Prologue

Prologue is an annual journal of academic essays designed to showcase first-year writing at Denison and provide students with the opportunity to have their works published, usually for the first time. The selection process began with many first-year students submitting their essays anonymously which were carefully reviewed by members of the Editorial Board, comprised of four members of the Writing Center staff. Four pieces were selected for publication, and one of the Writing Center consultants on the editorial board reviewed one of the selected essays and met with its author to discuss how the paper could be improved. These sessions with the authors and the strengths of each essay are surveyed in the commentaries following each essay.
The *Prologue* Editorial Board, 2014-2015

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**Elizabeth Postema**
Earth is a difficult place to live. Despite its abundance of food, water, and other resources necessary for survival, these resources are scattered unevenly across the globe, and humans during their early periods have often resorted to war as a way to continue to attain these resources and thus to survive. For this reason war is a vital aspect of human history, and war is embedded in human consciousness. Yet war today is waged with a fervor and a thoroughness never before known. As Chris Hedges discusses in *War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning*, war is not only about winning; an entire society must be convinced of the righteousness of the war, because the entire population takes part in war. This involvement of whole societies in war did not start until the early modern period, but the foundations needed to convince populations were laid in the Middle Ages. This era, during which war was shockingly prominent, saw in many ways the birth of our modern perception of war. Specifically, two major ideas from the Middle Ages have a significant impact. The Crusades brought us the concept of “holy war,” in which a will higher than any individual appears not only to drive the war but also to justify it. The code of chivalry that developed at about the same time idealized violence in many ways, placing it in the same set of morals as loyalty and courage. These two concepts – the idea of “holy war” and the code of chivalry – are central to the Middle Ages' impact on the modern perception of war because they created long-lasting rifts in Western consciousness.
Because we return to these rifts each time we wage war, understanding the scars of the Middle Ages is essential to making peace in the modern world.

The First Crusade, starting in 1096, was medieval Latin Christendom's first taste of “holy war,” and it was precisely what Europe needed at the time. After the Germanic tribes' destruction of the Western Roman Empire at the end of the fifth century, Europe was thrown into chaos. Trade devolved, infrastructure went into disrepair, and people could do little to avoid the famine, disease, and poverty that arose from the crumbling of the empire. During this time, one institution emerged as the guiding force of medieval Europe: the Christian Church. Its ascent to power meant that, as decades and centuries passed, more and more desperate people put their hopes in the forgiveness of God. Karen Armstrong, in *Holy War: The Crusades and Their Impact on Today's World*, notes that a Western Christian identity was beginning to form around the trauma of this time, polarized to such forces as the increasingly invasive empire of Islam, experiencing its golden age during this period (52-53). By about 1000 AD, the Church had channeled a great deal of importance into specific holy places, such as monasteries and shrines, for the people to find solace; yet it was clear to Europeans that the holiest place of all could only be Jerusalem, the place where Jesus was crucified (Armstrong 54). A pilgrimage was needed. In the same time period, towns and trade began to revive, because much of the chaos of the Early Middle Ages had ended, especially invasions by the Vikings (Perry 143). This created a new confidence in Europe – the Western Christians believed that God was with them (Armstrong 60). Europeans, still developing a Christian identity, now had a new self-determination for such adventures as pilgrimages to the Holy Land. In 1095, Pope Urban II called for the First Crusade to retake the Holy Land from the Seljuk
Turks. It should be no surprise that more than fifty thousand people, of all social classes, set out for the Holy Land (Armstrong 68) – the pressures of religion and self-determination were ready to be released, and Europe would take the next step in forming the Western identity.

The violence of the First Crusade and subsequent “holy wars” left deep rifts on Europe and its developing identity, not unlike violence leaves scars on the mind of an impressionable child. The concept of “holy war” is perhaps a contradiction in itself – if one of the Bible's ten commandments is “You shall not murder” (*The Holy Bible: New International Version* Exod. 20.13), then the idea of Christians waging war seems nonsensical (Armstrong 63). Yet holy war originates in the Bible itself, as Armstrong suggests when writing of the Jewish conquest of Jerusalem as the first holy war. God himself talks of destroying those living in the Promised Land, that the Jews might live there: “My angel will... bring you into the land of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites, and Jebusites, and I will wipe them out. … You must demolish them and break their sacred stones to pieces” (Exod. 23.23-24). There is a reversal of ordinary morality in this most ancient holy war. This apparent reversal applies in war today, which, for Hedges, involves a “[dismantling of] our moral universe” (150). The power and force of a holy war in a religion like Judaism springs from the fact that there is only a single God, while polytheists could see many possible solutions because they believed in many gods. For the Jews and later Christians, there is only one solution, and that is the belief in and submission to God (Armstrong 16). God's higher will serves not only as justification but motivation for holy wars of that era. From the very beginning, these wars had an absolute quality to them, in which one solution was right and all the others were
unacceptable; the righteousness of God versus those living in the Promised Land, or any other enemy the Jews might face, had the force of a battle between right and wrong, between good and evil. This idea – that God's holiness and higher will justified the terrible crimes committed in war – survived into the Crusades and was used by the Church as the reason for invading the Holy Land (Briggs 153). The resulting fervor allowed for such atrocities as the massacre of Muslims and Jews in Jerusalem upon its conquest in 1098. The contradiction of “Christian warfare” was covered up by “a powerful complex of passions” (Armstrong 68), and this ability of the Crusaders to rationalize or repress the horrors committed in war, ostensibly justified by some higher will, became a part of Western identity.

Successive Crusades were mostly failures, but Latin Christendom, through these Crusades, refined the ability to fall back on a higher will to justify war and repress its terrible violence, placing the memories so deep within the collective consciousness that each new generation simply forgot the horrors committed. In later centuries even wars that were not directed at the Holy Land were depicted as crusades. French royal propaganda during the wars against the Flemish of the early 1300s contained such passages as “He who wages war against the King [of France] works against the whole Church, against Catholic doctrine, against holiness and justice, and against the Holy Land” (qtd. in Briggs 170). During and after the Great Schism, popes elevated conflicts against both rival popes and their own political rivals to the status of crusades (Briggs 170-171). During the early 1400s, the religious reform movement of Eastern Europeans like Jan Hus became the target of several crusades (Briggs 171). The Age of Exploration, which immediately followed the Renaissance, saw the conquest of civilizations and destruction
of native cultures masked in “the fine phrases of chivalric deeds and the propagation of
the Faith” (Briggs 176). Today, holy war as a concept survives, though the “higher will”
for which violence is justified has changed. Michael Howard argues that the “higher will”
has shifted from God to kings to country, and that soon the ideas of “humanity” and “the
global society” will become the newest “higher will” (134-145). Chris Hedges argues that
governments and other institutions place their wars above individual will by appealing to
forces like God and country as well as to the dead, the victims who “rule” the conflict
(94). The ability of the Western world to justify warfare and keep its atrocities out of the
glare of rational thought stems from the existence of a power that is higher than any mere
mortal, a power against which the public cannot argue; this is the cornerstone of holy war,
in the Bible just as in the Crusades and in the modern world.

As the Crusades gave Europeans a way to justify violence, the code of chivalry
also gained traction in the Western mind. Chivalry has its origins in the values of the
Germanic tribes that conquered Europe at the end of the classical age – loyalty, bravery,
and prowess in battle (Perry 139). As the Church grew stronger during the medieval
period, it sought to channel the violent energies of the newly-developing class of knights
to its own purposes (Perry 140). Thus, the Church, as will be seen, naturalized warfare as
a means to salvation (Briggs 153); in doing so, Germanic values were given a Christian
element that included, for example, protecting the poor. This fusion of Germanic and
Christian values was the code of chivalry (Perry 140). Chivalry became a potent force in
the Western mind because of the knights that adhered to it. Because of a lack of
centralized government, some of the would-be royal power flowed to the knights, who, in
addition to their wealth, gained a certain form of fame (Saul 21). This fame was
augmented by the development of a new literary genre, the chivalric biography (Saul 23). Briggs notes that in this genre, “The dirty business of warfare is transformed into something beautiful and good” (Briggs 167). Marked by a shift in emphasis from groups to individuals and from characteristics to actions, these works often described the prowess, courage, and skill of the subject, as well as the thrill of action and elation of victory (Allmand 23). These are central to our perceptions of and ideas about war even today. The survival of works such as the *Histoire*, written of William the Marshal in the 1230s (Saul 22-23), shows us how important such literature was in the Middle Ages. Tales like these served a twofold purpose – not only were they used as models for how would-be knights ought to act, but they also acted rather like today's public relations departments, serving to bolster the knights' fame and control public perception of these figures (Saul 25). These knights, then, could be seen as the precursors of today's celebrities (Saul 25), and both upper and lower social orders aspired to be like the knights, whose code of chivalry was so strong a force as to be second to, even fused with, religion (Kaeuper 186).

The code of chivalry contained a strong idealization of violence. The original Germanic values included prowess in battle and the value of violence itself (Perry 139). The Church channeled these values into Christianity and thus into chivalry by preaching that violence in the service of God was a way to earn salvation. Clerics, as Charles Briggs elucidates, became “avid war propagandists” who, both in sermons and in literature, supported and legitimized participation in just war as a holy activity (153). Works like *L'arbre des batailles* (*The Tree of Battles*), written by a doctor of canon law, Honoré Bouvet, gave legal expression to this idea, already an accepted social standpoint (Briggs
The Livre de chevalerie (Book of Chivalry) by Geoffroy de Charny, one of the most influential medieval works about chivalry, showed that men “found in their exhilarating and fulfilling fighting the key to identity” (qtd. in Briggs 153). In the essay “Chivalry, the State, and Public Order,” Richard Kaeuper argues that it was believed that knights not only had a tendency but a right and a duty to violence (185). He also notes that knights waged private war – war against other knights and their territories – when there was no external enemy (225-227). That knights waged private war and committed other violence, and were not only expected to do so but were also glorified in literature for it, highlights the central role of violence in the lives of the knights. Thus violence – purposeful, legitimized, and even justified as a holy activity – was an integral aspect of chivalry, and when Europe adopted this code into its moral and social thought, this legitimization and justification of violence was absorbed with it.

In the Late Middle Ages a gap began to form between the changing reality of war and the static image of the honorable warrior, whose code of chivalry remained an ideal. M. G. A. Vale notes that the development of the first firearms made war “impersonal and mechanical” (57). He illustrates that, through Renaissance art and literature, which tried to beautify the gun for a chivalrous society, “The harsh reality of war, and of the gun's bite and sting, remembered in the words couleuvrine [“like a grass snake”], serpentine [“serpent-like”], and faucon [“falcon”], was being smothered under a cloak of illusion” (72). What gap may have existed between the reality of war and how war was perceived through the lens of chivalry became much wider with the appearance of the gun. At the same time, the bellicose predispositions of Later Middle Ages nation-states encouraged the development of standing armies whose right to violence was given by the king; this is
an image in stark contrast to that of the “knight errant” (Keen 45), who searched for war of his own initiative and waged it as his vocation from birth and with God on his side. The power of the knights was flowing to centralized government, and knights as a social class began to decline. Yet chivalry survived, adopted by the new king's soldiers (Briggs 163-164). Chivalry also continued to be associated with social status, and many who would not gain status through inheritance, including second sons and bastards of the elite, waged war for the purpose of claiming new social status (Keen 39-44). Chivalry came to be something earned after fighting honorably in battle, and with it came an associated claim to nobility. Chivalry in its new form infiltrated the aristocratic upper class of the early modern period. Maurice Keen concludes for Western Europe that, as early as the 1400s, “To live nobly was understood to mean to live by following the profession of arms” – that is, chivalry. This association between social status and chivalry, with its accompanying values of bravery, honor, and idealization of war, continue to be important in Western social thought into the twentieth century and even today (Perry 139).

We still rely on a falsely idealistic image of the modern soldier and modern warfare. Hedges points out that “The myth of war entices us with the allure of heroism” (83). Western society today relies on a cache of “high-blown rhetoric” (84) to draw men to war, ideas like honor, loyalty, and nobility. This is, for Hedges, contrasted with the “impersonal slaughter of modern industrial warfare” in which “Men … are in service to technology” (84-86). The gap that exists between Hedges's mythic and sensory realities is a virtually direct result of the chivalrous ideal created in the Middle Ages, in which soldiers are so loyal that their determination is never lost, so courageous that they never feel fear, and so skilled in battle that they never die. The myth is augmented by the
Western mind's ability to justify violence by appealing to a higher power, an ability created and refined by the Crusades and subsequent “holy wars.” Today, any war can be a “holy war” if its cause is sufficiently justified – the foundation of these wars lies in the belief that some idea, higher, more important, and more powerful than any individual's ability to reason, is the justification and the motivation for violence.

A significant segment of Western civilization, from prominent thinkers to common people, feel that war is irrational and the evil opposed to the good of a peaceful global interdependence (Perry 556). In today's world, war is indeed irrational, at least for the reasons we often claim to fight it. We rely on anachronistic idealisms of war and the soldiers that participate. The soldiers, on average, display no more loyalty or courage than they do plate armor and halberds; war itself has an impersonal, destructive, and horrifying nature that is covered up by the lofty ideas of chivalry and of God, king, and country. Yet these concepts of holy war and the chivalrous soldier survive in Western thought because they have been engraved and refined in our consciousness, from continual and perhaps excessive use over the last thousand years. Holding on to these values not only colors our perception of war, but, as Karen Armstrong argues extensively, it also unnecessarily creates new, practical problems in the world today. To flush these ideas from the Western consciousness would take more effort than many can give and more time than most can visualize, if indeed there is any solution at all. Yet, perhaps there is hope for our would-be peaceful Western society. Holy war and chivalry became so useful because they served as a response to the traumas suffered by Western civilization during the Middle Ages. To understand these values is to recognize that they no longer serve a purpose – simply because there is no longer any threat to the entirety of
Western society. This, then, may be the first step to healing the scars on our collective mind and building the ideal of a truly peaceful society.
Works Cited


Commentary:

I was so impressed with Patrick’s essay. He manages to connect the Middle Ages to the modern world in just ten pages with a tight argument about the perception of war in the West. His introduction lays a nice roadmap for the reader; his main points are neatly organized, his analysis is thorough, and the “so what” of his conclusion is important. Since this paper was already working at such a high level, when I worked with Patrick to revise it one last time, we were able to focus on lower level concerns, such as grammar and syntax.

-Kelsey Hagarman, Writing Center Consultant
Drones: Agents of Ethical Destruction
By Bobby Craig

In March of 2013, United States Senator Rand Paul stood before the Senate and filibustered the nomination of John Brennan for Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (Ewing). As it stood, Paul opposed President Barack Obama’s drone policy. Paul spoke for thirteen hours discussing his disagreement with the President’s policy of using drones domestically for lethal purposes (Ewing). While significantly fewer Americans believe drones should be used domestically than abroad (Brown and Newport), it is shocking that the majority of Americans believe foreign drone usage is ethically and legally justified when the same principles apply.

Officially starting their service in 2004, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV), often called drones, have killed thousands of foreigners, both combatants and civilians. Outraged by unlawful drone strikes in their countries, Middle Eastern citizens who have nothing to do with terrorist activities feel their rights are being infringed upon in a way that is not internationally legal or ethical (“Outrage in Pakistan”). Though American counterterrorism and drone experts claim that drones have “surgical precision” (Brennan), it is undeniable that there are still large amounts of collateral damage and civilian death involved with drone strikes. The psychological effects these indirect encounters can have on pilots are unmistakable and daunting (Martin). Pilots suffer from clinical stress and those not affected are often desensitized, raising more ethical questions (Martin). Drones are not the problem—the use of drones in military situations is the problem, and it needs to be confronted. The psychological aspects affecting all involved,
legal and political issues ignored by the United States government create an unethical, disproportionate scope of war.

Many groups are involved with the politics, tactics, and action of combat. Whether the party involved is a soldier or civilian, drones have a psychological effect on how armed conflict is perceived and carried out. It is arguable that pilots are the most affected by the use of drones. In carrying out the attacks, drone pilots quickly become desensitized to combat. It is not uncommon for United States drone pilots to sit in small rooms thousands of miles away from their intended targets (Bumiller “A Day Job”). Physical distance allows for a large emotional and ethical distance; not only do pilots not feel the same sense of brutality as they do in actual fighter planes, but they acknowledge the bizarre dichotomy between being in their dark drone room and being at home an hour later (Bumiller “A Day Job”). This emotional disconnect from prospective targets holds the pilots less accountable for their actions—due to this, apathy sets in and causes pilots to act in ways that would not be common if they were actually present. John Kaag and Sarah Kreps explain that due to the ease of using drone technology, this apathy leads to habitual actions, making them completely void of reason (“Opinion”). Robert Gresser’s conclusions add to this. He writes, “technology is replacing judgment and character” (78), which leads Americans down a confusing ethical path. Kaag and Kreps say in another article that if a soldier tries to justify his or her “moral legitimacy,” his or her scope of reason and ethical views become clouded—pinpointing enemies can never be an objective job (“The Use of Unmanned” 26). While these problems are evident with all warfare, they are multiplied when the soldiers are moved thousands of miles away from their intended targets.
History has seen relative proximity dictate the subjectivity of war; in medieval Europe, artillery was viewed as far more impersonal than engaging in close-quarters combat (Allmand 57-58). Bradley Strawser argues that this proximity has little affect on ethical decisions, merely being “an extension of a long historical trajectory of removing a warrior even further from his foe for the warrior’s…protection” (343), but there are problems with this mindset. It is far more personal to use force to impale an enemy rather than fire a projectile at them. The same applies to drone pilots in modern day warfare. Firing on enemy combatants while looking at a computer screen does not have nearly the same immediate effects as hearing and feeling huge explosions, people screaming, and smelling death in a warzone. This removal of distance also eliminates the fear of death or retaliation for pilots. While many would argue that this is a good thing, it must be understood that fear is a very important component of war. Fear holds soldiers accountable for their actions and is a key reason they often do not overstep ethical and moral boundaries. Without feeling like their lives are endangered, pilots are more likely to keep drones in combat zones and overstayed their often already unwelcomed visit, engaging in arbitrary killing (“Drone Warfare”). This feeling of security also creates a power disparity; while the American pilots do not feel the need to retreat for fear of losing their lives, the enemy combatants have these worries, resulting in an unbalanced fight. This results in far more deaths than if both sides of a conflict had to fear for their lives. Soldiers respond to drone piloting much like they respond to video games, often being desensitized to killing remotely and even referring to those casualties as “bugsplats” (“Drone Warfare: The Dehumanization”), indicating just how much they value foreign lives when presented through a screen. Pilots “inflict civilian
casualties…more easily draw[ing] the United States into conflict” (Bumiller and Shanker). This fact is minimized though; in order to continue public support, drones are offered to the public as a risk-free alternative. This additional support perpetuates violent acts, sending more and more soldiers (ground troops and drone pilots) to war, risking more lives and diplomatic relations between countries.

While pilots’ proximities to warzones affect their ability to make ethical decisions, it is important to note that this distance does eventually impact soldiers’ psyches, often resulting in unexpected psychological trauma. After missions, it is common for pilots to realize the effects of their unethical decisions, consequently weighing on their consciousness. One account by drone pilot Brandon Bryant details his task to “linger over a site for several haunting hours” where he would then attack and “watch people gather up the remains of those killed and carry them to the local cemetery or scrub the scene by dumping weapons into a river” (Power). In the same article, Matthew Power says that Bryant described this as a “voyeuristic intimacy” (Power), hardly the thoughts of a sane soldier. Little is completely known about psychological disorders in drone pilots since the area is such a new one, but according to Nancy Cooke, a professor of cognitive science and engineering at Arizona State University's College of Technology and Innovation, PTSD’s symptoms “may actually be intensified [with drone warfare]” (Chow). This conclusion is not extremely revolutionary, but it does refute the argument that drones are a safer alternative for our soldiers. When they are not abroad, they are still exposed to many of the dangers of war and are confronted with the results of their actions just as Bryant was. While it is simple to pull the trigger from thousands of miles away, it is just as hard to deal with having killed the subjects of lengthy periods of
observation. It is no more responsible to subject pilots to killing with drones, especially when it has been noted that the psychological damage can be increased—this decision is unjustified and unethical. The myth that drone pilots simply sit in a room and push buttons is obviously not true. Drone pilots experience an altered view of war. They see their targets as objects before a strike; when they finally see them as humans it is too late. While it would be assumed that pilots recognize these patterns, they do not.

Despite these obvious ethical and psychological faults in drone warfare, domestic civilians see drone warfare as something that is acceptable. Looking past the harm being done to soldiers, many Americans rationalize drone warfare by asserting that it is far more acceptable if American soldiers’ lives are not in danger. Not only is this false, but it creates a new, irresponsible mentality that urges solving every single problem with violence instead of diplomacy. When this mentality perpetuates conflict and the use of drones, foreign civilians then become angered regardless of the United States’ intent. For example, when the United States uses drones to target terrorist groups in Middle-Eastern countries such as Pakistan, the Middle Eastern civilians do not notice the terrorist threats that drones eliminate due to their stealth. However, when drone pilots make mistakes resulting in explosions near civilians and civilian casualties, other Middle-Eastern countries see that and develop animosity towards the United States. In her book, *Drone Warfare: Killing By Remote Control*, author Madea Benjamin notes that like soldiers, civilians in these drone attack areas start to develop PTSD symptoms. These issues were not as much of a problem prior to drones lingering, but now that they are in wide use, Hamdi Shaqqura, Deputy Director for the Programs Affairs of the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, explains the conditioned fear of death associated with hearing drones
above (Wilson). Shaqqura states, “You can’t sleep. You can’t watch television. It frightens the children. When they hear it, they say, ‘It is going to hit us’” (Wilson). It is unethical to make civilians feel unsafe in their own homes, regardless of the motive.

These Middle-Eastern citizens are not just angry about the collateral damage that is killing hundreds of civilians or the decreased sense of security in their own homes; they are upset about the United States violating international law to do so. The United Nations (UN) Charter argues against the United States’ current use of drones, especially for lethal purposes in the Middle East. The United States takes advantage of the ambiguity the international community has left surrounding drone legality. For example, Pakistan has had many problems with the United States micromanaging their tasks; the United States has consistently exploited international law loopholes by exercising missions in Pakistan without consent to fulfill their political and military goals by saying there is a “perceived violation of sovereignty” (Rosen). While this may not seem like a major problem, it becomes extremely problematic when the United States’ drones’ attacks account for a great deal of collateral damage. Furthermore, the United States is willfully ignorant about their attacks. In an effort to play dumb, the United States alters the method by which combatant deaths versus civilian deaths are tracked, “systematically underestimating” civilian casualties to appear more efficient (Friedersdorf). This allows the military to further justify their means. While Pakistan has not necessarily publicly denounced United States’ drone usage, Pakistanis become increasingly upset with their country’s inability to stand up to the United States. It is illegal by international law for Pakistan to “consent to…extrajudicial killing[s]” by United States drone strikes “unless it itself is engaged in an armed conflict with individuals or groups that are being targeted by
US drones” (Mahmood 66-67). Due to these secretive foreign drone strikes, both the United States and the countries it infiltrates violate international humanitarian laws. The cost of these civilians’ lives was an easily fulfilled political agenda. This would not be nearly as simple with ground troops, which would force the United States to be more accountable with their attacks and plan strategically rather than acting rashly.

In his speech unveiling the myths surrounding President Obama’s drone policy, John Brennan suggests that the United States’ drone policy “conform[s] to the principle of distinction” (Brennan). However, as the American Civil Liberties Union Deputy Legal Director Jameel Jaffer states, Brennan’s speech does not supply anyone with “legal analysis” or reason—most of Brennan’s claims are unjustified, unsupported “legal conclusions” (“ACLU”). In addition, Brennan’s claims appear to be untrue. According to research conducted by the Stanford and New York University Law Schools, the United States engages in “double tap” exercises where they hit targets in rapid succession, often not letting up for first responders (Cavallaro, Sonnenberg, and Knuckey 74). To justify these attacks, the United States uses the argument of “guilt by association,” which clearly violates the immunity that non-combatants are allotted in International Humanitarian Law (Mahmood 70). These problems are not present with manned aircraft due to the unwillingness to linger after attacks in fear of retaliation, again proving the necessity of fear and personal risk in warfare to ensure ethics.

As if the present nature of drones is not already unethical, the future of drones presents even more ethical qualms—these policies must be curbed before drone usage is continued and automated. The United States Department of Defense has already developed drones that takeoff, land, and refuel in mid-air, and international figureheads
are already anticipating and denouncing the automation of weapon systems (Cohen). As Noel Sharkey states in her 2011 publication, “There will be a staged progression towards autonomous operation; first for flight then for target selection” (1-2). This means that facial recognition and threat detection algorithms could one day be behind the firing of explosives, entirely eliminating humanity from combat. Not only is this unethical, but it is extraordinarily dangerous. While human-made decisions are not always perfect, it is questionable how accurate these algorithms can really be in “assess[ing] individual intention” (Cohen). As Lucius Seneca once stated, “[a] sword is never a killer, it is a tool in the killer's hand”—it appears it will not be long before the validity of this sentiment is questioned (Cohen).

Being the world’s pioneer of drone technology, the United States will have a profound impact on the future decisions made internationally. It is the responsibility of Americans to safeguard their own rights, and the rights of other individuals globally, and to protest the injustices they see their government committing. If the United States implements legal and ethical standards, it is likely that precedent will be established for countries that choose to adopt drones in the future. The issues surrounding drones are not problematic for one party involved—they are negatively affecting all parties and threaten to damage relations in families, civilians, and other countries. As other countries begin to adopt drones, extremely limited use must become the norm. Drones need to be thoroughly examined before they are accepted as any sort of widely used lethal weapon; with a technology so young, it is risky and unethical to learn about it as it is used. If the apparent problems are fixed and the drone policy is replaced with a more effective
alternative in the future, it could be a viable option; however, in their current state, drones are violating laws and ethics and should not be used.


"Outrage In Pakistan After U.S. Drone Strike Kills Talibam Leader." Personal interview.


Commentary:

The initially submitted copy of “Drones: Agents of Ethical Destruction” had a strong thesis, thorough support for that thesis, and a well-organized argument. The focus on the emotional effects of this type of warfare on both the pilots of the drones and the victims of drone strikes was particularly well examined, and is a perspective to this issue that seems to be frequently ignored by the news. In meeting to revise the paper, we mainly worked to clarify the argument in the few places where it was necessary. We altered any ambiguity in phrasing, and read closely to make sure any of these ambiguities were removed. Overall, the essay was a strong one to begin with, and the work we did in our meeting was to make sure what was already there was as clearly and well stated as possible.

-Paige Vosmik, Writing Center Consultant
On the morning of April 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 1863, travelling photographers William D. McPherson and his partner Mr. Oliver rose to document the lives of soldiers, officers, and civilians stationed at a Union camp in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Stepping into a medic’s tent, they were greeted to a grisly sight: a medical examination on a runaway slave known as Gordon. Gordon’s back was a maze of crisscrossing scars, the result of several beatings over the course of his years of enslavement. Dumbfounded, McPherson snapped an image that circulated in a variety of newspapers and periodicals, described by contemporaries as “An appeal so mute and powerful that none but hardened natures can look upon it unmoved.”\textsuperscript{1} Gordon’s deeply scarred back has since appeared in countless secondary sources, and as such, one could argue that it has lost some of its power. McPherson’s photograph has become a quintessential document, and yet it has become easy—routine, even—to push slavery to the back of our collective memory; slavery was certainly awful, but our understanding of its devastating effects can be contained and made less traumatic by observing Gordon’s ravaged back.

One hundred and fifty years later, filmmaker Steve McQueen’s \textit{12 Years a Slave} suggests that the director is dissatisfied with this reality. A dramatic retelling of Solomon Northup’s memoir, McQueen’s film aims to expose slavery for the visceral and dehumanizing institution it was, determined to delegitimize any account that

\textsuperscript{1} "Picture of a Slave." \textit{The Liberator} (Boston), June 12, 1863.
romanticizes, diminishes, or tries to excuse it. McQueen accomplishes this with his careful look at the relationship between master and slave, the role of women and sexual aggression and oppression on a plantation, and slavery’s destructive effects on both the victim and victimizer’s humanity. To his credit, McQueen constructs his argument without abandoning historical accuracy; even the few narrative changes he makes further heighten the audience’s understanding of slavery’s brutality, but not at the expense of thematic veracity. But far from being a totally melancholy film reflecting solely on slavery’s nightmarish horrors, McQueen infuses his film with brief flickers of hope to provide his characters—and his audience—with the thought that persevering against atrocities may yet lead to a better life.

Reflecting on McQueen’s film warrants a look back at other films that colored America’s perception of slavery, namely 1939’s wildly popular Gone with the Wind. At the time of its release, critics and audiences alike lauded the film as an unparalleled masterpiece, but it has since attracted criticism for its portrayal of slaves. The African American characters, depicted as bumbling idiots, represent several negative stereotypes. Worse still, they come across as completely at ease with their shackles, “dutiful and content, clearly incapable of an independent existence.”2 Oscar Polk’s domestic house slave, for example, is compliant—complicit even—in perpetuating an image of blacks needing supervision from white authorities; the film even goes so far as to depict the Ku Klux Klan as a heroic organization nobly defending the righteousness of white supremacy. Nevertheless, the film’s tremendous popularity seeped its way into the American consciousness, and for decades, its portrayal of the Old South as a noble society with slavery as an incidental afterthought shaped modern audience’s perceptions.

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In aiming to delegitimize such portrayals, McQueen subverts more than seventy years of deep-rooted, racist public beliefs about enslavement.

*12 Years a Slave* begins with the abduction and sale of Solomon Northup, a successful violinist and free black man living in antebellum Saratoga, New York. The film charts Northup’s rapid and profound dehumanization as his abductors sadistically declare his freedom forfeited, that any attempts to identify himself as a free man will only earn him abuse or worse. Locking him in a dank cell, his captors mercilessly beat Northup with a paddle, each crack of wood on flesh punctuated by Northup’s cries and his abductor’s emphatic shouts of “you’re a slave! You’re a Georgia slave!” As a free man, Northup’s brutal kidnapping and mistreatment may seem anomalous—in fact, a vast majority of the kidnapped African Americans were not full-grown men but women, children, or the elderly—but Northup’s own telling of the event corroborates McQueen’s account. In his text, he writes “Even now the flesh crawls upon my bones, as I recall the scene. I was all on fire. My sufferings I can compare to nothing else than the burning agonies of hell!” The film’s version of the scene is doubly powerful in its condemnation of slavery not just because of its adherence to Northup’s telling, but for its refusal to employ cinematic tricks to convey its brutality. Armed with only the stark violence of its imagery and a softly somber orchestral piece, the film thrusts viewers into a terrifying yet accurate portrayal of slavery’s awful reality: entrapment and torture carried out on vulnerable, innocent people.

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3 *12 Years a Slave*. Directed by Steve McQueen. 2013.
5 Northup, Solomon. *Twelve Years a Slave*. Derby and Miller, 1853. 25.
McQueen also explores slavery’s abject horrors in his treatment of the film’s female characters. Foremost is Patsey, plantation owner Edwin Epps’s young and dexterous slave whose extraordinary skill at picking cotton earns her the title “Queen of the Field.” Despite her exceptional performance as a worker, she suffers unspeakable cruelty at the hands of both her master and his wife: she is habitually raped by Edwin and routinely mistreated by her “jealous” mistress. According to Thelma Jennings, slave women were subjected to worse abuse than their male counterparts since they had to undergo sexual cruelty in addition to the violence and neglect other men suffered, and Patsey is no exception. A scene depicting her violent rape matches societal expectations at the time, as does the abuse she suffers at Mistress Epps’s hands. In his narrative, Northup characterizes Mistress Epps’s violence as a product of her jealousy, which can be supported by a variety of slave narratives. In his famous autobiography, Frederick Douglass describes slave concubines as “a constant offence to their mistress. […] She is never better pleased than when she sees them under the lash, especially when she suspects her husband of showing [them] favors which he withholds from her.” Contrast Patsey’s treatment with the slaves’ treatment in *Gone with the Wind*; in the latter film, the slaves are treated like common maids and manservants, without any hints that they may in fact be suffering unfathomable abuses. With Patsey, however, McQueen shines a light on the horrors slave women endured every day, living in constant fear of violence that many of them felt powerless to stop.

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McQueen further examines sexual exploitation with the ancillary character Eliza. Early on in the film, she is separated from her children when a New Orleans slave broker refuses to sell her family together. One of Jennings’ main arguments is that sexual exploitation was the worst abuse slave women had to endure, so it seems odd at first that Eliza’s primary hardship comes not from rape. To be sure, she suffers many of the same abuses as Patsey, but for her, the worst consequence of her enslavement is the loss of her children, which is in its own unique way a byproduct of sexual exploitation. 19th century women were taught to aspire to little more than marriage and children, but for Eliza, achieving these aspirations only means further emotional abuse when they are taken away from her. Separated from their children—and then forced to produce new ones for their master’s profit—women’s reproductive rights were nonexistent. So when Eliza insists that “By God, I will weep for my children,” the audience understands that her greatest pain is in fact an intense form of sexual abuse—perhaps not the most objectively awful, but for Eliza, by far the most traumatic.

Despite its unwavering adherence to historical accuracy, 12 Years a Slave does make some changes to Northup’s narrative. However, instead of diminishing the film’s integrity, such changes serve to elevate the narrative in ways that both amplify the audience’s emotional involvement and help viewers make inferences regarding what could have happened, even if not explicitly stated by Northup. One of these changes occurs in an early scene in the film in which Northup has a brief sexual encounter with another slave. Northup makes no mention of such an encounter, but upon further reflection, excising his sex life makes sense. In the 19th century, candid discussion of sex

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8 Jennings, “Colored Women.”
9 McQueen, 2013.
was extremely taboo, and it is unlikely that Northup would admit to marital infidelity in his writing. But that said, willingly or unwillingly, slaves reproduced; otherwise there would only be one generation. Knowing that they reproduced, and knowing that Northup may have consciously decided to exclude that episode from his narrative, McQueen’s inclusion of the scene is a reasonable inference. Even if the encounter is purely invention, historian Robert Rosenstone argues that good invention “Alters and compresses the spirit of the documentable events into a particular dramatic form. In such a scene, film clearly does not reflect a truth—it creates one.”

The invention in question is historically informed, and thus offers another window into Northup’s hardships: throughout the encounter, there is no evidence of joy or love from either party. For slaves, even acts that should provide physical pleasure and emotional happiness are reduced to their basest, least passionate qualities.

As McQueen uses historical invention to depict Northup’s disconnection from physical desires such as sex, other instances of invention appear in the film’s use of symbols to express the conflicting forces of hope and despair slowly gnawing at the characters’ humanity. Foremost of these is Northup’s violin, which comes to represent the life he had before slavery and the hope that one day such a life may belong to him once more. In the film (but not the narrative), Northup destroys his violin in a fit of rage, symbolizing the role slavery has had in traumatizing him and subsuming his identity. Without one reminder of his freedom—or, for that matter, his humanity—Northup is reduced to a piece of property. Although the scene is not in Northup’s text, the violin’s

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destruction gives audiences an effective visual image to express McQueen’s examination of slavery’s shattering toll.

Invention is used once again during one of the film’s most harrowing scenes with Patsey. Returning to Epps’s plantation with a bar of soap, Patsey shrieks that she picks “Five hundred pounds of cotton, day in, day out, more than any man here. And for that I will be clean.”¹¹ For her transgression (and because of his irrational belief that she was sexually involved with another slaver), Epps savagely flays her, shredding the flesh from her bones and knocking her unconscious. But at the end of this unendurably extended scene, as Northup unties her from the whipping post, the camera intimately zooms in on the bar of soap that drops from her grasp—she had been clutching it the whole time. While Northup’s narrative acknowledges that such a beating took place and that Patsey did indeed come back with an illicit bar of soap,¹² no mention is made of Patsey clinging to it. One could make the case that since Patsey ultimately drops her soap, McQueen aimed to demonstrate her complete loss of hope, but by refusing to relinquish her comforts (no matter how small they may seem) in the face of overwhelming dehumanization, Patsey remarkably holds on to the one thing that gives her hope that “things wouldn’t be that way always.”¹³ The invention, though not explicitly supported by Northup’s text, stays true to the film’s spirit and tone: bleak, awful, and at times overwhelming, but ultimately hopeful that life may one day get better.

Looking back on the centuries of atrocities humans have inflicted on helpless others, it is easy to fall into despair just as Solomon and Patsey at times do. It can be easier to look away, to content ourselves with knowing that slavery was degrading and

¹¹ McQueen, 2013.
¹² Northup, Twelve Years, 169-173
monstrous and inhumane, but refusing to acknowledge enslavement for what it truly was is to disrespect the spirits of the men, women and children who lived and suffered and died in slavery’s cruel grip. Shattering Gone with the Wind’s thin veneer of slavery as little more than ignorant but happy servitude, 12 Years a Slave at last affords audiences a chance to come to a deeper understanding of the peculiar institution for all its unimaginable horrors. But if the devastating stories of violence and terror become too hard to bear, keep this in mind: in the end, Solomon Northup did return home. Through the whipping that would have destroyed a lesser spirit, Patsey held on to her bar of soap until the bitter end. And after years of enslavement that left his back a tattered mess, the man known as Gordon became a soldier in the Union Army and fought for the freedom that had been denied him his whole life. One cannot diminish the atrocities that lurk in our history, but with Northup’s voice and McQueen’s camera, one can come one step closer to understanding and empathizing, and thus, can endeavor to ensure that no such horrors will be committed again.
Commentary:

This paper, which was written for Dr. Proctor’s Writing 101 seminar, examines the accuracy of Steve McQueen’s historical argument in his film *12 Years a Slave*. The paper was uniquely difficult to write, rewrite, and revisit—namely because each revision required re-watching one of the most overwhelming films I’ve ever seen. *12 Years a Slave* is a film that challenges and eviscerates our preconceived notions about American slavery, the ones we modern viewers have established to distance ourselves from its cataclysmic atrocities that lurk in our not-too-distant past. Creating this paper, then, became an endeavor to explain how McQueen’s depiction of unimaginable suffering was devastatingly, sickeningly accurate.

Revisions on this paper included expanding the discussion on historical preconceptions about slavery fostered by *Gone with the Wind*, further detailing the cinematic tactics the filmmakers employed to relate their argument, and correcting the grammatical errors that snuck their way in. The end result, I hope, is a paper that vindicates McQueen’s historical argument and encourages readers to turn to the film should they want their preconceptions about slavery to be shattered.

-Audrey Metzger, Writing Center Consultant
The plot of Peter Carey’s *The Chemistry of Tears* bears much resemblance to the clockwork automata it contains: complex, finely tuned, and constructed with a clever hand. Throughout the intertwining stories of Catherine, a horologist grieving her secret lover, and Henry, a worried father who commissions a mechanical duck, Carey deals with several intricate themes. The boundary (or lack thereof) between man and machine, the nature of the universe, and the possibility of a higher power are all subject to his exploration. In this 2012 novel, *The Chemistry of Tears*, Carey blends elements traditionally considered “human” with elements traditionally considered “mechanical” by describing human physiology and behavior as machinelike, while ascribing a certain life or personality to automata. By combining these normally disparate factions, Carey seems to argue that the distinction between the organic and the robotic is meaningless; instead, his interest appears to lie in the broader systems that transcend such categories. Whether human or machine, all things are subject to the scientific laws of the universe.

Aspects of human anatomy are of particular importance to Carey, as he recognizes their innate machinelike qualities. He details the various processes of the body, some of which bear heavy emotional connotations, in very robotic terms. When Catherine thinks of Matthew, her recently deceased lover, she cannot help but reflect on his decomposition: “All his beauty turned into a factory, producing methane, carbon dioxide, rotten egg gas, ammonia” (Carey 43). She compares his once living, beautiful
body directly to a “factory” of natural gasses, highlighting the mechanical nature of the corpse’s decay. Later in the novel, she also describes his tear glands as “intensely complicated factories” to achieve a similar effect (Carey 74). As suggested by the title, tears play an important role in the novel simultaneously as a traditional signal of human emotion and a scientifically complex chemical; after Catherine cries at a dinner party, her boss, Croft, explains how “tears produced by emotions are chemically different from those we need for lubrication” and that her “shameful little tissues… now contained a hormone involved in the feeling of sexual gratification, another hormone that reduced stress; and finally a very powerful natural painkiller” (Carey 224). Tears, which are usually detailed in more emotional terms (relating to sadness especially), are described by Croft in a surprisingly clinical way. Rather than make symbols of human emotion and mechanical elements mutually exclusive, The Chemistry of Tears tends to keep the two in close proximity. Even sex, an intimate and essential experience for most living organisms, can be understood as a machinelike process. Catherine remembers her private moments with Matthew in terms of his anatomy, their intercourse enabled by the process in which “the blood from the cavernous spaces of the penis is returned by a series of vessels, some of which emerge in considerable numbers and converge on the dorsum of the organ to form the deep dorsal vein” (Carey 144). The imagery of Matthew’s sexual organ as a kind of blood-fueled machine, full of “vessels” in the same way an automaton is full of tubes and wires, further bridges the divide between human and robot. According to Carey, then, all human bodies can be considered a kind of organic machine, programmed to abide by certain processes and laws of the universe.
To further muddy the boundary, Carey reverses how man and machine stereotypically behave; in *The Chemistry of Tears*, clocks and automata often appear lifelike, while humans seem cold and repetitive. The mechanical swan, a central figure throughout the novel, exemplifies the notion of the “living” machine. Catherine notes that when the swan is turned on, its “every eerie movement [is] smooth as a living thing, a snake, an eel, a swan of course” (Carey 221). While Catherine describes the swan’s lifelike motion as “eerie,” her opinion may be a product of her assumptions about machine behavior; as automata are traditionally viewed as cold and rigid, the idea of a machine that can move fluidly unsettles her. Despite being composed of inorganic parts, the automatic swan can maneuver just as smoothly and organically as any living creature. However, the swan is only one of several automata in the novel that displays uncannily lifelike characteristics – the laughing Jesus, an automaton made by Herr Sumper for his “Genius,” is another example. After the “eighteen-inch-tall likeness of Jesus Christ” falls, Sumper describes how “the arms opened wide, the body was lifted, and then the body rolled, and revealed the sacred heart, and then, from his chest came a laugh…” (Carey 193-194). Laughter is often considered a fundamentally human trait, entirely impossible for a humorless robot to experience. Sumper’s laughing Jesus contradicts this image, subverting the stereotype of machines as hollow, unexpressive hunks of metal. In fact, Catherine, a human, often expresses less emotion than the clockwork artifacts she works on. She describes herself as a “highly specialized creature,” able to easily observe and organize heaps of mechanical parts “even whilst reading heart-wrenching emails…” (Carey 104). Her ability to categorize with mechanical precision is, apparently, unaffected by her psychological state. Despite the emotional turmoil caused by her
lover’s last messages, she cannot help but note, classify, and mentally catalogue the swan’s various rings and plates, much like a robot designed to do a single job without thought. Even her deletion of the emails lacks much sentiment: “‘Meet you outside the place.’ Delete. ‘See you there.’ Delete. ‘I kiss your toes.’ Delete. ‘I love you. Sorry I was a beast.’ Delete” (Carey 102). The rhythm of the sentence imitates that of a factory machine, continually turning screws or drilling holes for each piece that cycles past. Catherine’s concise, repetitive actions – in the face of an emotionally charged process – paint her as more robot than human. Due to Carey’s subversion of what it means to be human or machine, it is often difficult to tell who or what is truly “real,” in the organic sense.

As the labels of “mechanical” and “humanlike” become less and less illuminating of differences between the two groups, The Chemistry of Tears turns to a different method of understanding the world: how life and the universe can be fathomed through a broad network of natural laws. Whether a being is composed of flesh or metal, the same rules of physics, thermodynamics, and conservation apply; both humans and machines are, above all, systems driven by actions and reactions. The digestive system, shared between both Catherine and Vaucanson’s Duck, exemplifies the notion of universal patterns. The language Catherine uses to describe this system, “eat, macerate, excrete” (Carey 137), mimics the actions of the duck, who “would be made to flap its wings, drink water, digest grain and defecate…” (Carey 22). The inorganic or organic nature of the individual is inconsequential, as these classifications play second fiddle to a more universal process. The sequence of eating, then excreting, remains the same whether it is a man or a machine. However, these systems are detectable outside the individual as well;
the Swinburne, an enormous museum and Catherine’s workplace, can be considered a kind of system in its own right. Catherine refers to it as a chaotic, yet astonishingly beautiful “great mechanical beast inside its Georgian cube on Lowndes Square, the wires, the trustees, the rules, the secrets… the entire jerry-built mandarin complex of rat runs which is a two-hundred-year-old building in twenty-first-century space” (Carey 82). Like many objects and environments described in *The Chemistry of Tears*, the Swinburne consists of both animate and inanimate elements, from complex networks of cables to hurried curators. Yet, these traditionally opposing facets fit together to form something “quite astonishing” indeed; like some enormous nervous system, the Swinburne operates through the numerous tracks, rules, and “rat runs” that constitute its existence (Carey 82). Though Catherine feels that she fits perfectly as a horologist at this museum, she can pinpoint her exact place among the macro-systems of the Earth itself while on vacation with Matthew: “Swimming off Dunwich beach, we had been aware of our skins, our hearts, water, wind, the vast complex machine of earth, the pump of rain and evaporation and tide, timeless wind to twist the health trees” (Carey 144). While Catherine’s heart pumps blood, the hydrologic system pumps water through “rain and evaporation and tide”; while the nerves in her skin rush signals to her brain, the wind rushes unendingly from higher to lower areas of pressure. From the small-scale organs of the skin and heart to the enormous, earth-wide organs of wind and water, she can detect the patterns that compose her universe. The individual (whether organic or mechanical), the group, the Earth, and, by extension, the entire cosmos are all guided by the same thing: a network of systems based on scientific laws.
Yet, several characters in *The Chemistry of Tears* delude themselves with the fantastical ideas of a “deeper order” or “greater meaning” behind the universe; both Sumper and Amanda all fall victim to these fantasies. Carey suggests that, while it is seductive to imagine such higher powers, it is more important to appreciate the visible world and its natural systems. After Amanda reels off a violent and apocalyptic prophecy inspired by Sumper’s theories, including “ghosts” and “fabulous beings” that elude human perception, she finally admits “none of [that] can possibly be true” (Carey 229). The notion of solving the *Mysterium Tremendum* mentioned in Henry’s notebooks captivates Amanda’s wild imagination, to the point where she cannot think of anything else; she is consumed by finding hidden connections and messages to support her claims. However, in the end, she realizes that her theories are nothing more than unsubstantiated ravings. Catherine understands this from the start, telling Amanda in an earlier exchange, “We are not here to invent stories about the hull. We are here to restore this extraordinary object. The real world is beautiful enough” (Carey 117). While Amanda feels as if the swan’s hull requires an invented backstory, or a mysterious higher power to guide it, Catherine knows that such beliefs are unnecessary. She recognizes the rare beauty of the artifact on its own, with no need for added mystery – the visible universe operates on the same principle, inherently more awe-inspiring than any lofty speculation could match. Both Catherine and Matthew are able to accept this, opting to appreciate the world on a material (rather than spiritual) level. She believes that, while neither of them “had time for souls,” and while their bodies were simply “intricate chemical machines,” their rejection of mysticism never “diminished [their] sense of wonder, [their] reverence for Vermeer and for Monet, [their] floating bodies in the salty water” nor their “evanescent
joy before the dying of the light” (Carey 17). A “sense of wonder” can exist without theological or mystical beliefs, according to Catherine; the natural beauty of artwork, oceans, and sunsets are more easily appreciated in the absence of complex ontological theories. Though humans may be like organic automata, piloted by electrical impulses, neurotransmitters, and chemical signals, this material nature does not impede the individual’s ability to experience joy and amazement.

At the novel’s close, Catherine remarks that a human’s skin, “the largest sensory organ,” acts as a microcosm of the “universe itself” (Carey 229). Organs, circuit boards, wires, and nerve cells can all be considered small universes, then, as they are all organizations of complex systems; both a grieving horologist and a robotic swan, while superficially different, rely on these same systems. In essence, the universe as described in The Chemistry of Tears is a vast network composed of smaller and smaller networks, each of these regulated by fundamental scientific principles. While the universe that Carey presents lacks spirituality in the religious sense, it retains a certain soulfulness, rooted in the proper appreciation of the world as it is. Perhaps what Carey is arguing, then, is that the differentiations between man and machine, the fabricated narratives of a “higher power,” and the delusions of fate are all barriers to fully recognizing the grandeur of the universe. According to Carey, a rich and vibrant reality lies directly in humanity’s line of sight – humanity just has to notice it.
Works Cited

Commentary:

Human and Machine Systematics in *The Chemistry of Tears* was written by Elizabeth Postema for Dr. Brown’s Writing 101 class. It is an exceptionally strong paper. Elizabeth and I mostly discussed the simple ways in which she could strengthen her argument through improving her rhetoric in certain and specific instances. With a few changes Elizabeth’s paper became even more persuasive and eloquent.

-Hadley Nugent, Writing Center Consultant