I Am a Parody (And So Can You!)

Nation, the man on the cover of *Esquire* is a true American hero. He is shown as a figure being punished for his beliefs, shot down with arrows. He is part of a demographic that is underestimated and he has chosen to speak out against that injustice. That man is of course the true patriot, Dr. Stephen T. Colbert, D.F.A. The text on the right of this iconic cover mentions a past cover of *Esquire* that resembles Colbert’s but apparently it was not old enough to be retro and therefore not reprinted. Some guy named Ali was on it; sounds like he must have been a friend of Aladdin’s if you ask this writer. If that cover was so important then they should have asked Ali to be on the cover again. Colbert has a busy schedule so he can’t just be making magazine covers willy-nilly. Some say that recreating old magazine covers is cheating and is an easy way for publishers to sell their magazines. Other people, who may or may not be those said publishers, say that by recreating famous covers from their past, the magazine is paying homage to those long ago celebrities who couldn’t make it a few more decades. Paying tribute to an old magazine cover is not a faux pas; it is merely a way for publishers to catch the eye of an audience and to get their message across in an almost unique way. Everyone is doing it because it works. They say that imitation is the highest form of flattery, and if Stephen Colbert is the one doing the imitation then you damn well better be flattered. Imitating Colbert, on the other hand, is copyright infringement and you better start paying some royalties.

This Ali fellow was apparently a big deal back in ye olden days of the 1960s. He punched dudes for a living but then refused to point a gun at bunch of Vietcong. How un-American! How dare this fellow refuse to fight against the Vietnamese just because his religion and his morals would not allow it (“Ali Timeline”)? Everyone knows that Stephen Colbert is a big fan of the U.S. military and supports them in any way he can. He even went to Iraq and shaved his luscious locks to support the troops. Ali, on the other hand, chose to stay in America during a time of conflict and was put in jail for avoiding the draft (“Ali Timeline”). That probably taught him a lesson about arguing against the government in order to stand up for your rights during war times.

On the cover of the afore mentioned *Esquire* issue, Colbert is depicted as being under attack by a rogue archer as he tries to make a simple phone call while half dressed. His innocent expression reads, “Please, Mr. Archer, don’t shoot me right now. I’m on the phone.” Clearly he is in the process of either undressing after a hard day at work or is about to embark on a journey outdoors as soon as the person on the phone tells him where his pants are. To the left of him is an inscription that reads, “Only one man has the courage to confront the critical issue of our time – The victimization of the white American male.” Though his late night talk show is where this brave man usually sets the country straight on what he knows to be true and why others should follow his example, this issue of *Esquire* magazine houses an article by Colbert about white American men being victimized by not being allowed to be victims. Ali had quite a different cover of *Esquire*; it was so boring it’s hard to understand where the comparison comes from. Sure, both men are in their underwear and under attack by the syndicate of archers that seems to have been hiding in *Esquire*’s photography studio for at least fifty years, but that’s all. Colbert has better lighting and was even able to splurge on a shirt and tie!

Some say that the truly significant difference between Ali’s cover and Colbert’s is the little use of text on Ali’s cover. Seriously 1960s, what’s the deal with that? How are the readers supposed to know all of the emotion and hardship the figure on the cover is going through if you don’t plaster it in large letters all across the cover? You can’t just expect people to take the image a disheartened figure secluded and wounded against a darkened backdrop and understand that he is being targeted by the government and the media for staying true to his values. The designers of today know how to make their point in as many words as they can fit on a sheet of paper. That’s why Colbert’s name is bigger than the magazine title on his cover. No one really even cares about *Esquire* magazine anymore. Colbert definitely doesn’t because his joyful face covers at least a third of the magazine title, showing that he’s what is special about the magazine, not the magazine itself. Ali didn’t seem to get the same memo and his pained face beneath the full title and his small name on his cover shows it.

Colbert and Ali address two completely different issues in their editions of *Esquire* magazine. Ali chooses to complain about the war. He doesn’t have much to complain about, really. He won nearly every fight he was in and when he refused to fight in the war, the government let him take a break from all fighting including boxing. All he had to do was spend a little time in jail for it, no big deal (“Ali Timeline”). Colbert uses his brand of hard-hitting facts that he may have made up to talk about the struggles of white men not just today but throughout history. He makes this point through images from white American men’s past to show their struggle through the early stages of our great nation like how difficult it was for white men to keep their slaves in check (Colbert). And then we have Ali who was afraid to get into a little skirmish to defend this country that at that time allowed him to share a water fountain with his fellow African Americans. Surprisingly enough, Ali eventually became a very important figure in the Civil Rights movement (“Ali Timeline”). The stories from these two men were quite different indeed.

One blogger by the name of Kimberley Croft says that she hates when magazines take the easy way out by taking old covers that had significance and meaning and revamping them so publishers can get an easy sell (“OMG… We Shot a Stupid Cover”). Well who does Miss Artsy Fartsy Marcy think she is? Just because she’s a designer and a former professor in London doesn’t mean she knows everything about the print industry and how to make cool images that catch the eye of the viewer without copying other artists’ work. Fun fact for you, Miss Croft; this essay writer has also dabbled in the world of design and let me tell you this, parodies sell. Maybe I only took design classes in high school but my work revolved around creating parodies so I have some experience getting easy sells. Magazines and newspapers are going out of style so publisher’s have to do whatever it takes to get a sale. Celebrities are going to continue to be on magazine covers and magazines like *Esquire* will make sexier parodies of those covers in order to pay the bills. If at the same time, those designers are keeping the memories of fallen celebrities alive, then I say good job Americans!

Colbert may not be the most serious guy in the world but he knows how to grab people’s attention and that’s most likely why *Esquire* chose him for their cover. His charisma and charm give him the ability to bring social issues to the forefront in an overly sarcastic but lighthearted way. And as long as they can tie their decisions back to paying homage to old celebrities and important figures then it’s really just a win-win situation for everybody. If it looks awesome and isn’t exactly like the original then it’s okay. Sure, some publishers are in it for the money but the people behind the publishers, the writers and the designers, are trying to get a point across in a way that they know will attract attention. *Esquire* and Stephen Colbert did not use Muhammad Ali to simply sell a magazine; they used the memory of him to remind people not only what Ali stood for but also what he still stands for.

Works Cited

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Self Assessment

I took a long break between this final version of my essay and the draft before it. After looking at it again, I found my feelings for the topic renewed. Parodies and satire are still my favorite art form and I enjoy the way they can adjust the mood surrounding a certain topic.

There were very few changes made to this final draft. Most of them were little grammatical things that had been overlooked but the major one was the conclusion. In the previous draft the conclusion was too long winded and the voice that I had used in the rest of the essay was hard to maintain. I condensed the last two paragraphs into one and tried to renew a bit of the tone that I had lost without returning to it in full force. In some ways, I needed to pull away from the tone so that I could be sure that my final points were clear. It was pointed out to me that by slightly changing the voice of the writing to one closer to my own, that it helped my argument about parodies.

Parodies can only go so far and they sometimes need to back down and become serious to show their intent. I’m confident that this final version of my essay reflects that sentiment.