

THE MAGAZINE OF THE OKLAHOMA HUMANITIES COUNCIL

Oklahoma HUMANITIES

WINTER 2013



POPULAR CULTURE

Movies | Reality TV | Fandom | Roots Music | Female Superheroes

5TH ANNIVERSARY
ISSUE!

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Oklahoma HUMANITIES

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WINTER 2013

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OHC is an independent, nonprofit organization whose mission is to provide meaningful public engagement with the humanities—disciplines such as history, literature, film studies, ethics, and philosophy. The humanities offer a deeper understanding of ourselves and others by confronting us with the questions, values, and meanings of the human experience. As the state partner for the National Endowment for the Humanities, OHC brings people together to explore these ideas through programming and community grants that support book groups, exhibits, film festivals, teacher institutes, and more. OHC engages people in their own communities, providing forums for education, critical thinking, and productive civil discourse.

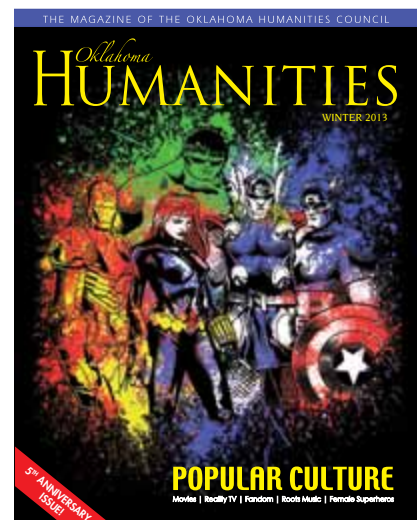
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Reader letters are welcome and may be directed to the editor at: carla@okhumanities.org or by mailing to the above address. Letters are published subject to editorial discretion and may be edited for clarity or space.

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ON THE COVER

Avenging Solace by Jerry Bennett. Illustrator Jerry Bennett is our new best friend. He tweaked this original design to add Black Widow—front and center—just for us (related feature, page 16). It's thanks to Jerry that we bring you the high-impact, comic-book-style images that give this issue its "wow" factor. A lifelong Okie and self-proclaimed geek, Jerry has been drawing comic book heroes and *Star Wars* characters since elementary school. He has realized his dream of drawing comics for a living, creating best-selling shirt designs for Teefury.com and licensing designs for Marvel and Lucasfilm. He has illustrated several children's books and is currently illustrating the Sci-Fi comic *Nadir's Zenith* with writer Jackson Compton: www.Facebook.com/NadirsZenith. See more of Jerry's art at: www.Facebook.com/TheJerryBennett.





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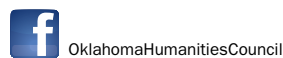
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From the Executive Director
ANN THOMPSON

OUR MAGAZINE, FIVE YEARS IN

When we made the decision in 2008 to migrate our newsprint publication, *Humanities* INTERVIEW, to a full-color magazine, we had several objectives. The first was to provide rich humanities-based content in a compelling format. The second was to reach an extended audience who may not have ready access to our other programs and provide them with a free subscription.

These objectives were met and exceeded. We have highlighted the talents of outstanding scholars including Krista Tippet, Mark Slouka, Natasha Trethewey, N. Scott Momaday, Kim Stafford, Dana Gioia, Rilla Askew, and Tom Averill. We have addressed topics of current interest, some of which are thorny and complex. We have tackled the role of politics within religion, the impact of Islam on American culture, race and reconciliation, personal integrity and public ethics, and the role of the Electoral College in our voting process. Through it all, we have been reminded that humanities disciplines offer a solid scholarly base for informed discussion.

Individuals and organizations in all seventy-seven counties receive the magazine. We know from our readers' surveys that the magazine is shared and passed around to others not on our list, thereby extending its reach. To meet still other needs, we have added every prison library and veteran center in our state to the expanding list of recipients who express a need for our publication.

An unexpected benefit of the magazine is the realization that teachers in secondary schools, colleges, and universities use it as an instructional tool. As a result, we launched EXTRA!, an online resource with discussion questions, recommended links, and a user-friendly means for downloading each article. Our hope is that this service will facilitate further discussion of the magazine's topics.

We have relied heavily upon the generosity of artists and photographers to create the imagery that many of our readers have come to treasure. The magazine's editor, Carla Walker, consistently assembles a beautifully orchestrated publication that enlightens, informs, and enriches. We are grateful to all who have made this magazine one of our signature programs and we look forward to many more years of connecting with our readers, learning together, and enjoying this journey through the public humanities.

Letters

GENERATIONAL SHIFT

What a huge topic to be covered in 20 pages! *Oklahoma HUMANITIES'* coverage of Reconciliation (Summer 2012) was superb. My grandmother came from Georgia to Indian Territory with her family in the early 1890s. She was one of the most gracious ladies you would ever want to meet, but with her Southern heritage she definitely believed in social separation, even though she worked alongside African Americans in the home of a wealthy oil executive. My father was a quiet, gentle man. About the only hint I ever saw of his racial views were in the occasional comment made when he and my son were watching OU football.

I went to college in the '60s and considered myself to be very enlightened and racially unbiased—until I observed my son during his high school days in the early 1980s. He opened my eyes to some of the prejudices that I refused to even admit that I had.

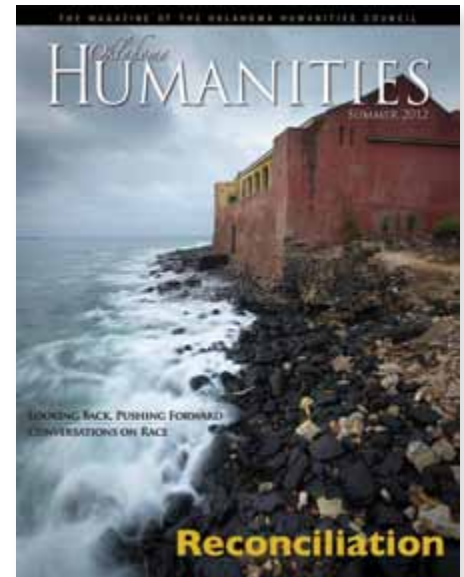
My grandmother was Cherokee and on the Dawes Rolls. When she was young, Indian heritage, even in Indian Territory and later Oklahoma, was not necessarily to be advertised. My children and grandchildren are all proud of their citizenship in the Cherokee Nation. It is enlightening to observe the change in attitudes toward race through four generations. All this to say that, though we may have a long way to go, we have also come a long way. Thanks for another provoking issue. —Bill Woodard, Bartlesville

MR. SMITH AND WASHINGTON

I finally have had the time to read the Summer 2012 issue of *Oklahoma HUMANITIES* and I want to congratulate you on an interesting and well-done collection of pieces related to race and reconciliation. I found all of the articles very intriguing and thought-provoking. I did notice one minor error that someone else may have already pointed out—the picture on page 14 refers to John White and it should be John Smith. Smith went to Jamestown and White actually died in the 1590s.

I also want to thank you for the ad about the Washington exhibit at the Gilcrease. I saw it when I flipped through the magazine when it came this summer and I had not heard about this exhibit. As a result of my seeing the ad, I was able to take my Colonial and Revolutionary U.S. History class on a field trip and they really enjoyed the exhibit.

Thanks again for all you do. —Carol Sue Humphrey, Professor of History, Oklahoma Baptist University



Send your comments, questions, and suggestions to Editor Carla Walker at: carla@okhumanities.org or mail correspondence to *Oklahoma HUMANITIES*, Attn.: Editor, 428 W. California Ave., Ste. 270, Oklahoma City, OK 73102.

GiveSmart

Oklahoma HUMANITIES magazine is just one of the many programs of the Oklahoma Humanities Council. OHC programs and grants strengthen communities, using the scholarship of the humanities disciplines to explore ideas. We're bringing people together through book groups, exhibits, film festivals, teacher institutes, and other public humanities events. If you value these forums for education, critical thinking, and productive civil discourse, please consider making a contribution to support them.

Gifts and Pledges of Cash: A gift of cash puts your contribution to work immediately, funding cultural programs across the state. A pledge of support over multiple years allows you to support the future growth of the Council at a higher level of commitment while enjoying a flexible payment method.

Unrestricted Giving: Financial support is necessary for the day-to-day operations of the Council. Unrestricted gifts support OHC operations and programs wherever the need is greatest.

Restricted Giving: Gifts may be directed to any of OHC's programs or special initiatives, such as Museum on Main Street or *Oklahoma* HUMANITIES magazine. These gifts allow you to support the programs most closely aligned with your personal interests.

Matching Gifts: Many businesses and corporations match dollar-for-dollar charitable contributions given by their employees and, in some cases, former employees. Please consult your employer to see if your gift is eligible.

Gifts of Stock: Transferring shares may help you make a larger gift to the Council and avoid capital gains tax on appreciated stocks.

Bequests and Planned Giving: One of the simplest ways to give to OHC is to name the Council in your will. Contact us for helpful information.

To make a contribution, use the donation envelope in this magazine or use the secure online service at our website: www.okhumanities.org/donate. For information on bequests, planned giving, and gifts of stock, contact Marketing and Development Director Traci Jinkens at (405) 235-0280.

View our complete profile at
GiveSmartOKC
Know More. Give More.
GiveSmartOKC.org



From the OHC Board of Trustees
DR. WILLIAM BRYANS, CHAIR

In my "Introduction to Public History" class, I show an episode from *The Simpsons*. Titled "Lisa the Iconoclast," it revolves around Lisa Simpson's essay on her hometown's namesake, a heroic Daniel Boone-like pioneer. Adroitly displaying the skills of a humanities scholar, she visits the local historical society and discovers that the town's founder was, early in his life, a cutthroat pirate and enemy of George Washington. When she reveals the truth in her essay for a class assignment, she receives a failing grade and is called a "PC thug." No one believes her, except for her father, Homer. The episode climaxes when Lisa, about to reveal the truth at the big community bicentennial celebration, hesitates and simply states that he was a great man, evoking enthusiastic applause from the crowd.

I show this episode because it touches on many of the issues embedded in public history—and the humanities. It provides an opportunity to discuss the role that memory plays in how people think and make use of the past. It also illustrates the power of strongly held historical assumptions, even if factually incorrect. The most interesting part of the class involves a discussion of whether Lisa did right by allowing the myth of the town's founder to survive rather than destroying it. I can raise these questions in a more scholarly way perhaps, but I doubt as effectively as Lisa does. This is what popular culture does best. It helps reveal the complexities of what it means to be a human being, often in a very vernacular, powerful way. Popular culture is a worthy topic to explore, as you'll see in this issue of our magazine.

This is my first communication through *Oklahoma* HUMANITIES as the new chair of OHC. I want to express how honored and humbled I am to serve the Council and its many supporters. Now more than ever, we need to be engaged in examining how the humanities shape our lives, and how they can guide our future. I look forward to sharing that journey with you.

Datebook

Hear | Read | See | Experience

Find more OHC events at: okhumanities.org/calendar

EXHIBIT

Chief J. B. Milam

Through April 14 (closed Jan.)
Cherokee Heritage Center, Park Hill
Information: 918| 456-6007



Chronicles the work of J. B. Milam, Chief of the Cherokee Nation who reconstructed tribal government and worked to repatriate culturally significant items to the tribe. cherokeeheritage.org

FORUM

Philosophy & Practice of Economic Policy in Okla.

March 8, 9 a.m. - Noon
CETES Conference Center
Cameron Univ., Lawton
Info: 580| 581-2496



Discussions will address philosophical underpinnings of southwest Oklahoma's economic system within the context of current economic trends and policy. cameron.edu/history_government

EXHIBIT

Diligwa Grand Opening
May 2, Park Hill
Cherokee Heritage Center
Info: 918| 456-6007



Grand opening of Diligwa outdoor living history village, a glimpse of Cherokee tribal life, c. 1710. Demonstrations on stick ball, basket making, flintknapping, blow guns, and more. Museum admission on May 2nd is free. cherokeeheritage.org

SYMPOSIUM

Image and Word

2013 Puterbaugh Festival of International Literature & Culture
April 9-12
The Univ. of Oklahoma, Norman
Information: 405| 325-0317



Theme explores the relationship between photography and literature. Events: keynote talks from Ethiopian writer Maaza Mengiste and international photographer Phil Borges; opening of the exhibit *Stirring the Fire: A Global Movement to Empower Women and Girls*; documentary film *10x10*; roundtable discussions; and more. worldliteraturetoday.com

Humanities Headlines

OHC WELCOMES NEW BOARD AND STAFF

The Oklahoma Humanities Council is proud to welcome Dr. Britton Gildersleeve of Tulsa and Darlene Williams of Jenks to our Board of Trustees, and Caroline Lowery to our staff.

Britton Gildersleeve holds a Ph.D. in creative writing and rhetorical studies from Oklahoma State University (OSU) and is the director emerita of the OSU Writing Project. She taught in the OSU English department and remains active in the National Writing Project. She serves on the Oklahoma Arts Institute, *Nimrod International Journal*, the Tulsa Holocaust Council, the John Hope Franklin Center for Reconciliation, and teaches in the continuing education program at The University of Tulsa.

Darlene Williams is CEO and owner of Skyworthy Interiors. She is President of Emmaus Ministries, where she serves as a Marketplace Chaplain. She is a graduate of Leadership Jenks and is a past president of After Hours Rotary Club in Tulsa. Her board memberships have included Tulsa Cerebral Palsy, Literacy & Evangelism, Tulsa Literacy Council, Tulsa Ballet Guild, Quota International, and United Way.

Caroline Lowery joined the OHC staff in November 2012 as Program Officer. Her roles include management of the Museum on Main Street program and grant administration. She received her B.A. in humanities with a minor in history from the University of Central Oklahoma in 2009. Her background includes two years of non-profit program management.

FREE Concert Kickoff
Smithsonian Traveling Exhibit Opening
March 16th, 7 p.m.
Idabel High School, 901 Lincoln Road, Idabel, OK

**New Harmonies:
Celebrating American
Roots Music**

Gail Davies • Red Dirt Rangers
Cheevers Toppah • Presley Byington
Byron Berline • Harold Aldridge
Towali United Methodist Church
New Dora Missionary Baptist Church
First Assembly of God of Haworth
Hutche Chuppa Indian Baptist

Presented by:
 OKLAHOMA HUMANITIES COUNCIL

Experience state history as told through Oklahoma's varied music traditions—Native American flute, African-American spirituals, Anglo-American gospel, old time fiddle, acoustic blues, folk, country, and Oklahoma's own "Red Dirt" sound.

SEE THE SMITHSONIAN IN OKLAHOMA! Your 7-page travel guide to the exhibit tour.



NEW HARMONIES: CELEBRATING AMERICAN ROOTS MUSIC

Beginning in March, the Smithsonian exhibit *New Harmonies: Celebrating American Roots Music* will make a ten-month tour of the state, giving Oklahomans a view of America's roots music traditions. The Oklahoma Humanities Council partners with the Smithsonian Institution to present Museum on Main Street, bringing museum-quality exhibits to small communities.

Competition is stiff and only six locales in Oklahoma are chosen to host each traveling exhibit. Here and on the next several pages you'll find a brief description of *New Harmonies*, an essay on Oklahoma music traditions by our distinguished state scholar, and info on where you can see the exhibit. Read more at: MuseumOnMainStreet.org/NewHarmonies

LINER NOTES – ABOUT THE EXHIBIT

American roots music rises out of America's story, carrying our history and cultural identity in its songs. It's the story of immigrants, slaves, and Native Americans. The distinct cultural identities of these people are carried in song—both sacred and secular. Their music tracks the unique history of many peoples reshaping each other into one incredibly diverse and complex group—Americans. Their music is the roots of American music, which would eventually evolve into jazz, bluegrass,

rhythm and blues, rock and roll, rap, and more. The refrains of the exhibit note the ongoing cultural process that makes America the birthplace of more music than any place on earth. *New Harmonies* provides toe-tapping audio and a fascinating display of America's multi-cultural exchange—from "Yankee Doodle Dandy" to hip-hop music—with familiar songs, instruments, records, photographs, and memorabilia.



TEACHERS! Watch for info on our *New Harmonies*-themed teacher institutes. Check our webpage often for developing details. okhumanities.org/museum-on-main-street



Smithsonian
Institution

New Harmonies: Celebrating American Roots Music is part of Museum on Main Street, a collaboration between the Smithsonian Institution and the Oklahoma Humanities Council. Support has been provided by the United States Congress. Oklahoma programming is supported by BancFirst; Bank of Commerce; Beaver Express Service; The Boeing Company; Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma; E. P. & Roberta L. Kirschner Foundation; University of Oklahoma Press; Weyerhaeuser Giving Fund; and the National Endowment for the Humanities.



Image credits: (clockwise from top) Woody Guthrie, photo by Robert C. Malone, Smithsonian Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives and Collections. Powwow 2005, photo by Walter Larrimore, National Museum of the American Indian. Roy Acuff performs at the Grand Ole Opry, 1939, courtesy Grand Old Opry Archives.

CELEBRATING AMERICAN ROOTS MUSIC

GIG #1: IDABEL

Sponsor: Idabel Regional Arts Council
Venue: Museum of the Red River
812 E. Lincoln Rd. • (580) 286-3616
March 16 – April 27



"Acro," the official State Dinosaur

HEADLINER: As the "Dogwood Capital of Oklahoma," Idabel is the perfect place to catch the *New Harmonies* exhibit and springtime blossoms in one trip. The Museum of the Red River, Idabel's host site for *New Harmonies*, is home to *Acrocantnosaurus atokensis*, the official State Dinosaur. A full-size cast of the skeleton (nearly forty feet long) is on display, as well as regional natural history specimens and artifacts from around the world.

PLAY LIST: Idabel is in the heart of Oklahoma timber country and the nearby Red Slough Wildlife Refuge is premier birding territory with over 300 species of birds. Beavers Bend State Park, just a short drive away, is a nature lover's paradise—towering trees, crystal waters, and mountainous terrain—with a wide variety of activities: fishing, biking, canoeing, camping, hiking, golf, and more. The annual Dogwood Days Festival takes place on the first Saturday in April and features a 5K run, crafts, children's games, live entertainment, a barbeque cook-off, and more. Don't forget your walking shoes!

BETWEEN SETS: The locals have dubbed AJ's Steak & Pasta "the best restaurant in town." Chef-owner Hung Pham Vo, former personal chef to Lady Bird Johnson, will serve up a burger and fries or a ribeye steak fit for ... well ... a First Lady. Java Dave's Coffee will kick-start your morning. For comfort food, try Gemini Coffee Shop, known for their homemade-biscuit breakfast and daily plate lunch specials.

TUNES: Don't miss the free concert kickoff for the statewide *New Harmonies* exhibit tour at Idabel High School, March 16, 7 p.m. (see ad on page 6). You'll also find a country showdown and other live entertainment during the Dogwood Days Festival.



Barnes Stevenson House

New Harmonies

Celebrating Oklahoma Roots Music

By Hugh Foley

Sampling the tracks of Oklahoma music.
An introduction to the Smithsonian exhibit tour.

Along with drama, architecture, foodways, literature, and visual arts, music is a key way that humans express our joys, sorrows, spiritual pursuits, and collective memories. By delving into a region's music, we learn more about the people who live and have lived in that place. By extension, we learn about the commonalities we share as people, as well as understand more about our individual cultural identities.

"Roots music" is the original music of ethnic America, often referred to as folk music but expanded to describe the cross-cultural influences and individualistic musical styles prominent in American music history. The Smithsonian exhibition of *New Harmonies: Celebrating American Roots Music* not only teaches us about the traditional music of the United States and its impact on contemporary popular music but also allows Oklahomans to learn more about the tremendous impact the state's musicians have had on the history of traditional American roots music. Nearly every aspect of the exhibit can be connected in some way to Oklahoma musicians.

With Oklahoma's unique history of American Indian, African-American, and Anglo-American settlement, and the experiences of its residents through times of economic hardship and fruition, the state's musicians not only make us tap our toes, dance, or sing along, they also provide a multi-faceted view into the state's historic evolution from pre-statehood to the present.

SACRED TRADITIONS

As a result of the varied migration of First Nations people to the state, a vast catalog of American Indian music is associated with Oklahoma music history. Some of the very first recordings in state history are of American Indian music. Austrian ethnomusicologist Erich von Hornbostel recorded about forty Pawnee songs in 1906. Native American ceremonial songs are still being sung around Indian Country, including Kiowa Gourd Dance or Black Leggings songs, Wichita Ghost Dance songs, Seneca Green Corn songs, Caddo Turkey Dance songs, and more.

An important part of the story of Oklahoma tribes is the connection between Southeastern tribes and the slaves of African descent who were removed with those tribes. As

GIG #2: POTEAU

Sponsor: LeFlore County Historical Society
 Venue: Patrick Lynch Public Library
 208 S. McKenna • (918) 647-9330
 May 4 – June 15



PHOTOS: ERIC STANDRIDGE

Cavanal Hill

HEADLINER: Poteau residents have a memorable way to help you pronounce the name of their town: just think of what you say when you stub your toe: “Oh, my po toe!” Currently under construction, the Patrick Lynch Public Library will exhibit *New Harmonies* in the new 21,000 square-foot, state-of-the-art facility.

PLAY LIST: Poteau has sites and sights for all. As the gateway to the Ouachita and Kiamichi Mountains, outdoor activities abound, from bass fishing to the annual Balloonfest in October. Poteau’s self-guided historic walking tour takes you past shopping, antiques, restaurants, and eight buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Cavanal Hill, billed as the “World’s Highest Hill,” has panoramic views of the Poteau River valley from its 1,999-ft. vantage. For a bit of nostalgia, pile the kids in the car for a movie at the Tower Drive-in. Or bring your board and catch some air at the 12,000 square-foot Skatepark on Broadway.

BETWEEN SETS: With a name like The Coffee Cup, we bet you can guess what’s on the menu: a full-service coffee, tea, and espresso menu, along with sandwiches, soups, salads, scones, and desserts. Make a day of eating breakfast by stopping in at Beano’s for their “country breakfast” and Blondie’s for biscuits and chocolate gravy—mmm, mmm. As the winner of the 2000 Golden Fork Award for the best steaks in the U.S., Warehouse Willie’s is the place to find the finest beef and other specialties with a Cajun flair.

TUNES: Live music events will include: the Poteau Music Festival, *Fiesta en el Centro* (Party Downtown), Musical Murder Mystery, a concert at the restored Old Lowery Hotel, Native American dancers, and venues featuring country, gospel, and African Spiritual music. Contact the sponsor above for dates and info.

October Balloonfest



Skatepark on Broadway



Lowell Fulson combined electric urban blues with horn sections to create “uptown blues” (courtesy Universal Music Group Development). Wanda Jackson album released in 2011 (courtesy Universal Music Group Development).

the Cherokee, Choctaw, Muscogee (Creek), Seminole, and Chickasaw were forced to migrate to Indian Territory beginning in the 1820s, some tribal members brought slaves who endured the same “trail of tears” as the owners they accompanied. As a result, Oklahoma religious traditions are infused with the sacred ceremonial music of American Indians, the deeply-felt spirituals of African Americans, and gospel music evolving out of the Euro-American South. For instance, Muscogee (Creek) hymns developed out of tri-cultural interactions. The hymns have the song structure and Christian ethos of Scottish missionaries, the melodies of African-American spirituals, and lyrics in the Muscogee (Creek) language, which often have dual meanings related to both the Christian experience and the pain of removal. The songs are still sung today in rural Muscogee (Creek) and Seminole Baptist and Methodist churches, echoing Oklahoma’s multi-cultural history.

Some of the deepest, most significant African-American spirituals have strong connections to the state. These spirituals emerged out of the American South as one of the sole musical expressions allowed by slave masters, who forbade all African instruments (such as the Nigerian “talking drum”) by which slaves could communicate with one another over distances. Often the spirituals were sung to send messages to relatives or friends on adjoining plantations.

The authenticity and origin of spirituals are seldom credited to individuals; however, three important African-American spirituals are believed to have been first documented before 1862 via Wallis Willis and “Aunt” Minerva Willis, slaves on a large plantation near Doaksville in the Choctaw Nation. The Willis family sang “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,” “Steal Away to Jesus,” and “I’m A’Rollin’” in the cotton fields of Reverend Alexander Reid, superintendent of a Choctaw boarding school. Reid wrote down the words and music, and then forwarded the transcriptions to the Jubilee Singers at Fisk University in Nashville, who sang the spirituals on a tour of the U.S. and Europe beginning in 1871. The popularity of “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot” extended to the biggest names in American popular music, from Duke Ellington to Johnny Cash, who made their own recordings of the ubiquitous spiritual.

Prominent Southern gospel composer Albert E. Brumley was born near Spiro, Oklahoma, and, in 1932, composed one

GIG #3: HOBART

Sponsor: Gen. Tommy Franks Leadership Inst. & Museum
 Location: The Stanley Building
 300 S. Washington • (580) 726-5900
 June 22 – August 3



Stanley Building

PHOTO: STEPHEN BOYD

HEADLINER: True to its namesake, the General Tommy Franks Leadership Institute & Museum (GTFLIM) focuses on leadership, patriotism, and service. GTFLIM will host the *New Harmonies* exhibit in its historic Stanley Building. Military music will have a particular emphasis at this *New Harmonies* venue.

PLAY LIST: With a southern view of the Wichita and Quartz Mountains, Hobart boasts some of the most beautiful sunsets anywhere. The granite terrain of nearby Quartz Mountain State Park makes a great destination for rock climbing and mountain biking. You can wet a line at three area lakes—Tom Steed, Rocky, and Hunter. Golfers can hit the Municipal Golf Course while shoppers wend their way through boutiques and antique shops in the downtown district. The Shortgrass Playhouse has great community theater. But watch out—the place is haunted.

BETWEEN SETS: Locals call Big-A-Burger “the best little burger joint around.” If you’re hankering for Tex-Mex, head to Nuevo-Leon Mexican Restaurant or Casa Mae Mexican Dining. Kozy Diner, a true “cowboy” café, is the place to indulge in an Oklahoma tradition: chicken fried steak. Other home-style favorites include salmon patties, pinto beans, burgers, fries—and pie! Ooowee!

TUNES: Coinciding nicely with the *New Harmonies* run is the annual Quartz Mountain Music Festival, July 20-29, featuring three classical music concerts. If you’re in Hobart for Memorial Day weekend, don’t miss GTFLIM’s Celebration of Freedom. Activities include a quilt show, parade, and motorcycle poker run (yes, it’s a combination poker game and motorcycle ride)—and there’s always live music. Other music events are planned, so contact the sponsor above for details.



Kiowa County Museum

PHOTO: WARREN MARTIN



Kiowa powwow

PHOTO: STEPHEN BOYD



Photos, left to right: The Musical Brownies, a Muscogee (Creek) country group from Okmulgee, played from the late 1940s through the 1970s (courtesy Smiley Barnett). Muskogee native Jay McShann (1916-2006) was a master of boogie woogie, blues, and jazz piano (Hugh Foley Collection). This unknown duo, photographed in Floris in the 1920s, typifies early roots music with a lead fiddler and a rhythm guitarist “seconding” or backing up the leader (Hugh Foley Collection). The Willis Brothers honky tonk band (Hugh Foley Collection). Albert E. Brumley, born near Spiro, is the composer of “I’ll Fly Away,” one of the best known gospel songs of all time (courtesy Oklahoma Music Hall of Fame).

of the best-known gospel songs in American history, “I’ll Fly Away.” Brumley, perhaps the preeminent gospel songwriter of the twentieth century, published over 600 songs, including the popular gospel tunes “Turn Your Radio On” and “Jesus, Hold My Hand.”

THE BLUES

Blues music of the pre- and post-slavery South expressed the heartache and hardship of human oppression. The blues has influenced jazz, R&B, rock, and rap music, with some of its earliest performers and players hailing from Oklahoma. Emerging from field hollers, work songs, and spirituals of slaves in Indian Territory and early-statehood Oklahoma, people who could play and sing the blues flourished.

As a result of the thriving economic environment of all-black towns and major black business districts in Tulsa (Greenwood), Oklahoma City (Deep Deuce), and Muskogee (South Second) after the Civil War, viable audiences existed for black entertainers throughout the state. Ragtime pianist Scott Joplin performed his opera *A Guest of Honor* in Oklahoma City in 1903, and the great Mississippi blues man Robert Johnson is documented as having played in the all-black town of Taft. The first known commercially printed twelve-bar blues in music history, “Dallas Blues,” was published in Oklahoma City by Hart Wand in March 1912, three months before W.C. Handy’s more famous “The Memphis Blues.”

Traveling territory bands of the 1920s, such as the Oklahoma City Blue Devils and Mighty Clouds of Joy, brought the hot-riffing, blues-influenced jazz music of the Southwest to black audiences in Oklahoma. The style may have found its summit in Kansas City, but many of its primary musicians came from Oklahoma, including Jimmy Rushing, Walter Page, Don Byas, and Claude Williams. Touring bands often picked up extremely capable Oklahoma musicians seeking better performance opportunities. Jay McShann left his native Muskogee and headed to Kansas City, the cauldron of



GIG #4: FREDERICK

Sponsor: Frederick Arts & Humanities Council
 Venue: Lois Long Center, Ramona Theatre
 114 S. 9th St. • (580) 305-5689
 August 10 – September 21

Midwestern jazz. Not only is he credited with introducing the world to the great jazz saxophonist Charlie Parker, McShann is a bridge from the jazz age to the R&B era of the 1940s. His hits foreshadowed additional blues successes by Oklahomans Roy Milton, Joe Liggins, Lowell Fulson, and Robert Jeffrey. Even the most ardent of music fans are usually unaware that the “father of funk guitar,” Jimmy Nolen, whose fame grew from playing “chicken scratch” guitar on some of funk king James Brown’s primary recordings, is a native Oklahoman.

By the 1950s and 1960s, many Tulsa musicians embraced the blues with tremendous success, including Flash Terry, Leon Russell, J.J. Cale, Junior Markham, and Elvin Bishop. In the 1970s, Oklahomans such as Steve Gaines (who contributed to the resuscitation of Lynyrd Skynyrd) and Jesse Ed Davis (who recorded with Taj Mahal, John Lennon, Eric Clapton, and B.B. King) kept the state’s blues tradition in the international spotlight. Today, Oklahoma’s best-known practitioner of blues-based roots music is Broken Arrow resident J.D. McPherson, whose 2012 blues and rockabilly release on Rounder Records, *Signs and Signifiers*, reached number one on the national Americana Airplay chart.

FIDDLES AND FOLKSONGS

The oldest Anglo-American musical forms migrated into Oklahoma after the Civil War when people streamed into the territories looking for opportunities in business, agriculture, and, eventually, oil. This additional layer of music brought by Irish, English, and Scottish immigrants consisted of fiddle dance tunes—reels, jigs, schottisches, and strathspeys—and formed the basis for old time country music and bluegrass.

Emerging from the traditions of Anglo-Celtic ballads and string band music is the best known Anglo-American folksinger—period: Woody Guthrie. Born in Okemah, Oklahoma, in 1912, Guthrie was internationally recognized and lauded for his 1,400-plus folksongs. He wrote songs about the Oklahoma Dust Bowl and the Great Depression, as well as children’s songs, ballads about tragic events, celebrations of notable (and sometimes notorious) figures, and wry observations on the ironies of life. Guthrie’s work has been the wellspring for several books about his life, performances and recordings of his songs by modern artists, and the inspiration for the annual Woody Guthrie Free Folk Festival each July in Okemah. To celebrate the 100th anniversary of Guthrie’s birth, the Kaiser Foundation announced that it purchased the Woody Guthrie Archives and is relocating the collection to Tulsa.



PHOTO: SHARON BENNETT

Concert in Pioneer Townsite

HEADLINER: The restored Ramona Theatre, once called the “showplace of the Southwest,” is the venue for Frederick’s *New Harmonies* gig. Built in 1929, the Mediterranean-style theatre hosts musicals and performances throughout the year.

PLAY LIST: Step back in time with a visit to the Pioneer Heritage Townsite Center. The general store, school, church, Frisco Depot, working windmill, blacksmith shop, and farm house represent life on the plains in the 1920s. The newest exhibit hails the exploits of Temple and Bud Abernathy (brothers, aged nine and six), who traveled cross country on horseback—alone—to meet President Teddy Roosevelt. Nature lovers will enjoy Hackberry Flat Wildlife Management Area, 7,120 acres of restored wetlands for bird-watching and conservation of prairie and migratory bird species.

BETWEEN SETS: It’s sure to be a scorcher during Frederick’s *New Harmonies* run, so cool off with an ice cream treat at Cold Front Express. When hunger sets in, dive into the Bomber Inn for pancakes and hash browns, fried onion cheeseburgers, or something they call “Kitty Chicken.” Los Arcos Mexican Restaurant is a local favorite thanks to the authentic family recipes from owner Francisco Luna. Melissa’s Dine-In has a kid’s menu and plenty to please the grownups: burgers, salads, and plate lunches.

TUNES: The Frederick Arts and Humanities Council will host music performances at the Ramona Theatre each Saturday night during the exhibit stay. Lunch-time concerts in the park are also planned. For details, contact the Council at the phone number above or the Chamber of Commerce at: (580) 335-2126.

PHOTO: RICHARD TOMLINSON



Ramona Theatre



PHOTO: VALERIE CLAYTON

Abernathy Bros. statue

GIG # 5: EL RENO

Sponsor: Redlands Community College
Venue: RCC Fine Arts Gallery
1300 S. Country Club Rd. • (405) 422-1485
September 28 – November 9



Heritage Express Trolley

HEADLINER: El Reno sits at the crossroads of Route 66 and the Chisholm Trail. Exhibit host Redlands Community College is situated near Crimson Creek Golf Course and Lake El Reno.

PLAY LIST: The Heritage Express Trolley is the only rail-based trolley in the state and runs from Heritage Park through stops in the downtown area. While you're at the Park, take in the Canadian County Historical Museum, housed in the fully-restored Rock Island Depot. The grounds encompass many historic buildings, including the first Red Cross Canteen in the nation. Nearby Fort Reno, an Indian Territory military fort, has fifteen buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Places. For a truly novel experience, sign up for one of their ghost tours. Ooo, scary.

BETWEEN SETS: You're bound to find a good burger when a town is famed for the world's largest fried onion burger—a hefty 800-pound phenom. El Reno's "Fried Onion Burger Day" festival attracts 25,000 people in May of each year. For a slightly smaller version, check out Sid's Diner, Johnnie's Grill, or Robert's Grill. All three establishments claim to be the originator—and best—of the noble concoction that fuses fried onion ribbons with thin meat patties, sizzled to drippy, mouthwatering goodness. There are many terrific eateries in town serving breakfast, sweet bakery treats, and down-home comfort food.

TUNES: Planned performances include ragtime music from pianist Nita Twyman; an exhibit on jazz artist Brun Campbell, known as the "The Ragtime Kid"; Cheyenne and Arapaho tribal dancers and singers; and campfire performances at Historic Fort Reno. Contact the sponsor above for dates and info.



Heritage Arts Festival parade

PHOTOS: REDLANDS COMMUNITY COLLEGE

OKLAHOMA "COUNTRY"

Both the rural nature of the state and the poverty confronted by its residents favored the development of the musical genre of blues. But, even more so, this environment created an astounding number of contributors to the field of American country music. Oklahoma's high percentage of tenant farmers and sharecroppers forced many to pursue music as both inexpensive, self-made entertainment and an avenue for leaving poverty.

A number of Oklahoma-based musicians helped turn country music into a profession, including Otto Gray and His Oklahoma Cowboys, Gene Autry, Bob Wills, and Hank Thompson. They often employed local Oklahoma musicians or gave first breaks to promising talent. Bob Wills' "Texas Playboys" were mostly Oklahomans. Future pop country star Patti Page and rockabilly queen Wanda Jackson got their first major breaks on local radio. Children in rural areas who hoped for careers in music were inspired by broadcasts of Otto Gray over KRFU (Bristow), Johnny Bond on WKY (Oklahoma City), and Gene Autry and Bob Wills on KVOO (Tulsa).

Virtually every sub-genre of country music can attribute substantial elements of its growth to Oklahomans or musicians associated with Oklahoma, including old-time fiddlers (Henry Gilliland), singing cowboys (Gene Autry) and cowboy bands (Otto Gray), Western swing (Spade Cooley, Bob Wills, and Bob Dunn), bluegrass (Byron Berline), honky tonk (Willis Brothers), country pop (Roger Miller), progressive or "outlaw country" (Ray Wylie Hubbard), "Bakersfield Sound" (Tommy Collins and Bonnie Owens), "Nashville Sound" or pop country (Reba McEntire, Garth Brooks, Toby Keith, and Vince Gill), alternative

Photo at top: Patti Page album cover (courtesy Universal Music Group Development). Bottom, left to right: Yellowhammer, one of Oklahoma's best-known powwow singing groups, at the 2012 Sac and Fox Nation of Oklahoma Powwow (Hugh Foley Collection). Carrie Underwood waving to sold-out crowd at the Royal Albert Hall in London (courtesy carrieunderwoodofficial.com). Mariachi group at the 2009 Oklahoma Folklife Festival, Oklahoma History Center (Hugh Foley Collection).



country (Kelly Willis, Cody Canada, and Mike McClure), and the Red Dirt movement (Bob Childers, Tom Skinner, Jimmy LaFave, Greg Jacobs, the Red Dirt Rangers, and John Fullbright). Oklahoma’s contributions to the country music genre are monumental and historic, and the firmament of Nashville’s country music continues to be lit with new quasars like Carrie Underwood, Joe Don Rooney of Rascal Flatts, Blake Shelton, and Miranda Lambert.

CONTEMPORARY DIVERSITY

While Hispanic music is a significant part of the Smithsonian’s exhibition on American roots music, the full impact of the rise in Oklahoma’s Mexican-American population has yet to be fully documented, outside of jazz guitarist Benny Garcia, guitarist extraordinaire Edgar Cruz, and a strong mariachi band tradition in Tulsa and Oklahoma City. Polka music brought by eastern Europeans is also considered American roots music and can easily be heard in Yukon, Oklahoma, at annual Czech festivals or on weekends in community dance halls. Contemporary American Indian music is highlighted by Grammy® nominee Cheevers Toppah (Kiowa/Navajo), recognized as 2011’s “Rising Star” by the Oklahoma Music Hall of Fame in Muskogee. Several intertribal powwow drum groups have become well known, too, such as Yellowhammer, Young Bird, Cozad, and Young Buffalo Horse Singers. And one can only imagine what will surface musically from Oklahoma’s cultural environment and new immigrant populations from Asia, Africa, and the Middle East.

The familiarity and appreciation of music is one thing we all have in common. It’s an engaging way to learn about the varied traditions of our shared history. I invite you to see the Smithsonian’s *New Harmonies* exhibition, to learn more about Oklahoma’s significant influence on American roots music and the experiences—of our state and of our nation—that have shaped the music we enjoy.

Dr. Hugh Foley is a professor of fine arts at Rogers State University in Claremore and author of the *Oklahoma Music Guide* (second edition forthcoming from New Forums Press, 2013). His writing on Oklahoma music and American Indian history has been published in numerous professional forums. His award-winning documentary videos have aired nationally on public television and at numerous film festivals, academic conferences, and public presentations.



GIG #6: ALVA

Sponsor & Venue: Graceful Arts Center
523 Barnes St. • (580) 327-7649
November 16 – January 4



Northwestern Oklahoma State University choir

HEADLINER: Alva is located near Great Salt Plains Lake, one of the largest inland salt lakes in the U.S. Hosting *New Harmonies* is Graceful Arts Gallery and Studios, which features artwork from local, regional, and national artists, and a variety of cultural events.

PLAY LIST: From sand dunes to gypsum caves, there is wide diversity in terrain and habitats near Alva. The Great Salt Plains National Wildlife Refuge has 11,000 acres of white salt flats with protected land for whooping cranes, eagles, and the endangered Interior Least Tern. Satisfy your inner spelunker while exploring the underground caves of Alabaster Caverns State Park (bats included). And for rip-roarin’ off-roading fun, ride the dunes at Little Sahara State Park. Alva’s two city parks are great for an in-town play date.

BETWEEN SETS: Ready for lunch? Stop in at the Sandwich Shoppe on Alva’s downtown square for sandwiches, soups, kettle style chips, and green tea. Champs is a favorite for burgers and chicken fried steak. For a serious barbeque attack, try the Smok-Shak, a short drive away in Ingersoll. You’ll find hickory-smoked ribs, brisket, links, and chicken served with choices of handcut fries, okra, coleslaw, baked beans, potato salad, onion rings ... and every meal comes with homemade cobbler. Better save this place for *after* you’ve seen the exhibit.

TUNES: During the First Friday Art Walk, December 6, choral groups will perform “Prairie Style Christmas in Song” at 6 p.m. On November 19, Graceful Arts Center will host “Cowboy Songs and Lecture” at 7:00 p.m. Dr. Shawn Holliday, NWOSU, will discuss the music history of the region and will perform songs that originated with cowboy camps that drove cattle across Oklahoma. For information on events, visit: www.gracefulartscenter.org.



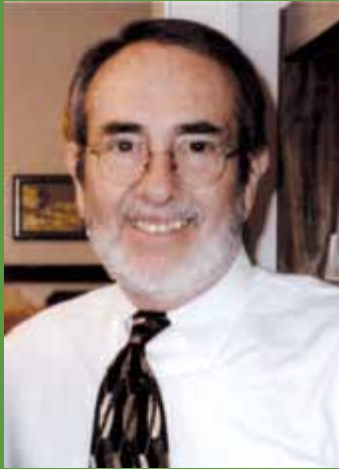
NWOSU Ranger bronze statue by Harold Holden

PHOTOS: VALERIE CASE



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POPULAR CULTURE: America's Mirror

An Introduction to Our Issue

By Peter C. Rollins

One of the best ways for America to understand itself is by looking into the mirror of popular culture. Popular culture includes the songs we play, the commercials we absorb, the news we encounter on our computers and television screens and in our cars. We retain these images and messages—whether we want to or not.

Some images seem harmless. Most of us can remember commercials from our youth for department stores, air conditioning companies, and new electronic gizmos. As a Boston native, I remember jingles about “Christmas shopping at Robert Hall” or ads touting “Crosley television sets,” even though my 1950s family would never have bought anything other than a Magnavox.

Other images are less benign. Twenty minutes into the 2012 premiere of the Batman summer sequel, *The Dark Knight*, a heavily-armed James Holmes announced himself to be the “Joker” from the previous installment and started shooting into the audience, killing twelve and wounding fifty-nine others. The tragedy in Colorado was so egregious that even movie magnate Harvey Weinstein—producer of such violent films as *Pulp Fiction* and *Kill Bill*—called for a “summit meeting” of filmmakers to discuss the ethical responsibilities of their popular art.

Incidents like this make us sit up and take notice of popular culture, to be aware of its messages, and we ask: *What is popular culture saying about us? What does it tell us about who we are?* A field of scholarly study blossomed in the twentieth century to study just that.

Of course, critical focus on popular culture hasn't always received the same level of respect that it does now. As far back as 1915, Pulitzer Prize-winning critic Van Wyck Brooks deplored the gap between “highbrow” and “lowbrow” cultures and rebuked his peers for restricting their focus to the work of elite writers and composers—thereby neglecting the artistry of jazz and popular literary genres like detective

fiction. Few responded to this clarion call until the late 1960s when Ray Browne, Russell Nye, and Marshall Fishwick organized the Popular Culture Association (PCA), a national group of scholars who believed in “cultural democracy”: that people have a right to enjoy any cultural product they select to consume, and that scholars should study these arts to analyze the messages they transmit to society. *The Journal of Popular Culture* was an offspring of this movement and PCA scholars, in the early days, were often disparaged for studying popular literature, music, film, and television. Fast forward to 2012 when every major scholarly humanities organization and every major university press has endorsed popular culture studies.

Over the years, I have participated in a number of Oklahoma Humanities Council public programs that focus on the popular. As early as 1975, I gave a slide/lecture presentation on the “Images of the Criminal Justice System.” The study revealed that television crime dramas affect how citizens interact with the police and justice systems. More specifically, I discovered the “Perry Mason Syndrome”: Ordinary citizens serving on jury duty often expect the prosecutor to force the accused to confess during cross examination, in a manner seen weekly on *Perry Mason*. The popular program began in the 1930s and, according to the Museum of Broadcast Communications, remains the longest running lawyer series in American television history. Here was a model case of the popular arts distorting public perceptions and a good example of what the scholar can do to promote visual literacy—for citizens today need to know how to interpret visual and aural texts. Turning to more recent TV and the successful CSI franchise, what might we learn from studying those fictional crime labs that

continued on page 23

Dr. Peter C. Rollins is Professor Emeritus of English and American/Film Studies, Oklahoma State University, and author of several award-winning books, including two volumes honored with the Popular Culture Association's Ray and Pat Browne Award: *Why We Fought: America's Wars as Film and History* (2008) and *Hollywood's White House: The American Presidency in Film and History* (2003). His films have been featured on PBS and the Discovery Channel. Dr. Rollins' many recognitions include the 2011 Oklahoma Humanities Award, OHC's highest honor, presented for significant contributions to the understanding of the humanities in Oklahoma.



Ty Cobb baseball card, 1912.



Poster for Long Brons, Pawnee Bill, and May Lillie play, *Madeline of Fort Reno*, c. 1897.



Woodie Guthrie seated with guitar, 1943.



Poster for the silent film *Saturday Night*, 1922. Images, Library of Congress.

Scarlett Johansson in a Catsuit

Superhero or Super Cliché?

BY MARC DIPALO



How female
superheroes shape
contemporary culture
and values.



Even before *The Avengers* film was released in summer 2012 to become one of the most profitable and popular films ever made, there was discussion of what role Scarlett Johansson's backside would play in the film. The early promotional posters featured the male heroes standing heroically on a Manhattan street, ready to face down an army of invading aliens. In contrast, Johansson, one of the biggest stars in the film, occupied the rear of the battle formation and stood showing off her perfect posterior. There was some question, based on images such as these, whether the film would deal fairly with her character, Black Widow, or if she would be overshadowed by the charisma, heroism, and runaway popularity of the Hulk, Captain America, Iron Man, Hawkeye, Thor, and Nick Fury.

Noticing the absurdity of the promotional images, artist Kevin Bolk drew a spoof poster on deviantART.com, comically showing all the male heroes pointing their backsides suggestively outward while only Black Widow faced forward, striking a combat pose. The picture demonstrated that turnabout is fair play, while underscoring just how much cheesecake Johansson was expected to offer up to the movie-going public. Handsome and sculpted as her male co-stars were, they were allowed to be attractive while behaving as their characters naturally would. She was not. Admittedly, the comic book version of Black Widow is only an occasional member of *The Avengers* and a supporting character in *Daredevil* and *Iron Man*, but she tends to be a beautiful, tough, heroic, morally complex character.

When *The Avengers* was released, some fans and critics were surprised that Johansson's character had the third most screen time of any Avenger, following Captain America and Iron Man. She beat handily the total screen time of Hulk and Thor. Black Widow was also a far more complex personality than she was

in her previous, thankless femme fatale appearance in *Iron Man 2*. She was, in many ways, a strong and likeable character despite being in a male-dominated ensemble action film. Her dialogue hints at emotional depth, a tragic past, and offers viewers hope that she will grow still more interesting and centrally important in sequels. Fans of the character argued that feminists could thank writer-director Joss Whedon, creator of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, for offering up an interesting female character in an action movie.

Most female characters in Marvel/DC movies are dull damsels in distress, rescued by the superheroes multiple times in the same film. The few superheroines featured in these films tend to be emotionless fighting machines in sexy catsuits who are equally frustrating and hard to relate to because they are such one-dimensional characters—even if they impress audiences with dramatic karate fights and gun battles with supervillains. Indeed, Whedon's Black Widow is a better heroic character than the film incarnations of Invisible Woman in *Fantastic Four* and Elektra in *Daredevil*, and she demands more respect than civilian characters like Mary Jane Watson in *Spider-Man*, Rachel Dawes in *The Dark Knight Trilogy*, and pretty much all of the James Bond girls (yes, the film franchise inspired *James Bond* comic books, too).

But even with Black Widow's new depth of character, Johansson's derriere was indeed on prominent display in at least one scene. The other two women in the film were also costumed provocatively. Agent Maria Hill (Cobie Smulders), like Black Widow, spent her film time slinking about in a skin-tight catsuit, while Oscar-winner Gwyneth Paltrow as Pepper Potts was relegated to a few brief scenes bouncing around in Daisy Duke shorts.

Like a classic Gothic damsel in distress, Black Widow is backhanded by the Hulk and spends an extended amount of time cowering and running from him. The villain, Loki, verbally abuses her.

Neither of these portrayals commands the character respect.

Why is any of this important?

It is important because a popular film has the potential to shape the opinions and emotions of millions of people, including their perceptions of women as human beings, as heroes, and as sexually autonomous individuals. A lot of online discussion and gossip magazine ink around this film was dedicated to describing Johansson's crash vegan diet, which enabled her to sculpt her body to the form-fitting black catsuit. If one of the biggest stars in the world is featured in a film this popular—primarily as a damsel in distress, a sex object, and a victim of physical and verbal abuse—then one must consider the consequences of the portrayal, especially if the film seems to validate this deplorable treatment of the character.

Now, to be fair, one might argue that the Hulk is out of control when he hits Black Widow, and Loki is the villain, so Whedon is making a potentially instructive statement about the dangers of male rage and the horrors of male-on-female violence. But male fans of superhero narratives often rant in online chat rooms about "political correctness run amok." Their standard line for critics—other than "It is just entertainment; take a chill pill!"—is that superheroes, male and female, are idealized as physically perfect specimens and should have athletic, powerful, sexy bodies.

Significantly, superheroes are extraordinarily popular role models—perhaps more so than ever—and they can mean many different things to different people. Children often see superheroes as the adults they hope to grow up to be. Some people see superheroes as replacements for gods and angels. Still others look to superheroes as moral and/or physical paradigms. Some enjoy the romanticism of superhero adventures and wish they themselves could perform feats of heroism. Superheroes can take on all these meanings, and more. But there are, arguably, more ways they can inspire and intrigue male fans than female fans because there are far fewer female

Marc DiPaolo is Assistant Professor of English and Film at Oklahoma City University. He is the author of *War Politics and Superheroes* (CHOICE Outstanding Academic Title 2011) and *Emma Adapted* (2007). He has written essays for *A Century of the Marx Brothers*, *Beyond Adaptation*, and *The Encyclopedia of Religion in Film*. He is co-editor of the upcoming book *Devised and Directed* by Mike Leigh (2013).


superheroes, and the ones we do have tend to be problematic portrayals or merely supporting characters. One defender of female superheroes is Gerard Jones, who wrote in his book *Killing Monsters: Why Children Need Fantasy, Super Heroes, and Make-Believe Violence* (2003):

The current generation of adolescent boys love active, powerful, threatening female figures—often as protagonists and often ... as a heroic surrogate for the boy himself.... Girls have long been known to identify with male fantasy figures. Now it looks as though young boys are finally learning the same art.... By combining the “frailties” normally allowed to women in commercial entertainment with the power and anger allowed men, [female superheroes] become much more complete characters.

Some of the best of these female protagonists include Kitty Pryde of the *X-Men* and *Excalibur*, Psi-Division Judge Cassandra Anderson from *Judge Dredd*, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, and Xena: Warrior Princess. It should be noted, however, that the Invisible Woman, Lois Lane, Batgirl, Catwoman, and Rogue from the *X-Men* can be excellent or dreadful comic book characters depending on how they are written and how they are drawn. Usually these women are rescued more often than they should be and are sometimes depicted as being annoying, unintelligent, or over-emotional. Many of them have been killed off, married off, or prematurely written out of their respective serial narratives. They are among the few classic characters we have to work with, though, and are sometimes truly excellent characters. But when these characters are, functionally, men in women’s clothing or objectified fantasies, then they are no longer worthy of being role models for (or fictional surrogates of) real-world women.

Part of the problem is, as much as one may celebrate, say, the acting ability of Anne Hathaway or Michelle Pfeiffer as Catwoman in *The Dark Knight Rises* or *Batman Returns*, Catwoman is *not* the

main character. Batman is. As morally ambiguous and fascinating as Catwoman is, she is often portrayed as either mentally unhinged or evil, and Batman is the “good guy.” He’s the one with all the action figures and posters, and he has eight monthly comic books to Catwoman’s one. This begs the question: Can a woman of any age, let alone an impressionable young girl looking for a role model, find anything worthwhile to relate to? Is there a lesson other than female superheroes have perfect physiques? That superheroines are sometimes victims and sometimes powerful—and sometimes evil or dangerous?



Wonder Woman had her heyday during World War II, when Rosie the Riveter showed women that strength and fortitude were virtues for women as well as men.

Perhaps the antithesis to these caricatures is Wonder Woman. The first and best of the female superheroes, she has been largely absent from television and film since the late-1970s Lynda Carter series went off the air. She has also been mischaracterized as a bitter, vengeful harpy in cartoons and comic books, literally, for decades. The original Wonder Woman is a daring feminist. She is, first-and-foremost, a pacifist who tries to negotiate with her enemies and find common ground. When she is forced into combat, she captures her vanquished opponents instead of killing them and she uses her lasso of truth to teach them to see the world in less black-and-white terms. She is gorgeous and sexy, but her beauty does not threaten other women and she is surrounded by female friends. Indeed, female friendship is one of the core values of the *Wonder Woman* comic, a positive counter-balance to the negative

view of female friendships found in films like *Mean Girls*.

Wonder Woman is a legitimate role model for women, not merely an underwear model who knows karate. And she has had a direct effect on the real world. Feminist activist Gloria Steinem grew up reading *Wonder Woman* comic books and learned from the fictional woman’s example how to change the world. Steinem wasn’t alone in responding to the character in such an important, fundamental way. As *Wonder Woman* comic book writer Gail Simone revealed in an interview:

[People tell me that] having Wonder Woman as a role model helped them get out of an abusive relationship, or that it got them to keep going to the gym and take care of themselves.... I’ve had young girls tell me that she helped them stand up to bullies at school. I’ve even had people go as far as to say it stopped them from committing suicide because that’s not something that she would do. People relate to her in a really emotionally deep way that I had no idea about before I started writing comics about her.

A statement like this underscores the value of Wonder Woman being made more available to the public through a new film or television series in which she is portrayed heroically and faithfully to the original character. She had her heyday in comic books during World War II, when Rosie the Riveter showed the women of America that strength and fortitude were virtues for women as well as men. Her TV series was another renaissance that occurred, unsurprisingly, during the 1970s’ second-wave feminism. Today, Wonder Woman appears as a supporting player in the video game *Justice League Heroes*. Unsurprisingly, players of the game use her to dismantle armies of robots in battle. This is the *Call of Duty*-approved Wonder Woman, not the humanitarian and progressive heroine of years past, who avoided violent confrontations whenever a peaceful solution could be found.



Extra! For more on superheroines, check our webpage: okhumanities.org/extra

When DC Comics launched “The New 52” digital comic book initiative in 2011, an effort to bring in new readers, the executives were widely criticized for hiring too few women writers and artists, and for over-sexualizing female characters such as Harley Quinn and Voodoo. Feminist critics were disappointed that the *Wonder Woman* comic was more

violent and macho than ever and that Lois Lane had been effectively written out of the *Superman* comic books.

The good news is that critical consensus proclaims the *Batwoman* comic, featuring stunning artwork and compelling protagonist Kate Kane, as one of the best comic books being published today. Recently, Marvel Comics tried to

one-up DC by making a bold move—promoting female character Ms. Marvel to *Captain* Marvel and reviving her solo comic book with writer Kelly Sue DeConnick at the helm.

Okay.

That’s a start.

But is it enough? ■

Pop Culture and THE POWER OF MOVIES

By Brian Hearn

People often remind me (especially my mother) that I have one of the best jobs in the world. No argument here. I get to watch, think, choose, write, and talk about movies in a restored art house cinema, smack dab in the middle of a thriving downtown art museum. Our community-based program has screened thousands of films—principally independent, international, and classic movies—of all lengths and genres. Over my career as a film curator, I've had time to consider the ups and downs of the motion picture medium, its technological evolution, and its long ascent from peephole parlor thrill to global pop culture sensation.

Movies are good for museums. They draw people in the doors that might not otherwise come. This has never been more crucial for institutions of "high culture" struggling to remain relevant to audiences that have unprecedented access to entertainment on demand. Movies in museums make sense because there is mass acceptance and appeal for the public, whereas visual art can be intimidating, as though one needed to know something about it to appreciate it. Nothing could be further from the truth of course. Visual art can be enjoyed without a hint of context. But movies bring people together and facilitate social interaction, providing a public experience as well as the private one. Movies are powerful because we are enchanted by visual verisimilitude, and we're suckers for storytelling. If you can accept the premise that film can attain the level of art, as I do, then movies are an ideal means of delivery, if for no other reason than people are receptive to them.

From the beginning, America fell in love with movies. Hollywood's emphasis on glamour, adventure, fantasy, and sex appeal caught fire with a nation reeling from the Great Depression. The hundreds of films produced annually in the United States also proved to be a potent, mass-cultural export that retains a majority of global market share to this day. Marshall McLuhan, the visionary media theorist, suggests the intangible secret of its pop culture success: "The movie is not only a supreme expression of mechanism, but paradoxically it offers as product the most magical of consumer commodities, namely dreams."

The cinema where I've had the privilege of working has been part laboratory for exhibiting movies as a legitimate art form and part temple celebrating our shared motion picture heritage as a teeming record of fictive life in all its messy complexity. What follows are a few observations on some of the most well-attended films at our theater in the last decade. It's a curious index that reflects the diversity of the medium, its artistic currents, and social preoccupations that resonate in contemporary society.

Brian Hearn is the film curator at the Oklahoma City Museum of Art. In 2009 he received the Tighman Award from the Oklahoma Film Critics Circle for "Outstanding support of independent, foreign and art films in Oklahoma and for raising film consciousness in the state."



The Artist, courtesy The Weinstein Company

*Movies are a teeming record
of fictive life in all its
messy complexity.*

Humans, both urban and rural, have come to depend on movies as the basic tools for delivering visual information, communication, and entertainment in the form of moving images. It's something we take for granted, a language unconsciously learned and consumed. Feature-length documentaries are uniquely positioned to raise awareness about the myriad issues facing human civilization. Through potent visuals and persuasive "talking heads," an immense amount of information can be conveyed to the audience.

Few films have done more to call attention to the issues of industrialized agriculture than *Food Inc.* (2008). Filmmaker Robert Kenner makes a sobering case that America's food supply is dominated by a handful of large corporations pushing high-calorie, low-nutrition processed foods that directly contribute to the national epidemic of obesity and diabetes. As author Michael Pollan (*The Omnivore's Dilemma*) says in the film, "The way we eat has changed more in the last fifty years than in the previous ten thousand." The film reveals how highly subsidized crops like corn and soybeans, industrialized meat production, and genetically modified foods have opened a Pandora's box of unintended consequences for consumer health and the environment. If we are what we "consume," then the fervor with which audiences flocked to this Oscar-nominated documentary was a signal that people were ready to hear, discuss, and take action on such issues.

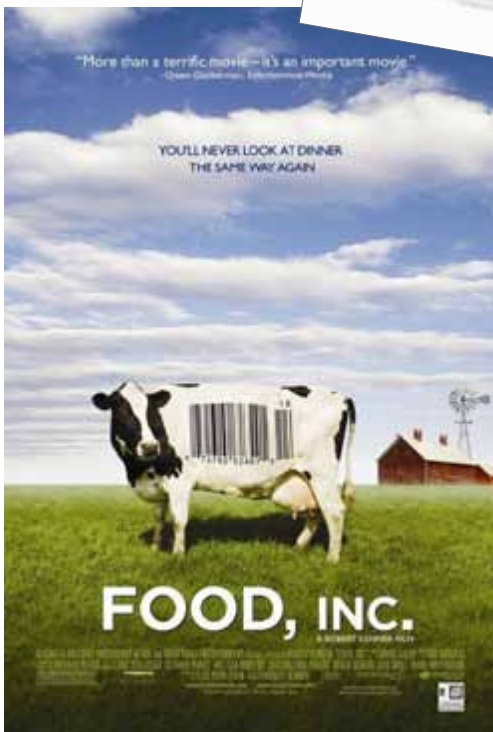
In the wake of the recent Great Recession, it appears that we are living in an era of corporate malfeasance run amok. This is hardly surprising when one considers an earlier business scandal of enormous proportions portrayed in Alex Gibney's Academy Award-nominated documentary *Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room* (2005). Based on the investigative reporting of two journalists, Gibney takes us through the labyrinth of corporate hubris at one of the nation's largest companies by focusing on the individual stories of key executives that would later face bankruptcy and criminal prosecution. Gibney took the Enron corporate motto, "Ask why," to its inevitable conclusion when he said, "I felt that the film would give me an opportunity to explore some larger themes about American culture, the cruelty of our economic system, and the way it can be too easily rigged for the benefit of the high and mighty." Given our state's deep reliance on the oil and natural gas industries, it was no surprise that this film struck a nerve with our audiences as a tragic, cautionary tale about greed and its devastating consequences.

Film has had an illustrious history of innovation. Today, movies have entered their first fully digital decade, a profound technological shift of the medium akin to the invention of synchronized sound in the late 1920s. We've never had more screens around us in an astonishing array of sizes, from handheld mobile devices to home theaters to immersive theatrical environments like IMAX 3D. We even have a generation of "digital natives" that could be called Generation S(screen).

ENRON: The Smartest Guys in the Room, ITVS Interactive



Sleepwalk with Me, courtesy IFC Films



FOOD, Inc., courtesy Participant Media, and River Road Entertainment

Sleepwalk with Me (2012), a micro-budgeted “dramedy” developed by a stand-up comedian with no filmmaking experience, had an unusual path to production, thanks to twenty-first century innovation. Mike Birbiglia’s wry sense of humor saturates his tales of thirty-something relationship woes, career mishaps and, yes, a severe sleepwalking disorder. His material went through several artistic incarnations as a one-man, off-Broadway show, to a bestselling book, to radio appearances on Chicago Public Media’s *This American Life* program, in which audiences were invited through social media to be a focus group as the film took shape. None of this should have produced a quality film, but its success can be traced in part to a clever grassroots email campaign encouraging devoted fans to lobby their local theaters to bring in the film. It worked famously well on us and demonstrates another development in movie-going audiences—to be more and more engaged with media, including film and its production.

A survey of the first motion pictures, recorded at Thomas Edison’s sunlit, tar-papered film studio, reveals a taste epitomized by the variety and decidedly popular culture of the day, the vaudeville stage. Boxing cats and monkeys, exotic



dancers, and half-naked strong men found themselves on the new perforated 35mm film strips, alongside scenes of the utterly mundane: a handshake, a sneeze, a kiss (oh my!).

In 1932, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences recognized short films with awards for both live action and animated subjects. A decade later, documentary shorts were also recognized. By definition, short films are under forty minutes in length. For many years the

theatrical experience always included short subjects before the feature, whereas now they are relegated almost exclusively to film festivals or online viewing. Nevertheless, short films have grown immensely popular in recent years. Our annual exhibition of the three categories of Oscar-nominated short films are guaranteed sellouts in the weeks leading up to the Oscar Night® telecast. Perhaps it is the decreasing attention span of the audience, or the rarity of seeing the best-of-the-best shorts each year, or the global diversity of exciting new talent that keeps audiences coming back.

There is nothing like a movie to add new layers of meaning and relevance to the “starved” perceptions of history and literature. First up, history: When sound on film became possible, famously if not first with *The Jazz Singer* (1927), the first great revolution occurred in the movies—they could not only move, but talk! This period is poignantly depicted in the Academy Award-winning throwback silent film *The Artist* (2011), directed by Michel Hazanavicius. In *The Artist* we see the hierarchical Hollywood studio system entering its heyday as a sophisticated technical industry devoted to producing entertainment products for the growing American population. Movie theaters became America’s living room as sound pictures opened up new genres such as musical, horror, and gangster films. Dramas and comedies, now dialogue driven, made new stars out of fast-talking actors.

The Artist’s protagonist, George Valentin, is a silent film star, circa 1927, at the height of his Hollywood career. In the opening scene George declares via intertitle, “I won’t talk! I won’t say a word!” He later discovers an eager young ingénue in Peppy Miller who wants nothing more than to break into show business. As the era of “talkies” commences and the studio announces the end of silent film production, George dismisses the newfangled technology at his peril while Peppy finds her star is rising. The winning mix of old Hollywood glamour, romantic comedy, melodrama, and one really cute



Noomi Rapace as Lisbeth Salander in *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornet’s Nest*, courtesy Music Box Films.

dog gave new generations a glimpse of the purity of visual storytelling perfected during the historic era of silent film.

Like history, literature, too, can come alive on screen. A good book can drive millions to the film version and vice versa. Stieg Larsson's Swedish crime novels, published posthumously as *The Millennium Trilogy* in 2005, became a literary sensation in Europe, then the United States, and eventually the world, selling tens of millions of copies. It was only a matter of time until film adaptations came along. The Swedish-language films were released consecutively in 2009 as *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, *The Girl Who Played with Fire*, and *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornets' Nest*. Given the mass appeal of the novels, particularly among women, there was a built-in audience, deeply invested in the exploits of the troubled heroine, Lisbeth Salander. This was a rare case in which Hollywood was late to the party. No major American film studio was willing to acquire the films, despite their success in Europe, so a small boutique distributor out of Chicago released them for a U.S. run. Our museum was extremely fortunate to secure exclusive engagements of all three films. The demand was so great that we had to bring them all back for a second run. I was curious what proportion of the audience had read the books, so I asked them prior to the screenings. Virtually every hand in the

theater went up. It is truly phenomenal how well these films performed, considering that they were subtitled, had complex plot lines, were set in a foreign culture, and contained frequently disturbing content combining sex and violence. In 2011, Hollywood finally caught on and Sony Pictures produced an English-language adaptation, even winning an Academy Award for film editing. I don't know if I'll see another blockbuster of this magnitude in my career.

So there you have it: a contemporary snapshot of a medium in only its second century of existence. Moving pictures started small, grew bigger and bigger, added sound, color, a third dimension, extra width, and then got smaller and more mobile. Regardless of the size of the screen, the content of movies continues to represent the full spectrum of culture, from viral cat videos to Terrence Malick films.

Funny to think that a YouTube window is about the same size as Thomas Edison's clunky Kinetoscope. In their quest to expand moving pictures to the masses, Edison and his official photographer, William Dickson, sought a complete audiovisual system with commercial potential. What emerged were two inventions rooted in the Greek word for movement: the Kinetograph, a motion

picture camera, and the Kinetoscope, a commercially viable viewing machine with images visible to one person at a time through a small peephole viewer. In Dickson's own *History of the Kinetograph, Kinetoscope and Kinetophonograph* (1895) he gushed at the immense promise imagined by their technological innovation:

What is the future of the kinetograph? Ask rather, from what conceivable phase of the future it can be debarred. In the promotion of business interests, in the advancement of science, in the revelation of unguessed worlds, in its educational and re-creative powers, and in its ability to immortalize our fleeting but beloved associations, the kinetograph stands foremost among the creations of modern inventive genius.

Strangely prescient, yes? As a success story of cultural production, distribution, and consumption, movies retain a unique importance in capturing a collective cultural memory, a shared dream of human culture that has much to tell us about ourselves and what we value.

EXTRA! Read Brian Hearn's brief sketch of film history, watch videos, and find discussion resources at: okhumanities.org/extra

POPULAR CULTURE

continued from page 15



Will Rogers, courtesy Will Rogers Memorial Museum.

gleam and glow with sophisticated equipment that few police departments can afford? How do such portrayals impact

our expectations of law enforcement?

Another fascinating public program I conducted involved *Letters of a Woman Homesteader*, a popular book published in 1914 and later rediscovered by the women's movement. Many people attending the program had seen the screen adaptation, *Heartland*, a 1979 film of an entirely different tone and message from its literary base. In a stimulating interaction, we concluded that both the book and the film reflected the moods of the country during the periods of their creation—Mrs. Elinore Pruitt Stewart's book radiated the optimism of pre-WWI, while the depressing cinematic counterpart revealed a demoralized nation recovering from its Vietnam debacle. These insights told us much about two disparate

eras of our national life. In no way was either an example of "fine art," but both were excellent cultural mirrors.

This issue of *Oklahoma HUMANITIES* features the work of several scholars who help us look into the mirror of popular culture. From movies and music to comic books and reality TV, from everyday favorites to frenzied fandom, our interactions with popular culture reflect who we are and what we value—and the humanities help us find meaning in the messages.

EXTRA! Read Peter Rollins' commentary on Will Rogers as Oklahoma's quintessential popular culture figure, along with discussion questions and links for further reading at: okhumanities.org/extra

INVASION

of the

TREKKIES

Thoughts on Media Fandom

By Mark Silcox



Captain's log, stardate 1301.01.
Exploring the strange new world of super-fans.

The phenomenon of media fandom has, in the early twenty-first century, moved from the fringes of American culture toward the very heart of the mainstream. The appetite for privacy and solitude with which earlier generations often enjoyed their favorite movies, novels, and TV shows seems to have gradually been replaced by a general inclination toward public display and communal celebration. Anybody at a U.S. high school or college, or who makes the most casual use of social media is bound to be acquainted with at least a few Trekkies, Potterheads, Pokéholics or Jedi.

Participants in this panoply of fan communities often claim that their involvement is a source of life-enriching happiness and fellowship. At the same time, outsiders to these groups are deeply puzzled by their weird behaviors: Is it really worth camping out in the snow overnight to see the new *Star Wars* film on the evening of its release, rather than just a day later? Should we be terrified of otherwise peaceful citizens who dress in suits of armor and beat each other with foam-covered swords? What hope is there for a marriage solemnized with bride and groom dressed as pointy-eared elves from a video game?

There is surely something to be learned about contemporary cultural life from the sudden, precipitous growth in the number of super-fans over the past few decades. To better understand the values and appetites that motivate media fandom, we would do well to glance back a few decades at some of its quieter, more eccentric origins.

On January 21, 1972, about three thousand people braved the cold to converge upon the Statler Hilton Hotel in Manhattan. A local group of science fiction (SF) enthusiasts had advertised a three-day event at which, for a modest entry fee of

\$2.50, participants could listen to speeches by luminaries such as science fiction writer Isaac Asimov and *Star Trek* creator Gene Roddenberry, meet up with vendors of SF paraphernalia and, as a special highlight, watch the very first blooper reel from their favorite television show, *Star Trek*. Organizers nursed the fond hope that about five hundred people would show up. When six times that many arrived, they knew they had tapped a deep current of hitherto undetected desire. A few newspapers and TV stations sent reporters and camera crews to cover the event and the rest of the world slowly became aware of the existence of Trekkies.

I remember watching a report about one of these early conventions on the evening news when I was a kid growing up in Canada. My parents had lofty cultural aspirations and normally wouldn't let us watch American TV shows they considered to be "junk." But I managed to catch a few early episodes of *Star Trek* while they were distracted and, eventually, they started to watch it with me in a spirit of genuine, albeit puzzled curiosity. I was amazed by the spectacle of hordes of frantic middle-class Americans clustered in a sweaty hotel lobby, dressed in Spock ears and waving foam phasers. I remember my mother proclaiming, "Something is wrong with those people," in a tone of genuine concern. At the time, I found it hard to disagree.

Four decades later, there are dozens of well-attended *Trek* conventions held around the world each year, even though not a single new episode of the series or its offshoots has been produced since 2005. But *Star Trek* enthusiasts occupy only a small corner of the contemporary world of fandom. There are whole theme parks devoted to the *Harry Potter* novels and the *World of Warcraft* video games. Annual multi-media gatherings such as the San Diego Comic-Con and the World Science Fiction Convention have attendance in the tens of thousands.

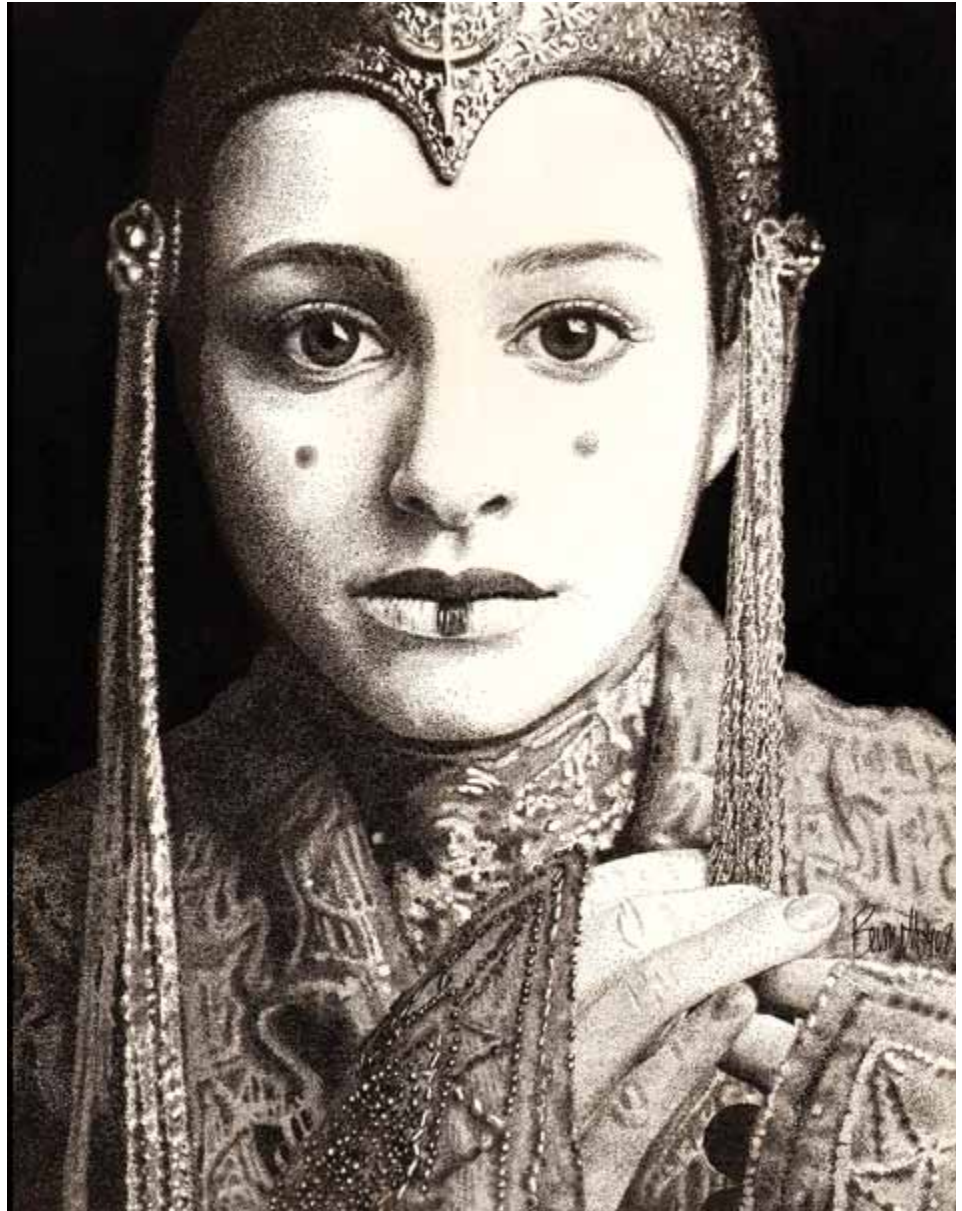
An even more interesting recent development is the widespread authorship of so-called "fan fiction." This term refers to the works of thousands of internet users around the world who spend their free time writing prose narratives that explore

alternative plot lines for their favorite movies, shows, computer games, and pulp novels. Many fan fiction authors devote countless hours to debating and refining what they have written, via passionate online discussion at websites such as FanFiction.net and ArchiveofOurOwn.org.

These phenomena are characteristic of the evolution of many forms of popular

all fans are potential writers whose talents need to be discovered, nurtured, and promoted and who may be able to make a contribution, however modest, to the cultural wealth of the larger community" (*Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, Routledge, 1992).

Jenkins argues that the image of the utterly passive, indiscriminately



Weight of the Crown by Jerry Bennett

culture from observational to participatory. One of the most sympathetic recent observers of media fandom, Henry Jenkins, applauds the sudden growth of participation in fan culture as a salutary upsurge of creativity and individualism. "Fandom," he claims, "recognizes no clear-cut line between artists and consumers;

omnivorous couch potato no longer represents a plausible stereotype of the contemporary pop culture consumer. The "mainstreaming" of fandom has provided ordinary citizens with the means to impose more personal, idiosyncratic meanings upon the stories being told by the entertainment industry.

To the extent that this (perhaps rather utopian) view of the participatory nature of fandom is plausible, it is especially good news for Oklahomans. Sheer geographical distance can often make us feel as though there's an unbridgeable gap between consumption and production. But thanks to the efficiencies of modern technology, media fans in our state have just as ready access to most American mass media as their counterparts in the nation's bi-

graduate school because she was afraid it would cut into her time as a prolific and widely-read authoress of fan fiction. Her repertoire included a surprisingly diverse range of TV shows—*Prison Break*, *Lost*, *Charmed*, and (most puzzlingly, to me at least) *American Idol*. I was disappointed, but not outraged. Every dedicated writer knows that once you've found an appreciative audience, only the very direst necessities should cause you to abandon them.

to flourish. Twentieth-century critics such as Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse lamented the seduction of the public away from the great artworks of the West and toward cheap but profitable imitations. "The attitude of the public," says Adorno in his *Dialectic of Enlightenment*,

which ostensibly and actually favors the system of the culture industry, is a part of the system and not an excuse for it. If one branch of art follows the same formula as one with a very different medium and content ... if a movement from a Beethoven symphony is crudely "adapted" for a film soundtrack in the same way as a Tolstoy novel is garbled in a film script, then the claim that this is done to satisfy the spontaneous wishes of the public is no more than hot air (Continuum Press, 1969).

It is unfashionable nowadays to make these sorts of overtly political criticisms of peoples' private tastes and preferences. But one can hardly help noticing that there are a lot more Trekkies and Potterheads than there are Bachies or Tolstoyheads. And if this isn't attributable to William Shatner's undeniable charisma or to the inherent aesthetic superiority of stories about child wizards, then it becomes difficult to completely ignore Adorno's point. Given the enormous amount of corporate money behind most media properties with sizeable followings, one must be prepared to acknowledge the ultimate artificiality of at least some of the appetites of hardcore media fans. No producer of commodities (cultural or otherwise) in a mass economy will risk trying to satisfy his customers' diverse, unpredictable desires when he can see a more efficient way to persuade them that they all really want the same thing.

Some more recent authors have also argued that the very media through which mass culture is propagated makes genuinely creative and autonomous responses to it impossible, even for devoted fans. In his book *Boxed In: The Culture of TV*, Mark Crispin Miller claims that the great and insidious power of television is



Gamers watching *World of Warcraft* on the big screen at GamesCon in Cologne, 2009; photo by Olaf Eichler, www.olaf-eichler.de. Inset: *Twin 2-D-2?* Attendees at *Star Wars Convention 2005*, Indianapolis; photo courtesy Ceasar S.

coastal regions. There's no need to seek one's fortune in Hollywood to make a meaningful contribution to the corpus of pop culture. All it takes is a reliable internet connection and a few local or online fellow travelers to keep one company.

My own observations of fannish behavior as a university teacher have led me to think that Jenkins may be on to something. When I hear students engaged in fiery debates about characterization in the *Twilight* novels or the relative merits of the first three *Star Wars* films, they can sound remarkably similar to my colleagues and me when we're embroiled in esoteric scholarly debates. A couple of years ago, one of my very best students shyly revealed to me that she had decided not to go to

There are, of course, plenty of horror stories about fandom participants who have pursued their enthusiasms to a level of obvious excess. One reads tales of obsessive celebrity stalkers, online gamers who have died in their computer chairs after marathon sessions, and friendships, marriages, and love affairs that are shattered when people try to extend relationships outside the safe familiarity of a fannish clique.

Are these occurrences mere anomalies within an otherwise congenial subculture? Or are they symptoms of deeper problems? One often-repeated concern about pop culture is that its content is simply not stimulating or provocative enough to provide space for the human imagination

its ability to mimic (and, by doing so, co-opt) the ironic and rebellious attitudes that its audience should be developing spontaneously:

[TV] protects its ads from mockery by doing all the mocking, thereby posing as an ally to the incredulous spectator.... It is this inherent subversiveness toward any visible authority that has enabled TV to establish its own total rule—for it is *all* individuality that TV annihilates, either by not conveying it or by making it look ludicrous (Northwestern Univ. Press, 1988).

Miller's remarks suggest a disturbing hypothesis about the growth of media fandom, which began as a fringe phenomenon before gradually coming to be viewed as a "normal" way for Americans to spend leisure time. Perhaps even the most seemingly quirky and idiosyncratic forms of fan behavior are ultimately just instances of consumers doing what they're told.

It seems to me that there is another way to view fan culture that's neither entirely utopian nor entirely dismissive. Both its capacity to liberate the imagination and its tendency to encourage conformism make contemporary media fandom look a lot like (at least some) varieties of *religious* participation.

It might seem implausible—or even a bit subversive—to draw this kind of analogy. Religious ritual is believed by many to be the most serious, sacrosanct part of a properly-lived human life, whereas most fan activities seem to represent the very height of frivolity. It's doubtful that attending a multi-media convention feels very much like participating in a confirmation ceremony. And certainly, it's unlikely that anyone actually *worships* Harry Potter or that dressing as a junior wizard resembles the performance of a Catholic Mass or a Buddhist pilgrimage. But both fandom and religious participation do seem to arise from a similarly urgent human need to feel that one belongs to

something bigger than oneself.

The surface resemblances between religious practice and fandom are impossible to overlook. Most organized fan events take place on weekends, as do traditional church services. Individual fan communities, like church communities, tend to be inward-looking cliques whose speech, dress, and etiquette follow precise codes. And the fervor that accompanies discussions among the most dedicated fans is similar to that of the religiously devout.

Deeper similarities to religious practice become apparent when one focuses on the very important element of play that characterizes most fan behavior. In his

quite genuine and spontaneous, and in part only acting up to a part imposed by tradition.... In all this it is impossible to fix accurately the lower limit where holy earnest reduces itself to mere "fun" (*Homo Ludens*, Beacon Press, 1971).

A devoted fan's attitude toward the fictional world that has ensnared his imagination—whether it's Hogwarts School, Middle Earth, or the Galactic Empire—often straddles the boundary between sincere belief and playful detachment in a way that strongly resembles the religious activities that Huizinga describes.



501st Legion Formation, including Jay Laga'aia (foreground, holding helmet) as Captain Typho, at the third official *Star Wars* convention, April 2005, Indianapolis, just prior to the release of *Revenge of the Sith*. Photo courtesy Ceasar S.

monumental study of "the *play* element in culture," Johan Huizinga describes some of the purification and coming-of-age rituals of aboriginal communities in curiously familiar terms:

The men tell the women gruesome tales about the goings on in the sacred bush ... Nor, in the last resort, are the women wholly duped. They know perfectly well who is hiding behind this mask or that. All the same they get fearfully excited when a mask comes up to them with minatory gestures, and fly shrieking in all directions. Their expressions of terror are in part

What we normally think of as the "consumption" of pop culture is, more and more, becoming a process of active engagement, both with popular artworks themselves and with others who enjoy them. Perhaps contemporary media fans are discovering new forms of community—or, indeed, *re-discovering* old ones—that we all could learn to share in.

Mark Silcox was born and raised just outside of Toronto, Canada, and currently teaches at the University of Central Oklahoma. He is co-author of *Philosophy through Video Games* (Routledge, 2008) and co-editor of *Philosophy and Dungeons & Dragons* (Open Court, 2012).

EXTRA! Want to read fan fiction for yourself? Follow the links at: okhumanities.org/extra.

It's not just TV. Reality TV matters.

Seriously.



Reality TV raises a wide range
of ethical issues.

By Kristie Buntun and Wendy Wyatt

Reality television is so ubiquitous today that its most popular programs and characters require no introduction.

Case in point: Not long ago, President Barack Obama told a late-night television host he wasn't too concerned about presidential primary skirmishes among his opponents in the Republican Party, saying, "I'm going to wait until everyone is voted off the island." The President knew that voters watching *The Tonight Show* would easily understand his reference to the long-running reality contest *Survivor*.

Or consider this case: A recent *Seattle Times* Sunday magazine piece about the city's strengths noted, "We breed innovative ideas faster than Jim Bob and Michelle Duggar can spawn a human." The article was entirely unrelated to reality TV, but its

author safely assumed that any reasonably literate newspaper reader would understand a reference to the Arkansas couple made famous by the TLC network's reality show *19 Kids and Counting*. In years past, a writer in search of a reference to a large family might have invoked *The Brady Bunch*, but today's readers don't identify with dated situation comedies. They live in the world of reality television.

Reality TV is popular and pervasive. Reality programs consistently dominate the television landscape. They regularly feature in the Nielsen ratings for most-watched television shows in the United States, and they're viewed by millions of people around the world. One scholar suggested that a typical weekly episode of *American Idol* might draw an audience equal in size to the combined populations of Colorado,

Maryland, Missouri, Minnesota, and Wisconsin.

Any form of popular culture that is this popular should be taken seriously as a significant influence on our ethical lives. Popular culture is not simply "low" culture or mere entertainment unworthy of the same level of intellectual scrutiny as "high" culture staples that include opera, literature, and fine paintings. Popular culture may entertain, but it is not "just" entertainment. The messages of popular culture—whether they are the literal texts of paperback novels, the visual texts of magazine advertisements, or the video texts of reality television—constantly tell us who to be as people. Those messages tell us who we are, what we ought to value, and how we should behave. And we apparently do take our cues about those attitudes

and behaviors from reality television. Recent news wire stories reported that Mason had become the most popular male baby name in the United States in just a year, probably because reality star Kourtney Kardashian of *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* had given her son the name.

Simply put, popular culture—including the burgeoning reality television genre—helps to shape our reality. Anything with an influence that potentially powerful has ethical implications worth examining.

Reality TV is complicated, broad, and ever-changing. The wide variety of program types that fit into the reality genre include contest shows such as *American Idol*, family-oriented stories such as *19 Kids and Counting*, introductions to offbeat occupations such as *Ice Road Truckers*, self-improvement shows such as *The Biggest Loser*, and philanthropy programs such as *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*. This complexity is further complicated by the mixture of production techniques a program may use: dramatic behind-the-scenes confessionals from contestants on shows like *Big Brother*; lavish, orchestrated “dates” set up by producers of shows like *The Bachelor*; or the seemingly straightforward narratives like those of the polygamous family depicted on *Sister Wives*. The genre becomes even more challenging to analyze because a reality program may change from season to season or may be adapted to global television markets, such as when *Bachelor*-style dating competitions are altered for the sensibilities of viewers in India or Indonesia.

Reality television can be an overwhelmingly moralistic genre. TIME Magazine TV critic James Poniewozik made that point in an introductory essay for our book, *The Ethics of Reality TV: A Philosophical Examination* (Continuum Press, 2012). He noted that “many supposedly depraved reality shows are, in fact,

among the most moralizing series on TV.” He pointed to the contest depicted by *Survivor*, suggesting that the series depends on viewers to “have an independent system of moral values that is most likely different from the one rewarded by the game.” *Survivor* producers then draw upon that conflict between viewers’ values and the game’s values to keep viewers interested in the program’s competition.

Reality TV raises a wide range of ethical issues. But analysis of a complex genre requires more than automatic condemnation. It is too simple to conclude that reality TV is morally bad because it’s sometimes sensational, exploitative, or stereotypical. Reality TV requires a more nuanced ethical analysis. To join us in that analysis for our book, we invited a number of authors from around the world to each address a specific ethical issue raised by reality television (such as privacy, cultural values, deception, and commercialization) and to use a particular ethical perspective to analyze it. So, for instance, we placed the ethical problems of *stereotyping* by reality programs under the ethical lens offered by duty-based philosopher Immanuel Kant.

Kant’s premise was that ethical decisions stem from a person’s goodwill, which is always and uniquely a moral good. Decisions, according to Kant, must be rooted in that goodwill, which dictates one’s ethical duty. This goodwill-based duty must be performed in all cases, universally, no matter the consequences or motivations. Furthermore, Kant suggested that our goodwill-based duties would respect persons as ends in themselves and never treat them simply as means to ends.

So, let’s see if reality TV stereotypes can survive the ethical scrutiny of Kant’s philosophy. Are television producers motivated by goodwill, in the Kantian sense, when they deliberately present false impressions of people for ratings or

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Kat Meads

profit? No. Are TV viewers motivated by goodwill when they are entertained by the misrepresentation of others? No. Can producers or viewers universalize the use of stereotypes—or suggest that stereotypes be employed in *every* media message? No.

Therefore, based on Kantian principles, the ethical television producer or viewer would reject the stereotypes presented by reality television. For instance, the sex-role stereotypes frequently depicted on *The Bachelor* are not ethically justifiable. The program presents outdated stereotypes of men as all-powerful and aggressive, and women as passive damsels who exist merely to be romantically swept off their feet. Furthermore, by almost completely failing to include contestants who are not white, these programs suggest that courtship and marriage are the domain of white people. *The Bachelor* has never been anything but a white man, and the few female contestants on the program who were women of color have been eliminated early on in the competitions.

Groups who are not presented or who are severely under-represented in media may be mentally erased from the minds of audiences. Viewers are likely to dismiss those groups as unimportant to the larger culture—a concept known as symbolic annihilation. Among those who are regularly symbolically annihilated by television are racial and ethnic minority groups. People of color are often missing from the television landscape, and their absence is complicated by negative stereotyping. For instance, *Washington Post* television writer Paul Fahri has contended that on the occasions that reality television has included African American males it has presented them as the stereotypical “bad black guy.” UC Davis professor Grace Wang analyzed the reality programs *Top Chef* and *Project Runway* and concluded that these popular competitions have regularly stereotyped Asian American contestants as “technical robots” rather than fully creative individuals. These sorts of racist stereotypes fail the Kantian principles of goodwill and respect for persons as ends in themselves.

Yet while reality television seems to unethically reinforce stereotypes of race, gender, and class, it also challenges them.

Reality shows present characters whose lives have not been seen on mainstream television, and the polygamist family shown on *Sister Wives* is a good example. Where else on television are viewers offered a straightforward look into the lives of a Mormon man, his four wives, and their sixteen children? The same might be said of *19 Kids and Counting*. Fictional television rarely depicts the lives of an evangelical Christian family. Reality television, by comparison, shows Jim Bob and Michelle Duggar’s home teeming with

The messages of popular culture constantly tell us who to be as people.

children and gives all the family members the opportunity to speak directly to viewers about their religious and patriotic values. In this way, reality television offers viewers a glimpse of a community that fictional entertainment often presents as the punch line for a joke.

The work of philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah suggests that humans have an ethical obligation to learn about other people so they can live together on an increasingly smaller planet. In his 2006 book, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*, Appiah writes, “I am urging that we should learn about people in other places, take an interest in their civilizations, their arguments, their errors, their achievements, not because that will bring us to agreement, but because that will help us to get used to one another.” Using the powerful stories provided by reality television, viewers who cannot literally travel around the world may see previously ignored communities of people and become more tolerant of them. To frame the outcome in Kantian terms, viewers might see others as morally worthwhile people when they attempt to understand one another. An ethical good may be achieved when viewers use television—the most powerful storyteller on earth—to understand their fellow people, rather than to persist in stereotypical beliefs about them.

In a ratings-driven television economy, we have ethical obligations for the content of reality TV. Viewers should learn to evaluate the ethics of reality TV, again rejecting the impulse to simply condemn the genre. We should ask questions about the programs we’re watching. We should consider not just producers’ tactics, but work to become critical consumers of reality shows. The genre has fostered an active online community for many of its programs, and viewers could use those online venues to encourage producers to end the most exploitative, stereotypical, harmful programs and instead create more positive messages.

“The concept of goodness is alive and well—and the subject of eager debate—among reality audiences,” says Poniewozik. “The viewers of reality TV are among the first to cite the genre as evidence that our culture is going to hell. But the controversy, argument and snark that it inspires are vital proof that we have not arrived there yet.”

Indeed. Media literate television viewers—those who question, evaluate, and actively engage with media—recognize the ethical implications of popular entertainment provided by reality TV and have the power to help shape the genre for the future.

Kristie Bunton is associate dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of St. Thomas, Minnesota, where she has been a media ethics professor for 20 years. Dr. Bunton is a frequent commentator on issues of media ethics. She has published in such venues as *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator*, and *Public Integrity*, and has written commentary for *The St. Paul Pioneer Press*.

Wendy Wyatt is an associate professor of media ethics and chair of the Department of Communication and Journalism at the University of St. Thomas, Minnesota. Her books include *Critical Conversations: A Theory of Press Criticism* (Hampton Press, 2007) and *The Ethics of Reality TV*, co-edited with Kristie Bunton (Continuum, 2012). Her most recent work, which appears in *Journalism & Communication Monographs*, is an ethical analysis of blame in the news.

EXTRA! Educate yourself on media literacy and become a more informed viewer. Find sources at: okhumanities.org/extra.



Morgaine by Allyson Hedgpath, courtesy Lynda Standlee. Allyson's work features large scale multimedia, oils, acrylics, and inks. ahedgpath@yahoo.com

End Notes from the Editor

Faster than a speeding bullet. More powerful than a locomotive. Able to leap tall buildings in a single bound. ("Look—up in the sky!" "It's a bird!" "It's a plane!" "It's Superman!") —Adventures of Superman TV Series

Our feature articles on female superheroes got me thinking about that ubiquitous question: If you could be a superhero, what would be your superpower?

Sometimes I wish for the ability to clone myself. The duplicate-me could clean house and run errands while I relax with a good book. And sometimes I'd like the ability to selectively turn off my hearing—especially when I'm having a nice meal with friends and the toddler in the next booth is in full meltdown (which officially graduates me to cranky old lady).

The fact is, I believe everyone has a superpower; we just don't acknowledge or recognize it. Some people are great with languages; some have a knack for fact finding and stories. Some people understand string theory and mathematical equations; others are more attuned to caretaking and public service. People have mapped the stars and the human genome; have analyzed weather patterns and traffic flow; have sung arias, built bridges, nurtured crops, delivered the mail. Everyone is good at something and

without them we'd all still be sleeping in caves.

So what does one do with a superpower like "editing"? First, find the best raw materials: brilliant authors, historic archives, beautiful artwork and photography, a darned good layout artist, and a printer with a soft spot for the humanities. Second, assemble the tools of the trade: a collection of dictionaries (those single, unabridged tomes are so unwieldy), a thesaurus, and the latest guide to punctuation and style. Third, accept the angst of comma placement: Delete it or leave it? Use it in this case, but not in that? The possibilities are endless. Fourth, come to terms with the fact that, no matter how many times you proofread text, mistakes will always find their way into the final print. Last, and certainly not least, count your blessings for too much of a good thing—namely, more content than you can print.

The writers we feature in our magazine have much more to say than our thirty-two pages can accommodate. Until now, there was nothing to do but banish the excess

into virtual limbo or erase the evidence with a press of the delete button. Enter the Webmaster. With a bit of wizardry we add a webpage, call it "Extra!" (extra ... get it?), and put that terrific content online: okhumanities.org/extra. Why didn't we think of that sooner? On the occasion of our fifth year in print, we also thought it appropriate to spiff things up a little. We hope you enjoy the easier read and updated look.

And so, you agents of change, you doers of justice and scholars of democracy, I leave you with these thoughts: Superherodom is not all laurel wreaths and adulation. There are lightning bolts to fashion and muscles to maintain; tights and tiaras to be fitted; capes and shields to be cleaned; Batmobiles and jet packs to send to the mechanic. Not everyone will appreciate your powers, nor will they necessarily want to be rescued. In the meantime, stand watch for opportunity, keep your superpowers sharp, and meet us here next time—same Bat-magazine, same Bat-Council.

Carla Walker, Editor
carla@okhumanities.org



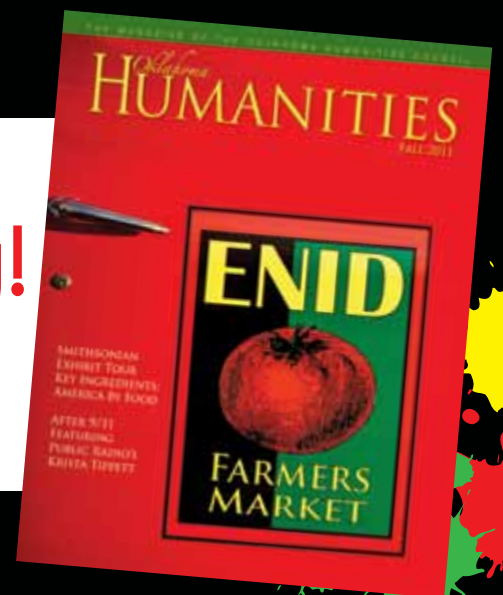
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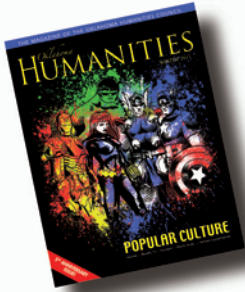
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Oklahoma HUMANITIES

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EXTRA!

Popular Culture: America's Mirror

By Peter C. Rollins | Winter 2013 | Vol. 6, Issue No. 1

For Discussion

1. How does popular culture *reflect* our world?
2. How does popular culture *influence* our world? The author mentions the “Perry Mason Syndrome,” which influenced citizens’ expectations of the justice system. Discuss how current TV shows, movies, and other media may be shaping the attitudes of society at large.
3. Is TV gaining or waning as a popular culture “platform”? What platforms are competing or perhaps merging with TV (for example, reality TV shows like *American Idol* where the audience sends text messages to support favored performers)?
4. Discuss the issue of violence as depicted in films, video games, and TV. Do you believe screen violence leads to copycat behavior as some suggest? Would regulation of violence in media infringe on individual rights?

EXTRA! Reading

- Ray B. Browne, *Against Academia* (Popular Press, 1989). Traces the efforts of popular studies to achieve “legitimacy” among scholars.
- *The Columbia Companion to American History on Film* (Columbia Univ. Press, 2004). A comprehensive survey of American culture as reflected in Hollywood productions, including major figures, wars, genres, and myths.

EXTRA! Links

- James Poniewozik, *Tuned In*. TIME magazine’s TV critic blogs about TV, pop culture, and society. (<http://entertainment.time.com/category/tuned-in>). Relevant posts: “We Are a Camera: Life, Death and the Urge to Shoot,” Dec. 5, 2012. “Kids at Tragedies: Turn Off the Cameras,” December 14, 2012.
- *The Huffington Post*, “Harvey Weinstein on Obama, Gun Control, *The Master* and *The Untouchables*,” July, 26, 2012 (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/07/26/harvey-weinstein-obama-romney-guns_n_1706394.html). Details a phone interview in which Weinstein calls for a filmmaker summit to discuss on-screen violence and its influence.
- Elinore Pruitt Stewart, *Letters of a Woman Homesteader*. Full text posted online, courtesy University of Virginia Library (<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/SteHome.html>).

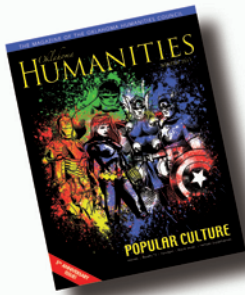
EXTRA! Will Rogers – Oklahoma’s Pop Culture Hero

Will Rogers, Oklahoma’s quintessential popular culture figure, is so valuable for our understanding of American history because he reached millions as he evolved through the ever-changing new media: vaudeville, the national lecture circuit, radio, newspapers, silent films, and talkies. He held a mirror up to America as it transitioned from war to boom to bust, providing gentle insights into the ways in which we neglected to live up to our American Dream. Oklahoma’s Will Rogers is just one outstanding example of the value of popular culture studies.

In 1967, Oklahoma quietly became a pioneer in popular culture studies when the Will Rogers Memorial Commission signed a contract with Oklahoma State University to edit and publish the writings of the cowboy savant. The sixteen-year project published twenty-one volumes—Rogers’ daily and weekly articles, including those for *The Saturday Evening Post*; radio programs; presidential nomination convention reports; and specialty books—all authenticated, annotated, and interpreted—a body of work that will be a basis for future studies of the major issues of the early twentieth century.—Peter C. Rollins

- *Will Rogers’ 1920s: A Cowboy’s Guide to the Times* (Dir. Peter C. Rollins, 41 min.). Film explores a dizzy period in Oklahoma history and how it was critiqued by Oklahoma’s great satirist. (DVD available from Will Rogers Memorial gift shop)
- Peter C. Rollins, *America Reflected: Language, Satire, Film, and the American Mind* (New Academia Publishing, LLC, 2010). Six chapters explore Will Rogers.
- Will Rogers Memorial Museums website (<http://www.willrogers.com>). Read a detailed bio of Rogers’ life, take an online tour of the museum grounds, and read samples of Rogers’ telegrams and newspaper articles.

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EXTRA!

It's not *just* TV. Reality TV matters. Seriously.

By Kristie Bunton and Wendy Wyatt | Winter 2013 | Vol. 6, Issue No. 1

For Discussion

1. What reality TV programs do you watch and why do you watch them?
2. How would you respond to the claim that reality TV is “just entertainment”?
3. Has watching reality TV given you insight into the lives, choices, or cultures of other people? Which programs, if any, do this well? Are the programs purely “educational”? What other motives might be driving producers' content in these shows?
4. Can reality TV programs foster democratic discourse and action? Should this be an aim of reality TV? If so, what program content or qualities are needed to prompt these responses?
5. Have viewers become accustomed enough to reality TV to expect that programs will be infused with staging, scripting, and editing? Should viewers be concerned that reality TV is deceptive? Are these deceptions harmful?
6. Should media literacy (learning to question, evaluate, and actively engage with media) be a regular part of our education system?

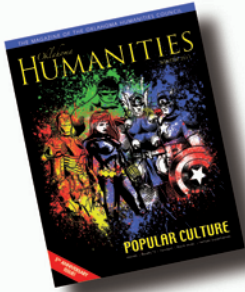
EXTRA! Reading

- “Introduction to Media Literacy,” created by the Media Literacy Project. This comprehensive essay demonstrates how to analyze and evaluate the vast array of media messages we encounter every day: television, radio, film, newspapers, billboards, packaging, ads, video games, websites, and more. Appropriate for ages 11 to adult. (<http://medialiteracyproject.org/resources/introduction-media-literacy>)
- Linda Holmes, “Ethical ‘Reality’: A Proposed Code for Producers to Live By.” Suggests ethical practices that reality TV producers can adopt to avoid contestant exploitation. (<http://www.npr.org/blogs/monkeysee/2011/08/31/140082930/ethical-reality-a-proposed-code-for-producers-to-live-by>)

EXTRA! Links

- James Poniewozik, *Tuned In*. TIME magazine’s TV critic blogs about TV, pop culture, and society. (<http://entertainment.time.com/category/tuned-in>). Related post: “What We Should Be Thinking About Pop-Culture Violence, and What We Will Probably Do Instead,” Dec. 20, 2012.
- Linda A. Henry, lesson plan: “Critical Media Literacy: TV Programs.” Teaches students how to critically analyze television programs and develop awareness of media messages. (<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/critical-media-literacy-programs-96.html?tab=1#tabs>)
- Media Smarts: Canada’s Center for Digital and Media Literacy. Nonprofit website containing articles, educational games, and other resources to help youth develop critical thinking skills and become informed digital citizens as they engage with media (<http://mediasmarts.ca>)

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EXTRA!

Scarlett Johansson in a Catsuit: Superhero or Super Cliché?

By Marc DiPaulo | Winter 2013 | Vol. 6, Issue No. 1

For Discussion

1. Why have superheroes continued to have broad appeal—from their first appearance in comic books to television and blockbuster movies?
2. How do female superheroes compare to male superheroes? How important are they to the storylines in which they appear?
3. Why do you think the physical appearance of female superheroes like Black Widow is so often an issue? Can the physical appearance of a male superhero also be controversial?
4. How do other female superheroes compare to Wonder Woman and Black Widow? What characteristics make them strong or weak characters?
5. Pick your favorite superhero and discuss the attributes of the character that are meaningful to you.

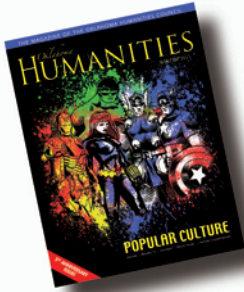
EXTRA! Reading

- Jennifer K. Stuller, *Ink-Stained Amazons and Cinematic Warriors: Superwomen in Modern Mythology*. (I.B. Tauris, 2010)
- Mike Madrid, *The Supergirls: Fashion, Feminism, Fantasy, and the History of Comic Book Heroines*. (Exterminating Angel Press, 2009)
- Alan Kistler, “Move Over, Boys: 10 Female Superheroes Who Need Movies.”
<http://www.newsarama.com/comics/female-superheroes-need-movies-111005.html>

EXTRA! Links

- *WONDER WOMEN! The Untold Story of American Superheroines*. Documentary film by Vaquera Films uses female superheroes to examine the changing roles of women and values over time. The website has a content-rich, 4-minute trailer and a comprehensive study guide, which includes discussion questions; a brief history of comic book superheroes; information on the creator and inspiration behind Wonder Woman; statistics on the status of women in the work force, in leadership, and in pop culture; and numerous links to related resources. (<http://wonderwomendoc.com>)
- Comic Art & Graphix Gallery – “The History of Comics.” Illustrated article that chronicles the history of comics, from comic strips of the early nineteenth century through contemporary Spider-Man comic books. (<http://www.comic-art.com/history.htm>)
- ReadWriteThink.org. Lesson plans, readings, and resources for the classroom. Enter “comic books” in the Search box. (<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources>)

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EXTRA!

Pop Culture and the Power of Movies

By Brian Hearn | Winter 2013 | Vol. 6, Issue No. 1

For Discussion

1. Along the cultural spectrum, the medium of film falls somewhere between “art” (high culture) and “entertainment” (popular culture). What elements influence whether a film is regarded as art, commentary, or popular culture?
2. Discuss the varied ways in which documentary films and fictional films tell us about human experience. Does one format have more relevance than the other?
3. How does social media influence film audiences? Are expectations and reactions to films changed by the “real time” way we communicate?
4. Choose three films that are meaningful to you. Discuss why they made an impact on your thinking.

EXTRA! Reading

- W.K.L. Dickson and Antonia Dickson, *History of the Kinetograph, Kinetoscope and Kinetophonograph*. Published in 1895, when motion picture science was only two years old.
- André Bazin, “The Evolution of the Language of Cinema,” from *What Is Cinema?* Explores the history of film up to 1953.
- Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964). McLuhan discusses the emerging phenomenon of mass media and introduces the concepts of “the global village” and “the medium is the message.”
- Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*. Postman discusses what he calls the “corrosive” effects of electronic media on a democratic society. Published in 1985, the work is touted by critics as prophetic of the twenty-first century’s obsession with entertainment.

EXTRA! Links

- Edison Motion Pictures (<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/edhtml/edmvhm.html>). This Library of Congress collection features 341 Edison films, a brief history of his work with motion pictures, and an overview of film genres produced by the Edison company. Examples available on YouTube include:
 - “May Irwin Kiss” (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q690-lexNB4&feature=plcp>)
 - “The Boxing Cats” (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6qre61opE_g&feature=plcp)
 - “Sandow” (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HWM2ixqua3Y&feature=plcp>)
- ReadWriteThink.org. Lesson plans, readings, and resources for the classroom. Enter “film” in the Search box. <http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/>
- The Independent Television Service (ITVS) (<http://www.itvs.org/educators/collections>). ITVS funds and presents award-winning documentaries and dramas, Internet projects, and the Emmy Award-winning PBS series *Independent Lens*. Their Community Classroom webpage offers short film modules adapted from ITVS documentaries and standards-based lesson plans.
- National Film Preservation Board (<http://www.loc.gov/film/index.html>). Provides links to the National Film Registry, motion picture archives, and other film preservation resources.
- National Film Preservation Foundation Screening Room. Watch videos of films preserved for American film heritage: (<http://www.filmpreservation.org/preserved-films/screening-room>).

The Incredible Shrinking Dream Machine

How the movies started small, got bigger, and then got smaller again.

By Brian Hearn

ACT I: Fine Art Sets the Scene

The media of human visual culture was relatively consistent for millennia. As seen in Werner Herzog's 2010 documentary, *Cave of Forgotten Dreams*, early cave paintings, drawn in charcoal and natural pigments, expressed the importance of the animal kingdom in the cycle of human existence some 25,000 years ago. Illuminated by torches, the dynamic images purposefully follow the contours of the cave, coming to life in the presence of light, shadow, sound, and the human imagination. Surely this is the origin of the cinematic experience, a persuasive illusion of movement, the visual experience of an image endowed with life. A powerful experience to be sure.

Over thousands of years, visual high culture further evolved into specialized fine arts: drawing, painting, sculpture, and architecture, across numerous ancient civilizations. These surviving works provide the visual cornerstones that would eventually blend with the traditions of printed typography and dramatic performing arts to form a potent pre-mixture for a medium born of the mass culture machine age.

ACT II: Moving Pictures as Art and Science

Fast forward to the late nineteenth century. The medium of photography ruptured the art world with its capacity to capture and reproduce realistic images. The next great prize would be for the creation of photographs that moved. It was a \$25,000 bet on whether galloping horses always had at least one hoof on the ground that led Eadweard Muybridge to successfully photograph a sequence of rapidly moving images in 1877, proving that, in fact, horses *did* have all their hooves off the ground at full gallop. When Muybridge projected his sequential moving pictures of animal locomotion at Chicago's Columbian Exposition of 1893, he effectively convened the first public movie exhibition. Referred to as "Zoopraxographical Hall," Muybridge's scientific studies projected the phenomenon of simulated movement—but it certainly lacked any hint of entertainment value.

Someone else was working on that for Thomas Edison in West Orange, New Jersey. Edison and his official photographer, William Dickson, were inspired by Muybridge's work and sought a complete audio-visual system with commercial potential. Edison wrote, "The idea occurred to me that it was possible to devise an instrument which should do for the eye what the phonograph does for the ear, and that by a combination of the two, all motion and sound could be recorded and reproduced simultaneously."

What emerged from Dickson's brilliant mind were two inventions rooted in the Greek word for movement: the Kinetograph, a motion picture camera, and the Kinetoscope, a commercially viable viewing machine with images visible to one person at a time through a small peephole viewer. These "short subject" films might still be found on the twenty-first century's version of the vaudeville video jukebox: YouTube. Even the experience of today's viewer—often alone, watching a small screen within a screen—is reminiscent of the popular but short lived Kinetoscope. Though Edison and Dickson discovered the pulse of popular content, projected motion pictures were just around the corner and would provide a paradoxically private *and* social experience on a much bigger screen.

ACT III: Hollywood's Heyday

Over the next fifty years commercial motion pictures found their feet with mass audiences. While Europe was embroiled in the Great War, projection technology improved with bigger-than-life images and synchronized sound. The industrialization of motion pictures moved forward with several highly organized production studios aiming to provide cheap, disposable movies for a mushrooming number of purpose-built movie theaters patronized by common people. The seat of American movie production moved from the east coast to west, with far better access to the best available light source, the sun. Audiences enjoyed silent films with live musical accompaniment; the same D.W. Griffith film in San Francisco with a live orchestra would be considerably different than a Des Moines "nickelodeon" with a live pianist. Mechanical improvements soon brought about the "feature length" format (in which longer, more complex stories could be told) that remains

the standard today. When sound on film became possible, the first great revolution occurred in the movies: they could not only move, but talk!

Hollywood's emphasis on glamour, adventure, fantasy, and sex appeal caught fire with a nation reeling from the Great Depression. Movie theaters became America's living room as sound pictures opened up new popular genres such as musical, horror, and gangster films. Dramas and comedies, now dialogue driven, made new stars out of fast-talking actors. Sound was here to stay. Hollywood's increasing dominance of the motion picture medium became evident in a number of ways. Studios became vertically integrated, consolidating production, distribution, and exhibition of films to profit from each sector of the business. The hundreds of films produced annually in the United States also proved to be a potent cultural export that retains a majority of global market share to this day. Marshall McLuhan, the visionary media theorist, suggests the intangible secret of film's pop culture success: "The movie is not only a supreme expression of mechanism, but paradoxically it offers as product the most magical of consumer commodities, namely dreams."

ACT IV: TV Tussle

The Hollywood dream machine proved to be vulnerable after the global upheaval of World War II. Two major threats emerged around 1948: a crippling antitrust suit decided by the Supreme Court and decreasing movie attendance due to the new small screen of television. As a result of *United States v. Paramount Pictures, Inc.*, Hollywood studios were forced to abandon vertical integration and divest themselves from movie exhibition. Selling off their movie theater chains immediately increased the cost of producing studio films and decreased the total number being made. The "Golden Age" of Hollywood was over.

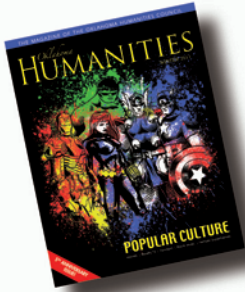
Postwar social changes (such as the growing affluence of a middle class with newfound leisure time) fed the popularity of television. American consumers traded the public cinema experience for private home entertainment. Film studios, sensing panic, began to sell off their libraries to television networks in need of content. Television cannibalized motion picture content just as movies had with vaudeville, live theater, and novels. To further complicate the issue, Hollywood talent began to migrate to television as more and more stations were granted licenses by the FCC. For many stars, their careers were extended or enriched by television—think Gene Autry, Donna Reed, and Alfred Hitchcock.

In the 1950s, the film industry countered declining attendance with technical innovations designed to overwhelm the television experience. More expensive, higher-quality films demanded bigger, wider screens (like Cinemascope and Cinerama) that offered viewers an immersive experience further enhanced by improved color film, stereo sound, and even 3-D imagery.

Act V: Screening Cultural Memory

Screens have become pervasive in contemporary twenty-first-century life. Consumers enjoy a dizzying array of screens to gaze at phones, tablets, laptops, desktops, flat screens, and home theaters. Even hardtop cinemas persist. Humans, both urban and rural, have come to depend on them as the basic tools for delivering visual information, communication, and entertainment in the form of moving images. It's something we take for granted, a language unconsciously learned and consumed. And yet the presence of the moving image screen has been with us a mere century and a quarter. How did we get so many of them so fast? Where did they come from? And why are they forever growing and shrinking? The answers to those questions can be found in the story of the movies themselves. It is an extraordinary life and death tale with action, glory, crises, survival, and redemption. As a success story of pop cultural production, distribution, and consumption, movies retain a unique importance in capturing a collective cultural memory, a shared dream of human culture that has much to tell us about ourselves and what we value.

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EXTRA!

Invasion of the Trekkies: Thoughts on Media Fandom By Mark Silcox | Winter 2013 | Vol. 6, Issue No. 1

For Discussion

1. What is it about comic books, films, TV shows, and other media that inspire fandom?
2. Have you ever written a fan letter or participated in fandom activities? Discuss what motivated you to move beyond being “just” a reader or viewer.
3. Fan fiction is a growing presence online and, in some cases, is joining the ranks of bestsellers distributed by mainstream publishers. Discuss how technology is changing the way we read and the way we engage with media. What are the risks and benefits in expanding access and participation?
4. Do you agree with the author’s correlation between religion and fandom? Discuss your views.

EXTRA! Reading

- Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (Routledge, 1992). “Taking a stand against the stereotypical portrayal of fans as obsessive nerds ... [Jenkins] demonstrates that fans are pro-active constructors of an alternative culture using elements poached and reworked from the popular media.”—Journal of Popular Culture
- Henry Jenkins, *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture* (NYU Press, 2006). Discusses participatory culture and its effects on society. Chapters can be downloaded in pdf format from Project MUSE: <http://muse.jhu.edu/books/9780814743690>.
- Noël Carroll, *A Philosophy of Mass Art* (Oxford University Press, 1998). Discusses theories of mass art, such as film, television, music, pulp literature, and others.

EXTRA! Links

- Authors@Google: Henry Jenkins (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FbU6BWHkDYw>). Video of lecture by Henry Jenkins.
- Fanlore (http://fanlore.org/wiki/Main_Page), a collaborative information site maintained by, for, and about fans and fandom.
- FanFiction.Net (<http://www.fanfiction.net/>), a comprehensive online forum of fan fiction.
- ReadWriteThink.org. Lesson plans, readings, and resources for the classroom. Enter “fan fiction” in the Search box. (<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources>)

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