

# WR

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# CONTENTS

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<b>EDITOR'S NOTE</b>	<b>1</b>
CARRIE BENNETT	
 <b>WR 098 ESSAYS</b>	
<b>Food: The Hard Work of Separating Families While Keeping It All Together</b>	
<i>Prize Essay Winner</i>	<b>3</b>
MARIA DEL ROSARIO CASTRO DIAZ	
 <b>The Melting Pot vs. Cultural Competency: The Crisis of Identity for Immigrants in America</b>	<b>9</b>
CALVIN POON	
 <b>WR 100 ESSAYS</b>	
<b>Exposure and Retaliation: Searching for Peace in the West Bank through <i>5 Broken Cameras</i></b>	<b>16</b>
CAMDEN DEAN	
 <b>Lionized Lincoln</b>	<b>25</b>
ZACHARY KRAEHLING	
 <b>Questioning the Copyright Act: Is Copyright Doing It Right?</b>	<b>35</b>
JUNG HYUN PARK	

- Alcohol, Emotion, and Tension in Raymond Carver's Fiction 43  
 SARA KORNFELD SIMPSON

### WR 150 ESSAYS

- Translating Troubles: Alliterative Verse in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* 54  
 ALICIA ESPINOSA

- Battlestar Galactica: A Vehicle of the American Road* 64  
 CAROLINE JONES

- Painting the Real Picture: The Benefits of Autoethnographic Filmmaking for Children with Life-Threatening Illness 75  
*Prize Essay Winner*  
 LAUREN KESLER

- On the Discourse of Cultural Colonialism: The Unexplored Political Dimension of Westernization in Brazil 88  
 MARIA CLARA BEZERRA

- A Good Little Monkey: *Curious George's* Undercurrent of White Dominance and the Series' Continued Popularity 106  
*Prize Essay Winner*  
 MAYA TERHUNE

### ALTERNATIVE GENRE ESSAYS

- Bad Parenting: The True Villain of "Rumpelstiltskin" 122  
 HANNAH LEVIN

Is violence—	130
<i>Prize Essay Winner</i>	
JAMES SBORDONE	
<b>This Is the Way We Are: America through Street Photography</b>	<b>135</b>
SARAH WHITE	
<b>HONORABLE MENTIONS</b>	<b>143</b>

## EDITOR'S NOTE

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Acting and directing theorist Anne Bogart boldly argues that “One of the most radical things you can do in this culture of the inexact is to finish a sentence [ . . . ] Words are dangerous and they can be powerful.” This kind of meaningful and deep engagement with language—from big ideas to single words—facilitates the larger academic conversation our students undertake as they become directors of their own ideas. The act of writing is inherently both critical and creative: the intellectual rigor in writing an argument claim mirrors that in composing a poem. To highlight the connection between the critical and creative, for the first time, *WR* includes two pieces of creative writing, a fairy tale and a poem. Our students are writing varied and vibrant texts, and Issue 7 showcases the Writing Program’s continued efforts to broaden the scope of academic conversation.

Chosen from 440 submissions, the 14 winning selections—11 essays and 3 alternative genre pieces—are exemplary in their originality, complexity, and creativity. Students take on bold ideas like Lauren Kesler’s prize-winning essay, “Painting the Real Picture: The Benefits of Autoethnographic Filmmaking for Children with Life-Threatening Illness,” which argues that children with life-threatening illnesses become agents of their own hospital experience through autoethnographic filming to help tamper Hollywood’s romanticized images of childhood illness. In another prize-winning essay, “Food: The hard work of separating families while keeping it all together,” Maria Del Rosario Castro Diaz examines Americanization through the lens of food. This essay ultimately highlights the complex and dualistic nature of enculturation, or the process an individual from another culture must undergo when confronted with a new cultural milieu.

The scope of subject matter and attention to detail in the rest of Issue 7's essays are equally impressive. The authors analyze cultural "texts" and people through new lenses: from interpreting *Battlestar Galactica* as an American road narrative (Jones) to questioning why Lincoln has remained such a beloved historical figure (Kraehling); and from examining the role alcohol plays in Raymond Carver's fiction (Simpson), to interpreting the significance of alliterative verse in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Espinoza), to even questioning the Copyright Act's relevancy to Jazz (Park). Other essays take on cultural quandaries, such as the effect of Westernization in Brazil (Soares Bezerra) and the crisis of identity for immigrants in America as depicted in Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Warrior Woman* (Poon); while other essays expose racial oppression in the historically beloved children's series *Curious George* (Terhune) and illuminate the significant role cameras play in exposing violence and searching for peace in the documentary *5 Broken Cameras* (Dean).

The alternative genre selections also ask the reader to see the world anew. Jimmy Sbordone's prize-winning poem "Is Violence—" meditates on both the destructive and generative force of a supernova. This short poem is itself a supernova for its brevity and brightness. In "Bad Parenting: The True Villain of "Rumpelstiltskin," Hannah Levin rewrites the classic fairy tale to highlight the power dynamic between parents and children. And in "This Is the Way We Are," a public intellectual essay, Sarah White shows us how street photography creates and reflects American culture.

These essays and alternative genre pieces achieve the challenging balance between big ideas and attention to language (and image). The authors accomplish Anne Bogart's belief: they make words dangerous and powerful in what they spotlight and expose. They ask us to look carefully at our world and by doing so examine its very foundation.

— Carrie Bennett, Editor

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## From the Instructor

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In Fall 2014 we introduced a new anthology for WR 098—*Globalization: A Reader for Writers*. Rosario’s final paper is one positive result of this text, a collection that prompted enthusiastic engagement because the issues it explores resonate with international students. In her essay, Rosario demonstrates an engagement with texts that anticipates the use of exhibit and argument sources in WR 100 and 150 while following the final paper assignment for WR 098, which involves analyzing a theme by engaging with a novel and two essays from the anthology.

Rosario chooses passages from *The Namesake* quite astutely to support her claims and interweaves Lahiri’s language smoothly and clearly with her own. Her paragraphs show a persuasive balance between evidence and analysis. She strategically adapts insights from Ali’s essay to her analysis of the novel. Carefully acknowledging distinctions between the contexts she and Wasserstrom analyze, she challenges the central claim of his essay. Rosario’s paper invites student writers of all levels to question others’ arguments and to use well-chosen evidence and meticulous analysis to create their own contributions to intellectual conversations.

— Holly Schaaf

WR 098: Introduction to College Reading and Writing in English

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## From the Writer

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Who would have thought food could play such a significant role in a family? Throughout Jhumpa Lahiri's novel *The Namesake* the character's diet makes recurring appearances that seemed to me to have been carefully planned by the author. Thus, my "Food: The Hard Work of Separating Families While Keeping It All Together" was born.

In my essay I ventured to analyze the role the food played in the development of the novel. Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom's essay "A Mickey Mouse Approach to Globalization" and Tanveer Ali's essay "The Subway Falafel Sandwich and the Americanization of Ethnic Food" are used as a lens to my argument. Wasserstrom believes American products have no power to change cultures; Ali says that when adapting products and traditions from other cultures to our own these lose some of their originality. Ultimately, I believe these issues to be more complicated than they appear and the Ganguli family proves them to be so.

— Maria Del Rosario Castro Diaz

MARIA DEL ROSARIO CASTRO DIAZ

*Prize Essay Winner*

## FOOD: THE HARD WORK OF SEPARATING FAMILIES WHILE KEEPING IT ALL TOGETHER

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In his essay “A Mickey Mouse Approach to Globalization” Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom claims that “American products [take] on distinctly new cultural meanings when moved from the US” (22) into other cultures, and that it is superficial of us to equate globalization with Americanization. Yet, when looking closely at the characters of Ashima and Gogol and their relationship with food in Jhumpa Lahiri’s novel *The Namesake*, we learn that this is not quite the case. These characters do not receive the American products in their native country as Wasserstrom argues; nevertheless, when the Gangulis first move to the USA they create their own little Calcutta where they gradually let in the influence of America. Throughout the novel, food plays an important role as a link between the characters and their Bengali roots. The characters, especially Ashima, tend to adapt American products to their own traditions. However, these very Bengali traditions become “Americanized” in the process. As Ali argues in his essay “The Subway Falafel Sandwich and the Americanization of Ethnic Food,” some quality of the original product must be sacrificed to fit the American standards (26) and such is the case with the Bengali food traditions in the novel. Moreover, Gogol’s relationship with food implies that “as generations settle in, the food, like the ethnic group itself, becomes subsumed into American culture” (25). Although American products can get adapted to other cultural traditions as Wasserstrom argues, Ashima and Gogol’s relationships to the food they consume suggest that the adaptation to America and its products is far more complex, making food not only a link to old traditions but also an important component of the Americanization of the new generations.

In *The Namesake*, American products are being constantly adapted to suit the Bengali traditions. From the very first moment Ashima moves to the United States, she adapts American products to cater to her needs. While she is still pregnant with Gogol, she tries to reproduce the snack from Calcutta she likes so much with Rice Krispies, peanuts and chopped red onion, all products bought in America, but she only gets to a “humble approximation” (Lahiri 1). Similarly she teaches the newly arrived Bengali wives how to make halwa from Cream of Wheat, she fries the shrimp cutlets in sauce pans, and she and the other Bengalis drink tea with evaporated milk (38). Ashima tries to adapt the American products to her Bengali dishes, but these do not take on a whole new different meaning as Wasserstrom claims Mickey Mouse did in China back in the 80s when he lived there (22). In fact, having to adapt these American products to her Bengali traditions brings much sorrow to Ashima since nothing is quite as it used to be back in her own country. The situation only makes her miss India even more. Ashima’s early attitude towards food seems to suggest that in fact, much unlike Wasserstrom claims, American products can Americanize other traditions, forcing them to adapt to American culture instead of the other way round. For example, for her son’s annaprasan Ashima regrets that “the plate on which the rice is heaped is melamine, not silver or brass” (39). She is forced to adapt her traditions to what she owns and has no option but to Americanize them, making them lose some of the original quality to adapt to the American standards as Ali claims in his essay.

The Gangulis do successfully manage to adapt American products to their own traditions; nonetheless, they are forced to give in to some American traditions that eventually create a unique type of Bengali culture that is neither entirely Bengali nor American. For instance, even though many of her customs are eroded by her experiences in America, Ashima successfully manages to adapt the American tradition of Christmas to her Bengali origins. Throughout the years her Christmas parties become very popular amongst her Bengali friends, so much so that towards the end of the novel we discover that everyone has come to “love Ashima’s Christmas Eve parties, that they’ve missed them these past few years” (286). She has managed to make Christmas her very own “adopted” tradition, using it as an excuse to cook Bengali dishes and to gather all her friends and loved

ones together who become one big Bengali family. Food not only Americanizes the family but it also keeps them in contact with their own culture. Yet, this tradition she creates is not Bengali, for they do not celebrate Christmas, nor American because Ashima's celebration takes a whole new meaning. Her situation has forced her to create a completely new culture that is composed of both her native and adopted traditions. Thus, I believe that Wasserstrom fails to see the dual role that in this case food can play in the Americanization of a family and its culture and how this same process can affect the originality of the traditions.

While food in many instances does help keep the Ganguli family stay connected to their Bengali roots, it plays an important role in the Americanization of the new generation. Throughout their lives, Gogol and Sonia never fully adopt the traditional dishes their parents eat; instead, their diet is based on American dishes and an adaptation of the Bengali eating traditions. From a very early age, Gogol eats peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and frozen waffles for breakfast (55). Ashima and Ashoke eventually give in when they go grocery shopping, allowing him to "fill the cart with items he and Sonia, but not they, consume" (65). These eating habits show that inevitably, the new generation gradually adapts to the American culture and food becomes a major distancing factor between generations. Although Gogol is initially taught to eat with "his own fingers, not to let the food stain the skin of his own palm" (55), as he grows up and becomes more distanced from his parents and his Bengali origins he begins to use a fork when he eats, seemingly ashamed of his parents for not using one. Food, amongst other things, has managed to Americanize him and consequently the traditions that were supposed to be carried on by him and his sister. This situation seems to suggest that the adaptation of American products to other cultures is much more complex and not as straightforward as Wasserstrom claims it to be. In his essay he refers to the exportation of American products to other countries; nonetheless, this same concept could be applied to those families that like the Gangulis emigrated to the USA. In this situation, the Gangulis are the "products" that are being exported and in turn are adapted to the new country's culture. The family, however, does bring with themselves their own little piece of India that gets Americanized through the food and products they use. Wasserstrom fails to look into the reverse situation in which the foreigners

go into the American culture and that potentially undermines his argument regarding Americanization. The Gangulis' Bengali traditions are eroded by the influence American food and products have on their family.

Certainly, people from other cultures can adapt American products to their own needs; however, we must not forget that in return these products will eventually Americanize these cultures to a certain extent. Ashima and Gogol's relationship to food in *The Namesake* proves to be a convincing example of this dual process. While food helps to maintain a connection to their Bengali roots no matter if it is made of American products, it also helps Americanize their traditions and the new generation in the family, who become subsumed into American culture and lose part of their Bengali originality.

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MARIA DEL ROSARIO CASTRO DIAZ is a rising sophomore in the College of Communication majoring in Public Relations and minoring in Psychology. She was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina. She would like to dedicate her work to her freshmen year teachers Holly Schaaf and Christina Michaud for helping her overcome her writing fears. She would also like to dedicate her work to her friends and family who helped her through the stressful early stages of writing.

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## From the Instructor

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The final paper in WR 098 requires students to create an original argument analyzing themes in a set of works. In this section, the essay had to “synthesize” Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts* and two essays from the anthology *Globalization*, which contains a range of arguments about education and global citizenship. The synthesis element of the paper is often challenging for students, and some struggle to find ways to incorporate the essays without having them appear as mere tangents or barely related examples.

Calvin’s essay is remarkable because it not only completes the requirements of the assignment beautifully, using ideas from the two essays as necessary components of an argument that illuminates the memoir, but the essay also makes it clear how the analysis of these texts can help us to understand and perhaps answer difficult questions about cultural integration. Framed as it is with personal experience, Calvin’s essay demonstrates the relevance and even practicality of his claims, and we don’t doubt his sincerity or investment. Additionally, sophisticated use of counterargument and contemporary touchstones contribute to making this a meaningful and clarifying essay.

— Kevin Barents

WR 098: Introduction to College Reading and Writing in English

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## From the Writer

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The idea of this essay stems from my personal experience growing up in Hong Kong and Toronto. I was often asked where I was from. While most people think it is a simple question, I always feel obligated to say Toronto instead of Hong Kong. I fear that people might label me as a newly immigrated alien, often referred to colloquially as a FOB (fresh off the boat). After reading the book *Woman Warrior: Memoir of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*, I found the story very easy to relate to. The first-hand stories about how the author, Maxine Hong Kingston, faced cultural pressure really resonated with my thoughts and experiences. In this paper, I decided to discuss the ways America's dominant cultural and social expectations shape immigrants' self-identities, forcing them to behave a certain way. Also, by drawing on different readings from earlier in the semester, I explored the question of how immigrants can face the dilemma of cultural competency. All in all, I believe balance and flexibility are key solutions for immigrants in order to have positive experiences in foreign lands.

— Calvin Poon

CALVIN POON

## THE MELTING POT VS. CULTURAL COMPETENCY: THE CRISIS OF IDENTITY FOR IMMIGRANTS IN AMERICA

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When I first met my friend Steven, he asked me where I was from. When I told him I was from Toronto, Canada, he inquired again but added this time asking, “where I was really from.” My answer clearly was not satisfactory; he thought my accent was “funny.” Surprisingly, his question was much more difficult to answer. I did not know what to say—why could he not accept that some Canadians have a “funny” accent? Did he want me to say that I am from China? Why did my accent matter? When he first asked me where I was from, I felt obligated to answer Toronto even though I was mostly raised in Hong Kong. I was reluctant to answer his question with Hong Kong; I feared that he might label me as a newly immigrated alien, often referred to colloquially as FOB (fresh off the boat). This short anecdote is typical of many immigrants in America, and raises important questions for exploration. First, in what ways do America’s dominant cultural and social expectations implicitly shape immigrants’ self-identities and ultimately force them to behave a certain way? Second, and arguably more importantly, how can immigrants face the dilemma of cultural competency; how, if at all, can immigrants be true to their own heritage while still remaining open enough to adapt to new cultural milieus?

Maxine Hong Kingston offers one answer. Kingston herself grew up in a different culture and also recounts first-hand stories from her Chinese family. In her famous autobiography *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood Among Ghosts*, Kingston recalls the “talk-stories” that her mother once told her, ranging from ancient Chinese tales to real life experiences. Kingston illustrates an important theme about the importance of acting a

certain way as an Asian-American, especially in the last two chapters, “At a Western Place” and “A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe.” “At a Western Place” is the chapter where Kingston shows the comparison between the extreme Chinese and Western cultures. Kingston tells the story of her aunt Moon Orchid’s transition from Hong Kong to America. Kingston describes the cultural conflict through Moon Orchid, a symbol for China, the children of Brave Orchid, the symbol for America, and Brave Orchid herself, the arbitrator. Brave Orchid balances the two poles harmoniously; when Moon Orchid arrives in America, she is so excited to give Brave Orchid’s children the gifts she brought from Hong Kong. However, the American children consider the Chinese gifts worthless as they do not follow the casual American model of gift giving. Nevertheless, Moon Orchid disregards their attitude and stays true to Chinese tradition. Eventually, Brave Orchid’s children grow tired of their aunt: the apparent “cultural gap” is unbearable. Even when Moon Orchid shows love when she affectionately smoothens their hair during the evening, they immediately order her to leave them alone (131). Moon Orchid’s numerous failed attempts to connect with Brave Orchid’s children drives her crazy (141). Her attempts to connect not only fail, but rather exacerbate the situation as the children become intent on keeping interactions with her as brief as possible. Thus, Moon Orchid’s inability to develop cultural competency and adapt to American culture resulted in failed relations with Brave Orchid’s children.

Julian Hill, an African American law student from Harvard University, faced similar challenges in developing cultural competency while trying to learn of his Ugandan heritage through interacting with local Ugandans. In “In Search of Black Identity in Uganda,” Hill calls Uganda his second home but has yet to travel there. He eventually goes to Uganda, discovering that calling a place “home” is not easy because there is more to home than merely having the same skin color. Hill felt it was impossible to “meld” both American and black identities: “it just seemed like I couldn’t have it both ways” (59). Hill recounts one phone conversation: “‘Yo, what’s good? I’m chillin.’ I’m mad on my way. I’ll see you like in like four-five. Fa sho. Word. Yuh.’ As I ended the call, I looked around. Great. Four sets of eyes were on me—each pair screaming ‘Muzungu’ (foreigner)” (57). Hill’s use of colloquial American language in his phone call likely confused others around him. More importantly, however, is that these people are

distinguishing themselves from him; their looks imply that “You’re not one of us, you’re one of them” (57). Hill, in an attempt to change these peoples’ views, learns local Lugandan phrases: “Throw in a few of my patented Lugandan phrases with a local, and I felt less like the alien that I really was among Ugandans” (59). But if Hill is to be “accepted” by the new society, he must change and adopt the new culture. Hill changes his behavior to behave more like the Ugandans. The Ugandans seem more accepting as he adopts their mannerisms and traditions: Hill admits that he “[does] not feel like a tourist” after learning the phrases (59). His Ugandan friend Frank even recognizes him as a “brother” (60). Hill, unlike Moon Orchid, was able to build positive and meaningful relationships with people from foreign cultures precisely because he possessed greater flexibility and open-mindedness in adapting to new socio-cultural expectations.

Kingston further reinforces this idea in another chapter called “A Song for a Barbarian Reed Pipe,” where she describes her own experiences with generational and cultural clashes. Despite her American education, Kingston still feels shame from her traditional Chinese. “[The emigrants] turn the radio up full blast. . . . they yell over the singers that wail over the drums, everybody talking at once, big arm gestures, spit flying. You can see the disgust on American faces looking at women like that. It isn’t just the loudness. It is the way Chinese sounds, chingchong ugly, to American ears, not beautiful like Japanese sayonara words with the consonants and vowels as regular as Italian” (171). Kingston decides to retract her voice to make herself more appealing to Americans: “We American-Chinese girls had to whisper to make ourselves American-feminine” (172). This adaptation is reinforced when Kingston bullies another Asian girl who refused to talk. On the one hand, this incident shows that as a Chinese American, Kingston judges the Chinese girl indifferent for not learning to speak English. Kingston calls her “sissy-girl,” squeezes her cheeks, and yanks her hair in frustration of her difficulty to interact with this “FOB” (175). But more importantly, Kingston despised the girl’s stereotypical fragility. Kingston’s self-racism goes further: she even generalizes FOBs as people who “wear high-riding grey slacks and white shirts with the sleeves rolled up. Their eyes do not focus correctly—shifty-eyed—and they hold their mouths slack, not tight jawed masculine” (194). FOBs, according to Kingston, do not adapt to other cultures, essentially isolating themselves.

This isolation is illustrated in the television series *Fresh Off the Boat* based on *Fresh Off the Boat: A Memoir* by Asian American author Eddie Huang. Eddie's mother, Jessica, resembles Kingston's mother. Not only is Jessica a stereotypical "Asian Tiger Mom" who requires excellence in everything her children do (like *Brave Orchid*), she also lacks cultural competency, fiercely guarding Chinese traditions considering all Americans foreigners.

Some might argue one should stay true to one's culture and heritage and that one should not change to adapt to others' expectations. However, people likely will need to change to adapt to new cultures when living in a foreign country for one's own flexibility and self-respect, not to impress. Examples include the way we talk, the way we dress and the way we behave. In fact, learning English is already the first step to adopting American culture. Leila Ahmed's "Reinventing the Veil" illustrates how dynamic culture is. Ahmed reflects on her childhood experiences to explore how the cultural implications and symbols associated with the veil have drastically changed. Egyptian women nowadays wear veils not as a way to obey patriarchal traditions, but as an alternative way of raising awareness and consciousness about the sexist messages in Egypt (307). According to Ahmed, embracing change can be "bracing" and "exciting" and can create a new identity (308). Ahmed's example illustrates how embracing change, though it may be difficult initially, can even catalyze positive social change.

Overall, balance and flexibility are key for immigrants to have positive experiences in foreign lands. Although different societies may maintain and promote different norms, values, and beliefs, I believe it is important to maintain balance and still stay true to one's own heritage, which would ideally be respected by those around them. The concept of cultural competency, as epitomized in the example of Hill, is one possible answer to the questions originally proposed. Although this concept is neither foolproof nor without exception, it provides for immigrants all over the world a unique conceptual framework with which to leave their lives in new lands, wherever their destinations.

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CALVIN POON is a rising sophomore from Toronto, ON majoring in psychology and economics. As a member of the College of Arts and Science, class of 2018, he is studying to become an occupational psychiatrist and a businessman. Calvin took his first semester off to embark on a marketing internship opportunity in Hong Kong. He believes his ambitious and adventurous personality contributes to the "thinking out of the box" approach of his essays. He would like to thank Professor Barents and his classmates for their tremendous patience and guidance; their support and feedback were immensely helpful throughout the writing process.

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## From the Instructor

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Camden Dean's excellent paper, written for WR 100: "Global Documentary," explores the destructive role that cameras play in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He focuses on the Academy Award-nominated documentary *5 Broken Cameras* (2011), which tells the story of a Palestinian farmer who films his fellow villagers' protest against the Israeli wall erected on their land. We studied this film at a poignant moment in the semester. The Israel-Gaza conflict had ended four months earlier. And we had just studied *One Day in September* (1999), which revisits the 1972 Munich Olympics, where 11 Israeli athletes and trainers were taken hostage and then killed by Palestinian terrorists—an event largely streamed on live television.

The assignment's sole requirement was that students pose and answer a question about any of our semester's documentaries. After presenting an outline of his ideas and receiving feedback from the class, Camden began to write. Many of our theoretical readings helped to shape his ambitious argument—Jean Rouch on *cinéma vérité*, Michel Foucault on the Panopticon, Susan Sontag on the desensitizing effect that images engender. While drafting his essay, however, Camden started to question the direction of his argument and wondered whether he should abandon it. Peer reviewers stepped in to offer just the right kind of feedback, inspiring the counter-arguments that frame his position for a skeptical reader and motivating him to keep going. Camden's ability to view the role of cameras in the West Bank from multiple angles gives his essay its rhetorical force and judicious tone. It was a pleasure to work with him on this essay and to read it again all of these months later.

— Marisa Milanese

WR 100: Global Documentary

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## From the Writer

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When given the opportunity to write a paper addressing any of the films covered over the course of the semester, I knew that mine would address *5 Broken Cameras*. The in-class discussions regarding the film followed the familiar narrative of “Israel does evil things to innocent people,” one that I have heard countless times throughout my life as a Muslim-American. With a chance to address the issue, I was able to question this train of thought in a way that identifies yet another issue that is overwhelmingly overlooked: people act differently when they know they are being watched. With more inspiration streaming in from the NSA scandal and the Edward Snowden leaks, I aimed to expose what could be yet another issue in Israel and the West Bank, and to offer possible steps toward sustainable peace in the region. This paper allowed me to be a contrarian, while still attempting to bridge a substantial gap between these nations.

— Camden Dean

CAMDEN DEAN

## EXPOSURE AND RETALIATION: SEARCHING FOR PEACE IN THE WEST BANK THROUGH *5 BROKEN CAMERAS*

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Guy Davidi and Emad Burnat's documentary *5 Broken Cameras* (2011) chronicles the life of one of the filmmakers, the Palestinian Emad, along with the rest of the people of Bil'in, his village in the West Bank. The villagers struggle against Israeli settlers who construct apartment complexes that encroach upon the Palestinians' land. Emad uses his camera as a source of not only what he calls physical "protection" against the Israeli soldiers who disrupt the protests, but also emotional protection, since the process of filming "heals" the Palestinians of their emotional scars (*5 Broken Cameras*). Although the opposite appears to be true—many instances throughout the documentary indicate that Emad's filming makes him a target for violence—his film's use for emotional healing and its ability to "boost morale" (*5 Broken Cameras*) for those under oppression show just two of the ways that cameras have become a vital part of the conflict in the West Bank. The camera's value permeates the borders of the Middle East as well, as footage can help Palestinians gain political support from sympathetic viewers in the West. Ultimately, however, cameras appear to have created an arms race of sorts: no one wins, and the footage loses its potential for change. With repeated exposure to images of the conflict, viewers become desensitized to them. And by using cameras in the search for much needed peace and stability in the region, Emad creates an additional source of contention as Israelis become hostile to the origin of footage, and in similar cases they retaliate with cameras of their own. Two people staring at each other through camera lenses with the intent of protecting themselves ultimately create an even larger divide between themselves and their ostensible opponents.

The presence of cameras in the West Bank complicates the already complex Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Over the course of sixty years, the two groups have lived a constant, and mostly violent, confrontation over land. With the help gained from its close relationship with the United States and the global support after the tragedy of the Holocaust, Israel was able to emerge as a prosperous nation in the region. Prosperity often necessitates the demand for greater resources, and Israel has continued to expand its borders, as Palestinian refugees have fled to neighboring Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan. Even the designated Palestinian land in the West Bank has begun to diminish, as Israel has consumed parts of this region for what it claims are rightful settlements. In *5 Broken Cameras*, the people of Bil'in find themselves confronting this predicament—how to deal with the technically illegal establishment of Israeli settlements on their land.

Emad's solution is to film. He captures the various injustices faced by the villagers: their olive trees scorched by Israeli settlers, their land cut by a so-called security wall, their people tear-gassed and beaten by Israeli soldiers. His footage becomes evidence when a villager faces legal charges in court; he and his people have done nothing wrong, and the camera proves it to be so. This is why cultural anthropologist Rebecca L. Stein classifies the use of cameras as "most necessary in sites of heightened conflict" such as these ("Viral Occupation"). Without Emad's footage, many of his friends, and even he, would face sentencing for crimes they did not commit.

Yet the footage also provides the villagers with an opportunity "to gain some distance from the events" (*5 Broken Cameras*) in a way that strengthens their resolve against oppression as their characteristically discouraging experiences are transformed into community rallying points. Emad gathers the villagers from the neighboring villages, who similarly find themselves struggling against a seemingly invincible 10-foot fence of their own, to watch the various clips of footage captured from Bil'in's own instances of resistance. The event "contributes to solidarity" (*5 Broken Cameras*) against Israeli oppression, and they are able to kindle resistance of their own. Emad's camera thus becomes an active weapon against complacency for those whose motivation is chipped away by the futility of their efforts.

Beyond the realm of the West Bank, the footage taken by Emad, and those like him, is also useful. Undoubtedly, a large portion of the footage that is captured and distributed to the outside world delivers its message by publicizing instances of purported injustices committed by one side against the other (Israelis against Palestinians or vice versa). Once people who support either side of the conflict begin to gain increasing exposure to a particularly notable event, it seems logical that they would become inclined to offer support for those in need, in tangible and intangible ways. Evidence supporting this is in great supply. A video of Palestinian farmers being beaten by four Israeli men with clubs and masked faces is one such example (Stein). Further examples are found in footage from the seven week Israel-Gaza conflict during the summer of 2014 which shows Israeli citizens taking cover from Gazan rockets, as sirens blare relentlessly. Such videos have gone viral, inspiring everything from donations to Twitter hashtags (from #IstandwithIsrael to #FreeGaza) (ABC News). Footage thus can hold some efficacy in inspiring empathy.

However, an image's ability to generate this empathy comes into question under closer scrutiny. In her book *On Photography*, Susan Sontag analyzes the usefulness of images in spreading awareness for any particular cause. In doing so, she claims that an image "cannot make a dent in public opinion" without "appropriate context of feeling and attitude" (17). In *5 Broken Cameras*, the villagers gather for a weekly protest against the Israeli wall on their land, and every time they gather, their protest is broken up by tear gas, sometimes gunfire. Emad hoped that his film would expose such injustice and gain support for himself and his people, but for the reasons that Sontag outlines, the efficacy is questionable. According to a recent World Public Opinion poll, 71% of Americans do not believe that the US should support either Palestine or Israel ("Taking Sides"). Thus, at least in the US, there is no "appropriate context of feeling and attitude" (Sontag 17) to change public opinion. While this is merely correlation, it is strong enough to be applied to this situation because it possesses parallels to examples given by Sontag herself: photographs of a skeletal, starving Andersonville prisoner of the South during the Civil War inspired no anti-war sentiment, but rather promoted the North's fight against the South. The images worked because they supported the existing sentiment for militancy against the South, but they could not create a new anti-war

sentiment—a genuinely “moral position” in Sontag’s terms—as they were intended to do. Images thus “cannot create a moral position,” but can only work to “reinforce one” (17). In this way, scenes from *5 Broken Cameras* are less effective at gaining support for Emad and the Palestinians in the West Bank than one may typically expect. And even for those affected by the footage, its efficacy diminishes over time. Although *5 Broken Cameras* was critically acclaimed for exposing the injustices committed against the villagers of Bil’in, these injustices become easier to watch with each successive tear-gassing at the weekly Friday protests. As Sontag would say, “[A]fter repeated exposure to images it [an event] . . . becomes less real” (20).

Within the region, a camera’s effectiveness can also be questioned—not just in terms of its product (its footage), but in terms of its presence. A camera is an observer, and observation can inspire vulnerability and fear. This is the premise of Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon (as described by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*), an ideal architectural apparatus used to monitor prisoners and their behavior without the need for an observer. Ringed around a central tower, the cells become “like so many cages, so many small theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible” (200). The prisoner, in his role as the observed, feels intentionally vulnerable and modifies his behavior, “becom[ing] the principle of his own subjection.” We can see these effects in some of the Israelis captured by Emad’s cameras. In one scene, Israeli soldiers insist that Emad “put the camera down,” suggesting that they do not want to be seen on camera. Their reluctance to be filmed might make it easy to associate this reaction to the camera with evidence of guilt. Yet Foucault shows that this sensation of being watched causes peculiar reactions in those being observed. Thus, the aversion to the camera could form a place of self-preservation, a search for comfort rather than the concealment of guilt.

In addition, to objectively film someone without provoking them is a problematic premise by nature: it is not entirely agreed upon whether or not it is possible. Cinéma-vérité filmmaker Jean Rouch believes that the camera encourages the subject to be more self-revealing—“infinitely more sincere” (Blue 267)—and many, such as those who support Emad’s footage, would agree. Documentary theorist Bill Nichols, however, believes the opposite to be true. In his discussion of the participatory mode in

documentary film (the interaction between the documentarian and their subject), he recognizes “the spectator as [a] participant” (181) in the scene captured on film. In many ways, a camera is an invasion of privacy. As G. K. Chesterton writes, “The most sacred thing is to be able to shut your own door,” and so the reaction of those whose door has been forcibly opened (as is the case with many people under the scrutiny of the lens in the West Bank) can quite understandably be hostile (Chesterton 2). An example of this hostility can be seen in *5 Broken Cameras* when Emad approaches an Israeli soldier lazily slumped in the passenger’s seat of an armored car while speaking on the phone. The soldier immediately becomes agitated at the sight of the camera, and grows increasingly so throughout the duration of its presence. The camera is provoking him, acting as more than a “spectator” of this reality, but also as a “participant” in it (Nichols 181).



*Figure 1. Abbas Momani/AFP/Getty Images*

Larger concerns exist for cameras in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. NPR correspondent Soraya Sarhaddi Nelson addresses the lack of empathy that exists within the region, attributing it to the lack of contact between the two groups. A camera is yet another barrier to contact, for if two men are in front of each other and one of them is holding a camera (Figure 1), that interaction becomes a different thing altogether. This is why placing such importance on documenting becomes especially questionable: the region does not need any further barriers to development of a positive relationship. Proof of this position is evinced not only in the

film, but also through multiple instances in the West Bank: the first step taken before a settlement is built is to erect a wall. This wall symbolizes the divide that has been continually exacerbated by sixty years of conflict and perpetuated by each death from one side by the other's hand. As Emad fights on a daily basis for the destruction of the wall set upon his land, he figuratively erects a new one with every encounter his camera makes with his opposition.

While documenting the enemy's actions in pursuit of peace and justice may seem like the best course of action, the reverse is true in Bil'in because it simply creates another degree of separation that exists between the two neighboring groups. Empathy cannot be built without direct, human exposure to the other side. Exposure is paramount to creating a common ground upon which peace can be developed, and the camera presents an insurmountable barrier to this. The situation that exists in Bil'in is complicated when considered optimistically, hopeless when viewed pessimistically, and ultimately impossible to solve when mediated by cameras.

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## From the Instructor

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Zachary Kraehling wrote “Lionized Lincoln” for his third and final essay for the WR 100 seminar “Lincoln and His Legacy.” In this course, students study Abraham Lincoln both before and during his presidency; then the final unit of the course examines Lincoln’s legacy from the time of his death until today. Zak’s extraordinary final paper synthesizes readings of Lincoln’s words and actions both in the presidential and pre-presidential eras in order to develop an assessment of the legacy that this leader has for us, today.

Zak’s essay makes a provocative claim: that Lincoln’s beloved reputation is built not only on what most people know about him (his humble origins, his rise to political prominence, and his moral leadership during the Civil War), but also on his dictatorial actions and grand ambition. This last charge demonstrates Zak’s willingness to confront the facts on the ground, so to speak. In a style distinctive for its voice, Zak’s writing effectively “plants nay-sayers” (as Graff and Birkenstein put it in *They Say/I Say*) throughout the essay in order to acknowledge and respond to counterclaims. In making his case, Zak also incorporates a diverse range of sources (historians, a legal scholar, an activist, and a politician), but he does not lean on these for their authority; instead, his command of the material enables him to treat his sources respectfully, but not deferentially. Zak’s essay offers the kind of intellectual criticism that we are most in need of: he admires the subject of his essay, but he is unwilling to ignore the flaws that he observes. Ultimately, his work suggests that we—as critical readers, listeners, viewers, and consumers of culture—can be active participants in discovering and creating the icons we admire.

— David Shawn

WR 100: Lincoln and His Legacy

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## From the Writer

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A lover of history, the United States, radical politics, and disdainful of political correctness, I examined President Abraham Lincoln through a rather critical lens while crafting “Lionized Lincoln.” Two insights motivate this essay: first, my sense that history is written by the winners, and second that an individual leader has a powerful claim on the minds of the masses. I would also be remiss to ignore the quintessence of my philosophy as a learner, both in and out of school, and borrowed from an inspirational thinker: to never put anything above the judgment of your own mind. With this approach, I examined Lincoln objectively and formed my own opinion on the man who had so great an impact on the course of history.

— Zachary Kraehling

## LIONIZED LINCOLN

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Among the giants lionized in American culture, none stands as tall as Abraham Lincoln. Often viewed as the crusading, moral savior of the Republic, Lincoln is known as the archetypal American leader and the ideal President. It is this sense of perfection that undergirds the collective romanticized depiction of Abraham Lincoln. In my examination, however, I aim to look past this political correctness and offer a portrait of Lincoln derived from empirical evidence, primary sources, and expert opinion. In doing so, I endeavor to ascertain if Lincoln is overly romanticized or if his life and actions warrant his glorification. In gaining such an understanding, I will answer the weighty question: why is Abraham Lincoln so beloved a man in American history? Lincoln's legacy endures because of the unprecedented dictatorial power he wielded as president, his command of the country through its greatest moral struggle, and his embodiment of progress and democracy.

Lincoln's legacy endures because he is the closest thing America has had to a dictator. Regardless of whether a given dictator is just or unjust, good or bad, enlightened or despotic, the fact is axiomatic: great dictators are remembered. In America's system of checks and balances, however, it is hard for any one individual, even one possessed of great political tact, to influence the country's political course. As a result, it is difficult to say of any one president that he realized political change by himself. However, while Lincoln had, as President, neither the totalitarianism of Hitler nor the military genius of Caesar, his immense powers as commander-in-chief, his unilateralism, and his indomitable will win him perhaps the only American place in the realm of dictators. In his speech to the Young Men's

Lyceum of Springfield, Illinois in 1838, Lincoln expounds:

Think you [a Presidential chair or seat in Congress] would satisfy an Alexander, a Caesar, or a Napoleon? Never! Towering genius disdains a beaten path. It seeks regions hitherto unexplored. It sees *no distinction* in adding story to story, upon the monuments of fame, erected to the memory of others. It *denies* that it is glory enough to serve under any chief. It *scorns* to tread in the footsteps of *any* predecessor, however illustrious. It thirsts and burns for distinction; and, if possible, it will have it, whether at the expense of emancipating slaves or enslaving freemen. (19)

While one may tenably argue Lincoln was not speaking of himself in this passage, his talk of emancipating slaves, his manifest passion, and the distinctiveness of this section of his oration suggest Lincoln's ambitions were here exposed. Rising from the depths of obscurity to the highest office in the land through self-education, Lincoln's ascent to greatness exemplifies the scorn expressed here for the well-worn paths to immortality. Moreover, Lincoln's proclamation at the Gettysburg Address that the Civil War would give rise to "a new birth of freedom" is congruent with his sentiment that the momentous leaders of history see "*no distinction* in adding story to story" (405; 19). In keeping with this perspective, David Donald of Harvard University advances that Lincoln was focusing on the long-term consequences of the war in his Gettysburg Address, that Lincoln "was deliberately moving away from the particular occasion to make a general argument" (461). Rather than a mere chapter in American history, perhaps as Lincoln suggests in the Gettysburg Address, the epoch America would enter after the Civil War would be "regions hitherto unexplored" (19). Lincoln created an image of himself as a trailblazer, which the test of time would not erode. In being a maverick, a visionary Chief of the country, and in emancipating slaves, Lincoln's own life and actions are thus in accord with his own definition of "an Alexander, a Caesar . . . a Napoleon" whom history will not soon forget (19).

The profundity of Lincoln's unprecedented expansion of Presidential power makes him a leader of a dictatorial yet romantic nature. Dennis Hutchinson in the *South Dakota Law Review* notes of Lincoln:

he suspended habeas corpus and jailed opponents, flouted a court order by the Chief Justice of the United States, ordered troops raised and material purchased, blockaded Southern ports, emancipated slaves after denying the right to do so—all without prior congressional authorization. (284)

While the justice of these actions remains a point of contention, that Lincoln expanded his Presidential powers to beyond its legal limits in the name of the Union has unequivocally ingrained in the American psyche a profound distinction for President Lincoln. Whereas some might argue Lincoln's expansion of Presidential power was pursuant to his constitutional powers as Commander-in-Chief, I rejoin that even if this were the case, the argument that he was the closest the United States has had to a dictator still stands to reason. Furthermore, it is not solely for his bold actions that Lincoln is remembered and romanticized; had the North lost the war, Lincoln's daring actions would surely have been condemned or forgotten. As weapons instrumental to the success of the North, however, it is natural that his dictatorial measures be portrayed typically in positive, apologetic light by posterity. While the dictatorial transgressions cited by Hutchinson are undeniably inimical to the American tradition, they stand as concrete examples of his obstinacy in the face of Southern treason. The effect of these unbridled efforts to save the country is plainly seen in our contemporary sanctification of him. The best example of this phenomenon is the fact that the Emancipation Proclamation is championed as an enlightened example of freedom despite the fact it is a dictatorial decree, and that the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment was more legitimate and fruitful in freeing the slaves. Is it not likely that had Lincoln sacrificed his daring, extraordinary measures of saving the Union in favor of agreeable, ordinary means he would not be so romanticized? It is, indeed, his creative, dictatorial, audacious methods of rescuing the country from the horrors of dissolution, the unprecedented lengths he went to in order to succeed, that have won him so august a place in the annals of history.

Although other Presidents led the country in times of world conflict, social strife, and racial tensions, Lincoln is singular in his leadership of a homeland engulfed in war and riven by the question of slavery. In his speech on the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854, Lincoln avers slavery is a "monstrous injustice" and proceeds, "I object to it because it assumes

there can be moral right in the enslaving of one man by another” (94; 96). In playing a large role in ending this evil institution in America, Lincoln is exalted as a uniquely moral leader. What other President can boast he freed the slaves? Lincoln goes so far as to say “[slavery] is hidden away, in the [C]onstitution, just as an afflicted man hides away a wen or a cancer, which he dares not cut out at once, lest he bleed to death; with the promise, nevertheless, that the cutting may begin at the end of a given time” (97). While Lincoln claims to have issued the Emancipation Proclamation out of necessity, it nonetheless inseparably linked him with the idea of equality, racial justice, and morality. Perhaps Lincoln’s name is so consonant with morality and justice because his Emancipation can be credited to himself only rather than to a whole legislative body. Through emancipation, Lincoln offered, in Martin Luther King Jr.’s words “a great beacon light of hope to millions of Negro slaves who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice,” a promise to cut out the immoral cancer from the body of the country that would be completed with the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment. Expanding on the degradation slavery brought America, Lincoln notes, “Our republican robe is soiled, and trailed in the dust. Let us repurify it” (98). In engineering the manumission of the slaves, Lincoln effectively re-purified the sacred robe, and in doing so realized the moral ideal set forth by the founders that all men are created equal. No other President can boast of an accomplishment of such moral grandeur. What is more, Lincoln realizes the gravity of the moral issues at stake in the war beyond slavery; the future of democracy and the United States itself rested upon the result of the war. In his Gettysburg Address Lincoln propounds, “now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether [this] nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure” (405). A “test” of the nation’s principles, the war was the trial by which the moral, enlightened, sacred ideals of the country would either die or succeed (Lincoln 405). By leading the “work” of saving “that government of the people, by the people, for the people,” Lincoln assumed a role of unparalleled importance in the crucible that was the Civil War, and in the moral history of our nation (405).

Even before accomplishing this great work in his presidency, Lincoln’s life story embodied the American ideal of progress. Perhaps more than that of any previous President, Lincoln’s life personified the senti-

ment that where one begins does not determine where one ends. Indeed, he climbed to the heights of the Presidency by virtue of his own initiative, consonant with the American ideals of individualism, democracy, and capitalism. Of his life in Indiana, he relates simply “there was absolutely nothing to excite ambition for education” (Lincoln 238). Donald notes of Lincoln “in fact he was, in grammar as in other subjects, essentially self-taught” (48). Having grown up in the most uninspiring of circumstances, it can be reasonably assumed his only impetuses for education were his vision for self-betterment and his burning for distinction (Lincoln 19). Taking the onus of socio-economic progress on himself, Lincoln thus fully adopted the American entrepreneurial spirit so cherished in our culture. This ability to dream outside the confines of present circumstance characterizes both American idealism and Abraham Lincoln’s life, making him a man every American can identify with. Lincoln’s self-motivated evolution from humble farmer to Chief Executive defines his enduring populist appeal; that he inherited nothing and accomplished so much captures the essence of the American dream and makes him a man worth remembering.

Various representations of Lincoln’s progress inform how he is depicted as the embodiment of democracy. President Woodrow Wilson stated at the donation of the Lincoln homestead to the United States government that “this is the sacred mystery of democracy, that its richest fruits spring up out of soils which no man has prepared and in circumstances amid which they are least expected” (3). In advancing from the lowly occupation of farmer to Chief Executive, Lincoln not only demonstrates the potency of the idea of American progress but also captures “the sacred mystery of democracy” (Wilson 3). By Wilson’s estimation, then, in Lincoln can be found an example of democracy more compelling and inspiring than perhaps any other American figure. The founding fathers promised that the pursuit of happiness would be an opportunity afforded to all in the United States. In proving the veracity of this proposition, Lincoln gives life to the words of the founders, and force to the ideal of democracy so treasured by Americans. Of course, how democratic is a nation that confines its geniuses and leaders to the upper classes? Further underscoring Lincoln’s populism is his admission, “my parents were both born in Virginia, of undistinguished families—second families perhaps I should say” (238). Innumerable Presidents both before and after Lincoln

were seemingly destined for power, having been birthed into aristocratic, wealthy, educated circles. Whereas many other Presidents might rightfully be viewed as the products of generations of self-interested elitism, Lincoln is unique in his proximity to the common man. This would go far in explaining the deference with which the American populace accepted Lincoln's clearly undemocratic wartime policies. Ascending to powerful leadership from the very ranks of the people he led, Lincoln became a paradigm to which Americans adhere to this day. A close analysis of my propositions begs the question: how can Lincoln both embody democracy and be dictatorial? In response, I offer that it is most commonly the men who capture the general will of their nation, the men who embody the principles of their people, who win positions of immense dictatorial power.

Lincoln's death secured his appeal as a uniquely democratic leader. President Woodrow Wilson further relates at the Lincoln homestead, "we are not worthy to stand here unless we ourselves are in deed and in truth real democrats . . . ready to give our lives for the freedom and justice and spiritual exaltation of the great nation which shelters and nurtures us" (5). Some might contend Wilson said this with the foresight that America would soon enter the Great War in Europe, and that he was rousing patriotic fervor for this purpose rather than to commemorate Lincoln. While this argument might hold some truth, it does not detract from the power of self-sacrifice in America's democratic tradition exemplified in President Wilson's words. The death toll of the Civil War would be incomplete without Commander-in-Chief Abraham Lincoln; by becoming what Lincoln scholar Harold Holzer calls "a martyred President," Lincoln indeed assumed his place among the people he led into war (53). The fact Holzer uses the term "martyr" is of particular importance; Lincoln's death was not meaningless, but rather had profound value for the cause he valiantly led (53). Harvard President and Lincoln historian Drew Faust goes so far as to say of Lincoln's death that "religion and patriotism united in the ritual observance of the passing of one who embodied popular hopes and sacrifices" (56). In posterity's collective memory, Lincoln's death thus evidences his devotion to his mission in a way not unlike Christ's sacrificial death. Besides making Lincoln a martyr for the cause of liberty, his death further cemented the perception of him as a democrat by making his association with the founding fathers even closer. Like the founders, whose

“*all*,” according to Lincoln, “was staked upon [the success of the American experiment and whose] destiny was inseparably linked with it,” Lincoln gave his very life for the causes of Union and liberty (19). In forever enjoining his name with the founding fathers and the scores of men who died for the Union, Lincoln stands as a monument to the American ideal of democracy.

Lincoln’s legacy is as enigmatic as his life. To accredit his enduring popularity to a single trait of his life would be to grossly oversimplify a man who represents so many things to so many Americans. To the general public, he is an example of what can be accomplished with education, vision, and persistent effort. In this sense he is proof of the legitimacy of the American dream. For this reason he is glorified as a distinctively democratic President and a populist savior. His death only further solidifies this association. Conversely, the unprecedented dictatorial influence he wielded as Commander-in-Chief makes his name synonymous with the numerous national accomplishments borne of the Civil War. In formulating an illustration of Lincoln’s appeal, it is both his own actions and the idealism of posterity that have created the Lincoln depicted in popular culture. Indeed, irrespective of the fame he garnered during his lifetime, his actions have perhaps more force in the collective American memory today than when he was alive. In understanding why Lincoln is so romanticized in the American tradition, one gains a deeper knowledge of the man who so profoundly impacted the course of history. Furthermore, grasping the reasons for his glorification aids us in identifying those in contemporary society and in our midst who possess the same potential for leadership and veneration.

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## From the Instructor

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Jung Hyun (Claire) Park wrote “Questioning the Copyright Act: Is Copyright Doing It Right?” for her second major essay in the WR 100 seminar “Boston Jazz Now!” The assignment for Paper 2 was to examine a particular instance of triumph or tribulation in jazz history. In her essay, Park addresses current copyright law as an existential challenge to jazz. She acknowledges that copyright law is designed with the laudable intention of protecting the intellectual property of composers, among others. However, she points out, the law deems improvisation (no matter how creative it is and no matter how much or little it depends on a previous work) to be derivative rather than original. This understanding, she argues, can have the horrible consequence of stifling the spirit of innovation without which jazz will cease to exist. In this thought-provoking essay, Park traces the background of the current law; exposes its flaws; and proposes strategies for ameliorating the problem.

— Thomas Oller

WR 100 ESL: Boston Jazz Now

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## From the Writer

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One thing that drew me to the course “Boston Jazz Now” was jazz’s spontaneity. I was impressed by the performers’ knack for taking an original piece as an inspiration and improvising to create a whole different sound. Upon listening to jazz performances in various concerts, I wondered: if jazz is an improvisatory art, how are both the composers’ original pieces and the performers’ original improvisations protected? Hence, my paper “Questioning the Copyright Act: Is Copyright Doing It Right?” challenges the efficacy of the current copyright law and its application to jazz. It seeks to assess whether the law keeps the fine balance between guaranteeing rights of composers’ intellectual properties and preventing any exploitation of performers’ creative improvisation.

— Jung Hyun Park

## QUESTIONING THE COPYRIGHT ACT: IS COPYRIGHT DOING IT RIGHT?

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Jazz music, at its best and most progressive, can be a very abstract art. Individual musicians have free rein to improvise on a melody, or even dispense with the melody altogether and improvise on chords. An audience member might listen with pleasure as an elaborate but mysterious improvisation unfolds, suddenly realizing only in the last ten seconds of the piece: “Ah, so *that* was the song they were playing!” In fact, jazz *per se* heavily depends on improvisation of an existing music to ultimately showcase the ingenuity and talent of the artist. It extracts the core idea from the piece and draws a mind map that expands so far, letting the artist wander but not be lost. Because of this unique quality, jazz is often caught in controversy in terms of copyright issues. The Copyright Act of 1976 dictates that the owner of a tune recorded in a tangible form must be compensated when an artist performs it or its derivative—a work based on one or more pre-existing works—publicly (Copyright Act of 1976). The copyright law seeks to ensure the musicians’ rights to their compositions and it is certainly a necessary measure to protect intellectual property. However, the act has a plethora of loopholes and limitations so that it ultimately does not protect musicians as a whole. It fails to keep the balance between guaranteeing rights to composers and allowing free expression of jazz performers. As an unfortunate corollary, the current copyright law does not protect, but rather threatens, jazz performers and the genre as a whole.

To begin with, the Copyright Act’s identification of jazz improvisation as derivative is inappropriate, and this erroneous categorization negatively impacts the musicians in many ways. Firstly, adaptation of and improvisation from pre-existing works are the *sine qua non* of jazz; however, it is essential to note that jazz musicians borrow the idea and

not the expression (Kim). They use other pieces as an inspiration, a spark that marks the beginning of a spontaneous creative process. With much expertise, they chisel and add to the original work to an extent that it fades into subtlety. This explains the phenomenon discussed in the introduction, where listeners do not know the song being played until the very end of the performance or even until they hear the title after the performance. Even though the current copyright law and its subsequent case law contend otherwise, jazz improvisation therefore can qualify under Section 107 of the Fair Use Doctrine. Clause three of Section 107 states that if “the amount and substantiality of the portion used in relation to the copyrighted work as a whole” (17 USCA. Sec. 107. 1976) are minimal, the reproduction is not an infringement and can stand as an independent creation. Given the doctrine, jazz improvisation is not derivative and must be prized as an original work of its musician. Unfortunately though, the Copyright Act of 1976 does not recognize jazz improvisation’s originality, by dismissing it as derivative rather than fair use of the copyrighted work.

Because the current Copyright Act considers jazz improvisation as derivative, artists have trouble financing their performance. One of the major components of a jazz performance is changing a famous and familiar song completely to incorporate an element of surprise and to maximize the audience’s appreciation of the musician’s talents. In order to do so, however, the musician has to pay royalties to the owner of the copyright. This signifies that if the concert is mainly comprised of improvisatory performance of pre-existing works, the musician has to spend a considerable sum of money. Furthermore, unintended breach of copyright becomes a tremendous financial liability to the performer. The cases of *Irving Berlin, Inc. v. Daigle* and *Same v. Russo et al.* clearly demonstrate the financial struggle of jazz musicians. In 1926, the plaintiff alleged that the defendants had infringed the copyright of his three songs by performing them at a dance pavilion in Plaquemine, Louisiana. Berlin demanded minimum statutory damages of \$250 per infringement—an absurdly enormous amount of money, especially in 1929, the advent of the Great Depression, when the court decision was made. However, the court ruled in favor of the plaintiff, despite the desperate appeal of the defendants (*Berlin, Inc. v. Daigle* and *Same v. Russo et al.*). This case was one of the first cases that exemplified how the copyright law brutally ignores the originality of jazz improvisation

by labeling it derivative—leaving a huge financial burden that is difficult for artists to carry. However, the painful truth is that the Copyright Act of 1976 is built on such cases rather than improving on them. It continues to categorize jazz improvisation as derivative and subjects artists to heavy accountability upon alleged breach of copyright. These incessant risks of infringement and resultant liability instill fear into current and aspiring jazz musicians and thereby hinder the growth of jazz in contemporary society.

Another major limitation of the Copyright Act of 1976 is that it awards compulsory license—the right to record and distribute an existing musical composition—only to the underlying work of the copyright owner and not to the contributions made by the artist. In other words, the improvisatory additions of the musician are not protected and are “vulnerable to unauthorized transcriptions and use” (“Jazz Has Got Copyright Law and That Ain’t Good”). This means that the exact cover of a song done by a college student has more rights than the artistic improvisation of an expert jazz musician. For instance, a jazz musician does not receive statutory protection from bootleg recordings of his or her performance. It is the copyright holder who can sue the bootleggers and receive statutory compensations. This is because Section 106 of the Copyright Act grants the copyright holder an exclusive right to prepare derivative works and to collect revenues from performance or distribution of the copyrighted work. The application of this section is evident in the case of Miles Davis and Cole Porter. In 1958, Miles Davis recorded a different version of Cole Porter’s song: “Love for Sale.” Davis completely altered the expression of the song; in fact, 75% of the recording was improvisatory, while only 25% alluded to the original music. Nevertheless, organizations like American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP) and Broadcast Music, Inc. (BMI) represented the copyright owner, Porter, and collected fees from radio stations and nightclubs for only the 25% of the song. As a result, Davis did not enjoy much commercial benefit and his 75% was left unprotected from exploitation (Wilson). In the end, this is genuine hypocrisy. Why does the copyright law place musicians’ intellectual property at risk when its supposed objective is to protect it?

Skeptics may note that most jazz performers are composers as well and argue that copyright can serve as a financial incentive for artists

to compose more tunes. They may also assert that the overdependence on existing tunes and the subsequent lack of new ones are the causes of jazz's decline in the modern era. However, Maslow's hierarchy of needs counters such skepticism. In 1943, Abraham Maslow proposed his motivational theory, which explains the levels of needs that motivate certain behavior. He asserted that both internal and external needs play a role in motivation. His hierarchy is composed of, in ascending level of impact, physiological needs (food, shelter, water, etc.), safety (security, law, order, etc.), social needs (friendship, intimacy, etc.), esteem (achievement, mastery, independence, etc.), and self-actualization (self-fulfillment, personal growth, etc.) (Maslow). Even though the hierarchy suggests that lower level needs—physiological needs and security—are fundamental, it seems otherwise in the jazz realm. Several distinguished jazz artists, such as Hank Mobley, continued their creative pursuits despite their humble beginning and end. Here, it becomes apparent that creativity requires motivation that is beyond mere physical needs. Creativity, then, is driven by Maslow's higher needs—esteem and self-actualization. Nevertheless, financial incentives provided by the copyright law only address physiological and safety needs. In reality, the copyright law's labeling of jazz improvisation as derivative rather disturbs the esteem and self-actualization of the artists. By only meeting lower needs while discarding, if not usurping, the higher needs, copyright law is futile in motivating creation. Furthermore, the law's bias towards composers thwarts the genre as a whole. The constant decline in consumption of jazz recording manifests its detrimental effect (The Recording Industry Association of America); the law is diminishing the stage of the performers, who feel vulnerable and discriminated against. However, it should be remembered that jazz is largely a performing art. To resuscitate jazz's prominence, it is imperative to revise the law to protect the performers as much as the composers.

The current Copyright Act of 1976 is ineffective in serving its purpose but rather impedes the growth of jazz in the contemporary society. The major concern arises from its categorization of jazz improvisation as derivative, despite its originality. This flawed classification works against many jazz performers, by financially burdening them and denying them exclusive license to their improvisation. Even though these limitations are apparent, they do not mean that the copyright law must not exist as

a whole. The copyright law is, by its nature, a protective measure, but it must be amended and enhanced to fulfill its purpose. One possible solution could be discussing the originality of the improvisation and the extent of the underlying music's prominence after the performance. Then, the performance could either be determined as either not derivative, or, if it is derivative, the payment could be negotiated depending on the use of the copyrighted music in the performance. Furthermore, the amount of royalties paid to the copyright owner could also reflect the financial benefits gained by the performer by adopting the copyrighted piece. This amendment may allow thorough consideration of several factors that constitute the complex nature of jazz improvisation. It is true that such consideration is done by the judge's discretion, once the dispute reaches the court. Just like other laws, the copyright act has a degree of flexibility in various cases. However, the judge is a human being, prone to errors in judgment. Moreover, the higher aim of law is to prevent conflicts rather than to simply resolve them. Hence, the Copyright Act of 1976 calls for lucid and unambiguous revisions that protect both the composers and performers to help jazz reach its renaissance as the world's popular music.

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JUNG HYUN (CLAIRE) PARK is a rising sophomore in Boston University’s College of Arts and Sciences, majoring in Psychology. Born in Seoul, South Korea, and raised in Cebu, Philippines, she graduated from Cebu International School where she garnered her interest in music and law. She would like to dedicate this essay to her professor—Dr. Thomas Oller—who is too humble to realize how much he inspires, guides, and helps his students. Furthermore, she would like to dedicate the piece to her family that supports her at any moment, making her every day possible.

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## From the Instructor

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In “Alcohol, Emotion, and Tension in Raymond Carver’s Fiction,” Sara Kornfeld Simpson writes about the complicated relationship between alcohol and emotion in the short fiction of Raymond Carver. The final segment of our class focused on *Cathedral*, Carver’s fourth and best-known collection. Many students and professional critics have read the collection, the scholarship, and the biographical information, and have come to the conclusion that the movement from alcoholism toward sobriety that is an important pattern in the book is Carver’s clear-cut statement on alcohol: the failure, loss, and emotional disconnection of “Chef’s House” to the recovery and improved communication of “Where I’m Calling From” to the emotional connection and enlightenment of “Cathedral,” Carver’s most famous short story.

Sara Kornfeld Simpson was not satisfied with that reading and decided to dig deeper, including going back to “What We Talk About When We Talk About Love,” the title story of Carver’s previous collection. She discovered that alcohol is functioning in a more complex and “paradoxical” way here and elsewhere, and that alcohol and its more complex depiction is a key to the emotional content of Carver’s fiction—emotion that is always in tension, and in relentless motion. Simpson discovered that Carver saw alcohol as a powerful and mysterious element that could enhance lives as well as destroy them, foster communication as well as silence or distort it.

Simpson argues an original and well-motivated claim through a wonderfully close, perceptive reading of four of Carver’s best-known stories, and she balances that reading with careful and astute engagement with a wide range of secondary sources, including Carver’s own essays and interviews, Carver scholarship, and critical essays from other points in the course—a truly successful capstone essay for WR 100.

— Anthony Wallace

WR 100: The American Short Story: Tradition and Evolution

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## From the Writer

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This was my final paper from WR 100 “The American Short Story.” The centrality of alcohol in Raymond Carver’s short stories drove me to reflect on its relationship to their mounting, if often sub-surface, emotional tension. Initially viewing alcohol as a recurring “menace” for this alcoholic author, I gradually uncovered a complex paradox: alcohol’s effectiveness as a social lubricant often left characters slipping and sliding socially and emotionally, for good or ill. Finally, I strove to place my ideas within the context of literary criticism, an important method I learned in WR 100 and 150. This allowed me to connect Carver with his model, Ernest Hemingway, and to join a larger scholarly conversation.

— Sara Kornfeld Simpson

SARA KORNFELD SIMPSON

## ALCOHOL, EMOTION, AND TENSION IN RAYMOND CARVER'S FICTION

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In "The Art of Evasion," Leon Edel complains that Ernest Hemingway's fiction evades emotion by featuring superficial characters who drink: "In Hemingway's novels people order drinks—they are always ordering drinks—then they drink, then they order some more . . . it is a world of superficial action and almost wholly without reflection" (Edel 170). If Edel fails to recognize the deep emotional tension in Hemingway's "Hills Like White Elephants," where one of the characters reflects critically, "that's all we do isn't it—look at things and try new drinks" (211), then one can only imagine the qualms he would have with Raymond Carver's stories. As Charles May notes in "Do You See What I'm Saying?: The Inadequacy of Explanation and the Uses of Story in the Short Fiction of Raymond Carver," literary "critics often complain that there is no depth in Carver, that his stories are all surface detail" (49). A self-avowed "fan of Ernest Hemingway's short stories" ("Fires" 19), Carver also saturates his stories with alcohol; his characters often consume inordinate amounts of alcohol and generally struggle with emotional expression. Do Carver's inebriated and/or alcoholic characters drink to evade emotional connections? Is his fictional world superficial and devoid of tension?

Carver's critical essays suggest a radically alternative approach to these issues. In "On Writing," Carver insists that in a short story, "what creates tension . . . is partly the way the concrete words are linked together to make up the visible action of the story. But it's also the things that are left out, that are implied, the landscape just under the smooth (but sometimes broken and unsettled) surface of things" (17). This suggests that critics who respond solely to the characters' consumption of alcohol to blunt

or evade emotion on the “surface of things” miss much of the emotional tension created or revealed by alcohol underneath the “visible action” of the story. In the same essay, Carver notes, “I like it when there is some feeling of threat or sense of menace in short stories . . . There has to be tension, a sense that something is imminent” (17). This essay will explore the many levels on which alcohol functions to enhance emotional expression and to create tension, a “sense of menace,” in four of Carver’s short stories. Analyzing the relationship between alcohol, emotion, and tension provides a key to the central conflict in these stories, for alcohol consumption is usually parallel and proportional to the rising action, leading to the stories’ most emotionally profound climaxes. Alcohol often acts as a social lubricant, creating emotional bonds among strangers or acquaintances, releasing the characters’ inhibitions and allowing them to reveal their deep fears and tensions in the stories they tell in their drunken state. Paradoxically, however, the characters’ loss of control while under the influence of alcohol can also menace or destroy emotional bonds, relationships, and even bodies and lives. The mysterious, inescapable, paradoxical power of alcohol pervades Raymond Carver’s fiction, shaping and complicating his characters’ identities, relationships, and lives.

In “What We Talk About When We Talk About Love,” alcohol serves as a social lubricant that diminishes inhibitions, which allows hidden tensions and emotions to emerge. On the surface, this is a story of two couples drinking gin and talking about love by telling stories. As Charles May explains, through their stories the characters “encounter those most basic mysteries of human experience that cannot be explained by rational means” (40), including the intricate connection between love and violence. Mel’s wife, Terri, reveals that “the man she lived with before she lived with Mel loved her so much he tried to kill her” (138). This inner story drives tension within the larger story by uncovering a hidden strain between Terri and Mel. Terri begs, “He did love me though Mel. Grant me that . . . he was willing to die for it” (140). After undergoing such trauma, she must cling to this view in order to cope. But Mel refuses her this, saying “I sure as hell wouldn’t call it love” (142); he too claims ownership of the story because Terri’s first husband had threatened his life several times. As Mel imbibes, he becomes less playful, less eager to reconcile their difference, and the tension mounts. Once intoxicated, Mel’s “concrete words” reflect

a complete lack of inhibition, as he tells Terri to “just shut up for once in your life” (146). The tension between them is unmasked as alcohol mediates between their outer and inner lives, revealing the opposing emotions warring “just under the smooth (but sometimes broken and unsettled) surface” of their complex relationship (“On Writing” 17).

As he drinks, Mel becomes more and more loquacious, gradually revealing his deep fears about the impermanence of love—and the permanence of death. At the beginning of the story, when he is sober, Mel insists that “real love is nothing less than spiritual love” (137), but later he asks, “What do any of us really know about love? . . . It seems to me we’re just beginners at love” (144). He now defines love as “physical” and “sentimental,” and no longer uses the word “spiritual;” he begins favoring *cupiditas* over *caritas*. Ultimately, the purpose of Mel’s monologue is to come to terms with the fleeting nature of love and life. Freed of all of his inhibitions by alcohol, Mel reveals his true, bleak, frightening perception of love: “if something happened to one of us tomorrow, I think the other one, the other person, would grieve for a while, you know, but then the surviving party would go out and love again, have someone else soon enough. All this, all of this love we’re talking about, it would just be a memory” (145). This concept of ephemeral love differs markedly from the permanence, profoundness, and eternal devotion associated with spiritual love, and is drawn forth from Mel as a result of his drunkenness. Although Mel insists that he is sober, that “I don’t have to be drunk to say what I think. I mean, we’re all just talking, right?” (145), he actually does need alcohol to say what he really thinks. As a result of his drunkenness, we are exposed to a tension within him as he struggles with his idealized and realistic concepts of love, as well as with the terror of impermanence and death.

Mel acknowledges his own confusion about love as he introduces the other story-within-the-story, but has great difficulty conveying the emotional meaning of this story because alcohol progressively blurs his speech and thought processes. Mel, a cardiologist, recounts an old couple’s struggle to survive after a drunk driver runs into their camper. He cannot finish his story because alcohol has robbed him of coherence. His language, the “concrete word,” becomes crude and vulgar as he tries to prove his point about true love: “Even after he found out that his wife was going to pull through, he was still very depressed . . . I’m telling you, the man’s heart was

breaking because he couldn't turn his goddamn head and see his goddamn wife . . . he couldn't look at the fucking woman" (151). Alcohol has interfered with his thought process so significantly that he cannot articulate the emotional significance of his story; he can only ask, "Do you see what I'm saying?" (151). He cannot explain that this is an example of the more permanent love he yearns for but fears he may never experience. The couple's deep spiritual love eludes his interpretive powers, and he destroys its purity with his profane language. This may appear to be emotional superficiality, but it is not; Mel is grappling with very deep emotions, both released and muddled by alcohol. The story ends abruptly, almost theatrically, when the gin runs out. Carver provides no resolution to the tension revealed under the influence of alcohol; he leaves the characters in the dark, listening only to their hearts beat.

"Chef's House" also explores issues of impermanence, but tension arises from alcohol very differently in this story. In "Chef's House," not a single drop of alcohol is consumed, yet it is the ever-present menace just under the surface of the characters' lives. Nowhere is Carver's desire to create "a sense that something is imminent" ("On Writing," 17) more powerfully realized. Edna decides to give up everything to move back in with her ex-husband Wes, a recovering alcoholic. They move into a house owned by Chef, Wes's sponsor, and start spending a blissful summer there together. Edna yearns for permanence, symbolized by her wedding ring: "I found myself wishing the summer wouldn't end. I knew better, but after a month of being with Wes in Chef's house, I put my wedding ring back on" (28). Their bliss, threatened by the menace of Wes's thin grasp on sobriety, is disrupted when Chef informs Wes that they must move out of the house so that his daughter can move in. Carver brings the menace to life; the day Chef comes, "clouds hung over the water" (29). Under this cloud, Wes succumbs to his perceived destiny as an alcoholic: "I'm sorry, I can't talk like somebody I'm not. I'm not somebody else" (32). When Wes decides to resume drinking, he chooses to end his relationship with Edna and to forget the emotional connection they shared. They must clean out Chef's house, and then "that will be the end of it" (33). Wes's sense of inevitability underscores Carver's conviction that "Menace is there, and it's a palpable thing" in most people's lives ("Interview with Raymond Carver" 67). Wes

and Edna both feel powerless against the irresistible draw, the mysterious menace, of alcohol.

Alcohol also menaces the characters' relationships and identities in "Where I'm Calling From." Set in a drying-out facility, the story is driven forward by the characters' fear of the lure of alcohol, of a relapse, of the impermanence of sobriety (ominously, the narrator is on his second stay). The menace looms larger when the narrator witnesses a fellow addict's seizure, as his body adjusts to withdrawal from alcohol. This awakens the narrator's deep fears of losing control of his body and his life: "But what happened to Tiny is something I won't ever forget. Old Tiny flat on the floor, kicking his heels. So every time this little flutter starts up anywhere, I draw some breath and wait to find myself on my back, looking up, somebody's fingers in my mouth" (129). To distract himself from his body's cravings and his battle for self-control, the narrator drinks coffee and listens to a newcomer's story: "J.P. quits talking. He just clams up. What's going on? I'm listening. It's helping me relax, for one thing. It's taking me away from my own situation" (134). Ironically, in this story, alcohol acts as a social lubricant, but not as a result of intoxication; talking and being social are the only things protecting these men from their need for alcohol. The men stay in control by telling each other about times when they had no control. J.P. remembers he had everything he wanted in life, "but for some reason—who knows why we do what we do?"—his drinking picks up . . . then a time comes, he doesn't know why, when he makes the switch from beer to gin-and-tonic . . . Things got out of hand. But he kept on drinking. He couldn't stop" (133-4). Alcohol, which gave him the confidence to ask for his first kiss, destroyed J.P.'s marriage to the love of his life, his happy home and children, and the job of his dreams. Most threatening of all, neither man can understand why he threw it all away. They tell their stories to stave off this tension, to try to attain control over the impermanence of sobriety and the menace that has shaped and ruined their lives.

"Cathedral" presents alcohol not as a destructive force, but as a constructive one, a means to build emotional connections between strangers, a way of liberating the mind and expanding consciousness. Alcohol functions in a positive capacity in this story, releasing tension, liberating the narrator, allowing him to see and connect in a way he is only open to do because he is stoned. The story opens with tension at its peak, with the

narrator in his most jealous and closed-minded state. A friend of his wife, a man she has a close emotional connection with, a blind man, is coming to visit. The wife used to read to the blind man, and after she left, she kept in close contact, constantly sending and receiving tapes on which they would tell each other every detail about their lives. The narrator is bothered by their closeness, that “they’d become good friends, my wife and the blind man,” (210), irritated when his wife dismisses his jealousy with the retort, “you don’t have *any* friends” (212). He is most affected by the fact that “on the last day in office, the blind man asked if he could touch her face. She agreed to this. She told me he touched his fingers to every part of her face, her nose—even her neck! She never forgot it. She tried to write a poem about it [as she did] after something really important happened to her” (210). Her ineradicable memory of this intimate touch awakens her husband’s jealousy and fears of betrayal and abandonment, which intensifies his disgust with blindness: “And his being blind bothered me. My idea of blindness came from the movies. In the movies, the blind moved slowly and never laughed . . . A blind man in my house was not something I looked forward to” (209). The superficiality of his vision is underscored by his lengthy description of the physical appearance of the blind man, which is salient in Carver’s writing because characters are typically minimally described.

As the story progresses, drinking alcohol and smoking marijuana release this tightly strung man’s inhibitions, facilitate male bonding, and finally expand and deepen his narrow, superficial vision. From the start, alcohol is introduced in a positive light, called a “pastime,” and received good-naturedly, even jokingly, by the blind man. Although the narrator begins drinking to drown out his jealousy of the emotional connection between his wife and the blind man, the end result of his intoxication, social lubrication, allows the man to reach an epiphany. Because his wife is smaller, she promptly falls asleep under the influence of the alcohol and drugs they all consume together, and neither man wakes her. When she no longer speaks, the source of tension between the two men is relieved and they are able to begin bonding. As the narrator drinks, he begins to appreciate the company of the blind man, and gradually realizes the emotional emptiness of his own life: “every night I smoked dope and stayed up as long as I could before I fell asleep. My wife and I hardly ever went to bed

at the same time” (222). Drinking and bonding with the blind man allow the narrator to confront his own loneliness and emotional evasions, and his mind and life start to open to new possibilities.

Gradually, guided by the blind man’s more expansive vision, the narrator begins thinking beyond the confines of his own narrow reality. As they “watch” a television program about cathedrals together, he suddenly remarks to the blind man, “something has occurred to me. Do you have any idea what a cathedral is?” (223). Although he describes the physical appearance of cathedrals, the narrator cannot capture their spiritual essence and begins to realize the limits of his perfectly healthy vision. Under the liberating influence of alcohol and drugs, he responds positively to the blind man’s suggestion that they draw a cathedral together, and allows himself to experience a physical and emotional connection that would have disgusted his sober self: “His fingers rode my fingers as my hand went over the paper. It was like nothing else in my life up to now” (228). This intimacy of hand touching hand, one man’s fingers riding another’s, recalls and transforms his vision of the blind man’s hand touching his wife’s face. Facing his deepest fear of real intimacy, the narrator inhabits and experiences the other man’s blindness; he closes his eyes, and then does not want to open them again, because he “didn’t feel like [he] was inside anything” (228). He feels completely free, no longer possessed by his jealousy, tension, or fear. The alcohol endows him with a liberating vulnerability he would never have been brave enough to reach were he not intoxicated. Although this story, too, ends with darkness, it is created by the narrator closing his eyes in an act of communion; the darkness signifies not unresolved tension or emotional evasion, but connection and revelation. The narrator has achieved a profound transformation of vision while under the influence of alcohol.

Alcohol possesses a paradoxical power in Raymond Carver’s short stories. The characters use alcohol to blunt their fear of death and the impermanence of life and love. But their consumption of alcohol in many cases brings them closer to death, and can just as quickly ruin love as stimulate it. Alcohol allows them to loosen up, to say and do things they would otherwise never be able to do, to tell their stories, but the intoxication robs them of their coherence. If they are able to finish their stories, it is possible that they won’t remember the profound nature of their intoxi-

cated experiences in a few short hours. Although alcohol acts as a social lubricant that allows the characters to connect with one another through stories, it also creates and surfaces tensions between loved ones and friends, and can even end up breaking connections. Alcohol gives and takes, pushes and pulls, and places the stories in what Carver in his essay “On Writing” calls “relentless motion” (17), driving tension forward as a sometimes intimate, sometimes menacing cosmic force that is nearly impossible for many of the characters to resist, control, or comprehend.

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SARA KORNFELD SIMPSON, sophomore, is a Trustee scholar and a triple major in flute performance, oboe performance, and neuroscience enrolled in the dual degree program in BU's College of Fine Arts and College of Arts and Sciences. In fall 2014, she was honored in Washington, D.C. as a Davidson Fellow Laureate for her research in neuroscience, and her spring WR research paper on Melodic Intonation Therapy was chosen for publication in *The Nerve*, BU's neuroscience journal. In addition to performing in BU orchestras, Sara participates in Boston Philharmonic Youth Orchestra, and toured the Czech Republic, Germany, and Switzerland with them this summer. Sara would like to thank her supportive family in San Diego and especially her two WR professors, Dr. Breen and Professor Wallace, for stretching the bounds of her creativity and teaching her to write clearly and powerfully.

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## From the Instructor

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While the class was reading the fourteenth-century Pearl Poet's *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* as the first text in the WR 150 seminar on "The Matter of King Arthur," Alicia Espinosa became fascinated with the power of alliterative verse to echo and instantiate the meaning of the words through sound. For the rest of the semester, Alicia delved deeper into this apparent anomaly of the Alliterative Revival that occurred in Middle English poetry long after the Old English poetic genre had been subsumed by the Anglo-Norman poetic verse forms of meter and rhyme. Alicia used her thorough research to effect in her final essay, "The Lost Tradition: Alliterative Poetry in Middle English," an extraordinarily clear picture of the unique qualities of this more experimental yet still vigorous recasting of the precise alliterative poetic rules found in poems like *Beowulf*. Alliteration is peculiarly adaptable to Germanic languages, so that the loss of the serious poetic use of alliteration can be understood in Alicia's essay as a cultural dispossession that the Pearl Poet and William Langland in his magnificent *Piers Plowman* tried to reclaim. What is most impressive about Alicia's essay is the way she uses all the major scholars of alliterative poetry to explain how and why the Old English style faded, the Middle English revival occurred, and the French poetic forms used by the contemporaneous Geoffrey Chaucer ultimately triumphed. Alicia Espinosa's essay is a classic example of the spark of interest in a topic catching fire and exciting the student to dig deeply and diligently for the treasure of knowledge to share with her colleagues.

— Sarah Campbell

WR 150: The Matter of King Arthur Then and Now

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## From the Writer

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“Translating Troubles: Alliterative Verse in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight” was my first paper for my WR 150 seminar, “The Matter of King Arthur.” This paper examines the priorities of translation. It particularly grapples with whether a translator should prioritize meaning over style when translating poetry. This paper gave me a lot of trouble at first. To make my argument for style over meaning, I needed to examine differences between three translations of Sir Gawain. The thought of uncovering those differences made me feel uneasy, since I had not attempted to analyze translations before. However, after much re-reading and highlighting, I developed an understanding of the three translations and how they differ from the untranslated poem. This paper is the result of that understanding.

— Alicia Espinosa

## TRANSLATING TROUBLES: ALLITERATIVE VERSE IN *SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT*

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Untitled and virtually unknown until the nineteenth century, the small manuscript containing the poem that would later become known as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* languished in obscurity. The identity of the author who wrote *Sir Gawain* remains a mystery and the author's biography conjecture. One thing, however, is certain about the Gawain-poet: he was a master of alliterative verse. The Gawain-poet's use of alliterative verse was rare in the fourteenth century. Alliterative verse seemed rustic to southern England (Tolkien 14); it only remained prevalent in midland and northern regions in this century, before it disappeared in the fifteenth century (Borroff XV). The Gawain-poet uses alliteration to his advantage, forming memorable, powerful lines using the stressed syllables and rhythm of alliterative verse in *Sir Gawain*, such as:

“Pe tulk þat þe trammes of tresoun þer wro3t” (Line 3)<sup>1</sup>

and

“On mony bonkkes ful brode Bretayn he settez wyth wyne”  
(Line 15)<sup>2</sup>

Using the parameters of alliterative verse, the Gawain-poet conjures revulsion toward betrayers and traitors and anticipation for the coming story. Some translators of the Gawain-poet's Middle English, however, do not emphasize the preservation of the poet's alliterative verse. These translators instead focus on making the Middle English comprehensible to modern audiences, allowing the alliterative verse to again fall into obscurity. However, while translating for meaning is important, the most authentic translation of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is one that primarily

focuses on preserving the alliterative verse of the Gawain-poet. Forgoing the alliterative verse alters those characteristics that define the untranslated *Sir Gawain*: the original tone and mood, the Gawain-poet's intent, and its subtle nuances. Simon Armitage, Marie Borroff, and J.R.R. Tolkien, three of the most prominent of *Sir Gawain* translators, each attempt to retain the alliterative verse (with varying degrees of successes) and therefore allow their readers a way to more directly experience the original text.

*Sir Gawain* follows Gawain's struggle to fulfill the pact he made with the Green Knight. In this essay, the following lines are taken from stanza 95 in the fourth part of *Sir Gawain*. This stanza details Sir Gawain's final confrontation with the Green Knight, who references the agreement that he made with Gawain to exchange three days' worth of prizes to each other. The Knight chastises Gawain for not exchanging the girdle with him, as per their agreement. While the Knight forgives Gawain for breaking their agreement, Gawain expresses his guilt over the matter. A literal translation of this stanza is included in the appendix.

The alliterative verse the Gawain-poet employs creates a tone and mood that is characteristic to the original text. Through the maintenance of the alliterative verse in a translation, the tone of the Gawain-poet is preserved and brings a translation closer to the original text. Tone and mood change in translations of line 2374 of *Sir Gawain*. The Gawain-poet wrote "Corsed worth cowarddysse and couetyse bope."<sup>3</sup> The poet employs a hard *c* alliteration, grabbing the reader's attention. The combination of grating, hard *c* alliteration and the placement of that alliteration in the line creates a demanding rhythm. Collectively, the alliteration and rhythm creates an anxious, trembling tone in the line. It provokes strong sensations in the reader; one wants to yell out the line. Armitage translates this line as "A curse upon cowardness and covetousness." While he maintains the hard *c* alliteration, Armitage rearranges the placement of the alliteration and adds a syllable. Armitage's translation feels uneven; the line sounds incomplete. He de-intensifies the rhythm, and the mood is more passive as a result. The Gawain-poet's apprehensive tone disappears in exchange for a hesitant tone. Borroff is more successful in preserving the alliterative verse in line 2374. She translates it as "Cursed be a cowardly and covetous heart." Borroff retains the alliterative hard *c* and its grating sound. Her translation places the alliteration in positions similar to those of the original line

and possesses the same number of syllables. Thus, Borroff maintains the demanding rhythm of the line and the Gawain-poet's intense, anxious tone. Line 2374 appears in Tolkien's translation as "Cursed be ye, Coveting, and Cowardice also." While Tolkien too conserves the hard *c* alliteration, he changes the syllabic length of the line and slows the rhythm. The translated line reads as more refined than intense and more angry than nervous.

Omitting the alliterative verse when translating *Sir Gawain* changes the intent of the Gawain-poet and distances the translation from the original text. Line 2371 in *Sir Gawain* displays how the Gawain-poet's intent becomes modified through translation. The line describes Gawain during his second confrontation with the Green Knight and originally reads, "Alle þe blode of his breast blende in his face."<sup>4</sup> The stressed *b* syllables create an unforgiving sound, and generates a rhythm that tempts the reader to rush through the line, to say it quickly. The rhythm mirrors blood rushing toward Gawain's face. Altogether, the alliterative verse in line 2371 produces an intense atmosphere and implies the Gawain-poet's intent to foreshadow Gawain's anxiety later in the stanza. Armitage translates line 2371 as "and the fire of his blood brought flames to his face." Armitage replaces the *b* alliteration in favor of *f*, generating a slithery, whispery sound not present in the original line, but which steadies the rhythm. His removal of the *b* alliteration changes the original intense atmosphere, since he does not mirror Gawain's blushing. Hence, Armitage's translation removes the Gawain-poet's intent to foreshadow Gawain's later anxiety. Borroff, in contrast, translates line 2371 as "All the blood of his body burned in his face." She retains the poet's *b* alliteration and places the alliteration in similar positions to the original line, allowing Borroff to preserve the hasty rhythm. Borroff's maintenance of the Gawain-poet's original alliterative verse enables the presence of a similar intense atmosphere and foreshadowing of Gawain's anxiety. Tolkien translates this line as "All the blood from his breast in his blush mingled." Like Borroff, Tolkien retains the *b* alliteration and the unforgiving sound it creates. Tolkien, however, translates "blende" as "mingled" and places "mingled" at the end of his translated line, unlike the Gawain-poet. "Mingled" adds extra syllables and alters the original rhythm. Instead of wishing to rush through the line, one now wants to drag out the line. By altering the rhythm, Tolkien reduces the intense atmosphere. The insertion of a more passive atmosphere

removes the Gawain-poet's intent to foreshadow.

The essence of *Sir Gawain* lies in the poem's alliterative verse. Without its distinctive form, the poem loses that which characterizes it and separates the poem from other fourteenth century works. Without the alliterative verse, the work becomes prose, not poetry. Thus, a translator whose primary focus is to make a work easier to understand and ignores the alliterative verse will change the essence of *Sir Gawain*. The meaning of the original poem is present in the translation, but the poem loses its particular flavor and subtle nuances. Translations of the line "For hit is my wede þat þou werez, þat ilke wouen girdel" (2358) clearly shows how the essence of the line changes when the translator favors meaning over alliterative verse. The Gawain-poet, in this line, employs an alliterative *w* consonant which creates a smooth, gliding sound. This line also possesses a steady, even rhythm. The combination of the smooth sound and steady rhythm reminds one of a loom, on which the girdle would have been woven.

Armitage translates line 2358 as "Because the belt you are bound with belongs to me." He chooses to make this line easier to understand by replacing *wede* (*weeds*, as in *widow's weeds*) with the more commonly used *belt* and omitting *girdel*. The replacement of *wede* and omitting of *girdel* changes the essence of the line. *Wede* starts the *w* alliteration in the original line; however, it is now *belt* that the alliteration centers on in Armitage's translation. The *b* alliteration does not create the Gawain-poet's original gliding sound, but rather gives the line a more percussive sound. The percussive sound also lends an anticipatory atmosphere that is not present in the original line 2358. Armitage's omitting of *girdel* upsets the steady rhythm of the line by removing two of the line's original nineteen syllables. In tandem, the percussive sound and different rhythm are not reminiscent of a working loom. Indeed, Armitage's rhythm causes line 2358 to read more like a sentence rather than a line in a stanza.

Borroff, however, translates this line as "For that is my belt about you, that same braided girdle." Borroff, like Armitage, translates *wede* as *belt* and subsequently alters the original *w* alliteration to *b* alliteration. Borroff's translated line consequentially possesses the percussive sound of *b*, not the gliding *w*. Unlike Armitage, Borroff places the alliteration in similar positions to that of the Gawain-poet's. Borroff, though, does not omit

*girdel* from her translation and thus retains the original nineteen syllables. The retention of those syllables and position of the alliteration allows Borroff to form an even rhythm that is comparable to the steady rhythm of the original line 2358. While Borroff successfully maintains the Gawain-poet's rhythm, she sacrifices the effect of the alliteration by translating *wede* as *belt* (not *weed*). Her translation loses the smooth *w* sound, that would have, in combination with the steady rhythm, remind one of a working loom (as the original line does).

Finally, Tolkien translates line 2358 as "For it is my weed that thou wearest, that very woven girdle." Tolkien's translation is arguably closest to the original line, since the stylistic elements of his translation are very close to those the Gawain-poet employs. Tolkien, unlike Armitage and Borroff, translates *wede* as *weed* and not *belt*, which allows Tolkien to retain the Gawain-poet's *w* alliteration and the smooth, gliding sound. Tolkien also matches his placement of the alliteration to the positions in the original line, conserving the original nineteen syllables by not discarding *girdel*, and preserves the even, steady rhythm of the Gawain-poet. By preserving the original sound and rhythm, Tolkien does not lose the evocation of a working loom. Tolkien's success in maintaining the style and essence of the Gawain-poet centers around Tolkien's choice to translate *wede* as *weed* and not *belt*. *Weed*, like *wede*, refers to a garment, but *weed* in this sense is archaic and not commonly known. By translating *wede* as *weed*, Tolkien prioritizes the effect of the *w* alliteration over using a more commonly known word like *belt* in place of *wede*. Tolkien's choice of alliterative verse over easy understanding allows him to retain the flavor and nuances of line 2358.

In conclusion, alliterative verse forms the core of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Translators who only translate for meaning and forgo the recreation of the Gawain-poet's alliterative verse cause their translations to lose or change those aspects which make Sir Gawain so distinctive, such as the reading experience, the Gawain-poet's original intent, and the essence of the poem itself. Without alliterative verse, a translation may convey the meaning of the original poem, but the translation loses its poetic appeal. A translation of *Sir Gawain* reads similarly to prose without alliterative verse, not poetry. Thus, the most successful and authentic translations of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* are those which preserve the alliterative verse

of the Gawain-poet. Accounting for alliterative verse when translating may make the translation harder to understand, but maintaining the alliterative verse allows readers a way to more directly experience the original text.

## NOTES

1. “The man that the stratagem of treason there wrought.” All translations not attributed Armitage, Borroff, or Tokein are my by myself and Dr. Sarah Campbell.
2. “On many banks Britain full broad he rules / with joy.”
3. See appendix for literal translation
4. See appendix for translation.

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## APPENDIX

Literal translation of Stanza 95, lines 2358–2388:

For it is my clothes that you wear, that is same woven girdle,  
 My own wife wove it; I know it well for truth.  
 Now I know well your kisses, and your behavior as well,

2360

And the wooing of my wife, I planned it myself.  
I sent her to test you, and truly I think,  
You, one of the most perfect knights who ever set foot on earth.  
As pearls are to white peas, you are more precious,  
In this way, Gawain, in good faith, than other fine knights. 2365  
But here you lacked a little, sir, and loyalty you lacked;  
But that was for no wild deed; neither for wooing.  
But because you loved your life—the less I blame you.’  
That other strong man in study stood a great while,  
So overcome with anger, he shuddered within; 2370  
All the blood in his chest rushed into his face  
As he shrank all for shame while the man talked.  
The very first words uttered by that knight:  
‘I am cursed by cowardice and avarice both!  
In you is villainy and vice that virtue destroys.’ 2375  
Then he caught the knot, and wrenched it loose,  
And threw the belt viciously to the man himself:  
‘Lo! There’s the false thing, let it fall!  
For fear of your stroke taught me cowardice  
To corrupt my courtesy, my worship to forsake, 2380  
That is largess and loyalty that belongs to knights.  
Now am I faulty and false, and fears have always been  
Of treachery and untruth—both betide sorrow  
And care!  
I confess to you, knight, here, 2385  
All fault is my own;  
Let me regain your good will  
And ever after, I shall beware.’

ALICIA ESPINOSA is a rising sophomore in Boston University's College of Arts and Sciences, studying history. She was born and raised in Virginia Beach, Virginia. She has always possessed an interest in medieval history and literature but gained an even deeper appreciation for them from this seminar. Alicia can not thank Dr. Sarah Campbell enough for her support and guidance throughout the course.

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## From the Instructor

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When Caroline first pitched her idea for this essay in my WR 150: “The American Road” class, she did it with a chuckle. Students had been asked to present three exhibit sources to the class that could be investigated for a semester-long research project, and her other two selections seemed much more “academic”; but she found that there was a lively scholarly debate surrounding something she was passionate about. Caroline’s keen sense of audience helped her synthesize sources and select evidence, and her dedication to the revision process comes through the beautiful prose, making this essay a pleasure to read.

— Gwen Kordonowy

WR 150: The American Road

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## From the Writer

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The most common question that I received from my peers about this paper was “How did you think of that?” In the beginning, the connection between *Battlestar Galactica* and the American Road was, for me, improbable at best and wishful thinking at worst. Despite my doubts, I decided to follow my gut feeling that there was *something* there to uncover. And although what I set out to prove and what I ended up proving are so wildly different that I cannot ascribe “evolution” as the means by which this occurred, my gut feeling was right.

Beyond my initial worries, the process of crafting this paper was fraught with frustration, dead-ends, and panic, and was certainly a lesson in dedication. A major problem that I faced during this process was that of scope. I had a huge task in front of me. Just the first few things that I had to tackle were introducing my audience to the mythos and plot of *Battlestar Galactica* and the scholarship surrounding it, introducing the American Road genre, and explaining how these two ideas had anything to do with each other. Unsurprisingly, this feedback from my peers on many of my drafts expressed confusion. It took many revisions before I found a balance between these huge concepts, and that was just the beginning of my paper!

While dedication and hard work aided me on this process, what really drove me to success was passion. I love *Battlestar Galactica*, and this paper represents my desire to share that love with other people. It is my sincerest hope that the reader senses that as they read and takes a little bit of it away with them. The writing of “*Battlestar Galactica: A Vehicle of the American Road*” has been a journey, and I am thankful to have taken it.

— Caroline Jones

CAROLINE JONES

## ***BATTLESTAR GALACTICA:* A VEHICLE OF THE AMERICAN ROAD**

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*Battlestar Galactica* premiered when 9/11 was still a fresh infliction on the American soul, and with the show's vivid depictions of issues such as terrorism, racial tension, and suicide bombings, it established its allegorical nature and fostered an open and honest dialogue about these issues with its audience. While there has been a plethora of scholarly discussion surrounding *Battlestar Galactica's* 9/11 allegory, all of this discourse has been done in the context of defining *Battlestar Galactica* as being solely a science fiction narrative. *Battlestar Galactica* is more than that—it is actually a complex blend of genres, encompassing not only the science fiction genre but also the travel genre and the road genre. *Battlestar Galactica* specifically operates as an American road narrative through allegory: its “American” nature stems from its commentary on 9/11, whereas its “road” nature manifests itself in the pilgrimage that the fleet takes through uncharted space. By using this new context to reconsider *Battlestar Galactica's* 9/11 allegory, new interpretations of the narrative can be gleaned that breathe new life into the series and ensure that it continues to stay relevant years after the initial aftermath of 9/11. This method of reconsidering genre can be applied not only to *Battlestar Galactica*, but also to discussions and interpretations surrounding genre as a whole as well as the complex ways in which genres interact with each other within single narratives.

### **Previously on *Battlestar Galactica***

In its original 1970's form, *Battlestar Galactica* was a science fiction narrative that would have fit the stereotypical absurdity that some

ascribe to the genre, with its inclusion of robot dogs and unicorn planets. However, the reimagined *Battlestar Galactica* with Ronald D. Moore at the helm did away with all of this silliness by focusing on the core plot of the original: a ragtag group of humanity's last survivors on the run from a robotic threat. Moore refined these core ideas and made them applicable to a post-9/11 world; to this end, Moore explicitly states that "what happens to the people in *Galactica* is what happened to us in September, but in several orders of magnitude larger" (Moore qtd. In Bassom 12). To illustrate this point, the series begins with a nuclear holocaust against humanity, committed by that which humanity created—the robotic Cylons, who have since evolved from hulking masses of steel to having exteriors that perfectly imitate those of humans.

Following this devastating event, which leaves very few people alive, the Secretary of Education of the Twelve Colonies, Laura Roslin, is sworn in as President through the line of succession. Concurrently, the commander of the *Battlestar Galactica*, Bill Adama, finds himself at the head of the fleet's military due to the *Battlestar Galactica* being the only battlestar to survive the attack. However, the Cylons will not settle for anything less than humanity's extinction, and a desperate chase unfolds as the fleet searches for Earth, a fabled lost colony from their religious scriptures, while simultaneously attempting to fend off the Cylons.

*Battlestar Galactica's* 9/11 allegory is robust and has already been explored in great detail in scholarship. However, all of this scholarship has been done with the assumption that *Battlestar Galactica* operates solely as a science fiction narrative. In "I See the Patterns": *Battlestar Galactica* and the Things That Matter," Tiffany Potter and C.W. Marshall write that *Battlestar Galactica* is an example of "blending traditions and subgenres," but do not actually define those traditions and subgenres that are being blended beyond the scope of science fiction (5). This oversight is understandable because of the ease with which one can classify any spacefaring narrative as a science fiction, but rather unfortunate because of the limitations that this rigid genre classification imposes on further discourse surrounding the narrative. If *Battlestar Galactica* was instead defined as a narrative consisting of multiple interacting genres, previously analyzed components of its 9/11 allegory can be reinterpreted using this new framework.

## Establishing *Battlestar Galactica* as an American Road Narrative

This pilgrimage that Adama initiates constitutes the backbone of what defines *Battlestar Galactica* as a road narrative. In *Romance of the Road: The Literature of the American Highway*, Ronald Primeau defines the “road journey” as “an epic quest, a pilgrimage . . . that helps explain where Americans have been and where they think they might be going” (1). While *Battlestar Galactica* can certainly be viewed as an “epic quest” through space, it aligns more closely with a pilgrimage due to the religious references that Adama invokes in order to give credibility to his claim of Earth’s existence. He quotes the Sacred Scrolls, the culture’s religious texts: “Life here began out there,” and turns to the fleet’s appointed spiritual leader, the priestess Elosha, for confirmation of Earth’s existence in the Sacred Scrolls (Miniseries Part 2). At the end of the address, the camera transitions to Adama’s audience, and while Roslin looks skeptical, and indeed later voices this incredulity to Adama, the ordinary members of the crowd look excitedly to and embrace one another, cheer and clap, their faces alight with the hope that Adama has succeeded in instilling in them. Thus the fleet begins their pilgrimage to find Earth.

This newly formed pilgrimage aligns with Primeau’s definition of a road journey, but complications arise with defining *Battlestar Galactica* as a road narrative due to the fact that they are not actually travelling on the highway—Primeau strictly defines American road narratives as ones in which the character(s) “travel by car throughout the country” (1). However, Primeau later states that “deviating from standard road formats are the experimental narratives,” one of which he describes as “the futuristic” (15). As one of these “futuristic” narratives that Primeau describes, *Battlestar Galactica* has abstracted the road and transformed it into the path through uncharted space that the fleet travels. The car, the vehicle through which the pilgrimage occurs, is therefore naturally replaced by the various space-faring vehicles that the fleet possesses. The imagery of the road (Figure 1) is strewn with barren loneliness, struck with a harsh geometrical divider of steel. *Battlestar Galactica* contains similar imagery in its opening sequence: the fleet is enveloped by the steely harshness of uncharted space (Figure 2). Therefore, *Battlestar Galactica* still aligns with Primeau’s definition of a road journey even though the road is not physically present—the road is

instead replaced by uncharted space in this “futuristic” narrative (Primeau 15).



*Figure 1: Lange, Dorothea. The Road West. 1938. Silver gelatin. Photograph.*  
 Source: [www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org)



*Figure 2: Battlestar Galactica, Season One Opening Sequence*

An American road narrative is distinct from road narratives in general because it focuses on aspects of American life particularly, which *Battlestar Galactica* accomplishes through its allegory surrounding 9/11. *Battlestar Galactica*'s allegory raises questions about America's 9/11 experience, yet gives few answers; indeed, *Battlestar Galactica*'s goal is not to provide answers, but to “[invite] people into dialogue” (Primeau 5). For instance, in “(Re)Framing Fear: Equipment for Living in a Post-9/11 World,” Brian Ott explores the plotline of New Caprica, a planet that the fleet attempts to settle in lieu of finding Earth. The temporary peace that the fleet has found is interrupted by the Cylons who descend upon the

fledgling colony, easily take over, and establish an oppressive rule. A resistance against the Cylons emerges, with its members eventually resorting to suicide bombings in order to attempt to overthrow the vicious Cylon authority. Ott notes that the Cylon's methods of maintaining order among the colonists, which include interrogation, parallels American involvement in Iraq post-9/11. He explains that "in seeing the world through the perspective of the humans on New Caprica, viewers are challenged to see Iraq through the eyes of Iraqis" (24). *Battlestar Galactica* adheres to this provocative storytelling throughout its narrative, and it is in this way that it aligns itself with Primeau's tenets of the road narrative—it is through this dialogue with its audience regarding 9/11 that *Battlestar Galactica* attempts "to understand experiences" surrounding 9/11 (Primeau 1). *Battlestar Galactica* in its entirety is an example of a complex coalescence of genre. It can be defined not only as a science fiction narrative, but dually as an American road narrative. With this new definition established, it is now possible to revisit other previously examined components of *Battlestar Galactica*'s 9/11 allegory and derive new interpretations from them.

## Interpreting Allegory Through a New Lens

Following the 9/11 attacks, the Bush leadership adopted an "us versus them" philosophy, which Ott describes as a "prominent strategy for addressing internal dissent" (21). It is in this way that the administration buried "emergent cultural values," a term coined by Raymond Williams and which Primeau describes as those that "advocate alternative or oppositional attitudes and beliefs"—under patriotic rhetoric, the "dominant cultural values" (4). This silencing of emergent voices is explicitly represented in *Battlestar Galactica*. In "Bastille Day," Roslin approaches the prisoners of the fleet with an offer: in exchange for their physical labor, they will be offered points towards their freedom. The prisoners unanimously decline, and from the group emerges a leader, Tom Zarek, an infamous political terrorist. A hostage situation unfolds, and Zarek demands Roslin's immediate resignation as President due to what he sees as her unlawful seizure of the office. In an attempt to silence this "emerging value," Adama dispatches an armed squad to regain order on the prison ship. In this clash of dominant and emerging cultural values, a mediator appears in the form of Apollo, the commander of *Battlestar Galactica*'s pilots, who is able to

broker a compromise by promising Zarek that elections be held within the year. According to Primeau, struggles between different cultural values are frequently present in American road narratives, and in this context, interpretations of this episode have different implications to *Battlestar Galactica's* allegory. While Ott views this episode “as a stern rebuff to the Bush administration and its...arrogant refusal to change course or even entertain alternatives,” it can also be viewed as an instance in which *Battlestar Galactica* is able to “open dialogues between oppositional elements” (Ott 22, Primeau 5). Indeed, Apollo is the physical manifestation of this dialogue, and it is through this rational conversing between dominant and emergent values that a favorable compromise is reached. This does not suggest a “stern rebuff,” but rather, an optimistic evaluation of the ability of Americans to respectfully consider views that differ from their own.

Although Ott may be correct in his claim about this scene, he fails to explore the conversational elements that manifest within the episode that are only definable through the use of the road genre’s vocabulary. At the conclusion of season three, four of the final five Cylon models are revealed through the use of an adapted form of Bob Dylan’s “All Along the Watchtower.” Although the song itself has ties to the 9/11 allegory through the way in which the song is related to the tumultuous 60’s era, which Eftychia Papanikolaou explores in “Of Duduks and Dylan: Negotiating Music and the Aural Space,” it is also a crucial plot element, as only four characters aboard the *Battlestar Galactica* can hear it—four of the unknown final five Cylon models. Through their search for the origins of the song, at the time only unrecognizable musical notes, they all inexplicably converge to the same location, and begin to hum the now recognizable song. They come to the realization that they are Cylons—their reactions range from disbelief to rage, but as they eventually come to terms with this revelation, Colonel Saul Tigh, second in command of the *Battlestar Galactica*, proclaims: “My name is Saul Tigh. I am an officer in the colonial fleet. Whatever else I am . . . That’s the man I want to be” (“Crossroads Part 2”). Tigh chooses his own path even with the revelation that he has been and has created his own enemy, rather than suffer from a crisis of identity. In the same way, through the stripping of political rhetoric and the revelations of the more controversial aspects of the War on Terror, Americans might find that America has become something that they do not wish it to be. American

road narratives “reaffirm traditional values even as they challenge the status quo,” which Tigh does in the way that he continually proves his loyalty to the fleet even with the knowledge that his true identity is that of the fleet’s enemy (Primeau 8). This reinterpretation through the American road lens suggests that the true message here is that Americans can still be patriotic and pro-America (traditional values) even while they disagree with the dominant culture’s political rhetoric (challenge of the status quo).

“All of this has happened before, and all of it will happen again” is the *sina qua non* line of *Battlestar Galactica*. By interpreting this central quote of the series in the context of the road narrative, it can be seen that this line represents the culmination of *Battlestar Galactica*’s 9/11 allegory. In “Daybreak Part 3,” the fleet begins to settle down on the new Earth, the audience’s Earth, and the audience is treated to stunning views of the frontiers of the untouched planet. American road narratives often deal with frontierism, and generally portray the frontier as an ideal that has mostly been tarnished by human hands, which is exactly what *Battlestar Galactica* does: as the camera continues to pan over the seemingly unending frontier scenery, the towering of steel buildings comes into view and the text “150,000 years later” appears across the screen. It is understood that this is the present day, and in the city, two manifestations of what seem to be angel-like figures appear who have taken on the appearances of Gaius Baltar, former President of the colonies, and Six, a Cylon. They reflect on the pilgrimage of the fleet and discuss the future of the planet, to which the angel Baltar asks: “Does all of this have to happen again?” (“Daybreak Part 3”). While this line is traditionally interpreted to be referring to the advancing robotic technology in the present day, it is also densely packed with allegorical meaning. Through both the destruction of the frontier and the events of 9/11 that have already happened on Earth, most of what was experienced in the fleet’s time has already happened again. However, this line represents the hope that humanity will deviate from some of the colonists’ mistakes in order to create a better world. There is a hope expressed in the culmination of the fleet’s journey that by having accompanied the fleet and having engaged in discourse with *Battlestar Galactica*, that the audience will “ultimately [return] triumphant” from this quest, and “[bring] restorative powers back home” in order to reverse the current trend of destruction on Earth (Primeau 7). While Ott views the audience

takeaway from *Battlestar Galactica* as having applications surrounding only the 9/11 allegory, by reexamining the series finale with the added context of traditional American road themes and values, a very powerful message about the disastrous consequences of unchecked destruction of the frontier also emerges.

This paper focused solely on the reexamination of previously well-defined elements of *Battlestar Galactica*'s 9/11 allegory through the redefinition of the series as an American road narrative, but *Battlestar Galactica* discusses many more issues than just 9/11. The framework established in this paper can be extended to any number of these issues in order to further explore the complexities that genre redefinition introduces into previously well-established narrative interpretations. In "No Exit," Brother Cavil, a Cylon, expresses his frustration with his human-like form:

I want to see gamma rays! I want to hear X-rays! And I want to—I want to smell dark matter! Do you see the absurdity of what I am? I can't even express these things properly because I have to—I have to conceptualize complex ideas in this stupid limiting spoken language! But I know I want to reach out with something other than these prehensile paws! And feel the wind of a supernova flowing over me! I'm a machine! And I can know much more! I can experience so much more. But I'm trapped in this absurd body! And why? Because my five creators thought that God wanted it that way!

Much like Brother Cavil, *Battlestar Galactica* has been trapped. It has been trapped in an unwavering, rigid genre definition, but by reevaluating this and freeing the narrative, new layers of meaning are revealed that enhance the show's interaction with the audience. Now, many years removed from 9/11, *Battlestar Galactica* remains relevant because of its central message interwoven within these layers: the road to a brighter future begins with hope.

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CAROLINE JONES is a rising junior majoring in Computer Engineering at Boston University. She currently resides in Los Angeles, where she was born and raised, and hopes to pursue writing as a hobby. She would like to thank Professor Kordonowy for her invaluable guidance and insight. She would also like to thank her friends and peers for their earnest feedback and support. This paper is dedicated to the author’s mother, Arlene Glucksman, for always believing in her.

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## From the Instructor

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As with the best arguments, the idea for Lauren Kesler's essay came from a deeply personal place. An aspiring documentary filmmaker, she began with the simplest of questions: What documentary film needs to be made? Her answer—an autoethnographic film that gives ill children directorial power over their own representations—wonderfully synthesizes the academic and the public, the theoretical and the practical.

Lauren wrote this essay for our WR 150: “Global Documentary” seminar as part of the WR X Genre and Audience Cluster. Students researched documentary films that piqued their interest and then wrote on their topic in three different genres for different audiences: a research proposal, an academic research paper, and a public intellectual essay. Their topics spanned disciplines and the globe, from the decline of Chinese ethnic minorities to the rise of adjuncts in American universities.

There is so much to admire in Lauren's essay: its extensive research, logical organization, and overall originality. I particularly appreciate the gentle confidence and humor of her voice, even when working with a subject as tragic as this one. It is gratifying to see Lauren honored for her topnotch essay, which lays the groundwork for what will be a revolutionary documentary. I await an invitation to the premiere.

— Marisa Milanese

WR 150: Global Documentary

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## From the Writer

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I had often thought of making a documentary film about childhood illness in the traditional documentary format, with a film crew following and interviewing children. Eager to develop the project, I decided I would write my research paper for my WR 150 class “Documentary Film: A Global Perspective” as a proposal for this film.

As I began to research films like *Maidentrip* and *Born Into Brothels*, which both put cameras into the hands of the subjects, I realized the possible benefits of allowing children with life-threatening illness to tell their own stories.

From there I began research filmmaking as art therapy for ill children and found a major gap in the literature. With that, I knew I had a niche to fill. It was an inspiring experience to feel like I was actually contributing to the field, as opposed to just rewriting what has already been created. I am looking forward to developing this project further and am thankful for my experience in WR 150.

— Lauren Kesler

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## Abstract

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Books (and films) like the teen cancer romance *The Fault in Our Stars* have popularized the “sick-lit” genre in young adult fiction. While the story attempts to depict life with illness, it is, in the end, fiction. Also fictional are the overly tragic PSA’s for research hospitals, where children are often overshadowed by a glamorous celebrity spokesperson. The voice missing in these representations is that of the child. I propose the creation of an autoethnographic film project that will allow seriously ill children to use cameras to express and represent themselves and their illness in the way they see fit. This paper will cover the history and uses of autoethnographic filmmaking, art therapy, and the idea of using filmmaking as a form of art therapy, which is currently missing from most literature on the emerging practice. The opportunity that children will have to film and edit their footage will give them control over their representation, leaving less room for misrepresentation by medical professionals and families, as can often happen when using traditional art mediums. The final films will provide an unfiltered, authentic view of childhood illness for outside viewers while remaining a positive, exciting, and ethical experience for the children involved.

Keywords: pediatric illness, autoethnography, art therapy, self-representation, ethics

LAUREN KESLER

*Prize Essay Winner*

## PAINTING THE REAL PICTURE: THE BENEFITS OF AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC FILMMAKING FOR CHILDREN WITH LIFE-THREATENING ILLNESS

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Nearly every media representation of pediatric life-threatening illness can be categorized in one of two ways. On one side, there is a fictionalized portrayal of life within the walls of a hospital, as seen in books and films like *The Fault in Our Stars*, which suggests that while a life-threatening illness is terrible, it will get you a cute boyfriend, sex, and a trip to Amsterdam. On the other side, there is the overly tragic view of illness: maudlin music, celebrities, bald children, and the concomitant plea for money for research hospitals on televised public service announcements. Both representations work to “oversimplify and misrepresent” disease (Nuñez), inviting the question: What is the experience really like for the young people who live between the walls, wires, and monitors of childhood illness?

Illness thrusts children and families into the foreign environment of a hospital. Here, children are taken from their regular lives and forced into one where pokes, prods, and questions from medical teams take priority over play and activity. Away from the normalcy of daily life, children face new fears about life—and sudden and confusing thoughts of death. A common way to help children cope with the experience is to encourage them to produce art while in the hospital. Tracy Councill, a professor of art therapy at George Washington University, argues that participating in art while ill “can support communication between the patient, family, and medical team and assist families in finding a balance between talking about painful subjects and going on with life” (78). While engaging in art, children are able to express their feelings and concerns in a way that is more comfortable for them than are interviews with therapists and medical professionals. Cathy Malchiodi, an art therapist and clinical counselor,

classifies art therapy as a beneficial communication tool, especially for children too young to fully explain themselves using words (16). While activities like drawing and painting are commonly discussed forms of art therapy, rarely discussed is filmmaking, specifically autoethnographic filmmaking.

Autoethnographic filmmaking offers people an opportunity to creatively engage with their environment, represent themselves as they wish, and produce a tangible product that can be shown to a wider audience. With this in mind, I propose the creation of an autoethnographic film project for children with life-threatening diseases. Putting cameras into the hands of children will give them the ability to ask the questions, represent themselves, and look back at the footage to better understand their new world. The project will enable children to turn the gaze away from themselves and their illness and explore their own curiosities, from interviewing their doctors to filming frightening exam rooms or their fellow patients. Unlike painting or drawing—which, once created, is often examined and interpreted by a therapist, leaving the child out of the process—allowing children to edit their own footage will let them do the interpreting and give them the opportunity to shape their footage in a way that is representative of their experiences.

Malchiodi defines medical art therapy in her book *Medical Art Therapy with Children* as “the use of art expression and imagery with individuals who are physically ill, experiencing trauma to the body, or who are undergoing aggressive medical treatment such as surgery or chemotherapy” (13). This practice originates in the idea that children “use art for self-expression, conflict resolution, and emotional reparation” (16). For children with illness, experiences such as separating from parents, being bed-ridden, and losing weight or hair are all common. Patients dealing with such challenges can feel a sense of a loss of control and helplessness, which art therapy attempts to combat by turning children into “active participant[s] in their health care” (16). Art therapy works not only to distract or entertain children during their illness, but also to help them recognize that they have created something real and “tangible.” For cases of life-threatening illness, this art can become a type of “visual legacy” of their lives and something that children, especially older adolescents, can choose to leave behind for their families as they anticipate their deaths (17).

For children experiencing unfamiliar medical procedures and the sudden discussion of death, art therapy can provide “stability” (Councill 75). For many children suffering from a life-threatening illness, MRI machines and wheelchairs have supplanted playgrounds and sports. Art helps to fill the gap by being an enjoyable and creative activity that does not require much mobility or physical energy. Councill says that art can provide children with the “comfort of touch, the freedom of nonverbal expression, reduction of stress, and the opportunity to exercise a measure of control” (75). For these reasons among others, various art programs are “flourishing in hospitals” and other medical settings in the United States and around the world (“Examples”).

While common art therapy activities include drawing and painting, autoethnographic filmmaking has not yet been seriously considered as an option of therapy in cases of pediatric life-threatening illness. This artistic approach has the same benefits of the traditional mediums, including self-expression, but has an added benefit of allowing the children to gain a sense of self-representation as well. While drawing may enable a child to express herself, a therapist is usually present to analyze the artwork for “what it represents” in the child’s life. For this reason, an outside audience can easily misinterpret the child’s unique vision. However, with autoethnographic filmmaking, the representation remains firmly in the child’s control.

Such filmmaking is not a new concept, and variations of it have existed for many years. In one of the first examples of autoethnographic filmmaking, anthropologists gave 16mm film cameras to members of a Navajo reservation with the hopes of learning about the culture by “put[ting] the camera directly into native hands” (Rangan 147). They originally coined the term *bio-documentary* as a way to describe “a film made by a person to show how he feels about himself and the world” (147). More recently, this idea of using cameras (still photography cameras in this case) to self-document is seen in the 2004 Oscar-winning documentary *Born Into Brothels*, in which photojournalist Zana Briski taught children living in the brothels of Calcutta how to use cameras so that viewers could “see this world through their eyes” (145). The project succeeded in giving the children a chance to represent themselves, as Avijit, one of the children featured, concurs: “It gave me a voice. It gave me a life” (Roston). This pro-

cess has been replicated by projects and organizations including Kids with Cameras (an organization founded by Zana Briski); ZoomUganda, which gave cameras to teenage girls in Uganda to document their lives; and the 2005 documentary *Desire*, which gave film cameras to teenage girls in underprivileged neighborhoods in New Orleans so that they could speak up about teenage pregnancy and other issues of concern (Rangan 151).

The principal assumption informing autoethnographic filmmaking is that people are more open to talking on camera when they retain the power to represent themselves, rather than having a stranger interviewing them. This openness can be seen in the 2014 documentary *Maidentrip*, which was directed by Jillian Schlesinger but was filmed almost entirely by teenager Laura Dekker while on a two-year sailing journey around the world. What is important to note is that Dekker had no interest in having her story recorded and shown to the world, as seen in the film by her annoyance with the media and journalists interrogating her while at port. In fact, she agreed to make *Maidentrip* only after Schlesinger asserted a desire not to “make a film about her, but make one with her” (Kemmerle). By granting Dekker an active role in the production process, Schlesinger gave her a “level of respect” and allowed her to have control over her own representation and the project as a whole (Kemmerle). Schlesinger explains in an interview with Tribeca that the freedom of representation she was given was “very empowering to her” (Kemmerle), and I would argue that it is likely the reason she agreed to make the film.

It is crucial to consider the importance of the camera in projects like *Maidentrip* to better understand why filmmaking would be a beneficial form of art therapy for sick children. There is something about the mere presence of a camera that intrigues people, especially children, and inspires them to start filming. While no single explanation exists, Gerry Bloustien and Sarah Baker have extensively researched the concept as part of their autoethnographic projects with pre-teen and teenage girls, hoping to use the films to better understand the “nature” and “complexity” of growing up (64). Through working with the girls, they began to understand the power that cameras can have in “telling a story of the ‘self’” (69). They explain how, as the camera developed technologically and became more compact and easy to use, allowing people to record with increasing ease, it has become both “voyeuristic” as well as “a means of control” (70). What most

surprised Bloustien and Baker was the allure that the camera possessed for the girls, simply by existing as a source of experimentation. The girls found that being able to represent themselves was exciting and more enjoyable than being filmed and questioned by professionals (71). Bloustien and Baker state that the camera has proven itself to be “a powerful tool for young people in their search and creation of that illusive and ultimately impossible ‘real me’” (76). This search for the “real me” is perhaps simplified by the camera’s unique ability to be turned on the filmmaker, both literally and figuratively, allowing the one filming not only to create compositions, but also to study the visuals and experiences (and themselves) when re-playing the footage.

One of the most relevant pieces of information from Bloustien and Baker’s research that can be transferred to a filmmaking project for children with life-threatening illness is the idea that the girls found filming themselves to be more engaging and less “dull and time-consuming” than when questioned in an interview setting (71). This feeling would certainly resonate with children who spend hours a day being questioned by doctors, nurses, and family. If an external film crew were to enter a hospital in hopes of talking to sick kids, they would likely meet a wall of children unwilling to be poked and prodded by yet another group of strange adults. In contrast, an autoethnographic film project will allow the kids to have “an authoritative voice” (Bloustien and Baker 72) and assume the role of interrogator. The presence of the camera will, in this case, allow the children to do something that drawing and painting cannot do, which is to control the gaze. Whereas traditional art therapy relies on professionals watching the child and interpreting their work, autoethnographic filmmaking will allow the child to watch the professionals and their surroundings from the position of an outsider. In doing so, children will gain the ability to see their world as others do, as the camera works to make, as Susan Sontag would say, “familiar things small, abstract, strange, much farther away” (167). By experiencing this distance, children will gain a new perspective on their illness—and themselves.

If filming themselves will turn the children into outsiders, what will happen when true outsiders are granted access to the children’s world? The idea of having the final films of the children’s shown to a larger audience outside of the hospital does raise some ethical questions. Should people

be given access to children's intimate thoughts and feelings during such a difficult time? As Calvin Pryluck questions in his landmark essay about the ethical questions surrounding documentary film, "What is the boundary between society's right to know and the individual's right to be free of humiliation, shame and indignity?" (24). Audience members watching the children's films may feel uncomfortable, as they are witnessing something that seems far too personal for outsiders to see. As a result, some may argue that films of this nature are unethical and disrespectful to the child and the people in his or her life.

It is true: the ethics of autobiographical documentaries must be treated differently than traditional documentaries. For one, the relationship between the filmmaker and the subject starts with "a level of trust and intimacy never achieved or even strived for in other films" when the film records the personal stories of the filmmaker and his family and friends (Katz and Katz 120). In other words, while film crews usually have to spend months or years building a bond with their subjects, autobiographical film projects give the promise of instant comfort between filmmaker and subject. Watching such a documentary, viewers might question emotional scenes, wondering why the filmmaker chose to film such sensitive material and whether those featured in the film (in our case, friends and family of the ill child) approved of the personal footage being shared. Were the friends and family coerced to participate? Did they agree to be filmed in that compromising position? In the end, determining whether or not a documentary is ethical usually relies on proof of the subject's informed consent to appear in the film, which can get more complicated when the subjects are friends and family of the filmmaker and the scenes are increasingly emotional and intimate (123).

Katz and Katz state that the key question to be asked when dealing with families and friends of the filmmaker is this: "Would the families in autobiographical films have, in similar circumstances, agreed to be filmed by strangers?" (123). They hypothesize that reasons such as "love, guilt, the fear of loss of love" felt toward the filmmaker (in this case, an ill child) may make families and friends agree to appear in a film they would not agree to in other circumstances (124). Katz and Katz believe that "'therapy' does not justify the sort of exposure they [the filmmaker] request or demand of family members" and that many times audiences and critics do not under-

stand “using film as therapy” and will instead view films of this nature as “manipulative” (128). This reaction is likely due to the discomfort audiences feel when viewing something that is so intimate it becomes “too personal,” and thus turns the camera into something “invasive” rather than “an instrument of inquiry” (125). Mark Ledbetter provides insight on the discomfort we feel when we view something we think we should not by noting that since childhood we have been trained “not to look” at painful images (4). This has created a “need to say that we did not see something,” as the word “voyeur” tends to have a bad connotation in our society (4). However, he goes on to argue that “we are voyeurs by nature, and voyeurism is necessary to ethical encounter” (4). In this way, while some viewers of a film about a child with life-threatening illness might say that we “shouldn’t be watching this,” I would argue that it is for this very reason that we should be watching it. Discomfort does not mean unethical, and “not watching” does not equate to “not happening.”

In addition, the consent process of this project—premised on collaboration—is one considered by documentary scholars to be the most ethical option. Pryluck argues that “voluntary informed consent in medical and social research is the protection of the physical and psychic well-being of the subjects,” that “subjects should not be humiliated by the experience,” and should not leave with “lowered self-esteem and social respect” (26). Because in this project the children are the ones doing the filmmaking, there will be no question regarding the well-being of the children participating. No children will be forced into filming, and only those who are interested and properly informed of the project will take part. The key to this project is collaboration between the director facilitating the program and the children and families participating, a collaboration premised on the assumption that “the subjects know more than any outsider can about what is on the screen” (Pryluck 27). In this way, “collaboration fulfills the basic ethical requirement for control of one’s own personality” and we can be assured that nothing will be shown on screen that has not been approved by all of the film participants (28). The goal of this project is to show a personal and authentic representation of pediatric illness. It is a goal that cannot be completed by a fiction writer, marketing team, or film crew. It can only be achieved by granting the children an active and prominent voice in the construction of the film.

Autoethnography is one of the most successful methods to enhance collaboration between children and filmmakers or researchers. This idea is emphasized in a program called Photofriend, which gives cameras to refugee children to tell their stories. The program seeks to gain information about the children for research into refugees but does so in a way that is “unobtrusive, respectful of children’s experiences of adversity, and enjoyable” (Oh 282). The experiences of ill children are clearly different from those of refugee children, but there are parallels to be drawn as we compare two groups of children who find themselves in unfamiliar and frightening places. In regards to Photofriend, there is an approach of “participation and empowerment” for the children being researched and a belief that children should be treated as “social actors rather than victims” (283). In addition, in accordance with the principle of “doing no harm to children,” which includes asking questions that may be painful for the child, Photofriend found that taking pictures eventually resulted in children talking about their painful experiences “without being prompted” (285). In this way, the research process became a safe environment in which the children did not feel pressure to say anything that they did not want to disclose—the kind of environment that my project intends to create.

Doctors, nurses, therapists, and families all want to better understand a child’s experience with illness and need the information to create better treatment plans for future occurrences of the disease. But sometimes the constant interviews and therapy sessions begin to feel too similar to the constant exams and medical procedures. Children are overwhelmed by the attention, inspiring emotional distress. There is a need to study the “victims” of pediatric disease, but there is also a need to remember that these research specimens are people who deserve a chance to share their voice. Giving children cameras to tell their story and express themselves will succeed in being a form of diversion and therapy for a child, while, when viewed by professionals and an outside audience, will also offer a useful insight into childhood illness. It is a mutually beneficial process that allows both sides to gain new and useful information about the world around them. It is art therapy, filmmaking, and research at its best and most ethical.

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LAUREN KESLER is a member of the College of Communication's class of 2016, studying Film and Television. She would like to thank her parents for being a pediatrician and a nurse, so that they could pass on just enough of their passion for sick children to inspire her to develop this project. She would also like to thank Professor Milanese for believing in this paper even when Lauren came to office hours ready to "destroy the entire thing." Lauren would also like to mention that if you happen to be a film producer, she would love to actually make this movie, so please be in touch.

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## From the Instructor

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Maria Clara Bezerra wrote her exceptional research paper for WR 150: “Burning Questions,” an experimental section of WR 150 that asks students to pursue a semester-long research project on a topic of their choosing within the framework of “human expression.” The research project culminates in the contribution of a new perspective to the ongoing scholarly conversation about the chosen topic as expressed in a research paper and in a public intellectual essay. Clara’s research paper addresses the volatile issue of Westernization in Brazil and offers a well-informed, culturally-sensitive challenge to the prevailing idea that western influence has been a uniformly negative factor in the evolution of modern Brazilian society. Her paper demonstrates a thorough, considered response to varied genres of source material. Clara’s remarkably insightful thinking, combined with her personal interest in the subject of her native culture, allowed her internalize the idea of the conversational model of argumentation and motivated her to study the scholarship on her topic as a search for questions, rather than just answers. Her openness to new viewpoints and her commitment to classroom citizenship elevated her own experience in the course, as well as that of her peers.

—Samantha Meyers

WR 150: Burning Questions: Human Expression

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## From the Writer

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In the past few years, I have noticed that societies may tend to operate at extremes. Well-founded movements against the shaming of bodies different from the ideal image as portrayed by Western media can quickly become thin-shaming. Initiatives to raise awareness regarding the power of words to offend can give rise to a use of language so restrictive that society comes to be confused by what is considered politically correct. Although well-intentioned, movements to remedy some issues in society sometimes trigger backlashes. The same occurs in literature on Western influence in Brazil; in an attempt to preserve the country's origins and tradition, scholars tend to claim that everything that comes from the West has harmed Brazil. In this essay, I take up a political lens to analyze whether or not this is true. I argue for a middle ground, recognizing the legitimacy of previous scholars' arguments but adding to the literature by offering examples of circumstances in which Western influence aided the development of Brazil as a democratic society.

— Maria Clara Bezerra

MARIA CLARA BEZERRA

## ON THE DISCOURSE OF CULTURAL COLONIALISM: THE UNEXPLORED POLITICAL DIMENSION OF WESTERNIZATION IN BRAZIL

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### I. Introduction

The heritage left by European colonialism to modern day Brazil is often regarded by scholars as an ill that permeates the social, political, and cultural ideals of the country. A country founded on colonial exploitation and repression, Brazil, it is argued, has historically struggled to create and express a genuine national identity that is mostly free of Western<sup>1</sup> influences. Aimed at preventing Brazilian tradition from being obfuscated by European values, the Modernist movement of the 1920s had as its allies distinguished musicians, scholars, artists, and poets, including in their ranks Brazilian poet Oswald de Andrade, whose *Cannibalist Manifesto* is often considered the foundation of Modernism in Brazil. Taking pre-colonial indigenous cannibalistic rituals as a metaphor for cultural appropriation, Andrade argued Brazilian identity could not survive unless it merged Afro-Brazilian heritage and Western customs to create an authentically new form of expression (Neves). After Andrade, multiple scholars and intellectuals have revived the subject of Brazilian cultural dependency on the West. Although diverse in terms of the structure, purpose, intended audience, and the context in which it was written, literature on this subject has, for the most part, consistently conveyed the same message: threatening Western colonialism and Brazil's tendency to adopt a culture incompatible with its own historical heritage will eventually lead to the destruction of the country's legitimate traditions. This discussion has remained highly theoretical and one-sided, with its proponents lacking a concrete mechanism by which to measure the effect of foreign influences. It is undeniable

that studying the formation of Brazilian culture is an essential part of understanding contemporary Brazilian society; however, texts on the subject of Westernization have not yet employed an international political lens to analyze concrete effects of foreign forces on the country's governmental system and decisions. An international political analysis of Westernization can be made through a focus on the divide between international relations and existing Brazilian literature, which includes both the opinions of prominent Brazilian scholars regarding Westernization and foundational documents that offer evidence of foreign influence. Bringing the dialogue to an international political framework not only provides a tangible framework to assess foreign influence, but also adds to existing literature by discussing whether or not the predominant view of Westernization as a menace proves true in the political dimension as well. When diplomatic relations between Brazil and the West are considered, it becomes clear that, although foreign influence in the country is in some cases worrisome and overpowering, it has had positive effects.

## II. Modernism, Anthropophagy, and Andrade's *Cannibalist Manifesto*

The Modernist literary movement in which Andrade was inserted is often understood as an international phenomenon. Arising in Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this movement was heavily influenced by the changes brought on by the Second Industrial Revolution (Gonzaga). As Brazilian journalist Sergius Gonzaga explains, "Modernism came about in many European countries, almost simultaneously. It can be understood as a reflex of the effects of modernization on socio-cultural life, behavior, and individual psychology"<sup>2</sup> (Gonzaga; translated). When appropriated by Brazilian scholars, however, Modernism and its ideals of social change became a nationalist crusade toward cultural independence; they aimed to "rediscover Brazil" through a recognition of the country's roots (Contier 5; translated). In Brazil, therefore, Modernism was not thought of as a movement to develop a civilized society based on the standards of industrialized Europe, but as an evolution toward a new reality that incorporated both Afro-Brazilian history and the forces of modernization that had begun to change the country.

Overwhelmingly depicted as “the most radical and innovative of modernist currents” (Dos Santos and Brito 61; translated), the Anthropophagic Movement had its beginnings<sup>3</sup> in Oswald de Andrade’s 1928 *Anthropophagic Manifesto* (Dos Santos and Brito 65), a founding Modernist text that rejects Western cultural domination. Andrade turned to the complex dimensions behind the *Tupi*<sup>4</sup> practice of devouring enemies as inspiration for this cultural project (Neves). Surprisingly, being selected by an enemy tribe to be devoured functioned as a form of praise—only warriors considered brave and worthy were devoured, because *Tupis* believed they could absorb the strength of those they ate (Neves). As cultural critic Suely Rolnik explains, anthropophagic rituals created “a certain relationship with otherness,” since *Tupis* “allow[ed] themselves to be affected by a desired otherness to the point that they were able to absorb [this otherness] into their own bodies, so that particular virtues would be integrated to the chemistry of their souls and promote their refinement” (Rolnik 2; translated). Converting this practice into a symbol, Andrade argued Brazilian cultural production should follow the lines of anthropophagy (Neves). Court judge Laílson Neves observes that Andrade “advocated for a Brazilian ritualistic attitude of devouring European values, in order to overcome the [Western] patriarchal and capitalist society, with its strict social norms and imposition of psychological repression” (qtd. in Neves; translated) as a mechanism of protecting the country’s identity. In other words, Andrade argues that, given the amount of influence Western forces exerted on the country, the only way to guarantee cultural survival would be to adopt some Western values but blend them into Brazilian historical tradition. Coining the notoriously clever phrase “Tupi or not Tupi”<sup>5</sup> (Andrade 38), Andrade calls for an appreciation of the past and the primitive, an attitude that had been historically frowned upon by traditional intellectuals (Dos Santos and Brito 65). From then on, the literary figure of the cannibal—intended to represent the Brazilian attitude towards foreignness—came to be incorporated into the country’s literature (Neves). It is in this manner, with much satire and boldness, that Andrade and his followers argue that the Brazilian community must revive past customs in order to fight cultural imperialism.

### III. Review of Modern Literature

Much of the literature on the topic of Westernization in Brazil focuses on the long-lasting negative effects of European colonial rule on the country. Describing what he terms a “whitening psychology,” political scientist and sociology professor Ricardo Cesar Rocha da Costa argues that European interests were apparent even before Brazil’s political formation; he claims that although “there was a concern with the construction of a sovereign and economically developed nation,” the idea was that “[Brazil] would, in the future, share the social norms inspired by Europe, which were considered superior in comparison to other peoples” (Costa 1; translated). Costa further explains that this European mentality encouraged the production of a forged national identity that was inconsistent with the country’s reality. According to Costa, even though more than half of the population was black, Brazil’s Portuguese rulers implemented a policy of “social whitening,” under the racist assumption that a predominantly black population would hinder the creation of a liberal society (Costa 2; translated). Costa cites historical instances of this policy that occurred before and after Brazilian independence in 1822 to suggest that the “whitening” mentality originally brought by Europeans carried over into the country’s psychological beginnings (Costa 2; translated).

Among scholars who agree with Costa is anthropologist Kabengele Munanga. Munanga similarly posits that “the process of the formation of a Brazilian national identity occurred on eugenic terms, aiming at the ‘whitening’ of society” (Munanga 15; translated), but goes further to argue that this ideology has remained intact “on the collective Brazilian unconscious” (Munanga 16; translated). To Munanga, although the goal of physically whitening the population may have failed, the *ideology* of white superiority still prevails in Brazilian society (Costa 5). As evidence, Munanga offers written transcripts that indicate leading Brazilian intellectuals of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries upheld a biological determinist belief “in the inferiority of non-white races, above all the black race, and on the degeneracy of the mixed-race” (Munanga 55; translated). To both Costa and Munanga, it is unsurprising that a nation founded on European colonialist thinking and its belief in whiteness would be predestined to struggle with issues of race. These scholars argue that Western ideology

made it difficult for Brazilians to create a national identity and point to the negative effects of such ideology, which still linger in contemporary society.

In even more recent texts, scholars have become intrigued by the concept of *estrangeirismo*<sup>6</sup> and the influence it exerts on cultural life. Originally a term for the adoption of foreign words into a country's vocabulary, *estrangeirismo* has been used to describe the Brazilian tendency of overvaluing anything Western, often at the expense of domestic virtues and ideals (Motta *et. al*). To scholars Fernando Motta, Rafael Alcadipani, and Ricardo Bresler, *estrangeirismo*—a mentality that originated from European colonial rule—“may assume a feature of segregation in the organizational world” (Motta *et. al*; translated). These academics argue that the fixation with the figure of the foreigner, a mentality that emanates from the “predatory exploitation of natural resources to be sold to the European market,” is a primary Brazilian cultural characteristic that can “influence the way in which people are perceived, managed, administered, and controlled” (Motta *et. al*; translated). *Estrangeirismo*, they argue, is a socio-historical phenomenon that prompts Brazilian citizens to devalue the unique aspects of their culture, therefore preventing the formation of a collective national identity as a source of pride (Motta *et. al*). According to the authors, this specific envy of Western ideals and objects was brought about by the dynamics between colonial Brazilians and European colonizers, since the latter always placed themselves as superior in matters of culture, power, and technology (Motta *et. al*). Motta, Alacadipani, and Bresler offer as examples of *estrangeirismo* the facts that “a number of Brazilians pride themselves in owning a foreign passport, thanks to the ‘benevolence’ of certain countries” and that “many Brazilians emigrate to the United States, Japan, and Europe” since “in the organizational world, the temporary emigration to ‘civilize’ oneself is seen as indispensable for academics and scholars (Motta *et. al*; translated). They further note “one can hardly imagine a European saying something similar about his country. He might argue that the government is useless, but never his own land” (Motta *et. al*; translated). They even go as far as to argue that the dichotomy of colonizer and colonized, which characterizes much of Brazilian history, informs and molds how Brazilians act towards and perceive one another, prompting them to view fellow citizens as either being the colonizer or colonized (Motta *et. al*). Their message is overwhelmingly clear: the racialized rela-

tions and lack of patriotism that plague Brazilian society are a direct product of European colonization, with its imposition of values that determine what can and cannot be considered civilized.

#### IV. A Political Analysis of the Effects of Westernization

There is no doubt that the perspectives offered by these scholars are historically well founded and valuable in that they contribute to the literature on the subject of Westernization in Brazil and raise awareness of the potential negative repercussions of foreign influence. It is also important to note, however, that there are several limitations to the conclusions reached by these writers that indicate that the detrimental nature of Western influence is not an absolute truth, although it is often portrayed as such. In fact, although not usually employed to challenge the claim that Western influence in Brazil has always led to negative consequences, factual information provided by scholars of Brazilian political structures sheds light on the contribution of Western-inspired political structures to Brazilian society. Drawing on the works of scholars Bruno Vainer and Celso Bastos—which are explanative background sources rather than argumentative texts—I contend that many of the political influences of the West on Brazil contributed to the country’s effective formation as a State.

Bruno Vainer, a member of the Brazilian Institute of Constitutional Rights, writes a factual account of Brazil’s first Constitution with the purpose of describing its central characteristics. Although his text is not an argumentative one, and therefore provides no assessment or viewpoint on the question of whether or not Westernization can exert a positive influence on Brazil, the information he provides regarding the creation of the Constitution provides evidence of the positive effects of Westernization in Brazil. Adopted on 24 March 1824, two years after the country’s independence, Vainer explains the Constitution’s most revolutionary character is that it “broke with . . . a tradition of absolute rule of power and inserted the newly created empire into a constitutional regime” (Vainer 163). Vainer further notes that the document was “modern because it possessed a liberal character . . . and constitutionalized fundamental rights such as the inviolability of civil and political rights, the concept of citizenship, freedom of expression and religion. . . . which were advances for the epoch” (Vainer 163; translated). It is Vainer’s placing of the Constitution in a global context,

however, that provides insight into the role of the West in the creation Brazil's first Constitution. He notes that the document emerged shortly after the French Revolution and the American process of independence, when ideals of liberalism began to gain prestige around the world (Vainer 162), including in Brazil. The great progress made by the Constitution in ensuring fundamental rights and creating a liberal state was largely a function of the Western "ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity," which emerged within that context and made their way to the Brazilian intellectual elite (Vainer 162; translated). These French and American ideals were the main source of inspiration and stimulus to the writing of Brazil's Constitution. As Vainer himself notes with neutrality, the American Revolution "demonstrated it was possible to organize a state . . . in the New World" that would transition from "an absolutist State to a liberal State" (Vainer 162; translated). Although Vainer's text is devoted only to a description of the Constitution, the information he provides points to the positive influence of the West on Brazil. In this sense, Western influence was not a colonial force, but one that promoted the independence and autonomy of the country. Not only did the dissemination of European and American values prompt the effective beginning of the country, but they also positively contributed to Brazilian society by establishing a foundation for the development of civilians' rights.

Scholarly accounts of the Constitution of 1891, most known for effectively making slavery illegal, prove no different. Respected Brazilian jurist and constitutionalist Celso Bastos explains the progressive measures that came about due to the new Constitution: "With the Federal Constitution of 1891, Brazil definitively institutes a Republic . . . inequalities are recognized . . . [and] authorities become representatives of the people, serving their mandates for the right amount of time" (Bastos 173; translated). Adding to Bastos's account, Vainer explains that the document transitioned from a census voting style to an open, direct vote to elect the first president of the Republic (Vainer 168). Once again, these progressive measures were a product of the successes the United States had experienced as a republic, which provided Brazil with a model by which to remedy its "political backwardness" especially regarding public dissatisfaction and unrest due to lack of representation (Vainer 167; translated). Furthermore, the Constitution's policies that founded the Brazilian legal

justice system—which made the judicial power a mechanism by which to enforce laws regarding the rights of citizens and tasked this body with the responsibility to “appreciate the validity of laws and regulations” so that laws incompatible with the Constitution do not apply to current cases (*qtd. in* Vainer 170; translated)—were heavily influenced by Montesquieu and American thought (Vainer 167). Notably, even the name given to the new State, “The United States of Brazil” (Vainer 166; translated), is indicative of how heavily the Constitution was influenced by Western ideals. An analysis of objective accounts regarding solely the origins of the 1891 Constitution leads to the conclusion that, by accompanying the progress of the West, Brazilian political authorities were able to adopt measures that promoted the country’s advancement. In this way, they are able to both establish a more effective system of law enforcement and increase the participation of citizens in government affairs.

Not surprisingly, Western ideals also permeated Brazil’s final Constitution, adopted in 1988 and still in effect today. Created forty years after the passing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, this Constitution took special interest in guaranteeing that human rights violations were penalized by the law (Vainer 188). Torture and racism were made unlawful, the rights of workers were addressed in unprecedented detail, and structures for the enforcement of constitutional law were made more accessible (Vainer 188–189). The commitment to the preservation of human rights declared in the preamble of the Brazilian Constitution is strikingly similar with that of the American Constitution<sup>7</sup>: “We, representatives of the Brazilian people, united in the National Constituent Assembly, to establish a Democratic State, designed to assure social and individual rights, liberty, security, welfare, development, equality, and justice as supreme values” (*qtd. in* Vainer 188). Not only can the influence of Western law and ideals be traced throughout the development of Brazilian Constitutions, but also continues to be present in the law book that governs contemporary society. The rights ensured by the Brazilian Constitution and largely inspired by Western thought increased civilian recognition and protection, rights that have moved to the forefront of government discourse and which are now at the ideological foundation of Brazilian society.

On the question of the Brazilian people’s agency, there is little reason to believe that Western influence on constitutional law was imposed,

a perspective that is often upheld in literature regarding Westernization through a dichotomy that characterizes the West as an imperialist force and Brazil as a colonial victim. Although he speaks in broad terms and does not provide compelling evidence to support his claim, Rui Barbosa<sup>8</sup>, one of the most well-known figures in Brazilian history, famously wrote about his admiration of the United States: “The American Constitution, American jurisprudence and American constitutional authorities are consequently the source of interpretation for the new system among us . . . our regime, this regime that we transplanted from the United States, contains as its cornerstone the principle of the supreme sanctity of the Constitution, considered as the law that has to be obeyed by all other laws” (*qtd. in Dolinger 807*). Barbosa’s standpoint does not seem to be unique—in his book *The Constitutional System of Brazil*, American scholar Herman James concludes that “to an American, the most awe-inspiring feature of the development of the republic is the deep admiration which the leaders of public thought in Brazil have had for the political institutions of our own land” (*qtd. in Dolinger 803*). Based on these accounts, elements of Brazilian political structures inspired by Anglo-American ideals seem to serve as a source of pride to Brazilian political figures, and not as evidence of colonial oppression as has been argued by Brazilian scholars.

It is important to recognize, though, that Western political influence on Brazil has not always yielded positive consequences. There have been instances when European and American interests were met at the expense of the country’s welfare, among which is, famously, the 1823 Monroe Doctrine. In this particular case, President James Monroe warned European powers against interfering in Latin American affairs, announcing “the American continents . . . are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers” (*Office of the Historian*). Passed immediately after the independence of several countries in the region, this document is often considered a confirmation of American imperialism. Distinguished historian Noam Chomsky, for example, characterizes the Monroe Doctrine as an instance of “US domination” (Chomsky 64). This perspective seems to be supported by the attitude of American President William Howard Taft toward Latin America, who Chomsky quotes saying: “the day is not far distant [when] the whole hemisphere will be ours in fact as, by virtue of our superiority of race, it already is ours

morally' . . . Latin Americans may not understand . . . but that is because 'they are naughty children who are exercising all the privileges and rights of grown-ups' and require 'a stiff hand, an authoritative hand'" (Chomsky 64–65). Clearly, there are reasons to be wary of Westernization in Brazil. Further, it would be unrealistic to assert that the contributions of Western thought alone led to the creation of a fully functioning democratic society, or that Brazil's constitutions were free of inefficiencies and injustice. Because culture and history are diverse, no society can adopt the ideals of another society and expect outcomes to be exactly the same. In fact, political scientist Martin Needler shows that some characteristics of "both [European and American] models have been adapted to the idiosyncrasies of the political dynamics of the region, especially to the frequency of dictatorship, rebellions, and other emergencies" (Needler 43). Nevertheless, the claim that Westernization has been consistently detrimental grossly excludes Brazil's foundations and historical development.

## V. Conclusion

I do not intend to equate Western political ideals with progress. The problems with the normative discourse that attributes to the West the status of ideal civilization and deems all other forms of social and political organization unfit, however, are beyond the scope of this essay. Further, at no point do I assume that Europe and the United States are benevolent actors that have enacted consistently friendly and beneficial policies toward Brazil. The political influence of the West on Brazil in this context is not seen as *intentional*—no matter the reason behind the dissemination of Western democratic ideals to Brazil, the fact is that it occurred and aided the development of the country. It is not the fact that these influences followed the political systems of the West that made them beneficial, but the fact that they brought tangible progress to the country, as an analysis of Brazil's constitutions shows.

There is no doubt that Brazil's history provides evidence of cultural oppression by Western powers. Following Oswald de Andrade's theories on cultural survival, scholars have argued that the colonial influence of Western nations on Brazil hindered the creation of a legitimate national identity from the start. Although there are limitations to this claim, I do not contend that Western colonialism has not negatively affected Brazilian

mentality. Rather, the primary flaw behind these texts rests in the assumption that Western influence has *always* worked to the country's detriment. Discussing the cultural and psychological heritage of colonialism in Brazil, scholars have often failed to explore the political realm, where Western influence is also apparent. In this way, the contributions of Europe and the United States to the foundation of Brazil and its progress as a democratic country are largely ignored. Brazil's constitutions are an example of how the country's reality and foreign progress were merged in order to ensure individual liberties and improve the functioning of the country. A more wholesome contribution to literature on the subject of Westernization in Brazil would necessarily entail a consideration of political, social, and cultural elements. Generalized conclusions that result from the exclusion of one of these elements are inevitably narrow and unrealistic.

As I conducted research, I was faced with an unsettling question regarding the overall Brazilian attitude toward Westernization. As suggested by Rui Barbosa and Herman James, leading political figures have shown appreciation and openness rather than ambivalence to Western ideals. Fernando Motta, Rafael Alcadipani, and Ricardo Bresler similarly point out that, in general, the Brazilian population has a tendency to value whatever they see as "foreign," so much so that the values and culture of their own nation are often dismissed. However, a large part of the Brazilian intellectual community, including the likes of Andrade, Costa, and Munanga, argue that Westernization is detrimental, a view they uphold so strongly that they ignore the country's foundation. Future research can explore this question, investigating the factors that account for this split in public and intellectual opinion. This may add to existing literature on the subject by assessing the different ways in which separate groups within Brazil were affected by Western influence, as well as potentially shedding light on existing biases in favor of or against Westernization.

## NOTES

1. “Western” in the context of this essay refers to Europe—where Portugal and Spain had particularly large roles in Brazilian colonization, and the United States, whose cultural and political ideals have been frequently used as bases for molding the country’s society and its formal and informal structures.
2. Several of the sources used in this paper have no English translation. When this is the case, I have taken the role of translating quotations for reading accessibility. Translated quotes are identified within parenthetical citations.
3. Although it is widely recognized that Oswald de Andrade’s *Manifesto* marked the beginnings of the anthropophagic movement, scholars disagree about its relative importance to the movement. Among the works of other artists, the painting *Abaporu* by Tarsila de Amaral—Andrade’s wife—is often credited as the foundation of the movement, which would have then inspired Andrade’s text. For more, see Contier.
4. The Tupi people formed the largest indigenous group in Brazil, and inhabited the country before the arrival of the Portuguese in the sixteenth century. Although almost entirely annihilated due to massacres, slavery, or diseases, the Tupi have a huge influence in the history of Brazilian society, especially in terms of agriculture and language.
5. The iconic phrase “Tupi or not Tupi: that is the question” is both an appreciation of native Brazilian tradition and an instance of the literary cannibalism Andrade advocates for, since it incorporates a famous Shakespearean line which is molded to fit Andrade’s project. The message Andrade intends to send is that the Brazilian people must choose a side: they can either choose to be Brazilian and therefore embrace the country’s roots, or choose not to be Brazilian; there is no in between.
6. Literally translates to “foreignism.”
7. The preamble to the American Constitution reads: “We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves

and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America” (*Law.cornell.edu*).

8. Dolinger describes Rui Barbosa (1849–1923) as a “lawyer, senator, Brazilian ambassador to the Hague Peace Conference of 1907, Finance Minister in the Republican government under President Deodoro da Fonseca . . . most important member of the committee that revised the draft of the 1891 Constitution, its most enthusiastic advocate and the most knowledgeable Brazilian Jurist in constitutional matter . . . [who] has been compared to Justice Marshalls” (Dolinger 807).

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- Chomsky, Noam. *Hegemony or Survival: America’s Quest for Global Dominance*. New York: Metropolitan, 2003. Print. I used this source to provide the reader with information regarding the Monroe Doctrine. Chomsky’s status as one of the most prominent historians of this century serves to back up my claim that some aspects of Western influence on Brazil was, in fact, negative.
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- "Monroe Doctrine, 1823." *Office of the Historian*. U.S. Department of State, n.d. Web. 01 Apr. 2015. Sponsored by the U.S. Department of State, this reliable source was used to access portions of Monroe's speech regarding the Doctrine.
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Vainer, Bruno Z. “Breve histórico acerca das constituições do Brasil e do controle de constitucionalidade brasileiro.” *Revista Brasileira de Direito Constitucional* (2010): 161–91. *Escola Superior de Direito Constitucional Online Database*. Web. 30 Mar. 2015. This is the primary source I use in my description of Brazil’s constitutions. Vainer’s text is an objective, informative source that explains the origins of Brazilian constitutions and their key characteristics. When I used quotes from this source, I provided the translation.

MARIA CLARA BEZERRA, an International Relations major, was born in Bahia, Brazil, and attended international school from the age of two. In this international context she came to be interested in understanding how cultural clashes within her immediate international community related to diplomatic issues in the field of international studies. Maria Clara came to the university to broaden her horizons and pursue her studies in IR in the cosmopolitan context of Boston. She plans to return to Brazil after graduation to apply her training in international studies in support of the struggle for rights of women and minorities in Latin America.

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## From the Instructor

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In our capstone essay for WR 150: “Aesthetic Constructions of Childhood,” students were asked to produce a researched academic argument about any aspect related to children’s picture books. With a chance rereading of *Curious George*, Maya framed her approach to this essay through careful and critical research. One of the key strengths of Maya’s remarkable essay is that she understood the scholarship so intimately that she was able not merely to challenge it, but actually to *further* it. Her work of contributing to the conversation about racism in *Curious George* is not only intellectually eye-opening but also gracefully executed. With this essay, Maya crafted a nuanced argument, drawing on the picture book’s history and scholarship, contributing her voice as a certain little monkey’s popularity continues to grow well beyond the confines of that first picture book.

— Anna Panszczyk

WR 150: Aesthetic Constructions of Childhood

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## From the Writer

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Revisiting *Curious George* was shocking and horrifying. When I had originally decided to examine the childhood classic, I was surprised by the story's upfront and unapologetic allusion to the transatlantic slave trade. This had not come to mind when I, or the many others I talked to, thought of the inquisitive, silly monkey with his friend, The Man with the Yellow Hat. However, this made sense when understood as a common symptom of systematic racism—we are conditioned to uphold societal norms while our ideas about the world are malleable. Witnessing the power dynamics between the socially-deemed “subordinate” and “dominant” in a positive manner primes us to accept and understand oppression as normal and healthy. Because of the story's relation to race, the unwavering loyalty of a captive from Africa to a profit-seeking white male proves particularly disturbing. What had scared me most as I wrote about the series was that I had never once as a child thought to question if George and The Man's relationship was wrong, much less why it was, and those who had encouraged me to read about this curious monkey had not either. Although it is appalling to think of the gruesome, racist writings that were once popular, it is more difficult to realize that in a society so many consider “post-racial,” we continue to let children's literature with such blatantly positive references to slavery and racism slip through the cracks.

This paper is a way for me to help myself and others process how our ideas regarding childhood and innocence as well as how our ability to ignore racism as a society has allowed *Curious George* to remain so popular; it is still considered a beloved classic while it maintains its association with a culture of oppression and a systematic hatred of black people. It is a way for me to explain how all these years later, this monkey transforms from a carefree, hilarious character to a victim of the oppression and dehumanization all people of color still face nearly 75 years later.

— Maya Terhune

MAYA TERHUNE

*Prize Essay Winner*

## A GOOD LITTLE MONKEY: *CURIOUS GEORGE'S* UNDERCURRENT OF WHITE DOMINANCE AND THE SERIES' CONTINUED POPULARITY

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A beloved childhood picture book series with a legacy that has withstood seventy years of technological and social evolutions, H.A. and Margaret Rey's 1941 *Curious George*, despite its blatant negative racial connotations and depictions, has remained a classic in the hyper-sensitive, highly-censored environment constructed for children. The series has spawned countless spin-offs and adaptations as a separate book series, television show, movie franchise, and video game, a classic which the media continues to revamp and reutilize in order to engage children and their parents as consumers. While in many ways the *Curious George* series proves to be the perfect childhood companion with its inquisitive protagonist and entertaining shenanigans, the earlier books in the series prove problematic with their overt references to the abduction and forced enslavement of Africans during the slave trade and their glorification of the Man with the Yellow Hat who is celebrated as a friend and protector rather than condemned as a captor and oppressor. The series' celebration of the oppression of an abducted monkey parallels the oppression of black Americans, making the books' fame seemingly contradictory to the atmosphere of innocence in which modern society has deemed it necessary for children to appropriately and healthily develop. While scholars such as professor June Cummins have addressed the books' ties to racist propaganda and negative depictions of blacks, none have explained the books' continued popularity despite a world increasingly aware of the problematic nature in which people of color are depicted in older literature. The *Curious George* series still remains such a prominent and popular American childhood classic as it is able to perpetrate the social and racial subordination associated with

childhood innocence through the power dynamics established between the Man with the Yellow Hat and George. Additionally, the commercialization of the series allows the stories and their characters to remain iconic without the need to directly engage with the original text while still supporting the original books' assertions regarding white supremacy by avoiding discussion of their problematic nature.

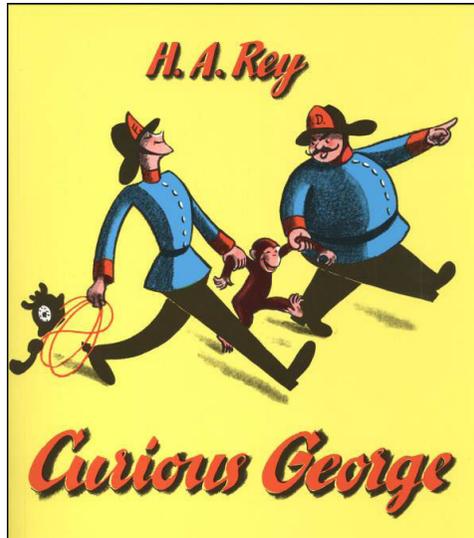


Figure 1: Cover art of Curious George



Figure 2: Top of page 39 of Curious George

The cover illustration of *Curious George*, the first book of the series, has become one of the most recognizable images of the franchise and provides an emblematic representation of the power dynamics, cultural structures, and characterizations associated with racism in America. Adorned in

vibrant blue and red in outfits which the “beholder”<sup>1</sup> immediately associates with policemen, the white men that dominate a predominant amount of space—especially when juxtaposed with the central character, George, who appears insignificant next the two men’s towering figures—are established as the authority in this relationship. His tiny arms clutched by the officers, George appears smiling between the two men, suggesting that he is a character not only in need of discipline and societal guidance, but joyful at the prospect of being punished for his actions and furthermore, his position of subordination. This particular introduction to George proves important given the image’s contrasting counterpart within the book itself; while the cover depicts George as gleeful, in the same image within the context of the story, he appears downtrodden and remorseful (Rey 39)<sup>2</sup> at the prospect of arrest. Numerous scholars including Cummins in her article “The Resisting Monkey: ‘Curious George,’ Slave Captivity Narratives, and the Postcolonial Condition,” have observed this disparity, speculating that the picture might “suggest that children should likewise submit to authority” and “speaks volumes about the ambivalence of the series as a whole” (79); however, none connect the racist implications of the narrative to the potential audience of the instruction to “appease [your] captors” (Cummins 79). In not only using an image that characterizes George through his breaking of societal constructions and punishment, but altering his facial expression as well, the Reys introduce a very specific and targeted conception of George, one that is not so dissimilar from common depiction of black individuals, particularly black youth, in America. Throughout the 1930s and early 1940s, the urban youth, especially that of the predominately black community in Harlem, was commonly portrayed as dangerous and delinquent-ridden (Finley 160). Riots that occurred during this time period further alienated white suburban communities from the lives and oppression of black youth with incidents such as a series of muggings and killings in the fall of 1941 by black teenagers allowing “New York newspapers to sensationalize the . . . ‘mugging[s]’ [and] suggest the Harlem youth were out of control” (Fletcher 43). As the book’s publication occurred in New York City and the story is thought to be set there as well, individuals interacting with the story during this time period would, as such, subconsciously or consciously associate George with black youth. Although the Reys, German Jews who famously fled the Nazi occupation of Paris on a bicycle, wrote the original *Curious George* manuscript in

Europe and not in New York, and consequently may not have intended this association, the book was a product of European children's literature which often villified blacks as exemplified in popular works like "Tintin in the Congo." Their book conformed to a Western expectation for dehumanizing portrayals of blacks and while possibly not intentionally racist, was due to its contextual presentation and readership. George, like the black youth of the 1930s and 40s, is similarly framed through his disobedience and accidental criminal behavior. Additionally, in literature and entertainment during this time period, black people were often depicted as monkeys and ape-like characters, harkening back to social Darwinism and the perception of blacks as inferior, animalistic, and in need of control. In presenting George as what Cummins refers to as, "enjoying his capture," the cover would seem to suggest that this depiction and treatment of George and transitively, black youth, is acceptable and welcomed—the white men in power understand how to best maintain an orderly society. Without even beginning the story, a very definitive and direct implication about the nature and treatment of George and the types of individuals he represents forms.

While the correlations between the book's cover and depictions of black Americans and their so-called place within society may seem unsubstantiated, these assertions prove justified when the text itself is explored. George, introduced as "a good little monkey" (Rey 4) from Africa, is spotted by a man with a yellow hat who proclaims "What a nice little monkey . . . I would like to take him home with me" (Rey 6). The Man proceeds to place the hat on the ground and lure George towards it. After watching George put on the hat, the Man "popped him into a bag" (Rey 8). Only pages into the book, the story of George's capture eerily mirrors that of the millions of Africans who, from the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries, were forcibly stripped from their homes and, like cattle, were packed into ships and transported across the Middle Passage portion of the Atlantic slave trade. References to the enticement of the native Africans appear in The Man with the Yellow Hat's deception. Although the book and the entire series' treatment of George's capture remains light-hearted and lacking any anger towards the Man who ripped George from his home, the drawing that accompanies the description of George being forced into a sack shows George with his head poking outside of the bag,

gasping for air and obviously in pain. The narrative continues with the Man immediately asserting his dominance, stating that George is being taken to a zoo and that he “will like it there” (Rey 14). Already stripped of the choice to not like the zoo, George accepts this as true, never questioning the Man or the situation. The image adjacent to the Man’s instruction shows the Man, in his yellow costume—which mimics that of a safari outfit, an emblem of white entitlement and colonization—with a pipe in his mouth, patiently instructing the little monkey who sits politely on a small stool in awe. In constructing the interaction between the two in such a way, the beholder immediately associates their relationship with that of a son and father. The Man with the Yellow Hat is instantly absolved of any blame and evolves from captor to paternal figure; he transforms into simply a man who “popped” George into a bag to take him to a place he will like. The book continues to glorify the slave trade as George accidentally falls off the boat and into the ocean, as if mocking the suicides of slaves who threw themselves off the ships on their journey to be sold into slavery. Additionally, the Man’s ultimate goal consists of robbing George of his freedom and placing him in captivity, an objective that encapsulates the intentions of slave traders. The similarities continue as the narrative reinforces George’s status as a child-like character and as a monkey. The Western world portrayed indigenous peoples as naïve, unsophisticated, subordinate, and often, especially from a religious perspective, in need of guidance. George adopts all of these characteristics, requiring the Man as a leading force in dealing with his inability to comprehend the societal constructs of the human world. Likewise, the traditional association of apes and monkeys with Blacks in comics and political cartoons throughout the twentieth century materializes with the Reys’ choice of George as a monkey, reaffirming his bestiality and his inferiority that results from being less than human. In ignoring the dehumanizing nature of the slave trade and slavery itself and instead celebrating their prevalent existence in American history by employing stereotypes and negative racial depictions, the book proves disturbingly problematic, especially given its wide-reception and popularity nearly seventy-five years later.

The authors continue to promote racial oppression in the second book in the series, *Curious George Takes a Job*, as well as in the rest of the Reys’ original seven installments. While the series’ utilization of positive

racist imagery can be scrutinized and cataloged—and have been by scholars such as Cummins—the repetition of certain behaviors and plot points within the individual books validate the oppressive and demeaning practices they reference and encourages their incorporation within “civilized” society. During the time of the series’ publication in the 1930s and 1940s, media and entertainment outlets utilized traditions such as blackface and the character trope of the barbaric, uncivilized African native, capitalizing on the supposed humor that could be derived from the humiliation and dehumanization of blacks. With traditions of placing blacks on display attaining persistent popularity in American culture during this time period, films and features such as *Tarzan the Ape Man* and *Kids ‘N Africa* popularized the jungle craze of the 1930s and Western comics like “Tintin in the Congo” and their limited cast of Black characters—of which included a character by the name of Whitewash Jones—condoned the depiction of blacks as incompetent, illiterate, idle, wide-eyed, and thick-lipped. These influences present themselves throughout the series especially given the presentation of George’s story in a cartoon-like style, his yearnings for Africa, and the Man’s constant push to display the monkey’s life to an audience. In *Curious George Takes a Job*, after his broken leg has healed in the hospital, George decides to investigate a “big blue bottle” of ether and the debilitating effects of the drug are shown in a set of panels (37). The panels, alluding specifically to the comic genre, display a loopy George with large eyes, wandering about until he eventually falls to the floor in deep sleep, a sequence that uses stereotyped physical comedy common in Western comics like “Tintin in the Congo”: George fails to understand that the bottle contains ether despite its label because of his inability to read and his inhaling of the drug renders him useless and dysfunctional in the same way that the broken English and incompetence and laziness of the natives in performing specific tasks drives the humor of “Tintin in the Congo” (Hergé). Additionally, the Man’s motivation for interacting with George consists solely of a desire to place him on display; he only comes to George’s rescue when he deems it will benefit himself. Upon hearing of George’s injury, the Man rushes to a telephone and directs that they “[p]lease take good care of him so that he will get better quickly. I want to take him to a movie studio and make a picture about his life in the jungle” (35). His concern exists not because he genuinely cares for George, but because once again, he saw the opportunity to exhibit George’s life

as a form of entertainment. In fact, the film he produces begins with the capture of a smiling George, whose abduction is a form of amusement and pleasure for the audience. The Man's filmic focus on Africa juxtaposed with George's constant yearning for his African home adopts the 1930s jungle craze, once more belittling the true nature of George's experience and establishing the country and its people as something to be gawked at and understood as primal and uncivilized, a subject of observation. In not only employing these tactics, but promoting them as normal, the books reinforce the ideals of inferiority that accompany racism and white supremacy and standardize them as acceptable parts of society.

The parent-child relationship between Curious George and The Man with the Yellow Hat additionally homogenizes homogenizing these ideals of racial superiority, embodying the paternalistic aspects of white supremacy and racism and the way in which childhood innocence is racialized. In his introduction to the essay collection *The Children's Culture Reader*, Henry Jenkins describes Viviana A. Zelizer's reevaluation of the American child at the turn-of-the-century and how the image of children and their relationships with adults adjusted with the mobilization of the middle class and increased pressures to create stricter child labor laws and resulted in the construction of the sentimental notion of childhood innocence (19). In this conception of the innocent child, the role of the parental figure involves protecting the ideological pure child from contamination by their surrounding environment. The obligation to maintain innocence in childhood denies any opportunity for autonomy and independence in this developmental stage and relies predominately on the limitation and oppression of the child's freedom. Indigenous people deemed "backward" during colonization were often described as "underdeveloped . . . because of their childlike natures," (Cummins 71), many of their characteristics and behavior likened to those of children in "need . . . [of] education and technology" and often, God, "in order to gain access to the Western, Christian, adult world" (Cummins 71). During the colonial period, in the same way that the oppressive, white, male-dominated community perceived African Americans and native Africans as immature and child-like, that same community also branded children with a similar negative societal understanding; as Robin Bernstein asserts in her book, *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights*, children were

predominately thought of as “inherently sinful and sexual—even more so, potentially, than adults, who had learned, through rationality and self-discipline, how to control their damnable impulses” (4). Especially given that childhood innocence is “itself raced white, itself characterized by the ability to retain racial meanings but hide them under claims of holy obliviousness” (8), George’s portrayal as not only a child, but as non-white—and for that matter, non-human—accentuates his need for the superior figure of The Man with the Yellow Hat to socially condition him and instruct his perception of socially acceptable behavior while obscuring the presence of “blacker” and “darker” evils. Of these two varieties of innocence—the Christian, Western, white innocence denoted by religion, access to technology, and being shielded from the world as described by Jenkins, and the “Native,” “Heathen” innocence denoted by godlessness, being “backwards”—therefore, “lacking” technology and Western culture—and being a part of the sinful, sexual world the other children are shielded from as described by Bernstein—George is a depiction of the latter. He is sheltered to the point that his innocence finds further expression in his inability to communicate through speech—he is not even permitted to voice his opinions. Combined with the unfamiliarity of the Man’s world and his lack of context with which to understand it, George is forced as a result to be wholly dependent on a white, entitled, masculine figure. The relationship presented in *Curious George* is inherently harmful because it relies on a racialized history of the concept of childhood innocence and readings of this book perpetuates these hierarchies and affirms these power dynamics. While issues regarding racial power dynamics shift into the subtitles of childhood innocence in the second and third series of the books, the established father-son relationship and associated levels of authority between The Man with the Yellow Hat and George persist in enforcing the subordination of children.

Although the books and their promotions of child subordination still compose the basis of the George empire, the franchise has expanded to encompass a number of motion pictures, a video game, and a toy store dedicated to George which sports a plethora of merchandise, and as a result, the series’ popularity cannot be attributed singularly to the books themselves; however, in rebranding George’s curiosity as conducive to teaching mathematics, science, and engineering education and altering

George's origin story while simultaneously maintaining a positive ambience about the original text, all subsequent George products continue to celebrate the first books, and therefore perpetuate their original messages. Released in 2006, *Curious George*, the first full-length feature film created of the series, rewrote George and The Man with the Yellow Hat's meeting, scratching the Man's plot to capture George and transport him back to America and instead having George, acting as his own entity, steal the hat and then, out of curiosity of course, sneak onto the Man's boat. This important distinction in transforming George from a victim to an instigator acknowledges the controversial nature of the original storyline. However, this drastic alteration receives little attention or commentary by the media, the director, or the producer. The Curious George community in this act of acknowledgement fails to actually condemn or address the series' negative implications regarding race; stance, or lack thereof, which reflects the characteristic response adopted by Americans while glossing over persistent racial issues. The television program that spawned as a result of the film's moderate success avoids the topic in a similar manner, instead shifting its focus to "inspire children to explore science, engineering, and math in the world around them" while additionally "show[ing] parents and caregivers how to foster the development of science and math literacy in children" (PBS Parents). With several episodes loosely based on some of the original stories, the program does not provide an explanation as to how George and the Man met, an omission that once again recognizes that the books' direct comparisons to the slave trade and the implications regarding race and power are unacceptable, but refuses to actually discuss the issue. Even if the show's creators use the series as a continuation of the film, they still avoid having to speak to the problematic nature of the books as the movie itself circumvents this as well. Furthermore, all Curious George movie and television program merchandise are marketed alongside the original series, particularly the first installment, only adding insult to injury. Interestingly, the other items sold consist majorly of stuffed toys, which themselves are rooted in a history of violence and objectification of blacks.<sup>3</sup> While the series has evolved away from the ideas of oppression and dominance asserted in the first books, transforming into a major platform for effective science mathematics education<sup>4</sup>, in failing to address the issues of these books and still actively marketing the story of "the curious monkey . . . [who] is taken from the jungle by the man in the yellow hat to

live in a new home” (The Curious George Store: Harvard Square)<sup>5</sup>, these additions by association implicitly support the racist ideals presented in the books and continue to promote their inclusion within children’s literature, and therefore, children’s mentality.

In a 2003 press release, the Houghton Mifflin Company asked, “Who isn’t smitten by Curious George? Whether you’re seventy, forty seven or four years old, the inquisitive little fellow who always seems to get into one scrape after another in all likelihood, captured your heart.” Unfortunately, they are not incorrect; the Curious George series occupies a reserved space in the heart of American childhood classics and its enduring legacy is one that has persisted over many decades and through many developments in technology and children’s literature. As Margaret Rey observes, the appeal of the monkey has always been that he “can do what kids can’t do...He can do all these naughty things that kids would like to do” (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt) and perhaps the largest impression the series has made on the youth it has touched does not revolve around societal limitations and indoctrinations George must learn, but rather on his insatiable curiosity that results in his seemingly endless amount of freedom. However, while the series has evolved to transcend beyond the racist archetypes and playful banter about the slave trade, it is still anchored in this framework and it still refuses to condemn the implications made by these themes. While the series’ transformation would seem to absolve the “new” brand of its early insinuations about race and dominance, the franchise, in simultaneously ignoring these assertions, which form its basis, and embracing and marketing themes of oppression and objectification, reinforces the implications about race and power that appear within the books. It is therefore impossible for the series to promote its themes of responsibility, discovery, and friendship wholly if it refuses to fulfill its obligation to educate, it ignores the history that has defined who can receive a math and science education, and it promotes diversity in friend groups, racially and characteristically, along with the oppression of non-white individuals. This is not to say that this classic should be removed from children’s literary consciousness, but that the discussion of the problematic nature of these books needs to occur in much the same way as it does with literature such as *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. These books provide an essential understanding of the institutional and social racial hierarchies that persist

in American culture and in ignoring their problems, society continues to indoctrinate children with the perception that these power dynamics are acceptable and normal. Especially given the culture of regarding racial disproportionalities as “historical” within the classroom and “post-racial” society, educating children about the problems with the series forces a discussion about race in its present context, something that the American youth still desperately needs. While curiosity killed the cat, it led George to an oppression that society celebrates and that children internalize.

## NOTES

1. The term author Jane Doonan of *Looking at Pictures in Picture Books* uses to encompass the simultaneous literary and pictorial reception of picture books which traditional definitions of “reader” and “viewer” does not sufficiently describe (9).

2. Where page one is considered to be the title page of the book.

3. In her article “Children’s Books, Dolls, and the Performance of Race; or the Possibility of Children’s Literature,” professor Robin Bernstein articulates that “[n]ineteenth-century doll manufacturers invited enactments of racial violence when they made Black dolls of materials, especially rubber and cloth, that could withstand rough usage that would destroy dolls of ceramic or wax” (164). Often these dolls were marketed as “prompts toward violent play” with advertisements such as “What child in American does not at some time want a cloth ‘Nigger’ dollie—one that can be petted or thrown about without harm to the doll or anything that it comes in contact with” (Bernstein 164), equating the abuse of these dolls with desirability. Beatings, whippings, and hangings were common in children’s play with these dolls and often games were constructed revolving around slave auctions and mob hangings of the dolls.

Even when these dolls were not subjected to ritual abuse, scholar Philip Nel observed as a child, his doll Golly, a racial caricature he grew up with, his innate dislike for the toy reveals “the fact that I was, unawares, absorbing messages about race and power, and that in its otherness, this doll was affirming my own whiteness as normal.” Because of the

doll's characteristics that contrasted the white, heteronormative figure, the doll "invites certain kinds of play" and although the doll's material would inspire a warm, intimate connection, the unsettling comparison of black with "thing" and its particular contrast to the more delicate, fragile porcelain dolls that often represented white girls and boys did not necessarily promote that instinct. While numerous children's toys currently are plush and made of soft, pliable material, given George's distinct connections to race and power, the exclusivity of the Curious George series' marketable non-game items as toys that have historically been associated with racism, violence, and oppression, proves interesting and worthy of note.

Robin Bernstein, "Children's Books, Dolls, and the Performance of Race; or the Possibility of Children's Literature," *PMLA* 126, no. 1: 160-169. 16 April 2015 Philip Nel, "The Archive of Childhood, Part 2: The Golliwog," *Nine Kinds of Pie*, last modified 13 January 2015. 16 April 2015.

4. Although the study regarding the improved math and science skills conducted by the Public Broadcasting Service for Kids interestingly predominately sample white families of average financial income where the highest household degree of education was typically a Bachelor's or a Master's degree, a demographic that does not include low income families, minority families, and less formally educated families.

Christine Paulson, "Evaluation of Curious George," *Concord Evaluation Group*, last modified May 2012.

5. An excerpt from the description of the plot of Curious George provided by the World's Only Curious George Store in Harvard Square which uses the choice phrase "is taken," an acknowledgement of George's lack of decision and passivity in his removal from Africa.

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## From the Instructor

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Although WR courses focus primarily on academic writing, in WR 100: “Fairy Tales and Literature” I ask students to write their own versions of a traditional fairy tale. This assignment, an “alternative genre” second paper, allows students to understand how and why fairy tales are written from the inside, rather than simply from an outside scholarly perspective. It also reinforces the importance of narrative structure: students come to understand that just like a fairy tale, an academic paper must tell a story, although an intellectual one. The assignment has three components: an introduction to the fairy tale, meant to draw a reader into the project as a whole; the fairy tale itself; and finally an analysis in which students explain how and why they wrote their versions.

Hannah Levin’s “Bad Parenting: The True Villain of ‘Rumpelstiltskin’” is a powerful retelling of “Rumpelstiltskin” not only because it’s so emotionally engaging, drawing us right into the story of the boy who was bargained away, but also because it functions as a response to, and analysis of, the Grimm version on which it’s based. The most successful fairy tale retellings do just that: they talk back to their predecessors, allowing us to see the story differently. If we look at Hannah’s version the way a scholar would, we can see how subtly she’s responding to and reformulating themes found in the Grimm version, such as the importance of names. But now it’s the boy’s lack of a name that becomes central, marking his abandonment. In this tale, Hannah talks back to the Brothers Grimm, telling them what she thinks of their tale and creating a new one of her own, in clear, lyrical prose, that gives voice to a character who is too often forgotten.

— Theodora Goss

WR 100: Fairy Tales

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## From the Writer

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When my classmates and I were presented with the task of writing our own version of a fairy tale, I knew that my biggest challenge would be doing something original. Adapting fairy tales is an extremely popular trend, with shows like *Once Upon a Time* and *Grimm* as well as the new wave of live-action Disney movies, and I wanted to examine a tale in a way that hadn't been done yet. That is why, upon deciding that I was going to adapt "Rumpelstiltskin," I decided to focus on the child that the miller's daughter wagers. The miller's daughter found out Rumpelstiltskin's name and won her bet mainly by luck, and it seemed to me that if only a few things had gone differently, the child would have been condemned to a horrible life with the man who stole him. I saw this as a huge risk on the part of the miller's daughter, but in all of the scholarly articles that I read, the potential consequences of the wager for the child were scarcely touched on, much less the morality of a deal. In this paper, I aimed to give the child a voice and bring to light the irresponsibility of the miller's daughter's actions, while giving insight into her character and plight as well. I had a lot of fun writing it, and I hope that I was able to make both the child and the mother complex, interesting, and sympathetic characters.

— Hannah Levin

## BAD PARENTING: THE TRUE VILLAIN OF “RUMPELSTILTSKIN”

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One of the many things about fairy tales that readers appreciate is that in the end, whether they are made to dance in iron shoes or turned into stone statues, the villains nearly always get their comeuppance. Afterwards, critics, folklorists, and psychoanalysts spend pages upon pages analyzing the implications of their crime and punishment. However, this is not the case in “Rumpelstiltskin.” Rumpelstiltskin receives his punishment in the form of a typically gruesome fairy tale death, but the tale includes several other characters that act selfishly or rashly: the miller’s lie lands his daughter in a potentially fatal situation, the King threatens to kill a helpless girl, and even the miller’s daughter disregards her child’s wellbeing when she promises him to Rumpelstiltskin. Yet they all live happily ever after, and readers ignore their transgressions.

My story attempts to highlight exactly how much damage the characters’ actions would have done if luck had not been on their side. What would have happened if the miller’s daughter hadn’t found Rumpelstiltskin’s name? Her son would have been given to a madman, forced to grow up without his parents, probably unloved and neglected. My story explores this scenario, showing events from the son’s point of view and exploring his feelings about his parents and the grief that they caused him. I attempt to hold those that did wrong responsible for their actions through the son’s thoughts on his mother and through his bitterness towards his life. In this new version of the tale, the miller’s daughter’s child is shown to be what he is: a person, not a bargaining chip.

## Rumpelstiltskin's Prize

When he is seven years old, he discovers that he is one of Master's trinkets.

Ironically, he makes this discovery through one of Master's other trinkets. His room is full of Master's trinkets: scrolls and gold and state secrets and magic items are piled to the ceiling. He is not to touch them, ever, under any circumstances. Master is very strict about that. So he lives in that room for the first seven years of his life, but he never explores it, only ever touching the magic carpet that he sleeps on in lieu of a bed.

There is a Looking Glass that has been tucked into a corner ever since he can remember. One day the Looking Glass calls him over. None of the trinkets has ever spoken to him before. He is curious. So he goes over to the corner of the room where it lies and runs his fingers over the cool surface, heart pounding wildly in his ribcage.

"Child," says the Looking Glass, "Do you know why you are here? Do you know why you live in this place, in this room?"

He does not.

And so the Looking Glass tells him of a day seven years ago when a young miller's daughter was told to spin straw into gold or be executed, of a tiny little imp that offered her salvation, of her bargain, of her marriage. Of how the servant she sent to discover the tiny little imp's name never returned. Of how she lost.

And then the Looking Glass says, "Do you know why I am telling you this?"

He shakes his head.

The Looking Glass says, "Because you deserve to know what you are."

The boy blinks once, twice, three times. "I am the prince," he says slowly.

"No," says the Looking Glass. "You are a prize that he won, just like everything he keeps in here."

"I am a prize," he whispers. He hates that he knows that it's the truth. He hates how much sense it makes that he lives in a storage bin

rather than a room. He hates that when he says those words, it feels natural and fitting and right.

He is twelve when he starts teaching himself magic. He is good at moving silently, and Master hardly cares what he does as long as dinner is on the table when it should be, so the boy is not noticed when he starts following Master around the house, quietly taking note of his spells. He talks to the Looking Glass sometimes, and it teaches him about the kinds of spells and enchantments that Master does not use. He practices and practices, sitting in front of the Looking Glass as it tells him to correct his hand position or make his pronunciation more precise.

He is fifteen when he tells the Looking Glass, "I want to meet my parents."

The Looking Glass thinks him foolish, but it helps him anyway. It tells him the way to the palace, and it teaches him spells for invisibility and moving in silence to get past the guards. It wishes him luck as he climbs out the window of the storage room.

He is fifteen when he flies through the window of the royal chambers, invisible and silent in the dead of night.

His feet touch down onto the pristine wooden floors of his mother's room. Everything is big, grand, extravagant, *gold*. His eyes are assaulted by gold. The walls are painted with intricate golden swirls, the dressers and bed are gold-plated, and the chandelier and the mirror and the lanterns and the bookshelves are twinkling the way that only pure gold does. He thinks back to the Looking Glass's tale and wonders how much of this room was made by his Master.

There is one thing in the room that is not gold. In the gold-plated bed, under the golden covers, resting on a golden pillow, there is a woman in a white nightgown. She is beautiful, so very beautiful, sleeping peacefully with her dark hair spread across the pillow. He approaches his mother. She looks young to be a queen, no older than thirty-five. There is a crease in her brow and frown lines on her face.

He reaches out a hand to wake her. Her eyes open slowly, but she shies away from him.

"Who are you?" she says, sitting up quickly and pulling the covers

around herself protectively. “I’ll call the guards—”

“I’m your son,” he says.

For a moment, it is silent.

“You can’t be,” she whispers. “I lost my son.”

He doesn’t know what to say to her. He hasn’t really thought of that.

But he doesn’t have to speak, because she continues. “You are. Oh, God, you are. I’m so sorry,” she tells him. “You have to understand—I was supposed to win.”

And suddenly the wrongness of the situation washes over him. This is not how it is supposed to be. This woman, his mother, should not be a complete stranger to him. He should not be learning for the first time at age fifteen that her hair is brown and that her eyes are the same shape as his and that her room is drenched with gold. He suddenly feels cheated, wronged, and he is hit with an incredible urge to fly back home to his Looking Glass.

“You’re so handsome,” she says, traces of a smile appearing. “You’ve grown up so beautifully without me . . .”

The words hang in the air between them. He had grown up without her.

He had grown up a trinket.

And he is standing in front of his mother and she is looking at him like he is something precious and he feels hollow, because he could have grown up with someone looking at him like he is something precious and he *didn’t*.

“You gave me to him.” The words are out of his mouth before he is aware of it. Her smile melts like ice thrown into a fire.

“Yes,” she says, voice barely above a whisper. “I am so sorry. I didn’t... I didn’t have a choice. I tried to *save* you. He took you.”

But he didn’t *just* take me, the boy thinks. There was an agreement, a deal. “How could you do it?” he asks. “You bet your necklace, and you bet your ring—but how could you bet your *son*? How could you bet *me*?”

“I didn’t want to!” she says. “I didn’t have anything else to give. I was going to die, and you didn’t even exist yet. He said he would save me if I’d only—”

“If you’d only *what?*”

“I didn’t have a choice!” she says. “If I could have done *anything* else—”

“You could have refused,” he says. “You could have run away, you could have offered yourself. You could have done something if you had stopped to think!”

“I didn’t have time to think,” she says. “I was about to die, the king was going to kill me!”

“You could have saved me!” He does not know what he is doing now; words come on their own accord. “I have no *name*,” he says. “I live in a storage shed. I feed myself and clothe myself and keep myself warm. I have no name and no friends and no family. You could have protected me from this, but instead here you are in luxury. In this room made of spun gold.”

“I did not want this room!” she shouted. “I did not want this gold. I did not want this life! I would trade everything I have for you in a heart-beat!” Her face is red, her fists are clenched, and she grabs his hand. “*My* father used me as a bid for power, I am married to the man that threatened to *kill* me, I was tricked by my supposed savior, and I lost my only child! You may hate me, you may blame me—and you should—but do not tell me that I wanted *this* and do not tell me that I am not suffering!”

That makes him stop. He looks once again at the crease in her brow and the frown lines on her face. And suddenly, his mother seems very tired.

Where was his father in all of this?

He does not know what her life has been. He does not know why she made her deal. He does not know why she is all alone in this golden room. He does not know her at all. Not like he should.

But he knows one thing.

“Parents are supposed to protect their children,” he says. “You were supposed to try.”

He is fifteen when he realizes that his only family is a Looking Glass.

HANNAH LEVIN is a mechanical engineering major in Boston University's College of Engineering Class of 2018. She comes from a suburb an hour outside New York City, where she has been doing creative writing ever since she was young. She would like to thank her high school English teachers, whom she credits with making her the writer she is today. She would also like to thank her professor, Theodora Goss, for all her help with this story and for creating such an exciting and enriching class, and her family and friends for all of their support.

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## From the Instructor

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In “Poetry Now,” students read and write about books by contemporary North American poets, to appraise the varied ways in which poetry engages with the world. Students also engage creatively with these books, to explore authors’ thematic, linguistic, aesthetic, and formal intentions.

To complement our reading of his book, *The Constitution* (Black Ocean, 2014), poet Brian Foley asked students to write two short poems: the first using declarative language to make an assertion about the self; the second (amendment) poem, qualifying, negating, or refracting the emotional logic of the source poem.

In this wonderfully ambitious and ethically complex poem, Jimmy Sbordone demonstrates his understanding of Foley’s use of line and stanza breaks to create and destabilize meaning, to defamiliarize language so that we see and hear it anew. The title carries quietly across sections, both enacting and bridging the seeming distance between a violent history and humanity. Additionally, Jimmy displayed persistent curiosity as he grappled with similar concerns across genres. He wrote about astronomy in “Is Violence—,” as well as in his final critical engagement with Foley’s book and Cathy Linh Che’s *Split*.

— Jessica Bozek

WR 100: Poetry Now

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## From the Writer

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The inspiration for this poem came when I was sitting in my astronomy class, and the professor showed a few artists' renderings of supernovae. The images conjured up an odd dichotomy, where one part of me almost mourned for the civilizations that may have lived near this star before the supernova. Hence, the two contrasting halves of this poem coax both of those feelings. In its concision and abrupt enjambments, this poem was a radical break from anything I had written before. It took a wealth of editing out words to pare this down to what it is now, but that process got me to appreciate every word. I intended the abundance of white space to be conducive to individual readers' connections and created a handful of double meanings and otherwise ambiguous lines.

— James Sbordone

JAMES SBORDONE

*Prize Essay Winner*

## IS VIOLENCE—

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A supernova is perhaps the most destructive process in the known universe: it is the final act of a large star that runs out of fuel. These massive explosions are so immense that they obliterate any planets or other bodies in orbit of the star. It is not purely destructive, though: a supernova is the only way to produce many of the heavier metals necessary for life as we know it on Earth.

### Is Violence—

1. Our identity?

The love-  
child species

Of atomic calamities  
& galactic murder.

For the metals in your brain  
Thank the planet

Somewhere.

You'll never know  
Individual names

lost, to the event  
horizon of Forget.

2. Just a wisp  
of our past?

Far from it  
To love arises

History's peripheral lens  
Demands we utter "Oh, horror!"  
So that we emerge mindful  
Of a molecular act of compassion

Only caverns of our nature  
Can cognize

a single point of light

Two of the poets we have studied in class (Cathy Linh Che and Brian Foley) use images of astronomy to illustrate their experiences: Che talks of "men like galaxies," while Foley tries to unpack a supernova of enlightenment stemming from a break-up. Like these two poets, I employed an objective correlative with the image of a supernova. I think this motif serves the poem well because, much like our own heritage, a supernova is a very distant series of events that is still largely vague and unknown to us: it is, in and of itself, already defamiliarized by its foreign-

ness. Although we do not understand these events, we know that they have some massive impact on our own personal development, as the heavier metals in our bodies and around the Earth (alluding to the mettle of our own identities) can only be produced in the process of a supernova. My hope is that the poem feels ethically uncomfortable: we as living organisms need the elements produced by this violent process, and supernovae always obliterate the planets orbiting around the former star. I was trying to get the readers to raise the same doubt of themselves that the speaker presents in the final scene of *Saving Private Ryan*: “Tell me I’m a good man.”

I was trying to draw from the way Foley incorporates line breaks in the middle of words or phrases to create an ambiguity through a double meaning. The example in this poem that I think was very effective was on “event / horizon” at the end of the first poem. Putting a line break there opens the door to two readings of this poem: one that reflects on the “event horizon” (the point of no return in a black hole) of forget, and one which broaches the depth of the event and the horizon of forget. Splitting the line and creating these two meanings opens the door to a plethora of interpretations of the entire poem, which was definitely a central goal for me in this poem: for Che and Foley, the speakers learn to see new insights through the same images of astronomy, and I aspired to do the same. My hope is that each reader gleans a new pearl of wisdom that I never foresaw being planted in the poem.

JAMES SBORDONE (CAS '18) is pursuing a double major in International Relations and Linguistics. Born and raised in Newton, Massachusetts, he was first inspired to write by his mother, who read Robert Frost poems aloud.

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## From the Instructor

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Sarah wrote this piece for my section of the Genre and Audience WR X cluster. Students had undertaken semester-long research projects and, in the final assignment for the course, were asked to reimagine their academic arguments for a public audience. Deciding to write in the style of *The New Republic*, which is, in the publication's own words, "tailored for smart, curious, socially aware readers." Sarah's focus on street photography brings her research on classic American images to a non-expert audience with diverse professional and disciplinary perspectives, appealing to their interests in history and the arts while tapping into contemporary culture.

— Gwen Kordonowy

WR 150: The American Road

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## From the Writer

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When I enrolled in an experimental writing class entitled “The American Road,” I assumed that the semester would be filled with discussions about the physical American road, its attractions, and its place in American history. While the physical road was an important subject in the class, I learned that this “American Road” was expansive beyond its physical limitations, able to encompass topics as broad and abstract as social progress, popular television shows, and, in my case, photography. I ultimately chose to investigate the works of two American street photographers, Robert Frank and Lee Friedlander, whose approaches to photography reveal much about life in America and what it means to be an American. While both photographers frequently feature the road in their pictures, I chose to focus more on the people and culture found alongside it and how they represent America. In light of recent photographic projects such as “Humans of New York” that have gained immense popularity in social media, I related Frank’s and Friedlander’s artwork to modern street photography and assessed how it has evolved in America over the past several years.

— Sarah White

SARAH WHITE

## THIS IS THE WAY WE ARE: AMERICA THROUGH STREET PHOTOGRAPHY

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*Frank.*

With today's popularity of smartphones and social network platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Tumblr, street photography is not hard to find. Taking to the streets with often just an iPhone, Daniel Arnold spends full days wandering New York City, snapping hundreds of shots of his surroundings and posting his favorites to his popular Instagram account and Tumblr blog, *When to Say Nothing*. Brandon Stanton, the man behind the immensely popular *Humans of New York* portraits,

posts on several social media sites his photographs of the city's most interesting, thought-provoking, and unique residents. Mike Kepka captures San Francisco city life in the hundreds of grayscale shots on his Instagram account, *The City Exposed*.

While the modern convenience of camera phones and image sharing sites makes street photography an easy endeavor, it is not, by any means, a new concept. As a genre, it is essentially as old as photography itself; many of the earliest photos were taken in the streets during the urbanization of the nineteenth century. John Thomson may have been the first to publish photographs in the genre as we know it today, focusing on London's poor who lived and worked on the city's streets in his 1881 *Street Incidents*.

When Robert Frank, a Swiss-born photojournalist, published *The Americans* in 1958, we were given eighty-three early street photographs depicting everyday life in the United States. Nearly fifty years later, American artist Lee Friedlander published his own epic collection of street photography taken between the late 1980s and early 2000s in *America by Car*. So what do these two volumes tell us about our own society and culture? And how has this visual national commentary evolved over time?

As a medium, street photography promises to provide an invaluable way of looking at a culture. It shows us how people interact with each other and with their surroundings, and we gain insight into how they structure their physical environments. Without artificial lighting, staged backgrounds, or framing, a street photographer looks around him, spots something of interest, and with a few quick snapshots his shoot is over. The street itself is fundamental in capturing these candid photos. Sustaining all of its inner movements and transactions, the street does not discriminate against class, race, or otherwise; anyone who wishes to embark upon it may.



Frank.

So if the street photography genre has so much to say, what can Frank's and Friedlander's pictures tell us about American culture? If we pause to think of some typical images of America, we likely conjure up the Statue of Liberty, the Empire State Building, Mount Rushmore,

cowboys, baseball stadiums, hot dogs, and lots of flapping red-white-and-blue flags.

Do Frank and Friedlander represent America through these kinds of clichéd images? To an extent, yes. Some of the photos within the two volumes are so nauseatingly, overwhelmingly *American* that they seem to invite mockery. Frank's volume includes a man with a gigantic cowboy hat smoking a cigar while looking on at a Detroit rodeo; a woman selling hot dogs promising to be "BIG-GER AND BETTER THAN EVER!!" at a market in Hollywood; and a huge American flag hanging between portraits of Abraham Lincoln and George



*Frank.*

Washington in a Michigan bar. Friedlander captures the cheesy replica of the Statue of Liberty welcoming visitors to Las Vegas.

But these clichéd stereotypes aren't quite at the heart of Frank's and Friedlander's America. Like the cowboy's hat, these photos over-exaggerate. At the heart of America are the unremarkable gas stations, bus stops, factories, parks, suburbs, newspaper stands, drive-in movies, taxi drivers, youths, and dog-walkers that make up so much of the nation.

The more unspectacular photos are the most realistic, the most telling of the American way of life. Frank and Friedlander offer us brief glimpses



*Friedlander.*

into the lives of the couples lounging in the rippling California grass (Frank), the Miami elevator girl looking longingly over her shoulder (Frank), the midnight trash collectors on Coney Island (Friedlander), the New York gentleman telling an animated story to a toast-nibbling child (Friedlander), the homeless children

grinning at the camera in Manhattan (Frank), the Tennessee family lined up proudly in front of their dusty car (Friedlander).

Friedlander saw the couple eating ice cream in his rear-view mirror and Frank saw the row of faces staring out from the seats of a bus, and they captured and commemorated these images so central to the American people. The photographers fail not to include the peculiarities of America: the enormous backyard replicas of the moon (Friedlander), the cowboys in the middle of New York City streets and the roadside advertisements for “Hot Babes” (Frank). Neither Frank nor Friedlander went out of their way to glamorize America.

Jack Kerouac wrote the introduction to *The Americans*. In it he remarks on “the humor, the sadness, the EVERYTHING-ness and American-ness of these pictures!” Kerouac marvels at the transparency of the photographs and the individuality of their subjects:

The faces don't editorialize or criticize or say anything but “This is the way we are in real life and if you don't like it I don't know anything about it ‘cause I'm living life my way and may God bless us all...”

Indeed there is an “American-ness” made evident through *The Americans* and *America by Car*. Frank's and Friedlander's street photography isn't what John Thomson captured back in 1800s London: photo after photo of the dreary poor struggling to survive on dirty streets. That's not to say

that Americans aren't poor, nor that their streets can't be dirty. Frank's volume is full of poverty and the roughness of street life, and Friedlander's collection includes plenty of examples of dilapidated shacks and lower-class families. But even the poorest in the photos seem to bristle with a



*Frank.*

certain enthusiasm for life. The family whose greatest possession is a filthy station wagon still smiles proudly beside it. The tiny children living on the street in Manhattan beam as their photo is taken. When Frank and Friedlander's Americans do find wealth, they spend it on gigantic sculptures of the moon or giant cowboy hats or ice cream and hot dogs. And much of their activities involve simple things like newspaper stands and bus stops where they read about the world and travel out into it. Regardless of their social status, Americans find hope in their surroundings and joy in their lives. Perhaps this all stems from the great "American Dream" that has haunted Americans for decades, perpetuating the belief that with enough determination they can overcome their current struggles and live a better life tomorrow. Whatever the case, even through their delusions and illusions, their perseverance, hope, and pride, even in the worst of conditions, is what unites these people as Americans.

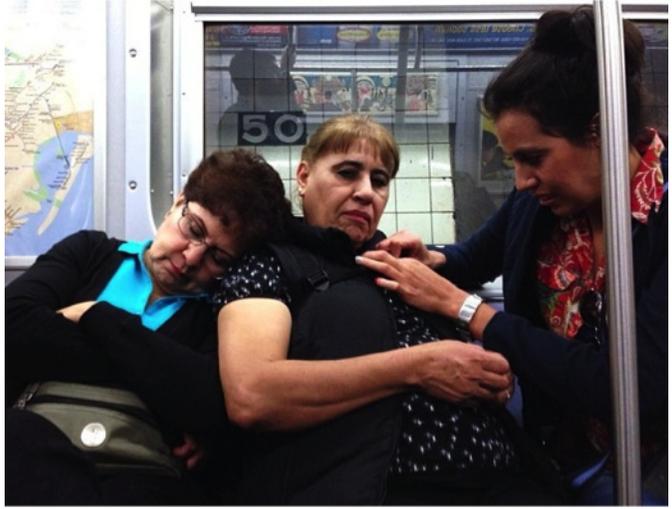
When Frank and Friedlander took the photographs that would eventually make up *The Americans* and *America by Car*, photography was a heavily involved process. Film had to be purchased, stored, developed, and scanned. Photos often couldn't be viewed until weeks after they were taken. For Frank to have taken an extraordinary twenty-eight thousand stills before narrowing them down to the eighty-three in *The Americans* was an unimaginably time-consuming, expensive process. Today, however, street photographers can capture their art on their phones without compromising quality. Immediately they can view their pictures, editing, cropping, and filtering with a few swipes of a finger.

Has street photography, as a national commentary, changed much over the past several decades as we move further into the digital age? As far as the approach goes, it has become a very different form of art. When Daniel Arnold shoots, he wanders the streets snapping hundreds of pictures a day, searching for the unique, the profound, and the indescribable. He can immediately see whether they have any value, instantly deleting the ones he doesn't care for while preserving those he finds worth in: the bodybuilder flexing in front of the ATM, the babies rolling down the street in wheeled cribs, and the lady dressed in trash bags. This allows for hundreds of photos to be taken a day without expense.

Additionally, street photographers can now be much more discreet with the use of the smartphone camera; this makes it easy to capture, say,

the person sitting across from you on the subway without taking out a bulky camera and getting their attention.

However, as far as its purpose goes, street photography is still what it has always been. Its aim is still to capture, in an uncontrived form, the everyday movements



*Arnold.*

and interactions of people within an environment. Street photography may be an easier pursuit with today's ease of access to cameras, but the theory behind it remains the same. The subject matter may have evolved slightly from the times of Frank and even Friedlander, due to changing social structures and advancements within American society and culture. But this does not mean that street photography itself has changed.

It is indeed the purpose of street photography to capture the evolution of a people, to document the way in which a society exists at a certain point in time. Street photography itself does not evolve; rather, it holds the ability to show us how *we* have evolved. And even through this evolution, photos like Arnold's of a young boy prancing down the street proudly holding aloft a huge balloon can still evoke the same relentlessly hopeful, cheerful, resilient sentiments that Frank and Friedlander did in showing just who the Americans are.

SARAH WHITE is a Film and Television major in the College of Communication's class of 2018. She is originally from South Kingstown, Rhode Island.

## HONORABLE MENTIONS

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### WR 097 ESSAY

Disproving the Illusion of Justice—a Revelation in *Montana 1948*

KAILUN JIANG

### WR 100 ESSAYS

Let's Call An Audible: Safety in the National Football League

MICAH BAUM

The Cage Door Had Clicked Shut and Not Open: an Exploration of Big Brother's Use of Social Psychology in George Orwell's *1984*

JAYNE EVANS

Violence in "The Boy Died in My Alley:" Society and Self

AISLINN KEANE

### WR 150 ESSAYS

From Cochabamba to Detroit: An Examination of Water Privatization and its Feasibility Around the World

LEANNE KEHOE

Secular Prayer: Allen Ginsberg's Jewish Identity Through "Kaddish"  
and "Howl"

TOVA LEVIN

Chiang Kai-shek as Seen in Life: Henry Luce's Influence on American  
Perceptions of China

NICOLE LUKAS

**ALTERNATIVE GENRE ESSAYS**

Giant Joey

CHAVISA RAMYARUPA

Friendship, Sex, or Money?

MAISIE SILVER