

"To Get to Harvard, Go to Haiti?" by Frank Bruni

The position Bruni presents is not his, but rather that of a diverse group of people. The first of these people is Dylan Hernandez, who introduces his classmates' disturbing trend of "mission trips" headed towards needy countries to improve college admissions chances. He mentions the familiar symbols of "Snapchat and Instagram" as the carriers of the contagion of the mission trips. Bruni spends a good part of his essay concerned about Hernandez's specific worries.

Lingering on Hernandez's opinion accomplishes multiple feats: establishing a down-to-earth example, using someone else's position, and using familiar symbols— "playing it safe" by not asserting his own opinion. By allowing others to lead the discussion, the author becomes blameless and shows that the argument is greater than himself. The focus is placed on Hernandez, the student; on Pérez, Delahunty, and Farmer, experienced admissions officers; on Dowling, a college counselor; on a sense of "they" rather than "I." Bruni is simply a hands-off moderator facilitating a view of others, cleverly compiling like views into a cohesive argument. The few times he does assert his own opinion — as little phrases like "Neither do I" — simply give Bruni a sense of voice, show that he is still there.

Bruni also enlarges the scope by turning a single instance into a mess of innumerable people, something that "becomes contagious." When he mentions "Harvard," he refers symbolically to all schools. "Haiti" and "Guatemala" refer to all the needy countries. And perhaps this mission-trip-ordeal is allusive to cheating in general. This is the art of synecdoche, a literary replacement by a representative component.

Bruni's main weapon of persuasion is satire. He ridicules "helicopter parents" for their gullibility ("She'd just read somewhere that colleges would be impressed by that") and students for their naivete (ignoring "more practiced and efficient" not-for-profit organizations). This scorn is epitomized as pithy lines dispersed throughout: sometimes as one-liner paragraphs: "But there's cynicism in the mix"; sometimes rhetorical questions: "Why is it fashionable to spend \$1,000-plus, 20 hours traveling, and 120 hours volunteering in Guatemala for a week?"; and sometimes basic reasoning: "No passports or customs lines [are] required" to help out at home.

As Charlotte mentioned Cohen "writ[ing] a eulogy of sorts: a final farewell of Europe as he once knew it," Bruni suggests a similar theme with his ridicule: what was once "empathy [is now] an extracurricular activity," a suggestion of care degraded into the bane of personal benefit. As with Brexit, things are changing — unfavorably.

And Bruni mocks us into believing it.