

# Emerging Voices

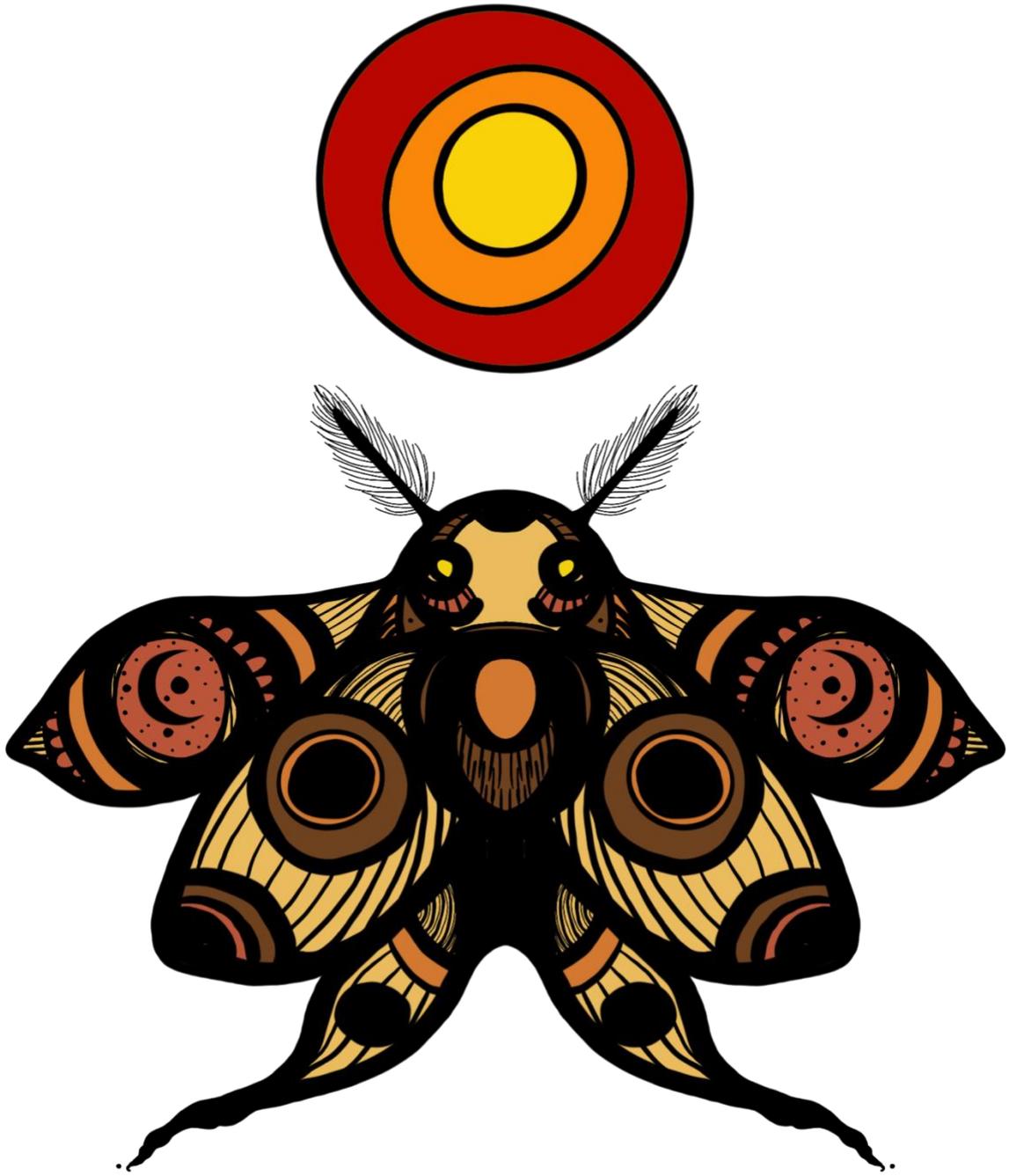
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University of Toronto Scarborough

Students of English Literature and Film

Journal of Creative Writing



## Publication Information

The Students of English Literature and Film (SELF) is a student-run organization at the University of Toronto Scarborough Campus. SELF works in close partnership with the Department of English to build a community of students in English and beyond by providing student services and organizing academic and social events.

In 2019, SELF published the inaugural edition of *Emerging Voices*, a publication created in response to the growing interest in creative writing among University of Toronto Scarborough students across many disciplines.

This year, we are extremely proud to present this second edition of the journal of UTSC creative writing, which includes poetry, microfiction and short stories by talented writers who spend their UTSC undergraduate years in an array of disciplines.

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## Editor's Note

When I started my studies in English and Creative Writing at UTSC three years ago, my main goal was to become a writer. A writer, I thought, was someone who gets their own writing published.

During my years here, while working on my writing skills – producing and polishing many pieces of writing – together with the amazing and encouraging faculty and ever-inspiring peer students on this campus, my narrative and poetic abilities definitely improved. Moreover, I discovered that living a life of writing and literature is not just about working on your own pieces. It is just as much about becoming part of a writing community, and this is something that is achieved in many different ways.

As I got involved with several student literary journals, including the starting up of the inaugural edition of this publication, I learned how fulfilling this part of the writing life is to me. I am very fortunate to have had the opportunity to study English and Creative Writing at UTSC, and to be part of the creative writing community here.

Editors, I could not have asked for a more committed, positive and patient team to work with. Contributors, I am equally proud and excited to share your writing with our readers. Thank you!

Eva Wissting



## Paper Houses

*by Joseph Donato*

Do you live in a paper house? One  
mistake and the building is engulfed in flame,  
destroying everything and everyone inside.

Tread lightly, or the weight of your footsteps  
will create a tear in the floor that  
no amount of tape can fix.

Keep your hands to yourself  
and off the furniture or  
you might give yourself a paper-cut and bleed to death.

Lower your voice, speak in whispers  
or the neighbours will hear through  
the paper-thin walls.

To the cars passing by  
the walls look sturdy, strong but  
take a step inside to see the lines and folds.

Tell your friends at school  
that you live in an origami home,  
a beautiful piece of art to fall asleep in.

But you know that all too soon  
the ceiling will cave  
and your paper house will eventually collapse on you.

## Rock Climbing

*by Joseph Donato*

You remember the wishes, pennies tossed in the fountain?  
Now look where you are; you're climbing a mountain.  
At the end of the week, reach the peak, the top –  
when you stop, was it worth it? An adequate job?  
That your palms bleed and your muscles throb?  
But it was, it was worth it, every nickel and dime,  
every personal crime, all the practice and time.  
For the chance to climb and to see the view  
it was worth it for you – it was special to you.  
But butterflies die and decompose in your stomach  
and you plummet, fifty feet from the summit  
and you crash through the branches, avalanches fall.  
Circumstances are dire and your chances are small.  
You lay in the grass five, six, seven hours  
among the flies and the sticks and the flowers.  
The sun disappears as the evening sours  
and the leaves from the trees fall like autumn showers.  
You look up and see the roots from the tree are in tangles,  
they wrap around your ankles and refuse to unscramble.  
When they start to move, you hold on like handles  
as bullets of memory beat you to shambles.  
August beaches and yellow sandals,  
heartfelt speeches over birthday candles,  
summer peaches on fireplace mantels,  
the roots still strangle, you claw at the dirt.  
Does it hurt? Yes it does, see the blood on your shirt,  
see the sweat on your brow, see your eyes so alert.  
The roots let you go and begin to revert.  
You're gasping for air at the river's edge  
like a suicide jumper too close to the ledge  
while the water begs for a cool embrace  
and you just can't refuse so you crawl at your quickest pace  
and you look in the river and see your own face.  
What a waste, what a pity – you used to be pretty.  
Now there's dirt in your pores and your hair is gritty.  
You offer a kiss but you miss and you fall  
into the water, into the abyss.  
In the river you shiver with overdue bliss.  
You open your mouth and make one last wish:  
That you stay here forever, alone with the fish.

## Yelp Except Yelp is Your Asian Friend

by *Cindy Tran*

Do I know a good dim sum place?

Yes I do.

It's past the neighbourhood

you're too uncomfortable to walk alone in.

No I will not show you

the good Cantonese BBQ.

You will eat from a trough, good sir.

For I know after you eat it

you will tell me your review:

"Too spicy!"

"Too greasy!"

"Too much MSG!"

"Bad service"

"Smells strange"

"Unclean"

"Not as good as when I went to Vietnam"

2.5 Stars

Oh. This does not taste authentic enough?

You cannot taste the intergenerational trauma,  
too much second-gen, not enough first-gen.

You want to taste the exile.

Unfortunately to taste our narrative

you must pay a head tax.

## Tell Me What Justice Is

*by Sura Kamil*

What is justice if not the breathing tube of a smoker,  
wheezing, barely sustaining heavy breaths.  
Any moment life will drain from his eyes.

Justice is like water cupped between two hands.  
It'll stay for a fleeting second  
and you watch as it slowly drains between your fingers,  
leaving a trace of droplets as the only mark.

And when you dry your hands  
all evidence and remembrance are gone.

Justice is the label slapped on to  
the confidential files on flimsy papers, acting like  
they are to the country what air is to earth.



## Toad in the Path of My Lawnmower

by Eric Wang

watches the rickety machine thresh, threat, smoke,

burn order & comply onto the backyard

& isn't having it.

isn't having any of it.

grandpa-textured frog (but never call it that)

steadfast with the sat-on-the-porch kind of rigor mortis

but don't ignore its Hedy Lamarr swagger

despite the, yes, spotted scrotum stature

it's just that god turned balloon into beast

then balloon said, forgetting to float

*I-think-I'll-hold-it-down-here*

never being held down

don't get confused, it's not kowtowing to anything, it's

Tank Man in combat stance, it's

*come-on-just-try-to-move-me*

*I've-got-world-power*

in its warted / warded skin, its bumps

whole nation-states & their people

their ghosts

stood against a horde, a fleet that came,

is come,

will come again

& wow, how that double-chin distillery alchemizes their bated

breath, the muzzled clarion, the bubbling zeitgeist,

all tequila-like --

shots of *don't-try-me*, rimmed with *I'd-kill-myself-to-stay*

*-alive*

## Swept in a Game

by Maherah Sadaf

*Ma-hee-rah*

*Ma-her-rah*

*Ma-hair-rah*

Anglicized, white-washed,  
whatever the other person would like to think.  
That is what has become of my name here.

The third version is the common way of pronouncing it,  
*the English way*,  
but the *real way* would be *Ma-hirah*.

Instead of the rough, crunchy 'r'  
the 'r' in my name should be soft and delectable  
like a sweet mango from  
the land that has dyed my lifeblood.

Foreign words and names  
knock around in everyone's mouths  
and roll off our tongues –  
some badly butchered, others more fine.  
They clang and oppose our teeth,  
maybe even some people's beings. But,  
they are here to stay.

Now,  
why is the *herah* in my name  
always associated with hair, and  
never the Greek goddess Hera?  
The spelling of the two isn't even that  
different. The pronunciation,  
*the English way*, is even closer.

So, I think: language is a game.  
*Maherah* means *talented*.

The words play with you, but you can also play with them.

## *Malik Sahib*

by *Maherah Sadaf*

The low humming of a ventilator jabbed at my heart and reminded me that life is just a fleeting moment. But, no signs of any visible tears. Maybe my lacrimal ducts weren't functioning properly?

"You're crying? Why?" I asked.

"You won't understand," my brother said. "You've got no heart. I've grown up looking at him, chasing after him, I've always heard his deep bellowing laugh, I lived with him. But you, you were born an alien. I bet you didn't even love him, that's how heartless and insensitive you are."

Let's recap fourteen years, but keeping in mind, of course, that pruning and rapid neural organization will have scavenged my memories.

*Babji*. That's what my brother called him, and naturally, I picked it up too. A wet monsoon ravaged upon me when I realized that that wasn't even a word that existed in any dictionary. I was befuddled. I started speaking when I was approximately a year old. My immediate family lived apart from my grandparents and my three youngest maternal uncles, but we were only five minutes away, for at least twelve years of my life. We lived in a condo and they lived in a rental.

While they lived there, I remember going into his room and fiddling through his cassettes, magazines, and newspapers, only to end up frustrated because everything was written in Urdu, a language I could barely decipher. Sometimes I'd sit beside him on his *charpai*, a woven hemp bedstead, and he would show me how to roll up tobacco in paper. He called them his homemade cigarettes.

He'd then light one up and inhale and, facing away from me, slowly exhale a gaseous jumble of fresh carbon dioxide, tar, nicotine, etcetera. All the detrimental things you can find in a little wad of tobacco and burnt paper. I'd always hold my breath, ever fearful of second-hand smoking once I learned of it in grade school. I could never say it to my grandfather's face: "You should stop smoking, it's not good for your health." And by the time I was able to say it, what was the point? It was already too late.

I suppose that was the extent of my hanging around with him, since after that, they moved into a tiny dungeon, which was maybe twenty-five minutes away by car from our apartment. Off-white with measly front and back yards, a two-storey 3-D box with a top. I never liked that place. With its dim interior lighting and guest bathroom with a window above the toilet made me think Michael Myers may pop the hell out of nowhere waving his knife or machete,

whatever it was, while I was in there. It basically always gave me the heebie-jeebies. The basement was another tale, but this is detracting from my main plot. My grandfather's room was on the second floor – you would ascend the winding staircase after entering the house, and once you were in the corridor, his room was on the far right. A big bellied TV like those from the 80s, or maybe 90s, would be sitting right across his now modernized single-bed-like *charpai* that was lined up against the wall. After they moved from the rental apartment into this sad excuse of a house, my grandfather became bedridden.

It was prostate and throat cancer. That's how I mentally justify calling this place a dungeon.

Back when they lived in the apartment, he'd always go downstairs into the lobby, take a stroll to the plaza and chit-chat with the other grandpas and anyone who was willing to talk. He had a lot of friends, probably more than me. But once they entered this cell, with barely any social liaisons and interactions, he was coiled into his room with invisible mechanisms set in place to keep him from getting out like DNA is enclosed in the nucleus of a cell. Except, the ribosomes floating around produced no mRNA, and nothing was copied. No clone, no nothing. All that gained access out was maybe the silent wind coming in past the sheer white curtains that lined the window and gracefully tickled his existence, passing through the door that was slightly ajar.

I barely ever went up to his room, and when I did, it was only for this:

"*Babji*, *nano* is calling you. You wanna have dinner with us now?"

"No *paray*, I'll eat later."

I think back now, and I feel upset. Not slightly upset, but madly frustrated-upset, but I don't think I'll cry. My paternal grandparents passed long before I was even conceived, and there's nothing I could have done about that. I feel that I lost treasure troves of knowledge, since there's always some form of the saying: listen to your elders, they've got experience and wisdom. Wisdom is different from knowledge. Anyone can spit out knowledge, but to apply it and understand it, to really grasp what the heck it's all about, you've got to have experience.

You know what, maybe I've become desensitized due to all the hocus-pocus that's on TV and other media outlets these days. All that stuff from psychologists about how TV is ruining your kids' emotions. Maybe I got messed up from that? But I mean, I do cry, sometimes. It's about death and violence, the stuff on TV that makes you less *hisaas* towards things like these.

But anyways, it was 2013 when they moved into that rental house. And it was in 2014 that *babji* passed away. We were told that he only had a few more months to live, and when I heard that the doctors had told him this to his face, I felt like sitting them down and throwing tomatoes at their faces. Like, I get the fact that the patient has the right to know, but really? That was the final blow to the old man's heart. He still had two sons that were supposed to

get married and he wouldn't be able to live to see their marriages. He knew that from the onset of his illness and didn't deny it, but it just felt worse hearing, "You only have a few more months to live, sir." What can a man say to that? I wonder if he cried. Maybe? Maybe now I'll cry? I don't know. I pray he's okay in his grave and that Allah is pleased with him.

When seven out of eight of his kids were gathered, before he passed away, we all squeezed ourselves into his humble retro abode. Apart from me and my brother, there were only three other grandchildren present, who were all younger than four years old. Our mother and her siblings were reminiscing of the past, talking about random stories from when they were kids. He was sitting on his bed in a *choukri* position as if he were a *malik sahib* of a *gaon*, a chief of a village. He asked for all the grandchildren to come to him, one by one. When it was my turn, it washed over me: this is the last time I'll be sitting with him on his *charpai*. He motioned for me to come closer, which I obeyed, even though I'm a germaphobe. He lifted his hand. This would be the last time he caressed my head. He brought up the other hand to my face and dipped my head ever so slightly. This was the last time he would kiss me on the forehead.

*"Ja jakay ragar kay mu do. Nani theri hath na lavai gi thenu agar onu patha chalgaiya meinay thenu pyar kardita si. Donna vahim de mariyan ho."* Which means go and scrub your face real hard. Your grandma won't ever touch you if she finds out I kissed you. Both of you are paranoid germ-freaks.

*"Acha,"* I laughed. Okay.

I went to the bathroom and opened the tap. Lathered soap on my hands. Lowered my face towards the sink. Brought my hands to my face and started scrubbing like an idiot.

Tears came out, uncontrollably. I think I sob-hiccaped, though quietly.

So, my lacrimal ducts were functioning properly, at least at this point, before going to the hospital.

After coming out of the bathroom and drying my face, I realized my eyes were red. It looked like I had gotten pepper-sprayed for being a creep. How long was I in there? I didn't know. Five minutes max. I went back in and tried flushing my eyes with cold water just like those blasted eye stations that haunt every sink in the science labs up until high school. I looked at my eyes. They seemed a bit better, so I left.

A week or so later my mom spoke to my youngest *mamu*, maternal uncle.

"Come over to our place and stay for a few days," he requested.

"Why? We're basically coming over every other day. My kids have school, too."

"No, just listen to me and come over, at least for a day or so, please."

“Okay, if you say so.”

The day we came over, *babji* was admitted to the hospital. He was smiling as he left. And I realized why *mamu* told us to come over. It was almost time.

The next night my mom and brother accompanied my grandmother and youngest maternal uncle to the hospital to keep *babji* company, despite his inability to speak because of the respirator and tubes attached to his face. The ominous call came not too long after from my uncle at the hospital: *babji* had passed on. Maybe it was shock, or something similar to denial, but I didn't cry. With some support from his sons, he was still able to walk down the stairs and do small things himself right before his death. He was only eighty three. But I guess that's a good age to have lived up until.

We gathered and set out to the Scarborough General Hospital.

When we reached the hospital and saw the lifeless body lying on the bed, I made sure to keep my distance. Not because I didn't love him, but because of the intense abhorrence I harbour towards germs. On a side note, I used to love hospitals, but gradually, I started hating them. Sure, they were amazing institutions with real-life heroes, but they made me feel nauseous because of the dreary atmosphere. The others were flocked around him, almost ignoring my statue-like presence, letting out muffled sobs and repeating “He was fine before he left! How did this happen so soon?” I prefer to think that sooner is better than later, and although I don't know what it must have felt like to be bed-ridden with cancer and then in the final phase being strapped onto a bed while having multiple tubes flowing with fluids, that marginally connected a person to life, up the nose and stuck deep into the veins residing in our forearms – it was for the best that his suffering ended.

To lighten up the mood between my brother and I, I said “He finally kicked the bucket, huh?” “How insensitive and disrespectful can you get?” he wondered.

I didn't respond, just internally trash-talked myself. Please keep in mind that I was fourteen years old at the time and was still a child, so my personality was not exquisitely cultivated.

It was around midnight that our family left, except for one of my uncles that stayed behind to fill in the paperwork. He somehow got the doctor to agree to postponing the burial process, sending the body to a morgue in the Baitul Hamd mosque in Mississauga. The body was supposed to be washed and held there until my eldest maternal aunt came from Pakistan, so the first set of funeral prayers were conducted there. When she did, the body would then be relocated to the Baitul Islam mosque in Vaughn for another set of funeral prayers, then it would lastly be transferred to the Nashville Cemetery in Kleinburg, Ontario, where it would

forever stay in the dark. I like to think of this as internal migration. Even after he died, his body went on from place to place until its final resting spot.

But, when I saw the coffin placed up on the viewing table for the first time, it didn't feel right. What was the purpose of viewing a dead body, with its mouth glued shut and complexion that lost all its former golden glory? Despite all that, the 5'10 man looked serene, bundled up in a white sheet. He finally looks as though he's at peace.

The final chapter in my memories regarding *babji's* death is when all the male relatives dug up the dirt from the purchased space in the cemetery and lowered the coffin. Then, the dirt was tossed back in atop the sleeping body which would never see the light of day again. Everyone gathered around the new grave and my father led the silent prayer. As soon as we were done, my eyes glassed over. But no tears fell. Rather, I was glad that it was over—no more pain for him and no more aching for us.

Perhaps the memorial services, that would be carried out later, eased for the living the loss of a jovial entity and their memories with him. At least for me they let me relive the moments I had assembled with him for over fourteen years. He will always be a part of our sweet lovable complaints, and with all our might, we say, have a gentle dream.



## I know how my dad REALLY died

*by Noah Farberman*

My mother says he spilled a cup of bottomless coffee and drowned but I know what really happened. Firstly, it wasn't even coffee, it was water, and second it wasn't a cup; it was an above ground swimming pool. Also he didn't really drown, the pressure of the water crushed his chest and he suffocated, but it's easier for my mother to say he drowned.

I know how my grandfather died, too. My grandmother says he drove off into the sunset and burned up, but that's not really what happened. He didn't drive, no license, my grandpa scooted off on a little teal electric scooter. It wasn't the sunset either, he didn't make it that far; the police found him on a bridge, twenty-three hours after we reported him missing. It was pills that caused the worst, and only lethal, case of heartburn any doctor had ever seen. But old ladies have trouble coping, especially after forty years of marriage.

I also know how my uncle died. And my brother-in-law, for that matter. My aunt once told me he flew over the cuckoo's nest and splattered to the ground while my sister just said that he flew the coup. They actually went crazy together slowly. After meeting at a Christmas party they formed an unusual bond that led them to a cliff. They landed on water so saying either of them splattered would be inaccurate, the police say it looked more like they exploded on impact. You've probably heard this before but from a high enough distance water feels a lot like concrete. My aunt and my sister don't like to talk to each other anymore so I had to piece this one together.

And, I guess, I know how my husband died, if you care.

I killed him with kindness.

Kinda.

## Bike

by Helen Jinshu Yao

Everything about the bike reminded Ming of his own back in China. But this one, locked up in front of the student center, was better—much, much better. It was a fabulous silvery grey mountain bike.

Ming had had his eyes on the bike since last month. The bike had 27.5 inch wide thick wheels. Its simple tracker-style handles were exactly like the one grandpa, *Wai Gong*, fixed on Ming's first bike. Even better, the way the tubes reflected light, suggested that the frame material was carbon fibre, which was much lighter than the steel or aluminum used for regular bikes. The streamline design showed the elegance of its body. Ming could feel the lightness even from a distance. The new paint shone in the sunlight, with black letters printed on the down tube that read GHOST in all caps—a precise apparition yelling for attention.

The only flaw was that the spokes on the wheels were slightly rusted because it had been left in front of the student center for more than two months. What a shame that it was being wasted. Having such a nice bike but not using it was a crime.

Ming got his first mountain bike back home after entering middle school. It was the result of a two-year negotiation between Ming and his parents. *Ba* and *Ma* simply couldn't understand why people would spend thousands of *Yuan* on a several speed cable while a one-hundred-*Yuan* bike could do just as well. They even blamed *Wai Gong* for building Ming's first bike by hand and teaching him to ride the bike by letting him rushing down a slope. "It can be dangerous!" they exclaimed. When Ming pointed out that sliding downhill on *Wai Gong's* backseat was one of his favourite activities and that he had longed for doing it by himself, they just turned quiet in disbelief. For *Ba* and *Ma*, the only goal in life is to move forward instead of rising up and falling down. Want to make a difference? Then study well, get into a good university, find a well-paid job. Adventures? That's irrelevant. Ming argued and argued, received firm objections, then stayed quiet for a few weeks until he couldn't stop himself from bringing up buying a mountain bike again.

Eventually *Wai Gong* spoke for Ming in front of *Ba* and *Ma*. "I know *Mingming* is not seeking a brand or trying to show off. He will make good use of the bike and let it live up to its worth."

Even though *Ma* again blamed *Wai Gong* for spoiling Ming, *Wai Gong's* words put an end to the mountain bike dispute. *Ba* and *Ma* bought Ming a mountain bike. Even though it was just a regular one, without the advanced designs of the Ghost bike, Ming was satisfied as long as it could carry him up the hill and let him glide down when he let go of the handles, opening his arms to embrace the wind, and imagining himself flying. He spent all his free time exploring on that bike.

Frequent use meant quick deterioration, but luckily *Wai Gong* was an expert on bicycle maintenance. The bike remained almost like brand new for three years, until *Wai*

*Gong* passed away. Shortly after, Ming started to prepare for the Chinese University Entering Exam and had no time for his bike. Then he came to Canada and his mountain bike was left rusting somewhere in the basement.

As the weeks passed, Ming obsessed over the Ghost. He watched it closely, wandering outside the student center and pretending to check his phone as if waiting for someone. But there was no one he could call and no one worth waiting for. All his attention was on the bike.

Whoever owned the Ghost was not only a criminal but also an idiot.

The lock cable, despite being thick and long as a boa, was wrapped around the tube above the front wheels. The Ghost was an antelope captured by a snake. Its lithesome body was tortured, its soul was imprisoned.

If the owner didn't value the bike, he didn't deserve it.

Anyone with a basic knowledge of bicycles could tell it was insecure. All it would take to get rid of the lock was to remove the front wheel, pull the forks through the loop formed by the lock cable and then put the wheel back. All a thief needed was a spanner of the right size to deal with the bolts.

Theft was frequently reported in the school and international students were often the target.

"I lost most of my hair because I worried too much about you guys," the bald campus police officer explained to more than 500 international students on Welcome Day. "You are away from home, without much help. Please be extra careful."

Hearing this, Ming tightened his fist around the portable knife in his pocket. He had brought it all the way from China even though it wouldn't be much more than a toothpick if something really dangerous happened.

Ming had witnessed a theft in the library. A slim man raced towards the door, a hat covering his face, while a boy chased after him, shouting, "My phone!" The boy, who was a little overweight, couldn't catch up with the man. He later came back, breathing heavily.

A campus police officer came along with the boy and requested to review the security camera footage. Ming sat near the front desk and heard the boy struggling with his poor English to tell the police and a librarian how the man had snuck up and grabbed his phone from his pocket. Ming knew the boy from his economics class. He always wore the same clothes and had a sour smell. He would sit alone, walk alone, and never talked to anyone. Ming pitied him but also felt disgusted. In the depth of his heart, he felt a little satisfaction seeing the boy wandering around like a lost puppy. At least Ming showered every day and did laundry every week. He didn't have many clothes but at least they smelled of lemon detergent.

After the theft, the girl at the front desk told everyone to look out for thieves. Ming disliked that girl even more than the smelly boy. Her English was good, but the way she said "sank you" suggested her first language was Mandarin. Yet, he only ever heard her use English, even when the smelly boy couldn't clearly describe the thief. The boy requested to

use the telephone in the library to call his parents but soon realized it was midnight in China. The girl just stood there with the same confused expression as the police as if she didn't understand the boy's desperate murmur in Mandarin. "What are you hiding?" Ming wanted to ask her. After the smelly boy had left, she imitated his accent and giggled with her co-worker, a blonde boy with blue eyes. The only thing Ming wanted to do was to grab her well-combed, silky black hair and rip it off her head along with that silly smile.

Ming used to think that thieves would only plot their crimes in the middle of the night or somewhere quiet and unwatched. Now, he realized, the best place to hide was in the crowds of people who didn't know or care about you. Students entered and exited the student center in pairs, trios, and clusters, all talking loudly. In order to avoid suspicion, Ming first held his phone to his ear as if making a call, but he gradually saw that no one ever paid any attention. With his courage increasing day by day, he gave up all the disguise and stared at the bike with longing.

After the theft, he searched online and found out that a Ghost cost three thousand dollars. Three thousand! That was more than the total monthly income of his family. He could imagine what *Ba* and *Ma* would say if he asked for the money to get such a bike.

"You live on campus," they would argue. "Why do you need a bike? Don't they have buses and trains?"

They wouldn't understand how awful his first bus ride was. How he went past the station and asked the driver for help. How he never understood what exactly the driver answered and two boys sitting behind him laughed at their broken conversation. He hated taking buses from that moment on.

Anyway, how could he get to know the city without a bike? He went through roads and streets and they all looked the same to him. Buses, trains, and taxis always required someone else behind the wheel, controlling the direction and speed. They were way too fast to let him have a glance at what he passed by—stores, parks, valleys, houses with different designs, or even the street art. Most of his best hometown memories were the things he discovered sitting at the back seat of *Wai Gong's* bike or the places he explored on his own.

Even if he could convince his parents, more interrogation would follow. "Why can't you buy a cheaper one? Do you know how much your tuition costs? Do you know how hard we worked to send you abroad?"

He never expected himself to be an international student. His family led a good life in China with both of his parents employed by a state-owned company. *Ma* was proud of their improved living standard compared to the older generation's. *Wai Gong* came from a village and ran a bicycle repair booth for a living before he retired. Life would have continued as it had over Ming's first 19-years if he had passed the Chinese University Entering Exam. Everything changed when he failed "the exam that determines destiny."

He could have gone to a nameless university in China but the study-abroad agency tricked *Ma* into believing success stories about average students winning scholarships from Harvard after studying abroad. She didn't realize that the only reason these stories were told

so many times was because they were rare cases. *Ma* immediately put *Wai Gong's* apartment on sale. Thanks to the booming housing market in China, “bubble” as Ming’s economics prof would say, *Wai Gong's* apartment made his education abroad possible.

The bicycle website used so many fancy words to advertise the Ghost: hyper-light carbon, lightweight beauty, race-ready performance. The paint was described as star white and night black. Ming wondered what *Wai Gong* would have said about the Ghost.

Ming used to spend all his time after school at *Wai Gong's* bike stand. *Wai Gong's* long fingers were always sticky and black with engine oil, and he smelled like it as well. It wasn’t a pleasant smell, but it was too familiar for Ming to reject it. *Wai Gong* used his magic hands to take the bikes apart and put them back together, solving all the problems that bothered bikers: leaking tubes, worn tires, stuck cables... Ming and the bikers watched this show with their eyes wide open, as if watching a magician pulling out rabbits from his hat.

Mountain bikes, however, usually expensive, were seldom dropped by the street side station to be repaired. *Wai Gong* got excited when he occasionally received one: “Look at the shape! Feel how light it is! Pinch the wheels. Feel that texture?” He would then tell the owners everything he knew about basic maintenance. How to clean the stains and lubricate the chains and gears. *Wai Gong* never worried about being driven out of business if all the bikers knew the tricks.

Ming went to the bike station less after grade three. Even though it was just a block away from his school, he was afraid of running into classmates. As Ming grew older, he started to realize that no matter how skillful *Wai Gong* was, repairing bikes for a living didn’t earn much respect. *Ma* stopped *Wai Gong* from working when his health deteriorated. She asked *Wai Gong* to move in with them but he insisted on staying in his small apartment by himself. The repair station closed before Ming finished elementary school. His bike was the only one *Wai Gong* had worked on after retirement—his last one. *Wai Gong* died when Ming started high school. Ming had always wanted to inherit the fascinating tools *Wai Gong* used to fix bikes, but when the time came, he shook his head, and *Ma* sold everything to a recycling station for the price of a broken TV. The only thing Ming took was a multi-purpose portable knife, the one with a mini screwdriver and spanner.

“It can’t properly fix a bike,” *Wai Gong* used to say, “but it is helpful if anything comes up in the middle of the ride.”

All the great time Ming spent helping or making trouble at *Wai Gong's* bike station, all the knowledge about bikes that *Wai Gong* had taught Ming, the regular calls *Wai Gong* made, which Ming was so reluctant to answer, these all became memories that Ming packed up and left behind when the plane to Toronto took off from Shanghai Pudong International Airport, or so he thought.

Ming was so close to the Ghost now. It was a 24-speed, with a suspended front, German design. Ming’s heart raced when his eyes landed on the bolts on the front brakes,

exactly the same size as the spanner on his pocket knife. He raised his head and looked around. Students walked, chatted, laughed with their friends.

A long time of staring and thinking had made Ming almost forgot the existence of his physical body, as if he was only a pair of eyes that locked on the bike. Two girls rushed past him, both giggling and chasing one another. The sound woke Ming up as he suddenly realized that he had been there for quite a while. He raised his head to look around. A man stood on the stairs of the student center, wearing a sweatshirt brought from the university bookstore. His hat shadowed his face but he seemed to be looking at Ming's direction. Ming froze, wondering if the man had detected his attempt, but a few seconds later, the man turned and left. Ming's mouth felt dry and his legs felt too weak to support his body. He remained there for a long time, with people passing by him like a flood.

Night fell and the campus quieted down. Ming looked through the blurry dorm window and saw the last bus disappear into the rain. His hands tightened in his pocket, grabbed onto the multi-tool knife. He could imagine *Ma's* voice.

"We sold Grandpa's house to send you abroad. You should be grateful to him. He looked after you even after he passed away."

From the depth of his memory came an older, more energetic voice.

"Sit still, hold tight! Here comes the down slope!"

Something slid down his cheek. He hoped it was rain.

The next day he squeezed through the busy hallway to his class. Some boys who waited in the line outside Starbucks were chatting loudly in Mandarin.

"Some fucker stole my bike yesterday."

"I didn't know you had a bike."

"I bought it when I first came here but never really used it, so I put it in front of the student center so I see it when I pass there every day, but this morning it was gone."

"Did you tell the campus police?"

"What could they do? It's already stolen."

"You don't really care, do you?"

"Well, it cost me three thousand bucks. But hey, I will just think of it as a donation to charity."

They laughed and Ming turned around to look at them. He didn't know any of them but he recognized the logos on their clothing, the most fashionable and expensive brands. Every time walking by a store like that, Ming ducked his head.

## Contributors

**Joseph Donato** is a Twitter famous escape room enthusiast. He draws inspiration from quality films like *Lemonade Mouth* and the musical stylings of artists from Lana Del Rey to Half Moon Run. This is Joseph's first publication after years of writing. He can be found on social media @new\_art\_form, which is also the name under which he releases music that you should buy.

"**Noah "Noah Farberman" Farberman** refuses to spell his name without "No" and "ah" and "Farberman." Noah can usually be found sitting down, but if you challenge that you will find him standing down. Noah "Noah Farberman" Farberman is a strong advocate for repetition. Noah "Noah Farberman" Farberman is a strong advocate for subtle changes. Noah "Noah Farberman" Farberman is a strange advocate for repetition." is what Noah wants written on the cake. Yes, all of it. Also, I don't drink milk or eat eggs so can you not put those in the cake or flour either thanks.

**Sura Kamil** is your average university student who is most likely to be found drowning in a pile of assignments and homework. During her free time, she writes poetry and short stories. At the University of Toronto Scarborough she is pursuing a specialization in English. Aside from school, Sura is a freelance writer on Scripted and a content writer on Art Start Tech. You can find more of her poetry at @freewriterlancer on Instagram.

**Maherah Sadaf** is an undergraduate student at the University of Toronto pursuing a double major in mental health studies and socio-cultural anthropology with a minor in history. She has been addicted to poetry and prose for over six years, and has been published in the *Word Paintings* anthologies compiled by the Kenneth G. Mills Foundation and the popular South Asian magazine *Suhaag*. Maherah's muse is her loaded family life and surroundings, but she occasionally writes pieces filled with fantasies that beg to bask in the outside world. When she is not writing or drowning in work, she enjoys reading manga or playing Kingdom Hearts.

**Cindy Tran** is a Vietnamese Canadian UTSC student studying conservation and biodiversity and global Asia studies and cinema studies. They enjoy writing on topics like post-colonialism, ecocriticism and diasporic connections. Cindy spends most of their time tweeting, (Psst...@thecoolercindy), doing too much emotional labour, and pretending to write. You can usually find them by Starbucks overusing the term "the multiplicity."

**Eric Wang** is currently studying English and creative writing at University of Toronto Scarborough. He will hopefully one day reincarnate as either a talking trash panda or Lil Uzi Vert's new Patek watch and, in case anyone was genuinely wondering, did not end up running over that toad with his lawnmower.

## Editors

**Editor-in-Chief Eva Wissting** is specializing in English and minoring in creative writing at University of Toronto. She writes and edits for *Asymptote Journal*, *Populär Poesi*, *Dagensbok.com* and *The Varsity* and her work is published in anthologies *Keyhole Stories* and *Dead Ends* and journals *The Women's Issue* and *The Underground*. She currently employs her interest in creative writing to explore her connection and disconnection with Toronto while missing her hometown Stockholm, Sweden.

**Associate Editor Jamie Bardocz** is a fourth-year student at the University of Toronto Scarborough. She is an English specialist and media studies minor. Jamie loves film and television and as a result has taken a special interest in screenwriting. In the future, she aims to someday work professionally writing for film and television.

**Associate Editor Ryan Gillies** is an English literature and creative writing student at the University of Toronto Scarborough. As a writer, Ryan explores all genres and is dedicated to writing fiction and screenplays. When he is not seen writing or at school, he enjoys reading, travelling, and binge watching most movies and television shows. He looks forward to graduating in the spring 2020 to explore all avenues of writing in his future.

### **Associate Editor Jingshu Helen Yao**

Jingshu Helen Yao

a creative writing student

at University of Toronto Scarborough.

Coming to Canada from another continent,

For an adventure of multicultural and bilingual.

She is now studying to become a linguist.

Language is both her method of expression,  
and the content that's being expressed.

**Associate Editor Anna Wong** is a fourth-year student studying English and psychology at University of Toronto. Ever since she was young she has been impressed by the craft of writing and the power of words to connect individuals, which motivates her to use writing as a recreational outlet of catharsis and healing. Her all-time favourite series are Rick Riordan's Percy Jackson series and Hiromu Arakawa's *Fullmetal Alchemist*.

**Design Editor Paige Camilleri** is a fourth-year English major with minors in classics and studio art. She will be continuing at UofT for her MA in Canadian Literature. Currently, Paige is expanding her portfolio by working as the graphic designer for SELF. She is excited to learn more about the Scarborough community through the publication of *Emerging Voices*.

**Design Editor Taylor Whitten** is an English and psychology major in her final year at UTSC. She is a social media executive of the Students of English Literature and Film (SELF), where she keeps students updated on events through social media and newsletters. She enjoys nature photography and video games, and when she isn't too busy you can find her walking through local trails with her camera.