

HUMANITIES

at BYU



BYU COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES
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from the Dean

Graduates



Dean John R. Rosenberg

Graduation is a step, a *gradus* (in Latin), taken after completing the requirements of a *curriculum*, which in Latin means a course, a run, a race—presumably consisting of four laps (or more), with one lap each year. Enthused novices approach the starting line, full of energy, fresh from high school: fresh men and fresh women. One lap under their belt, second-year sophists seem to have figured out the system, sophomores who must wince at the prospect of being called “junior” with its bitter memories of adolescence. We did junior in junior high, and again in high school, and that was enough. Then comes academic senior citizenship—seniors in our early twenties—which is as strangely named as eighteen-year old elders. Graduation is the last *gradus* across the finish line.

Of course, laps can be run hamster-like, each revolution an entertainment that doesn't go far. Some few run their college education to collect facts, information anthologized into a major, and wonder why those facts slip away shortly after they earn their diplomas. Wiser students value the facts not only for themselves but as an adhesive that holds together the habits of knowing and that allow us to approach the unknown with humility and untamed curiosity. In his poem “Graduates,” E. B. de Vito wrote,

They, most of all, are unaware
that schooling is not the whole, by far.
They, least of any, understand
the immeasurable range and scope
of things that unknowingly, they know.

“Lessons are breathed in from the air,” de Vito tells us. She is right that we live immersed in oxygen-rich lessons. But we misinterpret her, I think, if we believe

that we inhale the lessons passively, unconsciously, lazily. The paradox of learning is that which excites us often is a surprise, a glance around a corner that reveals something unexpected. The best surprises, however, come to the disciplined, the teachable, the curious, the connectors:

Knowledge comes, in a way, unsought,
as in the Chinese tale
of the youth who came for daily lessons
in what there was to learn of jade.
And each day, for a single hour,
while he and the master talked together,
always of unrelated matters,
jade pieces were slipped into his hand,
till one day, when a month had passed,
the young man paused and with a frown,
said suddenly, “That is not jade.”

What were the “unrelated matters” that occupied the master’s month with her student? What frustrations, spoken or not, did the student suffer when he couldn’t see how those matters applied to this course on jade, how they would be useful in his future life? What if the student had given up on his course of study because he couldn’t (then) see the end from the beginning? What moral and intellectual insights would have been sacrificed in exchange for the lentils of linear learning? Can an impatient student learn to discern between what is authentic and its counterfeits?

As Life is something, we are told,
that happens while you make other plans,
learning slips in and comes to stay
while you are faced the other way.
 (“Graduates” by E.B.
de Vito, *American
Scholar*, March 1,
1989, p. 282)

Life often out-guesses
our plans, not because
those plans are bad or



continued on p. 3

features

6 What Will You Do with a Humanities Degree?

Graduating student reflects on his education

8 Serving in Syria

BYU students provide service to Syrian refugees

10 Critical Language Studies

Centering language courses on debate

12 It Is with Words That We Are Sustained

Ancestral memory and the ancient Maya

21 Jazz and the Art of Civic Life

Musicians teach students about jazz and leadership



departments

2 From the Dean

4 Of Note

4 Moving On

23 The BYU Experience

25 Recent Faculty Books

27 Where Might You Give?

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

DEAN continued from p. 2

unnecessary—they are just finite. Plans are the disciplined conversations that position us for unadvertised epiphanies.

What strikes me most about de Vito's poem is that the student learned what was false through exposure to what was true. He learned to discern (Latin *dis-* [apart] + *cernere* [separate or sift]). In the Mishnah we read about four kinds of students "who sit before the Sages" (as our student of jade sat before his master):

[They are likened to] a sponge, a funnel, a strainer, and a sieve: A sponge, which absorbs

everything; a funnel, which takes in from one end and spills out from the other; a strainer, which allows the wine to flow out and retains the dregs; and a sieve, which allows the flour to pass through and retains the fine flour.

The discerning sieve serves us better than the indiscriminating sponge, and judgment is the jade of education.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "L. R. Rosenberg".

a Note

Bucknell Seminar for Younger Poets Fellowship Recipient

Russian major Conner Bassett received a full fellowship to the 2013 session of the Bucknell Seminar for Younger Poets, a fully funded writing residency and award offered to ten undergraduate poets every year. The residency lasts one month and gives young poets the opportunity to study with some of the nation's most honored and decorated poets.



Conner Bassett

Regional Model Arab League Competition

In March, sixteen students from BYU won 14 awards at the regional Model Arab League competition, which was held at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City. The competition required the students to play the role of leaders of assigned Middle Eastern countries, and the students were judged on their finesse in debating various challenging issues. Professor James Toronto was the advisor for the group, more than half of whom had spent time in the Middle East through the Arabic language study abroad program.

Moving *on*

Retirements

After many years of dedicated service, several faculty and staff members are retiring during 2013. Some of them are featured here, and others will appear in the October issue. If you would like to wish them well, Karmen Smith (karmen_smith@byu.edu) can supply contact information.



Michael J. Call

MICHAEL J. CALL (Humanities, Classics, and Comparative Literature) spent a year at BYU before he was called to the French East Mission. There, in spite of little measurable missionary success, he gained a love of the people, language, and culture of France. Back at BYU, he completed an Economics degree and intended to next attain an MBA, but he found himself more interested in literature and humanities courses than in business. In lieu of the Vietnam draft, Michael signed up for the BYU Army ROTC program and, while finishing officer training, obtained an MA in French. After a joint PhD in French and Humanities at Stanford, he joined the BYU Department of French and Italian, where he remained for seven years. In 1990, he moved to the Department of Humanities, Classics, and Comparative Literature. His research and publications have been mainly focused on the arts and letters of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century France, with a particular interest in the Napoleonic period. Over the course of his career, Michael has directed study abroad programs in France, England, and Italy. His extensive travels in Europe allowed him to speak from personal experience about nearly every site or work of art he discussed with his students in Provo. He was the recipient of an Alcuin Fellowship and the Karl G. Maeser General Education Professorship, and he served as department chair from 2006 to 2012. Michael feels blessed to have spent his career at BYU, helping students from all majors learn about big ideas and beautiful things. He and his wife, Connie, plan to leave on a mission shortly after his retirement.

NORBERT DUCKWITZ (Humanities, Classics, and Comparative Literature) was born in Stettin, Germany, in 1942. His family was later forced to flee their home as the Soviet Army crossed the Oder River in its way to Berlin. The family remade their home in the Celle/Hannover area and became the local branch of the Church. Their extended family eventually joined them, making every Sunday a family reunion. Inspired to be closer to the Church, the entire family moved to Salt Lake City, where Norbert graduated from high school. He served in the Düsseldorf, Germany, mission until President Ezra Taft Benson transferred him to the European Mission office in Frankfurt to serve as his personal interpreter. At BYU, Norbert completed majors in German and French, then majored in Latin and Greek. Graduate studies took him to Harvard University. By now, he and Susan had several children and decided Norbert should stay closer to the family in Provo and write his dissertation at the University of Colorado, Boulder. A colleague writes about him: “Few people have the breadth of mind and love of learning that Norbert exhibits. His warmth invited students to work hard; his close attention to the texts and his clear explanations were exhilarating. His contributions to the Classics program will be sorely missed but ever deeply appreciated.” Norbert and Susan have seven children and 19 grandchildren, most of them living in the Provo/Orem area.



Norbert Duckwitz



Randall Lund

WHEN RANDALL LUND (Germanic and Slavic Languages) applied for a position in the department, he was asked why he felt he should be hired with a doctorate in Education rather than in German. His reply was that he hoped the department and its students could benefit from a faculty member whose specialty was teaching. Teaching—whether in lower-division language courses he taught and supervised, upper division courses such as phonetics and business German, methodology courses for public school teachers and student instructors, or graduate courses in language acquisition and research—has been his passion for twenty-five years. After earning two degrees at BYU, serving in Germany in the military, and teaching German and English in a St. George junior high school, Randall completed a PhD at the University of Minnesota. He then taught for three years at SUNY-Albany before taking a position at BYU. He graduated just as the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines appeared. Much of his published work deals with the implications of these guidelines, as well as the European proficiency system, for language instruction. Randall and his wife, Gwendolyn, have nine children, and he retires just as the last of their children leaves their Lindon home, where they yet have kids . . . and does and bucks.

RON WOODS (Dean's office) completes forty years at BYU on his retirement day, not counting five prior years with CES. After college at Boise State (then Boise Junior College), conversion to the LDS Church, and a mission, Ron completed a BA in English at BYU. He taught seminary in Ogden and both religion and English in Samoa, and he later finished a master's degree in education. An opening in course development at BYU Independent Study led Ron and his family back to Utah Valley. When the seven-year itch hit—right on schedule—Ron accepted the position of Humanities Advisement Center Supervisor. For the final twenty-nine years, he was the resident bureaucrat/factotum/apparatchik in the dean's office. Known for obsessively riding a bike to work each and every day for decades, he shamelessly wimped out after only thirty-two years when the new JFSB opened, equipped with underground parking. In 1997, he was awarded the Ben E. Lewis Management Award. As a writer with eight published books, he frequently taught creative writing classes at the university. Ron will miss the good people he has worked with, April Fools Day at the office, and reading the names of graduates at convocation—some 20,000 of them over the years. He won't miss, he says, his frequent mangling of names at convocation.



Ron Woods

What Will You Do *with a Humanities Degree?*

by David Sabey

June 2012 Italian graduate, from his talk at the college's summer convocation

How many times have you been asked condescendingly what you're going to do with a humanities degree? Sometimes, when I was feeling particularly sassy, I would snap back, "Oh, I don't know . . . I think I'll just expand my mind, think critically, live deliberately, and suck the marrow out of life. What are you going to do with your BS (Bachelor of Science) degree?" Whatever our responses might have been, I want to discuss what I've come to believe is the most significant answer to that question: as students of the humanities, newly graduated from BYU, I believe that we are called upon and, in some ways, uniquely qualified, to establish Zion.

Words from the hymn "Awake and Arise" beautifully express the promise of Zion being established in our day:

The dream of the poet, the crown of the ages,
The time which the prophets of Israel foretold,
That glorious day only dreamed by the sages
Is yours, O ye slumbering nations; behold!

I hope we will all awaken to an understanding of how the humanities can help us bring about that glorious day.

Mosiah 18:21 defines Zion when it refers to having our "hearts knit together in unity and love." I have come to believe that Zion is not only an interesting footnote in the history and doctrine of the Church, but the central dynamic of the gospel. After all, isn't becoming one with God and with others ultimately what our covenants ask of us?

I came to this realization as a student of the humanities here at BYU. One moment of understanding came during Professor Richard Draper's New Testament class, as we read Paul's epistle to the Ephesians: "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and

prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God" (2:19–22). I see these verses as biblical evidence of the foundational importance of apostles and prophets—

and, consequently, of the Restoration. That is, no doubt, an important part of the passage, but Paul's main idea is not just the foundation, but the temple built upon it: We are to be built together as a holy temple in which God can dwell. This temple of Zion will not be built with marble, but with community; it will be held together not by mortar, but by relationships.

I believe we are called upon to assist in the construction of this holiest of temples—and that is ultimately what we should do with our humanities degree. So, although many of us have a healthy distaste for math and minimal familiarity with the basics of architecture, we have a unique contribution to make in erecting this temple, because we have spent these last few years coming to know its building material. We have studied the languages, ideas, and works of the human race and, in one way or another, asked what it means to be human. This study must influence our discipleship as we seek to establish Zion and construct this living temple. "The dream of the poet" can help us catch the vision of Zion, but it can also help us perform the gritty labor of building that temple.

We have all had occasion to gaze in awe at the sublime peaks of human potential. However, we've also all seen something of the darkness and confusion that troubles the human soul. From Mister Kurtz's "The



David Sabey

horror! The horror!” to Alyosha’s school boys’ “Hurrah for Karamazov!” we have witnessed much of the light and darkness within us all. I think, for instance, of reading *A Winter’s Tale* in Professor Rick Duerden’s Shakespeare class. I read of King Leontes who, in a jealous rage, condemned his innocent wife and newborn daughter to death. In the play’s miraculous conclusion, rock-hard hearts and stone-cold death yield to the vital rays of grace and love. Works like this should help us to recognize both the divinity and the deficiency within us all: we are like beautiful but deeply imperfect granite. Only the cornerstone of Zion’s temple is flawless rock. And yet, somehow, wonderfully, when we build upon that foundation, we “cannot fall,” despite the cracks in our own stone. If we will use that understanding to approach others with the faith and benevolence due to “heirs of God” and to forgive them with the empathy of an equally imperfect sinner, our relationships will be like the arches in the temple—“two weaknesses that lean / into a strength. Two fallings [that] become firm” (John Ciardi, “Most Like an Arch”).

Our studies have exposed us not only to ideas, but to actual people and cultures that are foreign to us. Professor Bill Eggington said in a devotional last year, “Our challenge . . . is to overcome our natural-man reluctance to interact with those who come from different languages, dialects, and cultural backgrounds and to treat them as no more strangers but actual, or potential, fellow citizens with the Saints in the household of God.” As we strive to meet that challenge, our study of the humanities will aid us once again. One reason is simply that many of us have experienced for ourselves what it means to be a stranger and foreigner—we know how hard it can be to learn a new language and how lonely one can feel in a foreign country. I hope we have also learned how wonderful it can be to overcome linguistic or cul-

tural barriers and participate in a previously inaccessible community. I know that my experience with Italian has been joyful in the way it’s given me access to the Italian people and their literature. This kind of experience should influence the way we reach out to investigators in our wards, new people in our neighborhoods, and anyone who may not feel accepted or understood in our communities. Our empathy for outsiders will help us assimilate Italian marble, Ghanaian mahogany, and Chinese silk into the temple we are building.

A part of developing this empathy has involved confronting the Other: some of the people and cultures we’ve been exposed to have, historically or contemporarily, thought, said, or done things that, from our perspective, are strange, incomprehensible, or disturbing. However, I think our studies have also led us to realize that, despite these seemingly incommensurable differences, there are bonds that unite us all, including “the human heart by which we live.” Just as many of the foreign languages we’ve studied share cognates, there are points of connection between even the most diverse people. Our ability to both accept otherness and to identify commonalities will help us find ways to bind together the disparate parts into a unified whole.

Friends, family, professors, and most importantly, graduates, our world needs Zion, and so do we. If we will use our study of the humanities to open hearts to others and to incline minds to unity, we can establish Zion in our own lives and beyond. May we build our lives and futures upon the foundation of faith, may we seek to be a part of Zion’s holy temple, and may we invite and help others to join with us. No matter what we do professionally, may we do this personally. There could be nothing more significant, fulfilling, or beautiful to do with our humanities degree. ■





Serving in Syria

by Lucy Schouten

Based on an article in

The Universe on Feb. 26, 2013

Chelsea Elliott met a six-year-old Syrian refugee boy who had witnessed his parents' death. He was fine—as long as someone was holding him. Even though the child later stole Elliott's water bottle out of her backpack, the small loss didn't mar the beautiful experience she and her classmates had with Syrians displaced by conflict. The BYU Arabic Intensive Language-Learning Study Abroad students of 2012 had planned on spending two hours a day talking with Jordanians. Speaking Arabic with native speakers was a homework assignment for this challenging semester of 16 credits of 300-level Arabic. Some students had also hoped to use their Arabic to fill church callings in the two tiny Arabic-speaking branches in Jordan. What they hadn't planned on was how the flood of hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees into Jordan would give them a service opportunity that, for many of them, would become one of the most memorable parts of the trip.

These BYU students worked with the Jordanian Royal Health Awareness Society, LDS humanitarian missionaries, and the Islamic Relief organization to provide unique aid for the refugees. For example, BYU students teamed up in Amman with Jordanian youth from the local Greek Orthodox Church to assemble hygiene kits. Lindsay McEwing, a master's student in public health, had studied refugee situations in class. But this

hands-on experience made her consider her own blessings. "It made it a lot more real and a lot more personal," she said. McEwing and other BYU students helped with an activity day for some of the Syrian children. They

Phillip Thurston, a recent BYU graduate, holding a Syrian child



used their Arabic skills to help cheer the traumatized children by playing games and spending time with them. “I was always kind of scared to try my Arabic with adults, but I felt more comfortable with kids,” McEwing said. She made friends with an eleven-year-old girl named Shereen, who had a passion for jumping rope. “We couldn’t really understand each other very well,” McEwing said. “But we just kind of fell in love.”

Elliott became a “puppet master” in Jordan. She directed a group of BYU students in translating into Levantine Arabic several health education puppet shows and performing them for the refugee children. The challenging but fulfilling experience of coordinating rehearsals and performances helped Elliott realize that she wanted to be involved in humanitarian aid as a career. “After the puppet show, the kids were just happy, laughing, playing with us,” Elliott said. “And I wanted to cry, because it just really struck me that we helped them forget their troubles for a little while.”

Paul Rasband, a Maryland native studying business and Arabic, said that the children’s events in Amman were the highlight of a challenging language-learning experience. “With this group of boys, I pretended like I was hiding from the director,” Rasband said. “They really liked that I was trying to be like them, and they thought it was hilarious.” The stress and uncertainty placed on these families is great. Rasband was happy to fill the role of “big brother” and has even signed up for the Big Brothers Big Sisters program in Provo since returning.

Now that the students have returned home, they can fill in the events they read about in the news with names and faces. However, in spite of her interest in the region, McEwing finds it painful to read the news reports on the continuing fighting in Syria. “Sometimes I don’t want to read another article about people who are dying,” McEwing said. “I want to remember the people I met who are still alive.” Elliott said she had come to love the Syrians, despite the differences in language and culture. “Even that little kid who stole my water bottle,” she said. ■

Chelsea Elliott (lower right), a senior Middle Eastern Studies major and the coordinator of the puppet show



Critical Language *Studies*

Five BYU students, four of them with majors in the College of Humanities, spent last summer studying languages in various parts of the world, with support from the US Department of State. The State Department wants to encourage students to study languages deemed critical to US interests, so it established the Critical Language scholarship to pay all expenses for students to spend two months studying a language in its native setting. The program is very competitive—only 11 percent of applicants are accepted nationwide.

Elizabeth Nielsen in Russia



Elizabeth Nielsen, a linguistics major and Russian minor, flew from her hometown of Moscow, Idaho, to Moscow, Russia, a city she's dreamed of visiting since childhood. "My ultimate career goal is to use Russian in linguistics field work," said Nielsen. "I love learning about languages even more than I love speaking them."

Senior Alex Williams of Dove Canyon, California, took his soccer cleats and harmonica to Tajikistan to study Persian. He began learning Persian (also known as Farsi) while serving an LDS mission in India. He loves the Persian language to the point of writing his own poetry and calligraphy in Persian. "I love the language most for the people who speak it," he said. "They're so welcoming and loving that I love being able to communicate with them." Williams's passion for making such connections led him to study international relations in hopes of landing a job overseas in government, translation, or international business.

Three language students spent their summer in Morocco studying Arabic. Kelly Danforth of Cody, Wyoming, recently graduated with majors in Middle East Studies and Arabic. From her ventures to the Middle East, she has learned how language and culture go hand in hand. "Arabs especially love their language," she said. "It's sacred to them. You can't truly understand their culture until you understand their language." Danforth hopes to utilize her passion for language and culture by joining the Foreign Service, working to keep the peace between countries and governments.

Robert Bonn from Henderson, Nevada, was excited to trek to Morocco, but it's not the first time he's made such a trip, having already traveled twice to the Middle East with his friend and fellow scholarship recipient James Juchau of Bothwell, Washington. Bonn is a recent graduate in Middle East studies and Arabic, while Juchau is double majoring in economics and Arabic. "Whenever you come in contact with different cultures, your eyes open to all there is to see in the world," said



James Juchau, Kelly Danforth, and Robert Bonn in a traditional Moroccan-Style hotel near Tangier's citadel on the Mediterranean Sea

Juchau, who is most interested in the economic development of the Middle East. "It broadens your perspective on life and ways of thinking."

From this once-in-a-lifetime experience, Bonn advanced his Arabic and acquired a sense of the Moroccan culture, including developing friendships with the native people. "The best part about traveling is the people you meet," Bonn said. "I've made some really great friendships abroad."

The Critical Language Scholarship program offers opportunities for cultural exploration outside of formal language study. Students participate in classroom study for five hours a day and are then free to enjoy in-country excursions, community service, or just exploratory walks in their host cities.

It's no surprise that several BYU students would snag such scholarships, since the BYU College of Humanities teaches more students at the intermediate and advanced levels in more languages than any other university in the country. Sixty-one languages are taught on a regular basis with a student body enrollment rate of 32 percent (compared to the national average of 9 percent). Overall, BYU students speak

111 languages. Additionally, the Center for Language Studies in the college of Humanities offers a competency-based language certificate program. Last year, 200 students in more than 60 majors earned the certificate to document their proficiency in Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish. ■

Alex Williams, second from left, in front of an ancient Tajik fort, Hazoor, Tajikistan



It Is with *Words* That We Are *Sustained*

Ancestral Memory and the Ancient Maya

Allen J. Christenson

Department of Humanities, Classics, and Comparative Literature

This article is adapted from Professor Christenson's 2012 P.A. Christensen Lecture

For the ancient Aztecs, the highest form of sacred communication was poetry, what they called *xochicuicatl* ("flower-song"). These were delicately beautiful hymns meant to be recited orally, often to musical accompaniment. In paintings, Aztec poets are depicted with visible speech scrolls issuing from their mouths, often with flowers attached as a token of their beauty and delicacy. Poetic speech scrolls are colored a rich blue or green, symbolic of the precious nature of the poets' words as if they were composed of jade or sacred quetzal feathers.

Because Aztec poets loved life, they constantly lamented their own mortality, as well as the mortality of all the beautiful things they knew in the world. Nezahualcoyotl, the Aztec king of Texcoco, wrote:

All the world is a tomb from which nothing escapes,
Nothing is so perfect that it does not fall and disappear . . .
What was yesterday, today is no more,
And what lives today cannot hope to exist tomorrow.

I, Nezahualcoyotl, ask this:

Is it true one really lives on the earth?

Not forever on earth,

Only a little while here.

Though it be jade it falls apart,

Though it be gold it wears away,

Though it be quetzal plumage it is torn asunder.

Not forever on earth,

Only a little while here.

(Miguel León-Portilla, *Native Mesoamerican Spirituality*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1980.)

But because poetry belongs to the gods and not to this world, it is the only thing that is eternal. It comes into the world untainted and becomes part of the blood and souls of those who hear it and remember:

Never will it perish, never will it be forgotten,

Always we will treasure it,

We, their children, their grandchildren,

Brothers, great-grandchildren

Great-great-grandchildren, descendants

We who carry their blood and their color,

We will tell it, we will pass it on

To those who do not yet live,

Who are to be born.

(Hernando Tezozomoc, *Crónica Mexicayotl*, 4–6)

Aztecs looked at poetry as a creative act inspired by gods who were called upon to be present at the performance. Thus the poet Ayocuan Cuetzpaltzin of Tecamachalco believed that his songs came from heaven, but lamented that his own words could not express them as they came undefiled from the gods:

From within the heavens they come,

The beautiful flowers, the beautiful songs.

Our longing spoils them,

Our inventiveness makes them lose their fragrance

(León-Portilla)

Aztec palaces contained a special room called the Calmecac where men gathered to recite their poetry, speaking each in turn, playing off each other's words like

soloists in a Jazz ensemble. We don't generally think of burly Aztec warriors as poets, but that was their highest art form:

I appear in this flowery court.
 Pictures blossom: they're my drums.
 My words are songs.
 Flowers are the misery I create.

I sing the pictures of the book
 And see them propagating,
 I am a graceful bird
 For I can make the books speak
 Within the house of the paintings.
 (León-Portilla)

In this text, poems are described as “the misery I create.” This is because they cannot be held onto in this world. Such songs exist only at the moment of their performance, their sound hanging briefly in the air, then fading to silence. They are frail and ephemeral things. As one poet called them, they are “blazing flower words of but a moment, but a day.” One thinks of the Symbolist poet Stéphane Mallarmé who sees the transcendent beauty of the azure skies above him, knowing that he will never be able to touch it, or possess it, or live in its world:

In serene irony the infinite azure,
 Languidly lovely as the flowers, smites
 The impotent poet cursing his genius
 Across a barren wilderness of Sorrows.

Fleeing with eyes closed, I feel it probe
 Deep as a racking remorse
 My empty soul. Where escape? And what eerie night
 To hurl, O remains, against this heart-mangling scorn?

O fogs, come forth! Pour your monotonous ashes
 In long shreds of haze across the skies,
 Drowning the livid quagmire of the autumns
 And rearing a vast ceiling of silence!
 (Stéphane Mallarmé, *Western Literature in a World Context*, Vol. 2, Paul Davis, ed. [New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995])

The surpassingly beautiful azure blue of the sky serves as a metaphor for all the dreams and longings that Mallarmé knew he could never have in this life. In the face of such unattainable ecstasy, he prefers never to have seen it at all. The Aztec poets are perhaps a bit more well-adjusted in this regard. Unlike the French Symbolists, they believed that through poetry they could achieve union with the divine, losing themselves utterly in the beauty of sacred words. But it is only when poetry



Xochipilli, the Aztec god of poetry and flowers.

is spoken that it reveals its divine origin, transforming the poet into a messenger of deity. The Aztec god of poetry and flowers is Xochipilli. In sculptures of the god he is wholly lost in the ecstasy of his art, covered with flowers. The sunken eyes and the open mouth suggest that he is in transition between the worlds of the dead and the living—a liminal figure belonging to both worlds and neither. This is also true of poetry itself. When recited, it comes briefly into this world but just as quickly passes back into the realm of the gods in the other world:

Now I am going to forge songs,
 Make a stem flowering with songs,
 Oh my friends!
 God has sent me as a messenger.
 I am transformed into a poem.
 (León-Portilla)

Such poems were learned by heart by those who heard them and were lost forever if forgotten. Thus

Aztec poetry had no permanent reality of its own, no more than a dream. The Aztecs never developed a phonetic written language; therefore, they had no way of recording their poetry. Because of its sacred nature as a performed art, I doubt very much that they would have if they could have. It is only by an accident of history that we know of them at all, because Spanish missionaries wrote some of them down soon after the Spanish Conquest in 1521.

Unlike the Aztecs, the Maya did not have to rely on Spanish priests to record their words. More than 2500 years ago, the Maya developed a sophisticated hieroglyphic script capable of recording complex literary compositions, both written on folded screen codices made of bark paper as well as incised on more durable stone or wood. The importance of preserving written records was a hallmark of Maya culture, as witnessed by the thousands of known hieroglyphic inscriptions, many more of which are still being discovered in the jungles of southern Mexico and northern Central America each year.

Being a phonetic script rather than a pictorial form of writing, Maya hieroglyphs were capable of recording any idea that could be thought or spoken. Ancient Maya scribes were among the most honored members of Maya society. They were often important representatives of the

royal family, and as such were believed to carry the seeds of divinity within their blood. In our culture the most common metaphor for the separation between this world and the world of deity is a veil. In Maya art, it is the open jaws of a sacred dragon. Its jaws represent a portal that leads from this world to the world of the sacred. In the scribe's hand is a paintbrush used to both write and illustrate the ancient Maya books. The

meaning of this incised bone is that the activities of the scribe and the painter come closest to those of the gods themselves. Both paint the realities of this world as divine artists. Maya artists, scribes, weavers, and others were engaging in a divine act, creating a reflection of the sacred world first conceived by gods. Art and writing are

therefore part of the fabric of the Maya world, just as integral to it as the sky, trees, and mountains. This is one of the things that draws me, as an art historian, to Maya culture.

Much of our knowledge of ancient Maya myth is derived from the *Popol Vuh*, a book compiled in the mid-sixteenth century, but based on a much older pre-Columbian text. For the ancient Maya, deities are not omnipotent, nor are they capable of sustaining themselves indefinitely. Thus the Maya version of creation is essentially a search for humans who will remember the gods and worship them properly through sacred ritual:

It shall be found; it shall be discovered how we are to create shaped and framed people who will be our providers and sustainers. May we be called upon, and may we be remembered. For it is with words that we are sustained.

(Allen Christenson, trans., *Popol Vuh*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007; all quotations from the *Popol Vuh* are taken from this work.)

The original Maya word for “sustainer” is *q'v'ol*, which refers to one who provides sustenance primarily in the form of nourishment, but also nurtures in any other way—such as a mother caring for an infant. The wording of this passage implies that human beings bear the burden of caring for the gods in much the same way as a mother nourishes and cares for her newborn child. This is done through sacred rituals and offerings. Much of this ritual is dependent on the spoken word, for, as the creator gods declare in the above passage, “it is with words” that they are sustained. Human ritual speech is not just praise or gratitude, but rather it consists of true regenerative acts that sustain the world and the very gods that created it. As one traditional priest told me, “Life can only begin when true words are spoken from the blood.”

While working on the translation of portions of the *Popol Vuh* in the late 1970s, I worked with a group of elderly traditionalist Maya priests, called *ajq'ij*. Each day before starting work on the translation, we observed a ceremony in which the notes and computer printouts to be used that day were carefully blessed and passed through incense smoke. The incense brazier was then passed across our chests to purify our hearts and breathed in to purify our lungs and blood. Finally, one of us would recite the names of all of the gods and individuals that might be mentioned that day. I was told that when pronouncing aloud the names of such



An incised bone from an important royal tomb at Tikal belonging to King Jasaw Chan K'awil, who reigned in the seventh century AD. It depicts a deified scribe's hand emerging from the open maw of a dragon.

a person or god, they became physically present with us and would speak their own words as we translated, so that we would not put false words into their mouths through a badly translated passage. Translating, therefore, is dangerous work—a bad translation would make the gods lie and they would likely punish the translator with illness or even death. At the end of the day, the ceremony would be repeated, and the ancestors and gods would be thanked for their help. We would also apologize to the ancestors in case they would rather have been somewhere else.

The Popol Vuh claims that the most important human attribute is the ability to remember:

Let us try again before the first sowing, before the dawn approaches. Let us make a provider, a sustainer for us. How shall we then be called upon so that we are remembered upon the face of the earth?

The word for remember is derived from *na'*, meaning also “to feel” or “to know something with certainty.” It is the word Maya members of the LDS church use when bearing their testimonies. The Maya don’t think of memory as a function of the brain, but of the blood. Memory is something of a miracle. Like a lot of miraculous things that we deal with on a daily basis, we take it for granted. The Maya don’t. Memory is what makes us human. It’s what gives us purpose. It makes us the vessels of the mind and will of God from eternity to eternity. Language, art, and literature bless us with the ability to share our memories with those we love, as well as with those we will never meet. Yet we can never share memory fully even if we wanted to. In death, memory is the only companion that will make the journey with us, and it can never be taken from us for long. It will be with us forever. Like our souls, it is unique to each one of us and belongs to us alone.

A few years back, a British colleague of mine named Andrew Weeks obtained copies of an old photograph taken in the 1880s by Alfred P. Maudslay. The original is in the British Museum. We thought the photographs might be a good gift to give to Maya priests who were helping us make a film on Maya ritual practices. The photograph shows a number of Maya elders on the steps of the old town hall. When I gave a copy of the photograph to one of the Maya priests, he pointed to several of the men and named each of them in turn. Surprised, I

asked if he had ever seen the photograph before or others like it. He said, no. He had no idea that there even were photographs that went back more than 100 years.

When I asked how he knew the people in the picture, he replied, “We all know them. They still visit us in dreams and in person. We know their faces, they are still very powerful, the very soul of the town and of our children. Their minds and souls are pure within us. This is our inheritance. These people live because I live. I carry their blood. I remember. They are not forgotten.”

Whether or not we believe that the priest could really identify the individuals in the photograph by name is irrelevant. He believed it, and he believed that they were a part of his own flesh and the blood in his veins. The Maya do not worship separable ancestors. They recognize the presence of the ancestors within them. As long as they live, the ancestors are alive and present. Memory for the Maya is not only to recall an image in the mind—it is to feel and know and make manifest the presence of that thing in the blood.

According to the Popol Vuh, the first men created by the gods had the gift of extraordinary vision whereby they could see all things:

Perfect was their sight, and perfect was their knowledge of everything beneath the sky. If they gazed about them, turning their faces around, they beheld that which was in the sky and that which was upon the earth. Instantly they were able to behold everything. They didn’t have to walk to see all that existed beneath the sky. They merely saw it from wherever they were. Thus their knowledge became full. Their vision passed beyond the trees and rocks, beyond the lakes and the seas, beyond the mountains and the valleys.

Although the creator gods eventually clouded this vision so that men could only see those things which were “nearby,” the ancestors of the Maya as well as their



Photograph of a number of Maya elders on the steps of the old town hall

Memory for the Maya is not only to recall an image in the mind—it is to feel and know and make manifest the presence of that thing in the blood.

descendants believe themselves to bear within their blood the potential for divine sight, bestowed upon them by their creators. It is this sacred ancestral vision that allows them to “see” beyond the limits of time and distance as the first ancestors once did.

Nearly all Maya ceremonies and mythic tales focus on creation, or how things first came to be. The focus of these ceremonies is to return to the moment of creation in order to rebirth the world in its pure and uncorrupted form. The principal bearers of this burden are the *ajq'ijab*, or traditionalist Maya priests. They are the ones chosen by the ancestors to stand in their place to keep the world going through prayers and sacred ritual. Among the Maya there is no institutional religion to sanction the qualification of a person to become an *ajq'ij*. Every Maya man and woman potentially has this ability because it is inherent in their blood. Blood contains the memory and soul of every ancestor that came before them. Maya priests are chosen by the ancestors to serve as mediators between this world and that of the spirit not because they are different from anyone else, but because they are called by the spirit world to do so. Once called, generally through dreams or the discovery of a sign interpreted as a calling to serve, the prospec-

tive priest often enters a period of apprenticeship. The approach that experienced Maya priests take in training their apprentices is to teach them how to remember through their blood the words and actions of their ancestors.

Apprenticeships and learning by example are undoubtedly important methods of passing along knowledge from one generation to another. However, the perception among Maya priests is that this is not the principal means by which sacred knowledge is gained. This must come directly from within oneself, directly from one's own blood, or it is

powerless. Non-Maya do not necessarily have this kind of ability, because their blood does not originate from the same visionary ancestral source.

I served a mission in Guatemala back in the mid-1970s, where I learned several Maya languages. Later, the church asked me and another former missionary to translate church materials into Maya—the Book of Mormon and the temple ceremony. In addition, BYU hired me to work on a dictionary and grammar, and to conduct work in anthropology. I was particularly interested in ceremonies connected with the ancient Maya calendar. But this would require me to go through a period of apprenticeship with a Maya priest, because otherwise I wouldn't be allowed to be present for the more sacred ceremonies. The catch was that I couldn't enter into work with the Maya priests unless I was invited by the Maya ancestors in a dream. This was frustrating for one Maya priest in particular, named don Vicente Abak. He was eager to have me use my camera and tape recorder to capture some of the more complex rituals that he conducted. So every day he would ask me about my dreams or if I'd seen anything unusual. I seldom remember my dreams, which don Vicente interpreted as a sure sign that I didn't have any ancestors with anything particularly important to say to me. Eventually, I did remember a dream in great detail and I told him about it. He got very excited about the dream and proclaimed it to be what we had been waiting for. I don't remember the dream to have been particularly special, but apparently the ancient Maya were okay with me. We began my apprenticeship the next day. As we hiked from altar to altar across the mountains, he would ask me periodically what I “saw.” I would dutifully describe the trees, ravines, rivers, birds, and so on, that we passed. Generally, he would receive this with an indifferent silence, but occasionally he would shake his head in frustration. He would never explain what he wanted from me on these occasions. After a couple of weeks, we visited a ceremonial house that had fresh pine needles strewn across the floor and a fresh bough of a sacred plant draped across the top of the doorway. This is done when a particularly powerful life-renewing ceremony is to take place, because the evergreens represent eternal life. I was about to enter when don Vicente stopped me and asked what I saw. It occurred to me that he might be asking for more than description so I replied with something like, “I see that death is not welcome in this place today—that new life surrounds us, both above our



Maya priest

heads and at our feet.” He was not one to smile often, but he clapped me on the shoulder and had a big grin on his face. “Ah, you finally ‘see.’” Just like the Popol Vuh’s description of the first men being able to see beyond the mountains and the trees, the Maya priests focus on seeing beneath the surface to reveal underlying truth. In so doing, they bring forth their ancestors through sacred memory.

In my own experience of working with Maya priests, my frequent errors in learning prayers, calendric information, and mythic histories was interpreted as the lack of Maya blood in my veins. I was not able to see with ancestral vision in the same way because I had a different lineage, likely not a very divine one. The Maya believe that they learn not by memorizing new material, but remembering what the ancestors in their blood already know. Learning is therefore a process of listening to the ancestors whispering to them from their own blood, so that they *remember* their words and actions back to the beginning of time.

A characteristic of Maya theology is the tendency to see seemingly ordinary and familiar things as shadows of the sacred. I did my doctoral dissertation work in the traditional Maya community of Santiago Atitlan, a beautiful town built on the shores of Lake Atitlan, a deep, volcanic lake. In Maya theology, the world began when the gods lifted three sacred mountains out of the primordial sea that once covered the world. I’m sure that the first Maya who stumbled across Lake Atitlan with its cluster of three volcanoes must have thought he had found creation’s ground zero. Certainly the people of Santiago Atitlan consider their home to be the center of the universe. They call it *remuxux kaj*, *remuxux ulew* (navel of the sky, navel of the earth). When meeting new people, the Maya often ask where a person is from. People from Santiago Atitlan receive a great deal of respect throughout Guatemala for being from such a sacred place. It is widely believed to be a powerful place with life-generating power.

The Maya claim the town’s sixteenth-century church building as their own and frequently resist efforts by Roman Catholic priests to maintain orthodoxy. While I was doing my dissertation work, a new Catholic priest was assigned to the town. At the time, the Maya refused to have Hispanic priests, preferring North Americans

who were seen as more open-minded to their traditions. Santiago Atitlan, therefore, was part of the archdiocese of Oklahoma and the new priest was from Missouri. On his first day, he was surprised to find that the baptismal font, which should have been kept in the baptistry, was placed

in the precise center of the nave, surrounded by flowers. For the Maya, sacred water should be at the center of creation and therefore at the dead center of the church. The flowers represent new life. In addition, the holy water in the font contained clumps of pine needles as a token of its role as the waters of eternal life. The new priest knew nothing of this and hired some young men to move the font back to where it should be. The next morning he entered the church to find the font back in the middle of the nave. He didn’t know that the Maya



A Maya Catholic church

Learning is therefore a process of listening to the ancestors whispering to them from their own blood, so that they remember their words and actions back to the beginning of time.

also had a set of keys to the church and could let themselves in whenever they wished. What followed was something of a battle of wills. The priest thought

kids were playing pranks on him, while the Maya priests who were responsible were afraid to tell the priest what was going on for fear that he would denounce them. In the meantime, the Catholic priest and I had become friends, and he asked me why I thought the kids in the town were playing tricks on him. I explained that they weren’t kids and that the local Maya priests were only defending their interpretation of Christian faith. To his credit, he found the Maya symbolism consistent enough with Catholic doctrine to let them continue to put pine needles in all the basins of holy water. The following Sunday he gave a beautiful homily during Mass on the nature of eternal, life-giving waters that blended Maya and Roman Catholic traditions.

For the Maya, the repetition of ancient words and actions is a means of preserving the lives and knowledge of their ancestors. To alter the actions of those ancestors would be to change the very fabric of their existence in potentially destructive ways. The foundations of Maya religion date back three thousand years, and



Maya calendar

core elements of their beliefs and rituals continue to be practiced in many traditional Maya communities today. It is a part of who the Maya are, and significant numbers of them have steadfastly held to their unique view of the world, despite the Spanish conquest and the ensuing centuries of pressure to abandon their traditional faith.

This fascination for creation and the renewal of life carries over into the more public Maya ritual offerings, processions, and ceremonies. These ceremonies are repeated again and again during the calendar year or during times of social crisis. On such occasions, when a Maya priest repeats the actions of his ancient ancestors, he is able to recreate the world just as it was at the first dawn of time. They believe that if they neglect to do this, the world will be unable to sustain itself and will sink back into the primordial waters that once covered the world. Darkness and death would shroud the earth as it once did before the first dawning of the sun.

Some of you may have heard that the ancient Maya believed that the world would be coming to an end on December 21, 2012. It is true that the ancient Maya calendar ended on that date. It is also true that this is an important event for the Maya. The Maya calendar began all the way back on August 11, 3114 BC. The completion of such a long

He quickly smiled and said the world ends all the time. It dies whenever the sun sets, at every harvest season, at the end of the rainy season, and so on. "But don't worry," he said, "we always get it going again."

calendar, more than 5000 years long, developed by one of the world's great civilizations, is certainly worthy of note. But the Maya never cared much about the end of the calendar, only the beginning. This is the only ancient Maya monument that even mentions the 2012 date. As usually happens with important texts, Murphy's Law made sure that the most important glyph that describes what will happen on December 21 has a crack running through it. Enough remains, however, to interpret the event as nothing more than the descent of the usual god who shows up anytime there's a major period ending. He then helps in the rebirth of the world, which starts a new calendric cycle. That's all there is to it. A couple of years ago I was talking with a Maya priest and he asked what all the fuss was about 2012. I told him that gringos can sometimes be foolish and they think the world will end that year. Without missing a beat, he calmly said that of course the world will end when the calendar completes its cycle. That wasn't what I expected. He quickly smiled and said the world ends all the time. It dies whenever the sun sets, at every harvest season, at the end of the rainy season, and so on. "But don't worry," he said, "we always get it going again."

The Maya perceive time in terms of repetitive cycles. Therefore, each ceremonial rebirth of the world is not seen as a *reenactment* of creation. They believe that these ceremonies fold time back on itself to reveal the *original* creation of the world. Those participating feel themselves to have been present at the very moment of first beginnings, making all things new and pure once again. For most faithful Christians of the European tradition, failure to attend Mass or sacrament meeting may be personally damaging, but would have very little effect on the continued existence of God or the world He created. This is not the traditionalist Maya view.

They consider themselves essential to the continued survival of all things. No wonder then, that those who are responsible for traditional Maya rituals consider themselves to be bearers of a great burden.

The world in which the Maya live is difficult, often cruel. It is a source of great hope that through prayer, sacred ritual, and offerings, the world and its sacred guardians can return to the moment of their first creation in order to be reborn to new life in a pure,

uncorrupted form. It is this periodic renewal that allows life itself to continue. While working on the translation of the Popol Vuh passages dealing with creation, I read my interpretation of a section of the text to an elderly Maya priest. At the conclusion of the section on the role of humans in remembering and sustaining the gods, he stopped me and said, “As humans we bear a terribly heavy, yet sweet burden, because we remember. And because we remember the world can be reborn. If we did not carry out our work, who would? Everything would die.”

In graduate school, I was privileged to study with one of the foremost Maya scholars of her day, Linda Schele. She was one of the pioneers in my field who helped to crack the code for the decipherment of Maya hieroglyphic writing. I was her last doctoral student before she passed away, far too young, of pancreatic cancer. Other than my dear wife Janet, who is a living goddess walking the earth, Linda Schele was the most intelligent, passionate human being I’ve had the privilege to know. To the day of her death, she never lost her sense of wonder in the face of new ideas. Even when she was confined to bed in her last months, she insisted that we continue to have our seminars in her home. They are among the most precious experiences of my life. Pancreatic cancer is a cruel disease. It is said to cause the most pain of any other affliction the human body can endure. Most of us have sadly seen what cancer, and sometimes the drugs used to treat it, can do to the human body. She had wasted away, and her eyes had a gray veil drawn across them most of the time. But there wasn’t a session when a comment from a student didn’t trigger a new thought that would force its way through the pain. Her eyes got the old fire behind them, and her whole face would light up. “I’d never thought of that! But if that were true, what new questions would that raise? What do you think?” For a few moments nothing else mattered. She never got jaded about the work she loved. That’s how I want to go out when the time comes.

Shortly before she died she said in one of our seminars: “I’ve spent my entire life struggling to learn what the ancient Maya had to say to me personally. It has only been recently that I’ve come to the realization that they weren’t talking to me. They were desperately trying to preserve their thoughts for their own descendants. Their words are beautiful, but they were never meant for me. But I take solace in the fact that I’ve learned how to look over their shoulders and catch glimpses of what they

had to say to others, and that will have to be enough.”

At the beginning of this talk, I described the nature of Aztec poetry, that it was considered eternal precisely because it didn’t belong to this world. It was a divine revelation from the gods and thus could only exist in this world for a moment before passing back into the world of the sacred. I believe that the Maya are right that memory is among the greatest gifts of God. It’s what makes us worthy to sustain the world itself. When I think

of the performance of Aztec poetry, I think of Sarah Vaughan (1924–1990). Human vocal cords were never designed to do what she could do with her four-octave contralto. Her performances were so moving that she was given the nickname “The Divine One.” Frank Sinatra, always the one for colorful descriptions, said: “[she is] a singer who sings so good, I want to cut my wrist with a dull knife and let her sing me to death.” But despite her achingly beautiful voice, she suffered from persistent racism much of her life. On tour, she had difficulty finding hotels or restaurants that would allow a black woman. She later said, “They’re memories not easily erased, and at the time, I was ready to quit show business.” But instead, she transformed the pain and humiliation into a voice like warm honey poured over the soul. In the 1950s, she traveled to Paris for a string of performances. Fortunately, technology was such that we have a decent recording of her singing George Gershwin’s “Embraceable You.” I’ve listened to it many times. No one who had not known the full ugliness and cruelty of life could sing that piece as Sarah Vaughan sang it that evening in Paris. For a moment, her pain was swallowed up in the rapture that was that last perfect note. That note is now eternal because those who heard it will always remember it. It is part of our grab



Sarah Vaughan



Photograph of Leonard Bernstein taken at one of his last performances

bag of memories—the Maya would say it is now part of our blood and our flesh, because we have the ability to remember.

Leonard Bernstein wrote of Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony, "He produced an entity that always seems to me to have been previously written in Heaven, and then merely dictated to him. Not that the dictation was easily achieved. We know with what agonies he paid for listening to the divine orders." Before Beethoven, the world seemed to get along fine without him. How could it ever be the same after he wrote his Ninth Symphony? A photograph of Leonard Bernstein was taken at one of his last performances when he conducted Beethoven's Ninth Symphony not far from the recently demolished Berlin Wall. The moment is the climax of the symphony with a combined choir of East and West Germans singing Schiller's "Ode to Joy." Even in a photograph, one can feel Bernstein's overwhelming ecstasy during that performance.

*From out of the caves of evening that swing
between the strong-limbed earth and the
tracery of the stars I summon Aristotle
and Aurelius and what soul I will, and
they come all graciously with no scorn nor
condescension. So, wed with Truth, I dwell
above the Veil*

I believe that the arts are one of the greatest solaces that God gives to a world that is otherwise frequently hateful and unkind. African-American W. E. B. Du Bois wrote that when he was most beaten down by the cruelties of racism and blind hatred, he turned to his books to regain his humanity:

"I sit with Shakespeare and he winces not. Across the color-line I move arm in arm with Balzac and Dumas, where smiling men and welcoming women glide in gilded halls. From out of the caves of evening that swing between the strong-limbed earth and the tracery of the stars I summon Aristotle and Aurelius and what soul I will, and they come all graciously with no scorn nor condescension. So, wed with Truth, I dwell above the Veil"

(W. E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk*. Chicago, IL: A.C. McClurg, 1903.)

Like the traditional Maya priests, we as teachers and academics bear what they call a terrible, sweet burden. We look over the shoulders of Phidias, Keats, Rossetti, Baudelaire, Leonardo, T. S. Eliot, Shakespeare, and hosts of the best and noblest that humanity has produced over the millennia. We can't see their faces or put our hands on their shoulders in gratitude. They do not know us,

but we know them in a way that is just as real as if we had walked with them in life. We remember their words and the works of their hands, and because we remember, they live through us. If we don't pass our memories on to the next generations, they will

be all but dead. We resurrect them with every lecture, every article, every conference paper. They live, because we live. It is in our very blood and fiber. And because we remember, they will never die. ■



Jazz

and the Art of Civic Life

by Jessie Hawkes and Phoebe Cook
Snow Fellows of the Humanities Center

A tenor saxophone sighed over the heads of the students. Moments later, a melodica replied from across the room, its tone eager and teasing in response. The “conversation” between the two voices soared and dipped, and soon students were swaying, laughing at the “words” no one spoke but all understood.

Who were the artists? Jonathan Batiste and Loren Schoenberg, an unlikely pair closely associated with the National Jazz Museum in Harlem. Hailing from New Orleans, Jonathan is a young Juilliard graduate with a rising name in jazz. He captivated the audience with a satisfied smile and an impetuous melody on every instrument he touched. Loren is the artistic director for the National Jazz Museum in Harlem and recently appointed Jonathan as his associate. The director entertained with added comments and wailing improvisation on his saxophone. In this event sponsored by the BYU Humanities Center, the pair joined Associate Dean Greg Clark and three students on drums, bass, and piano. They treated a JFSB lecture hall packed with students and faculty to music and an earnest discussion about how jazz presents a model for civic life.



Jonathan Batiste



Dr. Greg Clark (far left) and students



Loren Schoenberg (far left), Jonathan Batiste (second from right), and students



Jonathan Batiste (right) and student



Jonathan Batiste (second from right) and students

With an introduction by Dr. Greg Clark, a rhetoric professor who has been researching the rhetoric of jazz for many years, a very unconventional lecture began. Jonathan and Loren, backed by their student rhythm section, would improvise on a familiar standard for a few minutes, sharing solos and leading and following. Then one of them would follow up the music with a question to the audience about what we were hearing. These questions were not about the structure of the music or the history of jazz, but rather, about how what we were hearing could teach us about being better citizens and better leaders.

One of the ideas the discussion developed was that being a good leader also means being a good follower. Jonathan represented this concept well by playing and taking turns with the three student musicians, rather than just being accompanied by them, despite his greater prominence and skill as a professional musician. So, too, might good leaders listen to those they lead and give their followers turns to take the spotlight or solo.

We learned about the humility required of a leader, as well as the confidence a leader needs to gain the trust of those being lead. We saw and heard the results of that trust: when members of the band soloed, the beat gave them no time for hesitation, so it was up to the others to help each soloist be as successful as possible. Overall, this encounter with the music taught us that leadership is all about teamwork. And there was a larger lesson: we can learn from everyone around us.

This event was funded by the new BYU Humanities Center, an organization that has seen a lot of success in its first year. The Humanities Center, headed by Dr. Matthew Wickman, seeks to expand the learning and research environment by offering students and faculty deeper and broader connections to all of the humanities through colloquia, symposia, research groups, discussions, and even “musical lectures” like the jazz event. Please enjoy other Humanities Center events by finding our Facebook page or viewing our website at <http://humanitiescenter.byu.edu>. ■

We invite reader response on any of the following 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!

- “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”

A Memorable Experience at BYU

by Roger D. Prengel; Lacey, Washington
English 1963, 1970

Late one night in the late '50s, I paused for a moment as I was leaving the David O. McKay Building, stopping just outside the door. The clouds had parted, creating a small opening, like a sky stage illuminated by silver moonlight. At that instant, the arc of the moon emerged, accompanied by the beginning of a lovely piece being played on the carillon bells. I stood transfixed. The piece continued as the full moon seemed to traverse the opening in the clouds, reaching the other side of the gap just as the carillon piece ended.

I must have been the only one in exactly the right place to enjoy this exquisite phenomenon of nature and man. Was it a lucky coincidence or a sign of God's love for a humble student? I have often thought that perhaps it was an affirmation of my recent decision to change my major to English. I had switched because I saw English as the best vehicle to express not only profound thoughts on weighty matters, but also to capture the wonder of nature and the best of human achievement in the beauty of words.

Though it does not do it justice, I have tried to capture this experience in a haiku:

Carillon begins
Cloud curtains part, revealing
Moon-dance in the sky

Eventually, I earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in English and a Master of Arts in American Literature and then taught high school English for thirty-two years. I have written poems, plays, and two novels. Though I have had many beautiful experiences since, I will never forget standing in quiet wonder that night at the McKay building.

A Teacher Who Made a Difference

by Bette Lang; Moses Lake, Washington
English 1970

John B. ("JB") Harris, BYU English professor emeritus who passed away in November 2012, was my favorite teacher. I'd been a reluctant English major until

my first class with JB Harris, and I ended up enrolling in almost every class he taught. He was demanding, fiery, funny, astute—and kind. He taught life lessons along with English. He once told us that if he were alone at an intersection, with no traffic in sight, he would stop for a "Don't Walk" sign. I pondered the lesson: know, understand, and then obey the law—even if no one is watching. One class period, I fought back tears, and after class, Professor Harris asked if he could help. He couldn't, but my heart was cheered because he cared. When I was student teaching, he told me I was a natural teacher. His words of affirmation helped me overcome occasional teaching terrors. I've never forgotten, and today, because of Professor Harris, I believe in myself. I wish I had thanked him before he passed away. Although he might not have remembered me, I will never forget him. He made a difference in my life.

A Teacher Who Made a Difference

by Jonathan Wade; Raleigh, North Carolina
Spanish 2003, 2005

Taking *Don Quixote* from Dale Pratt was life-changing. The course introduced me to what has become my favorite novel. Falling in love with Cervantes's masterpiece may have happened regardless, but I like to think that Dr. Pratt (a.k.a., El Gran Pratt) had much to do with it. He brought a statuette of Cervantes's bust to most classes to lend an air of authenticity and authority to our experience. He would often read selections of the novel in character, and his interpretations of the voices of *Don Quixote* and *Sancho Panza* are embedded in my memory. What I most remember from the course, however, was Dr. Pratt's passion and dedication. I was moved by his presence in the classroom. He loved what he was doing, and he was absolutely great at it. So here I am, more than a decade later, reading a children's version of the novel to my two-year-old (at her request). My Dale Pratt impression has her convinced. I can only hope it will have the same effect on my students at Meredith College this fall when I teach *Don Quixote* for the first time. I will have my own statuette of Cervantes to help make it happen.

A Teacher Who Made a Difference

by Stephanie McKellar; Teton, Idaho
English 1998

Richard Cracroft was an open-hearted, quick-witted teacher who made you immediately feel as if you were welcome in his circle. My husband and I found ourselves in Professor Cracroft's Western Literature course soon after we were married, and we were spell-bound by the literature we read and by the interesting discussions in class.

The next fall, we returned to BYU for our last year of school. As we arrived a bit late to our first sacrament meeting in our new ward, we noticed that the man conducting the meeting was our former professor. Bishop Cracroft noticed us and interrupted the announcements to introduce us: "And here are the McKellars, with Stephanie looking like a fine Idaho bride." He knew I was from Idaho, and he could see my very visible pregnancy.

He was such a warm-hearted person, and he never failed to welcome people into his circle of family. About a year before his death in 2012, I sent him a letter telling him how wonderful it was to associate with him at BYU. He responded in a kind letter, once again taking time to make us feel as if we were special to him as students, as well as ward members.

A Teacher Who Made a Difference

by Jeanine Knowlton Nichols; Arlington, Washington
Spanish 1993

I was new to BYU when I returned in 1989 from my mission to Spain. I enrolled in many basic undergraduate classes, as well as some Spanish classes, as that was to be my major. I clearly remember Professor John Rosenberg during those years I took higher-level Spanish classes. I do not remember the exact classes he taught, but I remember his enthusiasm and passion for the language and for teaching! He had an absolute commitment to his students' learning, and he wasn't going to just hope that we learned. He was determined to give his all. He stretched us, and because he wanted us to succeed, he made an offer: he would read and correct our essays as often as we were willing to rewrite them and go to him for help! I took advantage of his offer and have never forgotten how I saw my writing improve. He made a difference in my BYU journey, and I often share that story with my growing children so that they know that going the extra mile for someone does have an impact.

Ideas That Made a Difference

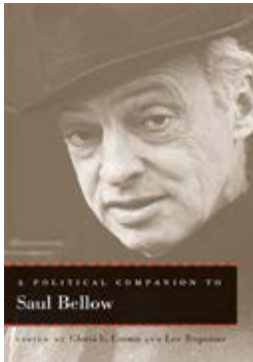
by Melinda Fillmore Temple; Malaeimi, American Samoa
Linguistics 2001

I really enjoyed "Fellow Citizens with the Saints" by Professor Eggington in the Fall 2012 issue. He was one of my favorite professors at BYU, and I just loved the ideas he shared in this article; for example, I'd never considered the spread of English as possible imperialism. When I read his article, I again felt the joy of learning ideas that ring true: the Age of Proximity, pragmatic failure, and unintentional ethnic superiority. I recognize those occurrences in my daily experiences living in American Samoa. My family and I are not Samoan, and though my husband can carry on simple conversations, I can communicate only well enough to shop at the fruit stand. I've often been tempted to retreat into the insular existence Prof. Eggington mentions in his article. "We can withdraw into our sameness . . . and set up barriers that protect us from interacting in meaningful ways with those who are different." I often think of picking up and moving back near my parents' comfortable life in the states. Or at least centering my life more at home by home schooling, relying more on technology, and becoming encased in my self-selected comfort zone. However, I'm glad for the perspective Prof. Eggington shares, that the Lord expects us to bless (and be blessed by) "all the kindreds of the world." My life is blessed by the experiences I have each day with my fellow saints on this island. I worked with local friends to start a school where I teach and where my children are thriving. I'm humbled to be serving as Primary president in our ward where I try to do things His way—not "mine," "yours," or "theirs." I owe so much of the richness of my life to my BYU experience, and I feel a sacred responsibility to now give back by serving in this "great world round me" (G. K. Chesterton).

We invite reader response on any of the following 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!

- "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"

Recent Faculty *Books*



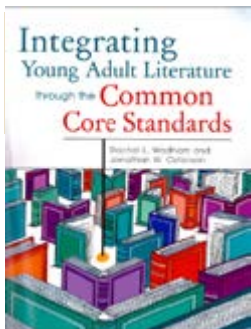
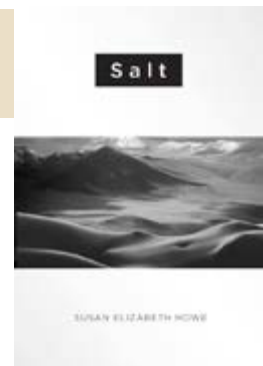
A Political Companion to Saul Bellow

by Gloria Cronin of the Department of English

This book of essays examines the political evolution of Saul Bellow, one of America's most acclaimed authors. Contributions by several scholars analyze his novels, essays, short stories, and letters, and reveal his evolution from a liberal to a neoconservative as his writings deal with democracy, race relations, religious identity, and multiculturalism.

Salt by Susan Howe of the Department of English

The poems in this volume are mostly Western but unmistakably modern, drawn from careful observation of humanity in both rural and urban settings. Professor Howe's weekly commute from her home in the heart of Sanpete County to her employment at BYU's Utah Valley campus provides solitude for reflection. She also has the opportunity to fine tune her metaphors and images as she winds through the long, broad canyons, seeing with the poet's eye and feeling with the poet's heart.

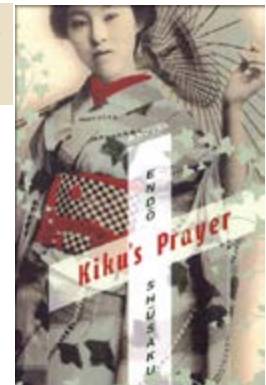


Integrating Young Adult Literature through the Common Core Standards by Jonathan Ostenson of the Department of English and Rachel Wadham

This new book is for those who teach English to young adults. School professionals have the task of deciding how best to implement the Common Core State Standards in meeting reading proficiency. The authors explore a powerful teaching approach that integrates current understandings about learning, young adult literature, and the Common Core Standards.

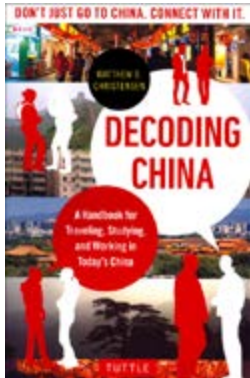
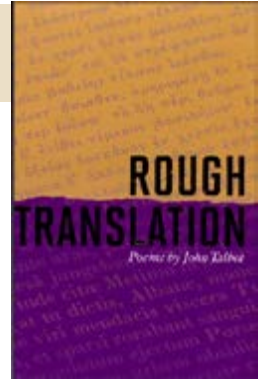
Kiku's Prayer translated by Van Gessel of the Department of Asian and Near Eastern Languages

Endo Shusaku (1923–1996) was one of the most important Japanese novelists of the twentieth century. His writings examine the unique challenges of being both Japanese and Christian. Endo writes of the struggles of the first Japanese Christians, who were tortured and persecuted for their beliefs, but also of the challenges facing the followers of Christ in modern-day Japan. *Kiku's Prayer* was published in Japan in 1980, but not in English until now. It deals with a group of Christians hiding out from the Japanese authorities in the 1870s. This is the seventh English translation of Endo's work done by Professor Gessel.



Rough Translation
by John Talbot of the Department of English

Of this volume of new poetry, a critic has written, “Talbot writes with the authority of one who trusts his book will find its readership.” “Refreshingly ambitious,” wrote another. A third critic wrote that Dr. Talbot writes with “great metrical felicity and flair for rhyme.”



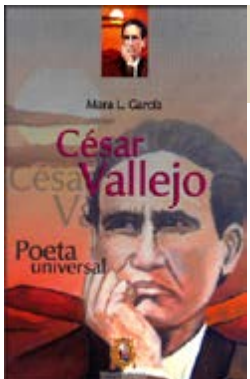
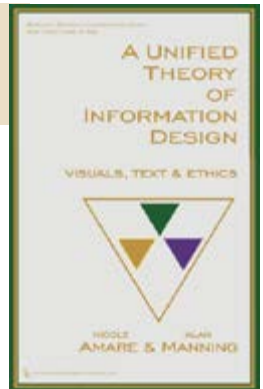
Decoding China

by Matthew Christensen of the Department of Asian and Near Eastern Languages

This book is for those wanting not merely to view but also to connect with China. Although useful for tourists, it is especially useful for those planning to study, live, or work in the country. Not merely a list of dos and don'ts, the book's goal is to help the reader understand the “cultural codes” behind everyday behavior and customs.

A Unified Theory of Information Design
by Alan Manning of the Department of Linguistics and English Language
and Nicole Amare

In this volume, the authors explain the major properties of diverse visual-communication forms and purposes within a common theoretical framework. They identify connections between foundational visual design elements and the grammar of language itself, treating visual communication as a science. A unified approach to visual communication will benefit visual designers, editors, and teachers interested in broader intellectual or philosophical perspectives on their work, as well as linguists interested in connections between the grammar of language and other forms of communication.



César Vallejo: Poeta universal

by Mara García of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese

This volume explores the life and works of the very well known Peruvian writer César Vallejo. This book includes critical studies, interviews on César Vallejo and his works, and new findings related to Trilce's author. Navigating in César Vallejo's work will always be an enriching experience, with an exhortation to deep reflection. (In Spanish)



PHOTO: SHAUN STAHL

To Russia with Love

BECAUSE OF YOU

Wherever Brian Anderson goes in life—and he’s already gone far—he will always feel deep gratitude for those who funded his College of Humanities scholarship, a gift that helped him achieve worldwide recognition.

Brian’s scholarship enabled him to spend a summer in Moscow with the Center for Strategic Research, a prestigious Russian think tank. He was selected to work with the organization’s president, Mikhail Dmitriev, who asked Brian to write a paper addressing the question “Will Russia experience full democracy in the near future?”

At summer’s end, as Brian sat across from Mr. Dmitriev, the truly unexpected happened. “He told me, ‘We want to publish your paper.’” That paper has now been read by diplomats all over the world.

Of the experience Brian says “The Lord wanted me to be in Moscow, and I wouldn’t have even made it on the plane if it wasn’t for the support of the university and generous donors. Thank you.”

We invite you to support student scholarships. Please consider donating online at give.byu.edu/moscow.

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COLLEGE CONTACTS

Karmen Smith, *Executive Secretary*:
801-422-2779; karmen_smith@byu.edu
Matt Christensen, *LDS Philanthropies at BYU*:
801-422-9151; matt_christensen@byu.edu
College Website: humanities.byu.edu

PUBLICATION OF *HUMANITIES AT BYU*

Ron Woods, *Editor*, ron_woods@byu.edu
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