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From the Editor

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From the Editor

Preface

IN EARLY 1791, A FRUSTRATED AND CANTANKEROUS GERMAN PHILOSOPHER, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, found himself, once again, out of a job. Having quarreled with a prospective employer in Warsaw, he resolved to visit Königsberg on his way home to call on one of the greatest thinkers of the age, Immanuel Kant. Unfortunately, the interview did not go well for the younger man. Unable to bear the disfavor of his idol, Fichte set himself to writing an explosive Enlightenment treatise in Kant's style, ambitiously entitled *Attempt at a Critique of All Revelation*. He sent it to Kant a mere six weeks after their first meeting. The older man was impressed enough to arrange for its publication. However, in a fateful twist that would guarantee Fichte's fame, the publisher released the first edition of the tract anonymously (apparently due to delay in securing the approval of the censors). So closely was Fichte able to imitate Kant's style and scope, its first reviewers assumed that Kant himself had to be the author. One amazed reviewer, upon discovering his mistake, hailed the true author as "a third sun in the philosophical heavens."¹ Fichte was vindicated.

Fortunately for us, things don't (usually) work quite the same way here in the BYU history department. Young students are not spurned by their professors until, locked up in Special Collections, they manage to spin a work of scholarly gold from the straw of adolescent ambition. Instead, BYU professors offer careful, committed mentorship to their charges, asking questions, offering suggestions, and providing encouragement throughout the historical research and writing process. Undergraduates do not—indeed, probably cannot—earn being taken seriously as scholars worthy of this type of mentorship; it is gift of

1. Daniel Breazeale, ed., *Fichte: Early Philosophical Writings* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1988), 6–9.

grace bequeathed by dedicated faculty to all alike, and one of the things that most makes the university system worth preserving. It is through this system, which mixes the master's methodological expertise with the apprentice's youthful panache, that the best undergraduate scholarship, the type sought after by *The Thetean*, is produced.

However, if we are not careful, striving students can end up feeling more like Johann Fichte than Susannah Morrison (whose two publications in the present volume represent her fourth and fifth in this journal overall). The pages of world literature and fiction are literally littered with resentful youth, from Cain in the Bible to the wizard Ged in the late Ursula K. LeGuin's *Earthsea* cycle, who did not receive the kind of enthusiastic patronage they thirsted for. The temptations to the professor are many: on its surface, history is a much more individually-driven discipline than some of the others on campus. Plus it can be fun to turn students loose without supervision and see what their febrile minds come up with. And anyway we live now in a hyper-individualistic and meritocratic society; the more ancient model of patronage relationships can seem outmoded, even to those whose job it is to live in the past. Those who are able to overcome the structural obstacles between themselves and their young charges, however, have, at least, the work of the nine students in this volume to show for it.

Unlike the departmental paper awards listed in the back of this volume, subject area is not considered in determining publication in *The Thetean*. We seek to publish the ten best papers produced in the department the previous year, period. This often results in some rather interesting, and often unexpected clusterings of topics—which we hope provides fruitful fodder for the journal's readers to make thematic connections, if nothing else. Zachary Osborne's and Natalie Larsen's papers on the Latter-day Saint movement, for example, together cause us to question the types of sources we privilege in evaluating the development of religious theology and practice. Mitch Rogers and Peter Abernathy invite us to reconsider the motivations of the actors in recent conflicts, cold and hot. Susannah and Miranda Jessop remind us of the enormous power wielded by (audio)visual media to spread ideology and shape values across the twentieth century. Finally, just in time for the hundredth anniversary of its effective dissolution in the aftermath of World War I, a trio of papers explore the complex legacy of the Ottoman Empire for modern notions of ethnic identity, law, and history. Much credit goes to Professor Isom-Verhaaren for opening up this neglected avenue of research to a generation of students since her arrival at BYU nearly three years ago.

In every issue, there is at least one paper not easily classified. This year the honor goes to Katie Richards, whose side-splitting, breezily written history of pay toilets will leave you . . . well, rushing to use one of America's free public restrooms. Written for an environmental history capstone with Professor Miller, it's an ideal example of the way faculty mentorship enables students to carry off unique and ambitious research projects successfully.

And of course, thanks go to this year's talented editorial staff for pushing the authors to greater heights of technical and organizational precision. They have each been a delight to work with. Mitch, Abby, Maren, Mary, Sarah, Porter, Emily, Mariah, Oscar—thank you. Your dedication and good humor were remarkable and sustaining as we plowed through sixty submissions in our quest to reset the journal's footing. Dr. Rensink, our faculty advisor, was also a great support and encouragement.

Our friend Johann Fichte quickly shook off his reliance on Kantian forms and founded his own school of German idealism. Most of the students published here will, regardless of future profession, likewise soon grow out of their intellectual training wheels, and one day look back on their undergraduate productions with a mixture of chagrin and bemusement. But, we must hope, their work, and this institution, will carry on, a repository of talent, a monument to striving, a testament to youth.

—*Ian McLaughlin*
Editor-in-Chief