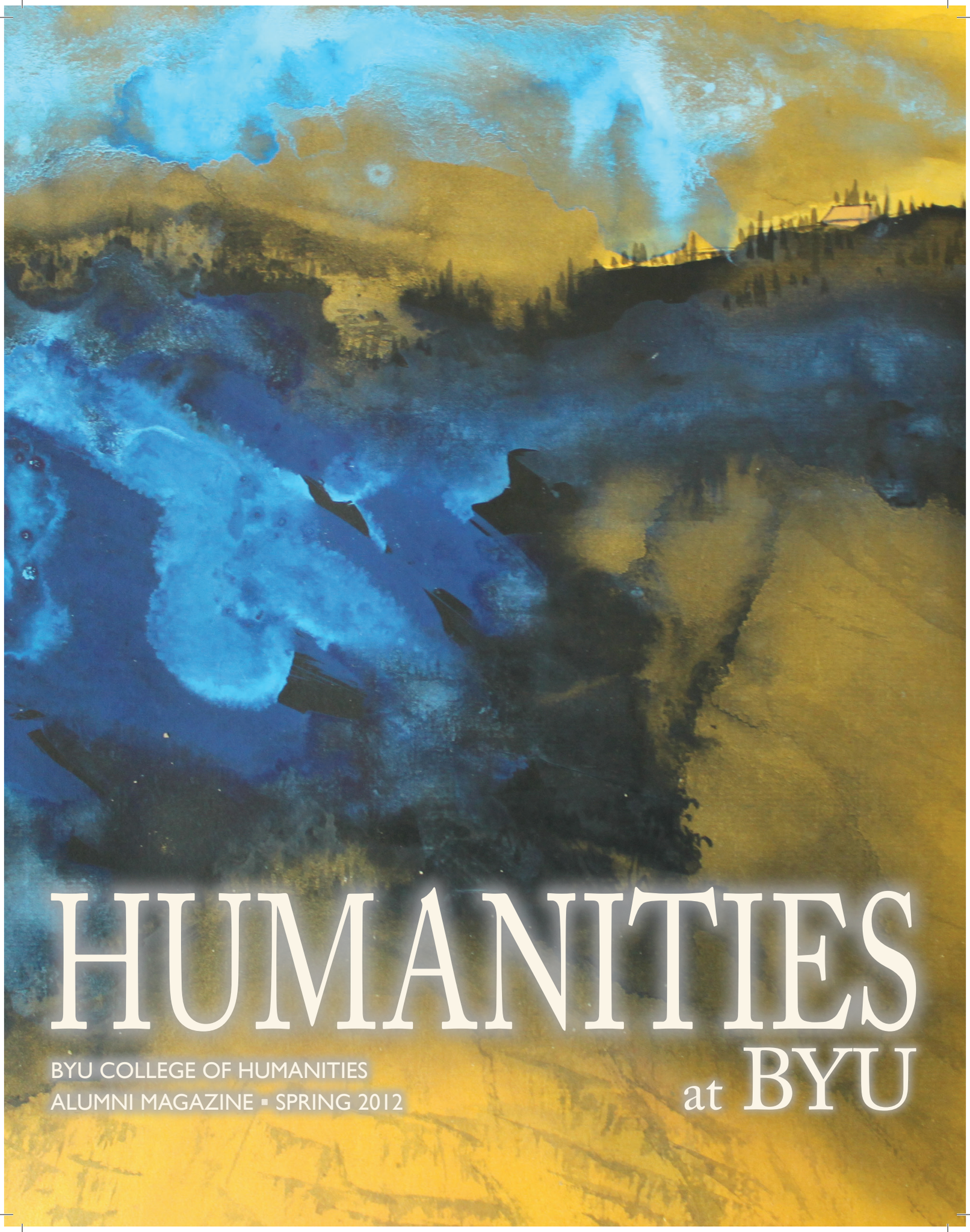

HUMANITIES at BYU

BYU COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES
ALUMNI MAGAZINE ▪ SPRING 2012

from the Dean

The Majesty of Calmness

Dean John R. Rosenberg

When I was a student at BYU, I walked to the Tree Streets on Monday evenings to the home of my grandfather. Each week he selected a book from his library and in the calm of his study we read together. When we finished, he wrote in the front cover of the book something like, "To my grandson, John, in memory of pleasant hours together." I now have in my own library dozens of Grandfather's books. One of them rests on the corner of my desk at work. Written in 1900 by publisher William George Jordan, it is titled *The Majesty of Calmness*. The four words of the title have reminded and restrained me on more than one occasion.

In the last few months, I have watched unknown parents aggressively insult each other at their children's athletic events, heard pundits and politicians stridently demean those whose ideas differ from their own, and cringed when verbal bullies dominated conversations. I have heard and read the unmeasured words of a few of our own students who seem not to understand the classic virtue of decorum and who, in their youth, make claims to wisdom they cannot discern in faculty and staff tutored by decades of life experience. I have seen incivility masquerade as righteous indignation—even a minor or unintended offense, it seems, warrants a cleansing of the temple. In order to avoid conflict, many good people remain silent—their good ideas unexpressed—and as a result, we are all morally and intellectually impoverished.

In one of Sophocles's great tragedies, King Creon focuses his anger on Oedipus's daughter Antigone because he wrongly believes she has brought dishonor to Thebes. Haemon, Creon's son, understands that sound judgment cannot flow from anger, and he nudges his father toward calmness:

> Don't always cling to the same anger. . . .
> If a man believes that he alone has a sound mind,
> And no one else can speak or think as well as he does,
> Then, when people study him, they'll find an empty book.
> But a wise man can learn a lot and never be ashamed;
> He knows he does not have to be rigid and close hauled.
> You've seen trees tossed by a torrent in a flash flood:
> If they bend, they're saved, and every twig survives,
> But if they stiffen up, they're washed out from the roots. . . .
> So ease off, relax, stop being angry.

Calm and reflective self-discipline traditionally was understood to be a product of Humanistic education and one of the distinguishing marks of an educated character. Historian Peter Brown writes:

> Long before the Humanities became, in modern times, a bundle of university disciplines, they were not a subject but a mighty virtue. *Humanitas*—in the singular—was a central value to the ancient Romans. *Humanitas* meant a sense of *measure* based on awareness of a common human condition. *Humanitas* assumed that the primary duty of humans was to deal with other human beings—not with abstractions, but with persons of flesh and blood and of like passions to their own. Above all, *Humanitas* was a virtue that needed to be fought for. *Humanitas* involved an insistence on integrity, candor and good counsel . . . and on *personal restraint*. . . . Above all, . . . it involved a strenuous attachment to wisdom and to humane good humor . . . *Humanitas* was the unwritten, moral constitution of the empire. (my emphases)

The majesty of calmness is earned, not endowed. It is cultivated in optimism about the human spirit, in the belief that we can find goodness in those who disagree with us. It is a by-product of charity. It is kind, giving, and forgiving. It is the disciplined recognition that however stressful the moment might

JOINING THE HUMANITIES CONVERSATION

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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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DEAN CONTINUED

be, it is "but a small moment" to be endured well. It is the product of seasoned patience refined in the hope that "the best is yet to be." In the second stage of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, we read about a little room "where sat two children, each one in his chair. The name of the eldest was Passion, and the name of the other was Patience. Passion seemed to be much discontented, but Patience was very quiet."

The majesty of calmness, William George Jordan tells us, is "the full glory of individuality, the crowning of . . . self control." Those who possess it pursue what the Doctrine and Covenants refers to as "the peaceable things of the kingdom." It is, or at least can be, a defining trait of one who has learned well the lessons of *Humanitas*. ✦

Front cover: *Splashed Ink Landscape* by Zhang Daqian, in the possession of Professor Jack Stoneman (see article on p. 12).
Back cover: Lance Larsen is appointed Poet Laureate of Utah by Governer Gary R. Herbert (photo by Trent Nelson).

of Note

✦ At the recent National Model United Nations conference, Brigham Young University's nationally ranked Model United Nations program received two Outstanding Delegation awards and a bevy of Position Paper and individual committee awards. This year's competition, held in in New York City at UN Headquarters and the Marriott Marquis, featured more than five thousand participants from universities in forty-four countries. BYU's delegation represented the Russian Federation and the Republic of Burundi. The advisor of the program is Cory Leonard, Assistant Director of the David M. Kennedy Center for International Studies. This year's team included three students with majors and nine students with minors in the College of Humanities.

Going into the competition with an eight-year winning legacy, BYU's MUN team aimed to win individual Position Paper awards in addition to delegation awards. A position paper is a tightly-written and focused policy document written to delineate a country's position on specific topics. The team submitted twenty-one papers, written from the perspective of both Russia and Burundi. On the last day of formal sessions, the BYU team learned that ten of their twenty-one papers had won awards—something no team had ever accomplished before.

Scholarships were provided by the College of Humanities, the David M. Kennedy Center, and generous alumni and friends to help students participate.

▲ BYU's Model UN delegation

✦ In April, the creation of the Donald R. and Jean S. Marshall Professorship was announced. Don Marshall, professor emeritus of Humanities, was the director of the International Cinema program for many years. He and his wife, Jean, were recently surprised at being honored with this professorship by a former student, who wishes to remain unnamed in this report. The donor and his wife have funded the professorship in the name of Don and Jean out of gratitude for the influence his former teacher had on his life, starting with unusual kindness and interest shown him as an undergraduate and continuing to the present day.

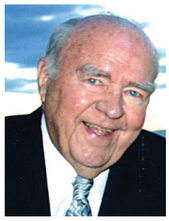
✦ Lance Larsen, professor of English, was appointed by Governor Gary Herbert as Poet Laureate of Utah in May 2012. Professor Larsen is a prolific poet, whose fourth collection of poetry is coming out this fall. He has taught creative writing at BYU since 1993. He is the fourth Poet Laureate in Utah history and is expected to hold the post for five years.

Moving *on*

EMERITI DEATHS

✦ Marshall Craig, professor emeritus of English, died on February 15, 2012. Former chair of the English Department, he was a member of the faculty from 1953 to 1981. Following his retirement from BYU, he taught for three years in universities in Xian and Nanjing, China. His service as commander of a navy minesweeper during World War II delayed his education. His wife, Ruth, preceded him in death.

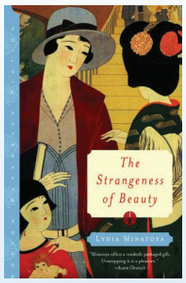
✦ Art Watkins, professor emeritus of German, died on February 23, 2012. Professor Watkins served as chair of the Languages Department and as chair of the later Germanic Languages Department. He co-authored several German textbooks, and at various times, taught German, Norwegian, French, Italian, and Russian. He was a member of the faculty from 1948 to 1981, with a two-year break. He inaugurated BYU's study abroad program in Salzburg, Austria, with 134 students, and he conducted seven travel study tours in Europe and one around the world. He gave up a fellowship at Yale during World War II to serve in army intelligence on the Italian front. His wife, Ruth, preceded him in death.



✦ David Yarn, professor emeritus of Philosophy, died on February 29, 2012. He was preceded in death by his wife, Marilyn. He started teaching full-time at BYU in 1950 as the first professor of philosophy and retired in 1985. Prior to the location of the Philosophy Department in the College of Humanities, he was the first dean of Religious Instruction. Upon retirement, he counted more than sixty-seven faculty members in thirty different BYU departments he could remember having had in class.

✦ Victor Purdy, professor emeritus of library and information sciences, died on April 9, 2012. During World War II, he served in the US Navy in the South Pacific, before obtaining degrees in history and library science from BYU and Columbia. After more than a decade as a librarian at BYU, he taught in the School of Library and Information Sciences for the twenty-seven-year span of the school's existence, starting in 1966. Victor retired in 1993 when the school was closed.

Books that made *a difference*



Kiri Price-Reeves
Sandy, Utah
English 1999

The Strangeness of Beauty ✦ by Lydia Minatoya

This novel tells the story of three generations of Japanese and Japanese-American women during the difficult period leading up to World War II. But mostly it is a story about finding yourself and having the courage to be true to yourself in a crazy world. This was the first book I read when I got back from my mission (a "find-yourself" experience for me), and I related to the growth process of the characters as they faced mundane and extraordinary life-shaping events. This book reminded me that the world, with all its strange and terrifying and joyful experiences, can bring beauty to my life if I choose to look for it.

Tell us about a book that made a difference for you. ron_woods@byu.edu

The Boys
of Mahabusu Ya Watoto

by Claire Bradford

When I went to Tanzania, I was full of uncertainty. I had decided that I would not attend school in the fall of 2010 and would pursue internship opportunities instead. With a major in interdisciplinary humanities and a minor in African studies, I hoped to find a placement that would suit both subjects. I found an organization called Cross Cultural Solutions that would take me to Tanzania, where I would volunteer for three months.

I was sure I would be working with women or in an orphanage. So when I received the email that confirmed I would be teaching in the Mahabusu Ya Watoto, a juvenile lockup facility for boys, I was afraid and uncertain at first. I was sure that I would be inadequate, that none of my life skills would have prepared me for this. But I received assurances from multiple sources that I would be prepared and that I would make a substantial difference. Any feelings of uncertainty disappeared when I entered the classroom, where I began my acquaintance with the boys I would have a relationship with for the next three months. Little did I know that my experiences in Tanzania, especially my compassion for these boys, would lead me to an unexpected career path.

Each morning, I would arrive with my fellow volunteer, and we would greet the warden and the staff. We would typically find the boys cleaning the courtyard, making breakfast, or washing the floor. While they were completing these chores, we would write math equations on the chalkboard, fill-in-the-blank sentences for English practice, and the lesson for that day. My fellow volunteer

▲ Outdoor markets in larger cities display produce and non-produce items for sale, such as Masaai blankets and fabrics.

and I planned a theme for each week, such as the different seasons, geography, cultures around the world, and so on. When the boys had finished their chores and the board was prepared for the day's lessons, we would first socialize with them for a quarter of an hour, sometimes learning more about the nature of their crimes. There were boys who were there for serious crimes like theft, and others for matters as seemingly petty as chopping wood for cooking fires in a national park.

I learned to love these boys whose backgrounds were so different from mine. There was Fidelis, the quiet fourteen-year-old who took two months to warm up to me but eventually expressed his affection towards me. Others like Big Peter and Hassan never completely welcomed me, but I came to understand their distance when I realized they had seen at least a dozen volunteers in their time at the facility. Amani asked me if soldiers firing practice shots into the sky could possibly kill Jesus. Elia wanted to know how to become Spiderman. And, even though I didn't want to have favorite pupils, Prosper immediately became my best friend and brother at the Mahabusu Ya Watoto. He was very intelligent and was one of the more advanced mathematicians. On my last day of the internship, it was Prosper who cried, it was Prosper who made a special bracelet for my wrist, and it was Prosper who slaughtered a goat in my honor.

Because of the sweet natures of the boys, I constantly had to remind myself that I was actually in a juvenile detention center. I became very attached to my students and concerned for their well-being. Before my arrival, I had thought I would have to force myself to enjoy the experience. I was unsure that I could teach these boys, and I was uncertain *what* to teach them. I wish now that I had worried less about those things and had instead spent those days being excited for what the boys would teach *me*. Their compassion, patience, and acceptance of a stranger was not something I expected, especially since volunteers like me came and went frequently, some after only three weeks. It was obvious why certain boys took some time to accept me.

A direct result of my experiences at the Mahabusu Ya Watoto is a newfound interest in international criminal justice. My dream is that my studies might grant me the opportunity to return to my boys in Moshi, Tanzania. ✦

▼ Street markets provide fresh local produce in many varieties.

English Department

Reading Series

by Susan Howe
English Department

In 1888 Mark Twain wrote, "The difference between the almost right word and the right word is the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning." That being the case, on Fridays at noon during fall and winter semesters, the auditorium of the Lee Library crackles with lightning as students and faculty listen to accomplished writers read from their poetry, fiction, or essays. Since its beginning in 1995, the English Department Reading Series has become a highly valued component of the Creative Writing Program on campus. Students have heard, for example, Nobel Laureate Derek Walcott; US Poets Laureate Maxine Kumin, Billy Collins, Charles Simic, W. S. Merwin, and Philip Levine; National Book Award winners Barry Lopez and Galway Kinnell; Pulitzer Prize winners Marilynne Robinson and Yusef Komunyakaa; and international writers Eduardo Galeano (Uruguay), Tomaz Salamun (Slovenia), Adriana Lisboa (Portugal) and Kevin Hart (Australia); along with many other excellent national, regional, and local writers.

The series was developed by professor John Bennion, who explains that it originated years ago with Eugene England's LDS literature class. As a student intern, Bennion was impressed that England had a writer visit his class each week; Bennion continued that practice when he began teaching LDS literature. Meanwhile, other creative writing faculty were arranging visits from such nationally prominent writers as Francois Camoin, Amy Hempl, and Carolyn Kizer. Bennion remembered how significant the reading series at the University of Houston, where he completed his PhD, had been to him, and considering all these influences, he proposed a reading series to department leaders and the creative writing faculty. Once the reading series became part of the English Department's annual budget, Bennion developed a model for the series: eleven readings per semester, selected from national, regional, and local writers working in poetry, fiction, and creative nonfiction.

To make the readings even more useful, a course associated with them was created. Students who take English 321R read selections by the writers prior to attending the readings and write a response paper after each reading, for one credit hour.

Asked which writers they best remember, students had a variety of answers.Catherine Curtis said, "My favorite reading was Scott Russell Sanders because he so carefully shaped his reading to have a narrative arc. He arranged several excerpts to take his readers on a journey." May Anderton said she was impressed by Neil Aitken, "an influential poet with strong LDS motivations. It was somehow reassuring to hear him both quote Hugh Nibley and use computer programming technology in his poems." She also said of Brian Doyle, "His sincere desire to understand humanity touched my soul. He has

Eric Freeze, short story writer, English professor at Wabash College

Steven L. Peck, BYU evolutionalry biology professor, novelist

a beautiful personality." Kylie McQuarrie named several favorites: "Marilynne Robinson:I have loved reading all her books, and it was a unique experience hearing her words in her own voice and hearing her discuss her writing process. Annie and Theodore Deppe: I thoroughly enjoyed their poetry and bought their books after they spoke. John Bennion: I've loved having him as a teacher, but it was completely different to hear him speak as a writer and creator. And Gail Carson Levine: it was fun to have someone I admired so much as a child come and speak about books I still treasure." Calvin Olsen said, "I will never forget when Billy Collins came to campus. I was brand new to contemporary poetry, and I wasn't sure what to expect. In less than an hour, he made me want to spend my life writing poetry. His reading was engaging, thought provoking, and instructive. I left the room thinking, 'If it's remotely possible to make a living doing that, tell me where to sign.'"

One reading each semester features three advanced creative writing students—one poet, one essayist, and one fiction writer—who compete for the opportunity to read. Those who have participated think of it as instructive as well as an honor. Michael Lavers said of his reading, "As far as the audience was concerned, my poems were only auditory. I was forced to become aware of [my poems] as sound objects, and I found myself making sound-based revisions that I otherwise would not have thought to make. That realization has stuck with me in my composition process." Catherine Curtis, an essayist, said, "Before I read, I could only visualize my audience in terms of my professors, classmates, family, and friends. The reading series helped me experience how my writing was received by a group of (mostly) strangers, and that was incredibly valuable feedback." And Claire Akebrand said, "The Q&A made me realize that I needed more practice articulating my ideas on poetry," and added, "Being chosen to read was a great confidence builder. I felt honored to get to read in the same place where famous visiting writers had read. It is a great way to encourage students."

Members of the creative writing faculty believe that the reading series provides extraordinary benefits to students. Stephen Tuttle notes the readers' influence: "Our students hear from great writers who might serve as models for their own writing." "It is crucial for students to hear a wide variety of creative writers, writing from different perspectives and in different styles," says Kim Johnson. Lance Larsen quotes Franz Kafka, who said, "A book should serve as the axe to the frozen sea within us," and adds, "A good reading, I think, can accomplish a similar thing: it represents a chance for writer and reader to gather from their respective solitudes to break bread." John Bennion agrees, "Students are inspired by the physical presence of writers who have done what they dream of doing."

Patrick Madden, who has directed the series for the past three years, points out the benefits of meeting and coming to know the writers personally. He says, "The biggest literary influences on me are Ian Frazier, Brian Doyle, and Scott Russell Sanders. All three have read at BYU, each staying a couple of days and working with students. Having them on campus was a way of extending their influence to my students. And on a personal note, these writers have been generous in supporting me, reviewing and promoting my books." According to Kim Johnson, poet Jill McDonough has also been "extraordinarily generous" since her BYU

Laura Dutson, BYU English graduate student, essayist

reading: "She met a number of our creative writing graduate student poets, and she maintains a pen-pal relationship with them, with 'soft advisement' included, to this day."

The English Department creative writing faculty welcome all students, faculty, alumni, community members, and guests to attend the readings, which are held on Fridays at noon in the Harold B. Lee Library Auditorium. To find out who is reading each week, check the English Department website. ✦

Students respond to a speaker in the Reading Series.

What have students learned by attending the English Department Reading Series?

I learned that writers struggle, that they can write about their deep and painful and joyous experiences without coming across as overly sentimental. I learned that writers enjoy talking about craft with each other. Writers have to be disciplined and must exercise mutual trust with readers.
–May Anderton

It's nice to see that these great minds are normalish people, and it's sort of touching to see what they gain inspiration from and what they're able to find beauty in. *–Tasha Staples*

I was asked to introduce poet Rob Carney. I wanted to become the resident expert on his work, so I studied it as deeply as I could in the time I had. Having to explain someone else's poetry to a large group got me into the poems like no perusal could. *–Calvin Olsen*

I love the reading series. The program has given me the opportunity not only to hear from several of my favorite authors, but also to meet them. I love that the university provides a way to learn from those who have so much to share with young writers like me as well as with anyone who enjoys a good read. *–Tyler Corbridge*

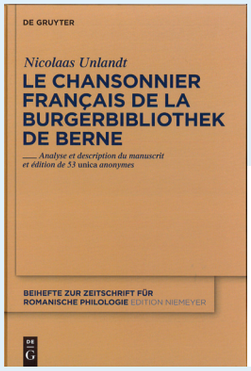
Patience is required to achieve excellence. Ideas just come, but you have to be patient for them to become what you've imagined or even better. *–Elise Meservy*

Words are enough without the flashy graphics and effects of so much of today's communication.
–Catherine Curtis

I learned that there are a lot of people out there who enjoy sharing and listening to poetry. I had no idea!
–Kristen Scharf

I enjoy being exposed to writers I haven't heard of and trying to familiarize myself with more contemporary literature so I can stay engaged in current conversations. Hearing about different writers' experiences with writing is helping me figure out my own writing process, exploring different methods, techniques, and subject matter. *–Kylie McQuarrie*

Recent Faculty *Books*



Le Chansonnier Français de la Burgerbibliothek de Berne

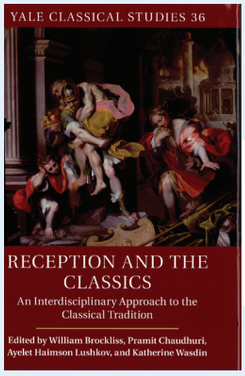
by Nicolaas Unlandt

The Berne songbook originates from the last third of the thirteenth century and is analyzed in depth for the first time in this volume by Professor Nicolaas Unlandt of the French and Italian Department. A synoptic index allows the reader to place the manuscript within the wider context of the written tradition of older northern French poetry. Written in French.

L'Italiano per Gli Affari

by Giovanni Tata and Cinzia Noble

This text is a manual for students of Italian desiring to develop linguistic competencies in the fields of economics and business. Numerous readings on related topics and a specific dictionary are included. Dr. Giovanni Tata is the author of the sections on business; Prof. Cinzia Donatelli Noble of the French and Italian Department is the author of the exercises, the sections on language and culture, and the dictionary.



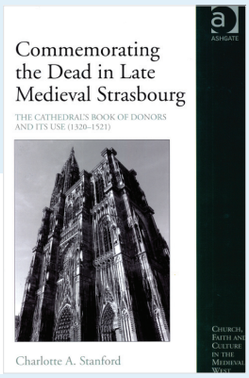
Reception and the Classics

edited by William Brockliss

William Brockliss of the Humanities, Classics, and Comparative Literature Department has coedited this volume that brings together scholars from different fields in the humanities and draws on their different approaches to the classical tradition in order to renegotiate the nature and role of reception studies.

Commemorating the Dead in Late Medieval Strasbourg

by Charlotte A. Stanford

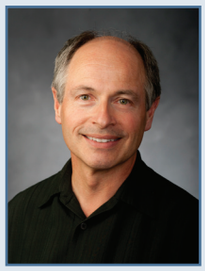


The medieval cathedral in the city of Strasbourg, Germany, begun in AD 1176, was funded by over seven thousand individuals who donated money, land, and personal possessions to build the immense structure. Professor Charlotte A. Stanford of the department of Humanities, Classics, and Comparative Literature analyzes those donations and the prayers that the donors received in return for their gifts.

Out of the Blue

Serendipity, Translation, and Literature

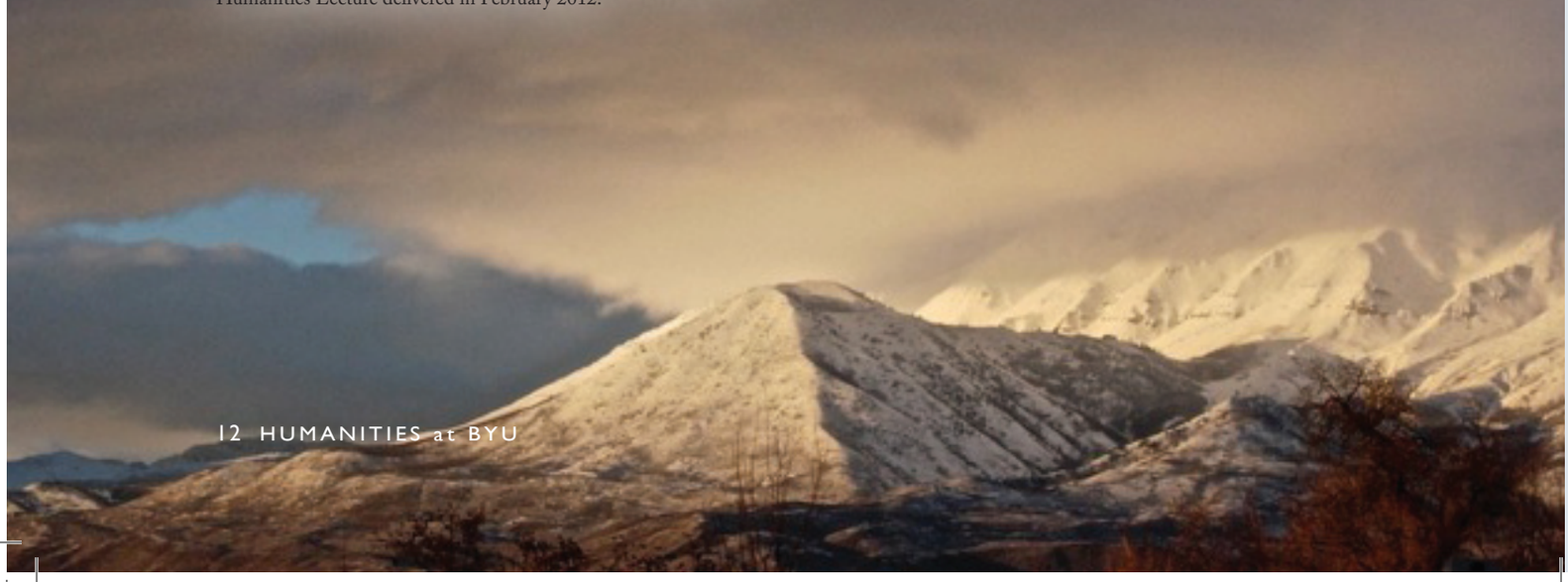
by J. Scott Miller
Department of Asian and Near Eastern Languages



A friend of mine, whose name I will change to protect the innocent (let's call him Augustine), told me of an experience he once had during his prodigal adolescence. Augustine knew he was doing wrong, that his life was spiraling downwards, and he could feel the darkness of the Abyss looming up to eclipse the glimmer of spiritual light that remained within him. While washing dishes in the sink of the pizza joint where he worked, and under the influence of a substance condoned by neither the Word of Wisdom nor common sense, Augustine noticed soap bubbles floating lazily in the air around him. As he reports it, while watching the bubbles suspended in front of him, he was suddenly filled with and overwhelmed by the Spirit of God in such a powerful way that it left him overjoyed and speechless. This moment of inspiration in the middle of wickedness marked a turning point in his life and serves as a touchstone for my message.

In life, as we all know, there is the *Ideal* and then there is the *Real*. There is no question that putting ourselves in ideal places can, and often will, lead to flashes of insight. But other moments of discovery or inspiration cannot be scripted and come to us quite spontaneously. When it comes to feeling the influence of God or spiritual promptings, for example, the ideal scenario finds us in church or in the temple, praying or reading the scriptures. In reality, however, the still, small voice will sometimes come to us, as it did to my friend Augustine, during periods of rebellion, great personal darkness, or just random distraction: when we're about

This article is adapted from Professor Miller's P. A. Christensen Humanities Lecture delivered in February 2012.



to commit sin, for example, or while we're paring our fingernails, or digging out a tree root from the backyard.

Likewise, when it comes to discovering great truths about life and the humanities, the ideal finds us in front of a great painting in one of the world's finest museums, or listening to a Brahms concerto featuring a brilliant pianist, or reading a great classic from world literature (preferably in the original language). In reality, however, we sometimes find that our greatest insights about life or the human condition come flooding into our hearts and minds when our child hands us a colorful crayon drawing of our family; or when we are stuck in traffic, scan the radio dial, and stumble upon music we have never paid attention to before; or when we are waiting in the doctor's office and, lacking anything to read, look up and begin to study the anxious faces of the other patients.

The lotus reminds us that sometimes we will find the ethereal where we least expect it.

Life is filled with both kinds of discovery: those that come after considerable forethought and preparation, rewarding patience and perseverance with the sought-after prize; and those that flash upon the mind, out of a clear blue sky, so to speak, when one least expects them. Although, in the retelling, most success stories tend to emphasize the preparation-perseverance continuum, I would like to give a bit of airtime to the other side of epiphany, that more-common-than-we-might-care-to-admit phenomenon of pleasant surprises where we least expect to find them.

There is a Buddhist metaphor for this kind of discovery: the lotus blossom. The lotus is a plant that rises above the water and blooms with beautiful flowers and a delightful fragrance. It is everywhere in Buddhist iconography, since Buddhism emerged in India, a land blessed with lotus flowers, which rise up from the bottom of murky swamps through the water to bloom in all their glory. The lotus serves as an apt symbol for Buddhist enlightenment, and in popular lore throughout Asia, but particularly in Japan, much is made of the fact that this most beautiful of flowers thrives and blooms in the midst of slime, mud, and filth. It is a fitting metaphor for how Buddhism perceives itself: a means to transcend the sorrows and pain of the world. It is also an apt reminder that even the most vile of sinners can escape the world's influence and achieve enlightenment.

There is an aesthetic parallel to the lotus motif that is sometimes conflated in both Buddhist art and classical Japanese literature: the paradox of a moment of singular beauty appearing in the midst of great ugliness. The lotus reminds us that sometimes we will find the ethereal where we least expect it, tucked away in some dark corner of the world, far from the bright colors and splendor of the city, a hidden flower whose mundane or even vulgar surroundings enhance its beauty and its purity. The lotus, then, stands for an idea that many great traditions of philosophy and art share in common: if one dares venture outside the walls of convention and contemporary fashion, into the swampy hinterlands, there is a world of beauty and insight awaiting discovery. In the spirit of the lotus, then, I will present a few blossoms of truth from the shallow muck of my limited knowledge, examples of surprises discovered in the oddest places, hidden flowers that demonstrate the value of expecting the unexpected.

Serendipity, usually referred to as a "happy accident" or "pleasant surprise," is the act (or art) of having things turn out well in spite of oneself. In 1754, Horace Walpole coined the term after a twelfth-century Persian fairy tale, "The Three Princes of Serendip," wherein the said princes were able, using logic and observation not unlike that of Sherlock Holmes, to clear themselves from charges of theft and wind up garnering riches and being appointed advisors to their former captor. (As someone who has studied the circuitous paths stories take as they migrate across cultures, I must note that the original Persian tale made its way into English first via a sixteenth-century Venetian translation that was translated into French and then adapted into an English version, all of these being very serendipitous for Horace Walpole.[1])

In considering, then, the role of serendipity in our lives, Louis Pasteur came up with the maxim, "Chance favors the prepared mind." Many of my colleagues demonstrate this well, having studied long and hard to become masters of their disciplines, now able to leverage

that preparation into works of great genius and beauty. In contrast, my own research proves that there are times when chance favors the *wandering* mind as much as the *prepared* one. In other words, sometimes looking at things from the wrong perspective, intentionally or not, can lead to valuable discoveries as well. By adopting unconventional perspectives we are often able to discover new insights and wrest new meanings from even very familiar contexts. In other words, I have learned to embrace my inner *misreader*.

Let me tell you a story that reveals why I sometimes choose to misread. Many years ago, before I came to BYU, I was on study abroad in Japan with a group of Colgate University students. We were in Hiroshima, at the Peace Memorial Park in the early evening, and the sky was overcast and gray. In that sultry twilight several of my students walked over to a rectangular fountain that surrounds the memorial cenotaph there and pulled some spare change out of their pockets.

"Did you know that if you set it up just right, a one-yen coin will float in a glass of water?" I asked them, remembering a trick that I had learned as a missionary.

"Really?" one student responded, as he tossed a one-yen coin underhand out onto the water.

"Not like that . . . " I began, but to our complete surprise his coin landed softly upon the water, slowly spinning as it floated away in the gathering dusk.

The students, to a person, stood still and uncharacteristically silent, watching. We had just come from the museum, and were sobered by its graphic depictions of the atrocities of the bombing. And there, before the memorial to the victims, we all watched a small miracle in that coin floating upon the water. Afterwards, back at the hostel, we talked about what had happened, and after discussing probabilities and modes of interpretation, most of the students read the floating coin either as an uncanny witness to the unnatural events that had happened there, or as a metaphor for how we, as individuals, could make a difference in ensuring that such atrocities would never be repeated. I still cherish that event as a highlight of my study abroad experiences.

Fast-forward nearly two decades, this time with BYU students at Nikkō, a famous shrine located in the depths of beautiful mountains outside of Tokyo. As the students wandered over to a rectangular cistern filled with rainwater from ornately decorated gutters, they saw coins at the bottom and pulled out spare change. I told them about my Hiroshima experience—or began to—when one of the students, a returned missionary, took out a one-yen coin and quickly placed it upon the surface of the water. "It floats!" he exclaimed, beating me to the punch line. Others quickly followed suit, and everyone soon had mastered the trick of making coins float.

They were all thrilled, but I was strangely disappointed, for several reasons. First, I had been upstaged and lost the chance to tell my cool Hiroshima story. Second, all the mystery was gone. What had, for me and for the first group, been a rare, even supernatural, experience was, for this group, a simple trick and a lesson in dexterity. What haunted me most, however, was the nagging temptation I felt to abandon my original interpretation of what happened at Hiroshima, to downplay the mystery in light of revised statistical probability. But I was reluctant to reject that earlier reading of experience; it had become too familiar, even sacred to me, to let it go, even in the face of new understanding.

From this I realized that there was a truth I gleaned from my misreading of the probabilities at Hiroshima that I would have never come to know had I been fully informed of how easily a one-yen coin can float upon the water.

And from this I realized that there was a *truth* I gleaned from my misreading of the probabilities at Hiroshima that I would have never come to know had I been fully informed of how easily a one-yen coin can float upon the water. Had I known that beforehand, I might even have used that knowledge to play a cheap trick of my own on my Colgate students: "Watch *this*!" I might have said, dropping the coin onto the fountain, pausing for effect, then, after letting them begin to form their own profound readings of the event, violently rip

away the curtain and reveal that it was only dexterity and physics, nothing supernatural at all. And I would have robbed myself and my students of a *misreading* that underscored a profound lesson of the human experience.

The point, then, is that we probably *misread* more than we *read*, but glean truth from our efforts nonetheless. So I believe firmly in the idea that sometimes we can stumble upon valuable truths even if we are clueless about all the details and facts.

I come to this belief with what I perceive to be a modicum of intellectual integrity. When I was a graduate student at Princeton, I was fortunate to have been studying comparative literature when the department brought Hans-Robert Jauss, the famous reception theorist, to campus for a week-long visit. He gave several lectures, took the graduate students out to dinner (since I did not drink any of the wine, he gave me the cork as a memento), and even held office hours. I spent an hour with him, talking about his ideas, and I remember his enthusiasm for what I was doing—applying his theories in the realm of Japanese literature, far beyond their usual targets—because it underscored one of the basic tenets of his approach: art is found just beyond the edges of our expectations, where we are challenged to interrogate strangeness. I loved his expanded, even redeeming, interpretation of the experience of irony: the unexpected can be both beautiful and edifying.

I was trying to find the balance between conscious, intentional effort and the improvisational state of no consciousness.

And so I invite you to think about the times when you have stumbled upon beauty in ugly places or have found truth just beyond the edges of your expectations. Life is filled with these hidden flowers: a lotus can blossom from the mud; a sagebrush buttercup can emerge from the snow melt of early May; redemption can spring from a depressing novel; a dispensation-initiating series of revelations can come forth from a burned-over frontier district; and one can sometimes find a surprising joy and comfort at a funeral.

I want to share a few serendipitous discoveries from my translation and literary experiences that suggest the value of looking beyond our expectations. In the course of research, and especially when writing up scholarship, even the best-planned investigations and studies are highly unpredictable. The irony of the research proposal writing process is that one must predict what one will discover, when in fact most of the time we discover just the opposite or something completely different along the way. This species of serendipity is a constant source of wonder to me. I am amazed at how often the scholarship that draws the most attention or that I feel most satisfied with emerges not from carefully thought-out and reasoned outlines or systematic study but from hints and suggestions that crop up along the way.

We all have moments when we find, while writing up something or elaborating on a very simple thought, that words on the page or screen seem to suggest new ideas, thoughts, or avenues for investigation that have turned out to be much more significant than the original intentions. So I have also come to understand that an important aspect of scholarship is a willingness to follow where new clues lead, even if they run into dead ends, because often there are things "out there" that enlighten us as well, sometimes in even more fundamental and earth-shaking ways.

Likewise, in the course of teaching, we may have well-prepared material before us, but sometimes the best teaching moments occur when that material serves as the framework upon which either class discussion or the sudden flow of new ideas leads the moment to become a *revelatory* rather than a pedagogical experience. We may be far from a revelatory topic (in my case it has happened right in the middle of an explanation of a passage of *The Tale of Genji*) when a student question or comment, or maybe even just the barest whisper of an idea, suddenly opens up a new vista on the subject or, more likely, on life itself. And, for a brief moment, as teacher I become the vessel through which a particular insight

flows. It is one of the great blessings of teaching, and I am grateful that it is not a rare one.

When I was studying at a Japanese university years ago as a Japanese government research fellow, I dabbled in *kyūdō*, or classical Japanese archery. What I learned from that experience was that often the Zen approach to learning a skill involves a great deal of repetition to build muscle memory (think Mr. Miyagi). My *kyūdō* teacher kept telling me that once I learned the movements intuitively I would hit the target consistently. And it was true. But throughout my training I kept struggling with my inner American that just wanted to shoot a bunch of arrows from all over the place until my brain and body figured out what to do. I was trying to find the balance between conscious, intentional effort and the improvisational state of no consciousness.

Another, more recent discovery is Gabriela Montero, a pianist who does classical improvisation at the end of her concerts because she sees improvisation in the classical piano tradition as a lost art, one that used to be regular expectation for virtuoso performances. When interviewed about this, she noted, "It's almost as if I'm in a different state of consciousness when I improvise. . . . I find it quite spiritual. It's like water that gushes out; it's inevitable and always changeable. And it's not really something that I control. . . . When I improvise, I tap into some kind of musical universe that I'm very connected to. I'm like an open vessel. Where does it come from? I really don't know." In teaching, as in music or even archery, we can sometimes become open vessels and, like Montero, come to rely upon the happy accident of inspiration to tap into a wider universe of truth. This is yet another side of serendipity.

Serendipity led me from a study of Japanese oral storytellers to the Ainu, aboriginal inhabitants of Japan whose language and culture diverge dramatically from the Japanese. I learned that Ainu have a long tradition of shamanism, and their oral storytellers also have a tradition of narrators who speak in the voices of those from the world beyond, much like the Victorians or Spiritualists who wanted to commune with the dead in their séances. Among the traditional Ainu, storytellers also narrate using the voices of animals, which are actually gods who choose to come among humans disguised as animals, both to enjoy their company and to surrender their physical bodies in return for prayers and offerings.

The Ainu storytelling perspective opened up to me a new way of looking at the narrating voice. The Ainu shaman represents the medium through which gods from another world are able to speak to the people, and I realized that this is also fundamentally what happens with translation: people from another language, era, or culture find a voice in our world through the mediation of a translator. And so it follows that a competent translator should be like a skilled storyteller, able to incorporate both conscious aptitude—a panoply of voices and personas—as well as improvisation—being in tune with the audience and the flow of the moment—as they seek to embody voices from other cultures and other times.

I have recently augmented my *thinking about* translation with some *actual* translation experience, focusing on a Japanese poet named Kajii Motojirō (1901–1932). Modern Japan has witnessed a number of brilliant young writers cut down in the prime of life. Kajii, whose life spanned the first third of the twentieth century, rode the wave of modernist experiments to create his own style of eloquent, introspective fiction. He died having finished only twenty short works and leaving behind many unfinished manuscripts just as the tide of war washed upon Japan's shores. Kajii was born in Osaka and studied in Kyoto and Tokyo, but at the young age of nineteen he contracted tuberculosis, which eventually led to his premature death at age thirty-one. His works, in the ensuing decades, have found recurring favor among critics, readers, and translators.

I have been translating two of his works that have yet to be formally published in English, largely owing to the difficulty of rendering the poetic and symbolic power of their brief but dense language. In my versions I have been attempting to practice a kind of translation that transcends mere correspondence. Taking my lead from the Ainu storyteller, I want the author to speak from the dust, as it were. I do not want my translations to be the reconstitution of dead texts showing us a dead world, but rather a resurrected series of thoughts and impressions coming to us from another place and time, showing us new ways to see our world.

Kajii began these two works during his recuperation at a hot springs resort on the Izu peninsula, and they reveal his own struggle to come to grips with his terminal illness. The earlier of the two is entitled "Out of the Blue" (*Sōkyū*, 1928) and opens with the poet reflecting on events from his recent past. He describes discovering natural phenomena that mirror his own emotional and intellectual tensions. The later is called "A Picture Scroll of the Dark" (*Yami no emaki*, 1930) and describes his penchant for taking solitary walks in the dark in order to learn to see its beauty.

Translating these essays has brought me two happy accidents. The first involves a peculiar, even metaphysical, event that occurred as I was finishing up a prepenultimate translation. It was a beautiful November afternoon, clear and sunny. I was rewriting, reading over the original, and smoothing the translation. There were a couple of sections that I still had reservations about, in particular the odd cloud formation that plays a central role in the essay. As I kept working over the language, tweaking my own, I began to see images in my mind's eye that were increasingly more detailed, showing the view he described. So as I "saw" the cloud more clearly in my mind the depth and symbolic power of the poetic language hit me as well, so powerfully that I felt almost as if I were at one with Kajii, seeing the world through his eyes rather than just trying to understand his words.

This experience paralleled those I have had searching out ancestral haunts. I have been fortunate to be able to visit the birthplaces or home areas of many of my distant ancestors, in an attempt to get into their skins, to understand their lives better, which has been a rich and rewarding pursuit, one that has taught me powerful truths about forging bonds between the hearts of fathers and children. And that, oddly enough, is how I can best explain the experience I had translating this Japanese poet. I have no genealogical connection with him, but somehow, through reading his words, I felt a similar kind of atavistic whispering to my soul that helped me add the finishing touches and bring the English essay into greater harmony with the Japanese.

Just as I finished up (it was in the late afternoon), I noticed a cloud perched in the sky outside my north-facing office window. It was an odd weather day; a cold front was moving in and the wind blew wisps of clouds back from the east over the crests of Mt. Timpanogos and Cascade Peak. The sky was a deep blue and the cloud contained a few lavender edges. But what struck me most as I first noticed it and then returned my gaze five minutes later was that, although the cloud was slowly rotating in a clockwise direction, it was standing still in the sky. And although the upper fringes kept breaking off and disappearing into the blue sky, it did not reduce in size. I continued to watch that cloud on and off for the next half hour, and it never moved from its fundamental position in the sky, and although its outline changed shape a bit, it never grew smaller. Returning to my translation I realized, with a slight shiver, that my cloud and Kajii's giant cloud were essentially the same.

A Japanese picture scroll, Yellow Mountains (Huangshan) *by Lu Yanshao*

The strangeness of this correspondence still baffles and amazes me. Did it really happen? I am as prone to skepticism as the next person, but I chose to read this as real, and as a gift, a physical manifestation that my translation was on the right path, somehow.

But what does all this mean? Kajii sees the cloud as a Buddhist metaphor for life: we come from a void (the sky), live our lives in a sort of precipitated vapor of sorrow and illusion, and then disappear back into the painless void once more. He was a young man with a terminal illness, confronting his mortality and reading nature in ways that embodied the deep emotions and paradoxes of his life. As I watched the cloud outside my office window that afternoon I realized that I, too, could read meaning into nature—multiple meanings, in fact, if I applied academic or spiritual readings (or misreadings) to the symbol of the cloud.

In his essay, Kajii found a first step towards transcendence in recognizing the nature of the cloud in the azure sky: it represented his own, sorrow-filled life as a kind of limited, vaporous, temporary state that would ultimately return him to a place of endless clarity. It helped him see that what he suffered alone was part of a larger cycle. I have found similar comfort through his insights as I contemplate my own and my family's inevitable mortality and, in a very personal way, find my life greatly enriched by this particular act of translation.

Reflecting back on the experience, I think this pleasant surprise was meant to teach me something about the humanity of translation, that when we seek to serve another through reincarnating his or her words in another tongue we are, in a sense, helping to build

connections between souls, embodying, in an oblique but powerful way, a kind of literary Spirit of Elijah. As I put my heart and soul into trying to divine Kajii's experiences and thoughts through his writing, literature became the medium connecting two very different souls—Kajii and me—in a unique conversation. Our hearts, I believe, were turned in the same way Elijah's spirit saves the world in the latter days, by teaching us to avoid the objectifying bigotry of stereotypes and see others as souls to love, souls who can speak to us from the past and across cultural and linguistic divides. In other words, I think that if we open ourselves to the spirit of translation, our hearts might be turned to dead authors or poets just as fully, or even more so, as they can be turned to seventh-great-grandmothers or undocumented siblings who died as infants.

The second happy accident came during my much more involved process of translating "A Picture Scroll of the Dark." The essay underwent multiple revisions and is the more structurally complex of the two and unfolds on two levels. Superficially, it is a mini-memoir, a collection of related memories retold with fond and loving description. More deeply, it is an allegory that reveals Kajii's own struggle to come to grips with the death sentence imposed upon him by tuberculosis. Structurally it follows a nighttime journey, upstream and into the dark, wherein he discovers a wealth of beauty where he least expected to find it, enough, in fact, to fill a picture scroll. And we, as readers, are led to see this elegantly painted scroll through his enlightened eyes.

One scene in particular stands out in the essay: his discovery, one evening, of a fellow traveler in the darkness. Here is the passage:

> Along the way stood one solitary household with a tree in front—perhaps a maple?—bathed in light like a magic lantern, it alone shining luxuriantly in that immense, dark landscape. The roadway itself brightened slightly at the spot, but this made the shadows ahead even darker as they swallowed up the path.
>
> One evening I noticed a man—like me, without a lantern—walking further up the road. I saw him because his figure suddenly appeared in the illuminated space in front of the house. The man, his back turned to the light, gradually receded into the darkness and vanished. I watched the entire scene, moved in a strange, singular way. Stirred by the man's disappearing figure, I thought, "In a short time I'll be walking into the darkness just like him. If someone were to stand here, observing, they'd probably see me vanish, the same way he did.

Kajii, for whom seeing and coming to enjoy the beauty in darkness is his discovery alone finds that another person has been walking, just like him, along the same dark path. It is a signal moment wherein he realizes that the isolation he feels as he faces his own imminent death is, if not universal, at least quite common. And I believe it is because of this sudden revelation that he continued to polish and refine this longer essay for several years before publishing it: he was reaching out to those fellow travelers of the dark path. One of Kajii's main motivations for writing appears to be the need to preserve and document his impressions of a fleeting life.

In this essay, then, Kajii the dark-walker has been taking his solitary night journeys as if a lone pioneer exploring new aesthetic terrain. But when he sees someone else on the same dark path—ahead of him, no less—walking without a lantern, Kajii has no choice but to conclude that the dark path is anything but solitary; that there are others who choose to walk alone in the dark at night to discover its hidden aesthetic pleasures. As he watches the traveler disappear into the darkness he considers—perhaps for the first time—that there could be others behind him, for whom his sudden appearance and disappearance would be equally shocking, cheering, and instructive. From this perspective, death takes on a new meaning. Hitherto both ostracized and creatively liberated by his terminal illness, Kajii finds grounds for a common humanity in his own impending death. Walking alone in the dark he has discovered a fellow traveler, and although he knows not what lies ahead in the darkness, both his new aesthetic appreciation of the dark and the realization that it is populated with fellow travelers takes away the sting, offering even the promise that, as one can discover beauty and tranquility in darkness, so can one hope that there is an abundance of both light and beauty in that darkness we now fear as death.

My own journey, through literature and life, leads me over and over to the conclusion that there is virtue, loveliness, value, and glory to be found in the most unlikely places, even as we confront our own mortality, if we but have the courage to look for it. I hope this brief glimpse into the other side of epiphany will encourage us to expect, and to find, an abundance of pleasant surprises. ✦

Note

1. The etymology of the word *Serendip*, which is an old name for Sri Lanka, is another curious path, and the word *serendipity* has been included, in a random Internet survey, among the top 10 most difficult English words to translate.

Receiving, then *giving*

April 27, 2012

Dear Brother and Sister Fulton,

During commencement and convocation exercises last week, the phrase "Enter to learn, go forth to serve" was tossed around quite a bit. I heard some students complain that they felt the alumni association was begging us for money before we even graduated, but when I heard invitations for us grads to give back to BYU and its students, I was really touched. During my four years at BYU, I've been largely supported by scholarships, grants for my international experiences in Jerusalem and Rio de Janeiro, and most recently, by your generous funding of the BYU Language Certificate program. Thank you from the bottom of my heart. I've been the recipient of your help (and that of many other donors, I'm sure) during the time when I really haven't had the resources to get the education I need, and now I see that it's my opportunity and sacred responsibility to do all in my power to use that education to first support my family and then give back to the next generation of students. Your generosity has blessed my life temporally, but your example will impact me eternally.

Brother Fulton, I was glad to be able to meet you briefly during your visit to the College of Humanities last month. I hope my perspective as an economics student wanting to keep the door open for future employment in Brazil was helpful as you made your decision to fund the Language Certificate program. I received the professional level language certificate, and I'm confident that as I enter Duke Law School in the fall, this addition to my resume will make me even more competitive for international externships or employment. Thanks again, Brother and Sister Fulton!

Sincerely,
Daniel Benson

Ira and Marylou Fulton give to the College of Humanities to assist students in their academic careers. Daniel Benson is typical of thousands of students who receive scholarship assistance and then go on to do great things in the Kingdom and society. If you would like to become part of the legacy of giving to the College of Humanities and blessing the lives of students, please contact Matt Christensen at 801-422-9151 or email him at mbchristensen@byu.edu. There are many ways to give and countless blessings to receive. ✦

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