



Poetry

Group 3

Mogao Histories

Carmel School – Elsa High School, Donnitz, Yair – 12

The Mogao Caves created by thousands of monks,
Told stories and literature of the Great Buddha,
Of his kindness and enlightened mind,
And how his teachings helped the world.

Its paintings are wonders to human eyes,
Their worthiness was tested as it was disguised,
As a trading place for ones who deceive,
And for those who wish to learn the way of the Buddha.

The monks were as wise as owls,
And knew that their work,
Would linger on this living world,
Rendering it immortal.

But the place was lost and isolated,
As the Silk Road era disappeared,
The stories and the power the caves had contained,
Were lost in the movement of time.

Its works and paintings of glory,
Now tarnished and ruined,
For its power was now transformed from that of a fierce and powerful lion,
To that of a small, tired lap dog.

But its transformation would not be long as hundreds of years later,
Explorers rediscovered the wonders of the caves,
And they penetrated the grottos, right to their very depths,
But found nothing of note.

Hope was wearing thin,
And the explorers were starting to give up,
But they were getting closer,
When they started hitting rock.

They finally entered the grottos through a cavern,
Engulfed in statues and paintings,
And saw many ancient manuscripts,
Made of skin and bound in leather.

They were written about the teachings,
And the Buddha with his enlightenment,
The explorers knew right then,
They had hit the jackpot.

The explorers came out and told the world,
Their findings below,
And the mission was set,
To reinstate the caves to its former glory.

Days were long and breaks were short,
As the world was anxious, waiting on it to be done.
The challenge was getting harder, as the paint needed to dry,
And they couldn't let the cave sculptures go and die.

The people worked harder than ever,
As the dust settled in,
But it was finally achieved,
And the grottoes returned with might.

Since then, the world has recognised,
And started to appreciate the caves again,
For their beauty and inspiration,
And for its impact on the history of religion.

And there is our story,
A beautiful place,
That was tarnished and lost,
Until we brought it to glory.

Western Caves

CCC Kei Yuen College, Kwok, Wing Chi – 14

I know they are in the west,
The caves.

So far away... they cannot be reached.
I walk for years....closer.

Closer.

Closer.

I reach them.
I feel a shiver passing me by, a whiff of arid air
From deep below the surface.

I find an opening.
It leaves me in shock.

After my eyes adjust, I gaze upon the walls.
It is the beauty I seek.

The old stories are here,
Kept so well.

It is beauty on hold.

Aubergine Grottoes

CCC Kei Yuen College, Law, Roniya – 13

Out here, in the desert.

On the walls, like a gallery.
Are paintings full of heart,

It is hard to imagine this level of beauty,
Especially in the evening light.

Mystery Script

CCC Kei Yuen College, Sarki, Pristina – 13

Far to the west, high up in the mountains,
Surrounded by desert,
A labyrinth of caves.

The cave mouth shines: an entrance.

I feel the whiff of cooler air.

Exhausted from trekking, I step inside,
And I am immediately astonished,
Art and treasure overflow.

I am drawn toward a jar in the corner,
But I dare not open it. Sealed shut.

Curiosity kicks in and I pick up the jar,
Only for a magical hand swats it away from my grip,
I cry out as it falls.

When it hits the cave floor, the shatter echoes through the chamber.

Stunned. Astonished by what's inside,
I look around to see if anyone is watching,
I dare not tell anyone. It's just for me.

Mogao Grottoes

Chinese International School, Cheung, Charlotte – 13

The monk sat down near the spring,
quenching his thirst with the sweet waters.
Across the land he peered, seeing
a thousand Buddhas on the cliffside,
basking and floating
in the golden light, in the sunshine.
Stunned by his vision,
he carved out the first cave,
giving way to a chamber of solace.

The cliff became honeycombed with aged painting,
by artists with the dream of paradise.
Frescos stretching from floor to ceiling,
filled with the statues and sculptures of gods.
Vibrant colors and saturated details,
flecks of paint so delicate.

The paintings.
Dragons, as orange as a pumpkin,
as black as the night sky,
soar towards the Buddha up high.
Sparkly deer run upwards,
escaping from the rocky spikes
and the rolling waves below in a crash.
A peacock, stretching its colorful wings,
zooms to the horizon in a flash.
Dark horses, scattered all over,
gallop forwards to the holy shrine.
Camels trot behind the merchants,
goods strapped to their backs,
ready for another day of trading and bickering.

The statues.
Some sit in silence, legs crossed,
robes drooping, painted in green and brown.
Some stand instead, hands clasped,
eyes closed, completely still.
One vast giant
reclines in a chamber someplace,
sleeping with a smile on his face.
Symbols of prayer,
to find one's peace,
to search for inner solace.

The man knelt down on the ground,
setting his eyes on the gigantic Buddha.
Across the room he glanced,
passing by a long road of history,
victories and defeats,
in the aura, in the reverie.
Astounded by his epiphany,
he found the clarity in his mind,
giving way to a realization of nirvana.

The Past Remembered

Chinese International School, Lent, Anabella – 11

The outside is
Red,
Dusty,
Cracked.
Old.
Inside, hallowed mysteries
Unfold
Passed by. Unremembered. Dead.
A voice, heeded at last, has said:
I have a secret. Many, in fact.
Unheard for ages, yet my voice is now back
I am treasures of silk and of ink and of stone.
I am coveted diamond, jade, fossil and bone.

Eons of knowledge from everywhere.
Here and there and nowhere.
I have seen many things, hard and true,
But now I emerge, born again through the new.

Rest here and listen.
To memories past.
Drink deeply from history
and learn from my mystery.
I am a labyrinth to the past
A tunnel that shall ever last.

The Ballerina and Her Trophy Dream of Mogao Dance

ESF King George V School, Wu, Kasper – 12

The ashes of burning dunes portrays the beauty
Of history, for a thousand cattles, million stories
Too close to the fame
Withstanding all climate and time – Dunhuang.

The stress of pointe shoes compresses the strong passion
In life, for a thousand pretties, one dance trophy
Too far to the dream
Dream my peerless practice on the Silk Road.

In the Endless Sea by ships of desert, long and slow
Pacing pace to follow my Polaris to the dance recital of Mogao
The lengthening tulle remarks no short-cut for a go, waiting a go
Since the little tutu ever desired to reach for the stars, a long time ago.

I walk by the emerald crescent, bearing new blisters, and old
Sinking sand noshes my every steps, a tug-of-war, tired never told
Not easy I win the chiffon of moony night, wait for the breezes' call
Reward my bony ankles with caress and champion's dream of all.

Slits of flash dazzle my drowsy eyes to open
Emancipated mural souls, springing alive in heaven
And said, "Get up to the stage, no time to wait
For your choreographing the Gateway of the grottoes, today."

"Shall we dance? Shall we fly? Shall I borrow your feather wands?"
I gaze at the Apsaras before me, waiting for her promise
She coaches me the right time to grab, grab tight
The softest scarfs and take off together
To the farthest of no name.
In a blink of an eye—
Elegantly I bend back on the rainbows
To see perfect inverted beehives of faith, who
Carved into cliffs on very still water, a dancing mirror
Reflects my faith in dance, as you teach
Only with sincere love can I really learn well.

Continuously I swift my leg high to my wrist, with your lift
To touch pinches of windswept rocks, pains drift
Across debris of the Great Walls, a recollection's call
For chronicling things that were not all roses, as you tell
Only with gratitude can I really manifest a life staging journal.

I learned your silken calligraphic note, a bolt from the blue
Is a farewell to the Sleeping Buddha in a pyramidal tomb and you?
"Cheer up for every fall," my dearest coach wrote,
"The smouldering incense end is calmness, if, you think through."
Only with intelligence can I really beat jitters in my shoes.

And after I sit on the nine-story grotto
The first sunray strikes on a faded face, illuminates
The blessing to caravanserais along the Silk
So clever am I, rolling up light beams into rhythmic sparklers
Turning silence into stage cheers.

A zither and a pipa narrate my sentiment overflown, oh dear

A dowry for homesick princesses, or a souvenir to Northwest from tears?
Rattling grief and joy in waves, far from my hometown
How close to the trophy?
I have to give the zither to a couple, a dragon and a phoenix
In exchange for a pair of lucky candles to warm up
The backstage for Princess Pipa.

The backstage with four book walls, altered from an antique library
Squeaks on the centipede ladders there introduce me old visitors, stealing scholars
Should I cogitate to mix their old footsteps to match my new choreo
Add an overture of rebirth from plunder?
"Sure you can." the couple assured
Reminiscing Mommy's whispers since I was a toddler.

I make a deer and a lotus embroidery with my fingers
The dragon teaches, I stitch
I wave an arc through the fragments of plundering with my wrist
The phoenix shows, I sew
A blessing in disguise, unfolding the world the treasures of millennia.

In a blink of an eye—

No time to wait, it is the sand of time, my show time
Nine—coloured deer furred my shoulder straps
Five—coloured clouds underpinned my flutter fluffy fringes
The alchemist of dance am I?
Even thousands of gods will gaze and never look away... on me.

I flick my legs to patter pipa's angry—looting notes
Hear my arm gliding over the heart—striking strings
Plucking behind my back, lean my back, hold your breath
I am beaming with pride, percussing the legend of Rebound
My jumps are larger and smaller pearls falling...on a jade plate.

Slowly my elbows draw enduring twirls, to salute
The glories and sorrows in Thousand Buddha Caves
Brushing the sand dust with my grand split leap, to dilute
The grief in grains of ignited bloody ruby
In the memorial of dynastic changes and interregnum days.

No time to wait, it is the sand of time, my show time
I absorb the energy on the stage, mesmerize the front
Revitalizing all the flying Apsaras riddles alive
I am a poetry in motion, the visible ballad in your eyes.

I

Close

My eyes

Hear my heart

Focus on the silence

Foot forward. Back straight

Head lowered, my last curtsy, to all.

A square of golden light falling from overhead

Head raised I clasp an imaginary Pipa in both hand

My signature to the world's curtain call.

Downstage.

Bursting into applause and a standing ovation
The trophy of mine reflects the cinematic glitters of Mogao
Coming true in my eyes and yours.

Trapped In Darkness

ESF Sha Tin College, Kwan, Nicholas – 14

One after another,
The caves uncover,
Long vast roads leading to caves of mystery,
Each discovery making history,

Down the long silk road,
Stories were being told,

For decades, stories and experiences echoed the caves,
Begging to be free, crying to be told,
Down the long silk road,

Stories were sitting there, confined like crime,
Testifying to be free, screaming to be heard,

One last cry, as that was all that was left,
Decades of hope, drained through time,
A cry that was heard, by our very own,

One after another,
The caves uncover,
Down the long silk road,
Stories were being discovered,

Like a tunnel to a realm,
The stories were overwhelmed,

Flying like a bird,
Running through the wind,
They were finally free,

The stories ran through the long silk road,
Maybe even beyond,
Now the whole world could hear them,
Stories that carried experiences, pain, happiness, anger, and sadness,
They were now being told.

A Portal to the Past

ESF Sha Tin College, Lee, Rosella – 13

Mò gāo, meaning none higher.

A collection of caves and crevices crushing together to create

A beautiful chest, full of magical wonders.

A grotto that doesn't reach any higher, but still stands tall and looming by the mountainside.

Layers of clay and dust gather by the entrance, but that's just what begs the question.

What's it like on the inside?

A grid-like structure with the crimson paint peeling from the sides.

The paint makes you wonder, what has happened to it?

A beautiful tardis, preserved perfectly with the piercing desert heat.

An entrance waiting for you to go through.

Walking through the opening of a cave,

Like walking through a time machine.

In one era then suddenly in the next.

You feel the familiarity of the Modern Era peel away.

Skin bare, stepping into something new and exotic.

The caves take off your thick coat of the present,

And the further you travel, the more you get dressed.

One by one.

Taking in each and every artefact passing by.

A Hebrew scripture from the 1000s,

A Tipitaka from the 400s,

A Bhudda's head from the 1500s,

An aroma of colours overwhelms you.

Inscriptions and scrolls.

As you stroll through the tunnels.

It seems like the further you enter,

The longer the road.

And so down and down the Rabbit Hole of Rabbit Holes

You venture further into.

Far from a wonderland, but still giving you the same high.

You see monks painted on the walls,

Eyelids closed, making you dare not make a sound to wake them.

Traditional Chinese instruments emulsified in the walls,

The muffled tunes of the Gǔqín echoing through the halls.

The light of the paintings end near the opening of the tunnel,

As the outside world beams you blindly.

And suddenly, you're back in the present.

Something sinks on your shoulders, wanting you to go back inside.

Though the knowledge of knowing and going through millennia of artwork and artefacts,

Can easily outweigh the desire to go through it once more.

New Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

French International School, Puyakoti, Namish – 13

I woke up to a throb in my head
I looked around positive I was dead
I'd fallen into a huge cave
Where awe hit me in a huge wave

As the beam of my torch moved about
I knew without a doubt
I had discovered a tunnel to the past
A place where beauty and wonder was surpassed

Color and knowledge was etched into the wall
But most beautiful of all
Were the statues and shrines
The patterns of lines

The faces and expressions
The posture and obsession
The details and hours
Put into the statues and towers

I'd discovered a historical find
On a magnitude enough to blow one's mind
There were remnants of Buddhism, Hinduism, and more
With literature and art galore

What secrets lay behind these doors
What knowledge was carved into the roofs and floors
Whose secrets might I discover?
What stories lie underneath this cover

This place of mystery
Was lost with history
But there was a tale to tell
About those who fell

A monk was the first observer of these caves
He taught a lesson to be remembered for decades
"You need not power nor wealth
To live a life full of happiness and health"

Made by Three sixty six hands
Filled with politicians, traders and their stands
It sat on top of the largest cross road
In a barren desert it was the people's humble abode

Filled with art and books millenia old
It held lessons untold
The home of early trading and politics
With roots in several cultural history and economics

I need to bring the lesson back to the world
As the cavern around me unfurled
I stood ready to explore
And the tales of the Grottoes began once more.

The Children, the Civilisations, and the Mogao Caves

Harrow International School Hong Kong, David, Antonin – 12

Do you know about the Mogao Caves
That Buddhist, Greco-Indian place?
I do because I went there,
That beautiful lair,
Where monks prayed at the mountain's base.

Why yes I do, because I'm Indian
And we were part of the Silk Road back then.
Anyway, what's your name?
My name is Trame
Where are you from, are you European?

Indeed I am, Indeed I am,
My name's Samuel short for Sam
I'm Italian
Nice to meet you Indian
My preferred book is Green Eggs and Ham.

Speaking of books, Trame poshly replied,
In the Mogao Caves, many books lie,
Books of philosophy,
Science and history,
But first I'll tell where the Mogao Caves lie.

I know this one, said Sam, in Asia
In Dunhuang, Jiuquan, Gansu, China
The Mogao Caves lie
Tall, proud and high,
But they're much more than some caves in China.

According to history, long ago
There was a China-to-Rome-road,
It was rich with tradition,
There civilisations,
Traded and communed on the Silk Road.

Trame spoke, the Mogao Caves were on that trail
And because the Silk Road went everywhere,
There was Hebrew stuff inside
Taoist, Greek stuff resides
And many more cultures, all lie there.

You do know, cultures get mixed up,
Like coffee added to milk, in a cup
And because of this,
This cultural haven was bliss
For people who wished to go to that cup.

People must have brought art with them too
And inventions of course, some old some new.
Of course! Sam cried,
That is the reason why

The caves have so much culture, old and new.

Back to the caves, continued Trame
Let me tell you some of the names
Of the Mogao Caves' caves,
That very sacred place
Nah, said Sam, now listen to me Trame.

The most important part of those caves
Is where all the manuscripts lay,
The Library Cave's books
Weren't gobbledygook,
But stored the oldest books to this day.

But the crystal, the heart, of that place
Is the oldest printed book in our race.
The Diamond Sutra,
Which is inside the
'Before sealed now unsealed', Library Cave.

But why was it sealed, why, O, why?
Some adults say that an army of guys
Was approaching the Cave,
And the people, afraid,
Sealed it to stop it being burned and fried.

Trame said, my mum said it ran out of space,
It couldn't hold more books of human race
As such it was sealed
But this doesn't feel
Right, why would you do that to such a place?

I think adults are thinking far too small
They're missing huge pictures of them all.
Why simply believe
It was humans who did
This to the Cave, this place we don't recall.

It could have been aliens from space,
Beeping aliens from another place,
They sealed up this Cave,
So humans would remain
Without knowledge so they could rule our race.

Of course not, laughed Sam, that's absurd
I mean, aliens don't live in any worlds.
No, this probably
Isn't the truth, let me
Tell you what quite likely occurred.

I think a nefarious novel nation
Hit Medusa's civilisation,
Killing so many of them
So Medusa then
Marched towards that human nation.

As monstrous, malevolent, malicious
Medusa marched, her plans merciless
 It was to seal the Cave
 To punish the human race
For slaughtering her kind which was vicious.

Really, jeered Trame, is that what you think?
That's pure silliness, you silly blink-link,
 That is so far off
 Your dad would laugh and scoff
At such a concept, now I have rethought.

The Cave was sealed by wizards of lore,
 Long, long ago, centuries before
 To protect magic books
 So humans could look
There, to learn spells to fight dark things of yore.

Or, decades ahead in the future,
 In a time-travel-computer
 Somebody time travelled
 And sealed up the cavern,
To prevent looting by time travellers.

Ha, smirked Sam, scoffing and snickering,
You really believe that? He said laughing,
 You have to be foolish
 To believe such silliesh
 Ideas, he said, sniggering.

Maybe I am wrong, it could be true
But then I could be right. Can you
 Prove I am incorrect?
 No, so we should respect
Each other's ideas, think it through.

Perhaps you are right, Sam mused,
 He was really rather bemused.
 Then I am sorry
 For being so jeeringly
To your thoughts, though they still to me confuse.

Wait, said both, isn't this the lesson
Of the Mogao Caves? Despite aggression,
 Nations get along,
 Trading, respecting all along
This is the Mogao Caves' lesson.

Civilisations only develop when they meet,
 Trade, share, which is no easy feat,
 Which is just how we
 Developed to respect each
Other, we only flourish when we meet.

Lost Colour

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Leung, Tan Kiu – 13

Paintings on silk and paper
but I am carved on solid rock.

An endless canvas that stretches from
the East
to the West.

Carrying the intricate patterns of
the artisans that
gave birth to my colour.

But
my colour has dimmed.
The sapphire blue,
brassy gold,
and lurid red
illustrations of
villages and the almighty Buddha.

Now specks of dust
 bit
 by
 bit...
 Decaying.

My heart aches
as I tell you my colour
had once been cherished
and praised.
Their eyes who beheld me with respect
and caressed me with admiration.

Have left me behind.

As time passes,
So does my age and
I can only dream of
and even so,
very faintly.
About how I was praised
and treasured.

Until one day a door in the caves opened,
Light shining through,
and I could feel the warmth tingling through my engravings.
And there the sound
of footsteps
and chatter of excitement.

Faces gleaming with joy that approached me.
Polishing and shining my surface.
And as they did so,
my colour was restored.

The pigment had not been lost,
just buried under the blanket of dust.
No longer concealed.

So I thanked them,
For giving me the hope and the admiration that I deserved.
For giving me my colour back.

The Epic Poem of Arcturus

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Li, Barton – 12

HATE:

*Howl Arcturus' hate,
Sinful and unholy, that cost his home
Myriads of pain and suffering, that will cost his later generations
Years of
Fury
Wrath
Vengeance*

*Let Arcturus
Drown and rot
In his own blood
In his own misery
Howl Arcturus' hate.*

*The anger of Arcturus could not be subdued
For he was
Exiled from his own tribe
Exiled from his very own family
He seethed
He loathed
He would not forgive—
Hate had reigned over him
Hate had marred him
Arcturus was rotten to the core.*

•••

Arcturus climbed up, up, up
His callused hands
Scraping
Against the craggy, juttied mountain of the Mogao Caves
Sand dripped down
Wind roared
Boulders clashed against the decaying desert, crumbling to dust upon impact
Arcturus, though haughty and conceited, feared his own death
His consciousness would not allow himself to die
At least, not now.
He had to prove himself to his
Righteous, self-indulgent tribe
He thought
Leave my family's bodies to rot as feasts
For crows
For ravens
Leave my family's bodies to rot as feasts.

Arcturus' muscles ached
His sturdy body was sore, numb and agonized
A hue of death and blisters swarmed over Arcturus' hand
Prophesying imminent danger and foreboding
That has yet to come

Begin the voyage of Arcturus
The despotic, dishonourable warrior.

• • •

RAGE:

*Jeer Arcturus' rage,
Felonious and errant, that deprived his tribe
Of countless lives, plunging many victims
Into hell's reign.*

Who murdered children in their sleep?

Arcturus

Who set the tribesmen at each other's throats?

Arcturus

*Charax's son and Otonia's, furious at his tribe's ignorance, offended,
By the chieftain. Charax had injured Arcturus' pride;
Seeing him unfit to be the future leader
Jeer Arcturus' rage.*

• • •

Sweat trickled down Arcturus' mottled face
His body felt
As if on fire,
Burning, searing
He looked up woefully, wishing he could reach the pinnacle.

Night fell upon the coarse mountain
Arcturus sighed, he would not reach his destination
Not yet.

He looked at the blood red moon,
Listened, to the eery, ominous roars of the wind
And took his last breath, before
He let silence and the dark take over him.

Sleeping
Twitching
Groaning

• • •

GUILT:

*Scorn Arcturus' guilt,
Which led to the tribesmen's demise--
Several banishments of victims
The deaths of countless souls
The disgrace brought about by Arcturus
Son of the imperious chieftain,
Charax
Scorn Arcturus' guilt.*

• • •

In the tribe of the Mogao Grottoes,

*Or, what used to be,
Caves started crumbling,
Abandoned,
And deserted,
Albeit the remnants of unfortunate tribesmen—
Corpses and bones,
Dirt and dust.*

•••

A pearly, rosy hue shone softly,
Reflecting upon the decaying desert of the Mogao Grottoes

Arcturus awoke, groggily
After dreaming
About the Mogao Grottoes
Decaying
Crumbling
Disintegrating out of existence
Looking at his surroundings—
A tree, swarming with maggots
Arid climate
Barren, deserted
Patches of lifeless sagebrushes, swaying.

Arcturus squinted
Hesitated
It couldn't be—
Not after several years
To the point of dying out of exhaustion
It couldn't be...
His home—
The Mogao Grottoes?

Arcturus
Still dazed by his discovery
Plodded aimlessly
His throat ached, eagerly desirous for water
His mind lingered on his
Exile
The emotions he felt—
Hate
Rage
And most of all, guilt.

Arcturus trudged on for ages,
His mind wandering aimlessly
Hate, rage, guilt
Hate, rage, guilt
Arcturus looked up
Gazing upon a towering, decaying piece of debris
Engraved were the words
“Here lie the Mogao Grottoes”
He grinned, dementedly
He was at home at last.

•••

Arcturus' throat itched
Aching for water
And, as if on cue,
A pool of murky water appeared, in the doorsteps of the Mogao Grottoes
With scattered corpses of beetles
He scrambled down,
Gazing breathlessly
He cupped his
Filthy
Blotchy skin with
Water
Gulping it all down.

His eyes bulged
Veins popped out of his blotched face
His heart beat erratically
He started convulsing
His hands strangled at his neck, helplessly
Terror coiled in his stomach
Arcturus collapsed onto the grainy desert
Not breathing.
Not moving.

One step away.

•••

*Let Arcturus
Drown and rot
In his own blood
In his own misery
For his sins must be punished*

*Let Arcturus
Decay and disintegrate
Out of existence
Erased from history*

*Let him suffer for what he did--
Unholy
Corrupted
Immoral.*

•••

Ode to Mogao Caves

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Lu, Angelina – 14

On the verge of the Gobi desert
In the heart of the Silk Road
Where streams of ancient monks
And indulging explorers
Once travelled through
Breathing the fierce flow
Of century old sand
An essence of the grottoes
I longed to strode
The Peerless Caves
Stand in front of me and glow

One Mogao Cave would be enough to dumbstruck
To put me under a trance
Let alone 735 heavenly caves
All worn with time,
From whose infallible hands
Gave me a chance
To open my unworthy eyes
500 walls of hand-carved paintings
So beautiful, worthy to be hung up in the sky
I feel my first romance
As I stand admiring the images of history, culture, and religion

Forget not
The additional 235 walls
Barren yet bewitching
Dark yet illuminating
A place for eternal peace
Blocking unwanted calls
For one to free the mind
Preparation for enlightenment
A pathway once followed by the Buddha
The one who awakens truth
A life always recalled

Unfailing patience, dedication
Embedded in rock
Preserve long lost stories and primitive life
The life prior to the ticking of a clock
Medieval China
Printing, paper, and the compass
Bedazzled gems of Asia
The time of Europe's greatest paintings
The Last Supper, The School of Athens
Mona Lisa and the Sistine Chapel ceiling
Brothers and sisters exploring truth and wisdom

The Mogao Caves
Through natural disasters, sandstorms
Marauding rebels, greedy explorers
And other dangers

Tests of creators and mankind
It survived with scratches on its breast
The battle scars of true bravery
But most honourably
It awakens and arises
The people of digital technology
Of entrepreneurs and voices wanting to be heard

I stand in front of the caves
My dream to take a selfie
Vanishes in the humid, scorching air
I've fallen in love
Conversing with those who came to seek and left reborn
And the serenity and escape
From the bustling city
I don't need a picture to represent my love
For the power and the roar and the life
Of the Mogao caves
Live on in me
Everywhere I go

The Search

Harrow International School Hong Kong, Yan, Yutong – 13

Slowly,
stepping,
luring.
Allowing the heat to consume him like a hungry beast scavenging for its next meal.
Draining away.
Fabricating under the ruthless sun.
Each step was slower than the last;
his feet heavy on the deceiving sand beneath him.
Days
weeks
months.
How long has he been here?

(15 years ago)
He had first heard of the caves
as a young boy
who would get into trouble for;
digging up his neighbours' garden
or
making faces when
he thought
the teacher wasn't looking
or
throwing tiny pebbles at his classmates
when they irritated him
like red rashes growing
on your skin when you've been
sweating too much.
On days like those
his mother
would tenderly tuck him in the stiff bed;
the only bed
they could afford.
She would gingerly brush
his tangled hair,
attempting to use her fingers to
comb out the knots.
She would
lovingly stroke his bruised face
and tell the story her mother had once told her,
of the caves,
the ones filled with extraordinary relics;
the treasures of those who came before.
Her words flowed out of her mouth
like a steady stream of water
that soothed his restless mind
and comforted his uneasy heart.
But he had long neglected those stories.
They're just myths
after all;
forgotten fairytales.

(Present day)

The cloudless blue sky
formed a dome around Yuanlu
and dried him up
empty and hollow
and
hollow and empty.
Nothing more than a shell of a person;
an uncoiled machine.
Holding his lips tight
he wanted to scream;
to scream all those thoughts,
those swarming thoughts
invading his benumbed mind,
but his mouth
could no longer form words,
only a faint whisper managed to escape his chapped lips.
Finally,
his shaking knees gave out,
and he fell face-first onto the
caramel sand that seemed to stretch
so far.
So.Far.
So far it seemed to just fall down the side of the earth.

He didn't know what would consume him first,
the desert,
or the loneliness.
Loneliness.
It seems to have gotten heavier and heavier and heavier;
piling up like the dirt that had piled onto his skin.
Becoming thicker and thicker and thicker
with every vacant day he spent
and his hunger for human touch grew and grew and grew.
So he curled up into a tight ball
embracing himself
desperately trying to stimulate
any
sense of physical touch,
and fell into a deep
deep
slumber.

(5 years ago)

His mother had always expressed
her desire to experience the Mogao Caves for herself,
so when Yuanlu's mother passed,
he started to research about the caves;
desperate to fulfill his mother's
dying wish.
When he told others about it;
which he did plenty,
they would just laugh and shake his head
saying that those were just
fairy tales.

But when they started to realize
that this wasn't just a half-hearted
joke,
a look of concern
permanently painted itself on their
judging faces.
And all those faces;
hushed and still and staring,
so desperate to pursue his mother's last wish
Slowly, it started to become an obsession;
eating away at him little by little,
consumed by the accumulation of loose papers
and books.
Then finally,
after years of research,
with just the clothes on his body
and a rucksack on his back,
he was set to search for the
Mogao Caves;
in the memory of his beloved mother.

(Present day)

Yuanlu awoke
and through his half-opened eyes
he saw a swirling vision of
crimson reds and camel beiges.
A temple.
The temple stood alone
in front of the wall
that had previously obstructed Yuanlu's path.
Half engulfed in the rocky terrain.
There is no explanation for it,
a temple
an entrance to a cave
in the middle of the barren desert
that seems to stretch for miles in every direction.
There was no door
and even though the sun shone so mercilessly;
the temple seemed to swallow the light,
only eternal darkness;
a never-ending void.
Still half-awake,
Yuanlu rubbed his eyes
once,
twice,
three times.
But instead of dissolving into nothingness
like the mirage he expected,
the temple stood firm
as if its roots stretched far beneath the surface,
deep into the beating heart of the Earth.

A sudden desperation
took over of him;
Controlling him like a puppet,
and he ran towards the temple.
And as his frail,
blistered feet

stepped onto the ground for the first time,
he felt a wave of shock
overcome his body.
Had he been away so long that he'd
forgotten
how it felt to touch
of a solid surface?
He called out into the dark
and the only thing he was greeted back with,
was his own voice.
He reached into his frayed pocket
and took out a matchbox.
As he removed
a match
from the box,
a dazzling fire
blossomed in the murky darkness,
then watched the light
dance onto the barren walls of the cave.

Wandering through the labyrinth of caverns
the stillness of caves
created restlessness,
causing Yuanlu to be more paranoid
that there were other life present.
Something caught his eye;
in the coarse darkness
he could make out
human-like figures.
As he raised his tiny match
it suddenly explodes into a
mammoth bonfire,
soaking everything in its
brilliant light.
Yuanlu winced
as his eyes slowly adjusted to the dark,
and saw time-worn statues
looming over his trifling figure.
Deities frozen in time
unblinking eyes
that observed all that happened,
and for a moment,
Yuanlu forgot his agony,
he forgot his desolation
his aching body.
For a moment,
he forgot everything.
He forgot how to breathe.
Yuanlu stepped closer
to examine the artifacts.
The sandy palette
so soothing to the eye.
The murals on the walls so impossible intricate,
each stroke of the brush
so lovingly painted.
The lines curved and twisted
to form beautiful images,
and even though it has visibly faded with time,
it aged like fine wine;
each dent

each scratch
each mark
tells a story that has long been forgotten.

Tears filled Yuanlu's eyes
as the whole world turned into a blurry mess of colours,
with every beat of his heart
it grew louder and louder and louder.
He had finally found it,
all those doubts tearing him apart,
those glaring eyes
those restless nights.

His mother was right and so was he.

It wasn't just a forgotten fairy tale.
He could feel warm air by his cheek,
he could hear his mother's lips near his ear
"I'm proud of you Wang Yuanlu"
Tears started flowing down his face
like mighty rivers,
clearing his eyes of all the accumulated dust and sand.
He ran down through the maze of caverns;
paying no mind to his burning feet
and the deafening roar of his heartbeat,
he ran from grotto to grotto
in awe of the splendor and beauty
before him.
The fire led him
From one cavern to another,
illuminating the pathway before him;
the flame so unpredictable,
as if taunting and provoking him.
Despite that,
he felt like an ecstatic child
on a treasure hunt;
a state of pure euphoria.

When he finally resurfaced
to the empty desert,
a group of travelers spotted
a sluggish speck on the horizon of the desert.
Too exhausted to talk,
the travelers
hauled Yuanlu onto the back of one of the laborious camels,
then offered him food and water;
ready to take him home.
And whilst his body
sat slumped on the back of a traveler's camel,
his mind
still lay in the eternal halls of the Mogao Caves.

New Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

Heep Yunn School, Shing, Yee Isis – 14

Magnificent cave, perched on a desert.
Abounded with uniqueness, as the monks assert.
Thousands of pilgrims took the advice,
As to view it with their own eyes.

The devotees dug their cave,
And decided to stay, they pave.
People created sacred arts and literature,
Knowing that pieces looked like no other.

But time elapsed and years passed,
The Mogao Grottoes were soon never asked.
It was no more than an arenaceous legend,
That anyone could have forgotten in a second.

Yet someone has rediscovered this extraordinary cave,
The breath-taking secrets were unlocked by the brave.
Hundreds of caverns were revealed upon them,
Paintings, sculptures, and literature sparked like a gem.

Howbeit the most astonishing one was the statue.
They knew it was ancient but it looked brand new.
It appeared to be majestic yet serene and ancient.
The Buddha stood before them with preordainment.

Abruptly the sand on the floor started to whirl,
And an archaic book was then revealed by the swirl.
The scholars felt as if they had time travelled,
Were destined to see the lost secrets of the past unravelled.

Taken aback by the real reason for Mogao's disappearing,
They found that the book was a diary that was missing.
It recorded all the deepest secrets of the place,
And witnessed the vicissitudes of the face.

The place was deserted because of two gigantic creatures,
Which were reluctant to let through the preachers.
They guarded the cave like it was a treasure,
And slaughtered the pilgrims since they had displeasure.

Diarist advised the monks to pause their coming,
But they were here to cease the creatures from thrumming.
Therefore, myriads of tragedies occurred,
They finally took the diarist's word to stop the absurd.

"Never challenge the nature," he said,
"It will just lead you to dread."
If only the travellers had listened to the diarist,
Their lives could have been cherished.

Hope

Hong Kong International School, Decatur, Connor David – 14

It was that one day I made the discovery of discoveries.
The pinch of salt that accumulated the very being of its existence
Oh, how sweet, oh, how lovely to receive
This cave was the cave of the free.

The texture of the walls,
So tender, so alive.
Oh, how immense the attitude of it lived inside.
It sought to belong, not drown nor forsake
This cave was the cave of those worthy to be safe.

Oh, and yes it grew,
It grew and increased.
The days passing by found more context underneath.
It continued to strive, not worsen or die
Oh, and yes it grew,
It grew and increased.

Growth was the name of the special
Had the special throw the name of growth away,
Had the cave gradually faded away.

What was the name of growth called again?
No sight, no existence
This discovery had no remembrance.

Was it 1000 years later?
Who even knew?
This cave was the cave of the free.

The growth of the special was isolated,
Abandoned, forsaken.
Oh, and yes it grew,
It grew and increased.

Seconds became minutes,
Minutes became hours,
Hours became days,
Days became weeks,
Weeks became months,
Months became years,
Years became decades,
Decades became centuries.

For hope was sought to be discovered again,
The cave had no need to continue.
However, it then became the day I made the discovery of discoveries.
Oh, how sweet, oh how lovely to receive
This cave was once again the cave of the free.

Caves may not be humans I must say,
For without hope humans nor caves would live till this day.

The Writing on the Wall

Hong Kong International School, Mei, Mollie Yufan – 13

Stalagmites shaped into
Humans of stone,
Lampblack ink made into
Art and scripture on the walls –
Faded but still there,
Lost but not gone.

Yet art
barely scratches
the surface
Of what was hidden
On purpose,
Shielding unwanted eyes
From the things that were not meant
To be seen.

Beyond safety,
Beyond humanity,
Beyond the present.
Backstage,
They hide
The pain.

My grandmother used to tell me
Forgotten things are never to be found,
And how one man's trash
Could not possibly
Be another's treasure.

Once upon a time,
I believed her.
Now?
I don't know
That she's right.

A voice
Behind the curtains
Screams.

Bad Dream

International College Hong Kong, Ho, Alyssa – 13

Fireflies,
Fill the
Still night of
China.

Flares of
Luminescence,
The
Nocturnal
Beings
Piercing the
Leaden sky.

A Man
Spellbind
By their
Beguiling glow,
An irresistible
Invitation
To the
Mogao Caves.

Passing
A threshold
From
Familiarity,
To the
Raw reality
Of the
Unknown.

Mogao Caves,
Alive with
Strife,
Imprints of
Good
And evil
Echoing
Boundlessly.

An unending
Battle
Between
The forces.

An aura of

Fear
Crowned
Upon him,
And the
Warning
Rhythm of
Danger
Invades.

Demons
Lunge
Towards the
Soul,
Unseen
To the
Naked eye,
Yet prevail in
Mankind's
Troubled
Thoughts.

The fireflies,
Engulfed by
The viscous
Shadows of
Blackness,
Lifeless fireflies
Engraved
Onto the
Indifferent
Walls of the
Mogao Caves.

But
Impermanence
Remains
In the
Ruthless
Triumphs
Of evil.

Ambiguity
Awakens
Mankind
To the
Victorious
Rise of
China's
Sun.

Above the
Mogao Caves,

Cascades of
Warmth
Heal the
Bad dreams
Of the
Chinese.

Treasure of the West

International School of Beijing, Ma, Andrew – 13

Far far away in the west,
The city of Dunhuang lies at rest.
Long ago a treasure was buried,
Through myths and legends it was carried.
Deep in the caves the treasure lies,
Those who seek it will meet their demise.
Through the crevices into the caves,
For those who linger it'll become their grave.
Millions of men seek the loot,
Searching desperately for the hidden fruit.
Long ago it was hidden there,
Waiting for its rightful heir.
For millennia it laid sunbathed,
Till this day it remains unscathed.

The Mogao Caves

Marymount Secondary School, Chan, Eugenia – 14

Organisation of space as unique and artistic,
Filled with antique sculptures that are mystic.
Paintings from the Sui, Tang and Song dynasties,
All are precious properties.

Caves of the Thousand Buddhas,
People around the world came to visit.
Breathtaking views and statues around,
Histories of Mogao Caves seem to surround.

Buddhas, bodhisattvas, heavenly fairies,
and motifs in murals holding mysteries.
They might not shine in everyone's heart,
But glows in every part in ancient times.

Oasis

Marymount Secondary School, Chow, Alvina – 14

A sense of wildness,
Surroundings seemingly suffering.
A sense of loneliness,
Alone I am standing.

Caves with Buddhist stories,
Caves with Chinese history.
Grottoes it comprises,
Civilisation is like a mystery.

On a camel I am riding,
Like an aboriginal in ancient times.
The breeze along the journey,
Gives a refreshing nudge of hope.

Poem about Dunhuang: The oasis city on the Silk Road and Mogao Caves

My Mogao Caves

Marymount Secondary School, Tsang, Ling Hei Angie – 14

A grotto, a history
Drawings, statues, scriptures, legend
The Buddha is sitting
The Bodhisattva is standing
Listening to the pleasant sound by the pipa

In a split second
Everything in silence
Is someone talking about me?
My journey spread into everyone's ears
Full of people worshipping me

Mogao Grottoes
A profound poetry
A salubrious song
A honourable history
A measureless mythology

Masterpiece

Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Lau, Shannon – 13

I
was hauled from the heart
of virtuosos millennia ago
Carved into slabs of rock,
a dust-covered
Masterpiece.

I housed
Millions of stories.
Millions of people
encountered
this Masterpiece worth
Millions

Fingers traced the culture
as abounding as a thriving field
embedded in my walls
Eyes gazed upon the statues and libraries
the years of knowledge and wisdom
encased in me.

I
am a Masterpiece, with value
not in currencies
but in sentiment
Priceless
as some would say

But

I was forgotten.

I couldn't recollect
the last time a creature came across me
the last time someone breathed life into me
the last time somebody cared

Time passed me by
I was left alone, with nothing but History to keep me company
and I felt myself slipping away
corroding, disintegrating into the universe

I spent my days
grievously admiring the fading paintings and sculptures
Dwelling on the fact that I, as a Masterpiece,
was gone, banished from existence.

Until

Slivers of light
peeked into my void
Something—

No—
Someone.

Finally.

I
am a Masterpiece, who was
uncovered
discovered
restored to my former glory.

My sorrowful heart
was unravelled
The silence I was habituated to
was muffled by gasps
of awe and wonderment

The world now
knew my name
The deserved prestige
Finally
in my palm

It was Wang Yuanlu
who tossed me the lifebelt.
On behalf of the pilgrims and monks
Thank you, Yuanlu
We shall be eternally grateful.

The Thousand Buddha Grottoes

Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Ng, Isabella – 12

In a mystical place, far, far away
Hidden from both Night and Day
His prying eyes, meant for none to see
There once was a cave where the Buddha lived.

There once was a man, they say, as well
Who built the cave after he said they'd tell
Him, his soul, of what the far future held:
The past, present, and who'd stand at the helm.

(By they, he explained, he meant the great One;
The One who was near; the One who was far.)
Where he preached in golden glory, radiant in his prime
And warned, not yet – now was not the time.

This he proclaimed with such melancholy as he grieved,
Struck upon his sweet face as he heaved,
Like damasked red roses, said a wise man –
That once was yet lost its tentative touch by hand.

(Flowers' scent, stolen from his fragrant breath
Why did the sun above, his fiery eyes?
The colour of coral, dyed from his lips
Where pretty pearls of ivory stood tall and fair

He swore, Adonis in the blood and flesh
Was not half as pretty as him, my prince
As his beauty, famed, did evince
Numbness; mere shadows imitated in death.)

All of this passed through the mind of the man
As he stood in dumb awe in front of the stand
Up where the Buddha sat, high on his plinth
Where once, the soul of a man had lived.

(But after the first, curious vision
More came free from the dark bars of prison
One after another under the shining sun,
Lasting ever after as History spun.)

Fear me not, they murmured, one and all,
“We are the bringers of time,” they said in the halls.
Until decades later, they were heard through the walls,
Enshrined with the beauty of him at his call.

More captivating still were the pictures of art,
Where of Nature's grace he inscribed on his heart,
Threw down his luxury and left down his cart
Filled with mortal baggage at the castle with bards.

He wandered the world, a gentle white dove,
Compassioned with sharp wit and delicate love.

His famed weapon, the tranquil peace he brought
To ease out the sins that the net of Men caught.

Everywhere he preached, and everywhere he taught –
Flowers, they grew where men knew naught.
Beauty hidden in the fragile masks within
Were unveiled, cast, 'neath the heels.

So the man, unmasked to see such in a haze,
Built up a grotto through his dreams in a daze.
And all that came by, from closer or further away,
Exclaimed, "The soul of the Buddha still stays."

Yet now, we must ask, was that really it?
For the years went by, bit by bit –
There it lay in the desert, blown over by sand,
What those in their pilgrimage built by hand.

The statues and carvings and paintings from distant lands,
And literature, those books! written in brilliant fervour, an expanse,
Of areas sketched, details captured in wordings of eld;
But gathered in dust, yet to be blown off, unfulfilled.

An abundance of art, a magnificent library,
Bibliotecas, tomes, and opuses – more than one could carry.
(Could jewels rich in culture stay 'till distant now?
The mighty scabbard of Strength; the carved wooden bow.)

Crumbling, forgotten, mildewed treasure lost
In glittering gold and dazzling diamonds, not without a cost
And now dozens flock to sight the Thousand Buddha Grottoes
Where the statues come to life, where the paintings are aglow.

(Those puzzle pieces of hopes, of a faraway mirage,
Shattered and dashed into pieces of ash,
In conflagrations lost with the workings of Time –
Tick, tock, goes his scythe, and so do brazen bells chime.)

And even as the decades of musty years bray
"Fate and kindness are of equal weight," as the Buddha says.

The World Within: The Mogao Caves

Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Wong, Matthew – 13

Stumbling, staggering
Over a boundless, vast sea
Of irate Sand jarring.
Stumbling, staggering.

Blind steps in the callous cold,
Ragged cloth and waning resolve,
Sleep deprived, rest forestalled.
Fragile warmth— monk's humble abode.

Sadistic grit on tender flesh.
Stumbling, staggering.

A flood of ecstasy,
Buoyant burst of rejoice, jubilation!
In dusty sea all so heartless and hostile,
Lies a sanctuary, an oasis so lush!

He staggered into Trāyastriṃśa,
The vibrant glow of emerald life,
A light, deep within
The unforgiving Sea of Darkness.

Many suns have set,
In this island of verdure,
Where he desperately scavenged,
determined to endure.

Yet this was bliss,
After the trod and stumble in the endless sea,
One not of the soft touch of silk,
But the biting frost of sand.

Yet now he ambled.
Not stumbling, nor staggering, carefree.

In this lush paradise,
He came across a cave so cold and damp,
Yet devoid of malice or contempt.
A radical, primal urge for the monk
To bring forth a fire, a light,
And delve into the black.

The fire was lit,
A gasp let out.
Whimsical stumble into treasure trove,
Preciousness worth more than gold.

Over the span of countless centuries,
The cave drew people like flame to moths,
And the cave at last was homely and warm,
Revelry as loud as storms.

Senseless bloodbaths and wars,
No blood could stain the timeless cave.
Yet the dust of time can't tarnish but it will cover,
The inexorable fate where
Layers
And
Layers
Of ancient history and ceaseless, flowing time
Cover the cave in the coffin of Myth.
And the revelry faded,
The prosperity—forgotten.

Till a youthful scholar coincided
On the cave, stumbling, staggering.

A world untouched,
A civilisation pure and united,
Untainted by the polluted ideals
Of the human world.
People free to live,
While others stumbled, staggered across the arduous journey that they call "life".

Saga of Mogao Grottoes

Shangahi American School – Pudong, Jain, Neev – 13

“Man of Tabgach, clan of Xian–Bei,
Son of Bahamut.
Dismantle your dwellings, build a shrine.
Reject Hindrance and acknowledge clines!
Put aboard the sprout of Shakya's, into the shrine.
The shrine you are to build
Shall have a thousand' enlightened ones,
Their width and length shall be in polyphony,
Enclose them with hints of Confucianism.”
For a thousand years and 7 nights
The mistral blew, boulders and grime overwhelmed the land;
When the seventh night arrived the sweat, fatigue, and yearning onslaught
Which had struggled like the woman in labor, like notorious whipping and fines,
Blew themselves out, confined.
The chattel became tranquilized, the inhallu wind grew quiet, the desperation held back.
They sought the sky; silence became apparent,
For centuries have elapsed, mankind became as clay.
One opened a porthole and light poured on his cheeks.
He bent down, then sat. He wept.
Tears of charisma and charm, fell from his eyes.
Serenity, Astonishment, quietude transfixed his mind,
He looked far down, eyes upon him;
And shouted, “它的壮丽, 它的辉煌 让我眼花缭乱!” (Its magnificent, its glorious blinded me!).”
“Man of Tabgach, clan of Xian–Bei, Son of Bahamut.
Youth of delight and future, come hither,
Reckon' the Stele of Buddha Maitreya.
Reckon' the Vajrapāṇi,
Reckon' the pulchritude of Bodhisattva.”
Twas' the eyes of lustrous ocher; mouth of virtue;
Speckle of memoir; twinkle of ebullience.
Beauty itself' was the contrapuntal Bhudas;
Enchantment, Twas' the result of purity.
Polyphony, Twere' the legacy of diligence.
The 14th century soon progressed, worship and pilgrimage soon became apparent,
In the Mogao Grottoes.
Now, as I look towards the idiosyncrasies of the thousand Shakya's,
I am nonplused,
The shrouded stories; secrets that show no lie.
Oh' great: Yuezun; why was your vision?
Yuezun; What was your vision?
Yuezun; How was your vision?
Was destiny chosen, given, or built?

Dusty Legend

Shanghai American School – Pudong, Bolstein, Alicia – 13

Our planet is like the old artifacts
Of the Mogao Grottoes.
Delicate. *So delicate.*
Remarkable. *So remarkable.*
Beautiful. *So beautiful.*

It can be wiped away with
One.
Single.
Touch.

The caves of the Mogao Grottoes
Began as a place for meditation.
Home to

Peace *and quiet.*

Later, as people built
More and more and more Caves,
It became a place

worshipped *and loved.*

Soon, the caves of the Mogao Grottoes
Were painted beautifully
with

Care *and respect.*

Oh, were these caves
Special.

The caves were a way to meditate
with it's

Peace *and quiet*

The caves were a way to teach the younglings
to be

Worshipped *and loved*

The caves were a way to show the beauty of Chinese culture
with

Care *and respect*

But soon, the darkest side of humankind
began to
Reveal
Itself.

Us.
Humans.
Decided.
To.
Stop.
Acknowledging.
The caves.
Of Mogao Grottoes.

The beauty of the Mogao Grottoes.
Was forgotten.

Merely
A dusty legend.

That held
treasures,
Stories,
And the beauty of humankind
Inside all the caverns.

All.
Forgotten.

As if the past was something not
Worth commemorating for.
As if the past was something not
Worth caring for.
As if the past was something not
Worth fighting for.

The caves of Mogao Grottoes
Had not been touched since
the Silk Road had ended.

Humans thinking everything else
Is more important
than the Mogao Grottoes.

Not caring about
The sand
That slowly started to build up in the caves.

The caves
With all those
Precious paintings,
Amazing artifacts,
Spectacular sculptures.

Like the magnificent mural of Avalokitesvara,
Or the marvelous Maitreya Buddha,
And the confounding Chinese Diamond Sutra.

All that love

beneath
The sand.

The silk road
Had been
A place,
Road,
Thing
Historians were curious about.
Because they did not know
Or forgotten
What it was.

Explorers
Looked,
And looked,
And looked.
Until a person named Wang Yuan Lu
Was credited for
discovering/not discovering
The Mogao Grottoes.

People began to take much interest
in the treasures.

Taking it
From the sacred walls,
Stealing it
From the magnificent cave,
Breaking it
From its home.

Now, after the discovery, and loads of drama,
UNESCO finally made the Mogao Grottoes
a world heritage site.
Making sure that every
Detail,
Care,
And love still there
Is kept safely.

The Mogao Grottoes
Is like
Our planet.

Earth.

Once a place
full of

peace *and quiet,*

A place
That was

Worshipped *and loved,*

A place
Full of

Care *and respect*

Has lost all the memories
Beneath the layers of rock
Within itself.

The Mogao Grottoes
Are sacred
But our planet
Is much more.
And unlike we did to the marvelous Mogao Grottoes
We must do our part in not forgetting
The beauty of our planet's past
And do our best
To keep,
And not steal,
The precious artifacts
Of our planet.

Earth
is just a droplet of life
In the midst of a
Never-ending, vast universe.

If we take the precious artifacts of our planet,
our planet
Delicate. *So delicate.*
Remarkable. *So remarkable.*
Beautiful. *So beautiful.*

Can be wiped away with
One.
Single.
Touch.

If we don't do anything save our planet from ourselves,
All the amazing artifacts of the past
Will be buried and forgotten by our descendants
Who might not be as lucky as the explorers
And find the treasure beneath
The sand
Of our future.

But hope.

A word that people use for
the good *Or the bad*
The mighty *Or the weak*
The powerless *Or the powerful*

Is something that we must keep forever in our minds
Because it is what will help us

Put an end to our old propensity
And rewrite the story
of our planet.

Cite for the history incorporated within the poem: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mogao_Caves#History

AUTHORS NOTE:

The Mogao Grottoes is a spectacular place. It's full of beautiful artifacts, amazing treasures, and a glimpse of how Chinese culture was like at the time of the silk road. These grottoes also have a big history behind them too. This is why I used the Mogao Grottoes as a metaphor to emphasize how carelessly and how irresponsibly we are caring for our planet. Obviously, us, humans, have been taking the world for granted. The resources Earth has given us, the life Earth has given us, the happiness Earth has given us have never been fully appreciated. All we have ever done is taken from our planet and not given back. Not only that, but we have forgotten the beauty of nature that we disrupted as the way we live now in the modern day slowly became a common practice and humans started focusing on others things supposedly more important than our planet. I hope that this poem will remind people of the beauty of our Earth and inspire everyone to learn more about how our actions are affecting and hurting the planet. As long as there is hope, we will be able to fix the damage that we have done.

Mogao Grottoes

Shanghai American School – Pudong, Wei, Joy – 14

*Life is a candle, time is the glimmering embers,
our existence gradually burns away,
time cannot be fought against or reversed,
but we can travel along its passing.*

In the naïve conscience of my diminished youth,
I dreamed of living forever,
exceeding life,
escaping the demise that awaited every soul.

Upon the crossroads of Dunhuang my childhood flourished,
blooming in a golden age;
my roots lay in Mogao,
guarded by the endless desert,
drenched by the blistering sun;
perched upon the sand, the Silk Roads stretched far,
twin pathways of the East and West,
the oasis of commerce and intrigue,
where difference mingled, merchants hawked their wares;
livelihood brought by trade and travel,
fought the monotony of the dunes.

Amongst the architecture, the Grottoes of Mogao loomed tall,
its rocky hills steep and resolute,
etched and carved from the cliffs,
its eastward cave faces greeted the sun.

Hums of chanting,
tolling of sacred bells,
prayers and incense rose to the heavens,
belief and religion swelled.

My house sat on wheels, accompanied by herds of cattle,
we ate meat and drank milk, we bartered for fruit,
we wore straw sandals,
dressed in garments of woven hemp and cotton.

My father was a wise merchant,
I gaze wonderingly at father as he exchanged elegant boxes of gleaming porcelain,
his gentle brow furrowed, carving deep crevasses across his forehead,
his nod of approval,
signaled agreements made, deals sealed.

Mother was a skilled seamstress,
At night, I peeked over my covers,
as mother sat and wove handsome brocades,
the threads crossing and splitting, sorting and cutting;
her folklore filled my mind with great warriors, dragons, people grasping the reach of immortality.
Xian.

Immortal life.
Mere mortals becoming eternal beings,
unbothered by war and bloodshed,
untouched by the elements,
they live an effortless existence,
separate of the bloodied world of mankind.

I imagined that life,
free,
unburdened,
impossible.

From that point on,
I wanted to win the race against the hours,
it was only a matter of time before my life goes out,
my candle snuffed.

I vow to defy that end,
I won't let the flame catch on,
I will always move forward,
I shall escape that destiny.

Time burns on.

I have grown old,
my view sharpened,
my gaze broadened,
my childhood playfulness gone.

I am dissatisfied,
ever desiring more to life,
for that nagging fear of demise,
like a beast of chasing from behind,
waiting glean my soul,
kept me scurrying forwards.

Lost in the tumult,
wandering on the busy streets of Mogao,
seeing people dancing, greeting, trading;
they lived unbothered, no trace of dread or worry,
merchants called,
sheep bleated,
horses pawed the dust,
craftsmen bent over copper, silver, gold,
tools dancing in metallic reflections,
the symphony of hammering and chatter.

Overwhelmed, I pace through the grottoes,
hoping to find clarity;
their numbers have grown,
from afar like anthills,
each grottoe yawned their openings.
I follow the trodden paths through the caves,
becoming lost,
encircled by this labyrinth.

Murals lay motionless,
they stretched across the ceiling,
stood on sandstone walls,
mingled with intricate carvings and delicate text;
They danced to the distant chanting,
Illuminated in the sunlight.
They depicted legends, deities, paradise
rich culture visualized by bright pigments of peacock green, deep aqua,
ruby red and warm amber,
adorned with gold and silver leaves.
Statues sat cross-legged, in serene meditation,

Feitian graced the skies, or amongst sumptuous palaces,
Buddha reclined upon daises, dressed in elaborate robes and grand headdresses.
Their sentient faces,
their air of reverence and neutrality,
rested in perpetual peace.

Time burns on.

I continue my race,
I followed the Silk Road on my own, westward,
journeying to foreign lands.
my old fears ever lingered,
driving my nomadic life forward.

Time burns on.

Decades have swung by,
carving crude canyons across my skin,
wrinkles and scars, scattering like constellations,
I have seen the world far and wide,
I need not travel further.

Tired, weary, bedraggled,
I lose the gaiety of laughter,
I forget the grandeur of youth,
I sink into contempt and cynicism,
wallowing in my own ennui,
doubting trust like a miser with hidden gold.

I can no longer move on.
I slowly lose race with the hour.

Time burns on.

Abandoning travel,
I trace the worn roads to my roots,
to those soaring sandstone cliffs,
and the deep caverns.

Time burns on.

Before the threshold of the Grottoes, I am again,
this time I gaze with clouded eyes,
balanced on creaky joints,
shaky hands grasping the walls.

The murals again greet me,
the painted gods and sacred text,
people swirling in an eternal dance;
their color hardly changed,
their faces clear and young.

I slump before their serene countenance,
hands frayed beyond recognition,
body landing into the incessant trickle of the hourglass,
my once fair frame contorted by the second;
I remember my wish,
so long ago,
that impossible dream to live forever,
now I reminisce in sorrow.

With one last effort,
driven by no clear rationale,
I write down my life on an empty cavern wall,
painted in gilded characters.
now, perhaps, I will live again,
my story can stay within these Grottoes;
turn into a myth, a folklore,
I will remain in the memory of humankind,
becoming part of that antiqued past,
but in living consciousness I shall last.

Time burns on.

I lay there, near the dunes,
buried beneath wisps of sand,
the future clouded as my eyes dimmed,
stillness encompassed my broken form,
as a final thought drifted across my mind:
*If my wandering conscience had stayed,
paused my stubbornness to notice the world around me,
then, I could have beheld
the true beauty of the present.*

Stop this useless struggle,
I had lived in worry,
but now, I find clarity
I relent and let time burn on.

The candle neared its end,
the wax trickling away,
time, at last caught up,
and I allow the flames to burn out.

Epilogue

Time, again, burns on,
centuries drift past, carried upon its curling smoke;
soft footsteps, echo upon deserted caverns,
a new exploration takes place,
daring to seek the pathways of Dunhuang's lost world.
They hear the voices, the whispered songs,
they read the gilded text whose bearer forgotten,
but listen to the stories, his unfinished scroll,
and envision that wandering boy, who lived long ago.

The Universal Ruler

Singapore International School, Kwong, Cheuk Yin Jonathan – 13

In the ages of dynasties,
In the era of crusades,
A boy was born,
Into a baptism of fire and wrath.

Great things he was destined for,
Born with a destiny to lead the greats,
Can Temüjin¹ rise to unite
His peoples across the steppe?

Lesser men may have relied upon armies of flesh and bronze,
But Temüjin united the Mongolians
Not through fear and death,
But with tolerance and freedom, diversity and religion

An army built through skill and merit,
Mongol tribes united under one banner,
All his enemies subdued,
Temüjin was crowned as the universal ruler, Genghis Khan!

With his loyal followers behind him,
And his army of cavalry in front of him,
He set his eyes on the Eurasian Steppe,
But this would be his last great act to come.

A fire extinguished in the same way it was ignited,
Genghis Khan died in his great conquests across China.
And left Mongolia as a blazing flame that would expand even after his death.
And taught the terrifying cacophony of his cavalry to the world.

¹ Genghis Khan's name before he was crowned the "Genghis" title.

Carvings of the Caves

Singapore International School, Mak, Chun Ho – 13

At the dawn of creation I was nothing
But hard rock and stone.
Until that fateful day
Where my creator came
From his homeland of China.

Seeing the come and go of men
From homes of faraway land.
To see the blessings of our lord¹
With it their tired spirits restored

Glimpsing the day where I would be gone.
As with death comes life,
I saw the loss of many.
With every winter, every eclipse, every war²,
I saw the broken dreams of men, washing ashore.

At that time my youthful mind still thought
My beauty, my youth, my history, all unrivaled,
My name, Mogao³, peerless and unequalled.
Until that fateful day a thousand years after
No one came to see me.
Gradually, slowly,

My caves, my carvings, crumbling,
My existence dwindling
Disappearing into the void.

My slumber felt peaceful, blissful
Yet I knew it would end
But how did it end
I have never imagined.

As sunlight showered me with her golden halo
The sand⁴ in my walls soon evaporated,
Leaving me bare
And people, people pointing at me.

As they entered my caverns
I realised
How did humanity change so much
With their special tools and magic
So different, did they look

As they entered, they gasped
Gasping at my history
My art, my world.

As more and more came
They themselves chose
To once again paint their history, their lives, their legacies,
On these very walls, just like their ancestors did
Bringing shards of memory being restored
To my soul.

For many years then

I rediscovered life
The brilliant, radiant green hue
That beautiful smell of life.
The sketches that was with me since the beginning
Grew even broader in their old age
Growing ever so wiser
With their ever growing canvas
Extending beyond the reach of our understanding.

As time goes on
More and more people come
Without knowing it
They paint a piece of art everytime
Breathing life into my walls

Proving how much humanity has grown
Has progressed, has adapted,
Has developed,
From a tiny, orange flame
To a red, glowing inferno.

The battles they have fought and lost
The trials they have overcome and failed
All recorded inside my walls.

So you see now,
I am not just a hole in the ground.
In my walls hold
The untold truth of humanity
In my caves hold
The paintings of our history
In me I feel
The carvings set me free.

Notes:

lord¹ – Buddha, the heavenly god whom the monks worship

war² – The devastating wars the Chinese fought. One of them most notably the An Lushan Rebellion, where General An Lushan declared himself emperor of Northern China, and fought the Tang Dynasty. This lasted through the reigns of three Tang emperors.

Mogao³ – The name that the caves were given, which means “Peerless”.

sand⁴ – Referring to the sands of the Gobi Desert, where the Mogao Caves are situated at its edge. The Gobi Desert is one of the world’s largest deserts, and is between China and Mongolia.

Faithful Follower

Singapore International School, Yan, Heidi Wye En – 12

I am a faithful follower of the great buddhas,
What they represent; true enlightenment.
Withstanding the golden death rays of the scorching sun,
And the isolating cold of this desert which seemed to stretch for ages.
Beads of pearls slid down my forehead.
My vision blurred,
my legs couldn't keep up.
My body ached and wore me down
But I had to continue, 'twas my life's motto, my mission.
As I gave my all to push.
A little more was all I needed.
My legs gave their last and fell out under me,
Gasping for air to breathe.
Everything blurred,
My mind, a mess.
A white fog clouded my vision.
Knowing there was a light somewhere,
I dragged my numb body upwards,
Barely moving an inch,
I used the power left.
I knew this was all in my head.
But,
I caught sight of something,
A blinding light,
A flare.
Stretching out into the horizon
across my vision,
It was clear as day.
The message was clear,
That even one's eyes whom
Have befallen upon would know.
And before that iridescent bead dripped down into the solid abyss,
I had my mission.
In my hand,
Life's essence.
The labor,
The patience,
The purpose,
Foretold.

And so,

With purpose I spent my years.
With patience I worked them away.
With punitive labour did I busy my hands,
For I had my mission.
I knew to complete
I knew alone, my task
would I fail to undertake, so
I called out, told others word of the mission
And Henceforth they came,
And they labored,

To sought enlightenment.
I'm glad others understood my urgency
To praise Enlightenment,
To follow their directs,
To labor.
To give effort to the Thousand Buddhas I glimpsed
So perhaps, later in my life
May I find Enlightenment,
And be free from this world
...Of Mortal recoil.

Our blood,
sweat.
Our mission.
All were endorsed in the caverns and patterns.
Each fine dent, and curve
Each swirl and carve,
All the small, fine details.
To make a wondrous big picture.
All held meaning.
Art with defined definition,
Indeed a sight to behold.
An empty yet elegant space,
Waiting to be filled with the artifacts it deserves.
Scrolls and books with frail, dry pages,
Each with a tint of yellow.
Containing the golden secrets
Frozen in the past, yet to be told.
Great towering arches,
Painted with vibrant colors.
The geometrical yet organic shapes engraved against the painted walls,
The outburst of creativity and sole dedication to this location
All could be noticed.
The strong, unique aura of this location,
Could be noticed.
This was a sign of our dedication.
The is was the successful proof, of my mission.
Our mission.
This was to be remembered,
Was so they would realize; The great buddha.

time passed,

My calls spread as if a wildfire had begun in the dry bushes.
Followers addressed the mission and contributed valuable amounts.
Even after my time in this life was over,
My legacy still remained,
As if an invincible pillar of steel.

I am a faithful follower of the great buddhas,
I am a story of many;
A grain of sand,
in the great Taklamakan desert.

A New Journey to the Mogao Grottoes

St. Paul's Co-educational College, Lai, Caitlin Gretchen – 12

I am tired.

Tired of the sand in my socks
That managed to wriggle its way in
Through the plastic shoe covers
Tired of the sweat in my shirt
That never seems to evaporate
Though the sun blazes

But I am here.

Here at the reception desk
Holding the ticket between my fingers
Hoping the trek was worth it
Here at the famous Mogao Grottoes
Holding a map in my hands
Hordes of tourists pushing me around

Cameras click as people pose
In front of the grottoes, centuries old
So unremarkable, only marked by two doors
But all that glitters isn't gold

So I enter.

Enter a world rivalling
Even that of Machu Picchu
Every sculpture carefully chiselled to perfection
Enter the caves and hallways where
Even the hardest of stones comes to life
Ever so slightly, robes fluttering, hair waving

And I am back.

Back when monks were stuffing the Library Caves with
Buddhist scriptures and documents to be sealed away
By them more than a thousand years ago
Back when they feared, perhaps, that
Borders were weak and an attack was coming
Better to keep their knowledge safe

An oasis of knowledge in the midst of war
Like the lakes of Dunhuang far from the desert's core
As the country split and reunified
Knowledge sprouted like the fruit the trees bore

And I marvel.

Marvel at the paintings on the walls with
Monks sitting cross-legged on the floor
Meditating with eyes closed
Marvel at the murals on the walls
Many showing donors doing heroic deeds or
Mythical creatures and cross-legged Buddhas copied again and again

Now I am leaving.

Leaving the Mogao Grottoes behind me
Looking back at the fading shadows of the cliff
Lost in the darkness of the night
Leaving sacred secrets behind me
Looking forward again, hoping that they will

Last forever, never forgotten again

As my feet once again tread on concrete, not stone
I think of the Grottoes so accident prone
Easily destroyed by bombs or even lost
But we all carry on, with legacies of our own

Lonely Star

St. Paul's Co-educational College, Ma, Tuen Hang Luann – 13

blood
flashing
bright on swords,
smirks on faces,
life

memories, dreams crumpled in heaps of ash
but i'm rising, gleeful, above them.
people died because i lived? true.
i dismiss the water "to
clean your hands, general"
sneers. i've stopped for years –
wastes water, so
i just leave
them stained
–red–
best hue,
i figure. how
funny it is that
both the start and end
of one is signified
by the same colour – red
metallic, unforgiving,
the difference is large, honestly,
see how they say "kill or be killed"? i
couldn't agree more. quick now, leave the scene.

what?
just puppets!
cut their strings
get it done with
quick!

sprawled on the ground, glassy-eyed, looking up at...
me. no, they wouldn't know it was me who
stole their breath, watched them murmur names,
whisper of a smile twitching
at their last. or would they?
no, impossible,
they would never.
but...their eyes
shout they
–do–
know my
viciousness,
how i want to
prove myself strong, prized,
powerful general.
the first time i've looked at them
so close, but surely, it has been

a century they have been loathing
us, (who am i kidding?) me, “general”.

voice
calling
come, come now
or simply
regret

the “r” word i never truly felt for –
radius of damage, radar, and
radioactive, roger, ruse
but not regret. then would i
understand it one day?
round the corner
my footsteps
leaded
–by–
nothing
nothing but
“r”adar? “r”oger?
no. by haunted eyes
staring up at me, by
letters of love slipping out
from their pockets – “can’t wait to see
my beautiful girls again” of course,
they’ll see you “he was a very brave man”.

do
monsters
make wars, or
do wars make
monsters

i breathe, *skies, what in the world is this place*
pale mud-coloured walls engulf me whole
tightly packed inscriptions, symbols
seem to swirl my vision, fill
my heart with only this
shouldn't've done it
it echoes, swirls,
it's only
regret,
–me–
what if
i'm someone
i don't want now,

what if suffering
just doesn't make you strong
doesn't build your character
it just hurts. me? the sufferer?
not at all, i'm just a poised mess, a
lonely star. i know, facts remain the same.

i
run fast
not enough
to just run from
me

empty storeys of brick red pillars reach
up into the heavens, with its top
out of sight – no one higher, or
peerless. lonely star. i see
fearful faces, low bows
hushed voices “my own
honour to be
at your knees”
monster's
–slaves–
but slaves
aren't peers
filled with people
who either bow deep,
or point a finger “go!”
my world, my universe, it's
just me, killing, hurting, myself.
all the fellow monks smile down at me
serenely, *stars shouldn't be seen alone.*

all
of us,
at least one
chapter we don't
read

i became all of them, haunted eyes, and
nurturing inner night, dark chambers
flicker and swish as one by one,
their faces appear, soulful,
and ruthless general
looks away. no more
is the pride of
not flinching
as he
–kills–
my kills

seem to fade
as i work on
manuscripts, building,
ploughing the fields again.
they still echo in my mind
but it's still pretty amazing
that i'm here right now, not back there in
the battlegrounds, smirking, unflinching.

they
say i've
become weak?
quite the opposite,
strong

someday i'll meet my fellow star right here
because soulmates have same hiding spots,
and i know – maybe i've done too
much to deserve it, but i'll
just be up there myself
until you come too.
faces visit
i still fail
but i
–try–
the word,
three letters
too many hidden
emotions – love, joy
trust, failing, victorious...
i don't always end up well
but that's life, isn't it – just a
perfectly put together mess and
i love it, wild and free, wonderfully chaotic.

The Lonely Monk

St. Paul's Co-educational College, Mok, Si Kei - 14

I was born in a hidden grotto
Tucked securely on the Mogao mountains
But not long
Everyone in the grotto died
To be buried under dust
So, I never had my childhood
And I became its sole guardian

At first
I was thrilled to have this mysterious cavern
All to myself
Being the childish boy I was
I roamed the halls that echoed with age
I traced paintings of the Buddha with a branch
I flipped through the countless pages
Suspended on shelves that were too high
But
As I grew taller with time
I realised
I was alone
The Crescent Spring in the distance could not pacify me
However clearly it sparkled
The flowers that grew every spring could not fill my life with colour
However colourful they grew to be
The Mingsha Mountain was a giant I could not rely upon
However steady it stayed
I was alone
And lonely

Often, I would roam the halls
Just searching for an echo
That signalled some holy presence
I would sit in the centre of my room
Where the echoes were the loudest
And recite endless chants
That fooled me into thinking I was not alone
Although I was still lonely

On every sacred festival
I was the only one there to glorify the gods
On every early morning
I was the only one who saw the sunrise
Each smile the sunbeams radiated
I could not return
And when winter came
I was the only one who was cold
And lonely

One day
When I was already an old monk
Three strangers entered my cave
They were from a faraway land
And called themselves a strange word
It sounded like archangels
Or maybe it was archaeologists
Captivated by the beauty of my home

They stayed and brought other company
Soon life bustled

At first
I was thrilled to see them
Regardless of how they were strangers
I took them around the place
And told them the secrets the walls had to whisper
But slowly
The people grew
Tourists started to come
Photographers flocked in
Lost in the middle of all this commotion
I stared and thought
“I’m not alone now
But am I lonely?”

When I was on my deathbed
I looked out the window
And saw a tiny bird singing on a branch
I smiled and faintly recited my favourite chant
To hear echoes filling up my room
The sun was rising
Its rays flooding my eyes with light
For the last time, I smiled
And serenely drifted away
For I understood
With nature by my side
I was never lonely

The Secrets Of Mogao Grottoes

St. Stephen's Girls' College, Chan, Man Yan Hailey – 13

Once in the good ol' land of China
A dragon said to me,
“Those are the caves of Mogao Grottos!
Don't just leave them be!
It's where the monks warmed their toes!”
The dragon was heard to say,
“Please don't leave me at bay!”

“This cave is a book,
Only for those who will look.
No, it won't teach you how to cook,
But please come and have a look!”

“Stare and stare,
Many eyes do glare,
Will they get at last,
The secrets of the past?”

“The statues and paintings,
The murals and carvings,
Are not only a piece of art,
I always get upset,
When children only come and fart!”

Will You be the one to get at last,
The secrets draped in a mask?

Wishing to be remembered

St. Stephen's Girls' College, Goh, Zi En Hannah – 14

Over a thousand years old,
Remembering when I was still being built,
From just emptiness inside me
To full of art, writing and prophecies.
Someone come be with me,
Come and look at me:
I'm full of art, but forgotten.

Come and understand me, I'm full of mystery
But I have been erased from human minds.
I have a tale to tell, but no one stays to listen.
I long to be appreciated.
Don't leave me alone and forgotten;
I need to tell you something.

Another 100 years have passed.
I've only heard birds chirping as the sun rises
And ear-buzzing silence when all is dark.
Minutes pass, hours pass, days pass,
Even years pass. I've lost count.

I hear an unfamiliar sound.
Something that's tickling,
Which feels new to me.
It's the footsteps of monks.
Does this mean someone's willing to listen to my story?
After all these centuries?

The delicate touch.
The soft brushing I feel,
Over stories that were carved a millennium ago.
The warnings, the premonitions. Please tell the world!
Please come back!
You've only discovered a small part of me...
Will I be forgotten again?

Many years have since passed yet again.
Am I so easily forgotten?
But soon enough,
I feel footprints again, more and more.
Are they visiting me? Or is it just my imagination?
I hear chatting, photo-taking clicks,
Fingers brushing.
I missed it.

I can finally reveal my creator's message
Which was hidden longer than the ice age.
Let me speak!
Listen to me!

Unveiling the Past

St. Stephen's Girls' College, Kar, Narvarro Charmaine – 13

Something was hidden in the cave,
Buried in silence like a grave.
The cave itself was hallow.
Filled with art in layers of shadow.

As time flew by, everything had been forgotten.
Everything in there seemed to be rotten.
But then the secrets were unveiled,
So their stories were exhaled.

Going through the cave from long ago
Was dangerous, so we went slow.
Then the rocks started crumbling,
And I started to hear rumbling.

Boom! Went the inner wall.
I must admit it was a close call!
Then treasures revealed as I watched it fall.
I was fascinated to see it all.

New Tales from the Mogao Grottoes

Wellington College, Shanghai, Hong, Yixuan – 14

Think and wonder,
Who untied the winds?
Set them free to roam and
Sweep a layer of thin sand off the vast body of gold.
Every grain of sand a piece of history.

Glimpse and stare;
Before you is a millenium of silent stories.
Stories voiced with every crack and rift
Etched by the skillful hand of time.
Flawed but flawless.

Whisper and hush,
Refrain from disturbing the slumbering statues.
Statues wearing coats of grey dust and time
Overlooking us majestically.
Hiding the past in dead black eyes.

Sink and drown,
In an oasis of history.
So allured to such dreamlike landscapes
That time vanishes into a river of sand.
Flowing back from the blossoming Tang.

Yet sand is ungraspable, and stories are soundless.
I look up from hypnosis, eyes hazy
To find myself
Before
The Mogao Grottoes.

Footprints

Wellington College, Shanghai, Lin, Lola – 12

When she spoke, she spoke quietly.
Lucid verses smothered by her dubious heartbeats that thud so loudly
Her words never stumbling, each breath subtly inciting anticipation.

When she sang, she sang quietly.
Her voice a sharpened knife that cut through the lulling atmosphere.
The birds turned to stare, rapid flutters silenced by curiosity.

When she painted, she painted loud.
Each stroke a breathless siren that flew off of the rocky walls of her property.
Forming the words, the final wishes of a thousand voices.

She never took a moment to breathe or rest
Under the burden of the mind of one desperate for expression
Her voice never heard, this was her one call for freedom
Dreams clouded by doubt as of her true identity
Whether she was fit to be the muse she claimed
Happiness fading, nightmares clouding
Her dreams the prison that sent her crying
Wisps of the future to come passing by
But she never took them seriously.

Bad omens warned her
Scattered across her imagination
Running through her vivid mind
The horrors that waded their way into the cracks

From then on, the terrors flocked
Grabbing her and tearing away at the foundations that kept the place standing
The masterpieces, which she had breathed soul and heart into.

Now I step through the same coven
Through the gateway into the kingdom she once entertained
With her fine arts and graces

Walls splashed with peeling paints
Once shining and vibrant with eons of color
And no rubbing can remove the dullness in their eyes
The dullness which her influence has left behind

All that remains are the marks made on the stretched canvas
Carven engravings that grow like wisteria rose across the covenant
So far away from the misery

Her story left untold
Hidden between the lines
Left to search for blindly
Or, as they sometimes call it
Follow in the muse's

Footprints.

Greed

Wellington College, Shanghai, Zhang, Anna – 12

Curling in the deep,
Shining with mystery.
It suddenly awakens,
But why does it?

With lustrous eyes,
And a dazzling look,
Razor sharp claws digs into the seemingly soft soil.
Auburn pupils gaze wisely into the vast plains,
Swishing and smashing, goes the luminous tail.
And down it falls, a precious and irreplaceable pearl of nature,
Unnoticed by the humongous scaled body.

Time passed, day and day,
Abnormal things happened year and year.
Trees burned down,
Rivers started flooding,
Disasters occurred occasionally.
Crack—
Went a tree.
Swish—
went the water.
Scream—
From the villagers.

Roaring and snorting,
The humongous beast realizes the problem.
The wilted blossoms,
The destroyed victims,
Means that one thing —
The priceless treasure is gone.

Going round and round in circles,
Looking around and around, searching for miracles.
The pearl remains lost,
And the world sank into disaster.

Whoosh, the great beast flies,
Into the vast skies.
Sharp eyes focused,
To find the pearl unnoticed,
And identify the conniving thief,
who stole the treasure.

Then it came, a smart and sharp-witted idea,
The Mogao Grottoes might be of some help.
Prancing around in the skies,
It aims for a destination and finally dives.
Thump! Thump!
The area is clear.
Inside the grottoes the mighty creature went,
to search for help with the nymphs, the gods, and all he could find.
Smashing furniture, breathing smoke,
The vast dragon reached a cave.
Inside it went,
Without caution,

With no guarantee of safety.
Then all went dark,
And in another world he emerged.

Old Chinese style,
Filled with creatures.
Gods, nymphs, temples, and fairies.
A tiny whisper into its ear.
“I will be your guide to find the treasure.”
He knew that this sound came from his inner heart,
And the last time of his life was spent here,
In the Mogao Grottoes.

He came to a God, and asked for the lost treasure.
“Your treasure is in the mountains, but be cautious the weather.
There you may find things that may make you have danger
Explore with your true heart and all will not wither.”

Down and down,
The dragon went.
Treasure after treasure,
Was all he could find.
He soon became greedy,
And lost track of time.
He forgot what he should have done,
Instead grabbed for gold,
that was all he had in mind.
The sky turned dark,
he noticed the time.
Now all he had,
Was treasure that was bad.
As soon as he went back to grotto number 2,
The treasure vanished and left the dragon to cry.
The priceless pearl still remained lost,
Wretched with guilt,
The dragon watched as the world withered and died.