destabilization of pre-existing alliances, driving Germany and Russia towards outright antagonism and threats of war, built the outline upon which the Triple Alliance and the Triple Entente would grow. These, in turn, gave shape to the alliance system within which the First World War was fought, drawing the line in the sand between the two warring sides. The ever-present "Eastern Question" served as a powder-keg, receiving the spark generated by rising Serbian nationalism, and resulting in the assassination of the Austro-Hungarian archduke and the onset of World War I. All of this, of course, can be traced back through the decades to the decisions made by those seven countries at the historic Congress of Berlin.

Appendix:

The map was added to the Treaty of San Stefano to illustrate the borders of the Greater Bulgaria proposed by Russia.

Count Schouvaloff. Annex to Article VI of the Treaty of San Stefano. Map. Edward Hertslet, 1878. https://pages.uoregon.edu/kimball/images/1878mr.SanStef.map3.jpg.

Primary Bibliography

Count Schouvaloff. Annex to Article VI of the Treaty of San Stefano. Map. Edward Hertslet, 1878. https://pages.uoregon.edu/kimball/images/1878mr.SanStef.map3.jpg.

This is a map annexed to the Treaty of San Stefano which shows the borders of the proposed Greater Bulgaria. I used it to help me visualize the impacts of the creation of this state on the rest of Europe both during preliminary research and as an appendix in my paper.

Gorchakov, Alexander. Letter to Emperor Alexander II, June 1878. https://mid.ru/upload/medialibrary/a8f/nzu6r9t57fmigkfylmfjlgmvo6rgcewz/51.pdf.

This is a letter written to Alexander II by Russia's Chancellor, Alexander Gorchakov. It is an extremely useful insight into Russia's perspective on the Congress of Berlin.

Houghton, William Henry. Letter to Earl of Beaconsfield, n.d. https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-2128003705/view.

This is a poem written for the Earl of Beaconsfield after his return to England from the Congress of Berlin. It is a primary source that demonstrates English sentiments towards the Congress of Berlin.

Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, Transmitted to Congress, with the Annual Message of the President. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1878/d523.

This source is a translation of the original Treaty of Berlin. This document contains all of the articles and introductions in the original Treaty. I used this source throughout my paper as it is the single most important primary source for this topic.

The Congress of Berlin *continued*

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This is a newspaper article from the German town of Stuttgart that talks about the overturning of the Treaty of San Stefano. I used it to gain insight into the German perspective on the Congress of Berlin.
"The Preliminary Treaty of Peace, Signed at San Stefano." In The European Concert in the Eastern Question, 335-48. 1885. https://pages.uoregon.edu/kimball/1878mr17.SanStef.trt.htm.
This is a translation of the Treaty of San Stefano. It contains all of the articles in the original treaty. I used this source mainly in the beginning of my paper as I was giving context about what caused the Congress of Berlin to take place.
The Times. "Austrian Heir and His Wife Murdered." June 29, 1914, 8. The Times Digital Archive.
This is a newspaper article from the Times in 1914 about the assassination of Franz Ferdinand. I used this source because it allowed me to make connections between the Congress of Berlin and the start of the First World War.
The Times. "It Would Be Charitable to Conclude That the Rus-." February 26, 1878, 9. The Times Digital Archive.
This is a newspaper article from an 1878 edition of The Times that discusses the Treaty of San Stefano. It demonstrates how the Treaty of San Stefano was perceived in England immediately after it was drafted, which was useful when contextualizing the Treaty.
The Times. "Latest Intelligence." February 25, 1878. The Times Digital Archive.
This is an 1878 edition of The Times which discusses the Treaty of San Stefano. This primary source helped me during my preliminary research because it made me realize that I needed to research more about European politics at the time to understand the Congress of Berlin.

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"The Congress of Berlin and Its Consequences." The North American Review 127, no. 265 (1878): 392-405. JSTOR.
This is a journal article about the Congress of Berlin and how it impacted the next few years of European history. I used this as I was doing preliminary research on my paper.
Karpat, Kemal H. "The Balkan National States and Nationalism: Image and Reality." Islamic Studies 36, no. 2/3 (1997): 329-59. JSTOR.
This is a journal article about nationalism in Balkan states. I used it as historical context for the tensions in the Balkans before the Russo-Turkish War. This article was helpful in describing the volatility that nationalism created in this part of Europe.
Little, Becky. "How a Regional Conflict Snowballed into World War I." History. Last modified March 3, 2022. https://www.history.com/news/regional-conflict-world-war-i-beginning.
This is a website about the assassination of Franz Ferdinand and the start of the First World War.
Medlicott, W. N. "Diplomatic Relations after the Congress of Berlin." The Slavonic and East European Review 8, no. 22 (1929): 66-79. JSTOR.
This is a journal article about political relations after the Congress of Berlin in Europe. I used this source to describe how alliances changed because of the Congress, especially between Russia and Germany.
"Russo-Turkish War 1877-1878." BritishRedCross. Last modified 2023. https://museumandarchives.redcross.org.uk/objects/46180.
This is a website with some basic information about the Russo-Turkish War. I used it mostly in my preliminary research as I was trying to build a timeline in my head of what happened when.
Shafer, Kenneth Allen. "The Congress of Berlin of 1878: Its Origins and Consequences." PhD diss., Portland State University, 1989. https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/open_access_etds/3927/.

The Congress of Berlin *continued*

This is a dissertation about the Congress of Berlin. I used this source throughout my preliminary and actual research because it has a comprehensive account of what happened before, during, and after the conference. This source was really helpful to me because it gave me an excellent jumping-off point as I started to deepen my research.

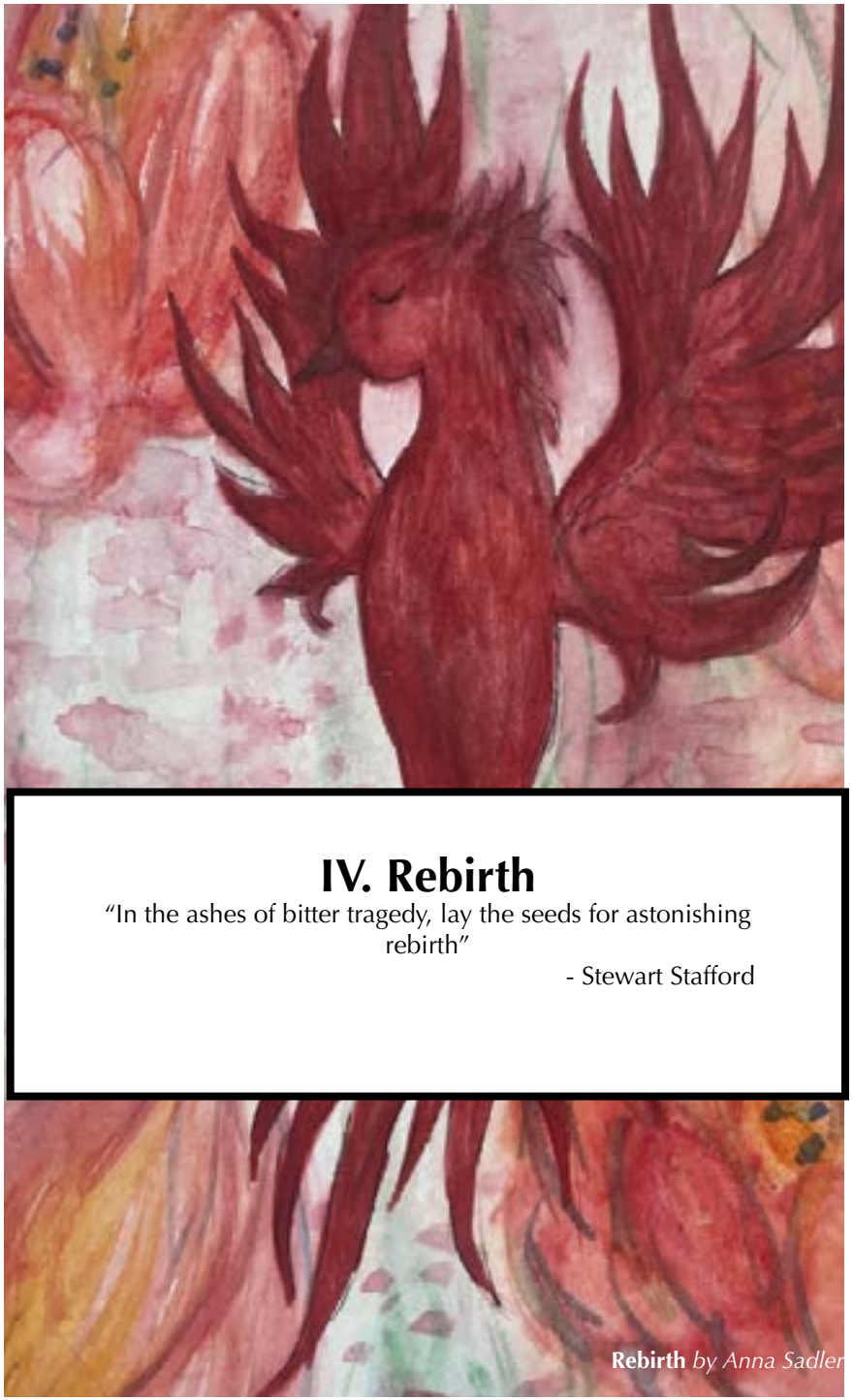
Tzouvala, Ntina. "'These Ancient Arenas of Racial Struggles': International Law and the Balkans, 1878–1949." European Journal of International Law 29, no. 4 (2018): 1149-71. https://doi.org/10.1093/ejil/chy067.

This is an article from a journal about the Balkans, and I looked specifically at the sections concerning Balkan nationalism. This source was helpful in understanding the impact of nationalism on the volatility of the Balkans. I used this source for the part of my paper concerning nationalism and how it was impacted by the Congress of Berlin.

[The Berlin Treaty of 1878 was Concluded]. Presidential Library. Accessed April 10, 2024. https://www.prlib.ru/history/619381.

This is a web page from Russia's presidential library giving an overview of the Congress of Berlin. This was one of the very few sources from a Russian perspective that could be translated, and was invaluable when trying to research Russia's perspective on the Congress.

The Barrier *by Evangeline Greenwald*



IV. Rebirth

"In the ashes of bitter tragedy, lay the seeds for astonishing rebirth"

- Stewart Stafford

Rebirth *by Anna Sadler*

Emergent *by Ada Gong*

Breathe in. Breathe out.
Hold my hand,
Let's begin our journey.

On the surface,
With our branches and leaves grazing the sky, our stage,
Dancing in the vivid sunlight,
To the beat of the breeze,
With the clouds and birds watching us, our audience,
Here we stand tall.

Embrace others.
Embrace ourselves.
And the beauty of we, and our minds,
What's down there?

What's behind the layers of leaves and bushes and trees and tears –
But here we stand tall.
We stride, we leap, we fly,
With the sun illuminating our backs.

We begin, and,
We emerge.

Plastic Slide *by Ada Gong*

The length of the slide stretches along my entire body as I lie on it,
facing backwards. My head on the foot, my feet at the head.

My body submerged by walls, walls of plastic like the ocean's froth
hardened, my mind in the sky, my heart in the hourglass untipped.

The sound of kids yelling in the playground is the lullaby that plays
in my ears as a young girl slides down, moving in antiparallel.

her pigtails fly in the air, mirroring the vitality
in her eyes that avoid my somber ones.

i see her old drawings filling her walls with paper birds,
attached by ringlets of scotch tape threatening to free fall.

her high school graduation speech saturated with colorful adjectives
and thankyous, a reflection of the
letter she wrote to her older self, back in
middle school.

The drinks she'll have with her friends despite her low tolerance, the
comments from her boss at work that leave the taste of raw tea

leaves pulled from the earth
a month or so too early.

The songs she'll belt in
karaoke about her first love who cheated on her,

but also the man she'll eventually marry, and
the child they'll bring to life in the season where

flowers bloom, along with vacations and honeymoons, filled
with sunrises, glimmering lights, and warm rice stuck

on corners of mouths, but not nearly as fulfilling
as the smiling picture frames, the house filled to the

brim, the green garden that grows
tomatoes, roses, memories flying past with the paper birds in the air.

The gardening shovel and gloves on the ground
tossed aside like the walking cane next to a white bed.

The letter, once referenced, but forever unopened.
The song remains unchanged.

The body was enclosed by a fancy plastic,
preserved like her story.

I keep waiting, on the slide.
My feet in the dark blue clouds,

the hair on my head scraping the wet earth.
I laugh.

My Cherry Lipgloss *by Ada Gong*

Unlike my cherry lip gloss
Unlike my cherry lip gloss
Romance was not all bright and shiny. When originally applied, a bright red, Passionate like the afternoon sun. Glistening like a clean apple unbitten, Beaming of a childlike innocence.

I hated it.

On one afternoon,
I received a little box from him.
Oh, he actually remembered my birthday.
A cherry lip gloss. It reminds me of you, he said.
I put it on, my lips
Repelled by the plasticky sweet taste that
Covered my last bit of
Authenticity. It accentuated the weird lines, the
Peeling skin on my lips, leaving a weird
Oily, but also dry
Feeling. The stranger's disproportionate lips looking
Even stranger on my face,
It felt terrible. He gave it as a gift, so I can't just wipe it off in front of him, right?
Reluctantly, I kept it on for the day.

But honestly, it wasn't that terrible, all $7.99 of the product, straight from the drugstore.
Hey, I'm going to use the restroom for a sec, alright?
I looked in the mirror, facing the stranger with the
Intimidating, weird, cherry lips.
It didn't really suit my skin tone at all.
I grabbed a paper towel, wiping, wiping, wiping the
Red swatches of color. I looked back at the
Mirror. Yes, the gloss was gone, but
Left on my lips was an ugly red stain.
Huh.

We said goodbye,
I made my way back home,
Took a shower, washing off the smell of expensive food, and
The day entirely. I looked at the mirror. It's finally gone.
Alas, even cherry lip gloss washes off eventually.
I guess.

Did I love him?
I do not think so.
Really?

But I hated it.
The very next week,
It was over. It was just a fling,
Was it really that bad?
I saw him in the corner of the street
Supposedly...
Hanging out with a new girl while I talked to a new guy.
Will she get a cherry lip gloss?
I don't care.
She will never get my cherry lip gloss.
My lips felt so clean right now.

Too clean. My lips felt too clean. Maybe it's time for another fling?
Reluctantly, this time around,
Right?
I kind of miss it.
Like the last one, maybe.
I put some makeup on. I reached, dug through my makeup bag,
And in the very bottom, there it was,
The cherry lip gloss, in all its former glory. Reluctantly, I put a thin layer of it on.
I can't possibly be reminiscing?

Unlike My Cherry Lipgloss *continued*

Like the last one?

Almost magically, a guy approached me. A possibility, just for a fling
or something. For the excitement that not just a red lip gloss can
give me. It'll be light, it'll be fun, we won't get too invested.
That lip shade, it really suits you, he says.
I smiled.
I hated it, but it was sort of fun.
Like the last one.
Maybe, I liked it.
A few dates later,
He gave me a gift.

Sunshine *by Huawei Ye*

City in the Clouds *by Evangeline Greenwald*

Flying, Sky's the Limit *by Anna Ryan*

What do you like to do? A question the students in Milton Daniel will be bound to ask each other on move-in day. My answer not only tells my story but also shares my unique approach to life and its trials. My answer to the question? I like to fly planes.

Mags on.. Mixture full rich.. Fuel pump on. Clear! I hear the engine roar as I engage the starter and pump the throttle. As a surprise on a warm August morning, my instructor told me we would have fun flying around today on the Detroit River Tour. Looking down at my city and seeing the beauty I hadn't realized I had been taking for granted, I found a unique perspective. Life has its ups and downs, but everything is a matter of how we handle a situation. While seeing the roads from above interconnect and continuing for an unfathomable length, I saw them paralleling my own life, traveling through rougher areas to reach better ones with a final destination yet to be determined.

Along with teaching me the importance of assertiveness and trust in those around me to do their jobs, flying taught me the importance of maintaining an open mind to all possibilities. I learned to hold my composure in an emergency, communicate when necessary, and know my limits, but not fear the challenge. These lessons have impacted all facets of my life, whether academically, athletically, or personally, and will continue to influence me as I continue my journey into and beyond college.

In my life, saying that I like to fly planes is saying I love to learn, laugh, challenge myself, and embrace everyone and everything all at once. It means I am poised, competent, and strong. My experience flying has given me confidence that all the world's problems can become clearer and less troublesome if we only change our perspective and adopt the bird's-eye view. An outlook I look forward to sharing with my fellow students in the Honors College, as we figure out our paths together in Milton Daniel.

For This I Am Grateful *by Anna Ryan*

In my family, Thanksgiving has always been a memorable holiday. Unfortunately, the whole Ryan brood wasn't able to come together this year, but I was overjoyed to see even just a few of my siblings and their children. My sister brought her twin daughters, Ella and Claire, but they had to go home on Thanksgiving. Despite their early departure, I was glad to spend at least a few days with them. As for who was present for the holiday, the list is as follows: Conor, Jake, Nicholas, Alexander, my parents, and myself. My mom and I were in charge of the cooking, while my brothers, dad, and nephew watched the Lions battle the Packers and played front-yard football. However, throughout the day, my mom and I would peek outside to see the older men teach my three-year-old nephew how to pass the ball and tackle. I could hear my nephew laughing as he grabbed Conor's knees and did his best to knock him over, earning a very dramatic fall from Conor. Nicholas was watching next to me with a big smile on his face, and I placed my hand on his shoulder as we just enjoyed each other's company. After all the food was prepared, I grabbed my jacket and ran out to join the game. My nephew instantly tried to tackle me and chased me around the yard. Throwing passes was my dad, as Jake and Conor were trying to push the other one out of the way to receive the pass. I looked over at the porch and saw my mom laughing at all of us and she said she had come to tell us dinner was served. After we all entered the dining room, my father led us in prayer, thanking the Lord for our blessings despite the trying circumstances. We all sat down to eat and talked about our lives; everyone gave input on where I should start looking to go to college; we joked about each other's appearances, and as always took turns calling each other adopted. We closed the night by watching a movie, before Alexander needed to go to bed, and sat together enjoying each other's presence.

As the night ended, I was able to reflect on what I was truly grateful for and realized I was grateful to spend another holiday with all of them, especially Nicholas.

Knowing that I might not have many holidays left with him made me see everything that we did together on Thanksgiving as a blessing. My family has always been inseparable, but now we realize that can't last forever so we have to take every opportunity to be together. Nicholas has always been there for me, and I struggle to cope with the fact that he won't be around forever, but I was able to spend at least one more Thanksgiving with him. I was also grateful that my brother was able to spend the holiday laughing, smiling, and spending time with his son. As my nephew was playing in the yard, I could see the sorrow and joy in Nicholas's eyes. While he was happy to see his dad and brothers playing with his son, I could see the pain from his inability to participate. I was grateful that my brother could at least watch his son continuing a tradition that has been around since we were young, even though it was hard to see him unable to throw the ball to his little boy. My family has always known we are lucky to have each other, but we never really acknowledged exactly how lucky. Without my whole family, I would not be the person I am today and would not have the same amazing memories that I have. I can recall past Thanksgivings and can't help but grin from ear to ear.

Unfortunately, sometimes I think that I have taken for granted having every single one of my amazing siblings impacting my life in their unique ways. I am grateful for the time my family got to spend with each other despite all the challenges we have faced these past few months. We somehow have managed to find joy in the darkness, and I find myself grateful for all the support we have given to each other through these trying times. However, the thing I am most thankful for is that Nicholas made it to Thanksgiving, for a long time no one knew if Nicholas would survive surgery or if the hemorrhage was going to stop, so the fact that he was able to make it through all that and sit down and eat dinner with us was the greatest miracle. I am grateful for the ability to see my brother walking around the house and most grateful for every chance I get to tell him that I love him. Even though I don't think I'll ever be able to tell him enough. I couldn't imagine a greater family, and for that I am grateful.

Optimism *by Anna Ryan*

How optimism has helped me through trying times. Before I share my story, I must define optimism. In truth, optimism is a mindset founded in fortitude. It is the fuel that drives people from complacency with the mundane or the struggles of life to find excellence. In short, optimism is stubbornness in the face of adversity. If there is one thing I should let you know about me, it's that I am incredibly stubborn. But I am not made of steel and I have allowed myself to falter in the past because, as we all can attest, growing up is challenging. Well, life in itself is challenging. Unfortunately, by the time I reached the end of my sophomore year, I looked in the mirror and saw someone I didn't recognize. While I still saw the shadow of the little curly haired girl in elementary school who made the highest honor roll and had no fear of standing up for herself, I saw a girl who tried to escape class before the teacher could ask about her missing assignments and couldn't save herself from a bully. What was the defining difference between them? My young self hadn't yet felt a fracture in the support system that has always defined who I was, but my 10th grade self was living it, and was finally fed up with allowing a bully to define her and knew who she wanted to be in her life and the lives of others.

High school is a time of intense change and growth. You meet a bevy of different personalities, and there is no guarantee that you will get along with all of them. That is normal. What was not normal however, were the changes I faced at home. My brother was very sick and in an attempt to help him handle his challenges, his family moved into my house. Though the real struggle began when my sister-in-law, for a reason I can't even begin to understand, went from a person that I called my friend to a monster I had no choice but to hide away from for my own protection She took every opportunity to belittle me to a point that it toed the line of dehumanization. I was picked apart down to my core where I couldn't tell what was true about me and what was simply her hate.

With all that in mind, in the vulnerability that accompanies the early teen years, I was hit hard by the realization that my support system, my family, wasn't impervious. No matter how much I reminded myself that she was one person and that nothing had changed in the way the rest of my family viewed me, I couldn't shake her presence. So, I started to look for my way out and college was the obvious answer. However, my golden ticket was slipping through my fingers more and more with each barely passing grade. I had gotten myself to a point as a student where college wasn't a choice for me to make but one that would be determined for me. Unacceptable. I was done allowing others to define me, I was determined to prove my sister-in-law wrong about everything. I was not going to sit idly anymore and let her negativity control my future because she meddled enough in my past and present. I decided the best way forward was to throw myself into my passions, and put in the work to better my life and maybe improve the lives of others. Out of all the interests I invested in, writing proved the most important. It became a manifestation of my optimism and my attempt to connect with others in need. In creative writing, there is complete freedom, my characters face adversity but always overcome it. A lesson I think we all need reminding of from time to time. Writing led me to competitions, positions in student leadership, and I am convinced was the reason I got into my dream school, Southern Methodist University.

My story has had its ups and downs, but that is what makes the audience want to read to the end. I started out as a bubbly straight A student with not a care in the world, then I was a young teenager barely passing her classes and silently dealing with her bully. Now, I stand before all of you giving a speech as a confident young woman ready to take on the world and do good. Throughout my life, I have lived and breathed the ideals of an optimist. I came to understand that the people around me were more than happy to knock me down, but I also learned I could build myself back up and reach new heights. An optimist isn't a person that is always joyful, but they are the person that finds joy in the hardships because they lead to growth in some respect. I have had my trials but that is okay. In hindsight maybe I should thank them, as they gave me a new perspective, or I should say reminded me of my 8 year old view.

Optimism *continued*

The world is what you make of it and there is a little good in everything, so why can't I be part of that something good? I try to be the person you can always count on for help, or for a kind word and a listening ear. My resolve is founded in the reality that an optimist has the stubbornness to make it through a tumultuous time and the heart to help others through pitfalls in their own journeys. Maintaining optimism isn't a leisurely stroll in the park, but it is necessary to overcome challenges great and small. So, I implore you to please join me in helping others through trying times with leading by an optimistic example.

Earth, Wind, and Fire *by Huawei Ye*

Some Defining Choices I Made at DCDS *by Cameron Costello*

Looking back at my time at Detroit Country Day, there are four major choices that really shaped who I became. Some small decisions at the time, but each blossoming with long-term impact. These choices brought growth, challenges, and lessons I'll carry with me well beyond high school.

The first choice I made as a freshman was deciding what sports to play. I joined football and track, which changed my whole high school experience. These sports taught me about discipline, accountability, and resilience. It also shaped who I looked up to. I looked up to older athletes who became my role models, and many of my closest friends came from those locker rooms and practices. The downside? Time. Balancing intense practices with school wasn't easy, and there were days I felt overwhelmed. But the pros far outweigh the cons. Sports gave me structure and purpose.
Another impactful decision was staying in the Hannett advisory group, a place that felt like home. As I got older and met new people, I encouraged a few of my close friends to transfer into that advisory with me. It turned into a space where I felt understood, supported, and grounded. The only real "con" is that not everyone could join, so some of my friends were in different groups. Still, the community we built in that room mattered a lot to me.

Academically, one of the biggest decisions I made was to challenge myself by taking rigorous courses. Whether it was honors, APs, or electives that pushed me out of my comfort zone. I wanted to test my limits and prepare myself for college. It wasn't always smooth, but I came out of it with stronger study habits, better time management, and more confidence in my academic ability. The short-term stress was tough, but the long-term growth has been worth it.
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Finally, maybe the most personal decision was who I chose to surround myself with. I built a friend group (LCC) of smart, ambitious people, many of whom are heading to some of the best colleges in the country. Their drive and focus rubbed off on me in a real way. I learned how to hold myself to higher standards, both socially and academically. Sure, sometimes it meant stepping up my game just to keep up, but it also meant constantly growing. Being immersed in that kind of environment, especially within the DCDS community, helped me reach my own goals, including my next step at Boston University.

Each of these decisions came with ups and downs, but together, they built the version of me that's ready to move on and thrive in college. I'm grateful I made those choices, even when they weren't easy. They made my Country Day journey unforgettable.

1000 Fire, 1000 more floods *by Sarayu Koli*

My mama
dagger of a woman
tough and sliced up like jackfruit
Is a land of 1000 fires and 1000 more floods
my motherland is a grave
until it can learn to speak English
A burning foreign land
I spent a life burning my soles running away
Until I became the fire
I leave white flowers at the tombstone in the morning wildfire
spreads flames breathe in circles like a sun
when the moon watches the wind blow the last one out
when the body is a flesh wound
all that's left is the bones of praying hands
smoke hangs so heavy in the air no prayer to god can escape
my mother is that prayer
sacred like her mama's land
But doesn't believe in sacred
She got lost when she was a kid
'Lost is fine when you aren't ready to be found'
when she dreams she's still lost
Her feet sweep the wasteland at the altar of the temple standing in vapor air
The one that looks like salvation
When she walks through that door it's empty
desecrated by 1000 fires And 1000 more floods pipes bleed brined acid waste
She's dancing at god's feet and he turned her away she thinks he can't turn her away enough
she thinks it's the last time everytime
it's only the beginning
a reminder of the end
I tell her godspeed before she sleeps

I. Words for free
My mama tied to train tracks
sees an asphalt dragon in the road
Only tracks hold her down
they took no prisoners
when the dowry cleaved in a hole in her chest
They left her open like that bleeding
They took no prisoners
but shes not free
When she walked through that door the last time they knew to bury their own vices in a closed casket sealed with that door
limbs pried into a lotus
lowered into the earth for a life of freedom bound until the trains heartbeat dissects itself into pulses and then breaths
Gritted teeth whisper from a kiln
lotus women gather on the third rail to hear this song
cursed enough to know this beat this pulse
dragon breath
my father knows the only words I know
Every word breathes a million different ways every one of his destroys me a million different ways to say prisoner
Prisoner (n.) - lotus woman, dragon wife, bleeding, buried, fish tongue
But only one to say free
My mothers tongue flails gutted fish white flesh hooked on scorching steel She can't say that word foreign and cold like nickels
on the salty mouth of the riverbank her fish tongue tells me 'watch' as the borders flood 1000 times The water swings like knuckles
curves like swan spine breathes like a dragon I see it there the only word to say free
The wildest river godhood drowns here and learns to look the sun in its eye my mother named me after rebirth
And I am reborn with every breath into a million different words for free

1000 Fire, 1000 more floods *continued*

III. Crocodile
My mother swallowed all her fears gave birth to them
Her daughter born guilty tongue a blunted blade
Mouth like a rat trap snapping over any word that bleeds
My mother, a woman of ration
    Ration (n.) - in accordance with logic or reason
    Ration (v.) - to limit, to restrict
Loves like an impaling stake but bleeds binary
My mother, a woman of medicine must think only the proven
can be sacred Streamlines herself into my veins with silver wrung
needles pale like blind moons ache of contingency stirs an empty
stomach
this is how she loves me a visceral resemblance of bone and blade
    Like in war
Leather cuff weaves blood into crescent moons along my veins
This is how I let her love me tethered to stone rationed
Conviction for the crime of being her crime her guilt her fear her
war still the bevel presses into me uncertain
Still fluorescent beams pierce me like i wouldnt be visible without
them as if to
    ask ‘are you whole? Or a shadow?’
I’ll never feel the weight of stone and leather the sting of silver
like my mama has.
I read once that crocodiles hold their babies in their mouth to carry
them to water instinct holds their mouth pressed open like a sprin-
glock Willful creatures don’t know they are condemned piled in
needle teeth and wire jaw But they’re never condemned like their
mother womb and mouth a vessel for what she couldn’t be
    My mama is a crocodile

And i’m a vice selfish by the weight of her sacrifice I won’t bleed
pure or binary but loved in a way that destroys her
held sacred
In her land of 1000 fires and 1000 more floods
    I promise Ii won’t drown or burn
    I promise I’ll never know condemned like you
    I promise I’ll make you proud mama

As an active shooter shuts down the building, two old friends, Jordan, a troubled girl living in an old school storage closet, and Sasha, a naive student, reunite, facing their complicated pasts as they prepare themselves for what might be the end.

Watching *by Caroline Nielson*

Pomegranate Juice by Elizabeth Lau

The operating scalpel pried open the dermis of your pomegranate
Seeds fall from your creation,
You claim them yours, for they are
Protected by your (?) crimson bubble of flesh

Upon collecting the damaged orbs
You seal her glowing, teary eyes in a vacuum,
Whilst beating the joy, the red, out of her.
Following the recipe

You extract like a gold mine, all the oil, that could've sparked a fire
Leaving behind an empty, plasticky, seedless casket
For the seeds escaped the illusion! Bursted through!
And were
[discarded]

You savor her juice, her blood, her achievements
Little by little
Watching the volume of the juice (that you've worked oh so hard for)
descend the ticks on the measuring cup

The aftertaste of the juice causes
You to wish for the pulp back on your girl
But all in front of you
Is her lifeless shell
Tainted by her innards of white.

With my Grandma by Anna Ryan

My grandmother is a wise lady. She has lived a long life, so with all her wisdom, I decided to interview her to learn more about her life. My grandmother, Joanne, is a kind, short, silver-haired woman with a passion for birdwatching and history films. Occasionally she enjoys neutral-toned nail polish and making home-cooked Hungarian meals. As she was already tuned into the TV for the start of another nature film, I readied my notebook. I sat down on her couch with pen in hand ready to transcribe. Despite knowing her for all sixteen years of my life, I found myself constantly surprised to learn new things. Things about my grandmother I would have never expected.

My grandmother loves making food. When I was younger, every Christmas year she would make Stained-Glass Window cookies and Christmas wreath cookies. However, I was surprised to learn that her love of cooking had started with her own grandmother who loved to cook. My grandmother had often visited her grandmother to bake with her. She was a strong woman who had raised her children alone after her husband died. She was a kind woman who obsessed over Sears's catalogs due to her undying love for hats of every kind, even the most peculiar and extravagant hats. She loved celebrating Christmas and had decorated her house head to toe with colorful decorations. My grandmother had often visited to make one of her favorite dishes: strudel. She fondly reminisced about rolling the dough out and shaping the dough into layers. "I remember stretching out the dough until it started coming down the table and looping around". When she and her grandmother had finished all their hard work, she would jubilantly relish the strudel dish on cabbage-green tablecloths and talk with her grandmother for hours over everything and anything. "Sometimes I would even stay at her house long into the after hours to talk", my grandmother had recounted fondly.

Her grandmother had passed on her love of cooking to her mother. The calm, hard-working mother who had taken care of my grandmother and her two sisters with so much love. Her mother had prized herself on generations-worth of recipes and home-cooked meals, despite being a widespread practice at the time. Her mother had cooked everything from su prisingly sweet gelatin salad to delectable breaded pork chops.

On a regular school day, she would return home from a long day at school to eat scrumptious cheese sandwiches and chicken noodle soup at the dinner table. She would watch as her mom made the pasta. "She would bring out this big, big board and a massive rolling pin. She would make a mountain of flour, poke a hole in the center, and crack open an egg. She flowered the whole board with a mountain's worth of flour. She kneaded the dough over and over with her knuckles." She would finish with flattening it out, and sectioning it off into ribbon-like, doughy strands. "It was a whole production, and it mesmerized me through each step", she reminisces. When she finished, her mom would sit down with the family to talk about how their days went. During the warm summers my grandmother and her mom enjoyed making jelly and jams. As a child, she grew up with a variety of different fruit trees from the traditional Michigan cherry to humble pear tree. Her father also enjoyed maintaining gardens of snap peas, carrots, and tomatoes. "I was never without a garden", she had said. With enough fruit, she and her mother would make heavenly pies. When making apple pies, she and her mother would fill pans full of pie crusts. They would core out fresh-picked apples, while inspecting for worms. If there were worms they would discard the apples disappointedly. If the apple was clean of pests, they would use and save the seeds. It was the one meal my grandmother treasured more than anything.

With my Grandma continued

On an ordinary summer day, my grandmother at 10 years old was waiting for her friend
Jackie-Down-The-Street to arrive for their playdate. She had begged her mom to make their marvelous
Michigan cherry pie. She would introduce her to the wonders of a homemade pie. But her mother refused.
Stubbornly, my grandmother declared that if her mother would not make one, then she would figure out
how to make it herself. When her friend Jackie arrived at the house, she finalized a master plan. Her friend listened and decided to join in. They spotted the cherry tree in the backyard and had pitched a mass of blankets and pillows into a tent to pick cherries outside. Instead, they got sidetracked with all their coloring books, celebrity magazines, and games. When the sky turned a cotton candy pink, my grandmother's parents began to wonder how long her stubbornness would persist. Her parents had asked whether she and Jackie would come back inside so late, but they both refused. It had been an hour after the sun had set, when they were interrupted by a monstrous creature. For above the blankets a giant caterpillar loomed over the girls. My grandmother remarked, "It was like all the worms had found a way to get revenge". It was the size of one of their fingers, with strange looking horns protruding out from its
heads. The girls screamed and yanked their blankets off the trees, banging onto the door. Her mother had let them both back into the house. She remained unsurprised that both of them didn't last long outside.

"I find it strange that my ordinary life is so interesting to you" my grandmother had admitted. "I didn't go to parties much, I just enjoyed baking with my grandma". But to me it was different. I had learned the history of my family.

Unexpected stories of family recipes I had never expected. Living life in the 1950s. But in the end, I had learned so much about my grandmother. "Sometimes there's nothing better than a cherry pie," she told me. I think she had meant that baking was important to her, because it
brought much of the family together. Now she bakes cherry pies with me.

Mine *by Robinson*

Water on my Mind *by Zoe Balogh*

For the longest time, I've always been a swimmer. I started when I was a teeny-tiny 5
years old in the big, deep pool with my floaties surrounded by other kids first learning to swim. I
barely remember much of it, but my mom says that "I enjoyed flailing around in the water, and giggling with other kids". Then I moved up to the class for kids, ages 10-14, where I started to
learn the different strokes: freestyle, backstroke, breaststroke, and butterfly. I wouldn't say that I was the most enthusiastic swimmer starting out, but all that changed the day I was introduced to competitive swimming. The coaches had bought some balloons, glimmering-gold Party-City balloons, and made a poster board that read "Competitive Racing for Kids."Some of the older
kids had already started to groan, wanting to go home already. But me, I stood in awe. The glimmer of golden-marker text lit up in a sea of other swimmers. The poster stood before me in
all its glory, begging me to join. I walked closer and closer to it, as it loomed over my face. Underneath it, was the very sheet of paper that would change my destiny. I grabbed the pen of fate, and I signed the paper contract. Thus began my first-ever race.

The whistle blew and I pushed off the wall, speeding ahead in front of all the other kids. With arms stretching out, I fly through the crystal blue water. Every kick going faster and faster.
I propel myself forward, feeling a thrill of emotions. Every breath falls into a rhythm: 1, 2, 3, breathe...1,2,3, breathe. Cheers echoing with fiery energy off white-tiled walls. The sunlight
from far-reaching windows hits the water just right, and the crystal blue glows with determination. Everything happens in a split second. The wall comes into view. I slow down a
bit. My arms reach out. I place my hand on the wall. Then, I begin to glance back behind me. I inhaled and exhaled for a moment.

Then-

"Hey there kid, congrats on winning the race,"my swim coach gave me a gleam as bright as this morning's sun.

"Seems like you really gave it all you got," she said in a pleased voice.

"Here's a rubber ducky, and a little medal, you're on your way to becoming a great swimmer."
She offered me a steady hand to pull me out of the depths.
I was in shock, my arms were shaky and my body was exhausted; however, my mind was racing with excitement. Faced against the infallible clock, I had managed to beat it in a battle of
time. All the years spent swimming had built up to this very moment. If there's anything I learned from that moment, looking back, it's that so many things can be accomplished, you just have to give it your everything.

***

It's 7:40 am and I sit in the classroom with sunken eyes and loads of homework backed up in my mind. My eyes blink for the third time, and I can feel my consciousness slipping in
between sleep and awakeness. The coffee is wearing off, even after the 3rd cup. Supposedly WebMd says that the effects of caffeine should last for six hours, but I'm living evidence of the
opposite being true. I wouldn't say that I have the worst schedule, but sometimes it feels like a lot. Right now I'm a junior in high school, and the only thing I want to do is go home to nap.

***

"Hey, wake up!", a distant voice said. I awoke to blaring lights and the silhouette of my friend.
"You've been sleeping a ton this week, this is like the fifth time in a row."She seemed apprehensive. Her eyebrow was scrunched up, and her eyes had a puppy-dog look of sympathy.

Water on my Mind *continued*

I did my best to assure her " I just haven't been able to get a ton of sleep this week, I'll be fine tomorrow".
But I could tell she wasn't going to budge.

"Fine", I sighed "I'll take a nap during lunchtime".
She lit up and resumed her usual eyeing the clock to count down to lunch. The bell rang, and I packed my bag. Pearl was walking away, along with a swarm of other
students following behind. I started walking out the door, when-

"Hey, I need to talk to you", my teacher said with a stern voice. I froze for a second, then I walked towards her with cautious steps.

"Hey, you can't keep sleeping in class, this is the second time this week".

"I'm sorry Mrs. Parks, but I promise that I'll be better next class".

"But you're also behind on your homework, and we have a project due next class. I'm afraid that I can't give you any more extensions. If this continues, I'm afraid that you'll have to drop this class or end up with a C".

"What?"

"I'm going to have a talk with your advisor, but please understand that this is out of concern".

"Mrs. Parks, I need to keep this class to keep honor roll".
I could have never imagined that it had gotten this bad. Anxiety started to build up in my gut, and I began worrying.

"How can I ever recover?" I thought to myself.

"How will I ever make it through school?"
Mrs. Parks looked at my face, and no doubt could sense the distress I was feeling. She sighed, and the cogs in her head started whirring away to find a solution.

"I'll tell you what, It's Tuesday, and the project technically is due tomorrow. I'll give you until the end of the week on Friday at 3:30. But that's it."

"Thank you Mrs. Parks", I said dashing away.
My heart beat fast, but all the dread I had experienced vanished with new resolve.

***

Everything begins with the sound of "Swimmers ready, 1, 2, 3 hup". My legs push off the platform, tumbling into the depths of familiarity. Everything is quiet, weightless, serene.
Nothing to disturb me, but I feel myself floating to the surface. Time speeds up as bubbles rush to the surface. I take a breath and gasp for air. My legs almost fail to keep treading as fast as possible. The clock hastens ahead of me with every tick. With everything I've got, I rush to the wall as fast as possible. I slam my hand into the wall. I looked around me for all the other swimmers in their lanes relaxing at the wall. I glanced up and I realized I ended up in last place. A terrible knot formed in my stomach, and my already fast-beating heart beat faster. I froze stuck in thought:

"What am I going to do..."

"How could I have failed the race..."

The crowds of cheering people grew louder and louder with a sarcastic sting. All I could
do was sink away into a pool of my own worst fears: I wouldn't be able to accomplish
everything I had worked for.

"What was it all for? Why did I even try?"

"Hey, are you alright?", a voice breaking through my train of thought.

"Huh, y-yeah", I said with an unsteady voice.

Water on my Mind *continued*

It was then that I became aware of my surroundings. Everyone had already left the pool and I was alone.

"Kid, take a breather."

"There's always next time, ok", she said with a winced smile.

"Just give it more effort".

"And hey, you may not be the best swimmer, but you're pretty good", she said. She handed out her arm and half-dragged me out. All I could feel was fatigue, I was so very tired.

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After that race, I decided it would be best to drop swimming. Sometimes I wonder what would have happened had I taken the advice of my coaches to "keep giving it more effort". I suppose it's a sort of moral dilemma to keep moving forward even if the stakes seem impossible. Should one keep going even if doing so causes so much pain, or should one give up? Regardless, I made up my mind. And so, I focused on academics and even ended up with a B in Mrs. Parks' class. Even though I gave up on my passion for swimming, my dedication to sports didn't end there. I began to pursue golf and began my sports journey down another path.

Starting golf was hard. What initially had been just to improve in putt-putt began a whole new world of new words, terms, and even new players to memorize. My simple putt-putt days with neon-green grass and fake plastic rock walls were far behind me. Instead, it started to look more like an in-real-time complex geometry problem. But I persevered. Failure, ironically, opened the door to a lot more opportunities. Instead of spending scorching summer days in the pool, I now began to swing golf balls during the heat of the day. Each swing began a new lesson to improve from my last mistake. Gradually, the months continued as my swings sent golf balls farther and farther. Then, came the fateful day: golf tryouts.

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It was 7:00 am in the summer. I had been woken up from my peaceful slumber at the ungodly hour of 6. The sky was still pitch black, but I was sent off to the big day. With the rattling of my golf clubs in the back of the trunk, my mind had wandered. I had recounted all my golf balls the night before, and read every rule in the official guide book. All that was left was to play the course.

"Are you ready for the big day?", my mother had asked through the clattering of clubs in
the trunk.

"Yeah, just nervous," I responded.

"Remember to stay hydrated, and I'll be cheering you on back home" she said comfortingly.

"You'll do fine."

We pulled up to the golf course after what seemed like an endless maze of cars turning in and out of the parking lot. After finally finding a parking spot, I grabbed the golf clubs and dashed to check-in at the front.

"Good luck", my mother exclaimed.

"Thank you", I said hurriedly.

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I was with a temporary white-folding table set-up complimented by two folding-chairs.

"This you?", the coach of the team asked while pointing at the roster .

"Yes" I responded quickly.

"Good, warm ups start at the putting green a little ways from here."

"We start teeing off at 8:30am. Get warmed up and get ready to go with the second group".

Water on my Mind *continued*

The brief walk from check-in to the putting green took me down the road to a tiny, hilly patch of land with mini-checkered flags. Only a few other golfers had been set-up, but they were zoned-in on hitting the tiny flags. Despite my half-asleep trance, I had managed to match their adrenaline by warming-up to the rising sun. It climbed up through the orange-stained skies to shine down below onto the bright green grass. A painfully sharp reminder to get my sunscreen and extra water bottle out at-the-ready. Now the hard part began.

"Golfers gather up", a voice from the check-in hollered. The coach sped down the asphalt road from upon the golf cart to give a message.

"We're heading out", he declared. "First group, follow me."

"Second group will be up next."

The cart zoomed off in the distance of the shining sun with a couple of the other golfers, while I watched in anticipation.

I line my shot up overlooking the lake in view of my shot. When I look at pools now, I am brought back to my memories of swimming with a newfound bittersweet nostalgia. I now realize that I am no longer that child who longed to swim at every opportunity. And so, my chapter on swimming has come to a close, as I begin the next stage of life. Swinging my golf club, my I now race with the clock in the pools of time.

Passing Down Traditions by Huawei Ye

When I graduate *by Anna Ryan*

Sitting in my usual classroom seat, in the front row on the far right side, I was asked a question that changed the trajectory of my high school career. “What color are you and why?

Tell me your story”,

Mrs. Hannett said while looking at me. I had never really been given a creative writing prompt before or that much freedom stylistically. Throughout my entire high school career, I was accustomed to the dry format of claim, evidence, and reasoning that accompanied assigned readings. Completed only for necessity, not enjoyment.

Throughout the lecture that day, I pondered my color and if I could be defined as only one, still not comfortable with my newfound creative freedom. I approached my teacher with my inquiry, and her smile was contagious as she said,

“Please write about your colors, every single one of them.”

In that assignment, I found joy in writing and used my words to paint a picture, feeling the beauty I knew writing could be. I turned in that paper, proud of what I had made, but scared I had done it wrong. Mrs. Hannett then surprised my class by stating that she was going to read our papers aloud to the class, but would keep the authors anonymous.

Suddenly, I felt my body go numb as I imagined my class mocking my attempt at writing. As she began to read, I heard my title,

“The True Fullness of Color,” escape her lips. I saw, as I listened to my words, and I felt my classmates’ gaze shift to me, realizing I was the author.

After she had finished reading, she looked at me, smiling, but kept her praise generic. However, after class, she approached my desk and told me that I had a gift. Hugging me, she said that she saw great things in my future writing. As I continued to write for her class, I learned new techniques and strove to improve my work under her guidance.

Even now, as I write my application, I can hear her saying, ‘Make sure to vary your sentence pattern and never use ‘this”.’ Soon I found myself entering competitions, not only writing but also oratorical competitions. She guided me through my inexperience and self-doubt, enabling me to receive awards on the national stage. I owe much of who I am now as a student, leader, and person to her and her faith in my capabilities.

With that in mind, if I told her I was applying to John V. Roach Honors College, I know she would tell me the sky’s the limit and to go for it. A mentor can be the difference between excelling and just getting by, an unrecognized yet universal truth. I was blessed to meet Mrs. Hannett, and I would be grateful to meet and know many more mentors in the future through John V. Roach, in the form of faculty and fellow students who will share and encourage my lofty aspirations for the future.

The Grandma Tree on 5th Avenue *by Sarayu Koli*

My real grandma lives in that burning foreign land
I spent a life burning my soles running away
Until I became the fire

My real grandma will wait for me
She dances above the gates and sings the song.
waiting for her daughter for her daughter's daughter
to stop burning
She wears orange to blend in
she told me i was orange too

a brave tiger
born underwater lungs made for flood
"never let them put you in a cage"

pocket knife in my left hand
silver ringing blade gutted grandma tree
stripes scarred pale on her
Tiger teeth stood between her bone and flesh queued like a choir of guilt
that day I didn't feel guilty
In the 5 letters next to it

S T R O N G
I know now burning makes you strong

Innocently Curious *by Yashvini Goddla*

Phoenix by Iris Pund

Letters from the Staff

I joined Spectrum in my sophomore year. My two years as Editor-in-Chief have allowed me to grow and develop as a writer, leader, and creator. Spectrum has allowed me to explore myself and discover my hidden abilities. I want to thank our faculty advisor, Mrs. Hannett, for welcoming me into the club and helping me every step of the way, from words on a page to meeting planning. Thank you to the other editorial board members, Sarayu, Zoe, and Grace. You all have helped set a great example and being great leaders for the club. Your hard work and open-mindedness have motivated me to become a better writer, leader, and person. I couldn't have done this without all of you guys, and it has truly been a memorable experience working with you all! Without all of our contributors, writers, and artists, this magazine would not have been possible, and I am so grateful for our club's hard-working and diligent members. And finally, to our readers: I hope you enjoy reading the magazine as much as I enjoyed helping to create it!

-Lara Hammoud, Editor in Chief

Lara Hammoud is a rising senior. She enjoys writing speeches and memoirs. Beyond writing, she loves traveling, playing field hockey, finding the best matcha, and hanging out with her friends.

Letters from the Staff

As a new member of Spectrum, I felt like I had found what was waiting for me. I was 7 years old when I wrote my first poem : Spectrum gave me not only a place to share my love for writing and literature through leadership, but also a creative outlet that my younger self spent years pining for. For this, I would like to thank Ms. Hannett, whose dedication to Spectrum goes beyond leading the club. Ms. Hannet's endless passion, caring nature, and deep wisdom gives Spectrum a beating heart - she is a reverential figure in not only the magazine's development, but also the creative journeys of individual students, who never forget her encouragement, even years after leaving Detroit Country Day. Among those people influenced by her are my fellow editors, Lara, Zoe, and Grace, all of which I would like to thank for their patience and hard work in this process - none of this would be possible without you all.

- Sarayu Koli, Assistant Editor

Sarayu is a rising senior who has been writing for Spectrum since her sophomore year. As far as literature goes, Sarayu loves it all, from Kafka to Jhumpa Lahiri and Maya Angelou. As a dedicated creative writer, Sarayu explores themes of humanity, translations of love, and identity through narratives, poems, and even screenplays! If she's not writing or reading, she's probably on a hike, at a hot yoga class, or cooking fusion cuisine.

Letters from the Staff

Although this is my first year as an editor, I've been writing pieces for Spectrum since my sophomore year. Spectrum is one of the few clubs our school offers that doesn't have any "set" requirements. It provides a much needed creative outlet for many types of writing that aren't traditionally taught or encouraged in traditional english classes, offering a friendly and open environment for members to freely explore their literary interests, whether it be poetry, essays, or short stories. Personally, Spectrum has helped me dive into my unique style. Mrs. Hannet played a big role in this, encouraging me to look deeper into what interests me. Nonetheless, I hope you enjoy this year's edition of the Spectrum Literary Magazine. A big thanks to my fellow editing staff, Lara, Sarayu, and Zoe, none of this would be possible without you all. And as always, a big thank you to Mrs. Hannet for bringing passion and enthusiasm to the club.

- Grace Kalkanis Assistant Editor

Grace Kalkanis is a rising Sophomore. When not writing for Spectrum, she can be found representing her class on the Student Council, playing tennis and field hockey, drawing, or spending time with friends and family.

As a first-time editor for the Spectrum magazine, I've absolutely enjoyed reading all the creativity in our community! I have been a member of the Spectrum club since Freshman year, and through Spectrum I have had the opportunity to grow, not only as a writer, but also to find a thriving writing community with each published magazine! Truly, none of this could have been possible without the rest of the team (Sarayu, Lara, and Grace) who worked long hours alongside me to review and compile all these pieces. Alongside, of course, the wise guidance from Ms. Hannett who sparked a passion in many of us to write and publish our stories! From the short but thought-provoking haikus, the deep, reflective narratives, and the breathtaking artwork, this piece is not only a collection of writings, but a narrative. With huge thanks from me to everyone who contributed to this edition, I hope that you, the reader, enjoyed this edition in its entirety!

- Zoe Balogh, Intern Editor

Zoe is a rising senior. She enjoys writing think pieces, haikus, and short stories - all of which provide an insight into her creative mind. To fuel this mind, Zoe is often drawing, crafting, or playing the violin when she's not writing.

Letters from the Staff


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