

HUMANITIES

at BYU

BYU HUMANITIES
COLLEGE ALUMNI
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On Beyond Y

“One Touch of
Nature Makes the
Whole World Kin”

Students Travel to
Cormac McCarthy
Conference



from the Dean

A Math Assignment



Dean John R. Rosenberg

In previous issues of Humanities at BYU we have spoken of our efforts to encourage all BYU students to supplement their education with a Humanities experience (+Humanities) and of our plans to provide Humanities majors with an optional suite of activities that will help them leverage their liberal arts education

in the world of work (Humanities+). We are pleased with progress being made on both initiatives. On the +Humanities side, we launched this fall our Language Certificate program that allows any BYU student with foreign language competence to earn a certificate by sitting for a nationally-normed proficiency test and completing nine hours of university credit in language, literature, and culture. In September we awarded our first certificate (in Japanese) to an accounting major headed for law school. Our Humanities+ initiative is gaining steam through improved advisement practices, more flexible curricula, and expanding interest in professionally relevant and intellectually rigorous internships.

At cottage meetings with alumni last fall in Chicago and Dallas I announced that I would commit \$100,000 in 2011 to build our internship programs. Our intent was to make funds available to faculty to assist them in developing new internship opportunities and to grant stipends to qualifying students to make a summer internship more affordable. I am now confronted with the challenge to raise the money that will allow me to keep my commitment. Upon learning of my predicament, our College Volunteer Leadership Council, composed of distinguished college alumni, asked me to complete a simple math problem: divide \$100,000 by the number of people who receive Humanities at BYU. $\$100,000 \div 27,100 = \3.69

When I completed the operation, our alumni leaders suggested that even in times of economic crisis, a modest sum might be carved out of any personal budget. And so, by assignment from your alumni peers, I write seeking your help to bless the lives of humanities students. You need only go to humanities.byu.edu and find in the upper right corner of our homepage the "Giving" link. Behind that link you will discover a few simple steps to complete your online donation.

On behalf of our students who will benefit from your gift, I thank you. ♦

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John R. Rosenberg". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first and last names being more prominent.



Front cover: Singers perform at the annual Adventsingens in the Provo Tabernacle, December 2010.

Back cover: The Joseph F. Smith Building at Christmas

We invite readers to update their e-mail addresses with us. Please send updates to Carol Kounanis at cek@byu.edu

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To Spelling

“The righteous shall inherit heaves.”
—Bible misprint

How easily Freud becomes fraud or my aunt
turns into an ant when you go haywire, spelling.

One slip up and seven rabbis hop swiftly
through a shaded forest.

Someone waves the silver wand of a pen
and, under your spell, even time vanishes—

months transforming into moths and flitting away
through an open window. You sneak

up on us, penetrate the fences of our spell checks,
plague e-mails and memos as a pest blights crops—

so that, yesterday, when I wrote in my journal
we’re in love, it came out were in love.

♦ Sean Johnson, English MFA Graduate Student
(2010 Mayhew Creative Arts Contest Poetry Winner)

Photo by Johnathan Ruchti

A Note



◆ Stephen Tuttle of the English Department has collaborated with composer Steven Ricks of the BYU School of Music on a commissioned project for the Amsterdam-based chamber-music ensemble Hexnut. The writing and the music respond to images by Canadian photographer Edward

Burtynsky. A vocalist will perform with the ensemble at Amsterdam's largest concert hall in May 2011.

◆ If you don't find presenting a business plan to company management stressful enough, try doing it in another language. But BYU teams kept their cool while doing just that at the Business Language Case Competition last fall. The competition was hosted by BYU, Michigan State, and University of Miami and attracted twenty-two teams from sixteen universities across the country. Students were charged with analyzing complex business cases, then presenting and negotiating their solutions. Teams competed in either Chinese, Portuguese, or Spanish. Diego Flores, a Spanish-section judge from Quito, Ecuador, was particularly impressed with the BYU students' mastery of the business and linguistic aspects of the presentations and the students' ability to think on their feet. "They have great minds, a very good understanding of business, and also a skillful management of the language," Flores said. In the Chinese section, BYU took first and third. In Portuguese, BYU-Idaho took first followed by Utah State University and BYU.

◆ Last summer, the fourth-annual summer workshop for Spanish teachers was hosted by the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at BYU. Sixty-two elementary and secondary teachers attended. The workshop's principal focus was on communication and technology in the language classroom. The workshop was, in effect, a Spanish immersion experience for the teachers, as virtually all of the sessions, breaks, and lunches were conducted "in language." Judging from comments written by the attendees, the conference was

helpful and appreciated. "This is the first conference I've been to where not one minute was wasted." "All of the presentations were excellent—I am very grateful." "All of the technology [demonstrations] were great."

◆ The McKay School of Education and the Department of Spanish and Portuguese are pleased to announce BYU's participation in the US-Brazil Diversity Project, an exchange program that will afford BYU education majors an opportunity to study for a semester at partnership universities in Brazil and will allow Brazilian students to attend classes at BYU. The program is jointly funded through a FIPSE grant from the US Department of Education and a CAPES grant from Brazil's Ministry of Education, with the purpose of giving future teachers an opportunity to learn how schools work with students of different cultures, ethnicities, socioeconomic levels, and geographic locations. Beginning in Fall 2011, two teaching majors from BYU will have the opportunity to participate in the program, which provides funds for travel, accommodations, meals, and language study. In addition to taking Portuguese and education classes in Brazil, students will have the opportunity to spend time in various public and private school settings. They will also participate in an online learning community with other American and Brazilian students in the program in order to reflect on their experiences.

Moving *on*

EMERITUS DEATH

◆ DAVID L. EVANS, Professor Emeritus of English, died on April 15, 2010. His desire to teach developed in his youth, and after service in World War II and graduate degrees at the University of Utah, he joined the BYU faculty, where he spent nearly four decades. Described by colleagues as one with an "unusual combination of erudition and warmth," he was honored with the Karl G. Maeser Teaching Award in 1989.



The Adventsingen

by Kathryn Isaak

Salzburg, Austria, is a city rich with tradition. Most Americans know it as the birthplace of Mozart or the setting for *The Sound of Music*, but the city is also home to the world-famous *Salzburger Adventsingen*, an annual program of music and readings meant to usher in the Christmas season. In the early 1970s, Garold and Norma Davis, now retired BYU faculty members, took a group of BYU study abroad students to the Salzburg Adventsingen. Their experience prompted the Davises to ask themselves if there was a way to bring the spirit of the Adventsingen back to Provo, to *all* the students studying German at BYU. With the help of faculty, students, and community members, the Davises launched their own BYU Adventsingen, a tradition which has now endured for 36 years.

Advent celebrations are common in many Christian communities and usually begin in late November or early December. Observances may include prayers, hymns, poems, carols, dramatizations, and the lighting of Advent candles to mark each of the four Sundays before Christmas. No matter the format or content, the focus of any Advent program centers on the birth of Christ and the transcendent beauty of the Christmas season. Those who attend an Adventsingen are therefore treated to both a cultural and spiritual feast.

Part of the impetus behind the first BYU Adventsingen sprang from a desire to expose students to the language and rich cultural traditions of German speaking countries. With that goal in mind, members of the *Studentenchor* (student choir) have the opportunity



The organ at the Provo Tabernacle, where the Adventsingen was held

to improve their German skills while learning pieces by the likes of Bach and Brahms. Attendees are invited to sing with the performers on certain pieces, such as the famous “Andachtsjodler,” a folk song performed every year at the close of the Salzburg Adventsingen. The audience is also introduced to some of the unique folk traditions of Germany, Austria, and Switzerland—from the sound of a *Hackbrett* (hammered dulcimer), to a quartet of *Alphorns*, to a women’s chorus attired in traditional folk costumes or *Dirndl*.

Ultimately, it is the spirit of the evening which creates the most powerful impression for both performers and audience. This spirit is evident from the beginning of the evening, as familiar verses from the Gospel of Luke are read aloud in German, to the end, when the choir and congregation stand and sing “Stille Nacht” (“Silent Night”).

For most of its history, the BYU Adventsingen has been held at the Provo Tabernacle. Less than two weeks after the 2010 event, the beloved building was destroyed by fire. This was a tragedy for the community at large, as well as for those who make the Adventsingen an annual part of their Christmas. The tradition will carry on, even though any new venue won’t be the same for performers or audience. But come next December, performers will hold final rehearsals, don their folk costumes, tune their instruments, and continue to share their Christmas gift of music, word, and spirit. ♦



Costumed performers in the Adventsingen



by John S. Tanner, Professor of English
and former Academic Vice President

On Beyond Y

This summer I hiked the “Y” numerous times for my morning exercise. I like the hike because it is close enough that I can get to the trailhead quickly, steep enough that it provides good exercise, and short enough that I can do it before work. Plus it rewards one with a bird’s-eye view of the valley, with vistas enhanced by that special satisfaction available only to those who “earn the view.”

The main disadvantage of the trail for my taste is that it is so popular. Unless I get going well before daylight, I always hike in company. This is not so, however, whenever I hike beyond the “Y.” It always surprises me how few people hike the narrow trail that snakes off from the top right corner of the block “Y,” ascending up to a large outcropping of rock and then around Y Mountain along Slide Canyon. Y Mountain is actually deep, and beyond the “Y” the vegetation changes for the better. As one goes back into the mountain, one leaves the drab shrub oak behind and enters a world of evergreens, aspens, wild flowers, and meadows. I remember the first time I discovered the lovely, lush, lonely landscape beyond the “Y.” It was a revelation. There is a whole world on beyond the “Y.”

I felt like Conrad Cornelius o’Donald o’Dell, that proud young man who, when learning to spell, thought he knew everything when he got to Z.

Then he almost fell flat on his face on the floor
When I picked up the chalk and drew one letter more!
A letter he never had dreamed of before!
And I said, “You can stop, if you want, with the Z.
Because most people stop with the Z.
But not me!
In the places I go, there are things that I see
That I never could spell if I stopped with the Z.”
On Beyond Zebra, Dr. Seuss

Those who stop at Z (or Y) may not realize that the mountains ringing this valley only seem flat and monolithic. In fact, they enfold deeper and more varied scenery than is visible from the valley. For example, there is a lovely waterfall on Battle Creek trail just up from

Pleasant Grove. Above the falls, the trail passes through aspens and continues up to a high meadow skirting the face of Timp. Once you hike it, you never look at Mount Timp the same. The same is true when you hike Squaw Peak, or traverse the saddle from South Fork to Rock Canyon, or hike to the top of Y Mountain from the back—all hikes I did this summer. There is so much to see on beyond Y.

A university provides a natural home for adventurous spirits not content to stop at Y or Z. As students and teachers, we are—or ought to be—explorers and guides in the landscape of learning. At its best, research is not about “re-searching” but “new-searching.” It is about discovery. And there are few things more exciting in this life than intellectual discovery.

In our era, we don’t have the opportunity to be the first one to come upon a mighty waterfall, or set our foot on an un-climbed peak, or gaze upon some vast unknown sea. There are, alas!, no regions marked “terra incognita”; no timid cartographer’s warning, “Here be dragons.”

Fortunately, however, there is still “terra incognita” in the regions of intellect. We are drawn to these regions precisely by the possibility of glimpsing strange and wonderful new things—dragons!

Such intellectual journeys are not easy. Many a weary mile is required even to reach the foot of the mountains we climb. And mountains of the mind have steep ascents, which must be scaled in pursuit of hard-won discoveries.

But, oh!, the vistas from the top when we have earned the view. And the thrill of helping others discover brave new worlds!

You’ll be sort of surprised what there is to be found
Once you go beyond Z and start poking around!
So, on beyond Zebra!
Explore!
Like Columbus!

For we “really don’t know all there is to be known.”
There are worlds to discover on beyond Y. ♦

“One touch of Nature Makes the Whole World Kin”



Thoughts on Alcott and the Lessons She Teaches

by Jesse Crisler
Department of English

From a talk at the English
Awards Banquet, March 2010

Years ago I taught at another institution, and I recall those years with ironic delight, for interaction with students there often resulted in situations as humorous as they remain memorable. Passing the open office of a colleague one morning as a new semester was about to commence, I stopped to say hello. When he saw me in his doorway, he immediately began chuckling, telling me he had just returned from the textbook area of the bookstore. While examining the titles I had ordered for my adolescent literature class, he overheard one young man guffaw to his friend, “What idiot thinks his students are going to read eighteen books?” Though I did not yet know who had enrolled in my course, I happily counted at least one student who would not be taking it: the young man who knew me only as an

“idiot.” As I left Lance to continue my own walk to the bookstore, I also overheard an exchange between similarly academically minded students. Said the first, “Dude, who you got for English this semester?” to which the second responded, “Man, I ain’t got no English.” Passing them, I couldn’t resist agreeing with his accurate self-assessment by voicing a succinct, “Indeed.”

Since such moments as these are happily not that uncommon for most of us who teach English, I tonight thought I would begin my remarks by asking you to consider five other recollections from a typical English teacher’s past. As a relatively impressionable youngster, I grew up in a home which valued the written word: my parents subscribed to daily newspapers; the mailman each week delivered a host of periodicals to our

house; one of my earliest memories is of listening to my father read me books each night by the children's writer Thornton Burgess; bi-weekly, I accompanied my mother to the local public library where she routinely checked out two score books and more, and where from the time I was six years old I had my own library card; my siblings and I counted the books we received from our parents and grandparents as prized Christmas and birthday gifts; finally, despite the tiny disposable income I now realize my parents commanded during Caesar's Gallic Wars when I was a boy, books were everywhere in evidence in our house. I saw them in bookcases in every room; I found them stacked on both sides of my parents' bed; boxes of them reposed in the storage room my father built onto our house when I was in grade school; and I knew that when I could not locate my parents anywhere else in the house, I could more than likely find them either in a favorite chair or lying on their bed reading books. I liked seeing these books; they gave me a sense of appreciable wealth, for how prosperous was the boy who could pull out a book at random and through reading transport himself to exciting other worlds?

Books gave me a sense of appreciable wealth, for how prosperous was the boy who could pull out a book at random and through reading transport himself to other worlds

I remember the magical experiences I had when I first encountered the richly evocative prose of Richard Halliburton's *The Royal Road to Romance* (1925), the mysteriously thrilling language of Kipling's *The Jungle Book* (1894), or the comfortably resonant words of Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876). I also liked seeing our books lined up in perfect order on their respective shelves, as if asking to be selected. During the Second World War when my two older sisters were very young, my mother had purchased many books in sets—a three-volume dictionary with an oversized atlas as a bonus, a four-volume collection of Bible stories, a six-volume “edition” of Twain's best-known works, and so on; the “set” that I liked best consisted of six volumes, each bound in what Emily Dickinson felicitously refers to as a “rush of cochineal” accented in the lime green of Coleridge's famous “bower.” This set, novels by Louisa May Alcott, formed a centerpiece in our home library, always beckoning to me to sample its delights, which I eventually did. Visible through the transom above my office door, this set now graces a top shelf in my office, where a few years ago it caused the wife of Trent Hickman, one my fellow faculty members, to comment

to him, “Jesse's books are prettier than yours.” Not to worry, Professor Hickman: I feel sure that when you are as old as I am, you too will have acquired a fair stock of “pretty” books.

The second vignette occurred years ago when I taught a section of our senior seminar here at BYU. I was looking forward to a lively discussion of *Little Women* (1869), one of my favorite novels, but I could never have anticipated the reaction of Jill Samuelson, a student in the class, to my initial query, “Why do we like it?” When called on, she spun a marvelous tale of multi-generational savoring of Alcott's novel. “As I was reading the hundred or so assigned pages,” she said, “I remembered the first time I read *Little Women* several years ago. My mother had recommended it to me one summer when I was bored; she told me that *her* mother had suggested that she read it when she had been about my age and that my grandmother had read it when she was our age as well. Though I realize *now* that my mother had thought that my knowing that both she and my grandmother had read and liked the book would significantly increase its appeal to me, *then* I merely read the novel for its story. This time, however, I keep feeling my mother reading over my shoulder, and I find myself imagining how she would react to an amusing passage, an emotional situation, a trusted homily; as I pause to ponder those reactions and match them to my own, I also inexplicably feel my mother's mother reading over her shoulder and reacting as well. Since we each read the book at different historical moments, can our reactions be the same, I wonder, and conclude that we are but three in a long line of girls who have enjoyed *Little Women*, each on our own terms, no matter how different those terms might be.”

The third memory is a little more recent. Chris Crowe, another colleague, once wrote a brief essay for *English Journal* which he titled, “A Defense: (Or, Real Men Don't Read *Little Women*).” In it he humorously clarifies why he has never completed the novel. He chronicles his years as “an avid young reader” when, like “any self-respecting” male, he never read it or any other “*girl's* book”; he mentions that despite having “drifted into a life of books and writing” in which he has “learned the merit of enduring books” that he “didn't like” so he “could appreciate them,” he still “could never make it past” the novel's third chapter. Finally, he remarks that “my good friend and colleague, Jesse Crisler,

stirred the coals of my guilt by . . . dogged attempts to convert me to the wonders of Alcott in general and *Little Women* in particular. I had faith in Jesse. . . . [H]e had proven to have keen insight into books and general good taste in reading. With my trust in him as a crutch, I limped again . . . to page 1 of Alcott's book." Notwithstanding our friendship, however, the result for Chris was disastrous: he read the first sentence, deemed it "awful," but resolutely "plodded on" to chapter 3, what he terms his personal "Heartbreak Hill, Martin's Cove, and Donner Pass all rolled into one," at which point he closed the book. Chris ends the column smugly, noting that his contempt for the novel is "a genetic defect . . . related to the Y chromosome," which explains why real men find perpetual pleasure in watching hours of "ESPN Sportscenter, playing racquetball, weightlifting, sitting around in the locker room shooting the bull with the guys, or reading tough books by Clancy or Grisham or . . . Steinbeck or . . . Hemingway." Naturally, Chris, a friend I respect, disappoints me in his close-mindedness anent Alcott, but I take satisfaction in knowing that he received his comeuppance a few years later when his wife, Elizabeth, forced him to watch the 1994 film version of *Little Women* after which he reluctantly informed me that a book that could produce a movie as good as that one might actually be worth reading.

A fourth incident happened in a course on adolescent literature I taught several years ago, which included, as our second reading, *Little Women*. Members of the class, of whom only three were men, responded well to the novel. That these male students were gracious enough to keep their protests to themselves rather than obstreperously sharing them in the tradition of Professor Crowe, gratified me. But I was even more gratified later in the semester when one student enthusiastically expressed her cheerful anticipation that in another course she was concurrently taking the last work the class would read was *Little Women*. I soon discovered that this other course was one on early American literature, taught by Keith Lawrence, whom I commend for his enlightened approach to our field. An inveterate physical fitness buff who visits the Richards Building on campus daily for a rigorous workout and whose debonair

good looks belie his true age, Keith is as "real" a man as Chris Crowe, whose physique is currently plummeting irretrievably into later middle age, can ever hope to be, notwithstanding Chris's former glory years as a Fiesta Bowl alumnus and WAC champion.



Finally, we move nearer the present. Assigned a few years ago to teach a graduate seminar in late nineteenth-century American literature, I chose texts judiciously, realizing that many of the works I like best from this period would likely be the very ones my students would have read. Having sadly accepted to my infinite dismay

Reasoning that one of our goals in graduate-level courses ought to be either to bring new works to our students' awareness or to present them with well known classics clad in new dress, I determined to give Alcott's text one more whirl on the reading merry-go-round at BYU.

that not all students, especially not all male students, not to mention some unfortunately resistant and intransigently

benighted male faculty members, share my passion for *Little Women*, I initially excised it from the course's endlessly protean reading list. But it stubbornly refused to take its quiet place in the "bonfire of the vanities" comprising works I assumed I would never teach again. (A side note here: another work grudgingly consigned to this conflagration is Yeats's exquisite poem, "Leda and the Swan," the throbbing imagery of which seems to be more than some of our students here at the university can handle.)

Reasoning at last that one of our goals in graduate-level courses ought to be either to bring new works to our students' awareness or to present them with well known classics clad in new dress, I determined to give Alcott's text one more whirl on the reading merry-go-round at BYU. When I walked into the seminar room on the first day of class, however, I lamented my decision, for with male students outnumbering their female counterparts nearly two to one, I knew that once again the task of convincing a group of men, not just reluctant to appreciate Alcott but possibly even hostile toward her, to relish her most famous novel might tax even my persuasive powers. At the conclusion of the course I asked one of those men, George Gordon-Smith, to write a synopsis of his reaction to this particular novel. Articulate, witty, self-deprecating, and honest to a fault, George seemed a fair choice for this assignment, though I confess that I awaited his report with some trepidation.

A marathoner, a tri-athlete, a snappy dresser, and, if sundry sighs in the wake of his progress through the halls of the JFSB are any indication, a consistent smiter of the fairer sex, George maintains an enviably manly reputation in the English Department. I share here excerpts from his lucid remarks:

“I had never actually read [*Little Women*] before this class, but I was familiar with the plot, understood its importance in the canon, and knew that it was wildly popular during the nineteenth century—and still is. Perhaps, I was bitter. Preferring Henry James in almost every way and baffled that while *The Portrait of a Lady* sold only twelve thousand copies at publication, *Little Women* sold over eighty thousand, I was more than a ‘little’ determined to dislike the book. And I did, at least initially. . . . We were required to read the first fourth of the text by our next class. Rancorous over time wasted, I was the first to raise my hand in response to Dr. Crisler’s question as to whether we had enjoyed the book. I was taken aback by his response to my pithy, ‘I hated it.’ He clearly stated, ‘Let’s just pretend [for a moment] that we are [critics] in an English class and discuss and analyze what we did or did not like about this text without simple vituperative remarks.’ Realizing that there was really nothing about it I liked, I went home determined

to find something ‘good’ about the book. It turns out I had been wrong all along. Alcott’s text is not nauseatingly maudlin. Rather, it

is insightfully precise in its sanguine manner of telling average adolescent women that real life need not exclude the ideal. Just like all great literature, it speaks today to a generation of women looking for meaning in their turbulent lives.” To the vast disappointment of his women peers in our MA program as well as the panting bosoms of hordes of nubile damsels in the freshman writing classes he has taught, George, once eminently single, has married and acquired his own lovely daughter, which puts an ironic spin on the final sentence in his assessment of *Little Women*: “My only hope now is that if I am ever fortunate to have a daughter she will discover [this book’s] merits sooner than I did.”



As the thirteen film and television adaptations based on *Little Women* since the first silent movie made from it

in 1917 amply demonstrate, the novel is eternal, having stood time’s test well. Whether our vision of Jo March corresponds best to interpretations of her character by Katherine Hepburn, June Allyson, Florence Henderson, Meredith Baxter, Winona Ryder, or perhaps to none of these but, rather, to a creation of our own imaginations, such as that of my student’s or her mother’s or her grandmother’s, we are all certain that we know and love Jo for both her faults and her virtues. Yes, the book is saccharinely sentimental; yes, too, parts of it now seem hopelessly dated; and, yes, as well, it is overly didactic, for Alcott never met a moral teaching she could resist either embracing or capitalizing on in print. Even so, the novel’s virtues are legion. Aside from the precision that George found in it and its worth as a text that perennially speaks to its readers, what else accounts for the astonishing popularity of *Little Women*, as well as the increasing respect accorded Alcott herself?

Initial responses to this question possibly seem conventional: for example, as evidenced by the famous opening scene in the novel, when the March sisters lament their reduced circumstances as Christmas approaches without the prospect of presents, a solid example of what critic Northrup Frye terms writing “to the moment,” which immediately captures Alcott’s audi-

ence, Alcott knew how to tell a good story; she also creates memorable characters—people her readers think they know, or

would like to become acquainted with, or perhaps have already met, or, if not, wish they could encounter; in other words, Alcott’s readers find themselves comfortable with her characters; and in terms of theme, Alcott deals in universals—clearly so, as indicated by her characters who model commonplace behavior, but also by the nostalgic domesticity of the novel’s plot, full, as it is, of scenes bespeaking not just a busy existence, but also what Alexander McCall Smith in one of recent *Precious Ramotswe* mysteries refers to as “a full cupboard of life” in which characters interest themselves so intimately in the concerns of others that the everyday becomes the momentous both for them and for Alcott’s audience.

But closer scrutiny of the novel reveals more critical reasons for its durability. A supreme ironist, Alcott subtly discovers the many contrarities present in the lives of the March family whose neighbors, the Laurences, are

rich beyond the Marches' wildest dreams but are not happy, whose father is a minister yet never preaches a sermon, and whose most boyish member, Jo, must ultimately realize that true femininity has its rightful place even in herself. Alcott also employs satire effectively, as she mercilessly examines fashionable dress, social mores, wedding customs, misapplied intellect, literary trash, Americans abroad, and much else; never intrusive, her satire nevertheless is inescapable, helping readers fully grasp what proper modes of behavior not just for "little women" but also for themselves should be. Another strength in the novel is Alcott's considerable descriptive powers: who can forget a shorn Jo when her tears finally console her for having selflessly sold her hair, her "one beauty," according to her sister Amy, to help finance Marmee's train trip to Washington, DC, to be with an ailing husband and father?

Additionally, Alcott crafts a structurally tight narrative, punctuated in Part One by the recurrent twin images of burdens the March sisters must bear and castles in the air they hope eventually to attain and extended in Part Two, which chronicles how each sister ultimately does realize her own castle.

Serviceable as all these and other answers are, however, the most compelling is neither a conventional one nor a matter of superb literary technique. Rather, it is the great and lasting service the novel performs by linking its readers to the vast continuum of a grand western literary heritage that Alcott is part of and that lives on among all readers. The staggering list of titles and authors Alcott effortlessly mentions in the novel, literary characters to whom she habitually refers, and works from which she breezily quotes clearly disclose that Alcott read much, and even though much of what she read is no longer standard fare even for the most liberally educated among us, I am convinced that her familiarity with other writers and their work comforts her readers, wrapping them in a kind of literary cocoon, one not only roomy enough to contain themselves, Alcott, her contemporaries, and those other writers but also snug enough to make her readers feel quite at home even with authors whose works they have neither read, nor in some cases heard of, nor, for that manner, may ever read.

Alcott was vitally in touch with both her own time and a lengthy literary past, and we continue to be informed by the sprightly elegance and urbane grace of her prose in ours.

Like Jo in *Little Women* whom Mr. Laurence allows to explore the literary treasures her own family could not afford to purchase but yet had learned to extol, Alcott mined the almost limitless ore of the well-endowed library of her family's distinguished neighbor, Ralph Waldo Emerson. Likewise, she devoured contemporary writing of all stripes—history, fiction, religious tracts, philosophy, moral musings, and drama. Nor did Alcott confine her reading solely to the present: her interests were catholic, as she mastered ancient classics as easily as she delighted in Transcendentalist pamphlets. Luckily for us, Alcott was vitally in touch with both her own time and a lengthy literary past, and we continue to be informed by the

sprightly elegance and urbane grace of her prose in ours. Ulysses in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* observes that "one touch of

nature makes the whole world kin" (3.3.175); surely, the continued appreciation of Alcott's *Little Women* likewise makes all her readers "kin."

Now, many of you may be wondering why at an English Department Awards Banquet I have devoted almost all of my remarks to only one work. One of our aims as your professors is to teach you ways to judge literature on its own merits. Some of you are leaving the halls of academe almost immediately; for others that departure will arrive soon enough. When it inevitably does, no longer will you be able to rely on your professors to identify for you the literary works you "ought to read"; instead, you must needs depend on your own tastes. Mine, as I have detailed, have led me, among other works, to *Little Women*; yours may take you elsewhere. Regardless of your selections, however, you must always be ready to defend your choices or, conversely, to challenge the choices others make with something more informed than George's flippant gut reaction, "I hated it," or Chris Crowe's complacently misinformed self-assessment as a "real" man. To paraphrase a luminous observation by Coleridge, "not the [book] which we have *read*, but that to which we *return*, with the greatest pleasure, possesses the genuine power, and claims the name of *essential* [literature]." ♦

Students Travel to *Cormac McCarthy Conference*

by Ruth Miller

While presenting a paper at a worldwide literary conference is a rare opportunity even for graduate students, four lucky undergraduates were able to do just that in October 2010 when they participated in the Cormac McCarthy Society Conference at Texas State University in San Marcos.

During the winter 2010 semester, Hillary Gamblin, Ben Miller, Ruth Miller, and Nick Peterson took Dr. Phillip Snyder's course on the works of Cormac McCarthy. Under the direction of Dr. Snyder, they wrote and submitted papers for the conference. "Before taking the class, I had read only one McCarthy novel, but I knew I had to read more," said Ruth Miller, a senior majoring in American Studies who presented a paper on humor and comic theory in *Blood Meridian*. "His writing is possibly the most epic and compelling that I've ever read, and he's extremely relevant to anyone hoping to study postmodern themes in literature and the humanities."

Entitled "Celebrating Twenty-Five Years of *Blood Meridian*," the conference featured literary criticism from scholars and students from all over the world. Hillary Gamblin, a senior majoring in English, said, "I could not have chosen a better crowd for my first presentation at an international literary conference—the McCarthy scholars were so welcoming, supportive, and encouraging."

Hillary joined Ben Miller, a junior majoring in English, in a panel discussing themes of freedom and proper burial spaces in McCarthy's third novel, *Child of God*. Ben said, "It was exhilarating to share my own ideas with the group, be part of their conversation, and have scholars come up to me afterwards and ask questions and give suggestions and just talk about ideas. It was a wonderful experience."

Nick Peterson, a senior majoring in philosophy, presented on Kantian duty in *The Road*. He said, "Because Professor Snyder's course made us so familiar with Cormac's canon, we didn't feel like outsiders—we got the jokes and references, and we were just as excited as anyone to get a sneak peek at the . . . recently opened McCarthy archives."

Professors Phillip and Delys Snyder each also made presentations at the conference.

Between sessions, the students browsed the library's collection of rare editions, original manuscripts, book covers, and commentary from Cormac McCarthy on his novels, as well as some film adaptations of his works. They also explored central Texas landmarks. "We arrived early and drove into the hill country," said Ruth Miller. "We felt so lucky that we were able to take advantage of historical and cultural as well as academic opportunities." ♦



Ruth Miller, Hillary Gamblin, Ben Miller, and Nick Peterson (with Professors Delys and Phillip Snyder in back) at the Cormac McCarthy Society Conference at Texas University

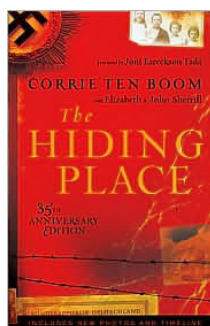
Books that made *a difference*



Emily Scoresby Franzen
Mendota Heights, Minnesota
English Teaching, 2007

A Wrinkle in Time ♦ by Madeleine L'Engle

I read voraciously as a child, but shied away from science fiction or fantasy. As a result, I missed out on the wonder of *A Wrinkle in Time*. When I turned to it as an adult, however, I found a treasure. What a wonderful story—not just of time travel and spirits with pronouns as names, but of agency, evil, and the power of love. The parallels to the Plan of Salvation are uncanny and the book is a sweet reminder of the things that are really important.



Nancy Ann Gauld
Independence, Missouri
English, 1958

The Hiding Place ♦ by Corrie Ten Boom

This is one of the few books I like to read yearly. It never fails to amaze, humble, and uplift me as I consider the life of this extraordinary woman and her family and friends. It is a constant reminder of the importance of Christ in our lives, and the good He can accomplish under the most horrendous conditions.



G. Robert (Bob) Ruff
Salt Lake City, Utah
English, 1943

The Magic Mountain ♦ by Thomas Mann

Way back in the fall of 1937, Assistant Professor Gladys Black invited four of us in her freshman English class to join her on a trip to the University of Utah to hear a lecture by distinguished novelist Thomas Mann. We piled into Miss Black's new Oldsmobile and parked in front of Kingsbury Hall. With great anticipation, we seated ourselves near the front. Mann's daughter acted as interpreter, and Mann told us something of his background and discussed several of his works. We had already read some of his shorter novellas, and I was almost through *The Magic Mountain*. This book especially resonated with me, because my father had recently battled for three years, and miraculously survived, the same dreaded tuberculosis that Mann depicts so graphically. Hans Castorp and his fellow patients in the high altitude sanatorium create a world apart from the world they left down below. Their intellectual debates can be read on many levels. I've re-read the book several times and found new meanings with each reading. In my opinion, it ranks with the best of the novels of the century that is known for great novels.

Let us hear from you! Tell us about a book, or several, that made a difference for you, at some point in your life. Include your name, major, year of graduation, and current place of residence, with a description about the book's influence on you. Email ron_woods@byu.edu

Why We Choose to *give*



Robert and Susan Kimball
Dallas, Texas

Almost every time we visit family and friends in Utah, we also return to the BYU campus. We enjoy the atmosphere, the memories, the encounters with friends and faculty, and of course the mandatory stop at

the Creamery. We are reminded how significant our BYU experiences were in shaping and blessing our lives.

We're pleased when colleagues comment that many of the top law school graduates they interview and recruit from law schools across the country were previous BYU undergraduates (many from the College

of Humanities). We've been impressed by what we have learned about the Humanities+ program and Dean Rosenberg's goal to facilitate more international internships. We believe those kinds of experiences help students better prepare for and obtain further education and jobs.

BYU provides one of the best educations available in quality and cost. We wonder, in light of the worldwide demands on the Church's resources, whether BYU can continue to be affordable for many families without greater financial support from alumni. We want others to enjoy the kinds of associations, employment, and intellectual pursuits we've been privileged to enjoy. So we give a high priority to the College of Humanities in our charitable contributions, putting it among our top three recipients annually. We hope others will also include the College of Humanities in their donations. ♦

How I have been *blessed*



Annique Winegar
English major

Throughout the past three years at BYU, I have had many wonderful opportunities and classes that have better prepared me for the future. This past summer I was able to complete an internship at the Federal Judicial Center in Washington, DC. This experience broadened my

view of future professional options. I was able to meet and talk with professionals from varied academic backgrounds. These encounters helped me realize the variety of career choices available with a college degree.

The opportunity to network in Washington, DC, proved to be invaluable because I was able to ask specific questions, hand out resumes, make connections with future employers, and interact with those who could help me jumpstart a career. I truly believe that internships are a perfect capstone to an undergraduate degree.

I loved my internship at the Federal Judicial Center and will use the skills I learned there throughout my future academic and career endeavors. The internship has been the best thing I've done at BYU so far! I was greatly blessed by those who have donated to the College of Humanities, helping make internships like mine possible. I hope to someday return the favor. ♦

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feedback?

We'd like to hear your views, your memories of campus experiences, or an update on your life since leaving BYU. Please email ron_woods@byu.edu.

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