

In This Issue...

How is the present shaped by the past? How can we use the ideas of the people who came before us to understand ourselves better and to make better decisions about our lives and our work in today's world? For the faculty members who teach in the Lynchburg College Symposium Readings (LCSR) program, who focus on classical writings, and who try to draw connections between ideas from the past and the issues of today's world, these questions have become one of the driving forces behind the LCSR curriculum. The other driving force behind the LCSR program is a concern for effective pedagogy: how can students be encouraged to read seminal works across the disciplines, to think about them critically, and to express their interpretations of those works clearly in both speaking and writing? The articles in this fifteenth issue of the *Agora* demonstrate that both of these driving forces are alive and well among the current participants of the LCSR program.

The first article, "Heroism or Delusion: The Ambiguities of Opting for Death in *Iphigenia in Aulis*," by **Dr. Richard Burke** (Professor of English) provides a challenge for students in dealing with ambiguity. Should Iphigenia's death in support of the Trojan War be seen as a glorious martyrdom or as a foolish waste of life? The connections between the content of Euripides' play and our attitudes towards participation in contemporary wars are easy to see, but in both situations, the ambiguity can be equally difficult to handle.

Dana Sliva won the Kendall North Award for the best LCSR-related essay in this issue of the *Agora* with her essay, "Exploring Homoeroticism in Herman Melville's Novella *Billy Budd, Sailor*." In an American literature course, Dana considered how an author could express ideas about homosexuality while living under the social strictures of nineteenth century taboos. Dana's uncovering of Melville's subtly disguised treatment of this controversial topic is intriguing and sophisticated.

Another award winner is **Rachel Moore**, who wrote "The Secret of Life" in an honors world literature course. Dr. Peggy Pittas chose Rachel's paper for this year's LCSR Program Director's Award as the best essay dealing with a social problem. Rachel elaborates on related insights in the ancient Sumerian *Gilgamesh*; the ancient Chinese Daoist book, *Chuang Tzu*; and Dan Brown's contemporary novel, *The Da Vinci Code*, which all lead to finding personal contentment in life. No matter the millennium or the culture, this topic has always preoccupied writers and their readers.

The next two papers were both written in the same honors world literature course as Rachel's paper. **Leslie Harris** in "Searching for the Middle Ground: Finding Balance in Literary Extremes" applies the Daoist principles of moderation and acceptance to literary analysis in order to resolve polarized views of the role of women in Medieval poetry and in *Gilgamesh*. **Mary Mohay** also strives to find compromise between opposing world views in "Einstein's 'Science and Religion': How the Ideas Presented Are Evident in Genesis and Australian Aboriginal Legends of the Dreamtime." Mary explains that the conflict between the scientific or secular world view and the devoutly religious world view can be resolved if each side is prepared to acknowledge the complementary nature of the other's attributes.

The next two papers, which focus on the role of women, were both written in literature courses. **Elizabeth Giglio** in "Feminism in *My Antonia*" explains the importance of and variety in women's attitudes to life and work in the settlement of the American prairies in the second half of the nineteenth century, and **Rosalind Eberhart** in "Girl Power!" discusses ways in which Korean and Japanese women have triumphed in their personal lives despite their circumstances of terrible suffering.

The next cluster of three papers, each of which focuses on a significant author, has been produced by students in the Westover Honors program, whose theme this year has been Latin

America. **Lydia Nilsen** wrote “Communist or Anti-Imperialist? The Personal Politics of Gabriel Garcia Marquez”; **Jackie Fox** focuses on the Cuban writer Guillermo Cabrera Infante in “The Political Influence of Countries on their Citizens”; and **Derrick Van Leer** focuses on Peru in “Gender Relationships in Latin America: Mario Vargas Llosa’s *Death in the Andes*.” By discussing the work of these three important Latin American authors, these students have shed light on struggles and issues beyond our immediate experience as North American readers.

The next group of three papers comes from disciplines other than literature. In an art history class, **Grace Rochfort** wrote “Distorted Realities: Existentialism in the Works of Salvador Dali,” where she explores the influence of Jean Paul Sartre’s existentialist ideas on the paintings of Salvador Dali. In a biology class, **Bridgette Polite** wrote “Women in the Sciences,” where she uncovers the sad fact that despite the advances in equal treatment of women over the last fifty years, the work of at least two important women scientists has gone largely unrecognized. In a course on religions of Asia, **Katelyn Coyle** wrote “A History of the Untouchables: The Buraku and the Dalit.” For these untouchable caste members in Japan and India, the discrimination and their struggles against it are remarkably similar. Katelyn clearly outlines the progress that has been made and what still needs to be done before these people can be thoroughly assimilated into and accepted by their societies.

The final cluster of five papers were all written in Senior Symposium, a course in which students are required to interpret ideas from LCSR readings and public lectures on contemporary issues in terms of their own experiences and opinions. In the first of these papers, “Education Systems: Classical vs. Jeffersonian,” **Jennifer Bolt** suggests ways in which our current education system could be improved by drawing on the strengths of two past educational systems. In “The Freemasonry of Race: Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. DuBois on Education and Black Cultural Consciousness,” **Beverly Brown** discusses ways to use the ideas of African-American writers of the past to continue combating the racism that persists in the United States today. Racism is also **Rebecca McGowan**’s focus in “Oppression in *Antigone* and Africa”; however, Rebecca’s focus is on international racism as she exposes the narrow-mindedness and greed of the Western nations’ attitude to and treatment of African nations today. In “Flash and Smoke: The Importance of Spectacle and Music in Theatre,” **Leigh Mackintosh** turns to the lighter topic of entertainment, but she also draws out the social significance of theatrical entertainment, explaining that many serious problems, which we might normally choose to shy away from, can be brought to the fore through musical theatre. This issue of the *Agora* ends on a strong note with **Gail Silveira**’s “Nature as a Theme in China.” Gail explores the overlap in the ideas of the eighth century Chinese poet, Li Po, and the principles of the martial arts form of T’ai Chi: both Li Po and the T’ai Chi appreciate the energy of nature and aim to use it to establish balance in daily life.

It is obvious that all these *Agora* writers have presented ideas worthy of consideration, and we are proud of their contributions to the academic community. However, it is also appropriate to commend the professors who supervised the writing of these papers in their classes: Dr. Terri Hartman (Sliva and Giglio), Dr. Elza Tiner (Moore, Harris, and Mohay), Dr. David Lipani (Eberhart), Professor Max Guggenheimer (Nilsen), Professor Nina Salmon (Fox), Dr. Katherine Gray (Van Leer, Mackintosh, and Silveira), Dr. Delane Bovenizer (Rochfort), Dr. David Freier (Polite), Dr. Jeff Burke (Coyle), Dr. Rose Jensen (Bolt), Dr. Robert White (Brown), and Dr. Sylvia Rinker (McGowan).

This year, the *Agora* editorial committee considered over fifty submissions, so I want to thank all those student writers who submitted papers; unfortunately, we could not publish all of them. However, we hope that everybody will continue reading, thinking, and writing in a similar vein

so that next year's editorial committee will have an equally difficult task in deciding which articles to publish.

Lyndall Naim
Faculty Editor