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ENC1101

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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.

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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

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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

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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. 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. As long as it looks awesome and isn’t exactly like the original then it’s okay.

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There is nothing wrong with paying homage to important people from the past, especially if you can do so and make some cash at the same time. As long as celebrities are on magazine covers, magazines like *Esquire* will be making 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! Because parodies are not just the result of designers or publishers running out of ideas for covers, they also allow the reader to remember the original image and get mad and write a blog about why parodies make them mad.

When a parody is done well, it can make an even stronger point than the original or even debunk the original work’s message. Parodies and satire are not just tools for making people laugh and getting an easy sell on the newsstand, they also are used to bring an audience’s attention to a certain subject whether it be remembering a fallen hero or reminding people that certain values and issues are still relevant in today’s world. 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. Sometimes that means using a popular cover with a message and recreating it to remind people of what that cover meant in the first place. *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.

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Self Assessment

This essay topic was a lot of fun to explore and write about and I really enjoyed it. It let me experiment with voice and it was interesting to see how far I could go using the overly sarcastic voice of Stephen Colbert and still get my point across to the reader. Comedy is hard and I don’t think I’m destined to follow in Stephen’s footsteps because after a while I felt I was making the same sort of joke too often or I didn’t set it up quite right. While drafting, the jokes became less funny to me as I read them over and over and I started to lose sight of what I was originally going for. I had to take some time away from the essay just so my mind could reset and I could remember where I planned to go next with the essay. Towards the end of the essay I found it hard to keep writing in the same tone and also get my point across.

In English classes in the past, I have had to write personal narratives where I could use voice and tone more freely than a typical research paper but that wasn’t until the later years of my high school career. I have written visual analyses before in an art history class but they were much different than this assignment. In art history, the goal was to interpret what the time period of the piece was based on the style and context of an image and not to argue either for or against what the image was. It was more factual than opinion based and the tone was definitely more serious than the one I used in this essay. But because I had written an analysis of an image before I felt that I had an advantage over some of the other students because I already had a good idea about what to look for in an image to base my writing around. And the design classes that I mentioned helped with that too. I know that the use of color and placement of text are just a few of the things to look out for when analyzing an image and that just because an image looks happy at first glance does not mean that the message of the image is necessarily a joyful one.

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**1101 Grading Rubric - Farmer**

**A–** The introduction explodes like a bomb. The writer has chosen a very original topic or has taken a fresh perspective on an already much discussed issue or common experience. An A paper may complicate the text, experience, or issue at hand and may try to resolve the resulting complication. The paper is relatively free of mechanical errors, which are slight. There is excellent detail and a tight focus. Outside sources if not required may have been used (where applicable) but not overused. In-depth analysis and a strong voice are present. The paper flows. The conclusion does a good job of tying up the paper and perhaps pointing in a new direction but does not merely restate or bring up new issues. The writer enlightens me about something or offers me a perspective I had not thought about before  
reading the paper. I am impressed.  
  
  
  
**B–** The assignment is fulfilled. Good detail, good analysis, relevant examples. The paper is fairly focused and seems strong. There are some errors, but they are relatively minor things such as misuse of possessives. The paper has a sense of structure, but does not demonstrate superior organization. A voice is either present or beginning to emerge.  
  
  
  
**C–** The paper minimally fulfills the assignment. There is little detail, little analysis, and few to no examples. Significant portions of the paper seem to be filler, but the filler is related to the paper; it may be, for example, information that is common knowledge. The transitional sentences are weak or nonexistent. There is a conclusion, but it does little more than restate the issue or rework the introduction. The paper seems too broad and brings in meaningless examples. A high C paper may have fair to good use of examples but might not expound upon the significance of those examples.  
  
  
  
**D–** This paper does not fulfill the assignment. It is too off-topic; the paper is too short (25% or more of the essay is missing); there are serious errors. The level of writing is poor. The reflection and/or analysis is superficial at best.   
  
  
  
**F–** There is no paper. The paper is half of the required length. Mechanical errors interfere to such a degree that I cannot tell what the writer is saying. The paper is blatantly plagiarized.