

In This Issue...

This year, 2007, is the seventeenth year of publication of the Lynchburg College journal, *Agora*, and we are proud to announce new developments with this issue: The *Agora* has become an online publication, accepting submissions of undergraduate academic writing from students nationwide. The inclusion of articles written by students from institutions besides Lynchburg College has been made possible through an agreement with the Association of Core Texts and Courses (ACTC). Faculty members at institutions belonging to ACTC were invited to encourage their students to submit their work at the 2006 ACTC conference in Chicago. Because students from Henry Ford Community College in Dearborn, Michigan, responded, we are happy to include in *Agora* 16 two of their essays along with the essays by one faculty member and thirteen students from Lynchburg College.

Even though the format of the *Agora* has changed and the pool of writers has been enlarged, the purpose of the *Agora* remains the same: this journal of undergraduate writing specializes in responses to the great books of the world. The aim of the *Agora* is to make connections between classical ideas and contemporary issues. To illustrate this aim, the *Agora* has taken its title from the marketplace at the heart of classical Athens, where much of Athenian public life took place: business transactions, performances, political discussions, athletic contests, and religious worship, all were conducted in the busy atmosphere of the Athenian *agora*. Similarly, this journal seeks to be a marketplace for important ideas and issues.

The first article, "Expanding Universes and Shrinking Humans," by **Dr. Neal Sumerlin**, who teaches chemistry and astronomy at Lynchburg College, draws a parallel between the experience of people in Galileo's time and our experience today. At both times, developments in the study of astronomy have forced us to reconsider our preconceptions of the Universe and the

relative position of humans in the Universe. Neal points out that the mysteries of the Universe present stimulating challenges for research that far outweigh any reasons for being daunted by recent findings regarding our own insignificant place in the Universe.

John Marks has won the Kendall North Award for the best essay in this issue of the *Agora* with his paper, “Abdication and Acceptance: Slave-Trading in Antebellum Lynchburg.” John has conducted research with primary source documents to uncover the locations and the logistics used for buying and selling slaves in Lynchburg in the first half of the nineteenth century. He has made comparisons with Frederick Douglass’s experiences as a slave in Maryland to comment on the unique circumstances of slave-trading in Lynchburg.

Several other student writers have dealt with other prominent American authors, such as Mark Twain, namely **Dana Sliva** in her essay, “The Little Engine That Couldn’t: Societal Fears, Upward Mobility, and the Failure of Technology in Mark Twain’s Works,” and **Jennifer Ervin** in her essay, “The Controversial Character of Roxy in Twain’s *Pudd’nhead Wilson*.” Dana aptly illustrates that Twain’s fears about most Americans being preoccupied with upward social mobility and his worries about the failure of technology mean that we who live in the early twenty-first century are not very different from people of the mid-nineteenth century. Similarly, Jennifer makes the point that just because our world today is more complicated than Twain’s, it does not mean that our understanding of human nature is any more sophisticated than his as she analyzes Twain’s complex character, Roxy, whom many modern critics have misunderstood and underestimated. Another well-known American author is Edgar Allan Poe, who is the focus of **Michelle Hensley**’s paper “The Solitude of Poe’s ‘The Raven’.” Michelle interprets this famous poem as a metaphor of the poet’s imagination culminating in overwhelming solitude. **David Neasz**, in “*Walden*: An Exercise in Awakening,” has chosen to write on Henry David Thoreau,

who is known for his scathing criticisms of many social attitudes of his day. However, David presents a more positive interpretation of Thoreau as a writer who encouraged average citizens to increase their intellectual engagement in important social problems. In her paper, “Jo March of Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women*, According to Adler, Horney, and Rogers,” **Ellen Parks** has focused on yet another well-known American writer. Ellen has taken an interdisciplinary approach to the novel, *Little Women*, by interpreting the character of Jo March according to the personality theories of three key twentieth century psychologists.

The next group of five papers involves international themes and a variety of disciplines. **Grace Rochfort** wrote her paper, “Classicism and Anti-Classicism in the Quintessentially Romantic” in an art history class. Grace draws a comparison between Washington Irving’s *Tales of the Alhambra* and the paintings of Eugene Delacroix as she explains how the Romantics, with their emphasis on emotions and individuality, were able to accommodate some of the Classicists’ emphasis on the intellect and civil responsibility. In fact, instead of representing two distinct movements, the Classicists and the Romantics had much reciprocal influence on each other. Similarly, in “Passion and Marriage in *Anna Karenina*,” **Kelly Castillo** elaborates on the head versus heart debate that Tolstoy illustrates so well in his nineteenth century Russian context. According to Kelly’s interpretation of *Anna Karenina*, the stable decisions made with the head lead to happier, more productive lives than the passionate decisions made with the heart do. With **Andrew Rohr**’s paper, “Translators Can Empower!” which was written in two linked history and composition classes, our attention switches to Latin America. Andrew elaborates on the role played by Cortes’ translators in the Spaniards’ conquest of the Aztecs to explain how translators should not be underestimated because they can be crucial for the protection or the demise of vulnerable civilizations. **Ryan Mayr** also tackles the sensitive topic of cultural

conflict in his paper, “Definition of *Jihad*: Legitimate?” which he wrote in a religious studies course. In the wake of 9/11, all Americans have been faced with interpreting the motivations of Islamic fundamentalists, and Ryan has helped with that endeavor by expertly outlining the nuances of the concept of *jihad*. In her senior thesis in English, “Talk Like an Egyptian: Applying the Theory of the Subaltern to the Works of Nawal El Saadawi,” **Elizabeth Giglio** continues to explore aspects of Islam and of the social and political life of Muslims in the Middle East, which most American readers are not familiar with. Elizabeth’s primary focus is on the silencing of women in Egyptian society.

The final cluster of five papers were all written in the Lynchburg College Senior Symposium course, where students read sources in the “great books” tradition, attend public lectures on contemporary issues, and then write papers that interpret those readings in terms of both the lecture topics and their own opinions. The first of these Senior Symposium papers, “The Fear Factor” by **Robert J. Howell**, has won this year’s LCSR Program Director’s Award as the best essay dealing with a social problem in the current issue of the *Agora*. Robert considers the increased security measures that we have all experienced since 9/11 in the light of Thomas Hobbes’ *Leviathan* to stress that we should not become so paralyzed by our fear of terrorism that we give up our hard-won civil liberties. In “The Press: the Tool and Foil of Tyranny,” **Chris Rand** also deals with the topic of civic responsibility as he discusses events in Ghana and in Nazi Germany that illustrate how the media can be either used to keep citizens informed or abused to extend the power of dictators. **Kyra Smith**, who wrote “An Educated People, a Stronger Society, a Stronger Country,” also touches on our civic responsibility to improve the quality of education in our public schools. Kyra uses ideas from John Berger, Paulo Friere, and Jean Jacques Rousseau to support her claim that improving public education will lead

to widespread and long-lasting social, political, and economic benefits for all. **Lauren Bruce** elaborates on the lowering of standards of taste in popular music in her paper, “The Declining Value of Music in American Culture.” Citing Leonard Bernstein, Lauren attributes this decline in taste to developments in technology and to the increased emphasis on material wealth and success that have developed in American society over the past half century. The final paper by **Shoshana Sakolsky**, “Lost Women: International Sex Trafficking,” confronts this difficult topic that causes much suffering and heartbreak in many parts of the world, including the United States. Shoshana insightfully analyzes the causes of the complex problem of sex trafficking and suggests that its spread can only be stopped if the problem is attacked on multiple fronts at the same time.

We want to thank all these students for their efforts in writing papers that provide us with serious food for thought. The professors who guided the writing of these papers in their classes also deserve thanks. From Lynchburg College, they are Dr. Kirt von Daacke (Marks), Dr. Terri Hartman (Sliva, Ervin, Hensley, and Rohr), Dr. Bianca Sumutka (Parks), Dr. Delane Karalow (Rochfort), Dr. Phil Stump (Rohr), Dr. Jeff Burke (Mayr), Dr. Kate Gray (Giglio and Bruce), Dr. Neal Sumerlin (Howell, Smith, and Sakolsky), Dr. Robert White (Rand), and from Henry Ford Community College, Dr. Michael Daher (Neasz and Castillo).

This year the *Agora* received over sixty submissions. Because of the recent developments of going online and accepting submissions from students at other ACTC schools besides Lynchburg College, we are looking forward to an even more impressive issue of the *Agora* in 2008.

Lyndall Nairn

Agora Faculty Editor