

# PLURALISM UNDER PRESSURE?

**L**iberal is a word commonly used to describe the atmosphere of LUMS.

It is true that LUMS functions as a distinct, miniature society, unrestrained by the cultural norms and societal judgement of the primarily conservative Pakistani society. In fact, it appears to promote values that distinctly, and perhaps purposefully, challenge all that. The first impression of the LUMS environment, a drive by the khoka, may leave one unsettled as students wearing low-cut jeans, and crop tops, with bejewelled bellybuttons and back tattoos, along with unabashed public displays of affection appear to be in the majority.

However, as one spends more time in the environment, you become aware of the many people who conform to the values that wider society holds. Girls clad in head-to-toe coverings, and boys in shalwar kameez and occasionally turbans are just as likely to be in your classes, and are equally as representative of the 'LUMS culture' scene are those are alt or preppy or grunge.

And this is in fact what liberalism actually means: that all of these seemingly distinct groups of people characterise LUMS together. They talk, mingle, mix, blend, and amalgamate into a single culture that all students at LUMS are participants in and believe in. The heterogenous composition characterizing the LUMS campus is a direct result of a principle that underlies all aspects of the university. It is outlined in the Student Handbook as pluralism. By extension, LUMS culture can mean several different things to a number of different people - predominantly, though, it translates as belonging.

**"Over here...I'm not really being dictated."**  
Says a first-year student at LUMS. **"I just feel like I have a lot of agency over here.** So that's really nice."

**"On campus, in many ways it's sort of a home to me, I think it's a home to all of us.** It does have that feeling, jab main ati houn. To haan, I do see myself differently inside LUMS, **I think I can [be] more of myself over here."**

INSIDE LUMS CULTURE  
BY AMINA PASHA

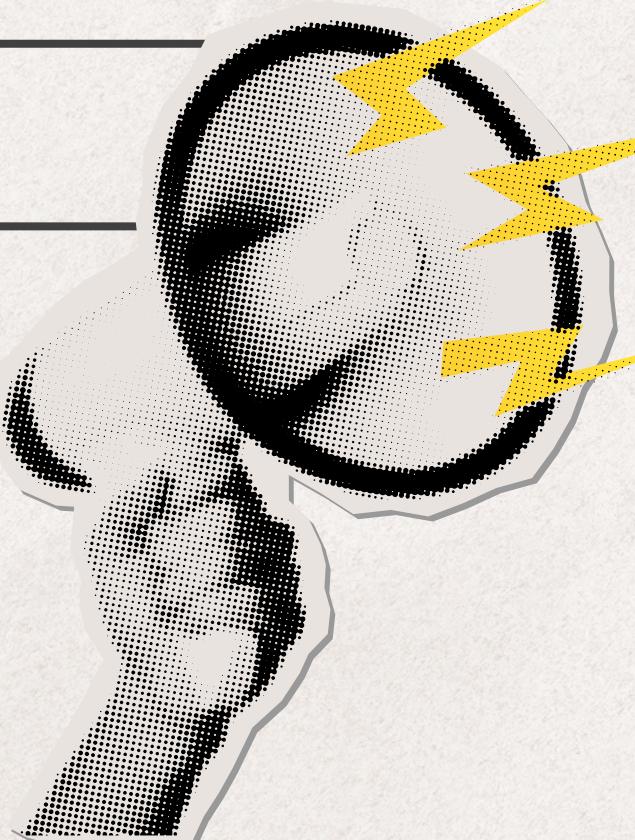
**"...In a lot of ways in Pakistan I think LUMS is one of the few places jahan istarah ki diversity ko accept kiya jata hain and it's encouraged in fact."**

The University provides a safe environment for students of all backgrounds where they can retreat and find solace. Where there is not a differential cultural hierarchy – where each student, no matter their tastes, interests, and lifestyle, is valued and respected as a member of the LUMS community. LUMS is a safe space – it provides some respite from the dominant (and to some) overbearing cultural norms of our society. LUMS culture is our culture.

However, confidence in the security that LUMS provides is dwindling in our student body. Certain incidents have left students and faculty unsure of the institutional support, or rather, protection they thought they could rely on is more theoretical than practical. Recently, a film screening was cancelled due to backlash from some members of the student and faculty community. The film featured a storyline that centred on LGBTQ+ experiences, and to some, the cancelling of the screening appears to be a direct attack on our university's policy of pluralism.

To others, however, the cancellation was not inherently wrong. As an example, a student voicing their concerns spoke about how the agenda promoted by an authority must draw from the context in which it is situated. To them, the sentiments of the cancelled screening of Rafiki represented the proliferation of values antithetical to the university's mission of progress towards social development, holding that such sentiments clash with local customs and ideas. And as such, the cancellation of Rafiki was not entirely out of order.

In any large institution or group, there will always be differing and clashing opinions, and affording respect to people with different opinions means that the predominant direction of progress and intellectual development remains positive.



It is important to recognize that LUMS culture is not one singular thing. It comprises a number of diverse groups, and the success of the liberal cultural identity of LUMS is in these diverse groups upholding and protecting each others' right to be different.

However, when different groups within the community feel that administrative decisions seem to favour certain groups over others, progress towards a balanced and respectful social fabric seems to halt as one is forced to question who really benefits.

# THE MERITOCRACY PAYWALL IS THE LUMS DREAM WITHIN REACH? BY AMINAH

LUMS remains financially unaffordable for many people despite being one of the best universities in Pakistan. A lot of people see their dreams come true when they receive that acceptance email, only to be crushed after seeing the fee bill that follows. And this isn't an issue unique to Pakistan. Globally as well, quality higher education remains out of reach for many.

However, LUMS does have a Financial Aid policy and also a scholarship system set in place—as do many other universities. **So the question arises: how fair and effective are these policies?**

According to the LUMS website, you need to provide various documents relating to income and assets. Your financial status is taken into account and you are provided aid accordingly. This seems fair enough but it is definitely not a simple process. The official website states that the Financial Aid Programme offers a wide range of support options designed to facilitate students who demonstrate both high academic achievement and financial need. However, it also states: "While LUMS endeavours to provide substantial financial assistance within its available resources, students are encouraged to explore external funding sources to complement the aid provided by the University." Therefore, students who have done O/A Levels, live in their own homes, or have working parents often find their chances of receiving meaningful aid significantly reduced. Additionally, many students online have shared that even after qualifying for FA, the remaining fee still feels impossibly high. So there are questions: *is the policy delivering what it promises?*

There are other options in place however. In 2001, LUMS initiated the NOP (National Outreach Programme). On the official website, it states "This prestigious scholarship programme focuses on identifying bright students with exceptional Matriculation and FA/FSc results and inducting them into the LUMS undergraduate programmes. The students who qualify as NOP scholars are provided full financial assistance." This seems like a good and fair option for many. Once again, many aspects are taken into account. The website also states: "All students, irrespective of whether they apply directly or through the NOP programme, are evaluated on the same admission criteria." This helps ensure a fair, merit-based process that recognizes talented and deserving students from across the country.

Still, the broader question remains: **doesn't everyone deserve the right to quality education? If money becomes the main barrier, what does that say about access and equity?**

The recurring fee hikes at LUMS have led to outrage for years and for good reason. Supporters of the hikes argue that they reflect inflation and rising operational costs, factors largely outside the university's control. Ultimately, assessing the fairness of LUMS' financial policies requires acknowledging the economic realities of the country itself. Not everything is black and white.



**B**ut it is nonetheless true that LUMS is expensive and thus does remain unaffordable for many. **And so we are left to wonder: how true is the phrase "Learning Without Borders" and for whom does it really apply?**

# DO WE DESERVE A PRESIDENT?

BY JALAL TARAR

Campus elections are usually carnivals. There are drums beaten until wrists ache, flags planted like conquests across every patch of lawn, slogans shouted into megaphones by people who lose their voices but not their zeal. There are the free samosas, the chai rounds, the first-year volunteers who suddenly find themselves transformed into campaign warriors. It is noisy, it is messy, and it is ours.

**This year, the carnival ended mid-act.** Like so many others, I had cast my vote when the music stopped. **Polling was abruptly halted; for hours,** the LUMS faithful kept guessing, second-guessing, and eyeing the rivals. **By nightfall, the announcement finally came: no results would be declared.** All three presidential candidates were referred to the Disciplinary Committee.

The absurdity deepened when the outgoing President and the Dean of Student Affairs were dragged into an impromptu inquisition. They stood on khokha benches for over an hour, defending the decision like generals surrounded by mutiny. They were graceful, composed. The candidates and their entourages, less so.

Months later, the results trickled out during semester break. But the presidency remained unwritten, an ellipsis at the top of the ballot.

If elections are meant to be political exercises, this year's version was pure theatre. The props arrived first: flags stitched overnight, shirts printed for core teams, and a small army of volunteers parading across campus like extras in a pageant. Candidates slipped into costumes (shalwar kameez with black coats), a cosplay of seriousness, as though attire could substitute for vision. The contempt for the voter could not be more glaring.

Then came the soundtrack. One candidate had a campaign song, another borrowed Faiz, plastering couplets on Instagram stories as if standing for student office was an act of resistance against tyranny. The irony, of course, was that their fiercest opponent was not oppression but indifference, and poetry, however noble, does little against yawns.

Even the manifestos joined the performance. Each year they grow longer, each year more unreadable, now swollen with the kind of empty jargon that might as well have been generated by ChatGPT. I read them all. They were padded with buzzwords about “inclusivity,” “sustainability,” and “innovation,” yet managed to avoid saying anything about the daily realities of student life.

***This wasn't an election so much as a dress rehearsal: a production with costumes, slogans, and set pieces, but no plot. A theatre where everyone played a role, but no one had a story worth telling.***

The absurdities of national politics have always trickled down into student life, but this year they arrived wholesale. Instead of “vote-buying,” we had food vouchers, the campus equivalent of a plate of biryani handed out at jalsas. Instead of fiery vision, we got borrowed couplets and endless sermonising from campaign stages, delivered with all the self-importance of a rally at Iqbal Park, minus the cause. Even the presidential debates, once formalised by the outgoing council to encourage seriousness, collapsed into little more than a shouting match between factions.

And of course, there was litigation. When all else fails in Pakistan, file a writ; when all else fails on campus, do the same. The spectacle is identical, only the stakes are smaller.

If you stood at the Khokha that week and squinted, you could have mistaken it for D-Chowk, the same flags, the same sloganeering, the same theatre of grievance. The only thing missing was the container truck. But give them some time; there's always next year.

At Harvard, newly elected students are already in a generational fight with Trump over the soul of their college. At LUMS, we're still quarrelling over vouchers and flags at the Khokha. I hope to see these leaders-to-be quote the same Faiz couplets when a higher power comes for our campus, or when our green spaces are mowed down for rich egos.

# ONE SEMESTER DONE... WAIT, HOW MANY MORE ARE THERE AGAIN? BY HIBA OMAIR

In our room, only one set of white study lights is open. My roommate is still asleep (we both have class at 10), and I'm up, writing this article, when I really should be working on one of the many presentations stalking me this week. It's been over three months since I last hugged my mother. I need to get breakfast as well. My sister misses me. There's that huge essay too. Am I a little tired?

**Just two more weeks, just two more weeks,  
just two more weeks.**

One semester in at LUMS, I somehow lost and gained weight, stopped eating and then started stress eating, made a bunch of new friends and also lost a few, which honestly, might be a personal record for just three months. I have come to hate presentations, hate research (we haven't even done any real research yet), hate reading (I genuinely did not know that was possible for a nerd like me), and also, specifically, hate writing sonnets. I have become a hater.

But then I think a little more, and I do adore the cats, and I do love the green and red buildings, and the gym and the swimming pool...maybe it's not so bad? Most of my professors are great to talk to; I love the living daylights out of all my TAs because they are the kindest, sweetest people who have helped me feel so much better about everything (from my terrible grades to my equally terrible sonnets).

Do weekends feel like a whole Great Depression to get through? Yes. Does every single LUMS coffee taste like shit? Yes, and I'm sorry, but that is true unless you like to drink milkshakes over coffee. But the doodh pati at Baithak...now we're talking! Way better than the overpriced coffee. It's all such a mixed bag, and as a hostalite, being away from your support system means it's so much harder. I wanted this article to be funny and sassy, not a deep dive into my feelings, but feelings rarely listen to instructions.

## Aaye ga? Hai himmat?

Sadly, this is an apprenticeship, a training ground for leadership. So what did we rehearse this year? That bribes work, that poetry replaces policy, that noise trumps debate, and that the law is a stick labelled "Boo". Because *jiski laathi uski bhens*. **Right?**



I can't deny the kind of resilience I've picked up along the way. At some point, I got tired of PDC food and went to the nearest Imtiaz, brought back groceries, and then proceeded to make the worst rice in existence. The rice itself was hard, and there was not much flavor to it given my lack of proper spices. But I had rice for the first time in my life, and honestly...I didn't burn the kitchen down? But after that, I humbly returned to PDC.

These last few weeks have been so busy and fast-paced that I've had to schedule crying time on the weekends, which have shifted from being the Great Depression to No Time For That. There is so much to do, and I think that everyone is being pushed to their limits, especially amongst the freshmen. It's the unfamiliarity of things, presentations and research essays, things we aren't used to yet, that makes this feel like the pits of Dante's hell.

But yes, two weeks left. For me, at least, my last exam is on the 16th, and you will not see a trace of me after that, because Karachi awaits with open arms, gol gappas and love. (Mastani sucks. I have never in my life had worse gol gappas. Ever.) If one semester is this bad, I can't imagine what monstrosity the rest of the four years will sculpt me into. I hope it's someone who is both tougher and kinder, and definitely knows how to cook rice.

# THE ACADEMIC GLOW UP YOU OWE YOURSELF

A GUIDE FOR THE SPRING SEMESTER BY ZOYA SHAHZAD

On the first day of the fall semester, Alina stood in the middle of the Academic Block hallway, clutching her map of campus like it was a lifeline. She had imagined this moment for years walking into university as the “new and improved” version of herself: Alina 2.0, the one who didn’t panic in crowds, who joined a dozen clubs, who suddenly knew how to balance academics, friendships and her cue to when her social and physical body needs a recharge like she had been training her whole life for it.

But within a few weeks, she realised something quietly devastating, the version of herself she had imagined was nowhere near ready for reality. And neither were most of us.

Well, the fall semester tends to break people. It floods, it scrambles, and it reveals the mushy, ambiguous parts of ourselves that we work so hard to conceal. Virtually every freshman brings invisible expectations of perfection, productivity, and belonging and nearly all fumble in the attempt to fulfill these checklists.

**Yet stumbling is not failure. It is the beginning of learning how to walk here.**

## The Illusion of the ‘Perfect Start’

Alina, like many first-years, believed fall was her one chance to get everything right. So she said yes to every club, every study group at the IST lab, every hangout at khokha or PDC. She convinced herself that exhaustion was a normal part of becoming “involved.” But by October, her calendar was overflowing, her sleep was collapsing, and her mental health was quietly deteriorating.

First-years don’t fail because they do too little; they fail because they try to become too much too fast. Spring is where you learn that being selective is not selfishness; it’s survival. Choose commitments that nourish you, not ones that drain you. You don’t owe your time to every opportunity that knocks on your door.



## The Curse of Fitting In

Fall is the season of performance. Everyone, not just freshmen, puts on a mask of who they think everyone else will approve of to like them. A socially accepted version. Alina adjusted what she wore, the sort of jokes she told, the way she slouched while walking to classes, all in comparison with people that she barely knew and who would hardly remember her at the end of senior year! My November she had come to feel like a blurry photocopy of herself.

The fact is harsh but needs to get off our chests: it is exhausting to pretend. The performance-based friendships start to crumble as soon as you stop performing and pretending just for the sake of fitting in. Spring calls forth a different kind of honesty. Show up as yourself. As a person who is unsure, unfiltered, vulnerable, flawed and still growing. Those who stay are the ones worth keeping and growing old with.

## The Silence Around Struggling

When Alina started falling behind in her classes, she convinced herself it was her fault alone. She didn’t email her professors. She didn’t talk to her friends. She didn’t ask for help because she believed everyone else was handling things better.

Almost every freshman believes this lie. This consistency of faith baffles me!

What we forget is that university isn’t meant to be navigated alone. Asking for help is not an admission of weakness; it is an act of courage. Professors are more understanding than we imagine. After all, they once went through the same spiral as ourselves. Spring becomes easier the moment you stop trying to carry the whole world by yourself.

## Procrastination and the Quiet Spiral

Fall makes time feel endless until suddenly it isn’t. Weeks dissolve into assignments, deadlines stack up, and panic becomes a regular visitor. Alina tried to “fix” herself by forcing long, punishing study sessions, but the burnout only worsened.

Spring teaches a gentler truth: change doesn’t come from extreme discipline. It comes from small, consistent steps. Twenty minutes of focused work beats three hours of guilt-fuelled cramming. Progress doesn’t demand perfection; it asks for effort.

## Losing Yourself in the Rush

Many students enter fall with identities they're proud of: artists, readers, athletes, dreamers. By the end of the semester, those identities shrink beneath the weight of academic survival. Alina stopped sketching and journaling which were, in a way, everything that made her feel connected to herself. However, growth requires strong grounding.

Spring is where you reclaim the parts of yourself you abandoned. It's where you remember that your life outside assignments is not a distraction; it is the source of your strength.

## A Renewal, Not a Rewrite

Alinaa's fall semester didn't become the flawless transformation she imagined. But it became something else—an honest beginning. A messy, bewildering, necessary start. The kind that teaches you what perfection never could.

And that is the real lesson here:

**Your fall semester doesn't define you.  
How you rise in spring does!**

Spring offers a second chance. Not to reinvent yourself, but to rebuild yourself with intention. To choose better. To rest more. To speak up sooner. To take care of the person you are becoming. Because growth isn't loud. It's quiet, steady, and often invisible until one day, you look up and realise you're no longer the person who stumbled into campus in August.

**Y**ou've grown.  
You have a long journey ahead of you.



# CLEARED FOR TAKE-OFF

## PAKISTAN'S AVIATION REVIVAL BY AYAAN

Pakistan's journey in global aviation has been a turbulent one. From pilots setting a world speed record for commercial airliners with an average speed of 582.98 mph (938.21 km/h), to pilots facing license scandals, Pakistan International Airlines has been through a rough patch before taking off once again to the west.

PK8303, a routine flight from Karachi to Lahore, crashed into a residential area on final approach, raising questions about Pakistan's international aviation safety standards. An investigation was launched by the Aircraft Accident Investigation Board of Pakistan, with assistance from the French manufacturer, Airbus. Soon after, former Pakistani Aviation Minister Ghulam Sarwar publicly confessed in Parliament that around 30% of Pakistani commercial pilots had "dubious" licenses. International media outlets reported this statement, making Pakistan's aviation sector vulnerable to sanctions.

In July 2020, damaged regulatory integrity led to the European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) suspending Pakistani operations across Europe. In addition, the Federal Aviation Authority (FAA) in the United States downgraded Pakistan to category 2, banning Pakistan from operating new US routes.

From Pierre Cardin uniforms for male and female stewards, to remarkably punctual domestic and international operations, PIA has seen days of glory in the past, making it a historical success for Pakistan. The airline responsible for leasing a Boeing 737-300 and an Airbus A300 to the world-class flag carrier of the UAE, Emirates, was later seen suffering due to a great deal of administrative malfunctions and politicisation.

**A wave of financial instability engulfed Pakistan's aviation sector, as the national carrier posted losses reaching \$270 million in the year 2023, with its liabilities being about five times the total worth of its assets. Dozens of domestic flights were cancelled when fuel could not be obtained for flight operations.**

As part of the recovery program, the Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority grounded 262 pilots suspected of holding suspicious licenses and later cancelled licenses that were confirmed to have been obtained improperly.

Furthermore, Pakistan invited ICAO for a Universal Safety Oversight Audit Programme in December 2021. Pakistan was successfully removed from the "Significant Safety Concern" (SSC) list after ICAO's review.

Recently, Pakistani aircraft soared in European skies again after the European Aviation Safety Agency lifted a five-year-long ban in November 2024. On 10 January 2025, PK749 took flight to Paris, carrying 330 passengers, reviving Pakistan's long-dormant aviation industry.

On 16 July 2025, the British High Commission in Islamabad revealed the successful agreement between the UK's Air Safety Committee and Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority, allowing the resumption of Pakistani operations to the United Kingdom.

Consequently, Pakistan International Airlines has announced the resumption of flights to British cities from August 2025, with further talks with the United States ongoing. Inaugural flight PK-701, operated by a Boeing 777, took off on 25 October 2025 from Islamabad to Manchester, officially marking a trend of the new era of Pakistan's national flag carrier.

Every Pakistani citizen wishes to see Pakistan International Airlines soaring high in global skies again without any restrictions, and the current trajectory proves to aid Pakistan's international success in the field of civil aviation.



# THE EMOTIONAL BLUEPRINT BEHIND MODERN POLITICS

## INSIDE ZOHRAZ MAMDANI'S CAMPAIGN

BY MUHAMMAD ALI

Political campaigns each year remind us of something very important: the winning of the election is not necessarily based on the most realistic policies. It is, oftentimes, about the ability to talk to people and make them feel heard. A good example of this, though not the only one, is the recent electoral success of Mayoral candidate Zohran Mamdani.

It cannot be denied that his campaign was a massive hit. However, the question that truly matters is whether the success was brought about by the policies that he brought to the table. Some of his flagship ideas, such as the rent freeze proposal, have been greatly criticized by economists. Assar Lindbeck, a well-known economist, famously said rent control is "the most efficient technique presently known to destroy a city, except for bombing." Why, then, did the people still support him when his policy was deemed unrealistic? That is because the campaign wasn't based on policy, but it was built on connection.

His use of social media was one of the most prominent aspects of his campaign. **Mamdani realized that the key to reaching Gen Z and young millennials is not to hand out flyers, but to make videos 20 seconds long that sneak into their algorithms at 2 a.m.**

More than that, he understood how to relate to other people. It was no coincidence that he often spoke in Urdu or Hindi. He knew the right way to appeal to immigrants of the subcontinent, and it clearly worked. It worked to the point where Pakistanis and Indians who didn't even live in New York were reposting his content and cheering him all over the internet. He was able to establish himself as "one of us," and in a city where there were many immigrants, that mattered.

Another major element of his appeal was his association with what most of the younger voters consider to be morally correct positions. His public advocacy for Palestine was highly noticeable, and in an era when the rest of the world was shifting its stances, his opinion placed him on the right side of the political spectrum. He used to attend the Pride marches. He was endorsing movements and causes that were already trending on the internet, and through this, he gained the support of the masses.

All this makes us ask a larger question not just to Mamdani, but to contemporary politics in general: How emotive, rather than practical, is much of our political success? I am not implying that his policies were destructive and that what he represented was all misguided. That's not the point. The point is that emotional appeal, cultural association, Internet exposure, and ideological placement may be several times more significant to voters than economic viability.

And to all the *luminites*, setting global politics aside, we see the same pattern when it comes to the student council presidential elections. How many of us vote on the actual leadership potential of a candidate? And how many votes are due to the fact that the candidate is their friend, or because their Instagram campaign is more aesthetically pleasing? The answer to this is fairly obvious.

Emotions often prevail over policy, whether it is a school president or a national leader, and an edited campaign video usually beats a well-written manifesto. If anything, these trends are a reminder to us to be more attentive voters. Having an emotional attachment is not a bad thing, as politicians ought to know their people.

**However, when every action of practical ability is subdued by emotionality, it is then that democracy is turned into a performance, not improvement.**

And perhaps that is the unpleasant reality of modern politics: that it is not always the ability to fix things, but the ability to make people feel that makes the difference.

# THE GHOSTS OF OLD BUILDINGS

SONNETS BY HIBA OMAIR

## THE HOUSE BY THE SEA

And voluptuous waves themselves they'd thrown,  
Towards the House By The Sea coldly grieved,  
Still clinging hard to the cliff, sandstone wreathed,  
The House remained aloof upon its throne.  
  
It was left alone to crumble, decay, and groan  
It whispered to me, with sea rotten breath  
About a woman, a fighter, as she seethed,  
Husband, with a jagir deed, had stole.  
  
Treacherous heart had sold their land for cheap,  
To the pallid foes who dwelt within the House snide.  
She jumped into the waters thrashing wild,  
And made so sure she took her prey down deep.  
  
Later, the House sank, no sins left to hide,  
It is the sea's own cold, awaiting child.

## VENICE UNDERWATER

A Carnevale mask watches appalled,  
Beneath glittering gold Italian sun.  
faded frescos rippling, now barely recalled  
half inside, half out of water, undone,  
swishing around the ruins overrun,  
Sink carved columns, arches, silvery spires.  
San Marco's chimera bell still faintly spun  
For Venetians long gone, nobody admires.  
Canals murmur secrets to the silken stairs,  
twisted iron gates tarnish with tragedy,  
a marble statue sunk to the sea despairs,  
The pride that sank the steepest, far from remedy.  
Slowly and steadily, no one's true fault,  
And Venice is consumed by love and salt.