Preface

The Writing Center’s Phyllis C. Whitesell Prizes honor excellent student writing in Franklin and Marshall’s General Education curriculum. Each year the Writing Center invites submissions and awards a prize for the best essay written in a course that fulfills the First-Year Writing Requirement and for the best essay from a Foundations course. This booklet contains the prize-winning and honorable mention essays from this year’s competition.

Named for the emeritus Director of F&M’s Writing Center, the Whitesell Prizes serve several goals. In addition to honoring both Phyllis’s dedication to teaching writing and the achievements of the College’s students writers themselves, the Whitesell Prizes seek to add to the vitality of the College’s General Education curriculum by getting students to think of their intellectual efforts as ongoing enterprises (revision, often after the essay has been graded and the class is completed, is a requirement of the competition). Also, by involving faculty and Writing Center tutors in the judging of the essays—and by making this booklet available to the College community, the Whitesell competition hopes to foster a fuller awareness of the interesting work being done in our Foundations and First-Year Writing requirement courses.

My great appreciation goes to this year’s Whitesell Prize judges. Prof. Christie Larochelle, Prof. Doug Anthony, and Writing Center tutor Scott Forsythe (’07) awarded the prize in Foundations. Prof. Matthew Schousen, Prof. Kabi Hartman, and tutors Libby Gaines (’07) and Kristen Evans (’07) were the judges for the First-Year Writing Requirement competition.

Many thanks go to Greg Davies and Pamela Eisenberg for editing the essays and to Amanda Blewitt for completing a final read-through and compiling this booklet.

Daniel Frick
Director, Writing Center
May 2007
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Nixon and “The Child”

“I ask you to help me make that dream come true for millions to whom it is an impossible dream today” (Freed and Stone 9).

The fictional Richard Nixon rushes to his enclosed bookcase and opens a thick book to find the words of his 1968 acceptance speech. He recites an excerpt from the speech, gesturing forcefully with pointed finger and shouting excitedly, watching his reflection and basking in the memory of enthusiastic applause (Secret Honor Chapter 6 “I see the face of a child” 16:22-17:06). In his 1968 acceptance speech, Republican nominee Richard Nixon spoke of a minority child who is struggling to overcome the obstacles of poverty and unequal opportunities that make it difficult for him to achieve the American dream. While the fictional Nixon recites the speech, he appears enthusiastic about improving the opportunities available to minorities and other less fortunate Americans. The circumstances surrounding Nixon’s presidency led to legislation that helped minorities and the poor overcome the obstacles of poverty, despite Nixon’s true feelings regarding race, which were inconsistent with such policies. The Richard Nixon that Donald Freed, Arnold M. Stone, and Robert Altman create in Secret Honor and the real Richard Nixon vow to help minorities achieve the American dream. However, President Nixon’s words and actions were not always consistent, and Freed, Stone, and Altman use Secret Honor to portray both the public and private Nixon in regard to the civil rights issue that consumed the country during his presidency. Through Secret Honor Freed, Stone, and Altman accurately portray the public and private Richard Nixon’s views regarding race and demonstrate that to achieve the
American dream one must act to please others, even if those actions fail to hold true to his or her beliefs.

During Nixon’s presidency, the government enacted policies intended to improve the lives of minorities and the poor, despite Nixon’s true feelings regarding civil rights. According to Herbert S. Parmet, a published historian, who has written about numerous presidential administrations, as Vice President under Eisenhower, Nixon was praised by leaders of the Civil Rights Movement who believed that he would have been more active in furthering equal rights had he been president in place of Eisenhower (268). Nixon stated that the government must prepare the American public for the changes that were going to occur due to the signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. According to an article that appeared in Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, while campaigning, Nixon told the public that the nation must improve the economic situation and quality of education minorities received, and “[build] and [strengthen] the black community…fashioning a new understanding between the races,” which he alludes to in his acceptance speech (qtd. in “Nixon Administration” 2,853). As president, Nixon advocated welfare reform, desegregated schools, and developed some of the first affirmative action programs in the country, but his personal beliefs were not consistent with his public actions.

Although Nixon implemented many positive programs to help minorities and the poor, his policies were not always carried through because privately, Nixon did not fully support them. According to Richard Matthew Pious, Nixon was more interested in foreign policy than domestic policy, but he did believe that having a good job is a basic civil right, and unemployment was one of the first problems he addressed as president (522, Nixon 437). Along with Secretary of Labor George Shultz, Nixon developed and implemented an affirmative action plan for government-funded construction projects. This plan required contractors employed by the
federal government on a particular project to hire a representative amount of minorities (Nixon 437). However, according to Dean J. Kotlowski, an associate professor of history at Salisbury University who has written widely about Nixon and civil rights, Nixon was often criticized for “offering symbolism more than substance,” and did not fully support the idea of civil rights (15). In his Richard Nixon and His America, Herbert S. Parmet writes that in reality Nixon was not very active in advancing race relations and civil rights (268). He did not truly support domestic policies that improved the plight of minorities. Nixon introduced the Family Assistance Program, which was aimed at helping less fortunate families and was an original, ground-breaking program because it provided a guaranteed income rather than guaranteed services.

However, Kenneth O’Reilly, who has written widely about Nixon and his contemporaries, stated that Nixon told Haldeman to be sure that the Family Assistance Program received publicity, but that it ultimately be stopped by Democrats in the Senate because the government would not be able to afford it (316). Jonathan Schell, professor at Wesleyan University, recognized that “there was a gap between image and substance – between what the Administration said and what it did,” as Nixon’s actions were often inconsistent with his beliefs (48). Nixon was interested in presenting himself as dedicated to helping minorities, but in reality, he did not support every program he proposed.

Many of the programs Nixon implemented were not effective because he did not provide the financial support required to accomplish their goals. According to an article printed in Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, in April of 1969, Clifford L. Alexander, chairman of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, resigned from office because he felt that the Administration was not doing enough to enforce equal rights laws. Nixon proposed a budget that reduced “Fair Housing” enforcement by $4 million, and in June stated that he was opposed to
continuing the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Nixon was again criticized when Philip Pruitt, head of the Small Business Administration, which was supposed to promote minority businesses, resigned, accusing Nixon of “lots of rhetoric…about helping blacks, but no money…forthcoming” (qtd. in “Nixon Administration 2,854). O’Reilly records that Nixon believed the “whole problem is really the blacks,” and that programs to improve the lives of minorities must be made with this in mind, but must not appear this way to the public, which illustrates his hypocritical stance on civil rights (314).

Although many Southern schools were integrated during Nixon’s presidency, his true attitude toward race was not consistent with his advocating desegregation. He believed that “legally segregated education is inferior education,” and stated that, “There is no reason why Americans, regardless of race, creed, or color, cannot be educated together” (qtd. in Kotlowski 40, qtd. in Parmet 269). Parmet states that Nixon demonstrated his belief in this principle when he and his wife, Pat, decided to send their two daughters to integrated schools (268). According to Kotlowski, as Vice President, Nixon made clear his support of the Supreme Court’s 1954 decision in Brown v. Board of Education that “separate but equal” is inherently unequal and that schools must be desegregated (24). Although Nixon advocated equal and quality education, Michael A. Genovese, a widely published Political Science professor at Loyola Marymount University, records that Nixon believed blacks were “genetically inferior to whites” and was firmly against busing to integrate schools (qtd. in Genovese 82). Nixon’s opposition to busing contradicts his alleged support of Brown v. Board of Education because busing was the most common and effective method of integration used in the South. O’Reilly notes that Nixon advocated “neighborhood schools,” which were really “all-white schools” (281). Words and
phrases that Nixon commonly used while discussing civil rights issues have a hidden meaning that provides insight into Nixon’s true attitude regarding race.

While Nixon boasted about his role in desegregating schools, he was not very influential in the process. According to John Robert Greene, a history and communications professor at Cazenovia College, Nixon proudly acknowledged that at the beginning of his term as president, sixty-eight percent of blacks attended segregated schools in the South, but that by the end of his presidency a mere eight percent attended segregated schools (46-47). Kotlowski states that Nixon successfully ended de jure segregation in the South; however, it was the Supreme Court that called for an end to the practice (16). According to Greene, Nixon wanted desegregation to be a slow process because he believed that the American public could not handle immediate desegregation. Slow integration through litigation was closer to his personal beliefs on the issue, as he was against federal intervention to force school boards to integrate quickly (41). Although Nixon tackled de jure segregation in the South, he made it clear that he would not attempt to eliminate de facto segregation in the North. Nixon noted that he was obliged to uphold the law, but that he was under no obligation to do more than the law required, and that he would not take action beyond what the public was willing to support (Nixon 440-441). Therefore, Nixon outwardly supported desegregation because the Supreme Court had declared that segregation was unconstitutional. He followed a strict interpretation of the law and did only what he needed to do to maintain the pro-civil rights image he wished to present to the public.

Freed and Stone include Nixon’s 1968 acceptance speech in Secret Honor to provide a greater insight into the difference between the public and private Richard Nixon. They use his own words to accurately represent the image that Nixon portrayed to the public. When the fictional Nixon recites the speech in Secret Honor, the audience understands that Nixon
outwardly advocated improving the lives of minorities and the less fortunate. Through President Nixon’s efforts to desegregate schools and improve minority business ventures in compliance with Supreme Court rulings, he attempted to hold true to his promise to “help…make [the American] dream come true for millions to whom it is an impossible dream” (Freed and Stone 9). During Nixon’s presidency, Southern schools were desegregated and minorities’ lifestyles improved as they received a quality education and better employment opportunities.

Although Nixon publicly advocated policies to keep his promise, the manner in which Robert Altman films the recitation scene demonstrates that privately Nixon was not behind his words in 1968, or his actions as president. *Secret Honor* illustrates Civil Rights lawyer Eleanor Holmes Norton’s observation that there were “two civil rights Nixons,” one that advocated equal rights to the extent that they were supported by the public, and one that attempted to reduce equal rights when a majority of citizens expressed discontent (qtd. in Genovese 82). When Nixon speaks of “the child” who is “black…white…Mexican, Italian, Polish,” he reads the words from a book (Freed and Stone 8). These words are planned and carefully recited, indicating that they are not his own thoughts. The minority child he speaks about is not significant enough in Nixon’s mind to remember as he does not speak passionately about him, and instead reads the words from a book. Later, however, when he speaks of himself struggling to succeed when he was younger, Nixon recites the words without referencing the book because his past struggles are more important to him than the current struggles of minorities to improve their lives and achieve the American dream. This indicates that Nixon did not feel as strongly about helping minorities succeed as he did about helping himself.

Philip Baker Hall’s actions while reciting the 1968 acceptance speech illustrate Nixon’s private opinions about race. As the fictional Nixon delivers the speech, he gestures, using his
hands to emphasize various aspects of his speech. His movements are sharp and brief and come at key moments in the speech when he hopes the audience will take notice of his description of “the child’s” struggle and his vow to help him (Secret Honor Chapter 6 “I see the face of a child” 16:22-17:06). These planned gestures are meant to demonstrate Nixon’s enthusiasm for providing aid to minorities, but instead appear to be part of an act, a tactic the public Nixon used to fake his dedication to domestic policy as Joan Hoff, Distinguished Research Professor of History at Montana State University maintains that he was not dedicated to domestic policy and quickly lost interest in it (132). The gestures illustrate that Nixon was often accused of using rhetoric rather than taking action (Kotlowski 15). Nixon sought to maintain a public image of outward support for civil rights by masking his true beliefs, which is illustrated in this moment from the film.

The camera angle Altman selects for this scene further illustrates that Nixon’s private views on race conflict with his public actions. As Nixon recites the speech, the viewer sees him from the side, and watches his face in the surveillance screens. He later moves to the window and turns his back to the viewing audience who, along with Nixon, watches his face as it is reflected in the window. The camera angle emphasizes the contrast between the public and private Nixons, as the reflection represents the public face Nixon wished to portray toward race. The image is fragmented by the windowpanes, and the pieces do not fit together, indicating that the public and private civil rights Nixons are not consistent. The viewer sees only Nixon’s back in his true person, which indicates that he did not truly believe in the programs he promised to provide and later implemented as president because he is not willing to show his true face when he makes the promise (Secret Honor Chapter 6 “I see the face of a child” 17:52-18:22). Secret Honor accurately demonstrates Parmet’s belief that Nixon’s policies were “tempered by his
political analysis of both the voters and the party” (268). Nixon interrupts himself after he declares, “For him the American system is one that feeds his stomach and starves his soul,” to chuckle and compliment himself on the brilliance of his words, saying, “That’s very good. That’s…that’s my favorite” (Secret Honor Chapter 6 “I see the face of a child” 16:47-17:09). This illustrates his selfishness and desire to present himself to the public in a particular light, rather than being concerned with implementing effective programs. His chuckle upon reading the line illustrates that he understands he has fooled the pubic as he intended.

Throughout Secret Honor, Freed and Stone illustrate Nixon’s true negative feelings regarding race. When he discusses Hiss and the Kennedys, Nixon uses derogatory nicknames for various groups, saying, “Jews, Niggers, Reds, Kikes” (Freed and Stone 15). In public, Nixon would not have referred to African Americans as “Niggers” as he does while alone in the room with his thoughts and the tape recorder. Nixon recalls that Haldeman called “Martin Luther King a ‘nigger’ on the telephone,” and O’Reilly suggests that Nixon himself used the word while speaking with Henry Kissinger on the phone, again using the derogatory word in private (Freed and Stone 16, O’Reilly 291). Nixon understood that the common American would be influential in his being elected, as he states, “I knew that, today, the dogcatcher is king! And…every…welfare bum and tramp in the country…that is your Palace Guard!” (Freed and Stone 15). He was selfish in vowing to help minorities and the “forgotten Americans” (Freed and Stone 17). Freed and Stone indicate that Nixon did not believe African Americans were equal to whites, as he says, “the jiga…the jiga…the, uh, colored waiters,” making the reader think that he was about to use the word “nigger,” but caught himself just in time (Freed and Stone 18). The playwrights’ decision to italicize the word “colored” draws the reader’s eye to the word, and prompts him or her to consider the implications of Nixon’s struggle to find the
“right” word. Nixon sought to be politically correct; however, “colored” had not been an acceptable term for African Americans since the 1950s, indicating that Nixon was careless with racial issues in his private life. Secret Honor delves into Nixon’s true character and thoughts about race, despite his attempts to conceal his feelings from the public.

Secret Honor illustrates that to achieve the American dream, Nixon masked his true opinions to portray the image he believed others wished to see. In his quest for power, Nixon vowed to help minorities and other less fortunate Americans achieve the American dream. He understood that this promise would increase his popularity and help him win the presidential election. Nixon attempted to achieve the American dream in a selfish manner and only sought to help others so that he could help himself succeed. Nixon’s representation as a caring, concerned president was in reality a façade he employed to mask his desire to achieve the American dream and his lack of concern for others’ success. In Secret Honor, after he recites the excerpt from his 1968 acceptance speech, Nixon asks Roberto, his secretary, to erase “everything back to ‘I see the face of a…child’” (Freed and Stone 9). Nixon’s promise to improve the plight of minorities would not have existed on the tape recording, indicating that had Nixon not masked his true opinion regarding race and made the promise to “the child,” he would not have been elected President or achieved his American dream. Nixon’s political actions relied on his views of the manner in which the public would perceive him as he constantly sought to please others while he struggled to achieve the American dream.

Secret Honor illustrates that Richard Nixon developed both a public and private persona regarding civil rights in an effort to achieve the American dream. Nixon recognized that to fulfill the American dream, one cannot act on his or her personal beliefs if they are not consistent with that of the majority, which influences the extent of the individual’s success. One must
make him or herself acceptable in others’ eyes to gain support and succeed. It is difficult to escape the influence of others, even while pursuing one’s dream. Just as Nixon was forced to mask his private views on domestic issues, many Americans change their public personalities to be successful and achieve the American dream.
Works Cited


Tricky Dick Tries to Trick Himself

“See, I could have beat Helen Douglas without any dirty tricks. But see, Chotiner and the committee, they already had the money coming in...[they planted] the rumors that she was a Red, and that she wore pink panties and oh yes, and that her husband’s real name was Hesselstein or Brown or...Look, I was only 37 years old, for Christ’s sake. I had nothing against Helen Gahagan Douglas. As a matter of fact I, uh...I thought she was...to me she was...But look, Helen was the leader in the drive to take away the offshore oil rights from the big companies. Period. Chotiner and the committee wanted her dead and I was to be the hatchet man. Period.” (Secret Honor)

Nixon’s path to success entailed dirty tricks, beautiful women, anti-Semites, pink panties, communist threats, and ruined lives. Though the general public sees Richard Nixon as an unethical politician after his behavior in the California 1950 Senate election, the film Secret Honor portrays him with less brutality. Secret Honor, released in 1984, was directed by Robert Altman and co-written by Donald Freed and Arnold Stone. Set in Nixon’s study, post-resignation, the film begins with him chronicling his life as though he were narrating his autobiography, while drinking heavily. He uses recording devices and is composed only when his attention is focused on these devices. Nixon gets increasingly worked up over the way his life has unfolded, and his narrating turns into a drunken string of tangents where he alternately sings, pleads, laughs, reflects, and curses. Nixon decided to take on Helen Douglas in the 1950 election, a decision that spurs the quote above, a seemingly schizophrenic debate over how to explain his behavior in the campaign. While all of the major events Nixon lists are historically accurate, some of the details are not. The most prominent difference between Nixon’s behavior in Secret Honor and history lies in his assignment of responsibility for the dirty tricks against Douglas. In actuality, Nixon showed no remorse for his unethical political actions, whereas Secret Honor’s
Nixon is bursting with guilt; Freed and Stone therefore argue that achieving the American Dream demands a silencing of conscience because success requires dehumanization and foul play.

**Historical Background**

Nixon’s drunken rant that is quoted in the epigraph raises questions such as, were there dirty tricks involved in the 1950 campaign? If so, were they necessary for Nixon’s victory? Was Nixon responsible for the alleged dirty tricks? What was Douglas’ stance on oil? Did Nixon actually have a crush on Douglas? Did Nixon feel remorse? In actuality, there were dirty tricks, the tricks were unnecessary, and Nixon was responsible for them. Douglas fought the decision to give control of California’s oil to private companies. Nixon did not have a crush on Douglas, and he did not feel remorse for the dirty tricks he used against her. *Secret Honor* agrees with history in every aspect except two: Freed and Stone completely fabricate Nixon’s crush on Douglas and Nixon’s guilt.

Just as *Secret Honor*’s Nixon claims, Nixon used dirty tricks to ruin Douglas’s campaign. In California’s 1950 Senate election, Richard Nixon ran as a Republican against Democrat, and ex-actress, Helen Douglas. Roger Morris, author of a highly regarded study of Nixon’s early career, *Richard Milhous Nixon: The Rise of an American Politician*, describes how Nixon lodged a full-fledged smear campaign against Douglas and destroyed her both “politically and personally” (qtd in *Nixon: The American Experience*). By slandering her, Nixon hoped to scare the public into voting for him. One of his big ploys was that she was a communist. The archetype of Nixon’s Red-baiting is when he equated Douglas with the known-communist Vito Marcantonio by circulating a copy of Douglas’ and Marcantonio’s voting records. The “pink sheet,” as it was called, physically highlighted the 354 times that the two voted similarly on legislation. Although the records were accurate, the message was misleading. Most of the bills on which they voted similarly were obvious legislation: laws that a majority of the Democratic Representatives or the overall House, including Republicans, voted the same, such as public
housing and rent/price controls (Morris 581). Nixon’s own Congressional votes agreed with Marcantonio’s 100 times. Ingrid Winther Scobie, a historian with several articles on Nixon in the Southern California Political Quarterly, shows how Douglas responded to the “pink sheet.”

Douglas used Nixon’s voting record to prove that Nixon and Marcantoio voted together on foreign policy issues as well. She argued that if Nixon was not a Communist, then neither was she (117). Unfortunately, Douglas’ defenses were drowned out by Nixon’s constant accusations. Most historians see the “pink sheet” as a symbol of the nature of the California 1950 Senate election. The sheet sums up how Douglas found it difficult to make the public see the truth because Nixon’s accusations were misleading yet skillful.

However, the voting record trick was not unique to Nixon; Manchester Boddy, who ran against Douglas in the Democratic primary, had used this same tactic. Nixon’s twist to this maneuver was the color of the paper on which the votes were printed: pink. The color pink worked in two ways. Firstly, it subtly reminded voters of Douglas’ alleged communist leanings. Stephen Ambrose, author of a three-volume biography on Nixon, reports that Nixon gave Douglas the nickname “the Pink Lady,” to suggest that she was a communist. Also Nixon often claimed that she was “pink right down to her underwear” (Ambrose 218). Other communist accusations frequented his speeches. For instance, on September 18, 1950, in a highly publicized radio broadcast, Nixon said, “If she had had her way, the communist conspiracy in the United States would have never been exposed, and Alger Hiss, instead of being a convicted perjurer would still be influencing the foreign policy of the United States” (qtd. in Morris 584). By painting Douglas as a communist, Nixon got voters to vote against her rather than for him.

Nixon used the color pink to not only draw voters’ attention to the notion that Douglas was a “Red,” but also, Ambrose explains, to imply that she was of inappropriate gender to be running for Senator (218). The 1950s was a politically conservative era and the overall belief was that women remained in the kitchen and left politics to the men. Greg Mitchell, author of
Tricky Dick and the Pink Lady, a book solely about California’s 1950 Senatorial election, explains that prior to 1950 there had only been seven female senators in the United States, and zero in California (260). Morris reports that even Douglas’ campaign team recognized the disadvantage her gender created. Douglas’ manager, Ed Lybeck, admitted that ‘‘she was the wrong sex politically’ for the place and era’ because of the return to traditional gender roles America experienced in 1950 (qtd. in Morris 543). Despite the public’s awareness of Douglas’ gender, Nixon did not relent in reminding them of it not only because it was incongruous with America’s overall attitude, but also because women were viewed as weaker and more emotional than men. Nixon used this stereotype to support his assertion that Douglas was incapable of fighting communism.

Nixon’s team did not stop there. Morris reports that they were suspected of spreading rumors about Douglas’ husband being a Jew, which drugged up feelings of anti-Semitism in voters and forced Douglas to endure hurtful, crude, prejudiced remarks (216). Some of the common anti-Semitic gestures Douglas dealt with include chants of “You can’t elect this woman that sleeps with a Jew” and a collection of propaganda calling her “Congresswoman Douglas-Hesselberg;” Morris concludes that the campaign was indeed a dirty one (543). Although Nixon denied that he was the source of these rumors, Douglas claimed he was. Either way, the general public placed Nixon’s face on the hurtful accusations, and though the anti-Semitic rumors cost Douglas some votes in the election, they lost Nixon more political support in the long-run. These kinds of personal attacks on Douglas’ gender and her husband’s religion are what made Nixon’s slandering seem uncommonly cruel and gave him the reputation of a ruthless politician.

Yet not all historians agree that Nixon was uncommonly brutal in his smearing. For instance, Irwin Gellman, author of a Pulitzer Prize nominated book on Nixon, The Contender, does not believe Nixon’s dirty tricks were especially harsh. Gellman’s view is unique because he sees Nixon’s Red-baiting tactics as clever. Unlike most historians, who view Nixon’s
victories as a result of his smears, Gellman credits Nixon’s political success to an adept reading of America’s attitudes during the time. In other words, Gellman feels Nixon’s strategy was brilliant because not only did Nixon correctly predict the country’s growing fear of communism, but he also used this concern to his advantage by exploiting Douglas’ weaknesses: she was a radical, a female, and a wife of a Jew—all of which made the country fear her (Gellman 452-453). As for the misleading “pink sheet,” Gellman justifies Nixon’s creation of it by pointing out that it is not very harsh in comparison to the dirty politics used later by other politicians. Gellman argues that Nixon’s communist accusations, not just in the election but throughout his entire career, were not completely dishonorable because Nixon truly believed Communism was a threat to democracy (Gellman 453-454). Despite Gellman’s argument that Nixon was not uncommonly harsh in his smearing, most historians, such as Morris, Scobie, Mitchell, and Ambrose, feel that Nixon went to extremes.

Secret Honor was also correct in claiming that Nixon probably could have beaten Douglas without the extreme amount of dirty tricks; therefore, Nixon’s smearing was unnecessary. According to Burton R. Brazil, who wrote about the California 1950 election in The Western Political Quarterly, the Democrats were already in significantly worse shape than the Republicans going into the election, so Nixon could have beaten Douglas without the slandering (68-69). The reason for the Democrats’ bad standing, Brazil explains, was that they appeared “on the defensive” to the public because they could not shake the Republican accusations of them being an “unpatriotic” party (69). This claim worried the public because the Red Scare was very prevalent in 1950, and any type of anti-American sentiment was linked with communism. Much of this fear of communism can be attributed to post-World War II hatred towards the Soviets, which left America distrustful of both the Soviet Union and its form of government: communism. Since the highly publicized Alger Hiss trials, which ran from 1949 to 1950, had just convicted Hiss, a government official, of perjury about espionage activities, the nation was left
paranoid and mistrusting. Brazil argues that, because of the popular opinion that the Democrats were incapable of fighting communism, the Republicans were favored to win (69). Nixon ended up winning the election by a landslide, two thirds of the votes, although it is unclear how many votes resulted from his campaigning and how many he was simply guaranteed by running as a Republican (71). Even though Nixon could have beaten Douglas without all the smearing, he still slandered her mercilessly, making him seem cruel even when it was unnecessary.

The debate for control of California’s tidelands oil demonstrated Nixon’s cruel nature when compared with Douglas’ strong morals. Secret Honor’s Nixon is correct in saying that Douglas wished to take oil control away from big businesses, but he does not acknowledge that her stance exposes the differences between him and her. According to Mitchell, Douglas was in favor of giving control of California’s tidelands oil supply to the Federal government, and her position on the issue upset many big businesses because federal control meant less profits for private California firms (30). Despite the lost political support, Douglas adhered to her opinion for purely moral reasons. In spite of her desperate need of campaign funds, she even withstood bribery. Douglas’ bold articulation of her tidelands’ stance is an example of the way she supported issues that weren’t popular or politically advantageous simply on principle. Because of her noble intentions, she became a kind of political martyr, who would sacrifice her personal success to advance a greater cause. While she ran purely on her own morality and tended to ignore political strategy, Nixon placed much faith in strategy and cared more about winning than adhering to morals, as seen through his deliberately deceptive smearing (Mitchell 30). The tidelands oil debate exposed that she was there to make a difference, and he was there to win. This winning mentality is why Nixon was so extreme in his slandering.

Although Secret Honor’s Nixon blames others for the smearing, historical evidence holds Nixon responsible. While some historians have attributed the dirty tricks to Murray Chotiner, Nixon’s notoriously corrupt campaign manager, most historians believe that Nixon was in
control. Ambrose says that “Nixon’s critics made Chotiner the evil presence behind the throne, with Nixon the willing front man, yet, in truth, Nixon ran the campaign, not Chotiner” (220). Nixon was in charge of not only the smearing done by his campaign team, but also, the dirty tricks that were not officially linked with him, such as anonymous phone calls telling voters Douglas was a communist, or cruel whisperings about her Jewish husband (Ambrose 221). Mitchell reports how Tom Dixon, Nixon’s radio announcer, later revealed that “generally, Nixon knew about everything that went on in his name” (37), which means Nixon, though he denies such accusations, was responsible for, at the very least, condoning the horrible sexist and racist comments that Douglas endured. Nixon’s endorsement of these terrible smears reveals he was immoral and heartless.

Though Secret Honor shows Nixon with natural, human emotions, history does not. The fictional Nixon had romantic feelings for Douglas, but there is no historical basis for these feelings. In the DVD’s commentary track, co-writer Donald Freed explains that Nixon’s crush was a complete fabrication. However, Freed argues that given Douglas’ beauty, “there is no reason why the callow, raw, country-bumpkin Richard Nixon would not feel something for her” (Secret Honor). Nevertheless, Nixon showed no signs of fondness for Douglas in real life. Rather, Nixon seemed to despise Douglas. Morris reports how Nixon exclaimed “Why I’ll castrate her!” (561) after hearing some of Douglas’ unflattering remarks about him. When a bystander reminded him that was not possible, he snapped back “I don’t care, I’ll do it anyway” (561), which indicated that Nixon’s attitude towards Douglas was far from fond. Nevertheless, Freed and Stone portray Nixon as having romantic feelings for Douglas, which makes him appear more human, even though in real life he was not soft or emotional.

While Secret Honor’s Nixon feels guilty about his dirty tricks, the real Nixon appeared to lack a conscience. In real life, there is only one instance where Nixon admitted feeling guilty for his behavior in the 1950 election. Ambrose discusses how David Astor, a British publisher,
claimed Nixon admitted regretting his attacks on Douglas in an unrecorded interview seven years after the election. Nixon was reported to have said, “I’m sorry about that episode, I was a very young man”; however, Nixon vehemently denied the statement as soon as it was released (Ambrose 220). This unrecorded interview is the only evidence that shows Nixon as apologetic for his slandering. Most historians do not believe Nixon felt remorse. Ambrose claims with certainty that Nixon “never regretted what he did” (220). There is much evidence that Nixon did not feel guilty about smearing Douglas. In Nixon’s memoir, RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon, Nixon explains that he “never questioned [Douglas’] patriotism” (76), yet in the election he ruthlessly slandered her for being unpatriotic and implied she was a communist. In other words, Nixon knew she was not un-American, but he accused her of it anyway, and he did not acknowledge this hypocrisy in his memoirs. Nor did he show any regret for his smearing, even in light of the personal and painful nature of his attacks. Nixon’s absence of remorse made him seem emotionless in the general public’s eyes. Consequently, the public believed Nixon was not concerned with ethics, which cost him political support later in his career. Ultimately, Secret Honor only disagrees with reality when it humanizes Nixon by making him remorseful or infatuated. In real life he was not very concerned with morals, and he did not display such vulnerable emotions.

**Secret Honor Analysis**

Freed and Stone, co-writers of Secret Honor, make the viewer sympathize with Nixon in order to prove that success requires immorality. They use Nixon’s rise to power, which is often cited as a classic American Dream story, in order to comment on the American Dream in general. The film is only historically inaccurate when it portrays Nixon as having a crush on Douglas and as feeling remorseful. Since passion and guilt are strong, intimate human emotions that Nixon did not display in real life, Freed and Stone humanize Nixon. Secret Honor creates sympathy for Nixon to show that the system is more at fault than he is. Therefore, the film hints
that the American Dream is corrupt. Nixon wins the 1950 election over Douglas, who chooses morals instead of political trickery; this outcome proves foul play wins over morality. Freed and Stone suggest that the achievement of the American Dream is neither clean nor moral, because success calls for a sort of dehumanization and foul play.

Through centering the film around the microphone, director Robert Altman changes the way Nixon acts in front of it, and ultimately, humanizes Nixon. Altman alters Nixon’s behavior drastically around the microphone to suggest that the Nixon the American public sees is not a true representation of the real Nixon. The film is a recorded confession, and every time Nixon notices the microphone, he becomes self-aware and regains his formal speech patterns and hand gestures. The microphone acts as Nixon’s constant reminder of the media’s watchful eye, which keeps Nixon guarded, stiff, and impersonal. It is as though any witness has the power to make the human Nixon crawl back into his emotionless shell. For example, when Nixon tries to describe Douglas to the microphone on his desk, he begins with jerky movements and says, “remarkable woman…strong woman…uh, noble-looking” (23), which are all bland, safe, politically acceptable ways to describe her. He says this with the same sweeping arm movements he does when addressing an audience. Only when Nixon forgets about the microphone does he become less guarded and reveal his true feelings. After describing Douglas to the microphone, Nixon forgets its presence and stares downward, focusing his eyes at an empty space near the edge of his desk, scarcely blinking. His once loud, modulating voice is reduced to a soft, fluid whisper as he sadly admits, “She was beautiful, is what she was. She was very beautiful” (23). Since acknowledging a fellow candidate was beautiful goes against the political rules of propriety, when Nixon does so, it is an indication that he is speaking without the media’s presence. Altman shows Nixon letting down his guard around the microphone to suggest that Nixon purposefully hardens himself on the record. Not only is Nixon admitting something that goes against political norms, but also, he is describing an attraction to Douglas. He speaks about
her with the kind of passion and interest that he does not have when he speaks about his wife. By making Nixon admit romantic feelings for Douglas, Freed and Stone humanize him.

Freed and Stone also humanize Nixon by making him feel guilt, and they prove that Nixon was not unaffected by his wrongs, but rather, was tortured by them. The fictional Nixon blames the smearing of Douglas’s campaign on Chotiner and the Committee of 100, a corrupt group of powerful officials, but, in actuality, Nixon was the one responsible. Secret Honor’s disagreement with reality emphasizes Nixon’s desperation to scapegoat others and appease his conscience, which is surfacing to the front of his attention in his drunken, vulnerable state. In the film, Nixon blames others for the smearing:

Chotiner and the committee, they already had the money
coming in from Florida and everywhere. And see, those same
jackasses…they paid those students…to plant the rumors that she was
a Red, and to say that she wore pink panties and oh yes, and that her
husband’s real name was Hesselstein or Brown. (23)

Most historians agree that Nixon was responsible for the events listed above, yet Freed and Stone’s Nixon places blame on a more powerful source to alleviate his overwhelming guilt and attempt to cope with the reality of the transgressions he made during his journey towards political success. He even tries to reason that he “was only 37 years old for Christ’s sake” (23), which makes him seem more pitiful because any reasonable thirty-seven year old man has a sense of accountability for his actions. Yet Nixon seeks any excuse, no matter how unreasonable, to calm his conscience. By making Nixon feel regret, Freed and Stone are, again, humanizing him; Nixon’s remorse allows the viewer to sympathize with him, and to identify with him instead of blaming him. Therefore, by showing Nixon as someone fallible and human, the film suggests that it is not Nixon who is corrupt, but rather the system.
When Nixon rationalizes his actions in the election as being inevitable, he reveals his belief that the only way to succeed is through dirty tricks, which proves Nixon was not cruel just for cruelty’s sake. He smeared Douglas to win, not for fun. He says, “I had nothing against Helen Gahagan Douglas. As a matter of fact I, uh…I thought she was…to me she was…But look, Helen was the leader in the drive to take away the offshore oil rights from the big companies. Period. Chotiner and the committee wanted her dead and I was to be the hatchet man. Period” (23). When the font changes to italics, Nixon begins talking to the microphone in decisive, choppy, fragments. The disconnect between his actual feelings of guilt and his articulated opinion stems from his preconceptions that he had to play dirty in order to succeed. The only way to deal with the pain he feels over hurting Douglas is to resort to his political reasoning, in which he ignored his conscience and pursued power with a sort of acceptance of his actions as inevitable. A period at the end of a sentence is a way to end a train of thought, and Nixon’s use of the word “period” (23) proves his belief in the finality of his decisions. The word plugs his outpouring guilt and shows an acceptance of his deeds. He saw his wrongdoings as necessary and inevitable. Nixon believes that he had no other way of gaining power, except through ignoring his guilt and acting immorally. In other words, Freed and Stone portray Nixon’s unethical behavior as an obligation instead of a choice, which again makes Nixon seem less evil and more human. Therefore, Secret Honor asks the viewer to consider that Nixon was the victim of a corrupt system, and not simply an inherently bad person.

Freed and Stone seek to expose the side of Nixon the American public never saw in order to make the viewer sympathize with him. Secret Honor unmasks his inner-voice by making him appear drunk. In the film, Nixon only becomes aware of the moral implications of his wrongdoings in his intoxicated, uncensored state. When Nixon enters his study in the beginning of the film, he pours a glass of sherry and sits in front of the fireplace. The grandfather clock in his study reads ten o’clock. After a few sips Nixon gets up, leaving his sherry by the fire, and
switches to scotch. He drinks four glasses of scotch, and begins his discussion of Douglas and the 1950 election. Having had a total of five drinks in one hour, he is visibly intoxicated. Freed and Stone use liquor as a sort of truth potion to show a side of Nixon that America never saw because the sober Nixon never revealed his real feelings. This weakness of emotion would not be seen if he were sober and in control of his decisions. Since Nixon is only ethically aware when he is intoxicated, Freed and Stone are proving that he feels it is necessary to hide his real personality, and thus his conscience, in order to rise to power. Therefore, they emphasize the importance of detachment from emotions and morals--which only weaken one’s ability to act immorally--while pursuing the American Dream.

Seeing the humanizing side of Nixon emphasizes Nixon’s efforts to dehumanize himself in order to attain the American Dream. Secret Honor links Nixon with images of machinery to suggest that the American Dream requires a sort of dehumanization. Freed and Stone bring up a nickname for Nixon, which demonstrates his inhuman public image: “they did not call [him] ‘iron butt’ in law school for nothing” (24). This statement is not just an allusion to his determination while studying law, which enabled him to sit down for long periods of time, but also, the image is reminiscent of a robot. In the film, Nixon announces this nick-name with pride, as though a buttocks made entirely of metal is something to gloat over, because he feels that being mechanical and inhuman in one’s reasoning will aid in one’s advancement. Also, during one of Nixon’s rants about the Watergate scandal, he claims that “Watergate was nothing more than a convenient hook upon which to hang my … political body” (9). Nixon’s need to specify that it was his political body, implies that Nixon sees himself as having more than one body. Although the phrase can be taken metaphorically to mean Nixon’s political career, the use of the word “body” also suggests that Nixon is literally split into two selves: a private Nixon and a political Nixon. The distinction he makes between his emotional self and his political self proves that Nixon believed the achievement of American Dream calls for a shedding of one’s emotions.
and conscience. Freed and Stone are emphasizing the need for ignoring one’s human qualities while pursuing success.

Nixon’s twisted priorities show that the American Dream asks one to give up moral values. In the film, while ranting about the way he was laughed at in college, Nixon reveals his high regard for the Committee of 100, a group of powerful and corrupt men who allegedly controlled the government, the mafia, and other powerful institutions in America. According to Nixon, the Committee of 100 prolonged the war in Vietnam in order to profit from international heroin trades, at the expense of many young soldiers’ lives. While talking about this unethical committee, Nixon shows that he values power over success by declaring that in college, before he met the Committee of 100, “(he) still wasn’t a winner yet” (14). The word “yet” implies that Nixon believes he becomes a winner later in his life. He even goes as far as to categorize himself, pre-Committee of 100, as “a young man—basically a loser” (14), which shows a misconstrued association of success with power. The Committee of 100 was responsible for the death of thousands of American soldiers, yet Nixon considers himself as successful once he is involved with this committee. Nixon’s idea of transforming himself into a winner meant he wished to become someone who did not have a conscience restraining him from rising to power. He wished to be a machine because that was how one got ahead. Nixon calls the guys in the committee of 100 “real men” despite their obvious lack of admirable qualities (13). They were Nixon’s role models because they were able to ignore their virtues and really go after success, whereas any regular human would have qualms with performing some of the operations they undertook. Freed and Stone use Nixon’s admiration of the Committee of 100 to show that silencing one’s conscience and reordering one’s perception of ethics is ideal for pursuing the American Dream.

Richard Nixon systematically destroyed Helen Douglas in the 1950 Senate election, without even flinching at the notion of ruining a wonderful woman’s life. Freed and Stone alter
the emotional aspects of this moment in Nixon’s life to comment on the American Dream. They humanize him by making him change his behavior around recording devices, admit to having romantic feelings for Douglas, blame others to alleviate his feelings of guilt, and appear drunk and thus uncharacteristically open, honest and vulnerable. Then Freed and Stone show how Nixon tried to ignore his conscience in order to achieve the American Dream. They dehumanize Nixon through their use of robotic imagery and through his twisted priorities. Now, at this late stage in Nixon’s life, he is trying to convince himself that all of the wrongs were not his fault and that he is a good person after all. Yet the truth continually surfaces; he was responsible. Nixon cannot deal with this on a human level yet, and so he resorts to illogical reasoning and weak excuses, which are attempts at justifying why he was so cruel. He spends the entire film trying to trick himself into believing he did not commit heinous wrongs. While Nixon may feel bad, Freed and Stone argue that these transgressions were necessary in order for him to succeed. Freed and Stone are using Nixon’s brief moments of humanness and emotion to show that the American Dream can make people do horrible deeds. Ultimately, Secret Honor turns the pursuit of the American Dream into a choice between power and morality.


In “The Stolen Child,” W. B. Yeats tells the story of a young boy who is seduced and ultimately abducted by a deceptively malicious fairy. This fairy says, “Come away, O human child,” describing to him a land that is full of adventure and free from sorrow, a land to which the child may travel by taking the fairy’s hand. However, as the fairy finishes its rhyme, it becomes clear that the world of the fairy may not offer what the child really needs. Sad as it is, Yeats finishes his poem with the child being abducted and the fairy offering its audience some mocking last words as it walks off with its treasure.

However grim this may seem, Yeats implies much more in his poem than his sad ending might seem to describe. Through the use of metaphor and allegory, Yeats speaks to a more universal dilemma than that of fairy kidnapping. Underneath the gilding of this fairy abduction tale lies a more human quandary that Yeats expects us to examine. Clearly the poem is about a choice – to take the fairy’s hand or not to? This choice represents a debate that all human beings experience, and one that, undoubtedly, Yeats experienced himself. To take the fairy’s hand is to give up; it is to die. Yet to resist the fairy’s call is to trudge forth in life, accepting that this is still a beautiful world. Yeats’s “The Stolen Child” mixes the choice between life and death with a classic and beautifully allegorical fairy abduction.

The poem’s first stanza is one of three that lull and lure the reader into a false sense of appreciation for the fairy life. On first reading this stanza, it seems that the fairy is describing a
truly beautiful setting. There are “flapping herons” and “faery vats” filled with forbidden fairy fruits, all of this found on a “leafy island” “[w]here dips the rocky highland” (Yeats 1996: 6). Everything about the island, from its scenic location to its majestic flora and fauna, seem to call to the reader invitingly. However, examine the writing more closely, and certain aspects of the island begin to appear disturbing. Notice how the “flapping herons wake / The drowsy water rats” (Yeats 1996: 5). Despite the lyrical language, it is clear that this is not necessarily a pleasant image. The rats are tired but are being kept awake, tormented. Also, the fact that the cherries in the vats are stolen is somewhat distressing. Why does Yeats have the fairy confess its theft? Other than perhaps casting a shadow on the fairies’ practices, the image also alludes to the stolen child, if only because of the connection between the word in this line and the title. It almost seems to foreshadow that the child, like the berries, will soon be among the fairies’ stolen treasures.

Directly following the first stanza, and each thereafter, is a four line chorus: “Come away, O human child!/To the waters and the wild/With a faery hand in hand,/For the world’s more full of weeping than you can understand” (Yeats 1996: 9). It is in this chorus that the fairy reveals its intentions. It wants to bring the child back to the fairy isle. The reader, after finishing this chorus, understands the gravity of the fairy’s presence, but perhaps not how dangerous that presence might be. As Diane Purkiss writes, “the idea that nothing is mortal in fairyland… is central” (Purkiss 2000: 295). In moving from the mortal to the fairy world, humans relinquish all ties and access to their former lives. The fairy coerces the young child to come with it into a new world, away from everything the child knows. And, although the child is not wholly unwilling to go from the start, without the persuasion and the seduction from the fairy, the child would not be kidnapped. After all, the child must take the fairy’s hand to go anywhere at all.
The last line of the chorus is particularly deceptive. It would appear that the fairy is trying to protect the child, to save him from woe and weeping; from all sadness, perhaps. Here, Yeats forces the reader to question the fairy’s motive, for what is wrong with being freed of sadness? Some would gladly give up their families for such a gift. The issue, however, is made clear by the final clause of the chorus: “than you can understand.” The fairy asks the child to come away, but knows that the child does not understand the importance of his choices. For a decision to be fair, the deciding party must know the nature of his choices. But the human child does not know what going with the fairy implies. He does not understand that to enter the fairy world is to reject the mortal world. This is the leverage the fairy is using and the reason the audience may infer that the fairy is malicious. The fairy is simply trying to trick the boy into becoming one of its many possessions.

In the second stanza, the themes of trickery and seduction are only made more apparent. The stanza begins with a very lighthearted discussion of moonlight being cast over the island of the fairies where, together, they dance into the twilight. The end of the stanza, though, is particularly interesting: “To and fro we leap/And chase the frothy bubbles,/While the world is full of troubles/And is anxious in its sleep” (Yeats 1996: 23). These four lines appear to be written in pairs. The first two depict a paradigmatic example of fairy frolicking and playfulness. Notice that even the bubbles are meant to be seen as fun, tempting to a child – they are frothy. These lines depict a playfulness that is so otherworldly as to be suspect. The dubiousness of the lines is amplified by the second pair, which depicts the problems with mortals, calling them “full of troubles” and “anxious in [their] sleep.” When contrasted with the first two lines, it becomes clear that the fairy is being extremely and intelligently coercive. We should then compare the “anxious” sleep of the mortal world with the sleep the rats have interrupted in the fairy world.
There does not even seem to be much of a disparity – the fairy’s argument is manipulative and deceptive.

In the third and final stanza, the fairy appears even more sinister. Like the other stanzas, there are a number of beautiful and desirable images: waterfalls, stars, slumbering trout, and ferns. And like the other stanzas, examining these images more closely provides the startling realization that these images are not meant to be purely beautiful at all. The majority of the stanza – albeit lyrically – describes the fairy tormenting of a slumbering trout. The fairies of the island, ever so softly, lean over the trout, whispering charms to give it nightmares. The last six lines of this stanza depict the very softly-spoken charms of the fairies inflicting torment on the fish. This idea is something of a motif in the poem: despite their size or gentle appearances, the fairies and their actions can be brutal. Finally, in describing the pools the trout inhabit, Yeats calls them “young” (Yeats 1996: 37). This particular choice of words seems to allude to the stolen child himself. In essence, the child is like the trout, and if he swims the way of the fairies, he will be tormented in the same brutal way.

In the fourth and final stanza of the poem, there is a change: “The fairies stop addressing the child; now they are talking over his head” (Purkiss 2000: 303). The fairy acknowledges to the audience that it is kidnapping the child, and that it cannot be stopped. The images of the stanza also change; instead of depicting the false beauty of the fairy island, the images now depict the true beauty of the child’s mortal home. There is only one reason for this abrupt change, and that is that the fairy has already won. It no longer needs to convince the boy, for he has already taken its hand. Instead, the fairy tells the boy and the audience what the stolen child has lost – the life he knew.
The chorus following the final stanza also changes. In the fourth stanza Yeats writes: “For he comes, the human child!/To the waters and the wild/With a faery, hand in hand,/From a world more full of weeping than he can understand” (Yeats 1996: 53). While most of these changes simply tell us that the boy is now going, and the fairy is no longer asking, the change of the pronoun in the final line is significant in other regards – regards as far reaching as the rest of the poem in its totality.

Through changing the pronoun from “you” to “he” in the final line of the poem, Yeats does two things: he reaffirms that the child is not prepared to make his choice, and more interestingly, affirms that, “you,” the reader, now are. In removing this one prohibitory word, Yeats has in essence given the reader permission to choose. Will you take the fairy’s hand, or will you not? Having finished the entirety of the poem, because you are necessarily at the end of the poem when you notice this change, you are now prepared to decide. You have seen what the fairy has to offer, and you have been reminded of the things you have at home in your world. Thus, the choice is yours, but you must choose wisely.

The idea of choice that Yeats gives the reader has many different symbolic applications. On the one hand, Yeats has written at length about the fairy world. It is beautiful, enchanting and alluring on the surface, but at its core, there is something malicious and vile. Oppositely, the human world has no gloss or glamor; choose it, and you know what you are going to have: human life. It is tough, and there are no shortcuts, but you will never be charmed into endless nightmares. Yeats’s comparison between the fairy and mortal world opens the door for broad symbolic interpretations. What do these two contrasting spheres represent? One is a siren’s call, the other is mundane but ultimately genuine.
Many different interpretations of these images can be made, but it is my belief that Yeats’s poem here represents two matched possibilities: life and death, and success (or determination) and defeat. I think of defeat because of Yeats’s notorious relationship with Maude Gonne, in which Yeats constantly had to cope with her romantic rejections (Purkiss 2000: 296). I think of life and death because of the polarity of the two worlds Yeats describes: the mortal world is living, the fairy world is not. Yeats has symbolically paired death with fairies before in “The Song of Wandering Aengus” (Purkiss 2000: 297). Yeats tells the reader that, despite what troubles there may be in living, it is the only option he or she has, other than death. And death, for all its allure in times of struggle, defeat, or mishap, is only a gilded treasure; it is not what one really wants. Understanding this is perhaps as important as understanding the choices Yeats gives in the first place.
The Stolen Child
W. B. Yeats

Where dips the rocky highland
Of Sleuth Wood in the lake,
There lies a leafy island
Where flapping herons wake

The drowsy water-rats;
There we've hid our faery vats,
Full of berries
And of reddest stolen cherries.
Come away, O human child!

To the waters and the wild
With a faery, hand in hand,
For the world's more full of weeping than you can understand.

Where the wave of moonlight glosses
The dim grey sands with light,
Far off by furthest Rosses
We foot it all the night,
Weaving olden dances,
Mingling hands and mingling glances
Till the moon has taken flight;

To and fro we leap
And chase the frothy bubbles,
While the world is full of troubles
And is anxious in its sleep.
Come away, O human child!

To the waters and the wild
With a faery, hand in hand,
For the world's more full of weeping than you can understand.

Where the wandering water gushes
From the hills above Glen-Car,
In pools among the rushes
That scarce could bathe a star,
We seek for slumbering trout
And whispering in their ears
Give them unquiet dreams;

Leaning softly out
From ferns that drop their tears
Over the young streams.
Come away, O human child!

To the waters and the wild
With a faery, hand in hand,
For to world's more full of weeping than you can understand.

Away with us he's going,
The solemn-eyed:
He'll hear no more the lowing

Of the calves on the warm hillside
Or the kettle on the hob
Sing peace into his breast,
Or see the brown mice bob
Round and round the oatmeal-chest.

For he comes, the human child,
To the waters and the wild
With a faery, hand in hand,
From a world more full of weeping than he can understand.
Erik Kelly
Professor Butterfield
CCS154: Groove: Time, Rhythm, and Culture
27 February 2007

February 27, 2007

Mr. Kilgore Trout
President
International Telecommunication Union (ITU)
Place des Nations
1211 Geneva, Switzerland

Dear Mr. Trout:

I begin this letter with a question: what does time mean to you? Is it simply an abstract concept designed for the purposes of scheduling and convenience, or is it more? Is solar mean time one of the most fundamentally natural and biological processes in the universe? President Trout, I assure you that it is so. Solar time is more than just a tool in the modern era of busy routines—it is something that lives within each of us. Mr. Trout, you are facing one of the most important decisions of your tenure with the International Telecommunications Union. The fate of the leap second, and with it, the fate of solar mean time, is hanging in the balance. I am optimistic that you will listen to my opinion on the true meaning of time and the important role that it plays in all cultures throughout the world. The leap second must be maintained not only for philosophical reasons, but for practical and economic reasons, as well.

The decision to keep the leap second not only holds physical importance to humanity, but philosophical and psychological significance, as well. In the technologically innovative world we live in, there is a widening void between society and nature. The last true tie that all of
humanity has with nature is the idea of solar time. As Michelle Stacy asserts in the article, “Clash Of The Time Lords,” there is a “sanctity of mean solar time” (51). This sanctity has been an integral component of human existence from the beginning. When timekeeping was first utilized, it was based solely on what could be observed in nature, the celestial bodies. For centuries, the heavens were the cornerstone to the idea of time and to the craft of clock making. Even as clocks became more sophisticated in the 17th century with the innovation of the pendulum clock, solar time remained the foundation from which all other forms of timekeeping were compared. However, it was with the discovery of the atomic clock that solar mean time lost much of its dominance, and consequently humanity risked losing a crucial link with nature. The elimination of the leap second would become the final straw to break this tie with Mother Nature. Do you want to be responsible for severing this bond? Do you want to be responsible for, as Stacy discusses, making the sun, along with all the stars and celestial bodies, irrelevant? In a world without solar time, “time,” as described by Stacy, will become an abstract set of numbers on a display with no relation to the outside world (50). Eventually, in three to four thousand years, the difference between nature and intangible atomic time will lead to darkness at noon (Stacy 50). This is where the psychological and the physical problems with destroying the leap second converge. By implementing the atomic clock as the only timekeeping device, we would not only be abandoning a relationship that humanity has maintained for thousands of years, but simultaneously we would be causing future physical problems through a “quick fix” made in the limited perspective of the present.

Mr. Trout, the leap second is not broken, so don’t fix it. As you are well aware, since the leap second’s implementation in 1972, all twenty-two leap second occurrences have come and gone without incident. With only twenty-two incidents in over thirty-five years, the leap second
is far from a common event. Intelligent officials such as yourself have perfected the addition of
the extra second, allowing it to run flawlessly when needed. The years between leap seconds
also allow for extensive planning and research that prevent problems in future implementations.
I understand that the recurrence of the leap second will become more frequent as the Earth’s
rotation continues to slow. However, proper planning and increases in technology will facilitate
the flawless maintenance of this necessary measure.

Some opponents to the leap second have expressed their concern about maintaining
proper time in areas of the world that must add a leap second during the day, as opposed to at
midnight in the United States. While this is a valid concern, the technology used for the leap
second has proven extremely precise and efficient in handling this occurrence. As our world
continues to rest more responsibility on the shoulders of technology, from autopilot systems on
airplanes to computer guided missiles, the leap second should also be trusted to technological
control. It is also interesting to note that it is not the regions affected by this daytime leap second
that have been raising this issue—it is the United States and other leading atomic time advocates.
Asia, the region most influenced by this argument, has yet to speak out about this “problem.” It
seems counterintuitive for this debate to be raised and supported primarily by countries not
affected by the issue.

Why is it that the United States is pushing so hard for this new time system when so
many other countries that are equally affected have not taken an anti-leap second stance? Are
U.S. atomic time supporters pushing the issue because they believe that it is the most effective
and beneficial decision for society, or are there alternative motives? Could their push for atomic
clock dependence have anything to do with the power that it would bring to timekeeping
institutions such as the United States Naval Observatory (USNO)? If the decision were made to
make the world dependent solely on atomic time, leading institutions, most of which are located in the United States like the USNO, would make the rest of the world reliant on their clocks. This United States domination would end international time influence. Great Britain, for instance, which has controlled the Greenwich Mean Time for decades, would be left with far less power after this decision. Mr. Trout, it would be a tragedy to have the leap second retired because of “national pride and competitiveness” (Stacy 55). It would also be imprudent to get rid of the leap second because it leaves far too much power and influence in the hands of one country.

This initiative, which would affect the entire world equally, is unequally supported by those in the United States in relation to the rest of humanity. As proof of this, Stacy notes in her article that Dennis McCarthy, a retired ranking officer of the USNO, stated that he does not see an overwhelming advocacy internationally for the disposal of the leap second (56). Mr. Trout, we cannot implement a decision so important both physically and philosophically to humanity without an overwhelming majority of approval. The economic and technological effects of this change would be tremendous, even by American standards. How can the many countries far less fortunate than the United States, with far fewer resources, implement this new time change, especially if they do not agree with it to begin with? In addition, how can we make a change as drastic as this, which would result in great sacrifice for the world, but yield power and influence to the United States and the few other counties with high-tech atomic clock facilities? Just as it would be a crime to get rid of the leap second due to competition, greed, and power, it would be equally immoral to burden the majority of non-supporting countries with the atomic time decision of a few, namely the United States.
The decision to abandon the leap second would prove not only burdensome and complicated, but extremely costly, as well. All time-keeping systems would need to be reprogrammed, and all institutions, machines, and other technology that depend on time would also have to be corrected. Telescopes, missiles, airplanes, and all other forms of transportation would need to be fitted with a new system. This is a task that would be challenging for one country, let alone the entire world, to implement.

With internationalism dominating the world stage, any country incapable of updating to the new atomic time would face the same difficulties as the English faced in the seventeen hundreds when the Gregorian Calendar replaced the Julian Calendar. This event, which is discussed by Stacy, was not only inconvenient for English travelers who were isolated from the world due to their obsolete time, but it was also a hazard; if unchanged, England’s Julian Calendar would have caused serious economic hardships due to time differences (54). In the world’s current economic state, many third world countries would never have the resources to upgrade to the atomic time system. As a result, these countries would have difficulties trading and communicating with other counties, cutting them off from the rest of the world and leading them into further economic and social hardship.

Not only would atomic time be costly, but experts say that many of the changes that the atomic clock would bring to technology like the telescope would hinder these research machines’ ability to work effectively. Mr. Trout, in a time when we continue to look to the heavens more and more for answers to overpopulation and depleting natural resources, the telescope is a more valuable resource than an atomic clock. Another problem, posed in Stacy’s article, is that the atomic clock would be unable to tell time in space (51). While the day when this type of information is needed may be decades away, the implementation of atomic time would be
permanent, eventually affecting space travel and all other space explorations. Is the atomic clock worth the huge setbacks that it would put on the future of humanity?

As you are well aware, Mr. Trout, there are two sides to the leap second debate. While I have outlined several reasons why the leap second should be preserved, the opposition will have their own motivations and rebuttals. Some may argue that adopting the atomic clock and retiring the leap second and celestial time would not make timekeeping any less natural. This is because cesium atoms, natural particles, are the driving mechanisms for atomic clocks, which would preserve society’s relationship with nature. This idea could not be farther from the truth. It is impossible to compare the largest, most important celestial body in our solar system, the sun, to a microscopic particle only visible under the most powerful microscopes. There is no doubt in anyone’s mind that this atom is more precise than the sun in telling time; however, its relationship to and effect on humanity is far inferior to that of the sun. The sun and the Earth’s orbit around it produce an intimate connection between humanity and nature. Our bodies are synchronized to these natural repetitions through biological clocks, creating a physical link between the heavens and ourselves. The effects of a cesium atom on humanity run no deeper than its ability to tell time. Few have ever seen this particle and no one is directly affected by its presence.

Humanity will be forever shaped by the decision on the leap second. Are we a people who believe that, “the sun’s day is over” (Stacy 52)? Are we a people who can turn our back on Mother Nature like we have so many times in the past? Are we a humanity willing to sacrifice our research and planning for the future in space for an atomic clock whose main supporters may be advocating its inauguration for selfish reasons? Mr. Trout, I believe that humanity is above such selfishness and greed. I believe that humanity wants a secure future, one that will be
greatly facilitated by the continued use of the leap second. We are a people who have a deep love and personal relationship with nature and the heavens that affect us everyday. We are a people who will use our intellect and technology to maintain natural time, not destroy it. This decision will rank as one of the most pivotal decisions for humanity. So, Mr. Trout, the question is this: to leap or not to leap? I am confident that from the evidence that I have proposed and supported your answer will be easy—leap.

Sincerely,

Zeppo Zappa
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Kundry: Prostitute or Penitent?

Is it possible for two completely contradictory natures to be fully reconciled in one human being? Logic says no. And yet, at first glance, it appears Wagner’s Kundry embodies just such a being whose dual nature “act[s] out oppos[ing] roles at once” (Treadwell, 216). In Parsifal, Kundry plays both the timeless seductress (Act II) and the Magdalenian penitent (Acts I and III). It could be argued that in the course of Parsifal, Kundry undergoes a metamorphosis, shedding her prostitute identity when she repents for her sins in Act III. But such an argument, even accepting Kundry’s duality, still labels Kundry as a true penitent. For Kundry to be redeemed, there had to be the possibility of redemption. During the course of the opera, the conscious Kundry never truly remembers her actions as a seductress (Wagner 55). Whatever deeds she commits at this time are purely under the compulsion of the curse. In her conscious state Kundry is constantly atoning for her sin against Christ through abject servitude to the Grail Knights. She takes on whatever task they give her even if it forces her to travel to the ends of the world. Kundry therefore had to be a penitent based on her dialogue and physical actions in the opera.

For Wagner, Kundry was one of the most complex and important characters in Parsifal. In fact, he dedicated several diary entries to defining and redefining her role. In the first prose sketch of Parsifal, a good portion of his analysis was devoted to explaining the idea behind Kundry. In Act I, Kundry is very strongly presented as a penitent, eagerly taking up whatever
task the Grail Knights required, no matter the difficulty or the distance of the journey (Wagner 51). If she was merely acting in such a manner to gain “customers,” it would have been easier if she had just come to them as a seductress. Instead, Kundry is treated “more as a strange, magical animal than a human being” (50). She willingly subjects herself to a great humiliation, appearing before them as something “dreadful to behold,” as someone barely human, let alone a woman (50). In describing Kundry, Wagner wrote this in his diary:

“She [Kundry] serves them with the most passionate self–sacrifice: never, when she is in this state, does she receive a loving look, being no more than a servant and scorned slave” (Wagner, 55).

Though Gurnemanz’ analysis of Kundry’s character was much kinder, he too very accurately “suppos[ed] her to be a woman accursed and having great sins to atone for in her present life” (51). Kundry puts herself in the service of the Grail Knights because she is compelled by her personal desire to repent.

For the majority of the opera, we see this obviously penitent side of Kundry. It is only in Act II, when Kundry has been put under Klingsor’s power that she once again becomes the irresistible seductress. At this point, the audience finally becomes acquainted with Kundry’s endless cycle of penitent and seductress personalities. But, as Wagner notes, “after violent ravings” in her temptress state, Kundry always reawakens penitent (55). How can one character undergo such a dramatic role reversal? Wagner explains that Kundry “carries no real consciousness of what has passed,” and having awakened penitent, she once again serves those she wounded, but “without hope, without respect” (55). Wagner strongly emphasizes that Kundry has only a vague idea of what she is doing during these “violent ravings.” For her, these memories are more dreamlike, barely solid enough to be connected to reality.
And yet, even in this “dreamlike” state, Kundry tries to consciously resist what she knows to be morally wrong. When Klingsor calls Kundry to him to seduce Parsifal, she makes a valiant effort to resist his hold on her:

“Kundry: I won’t do it. Oh! Oh!
Klingsor: You will do it, because you must
Kundry: You…cannot…force me
Klingsor: I have you in my power” (Parsifal Libretto II.i).

At last, knowing she will succumb to the will of Klingsor, losing conscious control, Kundry cries out in vain for the relief found only through an “eternal sleep” (Parsifal Libretto II.i). That she voices protestations when ordered to seduce Parsifal indicates Kundry, as a seductress, acts only under the compulsion of Klingsor’s power. When Kundry finally meets and is rejected by Parsifal, she does not treat him the way a prostitute would. Realizing Parsifal is indeed the “pure fool” the prophecy waits for, Kundry tries to lure him back into her embrace not for the sake of sensual pleasure but because she believes this is the only way to redemption. Though erred in thinking, Kundry, even in her temptress form, was still a penitent. This is most clearly indicated by her response to Parsifal’s rejection:

“Cruel One! If you now feel in your heart only the pain of others, then you can feel mine… An eternity have I awaited you… [I am] unable to weep, only scream and storm, rave and rage, in ever recurring nights of madness, from which, though penitent, I scarcely awake” (Parsifal Libretto II. ii).

Kundry very clearly acknowledges her wish to repent, voicing her frustration at her weakness as well as the weakness of the knights that succumb to her whims. Though Kundry makes a conscious effort to do so, she is unable to resist the hold of the curse, instead relying on Parsifal to supply the salvation she does not yet know how to receive.

It is only in Act II that Kundry’s duality comes into play when she is compelled by Klingsor to lure Parsifal to sin. By Act III, there is a strong parallel between Kundry and
Magdalene, especially in Kundry’s actions. For instance, Kundry doesn’t speak in all of Act III except to utter “dienen---dienen.” Gone is the underlying bitterness and contempt for the Grail Knights who failed to resist her charms. Instead, Kundry “silently acknowledges Parsifal as her Redeemer” (Everett, *Kundry*). In Act III, Kundry anoints the head and washes the feet of Parsifal becoming Magdalene, “the saint who is also a sinner, whose penitential awareness of sin actually constitutes her saintliness” (Treadwell, 216). Kundry is fully aware and conscious of her sins from the beginning of her curse to all the seductions after that. As such, it can be argued Kundry’s awareness of her sins actually lent more value to her penitence. Parsifal is finally able to give Kundry the peace she seeks throughout the course of the opera (*Parsifal Libretto III.i*).

One of Parsifal’s very first acts was to baptize her, cementing her belief in the Redeemer. Before the day is over, Kundry is finally released from her curse as she “embraces Parzival’s feet and silently sinks lifeless before him” (Wagner, 61). This action physically shows that her curse, the endless cycle of death and rebirth, has been broken. She would only have been thus redeemed if she had been a true penitent.

The idea of Kundry as a prostitute is not possible in *Parsifal*. This is most strongly supported by the very end of the story. Her death was her literal redemption, the end to her endless wandering. Such an act of redemption would only have been possible if Kundry had been a true penitent. The conditions for Kundry’s salvation were very specific as “complete annihilation is vouchsafed her only if her most powerful blandishments are withstood by the most chaste and virile of men” (Everett, *Prose Draft of 1865*). Kundry is therefore unwillingly forced to sin with every victory over the Grail Knights. It is not unreasonable to say Kundry was a true penitent throughout *Parsifal*, even during her most sinful acts. Every Grail Knight she
encountered, though they were not the prophesized one, had it within their power to redeem Kundry.

And despite each bittersweet victory, throughout the course of the opera, Kundry was constantly atoning for her original sin and all the sins thereafter through various forms of abject humiliation. But these forms of penitence were useless as long as she was unable to gain redemption. Forced as she was under the compulsion of the curse, Kundry had no choice but to constantly test and retest the Grail Knights with her charms of seduction. What significantly indicated Kundry’s penitence were her actions during the final act of *Parsifal*. In addition to her Magdalenian acts Kundry awoke *aware* as well as accepting of all her sins in her previous lives. If she had merely been using the guise of a prostitute, Kundry would not have willingly subjected herself to the baptism. And more than anything else, it was Kundry’s death that finally proved her to be a true penitent. The importance of her death was not so much that Kundry was “redeemed” as it was the idea there was even a possibility of redemption for her. Kundry was, ultimately, a penitent even during her most sinful states of living.
Works Cited


   <http://home.c2i.net/monsalvat/trans0.htm>


