



# humanities at **BYU**

BYU COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES | SPRING 2008



Dean John R. Rosenberg

## Becoming a People

During our recent April graduation celebrations, I attended a lunch for winners of one of our major scholarships; also in attendance were members of the foundation that make the scholarships possible. Seated at my table was a charming young woman from what most of us would consider a distant and

exotic place. Next to her was her father who had just deplaned for the first time in the US and who was soaking up everything he was experiencing in this strange and wonderful place called Utah. He was dressed in culturally appropriate clothing and nodded gracefully as the conversation circled around him in a language he did not understand. His daughter rose to speak, fluently and poignantly in her second language, English. As she spoke, her father bowed his head and wept.

As I tried to set my words to his feelings, my mind recalled a verse in the sixth chapter of Third Nephi, written at a time when the Nephites were prospering abundantly. Their society was complex, with specialized professions: merchants, lawyers, and civil servants. As they prospered, they began to define and pursue relationships based on social standing and wealth at the expense of a common identity as a people, as Nephites. “And thus there became a great inequality in the land, insomuch that the church began to be broken up” (14). The cause of this social fracturing was that “the people began to be distinguished by ranks, according to their . . . chances for learning, yea, some were ignorant because of their poverty, and others did receive great learning because of their riches” (6).

Education is many things. It is usually understood and justified in terms of its effects, and those effects are typically cast in economic terms. We often hear, “To get a good job, get a good education.” This is an interesting phrase to unpack. “Good job” is typically understood as elliptical for “good-paying job.” For others, “good education” means a “practical” (that is, vocational) major. And in a particularly cynical formulation of the idea, “good education” invokes prestige, as in, “it’s not the degree, it’s the pedigree.” Apparently, some educations are worth more than others simply because of the particular seal on the diploma.

Professor Mark Peterson recently shared with me a conversation he had with our late faculty colleague Honam Rhee about why the latter unfailingly attended campus forums and devotionals even when obligations pressed. Dr. Rhee explained simply that he was off to the Marriott Center because “I want to become a person.” That is education in its pure form. All other educational effects are secondary to this goal of becoming a person, a complete human being. It is that process that a Humanities education holds as the primary object of inquiry: what it means to be human (or humane); how to do it; and how to apply these insights to make us informed, creative, and inclusive parents, citizens, and employees.

Focusing on education’s secondary benefits (economic advantage) at the expense of its primary public purposes (becoming a person, building a people) makes it more likely we will contribute to the kind of divisive and ultimately unsustainable society described in that chapter of Third Nephi. We have received “great learning because of [our] great riches.” That is true even for those who work two jobs, seek grants, or take out loans to earn a degree. The very fact that we are here and that the majority of our education is paid by the faithful contributions of

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Photo by Kramer Photographers

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



Naomi Larson (center), and other family members with Billy Collins (far right), former Poet Laureate of the United States

The late Clinton F. Larson was, in the words of his editor, colleague, and friend David L. Evans, “one of the most significant and highly respected Mormon writers of our time and also one of the most prolific.” His wife, Naomi Barlow Larson, and family donated his works, holographs, library, and biographical material to the L. Tom Perry Special Collections of the Harold B. Lee Library. Professor Larson (1919–1994), BYU English professor for thirty-eight years, and BYU poet-in-residence for many of those years, was a prolific and dedicated poet and playwright. He was one of the founders of BYU Studies, the Rocky Mountain Writers’ Convention, and the National Federation of State Poetry Societies.

On March 15th, the Humanities Department held its annual Symposium Humanitatum. Students presented papers selected for their excellent research and content. One such student, Richard Peterson, said, “The Symposium was a great experience for me. I got a taste of what presenting a paper at a symposium is really like.” Dr. Carl Sederholm of the Humanities Department and the Humanities College Student Council worked together to organize the event. Students who participated were given valuable experience in preparing and presenting scholarly papers, strengthening their confidence, and preparing themselves for academic success in the future. A selection of papers from the symposium will be published in *Tabulae*, one of BYU’s student journals.



Gregory Clark, professor of English and associate dean of the College of Humanities, has been appointed executive director of the Rhetoric Society of America as of July 1, 2008. RSA is an interdisciplinary organization of scholars whose members come from composition, English, communications, philosophy, linguistics, history, political science, sociology, and other fields.

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Sean Johnson, an August 2008 English BA graduate, has won several writing awards, the latest of which are

- The Western Regional Honors Council Award for Poetry for his poem, “What We Knew.” Sean competed with students from more than 225 university honors programs in the western United States. He traveled to the Western Regional Honors Conference in Arizona in April to read the poem and to be recognized. The poem was also published in *Scribendi* (U of New Mexico) and in BYU’s student journal *Inscape*. It can be accessed at [http://inscape.byu.edu/fall2007/johnson\\_knew.php](http://inscape.byu.edu/fall2007/johnson_knew.php)
- A New York State Summer Writers Institute scholarship. Sean was chosen from over 300

applicants across the country to study with Henri Cole, a Pulitzer Prize finalist, in a poetry workshop at Skidmore College.

- First place, BYU Mayhew poetry contest (his fourth time winning a prize in the Mayhew contest in the past three years).
- The Carolyn Barnes Poetry Award from the BYU English Department.
- First place, Insight Writing Contest, conducted by BYU’s Honors Program and published in its magazine, *Insight*.

(This essay is published on page 12 of the current issue of this magazine.)

Sean may take a year off before applying to creative writing graduate programs.

# Moving *on*

The College says farewell to four fine faculty members this year. We appreciate their years of devoted service to thousands of students. Readers who would like to wish them well may e-mail [karmen\\_smith@byu.edu](mailto:karmen_smith@byu.edu) for contact information.



Dennis Rasmussen (Philosophy) came to BYU from graduate school in 1970. He took delight in watching his department grow as it became an independent unit and was eventually moved

from Religious Instruction to the College of Humanities. Over the decades, he most enjoyed teaching ethics and especially meeting students who were children of former students. He will miss daily association with his students and members of his department, calling them “the most admirable group of friends that I could ever have hoped for.”



Ted Lyon (Spanish and Portuguese) came to BYU in 1972 after teaching full-time at UCLA and at the Universities of Oklahoma and Wisconsin. While at BYU, he took a sabbatical during which he taught and

researched at the University of Glasgow, Scotland. His 35 years at BYU produced surprises at how intelligent and enjoyable he found many of his students. He feels he spent way too much time in administration (department chair, coordinator of Latin American Studies [twice], director of undergraduate studies in the David M. Kennedy Center, and more), but he managed to publish as well as receive teaching and research awards. But he received his greatest delight from simple sack lunches he ate with students in his office. His academic career has been interrupted three times by calls to serve in Chile—first as mission president, then as MTC president, and now as Santiago Temple president.

Beverly Zimmerman (English) joined the BYU faculty in 1992 and has taught technical communication, document design, and research in rhetoric and composition. She served as Coordinator of English 316 (technical writing) and

as advisor for the student chapter of the Society for Technical Communication. She received an Alcuin Award for excellence in General Education teaching, two Utah Campus Compact awards for her contribution to service learning, a Brigham Award for special service to students, and the 2008 Faculty Women Association service award. She is the mother of seven children and grandmother to eighteen. She looks forward to a new avenue of service in retirement. In July, she and her husband will begin an eighteen-month proselyting mission in Lima, Peru.



Marian Labrum (Spanish and Portuguese) passed away in January of this year. She started teaching at BYU in 1975. In 2000, she was diagnosed with primary/progressive multiple sclerosis. She went on the disability list but soon came back

to teaching. She taught from a wheelchair, determined to learn the use of technological aids to help her. She taught longer than anyone expected her to and was able to continue until August of 2007 when she had to go back on disability. Her upbeat attitude inspired many. Speaking of the enormous changes in her life caused by disease, she once said, “I’m learning patience. Everything has changed. The only thing that remains the same is that I still know I’m a child a God.”





Dean Rosenberg addresses the graduates

## the class of *2008*

Over 800 students will graduate from the College of Humanities during 2008, at the April, August, and December college convocations. We'd like to be able to bring you the stories of all of them, but we haven't figured out how to do that, so instead, we're bringing you just one story. Jeanna Nichols is a nontraditional student; her views of what it means to be a humanities major will likely resonate with our readers. Read her responses to our survey.

### Name

Jeanna Marie Johnson Nichols

### Major

English BA

### Graduation date

April 25, 2008

### Background

I was born and raised in San Jose, California. However, my husband, two children, and I now reside in Payson, Utah. This is a surprise as we swore we would never live in Utah, and we would especially never live in Payson. However, we would never, ever change the path we've taken.

### When did you "see the light" and become a Humanities major?

My brother and sister-in-law were both English majors who went on to higher degrees. When I learned from them that I could pick a major that allowed me to actually earn a degree by doing what I loved—reading and writing—I was hooked.



Graduates line up to receive diploma cases

### Advice to new freshmen

Utilize the Advisement Center. They can help you on your road to graduation in a way that no one else can. And if something comes easy to you, that means you have a talent, so pursue it and turn it into your own art.



## Plans

I'm 38 years old and still don't know what I want to do with my life. I would love to try my hand at writing a novel. I would love to try nursing school. I have always wanted to learn floral design and cake decorating. I would love to learn how to cut hair, but don't tell my husband and son that I don't know how! After taking English 495, which gave me a taste of graduate school, I would love to earn a master's degree. Elder Bednar gave some great advice at commencement: Learn to Love Learning. Having just completed my final two semesters, I can honestly say that in the past eight months, I have learned to love learning. I hope I can continue learning in some form or another for the rest of my life. I am assembling a reading list of classics that I, remarkably, never got to read while I was a formal student. I am seriously considering taking the GRE and applying for a master's program at BYU. Before I returned to school to finish my bachelor's degree, I was stagnant and unhappy with my own lack of progress. I feel that going back to school put me back on the path of educational, emotional, and spiritual progression.

## What your friends don't understand about Humanities

My non-humanities-major friends don't understand how I can actually enjoy writing a paper. But I have never understood how they can enjoy math or science. I respect those disciplines, but I am in love with the arts. What they never understood is that, in a paper, if you can use the text to support your opinion, you can have any opinion you want. I like the freedom of the humanities and that personal interpretation is encouraged and honored.

## How you expect your major to benefit your life

I believe my major benefits my life every day, especially in the way I communicate with others. I am able to express myself clearly, orally and in the written word. I hope to instill this ability in my children. Critical thinking and personal expression are key in all aspects of life.

## Regrets

I wish I had appreciated my education when I was young. I was once told by a BYU counselor that maybe I was more suited for a junior college. At the time, I was completely offended, but on reflection, that counselor may have been right. Now, I believe I have proven oth-

erwise, as my GPA for the past two semesters has been pretty stellar, especially considering that when I started back to school I was a wife, a mother of two, a part-time employee at a local hospital, and Primary president in my ward.

## Other comments about your major, your department, your teachers, the college, or BYU in general

I've had a lot of professors over the years. I've realized that the more effort I put into school, the more I appreciated my professors. Each professor has different talents. I learned to take what my professors gave and apply it to my own life, and I believe I have become a better person as a result. I had some younger friends at school that would criticize different teachers because of their approach to teaching. I took a different approach. Instead of being critical, I was accepting of each professor's knowledge and talents. That attitude made my learning experience a blessing to me. Things have changed a lot since I first came to BYU in 1987. In this day of multimedia and Internet access, being a student has never been more exciting. I believe the caliber of students has increased. Every time I squeezed in a class or two over the years, I felt more and more like I was falling behind the curve. More than ever, BYU now has top-notch faculty, facilities, and students. During my final two semesters, I believe that my life experience and viewpoint added to the educational spirit at BYU. I may have been a "nontraditional" student, but I tried to make a contribution.



Jeanna Nichols  
April 2008  
humanities graduate



# *wheels, windmills, and webs:*

## **Don Quixote's Library and the History of Reading**



Facsimile of a book wheel constructed by Jason Yancey (MA 2005) after Ramelli's design

In 1588, Agostino Ramelli published an engraving of a “book wheel,” a ferris-wheel-like contraption holding six or eight shelves upon which to lay open books for study. The scholar could rotate the wheel to bring other texts and passages into view. Although it is doubtful Ramelli ever built his book wheel, the notion of this reading machine underscores the Renaissance desire to increase the speed and thoroughness of the acquisition of knowledge as well as the deployment of technological innovations to do so. With each turn of the wheel, the scholar can open up a new textual window on his or her subject. Rapid cross-referencing and nonlinear reading become possible in this forerunner of both the eighteenth-century encyclopedia and the twentieth-century Internet browser. A few years after Ramelli's drawing, Don Quixote famously tilted at the windmills, an adventure immediately following the destruction of Don Quixote's library. The motions of the windmills and the reading wheel symbolically mirror the spinning of Don Quixote's mind and serve as key metaphors for understanding the ways people read. The reading practices of modern-day Internet surfers share much with the Renaissance scholars' (and their successors', the eighteenth-century encyclopedists) and with Don Quixote's. The history of reading can be seen as a series of wheels, windmills, and webs spinning from the earliest text



**Dale Pratt**

Department of Spanish and Portuguese

Photo by Jennifer A. Hoskisson



through Don Quixote's library to the Encyclopédie and now to the Internet. Twenty-first-century readers have come to emulate Don Quixote's style of reading as they surf the Internet; thus, Don Quixote's madness provides clues to the future of reading.

To read is to interpret a representation of ideas or information. Each reader's memories, strategies, contexts, skills, and desires color the reading of the text. Every text is fraught with intertextuality—myriad planned or unplanned connections with other texts, each an artifact of language related by context, time, geography, language, and expectations. The reader and the text bring potentialities to the reading experience, and the outcome depends on the reader's skill in exploring the possibilities of the text. As at a construction project, the reader-worker arrives at the site to find materials and plans. The worker brings a tool belt of reading skills and knowledge about previous construction projects or reading experiences he or she has "worked on." The finished product depends on the blueprints, the materials, and the worker. Some workers bring special tools to the task; others bring only a hammer. Some are neophytes; some come simply to smash. At the end of the project, the building might be a cottage, a house with an oversized addition, a mansion, a church, or a temple. Or perhaps it turns out to be a shack or just a stack of ruined pieces of wood with nails sticking out all over. In all cases, the interaction between the author, the text, and the reader constitutes our reading. As our expectations change—not just the cultural horizons that help establish "ours" and "theirs" but our expectations of reading itself—our experiences change. As our readings change, so do we.

In the Renaissance, a machine like Ramelli's reading wheel could facilitate comparative studies of religious and philosophical texts undertaken by the humanist scholars. Using this technology, the scholar could physically organize, reorganize, catalog, and recall his or her reading, as Don Quixote mentally does. Don Quixote does not have a reading wheel, but the first chapter of the novel shows his reading practices to be similar to those of the scholar. His studious reading of the chivalric novels and epic poems leaves him with an encyclopedic knowledge. Nevertheless, Don Quixote does not have the wisdom to discern the frivolity of his favorite texts, a grave problem examined throughout the book (as in the library episode, when the curate and the barber judge between books of "understanding" and books for "mere entertainment," the distinction Don Quixote consistently fails to make) (Cervantes 78).

Reading affects us—our moods, understanding, and feelings. It affects our bodies. Reading affects thought, of course, and has infiltrated our language, becoming one of the great metaphors. The angels read of our works, good and evil, in books

of life; natural philosophers read the book of nature. Scanners "read" barcodes at the store. St. Augustine, in a crucial moment in his life, heard a child's voice calling out *tolle lege*—"take it and read, take it and read," which he took as a message from God (177). Some of the first sinners Dante and Virgil encounter in the *Inferno* are there because of reading—Paolo and Francesca read the tale of Lancelot and Guinevere and "read no more that day" because the book itself acts as the go-between for their sin (30). Madame Bovary, a female Don Quixote, seeks escape from her mundane life by reading scores of romance novels.

Reading can put us into contact with the world or facilitate our escape from it. Although it was not always important (and was sometimes difficult) for readers to be able to distinguish between genres of writing as we would understand them today, the basic question of the purpose of the text (to instruct, incite, or entertain, for instance) did carry great weight in reading. Yet Don Quixote's style of reading, as well as nonlinear reading practices involved in web surfing, can obscure or thwart the original purposes of a text. Questions then arise concerning the nature of authors and texts and the relationship of the reader to them. Does the reader anchor the text to the world, bringing the words (perhaps written hundreds of years prior to this particular instance of reading) in contact with a specific socio-historical context? What of ideological differences between written texts and their readers? Does a reader "enter into" a text, or does the reader bring the text into his or her world (or do they accomplish both as Don Quixote did)?

Don Quixote clearly has a hand in his own readings. In the first five chapters of *Don Quixote*, the hero goes



Windmill in Spain

mad reading chivalric novels from his library, which he has stocked by selling off pieces of his land. He sets forth as a knight errant, modeling his actions and rhetoric on his readings. Throughout the rest of the novel, Don Quixote demonstrates a remarkable ability to connect his “adventures” in seventeenth-century Spain with passages from his novels. He even weaves passages from different novels together to create composite personalities that he can emulate.

Don Quixote elides differences between historical texts and chivalric romances, changing their genre and “purpose” and thereby the potential meanings and implications of the texts. He blurs the line between fantasy and reality. Although most readers would characterize Don Quixote’s reading as “misreading,” Don Quixote merely absurdly exaggerates the same methods all readers use as they interact with texts. Don Quixote’s madness sets him not on a different plane, but rather at the end of a continuum of readers. In addition, Don Quixote’s reading—like all reading—spins a web of connections between disparate texts. In chapter five of the first volume, Don Quixote’s identity shifts and shifts again as he chooses to identify with characters and situations from different texts. He connects his life and activities with characters from distinct national literatures written in different languages and time periods. Yet in his subsequent sallies, Don Quixote merges characteristics inspired by these characters to further solidify his personality. In effect, his reading tears out passages from the books in his library to create for himself a palimpsest personality. Different interpretations of a single book are often called “readings” (as in “a Freudian reading”); Don Quixote’s madness makes his work of reading in his library a “reading” that he himself personifies.

Myriad readers approach the novel with differing backgrounds of experiences, skills, and purpose, and thus there have been many, many distinct readings of Don Quixote in the last four hundred years. All these readers, critics, authors, students, the educated gentry, and the one we might call today the “lay reader” or *el desocupado*

lector, as Cervantes called the idle reader—in essence create different versions of Don Quixote.

Don Quixote’s knowledge of chivalric texts rivals in form what Denis Diderot and his collaborator Jean d’Alembert sought to create with their encyclopedia: a summa of all human knowledge, organized according to secular rational principles. The *Encyclopédie* contains 71,818 articles by over 140 contributors. By exploring connections between the original subject and the cross-referenced articles, a reader could discover new facts and principles useful to humanity. In this type of reading, the intelligence, diligence, and curiosity of the reader are paramount. Diderot himself comments hopefully on the lines of knowledge that readers of the *Encyclopédie* could trace by following the references collected at the end of every article. Each new reference article is like a

turn of the reading wheel or a new Internet link. Yet there is a danger: too much information can cause a reader to lose focus or interest, and the truth can be hidden beneath the trivial or extraneous.

In postmodernism, loci of “truth” that undergird structures of meaning in texts disappear. So, too, does the thinking subject, which is rather conceived of as a nexus where texts, voices, and ideology converge

to create a self that is more “other” than “I.” Although critics still debate the ramifications of these unsettling assertions, Internet reading seems to have a postmodern character. On the one hand, Internet research can seem like wrenching intelligibility from chaos, with the surfer providing the structure (a process similar to the traditional method of running around inside libraries, searching out and connecting texts). However, Internet reading also resembles flitting or skipping along with little logic guiding the process. In web surfing, returning to previously read passages becomes less fluid than with reading actual books (the reader’s hand becomes more distant from the text, as it were).

Diderot believed careful readers of his encyclopedia could find new knowledge in the multifarious connections they made between articles cross-referencing other articles referring to even more articles and so on. Yet



Gears of reading wheel facsimile



as Cervantes proves throughout both volumes of *Don Quixote*, the history of reading can also be seen as the history of misreading and misinterpretation. Surfing the Internet or reading nonlinearly challenges our understanding of what it means to “know” something. Traditional reading entails a reader’s surrender to the guiding logic of the text (the decision about whether to agree with the text comes later). Postmodern hypertextual reading or web surfing precludes such surrender because the reader determines the course through the labyrinth of texts. This power comes with a price because nonlinearity can subvert the intelligibility of a well-reasoned or a beautiful text. And what of knowledge when our nonlinear reading incorporates texts of dubious veracity from the web? Although fabrications, hoaxes, and fictions have always existed, the wealth of (mis)information available on the web in infinite combinations, accessed by multitudes of readers of varying backgrounds, presents myriad possibilities for new readings and misreadings, scholarship, muddled thinking, madness, creation, and adventure.

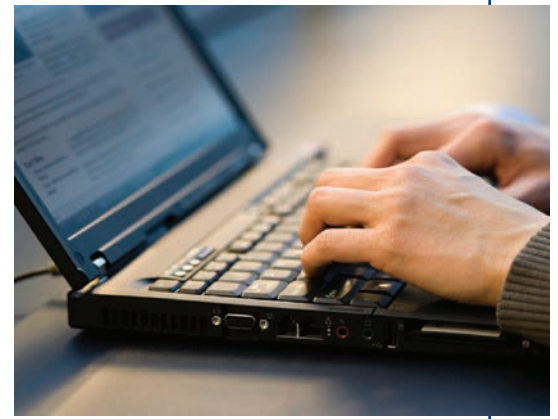
*Don Quixote* preserves reading’s linearity—following a narrative line through its circularities, doublings back, interweavings, and tangles to its conclusion. Reading on the Web offers a vertiginous experience that nevertheless establishes an order, just as when reading an encyclopedia (etymologically a great circle or cycle), we can trace back our path. In a way, the reader of any text becomes metaphorically a spool upon which the thread of a particular reading winds and unwinds. However, what happens if technology makes it possible to implant an entire dictionary or encyclopedia into a human brain? Science fiction writers imagine worlds in which humans can “download” texts directly into their minds. All parts of these texts function simultaneously—the characters know the texts without reading them. The perception of a book would then resemble the experience not of remembering (which entails ordering, omissions, embellishments, etc.) but of knowing, the way we know that the sun comes up, that addition means adding and not dividing and that “I” am not “you.”

What would a person be like whose path to knowledge avoids the bottleneck and selectivity of the narrative line, indeed whose “path” would be a chip, and whose “reading” would only be metaphorical? Borges’s character Funes el Memorioso, who remembers everything he perceives, faces a similar problem and at the end of his life turns away from the world and seeks linearity by following lines on his bedroom wall with his eyes. *Don Quixote*, whose identity in the beginning chapters of the

first volume appears in continual flux due to his prodigious reading, nevertheless exclaims, “I know who I am.” This statement evinces madness to us, yet perhaps ranks *Don Quixote* as the first among

postmodern readers. Texts formed by nonlinear reading do not have implied readers with whom authors dialogue, but rather fragments of implied readers drawn from different texts created at different times. In essence, nonlinear readers create not only the texts they read but also themselves; readers turning the reading wheel spin their own subjectivity. Funes, an idiosyncratic all-knower in a world of linear readers, stands in opposition to *Don Quixote*, whose chaotic, nonlinear readings lead him outward into the world, to write himself into a (linear) text of his own creation. *Don Quixote*’s identity flows among the shifting fragments of texts making up his personality, but frankly he becomes more interesting when he sets out on the quest to restore his stolen library, when his mad identity has solidified. Memory serves as the treasury of the soul, and unlike Funes, *Don Quixote* constantly and richly recalls passages from texts suitable for imitation. Funes is inimitable, but only in this is he memorable; if we were all like him, we would all be him.

As reading continues to evolve, so will we. Perhaps one day, in a “postreading” future, we shall live as the all-knowing gods (or vegetate in Funes’s hell). Until then, however, we may continue reading like *Don Quixote*.



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# The *ticketless* Travels of a *reader*

By Sean Johnson, English BA graduate, August 2008

This essay won the Honors Program's Insight Writing Contest and was originally published in the Honor's Program magazine, *Insight* (April 2008). Published here with permission.

The first summer I traveled to Spain I was twenty years old. The hills of Pamplona gleamed like glazed turkeys under a low-hanging sun as I walked the picturesque streets near la plaza, where the townspeople made final preparations for the next day's Festival de San Fermín. The soft swish of café owners' brooms mingled with the distant notes of a brass band practicing for the upcoming celebration. An old Ferris wheel spun slowly and, like an enormous eye, watched vigilantly for the crowds that would soon flood the streets to witness the running of the bulls.

My trip to Spain was the first of many trips I took that summer: a week in England, boarding at an old house on the Yorkshire moors; two weeks on the island of Saint Lucia in the Caribbean; three days drifting down the Mississippi in a two-man skiff.

During my years at BYU, I've watched as each semester several of my classmates have shipped off to London or Paris or Berlin on study abroad programs. These people invariably return to Provo the following semester with passports chock-full of stamps and suitcases crammed with souvenirs, beaming about their experiences. "I feel like Scotland is my second home!" I've heard more than one person say. Each season I browse the photo albums they post on their Facebook profiles: "Fifty Nifty Pictures of the Eiffel Tower!"; "Au(some) stralia!!"; "A Wailing Good Time in Wales!!!"

I've never participated in a study abroad program. In fact, except for a flight to and from Chile to serve an LDS mission, I've never had to use my passport. Each

time I open it, the blue pages yawn back at me, blank. But great books—especially those from the Honors Program's list of Great Works—have been passports that have allowed me, a landlocked resident of Utah, to become an experienced world traveler.

Reading Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, I've felt the heat of a summer in Spain, carried on conversations with locals in the cafés of Pamplona, and heard the rumbling rush of bulls running through narrow streets. Perusing a copy of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, I've wandered the moors of England and been a visitor at Heathcliff's mansion, where I've sat listening to the chatty housekeeper rattle off her long Gothic tale. Thumbing the pages of Derek Walcott's contemporary epic poem *Omeros*, I've drunk in the scenery of the Caribbean and admired the music of that region's distinctive dialect. And more than once I've scrapped together a raft with Huckleberry Finn to set sail down the Mississippi.

The Great Works List at BYU has been, for me, not a to-do list of requirements for Honors graduation but rather the world's greatest travel brochure. Want to see the French countryside? Try *Swann's Way* by Marcel Proust. Feeling adventurous? Joseph Conrad will take you on a steamboat journey up the dangerous Congo River in *Heart of Darkness*. How about a relaxing lakeside getaway in Ireland? Turn to William Butler Yeats:

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,  
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made.  
("The Lake Isle of Innisfree")



Every work of creative literature does in some way what Yeats's poem does very explicitly: initiates an expenses-paid trip to new places and new experiences. Each book that the Honors Program has designated as a "Great Work" is also a great travel opportunity. Through imaginative travel, any reader can, like Yeats, "arise and go"—without the hassle of suitcases and hotel reservations. Nonstop flights from the library to your destination of choice can be *booked* anytime.

But literature and the Great Works have been more than mere airplanes of the imagination, shuttling me to a wide variety of places around the world. Books have also been time machines, allowing me to experience the wide expanse of history—past, present, and even future—in true back-to-the-future fashion. I step into Homer's *The Iliad* and find myself transported to thirteenth century BC, fighting alongside the Greek armies. I slip inside the pages of *Great Expectations*—or any other Charles Dickens novel—and wind up in the Victorian era, experiencing a whole new (or old?) way of life. Or I set the chronological dial to 802701 AD and strap myself into H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine*.



Sean Johnson

(It's telling that the term *time machine* originated with Wells's book—literature has always been the portal that enables us to pass the boundaries of time.)

As I've read the Great Works and "traveled" to new places and time periods, my circle of acquaintances has expanded beyond the normal realm of family, friends, coworkers, and neighbors. Both the characters and authors of great literature have become my companions. I've small-talked with Langston Hughes's Madam Alberta K. Johnson about her failed hot dog stand and troubled relationships with men ("I got mixed up / With a no-good man," she sighs).

I've walked along the shores of Walden Pond with Henry David Thoreau, pondering how best to simplify my life. I've skipped school to go swimming with Tom Sawyer, laughing riotously at the authority figures we've duped. These literary personalities remain my companions long after their books are reshelfed.

Great works of literature have done more to expand my experience—and my sense of the broader human experience—than anything else. Passport in hand, I'll continue long after graduation the travels that I began as a student. And I'll leave my suitcase at home.

## DEAN CONTINUED

members of the church suggests that we are the fortunate few, the beneficiaries of prophets' plans to make education accessible to all the people in order to create a people. It is our charge to receive the gift of education and wrap it in reasoned humility. It is our moral imperative to make sure that our education binds us as a people. We repay our educational debt in part by ensuring that what we know never sets us above or apart from others. Such an attitude about education compels us to give of our time, talent, or treasure, doing our part to make sure that no one is denied access to education, or at least that someone is not denied access to education because of "their poverty." Because of the gift of education you have received, as you continue to "become a person," your capacity to give will grow. The educated mind reveals itself when it educates others.

Over a hundred years ago, John Dewey wrote, "What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all its children. Any other ideal for our [society] is narrow and unlovely; acted upon, it destroys our democracy" (*The School and Society*, Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1976, p 5). How we act upon Dewey's proposition will differ in nature and degree; that we act upon it earns us the right to see ourselves as educated citizens and disciples.

What I saw in that father's eyes was pride in his daughter's accomplishments and gratitude to those who had made her education possible. Pride is sanctified by gratitude. Gratitude is given life by giving back.



# books

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## that made a difference



**Tom Taylor,**  
English, 1983, Provo

### *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens

Compelled to read this in high school, I discovered that classics can be great reading. I had been a voracious reader, but wholly undirected. This book was the beginning of new directions in reading and the beginning of an intellectual life.

### *Beowulf*

After reading *The Lord of the Rings* series about twenty-five times, I started reading any- and everything else written by J. R. R. Tolkien. I came across his groundbreaking essay on *Beowulf*, which led me to become an English major. I now own about twenty-seven variant editions of *Beowulf*. I've read and loved each of them, except that terrible retelling by Nye.

### *The Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc* by Mark Twain

This was a work of love by Mark Twain, and he put twenty years of research into it. It's unlike anything else he ever wrote. I was so inspired by the story of Joan as told by Twain that I came to feel it should be required reading for every young woman.



**Suzanne Kershisnik,**  
English, 1986, Provo

### *The Outermost House: A Year of Life on the Great Beach of Cape Cod* by Henry Beston

I think I first read *The Outermost House* when I was in high school, maybe as a junior. I'd never experienced anything like it before. It not only had no plot and no real narrative arc, but rather it had gorgeous, lyrical prose—musings on nature and solitude and our mortality on this wondrous planet. I've grown wary of recommending it over the years, as people tend to hand it back the next day asking, "You do realize this is a book about nothing, don't you?" About nothing. About everything. My feelings for sand were forever altered.

### *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee

I could not guess how many times I've read *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but I do know that when someone once asked what objects any of us had in our houses that we would find irreplaceable, really mourn over, should they be destroyed, my thoughts flew to my worn and taped paperback copy of this book—the copy I've read out loud to my sister, to my husband, and to each of my children. It is my own chosen copy of the great American novel.

### *Cold Comfort Farm* by Stella Gibbons

This book completely blindsided me. I read it late in my college years, and for some reason I started into it thinking it was a serious British novel. I didn't "get it" until I hit the chapter describing Cold Comfort. I nearly punctured a lung laughing. This was the first time I understood what was meant by a "conversation between books"—that authors can talk across ages and continents to each other! My English professors were true! Who knew?

We would like to hear from you. For our next issue, we would like to include your thoughts about a book, or several books, that made a difference for you. Please include your name, your major, year of graduation, and city of residence with a short write-up about the book's influence on you. Don't be shy! Please e-mail SOON to [ron\\_woods@byu.edu](mailto:ron_woods@byu.edu)



## why we choose to *give*

BYU educational experiences have brought true happiness and excitement to our family. Whenever our family gathers, we are thrilled to listen to our children's new insights they have grasped with the help of remarkable professors. We are grateful for the solid springboard that BYU has provided as family members enter graduate programs at BYU and elsewhere.

I came to BYU one year after being introduced to the Church and being baptized in the Chicago area. My humanities professors helped me combine scholarly interests with a gospel-centered life. Josette Britte-Ashford, an emeritus professor of French, taught me the importance of cherishing cultural values around the globe. She emphasized that while we were learning about French literary contributions, we also needed to consider what the Church programs could bring to the French saints.

My husband, Greg, graduated in Philosophy and Mathematics. He remembers with fondness Chauncey Riddle's class, where the implications of science and religion were brought together. Truman Madsen's class taught him critical thinking skills that still benefit his career. And Terry Warner's Philosophy of the Mind class cultivated a lifelong interest in the study of self-deception.

Our youngest daughter, Rachel, is currently enrolled in the College of Humanities as an English major and Women's Studies minor. She says, "I thoroughly enjoy the discussions led by professors in my English classes. The works I have read have been life changing for me. I plan to pursue a graduate degree in Women's Studies, eventually leading to a career in the publishing industry."

We are honored to associate with the BYU College of Humanities and its dedicated faculty and staff. We have learned how rich and fulfilling education can be.

Jill Brim and family, Wheaton, IL



Photo by Kramer Photographers

## how I have been *blessed*

Elisabeth Cannon, English major




I am writing to express my profound gratitude for your donations that have helped me attend the Study Abroad program. I would like to clarify exactly why Study Abroad programs are such a vital part of my educational experience.

As an English major, I am constantly analyzing language and culture as well as the impact of place, time, and history on literature. I am currently writing an undergraduate thesis on travel literature as a genre. My fascination with travel writing began the first time I traveled out of the country. I was surprised and intrigued by the way my travels affected me emotionally, spiritually, and intellectually. I began to view the world quite differently. I experienced the "paradigm shift" that literature so often strives to develop. During the following semesters, I was able to delve much deeper into my studies because of my experiences abroad. The Study Abroad program truly is the research lab of the Humanities.

*Those* who donate to the Humanities Annual Fund make it possible for the college to provide students with study abroad, mentored learning, and other education-enhancing experiences. For more information, please contact Carol Kounanis, LDS Philanthropies, at BYU, 801-422-8294, cek@byu.edu, or visit our website at [byu.edu/giving/humanities](http://byu.edu/giving/humanities).





*Humanities at BYU* is the alumni newsletter 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](mailto:ron_woods@byu.edu).

**Quill and Sword Medieval Society perform on the Mary Lou Fulton Plaza of the JFSB.**

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