

# Meg Sircom Memorial Scholarship 2019-2020

Celebration

**Scholarship Winner:**

Mahfuzara Parvin

**Honourable Mentions:**

Aashiha Babu

Silka Adelle Tandoc







## About the Scholarship



The Meg Sircom Memorial Scholarship was established in 2011, in memory of Vanier College English teacher Margaret (Meg) Anne Sircom, who died of breast cancer in January of that year. The \$500 scholarship celebrates achievement in English and creative writing. Applicants must be Vanier College students who have received high grades (80%+) in at least two English courses, and must submit a 5-15 page portfolio of creative written work (fiction, creative nonfiction, poetry, plays, screenplays or other).

Each year, the scholarship committee adjudicates the portfolios received, and awards the scholarship along with one or two honourable mentions. Reading and discussing the creative work of Vanier students is always a highlight of our school year. In 2019-2020, we received a record number of portfolios (26), so competition was fierce! We were delighted to present the scholarship to Building Systems Engineering Technology student **Mahfuzara Parvin**, and honourable mentions to **Aashiha Babu** and **Silka Adelle Tandoc**.

The Covid-19 pandemic made it impossible to hold an awards ceremony this year. Instead, we have created this celebratory document, which will give you a taste of the engaging, inspired and impressive work of these student writers.

Congratulations to Mahfuzara and our honourable mentionees, and thank you for giving us the opportunity to read your excellent writing.

*Dana Bath  
on behalf of the MSMS Committee:*

*Kevin Bushell*

*Erin Churchill*

*Graeme Desrosiers*

*Michael Garmaise*

*Erica James*

*Marianne Lynch*

*Patra Reiser*

*Mariopi Spanos*

## A Word from Vanier's Director General



There are so many things to cherish and celebrate about Vanier, and the Meg Sircom Memorial Scholarship, which acknowledges the wonderful student writers in our midst, is one of them. It's always an honour and privilege for me to attend the annual ceremony and recognize the scholarship winner and those receiving honourable mentions. The quality and diversity of the pieces submitted are always remarkable, and this year is no exception.

Congratulations to scholarship recipient Mahfuzara Parvin! Reading through "A Dream at Sea" and "The Last Southern Waterbender" allowed me escape into the beautiful world of nature, even if for only a brief few moments. Congratulations as well to Aashiha Babu and Silka Adelle Tandoc for also allowing the reader to experience the powerful imagery presented in their respective works. I feel so proud to work at Vanier when I have the opportunity to encounter the outstanding talents of our students. Thank you.

Thanks also to the exceptional faculty who support our students and provide opportunities for them to showcase their wonderful writing. I'm certain Meg smiles upon you every year for the work you do and the legacy you preserve in her honour.

*John McMahon*  
*Director General, Vanier College*







## About Meg Sircom



The words “quirky” and “eclectic” often accompany any description of our late, wonderful colleague, Meg Sircom. Whether you were talking about her take on life, literature, or love, Meg’s point of view was always insightful, but it was also just plain funny. And in thinking about how she approached teaching and literature, I would have to say the same thing. Meg’s courses were so very diverse, showcasing her interest in the environment, pop culture and age-old cultural traditions and their connection to our physical and metaphysical selves: from “English and Care” to “Japanese Literature” to “You Are What You Eat,” her inquisitiveness knew no boundaries. She was such an enthusiastic educator. She absolutely loved to inspire her students to write, and gushed when they excelled. As a colleague, she was collaborative and supportive. And as a writer, she was, I would say, shy. She downplayed her abilities. She had no idea how good she was. Thankfully, we have lines like this one, from Meg’s story “Bad Men Who Love Jesus,” to remind us: “When they have disappeared around the corner she goes down onto the sidewalk and puts one bare foot carefully into a puddle left by the rain in the night.”

*Mariopi Spanos*



## Scholarship Winner



### Mahfuzara Parvin




*On reading Mahfuzara’s poems, we were struck by her evocation of the power of the sea--to awe, to lull, to empower, to call to action, and to tie us to eternity. Her first poem takes us on a journey, with the sea as a portal leading us to “fall / into the unknown.” By the final poem, her speaker has the power to “bend the water of the sea.” While the images are vivid, Mahfuzara’s writing also shows deft restraint, attention to structure and awareness of the impact of a well-placed line break. Her villanelle entitled “A Walk on the Beach” serves to emphasize the fleeting nature of time and memory through the simple and poignant refrains, “The waves come and go in an eternal motion. / I can only stare and be witness to the movement.” She writes in a voice that is innocent and forthright, filled with wonder, yet revealing depths of thought and feeling. In one poem, the words of a familiar lullabye are brought to complement the speaker’s assertion that “the wind and rain can roar, / twisting and tearing my sail,” but they “shall see the beautiful things” nonetheless. In another, the deceptive simplicity of the repeated image of a “white bear balance[d] on a tiny piece of ice” addresses the impact of climate change on our oceans. In a harmony of imagery and form, innocence and insight, Mahfuzara’s writing captured us with its unaffected, engaging beauty.*

*Marianne Lynch*







## A Dream at Sea

by Mahfuzara Parvin



*So shut your eyes while Mother sings  
Of wonderful sights that be,  
And you shall see the beautiful things  
As you rock in the misty sea.*

- "Wynken, Blynken, and Nod" by Eugene Field

My brown wood bed  
drifts through the night,  
always trusting  
the stars and moon  
to guide me in my dreams.  
*So I shut my eyes while Mother sings.*

Just a few hours ago,  
I was paddling on the agitated sea,  
when I saw from afar  
the magnificent jump of the blue whale.  
My eyes filled with sparkles  
*Of wonderful sights that be.*

In a blink of an eye,  
the wind and rain can roar,  
twisting and tearing my sail.  
Yet when I look up, the colors  
of the rainbow begin to shine,  
*And I shall see the beautiful things.*

The magic of the sea enchants me  
Even as it becomes harder  
to push through the waves.  
I row left, right, left, right,  
to go back to sleep,  
*As I rock in the misty sea.*

## The Last Southern Waterbender by Mahfuzara Parvin



My ancestors learned it from the moon,  
the original master of water, observing,  
in the depths of the illuminated nights,  
its push and pull motion on the tides.

Some twisted minds have realized  
that water is in all living things  
allowing them to manipulate, to control  
the blood of the unfortunate souls.

But the spirit of the moon  
eternally dances in a circle  
with the spirit of the ocean  
bringing harmony to the world.

The women of my tribe were gifted  
magical powers from the spirits.  
They can make the water glow  
and ease the most painful of sorrows.

My strength comes from its light.  
I am most powerful when it is fully bright.  
I feel the energy pulse through my veins  
when I bend the water of the sea.







## Honourable Mention



Aashiha Babu

*Literature often explores the intricacies of what it means to be human, and Aashiha's work does this through well-crafted reflections on abstract ideas about the universe and the human connection to art. She shows a keen understanding of the effective use of contrast to explore the macrocosmic implications of human existence, sometimes through the lens of science, or from a more personal point of view. Her portfolio included a variety of topics, but what draws them together is an exploration of the universal desire to understand human motivation. Whether she is personifying the universe in "Art and Science" as someone who looks for collaboration in order to achieve understanding, or what human existence would be like if we were particles of light in "If We Were Protons," or exploring the relationship between memory and the act of writing, through her words, Aashiha delivers a mature and controlled perspective.*

*Erin Churchill*



## Art and Science

by Aashiha Babu



People tend to think that the person who gets the highest grades will be the next Einstein. They believe that those who excel in academics are the most intelligent ones. The ones who are in fine arts are treated like insignificant peasants while those who are in science are put on a pedestal and worshipped for their “intellect”. People tend to forget that the secrets of the universe cannot be unraveled with just a high IQ. The universe is not a mathematical equation that can be solved. It is delicate and intricate and stubborn. It has its own mind and it refuses to be tamed by the mathematics and the science theories that are thrown at it. It only bows down to those who think like it rather than trying to make it become what they think it is. The universe only bows down to those who are not limited by their intellectual knowledge. It does not privilege the erudite. It prefers those who are gentle towards it. It is more collaborative with those who dare to step off their pedestal. The universe likes the ones who are willing to believe the impossible things that it tells them. It wants to divulge its secrets to those who are openminded. In the end, it wishes to bare its soul to the creative ones who would know what to do with it.

## If We Were Photons

by Aashiha Babu



I find it intriguing that it is all or nothing when it comes to energy: a particle of light can only have no energy or have a specific amount of energy. I wonder what life would be like if humans behaved like particles of light. We humans usually tend to do things halfway and tell ourselves that we “tried” and move on with our lives. I wonder what we would do if we were like photons: would we go all the way, or would we just give up? Would we do everything, or would we do nothing? I think that we would do everything: we would do the good things all the way, and the bad things all the way. In the end, we would tell ourselves that we are better than the ones who did nothing even though we did far worse than them by going all in on the bad things. After all, if there is one thing that we all humans love to do, it is to place the blame on the “others” in order to justify our actions.







## Honourable Mention



Silka Adelle Tandoc

*It's often said that good writing comes from the body, but Silka's writing is often about the body. One piece, "In Security," is a series of poetic musings on different body parts—eyes, nose, ears, hands—that literally explore the body and, like looking in a mirror, also identity. In the prose piece "The Day I Met You," we see the speaker this time musing while looking upon the newborn body of a sibling. Even when Silka is addressing other subjects, her writing is filled with imagery of the body, such as "fingernails drilled deep into flesh," and "the sweat on the palms of your hands." We might say that in her best writing, the body becomes a metaphor for the emotional self, allowing Silka to write about personal pain in a way that is universally recognizable. Her writing is imaginative in form yet free of contrivance. It is bravely honest, intimately revealing, and deeply moving—all that we can hope for in literature.*

*Kevin Bushell*



## Stitches

by Silka Adelle Tandoc



Red and blue flashing lights zigzag through the living room window,  
Tall men would march up to our door  
only to have my father say that they had nothing  
to worry about because she seemed calm now.

Fingernails drilled deep into flesh,  
sharp, like razor blades  
I rolled my sleeves up at recess  
while classmates gawked at the marks on  
my coloured skin.

Paper towel rolls, empty plastic bottles,  
the TV remote control, children's books, and sometimes  
bottles of products from my mother's hair salon,  
Things were often hurled across the room, sometimes  
landing on the skull of an 8-year-old who  
silently sat in her usual spot by the window sill,  
eyes hooked onto the sidewalk,  
simply waiting for mama to come home.

Pointing fingers like a gun to my, her, his head,  
"You're a bitch and I hate you."  
A letter to my mother titled "Reasons Why I Hate You" was enough to  
make her heart split open.

A locked bathroom and deafening sobs always involved a threat to  
bust the door open,  
or perhaps another call to the police,  
while the younger ones peeked through the cracks of our shared  
bedroom door.

My brother, pinning his finger into his ears, desperate to hush  
the noises, including his own,  
My younger sister, with needles to her quiet eyes,  
both huddled together.  
And I, silently standing behind them.

Our heads, hanging together by a single thread.  
Our lips, forever sewn tight.

