

People

1.

You come to our class to give a lecture, and I find myself drifting off into the complexity that could be your life. I make up facts and stories based on the way you roll up the sleeves on your white collared shirt, or the way you keep your hair long. I even think you look cute for a second, and have a momentary crisis where I ask if I've been lying to myself about my sexuality, until I ask myself if I would ever kiss you and I immediately recoil in my chair at the thought. I remember I can think things are cute, like dogs and drawings and boys, but that doesn't mean I want to make out with them.

You're still teaching the lesson, and I think that I should pay attention. Something about dark matter and stars, and I wonder what it would be like in your shoes, in your tall lanky body, in your collared shirt so clearly on top of a grey t-shirt that isn't as professional. What would it be like, to know all that science and math, to have so much knowledge on a single topic, to be an astrophysicist?

For a second I fall into my own head so strongly I see everything you know blink before my eyes, but I can't remember any of it. It's strange. It was like, for a second, I was you.

The bell rings and I talk to my friend about props or costumes for the upcoming show, and we walk out the door. It closes. I doubt I will ever see you again, with your shaggy hair and rolled up sleeves and brain full of knowledge and experiences I will never know, but that you do. I think about what it would be like to sit down for coffee with you, this person I don't really know, and learn about your entire life story, your wishes, your fears, your traumas, your delights. But the door is already closed and I'm already walking across the quad and you are a just a blip, a person I barely met, a life outside of mine I barely touched.

Isn't it funny, isn't it strange, that we may never cross paths again? And yet, at one point in this universe, for one single insignificant moment, *you were there with me*. [Swimming Tapes] I don't know if I remember your name. Ryan, or something.

So many beautiful lives surround us, so many people we brush shoulders with who are moving in the opposite direction towards something we will never know. I wonder, did you think that about me?

2.

I looked you up on Facebook yesterday. I know our generation doesn't really use Facebook, but I couldn't find you on Instagram. Hey, most people can't find me on Instagram either, so that's just something else we have in common.

It's weird to me how I used to know you so well. How many beautiful memories I have of you, and how many more we could have had together, how many would be gone if we had never met. What would life have been like if you had stayed in this country, in my world? *Who would I be if you had not been my friend?* [William Finn] I think about it from time to time, but when I think of you, I usually think of something different.

I think about the camping trip where we met, singing songs from cartoons and riding horses and seeing so many, too many stars in the sky. I think I had a crush on you before I knew what a crush was, with your long blonde hair and your Aussie accent and the way you didn't seem to be scared or embarrassed. I wished I could be like that.

I remember talking over google hangouts and drawing on the whiteboard in your house. I remember scootering to CVS for candies and having sleepovers and playing hide and seek and swimming in your apartment complex's pool.

What I remember the best is the summer camp you made me go to. The one where we built our own beds out of twine and cooked all our food over a fire. I remember reading John Green at night to everyone from my hammock bed and the silent tears I pushed through at the end of the book. I remember talking about our favorite TV shows and pranking everyone and loving being your friend. I remember that you cared.

But that's all they are now. Just memories. You moved across the world, *and now someone's gonna get to know the better you, when I was supposed to.* [Dodie] I miss you, or maybe just the idea of you. I look at your facebook page, but think better of messaging and close it.

Maybe in another lifetime.

3.

The day you visited was not an easy one for me. The world was breaking, falling, hurting, and I felt like I was fit to burst. *All of my sorrow wouldn't fit in my chest, it just burned like a fire* and it hurt, hurt, hurt. [Anais Mitchell] You had come over to do something silly, to learn microsoft excel or spreadsheets or something from papa. But you found yourself reading my essay on the computer upstairs. You were so happy to help, bounding down the stairs and asking if you could give me feedback. I couldn't stop crying and you stopped on the bottom step.

"Are you okay?" you asked, in that innocent way that held compassion. I could only shake my head and break.

As I started to sob, you asked for nothing and sat next to me, gently, your hand softly scratching in my sweaty hair. It didn't seem to bother you that I was smelly from practice and that I couldn't talk through my sobs. You waited, hand running through my hair in a way that felt safe. You told me I was okay, I was brave, I was good enough, fighting every doubt like a skilled swordsman, one handed of course. You never took away the hand that was scratching and soothing. An anchoring root I can still feel the shadow of if I close my eyes and sigh. In that moment, we were in sync, like you could *feel my pain.* [Mother Mother]

I remembered other times that I felt you like this. When Luke teased me and you pulled me close, scolding him. When we watched Good Will Hunting because we had both never seen it, and sat next to each other. When you made music videos with all of us, directing and editing and coming up with the best ideas. Watching Dora in theaters, coming to my volleyball game, turning the music up too loud in the kitchen and dancing, making me laugh in the car as you sing

and made weird faces, *cooler than being cool, ice cold*. [Outkast] We fought over movies and clothing, yes. You've yelled at me and I've hated you, I've burned with jealousy over the things you've accomplished and you've slammed doors at my face. We're so different, so different, and it has caused pain, but you've also laughed with me and loved me and held me. That night, you sustained me.

I was in pain, a deep ache in my chest leaking out through my eyes and caught in my breath violently. But as you sat with me, shoulders touching, hand soothing, words comforting, the hurt inside me subsided for a moment of relief best described as home.

Not always so wonderful, but I'd be lost without you. [Saint Motel]

4.

I think I've been in love with you for a long time. Longer than I've known. You waltzed into my life in a way that I didn't know would become so important.

I don't think it will ever happen between us. We're too comfortable, yet too nervous. It's like it's been too long and we've missed the train. We just stand across the platform, looking at each other. In the same place, but never moving forward. The place we are in isn't bad, but in my opinion there could be something better.

I want to kiss your lips. [girl in red] *I want to sleep next to you and hold you close the whole night through.* [Troye Sivan] [The Beach Boys] In the morning I want to make breakfast and sit together and *pretend like there's no world outside* and *dance with you* in the early hours. [Jack Johnson] [Chad Beguelin] I want to be stressed with you, be a mess with you, be my best and my worst next to you every day. I think about hearing you call "I'm home!" as you walk back from work and I think about hugging you after my shows and spinning you around and kissing you like in the movies. I think about making dinner with you and playing ABBA on the speakers, *honey honey, how you thrill me.* [ABBA]

You are my companion, my partner, my shoulder to cry on, *my love, my life.* [ABBA] And I'll never let you know, never let you read this. We speak about the future as if we will be together, you tell me we have to do Halloween at your house next year, and I tell you that you have to meet my extended family. But college is fast approaching and I don't want us to go different ways. I want to be with you as much as I can. *To the end of time, to the end of the earth.* [Anais Mitchell] And when it all ends too.

When time and space collide, I hope I'm by your side. [Gabriel Mayers]

Analysis Essay

In *Fear Icons*, Kisha Lewellyn Schelegel analyzes her own fears, whether they be fears of her son getting injured or fears of terrorists. Her lyrical essays come mostly in first person and use quotations as a unique creative tool. Schelegel takes the words of other famous authors and mixes them within her own writing, intermingling her own words with the words of others to create something new. In the end, her writing creates a beautiful amalgamation of fear, understanding, and resolution. To emulate this style, I imitated her general stylistic elements, her incorporation of quotes, and her selection of personal topics.

Schelegel's writing has a clear style that involves first person as well as a variety of different organizational techniques to create interesting and dynamic essays. In my essay, *People*, I copied her style from the essay "Dick, about Your heart," an essay about Dick Cheney and Schelegel's relationship with this figure. This essay had multiple parts, each numbered. Though the parts were different, they had an overall theme of fear binding them together. I was inspired by this, as I was unsure if I could write a personal essay about one topic for so long, but Schelegel's multiple different styles allowed me to explore what else is possible in lyrical essay writing. Another aspect of her style that I mimicked was her use of first person, but also using "you" constantly. When I first opened her book, the prologue, "Jesus?" startled me with its use of "you" despite being in first person. Examples of this can be found in the first few sentences, with "Jesus? Is that you?"(1) starting off the essay. Another example is "I tried to do as I was told. I looked into your eyes. You looked like you were pretending to be brave"(2). Schelegel was seemingly addressing the audience with her use of "you," but on closer inspection she is

actually addressing Jesus. This continues in almost every single essay, with the “you” being the new topic. In “Dick, About Your Heart” the “you” is Dick Cheney, demonstrated in “You stand on a stage”(50), and in “San Andreas Fault” the “you” is Schelegel’s husband, seen in “I only remember the photograph you took of me through the mesh of the tent” (69). In my essay, the “you” is the person I thought about when writing the essay, a different person in each. I enjoy this style as it feels highly personal, as if I am writing a letter to one specific person. I was also inspired by Schelegel’s very direct letter writing style in “Dear Phoenix,” which even includes post scripts such as, “P.P.S. I enclose in this envelope a stone,”(80) but chose a different route when writing.

One of the most important stamps Schelegel leaves on her writing is her use of quotations to amplify her own words. The quotes she uses are inserted into sentences and can even be modified to fit her needs. She also sources them in a very minimalistic way, without footnotes or numbers. She simply uses square brackets and a name. I used the same technique in my essay, implementing quotes where I found appropriate and where I felt they would be best mimicking her style. Schelegel doesn’t always use quotes in her essays. In “Centaur” she doesn’t use any, but in “Wild Things” she uses an extremely large amount of quotes, such as, “Tonight, my son wears his owl pajamas and makes *mischief of one kind and another*. [Sendak]”(55). Similarly, in my essay, I used a minimal amount in essays 1 and 2, but brought in more for 3 and especially for 4. Schelegel’s use of quotes is not sporadic, but in fact reflects the essay itself. “Wild Things” focuses on her son and the book *Where the Wild Things Are*, and she uses many quotes from the book to help get the message across. However, in other essays like “Centaur,” the quotes would not add anything important. She also chooses her quotes deliberately, picking out Bible verses in

the essay “Jesus,” including “I asked your established face- you ‘icon of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation,’ (Col 1:15)”(4) and children’s book rhymes about her son, such as “Wild Things,” in which she quotes the author of *Where the Wild Things Are*, Maurice Sendak. I attempted to reflect these choices in my essays, choosing love songs, songs that remind me of this person, or songs by queer artists in the 4th essay about love. Then I choose a single line from a song I didn’t previously know in my 1st essay about a near stranger. Also like Schelegel, I had a sort of theme to my quotes. Whereas she chose literature, I focused on music and only chose quotes from songs or musicals.

Looking at the broader book of essays and themes, Schelegel’s choice in theme was a highly personal one, her fears. To emulate this, I chose a personal topic: people in my life and what I think of them. Many lyrical essays have extremely personal topics, from being gay to being black, but Schelegel’s topic was not one of identity but one of her very personal experiences that she owns, yet everyone can relate to. So rather than writing about my experience as someone who is gay, or someone who deals with mental health issues, I wrote about my experience with other people, something personal to me yet relatable to everyone. Schelegel’s essays are so personal, containing facts about her great fears for her son and on her own ability to be a writer, and it’s difficult to understand how she so easily revealed herself to a broad audience. I myself am getting nervous about sharing this with a small audience of English students and a teacher. But I think in doing this I am truly reflecting Schelegel’s ideals of opening up about yourself and your fears, and revealing yourself to the world, *if you dare*.

[*Handsome Devil*]

Schelegel's *Fear Icons* is a beautiful display of the human emotion of fear, one both deeply personal and extremely universal. Her use of quotes weaved among her own words serve to further amplify her writing and draw the reader into her own mind. Her choice of first person, yet using second person to refer to a different being or person every chapter pulls the audience in and creates an intimate feeling in all her essays, and her broader choice of theme allows for a relatability many essayists miss. In emulating her, I took these ideas and applied them to my own life and style of writing to create a piece that reflects not only my deeper inner thoughts, but my outlook on this world as well.