

2018

## Foreword

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### Recommended Citation

Wittman, Kara and Bromley, Pam (2018) "Foreword," *essay: critical writing at pomona college*: Vol. 2: Iss. 2, Article 3.  
Available at: <https://scholarship.claremont.edu/essay/vol2/iss2/3>

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# Foreword

BY **Kara Wittman & Pam Bromley**

The origin story of the essay as a form is perhaps familiar: in the late sixteenth century Michel Eyquem de Montaigne took the word from the French *essayer*, “to try,” to describe the writing with which he was experimenting in his retirement from political life: roaming, curious, digressive; associative, critical (most of all of his own ideas and perceptions), and deeply, devotedly engaged with the self, the world, and the self in the world. Since that first volume of *Essais* in 1580, the essay has been defined, written, read, and redefined over and over again across the continents. For some it is a free, ecstatic way to explore the self; for some it participates in describing the fabric of a nation; for some it is an urgent intellectual and political force; for others its critical, playful essence resists definition, and in so resisting, resists totalization. For all, it is, as the essayist Gabriel Zaid puts it, “the laboratory itself, where life is put to the test in a text.”

We celebrate here excellence in that rich diversity of writing that tests the world and its ideas, engages critically both with the received and the new, and works in prose through urgent and complex arguments, thoughts, and perceptions. The essays in essay represent only a small portion of the fine critical writing here at Pomona College; we honor these for their critical insight, analytic precision, and rhetorical force, as well as for their playfulness, daringness, and willingness to experiment. The essays in this special issue honor work that Pomona College students completed in the Fall 2016 ID1 seminars. As the journal moves forward, each fall issue of essay will feature essays written in the previous fall semester’s ID1 seminars.

The ID1 essays represented in this volume go through a rigorous selection process: they are nominated by faculty members teaching ID1, the first-year Critical Inquiry Seminar at Pomona College. They are then read by a group of the Writing Partners working in the College’s Writing Center and narrowed down to a small selection of finalists. Finally,

the winning papers and the honorable mentions are selected by the Writing Program faculty. We would like to thank all of those individuals involved in the process, and to thank as well the writers represented in this inaugural volume. Without further ado, then, we are delighted to introduce this issue of *essay: critical writing at pomona college*.

*Friday, April 27, 2018  
Claremont, California*