PERSONAL ESSAY

To write, or not to write?

// BY REETI MALHOTRA

It is strange to think that I once disdained writing as much as I did.

Perhaps disdained is the wrong word — I was fatigued by it, having been inundated with high school required essays and written responses that left little time or desire to write beyond what I was required to.

I used to pen short stories and novels as a child. My greatest ambition was to be published by the age of 13. But then my 14th birthday rolled around, along with IGCSE exams and then IB exams and the tens of extracurricular activities to stock up on for college applications. All passion for the form disappeared, along with my regular sleep schedule.

My experience of writing became self-contained and sporadic: short poems and reflections tucked away into my Notes app and half-empty journals. I wrote when the need to express something became too great, but I lacked the non-judgmental and listening audience at 3 a.m. to say my piece.

It was therefore surprising, when I arrived at Yale and found myself writing. There were aspects that I had somewhat anticipated. I was taking Directed Studies and was well aware of the thrice-a-month essay cycles I was subjecting myself to. But that system was no different from what I had become accustomed to in high school. I was writing because I had to.

What was surprising was when I began to write outside of the classroom. It began innocently enough. I picked up a general assignment for the News to send along a byline back home. My mother had always said that I would be a journalist. My friends found it hilarious that I could be living the Rory Gilmore life. My English teacher, ever-supportive, was curious to see what I would get up to.

I decided to cater to all interested parties and send along a short reported piece on what I expected to be a farmer's market event, but ended up being on subsidised food produce being sold outside of the Fair Haven Free Public Library. The rush of having discovered something previously unknown was enthralling. The idea of having something I wrote being published and read — and potentially valued — was all the more invigorating.

That single piece woke something within me: the dormant, long-discarded passion for writing I had denied for years.

I began to write in earnest, or rather, in a blurred flurry. I churned out articles and WKND pieces and DS essays. It was an endeavour of learning as I went, punctured by subtle imposter syndrome that left me questioning if anything I wrote had any value at all. My lack of faith was rooted in an uncertain quest. I was searching for something that I couldn't quite articulate — a voice of my own. A niche to inhabit, where every piece would leave my blood hot with pride.

The prospect of discovering that voice seemed impossible. In my first effort to do so, I took English 1020 during my sophomore fall with lecturer Seth Walls. I wanted to make my WKND essays sharper; to dig into the craft of the so-called "personal essay," rather than haphazardly stumbling through it. The experience was life-altering — my seminar grew close and I developed a previously unfathomable candor in my essays. I left that class as an English major with a deep affection for and nascent desire to pursue quasi-new journalism. But still, I was unsteady. What voice was unmistakably me?

In my growing murk, I applied to "Daily Themes."

The class, taught since 1907 and currently led by senior lecturer Kim Shirkhani, requires you to pen 250 to 300 word pieces responding to five different prompts, five days a week, while you work one-to-one with an assigned writing tutor to improve. It wasn't clear what improvement would entail. Would my sentences just sound, suddenly, better? More pressing was that I had no clue what to write about, why I was writing, or if I could write. My greatest fear — lacking a voice and niche — was coming to the fore with "Daily Themes."

But now, 13 weeks have passed, and I have written some 19,500 words on various topics, while meeting with my tutor, Jen Stock, every Wednesday at Poindexter Coffee. I have experimented with grammatical structures and figurative language and rhetorical techniques to evoke certain responses from my reader. I have ruminated upon her feedback and pushed forward to challenge myself, even when writing a theme while half delirious in the airport on my way home for Spring Break or at 3 a.m. on a Tuesday while waiting for my laundry cycle to complete.

I just wrote — no concerns for voice in mind. And in doing so, I learned habits of my own; tastes and tendencies. My niche, ever-present, now noticeable.

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SASHA CABRAL



HOROSCOPES

// BY KIVA BANK

ILLUSTRATION BY JULIAN RAYMOND

Spring has sprung. Or at least it did before the sun sprang back into hibernation behind the clouds and brought on the 40-degree weather. Although the sunshine was brief, it was still enough time to illuminate the fashion choice that every girl on campus thinks is original: tank top, boots, mini skirt. You'll see the exact same "original" outfit combo for Spring Fling this weekend.

Alas, there is no Mercury or Venus or Saturn retrograde to blame your misfortunes on, as the only retrograde you're about to experience is your decline into debauchery and drinking BORGs.

The end is near — not just the end of the semester but the end of collective sanity and the end of these horoscopes. Here's what the stars have to say about your Spring Fling fate.

Aries

You've been told by your pledgemasters that diamonds form under pressure, and that's the justification they use to make you and the other pledges deep throat the Cholula. "The best bonding happens under trauma," says a Leo brother who has never experienced trauma or any real hardship in life. The elephant walk doesn't count.

Taurus

Your relationship was as fleeting as the seasons and ended as soon as cuffing season did. You're now entering an era of self-reflection as you realize that your situationships have treated you better than your official partners. Short-term boyfriend, long-term situationship, medium-distance relationship — whatever term you use, it doesn't matter. It all ends the same, with an angry Fizz post that you delete after six downvotes.

Gemini

You hosted the worst prefrosh this week who were so obnoxious and pretentious that they made you question the ability of the admissions office to put together a decent class of 2030. You hope they don't choose Yale, but it looks like they're going to fit right in with the DS kids. You would know from personal experience, of course, because it takes one to know one.

Cancer

Submitting an instructor permission request for the third year in a row is humiliating, just like texting an ex desperately trying to convince them to get back together with you. For the past week, you've been sending follow-up emails like, "Hey, it's me again. I just wanted to say I've been doing great without this class, but I really need you now."

Leo

You're sad to leave for the summer because you're going to miss one thing and one thing only. People complain about the food in the dining hall, but you're going to long for the various liquids Yale graciously supplies. And no, not those kinds of liquids. You need the fruit-flavored water to sustain your intellectual efforts. How else will you get through your boring 9 to 5?

Virgo

You only have a few weeks to take advantage of the Yale health insurance you paid an arm and a leg for, so if you're going to lose an arm and a leg, now is the time to do it. You should make sure that your habit of taking five-minute naps during lecture isn't narcolepsy. And book that gynecology appointment as soon as possible — you need to get that funky smell checked out.

Libra

You've discovered rock bottom has a basement, and final exams haven't even started yet. That's probably when you'll realize that the basement has an even lower level: a weird moldy sex dungeon. Avoid the descent into the ninth circle of hell — moving back in with your parents for the summer and having to share the car with your younger siblings, who have more robust social lives than you.

Scorpio

You've been looking forward to seeing Zara Larsson with your best friend ever since she was announced as the Spring Fling headliner, but unfortunately Yale Connect crashed. You didn't secure a guest ticket for her in time. The only midnight sun you'll be enjoying together is the Stephanie Myers version.

Sagittarius

It was hard for you to say goodbye to gazing wistfully at your crush across the seminar table, not just because of their pretty face, but because it's the closest you'll ever get to really loving academia. Your GPA will suffer until you find another delusionship to motivate you to study.

Capricorn

You haven't been able to sleep for days because your suitemate is wailing over his girlfriend who dumped him because she wants to have a "hot girl study abroad summer." It's offensive to feminism that he's making a woman's perfectly reasonable decision all about him. You must take him to the Women's Center so you can both learn about performative allyship and go forth spreading the wise word throughout your Big Apple capital ventures this summer.

Aquarius

You didn't win any position in Yale Model United Nations, and you've been walking around Beinecke Plaza aimlessly ever since. Now you're having an identity crisis because you realized you peaked in high school. Your days of being in faux positions of power are over, at least until you are put in charge of the new interns at McKinsey. Then you can lead the charge of buying coffee for your superiors.

Pisces

You have been preoccupied with finding a cute Y2K Eurosummer outfit and memorizing the "Lush Life" dance for when Zara Larsson calls you on stage. Unfortunately, with all your daydreaming, you completely forget to apply for fellowship funding. Now you're trying desperately to network in order to secure a paid internship for the summer, but pickings are slimmer than Y2K accessories on Depop.

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WEEKEND RECOMMENDS:

KEEPING A JOURNAL OVER THE SUMMER