

Identity

SPRING 2025

Scholar's
Publications

Western 

Essay, Poem, and
Fictional Exploration of
Identity as Told by
Western Scholars



Scholar's Publications

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A Foreword From the Editor

When the publication team met this year to decide on a theme for this year's publication, there were a number of ideas thrown out, with no stand-out winner. We were at a slight impasse—until the idea of identity was proposed. Reflected in the disparate nature of our collective brainstorm, identity is a multi-faceted idea that is not defined uniformly at the individual or collective level, and can be explored from a variety of angles. Such angles are explored within and reflected by the diversity of contributions from this year's publication contributors, in poetry, fiction, art, and essay. To singularly define identity, and thus explain the concept's importance, my singular perspective would fall short. Instead, I hope the subsequent pages will accomplish this for me.

Madeline Zajdlík
Editor-in-Chief



*Dreaming Above the
Clouds*

Isabel Buitron Lopez

IDENTITY

in Poetry



Sam Dabir | Art and Photography by Nicole Castano Yepes

A mirror splinters into shards,
Each piece, a tale, a fleeting card.
One shows the child, bright and free,
Another, the burdened legacy.

Eyes shift between the fractured view,
Seeking the self, the thread of truth.
Am I the whispers of my past?
Or futures dreamed that never last?

In fragments, unity yet resides,
A mosaic formed by time and tides.
Identity, a shifting stream,
Both the seeker and the dream.

FRAGMENTED REFLECTIONS





ROOTS & BRANCHES

Beneath the soil, my roots go deep,
In histories buried, in secrets they keep.
An ancestor's voice hums in my veins,
Their struggles, their triumphs, their joys, their pains.

Yet branches reach toward skies unknown,
Yearning for spaces not yet shown.
Leaves unfurl in the sun's warm gaze,
Shaped by winds of countless days.

I am the tree, both young and old,
A story of life in roots and bold.
My growth is mine, my roots still true,
In both, I find myself anew.

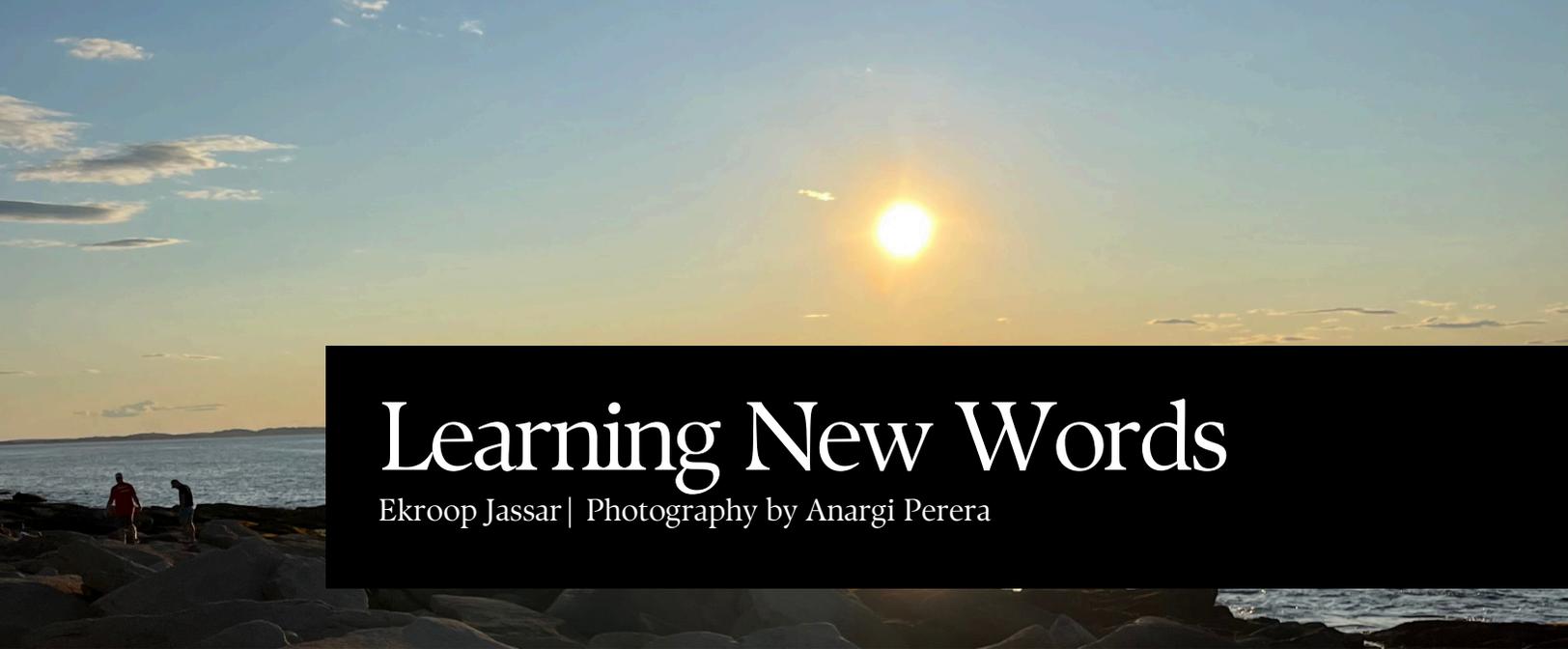
The world's a stage, they often say,
Where masks are worn to meet the day.
A grin for strangers, a scowl for plight,
A veil for sorrow in the dead of night.

But when the mask slips, what lies beneath?
A soul unveiled, raw belief.
A patchwork quilt of hopes and fears,
Of laughter's echoes, of silent tears.

Identity shifts, a dance of guise,
Yet through the change, a truth will rise.
In every mask, a fragment gleams,
Of who we are, and who we dream.

MASKS WE WEAR





Learning New Words

Ekroop Jassar | Photography by Anargi Perera

While language serves its purpose of communication, it is also a deeper reflection of who we are, where we come from, and how we see the world. Although it might be hard to imagine that the languages we speak can shape our identities, if we take a moment to compare the words we use with those of others, the significance of language on self-expression becomes apparent.

The language-identity interplay is most evident when considering geographically diverse languages. For example, the Inuit language has roots in northern Alaska and Canada, while English originated in England. In the modern day, these languages are spoken in the same location, but their words and phrases developed based on their original cultural necessities. Differences in culture – or group identity – are reflected by words that are untranslatable between languages. In Inuit, the word *Iktsuarpok* has no one-word translation in English, but roughly represents the feeling of anticipation when you are waiting for someone (Sivasubramanian). As a non-Inuit speaker, I cannot fully convey the meaning of *Iktsuarpok*, but its translation highlights the difficulty of conveying it in English.

The difficulty in translation between Inuit and English is not an isolated incident. There are countless examples of words that exist solely in one language. These words show that groups of people need to express certain thoughts more often than other groups. Native Inuit speakers likely feel *Iktsuarpok* more than English speakers, which is why the word evolved into the Inuit script. The feeling of *Iktsuarpok* may hold more significance for Inuit speakers, as speakers of other languages may not even be familiar with the concept. In essence, this example highlights that people who speak different languages have unique aspects of their identities that other language speakers do not.

This phenomenon is also demonstrated within languages through dialects. I never realized how pronounced the differences in dialects were before I came to university. Being from the GTA, I am painfully aware of how the slang in my city is influenced by Toronto culture but has a slightly inferior quality because the phrases get diluted as the distance from the city increases. While I knew the dialects of the surrounding cities differed from mine, I knew I could go to any city in the GTA and not notice any language differences if I was not purposefully looking for them. When I moved to my dorm, my roommates were all from large cities, allowing me to be ignorant about speech differences for a bit longer.

As I branched out some more, I realized that people from small towns spoke quite differently than people from large cities. I heard more people calling each other “buddy” in one week at Western than in a month back home. In my perspective, buddy is a phrase used by middle-aged people, but to many other students, it is a natural greeting, showing how language develops based on social norms in communities. The differences in cultural identity between regions of Canada become apparent when hearing the distinct ways Western students speak. The dialects of English have adapted to their users’ needs to reflect their personal identities, which is why people from different communities have distinct speech mannerisms.

Our way of speaking is shaped by our culture, geography, and social environments, acting as a testament to who we are. Linguistic variations serve cultural necessities and shape how we express ourselves and connect with others. Whether through the unique concepts embedded in different languages or the slang and speech patterns of our hometowns, language encapsulates the diversity and complexity of human identity.

However, language supersedes being a marker of differences - it is a window into the identities of others. Each untranslatable word or distinct dialect carries the weight of culture, history, and personality. The next time you hear a phrase you do not understand, consider how that person’s language represents their story. In understanding the language of others, we do not just learn new words - we gain deeper insight into the rich nature of human identity.

Works Cited

Sivasubramaniam, Jeevan. “Words from Other Languages We Need in English: Iktsuarpok!” Words Worth Knowing, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 27 July 2016, www.bkconnection.com/bkblog/jeevan-sivasubramaniam/words-from-other-languages-we-need-in-english-iktsuarpok.





HOW I LEARNED TO STOP WORRYING AND LOVE THE PIANO

*(By Leaving It
Behind)*

Willow Bosimer

Photography by Madeleine Zajdlik

Music has always loomed over my life. From the ages of five to seventeen, I was a pianist, performing in a cycle of student recitals and competitions that seemed never to end. My piano accompanied me throughout my most formative years, my interpretations of music and my experiences in life blending inextricably into each other, and through the whole gamut of emotions from joy, to resentment and frustration, to rage. Only upon making the decision to walk away from it all - the most momentous decision I'd made yet - was I able to realize all that I'd gained from music, regret all that I'd chosen to give up, and understand the person I'd grown to be.

It was easy to devote time to piano when I was young. Elementary school was almost trivial; studying was easily sacrificed in favour of hours of practice. Once I began high school, I found myself in a very different reality, one where I had to work hard in order to succeed. Piano became a burden. I shaved minutes, then hours, off my long-held routines. I skipped days of practice; inevitably, my playing lost some of its polish. It was plain to hear, and I was mortified—I couldn't keep playing in recitals and competitions like this; I couldn't allow everyone to hear me when I wasn't at my best. More and more, I resented everything about playing the piano, yet I couldn't bring myself to take the last step and stop for good. As much as I complained about it, I loved performing, and besides, my entire identity was based on piano.

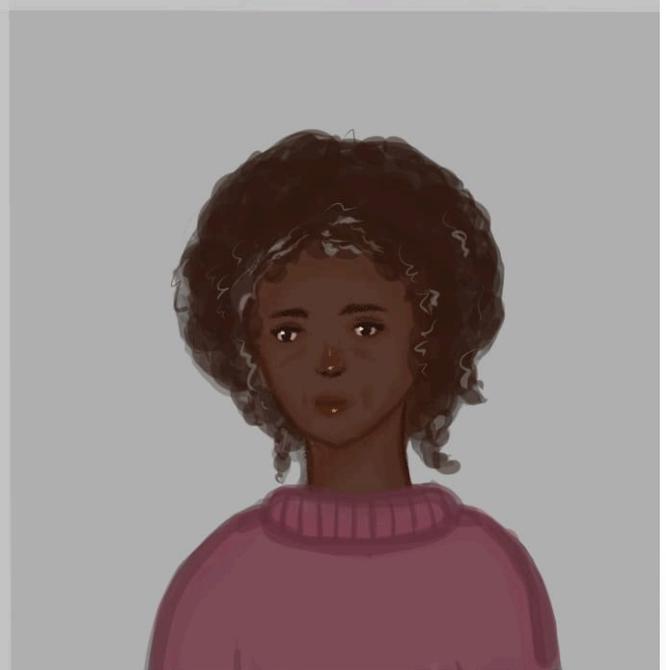
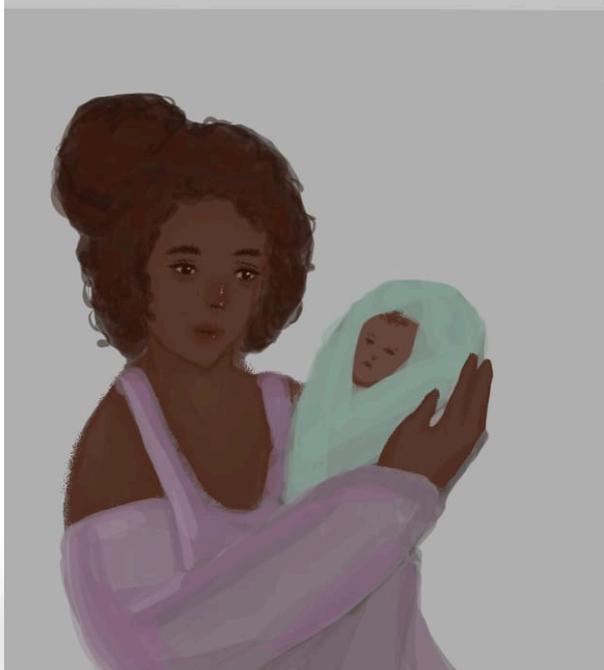
All of my best memories came from competitions and performing with my friends; at school, it was the one thing that distinguished me from my classmates. If I quit, what would be left? Would I still be special? Would I still be worth knowing?

Finally, after a number of false starts and one of the worst periods of my life, my morale bludgeoned by the pandemic's effects on socializing, school, and, yes, piano lessons, I walked away for good. I closed my piano and threw myself into enjoying what I could salvage from the COVID-wrecked pieces of my high school life: taking leadership positions in school clubs that better aligned with my passions, studying with friends, and the like. Yet the sound of a Beethoven sonata or a Chopin waltz summoned tears to my eyes and a fierce longing for the keyboard I never knew I had in me. I can't count the number of times someone has asked me, "Do you still play piano?" In response, I'd mumble, "Actually, I quit..." –and then, as though I had somehow failed them by giving it up, add, "—Sorry."

Over the months and years, I've decided I don't need to be ashamed of my choice. It was best for me at that point in time, and while piano music still has a bittersweet hold on me, I realized that, even if I wasn't the school pianist anymore, I still had a fulfilling array of interests and activities to pursue along with my schoolwork. Although I'd feared becoming a nobody, a "person without qualities" without my piano playing, I realized that, to my friends, I had always been more than just the "piano girl" (though I was called that name often). In fact, once I left high school and made new friends, being able to define myself without that moniker hanging over my head was refreshing. Music remained part of my identity, of course; ironically, stepping away from piano gave me a greater appreciation of music than I'd ever had before. My newfound detachment from the stress and pain accompanying high-level competitions is combined with years of getting to know the music of Beethoven, Chopin, and Bach as intimately as if they were my oldest and best friends. It allowed me to redefine my relationship with the piano on my own terms—yes, I adore classical music, everyone who knows me knows that, but piano is no longer the first thing people associate with me.

My life is incalculably richer for having dedicated so much of it to music. When I'm faced with hurdles like an important test on short notice or a difficult science competition, I know it's the discipline and calm in the face of stress that piano inculcated into me that allow me to excel. I visit my former piano teacher regularly, and one day he mentioned, almost offhandedly, that a younger pianist in town saw me as an inspiration, something I'd never expected. Knowing that the hard work I put into my performances pushed my peers to strive for excellence was, in a way, a relief—so it was all worth something, in the end. I'll always credit my time as a pianist as what shaped me into the person I am today—it's just as much part of me now as it was when I still performed—but being honest with myself and quitting was the catalyst that led me to realize how much I had already accomplished, and how much I had yet to offer.

A Changing Reflection



When I look in the mirror, I see my younger self.
A little girl,
Eyes that have yet to see the world for herself.
A head full of messy curls is matted down by a mother's hand
Chubby arms reach for her father to carry her into a sleepy abyss.
"Daughter" was my name.

When I look in the mirror, I see my younger self.
A young teen,
Shoulders that bear the weight of a thousand opinions and perspectives,
None of which are her own.
Luscious curls are flattened in a single swipe
Swatches of makeup blur the blemishes on her face.
"Friend" was my name.

When I look in the mirror, I see my younger self.
A woman,
Children dangling from her shoulders,
A face that fails to disguise the endless worries circulating through her mind.
Unbrushed curls plopped atop her head in a messy twist,
Eyes darkened from a lack of sleep.
"Mother" became my name.

When I look in the mirror, I see myself.
An older woman,
Skin wrinkled by age, wisdom and worry,
Limbs that have grown weary with the weight of the world.
Amongst the soft curls framing her face,
A smile peaks through wispy strands-
Her grandchildren are running in the garden.
"Grandmother" is my name.

The mirror sits in the same corner,
Still and steadfast.
The mirror remains the same,
Its reflection is constantly changing.



The Next Chapter

Madeleine Zajdlik

When I graduated high school, I used a song lyric from my favourite song at the time as my yearbook quote. I knew at the time the song wouldn't be my favourite forever, let alone even likely to the end of the current year, and it would've been incredibly naïve to think as such. In a speech I gave at my graduation, I referenced the choice, saying "I chose it because it represents what I like, what I believe in—right now." In effect, it was a symbol, chosen to represent my identity at a singular, critical moment in time.

I recognize my identity to be composed in chapters, subchapters, and broader parts. Each epoch tells its own tale, distinct from the others. Chapters continue to be written and closed with every action and decision; however, their closure does not render them inert or ineffective to one's broader narrative. These chapters are foundational, setting value and experience-laden bases for future decisions and their outcomes. I see echoes on my high school music taste—of my yearbook quote song—in the rhythm, timbre, lyrics, and melody of my current favourite songs, just as much as I see my current values reflected in the text of my graduation speech. I am a person built on the iterations of my past self.

In that speech, I also told my classmates that "In ten years, we will not greatly resemble who we are today," as a result of our forthcoming experiences and their narrative-shaping effects. On a surface level, I still agree with this statement, but on a deeper one, I do not. I might present myself in a manner disparate from how I did in high school or the years before, or listen to different music, or read and learn about different things. However, my values are comparatively steadfast. I can connect my current approaches to university and learning to values instilled within my first years of education, with my approaches to other people a running permutation of those I admire that came before.

Ultimately, although even parts of these values may change, there is a commonality to my various chapters of identity borne out of what has longstanding importance to me. It is in this that I find the most comfort, particularly as I contemplate closing the chapter of my undergraduate studies. Despite knowing that I will significantly change on certain levels, due to experiences of moving cities, changing academic disciplines, and meeting new peers, I know that my core tenets of self will not—tenets that have been tested through various life challenges to date, and been proven as resilient through them all. It is my confidence in my tested core identity that gives me the courage to take on my next chapter. In this sense, I am not unique. We all are a byproduct of our earlier chapters, with core themes running through selected by the mettle of life experience. As we are confronted by new challenges and experiences, it is therefore valuable to connect with our running themes and values to effectively take such tests on in a successful, self-validating manner.

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“who are you?”

Favour Babasola

I: a name

it starts with a name
not chosen by me
but mine all the same
mine to carry for the rest of my life
a placeholder in my absence
a signification of my presence
rolled off the tongue, printed on paper
one word
carries the essence of a life
signifies my blood, my being
who i was born to be

II: a family

the first semblance of love
family, chosen or birthed into, shapes us
their glaring beliefs and searing desires
embedded in their stories
and unspoken behind every embrace
as we are moulded by their hand
i can choose to stay on their paved path
or by tooth and nail start to carve out my own
but the scars left from the outset of my journey
will remain forevermore

III: an ancestry

my body unconsciously moves to a beat
heard before only by the deepest parts of my soul
my features, my food, my culture
mine by inheritance alone
forged by those who came before
people that i will never meet
yet have written the prologue to my story
passing the pen to me
entrusting me with power
to write the ending





IV: a relationship

before i even knew myself i was someone else's
someone's child, someone's friend
a piece of me belonging to all
yet owned completely by no one
"birds of a feather flock together" is what they say
but are my relationships an attraction to what i know
or am i taking pieces of everyone else too
shaping my nature and soul
damning myself to become what surrounds me

V: a hobby

every movement of one's body
is a revelation into one's heart
every word whispered from one's lips
or scribbled on a page
a small insight into their soul
time is the most precious currency of mankind
what one chooses to spend it on
each repeated, practiced action
our recreational pursuits
show what we care about most

VI: a perception

and when they look in my eyes, what do they see
how i am perceived matters just as much
as what i think "me" to be
the mirror is not enough to encapsulate it all
one's aura, the light in eyes
regardless of how desperately one searches themselves
can only be experienced by an outsider looking in
so a slippery part of me
evades my grasp
continuously remaining a mystery

who am i?
in this game of identification
i play to lose
this puzzle can never be truly solved
as the pieces are ever-changing
we try to define ourselves
yet we are infinite
so instead i will let it be





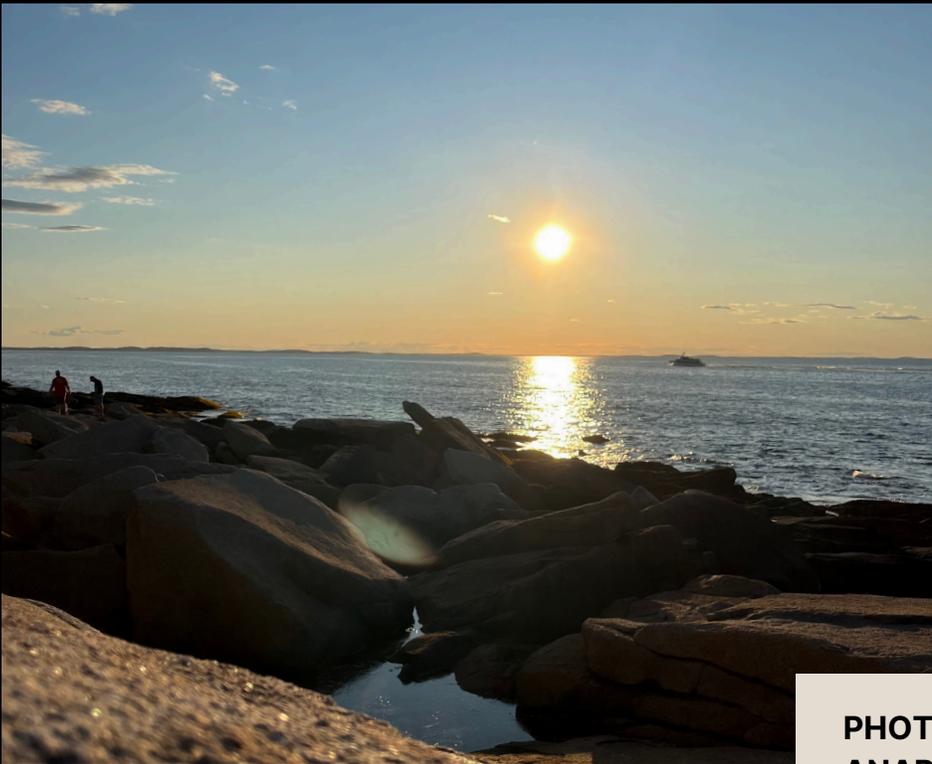


PHOTO BY
ANARGI PERERA

In Conclusion

In the previous pages, this year's team of publication contributors explored identity as it was defined to them, in a range of artistic formats. Collectively, these pieces explored what any sole one would be unable to do, offering an in-depth insight into the true definition of identity as revealed by its multi-faceted nature. No two contributions are alike, and it is these variations that offer the greatest insight the idea of identity as it is defined by Scholar's students at this moment in time. My time as editor of this publication has shaped my own identity, by virtue of learnings such as these, and I hope our collective output offers similar impactful insight for any who come across it in the future.

Madeline Zajdlak
Editor-in-Chief

Scholar's Publications, 2025

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