# Quotes Galore: On Earth We&#39;re Briefly Gorgeous By Ocean VuongSyllabus for Debate 101: NDT Edition Spring 2022

#### ~ Print layout is encouraged ~

### First, a Note From An Author:

#### <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SH1Y-KpRhoY>; read along!

#### “I use language and literature as a way to orchestrate a framework

#### To think and inquire

#### about American life,

#### including the legacy of American violence.

#### My name is Ocean Vuong, and I’m a poet and a writer.

#### I grew up surrounded by Vietnamese refugee women who used

#### *Stories to create portals*

#### The story is a virtual reality into another world,

#### Out of the present

#### But it’s also a record of where we’ve been

#### And a story is an

#### *Inheritance*

#### ‘Night Sky with Exit Wounds’ was a series of poems that attempts to cast a separate mythology

#### Out of geopolitical violence.

#### And I used elders and predecessors like Homer and a lot of the Greek classical texts and recast them in the guise and the gaze of

#### Vietnamese American life in the aftermath of the Vietnam War.

#### One of the central questions in ‘On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous,’ having been written as a

#### *Letter to a mother who will never read it*

#### *Is ultimately*

#### *Does language matter?*

#### Is it worth it to speak your mind and your truth in fiction, or otherwise

#### If an audience,

#### Even if it is an audience of one

#### *Is never promised?*

#### *Does it matter?*

#### Often we demand of the American novel to be

#### Cohesive

#### A monolithic statement of a generation

#### But having grown up post 9/11,

#### Cohesion was not part of my generation’s imagination,

#### nor our language,

#### or our self-identity

#### And I felt that if I were to write

#### My version of an American novel,

#### It would

#### have to

#### look more like

#### fragmentation.

#### In my Zen Buddhist practice,

#### one of the most privileged state of minds

#### is not the expert,

#### it’s not the master

#### it’s what’s called the

#### beginner’s mind.

#### The beginner’s mind is a mind that

#### Approaches the natural world, and the phenomenas within it

#### With utmost curiosity

#### And I think one of the most perennial powers of an artistic mind is

#### *Awe and wonder before the world.”*

### Second, a Course Description:

#### An invitation to a diasporic conversation. A queering of both technics and texts that color “outside of the lines”[[1]](#footnote-1) to radically makeover Asian America and debate. This course is an invitation to *speculation* prior to an invitation to *conception*.

#### When hearing – *when reading* – this sentence how will you attune yourself into this textual ensemble?

#### *How’s your flow look*?

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#### Reminder: Every syllabus has an author. Every resolution has a topic committee. Every speech has a speaker. Every 1AC has a writer.

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#### A body (of curriculum) is constructed both by what is *present* and what is *absent*.

#### Thus, it is no coincidence that in this absence – when bodies are omitted from space – there is a compulsion to

#### “touch each other just to prove we are still here”[[2]](#footnote-2)

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Caption: [[3]](#footnote-3)

*There is so much*

*I need to tell you – but I only earned*

*One life.****[[4]](#footnote-4)*** *[one round]*

#### For those skimming, here’s the SparkNotes

#### Theme 1: Contaminate research protocols – invert the expectation of how to listen and how to notice

Tsing 15 (Tsing, Anna, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, Professor of anthropology at the University of Santa Cruz and recipient of the Huxley Memorial Medal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, Princeton University Press, 2015)

To listen to and tell a rush of stories is a method. And why not make the strong claim and call it a science, an addition to knowledge? Its research object is contaminated diversity; its unit of analysis is the indeterminate encounter. To learn anything we must revitalize arts of noticing and include ethnography and natural history. But we have a problem with scale. A rush of stories cannot be neatly summed up. Its scales do not nest neatly; they draw attention to interrupting geographies and tempos. These interruptions elicit more stories. This is the rush of stories’ power as a science. Yet it is just these interruptions that step out of the bounds of most modern science, which demands the possibility for infinite expansion without changing the research framework. Arts of noticing are considered archaic because they are unable to “scale up” in this way. The ability to make one’s research framework apply to greater scales, without changing the research questions, has become a hallmark of modern knowledge. To have any hope of thinking with mushrooms, we must get outside this expectation. In this spirit, I lead a foray into mushroom forests as “anti-plantations.”

The expectation of scaling up is not limited to science. Progress itself has often been defined by its ability to make projects expand without changing their framing assumptions. This quality is “scalability.” The term is a bit confusing, because it could be interpreted to mean “able to be discussed in terms of scale.” Both scalable and nonscalable projects, however, can be discussed in relation to scale. When Fernand Braudel explained history’s “long durée” or Niels Bohr showed us the quantum atom, these were not projects of scalability, although they each revolutionized thinking about scale. Scalability, in contrast, is the ability of a project to change scales smoothly without any change in project frames. A scalable business, for example, does not change its organization as it expands. This is possible only if business relations are not transformative, changing the business as new relations are added. Similarly, a scalable research project admits only data that already fit the research frame. Scalability requires that project elements be oblivious to the indeterminacies of encounter; that’s how they allow smooth expansion. Thus, too, scalability banishes meaningful diversity, that is, diversity that might change things.

Scalability is not an ordinary feature of nature. Making projects scalable takes a lot of work. Even after that work, there will still be interactions between scalable and nonscalable project elements. Yet, despite the contributions of thinkers such as Braudel and Bohr, the connection between scaling up and the advancement of humanity has been so strong that scalable elements receive the lion’s share of attention. The nonscalable becomes an impediment. It is time to turn attention to the nonscalable, not only as objects for description but also as incitements to theory.

### Third, Course Materials:

#### Please note: all course texts and tools are human and, thus, fallible. Nevertheless,

#### *The most beautiful part of a text is where it’s headed. The most beautiful part of a syllabus is who it reaches. [[5]](#footnote-5)*

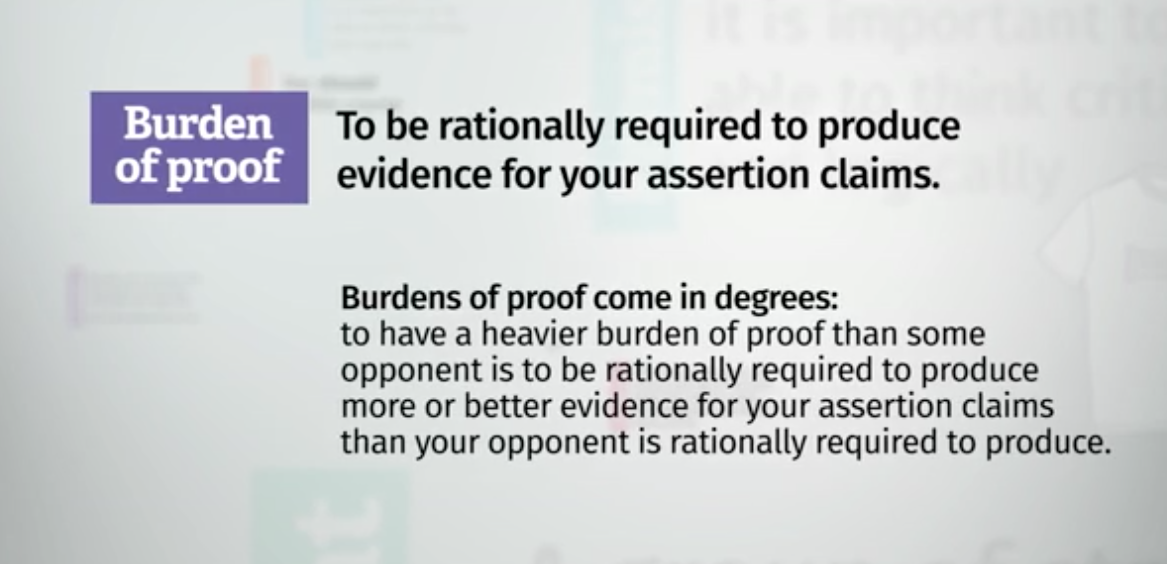
#### With that in mind, the following materials are required:

#### *~~Antitrust Controversy Area Proposal~~*~~, 2021,~~ [~~http://156.26.181.164/forum/index.php/topic,7654.0.html?PHPSESSID=979c6cbf0438c9d69427cc1128e0ad8e~~](http://156.26.181.164/forum/index.php/topic,7654.0.html?PHPSESSID=979c6cbf0438c9d69427cc1128e0ad8e)

College debate needs a domestic topic that foregrounds fundamental questions about how our economy should be structured. The concentration of market power in the hands of a few firms is one of the defining features of our current marketplace, it’s widely recognized as a problem worth addressing, and yet deep structural policy change is unlikely to be forthcoming. That makes the topic an ideal mix of timely but unlikely to fundamentally change week-to-week. The resolution can be written to require affirmatives to make large-scale change from the status quo, one of the biggest factors in good debates. Critical ground is plentiful on both sides. Curtailing the power of large corporations is an accessible debate topic that could help in recruitment and retention.

#### *Note: If you don’t have the time to finish this reading in advance, reading an abridged anthology is more than enough.*

#### ~~A Burden of Proof AND a Burden of Rejoinder~~



#### Phu, Thy: *Picturing Model Citizens* (Temple University Press, 2011), Introduction: Clasped Hands and Clenched Fists, <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/18981>

The civil engineers’ handshake in Russell’s photograph is only one of many gestures extended at moments when the parameters of citizenship are most vexed and contested. More than merely an accidental detail in Russell’s iconic photograph, civility is a trope **that surfaces** in signal moments when the civil rights associated **with citizenship** are **under greatest threat.** Perhaps the most notorious use of photographs as a popular means of constructing national identity occurred during World War II, as a means of protecting the “good” citizen, then the law-abiding Chinese American, against his “bad” counterpart, the enemy alien, the Japanese American, who, in the wake of the bombing of Pearl Harbor, was stripped of civil liberties. A brief primer in Life offered what the magazine described as the “handbook for Americans,” relying on photographs to provide guidance on “how to tell Japs from the Chinese.”6 In this primer, photographs, cursive script, and typescript intersect to parallel the triangulation between the groups that the feature describes as “U.S. citizens”; “U.S. Chinese,” who are victims of undeserved “emotional outburst[s]”;7 and the true culprits, the Japanese, who are “enemy aliens.”8 **According to this formulation, the citizen evaluates noncitizens**, **suggesting that the category of citizenship is constructed through encounters** with photography in addition **to** more familiar sites of engagement such as **the law**. At the same time, **citizens are advised, however indirectly, to comport themselves civilly**—that is, **to exercise judgment about their behavior, by judging first that the offending subjects deserve their wrath.**

Civility triangulates the unmarked but obviously white “citizen,” the “bad” enemy alien, and the “good” U.S. Chinese, within a constantly contested continuum of citizenship that obscures the arbitrariness of these categories by normalizing them. Sociologist Claire Jean Kim proposes the concept of “racial triangulation” to explain the complex constituencies of Asian America, which are formed in relation to the racialization of whiteness and blackness.9 Although the Afro-Asian nuances of this process, which are explored in a number of important studies, are not my primary concern here, my approach to varied racial encounters within this book upholds while unsettling Yen Le Espiritu’s notion of Asian American “panethnicity” (or strategic alliances between disparate groups) by drawing inspiration from the dynamic dimensions of the concept of triangulation.10 Indeed, embodied forms of civility are often posed as answers to such troubling questions about citizenship as: Who is a citizen? What are the rights of citizenship, and who may claim these rights? This book also argues that at still other times, civility serves as a strategic resistance to these provisional answers, which can be as troubling as the questions that they address. Civility, in other words, “frames” or shapes the meanings of citizenship. In so doing, civility also articulates and disarticulates the parameters of Asian America. Picturing Model Citizens: Civility in Asian American Visual Culture explores civility’s critical role in defining and redefining citizenship.

**Civility is so central to the formation of Asian America that it lies at the heart of one of the community’s most familiar and controversial figures, the model minority**. A figure that debuted in 1966 with the publication of William Petersen’s infamous New York Times Magazine article, “Success Story, JapaneseAmerican Style,”11 but was anticipated decades earlier, the model minority casts a long shadow that continues to influence debates on citizenship today. Described as “deeply ambivalent,”12 **the model minority inspires** commentary about the figure’s varied ideological functions: as evidence of **success to be emulated by other minorities**;13 **as an inspiring touchstone for the rejuvenation of white Americans** who, to their chagrin, find themselves questioning their formerly certain moral, intellectual, and economic superiority;14 as an equivocal discourse embraced **by some as an affirmative mode of self-identification**;15 as no less injurious a stereotype as the Yellow Peril specters that it ostensibly replaced and for that reason, to be disparaged; or, even more complexly, as a double-edged means of generating cultural and social capital through an exploitive “system of signification.”1

Despite Victor Bascara’s astute observation that the model minority is unmatched as “a visible priority for Asian American mobilization,”17 however, **these** extensive **debates are surprisingly consistent in their focus on productivity and self-sufficiency.**18 Notably, **proponents of the model minority myth focus on labor as the basis for achievement of full citizenship and its attendant rights of political representation and social recognition, aligning the efforts of the indentured laborer and his industrious descendants within the Horatio Alger fantasy of bootstrap gumption, obscuring the fact that, as Colleen Lye has convincingly shown, labor was the basis for exploitation and exclusion**.19 Addressing a later moment, Robert G. Lee likewise notes that this aspect of what Frank Chin has elsewhere termed “racist love”20 (in contrast to the “racist hate” projected at other minorities) is produced within a Cold War context, in which “stoic patience, political obedience, and self-improvement was a critically important narrative of ethnic **liberalism** that **simultaneously promoted racial equality and sought to contain demands for social transformation**.”21 If the ideological battle waged abroad required “containing” enemies of capitalism, containment on the domestic front served a no less urgent function, as Lee also points out, of **rewarding accommodation and assimilation while punishing militancy**, as part of a carefully crafted policy to thwart communist propagandists eager to pounce on any signs of internal dissension. The model minority’s assimilability handily serves the ends of containment in a process that links, as Mary Dudziak persuasively argues, foreign and domestic policies within a framework of “Cold War Civil Rights.”22

On the one hand, **the model minority myth** seeks to remedy injurious exclusions from the full rights of political and social citizenship, **dangling accommodation and assimilation as compensation** for a history of exclusion and alienation. On the other hand, the remedy, premised on the Protestant work ethic of self-sufficiency, is at best partial, for it **shifts the duties of Americanization and uplift to the shoulders of the aspiring immigrant and absolves the state from participation in, not to mention responsibility for, this process.** At the same time, this aspect of the model minority myth retains a residue of foreignness: the very qualities that make the model minority a congenial subject for American accommodation and assimilation—silence, discipline, obedience—cause worry when they are construed as an inhuman penchant for deceptiveness and robotic hyperefficiency. Vilified as part of the Yellow Peril menace, the inscrutable Asian is thus, as Lye incisively points out, the obverse of the beneficent model minority, “two aspects of the same, long-running racial form, a form whose most salient feature, whether it has been made the basis for exclusion or assimilation, is the trope of economic selfsufficiency.”23

#### Desire: *because a single legacy simply isn’t enough to hold all your queer possibilities*[[6]](#footnote-6)



### Fourth, An Interlude Before the End

It is known that every peach flower

is birthed with a twin beside them

Every future petal has been taught

to grow in the figure of their mother

from roots that cry out for

their lessons ascend

auburn staircases that spiral for generations

they pray that they don’t venture too far

and get lost in cracked and peeling bark

– a hardened cage of flesh –

that was once tender skin.

So tender, that country royals said

It was

To die for.

The violence of an expectation bleeds just as red.

It is known that every peach petal

grows into the figure of their mother,

into the shape of a teardrop,

bloodied pink when it was born.

### Fifth, Now What?

#### ­ How do we write about generations of memories? More importantly, how can we write *with* these generations of memory?

#### *All texts are human and, thus, sociable*

#### Consequently,

#### Interludes of words, footnotes, and space resonate and build off one another to create worlds and imaginations of their own making. To speak and to write through generations is when discrete paragraphs transmute into stanzas. *Generations bleed together*. Intergenerational inquiry is best questioned intertextually: in between line(age)s of distinct topic sentences, punctuations, and indentations are entangled enjambments, apostrophes, and conceits that inherit the voice of their predecessors.

#### *“Isn’t the saddest thing in the world, Ma? A comma forced to be a period.”[[7]](#footnote-7)*

#### Study in postmemory seeks to examine how post-war generations take on the memory of war through the “images, stories, behaviors, and affects” of their predecessors.[[8]](#footnote-8) Despite not experiencing the war first-hand, latter-generation Vietnamese Americans have inherited the “nightmares,” “mistrust,” and “depression,”[[9]](#footnote-9) that echo into the present.

#### Suffering is not static, especially when kept silent. J’ani amuyu.

#### By speaking to and with the bodies, desires, and memories of Asian American generations, this course has been an invitation to a diasporic conversation. Moving beyond silence, inverting the canon and syntax of Asian America offers a poetic intervention that exceeds both the content and form of a single (em)bodied experience.

#### Consider: a rearranging of headings, authors, their content, and their form – how can that theory translate (in)to content?

### Sixth, A Close Reading

“**T**hus, w**e[x] a**ffirm militant pre**s**ervation through planned **fail[ed]**ure.

“How do we live **(and** plan for a day that will **n**ever c**o**me.” **T**he 1AC **i**s a method of pla**n**ned f**a**ilure – “a poetics that ali**g**hts b**o**th page and pavement,” the w**o**rl**d** is broken and it’s easy to feel utterly lost in self-hatred and nihilism, rather than endorse a transcendence of antitrust reform that appeases policymakers, our method is an autonomous insurgency against a **w**orld structured by **a[y])**nti-black racism, colonialism, and manufactured consent that counters logistics in the “loophole between hope and resignation”.”

### Seventh, the Course Objective

#### An effort to “prove we are."[[10]](#footnote-10)

#### Extra 1NC sent in document Week 1: Antiblackness: Revisiting CEDA Semifinals

Jayan **Nayar**, Associate Professor of Law at the University of Warwick, “The Politics of Hope and the Other-in-the-World: Thinking Exteriority,” 20**13**, Law Critique 24:64-85, DOI 10.1007/s10978-012-9115-8. \*\*Parts read are gender modified in brackets.

#### Tea Party Turn – non-Black debaters articulating the gratuitous nature of black fungibility only solidifies their privilege—arguing that Blacks need a mediating voice in solidarity is itself oppressive

To conclude the present discussion, it is useful I think, to remember the scathing criticism by Biko (1979), thinking as he was from the exteriority of the Totality of Apartheid, about the ‘curious bunch of nonconformists’, ‘that bunch of do-gooders that goes under all sorts of names—liberals, leftists etc. … the people who claim that they too feel the oppression just as acutely…’ (ibid, p. 20). It presents us with a harsh judgement that remains relevant (notwithstanding the gendered language adopted, and its directed criticism against ‘liberals’) to our current efforts; we contemporary philosophers of hope might recognise ourselves in various ways here as the ‘they’ to whom Biko refers: They want to remain in good books with both the black and white worlds. They want to shy away from all forms of ‘extremisms’, condemning ‘white supremacy’ as being just as bad as ‘Black Power’. They vacillate between the two worlds, verbalising all the complaints of the blacks beautifully while skilfully extracting what suits them from the exclusive pool of white privileges. … Their protests are directed at and appeal to white conscience, everything they do is directed at finally convincing the white electorate that the black man is also a man and that at some future date he should be given a place at the white man’s table. …As a testimony to their claim of identification with the blacks, they call a few ‘intelligent and articulate’ blacks to ‘come round for tea at home’, where all present ask each other the same old hackneyed question ‘how can we bring about change…’ The more such tea-parties one calls the more of a liberal he is and the freer he [one] shall feel from the guilt that harnesses and binds his [one’s] conscience.…The same questions are asked and the same naivete exhibited in answering them. The real concern of the group is to keep the group going…In this sort of set-up one sees a perfect example of what oppression has done to the blacks. They have been made to feel inferior for so long that for them it is comforting to them to drink tea, with whites who seem to treat them as equals. This serves to boost up their own ego to the extent of making them feel slightly superior to those blacks who do not get similar treatment from whites.… Instead of directing themselves at their black brothers and looking at their common problems from a common platform they choose to sing out their lamentations to an apparently sympathetic audience that has become proficient in saying the chorus of ‘shame!’ … The liberal must understand that the days of the Noble Savage are gone: the blacks do not need a go-between in this struggle for their own emancipation. No true liberal should feel any resentment at the growth of black consciousness. Rather all true liberals must realise that the place for their fight for justice is within their white society. The liberals must realise that they themselves are oppressed if they are true liberals and therefore they must fight for their own freedom and not of the nebulous ‘they’ with whom they can hardly claim.

**~~Remember section participation is worth 25% of your grade.~~**

#### Week 2: Clash: Look what happens when you research.

Heather **Love** Associate Professor at the University of Pennsylvania Heather, ““Doing Being Deviant: Deviance Studies, Description, and the Queer Ordinary,” 20**15** differences Vol. 26, No. 1, p. 89-91

#### Logistics are flawed methods of political engagement in the university – makes violence inevitable.

Today, queer studies—prestigious but unevenly institutionalized—still signals absolute refusal or criticality—all anti- and no normativity. In their influential 2004 essay, “The University and the Undercommons” (and in the 2013 book that followed from it), Fred Moten and Stefano Harney rely on such an understanding of queer (as well as concepts borrowed from black studies, feminism, ethnic studies, and anticolonial thought). They call for betrayal, refusal, theft, and marronage as modes of resisting the iron grip of the academy, pointing to an uncharted, underground, and collective space they call the undercommons. “To enter this space,” they write, “is to inhabit the ruptural and enraptured disclosure of the commons that fugitive enlightenment enacts, the criminal, matricidal, queer, in the cistern, on the stroll of the stolen life, the life stolen by enlightenment and stolen back, where the commons give refuge, where the refuge gives commons” (103). Moten and Harney speculate whether the “thought of the outside” (105) is possible inside the university and suggest that if there is an outside, it is along the margins and at the bottom. Yet their imagination of that outside is indebted to the inside, in particular to the conception of deviance produced within sociology. Their account of the undercommons reads like a rap sheet, a list of the traditional topics of deviance studies: theft, homosexuality, prostitution, incarceration. Moten and Harney do not describe the undercommons, but rather ask their readers to join it, to participate in active revolt against profes- sional and disciplinary protocols. To o er an objective account of the social position of radical academics would be to further business as usual in the academy; dwelling in the undercommons requires giving up on the usual protocols of description. Moten and Harney argue against the traditional role of the “critical academic” (105), which they see as just another turn of the professional screw, since work that opposes the academy does not challenge its basic structure or everyday operations. They argue that “to be a critical academic in the university is to be against the university, and to be against the university is always to recognize it and to be recognized by it, and to institute the negligence of the internal outside, that unassimilated underground, a negligence of it that is precisely, we must insist, the basis of the professions” (105). In contrast to the figure of the critical academic, they forward the image of the “subversive intellectual” who is “in but not of” the academy (101). Without dismissing the galvanizing effect of such a call to the undercommons, it is important to consider the limits of the refusal of objectification as a strategy. To be unlocatable, to be nowhere, to be in permanent revolt: Moten and Harney describe the path that queer inquiry laid out for itself. Objectification—recognition, description, critique—can be a way to reinforce the status quo, but it is also a way of acknowledging one’s institutional position and the real differences between inside and outside. Even the most subversive intellectuals in the academy are “on the stroll” in a metaphorical but not a material sense. The fate of those who came “under false pretenses, with bad documents, out of love” (101), if they survive, is to become “superordinates” in Becker’s sense. Whose side are we on? Can we hold onto the critical and polemical energy of queer studies as well as its radical experiments in style and thought while acknowledging our implication in systems of power, management, and control? Will a more explicit avowal of disciplinary affiliations and methods snuff out the utopian energies of a field that sees itself as a radical outsider in the university? To date, both the political and the methodological antinormativity of queer studies have made it difficult to address our implication in the violence of knowledge production, pedagogy, and social inequality. Such violence is inevitable, and critical histories of the disciplines—and the production of knowledge about social deviance—are essential. Undertaking such work, however, will not allow escape into a radically different relation to our objects because we are (as Moten and Harney also argue) part of that history—we are its contemporary instantiation. To imagine a social world in which those relations are transformed—in what Moten and Harney refer to as the “prophetic organization” (102)—may be crucial for the achievement of social justice, but to deny our own implication in existing structures is also a form of violence.

*~~(please please please start your research assignments before the day of the deadline)~~*

1. **Welcome to the Footnotes! Glad you could make it:**

   Bryson, Mary, and Suzanne de Castell. “Queer Pedagogy: Praxis Makes Im/Perfect.” *Canadian Journal of Education / Revue Canadienne de l’éducation* 18, no. 3 (1993): 299. Citation includes paraphrasing that precedes the quotation [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. **RIP this cuz of zoom, but we tried <3 -** Vuong, Ocean. 2016. *Night Sky With Exit Wounds*. Copper Canyon Press. 57. Poem: *On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Photos taken from “Ocean Vuong ‘Breaks Down’ Experience In His Debut Novel (HBO) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lm\_Q5jXf6\_k [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. **Start the countdown for senior final debates!** Vuong, Ocean 2016. *Night Sky With Exit Wounds.* Copper Canyon Press. 62. Poem: *Untitled (Blue, Green, and Brown): oil on canvas: Mark Rothko: 1952).* The part “[one round]” was not part of the original poem. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. **Something, something, “this is only one round,” nobody cares -** Restatement of Ocean Vuong from *Someday I’ll Love Ocean Vuong*: “The most beautiful part of your body is where it’s headed.” [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. **You prepped the queer evolution K? Fear not, here’s the redux:** Restatement of Evangeline Heilger from *Global Justice and Desire: Queering Economy*: “because ‘the economy’ simply isn’t enough to hold all your queer possibilities.” [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Vuong, Ocean. 2019. On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous: A Novel. [New York]: Random House Large Print. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Nguyen, Kelly. “Queering Telemachus: Ocean Vuong, Postmemories and the Vietnam War.” *International Journal of the Classical Tradition*, October 10, 2021. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Depaul, A. (2013). *Trauma at Root of Mental Health Issues Among Vietnamese*. <https://voiceofoc.org/2013/02/trauma-at-root-of-mental-health-issues-among-vietnamese/> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Vuong, 57. Night Sky With Exit Wounds, Poem: *On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-10)