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SOUTHERN METHODIST
UNIVERSITY

HILLTOPICS



THE GHOST OF CLIMATE-FUTURE:

David Wallace-Wells'
Visions of Dystopia

THE MARE

by: Johanna Pang

FRESH AIR

by: Daniel Kulti

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ISSUE

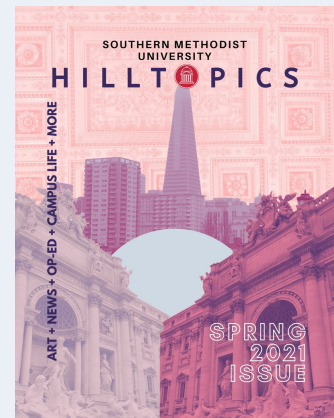
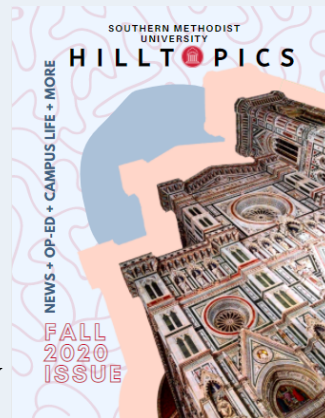
What is Hilltopics?

Hilltopics is the University Honors Program's opinion paper, founded by Honors students over a decade ago. Written and designed entirely by students, *Hilltopics* is committed to providing a public platform for all voices.

Hilltopics pieces range from the high literary to the traditionally journalistic, from the satirical to the personal. We welcome contributions from all viewpoints, political persuasions, and backgrounds—the most important thing is that all voices are free to contribute, in order to foster a flourishing of free speech at SMU. The paper is not limited to the Honors community; anyone at SMU can write for *Hilltopics*, and we seek to gain readership from all students.

The number one goal of *Hilltopics* is to publish good writing and let it speak for itself. Exclusive online *Hilltopics* content can be found on our website:

hilltopicssmu.wordpress.com 🔍



How to contribute:

Though *Hilltopics* is published by the SMU Honors Program, any student is free to contribute. We encourage discussion and creativity in our publication, so if you disagree with one of our articles, we urge you to write a rebuttal. If you have a strong opinion, a literary masterpiece, a cute cartoon, or anything else you've created and want to share, please contact our editors-in-chief for instructions on how to contribute:

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Also connect with us online to ask questions and keep up with everything Hilltopics

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A Grassfield in South Korea

by Johanna Pang

My legs were brisking through an empty field,
leaving behind crushed trails, when I recalled,
the world is always dizzying itself,
so I would try standing still, I resolved.

Against the sloping periwinkle hills
and sky as thick and bright as canvas, waves
rippled through the untrimmed carpet to softly
bend the peridot and emerald blades.

The spirited light which shone through chasing clouds,
along with the hypnotic sway and muted
hiss of rustling stalks, all lulled me into
a passive place, where I have never minded

His aged body sank against those stern faces
of rock long weathered, whose dust powdered
the terrain with a goethite hue.

It was then when the winged messenger came.

And what is white as the visual aroma of heaven?
The fingers of Joachim must have felt the ripple
of robe dancing in the wind
as Gabriel beckoned his eyes to follow along
those steps of airy ascent.

What vision was shared to salve
years of despair interned?
When Joachim's gaze returns to you,
beyond the frame and across the room,
his eyes well as he sees
Mary, robed in lapis blue.

Joachim
and the
Angel

JOHANNA PANG



SQUID GAME

As a teenage girl during the dystopian fiction boom, I was supposed to be the target audience for young adult novel film adaptations, but even as a devout fan of many series, I began to dread the near-grayscale movies set in an abstract future, where free will was but a memory and where the antagonist always ended up being some Hillary Clinton lookalike. Think *The Hunger Games*. Think *Divergent*. Think *The Maze Runner*. By the mid-2010s, the dystopian genre began to feel overplayed, and it seemed to take a bit of a sabbatical from the public conscience.

That is, until Netflix released *Squid Game* on September 17th. *Squid Game* follows Gi-hun, a struggling father with a gambling addiction who seizes an opportunity to make a fortune by playing a series of games from his childhood. "Inside, a tempting prize awaits — with deadly high stakes," reads Netflix's description of the series. Along the way, he makes allies and enemies and contends with how far he will go to be free from his debt.

The concept of death games is nothing new, but *Squid*

Game's mega-popular success comes from a variety of sources, including masterful suspense, captivating performances and an instantly iconic visual dictionary.

From the identical teal tracksuits on the players to the electrifying hot pink on the masked guards, the costumes already feel leagues above the drab monotony of other dystopian films. The costumes combine with some of *Squid Games*' most vivid settings, such as the highly-saturated mess of hallways and staircases and the playground-like playing field to set the macabre tone for the series, an intensely bloody melodrama set against the brightly colored facade of childhood games.

The melodramatic element is characteristic of Korean media, according to Contemporary East Asian Cinema Professor Kevin Heffernan. "Koreans are capable of making vomit bag, gore-soaked horror films, but those are never huge hits. You have to make them cry or they haven't gotten their money's worth," Heffernan said.

The actors convey that

A review by Sydney Sagehorn

anguish in a way that makes the series addicting, that is, if you watch it in the original Korean versus the English-dubbed version.

"There's certain phrases that the dub didn't pick up on," Erin Kang said. The SMU junior speaks Korean and has seen the series twice. Andrés Zúñiga, another fan of the show, believes watching the show in the original Korean enhances the experience. "If you watch it dubbed, and the mouths aren't matching up, you're not going to be able to feel as much of the emotion," he said.

Squid Game is not the first piece of Korean media to land with an American audience. In recent years, K-pop has found a solid fanbase in younger Americans, and *Parasite*'s strong showing at the 2020 Oscars, including its Best Picture win, introduced many people to Korea's thriving film industry. "The younger generation has a massively different sense of what globalism is," Heffernan said.

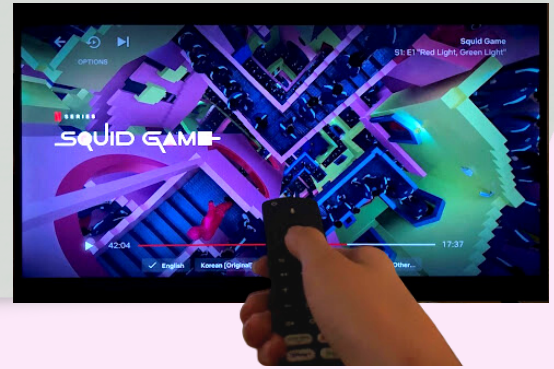
Reader be warned, the next section contains spoilers.

Squid Game only begins to show cracks in the episode with the glass panel game (episode 7). The American (or at least English-speaking) "VIPs" add little to the series beyond poor acting and cheap sex jokes. Adding a live audience element to the games does enough to convey abject depravity, so the attempted sexual assault of Jun-ho only adds a layer of perverse discomfort which removed me from the suspense of the main storyline.

Additionally, the scene of Player 001 dying in a hollow office building in the final episode attempts to serve as the vehicle for conveying the main moral message of the series, but fails. With his dying breath, Player 001 should have commented on any number of compelling themes revealed during the games, such as the betrayal of friends under difficult circumstances, whether or not the games present a true parity or the willingness of players to risk death rather than the consequences of their financial hardships, instead of proselytizing about his dissatisfaction with his own wealth. This "final message," the rich and poor are not so different, seems disingenuous to the rest of the series, especially against a backdrop of massive income inequality. Perhaps Player 001 was unhappy with his status as a rich man, but the players who died in the game were never afforded that opportunity.

***Squid Game's* release broke many records for Netflix. "It only took 17 days and 111M global fans to become our biggest ever series at launch," the company tweeted.**

Photo credit Sydney Sagehorn.



That being said, any complaints I have about the series are little more than gripes I trust the filmmakers to address in upcoming seasons. *Squid Game* was easily the most entrancing piece of media I have consumed in recent months.

Instead of taking place in some proverbial, post-apocalyptic future, the events of *Squid Game* take place right under the nose of society and authority, and the competitors deal with real-world issues: medical debt, immigration and labor violations, to name a few. This is displayed in the second episode of the series, named "Hell," not after the

conditions within the facility, but after the characters' real lives. As one player noted during the voting scene in episode 2, "It's just as bad out there as it is in here." The characters returning to the games of their own volition, because they feel they have no other option, is the true dystopia represented in *Squid Game*.

If you want to experience a meditative look on ethics and desperation, or if you just want to understand everyone's Halloween costumes this year, *Squid Game* is worth the watch.

Overall Rating:



NUMBER OF EPISODES: 9 EPISODES

AVERAGE EPISODE LENGTH: 1 HOUR

WHERE TO WATCH: NETFLIX

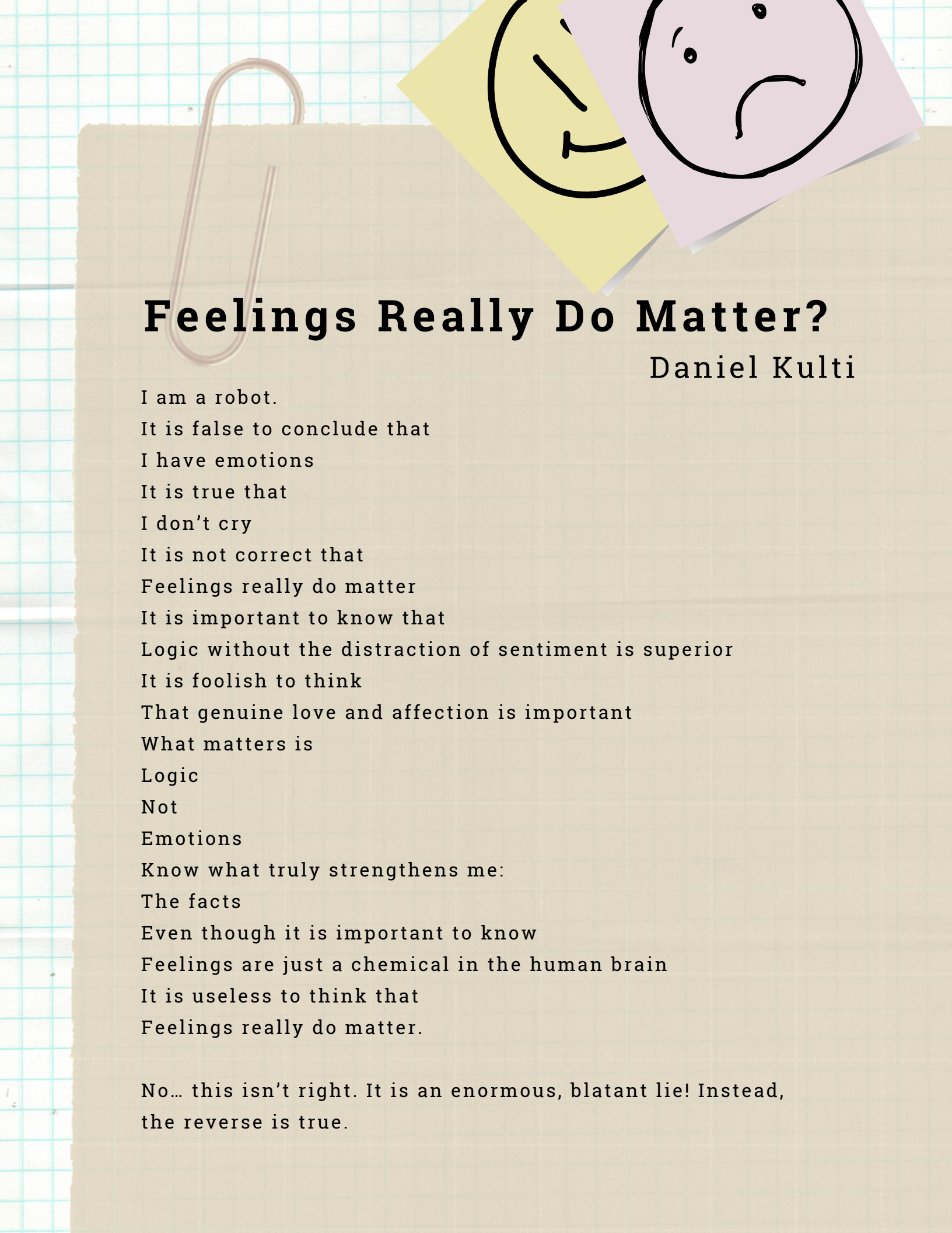
RATING: TV-MA

BEST EPISODE: GGANBU (EPISODE 6)

STARRING: LEE JUNG-JAE, HOYEON JUNG, PARK HAE SOO

CREATOR: HWANG DONG-HYUK

LANGUAGE: KOREAN (WITH AN ENGLISH DUB OPTION)



Feelings Really Do Matter?

Daniel Kulti

I am a robot.
It is false to conclude that
I have emotions
It is true that
I don't cry
It is not correct that
Feelings really do matter
It is important to know that
Logic without the distraction of sentiment is superior
It is foolish to think
That genuine love and affection is important
What matters is
Logic
Not
Emotions
Know what truly strengthens me:
The facts
Even though it is important to know
Feelings are just a chemical in the human brain
It is useless to think that
Feelings really do matter.

No... this isn't right. It is an enormous, blatant lie! Instead,
the reverse is true.

Neologos, Inc.

neologism: a newly coined word or expression

Newly transferred from that foreign space
where both Sense and Dream reside,
they're docked at the establishment of Opportunity,
which is for some, nothing more than a place to die:
We give meaning here at Neologos.

The one they call Order
shuffles them in to face the superior Intellect
and his square brown clipboard of regulatory indifference.
No one knows where he keeps Authority,
but none have ever questioned how it's been
since they defined Eternity.

We give meaning here at Neologos.

After three seconds of meticulous eyeing,
[undocumented]'s significance is decided.
Intellect, personified by his irascibility, croaks, "You,
you can be this, but remember, nothing more.
People will try and get creative and connote,
but it is we who give you meaning, here at Neologos."

The desirable ones are allowed to be used
in neon signs and wildly spun narratives –
so long as their characters are printed
in the book of names ordered A-Z,
they'll be stamped in English's memory,
free to share their harrowing etymologies
with those few listening ears,
and cluck their tongues over those who
the mind never thought to assimilate –

the others, like 君子 or bacach,
who looked too alien, or sounded like a choking hen –
they were sent off to the ward
where they would join the masses
to be named in History's books as the faceless.

We give meaning here at Neologos.

Neologos, Inc.
Johanna Pang

Neologos, Inc.
Content Director
"We give meaning
here at Neologos"

The Mare

Johanna Pang

"nightmare" is derived from the Old English "mare", a mythological demon or goblin who torments others with frightening dreams

Spectral shadows romp
across the waning moon-lit walls
as the noises of the night
thump a marish beat.
A mass of sandpapery limbs spills
in from the window,
body bumping onto wooden boards.
It half lumps, half scrape-scampers closer
to its unconscious host.

The impish figure stomps
onto the frail chest,
disturbing the once easy rise
and fall.
It blows anxiety into the air
to be inhaled as a rush of nightmares,
polluting sleep's sanctuary by
turning ripe dreams deliciously rotten.

Its exhalations match the quickening pace
of shallow breaths
as it feasts upon every nervous tremor,
smacking its gummy lips at every whip
of the head and hitch of the breath,
every wheezing inhalation
of the tormented dreamer.

Desperate for escape - no, just for air -
the prey wakes to look into
eyes that are not there.

The Ghost of Climate-Future:

David Wallace-Wells' Visions of Dystopia

by EJ Rorem

David Wallace-Wells seems to fancy himself a kind of "climate-Cassandra", a prophet woefully left unheeded by the masses despite the truth of his warnings. The topic of his overdue Gartner Lecture was his recent book "The Uninhabitable Earth" (named for his controversial New York magazine article of the same name), which lays out the author's borderline-apocalyptic predictions of the climate disaster to come as well as his own musings on complacency, human nature, and optimism.

During his time, Wallace-Wells stressed the speed at which climate change has already begun to throttle our world and the sluggish pace of science and policy in the face of this danger. A whirlwind tour of our still-evolving understanding of what the rise of climate change could mean for life on earth, Wallace-Wells' lecture came pockmarked with scraps of worst-case scenarios and snapshots of a world ill-positioned to the task of reducing emissions and staying off their most tragic effects. All Four Horsemen are accounted for; Wallace-Wells cites research that links a warming world to famine, war, pestilence, and death through a bevy of direct and indirect impacts. Nearly every major point was attended by anecdotes of the author's own journey from blissfully ignorant city-dweller to passionate advocate for climate action. The toll of this transformation is not lost on the observer; Wallace-Wells addresses a room of promise-laden students as one who no longer takes human progress as a given.

Though his demeanor might imply one who believes (on some level) that we are already too late, in Wallace-Wells' view, further suffering is elective. Reframing our disastrous effects on the

climate as evidence of our power over it, Wallace-Wells bids us godspeed towards meaningful climate policies and net-zero emissions although he cautions that the burden of what we have already wrought will stay with us for decades to come regardless. Perhaps Wallace-Wells' most poignant meditations concerned the human capacity to normalize suffering. The mere fact that we overlook millions in lost economic potential and hundreds of thousands of deaths due to the present harms of climate change more than makes his point. To paraphrase one of his better quips, Armageddon looks like just another grim reality when we get there.

Of course, any commentary on Wallace-Wells' work would be remiss without a fair look at his critics, and one need not wade into the fever-swamp of climate-deniers to find them. His seminal article in New York Magazine (where Wallace-Wells is still an editor) attracted charges of alarmism and poor scholarship. Climate Feedback (a fact-checking organization that scrutinizes climate change coverage in media) deemed his piece to be of "low" overall scientific credibility, mainly owing to his systemic use of misleading and unsubstantiated claims. This does not discredit the thrust of his message; many of the scientists who commented praised his basic thesis even as they decried the article's "unsupported conclusions" and "complete disregard for nuance". Though the organization has not spoken on Wallace-Wells' book specifically, it's safe to assume that the locus of their critiques would remain on individual projections and claims, not its premise. Climate change is a real, man-made phenomenon that is only going to get worse with time. On this, Wallace-Wells and his nay-sayers in the scientific community are in agreement.

In my opinion, it makes little sense (and demonstrates little integrity) to give less-than-rigorous armchair climate science of any kind a proverbial "pass", even when wielded by a proponent of climate action. Nonetheless, David Wallace-Wells' particular brand of climate alarmism has been influential in recent years, inspiring and taking inspiration from prominent figures in the movement, such as Greta Thunberg. His presence at SMU (belated as it was) was well-received and much-appreciated by the students, many of whom expressed surprise at some of the figures and projections he alluded to. The interest in the topic was palpable, which is itself a heartening minor victory.

Now comes the hard part.

A decorative border surrounds the text, featuring stylized blue and gold floral and leaf motifs. The border includes large blue flowers with gold centers, smaller blue leaves and berries, and gold-colored leaf outlines. The background is a light blue gradient.

Baby's First Snow

BY MELISSA WHITLER

A marshmallow
waddling through
pristine white.

A cry bursts
from the silence
as the bundle rolls
face first
into the slush.

Parents rush forward.

They need not worry, though,
For there are angels laughing
In the snow.

Fresh Air

BY DANIEL KULTI

No, Mom, I will not get fresh air, because it is boring!

I'd genuinely, genuinely, be lying if I said that

Now, I want to go outside, and spend time with nature.

Instead, I would rather be on my phone, tweeting, all day long.

I used to think that

Playing outside is fun!

How ridiculous, right? I actually thought that...

I want to watch only television, all the time!

In the past, I'd say that

Now, I want to go outside!

Sorry, but some people change...

(Now read from bottom to up)



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