discourse
vol. 1
We are excited to present Volume I of the relaunched Discourse Magazine to you, the students of Claremont McKenna. In reviving this magazine, our goal was simple: give the student body a forum in which to explore its thoughts and express itself. This volume has a single prompt: exploration. This starting point seems apropos as we begin to explore what Discourse is and can be, and as you all begin to use this medium as a forum for exploration. We at Discourse Magazine have found that creation is often a useful channel for every part of our experiences and, due to the variety of those experiences, we have recognized the heterogeneous nature of creative exploration. As such, each of the pieces found herein are pieces of student work which showcase creativity in its many forms. Many thanks to all of the students who submitted, in particular to last year’s Appel Fellows who have included snapshots of their work and to Cherin Yoo who has provided the beautiful cover art for our first issue. We hope you enjoy the work we’ve included.

Please, explore!

Most Sincerely,
Romi Ferder, Zoey Ryu, Sofia Trigo,
and the Center for Writing and Public Discourse team
smallness or starness

.jhh

coming out of a part of my own life
like taking off a tight shirt:
too happy breathing to lament it.
a different kind of life splashed into my canoe this year.
dark nights, mostly. solitude, silence. roaming.
reading poetry, dostoevsky.
ecstatic insomnia, intoxication.
trances or fixes.
smallness or starness,
cold, warm, crying.

Jake Hudson Humphrey ’20
“@” (lymnal #2)

“isn’t this pretty & calming & relaxing”
mother asks

father & 2 girls don’t hear
younger girl throws stick @ stream

“WHAT DID I TELL YOU”
clenched teeth demand

father & girls look @ stream
stream looks back @ father & girls
silence laps @ their ankles

mother jerks girl away from water

mother takes phone from holster
mother aims @ father & girls

“daddy turn around & smile”

stream looks @ mother already back in car

Jake Hudson Humphrey ’20
“Tied Up”

Kelly Keene ’21
country girl with a city mind,
her bag is ready packed at midnight;
half-light is her early start,
by sunrise she makes it into the city.
sight of the Han river
marks the heart of her Seoul;
her bus crosses and glides
on the way to her road.
girl’s country eyes are fixated
on the sun escaping dawn,
much too quickly to her heart’s dismay;
the country girl hops off, nowhere near her stop.

before the day fully starts,
she sits in the cold, in the city not yet breathing,
and soaks her country heart in gold,
wishing to keep the sun under her hold.
She is a dancing shadow
Haunting an ancient garden
Brushed onto my eyelids.
She commands legions of fireflies
Twisting around my thighs,
Dragging me back to her.
They bring me to my knees
Like an involuntary worship.
How can I atone for my sins?
Stretch my palms out
From here to Jupiter.
Pierce my side
With the shards I left in your lungs
From our last kiss,
And a thousand choking monarchs
Will grace your feet.
I’ll take mouthfuls of you down
Like my final gulps of air,
Desperate and heaving.
You sweet, sweet siren.
Why have I forsaken you?
But you take me down gently,
Like the broken body
Of a fallen god,
My shattered heart
Spilling between your fingers
Like pomegranate seeds,
Staining your skin.

Gloria Bates '20
“Diablo”

Kelly Keene ’21
Slow dancing with my shadow as I carve my signature into the basketball court with the wheels of my long board. Jazz music plays on my iPod and the crisp February air settles in for the night. I am finally alone after an entire day of stimulation. And on this basketball court outside my dorm I am free.

The anxiety can’t catch me as I loop and dodge and twist out of its grasp. And soon I am no longer skating. I am dancing in a ballroom. Full of important people. With important achievements repping important titles. And I glide across the floor with my husband in this grandiose ballroom with curtains that match the carpet and drinks to match the ostentatious attitudes that slowly fill the room. The music picks up and couples take to the floor. He leans in for a kiss and I lean into the turn and the ballroom disappears as I etch my way around the free throw line -- alone.

I circle back to the other hoop at the other end, carve hard to the right, and into the barrel of a wave. She’s a few feet a head of me, gracefully cutting through the water. Her tan legs support her and the ankle bracelet glimmers in the light. For a brief second she looks back at me, laughing. The sun shines through her teeth and reminds me of summer. I look out towards the sunset and am met with the headlights of a car, passing alongside the court and on home. There’s no one out this late, just me. So I skate and skate and skate until I find my way back into the ballroom or some where lost in the ocean with the one I love.

Ande Troutman ’19
I don’t even like the ocean.
But that day I saw the way it coaxed her in. She grasped her mother’s hand and it tickled her toes, as if to prostrate itself before her in a promise of harmlessness.

I don’t even like the ocean.
But that day it felt both small and huge at the same time. It felt like I could pin it down and call it mine. Grab hold of its vastness and envelop myself in its mass.

I don’t even like the ocean.
But that day I noticed how some demand of it and some delight in it. How many point cameras to try to make it Theirs. How they tap their feet and sigh and groan. And how mine just were.

I don’t even like the ocean.
But that day when I imagined the soundtrack to that moment I was overshadowed by the sea itself. It was both soft and loud. Consistent and percolating. Crashing and caressing. It was its own harmony.

I don’t even like the ocean.
But that day I was grateful for it.

Romi Ferder ’20
I come from either end of the northern pacific ocean born a love child between the east and the west, looking nothing like west acting nothing like east both wonder where I get it from. certain, the other is at fault for my faults while south interrupts, “oh she’s much too west to be east” while north comments, “she mustn’t be a traitor to her kin and wear east as a crown,” I sit here, in midst of it all, arms stretching for either end of my ocean, wondering why I am born a love child, not a child of love.

Zoey Ryu ’20

[love child]
two blue birds tumbled
through the bright sun-thickened breeze.
(i imagined us)

they were aching blue
that ensnared the eyes and heart.
(your piercing iris)

they moved together,
spiraling upon themselves.
(your wings around me)

they traversed my view,
a wave curled to tomorrow.
(our blue adventures)

gone amidst the sky,
their blues blended together.
(i imagined us)

Jake Hudson Humphrey '20
“One with Nature”

Kelly Keene ’21
Routine

Time goes by quickly in the house. The TV flickers, someone shifts their body. The two men sit in their recliners in the dimly lit room, curtains drawn. Cans pile up next to them as the day goes by, through the night and into the early morning. One of them might collect a few of the aluminum husks once in awhile, but for the most part they lie where they fall, trampled occasionally by a bathroom visit or a food run.

One voice breaks the silence. “What next?”
“I don’t know man, seems like we’ve watched it all.”
“Nah, I can get like any show on this website, have you seen Game of Thrones?”
“No, heard it’s good though.”
“So good. I guess I know what we’re doing for the next couple days.”
“Yeah...”

The title sequence pops on. They settle in.

Three days later, the same voice cuts through the dark room again.
“I’m gonna take a nap, can you get some more beer?”
“Yeah, sure.”
“Sweet.”

As his host drifts off, Matt sits up and looks around. It has been three weeks. Vacant chip bags and long forgotten pizza boxes litter the room. He can’t quite remember how he got there, from the house next door and the bed of a stranger who left one day after they spent a couple nights at her house, surrounded by family members.

Suddenly he needs to go. Pulling together his few shirts and socks, he picks up his backpack, fills it up with what he brought. Picking up his skateboard from the closet as he leaves, Matt rolls off to the side of the highway.

Picking up the scarred but resilient board, he begins to walk.

Gabriel Gluskin-Braun ’20
Baby’s Breath:
a fragile voice, a single stem, and some petals.

They cannot float nor drift when tossed
into ocean waves.

They only crumble
until gravity entices the torn floret
to settle for the bottom,
that blood stained percreta, an abyss
of sorts where innocence perishes.

Full on
the white petals touch the seabed
until they absorb into this flushed ground,
a blood bank,
Like all of mankind
it is our destiny of death.

No worries though,
this is just
a story of a flower,
not the lives of all of us
leaving our youth.

Hunter Kettering ’20
“Window to the World”

Kelly Keene ’21
At the Lake Again

The aged man is leaning
with hesitation at the waterfront,
boots pressing the snow
down.
The top
two buttons on his collared shirt are
undone. Loose
jeans, tight
gloves, iced
air, no
chills in the body;
I’m unable to tell how he looks
at his reflection in the water
because he’s wearing shades.
The surface of the water is wavering,
distorting the reflection of his visage,
his body, the being.
Until the quavering is over,
the lake can only contain
the image of this muddled man.

Hunter Kettering ’20
A weighted promise:

A drifters’ boat
collects no promises:
only an ocean of opportunities.

Lost and afloat –
suspended through life
on a boat
destined for infinite directions.

The waves slowly creep beyond the horizon,
carving a sun-lit path,
where dreamers can’t follow.

The drifter surrenders and
the rhythmic afterthought
gently lulls the passenger to rest.

The ocean plucks a final chord –
pianissimo.
Silence marks its crescendo,
and thoughts are a forte.

The ocean rejoices!
Finding solace in its eternal struggle,
between passion and tranquility.

A drifters’ boat can collect no promises,
because it does not know
where it will
end.

Lauren Livingston ’18
A muse is on the microscopic slide: the wing
Of a butterfly that never landed
There in a funk with hues of battleship grey, wet asphalt, and Egyptian blue.

The Romans, eternals to us goners, actually believed
That this insect of the earth was akin to the soul of man
While we, after the angiography, concluded that all pulses end.

We found the wing on the ground, but no one ever seemed to ask
“Where is the body?”
So the curious and reproached now scour
In abandoned grasslands and in puddles of pesticide
To find our hero’s’ paling symbol.

The butterfly is drifting only in these few minds
Instead of in ubiquitous tonic air as pure as sugar. We will panhandle one day soon
For a partial soul, a bit of a butterfly, and then find nothing
In the lurch we may try to revive our tropics
Before we are deserts and marrows similar to our lab experiment.

Hunter Kettering ’20
zen talking
folks eat dirt, dirt eats folks.
   u pile it into ur lap
   i pile it into mine, heavy
       with worry!
       —& u can’t take it with u!—
push hard & u only get hardship.
enter the jewel mountain,
   come out empty-handed

   all this talking, like flowers falling from heaven!

i dont know,    a mundane delusion?
u take care of urself,
       —it’s nonsense!—
u do a bit, every day,
a bit less
u dont think anything else
   but deluding dirt!

   just talking about it is no good!

what is this! what is this!
everywhere u go
       —sparring!—
stubbing ur toe on it!

let go,           isn’t that how it goes?
balance & dissolve

   if u let go or not, u still have to let go!

no easy task, coming here!
   (why did u come here?
       —exactly!—)
why did u falter?
something happened outside,
   isn’t that how it goes?

if u live here long enough,
   ur sure to accomplish something!

Jake Hudson Humphrey ’20
Ancient Structures

Kelly Keene ’21
“Lola”

Kelly Keene ’21
Notes Toward an Academic Discussion

I never thought I would regret the lack of décor in my office. The only color in
the room came from a banner that read “Pecunia Obediunt Omnia”\(^1\) draped over the
highest shelf of my bookcase.\(^2\) Other than that, there was nothing else to look at in my
windowless basement office. Nothing except the two adolescents sitting across the table
in front of me.

They were as different as two people could be, despite sharing the same age, na-
tionality, major, and socioeconomic background. I dreaded the particular similarity that
brought them to my office; namely, enrollment in my thesis section. Now, as the only
lucid member of the English faculty and perhaps the whole university, I avoided un-
healthy associations with both students and fellow academics to the best of my abilities.
I was forced to abandon this principle when it was imposed upon me as a requirement
for tenure. One cannot shirk departmental responsibilities directly imposed by the dean.

“We’re not just researchers or academics. We’re educators, preparing the next
generation for leadership. I’m sure that as the brightest new addition to our depart-
ment, you’ll be able to do a lot for the youth,” Kreutz said. “Rudy, it’s my dearest wish
to see you join the tenured faculty.”

“Of course, Dan. It would be my pleasure to work closely with a few more bright
young people. It’s what brought me here,” I said. He left smiling.

The reality exceeded my expectations. I regretted the life decisions that had cul-
minated in this moment—I didn’t bust my ass for seven years in Boston\(^3\) to be trapped
babysitting these fools.\(^4\)

“Professor Papadopoulos, I would love to hear your thoughts.”

This was Tom Reid. He was the sort of lad who acted as if he had grown up
reading Sartre in lieu of bedtime stories, and secured his bun with a leather cord strung
with wooden beads. He spurned recreational drug use, except for LSD, which he
praised for its spiritual and artistic benefits.

“I want to write a novel about what the greatest novel of all time—past, pres-
ent, and future—would theoretically be like. I’m thinking of titling it ‘Regarding the
Supreme Magnum Opus’.\(^5\) I’m thinking of referencing Joyce, Proust, Kafka, Camus,
Nabokov, and David Foster Wallace for now.”

\(^1\) Totum University’s motto, meaning “all things obey money.” I was ambivalent to the motto itself, but felt that
showing school spirit couldn’t hurt my efforts to rise up the Totum pole.
\(^2\) Where I kept a complete collection of Prince of Tennis. I kept academic texts closer to eye level.
\(^3\) Cambridge, to be precise.
\(^4\) I did it to read, write, and think in the presence of a great mind. Teaching was an unavoidable occupational
hazard.
\(^5\) Likely burgled from “Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction” by Wallace Stevens.
“An arresting proposal indeed. What made you choose this topic?”

“Well, I wanted to take a cue from American modernist poet Wallace Stevens. Much of his poetry was about poetry, and what the most ideal poem would be like. I wanted to honor the Stevensian approach, but with regard to prose. I won’t pretend to have his poetic talent,” he said.

It was the most pretentious thing I had heard since dissertation season, but I expected nothing less from Tom.

“I’m excited to see how it’ll turn out. How can I help?”

“Nothing yet, Professor. It’s still a raw seed, the unformed abstractions of a juvenile mind, if you will.”

“How about this—I’ll send along a couple reading materials to guide our conversation after I mull over the idea,” I said.

“I would appreciate that,” he said with a smooth smile. “Well, as much as I’d love to stay, I can’t be late for work.”

Tom departed with a final clack of his beads. One down, one to go.

“Sorry Prof. P, you still have me left,” Miranda said in a soft drawl, somewhat nervously.

“Oh, not at all. I’m enjoying hearing what you guys are coming up with,” I said.

“What do you want to write?”

“Bless your heart professor,” she grinned, obviously relaxing. “Well, I really love young adult fiction. You know, like Harry Potter and Twilight. So, maybe to write a really amazing YA novel?” She had that inflection many young women have, causing statements to sound like questions.

“I’m still deciding which elements to employ,” she paused. “Undiscovered powers, a training arc, named weapons, subversive child prodigies, a magicocracy, and perhaps an interspecies love quadrangle that turns into a traditional triangle after a love interest is killed off.”

“Oh my lanta!” She gasped, clutching the proverbial string of pearls round her neck. “How could I forget? Memory loss is always a winner.”

“Miranda, you’ve given me a lot to think about, and I can see that you gave this idea a lot of thought,” I paused.

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1 Despite my misanthropic tendencies, I can play my part as needed. I suspect that my smarmy colleagues are great actors who believe their own lies.

2 Tom’s writing typically featured archaic language, references to Kant and Hegel, and Latin phrases that even my stuffiest colleagues rarely used. No doubt, he considers them the sine qua non of his work.

3 On the first day of class, Tom shared that he was a part-time luthier. Only two in the room knew what it meant, and only one knew how to pronounce it properly—not to strum my own lute, that is.
I’d never seen this side of Miranda Roberts before. Relative to Tom the lit bro, she rarely spoke in class. Though her literary preferences were questionable, I found her less annoying than her peers. It was a pity that, by virtue of its genre, Miranda’s thesis would be less respected than Tom’s. My mind wandered to the Prince of Tennis volumes stacked face down. Did my propensity for picture books about high school sports clubs make me any less worthy as a researcher or literary critic? Distracted, I didn’t notice that Miranda had left my office.

Christine Kim ’18