

Scripps College Journal



Spring 2023 • Volume 22

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Spring 2023

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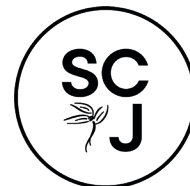


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this is a cliff right next to the ocean.
ruined a pair of shoes for this photo
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Reflections

Alex Martin, *Harvey Mudd '25*

Letter from the Editor

Dear Reader,

Whether this is the first time you've picked up a copy of the *Scripps College Journal (SCJ)* or you've been around since the inaugural issue in 1999, welcome.

Last semester, I was working on my laptop in Professor of Writing, Chair of the Department of Writing and Rhetoric, and Faculty Advisor for the *SCJ* — along with about 250 other roles — Kimberly Drake's office when she suddenly exclaimed, "I have a question for you!" I chuckled and replied, "Oh, boy. This is gonna be good." She immediately leaped out of her chair, held up a copy of the 2019 *SCJ*, and asked if I would help revive the journal. Like so many things, COVID got in the way of *SCJ*'s publication for the past few years. As far as Kim was aware, the 2019 journal she had just shoved in my face was the most recent issue. If you're an observant reader, however, you will notice that you are holding Volume 22. When I spoke to the printer about the cost of printing the 2023 *SCJ*, I half-jokingly inquired if they knew anything about the 2020 journal. An hour later, the printer frantically called me back and informed me that they'd discovered copies of the 2020 issue in their storage room.

The *SCJ* has traditionally distributed physical copies at a Scripps Tea toward the end of the spring semester to celebrate the contributors' and editors' hard work and to raise awareness about the journal. But because of the journal's lengthy hiatus, no current students are old enough to have attended the 2019 launch.

As Editor-in-Chief, I was concerned that the lack of recent institutional memory would hinder the number of submissions we received. Thankfully, I was proven very wrong. We had about 175 pieces submitted from students across the 5Cs.

This year's Editorial Board is small but mighty. While this meant we each undertook more responsibilities, I had full confidence in the team from day one. I could not have asked for a more qualified, caring, and dedicated group of people to introduce the *Scripps College Journal* to the next generation of students at the Claremont Colleges.

I hope you enjoy Volume 22 of the *Scripps College Journal* as much as we here on the Editorial Board do.

All my best,
Molly Yeselson SC'23

Editor-in-Chief of the *Scripps College Journal*

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Wildflowers

by Annie Bragdon, *Scripps '26*

Nonfiction Winner

P*hloxes* overthrew my garden. Variegated pink crowns upheld by green stems crowded and cast shadows on the picked-over strawberries. I foolishly thought I could control wildflowers, not knowing they sprang up and out of the soil with no warning and no regard for their surroundings.

A few years ago, I began exploring the mystery of plants and flowers. Every day, I donned ragged t-shirts and old jeans before heading outside. Under the scathing sun, I hunched over garden beds, slowly accumulating soil under my nails. Cabbage, strawberries, broccoli, tomatoes, eggplant, arugula, zucchini. It was missing something. Mint, rosemary, lemon balm, lavender, thyme, sage. Yes, this was the garden I wanted, the garden I made for myself.

My path to plants and flowers was not straight or predictable. I found myself tending my garden after I learned to tend my health, exploring the mysteries of nature while navigating the mystery of the human body. I have heard the exclamation “Well, aren’t you just a medical mystery!” far too many times, with doctors staring at me the way I now examine those unpredictable wildflowers. Chronic illness locks you in perpetual grieving — the grief of what you cannot do or be for yourself and others. The anguish of hope gained and lost. You grieve for the body you can’t have, the health it can’t provide, the life it cannot give you, and the one it leaves you: plans unfulfilled, promises broken, trips not taken, paths not followed, experiences unlived. Your body mourns the beauty it cannot hold and the peace it cannot feel.

My chronic illness had always impacted me, but I had always persevered, tried to control it. But at some point, you cannot control wildflowers. Chronic hives no longer allowed themselves to be covered, bone pain no longer allowed itself to be dominated, endometriosis no longer allowed itself to be drowned out with Ibuprofen, chronic nausea no longer allowed itself to be glossed over with sea-sickness bracelets, Gin Gins, and Zofran. My body, my garden, was not in control and was too exhausted to pretend to be.

People tell you: you cannot lose hope because if you do, it’s over. I don’t know what “it” is, but I know that not having hope is not the worst feeling.

I have been chronically ill since I was eighteen months old. I have been trying and trying and trying to get better for eighteen years. My body has been a warzone,

an experiment, an exciting mystery for doctors, and a set of symptoms devoid of personhood. It has never been a refuge or a home. I have done every diet, taken countless medicines, had multiple surgeries, and undergone extensive and invasive testing. I have done that — relentlessly done that — for almost two decades. When your body is Sisyphean, hope can feel fatal. At what point can we say, maybe the boulder can stay down here? Maybe the wildflowers can stay? Being chronically ill is one of the most exhausting experiences, and we place so much pressure on chronically ill people to stay hopeful.

When hope fuels your treatment, knowing your illnesses are hard to treat (if even possible), and it doesn't work, you become bereaved. And you kick yourself because you knew. You knew it wouldn't work. But somehow, you convinced yourself it would, that this would be the one that would change everything. It is a rebirth — or re-death — of sorts, the experience of “becoming” chronically ill again because, for a second, you convinced yourself you wouldn't be anymore. And then you do it again. You start again, replanting the strawberries that phloxes will make their own.

I will not and cannot do it anymore. Chronic illness already feels like an endless struggle to tread water, slipping into drowning spells, scarcely staying above the water. Hope can be a life-preserver, and we love to believe, project, and impose that view — but it also can be a cinderblock. False hope is far more dangerous than having none at all.

How could I accept the wildflowers when my acceptance is contingent on their disappearance? How could I get to a place of acceptance with perseverance contingent on hoping I will get better? I couldn't. It is not possible. I do not think I will ever be fully well; I do not know whether I will ever feel better than I do now, I might, but I also very likely might not. People tell me not to say things like that, that it's grim. But it is true, and keeping the facade, doesn't keep depression at bay, it brings it closer.

Hopeless has such sad, pitiful, and tragic connotations. When I say hopeless, I simply mean the absence of hope — forget the baggage. I think my health is hopeless. But I accept that, and it has been the most transformational shift I have made. I am hopeless in my health, but not in my life. Because there is more to life than that. And at least now I can imagine my life. When you depend on hope, you cannot imagine your life because you are waiting for a fundamental change to “begin” your *real* life. I always felt like I could picture my life and what I wanted once I got through this interpolation of illness and disability. Once I accepted my life as it was, I began thinking about what I could do if my life didn't dramatically and improbably change. Why shouldn't I learn to work with the wildflowers instead of against them?

I still try treatments, and I still go to more doctor's appointments than most people (do you text your doctor, too?), but I go into everything with the attitude that if something works, that would be great, but it probably won't, and that's okay. It is easier to keep going now that I don't have the hope everyone always wanted for me. Now

when things don't work, I just keep going. I am not incapacitated by disappointment. Hopelessness doesn't have to be self-pittance or complacency; it can be a form of acceptance.

My relationship with my body and my symptoms is better, too. I used to have an adversarial relationship with both, but I'm slowly bridling the psychomachy, the contention between body and soul. I used to view my illnesses -- pain, nausea, fatigue -- as something my body was doing to me. I now see them as something my body and I endure together. I am struggling, but so is my body. I understand that I am the same entity as my body, but illness creates a detachment. I used to be angry at my body, angry at myself for being weak, tired, and ill. While I still deal with anger and frustration, I don't turn them inward.

"Phlox" means flame in Latin, and I like to think it is a restorative fire. *Phloxes* overthrew my garden; they burned down what once was. Instead of trying to mold ashes into the life I once had, I will learn to live among them. I cannot control the wildflowers, and I won't pretend that one day I will be able to, but that doesn't have to make today and tomorrow less hopeful. Today I will live with the wildflowers, tomorrow I will live with the wildflowers, maybe forever, I will live with the wildflowers.



**Still Life
(Bedside)**

Tara Attanasio,
Scrapps '26

Loch Ness

by Krystal Yang, *Pomona '23*

Fiction Winner

I know one truth. That is, I can only believe one thing: the fathers in my family are always slipping away, like water dripping out of my cupped hands. It happened with my mother's father and his father too. And so, of course, it happened with my own father as well.

According to my mother, he left us the day I was born. It was a hot summer Sunday when my mother drove herself to the hospital in our old Toyota, running her first-ever red light before the entrance to the 101. When she arrived at the hospital, she was already losing her mind from the pain, the doctors rushed to help my mother out of the car. That's when they discovered my father with his face folded between my mother's legs. Apparently, he refused to come out, stuck in some wild, hormonal hibernation underneath the steering wheel until the doctors anaesthetized him, alongside my mother. And when she opened her eyes after the C-section, he was gone.

My mother refused to tell me why he left. In retrospect, it feels like I've spent my entire life craving the truth, but this is a lie I like to tell myself. The answer to my father's disappearance must have been like a family heirloom, a piece of buried treasure bulging from mother's heart like the cancer that eventually metastasized in her chest. Good fortune, she liked to tell me, didn't run in our family bloodstream.

In my dreams, he was always with her. The night before my mother passed away, I dreamt that he was a shadow stooped low over the horizon, as real as a plastic submarine, and she was the ghost of a conch shell, echoing with ambient noise when you cocked your ear against her stomach. Her breathing was haunting and empty and fizzling away from my imagination when I woke up in the morning. But because dreams never make sense, and because my family has always felt a little make-believe, I grew up thinking nothing of it.

One of the first dreams I remember (in that surreal, tip-of-the-tongue way): I was six, curled up in my mother's bed like I always did — or else she would spend all night walking aimless circles around the house instead of sleeping. I fell asleep, and in the dream, my father was a rainbow, and I was a snake. My mother was herself — for some reason, she was her most authentic self in my dreams. We were in a fish tank, or beneath the sea, or maybe floating in a primordial soup. My mother was falling away from us,

deeper and darker, and my father and I arced through the water in desperate pursuit.

The next thing I remember, in that inexplicable dream-logic way, is standing in a nursery. My family and I were tangled on the floor, staring up at one of those hanging plastic mobiles with strange shapes that resembled animals — no, not animals. Creatures, probably. My father and I wrapped ourselves around my mother's waist. We closed our eyes and held our breaths and listened to how her insides resonated at a slower and deeper frequency, like her body was trying to speak something unhuman. We let her vibrations push through us, and I woke up the next day with a raging fever and my eyes burning from sleep. Later, when I told this memory to my wife, she laughed and said she didn't believe me.



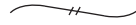
My mother and I tried to find him every summer at the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk. The one with the big spinning mushroom ride and the colorful arcade with pink jawbreakers and expired glow-in-the-dark bubblegum springing up like plastic corpses from the park entrance. We would blow ten dollars on the dumb claw-machine games, then walk our way down to the pier. I would try to traverse the sand in a straight line, leaving a trail of grimy footprints as bait to be devoured by the water or the fish or whatever other things lived underwater.

I liked to waddle in after my mother, my hands balled into empty fists and tucked into the crevices on either side of my nose to form a pair of fleshy binoculars. We would trudge deeper and deeper until the back and forth of the tide made us dizzy, but we were desperate, and the ocean was always opaque with nothing.

For my parents' ten-year anniversary, my mother mailed old wedding photos to our friends. I remember staring at my parents in the photos, their profiles fuzzed out with the grain of the photo. I imagined my father swallowing me whole. I imagined myself burning with shame, searing a hole through his belly and tumbling feet-first into the icy Pacific. Sometimes I dreamt of drying up the entire ocean with my hands.

I told my mother this once when I was sixteen, and we were spending Christmas at the Boardwalk, our feet wrinkling from the damp sand as other families waddled around us. I watched sticky fingers wrap around larger, calloused ones and felt something writhe awake in my chest. My mother started crying, and the tension in my body wound so tight that I started crying too. We sobbed until our eyes hurt and the water streaking down our faces left white grime on our cheeks. And when we couldn't cry anymore, my mother rolled up her pants and soaked her toes in shipwrecked seaweed along the shore, wove her fingers around her waist, and filled the chilling air with her stories. She told me new things this time, like how they used to eat at a local Chinese place just for the plasticky fortune cookies packed with statements like "happiness will bring you good luck" and "in the end all things will be known."

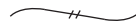
Sometimes we collected scraps from around the house and lugged them to the beach. My mother liked to throw things into the water for him — aspirin tablets, napkins, bridal magazines stuffed into wine bottles. I liked helping her. It was an alien catharsis, copying the stroke of my mother's right arm, launching books and flowers into the swell of the tide, not quite sure where or what or whom I was aiming at.



I got in trouble at school a lot, mostly because my mind was always wandering elsewhere. When I wasn't thinking about the beach, I was thinking about the day he left, about the way my mother might have pushed her skirt up around her stomach and stared at the tops of his lashes from the space between her knees while their cold sweat pooled together in a salty, sour soup. In kindergarten, we drew family portraits. Everyone ripped into the green crayons, their messy stick-figured mothers and fathers smiling against a background of grass and flowers and butterflies. But I picked up the blue crayon and covered my paper in blobs of seawater. My mother didn't keep many photos around the house, but she hung my drawing on the fridge.

After her cancer, when I went back to collect her things, I realized the stick-figures looked like they were drowning.

As I got older, I became a bit more studious. That, or I actually started taking my father's disappearance more seriously. I scoured the neighborhood library for stories, learned how to make an annotated bibliography way before college. After those long evenings, I came home to find my mother pacing around the house, walking toward her bedroom before turning around and running to the front door, then shuffling back to the bedroom, back and forth like a wave that couldn't decide how to break against the rocks.



When I was in high school, I wanted to work at the local aquarium. To get a bit of distance from my mother, who was gradually drifting away. I went through a phase where I was sick and tired of her — her hands, her breathing, the way she always stared at me, unblinking.

At the aquarium, the lady in charge made me fill out a background check about my parents. I told her that I couldn't write down the name of my father because I didn't know his name. She glared at me. There was a wart on her nose. It drooped so low it almost touched her upper lip. It reminded me of the plants on our kitchen counter, which were always chronically overwatered so that their leaves grew, thrived, bloated, then died.



For my eighteenth birthday, I finally decided to tell my mother.

“He’s gone. He’s gone, and he’s not coming back.”

My mother stared at me across the kitchen table. Her eyes: sharp and bright.

“Are you going to say anything?”

She reached across the kitchen table. Touched my cheek. I thought her whole body would be shaking — she was always complaining about how cold it was inside the house — but her touch was firm and insistent.

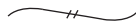
“I can’t handle your moping anymore.” I didn’t mean for this to sting, but the cold shock of her hand made the words rougher. “You’re literally making yourself sick, and for what?”

I knew I could move my face away. It would be easier to turn around and storm out of the room. But it had been so long since my mother held her hand out to me, and in the most monstrous way possible, I wanted her to stay.

“Please, please say something.”

My mother blinked, and her eyes misted over. It was as if she was looking past me, across the interstate highway, toward the nothingness of the ocean. And just like that, I had lost her to him.

He must have been watching us. But I’m not sure. Thinking about this interaction now makes me feel a little seasick.



On the day of my college graduation, my mother spotted his blurry picture in the newspaper. He had blue eyes — cobalt, like mine. So I spent most of my adulthood standing in the dim light of my apartment in Santa Barbara, inspecting that space between my temples in the mirror and watching my pupils expand and contract in my fogging reflection. They were breathing, maybe.

I met my future wife at the same aquarium I worked at when I was sixteen. We met by one of the older displays, the one with a taxidermized plastic eel slithering above our heads. When I snuck my hand into hers, I felt watched by the sea creatures around us.

When I introduced her to my mother for the first time, my mother gave her a small wave and my wife (girlfriend at the time) beamed back. She was born with five extra teeth in her mouth; her parents couldn’t afford a dentist, so my wife’s smile was all tooth and nothing else. Later, when we were about to leave, my mother pulled me aside and breathed softly into my ear.

“Are you going to tell her about your father?”

“I mean ... What is there to tell?”

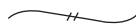
“It’s just ...” My mother made a face that, to this day, still haunts me.

I shrugged her off my shoulder. “I can handle my own relationship, thanks. Nora’s basically part of the family now.”

I thought my mother would be exasperated, but to my surprise, she burst out laughing.

“What’s so funny?”

My mother laughed until she started crying. I was still frustrated with her that I refused to hold her (though now I regret this with every bone in my body). Finally, when she wiped her wet face with the back of her hand and said, “One day, I swear, you’ll understand everything.”



I proposed to my wife at the Boardwalk. We ate at a nearby Italian place and stumbled wine-drunk across the beach, our sandals in our hands and our eyes trained on the sand, the tiny kernels rolling out and around our feet. When the sky reddened with dust, I got down on one knee and opened my mouth. I had my entire speech prepared, but when I looked into my wife’s eyes, those beautiful breathing things, I felt my words sink below the depths, like something was dragging language away from my body.

I wonder if the same thing happened to my father. I imagine this is how our family forgets our truths. Maybe my mother was onto something.

My wedding night was, for the most part, a soft kind of darkness. My wife stroked my hair for hours, which made me go a little cross-eyed until my vision grew blurry, and for a brief moment, I thought about how this will one day resemble the last time I see her, with her legs wrapped around my neck and her manicured fingers massaging the base of my skull. I felt the thin band of color around my pupils pull taut, and the motion hurt, actually hurt, like my optic nerve was being twisted and yanked through my skull. Perhaps this is what happened to my father on the day he left, when he slotted himself into the driver’s seat and knelt down in front of my mother, like he was shaking her awake from a dream.

How did he vanish? Did he disappear in a puff of smoke, like it was magic this whole time? And what about me?

The next day, I caught a few glances of myself in the mirror. Everything looked a bit hazy. In the shower, my wife’s eyelashes were heavy with moisture as she asked me what we should name our child. We can give him as many names as we want to, I told her. When we stepped out, I counted the water droplets clinging to my body.



My mother passed away six months later. The doctors said it was cancer. But

looking at the veins crawling across her whitening face, I imagined the weight of my father's identity cremating her insides, her immune system kicking into overdrive, her cells multiplying in a desperate attempt to protect our family.

The night before her heart died, I rushed her to the hospital — the same one I was born at, coincidentally. Coincidences, it turns out, can be tragic like that. I sat by her hospital bed all night, trembling with exhaustion. Perhaps I picked up my superstitions from my mother, but that night, I felt my father closer than ever. Like if I was lucky, I could reach out and touch him. Like if I leaned over and pressed my ear against my mother's belly, I might be able to hear an echo of a family.

People often describe grief as a deadening thing, something cold that infects you like a slow poison. But people don't talk about how grief can also strike you full of bullet holes. Grief is angry — it lashes out, and I did too, learning over and begging, really begging my mother, one last time, to tell me about my father. Why he left us. Why I had his eyes.

But by then, the truth had started coming to me. Day by day, my wife's stomach ballooned into a bubble of hot flesh, and feeling that unbearable heat at night, I was also realizing. I knew I would change, I knew my father had changed, and I knew that the stories about my father, the ones swimming inside my mother, were changing at that very moment.

So I wasted my mother's dying moment learning something I already knew.



When my mother passed away, he was spotted again in the Caspian Sea. The message was relayed by three fishermen who lived in Turkmenistan. My wife played me the news broadcast on her phone, balancing it on her pregnant stomach, and I chuckled at one of their eyebrows, thick and untamed in a way that made the whites around their eyes spill out from their sockets.

I wanted to hold my mother's funeral on the Boardwalk, but the police got involved and said it was a bad omen for tourism if a woman's ashes were dumped into the sea. My wife and I had no choice but to dig out old sand toys and bury her remains in our backyard. I stayed up for three nights after that, studying the rumors about my father: digging through archival footage, stumbling across articles about new DNA testing technology (written by scientists with capital letter credentials). Was I seeking out the truth or confirming what my mother's stories had been telling me all along?

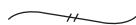


During one of our visits to the Boardwalk, my mother pulled me into a cheap souvenir shop. She pointed to one of those fortune-telling machines, the ones that would spit out a yellow ticket with lucky lotto numbers on it. This one was brand new,

the gold paint perfectly untouched. The animatronic inside — the torso of a mustached man wearing a turban — stared over my head, and I remember turning around, staring out at the beach to figure out what he was gawking at, or searching for. I asked her what she was going to do.

“Your father and I, we never knew what the future would be like,” she replied, digging out a crumpled dollar bill from her shorts. She slid it in. The two of us took a step back, watching the man inside the machine come to life. His eyes glowed red and the speaker below him croaked, “I can see your fortune — come see it too, no?”

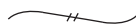
My mother kept the yellow slip with her until the day she died. I know, because when my wife and I visited her during the holidays, we would find her curled up in front of the fireplace, worrying the paper between her teeth. Before the cremation, the doctors handed me the slip, which was so worn and wrinkled that the writing had completely rubbed off. I think the fortune said something about apologies, or a happy reunion with a loved one, or how to discover your own truth, because why else would my mother treasure this prediction like her own child — with all the love in the world, knowing it would eventually transform into a monster before her very eyes?



A few weeks before my wife’s due date, I stopped sleeping. I tried taking medication, but the pills made my skin dry and flaky, and I started shedding bits of myself all over our apartment. Sometimes, if my wife woke up in the middle of the night, she helped me pick at my dried cuticles, laying them out on my pillow like a tarot card reading. But I mostly spent those long nights with my calves tangled around my wife’s knees, stroking her throat as she twitched in her sleep. I would bring her pulse close to mine. Close my eyes and think about the future. The exact moment when parenthood would drag me under, and I would take my first breath, my first real one.



In kindergarten, we read *Where the Wild Things Are*. I imagined my father was one of the horned creatures in the book. I imagined that my mother tamed my father like Max did, by sailing across the ocean, calmly meeting his gaze as he drifted farther and farther away. I imagined that my father was the wildest thing of all.



One day, my wife will give birth, and then I will realize: this was never about my father’s decision to leave. I will spend my nights following him instead of my mother, wondering when my own child will learn about the things that breathe underneath the water. I will wish I knew how it felt. Holding that infantile thing in my arms, peeling back its eyelids with a thumb and forefinger, and watching its irises swim away from the

white light glaring down at them from the ceiling of the operating room. Perhaps this flesh will have my eyes too.

One day, I will unlock all the possibilities hidden in my body. Then, I will do exactly what I was born to do: nestle between my wife's legs, press my ear against her stomach, and listen to the humming, drumming echoes in this untamed space. The buzzing of awakening creatures: my child, and me.



Gentrification

Tara Attanasio, *Scripps '26*

Art Winner

A Holy Guest

by June Lee, *Claremont McKenna '24*

Poetry Winner

At the bedrock bottom of your staircase,
I was baptized into your religion, an unforeseen guest of sixteen
sheepishly entering the shrine of non-silence: where shoes are allowed inside.

Was at least a shred of dignity
spared by the rubbing of soles against the doormat?

And it began — the frailty,
followed by the shepherd I befriended at the foyer,
the German kind, followed by the prick of the foot by the splintered wooden floor,
followed by a tale of their famed fifth cousin recounted by the football fanatic brother,
an affront to the father, a foe of the Patriots.

Past midnight I was wound down by the weighted blanket,
dreambound blessed, four elbows exposed
and pressed against three pillows,
parting upper lips only to whisper
two repressed wishes into the silence:
first to lest beknown that I was merely an apparition,
bound to be made agnostic once again upon exit.

Why You're the Best Mother in the Universe

by Inci Anali, *Harvey Mudd '23*

inspired by "Mountain Dew Commercial Disguised as a Love Poem" by Matthew Olzmann

Because every time we watch a movie,
you think we already watched it years ago,
even though it just came out.
Because you knitted 30 washcloths
when I was away studying in the U.S.
to keep your sanity. Because you probably
sewed at least ten different things for everybody
in the neighborhood. Because you saved
the phone number of that man who called us
pretending to be from the bank
in our phonebook as "swindler." Then, when
somebody else tried the same trick again,
you changed it to "swindler 1" and
added "swindler 2." Because you
make up recipes, and they always taste good.
Because you told me you tried to start the car
by pushing the steering wheel
in your driver's license exam,
and when the instructor promised
he would keep this between you and him,
you asked why because you thought
it was the perfect story to tell.
Because when I laugh at my own jokes,
you laugh at my laughing voice,
and it makes me laugh more.
And one night five winters ago,
when the school bus dropped me off
at some random bus stop and I waited
for you to pick me up,
you emerged with a cup of tea
from Karafirin in your hand,
because you thought it would
warm me up, and it was
the best tea I ever had.

The Third Type of Clarity

by Anushka Shah, Claremont McKenna '26

I always thought there were two types of clarity. Like a double-sided coin, each side is equal but different. Sometimes it hits like a lightning strike, sudden in its explosion. Other times it is a growing wave, the peak an undeniable reality. I should have known better.

A Jump

“We are here.” With those words, it is the moment I have been waiting for. “Are you sure?” they question. I am not, but adrenaline is flooding my blood, and I nod. I am vulnerable to fear but exhilarated by the thrill. I leap from the boat. The water is cold; the waves are slightly choppy. Salt burns my eyes and fills my nose. I swim faster. Long strokes from years of swimming and strong legs move me steadily toward the natural cliff steps. Climbing up the indents of rock, I make my way to the platform. It is a decision I have made after years of lessons on calculated risk. But, standing on the platform, rough and wild seas twenty feet below me, while the small outcrop of volcanic rock the guide warned me about peeks out to the right, it all fades away. I take a deep breath. Nerves grab ahold of me. I hate this fear. I want to extinguish it from my blood. Jump, a little voice whispers. Jump and be free. So I do. Crash. The impact burns. It cuts and stings. My lungs collapse, and I feel cold and hot everywhere. Then, I find it. For a minuscule, too-small second, I am gone. I am immersed in something grander, more purposeful. I am nothing but an instance of existence, a speck of emotion and feeling. I find clarity. Then, it all comes rushing back. My legs kick forward, and my sore arms propel me against gravity and toward the light. “Again!” I scream as I break the surface, my smile wider than it has been in a long time.

A Dive

Whoosh. Pause. Whoosh. Scuba diving is never silent. My breath reverberates and echos, every tiny movement and pause amplified. Bubbles race above my head, slightly crackling and breaking apart in segments. For once, my body is listening. My ears pop and equalize every few meters. My legs, sore from two other dives yesterday, seem revitalized with new energy. This is our last dive, a fifteen-meter shallow drift on the local reef. I had already gone snorkeling in the morning and found two black-tipped reef sharks, a manta ray, and many fish. The dive today is a comfort dive, a relaxing, thoughtful affair perfect to end the occasion. Five meters in. I can still see the subtle breaks of little waves above me. Bright, small schools of fish drift in and out of my view. Ten meters in. I sink deeper and deeper, the rest of the party far enough to pretend I am alone. I play a game of I-Spy: beautiful coral, a lobster, and more fish. Fifteen meters in. I hold onto a rock, pausing to wait for the rest of the group. Ocean undercurrents obscure the direct path of sunlight. Everything dances -- the light and water, the fishes and coral, even the sand barely visible another fifteen meters down. I look up. The bubbles change their tune from the rhythmic whoosh-pause to something more unsteady. A half-finished tank of air and a plastic line are the only things keeping me alive. Humans are intruders in this watery world. Our uncontrolled kicks topple old coral, our air bubbles disrupt the sound of water, and our greedy hands hold keepsakes and take bright pictures. As I look up at the reef wall, meters of colorful life mostly indifferent to my temporary intrusion, I feel small. For fifty minutes I am a guest in this magical world. For fifty minutes, I can escape the harsh realities of land and disappear amid the untamed ocean landscape. If clarity is realizing your small existence, I have found it. I am nothing in this ocean, but something of this world. A double-click sounds ahead, startling me from my philosophical ruminations. The instructor signs me "okay?" I respond, "yes," and start kicking.

A Run

Rain is wet. It is a simple fact, but it feels inexplicably wetter when you run. The harsh raindrops cut into your skin. The night seems to blanket you in a seductive, earthy scent. The pounding of your steps against concrete is a constant low thump. The street lights flicker while the darkness seems to hide secrets between nooks and corners. Emotion and feeling engulf the physical senses. I hate running. I do it anyway, running from my demons and emotions, from the responsibilities that weigh me, and the knowledge of who I should be. Fifteen minutes in, running in the rain, and my old sweatshirt is drenched, but I have never felt hotter. My breath comes in short, choppy puffs. The streets are empty, only a handful of couples under umbrellas risking the

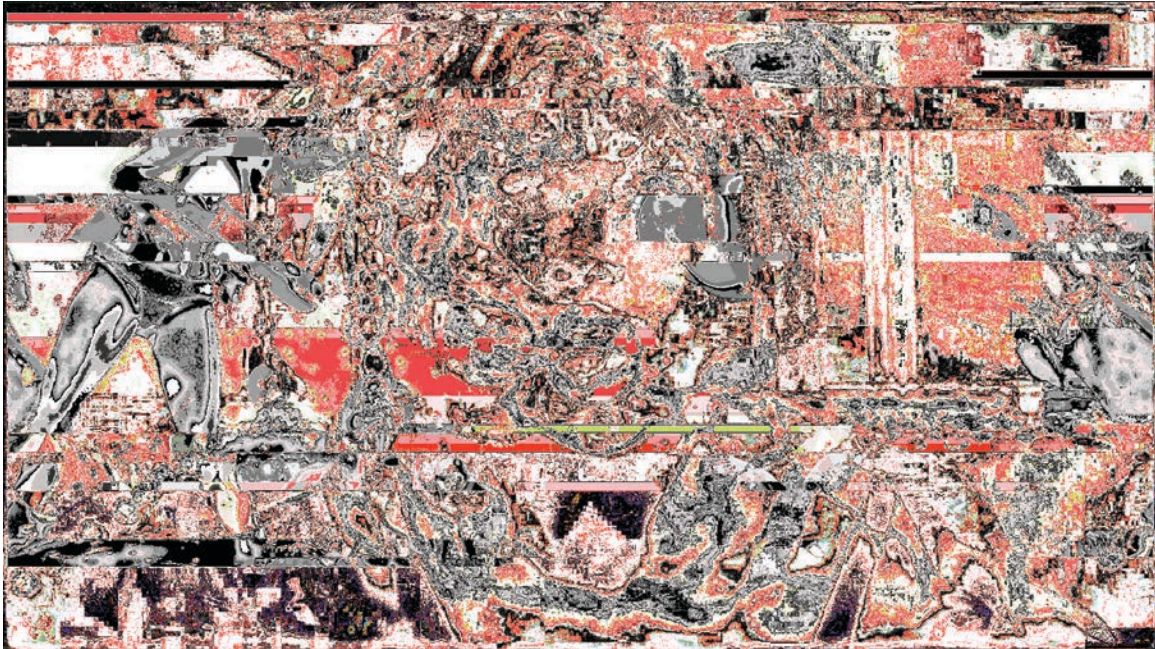
watery gloom. Miserable alternative rock music consumes my senses, my headphones drenched but I cannot find it in myself to care. I run because there is a moment when the endorphins peak; when the question bothering you, pushing you to run faster and harder, is unsatisfactorily answered by hormones. It is a planned sort of clarity, one that you hope is achieved and wait for, anticipating the truth. Now, it finally hits me. Looking upward, I open my arms and ironically laugh. I think of the endless work I must complete, the sorry emotions that define my loneliness, and the merciless rain that keeps falling. But despite those, maybe even because of those, I can remind myself what it means to be alive. It means I have something to live for.

Clarity is many things. It is Passion. It is Connection. It is Purpose. It is a moment that makes you forget and remember. It comes at different times, in different circumstances, with different meanings and realizations. When it comes, it never leaves you. You crave it, always chasing the semblance of peace, the otherworldly feeling it brings. I don't know if I regret finding clarity. It makes me a better person, sometimes. But I do wonder what it would be like to exist never knowing and chasing that feeling.



Her Favorite Fruit

Ciria Seyer-Ochi, *Scripps '25*



Corrosive (*top*) and Repulsive (*bottom*)

Emilio Muscarolas, *Pitzer '25*

This Night Has Opened My Eyes

by Mirabella Miller, *Scripps '24*

Esme stood perfectly still with her back against the wall, breathing in the childhood-home scent which smelled like nothing only to her. She counted her inhaleds and exhaleds rhythmically, preparing to apply a meditative clarity to her outfit choice. She knew from previous experience that the dress she had chosen would ride up as soon as they started walking to the bar and that this would mean sentencing herself to the awkwardness of tugging it down at a rate of once or twice per block. She regarded this tugging as immature, reminiscent of a teenage girl still unsure how to handle her newfound body in front of men. A grown woman, Esme thought, would just wear a dress that fits.

But Esme loved this black bodycon mini dress; she couldn't help herself. Despite its faults, it was the perfect dress for dates, where she didn't know what she would be like until she got there. It had no distinguishing characteristics, just a void of fabric: one color, one layer, one piece, one size. She had grown attached to this chameleonic thing. On dates, it became a part of her, accommodating her every studied-as-to-look spontaneous movement: throwing her head back and laughing, sipping her drink.

There wasn't time to change anyway. As she felt her heart pound at the thought of his impending arrival, she laughed a bit at herself, at the fact that she was having her typical date anxiety over Finn. Finn, who she had known since she was four. This wasn't a typical date, she told herself, and it actually might not even be a date at all. She waited for the text that would summon her to the door to meet him for the first time again. When her phone lit up, she felt her feet move. She wondered what happened to just knocking and why everything had to be so watered-down and evasive these days. A knock was decisive and purposeful. You would never have to ask a knock "what are we?" she thought. An "I'm here" text was so much murkier. You could do whatever you wanted with that.

"Hi," Esme said when she saw him. She stepped out onto her front porch and felt the warm summer night air envelop her.

“Hi,” he responded with a familiar smirk. She relaxed with the realization that whatever she had built him up to be in her head in the few years since they had seen each other, he was just Finn. They studied each other for a split second, sizing each other up quickly enough to pretend the other didn’t see.

“When did you start wearing glasses?” she asked. They were new yet looked so natural on his face that she wondered if she was somehow mistaken and he had always worn them. The round clear frames softened his perpetually intense gaze. The pieces of blond that fell onto his forehead brushed the top of the lenses.

“Oh, these?” he said with mock uncertainty, as if she would be referring to any other glasses. He took them off and studied them. “They actually gave them to me for free as soon as I declared my philosophy major. Thoughts?”

She smiled, not thinking the joke was quite worth a laugh, although it had been a good way to break whatever ice had formed between them.

“They look nice,” she said in the most neutral voice she could muster. She wanted to keep her cards close until she knew if this was a date or not. But the glasses did look nice, in the sense that they made him look like the type of guy who, after she brought him home from some party, spent a lot of time admiring her bookshelf. Picking up titles, asking her questions. Why not just get to the point? she always thought. You don’t need to create some hurried last-minute interest in my intellectual pursuits to justify what we are about to do, she wanted to tell them. When men did this, looked around her room for clues, stalling, it always seemed like some sort of apology. She never knew what they were trying to say sorry for.

She wondered how many girl-bedroom bookshelves Finn had studied at school. She wondered what books they were reading and if they had liked them.

As they walked through her neighborhood to the nearest bar she knew, she took him in through stolen glances. She had to look pretty far up to see his face because he was 6’5”. She loved walking with tall guys because she couldn’t look at them and also see where she was going. It was a pretty good litmus test of her attraction to them: how willing was she to not look where she was going if it meant she could look at them? For Finn, she almost tripped a couple of times.

They sped through their respective reasons for existing here and now. Esme was home from college after her junior year, working on a funded research project with a beautiful young English professor she’d projected onto. It was mostly a passion project, an exploration of the recent rise in female autofiction and how the blurring of fact and fiction on the page has different implications for women.

“That was my pitch anyway,” she told him. “I’m not exactly sure what those implications are yet.”

He nodded. “That sounds really cool,” he said, and proceeded to tell her how he was just home for a week because he was working as a research assistant for a

philosophy professor this summer. These were all things she already knew from her mom, who had heard from his mom that he was going to be home and encouraged her to send the text that brought them here.

They sat at a small table outside the bar. Inside was too loud, and they couldn't hear each other. After two drinks, they were talking about profile pictures. They discussed how, since they hadn't seen each other in three years, their ideas of each other had become a strange amalgamation of their childhood perceptions of one another and their current profile pictures. The conversation turned to hers, a pensive portrait taken in a museum exhibit that featured psychedelic-looking light projections.

"I think the lighting was so cool that anyone would have looked pretty," she joked about the picture.

He frowned. "Why would you say it like that?" he asked.

"Say it like what?" she countered.

"Like that anyone would look pretty in that situation," he said. "Like it's the lighting and not you."

He continued before she could protest.

"Is that what you want to hear from me, Esme? That I think you're pretty? Because I do. You are."

She didn't know what to say. She felt the alcohol slowing her wit, making her less articulate. Since she felt unprepared to construct a sarcastic response, she decided to tell the truth.

"I didn't know if this was a real date. But now I feel like it is," she said, looking into her drink.

"Oh," he responded. "I kind of thought it was a date."

She smiled at her drink, feeling a girlish pride in her own perception. But when she met Finn's gaze, the weight of his words set in. The declaration of his feelings for her should have opened up the possibilities for what they could do together. But instead, it seemed to foreclose them. The fact that they would have sex that night suddenly felt fated to Esme, not by any sort of force but by her own inability to deprive herself of experience. Having sex with Finn, something she had considered with varying levels of interest for so much of her life, was now on the table and within her reach. It was going to happen because it had to. Wanting to seemed beside the point.

Since she knew exactly what was coming, she finished his sentence for him.

"Do you want to—"

"Hang out after this?" she said. "Yeah."

She felt well-versed in the avoidant language of hooking up and regarded with pride and disgust in equal measure the experience that yielded this fluency.

"Okay, well we can't go to mine," he said. She knew it was because his parents and sisters were home. She guessed his sister Lila, two years his junior, had colonized

his bedroom when he left for college. “My parents and sisters are home, and Lila has kind of taken over my bedroom, so I sleep on the couch when I visit.”

She regarded this information coolly, cognizant of her ability to see where he was going before he did. She started to feel as if she was following a script, and it gave her a sense of clairvoyance.

“Are your parents home?” he asked after a pause.

“They’re at the cabin,” she replied perfunctorily.

“Oh,” he said.

“We could go to mine,” she said.



Esme’s front door opened with a turn of the knob and a slight push.

“You didn’t lock it?” Finn asked.

“No,” she replied. “I never really do.”

Unbeknownst to him this was the subject of her main argument with her parents since she had returned home this summer. She had gotten used to the security of her suburban campus, where one could mindlessly leave a laptop unattended in the coffee shop or leave their room unlocked with no fear of theft. This attitude was completely foreign to her parents, who seemed to be suffering from what she diagnosed as a uniquely Gen-X coping mechanism in a world decreasingly legible to them. It would go like this: she would forget to lock the door. They would accuse her of not caring about her personal safety. She would tell them that cable news was rotting their brains and their wealthy neighborhood wasn’t half as dangerous as the Ring doorbell industrial complex wanted them to believe. No one had ever broken in, a fact that both sides used to their argumentative advantage. To her, it proved her point that there was nothing to fear. To them, it meant that their security measures were working.

Finn stepped first into the entryway, wordlessly sitting down on a bench and taking his shoes off. She joined him in the same task, not bothering to turn the light on. She was done first and waited for him to meet her gaze.

“Do you want something to drink?” she asked. She watched him weigh the pros and cons: it would seem polite to accept, yes, but it would also suspend the anticipation of the task at hand. Declining might seem rude, and she might perceive it as too forward unless she was as into this as he was.

She snapped out of imagining what he was going to say to hear what he was actually saying.

“Yeah,” he said. “Do you have water?”

“Of course I have water,” she said, trying to infuse the statement with just the right amount of sarcasm so he would be charmed by her wit but not actually feel stupid.

He laughed. “That was stupid,” he said.

Fuck. She had overstepped. “No it wasn’t,” she backtracked. “I was being kind of rude. I’m kind of like, I don’t know, nervous?”

As she walked to the kitchen, she immediately chastised herself for doing that end-every-sentence-with-a-question thing that gave her away as a woman. He followed her there as she filled a glass.

“I kind of am too,” he said, leaning awkwardly against the counter. “I feel like I know you so much but also don’t know you at all.”

She marveled at the way they were still skirting around each other. They could do this for so long, she thought. But her impatience got the better of her. She handed him the glass and he took a few sips.

“Do you want to go upstairs?” she asked.

He looked around for someone who wasn’t there.

“Yeah,” he said, putting the glass down.



Finn’s presence cast the bedroom she’d lived in for twenty-one years in a strange new light. She felt out of place, like a stranger, or maybe a tourist who had looked up pictures before they got there. She was painfully aware of how young her room looked since she had already brought all her more elevated and adult possessions to college. It was a child’s room with no hope of accommodating her adult self.

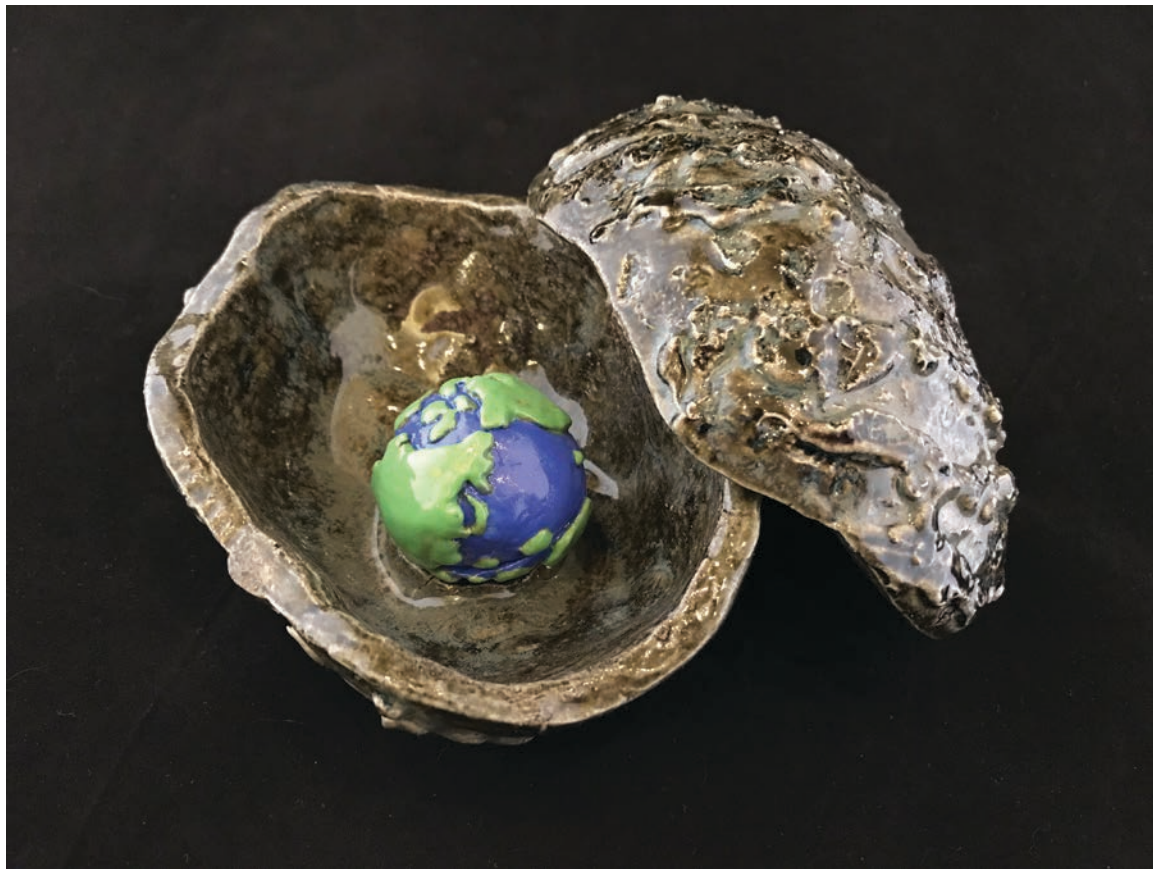
As he kissed her, Esme felt like she was pushing the brakes and the accelerator at the same time, and the car of her body was spinning out under her. The chance to show a new sexually confident version of herself to Finn was enticing, but she couldn’t shake a sense of impending permanence that scared her. A lot of things in her life felt transient and inconsequential: which classes she took or didn’t take, which dining hall she ate lunch at, if she ate lunch at all. As soon as Finn entered her, she felt an unfamiliar decisiveness.

She remembered how in chemistry class, her sophomore year, the teacher had put her on the spot in front of the whole class and asked her if cooking an egg was a physical or a chemical change. “Physical,” she had said, panicking, remembering how water turned solid when it froze, and an egg also turned from a liquid to solid when it cooked. The teacher, a clean-shaven man with kind eyes, had shaken his head.

“It’s chemical,” he said, “because you can’t undo it. You can’t uncook an egg.”

She knew that, in doing this with Finn, she had crossed some sort of threshold that she couldn’t come back from. But it was an exploration thwarted from the beginning by circumstance. He was leaving in a week, Esme thought. We could never be together in any real way because it would be too weird with our families. What they were doing had immense emotional gravity both because of who he was to her and who he could never be.

As he strained over her, Esme stared through Finn's face into the ceiling. The white plaster was pockmarked with glow-in-the-dark stars, like the pimple patches she bought off an Instagram ad. She gripped the lavender sheets, worn soft by a decade of her anxious tossing and turning. She focused on his The Smiths t-shirt crumpled on the floor. Morrissey stared back at her. If there are some stones best left unturned, she thought, adulthood seemed kind of about picking the right stones. She hadn't known this was going to be the wrong one until she picked it.



The World is Your Oyster

Grace Zhang, *Scripps '23*

Liminal Spaces

Sage Wong-Davies, *Scripps '25*



Sick

by Ari Daniels, *Scripps '23*

Look at that tree! Struck by lightning
and just toppled over, dead.
Her crown has split, her sap is running,
her bare roots exposed to the chill night air.
This is no shelter.
Just one burning cold, freezing hot, decaying
darling Diva.



Soil

Jessica Yim, *Scripps '25*

Forget-Me-Not in Ten Constellations

by AJ Jolish, *Scripps '25*

1. Jean shorts and a tank top despite the cold, the rain. We booked it back to her room when the first torrent struck but got soaked to the bone anyway. If I had been paying any attention, I would have seen it coming: the thunderstorm and the breakup.

We're sitting on her floor, her long hair dripping intermittently onto the rug. I can feel the water squelch in my socks. We've been officially dating for three months, the unofficial runtime stretching back much further.

I watch her lips as I wait for her to speak. They're chapped. They always are in winter; she can never hold on to lip balm for more than five minutes without losing it. My hand digs in my pocket for mine, finds it, holds it out to her, and replaces it when she shakes her head no. Be that way.

Words elude her. In the past, she's resorted to clichés. She once told me I was "the bee's knees." When I flew home for the weekend, she said, "absence makes the heart grow fonder." She said she loved me three weeks after we met.

She picks at her turquoise nail polish. I track the flakes as they settle on the floor. "I hope you understand I'm not the only fish in the sea," she says.

2. This time, both of us are astronauts. We've been training our whole lives for today, and here we are: liftoff. I'm shaking, and she puts her hand over mine to buckle my seatbelt. The click comforts me, and I return her lopsided smile.

Our schedules are packed from dawn to dusk, but we make time. Our first kiss is in front of a view of the entire planet. When she holds me, not even gravity can impose itself between us. The other astronauts videochat with their spouses whenever they want, but I know they're rabidly jealous when I reach out and pluck a fallen eyelash off her cheek. We don't blow it away (the air recycling forbids it), but we make a wish anyway.

When she breaks up with me, she does not tell me she "needs some space," but I

wish she had. Our situation is too ridiculous to be serious. Instead, she talks extensively about the pressures of work, of being away from her family. At the next crew dinner, she avoids eye contact while I count the number of times I chew each bite of our individually pre-packaged meals.

Our crewmates seem pleased to swap their envy for pity. They wince every time I open my mouth, bracing themselves to hear heartache they have no patience for. We all have work to do. It's another three months before we go back down, and when I cry, the tears form saltwater spheres around my eyes.

3. I'm a Renaissance oil painter, and she's my muse. Women in my classes lament that we aren't allowed to paint male figures, but contemplating the female form never bothered me. She and I make extra appointments after hours, and I start a series cataloging her collarbones. I touch her to position her chin, lingering for longer than strictly necessary. This is how it begins: my hand in her hair splays as she pushes her head back into it, her neck flexed, my fingernails on her scalp, lightly.

When she invites me to her house for dinner, I'm nearly too bashful to say yes. I'm unfamiliar with the choreography of wealth, so she teaches me which forks to use in what order, when to compliment the estate, and how to answer questions about my family. It works like a charm: her parents adore me.

They take me with them on their annual trip to the coast. The beach is irresistible, the sunsets miraculous in their audacity. We lounge on the sand, trying to toss grapes into each other's mouths. There is nothing but passion and the time to savor it. She reads me her favorite poems, and I fill a sketchbook with just her silhouette.

After only a year, she becomes enchanted by a convent in Tuscany. She never wanted to marry, and this way she doesn't have to. I wish I could be happy for her, but they allow no decorative possessions and no lovers in the house of God.

4. We're rivals in the Wild West. She's a ranger famous for catching outlaws, and I'm the most notorious robber of them all. We circle each other for years, hearing stories, hiding our curiosity, before we finally meet. When she catches up with me, I offer her a whiskey. She grimaces as she sips, but her voice is steady as she challenges me to a game of poker. I accept. As we play, I memorize every tiny shiver in her face, every furrow of her arched eyebrows. I can't resist letting her win. When we flip over our final cards, the righteous satisfaction rolls off her in waves. She lists my crimes with a knife to my throat. I grin, and when she looks into my eyes, she can't bring herself to kill me.

We see each other in fits and starts for years, each time electric with the expectation that it'd be the last. We are the only ones who understand each other, our need for the chase. Even so, I would give it all up to be with her. I don't say it in words, but she sees the look in my eyes one humid July evening when I spot her across the

saloon. She shakes her head once very quickly, and we never see each other again.

5. We're stray cats adopted by the same family. We spend our days sleeping in pools of sunshine, and we have enough to eat every night. We spend almost all our time touching in some way: paws kneading fur, or whiskers brushing, or tails intertwined. Her favorite activity is watching the street outside the living room window, her absinthe eyes tracking the cars as far as she can into the distance. She paws at the second-floor windows as birds build treetop nests.

One day, I find a mouse in the attic and give it to her to hunt. I wish I hadn't. She doesn't let it die for days, and there is no going back after that. It's obvious by the way she paces down the hallway that her escape has become inevitable. She tries to convince me to come with her but doesn't try very hard. I watch her squeeze through an open window and drop the two stories to the sidewalk. She lands unharmed but walks back into a lifespan a quarter of what we could have had together.

6. I'm a ghost haunting her house. I water her plants for her when she forgets. I try not to watch her sleep, but I get so bored. Sometimes, she brings friends over, and it's an ice-cold shock to remember that there is a world full of people out there. I don't like her friends. If she was the only person I saw for the rest of my afterlife, I would be satisfied.

I go about the gestures of haunting, but she's too much of a skeptic and it's getting embarrassing. I cut the faces out of the photos in her newspaper, she forgets to read it. I steal her jewelry, she assumes she's misplaced it and responds with a shrug. I turn the radio on and off, she thinks it's a glitch and doesn't have the interest to look into it. I'm not powerful enough to change anything about her life enough to make her care, so I spend my days tracing the outline of her profile, my finger a fraction of an inch away from touching her skin.

This isn't something a healthy person would do, but it's okay because I'm long-dead. I have no choice but to spend all my time thinking about her. Ghosts don't sleep, so nobody can blame me for sitting on the floor next to her nightstand, watching each rise and fall of her chest like a new revelation. I hope she would be flattered that it's possible for someone to love her this much, but that's not how she would react. I know her too well. Her first emotion would be shock, bleeding into pity, bleeding into disgust.

7. In this one, we're high school sweethearts. She ends things the day after graduation at the ice cream shop where we had our first date. She says something about different forms of intimacy, how I'll be just fine, and why she needs to find herself as an adult before she can settle down. I never stop loving her. I follow her to the East Coast for college, and we are roommates for half a dozen painful years. We never talk

about it, but I have a sneaking suspicion that she doesn't care enough to gossip about me.

Everyone in my life tells me I have to move out, but I wait for her to make the decision. I move through life looking for moments she would love, like the hummingbird nest I see on a walk one day and the vintage brooch I don't have the money to buy for her. I keep lists (her favorite flower is a forget-me-not, her favorite movie is *Mary Poppins*, her favorite soda is orange cream), so I never ask the same question twice.

Every year, she and her partner invite me to their New Year's Eve party. I show up on time, and they're never ready. I can't help myself: I help set up the chairs, I help plate the snacks, and I help welcome guests into their home. By the end of the night, she's too drunk and sprawls asleep on the couch. As time passes, the champagne gets more expensive, the couch cushions more tasteful. One year I'm more obvious than usual, my eyes on her lips, the hem of her silk slip dress, the smudge of her pink lipstick. She giggles *why are you looking at me like that?* Even though she already knows. Does she want me to say it? *I'm yours* waits on the tip of my tongue. *I would give anything for you to kiss me* sticks to the roof of my mouth. I shake my head, say nothing. I think: *you will be my undoing.*

8. What about if we never meet? I sit somewhere else on the first day of psychology class. She is exactly the same as every other beautiful girl whose name I don't learn. I fall in love with a different person. She breaks my heart too, but it's less devastating.

When my neighbor mentions her hometown, it doesn't affect me at all. When she gets married, I do not hear about it from mutual friends I do not have. Maybe I see her on the street, years after we do not meet, and I'm struck by the way she scrunches her nose when she smiles. Or maybe she never once takes up space in my mind.

9. It's only one out of a trillion timelines that I break up with her instead, and the reason is still that she doesn't want to be with me. It doesn't matter; I have the self-respect to make her listen to one of the speeches I wrote in my notes app. She stands the whole time, wringing her hands and staring at her boots. I cling to the fact that I was the one who walked away. I nod when I see her on campus. Eventually, I smile.

10. She tells me she doesn't love me during a thunderstorm. I cry on the bench where we had our first kiss. I cry on the floor of my dorm room. I cry in front of her and seven of our friends. I feel like shit way after I should already be over it.

One Sunday, I stop imagining what would have happened in another universe.

I'm sitting on a roof, the terracotta tiles pressing ridges into my legs. It's winter, and I let myself shiver, relaxing into the rhythm of my teeth knocking together. I used to

say I am nothing if not a romantic, and when she told me “it’ll pass,” I wanted to prove her wrong. Yes, I have found something better than proving her wrong -- when I think about her, she’s not the goddess at whose feet I used to grovel. It’s not that I never miss her, but that those thoughts are never prayers.

I breathe out and watch the puff of warmth dissolve into the night. I tilt my head back, let the wind brush the curls from the nape of my neck. I search the constellations for my own zodiac.



Moulton Barn Sunrise

Devon Overbey, *Harvey Mudd '24*



Blue Girl

Elisa Laloudakis, *Scripps '26*

Nothing (Somewhere)

by Cecelia Blum, Scripps '24

In a burning orb
On a bed of ice
At the supermarket for \$4.99 a pound

Can run
Can't hide
May migrate to Mars
And Jupiter, in my dreams

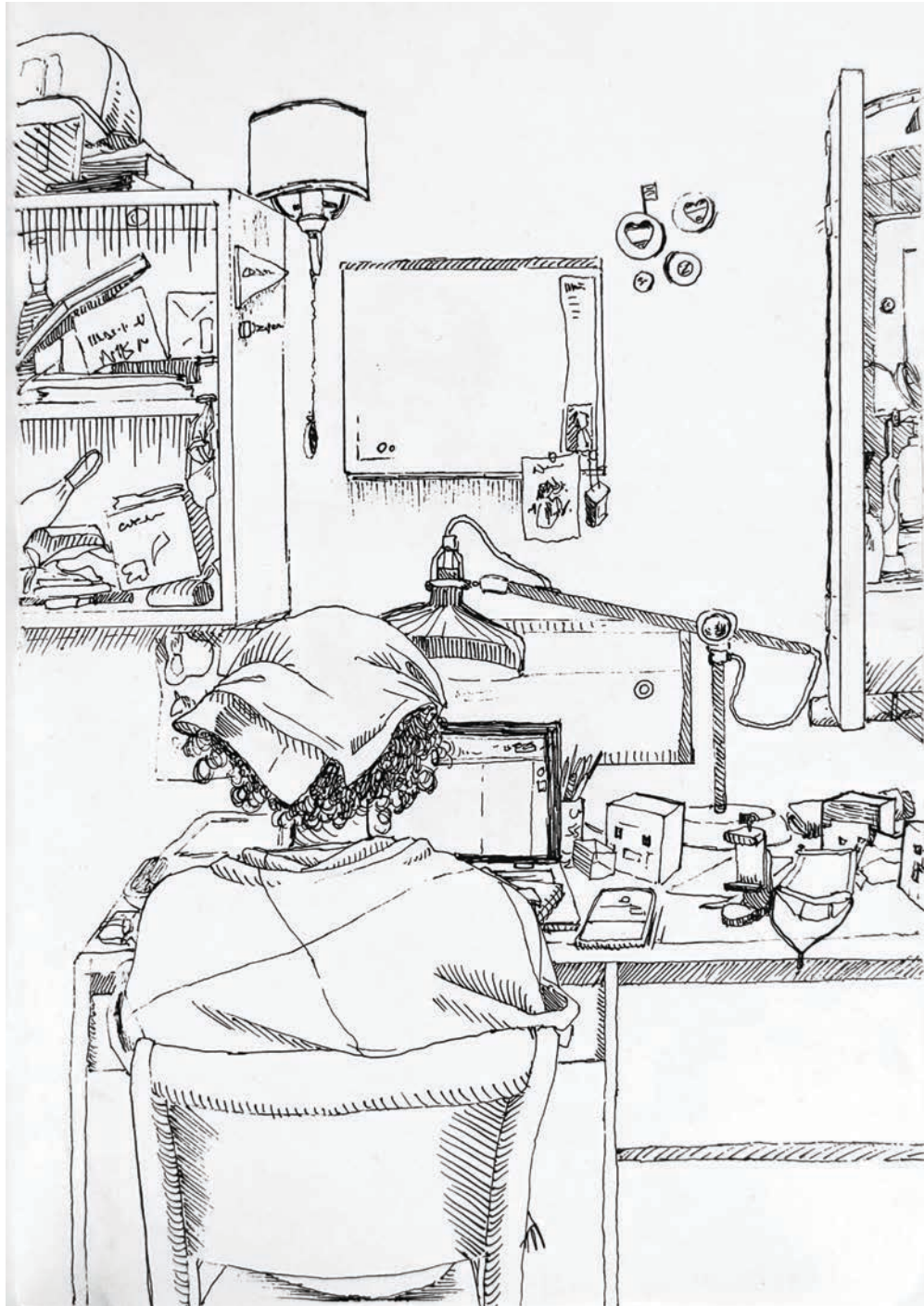
But here I've ran aground, unable to dislodge
I die but I won't because someone will take
All of my places

At the end of the day
When the glass doors collide
The asphalt parking lot so painfully bleakly beautifully fatally
Infinite

Crowdfunded miasma of crude oil
I love you

The West Corner

Gabi Seifert, *Scripps '23*



Selina Meyer and Richard Nixon: A Nixonian Character Analysis of *Veep*

by Porter Reyes, *Pomona '25*

Many political insiders hail HBO's hit television show *Veep* as the most accurate television show about American politics.¹ *Veep*'s protagonist, Selina Meyer, starts in season one as the Vice President of the United States — a position that never satisfied her. After being promoted to commander in chief following the former President's resignation, she goes on to lose the following presidential election but regains the presidency in the final episode.² Meyer's political journey mirrors that of another former vice president turned commander in chief: Richard M. Nixon. Throughout the series, despite differences between their superficial characteristics like their upbringing and sex, *Veep* includes a surprising amount of Nixonian overtones, parallels, and allusions that suggest an intense similarity between Meyer and Nixon.

The strongest evidence supporting Meyer's resemblance to Nixon is that she attributes the impetus for her desire to become President to her experience at Nixon's inaugural ball. In season five, episode nine, Meyer's daughter Catherine interviews her for a documentary. Catherine asks Meyer when she first knew that she wanted to be President, to which Meyer responds: "It was 1973... Daddy asked me to be his date for President Nixon's inaugural ball... Daddy leaned into me and he said, 'You know, a lot of people don't like Nixon, but by God, they respect him. And that's you, peanut.'"³ Thus, Meyer's father telling her that she, like Nixon, may be disliked by many but will earn respect is what prompted Meyer to run for President. Meyer smiles after telling this story, but then her grin fades, and she looks off to the side, conveying sad contemplation. Perhaps in this moment, Meyer comes to understand that her political success cost her dearly. Like Nixon, Meyer is a ruthless political operator — she did whatever it took to win the presidency, even breaking the law. While this path led to success, it resulted in her being remembered unfavorably by the public, a fate Nixon shared. Furthermore, Meyer's connection to Nixon is subsequently strengthened when she proclaims in the next scene that "I don't want to jinx things, guys, but I think maybe

we should start making our list of who I'm going to punish when I win [this election]."⁴ Considering that the show explicitly mentioned Nixon shortly before Meyer says this and that Nixon was known for his vindictiveness, this statement is likely a Nixonian allusion.⁵

Veep includes many more instances in which Meyer's character and political career are likened to Nixon's, the most obvious of which relates to the infamous Watergate scandal. In season five, episode six, a scandal, dubbed "C**tgate," emerges in which the media reports that one of Meyer's staffers called her a "c**t." Furious, Meyer demands that her staffer Amy launch an investigation. When it does not yield timely results, she fires members of the communications department. During a discussion about this decision, Amy exclaims that "She's becoming seriously unhinged. She has gone full-metal Nixon."⁶ This phrase indicates that Meyer was exhibiting Nixonian behavior with full force. In particular, Amy is likely referring to Nixon's desire for absolute loyalty from White House staff.⁷ Thus, in addition to "C**tgate" referencing Watergate, the show explicitly states that Meyer resembles Nixon once again.

Another more subtle Nixonian allusion occurs in the ninth episode of season four. During a congressional hearing on the topic of alleged misconduct by the Meyer administration, the President's personal secretary Sue reveals the existence of incriminating voice memos sent via iPhone. The way this political scandal emerged is similar to how the White House tapes were revealed to the public. Alexander Butterfield, who served as Nixon's deputy assistant, was the first to tell Americans about the White House tapes.⁸ While Sue and Butterfield do not share the exact same role, they are similar in their status as relatively obscure staffers. Yet, both had information that had the potential to bring down the President. Thus, this plot line in *Veep* likely serves as a twenty-first century version of the scandal surrounding the White House tapes, which furthers Meyer's connection to Nixon.

Veep includes many more situations in which Meyer's behavior and political career resemble Nixon's. For example, in episode eight of season three, Meyer experiences a visually problematic eye twitch during a debate. This mirrors the challenge Nixon faced during his first debate against JFK, in which Nixon looked uncomfortable because of his knee injury.⁹ Additionally, like Nixon, Meyer committed election interference to secure the presidency by working with a foreign government.¹⁰ But isolated examples such as these are not where the similarities stop: Meyer also possesses key Nixonian qualities.

One of Nixon's characteristics that Meyer embodies is described best by historian Joan Hoff. Hoff describes Nixon using a term he coined: "apprincipled." In his book *Nixon Reconsidered*, Hoff explains the distinction between an aprincipled and unprincipled person:

An unprincipled person is one who consciously lacks moral scruples and is

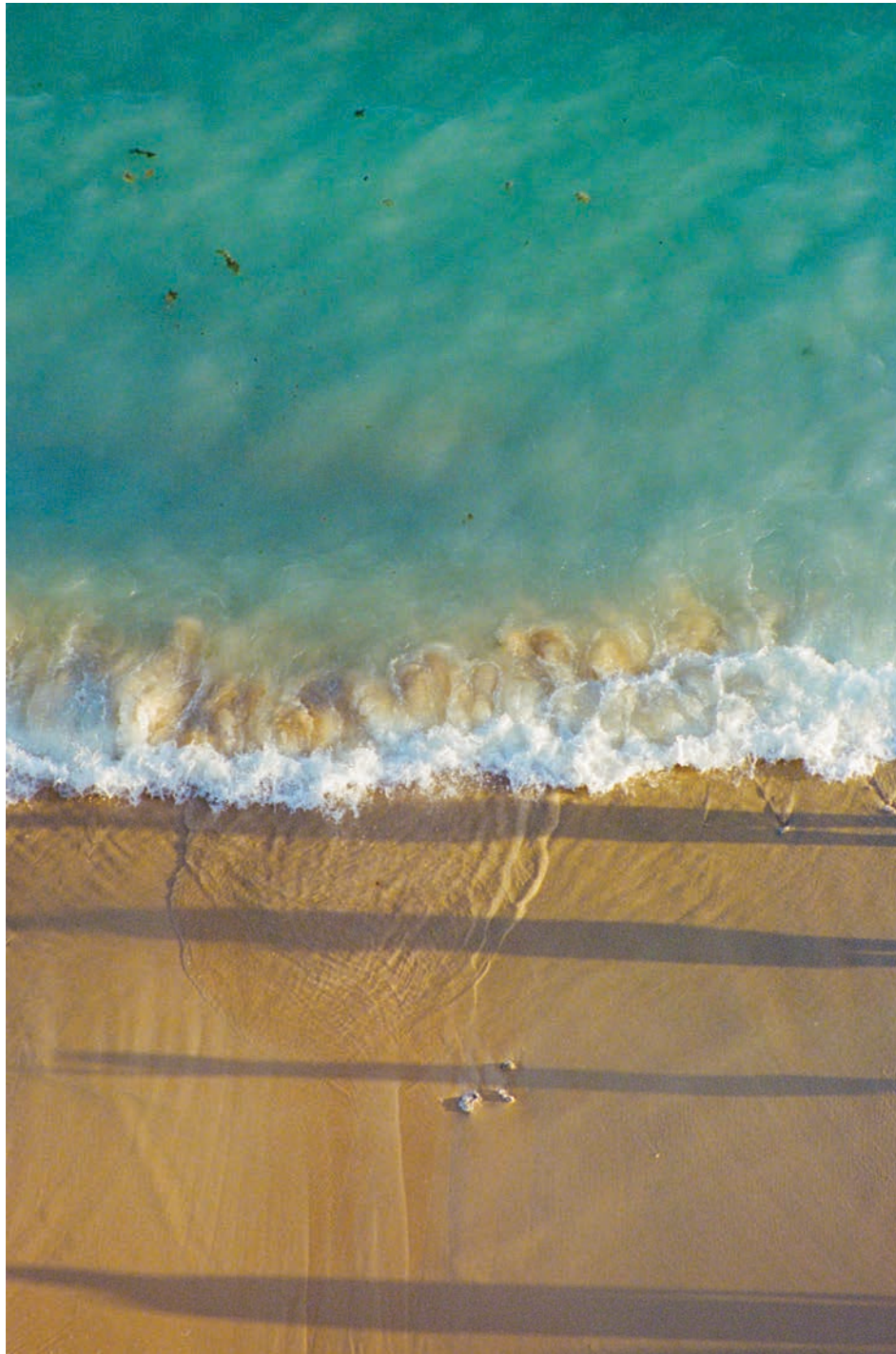
presumably aware that standards are being violated. In contrast, the aprincipled person, seldom reforms his behavior or expresses remorse for transgressions against societal norms because there is no conscious admission of wrongdoing — no apparent awareness of conventional moral or ethical standards.¹¹ (Hoff 3)

Meyer displays this attribute throughout the series and exemplifies it toward the end when she betrays her daughter to win the presidency. At this point in the show, Catherine has told her mother she is dating a woman. Yet, when choosing between gaining a governor's support that would ensure her political survival and banning same-sex marriage, Meyer does not hesitate to make the politically expedient choice: "In exchange for your support, I will raw-dog a plank right up our party's platform, and I will outlaw same-sex marriage."¹² Notably, Meyer mentions this position goes against her party's platform. Like Meyer, Nixon had no problem betraying his party's ideology if it was a politically wise decision, which left conservatives feeling betrayed.¹³ As Hoff observes, as an aprincipled person, Nixon did not view his tendency to go against his party's domestic policies — which ostensibly reflected his ideology — as immoral. Rather, Nixon's ideological flexibility was a cornerstone of his political strategy.¹⁴ When Catherine angrily confronts her mother for agreeing to overturn same-sex marriage, Meyer demonstrates a lack of remorse and infidelity to her party's ideology: "Can you believe I'm having to deal with this right now? ... It is just the party platform. It's like a to-do list of things we're not gonna do."¹⁵ This interaction shows that Meyer is aprincipled, which is a key Nixonian quality.

Nixon's refusal to conform his policy proposals to conservative ideology exemplifies one of his political strategies known as "triangulation," which Meyer also uses. The term was coined by political commentator Dick Morris, who explained that triangulation means "[taking] the best from each party's agenda, and [coming] to a solution somewhere above the positions of each party."¹⁶ Meyer demonstrates triangulation in the second episode of season three when she contemplates her stance on a cutoff date for women seeking abortions: "We [just can't go] over 40... I can't stick to 24 weeks now because that's gonna make me the most liberal ... [compared to my opponents]."¹⁷ Here, Meyer uses triangulation by trying to find a middle ground between a liberal and conservative abortion policy. This instance shows that Meyer bases her domestic policy on political considerations rather than personal convictions — a well-known Nixonian tendency.

While Meyer gained the power and influence she desired, like Nixon, she left a terrible legacy. Although Nixon had significantly more achievements than Meyer, he is nonetheless remembered similarly by many Americans as corrupt and unsuccessful. Nixon and Meyer's story should cause Machiavellian political thinkers to reconsider a critical question: do the ends *always* justify the means?

(see pg. 61 for notes)



High tide

Alex Martin, *Harvey Mudd '25*

Overgrowth

Cira Seyer-Ochi, *Scripps '25*

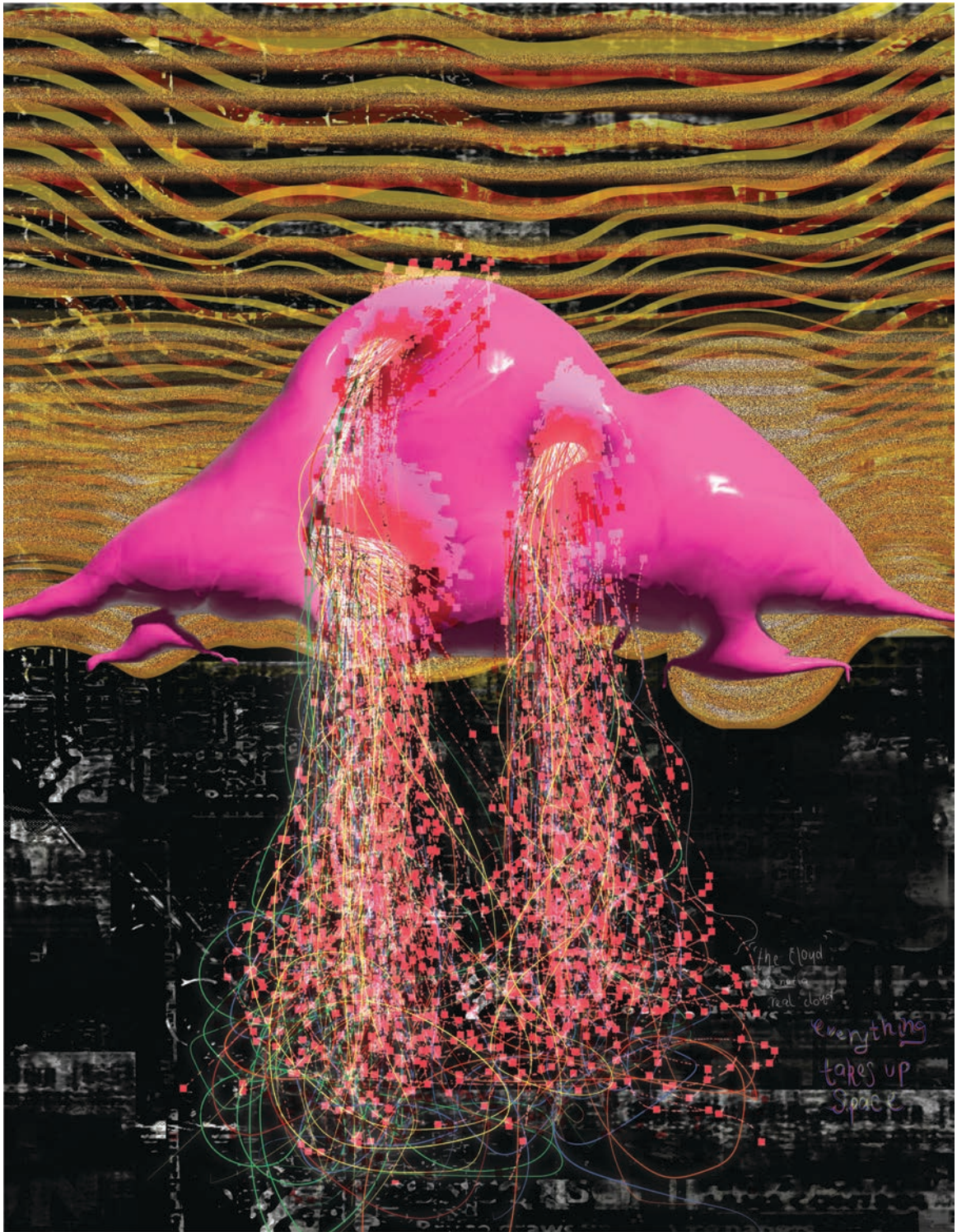




Chaotic Dynamical Systems

Gabi Seifert, *Scripps '23*

The Cloud (*right*)
Cecelia Blum, *Scripps '24*



Defining Borders

by Tess Frazier, *Scripps '26*
Sands Award Winner

Borders not only define the physical confines of neighborhoods, but they also play a dynamic role in defining the lives of their inhabitants. Jane Jacobs, in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, defines borders rigidly, framing them as limitations — a “curse” (261) — that “[exert] an active influence” (257) and channel physical and spiritual life into destructive patterns. In *My Brilliant Friend*, Elena Ferrante’s characters Lila and Lenu complicate Jacobs’ view of borders. Although borders define both girls, their responses to imposed conformity lead them down different paths. Despite feeling trapped by borders as a child, Lila defines herself within the confines of the neighborhood and becomes dependent on borders — creating her own for safety and control. In contrast, Lenu never feels empowered within neighborhood boundaries, so a desire to escape motivates her. The arcs of both women complicate Jacobs’ narrative that borders are destructive and limiting. Through borders and their interactions with them, Lila and Lenu’s childhood friendship and diverging adult lives are delineated. Though confining, the girls’ relationships with borders allow them to define themselves.

Having only seen the world from inside their neighborhood, Lila and Lenu’s early friendship builds on their curiosity about borders and their limits. To Jacobs, “the root trouble with borders ... is that they are apt to form dead ends ... They represent, for most people ... barriers” (259). Capitalizing Jacobs’ principle of borders as barriers, the parents of Naples tell stories to create social borders that restrict movement and curiosity and promote safety. While this enculturated fear leads Lenu to believe that “up or down ... we were always going toward something terrible” (29), Lila is not restricted. For her, the presence of borders inspires the very curiosity they are supposed to eliminate. She challenges boundaries by misbehaving in class, throwing rocks at bullies, and exploring dark cellars. To Lenu, “although [Lila] was fragile in appearance, every prohibition lost substance in her presence ... she knew how to go beyond the limit” (64). Lila’s rebellions push the boundaries of Lenu’s comfort. Captivated by Lila, Lenu follows her up the stairs to the apartment of Don Achille, the “ogre of fairy tales,” whom they were “absolutely forbidden to go near” (27). These relatively safe transgressions of both physical and social neighborhood boundaries solidify the girls’ friendship.

As she grows up and sees beyond the borders, Lila's relationship with borders changes from rebellion to conformity. After panicking during her first excursion beyond the neighborhood, Lila experiences "episode[s] of dissolving margins" where "outlines of people and things suddenly dissolved" (89). This leads Lila to represent Jacobs' assertion that "people who live behind project borders and feel estranged and deeply unsafe about the city across those borders are not going to be much help in eliminating district border vacuums" (402). For Lila, this manifests as fear of the physical city beyond the neighborhood as well as its norms and people. Lila's fear not only causes her to be unhelpful "in eliminating ... border vacuums," but she actively works to create more borders. On New Year's, Lila's episode of dissolving margins occurs when "Rino had lost his usual outline, she now had a brother without boundaries, from whom something irreparable might emerge" (180). Lila feels out of control, and in response, creates her own borders to replace the vanishing ones around her. This is embodied physically as she "narrowed her eyes, squeezed them almost until they were closed" — Ferrante notes Lila "narrowing of her eyes" a total of ten times (213). Because her parents forbid her from continuing her education, Lila focuses energy inwards on the neighborhood by joining the family business and marrying Stefano, a prominent bachelor. To prevent depression, Lila's life must be contained within a narrow focus, like a draft horse wearing blinders. Borders, their creation, and their breaking empower Lila — at least at first — explaining why she works to create her own even when they are not provided physically. For Lila, borders do not only represent "barriers" (Jacobs 259) but also freedom.

In contrast, Lenu has a more straightforward relationship with borders, which emerges from new opportunities that lead her outside the neighborhood. Attending school in the city causes Lenu to feel "as if our neighborhood had expanded" (197). Through education, Lenu safely escapes the neighborhood's confinement, and an increased understanding of both language and literature inspires her curiosity and desire for a bigger life than the neighborhood can provide. She even wonders if "only our neighborhood was filled with conflicts and violence, while the rest of the city was radiant, benevolent?" and feels safer outside the neighborhood than within (137). While Lenu grows beyond the boundaries, Lila restricts herself within them.

Lila and Lenu's diverging relationships with borders metabolize in the physical changes puberty causes; while Lila narrows, Lenu expands. After spending a summer apart as teenagers, Lenu describes how Lila's "old clothes were short and tight, ... they hugged her body more than they should" (208). Lila's clothes symbolize the neighborhood, and although they no longer fit, Lila continues to wear them, confining her body and mind. Instead of growing out, Lila grows up, becoming slim and tall. Lenu describes Lila's poignant beauty, explaining how observers "gaze on the childish shoulders, ... on the narrow hips and the tense buttocks, on the black sex, on the long

legs” (284). By forcing herself to fit physically and emotionally within the neighborhood, Lila becomes the most desirable girl. Alternatively, as Lenu’s body changes, she describes herself as “tarnished. I looked in the mirror and didn’t see what I would have liked... My whole body continued to expand but without increasing in height” (120). These changes occur while Lenu is in middle school when she is living her life beyond the neighborhood and also expanding her mind through education. Her negative self-image reflects her psychic displacement, which increases when her mother makes her feel “ashamed” and “indecent” about her “big breasts” (102) and changing body. Similarly, Lenu feels isolated by her education, which the neighborhood does not value. When Lenu leaves home to spend her summer in faraway Ischia, she feels her beauty: “I looked at myself in the mirror and ... marveled: the sun had made me a shining blond, but my face, my arms, my legs were as if painted with dark gold” (233). However, this feeling is short-lived following her return to the neighborhood where changes in physique leave her feeling “excessive, anomalous” (233). Because she has expanded beyond the neighborhood both mentally and physically, Lenu finds her power and beauty when she leaves.

My Brilliant Friend culminates with Lila and Lenu living separate lives, which is seen by examining their relationships with borders. To Jacobs, “railroad tracks are the classical examples of borders, so much that they came to stand...for social borders” (257). Lila and Stefano buy an apartment where “two hundred yards away ran the gleaming tracks of the railroad” (Ferrante 288). Although Lila is starting a new life, she feels safe defining herself as living within the visible neighborhood boundaries. But Lenu finds border zones dangerous. Her experience of the railroad is ruined by Donato Sarratore, the poet-railroad worker, who sexually assaults her. He tells Lenu that “he would wait for [her] forever, that every day at noon he would be at the entrance to the tunnel” at the neighborhood border. In response, Lenu “shook [her] head forcefully: I would never go there” (285). Although the “border vacuum” is a safe place for Lila who feels secure among concrete boundaries, Sarratore’s presence solidifies Lenu’s feeling that she will never be comfortable in the neighborhood (Jacobs 402). Lenu believes the neighborhood is “a whirlpool from which any attempt at escape was an illusion,” but Nino shows her escape is possible (220). Lenu’s love for Nino, who can “enter and leave the neighborhood as he wished, without being contaminated,” reflects her own desire to leave (330). Although leaving the neighborhood as a kid during “the stormy move had almost cost [Nino] his life,” borders no longer apply to him (330). Recognizing this cost of freedom, Lenu questions whether she can truly escape the neighborhood’s confines. Because of their diverging paths, leaving the borders of the neighborhood also means leaving her most sacred possession — her relationship with Lila — who remains trapped inside.

Borders develop their own character in Ferrante’s neighborhood and become an

active influence on Lila and Lenu's lives. Although Jacobs advocates that "understanding the drawbacks of borders should help rescue us from producing unnecessary borders," Lila defines her life and power in the neighborhood by creating new borders (265). Through conforming, Lila epitomizes female beauty and can "leave the neighborhood by staying in the neighborhood" (273). But Lenu remains an outcast. When she leaves, Lenu experiences "joy of the new," and an urge to escape the neighborhood defines her (211). Although Jacobs paints borders as an evil that should be destroyed, Lila and Lenu prove that borders play a complex role in self-definition. The girls' struggles with borders give their lives meaning.



Roo

Tara Attanasio,
Scripps '26

Erosion

by Andrea Posada, *Claremont McKenna '25*

I had a bruise on my shin for three weeks,
shaped like the
aerial view of
a long mountain
range.

The geographic formation on my skin was the result of a scrape
against a wooden drawer, a harsh confrontation between my skin and its corner.
The bruise sat as a pool of lava on my skin, a deep shade of purple, almost black. It took
its time to cool.

As my blood broke down and died and became new again, lichen visited my leg, and
igneous rock became moss became soil.

Not set for every type of plant, but fit for some.



**this is a cliff
right next to
the ocean.
ruined a pair
of shoes for
this photo**

Jonathan Ipe,
Harvey Mudd '25

Yu's Going Through Changes (Oh, in His Life)

by Caitlyn Muñoz, *Scripps '26*

Sands Award Winner

Regardless of whether or not Charles Yu's novel *How to Live Safely in a Science Fictional Universe* ought to be classified as science fiction, the character Charles' narrative is developed around the common element of any successful story, notwithstanding genre: character development. At the novel's start, Charles is portrayed as lacking maturity, empathy, and a sense of self. Afraid to face these realities of his character, Charles opts to exist alone in the present indefinite. Here, he takes refuge from the present moment and the passage of time, where the stagnancy of his shortcomings would publicly define him. Despite his own aversion to living in the present, Charles' father's fixation on the future — notably, his hopes of creating a functional time machine to fully escape the present — is the characteristic that he most criticizes in his father. While evidently unwilling to better his own character, Charles immaturely and hypocritically faults his dad for the qualities he himself inherited. Yet, by following the turbulence and shifts in their relationship, readers discern that Charles gradually develops unconditional positive regard for his dad, marking his own maturity and growth as an individual. Ultimately, Charles comes to an understanding that the only person he can control is himself. While later points in his narration seem to contradict this development, Charles is motivated to take control of his life by the end of the novel; choosing to embrace his father despite his faults demonstrates great maturity, a maturity that enables him to grow as a person by doing what his father never did: fully exist in the present moment.

At the outset of his story, Charles' own narration betrays him as a man without direction or a sense of self, who fears the reality of his life; as such, the qualities of his language and his evident infatuation with alternative timelines to the one he evades reveal his intense fear of reentering the present. Early in the novel, Charles' fixation on the inadequacies he perceives in his father and himself is made clear; while he would have his father conform to the image he holds of an ideal father, Charles neither strives for nor values any positive change in himself. In line with this hypocrisy, while Charles outwardly grapples with the question of what deep-rooted unhappiness drove his father's dedication to altering time and space, he tiptoes around his own feelings of deep dissatisfaction with his life (Yu 54). Evidenced by his desire to "pry open really tiny temporary quantum windows into other universes" to spy on alternate versions

of himself, “so long as any distortions [he] creates in the fabric of space-time are completely reversible,” Charles, like his father, is driven to evade the present moment (Yu 10). The evocative imagery of Charles forcing his way into alternate universes through very small openings, while trying not to “distort” space-time, suggests that to do so is unnatural and reckless; to risk slipping into 39 alternate universes, as he does, implies that Charles cannot find his place within his own universe. This exemplifies his desperation to avoid reentering the present. Moreover, of the 39 variations of himself that Charles reportedly observes, he perceives 35 of them as “total jerks,” and concludes that “If 89.7 percent of the other versions of you are assholes, chances are you aren’t exactly Mr. Personality yourself” (Yu 10). This conclusion, coupled with Charles’ strong negative language, asserts that he has poor self-perception; this perception is entirely based on these alternate versions of himself. Given that the novel’s protagonist so strongly associates himself with alternate versions of himself, he opts to vicariously live through their time frames, rather than facing his fear of living his own life in the present.

Intertwined with Charles’ fear of the present is his dismissal of his shortcomings. Improving upon these shortcomings would give Charles the direction and sense of self he lacks, thus alleviating his fear of reentering his life; instead, Charles’ passive language indicates that he has no interest in either shifting his reality to the present or in bettering himself as a person. This quality renders him a hypocritical replica of how he perceives his father as a parent. Deepening readers’ understanding of his self-perception, Charles closes Chapter One saying: “Sometimes when I’m brushing my teeth, I look in the mirror and I swear my reflection seems kind of disappointed. I realized a couple of years ago that not only am I not super-skilled at anything, I’m not even particularly good at being myself” (Yu 10). By preceding profound self-reflection with imagery of himself brushing his teeth, Charles utilizes humor to distract from the gravity of his self-realization. In conjunction, his passive tone and language in saying he is “kind of” disappointed and not “super” talented suggests that Charles minimizes these shortcomings and chooses not to address them fully. This passiveness regarding his character sets a precedent for his continual evasion of time and the present moment. Looking back on his childhood, Charles outwardly reproaches his father for never molding into the ideal, present parent he envisioned, yet, adult Charles gives the immediate impression of a hypocrite, given that he neither exists in the present nor strives to better himself (Yu 161). Given this analysis, it can be concluded that early in the novel, Charles is no better of a man that he perceives his father to be.

Accordingly, Charles demonstrates childish resentment and lack of empathy when reliving childhood memories with his father; the immaturity and decades-old emotions that Charles carries from his childhood suggest that to some extent, a part of his consciousness remains in his past rather than in his present. In this way, Charles can be understood as a younger version of his father. Charles opens Chapter Three

by recalling his earliest memories of his father. These memories quickly diverge from bedtime story times to the “Years of his life, my life, his life with my mom, years and years and years, down in that garage, near us, but not with us, near us in space and time ...” (Yu 17-18). Although Charles claims twice that his father was near the family, he implies that this nearness entailed limited intimacy. Psychologically speaking, awareness of space and time is crucial in the development of one’s consciousness and presence. Evidently, only this consciousness would ensure that his father was “with” him. By stating that his dad was once near to the family in space and time, Charles reveals his perspective that his father’s lack of consciousness within their relationship was an active choice; although he had the means to be present, he chose distance from his family. Thus, without any attempt to evaluate his father’s psyche or reasoning, Charles uncompassionately frames his father as selfish in his evasion of the present. This immature perspective is furthered by Charles’ language. His initial choppy syntax suggests a turbulent state of mind, and the following repetition of “years” has a childish, tantrum-like quality to it. Evidently, resentment of his father’s absence throughout his childhood partially traps the grown Charles in those past memories and prevents him from living in the present. This ultimately demonstrates that Charles chooses to live his life defined by what he identifies as his father’s worst quality.

This immaturity carries over to Charles’ description of the relationship he presumably envisions with a more ideal father. Charles mirrors his dad’s self-centered motives with his own, suggesting to readers that he is equally as selfish as he perceived his father to be. The novel features themes of the American dream and immigrant experience, specifically through Charles’ father’s work mindset and its effect on his relationship with his son. From Charles’ perspective, his father prioritized his own future and the possibility of a functioning time machine over their relationship; although he faults his father for this perception, Charles’ most desirable image of a father-son relationship can be understood as highly selfish. While reliving the day his father’s efforts were supposed to be rewarded, Charles is distracted from the failing time machine demonstration by the concurrent scene of a son entering the nearby baseball field “behind his dad, who looks like a real athlete, like he could have played two sports in college ...” (Yu 185). Considering the placement of the scene as an interruption of his dad’s demonstration — and the immediate distraction it poses for Charles — he prioritizes his dream of an alternate, idealized father-son relationship over his father’s present opportunity. Rather than concerning himself with his father’s crisis, Charles shifts his attention towards the baseball father and son, who “set up about fifty feet away from each other, two endpoints of a little father-son axis, and the dad began lobbing slow overhand pitches to his son ...” (Yu 185-86). While his dad’s American dream is to become a self-made success story, Charles’ American dream is better understood through this American baseball game. The game reveals that Charles envisions a

father-son relationship that caters only to his own happiness. This seemingly ideal relationship that Charles envisions is not perfectly equal; rather, the father caters to the child, limiting his own athletic capabilities as a potential “two-sport athlete” to gentle lobs for his son’s benefit. In essence, the scene suggests that Charles idealizes a father who sacrifices his own dreams or talents for his son’s benefit; hypocritically, Charles’ engagement in the baseball scene is only possible through his complete disregard of his father’s best interests. Thus, in this moment and moments preceding it, Charles is no better than his father.

And yet, as the baseball scene continues, the young boy in the ideal father-son axis hits a home run. Both this moment and its aftermath initiate Charles’ character development and maturity; exemplified through his syntax and language, this shifting point enables Charles to become his own person, a separate entity from his father and his father’s mistakes. The overarching theme of this baseball metaphor — represented by the impossibility of predicting which swing will hit a home run, and that when the ball is hit, the “sound it [makes]. It [is] a perfect sound. Crack.” — is the value of a single moment (Yu 186). This point is emphasized in the quote through extreme brevity of the three sentences; moreover, it is significant as a representation of Charles’ regard of time: for the first time in the novel, Charles realizes that to truly live and experience triumph, as this young boy has by hitting a home run, he must be present for the other “three dozen pitches and four or five dinky glance hits” (Yu 186). In other words, Charles comes to understand the value of living in the present. Following this epiphany is the realization that his father will not follow him into the present. Both in this memory and in the context of the story, Charles’ father remains lost in the future: “The only person who hadn’t watched [the home run] was my dad. I didn’t know it then, but now, I see it” (Yu 186). As he directly states, Charles’ new perspective allows him to see what he could not before: while he must reenter the present, his father will never return with him. While this truth is upsetting, Charles’ sentence structure reveals acceptance of this reality. Closing the quote with the short but significant clause “I see it” gives the full sentence extra weight and finality. Because this note of finality follows his decision to reenter the present moment, it provides closure to Charles without challenging his choice. Thus, as the novel’s end draws nearer, Charles demonstrates maturity in his willingness to grow as an individual, rather than as a son intrinsically tied to his father.

With this understanding, Charles finds the inner strength necessary to let go of his father, breaking his final tie to a time frame other than the present; as seen through Charles’ new definition of self, this break enables him to better himself and grow as an individual. In pages approaching this turning point in his character growth, Charles encounters an alternate version of himself, who orders him to “get back to [his] life and stop being such a whiny little wuss. Be a man. Find [his] father, tell him [he loves] him. Then let him go” (Yu 139). Alternate Charles’ language alludes to protagonist Charles’

self-pitying, childish ways, inferring that his behavior renders him less mature than a full man. While growing up and into a “man” generally connotes adapting to some level of toxic masculinity, this definition instead requires Charles to develop emotional maturity. This entails finding the strength to love his father and to develop a sense of self and purpose beyond that family tie. Charles achieves this by the end of the novel, despite his final insistence against personal growth: “I am still the asshole who shot myself the first time around, which is to say, I’ll always be the asshole who shoots myself ...” (227). Earlier in the novel, Chapter 14 opens with the line: “When it happens, this is what happens: I shoot myself ... I shoot my future self” (Yu 88). Both early in the novel and later on page 227, Charles narrates his conscious thoughts in the present tense, yet his definition of “self” is shown to have shifted over the course of the book. On page 88, Charles unites his present and future self with a single word: “myself.” Contrastingly, on page 227, he divides the word into two, distinguishing himself in that moment from his previous, or past, self. The underlying meaning of this strategically broken word undermines the initial reading of Charles’ words; ultimately, it suggests that Charles is in fact not the same person who runs in fear from his identity and his present. Rather, as seen through his textual definition of self, Charles chooses to live primarily in the present. This choice proves that he achieves the growth he once desired only in his father; for this reason, readers conclude the novel with the knowledge that Charles is a better person and man.

The purpose of this essay has been to prove that Charles ultimately seeks betterment as an individual. This is done through the development of an argument that assumes Charles’ emotional maturity and growth over the course of *How to Live Safely in a Science Fictional Universe* can be assessed in his ability to love and accept his father, while still breaking off their restricting father-son ties. While it addresses Charles’ everchanging regard for his father, this essay fails to consider his poor regard for or treatment of his mother; moreover, it fails to address that this constant factor contradicts any positive personal growth. Throughout the novel, Charles’ mother is disregarded and mistreated by both her son and husband, suggesting that it is a learned behavior passed down from father to son. Ironically, the essay concludes that by learning from his father’s mistakes, Charles betters himself as a man; this reveals an inherent flaw in the thesis’ applicability to the novel at large. The novel’s protagonist conclusively grows to accept his father, but there is no such closure or care shown to his mother. Informed readers understand that at least some elements of the novel are based on Yu’s personal experiences; given the mental and emotional space Charles’ father-son relationship holds in his psyche, they question whether this unresolved, disproportionate focus on the father over the mother was purposeful, serving as written proof that there is always another area of one’s character to grow in. Perhaps it is simply a manifestation of the author’s own misogyny, and therefore an area of growth for author Charles Yu.

The Sign to Sign: A Plea for ASL at the Claremont Colleges

by Molly Yeselson, *Scripps '23*

As is the case at many colleges and universities, Scripps College has a foreign language requirement that can be fulfilled in one of several ways. One possibility is to take at least three semesters of a language unavailable at the Claremont Colleges and then transfer the credits back to Scripps.¹ Despite the fact that American Sign Language (ASL) is the primary language of approximately one million Americans, it's not one of 13 modern and classical languages taught at the 5Cs.² Curiously, Scripps' academic catalog explicitly states that "full-course American Sign Language credit"³ can be used to fulfill the College's language requirement.⁴ I was thrilled when I noticed this small but important detail prior to my matriculation to Scripps as I had taken through ASL IV at Gallaudet University, the world's only university specifically for deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals.

There is a common misconception that American Sign Language is "just English" and serves as a cop out for students looking to fulfill their language requirements. In reality, the two languages are independent of each other for a plethora of reasons. For example, English operates via a subject-verb-object word order, while ASL uses subject-verb-object, subject-verb, time-subject-verb, and time-subject-verb-object word orders.⁵ Also in English, most speakers will increase the pitch of their voice and change word order to indicate the rhetorical nature of a question, while rhetorical questions in ASL require a signer to widen their eyes, raise their eyebrows, and tilt their body forward.⁶ Another reason ASL is also not "just" signed English is because Pidgin Signed English (PSE) and Signed Exact English (SEE) exist. PSE is a combination of ASL and English that uses grammatical rules from both languages.⁷ Alternatively, users of SEE sign every word,⁸ including articles (which don't exist in ASL).⁹ As with any language, ASL has regional dialects and accents,¹⁰ and although ASL isn't a "foreign" language when used within the US, it is a foreign language for signers outside of the country as there are approximately 300 different sign languages used worldwide.¹¹

My ability to count ASL as my “foreign” language is anomalous, but my interest in ASL and Deaf culture is shared with peers across the 5Cs. In Fall 2022, Sage Wong-Davies (Scripps ’25) sent out a survey to all 5C students and found out that an astonishing 371 out of 374 respondents (99.2%) selected “yes” in response to the question “Do you think that ASL should be offered at one of the 5Cs?” Then in Spring 2023, Wong-Davies orchestrated a wonderful — and extremely well-attended — Scripps Presents @Noon event featuring DJ Kurs, Artistic Director of the Tony Award-winning Deaf West Theatre company. While I’m thrilled by Wong-Davies’ initiative, I’m also very disappointed that she has to do this work at all. Students at the 5Cs have been fighting this same battle for at least the past eight years. Adding ASL not only provides another language option for students but actually supports and enhances the mission of Scripps College.

There are approximately 6,909 distinct languages worldwide and no college can introduce students to all of them.¹² That being said, the 5Cs do offer an impressive selection of languages including Spanish, French, Modern Standard Arabic, Chinese, Classics (i.e., Greek, Hebrew, and Latin), German, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, and Russian.¹³ According to the Modern Language Association (MLA), ASL is the third most-studied language — following Spanish and French — at US colleges and universities.¹⁴ In 1990 when the MLA first estimated ASL enrollment, there were approximately 1,602 students, and by 2016 that number skyrocketed to 107,060 ASL students.¹⁵

American philosopher Martha C. Nussbaum argues that teaching foreign languages is “part of the multicultural story that has received too little emphasis.”¹⁶ ASL not only checks off the box of adding another language to the Claremont Colleges, but it also aligns with Nussbaum’s belief that an “[a]wareness of cultural difference is essential in order to promote the respect for another that is the essential underpinning for dialogue.”¹⁷ Scripps reiterates Nussbaum’s point in its academic catalog when the College states, “One of the most important features of a liberal education is familiarity with the language of a culture other than one’s own. Such familiarity not only clarifies a student’s sense of cultural identity, but also enhances articulateness and enlarges the view of the scope of thought and language.”¹⁸

Allow me to expand your own “view[s] of the scope of thought and language.” Those unfamiliar with Deaf culture are often surprised to learn that “deaf” and “Deaf” do not mean the same thing. Lowercase ‘d’ deaf is defined as “[t]he medical and audiological definition for having hearing loss, which may differ in severity from one person to another.”¹⁹ Uppercase ‘D’ Deaf refers to those “who are active members of the Deaf community and identify themselves as culturally Deaf.”²⁰ Many people who identify as Deaf have been deaf since birth, and as a result, ASL is normally their first and thus primary language. People who are capital ‘D’ Deaf often see being Deaf as an identity

rather than a disability. The flipside is that a person can be deaf without being Deaf; one's lack of connection to the Deaf community and culture can be a result of personal choice, external forces, or a combination of both.²¹ Obviously, the difference between deaf and Deaf is far more complex than this crash course. The point is that ASL courses — just like any language class — not only teach students another language but also “promote the respect for another that is the essential underpinning for dialogue.”²²

The dialogue surrounding offering ASL at the Claremont Colleges began prior to my matriculation. After putting out a call on Facebook for any information regarding ASL at the 5Cs, I was able to connect with Alegria Martinez (Pitzer '18). Martinez started the ASL Club in 2015 because she was disappointed by the lack of ASL and Deaf Studies courses. In 2018, ASL Club approached Pomona's Linguistics Department about offering ASL and/or Deaf Studies courses. Unfortunately, nothing materialized and the ASL Club never received a concrete explanation.²³ In spite of the Linguistics Department's lack of transparency, Pomona has offered an ASL table at its foreign languages dining hall, Oldenborg, since at least 2017.²⁴ Meanwhile, the folks over in Scripps' Office of Marketing and Communications published an article on an event featuring UCLA Lecturer of American Sign Language Benjamin Lewis and the piece conveniently omitted the fact that ASL is not offered at the 5Cs.²⁵ Even more scandalous, *The Student Life (TSL)* reported that the event's host — the 5C club Disability, Illness, and Difference Alliance (DIDA) — was forced to find and hire its own interpreter for Lewis' visit because the 5Cs did not have a go-to interpreter for public events.²⁶ I find great irony in the fact that both Scripps and Pomona tout on-campus events featuring or requiring the use of ASL, while ignoring students' requests for ASL and Deaf Studies courses.

There has been *one* instance in which American Sign Language was offered at the 5Cs and it was not at Scripps or Pomona. Instead, in the Fall 2019 semester, Pitzer offered one section of ASL I and all 18 slots were filled.²⁷ (Pitzer does not even have a language requirement, which adds to the irony of it being the only one of the 5Cs thus far to offer ASL.) I was intrigued by this revelation, and after tracking down the adjunct professor Yazmin Marin's LinkedIn profile, I had even more questions. Professor Marin's page states that she was hired to “Develop the American Sign Language department include in [sic] Deaf Culture, Deaf Studies, ASL levels)” and to “Teach American Sign Language in level 1 and 2 and teach Fingerspelling.”²⁸ I couldn't find anything on Pitzer's website to confirm Professor Marin's claims regarding the initiation of an ASL/Deaf Studies Department. Once again thanks to the power of social media, I was able to speak with Ethan Arvanitis (Pomona '20) who was in Professor Marin's class. Arvanitis said that nearly everyone enrolled in ASL I intended to take ASL II in Spring 2020. Towards the end of the Fall 2019 semester, however, Arvanitis and his classmates were informed that Professor Marin would not be returning and Pitzer did not plan to hire another professor to teach ASL II. Arvanitis recalled that he and his classmates were so

passionate about continuing their study of ASL that they started a petition.²⁹ Between Arvanitis' account and Wong-Davies' survey, it's obvious that an ASL sequence would be well received at the 5Cs.

The Claremont Colleges are considered elite educational institutions; consequently, some of the best places to look for guidance regarding implementing an ASL curriculum are the Ivies. Brown, Princeton, Yale, Harvard, the University of Pennsylvania, and Cornell offer ASL.³⁰ Besides Brown, which houses ASL within its World Languages and Cultures Department,³¹ the other five schools offer ASL through their Linguistics Departments.^{32 33 34 35 36}

For years, students at Yale proposed an ASL sequence and combined with strong support from the faculty, Yale's administration agreed to enact a three-semester pilot program of ASL beginning in Spring 2018. The pilot program was extremely successful, and the University continues to expand its ASL curriculum as demand increases for more advanced courses.³⁷ For Spring 2023, Yale offered a staggering eight sections of ASL II, two sections of ASL IV, and a Deaf Studies course for students who had already completed ASL I through IV.³⁸

Because of the success Yale had with its implementation of ASL following a student-driven initiative, I believe launching an ASL pilot program would be the most logical first step for the 5Cs. A pilot program would allow the consortium to test out different curricula and professors. While Scripps specifically notes its acceptance of ASL for the foreign language requirement, Pomona and Claremont McKenna must also do so to affirm that ASL is in fact a distinct language. (As of Spring 2023, Harvey Mudd and Pitzer do not have specific language requirements.) The pilot program must be, at minimum, three semesters long and include ASL I, II, and III. This structure guarantees that students starting in ASL I will be able to fulfill the language requirement and not fear ending up stranded like Arvanitis and his classmates. The overwhelming majority of Ivy Leagues house ASL in their Linguistics Departments, so I agree with Martinez and the ASL Club that it would be most appropriate for a 5C ASL program to be part of Pomona's Linguistics Department. Depending on the pilot program's success, the 5Cs could consider making a separate ASL/Deaf Studies Department as was claimed to be in progress at Pitzer.

The Claremont Colleges offer students an educational experience unlike any other in the world. The consortium gives students access to more courses, extracurricular activities, social groups, and research opportunities than any of the colleges could do on their own. Diverse and multitudinous as they may be, however, those course offerings and academic programs must evolve to meet students' interests, as well the needs of a more inclusive society. It's time to stop ignoring the signs that 5C students want to sign.

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