BELMONT UNIVERSITY PRESENTS
The 20th Annual
Humanities Symposium
Sept. 27 – Oct. 4, 2021
INTRODUCTION

Radical acts impel change, and the act of reading, perhaps more than any other enterprise, has profoundly shifted our human experience away from local scenes of communication and toward much wider networks of shared understanding. While reading creates these significant connections, it is only able to do so because it is also fundamentally grounded, or “rooted,” the original sense of the word radical.

With its inherent connectedness, reading affects us in ways that are fundamental to humanity and its many narratives. Unlike spoken communication, written texts await their readers, sometimes for centuries, allowing time for reflection and response. As such, reading offers the possibility of deep mental engagement for authors and audiences alike. In addition, reading transports us to places and times other than our own, whether Homer’s Greece, Jane Austen’s English countryside, Zora Neale Hurston’s South, or some other terrain. In other words, reading mobilizes us and, at the same time, creates cognitive dissonance very similar to that of physical travel—exposing us to new worlds, jarring us out of our habits, and forcing us to see ourselves in new lights. And at its core, reading leads to change-making in ourselves and in the world.

This Belmont Humanities Symposium’s 20th anniversary event is dedicated to investigating and unpacking reading practices, including the range of perspectives that come with such scrutiny. These diverse topics will include means of communication, verbal and visual; technologies of reception from early writing to electronic media; institutions of engagement from pluralistic education to public libraries; cultural impacts from classical literacies to present social reforms; and personal impacts from cognition to the imagination.

Crossing disciplines and initiating conversations, the sessions will offer insight into reading’s centrality and status with respect to our intellectual and cultural traditions and will explore its inherent missions of recovery, renewal, and redefinition. The goal is for attendees to develop greater appreciations of how reading has transformed our past and defined our present—and how it will continue to reshape our future.

Dr. Jason Lovvorn, English

2021 Humanities Symposium Committee:
Dr. Jason Lovvorn and Dr. Maggie Monteverde, Co-chairs; Dr. Chris Born, Dr. Wyeth Burgess, Dr. Francesca Muccini, Dr. Natalia Pelaz, Dr. Regine Schwarzmeier, Dr. Annette Sisson, Dr. Andrea Stover

With special thanks for their continued support and assistance: Dr. Bryce Sullivan; Dr. Nathan Webb; and Karen Bennett, College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences
2021 HUMANITIES SYMPOSIUM

All sessions are in the JANET AYERS CONFERENCE ROOM JAAC 4094

*featured speakers

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 27

10:00 A.M. — “Take and Read”: Cultivating Imagination through Traditioned Innovation President Greg Jones*

12:00 Noon — Was This Title Written by an AI? Scott Hawley

1:00 P.M. — Finding Home Through Reading Natalia Escribano-Pelaz

3:00 P.M. — Finding Voice: Drama, Reading, and Creating Person Shawn Knight

4:00 P.M. — “The Roar on the Other Side of Silence”: Reading the Invisible Life Beyond the Page Annette Sisson

6:00 P.M. — Film and Discussion: The Book Thief Moderator: Annette Sisson

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 30

10:00 A.M. — The WPA Packhorse Library Project Jeanne Canella Schmitzer*

11:00 A.M. — Freedom to Read, Write, and Speak Discussion, moderated by Noel Boyle, Philosophy

12:30 P.M. — Why We Resist: The FYS Anthology as a Resilience Manual Noel Boyle, Charmion Gustke, Daniel Schafer and Michelle Shaw

2:00 P.M. — “Read to me! Read with me!” Erika Berroth*,

5:00 P.M. — “The Library that Dolly Built” Documentary Moderator: Wyeth Burgess

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 1

10:00 A.M. — Philologoi: Open Discussion Moderator: Andrew Davis

12:00 Noon — Every Reader a Nexus Maggie Monteverde

1:00 P.M. — Reading Together: It’s Not Just for Kids Panel Discussion

3:00 P.M. — Writing Competition, Reading by Winner Moderators: Susan Finch and Gary McDowell

NOTE: MONDAY, OCTOBER 4

10:00 A.M. — Wrap Up Panel Symposium Committee Members
FEATURED SPEAKER

“Take and Read”: Cultivating Imagination through Traditioned Innovation
Dr. Greg Jones, President Belmont University

We live in a time when we are suffering, culturally, from an ‘imagination deficit disorder.’ Dr. Jones will explore why and how the radical act of reading cultivates a lively sense of the past that enables creative opportunities for the future and stirs our imagination in the present.

10–10:50 A.M. • WELLCORE SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING

Was This Title Written by an AI?
Dr. Scott Hawley, Chemistry and Physics

This overview provides non-technicians in Humanities (and Law) with an inspiring set of starting points for individual exploration of recent revolutions in Natural Language Processing (NLP), whereby advanced language models routinely facilitate automated textual analysis and generation of essays, news articles, and narrative stories. In so doing, these models encode the implicit rules and biases of their designers and training datasets. The effects of this encoding have ethical implications when these models are deployed on large scales as proxies for human decision-making as well as personal implications for readers and readership in general.

12–12:50 P.M. • WELLCORE INTELLECTUAL WELL-BEING

Finding Home Through Reading
Dr. Natalia Escribano-Pelaz, Foreign Languages

It is well understood that books help us create alternative universes, worlds far distant or close enough that we can easily feel identified with their characters, landscapes, language. For migrants, though, reading in the native language becomes an act of resistance against losing memory of words, of worlds that once existed. Reading in a foreign language, on the other hand, constantly reminds us or our otherness, our in-between condition. Having the privilege to be able to read in different languages helps me build a new home, neither there nor here, a home with no physical referents, just with the ethereal pillars of readings.

1-1:50 P.M. • WELLCORE CULTURAL WELL-BEING

Finding Voice: Drama, Reading, and Creating Person
Professor Shawn Knight, Theatre and Belmont Alumnus

Authors often talk about “voice” in terms of characters, narrators, and individual writing styles. In theatre, however, voice is the physical manifestation of sound. This physical manifestation can frighten, comfort, disguise, reveal; it can infuse every word on a page with life. Exploring the connection between voice on the page and voice on the stage can yield stronger theatrical choices and, if utilized in the reading process, can more fully engage even non-theatrical readers of every level.

3–3:50 P.M. • WELLCORE CULTURAL WELL-BEING

Monteverde Plenary Address

“The Roar on the Other Side of Silence”: Reading the Invisible Life Beyond the Page
Dr. Annette Sisson, English

In her novel Middlemarch, George Eliot (née Mary Ann Evans) observed in 1871, “If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel’s heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence.” This passage employs dramatic metaphor to suggest the concepts I will explore in this presentation. Using examples from literature and pop culture, I will discuss how the process of writing and reading makes what’s invisible visible. Paying attention to what is beyond the page—that is, grappling with mystery—allows readers to practice grappling with life: with their own experiences, with metaphysical questions, and with people, cultures, ideas, beliefs, and experiences that transcend their own.

4–4:50 P.M. • WELLCORE INTELLECTUAL WELL-BEING

Film and Discussion: The Book Thief
Moderator: Dr. Annette Sisson, English

Following a viewing of the 2013 film version of Markus Zusak’s 2007 powerful best-selling novel The Book Thief, we will discuss some of the important themes raised by this story of a young girl growing up as a foster child in Nazi Germany, including but not limited to the love and connective power of books in spite of danger in a world of deadly racial and political persecution, book burning, and war. For those who have both read the book and seen the movie, we will also consider how the two experiences of the story differ.

6-9:00 P.M. • WELLCORE CULTURAL WELL-BEING

Join in person at Janet Ayers Academic Center 4094
Join on Zoom at www.belmont.edu/symposium
Reading Sign: A Brief History of Sign Language and Its Use Today
Adam Riekstins and Members of Belmont’s American Sign Language Organization

Did you know that although we often speak of “sign language” as though there is just one, in fact sign language varies from culture to culture? This presentation by members of one of Belmont’s newest student organizations will offer a brief overview of the history of sign language in different cultures and what sign language looks like in America today. Club members will also discuss how you can get involved in their organization and learn to sign and read a bit of ALS yourself.

10-10:50 A.M. • WELLCORE INTELLECTUAL WELL-BEING

TEACHING CENTER LUNCHEON
FACULTY / STAFF ONLY

Reading for Success in the College Classroom
Professors Sue Trout and Jason Lovvorn, English

While most college teachers maintain that reading is important for students to perform well, far fewer consider the ways in which reading assignments should be implemented, the methods by which students might be taught to read effectively, and the strategies by which students can be encouraged to read more consistently. This presentation will address the significance of academic reading, and presenters will provide concrete tips to help teachers understand how they might develop better reading instruction and how they might get students to read consistently.

11:30-1:00 P.M. • FACULTY/STAFF ONLY

Shakespeare is From Nashville
Dr. Jayme Yeo, English

Shakespeare made the South and the South made Shakespeare. This talk illuminates how the South—and particularly Nashville—shaped Shakespeare through antebellum depictions of race, civil rights struggles, jazz and country music, and more.

1-1:50 P.M. • WELLCORE INTELLECTUAL WELL-BEING

Literacy Matters:
Kim Karesh and representatives of the Nashville Adult Literacy Council

Imagine for a moment: you arrive to apply for a job or take a family member to the Emergency Room, and when someone hands you a form to fill out, you have no way to do so because you can’t read it. This isn’t a hypothetical situation for thousands of adults, native and immigrant alike, who live right here in Middle Tennessee. In “Literacy Matters,” representatives of the Nashville Adult Literacy Council will discuss the realities many of our fellow Nashvillians face every day and discuss ways that you can become involved in helping this organization help others.

2-2:50 P.M. • WELLCORE INTELLECTUAL WELL-BEING

Reading the Web in the Age of Misinformation
Jenny Mills, Coordinator of Reference Services, Lila D. Bunch Library

How do you read the web well in the age of misinformation? Today’s students have been taught from a young age to read and evaluate websites, most often by employing a checklist of criteria with which to judge a source’s credibility. Studies show that most people read the web by looking for outside markers of quality to evaluate quickly what they find. We’ve all become information skeptics, perhaps necessarily so in our post-truth, socially-networked world, but some argue that the way we’ve been taught to read the web has led to a kind of cynicism about information, where everything is biased and suspect. In a rapidly changing information ecosystem, where misinformation abounds and algorithms proliferate, reading and evaluating the web requires a more nuanced approach. In this session, a Belmont librarian will introduce some strategies to help you read and contextualize the web in order to use information in your academic and personal life.

3:30-4:30 P.M. • WELLCORE INTELLECTUAL WELL-BEING

The Radical Possibilities of Memoir
Panel: Dr. Sarah Blomeley and Members of her Reading and Writing Memoir Class

Join us as a group of students from ENG 5895 (Reading and Writing Memoir) discuss how memoirists such as Dave Eggers, Jesmyn Ward, Roxane Gay, Lindy West, Mary Karr, and Glennon Doyle transformed the ways they approached the “reading” of their own lives and the writing of their own memoirs.

6-7:00 P.M. • WELLCORE INTELLECTUAL WELL-BEING
**WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 29**

**FEATURED SPEAKER**

*Why You Can't Have a Democracy without Newspapers*

Steve Cavendish, Belmont Alumnus and Editor, *Nashville Banner*

Throughout American history, newspapers have provided the shared information vital to a functioning democracy. But in a digital age, it’s more important than ever to support local news organizations under assault from market forces, partisanship and misinformation.

10-10:50 A.M. • WELLCORE INTELLECTUAL WELL-BEING

**Will You Read Me A Story?**

Dr. Rachael Flynn and Dr. Cathy Eschete, Education

This presentation will address the importance of early literacy experiences in a child’s development. We will explore what culturally competent educators do to help all children identify as readers while also considering the types of reading experiences we should be creating to ensure that all children read well and develop a love of reading.

12-12:50 • WELLCORE INTELLECTUAL WELL-BEING

**Reading and Pilgrimage: From Chaucer’s Canterbury to the Modern Pilgrim’s Way**

Dr. Jonathan Thorndike and Dr. Maggie Monteverde, English

In the final decades of the 14th century, Geoffrey Chaucer chose a pilgrimage to Canterbury as the frame for his *Canterbury Tales*, an unfinished collection of stories which entertained readers with its bawdy humor and thought-provoking social commentary, and inspired millions of pilgrims to see the holy relics and shrine of St. Thomas à Becket at Canterbury. Chaucer’s work also actively reminds us that readers and pilgrims are constantly recreating a text through direct experience of “the way,” the pathway of generations of pilgrims before them or the way laid out by an author and followed by each reader individually. By means of an informal dialog accompanied by images, this presentation will explore the deep connection between the acts of reading, pilgrimage, and human experience, focusing attention on the experience of the Pilgrim’s Way in text and trek from Chaucer’s world to our own.

2-2:50 P.M. • WELLCORE SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING

**Books that Changed Us**

Panel: Professors Jimmy Davis, Nathan Griffith, Pete Kuryla, Sue Trout and Jayme Yeo

“Radical acts impel change, and the act of reading, perhaps more than any other enterprise, has profoundly shifted our human experience...” So opens the first sentence of our description of this year’s symposium. In preparation for this panel, we asked faculty of the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences to identify books “the reading of which changed us” (with us meaning society broadly, our disciplines or even us as individuals). Five faculty from three different departments will discuss their personal book selections. In addition, a list of other books will be shared at the end of the session from faculty who couldn’t participate personally. We will also solicit nominations of other books from the audience of the session.

3-3:50 P.M. • WELLCORE INTELLECTUAL WELL-BEING

**FEATURED SPEAKER**

*Not Go Away is My Name: A Virtual Visit with the Poet Laureate of Arizona*

Alberto Ríos, Arizona State University Regents Professor, English

Arizona poet Laureate Alberto Ríos will join us via Zoom for a reading of some of his poetry, including “Don’t Go Into the Library” and pieces from his latest collection *Not Go Away is My Name*, followed by informal conversation about how living in an bilingual, bi-cultural environment has shaped how he reads and writes the world.

5-6:00 P.M. • WELLCORE CULTURAL WELL-BEING

**THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 30**

**FEATURED SPEAKER**

*Poor Girls and Book-laden Mules=Access to the World: The WPA Packhorse Library Project*

Professor Jeanne Canelia Schmitzer, Tennessee Tech University, History

The Great Depression devastated the nation, but especially hard-hit was Eastern Kentucky - a region already steeped in poverty and so isolated as to have few roads and no electricity. The WPA Packhorse Library helped to change the lives of many by bringing them access to the world through books and ideas.

10-10:50 A.M. • WELLCORE INTELLECTUAL WELL-BEING
Freedom to Read, Write, and Speak
Discussion, moderated by Dr. Noel Boyle, Philosophy

After a brief introduction, select students from Dr. Boyle’s Social and Political Philosophy class will participate in a roundtable discussion. Partly incorporating course materials, they will reflect on the importance, and limitations, of the freedom to read, write, and speak. Discussion will include the role of such freedoms in both political and academic contexts.

11-11:50 A.M. • WELLCORE INTELLECTUAL WELL-BEING

Why We Resist: The FYS Anthology as a Resilience Manual
Panel of First Year Seminar Faculty: Drs. Noel Boyle, Charmion Gustke, Daniel Schafer and Michelle Shaw

Mary Frances Berry, the Geraldine R. Segal Professor of American Social Thought at the University of Pennsylvania and former chairwoman of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, has dedicated her life and work to the fight for freedom, equality, and justice. During this panel, FYS faculty Daniel Schafer, Noel Boyle, and Michelle Shaw will examine the way in which readings from the FYS Anthology intersect with Dr. Berry’s message of resistance and resilience, offering new ways for us to think about the ever-evolving relationship between power and knowledge.

12:30-1:30 P.M. • WELLCORE INTELLECTUAL WELL-BEING

“Read to me! Read with me!": Increasing Awareness of Diversity and Inclusion for Readers and Listeners of All Ages”
Dr. Erika Berroth, Southwestern University, German

Current German language picture books and books for early readers develop a variety of strategies for increasing awareness about diversity and inclusion. We will explore how this new genre connects to cultural traditions and how the future may be shaped by developing empathy through different forms of reading together. We will explore the power of reading as a social activity across diverse age groups and communities and enjoy discovering the joys of reading to and with others.

2-2:50 P.M. • WELLCORE CULTURAL WELL-BEING

Mr. Darwin: Still Radical After All These Years
Dr. John Niedzwiecki, Biology

In 1859, Charles Darwin’s writings about evolution by natural selection caused a stir that ultimately revolutionized science, and fundamentally shifted the way we looked at ourselves. Science and society, with some notable exceptions, steadily incorporated a version of Darwinism into the mainstream. Over time, parts of Darwin’s writings were put aside -- sometimes appropriately so, as new data failed to support specific ideas or mechanisms. However, other ideas from his writings were glossed over because their importance was not yet understood, or their implications were too uncomfortable. As we have moved into the 21st century, scientists are beginning to re-examine some of the under-emphasized parts of Darwin’s writing to get a better sense of how revolutionary and far-reaching his theory of natural selection is.

3:30-4:30 P.M. • WELLCORE INTELLECTUAL WELL-BEING

FEATURED SPEAKER
The Black Book Project
Meredith McKinney, Metro Nashville Public Schools

If you think back to your favorite books from your childhood, which titles come to mind? Why did those particular books resonate so deeply with you? For many young readers, being able to see themselves reflected in the main characters strikes a deep chord. Reading books with representations of students’ own cultures can contribute to self-worth within children, while allowing them to connect with themselves and their culture on a deeper level. I launched the Black Book Project to address the lack of cultural representation in children’s literature.

5-5:50 P.M. • WELLCORE CULTURAL WELL-BEING

Film and Discussion: The Library that Dolly Built
Moderator: Dr. Wyeth Burgess, English

Across the world, over a million young children every month each receive a package addressed to them personally; inside they discover a brand-new book. This documentary tells the story of a project begun by Dolly Parton to provide books to the children of rural Sevier County, the place where Dolly grew up and which she still calls home. Intended to encourage not just reading but the kinds of dreams that often begin in books, The Imagination Library has since spread through the state, across the country, and on to Canada, the UK and Australia, where thousands of local organizations large and small assist “Dolly’s Library” with funds and volunteer labor to help fulfill the dream that “every child should grow up in a home full of books.” In this session, we will watch the documentary made by UTK professor Nick Geidner and the film students of Land Grant Films, and then discuss this amazing project set in motion by an amazing person...and hope that at least a few people in the audience will recall receiving books from The Imagination Library.

7-9:00 P.M. • WELLCORE CULTURAL WELL-BEING

Join in person at Janet Ayers Academic Center 4094
Join on Zoom at www.belmont.edu/symposium

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Join on Zoom at www.belmont.edu/symposium
Philologoi: Open Discussion
Moderator: Dr. Andrew Davis, Philosophy
Philologoi, Belmont’s weekly student-led philosophy discussion group, will engage this year’s Symposium theme. The question for today will be inspired by Socrates’ concerns about writing: how is reading a book different from having a conversation? how does this difference impact the way our thinking is affected and potentially changed by writing and by speech? All members of the audience are invited to participate actively in the discussion.

10-10:50 A.M. • WELLCORE INTELLECTUAL WELL-BEING

Every Reader a Nexus
Dr. Maggie Monteverde, English
In the famous essay “Why Read the Classics,” Italo Calvino defines “classics” as “the books that come down to us bearing...traces of readings previous to our [own]” but also acknowledges that each of us will have our own collection of works which form the “background noise” of our lives. I would argue that these are our own classics, many of which may be classics only for us, because each of us is the point where a unique selection of works intersect: each of us is a nexus. In this presentation, I will examine three different types of nexus we experience through reading, connecting not just those works to and through us but also ourselves with other readers. I will also reflect on the distinct nature of the connectivity experienced in reading as opposed to oral communication, due to the physicality we associate with written language, even in virtual environments.

12-12:50 P.M. • WELLCORE INTELLECTUAL WELL-BEING

Reading Together: It’s Not Just for Kids
Panel Discussion: Belmont Students and Alumni
While we tend to associate “common reading” with educational settings, in fact, almost from the beginning of the book, people have gathered together to discuss things they’ve decided to read together. In this panel, members of two very different reading groups, The English Alumni Reading Group and the Philosophy Reading Group, will discuss some of the pleasures, intellectual and social, they have discovered through acts of reading (and reflecting) together.

1-1:50 P.M. • WELLCORE INTELLECTUAL WELL-BEING

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Thank you for participating!

We hope you will join us next year for the 21st Annual Humanities Symposium!

The members of the 2021 Humanities Symposium Committee would like to extend their heartfelt appreciation to the many Belmont faculty, students, and staff who made the symposium possible. Special thanks go to the Office of the Provost for its financial support; to the Office of University Marketing & Public Relations for its assistance in preparing promotional materials; the Office of Events Services for its assistance in reserving and equipping presentation space; and Brenda Hancock of the School of Humanities, for assistance in managing many of the day-to-day concerns for this event.