Discourse
Vol. II
We are excited to present Volume II of the relaunched Discourse Magazine to you, the students of Claremont McKenna. In this volume, we continue to uphold our mission we set in reviving Discourse Magazine: give the student body a platform for self-expression.

Last spring, Volume I focused on exploration. We are grateful for the amount of the submissions we received and for the interest our magazine garnered.

Volume II focuses on a different theme: consciousness. This was an effort to reflect Claremont McKenna College’s choice of Frankenstein by Mary Shelly as the common read for the academic year of 2018-2019. In introducing our chosen theme, the editors posed the question that were central to the writers of the Romantic era: What does it mean to be conscious? What is consciousness?

Many thanks to all of the students who submitted, in particular to Matiss Ozols, our first featured artist and to Omar Rodriguez who has provided the beautiful cover art for our second issue. We hope you enjoy the work we’ve included.

We hope you enjoy Volume II of Discourse Magazine.

Most Sincerely,

Zoey Ryu, Riya Kumar, Caity Kwun,

and the Center for Writing and Public Discourse team
Interview with Featured Artist Matiss Ozols

What environment do you prefer to work in and what effect does it have on your artwork?

Most of my art is produced late at night, for example. I like having music going on in the background and that determines the mood of the painting as well, just because, you know, a loud, banging music is going to be quite sharp strokes as you move to the beat. Whereas if it is classical music, it would be very slow and flowy.

How would you describe your process of making art?

Painting process itself starts off with a blank canvas, then I always apply a layer of primer, gesso, even though some say the canvas already comes primered. But that doesn’t matter to me, because my addition of primer makes it smoother. It makes the paint flow better, which is something I am a main advocate for. Pretty much all these colors have been mixed with primer in some degree, because it allows me to have more paint to keep adding and changing and whatnot.
When you start the painting, how do you decide what to do next?

Professors often say when you are writing an essay, you shouldn’t know the answer before you start writing, you should figure out the answer as you keep developing the idea and get to the end. That is very similar to painting. If you believe that to be true. My artwork “Verticals,” I thought at first it was just going to be maybe two straight lines but then I thought adding these non-parallel segments to it would give it more of a cooler feeling. Painting develops around the idea, in other words. But then again the idea could change completely and I could decide to do something that is against the original idea.

What inspired you to paint “Distorted Lettering”?

I had a pen with a convex clear lens, so in class one day I look at my own handwriting or in the text and I put the lens on top of the word, and the word would be completely changed. That is why I can’t actually tell you what letters are there in my painting. The longest stroke in my painting, for example, is probably going to be the letter “P” or something like that. I thought the representation of the letters reflected in my painting was well-suited for the CWPD.

When did you come to self identify as an artist?

That’s interesting because I don’t consider myself an artist. I am just someone who paints. I find it almost insulting to actual artists because art and artist are such broad terms. And if artist is the term you’re using to describe me, then you are putting me in the same bracket as Picasso. Matisse, Van Gogh, and that is not true whatsoever. I find it insulting to such legends like them.

How did you enter the art world?

My mom would always take me to the Tate because I used to live in London. I remember I was in grade 2 and someone mentioned Matisse, as in Henri Matisse, and I was surprised to see that connection between my name and his. But the entrance into more serious painting on these big canvases was when I took on a challenge to paint something every day for 365 days. So if you see these numbers, for example, “Verticals” is 114 out of 365.
Why do you paint?

It is an escape. But then again, I would like to do it full time so it wouldn’t be an escape, I guess. [laughter] Every piece of artwork is unique and priceless. I admire the impact art has on the world around us, like Picasso had a tremendous influence on the fashion world. But again, why do I paint? I love it. I love the grind, the process, the thinking, the ability to put my crazy, creative mind on a canvas, I mean, I will paint on anything. I would paint all these buildings. [Matiss looks around at CMC buildings]

Does writing play a role in your art?

I carry around a little book of poetry, an Oxford Press book of poems. It is a second hand book, it is very old, probably from the 1950s or something. In the front page, there is a message that says “Good luck on your first day at university.” This person is probably dead now and I have this book. Sometimes I skim through the lines to keep my mind moving. It kind of helps you to brainstorm many different images like “waterfall,” “trees,” “oak,” and “greenery.” It is helpful to pick out specific phrases or words, because it gives me a different way of thinking during the process of painting.

Interviewed by Zoey Ryu ‘20
I hate the sound of jingling keys, for I know when I can feel them in my fingers, it means I’m waking up again. Please, not yet. I’ve only been dreaming for seven hours, just one more minute. I feel the effects of the drugs thinning in my sludgy blood as I climb the cobwebs of unwelcome consciousness—sweaty hands, the twinge in my stiff neck, a sensation of drowning in dead air. I squeeze my eyes shut, hoping if I just don’t open them, I won’t know I’ve awoken in this room I never leave, an existence that is waking death. The others never wake. It is only Theo and I who know the truth. I hold my breath, praying just this once, I can stay in dreams, in blissful unconsciousness as the others do, but it’s no use. In my dream world, the Parcinian, I glimpse the last light of cerulean crashing waves on my beautiful beach, squeeze Theo’s hand, and fall back to dreaded consciousness. I won’t. I squeeze Dad’s keys until they cut my hands, for the pain reminds me of him and that I’m alive. They also open the chests beneath the clandestine floorboards where the books are, the books that remind me of my mission. But for now, the beluga whale of my white bedrest seems mountains away from me; using my left hand to stabilize my right arm, I reach for a glass of water, then gulp the lukewarm liquid to wet my dry lips. Rolling over on my side, I watch as Euphora, the beautiful liquid that will make me dream, seeps out of the machine and into the tube connected to my body. It will take at least five minutes for the IV serum to rejuvenate, so to pass the time, I count my keys. Taking in the peculiar indentations and intricate details that make each its own, I sigh as the sounds of the keys clanking against each other fades into dull music; I’ve reached the Intermediary. It’s as if I have been reborn, but this doesn’t surprise me; it is always this way when you’re on the way to the Parcinian. The Parcinan is what we call our ‘state of mind’ when sleeping, or in other words, the third stage of consciousness. The first, obviously, is awakeness. Second comes the halfway point, the stage between the conscious world and the conscious unconsciousness, also known as the Intermediary. And third, where anything and everything is in the realms of possibility, the Parcinian.

When first reaching this stage, the location of one’s ‘landing’ is called the Receiver. These can differ by day, placing you in the Chocolate Hills on Tuesday and perhaps the ancient Parisian catacombs the next. Where you land is contingent on your thoughts, as the wonder of this world is the illusion of power it gives you. That’s why no one wants to wake.

I close my eyes. I open them, and now I’m home. I’ve been to this Receiver before. The scent of nectarine blossoms and honey consume my nostrils and sing to my five senses; Theo must be close. I feel it, and the thrill of
It leaves me quavering with gratitude. It is my fear that every time I land, I will not be able to find him. The lush meadow flows with dozens of willow trees that dance right and left with each gust of wind, guiding me like some sort of magical locus.

Looking down at my bare feet, I feel the ground tremble with his steps. I sense him—my love, my only purpose. He knew I’d be here and the mere thought of him arriving shortly sends my knees quaking and cocoons of joyful butterflies erupting inside me. I sink into the endless sea of grass, then stretch and roll onto my back to expose my face to the radiant sky in anticipation of his coming. It’s only minutes later that my trance is interrupted, but I am not bothered by this as it’s his gorgeous face blocking the balmy sun. My eyes sting. I always tear up in relief that he’s found me.

“God, how I’ve missed you.”

His voice is an embrace, and I look up, dizzy with the mere sight of him. I leave no time to waste before flinging myself into the warmth of his broad chest. He smiles down at me, then cups my face in his hands to lift me toward him. We are a study in contrasts—his square jaw to my delicate one, his clear blue eyes to my umber brown, his wavy ink black curls to my burnt sienna tresses. We breathe each other in, reveling in the sheer joy of it. I quiver with what is to come, but instead, he speaks.

“You are a vision from another world, my breathtaking Leena.”

I demur, knowing the scar on my cheek made his words untrue. Somehow, my scar was so powerful not even the Parcinian could erase it. He knew I was sensitive about it, so he caressed it, looking into my eyes as he did.

“Don’t think it,” Theo said.

His eyes make me forget my doubts.

“Have you thought about it?” he asks, switching to that dreaded subject. I bite my lip and look away.

“Of course. I always am.”

“And? Have you made up your mind regarding the day?”

My gut twists in annoyance.

“Why can’t we just enjoy our brief time?”

I smile up at him sweetly, hoping the look in my eyes will make him forget what he wants me to do.

“Leena, we’re the only ones who can do it.”

I look up at him, my insides clenching further.

“Why? I just want to be with you. If I do what you suggest, we might never see each other again. And I don’t know what I’ll do if...”

My eyes plead with him, saying everything I know we cannot as the government might be listening.

Theo takes a twig and starts drawing in the dirt, for They hear but They do not see.
Each day that passes is another day we could be together. Not just here. Not for a couple hours. Always. You know we must do this. We’re the only ones who can. He looks up at me, his eyes full of his confidence in me, and for a moment, I think I can. He takes me in his arms, and I feel the warmth and strength of him seep into me. In that instant, I forget everything except the wonder of him.

Tomorrow, Theo writes.
I take the twig and etch my reply into the dirt.
No. Yes. Alright.
He kisses me, finally, into oblivion.

* * *

Theo’s kisses make waking even more dreadful, for the stark contrast between the warmth of his lips and the graveyard embrace of my cold, clammy bed send me straight into my personal Purgatory. I grit my teeth in exasperation, looking at my thin hands and the cave of my stomach. I am not beautiful here as I am in the Parcinian, but not a sliver of guilt overcomes me, although the thought of mom’s homemade gnocchi bubbling and smothered in marinara and freshly grated parmesan makes my stomach clench in remembrance of things past. When the government first imprisoned us to our beds, at least they were considerate enough to allocate IV’s to our rooms to keep us satiated and barely alive. While in the Parcinian, your body is perfect, your fantasy avatar of yourself, while in reality, you are a shadow of yourself. I’ve unhooked the needle from my right arm and haven’t looked back. If They sense me dying, I will be taken away from here -- to a place where this constant dreaming and waking can all go away. I wonder if Theo will look different when we meet in the hospital. That is where we are both headed. The plan we’ve devised is to destroy the Center that keeps the human race dependent on the Parcinian as a gateway to a false life.

But the fear that gnaws on my mind is this: What if Theo isn’t real? And what if he isn’t there when I get to the hospital?

Sometimes, when the darkest worries grip my mind, these thoughts plague me. I would not put it past Them to taunt me with a man who doesn’t exist. And, They could be testing me to see if I will go against Them. I shudder to think what will happen if my worst fears are right.

But I cannot think these thoughts. I have to stick with the plan. And that means not eating Mom’s gnocchi. And believing that there is some good left in the world--something and someone to live for.

The others aren’t aware of what life could be. For God’s sake, they never wake. Past generations took consciousnesses and its pleasures for granted; if only they knew what would become of human life only two centuries later. Dad once told me that centuries ago, an author named Steven Pressfield wrote in a simple few sentences the truth I spend my days and nights tossing in my mind like a wilted salad. Pressfield pointed out, “It may be that the human race
is not ready for freedom. The air of liberty may be too rarefied for us to breathe.”

“Not ready for freedom?” I remember asking Dad.

“Yes. Just look at the human races’ choices. What is worse--a society that bans books for fear of impregnating people’s minds with incendiary information or a society that has books but does not bother to read them at all?”

I remember sitting on the kitchen stool, in a room that reeked of tea and tears, thinking about the history books I clandestinely read. Before the dawn of our new government, our noses had been so buried in our screens and social media that books and newspapers died, and we became unable to discern truth from fiction.

“The paradox seems to be, as Socrates demonstrated long ago, that the truly free individual is free only to the extent of his own self-mastery, while those who will not govern themselves are condemned to find masters to govern over them,” Dad said, quoting a favorite author who lived centuries ago. Now, his prediction has come to life.

I thought about the books I had read, the ones Dad hid under the floorboards of the basement. He said they had been required reading for all high schoolers back in his day, and that everyone had grumbled about having to read them. But now, the nightmare predictions in them had come true.

One of my favorites is George Orwell’s 1984, a dystopian tale about a man who tries to defy his government only to succumb to its power in the end. It illuminates a world where even keeping a diary is an act of rebellion, and love means you want the woman you “love” to suffer torments so you do not.

Another even more disturbing favorite, Aldous Huxley’s Brave New World, depicts a world where human life has been almost entirely industrialized, and the natural processes of birth, aging, and death represent horrors in this world. The populace is high on a drug called Soma which puts them in a constant state of ecstasy. Sound familiar? Yeah. I guess since the kids never bothered to read the book in high school they didn’t realize what was happening when the government offered us Euphora.

Dad always said, “Orwell shows us a world where we are deprived of knowledge, whereas Huxley reveals one where we don’t even desire it. What is worse?”

Theo and I know the answer. Our reality is both. But the others don’t know it. Only we know. And that’s why we have to do something about it.

* * * *

I’m reading Dad’s books again as they are giving me the strength to do what Theo asks. But I know if They find me with a book, They will kill me. But what can I do? Dad’s books are my most treasured possessions as through them, he still speaks to me even though he is no longer here. I press the books to my nose and inhale deeply.
Bibliochor, the smell of old books. In Latin, it means, “the blood of the gods.”

Inhaling the words gives me strength to do what I know I must.
My life is a chess game, yet I'm not the one making the moves that dictate my fate. It is They who move my pawn, limiting the realms of possibility in which I can love, feel, and be human. Each time I try to elude consciousness, I’m slung back into it like a lifeless rubber band.

But I’m not as stupid as They think I am. I can think for myself. I can choose something different. Theo will help me.

Sometimes it’s tough being different. It means I have this extra responsibility to free the Others because I can. But that doesn’t mean I want to. To be honest, I’m scared--scared to be alone, scared to be wrong, scared that when I get to the hospital, Theo won’t be there.

In my worst nightmares, I wonder if Theo is an idea I’ve conceived to keep me sane, just as in history, people slung themselves into “Netflix and chill” and virtual reality to forget the drudgery of their real lives. I think we were too lazy to create vibrant lives for ourselves, so we started living vicariously through actors and avatars. But then, the Government took our choice away from us.

Sometimes I wish I were an animated ragdoll like the Others; it would certainly be easier than trying to save humanity. But you know what? The only thing more arduous than saving a race of people is saving people so ignorant they don’t want to be saved. Theo thinks we’re going to be crowned heroes, but I know better. I don’t think anyone is going to be grateful to wake up at all. It will kind of be like a world of drug addicts going cold turkey. Yeah. Can’t wait.

*

Theo

The scent of nectarine blossoms and fabric softener once again blooms in my mind. Leena’s essence weaves itself into the tapestry of my dreams, like Daphne forever eluding Apollo. Could I catch her? Death would end the chase, the dreams, the falling. Eventually, the rainbow flashes ignite the twilight like fireworks in my brain, and I descend into polka-dotted darkness.

For now, I am complacent, content to float into the labyrinth of my mind, for there are so many rooms to explore. Go now, and do not think you are alone. I will be with you always, Jesus had said...until the end of time. Was the End now or did it happen long ago? Kicking my legs through water and air, I propel my way into another room in my mind. Lovely it is, though notes of bitter and metallic singe my tongue with remembrance of things past.

Remembrance of things past. It’s a phrase she uses--one she stole from a book of her father’s. I wish Dad had left me books. But no, I can’t think of that. Only of what Leena and I must do together. More, more, I say, tugging at the seams of
sweet unconsciousness. No, I must go higher and higher--out of here, out into the bright, cruel world.

Over the hedges of my brain I fly, defying dismay and grasping God. Please, just one finger. An image of Adam painted on the Sistine Chapel flashes through my mind, and the greatness of what humanity used to create tugs on my heart. Even if they don’t appreciate it now, one day they will. I hope. Right now, all I want is to float up--away from the burning light to burst into dream consciousness. I can feel the cool water again, brushing upon my toes like blue paint on a pulsing canvas. Trickle, trickle, it goes, making its way up to my calf, thigh, then belly until the water engulfs me in golden liquid bliss.

Unearthing myself from this endless sea, I gasp as my head breaches the water, and I look for her; always look for her lovely visage that transcends time. She is nowhere and everywhere in this world. But today is not to be. Wisping away from this conscious unconsciousness, I slam into concrete and feel the pain reverberate like a gong in my skull, and I count each painful ripple like waves in a sea--endless, pulsing, relentless--I want it to end, and yet I don’t, for the pain means I am alive, and that is something.

Glossary:
**Euphora:** The Drug they are on that keeps the people from waking up from the sleep world
**Receiver:** Where they end up after first going into this stage of consciousness
**Parcinian:** The Third stage of consciousness where they reach the dream world
**Intermediary:** the halfway between consciousness and unconscious consciousness

Kayla Catherine Kiani ’22
Dreams

Dreams substitute reality, perhaps
In a way that precedes it.
They impose expectations and beg for
Disappointments.
Subverting your reality,
Until you prayed for another.
I dreamed a lot. Of romance and glory,
Where I was more loved than I could love,
And pride was a magnet, demanding
Hungryly prying eyes and whispers.
You lived a lot. With heart and patience,
Where passion ripped your clothes at the seams
And perfection sewed them. Precisely.
Passion and perfection converged and I
Was full without the eyes.
Except for yours, those ones,
That drew me from dreams to
A dream reality with you.

Julie Tran ‘20
Beginner’s Luck

You are standing on a brink. They strap you, of course, and attempt to reassure you. It’s worth it, they say. Your gaze uncontrollably shifts downward and a terrible chill travels down your spine. Do you trust us? You murmur something about trust but your sweaty palms and your shaky breath quite obviously betray you. They all laugh out loud. Whenever you’re ready, jump! You know you’re never going to be ready. You are contemplating giving up when two fingers gently push you off the edge. You are sent spiraling down to the depths of the Grand Canyon. While you are falling, only a spate of vulgarity pass through your mind: shit, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck. That skanky asshole. But all at once, the falling stops and you are left hanging, swaying side to side. You breathe consciously. This is the first time you look around at the unperturbed lotusland, down at the river that is only a few feet below your head, and you begin to think, maybe they were right. You bird-dog the person who pushed you off; your neck is craning. Surprisingly, you admit to yourself that you would do it all over again, and on your own, too, this time. And you accept the beginner’s luck here. Not the beginner’s luck most people think of, where luck favors the beginner against an expert. This beginner’s luck is the one that actually matters, the one that allows (or, in this case, forces) you to do something for the first time when you thought you couldn’t (the one where luck favors the beginner in a battle against the self). The two fingers that gently nudged you — that’s your beginner’s luck. Without it, would you have jumped the first time…? Thankfully, this luck never runs out. It is present in most beginnings. Like that time you learned to ride a bike— you screamed, “Don’t let go, Mom!” — but she did anyway, and when you didn’t hear a response, you looked behind, panic-stricken, to see that she was a few feet behind, smiling. You fell as a result, felt betrayed for a split second, but found yourself excited that you were cycling on your own. You got right back up and cycled again, this time, allowing your mom to let go. You didn’t recognise the beginner’s luck then. But now you do. And one thing is certain, now, about the beginner’s luck: it comes when you don’t want it to, but when it leaves, you are relieved that it came. Kind of like puberty.

Zoey Ryu ′20
Eyes

Altophobia. Fear of heights. Apiphobia. Fear of bees. Amathophobia. Fear of dust. Alliumphobia. Fear of garlic. I know I am at peak discomfort when mentally reciting my favorite phobias alphabetically is less disturbing than engaging with the other human being sitting in the front seat of this car. If you could call this slicked up, futuristic-looking, rocket launcher a vehicle. I wonder if my father and his young, bubbly, affluent wife have done the nasty in the backseat. My corneas burn.

My dad, as slicked up as his car with his sunshades on, softly sings along with Jagger about wild horses dragging him away. Equinophobia. Fear of horses. My dad used to sing that I was his only sunshine. My eyes meet his shades in the mirror. I wonder if the plastic barrier of the lenses is his armor against me.

“Your mom tells me you got into Stanford. That’s great, honey.”

“Sure. How much longer till we reach the cabin?”


My dad smiles happily, “What do you want to do first? The lake is perfect this time of year.”


My dad takes off his sunglasses. The sun is not even that bright to be honest and I didn’t get why he even bothered wearing them in the first place. Maybe it’s a rich people thing. It’s probably a gift from his new wife. Whatever. He stares intently forward as if by will alone we could magically reach the cabin quicker.

“I don’t think I ever told you that I was sorry. That I failed you.”

Atychiphobia. Fear of failure.

In a burst of unwanted memory, I smell mint and salt. Cheap whiskey and my tears. Just one of the many memories of my dad’s ill-fated attempts at sobriety. Images of my mother’s frustrated tears when she realized that all of her waitressing tips were gone. Her face when she realized we would not make the rent this month.

I look into those eyes. Ommatophobia. Fear of eyes. Those piercing, crystal blue eyes looked nothing like the glazed, dull eyes from memory. Before the bad times, I used to proudly proclaim to my schoolyard friends that I had my daddy’s eyes.

“You failed me in every way possible.” Soon after meeting his soon-to-be new wife, my dad checked into rehab. I read an Alcoholics Anonymous book online. Step 8. Making Amends. Seriously? He wants to make his sobriety
amends when I’m stuck in a moving vehicle with no means of escape. Guess his wife, Stargazer? Or is her name Celestial? was good for something other than syphilis. Syphilophobia. Fear of syphilis.

“I know,” he replies.
“Just as I know that you know I am only here so that your rich wife can believe that her hubby made up with his estranged daughter and sang kumbaya with her in the forest.” My fingers twist in my lap. I breathe. Hylophobia. Fear of forests.

I continue on, “I just need her to write me a pity check, so I can actually attend Stanford and you can go back to your new life.” Forget me. Athazagoraphobia. Fear of being forgotten.

My dad goes quiet. Rocks form in my throat. I close my eyes. If I see nothing, then maybe I’ll feel nothing. Lies. But lies got me through the worst of it. My heart is like a wounded animal in my chest. Feral, lashing out at anything that comes too close: my mother, boyfriends, the guy at the corner bistro who just couldn’t take a hint. Symbolic but accurate. God, I hate symbolism. Symbolophobia. Fear of symbolism.

The car stops. My eyes open. We have arrived at our destination. I glance once more into the rear-view mirror into eyes identical to my own.

“Let’s see if this isn’t a waste of time.”

Danielle Dominguez ’19
settling into my airplane seat

The engine starts and that familiar white noise, backdrop to so much childhood anticipation, permeates the airplane: here I am again. I’ve always felt comfortable in transit, especially in the air, bridging continents as I learned to bridge identities. Since I was twelve, I’ve taken airplanes between Taiwan and the U.S. every summer. I loved the chrome and high ceilings and bigness of every airport; I was convinced that the moving walkways were powered by magic. On the plane, as I watched the Pacific inch by below my window, I would try to make out sea foam in the daytime and boat lights at night, and attempt to catch mountains peeking through the clouds. Crossing the ocean felt symbolic of the other shifts that were occurring: a slowing and quieting, from neon night markets in which sounds from every direction echoed between vendors, to big-sky-small-towns where even the stillness was swallowed up by the thin blue air. I felt like a totally different person in America: skin brown, hair tangled with chlorine as I played board games and camped and baked apple pie with grandparents. And then when I came back to Taiwan, I’d transform again: humidity sinking into my pores as I wandered apartment-lined streets on my way to school and ate dumplings. The plane ride was a buffer zone, giving me time to become my other self. I imagined the reflection of the plane in the waves, its motion mirroring the mental journey of the small child ten thousand meters above.

I am still that little kid trying to find their reflection in the water, being reminded of how big the world is. After nineteen years traveling back and forth, I’ve never felt completely whole in either home. I wonder if would have developed more confidence, deeper connections, or a more secure sense of self if I had stayed in one place. In all of these trips, has anything been lost? Have I left parts of myself behind, still rotating around the baggage carousel? I think about how heat is lost through friction as energy converts from kinetic to potential, and how sentences become meaningless as they are translated back and forth. Am I always in the wrong time zone? Are parts of me forever jet-lagged, lost in translation, dissipated by the friction of converting myself between forms? I am grateful to this plane ride for giving me ten thousand feet of distance from notifications and worries, an eleven hour pause between my origin and destination. The girl next to me tells me about her year studying abroad in Utah. An old woman across the aisle leans into her husband and puts her arm around him. On this plane, no one is grounded; everyone is in a liminal space.
If I don’t find home in either country I’m from, then maybe I can try looking along the path between them.
I put away my headphones. I listen to the engine hum.

Andria Tattersfield ‘21
part i

I have too many words and

not enough places to put them. or maybe too many possible places to put them
and no idea where is the right one or when is the right time. so many half-
written letters I never sent and poems that popped a tire on their way
somewhere, tucked into wrinkles in my shirts, behind my ears. my pockets
overflowing with ghost conversations. stuck between my teeth are all the thank
yous I ever want to give and a few extra just in case, sometimes falling out of my
mouth unexpectedly like slippery watermelon seeds. so many love-yous pressed
into my palms; I am always accidentally dropping them all over the place. this
clumsy body of words, stumbling and leaving trails of unfinished sentences
wherever she goes. sometimes feeling like a flower girl throwing petals into the
air at a wedding and the whole world is invited. sometimes feeling like a maple
tree in December, branches empty. but spring always comes. i am still here even
if all of my words fall and wither, even if i am too many words and do not know
how to stop giving parts of myself away.

here, take these words (but they are also for myself)

part ii

self-translation dictionary, entry #1:

hello nice to meet you
which is to say that i dive in heart first
so suddenly that i leave the rest of me behind,
which is to say that i sometimes forget that i have eyes, or hands, or voice,
and feel like i am learning to use them for the first time
which i think means that i have a lot of words i would like to give you
but they don’t quite fit in my mouth, so i’ll start with

hello

Andria Tattersfield ‘21
OUT OF MY MIND

Kylie Harrison '20
Who Decides My Identity

Very old Cuban lady with her old Cuban lady friend came up to me while I was sitting by the domino table. She said no está todo muy lindo. Oye que lindo todo. Como quiero a mi paiz. Then she asked me where I was from and I said Los Angeles and then she said no where are you from and I said my family is from Mexico. She said in Spanish tu querrá que las cosas de tu país son lindos y yo del mío. In Spanish she said we both yearn to be back in our own countries. Then she said but yours. Yours is so corrupt. They are in limbo and may let that communist in. Your country doesn’t know anything about communism. Then she left.

Later she came back and asked me how long I’ve been here. And I asked here and she said the US. I said I was born and raised here. Then she said “tu no eres Mexicana. Tu eres American. Eres de aquí. No, de allá. Tu no tienes acento mexicano.” I could not understand some of the things that you said.

I could not hide the embarrassment and shame on my face, as the old woman walked out of the store with her friend. How could she tell me that I was not really Mexican, when my whole life I had been told differently. Looking back at that experience now, I realize that she was right. I am Mexican, but I am American too. I take pride in my bi-cultural experience. I may not speak Spanish the “proper way”, but that doesn’t stop me from laughing with my grandma during “Gordo y La Flaca” or swaying to the beautiful lyrics of “Cielito Lindo”. Being a second-generation Latina means being a motely of different experiences. On one end, I am the girl who cried when she stood at the steps of the Lincoln Memorial and on the other, I am the girl overwhelmed with pride after climbing the top of an Aztec pyramid in Teotihuacán.

Elena Castellanos ‘21
Juxtaposition

I am a human with multiple stories.
Yo soy un humano de diferentes historias.
My tongue is split.
My lengua está dividida.
I carry two pens in my hand one green, red, and white and one red, white, and blue.
Yo cargo dos lapizeras una de verde, rojo, y blanco y uno rojo, blanco, y azul.

My heart is guided by my emotion and reason.
Mi corazón está guiado por la emoción y razón.
Sometimes I want to let go of reality and live in the dreams of my imaginacion.
Habes quiero olvidarme de la realidad y vivir en los sueños de mi imaginacion.
So what do I do, when my heart pumps the blood of two.
Que hago, cuando mi corazón bombea la sangre de dos.

My grandma says a tree can’t grow without its roots
Mi abulita dice que un árbol no puede crecer sin sus raíces
But what happens when the roots are moved to new soil.
Pero que pasa cuando las raíces están movidas a un suelo nuevo.
How long can a tree survive once it’s uprooted?
Cuanto tiempo puede sobrevivir un árbol que ha sido desarraigado?

Elena Castellanos ‘21
My Tongue Needs a Mechanic

My tongue needs a mechanic.
Yesterday, she tried to say Raize.
She began to propel herself back to make an O shape.
This is necessary to make a crisp RRRRR sound.
Half way into the back flip, she froze.
She tried again.
She went for the roll.
rrrrrrRR….
Again, she froze.
I should have known her lingual abilities weren’t up to par.
Last week, she said parkiar instead of estacionar.
And the week before, she forgot to stress the a in Mamá.
At night, I can feel her shake.
She moves.
Back and forth.
Extends and Retracts.
Side to Side.
Still no change.
It’s getting worse.
Today, she tried to say Cultura.
She went for the C
But stricked a K.
She’s scared to move.
She feels alone.
My tongue needs a mechanic.
I called but they said they don’t make those parts anymore.

Elena Castellanos ‘21
The modern-day education system in India is often characterized by Western influences such as 20th century British colonialism and media intervention. A deep fascination and want to be like western countries has caused a rift in Gujarati society. If you turn on the television or look outside, you are confronted with images of people with fair complexions and glowing skin. Different corporate businesses profit from people’s insecurities by selling products catered to a type of beauty that most Indians do not subscribe to. For example, salons sell skin-lightening creams by showing television advertisements of dark-skin women failing to find employment. After the dark-skinned woman applies the cream, she attracts a significant amount of male attention and gets hired by a male employer. This phenomenon does not stay confined to the television box, it also permeates into the Indian education system. When you open a government-sponsored textbook, you are looking at images of light-skin individuals with European facial features. When you walk around a school campus, you are confronted with murals of white children playing on the grass. One can say that Gujarat is having its own identity crisis. With a lack of media representation, young Indian students, both boys and girls, are unable to identify with the characters they see around school and on television. India, like its problematic advertisements, also comes in varying shades. Its ugliest shades often originate from the effects of colonialism on the Indian education system.

British colonialism forced India to transition from its tapovan paddhati to its current English-centric style of education brought by Thomas Babington Macaulay of England (Evans 2002). What was once a culture-based education has now become one primarily orients itself towards technological and economic advancement. According to Stephen Evans of the Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, “Macaulay called for an educational system that would create a class of anglicised Indians who would serve as cultural intermediaries between the British and the Indians.” Essentially, Macaulay made English, over native languages, the medium of instruction for education in India by passing the English Education Act of 1835 (Evans 2002). Subsequently, the term Macaulayism was drafted to demonstrate the extent to which Macaulay damaged the culture of India and its education system (Evans 2002). Although the British brought many great innovations, like the railway system, to India, to this day, many Gujaratis believe that their communities are still recovering socially, economically, and politically, from the years they spent enslaved under the British colonialists like Macaulay. To observe the ways in which colonialism affected public instruction for high
schoolers, I spent four weeks in Kandari, Gujarat, India at my Grandfather’s old school, Patel J.K. Sarvajanik High School.

Upon my entry at Patel J.K Sarvajanik High School, I began inquiring about the state of public, or in India, government schools. From my discussions with teachers, government officials, and Gujarati citizens, I got the idea that government-sponsored schools in India did not have the best reputation. Government-sponsored schools are known for not equipping their students with the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes for higher education. In addition to poorly written textbooks, many individuals expressed their concern with the quality of teachers at public schools. After spending four weeks at Patel J.K. Sarvajanik High School, I realized that many of the teachers at the public school were ill-equipped with the skills needed to teach all types of students. For example, some of the teachers would only teach for half of the time allocated for instruction, allowing for multiple hours of free, unstructured time. During these “free” periods, students would gossip and pull pranks on each other while the teacher sat at the front of the classroom observing. Some of the bolder teachers would leave class and fail to return for the rest of the period. In those instances, children under the age of eighteen were left without oversight at a government-run institution. Additionally, the school’s administration was more fascinated with my life than the lives of the students that they were teaching. Personally, this made me feel terrible. Instead of lecturing on accounting skills and world history, teachers would want to come chat with me about my life in America. The relaxed attitude of the teachers had me confused. I thought: where was the disconnect between the teachers and the students? After much deliberation and conversation with education specialists, I concluded that the disconnect originated from several teacher’s preconceived notions about their students. Currently, there is a phenomenon in India in which wealthier students attend private schools, and children of the labor class attend public schools. This manifestation of the wealth divide has caused teachers at public schools to see their efforts as futile because they believe that their students “are not from well-respected families,” and do not have the mental capacity to learn and climb up the ladder of social mobility. Despite their best intentions, some school staff do a lot of harm to the psyche of students coming from lower-class and lower-caste backgrounds. Patel J.K. Sarvajanik High School and many other public schools use outdated forms of punitive punishment and ineffective teaching methods that are ill-catered to their student body. For instance, the boys of each standard are lined up every morning to get a “hair check.” If their hairstyle did not abide by certain subjective guidelines, they were slapped and sent back home for the entirety of the day. Boys who were sent back home were denied entry into the school until they got the “proper haircut.” This overarching inability to accommodate to the needs of the students points to larger concerns of Gujarati society. For example, there is an overabundance of negative and
rigid attitudes towards children of lower classes. These students are not granted the same care, time, or consideration that wealthier students are given. While the government has launched many initiatives, like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and Right to Education (RTE), to close the inequality gap in rural Gujarat, the income gap will continue to rise while there is a disparity in the quality of education given to public school students in comparison to those at private schools. Although India has a booming population, every student deserves to be equipped with tools to explore their consciousness. Until this is recognized and accepted by every teacher, politician, and member of society, the future of lower-income Gujarati youth remains bleak.

Works Cited

Nandeeni Patel ‘21
In writing
my limbs carry out the functions of another woman.
I am distant to what makes me human
by a bit, a critical distance,
a suppression of the self.
With a slight tilt of the will*
I become someone else.
Emotions that once were vibrant
now blur my vision, cloud my mind
as I've become subject
to something bigger, more divine.
Oh precious, how I gather bits of you over time
from my masturbatory reappraisals!
Is it really you that I'm looking for?
or me, in you, through me?

I want to want, twice removed,
I miss to need, and be one
clearly delineated.

‘A rolling rock gathers no moss,’
my gentle gaze carries no harsh feelings.
I'm open and loving of living
but still trapped in something.

* “The act of teaching a stone to talk is a performance involving sacrifice, the suppression of self-consciousness and a certain precise tilt of the will, so that the will becomes transparent and hollow, a channel for the work” (Annie Dillard, Teaching a Stone to Talk)

Isabel Rose ’19
Self-conscious anthem

Half-singing,
I’m lonely and talentless
I can’t create, I construct
So when you ask me to be
I am restless (reckless)
There is nothing to me
but data and luck

Isabel Rose ‘19
things I know now / things you never will

We grew up together-
Black canvas shoes, hallways infused the smell of mallipoo
Classrooms with red grills, the electricity would come and go
The screech of chalk, goosebumps
Chennai weather at 41 degrees

You held my hand, we were five
Shared tiffin boxes,
I exchanged Methi parathas for fries
Pictures from my birthday-
Me in a tutu, a garden swing
You behind me, that boy-ish grin.

You didn’t know,
That when I was five,
Imaginary letters to you,
In fountain pens and broken ink
In playgrounds made from pipe dreams.

That when I was 15,
A photo album.
That picture of us, your chocolate skin
My cock-eyed glasses and butterfly wings.
Memories I held onto, memories I kept from you
Buried in a mahogany desk
In a city neither of us call home.

And at 21,
You’re a foreign concept to me,
The idea of you that I’ve left
In hallways where,
We’ll never meet.

Riya Kumar ‘19
Recently, I’ve been thinking....

Recently, I’ve been thinking. Mainly about human minds, and what chaotic machines they can be. Our minds flood us with thousands of vivid images and thoughts. Yet, no one can exactly picture what we’re thinking, no one can fully relate nor fully understand. Logic, facts and numbers are fodder for our minds to grasp the way the world functions. Yet, we make decisions based on intuition, instinct and emotion. Our minds guide us to post our innermost thoughts on social media for the entire world to see. Yet, these are thoughts we hide underneath the tresses of insecurity and denial, which refuse to make an appearance even when we’re all alone.

Recently, I’ve been thinking. Mainly about human minds, and how utterly paradoxical they can be. Our minds could be drafting research papers about the environment. Yet, we write these very papers in air-conditioned rooms containing trash cans full of coffee cups and plastic food boxes. Our minds could be framing arguments in favor of social justice, human rights and equality. Yet, they will never recognize the ways we are beneficiaries of the very systems of inequality we criticize. Our minds could be convincing us to achieve our passion and soar new heights that no human has ever reached before. Yet, our very minds present a thousand reasons to choose the road most travelled.

Recently, I’ve been thinking. Mainly about human minds, and how they always seem to miss the point. Our minds draw our attention to affairs of nations and people 7,000 miles away. Yet, no one seems to have the time to think about family and friends under their nose. Our minds feel sympathy for those in need. Yet, seconds later, we seem to forget that there is something we can do to change that. Our minds seems to love compartmentalizing phenomenon as women’s issues, third world problems etc. Yet, we seem to lack the vision of looking beyond these labels, and recognizing the shared gift of humanity between us all.

Recently, I’ve been thinking. Mainly about human minds, and how they seem so meaningless at times. Our minds spend aeons of time reminding us what we don’t have, and what we haven’t achieved. Yet, all that time, not once did we invest contentment in the beauty of everything in our lives that wasn’t necessarily perfect, but was ours. Our minds are hyper concerned about thinking forward, about how to leave an indelible mark in the future. Yet, we seem to be nostalgic of the past, and the serenity that came with living in the moment. Our minds are vigilant, constantly guarding what we can think about and what we cannot based on some arbitrary assessment of what is good and bad, or success and failure, or acceptance and rejection, or attractive and unattractive, or cool and lame, or…… Yet, we hold tightly to these confines imposed by our free, limitless and uncontrolled minds.
After all that thinking, my mind is more confused about how other minds think. If you can, please let me know what your mind feels.

Ravi Sadhu ‘19
Refugee

Do I have a self if I have nowhere to seek refuge? If I have no place to call home, and the place I considered home has changed forever?

Do I have a self if I don’t exist in the pages of history, or on the news hour on television? Do I exist if I’m just a pawn in a game of power?

Do I have a self if my identity is reduced to a number? If I'm considered the enemy by my own, and an alien to the rest of humanity?

Do I have a self if there’s no food in my belly, no strength in my purpose, and no peace in my heart?

Do I have a self if my world has crumbled in front of me, my loved ones I could die for are dead, and the only thing I have the luxury of thinking about is survival?

Do I have a self if I’m just a tool of perverse pleasure, an instrument of meaningless revenge, an object that can be violated by anyone arbitrarily?

Do I have a self if I continue to battle day in and day out, but no one gives a damn? The Americans say I do; they say I am a refugee.

Ravi Sadhu ‘19
Prodigy

I was born, pieced together by fragments.  
Just as the dingy doilies on abuela’s kitchen table,  
Laced by fabric that was laced with failure.

I was born, bred by mistake.  
And all the world, including mother,  
grossly underprepared for my creation.

As poems do not exist to be poems, I simply am.  
And already, the ground has opened up to accept me,  
with real poets all the same.

I am prodigy. Whole.

Anonymous
Bloody Sunshine

How do I hate him? He never asked to be repaid.
Like a daisy hidden in soft understory,
Yearning for one drop of bloody sunshine,
I screamed out shivering silence,
So Apollo, in pity, sliced open his sober vein
To drip streaks of sun across my petal tongue.

To give to him my blooming daisy heart in return
Was to kiss metal over flames, I knew.
But I let caution slip like pollen through my open fingers.
And my snowy petals crisped and fizzed like fat
Frying against his searing chariot until,
Charred and crumpled, they fell amongst the mulch.

In September, wilting, the daisy is limp. I sink my nails into the browning stem. Poor Ophelia! who, under weeping willows, now sings with only nettles in her crown.

Elaine Guo ’19
Girl and I

Girl walks. Rain sprinkles onto hood of red woolen coat.
Familiar voices drizzle about like rain but she prefers headphones to the voices of friends and city
for now.
The Tangible realm: to be enjoyed in careful quantities only. Increase portions with parental guidance.

Girl often suffers overexposure.
Bach seeps in through eardrums like he first seeped in through placenta and—lucky girl—there it is. Inside.
Mom and Dad grew up in a Reality called communism, so no parental laissez-faire will reconcile the worldviews that first sank
alongside Brandenburg Concertos into bones and grey matter with the opinions of this franks and beans country.

No need Inside to reconcile. No need to figure out my being to build pretty things in my head.

Girl is the antichrist. By popular consensus Christ is a man, you see.
“So this is God’s order of the world,” marvels the pious man who suffers only from the fault in Eve’s nature.
What a society! that too readily warns of ceilings before the girl even dips her toes into the world…

Well.
Even distrust of God does nothing to efface the patronizing reminders that mar her subconscious wall.
No need to graffiti my existence with inevitable disadvantages. Post no bills on my mosaic towers Inside.

For there, too, sprinkles rain, but like the trilling of flutes bestowed by Bach upon us mortals, wings dancing, dusting on red wool.

Elaine Guo ’19
I think my favorite part is when they fade into focus
That imperceptible transition between a dull numbness to a sharper pain
The signal that has finally made it through the peripheral nervous system into
the brain
What does it mean to feel pain?
How does the physical become chemical or mental?

Caity Kwun ‘20
some are repulsed 
by the idea of sleeping 
in a used bed.

why must we christen all that we touch?

not sanitized enough 
to remove the stain of past guests, 
not luxurious enough 
to be considered a vacation from reality.

a lapis blue concrete pool 
simmers next to a bustling concrete lot, 
chlorine wafting in the breeze.

toddlers in paper diapers, 
leathery men in chains, 
the samba hums low from a portable radio.

pulpy, palpable air 
entangles with crisp grass, 
fresh yet hard, aromatic like apples.

haphazardly placed wooden tables, 
carved with initials and dotted with ash, 
were made for languid afternoon card games.

there’s a building attendant on the second floor deck, 
pushing his cart of lotions and potions, 
attempting to forge a blank slate.

motels were made for memories; 
late night impromptu check-ins, 
the rest-stop of the restless.

the rooms smell of barefoot dreams, 
sweaty, indecisive nights,
hardened, yellow, calloused.

it’s a holding place for the unheld, 
loose baby hairs and idling cares, 
unkempt and floating on.

yet there’s a certain comfort in the chaos 
that the forced intimacy of motels demand.

the local diner’s illuminated neon sign 
peaks above the waning grey sky, 
lights blinking invitingly, 
gatsby’s green light.

small towns seemed to be defined by sights like these to an outsider.

the sky is a disjointed canvas 
of innumerable yet empty lives 
waiting to be defined.

a lone palm tree sways in solidarity 
with the hymn of passerby blues; 
for here the diner is not your home, 
the road is the only friend you know.

Skylar Addison ‘21
the earth is a woman;
we share a knowing laugh

to not have dominion
over your own land

to be trampled,
  walked on,
    by a grand-standing man,
      your body belonging
        to some bureaucratic scam

colored flags mark “X”
where he claims to own

you touch her
  she is not braille;
    to feel
      is not to know.

if eve was created
from the rib of man

  then take everything,
    please,
      it was yours to begin with.

sure it was man
who graced the moon

  but it is woman
    who fertilizes
      home’s saplings and roots.

you can open your palms
to clear mountain streams

  but good luck
cleansing the hand
that tries to snatch
the bounty of dreams.

Skylar Addison ’21
flaxen grains

pastoral fantasies,
silky gold tresses
women in white lace dresses,
dance beyond my dashboard.

bucolic scents,
fresh amber grain
burnt rain,
whisper coolly beside my cheek.

called and dirty,
i am a vessel of uncertainty;
smooth and pure;
the fields remain sure.

an open road invites solemnity
yet gives way to heavenly serenity.
i rip through quiet day,
leaving behind ripples that splash once i’m away.

i want to sow my seeds throughout this beautiful world,
outstretched fingers dropping bits of my soul
as my honda sambas through the street.

that’s the problem with humans,
or maybe just me.
i want to capture every moment,
weave my being into every landscape.

sometimes scenery is meant to defy stasis.
the soft morning light of a stained glass cathedral
that peaks through a sheath of sequoias
evokes the essence of god
yet epiphanies can’t be locked into place.

the thunderous rolling hills of golden grains
lapse through my brain;
a vision of youthful delight
that I can’t capture tonight.
beauty can’t be bottled up.
it cannot be purchased or consumed.
instead it must be lived and breathed,
so it can at least pass through you.

Skylar Addison ’21
The Unfastening

Heavenly bodies, aloft,
Gyrate upon a disk:
A blanket pulled taut
With a heavy mass tugging and
Pearl planets,
Loosed from necklace thread,
Orbiting.

What cataclysm started this
Sturdy balance?
Things fell apart
Just enough—

What great unfastening
Awaits?

We run. We walk.
Then we crawl.

We’ll hardly hear
The slightest hush
That ends it all.

Malea Martin ‘19
For Sale

Your old house now has no life.
You left us yesterday in Mother’s arms.
When you went, Mother asked what you were thinking.
You told her, “I’m visiting friends and family,
Love, I’m flying through the gloaming.”
Your last breath whistled through the gap in
Your tea-stained teeth, British as ever.

Your old house is now empty.
Mother boxed up your curation
From every corner of every continent.
Your wanderlust was never lust, but love.
You didn’t flirt with life, you married it.
But now, life wants a divorce.
What did life do that you must leave?

Your old house has new occupants.
Two men who never let the rental agency in for inspections,
Who smoke and spill wine on your carpets,
Who leave greased bones and fat in the kitchen sink,
Who don’t know you, who don’t belong here.

This old house is for sale now.
Once blue and red and chipping
Is now doctor’s office white, antiseptic.
Once bearing a bronze rooster on the roof that always knew north
Is now without direction.
Once your old house, yours--
Is now new. Not yours. Just sold!

Malea Martin ’19