

In This Issue ...

The inauguration of the first African-American President. Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The financial crisis and the economic downturn. The role of women in civic life. Gay rights. Professionals violating the public trust by making unethical and opportunistic career decisions. Misunderstandings caused by misinterpreting and not tolerating other people's cultural values. Immigration and relocation. The significance of music and art for our spiritual and emotional well-being. All these events and issues in the news over the past year have clearly been on the minds of the writers of the essays in the 2009 *Agora*. These fourteen writers are making use of our cultural heritage provided by the great thinkers and writers of the past to enhance our understanding of our contemporary world and our own roles in it. The *Agora*, like its namesake of the ancient Greek marketplace, serves to disseminate the results of these students' serious attempts to deepen our understanding of ourselves and our world.

Paul Tierney won the Kendall North Award for the best essay in the 2009 *Agora* for his essay, "Three Translations of *Beowulf*: Interpretation or Misrepresentation of Meaning." Paul compares three different modern translations of *Beowulf* and considers what each translator offers to our appreciation of this text, just as each medieval *scop* would have provided his own interpretation of *Beowulf* when reciting it in the oral tradition.

Another award winner is **Katie Wilcox** with her essay, "Feminist Literary Criticism and *Lysistrata*." Dr. Peggy Pittas chose this essay for her LCSR Program Director's Award as the best one in the 2009 *Agora* dealing with a social problem. Katie analyzes Aristophanes' views on the position of women in ancient Greece and makes comparisons with the views of modern feminist literary critics.

Another student writer who focuses on the role of women is **Jessica Quinlan** in “Out of Hyacinth and Apple-Boughs: Sappho’s Aphrodite Myth and the Bisexual Anima.” Jess considers the possibility that Sappho was using Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love, as a way to explore her own psychological identity, sometimes treating her partner in a feminine and alluring manner and at other times acting in a more typically masculine role of the pursuer and instigator.

A third paper with a connection to the ancient Greeks is **Elizabeth Healy’s** “The Garden as Original Home: Nostalgia in ‘Paradise Lost’.” Elizabeth explains the non-sentimental nuances of the word *nostalgia* and relates it to the experiences of the main characters of three core texts: first, Adam and Eve’s nostalgia for the Garden of Eden after the Fall as described by Milton in “Paradise Lost”; second, Odysseus’ nostalgia for his home as described by Homer in the *Odyssey*; and third, Aeneas’ nostalgia for Troy as described by Virgil in the *Aeneid*. All three are forced to build new homes, but they do so while recalling the memories of their original homes, memories that are tied up with their self-identities.

In “The Crisis of Trust in *Hamlet*,” **Michael Colebrook** discusses Hamlet’s dilemma of being caught up in changing value systems and social structures as the medieval world morphs into the modern. In the course of these profound changes, everyone around Hamlet becomes untrustworthy, and ultimately, the social order collapses with the tragic deaths of all the main characters.

On a lighter note, **Sean Udell** addresses “The Sexually Awkward and Aloof Man Known as Mr. Collins,” a character in Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*. Sean suggests that Mr. Collins is gay, an assertion that would have been far too blatant for the very proper Miss Austen, but Sean’s supporting evidence is convincing nevertheless. Sean explains that in Elizabeth

Bennet's quest to identify the desirable qualities she wants in a husband, Mr. Collins plays the crucial role of exemplifying the most undesirable qualities.

The next two essays focus on texts by American writers. **Stephen Marowitz** writes on Herman Melville's story "Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street" in his essay, "'Ah humanity!': Bartleby's Challenge to the Lawyer." Stephen's analysis of the class difference and the lack of mutual understanding between the Lawyer and the lowly clerk echoes today's finger-pointing by both Wall Street and Main Street in attempting to attribute blame for our current financial crisis to others. In her essay, "Jim Burden and Jake Barnes: As Similar as Their Initials," **Ashley Ferry** draws an unusual parallel between key characters in novels by Willa Cather and Ernest Hemingway. Ashley explains that both characters are restless, that both are attracted to strong women, but that both fail to establish satisfying relationships with the women they love.

In his essay, "Nietzsche's Jesus, Weak Theology, and the Possibility of a New Christian Ethics," **Alan Reynolds** follows Nietzsche's lead of questioning conventional Christian teachings, such as the struggle between good and evil, the contrast between believers and non-believers, and the church's emphasis on legalism. Alan demonstrates that Jesus was not caught up in these rigid, absolutist attitudes, and he suggests that modern Christians have opportunities to grow beyond them.

Mary Patricia Jones considers the edifying role of music in spiritual experience in her essay, "The Rhetoric of Music in Dante's *Purgatorio*." Mary Pat asserts that the beautiful and orderly music of the hymns and chants in Dante's *Purgatorio* is intended to encourage the penitent souls who are searching for the goodness and truth that they hope will eventually be their reward in heaven.

The next two papers were both written in art history classes. In “Everlasting Tension: A Comparison of Themes between John Keats and Hellenistic Art,” **Kate Kauffman** elaborates on John Keats’ poem, “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” explaining that the artist who painted the figures on the urn over two thousand years ago captured their emotions so effectively that, like Keats, we today can empathize with their experience. Kate draws a comparison between Keats’ experience when looking at the Grecian urn and her own experience when viewing three ancient Greek sculptures. In “A Wanderer’s Eyes,” **Samantha Bryant** describes the painting, *In the Loge* by Mary Cassatt, and follows Renoir’s suggestions to analyze the relationship between the central figure of the woman and the man in the background, who is watching her. The composition of *In the Loge* leads Samantha to draw conclusions about the role of women in civic life.

The final two papers were written in Senior Symposium. In these assignments, Lynchburg College students are required to synthesize their own personal opinions together with ideas they have encountered in core texts and the Senior Symposium lectures. In the first of these two papers, “Irrationality and Intellect,” **Clyde Harkrader** warns against the dangers of succumbing to political propaganda as happened in Nazi Germany and suggests strategies for citizens of a democracy to avoid falling prey to those dangers. **Shane Durie** in “Considering the Right and Necessity of Civil Disobedience” contrasts the differing views on obedience to the law held by Socrates in ancient Greece and Martin Luther King, Jr., in the mid-twentieth century in the United States. Shane comes down on the side of relative circumstances and sides with King’s civil disobedience rather than supporting the universal application of Socrates’ commitment to follow the law of the land.

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. Elza Tiner (Tierney and Wilcox), Dr. Casey Clabough (Quinlan and Marowitz), Dr. Terri Hartman (Ferry), Dr. Delane Karalow (Kauffman and Bryant) and Dr. Kate Gray (Harkrader and Durie). From other ACTC institutions, the supervising faculty members are Dr. Mary Katherine Mumbach at Thomas More College (Healy), Dr. Bainard Cowan and Dr. Nalin Ranasinghe at Assumption College (Colebrook), Dr. Shayne Legassie at Columbia University (Udell), Dr. Donald Marshall at Pepperdine University (Reynolds), and Dr. Gerard Wegemer and Dr. Kathleen Burk at the University of Dallas (Jones).

This eighteenth issue of the *Agora* demonstrates the depth and breadth of undergraduates' writing on well-known texts of classical humanism. We appreciate their thoughtful output, which helps us to reconsider the events and issues of our contemporary world in a new light.

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