

## Critically Evaluating the Fictional World through Popular Culture

We are happy to present our special issue, “Criminals as Heroes: Problems and Pedagogy in Popular Culture,” guest edited by Kathryn (“Kate”) Lane and Roxie James. In this issue we explore the unique role that the anti-hero has taken in recent years. The changing nature of how criminals are portrayed in popular culture brings us a new understanding of how society has shaped this cultural form, and how popular culture has, in turn, shaped society.

Popular culture arms us with an exciting and powerful pedagogical tool and continues to offer a lens through which to grapple with serious societal issues. In the 1960s and 1970s in the United States, for example, popular culture provided an outlet for viewers to consider important changes occurring in society. Television programs such as *All in the Family*, *Maud*, and *The Jeffersons* helped us think about, and discuss, issues of race and gender equity during a historic period of social change. Today, television series such as *Modern Family* and *Speechless* provides society with a fictional world with which to consider how we define ourselves individually and exist as a families, presenting us with a far more inclusive portrayal of how we live our lives today through characters who may not look like us, behave like us, or perhaps even think like us. Through such fictional portrayals that address important issues, we can critically evaluate the changes taking place in our society.

While the articles are described in detail within Lane and James’s guest editorial, “What Hot Criminals, Anti-Heroes, and Bob Dylan Can Teach Us,” as a brief introduction here, the five articles in this issue reflect on the increasingly important, and changing, role and portrayal of the anti-hero in popular culture. First, Amanda DiPaolo helps us ponder the concerns that may emerge due to the continuing development of artificial intelligence. Max Romanowski then explores how good and evil are defined and portrayed in popular culture. Later in this issue, James Tregonning critically evaluates what it means to follow societal rules when they clash with personal ethics. Lastly, the final two articles by Courtney Watson and Melissa Vosen Callens, respectively, take on an analysis of the more recent incarnations of the female anti-hero.

Each of the articles in this issue provide ways that we can contemplate society today, using popular culture to address issues of equity, morality, and personal ethics. We are now seeing heroes, and in the case of this special issue, anti-heroes, coming from a varied cross-section of society. Today, we see an increasing variety of characters, such as individuals identifying as men, women, cisgender, transgender, as well as a range across ethnic and cultural identities, and representing various forms of ability and disability. Each variance portrays life, demonstrating a growing acceptance and portrayal of diverse variations within popular culture.

In addition to the full-length articles, the diversity in representation can be demonstrated to a greater extent in the online book review of *Ghettos, Tramps, and Welfare Queens* (Pimpare, 2017). In the review, Debbie Olson highlights Pimpare’s (2017) discussion of the “marginalized and maligned” while also noting how the book could be enhanced by further demonstrating the intersection between race, gender, and poverty.

The five articles in this special issue can inform the ways we may choose to consider how the antihero

is portrayed, providing insight into why individuals may have selected their path in life, even if at first, this path may push against societal assumptions of what is expected and normal. With the inclusion of the book review, we are shown how future essays and studies could delve into the ways in which sociocultural factors, positionality, and societal expectations and pressures can be examined further. The authors present new ways to use a fictional world to discuss important societal issues, and perhaps question and consider our own personal biases. We hope you enjoy this special edition of *Dialogue*.

**Kelli Bippert**  
Managing Editor

**Anna CohenMiller**  
Editor in Chief

#### **A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR IN CHIEF:**

Since 2011, when *Dialogue* was first discussed and brought to life, I have been fortunate to work hand-in-hand with amazing editorial team members. With Lynnea Chapman-King, Kurt Depner, and Rob Galin, we have developed strong and varied sets of issues addressing important and fascinating topics in popular culture and pedagogy. Today, I am pleased to introduce, or re-introduce in this case, our evolving editorial team for the next phase of *Dialogue*.

Kelli Bippert and Karina Vado have been active members with SWPACA and the *Dialogue* editorial board over the last few years. They have taken on the roles of Educational Resource Editor and Book Review Editor, respectively, and facilitated the development of our online short articles and musings. I have the honor to announce that Kelli will be moving into the position of Managing Editor and Karina has accepted a new position as Production Editor. With their keen awareness of contemporary issues in popular culture and pedagogical practices, and their exceptional insight and ability, I am excited to have them aboard and know the *Dialogue* community will benefit from these new developments.

Lastly, I would like to introduce our new copy editors to the team, Miriam Sciala and Robert Gordyn. For this issue, I would like to thank them along with all those that contributed to the production of this issue: Kelli Bippert (Managing Editor and Educational Resources Editor), Karina Vado (Production Editor and Book Review Editor), Kathryn (“Kate”) Lane and Roxie James (guest editors), all authors who submitted articles for consideration, our peer reviewers, and Douglas CohenMiller (Creative Director). As always, we look forward to hearing your thoughts about the issue and innovative ideas for future development.

**Anna CohenMiller**  
Editor in Chief



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