



# Poetry

Group 5

# Of Secrets Kept

*American International School, Chaudhuri, Aishani – 17*

A stone skitters, loosed by the wind,  
lonely;  
with no one to hear it, does it make a sound?  
Many say it doesn't, and some  
say it wasn't ever anything at all.

A space is carved out of rock, a  
haven  
forced out of unforgiving sandstone;  
but the threshold remains uncrossed for centuries—  
who does it protect, if it ever did?

A brush sweeps across stone,  
crimson,  
the colour of stories to tell, lives to record,  
but red is not red in the darkness, absent light.  
Was there ever a hand there?

A book is filled, carefully inked—in  
wisdom  
gathered over the years— reaching across time  
to guide those that come after,  
but what if it stays unread?

A husband climbs too high for favourite  
flowers,  
forever immortalised in art as he  
wasn't in flesh, if he ever was flesh—  
but what of his love?

Love was carved into these walls centuries  
ago,  
shaped into poetry and paintings lost to time.  
What happened to the love in its forgetting?  
Was it there, once, without anyone to remember?

Perhaps ghosts wove through grottoes they had  
haunted  
when alive; perhaps they loved the love  
they had left behind in these spaces when  
there was no one else to love it, and that was enough.

we love, and perhaps that is enough.

# Silent Dawn

*Dulwich College Beijing, Afian, Adib Maxwell – 17*

Spoils of conquests past  
Relics of joys and sorrows  
Condemned to eternal silence  
In the depths of the Mogao Grottoes  
A timeless cavern of ancient dust  
Beneath a hundred shining Buddhas  
Behind the veil of mystic rust  
I have found you Maitreya

What was once hidden is now revealed  
What was foretold has come to pass  
The light breaks once more upon your face  
And your presence beams back as if to say  
I have watched over you  
I have prayed for you

But all the scripts and sutras were to them  
As jewels and diamonds to sell and send  
To distant lands where they might be contained  
In a dim, silent vault behind locks and bulletproof windowpanes  
Your tears of liquid gold how they rain  
A thousand years more till the light dawns again

# Graying Grottoes

*Dulwich College Beijing, Zhao, Helena – 18*

I have a thousand brothers and sisters,  
Yet I'm lost in the sea of whispers  
Of a forgotten past,  
Hauntingly, leaving me aghast.  
I'm right here, upholding militant, firmly.  
Though time — my mortal enemy — is deadly.  
Inside, I'm a rotting beauty.  
To be my bolster is now your duty,  
For I've kept a thousand lives and histories  
Within me — too long. I'm exploding memories,

Which, in turn, mangle me.  
Open your eyes and see  
Past such temporary victories,  
For I'm full of invisible injuries.  
Save me, before time becomes your inescapable enemy.  
Understanding my anatomy is no blasphemy;  
On the contrary,  
It's quite visionary,  
For you are discovering mysteries  
Of ancient monasteries:

My head is a ceiling of paintings;  
My body is covered with wonderous writings;  
My arms open wide to all humankind —  
Millennials ago you may find  
Sinners sitting by my side  
In lotus leaves, for I shall guide  
Them through tough times  
With my purifying, heavenly chimes;  
My feet, once prayed over, cleaned, and shined,  
Now have become slightly unrefined.

So, if you may please  
Free me from the disease  
Of negligence. I want to be free  
But don't just let me be.  
I need more than mere company —  
I need yin–yang harmony  
From the sunny moon  
And moony sun at noon.  
My enigmatic interior is covered  
In tales–old secrets to be discovered.

Within me resides the lives of brazen hearts  
Who've withstood sandstorms and devilish arts,  
Trading their last breaths for so–called treasures,  
Fulfilling their days with picturesque pleasures.  
Though, if you look deeply into their souls  
You may find lost smiles in abysmal holes.  
Human beings — oh, such strange creatures,  
Trying to find purpose via adventures,  
When instead, here I reside,  
Full of lessons to be learned inside:

There once was a prince so terribly kind,  
Who fled his palace of jewels behind  
With his parents upon a malicious murder attempt.  
Days passed, ravenous for food, none are exempt  
From the pains of hunger and destitute.  
Yet, such circumstances did not alter his attitude,  
For the prince offered his flesh to his parents,  
In which they devoured relentlessly; remnants  
Are left by the roadside, yet, unfortunately,  
A hungry lion comes by. Naturally,

The prince, so generous and magnanimous,  
Self-sacrificed his final remains. Felicitous  
Deeds and a good heart all conquer ill fate,  
And are given fruitful treats in trade,  
For the lion is the mighty god Indra,  
Who restored him and gave back extra.  
You see, fortune is in your puny human hand,  
Changeable upon our gracious command.  
Serendipity is like a blooming Peach Blossom.  
Water it with goodness for prosperity and wisdom.

I am the Mogao cave, full of narratives, stories  
Of forgotten pasts, full of glories.  
Yet I still worry I'm losing my sense of identity.  
Who am I really? Is my existence a necessity?  
If so, then why do I feel deeply dilapidated?  
I'm exasperated, for I was once, oh, so sophisticated.  
Now, my delicate face is marred by people  
Who come not to pray or learn, but to scramble,  
Babble, mingle, stumble, and treat me without care.  
They pollute me inside out, toxifying my air

With trash, carbon dioxide, and humidity,  
Deteriorating my dignity and divinity.  
I think I need antioxidants, for my skin  
Is wrinkling with cracks and human sin.  
I, too, need to be loved and cherished.  
I, too, need to be continuously nourished  
With gems, courage, beliefs, wisdom.  
My vast history can feed a kingdom,  
So treat me like a king, with love and respect.  
Let the past, present, and future reconnect.

# Wandering War Soldier

*Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Lam, Haidee – 17*

A soldier trudges along the desert  
Wandering, lonely, guilty.  
He is young, with no home, no country to return to  
Not after the blood that stains his armor crimson  
Drying to rust.

A robed figure in the distance.  
“Where are you going?” He questions.  
His face is weathered with blemishes  
And his eyes crinkle with reminiscence.

“I am—”

The battle cries, the war horn—  
Blood glistening as he avenges the slain  
With his sheathing sword; hissing in pain  
Adrenaline overpowers his mourning.  
The thrill of savagery overrides his guilt.

“I have nowhere to go,” the soldier murmurs.  
Nowhere to live, nowhere to run.  
“The desert seems most fitting for a man  
who has committed  
unspeakable sins.”

The monk studies the soldier closely.  
“You have suffered,” he says.  
“Come.” He gestures.  
“Buddha awaits.”

If you walk 15 miles away from Dunhuang,  
Across the mirage of deserts—  
You will find  
A haven.  
A place of recuperation, of forgiveness,  
Of enlightenment.

# The History of light

*Po Leung Kuk Choi Kai Yau School, Tsai, Solomon – 16*

It's so different from before,  
*how so?*

So different  
from the monks' zen  
while reciting the Diamond Sutra,  
twirling their prayer beads.

It's so different from before,  
from when it started, and when it flourished—  
and from how the color ebbed  
while a monk painted his religion's histories.

It was a tranquil oasis on the south of Dunhuang:  
Trees that rose from the ground,  
flowers that bloomed at the twigs.  
Under the brilliance of the sun

lay a lonely hill—  
and the monk's lonely journey to the west  
was different from anybody else's.  
Here is the monk's testimony.

What happened, then?

*I was bearing my baggage,  
I was running out of water,*

*the journey had no end—  
until ten thousand rays of light*

*coming from every side,  
layering, scattering...*

*I closed my eyes for a second  
only wanting to open them again.*

*I took it as a sign  
and I started to dig—*

*whistling breeze blowing at my sleeves.  
It will be the best place to meditate.*

*How is it, now?*

A little fish splashed in the stream,  
a light ray  
peeked through.  
casting itself on the tall, wide walls:

the deities flying, soaring high,  
towards the sunlit sky,  
the plucking, gliding notes from the pipa ensemble.  
A painter finished with a wide smile, because

he's done it, one of so many thousands.  
What did time do to them?  
Paint fades into specks of  
mirages.

What was sat by monks  
are now sat by spider webs.  
So much for that light ray, lonely and late—  
Nothing is the same.

Is it a sign that it is destined to vanish away?  
How shall it wait  
for its former glory and peace  
again?



# Serenade to Stone

*Singapore International School, Boey, Jun Xin – 16*

On the cliff they knocked a hole  
First drew the face, moulded the chest  
Then they shaped the nose

of the leader they so worshipped,  
clad in an orange robe.  
Enlightenment is on their minds  
As paintbrushes fly and thoughts translate.

Preaching scripture has never been so visual,  
they add colour to dusty faces,  
assign names without words, tell  
stories without action –  
that's done and good, cast in stone.  
Literally.

The monks arrive, there is no room.  
But as one knows, space is a construct  
when you're in a cave.  
And so new halls appear  
with a snap of the fingers, a shovel or two,  
Soon chanting brings the murals to life,  
intonations undulating as the tongue flies;

Wang Jie brought the first book–  
Pinnacle of the ancient world  
It sat heavily on carved shelves  
conserved, untouched, gathering dust,  
with its paper siblings behind shadowy doors...

Open sesame, you cry  
And so knowledge rains down  
As if from the sky.

# Tales of Mogao Caves

*St. Joseph's College, Siu, Sung Yan Ronald – 16*

Eight hundred years slipp'd by buried in sand,  
The wonderful works, we relish with rhyme.  
Lift the veil, and so light from wonder's land  
Reach us, refracted through the Lake of Time.

It was sunset sixteen centuries ago,  
When a monk caught sight of bright golden lights,  
Buddhas appearing above the grottoes.  
Here laid the foundation of hist'ry's might.

Time, so childish, came and went silently.  
Pieces of rocks met, and sculptures were form'd,  
Paint coloured Eagles and Deers ardently.  
Telling tales of how Buddhism transform'd.

Until mankind's reincarnation's eve,  
Indestructible, forever they live.

# An Elegy for Decades Past

*The Independent Schools Foundation Academy, Moore, Genevieve – 17*

Surging winds traverse the desert floor,  
Rippling the surface with the undulations of the snake's back.  
Coarse, hot sands fall from nature's hourglass over cavernous cliffs,  
And cascade upon the endless expanse of jagged rock.

Some force of nature, its untamed storms or blistering sun,  
Effaces the roughness from the rock,  
Etches steady lines into the cliff,  
Engraves hidden patterns onto the precipice.

At the cliff's face stands the cleft that leads to the ancient grottoes,  
Older than the skull-lined walls of the Parisian catacombs,  
More unexplored than the unlit tombs of the Egyptian pyramids.  
What buried treasures lie concealed within the ancient grottoes?

Daylight falls upon the stone effigy shrouded by darkness,  
The golden palm outstretched beyond blue silken robes.  
By whose hand, that of man or divine presence,  
Was this pillar of the past shaped?

I saw the defeat of the Byzantine Empire.  
I watched the fall of the Roman Empire.  
I witnessed the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.  
I stood in awe as history was bisected into past and present, bygone and enduring.

Each age has yielded to another,  
Every era has ceded its power to the next.  
Here stands a monument of generations and dynasties past,  
The relics of the long-forgotten entombed within the grotto's walls.

Gilded sands glide across the desert floor,  
Beyond the cavern all is still; but now I see  
That winged beasts were roused from a millennium's rest,  
To adorn the grotto's divine statue in a canopy beneath the sky.