

HUMANITIES

at BYU

**BYU COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES
ALUMNI MAGAZINE • WINTER 2013**

from the Dean

Critical Openness



Dean John R. Rosenberg

The tortoise and the tiger were friends who lived in a village where not much happened. One day, fatigued from boredom, they determined to organize a dance to entertain the villagers. The tortoise and the tiger agreed that each would prepare one instrument for the dance: the nkú, a hollow wood instrument shaped like a small

casket, and the mbañ, a kind of drum.

The tiger decided to make his instrument in the forest, where no one would bother him, while the tortoise chose the road on which his neighbors walked to other villages so that he could take advantage of their suggestions. While the tortoise worked on his nkú he did the following: when he saw that someone approached, he hid near the nkú so that he could hear the criticism of the traveler; when the traveler had passed, the tortoise came out of hiding, modified his design as suggested by the traveler, and in this way perfected his work. By heeding criticism, the tortoise created a beautiful work of art praised by all the people.

In contrast, the tiger assembled a defective instrument because he didn't seek out the opinion of others, and when he had finished, he delivered to the village a horrible mbañ that his neighbors mocked and tossed away. In this way the tortoise became known as the best artist of the animal kingdom, due to the critiques of the travelers. Criticism is not always bad; occasionally we must tolerate it and it will expand our knowledge and make us stronger. Great works of art are the fruit of different points of view that the artist fuses in his work.

The fable of the musical tiger and tortoise comes from the Fang culture of West Africa (transcribed in Spanish in Equatorial Guinea).

The teachable tortoise reminds me of an anecdote recorded by Pliny the Elder, in Book XXXV of his Nat-

ural History. Pliny praises Alexander the Great's favorite painter, Apelles of Kos—a peerless artist who enjoyed a privileged relationship with the king (and who later became the inspiration for artists of the Renaissance who aspired to be the “new Apelles”). Pliny tells us that it was a practice of Apelles “when he had completed a work, to exhibit it to the view of the passers-by in some exposed place; while he himself, concealed behind the picture, would listen to the criticisms that were passed upon it; it being his opinion that the judgment of the public was preferable to his own, as being the more discerning of the two. It was under these circumstances, they say, that he was censured by a shoemaker for having represented the shoes with one shoe-string too little.”

The African fable and the tale of Apelles share an attitude of openness. The tortoise and the Greek do more than tolerate correctives, they strategically pursue them. But what about the danger of design by committee—the spoiling of the broth by a congress of cooks? What of Emersonian self-reliance, captured in the citation I committed to memory as a somewhat romantic teenager: “It is easy in the world to live after the world's opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own; but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude.” How does one navigate between non-conforming “independence of solitude” and the necessary collaborations of social and intellectual life? The answer is not in the clarity of axioms, but in the muddiness of stories where discernment is required to perceive discernment at work. The tortoise and Apelles were available to all counsel, but acted only on good counsel: “The next day, the shoemaker, quite proud at seeing the former error corrected, thanks to his advice, began to criticize the leg; upon which Apelles, full of indignation, popped his head out, and reminded him that a shoemaker should give no opinion beyond the shoes.”



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We invite readers to update their email addresses with us. Please send updates to Matthew Christensen at mbchristensen@byu.edu

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Educators are fond of claiming that education stimulates critical thinking. But critical thinking is merely the second of three positions. Critical thinking, as colleague Greg Clark has noted, points to the more engaged endeavor of critical judgment. It is preceded, I believe, by critical openness. Openness is an intellectual and moral stance of vulnerability—a willingness to risk the possibility that we might be wrong, or insufficient, or wounded. It is a hiatus during which the soul exposes itself to the world of difference, a hiatus subsequently confined by reflection (critical thinking), that in turn

leads to discernment (judgment). In 1794, J. G. Fichte delivered a series of lectures to German schoolboys in which he claimed that it was man's vocation "to become constantly better . . . , in order to make all that surrounds him better . . . and thereby to make himself ever happier." Infinite perfectibility begins with critical openness.

a Note



Tyler Bulloch, who graduated with a BA in Italian last August, won the 2012 National College Essay Contest from the American Association of Teachers of Italian (AATI). Tyler's essay, written in Italian, was originally submitted as class work in Professor Ilona Klein's Honors class and was submitted to the AATI competition by Professor Klein. The award comes with a \$500 cash prize.

BYU Students Win Language Competition

The BYU Marriott School of Business recently hosted the 2012 BYU Business Language Case Competition. Universities from all over the United States fielded teams to compete in business case analysis and presentation in a foreign language. Tyson Anderson, Chris Weinberger, and Zachary Wester of BYU's team took first place in the Mandarin Chinese category, with Indiana University placing second and Arizona State University third.

Zachary described the competition as "a great opportunity to practice professional-level presentation skills in Chinese, as well as to practice business analysis and strategy methods, and to receive feedback from some very professional judges. It was a friendly atmosphere among all of the teams. I think everyone learned a lot and enjoyed the experience." Dr. Steven Riep of the Asian and Near Eastern Languages Department put together two teams, mostly from students in his Chinese 347: Business Chinese class. Both Chinese teams were coached by Dr. Wang Shu-pei.



Faculty *award*



Congratulations to Leslie Thorne-Murphy of the English Department, who has been awarded the Douglas K. Christensen Teaching and Learning Fellowship.

Emeriti Deaths



Dean Rigby, professor emeritus of English, died on December 10, 2012. After US Army service in Japan just after World War II, Dean enrolled at BYU, where he obtained a bachelor's degree and later a master's degree. For thirteen years, he taught English and Spanish at four different high schools and junior high schools in Utah. He was then recruited in 1966 by BYU to teach in the Indian Education program under the General College. He later transferred to the English Department, from which he retired in 1996.



John B. Harris, professor emeritus of English, passed away on November 1, 2012. After serving in the US Army in Germany as a chaplain's aid, he completed bachelor's and master's degrees at BYU. After being hired at BYU in 1958, he soon took a leave to complete a PhD at Wayne State. He retired in 1990. His service included two terms as English department chair. An initially skeptical colleague wrote the dean, "My experiences with John have shown me his generosity, his constant encouragement and interest and praise, his very meaningful friendship. All this amounts to one of the greatest blessings of my whole professional career."



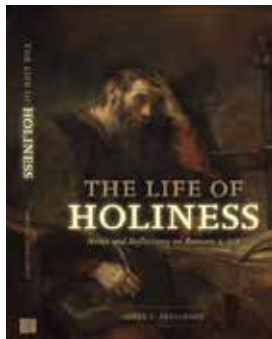
Curtis Wright, professor emeritus of library and information sciences, passed away on January 22, 2012. After obtaining a degree in Classical Greek and three master's degrees (in Hebrew, Classics, and library science), he worked as a cataloger in the BYU library and as Classics Librarian at the University of Cincinnati. After finishing a PhD from Case Western Reserve in library science and Classics, he joined the faculty of BYU's Library School in 1969. He retired in 1993, when the school closed.



Richard Cracroft, professor emeritus of English, died on September 30, 2012. He joined the faculty in 1963 and retired in 2001, with time out to complete his PhD at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. A popular teacher, writer, and speaker, he also served as department chair, as the second dean of the College of Humanities, as American Studies Coordinator, as Director of the Center for the Study of Christian Values in Literature, and as the Nan Osmond Grass Professor of English. A founding member of the Association for Mormon Letters, he was a tireless promoter of LDS literature. About his inveterate congeniality, colleague Stephen Tanner wrote, "[Richard's] sense of humor is not merely a personality trait; it is an index of his character, an indicator of how he approaches life and confronts its anxieties and sorrows as well as its pleasures and satisfactions."

- "Classes That Made a Difference"
- "Teachers Who Made a Difference"
- "Books That Made a Difference"
- "Ideas That Made a Difference"
- "The Humanities in My Life"

We invite reader response on any of these topics. Please send an email of inquiry or a full write up of 50–200 words to ron_woods@byu.edu for possible inclusion in future magazines. We think many of you have meaningful stories along these lines. Please let us hear them!

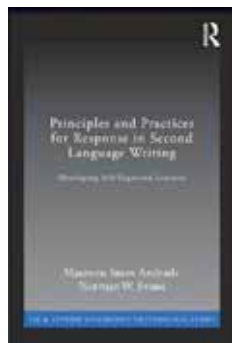


The Life of Holiness: Notes and Reflections on Romans 1, 5–8
by James Faulconer of the Department of Philosophy

This book encourages readers to delve into Paul's longest and most important epistle, to respond to its text, and to move beyond what we already know to a deeper understanding of its meaning and message. It is a book to provoke the reader's thoughts, offering questions for consideration and reflection more than answers, matters to consider rather than doctrine to hear.

Intersection of Service and Learning
by Gregory Thompson of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese

This book explores service-learning in the second language classroom. It addresses practical, real-world applications for the acquisition of culture and language, standards and assessments, contextualization, and challenges. An integrated approach includes suggestions based on research and experience.



Principles and Practices for Response in Second Language Writing
by Norman W. Evans of the Department of Linguistics and English Language and
Maureen Snow Andrade

This book introduces the framework for self-regulated learning to guide second language writing teachers' response to learners at all stages of the writing process. This approach provides teachers with principles and activities for helping students to take more responsibility for their own learning. By using self-regulated learning strategies, students can increase their independence from the teacher, improve writing skills, and continue to make progress once the course ends, with or without teacher guidance.

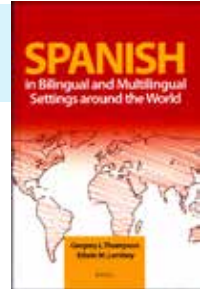
...Y los luceros no se apagarán
by L. Howard Quackenbush of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese

In this new volume, we see a happy (if still serious about the human condition) outlook. Poems like: "amo de casa," and "sexofobia" speak to the preoccupations of very real segments of our society, but with a certain reservation and optimism. Quackenbush's personal experience of over fifty years centers on an unceasing concern for and study of the Hispanic world, its language, people, and culture. His poetic mind thinks in Spanish. His experience in literature has been and is Hispanic; his language is bilingual and bicultural, reflected in this new poetic expression.



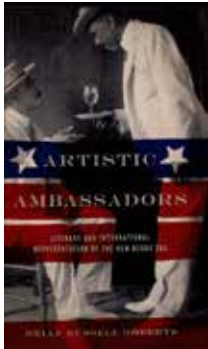
Spanish in Bilingual and Multilingual Settings around the World
by Gregory Thompson of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese

This comprehensive handbook will interest those who deal with issues of bilingualism as it relates to how other languages contact and interact with the Spanish language. The author analyzes how Spanish influences, and is influenced by, other languages in Europe, Africa, South America, and North America.



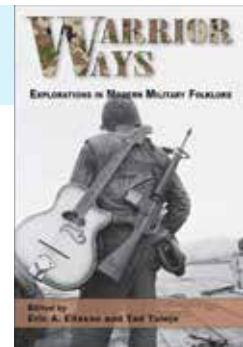
Artistic Ambassadors: Literary and International Representation of the New Negro Era
by Brian Russell Roberts of the Department of English

During the decades preceding the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and '30s, a vibrant community of African American authors worked as US diplomats. As the State Department sent black authors to locales including Haiti, Liberia, and Nicaragua, their work in diplomacy changed the complexion of the United States' interactions with nations of color. In turn, their travel gave rise to literature that shaped the aesthetic and literary discussions of the Harlem Renaissance.



Warrior Ways: Explorations in Modern Military Folklore
by Eric Eliason of the Department of English

This is one of the first book-length explorations of military folklife, and focuses on the lore produced by modern American warriors, the ways in which members of the armed services creatively express the complex experience of military life through battlefield talismans, personal narrative (storytelling), "Jody calls" (marching and running cadences), slang, homophobia and transgressive humor, music, and photography, among other cultural expressions.



Piedra De Almas Que Penan

by Danilo Sánchez Lihón

Prologue, analysis, and interview by Mara García of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese

This is a short story by the Peruvian writer Danilo Sánchez Lihón, with the prologue, analysis, and interview by Professor García of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese. In this story, the author submerges us in Santiago de Chuco, where every night, tales of death are told next to the family fire. The town becomes a protagonist, populated by shadows and ghosts, and we soon find that we can't distinguish the real town from the mythical. A book to be read on a full moon night.



Humanities Center

Launched

by Matthew Wickman, Humanities Center Director

In launching our College's new Humanities Center, we thought it expedient to reflect on the state of the discipline whose name the College bears. To that end, we invited Geoffrey Galt Harpham, Director of the National Humanities Center in North Carolina and one of the world's foremost authorities on the humanities as an academic field of study, to present a lecture.

The event was held on the Friday of Homecoming Week, October 12th. Professor Harpham titled his lecture "Finding Ourselves: The Humanities as a Discipline." In it, he made a compelling case for the role the humanities play in civic life and for their special place in American history. He built upon themes he addresses in his excellent 2011 book, *The Humanities and the Dream of America*, in which he discusses how the United States has long—since the era of Adams and Jefferson—envisioned the humanities as a tool for shaping the character of the nation and perfecting humankind. During his lecture, Professor Harpham noted that BYU preserves that vision in significant and perhaps unique ways.

This opening event was important not only for its outstanding lecture but also because the College named ten Fellows of the Center: eight faculty and two undergraduates, all of whom are exemplary. We had always planned to appoint faculty fellows, but the opportunity to include undergraduates in the Center's administrative structure was made possible by an extraordinary donor who endowed, in perpetuity, two scholarships that we are naming the Eliza R. Snow Fellowships. The College is deeply grateful for this gift and for all those whose generosity and service help BYU pursue its singular educational mission.



Geoffrey Galt Harpham

These are our inaugural *Humanities Center Fellows*:

Tony Brown (*Department of German Studies and Slavic Languages*), a Russian specialist whose research interests primarily reflect matters of developing Advanced and Superior language proficiency.

Frank Christianson (*Department of English*), whose research and teaching explore nineteenth century cultural nationalism in a transatlantic context. His publications range from work on nineteenth century philanthropy to “Buffalo Bill” Cody.

Edward S. Cutler (*Department of English*), a specialist in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American literature, with emphasis on the origins and development of modernism.

Janis Nuckolls (*Department of Linguistics and English Language*), who does research in the Amazonian region of Ecuador on the Quichua language, its grammar, and the worldview of its speakers. She is currently trying to figure out how a particular way of speaking may be tied to a sharpened awareness of nature, with implications for Quichua speakers' ecological skills, knowledge, and success in managing their complex biosphere.

Dale Pratt (*Department of Spanish and Portuguese*), who studies points of contact between literary and scientific discourses. He is currently completing books on protohumans and posthumans, and the posthuman in Spain.

Wendy Baker Smemoe (*Department of Linguistics and English Language*), whose research interests include second-language acquisition, varieties of English (dialectology), and psycholinguistics.

Anca Sprenger (*Department of French and Italian*), a specialist in French literature, especially the persistence of the discourse of the sacred in modern literary texts. Specifically, she examines the impact of secularization and loss of the “Ancient Régime” values on nineteenth-century French society and analyzes the way in which sacred gestures and spiritual discourses are recuperated and encoded in modern French literature.

Matthew Wickman (*Department of English and Director of the Humanities Center*), whose research and teaching interests include Scottish literary and intellectual history of the eighteenth century and after, interdisciplinary studies, literary theory, and the cultural labor of literary form.

Phoebe Romney Cook (*Eliza R. Snow Fellow*), a humanities major, folk musician (violin and mandolin), and student advisor for the BYU Honors Program.

Jessie Hawkes (*Eliza R. Snow Fellow*), an English major, a climber and avid outdoorsist, and essayist.

As announced in the Fall 2012 *Humanities at BYU*, three of these fellows—Professors Cutler, Nuckolls, and Pratt—function as the executive committee. ♦



Phoebe Cook and Jessie Hawkes, student Humanities Center Fellows

The Debate Model

of Language Gain

By Alexander Smith and Mariel Andrew

The emphasis on articulating clear learning outcomes has increased steadily in recent years, and many foreign language departments in the United States have turned to the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) scale to define outcome expectations. Facilitating language gain at the Advanced

Advanced level often becomes a formidable task for instructors

level often becomes a formidable task for instructors; in fact, most universities are thrilled if they can graduate students at the Intermediate-High level, which is roughly the level of many foreign language-speaking missionaries as they return home. Professor Tony Brown of the Department of Germanic and Slavic Languages wants to push his students to reach the Advanced-High and Superior levels.

In 2007, Brown designed a course with the goal of producing gain at the Advanced level. The aim of the course went beyond mere language maintenance and aimed to push students' proficiency levels up one sub-level (e.g., Advanced-Low to Advanced-Mid) and, occasionally, across a threshold (such as Advanced-High to

Superior). The course centered on debate, and thus required critical thinking skills, the use of concrete and abstract language, and the ability to speak in all time

frames, to support opinion, and to use domain-specific terms, all of which are indicative of spoken discourse at the Advanced-High and Superior levels.

Students who enrolled in the pilot course traveled to Russia to engage in parliamentary-style debates with peers at the Russian State University for the Humanities and Saratov State University. Students completed pre- and post-oral and written proficiency testing to determine if value was added by the experience. It was.

But travel from Provo to Russia is expensive. In an effort to provide similar language and cross-cultural experiences for future students, Brown explored alternative methods for creating authentic contact time.

Video conferencing was the answer. As the course has evolved, debate is the engine and video-conference technology is

the means for language growth. English-speaking and Russian-speaking students are now brought together every other week to debate various contemporary topics, such as security vs. freedom and economy vs. ecology; there are eight debate topics in all. In the debates, the language used alternates between Russian and English from one week to the next, so students in both countries



Debate is the engine and video-conference technology is the means for language growth





US and Russian students video conference to debate each other

benefit. Students are assigned the side of the issue that least associates with their respective culture, thus increasing their cultural awareness as well as improving their foreign language proficiency.

In addition to the debates themselves, out-of-class reading plays a critical role in students' learning. BYU students are given readings in Russian, while Russian students are given readings in English. These assignments, together with in-class language exercises, deepen students' understanding of the issues and introduce them to topic-related vocabulary and phrases.

Writing assignments also play a vital role: BYU students write persuasive two-page papers in Russian for each of the eight assigned debate topics. The papers are reviewed by native Russian-language teaching assistants who provide corrective suggestions that students may use when revising their work.

Brown, along with five other colleagues, is currently authoring a textbook for the class. His colleagues include Ekaterina Talalakina (Higher School of Economics, Moscow), Tatiana Balykhina and Viktoria Kurilenko (Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, Moscow), William Eggington (BYU Department of Linguistics and English Language), and Jennifer Bown (BYU Department of Germanic and Slavic Languages). Russian and English texts will both appear in the textbook. Prior to tackling an issue in their target language, students will first read the subject matter in their native language and then transfer that knowledge to the target foreign language when constructing their debate arguments.

Looking to the future, Brown envisions a textbook series that builds on the Russian-English model and will expand to other languages such as Chinese, Arabic, and Spanish. ♦

"I just thank my father and mother, my lucky stars, that I had the advantage of an education in the humanities." —David McCullough, American author and historian

When Serving is Learning

Recife Study Abroad and Internship 2012

by Vanessa C. Fitzgibbon, Department of Spanish and Portuguese

In 2012, a new component was added to the Recife, Brazil Study Abroad program: an opportunity for an internship experience with local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) located in and near Recife. Eighteen students enrolled for the seven-week experience. Diaconia, a non-profit Christian organization in Recife, offered us—students and teachers—the opportunity to experience a part of Brazil not seen on any of its postcards.

Rachel Naomi Remen, one of the participating students, wrote, “Helping, fixing, and serving represent three different ways of seeing life. When you help, you see life as weak. When you fix, you see life as broken. When you serve, you see life as whole. Fixing and helping may be the work of the ego, and service the work of the soul.” Soon enough, students understood that this internship would be about serving. Some of the

ways in which we served included cleaning, scrubbing, plastering, and painting walls; cooking; teaching English; playing sports, dancing, and singing; and sharing experiences. But most of all, we listened to the people and we learned.

The first project was graffiti: not to cover it, but to create it. Peixinhos is a community that struggles with violence, poverty, lack of running water and sanitation, and above all a general feeling of abandonment by government and society. Our students volunteered to paint houses and to add graffiti to walls to beautify them and uplift the community. At first, only three house owners gave us permission to paint—probably because of the discomfort that most residents felt upon seeing American kids invading their space. Student Joseph Burwasser observed, “I heard one man who was passing by say, ‘Oh, these Americans came here to see poor people going





hungry.’ It stunned me at first, but as I internalized what this man had said, I could understand why he felt that way. The subliminal attitude of these impoverished Brazilians towards outsiders is friendly respect, with the wariness of being exploited or taken advantage of.”

But we started painting. And singing. As time went by, residents started stepping out of their homes to observe and admire our small contributions. Little by little, more and more people asked to have their homes painted. Some children started to help us paint. Joshua Barton commented, “We didn’t have anywhere near the supplies necessary to paint even a percentage of the houses, but the people’s views toward us had changed a full 180 degrees.”

Joseph Burwasser noted, “It wasn’t the actual artwork that mattered. It was *the act* of creating art and giving it to someone else.” Natalia Ortolano said, “I was able to appreciate and sympathize with graffiti artists on a new level. Suddenly, the graffiti I saw on streets were more than mere vandalism—they were statements, a way for someone to leave a message behind to anyone looking for one. In a society where people have nothing, they can still leave behind their print.” And so did we with paintings and messages of beauty, peace, and faith. It became clear that our presence in the community was not to explore poverty or





misery but instead to leave them with a reason to be happy. As our local contacts mentioned, no other group of international visitors had done that, and residents felt and appreciated our attitude.

Another part of the internship was reserved for a trip to the city of Afogados da Ingazeira to visit the families and the farms that have received support from Diaconia. The area has been going through the worst drought of the past thirty years. Diaconia has developed a project to help families in the area construct cisterns and bio-digestors in order to improve their quality of life. The principles behind these projects are self-reliance and co-existence with nature.

Mario Farias, Diaconia's coordinator in the area, explained that Diaconia's goal is to transform problems into opportunities, teaching families and individuals "to fish instead of giving them the fish." Students had the chance to visit two main farms and see the impact of hard work and innovation that both families developed with Diaconia's support to construct their first cistern. Students demonstrated a great desire to help construct cisterns. But due to the lack of time and resources, our group was not able to do so.

Michelle McMurray, in her final report, made the following observation about her experience on the

internship: "We read an article about how volunteers from the United States sometimes do more damage than good when volunteering abroad because the social gap is so great between the volunteer and the under-privileged people of third-world countries, so there's no common ground for the two groups to meet on. I would hope the volunteer is aware of the gap and works to lessen it through understanding and sharing culture rather than trying to impose their own culture and beliefs on the host culture."

This first contact with Diaconia and other projects provided a life-changing experience to most BYU Brazil Study Abroad students. As members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, our perspective on service many times is centered in providing some kind of work that creates immediate results and relief. The Brazil Study Abroad students learned that one of the most important services one can give is to learn and listen to what people say, especially those whose voices have been muffled by social and economical circumstances. This learning experience cannot be taught in any classroom, but only through *vivência*, a Portuguese word learned by our students, which means to live the experience in its fullness, respecting each other's values and voices. ♦

Department *Highlights*

THE COLLEGE'S ACADEMIC AND SUPPORT UNITS are filled with dedicated faculty and staff doing a variety of interesting things besides their main tasks of teaching, researching, and advising students. Here we list but a few of the many recent activities that we think will be of interest to our readers. The list is necessarily incomplete and not all departments are represented this time.

Asian and Near Eastern Languages

BYU students will once again be able to study Hebrew intensively at the Jerusalem Center beginning Spring term 2013. The special intensive Hebrew option, which has been on hiatus for over a dozen years, will allow students at the intermediate Hebrew level the opportunity to improve their Hebrew proficiency while participating in the regular Jerusalem Center program.

Twelve Japan Study Abroad students participated in a humanitarian aid program, cleaning up rubble in Rikuzentakata City, one of the coastal towns heavily devastated by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami.

French and Italian

The department held a French “camp” for high school students this year for the third year in a row. Over forty students from all over the United States participated in the three-week program that featured language instruction and classes in cooking, art, fencing, and francophone cultures.

The department also conducted a week-long workshop for elementary and secondary teachers of French.

Center for Language Studies

Georgian was added to the list of returned missionary language classes offered. The Center is currently offering classes in thirty-six different languages. The College taught 1,454 language class sections during 2011.

BYU's language certificate program is the only university certification program that requires students to take an externally administered ACTFL test and attain at least the Advanced proficiency level, demonstrating real-world proficiency in their second language. As of July 2012, after less than two years in operation, the program had awarded 323 certificates.

CLS was the prime contractor in a \$1,380,000 contract to develop the first-ever, criterion-referenced, multi-stage, computer-adaptive tests of reading and listening comprehension in Chinese and Spanish. We are now developing tests in seven other languages.

German and Slavic Language

The department hosted German week in October. This event was funded by a grant from the German Embassy through the program “do Deutsch.” Under the direction of Randall Lund, the department and the German Club sponsored a creative arts contest, a play about the fall of the Berlin Wall, a mini World Cup soccer competition, and an Oktoberfest.

Humanities, Classics, and Comparative Literature

The Humanities Education and Research Association (HERA), a national organization of interdisciplinary scholars and teachers, hosted its annual conference in Salt Lake City, with the help of several department faculty members.

The BYU Scandinavian Program hosted the 102nd annual conference for the Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Study (SASS) in Salt Lake City.

Linguistics and English Language

The Utah section of the 2012 North American Computational Linguistics Olympiad was hosted by the Linguistics and English Language department. Two Utah high school students went on to the national competition.

Office of Digital Humanities

Over 2,000 FLATS (achievement) exams in forty-eight languages were administered by our testing center. They also gave about 31,500 exams (from various disciplines within our college) to over 10,000 students, and delivered over 300,000 WebCAPE (computer-adaptive placement) exams to students throughout the United States and abroad.

Women's Studies Program

The Women's Studies Program sponsored a two-day conference on women and creativity.

Spanish and Portuguese

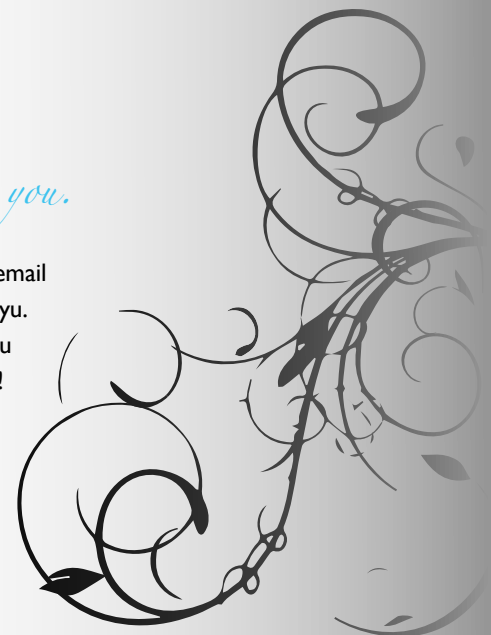
The department sponsored minicourses (week-long, intensive seminars for faculty and students) by Paul Sandrock, from the American Council of the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), Julio Borrego from the Universidad de Salamanca, and Valerie Hegstrom from BYU.

The Pedagogy Section hosted a three-day summer workshop for elementary- and secondary-school Spanish teachers from throughout the state of Utah.

We'd love to hear from you.

We invite reader response on any of these topics. Please send an email of inquiry or a full write up of 50–200 words to ron_woods@byu.edu for possible inclusion in future magazines. We think many of you have meaningful stories along these lines. Please let us hear them!

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Coaxing the Muse:

Thoughts on the Creative Process

by Lance E. Larsen, Department of English and Poet Laureate of Utah

This article is adapted from Professor Larsen's BYU Devotional talk delivered May 2007.

A few weeks ago, a neighbor of mine hazarded a question almost no one asks but other writers, “So how do they come, these poems you write—do you sit down and concentrate or do ideas pop into your head randomly, like when you’re working in the garden?” A terrific question—one I ask myself frequently, especially when things are going badly. But why rely on my answer? A few examples will demonstrate how different cultures have sought to tap into hidden reservoirs of creativity. In ancient Greece, you asked a Muse (or if you were greedy, all nine Muses) to sing you a song of wisdom. In nineteenth-century Manhattan, you petitioned a phrenologist to profile your personality by reading the bumps on your head. In early twentieth-century Vienna you scheduled two years of special sessions with a leather couch and a not-yet-famous therapist named Sigmund Freud.

Though we’re living in the wrong century to test these strategies *in situ*, one thing is sure: they would prove difficult to replicate in a classroom. Well then, you might be asking, what does work? This is the question I hope to explore today—strategies to help us harness this mysterious power. In a perfect world, I’d address the topic of creativity broadly, as it applies to all fields: visual arts, music, dance, the hard sciences, etc. Why not? After all, “If you’re not in over your head,” as T. S. Eliot observes, “how do you know how tall you are?” I realize, however, that even inside my field I’m hopelessly over my head. So I’ve decided to limit myself to what I’ve absorbed as a reader and writer and teacher of writing. I admit up front biases and blind spots. Still, I’m hopeful,

perhaps even guardedly optimistic, that what I say about writing may shed light on the endeavors of others, whatever they might be.

Read

This first principle is numbingly obvious (and therefore often neglected)—read. Let me re-phrase that: read, read, read! Some twenty years ago, while teaching a sophomore literature course at the University of Houston, I met a student named Ethan, whom I liked instantly. Not only was he inquisitive and articulate, but he had gorgeously messy hair and dressed in Salvation Army castoffs, which added a welcome aesthetic uncertainty to class. One day he asked me to comment on a handful of his poems, so I sat down with him after class. I read the first poem—bad. Thumbed to the second—worse. The third—no better. Five or six poems in all, all mediocre. By mediocre I mean undistinguished, highly abstract, vague, preachy, clichéd, boring. But what to say to Ethan? Remember he’s right at my elbow, like a hopeful beagle eager for praise. After fishing around for a diplomatic preamble, I finally hit on the following question: “So Ethan, who have you been reading, who are the poets that keep you up at night?”

He beamed. “Well,” he said, “I want to avoid being a copycat.” *Good, good*, I thought. “So,” he said, “I don’t read poetry at all. I don’t want anyone’s style rubbing off.”

Not so good. What Ethan failed to grasp is this: if we don’t consciously seek the best models in the canon, we unwittingly put ourselves at the mercy of

the most banal—sing-songy nursery rhymes, drippy greeting cards, fast food jingles, polemical political slogans, the saccharine cooings that leak into our brains when we turn on our car radios. In short, garbage in, garbage out. Each writer is a capacious storage tank containing a lifetime of experience, actual and vicarious. How can we expect refreshing elixirs to pour forth from our spigots if we have filled ourselves with stale pool water and artificial sweetener?

But we can change this. My advice to Ethan *then* and to all would-be writers *now* remains the same: devour books, the best you can find. Read eclectically and intelligently, even voraciously. Consider what others have said about the importance of reading. Nobel prize novelist Saul Bellow: “A writer is a reader moved to emulation.” George Seferis, a Greek poet: “Don’t ask me who’s influenced me. A lion is made up of the lambs he’s digested, and I’ve been reading all my life.” By immersing yourself, not only will you come to understand the history and significant questions of your specialty, you’ll develop a private sensibility, or compass, that will guide you as you become part of the conversation. I had a student once who grasped the potential of reading better than I did. In her imagined Arcadia, her City Lights Bookstore in the sky, sympathetic readers would get equal credit, along with authors, for creating a given novel or poem. Imagine this dust cover: *The Tragedy of King Lear*, by that Shakespeare guy and here insert your name. What is stopping us from metaphorically living in that world right now?

Write Daily

The second principle I stress is equally simple: write every day. And if not every day, then as regularly as possible. Everyone’s heard a version of the following story. An accomplished world-class pianist plays for an enthralled audience. Afterward, an admirer approaches the pianist and without thinking blurts out, “I’d give anything in the world to play like that.” Yes, anything except what the pianist gave—five and a half hours a day for twenty years. Certainly one can find accomplished writers who write in fits and bursts—binge writers we might call them—but in my experience they are rare. Most successful writers, like concert pianists and competitive athletes, have consistent work habits. They have learned the secret of doing at least a little bit every day, of breaking down the eating of the elephant into constituent bites.

Already I sense objections. Perhaps you are saying: “Wait a minute, I’m not a workhorse, I’m an artist. And

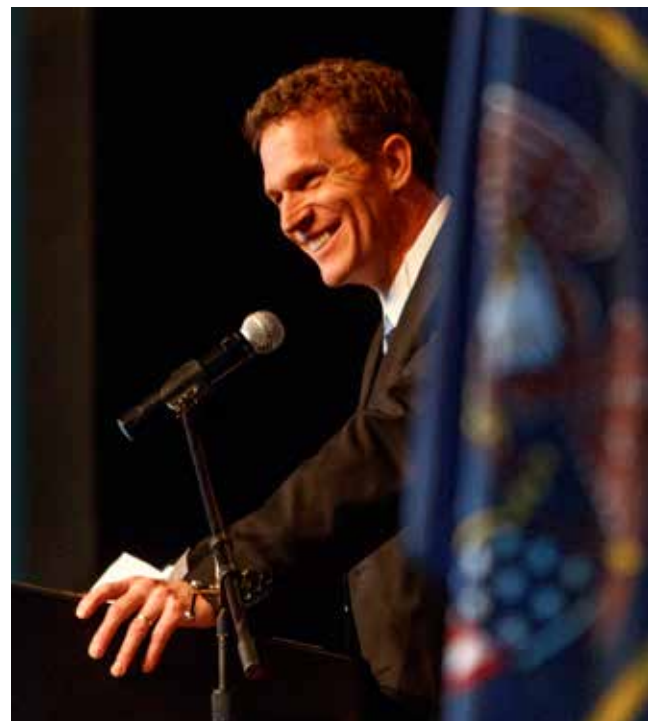
artists wait for inspiration.” Maybe, maybe not. According to one source, “Picasso once said, ‘I don’t know if inspiration exists, but when it comes, it usually finds me working.’” Suppose you’ve made the decision to write every day: how long is necessary? For Anthony Trollope, long enough to compose exactly 2000 words, which he could almost always squeeze in before lunch, even on vacation. Most writers count their labors in time, not pages. Edward Hoagland, an essayist, spent as much as eight hours a day. Flannery O’Connor, a novelist: three hours each morning. Walter Mosely, a popular and extremely prolific writer: ninety minutes. Even fifteen minutes is a significant feat—if you manage it daily. Here are some of the benefits I’ve noticed as I’ve tried to write regularly.

*First, I end up spending more time at my desk. By my estimate: two or three times as much.

*Second, I spend more quality time, which for me comes first thing in the morning. As Goethe puts it: “Use the day before the day. Early morning hours have gold in their mouth.”

*Third, I stay more engaged in the project at hand, more alive to its potential. As someone has said, “Skip one day, I know it. Skip two days, the work knows it. Skip three, the reader knows it.”

*Fourth—and this one surprised me—I relish my writing time more than ever. It feels like a gift, not an obligation—“an ax to the frozen sea within me” to borrow from Kafka.



On my best days I write my fifteen minutes or hour and a half before I teach, before I leave the house, before I eat breakfast. Anything on top is pure gravy. I'm still an embarrassingly inefficient writer, one who starts eleven poems, finishes two or three, publishes one. Still, this is a process I've learned to live with—more or less. As Samuel Beckett says, "Try again. Fail again. Fail better."

Let the Writing Lead You

On to principle three: let the writing lead you. In his seminal essay "Not-Knowing," Donald Barthelme argues, "The not-knowing is crucial to art, is what permits art to be made. Without the scanning process engendered by not knowing, without the possibility of having the mind move in unanticipated directions, there would be no invention." The best writers are constantly trying to discover what they didn't know they knew. Or as more than one writer has put it: "How do I know my thoughts on a subject, until I've read what I've written?"

Most writers I admire do their best writing when they ask a question they can't answer—at least at first. Why should this be the case? As Djuna Barnes, a twentieth century novelist, has said, "The unknown room is always larger than the known." Richard Hugo advocates not knowing in a very thin but influential book titled *The Triggering Town*. He makes the point that any poem has at least two subjects: first, "the triggering subject"; second, "the generated or discovered" subject. The triggering subject is what causes the writer to sit down to compose in the first place. In contrast, the discovered subject reveals itself only in the writing—writing that is serendipitous, intuitive, organic. Hugo argues that, in most cases, if we dutifully stick with our first impulse, we will lead the reader into Slumberland. By contrast, if we allow ourselves to drift a little and "depend on rhythm, tonality, and the music of language to hold things together," we will make discoveries we hadn't dreamed of before. Discovery is the almost infallible litmus test of good writing, as Robert Frost emphasizes: "No tears in the writer, no tears in the reader. No surprise for the writer, no surprise for the reader."

I like very much what Flannery O'Connor says of her much anthologized story "Good Country People," about a conniving door-to-door Bible salesman and one of his potential customers, an ornery woman named Hulga, who has a wooden leg and a PhD in philosophy. At a critical moment in the story, in a barn loft, the Bible salesman steals Hulga's artificial leg. Ironically, this theft humbles Hulga and helps prepare her for

God's grace at the end of the story. Here's the point I want to make: O'Connor explains that she had no idea that the Bible salesman would steal the leg till "ten or twelve lines" before he did so. Because O'Connor was surprised, her readers feel that surprise on the page. What can we learn from O'Connor? We need to allow ourselves to write freely, letting story or poem lead us rather than vice versa. Most of my pieces, short poems or longer essays, begin with no more than an inkling, an itch, a hunch, a question. I write to figure things out. In early drafts, this often means writing badly. More often than not, the awkward and uncooked lets me see what's on my mind. Consider William Stafford's response to writer's block: "So instead of trying to write something worthy, I just try to write *something* . . . something always happens. Something always comes along. . . . If you feel yourself going into writer's block, lower your standards and keep going."

Revise Yourself Into Eloquence

Revising yourself into eloquence may appear to contradict principle number three, but over time, the two principles work in tandem. Just as you must be willing to lower your standards, at first, and write sloppily and inventively, not knowing what you will produce, you must at a later stage, step in and revise without mercy. In a sense, we are each Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde stuffed in one body—the not-knowing, unpredictable Mr. Hyde, who invents wildly vs. the more measured, logical Dr. Jekyll, who shapes and edits the mess. One of the most crucial skill sets a writer can develop is the ability to keep these two in balance. They must find peace with each other. Okay, not peace exactly, but a tolerant standoffishness that acknowledges begrudgingly the other's necessity.

Ideally, you will become your own best editor, but most of us need someone else to weigh in on our work, too. Some of you may know the story of how T. S. Eliot's *Waste Land*, arguably the most influential twentieth century poem in English, came to its present form. In 1922, Eliot gave a rough draft copy to his bohemian poetry friend, Ezra Pound (who I might add was born in Idaho, my home state). Yes, *The Waste Land* was once a rough draft, though at the time its working title was *He Do the Police in Different Voices*. Pound liked it. He liked it a lot. In fact, Pound liked it so much that he recommended drastic cuts, which can be studied in a facsimile edition. Eliot himself excised large sections. In the end the published version came in at 434 lean-and-mean lines, roughly half its original length. Eliot

thanked Pound by dedicating the poem to him and calling him the better craftsman.

Better craftsman, however, does not necessarily imply flawless writer. A few years earlier, Pound took a sheaf of his own poems to Ford Madox Ford for evaluation. Pound was trying to perfect a contemporary voice. He also had the ambition of learning more about literature than anyone on the planet by the time he was thirty. In other words, a high stakes meeting. So Ezra Pound took the poems to Ford, a novelist who according to Charles Simic, “fought for Flaubert’s precision and economy in English prose.” Ford laughed at Pound’s poor attempts, then fell to the floor, gasping and rolling, the poems missed the mark so widely. Fortunately, Pound had thick skin and went on to say that “that roll . . . saved him two years.” Oh, that we could all be so gracious about accepting critiques.

Many years ago, I tested some of these principles of invention and revision with my third-grade son as guinea pig. I steeped him in example poems, tutored him in writing concretely, provided a simple repeating rhetorical structure, and turned him loose. I had one controlling rule: throw out any patently bad lines or revise them till they were compelling. Here’s the poem he wrote. The results surprised even me.

New Body

by Derek Larsen

If my nose was a bear nose I could smell
if dinner was ready from my friend’s house.

If my back had porcupine spikes then I could roll around
and spike a bunny and eat it.

If my index finger was a T-Rex tooth
then I could slice a cake with one finger.

If my hair was a foot I could jump
on my head or hop to the circus.

If my hands were spiders I could take
them off and put them on my mom’s bed.

If my legs were icebergs I would chip
pieces off to put in my drink.

If my stomach was a painting then I would hang myself
on the wall and win prizes.

Fall in Love with the World and Take Notes

Most writers possess an innate curiosity about what surrounds them, as an entry in Charles Darwin’s journal makes amply clear. As a young student studying at Cambridge, Darwin got caught up in a national mania for collecting un-catalogued beetles. The prize? Not money or medals or real estate in the Lake District, but credit for discovering a rare six-legged species, as well as naming rights. Darwin explains, “One day, on tearing off some old bark, I saw two rare beetles, and seized one in each hand; then I saw a third and new kind, which I could not bear to lose, so that I popped the one which I held in my right hand into my mouth. Alas! it ejected some intensely acrid fluid, which burnt my tongue so that I was forced to spit the beetle out, which was lost, as was the third one.” I’m not advocating a new source of protein for your diet, or arguing that you must prove your sincerity by snacking on forest foragers, but I do recommend Darwin’s passion and engagement.

Nor is it enough to merely observe. Take notes, as well—right on the spot, if possible. Writing is often more a matter of collecting and eavesdropping than inventing. Don’t trust your brain to hold onto things. Write it down in a notebook, on a receipt, in a check-book, even in the margins of a textbook. Mary Oliver hides pencils along a favorite hiking route. Brian Doyle once took notes on the only thing he had handy—the neck and shoulders of his ten-year-old son. At home or on the road, whenever I reach for a piece of paper, my wife and kids groan, knowing their latest utterance may end up in a poem. Consider this passage from my toddler son: “You be Jesus, and I’ll be the tiger keeping the wolves away.” This strange, almost surreal phrase has made its way into an essay, a poem, countless class discussions, and now this forum. Luckily, when he said it from a car seat in our battered Honda Civic, at age four, he wasn’t aware of the need to copyright.

Here are some other things I’ve written down recently. The punch line from a joke a Jewish friend of mine tells: “Oedipus Schmedipus. So long as the boy loves his mother.” What a five-year-old yelled in Hyde Park in London: “Give me squirrels, or give me death.” A teenager’s description of the next life: “All puffy and white, goldy, harpy, and angelonic.” Why are close observations so important? Not only do they provide authenticating detail in an essay or poem, but they help the writer, as William Blake has famously observed, to intuit larger connections:

To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,
And Eternity in an hour.

Immerse Yourself in Other Disciplines

Here's my final piece of writing advice: expand your disciplinary frontiers. In other words, let other ways of seeing inflect your own. We have an elevated term for this in academe: interdisciplinarity. In my own work, I find myself especially drawn to the visual arts, most likely because my wife, Jacqui, is an artist. Whenever I travel, whether for pleasure or professional development, I make it a point to visit art museums and take in the offerings, whether they be Cassats at the Norton Simon, Richters at the Getty, or Claes Oldenburg shuttlecocks as big as cars in Kansas City, all of which have helped to deepen, enliven, and complicate my understanding of twentieth century literary arts.

I count it a great fortune being married to a visual artist. Jacqui provides a second and more insightful set of eyes on all matters aesthetic. Our discussions about art—when we can fit them in around piano lessons, soccer car pools, and science projects—are far-ranging and collaborative. We collaborate informally, as well. I scrounge antique shops for the raw materials of her collages; she reads early drafts. I help her brainstorm titles for her pieces; she reads early drafts. I help her frame and deliver her pieces; she reads early drafts. More specifically, she helps me know when obscurity has set in like a paralyzing fog, or when I have created a literary still life, dead on the table. She has also provided the art work for three of my four poetry collections. On the cover of *In All Their Animal Brilliance*, you'll find a painting featuring a crow, a spider, and a salamander—emblematic of the animal life that stitches the book together. In the center stands Galileo, complete with telescope—a figure who stands in for each of us, very much in this world, but peering into the heavens, an inspired backyard astronomer.

Sometimes merely looking at a piece of art isn't enough. I want to see by writing, which opens up art in surprising ways. Poems about other works of art are called ekphrastic poems. I've written a handful of these, about the art of Hieronymus Bosch, Fra Angelico, Marc Chagall, Joseph Cornell, and of course, Jacqui Larsen. I've also written a response to a photograph by Sebastião Salgado, the most celebrated documentary photographer alive, who takes stark black and whites of the world's

underclass. Jacqui and I had the opportunity of seeing his heartbreaking show, titled *Exodus*, several years ago in Salt Lake City. What I admire about Salgado is that he refuses to treat any given individual as a category or a victim of circumstance, but instead celebrates that person's quirkiness, dignity and resilience—a way of seeing that I hope has enlivened my own work:

Cottage Industry

On Sebastião Salgado's photograph "Outskirts of Guatemala City, 1978"

How many apples can a campesina carry on her head?
Assume she is six and a half, that each apple is sticky
with caramel, that her cardboard tray bends

but doesn't buckle. The girl, bottom left, a study
in doggedness and braided hair, threatens to walk
straight out of the frame. Meanwhile, from inside

a postage stamp of a window, top right, a woman
(the girl's mother?) watches. The planks
between them are weathered enough for pathos,

the woman's face a diagram in chiaroscuro and waiting,
so why insist on kinship? Isn't it enough to try,
and fail, to keep both faces in focus at once?

If the girl weren't bearing third-world innocence,
if the woman weren't pinned in place like a tin saint,
maybe we could shrug off the sheen of those apples,

five rows of four. Their sticks point everywhere,
like army compasses gone berserk—east is to west
as poverty is to always. And of course the apples

might not be caramelled at all, but candied.
Who can say with black and white, which turns
even the simplest colors theoretical? I mean twenty

floating apples. I mean the one I singled out
to buy but can't. I mean the one the girl is eating
so casually, as if it were not money or her future.

Conclusion

In finishing up I want to make clear that I have merely scratched the surface of today's topic. Creativity remains a messy, recalcitrant, but invigorating process that resists—thank goodness—my attempts to explain it.

Still, the principles we've talked about can easily be applied to our various circumstances. First, reading widely and deeply will allow you to immerse yourself in a given field and gain expertise. Second, establishing a daily habit of writing or similar engagement will take you into the heart of nearly any discipline. Third, letting the writing lead you, or having faith in the mysterious process of creation, will let you tap sources beyond your own limitations. Fourth, revising, regardless of the field, gives you the chance to revisit and improve upon early efforts, and in the process take full advantage of the perspectives of others. Fifth, falling in love with the world and taking notes can help cultivate powers of observation otherwise left dormant. And finally, sixth, gathering insights from other disciplines will help you see more clearly through your own lens.

Sometimes, when the work isn't going well, when I'm stuck or discouraged, I like to read a passage by Gordon Lish, a fiction writer, teacher, and infamously demanding editor. In his heyday as an editor, working without hired underlings, he single-handedly screened the hundreds of submissions that came across his desk each week. His strategy: read till he hit a bad line. If it happened to be your first line—sorry, you lost your chance. On the other hand, if Lish made it to the second page of your ten-page story, you stood an excellent chance of being published. In any case, this most intimidating of editors sounds a remarkably generous note about our potential, if we are willing to work: “I see the notion of talent as quite irrelevant. I see instead perseverance, application, industry . . . will, will, will, desire, desire, desire.” Let us roll up our sleeves and go to work. ♦

Late Morning Salvage

And now a calico stray ankles along
begging me to pick her up and breathe

her sacred groves, and now a rubythroat
mistakes my striped shirt for Eden

and tries to drink my bum shoulder—
ah, the pleasures of waiting like a peasant

for the next life. I can almost hear
the search party above dragging the lake,

all curses and oars and grappling hooks,
placing bets on how quickly I'll be found.

Chancellor of Shadows

Horses are praying the old fashioned way, trotting
a fenced field at twilight under a towel of moon.

Swans settle on the pond, like a five-paragraph essay
on beauty. Yes, we have our rituals, like the skunk

stitching one pulsing patch of shadow to the next
with the swish of its tail. Not to mention questions.

How many broken pies at the bakery dream
the forgiveness of hungry mouths? How many

weeks till the silverfish chews through Chaucer?
What if the other life is buried inside this one?

A stack of bricks, a work shirt billowing on the line:
epics in the making. Each set of doubts, a path.

Like the owl, I'll take my wages in mice and falling
stars, take my midnights in the middle of the day.



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