

EDITOR'S NOTE

The College of Arts and Sciences prides itself on being the “heart of the BU experience,” and we—the instructors and staff of the Writing Program—pride ourselves on the centrality of our program to that experience: nearly all BU students take at least one class from the diverse offerings of the Writing Program. So, it seems a fitting connection to be reminded of a day last fall, when, hurrying on my way to a writing class, I was captivated by an advertisement on the side of the bus shelter that stands in front of the CAS building on Commonwealth Avenue. The image presented a highly feminized robot—a fembot, no less—with the clever caption “i text, therefore IM.” We could dismiss this play on words as nothing more than an amusing advertising ploy, yet I was struck by how neatly the words complemented Descartes’ famous proposition, “I think, therefore I am.” Serendipitously, the fembot of Comm. Ave. (as Bostonites, local and transplanted, call the street along which BU is situated) gives this statement of consciousness a 21st century gloss, completing the stimulating circle that describes critical thought, communication, and the creation of text.

Let’s leave aside the contentious arguments about just what kind of writing is created through the act of technological texting; let’s focus instead on the broader meaning of text and extrapolate from the cool quotient of the fembot’s aphorism to assert, “I write, therefore I am.” But how do students practice this contract between writing and identity within the liberal arts education that BU offers? Let’s draw further on the connections that our glossy fembot suggests to consider writing as an affirming and performative act that enables students to enter, with confidence, not only their immediate scholarly communities, but also their vocations and avocations beyond the university experience.

As the fembot proclaims, the art of producing text is a fundamentally affirming act: it pairs thought and identity in the conscious act of writing. In other words, the text has a point of view, or as we would more likely term it, an argument. The twelve student authors represented here have been selected because their work presents compelling and thoughtful points of view, developed out of a passion for inquiry and refined through discussion and revision. Indeed, *WR*—a journal to be produced annually drawing on the strongest works of students within the Writing Program—showcases these individual voices: from Natalie Lam’s elegantly wrought discussion of the demanding truth of Kafka’s works, to Jenessa Job’s meditation on the meaning of autobiography in *The Woman Warrior*, and to Michele Bounanduci’s extended explication of a single work by Emily Dickinson, the voices of these student authors ring clear as they engage with texts and sources from their writing seminars in various disciplines. The centrality of this engagement to the writing process is further underscored by the students in their introductory comments: George Brova, the author of “The Emergence of Environmental and Social Sustainability,” notes the importance of a “strong passion or even a personal infatuation” for the topic; Perry Schein finds his topic in the meeting place between his professional interests as an engineering student and the poetry of T.S. Eliot; and Patrick Duggan reflects on the “great jumping-off point and lingering question” that inspired him to explore Oscar Wilde’s view of aestheticism. These students, as representatives of their peers, give us a timely reminder of the importance of passion to even the most academic modes of unity and argumentation.

Writing is also an act of performance, a notion which the directors of the Writing Program have actively endorsed. First, Professor Michael Prince, the founding director of the program, consistently reminded instructors and students alike of the comparisons between training as an athlete or a musician and the journey of a writer: the quality of the performance rests on the supporting preparation and practice. Now, current director Professor Joseph Bizup reaffirms the vision of writing as an act that moves from cognition to creation in a series of performative movements: our students imagine and envision the intellectual conversation through the readings of texts, rehearse the academic argument in class discussion, and create their own contributions to this scholarly perfor-

mance through the process of writing and revision. Many of the students whose essays are included in this inaugural edition of *WR* reflect on these aspects of their work: Aneesh Acharya gives us a lighthearted glimpse of the preparation and revision behind his timely analysis of financial institutions; Rachel Fogley explains the painstaking process of annotation and argument-development; and other students similarly highlight the importance of peer revision, instructor feedback, and presentation of their ideas to a wider audience as a means of refining their arguments.

Our Comm. Ave. fembot also reminds us that text is embedded in networks. In their comments the student authors presented here bring this notion into the university context: writing is not only a way to express an individual voice, but is also a means to enter an intellectual conversation. These students, whose work represents much of the gamut of Writing Program topics from the humanities to the social and natural sciences, are inspired (as Chris Meyer, the author of “The FSA Photographs” writes) by the views of significant authors in relevant fields to pursue their own intellectual investigations. The students—as Gordon Towne in “Peak Oil” and Militza Zikatanova in “Legend of King Cormac and King Conn” so ably demonstrate—engage with relevant thinkers, ideas, and texts in the formation of their own arguments. They draw, as Mariah Sondergard shows in “Identity in *Ulysses*,” on critical scholarly sources to illuminate their own discussions, and in so doing, learn the conventions of the academic conversation: engaging with texts, whether these are factual, exhibit, argument or theory sources; finding a question that can be meaningfully pursued; identifying gaps in drafts; and working with the feedback of colleagues to produce a stronger, more compelling argument.

It takes courage to join these active and frequently intimidating conversations, and as we present these essays, I reflect on the Comm. Ave. fembot’s final lesson: that writing now, more than ever, takes place in the domain of technology. *WR*, as a new online journal, is evidence of that shift. Far more significant, though, is the way in which students now create and store their work in cyberspace: they post and revise their work via Blackboard folders; create communal spaces where they collaborate on writing projects; and upload portfolios with illustrations and links to other technologically enhanced sites. This confluence of technology and the public performance of writing means that students now contribute to the

scholarly community far earlier, and in a far more transparent way, than previous generations. These essays are a courageous foray into that community, and we, as readers, should engage with the authors in a conversation that is as encouraging as it is critical.

On behalf of the editorial board, which in turn represents the instructors who teach the great diversity of classes in the Writing Program at Boston University, I welcome the student authors whose work is presented in this first issue of *WR*. They enter the scholarly conversation knowing that what they have to say perhaps represents a beginning, rather than a final position. Indeed, several of the authors reflected just this wish as part of their comments: if only they could write or revise a little more! Instead, the essays have been lightly copy edited, and most are presented here in the same version that students submitted to their instructors. To draw on Natalie Lam's reflection of Kafka, writers must confront the "paradox and struggle" inherent in any act of writing. *WR* celebrates the work of these twelve students who have so ably recognized and taken up the struggle of the act of writing.

— Deborah Breen

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This online journal is a new venture for the CAS Writing Program, but it follows in the footsteps of an earlier collection of students' work, the *Journal of Exemplary Writing*, edited by Allison Adair in 2006.