

Project 14 – Non-Fiction: Opinion Pieces

- Read the two essays provided and answer the questions.

And May the Best Cheater Win

1. What thesis is Bruce expressing in this opinion piece?
2. What support ideas does he use to back up his opinion? In other words, what reasons does he give for his opinion? (these are key ideas, not simply examples)
3. Do you think Bruce has put forth enough evidence to support his opinion? Explain.
4. How would you characterize Bruce's style of writing in this essay? (is it formal. Informal, etc...) Provide an example to back up your answer. Is his style effective, considering the subject of the essay?
5. Response: Is cheating ever acceptable? Explain with evidence/reasons to back up your opinion. Don't limit your analysis to sports alone. (1/2 page minimum)

Why we Crave Horror Movies

1. What thesis is King expressing in this opinion piece?
2. What support ideas does he use to back up his opinion? In other words, what reasons does he give for his opinion? (these are key ideas, not simply examples)
3. Do you think King has put forth enough evidence to support his opinion? Explain.
4. How would you characterize King's style of writing in this essay? (is it formal. Informal, etc...) Provide an example to back up your answer. Is his style effective, considering the subject of the essay?
5. Response: What other leisure activities do people get involved in that reflect on their need to experience the kinds of emotional and physical stimulation that horror movies provide? Why do they crave them? Explain with evidence/reasons to back up your opinion. (1/2 page minimum)

Why We Crave Horror Movies

By Stephen King

I think that we're all mentally ill; those of us outside the asylums only hide it a little better – and maybe not all that much better, after all. We've all known people who talk to themselves, people who sometimes squinch their faces into horrible grimaces when they believe no one is watching, people who have some hysterical fear – of snakes, the dark, the tight place, the long drop . . . and, of course, those final worms and grubs that are waiting so patiently underground.

When we pay our four or five bucks and seat ourselves at tenth-row center in a theater showing a horror movie, we are daring the nightmare.

Why? Some of the reasons are simple and obvious. To show that we can, that we are not afraid, that we can ride this roller coaster. Which is not to say that a really good horror movie may not surprise a scream out of us at some point, the way we may scream when the roller coaster twists through a complete 360 or plows through a lake at the bottom of the drop. And horror movies, like roller coasters, have always been the special province of the young; by the time one turns 40 or 50, one's appetite for double twists or 360-degree loops may be considerably depleted.

We also go to re-establish our feelings of essential normality; the horror movie is innately conservative, even reactionary. Freda Jackson as the horrible melting woman in *Die, Monster, Die!* confirms for us that no matter how far we may be removed from the beauty of a Robert Redford or a Diana Ross, we are still light-years from true ugliness.

And we go to have fun.

Ah, but this is where the ground starts to slope away, isn't it? Because this is a

very peculiar sort of fun, indeed. The fun comes from seeing others menaced – sometimes killed. One critic has suggested that if pro football has become the voyeur’s version of combat, then the horror film has become the modern version of the public lynching.

It is true that the mythic “fairy-tale” horror film intends to take away the shades of grey It urges us to put away our more civilized and adult penchant for analysis and to become children again, seeing things in pure blacks and whites. It may be that horror movies provide psychic relief on this level because this invitation to lapse into simplicity, irrationality and even outright madness is extended so rarely. We are told we may allow our emotions a free rein . . . or no rein at all.

If we are all insane, then sanity becomes a matter of degree. If your insanity leads you to carve up women like Jack the Ripper or the Cleveland Torso Murderer, we clap you away in the funny farm (but neither of those two amateur-night surgeons was ever caught, heh-heh-heh); if, on the other hand, your insanity leads you only to talk to yourself when you’re under stress or to pick your nose on your morning bus, then you are left alone to go about your business . . . though it is doubtful that you will ever be invited to the best parties.

The potential lyncher is in almost all of us (excluding saints, past and present; but then, most saints have been crazy in their own ways), and every now and then, he has to be let loose to scream and roll around in the grass. Our emotions and our fears form their own body, and we recognize that it demands its own exercise to maintain proper muscle tone. Certain of these emotional muscles are accepted – even exalted – in civilized society; they are, of course, the emotions that tend to maintain the status quo of civilization itself. Love, friendship, loyalty, kindness -- these are all the emotions that we

applaud, emotions that have been immortalized in the couplets of Hallmark cards and in the verses (I don't dare call it poetry) of Leonard Nimoy.

When we exhibit these emotions, society showers us with positive reinforcement; we learn this even before we get out of diapers. When, as children, we hug our rotten little puke of a sister and give her a kiss, all the aunts and uncles smile and twit and cry, "Isn't he the sweetest little thing?" Such coveted treats as chocolate-covered graham crackers often follow. But if we deliberately slam the rotten little puke of a sister's fingers in the door, sanctions follow – angry remonstrance from parents, aunts and uncles; instead of a chocolate-covered graham cracker, a spanking.

But anticivilization emotions don't go away, and they demand periodic exercise. We have such "sick" jokes as, "What's the difference between a truckload of bowling balls and a truckload of dead babies?" (You can't unload a truckload of bowling balls with a pitchfork . . . a joke, by the way, that I heard originally from a ten-year-old.) Such a joke may surprise a laugh or a grin out of us even as we recoil, a possibility that confirms the thesis: If we share a brotherhood of man, then we also share an insanity of man. None of which is intended as a defense of either the sick joke or insanity but merely as an explanation of why the best horror films, like the best fairy tales, manage to be reactionary, anarchistic, and revolutionary all at the same time.

The mythic horror movie, like the sick joke, has a dirty job to do. It deliberately appeals to all that is worst in us. It is morbidity unchained, our most base instincts let free, our nastiest fantasies realized . . . and it all happens, fittingly enough, in the dark. For those reasons, good liberals often shy away from horror films. For myself, I like to see the most aggressive of them – *Dawn of the Dead*, for instance – as lifting a trap door in the civilized forebrain and throwing a basket of raw meat to the hungry alligators

swimming around in that subterranean river beneath.

Why bother? Because it keeps them from getting out, man. It keeps them down there and me up here. It was Lennon and McCartney who said that all you need is love, and I would agree with that.

As long as you keep the gators fed.

AND MAY the BEST CHEATER WIN

by Harry Bruce

Every youth knows he can get into deep trouble by stealing cameras, peddling dope, mugging winos, forging cheques, or copying someone else's answers during an exam. Those are examples of not playing by the rules. Cheating. But every youth also knows that in organized sports across North America, cheating is not only perfectly okay, it's *recommended*. "The structure of sport ... actually promotes deviance," says U.S. sport sociologist D.S. Eitzen.

The down-checked hockey player who refuses to play dirty may find himself fired off the team. The boy soccer player who refuses to rough up a superior striker to "throw him of his game" may find himself writhing under a coach's tongue-lashing. The basketball player who refuses to foul a goal-bound enemy star in the last seconds of a close game may find himself riding the bench next week. Thus, we have that cynical paradox, "the god foul," a phrase that makes about as much sense as "a beneficial outbreak of bubonic plague."

If organized sports offer benefits to youngsters, they also offer a massive program of moral corruption. The recruiting of college athletes in the United States, and the use of academic fraud to maintain the "eligibility," stunk so powerfully in 1980 that *Newsweek* decided "cheating has become the name of the game," and spoke of the fear on U.S. campuses of "an epidemic of corruption." But the epidemic has already arrived, and what really worried *Newsweek* was national acceptance of corruption as normal: "Many kids are admitting that they have tried to take the bribes and inducements on the sleazy terms with which they are offered. Their complaints are not so much that illegalities exist, but that they aren't getting their share of the goodies." Fans, alumni, coaches, college administrators, players, and their parents all believed nothing could ever be more important than winning (or more disgraceful than losing), and that cheating in victory's cause was therefore commendable.

"Candidates for big-time sport's Hall of Shame have seemed suddenly to break out all over like an ugly rash," William Oscar Johnson wrote last year in *Sports Illustrated*. He constructed a dismal catalogue of assaults on cops, drunken brawls, adventures in the cocaine trade, credit-card frauds, and other sordid activities by rich professional athletes who, in more naive times, might have earned the adulation of small boys. Jim Finks, then Chicago Bears general manager,

speculated that the trouble with the young lawbreakers was that they had "been looked after all the way from junior high school." Some of them have had doctored grades. This plus the affluence (astronomical salaries) means there has never been any pressing need for them to work things out for themselves. They have no idea how to face reality.

No one in all their lives had taught them about fair play. "In the early days of playground and high-school leagues, one of the key issues was moral regulation," says Alan Ingham, a teacher at the University of Washington. "You got sports, and you got morals and principles thrown in, too." Now, however, "the majority of things taught in sports are performance things." John Pooley of the School of Recreation, Physical and Health Education at Dalhousie University, Nova Scotia asked Calvin Hill, a former Dallas Cowboy, what percentage of all the football rookies he'd ever met had said that, as college players, they'd encountered no cheating. Hill's reply was short: "None."

So here we have the most powerful nation in the world, and it blithely corrupts children so they'll mature as athletic machines without an ounce of the moral sense that might prevent their sniffing cocaine or complicate their lust for victory. Pray for nuclear disarmament, fans.

Still, Canadians are little better. We all know who invented the game that inspired Paul Newman to star in *Slap Shot*, a black and bloody comedy about butchery on ice. We can't argue that it's only American coaches who teach peewees to draw tripping penalties rather than let an enemy player continue a break-away on your goal. Moreover, I happen to live in Halifax, where St. Mary's University was disgraced for allowing a ringer from Florida to play varsity basketball. The coach of a rival but inferior team ferreted out the truth about the player's ineligibility. In doing so, he imported one of the fine old traditions of amateur sports in the States: if you can't beat them, hire a private detective. Oh well, that's what universities are supposed to be all about: the pursuit of truth.

Pursuing another truth, Pooley of Dalhousie surveyed recent graduates of three down-east universities. The grads were both men and women, and hockey, soccer, or basketball. "With one exception (a woman field-hockey player), all felt there was immense

pressure to win,” Pooley said. Typical responses: “Winning is everything in university sport ... The measure of success was not how well you played but the win-loss record ... There is incredible pressure to perform because there are always two or three guys on the bench ready to take your place.

Half said their coaches had urged “winning at any cost.” One grad revealed, “Some coaches send their players ‘out to get’ a good player on the other team.” Another described “goon coaches who stressed intimidation and rough play.” Coaches had not only condoned tactical fouls, but had actually taught the arts of fouling during routine practice. A player who had competed against British and Bermudian team said they played “Intensely but fairly” while the Maritimers “sometimes used dirty tactics” or “blatantly tried to stop a player.”

Pooley wondered if the grads, after years in intercollegiate sports, felt it had promoted fair play. Only the field-hockey players said yes. Answers from the others were shockers: “Everyone cheats and the best cheater wins ... Fair play and sportsmanship are *not* promoted. This is a joke ... You did whatever you could to win ... You are taught to gain an advantage, whatever it takes.” Such cynicism, from people so young they’ve barely doffed their mortarboards, confirms the sad opinion of one Kalevi Heinila, who told a world scientific congress that fair play was “ripe to be dumped in the waste basket of sports history.”

The irony in all this – and it’s both ludicrous and nauseating – is that universities defend their expensive programs for intercollegiate sports with lip service to the notion that keen teamwork in clean competition nurtures good citizens. Fair play in sports, don’t you know, spawns fair players for the worlds of politics, the professions and business.

That’s a crock. What intercollegiate sport really teaches is how to get away with murder, how to be crooked within the law. Just listen to one of the fresh-faced grads in Pooley’s survey as he sets out to make his way in the world, his eyes shining with idealism: “University sport teaches you to play as close to the limits as possible; and this is the attitude that will get you ahead in the business world.” Another acknowledged that his “concept of fair play decreased”; but, on the other hand, he had learned to “stretch the rules to my advantage.” A young woman confided, “University sport has made me tough, less sensitive to other people’s feelings.” Still others stressed that

college sport had prepared them for “the real world,” for “real life,” in which winning was all.

Cheating in amateur sport, Pooley says, “gives it a hollow feeling. Many coaches do not have integrity. I’m still sickened by that. It upsets me, at all levels.” A tall, talkative, forceful man with a bony face and a thick brush of steely hair, Pooley has coached soccer in six countries, once played for professional teams in Britain, and now, cavorts on a team of men of 35. “I’m still playing league soccer,” he wrote in a paper for the Olympic Scientific Congress in Eugene, Oregon, “because: a) I helped to organize and plan my own youth soccer experiences; b) coming second or being beaten was okay; c) I was always much more interested in playing well than playing to win; d) I never minded playing less well than I’d earlier played; and e) I always felt successful at the level played.”

Those are highly un-American reasons for playing any sport, but Pooley is originally from northern England, the nation that invented “fair play” and knew that certain things just weren’t cricket. That was in a time long before Americans institutionalized cheating even in soap box derbies, before athletes gobbled steroids, before universities invented courses in weight lifting and racquetball so quarterbacks could qualify as “students.” Moreover, Pooley believes that the few adults who stick with team sports until middle age do so because, as youngsters, “They preferred the feel of the ball, the pass well made, the sweetness of the stroke or the power in the shot, rather than whether they won or lost the game.” Such people don’t need to cheat.

Some scholars believe that the sleaziness of organized sports simply reflects the sleaziness of our entire culture. Pooley points out, for instance, that one sociologist offers two reasons why cheating in sports shouldn’t be “disproportionately reprimanded.” The first is that it’s “endemic in society,” and the second is that even more cheating probably occurs in other fields. Pooley disagrees. He says this argument is like saying you should not disproportionately reprimand the clergy for being dishonest. Poor Pooley. He has such quaint ideas about sports. He actually believes they should not be immoral, and should be fun.