



into
**THE
DEEP
END**

a recording of currents

The 2022 Youth Performance Troupe

It is a gorgeous autumn day in late November. This Thanksgiving meant a lot more to me because I could actually gather with all of my family in one space. The hybrid time of the pandemic has been helpful to me mentally and emotionally. With care and vaccines, we have the option now to go outside and see each other without a mask. Still, the pandemic lurks with hard reminders that whatever we thought a return to normal would look like is not the reality of what truly is. It has been a season of currents, y'all. I'm grateful that me and these brilliant artists have navigated these waves of the year and have not been swallowed by them.

The 2022 InsideOut Youth Performance Troupe youth have been a lighthouse in a world plagued with a healthy mix of uncertainty and newness. **Efrain's** voice is full of old wisdom and quirkiness. As the youngest poet in Performance Troupe history, I am often left wondering what other life I've met him in. He's a sage and the anointing from poets past rests on his work. **Stella** is a star like her name. She is serious but super funny. Wise and curious. I really appreciate how her work is full of so much imagery and color. It takes my breath away. It was a small tug to pull Stella onto the troupe, but I am so glad she joined us. **Noelle** is no nonsense. Her energy is intentional, and she means exactly what she says. What I like most about Noelle is how she leans into everyone. She listens, critiques and celebrates her teammates as if *she* is the coach. I've learned so much from her. She has informed my coaching style moving forward. **Milo** is the heartbeat of the troupe. They show up attentive and ready to support. They are the first to raise their hand and voice for a performance or daunting task. They brave so many things personally and creatively to keep showing up for themselves and others. **Samer** is unlike any poet I've come across in my 46 years on the planet. Their work is a celebration of their Palestinian upbringing comingled with the curiosity and complexities they are experiencing with their new life in America. This year's troupe as a whole is BRAVE and they are not here for anything less than authentic. I am a realer, more authentic version of myself because of them.

InsideOut Literary Arts has been fortunate enough to have a bit more in-person programming this year. While we are still mainly hybrid, the Troupe has literally seen more of each other in person than previous years. Highlights of the year for the Troupe included a performance at the inaugural *If The River Could Sing* event which brought out a ton of vibrant souls on a gorgeous summer day in Valade Park. This was a partnership with the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy and was a superb affair for the community. The team also gave a performance at the North American International Auto Show on the Toyota main stage. Our section was packed, and the performances were high octane. The troupe was rewarded with brand new iPads from Toyota. My smile was wide as shock hit the faces of my brilliant artists. This was a well-earned investment into their craft. This was the least we could do for my beautiful babies.

Into The Deep: A Recording Of Currents is filled with poems by artists interrogating the world around them. From current events to the currents of life, this body of work is varied in its subject matter but unified by the river poems each artist included. The poems are unique to each artist's voice yet tugs at the heartstrings...makes us hear our own internal voices in reflection.

As always, I remain in awe that I've been afforded the opportunity to flick a switch on in these talented artists. They don't *need* me. They welcome me into their spaces. They willingly show me glimpses of their worlds and the things that make them tick. But they don't need me. We – this world – needs THEM. The 2022 InsideOut Youth Performance Troupe has flooded my year with so much color and light and promise. They have been the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow...the end of the pandemic.

Let their words wash over you. Let them electrify you with their current. Let them inspire you with their depth.

La Shaun phoenix Moore
Coach. Mentor. Fangirl.
Hybrid World 2022

I've stopped saying: "the youth is our future."

As the director of a youth-serving organization, this simple statement might be a bit shocking, but bear with me – I have my reasons. Here are two of them.

First of all, over the last several years (and especially the last few months) I have taken some time to listen – really listen – to the young people we serve. It turns out, they are tired of us counting on them to "be the future." They are frustrated with the world we have handed them (rightly so) and all our "adult expectations" that they can take it and make it better. They can fix climate change. Solve racial inequality. Right the sinking ship of democracy. Make schools safe. It's A LOT. And it isn't fair. So, I am intentionally not putting this planet-sized burden on their shoulders.

The second reason is that they are actually "the right now." You don't have to wait for the future to learn from these beautiful young souls – just take a peek at the following pages. These "babies" (to borrow their coach's word) are capable of amazing things. Right now. I have already learned so much from them. They are resilient and smart and thoughtful and vulnerable and brave.

And they DO give me hope for the future. But I am not waiting. Let's dive into this Deep End together – right now.

Suma Karaman Rosen
Executive Director, InsideOut Literary Arts



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InsideOut Literary Arts *“inspires and equips young people to think critically, create bravely and share their voices with the world.”*

Citywide Poets is a writing community that meets weekly at various sites across the city of Detroit, and offers a number of open mic and performance opportunities. The InsideOut Youth Performance Troupe members are the official youth community ambassadors for InsideOut Literary Arts.

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Table of Contents

Efrain Rivera

Will To Write

I Never Did

Simplicity Itself (or Detroit is always a haiku waiting to happen)

Efrain Speaks of Rivers

The Path of Grief

Milo Borsodi

Undo Button

Alphabet Soup

Tea With The Moon

Milo Speaks of Rivers

Plant Like Soul

Noelle Taylor

Laundry With Bleach

My Honesty

Noelle Speaks Of Rivers

Stuck

Limitless Possibilities

Samer Budair

Lost In Translation

The Palestinian Speaks of Rivers

Return To A Home On Foreign Land

Government Cheese Makes Great Mana'esh

God-Washed Prayer Mat

Stella Hughes

Dual Worlds

City Girl Without Cement

Poetry, My Hallway Crush

Mobima; Greatness; Majesty; Pride; Loftiness; Height

The Splitting Of Our Moon



Efrain Rivera

Efrain Rivera is a member of the 2022 Detroit Youth Performance Troupe sponsored by Toyota. He has performed at the Durfee Innovation Center and Room Project.

Will To Write

People say I'm gifted –
Gifted with the ability to create worlds
that reflect my beliefs and intentions
Worlds that display my thoughts and my truest emotions.
Worlds, that create **me**.

I put my soul into each of my worlds,
sacrificing time and effort
Each world broader and more beautiful than the last.
Each world my own little fabrication of the already fabricated.
Should I speak my ugly truth,
or create this wonderful, beautiful lie?

O worlds, so many worlds
I'm a god of many
with topics so bright and stars a plenty.
A deity with no downsides
my triumphs are all mine

My beautiful worlds
each meaningful to me!
Beaten and battered and shown off for all to see.
I create MY worlds
And you have no right to critique my craftsmanship
Just call me the god I am.

Feed me with those comforting compliments
so that I can create more wonderful tales
of starstruck lines
beautiful skies
and joy-filled eyes.

I Never Did

Though I am young, my regrets are plenty.
The weight of the simple phrase “what could have been” strikes heavy.
My regrets are like the bitter parts of an orange
nasty, unsavory, and plentiful.
I often imagine a world free of regrets and incorrect choices
and I can’t help but think “How wonderful!”

But my regrets aren’t just a compilation
of my missed opportunities, or fumbled conversations and
awkward moments shared with strangers I’ll never see again.
No, they’re also filled with choices that I regret making.
Choices that at the time I believed were right.
Choices that defined how I once thought and lived.

I’m left with these regrets at night.
They keep me awake
Make me wish my pillow was just a little bit colder,
or that my mind was like a radio
so I could easily change the station
to a happier, more upbeat tune.

But sadly, I never could.
So, I never did.
Just like how I never did respect my mother as much as I could’ve.
And now I’ve lost any chance to respect her at all.
Her soul resides in a faraway place now
Surrounded by hard white walls.

I never did want to take my life for granted,
But I did anyway.
And here I am.
Stranded
No mother to hold my hand
and guide me towards the end of my strife.

I’ve always bottled this pain
wishing to send it across the sea
so it can burden someone else.
Being told to release it never helped
even though they only wished me the best.

To put it simply
it’s my pain and mine alone.
I’ve cried my tears.
I never shared my pain because I simply never could.

So, I never did.

Simplicity Itself (or Detroit is always a haiku waiting to happen)

What your hands provide,
Some would steal in an instant.
Detroit Simplified.

Efrain Speaks of Rivers

I used to live in the country.
Used to live out in the fields
breathing the fresh air.
After my father cut the grass,
I'd venture off on my own
to the forests behind our house.
Through twigs and bush
rocks and trees.

I could never remember which path I took
or how long it took me to get there,
But eventually I'd hear the sound of rushing water
Smell wet rocks
and damp grass
All of it an aura of tranquility.

Sure, this was no river
it was a stream.
But to me
it was an amazing spectacle of nature!
Perfect, flawless, the best there ever was!

No river, lake, basin, ocean, or any body of water could even compare.
Longer than the Nile,
Wider than the Amazon,
Deeper than the Congo!

And sure,
maybe it wasn't *really* longer or wider or deeper than any of those rivers
But would you have the heart to tell a young, growing boy the same?
And if you did,
how would you strike down his imaginative heart?

What words or phrases would you use to cut through and destroy his creative way of thinking?
Would it be a simple fact check?
Would you explain to him that his river that flows from Tennessee to Detroit
was simply a dream
or one of his great disconnected memories
created by traumas of the past?
How he's never even truly seen a river?

Did you even stop to wonder why he saw such a tiny strip of running water
as a great and powerful vital ingredient of nature?
Perhaps you misunderstood this boy completely.

The boy with a mind that flows like a river which stops for nothing
but curiosity and wonder.

The Path of Grief

I've begun to notice a pattern
with the ones I hold so close.
They'll disappear
They'll leave me here
with nothing but broken memories
and a path I never chose.

Disbelief clouds my mind.
The thought of what happened that fateful day plague me.
I refuse to believe it.
This can't be true.
This is the sorrowful cry from me to you.

With you gone, my mind goes wild.
The heat of burning rage
my grief no longer mild.
Why was it you?
Why has fate chosen this?
Such a terrible thing done to an innocent person
What an infuriating injustice!

Perhaps if I try harder
grief will loosen its grip on my life.
No matter what I offer
I'm still infected with strife.

I can't bear this pain of being alone.
I was so used to you right next to me.
I hope you can hear
my monotone symphony.

As time goes by
I improve myself.
The grief begins to loosen ever so slightly.
I still examine your picture, which rests upon my shelf.

As more time passes
and I grow and grow
The grief loosens even more.
And from time to time
I'll watch our favorite TV show.

The grief lets go of my heart.
It's finally time for me to let my mind clear.
Even though I'm no longer plagued with sadness
I'll never forget you
I'll always miss you.



Milo Borsodi

Milo Borsodi (they/ them) is a junior at Thurston High School. While they haven't been writing for long, it is one of their favorite activities. They dabble in many genres of art including piano, stage acting, theater tech, singing, and digital and traditional drawing. Milo writes about their experiences as a trans person in today's world and is heavily inspired by Greek Mythology and fantasy novels. Milo was a member of the 2021 InsideOut Youth Advisory Board and is a current member of the 2022 InsideOut Youth Performance Troupe sponsored by Toyota. As a member of the Performance Troupe they have performed at If This River Could Sing, The Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit, The Detroit Auto Show, Room Project and several virtual events.

Undo Button

My bangs keep drying weird
I end up with Pamela Anderson
or James Madison depending on the weather
if im lucky
they'll stay one way and not flip flop in-between
if im lucky
which im not

I keep bumping into stuff
I got bruises up and down my hips from the cabinet corners
if im lucky
they end up just matching my kitchen tile grey instead of NyQuil blue
if im lucky
which im not

I keep losing my friends
they fall out of my hands like my earring down the drain
I hope the slip away is smooth
even though I know it's not
if im lucky enough
i'll get a nod
the occasional wave
if im lucky

which im not.

Alphabet Soup

We are clad in capes of brown leather and blue.
I don't think I've ever known so many souls better than I do now.
I am sculpted into so much more than the puddle of mud I entered as.
Comfort and knowledge have kissed me on the cheek
and I am blessed enough to be baptized in a river of pencil lead
and alphabet soup.

Tea With The Moon

I am enveloped within the folds of the darkness in my room
and it is not a bondage unbreakable spider-webbing

but rather

a mother tucking her son in
curling up with the rain
a warm towel after swimming with the fishes comfort

the tendrils of my plants snake around the sun
draw it down so that the moon may say hello
the dish and spoon have settled for tea
the birds have settled in the nooks of their nest
the shadows have joined me in conversation of Cassiopeia and Centaurus
we feast on the music of distant cars and crickets

As I curl up with my telescope and my imagination
I dream of nothing but firefly feelings
and the book waiting for me on my nightstand.

Milo Speaks of Rivers

I used to paint.
I had this giant collection of those cheapy tempera paints that get all crackly when they dry.
Dear god,
I loved those paints!

I loved to paint.
I wasn't good.
I was bad, actually.
Some people say they're bad to compliment fish.
I was just actually bad.

I painted my cat one day
and my mom asked me if it was a worm.
I was bad at painting
but I was good at enjoying it.

I was also good at taking the pictures of the tiny world in my head
and pouring them out on the page
a river of creativity and joy.

My river of creativity and joy.
My small, sausage-fingered hands
furiously transcribing the stream of ideas in my head.

My little river was/is clumsy.
It tripped over paint-clumped rocks
and dirty brush branches in its path.

Yet despite its clumsiness
and lack of skill
it kept tempera pouring paint
onto the paper I stole from my dad's printer
printing out the flood of pictures
from my ever-waterlogged brain
a babbling brook of paint
bounding over every self-made boulder
to settle in my river of consciousness.

Plant Like Soul

the trees are green again
the sky is that bright summer blue,
the kind that's a little cloudy and pale
the sun rains down its warmth and light
it's raining again

I love rain
I love rain so much that every time its starts raining
or someone notices the rain
or even if somebody mentions rain
I mention that I like it

It's good for the garden
And while it definitely is good for my garden
I love rain not just because of that
I love the smell that comes before the storm
the cool drops on my skin
rejuvenating me
watering my plant-like soul

the rain washes away the dirt of today
the ugly feelings of sadness and fear
the caked up nasty under my skin and nails
the guilt stacking in my soul
and I am content

I am content knowing that the droplets on me are clean
they keep me clean
my mind
my body
my plant-like soul

but my favorite thing
the best thing about the rain
is its sound

sound can be hard for me sometimes
it seems like every new noise builds up
until I can't take it anymore
and I break down

but the rain
the rain is a happy sound

at day
it drowns out the noises
I can't handle and replaces it
with something peaceful, soothing

at night

at night is when the rain is the best
the silky patter-patter on the roof
washes away the worries of my day
each teardrop cried by Demeter lulls me to sleep
all of the pain and sorrow is gone
the drought of tomorrow is forgotten

the trees are green again
the sky is that bright summer blue
the kind that's a little cloudy and pale
the sun shines down its warmth and light
and it is finally raining again

and my summer blooming
plant like soul
is finally at peace.



Noelle Taylor

Noelle Taylor is currently a Metro Detroit based artist. Poetry is something that she deeply enjoys and uses as a way to express herself. Her sister's poem titled Everything's Wrong inspired her craft.

As a member of the 2022 InsideOut Youth Performance Troupe, sponsored by Toyota, Noelle has performed at the Toyota Main Stage at Huntington Place Detroit for the Detroit Auto Show, The Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit, Detroit Riverfront Conservancy for If The River Could Sing, Durfee Innovation Center, and Room Project.

In her free time, she loves to listen to music and observe all forms of arts.

Laundry With Bleach

Dear America,
your country is like the bleach
that you put in a dirty load of laundry
of all white clothes

and what you get in return
is a beautiful batch of stain free clothes
nice and warm
ready to be worn

however put that bleach
in some clothes with color
in some clothes with a tint

and what do you get?

The way that bleach damages
and destroys
that beautiful black shirt
The most beautiful shirt in the world

It leaves a nasty yellow stain
that changed the whole batch
into something that can't be worn
that might as well be torn
ripped to shreds and thrown away

America, this is you I must say.

My Honesty

(after Rudy Francisco)

I was born on January 29th.
That makes me an Aquarius.
That means I'm a winter baby –
and no one wants to come out to your birthday party

I don't know how to be open with people.
I'm a sucker for anime.
I'm still learning to skate into the arms of people I don't trust.
Sometimes I'm blunt when I should spare others feelings.

I like music a lot.
I've been told I'm withdrawn and impatient.
Secretly, I get nervous every time I interact with humans.
I know it sounds crazy,
but I wouldn't mind having my own form of communication
where people understand me perfectly.

I'm scared to death of pursuing my dreams
Cuz, what if I get held back?
What if I don't make it?
What if no one supports me?

I'm afraid if I let you see the real me
you would dismember and eat each limb that represents a flaw
to fulfill your need to build yourself up.

Hi.
My name is Noelle.
I enjoy alone time
Self-care
and any form of artistry.
But I don't allow myself to show self-love as often as I need to.

I don't know much
but I do know this.
I am a good, loving, and smart person.
I know that heaven is full of color.
And I know it's waiting to embrace me with culture
and music out of this world.

Noelle Speaks Of Rivers

One river
the only river I know
been there since I been born.

Connected to rivers?

I'm unsure.
I've floated down the one
just to stop.
Scared of the other rivers
cuz they've been here before me.

I'm younger than the river,
yet just as old.
As the years come and go
I flow on and on.

My river has always flowed around the world –
one day I will.

One day I will, too.

Stuck

Mentally I am stuck.
Spiritually I am stuck.
Physically I am moving.

Trying to turn with the Earth
but it rotates against me.
Ripping and running
to take my mind off my struggles.
I stop and ask the universe
Why can't I be happy?
What am I doing wrong?

No matter how positive I try to be
knives like rain
fall from the haunting
black misery filled clouds
above my existence.

The only thing I get
is money.
Yet money doesn't fill my heart's donation basket.
Trying to receive all the emotions I can get
from any and everyone who's willing to donate.
My basket is filled with uncertainty.
Not sure what to do
or how to feel.
I am just here.

As I go through the days,
life feels like an electrocardiograph.
Up and down
and eventually flatlined.

That's my goal –
To not struggle.
An endless nirvana.

Until I am complete.

Limitless Possibilities

Have you ever had a dream
you could do anything?
Like be an actor
A musician
A famous artist
A business owner
Even something like a vet?

It seems impossible
like it's already been done
or the goal feels unattainable.

Maybe you feel you're a little too brown
or got a little more bass in your voice
Maybe the main religion says one thing
But you believe another.

Supply and demand
is what we are told –
So you feel everything that is demanded
has to be supplied.

Then the dreadful thought hits you –
I have no money
no experience
no knowledge
no talent
I am simply not the right look.

But I learned sometimes you gotta stop and think.
Life's trials and tribulations
don't have to stop you.
It doesn't matter if you are a little more brown
or have no money
experience
or even talent.

I know you've already heard
"success depends on your mindset"
It is very true by the way
You think Beyoncé would be Beyoncé
if she thought she could never make it because
she was a black woman?
Please!
Tupac still made music despite coming from
a home with low funds.
Like be for real!

I know it sounds cheesy...
However, it's true

We are quick to judge ourselves
limiting our abilities.
There are opportunities for each and every one of us.
Like a kid with a crayon
coloring our wildest dreams,
we draw our world

So let's draw it
that world
with limited possibilities for all.



Samer Budair

Samer Budair (سامر بدير) is a Palestinian writer, poet, and subversive. In their poetry, they utilize a form of writing that, in various ways, occurs organically to the multilingual mind. Samer sometimes writes in one singular language, but oftentimes in two, creating dialogue between poetic stanzas and lines in different languages. They manipulate etymology, syntax, semantics, phonology, morphology, and dialect in both Arabic and English as well as the cross-section between the two in order to communicate messages through the influence of each language on the other. Samer sees poetry as an existential exercise that they use to establish themselves in the metaphorical Home fashioned from the exile of diaspora, heritage, philology, metaphysics, spirituality, and faith, thus a speculative meditation on place, identity, and existence.

Raised between Jordan and the Emirates, Samer immigrated to the U.S. in 2019 and began writing to understand themselves and the world around them. Samer is a graduate of the Arab American National Museum's 2022 writing fellowship, a member of the InsideOut Literary Arts Youth Performance Troupe sponsored by Toyota and president of Poetry Club at Fordson High School, where they are currently a senior.

Lost In Translation

Have you ever had to translate your own poem?
It's a funny thing, it is
to try to not lose yourself in translation,
laugh a little at the irony of writing in English
still invent yourself again
become confused because you don't know who you are.

A poet, they say, is but a dying poppy that blooms just after it's killed itself.
Or perhaps it was me who said it.
That is all there is to it, you see: the words aren't mine.
The poet is but a poppy in a field of other poppies,
A civil servant with Palestine and a mission in mind,
Or perhaps that's just me.
You see: confusion again in syntax and identity, a diglossic divide.
You laugh, or I laugh, whoever—the mission, accomplished.

Distorted perception is but the lens a poet puts on to read her poem
I've spent this poem defining things

تَقْصِدُ وَقَصِيدَةٌ، قَصِيدَةٌ تَقْصِدُ، قَصِيدِي أَنْ أَقْصِدَ قَصِيدَةً، قَصِيدِي أَنْ أَقْصِدَ قَصِيدَةً تَقْصِدُ قَصِيدِي

The poet, I say (or they say) , poeticizes to make sense of herself.

قَصَدْتُ نَفْسِي

And I will translate again and invent again,
all to understand
my poem.

The Palestinian Speaks of Rivers

From the mountains of Syria and Lebanon, flows a divine tempest
Filling the lungs of a people who speak of a tempestuous river.
It flows through the Sea of Galilee
Quenching the throats of a lost people with holy hymns
And they chant an enchanting euphony
Everyone turns a deaf ear.

From Canaan to Judea, it nourishes unsullied springs
Of Figs and Olives sworn by.
Flowing to deliver the م of its القدس to مياه
And lay forth the Holy Land

It beckons the mother to caves of solace
Teaches the child of holy homilies
beckons its children to the walls of God
And unseals the heavens for them
To declare Al Razaq's promise of paradise ripples within their rivers

At the dawn of time, the children chant,
The river empties itself into the Sea of the Dead
The gale of divine cascades blows the Trumpet from the precincts of Al-Aqsa
To let slip the gates of mercy
Exhorting all to listen when a Palestinian speaks of rivers
And the river's mosque is the only direction left to pray toward,
Its athan the only hymn to heed.

Return To A Home On Foreign Land

The morning speaks to me in my Mama's voice.

From a slumber, I come to with the wistful smell of fresh-cut mint and the sound of Fairuz coloring the air

A balmy warmth permeates my house, reminding me of nasmat el sharq,

An open window ushers in the sun that also imbues life to the wara2 3inab in our American backyard, and my mother stresses the time.

How lovely it is, I think, to be awoken by such grace.

To be removed from the repetitive daily American hustle and bustle, and reminded what mornings at Home felt like

How lovely it is, I think, to wake up to a glistening sun and an appetite for shay ma3 na3na3

And hear my mother's voice as she sings along to Saalouny Elnas

To be able to earnestly wake and say "Alhamdulillah"

To welcome Al Quds, Dimashq, Amman, and Beirut to the walls that estranged me from them

To sing along to the voice of Raw7 Libnan and drink shay ib juthoor liblad

Because suddenly I was no longer in exile, no longer severed from home, and suddenly, I remembered the sound of my Mama's voice.

Government Cheese Makes Great Mana'eesh

Mama, Mama, I'm leaving now
You smile and raise a brow
As you hand me a Tupperware packed with food for the day
Mana'eesh, the American way, you say

Say bismillah, don't let it slip your memory
The mana'eesh, it's soft and stretchy;
Soft because you sacrificed the strength of your bones, wooden, no longer young,
to knead a dough into a light fluff on your children's tongues.

Stretchy because mana'eesh wasn't meant to be made from government cheese
Be grateful, I have made for you something from nothing with ease
how ironic to make the food of a country with ingredients of another that tore it to war
of a country that took your education away, and took from you the poetry you wrote
before

For you, Mama, I write every word war said you couldn't
For you, Mama, I write till my bones go wooden
For you, Mama, with my literature I shall light the darkest nights
and say bismillah before every poem I write.

God-Washed Prayer Mat

To the father who taught his daughter how to pray, to the mother who mourns her own death, to the heathen who denounces God's existence, and soldier who comes back from war to preach forgiveness; to every child who's ever prostrated before God not knowing *what* or *why* or *if* He ever was.

Confused little god-washed prayer mat
Stumped all over by your gall and shout

They say culture dwells in memory;
They—I mean *I*
Because I've been submerging my voice in fear and sukoot for so long.

And instead of sitting idly by a candlelit altar or the stumped-all-over carpets of a mosque
Waiting for an elegy to lament every breath that hid under my tongue
I'll breath the poetry like your god breathed life into man
And like man breathed over woman

So here I posit the *why*
And watch you tremble at its utterance

Tell me, then
Why you tremble when a child asks why
As if holding the sacrosanct in skepticism is blasphemy of the highest degree
As if you yourself know not the answer
So here I am; I've come to be your skeptic.

Tell me why I was taught to respect the vilified
As if Villain was defined as what *I* owed respect to

Tell me why the poetry says to be burned to ash is to be reduced to dust
As if culture was not contained by sand but by memory

Tell me why a country didn't slip from its last generation
As if the basis of nation isn't flesh but *ذكرة*
Not to be mistaken for *فكرة* because those get buried with us too.

Tell me why instead of bidding a soul farewell you start to let go of your own
Like valediction began with death and ended with yours
Like *إنا لله وإنا إليه راجعون*
As if death is only the beginning.

Tell me why a word's whisper forms another
As if cyclones breathe whirlwinds that settle to form rivers
And the mosaic of all those words and their breath spells out a book sent down centuries ago
As if memory wasn't concealed by the tremble of "why"
As if that *if* was exiled by tremble.

Bullet wounds do not fester but leak oil your troops swim around like sharks

Only for you to call into question my existence
Cornering me into a ripple of mirage
Asking for yet another testament of my humanity
And defense that life is contained beneath my flesh

Like you and me were created by not the same God
Like لا اله الا الله
Like لا إله إلا أنا

My poems fall through clouds of Arabic before they meet your eye on the ground
Forgetting to remove density of the ض because Arabic is the only language that dared to speak it
Like macabre is the life that ends in قبر
Like ضلع from فضل like فضل الله

Ensnared by a mirage
Like معراج محمد من القدس الى الجنة like معراج
Like Palestine was the closest we'd get to the promised paradise;
Al Razzaq promised us paradise and promised us Palestine but I declare to you they are one.

Our language even now is flecked with traces of yours
Like our blood is flecked with traces of your hemlock
Like فلسطين from philistine because you didn't want our فلسفة to be heard
Like ماض from god
and gharb from ghareeb because we still found you odd.

So what better to plant my words in than a language born of sacred poetry?

Those poets they say love will blind us and break us and we will have to just sit there and let it

You see it now? That is the difference you and I:
I put name to the madness, use it to stare you in the eye and breathe so close to your face it begins to sweat
my breath
I wear my name like an amulet forged from cacophonous moondust while you pretend it was swathed and
buried beneath the nigh rubble of the minarets of Al Aqsa
Or better yet: your big bangs declared it to never have been mektoob
Because fate is just an Oriental myth isn't it?

So I soar from the trenches of the Dead Sea—or perhaps it was the Sea of the Dead—
As an homage to the woman who bit the apple and spit it at the man at her feet so he could have a taste of
knowledge
And he nibbled and still to no avail

For I am the onslaught forgeone and abrupt like the embers of the poetry that possessed the bards and sang
when tongues were denser than breath
Like novel catechism written in verse sent to civilization's finest جاهلين
Ironic how they needed God when they rendered woman inessential.

And so you tremble at the question of why
Forgetting books were so autotelic they used كتاب and مكتوب as the metaphor for the only thing with the
breadth to contain fate

But what am I beyond the symphony that reverberates to the mellow sound of oud that ripples through rich Arabica coffee?
What am I beyond the tremble that follows the conception of the *how* or the *if* or the *why*
That forms a cyclone of moondust that settles as شعر on the pages of كتاب that coalesce
As a whisper of verse that slips off my tongue as I prostrate confusedly
On my confused little god-washed prayer mat?



Stella Hughes

Stella Hughes is a young, Hamtramck poet. She writes poetry as an attempt to form this confusing life into comprehensible words. Stella is inspired by music, languages, her family full of artists and her incredibly strong and passionate friends. She has recently found joy and satisfaction as a poet and hopes to continue writing and performing throughout all of her life.

Stella is a member of the 2022 InsideOut Youth Performance Troupe sponsored by Toyota. This year she has had the opportunity to perform at the Durfee Innovation Center, Valade Park, Room Project and the Detroit Auto Show on the Toyota stage. She was also given the privilege of being interviewed by WDIV Channel 4 News at Campus Martius in Detroit prior to the Auto Show performance. Stella is now serving on the 2023 InsideOut Youth Advisory Board.

In her free time Stella likes to study Korean, listen to music, and hang out with her cat.

Dual Worlds

The sky is breathless
and full of empty silence
I float in nothing, on nothing
I am now free
and slightly terrified

One long winding sidewalk, full of cracks and humps, stands behind me
leading off into our own modern, urban, oblivion
where the buildings are so tall they could touch the clouds
and slabs of cement have eaten up all the dirt

Cars and people are forever moving
weaving through what might have been wet land with wildflowers, large stones, damp moss
They trickle, and stream, and run through life
like single droplets racing forward together as a pool
They sink the unlucky to reach the finish line
Breathless

I am restless
We are rested
and ready for the big day

Here, This, a place for flying
and hopeful what ifs
and no child can tell you what the ALICE drill is, much less what each letter stands for
Tap water runs clear every time,
Walls are built up only for leaning on,
for rest, for gathering warmth, love

Here, when each of us rise to stand up on our own stage
No matter who we are
This world pauses it's flow
Watches with respect
as you carefully walk up the stairs
When you first glance out at the crowd
and when you open your mouth and speak

All eyes

Quiet.
Hopeful.

City Girl Without Cement

Down in the dark on the ground
Only a blanket between me and the bed of rocks that protrude into my back, my thighs
I am slightly apprehensive with my only light being the dim stars on a cloudy night
With the possibility of spiders taking a stroll down my body
And the deep trench of night-time thoughts opening up like a gaping jaw

If I pull away hard enough, for long enough
It's just my sister and I
giggling over nothing, staring up at the night sky, waiting for a shooting star
Waves crashing in the background a steady beat
Pulsing
Pushing away intrusive thoughts

I forget for a moment how greasy my hair is, how sticky my skin, my intense desire for warm running water
and flushing toilets
I can smell the air, cool and fresh against my cheeks
I can hear the quiet
How eerie and beautiful it is to feel

the absence

of roaring freeways
humming computers

Clocks ticking
marking each second of my life spent waiting
for a text back
bell to ring
the morning to come

for contentment

I wonder
if I truly wish to be young forever
if the clock ticks too fast
runs out of power too suddenly
or

If I just want to skip to the good part.

Poetry, My Hallway Crush

The first time I attempted to write poetry was a Saturday night maybe 2015
My parents were out and I was anxious like usual
I put a silly rhyme or two on some loose paper and thought
“Ah, this is nice and boring”

I struggle to consistently want poetry
On good days I find her in my bedroom, on the front porch, walking around the school building, effortlessly
eye-catching
She’s at lunch, scribbling down homework
She waits at the desk in the office, sitting into her hip and tapping her fingers on the counter
But many other days, when I can’t find her, I easily forget about her
My life goes on so smoothly you’d think I’d never spared her a glance

It seems my body only wants to remember the feeling of restlessness when I write
How my mind tends to squirm while I try to form intangible thoughts into words
Uncomfortable

Then again, I’m almost free
When I complete a poem
I am understood, by myself if not by anyone else
I am proud

That poem is me
I am that poem

Sometimes I wonder if I’ll look back at this poem when I’m 20
If I’ll cringe
If I’ll be all grown out of this and give it away like old clothes
If I’ll ever look back satisfied

Like I am right now.

My emotions free to play out on this page.

I run across endless white space.

Mohima; Greatness; Majesty; Pride; Loftiness; Height

I know I say I'm used to relaxing alone at home all summer
to not seeing my friends
and I am

But my heart floats
bubble gum pink
like a little girl's dreams
and full of your contagious joy

When we talk on the phone late at night
and meet for a moment at Driver's Ed
You say ridiculous things with the sweetest voice
and other times you're so sincere, my heart feels your every word

This is a poem of my rushing love for you
that has pooled up from my gutters onto the edge of Hamtramck streets
and trickled down into the usual half-clogged sewers
out into rivers

This is a poem of our endless talks in the girls locker room
how our words flowed together with ease
and our evaporated dreams or thoughts formed again as clouds in the air

This is a poem of the smiles you give me
and the lines that come with them
like maps where land meets ocean

I think
you are the Atlantic and I, the Pacific
Our waters push and crash against one another, molding each of our lives
flowing in different ways but making contact wherever the continents allow

I wonder what more secrets you will reveal about your deep waters,
full of bright creatures, made of your own thoughts and memories
I wonder what more I will let slip of mine

How we will blend together into one blue and crashing force.

The Splitting Of Our Moon

It was obvious
the day our crescent of cafeteria seats broke into two curved lines
a gap of air in between that seemed to hold our breath
like opposite ends of an island broke off and floated away
meeting in the open sea
as if the wave that split up the land was planned

We all knew that we all knew that we all knew
we were changed
No longer 5
but 3 and 2
2's whispers tease
2 says
"Nothing"
"It's nothing"
3 knows
2 will never share
3 knows
and 3 will not ask again.

Gratitude

The 2022 InsideOut Youth Performance Troupe would like to thank Suma Rosen, Michelle Bolofer, Justin Rogers and the entire InsideOut Literary Arts staff, writers, sponsors, and donors for making this year's Troupe a huge success. We also extend our deepest gratitude for all of the guest writers who touched our lives and our digital workshops during this extended quarantine season.

We are bravely holding the line for every youth artist who comes after us as we forge ever forward.