DEAR READERS,

Welcome to the tenth volume of Best Writing! The Best Writing anthology is a collection of outstanding writing from our students, staff, and even a few faculty, a platform to showcase our talent and creativity. This anniversary edition—Enduring Legacies, Bold Futures—is an opportunity to reflect on our journey and the impact Best Writing has had on the TAMUQ community over the past decade. It is also a vehicle through which we can imagine our future.

ENDURING LEGACIES

My personal journey with Best Writing started in 2017 with the edition themed “What Writing Can Do.” I was very excited when I received an invitation to join the co-editors, Drs. Mysti Rudd and Amy Hodges, as well as the rest of Best Writing committee on a mission to discover new student voices at TAMUQ and promote the power of the written word in the community. I found myself remembering the day I was holding the 2016 edition and thinking what a great idea this project was and that I wanted to be part of it. I was responsible for collecting student submissions, and, frankly, I was expecting from engineering students a lot of research essays or lab reports. To my great surprise, I discovered that many Aggies were writing amazing poetry in both Arabic and English, as well as beautiful prose pieces. The thematic diversity was impressive, too, as students were discussing various topics including politics, social issues, environmental problems, science, education, etc. This made me realize that a vibrant community of talented and passionate writers existed within the walls of TAMUQ, and our goal as a committee was to ignite and nurture their passion.

Best Writing has given me an opportunity to get to know students better. Behind each writing, there is a personality with emotions, feelings, thoughts, and ideas. It is always interesting to find out about certain aspects of a student’s character, or their hobbies and interests, or their backgrounds by reading their pieces. Writing reveals their passion, dreams, and values. I also love to see the joy on the faces of students when we notify them that their pieces have been accepted for publication. It’s great to know that their hard work pays off, and being published serves as a validation of their skills and dedication, as
well as a confirmation that their voices and stories are worth sharing with the world.

Another valuable takeaway from being part of Best Writing is the sense of belonging to a community. A great team of faculty, staff, and students work on this project. Over the past seven years, I have built bonds with them and have learned a lot from them. When people who share a common goal and have a similar passion come together, collaboration thrives, and beautiful things come to reality. The community around Best Writing is very encouraging, supportive, and motivating. These people believe in the project’s mission and advocate for its success. Each member of the Best Writing committee does their best to provide guidance and support to students and encourage them to express themselves through writing.

I’m a big fan of Best Writing. Throughout the years I have witnessed the project evolve and expand. I was growing with this project too. The past seven years have been enriching for me both personally and professionally. The 2023 edition of Best Writing is very special for me not only because we celebrate its 10th anniversary, but also because of a new role I took on as co-editor. To be frank, the emotions I experienced were both exciting and nerve-wracking as the new role came with challenges and the feeling of an increased responsibility for the outcome.

However, reaching the finish line has been extremely rewarding and satisfying, and thanks to the joint efforts of Best Writing committee members, you are now holding this book in your hands. We sincerely hope that you will enjoy reading this volume.

I feel proud that Dr. Rudd’s seedling of an idea to showcase student voices has grown and matured into a decade-long project that has inspired hundreds of students, staff, and faculty to pursue and share their passion for words and images.

Olena Snitko | Co-Editor

BOLD FUTURES

Now in its 10th year, Dr. Rudd’s “enduring legacy”—Best Writing—turns toward the future. But even in the act of looking to the future, we need to glance back at the past. In last year’s volume, we considered the value of “embracing ambiguity.” We suggested that “embracing ambiguity” and its
uncertainty and lack of clarity opens possibilities, creating opportunities for artistic, intellectual, and scientific innovation, for personal exploration and community collaboration, for breaking down binaries to foster sharing and community. Ambiguity is a necessary stage in an ongoing cycle. Ambiguity shatters our complacency, our confidence in predicting the future. It pushes us toward the unknown.

With this 10th anniversary volume, we propose a Janian frame for understanding the relationship between Best Writing's (and TAMUQ's) past and future. Janus—an ancient Roman god whose two faces gaze in opposite directions, allowing him to see both past and future—represents a duality of vision. Janus represents change, transitions, doorways, passageways, options, beginnings and endings, entrances and exits. Although often associated with hypocrisy, “Janus-faced” refers to a reflective attitude, one that recognizes the duality of time. This volume brings Janian duality into play: the artificial binary of past and future is dissolved; each complements the other. An enduring legacy is by its very definition one that has long-lasting impacts on the future, while a bold future, in part, is only bold in its radical departure from and, thus, backward glance at the legacies of previous generations. In this sense, then, we plant our feet firmly in our enduring legacies to propel ourselves toward the unknown. We take a leap of faith, a BOLD leap into the future. Boldness requires imagination, creativity, tenacity, a willingness to risk. Boldness is a catalyst for transformation.

Each of the chapters in this volume lean into this transformation. In “Beginnings,” students, staff, faculty, and alumni reflect on their own beginnings at TAMUQ, or with Best Writing, a compilation of voices reflecting on the legacies of TAMUQ and looking toward the future. The pieces in the second chapter, “Leaving a Legacy,” pay homage to the legacies of our personal journeys but also to those social connections that have sustained us and given us hope for what might be. “Defining Identity,” chapter 3, explores the numerous ways in which our personal identities are tied to our communities' identities and histories. Through revisiting their own histories, the authors in chapter 4—“Overcoming Obstacles”—reveal the sometimes painful, often complicated, but always transformative challenges they've faced to become who they are in the present. The next two chapters, 6 and 7, take on Janian perspectives of human nature. Chapter 5, “Finding a Path,” maps the individual authors’
struggles to find their way through the ambiguity, fear, doubt, and uncertainty to a more hopeful, confident embrace of their abilities and value. “Searching for Light,” in contrast, examines the darker nature of humanity as a collective, the often-self-destructive actions that close off hope for our future. This darkness is also reflected in the chapter that follows. “Unveiling Vulnerability” reveals the vulnerability of the individual alone and the ways in which that solitude reflects darkness. The last three chapters, however, guide us toward hope. “Making Music” explores our human yearning to connect with others. Chapter 9 demonstrates the way in which “Pursuing Knowledge” is a fundamentally hopeful act. Finally, we (re)imagine “Creating a Better Tomorrow.”

We close this volume with an epilogue. “The Life of a Snowflake”—a meditation on the ephemerality of time, of form, of life itself—best expresses the spirit of this volume: **Enduring Legacies, Bold Futures.**

We hope to see you in our future volumes. Happy reading!

**Dr. Mary Queen | Co-Editor**

*Best Writing 2023*
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude and appreciation to the students, staff and faculty who submitted their writing to this year’s volume of *Best Writing*. The publication would not have been possible without your talent, creativity, and dedication to the written word. It has been a pleasure to work with such a group of writers, and we applaud your efforts in shaping this anthology.

We also want to acknowledge the *Best Writing 2023 Committee* composed of the following students, staff, and faculty:

**Amanda Cruz,**
Class of 2025

**Betsy Riley,**
Division of Arts and Sciences

**Bryant Scott,**
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**Fatima Abuhaliqa,**
Class of 2023

**Ira Setiawan,**
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**Shauna Loej,**
Division of Arts and Sciences

**Vishmi Singhapura,**
Class of 2023

**Wala Abdelhalim,**
Class of 2025

We appreciate your outstanding teamwork and determination that produced this high-quality 10th anniversary edition of the *Best Writing* anthology. Throughout the process, you have demonstrated commitment to the mission of the project and each of you have played a vital role in bringing this book to life.
Special thanks go out to Khadija ElCadi whose contributions have extended far beyond her specific tasks. Her positive attitude and willingness to help have made her an invaluable asset to the team.

We would also like to thank the Best Writing Photo Contest Committee for dedicating time and effort to choose the best photo for this year’s book cover: Olena Snitko (Division of Arts and Sciences), Fatima Abuhaliqa (student), Kushal Guruvasudevan (student), Darrell Pinontoan (Marketing and Communications), Destarte Prieto (VCUarts Qatar), Khadeja Abuhaliqa (Youth Advisor at the Ministry of Sport and Youth of Qatar), Maria Del Rio (Cultural Ambassador at the Ministry of Culture of Qatar), and Murtaza Khan (TAMUQ alum).

Thanks to Abdulla Almarri, mechanical engineering student, for the cover photo that so perfectly represents this year’s theme: Enduring Legacies and Bold Futures.

We would also like to acknowledge the talented student photographers whose photos were chosen as chapter dividers: Saif Al-Mohannadi (chapter 1), Imran Parvez (chapters 2 and 4), Abir Roslan (chapter 3), Kushal Guruvasudevan (chapter 5 and epilogue), Abdulla Almarri (chapter 6), Samiha Rahman (chapters 7 and 8), Joshua Silva (chapter 9), Sayed Kameli (chapter 10).

It has been a pleasure and a privilege to work with graphic designer Jawad Hamdan for a third year in a row. We appreciate his creativity in translating the given theme into stunning visual elements.

Also, we would like to thank George Hale for providing expert editorial support to Best Writing. His proficiency in language and grammar was very helpful in refining the manuscript. A special thanks to Meera Jarrar for editing the Arabic submission. We are grateful to Lesley Kriewald for reviewing the manuscript and getting it ready for publication.

Finally, we express our deep gratitude to Dr. Bernhard Lamel, Director of the Division of Arts and Sciences, for his unflagging support, enthusiasm, and encouragement that sustains our efforts in showcasing TAMUQ’s Best Writing.

We greatly appreciate the continued support by Dean César Malavé and Executive Associate Dean Ioannis Economou to fund this student-centered anthology—now in its TENTH year!
DEDICATION

With this volume—*Enduring Legacies, Bold Futures*—we enter our second decade of providing a forum for the unique, creative, stimulating, and exploratory voices of the TAMUQ community. We dedicate this anthology to those students, staff, and faculty whose dreams, commitment, and sheer determination have built a singular Aggie legacy at TAMU in Qatar, one firmly grounded in core Aggie and Qatari values of respect, excellence, leadership, loyalty, integrity, and selfless service. These shared values provide an unshakeable foundation on which students, staff, and faculty can envision a bold future.

*We are a continuum. Just as we reach back to our ancestors for our fundamental values, so we, as guardians of that legacy, must reach ahead to our children and their children. And we do so with a sense of sacredness in that reaching.*

—Paul Tsongas
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Aiman Ali

Howdy! My name is Aiman Ali and I’m a sophomore at Texas A&M University at Qatar. I have always had deep ties to Texas A&M. I have an older brother who graduated from TAMUQ, and I had the opportunity to visit the main campus this year.
THE ENDURING LEGACIES OF TAMUQ
Staff and Faculty Voices

I believe one’s life is divided into three stages: time at school, at university, and going to work. Your stay here at TAMUQ will most likely be the shortest of the three, usually lasting only four to six years. Nevertheless, Texas A&M and its faculty and staff always leave a fascinatingly profound impact on both graduating Aggies and the community as a whole. In order to better study this phenomenon, I interviewed some faculty, staff, and alumni about what they think is the legacy of Texas A&M and its Aggies. In this entry, you will find answers ranging from the legacy people wish to leave behind to the legacies from the past that helped Aggies in the present. Perhaps at the end of this compilation, you can chart out what you wish your own legacy here at Texas A&M Qatar to be as you take steps into your own bold future!

SHAUNA MARIE LOEJ
Writing Consultant
Division of Arts and Sciences

Look back at times gone by and see who you were and how you felt at pivotal times in your life. Remember the younger you when you were so in awe of the world around you. When you take time to reflect on yourself, and your legacy—so far, you’ll see there’s a constant motion, an ebb and flow of learning going on that has brought you here today. What was done yesterday was only possible from what was learned before. What will be learned today will shape the person you will be tomorrow. A beautiful motion called life.

It seems simple enough to reflect on how much we grow, change, and progress in life. Yet we don’t always want to go back to the past for we get caught up with the work at hand or the daunting project that needs to be planned tomorrow. Life keeps happening.

When I take a moment to go back in time, I remember my first day at TAMUQ with that sense of wonder. My nervous excitement to start this
journey, an eagerness to learn a new role sprinkled with the curiosity about where I had landed in this institution of Aggies as one can only feel on a “first day” at something. Over the years since joining, my first day framed everything then and will continue going forward. The nervous excitement is now channeled into the passion I have for my work while feelings of eagerness remain to keep learning and to support students, and overall, I will always be curious as a key to never-ending growth. This is my legacy so far and dear students yours is also set in motion, ready to unleash your knowledge into the world.

I came to TAMUQ from College Station in January 2015. And what immediately struck me was how warm, how welcoming the folks here were and are; how quickly we felt at home and part of the family. That is something I think is unique to Aggies, regardless of where we are in the world—we find each other. It’s like there is some inner homing beacon in us that just somehow draws us together! (Southern hospitality and Arabic hospitality have a lot in common—folks are very generous, there’s a LOT of tea drinking, and both cultures will feed you ‘til you pop!)

I do think that the family aspect is even more apparent at TAMUQ because we are so small, in comparison to the main campus. This really allows for faculty and staff to get to know their students as a whole person, not just a name on a roster or a UIN or GPA. My favorite day every year is graduation because I KNOW how much work went into getting to that moment. It’s very special for me to watch my “kiddos” succeed, because I watched them struggle, stumble, and ultimately grow so strong. I could not be prouder or happier if they WERE actually my kids. And every time a former student comes back and makes a point to stop by my office to say hello, I get a little teary. It’s nice to know that I played a tiny part in their growth.

So yeah… FAMILY. That, I think, is the biggest legacy that has transferred between campuses and will endure long after I am retired.

(I hope so, anyway!)
As a current graduate student in chemical engineering at Texas A&M University at Qatar, I am proud to be part of the legacy of this exceptional institution. The university's commitment to academic excellence and the Aggie core values has not only enriched my education but also shaped my character and prepared me to become a responsible and compassionate leader in my field. The supportive faculty and staff have provided me with opportunities to develop my skills and knowledge through hands-on experiences, research projects, and professional development programs. I am proud to be part of the Texas A&M University at Qatar community and look forward to making a positive impact in the world.

SHAUN TORRES, Class of 2003
Assistant Librarian
Director of Library

When I was young, I was a Boy Scout. Whenever we went camping, we were told that you should always leave a campsite better than you found it. I think that's the way I feel about TAMUQ and about life in general. If I can look back when I retire and say that this campus is better off for my having been here, or if the students I helped are better off for having known me, then I can call that a success. I want to know that I changed things for the better, that I left the community and the campus better than I found it; and I think I have been working to do that. It's always hard to know where things are going when you are in the middle of them, and sometimes choices don't work out the way you thought they would, but I like to believe that my work here has been good, for the community, for the university, for the students, and for myself.

Every student's experience at TAMUQ will be different, and, as such, each student will carry forward different lessons and ideas out of TAMUQ. The main thing that I hope they will carry forward is a love of learning and a
willingness to keep an open mind towards other people and ideas. I hope that their experience at TAMUQ will be a jumping off point for a life of exploration, compassion, and integrity.

My wish for my legacy is to inspire and encourage the current and future generation of students to pursue their academic and personal goals with dedication and passion. I hope that my achievements will serve as a testament to the endless possibilities that exist for those who are willing to seize opportunities, work hard and persevere. Ultimately, I aspire to leave a positive impact on the TAMUQ community by fostering a culture of selfless service and instilling a sense of pride and belonging among all who call this institution their own.

**Reflection on past decade (or more) of service at TAMUQ:**

**SMITHA ABRAHAM**
Business Coordinator
Office of Research

While learning American history in school, one of the quotes I was taught was the one from John F. Kennedy’s inaugural address: *Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.* As a member of the TAMUQ community for over 17 years, I observed a similar spirit of unity, among the members I have worked with. Each person has a sense of community and the mindset of contributing towards making TAMUQ a more enriching and fulfilling place to be. It’s a privilege to work among such honorable people.
Your brightest memories related to Best Writing:

NANCY ABRAHAM
Assistant Director | Qatar Campus
Division of Human Resources and Organizational Effectiveness

I recall Dr. Sherry Ward had her class read my poem in Best Writing. She sent me her students’ interpretations of the poem, which filled my heart with joy. It was very interesting how they understood it in different ways.

MARWA ABDELGAWAD
Instructional Assistant Professor
Mechanical Engineering

Reading the various types of submissions, gaining knowledge from them, and being influenced by their thoughts, emotions, and perspectives. It is a genuinely enlightening experience for me, particularly when I find out later who wrote each piece. I relished every meeting with the BW committee as we attempted to organize various events, brainstorm methods to encourage students, and even collaborate with student organizations to conduct writing sessions. I thoroughly enjoyed participating in and attending these sessions. These sessions essentially taught me to investigate other writing genres and to convey myself through writing without fear.
Chapter 2
Leaving a Legacy
For ENGL 104, I spent a lot of time considering what to write and how to define my poem title before settling on “Why We Live.” As I write this poem, I visualize the words and can clearly picture them in my head. It was the first time that I had ever written a poem, so I wasn’t expecting to write a nice piece, but I really enjoyed writing this one. It was like mixing interesting words to create a movie.

Shaikha Al-Burshaid is a Qatari student majoring in chemical engineering. She enjoys writing because she thinks writing is an art form that should be mastered. People can express themselves, their feelings, and their emotions in a unique way through writing. She is overjoyed that her work has been selected for the 2023 edition of Best Writing.
WHY WE LIVE

There are many things which we deserve to accomplish, 
And that is why we live. 
We live because life is matter, 
And the honest is. 
We live because 
The dream we have to see by 
Is always changing.

Never forget that humans are a matter of life. 
We continue each other’s lives. 
We got married. 
We are for each other as a family. 
Our lives matter. 
Our five senses matter.

Never forget that living is a gift from God. 
We do bloom the earth. 
The flowers inside the hearts. 
Each human is a gift. 
We feel it after newborns. 
Every new day is a reward to ourselves.

Never forget that living is meaningful. 
Not on days when it is simple and easy to dismiss it. 
We do exchange each other’s energy. 
Energy comes from souls. 
Souls can destroy or build themselves. 
Like a snowstorm
Writing this poem, I was in a space where I was reminiscing about the idea of having a timeless legacy. I thought about the many anxieties we all have about building something or making a difference in our lives and forgetting that for us to create a legacy of our life, we must live in the present. By living in our present, we can build our future and our legacy.

Fatima Abuhaliqa, currently an electrical engineering student, is passionate about writing and creativity in whatever she produces. Writing is a home and not an escape to her; it propels her to express ideas and build worlds.
TIMELESS LEGACY

Time awaits nothing but death, so we die. And I was waiting for something to change, but it didn’t, and so I stayed. I stayed with my emotions and faded into a spiral of nothing but mind mines. After time had taken away some of my life, I decided to change and build a legacy I dared to keep. Through time I’ll live on with my days much brighter, with hope filled with a future full of joy.
Scoping out efficient, uncharted path always made sense to me. But it wasn’t until writing this reflection on friendship that I connected the added social element of desire lines: a shared experience. It seemed fitting to share about my friend Terry—a long time Doha resident—for this year’s Best Writing edition. An “enduring legacy” can be forged when people know we care and continue the conversation.

Betsy Riley is a Professional Consultant in TAMUQ’s Writing Center. She is eager to help students reach their writing and presentation goals, whether they are working on document design, building a more persuasive argument, or organizing their research more effectively. With a B.A. in both Professional Writing and Creative Writing from Purdue University, Betsy has broad experience in communications, marketing, and tutoring non-native speakers of English. Bullet-journaling, Mary Oliver poetry, and hot ginger milk are some of her favorite things.
**TAKING DESIRE LINES**

The stone steps were situated on a steep incline ascending into my friend’s neighborhood. As part of a tour of their new Seattle surroundings, we climbed the stairs together, as if hiking up a series of city switchbacks. We worked our way upward, cutting right through rows of houses, past thick vegetation spilling over fences, even along a private garden where a man painted and drank coffee. We set our sights upward.

After 30 years working as a chemistry professor in the Middle East, my friend Terry and his wife had returned to the city holding their memories from childhood and young adult years, and now I had the joy of visiting them in their new home on the outskirts of University of Washington campus. The visit, however, was punctured with grief and foreboding: just two months before, a stroke had pointed to this underlying reality: a large tumor was growing in Terry’s brain. Once neurosurgeons jumped to action, operating and removing the mass, Terry was left with rounds of chemo and nine months to live if he defied odds. And so, I flew to Seattle, to walk neighborhood steps with a mentor who, in many ways, had helped me learn to walk out a meaningful life. That day, though weakened by a recent round of chemo, Terry relished those neighborhood steps. He climbed and counted them, 233 in all.

After so many years abroad, and having grown accustomed to stark, desert landscapes, in his retirement Terry discovered an interest in gardening. Adjacent to the house, he cleared a patch of land of its rocks: jagged stones the size of grapefruits daring him to plant rows of bulbs in the land they had claimed. He filled buckets of them, laughingly offering them to passerby. But his hours kneeling in the soil culminated the next spring, when new daffodils and tulips emerged, opening in triumph their yellow and orange rippled lips.

Before Terry was a gardener, he was a chemistry professor. He knew how to follow instructions but he also knew when to experiment; he wasn’t intimidated by a limitless horizon and he taught his students to look closer, try it again, for what wonders await? He approached those Seattle steps like he approached dunes at Sea line and life itself: he stood back, sized it up, then climbed straight up the vertical face.

Some people would call Terry a trailblazer and although he possessed visionary qualities, plus a streak of independence, I don’t picture him
whacking back vines with a machete as much as fixing his eyes on a far-off
destination and rambling about, creating a desire line.

Desire lines are the pathways made by pedestrians who don’t stick to the
prescribed or formalized route. These stamped-down grass, the “cowpaths”
as they’re sometimes called, express instinctual human need to head in
our own directions\(^1\). Gaston Bachelard was the first to write about desire
paths in 1994, gathering from these well-trodden paths emotional attachments
particular people make to a route\(^2\). He found we pound out a route out
of necessity, yes, but also because of its familiarity or ability to satisfy
an aesthetic longing\(^2\). With Gandalf’s words, “Not all who wander are
lost,” Bachelard must agree\(^3\). Some wanderers have simply staked out a
destination and will avoid a longer or monotonous route for the path they
want to take – whether it be pleasurable, familiar, or more efficient.

Terry lived as both a desire path taker and maker. He was principled,
habitual. He swam every morning at 6 o’clock after measuring the
water temperature and recording it in his notebook. Every weekday, his
lunch was exactly four dates, one apple and one carrot, sliced. But his
steadfastness also left room for fun. His deep belly laughs would often
turn to wheezing with his eyes squeezed tight. A deep faith compelled him
to act kindly toward all God’s people, especially those with backgrounds
different than himself. The hospitable nature of his Arab friends rubbed
off on him: guests to his home would, without fail, be walked to their cars
where conversation continued. Terry didn’t take shortcuts in life, but he
also wasn’t afraid to choose an unpopular destination. He dug into life like
he dug into his rocky Seattle flower bed, and his email signature mirrored
his personal priorities: “Put first things first, and second things will
fall into place.”

Six months after our trek up the Seattle stairs, the chemo pills’ effectiveness
was maxed out. Radiation therapy was holding back brain cancer’s deluge
and salvaging a few more months for putting first things first. But life as he
had known it—syllabus-writing, formula-following, waffle-making—was
waning. In January, after flower beds were frozen over and grandkids had
come to hug their “Jiddo,” the neurologist told the man who had planted
so many years in Oman and Qatar, “You should go back and say goodbye.”

Thus Dr. Terry booked international flights for the last time. He leaned
back in those familiar burgundy seats and crossed an ocean to knock on
carved doors of his Omani friends and to sit in their majilis, tipping his finjan back and forth one final time. Khalas. Kafi.

By the time Terry made it to Doha on the final leg of his goodbye journey, his tumor’s swelling was picking up pace. He could manage only a few hours’ visit before returning to a dark hotel room, spent. One afternoon while he napped, his wife and I had coffee. She hesitated leaving him alone at all and, after a few sips of a cappuccino, returned quickly to check his status. But the road to their hotel was impassable by car, so upended and ravaged it was by diggers and cranes and barricades and blocks. Undeterred, she picked her way on foot over broken-up asphalt, wound around large barriers, and stepped over cast-off bricks. In this trek, deep down she knew, this is what you have before you. But you are not alone.

The tumor took over Terry’s frontal lobe a few months later, choking out cognition and function and finally life. Though his blood and brain waves tried valiantly to pick their way through a construction zone of swelling, the barrier was too high, and he died at home in Seattle, clearing a new desire path into life beyond.

What wonders await?

There is another steep incline at Katara, overgrown with winding vines and pocked with yellow flowers. From the car park below, no staircase is visible, so the interested walker is left with no choice but the desire lines. I imagine a gardener was the first to pick his way up the treacherous slope to repair irrigation lines or prune those chaotic vines. Later, others saw the trampled plants and chose the most convenient or pleasurable thing – like a StairMaster workout but more precarious! Desire path takers multiplied, enough to wear a dirt path directly up the incline, forming terraced footholds all the way up. Why not continue where others have gone before? Over time, the worn footfalls reveal a loosely formalized, shared experience, one that only emerges when its first taker is not the last.

For me, Terry’s is a legacy worth noting and a desire path worth sharing. He lived life outside of himself, giving himself up for his students and friends repeatedly. With characteristic warmth and hospitality, he took a couple of twenty-somethings—me and my husband—under his wing when we moved to Doha in 2009. Later, when I was overwhelmed with repeated disappointments, Terry did not offer me reasons to think differently or reminders that it could be much worse. Instead, a gentle
hand on my shoulder. A head nodded in understanding. He listened, and when Terry listened, somehow, all would be well.

In distressing times, I discovered I can’t always muster the faith or guts to travel the roads I must. If left a choice between planned cement sidewalks or the pathway stamped out by others, I choose the desire line. For me, following Terry’s path looks like remembering to listen to an overwhelmed friend without judging them, risking hospitality toward those unlike me, and maybe even walking someone to their car. At life’s most critical moments, this strategy isn’t a copout. It’s gracious common sense. When I don’t know the way, why not take the trusted footpath of another? A well-worn desire path might lead somewhere wonderful, or the journey itself might be pleasant enough to get me through.

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Since I really missed my grandparents, I wrote this essay to express how I felt about life after them. This work is unforgettable and contains a lot of hidden memories.

Shaikha Al-Burshaid is a Qatari student majoring in chemical engineering. She enjoys writing because she thinks writing is an art form that should be mastered. People can express themselves, their feelings, and their emotions in a unique way through writing. She is overjoyed that her work has been selected for the 2023 edition of Best Writing.
Life without grandpa Ali and my grandma Sara is so meaningless and without any honest old memories. After my grandparents died in a car accident in 2018, life suddenly became so boring. Before they died, we used to gather every Thursday in their house. It was like a main house where all of my mama’s family were. However, after they died, their house became abandoned.

One day I was forced to visit my grandparents’ house. I didn’t want to go there, but my mom shouted angrily, “If you don’t go, I will not talk with you, and I will be so mad at you, Shaikha!” My grandfather was an army veteran and a fisherman. He had a lot of pictures on his wall, one of when he won a competition for 10,000 Qatari riyals, another when he first joined the military. They are such meaningful pictures and the loveliest to my heart, especially the one where my grandfather Ali was 27 years old and wearing the white thobe, standing behind my grandmother Sara dressed in white, in their wedding. It wasn’t easy to see these pictures again, more than four years after they died.

I remember when I was 13 years old, my grandmother was cooking the best fish machboos from fish my grandfather caught. I liked to watch her when she was cleaning the fish, and once asked her if she was afraid. She laughed and said, “I used to do this since I married your grandfather.” Then my grandfather came to bother her by eating before she finished her cooking. My favorite moment is when I saw the love between both of my grandparents when they saw their children and the children of their children. Their eyes spoke, and it seems that they were so lucky to have each other.

After my grandparents died, our family traditions changed. During every Eid, we used to be in my grandparents’ house from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. Now, we gather from 1 to 5 p.m., and then our family Eid ceremony finishes. Further, my family and I used to gather every Thursday. But since my grandparents died, we gather twice a month. However, my grandmother Sara left for me her special fabric swatch, as I was her favorite granddaughter. This swatch is now inside a closet, and I don’t think that I will put it in my hand until my biggest day when I will dress in white.
The poem was originally written back when I was in eighth grade in high school. During that time, our English lessons were mostly focused on literature, and we had to write many poems, sonnets, haiku, and other literary pieces. The poem “Embrace the Wonder of Life” was meant to be submitted as my final piece for the end of the eighth-grade semester, but I decided to write another poem instead, so this poem never made it beyond the draft stage. When I saw the Best Writing competition, I decided to work on the poem and improve it, as I regretted not submitting it back in high school. Essentially, the poem is meant to grab the reader’s attention and make them think about their goals in life. It shows us how life can be a beautiful thing and that we should not take anything for granted. The reader should also understand that every day is a lesson, and that if things do not go as planned, we would learn how to cope with the consequences, which could be a very useful thing for our future actions.

Marwan Humaid is a Bulgarian-Palestinian student majoring in computer science and engineering at Hamad Bin Khalifa University, but is also cross-registered at Texas A&M University at Qatar. He enjoys writing, as it allows him to express his views on topics in a indirect way. He finds writing more effective compared to directly expressing an opinion. He believes that literature can be used as a tool for our society to learn from, and improve over time, as literature is one of the most important elements of all cultures around the world.
EMBRACE THE WONDER OF LIFE

The world is full of wonder, so much to explore
From mountains high to oceans deep, and everything in store.
Each day brings new adventures, for those who dare to seek
And every step we take, can be a journey unique.

We find ourselves in moments, that take our breath away
The beauty of the world around, inspires us to stay.
We laugh, we cry, we learn, we grow, and always we aspire
To make the most of every day and live a life entire.

And when the sun begins to set, and darkness fills the sky
We know that we have done our best, and that’s the reason why.
We cherish all our memories and hold them close in heart
For every moment that we’ve lived, has been a work of art.

So let us take these precious gifts and share them far and wide
And spread the love and joy we’ve found, to all who are beside.
For life is but a fleeting thing, a moment in the sun
And every second that we have, should be enjoyed and won.

Let us take the world by storm and make it our own place
And fill it up with happiness and leave behind no trace.
Of sadness or of sorrow, but only love and light
For that is what the world needs most, to shine both day and night.
While working on an assignment for a course, I got to explore and learn more about what truly happened during the Bangladesh liberation war. Every piece I have encountered talks about the pain and the suffering of the people and how it had left them hopeless before finally earning our freedom. This piece looks at our freedom in a different perspective. Those who once fought for freedom, their voices now breathe life into poetry, igniting inspiration within us all. Their struggles, their unwavering dedication to change, are forever etched into the records of history, laying the foundation for a future that gleams with potential. Amidst a world clouded by uncertainties, their legacy emerges as a guiding light, cutting through the ordinary shadows. The stars of their aspirations shimmer above, serving as a radiant roadmap for us to embrace. As we continue our journey, their essence transforms into our guiding compass, leading us through every step of life’s path.

Samiha Rahman was born in Bangladesh but transplanted to Qatar during her formative years. She carries her cultural roots as a torch lighting her path. With a never-ending passion, she dives into her Bangladeshi heritage, putting in the effort to connect her present with where she comes from. Raised in a household brimming with creativity, courtesy of her artist father and writer mother, she proudly wears the mantle of their influences. Samiha’s deep love for the beauty of languages drives her dreams; she imagines a future full of adventures, where she can uncover the intricate blend of languages and art forms from different corners of the world.
LEGACY OF TIME

It will always be etched in time,
The mark of those who came before.
Their memories live on in rhyme,
Their courage echoes evermore.

Their voices still ring clear and loud,
Championing causes of the past.
Their struggles helped to pave the road,
On which we all must walk at last.

Their legacies, though years have passed,
Are bridges to the future’s dawn.
A map to help us chart the path,
And rise above what we have known.

Their boldness, like a beacon bright,
Guides us through the darkest night.
Their dreams, like stars that light the sky,
Illuminate the path we try.
The future lies before us now,
A canvas waiting for our art.
With each new step, we must allow,
Our courage to ignite our heart.
COMMUNITY
CONSIDERATION
CONVINCION
COMPETENCE
KINDNESS
KNOWLEDGE
CREATIVITY
STORY
BOUNDLESS
COMPREHENSION
EXCELLENCE
EXPERIENCE
DECLARATION
RESPECT
DIVERSITY
AMBITION
WORD
FASCINATION
IDENTITY
FUTURE
ART
MEANING
LEGACY
COLLABORATION
PASSION
EXPRESSION
FEELING
ELEGANCE
GROWTH
BELIEF
CURiosity
CONTENT
CONVERSATION
DISCUSSION
EXHIBITION
EXHIBITION
Abir Raslan | Qatar Welcomes the World. Flag Plaza, Doha, November 2022.
As we try to match the fast rhythm of life, the fear of getting left behind engulfs us. Overthinking further twists our relationships with others, making us feel miles away, even from those we hold dear. Lost in thought, we wonder if we’ll ever find ourselves again, if we’ll regain our footing, if we’ll truly belong.

Reem ElShabasy is a chemical engineering senior who enjoys reading, writing, drawing, and watching shows in her free time. She’s fond of things that spark her imagination, which makes sci-fi and fantasy her favorite genres. It is for the same reason that she loves poetry, even when she can’t fully understand it. She sees it as a preservation of others’ voices and a projection of her own. If you find her awake past midnight, she’s most likely writing another poem (or just drowning in her CHEN assignments).
TO BELONG

There is a sense of longing that gnaws at me when I look at other people living their dream. There is a certain fear that engulfs me when I watch others advance as I fall behind. I pace two steps forward, three and four, but I never seem to catch up for long.

Their bond is too strong; it keeps them from falling. My bonds with them are entangled; they trip me over I can’t seem to hold on.

There is a feeling that gnaws at me—a sense of longing, a sense of wanting to belong.
Mohamed Bakri is an electrical engineering student in the Class of 2026. Some of his hobbies include robotics, computers, and debating. He also enjoys sports such as Formula 1 and football, where he supports the biggest club in London, Chelsea FC. His love for writing was inspired by reading novels as a child. His favorite book is *Not a Penny More, Not a Penny Less* by Jeffrey Archer.
“History is who we are and why we are the way we are.”
David McCullough, American historian (1933-2022)

The National Museum of Qatar’s primary purpose is to represent Qatari identity and showcase Qatar’s rich culture and history. The exhibits tell the marvelous story of how Qatar went from a small Gulf state with an economy dependent on pearl diving and fishing to one of the largest exporters of liquefied natural gas, which allowed the country to develop and greatly increase the quality of life of its citizens and residents.

This new building was opened in March 2019 and was designed by French architect Jean Nouvel, who was inspired by the desert rose crystal. The desert rose is a unique and intricate crystal that is formed when discs of gypsum are joined together and is typically found trapped between layers of dry and wet sand. The final product is a striking and sophisticated
flowerlike structure that, according to Nouvel, serves as a symbolic element that fuses the contrasting stories of Qatar and its people¹.

The museum is on Museum Street in the Corniche, a seven-kilometer-long promenade along Doha Bay². The Corniche is filled with beautiful parks, cafes, museums, restaurants, and luxurious hotels such as the iconic pyramid-shaped Sheraton Hotel. This is also where celebrations of events such as Qatar National Day and National Sports Day are held. Think of it as Qatar’s version of Constitution Avenue or National Harbor. Another cool feature of this museum is that it is located directly across the bay from Stadium 974, which is one of the eight stadiums where World Cup matches were held.

The first thing you notice when you walk through the entrance, aside from the much-needed air conditioning, is the dim lighting, which instills a sense of peace. This is further aided by calming music that changes to fit the theme of the specific gallery you are in. I later learned that the lighting also serves a more practical purpose: protecting the pieces on display from degradation caused by light.

In contrast to some of the items on display, the museum is very modern, featuring interactive displays that provide more detailed information regarding the exhibits. Some of them even have fun games like collecting pearls. The walkways’ walls also feature projectors that play immersive videos and well-directed short films related to whichever gallery you are in. There is a café near the main entrance, and of course, they also have a couple of gift shops.

The museum tells the story of Qatar in a series of 11 chronological exhibitions that feature authentic documents and objects that portray some of the pivotal points in the nation’s history, such as the original constitution and maps made by European powers who set their eyes on controlling the Gulf region. The 11 galleries are divided into three main chapters that revolve around a specific theme³.

**CHAPTER ONE—BEGINNINGS**

The first gallery is called “The Formation of Qatar.” It describes how the peninsula we now know as Qatar came to be, going back as far as 700 million years ago, when it was nothing more than a somewhat distinct blob of land. This is also where you will find the fossils of a few extinct creatures that used to live in and around Qatar.
You then move on to the second gallery, which explores Qatar’s natural environments and the diverse species that inhabit this country ranging from the national animal, the Arabian Oryx, to whale sharks, dugongs, and falcons. This chapter is concluded by what is, in my opinion, one of the best exhibits, “The Archaeology of Qatar.” In this gallery, you will find fascinating artifacts left behind by previous inhabitants. Some notable examples include recreated campsites and ancient equipment like pots and pans.

CHAPTER TWO—LIFE IN QATAR

This chapter focuses on the most important aspect of any civilization: its people. It beautifully represents the traditions and rich culture of the Qatari people, going into detail about their lifestyle and the techniques they employed to live in less than friendly conditions.
You are also introduced to a crucial part of Qatari heritage and history: pearls. These shiny little spheres shaped the way in which people lived and even celebrated. The museum rightfully dedicates an entire gallery to pearls, where it showcases stunning pieces of jewelry. It is interesting to think about how different this country would be if it weren’t for these precious pearls.

CHAPTER THREE—MODERN HISTORY OF QATAR

We now get to every history enthusiast’s favorite chapter, where you learn, in vivid detail, about the entire history of Qatar as a state and even prior to that. Tribal disputes and conflict, invasion, and conquest by major European powers like Britain and Portugal, eventual unification under a ruling family, and significant economic catastrophes and opportunities are just some of the things described in the three galleries that make up this chapter. This is also where you encounter my personal favorite display, which shows off traditional swords and firearms that were used in battle against invaders.
Last but not least, we arrive at the largest artifact on display: The Old Palace. It was built in 1906 and has been renovated several times over the years. The palace served as the home and seat of the government of Sheikh Abdullah bin Jassim Al Thani for around 25 years[^4]. Visitors get to explore the palace and learn about some of the interesting design choices that make living in the extreme heat somewhat comfortable.

[^4]: [4]
I have always been fascinated by history. Why is a certain country powerful or poor or large or tiny? Why do these countries like or hate each other? Why does this country excel at a specific thing? All these questions and much more can only be answered by understanding the string of planned events, coincidences, and pure mystery that is history.

My passion for history and politics still doesn't explain why I chose to write about this specific museum. There are plenty of historically significant landmarks within walking distance of the National Museum of Qatar, such as the Museum of Islamic Art or Souq Waqif. Indeed, these places are fascinating, as I am sure my classmates have proven to you in their descriptions, but what intrigues me about the National Museum of Qatar is the way in which it depicts the story of Qatar, relying on a mix of very modern tools and ancient artifacts. It also spares no details in its description of the journey. The end result is a mesmerizing and accurate illustration that almost everyone will find entertaining.

The story of Qatar is particularly important to me because, while I am Sudanese, I was born and raised in this country, which essentially makes it my second home. Naturally, there is an element of functional attachment at play; living in Qatar has granted me an incredible number of opportunities in every facet of my life, such as access to high-quality education and affordable healthcare. I am, without a doubt, extremely fortunate to live here, but there is another layer to the bond I have developed with this country. Everything I have experienced over the 18 years I’ve been on this planet, whether it be friendships, academic and personal challenges, or even loss, happened here in this country that is around 1,400 miles from my true home. All these events, however inconsequential and trivial they might be, add up to form a remarkably powerful emotional bond.
Furthermore, it would be foolish to ignore the religious and cultural factors in my attachment to Qatar. The vast majority of the people here practice the same religion I do and hold similar beliefs; a sizable portion of them are also Arabs. This contributes to a sense of homogeneity, which makes it easier to fit in and interact with others. These benefits, crucially, do not come at the cost of diversity, allowing me to enjoy the best of both worlds.

The roots and connections I have developed in this country certainly push me to be curious about understanding its past, to try to explain how and why my parents left their homes to come and raise a family here. These questions are answered by appreciating the exhibits in the National Museum of Qatar, but, at the same time, you are also forced to wonder and ask yourself, “What if?”

REFERENCES


The research essay delves into the captivating world of media and its pervasive influence on our perceptions, specifically exploring the damaging impact of stereotypes. It unravels the intricate web of gender and ethnic stereotypes woven into our media landscape, shedding light on the pernicious effects of these ingrained biases. The consequences of stereotypes are laid bare from prejudice and discrimination to the perpetuation of inequality.

As we reflect on this thought-provoking topic, we confront the distorted lens through which media portrays diverse cultures and identities. Stereotypes not only obscure reality but also stifle our understanding of the rich tapestry of humanity. They serve to reinforce biases, hindering our collective progress. However, as discerning consumers of media, we hold the power to challenge and dismantle these stereotypes.

By championing inclusive and authentic representations, we can forge a more equitable society that embraces the uniqueness of every individual. Breaking free from the shackles of stereotypes enables us to foster empathy, deepen understanding, and celebrate our diverse global community. Let us embark on this transformative journey, rejecting stereotypes and embracing the rich mosaic of humanity that surrounds us.

Hemyan Al-Malki is a passionate scholar and writer dedicated to addressing social issues through academic research. With a keen interest in exploring the impact of media on stereotypes and their consequences, Hemyan embarked on a journey to investigate the role of media in
perpetuating stereotypes based on gender, race, and ethnicity. Recognizing the significant role of media in shaping public perceptions, Hemyan sought to shed light on the adverse effects of stereotypes. Their research highlighted the detrimental impact of media stereotypes and emphasized the need to challenge and eliminate these harmful portrayals. As a dedicated writer, researcher, and advocate, Hemyan strives to contribute to a more inclusive and equitable society. By addressing stereotypes, Hemyan aims to promote understanding, empathy, and the dismantling of harmful biases in media representations. Through their academic pursuits, Hemyan Al-Malki continues to engage in critical dialogue, pushing boundaries, and advocating for positive change in the media landscape.
STEREOTYPING IN THE MEDIA

Abstract: Media has become an increasingly vital component of our daily lives. It shapes how we see the world and our perspective about others in today's globalizing society. It casts an effect on individuals and society, yet the media plays an adverse role in shaping stereotypes under their umbrella. Media has portrayed women, and other people with unique attributes like race, caste, and color in a fashion that makes them appear that they are considered lower or “others” in the global village. This explores addresses such stereotypes and their adverse effects, which shows why it is vital to mitigate them from the world.

Keywords: stereotypes, gender stereotypes, media, advantages, disadvantages

I. INTRODUCTION

A stereotype is a specific idea or a collection of ideas about a particular community, place, country, or situation. Groups are commonly subjected to stereotyping, wherein they are often categorized and generalized based on distinct attributes such as sex, gender identity, race, ethnicity, nationality, age, income level, language, and various other factors. According to Communications scholar Robin Nabi (2009), stereotypes are inherent features of human cognition.

Most of the time, these stereotypes are developed incorrectly. Many academic fields use this stereotype concept, including psychology, neurology, anthropology, sociology, and cultural studies. Stereotypes commonly contribute to ethnocentrism, prejudice, and discrimination because they lead people to create broad assumptions about others without having access to such knowledge.

Stereotypes can manifest across various forms of media, including movies, documentaries, and even children’s cartoons. According to Dana Mastro, a professor of Communication, media images play a significant role in both perpetuating and establishing these stereotypes (2009). Such stereotypes could be against different genders, nationalities, races, or religions. Multiple studies have demonstrated that the media plays a role in reinforcing negative stereotypes about different ethnic and racial groups. Furthermore, the media holds influence over society and significantly impacts how people acquire knowledge and understanding about one
another (Stereotypes, n.d.). In many different forms of media, such as news, cinema, and games, ethnic minority populations are frequently forgotten and ignored. They are frequently misrepresented as the unsettling “other,” disproportionately portrayed as violent, criminal, or “less than” dominant groups, or only shown in specific contexts (Ross, 2019).

Mass media has a vast reach in our society and act as the critical source through which people learn about each other. However, our media still keeps producing stereotypical content biased towards ethnicities and races. In various mediums, such as games, news, and dramas, ethnic groups are overlooked and marginalized. Even if they are represented, they are portrayed in one-sided or narrowly stereotyped roles such as exotic Latinas, Asian migrants, or some “other” problematic roles. Ultimately, they are shown as lower than other dominant groups (i.e., less powerful, less intelligent, and less worthy).

Arabs frequently encounter negative ethnic stereotypes, which have been prominently portrayed in the media of Western countries, particularly Europe and the United States. The term “Arab face” is associated with producing and disseminating racist stereotypes and evil thoughts about Arabs. The inhabitants of the Middle East are sometimes referred to as “Arabs,” even though there is a wide range of differences between countries there. Each country has its unique culture, beliefs, and religious practices. Moreover, millions of Arabs are not Muslims, and millions of Muslims are not Arabs, despite the common belief that Arabs and Muslims are the same. For instance, Iranians are Persians, not Arabs. They are not of Semitic descent and do not speak Arabic. The phrase “Arab” is often used colloquially in America to refer to a few stereotyped pictures. A scoundrel, seducer, hustler, and robber who lurks at the gates of civilization for decades, the Arab has played these roles for centuries. New stereotypes, such as the fanatical terrorist and the suicide bomber, evolved in the latter half of the 20th century. In every form of American media, including novels, movies, television, and video games, Arabs have evolved into universally detested antagonists or buffoons (Gandhi, 2022).

Arabs from the Middle East often face misconceptions and incorrect stereotypes. One prevalent stereotype is the belief that all Arab countries are in desert regions and oil-rich regions only, which is not valid. Additionally, Arab countries have been stereotyped as primitive countries with no development in them, which is not true at all. Contrary to this stereotype, Arab countries boast thriving cities alongside their desert
landscapes. In fact, nearly all Arab countries have witnessed substantial progress, particularly the Gulf countries, which is readily evident to anyone who visits them. Furthermore, it is misleading to assume that Arab countries rely solely on oil for their prosperity. While oil remains a significant economic factor for most Arab nations, they are actively diversifying their economies, with tourism playing a crucial role. For instance, cities like Dubai, Riyadh, and Doha are rapidly emerging as premier global tourist destinations (Common misconceptions, 2013).

II. GENDER STEREOTYPES AND ROLE OF MEDIA

Stereotypes based on gender roles, known as gender stereotypes, are one of the most common examples in media. Media often confines the roles of each gender, exemplifying certain stereotypes. For instance, in a relationship, men are commonly depicted as the primary focus on work, making money, rarely lending a hand around the house, and enjoying sports with the boys. Conversely, women are portrayed as materialistic, showing interest in makeup, fashion, cooking, cleaning, and tending to their children. Even when women are depicted in professional settings, their job opportunities are often portrayed as limited. For instance, it is common to see men portrayed as doctors while women are portrayed as nurses in the media. Similarly, men are often depicted as managers while women are depicted as secretaries. These stereotypes are completely inaccurate. Women have the capability to pursue careers as doctors, engineers, CEOs, or any profession they choose. When the media portrays women as weaker or unsuitable for powerful positions, it perpetuates injustice. This can lead to real-life consequences, as people may wrongly believe that female employees are incapable of performing at the same level as their male counterparts, regardless of their actual qualifications and achievements (Killian, 2022). Due to these stereotypes, men consider themselves more powerful than women, and women are often portrayed as disempowered and dependent on men. An excellent example of this can be quoted from a 1985 Japanese movie, Tampopo. In this movie, women are depicted as accessories to men, as soulless household appliances or submissive sexual playthings, whose existence is based on their utility as a long-suffering mother or a sexual partner only. Even in the present day, the same concept holds: women are expected to do household chores and be subservient to their husbands. It ultimately depicts a very stark divide between the role of both sexes in society (Andres, 2017).
III. PROS AND CONS OF STEREOTYPING

There are substantial adverse effects in real life due to stereotyping. First, stereotyping can result in low morale for the person or group affected and may even create a hostile work environment in companies and industries. Employees may become unmotivated and uninterested in their work if they consistently get remarks, critiques, or other unfavorable outcomes due to stereotyping. This may lead to a delay in the development of the country. Second, stereotypes frequently result in prejudice, that is, the preference for one individual or group over another based on assumptions rather than experience or reason. Third, stereotypes may lead to gender injustice. Due to historical sexism in western civilization, women were denied access to the same educational possibilities as their male counterparts. As a result, men produced more media, and stereotypes about how women ought to act were constructed. Finally, stereotypes may lead to hatred and animosity between societies and countries. This may lead to wars and heavy losses in the future (Gill, 2012).

Even though stereotyping is a very bad habit and has a lot of disadvantages, it still has some advantages. First, when faced with an unfamiliar environment and the need to make quick judgments and decisions, stereotypes might be helpful. If you have never encountered a member of royalty, for instance, you may have a stereotype of them being formal and reserved, which may aid in your ability to respond to them respectfully and model their conduct. Stereotyping can be thought of as the simplification of our environment for ease of understanding. Second, by grouping people into stereotypes, you may create expectations about them and their behavior, which can make life more predictable and simpler to comprehend. Some people may enjoy being stereotyped because they want their appearance and manner of clothing to be obvious to others, who will therefore be quick to judge them and know how to treat them and how other people feel about them (Stereotyping, n.d.)

IV. CONCLUSION

Mass media plays a vital role in shaping the collective identities of groups and individuals and distorts the picture that the audience sees by stereotyping certain groups. Researchers have found evidence of how media promotes public hostility toward ethnic groups and lowers their
self-esteem. Research to combat stereotypes and promote a positive image in the media is crucial (Ross, 2019).

In a nutshell, stereotyping is a nasty habit that no one should adopt, and it should stop appearing in the media. Even if it has some advantages, its disadvantages affect way more. Avoiding stereotypes will lead to a safe, healthy environment between employees, people of different nationalities, and worldwide. Avoiding stereotyping will also prepare us as people evolve and accept others, get to know them, and learn from their differences. Acceptance of other societies will make our country’s relations with other countries stronger, as we will have diplomatic relations, which will lead to the development of our country and elevate our country among the world.

REFERENCES


Yahya Obeid

I started working on this piece as part of an ENGL 222 assignment. Simply put, I was asked to write a narrative speech that articulates a personal belief of mine while relating it to the class material. As I made progress writing the narrative, I began to realize that it did not only showcase a belief of mine, but it also encompassed a lot of the personal development I have made throughout my life while blowing the smoke off from a problem much larger than me alone.

Yahya Obeid is an electrical and computer engineering major. In his free time, he likes to try and find out what he would enjoy doing in his free time. He also likes learning about a lot of different things, but he often takes it so seriously that whether it counts as free time or not is up for debate.
THIS I BELIEVE

Reading about Hanan, the protagonist of *The Inheritance of Exile*, I immediately felt a connection between her dilemma and one that troubled me for most of my life: the subconscious struggle to try to fit in. Having been forced to live in exile all my life, I was bound to face the same trouble of feeling that my identity would never allow me to belong anywhere I live. As a refugee, it often seems that I am reduced to this label by people who don’t know me. To many I am either an inconvenience or a victim that they have a duty to pity without considering the historical and current factors that have forced me into my position, and as a consequence, I am grouped with other refugees, erasing my traits as an individual. Despite that, I have come to the realization that to live in dignity, one must not suppress who they are in an attempt to conform to the norms of the society in which they live. Instead, they should be aware that they should make their own judgments and have their own standards.

Going back to the story of Hanan, I notice that although there is much similarity between her situation and mine, there is one fundamental difference: Hanan seemed to have decided to dissociate from her Palestinian identity, as she probably found herself more secure as an American. My experience meeting Palestinians and other displaced people, especially since I have moved to Qatar for university, has led me to believe that this is due to Hanan’s status of citizenship. Although both of us are aware that our Palestinian identities are unwelcome, Hanan has the option to relieve herself of all the trouble she associates with embracing her roots without necessarily being conscious about why she has chosen to do so. I, on the other hand, have not had this option.

My family on both sides having been ethnically cleansed from Palestine in 1948, my great-grandparents were the last generation to have experienced living in their homeland, where their culture did not seem alien to those around them. My grandparents, my parents, and I, have consequently spent almost the entirety of our lives in Lebanon. Growing up as a child, I got the message that I should not make it obvious that I was Palestinian in public. Stories I would hear from my family about their experiences during Lebanon’s civil war, job vacancy posters I would see on the street that asked for nationals only to apply, and small details in my daily life like the day I found out that my elementary school best friend was also Palestinian...
but would only speak the Lebanese dialect reinforced this unspoken rule in my head.

As my life progressed, I have learned to master becoming two people. The first person being the Palestinian version of myself, which only my family and relatives would see, and the second person would be the other me. The other me who would speak the Lebanese dialect but would still feel like an outsider every day in the morning when the national anthem played on the speakers in school and everyone had to stand up to words expressing loyalty to a homeland that wasn’t mine.

Fast forward to my life in middle school, and I was having a harder time keeping my first identity a secret. I had just received a scholarship to a new school in sixth grade, and this school had a program in which students would travel together with their teachers for a week every year. Until this day, I remember the fear I felt at the airport on the day of departure during the sixth grade’s program. I had recently received my travel document, and I was terrified when I heard some of the students behind me in line ask each other what passports they have, as almost everyone either had a national passport or a western one if they were dual citizens.

My fear was justified when we reached the duty-free area, and I left my travel document face down, next to my bag on one of the seats facing the stores. I was strolling around the shops mindlessly, when a kid I knew approached me with my travel document in his hand. “You’re a refugee!?” he remarked and grinned spitefully as he read the print. I frowned at him and snatched my travel document from his hand. Although I have no memory of what I uttered to him, I can vividly recall how embarrassed I felt at that moment as my head filled with thoughts of assumptions that he might have had about me.

Since then, I have begun to reflect on myself and my identity, and tried to understand why I was conflicted and felt the way that I did. I have also since become less concerned about other’s perception of me and more concerned with why I am a refugee in the first place. I slowly began to realize that a person should not be ashamed of something they have no control over, and that simply because a culture is in the minority does not mean it is inferior in any way. This I believe.
Chapter 4: Overcoming Obstacles
Imran Parvez | Embracing the Void. Fuwairit Beach, January 2023.
Noof Alnasr, a dedicated chemical engineering student (Class of 2026), possesses a profound passion for the art of photography. Her keen eye for detail and aesthetics translates into captivating photographs, which find their way onto her Instagram feed, mesmerizing viewers. Through her eloquent writing, she articulates her thoughts and shares her experiences on social media. Noof’s thirst for exploration leads her to uncover hidden gems in unfamiliar locations, embracing the thrill of discovering the unknown. With a unique blend of creativity and curiosity, Noof Alnasr continues to inspire others through her artistic endeavors and love for adventure.
OBSTACLE CHALLENGE

It is good to work on something that will benefit you in the future. My journey began when I learned another language besides Arabic in primary school. I was in a school that taught subjects in English, and I had a good foundation and knowledge of grammar in English. The situation started to change after I transferred to a school that taught in advanced Arabic. I felt like I had lost my English, and this lowered my confidence at some point. I decided to start from scratch and not let changing my school be a barrier to mastering the English language.

Because I felt embarrassed and insecure, I decided to start developing the language at home first. I began to merge some Arabic and English words. I replaced long Arabic terms with shorter terms in English; for example, instead of Alsalam Alikom Wa Rahma Allah Wa Barakatu, I simply said “hi.” When I was altering some Arabic terms to English, no one made fun of me, and my parents encouraged me a bit. I remember precisely when I went to my grandmother’s house with my father. My father was proud of me and told everyone that his daughter was more fluent in English than her sisters, and his eyes shone with pride. After that, I felt that my self-confidence began to rise in front of my cousins in my grandmother’s house.

After I felt confident that I could gain the language skills again, I thought a lot about the next step I should take to develop further. I was sitting in my room with my favorite pink notebook in my hands. The house was so quiet that I could hear my heartbeat. My to-do list page was opened. I challenged myself and wrote never to speak English in front of my friends at school. And here was the struggling point. On Sunday, I had a math class at 7:00 in the morning. I was ten minutes late. I entered the classroom and said to my classmates, “Good morning.” All my classmates and the teacher laughed at me. The math teacher stopped the lesson and told me, “تحدثي باللغة العربية”. I was sitting in the very back row in the class with my hands and legs trembling, my body sweating, and my body temperature rising from embarrassment. She paused the lesson and started talking about the importance of paying attention to the Arabic language and its importance for us as Muslims. We should not get rid of our language by replacing it with English. However, what caused me regret at 18 was that she did not say we could speak and master both English and Arabic.
The next step in my favorite small pink notebook I titled “Obstacles Challenge.” The most difficult task was to challenge the environment that was disappointing me and destroying my confidence. I spoke more in English at school. I wrote dates, numbers, and the day in English. I preferred reading English novels and books in my leisure time at school. A group of girls who sat at the front of the class laughed at me and started bullying me. I was going to explode in anger, but I decide to calm myself down and say that one day they would want to develop their English language skills. It will be too late when a private university rejects them in a few years after discovering they are weak in English. But I insisted and challenged myself to complete my mission.

The task highlighted at the bottom of the page of my pink notebook was to take the English language placement test before applying to universities. I only studied or prepared for it a little, to find out my absolute level of English, without knowing the techniques of taking the exam. I thought a lot two days before my exam. All my classmates were waiting for me to take the exam to tell them my result. Finally, the exam day came, and I was so panicked that my grade would be low and my classmates would embarrass me. Indeed, I did not overcome my fear during the exam, but I was content with my performance. Two weeks later, the exam results came out, and it was satisfactory.

I won the battle. I learned that when society rejects something considered your desire, it does not prevent you from achieving it. Determination can move you to a satisfactory result. I faced many difficulties in year seven when it was challenging to acquire a language, but I fought for what I wanted to achieve. Ultimately, I was admitted to an American university that teaches courses in English. I have had no difficulty in understanding the professor’s speech, and I communicate easily with students of other nationalities. My plan was the most correct step I have ever taken in my life.
Al Hanouf Al-Abduljabar

Do you truly know what meaning comes from the “endless” word? For me, it means that stories never have an ending. I specifically made this piece of writing for the book of Best Writing, as it is so meaningful to me. This essay describes a portion of my life, the experiences I have been through, and unexpected situations that have kept me from ever dreaming. In this piece, I discuss how life is going and how failure might be the first step toward success.

Al Hanouf Al-Abduljabar is a sophomore majoring in chemical engineering. She writes to express her feelings and challenges. She aspires to become a well-known author one day.
“I’m sorry, but I don’t think you deserve it.” Many obstacles got in my way and prevented me from achieving my goals. I dreamed a lot and fell. I’m the kind of person who always thinks life isn’t worth living if you are not doing something you truly love! On my way to my dreams, I fell several times, and some people tried to pull me back to the starting point. I felt disappointed every time I tried to reach one of my goals and found myself fighting for nothing in the end. But I never gave up on myself. I knew that there was a light waiting for me at the end of the road!

In my childhood, I used to draw a lot. It was my main hobby and I really enjoyed it. My family was always telling me that I would be a great artist in the future. I have dreamt of having an exhibition of my drawings. Later in life, my dreams grew bigger as I got older, and things in my life changed, such as hobbies, interests, and so on. I found out that drawing is not a thing I enjoy anymore. I lost my passion for it, and I think losing a passion for something you like may make you never want to do it again.

However, during my first year at high school, I began doing new activities I had never done before, and found out that I am good at other things and that it isn’t just drawing that determines who I am. Initially, since it was my first year in high school, there were a lot of challenges that made me go through a difficult time. There was a book exhibition that had just opened, and I actually wasn’t interested in going, but one of my friends convinced me to go with her. When I saw the books everywhere, I was amazed! “Wow, how great their world is!” I told myself. What impressed me the most was seeing the authors with proud expressions telling people about their stories. It made me feel in a way I had never felt before. My eyes brightened every time I saw an author standing with their book. I tried once to write my feelings, through my genuine attempt to capture the depths of my being in writing, the painful journey of abandonment I experienced revealed itself as an endless source of intense feelings. These emotions infused my words with an unstoppable passion that surpassed the turbulence of my past. It was a special feeling when I started to write for the first time. I held the pen and looked at the paper, and I started to write without stopping or thinking about what I should write. I felt that my feelings were spilled on the paper and became expressive words. An inner voice came to my head and said, “You are good at writing!” I saw that writing is actually my best way of expressing my feelings, and I finally found something I like to do.
Besides writing, I was practicing and enjoying other hobbies, such as sports. Once, a girl in my school came to my classroom and announced, “If you’re interested in athletics and want to join, meet with the sports instructor.” I was interested, so I decided to join. After a few days, my request was approved. I practiced hard until I was prepared enough for the competition. One week later, my instructor told me that I would not join their team. I asked her why, but her only answer was that they already had enough competitors. I ran away to a place where no one could catch me crying, and the washroom was an ideal spot. I looked at myself in the mirror, and tears rushed down my face, turning my cheeks into a river of sadness. Each tear held an unknown story, a weight lifted from my heart’s burden. I gave myself permission to fully embrace the emotions that had overwhelmed me.

One of my other rejection stories occurred during my last year of high school, when I decided to join one of the writing competitions that I had heard about from one of my friends. I told my Arabic teacher about it, and she said, “I already nominated your name.” It felt great that I would finally accomplish something that was related to writing. After a few days, a committee evaluator visited our school to conduct interviews with those students who had been nominated. I was excited until I realized that my name wasn’t called. “What about me?” I asked. I discovered that my name was excluded without reason. I was broken. I felt like luck was never on my side. I recall calling my mom from the school phone that day, crying so hard as I explained the scenario to her. My mom proudly said “Your current wishes will become vibrant realities in the future. You still have a long journey and if now isn’t the right time I am sure it will be in other time and different circumstances”. The profound impact of her words resonated within me, creating an incredible burst of motivation that exceeded all expectations.

I am writing to tell you that this wasn’t the end of the story. It’s just the beginning of a new journey. I have successfully achieved one of my major goals by becoming a part of TAMUQ. I never gave up, and I will never. I am already working on publishing my first book. What I learned is that I will never succeed without suffering. At the end of the road, I realize that all my small dreams that I was wishing for were being replaced by bigger achievements. I realize that not everything I wished for was supposed to come true. You will never know unless you try!
THE EAGER MONSTER

I was a cute, chubby, brown-haired baby with honey-colored eyes, the first-born boy to lovely parents living in Qatar. Due to that, my parents set high hopes for me. I went to the best schools in Qatar and learned how to read and write Arabic when I was five years old. I wore a dark green Chanel jumper with white Louis Vuitton shoes that none of my classmates could afford. I was smart, confident, and elegant. Yet I might have also been considered spoiled, arrogant, and stupid sometimes. When I asked for something, I received it, so I never stopped asking for more. Nothing was enough for me, which made my parents’ attitude change.

When I was six, I went to a big, crowded carnival called “Darb Al Saei” with my parents. As soon as I arrived, I saw a yellow football near the entrance that I wanted more than anything. “Mom, I want this ball,” I said, pointing at the ball.

“Sure, but we have to win this dart game to get it,” my mom replied.

I had five tries to pop three balloons. My first try was entirely off the target; however, on the second try, I somehow popped one. That gave me hope, which I wished it had not, because the other three tries were so shameful that I would not talk about them. “Mom, buy it for me; I cannot win this,” I said.

“That is not how it works; you must earn it, not buy it,” she said with a terrifyingly cold look that I had never seen before.

My mom said that because she could not buy unnecessary stuff anymore. Our family’s circumstances were not the same as when I was born. I knew that when I heard her shouting at my father in the living room, two months earlier, “You lost your job. What are we going to do now? What will we eat?” She had never shouted at my father before, which is why I remember that day.

However, my mother’s words, “you must earn it, not buy it,” changed my life. That evening, while I was sitting in my bed, I wondered, till when will I be the spoiled kid? I must do something, or my family will suffer more. That sense of responsibility came in handy when I became an older brother of two girls and a boy. Seeing them as kids, unable to reach their little cars on the table and asking me to hand them to them, made me realize what it means to be the oldest son. I felt the responsibilities upon my shoulders.
When my parents were not at home, I became the government: it is what I say that gets done. It is my opinion that is taken into consideration. So, I decided to direct my sense of dissatisfaction in a way that could be beneficial for my parents. The ability to not only analyze a situation, but to also take the necessary steps to support my parents began to develop.

My first step in directing that eager Monster within me was in school, because I thought it was my way to a better future. I used to play PlayStation for eight hours straight and spend the rest of my day sleeping or watching football matches. Overnight that changed. I started studying days and nights, doing every homework assignment as soon as it was uploaded, knowing that my family could not afford my university tuition and feed four kids anymore.

The last year in high school was handy. I spent all my time studying to the point that I decided to memorize four English essays for the exam instead of writing one to ensure I did not lose grades. I had no social life, my beard and hair had grown long, and I lost my desire to watch football matches or play video games. The only time I had other than studying was for praying, and even there, “Please, God, make my exams easier,” I would pray. I guess God answered me because I managed to get a 99.63 percent at the end of the year exams. Two weeks later, on a scorching sunny afternoon, I was walking back from school with my certificate as if it were spring. I went home to my mom’s warm lap and cried so bad that she could not handle it and mixed her tears of joy with my tears of exhaustion. “You have made it, son; congratulations,” she said.

But that was only half of the story. In my last year of high school, I not only got an excellent grade, but also managed to win a bronze medal at the National Scientific Research Fair in Qatar. This secured me a sponsorship for the university of my choice in Qatar. After all my accomplishments, that feeling of happiness did not last, except for a couple of days, before that disgusting Monster possessed me while I was searching for a university.

*It is now in the hands of the eldest son to decide his fate on his own. A few months later, he chooses to join the mighty Texas A&M University at Qatar. He is officially a chemical engineering student with a neat, shaved beard and mustache, sitting in his dark blue bedroom that looks like an ocean, writing an essay which is “the modern translation from the French corresponds simply to attempt” (Depp 2). He is drinking Nescafé, wondering how he can*
customize the “why am I here?” prompt his English teacher assigned him to write in a way he can relate to. After two hours of thinking, and from all the questions he could have thought about, he chooses to focus on “Why do I not want to be here?” He writes, “It is not like that. I do not like it here. It is rather that I do not want to stay here if that makes sense.” It is somehow amazing, but still annoying the sense of dissatisfaction he has had since his childhood that has grown bigger along with him. He is an eager Monster who keeps asking for more!

But that makes me wonder, is that a good or bad thing to have? Would he be where he is now if he liked where he was before? It is complicated how the sense of dissatisfaction can be helpful, but is this the case every time? Will he ever feel the joy of permanent satisfaction? Does he think that permanent satisfaction is an obstacle to development?

When I finished my 22 chemistry assignments, studied for the math and political science midterms, added details to my English draft, solved practice set three for engineering class, and started the lab report for Chem117 that is due two days later, all in one weekend, the Eager Monster pushed me to do it. When it is finally my time to relax and watch the long-awaited movie Top Gun, which I have wanted to watch for a month, I do not. Instead, I feel stressed, like there is someone lurking behind me at midnight in the long dark street while hearing aggressive pit bulls barking, waiting for a chance to get a taste of my flesh. Feeling that I am not done yet—that I still have things to do—is a pain in the neck. I never stop asking for more, even if I have nothing left.

**REFERENCES**


Noof Alnasr

Noof Alnasr, a dedicated chemical engineering student (Class of 2026), possesses a profound passion for the art of photography. Her keen eye for detail and aesthetics translates into captivating photographs, which find her way onto their Instagram feed, mesmerizing viewers. Through her eloquent writing, she articulates her thoughts and shares her experiences on social media. Noof's thirst for exploration leads her to uncover hidden gems in unfamiliar locations, embracing the thrill of discovering the unknown. With a unique blend of creativity and curiosity, Noof Alnasr continues to inspire others through her artistic endeavors and love for adventure.
ACADEMIC TRANSFORMATION

The means are different, but the end is the same. I was in an Arabic school in Qatar, near my house, where we learned foundation English. Three months ago, I was admitted into an American university specializing in engineering in Qatar. My biggest fear after graduating from high school and going to college is that the difference in educational environment would be an obstacle in my academic life. But I remembered that everyone feels that way. After the first day of attending the university, I noticed that my life would change. I observed differences between studying in school and being a student at Texas A&M University: self-reliance, class duration, and making friends.

A critical difference between high school and Texas A&M University is self-reliance. In high school, the instructors reminded the students everything they must submit. For exams, for example, the school prints the schedule a month before and distributes it to us. Therefore, all the students get informed about the exams. In addition, submitting the assignments in secondary school was by physical papers, which could be submitted late without reducing our grades. However, at Texas A&M University, the professors upload course syllabi to the university platform. We must read them carefully and know their exam schedules based on the subjects. Moreover, students are responsible for checking the course platform to see when the assignment deadline is to submit it before they close.

Studying in school is also different from Texas A&M University in terms of class duration. The class period in high school was only 45 minutes, and the attendance in school was only for seven hours, from 6 a.m. until 1 p.m. The school scheduled two consecutive periods for the lab sessions, making the lab an hour and a half. On the other hand, university classes differ in duration from each other depending on the subject. For instance, the chemistry laboratory session takes three to four hours. Students’ schedules are also different from each other. For some, they attend after midnight, and others follow at 8 a.m. in the early morning.

Finally, getting to know people is the difference between studying in high school and at the Texas A&M University at Qatar. When I was in secondary school, I did not make friends because I did not mix with them much. The reason was that the classroom was fixed and stayed the same throughout the school year; this prevented me from getting to know
students from other classrooms. Also, I had never met friends who shared the same interests as me to be my best friend. In contrast, making friends at the university is very easy because, in each class, there will be students who are different from the other class, and even senior students can be mixed with first-year students in some classes. Furthermore, the faculty at Texas A&M schedule specific sessions for students in each engineering major. For example, on the Aggie 101 Orientation Day, there was a session for chemical engineering students where I got to know a lot of male and female students who have the same academic interests as I have.

To conclude, the three differences between studying in high school and studying at Texas A&M University at Qatar are self-reliance, class duration, and making friends. I have completed a month and a half as an Aggie, dealt with obstacles well, made friends, and learned the meaning of time management. I look forward to being a successful student and participating in university activities to get used to the new community. We must handle these differences well and keep them from hindering our academic life. The change must turn for the benefit of the student, even if they do not like it, but living with these differences and knowing how to deal with them is very important.
Hasan Shomar is a mechanical engineering major, Class of 2026. Besides engineering, he is strongly passionate about music and writing. What inspires Hasan to write is his personal experiences, his greatly shaped imagination, and his will to share stories.
THE FEAR OF NOT FEELING

He took me by the hand and sat me down next to him. I felt like a 6-year-old child who was about to get instructed that telling someone “You’re dumb” is wrong and inappropriate, but I was 15! I wasn’t a child anymore. I didn’t like or appreciate the way my father was treating me. But I knew what I had done, and the kind of problems that I brought upon not just myself, but the reputation of my whole family. I felt a vigorous pulse of fear and guilt course through every single vein in my body. I’ve been in situations like this before. I’ve done bad things. I’ve been lectured by my father, but this time it felt different. This time I actually felt something. This was new to me. I had always thought I was numb to intense emotions. There was no reason for me to feel the way I was feeling. Why had I never felt like this before? I knew my father and the way he reacted to things like this. So why did this feel different?

He wouldn’t.

My father is one of the greatest, most extraordinary people I have ever met. He is kind in every way and known to his family and friends as the one person anyone could go to when they needed help. I have never heard him speak a single bad thing about anyone or seen him do anything less than try to be most helpful for everyone around him. He is intelligent, analyzing and investigating every choice he makes in his life that could even remotely impact his family, their well-being, their safety, and their happiness. So many of the memories I have of my father revolve around us sitting on the big navy-blue sofa in the far corner of our spacious living room. A sofa I remember so vividly because of the piercing coffee smell it exudes after my younger sister burned her hand while spilling my mother’s coffee all over herself and the sofa.

On that very sofa, my father would often sit down next to me and tell me stories about his mother, a woman I unfortunately had never gotten the chance to meet. He would tell me the kind of person she was. Yet with every detail he’d share, I’d gaze into his eyes and think to myself: You are describing none other than yourself.

The greatness in character, the kindness, the graciousness. In my eyes, he was perfect.

He wouldn’t.
I had never witnessed him raise his voice, let alone get physical in any way. So why was I expecting this revolting blast of anger and rage? Something felt different. Something inside me was changing and I was yet to understand what exactly that was.

“Hasan, what were you thinking?” he said in the calmest most comforting tone. My vision fogged up. There were no tears, but a massive wave of confusion. His face became all but a washed-up oil painting of colors intertwined within each other, mirroring the emotions stirred up inside me. I turned to see a blurred image of my mother leaning on the frame of our kitchen door, her arms crossed tightly, shoulders raised, signs of what I could only assume were disappointment and shame.

I sensed the increasingly strong shivering of my hands. I couldn’t speak. I didn’t want to speak. Like in an echo chamber, the voices in my head started getting louder and louder and louder. Like in a maze, my thoughts were lost, and I just couldn’t seem to find a way to piece them back together. I was lost in my own mind trying to find a way out.

I was torn back to reality as I felt a gentle touch on my right shoulder. I flinched, almost falling off the sofa. It was only my father’s left hand trying to calm me and get me to relax and speak.

My father’s phone rang.
It kept ringing.

—
My father still sitting next to me trying to understand why I did what I did. And his phone kept ringing.
—

A deep sigh … and he stood up to see who was calling. He took his phone off the dinner table, sat back down next to me, and answered the call.

Sometimes people say silence can become awkward. But silence can also become the loudest thing you will have ever heard. The heaviness of silence in moments of immense tension. My father sat still. For two minutes he sat still, not moving a single muscle in his body. My sight was back as my vision cleared. I was suddenly distracted by this strange and bizarre behavior that my father was showing. His eyes began shimmering and within seconds the first tear drop rolled down the side of his face.
He lowered his arm, his phone still in his hand, looking into what seemed like an infinitude of nothingness and said, “Hasan, you won’t ever be able to speak to your grandfather again.”

An infinitude of nothingness.

I feel like I’m falling down an endlessly tall skyscraper, my heart pressing against the back of my rib cage waiting to rip itself out and leave my soulless body to crash onto the ground.

Time stops.

Everything around me turns black. I stand there in the middle of a boundless land of … nothing.

I nervously walk, then run around struggling to keep myself composed as I lose my mind. It feels like a dream. I’m in a dream. I’m suddenly standing at a slowly evaporating beach scene. The bright sun is extinguished, and the stars wander darkling into the eternal space of nothingness, rayless and pathless, and the icy earth swings blind, blackening in the moonless air. My heart, now cold as ice, drops like an 800-pound dumbbell trying to leave the ground at the hands of an 80-pound beanstalk. I fall to the ground, struggling to breathe. Screaming and shouting for help … but no one is there. Alone I suffer for what feels like eternity. Alone I keep trying to push myself to get up and fight this feeling of emptiness. Fight this darkness and be brought back to reality. I wake up from my dream.

I hadn’t known my grandfather. I knew him, but I didn’t know him. I knew who he was, and I talked to him a few times, although mostly just a “How are you?”, “I’m fine thank you” kind of exchange. Of my four siblings, I’ve always been the one most estranged from my distant family. I lacked the ability to communicate with who I perceived to be strangers, but more disappointingly, I struggled to feel any sense of wanting an emotional connection with them. I always had this guilt inside of me for not being able to find empathy for the very people who not only share my name but are my family, my blood.

My grandfather was only one of many people in my family who had left us over the past few years. Not one time was I able to truly get to know someone to begin to form any kind of interpersonal relationship with before they passed. I couldn’t help but keep feeling this rage inside me, the urge to slap myself repeatedly until I’d finally squeak a droplet of emotion.
from the inside world within me to the outside world around me. It hadn’t happened … yet.

Sometime after the phone call I must’ve gone back to my room and fallen asleep. I woke up, finding myself lying face down on the soft mattress of my warm cozy bed. My beloved bed. My one true place of consolation. But something felt different. I tried to move but couldn’t. Something was off. I felt broken. Pieces of me started escaping into the grand unknown trying to flee from the virtual prison I built to keep my thoughts in. Thoughts, feelings, emotions. They all slowly but surely squeezed themselves out.

It was only a matter of seconds before my heart pulled me further into my mattress and the rainfall of tears started pouring out of my eyes. I had done it. Somehow, I was happy and proud. I had finally cracked and found a way to let go of my emotions. Was I allowed to feel this way? I felt guilty, and then I felt complete. I was supposed to mourn my dead grandfather, so why was I lying in my bed crying but feeling a sense of accomplishment? I shouldn’t.
I relate my experience as a perfectionist in this writing. Being a perfectionist doesn’t necessarily guarantee a perfect life, but it does mean that you will experience more difficult times. I’ve always wondered why I strive for perfection and why it’s essential to go beyond the expectations of the word “perfect.”

Al Hanouf Al-Abduljabar is a sophomore interested in majoring in chemical engineering. She writes to express her feelings and challenges. She aspires to become a well-known author one day.
MY LIFE AS A PERFECTIONIST

“Oh no, I got a low grade! I am such a loser. I don’t deserve it. I will never be capable.” As a perfectionist, that’s what usually comes into my head. Although perfectionism brings out the best in me, it can also bring out the worst. From a perfectionist’s perspective, failure is never a possibility. Everyone strives to do their jobs, exams, and so on to the best of their abilities, but a perfectionist will always strive to be perfect. There is no way a perfectionist will accept anything less than a perfect result. What makes a perfectionist suffer that much?

Initially, a lot of people may think perfectionism is great, and that’s because they just see the positive side of a perfectionist’s life. But they never notice what a perfectionist goes through or what even goes through their mind. For me, one of the reasons I am a perfectionist is that as I grew up, my academic level has always been excellent. I never got below an A. In addition, my early childhood experiences, such as having a parent with high expectations, reflected on my personality and my desire to be perfect every time I try a new thing, such as learning a new course.

One unforgettable incident in grade 10 made me question whether I am perfect or if I am living in delusion. I got into an argument with one of my teachers, which prompted the administration to speak with me. I began explaining my viewpoint politely, but the administrator exclaimed, “Stop it, you’re not always right and perfect. Not everyone tolerates you!” I wasn’t expecting to hear that, especially because I assumed she’d be on my side. Eventually, I intended to resolve the conflict between myself and my teacher by establishing a positive relationship with my teacher. This incident serves as a stark lesson of the difficulties that come with being a perfectionist. My administrator’s exclamation shattered my idea that my constant pursuit of excellence would gain me validation. It forced me to face the fact that my expectations could cause conflict and misunderstanding in my relationships. The most important thing I discovered was that accepting my flaws and embracing different perspectives were crucial steps in developing empathy, understanding, and a more compassionate attitude toward myself and people around me.

Another challenge to my perfectionism occurred in my senior year. I had always dreamed of graduating from high school with a great GPA. I had told myself that a 90% would be absolutely perfect. But during my senior
year, I was aiming for the best I could do. My mindset had changed a lot. “Not 90, but 95!” I said to myself that I was going to achieve that grade and excel in all my classes no matter what. It really happened, and I earned an outstanding 95.5% in my first semester. I felt as if I had attained the peak of academic success! It was an unforgettable day. So, when I saw that I was capable, I said to myself, “Why not challenge myself to achieve an exceptional 98%?” The second semester finished, and I did my final exams. In the end, I did not get 98%, but 94%. I wasn’t satisfied with my grade, although it's considered excellent. I had lived with stress every day, over thought everything, and cried every night. Then, I remembered that exactly one year before, I was saying, “Achieving a 90% in my senior year of high school is almost impossible.” I realized that I had been too hard on myself. In the end, I succeeded.

However, being a perfectionist has at least as many benefits as drawbacks. A perfectionist would never disappoint himself or the people around them. A sense of perfectionism made me more interested in many things in my life, such as studying. I am more excited when I study, so I make my family and my teachers proud. It is a bit challenging, but fascinating at the same time. Besides, I always tell myself, “Everyone has a dream, even if they do not say it loudly, but I am sure each one in life wants to reach a certain point at the end.” So I knew I was doing all of this so that I wouldn’t look back and regret not trying!

Now, I am living one of my dreams of being a part of TAMUQ. I knew that I did my best so I could go to the university of my dreams. I encountered various challenges in my freshman year. I took five classes in my first semester, one of which was a little challenging for me. Unfortunately, I received an F on my first exam in college. A wave of self-doubt and disappointment came over me. It was a vivid reminder that even my greatest efforts could occasionally fall short, leaving me doubting my talents and fearful of future failures. Anyway, my worst mistake was giving up. After all, I Q-dropped that course, and I decided to take it again in the spring.

Inspired by the difficulties of the previous semester, I’ve embarked on an emotional journey to improve my study habits. I pour my all into each project, driven by the fear of repeating past mistakes, hoping for a future defined by triumph and personal improvement. I still struggle with trying to do everything perfectly, which leaves me worn out and exhausted most of the time. I am now trying as much as I can to avoid dealing with myself
in a harsh way. I know there is a way out, and one day I am going to figure it out! Remember, under any circumstances, never be unkind toward yourself. Give yourself a chance to do better and don’t push yourself beyond your limits.
Anonymous

While working on this essay for my ENGL 222 class, centered around the theme of “This I Believe,” I embarked on a deeply personal journey of self-reflection. Through exploring the emotions surrounding the loss of my sister, I discovered healing through the power of music. The assignment prompt urged me to dive into my own beliefs and experiences, and as I poured my heart into the writing process, I could share my experience and how I felt. Although it was pretty difficult to express my feelings through words, I hope this essay offers a glimpse into the transformative impact music has had on my healing journey.
“Play ‘Waltz of the Flower’,” she said, staring at me with her puppy eyes. Even though she finds amusement in interrupting me every time I play the piano, I can’t say no to her. So, we sat down together, hit those black and white keys, and enjoyed the beautiful melody.

It’s been seven years since I lost her, my sister. The pain of her absence is still fresh in my mind. She was full of energy and innocence. She loved learning and exploring new things, especially music. She would always watch me practice, and sometimes would join along. I enjoyed teaching her some basics because I always saw the passion in her eyes. Now, she’s no longer here. She was playing in the pool one day with my older brothers. After everyone left, including her, she decided to go back in for another swim. No one else was there. She was unable to swim, and drowned in the cold water, all alone. It was too late to do anything. She was gone.

Losing a sibling is a tragic experience, and the pain of this loss never really goes away. I felt empty. I couldn’t touch the piano because it reminded me of her. It was the one thing we both loved doing together. Until one day, I decided to start playing again. I wondered: will music heal this sorrow?

It kind of did. We all experience losses in this life. However, we have to find a way to cope. The piano became my coping mechanism. Every time I ran my finger across the piano keys, I felt her presence near me. It felt as if she was there listening.

The piano has become my safe space, where I can get away from the outside world. It felt like therapy in a way. It was like a break from everything happening around me. Music has always held a special place in my heart, not just as a source of entertainment or background noise, but as a powerful tool for resilience and healing. I realized that playing the piano sharpened my concentration. Playing any musical instrument is a multi-tasking exercise. You have to focus on the rhythm, pitch, tempo, and much more, while reading the notes. It allows all parts of the brain to work at the same time. I learned perseverance and discipline as I practiced daily, and I believe this helped me ease my sorrow.

The grief that I went through reminded me of the story “The Fall of the House of Usher” by Edgar Allen Poe. In the story, the main character, Roderick Usher, also experiences a loss of a sibling. I could totally relate
to Roderick’s pain and suffering. Unfortunately, Roderick was unable to cope with his loss, which drove him to insanity and paranoia. Roderick’s tendency to isolate himself in the decaying mansion only deepened his sense of despair and anxiety. However, seeking support from his family and friends or finding a distraction could have certainly helped him. He was stuck in a circle of grief, which led to the fall of the house of Usher.

Finding an escape out of the grief is what differentiates me from Roderick. I was able to find a way to move on, despite the pain that will forever settle in my heart. Roderick could have also viewed his sister’s death not simply as a loss, but as a celebration of all that they shared as siblings. This could have helped soothe his heartache and find peace and closure in the face of his grief and allow him to move forward with a greater sense of resilience and hope.

We all experience losses in life; however, we deal with them differently. The loss of my sister and the story of “The Fall of the House of Usher” reminded me of a narrative that I read in one of the books of the Seerah. It was mentioned in the Seerah that “Dhul-Qarnayn” was the only child of his mother, and that, as we all know, he traveled the earth from its east to its west to set up a barrier between a certain people and Gog and Magog. When he reached Babylon, he fell severely ill, and he felt that his death was approaching. At that time, nothing came to his mind except the sadness that will afflict his mother if he dies. So, he sent her a great ram and a letter, writing:

“Mother, this world has written known lifespans for everyone, so if you hear the news of my death, sacrifice this ram, then cook it, and make food out of it; then call the people to come, everyone, except those who lost a loved one!!”

When the news of his death reached her, she carried out his will, so she made the ram as he asked and prepared the food and called out to the people as he ordered. However, she was surprised that no one accepted her invitation; no one came. Hence, she knew that everyone had experienced the loss of a loved one.

We all experience losses in life. Sometimes it’s difficult to let go; however, there is always a way to pull yourself up and move on. My experience with loss taught me many valuable lessons. One of them is making a choice. I think the difference between me and Roderick from “The Fall of the House of Usher” was that I chose to get up and find a way to heal. I knew
deep down that my sister is in a better place, safe and happy, and living with no worries. This mere thought, along with my piano, was my way of coping. The story of Dhul-Qarnayn, as well, taught me that everyone has lost a dear one, and if not, they will one day. It’s up to us to either let go or stay in the same place, because life will move on and everyone around us will continue to live. So, live as well. This I believe is how life works. People come and go, and eventually, we will all be gone. Salam, may you rest in peace.
Chapter 5

Finding a Path
I wrote this poem a few days to my graduation from university. These words started off from a place of self-doubt and anxiety, to not know what the future holds. By the time I was done writing to myself, I was filled with confidence and hope. Ready to take a bet on myself through God’s grace. That leap of faith.

Chinemere E. Obi is a petroleum engineering Ph.D. student on a research exchange at TAMUQ. Obi likes to socialize, travel, and learn about people and cultures. He enjoys sports, music, and chilled times. He uses writing as a means to reflect on self and purpose. For Obi, the most enduring legacies are those which we live in the hearts of others.
A LEAP OF FAITH

I don’t feel like it anymore; I haven’t been feeling it for a while now. Very soon, within the twinkle of an eye, it will be over.

How I wish I could numb these feelings
Not confident, unsure, uncoordinated,
not knowing my next move.

I am used to these walls. For years
I slept within these walls and ate within these walls.
Built so many “ships” within these walls;
Learned and taught within these walls.
Walk the perimeter of these walls and see all my thoughts painted on these walls.
I see now, it was so easy within these walls.
I see now, the comfort and assurance within these walls.

How do I run in a race with no tracks? How do I walk in a field with mines?

When the cock crows tomorrow with the rising of the sun,
The elders and all townspeople will gather in merry to celebrate the release of this eagle.

But this Aggie is worried, and they know not.

He is so used to these walls; his feathers are now stiff as the blocks.
He feels so heavy both in body and mind; the body heavy as anchors.

His mind is saturated with “what ifs”;
no one hears the doubts in his thoughts.

So now when the hands of time meet at “true north,”
and the church bells sing songs of his glory,
What will be his move?
What will become of his journey?
Will he take flight and soar,
or attempt to take flight and fall?
Oh!! soon to be free Aggie, if only they knew …
Ghalya AlMarafi

I submitted this piece of writing as part of my coursework for ASCC 289, taught by Dr. Bryant Scott. The assignment called for us to discuss someone who significantly influenced our academic achievements. In my paper, I focused on the immense impact my parents, particularly my mother, had on my education from the very beginning of my schooling journey up until the present day.

Ghalya AlMarafi, a sophomore studying electrical engineering, has long struggled with a lack of enthusiasm for reading and writing that persisted since her early years. The world of words never seemed to capture her attention, leaving her feeling uninterested and uninspired. However, a significant breakthrough emerged when she found herself faced with a mandatory writing assignment. It was the first time she embarked on such a task, pushing herself beyond her comfort zone. This transformative experience unfolded during the challenging period of the pandemic, where Ghalya found herself isolated in quarantine, separated from her beloved family. Amidst the solitude, she seized the opportunity to delve into her thoughts and emotions, pouring them onto paper. Driven by a desire to connect with others, she made the brave decision to share her written essay by submitting it for consideration in the prestigious Best Writing 2023 edition book. This courageous act not only demonstrated Ghalya’s resilience but also symbolized her determination to embrace new challenges and pursue personal growth.
WHO CONtributes TO MY ACADEMIC SUCCESS?

All of these events occurred, to varying degrees. Fifteen years ago, 7:30 in the morning, in front of the Gulf English School (GES). I still remember being dropped off by my parents on the first day of school: my mother in a white coat and my father in military attire. They both arrived late to work just to drop me off for my first day of school. I was dressed in a blue shorts and a green t-shirt with white sneakers because I had not yet received my school uniform. I heard many of the other children crying, and like any child at the first day of school, I was very frightened and started crying as well. I didn’t want to go, but my mother said, “my dearest daughter, I didn’t learn from my parents to force anything on my children, but this is about your future. You need to go.” She continued, “Education is great and very important.”

I come from a family that is very serious about academics. My mother is an associate professor and senior consultant in maternal-fetal medicine; my father is a first lieutenant in the armed forces, and many of my relatives also have high educational backgrounds. My father had planned to study dentistry in the United States when he was young, but when he reached secondary school, he changed his plan and chose to study in Doha for a bachelor’s degree and then join the military. My mother studied in the United Kingdom as well as Oman. She studied medicine at Sultan Qaboos University and received her PhD from the University of Leicester in the United Kingdom. She studied abroad because she wanted to fulfill her and her father’s dream and specialize in maternal-fetal medicine, which was a new branch in medicine at the time, and there was no school of medicine in Doha. She also wanted to be among the first Qatars to pursue this field, as no Qatars had ever studied it. My mother was the closest daughter to her father, and all of her requests were met. She was not careless, but she was reliant on her parents and her elder sisters for many things; however, as a consequence of her study abroad, she became more independent. Also, her study abroad experience impacted her viewpoint on education, causing her to broaden her horizons. She did not stop as a physician working at a hospital only; she worked hard as she represented Qatar in local and international conferences as a speaker. She also wrote several papers and a book to become a professor in both Qatar University and Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar. Currently, she holds a post of clerkship director for the College of Medicine at Qatar University.
My mother did a lot for my education. She worked hard to ensure that I attended and received an education from the best schools. After a year at GES, her friends at work told her about AlBayan Primary School for Girls, a new strong school that had recently opened near our house and follows the International Baccalaureate curriculum. AlBayan Complex is Qatar’s only independent school for girls that teaches the governmental curriculum in English. My mother went to the school right away to meet the instructors and to ask them about the school’s curriculum and studies, and she then switched me to AlBayan School, which was the best independent school at the time.

Because my mother is a doctor, her job requires her to travel frequently to attend conferences relating to her specialty. She was still studying when I was born, so she took me with her to the United Kingdom, where we resided for more than seven years. I remember when my mother took me to a nursery school near to her college, since she wanted me to learn the foundations instead of staying at home with a nanny. She was about to end her PhD studies when I reached primary school age, so she didn’t want to enroll me in a school in the United Kingdom since we would be returning to Doha in a few months. She decided to return me to Doha with my father and stay in the United Kingdom to finish her studies. Despite this, my mother was in contact with the school and the teachers, and she was always following up on my studies throughout her studies abroad.

My mum was given the opportunity to work for almost two years in Germany, at the University Hospital Frankfurt (Universitätsklinikum Frankfurt) with Professor Thomas J. Vogl in 2007. She needed to learn German to make reports and communicate with patients and other people there, so she registered for several classes at the Goethe Institute, which is a well-known and highly regarded school for learning the German language. Her passion for learning has driven her to master more than one language, including French and some Spanish, as we often visit these two countries. My mother also influenced my father, and he registered in some French language courses as a result. She and my father had a really excellent vision for the future for me, my sister, and my brother at this point. They decided to send each of us to a completely different language school to better educate us. My younger brother and sister are attending the French school (Lycee Franco-Qatarien Voltaire), and my other sister is studying at Durham School for Girls, a private British institution. In addition, my mother recommended that my sister, who is starting college this year, and I
study law in French in France or medicine at the University of Leicester in the United Kingdom, where she also studied. However, we both decided to study electrical and computer engineering, but at two different universities in Qatar, I chose Texas A&M University and she chose Qatar University, as we wanted to achieve the vision of Qatar 2030 and will be honored if we became a part of the development. My mother was thrilled when we were both admitted to our first choices, because we will be studying engineering, which is one of the most important fields for accomplishing the goals of Qatar 2030, Also, because we will be studying at two of the best universities in Qatar: Qatar University and Texas A&M University.

I feel so proud when anyone calls me her daughter. I have seen my mother work so hard and smart to build a better life for herself, for me, and for my sisters and brother. I will forever be indebted to my mother for her encouragement. Nothing compares to her efforts in assisting me to reach where I am today. I believe that when God made moms, he gave me the best one. She is more than simply my mother. She is also my role model and my superhero.
Nancy Abraham

Nancy Abraham is an Aggie graduate of the Class 2001. She has been a part of the Qatar campus for over 15 years. Nancy is currently Assistant Director for Human Resources and Organizational Effectiveness at Qatar. She is an artist at heart, primarily oil paintings and poetry writing.
GETTING TO QATAR

A picture of her Highness Sheikha Moza sitting at the opening of the Texas A&M University at Qatar building captures my attention. I had no idea we had a campus in Qatar. I have been applying for 3 years at TAMU, without any luck. I should not have left my student work position after graduation for an hourly position at a TV cable company. I could have gotten a job easily if I had remained and applied at that time. We are self-employed and I need a good job that provided benefits for my family. I am determined to keep trying, but since they have a campus in Qatar and I am ethnically Arab, maybe I should focus on my strength of culture and language. I started to apply only to jobs posted by the International Programs Office (IPO).

In November 2006, I got an email for an interview as a Study Abroad Advisor in Study Abroad Program Office (SAPO) part of IPO. I was extremely stressed and excited at the same time. Finally, an opportunity. I parked in Koldus and walked through Rudder fountain to Bizzell Hall. Upon arrival for the interview, I was informed that another committee has been put in place since the SAP Director had traveled to the Costa Rica center. I was escorted upstairs instead to the second floor to wait for my interview. While waiting in the hallway, I looked up and saw a sign for the Qatar Support Office (QSO). I could not believe it; in my heart, I said, “I will work for this office someday. I am a hard worker and, in a few years, can move here. Who knows, maybe move to Qatar too.”

I was called in for the interview and greeted by the Associate Director of IPO and two other study abroad leadership team members. They each took turns asking me questions, and I felt confident. It came back to the associate director for her second question to me, she asked me if I had ever experienced conflict with an international person. My first response and last response were the same, “no.” I explained that I was an international person myself due to my ethnicity, travel, and life experience; at the end we are all humans. She asked me for the second time the same question. I explained that I have always been involved with international people including volunteering at the international house and festival at Purdue University frequently as a teen. I had also taken part in an exchange program to France at the age of 17. Also, befriended all foreign exchange students during high school and became pen pals for many years. So, “No, I have not experienced conflict at all.” On her third attempt, she placed
her papers on the table, slammed her pen, and death-stared me in the eye, “Nancy, it seems you are not understanding my question. You must have had a conflict with an international person.” I responded, “It seems you are the one who is not understanding my answer and I question why you have a hard time accepting that one can engage with people without conflict.” She picked up her paper and pen, then signaled to the next person to ask me a question.

At the end of the interview, I walked out, knowing I did not make it. I just argued with one of the highest-level members in IPO. I got home, and within 30 minutes, the administrative assistant called me and told me I had one hour to respond to an email she had sent me. The email contained a question to test my ethics, a FERPA-related matter. Within an hour of my response to the email, the associate director called me to extend a verbal offer. I tried to negotiate the salary, but it was not possible since it was an entry-level position. I accepted with relief at my ability to help support my family.

Accepting the offer created another issue that I needed to tend to, childcare. I was frantic to find a daycare for my daughter and an after-school program for my boys. One week went by without any luck, everything was full and I added their names to waiting lists. I happened to meet my son’s kindergarten teacher at the mall during the holiday break. She told me that she had quit teaching to take care of her three boys and was staying home. Ms. Kelly was sent to me by God; I have no doubt. She agreed to watch my daughter and take care of the boys after school. It would give me a year to get my daughter in daycare as she turns 2 and the boys in afterschool programs. My spouse asked me a few times to decline the work offer. It seems that I would not be making that much money after paying for the children’s care. However, I was very clear that this was a step through the door and I was determined. We made a deal: I will quit when he can provide benefits and a steady income.

My foot entered the door to Bizzell for work on January 2, 2007. I was assigned a mentor to start training me and quickly a few programs were handed over to me. I was also placed as a secondary advisor to the International Programs Office for Engineering, where I met Dr. Cesar Malavé. I was part of the first-semester exchange program between Qatar and College Station students. I attended a meeting with the Qatar campus on various logistics and details. In the meantime, I decided to participate in the free Arabic language class supported by QSO. I met Patti Urbina.
in class, not know she was with the director of QSO that day. Later that
month, I attended presentations by the Qatar students for the spring break
leadership program. Patti was struggling with some students’ behaviors. I
offered to help and made some suggestions after the presentations.

One day, the director of SAPO, Jane Flaherty called me into her office. She
told me that Patti had requested for me to chaperone the students. I would
have to take the College Station students to Qatar and a week later bring
back the Qatar students to study on the main campus for the fall semester
2007. However, SAPO couldn’t allow me to go since I was new and other
SAPO members had seniority. I did not mind and understood the logic
behind it. I appreciated Jane for letting me know rather than hearing
it from others.

In May 2007, Patti called and asked me to come up to her office. It was
around 3:30 pm. I went up to the second floor, not knowing what she
wanted to talk about. I figured it was related to the Qatar program. When
I entered her office, she had a big grin on her face and said, “I want you
to work for the QSO.” It is the office dedicated to all matters related to the
Qatar campus located at the main campus in College Station. I have two
positions opening, and I would like you to take the higher position as
program coordinator. Just let me know how much salary you would like,
and I will do my best.” I was shocked and bubbling with excitement while
composing myself. I indicated my salary requirements and thanked her.
On my way out of her office, she added, “Oh, Nancy, you will be taking the
students to Qatar, so just be ready.”

It seems Patti had been informally interviewing me in our regular
conversations, including introducing me to the Qatar HR Director, Bill
Barker. She also asked SAPO leadership about me in an informal reference
check. In June 2007, I was in the QSO officially and learning all about
Qatar immigration, attestation requirements, mail, students, programs,
visitors, and relocation. By August 2007, after much preparation and
orientation, I was on my way to Qatar. After handing off the students, I
was greeted by TAMUQ HR office. I met my colleagues, who provided the
offers, immigration support, housing, and visitor coordination. I felt so
welcome and at home.

A few years passed. I applied for a position in Qatar but did not get it. I
continued supporting QSO operations, working with the relocators
and semester students, chairing the committee for the leadership

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exchange, and organizing an annual Cultural Awareness event during Ramadan. At our annual event, our Qatar semester students helped host and provided write attendants names in Arabic and henna artwork on hands. We had an Arabic student band and provided Arabic food from Houston. We also serviced Majdoul dates and created space for those to pray. I loved the diversity of my work and engaging with students while helping new employees.

The, one day that I'll never forget, Patti stormed into the office very stressed and called my co-worker and me to join her. She thought the QSO may be dissolved and encouraged us to look for jobs. She knew my situation well and wanted to make sure I remained employed. That day, my respect for Patti grew even more. She was a very selfless being. Always made sure the Qatar students had a home in College Station, and now she was putting us ahead of her. Shortly after, my co-worker found a job and moved. I, on the other hand, did not and was very worried. I had spent many nights, after an exhausting day of work and children, laying restless in bed, praying.

One Monday morning in February 2011, Patti called me into her office. She said that the new director of HR wanted to move my position to Qatar and was offering me to go with it. I, once more, found myself speechless. I was grateful but very sad. This confirmed what would come next. Weeks went by while I prepared and waited for my offer. It seemed to take forever, and this only added to the boulder of insecurity that I carried. Two months later, the offer was extended, but it was only for one year. After I asked about the limited term, I was told it was simply the director’s way of ensuring that I was a good fit.

I had helped so many people and families relocate to Qatar. It was my turn, and it was not easy for someone who was an “expert” on the matter. I was moving 17 years of memories in College Station, three children, and a hoarder spouse mourning the end of his business. We headed to the airport with Patti and many friends helping to gently detach us from our home. Houston Airport, July 17, 2011, our 17th wedding anniversary. This date aligned with major shifts in my life, including my children's birthdays on 1/27, 1/7, and 11/27. So, to Qatar or bust. This was my third time in Qatar. This time it was my home.

It will be my 12-year anniversary in Qatar this July 17, 2023. I have become the Assistant Director of HR; my children are so grown. Ironically, I am
helping with Dean Malavé’s student programs after all these years. Like many others who relocate to Qatar, I don’t know how much longer this will be my home. I do know that it is my home for now, and TAMU at Qatar is a part of my heart.

Despite the relationships we foster at TAMU at Qatar, all its members who come and go cross each other’s paths. This crossing is the gift of experience, which helps us evolve into a higher awareness as individuals and as a collective. I am grateful to all.
Aiman Ul Haque

This was the first writing assignment I received in university and it took me a while to understand the question “Why are you here?” This essay perfectly reflects my journey and the obstacles I faced to get here to study electrical engineering, a field I am deeply passionate about. Writing this essay helped me realize how life often presents us with new beginnings and opportunities that bring us back to the same starting points.

Aiman Ul Haque was born and raised in Qatar. He is an electrical engineering sophomore who will graduate in 2026. He is determined to break away from family expectations, making the bold decision to pursue engineering, a field that is foreign to his family. He believes it is important to be true to yourself and make decisions based on individual aspirations rather than others’ opinions.
When I entered university as a freshman, I often hung out with my friends from school. They would tease me by calling me a ”Freshie” because I joined the university late by taking a gap year after high school. After completing high school, I could not decide what I wanted to do with my life.

While in school, I explored different fields and attended various workshops at universities in Education City. One such workshop was the ”Director’s View” program at Northwestern University, which gave me an insight into what it takes to become a director and got me interested in media. I also attended the “Mindcraft” workshop at Carnegie Mellon University at Qatar a few years ago, where I was first introduced to programming, which I found interesting and thought I would pursue programming in the future. Finally, I attended the “Fusion 360” program at Texas A&M University, where I learned about 3D modeling, which was effortlessly fascinating and turned out to be extremely fun. I was excited to design weird 3D shapes such as a water bottle or a complicated structure. These experiences made me realize that I wanted to be a renaissance person.

After graduating from high school, I took a year off to decide what I wanted to do with my life. My parents initially hoped for me to pursue a career in medicine, but I wasn’t sure whether that was the right direction for me. That is why I took biology in high school. I was having difficulty deciding what I wanted to do with my life, and I knew it was a big decision because I would do it for the rest of my life.

So, I took a few weeks to recall my various experiences in the different workshops and programs. The one that appealed to me the most was the one at Texas A&M. I spoke to my parents about my decision to become an engineer. They were surprised that I chose to take this decision because they never thought I was interested in engineering, and it was the farthest thing in their mind. They were still under the assumption that I would pursue medicine because I had a slight interest in medicine in my final years of high school. It is one of those decisions that I think about even today. I was shocked to discover that nobody in my family had ever pursued engineering. In my family, people usually study business after completing school. So, I decided to break this cycle.
I wanted to take a different route from my siblings. My elder sister already graduated from Carnegie Mellon University at Qatar, and my elder brother recently graduated from Northwestern University. I wanted to follow in my sister’s footsteps and work in the field of science. This led me to choose Texas A&M University in Education City. I looked up the different majors provided at Texas A&M University. The one that appealed to me the most was electrical and computer engineering. I have always been interested in computers because it would be nearly impossible to do anything without a computer. I also felt that this major would be challenging for me as I have no prior experience in programming or coding. I decided that this was what I wanted to pursue, but I wasn’t sure whether this would make my parents happy. So, I sat with them and talked about it, and although they were a little disappointed that I wasn’t pursuing medicine, they were proud that I was able to make my own decision and look after my own interests. They said they were happy as long as I was pleased and that my decision made sense because I was the one who had to do work in this field for the rest of my life. They just hoped that I wouldn’t regret this decision in the future. I knew there were no takebacks after that, so I had to give it my all to get accepted into TAMUQ.

After getting their approval, I began working on my application to this institution. I started focusing on my standardized tests, such as the SAT, to build a robust application for myself. My biggest challenge was the personal essay because I needed to figure out what to talk about or how to start the essay. I had a lot of difficulties projecting my thoughts onto paper. I spent several hours brainstorming ideas. I often found myself staring at a blank screen, and there were times I gave up trying to write anything. So, I decided to talk to one of my friends who was already in university about what to write in my personal essay. The best advice he gave me was, “Be yourself and write about yourself because that is what they want.” This helped me understand that I should be talking about the experiences I have gone through and why I am interested in the major I have selected. I realized that I should be talking about my goals, which are to become the first engineer in my family, and that I hope to become a successful engineer who can contribute to the development of society by graduating from Texas A&M University. Writing my personal essay made me realize that in my life, I have always taken little steps to reach here. As I start this essay, I find myself in front of a blank screen once again, which seems somewhat like the circle of life, where I ended up in the same place as I started.
I didn’t have an endpoint while writing the poem, nor a proper plot, and just pieced words that complemented each other, until I realized that I could stitch two stories together. Death and déjà vu are common themes and I wanted to highlight both in my writing in a way that might create suspense for the reader, but lead to a happy ending.

Mb Soaib Bin Awal is a computer engineering freshman at HBKU. He loves to read everything he stumbles upon and forget about the time passing away. He also likes to capture photographs of nature, and might be seen focusing his phone on a flower by the road.
REINCARNATION

A bird sat on the tree.
Contemplating whether it should jump down the branches to fly.
Or to die.

Will the wind hold her?
Will she glide down the breeze as the leaves flutter by?
Or will she plummet to her demise?

A bleeding and ragged mess at the bottom of the tree.
A corpse by the trunk.

Days will go by.
The Earth will take the bird who wants to fly.
Where it belongs, forever,
As fate determined only,
The time had come far sooner.

The Earth has taken what it owns.
The bones are all that remains of the bird.
Never degrading, for the Earth likes to keep souvenirs.
For those curious enough to search.

For those who dig down into the Earth to hide a body,
Six feet deep, wrapped in linen,
The corpse of his friend,
Still bleeds,
The cloth is red.
Leaving behind a trail of scent,
Rotten to the core for the hounds to pick up.

He finds the remains of the bird.
Just the beak and the ribs.
It hurts to see another corpse,
Or what remains of it,
It shatters his mind.

The voices will not stop.
They call him a coward.
He killed his friend in cold blood,
But cannot bury him.
The voices laugh.
What is this humanity?
Why does it exist?
Can we make it go away?
Why do we have to suffer?
Why can’t we be free?

Shackled to this weakness,
Which will not let me bury,
The body that deserves a goodbye.

The skeleton of the bird falls to the ground.

The man takes out his phone, calls the police station.
“Hello? Anyone there? I want to confess; I want to confess. I WANT TO CONFESS … that I’ve killed him, but I didn’t want to … please believe me, I didn’t … Help me, I can’t take the voices. They won’t leave! They told me they would, but they’re still HERE! They told me that they needed a sacrifice, and I’ve killed him! I’ve killed my friend!! But they said that they intend to stay. I can’t take it anymore. I’m sorry, Max, I’m so sorry …” He disconnects the call.

The cold grip of the revolver calls to him,
“Here I am, your salvation, your peace, do it … What more is there to live? This is now your prison. You’ll never leave. You’ll never live!!”

The police arrived half an hour later.
They find two corpses.
Three, if the bird is there.

But it has gone underneath the ground.
The Earth has taken it back.
A sign, a ray of hope,
For the earth calls.
She never forgets her children.
And she will have them back in her cradle, be it in a coffin, be it in clothes, be it just bones.

Is there a new beginning?
After transcending the realm beyond, do we float aimlessly in a void, or do we drown?
Do we suffocate? Does the absence of air leave us breathless?
Or do we fight until all the oxygen is forced out as the saltwater fills our alveoli?

What is this new realm? Why is it so cold?
Why is all I see entirely white? Is there no hint of color left? What do I have here? Is it a beak? Are those the wings I never got to fly with?
Will my new wings help me fly? Like the sparrow by the rose bush did? Where is she? Why do I remember these?
I thought they were just nightmares in which a gruesome memory plays repeatedly.
I dreamed the most horrific of dreams where I’d die.
I tried to fly foolishly and jumped from my home, trusting the wind to help, but I was betrayed.
The only being to embrace me had been the Earth.
It took just seconds. Those seconds were the only time I’d ever felt free.
To be me.
To embrace my destiny.
To glide down the tree for the sky is where I was ever meant to be.

But I’d been lied to me by myself.
There had been adrenaline, hope, and gravity, and I’d finally been greeted by death.
But why do these memories plague me?
These are the visions I never want to see.
Where I embraced my life only to bleed slowly toward the realm of pain and greed.

But now, with a new life to lead, I wish to fly by the forbidden streets.
Is it still cold or too cold for me to feel the snow? Why is there snow?
Is this what the white canvas is? Why is it everywhere? Why are there no trees or leaves? It’s obstructing … It’s hard to walk on.

What is that … thing? Covered in fur that mimics the snow. Why is it rushing towards me?
Are instincts my friend or foe? They killed me once. Will they kill me again?
I wish to live, not to greet death, not now when I see.

The visions are my treasures; my own to keep.
My own to see, my own to laugh about, my own to cry upon.
The beast is gaining. I see the fangs; I see the blood that trails from them. The streaks of crimson upon the white snow, menacing, threatening, for I might be next cartridge of red ink for the vicious painter to dip their fangs in.

In this delirium of thoughts and threats, I do not see what’s behind me and creep towards the unknown, for if I turn back, the beast might be upon me. Trust in my instincts might save me, for the unending snow will conceal me.

One step, then another, then the third, then none. The small momentum of lost footing tips me down … down below, below to emptiness. I fall again.

My wings fail me once more, and consequent deaths await me. I feel the adrenaline of being free, of being able to fly.

The blue surface races towards me; it ripples, and the waves clash within. Another entity is waiting for me.

Water … how ironic to meet my demise by the Earth to remember it vividly, only to die once more by the sea. Had it been as before, could I have prepared myself for the inevitable crash, as I plummeted to an impenetrable surface? Am I destined to drown in agony and terror as the air is ripped away and all that rushes in is the saltwater as my lungs scream, for there is no oxygen in the branches of my alveoli?

The thoughts barely end as I hit the sea. Perhaps I’ll let the depths take me. It might be only moments of agony. Then perhaps peace would be mine as I look for my destiny. Perhaps not.
I try! I try my useless wings to survive. Perhaps attempts to live would give me something … a sense of satisfaction that I’d tried, as I swing the obstructions of my wings helplessly upon the waves.

Propel me, for I have no flight feathers, but contours! Each stroke manoeuvres me towards where I want to go, where I want to escape, where I want to “fly,”

I now “fly” beneath where the water is my air, Where the ocean is my sky, My blue canvas of freedom.

My white and black coat sleekly soars, and the cold doesn't bother me. I am a creature of the cold, I embrace the snow and freezing waters to finally “fly.”
I have an intense desire for a distinct life goal combined with a fascination with astronomy. Despite my parent’s worries and other obstacles to pursuing a career as an astronaut, I continue to persevere. A motivating teacher rekindled my determination, and now I am seeking a degree in computer science engineering as a first step in achieving my objective. Although I know I have challenges in physics coursework, I am unyielding in my tenacity and dedication to achieving my goal.

Alah Omar is a passionate computer engineering student (Class of 2026), studying at Hamad Bin Khalifa University. She profoundly loves writing and embraces it as a powerful means of self-expression, connection, and personal growth. Alah’s unique blend of creativity and studies positions her as a promising student, ready to make a lasting impact in computer engineering and writing.
MY HIDDEN PASSION

All people aspire in life. It’s crucial to have a clear life goal. With a specific plan in mind, we can hope to succeed. Astrophysics is one of my life’s goals. My fascination with astrophysics has driven me since I was nine. My love for the atmosphere around me and my curiosity to explore more and more have instilled a passion inside me. My interest in stars started when I was five. The first rhymes we learned in kindergarten were those of the twinkling stars, and even our great ancestors were bewildered by them. Cave art depicts constellations, planets, and astronomical events. We also have mythological stories that portray life outside our world. The entire branch of astronomy is focused on the stars. No one can deny the intrigues of the night sky.

I have always been fascinated with outer space. As mentioned above, I gravitate toward how beautiful and bizarre things can be up there. When I was five, I wanted to be an astronaut. I was so excited to find something I wanted to be and enjoy, finally. My family has always supported everything I did, but they did not tell me not to be an astronaut. They just told me all the bad things about being an astronaut. I remember stopping at the shopping center in the car with my mom, sister, and dad. “What do you want to be when you grow up, Alah?” they asked. “I want to be an astronaut!” I replied. “I love how space looks and want to see what all the planets look like.” But they did not look happy with the answer. As we got out of the car to go to the shopping center, my parents were whispering, and they seemed confused. I asked them, “What’s wrong?” and Dad said, “Nothing.” I felt terrible that day; I thought I had done something wrong.

My parents thought that I had forgotten about being an astronaut because I stopped talking to them about it; however, every night before I went to sleep, I used to imagine: If I were an astronaut, I would be wearing a hefty space suit which would help me to survive in outer space. I will carry oxygen to breathe, and my spaceship will be attached to a rocket. I can imagine the countdown, and when it reaches zero, the rocket will be fired, carrying me and the rest of crew. After some time, I will be floating in the spaceship. It will be entertaining to play games in space. Finally, we can see the target moon, and we will prepare for our descent. Our spacecraft finally touches down the moon’s surface and we step out and explore the moon. I will drive a particular vehicle and ride on the moon’s surface. It will be such fun to go
in a weightless environment. Finally, the time is up: we regroup, get into our spacecraft, and travel back. What an exciting dream!

One day, my friend came to my house to play with dolls; my mom heard me talking to my friend about being an astronaut and how exciting it would be if she were with me, traveling to the moon and flying through the stars. After my friend left, my mom wanted to talk to me. She was open to me and talked about how being an astronaut is dangerous and how it’s impossible to study astrophysics here. And I knew for a fact that she would not let me study abroad.

I now realize that my parents were not discouraging me, but rather were helping me. They ensured that I knew all the ups and downs of being an astronaut. They saved my time, but also crushed my dreams. I know that my parents were not trying to tell me not to be an astronaut. I think they were telling me everything I needed to improve to help me reach my dreams of being an astronaut. Unfortunately, I did not listen to their advice and just gave up on my dream of going to space and being an astronaut. I let the negatives get the best of me, and I never focused on the positives of being an astronaut.

In high school, my dream of becoming an astronaut came to mind again, and I told one of the teachers about my goal. Ms. Espinoza, who was a Chemistry teacher, was my favorite. She said, “Wow, Alah, I have never heard anyone in my entire career have that dream.” This boosted me to look at what I could do to get there, even though there are no universities that offer that area of study here. But I told myself that I could look for something to at least get me in the field. My dad told me about the computer science engineering degree and how this degree can open many options of where I could start my journey. My dad thinks that I have forgotten about my childhood dream of being an astronaut, and I don’t want to tell him, because I want it to be a surprise for them if I can get into the field.

Getting a computer science engineering degree gives me faith in pursuing my goal and hitting the target. However, I am concerned about physics. I have always struggled with physics. Maybe because I didn’t have great teachers back in middle school, I didn’t take it as a core subject in high school. But I tell myself that physics can’t stop me. I hope this journey ends up happily and hits that target.
REFERENCES

Faisal Mamdouh Ashour

Honor, pride, joy, and a mix of emotions was filled in this experience. From the day I submitted my draft for the speech, selected as a finalist, chosen to be the commencement speaker for the Class of 2023, and practiced daily until the day of graduation, it was one of the proudest moments I had at TAMUQ. My speech mainly revolved around the students of the Class of 2023, taking them back to our first day at TAMUQ, celebrating their achievements, reminding of the hardest days and support from our community, and Texas A&M University at Qatar as a whole.

Through the speech, I was able to present how special the Class of 2023 was at TAMUQ and how they will always remember the memorable moments at our campus. On a personal level, my parents did not know I will be giving the speech and seeing their faces from the stage made me proud to be a TAMUQ Aggie. It was a great honor in the end to represent my beloved class and I will always remember that day, 11 May 2023.

Wishing you all the best, Class of 2023!

Faisal Ashour is a chemical engineering graduate, Class of 2023. Faisal spent most of his life living in Qatar and since secondary school was hoping to get admitted to TAMUQ. Since his admission into TAMUQ in 2019, he has always strived to overcome new challenges and explore opportunities outside his comfort zone and that is thanks to TAMUQ. Through his journey, he was able to participate in research, student organizations and industrial experiences that he thoroughly enjoyed and was proud to be a representative of TAMUQ in them. Through these experiences with
his Class of 2023, he had the honor to represent his class in graduation as the student speaker to bring back memories from the class’s journey at TAMUQ and the importance of being an Aggie.
Asalam alykum and Howdy, your excellencies, members of the faculty, parents, family members, friends, and my fellow graduates of 2023. We have finally walked the stage, and dreams have come true. My name is Faisal Mamdouh Ashour and it is a great honor to stand before you to represent the Aggie Class of 2023 in this unforgettable occasion.

Let me start by announcing how both of my parents did not know I would be up here today giving this speech. I can see in the crowd how proud they are and they did not even know I was writing this while in the living room with them months ago. But I did not only do this to surprise them. I did it to let all our graduates know how their biggest support systems—parents, siblings, family, or friends—must have felt when they walked this stage today. Today, Aggies, you have officially done it. You completed a milestone that will forever change your lives, thanks to our biggest support systems and, of course, the Texas A&M University at Qatar community.

I want to share with you all a short story of a guy I knew back in high school. He was applying to universities and had to do his IELTS exam, as most universities require it. He was so nervous and anxious about the speaking part of the exam that he did not eat or sleep well for a week before it. He explained that he did not understand why grading someone on speaking abilities would matter. I thought that was a lie, though; he was just afraid of presenting or speaking to a stranger in a professional setting. However, he got through it eventually and was accepted in a university. Four years pass by of his undergraduate studies and finally he graduates, today and standing in front of you to give the commencement speech. That guy did not just represent me, literally, but every one of our graduates today. We all joined TAMUQ with our own weaknesses, but the A&M community develops your character, challenges you to be the best leader, and conquer wherever you go as Aggie engineers.

August 20, 2019: remember that day. Our first day of orientation, where we did not know what this four-year journey had in store for us. We met each other, laughed at the Aggie traditions like outsiders, fumbled with our schedules, excited about getting two-hour breaks between our classes. As freshmen, some of us brushed off the courses, saying it was too easy and others just enjoyed the all-week events, mostly for the food as it seems a TAMUQ tradition. But it’s incredible how the A&M effect comes
in play so fast. Fast forward to our sophomore year, where a group of us, including myself were the orientation leaders for the Class of 2024, others were already in research groups, and board members of organizations were already planning the best professional and social events. See what I mean? A year before all this, we were laughing about Aggie traditions and worrying about courses, and now we were all part of it and advancing in this community. That’s what the A&M effect creates and is known for.

As we embark on this fruitful journey, we look back at how we, as Aggies, created our own routes of success. We excelled in our academics and professional development; we participated in research projects and presented in conferences; we interned in different companies and sectors and represented what Aggie engineers can do; we won international competitions and triumphed in sports; and we did all that as the spirited Aggie community we strive always to be. As for the Aggie traditions, they aren’t something we simply follow now, but a feature of our character and something we are proud to represent for Texas A&M University at Qatar.

Today we leave this commencement as engineers, but don’t forget, Aggies, you are not just engineers, you are Aggie engineers. This means that not only do you carry academic excellence, great competence, and being a higher value engineer, but you are equipped with leadership and comradeship qualities that characterizes us as Aggies. Fellow graduates, just look at the person sitting next to you, and you might just be looking at the future CEO of a company, an inventor of a new technology, or a mom engineer with children that inspire her. The possibilities are truly vast and endless when it comes to us Aggies. So, whether you leave to work for the big industrial companies, continue your studies at graduate school, or completely deviate and start your own business, you will carry this brand in our community as an Aggie leader of the future. At last, this is our slogan, engineering leaders in Qatar. Let’s not forget that our community made this possible, from our professors who helped us through our endless senior design reports, to our families that waited for us at home after those long nights of work in our study caves of 106, 122, 105 and the never-found mechanical engineering senior room. All of this would have not been possible without you. Thank you.

To the Class of 2023, you have made your batch truly proud. You have encouraged one another to challenge the world together and always cherish the unforgettable moments through our campus. You have led by example our beloved community and contributed to advancing it
through this journey. You studied abroad at College Station, Texas, created Education City’s biggest events, impressed industrial professionals, and left no stone unturned to represent this class as the true example of an Aggie engineering graduating class. To my fellow pre-cal summer students: we made it along with our true batch. I’ve been waiting to say that since then 😊. As for my chemical engineering department, special thanks to your leadership, amazing faculty, most helpful staff, and the ever so great chemical engineering student body.

In the end, I would like to transmit our first letter as engineers, on behalf of the Class of 2023:

Dear World,
We graduate today as Aggie engineers, to conquer in excellence in any of the fields we pursue. We overcome our challenges with integrity and continue to represent our community in a spirit of leadership; leadership qualities that are only found in Aggie engineers. Loyalty can always be found in us, as our loyalty to our greater community of Aggies enriched with values, traditions, and culture shall never perish from our journey. Respect is a core value that applies to all our actions. In the end, we are the Aggies, the Aggies are we. Bound by selfless service, we will always be there to serve our community; experience in service is what defines us as Aggie engineers.

Kind regards,
TAMUQ’s Class of 2023

Congratulations, Class of 2023! Thank you for everything, and I wish each one of you success in your next journey. I hope our paths will always cross, and until then, enjoy the rest of your night and always be proud of this incredible milestone. Good night.
Chapter 6

Searching for Light
Abdulla Almarri | Lusail at Night.
الهروب إلى الخنوع

تعود العادة تكرر نفسها، حين تجد نفسك في طريق طويل مظلم؛ يأكله الضباب، لا تفرق اللون الأسود باللون الأكثر غمّة. هذه الحروف تأكل الدموع. تعبت من السير ولا تريد الوقوف، فتملك خيار الجلوس، ولكن 된ّ تجلس؟ وكل دمعة تذرفها تتبّت شوكة، وأين تقف؟ وكل بقعة يملؤها الذكريات الحزينة، وأين مثّي؟ وإنهاء يملؤه الصدمات والأذى. تخيل مع كل ثانية، وأين تفقد جزءات من جسدك، فتخيل أن-girl أن تنفس بدلاً من التنفس، وتشعر بوجود جسم لا يشبه أنفسك.

في النهاية، ليس هناك شعور أسوأ من فقدان الأمان في بيتك، ووطنك، وتفكيرك. تنتظر حتى يأتي شخص يمسك رأسك، ليخرجك من ظلمتك الكالحة، وينحص دموعك. وتستمع لصوت روحك، وتتفكر في نهاية الطريق، حتى تستنفر نفسك، وترفع رأسك ليتمكن روحك من الخروج.

لست بحاجة شخص يحبك؛ بل تحتاج لشخص يفهمك، ويستطيع أن يفهمك عن الوقوع في أفكارك الخبيثة. في أغلب الأحيان، لا تملك ذلك الشخص الذي يخرجك من أفكارك القاتلة. لهذا، إن الخروج منها يصبح يشبه الطريق إلى الأبد. فهناك كتبة في نهاية القصة: الأولى، وهي استجابة كل شجاعتك المترممة تحت الأشواك، وجアイテム الوعي، وكرامتك، وألمك. وصبرك الذي لا تريد السير حتى تلتقي نفسك في الخارج. أما التكملة الثانية، فتحصل عندما لا تجد قوتك في السير والتجاهل، وتستقر العيش في ذلك الطريق وت défini سقى من حزنك، فطبيعة الإنسان أن يبقى إلى الأمان في البيت. فتبتيني بيتاً لتدافع قلبك، ويبعدك عن شعورك. وتستقبل الأمل، وتستقبل الأمل في أن تحس أن كل شخص محب الاب يقدر عبر باب المخبز، وتتحقق في خيالك.
These words are in response to the comments once made by a former Nigerian president: “The Nigerian youths are lazy.” For context, when we were children, they told us: “You are the leaders of tomorrow.” Now, “tomorrow” is here, and these same leaders still cling to power for their selfish desires. When will tomorrow come?

Chinemerem E. Obi is a petroleum engineering Ph.D. student on a research exchange at TAMUQ. Obi likes to socialize, travel, and learn about people and cultures. He enjoys sports, music, and chilled times. He uses writing to reflect on self and purpose. For Obi, the most enduring legacies are those which we live in the hearts of others.
TO THE LEADERS OF TOMORROW

By our past,
we have made a mess of the present and
ruined the promise of the future.

By our present deeds,
we want to save our seeds from the ugliness of our past,
so we constrain their future.

For their future,
we want to give them all the presents of the present,
but we just end up repeating our past.

We never learn.

Yours remorsefully,
The lifeless ruler (*Cul de sac*)
Anonymous

In a world where the hum of vanity drowns the voices of sincerity, this poem calls out for wakefulness. It implores us to cast aside the masks of perfection, to recognize our shared humanity, and to bask in the warmth of genuine connections. It delves into the depths of the human psyche, revealing the stark contrast between the allure of vanity and the profound beauty of authenticity. Amidst this bleak portrait, I dare to hope. To bring forth a yearning for change—a desire to awaken from the slumber of vanity and embrace the true radiance of humanity.
VANITY

Perfection, a sterile and frozen thing,
Barren, lifeless,
Without a heartbeat’s ring.

It chills the soul, like winter’s icy breath,
A weight upon the womb,
A silent death.

The trees of life, they stand like ancient beasts,
Releasing what brings no joy, no feasts.

Comeliness,
It means: no idols, no false gods to heed,
Just me and you,
Our hearts and souls to lead.

But in the world of artifice and lies,
Mannequins stand, with plastic smiles and eyes.
In cities, where the sands doth blow,
Mannequins, with eyes that do not glow.

Their frozen grace,
In a city where the heat does not embrace.
A lifeless show,
They stand exposed.

No wakefulness,
They lean with slender legs,
Flayed of humanity,
But throned in stellar sheens.

Distant,
No power to speak.
Just hideous hums,
And dreary sounds like keens.
I drew inspiration from Bird Box, aiming to craft a chilling scene by withholding any explicit description of the creature, thus leaving it to the reader’s imagination. This challenge showcased the genre’s versatility, proving that horror extends beyond jump scares and unsettling appearances. It demonstrated that a mere voice or a seductive allure can dismantle a person’s sanity and moral direction. Such were the objectives of “The Voice.”

Essraa Afifi is a computer engineer sophomore at Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU). Her hobbies include writing, reading, 3D modeling, and programming. She is a passionate and dedicated person that loves learning. She likes writing as it allows her to express herself freely. This writing is important for her as it reflects the improvement in her writing.
THE VOICE

“Hello, there, little one,” I hear a voice playfully say from behind me. Something about that voice sent chills down my spine, stopping me from rocking on my feet. I look behind, just a flickering light bulb and an empty bench. It must be the fatigue catching up to me. I should quickly head home.

“Why didn’t you reply?” I hear it again, this time closer than before. I look behind me again. Nothing.

“Am I hallucinating?” I question out loud.

“You still haven’t answered me,” it says, irritated.

*What’s wrong with me? Have I gone mad?*

“Don’t worry. I don’t bite,” it says playfully. I ignore it, gaslighting myself into thinking it’s just the lack of sleep. Nothing that a good night’s sleep can’t fix.

“Oh, you’re not dreaming. I’m real,” it whispers in my ear. I freeze in place—my mind racing. My lungs taking in air in ragged, short breaths, barely enough air to stay conscious. My heart pounding in my chest, reminding me that each quick beat is a sign that I’m alive. The fear hypnotizing me, trapping me between its claws. *C-Can it read my thoughts?*

Not long till it giggles, “Yup! I can read it! Don’t worry though, my little angel, I won’t spread your little secrets.”

I feel it shove me, making me slip and fall onto the metro railing. The station starts to fade away, and my vision is consumed by darkness. There is a luminous circle in the middle shining brightly. It’s the light at the end of the tunnel. *Am I saved?* I hear whistling sounds coming from the light. A high-pitched screech gets louder as the light nears. My head is throbbing. I’m all alone.

I wake up in shock. “It was just a dream?? It was just a dream!! I’m safe!”

The doctors standing by the doorway quietly talking give me a concerned look before returning to their discussion.
I don’t give it much thought; they aren’t aware of what I’d just been through. I never thought I would be happy to be back in the hospit-

Wait… hospital? Shouldn’t I be home?
I grab the calendar next to me. 29 January.

I left the hospital yesterday… I remember the doctor coming to me with good news… Why am I back here?

“Yes, there! I know we had a rough beginning, but I hope we can get to know each other better. In hell.” The same chilling voice breathed in my ear.
After publishing my second academic book, I sat down to write a story that had been floating around in my head for years. It was my first attempt at fiction, so I had to learn how to write fiction as I went along. Set in the early 1800s, it’s the story of a witch who is terrorizing a Native American community by killing its young children. At the end of the tale, a young boy (whose name is “Scabby Boy”) exposes the witch with the help of some animal friends. Below is an excerpt of the novel I wrote, and it introduces the animals that will help the boy-hero defeat the witch.

After completing the manuscript, I sent it out to a few dozen literary agents. None of them would take it on and market it to publishers, though a few wrote encouraging rejection letters. The book now lays in a drawer. Perhaps someday I’ll give it another try. Regardless, I learned a lot about the process of writing fiction, and the story still gives me a sense of accomplishment as well as joy.

Mark van de Logt teaches U.S. history at TAMUQ. He specializes in Native American history, U.S. Military history, the Gilded Age, and the American West. He has published three academic books: War Party in Blue: Pawnee Indians in the U.S. Army (2010), Monsters of Contact: Historical Trauma in Caddoan Oral Traditions (2018), and Between the Floods: A History of the Arikaras (2023). Currently, he is completing a work on the 1586 siege of his hometown of Grave, the Netherlands, during the Eighty Years’ War. In his spare time, he wrote a yet unpublished novel titled The Witch and the Scarecrows from which the excerpt above was taken.
THE BEAVER

They came from all directions.

Those who came by air battled stormy winds and icy rains. Those who journeyed along rivers and streams braved wintry currents, and those who traveled by land lumbered across treacherous rocks and prickly brush hidden under layers of snow.

They gathered in the lodge of Mr. and Mrs. Beaver, a cozy home lit by a snug fire in the center of the room. Here they sat in a circle and rubbed their weary limbs.

Though they were tired from the journey, the room soon filled with friendly chatter. Old friends fell into each other’s arms, acquaintances were renewed, and old quarrels settled, undoubtedly helped by the soup that Mrs. Beaver dished out and that put everyone in a good mood, except for grumpy Mr. Bear, who had been fast asleep when the call had come for the gathering.

After they had finished their soup and Mrs. Beaver retired to wash the dishes and share the leftovers with her children, Mr. Beaver filled his pipe and lit the tobacco with a piece of straw from the fireplace. Soon the smell of the burning tobacco filled the room. All sat quietly as they inhaled the smoke and stroked their bulging bellies.

Mr. Beaver took a few puffs before he passed the pipe around. Everyone smoked in turn. They sat solemnly and content. Even Mr. Bear, who filled up almost half of the room with his enormous frame, seemed in better spirits.

After everyone had smoked, Mr. Beaver took a few more puffs before he placed the pipe in front of him. He was a stern-looking fellow, and in the glow of the fire his black beady eyes shone brilliantly. He stroked his whiskers, cleared his throat, and then opened the meeting.

“Brothers,” he said, “a matter of great importance lies before us.” He glanced around the circle. Nobody stirred. They all knew something serious had happened.

“The people are in trouble,” he said gravely. “For some time now, the Throat-Cutters have been preying on them. They are troublesome characters, those Throat-Cutters. They are numerous and powerful, but
they are greedy at times. They are not content to have a fair share. They want it all. They make war upon the human beings. They sneak up on the women and children when the men are away. They have disgraced men too old to do battle. Where’s the honor in that? Brothers, the Throat-Cutters have become shameless.”

Mr. Beaver looked at his feet. There was a sad frown on his face. “It has also been many winters since the strangers came to our land. They are a dreadful lot, those people. They have been even more insatiable than the Throat-Cutters. They are a scourge. But they are powerful. There are more of them than there are of us. Soon they will come for us, too. But I don’t worry about that. We can hold our own. But I am not so sure about the people. They cannot hold off these strangers so easily. Already they have weakened the people with their poisonous drinks, and their goods are creating much jealousy and ill-will. These things worry me. It is not good for any people to hold so much power.”

“Ráwa!” responded everyone in attendance.

Mr. Beaver sighed and dropped his head. His voice turned into a whisper when he spoke again. “But it is not the Throat-Cutters or the strangers that caused me to call this meeting. There is something else that troubles me. It troubles me a great deal more than the Throat-Cutters or the strangers. There is a traitor who has been causing lots of problems. This witch has already killed some of the human beings and it is growing in strength. If it continues to do harm, there might not be any people left to hold off the Throat-Cutters or the strangers from the east. I fear that this witch will cause great mischief. I ask of this assembly what should be done about it.”

He turned to his left, and signaled to the man next to him that he had nothing more to say.

“You ask if we must do something,” the man next to Mr. Beaver said, “But should anything be done? Lately, the people have caused nothing but trouble for us. They have neglected their duties. They even managed to offend the Heavens and so brought bad weather upon us. The snows fell earlier this year than ever before. The grass doesn’t grow as high as it once did and food is getting scarce. Why should we care about them when they don’t seem to care about us? Shouldn’t they take care of their own people first before we lift a finger? If the people disappear, they brought it upon themselves.”
They took turns speaking. Each of them complained bitterly about the people.

“They take two eggs when they should take only one!” said one.
“They plundered my cache so that my family nearly starved last winter,” said another.
“They complain about the Throat-Cutters, do they? But they kill our cows and calves without restraint.”
“They are thoughtless!”
“They are greedy!”
“And selfish!”
“And disrespectful, too!”
“Let them die!”

Each complaint was followed by a heartfelt “Ráwa!” The delegates who were sitting around the fire pit were getting quite excited about the foolishness of the people. Why should they care about them now?

Mr. Beaver, who presided over the meeting, called them to order. “What about you, ambassador Bear?” he asked. “Everyone has spoken except you, my old friend.”

The bear had sat silently while everyone else spoke. His mood had soured again hearing about the people and all the bad things that they had done.

“I am no friend to people,” Bear said, “I prefer to be left alone and mind my own business. They are always trampling around and sticking their noses where they don’t belong. It is bothersome when they wake me from my sleep. I don’t enjoy chasing them away because they always come back. They have poor manners indeed. It is true that the people have become thieves, cheaters, and liars. Lately, they have shown nothing but contempt for us. The bees stopped sharing honey with me because the people had taken it all. The humans worship the white people’s goods more than they revere the sacred powers. They are no better than beggars. They deserve punishment.”

Everyone listened quietly, for Bear’s words carried much weight in the assembly. He had been one of the original delegates to the first gathering, which had taken place when the world was still young, and the people lived in trees and caves.
“Even so,” the bear said, “I refuse to believe that all the people are bad. Surely there must be some honorable ones among them. We should find one and help him.”

The lodge had fallen silent. The wood crackled in the fire. In the distance they heard the faint sounds of Mrs. Beaver singing a lullaby to her infant children.

“Besides,” Bear concluded, “I hate witches and I never cared much for Throat-Cutters and strangers.” And he scratched his back.
I have always felt a strange connection to the cities and towns I’ve lived in throughout my life. From my urban hometown of North Bergen, New Jersey, to the beautiful weirdness of Austin, Texas; from the rustic familiarity of Güiquiliapa, Nicaragua to the modern desert oasis of Doha, Qatar. Every city is unique, and every city is captivating if you know how to see its soul.

Cities bring together all that is good and bad in the human experience. They are links to the past and bridges to the future. The story of a city is the story of the people that live in it, and the legacy that we leave behind us is written in the brick and iron of cities.

Shaun Torres is the director of the Texas A&M at Qatar Library and has worked for Texas A&M University for 20 years. He has been writing poetry and short stories for most of his life. He is a gamer, a geek, and a lover of many types of art and literature, including absurdism, magical realism, speculative fiction, and many others.
DREAMS OF THE CITY

Do you see it?
This is our City.

Scorched neon spires,
Cold metal and hot brick.
Water in the desert,
Life in the sun.

We find our hearts and we lose our souls,
In the City.
In each other.

It breathes us in and we breathe with it.
It breathes out and we are gone.

Do you see it?
Look around you.

It scuttles and hums like a prismatic beetle,
Glittering eyes open to the world,
Wings spread.
In the dark it shimmers.
In the light it burns.

We come in ones and twos,
Drawn to the shadow of iridescent wings.
Desperate for shade,
Dreading the dark.
Sharp shadows cut deep.

Do you see it?
It is changing.

Look at it.
Burn it into your eyes.
Carve it on your heart.
Dance to the thrumming beat of its wings.
Take it in.
Hold it.

For it will never be the same again.
Alah Abdulkareem Ibrahim Omar

An in-depth examination of life’s difficulties and questioning one’s circumstances are revealed by reflecting on the poem “Why Me?” The poem encourages readers to take a minute to think about themselves, asking them to consider both happy and sad times and to consider the inherent human propensity to question why some things happen to them.

By writing in the second person, the poet establishes a personal connection with the audience, drawing them into a shared moment of reflection. The poet asks readers to explore their experiences through rhetorical questions, inspiring empathy and introspection. The poetry gains a dramatic dimension when the poet uses vivid imagery to describe complex or perplexing circumstances, such as the sun’s melancholy and the fall of enormous showers. These analogies effectively convey the emotional heaviness and confusion felt during trying times. The phrase “Why me?” is often used to highlight the sense of confusion and annoyance that can come with adversity.

The poem interestingly takes an unexpected turn as it challenges readers to reflect on their behavior, even in times of joy and fulfilment. This change calls into question the idea that happiness is innately deserving or predictable. They are inspired to reflect on the transient nature of happiness and ask themselves why they experience joy when others might not. This line of thinking encourages a more in-depth examination of appreciation and an acceptance of the erratic character of life’s events.

The poem encourages reflection on existential issues like fate, purpose, and the idea of fairness from a larger perspective. It forces readers to face their innate drive to seek meaning and comprehension amid happiness and adversity. “Why me?” explores
the complexities of the human condition and the propensity to examine life’s circumstances. The poem fosters a deeper awareness of the common thirst for solutions to life’s unanswerable problems by encouraging readers to reflect on their experiences of misfortune and happiness through its thoughtful and reflective tone.

Alah Omar is a passionate computer engineering student (Class of 2026) at Hamad Bin Khalifa University. She profoundly loves writing and embraces it as a powerful means of self-expression, connection, and personal growth. Alah’s unique blend of creativity and engineering interests positions her as a promising student, ready to make a lasting impact in computer engineering and writing.
WHY ME?

*Why do you have to ask me?*

When you’re unfortunate,
When the world turns against you,
When you don’t know what to do,
When giant raindrops fall,
When you’re even more confused.

When the saddened sun won’t shine,
When the stars will not align,
When you’d rather be inside your bed,
The covers pulled above your head.

When life is something,
You dread.

And you have to ask, *why me?*

And when the world seems right and true,
When the rain leaves its gentle dew,
When you feel happy,
Ask yourself, why me?

*Even then.*
Samiha Rahman | The Treasures of the Sea.
“Portrait of Longing” shows the complex nature of an unstoppable and endless longing that takes over. I found myself confessing to the all-consuming power of obsession, those hours that slip away without notice, held by its grip. Whoever or whatever the focus of this obsession is, I believe the emotional journey of this obsession resonates with readers. Amidst it all, hope appears and vanishes, reminding me that not all dreams survive these strong feelings.

Samiha Rahman was born in Bangladesh but transplanted to Qatar during her formative years. She carries her cultural roots as a torch lighting her path. With a never-ending passion, she dives into her Bangladeshi heritage, putting in the effort to connect her present with where she comes from. Raised in a household brimming with creativity, courtesy of her artist father and writer mother, she proudly wears the mantle of their influences. Samiha's deep love for the beauty of languages drives her dreams; she imagines a future full of adventures, where she can uncover the intricate blend of languages and art forms from different corners of the world.
A PORTRAIT OF LONGING

The whirlpool of passion swallowed me whole,
Countless hours spent in obsession’s toll.

With desire's brush, your portrait I have drawn,
Imperfections once present, now completely gone.

For I’m mending them ceaselessly, night and day.
All the scars of your past are washed away
with the overflowing tears that I lay.

In each moment, I adorn you in a new guise,
But hope’s drowned in the river, a cruel surprise.
We agreed to a new chapter of love’s fair play,
But some wishes and dreams were lost along the way.

I keep swimming in waters infinite and deep,
Hopeless heart’s shadow in the calm waters seep.

The portrait of my dreams once painted by light of the dawn
under the canopy of clouds, forever gone.
CHAPTER 7 | UNVEILING VULNERABILITY

Safya Al-Marri
The colors in your eyes, they faded away,
Like birds in the sky, they flew away.

The air was heavy with chemicals and antiseptics
The floor was swept from fresh green liquids.
The beeping monitor said, “He’s okay; don’t hurt your head.”
How is that if you’re tied in bed?

A reservoir in your eyes, but a waterfall in mine.
We were holding back what I knew was a sign,
The minutes of silence and the minutes of stare
Something was off; how can a child prepare?

I held your frail hands to take the pain away,
Though they were cold as ice, I told you I’m here to stay.

The silence spoke before you could,
It shattered my heart as I know it should.

You opened your mouth,
The words flew free,
“Take care of your brother, he’ll need you to see.
Don’t forget your sister, don’t leave her alone.
As well as your mother, she can’t be on her own.”

Years have passed, and you’re still here,
Fighting the odds, I thank god you’re near,
I’m not a child anymore, yet it’s still my fear,
That it will come back and,
You’ll leave me here.
“Restart” represents life’s challenges and transitions. It explores frequent goodbyes, the anxiety of being overlooked by those who mean the world to us, and the ticking clock that keeps us on our toes. It is about starting over again and again in new places with new people. It evokes the odd feeling that, even when starting from scratch, we sometimes seem to be living the same story in a different place. Simply put, this poem is about the ups and downs of endings and beginnings, as well as the worry and hope they bring.

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Reem ElShabasy is a chemical engineering senior who enjoys reading, writing, drawing, and watching shows in her free time. She’s fond of things that spark her imagination, which makes sci-fi and fantasy her favorite genres. It is for the same reason that she loves poetry, even when she can’t fully understand it. She sees it as a preservation of others’ voices and a projection of her own. If you find her awake past midnight, she’s most likely writing another poem (or just drowning in her CHEN assignments).
I type this with a heavy heart.
I struggle to form the words and I don’t know from where to start.
Day by day I watch the end become closer.
Day by day I watch you drift farther.
Day by day I fear the changes I see.
Would time be so kind to slow?
What if one day the moments I live become memories, long gone?
Suddenly my world would never be the same again.
Suddenly I’d feel alone again.
Suddenly you’d be gone and I’d lose a part of me that I’d struggle to regain.
With a soaring heart and a throbbing mind, I forge on into the future.
Everything starts to look oddly familiar as I grow older:
I am alone.
And the only things left of you are memories.
I say this with a heavy heart:
I knew not that there was a greater fear than drifting apart—
The fear of running out of time,
The fear of having to restart.
The concept behind “You” occurred to me when I was brainstorming ideas for a psychology project on the portrayal of mental illnesses in media. What started as a mere case study quickly evolved into a hopelessly tangled web of questions to ponder, considering “You” delves into the mental state of Trevor Reznik from The Machinist, a man who has become emaciated with guilt, his reality falling apart before his eyes. In turn, we start to question the nature of our own reality, the security of our very being, and the unknown future to come. Through Trevor, we see the need to critique our continued existence; to reflect on who we have been, and to look towards who we could be.

Meera Jarrar is a junior CHEN major from Jordan with a penchant for liberal arts. She enjoys reading existentialist literature and analysing cinematography. You can usually find her in the library procrastinating on her math homework. One phrase she lives by is “to each, their own,” and hopes that one day someone else will be able to see the wisdom in it.
YOU

You are panting. Each breath feels more laborious than the last. Each gulp of air getting smaller as you fight to take the next. It truly does take a lot of effort, rolling up a corpse in a carpet, a human you killed, a life you ended, but it must be done.

There is no other way.

Blood still stains your face, dripping down as you take a much-needed break to get that sweet, sweet release of nicotine. It’s serene outside, but that is to be expected in the waning hours of the night.

It is also serene inside, your mind refusing to process what you did, your body moving in robotic motions to load up the carpet in your van, your hands twitching every so often with a newfound tremor.

You make it to the beach, in hopes that the sea will wash away your sins. You park at a discreet spot and run to the back of the van. Another round of heavy lifting awaits you.

Desperate, paranoid, crazed, you finally make it to the pier, your fear screaming in your ears when a blinding light suddenly flashes from behind you.

Your heart pounds like a fist against your ribs, fighting to break free. You become more frantic, your movements sloppy, your vision distorted. The light gets closer, blindingly bright. You have no choice but to throw the carpet.

With every nerve on fire, every bone turned rigid, and with every breath catching in your throat, you stare. The carpet begins unravelling, inch by agonizing inch, and so does your sanity (or whatever remains of it). You hear a voice calling out. You refuse to look back. Your eyes will not, cannot, leave the carpet as it finally unwinds, the mere few seconds becoming an eternity …

Empty.

It is empty.

How is it empty?
The voice has now disappeared, replaced by a deafening bewilderment. You choose this moment to turn back. Perhaps your executioner could become your salvation? But all you see is yourself.

You.

The body in the carpet.

You.

The murderer in the night.

You.

The voice with the light.

You are your own worst enemy.
Chapter 8
Making Music
Samiha Rahman | Dancing Amongst the Clouds.
Admiration is unconditional. We see in others what we fail to see in ourselves. And while these emotions might be fleeting, what matters is that at some point they made us wish we could pause time. Savoring these fleeting moments and immersing oneself in the ‘tune’ as it plays, despite knowing it may not last, is the only way we pay tribute to the unmet longings of our hearts.

Reem ElShabasy is a chemical engineering senior who enjoys reading, writing, drawing, and watching shows in her free time. She’s fond of things that spark her imagination, which makes sci-fi and fantasy her favorite genres. It is for the same reason that she loves poetry, even when she can’t fully understand it. She sees it as a preservation of others’ voices and a projection of her own. If you find her awake past midnight, she’s most likely writing another poem (or just drowning in her CHEN assignments).
A TUNE

You are a tune to her,
One she never gets tired of hearing.

She knows you’ll be gone someday,
But you make her happy for the time being.

Short-lived were your interactions,
Yet ever growing was her love.

You were tone deaf,
While she was hung up on blues.

She needed not an instrument nor company,
To relay her words over and over.

She sang by herself,
The walls her only audience.

Perhaps your presence would’ve brought her closure,
But you would’ve listened to her for hours, not knowing,
You were the muse,
Behind all her sad rhythms and tunes.
Writing “The Beauty of Music” has been a deeply personal and gratifying experience for me. As a 19-year-old writer with a profound love for music, I found myself delving into the essence of what makes this art form so incredibly beautiful and influential in our lives. My journey into the world of music began early on, as I was exposed to a rich tapestry of musical styles and cultures. However, it was during my time in Spain that I encountered a street musician who played the acoustic guitar with such raw emotion and skill that it left an indelible mark on my soul.

Witnessing the power of music to communicate feelings and stories ignited a passion within me to explore this medium of expression further. Determined to learn the guitar, I returned to my home country and set out on an adventure of self-discovery and musical growth. Practicing daily, I immersed myself in mastering chords and techniques, quickly progressing to play some of my favorite songs with increasing finesse. Beyond the technical aspects, music became a profound emotional outlet for me. I discovered the art of writing heartfelt lyrics, channeling my experiences and feelings into melodies that spoke volumes about my inner world. Through this creative process, I found the courage to express myself more openly, enriching my life and relationships in unforeseen ways.

The transformation I experienced through music extended beyond my creative pursuits. The discipline and commitment I applied to my musical journey spilled over into my academic life, influencing my dedication to my studies at university. Music taught me the value of perseverance and the rewards that come with investing time and effort into something that brings joy. I am incredibly grateful to have been
given the opportunity to share my reflections through “The Beauty of Music.” This essay is not just a celebration of music’s enchanting allure but a testament to the transformative power of art and self-expression. I hope that my words resonate with others, inspiring them to embrace their passions wholeheartedly and discover the unique ways in which creativity can enrich and shape their lives.
THE BEAUTY OF MUSIC

The right song could completely change your mood, or make you feel like you’re in a romantic scene in a movie. Music is one of the most expressive forms of communication; it is easier to express our emotions through notes and rhythms. It can even be like therapy for some people like me; it helps me translate my feelings into notes. My music comes in the form of a guitar, which has changed my life and is now like a friend to me.

My journey began when I moved to Spain. I met this guy who played the acoustic guitar on the streets in Seville. We talked a lot about our lives and how music changed his. He told me he plays the piano, the guitar (both acoustic and electric), and the drums, learning everything on his own. I wanted to be him honestly. He was very talented, able to make money off the music he loves, and doing something that represented him. He was the reason why I wanted to play guitar, and after that encounter, I started saving up money to buy my very own guitar and teach myself how to play.

After three months I moved back to my home country. It was a difficult time because I missed Spain and its atmosphere: you could find a person playing music on every corner of Seville. Doha was not the same, and I felt aimless. I had a lot of free time, which led to me sleeping a lot. It got to the point where I didn’t see anyone at all. It was always me and my pillow. I had long since lost contact with the guy I met in Seville, but one day on a random afternoon, he popped up on a social media app. He was playing guitar in London this time. I remembered my plan to buy my own guitar, and suddenly I had a goal in life. I went out with a friend who also happened to play the guitar, and we bought a lovely light brown guitar to call my own. Playing the guitar filled my time, and I became happier. In this way, music was able to pull me out of my misery and give me something to look forward to.

After a while, I got very good at playing the guitar. I was practicing every day for at least three hours, putting all my focus into playing. In less than one month, I had memorized all the common chords used in musical pieces and how to transition between them. I was watching a lot of videos that taught me to play a lot of newer songs I liked a lot. The first song that I learned how to play was “Fine Line” by Harry Styles. I was very happy after that because I successfully put three chords together and jumped between them smoothly. To this day, I learn new techniques every time I touch
the guitar, specifically finger style. My interest in learning encourages my commitment, both of which are skills I carry over to other things in my life, such as my studies at university.

Music helped me a lot with expressing my emotions. I now write them down, turning them into lyrics, and then try to make them into a song by finding the right notes. Although this is hard—finding the notes that can properly fit my emotions is tiring and takes a lot of time—I am still happy to be able to do something I love and put effort into something that gives me joy. Previously, I would just put random notes together and try my best to find the words to put in a sentence. This also changed my way of viewing other people, as ever since I was a little kid, I had a problem with expressing how I feel to everyone, even the people closest to me. I would prefer to swallow my feelings, cry in a bathroom, and just complain about anything and everything. However, now I feel like I am a more grateful person in general, and although I still keep my feelings to myself, you can find them in the songs I write and the melodies I play. After playing the guitar, I noticed how I changed as a person. I became more positive, having found inner peace after being able to let my emotions out through music.

Music in general, and the guitar specifically, has changed me. I am a more spirited person who is actually excited about life. I started playing because of someone else, but I kept on playing for me. The guitar was able to cheer me up during a time when I was feeling very down, taught me how to learn about something and commit to it, and helped me express my emotions in a healthy way. I hope that one day I can inspire someone who is hesitant into picking up an instrument and practicing music the way I did.
Asad Abu Alrub

In crafting this poem, Asad carefully selected words and phrases that would evoke strong imagery and stir the emotions of his readers. He wanted to create a sense of warmth, resilience, and hope, emphasizing the eternal nature of love that can withstand any challenge. By sharing this piece with the TAMUQ community, Asad hopes to inspire others to cherish their relationships, find solace in love during difficult times, and appreciate the profound impact it can have on one’s life.

Asad Abu Alrub is a passionate mechanical engineering student with a deep appreciation for creative expression. Through the composition of this poem, he sought to convey the enduring power of love and the unwavering strength of human connections. Inspired by personal experiences and the emotions they evoked, Asad aimed to capture the essence of eternal love and the comfort it brings even in the face of hardship and adversity.
WARMTH OF LOVE

Though the sun losing its warming daylight,
My heart will be filled with warmth and divine,
Our bond will stay so strong, shining so bright,
My soul beats for you to keep me alive.

My warmth from you will never fade away,
Even through many hardships and long cries,
Because your love is always there to stay,
Your care is immortal through my dark eyes.

Through the burning fire and hell we will go,
Nothing can keep us warmer together,
No matter what the far future will hold,
Joyful moments, in the dark hot weather.

If the sun should die,
Through the darkest night,
Our love,
Eternal and shining bright.
The poem describes the feeling felt by humans when music is played. The sudden rush of emotions passes through all the listeners at once, connecting one piece of music to everyone around. The notes work in unity and bring people together.

Siddhant Rao is an electrical engineering student graduating in the Class of 2026. He enjoys watching Formula 1 and playing sports. His favorite hobby is playing instruments such as guitar and piano. He listens to several different genres of music. The moment that inspired him to get involved in writing was after listening to the lyrics of the song “Hotel California” by the Eagles, due to its expansive world-building.
HAIKU: MUSIC

Everyone was stunned,
The notes rang from one speaker,
Thousands of souls moved
Chapter 9

Pursuing Knowledge

Patience  Consideration  Pride  Treasure  Source  Discussion  Story  Competence
Inspire  Together  Message  Acceptance  Intellect  Chat  Passion
Learning  Ability  Vision  Knowledge  Metaphor  Love  Diversity
Past  Term  Reason  Insight  Satisfaction
Service  Challenge  Reader  Reasoning  Vision
Change  Wisdom  Ethics  Boundlessness  Idea
Research  Perception  Statement  Content  Imagination
Discovery  Respect  Information  Affection  Future
Faith  Leadership  Rationality  Excellence  Think  Creativity
Intelligence  Skill  Declaration  Infinity  Think  Creativity
Intelligence  Skill  Declaration  Infinity
In my Composition and Rhetoric course (ENGL 104), I worked on a project where I explored my father’s perspective and narrated his journey of learning Turkish. This immersive experience allowed me to understand his struggles in acquiring a foreign language. By capturing his story authentically, I was able to share his unique narrative and highlight the resilience and determination required to master a new language. Overall, the project provided an enlightening and rewarding opportunity to dig into my father’s mindset and convey his inspiring journey of language acquisition.

Dana AbouHassanain, a student in computer engineering, embodies a social and friendly nature that fosters meaningful connections. Driven by an unwavering determination, she wholeheartedly pursues her goals, leaving no stone unturned. With a passion for technology and a natural inclination for problem-solving, she eagerly embraces challenges within the field. By combining her sociable demeanor and relentless work ethic, she strives to make a positive impact as she embarks on her professional journey.
LANGUAGE DIARY

On a sunny Friday, I stare at my dad and my uncle as they sit in our front yard and chat in a language that I do not speak: Turkish. I have always known that they both speak Turkish since they studied there but hearing them speak Turkish fascinates me every time. Later that day, after my uncle left our house, I excitingly rush to my dad to ask him the questions I’ve been dying to ask the entire day: “Baba, how did you learn Turkish? Was it easy or hard? Did it take you long to learn? How did you not forget it after all these years?” My dad laughs and says, “easy there with the questions. Give me a minute and I will bring you something that will answer all your questions.” He goes to his room and walks out a few minutes later, handing me a book that looks about 30 or so years old. “What is this?” I ask. “Read and find out,” he replies.

I do exactly that, I go to my room and get myself into my reading mood. I make myself a cup of coffee, then sit at my desk, turn on my desk lamp, put my headphones in to listen to some music, and start reading. *My diary, 1987* the first page reads.

*May 3rd, 1987.* Mohammad, my oldest brother, drops me and Ahmad, my other older brother, at the airport after we said goodbye to our parents and the rest of our siblings. “I will miss you two,” Mohammad says as he hugs us both. Ahmad and I then rush to check in our bags and get to the plane. Anyway, all these boring airport details don’t matter. What matters is what we saw when we landed in Turkey, where we would be pursuing B.A.s in business. This place is green all over! I am not used to all this greenery at all; I’m used to the yellow sand everywhere in Qatar. Even though it’s nighttime you can easily tell this place is amazing! Not to mention the weather. There’s a cool breeze in the air and you can walk without feeling like you got fried.

We hail a cab, and this is where the problems started. We both can’t speak a word of Turkish, and the driver can’t speak a word of Arabic. Shit. We showed him the address of our apartment that we had written on a piece of paper, and he gives us a thumbs up and starts to drive. We felt a bit of relief that he understood where to take us, but when we arrived, we didn’t understand how much we owed him. So, I pulled out some money I had in my pocket and showed it to him to pick whichever bill is right. He takes a 20-lira bill and gives me 5-lira back. I know he could’ve easily scammed
me, but you do what you got to do. Ahmad gets the key to the door, which was shipped to Qatar by the landlord, from his bag and opens the door. After that long flight, we don’t even unpack; we just head right to bed excited for tomorrow.

May 4th, 1987. When we woke up, we went to get breakfast at a restaurant we found at the end of the street our apartment is on, but again we had the same problem: we could not communicate with the waitress. We end up just pointing at the pictures in the menu and signing with our hands the quantity we would like. “We really need to learn Turkish,” I say to Ahmad. “We can’t stay like this. Let’s look for a language teaching institute after we finish eating.” Ahmad agrees with me, so we do that after struggling to pay (again).

We walk around our neighbourhood until we find a big sign in Arabic that says, ”learn Turkish for only 50-lira per course.” We walk into the institute and talk to the lady at the reception desk, who surprisingly speaks Arabic! We tell her that we need to learn Turkish. “How much Turkish do you know?” she asks. Ahmad and I look awkwardly at each other, and I say, “nothing at all” to her. And so, she signs us up for the beginner classes, but she warns us that we will take about a year to learn how to speak fluently. We start the classes immediately because we want to learn as soon as possible. We meet our teacher, who tells us that we will be learning the basics of the language today, the letters and very basic sentences like “how are you?” and “how much is this?” I originally thought that the Turkish alphabet is like the English alphabet, but the letters are pronounced differently. We spend most of our day in the institute, so that by the time we leave it’s dinner time. After eating at the same restaurant we ate at for breakfast, we walk around some more before going back to our apartment to go to sleep.

July 1st, 1987. Almost two months and we have the same routine: go to the institute, listen well in class, practice some more after class, eat, walk, and then go home to sleep. We learned so many new things though. When we go to the restaurant we always eat at, we can hold a conversation with the waitress and the owner of the restaurant. It’s safe to say they’re both impressed with our improvement. So, I can say that our hard work hasn’t been in vain. We also learned about verbs and nouns, as well as grammar. But also, simple things like the numbers, animals, and such.
We did go to some places to have fun on the weekend, but their names are hard to write, so I won’t do that. We visited a waterfall site that had a little restaurant next to it owned by a lady who did everything herself. She makes a traditional Turkish bread (I don’t know the name) with potato and cheese inside; it was so good! We also found an arcade near our apartment that we visit often to unwind. But I think my favourite place is the park we have in the neighborhood; I like going there to study. That’s about it, there’s not much to say as all we did most of the time is study the language. Anyway, next week I will start classes in university. I can’t wait!

**July 4th, 1987.** One thing about learning Turkish that I find easy is that it’s so similar to Arabic. Like there are so many similar words. For example, insan in Turkish and إنسان in Arabic both mean human and they are pronounced very similarly. This is something that helps me a lot as I am learning Turkish; however, pronunciation is so hard! If you slightly mispronounce a letter no one will know what you are trying to say. What makes this worse is that some letter’s pronunciations are so similar to each other. While some letters are just impossible to get right, like Ğ!

**July 8th – September 19th, 1987.** I feel like I am not fluent enough to be able to sit through a business class in Turkish. But when I shared my worries with my teacher, she said, “Think of it as an advanced class that you are taking to learn Turkish.” So, I started my first two classes in university with that mindset, and it helped me so much! Not only did I expand my Turkish vocabulary, but I also managed to understand everything the lecturer was saying, and I made some Turkish friends. I kept practicing my Turkish while talking to them, which helped me so significantly that my Turkish teacher commented on it. I can also see my own improvement: I can easily talk to waiters and cab drivers now!

**November 17th, 1990.** I haven’t touched this diary in a while; I’ve been so busy with university and learning Turkish I completely forgot about it. I’m here with some sad news, Mohammad lost his job, so my family is now short on money. That led to Ahmad and I heading back to Qatar and cutting our education short. I had plenty of fun while I was in Turkey these past few years, so I am a little sad about leaving this country, but I understand. So, I guess this is the last page of my diary.

I close the diary and quickly go down the stairs to talk to my dad, who’s in the living room on his phone. “Baba, that was so interesting!” I say and
safely give him back his diary. “I’m glad you enjoyed it,” he said. “It makes me want to learn Turkish, too,” I laugh. It was so intriguing to me to learn about my dad’s dive into the unknown world of a new country and a new language, and now I really want to learn Turkish, too. The one thing I know in Turkish is “seni seviyorum,” which means “I love you.” It’s the one thing my dad would say to me in Turkish, and I always reply with “ben de seni seviyorum,” which means “I love you too!”
Muhammad Hanif

We often overlook the power of the media we consume every day. As a fan of Marvel movies, I realized that there is more to superheroes than meets the eye. I wrote this piece for my final Literature and Other Arts course project to highlight the effects of superheroes in the real world.

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THE SOCIAL AND PHYSICAL EFFECTS OF SUPERHEROES IN MEDIA ON OUR SOCIETY

Superheroes have always existed throughout human history, whether it be Hercules or more modern ones such as Captain America. In recent times, their appearance in the media has increased. From companies such as Marvel Studios, DC Comics, and Amazon Prime, superheroes have been engraved in our lives (Coyne 634). These characters’ effect on our society is often overlooked since they have power outside their fictional world.

Superheroes are depicted as the best of the best. They stand for what is right and are shown to be saviors. Young people tend to look up to them because of their costumes, powers, catchphrases, and physique (Budzynski-Seymour 2). This could motivate young people to adopt those values and become good members of society. Not only does this benefit the children, but it will also help us maintain a healthy environment for everyone. In addition, physical activity is one of the most important things for growing people, preventing muscle atrophy and excessive weight (Budzynski-Seymour 2). By using special video effects or exciting moves, we could make it an immersive experience for them. It has been proven that by using video graphics and superhero moves and costumes, the immersive qualities of specific activities, such as exercise videos, have increased dramatically (Budzynski-Seymour 8). It makes the participants, usually children, feel good about themselves after engaging in physical activity since it’s as if they are superheroes themselves.

Additionally, superheroes could be used in therapy for children who are experiencing a mentally challenging time. Whether it’s a divorce or the absence of parental figures, superheroes in story books could assist young people struggling in that situation through bibliotherapy. Bibliotherapy is the use of literature to help people develop better mental health, and it is a practical and cost-effective method of therapy (Betzalel 474). Children are susceptible to negative thoughts, especially regarding topics that they know little of, such as a divorce or the absence of parental figures. Stories of superheroes are filled with hopeful outcomes and happy endings. While it may induce an unrealistic image of the real world, it could be used as a foundation for them to build healthy thoughts on life moving forward. Children who are provided bibliotherapy with superheroes in the stories to help them with absent parental figures are proven to be more hopeful
about the future and think less about home (Betzalel 483). It is unhealthy for them to dwell on thoughts that could make them feel unwanted or alone since this could lead to depression.

Moreover, superheroes could help teachers explain complex topics to students through superheroes. This increases the overall class interest in the topic and creates a better relationship between the teacher and students (Price 364). Superheroes are more than an entertainment; they are a psychological tool which we can use for our benefit. Complex scientific topics that may be boring or hard for students to grasp may be modified in a way that incorporates superheroes so that it is more relevant to the students (Price 362). Their appeal is more than visual, some superheroes in comics and movies employ actual scientific concepts to produce their gadgets. *Ironman* is an excellent example of a brains-over-brawn superhero (Smith 259). He invented and built the technology needed to protect the Earth from the next “bad guy.” His character could inspire many growing minds and even adults in the workforce. For example, *Real Life Superheroes* is a global organization where people dress up as superheroes to complete community service tasks, such as neighborhood watch (Castle 1089). They utilize the concept of superheroes to promote the idea that community service workers need to be appreciated more, and they succeed by advertising themselves while working. This suggests that superheroes in the media have inspired us to take on their positive characteristics in the real world. Although we might not be as powerful or talented as they are, dressing up like them can be enough to make ourselves feel stronger.

On the other hand, superheroes are fictional. The feats they perform and the people they save are made to fit their story. The world they live in usually revolves around them, even if they say that it doesn’t. They have muscles and fit bodies, with handsome and beautiful faces. The body image portrayed by superheroes could increase “hegemonic masculinity,” a code of masculinity that pressures men to uphold what society deems “masculine” (Coyne 635). This could initiate unhealthy thoughts about oneself because of unrealistic expectations. The physique of superheroes in movies is that of a Greek god, and to compare ourselves to these images is both unrealistic and damaging. This could lead to mental illnesses such as E.D. (Coyne 635-636). Understandably, some would try their best to look like a hero, but what could one do if it’s impossible?

Technology in superhero movies is an inspiration to some. *Limitless Solutions* is a non-profit organization that utilizes *Ironman’s* gauntlet
that he gave to the child in *Iron Man 3* as a base to create a prosthetic to help people with disabilities (Smith 259). They propose that it could be a beginning to integrate fictional technology used in Superhero movies to develop designs to help people with disabilities. Not only does this help them physically, but it also helps them feel more confident with their bodies since having a part of a superhero on you can make you feel like a superhero. Thus, superheroes could inspire us to produce relevant technology that would aid us in moving forward in society. Their influence surpasses that of the fictional world they inhabit.

However, not all superheroes are fictional. From public health workers to firefighters, there are many people who engage in heroic behaviors every day. They are different from the *Real-Life Superheroes* organization that was discussed previously in the sense that they don’t use heroic costumes while on the job. Their work literally saves lives. With that being said, we could use the appeal superheroes have in the media to promote the hard work that these real heroes do (Brown 625-626). Children could be influenced by this change and want to be public heroes. It has been proven that superheroes in media increase the popularity of a subject, so why not mix them up with real heroes?

The answer is simple: realism. How could real-life heroes compete with “super” heroes, whose feats are cosmic, beyond the human realm. Therefore, we need to find the “sweet spot” for public health, firefighters, and other human heroes to level the playing field with superheroes in the media. One idea is to include real names in fictional worlds where superheroes exist. Make the superhero look up to someone who helped change the world so that it would invite the audience to look up to them, too. Create a fun cameo in which they feature in the movies or have a dialogue with characters in the film (Brown 628).

In the end, superheroes are more than characters in movies. They are a fusion of the best traits that we see in ourselves. They are a projection of what we hope this world can be. It is impossible that they exist physically due to their powers and naïve way of solving problems. However, we should take inspiration from their unbreakable will and willingness to be selfless. Their effect on us is mainly positive and only harmful when we cannot find that balance between fiction and reality. It is true that they could induce an unhealthy body image of ourselves, but how does that compare to the lives they have inspired, the kids they have made happy, and the technology that has been derived from their intelligence?
REFERENCES


I remember writing this essay in my first semester at Texas A&M. Every course was new and I did not know what to expect. It was the most memorable essay as I worked on it throughout the entire course, despite it overlapping with other essays. When we learned what was required to write the essay, my interest was piqued. This writing was like no other I have ever done. We were to analyze scenes, assign and identify a particular theory in it, and then write about that theory in the film. This theory was Freud’s theory of the uncanny.

For me, this assignment was unique and involved aspects that I found fascinating, such as the film and the reading material. Reflecting back, I remember watching the film in class and being completely disinterested because of its age. However, when I received the reading material, which included an explanation of Freud’s theories, I realized that this film was not just something to watch, but to analyze. The identification of his theories in the film was so satisfying, and an explanation of those theories offered a lot of room for creativity because we were able to branch off root ideas from the ‘main tree’ (The Uncanny).

After a few weeks, I was completely taken in by this theory and the film. To me, it was a masterpiece. How can something be so deep and yet so superficial, so mysterious and yet so apparent? The film impressed me over time, and the more I engaged with it, the more I was drawn in. The way the director implemented Freud’s theories was extremely intelligent, and it kept me engaged and motivated me to write and express what I thought. It was like trying to solve riddles and puzzles, find the exit of the labyrinth, connect the dots by a line, and so on. I remember spending hours before an interview, so busy perfecting...
my design just to get as much feedback as possible. Overall, I learned a lot while writing this essay, from my analysis to my research skills, and if I could do it all over again, I would.

Abdulrahman AlAnbari is a TAMUQ student (Class of 2026), studying electrical engineering and following in his father’s footsteps. He believes that perseverance comes with strength, discipline, and hard work. He believes that the foundation for success is perseverance above all else and always strives to be a better version of himself through the word.
In Sigmund Freud’s essay “The Uncanny,” he states that for something to be uncanny, it must have a familiar aspect. He defines *uncanny* as a “class of terrifying which leads back to something long known to us” (p. 220). Unlike other interpretations of the uncanny—for example, Ernst Jentsch states that it is a feeling of uncertainty—Freud says that the uncanny is the uncertainty within what is familiar to us. Freud gives many examples of this, such as the idea of repetition, or, as we like to call it, déjà vu. A cycle of repetitions in an unsettling environment is the familiar aspect that, for Freud, creates the sense of the uncanny in the first place. He gives an example of this by telling a story of himself in the streets of Italy during one hot summer (p. 237). The repetition of his appearance on the same street in an eerie atmosphere is what gave rise to the uncanny, and without the familiarity that comes from this repetition, the uncanny would not occur. So now we understand that Freud’s theory of the uncanny deals not only with that which is unfamiliar or uncertain to us, but also with the frightening that leads back to something familiar, like memory or a repetition of events. Freud also dwells on many more ideas and examples to prove his theory, which I will discuss later.

A great example of a work of art that is worthwhile in evaluating Freud’s theory on the uncanny is Alfred Hitchcock’s 1963 film *The Birds*. The film displays Freud’s theory in many different scenes and allows us to reconsider it ourselves. The film tells a story about Melanie Daniels and the Brenner family. Melanie meets Mitch Brenner, a lawyer in San Francisco, at a pet store and takes a liking to him. She then tries to fool Mitch by pretending to work there but is unsuccessful. Mitch scolds Melanie for her antics and leaves the pet store. Later, Melanie searches for Mitch and finds out that he lives in Bodega Bay. They meet again at a bar where Melanie is invited for dinner to the Brenner home. As time goes on, bird attacks in Bodega Bay increase significantly as Melanie and the Brenner family try to protect themselves. The first instance of a major attack was at Cathy Brenner’s party. From then on, the situation escalates, and by the end of the film, Mitch drives Melanie’s sports car to the front of the house, escorts Melanie and his family to the car, and then carefully drives off into the fields. There are many instances in the film that confirm Freud’s theory, such as the scene where the birds trickle down the chimney into
the Brenner family home and where Melanie waits outside the school. However, some passages in the film, such as the restaurant scene, cause us to reconsider Freud’s theory.

For us to understand the relevance between *The Birds* and Freud’s theory of the *uncanny*, we must take notes and analyze parts of his essay. Freud focuses on the definition of the uncanny in various languages, especially German. He looks at the word *heimlich* and uses its definition to support his idea of the uncanny. *Heimlich* means cozy, familiar, or homey. It can be used to represent something safe and cozy like home, but at the same time, it can also be used to refer to secrecy. Freud investigates this and concludes that the word *heimlich* is related to the antonymic word *unheimlich*. Thus, he says that the definition of *heimlich* evolves into a contradictory state until it coincides with its opposite definition. This parallel between the two words is what Freud calls the *uncanny*, a word that is defined by two sets of ideas: that which is familiar and that which is unfamiliar. Freud was also concerned with the changes that take place in our minds as we grow from childhood to maturity. The uncanny seems to have to do with childhood beliefs that we have forgotten, covered over, or put away as adults. Freud examines this by looking at children and their relationships with dolls. He says that a child may desire their doll to come to life, whereas a doll coming to life for an adult would be terrifying (p. 233). He believed that whatever reminded us of our childhood memories and fears can be uncanny because it then seems more real to adults than the adult way of thinking. For an adult, the suspicion of a childhood fantasy coming to life is disturbing. They may be familiar with a childhood memory, but not so much with it being real. Freud also talks about something called the “evil eye.” He says that it is one of the uncanniest superstitions someone could experience, and that it is the envy that someone projects onto others when they themselves are afraid of it (p. 240).

In *The Birds*, Hitchcock uses Freud’s theory of the uncanny to evoke an unsettled feeling in the viewer. One such scene that confirms Freud’s theory is the scene where the Brenner family and Melanie seek shelter after being attacked by birds during the party (54:35). In this scene, the Brenner family and Melanie are sitting in the living room. As they talk, Cathy mentions the chirping of lovebirds in the background. Suddenly everything goes quiet. The camera pans in close to Melanie’s facial expression. This particular camera angle makes Melanie appear threatened. Also, she makes a facial expression as if she knew what was
about to happen and utters “Mitch” as a signal of what was to come. Birds then suddenly burst out from the chimney and swarm the Brenner home. Melanie knew what was coming because she had experienced the same scenario before in the pet shop (25:25). During this scene, we know that the birds in the cages are surrounded by people, whereas in the chimney scene we can see that the roles are reversed: the Brenner family and Melanie are now surrounded by birds instead. Freud’s statement about a child wishing for their doll to come to life, which would be terrifying for an adult (p. 233), applies to these two scenes, as the reversal of roles transforms something from ordinary to frightening. In these two scenes, there are similarities in the roles that are played, but the role reversal is what makes one scene scary and the other one harmless. Freud asks, “Where do the uncanny influences of silence, darkness, and loneliness come from? Do not these factors point to the role that danger plays in the etiology of the uncanny?” (pp. 246-247). In the party scene, Hitchcock employs the technique of “silence before the storm,” i.e., the absence of sound in a film creates a “horror tension” that psychologically frightens the viewer. He specifically uses it between Cathy’s reminder of the lovebirds and the attack, both of which are familiar things, to ensure the maximum effect of the uncanny.

Another scene in which Hitchcock applies Freud’s theory of the uncanny is the school scene between Cathy and Annie Hayworth (1:11:18). In this scene, Melanie sits on a bench outside the school while waiting for Annie to finish her lesson. Melanie lights a cigarette. The line match cuts between Melanie and the climbing frame behind the school, on which a few crows are perched. The camera returns to Melanie. She turns and looks back at the school with an expression of annoyance at the repetitive sounds of the children’s rhyme. The camera catches Melanie’s perspective as she again looks at the climbing frame, this time with more crows on it. The viewer is put in Melanie’s shoes as she turns around between the school and the climbing frame. Melanie looks back at the school a second time, while the children’s song can be heard in the background. The atmosphere is altogether unsettling; the only sound that can be heard is that of the rhyme. Suddenly Melanie sees a crow in the sky. The camera switches to Melanie’s perspective as her eyes follow the bird to the climbing frame where there is now a flock of crows. Suddenly she stands up in shock and runs toward the school entrance, knowing what is about to happen. Throughout the film, Hitchcock uses repetition many times to
achieve the desired uncanny feeling. In this particular scene, repetition is used through the increase in the number of birds each time Melanie looks at the climbing frame and through the repetitive nursery rhyme in the background. Hitchcock uses different camera angles to put the viewer in Melanie’s shoes to give the viewer an idea of what Melanie is feeling. By simply using a line match cut between the climbing frame and the school, the viewer can come to the same realization as Melanie, because they and Melanie have experienced the same repetition of events throughout the film. For the viewer, something familiar, like the appearance of birds, has been transformed into something frightening and sinister by their adaptation to these events. Freud says that whatever reminds us of our “inner compulsion,” that is, our instincts and memories from childhood, is perceived as uncanny (p. 238). Hitchcock uses the nursery rhyme to do just that: to remind us of our childhood memories and to use that memory in a disturbing scenario to evoke the uncanny.

Freud’s theory may have been confirmed in some of the scenes mentioned earlier, but in other scenes in the film, such as the restaurant scene, we can see that some aspects of Freud’s theory do not match. This scene will lead us to revise his theory as it demonstrates the uncanny in a way that Freud fails to mention. When Mitch and Melanie return to the restaurant after the attack and discover a group of women gathered in fear and discomfort (1:28:30), these women look at Melanie at eye level, which is used by Hitchcock to put us in Melanie’s shoes. The whole atmosphere overall is uncanny, and all characters on screen visibly show the effects of this. However, the women who stare at Melanie aren’t familiar with this scenario, which contradicts Freud’s theory, in which he says, “for this uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old established in the mind” (pg. 241). Freud is completely refuted because the women in this scene have never experienced anything like it yet still experience the uncanny. So, when it happens and the truly uncanny nature becomes known, it is something new and frightening to the women. Furthermore, the women stare at Melanie with an “evil eye,” which Freud says the dread of is “one of the most uncanny and widespread forms of superstition.” Later, he also states “Whoever possesses something that is at once valuable and fragile is afraid of other people’s envy” (pg. 241). These women stare enviously at Melanie because Melanie is seen as Mitch’s main love, while it is obvious that many women like and long for Mitch. Although one might think that this is consistent with
Freud’s theory, on the contrary, the women were not *heimlich* (familiar) with the uncanniness of this scene, so how could they possibly feel the uncanny using Freud’s definition?

Another error is revealed in the same scene. During the scene, we notice that there are many people in the restaurant. As Melanie encounters the women, we can see Freud’s ideas of the uncanny in action. For example, the “evil eye” mentioned earlier and the idea that silence can evoke an uncanny feeling. Apart from the fact that the women were not familiar with such a scenario, we can also see that the uncanny is shared between the women. This scene shows that the uncanny can happen in a way that large groups can experience, which is an aspect that Freud did not mention in his essay. All the examples in Freud's essay involve a situation or an idea that displays the uncanny at an individual scale. However, the restaurant scene from Hitchcock’s film allows us to understand the uncanny and shows us that it can also affect larger groups.

Finally, Freud’s theory is convincing in its explanation that the uncanny has a familiar aspect, but Freud does not mention how the uncanny can function because he assumes that it happens individually, whereas in *The Birds* we can see that the uncanny is shared by groups of people. If we look at the scenes from the film, we can see that some aspects of Freud’s theory agree well, but if we look at other scenes, we can see that his theory is incomplete. To be precise, Freud uses examples of the uncanny on an individual scale. Hitchcock’s film helps us understand the uncanny by showing that it can also occur on a larger scale. Moreover, Freud commits another error when he claims that the uncanny must have a familiar aspect. After analyzing the restaurant scene in the film, we can conclude that this is not the case and that the uncanny can indeed occur without the aspect of familiarity. Overall, Freud’s theory is strong as it is displayed throughout the film well, but it is missing some aspects that the film sheds light on.
Anonymous

This ethnographic study helped me discover things I have always wanted to discover but never had the guts to do so. Interviewing my father and friend and asking personal questions was not something I would casually do. Until it was for my ENGL 104 project, which thankfully was enough to convince them to be interviewed.
SMOKERS AMONG MY SOCIAL CIRCLE
An Ethnographic Study

BACKGROUND

Two years ago, during the COVID-19 pandemic, I was laying on the couch in the front of our Majlis, admiring our garden: the big green fronds of the palm tree my father planted 38 years ago, the reddish pink Al-joury flower standing with all her pride, the fragrant white jasmine. That is, until I remembered that we were under quarantine, and this was all I could do. Well, this is not a hundred percent true. I saw a beehive at the top of the Sider tree we had. Mmm … I want that honey, I greedily said to myself. I grabbed a wooden bat, wrapped one side of it with some old dirty clothes of mine, dunked it in diesel, and set it on fire. I fully covered myself with clothes, climbed the tree, placed my bat under the hive, and waited for the bees to choke and run away from the smoke. After half an hour, it worked! The bees had gone, the hive was all mine, and I was safe and sound, thank God, without any stings. It was a landslide victory.

I got the hive, great, now how am I going to extract the honey from it? I wondered. I didn't know the answer and I was starving, so I just ate the whole thing, sucked the honey, and spit up the wax. Minutes later, something unexpected happened. I had a bite of the hive, but not a delicious bite as the previous ones, because it tasted like s**t. What? Huh? Why? What happened? Why does it taste bad now? Is that honey? I wondered. I went to my grandmother, who is the bee expert in our family and told her what happened.

“You literally ate bees’ s**t. They store their waste in a part of the hive, and you just ate that part,” she said laughing.

But that did not matter to me because when I ate that s**t, I instantly went six years back in time, to when I was ten years old, and I tried to smoke for the first time in my life. A ten-year-old kid smoking is something you do not see often. However, I grew up in a smoking family. Not all my family smokes, but still there are many. When I was a kid, I saw them regularly smoke every day. No one told them anything, and I did not see any side effects of it. You have people who drink coffee, and you have people who smoke. That is how I thought it was. That was the reason why I had no fear of smoking. There was no barrier that kept me away from smoking except for its taste.
The awful taste of cigarettes made me resent smokers whenever I saw them. If cigarettes taste exactly like s**t, why do people smoke then? I asked myself. It is written on the packet, “Smoking can cause cancer and early death,” and yet, they still smoke. A couple of months later, I learned that smoking is forbidden in my religion. I just did not understand why they smoked. Which made me despise them even more. Until I met my friend Ali.

The first time I saw him was in grade eight outside of school, smoking with his friends. I did not like him, just as I did not like any other smoker. In grade nine, Ali was in my class. I stayed away from him as much as I could. But that did not last long. He was a One Piece fan, so yeah, we talked about it every now and then. Some more chats with him and suddenly I was sitting next to him. It turned out that he is one of the most respectful friends I have ever known. I felt ashamed; I misjudged him only because of a bad habit! All of us have bad habits, including me. That does not determine whether I am a good person or not; it takes more than that.

No matter what the reasons are, doing something I totally know will negatively affect my health and judging people because of something I do not understand are both outrageous. My story with smoking and my judgments of smokers made me question, “How do smokers reconcile their habit with their well-being and their community?” This question led me to research to find answers. It is my original research question.

**METHODOLOGY**

To find answers to my research question, I conducted an ethnographic study on smokers among my social circle. To understand how to conduct an ethnographic study, I read an overview of ethnography. From there, I learned about various data collection methods: interviews, observations, and surveys. I instantly had two people in mind to interview: my father and my friend. I chose them because they are smokers, I can reach them, and they made me doubt the addiction smoking can cause. I learned later that I used convenience sampling (Simkus). They can smoke every day for six months, then they would cut it off for three months without any effects or even realizing that they did not smoke for that period. But what am I going to ask them exactly? I wondered. I could not just walk in and say how do you feel being a smoker.

To get a better idea of what to expect and what questions I should ask, I used a secondary research source. On the TAMU library website (Howdy)
is a database search. From there, I used the ERIC database to look up some keywords related to my research such as smokers, Muslim, Middle East, and Arabs. These were the common factors and criteria of my targeted people to survey and interview. The article I found was “Marlboro and Other Usual Brand Choices by Youth Smokers in Middle Eastern Countries” (Page). After reading this article, I found out that there are some teenage smokers who believe that some brands of cigarettes are less harmful than others. Because of that finding, my research question shifted a bit. I wanted to prevent teenage non-smokers from smoking like the author, but in a different way. Rather than knowing why smokers prefer a brand of cigarettes and using that information to prevent people from smoking, I wanted to know what makes a smoker originally smoke and hoped to prevent people from falling in that direction. I guess empathy is what I felt.

To organize my ideas, I created a concept map, which helped me figure my out my main research question: “How do smokers reconcile their habit with their well-being and their community?” In addition, the concept map helped me decide what questions should I ask my interviewees. It also made me conduct a survey that would help compare smokers in my social circle with other smokers. I thought it would be useful if I wanted to prevent teenagers from smoking. The questions I wrote for the interviews and the survey were classified into two main groups based on physical and psychological smoking effects.

Then I wrote an informed consent form for my interviewees to give them an idea of what we were going to talk about and what information they wanted to me share and not share in my paper. This was also so my research would be ethical (Sunstein). I felt comfortable interviewing my friend, but an interview with my father about his experience with smoking was terrifying. In the end, both interviews were fantastic and exceeded my expectations (see appendix B).

To satisfy my curiosity and triangulate the results (Carter), I needed more sampling. But more interviews would take lots of time and work. Thus, a survey turned out to be the best solution. I used Qualtrics to build the survey and decided to make the survey questions fast, clear, and easy for people to complete. In the survey, I was able to reach both smokers and non-smokers, so I asked non-smokers about their thoughts on smoking. This was crucial for me to see society’s judgments on smokers. Most questions were multiple choice questions, but there were some scales and text entry questions (see appendix A). I was afraid that people
would ignore those items and would not have any responses, but luckily that did not happen.

Dr. Mysti sent the survey to all TAMUQ faculty, staff, and students by email. The responses I received for every question ranged between 30 and 40 responses. I compared the answers from the survey to those from my interviews to discover if there was a pattern or common answer that can satisfy my curiosity.

**RESULTS**

After conducting both interviews, I was amazed by the answers I got. I explored a new side of my friend’s and my father’s personalities: they were eager to tell someone about this habit but never had the chance to previously. The society they were living in never let them express their feelings, but I did. I collected some answers from the survey of people between 18–25 and 36–49 years old because they were in my interviewees’ age ranges. This would help make the comparison between the interviews and survey answers fair and reliable.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Age 18-25</th>
<th>Age 25-49</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Everything should be tried once.</td>
<td>Everything should be tried once.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Smoking is really bad for you, after a while you’ll really become addicted and regret it.</td>
<td>Smoking is really bad for you, after a while you’ll really become addicted and regret it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bad habit, stay away, long term health issues, not worth it</td>
<td>Bad habit, stay away, long term health issues, not worth it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>You smell bad to others</td>
<td>You smell bad to others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don’t start. It is much easier to say no the first time than the hundredth or thousandth time. There is really no advantage to it and there are many downsides. Your health is affected, you get headaches and stomach issues, it can shorten your life, and it usually makes everything smell awful.</td>
<td>Don’t start. It is much easier to say no the first time than the hundredth or thousandth time. There is really no advantage to it and there are many downsides. Your health is affected, you get headaches and stomach issues, it can shorten your life, and it usually makes everything smell awful.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. Smokers responses to a survey question.

The “Everything should be tried once” response in Figure 1 shows that curiosity can be one of the factors leading to smoking. The data also shows the regret smokers feel despite the age difference between the two demographics. Some regret smoking because of their health, and some regret it because of other people’s thoughts and concerns about them. One survey respondent said, “Smoking is really bad for you, after a while you’ll really become addicted and regret it.” This is interesting to hear from
someone in the 18–25 age group. I didn’t think that the health issues smoking causes would be seen at such young age.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>What do think about smoking/smokers?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-25</td>
<td>Selfish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-25</td>
<td>bitches, even though it’s an addiction. any person that smokes in public or around another person is a disgrace to society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-49</td>
<td>I’m not a fan of being around smokers. People can make any decisions they want about their own health, but when those decisions affect others (e.g., with secondhand smoke), it’s a problem. I wish that smoking were permitted only in designated areas where the smoke can’t reach others who aren’t smoking.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2. Non-smoker responses to a survey question.

The second question was directed at non-smokers only. I found more variety in the responses of non-smokers to their question compared to responses to the question for smokers. As I expected, there were some judgments, but I did not expect bad words to be honest. One interesting response I got, which I personally admire, is the last response in Figure 2: “I’m not a fan of being around smokers. People can make any decisions they want about their own health, but when those decisions affect others (e.g., with secondhand smoke), it’s a problem. I wish that smoking was permitted only in designated areas where the smoke can’t reach others who aren’t smoking.” It shows nonacceptance of a habit, but one that is still respectful with no judgment toward smokers. This is exactly how I have dealt with smokers in my life.

DISCUSSION

After conducting the interviews and collecting the survey responses, I found out how smokers reconcile their habit with their well-being and their community. Smokers in my social circle are totally aware of smoking’s effects on their health and the community’s judgmental thoughts toward them, and they have accepted it. “Smoking is really bad for you, after a while you’ll really become addicted and regret it.” Reading these words from a 18–25-year-old smoker shows his regret and inability to quit his habit.
“But why? Why is it hard to quit something you hate?” I asked my father. He explained, “We do not hate smoking; we hate its effects. For the enjoyment of sitting with smokers and listening to their funny stories, I personally do not mind sacrificing my health. Plus, a habit is something you can easily quit. I quit smoking after every cigarette, but for how long? You pray five times a day, and you can easily skip one prayer because you are asleep, but how would you feel when you wake up? You feel bad, lost, as if something is missing. Do not look at me when I quit smoking for months without any effects. I learned to control that. You have no idea how hard that was.”

He thinks that he is sacrificing his health for his enjoyment. However, the truth is that he is sacrificing a day with his family. It is hard to convince him to quit smoking now. I just wish I could have stopped him from this habit from the beginning.

Free time, friends, boredom, family members, and curiosity respectively made smokers smoke from the beginning, continue smoking, and struggle to quit smoking. My father continued, “The external atmosphere makes the internal motives stronger. I started smoking when I was studying in the United States. I had nothing much to do on my semester breaks until I met a group of friends. They used to go camping every weekend in a new place, and when the sun set, the fun starts. Everyone pulls out his cigarettes, tells a hilarious story that gets me laughing and falling to the ground, and eats the food I proudly made. Sooner or later, I had to smoke so I could be with them without feeling like an outsider. I could not fill my free time with anything except with them then and I still cannot with your uncles.”

Feeling abandoned, left behind, and out of the group is something I have personally experienced. I hated it in the beginning, but after a while it turned out to be the best thing that ever happened to me. It was not the place I belonged to originally. It was either I lose them, or I lose myself. I chose to lose them.

“*%#$@, even though it’s an addiction. Any person that smokes in public or around another person is a disgrace to society.” I appreciate the honesty in this response. Yes, it is a bad habit. Yes, it is harmful and haram. But that does not give anyone the right to despise smokers. When I first read this response, I took it personally: “The smoker you are talking to is my father you *%#$@.” My friend remarked about the community’s judgment on smokers: “Society only makes judgments based on what it sees. Smoking
is a visible habit; that is why they judge us. That is why I stopped caring about their judgments.”

WHERE DO I GO FROM HERE

The two smokers I interviewed in my study sacrifice their health for the amusement of sitting with another smokers. They do not care about society’s judgments because they do not think it is a fair judgment. Free time, friends, boredom, family members, and curiosity are the main reasons that made them smoke originally. Cutting off smoking is hard if the reasons that made a smoker smoke still exist. This is how smokers among my social circle reconciled their habit with their well-being and their community.

I did it. I finally satisfied my curiosity. But it is sad that my father waited 37 years to have a chance to talk about his habit, while someone who does not know him randomly calls him a “*%#$@” Even if it is not direct, judging people like that is much worse than smoking.

The thing I am worried about now is my father’s and friend’s health, but they are not. I have no idea what to do to help. The only thing I can do for them is not allow them to smoke while I am with them. However, I can still prevent young people from falling into these accursed habits. After doing this research, I learned that judging people can be as bad as smoking. The responses the smoker and non-smoker interviewees had to the survey made me realize how these two habits – smoking and judging people are related. A smoker damages his health first, while judgments damage other people’s psychological health.

REFERENCES


APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: SURVEY QUESTIONS

Understanding Smokers

This survey aims to understand what it is like to be a smoker in Qatar and how a smoker can quit smoking. We are doing this project for ENGL-104 and your answers to this survey will help us acknowledge smokers and help them quit this habit. Thank you for your contribution, we appreciate your time.

How old are you?

- 18-25
- 26-35
- 36-49
- +50

What is your relationship with smoking?

- I enjoy smoking and I do not want to quit
- I have never smoked
- I quit smoking
- I smoke but I hate it
**APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.**

Interview questions.

- How old were you when you started smoking?
- Do you think that the people around you can be a reason to make you a smoker?
- Do you feel like our community is unfair to smokers? How?
- How do you deal with people’s judgments on you as a smoker?
- How can we make them stop judging smokers?
- Has smoking affected your health? How?
- If you had a little kid in your family, would you smoke in front of him?
- Does smoking have any financial effects?
- What are the financial consequences of smoking?
- What is your advice for both smokers and non-smokers?
Chapter 10
Creating a Better Tomorrow
Abdellatif Hussine is an ECEN sophomore student from Egypt. Poems both in Arabic and English were a part of his childhood growing up. Reading and studying poems in school was one of his favorite activities, and he had a dream of creating his own to bring joy to readers.
BUILDING A BETTER WORLD: ENGINEERING AT TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY AT QATAR

At Texas A&M University at Qatar, where engineering takes center stage, students come from near and far, to build a better world and engage.

With labs and classrooms all around, the campus is alive with innovation, students and professors abound, in a mission of exploration.

From chemical to mechanical, and electrical to petroleum, every discipline is practical, and valuable to our world’s dome.

In Qatar’s desert land, engineering knowledge abounds, as students learn and understand, the principles and techniques profound.

With Aggie pride and honor true, the students learn to lead, to take on challenges anew, and find solutions they need.

So, here’s to Texas A&M at Qatar, a beacon of engineering might, where students learn to be a star, and engineers make the future bright.
Mohamed Bakri

Our final English 104 project required us to build on prior research and knowledge gathering to argue for a defined stance on a critical challenge of our choice. I chose to look at one of the greatest socioeconomic hurdles in my home country of Sudan, affordability of housing.

Mohamed Bakri is an electrical engineering student in the Class of 2026. Some of his hobbies include robotics, computers, and debating. He also enjoys sports such as Formula 1 and football, where he supports the biggest club in London, Chelsea FC. His love for writing was inspired by reading novels as a child. His favorite book is *Not a Penny More, Not a Penny Less* by Jeffrey Archer.
AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN SUDAN: PURE FANTASY OR POSSIBLE REALITY?

One of humanity’s most primitive needs is shelter. Having a stable roof over your head is one of the fundamental determinants of quality of life. It is simply impossible to overstate the importance of housing, so much so that there is now a global movement with the sole objective of enshrining housing as a human right.

Affordable housing is defined as housing units that are affordable to individuals with an income below the median household income in their country\(^1\). Unfortunately, the reality is that affordable housing can best be described as an illusion for the average Sudanese family. Estimates put the average monthly salary in Khartoum somewhere in the range of 30,000 Sudanese pounds, which is equivalent to 50 US dollars\(^2\). However, the average monthly rent for an apartment in Khartoum is 190 to 587 US Dollars\(^2\), which is more than four times the average income. The consequences of this disparity are enormous. For example, the percentage of squatters in Khartoum, that is, people living in abandoned and unoccupied buildings, stands at a horrifying 60%\(^2\). Desperation has forced most residents into living in slum conditions without access to basic infrastructure or any form of stability. The cost of housing, in combination with high levels of inflation and the general economic slowdown, means that effectively speaking, it is no longer possible for a Sudanese family to live comfortably without assistance from relatives abroad.

It isn’t all doom and gloom though. There are solutions to this crisis, some more effective than others. Based on the experiences of other countries, alongside an overwhelming amount of credible data, the logical conclusion is that the Sudanese government should invest more resources into public housing while also strengthening urban planning authorities. This approach represents Sudan’s best chance at tackling this crisis, which is preventing it from realizing its true potential as an economic and political power in the region.

Now that we have established the existence of a housing crisis in Sudan, it is imperative that we understand the causes behind it before trying to come up with possible solutions. As is the case with most aspects of the economy, the main cause is supply and demand. The demand for
housing, particularly in urban centers, has steadily increased in recent years. The lack of support for critical sectors of the economy, such as agriculture, has contributed to the recent trend of urbanization in Sudan. Residents migrate to cities like Khartoum and Omdurman in search of job opportunities and access to higher-quality services relative to rural areas. This trend has been consistent over the past couple of decades, but it has also seen a sharp spike lately. The average growth rate of Khartoum’s population was over six percent between 1973 and 2005; Khartoum’s current population is an estimated six million.

Housing supply, however, has not kept up with this dramatic increase in demand. High construction costs and land prices have resulted in reduced development. As a result, in 2021, the housing supply deficit in Sudan was estimated at 2.5 million units. Massive increases in government investment in housing would certainly help ease the pain felt by the Sudanese people. This investment can come in many forms. The simplest of those is providing assistance in the form of loans and tax breaks to lower-income families. Doing so would reduce the cost of renting or purchasing a home, but it would not help reduce the housing supply deficit. That would require more direct intervention in the housing market, such as the development of public housing on a massive scale. The Sudanese government owns all unregistered land, which accounts for 90% of the country’s territory. Most of this land goes undeveloped and underutilized, while a small percentage of it is leased to private investors who are not guaranteed to deliver housing at an appropriate price or quantity. If the Sudanese government were to cut out the middlemen and build housing on their land, they would find themselves on the path to eliminating the housing deficit, which would push prices down into more reasonable territory. There are plenty of examples of countries and cities that have implemented public housing schemes to great success. One notable example is Vienna, Austria, where almost half of the housing market consists of government-owned units. In total, 60 percent of the city’s inhabitants live in subsidized housing. The success of these policies has led to Vienna being described as “the world’s most livable city.”

However, increasing investment in the housing market would be useless if another critical factor is ignored. That factor is the strength and coordination of urban development authorities. These government agencies are responsible for developing land use plans and approving housing proposals with the aim of achieving sustainable growth in a
community. Given their role, it shouldn’t come as a surprise that leaving these agencies weak and underfunded is a recipe for disaster. Tragically, Sudan has followed that recipe and is now reaping the consequences. There is no coherent urban development strategy in Sudan, and, to make matters worse, most states don’t even have local urban planning agencies. The result of this is that the current system practically incentivizes corruption and lack of development. Establishing urban planning boards and providing them with resources and power would serve as the first step toward sustainable and affordable housing development in Sudan.

Some may argue that a more effective solution would be instituting rent control policies. Placing a limit on rental rates might seem like a smart idea, but it would cause more harm than good. It is true that this type of legislation would lower rent prices in the short term, but in the long run, it tends to result in higher average rents, less development, and worse housing conditions. When landlords are forced to lose profit from their rent-controlled units, they raise the rental prices of their other uncontrolled units to offset that loss. Going back to the main cause of the housing crisis in Sudan, it is important to note that rent control also disincentivizes the development of new affordable housing. It simply makes no sense for developers to build affordable housing, which they will take a loss on, when they can build luxury housing that wouldn’t be subject to these laws and therefore would provide them with bigger profits. These are just some of the drawbacks of rent control legislation that make it clear that other approaches to the Sudanese housing crisis would be vastly more effective.

To say that Sudan is not going through the best of times is quite an understatement. In just a few short years, the country has undergone a revolution, coups, record inflation, food shortages, and much more. It seems hard to believe that not all hope is lost and that there is indeed light at the end of the tunnel, but that is certainly the case. Tackling the crisis of housing affordability is a major challenge that will take years, if not decades, to accomplish. However, with the right tools in hand, Sudan can and must work toward securing a brighter future for its citizens, a future where a family in Khartoum can rent an apartment and still have money to put food on the table.
REFERENCES


In a world where the growth of technology knows no bounds, the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) has equally sparked both fascination and apprehension. Having been intrigued yet doubtful, I wrote this piece to educate and inform ourselves about the capacity of AI steadily encroaching upon our own. This was written prior to the rise of ChatGPT; yet now, we can truly imagine the unsettling reality that awaits us, not too distant in the future, where power, humanity’s greatest strength and weakness, slips entirely from our grasp.

Sai Surag Lingampalli is a computer engineering junior at Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU). Born in India but raised in Dukhan on the west coast of Qatar, his zeal for problem-solving has captivated him in computers and technology. His hobbies include swimming, cycling, music, and reading. He believes in the notion that one’s work must ameliorate the society around them, and that learning is a lifelong process.
RESISTANCE IS FUTILE — THE THREAT OF SUPER INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence is commonly compared with power — the smarter an entity is, the more power it possesses in getting tasks done in their way. Compare humans to ants. These are two separate sentient creatures, of which the former possesses intelligence far greater than that of the latter. The more intelligent an organism is, the more effectively it can adapt its surroundings to attain its objectives, whatever those objectives may be. Humans and ants are species with completely different goals and responsibilities, and this misalignment of goals leads to a threat that consumes the inferior species. If we are not to involve ourselves in the ant’s tasks, both would coexist peacefully. However, if humans decided to construct a house and an ant colony was on the land, we would not hesitate to destroy the ant’s homeland. This conflict of interest between goals and a consequence of danger for the inferior species is attributed to the lack of intelligence. Humans can be relieved that ants do not hold the intelligence or the capability to resist against our decisions. Now, suppose the same idea is redeveloped, however with artificial intelligence and humans, where the machines are smarter than us. What does this mean for humanity? Are we under threat? Who is in control now?

Can we ever stay in control?

Technology has always been admired as the pinnacle of human creation, with its benevolent use. Through wondrous benefits, it has been applicable in sectors such as healthcare and food industry, overall safety, and productivity of work. Technology has become a part of various aspects of our lives, as it has evolved and grown in strength and power over the last century. However, whether this evolution is for better or for worse has been debated tirelessly, especially with regards to the rise of artificial intelligence. Artificial intelligence, or AI, can be defined as “the field within computer science that seeks to explain and emulate, through mechanical or computational processes, some or all aspects of human intelligence.” (Encyclopedia, 2018). A.I. has various benefits in society, such as but not limited to research and data analysis, automation, and decision-making. However, there are always two sides to every coin, and these developments, undoubtedly, have brought cause for worrying concern.
The malicious intent of technology has always been debated, and this leads to the threat that superintelligence poses upon humanity, and how we will fare once we achieve this goal. The general consensus shared by many leading scientists, philosophers, and enthusiasts is that a body that is more intelligent than us poses a threat to our existence on this planet (Choi, 2021). Well-renowned scholars have been wary of its development, with Stephen Hawking stating it “could spell the end of the human race,” and Elon Musk comparing it to summoning the demon (Padma, 2021). However, these same people also understand the positives brought about by the development of AI, and believe that the issue to solve is to find ways to keep it under our control. I argue that the threat of superintelligence to humanity’s existence cannot be solved through its control.

To understand how superintelligence can have drastic negative impacts on society, one must understand the difference between ‘narrow’ and ‘general’ AI. Narrow artificial intelligence is a software created to solve just one specific instance of a problem. Whether that may be linguistic analysis software used to translate text-to-speech inputs, or a chess program that is able to instantly calculate the best moves based on the board’s position, these are software’s that are narrow, i.e., limited to their domain. On the other hand, general artificial intelligence allows machines to “apply knowledge and skills in different contexts.” It mimics the human brain, as in the knowledge that we absorb can be utilized in various other sectors. From here, superintelligence comes into play, which is general artificial intelligence that surpasses the intelligence of humans. Although we have not yet been able to create a digital structure that is the equivalent of the biological networks within our brain, over the last couple years, we have inched closer and closer towards understanding how to emulate this. The day we do reach the point where machines are as smart as or even smarter than humans (which is where the terminology artificial superintelligence is coined), it would be catastrophic for humans, since we would not therefore be the smarter creature anymore. (Encyclopedia, 2018)

“Almost any technology has the potential to cause harm in the wrong hands, but with superintelligence, we have the new problem that the wrong hands might belong to the technology itself.” - Alan Turing

The reason why superintelligence cannot be controlled is because once AI reaches the point where its intelligence surpasses us, the machine would not consider the human species in its best interests. Any species treats itself in its own best interest, and this spells danger for humans. There
are many ‘thought experiments’ that showcases what a superintelligence could potentially do, which is a mistaken approach to shining light on this issue, since it is only based upon assuming what an intelligent agent could do. This is one of billions of possibilities, and does not reflect truly what a superintelligent AI could do. Nick Bostrom believes that there could be a solution to this problem,” and this sentiment is shared by Musk and Hawking (Sevilla & Burden, 2021). However, this in of itself is paradoxical – how do we control something that is smarter than us?

Ironically, this concept is covered by Bostrom himself when he compares the relationship between superintelligence and humans as that of humans and gorillas (Adams. 2016). In the same manner that the survival of the nearly extinct gorilla species is heavily dependent on humanity, similarly, “an inferior intelligence will always depend on a superior one for its survival.” Totschnig calls this idea “chimerical” and almost fairy-tale like, comparing it to trying to keep a genie in a bottle. (Totschnig, 2017)

This is because we therefore cannot control the machines anymore, and their goals will slowly become misaligned to ours (Conn, 2015). Machines are built to complete their task. By being smarter than us, they are able to solve issues and pursue goals whether we want them to or not. There is no guarantee that machines will be sympathetic or caring towards the welfare of humanity. Even if we are in the way, superintelligence is smart enough to navigate around that obstacle. Due to the fact that we cannot control the machines, their goals will most certainly become misaligned to ours. In the words of Alan Turing, once the “machine thinking method has started, it would not take long to outstrip our feeble powers… At some stage therefore we should have to expect the machines to take control.” (Torres, 2021)

There have been many examples in this day and age where the power fostered by AI machines have allowed technology to get away from us. For instance, two AI robots created by Facebook were shut down a couple years back after “the bots began to deviate from the scripted norms and started communicating in an entirely new language which they created without human input” (Clark, 2017). This created dialect was not decipherable to the scientists. When machines are smarter than us, there is no way of understanding the thought processes that machines exhibit, which means that they will not be in our control. Another example, shown below, are digital AI creatures that evolve in ways unexpected to our
predicted path. These unforeseen developments caused by the use of AI could propagate in a negative manner on a larger scale.

Solutions regarding teaching machines morals and ethics have also been proposed to ensure that the AI’s goals coincide with human reasoning and values. This is a precarious take, since when we as humans do not follow our own social principles, we cannot expect the machines to do the same. We see this issue discussed extensively in the trolley problem brought forth by the use of artificial intelligence in autonomous vehicles. The trolley problem is a thought experiment that goes along the following lines; imagine there is a running train with no functioning breaks hurdling towards five strangers, putting their life in danger. You stand next to a lever, which allows you to redirect the train onto another track, but this track has one stranger (D’Olympio, 2016). Would you pull the lever and safe five people at the cost of one, or do nothing, leading to the death of five? This concept is also debated using artificial intelligence in self-driving automobiles. This idea is heavily debated across the globe, and to this day we still cannot solve this widely debated problem. That is where the issue lies - we share values across humanity, yet these values change through changes in growth and maturity. Not everybody has the same answer to the question above. Now taking this philosophy back to A.I., we first off cannot predict the decisions it could possibly take, and secondly cannot determine whether the moral ethics taught to it (if possible) are foul proof.

Another significant issue that comes into play regarding keeping control is that there is no physical off-switch to the chaos. This can be analogous to the internet. Is there a physical off-switch that exists on Earth that could kill the internet and all its data instantly? Similarly, no such kill-switches are being implemented in artificial intelligence programs. Even if we were able to make a kill-switch, the machines having a mind of their own and wanting to preserve their future, would be able to find a way to outmanoeuvre our restrain and give themselves the freedom they need (Raza, 2020). It should be noted that current generations of AI systems do not possess the power of consciousness, depriving them the capabilities to comprehend time and anticipate events of the future, as systems nowadays operate primarily on pattern recognition and statistical correlations. However, the goal for computer scientists has been to build “cognitive architecture” that is “largely inspired by human psychology” (Thomas, 2023), which could potentially grant them this concept of time and self-preservation, the latter of which is thought to be innate across all species.
with consciousness. This cognitive aspect could be even more dangerous if the artificial intelligence is given access to the internet. Many narrow AIs utilise the internet for gathering knowledge and data. For example, only 10% of the stock market can be attributed to stock trading by humans according to JPMorgan (Cheng, 2017). The rest are decisions made by fast-reacting AI robots. We also know the internet as an example of long-term longevity. If general AI is able to access the internet, that would mean that it unlocks the code to living forever. Then, there would definitely be no way, physically or digitally, to keep a hold of AI.

Reaching superintelligence is inevitable; whether this takes a hundred years or a thousand, we will undoubtedly reach this point due to our interest in technology. Mrs. Addagalla, a pharmacist who has actively observed artificial intelligence become a greater part of life, including their medical sector, believes otherwise, stating that “although artificial intelligence proves beneficial to us, we won’t ever reach machines that are smarter than us.” (Addagalla, 2022). However, I find it ironic how we constantly talk about robots taking over in sci-fi movies and fantasy novels, yet humans are unable to deal with the complexity of this issue and how fiction could prove to be non-fiction. Why? We have observed advancements in this field be revolutionised over the course of our lifetime so far, through an ‘intelligence explosion’. Technology is booming ever so quickly that we cannot comprehend how imminent this danger lies ahead of us in the nearing future. Just see how much power ChatGPT has – now imagine how quickly technology will develop within the next few years. This is a global phenomenon that will transform how we live our lives, and attempting to stay in control of this power is meaningless. The truth is, we are obsessed with our creation, and will continually improve on what we develop. The issue lies in our obsession turning into our doom. Rather than fearing this eventual fate, we must find solutions and ways as quickly as possible (not just limiting ourselves to the technology sector) to co-exist with superintelligence. We must learn not to fear our creation, but admire it, and find a way to live alongside it without jeopardizing our safety by trying to keep superintelligence under a leash.

This is the only optimal outcome; after all, how do you keep a greater power under your control?
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This piece was written out of my curiosity and knowledge that everything in life can be modeled, then why not life. To mathematically describe life’s journey, which would simply be “an integral of the rate of change of life,” I got stuck. To express my frustration, I wrote down my thoughts and tried to represent this journey in a graph of life vs time.

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THE PARABOLA OF LIFE

This is the parabola of life,
the metamorphosis of human.

A representation of human’s journey,
life against time.

The rate of change of self,
a negative or positive gradient.

Do we get to the maximum or minimum points of our life?
Or maybe just an undefined point, a mid-life crisis?

Did we start full as a cup of tea, or empty as a fool,
“tabula raza.”

How do we finish?
Did we complete our given assignment? or just left another problem behind.

Know this: no one owes you anything,
But you owe the world something—value.

Drop all entitlement mentality, you are not a cat.
Stop depending on anything but yourself, you are not an epiphyte.

Let go of the beginning, look forward, and focus on the end.
Kushal Guruvasudevan | Heptagon. MIA Park, November 2018.
Nancy Abraham

Endurance is the flow of life while being bold is accepting what is and will be. The future does not exist, for we are always in the present, and the future is merely the mind’s projected dream. Legacy can’t be quantified, for even a drop of water ripples through everything.

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LIFE OF A SNOWFLAKE

The pressure of it all, a squeeze, a drip, a fall; free, dropping from the clouds. I must latch on to something; a particle will do. Down I go, collecting more moisture along the way, forming a six-pointed snowflake like a Merkabah falling from the heavens.

Plummeting from mother earth’s veil to land on her face. I endured the force that pushed me toward her. Some evaporated due to a lack of support, returning to the atmosphere. Others melted on contact to quench her burning heart. Other flakes continued to stick to me, and we collectively created a pile of snow. With time, we got stomped on, shoveled around, and fused as the sun kissed us during the day while the night’s cold darkness turned us to ice. Changing form from becoming an indistinctive coagulated layer to a rigid and gray mass.

Seasons change; I witness others melt into her, each on their own path. Feeling overjoyed and fascinated at the thought of “what next.” My turn has come. I feel a tug, pull, a force sucking me gently into the ground. The feeling of softness, a sweet slumber, as I sank into her heart. I awaken into a seedling, ready to pierce the soil. The flowers that are yearning to bloom. The trees who are feeling an exhilarated extension towards the heavens. A part of her veins that run even beneath the desert sands. I am.