



## Editor's Introduction

**N**O ONE DESIGNS liberal arts education with a global pandemic in mind. The last year has been an ordeal for students, staff, and faculty at the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma, as we, like our friends and colleagues nation- and worldwide, have committed to an ad-libbed marathon of an experiment: How do we engage the liberal arts in a socially distanced, face-masked, medically dangerous world? How do we carry on with rug of human interaction ripped from under our feet? When nearly 600,000 Americans have died of COVID-19 (to say nothing of those merely hospitalized, let alone the George Floyd protests, the 2020 election, the January 6 insurrection at the Capitol, and so on), what good are Kant, Sophocles, Wollstonecraft and other canonical figureheads of the liberal arts curriculum? How do we make such a vision of higher education matter in a traumatized world? At a time like this, well, *who cares?*

While the constellation of names and issues we should care about surely evolves, I'm glad to say that students do definitively care. Having taught (planned, improvised, experimented with, blundered through) COVID-19-era classes for over a year, I have only

fragmentary answers about new “best practices,” if such a phrase even applies anymore. I also certainly miss the energy and intimacy of in-person, unmasked classroom discussion. And yet, the enduring intelligence, curiosity, and goodwill of the students has made teaching during the COVID era—at least for me—not only tolerable but enjoyable.

Twenty-twenty and 2021 have been hard, and students especially have encountered plenty they didn’t sign up for. Despite limited COVID cases on campus, students, staff, and faculty at Science and Arts suffered stress, alienation, burn-out, and precipitous dips in mental health. None of this has been easy, but the instances of and causes for togetherness in 2020-21 made things tolerable and often downright joyous. Among other things, I’m thinking of the Black Lives Matter event organized by Science and Arts students at the oval in June 2020, the long conversations with students and mentees on Zoom, and the delight of reconvening for an in-person commencement (distanced, outdoors, masked, but in-person) in April 2021 of this year. And of course, I’m also thinking of this journal.

In the intro to last year’s volume, I offered *The Drover Review* as a gesture of hope and stability in unhappy times. The present volume—which illustrates, if nothing else, the continuation of sophisticated thought and writing among the University’s student body, even amid the pandemic—ought to invite similarly welcome emotions. I’m very happy, further, to note the increased student presence on the journal’s Editorial Board this year: Megan Hay, Wendell Hixson, Korbyn Peebles, Rhiannon Quillin, and Claire Smith join returning student Board member Genevieve Gordon. I’m deeply grateful to all of you for your insight and hard work.

THIS VOLUME INCLUDES fifteen essays derived from University coursework, split between the First-Year Writing section (covering work from Writing I and II, the core Interdisciplinary Studies writing courses) and the Writing across the Disciplines section (covering

a range of work across the majors and the IDS core). Finally, the volume also includes the winner of the annual Jernigan Scholarship.

The first of four works from Writing I, Abigail Dulle's personal essay "Blessings through Pandemics and Pollution" represents a powerfully fitting introduction to First-Year Writing section and the volume as a whole, as Dulle meditates on her renewed appreciation for simple joys amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Next, Eriyon Tecson's "The Story behind 'Raconteur'" offers an innovative, heavily researched, and in-depth look at the varying definitions and connotations surrounding an unusual and colorful word. Jensen Link then provides a close rhetorical analysis of Thomas Paine's renowned pamphlet *Common Sense*, and Anastasia Dulle's "From Glory to Governments" perceptively recounts a formative childhood encounter with the maddening complexity of real-world politics. Next, Destinee Asbill's "Molest the Dead" initiates a series of four Writing II essays, reading Seamus Heaney's poem "Punishment" as an inventive commentary on the scapegoat archetype. Isaiah Young then offers a probing look at the ethical commitments of the reader in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's landmark short story "The Yellow Wallpaper," and Mike Hixson charts the surprising, morbid uses of narrative humor and duplicity in Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour" and Margaret Atwood's short poem "[You Fit into Me]." Rounding out the First-Year section, Kalep Glandon's researched synthesis "Breaking the Dice" configures the table-top role-playing game *Dungeons & Dragons* as an invaluable aid to individual and social betterment.

Two commentaries on Immanuel Kant's "What Is Enlightenment?" essay initiate the Writing across the Disciplines section: Eden McIntosh, first, argues that Kant's pronouncements compel critical thought via individual criticize of oppressive power structures in the present, after which Danielle Stevens contends that the Enlightenment lodestar of "reason" alone isn't enough when a healthy society requires educated trust in others. Claire Smith's "The Sublime and the Divine," next, offers a panoramic comparison of

numinous experience across philosophical, theological, and literary traditions in diverse cultures. In a detailed piece of science writing, Abigail Davis then reports on experimental data on concentrations of bacteria in face masks, suggesting timely hygiene precautions for folks navigating the COVID-19 era. Two textual analyses follow from there. First, Shawn McDaniel provides rhetorical commentary on lyrics and visuals associated with hard rock music, noting the primacy of constructive and empathetic messaging within a genre wrongly pigeonholed as violent and depraved. Wendell Hixson then surveys the manifold connotations of the serpent as a symbol in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and in biblical literature, offering an image of power, virility, and complexity irreducible to the snake's simple associations with evil and conniving. Logan Nitzel, finally, guides readers through the fascinating curiosities of Soviet consumer technology, which drew strange inspiration from the works of those capitalists across the ocean.

This volume concludes with Erin McCaslin's essay "America Will Persevere!" which contends that the COVID-19 pandemic has also given way to quintessentially American efforts of problem-solving and activism, giving us all welcome cause for hope. McCaslin's essay is this year's winner of the Betty Baker Jernigan Endowed Scholarship Fund, which, each year, offers \$1,000 to the winner of a contest open to qualified continuing and incoming USAO students. *The Drover Review*, in order to publicize the contest and celebrates its winners, also offers to publish winning essays like McCaslin's.

THIS VOLUME OWES MUCH to many. In addition to the aforementioned student Editorial Board members, I thank my colleagues Tonnia Anderson, John Bruce, and Shelley Rees for their continual hard work and support of the journal as Board members. Congratulations, too, are in order for graduating Board members Genevieve Gordon and Korbyn Peebles, each of whom exit USAO as winners of the Outstanding Graduate Awards in their academic divisions, among other

accolades aplenty—including multiple publications each in this journal.

This journal, too, persists as a reflection of the intellectually rich and diverse writing practices that occur across Science and Arts' majors and Interdisciplinary Studies program. In addition to Board members, faculty whose coursework yielded submissions to the 2021 volume include Alex Coleman, James Finck, Nicholas Boyde, Zachary Simpson, Misty Steele, Jason Shaw, and David Reed. Thanks, too, go to those in administration, the Communications and Marketing office, and elsewhere across campus who have aided *The Drover Review*.

Last and most important, thank you to the students who submitted work to *The Drover Review* in 2020-21, in the midst of a pandemic and everything else, for giving us all the chance to read, engage with, and learn from your wisdom, wit, intelligence, and hard work. We're all better for it. And 2021 is a brighter year for it, too.

Happy reading! As always, thank *you* for your interest in this journal and in supporting the vital intellectual work of student writers. ►►

*Ben Wetherbee, PhD*  
*May 2021*