

In This Issue...

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The value of the classical writings of human civilization lies in their ability to assist us in dealing with the issues of our own time. The purpose of the Lynchburg College Symposium Readings (LCSR) program and of similar “great books”-type programs at universities and colleges that belong to the Association of Core Texts and Courses (ACTC) in the United States and around the world is to assist students in their educational quest to realize as much of that value as possible. As students read the seminal works of human civilization across all disciplines, they encounter ideas, values, and beliefs that have stood the test of time, and in the process, these student readers and writers become better equipped to address the problems of our modern world. The *agora*, the marketplace of ancient Greece, provided a venue for the exchange of ideas, and so this journal, the *Agora*, aims to provide the same function for students writing to share their ideas about core texts.

The 2011 issue of the *Agora* contains one essay written by a faculty member, **Dr. Peggy Pittas** of Lynchburg College. In her paper, entitled “Questioning Who We Are While Reading *Ota Benga*, *The Pygmy in the Zoo* and Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*,” Dr. Pittas draws parallels between Conrad’s fictional novella and the contemporaneous historical accounts of an American missionary who knew Ota Benga, a Pygmy, who was brought to the United States, who was exhibited with the monkeys in the Bronx Zoo, and who committed suicide in Lynchburg, Virginia, in 1916. Dr. Pittas explains the racism and mistreatment of minority groups in Central Africa and the United States of a century ago, provoking us to question how much progress we have made with these issues in the intervening years.

Theresa Smart, a student at the University of Dallas, won this year's Kendall North Award for the best essay in the 2011 issue of the *Agora* with her essay, "Human and Beyond: Dante's Transhumanization and the Scope of Liberal Education," which she presented at the ACTC student conference at Pepperdine University in March, 2011. Theresa focuses on the metamorphosis of Dante the pilgrim into a higher being as he enters the highest heavens; Theresa then compares Dante's experience to the transforming experience that students undergo while engaged in liberal arts education.

Peter Zuk, who studies at Pepperdine University, won the LCSR Program Director's Award with his essay, "Milton as Servant, Satan as Existentialist: Competing Conceptions of Freedom in *Paradise Lost*," which he also presented at the ACTC student conference at Pepperdine University in March, 2011. Peter explains that in *Paradise Lost* Milton's attempt to resolve the free will versus determination dilemma is not completely convincing; Peter concludes that self-determination is the key to true freedom.

A third paper presented at the ACTC student conference at Pepperdine University in March, 2011 is "The Water Nymph" by **Sarah Renteria** of Orange Coast College. Sarah adopts feminist theory and focuses on Ophelia in *Hamlet*, suggesting that Ophelia's intelligence and virtue are too often under-estimated.

Samantha Chapman of Lynchburg College, in her essay "Equipping a Generation," explores the benefits of education organized along classical lines. Samantha explains why today's prevailing pragmatic view of education purely as a means of job preparation leads to an under-appreciation of the benefits of classical education.

David Griffith, a computer science major at Lynchburg College, has written “Symbolic Intelligence” to explore the analogy between the human mind and computers. David discusses the attributes that we like to think of as uniquely human and considers whether human consciousness could be replicated in a machine.

The topic of human interactions with technology is continued by **Eric Jones**, a recent graduate of the Visual Arts program at Richard Stockton College of New Jersey. In his essay, “Creating New Forms: Art, Technology, and the Imagination,” Eric discusses some innovative forms of technology that artists are currently using to bring their artistic creations closer to the imaginative ideals that inspired them. Instead of mass production and technology compromising the uniqueness of works of art, computers can be used to enhance the artistic endeavor.

Another student writer who focuses on art is **Daniel Telele** of Lynchburg College. In “*Guernica*,” Daniel explains how the powerful artistic expression of talented artists like Picasso provides viewers of paintings, such as *Guernica*, with the opportunity to glimpse some truth of historical events that might otherwise have gone unnoticed.

Joshua Evans of Yale University in “The Blank Card: Meaning and Transcendence in T. S. Eliot’s *The Wasteland*” discusses the human desire to move beyond the meaninglessness of modern life. Joshua agrees with Eliot’s conclusion that such a desire is futile because the only way to achieve any transcendence is to follow Tiresias’s example and to accept the limitations of the human condition.

Jeremy Schiffres, who is also a student at Yale University, wrote “Re-Judging the Judgment of Solomon.” Focusing on the book of I Kings in the Hebrew Bible, Jeffrey explains

how King Solomon's use of his sword to decide the true mother of a baby claimed by two women effectively established the tone of Solomon's reign as one governed by wisdom that had been granted to Solomon by God.

E-Lynne Yap, another student at Yale University, also focuses on literature of the ancient world in her essay, "Life after Death: Odysseus' Meetings with Anticleia and Laertes." E-Lynne compares Odysseus' meetings with both of his parents to support her claim that the best way to deal with grief over the death of a loved one is to accept it so that the mourner can begin to appreciate life again.

The final three essays in this issue of the *Agora* were written in Senior Symposium, a general education course in which Lynchburg College students combine ideas from LCSR readings and public lectures on contemporary issues together with their own experiences and opinions. These three students wrote their essays in fall 2010, when the theme of Senior Symposium was sustainability. **Glenn Lucker**, in "Leadership Change," develops the theme of sustainability as it applies to leadership studies; he advocates servant-leadership as the most effective approach for building sustainable groups and societies. **Aubrey Berry** continues in a similar vein in "The Power of Humble Leaders" as she contrasts the stereotypical image of a strong, outgoing leader with the less noticeable example of a quiet leader who chooses to focus on the needs of others. In conclusion, **Elizabeth Keese**, in "The Need for Public Spirit," discusses the importance of citizens participating in their government and their communities to ensure that the wellbeing of everybody is promoted.

We are proud of these students' contributions to the academic community. Nevertheless, we also want to thank the professors who supervised the writing of these papers in their

classes. From Lynchburg College, these professors are Dr. Mari Normyle (Chapman), Dr. Will Briggs (Griffith), and Dr. Delane Karalow (Telele). From other ACTC institutions, the supervising faculty members are Dr. Scott Crider at the University of Dallas (Smart), Dr. Donald Marshall at Pepperdine University (Zuk), Dr. Ken Parker at Orange Coast College (Renteria), Dr. Kate Ogden at Richard Stockton College of New Jersey (Jones), and from Yale University, Dr. Alice Kaplan (Schiffres), and Dr. Jane Levin (Evans and Yap).

This twentieth issue of the *Agora* demonstrates the strengths of undergraduates' writing on core texts. We appreciate their thoughtful essays, which help us to reconsider the events and issues of our contemporary world in a new light.

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