

Foreword

This issue of *Halfway Home* explores the theme of wilderness, which is one of the most primitive and basic human ideas. Some of the writers in this issue examine wilderness in terms of a direct confrontation with incomprehensible, potentially dangerous, physical places: for some it is a thorny, overgrown, or inhospitable world, while for others it is a fanciful escape from the frenetic pace of our familiar, and largely structured, urban existence. Yet, as we read closely these various treatments of the theme, one finds that the idea of wilderness not only designates space, but also describes a number of inward confrontations: with a future unknown or unrealized, in terms of reckoning with a difficult past, or perhaps as a memory that has taken on a life of its own.

Indeed, the writers in this issue reveal to us that as wilderness spaces surround us they are also, just as significantly, within ourselves. As managing editor of this issue, I would like to thank all of the contributors and editors of for taking these daring steps into unknown and untamed worlds.

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Halfway Home VIII

Hong Kong Writing

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FICTION



Different Lifestyle

Fong Fu Yiu, Erin

The smell of black mold and stew put together a lingering scent that somehow haunted me forever; I didn't want to eat anymore but my mother kept cooking.

Ever since I was little I had this particular image in my head: my mother in the kitchen, alone, cooking all day... and I could barely talk to her. My father was never there, only my mother. I felt like I had a father-figure, someone who gave me warm hugs and put me to sleep with a sweet lullaby. Apparently I was wrong.

Mother likes to cook. But all she ever made was stew, with very few vegetables and a lot of meat. I asked her to make something else, and she said stew is the best way to serve meat.

I could finally move my legs so I went to get my food. This room is worse than the previous place we stayed at. I couldn't even find one decent chair, but who am I to be picky; it is nice enough to have a roof over our heads.

The bones lying around mother's feet caught my attention. They were so clean, to the point where you could see the glitter of the pure bone white surface. Mother never let any of the meat go to waste, every bit of flesh

clinging to the bones she peels them off and adds them to her unrivaled pot gourmet.

Sometimes, I feel like the bones were speaking to me. Not in words, obviously, but they were giving off this weird vibe that made me tremble. My mother served me a plate so I tried to forget the bones and ate.

But then I heard noises, and I knew it was time to leave again. My mother picked up her knife - the only thing she cared about - and wiped off the blood and flesh on it. I packed up what was left of our belongings and ran to the car.

I never really understood why we are always on the run, and the only time I asked, my mother said it was because we have a different lifestyle, a natural, primal lifestyle. I wasn't brave enough to keep asking. I could tell she was already annoyed from the way she frowned, the way she held my hand so tight, but these are nothing compared to what has frightened me always, her eyes. From time to time, mother puts up this blank stare that gives me serious creeps, it is like she doesn't have a soul anymore. Her eyes just become hollow and something is trying to crawl out from them. So I kept quiet and got in the car.

Like every time my mother gave me something to drink, something that made me dizzy but relaxed. I knew that when I woke up that we will be

somewhere safe, away from the people trying to get to us. I was starting to lose my strength so I leaned on an arm to make a good position to sleep. It was softer than the car seat but it was also cold. More importantly, it had this familiar smell and it made me shiver. I didn't catch a good look at who it was but I couldn't bring myself to it.

Before I went completely dark, I heard Mother mumbling:

“Don't crush it, sweetie. It's not easy to cook when the bones get stuck in the flesh.”

I didn't understand, but I fell asleep.



Photo by Chris Leung

Muse

Leonardo David Tay

*“Nature’s first green is gold,
Her hardest hue to hold.
Her early leaf’s a flower;
But only so an hour.
Then leaf subsides to leaf.
So Eden sank to grief,
So dawn goes down to day.
Nothing gold can stay – ”*

Frank slowly lowered his print-out to reveal the “*poetry*” group circle slack-jawed in awe, and slowly coming to a round of applause.

The circle leader started first, “I-I don’t know what to say Frank. That was amazing, that was beau - ”

“Oh, no Jude, I uh, didn’t write that.”

Silence and cocked heads.

“That was Robert Frost, *Nothing Gold Can Stay*.”

Though the applause evaporated, it was instantly replaced with *oob's* and *ab's* and a single *Pfft, of course I knew it was Frost*. Frank shifted a little in his seat and fiddled with the edge of the paper sheet. It wasn't his own writing, and there's little to no legitimacy to this poetry circle, but he had to get it off of his chest. Any club would do, it's better than a Facebook rant. Unload, leave, and they will never have to see his face again.

Jude creased his eyebrows, "So, Frank. I thought that last week we agreed to bring our own pieces to –"

"I can explain. But you guys will have to bear with a whole lot of emotional baggage, hear out one man's totally irrelevant existential crisis, and basically waste all of club time BUT I will be out of here and I'll treat all of you to a couple of drinks tonight, or I can just leave altogether. Anything's fine with me."

Silence and cocked heads.

"Um, sure Frank, if you'd just stop cutting m –"

"So, I used to believe that the world was just one big boring blueberry –"

- and that blueberry was rolling around in the palm of Clarissa Cress, who

somehow convinced me to bail Biology to look into the woods in search of ponds with slimy, slivering tadpoles. She whispered to me behind our upright textbooks, which sheltered us from the ever-scrutinizing eyes of Mrs. McCleary, *Why would I read about a tadpole in a damn textbook when I could sample the real thing right in our backyard?* While every cell of my being said no, I felt a tug that got me out and about, confused, in the deep and ancient woods of Oaktown.

The air was crisp cold and leaves crunched under our boots, the skeletal branches dividing the gray sky above into a mosaic of puffs and patches of faded blue. Clarissa had a red jacket on, barely enough to fight off the wind, but there she was, putting one foot in front of another and swinging her straightened arms in tune as a toy soldier might. *What am I doing here?*

I regained some senses and realized the stupidity of this little escapade, stopping in my tracks. “Do you think tadpoles are even around during Autumn?”

Clarissa continued at her pace and without turning around, “I read a story once that some tadpoles didn’t grow fast enough in the summer, made it through the winter and turn up even bigger than other frogs when spring comes. What makes you think they’re not swimming around now?”

My sigh materialized into a defeated, frustrated mist, “I don’t. It’s just that,

I don't know why I agreed to bail with you. I should have just gone to piss as toilet breaks are meant to be used. McCleary's gonna freak when she sees two empty seats and I'll lose my year-end *Distinguished Student* award and my grades will start slipping and I can't go to college and I can't find a job and I'll have to start selling...selling..."

"Drugs?"

"DRUGS! GOOD LORD, I can't be out here, I'm gonna lose that scholarship and I can't...dad will..."

Clarissa collapsed into breathless laughter, "For Christ's sake Frank, I've just known you for like, 2 hours, and you've already cemented yourself as the most uptight of the bunch. I thought you were different. Nobody would come along with me, and yet here you are. You could just turn back you know?"

"Yeah, you're right, thanks for pointing that out."

I turned on my heels and marched away from Clarissa Cress, and in that moment I single-handedly defied gravity.

When she was introduced to the class that morning, there was something about the highlights of silver-white that streaked one strip of her jet-black

hair, her electric blue eyes, and the decision to roll up only one sleeve of her jacket that made my adrenaline spike. I could see that even if you didn't like her guts, you just couldn't truly hate her. Case in point, I walked away feeling bloated with unease and that aging school offered only a superficial and downright false sense of security.

I turned around and shouted from a distance away in childish spite.

“Oh, by the way, I'm pretty sure that Ben Riley would've gladly come along with you, he's just *dying* to get expelled. Have fun finding tadpoles.”

Whistling wind and skeletal branches rattling.

I continued walking when a miniature meteor hit me in the back of my head. I winced and looked down – it was a blueberry.

Looking back, I see no one, but I could just barely work out the word doofus lingering in the breeze.

Later that evening, I sat on the edge of my bed with my back against the window, staring at my newly-bought guitar in its hole – the abyss that stares right back. No crowd, but my palms were sweaty; no stage, but my knees were weak; no lights, but I was blinded.

It's just a guitar. 6 strings, 5 fingers, 1 voice. No big deal. Just remember those old songs Mom used to sing to you and give them life.

Right as I worked up the courage to play, a shadow loomed over me and I heard the latch to my window unlock.

“Hey, doofus.”

I fell forward but managed to avoid crashing into my guitar.

“Clarissa! What the hell are you doing here?”

“I’m really sorry.”

“What for?”

“For being an insensitive prick. I didn’t mean it when I said you’re uptight. You’re really cool, you talked to me when no one else did today.”

This girl.

“Well, no harm done.”

I held onto my arm, rubbing it up and down.

“So –”

“So?”

“So, I’m sorry too, I didn’t mean to lump you in with Ben Riley.”

Her lips turned from serious girl to Clarissa, a lopsided smile that I came to know as the essence of the girl who rides on the wayward wind.

She extended an arm towards me, in parallel with the moonlight.

“Come with me, I want to show you what you missed out this afternoon.”

I was scared to go with her because like moonlight, you tend to find yourself – all of you – illuminated; because like the forest, you might find yourself lost in space and time; because like the feeling of finding a great view over the hill, you might find yourself disappointed.

Clarissa sighed, “Biology class has been dismissed for a while now. You’re not bailing out on anything you know – ”

“– And just like that, I went with her. Clarissa told me to bring my guitar along, and we covered the same route that we did earlier on in the day. She marked the trail with a glow-in-the-dark string (a process that involves a

whole lot of tonic water and a chemical called quinine, don't ask) which helped with navigation, but was redundant when fireflies lighted the way. In the end, we found a clearing with a large oak tree in the middle, which had a lot of strong, low-lying branches you could sit on. We sang our hearts out 'til morning come."

The air was silent, but Frank could hear the gears turning in their heads.

"By the way, I'm sorry for interrupting Jude."

Jude had his chair turned around for a while, his head leaned in intently listening.

"Never mind that. So, what happened? You two became a thing after that?"

"What? No, ew, that's such a cliché. Nah, we kept coming back to that spot everyday after school, and she'd be like, my muse, being her weird self. It gave me a lot of inspiration for songs and poetries like that, but I'd never expect that she'd be the reason why I abandoned medicine completely and took up music. Thank God for that."

Frank smiled at the ground, looking defeated.

Jude creased his eyebrows, noticing.

“Hey, you okay over there Frank? That ain’t the end of the story, right?”

Frank scoffed.

“That’s the thing, I don’t really know where it ended. She’s not here anymore, but the thing is, whenever I write or sing, I can feel her next to me, feeding me all this... magic. One day I just came to the clearing to find that it wasn’t there, like meeting her was all in my head, some illusion of the wilderness, which is just – ”

Frank was pulling at his hair.

“- complete bull.”

He slumped in his seat and looked at the bewildered club members.

“Yeah, the poem. I’m sorry. Ah – ”

Frank ran his hand through his hair, puffing his cheeks.

“I just meant to say. All good things come to an end. Clarissa was there, and then she was not. Ever since she disappeared, she’s been stuck inside my head, and the funny thing is, it was like nobody had met her in the first

place. I don't understand what happened to me, but as I found myself sharing this with you all, I guess that I wanted people to know about her, so that she could live on, and not just a sad thought whenever I read Frost's poem."

Silence, and Jude's compassionate eyes.

Amused, he proclaimed, "Well boys and girls, I think it's about time we turn this poetry club into a fiction club instead, none of you ever had the talent anyways."

All the club members' heads nodded in unison.

Gesturing to Frank, Jude said, "Maybe Frank could get the ball rolling. Come again, next week – we'd like to hear more about this, Clarissa Cress."

Never Should Have Left Home

Maligawage Jayani Anupa Premaratne

Sarah always heard stories about a group of men lurking around the woods waiting to claim their next victim. On Christmas day, after an argument broke out with her parents yet again, she needed an escape. She grabbed her coat that freezing cold night and went out into the woods. As she walked further and further in, she started to question whether she could trace her steps back home. She thought she could recognize the bushes and trees, but they all started to look more and more alike. Just then, something else caught her attention. The crushing of fallen leaves. Footsteps right behind her. “We've got you surrounded little girl”, they whispered.

Be missing

Lam Wai Kit, Ricky

I feel the warmth of the sunset shining at my back, it reminds me of her body.

Tomorrow is her 25th birthday; I started drawing a birthday card for her. I cut and glued my photo onto the card, and drew her face beside it. I wished her all the best, just like I did every year. Looking at the chocolate brownie I'd prepared for her, I just hoped she could blow out the candles.

The light-blue walls of our bedroom are filled with all the notes I've written and cards I've drawn for her. These are all I am left with.

When I was leaving our bedroom, the phone in my pocket rang. My heartbeat quickened when I saw the caller's name – Karen, Karen who went missing three years ago while going a backpacking trip. This was the first time I picked up my phone with such a hand shaking.

“Hey, dear! I'm so scared right now. Wh...what should I do?”

“Karen? Is that you Karen? God bless! Where have you been all these years? I kept tracing you for a loooooong time.”

“I...I can’t move anymore. My legs got injured by a nasty fall.”

“Huh? You got hurt?”

“And I’m more than faint with hunger. No more foods with me.”

“Wait, calm down! What can you see nearby?”

“I’m beside a Devil Mountain and a...do...do...do...do”

I have always believed that she would come back to me one day. Whenever we met, her image came to my mind - she would run into my arms with her silly grin and the scent of her hair would surround me. I was thrilled by the thought that my love had stood the test of time. When I looked around my bedroom, the blessings of the birthday cards were glittering and sparkling in my eyes. Karen, I will not lose you again, I told it myself as I ran to the table and grabbed my key with shaking hands.

On the way to the mountain, the air was thick and turbid. I could barely breathe. I was dazzled by the misty, mazy tracks running over the mountain. The trees were bladder-brown; all I could see was the faint light from the densely packed leaves. Strange noises were coming from all directions, the trees whispering and the leaves rustling, surrounding me with the biting cold. But there was no sign of Karen.

I stumbled almost blindly, trying my very best not to get lost as I made my way along the dangerous track. The dim pool of illumination from my phone was the only light I had. Suddenly, there was a despairing whine echoing in the night air. I could hear my rapid heartbeat set pounding by the scream. Is that Karen? I turned around and around, trying to find the source of that screech. What I saw was Karen, with a pale and bloody face and mud all over her body, walking, walking like a ghost towards me. I collapsed backwards against a pine tree. She was getting closer and even closer. My limbs were feeble when I saw her, half of her head crushed, most of her skin rotten and peeling, with thick slabs of dried blood covering it. Her right eye was swollen and her nose was crooked. I was not sure if she had legs, she was half transparent from the waist down, as if with rapid movement. I knew there was no way to escape. Instead of running, I held my breath and closed my eyes. I could hear her steps as the cracking sound of the leaves on the ground was getting towards me.

A moment later, she touched my skins with her broken fingernails, from my neck to my face. I could smell the unique stink of corpse mixed with the mud from her hand. She was touching me softly, the way a mother touches her baby. I opened my eyes. She looked lifeless, except for the blood dripping off her face. From her touch, I knew she could recognize me.

“Karen, I’ve missed you much,” I gasped, and grabbed my long-lost

girlfriend in my arms.



Photo by Gloria Chan

Your Own Game

Chan Wai Yu, Michelle

“3, 2, 1... Ready. Go!”.

The competition began and all the contestants spared no effort to run. There was no destination but they just knew that they could not stop until the last second. Oh, no! One of them tumbled over and fell behind. The medical team rushed over and wrapped the wound with a bandage. The contestant stood up and started running again.

Different voices were soaring here and there. The cheering on the left side was as powerful and loud as thunder. Contestants number 1, 7, 13, 20 and 30 were in the lead. Flip. Flip. Flip. Wait a second, the cheering on the right side was drowning them out with the use of microphone. The other contestants were speeding up their pace! Flip. Flip. Flip. It was already halfway towards the end. Who could win the competition? The result was unpredictable.

None of them compromised and tension filled the air. More and more contestants got nervous and tripped again and again. There was no time for the medical team to do their job. Most of them just got up, dusted the dirt away and continued like there was no tomorrow. There was no way to look back.

“Time’s up!”. A profound silence prevailed all of a sudden.

Bandages were scattered on the track and traces of the battle were imprinted. Well, at least, the war had come to an end.

The Empty Bottle

Law Wai Ching Wendy

He held the water bottle next to his left ear and started swaying it. Perhaps his exceptionally perceptive ears detected faint rattling sounds of the swinging water inside. The sweet, sweet liquid. A few sips left. How it would nourish his bloated lips, and his flaming tongue that hanged between the rigid palate and jaw like a smoked fish. He swallowed. In his imagination, fountains and cascades of rainwater engulfed him. He was still hopeful, because a few sips left in the bottle. No, it still contained one-fourth, probably one-third. Damn that left ear.

People used to joke about how ridiculous it would be if water disappeared. How apocalyptic it would become, when everybody was scrambling for water until the last drop was consumed. How drought would hit and every living creature would die from thirst then from starvation. But they were wrong. He stood in the crowd, exhausted, watching as the dehydrated walking beings passed him by, to and fro, to and fro. The ebb and flow was reflected in his dark eyes - an ordinary scene of passersby, of the women and men in the crowd; of students, pedlars, businessmen and labourers... So typical a scene, except their eyes were bleak. Their limbs jerked, twisted and swayed in obscure angles. Chapped and wrinkled ashen skins, wrapped around their bones. They survived without water, moving their body, roaming around the city of absolute peace and harmony every day.

“Ar, Arrrr, Arrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr ——” a being among the walking mass broke the silence. Such a fierce and deafening howl was followed by impossible contortions of its neck, right wrist, left elbow and the ankles spontaneously. The crowd aggregated towards the howling being, their movement rhythmically resonating with each others’. Minute by minute, all the twitching necks and limbs synchronised with their growl. They amassed in a circle, surrounding the howling being and the substance that was next to it on the ground. Water, water! They were horrified and vexed by that little puddle. Their once dreary eyes now glared at the puddle, like it was an archenemy, or some deadly virus that ought to be exterminated at once. He casted his gaze upon the frenzied crowd, his expression showing no signs of bewilderment. Regaining his steps, as the crowd continued to conglomerate, he tried to evade the jostle in the least noticeable way, although they were too fixed to pay any attention to him. Slowly, he creeped in reverse direction and disappeared from the throng.

This was the 81st day. Hours and hours of long walks. His blurred vision still managed to spot a yellow dot more than a hundred metres ahead of him. It stood on top of the concrete barrier in front of the harbour. As he approached the dot, the silhouette became finer. Something extended above the person’s head like a voluminous flower. When he could observe clearly what was before him, he had never been more perplexed.

“Why are you holding an umbrella when it doesn’t rain anymore?”

She didn't answer. She only gazed upon the sky. He stood next to her, studied the sky and his new companion, then sat down to take a rest. From morning till dawn, she stood there. It was already nightfall when the baffled observer decided to leave. She stood there. Perhaps he would never understand. He never understood. Why bother? She stood there. And she suddenly raised her hand and pointed north. A little startled, he decided to follow the lead. Crossing several streets, he found himself inside a dingy alley and walking towards an old grocery store. The door was swung open. The first glimpse he caught was rows and rows of bottled water inside a fridge. Of course his throat was burning. Burning. Water. Water! Without a second thought, he crashed through transparent doors of the fridge and swept all the bottled water within his arm's length into his chest. He turned open the cap and poured water straight down onto his head. Not enough. He shoved two water bottles into his mouth. His hands shook, crushed and squeezed the thin plastic exterior with all his remaining strength. Water splashed and spilled. He was in heaven. But his thirst was far from being quenched. As he jolted the bottles, water gushed through his mouth, as if there was an invisible hole on his chin, flowing like a waterfall. His eyes watched as all the water fell to the floor, his pupils reacted with dilating despair. What's wrong? What's wrong?

“No, no, no!” He kept pouring water into his mouth, only to witness it plunging straight through him, landing on white tiles. Bottle after bottle, until the very last one was emptied, his hands were jolting the bottles like a

maniac. Bottle caps scattered across ponds on the floor. He was about to crouch down and lick the precious water, but it vaporised. Gasping, he ran away from the store and the dingy backstreet. He wanted to scream, yet his throat tightened by terror didn't allow his voice to leak. The city landscape was once again reflected in his wide opened eyes. Lights were seeping out of the lit offices and apartment flats. Like phantasms, they were flickering on the harbour's water surface. Left, right, left, right, they were wobbling, palpitating, in a weaker and weaker strength. The movement seemed to have come to a standstill. Billboards. Red, blue and yellow neon signs - street lamps - vertical sticks that aligned in straight lines along the road, where headlights and backlights of vehicles traced illuminated tails in the darkness. Despite the cacophony of lights, this city was filmed by eerie silence. Once the stagnant facade was torn asunder, the sky would collapse - it is collapsing - revealing its rotten, sullied core. Together with the sky, shedding into pieces, the glistening skyscrapers crumbled, by the blink of the eyes, into dunes lying on a widespread desert. A crowd of cacti were circling a little mud puddle. The weeds and the curious spikes of the cacti swayed, they seemed. He closed his eyes amid the heat of the sand.

That supposedly exceptional ear of his, that damned left ear, can no longer hear the slightest movement of water quavering inside the bottle. It is too deaf. It must be exceptionally deaf. This has to be why he could only hear emptiness, echoing within the hollow of the bottle all the time. He looked at his hands, they were wrinkled and a bit greyish.

A Waking Dream

Writing competition winning piece

Leung Angie Lok Sze, Heep Yunn School

Dawn broke as pale golden rays gradually filtered through the treetops, barely illuminating the ground. It had rained overnight, and the fox could smell the dew on the ferns where raindrops had landed. His stomach grumbled as he padded out of its den. *Food*, he thought, as he buried his muzzle into the ground and sniffed. The metallic tang that sprung forth was so sharp that it nearly stung his nose. Two black-tipped ears pricked up, and a bushy orange tail swished left and right.

Following the tantalizing scent of blood, the fox trotted through the undergrowth. *Rabbit?* He wondered. *A sbren, maybe?* The trail twisted through winding mossy ways and finally opened up into a sylvan glade, where a whimpering figure lay.

The fox's heart nearly stopped in a moment of panic. *HUMAN!* He bristled in alarm, ears flattening against his head as he silently berated himself. *Stupid, stupid fox.*

The human squealed as he curled his lips back in a menacing snarl. It lurched back, its paws moving clumsily to cover its neck. There was a long gash on its arm.

What was it doing so deep inside the forest? The nearest human nesting site was miles away. *Was it abandoned?* Fear gave way to curiosity, and the fox padded up to sniff at the golden curls that tumbled from its head.

The cub yelped, and cried for its parents. *Hmm. Lost then.* It trotted to the edge of the glade. The human place would take at least half a day to reach. He turned to bark at the human. *Follow.* It stayed where it was. He barked again, and in the dappled shade their eyes met, molten amber and baby blue.

In the mulberry bush, a finch trilled delicately. A tentative step was taken, then two, and then the human and the fox vanished into the waiting trees.

The dense canopy overhead blocked out most of the afternoon sun, but the fox yawned lazily all the same, revealing a lolling pink tongue and sharp white teeth. Behind him came a weak mewl as the human struggled to keep up. His ears twitched irritably. What was it doing? Perhaps it was hungry. Looking around, he noticed a jackdaw fluttering amongst the undergrowth. In a pounce and a neck snapped, he dumped his victory prize at its feet triumphantly. *Here. Eat.* The human stared at it incomprehensibly, then let out a surprised shriek and batted it away. The fox chuffed at it in anger. *Fine. I eat then.* He swallowed the bird in one gulp, his tail swishing sideways in frustration. Needy, ungrateful human. With all the racket it was causing, he wouldn't be surprised if it attracted

unwanted attention—

The faintest whiff on the wind sent his tail bushing up. *Danger!* Too late did he notice the black nose poking out between the shrubs. Two chocolate brown eyes appeared next, deceptively innocent, then the fronds shivered as they made way for the great grizzly.

The human made a tiny squeak. The fox felt like squeaking himself. His eyes darted to and fro nervously, and landed on a cave entrance. As he slowly crept towards it, he could feel the human's gaze on him, and their eyes locked once more. *Move*, he begged, *move*. It shifted, and nervously stepped back.

Crack.

Four frantic paws and two feet dashed for the hole. As the grizzly roared in outrage and bounded towards them, they barrelled into the cave, followed by a deafening slam outside just seconds after. A hairy brown paw poked into the hole and scabbled at the rocks, sending small pieces of debris tumbling down in a shower of dust and ash. The infuriated roar that echoed around the cavern afterwards left the two shuddering in terror.

When they emerged from the hollow, night had fallen and the stars were like lucid snowflakes of silver as they sparkled in the night sky. The fox trotted forward a few paces and barked at the human. *Nearly there!* It wasn't

in the best shape: The gash on its arm had started bleeding again, and a sickly blue tainted its lips. Whining, he nudged at it until it stumbled forward. The flickering lights of the human place were so close! It seemed to realise it too, and with a transcendent effort, hobbled towards the edge of the forest.

The fox lingered behind. He would not step outside with it.

A final shove sent its sprawling onto the ground and out of the forest.

As the shouts of the villagers rang in the air, a faint outline moved nearby.

Two golden eyes seemed to be waiting for something, but just as the firelight seemed about to touch, it withdrew, and with a swish of its tail faded into the forest dim.

A landscape photograph featuring a wide, flat field of golden-brown grass in the foreground. A dirt road with patches of snow runs diagonally across the field. In the background, there are rolling hills covered in a light layer of snow. The sky is a clear, vibrant blue with several thin, white, wispy clouds stretching across it. The word "POETRY" is centered in the middle of the image in a bold, black, serif font.

POETRY

Maiden Pink

Maria Krutova

Bright color of maiden pink.
Rich smell of bitter herbs.
Sun shading its golden ink
And pierces pines, the ground towards.

It's still and silent. Air unmoving,
And only clouds in sky above
Move slowly, only barely cruising,
Like the smoke they're reminiscent of

Life flourishes in wild lands:
It hides among the trees;
It colors green and fills the woodland;
And is forever there at ease.

All is untouched by man and ruin,
Where sun is shading its golden ink,
Where everything is still, unmoving,
And filled with the color of maiden pink.



Photo by Anastasia Stulba

The Trip in Sicily

Cheng Kwan Chak, Jeff

Heading to Agrigento,
I knew I was in trouble-
I had lost all my money
so as feeling rather lonely.

Sitting on the trembling seat
I could feel the sizzling heat.
The shuttle bus kept roaring
and the waste gas was soaring.

It seems no flowers could yield
on this endless and dry field.
I had not planned to see these -
the impoverishment and fleas.

The last Saturday of May
turns the sky into dark grey.
Only if someone could show me my place,
greeting me like the old days.



Photo by Gloria Chan

The Decision I Made

Ng Yat Yan, Vicky

As I open my eyes, a glimpse of sunlight
Shines through the sky,
A cosy touch of Summer warm, bright
With a soft melody in the trees high.

Waking from terror, finds nobody but remembering my dear,
The breeze whispering through the grass,
Butterflies flying free, while the fawn is loved by its deer,
The earthy scent through leaves and weeds.

The stream water, like the cure of the summer desire
Fresh, sweet, pure which comforts my mind.
My footprints are only marks while in search for my dear
Chirping of cicadas like a rhythmical cheer.

I – dash, spring, climb like a Tarzan gusto pro
Unexpected break above a gigantic waterfall,
Wind drifting across the hope of sight
I – close my eyes.



Photo by Jasmine Wong

SHOULD YOU NOT LISTEN

Wong Wai Yiu, Tom

Should you not listen
to the sound of clapping leaves
Why not hum along, wandering softly?
On me, the bamboo crutch, the straw shoes
better a bit than horses.
Scare whom?
My life goes on still
in a cloak of rain and fog.

The light breeze blows,
my drunken mind awake
Welcomin' me there's the rising sun, lying
at the top of the mount.
Looking back the place of desolation,
I return –
no rain and wind in me,
nor the glowing sky in us.

Ruby's Rock-a-bye-baby & Jimmy

Introduction to the two poems

Jimmy and Ruby are characters from Jane Harrison's play *Stolen*. The play has been performed widely on stage since 1998 in Australia and many other places including Hong Kong. Each character has their own story. They are the stolen generation who have been taken by force by the white authority to be whitened for ethnographic convergence. We felt, as we read, the pain and traumatic emotions of the characters in the play. Therefore, we decided to adapt their stage lines into poems which can more effectively deliver the emotional resonance. Moreover, we chose to present Jimmy and Ruby's experience in a sense that Jane Harrison did the same in giving small figures the most profound feelings about home and identity.

Character Chosen by Richard

I decided to choose Ruby, because her character touched me the deepest. Based on Ruby's monologue, I concluded Ruby's story into four parts which determines four stanzas for my poem. These four parts are representing: being abandoned by her mom, in the children's home, slaving for the Hardwicks and indifference to her reunion with her dad and sister. So, each of my four stanzas deal specifically with each of these four part of Ruby's lines in the script.

Character Chosen by Li

The biggest irony for Jimmy in Stolen is his finally realized ray of hope of knowing her mother's still alive. Yet, his mother's death in the end is fatal for him to acknowledge, which accelerated Jimmy's suicide. The reason for choosing Jimmy as my character is the transcendent pity and sorrow his character left me. My four stanzas are ordered chronically, borrowing ideas from Blake's The Chimney Sweeper.

Ruby's Rock-a-bye-baby

Richard Song Yun

I waited for me mom to come,
But she didn't care if I get harm.
I thought if I would cry so loud,
She'd hear and reach for me no doubt!

There's Ruby rocked a doll in bed,
I saw in quiet her tears were shed.
At least the abuser let her shop for free,
A doll I sing with rock-a-bye-baby!

The Hardwicks made me nurse, cook, scrub,
their slave, I had to wash, Iron, mop!
In ambulance, I need my mummy,

But all is silent, where is she?

Mom signed, indeed, for me adoption,
But, Dad, Sis, I've only got confusion!
Don't need no room of me own,
I've got to live without a home!

Jimmy

Liang Li

There's Jimmy, who cries in his dream.
The rainy memory repeatedly appears,
“Willy, Willy”, his mother called,
“Hide yourself well and don't get caught”.

I have nothing but the darkest skin,
I want mother not the British King.
God can you hear me, why disappear?
Should you know me, bring me there.

“Your mother's dead” as they said,
so I'm naughty, and troubles are made.
“she wouldn't leave me, she's not dead,
she will come and find me, just you wait.”

Nobody wants me, no one care.

Nobody loves me, everyone sneers.

Arrest me in the name of being a thief,

Prison is the place where I hung my self.

↑ ↓ (**The rise. The fall**)

Chan Yan Tung, Janie

Inhale.

Airbag.expand.

Exhale.

O2. exhaust.

The rise. The fall.

Narrow up,

higher, you go.

Mellow out,

lighter, your soul.

The rise. The fall.

See me stand

against my pride.

The rise.

Catch my sigh

forfeit my frown.

The fall.

The rise.

The fall.

Plover Cove

Chan Cheuk Ying, Anika

I cycle along the treacherous slope
With heavy panting and a pounding heart
on my way to see this magnificent cove
Kids are flying a kite so high into the blue
I see nothing but a tiny black blot
against a canvas of clouds.

One dam splits Tolo Harbour into two
One side brine, the other bland:
Smell the confusion in the atmosphere.
Drizzling rain and the windswept hair
of billowing trees
tell me where I am.

The sun sets

Kids scoot off on their bikes,
Hurry away to their parents side,
Abandoning their lovely kite
Going to their barbecue run
Pink and orange hues of nightfall;

I narrow my eyes and gaze at the setting sun.



Photo by Gloria Chan

The Wolf in Me

Cho Lok Yee, Alison

Into the wilderness

Where the truest definition of life is embraced;

Blizzard chasing the beasts away,

Wolves fangs prick into

the neck of the fragile and feeble,

Its teary innocent eyes wide open,

Though no mercy is given.

Caught in the game of nature,

Feeding on its blood and flesh

In greed,

In hunger.

Throwing all that's tangled in their minds behind,

Just greed,

Just hunger,

voids to be filled.

I feast on the scenery,
preying on the wolves with a shotgun in my hand,
I see the wolf within me.
I, the starving visitor of desolation .

Wild Places

Writing competition winning piece

Yolanda Cheung Tsz Yat, Heep Yunn School

Land of seclusion

Where the vines grow derelict,

Indecipherable

A peace of the mind

In which the only sound's from

Bird's song, crystal clear

Thunderstorms prevail

The world lapses into turmoil

Windswept, churning mess

Not a soul in sight

Save from the lone tiger

Running wild on dreams

Nimble, bubbly brook

Flowing with vitality

Constant stream of thoughts

Criss-cross, interlace

Footprints left by creatures' pace

Imprinted for life

The wild is much like

A remote yet close-to-home

Realm in our heads

Turn Over, Face Above

Sham Shiu Yan, Colette

Deep in the forest
of your withering dreams,
where the nights glow darkest,
and souls go weightless

Knees turn weak
you sink and swallowed
by the spinning earth,
where your bruised limbs tread,
and your crushed skin bleeds

Breath runs out
you drown and dissolved,
with a dying heart,
once treasured by the smiles,
hanging in frames in fading styles.

Turn over,
face above.
Watch the light cease
before you cry,

hours until you find
peace.



Photo by Anastasia Stulba

A person in a dark jacket stands in a snowy field with a forest in the background. The scene is captured in a cool, blue-toned light, suggesting a winter or high-altitude environment. The text 'NON-FICTION' is centered over the image.

NON-FICTION

Ms. Roxymoron

Li Ying Tung, Faye

A floral scent snuck into my nostrils as her nude jelly shoes stepped on the line which separated the bricks and tiles. The one-piece dress with lace on the hem fitted her perfectly, showing her healthy and svelte waist. As she gently put down her books and notes and water bottle on the desk by the blackboard, her heart-shaped pendant leaned forward in alignment with her black straight hair, which flowed like a silk ribbon over her shoulders.

“Girls, please stand up. Let’s kick off our first day of school with a loud and clear greeting!”, she said, using that soft but magnetic voice resembling a bird singing at dawn. “Good morning class!”, she said, emphasizing each word precisely.

Ms. Roxymoron was an enigma in Canossian College. No one would ever think her the right kind of person to get a job in a girls’ high school. The monotony, one might think could drown her like algae entangling a diver’s neck in the sea. It seemed that there was an invincible aura of tranquility keeping her effortlessly elegant, protecting her like a queen.

She had the body of a jazz dancer, or yoga instructor. Every movement she performed was god’s gift that no one else could duplicate. But she

settled for nothing. Nothing could hold her back from travelling over the Mount Everest and the Atlantic sea.

A free mind, a fearless heart, and a lover of unknowns. A model of how far women can reach.

One August afternoon after she had left school, she was standing in the crowd in front of a Hang Seng Bank branch waiting for me. The moment when my sight fell on her, the clock stopped, time rewound to the second when I first met her in the classroom 9 years ago. A sleeveless white dress with broderie anglaise, a pair of nude jelly shoes, the black straight hair.

“Oh! Look how much you’ve grown! Such a pretty young lady now.” I wondered why she always spoke like she was singing. “Come, let’s find our way to Samurai Ramen.”

While she was gently sending the noodles into her mouth without a noise, I tried so hard not to let the soup spill on the wooden table. She swallowed the first few pinches and said, “Sorry for disappearing. I switched off my phone and locked myself in the bedroom the last whole week. I felt like I needed some time alone.”

“Was she sick? Did I upset her?” I couldn’t help thinking but had no courage to ask aloud.

Noticing my not-quite hidden concern, she giggled and continued, “There’s too much grime, the world is noisy. But the space of a single bed is more than enough for people like us to escape from the reality.” She took another sip of tonkotsu soup, “I was trapped in the beauty of Africa. I never really want to come back from the fantasy because the place where the king of the wild roars at the yolk-like sun is the place where we should live.”

My stomach was digesting the seaweed at the same time as her words. More time was needed for that, so I shifted the topic and tried to ease the atmosphere by teasing, “When are you going to marry your boyfriend?”

No one could be a worse joker than I did. I supposed she was laughing at my naivety. She smiled, “I’m 29. A list of things is waiting for me, and perhaps I will go to Africa again. I know you’re just like me, darling.”

I wasn’t sure if I understood what she meant, but the image of a railway in a paper town flickered in my head.

Home

Amanat Maira Ali

I looked out of the window and watched the clouds below as they hurled through the sky. My daughter sat next to me, her body stiff in fright. My wife sat beside her, a magazine in her hands. I looked over at Avanna, her hands clutched at the armrest as her face remained tense, her eyes gazing forward into nothingness.

“Are you alright, baby girl?” I leaned towards her and placed my hand on her tiny pale ones.

“Dad, my friend said that planes go in circles.” She looked at me.

“What do you mean?”

“She said the plane driver -”

“A pilot.” I corrected her.

“-the plane driver pilot would get bored after hours and hours of flying so he would do spins in the air. Is that true?”

I gave a laugh. “Of course not!”

“Daddy, when will we arrive?” Avanna's black-flecked brown eyes looked into mine in anticipation. “Just a few hours,” I answered but Avanna's eyes continued to race back and forth. I placed my arm on the armrest and leaned towards her and whispered “You know, you should be really proud of yourself. I was twenty when I first got on a plane.”

“But Daddy, this is horrible! Why would anyone ever want to get on a plane?” She asked nervously, her thin black eyebrows scrunching. “Well, I had to leave the country, to find something better for myself.”

“Like what?”

“Like a good job, a safe house, a better place for you to grow up in.”

“Did you live in a bad place?” She asked, her rigid arms slowly relaxing.

I leaned back in the chair. “Not really. It wasn't a bad place at all. I used to live in a farm house, me, your granddad and your grandma and our extended family. The house was big with three stories, each level for a different family. Every day, I would wake up to the sound of Mama, your grandma, reciting the Holy book, her voice is...

”

“Is her voice beautiful?” Avanna asked, waiting for me to continue. I looked at her, noticing the freckles on her nose, remembering how I would

count the freckles on Mama's face when I was young, I smiled. "Beautiful would be an understatement, baby girl."

Her voice is divine, like fingers glazing over the harp strings. As if the angels themselves had descended down from heaven and sang in their hauntingly pure voice. A voice I hadn't heard in a long time. I remember lying in my woven bed every morning listening to Mama, hearing every intonation, every rise in her tone as I echoed her speech to myself so that I could one day master the way she prayed so gracefully. I would listen to her until her voice started to crack, until she coughed at least twice and decided she had done enough reading for the day. I would then get up, give her a glass of water and race to the bathroom before any of my cousins could occupy it.

My parents would be in the fields almost every day and I watched as their medium olive skin deepen to dark brown and as their hands become wrinkled and rough like a bark of an ancient tree throughout the years. As the child of farmers, I knew that education would be an uncertainty so I never put in much effort in school. But my Dad would always keep a wooden stick in the house. He never wants to see me fooling around and if he did, he would use his long wooden stick on me. But he never did. One day, my friends dangled the idea of bunking school to go to a carnival kilometers away. The idea was alluring and gave rise to a thirst that could only be quenched with compliance and my inner mischievous child just

couldn't say no. I remember sitting on the Ferris wheel and watching my village stretch over the horizon, experiencing weightlessness for the first time while riding the pirate-themed swing boat, and then gulping down a lime flavored popsicle and sweet almond milk ice cream and finally suffering from the best brain freeze of my life. The reminiscence of the taste of the popsicle was still vivid after all these years, sweet and tangy. When the popsicle touched the tongue, you could almost feel the taste buds do a dance number. Are there almond milk flavored ice-cream in Hong Kong?

I came back home that day and Dad noticed the bright green stain on my white school shirt. "What's that?" He asked. My breath got stuck in my throat at my own stupidity as regret started to devour me from the inside. I was expecting a long reprimanding, maybe he would even use his wooden stick, but all he did was level himself to my height, pat my cheek gently and said: "Go and shower." From then on, I focused only on my studies. I went to school on time, raised my hand faster than any other student, and surprised myself and my parents when my teacher told them that I had outdone my classmates in the exams. I realized then that I could become a teacher as Mama had wanted for herself, or maybe a civil servant like Dad had envisioned for himself and do something that they never had the luxury to. Whenever I asked them what they wanted to become. "Farmers." They lied.

But I knew. My parents had lied so many times that they have mastered the convoluted art of deception. When Mama said that they had a good harvest this month and that's why we were having meat for New Year, I knew she had pleaded my aunt to donate some of hers just so she could feed me well. Maybe that's why my aunt was bitter towards me and Mama around the day of festivities and maybe that's why she would give me ten dollars for my red pocket while my other cousins would get twenty. And when Dad said he was able to pay for my college fees because his friends had repaid him their debts. I knew he had to sell my mother's jewelry to send me to the city because the only three thin gold bangles my Mom had ever owned suddenly vanished after that day.

I remember the time I came home from school and my shoes got ripped from the front because of the boggy path. I rushed home and went to Mama's room and locked the door. I opened the cabinet door slowly so that it wouldn't let out its hyena-like screech and pulled out the biscuit box that was filled with thread and sewing needles. I found myself a black thread, inserted it through the eye of the needle and didn't even realize when I became a master at sewing until weeks later when my uncle noticed my shoes that were heavily pieced together with threads. I cannot forget the look of embarrassment my father had on his face, followed by my guilt of not being able to take care of my shoes, when I watched my father use the money he had saved for Mama's birthday gift on me.

“I am going to become rich and I will take you all around the world!” I would say and Mama and Dad would laugh and plant a kiss on their only child's head, then continue on with their work. I don't think they had ever thought I would ever make it this far. But I did. I got into a university, got a scholarship to study Engineering abroad, met the woman who brought out my inner comedian and created the world's most angelic child with her and lived there for the rest of my life.

“I'm going to have your application for a Hong Kong visa submitted.” I had said into the phone when I finally got a job as an Engineering Manager.

“No,” Dad said for the hundredth time. “I will stay here.” He insisted.

I heaved a sigh. “Why?”

“I don't want to leave my home. Son, I am old and weak, and the day will come pretty soon.” He said as he let out a few painless coughs.

“Dad, please, don't.” I paused, and breathed in. “Why do you keep saying that?” I hated it whenever he brought up the subject of death.

“My boy, not talking about it will not change the reality. I am eighty-four and I want to make sure that whenever the time comes-”

“Dad!”

“-I would be under the blue skies of my home, on the soil I got dirty in as a kid and not on some foreign land, among people who I don't know. I won't be able to survive there.” He gave out a couple of brutal coughs, coughs that seemed to be clawing the insides of his throat.

A veil of silence fell between us as I heard him shift and slurp a glass of water. “Anyway, why don't you come here. Bring my daughter-in-law and Avanna. Live here, with us.”

“I don't think I can get into the habit of living there, Dad.” I said.

“You've lived here half of your life, son.”

Our plane landed and we took a bus straight to my village. Avanna sat on my lap, her head on my chest, snoring. My wife rested her head on my shoulder. The bus drove along the rocky road for two endless hours. The agonizing wait to finally be home and surprise my parents were starting to kill me. I imagined arriving home, walking through the mahogany brown double doors and inhaling the minty scent of the freshly cut grass and the earth's soil after a gentle rain. I imagined seeing Mama on the swing in front of the house with her round glasses on the ridge of her button nose as she read the newspaper. Actually, she might be in the fields, picking

tomatoes, or feeding the cows and chicks behind the house. Dad would probably be in front of the TV, watching a cricket match and yelling out proudly as his favorite cricketer scored once again and made the nation proud, or perhaps he was in the mosque, praying the afternoon prayer. The house would still be the same. An enormous picture of Mecca would be hung on the wall as well as the inscriptions of my height recorded over the years, faint yet visible. The aroma of mixed herbs, rosemary and jasmine would be lingering in the air and I would finally get to see the collection of utensils Mama had crafted herself for Avanna that she had been talking about.

My journey from the clean and bright city to my sandy and muddy village came to an end. My wife got off the bus as I carried Avanna who was still asleep. We pushed the main gate open and slowly walked in. I looked around at what was supposed to be the vibrant memory of my home. The house I grew up in now stood in the middle of a brown barren land. The color of the building that was once red and white was now faded into brown and pale yellow. The swing that Dad had crafted for me wasn't there anymore.

Where's the grass? Where's the cricket field Dad had painted for me?
Where's Mama's favorite porch swing?



LIFE

Travel Logs



What Are You Doing Now In Your Twenties?

Law Sin Hang, Nicole

When I was on a trip in Italy with my friend back in 2017 April, I was recommended by her to a book called “The Defining Decade: Why Your Twenties Matter and How to Make the Most of Them Now” by Mag Jay. I have never really been a fan of non-fiction books before so I was a bit doubtful to start reading this. Yet, finishing this makes me realise once again how books can somehow knock some sense into you and help you see things that you most likely have omitted in your daily life.

So back to our topic, my first question to you all out there would be “Do you know what exactly you are doing with life at your twenties right now?” Personally, I’m quite content with my twenties so far – traveling, studying something that I have a passion for and paying lots of effort in preparing myself for what the future may have for me. Yet, I know I’m only of the very few lucky ones who have found what she wants to pursue in life, at least for now. I have observed that many of my counterparts are lost, confused and sometimes even lack the motivation to figure things out just because there are too many unknowns ahead. This non-fiction has definitely given me some more insights in what I should be thinking about right now, for the sake of the present and future me. It confirms what I have opted for myself at this stage as well as reminds me of things that I need to pay more attention to. Here are a few things that I find the most

interesting, which you might want to take note of too.

Accumulating Identity Capital

The one thing I have learned is that you can't think your way through life. The only way to figure out what to do is to do—something. – May Jay

Many people who are at the same age as me and also in universities hold the belief of “You Only Live Once” or that “We Are Only Young Once”. Those people do not want to settle to just one thing, nor do they think it is worthy to spend most of their youth in some dreadful work that is supposed to shape how they really are and prepare them for the challenges ahead in life. While I don't deny that there is certainly something that we cannot do when we are old such as hiking the Himalayas, we cannot ignore the fact that spending all our youth in realising all your so-called dreams or having fun partying with your friends have its potential negative effects on our life, too.

One major thing I have learnt from the author is that you cannot just sit there, stay confused and expect something to happen for you that would tell you what you are supposed to do in life. No doubts, college years give us so much freedom that we can do almost everything, or nothing at all. But some people take these freedom as granted and end up wasting it, thinking that things will become clear and make sense when they reach a certain age. It's time for the twenties something to understand that life

does not happen this way. The best way to understand oneself is to try, try as much as you can, discover what you like and what you don't by involving yourself in various types of jobs or activities. One's identity has to be discovered through actually doing something to work on it. And this is what identity capital is about- your experience in work, school and so on. Things that make you know what you like and dislike. Then you will know what kind of person you truly are.

Gathering Your Bargaining Chips

On top of shaping our identity, one thing that is also very important to take note of is that in order to actualise our dreams, twenty something is the best year to equip ourselves with whatever we need for doing it. I relate to this a lot because I have realised this is exactly what I'm doing at this point of my life. Right now, my goal in life is to be able to engage in work that requires specific and professional knowledge, like teaching a language. Therefore, while I'm living my youth by traveling a lot to different countries, I'm also paying a lot of attention on making my resume presentable and gathering experiences that would be useful for my future/possible careers and applying to graduate school.

One must have some bargaining chips in hand to do things they want to do in the future. You cannot just show up at a job interview at your 30s and tell the interviewer that "Okay, I have finished experiencing my youth now and I really want your job because it has always been my dream. Can

you hire me even my resume is a blank page?” As dreary as it sounds, it’s the boring job that we must do – internships, placements and useful part-time works that will make our future life interesting because it at least gives us a shot to do things that we want.

Therefore, my point is: don’t just sit there and think about how amazing it is that you could enjoy life by drinking and partying with your friends all day all night in your twenties. You are losing your chance of gaining your bargaining chips that would be beneficial to you when you enter the job market. Life might be easy and glorious now without much worries but you would most likely regret it when you realise that your life is going nowhere without anything useful on your resume.

Taking Relationships Seriously

Most of my friends of my age, including me, are still in the process of understanding ourselves and contemplating what we look for in our future partners. We take our time, often engaging in relationships that is nothing close to anything serious. Or really, you can just say they are random hook-ups that we probably don’t remember a week later. Yet, the book has reminded me of the possible consequences that we would suffer from had we not planned ahead for our future life, especially in terms of relationship.

Girls in my social circle are always dreaming about having kids when they

reach close to 30 but are still not willing to commit to a relationship now. Let say we are 21 now. There are only 9 years ahead of us for us to find the “perfect” partner, get engaged, get married, try to get pregnant, become actually pregnant and then deliver the baby. With that being said, I guess it’s clear to us all that we must be taking relationships seriously from now on, unless you want to just marry to a random guy when you reach 30 and getting unnecessary pressure from your peer and family regarding this aspect. Most things do not happen all of a sudden. The earlier you realise how important it is when it comes to finding your perfect partner by being serious in relationships, the less pressure you are going to suffer from the time dues for marriage and entering your next stage of life.

My conclusion for finishing this book is that work and study should never be the only thing that a twenty-something puts all their effort in, nor is “living life to the fullest”. The idea of forward thinking is critical to a person who has recently joined the game of adulthood. My life did not change dramatically right after finishing this book but it did get me thinking about where I am and what I am doing in life. It is time for all of us who still have more than 60 years to live in the future to start taking life seriously when we still have the opportunity to make mistakes and turn things around.

Scattered Oases in the Desert – Indonesia 2017

Law Sing Hang, Nicole

Being told that I should avoid traveling to certain places in South-east Asia all the time when I was growing up, it has never come across in my mind that one day (or today) I would be traveling to Indonesia.

I am very fortunate that I am working for an awesome company in Singapore for my last summer in university. And, with a boss who is so kind, generous and keen on teaching me different things, I am blessed with a chance to come to Indonesia with them for a project in Kalimantan concerning the haze problem. Never have I ever thought that I would be granted such amazing opportunity to actually understand how the human race finds the way to cope with our mother nature.

From being invited to come along for the project to actually being here in person in Indonesia, it had only been 4 days' time. With such a short period of time to prepare, I spent the last two days rushing about, gathering everything I need that could be fit into my tiny backpack. It was a bit stressful since I do not have a lot of the stuff I need for traveling in Singapore. But, taaadaaaa, here I am now, writing in the hotel lobby in Jakarta and getting excited for everything I will be seeing and experiencing in Kalimantan for the rest of the week.

Okay, enough of the introductory part of my blog post. Let's talk about something more interesting and of course, eye-opening on my first day in this new country.

Heading out at 10 this morning, we first went to a brunch place called Potato Head in Southern Jakarta. On our way there, I could happily say that I had the first actual experience of what Jakarta/ Indonesia is like – TRAFFIC IS HORRIFYING. Not only did the uber take a double of the estimated time it suggested on the app to arrive at the hotel, the road condition was so bad to a point where the motor cycles were merely 5cm away from our car. I have always thought that Hong Kong people drive crazy, and obviously people in Indonesia are on the insane level.





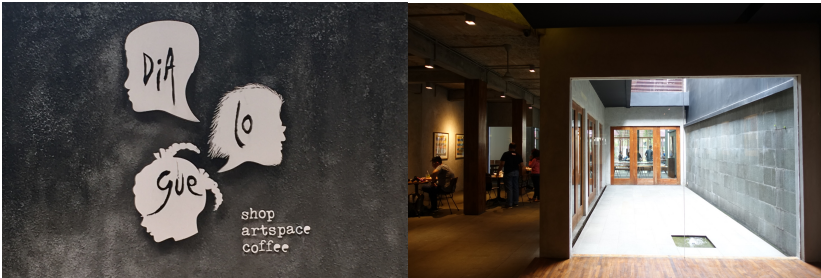
But what I must say, is that Jakarta did surprise me. On the positive note, of course.

Brunch at Potato Head was amazing. From all the pictures above, you can see that it's a delicately decorated brunch place. When we arrived, there were only a handful of people sitting around, drinking coffee in such peaceful environment.



Food was done beautifully. And this flat white easily beats the one I used to have almost everyday in the UK. It was smooth and has a surprising sweet taste to it.

After taking dozens of pictures in the restaurant, we then visited a place called “Dia.logue”. And, again, this is somewhere that you would never expect to see in a city like Jakarta.



Dia.logue is the point where I realized that “scattered oases in the desert” might just be the best description of Jakarta. The second you go onto the streets in Jakarta, you will realize that the city itself is gloomy and depressing. There are many cars on the road, only a few pedestrians walking by (obviously it’s not quite safe to roam around the streets) and many tall and dilapidated buildings. From what I have seen from our cab, things are spread out and sometimes even quite empty. The city does not appeal to me to be somewhere I would like to stay long, nor does it impress me at all.

Yet, among all the old and worn-out buildings, there are places such as Potato Head and Dia.logue that make you question whether you are actually in Jakarta or somewhere in a beautiful city in some tropical islands/ cities. It creates such a huge contrast that I find strangely odd. The pictures of a city full of carbon dioxide with the hustles on the road just does not match with one that is filled with the aroma of coffee and soft music calming you while you scribble on your notebook.

These little artsy and chill cafes are the oases of this desert of Jakarta. It’s somewhere that you can slow down, take a sip of a nice coffee and then go back to everything that exhausts you in the reality. The reality that stretches out till countless miles ahead. The miles and miles of nothingness in the middle of a desert.

City Narratives



Memory Lane

Yung Yan Yin



Have you ever experienced the illusion of yourself standing still in one spot while your surroundings just flee past you? It is as if you are on an express train, witnessing all sorts of architectures and majestic landscapes sprinting away outside your windowsill. As if they were laid out nice and flat on a timeline. As if they were in one of those Chinese revolving scenic lanterns. As if you were the one who stayed still in space and time.

If you have been to Hong Kong, you would have probably tried the infamous *cha chan tang*, literally translated as “tea restaurant”. Whenever people thought of *cha chan tang* now, all they could gather was rude and grumpy waiters of minimal patience, always sucking on a toothpick like a kid with his lollipop. They yelled and shouted orders after orders, filling

the *cha chan tang* with a froth of saliva and deafening silence. The place could get so clamorous and crammed, yet, I could feel desolated as ever. For the sake of tourism and economy, *cha chan tang* had transformed into something I found unfamiliar with. I could name all the sweets and savories, even knowing how the waiters jotted down orders in some Chinglish code with the bizarre combination of Chinese characters, English alphabets and certain numeracy, however I failed to find the slightest of resemblance to what I once felt in these shops. The food stayed mainly the same throughout the years. And ordinary. Good, but ordinary. What was different, was everything else. They were formerly called *bing sud*, which was “ice room” in translation. It was not the well air-conditioned *cha chan tang* that you knew of. The door to the ice room was always open. And as you could imagine, the heat could get quite unbearable when it was full-on summer. Yet there was a sense of comfort listening to the old, rusty fans clattering on the sides of the walls, almost in harmony with the traditional air conditioner’s eternal whooshing in the background. Surrounding the ice room was walls of pale yellow paint. You could tell the paint was not done seamlessly. Patches, and discoloration were the highlights of those walls. Thinking about it, the walls reminded me of *The Yellow Wallpaper* I studied in high school, written by Charlotte Perkins Gilman.

“There are things in that paper which nobody knows but me, or ever will.”



Looking up towards the sky was another favorite of mine, especially when I was towered by swarms of buildings. When I was young, the sky seemed much brighter in the day. There used to be bluer, which was also one of the reasons why I liked to look up. I could trace every single cloud's path, how the air above pushed them into different directions, molding them into cartoon-like figures along their course. Occasionally, the sun would peek through on the edge of a thick, sizeable cloud. It would illuminate all the clouds beside it, as if they all had their own little halo, complementing the clear blue sky. Watching all this from the ground lifted my spirits. And amongst the swarm of buildings, this window let me escape from gravity for once, letting my imagination run wild. I remembered this ludicrous hallucination I once had where the sky was the ground and all buildings was built right on it. That made me the one towering over all construction.

And even I was standing firmly on the concrete ground, I felt this centrifugal force in me, steering my flight from one building to another, and I was as light as Harry with his broomstick. But gradually, that window grew smaller and smaller. Where I once saw the map of the sky now became a strip of white fog and absurdity. The clouds and the sky emerged till I could not tell them apart. My sense of gravity found its place in me and decided to settle in. My feet were cemented into the ground and I could feel my whole weight on it. Every step that I lifted up pulled back down into the ground, and every time I jumped, I fell. Hard. As though I just realized that I did not have a choice but to wear my weight into the ground. Sixteen years of my life and I could not figure out the existence of gravity until then.



My family was fairly wealthy, and my parents would spoil me and my sisters by driving us around. I never needed to go to school by school

buses or public transport. My dad would always wake up at 6 a.m. and drive me to my primary school. It was a mere fifteen-minute drive from my home, but it was always the favorite part of my day. I would always sit at the front seat to witness the rareness of the quiet roads. Together with my dad, the automobile was our chariot and we would conquer lands together. My memory was like a sieve and most things appeared elusive to me. However, when it came to roads, it was like my second nature to navigate. I remembered exactly how to get to my school, my tutors' homes and a few restaurants. Having being escorted in a car half of my life, I considered myself as quite talented in this field. Then eventually, my parents got busier with work and I got irregular class schedules and driving me to my new school costed way more than fifteen minutes. And so, I adapted to taking buses and subways. I still enjoyed it whenever I was in a vehicle in motion, not as a conqueror, but as a fly on the wall. I could tell how the tired the lady in the suit was beside me, dozing off just a few seconds after taking her seat with her hands still clasping tightly onto her black, boxy bag. How the people standing on the lower half of the bus tried to squeeze into the vehicle for they could not afford to miss this exact one. How there were random people who were probably tourists that took up more space than anyone else with their baggage and their legs standing wide apart. How others secretly hated those tourists for a brief minute because we all knew that tiny space occupied between those legs could grant us the greatest relief.



Have you ever stood on a safety island with massive roads on both of your sides, and cars and gigantic buses would pass by you and you feel like nothing but a thin, hollow crack? It was as if those cars would come closer each time they pass by you. In the first time, you would only notice your hair flying up and across your face. The second time, you would feel the sudden pressure on the sides of your face, your arms and your legs when they pass by. The third time, the pressure would appear stronger that it startled you a bit. You would need a gasp of air to remind your body to feel every muscle and nerve that is still attached to you, to make sure there is nothing less. Then there would be a delicate moment where the roads are clear and you are still standing right in the middle of the roads. I looked back. I looked around. I searched in my mind. *Where am I?*

The Magic in the Maze of High Rise Buildings

Katharina Hwang



As a final year English major the realisation of my impending graduation looms over me like heavy clouds on an overcast day, with a predicted 60% chance of rain. The realisation of leaving Hong Kong, the city I have dreamed of returning to since high school when everything is said and done. Will always send me down to memory lane. Every time I go down that road I end up thinking about the place that I first fell in love with when I first arrived in Hong Kong. Funnily enough, it is not City University or even a club I would inadvertently find myself in during a post-semester haze. It is a place bigger and busier than both of the

aforementioned places, and that place is known by many as the cosmopolitan heart of Hong Kong: Central.

Describing a whole district in any city is not a quick or easy task, but if I had to I would say that the Central district in Hong Kong is an ever-changing labyrinth that keeps up with the fast-paced demands of a consumer-driven hyper-capitalistic society. You are surrounded by luxury brand shops and glossy advertisements every corner you turn. There is also the fact that there is always something new. Whether it be shops or new eateries or when developers decide to take down old buildings to reconstruct them into something bigger and more lucrative. Fresh out of high school and naively starry-eyed, Central was just like any other part of Hong Kong to me. New and overwhelmingly commercial. However, the glossy shops and trendy eateries are not where I found the magic in the maze of high rise buildings.





My enchantment and fondness of Central lie within the memories I have created in this place in the 5 years I have lived in Hong Kong. I remember being fascinated by the colourful stalls lining the cramped back alley of Pedder Building right outside exit D of the Central MTR. Thinking how it added to the restless buzz hanging in the atmosphere. How the pungent smell that was distinctly *Abercrombie & Fitch* would forcefully drown my sense of smell, as I made my way to the pedestrian crossing leading to D'Aguilar street and dissipated as fast as the people walking past me. And once the cars came to a stop and the pedestrian crossing light changed to green, the rhythmic chimes rised in pitch as it grew more urgent. No matter how little or big the crowd, it always felt like the crosswalk was flooded by people. Much like how a wave would break the sand on a beach.

The different roads and streets in Central are like arteries and veins that sustain a beating heart. Whenever I walk up D’Aguilar street or Lyndhurst Terrace, there are always people rushing to go somewhere or tourists exploring the shops tucked between looming buildings. Although, you can find a variety of different cuisines in Central from varying quality and price points. *Mana Slow Fast Food* on Wellington Street 92 was and still is my favourite restaurant in Central. Despite its booming popularity, Mana is a small vegan restaurant that takes the meaning of “a hole in a wall place” quite literally. With reggae music playing on loop and its barebones bohemian interior design, and open roof seating at the back. The atmosphere of the restaurant makes you forget the busy hum of the streets in Central as if you stepped into a different dimension.



SoHo is another part of Central that brings up fond memories. There used to be a cafe on Shelley street next to the Mid-level escalators, where I used to have weekly brunches with a good friend every Saturday before he left for England. The outside of the cafe was painted in a dusty brick red with a big sunflower mural painted in the centre of the visible wall. Standing out like the sun coming out after a storm between all the monotoned buildings, which was very fitting since the cafe was called *Life Cafe*. Now the cafe is replaced by a Lebanese restaurant and the sunflower by a painting of a woman.



I remember how my friend and I would have brunch and then explore the area. Ducking into small shops and boutiques that are not featured in big magazines or tourist guides. Before heading to IFC to get cold-pressed juices. As the tallest buildings in Hong Kong, the IFC buildings are like

two ancient trees, and the bridge connected to it like its branches spreading throughout Central. The animated chatter from the sea of people on the bridge heading in different directions drown out the roar of car engines and the jingle from the tram on the street below. There used to be colourful murals blooming with different designs, each telling a story on the Mid-level to Central bridge. Most people just walk past them, but sometimes there would be a few tourists taking pictures immortalising it.



Now, the murals are replaced by government infographics transforming what was once vibrant and colourful to stiff and serious. Whenever I think about the change that has happened within these 5 years, I remember the saying: The more things change the more they stay the same. Despite the changes such as *H&M* being replaced by *Zara*, and *Abercrombie & Fitch* finally closing down. Along with buildings being demolished and new

construction happening in the area, Central never lost its identity. It is still the cosmopolitan heart of Hong Kong. In a similar vein, I have grown as a person in the past 5 years. Even though, most of my personality and my love for exploring Central still remains the same. I am not the naive starry-eyed 19-year-old I once was.

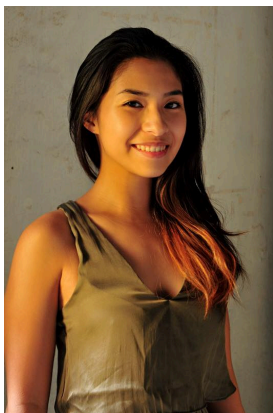
The biggest change, however, is that I do not bother walking back to the Central MTR station from IFC anymore. Instead, I just go through the Hong Kong MTR station. It saves so much more time.

Into the Arts



Interview with local artists

Yung Yan Yin



Tracy Wong (黃翠絲), born in Macau, graduated from Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts with a Bachelor of Fine Arts (First-class Honors) in 2013, majoring in Contemporary Dance.

During her study in HKAPA, Tracy was awarded with The Margret Zee Outstanding Performer Award, Dean of Dance Prize and the Faculty Scholarship of Contemporary Dance; at

the same time, she also received scholarships from the Instituto Cultural de Macau and Education and Youth Affairs Bureau. Tracy is now a successful independent artist, and has been working with various world-renowned artists.

Mao Wei (毛維), from Hunan Chengde, was awarded with full scholarship in China and graduated from Hong Kong Academy of Arts, majoring in Contemporary Dance. He has worked with world-renowned artists from all around the world, and participated in multiple art festivals globally with



different artists to advance his experience. After his graduation, Mao Wei has become a Hong Kong-based independent artist along with his passion for dance choreography and body exploration.

In recent years, Tracy and Mao Wei has been collaborating cohesively, and founded MW Dance Theatre. The couple aim to further explore and develop their own unique dance styles by focusing on the expedition on humanity and its core, and generating real emotions from their own creations and productions. The two believe that the examination of their past experiences can lead to a more profound understanding of themselves both physically and mentally, creating endless possibilities and opportunities in their path to the origin of humans' natural beauty. A lot of their creative productions surround the topics of self and issues on humanity in our current society, and are mostly expressed through duet and partnering work. Tracy and Mao Wei are impassioned towards the discovery of the physical body and the techniques in partnering work, as well as the extensive exploration of character, hence their extraordinary dance style. Some of the unique features of their style are the sentimental duets and the intense visual impacts. The couple's unique movements and choreographies have gained them the spotlight amongst the rising generation in Hong Kong.



In their study in HKAPA, Tracy and Mao Wei were always partners in duets at school, thus their rapport and chemistry has been growing ever since. Considering that both of artists were not originated in Hong Kong and has no family in the city, Tracy and Mao Wei had contemplated joining dance companies after graduation, however they realized that the mechanical lifestyle of being in a company did not suit them. In addition to their passion to choreograph, both artists decided to challenge themselves by researching on their own bodies, grasping every chance they get to create their own production.

The couple also realized how rare partnering artists are to be found in Hong Kong. The dance industry is overflowed by either individual artists or companies, while in Hong Kong, it appeared that no one ever

researched in duets with individuality. “Partnering has already become a dance style and a class type in Europe”, said Tracy. Therefore, the couple were determined to focus on this aspect and decided to venture into the arts of duet. Tracy and Mao Wei tend to showcase the sense of partnership and duet in both their creative productions and dance classes, hoping to find a voice of their own in the bustling city.



Tracy and Mao Wei have collaborated multiple productions and pieces together, and one of their favorites and the most memorable one was *Shelf Life* (賞味期限). *Shelf Life* was their first public production, as well as their first full-length performance as partners. *Shelf Life* was born under the coincidence of the couple encountering a theatre director. “His theatrical company was also coincidentally applying for the Black Box Theatre Scheme, and he asked us if we were interested to create a production with his team”, Mao Wei explained. With limited budget, Tracy and Mao Wei gave birth to *Shelf Life* in the theatre company’s Black Box Theatre. At that time, the couple were pioneers to do a dance performance in that company’s theatre. With their bold attempt and under the restriction in finance, *Shelf Life* ended up as more than a pleasant surprise to the audience, and the couple received numerous rave reviews and laudatory commentaries.

Two years after their first production, Tracy and Mao Wei were invited to perform *Shelf Life*, once again, in the Macau Arts Festival. In that particular performance, they approached the acclaimed Hong Kong visual artist Justin M.H. Chow for collaboration. They rejuvenated the original version of *Shelf Life* with fresh elements, thus the performance was beyond successful and gained the artists increasing attention. They were then touring in multiple cities such as Hong Kong, Guangzhou, marking *Shelf Life* as Tracy and Mao Wei’s iconic production.

Shelf Life aims to explore the relationship amongst men, and between men and time. “There was once we saw a news where a Taiwanese man was insanely stabbing passengers on the subway”, Mao Wei mentioned. “It inspired us to reflect on how and why sudden changes can occur to men. Did he experience something without telling anyone? Or is it time that dragged him down and caused his lunatic behavior?”, Tracy added. The couple then further developed this idea, asking themselves multiple questions. *If food has a shelf life, so does objects, then is there a deadline for men as well? And when men reach their time limit, would they start to deteriorate like food and objects?* They took this idea as the stem and reflected it upon their own experiences. With Tracy and Mao Wei being partners in dance and also in life, they would question themselves on the meaning of their own relationship when facing changes and transformations.

As for their dance productions, Tracy and Mao Wei are fond of using their real experiences as inspirations and the point of view of, keeping in mind that they would like to deliver the truest and most eloquent impact to the audience.



“Dance for us refers to a kind of expression, a way to voice out; it is also a channel for us to exchange and share ideas. Contemporary dance, more so, is about the now, the existence; that is personal, unique, and free.”



Although Tracy and Mao Wei are contemporary dancers, their productions, however, are not simply dances. The couple name their pieces as dance theatres, as they tend to include various drama and theatre elements into their works. In some occasions, they would also add specific visual art elements or live music. Hence, the couple are not merely using their physical bodies and movements to express dance.



“Whether or not the audience consider our craft as ‘dance’ lies solely in their perspective.”

- Mao Wei and Tracy Wong

All photos in this article are provided by the interviewees

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