

THE HARVARD
independent
11.7.19 THE STUDENT WEEKLY SINCE 1969



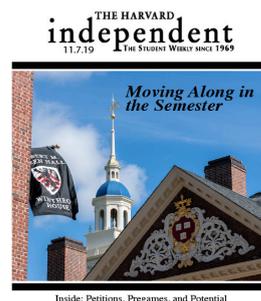
*Moving Along in
the Semester*

Inside: Petitions, Pregames, and Potential

The Harvard Independent

11.7.2019

Vol. LI, No. 6



The Indy is just chugging along.

Cover photo by Andrew Haimovici '21

CONTENTS

- 3 A Dissolute Council
- 4 Lost in a Cloud of Smoke
- 6 The “Massive” Student Tailgate
- 8 Hollow Days
- 10 My Mother Serena Joy

STAFF

President Jilly Cronin '21
Editor-in-Chief Tushar Dwivedi '20
Associate Editor Marissa Garcia '21
Managing Editor Ana Luiza Nicolae '22

News Editor Graham Walter '21
Forum Editor Alaya Ayala '21
Arts Editor Jasper Fu '21
Sports Editor Elizabeth Gummer '21
Podcast Editor Marissa Garcia '21

Visual Arts Editor Natalie Sicher '21
Photography Editor Andrew Haimovici '21

Staff Writers Jose Espinel '20
Claire Park '20
Malcolm Reid '21
Evelyn Gray '21
Mimi Tarrant '21
Grace Tworek '21
JP Vieira '21
Jaycee Yegher '21
Amal Abdi '21
Michael Kielstra '21
Aidan Fitzsimons '21
Ava Salzman '23

As Harvard College's weekly undergraduate newsmagazine, the Harvard Independent provides in-depth, critical coverage of issues and events of interest to the Harvard College community. The Independent has no political affiliation, instead offering diverse commentary on news, arts, sports, and student life.

For publication information, email subscriptions, and general inquiries, contact President Jilly Cronin (president@harvardindependent.com). Letters to the Editor and comments regarding the content of the publication should be addressed to Editor-in-Chief Tushar Dwivedi (editorinchief@harvardindependent.com).

The Harvard Independent is published weekly during the academic year, except during vacations, by The Harvard Independent, Inc., Student Organization Center at Hilles, Box 201, 59 Shepard Street, Cambridge, MA 02138.

Copyright © 2019 by The Harvard Independent.
All rights reserved.

Find us online!



@HarvardIndy



soundcloud.com/harvardindy

INDY NEWS

A Dissolute Council *Movement To End the UC*

By MICHAEL KIELSTRA
and ARSH DHILLON

On Sunday, October 27th, Nicholas Eynon '21 sent an email to the Kirkland mailing list, urging students to sign a petition to dissolve the UC. The Dissolve the UC group hopes to get their referendum question on the UC voting ballot, so, as they state, the UC “can #cancel itself lol.” Essentially, the group’s main claim is the UC, with its cringy emails and overly friendly members, is too annoying and pointless to exist. So instead of voting for the UC President, Eynon has asked the members of Kirkland to vote for his petition, which would replace the UC Constitution with a single clause which simply states that the UC as a body is dissolved, and say “Bye Bye UC :)” Although such petitions are, according to the UC Constitution in its current unmodified form, usually simply advisory and not binding, the passing of this one would represent a serious blow to the legitimacy of the governing body.

Bye, Bye, UC :)

The UC is no stranger to existential issues. It has almost impeached at least one President over issues of campaign finance (passing out buttons made from blanks stolen from the QSA), and in 2019 it voted that the President and Vice President, technically “Executive Officers” and not full “Members”, could neither propose legislation nor vote. Proponents of this ruling called it “the Great Reform”; the Crimson called it “uncommonly silly”. Furthermore, efforts to dissolve or, at least, severely inconvenience the UC have a long history. In 2011, the Crimson refused to endorse a candidate for the Presidency, encouraging students instead to abstain from voting at all. While this editorial argued that the UC was simply too powerless to do any good, Eynon’s claim that the UC actually

does harm by spewing pointless fluff and wasting time or worse can find plenty of historical confirmation as well.

In the late Twentieth Century, the UC passed various resolutions against such things as the behaviour of the Burmese government, having little to no effect on the actual situation in Burma and using up meetings that could have been geared instead towards student services. In 1992, it led a charge to convince Harvard to ban grapes from dining halls, and succeeded until 1997, when a counter-protest under the slogan “Grapes are tasty” brought them back again. The UC has been around for a very long time, and any such organization is

bound to have made a few slip-ups here and there, but at this point the argument could be made that Eynon might be right. After speaking with several Kirkland residents, a similar sentiment seems to abound: “I was amused, to be honest - the UC really doesn’t do anything.” These students also did not fill out the petition itself, indicating a somewhat strange level of apathy regarding both the UC as well as its dissidents.

Be that as it may, the UC is not without its supporters. In an email to the Kirkland mailing list, Madison Trice '21, one of Kirkland’s UC representatives, wrote that “The avenues of



Andrew Haimovici '21

INDY NEWS

A Dissolute Council, continued.

activism and representation [provided by the UC] are both really important for moving change forward at this school.”

“The avenues of activism and representation [provided by the UC] are both really important for moving change forward at this school.”

She was forced to make this defence on her own, as the UC leadership has neither issued a statement nor responded to the Independent’s request for comment. (Carter Nakamoto ’21, Kirkland’s other representative, also seems to be staying out of this.) Perhaps this is more evidence in favor of the idea that the UC needs shaking up: in a time such as this, a crucial turning point in the history of the body, it falls not to the President, nor the Vice President, but to one of Kirkland’s representatives to defend its very existence. Trice, incidentally, did

not stop there and stated that she’d be happy to speak further if given the opportunity.

Bees? ... NO!

There have been no other referendum petitions that would so completely impact the business of the UC, although there is one to simplify the voting system so as to choose all representatives and members simultaneously, another to merge BoardPlus and Crimson Cash, and a third which simply states “Bees?” (To this we, taking our cue from Nicholas Cage, strongly urge our readers to vote “No”.) Like many public occurrences on campus, the general flurry of petition drives has also found itself providing a forum for Divest Harvard. Last year, they passed a divestment referendum with 72% of the vote; this year, with Harvard’s endowment still invested in fossil fuels, they are trying to do the same thing again. If the UC does survive, this coming term looks to

be both busy and controversial.

Satire V, a campus humour organisation, took responsibility for the petition and claimed it was a prank, but the debate it has engendered is symptomatic of a deeper issue regardless of who started it. Whether the Dissolve the UC has any real widespread support, the matter of a number of Harvard students viewing our student council as pointless and annoying shows that our student government lacks the legitimacy and respect it needs. Maybe getting their referendum on the UC ballot will shake things up enough to force the UC to be more effective in representing the student body. All it takes is a simple majority vote...

Michael Kielstra ’22 (pmkielstra@college.harvard.edu) is, if his desk is anything to go by, an expert in replacing the structures of order with glorious chaos.

Arsh Sekhon ’23 (asekhon@college.harvard.edu), like Michael, seems to enjoy chaotic energy a bit too much.

Lost in a Cloud of Smoke

Examining the Vaping Epidemic on College Campuses

By ANNIE COLLOREDO-MANSFELD and MARY JULIA KOCH

They’re mango, watermelon, or mint. Small, USBs, housing gigabytes of potential. You’ll find them in a pocket, a pencil case, maybe the palm of your hand – anywhere but a smoke shop in Massachusetts.

What’s happening with vapes? In light of the state’s recent ban on nicotine and vaping products, The Independent decided to investigate the threats posed to youths by the wildly popular vaping trend, specifically by JUULS. Given the preponderance of JUULS and vaping on Harvard’s campus, we reached out to Lauren Sandford, a staff writer for ConsumerSafety.org – who is trying to spread awareness about the hazards of vaping – for more information on the subject.

INDY: What are your thoughts about the vaping epidemic?

SANFORD: I personally find the statistics of injuries and deaths linked to vaping pretty

shocking. It seems that overnight, e-cigarettes went from a considerably safe alternative to tobacco cigarettes to a human health hazard. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), there have been about 1,888 reported cases of lung illnesses associated with vaping in every state except Alaska. There have also been 37 confirmed fatalities in 24 states linked to this mysterious lung disease. The illness has recently been given the name EVALI, which stands for e-cigarette or vaping product use-associated lung injury. Even with this recent discovery, I think more research needs to be done to ascertain what exactly is causing so many e-cig users to suffer.

37 Confirmed Fatalities...

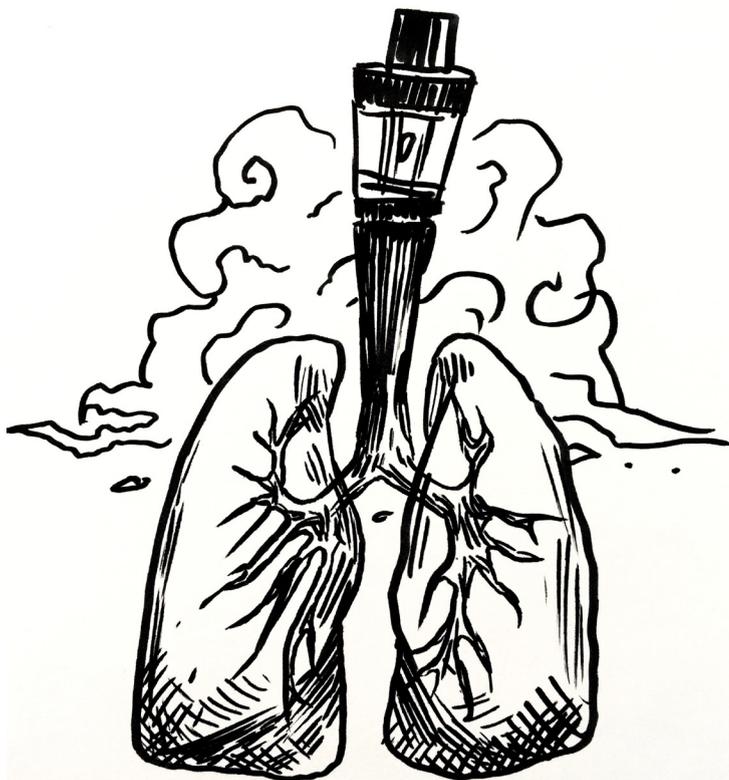
INDY: What are the hazards of vaping, and how does it compare to cigarette smoking? What are the long term effects?

SANFORD: E-cigarette manufacturers, like JUUL, originally intended for its products to be used by adults who already had a history with smoking and nicotine addiction. However, these same companies have also been accused of explicitly targeting young people with enticing, teen-friendly marketing campaigns.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) state that e-cigarettes are not safe for kids, teens, and young adults. E-cigs contain high levels of nicotine that can be detrimental to teen brain development. According to Truth, a single pod contains as much nicotine as a pack of 20 cigarettes. E-cigarette vaping liquids can also contain THC, CBD oil, and other chemicals that can potentially harm the lungs when inhaled. Cases of teens who have suffered from seizures,

INDY NEWS

Lost in a Cloud of Smoke, continued.



Ava Salzman '23

nicotine poisoning, exploding or defective e-cig batteries, and death as a result of vaping have also been reported. For more in-depth information about the potential short- and long-term health effects of vaping for teens, check out the CDC website.

"A single pod contains as much nicotine as a pack of 20 cigarettes..."

INDY: Has the prevalence of vaping decreased now that it is illegal in Massachusetts?

SANFORD: To my understanding, vaping was declared a public health emergency in Massachusetts in response to the growing number of hospitalizations and fatalities linked to vaping. According to Dr. Monica Bharel, Commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH), the e-cigarette ban involves the following:

"The sale or display of all vaping products to consumers in retail establishments, online, and through any other means, including all non-flavored and flavored vaping products, including mint and menthol, including tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) and any other cannabinoid, is prohibited in the Commonwealth."

The ban won't necessarily make it illegal for

users to vape, but it could make it more difficult for consumers to purchase e-cigarettes and flavored e-liquids.

The Trump Administration, as well as several states, including Michigan, California, New York, and Rhode Island, has also proposed vaping and e-cigarette bans in an effort to curb the teen vaping epidemic. Stores like Kroger, Walgreens, and Walmart stopped selling electronic cigarettes in wake of the growing uncertainty over the health risks linked to vaping. The bans may also prohibit vaping in public spaces.

INDY: Do you have any statistics on the usage of vaping on college campuses?

SANFORD: Though I could not find any concrete data that reveals how many users vape on college campuses, the CDC states that 1 in 5 high school students reportedly vape, and 1 in 20 middle school students have used electronic cigarettes in the past 30 days.

INDY: What is the FDA doing to address the issue?

SANFORD: In the midst of the vaping epidemic, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) released this report on October 4th, 2019 advising users to stop using certain e-cigarette products, especially those containing Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), that were obtained off the street. Other warning letters and regulations can be found on the FDA website.

More generally, the FDA is cracking down on e-cigarette manufacturers that are making false claims that its products are safe. In September 2019, the FDA sent a warning letter to JUUL Labs regarding claims the company was making about the safety of its products, and JUUL's marketing practices that were deliberately targeting a younger audience. These are not the only actions the FDA is taking to address the vaping epidemic; more specific information and cases can be found on its website.

JUUL marketing practices deliberately target a younger audience.

INDY: How can schools better regulate the usage of JUULS, giving that "juuling" is very easy to conceal?

SANFORD: Though I am not qualified to make claims about how schools and universities

can better regulate vaping, we have seen that college and university campuses across the nation are enforcing e-cigarette bans. The most recent case I have seen is Texas A&M university enacting a campus-wide vaping ban that applies to students, faculty, and staff.

INDY: What advice do you have for addicted users?

Recently, there have been reports of e-cig users who are turning to traditional cigarettes in an effort to kick their nicotine addiction brought on by vaping. However, the CDC has other recommendations for users who are addicted to vaping, and users who have been harmed by their e-cig devices have the option to sue the manufacturers for compensation for their suffering. There have already been cases of younger plaintiffs who allege that JUUL and other e-cig companies falsely advertised their products to appear "healthier" and "safer" than regular cigarettes, which have led many users to unintentionally develop nicotine addictions. JUUL is expected to receive a wave of consumer lawsuits in the midst of the mounting health claims against its products.

"JUUL is expected to receive a wave of consumer lawsuits in the midst of the mounting health claims against its products."

INDY: Lastly, what is your profession/what is your background in regard to e-cigarettes, and how have you gathered this information?

I am a staff writer for ConsumerSafety.org, a consumer advocacy organization dedicated to arming consumers with the information and resources to recover financial losses caused by unsafe products and conditions. One of our goals is to spread awareness about the dangers linked to vaping and to keep consumers informed on these issues. We find most of our information from reputable organizations, like the CDC and the FDA, and stay up-to-date on all e-cigarette news so that we can deliver the most accurate information possible.

The legal and health detriments of e-cigarettes are unmistakable. But whether this knowledge will dissolve the vaping culture is a question of time and commitment; the flavors are enticing, the addiction is ever-present. Fostering a dialogue on the vaping culture is a step in the direction of a safer, healthier youth. We hope to promote this change within our Harvard community.

Annie Colloredo-Mansfeld (acoloredomansfeld@college.harvard.edu) and Mary Julia Koch (mkoch@

INDY SPORTS

The "Massive" Student Tailgate

Harvard Comes Together Across the River

By ELIZABETH GUMMER

Attendance was remarkably high at the Harvard-Dartmouth football game this past Saturday, with the stands of historic Harvard Stadium filled with fans, families, and friends alike. A total of 20,112 people came out to the home game, the most (aside from Harvard-Yale) since the Crimson's 2008 meeting with Holy Cross. But what was different about this game that brought out such significant student attendance compared to the past games this season? It may have been due in part to what Harvard Athletics publicized as the "Massive Student Tailgate" that would occur prior to kickoff at 1pm.

"MASSIVE Student Tailgate!!"

Harvard is not exactly known for its tailgate culture. While many may look at the school as leading in academics, it is not commonly renowned for its school spirit, especially with regards to athletics; student attendance at typical sporting events tends to be low. Unless there is a championship game or important match, students don't seem to find their way across the river into Allston, especially as the weather continues to turn south. Considered amongst students as one of the main sporting events of the year, the Harvard-Yale football game draws crowds of students that is unmatched by any other Crimson team.

For the 135th Harvard-Yale meeting last year, Harvard broke tradition and hosted the game not at historic Harvard Stadium but rather at Fenway park. Aside from simply changing location, Harvard denied the request of students to relocate tailgates to the on-campus athletic facilities. Whereas in past years there was the communal Harvard-Yale student tailgate held on Cumnock Field and Harvard sanctioned tailgates were held the tennis courts, last year Harvard admin-

istration chose not to allow the typical pre-game festivities to occur.

Prior to the game, students were told that Harvard Athletics were planning on hosting tailgates by Fenway Park in an attempt to bolster student attendance at the game. By moving tailgates downtown, Harvard Athletics wanted to incentivize making the journey off campus and increase the amount of students who actually watched the game. Upset by this decision, over 700 undergraduates signed a petition to move the tailgates back to their original location on Harvard campus, a more accessible location for Harvard and visiting Yale students alike. This request was denied by the administration, with the expectation that tailgates would be able to be hosted by Fenway.

Come game day in late November, no tailgate space had been provided near Fenway. Instead, students were guided to attend pre-game events in the Science Center plaza. Unimpressed by the offering from the college administration, most students chose to attend private events to pre-game "The Game" itself. Many of these events were exclusive to members of specific social clubs or self-selecting groups of individuals. Senior Carrington Walsh felt that the "DSO and Athletic Department had a strong hand" in the lack of ability for students to come together, and "the administration actively thwarted the efforts of undergrads to enjoy and revel in Harvard school spirit." On one of the few days of the year that Harvard students express collective school pride, many chose to spend the day with select groups away from the general student population.

"The administration actively thwarted the efforts of undergrads to enjoy and revel in Harvard school spirit."

Moving forward to the 2019 season, stu-

dents have trickled into games in similar fashion as past years. The Harvard-Brown game late this September showed promising spirit, with both Harvard and Brown students meeting on Cumnock Field prior to the 7pm kickoff for a communal tailgate. While the tailgate wasn't hosted by the college itself per say, students were given the ability to congregate on campus property for the event. Complete with rental U-Haul trucks, blaring music, and plenty of beer, the event gave off what one junior at the college described as "Harvard State energy." Keeping the energy alive for the game, most students stayed around to catch the football game after the conclusion of the tailgate. Attendance was similar as in past years, with the crowd filling slightly below a third of the stadium's capacity with 10,088 spectators.

10,088 spectators

This weekend, Harvard hosted what was promoted as a "Massive Student Tailgate" prior to the Harvard-Dartmouth game. Straying from the usual 11:30 am to 2:15 pm lunch hours offered by HUDS, this tailgate was marketed to undergraduates as the lunch option for the afternoon. The event served up burgers, salad, and brownies from 10:30 am until 12:30 pm; all but two of the undergraduate dining halls were closed for lunch in light of the event. Sophomore Grace Hulslander felt as if she would "have no other option but to come to the tailgate," which admittedly is one effective way to enhance attendance, but others such as sophomore Kat Hairston felt "forced to go to the tailgate because of the closed dining halls," a sentiment that does not emit much enthusiasm towards the game or spirit in general.

Despite mixed reviews in anticipation of the event, the venue was bustling at 11 am on that sunny Saturday afternoon. The crowd was adorned with various Harvard

INDY SPORTS

"Massive" Student Tailgate, continued.

paraphernalia: DHAs, letter sweaters, logo laden t-shirts, and Harvard team gear. Mingling amongst themselves, students spread out in groups, large and small, and enjoyed the atmosphere of the event.

In addition to Harvard students were the families of the class of 2023. As the game occurred over First-Year Family weekend, families of the youngest class were welcomed to join the pregame affair. Students and their families congregated on Mignone Field, notably emitting a more wholesome feel than the average college tailgate. To entertain, the college offered a mechanical bull ride, live music, and a restricted 21+ area where drinks could be purchased, though most students though were simply sporadically sprawled across the warm turf eating their lunch, awaiting the 1 pm start of the game. Unlike the stereotypical college tailgate, there was no (obvious) underage consumption of alcohol, no loud voices, danc-

ing, or physical tailgates of trucks.

"It seems like Harvard succeeded at incentivizing students to come to the game by hosting a tailgate prior to kickoff, indicated by sheer attendance to the game itself."

It seems like Harvard succeeded at incentivizing students to come to the game by hosting a tailgate prior to kickoff, indicated by sheer attendance to the game itself. While this number was of course boosted by visiting families of the first-year class, the student section of the game was noticeably more vibrant than past games this season. Prashanth Kumar '21 reflected on the importance of Harvard Athletics on facilitating school spirit through "fostering school

wide activities" as a way to "increase student participation and decrease exclusivity." This event proved that given the space to do so, students will show up for their teams and take part in school spirit.

In the opinion of Olivia Chapman '21 "school spirit is such an important part of the American college experience," and that spirit is abundant at events such as tailgates and sports games. When the administration facilitates, or even simply allows, the gathering of students in these spaces, students are able to participate in an experience that is somewhat unique to the American college population. Hurrah to Harvard for hosting this weekend, and here is to the hopes of harbouring future school-wide spirit through

Elizabeth Gummer '21 (elizabethgummer@college.harvard.edu) writes sports for the Indy.



Andrew Haimovici '21

INDY FORUM

Hollow Days

Some Thoughts on the Holiday Season while Away from Home

By ALAYA AYALA

It's November, and coincidentally the beginning of one of my favorite times of the year. There's just something magical about the time before Thanksgiving, and the idea of planning ahead for seeing family again. The holidays have always held notes of the fantastic for me. The nights leading up to it feel more vibrant, as if some barrier between me and my surroundings is getting thinner. When I was younger I used to get so excited by this experience that I believed that there really was a barrier getting lifted between me and some other dimension. Now it's less about the fantastic and more about the knowledge that the year is coming to a close. These while I'm at school are going to be some of the last ones where I'm actually going to enjoy being outside instead of shivering and hurrying to get inside because of the cold.

Since coming to college I've noticed that the cold, the holidays, and my emotional experiences are all really deeply tied together. One of the most festive times of year that begins with Halloween also marks the beginning of what will be an emotional struggle with being away from my family back home during such a happy time and the stress of exams and final projects here.

"Since coming to college I've noticed that the cold, the holidays, and my emotional experiences are all really deeply tied together."

For the last two years, my Halloween was spent alone. The days leading up to my first Halloween at Harvard were pretty fun. I decorated the common room with one of my roommates and bought a ton of can-

dy for the room from CVS. I went thrift shopping for a costume with some friends and acquaintances in Central Square, and I consulted with my mom for my siblings' Halloween costumes back home, helping her to nail down some final details for their facepaint. The first time I did an elaborate makeup look and enjoyed a night in with candy and a horror movie. The second time I worked as a bartender at my place of work with a full face of Halloween makeup and went home to sleep afterward. I didn't go trick or treating, or throw a Halloween party with my friends and family like I did every year growing up. I didn't have some grand time that left me wishing it had never ended in the morning. It was just a cute night where I indulged myself in some nostalgic things and then I went to sleep.

This isn't meant to convey that I had a bad time, or that my last two Halloweens were sad nights. Rather, I mean to point out how adulthood has a habit of being isolating and of minimizing the more "magical" aspects of life. Things that made my heart sing when I was a kid, like Halloween and prancing around in a costume, only make me smile a bit now. I don't know if it's because college has sucked some of the life out of me or if it's because Halloween always makes me homesick, but I simply don't enjoy the holiday as much as I used to.

The same goes for days like Thanksgiving and Christmas. Thanksgiving break has grown into something stressful since coming to college. Instead of enjoying time with my family, deadlines for projects and final exams always hover in the back of my mind. There hasn't been a ton of space for being "thankful" when I know I have to go back to school in two days and pick up the pace as we rush toward the end of the se-

mester. Of course, I realize it's part of being an adult, this "taking your work home with you" phenomenon, but I didn't realize how much it could ruin a holiday entirely when I went to college.

Winter Break is an entirely other matter. Back home, there isn't much space for me anymore. It isn't anyone's fault, but really just a matter of a big family having to make do with a limited amount of space. When I moved out to go to college, my younger brother moved into my bedroom so that he wouldn't have to share a room with our baby brother anymore. Now Winter Breaks are spent sleeping in my little sisters' bedroom or making do with the living room couch. This gets rather stressful after a few weeks. I've been left wishing to go back to Harvard where I have my own space, when I should just be enjoying spending time with my family, who I no longer see nearly as often as I'd like to.

"Back home, there isn't much space for me anymore."

That's on top of how restrictive it can feel to be at home during break compared to the relative freedom of being away at school. Here, if I want to leave at 3am to go to CVS, or stay up all night binge watching Netflix, or go out on a Friday and not return until the next day, no one bats an eye. I can't do things like that at home, because there aren't 24-hour pharmacies close by, and I don't have a car at home to get around with, and my siblings need to sleep because they have school the next day, so I should "seriously go to bed too." This change to my routine at school is a month long, and has served to seriously damage the way I used to see Winter Break when I was

INDY FORUM

Hollow Days, continued.

Now, yes, it's still something to look forward to as a break from college stress, but there's also this sense of no longer knowing who I am in my own home, or where I fit in. Thus, Christmas and New Years will probably never be the same for me, because I'm a visitor now when I go home, rather than someone who lives there.

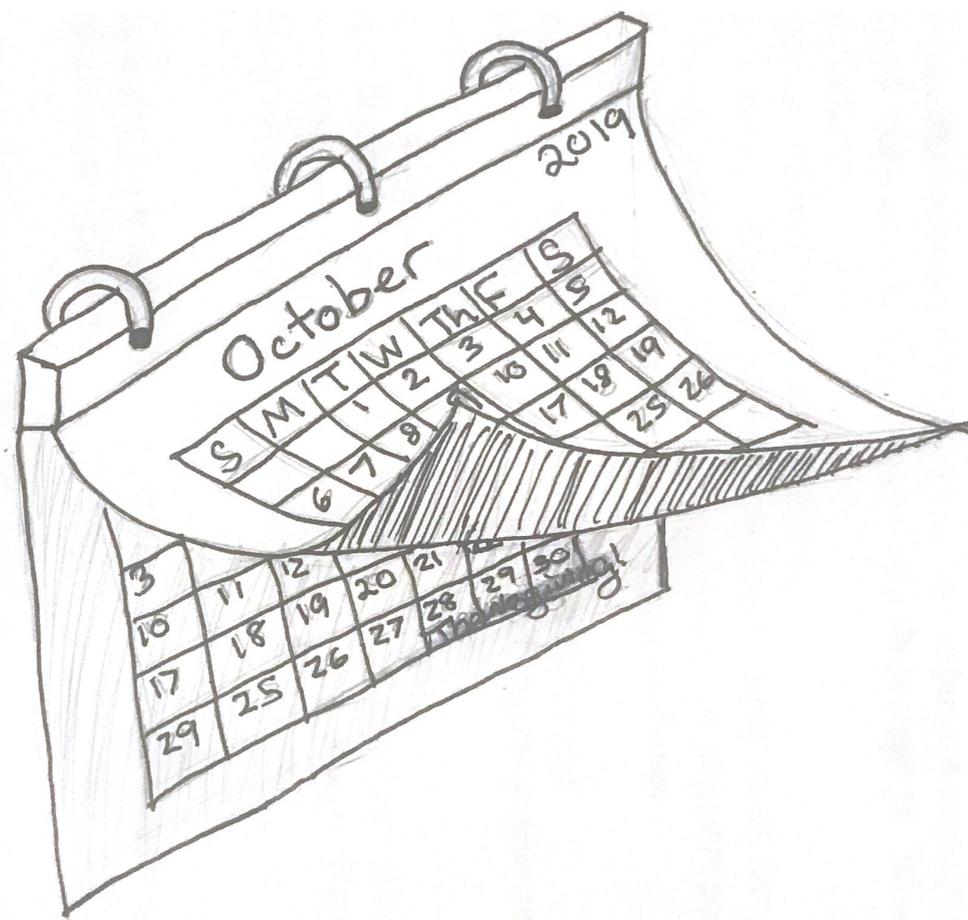
Thus, Christmas and New Years will probably never be the same for me, because I'm a visitor now when I go home, rather than someone who lives there.

I know I'm not alone in my experiences, especially here at Harvard. I know people who dread the holidays for different reasons entirely. They actually can't go home, because they live too far away and plane tickets are expensive. Or maybe since coming to college they've had insurmountable falling-outs with their families, and they no longer feel safe at home. It's a different reason for everyone I've talked to about it, but the sentiment is the same: the holidays aren't the same since we've had to spend time away from home, and we don't know what to do to fix it. For my part, I'm hoping that this year will be different, because this year I have a driver's license and I can

leave the house more easily if I want to. This has also been one of my least stressful semesters at Harvard, which I'm hoping has a positive impact on my time at home and the days I will spend decompressing from Finals-induced-stress.

I'm hoping others will read this piece and see that they aren't alone if they do dread the holidays for whatever reason, and that it helps someone to make changes that might minimize any negative associations they have with this time of year.

Alaya Ayala (alaya_ayala@college.harvard.edu) wishes everyone good luck with



INDY ARTS

My Mother Serena Joy

Who Writes The Handmaid's Tale?

By MICHAEL KIELSTRA

I admit it. I was late to the Margaret Atwood party. I didn't read *The Penelopiad* until late last year, and I didn't read *The Handmaid's Tale* until after that. I still haven't read *Oryx and Crake*. I am the first person to admit that many, many other people have read Atwood before me. Luckily, that doesn't change the contents of the books at all. The texts remain, not fundamentally tied to their time and place of writing, ready to be picked up anew and reinterpreted by each new generation (or, in my case, to give me a very peculiar feeling of being slightly gross and shameful, as if I should take a hot shower). I have all the time in the world to read Atwood.

This was, pretty much, the extent of my thought on the matter up until I tried to talk about *The Handmaid's Tale* with my mother. It was a discussion to which I had been looking forward: she had studied English Literature at Bryn Mawr and Oxford and had impeccable feminist credentials, as well as being, you know, my mom. I had expected her to have interesting ideas that I would not have considered, as well as contextual knowledge that would further illuminate the work. I did not expect, and would never in a lifetime have expected, the anger, the blind, mind-numbing wrath that filled her response.

The Handmaid's Tale, you see, turned out to be her novel, not mine. She had read it when it was first published, along with all her Bryn Mawr friends. They had dissected its themes, its message, and its style. They had done all this, not I, and yet here I was, some kid who hadn't even been alive when Atwood was writing her magnum opus, who dared to not only have opinions but suggest they carried enough weight to be worth telling. *The Handmaid's Tale* was a solved problem, solved through the unstinting efforts of a heroic group of Twentieth Century literary critics, and now young people were reading it for themselves and coming up with their own thoughts on it? It was the angriest I'd seen my mother in months.



Ava Salzman, '23

INDY ARTS

My Mother Serena Joy, continued.

The worst part was that, honestly, she had a point. One could argue that certain stories should be under the control of certain people. As a journalist, part of my job is taking other peoples' stories and turning them into printable copy, which always carries with it the temptation to twist words or take quotes out of context in pursuit of a snappy line or a touching paragraph; like the rest of the Independent writers, I work very carefully to avoid doing this. Similarly, my mother, who lived through a time when many people would agree it was more difficult to be a woman in the USA than it is now, is "closer to the action" of *The Handmaid's Tale* than I am. If not outright control of the narrative, this would seem to grant her the right to some sort of veto power.

"As a journalist, part of my job is taking other peoples' stories and turning them into printable copy, which always carries with it the temptation to twist words or take quotes out of context in pursuit of a snappy line or a touching paragraph."

It took me a few days to properly process this, between lectures and problem sets. I could point out that modern Shakespearean criticism doesn't just slavishly copy what his contemporaries thought of him, but Shakespeare was writing centuries ago, and we would automatically at least listen to a time traveler from his era. I could wonder what the point of English Literature was, but "promulgating your elders' idea of the truth" has been a long and glorious tradition in many academic fields. There didn't seem to be an easy way out.

In the end, it was literary theory that

saved me. (There's a sentence I never thought I'd write.) Ironically, the ideas I turned to originally came from an essay my mother had recommended, which pointed out that a text cannot be disentangled from the act of reading it. Certainly, there exists a text independent of readers – anyone who reads *The Handmaid's Tale* and then writes an essay on what appears to be *Paradise Lost* would probably fail *Modern Canadian Literature 101* – but we cannot analyze a text without reading it. Therefore, we are not analyzing the text itself, because we simply do not and cannot have direct access to that, but the text as read, as filtered through our own minds. If nothing else, I am the expert on how I read *The Handmaid's Tale*. No-one else can write for me about my own personal experience with the text, or tell me how it should go.

This does, of course, necessitate asking whether or not my personal experience is worth relating at all. My mother's experience draws its legitimacy from being similar in some way to that of Atwood's: she, too, lived in 1980s North America. Mine, on the other hand, is a counterfactual: what if Atwood had written *The Handmaid's Tale* in 2019 Massachusetts? What would she have portrayed by writing these words in that context? The answers to questions such as these have a name: "fiction".

"The answers to questions such as these have a name: 'fiction.'"

We describe how characters in this alternate history would act and think, and from this we draw lessons about how we ourselves should act and think. This is no different to describing and learning from the actions of characters in an alternate reality in which Hamlet was prince of Denmark,

or in which Frodo brought the One Ring to Mordor. By critiquing literature from a different time, we are in fact writing literature for ourselves right here and right now, and there is no-one whose opinions on that are more legitimate than ours.

"By critiquing literature from a different time, we are in fact writing literature for ourselves right here and right now."

That got very metaphysical very quickly, but the point is simple: although my mother might have more of a claim to her reading of *The Handmaid's Tale* than I do, my own reading springs from just as interesting a context as hers. Literature is not meant to be the preserve of a few great minds, situated just at the right time and place to produce canonical ideas. It is an open debate in which a good idea or a world-changing story can come from anybody. Usually, my mother will agree with this, which is what made her *Handmaid's Tale* outburst so surprising. I'm still not sure what came over her, but I'm grateful for the opportunity to think so deeply about what literature means to me.

Michael Kielstra '22 (pmkielstra@college.harvard.edu) has many, many more hot takes on Atwood than anyone could ever need.

captured and shot



Keep on Climbing

By ANDREW HAIMOVICI