

humanities at **BYU**



BYU COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES
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Dean John R. Rosenberg

Bridges

One of my favorite excursions tracks the pilgrimage road that ends at the tomb of St. James in Santiago de Compostela (Spain). Travelers pause at dozens of Romanesque churches, ascend and descend two mountain ranges, and rest in river-threaded valleys.

Across those rivers they gratefully find bridges that ease their push toward Santiago. These bridges are embellished with tradition and legend. There is, for example, the bridge at Orbigo, where in 1434 Suero de Quiñones (admired by Don Quixote) held a massive jousting tournament—30 days, 300 lances broken—undertaken so that he might be absolved of a weighty promise he had made to a woman. But my favorite bridge is Puente la Reina, presided over by a statue of the Queen of Heaven (it is said that every century or so a bird flies by to dust the statue with its wings). This structure marks a symbolic initiation to the pilgrimage experience. For a thousand years pilgrims set out from here, ascended the bridge to its high point at the top of the central arch, and then descended into the spiritual journey suggested by the pilgrimage itself. The bridge, then, was a liminal space, a marker that separated the world of worldly obligation from the

upcoming sacred journey. Bridges do that: they are a stone umbilical that binds where we've been to where we're going. Bridges, both tangible and metaphorical, are the conjunctions in the syntax of human experience. The *pontiff* is said to be the bridge (*pons*) between God and man. A handshake or embrace is a temporary bridge between two people. A book is a bridge between two minds (but only when opened).

Those educated in the Humanities are bridge builders. Not *civil* engineers, but *civic engineers*, they bridge past and present, foreign and familiar, high and low, building an infrastructure of ideas that makes possible the democratic human conversation. We are proud of that role, and rightfully celebrate a Humanities education as a non-vocational pursuit

of destinations, people, and ideas that is transcendent (“*L. tran(s)cend-re* to climb over or beyond”; in other words, bridge-like). Yet, the perpetual pilgrimage is not possible (or desirable) for most people. Indeed, some two-thirds of Humanities



graduates work in fields not directly related to their courses of study (such as businessmen and women, attorneys, health care professionals, civil servants, and parents). It is only superficially paradoxical to insist that we are justified in promoting the *disinterested* nature of the Humanities as we help our students build bridges that connect their studies in language, literature, art, and philosophy to the vocations that will demand most of their time and labor. Our students must understand that the skills,

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Cover photo: Puente la Reina, Navarra, Spain

We'd really like to have readers update their email addresses with us. Please send updates to Carol Kounanis at cek@byu.edu.

Quotidiana, an online anthology of classical essays, has received an Albert J. Colton Fellowship for Projects of National or International Scope from the Utah Humanities Council. The site, www.quotidiana.org, is an ongoing project created by Patrick Madden, assistant professor of English. It contains a collection of 377 essays by almost 70 essayists as well as several interviews with contemporary essayists.

The Colton Fellowship is named after the late Albert Colton, a Salt Lake attorney and Episcopal priest who loved the arts and was a member of the board of the Utah Humanities Council. The award established in his name provides Dr. Madden with \$3,000 to further the work of *Quotidiana*, which Dr. Madden hopes to expand to include book reviews, conference papers, audio files, and contemporary essays. One of Dr. Madden's own essays is found in this issue of *Humanities at BYU* (page 8).



The Honored Alumni Lecturer for 2008 was E. Markham "Mark" Bench, English '64, of White Plains, New York. Mark serves as the executive director of the World Press Freedom Committee, an organization that monitors restrictions on the flow of news, information, and opinion across the world. Early in his career, he managed New York City radio station WRFM, helping the station earn more public affairs and journalism awards than any other competing station at the time. Mark has also served as mayor of Scarsdale, New York.

Scott Sprenger, associate professor of French Studies and director of BYU's European Studies program, has been awarded a Fulbright-Schuman Grant to conduct research in Paris from February to June 2009. Professor Sprenger's research project focuses on a new language policy in the European Union called "multilingualism," a plan designed to promote cultural unity and identity in spite of language barriers across European nations. Sprenger will examine the implementation of the policy in four countries: France, Belgium, Romania, and Sweden.



Three more lectures by College of Humanities faculty members have been scheduled for broadcast on BYU-TV as part of the College of Humanities' "Voices in the Human Conversation" series. The lectures will be broadcast each Saturday at 3 p.m. Mountain Time on the following dates.

Feb. 7: Greg Clark (pictured right), professor of English, "Civic Lessons from Jazz Music"

Feb. 21: Dale Pratt (below), associate professor of Spanish, "Wheels, Windmills, Webs: Don Quixote's Library and the History of Reading"



Feb. 28: Roger Macfarlane, associate professor of classics, "Illuminating the Papyri from Herculaneum and Beyond: BYU, Multispectral Imaging, and Ancient Texts"

In later weeks, BYU-TV will also re-broadcast four previous lectures by Allen Christenson, Donald Parry, Royal Skousen, and George Tate. Although these lectures will be broadcast on the same time and day, their order is forthcoming. Check www.byutv.org for updates. After their first broadcast, all faculty lectures are available on the College home page, humanities.byu.edu.



Arabic without Walls

*T*he language learning program, Arabic Without Walls, co-developed at BYU, was the winner of the 2008 “Access to Language Education” Award given by The Computer-Aided Language Instruction Consortium (CALICO), the Esperantic Studies Foundation, and Lernu.net. This prize is given each year to an outstanding language learning web site.

Arabic Without Walls began in 2005, when the U.S. Department of Education awarded a partnership between BYU and UC Berkeley \$425,000 to produce an online introductory course in Arabic. Professor Kirk Belnap of the Department of Asian and Near Eastern Languages at BYU and Dr. Sonia S'hiri of UC headed the project.

A key participant in the development of the project was Mike Bush of the Center for Language Studies. Dr. Bush directed student employees of the ARCLITE lab, which he supervises, as they video-taped interviews, edited video, wrote lesson plans, and trained professors and students at UC Berkeley how to use and test the material. According to Dr. Belnap, “Mike Bush and ARCLITE helped us streamline and considerably accelerate the production of learning activities and made critical breakthroughs in how to handle the tracking of student progress.”

The CALICO awards committee said, “The Arabic Without Walls site was chosen for the richness and depth of its materials in support of learning Arabic. The evaluation committee was impressed with



Mike Bush of the Center for Language Studies

the resources that Arabic Without Walls can offer to individual learners, both within the University’s course programs, and for those attempting to learn on their own. Arabic Without Walls is very professionally done, both in terms of pedagogy and in terms of web implementation. It offers many innovative features, including nice use of video and audio. We hope that Arabic Without Walls will continue to expand and enhance its materials, and to support Arabic education for both your students and for the larger language learning community.”

Students *Mentor* and Are Mentored in Pennsylvania



Matthew Jackson
English Department

Teaching and, *a fortiori*, mentoring, can be thought of as the relational pursuit of truth that draws out the infinite in us and breaks the confining circularity of mundane learning. In such a pursuit, the traditional model of teacher as the learned lecturer and students as *tabulae rasae* ready for the imprinting of knowledge is dissolved.

Last spring, funded by a university mentoring grant, with help from the College of Humanities and the English Department, ten students and I participated in the “Examining Whiteness” conference at Allegheny College in Meadville, PA.

Our preparations for the conference began well before our arrival in Pennsylvania; each student had written a paper engaging the works of four prominent scholars who had been invited as the keynote speakers of the conference: Charles W. Mills (John Evans Professor of Moral and Intellectual Philosophy, Northwestern University), Linda Alcoff (Syracuse University), Shannon Sullivan (Penn State University), and Lucias Outlaw (Vanderbilt University). These scholars spoke to all of the participants on the first day of the conference.

The second day of the conference was scheduled for the students to give their papers addressing issues of (racial) whiteness. However, it was not until we actually started attending the early sessions of the conference that my students realized that the professors whose works they had engaged in their papers were actually going to be in the room listening and asking questions about the papers.

My students were scheduled to give their papers in two subsequent sessions after lunch, and during

the lunch break they expressed their anxiety. I tried to reassure them, although I have to confess to being a bit nervous myself. My students were presenting work to scholars whose work I had read and admired for years, and I wondered if I had prepared my students well enough, if they had really studied and understood the scholars’ arguments, and if their papers (even after the many drafts we’d exchanged) were going to be strong and clear. And I wondered if they would deliver them with poise and style.

I needn’t have worried. The questions that other students asked upon hearing the papers were very satisfying; to hear the prominent scholars, one in particular, ask respectful questions and make genuinely helpful comments on my students’ papers was thrilling.

After the session ended, it was very fulfilling to hear my students talk about their experience with such excitement and animation—and they had every right to be pleased and enriched by the opportunity.

The students wrote letters of thanks to the ORCA office, the College of Humanities, the English Department, and to Allegheny College. Here are a few representative excerpts from four of them:

“One of the most valuable parts of this experience was the opportunity to associate with well-known



Students benefited from the opportunity to research and then present their own papers.

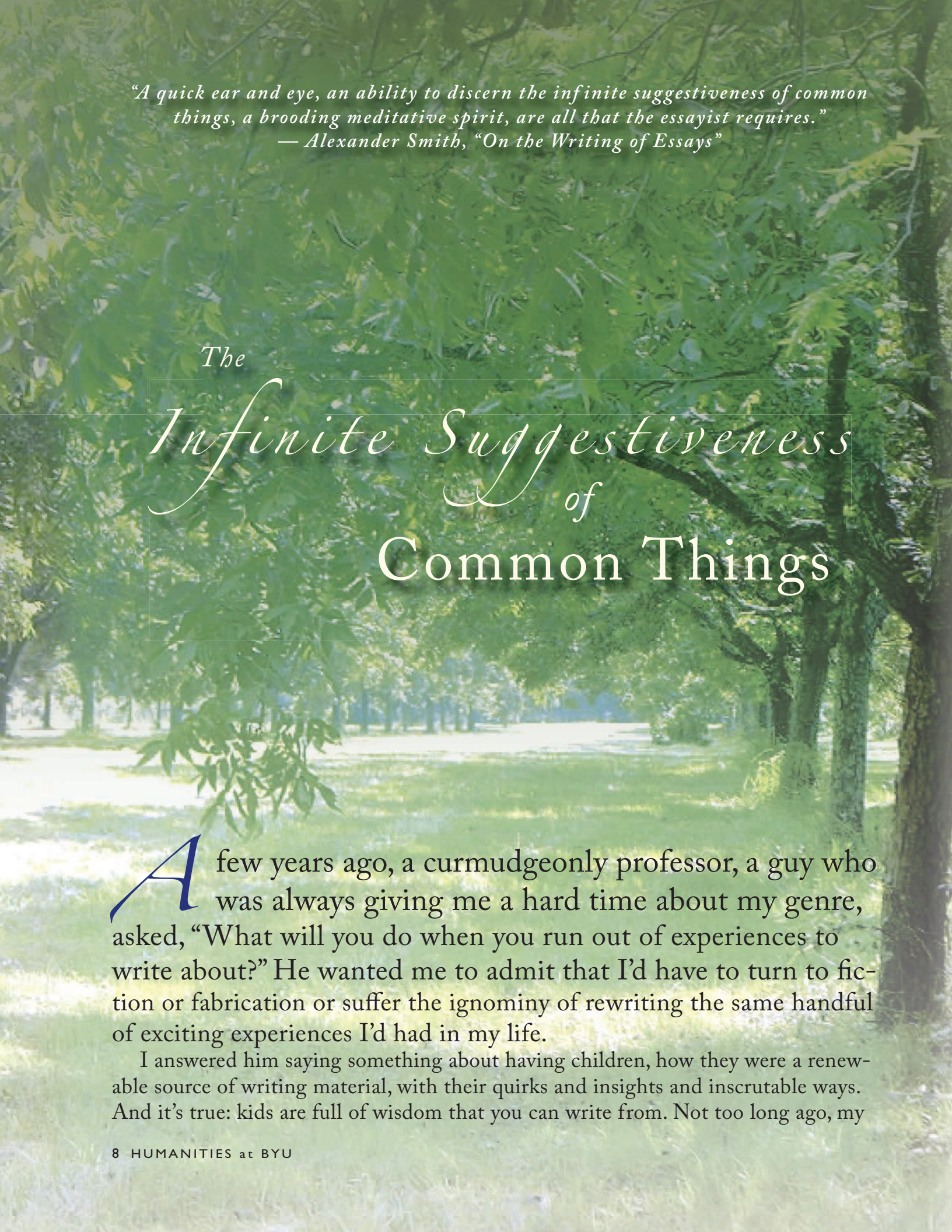
scholars, as well as undergraduates from other colleges across the country. It was insightful to be immersed in conversations where individuals were coming from perspectives that differ from an LDS viewpoint. I felt like my own perspective was broadened as I realized that not everyone bases their opinions on similar values. I felt that it raised my whole level of thought.”

“Because I wasn’t [attending the conference] as a part of a class, it was so exciting to be immersing myself in these issues because I was genuinely interested in them, and not for a grade. I felt like I brought a whole new perspective on learning and education home with me. I was more interested in really learning the material and how it applies to real life.”

“The opportunity to research and then present my own paper was a great growing experience for me. . . . I feel grateful for the opportunity [the conference] provided me to learn and engage in meaningful discourse about the important issue of racism in America. I consider the conference one of the highlights of my education at BYU so far.”

“The conference allowed me to understand racial issues that I had never had the opportunity to learn about before. It was also a great experience to be able to hear and even get feedback from both the professors we had studied and other professors who were so knowledgeable on the subjects. I am so grateful that I had this opportunity. I truly consider it to be one of the best experiences that I’ve had while attending Brigham Young University.”

I wish that every student and teacher at BYU could do something akin to what my students and I experienced. Upon a few months reflection, I now see that though I acted as a mentor, I was truly mentored. My own circular and mundane ways of knowing were disrupted by my interaction with the students and professors in preparing for and participating in the conference. Thanks to the ten students who helped mentor me: Lee Adams, Kristin Anderson, Nikki Appleby, Jaqueline Aquino, Machayla Barros, Kaila Brown, Hali Donohoo, Tyler LeFevre, Ilene Mortensen, and Jane Wilson.



*"A quick ear and eye, an ability to discern the infinite suggestiveness of common things, a brooding meditative spirit, are all that the essayist requires."
— Alexander Smith, "On the Writing of Essays"*

The
Infinite Suggestiveness
of
Common Things

A few years ago, a curmudgeonly professor, a guy who was always giving me a hard time about my genre, asked, "What will you do when you run out of experiences to write about?" He wanted me to admit that I'd have to turn to fiction or fabrication or suffer the ignominy of rewriting the same handful of exciting experiences I'd had in my life.

I answered him saying something about having children, how they were a renewable source of writing material, with their quirks and insights and inscrutable ways. And it's true: kids are full of wisdom that you can write from. Not too long ago, my

oldest daughter, Adriana, who speaks both English and Spanish, misunderstood the Paul McCartney song “Coming Up” to say “Caminar like a flower,” which is, “Walk like a flower,” which I like better than “Walk like an Egyptian,” at least. And just the other day, another daughter, whom I’d just put to bed, grew impatient waiting for me to bring her a tissue. When I finally appeared, she pointed to her nose and explained, “I put the booger back.” At least she didn’t wipe it on the blanket.

The essay is an open, leisurely form, somewhat allergic to adventure, certainly opposed to sensationalism. Even Montaigne, when he encounters a “monstrous child,” a traveling freakshow exploited by his uncle for profit, turns his thoughts to a subversion of common notions of “natural,” with barely a mention of the exotic scene he’s witnessed. During my first extended encounters with the essay, I was struck (dumbstruck, moonstruck) by those authors who wrote from seemingly insignificant, overlooked, transient things, experiences, and ideas, who were able to find within their everyday, unexceptional lives inspiration for essaying. What is it Phillip Lopate says in the introduction to *The Art of the Personal Essay*? He says, “The essayist . . . aligns himself with what is traditionally considered a female perspective, in its appreciation of sentiment, dailiness, and the domestic.”

While children are certainly part of the daily and domestic, that’s not how I should have answered my antagonistic amigo. Would that I had known then Alexander Smith, the nineteenth-century Scottish “spasmodic” poet whose essays, recently, have been a revelation to me. Here is *trepverter* or *l’esprit de l’escalier**, if I’ve ever known it. This is what I would say to my interlocutor now:

The essay-writer has no lack of subject-matter. He has the day that is passing over his head; and, if unsatisfied with that, he has the world’s six thousand years to depasture his gay or serious humour upon. I idle away my time here, and I am finding new subjects every hour. Everything I see or hear is an essay in bud. The world is everywhere whispering essays, and one need only be the world’s amanuensis.

Because I only recently learned the word *amanuensis*, I thought I’d allow you, dear reader, a bit of my own process. As often happens, I learned the word then heard it again several times in the following week. Shortly after my first contact, in the above quote from Smith’s

“On the Writing of Essays,” I met it again in Stephen Tuttle’s short story “Amanuensis,” about a disappeared junior high school biology teacher with a scale model of the town in his basement. Then, as I studied the biography of essayist Vernon Lee, aka Violet Paget, I learned that she had acted as an amanuensis for her sickly older brother, poet Eugene Hamilton-Lee. By then, of course, I had looked it up in several dictionaries, but even before I knew what it meant, I liked the word and knew it was important. Just look at it: *amanuensis*. Is that French? It has as many vowels as consonants. It’s an anagram

for “sun amnesia” and “sane animus” and “manna issue” (which all sound wonderfully fascinating, don’t they?). But what does it mean? You may be disappointed to learn that an amanuensis is a secretary or stenographer, “one employed to write from dictation or to copy manuscript.” But if you think instead of a cloistered monk toiling by candlelight at some glorious copywork, taking pains not just to write but to draw letters, to illustrate, to infuse his work with spirit and reverence, then you will be closer to the notions the word conveys to me.

Amanuensis is a fine word, but my favorite word is *quotidian*, a word I learned late in life, from Spanish, and which I pined for, eagerly sought in English, until one magical day I found it. Let’s back up: In the early 1990s, I was living in Uruguay as a missionary, picking up Spanish from conversations and signs, and I kept hearing the phrase *la vida cotidiana*. This, I surmised or discovered, meant “everyday life.” But the choice of words seemed so elegant, and that adjective, *cotidiana*, so unlike what it meant, that I fell in love. What a word to mean “mundane, everyday, common, etc.”! So beautiful, so seemingly opposite its meaning!

When I returned to New Jersey, one of my first tasks was to find this *cotidiana* in English. Knowing that the French influence on English left a rich legacy of Latinate words, which vary from their Spanish cognates by a letter or two, to the dictionary I went. From the dictionary I came, disappointed. There was no such word, not even in the library’s multi-volume OED.

** Speaking of words one wishes for, which I shall do in a paragraph or two, both Yiddish and French have terms for the witty retort one thinks of only too late, after the heat of verbal battle, when one is on the stairs, on the way out. English, that great amalgamator, must simply borrow these right-on phrases.*



Patrick Madden
English Department

Meanwhile, I began my graduate studies in English at BYU, hoping to learn how to write, to become an essayist. Then I learned that essays were not stories, did not focus on great adventures or recoveries, were not extraordinary in their subject matter at all. Essayists are keen observers of the overlooked, the ignored, the seemingly unimportant. They can make the mundane resplendent with their meditative insights.

Then one day, as I was leafing through the dictionary—

Researches, however great or small, [are] great pleasures in themselves, full of serendipity; I have rarely paged through one of my dictionaries . . . without my eye lighting, along the way, on words more beautiful than a found fall leaf.

— William Gass, “In Defense of the Book”

—my eye alighted on the word I had been searching for all these years, the word I had hoped for, had almost wished into existence: *quotidian*, with a Q. This was a revelation.

Of course, I then began to read about quotidian writings and concerns in essays and essays on essays, and I began to doubt my own awareness of the world

around me. Surely this word had crossed my path before, in other readings, other essays; and yet, maybe not. Perhaps *quotidian* was absent from my life until my need for it became great enough.

And maybe simply knowing the word made me more aware of the world, more open to the miracles drifting by.

The fastidious habits of polished life generally incline us to reject, as incapable of interesting us, whatever does not present itself in a graceful shape of its own, and a ready-made suit of ornaments. But some of the plainest weeds become beautiful under the microscope. It is the benevolent provision of nature, that in proportion as you feel the necessity of extracting interest from common things, you are enabled to do so.

— Leigh Hunt, “On Washerwomen”

One day as I sat at my bedroom computer, writing whoknowswhat, Adriana, then almost three months old, began to laugh behind me on the bed. I turned to see what she was laughing at, but could find nothing. Thankfully, I recognized the world whispering, put fingers to keyboard, let the ideas collaborate and grow.

That daughter is now nine years old, and that essay may well be the first good thing I ever wrote. So maybe the value of children, from a writerly standpoint, coincides with the value of the quotidian. Children may awaken us to the marvels slipping past us, almost unnoticed. Scott Russell Sanders, who writes a mean quotidian essay himself, spoke to this in a 1997 Lannan Foundation interview with Bernard Cooper:

We sleepwalk through most of our lives . . . and . . . every once in a while something happens . . . outside ourselves that forces us to pay attention in a new way, or something happens inside us that enables us to pay attention in a new way. And we suddenly realize that the world is so much richer, and more magnificent, and more wonderful than we had felt for a long time. Not to sentimentalize . . . , but I think children live much more continuously in a state of awareness of the miraculousness of existence.

I want a genre that allows for the staid, mundane life of a loafer, that reaches for new connections, that recognizes “the world in a grain of sand” (Blake). Of course, to stick to surfaces, to slither hither and yon but never move beyond the everyday, that would be . . . superficial, suicidal. A successful commonplace essay will gather memories and researches, attach ideas and stories to build upward, toward meaning. Again, Alexander Smith:

[The essayist] lifts a pebble from the ground, and puts it aside more carefully than any gem; and on a nail in a



cottage-door he will hang the mantle of his thought. . . . He finds his way into the Elysian fields through portals the most shabby and commonplace. . . . Let him take up the most trivial subject, and it will lead him away to the great questions over which the serious imagination loves to brood—fortune, mutability, death.

This is not to say that the essay can't allow for some extraordinary experience—it is, as Phillip Lopate says, a “wonderfully tolerant form”—but I am inclined to agree with Theodor Adorno that “the bad essay tells stories about people instead of elucidating the matter at hand.” I prefer the intellectual surprises wrought from “render[ing] the transient eternal” (Adorno), the essay I halfway recognize as containing my “own discarded thoughts” (Emerson) or things I wish I had been observant and curious enough to see. So does Joseph Epstein:

I prefer when the essay takes a small, very particular subject and, through the force of the essayist's artistically controlled maunderings, touches on unpredictably large general matters, makes hitherto unexpected conclusions, tells me things I hadn't hitherto known, or reminds me of other things I have always known but never thought to formulate so well.

— Introduction, *The Best American Essays*, 1993

The fact is that essayists have been doing this sort of thing for centuries. Montaigne, who gave us the name for the form and its first, best examples, proclaimed repeatedly the tenet of writing from ordinary things:

Of the most ordinary, common, and known things, could we but find out their light, the greatest miracles of nature might be formed, and the most wondrous examples.

— “Of Experience”

Virginia Woolf, pondering the master, noted similarly:

The most common actions—a walk, a talk, solitude in one's own orchard—can be enhanced and lit up by the association of the mind.

— “Montaigne”

Sometime in between those two greats, William Hazlitt was carried away almost to ecstasy thinking about the infinite possibilities that life offers for thought and writing:

It is the very extent of human life, the infinite number of things contained in it, its contradictory and fluctuating interests, the transition from one situation to another, the hours, months, years spent in one fond pursuit after another [that], baffling the grasp of our actual perception,



make it slide from our memory. . . . What canvas would be big enough to hold its striking groups, its endless subjects! . . . What a huge heap, a “huge, dumb heap,” of wishes, thoughts, feelings, anxious cares, soothing hopes, loves, joys, friendships, it is composed of! How many ideas and trains of sentiment, long and deep and intense, often pass through the mind in only one day's thinking or reading, for instance!

— “On the Past and Future”

You begin to sense the dizzying possibilities inherent in such a childlike curiosity, the dangers of noticing everything all the time, yet this is a valuable perspective to have, a useful practice to know, for teachers and writers alike. When I have taught the “personal narrative” in freshman composition courses—before I knew what I know now—students inevitably sought their most dramatic, easily significant experiences. For the majority of them, this translated to tales of loss or conquest. Grandparents died; girlfriends broke up with boyfriends; young athletes were nearly cut from school sports teams only to rise up and win a starting spot in the squad, then, preferably, to make the winning shot in the state championships. But my students were unable to write beyond clichés, received ideas, or meanings

gathered largely, I presume, from movies and sit-coms. They were force-fitting their experiences to preexisting legends. They were stifling their own thinking in order to match up. Sir Joshua Reynolds, an eighteenth-century British painter who portrayed some of our early essayists (Johnson, Burke, Goldsmith, Sterne) once said, “There is no expedient to which a man will not resort in order to avoid the real effort of thinking.” Thomas Edison had this saying framed in every room of his West Orange laboratories.

David Shields is of this mind:

The world exists. Why recreate it? I want to think about it, try to understand it. . . . I want a literature built entirely out of contemplation and revelation. . . . The real story isn’t the drama of what happens; it’s what we’re thinking about while nothing, or very little, is happening.

— “Reality Hunger: A Manifesto”

Writing from the everyday, straining toward new connection, new meaning, is not necessarily easy, but even at its worst, it beats writing banalities as if they were revelation. It is also a stay against the perfidious notion that I, or you, or they, are inherently interesting or important to a world of strangers. Our minds, on the other hand, may offer somewhat of interest to coexplore.

In a *New Yorker* interview with Joseph Cuomo, W. G. Sebald gave these matter-of-fact instructions, a kind of play-by-play of the essaying process:

As you walk along, you find things . . . by the wayside or you buy a brochure written by a local historian which is in a tiny little museum somewhere . . . and in that you find odd details that lead you somewhere else, and so it’s a form of unsystematic searching. . . . So you then have a small amount of material and you accumulate things, . . . and one thing takes you to another, and you make something out of these haphazardly assembled materials. And, as they have been assembled in this random fashion, you have to strain your imagination in order to create a connection between . . . things. If you look for things that are like the things that you have looked for before, then, obviously, they’ll connect up. But they’ll only connect up in an obvious sort of way, which actually isn’t, in terms of writing something new, very productive. You have to take heterogeneous materials in order to get your mind to do something that it hasn’t done before.

So let’s think more, ponder, wonder, meander, maunder. Despite appearances to the contrary, despite the clamor and clang of true-life sensationalism in every medium, quotidian essays are being written and published all the time. They’re an antidote to the harried hullabaloo of—what?—talk shows? tabloids? the madding crowd? And so I (and my friends, known and unknown) continue this quiet labor, stopping to smell the roses, suspicious that the tree falling in the forest does make a sound, the cat in the box might as well be alive. The exercise of writing from the infinite suggestiveness of common things has proved fruitful for me time and again, with essays sparked by considerations of garlic, diaper changing, washing grapes, a chipped tooth, and others. I’m addicted to that world’s whisper.

And in case you were wondering, that curmudgeonly professor who likes to bust my chops is Doug Thayer: his latest book is a memoir, a kind of catalog of the everyday life of a Mormon boy in 1930s Provo, Utah. I’ve still not tried my hand at fiction.

P.S. Although I now own the domain (at regular price) and use it for my professional work, as a repository for essay resources and an anthology of classical essays, when I first tried to register quotidiana.com, it was already owned by a cybersquatter who wanted to sell it to me for \$2,500. The domain registrar’s handy name-suggester gave me the following alternatives to consider:

everydaya.com, mundanea.com, routinea.com, unremarkablea.com, workadaya.com, ordinarya.com, averagea.com, commona.com, mediocrea.com, simplea.com, so-soa.com, tolerablea.com, faira.com, passablea.com, commonplacea.com, indifferenta.com, nondescripta.com, middlinga.com, moderatea.com, reasonablea.com, usuala.com, runofthemilla.com



books that made a difference

John S. Harris, English Professor Emeritus
Springville, Utah

Horatio Hornblower series by C. S. Forrester

In September of 1989, the crash of my experimental airplane gave me a serious case of Humpty Dumpty Syndrome. I had a concussion, my back and neck were broken, my shoulder was smashed, and my pelvis shattered. After four major surgeries, lasting ten to fourteen hours each, several gallons of non-original-equipment blood, a bunch of new mechanical parts, and five weeks in the intensive care unit, I came to the rehab hospital with one arm and both legs paralyzed. I was finally conscious, but my thinking was badly scrambled. I could not carry on a coherent conversation or sign my name legibly. I could not read more than a sentence or two at a time of any text.

While in rehab, I had my sixtieth birthday. My wife, looking for a present, made a brilliant and lucky choice. In a used bookstore, she found paperback editions of all eleven of C. S. Forrester's Horatio Hornblower novels tied in a bundle. These novels tell the story of a fictional British naval officer during the Napoleonic wars. I had read them all before—most of them when they appeared as serials in the Saturday Evening Post during the '40s and '50s. I had read some of them again later. My wife knew I liked them, so she bought them and brought them to the hospital. I began reading.

The novels were familiar to me but still exciting. They were stylistically skillful and technically and historically accurate. The characters were appealing and believable. Three weeks later, I had read all eleven volumes. After that, I could read anything, including difficult histories and books on psycholinguistics. I could think clearly, and I could begin the grueling task of physical rehabilitation. I even began teaching again when the term began again in January—two months before I left the hospital. Hornblower had reprogrammed my mind.

I taught literature classes at the university for decades. I well know what books are called the great classics. But because of my experience, I no longer hold any of them in the same affection as the novels and stories of Horatio Hornblower.

Charles Stanford
Las Cruces, New Mexico
Linguistics, 2001

Nova by Samuel R. Delany

I owe thanks to my wife for suggesting that I read Nova at a time when I had lost much of my interest in speculative fiction. Delany's staggering imagination and fearless curiosity produce scenarios that point to a fuller understanding of how cultures are shaped by their technologies. This book single-handedly rekindled my interest in science fiction, a genre that is often unfairly dismissed as unoriginal or lacking in literary merit.

Emily January Petersen
Kaysville, Utah
English, 2001

A Tree Grows in Brooklyn by Betty Smith

I love E. B. White. Not so much through his books for children, but through his honest, witty, and memorable outlook on life. I've enjoyed the collection of his letters and essays, which reflect his observations over a lifetime of writing for *The New Yorker*. His use of language is enviable, entertaining, thought-provoking, and just plain enjoyable.

Readers: For future issues, we would like to hear about a book, or several books, that made a difference for you. Please include your name, your major, year of graduation, and current city of residence with a short write-up about the book's (or books') influence on you and email it to us at ron_woods@byu.edu

One of my first memories is of riding a horse. It was young blue roan my grandpa had just bought and it was really fast. With my mom and grandpa looking on, I galloped the horse around the corral feeling exhilarated and terrified. Over the next few years of my early childhood this became a rare but treasured weekend ritual: a trip to see grandpa's horse, a short ride, maybe brushing the horse or carrying a saddle blanket.

Though these outings grew less frequent as I got older, these memories tether my life to the experiences of my predecessors: my grandpa's leatherwork and work as a rodeo clown; my uncles who still board and shoe livestock today; even my great-great-grandpa who worked as a sheriff in Arizona and whose original colt revolver I recently had the chance to handle. And while my own life is strikingly different from those who came before me, I recognize

Jim Dalrymple II
English graduate student
Glendora, California

that the literature, culture, and mythos of the American West maintains a strong influence over who I am.

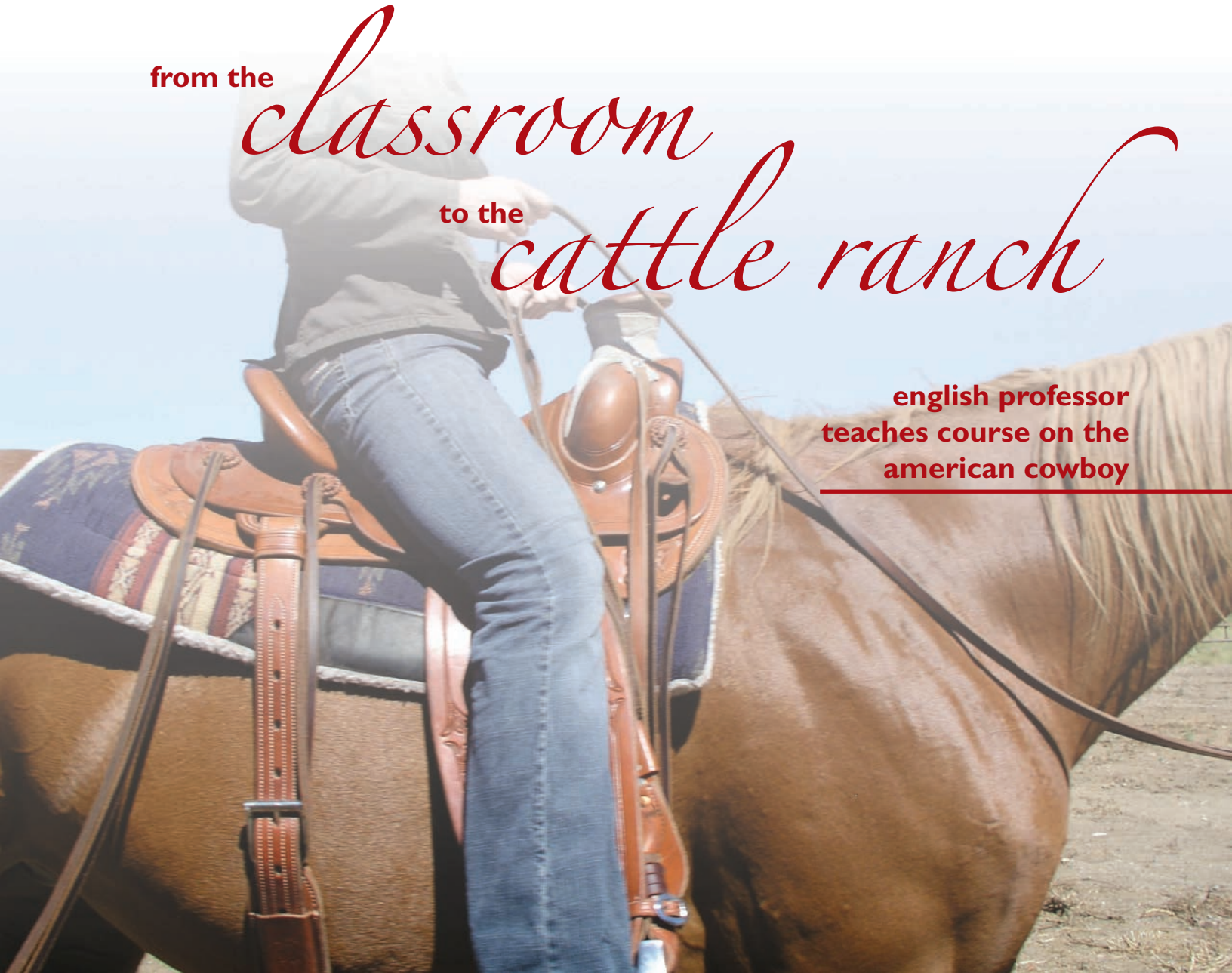
On paper at least, the cowboy West needs no introduction. For many of us, it quickly conjures up images of cowboys and Indians, outlaws and cattle drives. Yet beneath the West's rich narrative façade were and are very real cowboys, cowgirls, ranchers, and others. As a member of Dr. Phillip Snyder's Fall 2008 English 495 course on the American cowboy, I had the privilege to get to know some of the real people that populate the remains of what was once the great American frontier.

Like myself, Dr. Snyder was raised in Southern California and thus, for both of us, the West began on film and in books. It was the 70 mm cinemascope desert, the rugged cowboy gait of John Wayne, and the romance of Louis L'Amour. Fittingly then, the students' experiences in Dr. Snyder's course began with

from the

classroom to the *cattle ranch*

**english professor
teaches course on the
american cowboy**





All of the students had the chance to try their hands at the lasso at the Keetch family ranch.



Each student took a turn driving the tractor. The opportunity to taste ranch life made the literature come alive for the students.

the cultural texts about the West: novels, biographies, films, cowboy poetry, and even music. From the first day of class we began looking at the motifs and themes that characterized the work of esteemed writers such as Cormac McCarthy and James Galvin. While reading Owen Wister's *The Virginian*, we discussed the emergence of the "western" as a genre and later, in Sandra Day O'Connor's *Lazy B*, the end of ranch culture. Dr. Snyder also challenged us to look for "texts" of the American West beyond the pages of our books. On the first day of class, for example, he wore his cowboy hat and brought a saddle, prompting us to examine both the functional and rhetorical purposes of western tools and clothing. This activity only proved to be a starting point: over the next several weeks we would take five field trips, each one providing new "texts" that enriched our study and classroom discussion. Thus, as we read about cattle drives, horse culture, and beef production, we visited ranches, stores, and western homes in an effort to better understand and critically examine the importance of the American West in our lives and culture.

Our first trip was fun, and relatively easy. We piled into two vans and drove to sparsely populated Salem, a small town in Utah Valley, where the Snyders had prepared a barbeque lunch. We ate burgers and beans and afterward, learned how to saddle and groom a horse. Most of us also took turns riding Duke and J. D. Fellow student Ryan Saltzgiver scraped J. D.'s hooves. He said,

"That was really fascinating because of the relationship that you have almost instantly develop with the horse. J. D.'s personality came out quickly as I scraped his hoof. He leaned on me as I lifted the hoof, placing as much weight on me as he knew I could handle."

Our personal explorations of cowboy culture continued on our next trip when we visited the Keetch family spread. After watching a roping demonstration and trying our hand at the lasso, we were put to work. Each of us took turns driving a tractor, churning up the soil in the corral. All of us felt it was this kind of hands-on experience that made the class memorable and the cowboy literature we were reading in class seem so much more authentic.

If a theme began to emerge from our trips it was perhaps that the West is a place of change. Of course, our class itself might epitomize this change: a group of budding scholars taking brief forays into the landscape we normally encounter only in libraries and cubicles. But our field trips also demonstrated the region's dynamic nature. Our third trip took us to the Lyman ranch, a fully functional cattle operation tucked in the shadow of the Rocky Mountains, but also incongruously juxtaposed with car lots, big box stores, and even the visually striking Spanish Fork Hare Krishna temple. Yet, despite the odd mixture of the region's inhabitants, Ryan Saltzgiver noticed that ranch patriarch Keith Lyman had an "idealistic outlook on keeping his ranch operations going.

Despite the encroachment of modern development, there seems to be some romantic sense of connection between man and land that exists in Keith that is simply unconquerable.” Surprisingly perhaps, this idealism is a mixture of traditional and modern practices; the Lymans run cattle, but also experiment with new research that may potentially make ranching more economically viable. Cowboying is a fading lifestyle, and the Lyman ranch revealed that efforts to preserve it must inevitably embrace the old and the new.

Our next trip, to Western Unlimited, showed us another way the world of the cowboy has changed. Located midway along Spanish Fork’s quaint downtown avenue, Western Unlimited was at one time a typical cowboy outfitter. When we visited, however, things were different. Although the store had numerous cowboy hats, boots, and saddles, Heather Yates noticed that it also “catered to a more modern, hip look, like you would find at other modern stores.” Walking in, we saw advertisements on the bulletin board for horses and cattle, but we also heard British piano pop band Coldplay over the store’s sound system.

Our final field trip showed us the last stage of the

work of the cowboy: the slaughter and processing of cattle. For this trip we visited Deseret Meat, a slaughterhouse in Spanish Fork owned by the LDS Church. We expected this trip to be graphic, and it was. Upon arriving, we were immediately taken aback to watch freshly killed steers be skinned. From our vantage point we could see the slaughtered steers, hung by their back

hooves, enter the room as whole animals and exit as sides of beef. By the time we left, we had witnessed every stage of the process: skinning, dividing the meat into specific cuts, even processing hotdogs. This experience stood in sharp contrast to earlier field trips. We were never outdoors and there were no cowboys, no elements of romanticized cowboy culture. But that was where it all led, to beef production. As we watched the meat cutters it became appar-

ent that for all the change in the ranching and cowboy industry, this one fact remained the same.

As I’ve talked to other members of Dr. Snyder’s course, the thing that stands out most is the field trip experience. For each of us, our time studying cowboy culture was a chance to examine a particular piece of American life with a critical eye, looking at both the physical realities as well as the novels, memoirs, and histories we

read. More importantly, it was a way for us to get at the heart of the culture and its effect on us. It wasn’t just a class, it was something more personal than that. Senior Shelli Snyder perhaps sums it up best when she says “I’ve found this western genre inspires me differently than any other I’ve come across thus far. The depth of compassion I’ve been taught by the rough, raw characters has been invaluable to me. I’ll read western literature all my life.”



At a ranch in Salem, a small town in Utah Valley, the students learned how to groom and saddle a horse.



The students had the chance to visit Western Unlimited, a modern cowboy outfitter.

Regional Events for Humanities Alumni

On September 19, 2008, Dean John Rosenberg visited with Humanities alumni and friends in the Dallas area at the home of Bill and Barbara Benac. He discussed the direction of the College of Humanities in the twenty-first century and ways in which alumni can help, including mentoring students, providing internships, and supporting college programs. Many of the people in attendance expressed interest in more local events as well as a possible trip for Humanities alumni, so be watching for details. If you would like more information, please contact Pamela Owen Bennett at pamiris123@aol.com.

Jill and Greg Brim hosted an event at their home in Wheaton, Illinois, for Humanities alumni and friends on October 25, 2008. Dr. Roger Macfarlane and Dr. Stephen Bay, faculty members in the Humanities, Classics, and Comparative Literature department, presented a program about the Ancient Textual Imaging Group and its projects. The following evening Dr. Macfarlane and Dr. Bay presented a fireside entitled "Whispers Out of the Dust: Papyrus Documents and Early Christianity" at the Naperville Stake Center.

Michelle Curry helped organize two events in the Phoenix area in January for Humanities alumni and friends; one at the home of Susan and Paul Gilbert in Paradise Valley, and another at the home of Ira and Mary Lou Fulton in Chandler. Dr. Stephen Bay presented a fireside at the LDS Institute at ASU in Tempe the same weekend.

Events are also being planned for the Washington D.C. area and the Boise area in 2009. For more information on these events or for information on planning an event in your area, please contact Carol Kounanis at cek@byu.edu.



Dr. Stephen Bay presented a program about the Ancient Textual Imaging Group at the home of Greg and Jill Brim in Wheaton, Illinois.

Campus Events for Local and Visiting Alumni

As much as we love organizing events around the country to reconnect with alumni, we realize that a majority of our alumni live in Utah, many within easy driving distance of the BYU campus. We also know that many alumni visit the Provo area and often wonder what activities are available when they are in town. To that end, the Humanities Alumni Board has decided to sponsor one activity per month with a Humanities "Meet and Greet" event before or after the activity. The Meet and Greet events are free, and you can attend them whether or not you want to attend the accompanying event. Tickets to the accompanying events will be available at a discounted rate for Humanities alumni.

Details can be found on the College of Humanities website or by contacting Suzanne Kershisnik at suzanne@kershisnik.com.

On Thursday, March 19, we will host a Meet and Greet and a viewing of one of the film versions of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. On Friday, March 20, we will reserve a block of tickets for BYU's live production of *Macbeth*, and on Saturday, March 21, we will videotape a discussion by faculty and alumni contrasting the film and play versions.

On Saturday, April 11, we will host a Meet and Greet prior to the matinee performance of *Ballroom in Concert*. The May event will be a poetry reading by selected faculty members.

Humanities Alumni Book Club

In our Fall 2008 issue, the Humanities Alumni Board announced their sponsorship of a book club and encouraged the organization of local book clubs to keep alumni connected to events on the BYU campus and to other alumni in their area. If you would like to host a group in your area, please contact Tom Taylor at taylor745@earthlink.net. We will post your contact information as well as the date, time, and location of your book club meetings on our College of Humanities website and in future issues of this magazine.

Greg Clark, Associate Dean and Professor of English, recently hosted a videotaped discussion of the first book chosen for the college, *First Democracy: The Challenge of an Ancient Idea* by Paul Woodruff. Professor Clark led a panel of fellow faculty members George Handley (Humanities, Classics and Comparative Literature), Jill Rudy (English), and Laura Catharine Smith (Germanic and Slavic Languages), and their taped discussion is now available on the College of Humanities website. If you're looking for ideas on discussion questions and book club formats, you might want to check this out.

Dave Norton has chosen a unique approach for the Colorado Springs area discussion of *First Democracy*. He plans to organize a debate moderated by BYU English faculty member Gary Hatch. For more details, contact Dave at dave@gostonemantel.com. Michelle Curry is looking for people in the Phoenix area who are interested in participating in a book club. For more

information, please contact her at mn.curry@cox.net. And if you live in the Chicago area, Jill Brim is looking for people who want to join a book club as well. You can reach her at nauvoojill@hotmail.com.

Winter 2009 Book Club Selection

The Humanities Alumni Board has chosen Shakespeare's *Macbeth* as its next selection for Book Club readers. Check the college website for resources from faculty members and alumni, such as how to introduce Shakespeare to young readers, a discussion contrasting Shakespeare's works with film versions of his plays, and other innovative approaches for book club discussions. The board chose to study this book in conjunction with BYU's production of *Macbeth* on March 18–April 3. See details on page 17 for information on a Provo alumni event in connection with this production.

Alumni Careers

A recent survey of our graduates indicated that many go on into non-Humanities careers. This month we'd like to hear from Humanities alumni who have gone on to careers in Business or Finance so we can share your stories with current students who are contemplating a similar career choice. How did your Humanities major prepare you for your career? What advice would you have for others who are considering a similar career path? Send your responses to Carol Kounanis, cek@byu.edu or 4019 JFSB, Provo UT 84602-6704.

DEAN CONTINUED



opportunities that will make those dreams possible. We need your expertise. We need your stories. We need your connections. We need your words. We need you to be bridges. To find out how to help, please contact us at bridges@byu.edu.

knowledge, and dispositions they have cultivated in our classrooms do not stand in defiance of the world of economic obligation, but rather that these attributes qualify them to make unique contributions. The major initiative for the Deans Office in 2009 is to do a better job helping students conceptualize, articulate, and leverage their uniqueness. Humanities faculty play an important role in this process, but it is the alumni living and working beyond campus who are best equipped to build bridges between our current students' dreams and the tangible experiences and



WHY HER EDUCATION IS A MIRACLE

Laura Sue Nava, mother of four, aspired to finish her English teaching degree at BYU. But she needed a scholarship to pay for school and give her time to care for her family.

After exploring the possibilities, Laura was about to give up hope. Then, at the last minute, she opened an e-mail and learned that she had been approved for a Teacher

Education Scholarship from the College of Humanities. Today, Laura considers it a miracle, saying, "I feel thankful for each donor who gave me such a blessed first semester back to school." We invite you to support students by giving generously to the BYU Annual Fund. And please be sure to designate the College of Humanities.

EVERY GIFT MATTERS

To talk about helping the college with a special gift, call Carol Kounanis at 801-422-8294 or e-mail cek@byu.edu.



Humanities at BYU is the alumni magazine of the College of Humanities.

feedback?

We'd be glad to hear from you with your views, memories of campus experiences, or an update on your life since leaving BYU. Please e-mail ron_woods@byu.edu.



Puente la Reina,
Navarra, Spain

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