



a journal of first-year writing

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How the Molded Clay Was Shaped**

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Volume 9 | Issue 2 | Fall 2018

The Journal of the First-Year Writing Program at the University of Central Florida

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From the Editor

In one of my earliest memories, I'm three or four years old, and somehow—indeed, disastrously—I've acquired a blue ballpoint pen. The details are hazy, but my intent was simple: I was going to write. My older brother had been learning cursive in school, and he spent the afternoon showing off his fancy new signature, one full of lovely swoops and curlicues. It made his name entirely illegible, but that was beside the point. I knew his name, so communication here was secondary. What he was making was art. And I wanted in on that.

Lacking paper, I decided the wall of my bedroom would have to suffice. I gripped the pen tightly in my fist, moving it across the wall with my whole arm rather than my hand or wrist. After several shaky seconds, I created an elliptical loop—think of a roller coaster in profile and you'll have it—that looked exactly nothing like any of the letters in my name. Still, it was mine. I remember touching my pseudo-letter, feeling the cool wall behind the ink. I was a frequent wall-scribbler as a child, but my previous doodles had been different. They were usually made in crayon, and consisted of whatever sort of whorl I could produce by spinning my arm around as fast as possible before anybody could catch me. This time, though, I was not trying to deface, but rather to create.

It has been years since I'd last thought of this memory, but reading the articles in this issue of *Stylus* prompted me to consider my history as a writer. Each piece is organized around an author looking back at his or her own history as a writer and communicator, albeit in different ways. This isn't just reflection for the sake of reflection. It's reflection that *gets at* something. It's reflection as discovery. What's discovered is understandably different writer to writer, but if there is a theme to this issue, it's this: Every act of composing—no matter how seemingly small or insignificant—is an opportunity to mark the world, and to, in turn, be marked by the world.

First up is Chad Jones' essay "The Becoming of an Outsider: A Story of How the Molded Clay Was Shaped." Jones presents a compelling narrative that traces his developing awareness of

language—specifically, how others perceived his language, and him as a result—from kindergarten to his senior year in high school. His story makes clear something many of us probably feel intuitively: language and identity are intrinsically bound together. Jones describes his efforts over the years to fit in and adapt how he sounded to each new group he joined. Sometimes, this meant “talking white.” At other times, he emphasized his blackness to try and make his peers. He eventually realized, though, that he has control over how and where he deploys particular language patterns. “I have learned that the only opinion worth something is mine,” he writes. “With that, the way I interact with people is contingent on how I see fit, but I remain black through it all.”

Next is “From a Diary to an iPhone: The Extension of Journaling to Digital Forms,” by Izabela Olejnik. This piece and the remaining articles in this issue are examples of a research method known as autoethnography. Each author looks closely at some of his or her own literacy practices, using as evidence specific stories and examples of the texts themselves. This combination of reflection, analysis, and firsthand knowledge allows the researcher to create a fully realized picture of the practice and connect it to larger conceptions about how writing works. Olejnik’s focus is on Instagram, or, more specifically, “Finstagram.” She considers how her use of her Finstagram, or “fake Instagram,” mirrors her earlier journaling practices. Finstagramming serves a similar functionality, but with new affordances (such as easily including images, or writing from almost anywhere) and one big change: she now has an audience.

The third article comes from Dan Remie. In “Written in the Stars: Advocating for an Astronomical Literacy,” Remie reflects on his experiences writing in and around his high school astronomy class. This course certainly left its mark on Remie, but not just because he was so passionate about the content. Remie observes the differences in how writing was used in his astronomy class versus his English classes. In Astronomy, he felt encouraged to “write to learn.” Writing wasn’t the end goal itself, but rather the means to learn about something he cared about and communicate that learning to others. Remie supports his discussion with several examples of his own writing, from both in and out of school.

The final piece, “Reddit’s Diverse Platform: Transforming the Social Media Landscape Through Its Communities,” is by Daniel Lu. For Lu, Reddit isn’t just another social media platform. Rather, it’s a “big group chat where anyone could contribute to any ongoing conversation at any time.” By examining several of his own posts and the ways he’s used Reddit over the years, Lu constructs a portrait of a community that has shaped the way he sees himself as a writer.

We hope that you enjoy reading this issue of *Stylus*, and that the work presented here inspires you to explore what you can do with your writing, both in and out of the classroom. We also hope that you’ll consider submitting your own work for publication; at one time or another, all of the students published here were sitting in a first-year composition class, just like you. To read about their experiences (and, sometimes, struggles) along the way from receiving an assignment to being published, be sure to take a look at the writer’s statements accompanying each piece.

If you’re interested in submitting to *Stylus*, simply ask your Composition I or II instructor to forward the piece you would like to submit to the journal and we’ll take care of the rest. If you have any questions about this process, please feel free to contact the *Stylus* co-editors, Megan Lambert at Megan.Lambert@ucf.edu or me at Matthew.Bryan@ucf.edu.

-Matt Bryan
Stylus Co-Editor