|  |
| --- |
|  |

**Sample essays 2017**

**Scripps College**

**The Strange and The Familiar**

**Anonymous**

**"Some questions cannot be answered. They become familiar weights in the hand, Round stones pulled from the pocket, unyielding and cool." --Jane Hirshfield, poet, Princeton Class of 1973**

It was to my temporary Italian address that a package arrived in mid-November. Even though it had been only a couple of months, I had yearned for something to read as a respite from the unending flow of Italian, which inundated my still-untrained ears every night I spent with my host family. The package contained a book by Haruki Murakami. I had read some of his stuff before, so I asked my mom to get me another of his books because I wanted something familiar. The title of this one was strange, even more conspicuously and obnoxiously strange than the titles of most of his books: Hardboiled Wonderland and the End of the World.

The next morning, like all of my school mornings in Italy, my host sisters and I piled into the Italian version of a minivan: pale blue and boxy, but filled with the same dirt and daily debris as any car anywhere in the world. I started reading my new book during that ten-minute ride and finished it in the same place a week later. Once I finished it, I no longer felt such a strong need for respite. Reading it had been like “pulling round stones from my pocket,” “familiar weights.” The book provided me with a connection to someone else -- the author, the protagonist. It started a dialogue. It opened a discussion of unanswerable questions. The end of the book was not a resolution to those questions, but rather a reminder of their importance to me. The unanswerable questions we ask ourselves become part of us; they drive us to seek their answers. In a way, those same questions had brought me to Italy in search of answers. Though their weight was often a hindrance, it was also a necessity, a fuel for living.

Italy was a new, different ocean than the one I was accustomed to, and I had to learn to swim a different stroke. By November, the weight of the questions to which I had grown accustomed seemed somehow less pressing. For all of the fabulous things that study abroad has to offer, it also has a way of disorienting you. Of course, the beauty of disorientation lies in the chance to regroup and perhaps to find oneself pointed in a new direction. It was somewhat disorienting to realize that I had found comfort in a book written by a surrealist author in Japan, translated and purchased in the U.S., and sent to me in Italy. Perhaps that book was a strange place to look for a feeling of home. Perhaps it was a strange place to find it. I went abroad looking for adventure, but I also went to learn how to live in a different family and a different culture. Reading Hardboiled Wonderland and the End of the World showed me that the familiar can sometimes be found in the most unexpected places. It reminded me to open myself to the possibility of discovery. If I could find what I needed in a book from the far side of the world, I reasoned, then I could certainly find something familiar in my host family. Maybe I could even provide them with what they had hoped to get from hosting an American girl.

The rediscovery of those elusive questions restored a certain weight to me as well as the sense of purpose that I had lost in my new surroundings. Their weight gave power and direction to each stroke of my arms in this foreign ocean. I quickly learned a new efficiency. I also gained respect for how much I had left to learn, for how much I could learn in Italy, and for what I knew I could give back.